

The Role that Dialect Plays in Deepening the Theme of D. H. Lawrence's Works

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Abstract

Dialect comes from life. As a remarkable feature of D. H. Lawrence's works, the use of dialect shouldn't be neglected. The use of dialect plays an important role in deepening the themes of D. H. Lawrence's works, including both his novels and his poems. It is of great necessity and importance to conduct studies in the dialect in D. H. Lawrence's works. Letting the characters in his works reveal the social problems hidden behind the words through their own words is one of the creative writing methods of Lawrence and also one of the linguistic features of Lawrence's works. This paper intends to analyze the concrete roles that dialect plays in D. H. Lawrence's works in detail and tries to probe into the social problems hidden behind the dialects.

Key words: D. H. Lawrence; Works; Dialect; Role

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1. INTRODUCTION

As an eminent novelist in the twentieth century, D. H. Lawrence's use of dialect is one remarkable feature among his writing styles, which is worth probing into and should not be ignored. This paper intends to analyze D. H. Lawrence's creative use of dialect in his works and the roles that D. H. Lawrence's use of dialect plays.

2. LAWRENCE'S CREATIVE USE OF DIALECT IN POETRY

In some of Lawrence's poems such as *The Collier's Wife*, *Violets*, *Whether or Not*, *True Democracy*, *Red-Herring* and *Gipsy*, dialect is used. Through the use of dialect, these poems strikingly depict the figures in these poems and leave a vivid impression on the readers. From the dialect the figures in the poems use, one can make a correct judgement of their identity, social position or their circumstances. Though they speak the dialects which are always spoken by the lower classes, they are as equal as those who speak Queen's English. The creative use of dialect forms one of the distinctive artistic features in Lawrence's poems.

Let's illustrate this by taking the poem titled *The Collier's Wife* for example:

Somebody's knockin' at th' door
Mother, come down an' see!
-I's think it's nobbut a beggar;
Say I'm busy.

It's not a beggar, mother: hark
How 'ard 'e knocks!
-Eh, tha'rt a mard-arsed kid
'E'll gie thee socks!

Shout an' ax what 'e wants,
I canna come down.
-'E says, is it Arthur Holliday's?
-Say Yes, tha clown.

'E says: Tell your mother as 'er mester's
Got hurt i' th' pit-
What? Oh my Sirs, 'e never says that,
That's not it!

Come out o' th' way an' let me see!
Eh, there's no peace!
An' stop thy scraightin', childt,
Do shut thy face!

'Your mester's 'ad a accident
An' they ta'ain' 'im i' th' ambulance
Ter Nottingham.' -Eh dear o' me,
If 'e's not a man for mischance!

Wheer's 'e hurt this time, lad?
-I dunna know,
They on'y towd me it wor bad-
It would be so!

Out o' my way, childt! dear o' me, wheer
'Ave I put 'is clean stockin's an' shirt?
Goodness knows if they'll be able
To take off 'is pit-dirt!

An' what a moan 'e'll make! there niver
Was such a man for a fuss
If anything ailed 'im; at any rate
I shan't 'ave 'im to nuss.

I do 'ope as it's not so very bad!
Eh, what a shame it seems
As some should ha'e hardly a smite o' trouble
An' others 'as reams!

It's a shame as 'e should be knocked about
Like this, I'm sure it is!
'E's 'ad twenty accidents, if 'e's 'ad one;
Owt bad, an' it's his!

There's one thing, we s'll 'ave a peaceful 'ouse f'r a
bit,
Thank heaven for a peaceful house!
An' there's compensation, sin' it's accident.
An' club-money-I won't growse.

An' a fork an' a spoon 'e'll want - an' what else?
I s'll never catch that train!
What a traipse it is, if a man gets hurt!
I sh'd think 'e'll get right again. (Lawrence, 1994)

This poem reminds one of a scene in *Sons and Lovers*. It reminds readers of the conversation between Mrs. Morel and a young collier after she hears the news that her husband has been injured. There exist some similarities in language use, yet one can also clearly see the differences. The heroine in this poem is totally depicted as one of the common housewives in the collier class and she is depicted in great details.

Through the use of dialect, this poem vividly and truthfully presents the image of a collier's wife. After hearing that her husband has an accident, she is very worried. She immediately inquires where her husband is hurt, she hurriedly packs clean clothes for her husband, and she hopes that the accident is not serious and that her husband can pull it through. Of course, she also complains about her husband's carelessness. He should have taken good care of himself. She tries to appear quiet and calm, yet her incessant remarks and complaints betray her panic. Through this poem, one can clearly see the image of a common, simple and hard-working housewife and clearly see the living conditions of common colliers.

In this poem Lawrence skillfully follows the theory of "adaptation" and vividly presents the family life of the collier class. The speech of the characters is consistent with their overall situation.

In this poem, one can see that many pronunciations are not standard. For example, in the first stanza, the word "knockin'" is a mispronunciation of "knocking", the word "th'" is a mispronunciation of "the", the word "an'" is a mispronunciation of "and", and the word "I's" is a mispronunciation of "I". In the second stanza, "'ard" is a mispronunciation of "hard", "'e" is a mispronunciation of "he", "tha'rt" is a mispronunciation of "you are", and "gie thee" is a mispronunciation of "give you". In the third stanza, "canna" is a mispronunciation of "cannot", and "tha" is a mispronunciation of "that". In the fourth stanza, "'er mester" is a mispronunciation of "her master", and "i' th'" is a mispronunciation of "in the". There are some other pronunciation errors, which will not be listed in detail.

Judging from the mispronunciations of many words, one can see their education level is not high. The colliers are in the lower class. Their job is dangerous and their working and living conditions are worse.

In the last two stanzas of the poem "Red-Herring", dialect is also used. Though the protagonist in the poem is now "a member of the bourgeoisie", yet he hopes to become intimate with the maid who speaks dialect and brings him his tea, for he treats himself as one of them:

My father was a working man
and a collier was he,
at six in the morning they turned him down
and they turned him up for tea

My mother was a superior soul
a superior soul was she,
cut out to play a superior role
in the god-damn bourgeoisie.

We children were the in-betweeners
little nondescripts were we,
indoors we called each other you,
outside, it was tha and thee.

But time has fled, our parents are dead
we've risen in the world all three;
but still we are in-betweeners, we tread
between the devil and the deep sad sea.

I am a member of the bourgeoisie
and a servant-maid brings me my tea –
But I'm always longing for someone to say
'ark 'ere, lad! atween thee an' me

they're a' a b-d-lot o' –s,
an' I reckon it's nowt but right
we should start an' kick their –ses for 'em
an' tell 'em to –. (Lawrence, 1994: 404)

In this poem, when the protagonist of this poem relates, standard English is utilized. Then suddenly the

standard English changes to dialect, which is supposed to be said by one from the lower class. This kind of change constructs a striking contrast. This kind of change in language use can produce intense artistic effect, making one realize the existence of another voice, a voice coming from the underclass. Their language may be vulgar. Most probably they can't use standard English. Yet this is caused by their lack of education. They live in the lowest stratum and have the lowest social status. They have to work hard in order to make a living. They have no money or opportunity to receive education. The existence of this kind of voice exactly reflects the social problems.

The protagonist of the poem expects the appearance of this voice, which shows that deep in his heart, he treats himself as one of them and dislikes the class that he is now in, though it is not easy for him to be one member of it.

This poem, just like the novel *Sons and Lovers*, is autobiographical. And it is closely related to *Sons and Lovers* in plots and contents.

Dialect comes from life, while "poetry, it is clear, is not cut off from life, but is basically concerned with life—that is, with the lived fullness of the world." (Brooks, 2006)

Besides conveying the meanings that it itself contains, language is the "way individuals situate themselves in relationship to others, the way they group themselves, the powers they claim for themselves and the powers they stipulate to others." (Lippi-Green, 1997: 31)

From the dialect the figures in the poems use, one can make a correct judgement of their identity, social position or their circumstances. Though they speak the dialects which are always spoken by the lower classes, they are just as equal as those who speak Queen's English. They are not inferior to any other group of people. They have their right to live a decent human life instead of being enslaved by the mechanical civilization and industrial system.

Letting the characters in his works reveal the social problems hidden behind the words through their own words is one of the creative writing methods of D. H. Lawrence and also one of the linguistic features of Lawrence's works. One can see this clearly not only from these poems but also from his novel *Sons and Lovers*.

3. LAWRENCE'S CREATIVE USE OF DIALECT IN FICTION

3.1 Lawrence's Conception of the Novel

Lawrence put forward a series of novel theories in such essays as "Art and Morality", "Morality and the Novel", "Why the Novel Matters", "The Novel and the Feelings" and "The Novel". These unique artistic theories are of great significance to the study of Lawrence's novels.

In "The Novel", Lawrence proposes that "in a novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all." (Lawrence, 2006) "There you have the greatness of the novel itself. It won't let you tell didactic lies, and put them over." (Lawrence, 2006: 53) The great merit of the novel is that "it cannot exist without being 'quick'". (Lawrence, 2006: 59) Lawrence says that the character in the novel must be "quick", which means that "he must have a quick relatedness to all the other things in the novel". (Lawrence, 2006: 60) In Lawrence's view, "unlike the essay, the poem, the drama, the book of philosophy, or the scientific treatise: all of which may beg the question, when they don't downright filch it; the novel inherently is and must be:

1. Quick.
2. Interrelated in all its parts, vitally, organically.
3. Honorable." (Lawrence, 2006, p.65)

In "Morality and the Novel", Lawrence proposed that "the business of art is to review the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment." (Lawrence, 2006, p.74) "And this perfected relation between man and his circumambient universe is life itself, for mankind." (Lawrence, 2006, p.75) Lawrence believed that "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 us and the living universe around us "that makes our eternity", and by improving this relationship, a person's soul can be saved. In Lawrence's view, the beauty and the great value of novel lie in that "the novel is the highest complex of subtle interrelatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance. If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail." (Lawrence, 2006, p.77)

In D. H. Lawrence's eyes, all emotions go to the achieving of a living relationship between a human being and the other human being or creature or thing he becomes purely related to. Lawrence emphasizes 'the living moment' because in a novel, as he argues in "Why the Novel Matters", "the characters can do nothing but live. If they keep on being good, according to pattern, or bad, according to pattern, or even volatile, according to pattern, they cease to live, and the novel falls dead. A character in a novel has got to live or it is nothing." (Lawrence, 2006, p.94)

Thus, we should "Turn truly, honorably to the novel, and see wherein you are man alive and wherein you are dead man in life." The novel can test the difference between true life and walking dead:

To be alive, to be man alive, to be whole man alive: that is the point. And at its best, the novel, and the novel supremely, can help you. It can help you not to be a dead man in life. So much of a man walks about dead and a carcass in the street and house,

today... But in the novel, you can see plainly, when the man goes dead, the woman goes inert. You can develop an instinct for life, if you will, instead of a theory of right and wrong, good and bad. (Lawrence, 2006, pp.95-96)

In "*The Novel and the Feelings*", Lawrence proposed that "if we can't hear the cries far down in our own forests of dark veins, we can look in the real novels and there listen in. Not listen to the didactic statements of the author, but to the low, calling cries of the characters, as they wander in the dark woods of their destiny." (Lawrence, 2006, p.106)

The beauty of the novel is that "everything is in its own relationship, and no further", and yet "the relatedness and inter-relatedness of all things flows and changes and trembles like a stream". This, for Lawrence, makes the novel "the highest example of subtle relatedness that man has discovered". (Lawrence, 1968)

He concludes in his essay "Morality and the Novel" with memorable assertion that "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)

So, Lawrence asserts in his essay "Why the Novel Matters":

For this reason, I am a novelist. And being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and the poet, who are all masters of different bits of man—alive, but never get the whole hog. (Lawrence, 2006, p.90)

3.2 Lawrence's Creative Use of Dialect in the Novel

Sons and Lovers is a masterpiece among Lawrence's novels. In this novel, the protagonist Paul lives in a family full of class conflicts. His father is a miner and is not well-educated, while his mother Mrs. Morel has received a good education. Since childhood, Paul stands with his mother and tries to use Queen's English instead of following his father's way of speaking. Mrs. Morel wants to cultivate Paul into a member of the upper class. To please his mother, even when his father converses with him in the dialect of Bestwood, he still uses Queen's English.

When Paul was a child, one day, after coming back from fetching his father's wage, he complained to his mother:

They're hateful, and common, and hateful, they are, and I'm not going any more. Mr. Braithwaite drops his 'h's, an' Mr. Winterbottom says 'You was.' (Lawrence, 1992)

From Paul's words, we can see that he detests the nonstandard ungrammatical ways of speaking in the dialect and tries to speak Queen's English. Yet, he still uses "an" instead of "and" in his speech, which shows that at this stage he still cannot avoid being influenced by the dialect and still cannot speak perfect English.

After Paul grows up and is able to speak Queen English, he still inadvertently integrates dialect into his speech when conversing with his mother:

"And we'll have a pretty house, you and me, and a servant, and it'll be just all right. I s'll perhaps be rich with my painting."
"Will you go to bed!"
"And then you s'll have a pony-carriage. See yourself-a little Queen Victoria trotting round." (Lawrence, 1992, p.244)

"s'll" should be "shall" in Queen's English. On this occasion, Mrs. Morel does not correct Paul's use of dialect like her having ever corrected Paul's elder brother William's. In fact, this shows that Paul does not reject Bestwood dialect like before. He does not intentionally distance himself from the class that his father represents any longer.

And this change of attitude can be clearly seen from a later conversation between Paul and his mother:

"You know," he said to his mother, "I don't want to belong to the well-to-do middle class. I like my common people best. I belong to the common people."
"But if anyone else said so, my son, wouldn't you be in a tear. You know you consider yourself equal to any gentleman."
"In myself," he answered, "not in my class or my education or my manners. But in myself I am."
"Very well, then. Then why talk about the common people?"
"Because-the difference between people isn't in their class, but in themselves. Only from the middle classes one gets ideas, and from the common people—life itself, warmth. You feel their hates and loves." (Lawrence, 1992, pp.254-255)

And on another occasion, in the course of conversing with Clara in Clifton Grove, the Queen's English that Paul speaks switches to Bestwood dialect naturally, which shows the resurrection of Paul's male consciousness and patriarchal ideology.

"Your flowers are smashed," he said.
She looked at him heavily as she put back her hair.
Suddenly he put finger-tips on her cheek.
"Why dost look so heavy?" he reproached her.
She smiled sadly, as if she felt alone in herself. He caressed her cheek with his fingers, and kissed her.
"Nay!" he said, "Never thee bother!"
She gripped his fingers tight, and laughed shakily. Then she dropped her hand.
He put the hair back from her brows, stroking her temples, kissing them lightly.
"But tha shouldna worit!" he said softly, pleading.
"No, I don't worry!" she laughed tenderly and resigned.
"Yea, tha does! Dunna thee worit," he implored, caressing.
"No!" she consoled him, kissing him. (Lawrence, 1992, p.309)

In the conversation, "dost" should be "do", "Nay" should be "no", "thee" should be "you", "tha" should also be "you", "shouldna" should be "shouldn't", "worit" should be "worry", and "Dunna" should be "don't".

From the foregoing analysis, we can see the delicate

change of Paul's state of mind. From disliking and rejecting using Bestwood dialect to using Bestwood dialect naturally, Paul has gone through the process of maturity, the maturity in ideology. He doesn't reject Bestwood dialect like before. He doesn't consciously distance himself from the local people any longer. He begins to accept the Bestwood people and the Bestwood people. He begins to treat himself as one of them—the common people, for from them he can find warmth and life itself.

Paul's mother's influence on Paul recedes. Paul's own outlook of the world begins to mature.

In the novel *Sons and Lovers*, there is a dialogue in which a miner tells Mrs. Morel about her husband's injury. The paragraph preceding the dialogue is written from the perspective of the third person narrative. The English used is also Queen's English, but then there are significantly different speech expressions, the pronunciation, grammar and syntax being all seriously non-standard English language of a miner:

About a year after William went to London, and just after Paul had left school, before he got work, Mrs. Morel was upstairs and her son was painting in the kitchen—he was very clever with his brush—when there came a knock at the door. Crossly he put down his brush to go. At the same moment his mother opened a window upstairs and looked down.

A pit-lad in his dirt stood on the threshold.

"Is this Walter Morel's?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mrs. Morel. "What is it?"

But she had guessed already.

"Your mester's got hurt," he said.

"Eh, dear me!" she exclaimed. "It's a wonder if he hadn't, lad. And what's he done this time?"

"I don't know for sure, but it's 'is leg somewhere. They ta' ein' 'im ter th'ospital."

"Good gracious me!" she exclaimed. "Eh, dear, what a one he is! There's not five minutes of peace. I'll be hanged if there is! His thumb's nearly better, and now—Did you see him?"

"I seed him at th' bottom. An' I seed 'em bring 'im up in a tub, an' 'e wor in a dead faint. But he shouted like anythink wher Doctor Fraser examined him i' th' lamp cabin—an' cossed an' swore, an' said as 'e wor goin' to be ta'en whoam—'e worn't goin' ter th' 'ospital."

The boy faltered to an end.

"He *would* want to come home, so that I can have all the bother. Thank you, my lad. Eh, dear, if I'm not sick—sick and surfeited, I am!"

She came downstairs. Paul had mechanically resumed his painting. (Lawrence, 1992, pp.83-84)

This dialogue has something in common with the foregoing poem "The Collier's wife". What's different is that in the poem *The Collier's wife*, the heroine is completely an uneducated woman in the lower class. From the conversation between her and the miner coming to tell her about her husband's injury, we can detect that both she and the miner haven't received proper education.

Both of them completely use dialect in the conversation. Yet in the conversation in *Sons and Lovers*, we can see that Mrs. Morel just consciously uses some Bestwood dialect so as not to distance herself from the miner. This kind of way of expression conforms to D. H. Lawrence's conception of the novel that "The novel is the perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationship."

Letting the characters directly speak out their mind by using their own dialect is even more vivid than the third person writing. It can narrow the distance between the characters in the works and the readers. The use of dialect can make the readers ponder over the living conditions of the miner class: suffocated living environment, lack of education, being marginalized, lower social status, hard life, worrying future, etc. It will surely arouse the readers' sympathy with the living condition of the people in the lower class.

By utilizing dialect in a proper way, Lawrence not only presents the social life vividly but also reveals many social problems behind the dialect. The use of dialect has played the role of deepening the theme of this literary work.

4. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing illustrations, one can clearly see D. H. Lawrence's creative use of dialect and the marvelous artistic effect it produces.

Lawrence's creative use of dialect is the embodiment of his conception of the novel. It can truthfully and vividly present the relationship between the figures in the novel and the relationship between them and the environment they are in. It can deepen the theme of the novel and produce striking and profound artistic effect.

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