

On the Three Themes of *The Rocking-Horse Winner*

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Lawrence is a literary giant in the history of English literature in the 20th century. He has created a large number of works in his life. *The Rocking-Horse Winner* is a famous short story in his later years, which reveals the distortion of humanity caused by the expansion of capitalist desire for money. By analysing the three themes, help readers understand this short story deeply.

Keywords: Lawrence, *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, Themes

Introduction

David Herbert Lawrence is a famous British writer in the 20th century. He is one of the most important figures in English literature in the 20th century and also one of the most controversial writers. His major achievements include novels, poetry, drama, prose, travel notes, and letters. Many of his novels have been controversial since they were published, but they are still widely concerned by the literary world. However, compared with Lawrence's novels, the literary value of his short stories is also worth studying. Lawrence's series of short stories show the distorted relationship between human and nature, man and man, human and society, and the destruction of humanity under the impact of industrial civilization from different angles. These short stories are more compact in structure, more concise and powerful in language, and more direct and profound in theme expression.

The Rocking-Horse Winner is a short story published by Lawrence in his later years. Paul in the story yearns for maternal love which his mother cannot give him. In order to please his mother and stop the unbearable voice at home, Paul rode on the Trojan horse and asked the Trojan horse to take him to the "lucky" place, because his mother told him that good luck can bring money. He found that when he went crazy on the Trojan horse, he could predict the name of the winner-horse that would win the next race, which won him a lot of money, while the voice reverberated at home not only did not disappear, but became louder and louder, which indicating that human being's desire for money is endless. After making his last prediction, Paul fell off the Trojan horse and died soon later. In this short story, Lawrence uses a lot of imagery and satire to tell the story of Paul, a little boy who is eager for maternal love and finally loses control of his mind in the desire for money and dies. Lawrence profoundly revealed the distortion of human nature and the imbalance between human and society under the control of money desire in the capitalist industrial society.

The researches on this short story at home and abroad mainly focus on ethical relations, symbolism, Oedipus complex, humanity, and so on. This paper attempts to analyse three themes in this short story: the desire for money, the distortion of human nature, and the death of innocence. Thus, further to reveal that it is

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the development of capitalist industrial civilization that makes people have a strong desire for money, which leads to the distortion of humanity, and finally leads to the rupture of the normal ethical relationship between people.

The Lust for Money

The Rocking-Horse Winner was written in 1926. At that area, the whole Europe is in the stage of economic recovery after the First World War. The speed of capitalist development was more rapid, the rule of the bourgeoisie was fixed again, and the development of industry was essential, while, in the upper class, the desire for money was more intense. Through this short novel, Lawrence deeply satirizes and criticizes people's desire for money under the rule of the bourgeoisie. When Paul's mother received the birthday gift that Paul had prepared for her on her birthday, the whisper of the house got mad, which symbolized her mother's desire for money is becoming larger. When she saw the unexpected wealth, it was like adding a lot of firewood to the raging fire, and the fire of her lust burned more vigorously. When she saw the envelope, surprisingly, "a cold and determined look came on her mouth" (Lawrence, 2003, p. 117), all these deeply reflect her dissatisfaction with this kind of "lucky", because she did not get all the five thousand pounds, which needs to wait for five years that was absolutely intolerable for her. She had to get it immediately, which implied her urgent need for money.

For Paul's mother, she is a "beautiful woman who started with all the advantages, yet she had no lucky. She married for love, and the love turned to dust" (Lawrence, 2003, p. 103). She was a beautiful lady with bonny children, but she felt no love for her children. She lives in the upper class, although not very rich, but her living conditions and material wealth are far higher than the common people; these favourable conditions should have made her satisfied, but the reality is not the case (Huang, 2011, p. 126). For her, she always needs money to maintain her expensive taste and social status, imagining that she could have unlimited wealth to squander. In fact, she had been driven by money and manipulated by the strong desire.

The Distortion of Humanity

Paul's mother was obsessed with the pursuit of money, selfishness, indifference, and lack of love for her children, and failed to guide her children's healthy growth with correct values. Paul's father also failed to fulfil his responsibilities and obligations. He did not make his effort to make money to improve the family's economic situation and ignored the growth of his children. What's more, his uncle showed concern for Paul; he was actually a mercenary. Due to the distorted family environment, little Paul's growth path was full of thorns and bumps and the incomplete family affection that finally led to Paul's tragic death.

At the beginning of the novel, it reveals Paul's mother's distortion of her motherhood under the influence of bourgeois monetarism. Maternal love is instinctive, primordial, but under the influence of monetarism, she has lost this kind of love. When Paul asked his mother, "why don't we keep a car of our own?" (Lawrence, 2003, p. 105), she passed her distorted value of money to Paul, which was deeply engraved in little Paul's heart, making him think that if he has chances to get "lucky", he would get love and attention from his mother, which directly led to Paul's paranoia and madness in looking for "lucky". Under the control of money desire, little Paul's innocence was directly strangled and became a puppet of his mother's lust. He has to stick to it and win more money by gambling on horses to satisfy his mother's endless material desire. Gradually, Paul's ego has changed (Ru, 2012, p. 197). On the other hand, there is always a mysterious connection between the mother

and the child. This mysterious connection can connect the feelings of the mother and the child. When she feels little Paul is abnormal, “she fought with the feeling, might and main” (Lawrence, 2003, p. 121), and still cannot give up the temptation brought by the glamorous parties. Her motherhood has been completely distorted. As the novel just wrote at the beginning, “only she herself knows that at the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, not for anyone” (Lawrence, 2003, p. 103).

What’s more, his uncle was obedient to Paul; however, his real purpose is to get the information about victorious horse, so the pure kinship is also distorted, which is full of interests and utilization. Driven by money worship, people gradually lose their own thoughts and dignity, and are alienated into something that is only used in the market. It is money worship that makes all of them lose their humanity. Unfortunately, they cannot find a way out in this world, because they have lost the ability to love.

The Death of Innocence

In the 1920s, the development of industrial civilization was in its heyday. The ideology based on production was gradually replaced by the ideology based on consumption. People began to blindly compare wealth and show off and the whole society was filled with the atmosphere of money worship and the concept of money supremacy. And people began to become more and greedier. People driven by unlimited desire felt that they could never be satisfied. These distorted values such as money first and greed are vividly displayed in the Trojan horse winner. It is these distorted values that led to Paul’s death. In such a social environment, death is obviously the inevitable outcome of little Paul. The expansion of adult’s desire makes him unable to bear such heavy pressure any more. The mental madness and physical death are the best way for him to get rid of the control of money and the oppression of desire. Ironically, little Paul’s death does not receive the most sincere grief and mourning of his family, because the development of modern civilization has made them lose their humanity, and family affection is not worth mentioning in front of money.

On the one hand, Paul’s death represents the death of children’s innocence under the oppression of modern industrial civilization; on the other hand, it also represents Paul’s liberation from the society polluted by the money. The death of innocence also reveals Lawrence’s aversion and opposition to the development of industrial civilization, because the development of industry and technology makes human nature begin to alienate. The relationship between human is full of interests and desires, and the indifference and ruthlessness of human nature are also exposed. The world of material desire promotes the destruction of human nature. For children who grow up in such a society that the interpersonal relationship is indifferent, death may be the simplest way to extricate themselves, and it is also a profound satire on the concept of money supremacy at that area.

Conclusions

The development of industrial civilization has led to the expansion of the desire for money, while the expansion of the lust for money distorts humanity. Under the influence of the twisted human nature and the control of the overwhelming lust for money, the little Paul was no longer a carefree child, embracing by maternal love, rather a puppet of desire. With the development of industrial science and technology in modern society, people’s material desires are more and more difficult to be satisfied. The worship of money makes the relationship between people materialized (Shi, 2010, p. 154). Little Paul is innocent and desperate, trying to help his mother. However, when he was frantically searching for the victorious horse on his Trojan horse, no

one could wake him up, because they all lost in the world of money. At the same time, these distorted values are still handed down from generation to generation. Lawrence keenly observed the alienation of humanity and split personality with the development of industrial civilization. Not only the balance between human and natural ecosystem has been broken, but also the bond between human and human has been cut off. All of these make the significance of *The Rocking-Horse Winner* profound and spread up to now, also serving as a warning to human beings in modern civilized society.

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