

Representation of Hegemonic Masculinity in D.H Lawrence's *The Rainbow*

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Abstract: *Hegemonic masculinity embodies a wide variety of contexts and has recently been subjected to critical review among numerous scholars. Its successful application to a wide range of diverse cultures suggests that relevant social systems legitimise the dominance of men over women. Hegemonic masculinity is ideologically sanctioned in social formations and particularly in this study, the early twentieth century of England. Not all men attempt to comply to this type of masculinity as there are some who oppose hegemonic masculinity by inculcating alternative masculinities which are subordinate in nature. However, most men position themselves accordingly in situations where their choices may be quite restricted. The purpose of this study is to explicate the representation of hegemonic masculinity in one of D.H. Lawrence's (hereafter Lawrence) male protagonists, in his novel *The Rainbow* (1915). This paper utilises the theory of Connell to elucidate the attributes connected to hegemonic masculinity in a gendered relationship. The principal finding reveals that the male protagonist depicts his dominance by controlling his emotion and feelings.*

Keywords: *Hegemonic masculinity, Dominance, Gender, Patriarchy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Through the period between 1800–1914, Britain was primarily an industrialised society. It was also, through intensifying observation, an imperialist country which had a society that was characterised by a largely rigorous classification of gender and sexuality. Masculinity is self-evidently fundamental in Lawrence's novels to understand the theme, which has been the focus of important work over the past fifteen years (Tosh, 2007). Lawrence struggled to interpolate the depreciation that England would experience and proposed methods for the nation to resume to its "natural" roots through his novels. Lawrence creates his journey for completeness and resolution through the leading male characters during this period of time. Due to World War I, Lawrence, "set off on his savage pilgrimage," that "transformed him from a symbolist experimenter in the traditional novel into the compulsive, chaotic, half-comic propagandist of the popular imagination" (Myers, 1982: 44). There must be a rational explanation for Lawrence's gradual disillusionment with his struggles. It is because of these reasons that the study on masculinity in Lawrence's work is crucial.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study aims to examine the characteristics related to hegemonic masculinity in Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow*. These characteristics are analysed based on Lawrence's male protagonist Tom Brangwen's (hereafter Tom) portrayal of masculinity. The analysis is focused on the gendered relationship between Tom and his wife, Lydia Lensky (Lydia). These characters' behavioral codes and Lawrence narration are used as the data for analysis. The study utilises the hegemonic theory illustrated by Connell (1995) to elucidate the masculine identity in the novel.

3. HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN *THE RAINBOW*

In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence constructs a potent and profound psycho analytic reading of man-woman relationship across three generations of the Brangwen family. Firstly, it is Tom-Lydia relationship that endures through the marriage of Will and Anna, and finally, ending with the third generation of Ursula. In this study the focus is on the hegemonic relationships between the first generation of the Brangwens, that is Tom and Lydia. Tom, a significant English farmer of Marsh Farm in Nottinghamshire is a desolate man, leading a bachelor's life. He is characterised by his yearnings for

sordid meetings with temporary women friends and frequenting the bars until his marriage to Lydia. Lydia is a Polish widow with whom he was attracted to due to an unforeseen circumstance. Although there is language barrier between them, Tom is fond of his wife and he adores his stepdaughter, Anna. As time goes, Tom turns into a kind of rural patriarch, having minor conflicts with Lydia.

The Rainbow is Lawrence's pursuit to rediscover men's inherent dominant masculine potential, which he considers to be obvious in the social practice. The dominant attributes of men are the results of civilisation that has constructed men to display obligatory and acceptable roles that conforms to hegemonic masculinity. Lawrence writes about human relations, and the struggles resulting from conflicts, to attain dominance in the relationships of his characters. The male protagonist, Tom is originated from a long line of minor landholders who had possessed Marsh Farm in Nottinghamshire for countless generations. Tom is a man who works in the farm and he lives alone with only an old woman, as companionship and as a housekeeper. Tom is described as the strong and courageous masculine representative of the Brangwen heritage. He is a typical Brangwen, a masculine fit characteristic of the English rural folk:

"He worked and rode and drove to market, he went out with companions and got tipsy occasionally and played skittles and went to the little traveling theaters" (Lawrence, 2012: 53).

Tom is described as conforming to the ideal masculine features with his perfect physical appearance. Men living in the industrial era were required to hold civilised jobs, marry decent women, and produce future generation appropriate for British citizens. Tom who represents a perfect masculine identity is portrayed as fearless and brave and he could never show his limitation or arrogance. He is courageous because with his integrity, he has nothing to be alarmed about. He is never ashamed, for he has high opinion about himself and is profoundly conscious of doing the right thing. In addition, Tom keeps his principle untarnished, to maintain the respect from the society he lives in. He is not a violent character but a gentleman, who posses the basic qualities of a descent dominant man.

"Masculinity" does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity' (Connell, 1995: 68). For Tom to fulfil a complete masculine identity, it is necessary that he marries a respectable woman. The Polish widow, Lydia is the housekeeper of the vicar of the local church. She emerges as a victim of the disastrous nationalist rebellion against Russia. Tom and Lydia have lost so much due to the unsuccessful revolution that leads to the perplexed tenets of nationalism including patriotism, responsibility and sacrifice. Tom's inclination towards taking on the social identity of "being a man" is when he takes the step into matrimony. He waits for the right time to search for his wife, until one day he sees this strange woman passing:

Her face was pale and clear, she had thick dark eyebrows and a wide mouth, curiously held. He saw her face so distinctly, that he ceased to coil on himself, and was suspended. That's her,' he said involuntarily (Lawrence, 2012: 23-24).

Tom was attracted to Lydia and as a man, he felt he has the right to demand marriage from her. One evening a few months later, Tom found the courage to present the widow with a bouquet of daffodils in the vicar's kitchen and to ask her to be his wife. "I came up," he said, speaking curiously matter-of-fact and level, "to ask if you'd marry me. You are free, aren't you?" (Lawrence, 2012:44).

Tom demonstrated his dominant identity as a man by pressing the idea of marriage on Lydia in a controlling way. By asking Lydia if she is 'free' for him, Lawrence is portraying Tom's construction of masculinity, which is hegemonic. Tom knows Lydia is subordinated to him because she is a lonely and helpless widow and she needs the support of a masculine man. Lydia accepted the proposal although she hardly knows him because she is in need of a male protection. Besides, Tom posses almost all the qualities of a masculine ideal, especially his good looks and his material possession.

Tom and Lydia had difficult time getting comfortable with each other, because they both come from two different cultural backgrounds. Lydia, who originates from Poland, had a difficult life before meeting Tom. Tom on the other hand was born and grew up in Marsh farm. Due to the difference in culture, Lydia spends most of her time being alone and this attitude psychologically burdens Tom. He believes that he does not possess her and she is the "other" with whom he finds difficulty in understanding:

Tom's anguish and pride, his dissatisfaction and self-awareness give him a stature to match Lydia's fierce self-possession and mysterious serenity. (Lawrence, 2012: 17)

The extract portrays that although Lydia is able to fulfill Tom's needs as a wife, both of them feel disconnected because there is no understanding and communication between them. Tom, in his hegemonic position believes that his ideas and thoughts are more important than that of Lydia's. There is a major lack of understanding between Tom and Lydia. This lack of understanding is often complicated by extreme sexual relationships. They have a hard time making partnerships with each other or sharing their thoughts and feelings. Often one or both of them seek a deeper relationship, but they are unable to do so due to lack of emotion and Tom's dominant nature. Lydia is persistently stifled by the authoritative masculinity manliness depicted by her husband through a series of threats and physical force. Tom being the product of the socially constructed ideal of hegemonic masculinity supports dominance as a natural right over Lydia.

Since Tom and Lydia belong to two different cultures, they have a challenging time connecting as a married couple. Lydia's attempt to explain about her childhood experience in Poland to Tom is futile because Tom is unwilling to show interest because he feels it is unnecessary. Due to Tom's dominant stubbornness, their marriage routine is generally without much discussion. However, Tom believes their fulfilling sexual relationship is the closest and most important way to appreciate each other and that is the masculine way.

Tom's attitude in dominating Lydia suggests that maintaining individuality of partners is critical in a successful marriage. Lydia can sense his dominance and expectations overpowering her. During the Industrial Age, women were constricted within the four walls of the house, and thus a psychological conflict was created between men and women. In this situation, Lydia is a victim of rules set by her husband who is influenced by the social practices during the era. In the scene when Lydia delivered a son from their marriage, Tom is subtly, thrilled and excited about the idea of being a father. However, he feels it is unimportant for him to be with the baby because he is the father, the dominant figure, "But he felt not very much outgoing to the baby itself. He was its father, that was enough" (Lawrence, 2012: 78). Tom believes that his responsibility as the head of the family is sufficient as long as he holds on to the identity as the baby's father. To him it is his wife's responsibility to take care of their child and he is pleased that he does not have to be involved. Although, biological aspects and destiny may play a role in the moulding of an individual in Lawrence's novel, social forces are the fundamental determinants of subjectivity and human life. Thus, Tom adheres to the traditional role of the hegemonic position that is ideologically sanctioned by social and historical structure.

In the analysis on the dominant position in *The Rainbow*, it is found that hegemonic masculinity is characterised by aspiration, strength, and independence. Through Lawrence's perspective, it also reveals that such characteristics are encouraged in men but not in women. In *The Rainbow*, the relationship between Tom and Lydia is evident in their disconnectedness during the course of their lives. Tom hardly knows his wife. In marrying her he does not know her. In their marriage, he does not put effort to understand her. After some time, Lydia realised that Tom's attitude is similar to other men where their mission is to sustain their dominance over women. Tom was "the dark opposite to her, that they were opposites, not complements" (Lawrence, 2012: 53). Although both Tom and Lydia understood that they are from different backgrounds, yet Tom chooses to adhere to the social condition of masculinity.

Another characteristic of hegemonic masculinity is the act of men controlling their emotions which is culturally idealised during the industrial period. Tom stifles his feelings toward his wife as he discovers that it is a challenge to share his dilemmas and troubles with her. This is exactly how an ideal man should behave and this is the aim Tom should seek to accomplish within the masculine practice. There are numerous occasions in the novel where Tom was agonised and he suffered because he was not allowed to express his feelings, "His silence was one of angry frustration. He was astonished." (Lawrence, 2012: 88) Along these lines, *The Rainbow* entirely exposes Lawrence's loathing against the rising materialism that has negative effects which include the dehumanisation of society that destroys the fundamental feelings in the human relationships. Lawrence's confrontation on industrialisation is not steered towards principled reasons but it transpires based on his strong consciousness that men and women are physically thriving and developing.

Patriarchy which is directed to limit women's education naturally attempted to dismiss women from professional life. There is a significant discrimination in the varieties of activities and careers that men and women occupy. According to Millett, this type of discrimination in the workplace and women's prohibition is an added part of the political agenda that attempts to guarantee upper status for men

in both personal relationships and society (Millet, 2000). Lawrence's idea of disaster and the most powerful depiction of patriarchal gender roles are attained through his depiction of a primitive, yet powerful man in Tom in the *The Rainbow*.

In this discussion, there are implications that Lawrence outlines the qualities of maleness which correspond to women. Lawrence's character, Tom, like the author himself, knowingly or unintentionally is on a journey to connect to the various dimensions of his life in a period of great social upheaval. Tom is clearly reminding himself to follow the rules that are strongly related to social concerns. It is believed that the social expectation of men to behave in a particular manner that aligns to the dominant position in the form of hegemonic masculinity is vital in a relationship. The struggle of Tom, to achieve fulfilling personal relationships, satisfying work, and a sense of connection to life which is often seen as religious, is done by supporting the tenets of the dominant type of masculinity. Clearly, Lawrence appears to deliver a powerful message that industrialisation instigates not only dehumanisation, but also impedes the normal flow of instincts due to patriarchy. It is therefore necessary for men to understand the importance of conformity and fulfillment for human to explore his identity as human.

4. CONCLUSION

Lawrence's habitual combination of industrialisation experience and humanity is evident in *The Rainbow*. Tom's relationship with his wife Lydia suffered a negative fate in their early married life. Tom's reluctance to discuss his problems with his wife caused constraints in their relationship. One of the criteria of hegemonic masculinity depicted by Tom is the notion that having mutual discussions with his wife lowers his image as a real man. Tom experiences challenges in his early married life in a capitalist society undergoing the feelings of disintegration. One of the principle characteristics of hegemonic masculinity is to control one's emotion and this is evident in the male protagonist, Tom. Hegemonic masculinity may exemplify the notion of dominance, but it also brings constraints to the character.

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