

Trans-nationalism in D. H. Lawrence's 'The Crown'

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D. H. Lawrence's essay 'The Crown' was written during the World War I, and the first three chapters of this essay were published consecutively in *The Signature*, a magazine which he started with John Middleton Murry in 1915. The whole essay was published ten years later as a book with his other essays. 'The Crown' is important not only in relationship with his novels and other literary works but also as a key element for his view of the world, life, nation, and so on. Besides, it significantly testifies to the status quo of the wartime England.

This paper tries to examine the theme of 'The Crown' and delve into Lawrence's viewpoint on nation, or rather, his trans-nationalistic view which may lead to a further prospect for a new world.

1. The Battle between the Lion and the Unicorn

At the beginning of 'The Crown,' two lines are quoted from an ancient rhyme.

The Lion and the Unicorn
Were fighting for the Crown (253)¹

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, this popular rhyme is believed to refer to the amalgamation of the Royal Arms of

Scotland with those of England in 1603, and to the rivalry between the two countries both before and after the Union of Parliaments a century later (269-79).² However, the antagonism between the lion and the unicorn is very ancient. The lion, the king of the beasts, symbolizes power, whereas the unicorn was a symbol of purity. In *Christian Symbolism*, Mrs. Henry Jenner wrote “[t]he Unicorn in pre-Christian times was a symbol of purity [. . .] said to be caught and tamed only by a pure virgin. As an emblem of chastity and strength it was very frequently introduced as an accessory to representations of Our lady [. . .]” (148).³ Lawrence read this book in 1914 and wrote in a letter to Gordon Campbell that he “liked it very much, because it put him more into order” (*Letters II*, 250).⁴

After this quotation, Lawrence begins his description, “What is it then, that they want, that they are forever rampant and unsatisfied, the king of beasts and the defender of virgins?” (253) In fact, why do they have to fight with each other? Which will defeat which? If one defeats the other, what does it mean? Besides, will one of them surely be able to win? In the first chapter of ‘The Crown,’ Lawrence analyzes the temporary society by comparing it to the fight between the lion and the unicorn.

‘The Crown’ is important not only in relationship with his novels and other literary works but also as a key element for his view of the world, life, nation, and so on. What’s more, it significantly testifies to the status quo of the wartime England. ‘The Crown’ is composed of six chapters and the first three chapters were published as a series in a literary magazine – *The Signature* No. 1 (4 October 1915), No. 2 (18 October 1915) and No. 3 (4 November 1915). As the war had already dragged on for one year, Lawrence and John Middleton Murry started the publication of this magazine to express their opinions mainly concerning the freedom of human ego. However, this radical magazine set off confusion both in readers and publishers. Murry and his wife, Katherine Mansfield who was also a supporter and contributor of the magazine, decided to withdraw from the project. *The Signature* was discontinued after three numbers were published. As a result, the latter part of ‘The Crown’ (Chapter four

to six) came to be shut up without publication, although Lawrence had already finished them.

Ten years later, in 1925, Lawrence revised this essay a little and published as a book with his other essays — *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*. In this book, he entered a short essay 'Note to "The Crown"' as the preface to 'The Crown'. In 'Note to "The Crown"', he wrote like this.

I knew then, and I know now, it is no use trying to do anything—I speak only for myself—publicly. It is no use trying merely to modify present forms. The whole great form of our era will have to go. And nothing will really send it down but the new shoots of life springing up and slowly bursting the foundations. And one can do nothing, but fight tooth and nail to defend the new shoots of life from being crushed out, and let them grow. (249)⁵

In 1925, Lawrence was in Mexico. Diagnosed with the return of tuberculosis, he made his mind to leave the country. He passed the border, hiding his pale cheek under his wife's cosmetic powder, and went back to England via New York. He knew his physical condition was serious and his remaining life was not so long. Naturally he would have thought about the meaning of life. It was this year that Lawrence publicized 'The Crown' again to people. At last, this long essay was wholly shown ten years after it was written. As he wrote in 'Note to "The Crown"', his belief had changed little for the ten years. So, 'The Crown' which was first written in the depressing World War I, can be taken as the essence of his continuous thought in life.

2. The Lion Wins

The second chapter of 'The Crown' begins with another part of the ancient rhyme which follows the part quoted in the first chapter.

The Lion beat the Unicorn

And drove him out of town (262)

The lion and the unicorn were fighting for the crown. In the royal armorial figure, both the lion and the unicorn are rampant and their strengths are balanced. It seems they have the reason of living only in fighting. But when the lion beats the unicorn, he drives the unicorn out of town, expels him, obliterates him, and erases him from memory. Perhaps that is why people regarded the unicorn as a mythological beast that never existed. However, what has become of the winner lion? Lawrence describes as follows.

But think, if the lion really destroyed, killed the unicorn; not merely drove him out of town, but annihilated him! Would not the lion at once expire, as if he had created a vacuum around himself? Is not the unicorn necessary to the very existence of the lion, is not each opposite kept in stable equilibrium by the opposition of the other.

This is a terrible position: to have for a *raison d'être* a purpose which, if once fulfilled, would of necessity entail the cessation from existence of both opponents. They would both cease to be, if either of them really won in the fight which is their sole reason for existing. This is a troublesome thought. (253)

If we apply this writing to the war, we notice Lawrence's assertion that the limitless desire for strength will end in the void after all. Those who fight for power can never keep away from the bottomless swamp or vacuum. We can imagine how much people were forced to worry by this audacious allegory of the fight between the lion and the unicorn when they read this essay in the midst of the World War I. What's more, this was really a challenge against the government whose war policy was based on stirring up the morale of the whole nation. Naturally it caused a serious situation in Lawrence's career. He published *The Rainbow* in September 1915, only one month before the publication of *The Signature*. It was two months later on 13 November that *The Rainbow* was suppressed on a charge of obscenity. Here, we cannot but suspect that

the suppression had something to do with his opinions in 'The Crown,' because all the numbers of *The Signature* which included 'The Crown' were published between the publication and suppression of *The Rainbow*.

At the same time, however, we should not consider 'The Crown' only from the viewpoint of war criticism. What Lawrence asserted with the allegory of the fight between the lion and the unicorn is the dichotomy of light and darkness in the universe. It is applicable to that of flesh and mind, man and woman, law and love, and other opposite concepts. It was not necessarily produced in the wartime. It was his ontological assertion since prewar time. He had already conceived and described it in 'Study of Thomas Hardy' (hereafter 'Hardy'). However, 'Hardy' had not yet been completed when he wrote 'The Crown'.⁶ Therefore, it will be worthy to examine 'Hardy' for the better understanding of 'The Crown'.

3. 'Study of Thomas Hardy'

'Hardy' refers not only to the works of Thomas Hardy but is, rather, Lawrence's philosophical view with a grand structure. It describes the fundamental principle of human activities based on the dichotomy of Law and Love.

It seems as if the history of humanity were divided into two epochs: the Epoch of the law and the Epoch of Love. It seems as though humanity, during the time of its activity of earth, has made two great efforts: the effort to appreciate the Law and the effort to overcome the Law in Love. And in both efforts it has succeeded. It has reached and proved the Two Complementary Absolutes, the Absolute of the Father, of the Law, of Nature, and the Absolute of the Son, of Love of Knowledge. What remains is to reconcile the two. (123)⁷

Lawrence describes that humans have disputed on "Law" bombastically since ancient times. The supreme expression of "Law" can be seen in relation with "Love," for instance, in the Book of Job, Aeschylus, Dante and Botticelli. Lawrence says that Plato and Raphael rather oppressed

the relation by raising its level into the abstract. Contrarily, the supreme expression of "Love" can be seen in relation with "Law," for instance, in the works of Rembrandt, Shakespeare, Sherry, Wordsworth, Goethe, Tolstoy, and Turner. Those who wrote the fight between "Law" and "Love" were Dostoevsky, Hardy, and Flaubert. Lawrence, however, depicts that those masters have not satisfied human souls because too much reality and completeness in their description of the fight between "Law" and "Love" left each of them uncontrollable.

To put it in another way, Lawrence thinks that the job left to humans is to reconcile "Law" and "Love". They are not diverse and accidental, but complementary.

The two great conceptions, of Law and of Knowledge or Love, are not diverse and accidental, but complementary. They are, in a way, contradictions each of the other. But they are complementary. [. . .] They are the fixed condition of our being, and they are the transcendent condition of knowledge in us. They are our Soul, and our Spirit. They are our Feelings and our Mind. They are our Body and our Brain. They are Two-in-One.

And everything that has ever been produced, has been produced by the combined activity of the two, in humanity, by the combined activity of soul and spirit. When the two are acting together, then Life is produced, then Life, or Utterance, Something, is *created*. (125)

Here we see Lawrence's assertion that only the principle of human activities based on such combination leads to creation in life.

4. Combination of the Opposites in 'The Crown'

Returning to 'The Crown' with this thought in 'Hardy', we easily understand that the lion and the unicorn should confront each other only for the creation of something new. The opposites confront and fight each other, but what we need is always the final consummation of the opposites. The opposites mustn't fight for the crown. The crown shines on

top of the consummation as a result. Lawrence writes as follows.

There are the two eternities fighting the fight of Creation, the light projecting itself into the darkness, the darkness enveloping herself within the embrace of light. And then there is the consummation of each in the other, the consummation of light in darkness and darkness in light, which is absolute: [. . .] And this supreme relation is made absolute in the clash and the foam of the meeting waves. And the clash and the foam are the Crown, the Absolute. (259)

However, people with unsatisfied soul will seek to satisfy it by bringing the whole world under their order. They seek to make themselves absolute by devouring their opposite. In human history, there have been kings and heroes who desired absolutes — the absolute right, the absolute power, the absolute source, the absolute authority, the absolute being, and the absolute love. So did Caesar, Saul, Napoleon, and in one sense, Jesus himself who fought for the absolute love.

Nonetheless, all the people who get triumphant cannot avoid the destiny to perish. It was true of Caesar, Napoleon, and Christ. The decline of Roman Empire was latent in their consecutive victories. Lawrence continues this assertion, and comes directly to the point that England will fall in the same pit.

He who triumphs, perishes. [. . .] Triumph is a false absolution, [. . .]

In the Roman "Triumph" itself lay the source of Rome's downfall. And in the arrogance of England's dispensation of Liberty in the world lies the downfall of England. (269)

This was really a straight and audacious criticism on England where the Government was propelling the war policy supported by the whole nation. It is still unclear why *The Signature* was discontinued with only three issues in less than two months — whether Lawrence was too audacious or Murry was too timid. However, it is apparent that the critical view of dichotomy which Lawrence had cherished since prewar time gave some

undeniable impact on his contemporaries in England.

5. Trans-nationalism

Lawrence and Murry announced their plan to publish *The Signature* in early September 1915. And Lawrence finished writing the first chapter of 'The Crown' by 20 September. In the letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith dated 20 September, he wrote "at last we have burst into a sort of activity. You will see by the leaflet, about the little paper we are starting" (*Letters II*, 397). He excitedly wrote to Lady Cynthia that they found a reasonable Jewish printer and rented rooms for meetings. He also added, "Don't be alarmed at the paper: my contribution is purely philosophic and metaphysical, and on these grounds sociological. Murry is purely introspective" (*Letters II*, 397). Lawrence completed all the six chapters of 'The Crown' by 2 October, and the first number of *The Signature* was published on 4 October with the first chapter of 'The Crown'.

However, as I mentioned in the second chapter of this paper, *The Rainbow* was suddenly suppressed on 13 November in less than two months after it was published. On a charge of obscenity, the magistrate fined the publisher, Methuen, and ordered them to dispose of all the copies. Methuen agreed to the order, being afraid of its influence on their business. Lawrence received no information from police. Besides, he could not persuade Methuen to resist the authorities. The publisher supported neither the novel nor the novelist.

The way those things went on was like a flow: the publication of *The Rainbow* (30 Sept.) - the publication of *The Signature* (4 Oct., 18 Oct., and 4 Nov.) - the suppression of *The Rainbow* (13 Nov.) - the ceased publication of *The Signature*. We cannot but suspect a causal relationship in the course of these things. In other words, it seems like this. What the authorities worried most and tried to eliminate was not so much obscenity in the novel as a risky possibility that the English consciousness, or so to speak, patriotism of the nation will be destroyed from inside in the middle

of the wartime.

The Rainbow was dedicated to a German woman, Else Jaffe, elder sister of Lawrence's wife, Frieda. In the novel, after all, the heroine Ursula refused her lover, Screbensky, who belonged to the Royal Engineers. So, Mark Kinkead-Weekes points out that these elements in *The Rainbow* might well have caused offence in those dark days of the war. He depicts "[t]he Home Office may have seen, in the accusation of obscenity, a good opportunity to discredit an author who was becoming, if not dangerous, at least a nuisance - though the evidence is not conclusive" (xlviiii).⁸ Certainly the remarkable matters such as dedication to a German name and the insulting treatment of a Royal sapper may have offended the authorities. Nonetheless, I think what was more offensive to the authorities would have been something more fundamental, what could be called "trans-nationalism" in Lawrence's view on nation.

For example, there is a scene where Ursula disputes on war and nation with Screbensky who is proud of his job as a sapper to build bridges or railroads on battlefields. Whereas Screbensky says that he could not be himself if there were no nation, Ursula asserts that her existence has no relation with the nation.

"Well, if everybody said it, there wouldn't be nation. But I should still be myself," she asserted, brilliantly.

"You wouldn't be yourself, if there were no nation."

"Why not?"

"Because you'd just be a prey to everybody or anybody."

[. . .]

"[. . .] What do you fight for, really?"

"I would fight for the nation."

"For all that, you aren't the nation. What would you do for yourself?"

"I belong to the nation and must do my duty by the nation."

"It seems to me," she answered, "as if you weren't anybody - as if there weren't anybody there, where you are. Are you anybody, really? You seem like nothing to me." (288-89)⁹

Here Ursula talks about something beyond the nation as a way to live. She thinks there exists one's self even if one's belongings are not protected by the nation.

In the conviction of an independent self as above, she makes her mind to break up with Screbensky, her lover, and go on the way to look for a new life. Her decision to part from her lover, family, home, country, nation, or in fact everything that had surrounded her, suggests that she is not adhering to the habitual concept of nation but aiming at some transnational world. Was it not this trans-nationalistic view of Lawrence that the authorities really worried as a risk to the country rather than obscenity in description?¹⁰

Returning to 'The Crown', we surely find there a dialectic viewpoint for the future to liberate people from the standstill confrontation of the absolutes. That view suggests some new ideal society on the rail different from the existent world. It substantiates his idea of Utopia. In fact, Lawrence had conceived the construction of a utopia named "Ranim" already seven months before he wrote 'The Crown'. He mentioned it in the letters to his friends such as E. M. Forster (*Letters II*, 266) and Lady Ottoline Morrell (*Letters II*, 272).¹¹ The utopian idea which he conceived with "Ranim" is not completely consistent with 'The Crown'. However, it certainly laid the foundation for the mental development of Ursula in *The Rainbow* and the dispute on the lion and the unicorn in 'The Crown'.

Lawrence proposed "Ranim" to his acquaintances early in 1915. At the early stage of the World War I, it was naturally seen as an illusionary plan by most people. But the idea can strike more people who live at the present time of the 21st century and confront with various critical problems on the earth that definitely need a transnational viewpoint to iron out.

References

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- ³ Mrs. Henry Jenner. *Christian Symbolism*. London: Methuen, 1910.
- ⁴ George J. Zytaruk & James Boulton, eds. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Vol. II: 1913-16*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981. Abridged to *Letters II* in this paper.
- ⁵ D. H. Lawrence. 'Note to "The Crown".' *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*. Ed. Michael Herbert. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- ⁶ Lawrence started writing 'Study of Thomas Hardy' in October 1914 and stopped it in December 1914, because, with the intention to rewrite it later, he began to devote himself into writing *The Rainbow*. As a result, 'Hardy' was published in *The Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* edited by Edward D. McDonald in 1936.
- ⁷ D. H. Lawrence. 'Study of Thomas Hardy.' *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*. Ed. Bruce Steele. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.
- ⁸ Mark Kinkead-Weekes. 'Introduction.' *The Rainbow* by D. H. Lawrence. Ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- ⁹ D. H. Lawrence. *The Rainbow*. Ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- ¹⁰ Some critics have pointed out anarchism in Lawrence's view. For instance, Simon Casey. *Naked Liberty and the World of Desire: Elements of Anarchism in the work of D. H. Lawrence*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003.
- ¹¹ The letter to E.M. Forster is dated 28 January 1915 and the letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell 1 February 1915.