

Eliot and Lawrence



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T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence – Compare and Contrast their Techniques and Themes T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence, although they are both contemporary authors of Modernist period, express different values and techniques. They are both born in 1880s when the world enters the industrial age. While both witness the dynamic transition, they both criticize the modernity but in different methods. Two authors' relations regarding techniques and themes would be analyzed by comparing Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) and Lawrence's two poem - *How Beastly the Bourgeois is* (1929) and *Bavarian Gentians* (1923).

Eliot and Lawrence both display modernistic aspects. Modern middle class of England, so called Bourgeois is strongly criticized in Lawrence's poem, *How Beastly the Bourgeois is*. The title itself clearly demonstrates Lawrence's hostility towards bourgeois. The poem begins describing how bourgeois seem fancy outside. However, if he were let to be "faced with another man's need, or to a bit of moral difficulty (11-12), he goes soggy like a wet meringue (13). He is all wormy and hollow inside just like an old mushroom.

To Lawrence, bourgeois hold every aspect of cultural decay in the modern Western world. One of typical modernist tactic is to criticize modernity which includes the suddenly enhanced status of the middle class who lack corresponding intellectuals. Eliot also demonstrates Modernism. He was a key figure of Modernism and was so important a figure that the early Modernism era in 19th century is also called 'The Age of Eliot'. In *The Metaphysical Poets*, written in 1915, he introduces his thoughts on what distinct features 'Modern' or 'Metaphysical' poets should use.

Although his early poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is published prior to the book review, it also displays modernistic features. First of all, Prufrock, the speaker of the poem, is not going for 'telos'. His utterances are not logically connected and thus fail to be accumulated into certain purpose. In this poem, his objective would be to declare his love as the title implies. However, all he does is to vision and revision (33). Constantly suggesting something bold but never do as so, he doesn't move forward but always retreat. And indeed there will be time

To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?' Time to turn back and descend the stair, (37-39) His impotent feelings are shown in lines 39 as he descend the stair or as he uses the word 'digress' (66). He keeps inferring to 'overwhelming question' but it doesn't lead to actions, which reminds of *Bourgeois*. Another similarity between Eliot and Lawrence's poems is the coherent relationships between contents and structures. In *Bavarian Gentians*, gentians are compulsively modified by various embellishments. Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark arkening the daytime, torch-like, with the smoking blueness of Pluto's gloom, scribbled and torch-like, with their blaze of darkness spread blue down flattening into points, flattened under the sweep of white day torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark-blue daze, black lamps from the halls of Dis, burning dark blue, giving off darkness, blue darkness, as Demeter's pale lamps give off light, 10 lead me then, lead the way. (3-10) Words or phrases such as "big and dark, only dark and again darkening the daytime" qualifies gentians and those embellishments don't stop until the line 6 before the main verb 'sweep'.

Compulsive embellishments start again after the main verb, and what the speaker does from line 3 to 10 is just to describe how dark and blue the gentians are. This strikingly repetitive structure helps expressing the desperate desire the speaker has for deadly vitality. Bavarian gentians itself contains vitality as the word 'Bavarian' infers. Also, its role is to lead the speaker to underworld where ultimate source of vitality seems to reside. Prufrock's utterances are wordy and redundant as well. For instance, he uses triplets from line 122 to 124. Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. (122-124) Triplet is a powerful technique to finish because it lets reader to feel that something is completed. However, Prufrock could not resist temptation to add some more. Right after the triplet, he continues as if he murmurs, "I do not think they will sing to me" (125). This endless revision mars the effect of the triplet and even makes it redundant. Triplet turns out to be in vain and this structure strengthens Prufrock's indecisive character, in accordance with contents

Eliot and Lawrence are also both talented in using vivid and powerful images. In *How Beastly the Bourgeois is*, Lawrence borrowed the hollow and damp image of mushroom to describe Bourgeois. It starts "Nicely groomed like a mushroom" which gives some humor to the poem. In *Bavarian Gentians*, repetition of dark and blue makes strong impressions. The gentians are like dark torch "darkening the daytime" (4) and "their blaze of darkness" (5) assign unimaginable darkness to the gentians. The vivid and

powerful images of gentians are so impressive that it remains long after the poem is finished.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is also famous for shocking images, devised by Eliot's attempt to achieve 'sudden contrast'. When the evening is spread out against the sky Like a patient etherized upon a table (2-3) This striking juxtaposition leaves strong images. Evening, like a patient etherized upon a table presents a symbolic landscape where Prufrocks' unfruitful floundering eventually ends to be drowned. Line 8 to 9 also shows Eliot's brilliance. The lines "tedious argument / Of insidious intent" (8-9) successfully secure the effect by putting unexpected words joined together.

Eliot deliberately polished his lines to give exactly this unusual feeling. Samuel Johnson, however, criticized this kind of juxtaposition. He first named them 'metaphysical' poet with negative connotation. Also, he diminished the effect by arguing that in metaphysical poetry "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together" (Samuel Johnson, Cowley). However, Eliot rebutted Johnson's review in *The Metaphysical Poets*. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.

Furthermore, he encourages that poetry should include heterogeneity of material compelled into unity only differ in degree. While both Eliot and Lawrence create powerful images, their concepts of image are very different. Lawrence claims "poetry must be spontaneous, flexible, alive, 'direct utterance from the instant, whole man,' and should express the "pulsating, carnal self" (*The Poetry of the Present*, 1919). His version of successful

poetry should contain raw feeling of instinctual self. On the contrary, Eliot is strongly against dissociation of sense and sensibility.

Therefore from Eliot's point of view, Lawrence's inclination toward sensibility is not desirable. In Eliot's point of view, Lawrence could even be categorized as a romantic poet. It is because Lawrence's trust in instinctive raw feeling might relate him to Romanticism where human's individual feelings were though highly of. Eliot endeavors to deliver image by letting people "feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose" (Metaphysical poet). For him, thoughts do not conflict with feelings. They are rather harmoniously joined together and produce memorable expressions.

He used 'allusion' to achieve these effects. When classical literature is inserted as an allusion, a text is connected to another, enlarging the thought and feelings of the text. While Romanticism regards poets' genius as important, Eliot regards classical texts as so. Meanwhile, Lawrence values poet's genius above others as he tries to capture ecstatic moments of vitality through his vision as shown in *Bavarian Gentians*. Eliot might advise Lawrence to control his overwhelming passions and use classical literature instead, for old texts often possess depths which enlarge the meaning of poetries.

For example, an epigraph attached to the *Love Song* alludes to Dante's *Inferno*. Guido confesses his sins to Dante only because he thought Dante would not be able to escape from the inferno and infamy him. Guido's utterance takes place because Guido presumes that his utterance would mean nothing as if it has never existed. *Prufrocks's* utterances are also facing ontological question. Unlike its title, love is neither ever achieved nor

even declared. He confesses “ It’s impossible just to say what I mean! ” (104). His utterances fail without accomplishing any goal.

Therefore, the epigraph arranged rich context in accordance with Prufrock’s situation. Although Lawrence might be related to Romanticism with regard to his trust in human instinct, he is not Romantic poet. Contrary to typical Romanticism which tends to be often criticized for its idealistic detachment, Lawrence sings the vitality of human instinct, closely related to reality. In *Bavarian Gentians*, the speaker does not fly away from reality but rather goes underground and face the reality of realities – death. *Gentians’* dark and blue power guides the speaker to enter into the presence of Pluto.

Were it not been for his desire for the essence of vitality, this brevity to face death would not be possible. Lawrence “ takes off his mask of persona unlike other romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Yeats” (J. Kim, Lawrence) and vigorously recites his raw feeling as it is. As Eliot pursues to “ incorporate erudition into sensibility” (*Metaphysical Poets*), he would prefer *Bavarian Gentians* to *How Beastly the Bourgeois is*. While Lawrence exposes direct feeling in both poems, *Bavarian Gentians* uses myths of Persephone or Odysseus. and Persephone herself is but a voice r a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom, among the splendor of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on the lost bride and her groom. (16-20) Persephone or ‘ the lost bride and her groom’ could be seen as allusions as it strengthens both the images of life and death. Persephone, combined with his mother Demeter, symbolizes uncontrollable vitality of land. Within this context, it

become more persuasive that the speaker does go underground searching for essence of vitality retained in death.

Regardless of their different techniques and themes, Eliot and Lawrence deliver messages and images vibrating with energy. They are contemporary poets with critical minds. Each took different measures to depict problems but both proved to be effective. Eliot who went over to England in pursuit of ‘tradition’, he referenced other works of literature within his text. This technique, called ‘allusion’ enabled Eliot’s text to be equipped with richer context in which the texts could be more delicately understood.

Lawrence, on the other hand, focused more on expressing innate vitality of human being just like a person who was passionate enough to elope with his lover. He created direct and vivid images. Ceaselessly correcting himself, Prufrock loses his momentum. Eliot shows alienated character without making any adjustments. He rather chooses to borrow classical literature to round Prufrock’s character. Lawrence, meanwhile, tries to solve the problem of his era by suggesting the power of vitality. He urges others to pursue the vital power to the end, even till one faces death, where the essence of the power could be found. (1835 words)