

## Metaphor and Metonymy of Colors in Lawrence's Fictional Works

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#### Abstract

D. H. Lawrence is one of the most unique and controversial novelists in the twentieth-century English literature. With his abundant legacies of fiction, poetry, and other works, D. H. Lawrence has attracted the critics' attention from all over the world. However, it is the theme of his novels that the critics mainly focus on, and his strategies in arranging the narration, especially his use of color words, do not receive enough attention. Very few of the critical essays or books have analyzed in detail the color usage in Lawrence's fictions, though these chromatic terms prevail nearly every piece of his writings. Even fewer answered the questions as to why Lawrence strenuously depicted the colors, and what are the reasons behind this kind of narration. Accordingly this essay takes into account the importance of color usage in Lawrence's selected fictional works in light of Jakobson's theory on metaphor and metonymy, seeking to give further insight into Lawrence's techniques, concerns and objectives.

**Key words:** Color words; Metaphor; Metonymy

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### INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the discursive presence of the color words in Lawrence's writing may make the systematic classification of them quite difficult, Jack F. Steward's essay "Metaphor and Metonymy, Color and Space, in Lawrence's 'Sea and Sardinia'" serves as an inspiration for this task. Color words may be examined with reference to semiotic theory as well, since they belong to the group of signs. Roman Jacobson's distinction between the metaphoric and metonymic characteristics of language, which also can be extended to other system of signs, can be applied to the classification of color terms appearing in Lawrence's fictional work.

In his book Fundamentals of Language (1956, p.58), Jakobson suggests that the use of language involves two operations—selection and combination: Speech implies a selection of certain linguistic entities and their combinations into linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity.

According to Jakobson, metaphor corresponds to the operation of selection. As the perception of similarity is involved in the course of selection, the possibility of substitution may well be implied. In that case, making a metaphor means that there must be similarity in meaning and dissimilarity in the species the two things belong to. In literature we could find that poetry is metaphoric. First, the formal rules, such as meter, rhyme, stanzaic form, etc., are based on relationships of similarity. Secondly, the similarity of meaning is also a form of metaphoric mode as well, and the images, symbols, and even thematic motifs which can all be regarded as metaphors. In Jakobson's scheme, metonymy belongs to the combination axis of language, in which contexture is the most essential procedure. By "contexture" Jakobson means that "any linguistic unit at one and the same time serves as a context for simpler units and/or finds its own context in a more complex unit" (p.60). As prose describes logical relationships between concepts, entities, or events, it tends towards the metonymic pole. Since the writer writes about the logical relationship of events or ideas, the details chose by the author become the substitutes for the many other observable details which would have been there in reality. In fictional works, especially in Realistic novels, what happens in the story is only a snap of the real world, and this makes novels a kind of metonymy.

When it comes to modernist fiction, there is an interesting rupture. The modernist novelist endeavor to make some innovation in fictional writing, through which the description of events are replaced by that of consciousness. As David Lodge (1977, p. 46) points out:

To compensate for the diminution of narrative structure and unity, alternative methods of aesthetic ordering become more prominent, such as allusion to or imitation of literary models or mythical archetypes, and the repetition-with-variation of motifs, images, symbols—a technique variously described as "rhythm", "Leitmotif" and "special form".

Then he concludes that modernist novels are mostly combination of metonymy and metaphor, and D. H. Lawrence, as one of the modernist novelists, is very typical in this mode of modern writing.

As color words can be read as signs and messages and they demonstrate the characteristics of both metaphor and metonymy, this paper will providing the reader a new sight of Lawrence's style and the strategies he applies in his fictional writing with the perspective of Jakobson's theory, and prove the importance of color words in producing the modern mode of fictional writing.

#### 1. DISCUSSION

Anais Nin notices that D. H. Lawrence "worked like a painter" (1964, p.63), and in his writing he "does a real painting of nature, animals, clothes, surroundings" (p.62). It is quite possible that Lawrence borrows the techniques from visual art to transfuse the objective vision with a fine poetic imagination, and this brings about the symbolical significance of color words.

Take the color red for example. If we look through Western literature, we would find that it is full of the red and white images: Virgil portrays Lavinia's blush as "Lavinia's hot cheeks were bathed in tears/ she heard her mother's words; and her blush/ a kindled fire, crossed her burning face. And/ just as when a craftsman stains Indian ivory/ with blood-red purple, or when white lilies,/ mixed with many roses, blush: even such,/ the colors of the virgin" (Aeneid 12.64-69); in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, Viola says, "Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white/ Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on" (1.5.239-40). For these great masters, motif of red and white implies flesh and sexual love. As Frye observes, "the red and white symbolize the two aspects of the risen body, flesh and blood, bread and wine" and that "the link between the sacramental and the sexual aspects of the red and white symbolism is indicated in alchemy, with which Spenser was clearly acquainted, in which a crucial phase of the production of elixir of immortality is known as the union of the red king and the white queen" (1957, p.195). Lawrence borrows the symbolic usage of the color red and white from the precedent literary masters.

The short story "The shadow in the Rose Garden" tells about the problem of a wife. The problem may not be the

assumed mismatch between a sensitive woman and her socially inferior and somewhat coarse husband, or neither as it appears that the woman is kept at bay by her romantic memory of an old lover. It may well be the earlier instance of her persistent tendency toward self-protection and life denial the cause of her present problems. The description of the garden full of red and white roses reveals this psychological state:

...Again the same softness of intimacy came over her, as she stood before a tumbling heap of pink petals. Then she wondered over the white rose, that was greenish, like ice, in the centre. So, slowly, like a white, pathetic butterfly, she drifted down the path, coming at last to a tiny terrace all full of roses...

She felt herself in a strange crowd. It exhilarated her, carried her out of herself. She flushed with excitement. The air was pure cent. (1995, p.125)

First, the color red and white indicate the rose garden is a heaven to her where she could fully enjoy the sensual feelings. She touches the petals, smells the scents, identifies their colors so tentatively, and when immersed in the feeling, the scent, and the sight, she was "exhilarated," "carried out of herself" and even "flushed with excitement". Her sense of being like a rose not capable of blossom, and of her own tension, indicate her situation where she would like to be free of. The story is not simply one of a sensitive woman sunk in a past loss, but rather a portrait of woman, educated to subdue her physical feeling, struggling against a fear of giving herself whole-heartedly to the sensual passions. Lawrence is known as a fighter against modern civilization in which human beings are alienated by their excessive application of sense, so he preaches in nearly all of his writings the regaining of instinctive senses. In his opinion, the physical pleasure is also quintessential for men's Being, as he claims, "the sensual passions and mysteries are equally sacred with the spiritual mysteries and passions" (2006b,

Besides, color black and darkness is also omnipresent in Lawrence's fictional writings. For instance, in *The Rainbow*, when Tom first met Lydia on the road, she was in a black dress, and in the ritual scene of Tom's death in the flood, it was also darkness all over. And in other stories like "The Prussian Officer", "The Blind Man", "England, My England", and "Sun", etc., we could see the symbolic blackness and darkness serves as a key point to the theme of the whole story.

In Western tradition, black is usually related to the negative things like sadness, death, or evils. Famine rides a black horse in the Book of Revelation (6.5); Dante's inferno is dark, with "black air" (5.51, 9.6) as well as black devils (21.29) and black angels and cherubim (23.131, 27.113); Milton's Samson feels his grief fester to "black mortification" (662); a character in Shelley says that one can "stir up men's mind/ To black suggestions" (*Cenci* 2.2.157). Spenser's Palmer, a pilgrim who had been to Jerusalem, is "clad in black attire," and seems "A

sage and sobre syre" (FQ 2.1.7) (as cited in Ferber, 1999, pp.28-29). Yet none of these connotations are imparted in Lawrence's use of blackness and darkness. For Lawrence color black is endowed with the implication of the imperceptible power of libido, a mysterious other world.

Lawrence purports the importance of a refreshed recognition of man's physical desire, and his metaphysic draws attention to the reestablishment of the duality of body and intellect. He is not biased against sense and intellect, as some critics assume, instead he is willing to present the contrast between the two forces in most of his tales. It is under the condition that modern civilization has emphasized too much the wisdom or spirituality that he would like to stress the bodily pole of this dichotomy. Since "the potency of blood acts" is "dark" (Lawrence, 1971, p. 364) and unknown, it becomes the representative term to contrast the light of intellect, and most of Lawrence's tales are concerned with this fierce contrast between this two forces, among which "The Prussian Officer" is one of the most outstanding.

In this story, both the protagonists are presented as oppositions to each other. The orderly has "dark, expressionless eyes, that seemed never to have thought, only to have received life directly through senses, and acted straight from instinct" (1995, pp.2-3), while the captain has "light blue eyes that were always flashing with cold fire" (p.2). The colors of their eyes indicate that the two men are representatives of the two forces of life. Dark eyes suggest that the orderly is clearly too much on the animal side of human beings, while the captain is too much of the intellectual side. The contrast of the two forces can also be discerned through the sunlight and darkness in the natural scenes. The hot sunny field is a great torment for the orderly, and so is the gaze of the captain's steely eyes on him. The orderly "wanted to stay in shadow, not to be forced to consciousness" (p.11). As for the captain, once inside the shade of the wood, he "was less real than himself" (p. 13). After the orderly killed the captain, he found himself isolated from the sunlit world beyond the wood. The confinement to a phantasmagorical world of shadows and darkness in a sense makes him relaxed. Lawrence brilliantly describes this inverted feelings of the world that the orderly felt in several other ways, in which, for in instance, lightning at night exposes a "half-revealed world" (p.19), a "ghostly shadow, thrown for a moment upon the pure darkness, which returned ever whole and complete" (p.19). The orderly can only exist now in the dark, and it is totally out of propriety that he should die of sunstroke. The story ends with two images. Both of them correspond with the polarization that characterizes the two men: the body of the captain was "laid rigidly at rest", while that of the orderly looked "as if every moment it must rouse into life again, so young and unused, from a slumber" (p.21). In the end, the instinctual, as it always does in Lawrence's stories, gains the upper hand in the end.

As we have discussed above, repetition is a device to produce metaphor and usually applied in poetry to create rhythm. Some critics (Nin, 1964; Ingram, 1990; Thornton, 1993) have pointed out that Lawrence's language in prose writing bears some poetic qualities, and yet it does not occur to them that it might be a metaphoric feature. Generally speaking, Lawrentian repetition usually includes two kinds: lexical repetition, the repetition of certain words, and rhythmical repetition, produced by thematic parallelism. The color words may be only concerned with the lexical repetition, but there is still rhythmical repetition in a way or another.

There are quite a number of repeated color terms in Lawrence's works. For example, there are descriptions like "ruddy faces, ruddy hands holding food, red mouths working" (1990, p.50), "she saw him mount into the darkness", "he went on into the darkness" (p.54), etc. Apparently, the repetition does not mean that Lawrence is lazy at words selecting, but instead, this kind of description shows Lawrence's effort to create a poetic language in prose writing, and also the repetition could draw enough attention of these words.

In the short story "England, My England", there is a part of detailed description of the characters' house. It is spell like and full of the blood energy absorbed from the young couple's "blood-desire". It was presented as all dark:

The silent house, dark, with thick, timbered walls and the big black chimney-place, and the sense of secrecy. Dark, with low, little windows, sunk into the earth. Dark, like lair where strong beasts had lurked and mated, lonely at night and lonely by day, left to themselves and their own intensity for so many generations. (p.8)

The three sentences follow the same structure: "dark, with" and "dark, like". Not only it reads like a poem rather than a prose, but the re-stress of this word also draws the reader's attention, making them to think about the symbolic meaning underneath the text. Indeed, the house is not only a country house of the young couple, it is also bestowed with the metaphor of "seed in the darkness". Other things about the house help to make the indication more relevant. Firstly, the house itself is a shelter, like the shell of a seed, making place for the core of life. Secondly, it "sunk into earth", like the way a seed lying in the earth waiting for the spring to come. Thirdly, it is silent and lasts for generations, which resembles the serenity and eternity the status of a seed in the darkness.

Besides, the rhythm produced by the repetition make the language stylistically poetic. There is rhythm in it, and none of the three sentences are composed in a complete sentence structure. In that case, we could see that the description breaks the contiguity, and is formed by similarity. The repetition of "dark" plays a crucial role, for it is a metonymic attribute of the context and a metaphorical vehicle for the symbol of seed. This part of description gives the reader an impression: the discourse is not moving forward to narrate new facts, but unfolding

the deeper significance of the same facts. Therefore, this part can stand alone as a poem, and the repetition of the word "dark" helps to make the metaphor, both in meaning and sentence structure.

Another kind of repetition of color terms is the rhythmical repetition. The color terms are used again and again, not in the form of a single word, but usually may take form in a larger sense, the thematic repetition within the whole context. This kind of repetition is very typical in "The Blind Man". In this story Lawrence sets up a binary opposition between "white" and "black" to reflect the theme of the dualism of intellect and blood-consciousness. The two forces constantly conflict with each other, which is embodied in the protagonists: Maurice, the husband, Isabel, the wife, and Bertie, the male friend of the wife. The conflicts between the couple and between the two men can be generalized as the following columns:

Black White
Maurice Isabel
Touch, tactile communication
Sight, verbal communication
Retreat to the dark silence of the barn

Live in the lighted house, work as a reviewer for and stable a Scottish newspaper

Maurice is the representative of blood-consciousness, since all the ways he act are based on the instinct. But Isabel is the opposite; the way she lives is intellectual. The conflict between them reaches its peak when she tries to look for Maurice in the stable. Maurice feels quite easy with the horses in the darkness, but his wife is quite scared under that condition. Unlike the easiness her husband with the horses, she is startled and terrified by the smell and warmth from the animals which are totally invisible to her. Lawrence's description of Isabel's experience of the confrontation with the darkness and the animals is full of tension, and even with a sense of violence. And it is her mind that helps her to find a way to get away with her fear.

The same conflict happens later between Maurice and Bertie. The difference between Bertie and Maurice can also be shown in columns:

Black White
Maurice Bertie
Tall, have large and ruddy hands, and
Small, with thin, white hands and little
powerful and macular legs short legs
Slow mind, feelings being quick and acute
Mind much quicker than his emotions
Have a close relationship with the animals
Dog barks violently at him
Have a profound, dark intimate relationship
Incapable of intimacy of any kind
with a woman

It is quite clear that the two men are opposite to each other. The violence of the final encounter in the barn also shows the severe conflict between the two life forces as black and white. The blind man manages to touch the other, and tries to start a friendship, but the other is deeply humiliated by his behavior. And as the story ends, Lawrence makes him "like a mollusk whose shell is broken" (1990, p.63). In addition to the two big conflicts, there are still other ones throughout the whole story, such as the sulk between the couple at the beginning of the story, the exclusion of the husband at the dinner table, and the husband's going out of the house all alone. The conflict between the two life forces turns up again and again and is constantly reinforced in this story, and this gives rhythm to this fictional work. The conflict, represented by the two life forces as the dark blood-consciousness and the white intellectual consciousness, is like the thematic melody of music, the repetition of which helps stress the themes and also bestows poetic rhythm to it.

The metonymic texts, as Jakobson observes, can be regarded as a synecdoche, a representative bit of reality, and fiction is read as a slice of life. The modernists are also concerned about reality, and, however, they differ from their precedents on the question as what the reality is. Lawrence does not like his contemporaries, who render reality to people's inner thoughts; his works describe the world within or without the characters' minds. Therefore, his works keep some stylistic features of the realistic novels, and are keen on the description of details. Lawrence, learning from Thomas Hardy, also prefers the illustration of natural settings and the appearances of the characters, in which the color terms is the most frequent.

The first kind of metonymic colors in Lawrence's fictional works is to create the "the spirit of place", which is usually in tune with the character's emotion. For Lawrence, the characters cannot stand on their own in isolation, and they must be related to everything else in the novel:

The man in the novel must be "quick". And this means one thing, almost a host of unknown meaning: it means he must have a quick relatedness to all the other things in the novel: snow, bed-bugs, sunshine, the phallus, trains, silk-hats, cats, sorrow, people, food, diphtheria, fuchsias, stars, ideas, God, tooth-paste, lightning, and toilet paper. He must be in quick relation to all these things. What he says and does must be relative to them all. (as cited in Roberts and Moore, 1968, p.420)

There must be a living relationship between the characters and the circumstances around. The achieving of "relatedness" within the novel is also presented in the form of colors in the natural scenes.

The story "England, My England" starts with a piece of description of the living surroundings. As the story starts, Egbert has become worried and has "a pleat between his brows" (1990, p.5). The colors in this opening paragraph are in accordance with his dark feelings. The earth is "grey, dryish soil bare", the flowers are "white and purple", and garden path is "green-grassed" and rises from the shadow. The tonality of color grey, white, and purple is cold, and it helps create an atmosphere of sadness and indicate the futility which would come forth in the end.

"The Thorn in the Flesh" is not lack of the expressive colors as well. After Bachmann escapes from the camp where he is deeply depressed, he feels light-hearted in the world outside:

Many little vine trees rose up in spires, holding out tender pink shoots, waving their tendrils. He saw them distinctly, and wondered over them. In a field a little way off, men and women were taking up the hay. The bullock-waggon stood by on the path, the men in their blue shirts, the women with white clothes over their heads carried hay in their arms to the cart, all brilliant and distinct upon the shorn, glowing green acres.(1995, p.27)

In this part of scenery description, the pink color of the shoots tones beautifully with the glowing green acres. The color of the peasants' clothes, blue and white, is the color of sky and cloud. All of them would arouse a feeling of harmony, which is also the impression Bachmann have at that time: "He felt himself looking out of darkness on to the glamorous, brilliant beauty of the world around him, outside him" (p.27).

In his later years, Lawrence borrows techniques from the modern visual art to impart narrative power to colors. The change of the hues of colors is consistent with the progress of the narration, thus the colors are no longer stable, and they become active with movement. The color words are like the colors in modernist paintings, which become the major elements on the whole plate. The colors in "The Princess" are of this kind.

"The Princess" is about a white woman's journey from one world to another. As the story proceeds, the princess makes a journey deep into the Rocky Mountains. Her denial of the Mexican guide after she deliberately starts the intimate contact with each other becomes the cause of impersonal violence imposed upon her as punishment. Lawrence narrates heroine's journey through the mountains in the way of travel writings. As Jack F. Steward observes, "[m]etonymy dominates in travel writings, where direct visual experience precedes commentary and reflection" (1995). Therefore, the text is full of scenery descriptions and color terms. When Dollie Urquhart, "the princess", enters the mountains, "the canyon was full of a deep blueness", the sky is "perfect blue", and there is also "blue black pines and grey-blue rock" around (2006a, p.194)). But in the deep centre of the mountains, the trees become "dark", the valley is naked and with "grey rock", there is a pool of water with the color of "dark green" (p. 204). The change of the color hues from bright to dark, tallies with the proceeding of the plot from the good will to the eventual tragedy. Besides, deep blue usually impresses people with a feeling of depression, thus it carries with it an atmosphere of doom and gloom. Since the color blue is also the color to represent the royal family, the first part of the story which tells about the heroine's personal growth can be replaced with the color of deep blue, and color blue not only indicates the royal identity, but also promises a bad ending.

Yellow is the most frequent color in this short story, and it prevails the whole text without any change in tonality. When the "princess" entered the mountains, her sight was full of yellow:

But the three trotted gently along the trail, towards the sun that sparkled yellow just above the dark bulk of the ponderous mountains. Side-slopes were already gleaming yellow, flaming with a second light, under the coldish blue of the pale sky. (p.194)

Then as they proceed, an accident happened and her maid Miss Cummins chose to go back with the injured horse. Still she gave special attention to the yellow aspens around:

Here a wind swept, and some of the aspens were already bare. Others were fluttering their discs of pure solid yellow, leaves so nearly like petals, while the slope ahead was one soft, glowing fleece of daffodil yellow; fleecy like a golden fox-skin, and yellow as daffodils alive in the wind and the high mountain sun. (p.198)

When she and the Mexican guide finally reach the centre of the mountains, despite the shagged desert-like surrounding with full of cold colors such as grey, dark, deep green, the yellow is still there:

Winding through the thin, crowding, pale-smooth stems, the sun shone flickering beyond them, and the disc-like aspen leaves, waving queer mechanical signals, seemed to be splashing gold light before her eyes. She rode on in a splashing dazzle of gold. (p.204)

It was a deep cup of shadow. But above, the sky was still shining, and the heights of mountains were blazing with aspens like fire blazing. (p.205)

Every time when the heroine set her eyes on the mountain around, the color yellow would turn up. And every time this color appears, it is foregrounded in a setting full of darkness or shadow. Because of its light and bright quality, the color yellow serves as a parallel to the ideal of the "princess", which symbolizes the people's ideal of subjectivity and intellect. "The Princess" is an allegory of resurrection, implying the possibility of restoration to the good past days by embracing the primitive nature. Yet The tragic ending suggests Lawrence's doubt about his solution. The "princess" ended up with madness, and in her madness she keeps on being a "princess" as she was before, and this again tallies with the foregrounding of color yellow everywhere.

The change of colors in this tale embodies a proceeding motion from the seemingly peaceful beginning to the tragedy in the end. The motion leads the reader's mind to stop at the deserted dark and grey centre. Meanwhile, the omnipresent yellow is a ray of sunlight shedding on the dark punishment imposed on the heroine. With all these into consideration, the colors give us a feeling that they impress us so thoroughly that the whole body of narration can be replaced by the colors in our mind, thus the colors functions as synecdoche to the whole story.

#### CONCLUSION

As David Lodge points out, "[t]his concern for flow, for continuity, meant that Lawrence's style had to be essentially metonymic in structure, forwarded by contiguity, though the meanings he groped after could only be expressed metaphorically" (1977, p.161). We could see that color words in Lawrence's fictional works are of the same usage. They fall in to two groups correspondingly: one with plain metaphoric meanings; the other is written under metonymic mode to give referential information of human appearances or settings of the events. In a word, the color words help to stress the metaphysics which Lawrence has long purported, without speaking out the truth directly. And this narrative strategy, as Lawrence suggests, gives the novelist freedom not to "put his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance of his own predilection" (1987, p 172). The other group of chromatic details which do not show the dominance of metaphor as symbolic meanings and poetic repetition belong to the metonymic mode of writing. The colors corresponding to the inner thought of the characters even give spirit to natural scenes. And in this way the natural scene make the reader see, feel, and finally experience what is told in the story. In the later phase of Lawrence's writing career, the colour details in the natural scenes can even replace the narrative and are endowed with the power of narration as those in the abstract art. The change of hues, and foreground and background of certain colors are in tune with the movement of narration, and yet the clots of colors make the story acquire the quality of tranquility and eternity, which, as Wincklemann suggested years before, belongs to the art of the superb.

In short, the colour words in Lawrence's fictional work are not inadvertently used, instead, they are not lack of insight, and plenty of connotations and narrative strategies are embodied by them. Therefore, the usage of them is not merely a rhetoric device to make the description more vivid. A specific study of them would help us make clear the ambiguity of his stories, know more about his narrative techniques, and even the relation between he and his precedents, and his time.

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