

MODERNISM IN “MABEL” AND “THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER”

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Abstract: Modernism in writing had influences or impacts from the Industrial Revolution that took place before and after the turn of the 20th century. Unsurprisingly, it affected many changes in human's thought. In this article, I discussed influences of the changes that are represented in two short stories titled “Mabel” by W.S. Maugham and “The Rocking-Horse Winner” by D.H. Lawrence.

Keywords: *Industrial Revolution; Mabel; Modernism*

INTRODUCTION

The Enlightenment era and the rise of science before and after the turn of the 20th century have shown that human's technology could influence human's life and thought. The inventions like the steam engine, train, and telephone have changed how people see the world. Steam engine, for instance, which was invented by James Watt, has caused the use of it in industries and in making new mode of transportations like steamboats and trains. The use of the engine in industry made the production process more effective and efficient. Then, the Industrial Revolution took place.

However, the engine that was widely used by industries all over Europe was not fully automatic and needed coal to operate. Therefore, human's labour was needed to operate the engine and to extract coal from the earth. The need of humans to operate the engine and also workers to work in the factory and mining it then caused many people who lived in the countries to move to the cities. The migration of the people to cities then changed the landscape of countries since there were not many people who lived and worked there. There were also changes in the cities as slums were scattered everywhere. The slums were places where the factory workers lived in the cities. The low wages that they got from working couldn't make a good living in the city.

That condition above was likely depicted in novels such as *Hard Times* (1854) and *Oliver Twist* (1839) by Charles Dickens using realism style, a popular mode of writing in the 19th century. Authors who used this style might try to depict life in an entirely objective manner, without idealization or glamour and without didactic or moral ends (Benet, 1973). Using this style, many writers in this age were trying to depict the condition of the people who lived at their time 'realistically'. Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist*, for instance, depicted child labour and poverty which existed along with Industrial Revolution. Works in realism style then could be regarded as a representation of the condition of people when it was written. However, the use of the style was then challenged by modernism as one of ways of representing human's condition (Childs, 2000, p.3). In this article, I would like to bring the influences of modernism in writing into further discussion.

Modernism in Writing

As a style in writing, modernism is newer than realism in representing life. Although realism is a writing style which tries to tell its reader objectively, Peter Childs (2000) considers modernism to be more real than realism in representing life. It is because modernism represents consciousness, perception, meaning, and individual's relation to society through for instance interior monologue and stream of consciousness in writing (3). In Ezra Pound's phrase, it is an attempt to 'make it new' of the previous style in writing which expresses sensibilities of modernism. The sensibilities of modernism in literature more or less is about "... of the city, of industry and technology, war, machinery, and speed, mass markets and communication, of internationalism, the New Woman, the aesthete, the nihilist and the flaneur" (Childs, 2000, p.4).

Modernism in writing can be regarded as what Harold Rosenberg called 'tradition of the new'. It tries to break what exists – and famous – before, realism, to something new and contains process creation and decreation (in Childs and Fowler 2005). It is why we can find that modernist writing somehow still has parts of realist writing in it. It is because modernist writers not only create something new but also decreate what has existed. In "Mabel", I find that it is not chronologically narrated. It is one of the experimental ways of modernist writers to write their works. 'Oppos[ing] to chronological form' is one of characteristics of modern writing which arose in about the 20th century. This might what make modernist writing not easy to be read by English readers in the late 19th century to the beginning of 20th century when they first appeared. It perhaps because of the preference of English readers at that time who, in Christine Broke-Rose's words, had "...preference for content over form, the what over the how, even at a time of technical innovation" (in Caserio, 2009, p.11). But, however, the modernists insist on breaking what existed before, to 'make it new'. Before the 20th century, what was regarded as art was about ethical content rather than aesthetic. This kind of view, in fiction, then was challenged by modernist writers who prefer to put their vision in their works rather than to put ethical content in it. There is a process of creation and decreation that is applied in the attempt to break what existed before and to make it new.

Furthermore, modernism in writing also had influences or impacts from the Industrial Revolution. Unsurprisingly, it affected many changes in human's thought. One of the changes brought was a challenge towards traditional views on women. The view that women were weak, inferior to men, and as 'Angels in the House' were challenged by the condition of lots of women who worked in factories. It was due to industrialization, in particular, that a number of women had the chance to work outside of the home (Wrenn, 2010). As many women worked outside the home, the notion of 'Angels in the House' was obviously no longer relevant. Besides that, the occupation that the women had then could make them independent in terms of financial situation. Afterwards, a married woman with an occupation did not need to be dependent on men financially or even if a woman intended not to marry, financial matters would not affect her. This new view on women was brought into literary works by authors in the 20th century.

The Achievement of William Somerset Maugham and David Herbert Lawrence in Writing Short Stories

Many authors of fiction works in the 20th century are known as those who tried to represent 'consciousness, perception, meaning, and individual's relation to society'. Authors like William Somerset Maugham (1874 – 1965) and David Herbert Lawrence (1885 – 1930), in their writings, have shown tremendous signs of using modernism style. Both of them were British and highly regarded as great writers in Britain and their works appeared in many publications and adaptations.

Maugham was born in 1874 at the British Embassy in Paris, France. When he was young, he showed interest in two fields which were rather unrelated to one and another; he studied philosophy and also medicine. After years of travelling, he then settled in Paris, France to start

his career as a writer. Some of his works, including short stories, are regarded among the best in the English language. Among his best literary works are *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), “Mabel” (1924), and *The Razor’s Edge* (1944). His finest short stories were published by Heinemann in 1951 with the title *The Complete Short Stories of W. Somerset Maugham Volume I, II, and III*.

Eleven years after Maugham’s birth, Lawrence was born. He was born in 1885 in a working-class family in Nottinghamshire, England. In fact, he was the first notable British writer who came from a genuine working-class family. Among his best literary works are *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), “The Captain’s Doll” (1921), “The Fox” (1922), “The Rocking-Horse Winner” (1926), and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928).

In terms of genre, both Maugham and Lawrence are known for a wide range of writings like novels, poems, and short stories. Moreover, for Lawrence, although many might wonder about Lawrence’s supremacy in writing short stories, literary critics believe that he got great achievements in the genre (Lewis, 1955; Maunder, 2007; and Harrison, 2008). His short story titled “The Rocking-Horse Winner” is one of the most popular which appeared in many publications and adaptations. There are a number of movies produced after the filmmakers found the story in a publication. The short story has attracted lots of attention and can be seen from a fact based on a survey on American High-school English teachers in the US in 1979. The survey revealed that the short story is one of the most personal and favourite reading material for the teachers to teach (Ward, 2016, p.149-150).

William Somerset Maugham also had great achievements in this genre. He wrote at least ninety-one short stories. Besides a great number of stories written, he was also influential in terms of giving appreciation to his fellow writers. One of the most important literary prizes awards for short story collections is the Somerset Maugham Award which was launched by the person himself in 1947 (Maunder, 2007, p.23). Unsurprisingly, the award is notable because of Maugham’s influence in this genre. The award was created and endowed by Maugham for young British authors under 35 years of age so they can use the prize to go and spend time abroad. The idea was, perhaps, influenced by what Maugham believed to be influential in his writings. Maugham used his experiences abroad as his inspiration in his works (Maunder, 2007, p.278).

Both writers’ works appeared together in several publications including in *British and American Short Stories* which was firstly published by Longman Simplified English Series in 1960. Some other publishers also republished the book in 1993, 1997, 1999, and 2008. This shows how big the influences that both writers have until today. The short stories that appear in the book are the short stories titled “Mabel” (1924) by Maugham and “The Rocking-Horse Winner” (1926) by Lawrence. In the next part of this article, the two short stories will be discussed further.

The Short Stories: “Mabel” and “The Rocking-Horse Winner”

“Mabel” is included in the *The Complete Short Stories of W. Somerset Maugham Volume III* which was published in 1951. The story mainly tells about the perseverance of a woman character named Mabel in pursuing her elusive beau, George. The two had supposedly been married. However, due to the passing of Mabel’s father, the war, and George’s posting in a dangerous area, the marriage is delayed for seven years. When the day that Mabel can finally come to see her fiancée in Burma, he decides to run away from her to avoid the wedding. What follows then is an interesting adventure story across Asia. Interestingly, Mabel always knows George’s whereabouts. When George feels that Mabel can never find him, she appears in front of him. The adventure is finished and they finally get married.

“The Rocking-Horse Winner” written by David Herbert Lawrence was first published in Harper’s Bazaar magazine in July 1926. The short story is one of the most famous ones by Lawrence. It was then appeared in several publications e.g. The Ghost Book: Sixteen New Stories of the Uncanny which was published in the same year, The Lovely Lady in 1933, A Century of Creepy Stories in 1934, and in The Complete Short Stories of D.H. Lawrence volume III published by Heinemann in 1955. The story mainly tells a story in which a boy named Paul dies in efforts to show to his mother that he’s got ‘luck’. To prove his luck, he rides his rocking-horse like a madman to get ‘inspiration’ before he puts his bets. He does this in order to stop what he believes as whispers from his house. He believes that his house always whispers, “There must be more money!”. Interestingly, Paul manages to win lots of bets and a big sum of money that he would give to his mother with the help from his uncle. However, the money that he gets from betting does not stop the whispers. The more money that is given to his mother, the more she spends. At the end of the story, Paul becomes so obsessed with betting and money. He tries so hard to get the ‘inspiration’ until he finally becomes very ill and then dies.

Modernism in “Mabel” and “The Rocking-Horse Winner”

The story in “Mabel” is started with the appearance of a character, no name given, in Burma. Firstly, the story is about him but suddenly it goes to another person’s story – and now with a name, George – with his wife, Mabel, whom the short story’s title is taken. It is when the no name character is with the secretary, he is told the story of George and Mabel.

I was at Pagan, in Burma, and from there I took the steamer to Mandalay, but a couple of days before I go there, when the boat tied up for the night a riverside village, I made up my mind to go ashore. The skipper told me that there was there a pleasant little club in which I had only to make myself at home; they were quite used to having strangers drop off like that, and the secretary was a very decent chap ... There was a man sitting of the veranda and as I walked up he nodded to me and asked whether I would have a whisky and soda or a gin and bitters ... (Maugham, 2008, p.6).

In this hospitable place they did not ask you if you would have anything; they took it for granted. Then he settled himself in his long chair and lit a cheroot. He told me the story of George and Mabel (Maugham, 2008, p.7).

Until this point, the story is narrated in first person point of view with the unnamed character as the narrator but when the story of George and Mabel is told, it changes to a third person point of view. When the story of George and Mabel is told by the secretary, the plot of the short story then goes flashback telling a story which has happened before. Setting and scene of the short story suddenly change. The change starts to happen in a part of the story which tells about Mabel who tries to meet George in order to marry him and George tries to run away from her to some places across Asia.

He could rest at last: Mabel would never find him there. The consul happened to be a friend of his and stayed with him. He enjoyed the comfort of a luxurious house, he enjoyed his idleness after that strenuous escape across Asia, and above all he enjoyed his divine security. The weeks passed lazily one after the other (Maugham, 2008, p.10).

The story of George and Mabel which is told in third person point of view replaces the first-person point of view from the unnamed character that appears first in the story. In other words, there are multiple points of view in “Mabel” in narrating its stories. Using first person or third person in writing have been applied by writers before modernism took place but the use of the two and not chronologically narrated story in one work was a new kind of style in writing. It is not a chronologically narrated story because the events in which a story of George and Mabel

are a group of events which supposedly take place before the unnamed character appears and starts his narration about his whereabouts.

To end his story, Maugham interestingly chose to finish the story with Mabel successfully marrying George rather than going back to the unnamed character continuing his narration.

She turned to George's host.

'Are you the consul?' she asked.

'I am.'

'That's all right. I'm ready to marry him as soon as I've had a bath.'

And she did

(Maugham, 2008).

Since 'oppos[ing] to chronological form' is one of characteristics of modern writing, "Mabel" then can be considered as one of the kind. A different style was applied in "The Rocking-Horse Winner" by Lawrence. He did not use non chronological narrated story. He wrote in chronological way in the short story. But there is a similarity between the two that is a new representation of women in writing. In "Mabel" we can find that Mabel has a different representation in the short story than any other works before 20th century. She is represented as a New Woman who is not 'womanly women' in Mary Roberts Coolidge's term. William Somerset Maugham as the author of "Mabel" did not treat her as a woman who is a 'womanly women' in the story. Instead of presenting Mabel as a weak character and inferior to male characters, Maugham presented her as a strong character and equal to male characters mainly George. In doing this, Maugham created her be able to travel across some places in Asia alone chasing George which George believed she will not make it. But, she does make it. In simple sentence concerning this, Mabel can do what George can do in case of travelling to places which are far in distance and do it alone. Moreover, she does not only travelling but also chasing George which makes her even looks clever in the short story, cleverer than George. This makes her as a new representation of women in writing as a woman is not treated as inferior to man.

Mabel then is not a 'womanly woman'. A different one but still has a similarity; Hester in "The Rocking-Horse Winner" by Lawrence is treated as an active and independent woman in a background of 20th century family life. Lawrence put the modernist point of view in creating characteristics of Hester. The modernist point of view that he puts moreover challenged the traditional view of women. Since the Industrial Revolution took place, the need of many workers in textile factories has put women to work outside home and then it "...presented a challenge to traditional ideas of woman's place" (Christ, 2013). This is perhaps one of many aspects which influenced the new representation of women in writing after all. Hester is a wife and also a mother of her children is treated as a not dependent woman towards her husband. In the need of money to keep her family living in style, Hester works to get more money for it though her husband already has a job.

His mother went into town nearly every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a friend who was the chief 'artist' for the leading drapers. She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements (Lawrence, 2008, p.26).

Her intention to work does not get any prohibition or resistance from her husband. So that both work to keep the family living in style. The role of Hester then in the family is not only a wife and a mother but also a supporter of the family need of money which makes her not inferior to her husband. The representation of Mabel and Hester in each of short stories can then be regarded as representation of 'New Women' in literary works.

The representation of 'New Women' in both stories could be much related to the Industrial Revolution that emerged at around the time when both authors lived. I have mentioned earlier that "The Rocking-Horse Winner", in short, tells about a story in which a boy named Paul dies in efforts to show to his mother that he's got 'luck'. Jeffrey Meyers (2002) said that the story was inspired by a desperate and unhappy family where remoteness existed among its members and obsession with money was there too (122). The quotation below hopefully can give a little bit of illustration:

"Mother," said the boy Paul one day, "why don't we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use uncle's, or else a taxi?"

"Because we're the poor members of the family," said the mother.

"But why are we, mother?"

"Well - I suppose," she said slowly and bitterly, "it's because your father has no luck."

The boy was silent for some time.

"Is luck money, mother?" he asked, rather timidly.

"No, Paul. Not quite. It's what causes you to have money."

"Oh!" said Paul vaguely. "I thought when Uncle Oscar said filthy lucker, it meant money."

"Filthy lucre does mean money," said the mother. "But it's lucre, not luck."

"Oh!" said the boy. "Then what is luck, mother?"

"It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're rich, you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you will always get more money."

"Oh! Will you? And is father not lucky?"

"Very unlucky, I should say," she said bitterly

(Lawrence, 2008, p.19-20).

The situation quoted above seems to represent what modern life is. It's all become too materialistic in which the concept of luck is understood as merely the ownership of material objects like cars. In fact, since the era of Enlightenment, Western society has turned from irrational to rational. Reason has become the standard in differencing right from wrong, the truth from the lies. This then influenced the society into having more belief in something that can be seen, heard, and touched. In other words, the Western society has become more materialistic. On one hand, these changes have brought them into the glorious advancement in science and technology. However, the changes also made the people become delusional with their life as an individual and as a social being. Modernist writers like Lawrence and Maugham depict this fact in their writings.

Modernism can be taken as a response by artists and writers to several things, including industrialisation, urban society, war, technological change and new philosophical ideas. Because the nineteenth century experienced a spreading disillusionment with existing models of the individual and the social, the Western world was transformed and reinterpreted ... (Childs 21).

The Industrial Revolution did give many impacts to human's life. One of the impacts is it affected many changes in human's thought. The changes however also brought a challenge towards traditional views about women. The view of women that they are weak, inferior to men, and women as 'Angels in the House' were challenged with the many women who work as "... industrialization in particular, gave a number of women the chance to work outside of the home" (Wrenn, 2010). As with many women who work outside the home, the notion of 'Angels in the House' however is challenged. Besides that, the occupation that the women have then can make them independent in the economy. Afterwards, a married woman with an occupation does not need to be dependent on men in the economy or if even a woman intends not to marry, economic matters will not affect her. Relating this to Hester in "The Rocking-

Horse Winner”, she even has an occupation with intention to support her family to live in style. While to Mabel, she is even narrated as far from weak, inferior, and ‘Angel in the House’.

CONCLUSION

The unchronological narration, the use of multiple points of view, and the representation of ‘New Woman’ and new Western society are characteristics of literary works which have modern sensibilities that can be seen from both. The writers were quite sensitive in understanding the world around them. After all, it is “... preference for content over form, the what over the how, even at a time of technical innovation” what writers in the 20th century intended to oppose. This then, perhaps, a reason behind the experimental ways in which many writers applied in their works.

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