

Lawrence and Popular forms of Fiction, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* and other works
Globalized Women Prologue

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Abstract

D.H. Lawrence used the elements of suspense and romance borrowed from popular forms of literature but to different ends other than keeping his audience enthralled to an old fashioned formula. In the penultimate chapter of *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, the figure of the Damsel in distress as embodied in his female character Yvette is involved in a life threatening situation whereas his male character, the Gipsy, is proactively involved in rescuing her life. However, the end result of the rescue scene is to see Yvette through on her way to self-realization. Conversely the male figure dwindles into oblivion at the end of the novella when his mission as a catalyst is over. Nothing remains of the male persona except the prosaically English name of Joe Boswell at the end of a letter addressed to Yvette. The dark figure of the exotic Gipsy is reduced to a name, which Yvette realizes, to her surprise, he has had all the time.

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With globalization people of all cultures are sucked into a uniform world-wide way of life over which they have no control. Can a re-reading of an “old fashioned” writer present a better alternative to the way men and women are shaped and marketed these days?

Consumerist society foundational *raison d’etre* is the volatility of consumption: there is no absolute, only the till further notice proviso. “Consumed goods should satisfy immediately ... but the satisfaction should also end – ‘in no time’” so that more consumption can be generated. Concomitantly consumption time should be reduced to bare minimum. This can only be achieved if “consumers cannot hold their attention or focus their desire on any object for long”. Perfect consumers are “impatient, impetuous ... and above all easily excitable and equally easily losing interest”. Consumerist heaven can be achieved if the “waiting is taken out of wanting and the wanting out of waiting” thus making “the physical durability of the objects of desire” no longer necessary. The object of desire becomes that of more and more consumption”.¹

Consumers par excellence do not seek the gathering of objects in their material, tangible sense, rather they crave “the excitement of a new and unprecedented sensation ... Consumers are first and foremost gatherers of *sensations*; they are collectors of *things* only in a secondary and derivative sense” (*Globalization* 83).

Moreover, consumers have the illusion of free will: of freely engaging in turning around the wheel of consumption. What they do not realize is that their desire to consume, their compulsion, their internalized pressure to buy and buy is manufactured by the consumerist society itself. (*Globalization* 84-5).

D.H. Lawrence anticipated our revulsion with this dehumanized version of people as mere consumers in his rejection of middle class capitalist values, especially those of social and moral superiority over other classes and ethnic groups. However, and despite his Modernistic originality of style and manipulation of point of view, Lawrence was still

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization*, New York: Columbia University Press 1998 (81-2), hereafter referred to by title and page number within the main text.

tied to the rather “conventional” genre of the novel in its monotheistic centrality of plot and hero worship. His solution was for his novels to use the tired old formulas of romance and sensationalist suspense situations against their own apparent objectives of keeping the readers sedated and enthralled to old fashioned values. Furthermore, his short stories with their inherent capacity for innovation and departure from the strict formulas of the novel allowed him more scope for the subversion of status quo ideals.

Lawrence and Popular forms of Fiction, *The Virgin and the Gipsy*

D.H. Lawrence used the elements of suspense and romance borrowed from popular forms of literature but to different ends other than keeping his audience enthralled to an old fashioned formula. In the penultimate chapter of *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, the figure of the Damsel in distress as embodied in his female character Yvette is involved in a life threatening situation whereas his male character, the Gipsy, is proactively involved in rescuing her life. However, the end result of the rescue scene is to see Yvette through on her way to self-realization. Conversely the male figure dwindles into oblivion at the end of the novella when his mission as a catalyst is over. Nothing remains of the male persona except the prosaically English name of Joe Boswell at the end of a letter addressed to Yvette. The dark figure of the exotic Gipsy is reduced to a name, which Yvette realizes, to her surprise, he has had all the time.

I

Yvette’s journey into self-discovery, her Bildungsroman, is unconventional in the sense that she uses the men in her life as a spring board for her self realization. Her voyage involves in reductivist Freudian terms the abandoning of the mother in favor of the father and then the substitution of the lover for the father. However, her negotiation for a place in the centre as opposed to that on the margins cannot be merely mapped out in such over simplistic reductions such as Yvette renouncing orality in favor of genitality.

Two aspects of Yvette’s growth in emotional and moral stature remain strictly Lawrencian and Modernistic at the same time. First of all

to every successful Lawrencean heroine exists a female foil that helps accentuate the latter's failure and the former's success, a Gudrun to her Ursula, as it were. Yvette's sister remains flat and confined to her mechanical job as a secretary in the city. After our first encounter with her she is relegated to the back benches; her audience is to assume that her growing financial independence is not self-nurturing as it is subjugated to the mechanical world Lawrence is at pains to dismantle. Capitalistic modernist societies have accepted women in the job market only to turn into mechanical versions of men. Yvette on the other hand remains impoverished and has to pilfer money from the church box in order to afford such girly frivolities as ribbons and dress material but she remains emotionally and spiritually unfettered roaming the country side searching for love and self-knowledge.

This brings us to the Modernistic concept of the self that colors Lawrence's work. The self is no longer a unified moral and ethical entity shaped by accepted social mores. Rather it is a fragmented organism at odds and in conflict with the dictates of social groups surrounding it. This is particularly true of his female selves battling against the hypocritical double standards of Edwardian England that urges women to be free and modern and enslaves them to outdated Victorian dictates of womanly respectability.

In Lawrence the demon within is not sexuality (by no means genitality) as the Victorians would have it; rather it is white middle class respectability that forces Yvette's mother to elope and pushes Yvette further and further away from a home ruled by a rapacious grandmother (referred to, grandiosely, as the Mater) who controls men and woman alike and feeds on their dutiful enslavement to her. The Mater's greed is metaphorized in her gluttonous obesity. As she dominates the dinner table she feeds on the best morsels of meat and deprives the other women who grow thinner while she grows fatter like a leech. Her grossness is made further abject by her disgusting habit of belching and breaking the amounts of wind she has devoured while avariciously gulping down her food. She is thus reduced to a tube that ingests food only to turn it into smelly waste.

So this is the centre Yvette is forced to abandon in favor of the margin where she hangs around pariahs such as gypsies and unmarried

couples. With these decentralized figures the meals she consumes outdoors contrast heavily with the stuffy and smelly ones endured at home. Such pilfered emotional pickings feed Yvette's growing awareness of her budding self knowledge. This is symbolized in the text by a cluster of images that structure Lawrence's work: those of smelly, stuffy indoor family gatherings counteracted by outdoor scenes where the young, especially Yvette, roam free to discover themselves and the outside world.

*Granny, sitting back like some awful old prelate, in her bulk of black silk and her white lace cap, was warming her feet by the fire ... Aunt Cissie prowled in and out ... Yvette sat on a wooden seat in the garden, only a few feet above the bank of the swollen river, which rolled a strange, uncanny mass of water ... Aunt Cissie appeared at the top of the porch steps, and called to ask if Yvette wanted that early cup of tea ... **An early cup of tea, indoors, when the sun actually shone? No Thanks!** (*The Virgin and the Gipsy*, 78).²*

In the above scene, Lawrence's masterful vacillation between the stuffy scene indoors and the breathtaking--literally because of the impending flood—one outdoors is equally paralleled in his layering of his third person point of view with character thoughts. His skillful manipulation of Free Indirect Discourse that hides the distinction between narrator's words and character's thoughts comes to a climax in the final sentence that is no other than Yvette's interior monologue of "**An early cup of tea, indoors, when the sun actually shone? No thanks.**" (78). This Bakhtinian heteroglossia of voices leaves Lawrence's reader in no doubt of the anti establishment premise of Lawrence's text.³

While the Mater deteriorates into more corpulent consumption indoors at the centre of the Victorian household, Yvette gains moral

² D.H. Lawrence, *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, Florence: G. Orioli, 1930, hereafter referred to by page numbers within the main text.

³ "Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorecie] can enter the novel, each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)". Mikhail Bakhtin "Discourse in the Novel", *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds), 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, 674.

ascendancy and emotional independence outdoors on the margin. For her final initiation into self knowledge and control of her own destiny, essential to become a centralized figure in Lawrence, she has to die to her old self and be resurrected again in the flesh. This will take place in chapter nine of the novella when Yvette will endure death and rebirth by drowning, a metaphorical baptism into Lawrencian Life.

II

The penultimate chapter of *The Virgin and the Gipsy* opens with the narrator declaring that Yvette did not keep her promise. She has promised to visit the gypsy camp but she is too lazy and lethargic to do that: "She lived as usual, went out to her friends, to parties, and danced with the undiminished Leo. She wanted to go up and say goodbye to the gypsies. She wanted to. And nothing prevented her" (77). She has energy for superficial action but not for one that will make true her passion for the gypsy. Years of indoctrination in Victorian female passivity disenable her to seek the fulfillment of her emotions. Instead she dreams on: "She was conscious of her gipsy, as she sat there musing in the sun. Her soul had the half painful, half easing knack of leaving her, and straying away to some place, to somebody that had caught her imagination" (78). The conflict between emotion and action, or inaction in this case, is dramatically metaphorized in the scene whereby the lone female figure is sitting musing by the river "which rolled a strange, uncanny mass of water" (78) that swells dangerously around her. In the text's words the warnings could not be more forceful: "the river swells dangerously against the arches of the bridge: the river turned, thrown back harshly, ominously, against the low rocks across stream, then pouring past the garden to the bridge. It was unnaturally full, and whitey-muddy, and ponderous, 'Listen for the voice of water,' she said to herself. 'No need to listen for it, if the voice means the noise!'" (79). Yvette's skepticism and class condescension make her dismiss the warnings of the oracle as mere noise. However, the linguistic register of the text makes no mistake about Yvette's mistake. The syntactical and semantic elements in the text combine to warn the reader to the inherent flaw in Yvette's day dream, her inability to detect danger. The abundance of adverbs designating danger and the repetition of warnings emphasize the fact that she is in peril and that if she does not act, she is doomed.

And to her horror and amazement, round the bend of the river she saw a shaggy, tawny wavefront of water advancing like a wall of lions. The roaring sound wiped out everything. She was powerless, too amazed and wonder-struck ...

Before she could think twice, it was near, a roaring cliff of water. She almost fainted with horror. She heard the scream of the gypsy, and looked up to see him bounding upon her, his black eyes starting out of his head.

“Run!” he screamed, seizing her arm (80).

Nature forces itself on young Yvette but she rises to the task. The next sequence will involve thriller action worthy of Hollywood disaster movies. Yvette and the gypsy will go under water, come up for air, go down again, come up again, hang on to whatever flotsam comes their way, try to climb the stairs of the crumpling house, find the broken stairs, try for it several times before succeeding, finally crawl into the only upstairs room with a chimney, one that will withstand the onslaught of water, shiver and cough water and blood, search frantically for a dry spot to ward off death of hypothermia, with their freezing flesh and chattering teeth they find the bed and sink into it. Only then does Yvette assume an active role when she commands the man:

“Warm me!” she moaned, with chattering teeth. “Warm me! I shall die of shivering.”

A terrible convulsion went through her curled-up white body, enough indeed to rupture her and cause her to die.

The gypsy nodded, and took her in his arms, and held her in a clasp like a vice, to still his own shuddering. He himself was shuddering fearfully, and only semi-conscious. It was the shock.

The vice-like grip of his arms round her seemed to her the only stable point in her consciousness. It was a fearful relief to her heart, which was strained to bursting. And though his body, wrapped round her strange and lithe and powerful, like tentacles, rippled with shuddering as an electric current, still the rigid tension of the muscles that held her clenched steadied them both, and gradually the sickening violence of the shuddering, caused by shock, abated, in his body first, then in hers, and

the warmth revived between them. And as it roused, their tortured, semi-conscious minds became unconscious, they passed away into sleep (85-6).

The abundance of visual imagery in the above scene runs the risk of transforming it into a sensationalist text—two naked figures nestling in each others' arms. Yet in Lawrence the force of echoing in repetitive onomatopoeic words the convulsive shuddering bodies fighting to ward off death by hypothermia saves the text from being read as mere vulgar titillation. More importantly the female nudity is not dwelled upon and the female reader of this text is not forced into the position of either narcissistically identifying with the female specter or to voyeuristically ogle her in a coarse imitation of male gazing.

The final paragraph of the above excerpt renders in sensual aquatic imagery—the tentacles of the octopus wrapped around Yvette's body---the couples' fight to survive the danger of freezing to death. Their shuddering naked bodies are not on display visually. Rather it is the kinetic tension between the compulsive shaking of their limbs and the firm grip that holds them together that is highlighted through the convulsive repetition of words designating a struggle between two opposing forces.

Next morning the sun shines on sleeping Yvette, alone in bed. As the men downstairs call out to her to climb out of the window, she remembers the gipsy and their fight for life.

Yvette, her face gone numb and disappointed, got up quickly, closing the bed-clothes ... She dressed herself, then looked in a mirror, and saw her matted hair with horror. Yet she did not care. The gipsy was gone, anyhow ... There was a great sodden place on the carpet where his had been, and two blood-stained filthy towels. Otherwise there was no sign of him.

She was tugging at her hair when the policeman tapped at her door...

...

...

There were great shouts. She had to go to the window. There, below, was the rector, his arms wide open, tears streaming down his face.

“I’m perfectly all right, Daddy!” she said, with the calmness of her contradictory feelings. She would keep the gipsy a secret from him. At the same time, tears ran down her face.

...
...
...
...

“Dare you go down that ladder, Miss?” said the policeman.

Yvette looked at the sagging depth of it, and said promptly to herself: No! Not for anything!—But then she remembered the gipsy’s saying: “Be braver in the body.” (88)

Thus Yvette finds the strength to trust her body and assume control over her own actions. Her gaining of moral and emotional stature is aided by the gipsy’s intervention but by no means is it subordinate to it. The man himself is forced to flee the scene of action and Yvette learns his name for the first time; his powerful physical presence is reduced to the mundane signifier of the English proper name, “Joe Boswell” (90), a common and boring name with no hint of the pariah in it.

III

The tempo of chapter nine in *The Virgin and the Gipsy* is swift and perilous like the river Papple that swells and swerves, ebbs and flows, and violently spins and sucks the insignificant human figures caught in its turbulence bringing them to the brink of death by drowning or by hypothermia. This natural force forces the human figures to fight for their lives and brings out their survival instincts. On this basic level they can shed class and ethnic difference and atrophied moral restrictions and meet as man and woman. As the couple crawl naked into bed they are seeking to warm their flesh and dry their naked bodies. Their shed off clothes serve as a metaphor for their old selves, the superficial social ones

that separate them from each other. In so doing they find the warmth in each other and literarily save each other's life.

In a startling discrepancy between narrating and narrated time, Lawrence dedicates six pages to describing a scene of rescue that could not have lasted more than twenty minutes. The scene's dramatic cadence intensifies with every shot (I counted sixteen) placing the hero and heroine at death's door and bringing them back to life again. Lawrence's use of onomatopoeic words to describe the sound of the water as it tears and crashes the house and drowns its inhabitants, his repetition of synecdochal images of body parts drowning and floating on the surface, his use of the progressive tense, and his breathless rhythm of narration all coalesce to elevate the scene from a thriller's struggle for survival into a symbolic cosmic scene of death and rebirth with biblical shades of the deluge and baptism. Then, in a daring game with the cliché of end scene with the two figures going to sleep entwined in each other's arms, Lawrence capitalizes on the realistic representation of the aftershock of exposure to the elements and imbibes it with sexual and emotional significance. The shift of scene to next morning with Yvette alone in bed, while worthy of most romances (written and dramatized as romantic comedies or soap operas) is in tune with the gipsy's role in the novella. As a pariah, he cannot realistically stay and risk being discovered in the same bed with Yvette. Second as an emotional catalyst, an agent in bringing Yvette closer to self-realization, his function has been achieved and he needs to make his exit. Lawrence's game with elements from the thriller and the romance genre is masterfully played serving the purposes of the text on two levels: first by keeping the readers mesmerized in the act of reading, and second by mapping out a symbolically climactic moment in Yvette's life when she dies and is reborn again. Thirdly, Lawrence's text tightens the suspenseful grip of the events in a language that relies heavily on **Free Indirect Discourse**, a way of representing character's thoughts and feelings in the diction of the narrator. This technique of representing discourse capitalizes on guarding Yvette's perspective as the main focus of the scene while rendering her racy feelings in an "acceptable" language act. It also has the added advantage of multiplying the voices of the novel—Yvette's, the Gipsy's, his

mother's—along with their social and ideological dimensions--while keeping them within the framing narrative strategies.

The only “natural” outcome of this scene is for Yvette to find the courage to climb down to earth, on her own, shunning the arm of her rescuer. Emotionally speaking, she no longer needs the gipsy, or any other man for that matter, to continue her journey of self discovery. Appropriately, Yvette reads the gipsy's letter with no remorse and notes the banality of his "English" name, "Your obedient servant Joe Boswell". The final sentence of Free Indirect Speech which mixes the narrator's words with Yvette's sentiments reads ironically: "And only then she realized he had a name" (90).

In bringing about Yvette's resurrection and baptism into life chapter nine of the novella redeems the other eight chapters that serve as a boring prologue to this dramatic and fast encounter with one's destiny. Apart from that the first eight chapters are marked by heavy handed authorial intervention where Lawrence is at pains to lash against Victorian middle class morality. This chapter calls to mind the pithiness and beauty of another successful emotional encounter in Lawrence's fiction, one that saves lives literarily and emotionally.

IV

Lawrence and the inversion of the Fairy Tale Tradition, “The Horse-Dealer’s Daughter”

This takes place in the short story titled “The Horse-Dealer’s Daughter” where a lost female soul by the name of Maple willfully enter a stagnant pond with the intention of putting an end to a life of financial and emotional enslavement to her brothers. Seen from afar by the young country doctor, Jack Fergusson, he rushes to the rescue only to nearly drown himself in the process. As the doctor warms Maple's body back to life she awakes from her coma to willfully bid him to love and keep her. She repeats her demand to him and her audience till he and we are convinced that he must have loved this sullen and uncommunicative woman all along. Her joy and luminousness propels us to wish for her happiness and to want the happy ending she so deserves:

She looked at him again, with the same supplication of powerful love, and that same transcendent, frightening light of triumph. In view of the delicate flame which seemed to come from her face like a light, he was powerless ...

“You love me,” she repeated, in a murmur of deep, rhapsodic assurance. “You love me.”

Her hand were drawing him, drawing him down to her. He was afraid, even a little horrified. For he had, really, no intention of loving her ... He put his hand quickly to steady himself, and grasped her bare shoulder. A flame seemed to burn the hand that grasped her soft shoulder. He had no intention of loving her ... And yet wonderful was the touch of her shoulders, beautiful the shining of her face (“The Horse Dealer’s Daughter 225).⁴

In the first part of Lawrence’s short story Mabel’s face is characterized by an impassive fixity that highlights the absence of expression and lack of emotion. In the third part her face is characterized by a flame that invites Dr. Fergusson to consider his love for her: “In view of the delicate flame which seemed to come from her face like a light, he was powerless” (225). Moreover, “wonderful was the touch of her shoulders, beautiful the shining of her face” 225. In contrast and when threatened with his resistance to the offer of her love Mabel’s face changes dramatically: “Her eyes were now wide with fear, with doubt, the light was dying from her face, a shadow of terrible greyness was returning” (225). Again, here, the role of the female spectator is not to voyeuristically stare at the nudity of another female in imitation of the male gaze, rather she is invited to see the light that streams from Mabel’s face and transforms this ugly duckling into a beautiful swan. Moreover, Mabel’s eyes are fixedly gazing at the male character turning him into the object of desire in a stark reversal of “established” male/female roles. The text’s narratorial voice reflects this juxtapositional configuration by replaying the polarity of light and darkness and that of yearning and fear

⁴ D.H. Lawrence, “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter, *The Complete Short Stories of D.H. Lawrence*, Thomas Seltzer, 1922, hereafter referred to by page numbers within the main text.

while reserving them to the language acts associated with the female character.⁵

Fergusson's feelings are a mixture of love and fear: "He was amazed, bewildered, and afraid. He had never thought of loving her. He had never wanted to love her." (225). So much stress – in the repetition of certain negative grammatical structures – is given to his willful resistance to this newfound love: "For he had really no intention of loving her" (225). "He had no intention of loving her; his whole will was against that yielding" (225). Fergusson is torn between the strong force that emanating from her face and body is drawing him to give in to her love and his conscious "will" that is refusing the surrender. The "I" of his consciousness is refusing to surrender to the "other" of passion and unconsciousness. In saving and loving her, the doctor has saved and redeemed himself. He has managed to overcome his fear of the "other".

The quasi fairy tale plot of Lawrence's short story calls to mind the story of "Cinderella": the changing of Mabel's fortune from that of a mere burden and quasi servant to that of a princess worthy of her charming doctor prince. "The Sleeping Beauty" one revolves around both Mabel and Dr. Fergusson who, before his dive in the water, were sleep walking and living life on the surface only. However, Lawrence is parodying the fairy tale tradition in two significant ways. First Lawrence's women are never seen as passively acquiescent of their fortunes/misfortunes as those of fairy tales. Rather they are proactively involved in changing their destinies and forcing their male counterparts to notice and love them. Second, his endings are not the stereotypical: "and they lived happily forever after." Rather, they stress the ongoing conflict at the heart of the man-woman relationship: "'No, I want you, I want you,' was all he answered, blindly, with that terrible intonation which frightened her almost more than her horror lest he should not want her" (228).

⁵ "It goes without saying that these languages [those of different voices in the novel] differ from each other not only in their vocabularies; they involve specific forms for manifesting intentions, forms for making conceptualization and evaluation concrete" "Discourse in the Novel", *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds), 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, 675.

The reciprocity of male female passion and the ascendancy of the woman's joy and pleasure in all of Lawrence's successful love scene pales into nothing the best of Hollywood romantic scenarios; ones where young women and even preadolescent girls are fetishistically visualized to titillate the male audience and to further internalize women's subjection to genitality and the controlling male gaze. Unlike the Hollywood love scenes, Lawrence's texts never dwell on the woman's body, rather it is her rapt face and dark eyes that are described again and again invariably relying on a positive linguistic register of light and luminosity. Her eyes would be dark, true, but that is darkness in Lawrentian terms where the heroine is oblivious to the superficial shallow materialistic world and tuned to her own awakening into love and passion.

Lawrence's love scenes are his best in terms of language and symbolism and drive home his message of the importance of searching and striving for self knowledge by embracing the other better than his long winded forays into pseudo psycho-sociology. They make one echo along with Lawrence when he wrote to a friend advising not to trust the artist, rather to trust the tale.

V

Lawrence and the Melodrama of the Battle of the Sexes, "Tickets, Please"

"Tickets, Please" was composed immediately after Lawrence's letter to Katherine Mansfield, 5th December 1918, in which he had stated that a "woman must yield some sort of precedence to a man" (*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence* iii, eds. James Boulton and Andrew Robertson, CUP, 1984, 302). The story, however, dramatizes the opposite whereby man gives precedence to a woman and refuses to take up the "manly" role demanded of him by others, including the women themselves. The story appeared in the Strand, April 1919, and was later collected in England, My England, 1922. The story concerns the love affairs of the midland bus conductresses: the "fearless young hussies ... who pounce on the youth who try to avoid their ticket-machine" during the First World War

(“England, My England” 42).⁶ Annie, the forcing character who is “preemptory, suspicious, and ready to hit first ... [and who] can hold her own against ten thousand” (43), takes an interest in John Thomas (“[a] fine cock-of-the-walk” beyond mere sexual attraction and demands of him an equal commitment (44). However, being a man interested only in the physical aspect of their relationship: “John Thomas intended to remain a nocturnal presence; he had no idea of becoming an all-round individual to her” (46). Naturally he shuns her for the other girls whom he picks up at whim and drop with ease. Organized by Annie, the girls all agree to teach John Thomas a lesson he will not forget. One evening they corner him at the bus depot and maul and beat him into choosing one of them, only one:

But at Annie’s signal they all flew at him, slapping him, pinching him, pulling his hair, though more in fun than in spite or anger. He, however, saw red. His blue eyes flamed with strange fear as well as fury, and he butted through the girls to the doo. It was locked. He wrenched at it. Roused, alert, the girls stood round and looked at him. He faced them, as bay. At that moment they were rather horrifying to him, as they stood in their short uniforms. He was distinctly afraid (50).

John chooses Annie. Shocked by what she has done, Annie refuses him and he leaves dragging his tails behind him. The women resume their daily toilette but with a difference: the life has gone out of their faces the text implies:

There was a silence of the end. He picked up the torn pieces of his tunic, without knowing what to do with them. The girls stood about uneasily, flushed, panting, tidying their hair and their dress unconsciously, and watching him. He looked at none of them ... The girls moved away from contact with him as if he had been an electric wire (53)

In defeating the phallus-bearer, the women have defeated the part of themselves that is vulnerable to his charms: “The girls were all anxious to be off. They were tidying themselves with mute, stupefied faces (54).

⁶ D.H. Lawrence, “England, My England”, *England, My England*, New York: Seltzer, 1922. Hereafter referred to by page numbers within the main text.

When one examines the two versions of the story one notices the considerable amount of revision that has gone into this relatively "short" short story (the longer edition text is only fourteen pages long). There are minor verbal changes scattered throughout the text, basically consisting of additions. However, the first and most striking revision is that of changing the name of the leading male character from John Joseph Raynor into John Thomas. By revising the name of the protagonist, Lawrence transforms the edition text into a "battleground" between the women and the phallus bearer John Thomas. He also transforms it technically into a melodrama, a piece that combines pathos and bathos.

What Lawrence achieves in both versions is to keep his point of view very objectively balanced between the women and their adversary. To every sentence with a "he" in it there is an equivalent one with "the women" in it. To every sentence with a "him" in it there is a sentence with "them" and "their" in it. Be it in the place of subject or in the place of object the man and the women are given each his/her own moment in limelight. Even at the end there is no conqueror or conquered. All is lost in this battle, for it man will not be man enough the women are corrupted into becoming a latter day version of the Bacchantes or the harpies. Lawrence believed in this rustic wisdom and dramatized it --all too well--in most of his works.

The balance in tone, point of view, and moral lesson is paralleled in this work by the technical balance of melodrama. This story is neither a comedy nor a tragedy. It is not sublime enough, rather it is too mundane to merit the "dignified" genre of tragedy; equally it is too painful to remain a comedy. In its balanced mixture of pathos and bathos it saves itself from degenerating into a mere quasi pornographic "lesbian inferno" vulgar reading. While remaining comic and light in tone all throughout, barring the violent end, the story stays on the level of fantasy or dream bordering on the nightmare. The perfect leitmotif metaphor for this work is that of the tram-car careering in its way like a ship across the sea:

There was a good feeling between the girls and the drivers. Are they not companions in peril, shipmates aboard this careering vessel of a tram-car, for ever rocking on the waves of a storm land? (43).

VI

D.H. Lawrence and the “I” of the Gaze, “The Shades of Spring”

In “Morality and the Novel,” 1925 Lawrence writes: “The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relationship between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child, will always be subsidiary” (*Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence* ed. E. McDonald. London: Heinemann, 1936, 531). The implication of this letter as regards Lawrence’s women characters is to reduce them to mere recipients of male passion. However, and lucky for Lawrence’s fans among the feminists, Lawrence’s practice in exploring and developing the complexities and inconsistencies of the loves between his characters shows both subtlety in understanding and technical skill in the use of language to convey the nuances of the “great relationship.”

Lawrence’s women characters, while very often “looked” at, are never “seen” as straightforward passive objects of aggressive male desire. The effete Syson of “The Shades of Spring” is “viewed” by the reader while caught in the act of voyeuristically “looking” at a lovemaking scene between his former girl, Hilda, and her present lover (D.H. Lawrence, “The Shades of Spring”, *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, London: Duckworth, 1914, 114-129). While Syson’s eye is obviously male in gender terms, it cannot be so simplistically classified in terms of sexual orientation. His fascination with the scene is energized by pleasure derived from watching both male and female figures. Moreover, the lovemaking partners are not traditionally drawn around the model of a passive female receiving the aggressive caresses of the brutal working class male. The woman in the scene is dressed in animal fur and her participation is proactive rather than reactive. Keeping in mind that in Lawrence unconventional clothes registers coincide with ambivalent psychological and emotional traits one cannot fail to notice the inversion of traditional sexual roles. Lawrence’s interest in the “great relationship” is thus redefined to rest on a triangle of two men and a woman rather than on the more “straight” one insisted upon in his letter.

VII

Compared to above women from above Lawrencian scenes the music and film- industry pop-culture versions are but commercialized sensationalist representations of love and sexual passion. Invariably in such abundant representations, usually targeting adolescents and the youth of both sexes a plethora of females displayed in various soft-core pornographic positions are marketed as hot, sexy and therefore liberated and successful. Their faces are obliterated in an orgy of naked limbs, breasts and bottoms constantly gyrating to the sound of mechanical loud music. The lyrics accompanying these video clips--readily available on mobile phones, I pods, and major video net sites--are banal and vulgar repetitions of swear words interspersed with street lingo of drug abuse and sexual addiction. Video game versions of girl power display skinny young females in tight clothes revealing enlarged breasts and anorexic wastes and cosmetically altered noses, and Botox lips and cheekbones. These "in" girls constantly worry about their boyfriends abandoning them and regularly go on slimming diets while dreaming of chocolate binges. The glamorous talk-show female hosts interviewing troubled teenage girls are themselves the product of hours spent in gyms, yoga-for-slimmer's classes, and weight-watcher diets. These icons of success, along with major pop stars, admit to drug and sex abuse and substance addiction and constantly preach vigilance over an impossible-to-maintain ideal of beauty seen as slim, youthful, and hot. Female bodies are once again agonized over, curtailed, streamlined, underdressed-to-kill, and surgically altered in the endless search for yet another commercially manufactured sensation. One wonders if the millions of females of all ages and cultures who do not adhere to this Globalized image of successful womanhood should seek therapy for failing to meet the standard. One wonders if it is not time for a total demise and a consequent rebirth—along the script of *The Virgin and the Gipsy*—to redeem what has been deformed by post-modernist mass culture!

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