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The Virgin and the Gipsy & Other Stories

D. H. LAWRENCE

SELECTED STORIES

THE VIRGIN AND THE GIPSY

and Other Stories

D. H. Lawrence

With an Introduction and Notes by
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

David Herbert Lawrence (1885–1930) occupies a secure position in that tradition of early-twentieth-century innovation and experiment in literature and the arts which we now, retrospectively, call modernism. Like British contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, Lawrence took the forms of realist fiction and made of them something radically new. Yet certain characteristic features of Lawrence's work insist on the need to distinguish it from the modernist aesthetic as it is found in Woolf and Joyce. We associate modernism with a turn towards what T. S. Eliot called 'impersonality', towards highly symbolic languages of abstraction and difficulty designed to represent the new complexities of experience in a world of rapid, bewildering change.[1] With, perhaps,

1 For a vivid account of modernism and modernity in this light, see Berman. For full details of this and other references turn to the Bibliography at the end of this Introduction.

Joseph Conrad's magnificent and troubling novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) as a starting point, modernist literature seems often to be founded on a conviction of its own inadequacy in the face of such complexities, drawing attention to our imprisonment within the limits of expression and representation.

To read Lawrence, on the other hand, is to become aware of a strong, personal authorial presence, and of a didactic, even prophetic tone which his art seems powerless to disguise. Against all the dictates of modernist impersonality, Lawrence persisted in wanting to *tell* his readers things: 'I do write,' he insisted in a letter to A. W. McLeod in 1913, 'because I want folk – English folk – to alter, and have more sense' (Boulton [ed.], p. 544). To remedy a condition of 'atrophy' in the England of his birth, Lawrence proposed a 'readjustment between men and women', a 'making free and healthy' of the sexual relation, which he was to pursue in the symbolic forms of his fiction. Here, in other words, we have the D. H. Lawrence of popular cultural mythology – a 'Priest of Love', whose answer to the discontents of civilisation was a rediscovery of authentic, uncontaminated sexuality. This image of Lawrence gained ground in the 'swinging' 1960s, an era for which the lifting of the censor's ban on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 was an inaugural event.

The essentially oppositional nature of Lawrence's writing may be explained by a life in which he appeared forever caught between worlds. While Woolf, the daughter of Leslie Stephen, was effectively born into the English literary establishment, and Joyce was of respectable Dublin middle-class stock, Lawrence was the son of a Nottinghamshire collier, and grew up in the East Midlands mining village of Eastwood. His mother was of genteel origins, and in his early life he saw played out in his parents' relationship the tensions between bourgeois aspirations and the patterns of working-class culture. Lawrence was stimulated into intellectual life by non-conformist religion and by the advanced literary and political ideas of his Eastwood circle. But, in a classic paradox, the intellectuality which he derived from a vibrant working-class culture became the very means of his flight from it. After scholarship, university and a taste of schoolteaching, in the spring of 1912 Lawrence scandalously fled abroad with Frieda Weekley, the wife of his university languages tutor and a member of a famous German aristocratic family, the von Richthofens. His commitment to a life of writing became entwined with a nomadic existence with Frieda, confirming a distance both from established, bourgeois literary culture and

from the close-knit communities of his origins. It is true that Lawrence quickly became well connected in the literary world, the distinctiveness of his writing and of his working-class origins giving him a unique position; but the question of belonging remained forever open and unsettled.

All of the stories in the present collection were published between the mid-1920s and 1930, towards the end of a life tragically cut short by tuberculosis. Whilst they therefore highlight some characteristic features of Lawrence's later fictional writing, belonging essentially to the period in which his last great novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was being drafted and redrafted, one story provides an unusual opportunity to view a continuity of concerns across the early and later periods of his work. 'Love Among the Haystacks' was first drafted in 1911, but the story was revised and published in 1930, the year of Lawrence's death.

'Love Among the Haystacks' typifies the meticulous realism of Lawrence's early fiction, whether in the vivid and detailed evocation of the agricultural landscape in which the Wookey brothers are working, or in the carefully observed East Midlands vernacular spoken by the brothers. The reader only has to note a pattern in the opening sentences of some of the later stories – 'There was a woman who was beautiful . . .', 'There was a man who loved islands . . .', 'There was a peasant near Jerusalem . . .' – to sense a marked contrast between the painstaking descriptive rendering of the early mode and the blithe, almost offhand, fairytale sketching of the later. However, it is soon plain that there is more at stake in the early story than the faithful reflection of a rural way of life. A sense of dangerous rivalry and antagonism between Maurice and Geoffrey is quickly established. Maurice, a year younger, has upstaged Geoffrey in the affections of Paula, the vicar's young *au pair*, and his taunts prompt a barely suppressed impulse in Geoffrey, 'flushed with hate', to stamp on his brother's mouth. The story's analysis of the conflict then moves equally swiftly from the immediate circumstances of mood or temper into a diagnosis of a whole condition of being: Geoffrey's 'inflamed self-consciousness was a disease in him', and there was 'a danger of his sinking into a morbid state, from sheer lack of living, lack of self-interest' (pp. 76–7).

Two features of this analysis are both distinctively Lawrentian and noticeably modernist, and we will soon encounter them again in the other stories in the volume. First, life histories are delineated with brushstrokes of striking economy, as if the equivalent in writing of the Cubist techniques of the great French modernist painter Paul

Cézanne, for whom Lawrence had such admiration. In the space of a short paragraph, we learn that Maurice and Geoffrey had been brought up by 'a proud mother, a stranger in the country', placing barriers both of class and of sexuality between them and all other women, so that they had grown up 'virgin but tormented' (p. 77). Second, there is an unmistakable preoccupation with the unconscious motivations behind conscious behaviour. While Lawrence was to express reservations about the theories of Sigmund Freud, he shared with Freudian psychoanalysis a sense of the intimate relation between psychological repression and physical expression. States of being thus appear as bodily habits and gestures: Geoffrey's blue eyes are 'unsteady', his mouth 'morbidly sensitive', his whole face 'sullen', his hand 'slack with brooding'. Maurice's face, that of 'a young man roused for the first time in passion', reflects the unanticipated sexual success which prepares the ground for subsequent dramatic events to unfold.

In Geoffrey Wookey we find an emblematic figure whose significance resonates through the later stories of this volume. Geoffrey's life is thwarted, arrested by a lack of fulfilment through human contact. Overcoming this impasse becomes, both literally and metaphorically, a matter of life or death. The damned-up forces of Geoffrey's suppressed life-impulse are momentarily expressed in the struggle on the haystack, when Maurice's fall threatens both of them with oblivion. Geoffrey briefly contemplates suicide, for at least in death there would be an absolute certainty and finality; were he to live and Maurice to die, his would henceforth be a death-in-life, a 'shrinking', 'coiling up in himself like a tortoise with no shell' (p. 82). Yet neither brother is to die; rather, each is to be delivered into life by the discovery of human warmth. Both of the women concerned, Paula and Lydia, are outsiders, on the cultural or social margins of the narrow world of the Wookeys. The foreignness of the tempestuous Paula (the narrative seems unable to decide whether she is a Pole or a German), with her restless search for 'life', is a challenge to the confined Englishness of the vicar, 'a rather pale, cold man', who expresses relief that this 'wild thing – disobedient and insolent', has only three weeks of her tenure left. She and Maurice are soon engaged, though not before her passionate anger at the suspicion that Maurice had tricked her into spending the night with him on the haystack has run its course. Acting as a corrective to Maurice's earlier gloating, this device underlines the fact that the real revelation of the story is Geoffrey's encounter with the vagrant's wife, Lydia. In a scene of delicate intensity, which

anticipates the ending of *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, Geoffrey warms Lydia's freezing feet, the prelude to 'his first love kiss' and the night in each other's arms.

Readers may be surprised, again, at the swiftness of events, and at the lack of the conventional romantic trappings of courtship in the story. Geoffrey feels profound 'tenderness' as he wakes to gaze upon Lydia's face, and the attachment is already decisive: 'With her to complete him, to form the core of him, he was firm and whole. Needing her so much, he loved her fervently' (p. 103). Within minutes, he is asking her to marry him and emigrate to Canada with him. This, however, is only partly explicable in the historical context of a time when a night of passion might oblige the participants to marriage and a lifetime's commitment. Again and again in Lawrence's fiction, the value of genuine human contact and communication can change a life; this is embodied in a vocabulary of touch and warmth, the 'tenderness' which is felt at last by the 'man who died' in this volume, and which Lawrence was to propose as an alternative title for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. By contrast, the trappings of romantic love and fine feeling were for Lawrence more likely to obstruct than to facilitate this flow of human connection.

To turn from this early story to a later one, 'The Lovely Lady' (1927), is to find the model of Geoffrey's thwarted, repressed life echoed both in Robert Attenborough and in his cousin Cecilia. The two share a curious *ménage* with the overweening 'lovely lady', Pauline Attenborough, mother to Robert and aunt to Cecilia, in a 'quite exquisite though rather small Queen Anne house some twenty-five miles out of town'. The fact that this is 'an ideal place and an ideal life for Aunt Pauline' will immediately place experienced readers of Lawrence on the alert. Far from being something to strive for, the 'ideal' characterises the tendency, which Lawrence found on a grander historical scale in Christian doctrine and in post-Enlightenment democratic modernity, to substitute ideas of perfection for the messy physical realities and contradictions of life itself.[2] Sure enough, the ideal is literally embodied in the figure of Pauline herself, in the form of an indomitable egotism which effectively represses her own ageing and enables her to 'wonderfully preserve' the appearance of a thirty-year-old.

2 See, for example, Lawrence, 'Democracy', in *Phoenix*, pp. 699–718.

The motif of this story is the museum, a symbol of Western imperial modernity which wrests things, often forcibly, out of their contexts and turns them into objects of contemplation in pristine, artificial settings. Pauline has turned herself into just such a fetish, and the enormous energy expended upon the preservation of exquisite objects is at the expense of the lives of her sons. 'Ciss' knows that Henry, the elder son who died at the age of twenty-two, was killed by his mother's 'poisonous' opposition to his passionate attachment to the actress Claudia; she also knows that the lovely lady is in the process of killing her younger son, 'convulsed with shyness', whose life is a 'negative affair' (p. 118). Ciss suspects that Pauline wishes she and Robert to marry, but only after her death, by which time Robert will be 'the shell of a man who had never lived'. The issue is posed with the characteristically dramatic clarity and intensity of Lawrence's stories: can Pauline's egotism be allowed to sap the lives of her young people? Who is to live, she or they? When the grotesque comic bathos of the sun-bathing scenario begins, Ciss realises that 'one of them would surely have to die' (Lawrence was writing 'The Lovely Lady' for a book of murder stories collected by Cynthia Asquith). When Ciss strikes through Pauline's psychological armour, the lovely lady begins to crumple and shrivel, in a process of transformation worthy of a low-budget horror movie. Lawrence deftly uses Gothic conventions for the purposes of his own critique: Pauline dies having had her mirrors taken away from her and having been condemned as the vampire who 'put a sucker into one's soul and sucked up one's essential life' (p. 124). The open ending allows the reader to assume that Ciss and Robert can live happily ever after, but not without the warning that idealism is so powerful and difficult to root out, it can endure beyond the grave, in the form of the 'Pauline Attenborough Museum'.

The vengeful, murderous impulses at work in such stories can be disconcerting for readers of Lawrence. We are reminded of the infamous judgement of the philosopher Bertrand Russell, who after a brief but finally acrimonious collaboration with Lawrence in 1915 declared that his theories of 'blood knowledge', of the primary powers of the instincts over and above the rational, intellectual faculty, led straight to Auschwitz.[3] If Lawrence wanted folk to overcome the 'atrophy' of their instincts, what kind of

3 Russell, in Nehls, Vol. I, p. 284

dangerous everyday advice might his writings imply? It is, however, perhaps timely to reflect here upon the symbolic function of all fictions. Are the deathly actions in the stories really practical recommendations for everyday life, or are they a kind of narrative language, which allowed Lawrence to articulate the very existence of those unconscious forces or motives most threatening to civilised society? At their best, the stories demonstrate how far such psychological forces are *themselves* the complex products of a whole social order, and not simply reactions to it. The most eloquent example of this is the long title story or novella of this volume, *The Virgin and the Gypsy*. Here, the familiar pattern of repression extends to the Saywell family as a whole, with Granny or 'the Mater' eternally prolonging her life at the expense of those existing within her shadow: Aunt Cissie, 'gnawed by an inward worm'; Uncle Fred, who 'just lived dingily for himself', and the rector, Arthur, an 'utter unbeliever' at heart. Yvette and Lucille look set to be the victims of this pattern in the next generation. Scandalously forsaken by their mother Cynthia, whom they remember bringing a 'great glow, a flow of life' into their previous home, 'like a swift and dangerous sun', the young women can only seek distraction in aimless motor excursions with their well-heeled friends, finding there the predictable reproduction of the rituals of courtship and marriage.

How can their lives be resolved? Where might a life-belief be found, to set against the unbelievers? In Yvette's encounter with the alluring gipsy, the story seems to flirt dangerously with cliché. Foreigner and social outcast combine in the figure of Joe, 'one of the black, loose-bodied, handsome sort'. Yvette's heart jumps at the first sight of him, and something 'took fire in her breast' when their eyes meet: 'She thought: "He is stronger than I am! He doesn't care!" ' (p. 18). Prim English rose finds love at first sight with dark, handsome stranger? Lawrence, however, cannot leave the story stranded at this level of romantic convention. First, Yvette encounters another alternative to the established order of things, in the form of the Eastwoods. As John Turner has noted in a fine essay on the story, the timing of their arrival – Yvette is about to step, entranced, into the gipsy's caravan – wrenches the story out of the familiar ballad tradition of 'Wraggle Taggle Gypsies', in which 'a woman throws over all the advantages of class, education and wealth in order to roam the wildness of nature with her chosen gipsy' (Turner, p. 143). Instead, the site of seduction is dangerously relocated, from the caravan to the rectory, from a position beyond

the pale to a position at the heart of Christian bourgeois society. Second, the extraordinary resolution of the story suggests how deeply problematic is the task of challenging and successfully breaking free from social convention – so problematic that it can only be represented in mythical form, in precisely that mode of the imaginative expression of desire which is unavailable to the rational, materialistic Saywells. Joe, himself a 'resurrected man' after his brush with pneumonia during the war, appears bounding around the bend of the road with the flood close behind him, an image of dammed-up forces finally released: 'a shaggy, tawny wave-front of water advancing like a wall of lions' (p. 66). Yvette was 'barely conscious: as if the flood was in her soul'. Only in this dreamlike, semiconscious state can the two come together in a mutually warming sleep, Yvette waking to find the sun 'shining in heaven'. However, the gipsy has subsided, like the dream figure he always was, and is replaced in Yvette's suspended bedroom, as a reminder of the dogged persistence of conscious, conventional life, by the hapless figure of the policeman.

The flood is necessary, then, not just for the purposes of Yvette's personal and sexual transfiguration. It strikes precisely at the source of a wider malaise: the house, and the Mater with it. Lawrence reserves some of his most mischievous invective for the domestic situation in this story, with Granny slobbering her food and rifting in 'gross physical complacency' as she presides over crossword puzzles 'invented by Satan himself' (p. 11). There seems little doubt that Lawrence, like our contemporary Alan Bennett, had first-hand experience of the deadening rituals of lower-middle-class life – 'the eternal and everlasting piece of bought cake' (p. 13) – though in Lawrence it surely forms the basis of a more searching critique of a taboo-ridden bourgeois culture. Here again Lawrence is typically modernist, as he homes in on the fraught issues of food and cleanliness, thus sharing with Gertrude Stein and Franz Kafka a capacity to expose the inner, psychic neuroses behind bourgeois respectability.[4] The counterpart to Granny's voracious, indiscriminate appetite is Cissie's anorexic hatred of food, both expressing a denial of healthy bodily life and the production of the waste that necessarily accompanies it. Dirt, whether literal or metaphorical, cannot be acknowledged; hence the elaborate sanitation systems of the twentieth-century house. But to stigmatise dirt and the body is, precisely, to sully life itself through a false idealisation of it, just as

4 See Stein, *Three Lives*, and Kafka, *Metamorphosis*.

Lawrence argued that pornography was created, as a concept, by the very people who sought to repress it.[5] Like the museum of 'The Lovely Lady', then, the modern house is the literal embodiment of a repressive social structure, just as the Saywells must 'say well', at whatever cost to the truth. Yvette's thoughts are a summation worth pausing upon:

> Only she lay and wished she were a gipsy. To live in a camp, in a caravan, and never set foot in a house, not know the existence of a parish, never look at a church. Her heart was hard with repugnance against the rectory. She loathed these houses with their indoor sanitation and their bathrooms, and their extraordinary repulsiveness. She hated the rectory, and everything it implied. The whole stagnant, sewerage sort of life, where sewerage is never mentioned, but where it seems to smell from the centre to every two-legged inmate, from Granny to the servants, was foul. If gipsies had no bathrooms, at least they had no sewerage. There was fresh air. In the rectory there was *never* fresh air. And in the souls of the people, the air was stale till it stank (p. 27).

Joe is, then, far more than a means of romantic deliverance for Yvette. As a gipsy, he represents a long-established oppositional culture (always stigmatised as dirty by the middle-classes, yet scrupulously clean in Lawrence's story), committed to alternative forms of labour and livelihood, property-owning and family relations (Turner, p. 158). The house, and Granny with it, must go, the apparent solidity of the bourgeois world undermined by an earlier (though equally social, perhaps Roman) structure, a tunnel 'unsuspected, undreamed of'.

This critique of the bourgeois-capitalist order of things is even more pointed in 'The Rocking-Horse Winner', ostensibly a tale of the power of psychic forces. The story was a contribution to another Cynthia Asquith anthology, this time of ghost stories. The house is again the key motif, and Paul's house is indeed 'haunted'. But the whispered phrase *'There must be more money!'* is scarcely an other-worldly phenomenon: more evidently, it is the actual crystallisation of a pervasive materialism, a sign of how deeply greed can embed itself in the human consciousness. The whisper – 'nobody ever said it aloud' – recalls the repressive model of the 'say wells',

5 See, for example, Lawrence, 'Pornography and Obscenity', in *Phoenix*, pp. 170–87.

compounding two forms of artificial or idealised appearance. First, Paul's mother cannot love her children, and covers her coldness by being 'all the more gentle and anxious' for them, 'as if she loved them very much'. Second, entangled with this dissembling is the need to 'keep up' a prosperous middle-class social position or image without the resources to do so. 'Luck' is the form of mystification or self-deception by which the mother justifies her dissatisfaction, and it becomes the central ironic device of the story. Luck for Paul, we feel, would be love and warmth from his mother, and thereby an exorcising of the spirit of cold, hungry materialism with which he and his sisters must live. In desperation to gain his mother's approval, however, Paul discovers that 'luck' is simply 'what causes you to have money' (p. 136). Lawrence here uses the potent fictional device of the innocent perspective of the child to devastating effect. Paul's uncanny ability to pick winning horses is not so much a form of supernatural mediation as an extension of the Romantic conception of the child as a highly impressionable, sensitive and receptive instrument. Through a supreme exertion of will, Paul can see into the future, but only at the expense of his fragile life. His mother ironically misreads his nervous condition, attributing the 'damage' to the vice of gambling rather than to the money-system to which she is enslaved, and which turns all human activities towards the principles of mechanism and calculation.

' "It seems to me, men and women have really hurt one another so much, nowadays, that they had better stay apart till they have learned to be gentle with one another again . . . Now, it's only each one fighting for his own – or her own – underneath the cover of tenderness" ' (*St Mawr and Other Stories*, p. 122), reflects Lou Witt, the central character in Lawrence's novella *St Mawr*. Lawrence's writing consistently reapproaches this view that the exploitative nature of an industrial-capitalist society finds expression in the most intimate areas of human experience. A materialistic individualism interposes itself between people, making relationship itself impossible – relationship being, as the critic Raymond Williams puts it, 'precisely an alternative to the use of others as raw material' (Raymond Williams, p. 213). Lawrence's stories thus exhort their readers to a kind of critical vigilance, ever on the alert for the ways in which exploitation can work by stealth, masking its damage beneath the *appearance* of tenderness. The stories show us individuals who are particularly adept at inculcating a false consciousness, deceiving themselves, if not others, as to their motives: Paul's mother, who seems to know but cannot act on the true nature of her

son's degeneration; Granny Saywell, who is able to believe her own lie about 'half-depraved stock'; Pauline Attenborough, whose monologues with her dead son maintain a state of self-delusion.

In this light, and despite Lawrence's reputation for popularising a version of free love, the last thing his fictions endorse is relationship at any cost. On the contrary, an equally strong tendency, especially in his later work, is towards the proud disavowal of human contact. The two other substantial stories in this volume, 'The Man Who Loved Islands' and 'The Man Who Died', demonstrate this tendency towards singleness and isolation. At this time a sense of disillusionment, born out of what Lawrence once referred to as the frustration of his 'instinct' of community, seems to become transferred to the act of writing itself. Thus in February 1926, in between the completion of *The Virgin and the Gipsy* and the composition of 'The Rocking-Horse Winner', Lawrence declared himself 'really awful sick of writing', much preferring to paint; in the spring of 1927, whilst revising 'The Lovely Lady', he continually alludes to the attractions of a hermit life: 'I feel like turning hermit and hiding away the rest of my days from everybody' (Sagar, pp. 149, 162).

This is not quite the decision of the islander in Lawrence's story, for he wants an island 'not necessarily to be alone on it', but to be Master, in a world of his own making. The story, however, satirises the contradictions within a Utopian impulse which is also an act of egotism by demonstrating that he needs three attempts at his plan, each time becoming rather more desolate and drifting further towards an open but ominous conclusion. Again the money system cannot be evaded, the first island having the ability to make a hole in his capital 'as if it were an octopus with invisible arms stealing from you in every direction' (p. 158). Neither, it seems, can he escape from debased human relationship, despite the second island being no longer a 'world' but simply a refuge. In 'falling' into an affair with the widow's daughter, Flora (an ironical reference to his safer passion for the earnest cataloguing of the wild flowers of the islands), the islander soon finds himself faced with the prospect of family responsibility and domesticity – 'They might have been a young couple in Golders Green' (p. 164). This, apparently, has been the wrong kind of sex: automatic, mechanical, 'driven by the will' on Flora's part, even though she too, 'in her true self', hadn't wanted it. Having failed to meet on that 'third rare place' where the true 'crocus-flame' of desire between man and woman might burn, the islander is already arranging his own third place, edging towards obliteration through a state of withdrawal from organic life

whereby even the 'lumps of sheep' appear to him hideous and gross. The encroaching snow is a familiar Lawrentian ending (see, for example, the fate of Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*), connoting the tragic decline of Western 'man' into the wastes of frozen rationality and materialism.

If, however, for a moment we strip away this grand metaphysical scheme from Lawrence's stories, an alternative pattern or interpretation can begin to emerge. According to this interpretation, the islander's action becomes a rather more familiar form of desertion, in which the man escapes the impending 'millstone' by going off to seek his own destiny, leaving the woman, Flora, with the responsibility of the child. Woman, in a version of the biblical myth, is the temptress threatening to expel man from paradise, and from motives which are more worldly than transcendent. Flora might weep when the islander announces that 'he had to go away for a time', but Lawrence has her revive noticeably when the islander hands over his chequebook. At the beginning of the 1970s, after a decade in which Lawrence's reputation had enjoyed some revival in the post-Chatterley era of sexual emancipation, feminist critics like Kate Millett began to question the sexual politics of his fictions, arguing that the terms of liberation were for and on behalf of men, leaving women in a familiar subordinate position. In recalling her adolescent response to the 1922 novel *Aaron's Rod*, which clearly bears some structural similarity to 'The Man Who Loved Islands', Sheila Macleod gives a classic illustration of how a gendered perspective can help us to read against the grain of Lawrence's fictions:

> The beginning of *Aaron's Rod*, where Aaron walks out on his wife and children just before Christmas, enraged and frightened me to an extent I would not have been able to admit. I didn't want to know what happened to Aaron. I wanted to know what happened to Lottie Sisson without her husband and to Millicent and Marjory without their father. It was as if Lawrence had wiped them out, relegated them to some sub-world not worth writing about. But this world of women and children was the only world I knew.[6]

This critical angle can profitably inform our reading of 'The Man Who Died', a beautiful and melancholy tale whose overtly mythic structure clearly summarises many of the Lawrentian

6 MacLeod, p. 2

preoccupations found elsewhere in this volume. It is, of course, *the* Resurrection story, of a man restored to life, prefigured by the cockerel which, though eventually re-tethered (the original title of the story, based on its first half, was 'The Escaped Cock'), continues to cry out the 'triumph of life'. But Lawrence's rewriting of the Christian myth contains a number of further distinctive turns. First, this Christ experiences the rebirth of an actual life of the body, not simply a prelude to heavenly ascension. Despite the vibrant example of the cock, there is nothing ideal about this experience: after the peace of desirelessness, life hurts, and Christ is filled with nausea and disillusion. He thus rejects the importunities of Madeleine (or Magdalene, another worldly-woman figure whose eyes flicker with 'the greed of giving'), not because he is about to ascend but on the contrary because he has now 'outlived' his mission, and must devote himself to his own withdrawal into the phenomenal world: ' "I can learn to be alone." ' Lawrence's Christ acts, then, as a vehicle for the critique of Christian doctrine: the 'compulsion' to love is a form of idealist tyranny, warping the true feelings and shielding us from an authentic experience of the world in its 'vast complexity of entanglements and allurements' (p. 190).

The 'phallic' second half of the tale decisively completes the act of revision. Here Lawrence merges the Christian myth with another myth of resurrection, that of Osiris, this time from pagan mythology. Modernist writers, notably T. S. Eliot, had become interested in the rehabilitation of ancient knowledges and cultural forms as alternatives to a sceptical and exhausted modernity, and a widely influential source of ideas was J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, published in twelve volumes between 1890 and 1915. Lawrence's reading in anthropology included Frazer, and he would have found there the components of the Isis and Osiris myth. In ancient Egypt, Osiris was worshipped as a god of fertility who, when alive as a king, advocated techniques of early agriculture which took him travelling around the world. Osiris suffered a violent death, his body dismembered into fourteen parts, but after much searching they were recovered by his wife Isis, save for his genitals, which had been eaten by a fish. In a sacred rite aided by her sister and a messenger of the sun-god Ra, Isis succeeds in reviving Osiris, who then reigns as king of the dead in the other world. Combined thus in the episode of Osiris are the ideas of bodily resurrection and, in his image as 'corn-god', the seasonal growth and decay of the vegetable world.

The encounter between Christ and the priestess of Isis in

Lawrence's story is thus an almost programmatic fusion of two religious tendencies, the Christian and the pagan. As in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the possibility of a renewed sense of the sacred in the modern is seen to lie in an imaginative – or imagined – transaction between theologies. The priestess has remained pure, finding in the military men of Rome and Egypt – even Antony himself – an 'inward meanness' and 'inadequacy'. Instead, heeding the words of an old philosopher – ' "rare women wait for the reborn man" ' – she waits for 'the lotus to stir'. Like Yvette and the gipsy, the effect of transfiguration is swift when it happens: 'For the first time, she was touched on the quick at the sight of a man, as if the tip of a fine flame of living had touched her' (p. 197). Likewise the Christ-figure finds in her the tenderness and warmth which will complete his 'destiny of splendour': she is 'sunshine', 'a tender flame of healing'. Their lovemaking gives a scandalously physical twist to the resurrection theme: 'I am risen!' (p. 209).

Kate Millett has noted that behind Lawrence's 'resurrection of the body' narratives there usually lurked 'the transformation of masculine ascendancy into a mystical religion' (Millett, p. 238). Certainly, beneath the lyricism of 'The Man Who Died' there could be said to be a weary predictability to the course of events – not only the phallic supremacy of the man, for which alone the priestess has been waiting, but the subsequent desertion of the pregnant woman after he has 'sowed the seeds' of his life. The mythic dimensions of the tale cannot obscure its sexual politics; it was, we remember, written in the late nineteen-twenties. Yet the critical debates around Lawrence's work go on, testifying in the end to a slipperiness and open-endedness which perhaps belies the image of the hectoring counsellor and preacher. Readers will decide for themselves how far his stories are 'hymns to the phallus', or how far they dramatise a sexual mutuality, women such as Yvette, Cecilia or the priestess showing a resolute independence which often involves a rejection of conventional models of masculinity. Even in as slight and unsatisfactory a story as 'Rawdon's Roof' – the only real evidence in this volume that Lawrence might have been weary of writing – a pervasive satirising of men's inability to form healthy and open relationships with women seems to be at issue. From the perspectives of gender studies today, Lawrence's analysis of sexual morality and relationship could be said to encompass the trials and tribulations of the constructed categories of femininity *and* masculinity in equal measure; some critics have already begun to suggest that Lawrence's significance is