

## **“TICKETS, PLEASE”: FEMALE AGGRESSION AND THE NOTION OF “CONSUMMATION” IN D. H. LAWRENCE’S FICTION**

**Dr. Nina Haritatou**

American College of Greece-Athens Kapodistrian University

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**ABSTRACT:** “*Tickets, Please*” is considered as one of the most aggressive tales of D.H.Lawrence as here the writer delineates for the first time a team of women literally invested with the role of avengers: they conspire against a man, attack him and force him to commit himself to marry one of them. Initially it seems that the main theme of the story evolves around the cruel punishment of the man which is to meet these women as nature red in tooth and claw coming face to face with female aggressiveness which threatens him even with death. However, the present article aspires to show how this ostensible punishment might also reveal other aspects of the authorial intention related to the writer’s convictions and beliefs concerning the concept of the real connection between the two sexes, what Lawrence calls “consummation.” It also attempts to explore processes, like that of mythicization, which Lawrence applies when delineating his heroines.

**KEYWORDS:** mythicization, feminine, male, consummation, Jung, unconscious

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The story was completed in December of 1918, together with “The Fox” and four essays at the “Education of the People,” when Lawrence was at Mountain Cottage in Eastwood, and first appeared under the original title “John Thomas,” in the *Strand* magazine in April of 1919 (Kinkead-Weekes 483). Annie, who is a tram-conductor, is the betrayed woman, who, together with her female colleagues at work, decides to give a lesson to John Thomas, a ticket-inspector on the Ripley to Nottingham tramway, a man who does not hesitate to play around with every female soul he meets. The attack of the women to the hero of the story has often puzzled the reviewers of the writer as to whether Lawrence actually aimed at a fearful portraiture of women’s feelings of revenge. However, the story conveys other aspects of the authorial intention as Lawrence here seems to condemn this aspect of the feminine aggressive impulse which results from an irreversible distortion of the real feminine nature, a distortion which is also detected in the male attitude and behavior towards women and constitutes an obstacle in what the writer calls real connection between the two sexes (consummation). The Jungian theory on the *unconscious* and its relation with the feminine will be the background theory for this analysis as it offers the potential to explore the writer’s influence by the famous psychoanalyst and its reflection in his fiction.

### The Dark Side of the Feminine

Quite apparently, the women in this Lawrencian story resemble the members of an ancient Greek chorus only instead of supporting the tragic hero and commenting on his actions, they take essential decisions, they judge and punish, they become terrible monsters, fearful Maenads, the terrifying figures, who, in Euripides' *Bacchae*, devour King Perseus, punishing him for his reluctance to accept the new god Dionysus, the god of passion and of instinctive drives, the god who metaphorically reigns in the realm of the unconscious. Bacchae become the protectresses of this dissipated god, the protectresses of the inexplicable, obscure aspect of the human soul where the dark side of the feminine emerges. Women are frequently connected with this "other," not only in Jungian theory and male authors, but also by iconic feminists. Starting from Jung, it is worth noting that for the psychoanalyst, the unconscious is a feminine realm: "Psychologically the self is a union of conscious (masculine) and unconscious (feminine). It stands for the psychic totality. So formulated, it is a psychological concept" (Wehr, 116). Erich Newman, in *The Origin and History of Consciousness* (1954), asserts that "man experiences the 'masculine' structure of his consciousness as peculiarly his own, and the 'feminine' unconscious as something alien to him, whereas woman feels at home in her unconscious and out of her element in conscious" (Wehr, 117). Julia Kristeva, calls the "unconscious" phase in a child's development, when the infant is still attached to the mother's body, "semiotic," and the subsequent phase, the masculine order, when the child becomes aware of individuality and enters human society, "symbolic" (103).

Lawrence dramatizes what *he* finds threatening in the unconscious feminine territory (as it has been infected by civilization) using at the same time the mystical language and semiology of ritualistic scenes alluding to ancient pagan times, that he employs in other works in order to divinize his heroines. This time, it is not the omnipotent power of the moon (which transforms Ursula in *The Rainbow*), or the living cosmic power in a tree-trunk (which awakens Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Katherine in "The Border Line"), but the extra-cosmic sense of destruction which unites the women of the story and turns them into alien, menacing creatures:

Annie knelt on him, the other girls knelt and hung on to him.  
Their faces were flushed, their hair wild, their eyes were all  
glittering strangely. He lay at last quite still, with face averted,  
as an animal lies when it is defeated and at the mercy of the captor.  
Sometimes his eye glanced back at the wild faces of the girls.

The girls are filled with "supernatural power," "a terrifying lust" (CSS, 323) in their voices, they often burst into "shrill, hysterical" (325) laughter. Lawrence portrays them as frenzied furies emphasizing the depth of their wounded feelings and their lust for justice. They want to "correct" John Thomas obliging him to choose one of them for marriage. Thus marriage becomes a vengeful act showing the resentment of these girls for being rejected.

This is a negative sort of mythicization as it reveals the threatening aspect of goddesses which religious myths in almost every culture have depicted: the aggressive femaleness as a destructive force which makes no distinctions. Agave, in Euripides' tragedy mentioned above, destroys her

son with her own hands. Inanna, the Sumerian goddess, is also a lion goddess of the war and a dragon slayer (Whitmont 134). In the Greek mythology, we find Gorgon, the Medusa whose sight turns the beholder into stone (134) and the Erinyes, daughters of Gaia who emerged from Uranus' (their father's) blood after his castration by his son. They are the terrible furies who pursue anyone guilty of a sin against the will of gods.

By depicting these women as demoniac figures, Lawrence initially dramatizes his abhorrence for this aspect of the feminine nature, the nature he is mostly afraid of, the nature which in the form of maternal or matrimonial love, seeks to suffocate man and his free spirit. In a letter to Katherine Mansfield of 5 December 1918, he writes about the "devouring" power of the Mother-Woman which can absorb and destroy man's maleness, a power from which he "struggles all [his] might to get out" (*L* iii. 301-2). During that period, Lawrence had been reading Barbara Low's copy of Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious*, which contains a critique of Freud's view on incest (Kinkead-Weekes 487). His reading of Jung made him realize the importance of writing fiction which crossed "the threshold of the psyche" (488) and enhanced his views on maleness and femaleness, motherhood and the human soul, views which were to be analyzed later in his *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1920), as well as dramatized in his fiction to come.

In this story Anna, John Thomas' last lover, takes the form of the Medusa, an image which for Erich Neumann constitutes the archetype of the Terrible Mother existing in the iconography of all matriarchal cultures. This myth of the Medusa killed by the brave Perseus, in both a Freudian and Jungian analysis is interpreted "as a young man's struggle with the devouring and possessive image of the feminine" (Woolger 83), a struggle which for Lawrence lasted almost his whole life, given his problematic relation with his mother (dramatized in his famous novel *Sons and Lovers*) and later with his companion, Frieda, and which had a strong impact on the formation of his attitude towards women.

### **"The Real "Consummation" and The Distortion of Human Soul: Mechanization and its Effects**

This negative aspect of the feminine power is often connected by Lawrence with the malaise of industrialization. The women of the story are all products of the dehumanized world of the machine:

The girls are fearless young hussies. In their ugly blue uniform, skirts up to their knees, shapeless old peaked caps on their heads, they have all the sang-froid of an old non commissioned officer. With a tram packed with howling colliers, roaring hymns downstairs and a sort of antiphony of obscenities upstairs, the lasses are perfect at their ease. They pounce on the youths who try to evade the ticket machine. They push off the men at the end of their distance. They are not going to be done in the eyes- not they. They fear nobody – and everybody fears them. (CSS, 315)

For Lawrence the mechanization brought about by industrialization amounts to the devastation of the female psyche. Clara in *Sons and Lovers* is depicted as another example of such a destroyed female instinct bound by civilization: “She seemed denied and deprived of so much. And her arm moved mechanically, that should never have been subdued to a mechanism, and her head was bowed to the lace, that never should have been bowed” (*SL*, 304). Thus, it is interesting to notice here that the destructive aspect of the female psyche for Lawrence, is not to be seen as something inherited from nature, but as a distortion of this nature. These women, caught in the sharp teeth of mechanization, are lost, alienated and miserable in the same way men are. They have lost contact with the “softly flowing stream of attraction and desire and beauty” and

they see themselves as isolated things, independent females,  
instruments, instruments for love, instruments for work,  
instruments for politics, instruments for pleasure, this, that  
and the other.

Life for Lawrence “is not a question of points, but a question of flow.” And the woman used to be the flow, she used to hold the secret of life, she used to live “in a long subtle motion that has no full-stops and no points” in opposition to man, who likes putting points “in life and love” (*Phoenix II*, 541-542). For Lawrence, “the female exists in much more than his [the man’s] woman. And the finding of it for himself gives a man his vision, his God” (*Study*, 53). For Lawrence, woman is something more than a representative of the female species: She is “the door for our in-going and our out-coming” (*Foreword*, 471), the one who leads man to self-discovery, a “God” that must be embraced. Woman, for Lawrence, is thus more than “inspiration” often emerging in his fiction as a sacred, respectable figure.

Unfortunately the women of the story are searching for a “point.” What is missing in them is the courage to return back and discover their female nature. They have become so immersed in the man’s world that they have completely forgotten what real life and their consciousness has adapted so well to prevailing male structures that they risk turning into men themselves: “It is a pity of pities women have learned to think like men.[...]. Our education goes on and on, on and on, making the sexes alike, destroying this the original individuality of the blood, to substitute for it this dreary individuality of the ego, the Number One” (*RDP*, 341). For Lawrence, the feminine self of these women remains undeveloped and the insecurity they feel inside, despite all their “masculine” achievements, becomes the source of their aggressiveness: the fiercer they become the more they hide their vulnerable self. This insupportable split between the fragile, intuitive woman and the strong, outer fighter is the price the modern woman has to pay in order to succeed. Although this approach can be considered as an essentialist one, Lawrence seems to avoid the trap of stereotyping: civilization and its consequences on human nature are degenerative for both men and women. Moreover, the alternative choice for women to be married and have children is also a degrading one, as, even when they don’t want to get involved in male activities, Lawrence accuses them of conforming with the rules that society has set up for them. They want to have love -- no matter how meaningless and absurd such a feeling might be. They need to settle down and get married and have children and a family, but, having lost the true essence of life which is not to

bear children but to “bear themselves” (*Study*, 48), they find no satisfaction in achieving their goals. For this reason, despite his fear of this unexpected and dangerous development in women’s nature, it seems that portraying them as destructive figures is not Lawrence’s intention. Annie, the female protagonist of the story, is a sensitive woman before “the possessive female was roused in her” (*TI*, 319). She feels warmth and security on John’s presence:

She felt so rich and warm in herself when he was near. And  
John Thomas really likes Annie, more than usual. The soft,  
melting way in which she could flow into a fellow, as if she  
melted into his very bones, was something rare and good. He  
fully appreciated this.

The woman seems to be capable of really touching a male heart, while John acknowledges the soft, feminine touch, the flow of life that Anna represents. Both of them could have been the Man and Woman, who, according to Lawrence, could have achieved the sacred union between the male and the female, what Lawrence calls “consummation,” if modern life had not wounded their intuition and pure nature irreversibly. Lawrence believed in what he called the union of “pure mutual opposites,” the ultimate union of the opposite elements like fire and water, on which the law of creation is based (*Phoenix II*, 231). Man and woman and their union play a vital part in his theory: “In procreation, the two germs of the male and the female epitomize the two cosmic principles, as these are held within the life-spell” (230). This is a concept which, as Jung often points out, is to be found in most philosophical systems of antiquity as well as Christianity. In Hermetic philosophy, it is expressed by the term *coniunctio* of male and female, and in Gnosticism, it is known as the *mysterium iniquitatis*. Jung refers to the primordial concept of *hieros gamos* in Christian mysticism, which however was “sublimated on a lofty plane.” For the Swiss psychoanalyst, “the physical performance of *hieros gamos* as a sacred rite not only became a mystery – it faded to a mere conjecture.” He believed that Gnosticism and subsequently the Church, turned the natural philosophy of this union “into an abstract *theoria*,” severing it from its physicality (Segal, 140-1).

For Lawrence, this union with the other sex would help the human being to find his/her authentic, real self, the self who is mostly connected with the body and the senses and as such is closer to the primitive rather than the civilized idea concerning the image of the self. This union has both physical and metaphysical dimensions. Inspired by his reading of ancient mystical and pagan philosophies, he called this union “a consummation,” which “may be also physical, between the male body and the female body. But it may be only spiritual, between the male and female spirit” (*Study*, 68). But physical or spiritual consummation alone is inadequate: “the marriage in the spirit is a lie, and the marriage in the body is a lie, each is a lie without the other” (83). The ultimate union must be both in body and spirit, it must be “the Holy Ghost” union. The employment of the word “holy” shows how much Lawrence values this experience which becomes one of the main subjects of his work. In “Tickets, Please” the male hero can only “appreciate” Anna’s sensuous, female presence, and Anna “wanted to take an intelligent interest in him” (318). Both of them have committed a sin against life by treating the union of a man and woman, not as a divine gift, but as

a commodity to be exploited. Lawrence attacks, not only the woman perverted by industrialism, but also “male chauvinism” (Kinkead-Weekes, 488), suggesting that true maleness has nothing to do with the fake confidence that meaningless sexual affairs build in a man’s psyche. Lawrence’s comment on modern Don Juan is caustic: “Don Juan was only Don Juan because he *had* no real desire. He had broken his own integrity and, was a mess to start with. No stream of desire, with a course of its own, flowed from him [...]. That’s Don Juan: the man who *couldn’t* desire a woman” (*RDP*, 342). John Thomas’ desire is similarly false condemning him to remain without passion and respect for women.

Although Lawrence is very cautious towards the feeling of love and the institution of marriage (and women’s obstinacy to get it) as a reliable feeling which can keep a man and a woman together, here, the reader might be left with the impression that the feminine demand to “be loved” is justified as its lack arouses so strong, frustrating and revenging feelings, in the female soul. However, at the end, not only Anna, but also the rest of the girls turn John Thomas down. His offer to marry Anna is rejected by her and none of the other women seem willing to finally take him as their husband. He leaves with torn clothes and bleeding face, daunted and alone. Anna now seems to realize that what she wanted was real male contact, real happiness with a man who would discover her femaleness and would not be afraid to embrace it. Anna is saved at the end, as Medea in Euripides’ tragedy is forgiven for the killing of her children (murdered in order to take revenge for her husband’s betrayal). Both women are tragic, each in her dimensions, as their initial sadness and misfortune has been transformed into mere revenge and their rage has become their power. But Lawrence, like Euripides in the past, appears to have a sense of natural justice and he does not hesitate to save these women as they give up being the willful possessive females and they listen to their inner needs by acknowledging in the man the falsity of his feelings and by rejecting him: Medea is saved by the god Helios, the Persian god of the sun, while Anna with her Maenads are saved by the unexpected prevailing of the feminine instinct hidden in the unconscious, the realm of the god Dionysus. It is a metaphorical salvation as women here are presented from a powerful point of view, dispensing justice and punishing the one who dared to play with their emotions and abuse their need for real bond, for real “consummation.”

The tortured man at the end of the novel becomes the symbol of a collapsed sensationalism, a term used by Lawrence in his “The Crown” (*RDP*, 285) to denote the degradation both of flesh and spirit which comes as a result of the accumulation of useless experiences. John Thomas epitomizes the reluctance of the male to listen to the female voice and accept a woman as a true lifelong partner for the man in the body and soul.

In this short story it is the female protagonist, who, invested with the role of the avenger, manages to realize that it is the falsity of her own expectations (a comfortable marriage deprived of real connection) which has actually deceived her rather than the outrageous behavior of her male “victim.” However, Lawrence, by vividly depicting through a ritualistic motif the distortion and discouragement of modern man and woman and their deviation from what is supposed to be their real nature, dares to challenge equally both sexes and make them face their responsibility to really approach and listen to one another.

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