

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S *WOMEN IN LOVE*

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Abstract

Our present paper analyzes instances of non-verbal communication, which bear the distinct mark of expressionism, on the language of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. This artistic "channel" is mainly expressed by means of a "language of the unconscious" that is best illustrated within "symbolic rituals."

It is through Lawrence's use of original lexical and stylistic devices that he proves a great master of the language. Our selection of such devices belonging to five representative chapters in the novel - *Water-Party*, *Rabbit*, *Mooney*, *Gladiatorial* and *Excuse* - includes the effect of rhythmic rhetoric and repetitive images mostly. These are built up by means of the accumulation of repetitions and symmetric phrases that give the scenes a hypnotic, almost irrationally driven power. The latter depends on an expressionist use of language capable of producing a strong emotive response to the reader. Within an apparently realist form, D.H. Lawrence builds up symbolic "worlds" appropriate to his characters, who feel so much at ease that they spontaneously express their most contradictory modes of consciousness by means of body language, dance, physical contact, etc. This is done by Lawrence's employing a clash of contradictory "languages" in the book (expressionist, symbolic and metaphorical) that poetically suggest non-verbal communicative relations between characters.

Keywords: *allotropic states, art speech, emotive response, eurhythmics, expressionist elements, expressionist rituals, kinetic imagery, mystical rite, non-tactile awareness, non-verbal communication, physical ritual, symbolic rituals, symbolic worlds.*

Women in Love is D.H. Lawrence's most complex novel in terms of its mode of conception, its ideas and the language used. There are several converging influences in it, among which expressionism and "primitivism." These constitute the writer's most adequate artistic "channels" by means of which he relies on non-verbal communication to present his characters in all their inner complexity.

We shall focus our attention on the ways Lawrence understands to exploit these channels; we shall also prove their direct influence on the rhetoric and language of the novel.

The most obvious influence on the style of *Women in Love* is expressionism. Considered by some critics as one of the greatest texts of European expressionism, the novel reveals Lawrence's use of a 'language of the unconscious' that clearly has expressionist overtones, if we are to consider the articulation of subterranean forces in the psyche, the turbulent, inarticulate energies which are to be found under the surface of civilization, or the religious drive toward revelation of being, which are all expressionist in spirit.

We have selected a series of scenes - *Water-Party*, *Rabbit*, *Mooney*, *Gladiatorial* and *Excuse* - that convey "symbolic rituals" in expressionist language, as Jack Stewart calls such scenes in order "to emphasize the structuring of action by unconscious forces," revealing the essence of character in spontaneous bodily movements and gestures. (Stewart 1999:76)

We have identified clear expressionist elements in the chapter called *Water Party*. It is during the water-party that the sisters escape to an island, and Gudrun, wishing to relieve her tension, asks Ursula to sing while she does Dalcroze exercises: "Gudrun, looking as if some invisible chain weighted on her hands and feet, began slowly to dance in the eurhythmic manner, pulsing and fluttering rhythmically with her feet, making slower, regular gestures with her hands and arms ... her feet all the time beating and running to the measure of the song, as if it were some strange incantation, her white, rapt form drifting here and there in a strange impulsive rhapsody (...)." (156)

Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, who invented the eurhythmic method of self-expressive dance, defines rhythm as the natural force which incites and vivifies, unifies and repeats our acts and wills. Eurhythmics expresses the unconscious in

consciously coordinated bodily movements, aiming at equilibrium, inner harmony and liberation from inhibition. Eurhythmics and expressionism are historically connected.

In *Women in Love* dance is a supplementary form of art speech. In its capacity to express inner being and preverbal feeling, dance is affiliated with expressionism in literature and painting. Interrelations between arts were a characteristic of the expressionists. Lawrence himself was a visually oriented writer who was keenly attached to touch, motion and rhythm and for whom writing was a kinetic as well as a mental process. Consequently, Lawrence sees the possibilities of expressing allotropic states through verbalizations of bodily movement.

Eurhythmics is the right mode of expression for Gudrun in her state of inner tension and immobility as the simile *looking as if some invisible chain weighted on her hands and feet* manages to link to. The movements of her improvised dance, its intensity and contortion, suggest that she feels inwardly 'contravened' and is desperately trying to break free. As Gudrun's energy is entropically arrested, it is logical that she should resort to dance. Her dance looks unnatural or perverse, because her movements are the bodily expression of a divided will (e.g. *pulsing and fluttering rhythmically* or *beating and running* or *drifting here and there in a strange impulsive rhapsody*). Her ambivalence is manifest in the civilized / primitive contradictions of her dance successively rendered by means of the two series of coordinated gerunds (*pulsing and fluttering* and *beating and running*) that are followed by an independent gerund (*drifting*). Her mixture of confidence and diffidence provides the tension and motivation of her dance. Gudrun feels a compulsive need to surrender to sensations, yet she cannot abandon her will; hence the drifting movements of her dance, in which somatic states seek expression. It is natural that Lawrence, with his keen interest in allotropic states, should find a parallel medium in dance or "the language of the body in motion," which he incorporates into the expressionist language of the novel.

Gudrun's dance culminates in releasing her destructive will in a symbolic act. Confronted by

the menacing cattle, "(she) went in a strange, palpitating dance ... lifting her body towards them as if in a spell, her feet pulsing as if in some little frenzy of unconscious sensation, her arms, her wrists, her hands stretching and heaving and falling and reaching and reaching and falling, her breasts lifted and shaken ... her throat exposed as in some *voluptuous ecstasy* ... whilst *she drifted imperceptibly nearer*, an uncanny white figure ... (that) ebbed upon them, *in the slow, hypnotizing convulsion of the dance*. She could feel them just in front of her, it was as if she had *the electric pulse from their breasts running into her hands.*" (157)

This rhythmic yet mechanical bond reflected here in the personification - *the electric pulse from their breasts running into her hands* - recalls the blood pulse of the cows that metaphorically *beat into the pulse of the hands of the men* in *The Rainbow* (8), while the *voluptuous ecstasy* of the dance in this passage connects to Hermione's *consummation of voluptuous ecstasy* in striking Birkin in *Women in Love*. (107) Gudrun seems to manipulate animal magnetism in a ritualistic and hypnotic expression of female power (*she drifted imperceptibly nearer (...), in the slow, hypnotizing convulsion of the dance*) that equally draws Gerald to her and brings his destruction. She puts the bullocks to flight, ritually proving the repulsive power of her will over masculine brute force. Her eurhythmic self-expression seems to put her in touch with an *unconquerable desire for deep violence* against the male sex. (160)

In the sinister *Rabbit* scene, animal impulses are expressed in mechanical images. Expressionism releases repressed emotions and attempts to penetrate to a hidden core of reality, it involves dynamism and distortion, and it is intentional, humanizing and subjective. A ritualistic scene like *Rabbit* is essentially expressionist in its violent projection of inner states. Gudrun hauls the creature out of its hutch, and in another instant it was in mid-air, lunging wildly, its body flying like a spring coiled and released, as it lashed out (...). (230)

There is obviously the suggestive force of the vivid visual image created by the simile *like a spring coiled and released* that retains our attention

here. The girl's response reveals raw impulses, in a way characteristic of expressionism: "Gudrun stood for a moment astounded by the thunder-storm that had sprung into being in her grip. Then her colour came up, a heavy rage came over her like a cloud. She stood shaken as a house in a storm, and utterly overcome. Her heart was arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity of this struggle, her wrists were badly scored by the claws of the beast, a heavy cruelty welled up in her." (230)

The passage contains several figures of speech that bear the imprint of expressionism: the metaphors *astounded by the thunder-storm that had sprung into being in her grip* and *a heavy cruelty welled up in her* as well as the similes *a heavy rage came over her like a cloud* and *shaken as a house in a storm*. Shocking effects are obtained by means of the actual exacerbation of violence through repeatedly using the adjective *heavy*, which thus acquires distinct connotations in the noun phrases *heavy cruelty* and *heavy rage* such as "terrible" or "horrible." By modulating expressionist elements into his poetic prose here, Lawrence depicts a grotesque image of the female character being possessed by violence. In the description of the writhing rabbit there is to be read an extension of human sensuality, contorted by the will. The terrified creature embodies the couple's (Gudrun-Gerald) tension, fear and twisted craving for sensation.

This compulsion to express what is hidden in the psyche was the heart of European expressionism in the pre-war and wartime period when Lawrence was writing *Women in Love* (1913-1917). He later exposed the atrocities of the war in *England My England* (1921), referring to repression and sublimation as the causes of violent manifestations during the great conflagration.

The rabbit's name, Bismark, implying a connection between blood, sex, lust and war is also an appropriate name for a fetishist medium of violence and suffering.

As the contortions of Gudrun's dance act out inner tensions, so the sadomasochistic frenzy of *Rabbit* is an expressionist acting-out of latent violence and reciprocal destruction within the

couple. The rabbit, like the mare, becomes the embodiment of physical impulses forced into grotesque convulsions by the will: "The long, demon-like beast lashed out again, spread on the air as if it were flying, looking something like a dragon, then closing up again, inconceivably powerful and explosive. The man's body, strung to its efforts, vibrated strongly. Then a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit." (231)

The impact of the scene derives from a combination of realism with symbolism and expressionism. The focus moves from realistic visual detail (*all its belly flashed white in a whirlwind of paws*) to symbolic description (*And he saw her eyes black as night in her pallid face (...). He looked at her, and the whitish, electric gleam in his face intensified*). (231) Gudrun's demonic look recalls her *black-dilated, spell-bound eyes* as Gerald dominates the mare and her *dark, dilated, inchoate eyes* when she defeated the cattle (103, 160). The sadistic rabbit ritual reveals the unconscious as a chaos of lust and cruelty. Gerald and Gudrun are plunged into this horrifying abyss as into a tide of blood. They willingly abandon themselves to demonized sensation. Their struggle with the rabbit arouses a sadistic will-to-power that frightens even Gerald. The sense of a Faustian bond with the powers of evil - "There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both" (232) - is strong as they appear ravished over each other's wounds: "It was as if he had had knowledge of her in the long red rent of her forearm ... (that) seemed torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the forever unconscious, unthinkable red either of the beyond, the obscene beyond." (232)

Occult knowledge overwhelms Gerald shattering his iron control. The metaphorical expression of inner states is concentrated and revealing: Gerald identifies carnal knowledge ("It was as if he had had knowledge of her in the long red rent of her forearm") with violation (*seemed torn across his own brain*) and sex (*the obscene beyond*) with suffering (*tearing the surface of his ultimate*

consciousness). Ironically, some part of his brain seems to be torn in him, leaving him mentally exposed and unguarded. The symbolical haemorrhage brings over to the surface uncontrolled primitive instincts that somehow seem contagious. The couple is initiated into demonic sensuality: their sadomasochistic bond is sealed in the blood of a beast, their exultation in each other's wounds is a mockery of blood-brotherhood. The language used by Lawrence in this episode is highly expressive yet it contains harsh overtones inspired by expressionism.

The symbolic action of *Moony* is so powerful that the reader experiences it immediately and sensuously rather than cognitively. Lawrence uses a sort of language that contains expressive elements akin to dream-like reality, hypnotic trance and incantatory rituals. The rhetoric of the moon-stoning is characterized by dynamism that is, it is alive with movement and vibration. Lawrence makes use of expressionist language when referring to the primordial - the light-darkness or water-fire dichotomies: "Then again there was a burst of sound, and a burst of *brilliant light*, the moon had exploded on the water, and was flying asunder in flakes of white and dangerous fire. Rapidly, like white birds, the fires all broken rose across the pond, fleeing in clamorous confusion, battling with the flock of dark waves that were forcing their way in. The furthest waves of light, fleeing out, seemed to be clamouring against the shore for escape, the waves of darkness came in heavily, running under towards the centre." (214)

Birkin's moon-madness recalls Ursula's identification with the incandescent, *corrosive moon* in *The Rainbow*. In *Moony* she is identified with the moon's inviolable completeness, which he is savagely attacking - "*a vivid, incandescent quivering of a white moon not quite destroyed, a white body of fire ... not even now broken open, not yet violated.*" (214) The identification of the characters with natural forces, invoked through a dynamic pattern of action, defines this scene as an expressionist ritual. In his *Letters II*, Lawrence specifies that "ritual makes ... a bridge between real life and art, a bridge over which in primitive times it would seem man must pass." (Lawrence

1981:135) Ritual is the bridge between the unconscious and art-speech, which is *the passionate struggle into conscious being*. The effect of rhythmic rhetoric and repetitive images - built up by abundant use of repetition and symmetric phrases (*burst of sound / burst of light, fleeing in / fleeing out, waves of light / waves of darkness, flakes of white and dangerous fire/ flock of dark waves*) - gives the whole scene a hypnotic, almost irrationally driven power. The latter depends on an expressionist use of language capable of producing a strong emotive response. Lawrence "makes visual and tactile imagery resonate beyond semantic or referential functions." (Stewart 1999:88)

The interactions between the characters in this scene can be best described as dreams of attraction and repulsion. This apocalyptic process of mutual destruction and re-creation is presented in a cyclic pattern that comprises a centrifugal-centripetal rhythm of dispersal and renewal. The structure of this pattern may be illustrated by isolating verbal or participial phrases. First, there is the outward, disintegrating movement, in which *the moon had exploded on the water, and was flying asunder ... (the) furthest waves of light, fleeing out, seemed to be clamouring against the shore for escape*. A contrary movement comes back toward the centre, with *the moon's image getting stronger ... re-asserting itself ... in triumphant reassertion*. The interaction (*works*) up to culmination in the last phase, in which harmony is almost completely restored.

The repeated action and reaction of this psychic ritual is an example of the "pulsing, frictional to-and-fro" that is organically characterizes Lawrence's style. In a real sense, "the expressionist style is a manifestation of the psychic rhythms of the writer's being." (Stewart 1999:88) Expressionist rhythms project inner tensions in successive disruptions and re-integrations of the moon's image on the mirror of the pool. The complex ritual succeeds in uniting man and woman, dark water and moonlight, in a mysterious equilibrium. Birkin and Ursula, coming together in search of wholeness, are initiated into sacred mysteries,

just as Gerald and Gudrun are *implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries* of cruelty. As Birkin's moon-stoning suggests tension / release, joining / separation in the couple's relationship, so does Lawrence's linguistic reproduction of archetypal impulses activate the reader's imagination due to the brilliant mingling of visual forms.

Polarized themes of integration / disintegration and creation / destruction symbolize not only the psychic drama of the characters but also the drama of their historical period. The interplay of white fire and dark water creates a microcosm interpretable as Birkin's ritualistic expression of the disintegration of European society. Understanding the moon-stoning as a correlative of the war requires just a slight shift from metonymy to metaphor, in the battleground-like images: "*a burst of sound, a burst of brilliant light, exploded; flying asunder, dangerous fire; fires all broken, fleeing in glamorous confusion, battling, fleeing out, strange, violent pangs, broken lights scattered over her face; a battlefield of broken lights and shadows.*" (214-215)

The stoning of the pool can also be read as an apocalyptic ritual, in which the old order of civilization is challenged and destroyed to be replaced by new forms, in a never-ending process. Birkin is unconsciously pointing towards the decline, fall and eternal re-creation of cultures yet he is also trying to solve a personal dilemma: oscillation between civilized and primitive life-forms (as seen in the all broken fires, *fleeing in glamorous confusion*), self and 'otherness.' His whole torment and reflections during the ritual are meant to lead him to illumination.

Another interesting chapter that contains essential expressionist elements is *Gladiatorial*. The two protagonists, Gerald and Birkin, physically confront each other in a wrestling scene, which is suggested by kinetic imagery. An expressionist element is the non-tactile, non-visual awareness of physical presence. The wrestling as such involves an interaction of diverse inner states: Gerald's longing for extreme sensation encounters the frustration and

anger in Birkin who, temporarily rejected by Ursula, is yearning for blood-brotherhood: "(Gerald) seemed to stand with a proper, rich weight on the face of the earth, whilst Birkin seemed to have the centre of gravitation in his own middle. And Gerald had a rich, frictional kind of strength, rather mechanical, but sudden and invincible, whereas Birkin was abstract as to be almost intangible. He impinged invisibly upon the other man, scarcely seeming to touch him, like a garment, and then suddenly piercing in a tense fine grip that seemed to penetrate into the very quick of Gerald's being." (234)

Their strengths are complementary; each needs some input from the other. The *physical junction of the two bodies* implies a spiritual conjunction of opposites. Their distinct physical strength is metaphorically referred to in quite distinct terms: Gerald's strength is *rich and frictional, rather mechanical*, while Birkin's is *abstract and almost intangible*. At the high point of tension, the two wrestlers are *clinched into oneness*, as Will Brangwen's soul is similarly *clinched* into solitary ecstasy in the apex of the cathedral. Will, spiritually, and Birkin, intuitively, seek *the meeting, the clasp, the close embrace ... the perfect, swooning consummation* (167) of oneness.

In *Gladiatorial*: "(the two men) seemed to drive their white flesh deeper and deeper against each other, as if they would break into a oneness. ... (Birkin) seemed to penetrate into Gerald's more solid, more diffuse bulk, to interfuse his body through the body of the other, as if to bring it subtly into subjection, always seizing with some rapid necromantic foreknowledge every motion of the other flesh, converting and counteracting it. ... It was as if Birkin's whole physical intelligence interpenetrated into Gerald's body, as if his fine, sublimated energy entered into the flesh of the fuller man, like some potency, casting a fine net, a prison, through the muscles into the very depths of Gerald's physical being." (235)

Birkin's *white magic* combines a little bit of the occult with *physical intelligence*. The strong inhibition against homosexuality produces a high charge of *sublimated energy*. Birkin's desire to anticipate Gerald's impulses with *rapid*

necromantic foreknowledge resemble Gudrun's desire to seize on his sexual essence (159). Gerald represents the potent but inert male that more intelligent agents, such as Birkin, can manipulate for good or ill. This is sensationally hinted at by means of the merging of the metaphorical image - *fine, sublimated energy that entered into the flesh* with the simile - *like some potency*, the result being grasped by another metaphor a *fine net, a prison*. The whole scene contains a subtle metaphorical allusion to the supremacy and "potency" of fine intelligence over physical strength or rather the triumph of the spiritual over the material.

In *Gladiatorial* there is also an element of poetic abstraction: identities submerge in impersonal *junction*, while minds are totally absent and transcended by an image of pure motion, like that of the expressionist dance: "So they wrestled swiftly, rapturously, intent and mindless at last, two essential white figures ever working into a tighter, close oneness of struggle, with a strange, octopus-like knotting and flashing of limbs. ... Often, in the white interlaced knot of violent living being that swayed silently, there was no head to be seen, only the swift, tight limbs, the solid white backs, the physical junction of two bodies clinched into oneness." (235)

The act of wrestling reveals here the potential oneness of physical and intellectual opposites. It is during the act that each loses himself in instinctual motion - *they wrestled swiftly, rapturously, intent and mindless* - in order to find himself again. The swooning exhaustion that Birkin feels afterwards is described in apocalyptic images: *The earth seemed to tilt and sway, and a complete darkness was coming over his mind*. (236) By means of expressionist language, a casual wrestling taking place in a library turns into an exploration of occult phenomena and a struggle to reach *the very depths of ... physical being*.

The physical ritual of *Gladiatorial* is matched by the mystical rite of *Excuse*. An invisible realm stretches behind Birkin's and Ursula's actions, and the abundance of metaphorical and metaphysical terms make the chapter seem unreadable. Some critics think the rhetoric of the

strange rite of touch, with its *current of passionate electric energy ... released from the darkest poles of the body* (289) is euphemistic language that under-covers reference to abnormal sexuality. Given Lawrence's propensity towards the physical and metaphysical, it is obvious that we can also read the chapter as a linguistic attempt to spiritualize the body and embody the spirit with expressionist means. The mystically-physically satisfying relations of Birkin and Ursula are expressed in electrical imagery of passionate impulses circulating through the bloodstream that resembles Lawrence's use of similar imagery to describe the energy stimulated by eurythmics.

The language here projects into the depths of being, transmuting tactile into spiritual. Through a bunch of words and phrases whose sexual allusions are subtly covered in mystical overtones, and a use of parallelism, abstraction and negation, Lawrence expands the horizons of expression. The density of noun phrases, and implicitly the scarcity of verbal phrases, points toward otherness and silence: "Quenched, inhuman, his fingers upon her unrevealed nudity were the fingers of *silence upon silence*, the body of mysterious night upon the body of mysterious night, the night masculine and feminine, never to be seen with the eye, or known with the mind, only known as a *palpable revelation of living otherness*." (295) While *vital, sensual reality ... can never be transmuted into mind content*, Lawrence's metaphors invite the reader to transmute verbal into sensual / spiritual experience. Language becomes an occult phenomenon: everyday meaning is erased, as words point toward tactile, kinaesthetic and emotional experience. The urge to communicate an inner vision, at the cost of dislocating the medium, is essentially expressionist.

The language of *Excuse* expands erotic implications. Expressionist rhetoric culminates in this chapter, where *accession into being* is achieved through rites of touch. The couple reaches mutual fulfilment via the mystics of the erotic body. Lawrence's fusion of opposites points to a primordial silence that transcends the self.

In *Excuse*, Lawrence devises the rhetoric of paradox: a dialectics of mind and sense, speech and touch lies behind the cumulative paradoxes of this chapter. He is a master of mingling words with touch and touch with being. Lawrence's expressionist language connects the verbal with the *unthinkable*, the *palpable* with the *untranslatable*, the expressive with the *unutterable*, breaking down distinctions and conventions. It is not surprising that rationalist critics accuse the writer of this excess. True enough, Lawrence does defy the limits of language and logic. The stylistic enterprise of *Excuse* is an "expressionist breaking-through of the referential functions of language to reveal experience of Being." (Stewart 1999:93)

A fruitful interrelation between arts is part of the expressionist enterprise. As, for example, novelistic language borrows from the visual arts to transcend its own forms of expression. In *Women in Love*, expressionist language is not just visual or kinetic but reveals the vital of the "beyond," expressing diverse states of being never previously explored. Lawrence uses expressionist language as a tool to penetrate human action, reflection and being, linking characters with their culture. He exposes forces that underlie visible phenomena at a given historical moment (e.g. the shocking and traumatic effects of war) and challenges readers with an alternative vision of creation and / out of corruption.

Within an apparently realist form, Lawrence builds up symbolic "worlds" appropriate to his characters, who feel so much at ease that they spontaneously express their most contradictory modes of consciousness. This is done by Lawrence's employing a clash of contradictory "languages" in the book (expressionist, symbolic and metaphorical) that reflect non-verbal communicative relations between characters. It is by means of this convergence of a vast range of modes of expression that he could give a summative evidence of his vision, by bringing it into contact with the dominant sensibility of his day. The dramatic presentation of such "worlds," through a projection of particular kinds of sensibility in his characters, leads him

to the recognition of existent linguistic and ontological limits. Lawrence's awareness of these limits and of the need to surpass them has determined him to create a "new world of symbols" from the unconscious symbolic activity of the psyche. (Bell 1992:154)

We may conclude that *Women in Love*, as his other novels discussed so far, with their realistic demands, are the principle arena in which this conjunction occurs. As Lawrence's vision matured, its incompatibility with the modern world was more apparent. This is to be reflected in the novel in the way "the characters are being trapped within a relative mode of consciousness with a sense of other possibilities lying close at hand yet out of reach." (Bell 1992:166) Such ontology is constantly glimpsed in *Women in Love*, but only at an exotic distance.

Within the expressionist and symbolic domain of artistic form, or within what he called "art-speech," Lawrence is "pursuing exploratory and prophetic language paths." (Bell 1992:87) This conception of art as a combination of sensory apprehension and symbolic projection of knowledge is originally reflected in Lawrence's novel by means of a dynamic and exploratory non-verbal interplay of these principles.

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