

"Desire" in D. H. Lawrence

Motofumi Nakayama

Lawrence thought that life is not a static material, but something streaming, or flowing. This is especially remarkable in his later works. This idea of Lawrence first can be seen in *Women in Love*, and becomes clearer in *The Plumed Serpent*. There is an reflection of the same idea also in *The Virgin and the Gipsy*. This story describes a young heroine who lives frustrated and dissatisfied within the "pale" and comes to understand the significance of living up to the flow of life attracted by the "desire" of a gipsy man who lives outside the "pale." This is, in that sense, a story of "passion." *The Virgin and the Gipsy* has a gipsy who lives a life-oriented life outside the social order, travelling around with no house to settle in. In that sense, the gipsy has the similarity with the native Indians following the life-impulse in New Mexico in *The Plumed Serpent*, Mellors enjoying a solitary life in the woods in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the man who once died and was wounded all over in *The Man Who Died*. Furthermore, what these stories have in common is that each of those characters regards life as endlessly streaming, not as fixed.

Key Words : life, passion, desire, impulse, stagnation

I

The Virgin and Gipsy is a novella which Lawrence started to write in about the end of 1925 and finished in January, 1926. Since it was written in the last stage of his writing career, this story shares the same realm that he reached in the later years when he wrote *The Plumed Serpent*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and *The Man Who Died*. He describes "the flowing life" in "Art and Morality" like:

Each thing, living or unliving, streams in its own odd, intertwining flux, and nothing, not even man nor the God of man, nor anything that man has thought or felt

or known, is fixed or abiding. All moves. Nothing is true, or good, or right, except in its own living relatedness to its own circumambient universe; to the things that are in the stream with it. (529)

The idea that everything is streaming is contrasting to T.S. Eliot's notion that the center of thing is static, fixed. This idea of Lawrence first can be seen in *Women in Love*, and becomes clearer in *The Plumed Serpent*. There is an reflection of the same idea also in *The Virgin and the Gipsy*. This story portrays a young heroine who lives frustrated and dissatisfied within the "pale" (237) and comes to understand the significance of living up to the flow of life enchanted by the "desire" of a gipsy man who lives outside the "pale." This is, in that sense, a story of "passion." This story of passion constitutes of the contrasting ideas such as "social order and individual freedom," "morality and immorality," "reason and desire," "the rectory and the gipsy life" and what not.

The Plumed Serpent illustrates the process of a middle-aged woman's alteration while realizing that life cannot be confined within the frame of individuality through the living contact with the native Indians of New Mexico. Since she was born and educated in Europe, she had a firm belief that she had "a completed I." (325) In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the heroine who is obliged to live a closed life with the disabled baron is gradually led to the world of streaming life by the gamekeeper. And also there is a man who was exiled from the world by crucifixion and came back to life and knows a pleasure of living life by touching the warm life of the priestess of Isis who awaited the appearance of a man who gives a clue to life. *The Virgin and the Gipsy* has a gypsy who lives a life-oriented life outside the social order, travelling around with no house to settle in. In that sense, the gipsy has the similarity with the native Indians following the life-impulse of New Mexico in *The Plumed Serpent*, Mellors enjoying a solitary life in the woods in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the man who once died and was wounded all over in *The Man Who Died*. Furthermore, what these stories have in common is that each of those characters regards life as endlessly streaming, not as fixed. This is quite close to the passion Gilles Deleuze advocates, and reminds us the reader of the affirmation of life disclosed in Nietzsche's *Zarathustras*. We cannot say that this story has attracted the attention of many critics but for some exceptions. C.C.Cowan and D.J.Schneider pay attention to the pattern of "death" and "resurrection" in this story. And M. Freeman says regarding the difference between this novel and the so-called "leadership" novels: "It was certainly a retreat from his ambitious efforts to describe social revolution." (216) Each of them admits its own value, but do not attach great importance to the fact that this is closely related to the main

theme of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Man Who Died*. This is a seriously important story manifesting the quality of desire described in Lawrence's works.

This paper traces how the heroine Yvette is influenced and led to the realm unknown to her by the gipyhood of the gipsy with special attention to the so-called "magic" affecting her.

II

This is, apparently, a story commonly seen in any households, except for the incident of elopement. The story centers on the aftermath of the elopement of the bishop's wife with a young man having no money and status, and on the heroine's irritation and repulsion to the family and the atmosphere of the rectory. Firstly, the discussion is turned to what the rectory and the people there represent.

The life of the rectory people is described through the eyes of the 19 year-old, sensitive, young woman Yvette who was just back from a women's school in Rosanne. She is severely critical of the whole atmosphere of Papplewick. To her this village seems to be very "boring." (172) The reason is that there are no real "men." (172) It is clear from her words that it does not mean that there is not such a man as she falls in love with, but that there are not energetic attractive men; "Why doesn't Daddy have some good sports for friends? As for Uncle Fred, he's the limit." (172) She finds that her family members help to make the village "boring." To her, the father and Uncle Fred both, who are boring people, lack vitality.

It is her grandmother that rules the rectory. She was invited to live with her son Arthur when he was appointed to the bishop and moved to the larger rectory. She has "the stony, implacable will-to-power" (180), and is filled with "impassive, implacable, relentless, insatiable greed for life." (180) She tries to keep the position of prestige "through the weakness of the unfresh, stagnant men she had bred." She always plays a role of the host deeply seated in the armchair symbolic to the authority of the family.

The men regarded as "unfresh" and "stagnant" are irresistible to the will-to-power of the Mater and helplessly loyal to her. All the others are also obedient to the "tradition" of the family; especially, Yvette's aunt Cissie, who is going on 50 years old, devotes her life to the Mater. She has given up being Cissie and a woman; she sacrifices everything. Now she goes so far as to share the bed with her mother every night because she insistently complains that she cannot sleep alone. It is quite natural that she is sometimes driven to a fit of anger and "strange green flares of rage would come up in her, and at such times, she was insane." (170) Rather, her rage shows the evidence that she still keeps her normality. However, she is totally

reigned by the Mater. Yvette finds a cruel will hidden in the Mater who queens it over in the house. Yvette suddenly imagines her as "the toad" from her expressionless face and greedy will. Not only her real children but also Cecille and Yvette are swayed and controlled and choked by "the full weight of Granny's dead old hand." (186) It is this Mater that stays in the center of "the decadent and easy atmosphere" of the rectory. It is as if "stifling and dirty house." (173)

It seemed ugly, and almost sordid, with the dank air of that middle-class, degenerated comfort which has ceased to be comfortable and has turned stuffy, unclean. (173)

Yvette keen sensibility sharply senses the stagnancy of the rectory. This prison-like place filled with "the stagnant air" does not allow the young girls to seek after the bright social life. This stagnant air prevails all through the rectory and infects all the residents here. "The rectory, and everything it implied" (196) are unbearable to Yvette who has inhaled fresh air from the study abroad in Switzerland. Yvette hates "the whole stagnant, sewage sort of life" (196) and thinks it to be extremely "foul." (196) The reason why she easily gets irritated with just trifling things lies in that she, even her soul, is almost stifled by the rectory full of unrefresh, stagnant air. One evening after dinner, she sits irritated, but suddenly stands up and opens one of the windows driven by some "smell." She finds that the Mater is the cause of the smell. The following is the discussion between Yvette trying to sweep the uncomfortable air and the Mater fully satisfied with that stagnant air. The Mater feels the usual old air comfortable; Yvette is overwhelmed with the unpleasantness of the stale air:

"Did you open the window, Yvette? I think you might remember there are older people than yourself in the room," she said. "It's stifling! No wonder we've all of us always got colds." ... "A draught to give us all our death." "Not a draught at all," roared Yvette. "A breath of fresh air." (176)

This "colds" does not indicate the literary cold, which is a disease which might cause "the lack of life" by inhaling the unrefresh air and losing vivid soul. Yvette senses their life here so unhealthy. Here is one of the reasons she gets irritated is here. Her unconscious resistance to "this stifling air," "the sordid life," "the lack of life" is seen in Yvette's counterattack — "not a draught at all ... a breath of fresh air" against the Mater's attack. "A draught to give us all of our death." Yvette seems to take over much of the eloped mother's "selfishness" and to be free

and impulsive in some way or other. The flow of vivid life forgotten in the stable commonplace circumstance is awakened suddenly. Yvette impulse reminds us of the argument between Birkin and Gerard about the impulse in the latter half of Chapter Two in *Women in Love*. It is quite an interesting discussion signifying the idea peculiar to Lawrence. This is the scene where Gerald younger sister escapes running to the entrance the moment she finds her bridegroom reach the church at last, for whom she has been waiting for a long time. Birkin praises her impulsive conduct, but Gerald is not pleased with it. It is because he thinks that the "standards" are cardinal for us to maintain public order. Birkin says applauding her:

"I think it was perfect good form in Laura to bolt from Lupton to the church door. It was almost a masterpiece in good form. It's the hardest thing in the world to act spontaneously on one's impulses — and it's the only really gentlemanly thing to do — provided you're fit to do it." (WL 32)

This idea of Birkin is shared by Yvette. Not only the Mater but also the bishop is responsible for this stagnation. He has gained good reputation among people in the parish; he is a so-called respectable priest. He has no friend to play sports with as stated previously. In fact, there is no depiction showing that he is being active outside the house. He is always reading something in his study room as the text goes like this: "He too was getting heavy and inert, sitting in his study all day, never taking exercise." ... (174) He has no pride in life, and what he needs is just "the *appearance* of love and belief and bright life." The mother herself realizes that the weakest point of her son is "his skulking self-love." (169) So, he seeks after his appearance of "a kind and broad-minded person" and "a man of attractive character." (193) The most important for him is to keep his face as a respectable bishop, and so he is so afraid of losing his mask. It is quite natural that he cannot help being conservative in thought and conduct. Therefore, he does not like troubles in the household. He dumbly stands up and closes the window and settles the problem when Yvette opens the window to remove the smell of the Mater. And he also attempts to solve the difficulty caused between Yvette and Cissie by paying for Yvette when Yvette was found to have borrowed money from the Fund without any permission. This gets Cissie to be more furious, but any way, this is settled. Concerning his wife who eloped, he first gets angry and disappointed deeply enough to think of killing himself, but comes to deny her immorality, and still cherishes her image of innocent bride like a snow flower. In consequence, he forgives her and pretends to be a respectable and generous

man. However, this event makes him more coward and more conservative. The rectory full of ill smell from poor sewage was unbearable to the woman like Cynthia who is a "life-believer" and "moral unbeliever." She is regarded as a "selfish" woman with the same "degraded lust" as the eloped woman. The wife was the only existence here who has "a great glow, a flow of life." For the Saywells, she was "bright," "glamorous," but at the same time, "selfish" and "dangerous." She would have been faithful to the husband, unfresh and stagnant, till her two children became 7 and 9 years old, repressing her brilliance of life.

III

It is the life of the gypsy that is juxtaposed with that of the rectory. He lives following the instinct of nature beyond the law and custom suppressing humanity in contrast to the Saywells who live restraining their free life in the stinking place. The gypsy life has no sewage institution, but is full of fresh air.

Yvette is a person within the fence by nature, but she feels that she is a gypsy type while she finds comfort and dignity in being a daughter and the rectory life. She has the same strong repulsion against the rectory morality just as her mother who went out of the "pale" driven by the "selfish" impulse. Her yearning for the free, open world leads her to the gypsy, which is shown in the habit that she looks at the bridge and road where she expects him to come down when she goes upstairs:

She always expected something to come down the slant of the road from Papplewick, and she always lingered at the landing window. (203)

She has a longing for the gypsy living beyond the social standards with the strong hatred for the fence. The reason she is attracted to him is that he enjoys a life bound by nothing totally different from her father and Uncle Fred who live "unfresh and stagnant" life.

The gypsy is an so-called outlaw of the society without any house to live in. He took care of horses in the artillery of the army, but chooses the gypsy life after he left the army. He has some resemblance to Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* who resides in the woods as a game keeper instead of going back to his home. This man has a "desire" which creates "glamour" and "brightness," which jeopardizes the "stability" of moralistic rectory people. The rectory gives her safety, but no freedom and vigor. The repression of the glow and flow of life causes Yvette to feel always uneasy and sometimes burst into a rage of irritation. She abruptly

blurts out "I should like to fall violently in love," which is the evidence that she acknowledges that she is thwarted and confined. What takes hold of her is the implicit family tradition and moral consciousness. Her longing for a "violent" love is nothing but a desire that she wants to be liberated from the invisible bondage. The encounter with the gypsy happens when Yvette went for a drive with her friends, Leo and John. When the gypsy turns back, Yvette is shocked. "— Yvette's heart gives a jump." (184) She is startled at "their level search, their insolence, their complete indifference to people like Bob and Leo" and at his attitude that he is not perturbed at all by the noisily repeated horn of Leo. When she passes by the man to have her own fortune told by the gypsy woman, Yvette meets with the gypsy man's gaze and thinks like:

Of all the men she had ever seen, this one was the only one who was stronger than she was, in her own kind of strength, her own kind understanding. (189)

And yet his way of looking at things is quite different from ordinary people:

It was a peculiar look, in the eyes that belonged to the tribe of the humble: the pride of the pariah, the half-sneering challenge of the outcast, who sneered at a law-abiding men, and went his own way. (188)

The eyes make her think that "There was something peculiar transfusing in his stare." (187) His gazing holds something "bold yet dishonest." (189) She responds to "something hard inside her," but "the surface of her body seemed to turn to water." This demonstrates the quality of his staring, which is not a momentary shock, but something like the flowing of life into her body. The reason lies there why she is disturbed and loses her daily consciousness entrapped by the desire hidden deep inside his soul when he looks at her. The following is the description showing that she suddenly pictures to herself the gypsy when she is deeply hurt by having been treated as a thief concerning the Fund:

Yvette quivered suddenly, as if she had seen his bug, blade eyes upon her, with the naked insinuation of desire in them. The absolutely naked insinuation of desire made her lie prone and powerless in the bed as if a drug had cast her in molten would. (197)

She gets filled with life just to remember his way of staring at her, and is freed from the helplessness caused from having been hurt.

The thought of the gipsy had released the life of her limbs, and crystallized in her heart the hate of the rectory: so that now she felt potent, instead of impotent. (197)
(italics mine)

What should be noted is the quality of power to liberate "the life of her limbs." Yvette feels that her consciousness is separated from her body and something flows into her whole body when Yvette faces his passionate gaze:

She is only aware of the dark strange effluence of him bathing her limbs, washing her at last purely will-less. She was aware of him, as a dark, complete power. (216)

The wording "effluence," "bathing," "washing" cited above surely demonstrates the character of his gazing. His eyes strongly capture "the same deep, secret place" (212) of Yvette as if to gain her, while Leo's way of courting just affects "the outside of the body" as a tennis ball hits her body. The reason she forgets her ordinary self and becomes "will-less" is that she feels that she is looked into "the inside, her secret female self" (207) and "the inside, her dark, tremulous potent secret of her virginity." (207) It is as if his watch is "alert," "significant," and has some power to straight hit her "some vital, undiscovered place." (210) There is a big difference between the gipsy and Leo; he is a domesticated dog, his way of asking for love is superficial and never comes to the depth.

The magic to work on the inner side of Yvette can draw "a law-abiding man," or "a man within the fence" into the immoral world. The "pale" is what is generated by the very consciousness for us to try to keep the social order, while the desire can be said to be the impulse of the life arising in the innermost self. While the "pale" confines us and restricts our conduct, the "desire" stimulates us and makes our life colorful. Of course, it sometimes exposes us to a danger or leads us to disturb social disorder. In that sense, Yvette's mother had something similar to the gipsy. Yvette takes over much of the mother's blood, which her father is so much worried about. Yvette wants herself to be freed from the stagnant air of the rectory:

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. (195-6)

And also she is disturbed by the gipsy woman's fortune telling:

There is a dark man who never lived in a house. He loves you. The other people are treading on your heart. ... But the dark man will blow the one spark up into fire again, good fire. ... (196)

The word "a house" in the phrase "a dark man who never lived in a house" implies "a fixed life"; the "dark man" is a man who is not shut in the "pale." So, he must be a man just like the gipsy, not like her father or Uncle Fred. He must be a man who travels around place to place following the movement of the moon, not a man who lives following the advancement of the hands of the clock.

Yvette finds in the gipsy "the only one that makes me feel — different," (228) who emancipates her from the stagnant life of the rectory and the irritation of frustration. He does not do or say any particular thing, but just looks at her. He gazes at her "as if he really, but really, desired me," (228) which makes her think that "she had no burden of herself, or it was rather wonderful, really! And it was something quite different in my life." (229) She confesses that "she is gone in his will" (216) at that time. Mr. Eastwood shows good understanding to her story. It is this very desire that drove him to the woman who has two children, 5 and 6. He finds great value in feeling "desire"; he has the firm belief that desire is the most wonderful thing. But the Jewish woman cannot take it seriously; she thinks it to be kind of prostitution. Not responding to her, he praises him that he was "the best man" (229) in the army. For the Jewish woman, the "desire" is nothing but the "sexuality." The Major conceives it differently. According to him, the "desire is the most wonderful thing in life," and he goes so far as to say that "anybody who can really feel it, is a king." (229) Probably he knows how the gipsy looks at Yvette and where the "desire" derives from, and besides, that it is not the "appetite" that "every common low man" (229) has as the Jewess criticizes. It is quite natural that they have different views. He has an experience beyond her understanding. The Major was snowed up close to death. The gipsy was also in critical condition of pneumonia in the war. Both of them glimpsed the depths of death. They are so-called resurrected men:

"That gipsy was the best man we had, with horses. Nearly died of pneumonia. I thought he was dead. He's a resurrected man to me. I'm a resurrected man myself, as far as that goes." (229)

Their experience have them share the meaning of "desire" each other. That is, without doubt, the ground that the man reached in the end after resurrection in *The Man Who Died*. Lawrence discovers in this desire a clue to the world disclosed in this last story. The desire stays in the opposite side of death, which motivates one to live positively. In that sense, their death experience overlaps with that of the man in *The Man Who Died*. The man who once died finds the pleasure of life in the warmth created by the life-touch with the priestess, still feeling nauseated at the real world. The desire is the metaphor of life which drives one to vitality; death is the metaphor of suspension of life. The gipsy is the manifestation of life in this story.

The same is true of another figure, the gipsy woman, who fascinates Yvette. She is depicted as "wolfish" with "bold, predative eyes" (186) and a big body. Yvette very much likes her "dusky, strong, relentless hands" contrasting to her own and "the covert fearfulness" domesticated ones do not have. She senses "her covert, unyielding sex, that was immoral" breathing in her. It is "immoral," but full of "a hard, defiant pride" (196) and captivates Yvette at the depth of her soul. Something "dangerous, fearless, immoral" that the woman has is frightening to people living within the fence. She is possessed of a personality powerful enough to make the spectators think that no one can control her. From her viewpoint, Yvette's father and Uncle Fred are just "domesticated dogs." (196) The charm overwhelming her has the same quality as the "glamour" that Yvette's mother has. They have similarity in that they are residents outside the morality. Yvette is attracted by her dangerousness. Her mother's danger is compared to "lions" or "tigers" (170); the gipsy woman is "bold," "active," "fearless." (196) There is no doubt that they are depicted as women having the same dangerous impulse as wild animals have. However, the gipsy woman has so powerful as to agitate the deepest part of Yvette's soul who lives in the closed, restricted world.

IV

The final consideration should be given to the flood which gulps down the whole rectory. That reminds us of the Noah's Flood. In the Bible, it is caused in order to sweep away the corrupted humans and create new beings by the God. This functions similarly even in this story. The Mater, who was the cause of stagnation, is swallowed up in this flood. It is a sad incident, but an opportunity for the rectory people to turn a new leaf. Even Cissie cries for joy to know that Yvette was rescued alive:

"Let the old be taken and the young spared! Oh, I can't cry for the Mater, now Yvette is spared!" (215)

Cissie will lead her own life, liberated from the Mater. And the father and Uncle Fred will also start living their own life without the Mater. In that sense, the death of the Mater suggests their liberation from the Mater's "will-to-power," and at the same time, the new start for all the family. The accidental death have us remember the sad occasion of "The Water-Party" in *Women in Love*, where Gerald's sister is drowned to death during the party. She is, of course, much younger than the Mater, but both drowning cases overlap in the meaning. The following is the scene where Birkin and Ursula are talking about the death:

"I don't mind about the dead," he said, "once they are dead. The worst of it is, they cling on to the living, and won't let go."

She pondered for a time.

"Yes," she said. "The *fact* of death doesn't really seem to matter much, does it?"

"No," he said. "What does it matter if Diana Critch is alive on dead?"

"Doesn't it!" she said, shocked. "No, why should it? Better she were dead — she'll be much more real. *She'll be positive in death*. In life she was a fretting, negated thing." (185) (italics mine)

The reason Birkin takes it in the affirmative way is that she is negative all the time while in life; she would rather die than live negatively. He believes that she is more real in death. He thinks in the same way about his own present life. He has the faith that we can breathe a new air by dying from this life. In Lawrence's idea, if we cannot live our life positively, that life is not worthy to live. That is reflected in Birkin's frightening statement about Diana's death. The idea stays alive in the Mater's death in *The Virgin and the Gypsy*. The Mater symbolized the prestige of the family. She was assured that she exists only when she keeps the family members under her control, deeply seated in the arm chair in the living room. It is a very negative way of life. The Mater's death results in the whole rectory being filled with a new air; the stagnant air is removed as if it is cleared away by the fresh air from the window. All the family are expected to lead a positive life at the end of the story.

V

The heroine experiences that she becomes part of the great flow of life while dancing with the native Indians to the sound of the drum in *The Plumed Serpent*. And she recognizes that life is not fixed within the individual, but flowing in the relatedness to other existence. The man who once died regains the flowing, living life by the warm touch with the priestess. The last scene where he sets sail following the current of the sea symbolizes Lawrence's idea of life.

This is a story of "desire" which drives human outside the "pale" as suggested in the elopement of the bishop's wife. The "desire" took her out of the "pale" of the rectory. "A great glow, a flow of life" is a metaphor of desire. The heroine Yvette who inherits much of her mother's blood senses in the gipsy a desire which nobody holds around her. Yvette criticizes her surroundings in the light of the gipsy's desire. Originally the flow of life cannot be confined within the "pale." In the end of the story, the rectory is swallowed up by the flood, which implies that the "pale" was destroyed by the desire. The flood was a metaphor of the stream of life, the desire.

Works Cited

1. D.H. Lawrence, "Art and Morality" in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence* (New York: The Viking Press, 1936)
2. D.H. Lawrence, *St Mawr and The Virgin and the Gypsy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960)
3. D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987)
4. D.H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987)
5. Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Champs: Flammarion, 1996)
6. Daniel J. Schneider, *The Consciousness of D.H. Lawrence: An Intellectual Biography* (Kansas : Kansas Uni. Press, 1986)
7. James C. Cowan, *D. H. Lawrence's American Journey : A Study in Literature and Myth* (Cleveland and London : Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970)
8. Mary Freeman, *D.H. Lawrence : A Basic Study of His Ideas* (Gainesville : University of Florida Press, 1955)

Bibliography

1. Charles L. Ross, *Women in Love: A Novel of Mythic Realism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1993)
2. Eugene Minkowski, *La SCHIZOPHRENIE Psychopathologie des schizoïdes et des schizophrènes*, (Paris : Desclee be Brouwer, 1953)
3. Leo J. Dorbad, *Sexually Balanced Relationships in the Novels of D.H. Lawrence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991)
4. Paul Poplawski, *Writing the Body in D.H. Lawrence* (Greenwood Press, 2001)
5. Daniel Albright, *Personality and Impersonality: Lawrence, Woolf, and Mann* (Chicago: Chicago Uni. Press, 1978)
6. Leo Bersani, *A Fututre for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976)
7. Kingsley Widmer, *Defiant Desire: Some Dialectical Legacies of D.H. Lawrence* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University, 1992)

