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# The Logic of Love: Deconstructing Eros in Four of D. H. Lawrence's Short Stories

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## Texte intégral

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Close your eyes, my love, let me make you blind!  
They have taught you to see  
Only problems writ on the face of things [...]  
Then perhaps in the dark you'd get what you want to find.  
The solution that ever is much too deep for the mind,  
Dissolved in the blood [...]  
(D. H. Lawrence, "These Clever Women")

Then I shall know which image of God  
My man is made toward[...]

(D. H. Lawrence, "Wedding Morn")

- 1 Modern English dictionaries define it in various ways. *The Oxford English Dictionary* says "of or pe (...)

1In Antiquity, Eros was the Greek god of love, with all its embodiments, while in contemporary culture it is understood in relation to the works of Sigmund Freud as the life instinct and the mythic name for sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Plato made his Eros neither purely divine, nor entirely human, and considered that he guides the heart in its awakening to higher truths. Later, Plotinus developed the idea of a many faced Eros and contended that there are as many Eroses as there are hearts. Then, Christianity separated the Hellenic vulgar Eros from his spiritual counterpart, naming the latter Agape.

2Freud based his theory of Eros on the opposition between the ego-libido and object-libido, placing the notion firmly within the borders of the somatic and psychic energy of man. Herbert Marcuse sets Eros in opposition to civilization, showing the destructive effect of desexualization in the weakening of Eros in favour of Thanatos. One more development of the image of Eros that comes to Michel Foucault is that of a purely social construct.

- 2 I am grateful to Peter Preston for the hint that together with the revival of such mythological dei (...)

3The first decades of the 20th century saw a powerful revival in the cultural enhancement of erotic literature, philosophy and art. This outburst absolved formally repressed, marginalized or neglected languages of sexuality and the erotic. The main rhetorical problem, however, as Julia Kristeva claims, was not resolved in the literature of the 20th century: what is the new language of love and eroticism like? "Metaphor proves impotent in the task of getting across the powerful message of the obscene and the sublime" ( 105).<sup>2</sup>

- 3 This helpful suggestion was proposed by Michael Bell.

4In this connection, Lawrence's name, in the general bulk of critical literature, is automatically tied to the erotic. But what was Eros for Lawrence? If one cares to examine the writer's own relationship with this notion (here I am referring strictly to "Eros" and its derivatives), one may be astonished to see that Lawrence does not use the words "eros," "erotic," "eroticism." Even in his most highly erotic works, the verbal realization takes place within the paradigms of other signifiers: Lawrence's texts abound in such words as "love" and "sex" but not "Eros." Perhaps, this avoidance is related to his desire to show the erotic as a concentrated power of life itself, not as a vulgar instinct.<sup>3</sup> Since Lawrence gives no definition of Eros, the closest notion will be that of Love which Lawrence defines as "a travelling" (*Love* 24) and a "vibration" (*Poe* 91). And the two major types of love are the "sacred and profane, spiritual and sensual" (*Poe* 75). This does not

deviate, in fact, from the general Christian understanding: the opposition between Eros and Agape. But in his fiction, Lawrence turns into a crafty realist who tries to involve, in the discourse of love, besides the spiritual and the sensual, all its possible varieties: maternal love, Christian love, patriotic love, possessive and brutal love, obsessive and unrequited love...

5However, a rather mythical representation of love and sex in the writer's novels and stories, and the strange enchanting spell of some particular texts, have led me to look for the unnamed Eros. Lawrence's stories on the theme of love and the erotic may be singled out for the sake of their language. The four stories selected for the study ("Second Best," "Love Among the Haystacks," "The White Stocking" and "The Blind Man") deal with the uncontested power of erotic enchantment, desire and the capacity to wound, where Eros "presides" over the plot, invisible but tangible and multifaceted. It makes sense first to reconstruct that image, in its upper or lower case forms. The first directs us towards its godly, mythical origin, the second, towards human nature.

6"Second Best," first published in 1914 in the early collection of short fiction, may be read as one of those love "re-inventions," mentioned by Arthur Rimbaud – "Love must be reinvented" (Rimbaud 318) – in the sense that Lawrence breaks away from the high rhetoric of the romantic Eros and depicts the unnamable. Here, the arrow of Eros strikes two potential lovers: Frances, whose boyfriend has jilted her, perhaps giving preference to a more sophisticated type, comes home to her village with suppressed suffering. The tormented inner world of conflicting love and pride is reflected in the evident conflict between her speech and her emotional state: Frances's claims of tiredness can't hide her nervous and desperate gestures.

7In a couple of short scenes, the author portrays Frances' meeting with her younger sister and the country lad Tom, to whom Frances gradually feels attracted. There is no special triggering event, but an attempt to capture, to feel acutely and to relate in language this mysterious and illogical instant when desire is born between a man and a woman. In this story the unconscious power of attraction – be it sexual or spiritual – works its way through the hearts, minds and bodies of Frances and Tom.

8Borrowing Kristeva's expression from her essay "Love Discourse," we can ask: Is it possible to make the ungraspable, the invisible, and the unclassifiable – appear seeable? Kristeva asserts: "In that case, the language of images, or literature, should correspond to this invisibility with its powerful pulsation" (104). This erotic pulsation (or vibration) is suggested through the description of the landscape. When Frances arrives back at the farm, it is described as scorched and faded, giving off heat in silence, "in a low state of combustion, the leaves of the oaks were scorched brown" (SB 63). But gradually, as wave after wave of suffering and changes of sensual perception swamp the girl, she becomes aware of the red stubs and green plants. This phallic symbolism emerges with the appearance of

Tom, a farmer's son. He is a bit blunt, an unpolished country lad, flushing nervously when he sees Frances. However, the correlation of the human image with the inanimate ones brings to the fore the ancient representation of Eros as a handsome young man. Eros in Tom's bodily shape triggers a sort of "arrow-shooting effect." Suddenly, the landscape acquires different hues:

[...] twinkling crab apples, the glitter of brilliant willows [...]. Everything smelt green, succulent [...]. They entered a field where stooks of barley stood in rows, the straight blond tresses of the corn streaming on to the ground. The stubble was bleached by the intense summer, so that the expanse glared white. The next field was sweet and soft with a second crop of seeds; thin, straggling clover whose little pink knobs rested prettily in the dark green. The scent was faint and sickly. (*SB* 66)

9The closer the characters are drawn to one another, the less there is to observe in the landscape, until the setting evaporates from view completely. Instead, there comes another symbolic image – a mole, which is killed by Anne. Far from being just accidental, the mole is heavily charged with meaning:

A mole was moving silently over the warm, red soil, nosing, shuffling hither and thither, flat, and dark as a shadow, shifting about, and as suddenly brisk, and as silent, like a very ghost of joie de vivre [...]. She watched the little brute paddling, snuffing, touching things to discover them, running in blindness [...] (*SB* 64)

10The little creature is compared to a shadow, and its blind eyes serve as a metaphor for the inexplicable sexual attraction, the blind passion. The mole is no simple symbol: as the artistic embodiment of the unconscious, it fulfils this function till it is killed. Why then does it have to be killed? The mole also functions as a metaphor for the past: if Jimmy is an exquisite "velvety" social creature, then he is also a vermin – which accords with Lawrence's idea of the damaging effect of class distinctions intervening in a healthy personal relationship. The animal image which is introduced into the erotic is representative of the general imagery of psychological condensation – the fusion of different meanings into one notion.

11Besides, the erotic is closely related to Lawrence's use of colours. Having lived out, along with the mole's death, her heartache and loss, Frances appears before Tom in a white dress. She is as if born again and with a new virginity of the soul; however, she has to sacrifice herself on the oblatinal altar of love and passion: "Their eyes met, and she sank before him, her pride troubled. He felt uneasy, and triumphant, and baffled, as if fate had gripped him" (*SB* 68). All the components of Eros with its archetypal imagery seem to be brought together in the story: an attractive male body, the blind power of the "arrow," the torment of desire, the play of colours.

12In “Love Among the Haystacks,” as well as in “Second Best,” the subtle workings of Eros are felt in the God’s mysterious pagan omnipresence. Two maturing brothers, unsophisticated country lads, are initiated into a love/sex relationship. They are “fiercely shy of women,” while courting two girls. Maurice is luckier because he has already had an intimate experience with a foreign governess, Paula, while Geoffrey has more self-conscious pain to go through before he can woo Lydia, a tramp’s unlucky wife.

13A strange unity and completeness characterizes this story: it begins with the pervading image of a golden landscape, the rich fields yielding their scent of succulent grass, beds of hay – while all the details lay bare the implicit image of a female waiting for her godly lover to come down from the heavens. The story lends itself easily to an archetypal reading: the night the lovers spend among the haystacks with its darkness which is akin to blindness, rain suggesting the great procreative power of fertility gods, the sun and the moon imagery. The ancient Greeks often represented Eros as laughing. And Maurice is repeatedly shown as laughing, even to himself, his laughter being “peculiar” and “excited.” He is the one who knows about love and treats his love affair with Paula as nothing unexpected.

Maurice, the younger brother, was a handsome young fellow of twenty-one, careless and debonair, and full of vigour. His grey eyes, as he taunted his brother, were bright and baffled with a strong emotion. His swarthy face had the same peculiar smile, expectant, and glad and nervous, of a young man roused for the first time in passion (*LAH* 7).

14When the arrow of Eros pierces Geoffrey, bringing about a strange heart-aching liaison with Lydia, it seems Lawrence has recovered a familiar pattern: Eros coming down from the skies (Maurice’s fall from the hay stack may be indicative of this), all in golden colours, shooting its jolly arrow at the two couples, and laughing as his arrows hit the target.

15In “The White Stocking” (1914), however, Eros seems to be ever playing a sort of “rogue,” trying to seduce over and over again. The story’s present is pervaded by its past. On Valentine’s Day, a young married couple is faced with reminders of a flirtatious relationship between Elsie, the wife and her husband’s former employer, Sam Adams, who keeps sending her rather expensive and suggestive valentine gifts. One of the most powerful rhetorical devices is the condensed symbolism of three distinctive things: a pair of white stockings, an amethyst brooch and a pair of pearl ear-rings. The discovery of the provider of these luxuries brings about a squabble, Ted’s loss of temper and a blow to Elsie’s mouth, after which follows a tender caressing and reconciliation. The presents are wrapped and returned to Sam Adams.

16From the very start, Lawrence makes it clear that Elsie was carried away by Sam Adams’ male impressiveness, which is not what the narrator would prefer to call

“love,” but rather “stimulation” (WS 85) and “intoxication” (WS 89). The clumsy and self-conscious Whiston, in the Christmas party scene, is heavily contrasted with the voluptuous Sam Adams. Whiston is rather “like a ghost, or a judgment, or a guardian angel” (WS 89). Elsie’s light-mindedness and easy-going temper misleadingly suggest that her feelings are superficial. The same disarming innocence breathes through all her gestures and words, which is much more eloquent than any verbal expression.

17As J. L. Borges points out that, Eros, or rather erotic play, appears

“to depend to a large part upon the erotic paradoxes of transparent concealment and opaque revelation. Mirrors, silks, the dark velvet of rugs and coverlets, transparent blue pools in the concealed courtyard, scarves and sashes, veils, scarlet and jade light through colored glass, shadows, implications, illusions, duplicities of disclosures [...]”  
(quoted from: *Postmodern Approaches to the Short Story* 151).

The white silk stockings, the pearl ear-rings, accompanied by occasional glances at mirrors are more than limpid erotic symbols in the story. The playful Eros also resides in the sweeping movement of the dance, in the hot magnetism of the bodies.

That dance was an intoxication to her. After the first few steps, she felt herself slipping away from herself. She almost knew she was going, she did not even want to go. Yet, she must have chosen to go. She lay in the arm of the steady, close man with whom she was dancing, and she seemed to swim away out of contact with the room, into him. She had passed into another, denser element of him, an essential privacy. (WS 89)

18Blindness, too, is inevitably evoked: “His eye was unseeing” (WS 89), “as if he could not see” (WS 90). It is the Eros of pleasure, or the vulgar Eros, who, however, inflicts a wound, when the shattered couple renew their intimacy after a violent scene.

19In “The Blind Man” (1918), Eros’ presence is first felt in the sensual character of Maurice (the same name as in “Love Among the Haystacks”) and his blindness. Keith Cushman points out “the association of the power of eros with blindness, which serves to link “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” and “The Blind Man” (Cushman 34). Maurice Pervin’s blindness, however, is a more profound mode of perception and knowledge. Isabel and Maurice seem to be very happy together in spite of the man’s blindness caused by the war. The god in him enjoys the “incomprehensible peace of immediate contact in darkness” (BM 81), but the human eros is ever unsatisfied. Maurice’s fits of depression make the desperate Isabel devise a sort of scheme: to invite a childhood male friend, Bertie Reid, to their house for diversion and greater socialization. The driving force of Eros in

Maurice, and aversion to it in Bertie, can explain the general opposition between the former man, basking in intimacy and utter bodily pleasure – “Life seemed to move in him like a tide, lapping, lapping, and advancing, enveloping all things darkly” (*BM* 92) – and the latter’s sheer agape type with “his beautiful constancy, and kindness,” and the fact that he “was ashamed of himself because he could not marry, could not approach women physically,” and was “unable ever to enter into close contact of any sort“ (*BM* 97).

20In all four texts, the composite image of Eros/eros corresponds mostly to the neo-Platonic Eros: primal energy, the “dark god” of natural powers. Lawrence the poet, expresses himself metaphorically and symbolically rather than logically and directly, making us construct our own meanings without much direct authorial guidance. There is no mistake if we identify eros as the life force and sexuality. Lawrence directly analyses the characters’ bodily sensations using extensive corporeal imagery and language, and phallic symbolism re-animates the Freudian Eros almost in its crude form. But where Freud opposes Eros and Thanatos, Lawrence’s fictional Eros seems to feed on his dark counterpart, which, by the way, was also represented by the Greeks as a winged youth. Lawrence’s allusions to death are less frequent in these texts; they occur, nevertheless, at moments of accumulated tension, as, for example, in the violent scene of Maurice’s fall from the stack of hay with Geoffrey wishing he himself were dead, or at the moment of Frances’ sensual “death” when she sees the dead mole.

- 4 McDougall, Joyce. *The Many Faces of Eros: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Human Sexuality*. (New Yor [...](#))
- 5 The terminology is partially borrowed from Lee, J.A. *The Colours of Love*. (Ontario: Don Mills, 1973 [...](#))

21What Joyce McDougall<sup>4</sup> called “the many faces of Eros” may appear in the passionate, and also vulgar, eros of “Second Best” and “Love among the Haystacks,” the playful and cruel one, or ludus, of “The White Stocking,” and the celestial and faithful one, or storge<sup>5</sup> (warm and calm love, friendship), of “The Blind Man.” However, the mixture of eros and ludus is close to mania (Whiston), a combination of ludus and storge results in *pragma* found in “The Blind Man,” when the lover is not possessive but strives to be dissolved in the object of his love.

22While symbolically asserting the phallic and male components of Eros, the text of “The White Stocking,” for example, creates a link with the female eros. The character of Elsie delighting in the obscurely transparent objects, singing and laughing, may be seen as a female Eros, “dressed in little wings” (*WS* 87). Moreover, the foreign mystery of Paula, “the rousing feminine quality” that “seemed in her concentrated, brighter, more fascinating than in anyone he had known” (*LAH* 33) – and the intentionally manifest poverty of barefoot Lydia bespeak a female element in Eros.

- 6 McDougall, Joyce. *The Many Faces of Eros: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Human Sexuality*. (New Yor [...](#))

23 Lawrence employs an intriguing arrangement of dialogue while transforming Body into Word. Going back to Plato, who associated Eros with Logos, and Logos with Eros, we may trace the development of the idea of a practical interchangeability of the notions in both ancient and contemporary thought. Blaise Pascal said: “By force of speaking of love we become enamoured” (Pascal 319). Barthes defined a person in love as the one “who talks” and love as a story / discourse: “It is my own local legend, my sacred little history that I declaim to myself” (Barthes 91). Gavriel Reisner observes: “To identify love with speaking is to understand the old romance dichotomy of Eros and Agape, physical and spiritual love, anew” (Reisner 239). In these stories, though, no character’s talking bears any resemblance to love talk. The dialogue presents a sign system of its own that has meaning only in the context of the overall erotic communication. One such example is the crucial conversation between Frances and Tom Smedley (*SB*). The sentences fail to express anything an average reader, or even another character – Anne – would easily comprehend (“I don’t know what you two’s been jawing about” (*SB* 67) )[6](#):

“You wouldn’t have to give yon mole many knocks like that,” he teased, relieved to get on safe ground, rubbing his arm.

“No indeed, it died in one blow,” said Frances, with a flippancy that was hateful to her.

“You’re not so good at knockin’ ’em?” he said, turning to her.

“I don’t know, if I’m cross,” she said decisively.

“No?” he replied, with alert attentiveness.

“I could,” she added, harder,

“if it was necessary.”

He was slow to feel her difference.

“And don’t you consider it IS necessary?” he asked, with misgiving.

“W—ell—is it?” she said, looking at him steadily, coldly.

“I reckon it is,” he replied, looking away, but standing stubborn. (*SB* 67)

24 The sensual experience seems to override the verbal expression and shun high rhetoric. Conversely, Lawrence’s eros elevates normally uncelebrated objects. “Second Best” is one of the most poetic stories of all – where the rhetoric of courting is disguised by the subject matter – killing a nasty vermin, and “talking nicely.” The rhetoric the characters use, does not, in the Aristotelian manner, appeal to the intellect through speech. The characters are conscious of the language they use, as is revealed in the infiltration of Anne’s retort into Tom and Frances’ talk:

“Such language!”

“Oh, what’s up wi’ it?”

“I can’t bear you to talk broad.” (*SB* 67)



25 There is hardly a privileged narrative viewpoint: the third-person narrator works through the perception of Frances. Her emotional state betrays a desire for “intimacy”, then she is “with him,” likes him, and her powers of female seduction and charm melt away – for it is not only the question of bringing herself closer to Tom and Tom to herself – she has to sacrifice something of her own: “She coloured furiously,” is then forced to be flippant (which is hateful to her), and hardness appears in her voice, with steady and cold tones, and even contempt, with the upsurge of inner pride which has to condescend to be at the level of Tom’s simple mind, for which a mole is just a harmful animal, vermin, that causes the farmers a lot of damage, but not a sentimentally perceived velvety and gentle creature. The robust country mentality proves more valid, and she gives in, tentatively, after an awkward pause, and finally submits to his male eros.

26 Tom, in his turn, goes through uncertainty and anguish (“he burned”), masking his “slow masculinity” in vulgar speech. Quick to feel the intimacy in Frances’ voice, he is stirred, but no more than for a moment, and then retreats to “safe ground” (speaking about killing moles), to be gratified in the end with triumph and a long awaited feeling of love.

27 “Second Best” might illustrate a Freudian discourse on defence mechanisms, for repression and rationalisation are evident here. The story may be read as a fantasy that translates the unconscious or repressed material into figural form. In fact, by divorcing word from body, Lawrence subordinates Logos to Eros: the latter is fulfilled by the utter consummation of pleasure and ecstasy, while the former is marked by chaos, or Chimeras, and does not know its own meaning.

28 Eros as Logos is evident again in “Love Among the Haystacks” where a series of dualities: two couples, day and night, the rhythm of work and leisure, sun and rain, passion and wrath, the vernacular and the foreign language, sexual desire and cultural constraints create a paradoxical reinforcement of the erotic. Maurice and Paula’s talk, for example, sounds like an echo of the rain and night: “It’s going to rain,” he said. ‘Rain!’ she echoed, as if it were trivial” (*LAH* 30). She repeats Maurice’s words as if to fit herself into his world.

29 From the very beginning, Maurice proves to be a much more adroit courtier and lover. He can afford to pronounce sexually charged utterances, “An’ there’s just a nice two-handful of her bosom” (*LAH* 9), while Geoffrey suppresses his sexuality in anger and violence and throws the rival brother down the stack of hay. “This accident had given him quite a strange new ease, an authority. He felt extraordinarily glad. New power had come to him all at once” (*LAH* 18).

30 Geoffrey’s conversation with the tramp woman, as they are both gratified by a deeper and more vibrant relationship, produces a powerful erotic discourse:

“I mean,” he said humbly, “are you wet through?”  
She did not answer. He felt her shiver.

“Are you cold?” he asked, in surprise and concern.

She did not answer. He did not know what to say.

“Stop a minute,” he said... [...]

“Why, you’re wet through!” he said.

She did not answer.

“Shall you stop in here while it gives over?” he asked. She did not answer.

“Cause if you will, you’d better take your things off, an’ have th’ rug. There’s a horse-rug in the box.’ (*LAH* 35)

31 “She did not answer” – the power of this rhetorical device is not to be found in the signifier – that is, the absence of reply – but in its repetition by the narrator. Pascal wisely observed: “In love, silence is of more avail than speech. It is good to be abashed; there is an eloquence in silence that penetrates more deeply than language can” (Pascal 420). Following Charles B. Smith’s idea, we may conclude that Lawrence’s Eros/eros is not the one who speaks, but the one who listens, and “language operating with the same logic as a bodily drive, can then be seen as a desirous exchange motivated by an absence, which is never obtained – only sought through endlessly deferred signs” (Smith). The characters’ dialogue sounds rather halting: neither the brothers nor the two women can properly express the unnamable vibration – or, what we may call, after Lacan, the “loss of the Real” created by birth. Language fails to compensate for that loss.

32 The loss may be related to Eros as well: In “The White Stocking,” Elsie is, in fact, aware that there will be no sufficient reply from Sam Adams, no return of the image that will provide satisfaction and closure: “A heavy sense of loss came over her” (*WS* 92). Images of erotic objects accumulate in the story, but they only emphasize the absence of the Eros that nourished them. Elsie deals with the loss by doing the work of Eros when Eros is not present. In order to endow the object with a meaning, the characters have to face its double nature: Whiston reads the Valentine twice, the narrator places these two lines twice for the reader; the stocking finds its mate...

33 The conversational components of eros – jealousy, desire to know the truth about the other – appear as a result of this doubling: the husband wants to know how far his wife’s romance with Sam Adams went. These are, in Kristeva’s terms, the semantic components, based on experience and reality, yet when they enter the literary discourse, they immediately lose touch with the signified and become symbolic. The cliché “Have anything to do with Sam Adams, and I’ll break your neck” (*WS* 96) is inserted into a new context, and it is not that this phrase produces a new meaning, but it is Elsie’s commentary on the manner and tonality of the words that helps to construe their meaning. “How I hate your word ‘break your neck,’” she said with a grimace of the mouth. “It sounds so common and beastly. Can’t you say something else –” (*WS* 97).

34 The story of Elsie’s involvement with Sam Adams is important not just because

it is erotic but because of the way she expresses herself. And the husband needs another language, another code to articulate it. The story as such is gradually replaced by the new meanings ascribed to the symbolism of the valentines.

35The objects in “The White Stocking” are engaged in a play of the signified. A commonplace stocking does not signify anything for Whiston before it is accidentally dropped on the dancing floor, picked up by Sam Adams, acquires its mate and is named a Valentine: here the symbolic significance of the stocking changes. But even these things, bearing the burden of symbolism, appear differently to Elsie and Whiston. He finds erotic meanings in the stockings, she in the earrings. As soon as the judgment of the objects is pronounced by Whiston – “It’s none of their fault” (WS 98) – they immediately lose their erotic undertone, and a new signified is attributed to the signifier.

36The stories contain an erotic form of rationalization when meaning is ascribed only in the chosen sexual context, even while this very context is excessively ethical by nature. In this connection, several ethical rituals of English social life can be considered: a dinner in the field, a party at the Adams’ house, killing moles and entertaining guests. Lawrence goes almost to excess in depicting the composition of each scene. They reveal an elaborate system of social signs showing the structure of social relationships, with a role for each object and gesture that regulates social communication. At the same time, each element at length hints at a subtle erotic signified, which when joined by others may weave a web of purely erotic communication: rabbit – wild and tame and in a pie - eating, sharing food, giving shelter, joining in rhythmically in a range of agricultural farm labour, sending stockings as a present, learning by touch.

37Eros, indeed, resides in all things and creatures in nature. Lawrence uses the image of a rabbit in the first two stories, using language symbolically in an attempt to articulate the realm of the real. Known as the most fertile animal, and therefore an erotic symbol – it appears in “Second Best”: Tom gives Anne a wild rabbit to go with her tame one. And the farmers in “Love Among the Haystacks,” during the hay stacking feast eat a rabbit pie. However, the word never stands for any particular thing, a rabbit figure articulates the relationship that becomes a struggle and a test, because of “absence,” or “loss.”

38Eros may depart the body and nature to become a construct produced by language. As Foucault demonstrated, sexual desire does not exist beyond its conscious realization and symbolization by concrete societies and groups jostling for power. Sam Adams’ desire for Elsie would never exist as such for Whiston, if it were not for the silk stockings. Geoffrey’s desire acquires a form only when the small ritual of warming Lydia’s feet is performed. Maurice Pervin’s desire is only made erotic by means of Bertie’s awkwardness.

39For the reader, erotic desire, while splitting itself almost completely from agape, is distinguishable only when written into the narrator’s intention to demonstrate

it. While words such as “anxious for,” “yearning,” “burning for,” etc. – voice desire, some shifts in the lexical unity create flickering and gaps. In his corporeal signs Lawrence pays particular attention to eyes and hands. Erotic imagery appealing to the eye is often associated with painful feelings, for the desire resulting from the erotic arousal merges with fantasy. Whiston suffered “from the sight of the exposed soft flesh” (*WS* 81), “she hurt him so deeply” (*WS* 85). Geoffrey

[...] sat and gloated over Maurice’s felicity. He was imaginative, and now he had something concrete to work upon. Nothing in the whole of life stirred him so profoundly, and so utterly, as the thought of this woman. For Paula was strange, foreign, different from the ordinary girls: the rousing, feminine quality seemed in her concentrated, brighter, more fascinating than in anyone he had known, so that he felt almost like a moth near a candle. (*LAH* 33)

40Here, the “eye” imagery, being an ironic rhetorical device is challenged by the imagery of touch through which Eros is supposed to exercise his blessing. But because he is blind, frolicsome and childish, his jokes often do not result in blessings but in wounds, as they do for Maurice Pervin, and for Bertie, who is another Maurice or Whiston.

41Touch in Lawrence is similar to the prick of an arrow. In “Love Among the Haystacks,” touch awakens in Geoffrey emotions that are difficult to call amorous or friendly, bodily or spiritual. Lawrence takes another wayward path to lead the reader away from either a Platonic or Christian reading of this story. The forgiven Cain, Geoffrey enters into erotic intimacy. However, surprising innocence radiates from all his movements and gestures. He provides shelter to the soaked woman, he tries to warm her cold feet in his hands; and his offer “was pure kindness” (*LAH* 39) and deep concern. In this scene the representation of erotic desire reveals a gap impossible to fill: when do kindness and concern become desire?

He held her very warm and close. Presently she stole her arms round him.

“You are big,” she whispered.

He gripped her hand, started, put his mouth down wonderingly, seeking her out. His lips met her temple. She slowly, deliberately turned her mouth to his, and with opened lips, met him in a kiss, his first love kiss. (*LAH* 41)

42We can say, to use Peter Black’s phrase, that Lawrence creates a kind of “erotic justice” (Black 106) by uniting passion and compassion.

43Touch can awaken self knowledge. Thus Elsie learns about the part in her that opens towards sexuality; violent touch makes Whiston acknowledge the Other; the blind touch of Maurice Pervin brings him the knowledge of his own power through Bertie, strongly undermining the sheer agape: “Being fearful, passive,

secretive, uncreative and passionless are the signs of the victims of erotized power” (Black 106).

44What is particularly noticeable in these stories is the mouth fixation. Descriptions or mentions of the mouth gradually replace the primary importance of the eyes in the expression of desire, including when it is most imperfect:

Both pleasure and disgust are more intimately linked with the proximity senses than with the distance senses. The pleasure which a perfume, a taste, or a texture can give is much more of a bodily, physical one, hence also more akin to sexual pleasure, than is the more sublime pleasure aroused by sound and the least bodily of all pleasures, the sight of something beautiful. (Schachtel 299)

45In “Love Among the Haystacks,” both couples have spent their first night of love. However, in the end, “Paula watched eagerly for the eyes of Maurice, and he avoided her” (*LAH* 46), while “Geoffrey smiled constantly to Lydia” (*LAH* 47). Geoffrey is described with his “morbidly sensitive mouth,” but “unsteady blue eyes” (*LAH* 8). Meanwhile, the deficient Whiston is constantly in the position of a watchman. His self depends on the object, so, when Elsie goes out of the room he feels “as if all his life and warmth were taken away” (*WS* 80).

46The mouth becomes the emblem of the love subject that speaks, as the carrier of love’s messages. In “The Blind Man,” “They talked, and sang and read together in a wonderful and unspeakable intimacy” (*BM* 80). In “Love Among the Haystacks,” the lovers are described as “only two voices in the pitch-dark night” (*LAH* 38). Lawrence theorises about the mouth in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, naming it “the great sensual gate to the lower body” (*FU* 62), which humanity has learned to suppress together with the sensuality of the “wolfish,” “devouring” teeth. As such, the mouth can be held in check: “Something about her mouth was pitiful to him” (*WS* 92). When “Geoffrey flushed with hate,” he “had an impulse to set foot on that moving, taunting mouth [Maurice’s], which was there below him” (*LAH* 9).

47The Russian scholar Vladimir Shestakov, writing about Ancient Greek philosophy, concludes that Eros means in reality “not the sexual love, but intellectual knowledge,” and that it looks toward a spiritual ascent ( 45). The alleged split of Love into Eros and agape in Lawrence is commented upon by Eliseo Vivas: “Lawrence wanted Eros in its naked manifestation when passion wells up, powerful and peremptory”; “Here we have the key to Lawrence’s hatred of agape” (Vivas, 43, 56). However, some markers in the selected texts may be read as corresponding to Lawrence’s Christian self, thus undermining the pagan philosophy they possibly assert. The romantic ending in “Second Best” hides in itself an awareness of the necessity of legalizing a relationship, of justifying it socially – that is, by telling the mother. Maurice and Paula find each other in an open engagement. “Geoffrey and Lydia kept faith with one another” (*LAH* 47).

Elsie returns to her husband “to roost” after the temptation and learns the higher spiritual value of nuptial love as she sobs on her husband’s shoulder. Maurice and Isabel are probably at the altar of spirituality, joined by the sanctity of a Christian marriage. They learn to love devotedly, unconditionally, faithfully. Paula, Lydia, Frances and Elsie – all suffer self-annihilation and surrender to their men to achieve the highest spiritual knowledge. It is a kind of feat.

48This indicates a shift from the Platonic Eros to the Christian agape. As Anthony Beal points out, “[...] the stories, being impersonal, nearly all have a definite conclusion, sometimes even a moral” (Beal 100). The characters, illuminating the paradoxical mingling of high eroticism and almost paradisiacal innocence, are led towards the moral lesson of how to travel heavenwards, which is necessary to compensate for Eros’ ramblings through their bodies and minds.

49In spite of the fact that these short stories are marked by a prophetic parable-like happy ending (“and they lived happily ever after,”) and seemingly create a new order out of disorder, the very closure is in conflict with the nature of Eros. Neither Eros nor agape lead to the gratification of desire, for desire is in itself a slippery notion, and all the characters seek different forms of its satisfaction. The “vulgar” instinct works towards the satisfaction of a basic desire in the denouement of “Second Best” – Tom “knew he wanted a woman” (*SB* 66) – but wants it ennobled by marriage. As for Frances, she

[...] knew what she was about. Tom was ready to love her as soon as she would show him. Now that she could not have Jimmy, she did not poignantly care. Still, she would have something. If she could not have the best – Jimmy, whom she knew to be something of a snob – she would have the second best, Tom. (*SB* 66-67)

50This passage of interior monologue is ambiguous: does Frances really have love in mind? She desires the assurance of possession, but submits to a man.

51Geoffrey seems to consider marriage as a form of cultural and natural harmony, but has to be content with being faithful. Maurice desires influence, but heads for marriage. Sam Adams seeks another victory as a Don Juan, but says the stocking will do for him; Elsie hunts for new ecstasy, the vital energy of desire, and is not interested in her precious things any more, as she learns a higher sense of belonging. Whiston’s physical desire is not satisfied either, for he was “all the while anxious for her, yearning for surety and kept tense by not getting it” (*WS* 85). Maurice Pervin’s desire does not really seek satisfaction, it creates a chain of related desires: from woman to another form of surety, “dark” knowledge in the body of the surrounding world, to the Aristotelian *philia* achieved by touch but inevitably accompanied by recoil, self-absorption and annihilation.

52Lawrence’s Eros is gradually deprived of his unquestionable godly power and turns into the eros which is in accordance with the word “err” – the erring eros,

and “chimera” (or impossible or terrible fantasy). One may argue that Eros strikes to bring two wandering selves into a strange irresistible fusion. Eros has greatly “erred” in “Second Best” about Jimmy the snob and shifts Frances’ interest onto the second best. Geoffrey’s desire for Paula is easily shifted onto Lydia. Elsie, engaged and in love with Whiston, is “roused to another man” (WS 88). At the same time while dancing an intoxicating dance with Sam Adams, she is left “partly cold” and “not carried away” by the look of the automatic irony of the roué” (WS 87). And Elsie resists this dark and evil Eros of Sam Adams. In all these examples, Eros is the affect of the self that ever transfers the object of desire. Eros “is not permanent, he carries us just for a time, and moves on” (Black 111).

53In certain instances, Lawrence’s Eros turns back on itself, writing its own parody. Sam Adams’ name is almost a palindrome. The fact that it is not completely so, rather hints at the imperfect and vile nature of the name’s bearer, bringing into play clusters of sounds that would have a world of meaning in shamanistic cults: Adam, madam, mad, damn. Lawrence creates a parody of Eros, whose narcissistic ego is “intoxicated more with himself” (WS 88). We find this mocking portrait: “a bachelor of forty growing stout, a man well dressed and florid, with a large brown moustache and thin hair[...] it was evident his baldness was a chagrin to him [...] His fondness for the girls, or the fondness of the girls for him, was notorious” (WS 85). Such characteristics as “with a real warm feeling for giving pleasure,” “constant red laugh on his face,” “his eyes had a curious gleam” (WS 87) are accompanied by the ironic “I was born with an amourette in my mouth” (WS 87), “he was too loud for her good taste” (WS 88).

54In order to ascend, a lover is doomed to a kind of descent into humiliation. Thus, Maurice falls, Geoffrey is teased, Tom undergoes the painful experience of blushing and hiding his awkwardness, Whiston is sick and tired of the violence and the shame.

55These short stories reveal the early 20th century’s changing attitudes to love as a relationship and a social constituent, as well as Lawrence’s tendency to erotize knowledge. I might suggest that in the limited space of the short story, travelling in love is both “heavenwards” and “hellwards,” with transitory in-betweens and no permanent stops. Throughout these works, Lawrence’s language performs a quest for the unnamed Eros – at once celebrating it as the concentrated religious power of life while also warning against the cheaper idol of the conventional modern eros.

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## Notes

1 Modern English dictionaries define it in various ways. *The Oxford English Dictionary* says "of or pertaining to the passion of love"; concerned with or treating of love; amatory. *The Concise Oxford* adds "esp. tending to arouse sexual desire or excitement." The *Penguin English Dictionary* says "of or concerned with sexual life," and adds "amorous." *Webster's Dictionary* mentions literary or artistic items having an erotic theme, esp. books treating of sexual love in a sensuous or voluptuous manner."

2 I am grateful to Peter Preston for the hint that together with the revival of such mythological deities as Venus/Aphrodite, Pan - Eros does not really figure very often in early 20th century writings.

3 This helpful suggestion was proposed by Michael Bell.

4 McDougall, Joyce. *The Many Faces of Eros: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Human Sexuality*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995).

5 The terminology is partially borrowed from Lee, J.A. *The Colours of Love*. (Ontario: Don Mills, 1973).

6 McDougall, Joyce. *The Many Faces of Eros: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Human Sexuality*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995).

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