

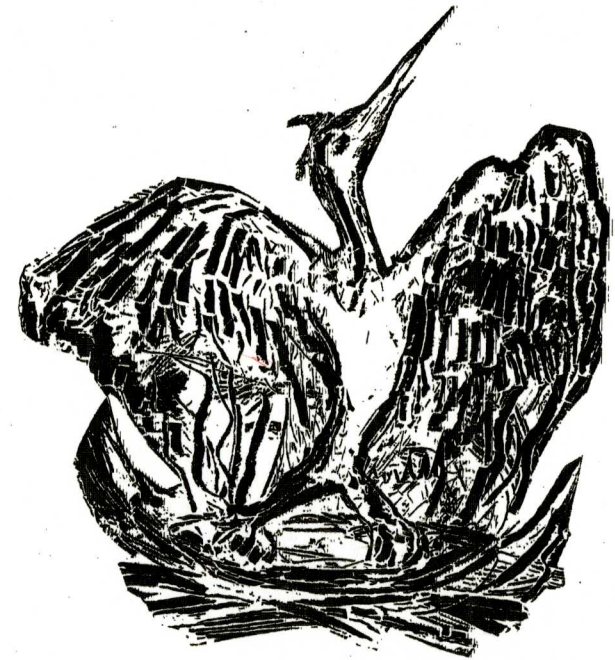
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D.H. Lawrence After Strange Gods III

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D.H. Lawrence
After Strange Gods III

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After Strange Gods III

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EROS AND THANATOS IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S AMERINDIAN TALES

The Woman Who Rode Away and *The Princess* were written in 1924, when D. H. Lawrence was living in New Mexico, and they both seem to result from the strong impact of the local Amerindian cultures.

Lawrence himself defined these stories as “not gay”;¹ in fact, they narrate the attempt and the failure of the two protagonists – both western women – to find an alternative to their own lives and worlds. The two stories are inspired by Lawrence’s personal experience of his contact with the Amerindian peoples and, without rhetoric or unrealistic optimism, discuss the possible results of an encounter between two very different cultures based on two completely different sets of beliefs: the animistic religion of the Indians celebrating life in all its expressions and the Whites’ cult of reason.

The protagonists of the two stories set out on a journey which is, in fact, a quest-journey, a literary transfiguration of the long journey Lawrence himself had started back in 1912,

¹ James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey, eds., *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. V, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 147 (Letter to Curtis Brown, 8 October 1924).

when he first left England to move to northern Italy.² After that, Lawrence's travelling assumed the form of an ideological quest, a search for an ideal society to be founded in a place which still retained its wildness, a place left intact and untouched by industrialization, not yet dominated by an absolute belief in power and money, but where life and its creative force were still considered as the basis for human existence.

It is not surprising that Lawrence, when he was still hoping to found his *Rananim*,³ was attracted to America, a place that the ideological and literary tradition had often depicted as a sort of Utopia, a land of freedom, and a New World where a new life was possible. Indeed, the quest for a new life is the starting point, of the action in both the Amerindian novelettes.

The narrative of *The Woman Who Rode Away* develops on a mythical and symbolic plane, presenting the adventure of a woman who decides to abandon her old life and her husband and children, in order to run away from a dull existence and join a tribe of Indians who still believe in the ancient gods and in a religion based on the forces of nature and the cosmos. Her attempt to penetrate the Indian culture causes the loss of her own identity and any link with her own culture; she is fatally attracted to the magic and charm of a world which, however violent and bloody, seems enchanted to her and whose spell

² Lawrence's pilgrimage round the world took him to southern Italy (1919-22), to Ceylon and Australia (1922), to New Mexico and Mexico (1922-25), to central Italy (1925-28) and finally, for his "death-journey", to Spain, Switzerland and France (1928-29).

For a more detailed discussion of Lawrence's travelling and its meaning, see Simonetta de Filippis, 'Introduction' to *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1999, pp. xv-xix.

³ Lawrence gave the name *Rananim* to the ideal society he wanted to found in an ideal place. The word comes from a Hebrew psalm which his friend Koteliensky used to chant (cf. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, eds, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. II, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 252, n. 3).

works on her through its slow rhythms, its unreal silence, and its ritualistic musical moments, in short, through a vision of human existence which is rooted in a remote mythical past totally unknown to western culture.

The Woman, then, sets out on her journey, aiming to find an alternative world to her own, but she encounters an otherness which she cannot penetrate unless she loses herself in it completely – psychologically, and at the end, physically.

An “alternative” requiring such a total sacrifice will certainly not seem valid to western readers; besides, the narration remains on a plane which is too detached from reality and it melts into the metaphors and symbols of a language that, in this respect, sometimes seems to be pushed too far. This tale, therefore, due to its excessively abstract nature, cannot represent a true source of confrontation and meditation for the reader who, however disturbed by it, can easily distance himself, considering the story unreal and belonging to a different world from his own.

This is perhaps one of the reasons why Lawrence, shortly after completing *The Woman Who Rode Away*, wrote *The Princess*,⁴ a story similar in many respects to the previous one but which, though also characterized by a strongly symbolic dimension, evolves on a more realistic plane with which the reader can feel more at ease.

The stylistic aspect of the two stories is important both in terms of Lawrence's canon and the literature of the time. In fact, Lawrence's highly symbolic and metaphorical language, particularly during this period, is representative of his artistic quest and his attempt to create a new way of writing which could best convey those “structures of feeling” and express the

⁴ Lawrence wrote *The Woman Who Rode Away* in June 1924 and *The Princess* in September; in between these two stories he wrote *St Mawr* and “The Hopi Snake Dance”. All subsequent quotations from the two novelettes are taken from *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories* (edited by Dieter Mehl and Christa Jansohn, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1996, pp. 39-71) and from *The Complete Short Stories* (vol. II, New York, Viking, 1974, pp. 473-512).

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pre-mental religiosity that the Indians ritualized in their dance movements and in the rhythmic sound of drums; that is, in cultural forms in which language is inessential and inadequate for the expression of what cannot be referred to the logocentric system characteristic of western cultures. Lawrence's search for new forms of writing is in tune with the attempts of the modernist movement to depict the anxiety and the uneasiness of the time through stylistic innovations as well (it must be remembered that Lawrence's stories were written in 1924, only two years after the publication of those works by T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf which conventionally mark the beginning of the modernist movement).

The story of *The Princess* is that of a "virgin intact" whose quest-journey is not so much a search for a different life through the contact with an alien culture, but a search for that "other" part of herself she has always denied. Her encounter with a Mexican man makes her conscious of her hidden desires but, after she asks for his embrace, she tries to keep away and "intact", causing, as a consequence, the man's psychological and physical death as well as her own mental death.

From the very beginning it is made clear that *The Princess* is narrated in a less symbolic language and form than *The Woman Who Rode Away*.

Though both titles refer to a generically defined female protagonist, there is a difference between the two: whereas the Woman remains unnamed throughout the story, the Princess has a proper name; indeed, she has various names which stress the double nature of the character as realistic and symbolic at the same time. Her father, calling her "*My Princess*", creates in her a sense of superiority and of belonging to a fairy, unreal world. Her name is, in fact, Dollie Urquart, as is declared in the opening lines; a little later, however, we are told that she had been christened "Mary Henrietta", but that her mother also used a nickname, calling

her “*My Dollie*” (p. 474), thus further emphasizing her belonging to a fantasy world.

In the Woman’s case, the lack of a proper name stresses the essentially symbolic nature of the character; indeed, a name would identify her as an individual and this would inevitably reduce the impact of her symbolic strength. It is interesting to note that, up to the moment when she decides to leave, the reader may not have noticed that she is always mentioned as “the woman” or simply as “she” because the other characters also tend to be defined generically as “her son”, “her daughter”, or “her husband”. However, the narrator suddenly draws the reader’s attention to this aspect by attributing proper names to all the other characters, even if they appear only for a moment or if they are merely mentioned, thus creating an obvious contrast with the Woman who remains unnamed, whereas the characters christened Freddy, Margarita, Lederman and Manuel immediately seem to become more real as individuals⁵. The abstract nature of the Woman as a symbol is consequentially emphasized, thus making her gesture less unacceptable. In fact, it is not the Woman as an individual but the Woman as a symbol who, by running away, acts – or re-acts – against all the most consolidated values and stereotypes of western society.⁶

⁵ The brief dialogue with one of the servants when she has taken her decision to leave is particularly significant as to the use of names:

“Manuel,” said the woman to her house-servant, “I’m going to ride to the convent to see Margarita, and take her a few things. Perhaps I shall stay the night in the convent. You look after Freddy and see everything is all right till I come back.”

“Shall I ride with you on the master’s horse, or shall Juan?” asked the servant.

“Neither of you. I shall go alone.” (p. 43)

Not only are the two children mentioned by their names but even a servant who is not present at this scene is evoked by his name as Juan. The Woman’s husband is hardly mentioned in this central moment but his authority can be felt in Manuel’s and Freddy’s worried words, making the Woman’s challenge appear even more threatening.

⁶ I have commented on this aspect in “D. H. Lawrence and the Amerindian Myth”, published in Italian (“D. H. Lawrence e il mito amerindiano”) in the volume *D. H. Lawrence. Arte e Mito*, edited by A. Piazza, Napoli, CUEN, 1999. This paper discusses only *The Woman Who Rode Away*.

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Up to this moment, she has always lived in the protected, though oppressive, world of her husband, a man who is twenty years older than her and who "Like any Sheik...kept her guarded among those mountains of Chihuahua" (p. 40). One should note that, as if following instinctively what Freud defines as the "compulsion to repeat", she will fly to other mountains where other men will keep her literally guarded, as a prisoner, recreating the same fatal situation which will lead to her physical death.

The Princess also spends most of her life with an older man, her father (her mother dies when she is only two), and, as she puts it, "Papa and I are such an old couple...living in a world of our own." (p. 477) Indeed, she remains crystallized in a timeless existence, like a character in a fairy-tale or a myth: "She was always grown up; she never really grew up. Always strangely wise, and always childish." (p. 475)

After all Colin Urquart, her father, seems to belong to a mythical world, too or, in any case, to one disconnected from reality. First of all, he is "just a bit mad"; that is, he cannot fit into so-called normality; moreover, he claims a royal heritage ("The blood of Scottish kings flowed in his veins") and his appearance evokes that of a mythical hero: "He looked like some old Celtic hero...His voice came direct out of the hushed Ossianic past." (p. 473)

His belonging to an unreal, abstract world is continuously emphasized ("he was like a living echo! His very flesh, when you touched it, did not seem quite the flesh of a real man", p. 474).

His daughter also evokes northern mythology when she is described "like a changeling" and her appearance, like her father's, seems to stress her belonging to a remote, unreal world:

She had exquisite little hands, that made the piano sound like a spinet when she played. She was rather given to wearing cloaks and capes, instead of coats, out of doors, and

little eighteenth-century sort of hats. (p. 476)...She was something like a changeling, not quite human. (p. 477)

Even the passage of time produces absolutely no change at all in her: ... "she had that quality of the sexless fairies, she did not change. At thirty-three she looked twenty-three" (p. 479). When her father dies she is thirty-eight and "quite unchanged". Suddenly, she finds herself exposed to the vulgarity of the world; for the first time in her life she entertains the idea of marriage, though in an abstract way, and decides that "the obvious thing to do, of course, was to travel" (p. 480). Travelling, for her, is therefore a quest for something and, though she still has confused ideas about it, she knows she must find an alternative to the kind of life she has led up so far.

The Princess feels a strong attraction to the south-west and goes to a ranch in New Mexico, where she finds herself surrounded by many attractive, rich young men with whom, however, she can establish no connection at all. The only man who attracts her attention is the Mexican guide Domingo Romero, in whose dark eyes she has seen a spark, which to her makes the difference between him and everybody else.

In *The Woman Who Rode Away*, there are many references to the eyes of the Indians as the silent means of communication with the white Woman. The Indian culture, moreover, has retained the capacity to speak with body language and the eyes of the Indians cannot hide the truth deep inside:

...their dark eyes, brooding over her, had something away in their depths that was awesomely ferocious and relentless. They would cover it with a smile, at once, if they felt her looking. But she had seen it. (p.57)

In *The Princess*, as well, "the dark eyes of the Mexicans were heavy and half alive, sometimes hostile, sometimes

kindly, often with the fatal Indian glaze on them, or the fatal Indian glint.” (p. 483). Romero’s eyes are also “black and Indian-looking. Only, at the centre of their hopelessness was a spark of pride, or self-confidence, or dauntlessness. Just a spark in the midst of the blackness of static despair.” (p. 483)

In both cases what comes out of those Indian eyes is the hostility of the colonized people who were subjugated in their own land, and who suffered the distortion of their ideologies, crushed by the arrogant weight of an alien culture imposing its own gods.⁷

Once the Princess has caught the fatal spark in Romero’s eyes, she changes her manner towards him; if, on the one hand, she feels protected when she is with him, on the other hand she is subjugated by his charm, a spell she cannot evade (“...she felt in his presence a subtle, insidious male *kindliness* she had never known before... ”, p. 484). “A vague, unspoken intimacy grew up between them”, made possible also by Romero’s elegant appearance and his efforts to speak English, though with a strong Spanish accent. In this respect Romero differs from the Indians with their dirty hair, their blankets and the vague Spanish language that only the young Indian is able to speak in *The Woman Who Rode Away*. In *The Princess*, Lawrence takes a step forward and establishes a contact between the characters on a linguistic plane, an element which is of great importance in western culture and which therefore contributes to the plausibility of the Princess’s behaviour. There is, however, an additional fundamental element which makes the Princess feel so attracted to Romero:

⁷ Mark Kinkead-Weekes discusses the possible interpretation of *The Woman Who Rode Away* in terms of colonization in “The Gringo Senora Who Rode Away”, *The D. H. Lawrence Review*, 22.3 (Fall 1990), pp. 251-65. I have studied the recurrent motif of the Indians’ eyes and the possible connection of their hostility with the problem of colonization in “Incontri ravvicinati. *The Woman Who Rode Away* di D. H. Lawrence” (“Close Encounters. *The Woman Who Rode Away* by D. H. Lawrence”), in *Annali-Anglistica*, XXXIX, 3, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli, 1996, pp. 107-123 (see in particular pp. 111-112).

And at the same time, curiously, he gave her the feeling that death was not far from him. Perhaps he too was half in love with death. However that may be, the sense she had that death was not far from him made him 'possible' to her. (p. 485)

Eros and Thanatos seem to be embodied in Romero, and the Princess can feel it – though still in a confused way. This feeling comes much earlier in the story than the actual realization of the action that is to combine those two elements, when sexual intercourse between the white woman and the Mexican guide produces several forms of death in the two characters. While the Princess feels irretrievably violated in her separateness, Romero suffers an equally painful psychological death caused by the “linguistic offences” of the woman which mortally wound his narcissistic male self-confidence and determine the consequent death of his sexual desire:

He went about in silence, with a dead-looking face. It was now so dreary and so like death she wished he would do anything rather than continue in this negation. If now he asked her to go down with him to the world and marry him, she would do it...But he would not ask her. His desire was dead and heavy like ice within him. (pp. 509-510)

This is indeed both a physical and a psychological death which proves to be much more destructive than the firing of a gun by a man in the Forest Service which, in the end, causes Romero's actual death.

The character of the Princess seems to embody the central concept that Sigmund Freud had developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) a few years before Lawrence's tale was written. Among other things Freud writes: “There is a clear opposition between individual drives and sexual drives

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because the former urge one towards death and the latter towards the continuance of life.”⁸

“Ego drives” prevail in the Princess, and the narcissistic process which represses the sexual drive in favour of an exaltation of the Ego (what Freudian theories define as *hypercathexis*), produces a mortal effect of “Ego fragmentation” (or “Ego breakdown”) and the deep wounding of the Other’s narcissism:⁹

“Don’t you like last night?” he asked
“Not really,” she said. “Why? Do you?”
...She could see she had given him a cruel blow. But she did not relent. She was getting her own back. She wanted to regain possession of all herself... (p. 505)

In *The Woman Who Rode Away*, the combination of Eros and Thanatos is evident in the description of the final sacrifice. The Woman is laid on a flat stone and four Indians hold her “by the outstretched arms and legs” waiting for the “penetration” of a knife which will bring death – a perfect sadistic scene. And, even though the final moment is not described, one can easily imagine the Indian crowd tense in an excited, unreal silence and then breaking out into a liberating shout at the sight of the penetration of the knife into the woman’s body, a sort of collective orgasm reaching its climax at the show of death.

An interesting comparison between the two women is made in this respect: the Princess feels attracted to Romero and tries to be with him when she catches the glimpse of death on his face; the Woman chooses to go to the Chilchui Indians

⁸ S. Freud, *Al di là del principio di piacere*, Torino, Boringhieri, pp. 70-1. The translation from this Italian version is mine.

⁹ Freud defines *narcissism* a kind of neurosis in which the individual retains all his *libido* in himself without consuming it in *object investments*.

in spite of – or perhaps just because of – their practising of the old ceremonial rites which also imply human sacrifice.¹⁰

Another common element in the two texts concerns the ritualization of the act by which both women sacrifice themselves. They both have to undertake a long tiring long journey of initiation on winding, uneven, uphill paths until they reach the sacrificial place on an esplanade a little downhill, a sign of nature itself that they have come to the end of their quest-journey.¹¹

In the Woman's case, the journey takes place twice: when she first follows the three Indians to the village for the period of purification, and after a few months, when she is taken to the place of sacrifice, through almost impassable paths, clambering up the mountains until they reach a platform, the altar on which the sacrifice will be performed.¹²

In the Princess's case, the journey leading to Romero's cabin is explicitly that of an individual going through a sort of trial to give proof of her courage before she reaches the sacrificial place. In fact, in this case, if the Princess is considered as a character belonging to the fairy-tale world, she can also be seen as a heroine of an old tale who has to overcome obstacles and trials in order to find her Holy Grail.

¹⁰ "...the old priests still kept up the ancient religion, and offered human sacrifices – so it was said." (p. 42)

¹¹ "They began the long, winding descent...At first it was all rocks: then the pine-trees began, and soon, the silver-limbed aspens. The flowers of autumn, big pink daisy-like flowers, and white ones, and many yellow flowers, were in profusion...At length came grass and pasture-slopes between mingled aspen and pine-trees." *WWRA*, pp. 50-1)

"They rode down a bank into a valley grove dense with aspens...Then they entered shadow and the dark, resinous spruce trees...And all at once they emerged in the sun on the edge of the spruce grove, and there was a little cabin, and the bottom of a small, naked valley with grey rocks and heaps of stone, and a round pool of intense green water, dark green." (*P*, pp. 499-500)

¹² "They were travelling on and on, upwards, across the snow under the trees...penetrating into the forest, into the mountain... Then through the bushes she emerged into a strange amphitheatre. Facing was a great wall of hollow rock...On the platform of the cave stood the priests, waiting..." (p. 69)

However, a first journey of initiation can be followed in the Princess's continuous travelling between Europe and America, after which she is able to choose New Mexico as the place where she might find a possible alternative to her present existence, and, above all, where she can achieve her own wholeness as an individual who can finally accept that physicality she had always denied.

Both women, moreover, choose to set out on a difficult journey almost unaware of the real reasons that inspire them, giving themselves vague, improbable justifications which cannot explain such a vital choice. The Woman, after hearing about the Indians, "was overcome by a foolish romanticism more unreal than a girl's. She felt it was her destiny to wander into the secret haunts of those timeless, mysterious, marvellous Indians of the mountains" (p. 42). When she is asked by the old Indian about the reasons for her being there and about what she was seeking, she simply and superficially replies: "Nothing! I only came to see what it was like."

As far as the Princess is concerned, she convinces herself that she wants to go up in the mountains with Romero in order to see wild animals, but the obstinacy with which she pursues this aim against all advice and reasonableness shows that there is something much more important she needs to achieve, though she is not yet aware of it. Even when Miss Cummins, the friend who accompanies her, has to go back because her horse has an injured leg, she refuses to give up her project and goes on alone while waiting for Romero to return. The stream of her thoughts at this moment reveals her deep motives and needs:

And she thought of her adventure. She was going on alone with Romero. But then she was very sure of herself, and Romero was not the kind of man to do anything to her against her will. This was her first thought. And she just had a fixed desire to go over the brim of the mountains, to look into the inner chaos of the Rockies. And she wanted to

go with Romero, because he had some peculiar kinship with her; there was some peculiar link between the two of them. Miss Cummings anyhow would have been only a discordant note. (p. 493)

Both women, furthermore, proceed on their journeys in spite of all the uneasiness and tiredness, never thinking of giving up, partly overwhelmed by a state similar to a trance in which their wills escape their control:

She didn't know where she was going or what she was going for...if she had any will of her own left, she would have turned back, to the village, to be protected and sent home to her husband. (*WWRA*, p. 45)

It seemed to her that for hours she went in torment, on her hands and knees, from crack to crevice, along the slanting face of this pure rock mountain...Yet what she wondered, all the time, was why she persisted in clinging and crawling along these mile-long sheets of rock. (*WWRA*, p. 50)

In front now was nothing but mountains, ponderous, massive... It frightened the Princess, it was so inhuman...And yet now one of her desires was fulfilled...She had looked down into the intestinal knot of these mountains. She was frightened. She wanted to go back.

But Romero was riding on...The Princess...closed her eyes and let her consciousness evaporate away...So on and on, in the wind again...with the height, the cold, the wind, her brain was numb...she pulled herself together. Her eye blazed up again with excitement and determination. (*P*, 496-8)

There is another important symbolic moment in both stories underlying the *rite de passage* from one kind of existence to another and, at the same time, emphasizing the awareness that both protagonists have of taking a final step towards a profound change in their own Self, their own

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individual and cultural identities. It is the ritual of “unclothing” to which both women are subjected.

The Woman tries to react against the request to take her clothes off and change into Indian clothing in front of the Indian men, but her resistance is not taken into consideration:

They...gripped her arms as she stood, without hurting her, but with great power. Then two of the old men came, and with curious skill slit her boots down with keen knives, and drew them off, and slit her clothing so that it came away from her. In a few moments she stood there white and uncovered. (p. 55)

This is an open reference to what will happen at the end when the old Indian performs the sacrifice by stabbing her to death with a knife.

The Woman is subjected to other ritual unclothings but she does not react to them, given her state of numbness and passive acceptance.¹³ In fact, the loss of her clothes coincides with the loss of her cultural identity and with her entrance into an alien world from which there is no return, since to penetrate otherness means to renounce one’s own Self, to lose oneself, and to die.

In *The Princess* the process of unclothing is less ritualized but equally symbolic. She is the one who decides to take her clothes off the first time in order to establish contact with the other and, above all, with that part of herself she has always denied:

¹³ “In the darkness and in the silence she was accurately aware of everything that happened to her, how they took off her clothes and...washed her all over with water and the amole infusion, washed even her hair...Then they laid her on a couch...and now rubbed all her body with sweet-scented oil, and massaged all her limbs, and her back, and her sides, with a long, strange, hypnotic massage...And the dark eyes glittered absorbed, as the hands worked upon the soft white body of the woman.” (pp. 66-7)

What did she want? Oh, what did she want? She sat in bed and rocked herself woefully...She wanted warmth, protection, she wanted to be taken away from herself. And at the same time, perhaps more deeply than anything, she wanted to keep herself intact, intact, untouched, that no one should have any power over her, or rights to her...Yet that other thing! (p. 502)

After she has decided to let “that other thing” prevail, she persuades herself that she can continue to control her life and that she can still “put her clothes back on” at will. But this can no longer be the case once she has taken the fatal step after which there is no return. It is Romero who, in a combination of violence and naivety, reminds her of this by throwing her clothes into the pool, a symbolic act not so much of his power over her but of the fact that she cannot put on the same clothes and pretend that nothing has happened. When the Princess returns to her world, she will have to do so without the clothes she was wearing at the beginning of her adventure and that is a significant sign of the transformation she has gone through, both in her external appearance – even her hair shows at last a touch of greyness – and above all, deep inside, as some slight signs of madness prove. In a pathetic attempt to recover her previous Self and identity, she re-creates the story of her adventure, removing some unacceptable details and modifying others in order to pretend to herself that she has remained the same “untouched” fairy.¹⁴

Finally, by marrying an older man, she unconsciously tries to go back in time, to feel a child again, recreating the original ‘couple’ with a husband-father who can protect her

¹⁴ “Apparently she had recovered herself entirely. She was the Princess, and a virgin intact. But her bobbed hair was grey at the temples, and her eyes were a little mad. She was slightly crazy. “Since my accident in the mountains, when a man went mad and shot my horse from under me, and my guide had to shoot him dead, I have never felt quite myself.” (p. 512)

and offer her that unreal and timeless equilibrium she had established with her father.

It is always rather difficult and embarrassing to deal with Lawrence's writings in his American period because of the many ideological ambiguities that critics have discussed at length, pointing out his anti-feminist and oligarchical position, revealed by his presentation of a phallogocentric world structured on the principle of "natural aristocracy".¹⁵

The Woman Who Rode Away, however, reveals and arouses, with its ending, an open dislike for the bloody phallogocentric Indian culture, whereas the Woman can be seen as a brave person who has chosen to give up everything, even her own life, in order to respond to her vital needs of authenticity and truth. In fact, Lawrentian heroines are generally more ready than their male counterparts to make vital choices even though these often imply difficult, risky changes in their lives; this seems to suggest that Lawrence, after all, identified women with the positive forces in life, as individuals capable of finding in themselves the strength to try and realize their deepest beliefs, a strong argument against those accusations of anti-feminism that Lawrence has so often attracted with his writings and has particularly inspired in feminist critics such as Kate Millett.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is

¹⁵ "...proximity to Native American culture...brought D. H. Lawrence a new dimension of being. He was able to cross the threshold into a mythical state of ideal masculinity and male dominance, and a new focus upon the power of primitive life entered his work." (Margaret Storch, "«But not the America of the Whites»: Lawrence's pursuit of the True Primitive", *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, vol. 25, 1993 & 1994, 1-3, p. 48).

¹⁶ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, London, Virago, 1977. See in particular pp. 285-93 where *The Woman Who Rode Away* is interpreted as revenge on Lawrence's part against that feminist movement which was challenging man's major privileges: "The short story does accomplish the human sacrifice of the female to Lawrence's phallic sect...the story is Lawrence's most impassioned statement of the doctrine of the male supremacy and the penis as deity" (pp. 285-6). The meaning of the Woman's gesture and its strongly political value are quickly and critically commented on by Millett: "She is clearly a woman who needs to run away – to something. What is curious is what Lawrence finds

true that both stories end in some sort of death – physical, mental, cultural – for the two protagonists, as a result of their challenge to society and its conventional values, but also, and more importantly, as a result of their challenge to a phallogentric ideology. And, in this respect, doubts about Lawrence's idea of women remain.

In conclusion, however, what prevails as the most striking aspect of these two stories is the presentation of the deep tension in the two women, pulling them towards a more vital existence, and the description of it as a gradual movement towards a climax where Eros and Thanatos combine to bring the individual to his consummation.

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for her to run away to – a death which is astounding in the sadism and malice with which it is conceived.” (p. 285)