

In Interpretation of Tickets, Please from Evolution and Sexual Selection Theory

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Abstract: D.H. Lawrence is one of the most controversial writers in English literature in the 20th century. He has been frequently criticized for his unfriendly treatment of female characters and a repulsion against Darwin's theory. However, his view on women and Darwinism gradually changed and developed. This paper intends to explore this change of view from the reading of Lawrence's short story Ticket, Please.

Keywords: Feminism; Sexual selection; Ticket please

1. Lawrence and Darwinism

In 1859, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* made its appearance on the surface of the earth. It affects the 19th century writers "not only at the level of theme, but at the level of organization." "The methods of scientists become the methods of emplotment, and scientific theories suggest new organizations for fiction". However, it seems that there is no apparent connection, reference or discussion of Darwinism in any of D.H. Lawrence's works. One reason might be, according to Granofsky, "the many hostile comments Lawrence allowed himself in his battle with Darwinism over the years." In fact, Lawrence, when he just reached adulthood, made Darwin's theory his early interests and was once enthusiastic to evolution. However, in his later essays and letters, he claimed that the tenets of the theories were all wrong. He once expressed his repudiation of Darwinism in *Morning in Mexico*, "Myself, I don't believe in evolution, like a string hooked on to a First Cause." For this shift in attitude, Granofsky gave his account and assumed that Lawrence's deterioration in health, the difficulties in marriage, and a loss of readership in England may cause this change of attitude. However, Lawrence reread Darwin's theory later during WWI and began to refer to the theory in his works produced during 1919-1922. In "Art and the Individual," originally a paper delivered in 1908 to the Eastwood Debating Society, Lawrence speaks of the whiteness and wings of the swan as expressive "of the great purpose which leads the swan to raise itself as far as possible to attract a mate, the mate choosing the finest male that the species may be reproduced in its most advantageous form".

The First World War played some part in the shift of attitude. Lawrence developed his understanding of the theory from nature to social domain and in his eyes the world became a place where only the fit can survive. There actually are works in the transitional period which embodies Darwinism in character, theme, plot and structure. *Tickets, Please* (1919) is one of them. Lawrence took WWI as its background and dealt with his most familiar gender theme. The story can be interpreted from Darwin's evolution and sexual selection theory, where there is an explicit connection between the social and biological status of women.

2. Darwin's Sexual Selection

In 1871 Darwin's *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* was published. He mentions sexual selection only briefly in *The Origin of Species* but develops the concept thoroughly in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Sexual selection was the book's primary focus and central achievement. It is Darwin's effort to account for differences in secondary sexual characteristics between males and females role and their part in the mating process in the animal kingdom. In the book, he states that male will be able to defeat his male rivals and to breed more frequently with the healthiest females. Here it is the female who selects her mate, or at the very least has the option of rejecting those who do not please her. The female does not "invariably prefer the victorious male", but it is clear that she is essentially a prize to the "victorious male."

Sexual selection involves the exercise of individual will more intimately than natural selection. The determination of who does the selecting is crucial. Darwin finds that through out most of the animal kingdom it is the female who must be pleased, who exerts a choice and selects mates. The male is the more active partner, first in battling his rivals and then in displaying his charms. The female must, however, choose some male, even if he is merely "the one which is the least distasteful" to her. Lawrence's *Tickets, Please* exploits and subvert Darwin's theories about sexual selection.

3. The Application of Evolutionary Theory in Tickets, Please

The story depicts a love tangle between a young couple. John Thomas is a inspector on a tram, who misbehaves with the ticket girls. Anne is one of them who is jilted very soon. Hurt and angry, she plans a revenge with the other jilted women.

For Lawrence WWI is period of insecurity, chaos and subversion. The world is of no order or reason. With the vacancy men left, women stepped up on the stage doing jobs once belonged to men. The new experience and fulfillment makes women confident and

purposeful. The conductors are girls who are “fearless young hussies”. “They pounce on the youths who try to evade their ticket-machine. They push off the men at the end of their distance. They are not going to be done in the eye-not they. They fear nobody-and everybody fears them.” The girls are taking the place of men and behaving more like men. The men who were left home were “unfit for active service: cripples and hunchbacks”. However, among them, there is one “of the right age, and one, the chief, is also good-looking”. John Thomas, as one of the rare young and healthy survivor of his gender, who was left behind for unknown reason, received enormous attention from the young and healthy females. He got the choice to choose from all female candidates.

Then a typical courtship is depicted. John Thomas impresses Annie with his figure, vitality and manhood like the case in animal world that male rivalry is carried on increasingly by displays of more brilliant color, more handsome plumage, or more beautiful voice. John Thomas shows his “color” or “plumage” to defeat the “rival” for the purpose of Annie’s thorough surrender. Annie caved in, then got jilted by John Thomas. she is no conventional girl. So are other girls John Thomas once dated and jilted. They want “tit for tat”. In the girl’s little waiting room, they lay a trap with bait waiting quietly and patiently for their prey. When John Thomas took the bait, they begin the game with the “sport”, door locked.

The locked door cut off any connection between the little waiting room and the outside world. It is impossible for John Thomas to reach for help, which makes him increasingly terrified. He is a trapped under the girl’s predation. Acting fierce and ferocious, the girls reveal the true self suppressed by “the ugly blue uniforms” and “shapeless old peaked caps”. The little locked room of their own offers shelter and security. Not only do they reveal their deeply buried self but also conceal their “interest” in John Thomas as the marked man of their revenge. The human features are suppressed and animal instincts dominate. Thus, a world of beast is formed.

Annie starts the attack by hitting John Thomas on the side of his head “with a movement like a swift cat”. Then all the other girls come at him violently. “They all flew at him, slapping him, pinching him, pulling his hair”. “Strange, wild creatures, they hung on him and rushed at him to bear him down.” Making full use of the “unnatural strength and power”, the girls are enjoying the pleasure of superiority, of being in control, the power to manipulate man, a relief of their long-held grudge. John Thomas, with one of his arm is naked, lay on the ground “as an animal lies when it is defeated and at the mercy of the captor.” However, the blood and the “bare arm maddened the girls”. They got excited. “Their blood (was) now up”. It seems there is no way for John Joseph to survive this. “You ought to be killed, that’s what you ought.”

Darwin’s jungle rule says: survival of the fittest. The story shows that it is women who can survive from cruel, hostile environment. They are stronger and healthier, resilient and adaptive. while men are either killed in the battlefield or survived but wounded, which means losing the ability to recover.

4. The Subversion of Sexual Selection in Tickets, Please

Instead of putting beautiful female in the position of choice, the male in the story, depicted either cripple or hunchback who are not desirable at all, got the right to pick. The only man stands out is John Thomas, who “had all the arts of love-making”. As the only fit male, he enjoys a privilege to pick from all beautiful and healthy young female. However, he refuses to settle with one. Darwin describes a situation exactly opposite to John Thomas. “The females in most or all the orders ... have the power of rejecting any particular male” but they do not have the choice to reject all male. The female does not “invariably prefer the victorious male, but it is clear that she is essentially a prize to the “victorious male,” whose aggression can be turned against the female if she seems reluctant.

John Thomas doesn’t just reject one female, he rejects them all, which results in the “aggression” from those vindictive girls. When John Thomas is on the ground, helpless, he is offer the choice again. Like in sexual selection, John Thomas is forced to pick one from the girls even if she is merely “the one which is the least distasteful” to him. In doing so, they surrender the power to male again. The momentary victory is gone. The sense of superiority and power are just temporary and possibly exist only inside the little waiting room. However, once they taste the joy and excitement of being on top, it is hard to go back to place where they are treated like commodities to be chosen. With the door opened again, the connection with the human world resumed while evolution theory still rules. No matter how reluctant they are, the girls still need to step out of the room living with the harsh reality. The fulfillment and pleasure can not last long. They are only provided by the special circumstance.

In Tickets, Please, it seems to be female who could adapt themselves really quickly to the change and take advantage of this new environment. Nevertheless, when WWI was over, when the survival men were back from the battlefield, they were stunned by what women could do. They have to face the tough truth that men are not that indispensable. They could be easily and conveniently replaced by women thus became expendable. Women were adapting so well and doing men’s jobs so well, which made their survival less significant and even unnecessary. Coping with the new situation, men’s immediate and urgent need was to restore the old rule, their rule and put everything back to where they belong. Thus, women retrieved themselves from the position they briefly hold back to where they started, the home. They were at a loss and need time to readjust again.

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