# Celebrating Difference: Postcolonial Discourse in D. H. Lawrence's *The Princess*

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Twentieth century brought a new recognition of the non-West cultures by the West. The non-West cultures which were considered exotic and retrogressive now seemed to offer an affinity that was regenerative. The West seemed to be more inclined to enlist the "foreign" and the "Primitive" for their own internal renewal. But the relationship between the West and the non-West in terms of power and status remained inequitable. The cross cultural conversation that emerged for a shift in relationship of sharing or equal interchange, in fact, underpinned discrimination, hierarchy, and restrictions upon self- expression (Boehmer 140). "European sovereignty remained largely unquestioned, as did the cultural authority of the West" (Boehmer 139). The two main groups that responded to the empire at this time – metropolitans on the one hand and the representatives from non-European cultures on the other – were concerned with the overlapping issues. Yet the positions from which they represented those issues remained divided in terms of different social and economic contexts and worlds of knowledge (Boehmer 139). Writing from his metropolitan position, D. H. Lawrence's critique of Western assumptions about native cultures is significant insofar as he more than any of his contemporary writers articulates his willingness to accept the native cultures on their own terms. According to Amit Chaudhari, Lawrence's works "seem to arise from a more complicated and ambivalent source, which partly belongs to the centre and partly to the unrecognizable margins of tradition" (115). His understanding of primitivism is a far more complex and sophisticated matter that raises a number of questions about cultural identity, Otherness, and the imagination that are crucially related to his works. The present paper argues that D. H. Lawrence's classical story "The Princess" not only simply encodes the cultural shift that had take place in his time but also harnesses imagination to sympathize with the cultural Other and issues a warning against the unmindful cultural assimilation of the West and non West cultures.

To comprehend the deeper meaning of "The Princess", the story needs to be read against its grain. According to Edward Said "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (4). In the works that followed, such as *Culture and Imperialism*, Said develops this position further to argue that while all the texts are "worldly", great texts or masterpieces encode the greatest pressures and preoccupations of the world around. So, Lawrence's classic story "The Princess" which explicitly seems to have very little to do with native American and colonialism, indeed, has a great deal more. Strikingly, all the main characters in the story are mentally either colonials, or colonized, and displaced. The imaginative development and the structure of the story springs from Lawrence's growing understanding of colonialism and what it means to those who profit by it, and to its victims. In "The Princess" the tragedy originates not merely in gender hostility but also in the impulses which underlie imperialism and colonial revolt.

Dollie Urquhart, the protagonist in "The Princess" is a typical white woman with a sense of blood superiority. Her father was of an old Scottish family and claimed royal blood in his veins. He called Dollie always "my princess". He was one of those gentlemen of sufficient but not excessive means who, Lawrence says, fifty years ago wandered vaguely about, never arriving anywhere, never doing anything, and never definitely being anything, yet well received in the good society of more than one country (442). She lived with her father, and travelled continually. Her father taught her from her childhood:

> You are the last of the royal race of the old people; the last my princess. There are no others. You and I are the last. When I am dead there will be only you. And that is why, darling, you will never care for any of the people in the world very much. …. Always remember that. …. You are the princess of old, old blood, and that all others are less than you, less noble, more vulgar" ("The Princess" 444).

The force of the lines clearly demonstrates the overweening arrogance of the white race.

After her father's death Miss Urquhart comes to Mexico with her maid companion, Miss Cummins. They stay at Ranch del Cerro Gordo, a mile from the Indian Pueblo of San Christobal and some four miles from the foot of the mountains. Here, Dollie meets her native Other, a man called Romero Domingo. Lawrence with his anthropological and psychological learning creates Romero as a typical Other of the white race: "His dark face was long and heavy, almost sinister… characteristic of the Mexicans of his own locality, Domingo Romero was almost a typical Mexican to look at with the typical heavy, dark, long face … with an almost brutally heavy mouth. The skull and the cross bones look of the Penitentes" ("The Princess" 450-51). He sold his ranch for two thousand dollars and now was working for the white people on that ranch.

Though Lawrence's description of Romero in anthropological terms evokes fear of the racial Other, he more than any of his contemporary metropolitan writer appears willing to take other cultures on their own terms. He rejects the logic of colonial civilizing mission and provides legitimacy to the existence of the primitive cultures. He writes in *Mornings in Mexico* that the native is not assimilable as and when the Europe will might dictate: "The Indian is completely embedded in the wonder of his own drama that has no beginning, it is all inclusive. It can't be judged, because there is nothing outside it to judge it" (53). In the same essay he asserts "The Indian way of consciousness is different and fatal to our way of consciousness. Our way of consciousness is different from and fatal to the Indian. The two ways, the two streams are never united. There is no bridge, no canal of connection" (*Mornings* 45). Lawrence makes his position clear that he does not want to become a primitive again, though he never wants to deny them or break with them. He accepts that "every drop of me trembles still alive to the old sound, every thread in my body quivers to the frenzy of the old mystery …. But I stand on the far edge of their firelight, and am neither denied nor accepted. My way is my own, old father; I can't cluster at the drum any more" (Phoenix 98-99) So when a subtle, unspoken intimacy grows between the princess and Romero, it seems to be heading for a crisis.

Dollie wants to see bigger animals so she and Romero plan to go in the mountains where there is a tarn below a small cabin on the ridge. The journey to the cabin is hard and strenuous. Detached from both the 'Principals' in "The

Princess" Lawrence draws close to the setting and invests it with the tense complexities of feeling that indirectly pertain to the human characters. In the thirty six page story there is thirteen page uninterrupted natural description while the two figures on the horse back ascend the Rockies. This extended presentation of the awesome landscape is full of terror and curiosity. Amidst the mountain contours she seems to be encroaching upon a precipitous and irreducible conflict of natural forces. Ahead of her the summits are "grey", "dead", "corpse like", and the "palely cold wind blows like some vast machine". In dizzying glimpses through the funnel like canyons Dollie sees the floor of the desert slipping away to a tilted horizon. The farther removed from the level earth, the sharper is her sense of "the inner chaos of the Rockies". This atmosphere of horror and compulsion is not created by the fictional characters but issues in the tale from the authorial response to the landscape and the gruesome setting (Cavitch 172).

The primitive here confronted Lawrence with the shades of deeply embedded cultural nightmares. The horror which the description evokes cultural associations of violence and crudity. The primitive Indian came to represent for Lawrence a being who was masterful but also "remote", "impersonal" and "inhuman". Lawrence symbolically describes the complex Otherness of the primitive people. He admits to the existence of cultural experience which is simply out of Europe's range – experience it cannot conceptualize. Lawrence rejects the Cartesian celebration of human subject's power over and freedom from the external world. This power- founded in knowledge – perceives a threat in the mysterious and incalculable nature of the external world which can only be overcome by reducing the unintelligible diversity and material alterity of the incomprehensible world to the familiar contents of minds. "This opens up the possibility of ordering and taming the wild profusion of things formally, according to the structure of the subject's emancipatory rationality, and similarly to the terms of a mathematical demonstration" (Gandhi 36). According to Max Weber this means that the world is "disenchanted" (139). Threat thus continues to characterize whatever is radically different from us. Fredric Jameson notes that from the earliest times the stranger from another tribe who speaks an incomprehensible language or follows outlandish customs has been thought to be a threat to individual and society as a whole. He states that in our own time, the avenger of accumulated resentments from some oppressed class or race, or else that alien being, Jew, behind whose apparently human features, a malignant and preternatural intelligence is thought to lurk (101). The essential point about these some of the archetype figures of the Other is that the Other is feared not so much because he is evil; rather he is evil because he is "Other, alien, different, strange, unknown, and unfamiliar" (Jameson 101).

Dollie's journey with Romero ends up in the mountains in a small cabin where it is awfully cold in the night. Dollie starts freezing. Though she never wanted, she yielded to Romero physically for warmth. And he felt a curious joy and pride in him at her expense. She felt like a victim there. And he was exulting in his power over her, his possession, his pleasure. He was so suffused with pride and luxury, and she was full of despair. Next day she wanted to return to the ranch but Romero took her hostage. He wanted to impose his will but failed. In utter desperation he violates her repeatedly. But she says, "You can't succeed. No body could. You could never get me under your will". Her spirit was hard and flawless as a diamond. Romero in a desperate attempt to engage in an encounter

with Forest Service personnel is killed. Dollie comes back to the ranch never to recover from the trauma.

The tragedy can be understood as a result of alienation and revolt in the colonial power. In colonial discourses and practices we have seen how a wide spectrum of representations encode the rape and plunder of colonized countries by figuring the latter as a naked woman and placing colonizers as masters/ rapists. But the threat of native rebellion produces a very different type of colonial stereotype which represents the colonized as a (usually dark skinned) rapist who comes to ravish white woman who in turn comes to symbolize European culture. One of the earliest of such figure is Caliban in *The Tempest* , who, Prospero alleges, threatens to rape his daughter Miranda. "This stereotype reverses the trope of colonialism-as-rape and thus it can be argued, deflects the violence of the colonial encounter from the colonizer to the colonized" (Loomba 79).

Here, in the story we see that Romero is the last of his old family that had owned miles of land around San Cristobal. But the coming of the white men and the failure of the vast crop of sheep, and the fatal inertia which overcomes all men, at least, on the desert, near mountains, had finished the Romero family. The last descendents were just Mexican peasants. Romero's words in the cabin when he fails to impose his will on Dollie echo a typical reaction of the victim of colonialism: " 'You Ameicans', you always want to do a man down'" ("The Princess" 472).

Romero's exultations after rape, his suffusion with pride and power, his arrogate and derisive body language can be interpreted in the light of Franz fanon's psychoanalytical study of the colonized black's formation of subjectivity. Fanon says that for the white subject the black other is everything that lies outside the self. For the black subject, however, the white Other serves to define everything that is desirable, everything that the self desires. This desire is embedded in the power structure, therefore, the white man is not only the Other but also the master, real or imaginary. Therefore, blackness confirms the white self, but whiteness empties the black subject. He cannot identify with that which is so persistently negated by the racist/colonist structure. Thus Fanon's Antillean patients reported that in their delirium, they had no colour. Fanon argued that in fact colonialism was the cause which engendered the psychic difference along racial lines and annihilated the black subject into nothingness. The fantasy of of possession of white woman by black man is offered by Fanon as the primal scene of colonialism: "When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine" (18).

"The Princess" evokes sympathy for the native Other in the pathetic end of Romero. The fact that Romero's pathological condition lies in his belonging to the darker race is as correct as the compelling realization that the seeds of his tragedy lay in his socio-economic condition. Both the conditions have their origin in colonial project. "The Princess" simultaneously respects the cultural difference and warns against the any unmindful assimilation of the two cultures that might be fatal to both of them.

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