

## Chapter VI

### THE LOST GIRL

After the completion of *Sons and Lovers* in November 1912, Lawrence conceived four different novels in the next four months. His plans for the first two, 'Scargill Street' and a 'Burns Novel' were quickly abandoned, the material of the last one 'The Sisters', was eventually turned into *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, while the third 'Elsa Culverwell' was transmuted into 'The Insurrection of Miss Houghton' later renamed *The Lost Girl*. Lawrence's initial impetus for *The Lost Girl* came from his reading of Arnold Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*, that no doubt depressed him. He told Sallie Hopkin: 'I shall do a novel about love triumphant one day. I shall do my work for women, better than the suffrage' (Lett, H.T.M.(ed), 170-71). The story referred to as 'Elsa Culverwell' and its successors, 'The Insurrection of Miss Houghton' and *The Lost Girl*, concentrated on the Cullen family of Eastwood which Lawrence knew as a boy and adolescent. George Henry Cullen whose failures became legendary, his invalid wife, his governess, his daughter, who like Alvina Houghton became a nurse - all are presented in disguise in *The Lost Girl*. The twenty-page fragment of 'Elsa Culverwell', a first person narrative of a girl describing her family and her girlhood, abruptly broke off in the middle of a paragraph. Lawrence probably wrote it by the end of December 1912.

Seven years later, in 1920, Lawrence found England faced with another problem, the problem of surplus women. Now, with the help of that remote story of

Elsa Culverwell, he wanted to suggest a solution to this problem. He wished to complete the incomplete story renaming the protagonist as Alvina Houghton. As Lawrence preferred an 'extraordinary and wonderful ... woman who can support the insupportable, can cross oceans and mountains in an answer to her thorough-going self' (Drapper, R.P., 1970, 154) he brought Alvina Houghton out of the humdrum lives to make her a 'declassé'. This unfamiliar attempt made the book "different from --- all other work, not immediate, not intimate - except the last bit, all set across a distance" (Lett, 11 June, 1920). The novel lacked the seriousness of his previous masterpieces so that Graham Hough said that the novel "seems to have originated in a far more superficial region of the mind than any of its predecessors except *The Trespasser*" (Hough, G. 1970, 111). But the novel proved to be a popular one. It was awarded the James Tait Black Prize, the only prize and formal recognition that Lawrence had ever received. J. Moynahan described the novel as showing a movement downward into a rich, shapeless darkness, a flight to remote pastoral place, Italy, which is, in a sense, an image of Lawrence's change of heart. As Moynahan comments; '*The Lost Girl* celebrates the triumph of lowmindedness and attempts to replace the old metaphors of moral strenuousness which fixed moral achievement in expressions like 'higher laws', "ascendency", "superiority", "uplift" and so forth with fresh metaphors of downwardness and underneathness' (Moynahan, J. 1966 : 122). But such comments often conceal the reality instead of revealing it. To speak otherwise, in a writing, when a profound contradiction arises between the writer's intention and the reader's susceptibility, the reader finds that

his own colour won't soak and he says that he does not like the writer (Drapper, R.P., 1970, 151). Keeping these two different comments in mind, we can say that *The Lost Girl* invites modern civilized man to see himself in terms of the vital self of its protagonists.

The theme of the novel explores in a renewed way Lawrence's metaphysics of the "blood knowledge". In *The Rainbow*, Ursula Brangwen craved for this dark knowledge symbolized by a host of horses. That was fulfilled perhaps at a hallucinatory state against the background of a pastoral world similar to that of Italy in *The Lost Girl*. Like Ursula Brangwen, Alvina Houghton is also a woman of middle-class origin. But she gladly embraced intuitive life, preferred a remote pastoral place in Italy and ultimately accepted primitivism instead of the life of the mind imposed upon by the industrial world.

*The Lost Girl*, at the outset appears intricate due to the introduction of a variety of minor characters. But it is 'unilinear in construction with no complication of plot' (Pinion, F.B.; 1978, 181). The mining townlet Woodhouse in the novel is Eastwood and the social setting is the same as that of *The White Peacock* or *Sons and Lovers*. But it looks different simply because Lawrence is not part of it and the portrayal is from outside :

A well-established society is Woodhouse, full of fine shades, ranging from the dark of coal-dust to grit of stonemason and sawdust of timber-merchant, through the lustre of lard and butter and meat, to the perfume of the chemist and the disinfectant of the doctor, on to the serene gold-tarnish of bank-managers, cashiers for the firm, clergymen and such-like, as far as the automobile refulgence of the general-manager of all the collieries: (*The Lost Girl*, 1981, 1; Hereafter by page number).

But Lawrence is now critical of the quality of life it offers. Here Alvina failed to earn sufficient means to afford her livelihood and had to compromise much to her dignity. But again from here she got the impetus to fulfil the mission of her life. Finally, she led her conjugal life at a remote place in Italy opposite in spirit to her birth place;

It seems there are places which resist us, which have the power to overthrow our psychic being. It seems as if every country had its potent negative centres, localities which savagely and triumphantly refuse our living culture. And Alvina had struck one of these, here on the edge of the Abruzzi, (314).

At the core of the novel is the marriage of Alvina and Ciccio. Alvina is a middle-class woman of the civilized modern society and Ciccio, a 'barbaric' Italian with dark physical vigour and apparently their marriage is just impossible. But this is a vital part of Lawrence's vision. In his first novel, *The White Peacock*, we hear from Annable that 'all civilization was the painted fungus of rotteness' and his advice is to 'be a good animal', and to 'trust to your animal instinct'(W.P.). Lawrence felt a sense of crisis which the Western civilization as a whole was undergoing. Although he never wanted the retrace of modern civilization to the past, he felt the necessity for the primal experience to fight modern deadness. Lawrence said :

We do not need to live the past over again. Our darkest tissues are twisted in this old tribal experience, our warmest blood came out of the old tribal fire—-. But I don't want to go back to them---. I never want to deny them or break with them. But there is no going back. My way is my own. (*Phoenix*, 99).

In *The Lost Girl*, Alvina plainly discarded her higher self<sup>s</sup> of moral,

intellectual and social awareness and upheld the lower self of physical instinct. As she was extraordinary she followed the call of her dark self the real self, and married Ciccio.

Alvina Houghton's upbringing for the first twenty years was rather simple with no remarkable event. While being brought up under the care of Miss Frost, her governess, Alvina saw the pathetic life-style of her heart-stricken neurotic mother. Simultaneously, she saw her father's successive failures in business. These bitter experiences provided her with courage and cunning endurance to break with the dead and dull situation. The temptations of Woodhouse, the constrictions of Alvina's sheltered living and paradoxically, her derisive attitude towards the youth who yearned to love her - all this created in her the rebellious defiance to reject the so-called modern society. At twentythree, she met Graham, an Australian of 'medium height, dark in colouring, with dark eyes'(22) who had taken her medical degree from Edinburgh. Alvina developed an intimacy with him but when she had to decide whether she would marry him or not, she was most obtrusively stopped by Miss Frost. Miss Frost implied that Alvina did not and could not love him because Miss Frost herself could not. This gave rise in Alvina a desperate woman, primitive and sensual. There was an 'old, derisive look at the back of her eyes, a look of old knowledge and deliberate derision'(21). She yearned to slip out of this weary situation. Meanwhile, she availed herself of a six-month training of a maternity nurse at Islington. It provided her with not only a temporary relief from the humdrum routine at Woodhouse, but also a new understanding. She was now

critical of the human situation itself :

Why have standards and regulation pattern ? Why have a human criterion? There's the point! Why in the name of all the free heavens, have human criteria? Why? Simply for bullying and narrowness. (46).

As Alvina was dissatisfied with everything that is modern, she preferred 'primitivism' both in life and in culture. The result is her failure in two love affairs, one with Albert Witham and the other with Dr. Mitchell. Alvina was eager to meet Albert Witham, a thirty-year old scholar of Oxford. But her short-lived relationship with him only confirmed the impression that marriage with him would be nothing but a repetition of what her neurotic mother had experienced. Although her father appreciated Albert, she found him a cerebral sort of man who 'did not think about what he was feeling and --- did not feel what he was thinking about'. (72). At the same time, Alvina was more interested in Arthur Witham, Albert's brother. On one evening, while Arthur was working on an organ loft, he fell down from it and was injured. Now, when Alvina was engaged in nursing him, the way he pressed her hands on his shin revealed to Alvina something intimate that was more than mere friendship. She was impressed by a 'secret determinedness' and a 'closeness' in Arthur, but at the same time was disillusioned at finding him selfish and egoistic never caring to understand her.

At that time, Alvina's father James Houghton called on a Red Indian troupe, 'Natch-Kee-Tewara' consisting of four young men and a woman, Madam Rochard. Here, in this troupe, Alvina met an Italian, Francesco Marasca or Frank, nicknamed

Ciccio, a youth 'fairly tall but loosely built --- with slightly sloping shoulders'(127). Lawrence modelled Ciccio on a native of rural Italy. For the nickname, Lawrence borrowed the name of the proprietor of the Fontana Vecchia, Francesco Cacopardo Ciccio, about whose romance Lawrence wrote to Amy Lowell in a letter on 26 June 1919. Ciccio was, to the modern, civilized people, a human animal. His appearance gives the impression that he was either degraded or backward in culture : 'His long, fine nose, his rather long, rounded chin and curling lips seemed (to be) refined through ages of forgotten culture'(160). He was more physical than cerebral, a man of action. His intimate talk with Alvina was rare, but what he wished to communicate was even plain from his appearance and physical gestures. Alvina loved him and let him leave Woodhouse only after he promised to meet her again. The relationship that began to develop between Alvina and Ciccio was 'a profound and dangerous interrelationship'(62), where 'the heart hears the heart'(146). Behind the veil of Ciccio's brutal appearance, she felt convinced of his ultimate good nature. He seemed to her to be the only passionately good-natured man she had ever seen. Ciccio was the first Lawrentian hero with dark, primitive physical vigour, a forerunner of Oliver Mellors, the hero of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, not in respect of genesis but, category. Lawrence's idea of the hero with a dark sensual power, an anti-hero in modern sense, initiated a new direction towards primitivism in his writing. This revolutionary idea of the hero defied socio-moral code and convention. Virginia Woolf noticed the emergence of this new tendency in Lawrence which is evident from what she comments on *The Lost Girl*. It is, she says, 'either a

postscript or a prelude' (Drapper, R.P., 1970, 143).

*The Lost Girl* embodies Lawrence's doctrine of silence, a state of sensual understanding, non-verbal and non-mental. It also marks his break with the past. In *The Rainbow*, Ursula's revolt against social maladies came out mainly through her expressions of discord and contradiction against the views and ideas of Skrebensky whom she rejected after a prolonged love relationship. In the present novel, Alvina never developed a prolonged love relationship with either Albert or Dr. Mitchell, who were, like Skrebensky, representatives of modern society; rather she tactfully evaded them. But this does not imply that Alvina was an escapist who dreaded modern youths and modern England which she finally left for a primitive place in Italy. She was a desperate woman, perceptual rather than conceptual, and a silent revolutionist who was always seeking to fulfil her deep sensual desires through silent physical communion instead of a lot of circumlocution. It is a process that Lawrence fully explored in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

After Alvina's father's death, Ciccio and Alvina met each other face to face at the door of Alvina's room. As soon as their eyes met, an understanding seemed to have instantly developed between them : 'His face too was closed and expressionless. But in his eyes, which kept hers, there was a dark flicker of ascendancy'(175). He suddenly asked with confidence : "You love me?-Yes?-Yes?"--in a voice that seemed like a palpable contact on her.

"Yes" she whispered---' (176).

Ciccio's sudden outburst charmed her, touching the strings of her secret

soul. She confessed to Madam later : “Siamo de accordo.”(we are agreed) came the voice of Ciccio. — “I don’t know” she said vaguely. “Have I” and she looked at him’(178). Her confession was not direct but it was enough to betray herself.

Alvina joined the Natchas as a pianist more for her love for Ciccio than for her livelihood. But she found that ‘they had horribly low standards - such low standards - not only of morality, but of life altogether’(209). So she decided to keep clear of the Natchas and as much of Ciccio. But her struggle to come out free from Ciccio’s spell only further intensified her love for him. She returned to her Manchester House with Ciccio. She “clung to Ciccio’s dark, despised foreign nature. She loved it, she worshipped it, she defied all the other world” (215). Later, she declared to Miss Pinnegar, her second governess, that ‘perhaps in the end I shall marry him’(217). It was unthinkable for Miss Pinnegar who called her a ‘declassé’, ‘a lost-girl’. But Alvina’s response was more towards her inner impulse than social or material status. She thought Ciccio understood her physically. But the low standard of the Natchas, quite unsuitable to her, forced her leave it and join a nursing job in a Hospital. Here she met another modern aristocrat, Dr. Mitchell, a Scotch ‘about fifty years old, tall, largely built with a good figure but with extraordinarily large feet and hands.’(253). His face was red and clean-shaven, his eyes blue, his teeth very good. He asked her to be engaged to him, tactfully creating a situation that compelled her to be so. However, Alvina observed him to be a hectoring person who, when he was crossed, became unendurable with a devil’s temper. While she had been with him, she felt, both physically and mentally, more depressed than

aroused. Indeed Dr. Mitchell was a gentleman but he was consciously so and Alvina knew 'if a man is conscious of being a gentleman, he is bound to be a little less than a man'(257). The engagement ring that Dr. Mitchell offered her was to her superficial and meaningless because 'he wanted her to be always there. And so he craved for marriage to possess her entirely, and to have her always there with him, so that he was never alone'(pp.270-71). It was for Alvina a caged life that she never could accept. Meanwhile, travelling with Dr. Mitchell, she saw Ciccio at a railway station in the fatal year 1914 when the First World War had just begun disturbing everything even the strolling life-style of Ciccio's Natchas. Her and Ciccio's eyes met for a secret understanding that gave Alvina a new turn in her life. She was now in a dilemma. If she married Ciccio, she would be lost, but her marriage with Dr. Mitchell might recuperate her social status and position. But she could not accept him as husband for he was, as she observed, arrogant and haughty, and when he was thwarted, he shouted her down rendering her dead in her spirit. Two isolated, passages, one of Dr. Mitchell and another of Ciccio, may show us the difference of their attitude to Alvina :

"Come" he (Dr. Mitchell) said, beckoning for her to give her hand. With a barely perceptible shake of the head, she refused, staring at him all the time. His ungovernable temper got the better of him. He saw red, and without knowing, seized her by the shoulder, swung her back, and thrust her, pressed her against the wall as if he would push her through it. His face was blind with anger, like a hot, red sun. Suddenly, almost instantaneously, he came to himself again and drew back his hands, shaking his right hand as if some rat had bitten it. "I'm sorry!" he shouted--- He dithered before her.(267-68)

Instantly falling to his knees before her, Dr. Mitchell begged for her pardon and her love", forgive me! love me!"(268). Now this is the way of Dr. Mitchell, a modern gentleman, to possess a woman simultaneously frightening and cajoling her, a tyrannical act with no call of love from within. But Ciccio's approach was quite different :

"Allaye!" he (Ciccio) said caressing her hand, kissing it with a soft, passionate, yearning mouth. Alvina shivered. Quickly he opened the gate and drew her through. He drew her into the shadow of the wall, and put his arms round her, lifting her from her feet with passionate yearning. "Allaye" he said "I love you, Allaye, my beautiful, Allaye, I love you, Allaye!". He held her fast to his breast and began to walk away with her. His throbbing muscular power seemed completely to envelop her. (278)

The way Ciccio expressed his passion for Alvina is straight-forward, originating from the heart. Alvina too could not keep herself to his call. The two directions, one forward to recuperate her social status and position, and the other backward, to the state of her physical self only, were now open to her. She was in a dilemma. But all on a sudden without completely realizing what she was going to do, she telegraphed Ciccio to come to her. This sudden act implies the defeat of her lofty self to her dark physical self. She married Ciccio and accepted the atavistic life-style without compunction. She became Mrs. Marasca and gladly swallowed 'the bitter cherry'(289).

In the opinion of Moynahan, Alvina's career was an arduous one. It was impeded yet evinced a triumphant ascent from death to life. Her instinct made her sink in the estimate of her so-called respectable fellow citizens, but thereby she

escaped the worn-out family tradition, best symbolized by the invalid mother with her neurotic heart disease (Maynahan, J. 1966, 124). She extricated herself from the drab circumstances of her life, but in Moynahan's opinion, not by rising above it but by sinking below. For Alvina, however, this does not apply. For her, to be related to the instinctual substratum of life is to be related to the reality of one's self, the 'blood knowledge'. For Lawrence too nothing can be more authentic.

With Ciccio Alvina left England that appeared to her 'like a long ash-grey coffin'(294), thereby shed the repressive and mechanized bourgeois life of industrial Midland. She was happy with the outer world : 'whatever life may be, and whatever horror men have made of it, the world is a lovely place, a magic place, something to marvel over. The world is an amazing place'(299). Alvina loved to be an adventurer. She felt both frightened and charmed by the new alien place, Pescocalascio, a primitive village in Italy. Originally Pescocalascio was Picinisco in the province of Caserta where the Lawrences spent a short time in the winter of 1919, and a vivid description of its icy and comfortless grandeur is on record in his letter to Rosalind on 16 December 1919 :

It is a bit staggeringly primitive. You cross a great stony river bed, then an icy river on a plank, then climb unfootable paths----. The village 2 miles away, a sheer scramble - no road whatever - the market at Atina, 5 miles away - perfectly wonderful to look at, costume and colour--- the sun shines hot and lovely, but the nights freeze : the mountains round are snowy and very beautiful. --- I believe you would enjoy it here. (Lett, 601).

Lawrence seemed to have relieved the experience through his fictional counterpart. While he left it in a fortnight, Alvina spontaneously decided to live

there. It is because Lawrence only turned his imagination towards primitivism, whereas Alvina her life itself. Alvina observed Italy as a vivid and colourful counterpart of England in the same continent of Europe. She was happy and fulfilled there. Her pleasure and satisfaction were expressed symbolically through the spring flowers, the green silken corn and maize :

The loveliness of April came, with hot sunshine---. Alvina was amazed. The burning day quite carried her away. She loved it : it made her quite careless about everything. She was just swept along in the powerful flood of the sunshine.(334).

Now the paradox is that Alvina was not lost, rather she focused herself. She was out to 'affirm her freedom, expressivity and most of all, passion' (Brown, K. 1990, 58). Her flight to Italy was an escape to a life of primitive simplicity and natural instinct. But it does not imply that she was forced to live there 'to work out her destiny'(Hough, G., 1961, 116). Her decision was spontaneous and she was free either to live there or to leave it :

She had sixty pounds of her own money, always intact in the little case. And after all, the highway beyond the river led to Ossana, and Ossana gave excess to the railway, and the railway would take her anywhere. (331).

But she would not leave Italy. She loved it. Its unravished natural beauty made her life open and free. What England and its bourgeois society failed to provide, she found in Italy. Ciccio was now more fond of her than before; his love was genuine; 'she knew how he loved her - almost inhumanly, elementally without communication'(321), and his passion 'haunted her like a dark angel'(321). Although she saved herself having fled the toils of modern civilization, she could not

avoid its fatal effects that manifested in the form of the First World War, a 'colossal idiocy' of modern men. Ciccio, who was afraid of the war and was doubtful of his return from it, had yet to join it. But Alvina never lost her faith; she remained optimistic about Ciccio's return :

"If you make up your mind to come back, you will come back.

We have our fate in our hands"she said. He smiled slowly.

"You think so?"he said.

---"I know it" she said.

"All right" he answered. (338-39).

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