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Bernard-Jean Ramadier

1 "Tickets, Please" is one of the short stories in the collection England My England, published in 1922. It is a simple anecdote told in deceptively simple language; a young inspector of the tramway system seduces all the conductresses on the Midlands line. One of them, Annie, eventually falls for him on a special occasion, but she wants more than a flirtation. As she becomes more and more possessive, the young man lets her down and picks up another girl: Annie then decides to take revenge. As all the other conductresses more or less consciously bear a grudge against the seducer, they set a trap for him; one evening they manage to attract him into their waiting-room at the depot where they molest him. The girls' pretext for harassing him is to make him choose one of them for his wife: eventually he spitefully chooses Annie who, far from being proud and contented, falls prey to conflicting feelings. Freed at last, the inspector walks away alone in the night while the girls leave the depot one by one "with mute, stupefied faces" (346)

2 Yet, for all its apparent simplicity, the plot is as baffling for the reader as their newly-acquired identity is for the girls. There is more than meets the eye in the story: it was written during the First World War and it uses the moral and social upheaval brought about by the conflict, insisting on the psychological consequences of the change in women's status resulting from employment and following their fight to be given social recognition and the vote. At the time, that new social role of women was regarded as a form of progress by the male-dominated society and by some women, as Lawrence makes critically clear. The girl conductors benefit from their new status in the microcosm of the tram system before becoming aware of their real second-rate status when it comes to direct human relationship. Living under the delusion of being real actors recognised as fully responsible human beings, they are brutally shown by the chief inspector's offhand attitude how wrong they have been. Their subsequent violent reaction reveals their deep frustration and the ambiguous relationships between the sexes, marred and warped by progress.
Like the girls, the miners are both beneficiaries and victims of progress; they form the social background of the story, at the same time realistic and symbolical as the introduction of the short story shows. The miners’ economic function is laden with an implicit symbolical value; extracting coal to fuel the industry is like raping the earth by plundering its riches, which has far-reaching consequences for human beings. German mythology provides a similar image of aggression when dwarves wrest gold from the earth, turning the latter into a wasteland where spirituality and transcendentalism are dead. In "Tickets, Please", the incidental effects of progress on humanity are shown through the Lawrentian central theme of the relationship between men and women. Here, the weaker sex and the stronger sex are respectively and ironically embodied by Annie Stone and John Thomas Raynor.

The girl conductors are "fearless young hussies" (335) who bravely face the dangers of the tram journeys and the male passengers’ advances; as such, they belong to a different class of women whose job is exceptional: "This, the most dangerous tram-service in England, as the authorities themselves declare, with pride, is entirely conducted by girls". (335) Such a positive and indirectly self-congratulatory statement is immediately tempered with the grimly humorous description of the girls, transformed into hybrids:

In their ugly blue uniform, skirts up to their knees, shapeless old peaked caps on their heads, they have all the sang-froid of an old non-commissioned officer. (335)

One of Lawrence’s key-words—ugly—is used here to describe the devalued official uniform worn by the girls, just as the word is repeated to stigmatise the industrial landscape crossed by the tram in alliterative phrases ("long ugly villages," "last little ugly place of industry," 334). Resembling transvestites in their ugly uniforms, the conductors retain only a bawdy sort of femininity with their "skirts up to their knees." They are the drivers’ fit counterparts; the latter are "men unfit for active service: cripples and hunchbacks" (334) who compensate for their physical deficiencies by taking foolish risks while others, effeminate, "creep forward in terror." (335) Excessive prudence or rashness betrays their deep imbalance, a defect reinforced by the chaotic rhythm of the syntax in the long opening paragraphs of the short story. They lack the "sang-froid" which characterizes the girls, as if they might just as well swap jobs with them. A parallel can be drawn between the drivers' loss of manhood and the conductresses’ loss of womanhood. Lawrence makes it clear that the price to pay for social progress is the loss of gender differentiation: the girls assume a new authority, which turns them into sham soldiers ("non-commissioned officer," 335) with a masculine, sailor-like behaviour:

this roving life aboard the car gives them a sailor’s dash and recklessness. What matter how they behave when the ship is in port? Tomorrow they will be aboard again. (336)

Annie Stone is one of them and her name, which is evocative of a hard, mineral substance, is in keeping with her inflexible, adamant way of asserting her brand new soldier-like authority. Lawrence ironically insists on the girl’s commitment to her job through tapinosis, referring to the Greek battle of the "hot gates": "The step of that tram-car is her Thermopylae." (335) In order to show the ambiguity of the relationship between men and women, the young inspector John Thomas Raynor is introduced as a central device to the meaningful melodrama that gradually develops. "A fine cock-of-the-walk he was": the young man’s numerous conquests make him an object for scandal; always on the lookout for "pastures new," he considers himself as the proprietor of the girl conductors ("his old flock," 340). This vocabulary aims at revealing his simplistic
approach to his relationship with his subordinates; he is reduced to a shallow figure of a man, meant to embody a male-dominated system that gives women the outward attributes of authority within the limits of the tram car and under man’s supervision. Annie’s personality is more complex; she has two faces, a superficial one on board the tram and a deep, instinctive one outside the system. Impervious to one another in the first half of the short story, the two identities then begin to overlap. As a conductor she takes her job seriously, which increases her natural shrewishness and consequently she first adopts the same attitude with John Thomas Raynor as with the other male passengers: "Annie [...] was something of a Tartar, and her sharp tongue had kept John Thomas at arm’s length for many months" (336), before allowing a gradual complicity, both intimate and distant to develop between them:

In this subtle antagonism they knew each other like old friends, they were as shrewd with one another almost as man and wife. (337)

Each of them knows the rules of the game and plays them on board the tram within the frame of a relationship superficially liberalised by their respective functions and their young age; however, Annie’s feminine instincts and impulse are still there, to be given full play on a fit occasion.

There is a drastic change of attitude between Annie-the-conductor and the girl who has a night off and goes alone to the November fun fair. Despite the "sad decline in brilliance and luxury," (337) many people are there for entertainment, and the general illusory, transient atmosphere of the event is indicated by the expression "artificial wartime substitutes" (337), describing ersatz coconuts. In an environment whose hostility is suggested by the expressions "drizzling ugly night" (337) and "black, drizzling darkness" (338) introducing and closing the fun fair scene, the place, for all its shabbiness, is a fit place for a love encounter; furthermore, "To be at the Statutes without a fellow was no fun." Lawrence explicitly links the change of place with the change of rules which at the fun fair define the status of men and women; the latter resume their traditional passive attitude, whereas men assert their long-established economic superiority. Annie is no longer the woman in charge; she has left her uniform to don her best clothes, more appropriate in this place where it is advisable to observe a ritualistic form of behaviour to be in "the right style" (337), which is in fact an intimation of submissiveness. The new quality of the relationship between Annie and John Thomas is emphasized by the repetition of "round"; like the world, "The roundabouts were veering round", and the fair, despite its sham, allows a re-enactment of the real positions of men and women in society:

John Thomas made her stay on for the next round. And therefore she could hardly for shame repulse him when he put his arm round her and drew her a little nearer to him, in a very warm and cuddly manner. (337)

John Thomas’s permissive attitude, accepted by Annie as a matter of course, is an implicit denial of the reality of the social progress giving women authority and autonomy. The conformist rules at the Statutes Fair are those of the society of that time: men pay for women, thus resuming in civil activities the domination temporarily handed over to women in the tram service. In their Dictionnaire des symboles, Chevalier and Gheerbrant see the conductor as a figure of the impersonal self, both a judge and a sanction whose function evokes strictness and clockwork precision, while the ticket suggests a give and take deal. In that symbolical reading, the title "Tickets, Please" announces the girls’ deep desire for real reciprocity in their relationship with men; in the reality of their daily
routine aboard the tram, because they embody regulation, the conductors' "peremptory" request is their "ticket" to respect and consideration. As a conductor, you are handed the ticket whereas as a merry-go-round rider you have to hand over the ticket or token. On the Dragons, Annie is completely passive because she has no direct part in the exchange; her partner pays for the round and hands the ticket over, thus buying the girl's complaisance: "John Thomas paid each time, so she could but be complaisant."

In this budding affair, both of them find what they were looking for in an egocentric way; their flirtation does not imply love as hinted by the use of "liked"; it remains foreplay, as superficial as the setting, the contacts remain shallow and go no further than kisses on the lips, that "terrain de la sensualité permise" as Bachelard has it. Their attraction for one another is genuine and uncomplicated at first: "Annie liked John Thomas a good deal. She felt so rich and warm in herself whenever he was near", "And John Thomas really liked Annie, more than usual. The soft, melting way in which she could flow into a fellow, as if she melted into his very bones, was something rare and good," (339) but that sensual convergence, which seems to announce a future harmonious development, is only momentary. John Thomas and Annie, although momentarily brought together, remain poles apart; their affair is doomed as their symbolical positions on the wooden horses makes clear. That merry-go-round (open and lit, contrary to the dragons and the cinema) is a mechanistic representation of the world and society; on it each one instinctively finds his or her place: "she sat sideways, towards him, on the inner horse", "He [...] sat astride on the outer horse" (338); they share the same circular movement ("round" comes again twice), but while Annie sits near the centre, John Thomas chooses a horse on the outer edge of the platform, to perform eccentric antics on it:

Round they spun and heaved, in the light. And round he swung on his wooden steed, flinging one leg across her mount, and perilously tipping up and down, across the space, half lying back, laughing at her. (338)

Spatial position and behaviour are directly linked: Annie's quiet side-saddle riding contrasts sharply with the man's eccentricity. The girl is concerned about her appearance, ("she was afraid her hat was on one side") and John Thomas plays his part as a perfect suitor, winning hat-pins for her, thus re-enacting primitive man's gift-giving to his female companion. This is only, however, superficial behaviour, for he intends to preserve his marginality. He does not want to enter the circle of a complete sentimental relationship, characterised by possession and mechanical circularity: "he had no idea of becoming an all-round individual to her". (339)

The lovers are not mere anecdotal characters: they are given significance by Lawrence's irony and use of onomastics. Like Annie, the inspector's function and name mark him out; he has authority over the girl conductors, he has "clean hand[s]" (337) unlike the miners, and he is neither a cripple nor a hunchback, unlike the drivers, which makes him desirable. As for his name —John Thomas Raynor— the reader's attention is attracted by the first part of it with reference to Lady Chatterley's Lover, where the same "John Thomas" is used by Mellors to designate his penis. Fully exploited in the novel, the sexual connotation of the name is used here to suggest that the young inspector is only a regressed predecessor of the game-keeper and his natural, blooming phallus, which is confirmed by the author's spelling out that the young man is "always called John Thomas, except sometimes, in malice, Coddy" (336). The explicit nickname given to the ladykiller is a diminishing alteration of "codpiece" in order to minimize the phallic identity of the character. Yet, John Thomas wants to keep his status of object of desire and as Annie
becomes more and more possessive, he shies away from further involvement in a love story; after the parallelism of the first feelings ("Annie liked John Thomas," "John Thomas really liked Annie") comes divergence: "She did not want a mere nocturnal presence," "John Thomas intended to remain a nocturnal presence" (339). The girl wants to go beyond superficial sexual gratification to reach a complete relationship reconciling the diurnal and nocturnal phases of human personality: "Annie wanted to consider him a person, a man; she wanted to take an intelligent interest in him, and to have an intelligent response." To use Lawrentian terminology, Annie is then developing her "knowing Self," i.e., her conscious ego, and by developing the latter, she causes her instinct for possession to grow: "The possessive female was aroused in Annie". That desire is similar to that of Hermione in *Women in Love*, as Birkin has it: "You want to clutch things and have them in your power" and it is linked with the repetition of the name of the fair in which the norm refused by John Thomas is inscribed; "The Statutes" connotes law, regulation, code, and more precisely marriage, which remains unspoken up to the dialogue between the man, Annie, and Muriel Baggaley:

"Come on, John Thomas! Come on! Choose!" said Annie.
"What are you after? Open the door," he said.
"We shan’t—not till you’ve chosen!" said Muriel.
"Chosen what?" he said.
"Chosen the one you’re going to marry," she replied. (342)

In the central scene at the Statutes, Lawrence gives John Thomas enough rope to hang himself: on the horses, the inspector's mount bears the name of "Black Bess," the mare that carried Dick Turpin to York, where he was hanged, and in English as in French, hanging evokes marriage. On the other hand, by entering the girls' room, he unconsciously walks into the lion's mouth and becomes the conductresses' plaything ("he was their sport," 343) and their prey: in that scene, the parts of the cat and the mouse, as portrayed in a famous poster of the time are reversed: first "at bay", the man is compared to an animal: "He lay [...] as an animal lies when it is defeated" / "he started to struggle as an animal might." (343) Their will for revenge sets free deep forces in the girls: "Wildfire", evoking the final burst of violence, was the name of Annie’s horse. The adjective "wild" is repeated five times in the short sentences used to describe the physical assault against John Thomas ("wild creatures," "in a wild frenzy of fury," "wild blows," "their hair wild," "the wild faces of the girls," 343) to stress the young women's metamorphosis and to throw a different light on the scene. In the physical assault against John Thomas, staged like a hunt, a dream scene can be read between the lines, the Freudian Other Scene, in which the girls' unconscious desire to own the man, to "hold" him, emerges. Annie's desire has been frustrated ("she had been so very sure of holding him," 339) and changed into manifest aggressivity. What the text shows us really is an aggravated date rape: an over-confident victim willingly walking into a self-set trap, a gang of aggressors, mounting tension in the dialogues and the final breaking loose of instincts.

Blinded by conceit, John Thomas behaves boorishly, declaring: "There's no place like home, girls" (341); his personal system of references is superficial and simplistic; he is unable to understand the change in the girls' attitude, motivated by frustration and anger. Still clinging to his position as a male and an inspector, he does not perceive that despite their uniforms marking them out as guardians of order and discipline, the conductors are about to yield to instinct and give vent to their animus. The words he uses reveal his misunderstanding of the real situation, as he first tries to place his gaolers back
into the context of service and reality ("We've got to be up in good time in the morning," he said, in the benevolent official manner," (341) before assuming his inspector's status ("get back to your senses." He spoke with official authority." 343). Both attempts are ineffectual because by appealing to the girls' reason, he uses a system of references ("intelligent response," 339) which he has himself refused to endorse ("He hated intelligent interest," 339). Similarly, the huntresses no longer recognize his social identity and authority, inseparable as they are from his uniform: he has taken off his coat, his cap has been slapped away and his jacket and shirt have been torn. Progressively downgraded from his rank, held to the floor, John Thomas falls silent and his half-nakedness, his forced immobility and muteness eventually change the scene into a metonymy of impotence.

Symbolically, there are five girls besides Annie (six is a number also evoking union and revolt) who outnumber the man inspector and relish their revenge; but they dominate John Thomas by force of numbers and paradoxically it is Annie who breaks the unity of their group --thus allowing their victim to regain control, to have the last word-- by forcing him to answer the obsessive question. Having regained his status as subject, the man chooses Annie and so marks her out as his favourite enemy, as if the relationship of a man and woman in a couple could only end in struggle, as if the only fit rhyme for wife were strife. Thus the dialogue between Annie, John Thomas and Laura Sharp finds a justification:

"tha's got to take one of us!"
"Nay [...] " he said [...] "I don't want to make enemies."
"You'd only make one," said Annie.
"The chosen one," added Laura. (342)

The brutal ending of the short story is the result of the combined effects of the environment and dubious progress: the conductors reenact the mechanical violence that surrounds them; John Thomas crystallises men's social domination and by aggressing him, the young women compensate for the frustration they experience from the passive role society confines them to in spite of the apparent emancipation it bestows on them by giving them jobs. In its excess, their violent assault against John Thomas is similar to the tram drivers' erratic behaviour; in Lawrence's symbol system, it has the same significance as Gudrun's reaction before Gerald Crich's mare, opposing a violent movement with a similarly violent movement.

The war emphasizes the dubious quality of the technical and social progress that the story exposes; the first world war sets the background of the three main scenes, denouncing and amplifying man's inability to find an agreement in a pacific way and to use technical progress for the benefit of mankind. The backlash or after shock of the event is to give rights to the weak which had hitherto been refused to them; for Lawrence, this social progress is dubious: instead of promoting order and harmony, it causes degeneration and regression by altering natural relationships between people. The girl conductors have been contaminated by the superficial order of social progress and the disorder it finally brings about; socially promoted by their job, Annie and her likes are only able to play their part fully while on the tram; in the general outside movement of society, men remain in control, as the scene at the Statutes shows. Because she is more proud, more possessive, and also harsher than the other girls, Annie Stone inspires them to revolt against John Thomas, both the emblem and instrument of alienating progress.
By allowing the obscure, unbridled forces that characterize the outside ("Outside was the darkness and lawlessness of wartime," 340) into their well-protected, "cosy" world, the women, who have already lost their natural specificity through their uniforms and function, lose it now through violence. Changing genders is a regression underlined by Lawrence through the use of "strange" (343) and "strangely" (343) to describe the girl conductors and the glare in their eyes, and the use of "unnatural" and "supernatural" to qualify the strength they derive from their number.

In his great novels, Lawrence "vise à établir une éthique à rebours du conditionnement socio-historique" and in "Tickets, Please" he clings to the cultural primitivism that informs his works, showing through the story of Annie and John Thomas Raynor the authentic sadness he deeply felt as he witnessed the disfigurement of his country—England my England—and the perverted relationships between people as a consequence of misused progress. The unbridgeable gap between the protagonists is eventually described through their walking out in the night, one at a time, imprisoned in his or her egoism and oblivious to the rest. Before this final definitive divorce, two images give a palpable reality to the opposition between men and women's aspirations, reducing them to physical phenomena of attraction and repulsion caused by an excessive temperature ("Annie let go of [John Thomas] as if he had been a hot coal," 344) or by incompatible polarities ("The girls moved away from contact with him as if he had been an electric wire." 345). Coal and electricity thus reappear in the text to remind us that for Lawrence, life is a self-regenerating movement, as natural as Gudrun's love-dance, and opposed to the "self exhaustive motion" of a society spiritually bled dry by mechanical progress. "Tickets, Please" reads like an illustration of the criticism in Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, in which the novelist sharply judges the outcome of progress: "the whole of modern life is a shrieking failure. It is our own fault."

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

2. Women's struggle for their rights and a real social status was at times very violent; in August and November 1913, as he visited Scotland, Asquith was twice molested by suffragettes; arson developed: letters were set alight in pillar-boxes and buildings were burnt. The same year, Mrs Pankhurst was tried after a bomb attack on the Surrey home of chancellor David Lloyd George.
4. See the use of "impudent", 336 and 341, which echoes "hussies", p. 335
5. Italics mine.
11. In 1913-1914, the « Cat and Mouse » Act was promulgated, enabling the release of hunger-strikers so that they did not die in prison but leaving them liable to be rearrested later for the same offenses. A poster was issued, denouncing the cruelty of the Liberal government; it showed a huge Tom-cat holding in its fangs a tiny woman girt with a WSPU banner.
12. Lawrence was himself aggessed by women: at sixteen, he was working at a Nottingham artificial limb factory when his women fellow workers, excited by his feminine looks, physically assaulted him to check his sex. *Cf. F. J. Temple, David Herbert Lawrence*, Paris: Seghers, 1960, p. 37.
13. Representing six antinomic and complementary emotions, anger, joy, desire, pain, hatred, love. The girls' names, like Annie's (Muriel Baggaley, Nora Purdy, Laura Sharp, Polly Birkin and Emma Houselay) are not chosen at random by Lawrence. Another girl is mentioned, Cissy Meakin, but she has left the service.
14. This is implied by the narrator's commentary: "In this subtle antagonism they knew each other like old friends, they were as shrewd with one another almost as man and wife. p. 337.
17. The desperate exclamation is repeated in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, op. cit., chapitre XI, p. 162.
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