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Don't Cry for Me Old Bolsover
England In and After the Great War with D.H. Lawrence

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*Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.*

*So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.*

Alfred Lord Tennyson,
In Memoriam A.H.H.

Near the conclusion of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, having fled to her own room against the first intimation that Gerald Crich intends to inflict on her some physical harm, Gudrun Brangwen contemptuously summarizes her final understanding of the nature of Gerald's feelings for her. "[L]ike a child that is famished crying for the breast," she thinks. Consciously invoking Tennyson and George Eliot, she laments: "What then! Was she his mother? Had she asked for a child, whom she must nurse through the nights, for her lover.... An infant crying in the night, this Don Juan.... But how she hated the infant crying in the night.... So manly by day, yet all the while, such a crying of infants in the night." (*Women*, 466.)

At the conclusive, dramatic moment of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, when Clifford Chatterley receives Lady Chatterley's letter asking for a divorce, Clifford breaks down "like a hysterical child." Mrs. Bolton, whose relationship to Clifford has slowly evolved over the latter course of the novel, from that of nurse, to bosom companion, to virtual wife, takes Clifford, weeping, to her breast and he "put his arms round her and clung to her like a child, wetting the bib of her starched white apron, and the bosom of her pale-blue dress, with his tears." "Oh Sir Clifford!" she wonders. "Oh high and mighty Chatterley's! Is this what you've come down to!" And in case we hadn't gotten the point altogether, Lawrence's narrative voice chimes in to inform us that "After this, Clifford became like a child with Mrs. Bolton." (Lady, 290-91.)

In the figure of these two men, Gerald Crich and Clifford Chatterley, pillars of pre-War society, masters of great houses, commanders of sprawling industrial works, reduced to blubbing, needy children, D.H. Lawrence tells a story of the devolution of England from empire to mere nation, its descent from a land of "living thoughts" and "pure happiness" into a measly field for "sordid and foul mechanicalness" (Women, 355). Gerald suffering a psychic wound, the "strange, infinitely-sensitive opening of his soul" (446) inflicted on the altar of Gudrun Brangwen; Clifford "shoved into war" in obeisance to his father's "for England and Lloyd George" obstinacy in the "terrible year 1917" and coming home literally "smashed," as if from some over-boisterous dinner party (Lady, 11-12): if these men were the representative men of England, England – for Lawrence – had suffered a shock from which it was grotesquely ill-equipped to ever recover.

Was it the war? Or were these wounds to "English manhood," as it were, something more elementally, historically, culturally, psychologically inevitable? *Women in*

Love, the earlier and actual war-time novel, is more obtuse on the question, full of an apocalyptic psychological foreboding that has no such clear-cut historical or political corollary as the war itself: it is Birkin, in the book's cashiered "Prologue," recognizing "that he was on the point either of breaking, becoming a thing, losing his integral being, or else of becoming insane" (*Women*, 510) that constitutes the essence of the book's "crisis" (pun intended). By the time of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the war and its consequences can be addressed more literally. If we stipulate, for a moment longer, that Clifford Chatterley can be read as an "embodiment" of England, Lady Chatterley herself suggests that the novel can be read as a contemplation of a kind of national post-traumatic stress disorder (if one will forgive the diagnostic anachronism, as PTSD seems to fit so much better what Connie is describing than the contemporary appellation "shell shock"):

...when the emotional soul receives a wounding shock, which does not kill the body, the soul seems to recover as the body recovers. But this is only appearance. It is, really, only the mechanism of reassumed habit. Slowly, slowly the wound to the soul begins to make itself felt, like a bruise which only slowly deepens in its terrible ache, till it fills all the psyche. And when we think we have recovered and forgotten, it is then that the terrible after-effects have to be encountered at their worst. *So it was with Clifford*. (Lady, 49, emphasis mine.)

"The cataclysm has happened," Lawrence tells us at the novel's very outset, and provocatively invoking the Browning poem that Birkin had quoted in the earlier novel, says simply "we are among the ruins" (*Lady*, 5), simultaneously setting the political context while letting Browning's words unconsciously foreground both Lady Chatterley's impossible "home" that is Wragby's war-denuded park ("Now the country does not even boast a tree" (Browning, l. 13)), and her future actions ("That a girl with eager eyes and

yellow hair / Waits me there” (ll. 55-56)). This is such a perfectly “Lawrentian” gesture, on the surface invoking political reality while underneath conjuring the “sense-awareness, and sense-knowledge, of the ancients” (Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, 91; quoted in Wientzen, 45). And it points us to the complexity of trying to “nail down” – in light of Lawrence’s practice and profession that “If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail” (Lawrence, “Morality and the Novel,” 172; in Wientzen, 47) – anything as monumental, slippery, and ill-defined as “England.”

There is no consensus in the social sciences, broadly conceived, as to exactly what constitutes a nation, and nationalism, and what relationship those ideas and entities bear to any governing, sovereign state, which after some fashion, is what we must be talking about when we talk about “England.” There were two contending, major schools of thought regarding nations and nationalism at the end of the twentieth century, the “modern” or “constructivist,” and the “primordial” or “ethnosymbolic.”¹ To over-generalize, the “modern” school, as typified in the work of Ernest Gellner, views the nation and nation-state as an exclusive product of modernity; with more than a tip of the hat to 20th-century Marxian thought, nations are understood as ideological “‘fabrications’ resulting from the imperatives of industrialization and its division of labor” (Hedetoft, 315). The “primordial” or “ethnosymbolic” concept of nation, typified in the work of Anthony

¹ There is a broad agreement on the outlines distinguishing the two “schools” of thought, but, perhaps typically, no clear agreement on nomenclature. The designations “primordial” and “constructivist” are taken from the categorization used by Ulf Hedetoft in his chapter on “nations, belonging and community” in Gerard Delanty, ed., *Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory* (2006). The terms “modern” and “ethnosymbolism” derive from Ephraim Nimni’s 2009 article in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, “Nationalism, Ethnicity and Self-determination: A Paradigm Shift?”

D. Smith, on the other hand, highlights “the historical continuity, anthropological ‘constancy,’ cultural grounding and innate natural properties of ‘nationness’ as invariables of human bonding, affective belonging and solidary behavior” (313)². One can add to this mix other, more idiosyncratic theories of the nation, like that of Benedict Arnold, who argues broadly that the nation-state was largely a by-product of the printing press; or that of the psychologist J. Philippe Rushton, who believes “ethnic nationalism” can best be understood through the evolutionary psychology theory of altruism and its “dark side, xenophobia,” as explained and quantified by “genetic similarity theory” (see Rushton at 494, 503). “Karl Marx,” Rushton summarizes, “did not take his analysis far enough: ideology may be the servant of economic interest, but genes influence both” (503). Further complicating any easy working definition of nation or nationalism are so-called “postmodern challenges” to theories of “national community and belonging, which Ulf Hedetoft, in his helpful overview, collects under three broad categories:

...*multiculturalism* (including theories of hybridization); *transnationalism* (including epistemic communities and diasporic networks); and *cosmopolitanism* (including regional configurations like ‘European identity’) (317).

Lawrence’s English characters’ views of their own country, England – and one can argue by extension, if a little guardedly, Lawrence’s – splay wildly across the whole range of these theoretical *topoi*. “England my England! But which is *my* England?” Lady Chatterley wonders, as she motors through the Tevershall countryside which was the very “centre of it” (155), with the “powerful bulk of Warsop Castle” above and “the plumes of

² A fascinating and lucid debate between Gellner and Smith – referred to as “the Warwick Debate” – can be found in a special issue, Volume 2 No. 3 (1996), of the periodical *Nations and Nationalism*.

dark smoke and white steam from the great colliery below” (154). There’s also Birkin’s “Jane Austen’s England” (Women, 355), to compare to Lady Chatterley’s “Shakespeare’s England” and her England of “Good Queen Anne and Tom Jones” (Lady, 153). Is it “coach and cottage England, even the England of Robin Hood” (153), or of “the little grey home in the west” that for Ursula Brangwen, weeping with relieved laughter the indicting indicative, never “*was?*” (Women, 374.)

In the more literally war-torn but clearer-eyed perspective of 1927, Lady Chatterley holds closer, if not entirely, to a “modernist” view, implicating industry and politics in the fate of *her* England.

This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical.

...

... the Prince had been a King, and the King had died, and now there was another King, whose chief function seemed to be, to open soup-kitchens.

(156-57.) This is a vision of the “problem” of England and Englishness after the Great War that is creeping towards a “modern,” material construct of the nation, but is still grappling at the margins with the symbolic, the mythic, the ethnic. (Well, one thing it’s probably safe to say Lawrence’s England was not and could never be, was Jewish.) This can be viewed as a classic bit of Lawrentian “indeterminacy,” on the one hand, or evidence of the ability of the novel to contain social and historical “truths” that as yet cannot be satisfactorily expressed in theories of historiography, revolution, and social change;

perhaps a little of both. Systematizing or theorizing Connie Chatterley's baroque fantasia of Englishness would, at the least, call for an amalgam of approaches, or possibly to a major, new theoretical synthesis altogether. She, nor Lawrence's, England, at any rate, seems particularly amenable in the instance, to being contained by theory.

In *Women in Love*, the contours of the debate about nation, citizenship, and national belonging are less concrete and material, but at the same time, no less complex and, perhaps purposefully, a little baffling. Less encumbered with talk of a mechanistic modernism, *Women in Love*'s "England" – as much as such a thing can be said to exist – may yet express something more along the lines of what Timothy Wientzen of Harvard, in his "Automatic Modernism: D.H. Lawrence, Vitalism and the Political Body" describes as Lawrence's core belief in the possibility of the transcendence of the unmediated, unpremeditated, "embodied" experience as the only way of escaping the "habituating" effects of social, cultural, and political experiences, as well as transcending political "categories of Left and Right with their ready-made models of collectivity" (Wientzen, 45). Contemplating the experience of arriving at Innsbruck, casting her mind's eye back to *her* England, prefiguring her growing dis-ease with a Gerald who will soon become for her the very symbol of an impossibly sodden Englishman, Gudrun asks the party whether being in Innsbruck doesn't make them all "feel übermenschlich," prompting an illuminating and emotional debate.

"Oh, of course," cried Gudrun. "One could never feel like this in England, for the simple reason that the damper is never lifted off one, there. It is quite impossible really to let go, in England, of that I am assured."

...

“It’s true,” said Gerald, “it never is *quite* the same in England. – But perhaps we don’t want it to be – perhaps it’s like bringing the light a little too near the powder-magazine, to let go altogether, in England. One is afraid what might happen, if *everybody else* let go.”

“My God!” cried Gudrun. “But wouldn’t it be wonderful, if all England did suddenly go off like a display of fireworks.”

“It couldn’t,” said Ursula. “They are all too damp, the powder is damp in them.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Gerald.

“Nor I,” said Birken. “When your English really begin to go off, *en masse*, it’ll be time to shut your ears, and run

Birken continues his misanthropic take on his native land, in response to Gerald’s assertion that Birken really loves England:

“We may.” Said Birkin. “But it’s a damnably uncomfortable love: like a love for an aged parent who suffers horribly from a complication of diseases, for which there is no hope.”

...

“Any hope of England’s becoming real? God knows. It’s a great actual unreality now, an aggregation into unreality. – It might be real, if there were no Englishmen.”

Gudrun senses “It might have been her own fate she was inquiring after.” Finally, Gerald and Gudrun, the combating pair, complete the exchange:

“I think Rupert means,” he said, “that nationally all Englishmen must die, so that they can exist individually and – ”

“Super-nationally –” put in Gudrun, with a slight
ironic grimace, raising her glass.

(Women, 395-97.)

What exactly is the meaning of “going off” in this passage, or the meaning of “death?” And what could that possibly have to do with England? The passage is at once highly provocative, and as unfocused and ambiguous a political assertion as one is likely to find in a literary passage that superficially points to a concrete political meaning. Lawrence appears to be pointing towards a kind of “social death.” But that phrase, in a national/political context, is normally reserved for describing the marginalized, the oppressed, the enslaved; not for the kind of upper and aspiring middle-class English one assumes this group is speaking towards. The England being discussed here is neither an England of coal mines, fine homes and relentless capitalism, nor an England of Stonehenge, ironically Angle-speaking Norman kings, or Falstaff; it is, rather, an England of the psyche, containing all those things, yet constituted of none; shape-shifting, awesome and compelling, as nearly impossible to put a finger on as it is to escape.

Women in Love offers us an ecstatic madness of Englishness, vaguely related to the War, whose full historical and psychological resonances could not have settled enough as of 1916/17 to make for a less tenebrous meditation. It has, in some ways, for its companion piece, the short story “England, My England,” written at about the same time. In their own flights of and from war-time madness, Gerald finds his “wounding” by Gudrun to have opened up a murderous capacity in himself, which he also discovers is his “cruellest joy” (446), much as the face of the wounded soldier of “England, My

England,” fulfilled finally as a single-minded, uncompromised agent of naked death, takes on a “white gleam” and becomes “luminous with an abstract smile” (England, 179). Gudrun’s own response to Gerald’s sudden masochistic efflorescence – “In her will she killed him as he stood, *effaced* him” (Women, 455, emphasis mine) – is mirrored nicely by the final image of the German soldier who “cut and mutilated the face of the dead man as if he must obliterate it” (England, 180). What can one call this, other than the “going off” of a purifying, affective violence, which was simultaneously inarticulable and the single most lucid fact of that terrible year 1917? Against the more considered, more distant, more concretely comprehensible post-war milieu of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, in the wartime world of Gerald, Rupert, Ursula and Gudrun, there was so much less to understand, so much more at stake.

Despite our reluctance here to engage in a possibly tedious and likely jargon-rich *a priori* multi-disciplinary theorizing of the concept of the nation, nationalism, and consequently “Englishness,” reading the two Lawrence novels under consideration here through a lens of Anthony D. Smith’s classic “ethnosymbolic” theory of nation formation has much to recommend it. First, there are reasons to suspect a certain affinity between Smith’s theory and what we know of Lawrence’s *weltanschauung*, which suggests their intellectual marriage might be a relatively happy one. Second, it may provide an entry point for discussing representations of England and Englishness in Lawrence’s novels more nuanced – certainly differently shaded – than those available through an analysis of the characters’ and narrator’s verbatim pronouncements about England, discussions of how much one character or another may best represent aspects of Englishness and English identity, or facile comparisons of the houses Breadalby and Wragby, their sur-

rounding landscapes and 'shires. Lastly, in terms of studying specific characters, it shifts the focus from Gerald Crich and Clifford Chatterley interestingly onto Birkin – who as a kind of fantasy amanuensis of Lawrence always merits study – and fascinatingly onto the figure of Mrs. Bolton, who turns out in this view, surprisingly, to be the *sine qua non* of modern British womanhood.

Smith's "ethnosymbolic" theory of the nation is set forth most distinctly in his article titled, not too shockingly, "The origins of nations." Agreeing, to begin with, with other so-called "modern" theories of the nation, that "[t]he nation, as we have defined it, is a modern phenomenon, and its civic features can only reach full flowering in the modern era," he breaks company with "modernist" theorists when he describes nations as being "communit[ies] of history and destiny," "based on historic and quasi-familial bond[s]" that often appear "more like the institutionalization of a 'surrogate religion' than a political ideology" (Smith, 362-63). Smith argues from the evidence of "[t]he conflicts that embitter the geo-politics of our planet [that] often betray deeper roots than a clash of economic interests and political calculations would suggest" to conclude that "there remain 'irrational' elements of explosive power and tenacity in the structure of nations" and that among the most important of these irrational elements are "the myths, symbols, memories and values that define the ethnic substratum of many modern nations" (363).

The form a modern nation state takes, and the manner in which it reproduces itself, depends on the structure of the pre-modern ethnic communities – *ethnies* in Smith's parlance – out of which those nations descended. All modern nations derive from one of two broad types of *ethnies*, "the aristocratic lateral and the demotic vertical types" (361). England – "Britain" is Smith's choice of term – is, for Smith, the "most clear-cut

example” of the lateral *ethnie* type (350), as are to some lesser extent, France and Spain. Without getting deeply into their distinguishing characteristics, which aren’t of paramount importance here, Israel, Greece, and Iran are for Smith typical examples of “vertical demotic” *ethnies*.

What is of paramount importance to this discussion, however, is Smith’s theory on how lateral aristocratic *ethnies*, epitomized by Britain, emerge and reproduce themselves as nations, and generate their unique “myth[s] of nationalism” (363).

In the case of nations formed on the basis of lateral *ethnies*, the influence of the state and its bureaucratic personnel is paramount. It is the culture of an aristocratic *ethnie* that an incorporating bureaucratic state purveys down the social scale and into the countryside and inner-city areas, displacing the hold of ecclesiastical authorities and local nobles (or using them for state ends). This is very much the route followed by those Western societies, in which ***cultural homogenization around an upper-stratum ethnic core*** proceeded *pari passu* with administration incorporation. (362, emphasis mine.)

So the question presents itself: who in the novels *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* can be said to be undergoing most thoroughly this process of “homogenization around an upper-stratum ethnic core?”

The case for Rupert Birkin being the character in *Women in Love* who best matches the above description is perhaps the more controversial, and could be said to partake of a certain kind of “biographical fallacy,” drawing as it might on the well-known facts and biases of Lawrence’s life. Nevertheless, Birkin is described as a “coming somebody,” (*Women*, 501) a telling phrase, again from the passed-over Prologue that suggests both his sexual vitality and his lack of an as-yet firm social identity. It puts something of a different spin, as well, on Birkin’s easy if inexplicable acquiescence to Gerald in their

“Gladitorial” escapade: his agreeing to demonstrate his jiu-jitsu despite the fact that it “doesn’t interest” him, his willingness to strip on Gerald’s command (268). Gerald certainly represents here some vision of a specifically British “upper-stratum ethnic core,” with his “northern kind of beauty, like light refracted from snow” and his expensive “silk socks, and studs of fine workmanship, and silk underclothing, and silk braces” (273), the un-self-conscious ease with which he slips into his master-of-the-silk-road Bokharan caftan as if to imply that the sun never sets on the Breadalby empire.

Would it be too much to suggest that the “homogenization” to which Birkin volunteers himself in Gerald’s presence is both nearly total, and literalized, perhaps quite characteristically, by Lawrence as a “homogenization” of bodies so complete that that it takes place in a space even more “vital” than mere politics *or* culture?

He seemed to penetrate into Gerald’s more solid, more diffuse bulk, to interfuse his body through the body of the other, as if to bring it subtly into subjection, always seizing with some rapid necromantic foreknowledge every motion of the other flesh, converting and counteracting it, playing upon the limbs and trunk of Gerald like some hard wind. It was as if Birkin’s whole physical intelligence interpenetrated into Gerald’s body, as if his fine, sublimated energy entered into the flesh of the fuller man, like some potency, casting a fine net, a prison, through the muscles into the very depths of Gerald’s physical being. (270.)

Is there not a part of English ethno-mythology that depends on the very idea of “an eternal union” of man to man, those happy few, that band of brothers, that seems to have forever “rubbed off” on Birkin in this famous wrestling match, and that remains exclusive of and impenetrable by the female – to any ‘her,’ “an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity” (481). Any and all of which words any good feminist theorist could be expected to invoke in response to the very notion of a “British” national ideology, and which of itself may be

the best evidence that that's indeed what we are looking at when we consider the "love" of Birkin and Gerald. We could say, too, *contraposée*, that modern English nationalist ideology interestingly marks out a space of conflict between the queer and the feminist.

The case for Mrs. Bolton as a controlling trope of English nationalist mythography in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is perhaps, like the political ideology of the book itself, a little tamer, stands on a little more familiar ground, does not startle us quite so, while it leaves us, perhaps depressingly so, with a darker, more foreclosed vision of the English nation, one that like so much of Lawrence's best work, presages sentiments common to the later decades of the twentieth century, of a cold, grey, island sitting in a cold grey sea, sinking slowly into irrelevancy and impotence under the combined weight of the upper class's "sterile want of sympathy" (Lady, 193), the "pettiness and ... vulgarity of manner" of the striving middle (142), and the "half-witted" "bolshevist" / "mechanical" onslaught "against all emotion and feeling" (38) of the blighted plebes.

How perfectly middle class Mrs. Bolton is. And how perfectly she will represent the ultimate "triumph" through co-optation of a certain kind of Thatcher-esque daughter-of-a-shopkeeper, scold of the worker, queen of the new soup-kitchen state. There was her professional education, her "newish" "quite select" house (79), her "heavily correct English" (80) and her unimpeachable reputation of being of the "governing class of the village" (80). If she didn't exist, you'd have to make her up, which is, of course, exactly what Lawrence did. She had that perfect balance of familiarity with the griminess of working class life, the glory of middle-class independence, and the simultaneous gossipy fascination and fearful revulsion of her social betters to become the vessel of all her ailing nation's care and nursing.

She liked the colliers, whom she had nursed for so long: but she felt very superior to them. She felt almost upper class. At the same time, a resentment against the owning class smouldered in her. The masters! In a question of the masters and men, she was always for the men. But when there was no question of contest, she was pining to be superior, to be one of the upper classes. The upper classes fascinated her, appealing to her peculiar English passion for superiority. (81.)

Mrs. Bolton progresses smoothly and uninterruptedly through a sequence of first professional, then social, then in the final triumph, sexual *homogenization* into her new upper-class milieu, her gradual adjustment to the “high class folks, so far unknown to her, but now to be known” (82). It is, of course, Mrs. Bolton’s “overly correct English” appellation, hitting her first and alone in recognition of a certain animal perturbation in the “black figure in the twilight” unseen to the others at Wragby, that gives the novel its queerly refractive title:

What did the man want? Did he want to rouse the house? What was he standing there for, transfixed, looking up at the house like a love-sick male dog outside the house where the bitch is!

Goodness! The knowledge went through Mrs. Bolton like a shot. He was Lady Chatterley’s lover! He! He!

(144-45.) And of course, in the end, she becomes the “Magna Mater” to Clifford’s perverse child man, who under the “nearly religious” yet “perverted” imprimatur to “become again as a little child,” performs heretofore unheard of feats of capital accumulation with a newly “remarkable inhuman force” (291). And one should take Mrs. Bolton at her word when she takes full credit for it: “...that’s my doing. My word, he’d never have got on like this with Lady Chatterley.” Thus, England: Clifford launched into the final abstraction of pure bitch-godess’y accretion, hitched helplessly forever to the breast of a

shape-shifting woman who “in some corner of her weird female soul ... despised him and hated him” (292).

England, my England, indeed. Last seen you were being pushed about, invalid, through the garden you once thought was inalterably and forever England, but that you’ve now had to admit is part of a bigger world, and a bigger idea, by your once subject but now game keeper. At least raise a glass with me, England, to the “democracy of touch,” in the name of Mr. D.H. Lawrence’s ancient new “peace of fucking.”

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