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「ミスター・ヌーン」と「大尉の人形」：
ロレンスとコメディ

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Mr Noon and “The Captain’s Doll” —Lawrence as a Comic Novelist—

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Until the publication in 1984 of a fuller version of *Mr Noon*, it was a fixed reputation that D.H. Lawrence was a great novelist who constantly pursued the truth of life during his career as a writer. In fact, Lawrence described himself as a “religious, earnest, suffering man” as early as in 1914. But this unfinished novel *Mr Noon* is a richly comic novel and helps to modify that reputation. We have to realize another aspect of Lawrence. In this essay I would like to demonstrate that Lawrence also could have become a great comic novelist, considering *Mr Noon* and a novellette “The Captain’s Doll” which is full of comic scenes.

Keywords: Comedy, Situation, The Narrative Voice

I

Though F.R. Leavis called Lawrence “one of the great masters of comedy”,⁽¹⁾ most critics of Lawrence have observed that the comedy is not on the whole his forte. He has been declared to be both humourless and monomaniac in pursuit of his peculiar certainties. Katherine Mansfield, for example, at the very end of the World War I, portrayed Lawrence in a letter to Outline Morrell:

Perhaps his whole trouble is that he has not a real sense of humour. He takes himself dreadfully seriously nowadays: I mean he sees himself as a symbolic figure—a prophet—the voice in the wilderness crying ‘woe’.⁽²⁾

Thus, deriving from a number of other sources, the notion that Lawrence has no sense of humour has been taken for granted. But on the other hand, we also know

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that Lawrence, in his real life, was a genius of mimicry, charade and drama. His biographical records are full of the evidence. For instance, Jessie Chambers, in her book, recollected their younger days.

It was by now an established rule that Lawrence should come to tea on a Saturday, and when he entered the house he brought a holiday atmosphere with him. It was not merely that we were all nice with him, he knew how to make us nicer to one another. Even my eldest brother thawed when Lawrence was there. He brought a pack of cards, and taught us whist, and we played fast and furious, with the younger children crowding round to watch, and Lawrence excitedly scolding and correcting us. When he was in the mood he could be very funny, particularly when mimicking the members of the Christian Endeavour class repeating in turn ‘The servant of the Lord is like a well-

filled house...'⁽⁶⁾

Christmas was a wonderful time. There were parties at one house or another during the holidays, and always thrilling charades at our house, with Lawrence directing things, and father joining in the play like one of us.⁽⁶⁾

Lawrence entertained his friends with performances so funny that (David Garnet once said) they laughed 'until laughing was an agony'.⁽⁶⁾

Lawrence started his career as a writer who exclusively pursued the reality of human existence. He wanted his work to change the lives of his readers- how else could the novel be 'the one bright book of life?'⁽⁶⁾

What made Lawrence try to write comic writings then? There are some possible answers to this question. The more passionately Lawrence felt about his mission as a rescuer of the world, the more he was rejected. *The Rainbow* (1915) was suppressed by court on 13 November 1915. The publication of *Women in Love* (1920) was the source of much difficulty among the people around Lawrence. Neither *The Rainbow* nor *Women in Love* had sold well. He was full of complaints about his audience who paid scant attention or misread. He wanted to create a new reader. As early as in 1917 Lawrence had realized that 'It is necessary now for me to address a new public. You must see that. It is no use my writing in England for the English any more'.⁽⁷⁾ These facts may have made the writer nervous about publisher, libraries and readers. Lawrence tried to avoid transgressing the same taboos as the early fiction. Thus, I think, Lawrence of the period 1920-22 was very careful to write the kind of books which were suitable for light casual reading and 'unexceptional' as far as the censor is concerned.⁽⁸⁾ The 'unexceptional' novel was *The Lost Girl*, which started with lightness but eventually fell flat. Lawrence challenged again. In *Mr Noon* he used the same setting as the former; it is in Woodhouse which is obviously modelled on Eastwood, the author's birthplace, that the early scenes take place. Additionally Alvina Houghton, the heroine of *The Lost Girl*, makes a brief appearance in the chapter called 'Choir Correspondence'. This time it is the male protagonist Gilbert Noon who begins his pilgrimage, starting in England and finishing on the Continent. In a letter of November 1920 and others, Lawrence repeatedly called *Mr Noon* a comedy.⁽⁹⁾ He also called "The Captain's Doll" 'a very funny long story'.⁽¹⁰⁾ Indeed the most striking feature of these books

lies in their lightheartedness which readers of Lawrence rarely find in his other books, especially in his long novels.

II

Now I have reached the point where I shall begin to discuss *Mr Noon* and "The Captain's Doll" in detail. Roughly speaking, Lawrence's comedies are generated partly by situation and partly by the narrative voice. First I will take up the examples of comic scenes produced from situation. In Chapter XI of *Mr Noon*, a young bankclerk Walter George appears to console his fiancée Emmie in her bedroom.

But Walter George slowly disengaged himself and stood up, whilst she gazed upward at him. His hair was beautifully brushed and parted at the side, and he looked down at her. Their looks indeed were locked. He silently laid the flowers at her side, and sank down on one knee beside the bed. But the bed was rather high, and if he kneeled right down he was below the emotional and dramatic level. So he could only sink down on one poised foot, like a worshipper making his deep reverence before the altar, in a Catholic church, and staying balanced low on one toe. It was rather a gymnastic feat. But then what did Walter George do his Sandow exercises for in the morning, if not to fit him for these perfect motions.⁽¹¹⁾

Fanny, like a scientific school-teacher, polished her bedroom floors. The mat on which Childe Rolande [Walter George] was so springily poised on one foot slid back under the pressure of the same foot, so his face went floundering in the bed. And when, holding the side of the bed, he tried to rise on the same original foot, the mat again wasn't having any, so his head ducked down like an ass shaking flies off its ears. When at last he scrambled to his feet he was red in the face, and Emmie had turned and lifted the beautiful flowers between her hands.(N 85)

Here the cavalier Walter George is parodied with extremity of ridicule. These funny but absurd scenes begin to assume the characteristics of a farce or a slapstic rather than a comedy. Lawrence, at least one time, handled his characters in the same fashion. In the novella "The Captain's Doll", the hero Hepburn plays the role of a servant, a fool-like figure. Mrs.Hepburn

invites Hannele to the tea-party in order to get more information about her husband's love affairs and to find a solution. When Hepburn joins them, the farce reaches a climax.

"Ah, Countess Hannele-my wife has brought you along! Very nice, very nice! Let me take your wrap. Oh yes, certainly..."

"Have you rung for tea, dear?" asked Mrs. Hepburn.

"Er-yes. I said as soon as you came in they were to bring it."

"Yes-well. Won't you ring again, dear, and say for *three*."

"Yes-certainly. Certainly." (12)

"Alec, dear," said Mrs. Hepburn. "You won't forget to leave that message for me at Mrs. Rackham's. I'm so afraid it will be forgotten."

"No, dear, I won't forget. Er-would you like me to go round now?"

Hannele noticed how often he said 'er' when he was beginning to speak to his wife. But they were such good friends, the two of them.

"Why, if you would, dear, I should feel perfectly comfortable. But I don't want you to hurry one bit."

"Oh, I may as well go now."

And he went. Mrs. Hepburn detained her guest. (C 26)

The above quotation reminds me of one scene in Shakespeare's *I Henry IV*. Prince Hal and Poins are teasing the tapster Francis at the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap.

Fran. Anon, anon, sir. Look down into the Pomgarnet, Ralph.

Prince. Come hither, Francis.

Fran. My lord?

Prince. How long hast thou to serve, Francis?

Fran. Forsooth, five years, and as much as to-

Poins. [Within] Francis!

Fran. Anon, anon, sir. (II. iv. 38-44) (13)

Poins. [Within] Francis!

Fran. Anon, sir.

Prince. How old art thou, Francis?

Fran. Let me see-about Michaelmas next I shall be-

Poins. [Within] Francis!

Fran. Anon, sir. Pray stay a little, my lord.

(Ibid. 51-57) (14)

It is as if Hepburn's "Yes, certainly" echoes Francis' "Anon, sir". After Hepburn leaves the room, Mrs. Hepburn falls into her longwinded chatter, with a hearer Hannele who, taken aback, is just sitting, putting "her fingers to her ears to make sure they were not falling off." (C 27)

In *Mr Noon*, we can find another comic scene generated by situation at the very end of Part I. Emmie is in bed suffering from neuralgia of the stomach. Walter George is at her bedside, then comes the seducer Gilbert Noon inquiring after his spooning-mate. This awkward situation itself is the cause of the audience's laughter.

Emmie now gave way to resignation. Was she not the base of this obtuse angled triangle, this immortal trinity, this framework of the universe? It was not for her to break the three-cornered tension. Let fate have its way. If Gilbert had not given himself to vacancy the problem might seriously have concerned him: how to resolve an obtuse-angled triangle into a square of the same dimensions. But he was glotzing, if we may borrow the word. (N 92)

Lawrence had to rely upon the power of *Deus ex machina* to solve the seemingly eternal triangle relationships. The narrator screams, "Oh *Deus ex machina*, get up steam and come to our assistance,... So, *Deus ex machina*, come. Come, God in the Machine, Come!" (N 92) But his prayer is in vain. Without any convincing explanation, we are only told that "Emmie married Walter George, who reared prize cauliflowers, whilst she reared dear little Georgian children, and all went happy ever after." (N 93) Then the announcement of Part II is comically made by the employment of the nursery rhyme; "The cow in this vol. having jumped over the moon, in the next the dish, dear reader, shall run away with the spoon." (N 93) When he was in an ironical moment, Lawrence tended toward the nonsensical nursery rhymes, which were appropriate in such a comic text. (15)

I will cite another situation in "The Captain's Doll" which produces laughter among audience. On their return journey by bus, Hepburn and Hannele continue their debate on love. They have to cry or speak loudly because of the noisy swaying bus.

The car gave a great swerve, and she fell on the driver. Then she righted herself. It gave another swerve, and she fell on Alexander[Hepburn]: She righted herself

angrily. And now they ran straight on: and it seemed a little quieter. (C 81)

In spite of the graveness of the conversational subject, reader's response will not be so serious.

III

I will proceed to the other type of comedy, the one produced by the narrative voice. Among the several humorous scenes in *Mr Noon*, Chapter VI, titled "The Sack" will be enough to evaluate the comic tone in the first half of the novel. The very first sentence of the chapter begins like this, using an idiomatic expression; "Meanwhile a pretty kettle of fish was preparing for Mr. Noon." (N 51) Gilbert Noon is summoned to appear in a meeting in camera of his Educational Committee. Mr. Bostock has accused him of getting his daughter Emmie "into trouble." (N 54) Gilbert can give no answer.

Gilbert suddenly felt like a baby that has fallen to the bottom of the sea and finds all the lobsters staring at him in the under-sea light. So they stared, like inquiring lobsters, and he felt like a baby, with his fresh face and pouting mouth...

The lobsters buzzed and nodded in the submarine glare. They no longer looked at Mr Noon, but studiously away from him. He sat looking rather wonder-stricken and stupid, with his pouting mouth a shade open...

"Quiet!" said one of the lobsters distinctly and emphatically. Gilbert's eye strayed wonderingly to him.

"We are met here in camera, even without a clerk. If we can clear the matter up satisfactorily, nothing more shall be heard of it. We are prepared to forget all about it."

"Oh certainly, certainly," barked a couple of lobsters. (N 53-4)

The 'fish' turns out to be the 'lobsters' and the meeting is described as the 'bottom of the sea'. The narrator makes grand play with word-play, conjuring a consistent imagery.

As I have pointed out, the distinctive feature of *Mr Noon* is its lightheartedness; seriousness detract greatly from this humorous novel. This is true particularly of Part I. The opening chapter itself is rather similar to the earlier major work, using an omniscient narrator who is not obtrusive. In the following chapter, however, Lawrence suddenly begins to apostrophize,

addressing the readers. The 'dear reader' manner which was common in the 19th century is one of the devices employed here by Lawrence who did wish his new readers to participate in making fiction. Throughout Part I, the narrator address the reader directly only several times, and the 'reader' is always both 'dear' and 'gentle'. It is as if we are watching Lawrence enjoying himself in high spirit, addressing "gentle reader, you who sit in your comfortable home with this book on your knee." (N 86) Lawrence manipulates the characters as though he were a puppet master, though he is not thoroughly in control of the text as, for instance, when he asks "Don't you agree, dear reader?" (N 26) to establish the good relationship between narrator and reader. Why Lawrence was able to hold his distance seems very clear. As is widely known, the story of Part I is based on other people's experience, chiefly on George Neville, a close friend of Lawrence's youth. It seems to me that Lawrence could use their episodes to such extent that he amused himself to the full. But in Part II Gilbert Noon is not George Neville at all, and more importantly, the narrator is no longer a gentle narrator. Noon becomes Lawrence himself, thinly disguised, and so does the narrator, obviously irritated. The body of Part II consists of Lawrence's and Frieda's relationship between May and September 1912. Jeffrey Meyers observed that because Lawrence described his personal experience "directly instead of transmuting it into art, the novel offers many personal revelations."⁽¹⁶⁾ It is regrettable that this autobiographical element changed the characters of the narrator. Now exists the conflict between narrator and narratee similar to Noon's conflict with Johanna. As the story goes on, the narrative voice becomes more and more violent, often with other nouns and adjectives; "rampageous reader, ferocious reader, surly, rabid reader, hell-cat of a reader, a tartar," "you sniffing mongrel bitch of a reader." (N 205) Besides a cross fire of abuses, the narrator tries to repel us, claiming his superiority over the text control; "Am I writing this book, or are you? (N 137), "If you don't want to read, turn on pages." (N 185) We feel as if Lawrence's face pass from amiability to sternness. Thus the comic tone of the novel becomes subdued. It may be that because Lawrence was dealing with extremely intimate personal experience, the strain of detachment from his characters was too much for him. Nonetheless, some funny scenes occur intermittently in Part II. Gilbert, for instance, like Gilbert in the 'lobster' scene in Part I, is again subjected to severe ridicule. The Baroness unexpectedly appear to blame him for making an elopement with her daughter Johanna. She begins

to harrange, with startled Gilbert.

Poor Gilbert, the dawn-rose going more and more bewildered in his eyes, his mouth coming apart, his face growing pale, seemed to shrink in his chair—and shrank and shrank, as if he would get down between the two legs of the pedestal desk, and there, like an abashed dog retreated in its kennel, bark uncertainly at the intruder....

Our young male finch shrank and shrank behind the pedestal desk, and said never a word, not one single word. When the Baroness said—Do you understand?—he only gazed at her in silence. (N 217-8)

After her mother leaves, Johanna mocks persistently his submissive attitude and goads him to madness. Thus self-mocking portrayal of the hero recurs between confrontation and reconciliation, which serves to make this novel most readable and lighthearted.

Now let us look at the comic scene produced by the narrative voice in "The Captain's Doll". In this novella, it is Mrs. Hepburn who is handled with extremity of ridicule. As soon as she makes her appearance on the stage, this drama begins to assume a farce. Indeed she is a heroine in a farce, wearing "a dress of thick knitted white silk, a large ermine scarf with the tails only at the ends and a black hat over which dripped a trail of green feathers of the osprey sort." (C 15) She wears "rather a lot of jewellery, and two bangles tinkled over her white kid gloves as she put her fingers to touch her hair, whilst she stood complacently and looked around." (C 15) She always laughs "her tinkling laugh." (C 16) In the middle of the story, Mrs. Hepburn falls dead out of her bedroom window of the hotel. Chapter VII begins as follows; "And then a dreadful thing happened; really a very dreadful thing." (C 39) Even the adjective 'dreadful' only serves to convey a comical tone. No reader is able to feel the sympathy for Mrs. Hepburn which should be felt in normal situation. Lawrence obviously expects us to accept her death as a proper treatment for a comedy. She exits from the stage with mockeries of the audience.

IV

There are some scenes in both works which are generated by the combination of the two sources of comedy. In Chapter XV of *Mr Noon*, the narrator describes Gilbert's and Johanna's second sexual encounter in the flat of Johanna's brother-in-law.

Johanna was hovering in the doorway of her room as he went down the passage. A bright, roused look was on her face. She lifted her eyelids with a strange flare of invitation, like a bird lifting its wings. And for the first time the passion broke like lightning out of Gilbert's blood: for the first time in his life. He went into her room with her and shut the door. The sultriness and lethargy of his soul had broken into a storm of desire for her, a storm which shook and swept him at varying intervals all his life long.

Oh wonderful desire: violent, genuine desire! Oh magnificence of stormy, elemental desire, which is at once so elemental and so intensely individual! Oh storms of acute sex passion, which shatter the soul, and re-make it, as summer is made up out of the debacle of thunder! Oh cataclysm of fulminous desire in the soul: oh new uprising from the cataclysm. This is a trick of resurrection worth two.

The cyclone of actual desire—not mere titillation and functional gratification—or any other -tion-broke now for the first time upon Gilbert, and flung him down the wind. Not, dear moralist, to break him against the buttresses of some Christian cathedrals like a long-shotted shell. Heaven knows where it did not fling him. I'll tell you later on. (N 136-7)

No, gentle reader, please don't interrupt, I am not going to open the door of Johanna's room, not until Mr Noon opens it himself. I've been caught that way before. I have opened the door for you, and the moment you gave your first squeal in rushed the private detective you had kept in the background. Thank you, gentle reader, you can open your own doors. (N 137)

Soon after their consummation, the voice of the brother-in-law is heard, calling from the drawing-room that the dinner is ready.

And in two more minutes she appeared, bright, a little dazzled, and very handsome. Alfred still stood waiting in the doorway of the drawing-room; a small, correct figure with a white imperial.

"Where is Mr Noo-oon?" he asked, still singing.

"Mr Noo-oo-n!" sang Johanna in antiphony. And she led her cousin-in-law into the dining-room.

Critic, gentle reader, I shall not say a word

about Mr Noon's movements. Suffice that he walked in a dignified manner into the dining-room, wearing a neat bow tie, just as Julie was removing the soup plates. (N 137-8)

To cite an example from "The Captain's Doll", the following will be enough for this kind of comedy. Mrs. Hepburn is not only the person whom the narrator makes a mockery of. Hepburn is no exception. When Hepburn and Hannele climb up the glacier, he alone tries to conquer the summit in the third stage of the ascent. He comically struggles over the whole body of the glacier.

Then he tried throwing his coat down, and getting a foot-hold on that. Then he went quite quickly by bending down and getting a little frip with his fingers, and going ridiculously as *on four legs*. (italics mine, C 74)

Hannele is watching this ridiculous exhibition from below, calling him to come back, to the great joy of the mountaineers. Hepburn exactly reminds us of Chaplin, but by no means of Ahab in *Moby-Dick*.⁽¹⁷⁾

V

It is obvious that Lawrence read the works of George Meredith in his early days. Jessie Chambers wrote that "we read Meredith, in poetry as well as prose-*Love in the valley* had a special significance for him."⁽¹⁸⁾ Lawrence's reading list reveals that Meredith was one of his favorite authors and he had read *The Egoist* at least by 1927. The essay "Galsworthy", written in 1927, indicates knowledge of it.⁽¹⁹⁾ The reason I referred to Meredith here is that we find some similarities between *The Egoist* and "The Captain's Doll". For instance, Sir Willoughby, the hero of *The Egoist*, is described by Mrs. Mountstuart that "You see he has a leg," or "Have you noticed that he has a leg?"⁽²⁰⁾ In "The Captain's Doll", Hannele becomes engaged to the Herr Regierungsrat, who seems to her as if "he had no legs, save to sit with. As if to stand on his feet and walk would not be natural to him." (C 51) On the other hand, Hannele tells her friend Mitchka about the model of the doll, saying "Has he really such beautiful legs?" (C 64) The 'leg' appears several times in both works. Probably Lawrence employed such expression in order to show male's attraction after the fashion of Meredith. Besides such tiny similarities, more importantly, I presume that Lawrence had this in common with Meredith, that the comedy occurs

when egoism of each person collides with one another. The collisions between the protagonists in *Mr Noon* and "The Captain's Doll" come from exactly their egoism in the effort to subdue the opponents. Lawrence believed that "it needs a sort of cataclysm to get out the old world into the new. It needs a painful shedding of an old skin." (N 290) Profound conviction is born only through battle.

So far I have picked up several scenes to demonstrate that the comic devices are effectively employed for the development of the themes, namely the struggle between sexes in *Mr Noon* and male domination over female in "The Captain's Doll". Lawrence was thus able to express his sense of humour which, though it had scarcely found its way into his writing, was one of the most striking of his qualities. It is no exaggeration that Lawrence could have become a great comic writer if he had wanted to, but he was, before anything else, more enthusiastic to be a social commentator or a moralist.

Notes

- (1) F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 13.
- (2) Paul Delany, *D.H. Lawrence's Nightmare; The Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 386.
- (3) E.T. [Jessie Chambers], *D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record* (London: Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1965), pp. 29-30.
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- (5) Paul Eggert and John Worthen, eds., *Lawrence and Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 24.
- (6) Edward D. McDonald, ed., *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 535.
- (7) James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson, eds., *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Vol. III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 73.
- (8) *Ibid.*, p. 459.
- (9) *Ibid.*, p. 626.
- (10) Harry T. Moore, ed., *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence. Vol. II* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 670.
- (11) D.H. Lawrence, *Mr Noon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 84-5. All subsequent references to this novel will be indicated parenthetically in the text by the abbreviation N and page number.
- (12) D.H. Lawrence, *The Short Novels, Vol. I* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 25. All subsequent references to this novella will be indicated parenthetically in the text by the abbreviation C and page number.
- (13) William Shakespeare, "The First Part of Henry the Fourth," *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed., Bkake more G. Evans, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), p. 858.
- (14) *Ibid.*, pp. 858-9.
- (15) See *Mr Noon, op. cit.*, p. 185 and p. 205.
- (16) Geoffrey Meyers, "Lawrence's *Mr Noon*,"

Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1985), p. 712.
(17) See R.E. Pritchard, *D.H. Lawrence: Body of Darkness* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1971), p. 142.
(18) E.T., *op. cit.*, p. 110.

(19) Edward D. McDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 540.
(20) George Meredith, *The Egoist*, (Penguin Books, 1968), p. 43.

『ミスター・ヌーン』 と「大尉の人形」
—ロレンスとコメディ—

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概要

D. H. ロレンスは二十世紀最大の古典的文学者の一人としてその名声も今では固まっている。しかし、ユーモアやウィットがなく楽しく読めないというのが定評であった。だが、1984年これまで知られていなかった後半部分と合わせて『ミスター・ヌーン』がより完全な形で出版された。定評を覆すほどにユーモアにあふれた作品である。ロレンスの新たな側面に注目しなければならない。本稿はこの『ミスター・ヌーン』とコミックなシーンを多く含んだ中編「大尉の人形」を考察することによってロレンスのユーモアの特質を探ってみた。

キーワード：コメディ、状況、語り手

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