

Face, Response and the Nonhuman in *Women in Love*

(A reading of Winifred's portrait of Looloo)

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In both *The Beast and The Sovereign* and *The Animal That Therefore I am*, Jacques Derrida ponders upon Levinas's hesitation over the question of whether a snake has a face, and it is in *The Animal That Therefore I am* that Derrida invokes Levinas's full response:

"I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called 'face'. The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I don't know if a snake has a face. I can't answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed."¹

Levinas's hesitation in this response, or 'nonresponse', is criticized by Derrida as 'all too human'. Derrida discusses the question of whether a snake has a face in his reading of Lawrence's 'Snake', and he first identifies the difference between a face and a head, explaining that the face is 'not only what is seen or what sees, but also what speaks, what hears speech, and therefore it's to a face that our ethical responsibility is addressed, it's from a face that it receives something from the other.....'² Thus, the question is transformed into whether a snake can be a subject in ethical responsibility, and Levinas's hesitation indicates a reluctant yet implicit 'no' to this question. The problem is not that Levinas does not consider the snake, the nonhuman as an ethical subject, but that he knows he doesn't, yet he tends to avoid admitting he is doing so.

In my previous chapter 'The Nonhuman Other in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "The paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 171-2. Quoted in John Llewelyn, 'The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience: A Chiasmatic Reading of Responsibility' in *the Neighborhood of Levinas, Heidegger and Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 65

² Jacques Derrida, 'Ninth Session' in *The Beast and The Sovereign*, vol 1, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) p. 317

Poems', I cite Lawrence's discussion about whether a tree has a face, and his no is without hesitation:

Suppose you want to look a tree in the face? You can't. It hasn't got a face. You look at the strong body of a trunk: you look above you into the matted body-hair of twigs and boughs: you see the soft green tips. But there are no eyes to look into, you can't meet its gaze. You keep on looking at it in part and parcel.³

While Lawrence finds the trunk as body, twigs and boughs as hair, he finds no equivalent for eyes. In Lawrence's conception of a face, eye contact is central, without which one can hardly receive a response from the other. Though Lawrence clearly denies that a tree has a face, his attitude towards whether the nonhuman has a face is more ambiguous in his texts. Yet before moving further to this question, I need to state that whether a snake has a face is not equal to whether the nonhuman has a face – there is much more implied in the specific example of a snake. Derrida emphasizes the 'immense, allegorical, or mythical weight' that a snake carries, and also notices that the figure of a snake is less closer to human, compared with other species such as 'the cat, the dog, the horse, the monkey, the orangutan, the chimpanzee – whom it would be difficult to refuse a face and a gaze'.⁴ Thus Levinas's hesitation over whether a snake has a face does not equal a denial of the owning of a face of all the nonhuman. This then triggers questions such as which animal has a face and which does not, what the standard is, and who has the right to provide such a standard. In Lawrence's texts, you can find both animals with a face and animals without a face, but what causes such a difference and what such a difference implies, and the related ethical questions are what I intend to explore in this chapter.

Carrie Rohman, in 'Creative Incantations and Involution in D.H. Lawrence', identifies in Lawrence's animal poems 'the voice of *the living*', stating that 'his work refuses to cordon off the mind from the rest of the corpus, and he delves into the

³ D.H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and The Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*, ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 86

⁴ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) p.110

bodiliness and embeddedness not of the human or animal, but of the living in general'.⁵ However, what is actually the living, or what is perceived or recognized as 'the living? Derrida explains that for Levinas, 'the animal doesn't die', because:

Death is not for him, in the first instance, a passage from being to nothingness, an annihilation, but, as he often says, the moment when *the other no longer responds*. Well, this nonresponse of the face, of the corpse as facial corpse, would have no affinity with animal nonresponse and nonresponsibility...

...The corpse of the face doesn't return to being animal the moment when, like the animal, it doesn't respond. The nonresponse of this "he doesn't respond" of the dead face means "he is no longer responding" there where "he will have responded", whereas the animal's "it doesn't respond" means "it has never responded", "it never will respond", "it would never have responded", "it will never have been able to respond." Thus, at one and the same time the animal is deprived of the power and the right to respond, of course, and therefore of responsibility (and hence of the law, etc.), yet it is also deprived of nonresponse, of the right of nonresponse that is accorded "the human face" by means of secrecy or in death.⁶

Hence, if the animal is considered without a face, it is deprived of the right to respond, ultimately whether it belongs to the living is in question. Once the status of living is in question, it becomes justifiable that the animal can be used as resource for the sake of human being – after all, the animal cannot respond, and thus they do not suffer and they are not even living. In *Women in Love*, Gerald's treatment of an Arab mare reveals such an attitude and discloses an intentional negligence towards the response of the mare. However, the example that I wish to discuss with you today is Winifred's portrait of her pet dog Looloo in the Bismarck chapter. Portrait, according to Michal Peled Ginsburg, 'is a field of tension, if not of outright conflict, between sitter and artist'.⁷ The portrait not only shows the likeness of the person represented,

⁵ Carrie Rohman, 'Creative Incantations and Involutions in D.H. Lawrence' in *Choreographies of the Living: Bioaesthetics in Literature, Art and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 51

⁶ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 111-2

⁷ Michal Peled Ginsburg, 'The Portrait's Two Faces: James's "The Special Type" and "The Tone of Time"', in *The Henry James Review* 33 (2012): 165-176 (p. 166)

but is an artwork in which we recognize both the painter and the sitter as well. Thus, as Ginsburg concludes, there always involves ‘a competition between sitter and painter over the power to interpret and exercise irony’.⁸ However, when it comes to animal portrait, whether such a competition still exists or triggers other forms of tension needs to be examined. Noticeably, it is Winifred who proposes a portrait of Looloo:

“Darling!” cried Winifred, rushing to the dog, that sat with contemplative sadness on the hearth, and kissing its bulging brow. “Darling one, will you be drawn? Shall its mummy draw its portrait?” Then she chuckled gleefully, and turning to Gudrun, said: “Oh let’s!”

They proceeded to get pencils and paper, and were ready.

“Beautifullest,” cried Winifred, hugging the dog, “sit still while its mummy draws its beautiful portrait.” The dog looked up at her with grievous resignation in its large, prominent eyes. She kissed it fervently, and said: “I wonder what mine will be like. It’s sure to be awful!”

As she sketched she chuckled to herself, and cried out at times:

“Oh darling, you’re so beautiful!” (*WL*, p.235-6)

Winifred is a polite painter: she first asks permission for drawing, though without waiting for response. She then asks the dog to sit still, but she does not ask the dog to look at her. Winifred’s treatment of her dog reveals an ironic situation: on the one hand, she treats Looloo as if it is a human being sitter, and on the other hand, she denies Looloo’s participation in this portrait. It is emphasized that the dog is aged, mute and sad; neither does it express willingness nor reluctance towards Winifred’s intimacy, but it does gaze at her – it has been watching her with ‘its large, prominent eyes’ all the time. However, the eye contact receives no response from Winifred, as Winifred is more immersed in her passion for capturing the beauty of the dog. The negative emotions conveyed in Looloo’s eyes are ignored, and thus the dog does not even amount as a competitor for interpretation.

Another detail that I wish to draw your attention to is that the dog, is considered by

⁸ Ginsburg, p. 166

Winifred, to a certain extent, as deprived of visual capacity. When Winifred finishes the portrait, she ‘cried, with real grief for the dog, and at the same time a wicked exultation: “My beautiful, why did they?”’, and as she ‘took her paper to the dog’, and held it under his nose’, the dog ‘turned his head aside as in chagrin and mortification (*WL*, p. 236). Winifred does not show the portrait for the dog to see, yet placing it for the dog to sniff. When a dog is considered as perceiving the whole world olfactorily, its face may no longer be qualified as a ‘face’ despite the fact that it has eyes to gaze upon.

Finally, I wish to show you the detailed description of Winifred:

...Winifred was a detached, ironic child, she would never attach herself. Gudrun liked her and was intrigued by her. The first meetings went off with a certain humiliating clumsiness. Neither Winifred nor her instructress had any social grace.

Soon however, they met in a kind of make-belief world. Winifred did not notice human beings, unless they were like herself, playful and slightly mocking. She would accept nothing but the world of amusement and the serious people of her life were the animals she had for pets. On those she lavished, almost ironically, her affection and her companionship. To the rest of the human scheme she submitted with a faint bored indifference. (*WL*, p. 235)

Winifred’s indifference towards other human (who are not like her) is intended a contrast to her attachment for the pet animals that she own. Yet why does she lavish ‘her affection and her companionship’ on those animals which are even less like herself? Her indifference towards the response of the real dog shows her interaction with the dog is more like a role-playing game for her, in which she plays the role of ‘mummy’, the one who dominates the other gently with caressing and hugs. The sense of ‘amusement’ is what she shares with Gerald when treating the nonhuman other – they are both indifferent to the face of the animal, ignoring its response. No matter how the nonhuman expresses itself through its body, it does not trigger sympathy, merely amusement.