

# “There Must Be More Money!” : Employing the Gothic Economy in D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rocking Horse Winner*

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Judith Halberstam explains the term ‘Gothic Economy’ as a condition in which the ‘logic’ of capitalism transforms “even the most supernatural of images into material images of capitalism itself.” (Halberstam,102). It is therefore not coincidental that several fictions written during the nineteenth and early twentieth century reflected a reality that was essentially constructed by capitalism. The Gothic narrative has time and often stressed the fact that ‘fear’ is neither an isolated occurrence nor an exclusive personal experience but a ubiquitous and widely shared reality and this idea finds resonance in Walter Bagehot’s declaration in 1864, when he lent the word ‘panic’ an economic connotation that reflected a general state of anxiety produced by the unstable Victorian economy. He said- “It has not been sufficiently observed how very peculiar and technical is the sense in which we now talk of *panic*”. It would naturally signify a general destruction of all confidence, a universal distrust, a cessation of credit in general. But a *panic* has now come to mean a state in which there is a confidence in The Bank of England, and nothing but The Bank of England.” (Bagehot, 435).

In this study I want to argue a how D.H. Lawrence’s short story *The Rocking Horse Winner* employs the gothic tropes to register and assess the intense panic produced by the unstable economy and how the gothic economy also causes various ideological modes and ontological entities to haunt their others.

Lawrence’s popularity as an artist rests primarily as a novelist. Although he wrote more than sixty tales, yet this remarkable achievement is totally overshadowed by his novels. It is interesting to note here that this disparity reflects not only the relative importance of the novels as a genre over the short story but also the terms on which the tales were produced. Lawrence himself often represented his tales as a way of making ‘running money’. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the vogue of writing short stories opened a very lucrative market and Lawrence managed to get his stories published in a number of English and American literary journals. If a particular tale got published in different journals, Lawrence would benefit from it twice. This reflects a how both the production and the produced tale were bound more within and informed by a moneycentric system instead of being solely directed by the artist’s aesthetic sensibilities.

Charles Kindleberger reflecting on the relation between capitalism and nineteenth century fiction notes that the artist did not shy away from using the language of panic, frenzy and crisis to describe the triumphs and terrors of capitalism. (Kindleberger, 27) D.H. Lawrence although writing in the early twenties, is no exception. Using explicit and subliminal gothic tropes, Lawrence employs a

language in *The Rocking Horse Winner* that insists on capitalism’s effects on body and the psyche thereby conveying an emotional and even bodily response to panic.

Written in 1926, *The Rocking Horse Winner* was a contribution to the Cynthia Asquith anthology of ghost stories. The story is about little Paul whose house seems to be haunted with the ‘unspoken phrase’- “There must be more money!” (Wallace,136) During the eighteenth century, when Gothic, as an architectural term, entered the western lexicon, the concept of home was beginning to reflect the values of the rising bourgeoisie. Buildings thus became a metaphor of commenting on class politics and related structures of power and knowledge. (Cavallano,86) By the twentieth century, in a number of texts, the Gothic mansion is replaced by the bourgeois house which itself becomes the locus of disorder and take on monstrous dimensions to erupt with devastating repercussions on its owner’s certainties and values. The haunted house hence becomes the site upon which the collective anxieties converge. Hence although Paul’s family lived in a pleasant house with a garden in front and discreet servants which made them feel superior to others in the neighbourhood, yet “they felt always an anxiety in the house.” (Wallace,135) Given the context, the whispered phrase, “There must be more money!” hardly seems to be a supernatural phenomenon. Rather it is the actual crystallization of a pervasive materialism echoing Judith Halberstam’s concept of ‘gothic economy’ and is a sign of the extent to which the lust for money can get embedded in human consciousness and start haunting the psyche. (Wallace, XVI) With the rise of capitalism, there was a paradigm shift towards seeing everything first and foremost through the logic of ‘the economy’. As a result, instead of the currency system being subservient to the comfortable employment of the people, the people’s comfort became obsequious to a supply of money. The fact that the house seemed to repeatedly whisper for more money although nobody said it aloud is an index to the shared sense of panic arising out of the compulsion to dissemble and keep up the image of a prosperous middle class position without having the requisite resources to do so. The house is then a reflection of the characters’ tormented minds where evil seems to lurk at every corner.

However the evil is consciously kept suppressed by the repressive model of the facade that Paul's family keeps up. It is first discerned in Paul's mother, Hester. Lawrence informs us that she is a woman of beauty and yet within a few lines it gets clear that her beauty is as superficial as the social position that she maintains. She had married for love which had soon turned into dust and she has bonny children but they were not born out of love. Rather she believes that they have been

'thrust' upon her. The verb 'thrust' has been chosen by Lawrence very shrewdly. Knowing Lawrence, it would not be very difficult to infer that Hester's dissatisfaction with her domestic life had largely been sexual which causes her to turn frigid. In a letter to John Middleton Murry, Lawrence had once written that- "A woman unsatisfied must have luxuries". This is an apt description of Hester for we find both her and her husband having expensive tastes. Hester's husband is hardly mentioned otherwise. All that we get to know is that he "went into town to some office" and though he had "good prospects" yet they "never materialised". (Wallace,135) Failing to provide the material luxuries that Hester needed, he almost ceases to exist for her. In a capitalist society where families had taken money to be the nexus of affection, the husband's 'luck' is considered to be directly proportional to his capability of successfully providing the material comforts

to his family. Denying vital emotions and having committed to external money, 'luck' for Hester has come to symbolise a kind of self deception by which she justifies her dissatisfaction in life. In a vain attempt to keep up an idealised appearance, Hester fails to come across not only as a loving wife but also fails desperately to prove herself to be a good mother. Although she feigns to be more gentle and anxious for her children, yet she "always felt the centre of her heart go hard" (Wallace,135) when her children were present. Hence for little Paul, 'luck' would have symbolised an affirmation of love and warmth from his mother which he is awfully denied. In his desperation to get an approval from his mother, Paul ironically discovers that 'luck' in this cold materialistic world is simply "what causes you to have money".(Wallace,136)

Paul's attempt at replacing his father is then informed by not only a natural Oedipal urge but also by his desire to acquire 'luck' and thereby earn his mother's affection. Money per se therefore does not have any significance for Paul. Rather it becomes the medium of his substitution of the father figure by asserting that he is lucky while his father was not; indirectly insisting that he has a better claim for the mother's affection. Lawrence here uses the potent fictional device of the innocent child's perspective to devastating effect. By exercising his supreme will, Paul develops an uncanny power to pick the winning horse at the races by riding his rocking horse and hence earn money. Ironically, the money that he earns does not give him the desired effect. When he gifts his mother five thousand pounds on her birthday, he hopes that it would alleviate the panic and release the household of the haunted whisperings, thereby unleashing the vital emotions. But surprisingly the gift only aggravates the situation. His present makes his mother colder, harder and more engrossed in materialism—"The house had been 'whispering' worse than ever lately, and, even in spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it." (Wallace,143) Money as a symbolic substitute only sharpened the craving it was meant to satisfy. The house and its inmates had so internalised the money monster that even Paul's supernatural mediation could not ward off the evil.

Many critics have pointed out that Paul's riding the horse to acquire supernatural knowledge has affinities with the popular motif in gothic tales where the hero bargains with the devil in exchange of personal gain or forbidden knowledge. When Paul rocks himself into the magical and prophetic trance, his eyes glare blue and strange and he speaks to no one. His sisters dread him as he stares into the horse's wooden face: "Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy bright." (Wallace,137) As the story progresses, he becomes "wild-eyed and strange...his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness." We hear again and again of the uncanny blaze of the blue eyes, until at the time of his collapse they become "like blue stones" (Wallace,147). Evidently then in the process of exorcising the evil, Paul in turn is possessed by the same devil. The horse stands for the symbol of greed, lust, materialism and sexual danger and as Paul gradually internalises it, he becomes more and more stealthy. However the onlookers interpret his secretive nature from their own mundane perspective. Whereas his mother misreads his nervous condition, attributing the damage to the vice of gambling rather than to the money system to which she is enslaved, Bassett considers Paul to be almost a seer, a visionary and is religiously reverent towards him and Uncle Oscar, being the most insensitive of the lot, exploits Paul's fragile mental state for his own financial gains. Nobody tried either to understand Paul's desperate need for human love and companionship

or tried to live from their own vital centres; which alone could have rid the house of its whisperings.

Paul gains 'luck', but only at the cost of his own fragile life. But what he fails to gain is what he craved for most, his mother's love and affection but all that his mother has for him at the time of his collapse is a superficial concern emanating from a frozen heart. Paul's family draws a vicious circle of evil materialism which tightens over the child and in his attempt to control this sprawling monster and exorcise it, he himself is destroyed. In worshipping the new god of Mammon, the capitalist society turned all activities towards the principles of mechanism and calculation and therefore Lawrence gives the last word to Uncle Oscar- "My God, Hester, you're eighty odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner." (Wallace,148) The child has time and again been employed as the figure through which societies endeavour to domesticate their darkest

fears and they are relentlessly persecuted, victimized and abandoned into unknown dangers by the adults to protect themselves. As adults exploit the curiosity and naive adventurousness of children to keep their own nightmares at bay, children themselves confront the dark on their own terms in a struggle to understand and name the fear. (Cavallano, 212-213) Hence “Paul’s secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name.” (Wallace,145) The title then becomes ironic in this context. We realise that the story is not about a winner of a rocking horse but the rocking horse winning over Paul. The horse symbolising the materialistic acquisitive instinct of human beings emerges as the real winner in this capitalist-bourgeoisie society which prioritises money over the deeper emotions of love and warmth of human companionship. In his attempt to confront the frightening entity of money, Paul endeavours to control the external by a knowledge which destroys him. Money thus becomes the new monster of modern capitalist society which is simultaneously desired and feared but little do we realize that in offering ourselves as its devotees, we have allowed the economy to appropriate gothic dimensions, enslaving us and engulfing society by taking as its toll the lives of innocent people like Paul.

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