CHAPTER 8

FROM LESSER SEX TO GREATER SEX:

"Mr. Noon"
Mr. Noon published in 1984 is an unfinished novel. It is presented in two parts which denote a movement from lesser sex to greater sex. In the first part, Gilbert Noon, the protagonist is presented as a spoon and in the second part as a phallic conscious character in self exile though not alone, but with Johanna Keighley, a German born aristocrat with whom he elopes. Phallic consciousness prompts the protagonists to break the fixity of their family and society and search tirelessly till they find a new heaven and a new earth. Here the fate of the phallic conscious hero and heroine are in line with the protagonists in other novels.
The first part of the story introduces Gilbert Noon, an elementary school teacher, who is interested in mathematics, music and science. Woodhouse provides a background to this novel; the same background in Lawrence's The Lost Girl. It reads like a commentary on Woodhouse's bourgeois morals and traditional habits of marriage. In other words, Part One tells "a wry and comic tale of English provincial life."¹

In the introductory chapter, Gilbert Noon is exposed to the violent attack by the Goddards on the issue of his treatment with women. He confesses that he intends to meet a woman that night, but he considers her inferior to him. Patty's Sharp challenge at this, continue to haunt our minds throughout the first part of the novel. She asks: "But what is she to you? A trivial Sunday - night bit of fun: isn't she? - Isn't she now?" He answers that she is a "good fun".

We meet Mr. Noon the famous spoon and Emma the famous sport in the second chapter. Gilbert's kisses make her quiver with "epicurean anticipation." When he

continues to kiss her, she melts nearer to him and she clings to the warmth of his shoulders like "a drowsy fly on the November window-pane." The novelist presents his protagonist as a spoon as it is the essential mysteries of English modern love. Melvyn Bragg's explanation helps us to conclude that the whole business comes to the category of 'lesser sex'. "Spooning is innocent foreplay almost entirely restricted to facial nuzzling. As described by Lawrence, it is a form of sex in the head."

Gilbert Noon is a first rate spoon in the sense that he is a poet. His movements make her melt and her capacity deserves to be called a daughter of Venus. They seem to achieve some sort of a transcendental experience, but evidently not a phallic experience. She in her 'drunken consciousness' feels that she is high in space and sometimes to immensurable depths. When they keep their mouths fused to one another, it is a journey to the beyond to the infinite. But all the time they have been experiencing "a secondary mundane consciousness."

They cannot continue this secret affair for a long time. Alf Bostock, her father suspects foul play and identifies the man. Gilbert and Bostock fight each other

2 Ibid., P. ix.
and Gilbert finally manages to escape. The protagonist is one who never fails to find women of his choice. The very next week, he moves towards Woodhouse and meets Patty Goddard. He notices in her an Aphrodite quality. He feels that a flame runs from his heels to his head while looking at her. But all her feelings are smashed up by the emergence of a cow. It has spoiled the Aphrodite quality in her and the new roused feelings in him. Mr. Noon has been interrogated by the school authorities in the light of charges levelled against him by Alf Bostock. But Mr. Noon, instead of giving an explanation declares his decision to resign his job. He decides to leave to Germany for his doctorate in science. He finally will put an end to all his contacts with women: "He was determined to have done with Haysfall, Whetstone, Woodhouse, Britten-women, Goddard-women, Emmie-women, all his present life and circumstance, all in one smack." A few words of Bostock's letter still haunts his mind - "criminal correspondence", "got her into trouble" and "ruined her life."

Gilbert arrives at Woodhouse and meets Patty. It so happens that Mrs. Bostock arrives to see her at the same time. He learns that Emma has gone to Fanny's house.

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at Eakrast. He blames others for making their contact a problem. He can't help cursing: "Her father, society, and fools." Emmie deserves equal blame in this affair. She has been engaged to Walter George and all the time she has been carrying on with Gilbert.

Gilbert Noon's arrival at the Harold's is the climax of the first part of the novel. Harold takes Gilbert to the bedroom where all have been assembled. It is a 'tense situation to which all are drawn together. When Emmie, Gilbert and Walter are left alone, there is a 'deadlock' between them. Emmie thinks that she is the cause of this "obtuse-angled triangle". The first part comes to an end with an invocation of the god "Deux ex machina" to help to solve this problem or else the situation will continue forever in the spare bedroom at Eakrast.

The novelist, in the second part of the novel leaves out the Emma story. He prefers not to explain how Gilbert Noon manages the situation in Eakrast bedroom. But he mentions in particular how he happens to meet Mrs. Whiffen (Emma) and her daughter in Woodhouse last Christmas. And if he has left out the Emma story, that is part of his scheme. From the hints the novelist leaves in the first part, we expect the protagonist's future
involvement in his doctoral studies in Germany. It seems that the novelist has retained only the protagonist's name in the second part. He says: "We stand upon another footing" in the second part. Mr. Noon's name is no more synonymous with spoon. We confront a resurrected man in Gilbert Noon:

Lawrence sets out with Gilbert Noon in Germany as a totally different enterprise and we feel that little that matters to Gilbert is dependent on those minor alarums in Woodhouse. The German affair is totally self-sufficient and self-sustained. It is very agreeable to have the same name and the same physical description and even some of the same characteristics go out from England into Europe, but there is no sense that the quiddity of Gilbert is even half-rooted in the motorbike and greenhouse world he has left behind. Gilbert is brought to life by Johanna, that is all the life he wants and that is the life we feel with him.4

Gilbert's acquaintance with Alfred Kramer, the German professor is not given in detail. Their joint tours to

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4 Melvin Bragg, 'Introduction', Mr. Noon, P. x.
the countryside are in a way helpful to the protagonist’s awakening of phallic consciousness. He feels that his exclusive nationality breaks down in his heart. He loves the world in multiplicity, the rich and free variegation of Europe and its ‘manyness’.

His old obtuseness, which saw everything alike, in one term, fell from his eyes and from his soul, and felt rich ... and it was so nice to be one among many, to feel the horrible imprisoning oneness and insularity collapsed, a real delusion broken, and to know that the universal ideals and morals were after all only local and temporal.  

Mrs. Johanna Keighley, the counterpart of Gilbert Noon is introduced in the chapter entitled ‘Snowflower’. It brings to our mind the platonic love the Rector had with his wife in The Virgin and the Gipsy. If Mr. Noon part one focusses on the protagonist’s misadventures with women of different age and class, Mr. Noon part two narrates Johanna’s misadventures with men of different age and class. The protagonist’s seem to hail from the same background. But when they meet each other, the story

5 Mr. Noon, P. 135.
never remains in the category of emphasizing 'lesser sex' but undoubtedly of 'greater sex'. Johanna's momentary experience with the Japanese while travelling by orient express serves only to lose her consciousness about the surroundings and she alights at Munich instead of Frankfort. Though it is an insignificant episode in her life, it prepares the meeting ground of the protagonists at Professor Alfred Kramer's house. Thus the atmosphere is set for Gilbert to be smitten by this 'Snowflower', who is full-bosomed and full of life.

Johanna has utmost contempt for Everard's attitude of treating her as a 'Snowflower'. She hates commonness and the commonest man she has ever had is her husband. An exception to this is her wonderful lover Eberhard. She finds in him "something wonderful, something beautiful, and something so much more intense and real."

Gilbert is surprised at her frank invitation to come to her. The couple's first night together is not a success for either of them. The passion do not get free in either and therefore neither of them feel satisfied or fulfilled. But in the morning they are happy just being together and Gilbert tells Johanna that she must not go back to America, but stay with him. In their second meeting, Gilbert feels that passion in him breaks like lightning out of his blood. This wonderful passion is the "storm which shook and swept him at varying intervals all his life long."
The scene shifts to Detsch, where we find Johanna making contact with her old friend Rudolf Von Daumling. He has broken his relationship with his wife. Johanna tries to develop confidence in him and that prompts him to feel that his "impotent purity is unmanly, and a sense of humiliation ate him as a canker." She, at this stage has "purer compassion" for him and he takes it more humiliating than impotence. He writes long poems in which Gilbert Noon is presented as a 'raven of woe'. Johanna discloses to Gilbert that she was in love with a American named Berry. She adds that she had an idyllic love affair with him.

Johanna in a tone of soliloquy wonders if Gilbert is a good lover. But her present affirmation is an acknowledgement: "But it isn't every man who can love a woman three times in a quarter of an hour - so well - is it - ?" Here she has taken sex as a firm basis for marriage. In other words, by accepting the phallic marriage she has dismissed the hypocritical personal marriage based on "all sorts of spiritual, aesthetic, ethical and intellectual miracles".

Gilbert fears that if she goes back to her old marital relationship with Everard, it would be a

6 Ibid., P. 183.
'catastrophe'. He seems to arrive at certain conclusions as an instrument of instinct, in a process of strange abstraction, least exerting his mind for the process of thinking. Johanna is seemingly mesmerized at this special quality in him. The novelist here suggests that the fate of a true phallic character is unpredictable. The course of their love will be so 'jagged'. What he says here can be taken as an explanation to what actually phallic consciousness will provide a person and what are its prospects in responding to this instinctive consciousness:

... a jagged, twisty, water-fally, harassed stream is the most fascinating to follow. It has a thousand unexpected thrills and adventures in it. Let those who love peace seek peace and pursue it. We are not so keen on peace. To be a fat cow in a fat pasture is not our ideal ... Let us have a continual risk and tumble and the unceasing spur of jeopardy on our flank to make us jump and fly down the wind. None of your fat grazing grounds for us. If we are to have yon tasty tuft of grass, or yon patch of sweet-herb, we've got to hop perilously down a precipice for it.
And that is what we prefer. God, I don't want to sup life with a spoon. I'd rather go lean - bellied till I'd caught my bird.\(^7\)

A sense of the past is a constant obsession to the protagonist's mind. Gilbert finds in the May fair, "a deeper, more suggestive, more physical vulgarity, something ancient and coarse." The Gallic crudity in the fair gives him a sense of familiarity and old blood association, whereas the Germanic influence makes him feel ill at ease. Detsch makes him angry with the presence of soldier's and officers. He could not help hating the militarism and imperialism which Detsch is inflicted with: "Everything was assertive - so assertive that Gilbert, with his sensitive musician's tissue, felt often that he could not breathe..."\(^8\)

Gilbert and Johanna differ in matters like love, jealousy etc. She believes in Eberhard's words: "One should love all men: all men are lovable somewhere." She argues that she can understand something in every man. On the other hand, Gilbert hates what he understands and loves what he can't understand. He believes in

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\(^7\) Ibid., P. 192.

\(^8\) Ibid., P. 181.
"particular love" which she dismisses saying that it is selfishness. The noblest thing for her is to overcome jealously. But for him, jealously is as natural as love. He declares his belief: "I want exclusive physical love - There may be aberrations. But the real fact in physical love is the exclusiveness: once the love is really there." Sheila Macleod points out that "the duality/polarity between the lovers is set up at once, and what remains of the novel is concerned with the attempts at reconciliation between the two principles they represent."

Gilbert believes in strife in relationships and his prayer is that let that situation continue throughout his life. He knows that once he settles down accepting peace that would be similar to that of death in life: "Passion is always a fight, desire is always a strife. Hurray then for the fight and the strife. Let it never end, or we are picked blossoms." Phallic consciousness in Gilbert and Johanna are not a blind sort of attraction or excessive passion. There is a strong force at work in them that continuously revolts, to give way finally to submission. It is a recurring process in their life.

9 Ibid., P. 209.
11 Mr. Noon, P. 220.
Everard has failed in his relationship with Johanna because sex is a secret affair for him and openly he is for the non-existence of such things. Johanna had more sensual satisfaction out of Everard than out of her lovers including Gilbert. But he has a horror of any sensual or really physical reference by day. He is in the heritage of the "great sensual non-admitters". But what Gilbert admits in his life is shocking to Johanna at the same time she clings to him.

Gilbert's address to a crucifix at Kloster Schaeftlarn shocks Johanna and he thinks of the absolute irrelevance of such an idealism. The same night she complains about his method of doing everything in his own way while lying on their "passionate narrow bed." She protests and changes to another bed. The darkness in the room and his thinking makes him semi-conscious. When it is day break, slowly day consciousness comes to him and finally his normal day consciousness fights with the awful night consciousness. The duality that is at work in him is emphasized in the episode of their bathing in the stream. Johanna's nakedness fills him with a darkness of desire. He feels envy of her beauty and full with hostile desire for her.
he looked at her still with the dark eyes of a half-hostile desire and envy. Strange enemies they were ... And he brooded, looking at her as her strong bosom rose and fell, and the full breasts lay sideways. And with a sort of inward rage he wished he could see her without any darkness of desire disturbing her soul.\(^\text{12}\)

But in spite of all this, there is union in their difference and they can be happy. They seem to be mere forces that keep the law of the universe. The strife in which they are involved is, thus everlasting one: "He wanted life to be all his life, male; she wanted life to be all her life, female. And sometimes he fell under her tugging, and sometimes she fell under his. And then there was war."\(^\text{13}\) But ultimately a man and a woman has to enter into a complete relationship with one who can keep one's polarity and equipose. If it overbalances, there will be a terrible struggle to get back the balance. Gilbert and Johanna's life bear a good example to this.

Gilbert meets a German school teacher and his students in a village and he is reminded of his own

\(^{12}\) Ibid., P. 268.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., P. 269.
school days. At this point Mr. Noon seems to establish a link with the protagonist's life and affairs in part one of the novel. He thinks of the 'ignominy', and the "horror of the hideous tangled captivity" of that profession. He dislikes such a job because liberty is essential for his free soul and so such a job is to be contemplated with horror and hatred.

Wherever the protagonists settle down, they have to confront the soldiers. At Ommerbach, it is the sight of soldiers galloping. This sight makes Gilbert forget about the woman at his side. He has a deep longing to be with men, to be active, reckless, dangerous on the brink of death. Sheila Macleod thinks that the world of men holds pleasure which the world of women can neither offer nor understand. Lawrence may be stressing the duality inherent in man-woman relationship again in this episode:

As woman have children (a process from which men are excluded) so men must have a comradeship which excludes women. 'But man must remain man, and woman, woman, There is something manly in the soul of man which is beyond woman, and in which she has no part.
And there is something in woman particularly in motherhood, in which man has no part and can have no part'. Once again Lawrence, in the person of Gilbert, is turning male inadequacy to an advantage and in the process, finding further evidence for a further duality/polarity. For man or woman to trespass into the other's territory is 'poison' or 'misery', and the 'dual life-polarity' is the 'basic of the life-mystery' as the 'universe swings in the same dual polarity'.

Gilbert's fascination to the world of men does not last long. It gives way to the other extreme of Johanna's. He remains passive to the Baroness long lecture to him. The novelist comments that in "Gilbert's world people did not make speeches". Later, Johanna finds fault with him for remaining silent. He feels that "a sort of semi-conscious swoon drowsing his brain". But later on, their differences cease to nothing in their physical union:

And he and Johanna slept, with his arm round her, and her breast, one breast, in his hand: the perfect consummating sleep of true,

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14 Sheila Macleod, Lawrence's Men and Women, P. 220.
terrible marriage. As a new-born child sleeps at the breast, so the newly-naked, shattered, new-born couple sleep together upon the heaving wave of the invisible creative life, side by side, two together, enveloped in fruition.\footnote{Mr. Noon, P. 287.}

Gilbert's phallic conscious cast of mind cannot tolerate the anarchy of restraint and rules strictly imposed by the authorities. He with all his being hates their intervention on his spontaneous life. At the same time there is a counter movement at work in him; he is always in a voyage back to the medieval times. Reaching in Austria, Gilbert finds that he is ridden from the unpleasant feeling Germany gave. At Kufstein, he is impressed by the "medieval imperial feeling" and at Eckershofen, he notices "a strange, medieval catholicism everywhere". The valley with crucifixes of different types rouses in his mind a certain 'ancient root fear'. He realizes that the spirit of the ancient tree-worship still lingers in these valleys.

Gilbert observes Johanna dance with a peasant and he doubts whether she is a fraud. At a moment when the
dance reaches a crisis, she gives a cry which resembles a cry a woman gives in her crisis of embrace. Gilbert knows that the peasant desires her and he feels sympathy towards him. But she will not accept him because she could not love a person without a sort of spiritual recognition. Gilbert finds that she is excited and she will make use of him as an "instrument to satisfy her roused excitement." Johanna too has almost the same opinion with regard to Gilbert. She considers his correspondence with Emma as 'filthy messing'. She snatches those letters and tears them to four pieces. He feels glad at her 'decided action', but angry at her insolence.

Everard's letter with a little note from her son upsets Johanna. Gilbert is shocked at Everard's Christ-like role in this issue. But the fact is that Johanna's departure put an end to the "diabolical connubial tension" that had existed between them. Gilbert can imagine the tortured face and appearance of Everard. The valley with crucifixes hanging over the Alpine paths brings to his mind 'an almost preternatural apprehension'. He remembers the words in Everard's letter: "I gave you everything. I would have been cut to pieces for you". He could not understand the ideal
of sacrifice for somebody and especially sexual sacrifice. An imaginary situation comes to his mind:

Pontius Pilate had come at the last hour to calvary, and said, "No more of this unclean business!" Suppose he had ordered Jesus to be taken down, restored, healed and sent home to live. Would the world have been worse. Would it?16

Similarly, Everard's sexual - passional crucifixion is interrupted and he has been told to live. Gilbert is willing to take the responsibility of the 'interruption'. He anticipates that Everard should be grateful for taking away his 'Gathsemane Cup'. Paradoxically, Gilbert chooses to drink from the same cup, but surely with a 'different stomach.' But incurring Everard's hatred makes Gilbert look like an wounded animal which Johanna detests.

Johanna's disclosure of her sex union with Stanley does not influence Gilbert at all. For him this complete and unexpected statement has no meaning. He consoles her with "Never mind ... We do things we don't know we're doing". She takes his response as false and spiritual. Moreover, she is humiliated at his glorification of

16 Ibid., P. 323.
himself. But what Gilbert says is his actual self and if he protests that would be a hypocritical act. But he feels contempt to Stanley when she discloses that he was impotent. Here in this episode, Gilbert is practising what Johanna has been preaching in overcoming his jealously and in the process has confounded her.

In the last chapter, the protagonists are seen happy to settle in Villa Florin. Gilbert finds sensual pleasure in his attachment with her. The emotional experience resemble something "broke alive in his soul that had been dead before". It is the resurrection of a new man with a new realization: That love is both sex and sacred is something he learns gradually from his relationship with Johanna: "He had never known that one could enjoy the most exquisite appreciation of the warm silken woman, not in one's mind or breast, but deep in one's limbs and loins." 17

An important feature of Mr. Noon is the novelist's technique of addressing the readers from time to time. Thus it runs like a commentary on the consciousness of the protagonist. By adopting this technique, the novelist gives vent to all his pent up emotions to the

17 Ibid., P. 369.
criticism levelled against him so far. Epic device like invocation of gods, pagan rituals etc. serve the purpose to shatter the mental consciousness of the contemporary society which adheres to false morality and spirituality. We feel that the protagonists are accompanied unseen by the novelist and at each stage, he comes out from his hide out to comment on, to justify, to defend, to criticise the situation and the parties involved in it. The narrative is predominantly the consciousness of Gilbert Noon. The sequence of events prove that he has been led by phallic consciousness. It is, in fact, a progression from the lesser sex to the greater sex. Along with the fate of the protagonist, looms large the fate of the novelist. The consciousness of Gilbert Noon and the consciousness of the novelist can't be separated. For instance the novelist says indirectly that he too shares the protagonist's nostalgia for medieval times by grouping his way back to 'the tree of life' :

And I, poor darling, group my way back to the tree of life, on which Jesus was crucified. He did so want to be a free, abstract spirit, like a thought. And he was crucified upon the tree of the eternal, primal sensual soul, which is man's first
and greatest being. Now I, gentle reader, love my tree. And if my mind, my spirit, my conscious consciousness blossom upon the tree of me for a little while, then sheds its petals and is gone, well, that is its affair. I don't like dried flowers, immortels. I love my tree. 18

When we constantly listen to the novelist's address to the reader, we are forced to think about the phallic consciousness of the artist rather than that of the protagonist. The protagonist, thus seem to acquire insignificance and phallic consciousness comes uppermost. Gilbert and Johanna's wanderings thus turn to be a parable on phallic consciousness. They have experienced death and resurrection, different levels of transformation, many a time. The novelist himself has undergone such experience:

Ah, how many times have I, myself, been shattered and born again, how many times still do I hope to be shattered and born again, still while I love. In death I do not known, do not ask. Life is my affair. 19

18 Ibid., P. 240.
19 Ibid., P. 288.
If in other novels the novelist concentrates on the emergence of a phallic conscious and phallic character in the background of mental consciousness and its struggle, here in *Mr. Noon*, he goes a step further by depicting how the protagonists live with this consciousness amidst protests and problems. In this sense *Mr. Noon* stands apart from other novels and has a greater importance in understanding phallic consciousness.