

To the Puritan All Things Are Impure, Aldous Leonard Huxley

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Mrs Grundy resembles the King and that infernal worm of the Bible—she cannot die. *La Grundy est morte. Vive la Grundy!* There is no getting rid of her; she is immortal and succumbs only to be reborn. Disguised as Sir William Joynson-Hicks (for she frequently wears trousers), the old lady has been very active in England during the last few years. When the General Election put an end to Jix and his party, the optimists hoped that an end had been put to Mrs Grundy. But the optimists, as usual, were wrong. In the sphere of sexual behaviour the new government is as rigidly orthodox as the old, and as actively intolerant. Among the last acts of the departing Home Secretary were the banning of D. H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and the confiscation of the registered letter containing the manuscript of his 'Pansies.' One of the first acts of his Labourite successor was to set the police on to D. H. Lawrence's exhibition of paintings. *La Grundy est morte. Vive la Grundy!*

Sexual orthodoxy preserves not only its Athanasian Creed, but also its Grand Inquisitor. 'I believe in one heterosexual Love, monogamous and indissoluble. And I believe in Respectability. And above all in Silence.' Against the heretics who will not accept this profession of sexual faith, the Grand Inquisitors are permanently at war. At the beginning of last century, English Catholics and Jews had no political rights; atheists were expelled from English universities; blasphemers were severely punished. Today a man is free to have any or no religion; about the Established Church and its divinities he can say almost anything he likes.

But woe to him if he deviates from the narrow path of sexual orthodoxy! Penal servitude awaits those who act on their disbelief in the exclusive sanctity of heterosexuality; and for sexual blasphemy—that is to say, the writing of certain forbidden words and the frank description or representation of certain acts which every one performs—the penalty ranges from confiscation of the offending picture or writing to a fine and, possibly, in certain cases, imprisonment. It will thus be seen that, as things stand at present, any member of the Holy Trinity may be insulted with almost perfect impunity. But do, or say, or draw anything to offend Mrs Grundy, and the avenging Inquisitor will immediately swoop down on you. Mrs Grundy, in a word, is the only deity officially recognized by the English State. Men are free not to worship the God of Anglicanism; but the law compels them to bow down before the divine Grundy.

To argue the case against Grundyism would be easy, but wholly unprofitable. For in these matters, it is obvious, argument is perfectly useless. Argument appeals to reason, and there is no reason in Grundyism. There are at best only rationalizations of prejudices—prejudices that, in most individual Grundyites, date back to the teaching received in childhood. Those who accept the creed of sexual orthodoxy do so because, in Pavlov's phrase, their reflexes have been conditioned at an impressionable period. It would be absurd to doubt the sincerity of people like Mr Sumner of the New York Vice Society, and the right honourable gentlemen who have filled the post of Home Secretary in England. They are obviously quite genuinely shocked by such things as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Lawrence's paintings. Such things really disgust and outrage them.

Given their upbringing, it is inevitable; just as it is inevitable that Pavlov's dogs, after having been regularly fed to the sound of a bell, should start to dribble with hungry anticipation each time, in the future, that the bell is rung. Our vice-crusaders and Home Secretaries were doubtless brought up in surroundings where an improper word, an over-frank reference in Saxon phrases to the processes of reproduction and evacuation (notice how perfectly respectable these homely acts become when shrouded in the decent obscurity of a learned language!), was accompanied, not by anything so mild as the tinkling of a bell, but by appalling silences, by the blushing or swooning away of maiden aunts, by the sadly pious horror or Jehovahistic indignation of clergymen and schoolmasters. So that to this day they cannot hear these words or read these descriptions without at once recapturing (the process is as automatic as the salivation of Pavlov's dogs) the painful emotions aroused in them during childhood by the portentous accompaniments and consequences of what I have called sexual blasphemy. At present, most of those old enough to be occupying positions of power and responsibility were brought up in environments which conditioned their reflexes into the form of Grundyism.

A time may come, perhaps, when these posts will be filled by men whose reflexes have not been so conditioned. When the contemporary child takes a normal, healthy interest in sex and scatology, the majority of young parents do not weep over him, or beat him, or tell him that his soul will roast in hell-fire. It follows, therefore, that his future reactions to sex will be less violently painful than the reactions of those who were children in the high old days of Podsnapian respectability. We are therefore justified in cherishing a mild hope for the future. For when I said that Mrs Grundy was immortal, I was exaggerating. She may, old cat that she is, possess nine lives; but she is not everlasting. That a time may come when she will be, if not stone dead, at least enfeebled, chronically moribund, is, as we have seen, quite possible.

Moreover, it is perfectly certain that during long periods of history she hardly existed at all. If we throw our eyes over the whole expanse of historical time, we perceive that active Grundyism is not a normal phenomenon. During the longest periods of recorded history puritanism has been, if not absolutely inexistent, at least without significance or power. The epochs of highest civilization have been conspicuously unpuritanical. It was to the naked Aphrodite that the Greeks of the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. made sacrifice, not to the much-petticoated divinity worshipped by the Pilgrim Fathers, by the later Podsnap and our contemporary Vice Crusaders and Home Secretaries. Seen through the eyes of the philosophic historian, the Puritan reveals himself as the most abnormal sexual pervert of whom we have record, while Grundyism stands out as the supremely unnatural vice.

It was against this unnatural vice and the perverts who practise it that D. H. Lawrence waged almost his latest battle. A militant, crusading moralist, he hurled himself on what he regarded as the evil thing, the wicked people. But unfortunately the evil thing is sacred in our modern world, and the wicked people are precisely those Good Citizens who wield the powers of the State. Lawrence was often discomfited. The giant Grundy popped her huge crinoline over him and extinguished him by force. But not for long; his courage and his energy were inextinguishable and, in spite of the Home Secretaries, the bright dangerous flame of his art broke out again, the warning, denouncing, persuading voice was heard once more—up to the very end.

Cultured and tolerant people often ask: What is the point of this crusading? What is the point of shocking the Jixes into legal retaliation? What is the point of using the brief Saxon words that people shudder at, when you can express the same meaning, more or less, by means of circumlocutions and Graeco-Roman polysyllables? Might not Grundyism be attacked without ringing those particular alarm-bells which cause the mouths of the smut-hounds, not indeed to water, like those of Pavlov's dogs, but to foam with righteous indignation? In a word, might not as good or even better results be obtained if the crusade were conducted with tact and circumspection?

The answer to all these questions is: No. What Lawrence was crusading for was the admission by the conscious spirit of the right of the body and the instincts, not merely to a begrudged existence, but to an equal honour with itself. Man is an animal that thinks. To be a first-rate human being, a man must be both a first-rate animal and a first-rate thinker. (And, incidentally, he cannot be a first-rate thinker, at any rate about human affairs, unless he is also a first-rate animal.) From the time of Plato onwards there has been a tendency to exalt the thinking, spiritual man at the expense of the animal.

Christianity confirmed Platonism; and now, in its turn, what I may call Fordism, or the philosophy of industrialism, confirms, though with important modifications, the spiritualizing doctrines of Christianity. Fordism demands that we should sacrifice the animal man (and along with the animal large portions of the thinking, spiritual man) not indeed to God, but to the Machine. There is no place in the factory, or in that larger factory which is the modern industrialized world, for animals on the one hand, or for artists, mystics, or even, finally, individuals on the other. Of all the ascetic religions Fordism is that which demands the cruellest mutilations of the human psyche—demands the cruellest mutilations and offers the smallest spiritual returns. Rigorously practised for a few generations, this dreadful religion of the machine will end by destroying the human race.

If humanity is to be saved there must be reforms, not merely in the social and economic spheres, but also within the individual psyche. Lawrence concerned himself primarily with these psychological reforms. The problem, for him, was to bring the animal and the thinker together again, was to make them co-operate in the building up of consummate manhood. In order to effect this bringing together certain barriers must be broken down. They are strong barriers; for the conscious mind has taken extraordinary precautions to keep itself out of contact with the body and its instincts. The spirit refuses to be livingly aware of the animal man. Very significant in this context are the tabooed words which describe in the directest possible manner the characteristic functions of bodily life.

Early training has so conditioned the reflexes of the normal bourgeois and his wife that they shudder whenever one of these words is pronounced. For these words bring the mind into direct contact with the physical reality which it is so desperately anxious to ignore. The circumlocutions and the scientific polysyllables do not bring the mind into this direct contact. They are mere algebraical symbols, almost empty of living, physical significance—a fact which must somewhat diminish the hope for the future which I expressed just now. Brought up in a world that is learning to treat sexual matters only too scientifically, the future Jixes and Sumners will be quite undisturbed by literary references to micturition phantasies, auto-erotism, and the like. But if the same phenomena are described in plain Saxon words, they will probably be just

as painfully shocked as the present inquisitors. For when these Saxon words are pronounced, the mind suddenly finds itself in actual touch with that physical reality which Platonism, Christianity, and Fordism have one after another insisted on its ignoring. It shrinks with horror.

But it ought not to shrink with horror. Lawrence set out to overcome this shrinking. The methods he used were drastic—too drastic for many even of those who, in principle, were on his side. 'More tact, more circumspection!' they implored. But the use of forbidden words, the describing and portraying of things ordinarily veiled were absolutely essential tactics in the crusade. The mind had to be made conscious of the physical reality from which it was accustomed to shrink. This was the only way of doing it. The fact that people are shocked is the best proof that they need shocking. Their reflexes have been wrongly conditioned; they should be given a course of shocks until the conditioning is undone. The theory, I am sure, is psychologically sound. But to put it into practice is difficult. At every ringing of their familiar 'pornographic' bell, the right-thinkingly conditioned smut-hounds foam at the mouth. And unfortunately they are in a position to do more than foam; they are in a position to open our letters, confiscate our books and burn our pictures. What's to be done about it? Perhaps Professor Pavlov might be able to tell us.

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