The Evolution of a Hybrid Genre in Geoff Dyer’s *Out of Sheer Rage*: From Menippean Satire to Meta-Auto/Biography*

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Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre. This constitutes the life of the genre. Therefore, even the archaic elements preserved in a genre are not dead but eternally alive; that is, archaic elements are capable of renewing themselves. A genre lives in the present, but always remembers its past, its beginning. Genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development. (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 106; emphasis by Bakhtin)


Some reviewers of *Out of Sheer Rage* suggest that the book incorporates multiple genres. In addition, reviewers never fail to be overwhelmingly amused by the work. As *The Sunday Times* (London) bluntly opines, the work is “[a]n intriguing, magnetic, genre-rattling book.” Carolyn Nizzi Warmbold, in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, comments that the book is “[a] cross of so many genres that it’s a kind of literary mutt, a mutt you’ll want to take home with you.” Another, more witty version of this sentiment is found in Joey Sweeney’s review in *Philadelphia Weekly*: “Such a sprawling, good-natured mess of a book that one has to consult the library of Congress information to find out just what exactly the book is. Literary study? Yes. Travel book? Yes. Personal memoir? Oh, yeah. The trouble is, none of these categories allows you to believe how funny the book is.”

The history of this humorous hybrid genre, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, dates back to ancient Greece, to a time when Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire prospered. Of the two, Menippean satire is more important to the development of *Out of Sheer Rage*. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin details the fourteen basic characteristics of Menippean satire:*3

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* This is a largely rewritten and thoroughly revised version of the paper previously given at the 13th International D. H. Lawrence Conference in Gargnano, Italy, in June 2014. The research is supported by JSPS KAKENHI, Grant Number 26580058.


2 These reviews are reprinted in “Additional Praise for *Out of Sheer Rage*” in Dyer.

3 The following are the fourteen basic characteristics of Menippean satire Bakhtin gives in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*: 1) “the comic element”; 2) “an extraordinary freedom of plot and philosophical invention”; 3) “its bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure”; 4) “the organic combination within it of the free fantastic, the symbolic, at times even a mystical-religious element with an extreme and… crude *slum naturalism*”; 5) “an extraordinary philosophical universalism and a capacity to contemplate the world on the broadest possible scale”; 6) “a three-planed construction… action and dialogic syncrisis are transferred from earth to Olympus and to the nether world”; 7) “a special type of…”
of which are also found in Out of Sheer Rage. For instance, this work features “a wide use of inserted genres,” which “are presented at various distances from the ultimate authorial position, that is, with varying degrees of parodying and objectification” (118). Another feature is “the multi-styled and multi-toned nature,” by which Bakhtin means “a relationship characteristic for the entire dialogic line of development in artistic prose” (118). It is possible to consider Out of Sheer Rage a contemporized, postmodern version of Menippean satire.

At the same time, Out of Sheer Rage can also be regarded as a biography and/or autobiography, albeit written in a completely non-traditional form. Readers might pick up this book expecting a serious biography of D. H. Lawrence, but soon realize that these expectations were wrong. Dyer’s style of writing differs entirely from those of John Worthen, Mark Kinkead-Weekes, and David Ellis, authors of The Cambridge Biography of D. H. Lawrence (1991–98).4 Dyer does not write about Lawrence’s life in chronological order; he neither starts from Lawrence’s birth nor ends with his death, and he ignores most of Lawrence’s major life events and personal relationships. Also, it might particularly irritate academics that he never indicates the sources of his quotations. Interestingly, he exposes his lack of inclination to memorize things, take notes, or interview properly, which are all skills generally utilized in writing biographies. At the same time, Dyer caricatures himself and others who visit the places where Lawrence used to stay, namely, Eastwood, England; Taormina, Italy; Taos, New Mexico, United States; and Oaxaca, Mexico.

The book can also be read as an autobiography of Dyer, who is wrestling with whether to complete a study of Lawrence or to write a novel. The story of an academic/novelist destined to be an eternal procrastinator is constructed of fragmented episodes and sudden digressions; it is also narrated with multi-layered tones connoting irony, self-mockery, and self-degradation, which may make the reader laugh. It seems that Out of Sheer Rage embodies what can be called meta-auto/biography, characterized by Menippean satire.

Meta-auto/biography, a hybrid word combining the prefix meta- and the words autobiography and biography, is a newly emerging concept. Neither the latest version of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) nor the Encyclopedia of Life Writing (2001) includes this term. The origin of meta-auto/biography seems to go back to the period of modernism and the emergence of a new type of biography. As critics have articulated,5 Lynton Strachey’s Eminent Victorians (1918) marked a turning point in the history of biographical writing. In particular, Strachey perceives that in biography, it is “futile to hope to tell even a précis of the truth” (5); all he can do, he believes, is “to examine and elucidate certain fragments of the truth” (6). As a result, Strachey places a new emphasis on the biographer’s point of view: “it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them” (6).

As Ray Monk observes, however, “Strachey was not abandoning or weakening the robust distinction between fact and fiction mentioned above” (4), unlike Harold Nicolson and A. J. A. Symons, who blurred the


5 Richard Altick comments that “After Eminent Victorians biography could never be the same” (281); John Sutherland calls Eminent Victorians “the biography that changed biography” (xviii) while William C. Rubenow “revolution in biographical writing” (18). For this information, I am indebted to Dr. Max Jones, Senior Lecturer in Modern History of Manchester University.
boundaries of fact and fiction to a much greater extent. On the whole, both react positively to Strachey, but they differ from him in their treatment of fact and fiction. In *The Development of English Biography* (1927), Nicolson views Strachey as a biographer who has ended “pure biography” consisting of “truth, individual and art” and who is ushering in the future of biography. He predicts that biography in the future would take a different form, mixing fact and fiction. In fact, he tried to execute this in *Some People*, published in the same year.

According to Monk, “*Some People* is a deeply idiosyncratic work, representative neither of the New Biography nor of Nicolson’s other biographical work” (2). In *Some People*, Nicolson provides short sketches of nine people, but, as Nigel Nicolson, Harold’s son, comments, the “idea of *Some People* … was to put real people in imaginary situations, and imaginary people in real situations” (Qtd. in Monk 3). Consequently, “the central topic of the book is Harold Nicolson’s own intellectual and emotional development, the stages of which are personified by the characters Nicolson sketches” (Monk 3). Monk argues that the “book was, and remains, hard to classify” (3), but it can be regarded as one of the earliest modernist examples of meta-auto/biography. Virginia Woolf, in particular, was greatly inspired by *Some People*. She gave it a positive review, paying special attention to its treatment of fact and fiction: “*Some People* is not fiction because it has the substance, the reality of truth. It is not biography because it has the freedom, the artistry of fiction” (98). Interestingly, when she wrote this review, she was working on *Orlando* (1928), and five years later published *Flush* (1933); both can be considered some of the earliest metabiographical fictions.

On the other hand, in “Tradition in Biography,” a lecture delivered in 1929, Symons calls Strachey “the forerunner of the biographer of the future,” asserting that “the experimental significance of Eminent Victorians is equally beyond dispute” (159). Where he differs from Strachey is in his view on the biographer’s duty, namely, “to be interesting” (155). He states that “the biographer must not only select his facts, but also present them in the most telling order” (155–56), because “biography is the telling of a story—of a life-story” (156; emphasis in original). In fact, *The Quest for Corvo* (1934), a biography of Frederick William Rolfe (known as Baron Corvo) is told in an order evocative of detective fiction. In the “Preface” to *The Quest for Corvo*, A. S. Byatt greatly admires this hybrid form (ix), and it seems likely that she adopted it into her own work, *Possession* (1990), another postmodern meta-auto/biographical fiction. In “Fictional Metabiographies and Metaautobiographies: Towards a Definition, Typology and Analysis of Self-Reflexive Hybrid Metagenres” (2005), Ansgar Nünning discusses *Possession*, together with *The Biographer’s Tale* (2001) and other fictional metabiographies, such as Julian Barnes’ *Flaubert’s Parrot* (1984) and Peter Ackroyd’s *Chatterton* (1987). *Out of Sheer Rage* shows the same features as these postmodern meta-auto/biographical fictions.

This essay aims to demonstrate the ways in which *Out of Sheer Rage* embodies the evolutionary model of a literary genre from Menippean satire through modernist meta-auto/biography to modernist/postmodernist meta-auto/biographical fiction. To that end, I will refer to the four characteristics of meta-auto/biographies specified by Nünning: “to blur genre distinctions” (195); “to cross the boundaries between fact and fiction” (195); “to be read as an allusion to the increasing degree of self-reflexivity; to juxtapose several stories that present the reader with highly self-reflexive intertextual, or rather intermedial, biographical quests for the respective biographee” (196); and “to reveal more about the individual biographers than they do about their elusive subjects” (196). I will also examine how these meta-auto/biographical facets are intertwined with such elements of Menippean satire as articulated by Bakhtin, in particular “inserted genres,” “parodying and objection,” “multi-styled and multi-toned” and “dialogue.” The close examination that follows will, I hope, elucidate Dyer’s idiosyncratic “genre-defying” style, or what can be called a meta-genre.

1. The Crossing of Fact/Fiction Boundaries and the Increasing Degree of Self-Reflexivity

In this section, I will first examine the ways in which Dyer crosses fact/fiction boundaries in *Out of Sheer Rage*. Then, I will discuss how Dyer is self-reflexive about biographical writing with respect to traditional methods. In doing so, I will also consider that parody, an element
of fiction as well as Menippean satire, plays a pivotal part in blurring genre boundaries in *Out of Sheer Rage*. As Paula R. Backsheider says in *Reflection on Biography* (1999), parody is one of “the tactics available to creative writers” but is “not acceptable in biography” (110–11).

*Out of Sheer Rage* not only “blur[s] genre distinctions” but also “cross[es] the boundaries between fact and fiction,” which occurs when Dyer introduces the subject of his travel to Taormina. At the station, he and his girlfriend Laura meet an Italian man named Ciccio; Lawrence had used this name for an Italian male character who became the lover of Alvina Houghton in *The Lost Girl* (1920). Strangely, Dyer says nothing about this coincidence. “Ciccio,” in Dyer’s version, is portrayed differently from Lawrence’s fictional character in many ways; the former makes frequent calls to his girlfriend (Laura’s friend’s mother), and his business is to repair and sell cash registers. However, this same name is repeated in the same setting, Italy, although in Taormina in *Out of Sheer Rage* rather than in the Abruzzo region depicted in *The Lost Girl*. This might confuse readers, leading them to feel unsure if they are reading Dyer’s actual experience or Lawrence’s fiction.

Dyer seems to parody ordinary biographical writing: he looks at it from an objective point of view and adopts an extraordinary approach in his writing, resulting in what Nünning calls “the increasing degree of self-reflexivity,” which is another feature of meta-auto/biography. *Out of Sheer Rage* demonstrates the constructive process of writing: when and how the biographer (Dyer) becomes fascinated by his subject (Lawrence) and starts his biographical quest. At the beginning of the book, Dyer expresses his acute interest in Lawrence thus: “I had decided years earlier that I would one day write a book about D. H. Lawrence, a homage to the writer who had made me want to become a writer” (2). Around the middle of the book, he further details this moment: when he was seventeen, he had seen a picture of Lawrence “standing towards the edge of a vast horizontal landscape” while “[c]louds streamed across the sky” (97–98). He remembers that the picture was captioned “A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time,” and that he thought at the time that the caption “had been chosen so perfectly that the picture seemed less a photograph of Lawrence (a tiny figure in the corner, recognizable only by his beard) than an illustration of this line” (98):

> At the time I did not know where it was from: a quotation from Lawrence, presumably, but beyond that I had no idea. I wanted to track that quotation down—or, to put it more passively and accurately, I hoped to come across it—and the prospect was intriguing precisely because there was nothing to go on. From the start, in other words, I read Lawrence in order to make sense of—to better understand—a photograph of him. (97–98)

From that moment on, says Dyer, he went to bookshops hoping to come across this picture and read Lawrence’s letters: he had the “urge to discover the source of this caption” (98). Eventually, he found the phrase in one of Lawrence’s poems entitled “Song of a Man Who Has Come Through.”

It should be noted here that Dyer discloses the secretive part of biographical writing, that is, how biographers take interest in their subjects. Biographers, even traditional ones, must have had the “urge” or “pulse” to write about their subjects’ lives. In this regard, Backsheider states: “Most decisions to write a biography of a specific person have an element of intellectual or personal passion” (31). And yet, biographers tend not to include such stories of their own, other than in the “Preface” or “Introduction.” Backsheider, scrutinizing thirteen biographies awarded major prizes, including the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, the Bancroft Prize, the Whitbread Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, presents the following significant statistics: “The most common opening lines of the prefaces or introductions of winning biographies are personal remarks or anecdotes (18 or 43 per cent); second is impressive identification of the subject (12 or 29 per cent)” (23).

Dyer also reveals one of the difficulties that biographers may have faced, struggled to solve, and yet never mentioned in the main text: how to deal with the contradictory evidence that biographers come across in their research. Dyer’s unique way of handling such cases

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6 Hibbard also states: “It has been acceptable practice for biographers to allude to their own connection to the subject in a preface or introduction, before getting on to the real subject, however” (22).
comes to the fore when he considers Lawrence’s 1928 recollection on his childhood nickname, Bert. As Lawrence wrote in a letter to David Chambers, Jessie Chambers’ younger brother: “Whatever I forget I shall never forget the Haggs … whatever else I am somewhere still the same Bert who rushed with such joy to the Haggs” (6L 618). A little before that, Lawrence had written to Enid Hilton after reporting his sister’s and niece’s visit: “I am not really ‘our Bert’” (6L 535). Having “often puzzled over the contradiction contained within those rival claims” and having “stood in the drizzle,” Dyer eventually came to a conclusion that “they were both true”: “Taken on their own, individually, both would have been false; the truth lay in the contradiction” (84).

Backsheider sheds light on biographers as “decision-makers whose decisions matter.” In biographies, according to her, “the act of interpretation is ever present” (xxi), but even so, the interpretation should be invisible (3). In the aforementioned case, Dyer does not provide his interpretation on the issue, only showing his authorial presence. In contrast, other biographers of Lawrence have tried to interpret these apparently conflicting remarks, remaining invisible. For David Ellis, the first remark indicates that “[t]he memory of that time made him wish that he were nineteen again,” whereas the second must be understood “in the context of a feverishly angry outburst against the ordinary and commonplace” (449–50). John Worthen, like Ellis, understands the first claim, written to David Chambers, as showing Lawrence’s yearning for “loving, nostalgic reminiscence of the old days” (384). As for the second claim, he, unlike Ellis, focuses on Lawrence’s “sense of being cut off from the past, from his family, from his old self” that “haunted him in these years” (381). Ellis and Worthen view those two letters and provide their own interpretations of each of Lawrence’s reactions to “Bert.” Their interpretations are based on their acute insights into and deep understandings of Lawrence and are, therefore, quite persuasive and worthy of the reader’s consideration.

Backsheider also highlights the importance of preparatory steps for writing a biography: “meticulous record-keeping, painstaking filing, and prodigious feats of memory” (xvii). According to her, “only about 20 per cent of the time taken to ‘write’ [a biography] is spent writing,” which means that the rest is spent on other activities (62). Dyer is self-conscious of his lack of efficiency in these activities. For instance, he admits that he has “failed to take notes”: “I had intended doing so as I went along, transcribing any particularly important passages and keeping a careful record of where these passages occurred, but I had been in such a hurry to gobble down the letters that, except on a few occasions, I had not done so” (108–09).

It is interesting that he repeats this failure, never learning the lesson. Worse, he is not good at memorizing things, as seen in the part of the book in which he describes his first encounter with Lawrence, as discussed earlier herein. Dyer does not remember in which bookshop and book he found the crucial picture of Lawrence: “I forget which book I saw [the picture] in all those years ago” (98). His description of the picture itself is very vague: “if I remember rightly” (97). As with collecting evidence, Dyer understands the value of primary sources such as “journals, diaries, letters, manuscripts, jottings” because “we want to get nearer to the man or woman who wrote these books, to his or her being” (111). However, his treatment of these precious sources is extraordinary. Similar to his non-linear way of writing, he read the Cambridge edition of Lawrence’s letters out of sequence, “as they became available at the British Council Library in Rome, so that all sense of chronology, development had been lost” (108). As a result, he repeatedly reads seven volumes of Lawrence’s letters to find what he needs.

Dyer is never eager to interview any person who knew Lawrence. When he visits the Villa Fontana Vecchia, the house in which the Lawrences lived from 1920 to 1922, he meets a woman in her nineties: “when she was a little girl she had delivered the post to Lawrence” (63). After spending most of his time looking at “a lovely view of the bay, the sea and the sky,” he leaves the house only to note the following:

How nice it would have been, how authoritative, if

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7 David Middlebrook also states, “The purpose of a literary biography, simply, is to explain the internal and external influences on a writer’s work; the biography must supply a convincing account of the workings of the writer’s character, and it must also supply a lively evocation of the writer’s world” (14).
she had said, ‘Mr Lawrence he was very nice, molto simpatico,’ something like that. Spoken by a woman who had actually known him this otherwise unexceptional observation would have carried more weight than anything I had ever read about Lawrence in dozens of memoirs. This was as near to Lawrence as I was ever likely to get and I hadn’t asked her anything, partly because she was old and tired and I was too respectful, but mainly because it had simply not occurred to me to ask her anything and now it was too late. (64)

Dyer missed a rare opportunity to ask a firsthand source for evidence illuminating one specific moment of Lawrence’s life. However, Dyer’s regret does not sound very serious.

A similar teasing tone is prominent when Dyer, like other biographers, traces Lawrence’s footsteps: “the biographer needs to know the significant houses, gardens, even rooms, the vacation spots, major trips, and favourite restaurants, front porches and friends’ entertainment spaces” (Backsheider 72). However, he does not find any value in doing so; rather, he makes fun of it. The following passage reveals what Dyer tells Laura while searching for the Villa Fontana Vecchia, which he could not easily find:

A common part of literary pilgrimage … is that you often don’t know which house you’re meant to be visiting. In a sense it doesn’t make any difference but it’s very difficult to return home unless you have absolute proof that you’ve been to the right place. Hence the need, I conclude for a plaque on the wall: to free us from doubt. (59)

He laughs at the act of “literary pilgrimage,” but he laughs at himself as well, caricaturing himself as a biographer. Together with his blurring of the traditional fact/fiction boundaries, Dyer thus views his biographical writing from an objective perspective as parodying the traditional one to construct a new hybrid genre of meta-auto/biography.

2. Biographer or Biographee: Life-Writing as a Self-Discovery

Interestingly, Dyer’s satirical attitude towards his “literary pilgrimage” shows a striking contrast to his great excitement about revisiting a place to which he had travelled in the past. On the way to Taos, one of the places where Lawrence used to stay, he stops by the Painted Desert, a place he had visited in his last trip to the United States six years previously. Standing at the same spot, he felt a “strange” feeling of “the pleasure derived from revisiting a place”:

In Taormina, outside the Fontana Vecchia, I had tried to enhance my responsiveness to the place by reminding myself that I was standing where Lawrence had stood, was seeing the things he had seen. It hadn’t worked. But here, in the Painted Desert, I was moved by the fact that I was standing in the place I had stood, was seeing the thing I had seen. (211)

Dyer’s self-centered attitude, as observed in the previous quotation, leads us to another directive of meta-auto/biography that Nünning specifies, namely, “to reveal more about the individual biographers than they do about their elusive subjects.” To borrow Allen Hibbard’s words, Dyer is “not simply a parasite, living off the life of the subject”; he “identifies more and more with the subject as the research and writing progress” (32). In Out of Sheer Rage, Dyer, the biographer, comes to realize his new characteristics through his dialogue with Lawrence, the biographee. His process of self-discovery, discussed in what follows, is shown in a “multi-styled and multi-toned” manner, characteristic of Menippean satire.

It might be more accurate to read Out of Sheer Rage as Dyer’s autobiography rather than his biography of Lawrence. Dyer reveals more of himself than of Lawrence, presenting in fragments his own experiences and emotional states, such as indecision, procrastination, confliction, struggle, and other emotions he experiences in writing (or not writing) his study of Lawrence. However, Dyer the autobiographer is like Dyer the biographer, as Dyer himself suggests: “Long resigned to lacking the application adequately to research Lawrence’s
life I find I am not even qualified to research my own, to be my own biographer” (187). An example of this can be seen in the early part of the book, in which Dyer is “so preoccupied with where to live” that he cannot start an academic study of Lawrence or a novel (4). On this occasion, he remembers, although inaccurately, that Lawrence “hated” Paris: “One of the reasons I had become so unsettled in Paris was because it had only a tangential connection with Lawrence… He hated Paris, called it, in fact, ‘the city of dreadful night’ or some such” (12). Dyer does not specify the source but merely adds that “I had the exact phrase in my notes somewhere” (12). However, his quotation is incorrect; it should have been “that city of dreadful night” (7L 248; emphasis mine).

Dyer’s ignoring of the context in which Lawrence’s anti-Paris statement was used is unconventional. On 11 March 1929, Lawrence had arrived in Paris to find a publisher for an inexpensive edition of Lady Chatterley’s Lover because he had been greatly stressed by the widespread pirated versions of his novel; his one-month stay exacerbated his illness. In Dying Game: 1922–1930 (published in 1998), the last volume of The Cambridge Biography of D. H. Lawrence, David Ellis provides a detailed six-and-a-half-page explanation of this biographical event and then highlights Lawrence’s tendency to “blame his continuing ill health on life in a big city” (478). In D. H. Lawrence: The Story of a Marriage (1994), Brenda Maddox presents her interpretation of this incident by detailing the terrible environment of Paris: “It took [Lawrence] to the kind of place he usually avoided literally like the plague: a polluted northern metropolis at a cold and raw time of the year” (458). A comparison between Dyer’s biography and other treatments of this time in Lawrence’s life reveals that Dyer mentions Lawrence only to justify his own reluctance to stay in Paris.

A possible (and impossible) place for Dyer to move to is England, but again, he stops himself from doing so by remembering what Lawrence had said about England: “The one place I could be sure I couldn’t write my study of Lawrence was England, … moving back to England meant moving back into what, in my notes, I referred to by the Lawrentian phrase ‘the soft centre of my being’” (13). Notably, Dyer does not quote Lawrence’s words although he pretends to do so; he cunningly says “the Lawrentian phrase.” Because Lawrence had made numerous, varied comments about England, it would have been easy to find a phrase suitable to express his current situation, and yet Dyer makes no such effort.

Other biographers interpret Lawrence’s sometimes contradictory comments on England in terms of the time when he made them. For instance, Worthen focuses on Lawrence’s ambivalence toward his native country: “He did not become a writer for the countries he would now make his home…. he continued to see things on behalf of his country and to write in his own language…. whatever he [Lawrence] felt and wanted to feel, there was no final escape from the England he left for dead in November 1919” (211–12).

After prolonged contemplation about where he could live to help himself write, Dyer finally decides to move to Rome. Glossing over the practical reason—his girlfriend, Laura, owns a flat there—he tries to associate the place with Lawrence: “Rome was in Italy, the country where the Lawrences had spent more time than any other; it was within easy reach of Sicily where he had lived” (14–15). Then, he utters his expectation: “if I was to stand any chance of making any progress with my study of Lawrence it was probably the very best place I could be” (14–15). This expectation turns out to be thwarted, for he could advance his study of Lawrence neither in Rome nor anywhere else.

Dyer’s strenuous, self-serving effort to link his own experience with that of Lawrence also manifests when he and Laura get injured in a moped crash in Alonissos, Greece, a place that has no connection to Lawrence. During his convalescence, he recollects Lawrence; he “even suspected that it had been my destiny to go to Alonissos, read (a little) Rilke, crash the moped and discover this affinity with Lawrence” (33).

On another occasion, Dyer remembers his grandmother, who had died of lung cancer, although his parents had explained that it was tuberculosis to “make things less hopeless” (79). Then, he again makes a sudden thematic shift to Lawrence, as if using the free-association technique: “the illness Lawrence could not bring himself to name, to acknowledge. He preferred to talk about trouble with his bronchial, pneumonia, flu—anything rather than tuberculosis” (79). He does not give any further information on this issue, unlike other biographers, who describe how Lawrence resisted
seeing the doctor, or Jeffrey Meyer, who elucidates how tuberculosis was a deadly disease at the time by providing a medical explanation and statistics on death.\(^8\)

Dyer also comments on other various issues in which Lawrence showed keen interest: women (10), language (13), snakes (21–22; 109), the postal situation (34), fathers (145), and the camera (39–40), just to mention a few. Dyer’s purpose in writing about Lawrence often seems only to illuminate the great affinities between Lawrence and himself: in Dyer’s words, “to claim kin with” Lawrence (86). Backsheider argues: “It is familiar folklore that biographers have an ‘affinity’ for their subjects, may have long ‘identified’ to some extent with them, and ‘like’ them,” but “the affinity was deeply intellectual and perhaps psychological” (33). In Dyer’s case, the affinities that he perceives between himself and Lawrence are not “intellectual” or “psychological” but rather personal. He boldly admits: “The fact that Lawrence wrote Lady Chatterley’s Lover means next to nothing to me; what matters is that he paid his way, settled his debts, made nice jam and marmalade, and put up shelves” (149).

In Out of Sheer Rage, the self-parodying tone is juxtaposed with a serious tone, consequently forming the “multi-toned nature” of the work, another Menippean feature. This happens especially when Dyer writes about his own experiences without mentioning Lawrence. For instance, when Dyer is obsessed with where to move, as discussed above, he expresses his idea about moving thus: “It’s easy to make choices when you have things hampering you—a job, kids’ schools—but when all you have to go on is your own desires, then life becomes considerably more difficult, not to say intolerable” (5). It is obvious, especially to those who are acquainted with Lawrence through reading other biographies of him and reading his own writings, that Dyer is making an allusion to Lawrence here. Lawrence frequently travelled, assiduously considered where to go, and metaphysically explored the inevitability of moving in his fictional and non-fictional writings. In Aaron’s Rod (1922), for example, the character Rawdon Lilly says, “One is a fool to be lachrymose. The thing to do is to get a move on” (AR 102); additionally, Aaron Sisson is portrayed as a person who is in constant motion.\(^9\) Sea and Sardinia (1921) begins with Lawrence’s reflection on moving: “Comes over one an absolute necessity to move. And what is more, to move in some particular direction. A double necessity then: to get on the move, and to know whither” (SS 7). Dyer must have known the fact Lawrence was obsessed with moving, but he dares not refer to it directly. Instead, he imitates Lawrence’s metaphysical tone, which sharply contrasts with his usual teasing tone.

How Dyer adopts these different kinds of narrative tones is most clearly observed when he writes about mental depression near the end of the book:

Once you are depressed there is almost nothing you can do about it. It is useless trying to snap out of it or buck up because it is impossible to see the point of doing anything. Depression is the complete absence of any interest in anything. You cannot think of a single thing to do, or place to go, or book to read. (227)

Lawrence became depressed occasionally; the depressive episodes he suffered in 1911, from 1915 to 1918, and during the final years of his life were serious. He often reported his depression in his letters and explored depression itself in his works. For instance, in a letter dated 8 April 1915, he wrote to S. S. Koteliansky:

I have been fighting the powers of darkness lately. Still they prevail with me. But I have more or less got my head out of the inferno, my body will follow later. How one has to struggle, really, to overcome this accursed blackness. It would do me so much good if I could kill a few people. (2L 313)

\(^{8}\) Meyer provides a detailed explanation of the cause and process of tuberculosis: “In pulmonary tuberculosis, the lungs are damaged by the multiplication of bacilli in infected tissues. As bacteria attack and destroy body tissues, small rounded nodules or tubercles form, which contain bacteria and white blood cells. The bacteria cause lesions in the lung tissue, and the germs enter sputum. The wasting disease slowly progresses from tuberculous lesion, necrosis and formation of cavities to erosion of blood vessels and bleeding into the lungs, which, if massive, may cause drowning in one’s own blood” (323–24). He also reveals the number of people who died of tuberculosis not long after Lawrence’s death: “In 1934, 36,000 people died of tuberculosis in Britain” (326).

\(^{9}\) See Hoshi 107–08.
In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928), two of the main characters, Clifford and Connie, are portrayed as being depressed: “Clifford tended to become vague, absent, and to fall into fits of vacant depression” (*LCL* 63); “She [Connie] had forgotten him [the keeper] in her unspeakable depression” (*LCL* 85). The doctor who examines Connie gives the following advice: “You’re spending your life without renewing it. You’ve got to be amused, properly healthily amused. You’re spending your vitality without making any. Can’t go on you know. Depression! Avoid depression!” (*LCL* 78). No one reacts to this advice except Hilda, who “set her jaw, and that meant something” (*LCL* 78). At around the same time, Lawrence wrote “Boredom, Ennui, Depression,” a poem included in the posthumously published volume *Last Poems* (1932):

> And boredom, ennui, depression are long slow vibrations of pain that possess the whole body and cannot be localised. (542)

Thus, Lawrence explores the issue of depression in various literary genres, such as letters, novels and poems, to approach the issue from multiple perspectives and to narrate it using a multi-toned voice. Dyer’s writing about depression indicates similar inter-textual dynamics as utilized by Lawrence and also demonstrates how he appropriates Lawrence’s authorial voice, as inscribed in these genres.

Significantly, Dyer’s Lawrentian tone is quickly replaced by a self-mocking one when he confesses that the view he gained was of his own experience:

> The first time I became depressed I didn’t even realise it. I knew I wasn’t feeling that great, actually felt pretty terrible, depressed in fact, but since I had no prior experience to go on I didn’t realise that what I was experiencing was depression. Second time around there was a familiar cast to the greyness. The third time, … I had enough previous experience to know that I was depressed…. Getting out of depression is like finding a loophole in the law: you use it once and then it is closed up and sealed off so that it cannot be done again. (227)

Although Dyer is narrating his terrible experience with depression here, his narrative voice is tinged with a comic tone; he mentions how he was unaware that he had become depressed until his third time experiencing it. In addition, he compares “getting out of depression” to “finding a loophole in the law.” Dyer thus internalizes his dialogic relationship with Lawrence with respect to various issues, expressing them by using multiple styles and voices.

### 3. A Dialogic Relationship Between Genres Toward A Meta-Gerne

As has been examined previously, a wide variety of genres, including biography, autobiography, fiction, and Menippean satire, are intertwined in *Out of Sheer Rage* to create an entirely new genre. I will now discuss the dialogic relationship between these “inserted genres.”

*Out of Sheer Rage* is intertextual in multiple dimensions. Dyer refers to or alludes to many (but not all) of Lawrence’s works: five novels (*Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, *The Plumed Serpent*, and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*), three collections of travel essays (*Twilight in Italy*, *Etruscan Places*, and *Sea and Sardinia*), three collections of philosophical essays (*Study of Thomas Hardy*, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, and *Phoenix*), *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, and one play (*The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*).

In addition, Dyer mentions other writers and artists ranging from those who are dead, such as Albert Camus, Rainer Maria Rilke and Friedrich Nietzsche, to those who were most important to him, as well as such contemporaries of Dyer as Julian Barnes and Ian McEwan. In one episode in the book, Dyer walks the streets of north London, imagining how Barnes is “sitting at his desk” and “working” in one of the houses nearby and speaks of “an intolerable waste of a life” and “a betrayal of the idea of the writer” (93). This part can be considered metafictional, in that it discloses a writer’s writing process.

Dyer does not hide his contempt for certain literary critics. He ironically calls George Steiner “an academic!” (102) and, rather shockingly, calls Julia Kristeva “that old trout!” (228). His negative views on particular literary critics is most clearly presented in his violent
reaction to the Longman Critical Reader volume on Lawrence, edited by Peter Widdowson. A mere glance at the table of contents, including Lydia Blanchard on “Lawrence, Foucault and the Language of Sexuality” and Daniel J. Schneider on “Alternatives to Logocentrism in D. H. Lawrence” infuriates him to such an extent that he eventually burns it:

It was the book or me because writing like that kills everything it touches. That is the hallmark of academic criticism: it kills everything it touches. Walk around a university campus and there is an almost palpable smell of death about the place because hundreds of academics are busy killing everything they touch. (101)

Here, Dyer is perhaps thinking about “the death of the author” and expresses his rejection of ideas fundamental to poststructuralist approaches to textual analyses in literature; he actually refers to Roland Barthes (34, 36, 122). In contrast, he praises Leon Edel, who he says “embraced Henry James’s life and work as perilously intimately as any writer ever has” (102). For Dyer as a writer, the life of the author ultimately matters because he is in fact pursuing himself, the living, through his dialogue with Lawrence, the dead. For Dyer as a critic, textual analysis that ignores the presence of the writer and lacks the critic’s subjective commitment to the writer is not worth considering.

What is interesting, however, is that Dyer soon withdraws that claim about Edel because, as he opines, “it won’t stand up to any kind of scrutiny” (102). Moreover, he caricatures himself as a Lawrence scholar by describing his failure to give a lecture on Lawrence; he claims that he has little to say and his only actions are “much wiping of nose, sipping of water,” mainly because he has the flu (200). Such ambivalent views on literary criticism point to his aspirations to meta-criticism.

In conclusion, Out of Sheer Rage utilizes a variety of postmodern genres, such as meta-autobiography, meta-biography, meta-fiction and meta-criticism, but also uses certain elements that are commonly found in such classic genres as Menippean satire. As Bakhtin argues, “For the correct understanding of a genre, “it is necessary to return to its sources,” for a genre develops through adopting its “archaic” elements to regenerate as a new genre (106). A focus on the process of genre evolution in Out of Sheer Rage has thus made clear that, in it, Dyer incorporates various genres, both old and new, to move toward a unique meta-genre.

Works Cited


