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Migraine as text - text as migraine: Diagnosis and literature

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Chapter 8

Migraine in James Lasdun's The Horned Man:

The epistemological drive of a confused self

An unreliable narrator is not simply a narrator who does not tell the truth

Peter J. Rabinowitz, 1977

James Lasdun's *The Horned Man* is a subtle psychological novel that portrays and explores the thoughts of a disturbed character bound narrator. The text is built up as a thriller, with strong 'who's done it?' aspects and cliffhangers. The logic is that of a detective-story with all its epistemological aspects. It turns out, however, that none of the events described or solutions proposed 'thrill' anything else but the mind of the narrator. The story can therefore better be approached as the interior monologue, perhaps even as a quest, of a neurologically disturbed individual; a patient.

It appears that migraine plays an important role in this narrative and in the occurrences described. Migraine seems crucial for the portrayal of the narrator and the things he has in mind. In this chapter, I will analyze the role of migraine in this text, how it is described and what importance it has for the narrative. In his epistemological confusion, the narrator of *The Horned Man* will turn out to be an 'ideal' object to be analyzed and diagnosed as a 'real' patient. His fictional 'I' will also be of great help to further construct the 'migraine self' (see chapters 6 and 11), as he symbolizes the confusion of a 'real' patient though in the guise of a modernist logic of the detective.

In this chapter, I aim to answer the question why and how this narrator narrates what he narrates by first introducing relevant parts of his (medical) story and then focusing on the importance of his migraine in a literary / medical context. The key issue will prove to be an epistemological confusion that is characteristic of migraine.

The question of truth in fiction is inextricably connected with that of reference

Richard M. Gale, 1971

The story

Lawrence Miller, the first-person narrator, is an English professor of Gender Studies at an American university and a prominent member of the Sexual Harassment Committee of that university. He was left by his American wife shortly before the narrative starts and she now accuses him of stalking. Since the divorce, Lawrence lives alone and is desperately lonely. For example, he sends himself

telephone messages which he does not answer in order to be able to imagine that these are from his wife. He speaks of 'calls to my own machine at home; silent hang-ups initially, made simply so that I wouldn't have to return to a non-flashing machine' (52). When at work, he fanatically tries to avoid contact with female students, because he is afraid that they will accuse him of posing a sexual threat. When he cannot avoid talking to one of them, he leaves the door of his room wide open, so that passersby can look in and witness that nothing irregular takes place. Here is #me-too-fear avant la lettre. Indeed, what is in Lawrence's mind on occasions like this makes him blush vehemently.

One day, Lawrence starts noticing some apparently insignificant changes in his office. A bookmark has been moved, there is an unknown number on his telephone bill, a Bulgarian coin disappears from his room and a file has been removed from his computer. He hears that the predecessor of his position at the University – a woman – has been murdered and he finds her clothes and the probable murder weapon in his office. All of these signs point at one of his former colleagues, the Bulgarian writer and teacher Trumilcik, who has disappeared from the university not long ago after alleged sexual misconduct. Lawrence fears that Trumilcik is not far away and now stalking him. He could – for example – have been the one who took away the coin and deleted the file on the computer. It does, however, not become clear whether Lawrence's reconstruction is 'real' or must be ascribed to his self-declared 'professorial forgetfulness', which he compares with 'so-called parapraxis, Freud's term for the lapses of memory, slips of the tongue, and other minor suppressions of consciousness that occur in everyday life' (1). Indeed, many varieties of these 'lapses' form the main topic of Lawrence's frequent therapeutic sessions with his psychiatrist and seem to appear abundantly in his acts and thoughts.

More strange things happen. When hiding in Trumilcik's alleged hideout in his room, Lawrence is a voyeur of a woman, who later turns out to be also a member of the Sexual Harassment Committee. She leaves him a note to invite him for a private encounter in response to a letter she received from him, although Lawrence cannot remember having written her a letter at all. At their rendezvous, he tries to kiss her, causing a violent rejection and an accusation of rape. He still tries energetically to find out who murdered his predecessor at the university but is accused of this murder himself. When searching his ex-wife in a shelter for victims of domestic abuse he is accused of more acts he doesn't remember committing.

During one of his further attempts to get contact with his ex-wife, Lawrence encounters a man in an abandoned synagogue:

Immediately, I caught a familiar smell: the acrid male rankness I had smelled in Trumilcik's hideout. [...] As I turned to leave, I felt a kind of raging force rearing up toward me out of the darkness. I was aware of this in a purely animal way, before I saw or even heard the immense, bearded figure lurch across the doorway in my direction. It was the only time I did see him, pale and tattered, stinking of dereliction, his gray hair thick and flailing, his copious, rabbinical beard matted with filth. I bolted to the door. As I did, something rock-hard erupted out from him, smashing into my face. (125)

The smell is familiar, but the man is as much a creature as a human being, filled with raging fear. He, or it, seems to possess a horn that smashes Lawrence in the face at the spot where he will later grow a horn himself. This suggests that, in terms of reference, he may have smashed into a mirror, which in turn suggests that the man/creature embodies another side of Lawrence; the more brutal one. In

this context, it is small wonder that Lawrence is described as ‘blundering around his own personal hell’ (Royle 306). In one of the last chapters of the story, he visits an exhibition in the Cloister Museum of the so-called Unicorn Tapestries, on which is depicted how the unicorn first saves other creatures in the forest by dipping his horn in a stream, then is attacked by a bunch of huntsmen, kneels before a beautiful woman and in the end is ‘brutally gored to death’, but thereafter miraculously is restored to life. When Lawrence sees the tapestries, he feels ‘dazed, engulfed almost, as though I had just sat through some long, harrowing film full of scenes that stood in relations of dreamlike reciprocity or mysteriously revealing opposition to my own life’ (187). After this, Lawrence feels a sudden rising into the air, and wonders if he ‘truly had passed into the realm of the fantastical’ (190). To his delight, in this levitated condition he sees his ex-wife approaching and he hopes to be united with her again. Unfortunately, she cries ‘get him out of here’ to the two large guards who have their hands under Lawrence’s elbows and have lifted him into the air. Now Lawrence realizes the true explanation of his airborne state (190). He has wrongly interpreted ‘reality’ again. Despite being a member of the university’s Sexual Harassment Committee, he still seems to remain blind to his own escalating acts of harassment, stalking, and (probably) violence.

Next to the gender theme there is the theme of the horn and where there is a horn, the devil is not far away. This is so evident that *The Horned Man* has been called a ‘gothic novel’ (Royle 302). In this context the horn is introduced when Lawrence finds a long elaboration on the importance of horns in a manuscript written by his father, who had died from a brain tumor when Lawrence was five years old. In fact, his father’s manuscript is the reason why he came in contact with the woman who later would become his wife (and ex-wife), as she was interested in the text while preparing a book on the medieval cult of the Virgin Mary, which included the unicorn hunt described above. The creature was lured into captivity by a virgin before being killed (120). The horn was said to have medicinal action due to its polar opposites of benign and evil (121). Some saw the unicorn as a symbol of Christ, but the homoeopaths considered it as the ultimate toxic substance, the unicorn being an ‘aggressive, highly unsociable monster’ (121). Furthermore, the unicorn is ‘maddened by the enormous pain caused by the toxins distilled in his horn’ (122).

In the end of the narrative, it becomes clear that there are things in Lawrence that struggle to get out. One of these things is the horn. The other seems to be his ‘migraine’. The question is: are these the same? I will argue in what follows that indeed the metaphor of pain materializes in the horn.

By talking of what we don’t understand in terms of what we do understand, metaphor gives us words and objects where there were none

David Biro, 2010

Lawrence’s migraine

One day, shortly after reading Franz Kafka’s unfinished short story *Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor* Lawrence gets a migraine attack. In Kafka’s story a man called Blumfeld, when one day arriving home, finds two balls bouncing off the ground on their own accord. The balls start to follow him wherever he goes, and they annoy him, mainly because of the intolerable noise they produce. So,

Blumfeld decides to get rid of them. He is described as a very lonely individual and an egocentric misanthrope, because of his crankiness and condescension towards other individuals. Before starting reading, Lawrence thought that he did not know the story, but he discovers that he has marked in the text 'little underlinings and scribbles' (25), probably with the intention to use it in one of his classes. He does not remember a word of the text, so 'a complete mental evacuation must have taken place' (25). Then the attack starts, and he remembers that he once was diagnosed with migraine:

Abruptly, before I had finished the story, a small, pulsating silver spot appeared in the corner of my field of vision.

I hadn't experienced this phenomenon since I was twelve or thirteen, but I recognized it immediately, and put the book down with a feeling of alarm.

The spot began to grow, as I had feared it would, flickering and pulsating across my vision like a swarm of angry insects. [...] After a while all I could see were a few peripheral slivers of the ceiling and walls surrounding me. And then for a minute or two I became completely blind. (25-26)

Shortly thereafter, the sounds from his surroundings suddenly become pronounced, and then 'as rapidly as it had come, the occlusion faded. And right on cue, as the last traces vanished, my head began to throb with an ache so intense I cried aloud with pain' (26). He went to his bedroom to lay down on his bed in darkness, while, 'the pain concentrated itself in the center of my forehead. It felt as though something were in there trying to get out – using now a hammer, now a pick-axe, now an electric drill' (26-27).

It seems that Lawrence has an attack of migraine with visual aura. He had had these attacks for a period as a boy. The headache then lasted five or six hours, and:

after all other medication failed, my mother had taken me to a homeopathic doctor, an old Finn in a peculiar-smelling room, surrounded by dishes of feldspar and a sticky substance he told me was crushed red ants. He gave me five tiny pills, instructing me to take one a night, five nights in row. I hadn't had a migraine since then – not until now. (26)

Now, he feels as if being slowly compressed in a room with contracting walls and wonders what has been in the Finn's little pills. 'With the confused logic of the afflicted, I tried to think what substance might have a homeopathic relationship with this particular form of pain' (27). He leaves the house to drink a triple espresso in a bar, but the caffeine does not work. In the bar, he discovers a poster of a play based on the Blumfeld-story containing the words 'adapted for the stage by Bogomil Trumilcik' (28). To find this suspected murderer, he goes to the theatre, still with a severe headache. He meets the actor who is in the pause of playing the role of Blumfeld in the stage adaptation of Kafka's story. Lawrence's head is hurting more than ever:

'Are you by any chance suffering from migraine?' the man asked as I moved off.

The question stopped me in my tracks.

'How did you know?'

'Your eyelids are all puffed up and your lips are almost white. My brother had migraines as a kid. I know the symptoms. Here, if you'll allow me...'. (31)

The man puts his hands on Lawrence's temples and presses both thumbs into the center of his forehead, 'extremely hard'. For a moment Lawrence thinks that his skull is about to split. Then the pain is gone. After the attack, he feels 'light-headed, almost elated' (31). Later, he remembers that he has seen this person before. It was at a party, shortly before his wife left him. He then suddenly realizes: 'The actress was Blumfeld. He was a woman' (41). This confusion of gender (by a professor of gender studies!) adds to numerous other examples of the same kind. In some of the telephone messages that he sends to his own home telephone, for example, Lawrence imitates his ex-wife's voice by sending:

little friendly messages to myself, first from me, but then, as the sense of the need to inhibit myself in what I took to be an entirely private act diminished, from Carol [his ex-wife] – my imitation of her crisp phrasing and intonation, if not her actual voice – telling me she loved me, begging me to return her calls. (52)

In order to look for his ex-wife in a shelter for victims of domestic abuse (130), he puts on the clothes of his female predecessor who was murdered. In the shelter he is unmasked by a nun, who recognizes his blushing as an attempt to hide something. After a smash with her knee in his groin, he is thrown out, and thinks that this is because he is mistaken for another 'man' (for instance: Trumilcik). As in general 80% of stalking victims are women, 87% of stalkers are men, and a female stalking a man is a rarity (Pulda 200), Lawrence's stalking is very exceptional, as here a man in woman's clothes (who thinks he is stalked by another man) is stalking a woman. The 'gender confusion' adds to the confusion of the narrator and part of this confusion seems to be linked to his migraine.

A little later, he gets another attack. Being stressed, because he feels 'guilty of fraud and general duplicity' (174), he enters his apartment, which 'feels emptier and more silent than ever' (175), and he succumbs 'to a heavy, familiar inertia' (176). Then, a flickering silver light spreads across his field of vision 'like a great, sunlit shoal of mackerel' (176). He realizes that it is 'an emissary from the world of pain, come to pay me another call in its familiar metallic delivery' (176). A burst of childish self-pity emerges; he thinks again of his mother who 'had taken up the management of these migraines when I was a boy, entering so intimately into the interstices of my pain, it seemed she might be capable of assuming the burden of it herself, relieving me altogether' (176). But, to his shame, he has lost all contact with his mother many years ago. 'I had always been aware of something not quite natural about this, but now, for the first time, I seemed to come face to face with its full, appalling strangeness' (176-177). Then he gets a pounding ache, hammering the inside of his skull. Even the slightest efforts intensify the ache in his head. He goes out and encounters the same person that relieved the pain of the first attack by pressing on his head. Now the pressure of only one thumb is applied. This one-hand-touch 'seemed to make my head even worse' (180). The pain continues, and Lawrence wants to lie down in darkness. Then, he forces himself 'to stand still and confront my reflected head, I had the sensation of fainting rapidly through successive layers of consciousness, but without the luxury of passing out' (184). It seems that a thick, white, horn-like protrusion had grown out of his forehead, and then he is no longer in pain.

The reenactment is organized into a logical sequence, a narrative, with a beginning, middle, and end – a narrative that replaces the blankness and invisibility of pain

David Biro, 2010

Indeed migraine?

The first question for the present thesis is whether this patient is indeed suffering from migraine. The description of the visual symptoms could surely be diagnosed as a migraine aura, with the personal and original metaphors used. A small silver spot that grows, flickers and pulsates as a swarm of angry insects, and that in the second attack resembles a great, sunlit shoal of mackerel, is not the description of many of my migraine patients, but the growing and moving visual phenomena fulfill the current criteria of a migraine aura (although the duration of the visual symptoms is not mentioned here). That these sensations feel as ‘an emissary from the world of pain’ brings into mind Susan Sontag’s switch to the ‘kingdom of the sick’ (*Metaphor*). The visual symptoms of the first attack make him ‘completely blind’, which is not typical, as a migraine aura almost always causes a disturbance of a visual hemi-field. Most patients, however, indeed speak of ‘complete blindness’ although the true extension of this only becomes apparent when they are interrogated carefully. Then, the resolution of the symptoms of the first attack, including the sensation that his room is ‘disturbed in some furtive activity of its own’ (33), are in strong contrast with the premonitory (forewarning) symptoms of the second, when he feels that his apartment is ‘emptier and more silent than ever’ (175). Indeed, premonitory and resolution symptoms of a migraine attack often ‘mirror’ one another, be it for example yawning opposed to hyperactivity, or retaining fluid opposed to frequent micturition. It is in line with this that Lawrence’s first attack is followed by an elated feeling and the second preceded by a feeling of inertia. The headache of the attacks is throbbing, pounding, hammering and causes Lawrence to lay in his bed in darkness. The pain is severe enough to let him cry; it worsens at movement. Next to an apparent sensitivity to light, there is a sensitivity to sound, as the sounds from his surroundings suddenly become more pronounced. In his youth, the attacks lasted five or six hours, but the duration of the recent attacks is not mentioned. They can, however, be calculated from the text, to be approximately in the same range. A presence of nausea or vomiting is also not mentioned, but this is – according to the criteria – not an absolute prerequisite, especially so when sensitivity to light and sound are present.

Migraine’s occurrence in Lawrence’s lifetime is rather atypical, as not many (male) patients have attacks that cease around the age of twelve or thirteen to return (much) later in life. In addition to this, the apparently successful preventive treatment with five (homeopathic) little blue pills and the alleviation of the attack by external pressure with two thumbs (and the failure to do so with one thumb) can also be called remarkable in the sense of atypical. Further, the location of the pain – in the middle of the forehead – is uncommon. Besides, not many patients can be recognized ‘from the outside’ having migraine on the basis of externally visual symptoms such as puffed eyelids and white lips. Nevertheless, at first sight, there is little reason to doubt the diagnosis. On the other hand, any ‘diagnosis’ must be seen in the context of a literary work, with a certain artistic purpose, to which I will come back.

It appears that Lawrence not only has 'migraine', but also suffers from an unpredictable and embarrassing tendency to blush, which he calls 'a self-perpetuating problem' (4). He sighs, 'I sat back in the sofa and lapped frantically at my tea, hoping to conceal the scarlet fire racing up over my face. But I had become luminous: I felt it; pulsating incandescent! My whole head was throbbing like a beacon' (146).

These metaphors (pulsating, throbbing) indeed resemble those used by most 'real' patients with migraine. Lawrence thinks that blushing has to do with sex (147), but is told that the scientific explanation for blushing is that it is 'an evolutionary anomaly that answers to the interests of the social group rather than those of the private self [...] and alerts people to the fact that something duplicitous is occurring in their midst' (147). Maybe this relates to his feeling of being 'guilty of fraud and general duplicity' (174) mentioned above.

An association of blushing and migraine has indeed been described (Telaranta 2003). It is argued that the association points at a common disturbance of the autonomic nervous system (the part that is not under voluntary control), an opinion which has been debated much. In the light of the narrative, it is of importance to realize that both the blushing and Lawrence's migraine are visible from the outside. They 'mark' the sufferer, and later even seem to 'unmask' him. So, it can be concluded that at least something special is the case with this particular migraine-patient. He is 'semiologically' different from other migraine patients in which the signified (migraine) depends completely on the word of the patient (the signifier) and the criteria (see chapters 1, 2 and 3). In this case, however, something can really be seen from the outside. In Lawrence's case this is one visible sign of his migraine. The horn seems to be the other one.

After this description of the 'patient' and my argumentation why his 'migraine' probably indeed 'is' migraine as it looks like migraine and even fulfills (part of) the present criteria (see also chapter 3), I will now discuss how the disease diagnosed is important in the narrative. An important aspect is the un-/ reliability of this 'patient'. All taken together, it seems that Lawrence is not one person but several persons and that his migraine plays a role in this.

All works of representational art – including novels –
are "imitations" in the sense that they appear to be
something that they are not

Peter J. Rabinowitz, 1977

Uncertainty, reliability and unreliability

The Horned Man is a strange story, mainly because the narrator Lawrence seems to go from surprise to surprise, as is the case – for example – with his final 'levitation'. Although as an I-narrator his words create the narrative, he at the same time seems to be a 'victim' of the occurrences. The resulting uncertainty must point at something. What?

Lawrence tells his story in retrospect; it is in the past tense. The first words are 'one afternoon earlier this winter' (1), and a subsequent remark like: 'unknown to me at the time' (69) suggests a form of

prolepsis.⁴⁸ The past tense, however, stands in contrast with stream-of-consciousness parts that are necessarily in the present tense. The stream of consciousness technique may be defined as ‘that narrative method by which the author attempts to give a direct quotation of the mind – not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness’ (Bowling 345). It introduces the reader directly into the thoughts of the character. In the narrative of Lawrence, the contradictory mixture of tenses and of different modes of stream of consciousness create a feeling of uncertainty. Why does everything that happens in the present, for instance, come as a surprise for Lawrence as he already knows retrospectively that it has happened? The story mixes a retrospective story with a problem and solution as in a restitution narrative which is prospectively ‘controlled’ by the narrator (Brody) with a quest or chaos narrative. Maybe Lawrence is one of those narrators that ‘merely *report* unreliably but do not evaluate or interpret unreliably’ (Heinze 280; emphasis in the original). In Lawrence’s case, his unreliability cannot explain in a satisfactory way his exceptionally detailed knowledge of occurrences and chronology, which resembles the *paralepsis* described by Heinze (2008; see also chapter 7).

In the light of this, it is telling how in a past-tense narrative, in a crucial scene, Lawrence suddenly turns to the present tense. While in his second migraine-attack, he again encounters the actress who played Blumfeld and suddenly makes an association between the actress, his ex-wife and Trumilcik: ‘Only now do I see the cruelty of that smile: the same indolent, foreknowing expression that I note in retrospect as I recall the moment at our table months earlier’ (Lasdun 178). So, seen from an undefined ‘now’ the narrator sees in retrospect a situation in which he sees in (further) retrospect a situation of some months earlier. This is a form of ‘achrony’ (Bal 97) that is distinct from ‘anticipation-within-retroversion’, in which someone is referring forward within a back-reference. It is also distinct from a ‘retroversion-within-anticipation’, in which the narrator tells us how circumstances in the ‘present’ will be re-presented in the future. These two forms play an important role in migraine as is described in chapter 5. The situation here can be best described as ‘retroversion-in-retroversion’ and when this is applied to migraine, it describes how a migraine patient during an actual attack thinks of how he thought of the past during a previous moment in time.

The question emerges what the meaning of this new enigma is; this retroversion-in-retroversion. Is this double layer one of the examples of a ‘mise-en-abyme’ reflecting the protagonist’s confused ‘migrainous’ mind? To answer this, the article “Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences” (1977) by Peter T. Rabinowitz can instruct us how to approach the topic of the un-/reliability of a narrator – and maybe also of a ‘real’ patient with migraine for that matter. With Rabinowitz the issue is not considered on the basis of the characteristics of a (fictional) narrator, but from the opposite perspective: that of the spectrum of several, possibly real or fictional, readers. Here, I will not address the role of the real readers of flesh and blood, but rather the fictive ones. In my opinion, Rabinowitz’s approach can shed some light on the issue of reliability – unreliability of a narrator like Lawrence and therefore I will discuss his theory in some detail.

Rabinowitz’s starting point is the question ‘how do we even begin to talk about truth in fiction?’ (122). He bases his ideas on the fact that ‘the act of reading demands a certain pretense’ (124). According to him, there are at least four audiences implied in any literary text (125). First, there is the

⁴⁸ One speaks of prolepsis when a future act or development is put down as if already accomplished or existing.

actual audience of flesh and blood which is the only audience that is real and 'the only one over which the author has no guaranteed control' (126). This audience, as said, is not an issue here. Second, there is the hypothetical audience to which the writer of the novel rhetorically addresses his work. Rabinowitz calls this the *authorial audience*. With regard to migraine, for instance, *The Horned Man* may mainly address those readers who already know what migraine is. Yet, again, the aspect of the reading of external readers is not the topic here. The third category is that of the *narrative audience* and according to Rabinowitz:

since the novel is generally an imitation of some nonfictional form (usually history, including biography and autobiography), the narrator of the novel (implicit or explicit) is generally an imitation of an author. He writes for an imitation audience (which we shall call the *narrative audience*) which also possesses particular knowledge. (127; emphasis in the original)

For this category, he gives the example of Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* in which the narrator appears to be an historian, who 'is writing for an audience which not only knows that Moscow was burned in 1812 but which also believes that Natasha, Pierre, and Andrei "really" existed, and that the events in their lives "really" took place' (127). So, these fictional readers must do more than only join the authorial audience. They must also '*pretend* to be a member of the imaginary narrative audience for which this narrator is writing' (127; emphasis in the original). They must abandon their real beliefs and accept in their stead so-called facts and beliefs which even more fundamentally contradict perceptions of reality (128). To illustrate this function in a narrative, Rabinowitz uses the example of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In this narrative, the various readers are 'asked to accept the single fantastic fact that Gregor has been transformed into a gigantic beetle', and to do this without surprise (129).

Likewise, the fact that Lawrence grows a horn must be believed, just as the fact that he has migraine. In general, the choice between 'reliability' and 'unreliability' of a narrator 'determines not our view of the speaker alone but also of the reality evoked and the norms implied in and through his message' (Yacobi 113). Every 'I' in fiction is created by means of his 'own' words. Nevertheless, an 'I' in fiction can be distinctly a character, of which Lawrence is a good example. He is characterized by his confusion, uncertainty and epistemological desire to get grip on 'reality'. He is both the creator and the creation of the sentences. His stream-of-consciousness is confused, and his migraine seems one of the only 'true' aspects of his story. Real patients should be believed unconditionally, as I have argued, and the fictional Lawrence for that reason probably also should be believed. For this, however, he obviously needs a narrative audience.

As fourth audience Rabinowitz distinguishes what he calls the *ideal narrative audience*. This audience 'believes the narrator, accepts his judgments, sympathizes with his plight, laughs at his jokes even when they are bad' (134). For obvious reasons, a doctor would be the 'ideal narrative audience' for a patient. In *The Horned Man* most of the characters (e.g. his ex-wife, the female member of the Sexual Harassment Committee, the nun) do not believe Lawrence and thus are not his 'ideal narrative audience'. Only the actress who plays Blumfeld seems to feel what is the matter with him. The topic of their mutual understanding is his migraine, located at the center of his forehead and increasingly visible from the outside.

Such visible signs ask for an epistemological reading of this narrative in the light of the issue of representation. This becomes especially important in one of the last scenes. There, it is described

how Lawrence flies from the Cloister Museum after being thrown out at the command of his ex-wife and walks twenty miles to a wooden booth at the countryside. The door of this hideout is locked, but Lawrence gets an extradiegetic idea and suddenly addresses his readers directly: 'The reader of this account, not having just walked twenty miles, will surely be a few steps ahead of me here, though in my own defense I should say that it didn't take me so very many steps of my own before I too thought of what I should have thought of immediately' (Lasdun 193).

This enigmatic sentence appears to be the key to the (reading of the) whole story. It is as if Lawrence's rhetoric suddenly needs an extra impulse to become more credible and become an issue of representation. One can wonder at which audience / reader his words are directed here and what the scene tells us.

First, the 'I' seems to blame the reader not to have walked many miles, but to have sit still and read. Still, that is what most 'real' readers do. Then, the 'I' supposes that the reader will be steps ahead. Yet how can any reader be 'ahead' with so little reliable and so much confusing and unreliable information? Furthermore, the reader is also blamed for taking more steps than necessary to realize what the 'I' thought of what he 'should have thought of immediately'. The already sparsely informed 'reader' is, however, not informed what this 'thought' should have been and it is thus not easy to join Lawrence's (ideal) narrative audience. It is clear that the 'I' tries to defend himself in relation to his fictive reader by attacking him/her with words. The question emerges who, or rather what kind of reader, is addressed here.

After having blamed his readers for this and that, Lawrence indeed produces a little key from his pocket and is able to open the door. Here again, the narrative switches to the present tense:

I sit here too, using the ledge as a desk, where I have been preparing a full and scrupulous account of the events that led to this enforced retirement from the world. Though the powers arrayed against me have proved themselves to be formidable, I am confident that my account will bring this unpleasant isolation to an end, perhaps even reunite me with my wife.
(193)

So, this time and place is when and where Lawrence was producing his retrospective but at the same time also prospective text. The little key turns out to be the key to the story, as a 'Deus ex Machina'. The scene touches on the issue of what is diegetic and what is extradiegetic here and raises the question where to place the narrative of Lawrence, as both its extradiegetic narrator and the protagonist of the diegesis can be referred to as an 'I' (Bronswaer 5). Lawrence sometimes seems to need 'extradiegetic' confirmation of his words, such as 'the reader of this account' in the citation above. Yet, normally, 'the extradiegetic reader needs not to be mentioned by the narrative text' (8). In this scene, there probably is no extradiegetic reader, but a readership invented by Lawrence because of his agony. He needs someone who believes him unconditionally and did not find such a person in his ideal narrative audience so far. This 'reader' is 'invented' by Lawrence as an audience that is even more close than an 'ideal narrative audience' in Rabinowitz's sense. Nevertheless, even these 'more than ideal' readers are getting information that is incomplete and puzzling. This adds to the suggestion that Lawrence must be severely disturbed and desperate. An important question therefore is why his mind is so disturbed and which audience he needs in order to be 'helped'. This calls for a more in-depth analysis of the migraine described.

All patients who express pain must be unconditionally
believed

Joost Haan, 2019

The diegetic function of migraine in The Horned Man

The Horned Man can be seen as an example of a 'diagnostic novel' in which 'the characters are driven by the uneasy certainty that something is wrong' (Charon *Doctor-Patient* 143). Here, what is wrong appears to be related to the migraine of the protagonist, which – of course – lies outside his 'guilt'. Lawrence focuses on questions of meaning in his life through diagnostic enterprises, that is to say: through an epistemological quest. He very much resembles a detective, here. In such a story the protagonist detective:

is a witness who learns from the narratives he or she encounters: the detective inhabits a world of rules, a system of general laws, and is presented with an array of particular narrative and evidentiary instances which need to be apprehended as connected to a particular rule or a particular characterization of events. (Schleifer and Vannatta 376)

This description is, however, somewhat misleading in the case of Lawrence. He resembles more a kind of 'reversed detective' in his description of the meaning of objects and occurrences, as after each description of a new discovery, things become more confusing. The world Lawrence lives in is not one of rules and laws; it is one of confusion and a lack of logic. He sees signs that are not there, lets himself be surprised by changes that he obviously made himself, interprets things wrongly and seems to come to wrong conclusions. He seems stupid, absent-minded and straightforwardly sick, with an important role played by his migraine. He relates everything in retrospect, but, as said, still is also surprised by certain occurrences (for example the disappearance of the coin or the file from his computer). Whereas one of the prototypes of a detective, Edgar Allen Poe's Dupin, 'possesses enormous knowledge and [...] demonstrates his ability to apprehend coherent relationships among different and disconnected facts' (376), Lawrence judges all signs, facts and relationships wrongly, for some reason. I suggest he is some sort of anti-detective because of his migraine.

At first sight, the two attacks described by Lawrence broadly seem to fulfill the current criteria of a migraine aura (a one-sided neurological deficit, mainly visual, that gradually develops over time, lasts less than one hour and is often followed by a headache) and those of migraine headache (severe pounding or throbbing headache that worsens on activity, makes the sufferer lay down in his or her bed and is accompanied by sensitivity to light and sound). So, it can be said that these attacks fit in the current discourse of migraine. As explained in chapters 1 and 2, however, 'pain' is a signifier without signified and as explained in chapter 3 a diagnosis of 'migraine', in addition, depends on an international agreement (by means of criteria) on when to call a headache 'migraine'. So, nothing is 'real'. It can easily be understood that such quicksand can confuse its sufferer.

In my opinion, *The Horned Man* must be seen in this perspective. The description of the aura (a silver spot that grows; a swarm of angry insects; a great shoal of mackerel), but also the pain (a pick-axe, an electric drill, compressing, pounding, hammering) heavily depend on metaphors, which are not

more than 'shadows' of reality. The metaphors used are part of the discourse of migraine and in this text that discourse gets a special meaning, being 'materialized'.

The story is retrospective, and the question arises what the motivation is to describe the migraine-attacks in such detail. On the one hand, they might be seen as an attempt to create an anchor to 'reality' (Haan *Metaphor*). They could, however, also be seen as indices to the reliability of the medical information given by 'real' patients to their doctor (see Part I of this thesis). In that situation the words of the patient must be believed unconditionally and maybe that is also the main message of the migraine included in this text. The consequence is that the words of a (fictional and) disturbed mind such as Lawrence's should also be believed. Although the protagonist is fictional, pivotal parts of his story resemble that of someone with 'real' migraine and this has its implications for the story as a whole.

This issue of 'belief' is addressed in the article "Fictional Reliability as a Communicative Problem" (1981) in which Yacobi distinguishes five distinct principles that are important in 'the reliability in narrative and literature as a whole' (113). Here I aim to put the – at first sight – realistically described migraine attacks of *The Horned Man* in the context of her theory. First, Yacobi defines the *genetic principle* that 'resolves fictive oddities and inconsistencies in terms of causal factors that produce the text without coming to form part of it' (114). As examples, she mentions the creative process, history of the finished product and characteristics of the author. Examples of factors that are important in the second category, the *generic principle*, are 'a certain simplification of reality', 'referential stylization', and 'a generic compromise' (115). These factors contribute to the projection of 'a fictive world that parallels and approximates to extraliterary reality' (116). Next, the *existential principle* is 'the linkage and resolution in terms of the world', though this is not limited to institutionalized models. It manifests itself 'wherever the loose or divergent finds its place in an appropriate referential framework' (117). In other words, through this principle, historical, institutionalized or individual, but also verisimilar or even fantastic manifestations can be recognized. The *functional principle* serves 'thematic and normative ends' (117) and – finally – the *perspectival principle* 'brings divergent as well as otherwise unrelated elements into pattern by attributing them, in whole or in part, to the peculiarities and circumstances of the observer through whom the world is taken to be refracted' (118).

The presentation of the two 'migraine' attacks in *The Horned Man* poses several challenges to this theoretical framework for the problem of reliability and the issue of representation. Concerning the *genetic principle* there is little uncertainty. The novel does not seem to refer to causal factors outside the text, or peculiarities or deviances of the worldview, associated with the person of the author, the creative process, or his environment. In other words, it is – for example – not important for the analysis of understanding of the text to know whether the author (James Lasdun) suffers from migraine or not.⁴⁹ As for the *generic principle*, it can be said that – of course – the text offers a 'certain simplification of reality', but seems to be too confused to do this abundantly. There is no 'generic compromise', but a 'generic chaos' in the information given by Lawrence. Within this category, it is said that the 'I' sticks to 'generic frameworks that extend the area of institutionalized deviance (or from the reader's viewpoint, resolution) even to internal inconsistency' (115). Such internal inconsistency is easily found in *The Horned Man*. Whereas according to Yacobi, 'the generic

⁴⁹ This is in contrast with the migraine of Iris in *The Blindfold*, which is based on the migraine of its author – as described in chapter 7.

legitimation of inner tensions and discontinuities within the represented reality promotes the economy and the effectiveness of the many-sided outer attack on outer reality' (116), here, there is a 'double' discourse, or (again) a *mise-en-abyme*. The word 'migraine' can be considered as a 'disguise' in the real world, as it refers to a signifier without a signified and also to a linguistic or discursive agreement (see chapters 2 and 3).

The *existential principle*, then, 'includes but is not limited to the institutionalized models' (116). The fictive world reconciles explanations derived from reality, but these are not a *sine-qua-non*. Yacobi also gives the example of Franz Kafka's story *Metamorphosis* in which Gregor Samsa turns into a giant insect. Such a fictive world, accommodating the transformation of the human into the inhuman, 'derives more from the peculiar structure of reality the reader attributes to the work than from any pre-existent constraints or legitimations' (117). The parallel between *The Horned Man* and *Metamorphosis* indeed seems strong, as both refer to an anthropomorphic change. Samsa turns into an insect and Lawrence (temporarily and/or only migraine-metaphorically?) into a unicorn. Although these occurrences both are virtually impossible, the ideal narrative audience accepts them as belonging to some sort of 'reality', here that of 'horn-producing' migraine. For this, the transformation described in *The Horned Man* seems to use an institutionalized model, that fits into the discourse of migraine. The pain is described as something trying to get out using a hammer, a pickaxe, or an electric drill. In reality, language is our key to understanding the world, but here it creates a double layer by using the same words that normally indicate something else to produce another meaning, that of the pain of migraine.

In the *functional principle*, the work's aesthetic, thematic and persuasive goals operate as a major guideline to making sense of its peculiarities (117). It imposes itself on the thematic or normative end, as some sort of teleological principle. In *The Horned Man* this principle seems absent. There is no teleological principle as nothing works towards an understandable end. As a consequence of this, both the real and fictional reader is left 'puzzled'. All of this adds to the general confusion in this text, not so much representing that of 'real' migraine patients but performatively enacting it. Whereas the existential operation more or less plausibly relates the experienced anomaly to some referential feature or law, the functional operation explains the function of that anomaly, without necessarily integrating these laws with the world of the text. Migraine gives pain in the head and can indeed feel like a horn. The metaphors in this novel apparently can also become part of one's physical reality.

The description of the materialization of Lawrence's migraine seems (another) proof of his confusion between the feeling of pain and that of reality. This is enhanced by the following scene. When the horn has grown out of his head, Lawrence leaves his room to go the museum. He decides to cover the horn with the maroon beret which belonged to the female colleague that was murdered. The result is: 'The horn bulged oddly underneath the baggy fabric, giving it the shape of a child's bicycle helmet – a surreally soft one – but at least it was concealed' (185). This is the state in which he encounters his ex-wife in the museum. There are many aspects here (and elsewhere in the novel) that associate the horn – and by implication the migraine – with a phallic symbol, and as such with Lawrence's guilt and his 'fraud and general duplicity' (174) that heralds the second migraine attack. So, the frequently blushing member of the Sexual Harassment Committee covers a phallus-like protrusion under the beret of a murdered woman. Yet it seems that he has no other choice in a state of confusion that is caused by migraine.

Finally, there is the *perspectival principle* in which a 'limited figure observes (narrates, experiences, evaluates) the represented world' (118; my emphasis). Lawrence indeed seems to be 'limited' due to his migrainous confusion. In *The Horned Man* some sort of recognition is postponed to the last pages where he addresses the (created) readers. So, some emphasis on his performance is needed.

There is a great need for a objective biological test for
migraine

Henrik Winther Schytz and Jes
Olesen, 2016

Lawrence's performance

In my reading, the migraine attacks play a crucial role in *The Horned Man*. I also think that the novel plays with different possibilities of representation based on these attacks. The disturbed visual perceptions (insects, mackerels, etc.) add to the disturbance of most migraine patients to 'see' reality as it is. In addition, it leads to a translation into strange but enhancing metaphors. The pain described contributes to the feeling of horror. The consequent descriptions offered by the narrator are not unreliable, but disturbed. The pain only consists of words, just as would be the case if Lawrence was a 'real' patient. It does not completely destroy language but provokes a rhetorical construct, which then is subject to artificial criteria to determine its meaning. In the end there is the materialization of the pain into a horn, with which the bearer can damage, but also can be damaged. Maybe, such a material horn is something that many migraine-sufferers would like: a visible and in that sense *provable* sign for their pain. It would be ideal if their agony not only had to rely on symptoms (words) but also on signs. Indeed, many migraine-sufferers feel guilty for having migraine without 'signs' that are visible from the outside, as Lawrence during his second attack when he is stressed and feels guilty. The duplicity of his confusing narrative, to the point of being an extremely unreliable narrator, is enhanced by his switching from the kingdom of the 'healthy' to that of the 'sick' as any 'real' migraine patient does. No one can blame Lawrence for this, as no 'real' patient can be blamed. They have no 'guilt'. This is why, in conclusion, it can be said that the novel is establishing the uncertainty of a patient with migraine in a performative way.

This is nicely expressed in the last words of *The Horned Man* in a citation translated from the *Gnostic Gospels*, which is a piece of text that was excluded from the discourse of the *New Testament*: 'If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you' (195; emphasis in the original).

Indeed, what is in must come out and what comes out will/might save you. Yet in the case of migraine this only happens when you encounter someone who believes your words unconditionally as an ideal narrative audience (or a doctor). As said, as is the case with most pain, migraine is a signifier without signified. In that sense Lawrence's words are not different from those of a 'real' patient. He uses words to describe his pain as a 'real' patient would do and uses them for the same purpose: to find someone who believes them. The migraine-diagnosis exists on the basis of the agreement to classify the words of the patient in a certain way (see chapter 3). So, when Lawrence's words are read as those of a 'real' patient they must also be read as 'truth'. In neurology, therefore,

even the words of a confused patient must be believed unconditionally. As there is no unreliable patient, it can be argued by analogy that in the case of a narrative about pain or migraine there also is no unreliable narrator, as any (presumed) unreliability can be explained as an expression of the disease itself. Nevertheless, the epistemological drive of a confused self as Lawrence asks for and provokes trust in the words of the patient, but also leads to basal uncertainty. One must not forget that the mind of migraine patients can be confused and thus their texts can become confused as well. Migraine, moreover, can destroy words and thoughts (see chapter 4).

The migraine attacks in this novel are referential to the 'reality' of patients of flesh and blood, but in a sense only to the unreality of their reality, as one needs someone who can recognize the signs, reads the words correctly and believes the words. For a diagnosis of migraine, one needs a doubly artificial discourse, which is mainly based on metaphors. Taken to their limit, the discourses can seemingly become material, like a palpable substance, as happens with Lawrence's horn. Yet such a horn still is one that consists of words only. We must not forget that Lawrence's 'horn' also exists only by virtue of words. As is the case with migraine in general, this particular horn on the one hand has, but on the other has no 'real' signified. In this way, this novel gives us another double layer, or maybe even a double 'mise en abyme', that works in order to believe the words of a fictional person as those of a real patient.

The occurrences in *The Horned Man* can come as a surprise for the one undergoing, reading or hearing them, but as an imitation of a confused reality they should be believed as something that exists independently of the words and metaphors used. The double discourse adds to the 'intrinsic' unreliability of migraine in its double artificiality: that of its metaphors and of its discourse (see chapter 3). A lot of rhetoric force is needed to give migraine any substance and that is what Lawrence seems to do in his quest. He even seems to stumble over his rhetoric in order to tell his truth. His attempts lead to the exceptional situation that his migraine can be perceived from the outside. First, it is recognized because his eyelids are puffed and his lips are white (31), later it takes the form of a horn that is palpable from the outside and even able to change the shape of a beret into a child's bicycle helmet (185). The longing for external visible signs as 'proof' for the diagnosis produced by a fundamental epistemological uncertainty is one part of the definition of a 'migraine self'.