

THE D. H. LAWRENCE SOCIETY

D. H. LAWRENCE, DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY AN INTERNATIONAL

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Workshop: K - New work in Lawrence Studies: a postgraduate workshop and 3 minute thesis showcase (Sean Matthews, University of Nottingham)

My Doctoral thesis is titled ‘Literature and Art in the Victorian Era and in Early Modernism with special reference to selected works of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf.’ In my thesis I write about the influence of art on the work of Lawrence with a particular focus on ‘Women in Love’. I selected this work because of the high number of direct and indirect references, allusions, metaphors and symbols in this novel related to art, artists and aesthetic theory. My thesis research has taken me from exploring Lawrence as a young man growing up admiring classical pieces of art which he copies yet with an interesting vigour, for the most part enhancing colours to a new vibrancy. His experience as an artist appears to be at first a sort of social activity, then a manifestation of his rebellious character and an affront of anger, as well as a demonstration of his belief in the visceral, the solar plexus and the primitive harmony with the circumambient universe. Lawrence wrote about art in the role of art critic. He denigrates Sargent for his mimetic style and stifling portraits and it may appear that Lawrence painted as an art critic would, but he did not write art criticism as a painter. The way he approaches his own painting is an area of great interest to me. Of particular interest is how art transpired into Lawrence’s work and what effect art had on his writing.

My research began by tracing Lawrence’s introduction into art and the artistic milieu and then explores what painting really signified to him, what paintings or sculptures he was particularly drawn to, and for what reasons. I then proceeded to investigate Lawrence’s identification with the unconscious power of the creative flux or consciousness and how Lawrence perceived this creative force emanating out of the Solar Plexus to be a primal part of being and a very bodily or physical expression of energy and spirit. Lawrence believed that the process of artistic appreciation and at-oneness with beauty and art was the highest form of communion with the spiritual and a truly religious experience. He develops a mythopoeic consciousness as a product of his ontological vision, which he directs towards his art. He applies an attitude towards art that a prophet would apply to a strong faith. Lawrence thus creates a religion out of art. He projects the multiplicity and shifting nature of being, of consciousness and the significance of this constant liminal ambivalent position to his position on art and ultimately to his position on individuation and the self. Utilising a Jungian psychological theoretical framework through which to read Lawrence’s work, primarily in the application of analytical psychological theories associated with Carl Jung and the collective unconscious, my research discusses Lawrence and the Oppositional Discourse of

Identification. To Lawrence, the sub-modalities of art: composition, theme, chromatic elements and form represent heightened sensorial data related to the identification of the self-spirit. Lawrence's work can be read through a Freudian and Lacanian lens as the reconstituting of the 'Schema L' which utilises Freud's topological model of the psyche, in which interacting systems of perception-Consciousness, the Preconscious, Unconscious, Repression, and 'listening/hearing' -- the acoustics or 'listening cap' on Freud's 'onion' diagram are mediating instances between the 'id' and its product, the 'ego'.¹ Through placing his characters in opposition with themselves and with other characters, for the most part in a discourse on art, what we are presented with, through the interface at the liminal boundaries of character is Lawrence's own shifting beliefs on art and its importance. It is a vital point that Lawrence seems to 'need' art, as it were, in order to proliferate not only character but the multiplicity or rhizomatic element of perspectives. This is in fact the reason why he perceived Cezanne to be the only real artist of his time who informs us of the 'appleyness' of things, the fourth dimension and hidden depths and perspectives that we often fail to consider.

Lawrence's ultimate objective however seems to always be for writing, painting and artistic expression to serve life, to serve himself, as a way in which to explore and identify with himself and his own, complete spiritual being. To Lawrence art is how he connects with his 'circumambient universe',² however he also says 'When one is shaken to the very depths, one finds reality in the unreal world. At present my real world is the world of my inner soul, which reflects on to the novel I write. The outer world is there to be endured, it is not real...'³ Lawrence was referring to 'Women in Love' in this particular quotation. It seems fair to conclude that the contiguous and circumambient universe that Lawrence refers to, which he knows he can only connect to, through art, is his inner soul. Thus, Art serves as the medium through which to discover and to connect with the highest version of himself and so in itself art becomes a spiritual and religious act. In 'Apocalypse' Lawrence states that 'Everything that puts us into connection, into vivid touch, is religious'.⁴ This might very well be the reason why in his writings on Art, Lawrence resorts to many different genres of religions, myths and belief systems. Lawrence's real position on art seems to indicate that just as all religions at some point converge into a belief in God, since art is a representation of godliness or the sublime and the spiritual, then all mythologies also lead to art. Art is a process of self-identification which provides Lawrence with solace and understanding. The importance of seeing in full, or the ability to see both darkness and light, both redemption and dissolution, seems to have signified to Lawrence the vital need to look through a multi-faceted, ambivalently contradictory and at-times incongruous lens which he confirms when he visits Tarquinia and experiences Etruscan art. Briefly immersed in the art of this primitive culture Lawrence identifies with the portrayal of 'things mentally contradictory' implying the

¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id' in *The Freud Reader*, edited by Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), pp. 628–61.

² 'Morality and the Novel', *Phoenix, The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. by Edward D. McDonald (New York: Penguin, 1978)

³ LII, 610. As cited in Mark Kinkead-Weekes, D.H. Lawrence, *Triumph to Exile, Volume 2 of The Cambridge biography D. H. Lawrence*, (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 328.

⁴ *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, ed. by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 155.

presentation of multifariously shifting elements placed in opposition which then fuse together 'emotionally' which once again, consistently veers us to the importance of the seeing in full, the wholeness and holistic approach to experiencing his 'arts'. Here Lawrence identifies with the importance of shifting opposition as he describes the Etruscan world which '[..] must have been a wonderful world, that old world where [...] things mentally contradictory fusing together emotionally so that a lion could be at the same time also a goat, and not a goat.'⁵ Peter Fuller's interpretation of this aesthetic emotion concept in *Art and Psychoanalysis* would be 'the submergence of self into the environment, and the differentiation of self out from it'.⁶ His Freudian commentary posits this dialectic on the 'sublime' to emphasise 'mergence and union' and 'beauty' on the other hand, of which the 'derivatives' stress the other – that of separation'.⁷ Lawrence comes closer to this discovery through a connection with Etruscan tombs, a locus which embodies the harmony of opposite polarities and dichotomies 'of the divine cosmos', mentioned in *Twilight in Italy*. Lawrence connects to this novel artistic representation of symbols or semiotics of opposites. He is fascinated with the serenity of such 'opposing creatures' as 'the leopard and the deer, the lion and the bull, the cat and the dove',⁸ all symbols of prey and predator, however all depicted by the Etruscans not as opposites representing good and evil but the polarized activity of the cosmos as a natural aspect of 'animal creation'.⁹

Perhaps Lawrence resonated with this Etruscan Art primarily for the novel way in which it portrayed dichotomies of opposing aspects of personality which may have appeased his feelings of internal conflict and fragmentation. Here was an art which presented a possible solution for the resolution of opposite elements to be found in one's nature. Lawrence identified with this art on a very personal level, taking it as a sign for hope within himself for the harmonization and attainment of completeness. To Lawrence, writing and art were a connection to this divine power in which he strongly believed. The relationship between the divine power and art is a personal throbbing and mysterious connection to Lawrence. Certainly the position that Lawrence adopts in order to present aesthetics and art allows him to sit in liminality, above the lake of selfhood, in his glass-bottomed boat, always suspended, in transit, in the very flux, within the divergence, inconclusively in opposition, looking at himself, the ultimate vates as the ultimate work of art.

⁵ 'Sketches of Etruscan Places', *D. H. Lawrence and Italy* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 392. Also cited by Anne Fernihough, *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 81.

⁶ Peter Fuller, *Art and Psychoanalysis*, 2nd ed. (London, 1988), p. 199 as cited in Fernihough, p. 80.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ SEP, p. 381.

⁹ Ibid.