

Thirza Wakefield (University of Nottingham, UK)

Bio

Thirza Wakefield is an early career researcher based at the University of Nottingham, whose doctoral research was funded by the Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership. She submitted her PhD thesis, 'Serial return and regional working-class self-expression: a cultural history of the East Midlands', in March 2021, and passed her viva voce in the June. Her film and poetry criticism has appeared in *Sight & Sound*, *Granta*, *The White Review*, and the *Guardian*.

Abstract

D. H. Lawrence's mining plays—*A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Daughter-in-Law*, and *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*—are (in their first versions) some of his earliest works. This paper explores how the formative experience of representing for the stage the regional, working-class community of the mining town of Eastwood—Lawrence's birthplace, and immediate environment for the first twenty-three years of his life—shaped Lawrence's relationship to writing, and his conceptualisation of authorship. This paper argues that the practice of dramatising the lives of Eastwood miners and their families, and of situating the plays' focal familial and intimate relationships within the context of the wider mining community—with its mores and vernacular—equipped Lawrence to conceive of a relationship to authorship preferable to any he had previously encountered, or himself embodied. This alternative mode of authorship is defined by its eschewal of singularity and finishedness. It reveals itself in Lawrence's accommodation of repetition, and his composition of variants or multiples of texts. Lawrence's early experiments with the dramatic form and the dialect play, and, especially, the peremptoriness of proverbial speech these experiments brought home to him, suggested to Lawrence an anti-dogmatic mode of authorship more readily reconcilable with his working-class identity.

Unedited paper: Rhythms of Eastwood: The Centrality of the Mining Plays to Lawrence's Mode of Authorship

My PhD thesis (2021) looks at the works of three East Midlands artists: D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), novelist and poet Alan Sillitoe (1928–2010), and Shane Meadows (1972–), a Nottingham-based filmmaker who has lately made more television than film. It explores incidences of repetition within their works, and, especially, repetitive forms: cycles of works, variants, serialisation. My thesis argues that the repetitive modes common to these artists' works are motivated by their working-class and regional identities. What follows is an overview of the first chapter of my thesis, which takes as its focus Lawrence's mining plays, often overlooked, recently restaged (in adapted form) at the National Theatre.

My research builds upon critic Amit Chaudhuri's identification of the repetitiveness of Lawrence's poetry, and his characterisation of Lawrence's authorship as one that is indicative of difference, Lawrence's difference, his otherness. Let me begin, then, by summarising the

principles of Chaudhuri's study. In *D. H. Lawrence and 'Difference'* (2003), Chaudhuri draws out the open-endedness and ensuing interdiscursiveness of Lawrence's poetry. Each individual poem, he argues, is in dialogue with the whole of the poetic discourse. For this reason, *all* of the poems Lawrence wrote are important, even the supposedly "bad" among them. Additionally, Chaudhuri writes of Lawrence's revisionary impulse: his returning to poems after their publication to make alterations. Chaudhuri is especially struck by the *smallness* of these revisions. Why reopen a poem to change it hardly at all? Why fuss, as Lawrence fusses with finished poems, if not, Chaudhuri suggests, to assert one's continuing authorial presence within a poem, and, thereby, one's creative fallibility?

By his investigations, Chaudhuri reaches at an impression of the kind of poet and writer Lawrence was. He shows how Lawrence differs from, for instance, Yeats, who worked tirelessly upon a poem until it was perfect; for whom a 'poem "click[ed] shut"' when it was ready, when it was finished.¹ Yeats's is a normative authorship; he embodies the orthodox image of author beloved of the literary-cultural establishment: the author-God, the genius figure. By his revisions to poems *post*-publication—by refusing finishedness and finish—Lawrence distances himself from this normative formulation of authorship. The interdiscursiveness of his poetry—that meaning circulates amongst the poems in such a way as undermines any notion of the totalising intention of the Author with a capital "A"—is subversive, and announces Lawrence's difference. Lawrence, Chaudhuri concludes, is a different kind of artist. And as you may have guessed, I agree.

Only at the very end of his study does Chaudhuri put forward a possible explanation for the singularity of Lawrence's relationship to writing. There—in his 'Conclusion'—he gestures toward Lawrence's regional, working-class beginnings as the basis or wellspring of his difference. My research answers Chaudhuri's invitation to explore further this possibility. My thesis proposes that Lawrence's difference may, indeed, be attributed to his regional, working-class origins; his contemplation of a working-class culture and its specificity; and the challenge of its realistic representation. My thesis supports Chaudhuri's characterisation of Lawrence's authorship as non-normative, as progressive, as one that, among other things, accommodates and fosters repetition. It finds that Lawrence's development of a mode of authorship agreeable to him necessitated a partial rejection of the hubristic forms of

¹Amit Chaudhuri, *D. H. Lawrence and 'Difference': Postcoloniality and the Poetry of the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56.

authorship he had up to that time encountered in others, and himself embodied. And it traces this revelation, or crisis—his casting off of the conventional associations of authorship, and his forging of a non-conformist, non-coercive alternative—to his early experimentation with drama. In short, it is my contention that Lawrence's naturalist dramas are critical to understanding his negotiations with authorship, and that their four-year composition constituted a significant transitional period for Lawrence that has not been thoroughly explored up to now.

To the mining plays, then. They are *A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Daughter-in-Law* and *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*. These were Lawrence's first efforts at writing for the stage, and some of his earliest works in any form. Their first drafts were written within a period of four years: between 1909 and 1913. The plays share a setting, one based on the mining village of Eastwood on the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border, Lawrence's home for the first twenty-three years of his life. The characters of these domestic dramas speak the local dialect, the speechways of Eastwood, and frequently fetch into their conversation local proverbs.

My research finds that these dialect plays behave as the poems behave. That is, as the single Lawrentian poem draws upon the general poetic discourse for its meaning, the characters of Lawrence's mining plays, likewise, draw upon the word-stock of the dialect of Eastwood, a highly pictorial language, rich in imagery because rich in proverbs. This shared language links not only the characters within each of the mining plays, but the mining plays themselves, and brings them into dialogue with one another. Lawrence did not intend that the plays should be connected, that they should form a triptych, or even complement each other. Even so, the plays converse.

There is a further conversation at work within each of the mining plays, a reciprocity that operates on the level of plot and character. The plays express a two-way exchange between the individual character or household within the mining village, and the regional-industrial culture in which the inhabitants of Eastwood are embedded and participate. This culture shapes the lives of the miners and their families, who shape *it* in return, both by their adherences to its precedents and principles, and by their defiance of the same. This dialogism between the individual subjectivity on the one hand, and the overarching culture on the other is suggestive of the potential for infinite variety within a framework of sameness. That framework is, here, an industrial community wherein quotidian activities are, to great extent, dictated by occupational patterns and economic imperatives.

In this way, Lawrence's mining plays—separately and together—describe discontinuities within a continuum. Separately and together, they introduce difference into a field of sameness or repetition: traditions, ritual behaviours, proverbial speech, repetitive labour. By his three plays about a single emplaced people, Lawrence asserts that there is not *one* way to *be* in Eastwood, not even one way to *depart* from the traditional way of life modelled to its inhabitants by preceding generations, and inscribed in the local vernacular, which they daily use.

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This relation between the mining plays recalls Lawrence's characterisation of the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which he began writing some thirteen years after he finished *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* and *The Daughter-in-Law*: 'three complete MSs, pretty different, yet the same,' Lawrence wrote in a letter to David Lederhandler in 1929.² *If* we contest the teleological model of textuality by which the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* have been understood by (some) genetic critics; *if* we refute the idea that the first and second versions yield a perfect third; if we do not treat the earlier two versions as drafts or pre-textual material, but as variants, competitive narratives, *and* cooperative, reciprocally enriching, we might then allow that there is a pattern to Lawrence's compositional practices that unites the plays, the poetry, and the novels. That pattern is the insistence upon plurality over singularity, upon provisionality over perfection.

It is my belief that this idiosyncratic approach to composition has its origins in the writing of the mining plays; in the attempt to represent a way of life with which Lawrence was intimately familiar, one he knew to be *various*, even as the dialect of Eastwood exerted a conservative influence upon its populace, urging conformity. This formative, four-year experimentation with the dramatic form clarified for Lawrence the need, not for a master narrative—a single, closed, self-sufficient work—but, instead, for many, open(ed), interanimating narratives, which altogether hymn the indeterminacy of the Eastwood experience.

²D. H. Lawrence, *The Selected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 467.

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