D. H. Lawrence:
New Critical Perspectives
and Cultural Translation
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By

Simonetta de Filippis
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### List of Abbreviations

#### Works of D. H. Lawrence

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Letters of D. H. Lawrence


Introduction

In the past few decades the critical and theoretical debate in the field of culture and literature has been particularly stimulating and innovative. In our post-modern world criticism has called into question many literary categories, has re-discussed the literary canon, has totally renovated critical approaches in the wake of major changes in western society such as the irruption of new cultural identities, the disruption of the well-established Euro-centric conception, and the need to establish new world visions.

D. H. Lawrence has been a focus for critical debate since his early publications in the first decades of the XXth century and most of his works are still being read and analysed through ever-new critical lenses and approaches. The force of his thought, his courageous challenge against the most important values of western industrial society, his rejection of England and its bourgeois values, his choice to live in exile, his never ending quest for lost vital meanings, his open-mindedness in coming into contact with different worlds and cultures, the revolutionary impact of his writing which made him the prophet of the sexual revolution in the Sixties with the publication of the unexpurgated version of Lady Chatterley’s Lover after the trial against Penguin Publishing House: all these aspects have provided critics with important issues for discussion.

The present volume collects a selection of papers delivered at the XIIIth International D. H. Lawrence Conference, D. H. Lawrence: New Life, New Utterance, New Perspectives (23-27 June 2014), held in Gargnano, on Lake Garda: the place of Lawrence’s first Italian sojourn (September 1912-April 1913); the place where he started a “new life” with Frieda and a new phase as a writer.

“New life” and “new utterance” are the titles chosen by Mark Kinkead-Weekes for the first two chapters of his Lawrence biography of the years 1912-1922, Triumph to Exile; ¹ those two opening chapters refer

specifically to the Gargnano period, a rather prolific time in which Lawrence completed his first masterpiece, *Sons and Lovers* (1913), wrote a number of poems which were to be included in *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1917), described his impressions of his first encounters with Italian people and places later collected in *Twilight in Italy* (1916), and wrote the plays *The Fight for Barbara* and *The Daughter-in-Law*. At that time he also made a start on *The Sisters*, later developed into *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920), and his experience of that period was partly related in his autobiographical novel *Mr Noon* (1984), written in the years 1920-22.

Over a hundred Lawrentian scholars from all over the world gathered at the Gargnano Conference to exchange the results of their research and discussed diverse aspects connected to Lawrence’s works and thinking: poetry, drama, psychoanalysis, translation, travel, ecocriticism, cinema, editing, Italy, sexuality, biography, religion, art, dance, gender, music, America, spirituality, death and suffering. An incredibly wide range of topics which generated a fruitful and productive debate, thus considerably contributing to the enrichment of the field of Lawrence studies.

The essays selected for this volume deal above all with theoretical and philosophical approaches as well as with translation and cultural mediation.

In Part I Lawrence is discussed from various perspectives, and aspects of his production and his ideology are analysed in comparison with philosophers and thinkers whose theories offer critical insights into the interpretation of his writings and ideological statements.

The first section of Part I, “A Philosophical Focus”, compares aspects of Lawrence’s thinking – sexuality, primitive rituals, criticism of industrial society, evolutionism, “thing theory” – to names such as Sade, George Bataille, Antonin Artaud, Martin Heidegger, and Charles Darwin.

More in detail, “How to Have Meaningful Relationships with the Other: Lawrence, Sade, and Bataille” by Masashi Asai, investigates one of the most relevant Lawrentian issues which has stimulated the critical debate for over a century: the belief in a new kind of relation between men and women based on that concept of tenderness in which Lawrence combines the natural sexual drive of the bodily sphere with the delicacy of feelings within the emotional sphere as essential elements to realise a true
and constructive love relationship. Asai compares Lawrence, “the prophet of sex”, to Marquis de Sade and George Bataille, who also challenged sexual taboos trying to dismantle the erroneous idea of sex and eroticism in western society, a comparison which shows how the English writer has a rather different approach to that of the two French philosophers.

Lawrence’s theoretical discussions about the ritual dances in New Mexico and Arizona, are analysed in Sergio Crapiz’s essay “Dancing bodies: D. H. Lawrence and Antonin Artaud’s Poetics of Cruelty”. In particular, through a close reference to the short essay “Indians and Entertainment” (1924), Crapiz draws an interesting comparison between Lawrence and Antonin Artaud, the French theatre director and critic, who, in Le Théâtre et son double (1938), proposes the idea of a holy, ritual theatre based on the experience of “cruelty” and “purification”, an approach which produced a new form of theatrical language centred on physicality and the action of the actors’ bodies on stage. According to both Lawrence and Artaud, the sacred ceremonies of those cultures still living in harmony with the authentic vital forces can be considered as the most genuine expressions of theatrical performances.

Indrek Männiste, in “D. H. Lawrence: Nature, Technology and the Sense of Enframing”, confronts Lawrence’s criticism of modern technology with Martin Heidegger’s later philosophy of technology. Indeed, the German philosopher underlines how the essence of technology in the modern age is ontological in nature as it “arises from our distinctive way of Being”; similarly, Lawrence’s criticism of the industrial society is often presented through the existential conflicts generated in his fictional characters by the irruption of modern technology in a state in which Nature tends, on the contrary, to produce a feeling of totality, to relate man “to that-what-is in its entirety”. This treatment of Nature as phusis and its relation to technology reveal an affinity to Heideggerian thinking.

Jim Phelps focuses his contribution, “‘Flesh cometh only out of flesh’: Darwinian Considerations of D. H. Lawrence”, on an analysis of the impact of Darwin’s theories on Lawrence’s thinking, and how they make him liable to evolutionary criticism, especially with reference to embodied cognition and evolutionary psychology. The writing on which Phelps concentrates his analysis is Lawrence’s “Foreword to Sons and Lovers”, written at Gargnano in early 1913.
In her study “Why Matter Matters: Things and Beings in D. H. Lawrence”, Youngjoo Son applies “thing theory” to Lawrence’s short stories, travel writings, essays on art, science and religion, underlining how, while after the post-modern period a turn from epistemology to ontology can be observed, Lawrence suggests that ontology and epistemology are not and should not be entirely separate. In a number of his writings, in particular the short story “Thing” and the essays on art, Lawrence challenges “the age-old concept of matter as inert, static, and passive”, and debates the concepts of matter and materiality, thus anticipating recent new materialist perspectives.

The second section of Part I, “New Critical Readings”, provides innovative readings of Lawrence’s works and thinking examining them in the light of those new critical approaches which have been characterising the theoretical literary debate in the past few decades.

Flora de Giovanni, in her essay “Identity, Performance and Ritual in The Lost Girl”, analyses how some of the themes and images recurring in Lawrence’s later writings in the wake of his American experience and contact with the Amerindian cultures, appear in his earlier novel The Lost Girl. Indeed, the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras troupe, with their performances and dances, however grotesque, play an essential role in Alvina’s process towards the achievement of a new awareness of her own innermost drives and desires. Art somehow works as a mirror revealing Alvina to herself, a process discussed by Walter Benjamin in his study on the age of mechanical reproduction that provides a theoretical key to the reading of cinema and art as a means of revealing and transformative power.

“The Animal in D. H. Lawrence: A Struggle Against Anthropocentricism” by Jamie Johnson investigates the presence of animals in Lawrence’s poems and stories pointing out how, though on the one hand animals provide a key to the exploration of one’s own inner self, on the other hand they sometime provoke a violent reaction in Lawrence human characters. This form of contradiction has been analysed in recent animal studies by philosophers such as Agamben and Derrida as an attempt to call into question anthropocentric attitudes. Johnson shows how Lawrence deals with the tension deriving from the separation between the human and the animal world in a dialectic manner.
Feroza Jussawalla’s essay “Transnational, Postcolonial D. H. Lawrence: Coloniser, Colonialist, or Assimilationist?” poses important questions relating to Lawrence’s portrayal of Native Americans in his writings about Mexico and New Mexico. Lawrence’s contradictory attitudes have often been criticised as colonialisit and even racist, but Jussawalla underlines how he also expresses an authentic interest in the life and politics of the Amerindian peoples. Postcolonial and transnational theories, though usually applied to the contemporary world, shed light on these contradictory aspects of Lawrence’s production and ideological statements, providing a new critical key to the interpretation of his view of Native Americans and of his attempt to create a new religion for the Mexicans in The Plumed Serpent.

The Mexican novel is also the focus of Andrew Keese’s essay, “Hybridity and the Postcolonial Solution in D. H. Lawrence’s The Plumed Serpent”, in which he discusses the idea of nation and the problem for post-colonial people to recover their original cultural identity freed of all the influences of the coloniser. In this respect, the Mexican people in The Plumed Serpent are a hybrid; in fact, they are not strictly Aztec, as they were originally, nor Spanish, as they are partly seen after their colonisation. The experiment with a revived Quetzalcoatl movement that Lawrence proposes in his novel is an attempt to create a new sense of nation, a new hybrid where the native religious heritage predominates, but also incorporates the Christian European heritage. Keese illustrates how Lawrence deals with the concept of hybridity, so central in post-colonial studies, and how his experiment could provide inspiration for other decolonised peoples in the recovery their own cultural identity.

“Revising Women in Love: Lawrence and the ‘Over-Emphatic Explicitness’ of Theory”, signed by Laurence Steven, analyses Lawrence’s 1916 and 1917 revisions of Women in Love, paying particular attention to the “Excurse” chapter, where the author makes use of disruptive satire and mockery on the one hand, while, on the other, he moves toward “mythic-prophetic sentimental fantasies of male domination and political leadership”. These changes are especially relevant as they reveal the great tension between Lawrence’s ideological attitudes and his cautious diffidence of superimposed theory. In this respect, criticism plays
an important role as it indicates how sometime theory influences the creation of the fictional world.

Part II, “Cultural Translation”, is also divided in two sections: “Lawrence and Translation” and “Translating Lawrence”.

Jane Costin, in “Found in Translation: Lawrence’s Fascination with Verga’s ‘Red-Headed Brat’”, examines Lawrence’s translation of Giovanni Verga’s short story “Rosso Malpelo”, along with other translations of that same story, including the one by Alma Strettell that predates Lawrence’s effort. Lawrence was fascinated by Verga’s story, by his peculiar style of writing (verismo), and by the “primitive” peasant world depicted by the Sicilian writer which appears close to Lawrence’s own views and experience. Costin appreciates the quality of Verga’s writing and suggests that it is now time for a revaluation and new translation of Verga’s tale.

In “D. H. Lawrence and Cultural Mediation”, Simonetta de Filippis considers how “translation” is a concept which can be applied to the proper translation of texts from one language to another, but also to travel writing. Indeed, Lawrence can be defined a cultural mediator between English readers and the Italian culture, both for his experience as a traveller – an experience which reverberates in his travel writings, essays and narrative works – and as a translator of some of Giovanni Verga’s works, thus making Italy and Italian literature known to English readers. As proper translator, Lawrence had to face the challenge of translating from a form of Italian which included strong regional connotations, and discusses the importance of rendering dialect by creating new images and words which retain the flavour of local realities.

“‘Translation is no Equation’: D. H. Lawrence and the Art of the Original” by Judith Ruderman deals with the relation between Lawrence and foreign languages from a rather peculiar and unusual perspective perspective: the non-translation. Whereas critical studies usually tackle the subject of Lawrence as a translator of other languages or the translation of Lawrence’s works into other languages, Ruderman focuses her attention on the presence of untranslated foreign words in Lawrence’s works, referring in particular to the Gargnano period (1912-13), and discusses
how sometimes the choice to leave Italian, German and French words in the original language is not casual but aims to create a certain effect.

Stefania Michelucci, in “Translating Lawrence: A Personal Experience with an Elusive Fox”, presents the problems of translation from her own experience with translating “The Fox”. In particular she discusses the difficulty of translating the word “Fox”, a feminine noun in Italian. The gender problem along with formal and informal speech, untranslatable expressions, and censorship are analysed through a comparison with two previous translations dating back to 1929, by Carlo Linati, and 1991, by Flavia Sortino. Michelucci points out that, whereas the literary work belongs to its time, translations need to be updated and speak the language of the readers.

A different sort of translation is discussed by Jill Franks in “Lady Chatterley Films as Cultural Translation”. In the case of Pascale Ferran’s film adaptation of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, it is not only a matter of transcodification from the novel, or the written word, to the film, or the visual medium; it also implies the carrying-over from the British culture to the French culture along with a change from a male to a female perception and sensitivity. The delicacy with which the female French filmmaker deals with Lawrence’s message is in drastic contrast with the film version of Lady Chatterley’s Lover produced by Ken Russell where the English cultural heritage of sexual repression and class hatred and conflict are strongly emphasised.

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Simonetta de Filippis