

PAOLO AND FRANCESCA FLOATING DOWN THE WINDS OF HELL:
JAMES JOYCE AND D. H. LAWRENCE, A LITERARY RELATIONSHIP

Generally, critics find it difficult to deal with D. H. Lawrence in the context of modernism, perhaps more so when seeing his narrative in the light of James Joyce's.¹ For how can one possibly ascribe the same label *modernist* to such dissimilar writers? Yet Lawrence's own contemporaries never doubted to place him with the so-called *moderns*. Even when his mode of writing was belittled by some of his fellow writers—notably by T. S. Eliot and, less categorically, by James Joyce—the modernity of his own writings, their intrinsic *newness* was unfrequently disputed.² Thus, for example, following the publication of *Women in Love*, Virginia Woolf openly acknowledged that she felt somewhat uneasy about Lawrence's fixation on sex; but this did not prevent her from concurrently maintaining that "he is trying to say something, and he is honest, and therefore he is 100 times better than most of us" (*Letters* 2: 476). Ten years later, Woolf would more emphatically vindicate Lawrence's freshness:

One feels that he echoes nobody, continues no tradition, is unaware of the past, of the present save as it affects the future. (*Notes on Lawrence* 95)

Similarly, John M. Murry, in reviewing *Aaron's Rod*, identified Lawrence as the "only [elemental force] in modern English literature" (177), and after the publication of *Fantasia of the Unconscious* he went as far as to consider him "the only writer of modern England who has something profoundly new to say," and predicted that he would "become a figure of European significance" (187).³

One could go to lengths citing comments along similar lines, yet these will suffice to illustrate that Lawrence's writings, as much as Joyce's, were then seen to respond to Pound's celebrated motto: "make it new." In time, however, and to a great extent owing to T. S. Eliot's personal animosity toward Lawrence, his fitness within a modernist canon began to be cast doubt upon. For some (Beer 109-21) he became one of "the last Romantics"—and note that I allude here to a film title that designates, not Lawrence, but his most impassioned champion, i. e. F. R. Leavis; others regarded his writings as somehow post-realist (Squires 42), yet never modernist in ways comparable to Joyce's or Woolf's. Gradually, two antagonistic cliques

¹ See, for example, Dominic Head's exclusion of Lawrence in his recent survey of the modernist short story (34-35).

² For T. S. Eliot's critique of D. H. Lawrence see his *After Strange Gods*.

³ In his review of *Aaron's Rod*, John M. Murry would further say: "[it] is the most important thing that has happened to English literature since the war. To my mind it is much more important than *Ulysses*. Not that it is more important in and for itself than Mr. Joyce's book. No doubt it is a smaller thing. But *Ulysses* is sterile; *Aaron's Rod* is full of the sap of life. The whole of Mr. Joyce is in *Ulysses*; *Aaron's Rod* is but a fruit on the tree of Mr. Lawrence's creativeness" (177).

emerged: the Lawrenceans on the one hand, and the Joyceans on the other. For these two cliques it is apparently impossible simultaneously to be fond of both writers, which is exactly what F. R. Leavis suggested long ago (10). (One remarks in passing that while scholars today tend to regard F. R. Leavis's literary assessments as superannuated, in literary coteries D. H. Lawrence's work paradoxically continues to be seen in complete opposition to Joyce's, i. e., much as F. R. Leavis himself did.) The fact is that the two writers are much closer to each other than F. R. Leavis and some other critics have been willing to admit in the past (Daiches 185, Edel 203, Kenner 140). To be sure, there are formal differences between their works. In the last instance, though, these differences are outweighed by one common endeavor: that of fighting against the ascendancy of the human mind in Western civilization, and the vilification of the body attendant to it.¹

What I have just mentioned would in itself constitute the topic of a very lengthy comparative study. Hence the purpose of this paper is to open only a small avenue into such a potential study by surveying the various extra-fictional allusions, remarks, and formal criticisms that these writers made about each other. Apart from evidencing that much of the criticism that the Joyceans have often levelled against Lawrence and viceversa is an uncritical re-echoing of what the writers themselves said about each other, this survey will further give us the opportunity to explain away their mutual misgivings.

In spite of having many common friends, Lawrence and Joyce never met personally, although they almost did when the Lawrences stayed in Paris in April 1929. During their staying in Paris that year, the Lawrences had a friendly gathering with the Crosbys and the Huxleys. Apparently the Crosbys had to leave earlier because they had arranged to meet Joyce. Harry Crosby recalls that on seeing Joyce, he offered to introduce him to Lawrence. But Joyce declined the offer on the grounds that 'his eyes hurt [him].' At the time Crosby presumed that Joyce's unwillingness to meet Lawrence had to do with his 'timidity' (Qtd. in Lawrence, *Letters* 7: 233n); whether the real motive was this or an underlying anxiety of confronting one of his strongest literary rivals at the time will remain a mere conjectural matter. What is certain is that Lawrence and Joyce knew and kept track of each other's works, that they were fully aware of each other's growing reputation in international literary circles, and that at the time they were being linked together in people's minds. In effect, on returning the copy of *Ulysses* to its lender Wubbenhorst, Lawrence expressed his satisfaction at having had a chance to look through it, for as he then wrote to Wubbenhorst "in Europe they usually mention us together ... and I feel I ought to know in what company I creep to immortality" (*Letters* 4: 340). In a similar vein, Joyce felt compelled to have a look at *Lady Chatterley's Lover* because the work kept being connected to his *Ulysses* as "pornography" (Frank 87n).

¹ Amongst those authors that have attempted to bridge the gap between these two writers one could mention Robert Kiely and Gerald Carlin.

Lady Chatterley's Lover was not the only work by Lawrence that Joyce ever read. In June 1918, while working on the "Aeolus" episode of his *Ulysses*, he asked Pinker for a copy of Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (*Letters* 1: 115). There are no further references to Lawrence's novel in Joyce's letters nor elsewhere, so that we do not know for certain whether he ever received it. (One recalls that *The Rainbow* had been "ordered to be destroyed" (Worthen, Introduction 13) in November 1915 following its prosecution on charges of indecency, and that "just over a thousand copies of the novel survived" (Worthen, Introduction 14). What are the reasons that might have led Joyce to want to read Lawrence's *The Rainbow*? And on the highly plausible assumption that Joyce *did* manage to get hold of a copy and that he read it, can we discern any Lawrence trace in the episode on which Joyce was working at the time, or in other episodes to follow? One could ask, for example, whether there might be any possible analogy between, on the one hand, Taylor's vision and Stephen's counter-vision in the "Aeolus" chapter and, on the other, Ursula's vision at the end of *The Rainbow*; or between Ursula's hallucinatory experience nearing the end of *The Rainbow* and Bloom's in "Circe." This is not to say that Joyce was influenced by Lawrence in the composition of his *Ulysses*; rather, taking Joyce's letter as point of reference, I am merely positing some the possible directions an intertextual research involving these two novels might take.

Apart from this passing allusion to Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, Joyce made no other comments, whether written or spoken, on Lawrence's writings, save for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Nino Frank reports that Joyce once asked Stuart Gilbert to read him a few pages of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and that he "read a few more himself" (87n). Apparently Joyce thought that Lawrence's style was "lush," his English "sloppy," and "the pornography imitation" (Frank 87n). Nino Frank also recalls that around 1929 he happened to mention to Joyce that Lawrence was in Paris, whereupon Joyce observed: "Cet homme écrit vraiment très mal" ["That man really writes very badly"] (qtd. in Ellmann 615n). Apart from these brief remarks, Joyce wrote about Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in two letters he sent to Harriet Shaw Weaver. In the first one, written in September 1930, we read:

I understand from Miss Monnier that there is a big conspiracy on at the *Nouvelle Revue Française* to make a boost of Lawrence's book *Lady Chatterbox's Lover*, which is to be brought out in a form exactly similar to Lazy Molly's ditto-ditto accompanied by a campaign of articles in papers and reviews, the publication to be in French. This scheme is what Bloom would call Utopia and I cannot understand how they can expect any sensible person to pay hundreds of francs for such a production when the genuine article much more effectively done can be had in any back shop in Paris for one tenth of the money. (*Letters* 1: 294)

Interestingly, Joyce does not link Lawrence's novel to *Ulysses* but to Molly Bloom specifically, conceivably intuiting in Lawrence's novel some surreptitious response to Molly's monologue. Furthermore, the letter rings out a certain amount of concern at seeing Lawrence's novel being launched into the market through the same channels as those used for the publication of his own *Ulysses*, as if fearing some kind of competition, or indeed, as if the

publication of Lawrence's novel might imperil the current success of *Ulysses*. Finally, one cannot fail to appreciate Joyce's facetious re-titling of Lawrence's novel. Actually, such a re-writing might not be altogether whimsical; one might want to read in it a hint of Joyce's awareness of the central role that language plays in Lawrence's novel, a role which, one may mention in passing, is in many ways susceptible of being compared with that which it plays in *Ulysses*.

Lawrence's death did not make Joyce change his mind about the novel, nor about Lawrence's style. Thus, in another letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, dated December 1931, he would write:

I read the first 2 pages of the usual sloppy English and S. G. read me a lyrical bit about nudism in a wood and the end which is a piece of propaganda in favour of something which, outside of D. H. L. 's country at any rate, makes all the propaganda for itself. (*Selected Letters* 358)

Here one is given the impression that Joyce wrote the above cited letter to Harriet S. Weaver before he even read the novel. Nino Frank does not help us on this score, for he does not specify when Joyce had Stuart Gilbert read him from Lawrence's novel. However this may be, Joyce's negative assessment of *Lady Chatterley* rings rather hollow because critically undeveloped. Furthermore, it is the sort of judgement one might expect to hear from somebody who is somehow haunted by professional envy. The important thing is that his critique of Lawrence's style signals what Lawrence most objected to about his fellow writers, that is to say, what for him was an excessive concern with form, which is precisely what he himself was fully determined to eschew. As Lawrence would write in a letter to Ernest Collins,

They want me to have form: that means, they want me to have *their* pernicious ossiferous skin-grief form, and I won't. (*Letters* 1: 492)

This leads us straight into Lawrence's more extensive critique of Joyce, the sources of which are to be found mainly in some of his friends' memoirs, in his letters, in some of his essays, and more obliquely, in the second version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, i. e., *John Thomas and Lady Jane*. The remaining of this paper will focus exclusively on Lawrence's extra-fictional critique of Joyce, inasmuch as a fair examination of the overt allusions to Joyce in *John Thomas and Lady Jane* and their apparent erasure in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* would have to take into account too great a number of complex narrative factors to be developed within set limits.

Sometime between January and February 1920, while in Capri, Compton MacKenzie lent Lawrence the issues of *The Little Review* he had been receiving from Chicago and in which Joyce's *Ulysses* was being serialized. It is uncertain how many episodes Lawrence managed to read, but whatever he read, it did not impress him very favourably. Thus, according to MacKenzie (167) Lawrence "was horrified by it"; he further recalls Lawrence's saying: "This *Ulysses* muck is more disgusting than Casanova ... I *must* show that it can be done without muck."

If we are to credit MacKenzie's account, "[t]hat first reading of *Ulysses* set Lawrence off talking to [him] about sex for a couple of hours." On account of Lawrence's reaction to *Ulysses* MacKenzie was driven to speculate in retrospect that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* could well have been "conceived at that moment," a view that has been sustained by recent critics.¹ Whether it was then or at some later date that Lawrence "conceived" his last novel is not clear. But that Lawrence had *Ulysses* on his mind when he wrote it is evidenced by the few explicit references to it he made in *John Thomas and Lady Jane*.

D. H. Lawrence did not make further comments on Joyce in writing until two years later, when *Ulysses* was published in book form. Just before setting off to America that year, Lawrence wrote a letter to S. S. Kotliansky, in which he told him that he was looking forward to reading "this famous *Ulysses*," although he added: "I doubt he is a trickster" (*Letters* 4: 275). As with Joyce, were it not for Compton MacKenzie's report one would have thought that Lawrence had never read any *Ulysses* before. However this may be, the letter reflects Lawrence's scepticism about the literary value of *Ulysses*; it attests to Lawrence's suspicion that Joyce may be more of a formal designer or mechanical craftsman—perhaps in the manner of his own Loerke in *Women in Love*—than a *bona fide* artist. Lawrence does not elaborate further on this point. Instead, he goes on to notify his friend that he has "nearly finished" *Kangaroo*, of which he says that "[e]ven the Ulysseans will spit at it." Clearly this phrase points to Lawrence's awareness of *Ulysses* being a novel that transgresses sanctioned literary standards. But it simultaneously relativizes the presumed radical nature of *Ulysses* by anticipating an adverse reaction to his own novel from those who professed to be at the forefront of the literary avant-garde, that is to say, the very supporters of Joyce's novel. In a way, Lawrence could be seen to be punctuating here the conservative impetus inherent in all self-appointed revolutionary art, its inmost resistance to change, in brief, its fundamental relativity. As Lawrence was able to discern with much more acumen than many of his coevals, what is radical today will be reactionary tomorrow, or, as he himself put it,

[e]verything is relative. Every Commandment that ever issued out of the mouth of God or man is strictly relative: adhering to the particular time, place and circumstance. ("The Novel" 168).

Lawrence was not mistaken in his prediction about *Kangaroo's* reception. Save for the odd reviewer who praised the novel ("*Kangaroo*" 216), *Kangaroo* was then considered a literary failure (Draper, Introduction 16), as much as it is today. In this respect, John Worthen is correct when he says that while critics are inclined to condemn the novel for its authorial digressions—many of which are, it must be said at once, self-reflexive, after the fashion of a great deal of contemporary novels—and for its disjointed configuration, these same critics would never dare to gauge *Ulysses* according to such stale criteria (*D. H. Lawrence* 140-41).

¹ See, for example, Dennis Jackson.

Soon after writing to Koteliansky, Lawrence moved to Taos, New Mexico. Once here, Lawrence grows overanxious to read *Ulysses* (*Letters* 4: 306, 318, 320, 324, 330, 335). Yet he had to wait for over two months from the day he first asked Seltzer to send him a copy of *Ulysses* until he actually got it. This happened on the 6th November 1922 (*Letters* 4: 335). Then, only eight days later, Lawrence returned the copy to its lender F. Wubbenhorst — a friend of Seltzer— together with a letter in which he confessed to his personal inability to read *Ulysses* in its totality, that is, he could read “only bits” (*Letters* 4: 340). The last lines of such a letter read as follows:

I guess Joyce would look as much askance on me as I on him. We make a choice of Paolo and Francesca floating down the winds of hell.

In so identifying himself and Joyce with Dante’s carnal sinners it is clear that Lawrence had read enough to recognize that Joyce was embarked upon a project akin to his own: namely, that of liberating sexuality from the bonds of Victorian prudery. The fact is, similar as their projects were, *Ulysses* “wearing” Lawrence as much as it did Virginia Woolf (Lawrence, *Letters* 4: 345; Woolf, *Letters* 2: 234). Thus, in another letter to Seltzer, dated the 28 November 1922, Lawrence would comment: “*Ulysses* wearing me: so like a schoolmaster with dirt and stuff in his head: sometimes good, though: but too mental.” (*Letters* 4: 345; emphasis mine). As any Lawrence scholar knows, the word “Schoolmaster” with its didactic connotations is a key word in Lawrence’s aesthetics. One recalls that for Lawrence any attempt on the writer’s part to “nail anything down, in the novel” was anathema, the reason being that

If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail. (“Morality and the Novel” 177)

Lawrence did not condemn didacticism in the novel *per se*; on the contrary, “any novel of importance” had, in his view, a “[didactic] purpose” (“The Novel” 162). What he disapproved of was the kind of didacticism that went unaccompanied by an inbuilt self-critique:

The degree to which the system of morality, or the metaphysic, of any work of art is submitted to criticism within the work of art makes the lasting value and satisfaction of that work. ... [T]he metaphysic must always subserve the artistic purpose beyond the artist’s conscious aim. (“Study of Thomas Hardy” 89)

Elsewhere, he would similarly reject those novels in which the novelist could be seen to be “[pulling] down the balance to his own predilection” (“The Novel” 177). *Ulysses* was one such novel according to Lawrence, i. e., the product of one of those “modern [novelists]” who, much as they “[deny] having any didactic purpose at all,” are in fact “possessed ... by such a stale old ‘purpose’ [that their] inspiration succumbs” (“The Novel” 164).

Other key words in the cited letter are “dirt ... in the head” and “mental,” which in turn echo Lawrence’s impatience with the ending of *Ulysses*; this he described to Dorothy Brett as “the dirtiest, most indecent, obscene thing ever written” (Brett 81). Such violent outbursts on

Lawrence's part might be better apprehended in the light of what he thought was the worst of modern evils: a proclivity to overintellectualize sexuality, or what he used to refer to as "mental sex" and "sex in the head" indistinctly:

those who become seriously "free" in their sex, free and pure ... have mentalized sex till it is nothing at all ... but a mental quality. And the final result is disaster, every time. ("Pornography and Obscenity" 320)

Seltzer presumably entreated Lawrence to write something on Joyce.¹ Lawrence, however, declined the offer alleging that it was not be "fair to him" (*Letters* 4: 355). Yet he agreed later to write an article about the much debated question of "the future of the novel" for the *Literary Digest International Book Review*, which he forwarded to Seltzer in February 1923 (Steele, Introduction xlv-xlvi). The article, originally entitled "The Future of the Novel," was published three months later in a censored form and with a different title—"Surgery for the Novel - Or a Bomb"—in the aforesaid journal. Although here Lawrence does not concern himself specifically with Joyce, there are allusions to his kind of narrative as incarnating the latest trend in novel writing, which is one of the targets of Lawrence's lambasting—the other being what he calls "the popular novel" (151), epitomized by Edith Maude Hull's fictions, Zane Grey's, Robert William Chambers's, Sinclair Lewis's, A. S. M. Hutchinson's, and Baroness Orczy's. Against all odds, Lawrence would, for the first time, publicly proclaim his stark aversion to the so-called modern novel which, in his view, was represented by Marcel Proust's, Dorothy Richardson's, and James Joyce's narratives:

"Did I feel a twinge in my little toe, or didn't I?" asks every character in Mr Joyce or Miss Richardson or Monsieur Proust. "Is the odour of my perspiration a blend of frankincense and orange pekoe and boot-blackening, or is it myrrh and bacon-fat and Shetland tweed?"

It is self-consciousness picked into such fine bits that the bits are most of them invisible, and you have to go by smell. Through thousands and thousands of pages Mr Joyce and Miss Richardson tear themselves to pieces, strip their smallest emotions to the finest threads, till you feel you are sewed inside a wool mattress that is being slowly shaken up, and you are turning to wool along with the rest of the woollyness. (151-52)

Lawrence gives voice to the sort of impatience that many readers have surely felt now and again when reading Joyce's *Ulysses*, that is, an impatience at the book's encyclopedic bent and verbal pyrotechnics, which sometimes appear to be creatively sterile, or seem not to have much purpose or meaning beyond that of filling up pages (Deakin 396-97).

¹ Seltzer's letter has been lost; yet one infers that he proposed Lawrence to write on Joyce in light of Lawrence's letter of 5 December 1922, where he asks Seltzer: "Do you really want to publish my James Joyce remarks?" (*Letters* 4: 355).

Yet what nettled Lawrence most about Joyce's book is its ostensible emotional "self-consciousness" ("Future" 152), which is, according to him, what "hinders a first-rate artist" ("Translator's" 264). Actually, the concept of "self-consciousness" in Lawrence cannot be properly understood without reference to the notion of "self-effacement." As he unequivocally states in his Preface to Giovanni Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana*: "Self-effacement is quite as self-conscious, and perhaps even more conceited than letting oneself go." ("Translator's" 263).

In this essay Lawrence maintains that it is precisely the modern writers' attempt to achieve self-effacement in the manner of Flaubert that makes us "too much aware of the [authors] and [their] scissors" (264). Ultimately, what the reader gets is, according to Lawrence, the kind of "definite," "mechanical form" from which he himself shied away; "we need more looseness," he would further state, "an apparent formlessness." It is this ideal "looseness" that Verga seemingly achieves when he sets out to represent the illogical flow of the thinking "unsophisticated mind" of the Italian peasants (265), i. e., a laxity to which even punctuation contributes:

... in the matter of punctuation he is, perhaps, deliberately, a puzzle, aiming at the same muddled swift effect of the emotional mind in its movements. He is doing, as a great artist, what men like James Joyce do only out of contrariness and desire for a sensation. (266)

In other words, Lawrence senses that behind Joyce's method lies not an authentic interest in reproducing the thinking mind of his characters, as one may feel in Verga's fiction, but a certain exhibitionism, a conscious will to flaunt his own dexterity before the readers.

Seeing Lawrence's response to *Ulysses* it is easy to imagine what his reaction to *Finnegans Wake* might have been. Lawrence alluded to Joyce's "Work in Progress" only once; in a letter to Earl Brewster dated 15 August 1928, he commented upon no. 13 of *transition*, which included Book III, chapter ii of *Finnegans Wake* (*Letters* 6: 508). His comments on Joyce's work, as could have been predicted, were extremely inauspicious:

My God, what a clumsy olla putrida James Joyce is! Nothing but old fags and cabbage-stumps of quotations from the Bible and the rest, stewed in the juice of deliberate, journalistic dirty-mindedness — what old and hard-worked staleness, masquerading as the all-new!

A month later, in a letter to Crosby, Lawrence expressed what could be taken as his final verdict on Joyce: "James Joyce bores me stiff — too terribly would-be and done-on-purpose, utterly without spontaneity or real life." (*Letters* 6: 549).

One could elaborate more extensively on Lawrence's objections to Joyce's pretensions to impersonality through self-effacement, and on other related questions such as Lawrence's distinction between genuine artistic form and "literary fabrication" or "flat form," his dislike for

the stream-of-consciousness technique, and so forth. This, however, would eventually lead into a discussion Lawrence's caustic critique of Platonic idealism and Descartes's dualism, a discussion which, much as it would serve to lay open the common projects of such antagonistic rivals, I propose to leave for another occasion.

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