

D. H. Lawrence ‘after’ Jean Baptiste Greuze

At a young age, Lawrence had long decided he ‘couldn’t draw’¹ and so he experimented with producing artwork by copying artistic works off reproductions in books, magazines, postcards and calendars. As a birthday gift from Jessie Chambers in 1906, Lawrence receives six of the eight parts of ‘English Water-colour: with Reproductions of Drawings by Eminent Painters’ edited by Charles Holme and published in 1902 by ‘The Studio’.² Lawrence claims to have developed his ‘visionary awareness’³ from copying the works of English watercolour artists such as Paul Sandby, Peter de Wint and Girtin, Frank Brangyn and the Impressionists and notably the work of Brabazon. He painted these copies mostly as gifts for his friends and family. As a young man Lawrence’s experimentation with Art became a social activity at home. Jessie Chambers’ elder sister, May Chambers Holbrook describes the Lawrences’ kitchen as a hub of admiring girls and a boy who wanted a painting done for everyone in the group, crowding around ‘Bert in his shirt sleeves painting furiously’ in the children’s albums, ‘table littered with watercolours and autograph albums’⁴.

As a young man, Lawrence familiarised himself with various watercolour techniques from the portfolio of artwork facsimiles, as for instance the use of a very dry watercolour, covering half a square inch at a time, which he later confessed was ‘a method entirely wrong’. Later, he not only explored and studied art, but continued to paint and even taught art in his remit as a teacher in Croydon.⁵

The painting ‘Child, Girl With An Apple’, by Jean Baptiste Greuze⁶, here below

¹ ‘Making Pictures’, *The Creative Process: Reflections on the Invention in the Arts and Sciences*, ed. By Brewster Ghiselin (University of California Press, 1985) From ‘Making Pictures’ in Assorted Articles by D. H. Lawrence. By permission of Mrs. Frieda Lawrence; the English publishers: William Heinemann, Ltd., London; and the United States publishers: Alfred A. Knopf, Incorporated, copyright, 1928, 1929, 1930, New York City. The American edition was published with the title: Assorted Essays., p. 603.

² ‘English Water-colour: with Reproductions of Drawings by Eminent Painters’ (London: The Studio, 1902)

³ Fry 1989: 49; LEA, 230; Wallace, p. 316.

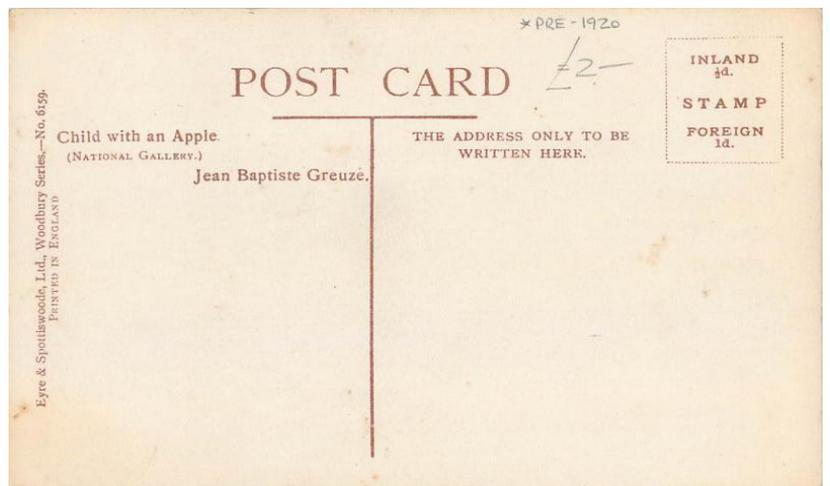
⁴ May Chambers quoted in Keith Sagar, *The Life of D. H. Lawrence: An Illustrated Biography* (2004) 9, 2L, 341. Also cited by Jeff Wallace, ‘Practitioner Criticism: Painting’, *The Edinburgh Companion to D.H. Lawrence and the Arts* ed. by Catherine Brown and Susan Reid (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p.305.

⁵ This excerpt is taken from Kathleen Vella, Ph.D. Thesis.

⁶ Jean Baptiste Greuze, *Child, Girl With An Apple*, c.late 18th Century, Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 32.1 cm, National Gallery, London, (Ellis Bequest, 1876)



was a very popular painting in its time, copied by many artists, one of whom, Francois Flameng who created it by etching on paper⁷, and who titled it 'Child with an Apple after Jean-Baptiste Greuze' in 1877. Greuze was a Rococo painter who was born in Tournus, France in 1725, educated at the Royal Academy of Arts and was renowned as a painter of 'sensibilité' or sensitivity. The painting was reproduced in 'The Graphic', London 1894 and was also a very popular image to be reproduced on postcards as can be seen here below.



⁷ Francois Flameng, *Child with an Apple after Jean-Baptiste Greuze*, 1877, Plate mark, 21.20 x 16.70 cm Transferred from the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Accession number: P 7608.

Lawrence alludes to Greuze and indirectly to this painting in *The Rainbow*, where he also refers to Sir Joshua Reynolds's 'Age of Innocence'⁸, (here below) and makes reference to 'Photogravure', a photomechanical process highly utilised and favoured by Pictorialists in the late 19th century and early 20th century by which a photograph is etched onto a copper plate which is then covered in ink and onto which a dampened sheet of paper is placed and passed through an etching press:

Ursula took her dinner to school, and during the second week ate it in Miss Schofield's room. Standard Three classroom stood by itself and had windows on two sides, looking on to the playground. It was a passionate relief to find such a retreat in the jarring school. For there were pots of chrysanthemums and coloured leaves, and a big jar of berries: there were pretty little pictures on the wall, photogravure reproductions from Greuze, and Reynolds's "Age of Innocence", giving an air of intimacy; so that the room, with its window space, its smaller, tidier desks, its touch of pictures and flowers, made Ursula at once glad. Here at last was a little personal touch, to which she could respond.⁹



Lawrence also mentioned Greuze in *Aaron's Rod*:

In spite of all the splendours and the elaborated convenience, he washed himself in good hot water, and wished he were having a bath, chiefly because of the wardrobe of marvellous Turkish towels. Then he clicked his way back to his bedroom, changed his shirt and combed his hair in the blue silk bedroom with the Greuze picture, and felt a little dim and superficial surprise.¹⁰

According to John Worthen, this pencil sketch is likely to date to around 1904 – 6, painted when Lawrence was around 19 – 21 years old, when he was studying before he left Eastwood. Both John Worthen and Kate Foster believe it was probably given to Ann Chambers as a thanks for all her hospitality. The signature, however, does not appear to be Lawrence's own, possibly added later by Ann.

⁸ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Age of Innocence*, ?1788, Oil on canvas, 76.5 x 63.8, Tate, Presented by Robert Vernon 1847.

⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Penguin Group, 1995), p. 357.

¹⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *Aarons' Rod*, (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 134.

It is possible that Lawrence may have come across the painting either on a postcard or in a magazine or calendar. Lawrence was evidently inspired by Jean-Baptiste Greuze here in this pencil sketch, sufficiently to attempt to copy it. Despite initially seeming like a copy, it is clear that Lawrence was not a stickler for mimetic copying. Let us observe, for instance, the nose which in Lawrence's copy is much narrower, or the hair which Lawrence seems to tame from a bushy head of copper to a flattened hair style. When comparing proportions, coordinates and positioning, once again, Lawrence's copy is well off the mark, as for instance in his rendering of the hand and the position of the hand in relation to the neck. (refer to Greuze's original and Lawrence's version here below)

Lawrence appears to be experimenting with pencil techniques here. The shadow-work on the elbow on the left makes the arm look somewhat hairy because of the grainy, textured paper which when shaded in pencil renders that effect. The apple would not have made Cezanne at all proud and lacks what would be later referred to profusely by Lawrence himself as 'appleyness'.



Lawrence attempts to re-create in pencil what Greuze achieves by brush in the contouring around the head, which results in Lawrence's girl being enveloped in what seems to be an oppressive grey aura. All in all, the sketch is hardly remarkable except perhaps for the eyes which are beautifully rendered albeit not an exact copy of the original, being smaller. There is a visibly good attempt at drawing the fabric folds, hardly an easy task. Perhaps the most remarkable achievement to note is that Lawrence succeeds to capture the mood, one of a child in a pensive languor, which despite all the differences is still somewhat retained, despite the eyes pointing to a slightly different direction.

Lawrence may have been motivated to copy this painting, possibly attracted to the state of solipsistic tranquillity of the girl who is transfixed in a moment. It may very well be however, that Lawrence sketched this 'pretty little picture[s]'¹¹ as it was popular at the time and it would have been an attractive and fashionable picture, recognizable to Ann who may have even requested it, certainly sufficiently popular to give as a gift. It could also be simply an exercise in shading and a way to while away the time. Judging from the playful flower motif on the bottom fabric, Lawrence appears to have enjoyed sketching and using the pencil or possibly different pencils of varying hardness of lead, to achieve different techniques, holding the pencil in different positions of the hand to achieve the different effects. Whatever the case, it is still the result of a moment of artistic reverie of D. H. Lawrence.

¹¹ D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Penguin Group, 1995), p. 357.