

This is an 'ordered and organised' text of the talk I gave to the Lunar Society on Wednesday 19th Jan 2022.

*I cut it short....and ad libbed not a little... on the night.
I'm happy for the recording and this text to be shared.*

"D.H. Lawrence....A Man on the Run"

Born 11th Sept 1885

Died approx 10p.m.. 2nd March 1930

So why the title for this talk ? It sounds almost criminal.

In his novel "The Lost Girl" Lawrence has Alvina say :-

"When in doubt. Move."

Those of you who know anything about D.H. Lawrence will probably accept that his greatest moment of fame was almost certainly in an English court. Weds 2nd Nov 1960 the Newspaper headline read "The Innocence of Lady Chatterley". Penguin Books had won its case against the novel being considered unsuitable for publication and it could now be read by all including 'wives and servants'.

Philip Larkin in his poem 'Annus Mirabilis' wrote

**"sexual intercourse began in 1963
(which was rather late for me)**

.....

**Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles first L.P.**

But, of course, Lawrence was the writer of more than just the 'mucky book'. Many critics, including F.R. Leavis, have described him as the greatest novelist in the English Language. So why do I see him as a a man on the run, and what was he running from and what did he seek.

Katherine Mansfield, writer and friend of Lawrence....and contemporary of Lawrence, Joyce and Virginia Woolf wrote in one of her letters :-

"The desire to travel is a great, real temptation. But does it do any good?"

John Worthen, the biographer *par excellence* wrote of Lawrence in a text titled "D.H. Lawrence; The Life of an Outsider". So why was Lawrence an 'Outsider', a man on the run, and did it do him any good?

So what is it that Lawrence runs away from, and what does he seek ?And why is it that HIS search for contentment is so significant when in fact in our own individual and specific ways we all make the same search? I believe that the answer to that question lies in the nature and character of his ART. Lawrence records all aspects of his search, and he does so with a keen sense of perception

and an extra-ordinary command of language and imagery—-he was also a painter but that was probably not his strong point, though that too got him into trouble with the authorities.

My view is that Lawrence reacted to a number of factors, some specific to his own situation and some common features of all human existence,

* He moved away from what he felt was a fragmented, dysfunctional family life at home. See *"Sons and Lovers"*

or poems *"Discord in Childhood"*

"The Little Town at Evening." Is he here speaking of death ?

* He turned his back on the strict non-conformist theology that his mother tried to impose on him.

* Partly for reasons of health he moved geographically to areas where he felt the climate, or the air, might be more conducive to good health... the clean air of the German and Italian mountains, the warmer climates of the Italian lakes, Sicily, Australia (though for less than a month) and Taos and New Mexico. And, of course, he observed the landscape, and the people, in all these places and he wrote in detail about them in travel writing, essays and in his use of the background and the people in his non-fiction texts and his poetry.

See *"Twilight in Italy"*

"Sea and Sardinia"

"Sketches of Etruscan Places".

One sees something of his power of observation in his essay *"The Crucifix Across the Mountains"* in the way that he moves from a comment on the form of the 'wayside crucifixions' to an analysis of how this reflects the nature of the people in each country.

In the short story *"The Woman Who Rode Away"* Lawrence uses the mountains and the forests of Mexico and New Mexico, and the silver mine in Minas Nuevas near Navajos, as the location for his narrative.

* He disliked what he felt was the sinister decay caused by a 'new' mechanised, materialist culture that was creeping across England and Europe. In one sense he pre-dated Attenborough...he felt men no longer lived 'with nature' but increasingly exploited it.

Lawrence loved the concept of man working together with the natural elements, and with his own skills, to produce items that were beautiful in that they contained part of the individual's creative character. Ironically while Lydia Lawrence went some way towards poisoning Lawrence in his attitude to his father he later saw the gift his father had for making and mending things and the love his father had for nature...the wild flowers and a baby rabbit just two examples that became part of Lawrence's own writing. Lawrence wrote a series of poems in which he suggests that *"We are Transmitters"* and that things made by hands have intrinsic worth. Ironically he probably would have supported the "Arts and Crafts" movement of William Morris, the Omega Workshop of the Bloomsbury group or Habitat or Dartington Glass (Those of us of a certain age

might recall). For Lawrence it was a case of *“Let us Be Men/ not monkeys minding machines”*

It was very much the case that Lawrence disliked the new emphasis given to the commercial profit motivated culture that he saw encroaching on the traditional values of work undertaken with dignity. Other writers had recognised this change and wrote in protest against it. Thomas Carlyle in 1829 in his essay “Sign of the Times” spoke of *‘mechanical dehumanisation’* and went on

“Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour”.

Ruskin would voice the same point in his criticism of what he saw as *“the rampant triumph of industrial profit and the consequential degradation of the craftsman”* From *“William Morris”* by N/M. Wells

* Lawrence explored his own sexuality, and he sought clarity in an examination of what he felt were new relationships— -my own view is that there is no evidence to suggest that he was physically ‘homo-sexual but he enjoyed what he felt could be a deeper male to male relationship.

* And, on perhaps the widest stage of all, our relationship to God, life and the creation of the cosmos and the idea of Death and what happened to us after death he sought to find new answers, sometimes coming round in circles. He was never A Christian writer/ poet....he was no John Donne...but he was a writer, I believe, whose work reflects a search for meaning.

Lawrence was born in Eastwood, Notts. on 11th September 1885. His father was a miner who had worked in the mines since he was seven. His mother Lydia had aspirations to be a teacher. She believed herself superior to her husband in terms of her ambitions. The discord that existed in the family arose for many reasons but the main one was undoubtedly the difference in character and expectations that Arthur and Lydia showed. Lawrence describes this discord in his poem *“Discord in Childhood”*. Lydia was a snob and showed a harsh disdain for all that her husband represented in his life centred as it was on the miners’ way of life. In their early courtship she had undoubtedly been captivated by the physical vitality and energy Arthur showed but this view of him quickly turned sour after their marriage in December 1875. Lawrence’s novel *“Sons and Lovers”* is very much an autobiographical fiction text and at least one of Lawrence’s sisters acknowledged it as being a fairly accurate account of the family life at home. One major difference was emphasised by Lydia’s strong non-conformist religious fervour and this emphasis on the Bible and Biblical theology had a profound influence on Lawrence throughout his life.

Lawrence's relationship with his mother left him seeking a deeper relationship with other women, but his relationship with his mother was strange, and in some ways an unhealthy one. He would admit to Jessie Chambers that he loved his mother not as a son might be expected to love his mother but more as he might love a 'lover'. It is ironic that in all his relationships with women the shadow of his love for his mother hung over them. He was on the run from what we might call an 'Oedipus' type of relationship but I do not believe he ever truly broke that 'bond' even when he met, eloped and finally married Frieda Weekley. In writing about her friendship with Lawrence Helen Corke...a fellow teacher in Croydon, and the woman who became the subject (and victim) of Lawrence's novel "*The Trespasser*" would write of how she felt Lawrence viewed their relationship :-

"I feel that his desire at the moment is toward me, and I am glad that he loves me. Yet there is no rest, no assurance in this love of David's because there comes with it an impossible demand. A demand not merely for passion given and returned, but for the absorption of my being in his"

D.H. Lawrence; The Croydon Years by Helen Corke

Perhaps this absorption of one's being into his was always at the root of his problems with relationships with women. It was an impossible ask...especially from the strong, confident women whose company he seemed to favour. It seems to me that this search for the 'ideal' relationship was another example of Lawrence's searching.

The circumstances surrounding Lawrence's first meeting with Frieda, their eloping and their marriage are interesting. Lawrence first met Frieda when he went to see her husband concerning a possible opportunity to live and work in Germany for a while. The Weekleys lived in a very 'posh' house in a rather 'posh' road in a rather 'posh' area of Notts. (Savills sold it a few years ago for a large figure with lots of 000s....but we did get some photos first). Frieda admits to be fascinated by the young Lawrence...her husband was late home so they had time to chat. This was on 3rd March 1912. By 4th May they were together in Metz after a hasty eloping. Their early days in Metz and Trier were hectic and uncertain but both were keen to be together, though Frieda already had concerns about her children and undoubtedly missed them. Frieda certainly felt insecure. Lawrence always denied that he had done anything wrong and said so in a letter to Ernest Weekley

The poem "Illicit" (written in June 1912 suggests the sense of uncertainty :-

In front of the sombre mountains, a faint, lost ribbon of rainbow

And between us and it, the thunder;.....

What have we but each other ?

The boat has gone.

But another poem “First Morning” suggests something of their relationship.

“First Morning”

The journey of Lawrence’s relationship and his marriage to Frieda is a long and complex one but was, I believe, never entirely free from their past, and especially Lawrence’s relationship to his mother.

The nature of both Frieda and Lawrence ensured the relationship could be passionate, stormy BUT essential in one sense for both of them. Frieda felt needed by Lawrence, but missed her children and still felt able to share some physical sexual relationships with other men after their elopement, as she had done with three men while married to Ernest Weekley. Towards the end of Lawrence’s life Frieda again found herself drawn to another man, Angelo Ravagli. He certainly caught Frieda’s eye in his uniform. Lawrence recognised the strong feelings that grew between Frieda and Ravagli. He speaks of :-

“ you think you have something in your life which makes up for everything and then you find you haven’t got it...two years ago I found this out”

Andrew Harrison suggests Lawrence might have described Frieda’s need for sexual experience with other men as *‘her necessary dose of morphia in her struggle away from the old life in England’*.

Dr. Andrew Harrison in “The Life of D.H. Lawrence”

She too was journeying. Frieda writes her own account of her experience in her book *“Not I but the Wind”* and in 2018 the writer Annabel Abbs penned her first study....what she called *“Frieda ; A Novel of the Real Lady Chatterley”* BUT the value of that text is a whole new discussion !!

The intense and passionate relationship with his mother might be explained by the fact that D.H. Lawrence was from birth a sickly child. He was described as thin, gaunt and sickly even when he was seen out in Eastwood pushed in a pram by his mother. A schoolboy friend of Lawrence J.E. Hobbs described him as ‘delicate’. As he grew up his mother acknowledged that she was unlikely to see him reach manhood and in her fear of his health she over protected him. As a child he preferred the company of girls and rarely mixed in the hard physical games the other boys played...he was described as a ‘girlie boy’, weak and puny. He missed many months at school because of his illnesses. T.B. was not diagnosed and only very much later as he knew death was coming did he admit that coughing up blood, breathlessness and bad coughing fits indicated ‘trouble with his lungs’. Despite this sickly nature Lawrence was in many ways energetic—he walked across the Alps with Frieda, he walked regularly from Eastwood to Brinsley and he enjoyed helping on the farm at Higgs Farm with the Chambers family. What he lacked in physical energy he more than made up

for in the range of his sensitivity and in his intellectual capacity...he read very widely, he had a good mastery of foreign languages (In Sept 1922 he translated 4 stories by Giovanni Verga...including Cavalleria Rusticana) and he wrote voraciously throughout his all too short life often returning to texts to complete a total rewriting. There are three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. :-

"The First Lady Chatterley" 1926

" John Thomas and Lady Jane" 1927-28

" Lady Chatterley's Lover" Feb—June 1928

(There are major differences between them.)

As Lawrence moved into adolescence he met a number of girls and women but it is interesting in terms of his attitude to women in his own life, and in his fiction, how he often found relationships with the opposite sex confusing and unsatisfactory. He admired strong, intelligent women but he often could not cope with the demands of a commitment to a 'giving' relationship, though in some ways he did with Frieda. He 'ditched' Jessie Chambers because, as he told her, 'he could not love you as I feel I should love a wife' (But he was also something of a pig because he had used her intellectually, he had persuaded her to attempt a physical sexual experience...which failed...and then he exposed everything they had shared as adolescents in "*Sons and Lovers*", and he made little attempt in that text to disguise people or place names.) Lawrence used some of the women that he met in his novels and he was sometimes cruel to them (Lady Ottiline Morrell was one example) in how he caricatured them. He could also be very insensitive in his use of material. He took the tragic events of Helen Cork's trip to the Isle of Wight with her music teacher, his resulting suicide, her guilt and he turned it into the novel "*The Trespasser*". Helen Corke recounts something of her own experience of knowing Lawrence and reading his work in that text "*D.H.Lawrence; The Croydon Years*" pub 1965

As the young Lawrence sought to establish himself in terms of making his own relationships so he also sought to work out his own theology. His mother tried hard to impose her strict non-conformist faith—the Cong church in Eastwood was physically a very dominant building, now sadly pulled and replaced by an Iceland freezer store. He rejected this strict theology despite Lydia sending him to church and Sunday School three times each Sunday. Lydia was tea total. Arthur had promised her that he would take the pledge and give up drink before they married but once wed he quickly went back on his promise. Much of his social life as a miner centred on the pubs and drinking with his work mates. This was another bone of contention in their marriage.

Initially Lawrence loved the raucous tub thumping call to God and later spoke of the old hymns and poetry of the Bible as meaning more to him than much of the secular canon of English poetry. (See "*Hymns in a Man's Life*" pub 1928) The evidence of his own writing would suggest that Lawrence read his Bible carefully, knew parts of it off by heart and later brought a critical, discerning eye to much of the Bible teaching he had got as a young man, but he

never forgot it. His own play *“David”* covers the early years of King David’s life and David’s time as a fugitive from a jealous and angry King Saul. In subtle ways Lawrence knowledge and familiarity with the Bible influenced the narrative style of his two best novels *“The Rainbow”* and *“Women in Love”*. They are almost generational narratives, a ‘he beget’ form. What Lawrence could not accept as a young man was the whole Christian emphasis on the divinity of Christ, the sacrifice of the Cross and the hope of a ‘second coming’, though in his final poems he comes back to the idea of a life (or something) after death. *“The Ship of Death”* or *“Shadows”*. Lawrence seems to have felt that the traditional theology, and the accepted code of social behaviour imposed restraints. In two significant letters to the minister of the congregational church Lawrence explains that his ‘reading in modern criticism of religion has seriously modified by religious beliefs’. In a letter to Rev Reid he explained that he could not accept the notion of the divinity of Christ though he would always acknowledge a Creator God. In these three poems he expresses something of the theology which he struggled with.

“Only Man can fall from God”

“God is a great urge that has not found a body”

“The Hands of God”

(In a letter to Robert Reid of 27th March 1911 he expresses his gratitude to the minister but explains ‘for me flesh and blood are the scriptures’) With some of his early friends...including Jessie Chambers and Louis Burrow, and with the support of a local council member and local J.P. called Willie Hopkin Lawrence read widely....Darwin, Nietzsche and others... and they often met together to discuss what they had read. They formed in Eastwood something of an informal group which became known later as ‘The Pagans’. The chapel provided Lydia and her family with a spiritual centre but it was also very much the centre of her social life...as the pubs were for her miner husband. The minister, the Rev Robert Reid, was no strict evangelical. He encouraged his congregation to read widely and to respond to what they read with an intellectual curiosity. He founded the Eastwood Literary Society. As Lawrence developed his own reading so he honed his ideas...both religious and political ideas... but he felt frustrated by Reid’s teaching, as he later felt frustrated by what he experienced in the teaching at Nottingham University College. (Mrs Lawrence later became concerned about this influence of the Rev. Robert Reid, as she became concerned about the emotional influence that Jessie Chambers seemed to have on her young dear son.)

To Lawrence the real energy of the universe was as much in the human body as it was concerned with the soul and hence the emphasis on the physical aspect of human relationships, the intimacy of the body as a tactile form and the significance of human sexual relationships. For Lawrence the core emotion was in the blood and was the emotion of feeling rather than a reaction to the objective thinking of the mind. It is certainly this that we see in the juxtaposition

of his responses to the naked body — -he adored the brazen exhibition of Frieda's bosom in some of his poems in "Look we Have Come Through" (see "*Glorie de Dijon*") but he was repulsed by some of the promiscuous sexuality he felt existed among some in the Bloomsbury Group and, much later, in Mexico he was forthright in his criticism of the group around Mabel Dodge. He emphasised the beauty of the human body (male and female) but he could be prudish and was certainly angered by the way Frieda flouted her body, and by her promiscuity even after their marriage. One of the tragedies of Lawrence's own life, and one which is often reflected in his novels is, I feel, the sense of the absence of the mutual satisfaction which the sexual act was supposed to create. I believe that one of the areas that Lawrence was moving away from and constantly seeking to find a fuller meaning was a fulfilling intimacy in sexual experience and in human relationships. One example of this we can see in Lawrence's novel "*Aaron's Rod*" and in the episode of Aaron's sexual encounter with the Marchesa :-

"Shall we be lovers ?

Yes, she said...if you wish"

It is a strange episode. Aaron can be tender, but he also feels brutality and the affair ends with an element of the unsatisfactory. Aaron had originally left his wife and family because he felt trapped but this new world of freedom also proves frustrating and empty. His friendship with Lilly serves to emphasise this sense of being unfulfilled.

Lilly says :-

"What is the use of running after life, when we have got it in us, if nobody prevents us or obstructs us "

"Aaron's Rod" Pub. 1922

For Lilly Europe is becoming a cage, and certainly Lawrence felt this of the European culture that he knew and had read about.

Surely this is Nietzsche or Rousseau ? In 1974 the American psychologist Gail Sheehy wrote words that Lawrence might have found easy to apply to the way of life that he sought to follow :-

"Let it happen to you....You are moving away. Away from external valuations and accreditations in search of an inner validation. You are moving out of roles and into thyself...the inner custodian must be unseated from the controls. It is for each of us to find a course that is valid for our own reckoning...to emerge reborn, authentically unique, with an enlarged capacity to love ourselves and embrace others"

This is not anarchy but it is an emphasis on the right of the individual to pursue behaviour determined by their own ethics. Lawrence, it seems to me, sought such a degree of freedom for his own life.

What we see of Lawrence's uncertainties and exploration in terms of sex, sexual relations and moral behaviour we also see in terms of his attitude, and his descriptions of the physical environment of England, and the morality and ethos of the culture that he felt was sweeping England and northern Europe. He felt it was also dominant in the culture of much of the U.S.A. Lawrence called the view of the countryside from Eastwood towards Crich "the Country of my Heart" but on his last visit to the town (1926) he could write

" It always depresses me to come to my native district.....when I was a boy the people lived very much more with the country (See "White Peacock") now they rush....they never seem to touch the reality of the countryside"

"Return to Bestwood" Late Essays

Or

"The real tragedy of England as I see it, is the tragedy of ugliness. The country is so lovely, the man made England is so vile..... The men are beaten down, there is prosperity for a time, in their defeat —-and then disaster looms"

"Nottingham and the Mining Countryside"

Lawrence sees at the root of this a 'disheartenment' and he blames the 'moneyed classes and the promoters of industry. He cites their greed as the cause of 'ugliness, ugliness' meanness and formless and ugly surroundings, ugly ideals, ugly religion, ugly hope, ugly love....ugly relationships between workers and employers.

(What would he have said of 21st century Britain?....see a film directed by Ken Loach "Sorry We Missed You" and zero hours contracts)

Ironically Lawrence sometimes puts the blame for this restlessness with the old rural rustic way of life on the women. The opening of "The Rainbow", set on the Brangwen's farm, sees the men content to live with and enjoy the routine fertility of the earth's natural cycles. It is the women who look away from the church clock and want more. In his early novel "The White Peacock" he has George and the farmers working close to the land and with nature while Lettie (the woman that George assumed he would marry) seeks new status and worldly trappings. At the end of the novel both are broken. George is 'downcast' and 'like a condemned man', Lettie gains prosperity and the gloves and furs she seeks but loses her vitality, she became a bored mother her 'vitality' dead. Finally her husband becomes immersed in his business, and politics. When

George comes to see her surrounded by the trappings of her new 'elevated status' she reflects a sadness and melancholy. It is not the physical landscape that has caused this ugliness, the landscape may be marred by pits and smoke but it can still be beautiful if it is not polluted by human greed.

We can see something of Lawrence's disillusionment with the coming of more and more mechanisation and the cult of materialism in the story "*The Woman Who Rode Away*". (Written 1924). Here Lawrence draws on the landscape of Mexico and New Mexico...mountains, forests and wide horizons. The landscape is also beautiful and far less spoilt than the Eastwood he had left behind. But even here there is a sense that a conflict exists, ironically a three way conflict :-

The beauty of the landscape

The vitality and energy Lawrence found in the primitive religious rituals.

The breakdown in the relationship between the woman and her husband.

"*The Woman Who Rode Away*" is a strange tale. It has been criticised because it high-lights the pagan violence of the Mexican religion, the ultimate human sacrifice. It has also been criticised because the woman is considered so unreal, so naive. The story has been widely criticised but one aspect that has sometimes been neglected is the reason why the woman goes off on her own, refuses the protection any of her husband's staff and just keeps riding into the forest. The 'villain of the text' is the husband. I believe that he epitomises everything that Lawrence despises in the creeping onset of materialism. The woman leaves to explore the world beyond her world. She is bored, she feels her husband is careless of her. He lacks the human soul and denies her the passion and vitality that she feels they might have shared. The man is successful and she has a 'comfortable' life. Lawrence describes the man as a 'good husband' but he has 'never become real to her mentally or physically.

In the text the husband has many of the characteristics that Clifford Chatterley shows in Lawrence's longer novel. The men who do well in the 'commercial/material orientated world are often portrayed as becoming obsessed with the need for material success...to own things, to control people. We see this as well in the character of Gerald Crich who is an industrialist. Clifford returns from the war in a wheel chair, sexually incapable, but so concerned that his business should continue under his ownership and patronage that he is willing to let Connie take another man...a man HE approves of... to produce a son and heir for him. Ironically she does take another man, but not the one he would have selected.

So what is it that Lawrence despises when he speaks of the ugliness of new materialism. It is the emphasis on profit and on the potential power that it gives to the 'magnates', the 'captains of industry' It is a complex concept and Lawrence seeks to explore what he holds as the ideal, the harmony of men enjoying the landscape and working with the environment and the natural order. He abhors 'the problem of modern civilisation'...modern Man has become 'a

mechanical being' mired in thought, regulation, order and structure and racked with the inhibitions of social expectations and restraints. In another late essay "Dull London" (1929) he calls London 'safe and nice' but only because it has no individual flame of life. He berates the traffic of London "*heavy, rolls massively and overwhelmingly, going nowhere*"

I have called my talk "Lawrence ; A Man on the Run."

In one respect Lawrence is like all of us. He is constantly seeking what is better, what might make life more pleasurable, and he is constantly moving on from what frustrates him and what he finds inadequate. He is looking for 'the perfect' and in that sense his search is inevitably bound to fall short.

Where I feel that Lawrence justifies his reputation as probably the greatest novelist in the English language...as well as being an essayist, poet, dramatist and critic...is in the fact that he brings to his search analytical perception beyond what most of us are capable of achieving, and he conveys the stages of his journeys in great depth and with an almost unparalleled command of language.

Where I feel most sorry for him is that he never seems to find that contentment, even if it is a contentment born of compromise, he seems for ever disturbed in his searching for answers.....and I do not believe that this was simply the result of his early death.

Books I Used for Reference, (and Other Suggested Reading)

- "Sons and Lovers" D. H Lawrence Cambridge Edt.
"The White Peacock" D.H. Lawrence Cambridge Edt
"The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence" Wordsworth Poetry Lib Edt.
"Pansies; Poems by D.H. Lawrence" Fredonia Books
"Complete Essays" D.H. Lawrence Blackthorn Press
"D.H. Lawrence ; The Early Years 1885 – 1912 by John Worthen
Cambridge University Press
" The Life of D.H.Lawrence by Andrew Harrison
Wiley Blackwell Press
"D.H. Lawrence; A Personal Record" by Jessie Chambers
Cambridge University Press
"D.H. Lawrence ; The Croydon Years" by Helen Corke
University of Texas Press

"Signs of the Times" Thomas Carlyle 1829

**Suggested text (s) by Lawrence which Lunar Society members might enjoy :-
“The Rainbow” and “Women in Love”**

**We can cheat !! Lawrence first planned this as ONE novel “The Sisters”
OR “Sons and Lovers”**

**And the one that moved me most initially (as a 14 year old and at the time not
entirely in love with literature) :-**

**“Odour of Chrysanthemums” It is in “D.H.Lawrence; Selected Short
Stories” which was published by Penguin as a Twentieth Century Classic. The
short story “The Woman Who Rode Away” is also in this collection.**

Malcolm Gray Jan 2022.