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EUROPE AND ENGLISHNESS, IDENTIFICATION AND DIFFERENCE IN D.H. LAWRENCE'S AMERICAN WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT

In his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, D. H. Lawrence asserts:

“Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality.”ⁱ

Lawrence's concept of Europeanism and Englishness finds expression in his American writings which concentrate on place, reshaping his literary content and his relationship with his reader in ways that respond to the American spirit of place. In the American continent Lawrence discovers a religious promise in the residue of aboriginal culture, which for England, and by extension for Europe, suggests the possibility of redemption and a new beginning. My paper argues, however, that Lawrence's American vision is marked by ambivalence, at once optimistic and pessimistic, sympathetic and anxious.

In *Mornings in Mexico* Lawrence focuses on Pueblo Indian religion rendering it with a strong sense of identification; he visits the Apache, Hopi and Navajo reservations to gain an understanding of indigenous American forms of consciousness which is very different from European and English forms of consciousness. This new vision will take shape as the nascent religion of *The Plumed Serpent*. However, this later, more substantial work concentrates on a female protagonist who is caught up in a conflict between submission to aboriginal America's dark, seemingly malevolent forces and the rejection of those forces because of the limitations of her white mental-spiritual consciousness. Lawrence clearly finds it wrong to impose European consciousness on aboriginal American peoples - the Aztec, the Maya, the Inca. Yet, as my argument will demonstrate, he nonetheless believes that the white and dark modes of consciousness in America resist unification. He emphasizes the differences between the local Americans and the Europeans and thus points out to the themes of individuation, heterogeneity and divergence. The Mexican Indians are different in their concepts of time, distance and money; dance and music and especially in their profound sense of religion. Despite his profound subjective engagement and his strong will to identify, he feels frustrated by "Indian" sensibilities, by what he perceives as unassimilable otherness. Yet he maintains his belief that he finds in America the primal wisdom that Europe has lost. Mexico becomes his own infernal paradise of conflicts and contradictions.

AMERICAN WRITINGS

Between 1923 and 1925 he wrote *Mornings in Mexico* and *The Plumed Serpent*. *Mornings in Mexico* acts like an introduction to that entire period of his career which one may call a savage pilgrimage and an invitation to cluster at the drum of natives. His visits to Ceylon, Australia, the Pacific and the American Southwest provide material for his travel writing.

In this paper the aim is to illustrate D.H. Lawrence's American vision-the continent as reflected in Mexico and the first three short stories are explored as they provide an economical context. “Corasmin and the Parrots”, the first story is a brief introduction which talks about the smell of carnations, clear blue sky and trees, ocote wood, coffee, leaves, morning and Mexico. “(...) Mexico has a faint, physical scent of her own, as each human being has. And this is a curious, inexplicable scent, in which there are resin and perspiration and sunburned earth and urine among other things.”ⁱⁱ Then, Lawrence describes the parrots' whistling, imitating Rosalino, the Indian *mozo*. The mocking voices of the parrots continue as they imitate someone calling a dog now, “Perro! Oh, Perro (...)” and says “Perro means dog. But that any creature should be able to pour such a suave, prussic-acid sarcasm over the voice of a human being calling a dog, is incredible.”ⁱⁱⁱ Lawrence finds the parrot's mimicry ridiculous and innocent as the parrot without knowing what it is doing naturally repeats what the native *mozo* is saying. It is curious how one is perceived and how one perceives himself or what our impression of ourselves are and how others perceive us? He continues “And one thinks: Is it possible? Is it possible that we are so absolutely, so innocently, so ab ovo ridiculous?”^{iv} The talented parrot's imitation seems like a way of showing how one is seen by the others and while being mocked, the little dog Corasmin seems indifferent.

Lawrence says,

“Myself, I don’t believe in evolution, like a long string hooked on to a First Cause, and being slowly twisted in unbroken continuity through the ages. I prefer to believe in what the Aztecs called Suns; that is, Worlds successively created and destroyed. The sun itself convulses, and the worlds go out like so many candles when somebody cough in the middle of them. Then subtly, mysteriously, the sun convulses again, and a new set of worlds begins to flicker alight.”^v

He seems to adapt the Aztec myth of creation which is the decline of the Sun or World and the emergence of a new world order. The parrot acting like an aristocrat presumably mocks the new system and does not want to admit that he has been “superseded” by something different.^{vi} After each Sun or World is destroyed, a new one is created and few creatures remain to mock the new order of life.

“The great big, booming, half-naked birds were blown to smithereens. Only the real little feathery individuals hatched out again and remained. This was a consolation. The larks and warblers cheered up, and began to say their little say, out of the old ‘Sun’, to the new sun. But the peacock, and the turkey, and the raven, and the parrot above all, they could not get over it. Because in the old days of the Sun of Birds, they had been the big guns. The parrot had been the old boss of the flock. He was so clever.”^{vii}

The parrot is now up a tree not dare to come down because of Corasmin, he is “(...) like the riff-raff up in the gallery at the theatre, aloft in the Paradiso of the vanished Sun (...)” and the parrot believes Corasmin is “imbecile”^{viii}. He finds the other birds celebration of the new sun ridiculous because “The parrot was a gentleman of the old school, he was going to jeer now! Like an ineffectual old aristocrat.”^{ix} Although the new order of life is not inferior, the parrot as an aristocrat belonging to the previous system has to resist it. The narrator and Corasmin can “admit” the “other dimension”.^x

“But the parrot won’t, and the monkey won’t, and the crocodile won’t, neither the earwig. They all wind themselves up and wriggle inside the cage of the other dimension, hating it. And those that have voices jeer, and those that have mouths bite, and the insects that haven’t even mouths, they turn up their tails and nip with them, or sting. Just behaving according to their own dimension: which, for me, is the other dimension.”^{xi}

In other words, all malice arises from a creature’s refusal to accept a limited place in the infinite variety of creation or world. When system changes, one has less power; it seems hard to adapt to the new system. As the riff-raff rises in the social ladder the aristocrat feels uneasy and cannot accept this new reality called the new dimension.

At the end of the essay, he recognizes this “other dimension” which separates him from Rosalino. “(...) what will come, in the other dimension when we are superseded?”^{xii}. As said before, man as a limited animal upon acceptance of his limits, who allows himself to be superseded, possibly is superseded by a new self as well. This new self decides not to exert his will over others or his own psyche to open his self to a continual creation or self-renewal which carries him onward. This continual change in one’s self probably leads the narrator to accept Rosalino as he is although his English upbringing and background makes it difficult to sympathize with the native because he is the other and his otherness is intolerable. The writer or the main character-the tourist persona must accept this dark, different servant with his virtues and vices, as he is and not try to assimilate him. The ego must meet and accept what appears to be darkly inferior and destructive. This unconscious acceptance is thus projected upon a man, an animal, a people, or a landscape different from England. If that acceptance occurs, if the marriage with the ‘other’ or the ‘unconscious’ is succeeded, then the closed and defensive ego may be transcended. A new, open to change, liberated self may step free embracing different peoples as they are rather than judging them.

Sympathizing with another culture and disregarding one’s own totally, seems highly difficult. The mood of the tourist persona keeps changing as he reflects his experience and changing attitudes towards the natives. As his white Anglo-Saxon, proud and nationalistic English self emerges, he cannot help but see himself as a superior human being. He sees Rosalino as an inferior version of himself due to his otherness but also he has to sympathize with this “other dimension”^{xiii}. “Just behaving according to their own dimension: which, for me, is the other dimension. (...) (Corasmin) and I, we understand each other in the wisdom of the other dimension.”^{xiv}

Lawrence represents the ‘otherness’ and ‘inferiority’ of Rosalino in the next two essays as well. In “Walk to Huayapa”, he finds humanity enjoying themselves as a “dreary spectacle” and he prefers to stay “in the hermitage of the patio”, relaxing with the parrots and Corasmin on Sunday morning and “the peculiar looseness of its sunshine”^{xv}. He enjoys the vast land, sunshine and easy-going attitude of the natives. Now he seems to enjoy the primitive life where you do not need a “machine”; “It is a question of a meagre horse and a wooden saddle; on a donkey; (...)”^{xvi} He thinks it is a “perfect” morning, away from the town, “ ‘I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my strength.’ At least one can always do *that* in Mexico.”^{xvii} He finds all the necessary ingredients of a fulfilling life in

“(...) pinkish-ochre of the valley flat, wild and exalted with sunshine. (...) the stiffly pleated mountains, all the foot-hills, that press savannah-coloured into the savannah of the valley. The mountains are clothed smokily with pine, ocote, and, like a woman in a gauze rebozo, they rear in a rich blue fume that is almost cornflower-blue in the clefts. It is their

characteristic that they are darkest blue at the top. Like some splendid lizard with a wavering, royal-blue crest down the ridge of his back, and pale belly, and soft, pinky-fawn claws, no the plain.”^{xxviii}.

This description of the countryside seems like all he needs from life. The landscape and climate which is very different from England promises happiness. He returns to nature and this is what he needs rather than the chaotic, grey, populated city of London. However, as soon as he begins talking to Rosalino, he knows that this is not enough. Rosalino “(...) as inevitable as the parrot’s ‘Perro!’ ‘Come no, Señor?’-‘How not, Señor?’”^{xxix}. Unfortunately, it is difficult to get answers from Rosalino, like the parrot he has memorized certain refrains and does not care if the reply is relevant or not. As a curious tourist, the narrator seems impatient with this attitude of the native. “Rosalino, which is San Felipe?” and the reply “Quien sabe, Señor?”^{xxx}. Although Rosalino has lived all his life in that small village, he either refuses to reply or probably his language knowledge is not enough and he probably does not even understand the question. One problem with the English tourist is that, he expects the native to speak Spanish and English fluently and if not gets irritated. This colonialist attitude of compelling the colonized to learn the ruler’s culture, language and even religion is probably a very high expectation. However, for the writer; teaching the natives English and English culture was a way of cultivating them. He was not one of them, they were the other but this otherness was also inexplicably curious, interesting and fascinating.

“Among the Indians it is not becoming to know anything, not even one’s own name. Rosalino is a mountain boy, an Indian from a village two days’ walk away. But he has been two years in the little city, and has learnt his modicum of Spanish.”^{xxxi}.

Having received no proper education or very little education the native actually can speak some Spanish and that is some kind of achievement but “The Americans would call him a dumb-bell.”^{xxxii}. The English tourist persona had no sympathy for the uneducated, the poor, the one who had no means to be educated to know more, thus; to be an intellectual like Lawrence.

Among the “dumb-bells of the land”, without being able to find fruit to eat, Lawrence goes back to his negative attitude towards the natives and says, “We don’t belong to the ruling race for nothing”^{xxxiii}. His proud, English fervor comes out once again. The English must rule the world, all world should be their colonies and all people within the slaves. His superiority complex flourishes among these villagers even more despite loving their rich physique, beautiful landscape and sunny climate. When Lawrence says “Adios!” to two women on donkeys, Rosalino’s voice is “the shadow” and when he says “Yes”, it is “with black eyes of incomprehension” and when the natives speak among themselves they speak “in half-audible, crushed tones”^{xxxiv}. He knows he does not belong there, but he does not belong to England either because he comes to America in order to look for the lost savor of his life. He feels isolated, lonely and cut off in the wilderness worn out by the heat of the “savannah valley” which is “shadeless, spotted only with the thorny ravel of mesquite bushes”^{xxxv}.

As Rosalino and Lawrence are approaching Huayapa, a fiesta is taking place and he finds the atmosphere so “magical, alone, tilted in the fawn-pink slope, again as if the dark-green napkin with a few white tiny buildings (...) deep groove of a canyon (...) detached from the world (...)”^{xxxvi}. He then moves from telling the differences in landscape to the differences in the physique and attitude of people. He talks about

“(...) two native boys, little herdsmen, (...) bathing, stooping with knees together and throwing water over themselves, rising, gleaming dark coffee-red in the sun, wetly. They are very dark, and their wet heads are so black, they seem to give off a bluish light, like dark electricity”^{xxxvii}.

Their bathing and the joyful attitude of the natives impress the writer. They are part of nature and live in harmony with it whereas in England, modernized, industrialized man does not live close to nature anymore. They seem to be overtaken by technology. When physical appearance is concerned; Lawrence says, “The Indians have a certain rich physique (...)”^{xxxviii}. The suntanned, handsome, brilliant and dark boys are very different from the pale, white Europeans. However, he concludes that they lack “spirit”; “Hastily retreating, I thought again what beautiful, suave, rich skins these people have; a sort of richness of the flesh. It goes, perhaps, with the complete absence of what we call ‘spirit’ ”^{xxxix}. Lawrence seems ambivalent about his definition of ‘otherness’ or ‘other dimension’ because although racially the natives are very different, they also do own some kind of individuality and a common humanity.

In “The Mozo”, Rosalino who has been in Lawrence’s service for two months is not the same as other natives. He is not impertinent, bold and ‘erect’ like other boys but rather “(sensitive and alone), as if he were a mother’s boy”^{xxx}. The Indian type described by Lawrence is actually quite different. They are insolent, bold and very proud. They look at the white man with curiosity and he describes other Indians as follows; “(...) the erect, bantam little Indians that stare with a black, incomprehensible, but somewhat defiant stare. (...) who seem as if they had never, never had mothers at all”^{xxxxi}. Lawrence explains why he dislikes this Indian type by using the “Aztec gods and goddesses” who are “unlovely and unlovable lot” because

“In their myths there is no race or charm, no poetry. Only this perpetual grudge, grudge, grudging, one god grudging another, the gods grudging men their existence, and men grudging the animals. The goddess of love is a goddess of dirt and

prostitution, a dirt-eater, a horror, without a touch of tenderness. If the god wants to make love to her, she has to sprawl down in front of him, blatant and accessible^{xxxii}.

The unification of god and goddess results in the production of a “stone knife” which is “(...) the sacrificial knife with which the priest makes a gash in his victim’s breast, before he tears out the heart, to hold it smoking to the sun. (...) the sun, is supposed to suck the smoking heart greedily with insatiable appetite^{xxxiii}. He obviously satirizes the violence of the Indians, forgetting the violence of the Europeans while trying to what they call civilize the primitive man as if they have ever been invited to America in the first place. It is arguable who is more savage, the wild man living away from machines or the European who seeks refuge in a new land because the old continent cannot offer him any future.

“So long as the devil does not rouse in us, seeing the white monkeys for ever mechanically bossing, with their incessant tick-tack of work. Seeing them get the work out of us, the sweat, the money, and then taking the very land from us, the very oil and metal out of our soil^{xxxiv}.

This actually explains the natives’ position-being exploited.

“The colonial-imperial register of self-other relations is particularly striking in Freud’s work, where the psychoanalytic formulation of identification can be seen to locate at the very level of the unconscious the imperialist act of assimilation that drives Europe’s voracious colonialist appetite. Identification, in other words, is itself an imperial process, a form of violent appropriation in which the Other is deposed and assimilated into the lordly domain of Self^{xxxv}.”

Lawrence then moves on to mock the white man from the perspective of the native who sees white as “phenomenon; (...) something to watch, and wonder at, and laugh at, but not to be taken on one’s own plane^{xxxvi}. For the white man “time” is important whereas to a Mexican and an Indian “time is a vague, foggy reality^{xxxvii}. “Distance” is well-defined for white man, he measures using miles but “To the Indians there is near and far^{xxxviii}. Money and possessions are not important. He does not want to keep money, wife or even children because he does not want responsibility in life. “Strip away memory, strip away forethought and care; leave the moment, stark and sharp and without consciousness, like the obsidian knife^{xxxix}. They are interested in living in the present and not worry about the past or future. Their view of life seems only limited to fiestas and their relaxed attitude disturbs the white man.

“It therefore becomes necessary for the colonizer to subject the colonial other to a double command: be like me, don’t be like me; be mimetically identical, be totally other. The colonial other is situated somewhere between difference and similitude, at the vanishing point of subjectivity^{xl}.”

Different geography, nature, flora and fauna, climate, culture, social structure create a different sense of psychology unique to a place. The American continent for an English intellectual writer was a totally strange but attractive and inspiring, intriguing but curious, lovely and attractive but repulsive at the same time. Yet, there was some inexplicable aspect of this new continent which made Lawrence stay instead of going back to industrialized, mechanized, technological England. Thus, versions of himself bloomed and his new liberated soul just like Kate in *The Plumed Serpent* bloomed leaving judgement and prejudice for the natives behind while confronting, accepting and recognizing the native American culture with its vices and virtues. However, D.H. Lawrence’s ambivalence prevailed when his English self rose, as it was wrong to impose European values on the unassimilable other.

ⁱ Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011), 45

ⁱⁱ Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico* (London: Penguin, 1986), 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 8.

^{iv} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 9.

^v Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 10.F

^{vi} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 11.

^{vii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 11-12.

^{viii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 12.

^{ix} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 12.

^{xx} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 14.

^{xi} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 14.

^{xii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 15.

^{xiii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 14.

^{xiv} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 14.

^{xv} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 15.

^{xvi} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 15.

^{xvii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 16.

^{xviii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 16.

^{xix} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 16.

^{xx} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 16-17.

^{xxi} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 17.

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- ^{xxii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 17.
^{xxiii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 26.
^{xxiv} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 18-19.
^{xxv} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 17.
^{xxvi} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 17.
^{xxvii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 19.
^{xxviii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 20.
^{xxix} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 29.
^{xxx} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 30.
^{xxxi} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 30.
^{xxxii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 30.
^{xxxiii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 30.
^{xxxiv} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 34.
^{xxxv} Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 145.
^{xxxvi} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 31.
^{xxxvii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 32.
^{xxxviii} Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 32.
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^{xl} Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 146.

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