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Religious Realisation in Lawrence's Travel Literature

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Travel offered many fragmented experiences to D. H. Lawrence. His thoughts and realisation about God and art and soul and the Bible had been revealed in this article. And Lawrence objected from his inner soul against the deification of Jesus Christ and his crucifixes. His eroticisation of the religion is also notable. God can be best felt through sensuousness and human attribution. Lawrence's deviation from the Bible and his two-fold approach to God and finally bracketing one's own soul with God had been shown in this article.

David Ellis and Howard Mills in the "Introduction" to their book *D. H. Lawrence's Non-Fiction: Art, Thought and Genre*, used "Lawrence's own dictum: 'Man is a thought-adventurer'" (8) [Lawrence wrote it in *Phoenix II* (9)] and argued that, "To be an adventurer means taking risks and, in art as in life, Lawrence was nothing if not a risk-taker" (8-9). Almost all of his realisations are, in some ways, "risks" and a traveller should take them, in real and metaphoric sense of the term. Though T. S. Eliot marked "an incapacity" in Lawrence, "for what we ordinarily called thinking" (58) in *After Strange Gods*, we may take it positively also. Lawrence disturbs the normal line of thinking, dislocates it, and this has become his forte. His writings provide a relief from conventionality and our deepest suppressed thoughts find an expression. We start feeling the pulse of life once again which has been crusted and rusted by the crude familiarity of the familiar things and thoughts.

Twilight in Italy (henceforth cited as *TI*), Lawrence's first travel book starts with the chapter, "The Crucifix Across the Mountains," where he commented on the artist who made those crucifixes. It appears to Lawrence that the crucifixes are pure work of art and nothing else. The job of the artist was not to convey any religiosity through these sculptors: "He is an artist, trained and conscious, probably working in Vienna. He is consciously trying to convey a *feeling*, he is no longer striving awkwardly to render a truth, a religious fact" (emphasis author's) (*TI* 96). And which can be considered as more blasphemous is that he took Jesus Christ as a common man who is just like us, full of virtues and vices. We do not make real statues of Jesus Christ because, in that case, Jesus would appear same as us, devoid of any gloriole. For worshipping, we need to grow a sense of reverence that necessitates someone bigger or greater than us. To accept the fact that Christ was a common man and curving his statues like common men and letting them to be subjected to decay and damage would be a sacrilege in the sense that we will lose all our respect and faith in him. Lawrence felt it and wrote uninhibitedly at the end of the chapter, "Christ in the Tyrol": "All those Christs, like a populace, hang in the mountains under their little sheds. And perhaps they are falling one by one. And I suppose we have carved no Christs, afraid lest they should be too like men, too like ourselves. What we worship must have exotic form" (*TI* 47).

Lawrence instinctively associates Church with sensuality and breaks the conventionality. In the second chapter of *Twilight in Italy*, "The Spinner and the Monks," he described his feeling in a church: "My senses were roused, they sprang awake in the hot, spiced darkness. My skin was expectant, as if it expected some contact, some embrace, as if it were aware of the contiguity of the physical world...my soul shrank" (*TI* 105). In the following lines also, Lawrence saw Jesus in purely sexual terms:

(a) In the chapter 'The Crucifix Across the Mountains' he described one crucifix as "Most strikingly *sensational* Christ I have ever seen" (emphasis mine). After that he said of Christ, "The *naked* strong body has known death, and sits in utter dejection, finished hulked a weight of shame." (emphasis mine) (TI 99)

(b) "But there is a tendency for the Christs themselves to become either neuter or else *sensational*" (emphasis mine) (TI 46).

(c) "Always there is the strange *ejaculation* of anguish and fear, perpetuated in the little paintings nailed up in the place of the disaster" (emphasis mine) (TI 97).

T. W. Wright in *D. H. Lawrence and the Bible* wrote:

Lawrence's critique of conventional Christianity and its moralistic reading of the Hebrew Bible (misleading, as he would have it, since it failed to appreciate the celebration of the flesh which pervades Genesis) also dominates his many retellings of the supposed "Fall" of man. Frieda and he, expelled from conventional respectable society in 1912, will be seen to have enjoyed playing Adam and Eve around the world, searching for a route back to paradise, a theme which runs all the way through Lawrence's writing from his early novels and poems to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Frieda, of course, brought her own expectations to the role of Eve, having heard (probably from her earlier lover Otto Gross) of the fall into bourgeois domesticity and the need to recover paradise through polymorphous perversity....*Not I, But the Wind* admits how fanatically she believed 'that if only sex were "free" the world would straight away turn into a paradise. (7)

Now Lawrence's unconventional way of taking the Bible and Jesus has its root in his childhood when the Bible was "poured everyday into" his "helpless consciousness," he wrote in *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, "till there came almost a saturation point. Long before one could think or even vaguely understand, this Bible language, these 'portions' of the Bible were doused over the mind over consciousness till they became soaked in, they became an influence which affected all the processes of emotion and thought" (59) and even at a mature stage, how intensely and negatively the Bible influences him, he observed: "...today, although I have 'forgotten' my Bible, I need only begin to read a chapter to realise that I 'know' it with an almost nauseating fixity. And I must confess, my first reaction is, one of dislike, repulsion, and even resentment. My very instincts *resent* the Bible" (59). So the "saturating" adverse effect of the Bible on his very young mind turns into irritation and resentment at mature stage. This artificial religiosity which has been imposed on him at a very tender age is in a complete clash with the innate instinctive nature of his mind and intense religiosity gradually gives way to the surging sensuality, and this clash goes all the way only to get even something better and more interesting in Lawrence: sensual religiosity or religious sensuality. And only by the blessing of this synaesthetic sensation he can write about the feeling towards the "deathly Christ" that "His supreme sensation is in physical pain, and in its culmination. His great climax, his consummation, is death" (TI 97). Painful pleasure or pleasurable pain leads to the eroticisation of death and Christ has become a sensual figure. He oozes a strong sex appeal to his devotees and discharge of blood has become "ejaculation."

The process of sensualisation does not stop itself only in Jesus Christ, the son but also the God, the Father and his supreme creations. In the chapter, "The Lemon Gardens," he took Blake's poem, "The Tyger" from *Songs of Experience* (1789) as the ascending steps to

God and connects the “white” fire of the tiger, and the “white eyes of the blazing cat” with “white ecstasy” (TI 117) which itself is infinite and therefore God:

This is one way of transfiguration into the eternal flame, the transfiguration through ecstasy in the flesh. Like the tiger in the night, I devour all flesh, I drink all blood, until this fuel blazes up in me to the consummate fire of the Infinite. In the ecstasy I am Infinite, I become again the great Whole, I am a flame of the One White Flame which is the Infinite, the Eternal, the Originator, the Creator, the Everlasting God. In the sensual ecstasy, having drunk all blood and devoured all flesh, I am become again the eternal Fire, I am infinite. (TI 117)

This carnal manifestation of God reminds us a beautiful poem of W. H. Auden, “Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love” where he wrote a line: “The hermit’s sensual ecstasy” (20). In this poem, he also like Lawrence, professes almost same idea that lovers can reach the God by sexual intercourse because it offers them a sense of infiniteness, the “white” ecstasy:

Soul and body has no bounds:
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon, (11-14)

The beloved’s body is compared to a slope as the portion below her stomach gradually goes down to her dark triangle which can lead a lover to ecstasy, to the creator, to eternity. T. R. Wright wrote in the beginning of the chapter, “‘The Work of Creation’: Lawrence and the Bible” of *D. H. Lawrence and the Bible*:

In one of his Last Poems, ‘The Work of Creation’, Lawrence makes the familiar Romantic comparison between the divine creation of the world and the artistic process of writing. ‘Even an artist’, he claims, knows the ‘mystery of creation’ is not a conscious or controlled process, the deliberate realisation of a carefully planned intention:

He could never have *thought* it before it happened.
A strange ache possessed him, and he entered the struggle,
and out of the struggle with his material, in the spell of the urge
his work took place, it came to pass... (CP 690)

The poem characteristically reverts to the somewhat archaic biblical phrase, ‘it came to pass’, from the King James or Authorised Version, where it occurs more than thirty times (Cruden 1954: 99), to introduce the idea that even God ‘knows nothing before-hand’ but acts spontaneously: ‘His urge takes shape in the flesh, and lo! / it is creation’. ‘Lo’, of course, has an equally biblical ring, which is again appropriate, for much of the material with which Lawrence’s own writing struggles is biblical. (1) [CP is the abbreviation used by Wright and it stands for *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*]

The infinite consummate flame that is only fuelled by ecstasy glows with ecstasy also. The art and spontaneous artistic creation power the ecstasy with the fuel of divinity and this divine eternal flame results in the glow which is again nothing but ecstasy. The creation has

no purpose, no reason. It is a reason in itself. And there is no result also. This whole eternal, purposeless, and spontaneous process inflamed oneness and destroys all differences, when the man and the god become the same, Christ turns into a common man, sacred and profane mix, religiosity becomes sensuality, sensuality becomes religiosity—only passion exists, creation exists, and ecstasy exists. A person cannot feel the ecstasy and will not be immortal without the culmination of his innate desires: “The eyes of the tiger cannot see, except with the light from within itself, by the light of its own desire....Hence its terrifying sightlessness” (TI 118).

These unifying desires achieve its consummation by having the knowledge of the other. The limitation of an individual resists the spirit of the whole mankind. The job of an individual is to break the iron gate of individuality and let it be connected with humanity. Therefore the consummation lies in seeking that other, in knowing that other: “Man is great and illimitable, whilst the individual is small and fragmentary. Therefore the individual must sink himself in the great whole of mankind” (TI 120). This limitless freedom can only be achieved by the elimination of the self, by connecting his own inflamed desires with the strong appetite of the mankind: “When I am all that is not-me, then I have perfect liberty, I know no limitation. Only I must eliminate the self” (TI 121). In the Chapter, “As Far as Palermo” (of *Sea and Sardinia*, henceforth cited as *SS*) Lawrence wrote, “Humanity is, externally, too much alike. Internally there are insuperable differences” (SS 12). So, how can one reconcile the internal differences of humanity and reach that professed unique unitarity? Lawrence has a unique vision on that. He argued that there are two ways: spiritual and sensual. And man should know the both.

There are two Infinities, twofold approaches to God; and Man must know both. These two ways are different and opposite to each other but surprisingly they are also connected to each other. To clarify this view, Lawrence took refuge in the Christian trinity and used the shape of a triangle:

There are two ways, there is not only one. There are two opposite ways to consummation. But that which relates them, like the base of a triangle, that is constant and absolute, this makes the Ultimate Whole. And in the Holy Spirit, I know the Two Ways, the two Infinities, the two Consummations. And knowing the Two, I admit the Whole. But excluding One, I exclude the Whole. And confusing the Two, I make nullity, nihil. (TI 126)

So knowing the two ways does not mean mixing them, which will lead to confusion and nothingness, as “Confusion is horror and nothingness” (TI 126). These separate two ways to the Infinite—sensual ecstasy and spiritual ecstasy—only connects themselves in the knowledge of man who is great, infinite and eternal. So man and his knowledge of the cosmos uniquely stand as the unification point of the absolute differences and, travel and travel writings only work as positive catalysts in the process of gathering the real knowledge of the cosmos and relating the two ways and attaining the “Whole” and achieving universal eternity.

While discussing the difference between the Greek drama and Indian way of entertainment in the chapter, “Indians and Entertainment” (of *Morning in Mexico*, henceforth cited as *MM*) Lawrence expressed his view of God which is very much different from the traditional way of taking or worshipping the God. God is present in the objects but He is inseparable. God and object became the same. He wrote, “The Indian does not consider himself as created, and therefore external to God....In everything, the shimmer of creation,

and never the finality of the created” (*MM* 66). Our thought about ideal God is bound to be proved false because ideally we tend to think God as a separate entity who controls everything. But it is very hard to find the mastermind directing the universe, because that ruled out any possibility of being any wrong or unjustified incident in the world. In *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, Lawrence wrote that the “individual was hardly separated out” and “the tribe lived breast to breast, as it were, with the cosmos” (130). Later he also wrote that, “The very oldest ideas of man are purely religious, and there is no notion of any sort of God or gods. God and gods enter when man has ‘fallen’ into a sense of separateness and loneliness” (131). In *Twilight in Italy* he wrote, “But Christ said: God is in the others, who are not-me....And this is the Christian truth, a truth complementary to the pagan affirmation: ‘God is that which is Me’” (*TI* 120).

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