

The Secret of Lawrence's Creativity

The eleventh International D. H. Lawrence Conference is, in August 2007, to be held for the first time in Eastwood, with the theme *Return to Eastwood*, and the flyer that announces it contains this quotation:

Curiously, I like England again, now I am up in my own regions. It braces me up: and there seems a queer, odd sort of potentiality in the people, especially the common people. One feels in them some odd, unaccustomed sort of plasm twinkling and nascent. They are not finished. And they have a funny sort of purity and gentleness, and at the same time, unbreakableness, that attracts one.

First, we have an affective statement, announced as though it were a surprise (“Curiously”); followed by the particularity of “up in my own regions”, the “up” (which is first a topographical note) being stressed by repetition in “braces me up”, so that the geographical and hilly north acquires a positive value, to be later developed through imagery. The note of surprise is strengthened by “a queer, odd”: this is the potentiality in the common people. So, the affective statement (“I like England again”) is accounted for in terms of this apprehension, which is now made alive in terms of scientific observation, as though of organisms seen through a microscope: “One feels in them some odd, unaccustomed sort of plasm twinkling and nascent.” Here is the poetic centre of Lawrence’s prose—recalling perhaps Ursula’s wonder when examining slides under a microscope.

We have here both the action of Lawrence’s mind and the perception it generates: we have the feeling of discovery, the excitement. This gives importance to the observation which is social or political in kind, Lawrence’s faith in the common people.

Now, one need not share Lawrence’s confidence in the truth of his observation (though it is a generous one). His imagination has produced it and his mastery of words has made it articulate.

The rest of the passage lightens the tone, with its mixture of qualities that has a funny contradictoriness: “And they have a funny sort of purity and gentleness, and at the same time, unbreakableness, that attracts one.” That “unbreakableness” enriches the list of qualities with particular force.

This is the secret of Lawrence’s creativity. His mind makes a poetic drama of everything—the basic staple of his work, his medium, whether in fiction, poetry, drama, essay, letter, etc., is always in dramatic movement.

Editor's note:

I can't agree with that, and don't find the quotation so attractive or revealing. It seems to me that what Lawrence makes there is not a little poetic drama but more a muddle, of what's in him and what's in them. I think if I were one of those common people I wouldn't have been so flattered by the good opinion Bert Lawrence had of me. I might even have felt a bit patronised, and inclined to say, "Curiously, you like England again?" *Well, Mexico's that way.*

Barrie Mencher's reply:

It may have been unwise or presumptuous of DHL to patronise his fellow Eastwoodites, but I see that as all part of the game. Unless he was a bit bats or drunk, I don't suppose DHL would have claimed that what took place in his imagination was true of all the world—which is an important point that Littlewood makes when commenting on the correspondence between DHL and Bertrand Russell (see *Tradition and Renewal*, Brynmill). In my opinion, it's a bit like Blake claiming that his pictures were dictated by spirits when all he was doing was trying to explain his own impersonality—the impersonality of his art, with which *he* had nothing to do.