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Regenesis: Lawrence and a Re-Evaluation of the Genesis story

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Abstract:

The sterility of twentieth century society fostered nostalgia for the values of the past and a renewed interest in classical mythology. For D. H. Lawrence (1885 –1930), myth became one of the most important elements in both his fictional and non fictional works. Taking well-known examples, he reinterpreted them as an illustration of his own personal vision. This article is limited to a study of three major fictional works: *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *The Virgin and The Gypsy* and attempts to analyse them in the light of the Genesis myth. It hinges on the hypothesis that Lawrence, by condemning orthodox religious beliefs, formulated his own creation myth: his regenesis. He attempted to expose the false ideals of conventional society, which had for centuries destroyed man's natural intuition, by a re-examination of the Genesis myth. By using an analytical approach, this article aims to answer several provocative questions. Firstly, how far did Lawrence succeed in undermining conventional authority? Secondly, how successful was he in formulating his philosophy of regenesis? Thirdly, to what extent can this philosophy be seen as an answer to the problems of the age?

Keywords: Darwinism, genesis, myth, mythical revival, regenesis

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Introduction

Disillusioned with the sterility of the twentieth century, D. H. Lawrence turned his attention to a re-assertion of the values of the past. Myth became one of the most important elements in his fictional works. He took well-known examples of classical mythology and re-interpreted them to illustrate his own personal vision. It was an attempt to simplify two thousand years of sophistication. He believed that the essence of life had been buried beneath layers of dogma and creed, and that it was his mission, as a writer, to strip away these falsehoods and present man with a kernel of truth that had always existed. In fact, one of his most famous remarks underlines this idea “*if there weren't so many lies in the world...I would not write at all*” (Nehls, 1959: P. 239). As one of the most well-versed men of the early twentieth century, we will show how he examined and analysed the classical ideals inherent in myth to try to find an answer to the predicament of the modern world.

His answer was regenesis, a philosophy of rebirth and renewal. Through his literary genius, he succeeds in showing mankind, that man himself is responsible for his own destruction. In the beginning, God (for Lawrence an omnipresent power) created life but, despite this man has failed to live. By imposing conventional rules and generalities, man has made it his mission to stifle spontaneity and intuition, which were for Lawrence the essence of life. Lawrence aimed to counteract two thousand years of mechanical sterility by shocking society out of its complacency. His aim was not to destroy but to recreate, to strip away dogma and creed and reveal a kernel of truth that has existed from the beginning of time.

Methodology

Our research takes an analytical approach and focuses on the study of three major fictional works: *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *The Virgin and The Gypsy*. Its aim is two-fold: to outline Lawrence's personal vision while re-interpreting his texts in the light of the Genesis myth. Taking *Apocalypse* as a guide, we aim to explore Lawrence's own literary critique to further our understanding of his fictional works. This article is divided into three sections:

The first section, *Mythical Revival*, as its title indicates, is dedicated to an exploration of the renewed interest in myth during the nineteenth century. We will see how this revival coincided with the advances made in both science and technology and led to the integration of both fields of study. It follows with a brief study of how the two most prominent psychoanalysts, Freud and Jung, used this interaction to their own advantage in formulating their theories of the human psyche. In the second section, entitled *Lawrence and Myth*, we outline Lawrence's definition of myth and show how it compares to those of Freud and Jung. Through an examination of his work, *Apocalypse*, we will show how Lawrence uses myth to illustrate his own personal philosophy, celebrating the spontaneity of primordial life over the sterility of the modern world. The third section, entitled *The Genesis myth Versus Darwinism*, centres around one of the most important debates of the twentieth century: evolution or the Genesis myth. Through an analysis of three of his major fictional works, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *The Virgin and The Gypsy*, we discuss both myths in the light of Lawrence's philosophy. We show how he undermined orthodox religious thinking by creating his own Genesis story and offering an alternative vision of hope and rebirth.

Mythical Revival

The premise that the past holds the key to the future was pertinent to the age in which Lawrence wrote and brought with it a renewed interest in the study of classical mythology. In the nineteenth century, extensive study revealed that common human conditions were central to both myth and religion. It led to a great mass of documentation from around the world with a detailed comparison and analysis from different cultures. For instance, in 1890, the Scottish philosopher James George Frazer produced a two volume work entitled *The Golden Bough*, commenting and depicting material on myth, folklore and ritual from different parts on the world. Similarly, in 1871, the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor produced his work *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, tracing the early history of mankind through its traditions and beliefs. This growing interest in the traditions and beliefs of other cultures coincided with the advent of science and psychology. Both fields of study, anthropology and psychology, were mutually interactive. Anthropologists turned to psychological concepts to explain and analyse the beliefs surrounding the society they studied. In their turn, psychologists studied anthropological material in order to uphold their theories surrounding the human psyche and this interaction still continues today.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, both Freud and Jung were influential in revitalizing interest in the study of mythology. However, the approaches of the two men were again very different. For Freud, myth represented the conscious expression of all man's irrational and negative impulses. For Jung (1980), on the other hand, they were an integral part of the collective unconscious and manifested themselves as archetypes instrumental in leading the individual to self-realization:

The archetypes... are not intellectually invented. They are always there and they produce certain processes in the unconscious one could best compare with myths.

That's the origin of mythology. Mythology is a dramatization of a series of images that formulates the life of the archetype. (Jung & al., 1980: P. 348).

Jung, (1980) states that, although myths are shared by all members of society, even by all mankind, their function is essentially personal. For him, throughout his life, every man moves along a journey towards self-realisation and myth serves as a clue to this process. Although this quest is common to every man, it is in fact, a solo venture. The difference between Jung and Freud then, hinges on how they view the outcome of this quest. For Freud, the individual is dependent on society and makes his quest, one of social acceptance. For Jung, the individual has to find his personal place within a society, inhabited by different individuals of a similar nature. Myth, then, is the ideal tool for inspiration; speaking to the individual not to the group; it holds a message which has to be interpreted individually.

Since the meaning of the Greek term "*mythos*", from which the word myth is taken, is a "*tale*" or "*a speech*", it is easy to understand why ancient mythology held such fascination for artists and writers alike. Myths are tales of exceptional human beings and awe-inspiring events, which serve to stimulate the imagination and stir the feelings. The growing interest in the psychological development of the character, coupled with the shift toward primitivism at the end of the nineteenth century, led to a renewed appreciation of mythology. In fact, in this period of literary innovation, cult writers re-interpreted old myths and used them in new ways, pioneering

a modern mythology which holds a central place in today's modern world. In his novel *Ulysses*, for example James Joyce creates characters of mythological dimension to elevate the life of an ordinary man to epic proportion. Yeats, for his part, used myths in his poems "*No Second Troy*" and "*The Second Coming*" not only to depict the decadence of society and moral values but also to show the intermingling of modernity with imagination. T.S. Eliot in his poem "*The Waste Land*" uses myth as a device to integrate modern society with the ancient world.

Lawrence and Myth

Like many of his contemporaries, Lawrence was prolific in his use of myth. Reference to Greek and Roman legends punctuate both his fictional and non-fictional works. He recognizes the relevance of their timeless message as an illustration of his holistic vision. Referring to the myth of Kronos, which had been subject to numerous interpretations throughout the centuries, in his work *Apocalypse*, Lawrence, (2002) dismisses all efforts to find a meaning in mythological stories:

The myth of Kronos lives on beyond explanation, for it describes a profound experience of the human body and soul, an experience which is never exhausted and never will be exhausted, for it is being felt and suffered now, and it will be felt and suffered while man remains man" (P. 49).

For Lawrence, to find a meaning behind the myth is to "*explain the myth away*". For him, myth is never didactic; its meaning is never fixed. It "*is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience, of which the purpose is too deep, going too deep in the blood and soul, for mental explanation or description*" (Lawrence, 2002: P. 49). Its strength lays in its ability to touch each man differently.

Lawrence defines myth as a "*descriptive narrative using images*" (Lawrence, 2002: P. 49) whose universal relevance was pertinent to his philosophical vision. Seen as a series of hereditary stories, which correlate the concept of the collective unconscious, it prompts man to look to the past in order to find answers for the present. By using mythological images throughout his fictional works, Lawrence reminds his readers of the inescapable potency of the past and its ability to heal the present. The elements of fire and water, for example, reinforce his nihilistic vision, emphasizing the themes of death and rebirth. They are both powerful natural elements, which have the potential, not only to destroy, but to purge and purify. The flood in his novel *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, for example, wipes away the suffocating conventions that gripped bourgeois society, purifying it and bringing hope of a new beginning. It is interesting to note that the flood was caused by the collapse of a Roman mine tunnel which had been buried beneath the reservoir dam. The style of the passage where this news is conveyed, is deliberately casual, almost dismissive. Such a stance, only serves to intensify the fact of the Roman mine even further

The flood was caused by the sudden bursting of the great reservoir, up in Papple Highdale, five miles from the rectory. It was found out later that an ancient, perhaps even a Roman mine tunnel, unsuspected, undreamed of, beneath the reservoir dam, had collapsed, undermining the whole dam. That was why the Papple had been, for that last day, so uncannily full. And then the dam had burst (Lawrence, 2004 : P. 74).

It is on this fact that the whole outcome of the story hinges and Lawrence's message is clear. The past can be instrumental in changing the present.

As a set of images appealing directly to the senses, Lawrence uses myth to illustrate his own personal philosophy, celebrating the spontaneity of primordial life over that of the sterility of the modern world. In the above quotation, the adjectives "*unsuspected*" and "*undreamed of*" seem to speak directly to Freud. If the Roman mine tunnel symbolizes an ancient way of life, where both the feelings and the instincts reign supreme, then, Lawrence is highlighting the power of the sensual being. Although mechanical society, with its emphasis on the value of the mind and reason, had, at best, forgotten instinctive feelings or, at worse, repressed them, they could surge forward with such potency, annihilating established conventions and instigating the rebirth of human individuality.

Lawrence derides religious scholars for giving a fixed interpretation to biblical mythology. In doing so, Lawrence argues, they "*explain the myth away*" and destroy it forever. Throughout his work *Apocalypse*, he reveals how the rigid dogma and creed of conventional religion killed forever the essence of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As "*a great aristocrat*", to adopt Lawrence's term, Jesus shows all the qualities of a mythological hero's strength, unwavering faith in his convictions, and the courage to face adversity. During his life time, he was seen as a controversial figure, undermining established authority and speaking out against all kinds of social, political and religious oppression. In other words, Lawrence's term "*aristocrat*" becomes synonymous with "*individual*". However, this hero of biblical mythology has been buried beneath two thousand years of dogma and creed, transforming him into a conventional leader and a mouthpiece of conventional authority.

In his work, *Apocalypse*, Lawrence, (2002) shows a lot of admiration for the Jesus of two thousand years ago. Together with John the Apostle and the disciple Paul, he described them as men who were "*strong in their souls*" who "*wished to withdraw their strength from earthly rule and earthly power, and to apply it to another form of life*" (P. 65). By the words "*earthly rule and earthly power*", Lawrence intended no religious connotations. He meant, instead, the life of rigid obedience to authority and the oppressive dictatorship of the ruling parties, which existed not only at the time in which Jesus lived but will exist forever. The "*other form of life*" of which Lawrence spoke was the inner life of the soul, a life governed by inner intuition and spontaneous feelings. He derides the author of *The Book of Revelation*, on the other hand, as a man who was weak in his soul; as a man who expressed his "*rampant hate*" for a "*strong, free life*" revelling in "*self- glorification*". John of Patmos's preaching was didactic as he imposed his selective vision on the followers of his creed. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, preached with "*tenderness and gentleness of strength*" (Collins, 2000: P.53). He had a reverence for Life which governed not only his feelings but his actions, pushing him to withdraw from conventional society and live his life in his own way.

It is often said that Lawrence saw himself as a Messiah and he lived his life in a similar way to that of Jesus Christ. Hugh Stevens, in his article *From Genesis to the Ring: Richard Wagner and D. H. Lawrence's Rainbow*, writes "*The changeling Lawrence becomes a prophet railing against the madness of a world which refuses to listen to him.*" (Stevens, 2014: P.5) After the censorship of his fictional works, Lawrence lived a self-imposed exile, ignoring both the derision and scorn of the established literary world. Following this idea, Michael Bell, in his

essay *Myths of Civilization in Freud and Lawrence*, says of him “it was not a matter of what he knew, but of what he was” (Bell, 2014: P.25). His words are pertinent to Lawrence’s philosophy. Lawrence lived by example and practiced what he preached. His life became an illustration of his philosophical message. Bell recognizes this through the words “Although he both absorbed and produced many remarkable works of art, maybe the greatest of his aesthetic achievements, in the Schillerian/ Nietzschean sense of the word, was the way he lived his life” (Bell, 2014: P.25). Bell recognizes, in Lawrence, all the qualities of a messianic figure who tried to elucidate his message, creating his own Lawrentian myth.

Although Lawrence was interested in Greek and Roman myth, his focus was on biblical mythology. In both his fictional and non-fictional works, he uses it as a tool to help him illustrate his philosophy. In fact, like many of his contemporaries, he re-mythologizes and demythologizes these ancient texts to formulate his own apocalyptic vision. He saw the need to “re-write” the Bible, to rid it of its permanency and stability making it applicable to the modern world. The literary innovations of the twentieth century made it possible for him to explore the world of myth and represent it in a new light. In his essay, *Art and Morality*, he emphasizes this point through his comment “we move and the rock of age moves.. each thing, living or unliving streams in its own odd, intertwining flux, and nothing, not even man nor the God of man, nor anything that man has thought or felt or known, is fixed and abiding” (Lawrence, 1925: P. 167).

His aim was to revitalize myth and make it relevant to the twentieth century. For the purpose of this article, we will limit our study to an examination of the Genesis myth, and, in the following section show how Lawrence juxtaposed it with Darwinism. To this end, through an analysis of his fictional works, we aim to show how Lawrence, not only offered myth as an alternative vision to modernity, but presented it as a dynamic potential within it.

The Genesis myth verses Darwinism:

When Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, it sent shock waves throughout conventional society. It undermined almost two thousand years of religious thinking and refuted the creation myth set out in The Book of Genesis. It pushed man to doubt the existence of the soul and a hereafter. The Bible was no longer considered as a sacred record of fact. At the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectual opinion was divided between the poles of science, on the one hand, and religion on the other. For many creative writers, this conflict became a theme in their works and Lawrence was no exception. Encouraged by the atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty, he found the courage to voice his own opinions and formulate his mature philosophy.

The Book of Genesis is the first book of the *Old Testament*, and describes God’s creation of the world in seven days. It goes on to relate the fall of Adam and Eve and their subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It continues with Noah and the Flood and finishes with the founding of the Hebrew nation under Abraham. It is the story of creation and destruction, punishment and redemption, death and rebirth: polarities pertinent to Lawrence’s creative writing. It is not surprising, then, that this biblical text was influential in helping Lawrence formulate his mature philosophy and illustrate his apocalyptic vision.

Lawrence recognizes the qualities of destruction and creation in the mythological symbol of the flood. In his novella, *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, the symbol of the flood is used in the

traditional way. Water is not only a destructive force but one that purifies and purges, offering hope for a better future. However, in the chapter entitled *The Marsh and the Flood*, in the novel *The Rainbow*, it is difficult to correlate this traditional interpretation with the death of Tom Brangwen. The flood, here, marks a watershed, signifying the end of the paradisiacal state, represented through the relationship of Tom and Lydia. Tom dies in a state of intoxication, which for Lawrence was a form of escapism. It was a defence mechanism, which Tom instinctively adopted to protect the sanctity of his inner being from the degradation of society. By this, Lawrence wants to show that the society in which the elder Tom lived had deteriorated to such an extent that he could no longer find his place.

Tom had to be sacrificed in the flood, for his life to have true meaning. He is at the mercy of the elements, not only recognizing but accepting their power. His fate is decided by cosmic forces beyond his control. Laughing dismissively “*at the six inches of water being in the cartshed*”, he felt compelled to discover its source:

He went to meet the running flood, sinking deeper and deeper. His soul was full of great astonishment. He **had** to go and look where it came from, though the ground was going from under his feet. He went on, down towards the pond, shakily. He rather enjoyed it. He was knee-deep, and the water was pulling heavily. He stumbled, reeled sickeningly. (Lawrence, 1995: P. 231).

By placing the verb “*had*” in italics, the author is underlining its importance. There is an element of cosmic determinism: Tom was destined to die. The flood is a tool which will lead him to his own destiny. Here, it could be suggested that Lawrence is making parallels with Jesus Christ. Like the Messiah, Tom is being sacrificed, so that his message would be heard. Tom’s god, however, is the cosmos.

In the greater scheme of the universe, the parameters of life and death have no real importance. When Lawrence describes Frederick’s vigil of his dead father, he deliberately leaves the dates, on the brass plaque of the coffin, blank “*Tom Brangwen, of the Marsh Farm Born Died*” (Lawrence, 1995: P.233). Here, he is emphasizing that the date and time of Tom’s birth and death have no importance. It is the way he lived his life that matters and Tom had lived it to the full. His immortality is assured. Anna, through her natural intuition of the cosmos, understands the importance of this:

He was beyond change or knowledge, absolute, laid in line with the infinite. What had she to do with him? He was a majestic Abstraction, made visible now for a moment, inviolate, absolute. And who could lay claim to him, who could speak of him, of the him who was revealed in the stripped moment of transit from life into death? Neither the living nor the dead could claim him, he was both the one and the other, inviolable, inaccessibly himself. (Lawrence, 1995: P.235).

Tom has become a mythological figure, “*beyond change or knowledge, absolute, laid in line with the infinite*”. Through death, he remains untouchable by time. The words “*inaccessibly himself*” are pertinent to Lawrence’s message. He has become a messianic figure, whose message, to live according to his own nature and fulfil his inner being, has become, not only universal, but eternal. Through his intimate knowledge of the Bible,

Lawrence was surely aware of the Biblical passage in *Corinthians*, “*Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die*” (Chapter 1, verse 15) (Carroll & Prickett, 1997). Paradoxically, Tom’s message, through death, has the potential to become more vocal than when he was alive. He has reached a state of immortality, which should be an example for future generations. Indeed, at the end of the chapter *The Marsh and the Flood*, Lydia, reminiscing about both her husbands, immortalizes Tom through her knowledge of him. He lives through her, just as she has lived through him:

He had died and gone his way into death. But he had made himself immortal in his knowledge with her. So she had her place here, in life, and in immortality. For he had taken his knowledge of her into death, so that she had her place in death. (Lawrence, 1995: P.243).

In comparison to Tom, her first husband, Paul, “*had never lived*” (Lawrence, 1995: P.242). In his lifetime, he had been an important intellectual figure, a leader of the Polish revolution and had lived through a series of dramatic events. However, paradoxically, he had left no mark on life, except for a slight physical resemblance to his grand-daughter. “*If it were not for Anna, and for this little Ursula, who had his brows, there would be no more left of him than of a broken vessel thrown, and just remembered*” (Lawrence, 1995: P.242). For Lawrence, he had been too preoccupied in chasing an ideal to touch the essence of life. Tom’s life, on the other hand, appears, superficially, mundane but he had fulfilled his destiny and lived his life with an intensity of his inner being.

The Genesis story has been explained and expounded by religious scribes for over two thousand years. They preach that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden after eating from the tree of Knowledge. Thereafter, every man is forced to live a life of adherence to God’s moral code in order to gain, after death, an eternal life in paradise. Lawrence deplored such an interpretation, seeing it as the attempt of a “*weak*” establishment to manipulate and control a gullible population. Instead, he launched his own counter-attack, defying religious authority and undermining the very fabric of conventional society.

Lawrence doesn’t just criticise and destroy; he reformulates and creates. His book *The Rainbow* and its sequel *Women in Love* have often been described as his Bible. In chapter six of his book: *D. H. Lawrence and the Bible*, T.R. Wright writes: “*The Rainbow is perhaps the most obviously biblical of Lawrence’s novels*” (Wright, 2000: P.84). John Worthen has written of its ambition to become a sacred text a “*Kind of Bible of the English people*” (Worthen, 1981:P.21), while Mark Kinhead-Weeks claims that Lawrence derived from sacred history “*a hint of the shape of his own bible*” (Wright, 2000: P.84). For Lawrence, though, the fall of man is marked by man’s stubborn refusal to recognize the demands of his inner being; when he turns to the mind for answers rather than the heart; when he exchanges the world of the cosmos for the world of machines and ideals. In fact, in a Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays he writes: “*While a man remains a man, before he falls and becomes a social individual, he innocently feels himself altogether within the great continuum of the universe*” (Lawrence & Bruce, 1985: P.211). His two novels, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, relate the story of man in his fallen state and his quest to return to the wholeness of his being, stirred by the forces of nature and in communion with the cosmos.

The rainbow, in the Genesis story of the Bible, was sent by God as a symbol of the covenant He made with Noah, that He would not destroy the world in such a powerful way again. In Lawrence's novel of the same name, it symbolizes the perfect union between Tom and Lydia. However, it is not a separate entity appearing on the horizon. These two beings ARE the rainbow, with Tom forming one side of the arch and Lydia the other. It is through the passionate synchronisation of their souls that the rainbow has come into being. As in the Bible, it sends out a message of hope to future generations. The experience of Tom and Lydia has become part of the collective unconsciousness and offers to their descendants the potential to fulfil their own happiness. Through the word "*the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit*" (Lawrence, 1995: P.418) Lawrence underlines this idea.

Several times throughout the novel, the rainbow appears as a reminder of this potential. After the birth of her first child, for example, Anna seems at a loss to discover the path her life and her relationship with Will should take. The cosmos tries to heed her to follow its signs "A faint, gleaming horizon, a long way off, and a rainbow like an archway, a shadow-door with faintly coloured coping above it" (Lawrence, 1995: P.163). Through the words "*faint*", "*faintly coloured*" and "*a long way off*" Lawrence is showing just how far this generation has fallen from the perfection of the original union. It is not until Ursula's encounter with the horses, and the re-awakening of her inner being, that the rainbow appears, once more, in all its splendid glory "The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven" (Lawrence, 1995: P.467). This is the language of strength. Although Ursula has not yet managed to achieve the potential of her grandparents, the promise is, nonetheless, present. She has finally cast off the sterile influence of conventional society and re-awakened her impulses, governed by both personal and hereditary forces, which serve to inspire her with hope of a better future.

In the Bible, man's salvation is always dependent on a variety of prophets who preach a message of repentance in exchange for an eternal life in heaven. This message of control was anathema to Lawrence who believed that man's salvation lay in his divorce from conventional authority and his return to the demands of his inner being. It has long been implied by theological scholars that the Fall of Adam and Eve meant their awareness of their differing sexuality. In *the Book of Genesis*, it is written, that at the beginning, before Adam and Eve, ate of the Tree of Knowledge, they could stand naked in "*God's presence without shame*" and were "*clothed with purity*". However, after eating of the Tree of Knowledge "*Adam, lost his (heavenly) clothing*" and Eve, "*was stripped of the righteousness in which (She) had been clothed*" (*The Book of Genesis*). They became aware of their nakedness and tried to hide themselves with fig-leaf aprons.

For Lawrence, though, the fall of man is synonymous with the repression of his physical nature; the re-awakening of his sensual being signifies, for Lawrence, a return to paradise. Susan M. Densmore, in her thesis *Mythic Allusion in D. H. Lawrence's Women in love*, comments on this reversal of the Biblical theme:

In simple structural terms, the Bible begins with the first man and the first woman whose actions are followed by a series of destructions and creations which eventually lead to the apocalyptic marriage of Christ and the Church. Women in Love appears to be modelled on the inverse of this plan the novel begins with a

marriage which is followed by a series of creations and destructions, culminating with the emergence of a new man and a new woman in Birkin and Ursula as we see them in the chapter Continental.” (Densmore, 1976: P.70).

She goes on to show how Lawrence illustrates, through his character, Gudrun, modern man’s unhealthy regard for the physical side of a relationship. Before consummating her relationship with Birkin, Gudrun “reached up, like Eve reaching to the apples on the tree of knowledge, and she kissed him, though her passion was a transcendent fear of the thing he was” (Lawrence & al., 1987: P.330). The phrase “transcendent fear of the thing he was” illustrates her trepidation, born out of centuries of puritan education, which has forced her to deny her sensual being and regard it as a sin. It is left to Ursula and Birkin to rise above bigoted ideals and relive the glorious transfiguration promised to them by their forefathers, Tom and Lydia. Unlike the Biblical text, Lawrence’s message is not of repentance but is one of rebirth, urging man to break free from the shackles of puritan convention and embrace his own individuality: that is to say, his own nature and with it, his own sexuality.

In his novel *Women in Love*, Lawrence offers a new perspective to the Biblical theme. For him, the salvation of mankind is not dependant solely on the teachings of one messianic figure, but is the responsibility of every individual. He believes that, in the modern world of the twentieth century, the figure of Jesus Christ, as a Messiah, as a Saviour, had no place. The message of conventional religion no longer holds any appeal, as man struggles to find a better life, in a corrupt self-destructive world. Susan M. Densmore, in her thesis *Mythic Allusion in D. H. Lawrence’s Women in Love*, makes it clear that Lawrence believes “That there is no redemption or transcendental good to be found outside the individual” In his novel *Women in Love*, he uses Gerald’s death to illustrate this point :“Gerald went along. There was something standing out of the snow. He approached with dimmest curiosity. It was a half-buried crucifix, a little Christ under a little sloping hood at the top of a pole” (Lawrence & al., 1987: P.533)

In this quote, the crucifix is a symbol of Christianity, but its position, “*half-buried*”, in a hollow, makes it clear that this institution is now obsolete. In fact, the adjective “*little*”, repeated twice in the above quote, has the effect of minimizing its importance. The universal figure of Christ has been reduced to “*something standing out of the snow*”, and in this image Lawrence pours all his scorn for conventional society. There is no longer any reverence in these words, only ridicule.

To recapitulate, then, Lawrence believes that man’s salvation can only come from within himself. First of all, he must recognize the corruption of society, reject it and create a new sense of being based on a union with nature and the cosmos. In his novel *Women in love*, Birkin is portrayed by Lawrence as a Salvatore Mundi. In the chapter “*Crème de Menthe*”, he is the only person who drinks this green liqueur, which prompts Susan M. Densmore to suggest, in her thesis, that Lawrence intended him as a quasi-saviour:“Green is the colour of hope, of regeneration and it is Birkin alone who drinks the green liqueur suggesting that he is the one person who can find salvation in a corrupt and self-destructive world” (Densmore, 1976: P.67).

However, through his philosophy, Lawrence aims to break away from the shackles of convention. He had no intention of creating his own iconic figure, which could, over time, become, itself, a conventional ideal. Birkin, as a Salvador Mundi, would have been anathema to

him. His message hinges on the polarities of individuality and reciprocity. The salvation of the world, as he saw it, would be the outcome of the relationship between two whole individuals, uniting on a spiritual plane and in unison with the cosmos. The consummation of Ursula and Birkin is seen in just such a light:

“In the new, superfine bliss, a peace superseding knowledge, there was no I and you, there was only the third, unrealized wonder, the wonder of existing not as oneself, but in a consummation of my being and of her being in a new one, a new, paradisaic unit regained from the duality” (Lawrence & al., 1987: P.420).

The religious connotations are evident. It is the language of rebirth, as Ursula and Birkin fulfil the destiny promised to them by their grandparents. They claim their paradise by rejecting the “*old formula of the age*”, the “*dead letter*”, and by creating “*a new oneness*” where “*all is perfect and at one*” (Lawrence & al., 1987: P.420).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lawrence’s feminist outlook was controversial and contradicted conventional opinion, which had been fuelled by religious thinking for almost two thousand years. In *Genesis*, Eve is seen as responsible for the Fall, seducing Adam and forcing him to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. In his fictional works, Lawrence, too, adopts the idea of women as instigators for change. In his novel *The Rainbow*, for instance, the Brangwen women feel the claustrophobic limitations of their Edenic lifestyle and they look towards the outside world as a means to fulfil their dreams:

But the woman wanted another form of life than this, something that was not blood-intimacy. Her house faced out from the farm-buildings and fields, looked out to the road and Village with church and Hall and the world beyond. She stood to see the far-off world of cities and governments and the active scope of man, the magic land to her, where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled. She faced outwards to where men moved dominant and creative, and with this behind them, were set out to discover what was beyond, to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom; whereas the Brangwen men faced inwards to the teeming life of creation, which poured unresolved into their veins. (Lawrence, 1995: P.3).

The parallel to *Genesis* is clearly evident. The “*road and Village with church and Hall*” represent for the Brangwen women what the Tree of Knowledge does for Eve. It is a “*magic land*” entrancingly seductive, promising them a freedom beyond “*their own scope and range*”. It is the Brangwen women who force their men to confront the world of knowledge and ideals. In *Genesis*, Eve’s seduction of Adam is considered universally as a sin. However, in this passage, Lawrence refutes this idea, admiring the Brangwen women for their tenacity and their potential to instigate change. The phrase “*and with this behind them*” is pivotal: the Brangwen women, through both the personal and the collective unconscious, are so firmly rooted in “*the teeming life of creation*” that they can test the waters without real fear of contamination. This is central to Lawrence’s holistic vision. Man, as an individual, must live in communion with other men; he must embrace both his physical and mental being, recognizing the forces of the past and the present, to fulfil the potential of his future.

As a male dominated institution, the church had always wielded an indisputable authority, fuelling the idea of female subordination. Indeed, it is written in the Bible that “*the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man*”. (Hamilton, 1995, Chapter 2: 22-23) which gives credence to this belief. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, women had become disappointed in the bigotry of chauvinistic society and were seeking their own emancipation. They found, in Lawrence, a voice for their frustrations. Most of his female characters, in his fictional works, are strong, dynamic and ambitious. As a staunch critic of society, he believed that the male sex was responsible for the sterility of the modern world, and real change could only come through the auspices of the female sex.

In *A Study of Thomas Hardy*, Lawrence writes of the differences between men and women:

But woman, issuing from the other end of infinity, coming forth as the flesh, manifest in sensation, is obsessed by the oneness of things, the one Being, undifferentiated. Man, on the other hand, coming forth as the desire to single out one thing from another, to reduce each thing to its intrinsic self by process of elimination, cannot but be possessed by the infinite diversity and contrariety in life, by a passionate sense of isolation, and a poignant yearning to be at one. (Lawrence & Bruce, 1985:P.63)

It is clear from this quote, that he sees women as the embodiment of “sensation” closely linked to “*the oneness of things, the one Being*”. Men on the other hand, are governed by the dictates of their mind, fulfilling the urge to generalise and classify, creating ideals that destroyed forever “*the oneness*” of their Being. His implication is clear. Women have, for over two thousand years, been subjugated to their male-counterparts. However, if they were to be given freedom to express themselves, they would fulfil their intuition and return to the primordial origins of life. The key to a better future, Lawrence thinks, lies firmly in the hands of the female sex. Just as Eve, in the original cycle of change, had the power to push man to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, then, most certainly, the modern Eve can clearly influence her male counterpart to return to his original state.

Like Jung, Lawrence believes that the lessons of the past remained buried in the unconscious, with the capacity to manifest themselves as answers in the present. Although he believes that time moves in cycles, and events give the impression of repeating themselves, he upholds the theory promulgated by ancient philosophers that you can never exactly experience the same thing twice. He says in the *Introduction to The Dragon of the Apocalypse by Frederick Carter*:

We can never recover an old vision, once it has supplanted. But what we can do is to discover a new vision in harmony with the memories of old, far-off, far, far-off experience that lie within us. So long as we are not deadened or drossy, memories of Chaldean experience still live within us, at great depths, and can vivify our impulses in a new direction, once we awaken them. (Lawrence, 2002: P.54)

In this passage, although Lawrence emphasises, once more that every man shares a common ancestry, it is his ability “*to discover a new vision in harmony with the memories of old*” that makes him unique. Here, he makes it clear that not only is the difference between life and

existence man's ability to become a true individual but the driving force behind it, is the quality of "fixed motion"

These ideas seem to reflect, at least superficially, the theories of Charles Darwin. In his work *On The Origin of the Species*, he put forward the idea that all species descend from a common ancestor. Although these ideas pertain to ancient Greek philosophy, they were, nevertheless, controversial in 1859 when the work was published. In fact, Darwin took an old idea and added to it his notion of natural selection, which can be defined as the tendency of any species to adapt and mutate into a different form in order to ensure its survival over weaker ones: "One general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die" (Darwin, 2003:P. 247). It was the survival of the fittest, which was the key to the evolution and development of all natural life.

However, in his work *Apocalypse*, D.H. Lawrence refutes Darwin's thesis about the survival of the fittest, at least as far human nature is concerned. For him, during the last two thousand years, it has been the weak who have dominated and overcome the strong: it has been the weak who have roused up and expressed "their rampant hate of the obvious strong ones" (Lawrence, 2002: P.65). Expressing all the scorn he feels for modern society, he writes "And the religion of the weak taught down with the strong and the powerful, and let the poor be glorified" pointedly reversing Darwin's words. He makes it clear that this obsession is fuelled only by a false sense of survival. According to him, throughout the two thousand years of so-called civilized life, man gradually "substituted the non-vital universe of forces and mechanistic order" (Lawrence, 2002: P.79) for the power of the cosmos, ensuring "the long slow death of the human being". He prophesizes, therefore, that it "will end in the annihilation of the human race ... unless there is a change, a resurrection and a return to the cosmos" (Lawrence, 2002: P.79). With such thinking, Lawrence successfully undermines Darwin's scientific research.

In biological terms, the verb "evolve", means to develop by evolutionary processes from a primitive to a highly organized form. In volume II of *The Descent of Man* (1874), Charles Darwin reiterates this idea:

The main conclusion arrived at in this work, namely that man is descended from some lowly-organised form, will, I regret to think, be highly distasteful to many persons. But there can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from barbarians.(Darwin, 1874: P. 386).

Throughout his writing career, D. H. Lawrence negates such thinking. In his work *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, he clearly refutes the existence of evolution: "I do not believe in evolution, but in the strangeness and rainbow- change of ever-renewed creative civilizations" (Lawrence, 1922: P.5). For him, man has not developed or evolved; it is not a question of evolution but of devolution. He undoubtedly thought that man had not "descended from barbarians" but had become himself "barbarian". The word "barbarian", for Darwin, meant a person living outside the bounds of civilisation. However, Lawrence plays on its secondary meaning; that is, insensitivity. Paradoxically, for him, civilized man has become uncivilized by following the dictates of reason and denying his inner being.

The phrase “*rainbow-change of ever-renewed creative civilizations*” is symbolic of Lawrence’s holistic vision. The image of the rainbow represents the co-existence of different polarities; mind and reason, male and female, life and death, day and night. He makes it clear that in a natural world, all these differences exist in harmony, and that variety is strength. The words “ever-renewed”, in the above quote, underline Lawrence’s vision of the eternal cycle of life. Lawrence realises that man cannot return to the past but must look back by living in the present and building a new, creative future. He is, indeed, recapturing the very essence of life, which cannot be ordered and categorized into neat blocks of knowledge. He believes that scientific study, in the modern world, should not obliterate the mythology of the past. A true-life experience combines all the various forces, both scientific and mythological, both rational and imaginative, both traditional and modern to revitalize existence and ensure the fulfilment of creative interaction.

Conclusion

Although Lawrence’s life was short, he was, nevertheless, a prolific writer who was able to paint a true picture of life in modern twentieth century Britain. It was a time of enormous change and Lawrence succeeded in portraying the conflicts that arose out of it. With the advent of the theory of evolution, the conventional story of Genesis had been completely undermined. The controversy that ensued encouraged Lawrence to create his own genesis story: or regenesis—a message of renewal and hope.

In this article, we have analysed three major fictional works: *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *The Virgin and The Gypsy* to show how Lawrence exposed the false ideals of conventional society by a re-examination of the Genesis myth. In fact, we have used Lawrence’s own literary critique, as is set down in his *Apocalypse*, as a guide to an understanding of these fictional works. We have shown how Lawrence uses myth to illustrate his own philosophy, celebrating the spontaneity of primordial life. Through a careful study of several pertinent passages, we have illustrated that his aim was not to destroy but to recreate, to strip away dogma and creed and to reveal a kernel of truth that has existed from the beginning of time.

We have shown that in many ways, Lawrence, himself, embodied all the characteristics of a mythical figure. Passionately intent on conveying his message, despite endless hostility, his life took on mythical proportions as he became, himself, the hero of his own Lawrentian myth. Subject to state censorship during his life time, Lawrence is now generally accepted as one of the most creative writers of all time. For many, he has become a cult figure whose following grew from the seeds of Catherine Carswell’s letter, written to the periodical *Time and Tide* on March 16th, 1930. Responding to staunch criticism after his death, she wrote:

In the face of formidable initial disadvantages and lifelong delicacy, poverty that lasted for three quarters of his life and hostility that survives his death, he did nothing that he did not really want to do, and all that he most wanted to do he did. He went all over the world, he owned a ranch, he lived in the most beautiful corners of Europe, and met whom he wanted to meet and told them that they were wrong and he was right. He painted and made things, and sang, and rode. He wrote something like three dozen books, of which even the worst page dances with life that could be mistaken for no other man's, while the best are admitted,

even by those who hate him, to be unsurpassed. Without vices, with most human virtues, the husband of one wife, scrupulously honest, this estimable citizen yet managed to keep free from the shackles of civilization and the cant of literary cliques. He would have laughed lightly and cursed venomously in passing at the solemn owls—each one secretly chained by the leg—who now conduct his inquest. To do his work and lead his life in spite of them took some doing, but he did it, and long after they are forgotten, sensitive and innocent people -if any are left- will turn Lawrence's pages and will know from them what sort of a rare man Lawrence was. (Lawrence & al., 1976: P.285).

Lawrence was, indeed, “*a rare man*”, an individual who lived his life according to his own personal creed. He did not seek recognition in his own lifetime but aimed for an immortality that would stretch on into eternity. He was, in fact, a man ahead of his time and it can now be said, with hindsight, that his message was indeed equal to the mythical legends of the past. Today, its relevance is only just beginning to be understood. Over half a century after his death, with a world in turmoil, his philosophy has a pertinence that cannot be ignored. It is time for Lawrence’s regenesis: for man to succumb to the ravages of his nihilistic state and embrace a new beginning revitalised by the values of the past.

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