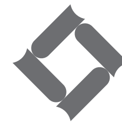
ФИЛОЛОГ

часопис за језик, књижевност и културу
V 2014 10
универзитет у бањој луци
филолошки факултет



originalni naučni rad

Marija Krivokapić
Vanja Vukićević Garić
University of Montenegro
Faculty of Philosophy Nikšić

UDK 821.111.09
DOI 10.7251/fil1410123k

D. H. LAWRENCE AND JAMES JOYCE: AUTHORIAL WANDERINGS AND THE GREAT WAR

Abstract: *This paper takes a comparative look at the experiences of D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce during the Great War with regard to their exiled and outsider positions, and the solitude they experienced and expressed in their letters written during the war. Their letters, therefore, are our primary corpus. We have shown that both writers cultivated similar modes of heroic solitude and isolation, assuming a posture recognised as a part of symbolist cultural and aesthetic habitus. Their stance is coupled with contempt for literary establishments and for popular opinion. The emphasis is, therefore, on the marginal, solitary condition of these two artists in a context of general catastrophe, from which they sought to distance themselves by adopting their particular versions of artistic "priesthood" and exclusive dedication. Our study of this correspondence is envisaged as a contribution to literary history and to the understanding of modernism as a moment of cultural, political, and human crisis augmented with the chaos brought about by the Great War.*

Key Words: *World War I, exile, solitude, literary establishment, author function, readership.*

Although serious disagreements between D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce were recorded – in 1928, commenting on *Finnegan's Wake*, Lawrence wrote: "My God, what a clumsy *olla putrida* James Joyce is!" (August 15, *SLDHL* 405), while the latter exclaimed, of *Chatterley's Lover*, published the same year: "In the middle of my own work have I got to listen to this!" (December17, 1931, *SLJJ* 359) – it is by focusing on this moment of rivalry and mutual suspicion that we begin to discern certain points of convergence between the two writers. By this we wish to refer to their understanding of their authorial function (cf. Foucault 1969) of the time. Faced with the constrained option of a retreat into secrecy and silence, a choice forced both by the pressures of the outside world of chaotic events and the tensions of their own innermost being, the response of both writers proved to be remarkably similar and was dramatically crystalised by the Great War.

While enduring a series of personal and financial travails, not to mention his chronic poor health, the most painful of blows Lawrence suffered at this time was unquestionably the suppression of *The Rainbow* and the bitter lesson that no one wanted to publish his "best bit of work" (*SLDHL* 153), *Women in Love*. As for James Joyce, only after nine years of rejections did he manage to have *Dubliners* published, in 1914. *A Portrait* had to wait a Portrait had to wait for another two years. Like that of Lawrence, Joyce's work enjoyed only the support of a small, marginal coterie, mostly composed of other writers. In both cases, the ordeal of general indifference interspersed with a few episodes of blatant hostility determined their choice of exile. However, the experience of exile would transform their silence into an arduous search for a cunning and devious way through which to stay true to that discovered "mode of life or of art, whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom,"[1] while still hoping their art could save their race.

[1] Cf. "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy

The letters written by Lawrence at the beginning of the war epitomise this complex and ambiguous experience. Writing to James Brand Pinker, he raged against "the colossal idiocy" of his predicament, asserting: "Out of sheer rage I've begun my book about Thomas Hardy" (*LII* 212). He was already (on September 21, 1914) complaining to Gordon Campbell of being depressed by "vulgar fools, and cowards who will always make a noise because they are afraid of silence" (*LII* 218). He admits to his own acute fear of such a fate of silence, confessing he had "grown a red beard, behind which I shall take as much cover henceforth as I can" (*LII* 224). This feeling went along with an anxiety about his role as an author, insofar as he rejects the society he was supposed to write for, be it even a review of another book: "Disclaim me to start with," he insists in a letter to Amy Lowell, "or I won't say anything at all" (*LII* 223).

Surprisingly little direct reference to the war is to be found in Joyce's correspondence. It is mostly a matter of marginal allusions to the general state of affairs, and is mainly devoid of the political involvement or the tones of fierce despair and rage found in Lawrence's letters during the war. Writing on November 2, 1915 to Nora's uncle, Joyce briefly and almost casually remarks that "it is a good thing to be alive in such times" (*SLJJ* 218), before going on to lament ironically his own practical misfortune in being an author living in "these evil days" (on September 25, 1916, *SLJJ* 222). In the same letter he goes on, in hopeless tones: "As for the future it is useless to speculate. If I could find out in the meantime who is the patron of men of letters I should try to remind him that I exist: but I understand that the last saint who held that position resigned in despair and no other will take the portfolio" (*SLJJ* 218-219). Like Lawrence, Joyce frequently referred contemptuously to the noisy crowds, to their uncritical subservience to the fashions of the day.

> No man [...] can be a lover of the true or the good unless he abhors the multitude; and the artist, though he may employ the crowd, is very careful to isolate himself. This radical principle of artistic economy applies specially to *a time of crisis*, and today when the highest form of art has been just preserved by desperate sacrifices, it is strange to see the artist making terms with the rabblement. (Joyce 2000: 50)

The defiant affirmation of the principle of the artist's solitary isolation is here ambiguously interwoven with a latent fear of "the sound of silence," whose all-pervading presence he tried to deal with by immersing his text into the world of the (sub)consciousness, thus creating the "night-language" of *Finnegan's Wake* as an ultimate way of transforming his personal "time of crisis."

For D. H. Lawrence, the autumn of 1914 found him in a combative spirit. Writing to Harriet Monroe about the "War Number of *Poetry*," he argues that "the business of the artist [is] to follow [the war] home to the heart of individual fighters," (*LII* 232) thus announcing the goal which will harness his energies in the months to come: the creation of a community of creative spirits who would cause "a shifting of the racial system of values" (*LII* 301). Without affirmative action, he said, he would remain "ashamed" as an author (*LII* 283). When he started "working *frightfully* hard – rewriting my novel [*The Rainbow*]," (*LII* 239) which he self-assuredly called "a beautiful piece of work," (*LII* 240) Lawrence expressed the hope that the war would arouse stronger and more sincere feelings in the sleepy hypocritical masses: "I am glad of this war. It kicks the pasteboard bottom in the usual 'good' popular novel" (*LII* 240). As reflected in the conception of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence was striving to venture beyond the limited question of his merely personal involvement, in order to discover a mode of expression and accomplishment for mankind, and that would develop into a symbolism of the Whole. On January 27, 1915, writing to Lady Ottoline Morrell, he argues against Duncan Grant's abstract geometric painting and comes down for "the great hand which can collect all the instances into an absolute statement of the whole" (*LII* 263). On the following day, January 28, in a letter to E. M. Forster, the task of

of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race"(Joyce 1996: 288).

seeking "the whole" in art is conferred with a religious purpose.

> It is time for us [...] to gather again a conception of the Whole: as Plato tried to do, and as the mediaeval men – as Fra Angelico [...] We are tired contemplating this one phase of the history of creation, which we call humanity [...] of measuring everything by the human standard: whether man is the standard or criterion, or whether he is but a factor in the Whole whose issue and whose return we have called God. (*LII* 265-266)

Insofar as the aspiration was conveyed through the structure and dynamic thrust of *The Rainbow* (and its sequel), Lawrence passionately believed that a way out of the "foul old world" (*LII* 555) was possible. His hope was that his, as he called it, "pet scheme," Rananim, his "island," was feasible, because it was to be "a real community," (*LII* 259) whose decency would be founded on the capacity of each individual to envisage the fulfilment of their lives "in relation to the Whole" (*LII* 266). Few artists can form the league, "Murry – and you [Gordon Campbell] – and perhaps E M Forster [sic!]" (*LII* 302). In a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, this hope is expressed through images of resurrection: "My heart has been as cold as a lump of dead earth [...] But now I don't feel so dead [...] We shall all rise again from this grave" (*LII* 269). Writing to Campbell, he contends that a new art must be made, not lyrical, but one that "give[s] expression to the great collective experience" (*LII* 301). To do so he rejects "writing of passionate love to [his] fellow men. Only satire (*LII* 283) or, even, obscene art, such as found in Gertler's picture, can be true now" (*LII* 660-661).

This conception of the Whole carries echoes of Joyce's idea of an "impersonal," or rather de-personalised text, predicated on an authorial distance which renders conceivable the infusion in the creation of vital energy which circles around others, and not only around its creator. In terms of such an aesthetic project, lyrical expression cannot be the highest mode of art, precisely because the relation between the artist and the image is not balanced and consciously transformed. Furthermore, the Joycean trope of the artist's refinement "out of existence," often taken as a modernist motto of the self-effacing authorial function, is in fact deeply embedded in an ancient and mediaeval conceptual system in which the world is seen as a Whole of interconnected units. This mode of thinking entails that the artist remains anonymous and impersonal, reproducing the Order of the Whole, his artifact being the micro-cosmos, which reflects the design of the macro-cosmos.

In the face of grave disappointment he experienced after Forster's disenchanting and unsympathetic visit in February 1915, Lawrence complained: "are my words gone like seed split on a hard floor [...] as if I talked a little vulgar language of my own which nobody understood" (*LII* 295). In March, he projects this fear onto the work of Van Gogh, whose fate made Lawrence "very sad": "he went mad [...] [because] He wanted that there should be a united impulse of all men in the fulfilment of one idea" (to Lady Ottoline Morrell, on March 1, 1915, *LII* 296). Writing to Bertrand Russell, he expresses doubts as to his ability to speak (*LII* 307) and, until the end of April, he voices his continual fears lest he be deserted because of his "extravaganzas, illusions. They say I cannot think" (*SLDHL* 104). He complains of living in darkness. His letters are resonant with the sense of an existential insecurity, which he attempted to conceal behind the aggressive stance demanded by the lonely war he was fighting: "As for *Rainbow's* [sic!] being cheerful, I don't think we've any of us the right to be cheerful. I think it is a true novel, and a big one, and as for the other people, if they can't swallow it, let them spit it out" (to Lady Cynthia Asquith, *LII* 411). Upon learning about its suppression, Lawrence declares that he is neither surprised nor moved. It all seemed "a ridiculous affair," one that ironically helped him achieve "a good deal of notoriety, if not fame" (*LII* 477). However, he still curses "them all, body and soul, root, branch and leaf, to eternal damnation" (*LII* 429) and, in November 1915, he again expresses the hope that the Society of Authors (still despised as "stomachy" and "stodgy," cf. *LII* 223) may fight for his cause by protesting publicly. He would like to learn about their opinions, although he "know[s] Henry James would hate [the book],"

(*LII* 447) because, as he writes on November 23 to Pinker, "subtle conventional design was his [James's] aim" (*LII* 451). At the same time he sends a message to Arnold Bennett "that all rules of construction hold good only for novels which are copies of other novels" (*LII* 479).

Like Joyce, who believed that to criticise and reform the rabble one must withdraw into exile, even at the expense of one's already limited readership, Lawrence asserts his tendency to be "an outlaw [...] fir[ing] bombs into [the herd]" (*LII* 546). Yet in April 1915 he calls himself "a proverbial exaggerator" (*LII* 319) and, by February 1916, he feels "ten times more ridiculous" (*LII* 535) because he is still addressing an audience made of "silly blighters, fools, and two penny knaves" (*LII* 537). In the summer of the same year, after complaining that he had only 6 pounds to his name, Lawrence suggests he may "*only* write stories *to sell*," (*LII* 637, original italics) "sweet simple tales [...] If only Guy Thorne would lend me his mantle for a week or two, or Lady Russell her muff" (to Pinker, on October 31, *LII* 669). By autumn he "had rather ventured among lions and tigers, than amongst my abhorred fellow men, who fill me with untold horror and disgust" (*LII* 641).

In the case of Joyce we encounter the same ambivalent attitude towards his readership, a contemptuous indifference and aloofness on the one hand, coupled with a painful consciousness of isolation and anxiety, masking a craving for communication, on the other. As he wrote to W. B. Yeats about *Exiles* and the "new novel" (*Ulysses*), he still had hopes "to engage the attention of [his] six or seven readers" (on September 14, 1916, *SLJJ* 221). Moreover, in his numerous letters to Ezra Pound throughout the 1917, his complaints come to an extremity of radical self-doubt.

I have been thinking all day what I could do or write. Perhaps there is something if I could only think of it. Unfortunately, I have very little imagination. I am also a very bad critic. For instance, some time ago a person gave me a two-volume novel to read, *Joseph Vance*. I read it at intervals for some time, till I discovered that I had been reading the second volume instead of the first. And if I am a bad reader I am a most tiresome writer – to myself, at least. (April 9 1917, *SLJJ* 225)

Joyce's extensive correspondence with his often tiresome, remote acquaintances that he considered to be potentially helpful to his career are symptomatic of the uneasy position in which he found himself: a now mature author still desperately trying to promote his work (as Lawrence was trying in a project with Phillip Arnold Heseltine). The humorous undertones often hide the bitter awareness that the commitment to artistic integrity carries the risk of a condemnation to silence. The suggestion of an unbreachable barrier of incomprehension, the corollary of authorial isolation and withdrawal, is implicit in the conclusion to the letter: "This letter, tardy as it is, is not very long or even complete but sometimes I find it difficult to keep my eyes open – like the readers of my masterpieces" (*SLJJ* 225). Joyce attacked the narrowness of his audience in words that are close to those of Lawrence. Whereas he found the English language a rewarding medium, suitable to his convention-subverting intentions, the existence of his English-speaking readers redressed the balance, representing a sort of punishment for the freedom of expression he was relentlessly striving for. As he complained to the Swiss writer, Fanny Guillermat: "Writing in English is the most ingenious torture ever devised for sins committed in previous lives. The English reading public explains the reasons why" (on September 5, 1918, *SLJJ* 230).

At this point exile becomes an existential choice whose implications go far beyond the obvious nexus of political, cultural and artistic motivations. It thus represents a condition that is profoundly and inevitably ontological, one that is regarded by the writer as the necessary prelude to the invention of new forms: for Lawrence, it is the prerequisite to writing and painting exuberantly. For Joyce, its concomitant is the imperative stipulating the endless change of technique.

From April 1915 on, D. H. Lawrence was obsessed with a desire to escape the "hell" which was "this Europe now – this England," frequently described as "slow and creeping and vicious, and insect-teeming" (on April 30, 1915, *LII* 331): "I

wish I were going to Tibet – or Kamschatka – or Tahiti – to the Ultima ultima ultima Thule. I feel sometimes, I shall go mad, because there is nowhere to go, no 'new world'" (*LII* 330). Although he had still hopes, up to November 1915, that he might travel to the States, he knew that his only travel could be an imaginary one, a "voyage of discovery towards the real and eternal and unknown land" (to Lady Ottoline Morrell, on July 9, 1915, *LII* 362). The sense that there remained something "uncivilised, unchristianised" (*LII* 496), which one could tap into in Cornwall made him "willing to believe that there isn't any Florida [...] There is my intimate art, and my thoughts" (*LII* 498). In an embittered letter to John Middleton Murray, his "intimate art" becomes the only region in which "miracles – supernatural" happen, adding poignantly: "And failing the miracle, I am finished" (*LII* 500). Letters written on February 25, 1916 show Lawrence in a "victorious" (*LII* 554) mood: "if we cannot discover a terrestrial America, there are new continents of the soul for us to land upon, Virgin soil [...] one must have the strength to depart, and go where there is no road, into the unrealised" (*LII* 555). When by March 1, 1916 he had realised that the publication of *The Rainbow* in the States was hazardous, the tactic he adopted to compensate for the impression of being ignored and denied was to assume the classical persona of exclusive dedication to the mysteries of art – *Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes*: "The world will go its own way, and I shall go mine [...] What I write now I write for the gods," he writes to Lady Ottoline Morrell (on March 15, *LII* 580). This "unseen witness" (May 1, 1916, *LII* 602) frees him from pressure, because "a work of art is an act of faith, as Michael Angelo says" (*LII* 602).

In formulations very similar to those of Joyce, whose absorption in writing made the external world, in relation to which the author remains self-contained and (apparently) untouched, a merely occasional object of the spectator's gaze, Lawrence writes in April that "real solitude" is the first condition for the achievement of any proper, intrinsically good art. He praises such a detachment in Catherine Carswell, deeming her "the only woman I have met who is so essentially separate and isolated, as to be a real writer or artist or recorder" (*LII* 595). The trope of the artist's detachment is again taken up in a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith:

> The world crackles and busts, but that is another matter, external, in chaos. One has a certain order inviolable in one's soul. There one sits, as in a crow's nest, out of it all. [...] Life mustn't be taken seriously any more – at least, the outer, social life. The social being I am has become a spectator at a knockabout dangerous farce. The individual particular me remains self-contained, and grins. (*LII* 601, April 26)

While many agree with the viewpoint of the Marxist critics concerning James Joyce's indifference and lack of historical consciousness, the Great Silence of Modernism, as John Blades suggested (1991: 132), may in fact have been the most adequate response to this "farce." Wasn't Dedalus modelled on his creator's striving to fly free of the inherited modes of social and artistic convention which were to prove unable to endure the cataclysmic blow of "the nightmare of history" inflicted by the disasters of the war? For Joyce, all systems exercising claims on the allegiance of the individual subject amounted to a kind of tyranny. It is for this reason that his socialism was "thin," "unsteady and ill-informed" (on November 6, 1906, *SLJJ* 125). Like Lawrence in his denial of the claims of European politics, in March 1907 Joyce explicitly stated that he had "no wish to codify myself as anarchist or socialist or reactionary" (*SLJJ* 151-152). The only interest sustaining him was the temple of his art wherein he could question, dissect, analyse and partly justify all other interests. However, along with his deepening absorption in his arcane meanderings of his work in progress, Joyce often felt himself obliged to defend his choices, even before those who were supporters. A letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver (on July 20, 1919) provides evidence of his oscillation between pride and insecurity, which for Joyce always ended in the renewed acknowledgment of the inseparability of art and life: "always when I have finished an episode my mind lapses into a state of blank apathy out of which it seems that neither I nor the

wretched book will ever more emerge" (*SLJJ* 241). A few lines further on, he perceives an almost mystical relation between the text and all the extra-textual aspects of reality, stating that

> the progress of the book is in fact like the progress of some sandblast. As soon as I mention or include any person in it I hear of his or her [...] misfortune: and each successive episode, dealing with some province of artistic culture (rhetoric or music or dialectic), leaves behind it a burnt up field. Since I wrote *Sirens* I find it impossible to listen to music of any kind. (*SLJJ* 241)

Referring to the numerous practical problems he had encountered upon his return to the sadly changed post-war Trieste, Joyce admits that "writing Ulysses [sic!] is a tough job enough without all this trouble." However he still believes that "abandon[ing] the book now would be madness," (*SLJJ* 246) and, despite everything, he takes an almost childishly exhilarating pleasure in talking about it: "*Nausikaa* is written in a namby-pamby jammy marmalady drawersy (alto là!) style with effect of incense, mariolatry, masturbation, stewed cockles, painter's palette, chitchat, circumlocutions, etc etc. not so long as the others" (*SLJJ* 248). At the same time, he expresses his gratitude to Miss Weaver for believing in his work, given that he himself has perpetually to (re)conquer his confidence in what he is: "It is very consoling to me that you consider me a writer because every time I sit down with a pen in my hand I have to persuade myself (and others) of the fact" (on January 6, 1920, *SLJJ* 248).

Eventually, after numerous vacillations and hardships met with as a writer who is sometimes disputed, often neglected, while being celebrated and supported by a few, Joyce simply and self-ironically concludes that had he become a doctor instead of a writer, he would more likely "have been even more disastrous to society at large than [he is] in [his] present state" (on February25, 1920, *SLJJ* 249). As for D. H. Lawrence, out of his particular combination of reticence and rumination, self-confidence and self-mockery, there emerged, in the course of 1917, letters filled with the imagery of a maddened world which deserves to be destroyed (on August 30, 1917, to Amy Lowel):

> The publishers say 'it is too strong for an English public'. Poor darling English public, when it will go in for a little spiritual athletics. Are these Tommies, so tough and brown on the outside, are they really so pappy and unbaked inside, that they would faint and fall under a mere dose of *Women in Love*? Let me mix my metaphors thoroughly, let me put gravy-salt into the pudding, and pour vanilla essence over the beef, for the world is mad, yet won't cry 'Willow, Willow,' and drown themselves like Ophelia. (*SLDHL* 153)

We hope that this comparison between the solitude of Lawrence and that of Joyce will be a useful contribution to literary history and to the modernist moment in culture, which is also a moment of cultural, political, and human crisis augmented with chaos brought about by the Great War. We have shown that both writers cultivated similar modes of heroic solitude and isolation, assuming a posture recognised within symbolist cultural and aesthetic *habitus*. Their stance is coupled with contempt for literary establishments and for mass opinion. The emphasis is therefore on the marginal, solitary condition of these two artists in a context of general catastrophe, from which they sought to distance themselves by way of their adoption of their particular versions of artistic "priesthood" and exclusive dedication.

Works Cited

1. Blades, John (1991), *James Joyce*: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, London: Penguin.
2. Boulton T., James (ed.) (1997), *The Selected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Abbreviated as *SLDHL*.
3. Ellmann, Richard (ed.) (1975), *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, London: Faber and Faber, Abbreviated as *SLJJ*.
4. Foucault, Michel (1969), "What Is an Author?", http://korotonomedya2.-googlepages.com/Foucault-WhatIsanAuthor.pdf, accessed at: June 2009.
5. Joyce, James (1996), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, London: Penguin.

6. ----- (2000), "The Day of the Rabblement." In *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing,* Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Kevin Barry, Translations from Italian by Conor Deane, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. Zytaruk, George J. and James T. Boulton (eds.) (1981), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume II (1913–1916)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Abbreviated as *LII*.

Д. Х. ЛОРЕНС И ЏЕЈМС ЏОЈС – АУТОРСКА ЛУТАЊА И ПРВИ СВЈЕТСКИ РАТ

Резиме

У овом раду разматра се доживљај Првог свјетског рата Д. Х. Лоренса и Џејмса Џојса, онако како су га сами аутори описали у њиховим писмима искључиво, са акцентом на њихов избор својевољног егзила. Установили смо да су оба аутора своје мишљење о ауторству развили на појму херојске усамљености и изолације, заузевши позицију која се препознаје унутар симболистичког културног и естетичког хабитуса. Њихов став подржава и презир према књижевном естаблишменту и мишљењу масе. Нагласак је, дакле, на маргинализованој, изопштеној, списатељској ситуацији у контексту катастрофе рата од које су настојали да се дистанцирају превасходно развијајући својеврсне верзије умјетничке „светости“ и ексклузивне посвећености. Ова студија замишљена је као допринос историји књижевности и разумијевању модернизма као момента културне, политичке и људске кризе коју је подстакао хаос рата.

marija13a@gmail.com
vanja.v@t-com.me