

DE PROPRIETATIBUS LITTERARUM

*edenda curat*

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# BOARDING THE SHIP OF DEATH

*D. H. Lawrence's Quester Heroes*

*by*

SAMUEL A. EISENSTEIN

1974

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## FOREWORD

Dr. Eisenstein has asked me to introduce his book to the reader, and I do so gladly, particularly since its main emphasis touches upon areas of my own personal interest and experience as a Jungian analyst. These contents have occupied and accompanied me for over a quarter of a century; they involve, among other things, the role of the hero in the growth of individual and group consciousness and are very much concerned with the altering patterns of male-female relationship, so much in evidence today.

The approach to D. H. Lawrence that Dr. Eisenstein offers us is itself something of a quest. It views the entirety of Lawrence's works against the moving, dynamic background of evolving human consciousness. The author has sought to represent and portray the individuation process in the succession and progression of Lawrence's heroes and heroines as they appear, struggle, evolve, decay, and reappear elsewhere to take up the hero quest, the impulse toward heightened awareness, integration, and wholeness.

The book is not about Lawrence, the man, though he is implicit and present by extension in all of his varied heroes and heroines – (who can deny the importance of the man and his known life circumstances in relation to his art?). Nor is it about Lawrence the prophetic genius – (it has been fairly commonplace to acknowledge these qualities in him in recent years, together with other, less flattering ones). The book's main concern is the hero's quest; the groping formation and emergence of individual consciousness out of the dark, unformed, and still incompletely explored *hinterland* of latent potential we call the unconscious mind. Psychoanalysts have previously made numerous forays into this Lawrencian territory. But they were limited, largely by the cramped model of the psyche on the scale of the nineteenth century Victorian family. The inclusion in this survey of the wider parameter of the collective unconscious with its historical, religious, and mythological overtones introduces a new and important dimension. This is an undertaking of no small moment.

It is welcome for it helps us better to perceive the process of unfolding individual and group consciousness; it helps us to see ourselves.

We are, I believe, far enough advanced into our present century to view in better perspective than Lawrence could have seen, or than anyone of his generation could have foreseen, the extent to which Lawrence's intuitions were truly prophetic. We see our century in sufficient perspective also to have gained the conviction that while we have learned to modify and, to a measure, control nature, we are still far from the means to comprehend our own turbulent nature, much less control it. And who can doubt that such comprehension must ultimately prove crucial to our continued existence as a species on earth?

The mythological hero is the archetype of emerging consciousness; the ancient and typical carrier of new form and content. The symbolic hero brings light and culture from the source to the social group for its use. Similarly the hero in the individual life and psyche is a symbolic bearer of emerging and enlarging self-awareness directed toward centroverson. The human ego, at first identical with the matrix, the mother that gave birth to it, separates itself out and grows stronger. Weak and vulnerable, it often feels itself to be lost and alone. When strong enough and properly armed, it wills itself back into its origins to do battle with the primordial monsters lurking in the turbid depths; those of inertia, self-indulgence, and the nostalgic longing for dissolution and immolation in the warm embrace of the unconscious – the primordial mother. A successful outcome of this struggle will prove that the quester ego-hero is truly heroic for he will have found a center within himself that is able to sustain and guide him in the face of the harsh abrasions of life's demands.

The artist, like the symbolic hero, functions as a catalyst. He enables us to see familiar things with the start of recognition (*re-cognition*). His more sensitive antennae are attuned to new and forthcoming developments before their actual emergence – the artist-hero as prophet. He departs from the *consensus gentium* and is all too often vilified and banished – the artist-hero as exile and outcast. Like all true prophets, he does not choose his role; rather he is chosen and cannot *not* obey the calling. He plunges into the murky darkness where others either fear to go, are unable to, or simply prefer the comfort of conformity – the hero's night-sea journey. He accepts the loneliness, the not-knowing, and the risk of dissolution as constant companions. This is his fate and he assents to it. He does not have to be dragged into the unknown depths kicking and screaming (although this may be his introduction to it). By his "yea"

saying, he proves his heroic worth. And his successful encounter rebounds to the enrichment of all.

Recent history has amply confirmed the extent to which Lawrence's intuitive gropings were attuned to the merging and emerging currents of contemporary life. All the instinctual, dark, pagan "gods of the blood", walled in by centuries of Judeo-Christian repression are once again unleashed and are full upon us; the unrestrained sexuality, the blood lust of interminable and recurrent wars, the proliferation of totalitarian and military rule under "strong-man" leaders, the greater prominence of mass man and mass mentality – all these are parts of our recent past and present.

Reacting against the mechanical certainties and the debilitating Victorian morality of the nineteenth century, Lawrence flung his gauntlet into the face of the prevailing pseudo-optimistic, tradition-bound opinions of his day. With obsessive and uncompromising zeal (he called himself a passionately religious man), he sought not reform but renewal. He became, in his own image, not so much the reformer but the savior-hero who is destined to announce the new gods and the new beginning. The revolution "of the blood" that Lawrence envisioned was directed against the impact of unrestrained and stultifying technology, the culmination of about three hundred years of emerging scientific rationalism. But the re-introduction of these repressed elements has brought neither peace, nor joy, nor a sense of meaning into our existence. Regression is a psychological sin except in the service of enhanced consciousness. And it has yet to be seen whether the current, regressive *nigredo* has rebirth appended to it. My own conviction is that it has, and that Lawrence, one-sided as he was, helped to surface – or better, foretold the impending surfacing of the important chthonic elements missing from consciousness in the exhausted *Weltanschauung* of his day, and ours.

It appears that we may not ignore our conscious, rational inheritance, as Lawrence and others have attempted to do, for it belongs and must find its place in harmony with the welter of instinctual nature. The rational mind is part of man's potential, part of his nature. We cannot ignore it except at the price of regressive barbarism. Nor dare we overlook the elemental, instinctual, and symbolic in our nature; the result too often is intellectual sterility. How to reconcile these opposites is the frustrating challenge, and it was no accident, in my opinion, that depth psychology was born at the turn of this century. It emerged in response to precisely this need and this dilemma.

The chief antagonist for Lawrence was the archetypal feminine – the

feminine in principle; not this woman or that one, taking on her own coloration in time and place, but his own inner image of woman – of the feminine. I need to touch here, briefly, upon some facets of feminine psychology that are somewhat obscure to most of us, and I do so even at the risk of didactic oversimplification. They are still being explored and delineated and occur at the sharp cutting edge of our growing awareness in this arena. What, after all, can any man really know about the feminine and the female, his inner, contrasexual counterpart, except that part of it which he is able to perceive in his own soul or in projection upon a corresponding outer object. The anima in a man is a composite of genetic, familial, and personal elements which combine to form not just an image or a symbol or a personification, but a sort of entity (E. Jung). This entity serves important functions for the male psyche, not least among them, to relate him to his unconscious – to the mother as source of new, emerging possibilities latent within him. For a woman, by contrast, the masculine entity within her, the animus, relates her to mind and spirit.

The vital distinctions between male and female psychology need to be stressed, all the more because of the current tendency to disregard and erase them. Biological variations aside, these differences appear as an intrinsic part of the psychological *Grundlage* of each sex. A woman, for example, may tarry indefinitely with her primary family unit – mother bound and mother identified. Within this matrilocal realm she may marry, have a family of her own and rule over it. She may be thought of as a simple woman, a naive woman, or as an immature woman, but nevertheless, in every sense of the word, a woman. Not so with a man. He must leave the primary maternal source and strike out for himself. Failing this, his manhood remains forever in question.

The groundswell seeking to liberate today's woman from her tradition-bound role demands that she be more than earthbound wife and mother; she must also cultivate mind and spirit, a psychological state not to be confused with career or specific outer role. This is both the inexorable demand and promise of our time, the culmination of millenia of subjugation and inferior status. What is not clearly discernible, even today, is the extent to which the inner entity in man, the anima, is concomitantly affected by the change occurring in the psyche of woman. Both sexes are challenged, both are affected, and both are being altered in relation to each other. The woman is expected to implement and come to terms with her cultural and spiritual resources; the man with eros – the function of feeling and relatedness. Lawrence's life span coincided in time with the early stirrings of woman's emancipation and the freeing of Eros from his



centuries-long entombment, and the heroes and heroines in the writings of Lawrence grope, advance, fail, reappear and try anew in precisely this arena of struggle.

The stages of developing individual consciousness in women have their collective counterparts in mythology, the recordings of group awakening. Powerful female-Mother Goddesses ruled the roost when Zeus and Jehovah were still attending a school for creators. Women functioning on this level of matriarchal consciousness feel themselves to be superior to the masculine. The male is useful and necessary, but only as a fertilizing instrument, a mere phallic extension of the Great Mother. He has little or no importance beyond his procreative role, an aspect of male-female interaction prominent in Lawrence's early novels. Apsu, husband of Tiamat, the primordial chaos in the Babylonian creation story, may be taken as an early mythological example of this quality of relationship. The female bond between mother and daughter, acting to preserve family and clan, alienates the masculine and consequently a union of male and female, of ego and unconscious, is not possible. The woman's personality remains relatively undifferentiated.

In Lawrence's later works the male hero assumes a more dominant role corresponding to the patriarchal stage of development (Greek and Hebrew model). The woman's ego is invaded and captivated by the patriarchal numen and she feels herself to be small and helpless, an instrument to please, to be used. The Bedouin of the desert, still today, says in effect: "First my camel, then my tent, then my wife" – in that order. Women functioning at this level of consciousness are daughterly and live in a mixed state of fascination and identification with the magical, phallic, creative power of the masculine, accompanied by bouts of repulsion and self-loathing. The Hades-Persephone abduction may serve as an example.

In a still later phase, the woman is rescued by a male hero who is still regarded as superior. As the author reminds us, Perseus, having severed the Gorgon's head (i.e. overcome the negative mother in himself) is now free to rescue Andromeda who, chained to a sea wall by the king, her father, awaits death in the form of a sea monster. Not just the negative mother but the dragon father as well must be overcome to free the imprisoned maiden. Liberation from the negative father state requires a hero, either a man properly equipped for the task or a courageous (heroic) attitude in the woman herself that can free her from patriarchal bondage. Male and female, psychologically speaking, can now encounter each other for the first time as neither superior nor inferior but as equals. A true union now becomes possible with all its creative potential, bio-

logical and spiritual. The phase of feminine psychology that has "overcome the patriarchal symbiosis" (Neumann) opens the way for the woman to become her own unique self.

The paths leading to integration for both male and female run parallel. But the differences are, to my mind, of utmost importance, particularly for the contemporary woman who, if ego-identified with the animus-hero, acts out his role. She tends to become heady and lose contact with her own instincts, her own feminine earth. She finds herself lost in the realm of spirit, idea and action, deprived of the vital nourishment from within to sustain her in this alien territory. Having been thrust into the *Logos* world, the intensification and enhancement of consciousness become, for the woman, an unavoidable demand and at the same time the promise of our time. She has to accept education and cultivation of mind and spirit if she is to meet and contribute to a culturally aware, technologically oriented civilisation. But this she must do as a woman and not in the guise of a second-rate male. The male entity, the animus, often appears to the woman as something strange and different; he is numinous, fascinating, repulsive, and threatening. To achieve a harmonious relation with this element in herself and still remain rooted in her own feminine earth is the challenge. With successful integration, there may emerge a woman with mind and culture, a spirited woman, a courageous woman, a wise and possibly creative woman, but yet a woman in contact with her essential wholeness. To her natural female being has been added, in consciousness, an activating, onward moving, creative essence to the enrichment of her personality.

It is into these, as yet dimly outlined realms of psychological reality viewed through Lawrence's life and works, that Dr. Eisenstein leads us and he does so with scholarship, clarity and vision. Yet there are questions that arise. Should one think of *The Woman Who Rode Away*, and gave herself as a voluntary sacrifice to the pagan gods, as the fate of Lawrence's own anima, his own eros and emotional feelings directed toward the dark gods for which he yearned? Or was this an expression by Lawrence, the intuitive writer, of the upsurge of sex, blood, and violence being ushered in during his lifetime and now fully emerged – or both? The author may not be faulted for not more clearly distinguishing in Lawrence's writings between the role of the hero in masculine psychological development and the comparable role in women. The work of discernment is current and still in its beginning stages. It is sufficient that he leads us closer to the firing-line of psychosexual evolution and differentiation, utilizing with excellent insight the tools of depth psychology.

Lawrence sought gropingly for the fruitful union of male and female both in his writings and also, assuredly, in himself, a fertilizing union that could give rise to new possibilities, new gods, to replace the moribund, departing ones.

It has been suggested that the now popular Aquarius-rising could become such a collective symbol-image. Aquarius, the water-carrier, the young masculine god bears on his shoulder the (feminine) vessel, container of the water (of the unconscious); a symbol of the reconciliation of male and female – of opposites. This is the direction toward which Dr. Eisenstein has skillfully and profitably directed his overview of Lawrence's peregrinations, and for this original and absorbing effort we may be grateful.

WILLIAM ALEX, M.D.

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## INTRODUCTION

Books about D. H. Lawrence and his work have been written in almost exclusively personal terms. Dorothy Brett wrote a worshipful book, *Lawrence and Brett* (1933),<sup>1</sup> employing the first person to describe her feelings – even writing directly to the dead Lawrence. Mabel Dodge Luhan did the same to chronicle Lawrence's year at Taos, in her *Lorenzo in Taos* (1932), except that she used the convention of treating the book as a personal letter to Robinson Jeffers – whom Lawrence never knew! Jeffers later wrote an introduction to *Fire*, a posthumous book of Lawrence's poems, thereby joining the distinguished list of literary people who have paid posthumous tribute – David Garnett, Aldous Huxley, Richard Aldington, and many more.

Knud Merrild and Kai Götzsche, Danish artists, lived with the Lawrences for a winter in New Mexico, and Merrild wrote of his experiences in *A Poet and Two Painters* (1939), a book which kicked up an enormous fuss among some of Lawrence's admirers. Lawrence's sister Ada wrote, with G. Stuart Gelder, an account of his early life, *Young Lorenzo: Early Life of D. H. Lawrence* (1932). Catherine Carswell took up Lawrence's middle life and his problems with the public and with the War, in *The Savage Pilgrimage* (1932).

Writers who deal with Lawrence's attitudes toward sex, literature and women, as Dallas Kenmare does in his *Fire-Bird: A Study of D. H. Lawrence* (1952), tend to view all of his production in terms of a great talent disfigured by greater imperfections. Bertrand Russell, in *Portraits from Memory and Other Essays* (1956), rejected Lawrence outright because of what Russell called Lawrence's "mystical philosophy of the blood", which led "straight to Auschwitz".<sup>2</sup>

In the *After Strange Gods* lectures (1934), T. S. Eliot called Lawrence

<sup>1</sup> Complete reference to these essentially biographical and hagiographical books will be found in the Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Portraits from Memory and Other Essays* (New York, 1956), 111.

"an almost perfect heretic", the result of a lack of tradition which led him to a reliance on intuition and the "Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity".<sup>3</sup> Eliot's list of indictments is fairly complete: Lawrence lacked the faculty of thinking, was distinctly sexually morbid, was violently prejudiced, cruel, indecent, and humorless. His books appeal mainly to the "sick and debile and confused" and can lead them only to the waiting "diabolic influences" of our day.

John Middleton Murry, in *Son of Woman* (1931), combined adulation with condemnation. Lawrence was meant to be a saint, but he meddled in sex. "Let him become a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>4</sup> But Lawrence, according to Murry, grew to hate women with a passion, became ever more a child, and died in total disintegration. "The quick of himself is in dissolution, there is no point of vital coherence any more."<sup>5</sup>

Eliseo Vivas, in his *D. H. Lawrence: The Failure and the Triumph of Art* (1960), freely admits that Lawrence had a "sick soul".<sup>6</sup> Vivas sets himself the task of criticising "Lawrence's vision of the world. Do we know how perfect or imperfect it was?"<sup>7</sup> Vivas, concerned with the "purity" of aesthetic vision versus "faults caused by the dribbling liar", contends that Lawrence did little more than to "thrust his long tremulous filaments into the future", and brought "back to us a report of what we were gradually to find there as the years went by".<sup>8</sup> Vivas agrees with Murry that the prophet and the propagandist in Lawrence undermined and destroyed the poet. Vivas applies labels to specific sections of Lawrence's novels; the "Volcanic Evidences", chapter in *Kangaroo* he calls "padding"; all of *The Woman Who Rode Away* is "death-wish". Vivas continues Eliot's general argument with the comment that Lawrence's oft-repeated desire to be absolute judge of himself is a desire too anti-social and nihilistic to be considered. He, like Russell, finds Lawrence a "proto-fascist".

Witter Bynner, in *Journey with Genius: Recollections and Reflections*

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York, 1934), 41 and 64.

<sup>4</sup> John Middleton Murry, *Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence* (New York, 1931), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Murry, *Son of Woman* 296-297.

<sup>6</sup> Eliseo Vivas, *D. H. Lawrence: The Failure and the Triumph of Art* (Evanston, 1960), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Vivas, *D. H. Lawrence* 10.

<sup>8</sup> Vivas, *D. H. Lawrence* 4.



*Concerning the D. H. Lawrences* (1953), agrees with the critics who called Lawrence a “genius, but –” and also brought forward the helpful suggestion that Lawrence’s outbursts in social relationships and in his books were caused by his intemperance with the wine bottle. Even the superior works of F. R. Leavis and Mark Spilka, in their *D. H. Lawrence, Novelist* (1956) and *The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence* (1957), tend to deal with the novels as mere reflections of their more – to the critic – interesting creator, Lawrence himself. While Tedlock, in *D. H. Lawrence: Artist and Rebel* (1963), and Father Tiverton, in *D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence* (1951), examine the works themselves, they do so still with one eye cocked on the artist. Harry Moore, writing biography in *The Intelligent Heart* (1962), is legitimately concerned with personal history; he contributes some valuable short analyses and evaluations of the works.

Various labelled nihilistic, anarchistic and apocalyptic, Lawrence’s prophetic visions of society’s collapse was given attention in Frederick Carter’s *D. H. Lawrence and the Body Mystical* (1932), Horace Gregory in *Pilgrim of the Apocalypse* (1933) and in *Lawrence and Apocalypse* (1933) by Helen Corke.

There are many, many more books, mostly explorations of fractional aspects of Lawrence’s thought. One of the most noteworthy is the monumental *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography* (1957–1959), a three-volume work by Edward Nehls, which allows the personae in the life of Lawrence to speak for themselves, in the form of memoirs, sketches and letters – surely one of the most fascinating montages of one man’s unforgettable character ever assembled.

More recent and available Lawrence biography and criticism are listed in the bibliography.

That the man was fascinating no one denies, but the truth of his vision has been in doubt from the first. Lawrence has been prescribed as a fool or dupe, an antidote for complacency, fascism, communism, democracy, even impotence. He has been, literally, all things to all people. What has not been pointed out in the works just cited or in numerous others (“How I wish people would stop writing about Lawrence”, Frieda Lawrence said in a colloquium at U. C. L. A. in 1953. “Why don’t they just read him!”), is the interior consistency and coherence in Lawrence’s completed work. Lawrence’s intuition picked up not only prevailing currents of savagery, emotionalism, destructiveness and the decay of his time. His intuition was at the service of the deeper, more enduring sense that detects purpose beneath seeming randomness of events. His “field theory” would track the process of growth and development in mass

man as he becomes an individual. Other writers have dealt with the hero as a subject in single works, but few writers have attempted to trace the progress of the composite hero, who changes in situation, time and context as he changes the "phenomenal" body, but never ceases, in whatever incarnation he finds himself, to explore himself and the world for the way, the "tao" to wholeness.

Lawrence's "monomyth" is a map followed by a diversity of characters, recording their successes and failures in the processes of birth, initiation, death and rebirth. *The books in which these processes are most apparent are those which have had least success as individual works of art.* They better demonstrate than the more famous and popular novels the hero's development toward wholeness or his disintegration, a particular phase of which may be explored less intensely though with more artistic detachment in succeeding novels. Lawrence's characters are always, even unconsciously, building their "ships of death" in the time-honored way of religious thinkers whose whole lives were aimed at a noble and holy dying.

Another reason that I have deliberately chosen to examine more obscure, less publicly successful books by Lawrence is because they demonstrate most clearly the stark pitfalls, snares and labors the potential hero has to pass through in all of the great initiatory ordeals of myth, history, and theology. Some of the novels demonstrate, sadly, what happens when a weak individual loses his vital spark; the potential hero falls back into the undifferentiated mass, a failure. Other potential heroes achieve a qualified success, the novels in which they appear follow them to the limits of their development. Always, the succeeding work carries on the constant theme: self-realization.

My attempt to treat the work of Lawrence as a separate whole allows me to relinquish biography as a crutch. If one holds to the theory that the purpose in all his books is identical, the works stand by themselves without reference to how or what Lawrence thought he was doing at the time. My "objective correlative" is the correspondence of the hero in a Lawrence work to the trials and experiments of the hero in myth and religious literature, tested in anthropological field studies. How, in other words, does the behavior of a Lawrence character correspond with his prototype in the permanent literature and scientific studies of our culture? The otherwise puzzling behavior of many a Lawrence hero becomes transparent when his stage of development is compared with that of other quester figures. Symbols apparently arbitrary are analogous to those in religious works and mythology, and, applied to Lawrence's work, the