

Freeing Sardinia from Lawrence's Narrative: Foxell's Fascination with Linguistic Traps

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Abstract

Lawrence constructed his image of Sardinia to fit his own theories on European civilization in the aftermath of World War One. Foxell's *Sardinia Without Lawrence* (2005) purposely deconstructs the unity of the celebrated *Sea and Sardinia* by exposing the aporias of Lawrentian discourse, fragments of a Victorian discourse on otherness, and by juxtaposing Lawrence's quotations, his metatextual commentaries and a detailed description of the island. Foxell's fascinating report is not only born out of another text, but by 'translating' and rewriting its hypotext frees Sardinia from ideological oriented past narratives.

Key words – *Sea and Sardinia; Sardinia Without Lawrence; intertextuality*

1. Lawrence's Sardinia

Sardinia has a special place in the imaginary geography Lawrence was constructing in 1919, when he left England and started travelling frantically. He projected onto European and American territories the polarity between an exhausted civilisation and vigorous wilderness, which is part of his interpretation of History. He moved, then, from an overly-refined and constricted England towards countries which he perceived as freer from social and cultural constraints¹. Sardinia was not only both physically and culturally midway between his own island and the continents he could perceive in the distance, but it was also England as it had once been: this discovery was thus recognition, albeit he was looking for something he had never experienced.

Limited by these ideological constraints, he hardly saw Sardinia as it was but as it should have been, a way of confirming his theories. Although so unmistakably distorted, the image of Sardinia that Lawrence construed still resonates in contemporary travel reports, either ironically or approvingly.

¹ Commenting on a very famous passage from *Sea and Sardinia*, Neil Roberts writes: «Girgenti [...] and Syracuse [...] represent respectively the achievement and the brutality of the classical civilization Lawrence is fleeing from. Africa and the Arabs represent the promise of otherness, but an otherness for which Lawrence does not feel ready. The 'not yet' interestingly suggests that the encounter with otherness is a progressive process [...]» (Neil ROBERTS, *D. H. Lawrence, Travel and Cultural Difference*, London, Palgrave and Macmillan, 2004, p. 43).

Sea and Sardinia was well-received in Italy. Some pages from the travelogue were first translated by Vittorini² (1938), but a new edition, including the expurgated parts which the 1997 Cambridge edition³ had restored, appeared in 2000. Both translations pay homage to the most recurrent devices of Lawrence's text by putting them back into Italian, although Vittorini objected to Lawrence's taste for repetition, «which if translated in full would bring to mind the worst D'Annunzio, whereas in English they have a completely different resonance»⁴. Italian critics devoted numerous appreciative comments to the travel report, highlighting its special place in travel writing, its visionary aspects, the transformation of the journey into a personal quest on the part of the speaking 'I', either buttressed or challenged by the queen-bee⁵.

In 2003, Nigel Foxell visited Sardinia in Lawrence's footsteps and wrote his own report, whose title is significantly *Sardinia Without Lawrence*⁶. Nearly a century has passed since Lawrence set foot on the island, but his words are echoed and recalled by Sardinians, whose Lawrentian descriptions have become accepted stereotypes, and by Foxell himself. *Sardinia Without Lawrence* is a hypertext haunted by its hypotext, which is fragmented, quoted, commented on, revised and powerfully echoed. As a matter of fact, Nigel Foxell was so greatly influenced by Lawrence's powerful mastery of words that he adopted a ventriloquising method, a homage to Lawrence, as well as an attempt to help the reader fully appreciate Lawrentian style. In so doing, however, while freeing Sardinia from Lawrence's construction, he also once again entraps the island by employing new linguistics 'tricks'.

2. *Sea and Sardinia*: A Fragmentary Narrative

In compliance with the restraints of travel writing, *Sea and Sardinia* is a fragmentary text. Not only is it plainly cut up into lines, split into chapters devoted to the individual stages of the journey from Sicily to Sardinia and back, but also broken up by digressions, quotations, dialogues, speeches and different languages. These fractures, or sudden shifts in meaning, style or viewpoint, are sometimes graphically marked by punctuation and dashes, as is typical of eighteenth-century travel writing and letters. This powerful sense of the collapse of narrative contrasts with the opposite sensation of a text knit tightly together by special verbal devices.

The passages which Lawrence dedicated to the movements of Sardinian buses or trains, to Sardinians' restiveness, or to the voyage itself, seem to be an appropriate definition of the author's narrative, which moves forward, then stops and curves back. One example:

² David H. LAWRENCE, *Libri di Viaggio*, translated by Giulia DE CARLO e Elio VITTORINI, Milano, Mondadori, 1981 [1938] [1961].

³ David H. LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, ed. Mara KALNINS, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1921] [1997].

⁴ Nick CERAMELLA, "Translation and Reception of Lawrence's Works in Italy: The 'Story'", in JANSOHN, Christian, MEHL Dieter (eds.), *The Reception of D. H. Lawrence in Europe*, London, Continuum, 2007, p. 96.

⁵ Stefania MICHELUCCI, "The Fortunes of D. H. Lawrence in Italy", in JANSOHN, MEHL (eds.), *The Reception of D. H. Lawrence in Europe*, pp. 79-91 (p. 84).

⁶ Nigel FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, London, Hearing Eye, 2005.

Cagliari is like that: all bits and bobs⁷.

I wished in my soul the voyage might last forever, that the sea had no end, that one might float in this wavering, tremulous, yet long and surging pulsation while ever time lasted: space never exhausted, and no turning back, no looking back, even⁸.

We slowed down and slid harmlessly past. Then again, on we whizzed down the looped road as a snake that has been wounded. Hamlet darted the bus at the curves; then softly padded round like an angel: then off again for the next parabola⁹.

A village which is two miles off the high-road, even if it is perched like a hawk's nest on a peak, still chafes and chafes for the great road to come to it, chafes and chafes for the daily motorbus connection with the railway. There is no placidity, no rest in the heart of the land. There is a fever of restless irritation all the time¹⁰.

Narrative mirrors the traveller's progress and his flight from death in a strikingly Sterne-like way: life has many detours. It is no accident that the speaking 'I' eagerly wishes for a voyage without a landing:

To find three masculine, world-lost saunter, and saunter on along with them, across the dithering space, as long as life lasts! Why come to anchor? There is nothing to anchor for. Land has no answer to the soul any more. It has gone inert. Give me a little ship, kind gods, and three world-lost comrades. Hear me! And let me wander aimless across this vivid outer world [...]¹¹.

Lawrence's style is varied: it could be diagrammatically represented by a broken line, a serpentine, a labyrinth, or even a circle. Ruptures are evident: each chapter is self-contained but broken into sequences and digressions, incursions into Italian and European history, journalism or literature. Although marked by a blank space on the page, some of these digressions spring from a word in the previous narrative section, which contains a story Lawrence cannot help writing. The author's bulimia is clearly evident in this passage:

[...] On Aspromonte there is grey cloud.[...]

Aspromonte! Garibaldi! I could always cover my face when I see it, Aspromonte. I wish Garibaldi had been prouder. Why did he go off so humbly, with his bag of seed-corn and a flea in his ear, when His Majesty King Victor Emmanuel arrived with his little short legs¹² on the scene. Poor Garibaldi! He wanted to be a hero and a dictator of free Sicily. Well, one can't be a dictator and humble at the same time. One must be a hero, which he was, and proud, which he wasn't¹³.

⁷ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 64.

⁸ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, pp. 30-31.

⁹ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 144.

¹⁰ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, pp. 115-116.

¹¹ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 48.

¹² D. H. Lawrence is clearly attributing to King Victor Emmanuel II features which were typical of King Victor Emmanuel III, enthroned as King of Italy in 1900.

¹³ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 14.

This digression, and many others I will not quote, is vital to the main contrast Lawrence develops between historical and pre-historical places, that is to say places which resound with memories of the past and blank spaces, still to be inhabited and ‘written on’ by human beings. Needless to say, notwithstanding his many references to Sardinian history, the island is to him an empty space¹⁴. On the other hand, deviations from the chosen topic are also typical of a way of writing which is constantly looking ahead, but also looking backwards to the previous paragraph.

Fragmentation is evident when Lawrence juxtaposes his, his main antagonists’, and the q.b.’s points of view, but always somehow corrected. Quarrels between an enraged speaking ‘I’ and his opponents are often expressed using flowing words, without starting a new paragraph, using inverted commas or capital letters. A typical magmatic discourse is constructed in which two or more voices are detectable: «We stray back. The q.b. wants to buy one of those saddle-bags arrangements. I say what for? She says to keep things in. Ach!»¹⁵.

This recurrent device is largely brought into play when Lawrence wants to reproduce the Italian interpretation of the frail post-war economic context. Enraged by the ingenuous construction of a political speech with clippings from newspapers, the ‘I’ boldly proceeds to deconstruct the schoolmistress’s speech, arrogant in its assertiveness:

Were we English? asked the schoolmistress. We were. Ah, a fine thing to be English in Italy now. *Why?* – rather tart from me. Because of the *cambio*, the exchange. You English, with your money exchange, you come here and buy everything for nothing, you take the best of everything, and with your money you pay nothing for it. Whereas we poor Italians we pay heavily for everything here at an exaggerated price, and we can have nothing. Ah, it is all very nice to be English in Italy now. You can travel, you go to the hotels, you can see everything and buy everything, and it costs nothing [...]

You are mistaken, said I to the schoolmistress. We don’t by any means live in Italy for nothing. Even with the exchange at a hundred and three, we don’t live for nothing. We pay, and pay through the nose, for whatever we have in Italy: and you Italians see what we pay. What! You put all the tariff you do on foreigners, and then say we live here for nothing¹⁶.

Italian rhetoric, based on the contrast ‘we’ vs ‘you’, is mimed in juxtaposed Lawrentian discourse, as well as the mesmeric repetition of words, but reversing their meanings. In showing his mastery of these rhetorical strategies, the speaking ‘I’ deconstructs and denies the schoolmistress’s speech. Readers acknowledge this, and appreciate the opportunities offered them to share in the discussion, but Lawrence’s real interlocutors confine themselves to reassuring stereotypes: «‘Ah!’ she said, “we Italians, we are so

¹⁴ «Wherever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the mediaeval influences, or of the far, mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean. [...] The land has been humanized, through and through: and we in our tissue consciousness bear the results of this humanization.[...] This Sunday morning, seeing the frost among the tangled, still savage bushes of Sardinia, my soul thrilled again. This was not all known. This was not all worked out. Life was not only a process of rediscovering backwards. [...] There are unknown, unworked lands where the salt has not lost its savour» (LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, pp. 116-117).

¹⁵ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 83.

¹⁶ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, pp. 175-176.

nice, we so good. Noi siamo così buoni. We are all so good-natured. But others, they are not buoni, they are not so good natured to us.»¹⁷.

It is no accident that the sentences are contained within inverted commas, each repeating the same meaning, both in English and Italian, as well as the same contrastive pattern. They call a halt to the merging of the two opposite discourses, rephrasing them as a contrast between nationalities. The 'I's retort is a lonely meditation offered to his English readers, not to the schoolmistress and her single-minded fellow-citizens. The text has reached a meaningful pause. The sudden interruption of the speaking 'I's logorrhea always intervenes when he feels tongue-tied by stereotypes. The word 'ignorant' frames the narrator's meditation on pity as a means of tolerating the Sardinian lack of civilised manners. He bitterly lays blame on compassion for maintaining indigence and ignorance. Then, he ends his meta-discourse by again repeating the above-mentioned stereotype:

[...] said the little bus-conductor [...] you must not be angry with them. [...] Poor things! They are *ignoranti* ! Why be angry?

The other two men nodded their heads in agreement and repeated *ignoranti*. It is true. Why be angry?

And here the modern Italian spirit came out: the endless pity for the ignorant. It is only slackness. The pity makes the ignorant more ignorant [...] Pity them! What they need is not pity but prods: they and all their myriad likes¹⁸.

The paragraph stops abruptly with typical sermon-like assertiveness. A circle could diagrammatically reproduce this type of writing, which curves back to where it started, like the speaking 'I', who regresses into his shell. However, the term 'ignoranti' is repeated once again in the following narrative section, at this point ironically pregnant with its true meaning, which is made of the bus-driver's insinuation and the 'I's criticisms: «The be-shawled appeared with a dish of kid. Needless to say the *ignoranti* had kept all the best portions for themselves.»¹⁹. As we will demonstrate, by mixing repetition and deconstructing terms, the speaking 'I' endows words with new, conflicting meanings.

The large number of quotations from other authors suggests a modernist idea of the text, constructed on the remains of the shipwreck of European culture. The speaking 'I' quotes from English, Greek, Latin, Spanish and Italian literature or alludes to characters in them. It is not my purpose here to point out pertinent examples²⁰. Eliot did the same, but his aim was to reconstruct the lost wholeness of a cultural project, while Lawrence is ambiguously fascinated and disgusted by the metonymies of a powerful past. In Nuoro, he writes:

I am sick of "things", even Perugino. I wouldn't care if Attila came and demolished every bit of art in Europe. *Basta la mossa!* The horrors of barbarism are not so fearful, I verily believe, as the horrors of strangulation with old culture. Beauty as we know is a millstone round our necks, and I am fairly chocked. Now I shall catch it²¹.

¹⁷ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 176.

¹⁸ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 109.

¹⁹ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 109.

²⁰ Mara Kalnins has scrupulously done this in the Cambridge edition I am quoting from.

²¹ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 142.

In his effort to grasp new, unknown beauty, the speaking 'I' increases the fragmentation of his work by inserting slogans, popular songs and theatrical remarks, along with scholarly allusions. This postmodernist act acknowledges no hierarchy between oral and written texts, between an anonymous hand and the writer's authority. It gives the full picture of a somewhat chaotic reality, without attempting to organise it into discourse. This culture, made up of bits and bobs, can be grasped by looking around us, outside our libraries:

[...] and on every big, mist-opaque pane he scrawled with his finger W
D'ANNUNZIO GABRIELE-W D'ANNUNZIO GABRIELE²².

[...] the great scrawlings on the walls: W LENIN and ABASSO LA
BORGHESIA²³.

Il soldato va alla Guerra
Mangia male, dorme in terra²⁴.

These bits of texts are interspersed within the travel report and contribute to fragmenting its surface. Thanks to them, reality intrudes into the narrative the only way it can: through breaches in the author's writing. The speaking 'I' does not comment on them, but just records them as life is moving forward. The sense of the muddled flux of life is powerfully conveyed by the use of unfinished sentences, with frequent elision of verbs or subjects.

Very dark under the great carob tree as we go down the steps. Dark still the garden. Scent of mimosa, and then of jasmine. The lovely mimosa tree invisible. Dark the stony patch. The goat whinnies out of her shed. The broken Roman tomb which lolls right over the garden track does not fall on me as I slip under its massive tilt. Ah dark garden, dark garden, with your olives and your wine, your medlars and mulberries and many almond trees, your steep terraces ledged high up above the sea, I am leaving you, slinking out. Out between the rosemary hedges, out of the tall gate, on to the cruel steep stony road.²⁵

It is easy to find many other examples of joyful taxonomic frenzy: the lists of vegetables, eggs and fruits in Palermo's and Cagliari's open markets are famous²⁶. The purpose is the same: conveying the brisk glimpses of reality a traveller witnesses while walking along the crowded town streets. This linguistic strategy wants to seize reality in progress, a reality too rich to be determined by grammatical categories. The reader, however, cannot fail to perceive the anaphora of the adjective 'dark' and, stressed by the elision of the verb and by anadiplosis, the anaphora of 'out'. The former is a key word in *Sea and Sardinia*, in the discourse about civilisation and primitivism which Lawrence is here suggesting even before clearly declaring it, while the latter term powerfully expresses the need to move out of the circuit of civilisation. Fragmentation is always connected to content in *Sea and Sardinia*: the unfinished sentences, digressions and

²² LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 174.

²³ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 41.

²⁴ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 139.

²⁵ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 11.

²⁶ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 64.

intense polyphony draw attention to the perceived design and hint at the limits of human knowledge, at a discourse and its deconstruction.

3. *Sardinia Without Lawrence: miming and defining Lawrence's fragmentary narrative*

When he came to Sardinia, Nigel Foxell put an old *Baedeker*²⁷ and *Sea and Sardinia* in his suitcase. The latter was perused by the Lawrences in 1921, although David bursts out: «I am no Baedeker», cutting short a dense sentence in which an epigraph at the foot of the statue of St. Joseph in the Cathedral and the Gospel are set side by side, just to highlight the irrationality of religious discourses²⁸. Aloofness from religious or secular authority is Lawrence's cipher, not Baedeker's. The latter describes and lists data, not questioning or criticising it, while the splenetic Lawrence cannot avoid doing so. From the very first pages, it is clear that Foxell skimmed his Baedeker to find out what Lawrence saw and to learn more about cities and villages. The model he used, however, was the Lawrentian travel report.

He respected the quadripartite structure, so typical of numerous travelogues, even though, as the inspired exile could not do, he brought home his narrative at last, in a poignant remembrance of Sylvia²⁹, the child whose leg was injured in *England, My England*, one of the best short stories D. H. Lawrence ever wrote³⁰. Most of all, he perceived that the charm of *Sea and Sardinia* is a result of its interrelated fragmentation, principally due to the constant presence of the two main characters: «Frieda is structurally vital, not only in so far as her ordinariness contrasts with the genius of the man at her elbow: she provides a constant element in a book that is divided cinematographically into a number of episodes. Structurally vital indeed!»³¹.

Foxell increases this interrelated fragmentation by adding himself as a character who contrasts, admires and mocks Lawrence's wrath or flamboyant style. He will follow in

²⁷ «[...] Karl Baedeker's *Unteritalien Sizilien Sardinien Malta Tripolis Korfu*, the very guide that Lawrence and his wife used» (FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 6).

²⁸ «And St. Joseph must be a prime saint. He has an altar and a verse of invocation praying for the dying. 'Oh, St. Joseph. True potential father of Our Lord.' What can it profit a man, I wonder, to be the potential father of anybody - For the rest I am no Baedeker» (LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 59). As the editor, Mara Kalnins, glosses, Lawrence is manipulating the sentence: «For what is a man profited», Matthews xvi. 26. (p. 207, 59:21).

²⁹ A blank space is followed by «I've left this space as a tribute to my dear Sylvia. She's dead. At her request there'll be no church service because she didn't believe in God, only in socialism and the earth into which her coffin, a cardboard one, will be lowered – earth that no Carrara will cover. And at no great distance lies that rusty sickle, rusting on. Having nearly killed her, it'll ensure her immortality. As for Heaven and Hell, she'd already sampled both of them. Someone at the graveside will doubtless recite *Sylvia: Two Years Old*, a poem written by her grandmother, Alice Meynell» (FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, pp. 96-97).

³⁰ «In January 1915 the Lawrences moved into a cottage in Sussex [...] Whilst living in the cottage Lawrence proceeded to compose a story, originally intended for the *Strand* magazine, drawing in its detail upon life at Greatham, the estate cottages of the Meynell family, and the domestic life of Madeline, one of the Meynell daughters, and her husband, Perceval Lucas. Lucas had been a keen gardener at Rackham Cottage, and it was in the garden that Sylvia, the eldest daughter fell on a sickle left by a visitor in the summer of 1913 and injured her leg. Perceval Lucas enlisted in September 1914, and died of wounds in France in July 1916, at which point Lawrence wished the story 'at the bottom of the sea'» (ROGER EBBATSON, *An Imaginary England*, Aldershot and Burlington, Ashgate, 2005, pp. 177-178).

³¹ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 38.

Lawrence's footsteps, but at the turn of the twentieth century. At the beginning of his report, Foxell points out: «It's almost the year's end.»³². The sentence rings a bell. At the beginning of his Sardinian trip, Lawrence wrote in Cagliari: «Land and sea both seem to give out, exhausted, at the bay head: the world's end.»³³. Each sentence is the reversal of the other, similar in structure, but so diverse in meaning. Both of them want to stress the marvellous nature of the expedition, but they point out different logical paradigms: time and space. Sardinia will soon establish itself as a special chronotope, a meaningful mix of time and space in the Lawrentian discourse on civilisation: Lawrence pretends he has reached the end of the civilised world. Foxell echoes his sentence, just to mark his personal quest, taking place in a different time-frame. Sardinia has become one of the favourite destinations of mass tourism, while Lawrence had the final glimpses of an archaic world, which was not prone to show off the remains of its culture. Foxell's ending reminds us of a chronological gap between the two expeditions: «I'd seen a non-sea; also, up to a point, a non-Sardinia. At least not Lawrence's»³⁴; «Certainly there's the beautiful Trenino Verde. But the railway inaugurated modern Sardinia, for better or worse.»³⁵.

Foxell's narrative diverges from *Sea and Sardinia*: to a certain extent it is a digression added to Lawrence's report, one Lawrence could not write but seemed to foresee. Foxell himself acknowledges his digressive strategies³⁶: like those of Lawrence, they are Sterne-like, progressive digressions. Largely devoted to making sense of Lawrence's travel report and looking back at its lines, Foxell «take[s] care to order affairs so, that [his] main business does not stand still in his absence.»³⁷. One of his devices to keep his narrative from halting or falling apart is to let the ghost haunting his writing manifest itself: Lawrence becomes his own interlocutor in many episodes. Immersed in the dreamlike vision of Sardinia from the ferry which Lawrence experienced decades before, Foxell pretends he has noticed the Lawrences while approaching the coast:

Dragging my eyes back to what's around me, I'm aware of a couple at my side. I turn. Lawrence and his wife! After a while he murmurs to her he has always sought that lilac shore: 'Every movement makes a great swing also backwards to some older, half-forgotten way of consciousness'. Whereupon they both descend the gangway and walk across the non-sea towards that dawn of history, where, conceivably, given that time is a flux of the soul, they are still living³⁸.

This dramatic device stresses two diverse visions of Sardinia by representing the separation between the couple and Foxell. They are both about to visit the same land, but Lawrence looks backwards, towards the dawn of history, while Foxell visualises a globalised Sardinia. An echo of this dreamlike scene is found in the final pages, when our contemporary writer wonders «if the Lawrences are still on the lilac coast»³⁹, lost in their construction, just like:

³² FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 5.

³³ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 57.

³⁴ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 97.

³⁵ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 97.

³⁶ «But I'm digressing» (FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 15).

³⁷ Laurence STERNE, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, London, Penguin, 1978 [1759-67], p. 58.

³⁸ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p.18.

³⁹ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 88.

In the *Rainbow* Will Brangwyn [who] imagines he's with his wife on a desert island, obviously an England, from which all the ugly works of man have vanished. Similarly Lawrence's alter ego in *Women in Love*, Gerald Birkin, 'wishes he were on an island, like Alexander Selkirk, with only the creatures and trees.' Selkirk was the sailor on whom Defoe based Robinson Crusoe. The romantic Byron envied him his isolation, or pretended to. Lawrence in many respects, was Byron reborn: he dreamed of being a married Crusoe, with Frieda as Man Friday⁴⁰.

Lawrence constructed his trip as a voyage towards a true island, tinier than England, remote and empty. He and Frieda were characters rehearsing the writer's novels.

Foxell's text is a perspicacious denunciation of Lawrence's fictional and ideologically-oriented response to reality. The author carries this out by reproducing Lawrence's concepts but also by abruptly stopping the flux of the writer's thoughts, by explaining the precise connotative meanings of some Lawrentian words, but also confuting them. A few examples:

[...] Self-consciousness is the crucifixion of modern man.

So said Lawrence.

Lawrence saw Sardinian peasants as Nature's aristocrats, and they carried their costumes as such. He venerated them, we may say. They were handsome. Proud. Robust. Indomitable. Survivors of a Europe from which the race of real men had virtually disappeared.

Etcetera. Forgive me, David, if I interrupt you, but my readers know how your interesting mind works⁴¹.

More than anything else he loathed khaki, having opposed Britain's entry into the First World War, by which nothing would be resolved. It wouldn't even bring peace, not a genuine one, only an absence of war, scarred by diffused and insinuating violence. This evening my ferry suggests he was right: eternally everything's as white as original innocence, but the interior being khaki, symbolizes Lawrence's worst fears. Fears that he ascribes to Egbert in the short story, 'England, my England' (1915): '... abhorrent khaki. He felt as if hideous cloth went into his blood and made it gritty and dirty'⁴².

I'll give myself a break to see if there's any e-mail. The usual junk. Ah, what have we here? A letter signed 'D.H.L.'. Oh, no! Will he try and convince me that that nickname is affectionate? 'It's you', he begins, wasting no time on formalities,' 'who fail to appreciate my mother-wife, being utterly blind to the structural dichotomy I have created between the writer-traveller-hero, that is to say the modern Childe Harold, and Frieda as Sancho Panza? *O anima confusa!* Well one must make allowances: he's getting on, you know.

I reply: 'If your wife is truly subaltern, I cannot understand why you call her a queen.' 'Because, thou unconscionable worm, I need feminine sovereignty. At the same time I have no desire to be a subject. I must dethrone her, therefore. And what happens? Back she comes'⁴³.

⁴⁰ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 88.

⁴¹ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 30.

⁴² FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 9.

⁴³ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, pp. 36-37.

Foxell's writing consists of fragments of quotations taken from many Italian and English writers, Dickens and Hardy being cited most frequently. They are the best examples of arranging the fragments of a discourse⁴⁴ on conflicting spaces – the country and the city of Raymond Williams' s pioneering work⁴⁵ – which Lawrence juxtaposed in his own work. Both of them indulged in describing a landscape changed and disturbed by industrialisation. It seems pertinent to quote Dickens observing the railway, which had been designed and built in 1911. In Dickens's literary production⁴⁶, railways symbolise progress as well as the mechanisation of our culture, a monstrous tool tainting nature. It could be inferred that Foxell himself agrees with him. The last line in his report: «But the railway inaugurated modern Sardinia, for better or worse⁴⁷» suggests both acknowledgment of a momentous event and a sceptical, ambivalent evaluation of its consequences.

In the passage quoted below, Foxell contrasts Dickens's and Lawrence's attitude towards railways and trains, clearly pinpointing how akin Lawrence is to the futurists' attraction for trains and machines. In spite of his many sermons against civilisation, he describes the little train which runs up, up, up like a snake, not a stain on the surrounding space, but so characteristically part of it:

Dickens, nostalgic for an 'Eden where fact and fiction are the same', raged against omnipresent utilitarianism, contrasting the delightfully named choice coach, Timpson's Blue Eyed Maid, with the bureaucratic Locomotive 97 of a company called 'S.E.R'. What joy could you expect from a 'Locomotive 97'? It spat ashes and hot water. With time, however, sensibilities change: Lawrence rejoiced in his *trenino*, integrating it with Nature in the way that the avangarde is integrated into tradition⁴⁸.

Lawrence devoted an essay to Hardy⁴⁹. While writing it, he was revising his novel *The Rainbow* and reflecting on his own works and theories. In his preface to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy defines his literary production as centred on local communities whose values are threatened by social mobility and fuelled by compulsory education and industrialization⁵⁰. At that time, Lawrence was focusing on his own local communities

⁴⁴ Reference is made here to the Foucauldian sense of the word 'discourse'. Cfr. Michel FOUCAULT, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2005.

⁴⁵ Raymond WILLIAMS, *The Country and the City*, Frogmore, St. Albans, Herts, Paladin, 1975.

⁴⁶ «Even for a man of the world like Dickens, the Victorian fascination with trains was constantly tinged with apprehension» (FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 29).

⁴⁷ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 98. The first railway to be planned and completed, almost at the turn of the nineteenth century, linked Cagliari and Sassari. Benjamin Piercy, a Welsh engineer, began his long-term work in 1862. English travellers to Sardinia mentioned the new railway as the promise of a Sardinian Renaissance. In his short novel *The Romance of Paulilatino* (1883), a sceptical William Edward Norris wrote: «[...] was progressing at a snail's pace along the newly-constructed line which was to regenerate Sardinia – some day» (William Edward NORRIS, *The Romance of Paulilatino/Idillio di Paulilatino*, translation and introductory essay by M. Grazia DONGU, Cagliari, Condaghes, 2003, p. 112).

⁴⁸ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 50.

⁴⁹ David H. LAWRENCE, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. Bruce STEELE, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

⁵⁰ «In reprinting this story for a new edition I am reminded that it was in the chapters 'Far from the Madding Crowd', [...], that I first ventured to adopt the word 'Wessex' from the pages of early English History, and give it a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom. The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition to lend unity to their scene. The change at the root of this has been the

and the conflict between an active way of life, close to nature, and a meditative one, influenced by academic education. When Lawrence wrote *Sea and Sardinia*, he still felt guilty about having betrayed his roots, but he had also already stated that Old England was dead, and had started to look for its substitute. Sardinia, which he considered the opposite of England, is nonetheless sometimes linked to Lawrence's native island. Foxell is so perceptive as to detect some hidden comparisons in Lawrence's lexical choices:

Sorgono! From afar Lawrence called it 'magic', from nearby, 'pretty'. Normally the tourist reserves the word 'pretty' for an English village. Precisely! We're evidently in the Hardy Country. 'There were glades of stripling oaks and big slopes with oak trees, and on the right a saw-mill buzzing'. In the Wessex novels we find an England of meadows and farmers, of small towns and light industry⁵¹.

As Foxell himself notes, Lawrence's illusion soon vanishes and he turns against Sorgono, against 'the world itself'⁵². His rage here might be due to the unfeasibility of living in the fictitious world he shares with Hardy. Not so surprising for a man who moved rapidly on the map, looking for his Rananim, or whose main fascination with Cagliari is that the town is a «steep and lonely city, treeless, as in some old illumination⁵³» as if «it could be seen, but not entered»⁵⁴.

Foxell imitates Lawrence's fragmented writing from a syntactic and lexical point of view as well. His sentences are often elliptical, but linked by the typical Lawrentian device of repetition, with a frantic and evocative echo-like effect: «My ferry would be lost in darkness if she weren't as white as day. White as the cubistic architecture of Civitavecchia. Herself cubistic»⁵⁵.

Like Lawrence, he could stop the flow of his writing again and again to discard a previous inference or just admit to being as wordy as Lawrence was. In the passage below, Foxell wants to act as a translator and a scholar, but continues correcting himself. In so doing, he shows the critical examination in progress and admits, as implicitly as Lawrence did in his unresolved contradictions, that any representation of reality (and art) is a temporary one. He effectively plays with an attentive reader, who is puzzled by Lawrence's about-turns:

Instead he bangs on about Jerusalem. Who is he? Some priest *manqué*?

Now *I'm* banging on, and I must stop. Jerusalem, then, if he must. Like Jerusalem, Cagliari is 'naked' (i.e. treeless); on the other hand it doesn't gently undulate, it's steep, uneven.

And Lawrence says 'almost miniature', which sounds equally odd.

recent supplanting of the class of stationary cottagers, who carried on the local traditions and humours, by a population of more or less migratory labourers, which has led to a break of continuity in local history, more fatal than any other thing to the preservation of legend, folk-lore, close inter-social relations, and eccentric individualities. For these the indispensable conditions of existence are attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation after generation after generation» (Thomas HARDY, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Norwich, Sampshire Press, 2010 [1874], pp. 1-2).

⁵¹ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p.57.

⁵² FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 58.

⁵³ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 53.

⁵⁴ LAWRENCE, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 53.

⁵⁵ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 5.

Miniature? Cagliari? He has just said that it ‘piles up lofty.’ How then, out of the blue (and what blue!) can he call it ‘miniature’?

But wait a moment: a few lines later we come across the following passage, replete with incremental repetition that’s worthy of the psalmist: ‘...like a town in a monkish, illuminated missal ... as in some old illumination.’ All now sorts itself out: the word ‘miniature’ doesn’t mean ‘tiny’ but ‘as in a miniature’, in that the houses are piled one upon the other evoking the manner of representation employed in illuminated manuscripts⁵⁶.

He mimes Lawrence’s repetition of questions when approaching Sardinia. In doing so, he does not only reproduce the frantic rhythm of desire, but also stresses Sardinia’s otherness, just like his companion, the ghost travelling with him: «What is this Sardinia?, do you happen to know, that I’m visiting for the fifth time in twenty years? Is it Italy? How come, then, that it’s so far from the mainland? Even Africa’s closer»⁵⁷.

Many passages from *Sardinia Without Lawrence* reveal a Lawrentian love for a postmodernist medley of learned quotes and advertisements read on city walls or puns:

Where should I fix my eyes? Almost obsessively I began studying the ferns in their pots, then the punctuation of ‘Bevete Coca Cola’⁵⁸.

On the side of the mole is written ‘A MODO NOSTRO IN GIRO PER L’ITALIA’⁵⁹.

Then of a sudden I find ‘CHRIS TI AMO’⁶⁰.

Meanwhile our ferry continued to plough a non-sea. The Tyrrhenian, is it called? It looked terrene⁶¹.

The hypertext, then, is a parody, a eulogy and a critical dissertation, where Lawrence’s voice is heard along with that of his mime and reviewer. The latter points out the devices the former reproduces. The reviewer’s greatest achievement is his acknowledgment that Lawrence’s style can be represented diagrammatically as a labyrinth, a serpentine, curves or circles.

Foxell describes the sinuosity of the *trenino*’s tracks, so similar to «the eurhythmic sinuosities of art nouveau»⁶², the small train driven by «a Bergsonian struggle, at war with the intellect that places images in a discontinuous series, outside the context of consciousness, a struggle against purely analytical logic.»⁶³. The train and its route stand powerfully for the materiality of Lawrence’s style, so similar to *art nouveau*’s twisting and circles, or to Deledda’s writing, as Foxell states, and also to the serpentine line typical of

⁵⁶ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 16.

⁵⁸ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 16.

⁵⁹ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 21.

⁶⁰ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 70.

⁶¹ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 17.

⁶² FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 51.

⁶³ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 51.

Mannerism.⁶⁴ Lawrence's style is first of all relentless movement, drawing circles, curves on the page; it is a style which fragments stories, and puts them together again at random:

[...] an absence of formal structure is typically cinematographic. The narrative undulates, whether in Sardinia or on the waves themselves. It knows nothing of land's rigidity, and, needless to say, it finds itself in diametrical opposition to ecclesiastical architecture, which is so fixed and enduring – unless it happens to be organic, as, for example, in a gothic nave, or in the 'sausaginess' of Cagliari Cathedral⁶⁵.

Foxell is right when he infers that circles must be linked with the cycle of birth, that is to say, intimacy with primeval Nature. His affinity with the author, but also his knowledge of Lawrence's artistic ancestors, lead him to clearly understand that Lawrence's style expresses a refusal of «Henry's James's formal perfection»⁶⁶, which is «[a]rtificial superimposition on real life!», in favour of «the free-flowing rhythms of Grazia Deledda»⁶⁷. Along the same line, contemporary criticism has discovered that Lawrence, who «read and absorbed»⁶⁸ 'The Nature of Gothic', reproduces the main features Ruskin attributed to the 'Gothic': love for a barbaric age belonging to a lost local culture, expressed in «breaking away [...] from linearity, progression and closure.»⁶⁹. It seems opportune to quote Foxell again: «A labyrinth is an elaboration of the circle, towards whose centre the believer aims. It's the centre of the page of the world itself, as every mediaeval map demonstrates»⁷⁰.

According to Chaudhuri, Lawrence's poems «share, superficially, some of the features of modernism – a disruption of homogeneity, and totality, and a tendency towards fragmentation»⁷¹, but this collapse of sentences and narration does not derive from a «clearly identifiable strategy, as one finds in Eliot or Joyce.»⁷². As we have demonstrated, Lawrence gathered quotations from canonised authors of both English and Italian literature, as well as slogans read on city walls or the train's windowpanes; he made extensive use of repetition and juxtaposed contradictory discourses, without establishing hierarchies between 'low' and 'high' culture. He was waiting for «the breakdown of the idea of a single culture»⁷³ and the appreciation of otherness: his broken style expresses a consciousness still belonging to a future time.

Less modern than Lawrence, Foxell emphasizes the serpentine narrative, but his lines are tinged with modernist nostalgia for a prelapsarian world, a universal cultural matrix, which had been shattered the day Cain killed Abel. The circle, then, is the goal to be reached as well as the point of departure, the archetypal module primitive cultures apply

⁶⁴ «There can be no doubt that Lawrence was the ally of a locomotive that flitted from image to image in the way the psalmist did. It moved in Celtic circles if not in their very interlacing, and it saluted we may be sure, the eurhythmic sinuosities of art nouveau, Beardsley's drawings, and, closest in kinship, the mind of Grazia Deledda» (FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 51).

⁶⁵ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 74.

⁶⁶ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 44.

⁶⁸ Amit CHAUDHURI, *D. H. Lawrence and Difference: Postcoloniality and the Poetry of the Present*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 198.

⁶⁹ CHAUDHURI, *D. H. Lawrence and Difference*, p. 115.

⁷⁰ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 55.

⁷¹ CHAUDHURI, *D. H. Lawrence and Difference*, p. 125.

⁷² CHAUDHURI, *D. H. Lawrence and Difference*, p. 126.

⁷³ CHAUDHURI, *D. H. Lawrence and Difference*, p. 126.

to their writings and architecture:

I'll make you write in spirals, starting at the centre of the page and ending at the horizon. You'll be the little shepherds of your words, you'll see how they skip, you'll be the pupils of your choo-choo as it puffs-puffs round a new, green-belt Eden.

Eden, unless a thousand painters lie, was circular. Only with the plough did the rectangular field come into being; and Cain killed Abel. The brotherhood between Man and Nature was transformed into dominion and slavery, peace into war.

The intellect broke the primal unity.[...]

If only I could escape into the circle of the sea. Of the sea, the sea⁷⁴.

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⁷⁴ FOXELL, *Sardinia Without Lawrence*, p. 11.

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