

Martin Štefl, *The Aesthetics and Short Prose of D. H. Lawrence* (M.A. Thesis)

Opponent's review

The M.A. thesis of Martin Štefl is an insightful, detailed analysis of some of D. H. Lawrence's short stories, viewed from the perspective of language, knowledge and self. These are the three major categories which construct the framework of Štefl's argument, nevertheless it is obvious that they are not treated as distinct, separated entities but as frequently overlapping notions and as concepts generating and involving other categories. The outcome of this close affinity of terms is that the thesis progresses towards elucidating the ever richer interpretive potential of Lawrence's short fiction.

Štefl's treatment of the topic manifests two strong points: his ability to see the above categories in a broad context of philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic debates (not only of Lawrence's own times) and his readiness to apply his conception in a detailed commentary on the selected short stories. His attention to e.g. various aspects of Lawrentian language, including strategies such as rhythmically placed "image units", is more than convincing and it testifies to the student's ability of nuanced critical reading. Štefl is moreover able to support his argument with citing Lawrence's own ideas, as expressed in the author's essays and correspondence, proving that he orients himself in the theoretical part of Lawrence's work with a great deal of security and comprehension as well.

What a reader of the submitted thesis lacks, however, is perhaps involvement of some other contextual aspects. In his treatment of what cannot be expressed verbally and what necessitates a different language strategy he more or less casually mentions symbolical use of language. This is closely connected with creating powerful topoi images such as that of dancing – would it not be useful to show how Lawrence constructs this in the atmosphere of general attempts of his contemporaries to employ a language of images rather than of denotative meanings? What is the relationship of his image-building strategies to the practise of the Imagists? Could not the figure of dancer be treated in the context revealed by Frank Kermode in his analysis of the dancer topos in *The Romantic Image*? I understand that such a claim would shift the focus of the thesis considerably, yet it would help us realize that Lawrence's ideas are a willy-nilly product of the intellectual atmosphere of his generation – that generation which he so often viewed critically.

What also strikes a reader of Martin Štefl's thesis is the fact that in his discussion of the Lawrentian self he basically does not deal with Lawrence's understanding of *ego*, as presented in one of his most significant studies, *The Crown*. Why has this text been excluded from the argument and what is the relationship between the self (as Martin Štefl sees it) and Lawrence's concept of the ego (and perhaps also of the social being, as he introduces it in his essay on John Galsworthy)? And, more generally, what is the relationship between the Lawrentian self and the idea of self as inspired and developed by 18th century empiricism and exploited e.g. by Romantics? Is this tradition relevant for Lawrence in any sense?

These questions apart, it is possible to conclude that M. Štefl's thesis more than meets the goals expected from this kind of academic writing. It offers very interesting points of view (in particular the intrinsic connection between Lawrence's conception of space and knowledge or understanding) and it presents these complex issues lucidly. The more it is to be regretted that the applicant was not able to avoid a number of minor language errors with which his thesis is rather densely studded (I even doubt, whether the title should read

“...Short Prose...” or “Short Fiction...”). Nevertheless, it is my pleasure to **recommend** the thesis for defence and to suggest that it should be classified as excellent (**výborně**).

PhDr. Zdeněk Beran

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