Why Study Lawrence, Why Not Teach Lawrence in a New Way?: D. H. Lawrence in the Decade of the British New Left and Now

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The Significance of D. H. Lawrence Studies in the Time of Crisis in Humanities

Humanities are in a state of crisis. Literary studies are particularly in crisis, during this age of utilitarianism, scientism and professionalism. The reputation of D. H. Lawrence, among literary academics, is also in crisis: he has been formerly labelled as a fascist and a sexist, and still is considered by many as unworthy of scholarly attention. Reflecting this attitude, the number of books and papers written on Lawrence is on the decrease. In spite of the local flourishes of D. H. Lawrence Societies in countries such as Korea and Japan, it seems to me that we Lawrentians are faced with the question of why we study D. H. Lawrence, where the significance of D. H. Lawrence studies lies. This paper attempts to answer it, by historicizing Lawrence studies and, based on the historical perspective thus gained, proposing a new approach to literary education using one of his novels.

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Britain in the Nineteen Fifties and the British New Left

I would like to start by examining the period when Lawrence was a hero, that is, the nineteen fifties in Britain, when F. R. Leavis published *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955) and Raymond Williams eulogized Lawrence in his academic masterpiece, *Culture and Society* (1958). This was a decade of prosperity and disillusionment for the British people, after the first post-war Labour government’s achievements (such as the building of the social welfare state and the successful management of the country’s economy) and failures (such as the centralization of power into the national government and the entry into the nuclear arms race). The nineteen fifties were known for economic prosperity and the spread of consumerism throughout the nation, as exemplified by Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s well-known remark, ‘Most of our people never had it so good.’ But, more importantly, it was the decade characterized by the Cold War, with its nuclear arms and space race; it was known for the three major political crises that happened in 1956, the denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and the Suez crisis. The first two events revealed the brutality of the Soviet regime, while the third made known to the British people the weakness and anachronism of British imperialism. Thus, these events, together with the deteriorating background of the Cold War, caused serious disillusionment among a wide stratum of people with both the British government (for its outdated imperialistic mindset) and the left-wing parties (the Communist Party for its connection with the U. S. S. R., and the Labour Party for its morally compromised realism, exemplified by its refusal to adopt the policy of the unilateral destruction of British nuclear weapons). These factors helped give rise to the non-partisan movement of the British New Left.

In 1957, two New Left journals, *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*, were founded, which would merge to form *New Left Review* three years later. In 1958, a collection of essays, titled *Conviction*, and considered as the New Left manifesto, was published. In the same year, CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) started, the largest post-war popular political movement, closely related to the New Left. One feature of