

DHL's *Oscar*. An Introduction

Francesca Orestano

My first encounter with D. H. Lawrence occurred in April 1966, when the publisher Arnoldo Mondadori decided that *L'amante di Lady Chatterley* "edizione integrale" – unabridged edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – would appear in the popular collection "Gli Oscar settimanali." These paperbacks cost 350 Lire: even teenagers could afford to buy the weekly issues out of their pocket money.

In 1965 the new Oscar series gained success from its very first book, which was Ernest Hemingway's *Addio alle armi*, soon followed by the novels of Cassola, Sartre, Buzzati, Steinbeck, Gogol, Ambler, Wright, Wilson, D'Annunzio, Austen, Greene, Maugham. Actually before Lawrence was awarded his first Oscar as n. 51, the collection had included a host of English and American writers – Buck, Cronin, Saroyan, Struther, Moore, Wilder, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Caldwell, Hemingway twice, Golding, Forester, Nabokov, Faulkner, Caldwell twice, Shute, Bellow. With this rich selection, the Oscar Mondadori signalled an important post-war cultural shift: these authors were the tokens of a programmed recovery, in Italy, of a literary tradition which although not altogether ignored, had been carefully filtered by censorship, and ideologically channeled according to the cultural requirements of the fascist regime. Lawrence indeed had been translated and *L'amante di Lady Chatterley* had appeared in the Mondadori series "Il ponte" in 1946, and in the "Medusa" in 1960.¹ But the Oscar was something completely different.

¹ I am grateful for the following information from the Mondadori historical catalogue to Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, and to Luisa Finocchi and Marco Magagnin, for their generous help. The cover of the Oscar is reproduced by kind concession of Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Lawrence's novel appears as *L'amante di Lady Chatterley* / David Herbert Lawrence ; traduzione di Giulio Monteleone ; illustrazioni di Luigi Brogginì ; prefazione di André Malraux - Milano : Mondadori, 1946. - 436 p. : 8 ill. ; 21 cm. (Il ponte); *L'amante di Lady Chatterley* / David Herbert Lawrence ; traduzione di Giulio Monteleone; prefazione di André Malraux - Milano : Mondadori, 1960. - 472 p. ; 20 cm. (Medusa ; 440); *L'amante di Lady Chatterley* / David Herbert Lawrence ; traduzione di Giulio Monteleone - Milano : Mondadori, 1963. - 416 p. ; 20 cm. (Il bosco ; 134); and finally *L'amante di Lady Chatterley* / David Herbert Lawrence ; traduzione di Giulio Monteleone ; con una cronologia della vita dell'Autore e dei suoi tempi, una nota introduttiva, una antologia critica e una bibliografia a cura di Piero Nardi ; prefazione di André Malraux - Milano : Mondadori, 1966. - 392

In the Sixties Lawrence's works would appear in a totally different light. His fiction would exert the fascination offered by a spacious geographical quality, and by the adoption of the viewpoint of an intelligent, young and curious literary tramp; it warmly suggested a classless intercourse between people of different nations; it emphasized the uninhibited celebration of sex. All possible options which the new generation, born soon after the war, would eagerly take to, in an atmosphere of general optimism and freedom. With very little money, one could travel, explore distant countries, make new friends, enjoy music, have sex, afford reading a book – the blurb provided by the poet Vittorio Sereni for the series, and placed inside the cover of the first issues, did fitly interpret the ideal moment in which leisure time would be devoted to reading and literature, and books and the radio would go hand in hand – the Oscars would also be called “transistor books”, being small, light and portable. People from all classes, schools and professions started reading, here, there, and everywhere:

The Oscars are the 1965 books for the Italians at work: workmen, technicians, clerks, managers, executives, students, families, the active and well-informed members of our society. At home, in trams, buses, metro, cars, taxis, boats, speedboats, ocean-liners, jets, factories, offices, bars, during a business trip, a weekend, a cruise, the Oscars will always be in your pocket, always handy. With the Oscars a publisher traditionally avant-garde has invented and created the high-quality weekly book, for a public in motion. The Oscars are the Oscar among the books: each week a new one, meant to last a whole life.

So far for the swinging Sixties, and Lawrence's presence as one of the figure heads of a period which would style itself as free, revolutionary, uninhibited. As it happens, D. H. Lawrence and his work, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* first and above all, stood as the totem to which old habits and conventions would be willingly sacrificed. But even this response, as I would realize in time, had to be re-examined and deflated.

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa in his lessons “Letteratura inglese” would represent and resume for a chosen group of young friends in Palermo the whole

question of Lawrence's reception in Italy, which, in his opinion, had been quite unlucky, *because of Lady Chatterley*:

D.H. Lawrence [...] is remembered as the author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and a pornographer. In actual fact he was a chaste writer, obsessed with problems that relate with the awakening of instinct and its dominance over rationality. He knew however how to exert (except in three pages of *Lady Chatterley's*) a tight artistic control on the provocative subjects he treated.²

We may well agree with the author of *The Leopard* that Lawrence's reputation in Italy was unjustly marred by the undue emphasis placed on one single aspect, a few pages indeed, of his output. Against this superficial and limited appraisal, Tomasi – whose extensive readings in many languages should never be forgotten – praised Lawrence's achievement, and especially *Sons and Lovers*, which he considered his masterpiece; he placed Lawrence's modernity in the context of the British art world, seeing in him a radical innovator, indeed “more radical than the mild Wells, or the too witty Shaw.” But he also remarked about the class prejudices which permeated the writer's social outlook. Finally Tomasi managed to select for his young Sicilian intellectuals the passages in *Sea and Sardinia* where Lawrence describes Sicilian men as barbarians, only noticing their “exclusive sexual preoccupation, free from all morality” – a passage which Tomasi would read and comment with supreme irony: “It's useless to take offense, he meant it as a compliment!”³ The lessons of the Prince came to redress the balance of a reception too often marred by an exclusive emphasis on the theme of sex, which – critically viewed – has “no great influence upon the sum of life.”

But to the contents of this small book. In the mid Seventies, a young scholar at Milan University, Anna Anzi, was asked to investigate from her place near Gargnano, on the events, characters, places, which had marked Lawrence's stay on the shore of Lake Garda between 1912 and 1913. She set to this task with curiosity and passion: the materials were there, still waiting to be gathered. The essay that was published in *Studi Inglesi*, n. 2, 1975, bears testimony to a sharp, thorough scholarly attitude, which exploits the rich soil of local memories and yet engages the reader in finding

² Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, “Letteratura inglese”, in *Opere*, Introduzione e premesse di Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, a cura di Nicoletta Polo. Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2006, pp. 671-1421, p. 1330. *Letteratura inglese* was first published by Mondadori in 1990-1991, in two volumes.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1332.

correspondences between the historical remnants, Lawrence's life on Lake Garda, and the literary fashioning of such period in *Twilight in Italy*. That essay, slightly revised and updated, is here translated for the first time into English; Anna Anzi would then become Chair of History of English Drama, at Milan University.

Last but not least, another Milanese contribution comes from Margaret Rose, Professor of Drama Studies, and committed scholar, writer, editor, translator. She has focused her attention on *The Fight for Barbara*, investigating a drama which Lawrence conceived whilst in Gargnano, and during the crisis in Frieda's life, after she, in love with him, had left her husband and children. Margaret Rose offers a critical introduction to this play, which she has adapted into a selection of readings for a group of young actors – the Teatro dell'Armadillo company.

Thus the XIII D.H. Lawrence Conference, which is held at the Milan University Centre of Palazzo Feltrinelli, in Gargnano, is the perfect occasion for bringing back the Lawrence that was published by Mondadori in the Sixties, the critical work of the Seventies, and recent scholarship and dramatic skills. These homages complement the manifold aims of the international Conference, in acknowledging the writer and the value of his work.

Francesca Orestano

Università degli Studi di Milano