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Lawrence, Cézanne and the Mediterranean Landscape

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Abstract

The article explores D. H. Lawrence's painterly style and visual imagination through a comparative analysis of his literary landscapes and Paul Cézanne's landscape painting. Focusing on Lawrence's engagement with visual art, particularly his admiration for Cézanne, the study examines how Lawrence's prose mirrors painterly techniques such as colour modulation and spatial layering. Situating Lawrence's visual writing within the context of expressionist and post-impressionist aesthetics, it argues that his landscapes are not static backdrops but rather highly dynamic, visually evocative, and emotionally charged spaces. A close reading of a Mediterranean landscape passage from *Twilight in Italy* alongside Cézanne's *The Bay of Marseilles, View from L'Estaque* reveals shared formal strategies and shows how Lawrence's prose enacts the visual experience to evoke a rich sensory and symbolic landscape that offers the reader an immersive perceptual experience.

Keywords: D. H. Lawrence, Paul Cézanne, landscape, Mediterranean, visual writing, impressionism

While D. H. Lawrence's literary output remains the prime focus within Lawrence studies, his sustained engagement with visual art has earned considerable attention from recent scholarship. His complex relationship with visual art is a significant dimension of his creativity that not only informed his aesthetic sensibility, but also offered a complementary medium through which he explored themes central to his creative ambition. Lawrence's own turn to painting in the 1920s, culminating in the 1929 Warren Gallery exhibition, was not a mere digression or therapeutic pastime. Lawrence's visual imagination permeates his literary

work, manifested in vivid imagery, painterly descriptions, and a symbolic use of colour and form. His essay “Introduction to These Paintings” (1929), written to accompany an exhibition of his paintings, provides critical insight into his aesthetic philosophy, emphasizing the body, emotion, and the metaphysical over technical precision. Paul Cézanne, in particular, occupies a privileged place in Lawrence’s artistic imaginary. Often evoked in his essays and correspondence, Cézanne functions not merely as a figure of influence but as a touchstone for Lawrence’s own theorisation of vision and artistic integrity. This article explores Lawrence’s negotiation of Cézanne’s art and the affinities between the artists and their approaches to landscape depiction. By comparing an example of Lawrence’s literary rendering of a Mediterranean landscape with one of Cézanne’s landscape paintings, it seeks to illuminate how Lawrence’s prose mirrors Cézanne’s painterly techniques, through fragmentation, layering, and a dynamic interplay of colour and form to recreate the full perceptual and emotional experience of viewing a landscape. The article argues that Lawrence’s literary landscapes are not merely descriptive but are constructed with a visual and emotional intensity that resonates with Cézanne’s own creative pursuit.

Existing research affirms that Lawrence achieved an admirable degree of synergy of vision and technique in his visual writing. Descriptions of spaces and landscapes are usually viewed as strengths in Lawrence’s writing, praised for their extraordinary “poetic precision and fullness” (Bell 43), command of language and technical innovativeness (Leavis, Aldington, Ingram, Bell, Beckett, Stewart). Characterised by “vividness” (e.g. Leavis 124) and “freshness” (Stewart, *Color* 72), they are tokens of the author’s “delicate, fresh responsiveness to the natural scene” (Bell 18).

Lawrence’s painterly approach to visual writing has been researched most thoroughly by Jack Stewart, who claims that inadequate attention to the visual properties of Lawrence’s language hampers a full understanding of his creative vision and art. Stewart’s study *The Vital Art of D. H. Lawrence: Vision and Expression* (1999), focuses on the complex relation between expressionist painting, Lawrence’s visual art and his ontological vision. Stewart demonstrates that, thanks to their sensual

intensity and emotional urgency, expressionist techniques prevail in Lawrence's writing as they help turn Lawrence's text into "a verbal force field" (69) in his quest to express the unconscious contents of the human psyche. The painterly style of expression thus plays a major role in Lawrence's search for a new language of the unconscious as it sustains the innovative force in Lawrence's writing, particularly in *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920). Vincent van Gogh and Cézanne come forth as painters of profound significance for Lawrence. Lawrence admired Van Gogh's vitalist vision and strife for integrity, yet dismissed the deranged, destructive intensity of his creativity. With Cézanne, on the other hand, Lawrence shared a "desire for a dynamic equilibrium in art" (Stewart, *Vital Art* 162). Particular attention is paid to plasticity in expressionist paintings, perceived as "oscillation between surface and depth" (Stewart, *Vital Art* 65). Along with rhythmic dynamism, expressionist plasticity provides ideal inspiration for Lawrence's creative ambition and is particularly significant in relation to Lawrence's language. The moonlit harvest scene with Anna and Will in *The Rainbow*, interpreted as another version of the archetypal rite of courting, for instance, is put forth as an example of "visionary expressionism that merges human and cosmic" (62) and a typical situation in which Lawrence uses expressionist language to express preverbal and transpersonal experiences and allotropic states, characterized by the "rhythmic fluctuation of consciousness and the unconscious" (Stewart, *Vital Art* 64). Lawrence's rendering of the harvest scene is compared to Van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889) and Edvard Munch's *White Night* (1901). Stewart observes that the field is initially introduced as an "impressionist space" (*Vital Art* 62), filled with "silver" air, with shapes only "vaguely" discernible in "the haze of moonlight and of dusk" (Lawrence, *The Rainbow* 114), yet gradually, the haziness of the twilight vanishes, and the scenery begins to acquire expressionist intensity and dynamism, coming to resemble the diagrammatic surfaces in Munch's painting. This shows, among other things, the fluid eclecticism and originality of Lawrence's imagination and prose which enable him to select, adapt, and combine diverse stylistic modes to serve his creative vision.

Women in Love is seen as one of the greatest achievements of literary expressionism, especially in its attempt to verbalize suppressed sensations and emotions, including frustrated sexuality (Stewart, *Vital Art*). In addition to landscapes, or spaces being projected on the characters' psychic states, the characters' actions become manifestations of their subconscious drives and desires. The painting *Winter Moon Landscape* (1919) by the German expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) is recognised as the nearest visual analogy to Lawrence's text, mainly for its apocalyptic symbolism (Stewart, *Vital Art* 88). Expressionist painting emerges as the most prominent and prevalent style in Lawrence's major novels. The main reason is that, ontologically and methodologically, it harmonizes with Lawrence's own vision and the prophetic nature of his art, since the expressionist interest in capturing the unconscious and inner tensions and conflicts, sensations and desires, accords best with his 'philosophy' and literary aesthetic.

The life of the body and the unconscious are central concepts of Lawrence's idiosyncratic metaphysical vision that dismantles and reconfigures the traditional Western and Christian dichotomies of body and mind, flesh and spirit/Word, and creation and annihilation. At the core of his philosophy lies "a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect," since "[w]e can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true" (*Letters* 503). Consequently, Lawrence recoils from the prioritisation of "mental consciousness" (*Psychoanalysis* 20), grounded in abstract reason, intellectual cognition, and self-conscious will, and instead privileges a "pre-mental" consciousness (*Psychoanalysis* 20), or "blood knowledge" (*Letters* 470), a pre-rational mode of knowing rooted in instinct and bodily sensation that enables acquiescence and attunement to the external, non-human world and to the unknown, greater transcendental "*being*" beyond ("Reality of Peace" 38). In Lawrence's metaphysic, this timeless and universal *being* is sustained by an eternal tension of opposites, an exchange or pulsation of creative and destructive energies. Described as "a great systole diastole of the universe" ("Reality of Peace" 27), this cosmic rhythm is discernible in the cyclical processes of nature and life, such as birth and death or the changing of the seasons, as well as in the relationship between man and

woman, their fusion in the sexual act, and their subsequent return to singleness. This principle was first articulated in one of Lawrence's earliest published texts, "Foreword to *Sons and Lovers*" (1913), which subverts the Christian doctrine of the Word made Flesh and instead proclaims the latter to be primal, infinite, and unquestionable ("Foreword" 467). It follows that man, created of the Word and representing potency, activity, and change, and woman, born of the Flesh and embodying eternity and stability, are construed as complementary opposites existing in a state of mutual tension that oscillates and strives towards balance ("Foreword" 471, "The Crown" 265-6). Sexual consummation of a heterosexual relationship thus acquires an almost sacred status as the enactment of the universal process of creation, through which a temporary state of equilibrium and oneness with the transcendental *being* may be attained (e.g. "The Crown" 265).

It is evident that Lawrence's metaphysics is inseparable from nature, since for him it does not mean merely the external physical environment but a living space in which human consciousness is embedded. A mode of existence grounded in organic unity with nature is famously rendered in the opening passage of *The Rainbow*, which traces a year in the life of the Brangwen family on their Nottinghamshire farm. The passage also possesses a distinctly post-impressionist quality, which nevertheless, dwells less in overtly painterly visualisation than in a metonymic evocation of the Brangwen family's relationship to the land. The image of the landscape is constructed through patterns of symbolically charged units, such as heaven or sky, air, earth or soil, vegetation, and cattle, which function simultaneously as mythic figures and as embodiments of fundamental natural elements and energies. Through this mode of description, the imagined environment acquires a sense of solidity, simplicity, and structural rhythm, generated by the cyclical processes in nature. The landscape thus constructed is archetypal and elemental, suffused with latent vitality, or the Lawrentian "life," that pulses in the "young corn," described as wavering and "silken," in the swollen udders of the cows, and equally in the "blood" and bodies of its inhabitants who live in organic unity with the land (*Rainbow* 1).

Landscape thus becomes a concrete expression of Lawrence's metaphysics, a mythic space in which human life remains integrated with what he understands as a greater cosmic order. This sensitivity to the latent energy of a particular environment draws Lawrence toward archaic cultures, for instance Etruscan, Aztec, or Indigenous Australian, and allows him to formulate his concept of 'spirit of place,' conceived as a singular amalgamation of specific "vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, [and] different polarity with different stars" ("Spirit of Place" 17), which both shapes and is shaped by unique cultures. Lawrence's responsiveness to the 'spirit of place' informs both the substance and the style of his writing, driving him to develop a language capable of expressing the distinctive vitality of landscapes. He approaches places not as static settings but as living presences with a formative influence on human perception and feeling. This principle is discernible in his fiction and non-fiction alike, lending his descriptive passages characteristic intensity and evocative power. It is especially impactful in his travel writing, where journeys through Italy, Australia or Mexico become philosophical and spiritual explorations of different forms of life and consciousness. With equal intensity, his contemplation of places, cultures, and mythologies permeates his novels, short fiction as well as poetry, giving rise to parallel bodies of work across genres. Thus, the travel essays collected in *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) may be read in conjunction with *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) and the short story "The Woman Who Rode Away" (1925), as well as with poems such as "Humming Bird" and "Autumn in Taos," both published in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* (1923). A similar cluster of texts emerges around his engagements with the Mediterranean. Alongside numerous poems collected in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, including "Cypresses," "Almond Blossoms," and "The Snake," the novels *Aaron's Rod* (1921) and *The Lost Girl* (1920), both partly set in Italy, may be aligned with the Mediterranean travel essays published in *Twilight in Italy* (1916), *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), and the posthumous *Sketches of Etruscan Places* (1932). *The Lost Girl*, begun in 1912 as an "amusing" popular novel (Worthen, Introduction xxix) but completed toward the end of the decade after Lawrence's multiple stays in Italy, contains an extraordinary stylistic shift

that accompanies his heroine's geographical and spiritual relocation from the English Midlands into the heart of the Italian Alps. Advancing into the rural alpine landscape, the female protagonist becomes increasingly alert and attentive to her surroundings, developing an acute sense of mystery. This heightened awareness and expansion of consciousness are thus closely associated with physical movement into the mountains and, simultaneously, with an imagined regression into a "pre-world" or "aborigine" (*Lost Girl* 409, 316) state of mind. Her gradual submission to the spell of the 'spirit of place' entails a profound ontological and aesthetic transposition: a return into what is construed as a primordial world and a form of alternative spirituality, also embodied by the old spinner in *Twilight in Italy*.

Visual description is central to travel writing as it helps convey places and people to the reader. As evident above, in Lawrence, what is seen is always linked to what is felt or intuited, so that the external world and inner experience remain closely connected. Landscapes are presented as containing hidden energies, understood as expressions of the 'spirit of place,' and are often sensed as carrying a mythic force or order beneath their visible surfaces. For this reason, a post-impressionist approach is especially relevant to Lawrence's writing. Rather than aiming at faithful representation or pictorial realism, his descriptions seek to capture the underlying structure, rhythm, and emotional and spiritual resonance of a place. As shown below, post-impressionist techniques, such as diagrammatic simplification, the distortion of form, and the use of repeated blocks or planes of colour, appear particularly fruitful for Lawrence's mythopoetic recreation of the places he visited.

Lawrence's essay "Introduction to These Paintings" underscores Cézanne's singular position among the visual artists who shaped Lawrence's aesthetic sensibility. Singled out as "[t]he most interesting figure in modern art, and the only really interesting figure" (Lawrence, "Introduction" 204), Cézanne dominates the essay as a revolutionary artist who found the courage to break away from old conventions, and at the same time, recognized a void and self-delusion in similar efforts of his impressionist contemporaries. Cézanne's response to impressionism was similar to Lawrence's: the latter valued it for its "discovery of light and

‘free’ colour” (“Introduction” 197). To Lawrence, the impressionist “escape from the body” (“Introduction” 197) was a dead-end. Cézanne made, in Lawrence’s view, the revolutionary and pioneering step of recognising and striving to express the true form and substance of an object. This was first achieved in Cézanne’s still-life compositions that present impersonal representations of his subjects as “separate entities” (“Introduction” 201), carrying an intuitive knowledge of their substance, or “personality” (212), described as the “appleyness” (212) of an apple. According to Lawrence, Cézanne learned to avoid cliché and to display in his still-lives “a triumphant and rich intuitive vision” (“Introduction” 213), a skill that he subsequently transferred to his landscape paintings. He regarded him as a realist painter, due to his strife for truthful representation – “something that was neither optical nor mechanical nor intellectual” (“Introduction” 211), something that would be born out of instinct and intuition. This self-less, impersonal feeling for an object in its autonomous existence is, in Lawrence’s view, only possible by breaking out of one’s mental consciousness, or, in Lawrence’s words, “the blue-sky prison” (“Introduction” 201) of one’s ego and allowing intuitive consciousness to work. Cézanne’s effort to visually express the intuitively apprehended substance of the painted object is, according to Lawrence, a radical and truly revolutionary act (“Introduction” 212). To Lawrence, Cézanne embodies the religious truthfulness, intuitive sensibility and dedication to the “inward vision” that he expects in a true creative artist (“Making” 231).

Despite his self-proclaimed indifference to and his rather conservative view on landscape painting, Lawrence was drawn to Cézanne’s landscapes as they seemed to pulse with the organic vitality that he sought to achieve in his writing. In “Introduction,” he claims that “landscape is always waiting for something to occupy it. Landscape seems to be meant as a background to an intenser vision of life, so to my feeling painted landscape is background with the real subject left out” (194). He further claims that, on its own, “it doesn’t call up the more powerful responses of the human imagination, the sensual passionate responses” (195). In most visual passages in his fictional prose, it is indeed people who charge landscapes with drama and dynamism. Stewart argues that

behind Lawrence's dismissal of unpeopled landscape in the essay there is an implicit attempt to validate and advocate for his own paintings that primarily depict human bodies set against minimalised backgrounds ("Landscape" 41).

Dealing with an unpeopled landscape, Lawrence prefers it "to be rather quiet and unexplosive" ("Introduction" 195); hence, he claims to appreciate fine, albeit escapist, English landscapes to "Van Gogh's surging earth and Cézanne's explosive or rattling planes" that "make a violent assault on the emotions" (195). Lawrence argues that in the work of post-impressionist painters such as Van Gogh and Cézanne, "landscape exploded, and came tumbling back on to canvases of artists in lumps" (198). In addition, he blames Cézanne for turning landscapes into plain geometrical shapes. Yet he has great admiration for his later landscape paintings and, as will be demonstrated below, many of Lawrence's depictions of the Mediterranean countryside in his travel writings bear much resemblance to Cézanne's Mediterranean imagery.

Cézanne's family roots and life in Provence were, in Lawrence's view, at least partly responsible for the painter's idiosyncratic sensibility and imagination, which enabled him to cherish the physical beauty and flamboyance of the Mediterranean countryside. It was his home region that endowed him with a "classic sentiment for landscape" (Fry 5). Cézanne's celebrated sensibility to and mastery of colour (cf. Fry, Machotka) was formed to a great extent by his close contact with nature and the land. His sensitiveness towards the colour spectrum of a particular place or region is reflected in his landscape paintings, whose colour harmonies are based on a choice of two to three groups of colour tones and a delicate balance of warm and cold tones (Machotka 98).

Cézanne's correspondence manifests his almost stubborn insistence on the primacy of nature and the artist's incessant study of it, which he himself pursued until his last days. He claims that "[a]ll things, particularly in art, are theory developed and applied in contact with nature" (228). The painter must "study above all after nature" (220), and it is the "long" and "strong experience of nature" (232) and the resultant "feeling for" (241) it that enable the artist to detach oneself from the great masters of the past and to reach creative autonomy. In respect to

landscape painting, the attentive, immersive observation of nature, happens predominantly on the instinctive and intuitive level appreciated by Lawrence. Nevertheless, the development of a deep intuitive bond with the landscape is preconditioned by a sincere intellectual interest and profound knowledge of the landscape, including its geological and geomorphological anatomy (Merleau-Ponty 242). In Cézanne's approach, the artist's unique creative vision is thus the product of a complex process of scientific enquiry, long, focused observation and meditation, born from intellectual and intuitive curiosity and a desire for truth, resulting in the deep knowledge of and emotional bond with the landscape. A view that captures the artist's imagination first becomes internalised and personalised into what Cézanne calls a 'motif.' In Merleau-Ponty's words, it refers to "the landscape in its totality and in its absolute fullness" (242); it is a visual object embraced by and absorbed into the observer's consciousness, "an idea accepted from the visible world" (Fry 35). Despite the abstract sound, for Cézanne, the 'motif' remains inseparable from the physical place and is referred to in such sense in his late letters – he writes, for example, "I am going to my motif" (270). Cézanne was obsessed with some of his 'motifs'; he treated them as something deeply personal and, haunted by his creative ambition and belief in his own incompetence, made notoriously repeated attempts at painting the same motif.

Nevertheless, his repeated returns to certain sites, most notably Montagne Sainte-Victoire, stemmed from a far deeper impulse; he sought to capture what he perceived as the underlying essence of the landscape, a fundamental cosmological order that endowed it with permanence and coherence. Like Lawrence, his engagement with and contemplation of the natural environment carried a distinctly spiritual dimension, suggesting that for both artists the landscape functioned not simply as a visual subject but as a site of metaphysical inquiry. Cézanne's struggle, dedication and sincerity were greatly admired by Lawrence, whose repetitiveness and hyperbole can be partly attributed to a similar desperate desire for adequate expression of intuitive knowledge and spiritual experience. According to Cézanne, the creative materialisation of the artist's vision is impersonal, with the artist "remain[ing] in obscurity" (198), and it

emerges from a non-cerebral source: "Primary force alone, *id est* temperament, can bring a person to the end he must attain" (228-9).

Cézanne's work is widely recognised and praised for its original chromatic artistry. To Cézanne, colour is "a direct exponent of form" (Fry 13) and "intensely personal" (15). His brief encounter with impressionism played a crucial role as it expanded his palette up to eighteen colours (Merleau-Ponty 236) and taught him to use complementary colours to render volume and movement, developing a method called 'modulation.' In his paintings, light is not an external element but "emanates" (Merleau-Ponty 236) from within his objects. According to Cézanne, "nature for us men is more depth than surface whence the need of introducing into our light vibrations, represented by reds and yellows, a sufficient amount of blue to give the impression of air" (234). As demonstrated below, the use of modulated colour planes and blue rather than black contours in combination with simple geometric shapes, create a specific visual rhythm and a sense of interconnectedness and fluidity, which can also be found in Lawrence's visual writing.

As in Cézanne's case, close contact with land and nature played an important role in Lawrence's formative years. Entering adulthood, he found a sanctuary at the Haggs Farm set on a stretch of farming countryside near his home, the mining town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. Learning about wild plants and herbs from a young age, he developed a deep appreciation for the natural world and an "empathy with wild things" (Worthen, *Lawrence* 106). Learning to draw and paint preceded his first writing attempts. He attended art classes and became a skilful copyist of drawings and paintings, particularly water-colours. He shared this pastime with most of his friends during this time and gave away pictures as presents to his friends and family. Much of his time at Haggs Farm was filled with reading and discussions of books, so his intuitive and intellectual attraction to nature and the countryside was nurtured alongside his passion for language.

Lawrence's keen scientific and aesthetic interest in fauna and flora, and his eye for detail also contribute to the acclaimed quality of his descriptions of the natural world in his fiction. Due to his sensitivity to the natural environment and the 'spirit of place,' nature and countryside play

key parts in his vision of England and Englishness, which, essentially pastoral as it is, is characterised by a deep, organic bond between people and the rural landscape. The following example comes from Lawrence's first novel *The White Peacock* (1911), set in the countryside of his youth. The description of the scenery is delivered by the first-person narrator and the novel's protagonist, who is a painter:

The hazels were thin, and only here and there an oak tree uprose. All the ground was white with snowdrops, like drops of manna scattered over the red earth, on the grey-green clusters of leaves. There was a deep little dell, sharp sloping like a cup, and a white sprinkling of flowers all the way down, with white flowers showing pale among the first inpouring of shadow at the bottom. The earth was red and warm, pricked with the dark, succulent green of bluebell sheaths, and embroidered with grey-green clusters of spears, and many white flowerets. High above, above the light tracery of hazel, the weird oaks tangled in the sunset. Below, in the first shadows, drooped hosts of little white flowers, so silent and sad; it seemed like a holy communion of pure wild things, numberless, frail, and folded meekly in the evening light. Other flower companies are glad; stately barbaric hordes of bluebells, merry-headed cowslip groups, even light, tossing wood-anemones; but snow drops are sad and mysterious. We have lost their meaning. (187)

This paragraph presents a richly textured evocation of nature, instilled with emotional resonance and symbolic depth. The visual language employed uses impressionist techniques focused on the interplay of colour, form, and light and evokes a mood of quiet reverence and melancholic beauty. The forms described take a variety of shapes, both horizontal and vertical, suggesting delicacy and fragility, as in "deep little dell, sharp sloping like a cup" and "white sprinkling of flowers," as well as mystery and primordial wildness, for example in the old "weird oaks" and "barbaric hordes of bluebells." Colour and its layering are the most striking elements of this painterly style. The palette is both vivid and subtle, composed of both contrasting hues as well as shaded colours. The "white" of the snowdrops is repeated throughout the paragraph, acting as a unifying motif bearing spiritual significance, suggesting purity, sorrow, and mystery. The whiteness is juxtaposed with the "red earth," a warm, visceral tone, invigorated by the sunset, that evokes fertility and life, and the "grey-green clusters of leaves," a muted colour that suggests stillness

and restraint. A different green in the “dark, succulent green of bluebell sheaths” adds depth and richness. The painterly responsiveness to light is manifested in the rendering of the effects of light and shadow, capturing a transition from day into night. The twilight fills the space with a melancholic mood, but it is also a spiritual moment, “a holy communion of pure wild things” underneath the “light tracery of hazel” and the vault of mighty oaks. The scenery is not static; there are minute movements and energy hidden in the “light, tossing wood-anemones” and “merry-headed cowslip groups,” and a deep sense of change. The use of Christian religious language and imagery that transforms the woodland into a Gothic cathedral is not accidental; it embodies Lawrence’s rejection of the institutional authority and teachings of the Christian Church and his replacement of what he saw as a life-denying, “egoistic” Christian theology (“Crown” 297) with a ‘religion of life,’ a form of nature mysticism in which nature becomes a living temple and an embodiment of the mystery of life.

The vivid rendering of a visually rich and symbolically charged landscape illustrates Lawrence’s extraordinary feeling for nature and the *genius loci*, as well as his painterly bravura. As we shall see below, the same sensitivity, intelligent curiosity and openness towards new experiences allowed him to feel the unique character and energy in the overseas locations that he visited and lived in. Lawrence was never a mere tourist; like Cézanne, he sought to feel, know, and understand places profoundly, along with their histories and their inhabitants. Those that affected him deeply and stand out in his oeuvre include the Mediterranean, especially Italy and Sardinia, Australia, and North America, particularly Mexico and New Mexico. In *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), Lawrence conveys the curious interplay between the primordial qualities of the Mediterranean landscape and the lingering traces of ancient civilisations, continually reshaped by ongoing human presence and activity in places such as Cagliari, described in an ostensibly painterly style as “a strange, strange landscape: as if here the world left off,” a place with “[n]o fate. Left outside time and history” (57). This haunting, elemental quality perceived as “the strange, sinister spirit of the place” (57) makes the contemplation of the landscape a profoundly spiritual experience.

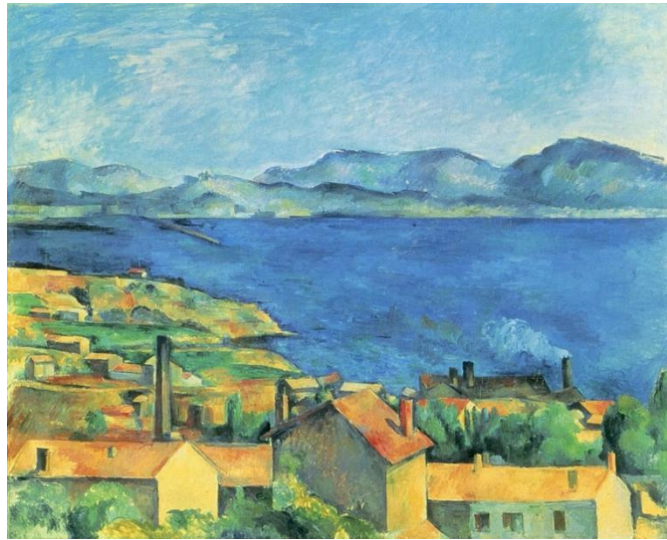
Lawrence observes and examines the wintry Sardinian scenery with a painter's eyes and seeks to translate the vision into prose:

There is a stream: actually a long tress of a water-fall pouring into a little gorge, and a stream-bed that opens a little, and shows a marvellous cluster of naked poplars away below. They are like ghosts. They have a ghostly, almost phosphorescent luminousness in the shadow of the valley, by the stream of water. If not phosphorescent, then incandescent: a grey, goldish-pale incandescence of naked limbs and myriad cold-glowing twigs, gleaming strangely. If I were a painter I would paint them: for they seem to have living, sentient flesh. And the shadow envelopes them. (84)

In this passage, Lawrence evokes the landscape through sensorial, almost hallucinatory imagery, again foregrounding the qualities of luminosity, texture and colour. He repeatedly attempts to find an exact term to describe the quality of the light, paying attention to the interplay of illumination and shadow and to the way light modulates colour. His visual writing is sustained by a rich repertoire of compound adjectives to render subtle shades of colour and qualities of light and texture, many of them of his own coinage. The creation of metaphorically rich compounds such as “pink-washed” (92), “blue-gloomy” (59), “golden-velveteen” (238), and “craggy-studded” (57) evokes the painter's act of mixing hues on a palette to achieve precise tonal effects. The imagery and colour vocabulary Lawrence employs to describe the “blue-shadowed, tawny-tangled” (116) mid-winter scenery seems to echo a wintry version of Cézanne's *Montagne Sainte-Victoire*.

The following analysis compares an example of Cézanne's visual representation of Mediterranean landscape with a literary one by Lawrence, focusing on their creative techniques and devices, including their work with colour, form and geometry, spatial organisation and achieving a balance between abstraction and representation.

Cézanne's painting *The Bay of Marseilles, View from L'Estaque* (ca. 1885) is one of a series of vistas capturing the village of L'Estaque near Marseille, France, painted at the beginning of his mature career in the mid-1880s. It is characterised, among others, by gentle, more diluted colour and brush strokes worked into the surface of the canvas.



Paul Cézanne: *The Bay of Marseilles, View from L'Estaque* (c. 1885)

A vivid contrast in colour, form and depth controls the painting. The canvas is structured into four main planes – the shoreline with the village in the forefront, painted in strong, earthy colours; the brilliantly blue sea filling the middle space; the hazy mountain range on the opposite shore and, finally, the luminous sky in the far background. The village architecture is strictly geometrical, with minimum detail and reduced border lines: the shapes are defined overwhelmingly by colour. The houses thus look both solid and elusive. The vegetation and the buildings and fields behind the village are also painted with short, sketchy brushstrokes, increasing the sense of abstraction. The painting is dominated by the strong dynamic contrast between the warm, earthy colours and geometrical shapes in the forefront, and the shapeless mass of deep-blue water in the middle of the painting. The unrefined outlines of the mountains on the far shore, rounded in contrast to the angular architecture, and the luminescent sky, retain some impressionist shimmer and add a mild sense of restlessness. The contrasts between the colour planes tempts the eye to travel between them, which almost generates an optical illusion of moving forms. Yet there is also movement within the planes and individual shapes, produced by using colour shades and

tonality in combination with short brush strokes, which creates a sense of gentle vibration and evocation of gentle waves on the sea and shiver of air in the atmosphere. The intensive sunlight permeates the luminously clear air, energizes the landscape and intensifies its colours. The shivery blueness dominating the upper part of the painting is juxtaposed with the warm earthy tones – oranges, yellows, and shaded reds on the buildings in the village, vivified by a dash of vermillion on the central roof, and the emerald green in the trees that provide lively accents suggesting hidden energy and vivacity. The warm hues of the village architecture are modulated by layering cooler tones – shades of blue, green, and grey – onto the surfaces of the orange and yellow walls. This chromatic interplay introduces a sense of atmospheric depth and spatial coherence. The bluish contours, moderately distributed, suggest depth and fusion between the planes, as if the village was being claimed by the natural elements in the background. The geometric regularity of the buildings introduces a structural rhythm, guiding the viewer's gaze across the canvas. There is slight distortion in perspective, visible in the roofs, walls and chimneys, that ushers in a sense of unrest and emphasises the materiality and plasticity of the objects. Finally, the bright vermillion accent of the central roof is repeated on a diminished scale in the far distance, on the roof of a shoreline cottage, where it contrasts with the blue surface of the lake in the background. This inconspicuous feature also imparts concealed tension.

All these qualities contribute to what Lawrence admired as a 'shiftiness' in Cézanne's landscapes:

In the best landscapes, we are fascinated by the mysterious *shiftiness* of the scene under our eyes, it shifts about as we watch it. And we realise, with a sort of transport, how intuitively *true* this is of landscape. It is *not* still. It has its own weird anima, and to our wide-eyed perception it changes like a living animal under our gaze. This is a quality that Cézanne sometimes got marvellously. ("Introduction" 214)

Lawrence notes this exceptional quality in Cézanne's landscapes: a certain non-static stillness; forms that are "[m]obile but come to rest" (214), revealing the painter's attempt to render the landscape's enduring

essence. What we see in the painting is a scenery filtered through the artist's vision, resulting in an abstraction achieved by the geometrical simplification and colour modulation that still preserves its vitality and sensuality.

The following extract from the chapter "The Spinner and the Monks" in *Twilight in Italy* (1916) is a manifestation of Lawrence's supremely painterly style and its affinity with Cézanne's painting techniques and intimate engagement with the subject. It demonstrates the descriptive bravura of his cinematic shifts of focus, precise attention to light and colour and selection of detail aimed at creating a dynamic that makes the portrayal feel alive. The viewer has just entered the sunlit platform of the San Tommaso church from a labyrinth of dark, narrow lanes:

It was another world, the world of the eagle, the world of fierce abstraction. It was all clear, overwhelming sunshine, a platform hung in the light. Just below were the confused, tiled roofs of the village, and beyond them the pale blue water, down below; and opposite, opposite my face and breast, the clear, luminous snow of the mountain across the lake, level with me apparently, though really much above.

...

There was a blood-red sail like a butterfly breathing down on the blue water, whilst the earth on the near side gave off a green silver smoke of olive trees, coming up and around the earth-coloured roofs.

...

Across, the heavy mountain crouched along the side of the lake, the upper half brilliantly white, belonging to the sky, the lower half dark and grim. So then, that is where heaven and earth are divided. From behind me, on the left, the headland swept down out of a great, pale-grey, arid height, through a rush of russet and crimson, to the olive smoke and the water of the level earth. And between, like a blade of the sky cleaving the earth asunder, went the pale blue lake, cleaving mountain from mountain with the triumph of the sky. (*Twilight* 104, 105)

Lawrence's description of the view overlooking a village and a lake surrounded by mountains uses similar imagery to Cézanne's *The Bay of Marseille*, with its full, intense colours and layered planes. Like in Cézanne's painting, the brightness of the sunlight does not blind the viewer but, on the contrary, increases lucidity and intensifies the colours. Lawrence's palette is similar to Cézanne's: it contains modulated hues,

such as pale grey, olive green or russet; cool whites and blues are equally juxtaposed with warm earth tones. They fill the scene in separate patches, creating clear patterns. Lawrence's landscape contains geometrical, diagrammatic shapes that are analogical to Cézanne's architectural patterns. The parallels include, in particular, the "confused, tiled roofs," evoking the same instability and deformity as the roofs of L'Estaque, and the lake that slices, "like a blade of sky," a horizontal intrusion just like the sea in Cézanne's painting.

The stylisation also gives an impression of weight, texture and movement, using a contrast between the solid, or even "heavy" earth, anchored by the rustic hues and compact surfaces, and atmospheric luminosity and tension. This juxtaposition lends the scene a very particular dynamic created by the contrast between the expansive radiance of the light-filled air space, "cleaving the earth asunder," and the concentric movements of the "headland sweep[ing] down through the rush of the russet and crimson." The use of pigment names as metonyms for coloured physical surfaces increases the level of structural abstraction and spatial complexity and, reinforced by the dynamic mimicry of brushstrokes in "sweep" and "rush," emulate the technique and activity of painting. The description has a precisely controlled spatial logic that manipulates the perspective to simulate the synchronicity of multiple viewpoints. This detachment, comparable to a painter's detachment from canvas and paints, creates a sense of abstraction foregrounded in Lawrence's text and also perceptible in Cézanne's paintings. In addition to painterly techniques and visual imagery, Lawrence uses rhetorical and literary devices such as metaphor and repetition to enhance the vividness and expressive quality of his text.

Like Cézanne's vision of the bay, Lawrence's text lures the reader-spectator into both visualising the scene and sharing the narrator's emotional and spiritual engagement. What the viewer's eye embraces is, despite the atmospheric quiver and latent tension, a landscape at peace with itself; a place infused with ancient tradition and history, conveying a profound sense of permanence and underlying order that makes the contemplation of the landscape and nature a spiritual experience. Whilst the spiritual dimension of Cézanne's paintings is irreligious, the

primordial spirit of Lawrence's landscape is again suffused with Christian imagery which, on the one hand, acknowledges the Christian tradition that shaped the local culture and the lives of the people, but, on the other hand, signals an alternative spirituality: "the world of fierce abstraction," associated with the Christian doctrine, is superseded by a different type of mystery, sustained by the solidity of "earth," clothed in olive groves, and the "confused" human world. The terrace with the church of San Tomasso, "suspended above the village," is likened by the narrator to the biblical Jacob's ladder, "the lowest step to heaven" (*Twilight* 104), that symbolises a communication route between heaven and earth, God and man. According to Krzysztof Bardski, the image of the ladder embodies a fundamental tension between the horizontal and the vertical, between stillness and motion – dichotomies that animate the landscapes of both Cézanne and Lawrence.

The stillness and permanence of the landscape is mirrored in the primordial appearance of an old spinner that the narrator encounters, "unobserved and unobserving" (105), at work by the church:

She was like a fragment of earth, she was a living stone of the terrace, sunbleached. . . . Her head was tied in a dark-red kerchief, but pieces of hair, like dirty snow, quite short, stuck out over her ears. . . . She was grey, and her apron, and her dress, and her kerchief, and her hands and her face, were all sun-bleached and sun-stained, greyey, bluey, brown, like stones and half-coloured leaves, sunny in their colourlessness.

...

Her eyes were clear as the sky, blue empyrean, transcendent.

...

She was herself the core and centre to the world, the sun, and the single firmament. She knew that I was an inhabitant of lands which she had never seen. But what of that! There were parts of her own body which she had never seen, which physiologically she could never see. They were none the less her own because she had never seen them. The lands she had not seen were corporate parts of her own living body, the knowledge she had not attained was only the hidden knowledge of her own self. She was the substance of the knowledge, whether she had the knowledge in her mind or not. (*Twilight* 105, 107)

Mirroring the colour scheme and stillness of the landscape, the old woman becomes the embodiment of ancient, selfless, earth-rooted consciousness, the primordial macrocosm. In this supremely Lawrentian

rendering, she may be recognised as the archetypal Great Mother, who, representing “places of regenerative power,” may take on the form of a landscape feature such a garden or a meadow, or a landscape as a whole (Lück 57). The spinner, using an ancient spinning method, “unseeing, but glancing from time to time, with a little unconscious attention, at the thread” (*Twilight* 106), strongly resembles the Great Mother as “the weaver of Fate and Destiny” (Lück 61). Nevertheless, placed next to the ancient church, with “her eyes . . . clear as the sky, empyrean, transcendent” (*Twilight* 106), she symbolises a point of convergence between pre-Christian, earth-based cosmology and Christian spirituality. The dark red colour of her kerchief ties may be read as an evocation of the blood of Christ spilled on the Cross. It echoes a small patch of red spotted previously on the lake in the form of a “blood-red sail like a butterfly breathing down on the blue water” and contrasting with “a green-silver smoke of olive-trees coming up and around the earth-coloured roofs” (106). These two flashes of red function much like the vermilion accents in Cézanne’s landscapes, serving as concentrated points of latent energy and life-force within an otherwise still composition. The comparison is reinforced by the butterfly metaphor, which introduces a sense of elusiveness and fugitive motion, suggesting that this vitality is transient, delicate, and only momentarily perceptible. Similarly to Cézanne, Lawrence mobilises colour and metaphor to animate the scene from within, allowing a subtle pulse of life to emerge through the landscape’s apparent tranquillity.

From the comparison between Cézanne’s *The Bay of Marseilles, Seen from L’Estaque* and the literary passage by Lawrence, several significant conclusions can be drawn, both about the nature of visual and verbal representation and about the shared aesthetic sensibilities of the two artists. Both works exhibit a painterly approach to landscape that emphasizes structure, clarity, and the interplay of elemental forces. Lawrence’s prose constructs the landscape through a series of vivid, colour-saturated images and movements that mirror Cézanne’s formal strategies. The lake in Lawrence’s text functions like Cézanne’s Bay: it forms a horizontal axis that divides and organizes the scene and, at the same time, symbolises a metaphysical boundary between earth and heaven.

Both artists employ abstraction using structural, frequently geometrical, elements and colour modulation, which endows the landscape with metaphysical meaning. Their works evoke both detachment from and intimate encounter with the environment. The comparison underscores Lawrence's extraordinary feeling for the landscape, highly developed visual sensibility, imagination and, finally, the capacity of his literary tongue to emulate visual art. His prose mimics the effects of painting through its use of imagery, metaphor, and compositional structure. His language does not merely describe the scene; it enacts it, allowing the reader to experience the landscape as a painter might – through light, colour, and form in motion.

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