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The Date of Composition of D. H. Lawrence's "Insouciance"

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The date of composition of D. H. Lawrence's journalistic article, "Insouciance," has remained largely under-examined within scholarly discourse on the author and his late engagement with popular journalism (1928–30). The year 1928 was pivotal in Lawrence's literary career: he completed some of his most renowned works, including the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the first draft of the poetry collection *Pansies*, and made a successful presence in the journalistic marketplace with an article titled "The 'Jeune Fille' Wants to Know" (published under the title "When She Asks 'Why?'" in the London *Evening News*. Intrigued by the prospect of writing a "four-pager now and then" (6*Letters*: 401) for popular journalism, Lawrence accepted an offer from Arthur E. Olley, the literary editor of the *Evening News*, to contribute four articles to the newspaper and sought Olley's suggestions on topics. Despite a willingness to adapt his journalistic persona for a broader readership, Lawrence found himself unable to produce an article on "Men Must be Master Again" under the pressure of a tight deadline imposed by Olley. It was under these circumstances that Lawrence wrote "Insouciance," a short piece in which he recounts an incident where the narrator finds himself reluctantly embroiled in a conversation about international politics across the balconies with an elderly English lady living in the adjacent hotel room. Lawrence used this piece to underscore women's preoccupation with abstractions rather than appreciating the more tangible physical world. Though "Insouciance" was the first piece in a series of four articles commissioned by the London *Evening News*, none of Lawrence's extant correspondence makes reference to its composition. The only direct reference made by Lawrence to "Insouciance" appears in a letter dated 27 June 1928, in which he enclosed the manuscript of the article to Nancy Pearn, the manager of the Magazines Department at the London office of his literary agent, Curtis Brown. Lawrence instructed Pearn to have the article typed and sent to Olley (6: 438). "Insouciance" was promptly accepted and published in the *Evening News* on 12 July under a revised title, likely modified by Olley, "Over-Earnest Ladies." Lawrence did not mention this article again in his correspondence until c. 24 November 1928. In a letter to Achsah Brewster – who, along with her husband Earl, accompanied the Lawrences for the majority of their journey to the Alps from May to October 1928 – Lawrence noted that "The *Atlantic Monthly* put our little old ladies of Chexbres in its contributors column this month – Nov." (7: 28).

Existing examinations of "Insouciance" either propose an estimated date of completion or solely reference its publication date. For example, in *D. H. Lawrence: Dying Game, 1922–1930*, David Ellis only uses the "Appendix" section to suggest the article was completed "by 27 June 1928" (559), the date on which Lawrence sent the manuscript to Pearn. James T. Boulton, the editor of *Late Essays and Articles (LEA)* of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence*, adopts a more cautious approach. He refrains from specifying the article's date of composition in the volume's "Chronology" section (*LEA* xiii) and circumvents making direct speculations in the editorial preamble to the article. Instead, Boulton states that "Lawrence felt unable to provide [Olley] with a piece on the topic proposed but, having already finished 'Insouciance,' he sent the manuscript to Nancy Pearn on 27 June" (*LEA* 94). Hence, determining a more precise composition period, if not the exact date, of "Insouciance" is crucial for potential future research on the compositional background of Lawrence's four articles commissioned by the *Evening News*, the possible intertextuality between these articles, and the broader

topic of how Lawrence built up his journalistic persona for a wider readership when he decided to make a frequent presence in the journalistic marketplace in 1928.

The determination of the precise composition date of “Insouciance” is facilitated through a comprehensive examination of textual, archival, and biographical sources. The Brewsters’ recollection, published in 1934, asserts that “‘Insouciance’ describes an incident at this [Grand] hotel” (171) at Chexbres-sur-Vevey in the Swiss canton of Vaud. Substantiated by the aforementioned Lawrence’s letter to them, the Brewsters’ testimony confirms that “Insouciance” is a factual recounting of Lawrence’s personal experience. A comparative analysis of the article’s manuscript and Lawrence’s extant correspondence provides more conclusive evidence that he wrote “Insouciance” in one continuous session on 27 June 1928. The manuscript, housed at the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas, Austin (HRC DHL Box 8 Folder 4), shows a variation in ink-color from gradually fading to clear again, indicating that Lawrence only refilled his fountain pen once during the composition process. This singular refill occurred after the completion of the first paragraph on the manuscript’s third page, which ends in Lawrence’s description of the old lady who “snatched [him] up like some ogress, and swept [him] off into the empty desert spaces of right and wrong, politics, fascism and the rest” (LEA 96). Though the archival evidence of a single ink refill does not entirely preclude the possibility that Lawrence composed this article either in a single sitting before 27 June or in two segments across multiple days, biographical evidence provides incontrovertible confirmation. In “Insouciance”, the description of weather following the opening paragraph, which notes “this afternoon being hot and thundery” (LEA 95), is almost identical to Lawrence’s wording in his 27 June letter to Pearn, in which he accounted that the weather was “hot here – now thundery” (6: 438) and enclosed the manuscript of “Insouciance”. In a separate letter to Koteliansky on the same day, Lawrence provided a similar description, noting it was “mixed – was very hot – then thundered – now is cool” (6: 437). Considering that Lawrence kept a consistent record of the weather in Chexbres in his correspondence and this was the first meteorological fluctuation recorded, it can be conclusively asserted that Lawrence composed “Insouciance” on 27 June.¹

While both letters are dated 27 June 1928, it is crucial to underscore that the structure of the *Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, which positions Lawrence’s letter to Koteliansky (6: 437) prior to the one to Pearn (6: 438), could potentially lead readers to presume that Lawrence wrote the letters in this particular order. However, Lawrence’s own records suggest otherwise: the difference in his descriptions between “hot here – now thundery” in the letter to Pearn, and “very hot – then thundered – now is cool” (6: 437) in the one to Koteliansky, implies that Lawrence wrote the two letters during separate time intervals of the day, with the one to Pearn being written first. A more comprehensive analysis of archival evidence strongly suggests that Lawrence had already dispatched the letter to Pearn earlier that day before writing the one to Koteliansky, as the postmark on the latter shows “28.VI.28.” Additionally, biographical evidence substantiates this presumption as in the letter to Pearn, Lawrence made no reference of the outing with Aldous and Maria Huxley to the Château de Chillon, located approximately ten miles from Chexbres. Despite the site’s historical connection with Lord Byron, who visited it and published “The Prisoner of Chillon” in 1816, it appears to have failed to captivate Lawrence, as he conveyed to Koteliansky that “this afternoon Maria motored us to the Castle of Chillon – but those show-places bore me.” As a prolific epistolarian, Lawrence is known for sharing aspects of his life, particularly his sentiments, to his correspondents, and Pearn was among his closest contacts during his late years, both professionally and personally. The only conceivable rationale for Lawrence not expressing his dissatisfaction about the castle trip to Pearn is that, by the time he completed the letter, he had not yet embarked on the journey to Chillon – Lawrence either sent the letter to Pearn before departing for or en route to Chillon. Drawing upon biographical and archival evidence, the composition time of “Insouciance” can be more precisely pinpointed to the early afternoon of 27 June 1928.

Precisely identifying the composition date of “Insouciance” is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it reinforces the close correlation and the potential intertextuality between “Insouciance” and “Master in His Own House,” the second of the four articles for the

Evening News, which Lawrence sent to Pearn for typing on the following day. Existing scholarship predominantly associates the latter with “Matriarchy,” the third article for the *Evening News*, composed almost two weeks later. As Andrew Harrison points out, this association arises primarily because both “Master in His Own House” and “Matriarchy” (published under the title “–And If Women Were Supreme..”) “contain wry reflections on contemporary gender roles of a kind guaranteed to appeal to a popular readership” (366). Establishing 27 June 1928 as the composition date of “Insouciance,” along with the understanding that “Master in His Own House” was composed between 27–28 June, underscores the potential for examining the intertextuality between them and the necessity to scrutinize this compositional period. Secondly, while “Insouciance” serves as a compensatory piece, it shows Lawrence took popular journalism seriously and valued the opportunity to discuss topics that are popular among the broader audience. Instead of hastily composing an article on the suggested topic, “Man Must be Master Again” – an idea Olley noted as being “much in tune with what many a man is thinking nowadays” (HRC DHL Box 36 Folder 6) – Lawrence used “Insouciance” as a preliminary exercise to articulate his gender politics and to hone his journalistic persona for the general reading public. This perspective diverges from the conventional academic narrative that predominantly links Lawrence’s journalistic writings to financial rewards; instead, a comprehensive examination of archival, textual, and biographical sources of this compositional period reveals prospects of further enquiry. Buxi Duan’s innovative reading of Lawrence’s *Pansies* notebook employs archival materials and biographical evidence to establish connections between seemingly irrelevant works yet composed in the same time period, thereby offering a new perspective on investigating the intertextuality between works across genres. Determining the date of composition of “Insouciance” not only offers a new lens through which to interpret this specific article, but also demonstrates the feasibility of applying Duan’s methodology of cross-sectional reading to the examination of Lawrence’s late journalistic writings and their potential intertextual connections with his works in other genres, underlining the necessity of scholarly focus on this long-neglected domain in the field of D. H. Lawrence studies.

Note

1. According to Lawrence’s extant correspondence since his arrival at the Grand Hotel on 17 June, the weather persisted to be “rather cold” (6: 426) and was gradually getting “warmer” (6: 430) until 23 June, when Lawrence first documented it became “very hot” (6: 433) and suitable for “sun-baths.” The warm spell endured for days, with the first meteorological fluctuation recorded on 27 June.

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