There is some debate as to whether or not Lawrence's short stories should be considered Modernist. Dominic Head, for instance, argues that Lawrence's "work in the genre is distinct from the modernist short story proper" because it draws upon the more traditional plotted narrative of the previous century.\(^{24}\) However, this view applies techniques used by other Modernist writers to evaluate Lawrence's stories rather than considering the significant contributions of Lawrence's own innovations to the diversity of Modernism.\(^{25}\) As Gregory Ulmer argues, Lawrence's approach was "a radical, informed effort to convert modernism to his own personal ethic of art" and thus to criticize Lawrence for perceived conservatism denies "Lawrence the recognition he deserves as a contributor to the vanguard theory of his day."\(^{26}\) Thornton explains that Lawrence rejected certain techniques associated with Modernism such as Joyce's use of stream of consciousness because he felt it identified "the self with the mind's conception of the self".\(^{27}\) Lawrence advocated a different understanding of consciousness that expresses its physical vibrancy and mutability. In this sense Lawrence might be considered as a writer who presents a distinct challenge to the predominantly visual medium of film. In fact, Lawrence appears to have been quite resistant to the emerging art of moving pictures, which marks a rare point of agreement between the author and many of his Modernist contemporaries.

**Modernists on film**

The majority of authors and critics of the Modernist era generally viewed contemporary film, which at that point in time tended towards the populist melodrama, as rather crass and no substitute for the refined arts of literature or theatre, which they feared it would desecrate.\(^{28}\) Cartell


\(^{25}\) Fiona Becket explains that "Lawrence is central to our understanding of modernism although many view him in practice and temperament as a figure at a distinct remove from intellectuals and practitioners like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf, who themselves embodied radically different approaches to their historical moment" (*The Complete Critical Guide to D.H. Lawrence*, 14).


\(^{28}\) This book adheres to Michael Bell's view that Modernism's "peak period in the Anglo-American context lay between 1913 and 1925" (*The Metaphysics of Modernism*, 9).
and Whelehan explain that such views were partly elitist in nature because the cinema was perceived as entertainment for the masses. Indeed, in 1911, 78% of the cinema-going audience consisted of the working classes with the middle classes “voting with their feet, refusing to morally or intellectually contaminate themselves by attending ‘the pictures’.” Even writers who wrote for the cinema during the Modernist period, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Aldous Huxley and Joseph Conrad were described as having done so “out of avarice and with self-loathing.” One of the most notable Modernists to have decried the cinema was Virginia Woolf who thought that it was degrading with readers replaced by “savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures.” Surprisingly, she was invited to contribute to the journal Close Up, an early periodical (1927-33) devoted to serious film criticism. Unsurprisingly, she declined. A columnist from the same journal ventured that it might also be a good idea to approach Lawrence for an amusing contribution to their monthly. Writing to the editor she wryly suggested, “You know that Lawrence loathes films? Foams about them. I’m sure he’d foam for you.” Like Woolf, Lawrence never wrote for Close up either and, in fact, considering how much he wrote about everything else that was happening around him in early twentieth-century culture, he wrote very little on film. Yet, much has been written about Lawrence’s hostility to this fledgling art form.

30 Ibid., 44.
Lawrence’s perceived view of film and the cinema has been pieced together from various biographical accounts, the opinions voiced by the characters in his fiction and a couple of poems and essays. According to David Ellis’ biography of Lawrence, a cinema provided warmth and shelter between trains for Lawrence and his friends Earl and Achsah Brewster when they were travelling through Strasbourg in October of 1928. They saw Fred Niblo’s 1925 adaptation of *Ben Hur* and the results of this visit have been reported in numerous accounts of Lawrence’s attitude towards film because they are seen to epitomize Lawrence’s extreme revulsion to the cinema experience:

Lawrence did not much like films (especially when they involved close-ups of kissing), but he was usually tolerant of them. On this occasion, he was so nauseated by what Achsah Brewster describes as the “falsity” of the action (“doves fluttering around baby-faced dolls, brutal Romans accursed with hearts of stone, galleys of inhuman slaves”), and the way the open-mouthed public accepted it all as true, that he had to leave after half an hour.34

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the specific examples provided here do not refer to the medium of film *per se* but to the affected melodramas that plagued the cinemas in the early years and the guileless response of the masses therein.

In several of Lawrence’s fictional works such as the short story “Tickets Please”, the novels *The Lost Girl* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and the poems, “When I went to the Film” and “Let Us Be Men”, the characters and narratives bemoan aspects of film and cinema such as its mechanical lifelessness and inadequacy and criticize its pornographic appeal to the eye, its intrusion into real physical relationships between real people, its condescension, its Americanism, its stock characters, stereotypes and lack of sophistication and its alarming ability to mesmerize, pacify and idiotize. In the essay “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, Lawrence responds to the accusations of pornography levelled at his novel by

---


countering that it should be the “counterfeit emotion” of film which is considered pornographic. He even goes as far as to denounce the “Close-up kisses on the film”, as exciting “men and women to secret and separate masturbation” in his essay “Pornography and Obscenity”.

Neil Sinyard describes the hostility Lawrence felt towards mechanized mass entertainment, “which he saw as symptomatic of the mass industrialisation of society which he so opposed in his novels” and goes on to propose that “One should not be surprised if Lawrence’s work in some way was not simply un-cinematic but anti cinematic”. Indeed, an argument could be made that much of Lawrence’s work resists a purely audio-visual representation because his prose is not only so inward looking but also loaded with references to bodily sensations – touch is a recurring and central theme in much of his writing. In stories such as “Odour of Chrysanthemums” (1914), “The Blind Man” (1918), “Hadrian [You Touched Me]” (1920) and “The Horse-Dealer’s Daughter” (1921), for example, the physical contact between the key characters, and their internal spontaneous responses to it, forms the pivotal moment of the tales. However, to argue that the feelings conveyed by Lawrence’s work, or those of any other great writer, could not be filmed is to reduce film to its descriptive audial and visual components. Anyone who has ever been moved by a film will know that film is much greater than the sum of its parts just as a great work of prose or poetry is much more than the words on paper. In fact, film, and especially cinema, is a highly visceral medium that can transport the viewer beyond the perceived sound and vision through the skilful synthesis of them, which for a period of time immerses her/him within the reality of the unfolding story using an array of cinematic techniques, which will be discussed in this book.

George Bluestone has argued that Modernist literature in general is less frequently adapted because it “has tended to retreat more and more from external action to internal thought, from plot to character, from social to psychological realities.” Bluestone’s views on this have undoubtedly contributed to the prevailing notion that the works of high

---

37 Sinyard, Filming Literature, 47.
38 George Bluestone, Novels into Film, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957, 46.
Modernism resist filmic adaptation, a view supported by the fact that pre-twentieth-century works are much more commonly adapted. However, it could be argued that to suggest Modernism is un-filmable is just another manifestation of prejudice towards film, which is deemed incapable of tackling the most literary of literature, high Modernism. Instead, it could be countered that Modernist works are less frequently adapted because, as Eisenstein suggests, the evolution of the story-telling conventions of film and the realist novel are more closely aligned. There is no reason why an imaginative filmmaker should not be able to find ways to convey a character’s sensations or thoughts or even certain stylistic traits of the source-texts through the multi-track medium of film. This is a point that Bluestone himself concedes when he explains that film “through the process of editing, [has] discovered a metaphoric quality of its own”, which can be used to convey the inner states of characters and even evoke certain aspects of literary style. In fact, despite the challenges presented by literary Modernism and what Sinyard believes are Lawrence’s best efforts to make his work un-filmable, it has been filmed, and many times over.

Lawrence’s apparent disdain for film and the cinema reflected the timbre of his times and Lawrence’s characteristically oppositional attitude, which is so frequent in his rhetorical style. Jaffe-Young reports, rather hopefully, that there were a few unguarded moments when the author shows that he was not ignorant of the young medium’s potential or completely dismissive of its effect on the literature of his time. She cites his review of John Dos Passos’ experimental novel *Manhattan Transfer*, which Lawrence admired for its “affinities with cinema, describing the work as being ‘like a movie picture with an intimacy of different stories and no close-ups and no writing in between’”. Furthermore, much of Lawrence’s own work could often be described as “cinematic” as will be illustrated throughout this book. For example, the opening of ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’, which surveys a sweeping vista of a blighted pastoral

---

41 Bluestone, *Novels into Film*, 24.
landscape in the manner of a long tracking shot, and then cuts to the main character, Elizabeth, the signalled subject of the tale. Similarly, the intercutting between parallel scenes of the chief protagonists in “The Horse-Dealer's Daughter”, which reaches its dramatic peak when they come together in the same frame. The climax of “The Rocking-Horse Winner” is rendered in the same way as a film might use dramatic tension between the audial and visual as the mother of the tale seeks to find the source of a mysterious sound, which is only revealed to the character and the reader, to be her son on a rocking-horse, when she turns on the light to illuminate this pivotal scene.

As this brief overview suggests, Lawrence's short stories were highly significant not only in terms of the author's contribution to literary Modernism but as a significant quantity of his literary output and the films it prompted. It is thus surprising to find them so frequently subordinated to the longer works in both the criticism of his prose and the film adaptations. There is little reason to believe that this situation has changed significantly in recent years, since among three recently published collections of critical essays only one discusses the tales. Similarly, the criticism of Lawrence on film has tended to focus on the longer feature-length films, while ignoring the short films and television adaptations despite the fact that half of all the screen adaptations of Lawrence's life and works are non-feature-length films of short stories. This is because most of the short film adaptations of Lawrence's works remain unreleased and unseen. It is hoped that this book will play its part in beginning to address this situation by bringing to light a number of rare short Lawrence adaptations, discussing them as invaluable contributions to the critical discourse on the author.

43 All of the following critics agree that within Lawrence criticism, his short stories remain secondary to the novels: Cushman, D.H. Lawrence at Work, 76; Harris, The Short Fiction of D.H. Lawrence, x; Gavin, “Marginalization and Colonization”, 136.


45 The appendix to this chapter lists 28 films of Lawrence's short stories, which are less than an hour long compared to 15 feature-length adaptations of novels.