

Rananim

Vol 15, No. 2, 2008

Lawrence and Gertler

By Jonathan Long

Introduction

Dorothy Brett, Ottoline Morrell, Gilbert and Mary Cannan, Aldous Huxley, Edward Marsh, Katherine Mansfield (and thereby John Middleton Murry), Gordon Campbell, S.S. Koteliensky, St. John Hutchinson, Monty Shearman and Dr. Andrew Morland of Mundesley Sanatorium in Norfolk. Those considering this list may think it relates to the life of Lawrence; in fact all were known to Mark Gertler as well and what follows demonstrates how they impacted on them in different ways. I am going to start with a short biography of Gertler (for which I am in part indebted to the excellent Camden Arts Centre catalogue), followed by some pictures illustrating the very different styles he adopted. I am then going to look at the similarities between Lawrence and Gertler as well as the differences. I will examine the occasions when their lives crossed. I will conclude with Lawrence's use of Gertler and his pictures in Lawrence's own work.

Outline biography

Mark Gertler was born in 1891 of poor Polish immigrant parents and grew up in a densely populated Jewish area of east London. At the age of 15 he started art classes at the Regent Street Polytechnic, paying his fees by working at a nearby stained glass works, a style later reflected in his art.

Between 1908 and 1912 the Jewish Educational Aid Society helped finance his training at the Slade School of Fine Art. After initial

loneliness he became accepted through his skills both as artist and mimic. Christopher Nevinson became an intimate friend and introduced him to new student, Dora Carrington. They had a lengthy correspondence through their troubled relationship.

At the Slade Gertler was considered the best draughtsman since Augustus John (although not producing the mystical statements of Augustus John in the 1890s) and won many prizes plus the Slade scholarship. He was an habitu  of the Caf  Royal and rapidly got to know other artists and styles.

Roger Fry's two post-impressionist exhibitions showing pictures by Matisse, Picasso, C zanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin among others had a great impact on Gertler. In December 1912 he had a joint exhibition with John Currie, which was well received. Through him he met Edward Marsh, who through their relationship bought about a dozen of his pictures. Other financial support and patronage came from the likes of barristers Montague Shearman and St John Hutchinson. Marsh introduced Gertler to his friends, including Rupert Brooke, Katherine Mansfield and Gilbert Cannan. In 1916 Cannan published *Mendel*, the fictional account of the lives of Gertler and Currie. Currie in turn introduced Gertler to Ottoline Morrell, who helped him sell his picture *The Fruit Sorters* to the Contemporary Art Society, one of thirty it acquired.

Gertler was often very anxious because of his lack of money and regularly borrowed from family and friends. This resulted in an inability to experiment as much as he would have liked, as he had to produce more saleable work to repay his debts. From November 1914 he was receiving  10 a month from Marsh in return for a right of first refusal on his work. His overheads would also presumably be lower when he stayed at Garsington, which he did for most summers between 1915 and 1927. Here he was much appreciated and seemed genuinely happy as a photo of him with Aldous Huxley and Brett shows. This of course extended his acquaintance with the right sort of people quite considerably. At the same time it no doubt underlined his pacifist views and meant

he felt obliged to drop the support of Edward Marsh, private secretary to Winston Churchill, which he could little afford to do.

In 1915 Gertler was elected to the London Group of younger artists and contributed three works to the November show including *The Creation of Eve*, the controversy over which I shall refer to later. The following year his *Gilbert Cannan at his Mill* was included. He had become a friend of Cannan and like Lawrence and Kot (through whom Gertler knew Gordon Campbell) visited his mill at Cholesbury in Hertfordshire. Cannan had married JM Barrie's wife and she brought with her the black and white Newfoundland dog in the picture, the Nana of *Peter Pan*. Also in 1916 Gertler produced his best-known picture *Merry-Go-Round*. As he wrote in April that year 'I live in a constant state of over-excitement, so much do my work and conception thrill me. It is almost too much for me and I am always feeling rather ill. Sometimes after a day's work I can hardly walk'. Even the very hard working Lawrence urged him to do less to avoid damaging his health. The picture was included in the London Group exhibition of May 1917, which was moved because the gallery did not want to show pictures by conscientious objectors. Indeed Gertler was advised against showing such clearly pacifist work.

The dreaded call-up papers were received by Gertler in February 1918 but following an appeal organised by Hutchinson and Shearman he was excused service because of his Polish origins and conscientious objection. Also at this time he attacked Lytton Strachey in the street in London. He was uncontrollably jealous after Strachey began living with Carrington. She married Ralph Partridge and their exchanges of letters became infrequent.

In 1919 Gertler moved into Dorothy Brett's house in Hampstead. He had met her at the Slade through Carrington and kept the room she provided for him rent-free for several years. He introduced her to Lawrence in 1915, having insisted he take her to tea at Lawrence and Frieda's house in the Vale of Health in Hampstead.

In 1920 he showed the first signs of TB and stayed for a while at a sanatorium in Scotland following a collapse. Financially things became easier though as the Goupil Gallery was showing his work regularly and made monthly payments to him. Indeed in 1922 to 1924 and in 1926 there were exhibitions of his work, the 1922 one including paintings of ceramic figures. TB was never far away though and the illness that killed Katherine Mansfield in 1923 and Lawrence in 1930 gave Gertler a prolonged stay under Dr. Andrew Morland at Mundesley Sanatorium in Norfolk in 1925 plus further visits in 1929 and 1936.

Leicester Galleries took over Gertler's work in 1927 and held exhibitions every other year from 1928. By the third day of the first exhibition he had sold £700 worth of pictures, leaving him with no debt to the gallery. However he was becoming increasingly depressed about his work. Comparing himself to Matisse and Picasso he wrote: 'What a rough, clumsy peasant they make me feel! What an everyday vision is mine compared with theirs!...Of course I contemplate death, over and over again. Sometimes it even seems the logical solution, for I frankly confess it, I cannot live without that purpose – to create real work!'

In 1930 Gertler married Marjorie Hodgkinson, a Slade graduate 10 years younger than him, and in 1932 their son Luke was born. After that the rest of his life was beset with problems. He had begun teaching at the Westminster Technical Institute to supplement his income, increasingly threatened because of the economic depression. Following the collapse of their fur business in 1930 his brothers could no longer help support him (see 1933 photo of him at:

http://www.mantex.co.uk/graphics/mark_gertler_1.jpg) The Leicester Galleries shows of 1932 and 1934 were unsuccessful, although the young Anthony Blunt, otherwise a harsh critic of Gertler's work, was appreciative of the 1934 *Mandolinist*.

Between 1933 and 1936 Gertler travelled in France and Spain but had insufficient funds to settle there. In summer 1936 he was at Mundesley Sanatorium again and attempted suicide.

The catalogue to the 1937 exhibition had a complimentary introduction by Aldous Huxley and his pictures sold well. But events in Europe upset him deeply and the consequential threat of closure of the Westminster Technical Institute depressed him, so dependent on it was he as his main source of income. His great supporter Ottoline Morrell died in April 1938.

In 1939 the Lefevre Galleries held an exhibition of his work but it was a commercial failure with only two pictures sold. Edward Marsh had begun to buy Gertler's work again in 1923 but was now saying he could not understand his new work. As Gertler wrote to him on 11th May 1939: 'The trouble is that I can never *set out* to paint to please. My greatest spiritual pleasure in life is to paint just as I feel *impelled* to do *at the time*.' Words that could have been written by so many artists who are only now fully appreciated. In May Gertler visited Marjorie in Paris, where she was studying painting. He then returned to London and made two attempts at suicide. The second, in his garden studio on 23rd June 1939, was successful.

Changing styles

His pictures reflect an obsession with painting and the following show his development as a representational artist through different themes and stylistic periods, including a gipsy gaudiness, an element of stained glass window imagery, and a poster or 2D effect:

- First of all the talented draftsman with psychological insight – *Study of a Girl's Head* 1911
<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/collection/advsearch/objdisp/index.html?irn=1024&QueryPage=%2Fcollection%2Fsearch%2Findex.html&QueryName=BasicQuery&QueryTerms=gertler&StartAt=1&QueryOption=all&all=Sum>

- [maryData%7CAdmWebMetadata&Submit=Search](#)), *Self Portrait* 1909
(<http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/S/selfportraituk/images/npgportraits/5431.jpg>)
- Then many pictures of Jewish people - especially use of his mother, an echo of Lawrence in his writings – *The Artist's Mother* 1911
(http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/N/N05/N05557_7.jpg), *The Artist's Mother* 1913
(http://www.swanseaheritage.net/img/article/60x60/000406_01779.jpg), *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* 1924, *Jewish Family* 1913
(<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=5125&searchid=9690>), *Rabbi and His Grandchild*, *Rabbi and Rabbitz'in* 1911
(http://www.artfund.org/images/artwork/5050_C.jpg), *Talmudic Discussion* 1911
(http://www.thelogician.net/images/3_rabbis.jpg)
 - There were several references to Cézanne – *Apples in a Bag* 1925 (<http://www.artfund.org/artwork/8479/apples-in-a-bag>)
 - He occasionally employed a poster style– *The Fruit Sorters* 1914
(http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/exh_gfx_en/ART14085.html), and *Merry Go Round* 1916, which I shall refer to later
 - Although very much based in London he had a love of nature – *The Pigeon House* 1920
(<http://www.artfund.org/artwork/6199/the-pigeon-house>) and *The Fruit Sorters*.
 - Several pictures echo Renoir – *The Servant Girl* 1923
(<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=5121&searchid=9690>), *Sleeping Nude* 1928
(<http://www.artfund.org/artwork/5172/sleeping-nude>) and *Supper* 1928
(<http://www.artknowledgenews.com/files2008/MarkGertlerSupper.jpg>) , the model for which was Natalie Denny, who died in 2007 aged 98, ironically Randolph Churchill's last love

- He referred to the formal language of eighteenth century artists such as Gainsborough – *The Coster Family on Hampstead Heath* 1924 can usefully be compared with Thomas Gainsborough's picture of *Mr and Mrs Andrews* from about 1750. Both sets of subjects appear looking very formal in an outdoor, parkland, setting, one owning and controlling all they survey and the other in a public park, but both dressed up for a sitting that clearly took place in a studio and not outdoors. The models for Gertler's picture appear in other works of his, more revealing of the Cockney market they would have been familiar with, and thus making a social comment more strongly for those familiar with his other work
- His visits to see pictures by Picasso is evident in such works as *Mandolinist* 1934 (<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=5129&searchid=11394>) and *The Artist's Wife* 1933 (http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/exh_gfx_en/ART14085.html)
- A phase of his career included paintings of ceramic objects – *The Dutch Doll* 1926 (http://www.virtualmuseum.info/art/ag_20th/gertler.asp), *The Basket of Fruit* 1925
- and classical images were involved later on – *Violin and Bust* 1934 (<http://www.artfund.org/artwork/6198/violin-and-bust>), *Three Graces* 1923 (<http://www.boundarygallery.com/gertler/graces.html>), *Classical Profile* 1933 (<http://www.bonhams.com/cgi-bin/public.sh/pubweb/publicSite.r?sContinent=EUR&screen=lotdetails&iSaleItemNo=2513209&iSaleNo=11955&sServer=http://images1.bonhams.com/&sPath=2005-04/22/94224440-1-2.jpg>), *Clytie and the Melon* 1929.

Threads of similarities

The list of friends and acquaintances in common included in my introduction is revealing in terms of the life experiences of Gertler and Lawrence. Gertler knew Brett, Gilbert Cannan (*Gilbert Cannan and his Mill* 1916 see http://www.artfund.org/images/artwork/2330_12998_C.jpg) and Kot well enough to paint them. Aspects of their backgrounds and some of their personal attributes are often similar.

Both were very local ‘artists’ in their early career, Gertler absorbed local colour, the fruit and fish he would have seen in the East London markets (represented in his pictures *The Fruit Sorters* 1914 and the *Coster Family on Hampstead Heath* 1924), the people in his pictures often Jews from his neighbourhood. In Lawrence there was the ‘countryside of my heart’.

Both had a love of Cézanne as we saw with *Apples in a Bag* 1925. Compare Lawrence’s Cézanne-inspired pictures such as *Two Apples* (1910) and *A Ginger Jar and Oranges* (1910). As he wrote in *Introduction To These Paintings*: ‘But Cézanne’s apples are a real attempt to let the apple exist in its own separate entity, without transfusing it with personal emotion. Cézanne’s great effort was, as it were, to shove the apple right away from him, and let it live of itself’.

Their chosen careers were almost unknown in the background they grew up in, with Lawrence’s father famously hostile to Lawrence’s writing career. They both became well known at least partly through their contact with and recognition by the upper class intelligentsia and Society figures e.g. Ottoline Morrell, whose home Garsington Manor became a refuge for pacifists during the First World War and was a particular favourite retreat of Gertler’s. His visits there were of course far more numerous than Lawrence’s, particularly in view of the latter’s falling out with Ottoline Morrell following her appearance as Hermione in *Women in Love*. Lawrence played much more of a fringe role in the Bloomsbury Group than did Gertler.

Lawrence was brought up in an ugly mining community that he hated but although Gertler was brought up in a working class background in poverty too, he liked London and was always an East End boy. They both loved the countryside though and Gertler wrote to Dora Carrington saying ‘I love all the beautiful things that grow and the sunshine most passionately! I want so much to introduce all these things into the backgrounds of my pictures’ The result was *The Fruit Sorters*.

Both had connections in common, especially through Garsington, with Ottoline, Kot, Brett, Marsh, Aldous Huxley, Katherine Mansfield and other I have named. They needed these as they both suffered from a shortage of money. They both had a need for patronage – Gertler had Marsh and Thomas Balston; Lawrence had Ottoline, - and both were very dependent on loans or favours from friends and family, certainly until *Lady Chatterley* brought Lawrence relative wealth, sadly too late for him to derive much benefit from himself.

Lawrence and Gertler both had a mixed reception. For example, Blunt criticised Gertler for ‘vulgarity’; Lawrence was criticised for vulgarity of a different sort. They were original and controversial – Gertler’s *The Creation of Eve* and *Merry Go Round*, which I shall be examining later, and with Lawrence *Lady Chatterley*, *Pansies*, *The Rainbow*, the paintings exhibition at the Warren Gallery in 1929 and so on.

Both were close to their mothers and married following difficult relationships with women – Gertler’s tormented love life with Carrington, Lawrence’s with Jessie. There are echoes of Gertler not having the relationship with Carrington he wanted (partly because of her absorption with Lytton Strachey) and Lawrence’s dealing with Helen Corke after her loss of Herbert Macartney, reflected in *The Trespasser*. As Gertler wrote to Carrington on 1st July 1915, ‘You are the sort of person with whom one never gets beyond a certain point of intimacy, or if one for a moment oversteps the boundary line, one finds that you have immediately

rushed back, leaving one alone gaping'. There is though no equivalent of Lawrence's rewarding relationship with Frieda in Gertler's life.

Both Lawrence and Gertler were conscientious objectors – Gertler was served with call up papers but excused to his delight because of his Polish family background. Lawrence of course was made to suffer because of his marriage to the German-born Frieda and adapted his wartime experiences in Cornwall for the *Nightmare* chapter of *Kangaroo*. Gertler wrote to Carrington of the war in the letter I just quoted from, 'I expect I shall be dragged into this wretched war, before it's all over but I shall keep out of it as long as I possibly can... How I shall hate it if it spoils my life and prevents me from carrying on my work. How hateful it would be to lose one's life, or even be maimed for life, through a purpose in which one has no sort of belief'. They each of course spent varying amounts of time at Garsington, that refuge for pacifists. Not surprisingly then they both described the futility of war – Gertler in *Merry-Go-Round*, Lawrence in so much of what he wrote around the time of the First World War.

For different reasons both men taught, Gertler (from financial need) at Westminster Technical College, Lawrence as the start of his working life at Davidson Road School Croydon. As strong and interesting characters both featured or were parodied in the books of their contemporaries – Gertler in Gilbert Cannan's *Mendel*, and the painter Gombauld in Aldous Huxley's satire on Garsington life *Crome Yellow*. Lawrence appeared as Rampion in Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, as Kingham in his *Two or Three Graces*, as Daniel Rayner in Compton Mackenzie's *South Wind* and his *West Wind* in the *Four Winds of Love* cycle and as Rico in Hilda Doolittle's *Bid Me to Live*

Both were passionate men. Lawrence needed to write and Gertler needed to paint. As he told Edward Marsh, 'I only want to arrange my life... [in order to] give birth one after the other to the pictures which are fighting in me to come out'. Both were 'artists' in widest

sense of word, particularly Lawrence who applied himself to so many different modes of expression, including of course painting. It is difficult not to believe that all this took its toll. Both men died in their forties and both had TB – Gertler spending a lot of time in sanatoriums and Lawrence travelling widely to more suitable climates for his health.

Differences:

Looking at their differences, in terms of their general background, Gertler came from a cultural minority whereas Lawrence of course did not. Lawrence was childless, although Frieda's separation from her children and later relationship with them played an important part in his life. Gertler had one son, Luke. It may be that the TB they both suffered from would have ended his life anyway but the comfort of a family did not keep at bay the mental illness that did end it.

Gertler disliked commissions whereas Lawrence was at times quite prepared to write for money, witness his allowing Edward Garnett to make numerous changes to *Sons and Lovers* to get it published and his writing 'to order' for newspaper and periodical publication. At the same time Gertler needed the protection of older, successful men. In Lawrence's case his most successful and long lasting friendships were with women, a notable exception being W. E. Hopkin, possibly his longest friendship.

Painting for Lawrence was more for his own satisfaction but for Gertler it was his living. It was important to Lawrence and he of course had the exhibition of his work at the Warren Gallery but he did not have the intense relationship with it that Gertler did. It was another medium for him but for Gertler it was the main one.

Gertler is generally criticised for being derivative. Although I have drawn attention to clear influences on him (Renoir, Gainsborough etc) that criticism may be rather harsh. Lawrence on the other hand was criticised for breaking through barriers of acceptability. If he was criticised for being unoriginal it was in the material he lifted from life, the characters that were too close to friends and acquaintances that recognised themselves in print.

The occasions their lives crossed

The Lawrences first met Gertler in 1914 at Gilbert Cannan's Cholesbury Mill and immediately liked him. They lived nearby at their cottage called 'The Triangle' and that Christmas the Cannans hosted a very happy party including Katherine Mansfield, Murry and Kot as well. After too many drinks, while acting out a play Murry had written Katherine strayed from the script and instead of returning to Murry remained with Gertler, kissing him passionately, material Lawrence was to use in the Loerke/Gudrun/Gerald relationship.

When Lawrence was in Cornwall he had stored some of his possessions in Gertler's bathtub in London and there is surviving correspondence about its return. Amongst that is a plea from Lawrence encouraging Gertler to renew his relationship with Marsh as the financial consequences of ending his patronage became too painful and he saw no end to the war. When the Lawrences did return to London in 1918 Gertler saw them but found Frieda intolerable and the two of them together too intolerant of the world. When Brett started her 'Thursday' meetings of friends, mostly male, Gertler often attended these, as did the Lawrences when they were in London. Gertler took over hosting the meetings when Brett left England and continued them for the rest of his life. The other guests included Kot and Murry.

Kot and Gertler attended the first night of Lawrence's play *David*, which he was too ill to attend and though they corresponded and heard each other's news through mutual friends (in particular Lawrence's declining health) they never met again although Gertler did play a small part in the sale of copies of *Lady Chatterley*. He and Kot also persuaded Dr. Andrew Morland to examine Lawrence in Bandol in January 1930.

Lawrence's use of and reference to Gertler and Gertler's paintings in his writings

It seems likely that Lawrence was influenced by Gertler's painting *The Creation of Eve* (http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/content/images/2002_2055.JPG). Showing influences of William Blake itself, it depicts Eve, appearing like a naked doll, legs splayed, being plucked from a slumbering Adam by a somewhat paunchy Creator. It caused outrage when it was exhibited in 1915. The passage in question appears in the *Girlhood of Anna Brangwen* chapter of *The Rainbow* (Cambridge Edition pp. 112.29 – 113.5).

Lawrence's work was also influenced by real events involving Gertler. The *Gudrun in the Pompadour* chapter of *Women in Love* in which Gudrun marches out of the Pompadour Café with Birkin's letter, followed by Gerald, is undoubtedly based on a similar scene on 1st September 1916 at the Café Royal where Katherine Mansfield walked out, followed by Kot and Gertler, carrying Lawrence's recently published *Amores*. Gertler (who you will note played a passive part in the event) reported to Ottoline Morrell in a letter the following day (see Cambridge Edition p.384.34n). Lawrence's letter to Kot of 4th September 1916 shows that he was aware of what had happened by that date. In *Women in Love* the latter part of the scene, where Halliday and his friends had been ridiculing Birkin and his letter, appears towards the end of the chapter (Cambridge Edition pp. 384.27 – 385.8).

Lawrence's surviving letters to Gertler start in January 1916 when he was in Cornwall. They peter out after June 1918 and the last

was on 23rd December 1929. Lawrence did not fall out with Gertler or take exception to him as he did with so many other friends and acquaintances. The first few letters are unexceptional by Lawrence's standard, dealing with his concerns of the day such as shortage of money and the horrors of war, moving his furniture from Byron Villas, the beauty of his surroundings and further musings on what the impact on the two men of conscription might be. Then on 9th October 1916 he wrote to Gertler (Cambridge Edition letter 1291) following receipt of a photographic copy of *Merry Go Round* (<http://www.fulltable.com/VTS/g/gertler/g.jpg>) . The tone and content are completely different from earlier letters.

Lawrence was so impressed by the painting that, as he admitted in his letter to Gertler of 5th December 1916, he used it in *Women in Love*. Typically of Lawrence he denied that there was any similarity between Loerke and Gertler. There may be; and certainly (except in the more sinister passages) the physical description is like Gertler (in the *Snow* chapter, Cambridge Edition p. 405.31-33 and 405.21n] although Loerke's views on art are those of Lawrence not Gertler. Furthermore, the character appeared in a draft version of *The Sisters*, written in 1913 before Lawrence knew Gertler. In that version 'the great frieze for a factory in Cologne' appearing in the *Snow* chapter of *Women in Love* (see Cambridge Edition p. 423.13-39) was a scene of wolves and peasants but was changed in November 1916 to a fair including Gertler's merry-go-round.

The description in the novel is powerful but the picture is very powerful indeed and plainly Gertler's masterpiece, a first class anti-war statement. The original is in the Tate Gallery (bought for the nation as Lawrence wanted) and is quite large, about six feet by four feet, its colours very vivid, making it an unnerving painting to look at. The feel of terror is heightened by the viewer's proximity to the scene, the uniform screams of the riders, the fire reflected on the roof of the carousel and the plume-shaped missile trails in the sky. The irresistible force of the war machine is reflected in the unvarying response of the civilians as well as the soldiers and their inflexible postures, the unvaryingly ferocious features of the

horses, the rigidity and unembellished structure of the carousel, the failure of the riders to resist what is happening (indeed their ghastly attraction to it) and the inevitable repetitiveness of it all.

To conclude, these were both passionate and exceptionally talented men facing financial, health, and emotional difficulties, often with public opinion against them, one killed by TB the other by a developing mental illness.