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**Book Section:**

Becket, F (2019) *Green Lawrence? Consciousness, Ecology and Poetry*. In: Männiste, I, (ed.) *D. H. Lawrence, Technology, and Modernity*. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, NY, USA. ISBN 9781501340000

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## **Green Lawrence? Consciousness, Ecology and Poetry**

Fiona Becket

One of the most critical episodes in Lawrence's novel of disintegrating modern consciousness, *Women in Love* (1920), occurs in the chapter called "An Island." The local mill-pond is the scene of an encounter between Ursula Brangwen and Rupert Birkin, the novel's Lawrence-figure. In a novel whose fundamental structure is dialogic, Ursula and Birkin develop their superficially oppositional positions on the nature of degraded humanity: this is the novel about which Lawrence said "the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters" ("Foreword," WL, 485). Birkin's stance is that humanity as a collective is so beyond redemption that a world emptied of humans is the only salvation possible. Ursula persists in arguing for the redemptive possibilities of individual integrity underpinned by love. The complex language of this encounter has a double focus: the "frictional to-and-fro" of the dialogue (486) and the ways in which the narrative embodies tensions between conscious feeling and unconscious response. Birkin has complained to Ursula that he can't make a success of his days: there is something, as he puts it, that "I can't get right, at the really growing part of me" (125, emphasis added). They debate their differences. The language of the episode reveals the unconscious drama of desire and loathing, attraction and repulsion, unity and separateness, which will define their relationship and lead to the open-endedness of the novel's final sentence. Birkin metaphorises: people are

over-ripe fruit turned to bitter ash inside, hanging on the dead tree of humanity. Eventually, emotionally exhausted by the intensity of their disagreement they drift away from each other and Birkin becomes absorbed in the simple action of dropping daisies into the pond. For Ursula, the spectacle of the flowers floating on the surface of the dark water moves her:

‘Why are they so lovely?’ she cried. ‘Why do I think them so lovely?’

‘They are nice flowers,’ he said, her emotional tones putting a constraint on him.

‘You know that a daisy is a company of florets, a concourse, become individual. Don’t the botanists put it highest in the line of development? I believe they do.’

‘The compositae, yes, I think so,’ said Ursula, who was never very sure of anything. Things she knew perfectly well, at one moment, seemed to become doubtful the next.

‘Explain it so, then,’ he said. ‘The daisy is a perfect little democracy, so it’s the highest of flowers, hence its charm.’

‘No,’ she cried, ‘no – never. It isn’t democratic.’

‘No,’ he admitted. ‘It’s the golden mob of the proletariat, surrounded by a showy white fence of the idle rich.’

‘How hateful – your hateful social orders!’ she cried.

‘Quite! It’s a daisy – we’ll leave it alone.’

‘Do. Let it be a dark horse for once,’ she said: ‘if anything can be a dark horse to you,’ she added satirically.

They stood aside, forgetful. As if a little stunned, they both were motionless, barely conscious. The little conflict into which they had fallen had torn their consciousness and left them like two impersonal forces, there in contact. (131)

As an educationalist Birkin's classroom knowledge, confirmed by Ursula who is a teacher, is shown to be inadequate to the task of understanding the daisy. Botanical knowledge belongs to the impersonal world of science and cannot explain Ursula's initial, non-cerebral response to the flowers' loveliness. The tongue-in-cheek banality of Birkin's attempt to invoke the demos through his understanding of the structure of the daisy contrasts with his previous account of mankind as a dead tree covered with galls, and himself as a blighted bud: "I can't get my flower into blossom anyhow" (125). Neither model of humanity can be assumed to be authoritative or final in Birkin's thought: he is, like Lawrence, exploring the terms of his personal philosophy. As this scene by the mill-pond proves, the relationship between Ursula and Birkin will be underpinned by conflict and oppositionality. The language suggests a metaphysical drama which implicates categories like 'consciousness' as a form of embodied feeling, often at a remove from what is verbal. In this example the daisy becomes the focal point for reflection and absorption. It is the agent by which Birkin and Ursula are taken out of themselves but, for all the theorizing they indulge in about the condition of human happiness they never achieve the different versions of happiness they crave. They remain overly self-conscious, egocentric human beings, continually wrong-footed by an abrasive language.

In *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), by contrast, Lawrence makes a skillful transition to the world of the daisy and succeeds where Birkin and Ursula fail; to bring the more-than-human world consistently into the foreground, to make it radically visible and, crucially, to implicate it in how we might understand consciousness, in poetry, in ways that transcend psycho-centric

models. In natural histories, the scale and diversity of non-human life far exceeds the human. Poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* acknowledge this imbalance and attempt to reverse the human-centeredness of aesthetic endeavour to re-position nature in relation to culture and, in so doing, to dismantle the crude binaries that conventionally define and restrict thought. In the “preface” to “*Flowers*” Lawrence plays with ideas of growth asking, “Do you know what was called the almond bone ... the last bone of the spine? This was the seed of the body, and from the grave it could grow into a body again” (Poems, 240). The metaphor is botanical (human regeneration is secondary to plant-formation) but are there ways in which consciousness can be understood as plant-like? “*Almond Blossom*” offers a view:

Look at the many-cicatrised frail vine, none more scarred and frail;

Yet see him fling himself abroad in fresh abandon

From the small wound-stump.

Even the wilful, obstinate, gummy fig-tree

Can't be kept down, but he'll burst like a polyp into prolixity. (260)

Animal categories of birth and death, being and self-hood, are confounded by the endless impersonal proliferation of plant-being, available in all its diversity and difference. So it is that *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* refuses the comforting certainties of the pastoral vision. Look closely, and we encounter poems about more-than-human life which develop models of consciousness that transcend human solipsism. Away from the birds and beasts, we are presented not with the pastoral imagination but a revised way of configuring plant forms in the context of poetry which acknowledges the diversity, strangeness and temporality of plants: “Trees suffer, like races, down the long ages./They wander and are exiled, they live in exile through long ages” (259) and

yet they return, “The unquenchable heart of blossom!” (ibid) put forth from boughs, as Lawrence expresses it, as if out of mineral hardness, “Seeing rusty iron puff with clouds of blossom” (ibid). In a vision which accentuates connectivity, animals, like those of the northern hemisphere identified in “Kangaroo,” “Seem belly-plumbed to the earth’s mid-navel” (344). This suggests the consciousness of non-human beings of the order that determines migrations and growth (“Audile, tactile sensitiveness as of a tendril which orientates and reaches out” (237)) and other kinds of “instinctive” responsiveness related to magnetism and related planetary forces.

So here is a direct and un-nuanced statement: D. H. Lawrence’s modernism is environmental. The eco-critic might wish to see in Lawrence’s work an extension of romantic pastoral or confirmation of the logic of deep ecology, for instance, but Lawrence’s writing destabilises and subverts the expectation. In a recent book Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, after a general introduction which invokes Lawrence, Conrad and, interestingly, Mary Butts, rightly commits two chapters to Lawrence.<sup>i</sup> Sam Wiseman considers Lawrence alongside John Cowper Powys, Butts and Virginia Woolf in an analysis of the “relationships between humanity, place and the nonhuman life.”<sup>ii</sup> David Mazel’s *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* includes Lawrence’s essay on Crèvecoeur with this justification: “D. H. Lawrence is another ‘man of letters’ who can be claimed as an early ecocritic. Like [Henry] Tuckerman, he takes a more positive view than [James Russell] Lowell of primitive nature and what he saw as its invigorating effect on literature.”<sup>iii</sup> My intention is to move the debate on by examining Lawrence’s poetry and in particular how it implicates consciousness in ecological models of connectivity.

It is certainly the case that in the novels and much of the discursive writing Lawrence develops comparisons between ante-modern and instrumental cultural paradigms. Yet, in his final work, *Apocalypse* (posthumously published in 1931) Lawrence is dismissive of the

pastoral: “What is our petty little love of nature – Nature!! – compared to the ancient magnificent living with the cosmos, and being honoured by the cosmos!” (A, 76). It is timely to ask to what extent are the easy binaries of nature/technology, spirit/science, more complicated than have been assumed in Lawrence? For eco-critics, to what extent has “technology” become an uncritical form of shorthand which obscures the potential of positive sustainable technologies which might yet redeem a degraded earth, and how might a reappraisal of the poetry clarify the nature/technology, spirit/science axes for the contemporary reader of Lawrence?

Lawrence is the “go to” modernist for a consistent and developed personal philosophy which emphasises the redemption of a degraded culture through the re-birth of the individual who, ultimately, has more meaning in the context of the whole. In *Apocalypse* the “whole” signifies the cosmos defined by connectivity, the goal being to “re-establish the living organic connections” and to jettison more solipsistic ambitions (A, 149). In *Women in Love*, where redemption is on hold, at the level of language an oxymoronic tendency embodies what is called elsewhere in Lawrence’s writing “the tension of opposites” (Poems, 302) and implicates the reader in a connective search for meaning. In the discursive writing, and central to Lawrence’s thought, are hyphenated verbal constructions of which the familiar “blood-consciousness” (PUFU, 185), and the less noticed “sap-consciousness” are two examples (19). Vividly metaphorical, these neologisms also embody a certain literalness, exemplifying the ways Lawrence creatively re-works technical, material language in the production of highly idiosyncratic expressions in his personal “lexicon,” and their attendant images. What these expressions demonstrate graphically are two terms in a state of semantic and spatial tension in which the whole is assumed to be greater than the sum of its parts. Critics have typically prioritized “blood” over “consciousness” in this expression which has produced a degree of

confusion in relation to the status of “lifeblood” in Lawrence’s philosophy of feeling, compared to blood as signifying race in the ugly politics of, say, *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). To some readers, perhaps the majority, “blood-consciousness” persists as a dangerous construction; “sap-consciousness,” if noticed, appears merely risible. Objectively, however, both deserve careful critical attention, and it is to the potentially fruitful “sap-consciousness” that I now turn.

As always, then, metaphorical creativity in Lawrence provides the principal way in to the complexity and idiosyncrasy of his thought. Consciousness – not the unconscious – is his theme, to which all other themes are subordinate, and his inquiry transcends the limitations of human experience. In Chapter 3 of *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921), called “The Birth of Consciousness,” Lawrence throws out a challenge:

But what we fail to know, yet what we must know, is the nature of the pristine consciousness which lies integral and progressive within every functioning organism. The brain is the seat of the ideal consciousness. And ideal consciousness is only the dead end of consciousness, the spun silk. The vast bulk of consciousness is non-cerebral. It is the sap of our life, of all life.

We are forced to attribute to a star-fish, or to a nettle, its own peculiar and integral consciousness. This throws us at once out of the ideal castle of the brain into the flux of sap-consciousness. (PUFU, 217)

The “peculiar and integral consciousness” of the starfish and the nettle as the embodiment of life-forms which do not replicate the human nervous system necessarily informs the ways in which much of the poetry in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* might be read.<sup>iv</sup> Crucially, in the long passage quoted here, it is a planetary perspective that is presented to the reader. It is in part a



statement of resistance to the human-centred psychoanalysis of Freud with whom Lawrence takes issue in both his books on the unconscious (*Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 1922). It is also a position that is central to Lawrence's unwavering anti-Cartesian stance, a position that he refines discursively in his often-stated objections to "Freudism." Drawing on scientific discourse for effective and relevant models, Lawrence argues that the "first fused nucleus of the ovule" (19) is established as the seat of consciousness long before the physical development of the foetal brain, and that in every organism this fused nucleus remains "the creative-productive centre, the quick, both of consciousness and of organic development" (ibid). It is a materialist thesis which implicates the life of feeling. Lawrence radically re-locates instinctive responsiveness to the nerve clusters of the body in order to interrogate the mind/body split perpetuated by Freudian psychoanalysis. Such threads and tendrils of living tissue, imitative of the sun (the solar plexus) are ambivalently present in the body apart from the mind and distinct, therefore, from the unconscious which, in Lawrence's parlance, is disastrously and irretrievably located "in the head" (thanks to Freud). But how does the "sap of our life" necessarily undermine the "ideal castle of the brain"?

At the level of metaphor "sap-consciousness" self-consciously conjoins terms usually associated with opposing sides of familiar binaries: botanical and animal. As a poet Lawrence must push language to its limits and unique, highly personal, metaphors result (the novels are the principal arena for this activity rather than the poetry which is often more "discursive"). It is because "sap" is linked, visually by means of the hyphen, with "consciousness" that Lawrence's argument transcends the human. Elsewhere in "The Birth of Consciousness" a different botanical term is used, "dehiscence," to describe the splitting of the mammalian subject from the body of the mother: "There at the navel, the first rupture has taken place, the first break in continuity.

There is the scar of dehiscence, scar at once of our pain and splendour of individuality” (21). Again at the level of language the “metaphysic” takes shape, more subtle than the often strident, dogmatic and assertive proclamations of the discursive writing. It is fitting and possibly inevitable that Lawrence’s theory of the origins of consciousness should be fashioned from a language which transcends the limits of the human to identify an ecological responsiveness which both requires and recommends what I term a “botanimal” knowledge. Further, Lawrence plays with the mindless (in the best sense) attributes of sap when he concludes in relation to dehiscence that:

Life cannot progress without these ruptures, severances, cataclysms; pain is a living reality, not merely a deathly. Why haven’t we the courage of life-pains? If we could depart from our old tenets of the mind, if we could fathom our own unconscious sapience, we should find we have courage and to spare. We are too mentally domesticated. (21-22)

So it is that Lawrence puts the “sap” back into “sapience.”

Here are signs, then, of the ways in which consciousness is related to non-human modes of being in Lawrence’s imagination. A study of green modernism is impoverished, even distorted, by not taking serious account of Lawrence’s poetry in this light and in particular, despite its many self-conscious departures from natural histories, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. While Lawrence’s early poems often took for their subject matter Lawrence’s first relationships with women, and while the poems in *Look! We Have Come Through!* largely concentrate on the relationship with Frieda, the poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* represent a movement away from the often confessional and heuristic material of the period up to the early 1920s and establish Lawrence’s right to be viewed as a poet of nature. This is double-edged, of course, and sits uncomfortably awry in

relation to metropolitan modernism and the anti-nature proclamations of, for instance, Wyndham Lewis in *Blast!* or the belligerent technologism of the Futurist manifestos. To what extent, then, is a turn to more-than-human nature in these poems a symptom of resistance to the solipsism of the earlier volumes, and more broadly to a solipsistic strain in modernism? To what extent do these poems open up a “nature” which insists on eco-consciousness rather than ego-consciousness?

Accepting the imperatives which took Lawrence to Ceylon, Australia and New Mexico, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* was inspired principally by Sicily and the area around Florence. Representations of the Mediterranean bioregion are interwoven with references to ancient local colour: democracy, Hellenic myth and the pre-Socratics. Natural histories are not separable, in the volume, from cultural histories but the natural histories themselves are wildly and playfully rewritten. Before I develop this idea in close analysis of some key poems, the “prefaces” reward some attention. The “prefaces” overturn common expectations of the form and use of the preface, refuse to provide any prefatory information about the poems collected there, but offer up codified forms of knowledge that may or may not resonate with the reader. So it is that the “Fruits” preface rehearses the spurious etymology that characterises the poem “Figs,” and the “Trees” preface invokes Empedocles’ thought in preference to modern botanical science. Lawrence, who had studied botany, overturns the authority of the Linnaean system of classification of plants, and of the general principles of received knowledge. This is in keeping with the familiar reception of Lawrence as anti-science, dismissive of evolutionary theory and confident denouncer of an over-reliance on scientific method based on empirical evidence.

What the prefaces provide, in dialogue with the poetry, is an aesthetic response to “vegetal life” because it is commonly overlooked, not least as an omnipresent embodiment of

non-human existence.<sup>v</sup> In this context Lawrence has undertaken something very special. The poetry in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* attempts to communicate plant-difference and diversity, for instance, by means of a range of interconnections because ultimately Lawrence's goal is to represent, and to understand, the cosmos. However, it might be premature to apply the epithet "green" to Lawrence. Here's why. The preface to the "Trees" section invokes an ecological crisis:

"It is said, a disease has attacked the cypress trees of Italy, and they are all dying.

Now even the shadow of the lost secret is vanishing from earth." (Poems, 248)

The poem "Cypresses" laments the loss of the trees' cultural, perhaps sacred, meaning to the ancient Etruscan people. In doing so it laments the Romans' instrumentalist attitude to the Etruscans so that what is 'Roman' becomes synonymous with contemporary, 'mechanical,' culture articulated ultimately in fractured reference to America and, indeed, to emergent fascism:

Vicious, dark cypresses!

Vicious, you supple, brooding, softly-swaying pillars of dark flame,

Monumental to a dead, dead race

Embowered in you!

Were they then vicious, the slender, tender-footed,

Long-nosed men of Etruria?

Or was their way only evasive and different, dark, like cypress trees in a wind? (250)

The eco-critic in search of expressions of concern about the blight killing the Tuscan cypresses will be frustrated. The aesthetic response cannot be assumed to be an environmentally-conscious response but it is, nevertheless, engaged in an encyclopaedic interconnectedness which starts with the tree endowed, like all non-human life in the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, with something we must call consciousness. This is poetry which participates in a steadfast refusal to allow the plant to be reduced only to itself – as food, waste and resource – so that it cannot be extricated from the complex interactions with nature and culture that would appear to define it. In a different poem the “Bare Fig-Trees” are a figure of the “Demos” but not before they are invoked as metallic, “silver”; many-branched, a “strange and sweet-myriad-limbed octopus” a “sweet-fleshed sea-anemone” and finally the “many-branching candelabrum” (251). Lawrentian metamorphoses are inscribed in this ecology of forms. In “Bare Almond-Trees” an Empedoclean idea is revised: the creaturely trees of the pre-Socratic imagination are re-worked by Lawrence into a form of living machine – an iron-stemmed “magnetic apparatus” potentially receptive to “electric influences” that might “hear the chemical accents of the sun,” “telephone the roar of waters-over-the-earth” and, crucially, “take the whisper of sulphur from the air” (253). Here the tree is ecologically helpful. It acts on chemical pollution but, by describing the tree in terms of the machine, Lawrence undercuts the received nature/technology binary. The tree in this example embodies interconnection. It can internalize and deal with technology as a facet of its world – there is no pastoral retreat which is different from the world of sulphur and trees.

What is described in “Bare Fig-Trees” is an alternative to the telos of the plant (classically from acorn to oak) which we encounter in “Peach,” a poem that articulates more clearly than any other the tension and interplay between different kinds of formation. Embedded in “Peach” is an observation which is both profound and provocative, and which begs questions

about the relationship between growth and artifice as equivalent forms of making. The fundamental question of the poem combines ontological as well as epistemological sensitivity: “Why was not my peach round and finished like a billiard ball?” This is immediately followed by a response which is also a riposte: “It would have been if man had made it” (232). This important and often overlooked judgement proceeds from a series of observations about the physical form of the peach which tap into a common sense of the texture of the fruit’s surface, its color, weight and shape. For Holly Laird, despite the seven questions posed at the heart of this poem, Lawrence “refuses to give us a glimpse of anything we might recognize as a peach.”<sup>vi</sup> I respectfully disagree. The entire poem is absorbed in interrogating the nature of the peach and the processes, coded in whatever lies within the peach stone, which produced it. This poem has the potential, as we expect, to be read in a highly nuanced fashion. One reading brings to the surface a coded celebration of the male body, familiar in Lawrence’s fiction, while a related reading recognizes in “Peach” a familiar narrative of desire constructed around women’s bodies. We are accustomed to aligning observations in “Fig,” “Medlars and Sorb-Apples” and “Pomegranate” with misogynistic positions in Lawrence. It might be tempting to read the celebration of the “heavy globule” (232) of the peach as of a piece with the “swung breasts” of “Gloire de Dijon” (176), and it could be argued that the “bivalve roundnesses” of “Peach” (232) open out the field of reference more erotically. These peachy observations are cast in self-consciously sensuous language which invokes the body of the fruit in the hand as “voluptuous heavy” and refers to its phases of growth from “silvery peach-bloom” to its bivalve form also of “such inordinate weight.” However, it is the botanical understanding of the peach’s structure (its “lovely, bivalve roundnesses” (ibid)) that ultimately undercuts the rather obvious androcentric suggestiveness and points to a serious project around “making” – a notion which encompasses

“natural” organic growth and manufacture. The opening and closing references to the peach stone – line 1, “Would you like to throw a stone at me?” and the final line “Here, you can have my peach stone” (ibid) – act as pericarp or pod in which the fruit (as text) takes form. The first and last lines, concerned as they are with the stone, are located peri + karpos, [‘around the fruit’] for the stone holds the kernel of the next crop of fruit. The metaphorical power of kernel and shoot is central to Lawrence’s language of rebirth as attentive readers of *The Rainbow* will acknowledge; but in “Peach” our attention is drawn first to the form of the fruit and then to more profound questions of how physical forms emerge from what Lawrence calls in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* “the first fused nucleus...the creative-productive centre” (PUFU, 19), a process which is the antithesis of industrial production.

The text of “Peach” gives barely a clue to the identity of the addressee. The silent presence is that of the implied but unvoiced interlocutor who is both the reader and potentially an other whose textual presence is palpable by virtue of the questions posed in the text and the invocations to look at, and feel, the peach as well as the peach stone. The poem’s first line constructs the addressee as aggressive – either playfully so, so that a peach stone stands in benignly for a rock, or as having the potential for real violence in the context of, say, a biblical punishment or form of martyrdom; or in a way which suggests that “people in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.” The final line of the poem indicates that the speaker has transformed all the possibilities of playful and actual violence implicit in stoning and has acquired agency, “Here, you can have my peach stone” (Poems, 232). The possibility of aggression has been transformed into benign condescension. The addressee has been disarmed. It is only in the final lines of the poem that we learn of the reason why the speaker might become the object of a (peach) stoning and it relates directly to the central observation of the poem to do not with the

organic bivalve and tactile form of the fruit, but with the distinction, indeed the contrasts, to be drawn between botanical principles of growth (in which evolutionary criteria can be assumed) and the rational machinic design of human imagination which would conceive a peach diagrammatically “round and finished like a billiard ball.” In this beguilingly simple observation is rooted a considered meditation on the distinction between phusis and techne. By implication the peach is not “round and finished.” It is, and must be, unfinished because it consistently and continually partakes in the cycle of growth and decay from stone to peach to stone to tree to fruit, and so on. Michael Marder gives a reason why this appeals to an ethical as well as an ecological understanding: “the plant is at once the most singular and the most general being: ethical concerns with vegetal life therefore pertain to plant ontology in each of its expressions and as a whole” (italics in original).<sup>vii</sup> The peach proclaims itself as a peach, not a ball, and its self-appearance is evident in the growth of the fused bivalves, and the dip where they conjoin. In the poem its end is not yet achieved in the way in which the billiard ball, in its featureless perfection, is perceived as finished (which, microscopically, is imperfection, but let that pass).<sup>viii</sup> To be functional, a manufactured object must at least approach the condition of being finished, and this is double-edged: in a palpable way one property of it as a thing, is that it has expired – it has ceased to develop. The peach can never be “finished” in this way, so that while it lacks the symmetrical and disciplined perfection of the functional billiard ball, its end is continually deferred. It ceases to be a peach only inasmuch as it might change its form. It might shrivel and rot on or off the bough; it might be consumed and transformed. As is common with plant-being(s), it transcends its fruiting form to take on other forms either as ‘waste’ (a misnomer) or in a new form of dissemination from the potential fullness and fecundity of what lies within the peach stone. Similarly, the boundaries of the plant (ego-less) are porous and multiple; plant-hood



is defined by infinite iterations of head, stem, petal, floret, leaf. A plant is not finite as an animal is finite: it never ceases to grow in the way an animal ceases to grow because of the endless proliferation of plant forms. It lends to cultural theory the epithet ‘rhizomic.’

While there is no context for construing D. H. Lawrence as politically “green,” there are grounds in his poetry for discerning a challenge to familiar habits and hierarchies of thought. This begins with his anti-Cartesian “metaphysic” and ends with the radical aestheticization of the more-than-human world which is itself suggestive of a new kind of humanities, one which pays attention to radical difference across the species and is, therefore, constitutive of an ethics of care and respect for that which is conventionally below the ontological horizon. Only in this context can we talk accurately about a “green” Lawrence. Indrek Männiste, in a study that concentrates on Lawrence’s novels and, in particular, on the place of coalmining culture in Lawrence’s fiction, argues that “Lawrence’s oeuvre unveils deeply rooted existential concerns regarding man’s ontological standing in the self-imposing technological age.”<sup>ix</sup> In this self-proclaimed ‘Heideggerean’ reading, “technology,” manifested as post-artisan culture, represents a threat to the integrity of the human spirit: and here *physis* (distinct from *natura*) is opposed to modernized sense of *techne*. Männiste is not alone amongst eco-critics in drawing attention to the relevance of Heideggerean thought to eco-poiesis. For Trevor Norris, “Both writers’ concerns fall within the perspective of ecocriticism because they reflect explicitly on what it means to be the inheritor of industrial and scientific modernity, and think carefully and persistently about its environmental, aesthetic, and spiritual transformations.”<sup>x</sup> Implicit, and sometimes explicit, in these writings is a clear sense of the tensions between the pastoral and the industrial, of culture shaped by artisanal making and the impersonal scientific culture of modernity. In my reappraisal of the poetry I have tried to move on studies of Lawrence’s engagement with the more-than-

human world beyond the familiar nature/technology binary: the “electric sensitiveness” in the almond-trees’ “steel tips” demands it (Poems, 253). Poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, in particular, give a specific articulation to the “sap-consciousness” of Lawrence’s imagining. Ultimately, as a collection, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* embodies the radical ecology of forms proposed counter-intuitively by Lawrence as a counter-voice and anti-dote to the “ideal castle,” the enclosed fortress, of the human mind which has produced planetary conditions enough to force a radical reassessment of human engagement with the more-than-human world. Lawrence proposed that we think about consciousness differently and this is not separable either from his re-presentation of unconscious functioning or from his sense of our radical interconnectedness with more-than-human life. Instrumental knowledge (Birkin’s daisy) is limited and, like Birkin (suggests Lawrence) we know it. Poetry, however, has the capacity to reveal networks of connection, and different orders of knowing, to which instrumental knowledge is insensitive.

### Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>ii</sup> Sam Wiseman, *The Reimagining of Place in English Modernism* (Clemson, South Carolina: Clemson University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>iii</sup> David Mazel, ed. *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press), 11.

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<sup>iv</sup> The first American edition was also 1923 and excluded the “Tortoise” poems from the ‘reptiles’ section.

<sup>v</sup> Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (Columbia University Press, New York: 2013) advocates an ethical approach to plant life based on a new critique of vegetal existence.

<sup>vi</sup> Holly A. Laird, *Self and Sequence: the Poetry of D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 131.

<sup>vii</sup> Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 183.

<sup>viii</sup> Made from wood, clay, elephant ivory or celluloid, the billiard ball is not as removed from organic nature as the image of tooled perfection might imply. Lawrence’s example, therefore, self-consciously challenges a received sense of what is ‘natural’ and what is manufactured.

<sup>ix</sup> Indrek Männiste, “Nature, Technology and the Sense of Enframing,” in *D. H. Lawrence: New Critical Perspectives and Cultural Translation*, ed. Simonetta Filippis (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 55-76.

<sup>x</sup> Trevor Norris, “Martin Heidegger, D. H. Lawrence, and Poetic Attention to Being,” in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, eds. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 115.