

The Philosophy of D H Lawrence: From Prophecy to Pragmatism

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Abstract

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Taking a more philosophical than literary view of Lawrence, this thesis interprets Lawrence's life and work in terms of its philosophical import and suggests that Lawrence's mature thinking can be seen as exemplifying the spirit of pragmatist philosophy. To that end, the ideas of pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty are drawn upon in order to shed light on the course and outcomes of Lawrence's philosophical development. Daniel Derwin and Terry Eagleton are also prominent among other critics to whom I refer.

Drawing on texts from several of the genres in which Lawrence wrote, the case is made that the particular circumstances of Lawrence's early life and emotional development first drew him towards an essentialist philosophical position which in turn led him into an ill-conceived 'messianic' phase. Among the texts considered here are Lawrence's short story 'A Modern Lover' and essays including 'The Crown' and 'The Reality of Peace'. These texts span the period 1910 to 1917. Lawrence's association with the philosopher Bertrand Russell is also discussed. Lawrence's eventual abandonment of philosophical idealism is discussed in relation to his 'Democracy' essay of 1919 and the 1921 novella *The Ladybird*.

Following a period of acute personal crisis in the aftermath of his failed messiahship, Lawrence's thinking is shown to have developed along lines which closely parallel Rorty's idea of 'contingency'. The main text discussed here is Lawrence's *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, a piece of travel writing dating from 1927. A further stage sees Lawrence moving to a position analogous to Rorty's idea of 'irony'. The key text here is Lawrence's novella *The Escaped Cock* (written in two stages spanning 1927-8).

The thesis culminates in an extended discussion of the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (written during the period 1926-8) viewed in the light of Rorty's notion of 'solidarity'.

Chapter One

Introduction

It is a recurring theme in the work of D H Lawrence that since ancient times there has been a fatal dichotomy in human consciousness between instinct and intellect, between what Lawrence referred to as the 'religious' and 'scientific' modes of knowing.¹ This bifurcation of consciousness has led to an over-emphasis on abstract, discursive knowledge at the expense of intuitive knowledge – a tendency Lawrence saw as worsening during his own lifetime. In his last book, *Apocalypse*, Lawrence located the inception of this change in man's consciousness at around 600 BC, at which time 'the immediate connection with the cosmos was broken', for 'man set himself to *find out* the cosmos, and at last to dominate it'² in the sense of subordinating it to the constraints and categories of objective knowledge and mental abstraction. Lawrence illustrates this shift in man's thinking in the following extract, where the palpability of 'pebbles' captures for us, in a manner similar to much of Lawrence's poetry, the kind of immediate apprehension of the concrete world which he felt had become lost to us:

We can understand the terrific delight of the early Greeks when they really found out how to think, when they got away from the concrete and invented the abstract, when they got away from the object itself and discovered laws and principles. A number was once *actually* a row of pebbles. There was no *seven*, only seven pebbles or counters.³

The result of 'this terrific *volte face* of the human consciousness' has been disastrous for man, for whereas 'it thrilled him with the highest happiness, or bliss, the sense of escape from the cosmos and from the body, which is part of the cosmos, into Mind, immortal Mind [...] at the same time it filled him with a great ennui and a great

¹ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, Mara Kalnins (ed.) (London: Penguin Books Ltd, (1931) 1995), p.190.

² *Ibid.*, p.196.

³ *Ibid.*, p.195.

despair, as he felt death inside himself, the death of the body'.⁴ For, as Lawrence puts it, what we are left with is nothing more than 'a frightful universality of knowings', a lifeless miscellany of divisions and disciplines, topics and categories, which 'don't do me *no good!*'⁵

It is typical of Lawrence, steeped as he was in the religious imagery of his Nonconformist upbringing, that he should associate this tragic act of self-disinheritance with the Fall. Not content with the pre-lapsarian state of grace in which man was at one with the cosmos, man 'ate of the Tree of Knowledge instead of the Tree of Life, and knew himself *apart* and separate'.⁶ In a further example of Christian religious allusion Lawrence writes of 'the Calvary of human consciousness'⁷ and even implicates the dead hand of established religion itself within the general malaise: 'Religion, with its nailed-down One God, who says *Thou shalt, Thou shan't*, and hammers home every time; philosophy, with its fixed ideas; science with its 'laws': they, all of them, all the time, want to nail us to some tree or other.'⁸ Nevertheless, as we shall see, Lawrence's rejection of the religious tradition in which he had been raised was not a rejection of religion *per se*. What he rejected was the sclerotizing tendency whereby the 'quick' of the religious impulse in man tends always to harden into a kind of dogmatic 'grocery-shop morality'. The Bible falls into the hands of the 'book-keeping' mentality of 'second-rate orthodox people, parsons and teachers',⁹ and its language and imagery thereby lose their resonance.

⁴ Ibid., p.196.

⁵ D H Lawrence, 'The Novel and Feelings' (c.1920), in *A Selection from Phoenix*, A A H Inglis (ed.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, (1936) 1971), pp.460-1.

⁶ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p.131.

⁷ D H Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, (1923) 1971), p.217.

⁸ D H Lawrence, 'Morality and the Novel' (1925), in *A Selection from Phoenix*, p.177.

⁹ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p.190.

Man can only experience a true engagement with his religious nature when religion is kept vital, held above the level of stultifying conventionality.

Though Lawrence attributes the splitting of consciousness into religious and scientific modes to the ancient Greeks, he sees it as a divergence which has never since left us. It may be said to have reached a high point during the Enlightenment, during which (to use another Lawrentian antithesis) the 'way of affirmation' was decidedly in recession and the 'way of question' held sway. The contemporary *Zeitgeist* held that the world was ultimately knowable and would yield its secrets to man by virtue of his exercising the faculty of Reason and thereby discovering an underlying Order. Broadly speaking, this continued until the backlash of the Romantic movement when, eventually disillusioned, man sought to reinvest the universe with some of the imaginative possibilities that appeared to have been stripped out of it by a reductive rationalism which had left behind it an arid and mechanistic Newtonian universe comprised of empirically verifiable phenomena and discoverable 'laws'. Thus Nature, the Sublime and the Imagination came to be exalted over rationality. The contrast between the two approaches corresponds with Lawrence's 'religious versus scientific' formulation. Naturally he deplored the 'versus', explicitly so in another of his expressions for this harmful divergence: '... the phallic consciousness... versus the mental-spiritual consciousness: and of course you know which side I take. The *versus* is not my fault. There should be no *versus*. The two things must be reconciled in us. But now they're daggers drawn.'¹⁰ Whereas the religious way of knowledge involves the building up of sense-impressions or

¹⁰ Martin Jarrett-Kerr, *D H Lawrence and Human Existence* (New York: Chip's Bookshop, 1978 (1951), p.101. The quote is taken from E and A Brewster, *Reminiscences and Correspondence of D H Lawrence*.

‘affirmations’ by way of image until a ‘humming unison’¹¹ of consciousness is reached, the way of science or ‘question’ proceeds conversely by breaking up and analysing our sense-impressions, insisting on their separability and thus the ‘separation of subject and object’.¹² This reductive tendency I will call man’s impulse towards differentiation, where reality is atomized into mere materialism by the process of separating A from B, X from Y, until ‘affirmation by way of image’ – the holistic engagement with the cosmos via an accumulation of images – is lost to us. For as Lawrence declares, ‘the atom is... imageless and utterly unimaginable... it has turned into nothingness’.¹³

Yet even if, by our relentless pursuit of particularization, we have succeeded in reducing the universe to nothing more than atoms, we find we are still capable of thought and emotion – and thus, paradoxically, materialism *seems* necessarily to give rise to idealism. As we shall see below, the reverse is more likely true. Robert E Montgomery, in his book *The Visionary D H Lawrence: Beyond Philosophy and Art*, points to the thinking of Parmenides (for whom ‘the logical exploration of Reality reveals... its essential and ascertainable structure’¹⁴) as one source of this specious dichotomy between materialism and idealism. The attempt to ‘seize the absolute by means of abstract concepts, in the mistaken belief that the logical and the real coincide’¹⁵ is the origin of the mischief. There is an underlying pointlessness and circularity in the effort to abstract concepts and categories from the chaos of the cosmos and then superimpose them upon the very chaos from which they have supposedly been derived. The effort proves ultimately unavailing, and such

¹¹ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, pp.192-3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.181.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.193.

¹⁴ E L Hussey, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ted Honderich (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence: Beyond Philosophy and Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.139-40.

conceptual schemes must forever be elaborated and revised in an unending series of interpretive paradigms: as Montgomery notes in Nietzsche's thinking, 'all pure "conceptions lead to contradictions" as soon as they are brought to bear on the empirical world... [for] "knowing and being are the most opposite of all spheres".'¹⁶ It is the mind's tendency to 'know' in the intellectual sense which leads to its detaching itself from holistic participation in the flow of existence, insisting instead on a spurious autonomy which it must then defend behind barricades of abstractions – one of which is idealism, which begets materialism. For rather than materialism giving rise to idealism as a means of reconstituting what seems to us a more intuitive relationship with the universe, *both* terms are 'the result of the same act of abstraction, in which the world of perceivable qualities is sacrificed to conceptual reasoning'.¹⁷ Materialism was not objectively *there* as some kind of pre-existing ontological 'given' which then necessitated the invention of idealism to account for human thought. As Lawrence realised, the *concept* of materialism is precisely that: a product of the human intellect's impulse towards differentiation, its tendency to proceed from the intuitively general to the aridly particular, with the resulting materialism proving to be a syllogistic blind alley from which man must somehow escape if he hopes to regain his sense of integration with the cosmos.

The pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty writes of the same problematic schism in his book *Consequences of Pragmatism*:

The opposition between 'the transcendental philosophy' and 'the empirical philosophy', between the 'Platonists' and the 'positivists'.
[...] To side with Hegel or Green was to think that some normative sentences about rationality and goodness corresponded to something

¹⁶ Ibid., p.140.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.141.

real, but invisible to natural science. To side with Comte or Mach was to think that such sentences either ‘reduced’ to sentences about spatio-temporal events or were not subjects for serious reflection.¹⁸

This is the divide which preoccupied Lawrence throughout the course of his philosophical thinking, whether it be characterized as idealism versus materialism, transcendentalism versus empiricism, or mental consciousness versus phallic consciousness; and although his claim to be a champion of ‘phallic consciousness’ could often be read as an attack on mental consciousness, this emphasis was, in Lawrence’s scheme of thinking, intended as corrective, for his overall aim was the reconciliation of these opposing modes of thought.

The trajectory of D H Lawrence’s thinking took him ever more strongly towards this urge for reintegration and away from the impulse to differentiate which I have outlined, for his abiding philosophical concern was with life itself – not with reductive philosophical systems which seemed to drive life to the sidelines. In *Apocalypse* he argues that the ‘way of affirmation’ and the ‘way of question’ can be reintegrated, ‘the two streams harmonised and reconciled’,¹⁹ for ‘the final aim of every living thing, creature, or being is the full achievement of itself’.²⁰ In his quest to exhort mankind towards the achievement of this ‘final aim’, Lawrence resorted to a fairly promiscuous syncretism of terms and beliefs drawn from his wide reading, and conflated – with, as Lawrence himself happily admitted, scant regard for accuracy or consistency – into what Anthony Burgess called ‘a big ramshackle philosophy’.²¹ Yet

¹⁸ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, (1982) 1998), p.xv.

¹⁹ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p.192.

²⁰ D H Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, quoted by Mara Kalnins in her introduction to *Apocalypse*, p.21.

²¹ D H Lawrence, *D H Lawrence and Italy: Twilight in Italy, Sea and Sardinia and Etruscan Places*. Anthony Burgess (introduction) (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), p.xi.

the outcomes of such a philosophical project would necessarily be heterogeneous, even disparate, for to construct a rigidly systematized theory or philosophy would naturally be anathema to Lawrence's urge to revitalize our experience of life and free it from intellectualism. Once any attempt towards a reintegration of the two streams has reified into rigidity and fixity, it offers us no solution – for it has merely become part of the problem, as Lawrence was aware: 'Theory as theory is all right. But the moment you apply it to *life*, especially to the subjective life, the theory becomes mechanistic, a substitute for life [...] You have begun to substitute one mechanistic or unconscious illusion for another.'²² He was also alive to such dangers in his own 'theorisings': '...I carry a whole waste-paper basket of ideas at the top of my head... and lo! here am I, adding another scrap of paper to the ideal accumulation in the waste-paper basket.'²³ Yet of course, in characterizing his ideas as scraps of paper which are then consigned to a waste-paper basket, Lawrence is deliberately emphasizing their provisionality, their elusion of fixity, their refusal to be accorded a lapidary significance that would reify them into a purposively expounded theory.

Thus Lawrence seems to stand in an ambivalent relationship with philosophy and 'theorising' in general; for as much as he saw a need to bring about a reconciliation between the two halves of man's divided consciousness, he was alive to the dangers of rigid philosophizing as a means of escaping problems which were themselves brought about by such philosophical thinking. With regard to this ambivalence towards philosophy I will argue in this thesis that Lawrence emerges (as in so much of his writing) as a curious hybrid within the tradition of pragmatism (Lawrence having been a reader of the American pragmatist philosopher William

²² D H Lawrence, 'Review of *The Social Basis of Consciousness* by Trigant Burrow' (1927), in *A Selection from Phoenix*, A A H Inglis (ed.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, (1936) 1971), p.467.

²³ D H Lawrence, 'The Novel and Feelings' (c.1920), in *A Selection from Phoenix*, p.461.

James). Lawrence was alive to the practicality of regarding truth as (in James's phrase) 'what it is better for us to believe'²⁴ rather than as some ideal of 'the accurate representation of reality' achieved through stringent rationalism. Yet in his early philosophizing, Lawrence misguidedly strove to reinstate and revitalize the kind of philosophic essences beloved of Platonists. Lawrence can thus be seen as an oddly Janus-faced pragmatist: eventually looking forward to the kind of non-superstitious philosophical outlook that serves us best in terms of our everyday apprehension of reality – yet only after much harking back to mystical ideas such as 'Truth', 'The Infinite', and 'The Eternal'.

Lawrence was pragmatic in his attack on rationality: he was well aware of the dangers of what I have called above the syllogistic blind alley, advocating instead the rediscovery of 'the ancient sense-consciousness', for he declared that 'we have lost almost entirely the great and intricately developed sensual awareness, or sense-awareness, and sense-knowledge, of the ancients'. In Lawrence's conception of that knowledge, 'the word "therefore" did not exist', thus the ancients did not fall prey to the fatal syllogistic imperative, the compulsion to try to live ourselves from the a priori, whereby 'we always want a "conclusion", an *end*, we always want to come, in our mental processes, to a decision, a finality, a full-stop'. Lawrence argued that there is no such 'goal' to consciousness, for 'consciousness is an end in itself... there is nowhere to get to'.²⁵ Needless to say, to our present-day rational mode of thinking, this approach seems counter-intuitive. Yet within the terms of Lawrence's thinking, the very fact that our intuition is nowadays so inextricably linked to the 'logical chain to be dragged further'²⁶ could itself be taken as an indication of how far we are

²⁴ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, (1980) 1999), p.10.

²⁵ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, pp.91 & 93.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.93.

removed from 'ancient sense-consciousness'. The problem can perhaps be related to present-day thinking in neuro-psychology regarding left-brain over-dominance: the left hemisphere of the brain is associated with linearity, sequentiality, reductionism, logic and intellectual abstraction, whereas the right hemisphere is associated with the complementary attributes of non-linearity, sensibility, image, simultaneity and synthesis.

Everywhere Lawrence rails against the predominance of the intellect, of idealism and the importance given to the fixed, static ideas which idealism leaves in its wake:

The brain is, if we may use the word, the terminal instrument of the dynamic consciousness. It transmutes what is a creative flux into a certain fixed cypher. It prints off, like a telegraph instrument, the glyphs and graphic representations which we call percepts, concepts, ideas. It produces a new reality – the ideal. The idea is another static entity, another unit of the mechanical-active and materio-static universe. It is thrown off from life, as leaves are shed from a tree, or as feathers fall from a bird. Ideas are the dry, unliving, insentient plumage which *interven*es between us and the circumambient universe, forming at once an *insulator* and an instrument for the subduing of the universe.²⁷

Words such as 'interven

²⁷ D H Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*, p247, [my emphases].

much heed to the constant ‘piff-piff-piffing of the mental and moral intelligence’²⁸ and thus cutting ourselves off from that which he characteristically called the ‘quick’ of life. For Lawrence, the brain had become ‘the vampire of modern life, sucking up the blood and the life’.²⁹ He considered that the purpose of the mind – at least, that part of it which functions as an ‘indicator and instrument’ – should be merely corrective, a generator of self-correcting feedback serving only to realign us with the true source of our being, and to prevent us from straying from the fullest realization of the life-force within us. The tragedy of modern man, as Lawrence saw it, is that we have mistaken the readings of this telegraph instrument for the stuff of life itself, thereby falling into ‘the nullification of all living activity [and] the substitution of mechanism’, resulting in ‘neurasthenia... and a collapsing psyche’.³⁰ Montgomery draws upon the work of Lancelot Law Whyte in articulating the implications of Lawrence’s beliefs:

...consciousness is ‘secondary’ not ‘primary’. Consciousness arises as the result of a clash between man and his environment. ‘Thus *self-awareness is basically self-eliminating*; its biological function is apparently to catalyze processes which tend to remove its cause, in each situation. Consciousness is like a fever which, if not excessive, hastens curative processes and so eliminates its source...’³¹

Montgomery further quotes from Whyte’s *The Unconscious Before Freud*:

Man’s self-awareness is not itself an independent controlling organ. It is one differentiated aspect only of the total organ of mind, important for the identification and ordering of contrasts, yet never the ultimate

²⁸ D H Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia*, Mara Kalnins (ed.) (London: Penguin Books Ltd, (1921) 1999), p.190.

²⁹ D H Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*, p.69.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.83.

³¹ Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p.61, [Whyte’s emphasis].

determinant of any ordering process, in thought or behaviour. The decisive factors, the primary decisions, are unconscious.³²

The extraordinary and paradoxical suggestion (one hesitates, in this context, to use terms like ‘conclusion’ or ‘deduction’) to be drawn from this is that *mental* consciousness (or self-consciousness) is a phenomenon which *ought* to function, in the natural way of things, in such a way as to obviate its own necessity – surely a pragmatic enough idea of consciousness. It is interesting that Whyte should call it ‘one *differentiated* aspect... of the total organ of mind’ and refers to its function in relation to *contrasts*. For if, as Lawrence constantly insists, it originated by being disastrously allowed to hive itself off from the totality of mind, then it perpetuates itself by re-enacting its own origin: born of differentiation, it lives by the same process – and hence the reductive ‘impulse towards differentiation’ to which I referred earlier, the reductivism of ‘A is not B, X is not Y’. Commenting on Lawrence’s essay *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*, Judith Ruderman interprets Lawrence’s notion of the rational mind as meaning that the latter is ‘a tool... providing humans with the means to recognize their deviations from the life-path’.³³

Thus we may have to accept – or at least consider the possibility – that the predominance of conscious rationality, which seems to us so ‘natural’, may actually be no more than historico-culturally contingent, however long-established its reign. Whyte feels that the Cartesian split between awareness and the material/physiological realm ‘may prove one of the fundamental blunders made by the human mind’, giving rise to ‘a new character type... *self-conscious man*, [who] treats self-awareness not as a sequence of self-eliminating moments of fever, but as primary in theory, in value, or

³² Ibid. The quotation is from Lancelot Law Whyte’s *The Unconscious Before Freud* (Garden City: Anchor, 1962), pp.32-3.

³³ Judith Ruderman, *D H Lawrence and the Devouring Mother* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1984), p.27.

in action'.³⁴ In other words, a self-conscious man (and here, of course, we interpret 'self-consciousness' in a wider sense than that of mere social awkwardness) is one who has failed to recognise the purely corrective function of consciousness and has consequently accorded it primacy, thereby deviating (in Ruderman's expression) from the life-path. It is as if consciousness, having originated as an adaptive mechanism, was at some stage allowed to outrun both itself and its own usefulness so as to assume a *maladaptive* predominance.

My overall argument will be that Lawrence's abiding concern with the nature of consciousness (and its apparently sundered state) arose from the circumstances of his upbringing and their lasting effects on his personality. The divisions which characterized Lawrence's early life gave rise to tension and instability, and a consequent sense of self-alienation – of being someone who belonged to neither side of such dividedness, but who was instead forced to exist in a perilous no-man's land in which he felt threatened from both sides. The constant sense of instability and threat gave rise to a febrile personality – vulnerable and hence reactively aggressive – which could never feel sure of boundaries, either of self or other. This early inability to manage boundedness was at once Lawrence's strength and vulnerability. It gave rise to his extraordinary talent as a writer, but also led him into a disastrous and self-deluding 'prophetic' phase in which he sought to achieve a longed-for sense of unity in himself and his world. This led to a painful period of estrangement, which itself led to Lawrence finding a new way of relating to the world – one which at last offered hope of finding a new accommodation between self and world.

I will further suggest that Lawrence's personal progress was paralleled by a process of maturation in his philosophical thinking. Given his idiosyncratic nature in

³⁴ Quoted in Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p.60.

relation to questions of boundedness, it was always typical of Lawrence that he tended to see the world and its problems as a reflection of himself and his most pressing personal concerns. It followed naturally that his progress in terms of personal psychology would have its implications in terms of wider philosophical questions. My aim will be to show that Lawrence's philosophical progress – from would-be prophet of essentialism to pragmatist celebrator of physical reality – can be read in terms of the philosopher Richard Rorty's concepts of contingency, irony and solidarity.

Though fuller definitions of Rorty's terms will follow, it is appropriate at this point to adumbrate his use of them. Contingency, for Rorty, is pragmatic in the sense that a contingent view of the world does not attempt to impose world-ordering belief systems on the flux of reality. Instead, it starts from an acceptance that, as human beings, our perceptions of that flux can never be more than fragmentary. Our conceptualizations of the world can only ever be, as it were, cross-sections through reality. With ultimate truth no longer 'out there' – at least, in the sense that such truth could ever be *rationally* sought, discovered and finally proven beyond argument – what matters is the imagination and creativity with which we can infuse our human propensity for 'making sense' of the world, so that the cross-sections yielded by our making and choosing should be conducive to our flourishing as human beings. In that sense, human purposes become more important than truth, for the quality and worth of what we *find* in the world will be an outcome of how fruitfully we can *look* at the world – where fruitfulness is found to be that which is most in keeping with our human being. Irony, for Rorty, is the sense of contingency we must learn to accept in relation to our own beliefs and those of others (though, as we shall see, this sense of irony is by no means another name for *laissez-faire* relativism). Irony implies the

acceptance that there is no 'final vocabulary' which can expect to outbid all other vocabularies in the business of ordering the world, and I will argue that Rorty's irony thus corresponds to Lawrence's eventual acceptance that his own attempts at setting up such a vocabulary had failed. With truth no longer 'out there' to be discovered as something which somehow exists transcendentally beyond our attempts to enshrine it in favoured vocabularies, the world becomes freed up, always inviting us to reappraise it. Solidarity is Rorty's suggestion for the spirit in which we should negotiate our way back into a sense of relatedness in a world thus thrown open. Again, I will hope to show correspondences with the outcome of Lawrence's philosophical thinking: solidarity is akin to kindness, inasmuch as kindness – in the sense of *humankind* – is the truest thing we can humanly hope to achieve; for Lawrence ultimately found human kindness to be a question of human purpose rather than metaphysical truth.

The fruits of Lawrence's late philosophy were hard won. His life journey was a difficult and wide-ranging one which characteristically saw corresponding developments in both his most private thought processes and his wider philosophical thought. The following piece of work will be, so to speak, a chronological cross-section through Lawrence's writings: one which hopes fruitfully to reveal the stages of his development and the lasting worth of his discoveries. Cross-sections can be thought of as selective rather than limited in what they reveal, and there is, in any case, neither time nor space in which to transect everything Lawrence wrote. I have therefore selected such of his texts as I consider best illustrate his journey. Though this selection will include most of the genres in which Lawrence wrote (prose fiction, essays, poetry, travel writing and personal correspondence), the novels commonly considered to be his major works are relegated to the margins. While it may seem surprising to focus on such works as *The Ladybird* and *The Escaped Cock* rather than

The Rainbow and *Women In Love*, I have chosen to focus on shorter works as these provide more succinct and self-contained summations of the relevant shifts in Lawrence's thinking – for my focus on Lawrence's life and writings is a philosophical rather than a literary one. The main writings I will discuss are as follows: 'A Modern Lover' (a short story written in 1910); 'The Crown' (an extended essay completed in September 1915); 'The Reality of Peace' (an essay of 1917); 'Democracy' (a sequence of essays dated 1919); *The Ladybird* (a novella of 1921); *Sketches of Etruscan Places* (1927); *The Escaped Cock* (a novella written in two stages spanning 1927-28); and the three versions of the novel which Lawrence eventually called *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1926-28).

I will also refer to Lawrence's letters to such individuals as Bertrand Russell, Cynthia Asquith and Ottoline Morrell. The most important critics to whom I refer in this study are Richard Rorty, Terry Eagleton and Daniel Dervin. In particular, Daniel Dervin (in his book *A 'Strange Sapience': The Creative Imagination of D H Lawrence*) provides important insights into Lawrence's early life and development – the focus of my next chapter.

Chapter Two

The Birth of Duality: Lawrence's Early Life

Beginnings

We have seen Lawrence's preoccupation with duality, and with man's seemingly ineluctable predisposition towards a bifurcatory mode of thinking. It is reasonable to suggest that this preoccupation with dichotomization arose from the divisive circumstances of Lawrence's early life – what John Worthen calls 'the duality of [his] upbringing'. As would so often prove the case throughout Lawrence's life, the divisions which marked his upbringing had more to do with complexity than clearness. For example, Worthen's investigation of Lawrence's family background has given the lie to the myth – established as early as the 1930s – that 'the writer D H Lawrence had had a working-class father and a middle-class mother':¹ it transpires that both parents were, broadly speaking, working-class. Nevertheless, Lawrence's mother Lydia (née Beardsall) came from a family which had indeed known better times. Her father's family had prospered in the Nottingham lace trade and her mother's family had boasted composers and hymn-writers among its forebears. But a collapse in the lace industry saw her father reduced to the status (and income) of 'engine fitter' – until he suffered a work-related accident in 1870 which left him unable to work at all. By the time of her marriage to Arthur Lawrence (who, as a coal-miner, was a comparatively high wage-earner), Lydia and her family had become markedly *déclassé*. The years of shaming poverty and sense of thwarted social aspiration – neither of which her husband's employment did anything to assuage – left Lydia Lawrence imbued with a bitterness which, ironically, made it all the more crucial for her to maintain the forms and precepts of middle-class respectability. For as Worthen notes, 'the most powerful class distinctions always operate in borderline

¹ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years, 1815-1912* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.26 & 286.

areas; and what divided the Beardsalls from the Lawrences was ideology, myth and expectation: that made for a deep and lasting division'.²

In general terms, Lawrence's father Arthur was a man associated with spontaneity, vitality, and hard physical labour followed by an evening in the pub with his workmates. Lydia Lawrence, in stark contrast, was characterized by determined self-improvement, religious rectitude, social aspiration, and a principled disapproval of her husband's behaviour. She was frequently visited by the local church minister for discussions on religion and philosophy – which, as Worthen notes, was 'something remarkable for a miner's wife'.³ She was an active member of the Eastwood branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild, which encouraged women to look beyond the domestic sphere and discuss wider social questions in the belief that 'education was to be the workers' best weapon'.⁴ Resentful husbands, meanwhile, were known to refer to the Women's Guild as the 'clat-fart shop' ('clat' being local dialect for 'gossip'), condemning it as a distracting influence which led their womenfolk to become too independently-minded. One could imagine Arthur Lawrence being party to such condemnation. In *Sons and Lovers* we see Lawrence fictionalizing these family conflicts in an effort to come to terms with their lasting effects on his personality. For as Worthen notes, 'the differences came to a complex kind of flowering and expression in the life of D H Lawrence. He contained the differences within himself, as the product of his upbringing; and he was continually articulate about them, in his ceaseless attempts to come to terms with them'.⁵ Terry Eagleton interprets these family divisions in Marxist terms as a clash between the proletarian values of the father and those of the petit bourgeois mother, and gives a

² Ibid., p.26.

³ Ibid., p.21.

⁴ Ibid., p.22.

⁵ Ibid., p.27.

persuasive reading as to how this familial background affected Lawrence and gave rise to his lasting preoccupation with the dualistic metaphysic through which he sought to reconcile these conflicts:

The mother, as symbol of the nurturing yet cloying flesh, is subconsciously resented for inhibiting true masculinity (as is the father's passivity), yet valued as an image of love, tenderness and personal intimacy. Conversely, her active, aspiring consciousness disrupts the mindless unity of sensual life symbolised by the father, but is preferred to his brutal impersonality.⁶

Crucially for the trajectory of Lawrence's thinking in later life, his early response to these familial conflicts was a violent reaction against his father:

'Lawrence was exceptional in his deep hatred of his father: he was the only one of the children to take over his mother's attitude completely. [His] answer was to 'retreat into a child's version of his mother's feelings'.⁷ Viewed from this perspective, Lawrence's later life then became a quest to reclaim the sense of spontaneity associated with the rejected father. Further parallels and inversions can be detected. Worthen notes how Lydia Lawrence 'never accepted that Eastwood *was* her community; she could, literally, look beyond it, to another world of human affairs: intellectual, literary [...] Yet her travels were always more extensive morally and intellectually than they could be geographically'. Arthur Lawrence, for his part, never looked beyond the Eastwood community: 'What was life to Arthur Lawrence – the community of men [...] the friends in public houses in the evenings – was alien to Lydia Lawrence.'⁸ Paradoxically, D H Lawrence sought to recover the sense of his

⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, (1976) 1992), p.159.

⁷ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years, 1815-1912*, pp.57-59.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.23 & 22.

father's spontaneity *away* from Eastwood, traversing the globe in his quest for a 'mindless unity of sensual life'; and as much as his travels may also have reflected a wish to fulfil vicariously his mother's yearning for intellectual 'travel', both to escape from and compensate for her sense of entrapment, they were simultaneously a rejection of her apparent devotion to intellectualism as a means to fulfilment.

Again, Eagleton traces these contradictions back to a 'deep-seated ideological crisis within the dominant formation as a whole' which then manifests itself in Lawrence's expatriatism, 'which combines an assertive, deracinated individualism with a hunger for the historically mislaid "totality"'.⁹ For as much as the 'totality' was mislaid (as we have seen above) as far back as the ancient Greeks, the same totality – in terms of a sensuous and intuitive engagement with life and one's fellow men – was also, in a sense, mislaid during Lawrence's *childhood* history. The deracinated individualism, meanwhile, can be read as a compensatory manifestation of his mother's lifelong frustration and alienation: just as Lydia Lawrence could not leave Eastwood, Lawrence himself could not do otherwise.

Besides the ideological divide separating his parents, further elements contributing to the young Lawrence's sense of estrangement were his marked physical frailty and relative intellectual capacity, each of which would doubtless have been seen as anomalous in a miner's son. Lawrence's first school attendance began at the age of three years and eight months and was a disastrous failure, probably due to a bout of serious physical illness and an emotional fragility which made school attendance traumatic. Following this debacle, Lawrence's schooling did not resume until three years later and was hardly any happier for him even then. At Beauvale Board School he was regarded as a 'quiet, studious, rather frail and thoroughly self-

⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 160.

conscious boy', who despite his studiousness was thought to possess 'no remarkable ability'. He was the type who would be naturally 'lost in a crowd of children [and] if they noticed him, then they despised him...'¹⁰ Further damage to the young Lawrence's self-esteem would have arisen from unfavourable comparisons with his older brother Ernest, who was rated as outstanding both academically and athletically. No less a person than the school headmaster told the young Lawrence that 'he would never be fit to tie his brother's boot-laces'.¹¹ In a way which seemed typical of Lawrence's formative years, the resulting sense of alienation from the rough Board School environment would later be matched by an opposing alienation at Nottingham High School. Having failed to fit in with the rough children of collier families, Lawrence now discovered that 'this time it was the middle-class children with whom he did not fit'.¹² The story is related of how one high school friend, having taken Lawrence home to tea, 'refused to continue the friendship as soon as he heard Lawrence was a miner's son'. It is as if the divisions which had bedevilled Lawrence's early family life, having done so much to shape his consciousness, were inevitably to repeat themselves in the wider world. If Beauvale Board School was, for men of Arthur Lawrence's ilk, no more than a tiresome and mainly irrelevant prelude to a life in which the 'three R's' that really mattered were 'ripping, repairing and road-laying',¹³ Nottingham High School represented the aspirational alternative so dear to the hopes of Lydia Lawrence. Characteristically, Lawrence could not fully relate to either environment. Little wonder that the sensitive Lawrence developed simultaneously an 'extraordinary intimacy with the place in which he grew up, and

¹⁰ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years, 1815-1912*, pp.77 & 76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.77.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.85.

¹³ *Ibid.*

yet [a] simultaneous and controlling detachment from it.¹⁴ It seems the dynamic of duality had already established itself as a powerful psychological paradigm – and at this stage it was a duality both painful and emotionally debilitating. This, in psychological terms, was the problem Lawrence had to resolve – or, at least, transpose into terms which might eventually provide a more workable self-conception.

As Lawrence's early life had lasting implications for the development of his philosophical thinking, it is worth delving below the surface details of his early life for clues to his psychological make-up. Daniel Dervin gives a persuasive account of the formation of Lawrence's sense of self and identifies character traits which will be relevant to all that I have to say about Lawrence's progress. Dervin sees the young Lawrence's life as having been marred by a series of 'profoundly disruptive traumas':

Lawrence, contending with severe bronchial illness, was nursed by an overly involved and overly extended mother, herself torn among the demands of older children, another pregnancy, and a marriage her son would describe as one 'carnal, bloody fight' [...] From those early events one infers that the emerging self was in a state of continual jeopardy, threatened from within by illness and from without by unstable adults.¹⁵

When the infant self feels threatened simultaneously both from within and without, such a self feels that it is under jeopardy in the sense that it has no sense of itself as having safe boundaries. When the threat is perceived as coming from within, there can be no escape outwards into a world which is perceived as hostile and unstable; and when the threat comes from without, there can be no safe withdrawal into any

¹⁴ Ibid., p.64.

¹⁵ Daniel Dervin, *A "Strange Sapience": The Creative Imagination of D H Lawrence* (University of Massachusetts Press: 1984), pp.21-2

defensible sense of self. Danger and instability are the only constants. With no sustaining sense of autonomy, the self is experienced as insufficiently differentiated from the world – as being too much at the world’s mercy – and this gives rise to what Dervin calls ‘a cognitive style based on macro/microcosmic correspondence between self and world’.¹⁶ Thus the young Lawrence could not hope for *either* himself *or* the world to change so as to afford him a sense of habitability: both would have had to change, for he experienced them as one. Dervin notes that the subjective medium for such frustrated infantile wishes is typically the ‘family romance’, wherein the inadequately formed self imagines itself to be a ‘foundling’ so that it may escape into consoling fantasies of rebirth:

The child who feels his original parents to be deficient in reciprocating his love finds relief for his painful feelings by believing himself to be adopted the true son of more illustrious (royal, Olympian) parents who will soon restore his lost self-esteem. [...] Most radically, it is a wish to revise one’s origins in order to be born anew. [...] Derivatives of some such cosmic romance are clearly felt behind Lawrence’s need to re-establish vital connections with the universe.¹⁷

This need is actually the paradox which lasted Lawrence’s whole life, and which impelled him through all the phases of his psychological and philosophical development. Having an inadequately bounded sense of self, he felt himself dangerously exposed to the world, with no way of standing fast against its endlessly painful incursions. At the same time, his inability to perceive himself as distinct from the world meant that retreat into self-exile was never *really* an option; for the more Lawrence would withdraw from the world in rueful self-protection, the more he

¹⁶ Ibid., p.38.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.15.

would be driven to seek some newer, more satisfactory accommodation with it. He was, it must have seemed, doomed to feel himself either invaded by the world or abandoned by it (and this oscillatory dynamic of trespass and desertion was something which Lawrence was, in turn, condemned to perpetrate on others). Lawrence typically felt the world to be insupportably encroaching on him or non-supportively disregarding of him – too rarely did he experience the happy medium of a sustaining accommodation between self and world. Lawrence’s consequent feelings of ambivalence would see him spend his whole life searching for those ‘vital connections’ – the feeling of having achieved a sustaining, organic integration of self and world. Dervin reads this search as indicating Lawrence’s yearning for ‘something both lost and yet attainable... a world of felt wholeness prior to any disruptive trauma or break’.¹⁸

One imagines that an inevitable outcome of Lawrence’s early feelings of estrangement and alienation would be to seek an intense emotional engagement with another, sympathetically-minded person – to seek escape into a relationship that would provide the longed-for sense of ‘felt wholeness’ and integrated selfhood. Lawrence indeed made several such attempts in his early life, with people such as Jessie Chambers and Louie Burrows, yet such involvements were invariably beset by a desperate emotional ambivalence, the inevitable concomitant of Lawrence’s psychic division. For it seemed – unsurprisingly – that no-one was capable of embracing and reflecting both aspects of his nature: his irreconcilable yearnings for both an immediate intimacy and a simultaneous controlling detachment, between ‘his desire for abandon and his watchful self-consciousness’.¹⁹ The awareness of duality and division had burgeoned from home to school and into the realm of personal

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.17-8.

¹⁹ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years, 1815-1912*, p.147.

relationships; for in reaching out towards others in the hope of attaining some sense of personal integration, Lawrence found only a baneful self-reflexivity in which his divided nature became writ ever larger. To yearn for what is (in Dervin's phrase) 'both lost and yet attainable' is to be caught in irreconcilability: for what has been attained no longer holds out the hope of what has been lost, and it is better to yearn than to have nothing to hope for. At that rate, one would rather *lose* what has been attained – for if one cannot even yearn for what is still felt to be lost, *all* is lost.

'A Modern Lover'

A moving fictional account of this dilemma is found in Lawrence's short story 'A Modern Lover' (1910). I will examine it as the first in a sequence of tales in which Lawrence addresses and finally works through his damaging emotional paradigm of trespass and desertion. Though the story cannot be considered as 'straightforward biography',²⁰ it is an example of what Worthen notes as a recurring tendency in Lawrence's writing:

...he continually presents and re-presents characters who insist upon and who exude coolness, separateness and isolation – while he confronts them with characters radiating warmth, physical immediacy and easy intimacy [...] they are versions of himself, too...²¹

The emotional ambivalence of the story's main protagonist, Cyril Mersham, is vividly rendered even before he encounters Muriel, the 'Jessie Chambers' character. In his coolness and detachment he is likened to a sea-gull, 'hovering and wheeling and

²⁰ Ibid., p.247.

²¹ Ibid., p.74.

flying low over the faces of the multitude... stooping now and again, and taking a fragment of life'. Yet simultaneously he craves a vicarious identification with the inner lives of his friends, asking that they 'kindle again the smouldering embers of their experience' – until a perverse reaction sets in: he becomes 'sick with the strong drug of sufferings and ecstasies and sensations'. He then attempts to console himself for this inevitable dissatisfaction with the notion that 'most folk had choked out the fires of their fiercer experience with rubble of sentimentality and stupid fear, and rarely could he feel the hot destruction of Life fighting out its way'. But this too frustrates him; and thus, in a further perverse contortion, he is left yearning that 'surely, surely somebody could give him enough of the philtre of life to stop the craving which tortured him hither and thither...' ²²

When he re-encounters Muriel after a long absence, this same neurotic tendency to emotional oscillation plays itself out in one-to-one terms. We infer from the narrative that the couple have been in some sense 'engaged' to each other, but that Mersham has, at some time prior to the story's commencement, sought to distance himself from Muriel. Lawrence's characteristic sense of himself – as one who is in search of something which must be 'both lost and yet attainable' – soon becomes apparent in Mersham's behaviour. As soon as Mersham and Muriel are alone together, it is 'her very submission' which causes him to 'wince and shrink' (p.30) from her in the same reaction that has caused him to reject her on previous occasions. Yet he cannot help but seek once more to draw from her a romantic response (using the same sophisticated laconicism with which he has, moments earlier, 'irrevocably' removed her and her family from him in 'a brilliant tea-talk' – p.32): 'Supposing you be my flint, my white flint, to spurt out red fire for me' (p.36). When he is surprised

²² D H Lawrence, 'A Modern Lover', in *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p.29. All page references in brackets in the text are to this edition.

and somewhat piqued to learn that Muriel has a new suitor (Tom Vickers), the latter's arrival prompts Mersham into further drollery at the expense of the relatively unsophisticated Vickers. Mersham easily gains the advantage in these exchanges, which, although ostensibly affable and bantering, are not without an undercurrent of resentment on Vickers' part and a sense that Mersham is deliberately 'playing ball with bombs' (p.41).

Yet the ironies build up. Mersham, though perceiving that Vickers is, at some level, a rival, and one whom he recognizes as a '[child] in simplicity' (p.39), cannot help but acknowledge the man's 'beautiful lustihood that is unconscious like a blossom' (p.45), for the character of Vickers is one of those 'versions of [Lawrence's] self' to whom Worthen alludes. Writing of the character of Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, Worthen notes how Lawrence 'in 1912-13, made Paul Morel the unselfconscious being he was himself then in the process of becoming, and which he desperately wanted to be'.²³ In 'A Modern Lover', written in 1910, Lawrence was still unable to attain to a such fictive reconciliation of his dual nature – his preoccupation was still with the emotionally exhausting duality. As one aspect of this duality, Mersham acknowledges Vickers' greater suitability as a suitor for Muriel (p.46) – though we shall return to this point in a moment. By this stage, the narrative is thoroughly interrogating Mersham's supposed facility with words. John Worthen cites Mersham as one of a cast of Lawrentian characters who is 'incapable of relationship, except... (above all) with words;²⁴ yet in a further irony, it is noticeable that when Mersham is confronted with moments of genuine emotional intensity, words fail him. At the moment when Mersham proposes to Muriel that they should arrange a sexual encounter, we have the following passage:

²³ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years, 1815-1912*, p.101

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.148.

So – well! – you understand, don't you? – and – if you're willing – you'll come to me, won't you? – just naturally; as you used to come and go to church with me? – and it won't be – it won't be me coaxing you – reluctant? – will it? [p.47]

It is painfully obvious that he is indeed 'coaxing her – reluctant', and the inappropriateness of citing memories of shared church-going as analogous to such a meeting is embarrassing, and gives the lie to Mersham's supposed urbanity. Indeed, the whole speech is marked by aposiopetic dashes, underscoring Mersham's *emotional* inarticulacy and insufficiency. By the end of their encounter, the narrative voice concedes that Mersham has 'played a difficult, deeply-moving part all night' – he is left 'too spent to think of anything to say' (p.48). Feeling even more emotionally raw than he was at the beginning of the tale, Mersham can but take his leave of Muriel and wander off into the darkness. Yet whatever the extent of the emotional toll this whole episode of strutting and fretting has undoubtedly taken on Cyril Mersham, he *has* ultimately played a 'part', even in spite of himself. Having to maintain the balance between what must ever remain alluringly lost and yet still alluringly attainable is a difficult and draining fate, and has involved the Lawrence-hero in a necessary degree of emotional fraudulence. Indeed, Keith Cushman has noted how Mersham's very name breaks down into 'mere sham'.²⁵

The story sets up an intriguing continuum between authorial knowingness and the limited insight of Mersham. Mersham declares to Tom, Muriel and her relatives: 'You live most intensely in human contact – and that's what we shrink from, poor timid creatures, from giving our souls to somebody to touch' (p.43), though this is in the context of his vain philosophizing and immediately raises the question of whether

²⁵ Keith Cushman, in D H Lawrence's *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Stories*, Introduction p.xix.

Mersham is sufficiently self-aware to be able to relate such pronouncements to his own sorry condition – at least, above the level of self-pitying dramatization. On the same page we read ‘Perhaps Mersham did not know what he was doing’ and naturally interpret this as narratorial insight; yet further down we read ‘For Vickers was an old-fashioned, inarticulate lover...’, and the reader wonders whether this, too, is narratorial insight, or Free Indirect Style expressive of Mersham’s veneer of sophistication. It is as if we are constantly made aware of this continuum of relative degrees of self-insight. At one end there is the author, the D H Lawrence of January 1910; then there is the narrator; at a further remove is the character of Mersham; then our awareness that Mersham is, in some sense, a younger version of Lawrence. Then follows our realization that Mersham, having been inferred by the reader as a ‘younger’ Lawrence, is actually aged twenty-six (p.37); Lawrence, in January 1910, was actually twenty-four years old. Thus we are left with the possibility that Mersham, while representing one of Lawrence’s frequent and determined forays through the medium of fiction towards a self-knowledge that would leave behind the ‘mere sham’, is also a projection into the future of Lawrence’s fear that this effort might fail. It is reasonable to suppose that such a fear would manifest itself in the idea that the effort to escape from obsessive self-consciousness might exacerbate the problem, leading only to a heightened, more sophisticated manifestation of the same entrapment.

‘A Modern Lover’ can be read as autobiographical in the sense that it reveals the inner workings of Lawrence’s narcissistic personality style; for as Dervin notes, the micro/macrocosmic mode of relating to the world – where the self, lacking a sense of personal boundedness, perceives itself as being continuous with the world and therefore, in a sense, at the *centre* of the world or somehow equivalent to it – is very

much a 'narcissistic mode of perception'.²⁶ One effect is that the narcissist experiences his regressive wishes (for the 'felt wholeness' which preceded the trauma of psychic injury) as:

... a need to be loved and satisfied, without being under any obligation to give anything in return [...] 'Primary Love', as it came to be called, is narcissistic because it does not recognize any difference between one's own interests and the interests of the object [that is, the other person in a relationship]; it assumes as a matter of fact that the partner's desires are identical with one's own. Self-centred thought it may be, a primitive sort of relationship with the environment exists.²⁷

I suggest that Cyril Mersham is Lawrence's fictive exploration of this element of his own personality. Just as the young Lawrence's urge to explore his own behaviour through the character of Mersham is indicative of at least a *degree* of self-awareness, Mersham seems comparably limited in his own self-awareness. On an intuitive level he acknowledges himself as having been unworthy of Muriel's love for him. Yet at the same time, he apparently feels resentment and frustration at Muriel's lack of understanding, as though she should at least have enough sensitivity to be able to accommodate herself to his vacillatory behaviour – which behaviour he already finds painful enough, without her cruelly adding her consequent emotional pain on top of his. It is as if the Lawrence-hero can be acknowledged as being at fault, but only in the extenuating context of the other person's fault. This is indeed a primitive, self-centred personality, seeking the sense of 'felt wholeness' which Dervin equates with

²⁶ Daniel Dervin, *A Strange Sapience*, p.77.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

the psychological concept of 'Primary Love': '... a relationship in which only one partner may have demands and claims; the environment must be in complete harmony with the demands... of the individual.'²⁸

This, we might say, is the maladaptive aspect of Lawrence's self/world conflation. Dervin suggests Lawrence's writings – especially on the subject of the latter's preoccupation with 'separate and opposed layers of consciousness' – are frequently indicative of 'a profound rift or fault running across the centre of the self'. Dervin further notes Lawrence's persistent vocabulary of 'breach', 'gap' and 'split' to describe feelings of conflict which are, in Dervin's reading, 'internal, whether they are located within the self or between the self and others'.²⁹ Nevertheless, conflict can be associated with creativity – the other aspect of Lawrence's psychological make-up. Dervin notes how 'a permanent and usually severe injury to infantile narcissism' commonly results in 'feelings of incompleteness', which in turn sometimes give rise to 'a rich and florid fantasy life'. The latter functions initially as a compensatory coping mechanism. Yet the imagination, used as a source of consolation for psychic injury, can also become 'the artist's medium or bridge for building correspondences between inner and outer reality'. All that I will have to say about Lawrence's progress can be seen in the light of his tendency to conflate self and world – a conflation which would often see damage done to both self *and* world, and yet which also impelled Lawrence's creative and philosophical progress and ultimately led him to achieve his longed-for 'felt wholeness' – a sense of harmony in which self and world would at last be reconciled. (In the meantime, as a postscript to 'A Modern Lover', Cyril Mersham will eventually 'reappear' as Count Dionys in Lawrence's novella *The Ladybird*.)

²⁸ Ibid., p.8.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.19-20.

A Room Full of Mirrors: Lawrence and Self-consciousness

A corollary of Lawrence's self/world conflation and preoccupation with levels of consciousness was a disproportionate degree of *self*-consciousness, which often seemed to hold sway at the expense of self-awareness. Lawrence's handling of the theme of self-consciousness could be by turns comic or disturbing. He shows a lightness of touch in dealing with the subject in his depiction of Albert Witham in *The Lost Girl* (1920). Witham, 'a talkative young man from Oxford' who has arrived with a bunch of flowers and the intention of courting the heroine Alvina Houghton, interrupts James Houghton while the latter is reading J M Barrie's *Tommy and Grizel*, and remarks that the eponymous Tommy is 'a study of a man who can't get away from himself'. Witham expresses wonder that such self-consciousness should be regarded as a hindrance, declaring: 'I think I'm self-conscious, but I don't think I have so many misgivings. I don't see that they're necessary.'³⁰ Witham, with his 'broad, pleased, gleaming smile' and graceless tendency simply to '[talk] in the direction of his interlocutor... [not speaking] to him: merely [saying] his words towards him', is presented as just such a spectacle of self-complacent social ineptitude as might be expected to be quite without any misgivings. He is self-conscious only in the sense that he is self-regarding, for his is obviously not the kind of self-consciousness that yields any degree of reflexive self-insight, and Lawrence nicely points up the narcissistic vacuity of such a character, which Worthen describes as a 'bland disregard of the handicap of self-consciousness'.³¹

³⁰ Barbara Hardy, 'D H Lawrence's Self-Consciousness' (1989), in Peter Preston & Peter Hoare (eds.), *D H Lawrence in the Modern World*, (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1989), p.30.

³¹ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years 1815-1912*, p.549.

Yet beneath Lawrence's lightness of touch in handling the comedy-of-manners interlude with Albert Witham there lies a biographical footnote of genuine sadness. Lawrence, a week after breaking off his engagement with Jessie Chambers (as he did several times) and agreeing with her that they should not even correspond, wrote to her to suggest that she read Barrie's *Tommy and Grizel* if she wanted to understand him, for he saw himself as in the same predicament as Tommy. As Worthen notes, 'Tommy cannot love... [He] is a man too conscious of himself ever to feel anything directly or unconsciously; and Tommy's was one of the fates which Lawrence was particularly frightened of, and about which he wrote again and again'.³² Here, surely, there is a correlation with the Cyril Mersham of 'A Modern Lover', who, it seems can never live sufficiently in the moment to respond to life or love with any genuine spontaneity.

An example of Lawrence's grotesque depiction of the same problem can be found in Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love* (1920). The chapter entitled 'Class-Room' gives a remarkably subtle presentation of arguments concerning the nature of intuition versus intellect, subjectivity versus objectivity, passion versus will, and spontaneity versus self-consciousness and premeditation (although as we have seen above in relation to Lawrence's thinking in relation to religion 'versus' science, we ought to regard the element of 'versus' as at best provisional – terms to be used for the sake of debate). Ursula (the school teacher) has been 'leading the children by questions to understand the structure and the meaning of... catkins' – although the atmosphere in the classroom is not one of analytical rigour. It is 'peaceful and still' in the 'copper-coloured... rich, ruddy' light of late afternoon, and the work proceeds in a

³² *Ibid.*, p.265.

‘peaceful tide... in an activity that was like a trance’.³³ Birkin (the school inspector) intrudes on this reverie with ‘Shall we have the light?’, and in the ‘strong electric lights’ the room becomes ‘distinct and hard’ after the ‘soft dim magic that filled it before he came’. Speaking of the catkins as he then does in terms of ‘gynaecious flowers’ and ‘androgynous flowers’ and insisting ‘It’s the fact you want to emphasize, not the subjective impression... What’s the fact?’, he strikes the reader at first as a Gradgrindian reductionist, a dispeller of soft dim magic in favour of hard-edged precision. But on closer reading, ‘the fact’ for Birkin turns out to be ‘red, little spiky stigmas of the female flower, dangling yellow male catkin, yellow pollen flying from one to the other’ – gorgeous images of colour and fructification. Indeed, he calls for crayons and colour in order that the children might better emphasize the richness of this ‘fact’, for ‘outline scarcely matters in this case’. Birkin is self-avowedly factual in his outlook, yet the vitality of *his* conception of the factual transcends the imperative of mere delineation. For Birkin, strong light aids rather than hinders true perception – and this becomes relevant in his subsequent confrontation with Hermione. She is self-consciously stogy in her social manner. She veers between demonstrations of feigned intimacy and ‘an odd, half-bullying effrontery’, which are both aspects of her protective façade of casual detachment. Birkin, however, cuts through her ‘*sang froid*’ simply by showing her a sprig of catkin and explaining how the flowers function in reproduction. This induces in her a ‘strange, almost rhapsodic’ absorption: three times she utters the phrase ‘little red flowers...’, for they have ‘some strange, almost mystic-passionate attraction for her’ (p.87).

Since this is presented to us without apparent irony, it seems to suggest that Hermione, beneath the self-conscious social façade, does have a capacity to respond

³³ D H Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin Books, (1920) 1989), p.84. All page references in brackets in the text are to this edition.

authentically and spontaneously to Lawrence's 'quick' of life – even as manifested in little red flowers – and it needs only the Lawrentian Birkin to elicit the appropriate response. But it seems Lawrence has a deeper motive in mind – 'aggressive irony', in Barbara Hardy's reading.³⁴ From rhapsodic absorption over little red flowers, Hermione lapses back into her falsely intimate social persona and begins to enthuse to Ursula over Gudrun's little carvings: she declares they are '...like a flash of instinct... full of primitive passion...', and notes their subtlety. But she immediately runs into trouble when Ursula challenges her with a distinction between what is little and what is subtle: 'A mouse isn't any more subtle than a lion, is it? [...] I hate subtleties...' Hermione is confounded: 'Suddenly her face puckered, her brow was knit with thought, she seemed twisted in troublesome effort for utterance...' (p.89). Whatever capacity Hermione has for spontaneous response has been suddenly thwarted, and she seeks – disastrously – to replace it with a mechanical version: 'Do you really think, Rupert... the children are better for being roused to consciousness?' What follows is an unsettlingly spasmodic and contrived eulogy in praise of animal 'spontaneity', which Birkin savagely denounces as nothing more than mentally derived – it is merely Hermione's mental self-consciousness preening itself on the idea of a reversion to such unconscious animality. Hermione cries that the schoolchildren are 'over-conscious, burdened to death with consciousness' (p.91), but Birkin responds that 'You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to *know* [...] You, the most deliberate thing that ever walked or crawled! You'd be verily deliberately spontaneous.' By referring to Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott', Lawrence introduces the 'mirror' analogy in order to point up the self-reflexive element of

³⁴ Barbara Hardy, 'D H Lawrence's Self-Consciousness' (1989), in Peter Preston & Peter Hoare (eds.), *D H Lawrence in the Modern World*, p.30.

consciousness which is, it seems, inescapably concomitant with the problem

Hermione embodies:

‘It’s all that Lady of Shalott business [...] You’ve got that mirror, your own fixed will, your immortal understanding, your own tight conscious world, and there is nothing beyond it. There, in the mirror, you must have everything [...] What you want is pornography – looking at yourself in mirrors, watching your naked animal actions in mirrors, so that you can have it all in your consciousness, make it all mental...’

[p.91]

Nevertheless, the very vehemence of the tirade implies a weight of frustration on the author’s part, and one feels inescapably that Lawrence is here re-enacting his earlier struggles against the enveloping coils of self-consciousness. This episode has been, in Dervin’s terms, an exploration of one of Lawrence’s internal conflicts, which he has sought to externalize through his fiction. These problems – concerning the apparently unbridgeable gap between self-consciousness and spontaneity, and the duality of consciousness which they seemed necessarily to entail if they were ever to be reconciled – continued to plague him. Yet such besetting difficulties at least afforded Lawrence both the impetus to write *and* the raw material for his fiction. Lawrence’s fiction provided him with the medium in which to objectify not only the painful experiences of the past, but also those burdensomely outgrown versions of self which are so often the legacy of such pain. Through his writing, Lawrence was able to turn these personal millstones into milestones, thereby marking both their enduring significance in terms of his personal history – *and* the distance by which he had come to regard himself as having superseded them.

Individuality – Allness or Oneness?

The ideas which have been covered thus far – of macro/microcosmic correspondence, self/world conflation and self-consciousness – are directly related to Lawrence's preoccupation with questions of individuality and personality. For Lawrence, 'personality' tended to mean self-conscious subjectivity of the kind which he satirised in the character of Albert Witham. 'Individuality', in Lawrence's use of the term, usually meant something wider: a mode of consciousness in which the individual rose above the constraints of solipsistic self-regard and achieved a sense of kinship with others. This is Lawrence's recurring ideal of unanimity or collective consciousness, which he pursued through both time and space throughout his writing life. An examination of the etymological history of the word 'individual' gives warrant for Lawrence's usage of it as indicating collectivity. As Raymond Williams has noted:

'Individual' originally meant indivisible. That now sounds like a paradox. 'Individual' stresses a distinction from others; 'indivisible' a necessary connection. The development of the modern meaning from the original meaning is a record in language of an extraordinary social and political history.³⁵

Until the eighteenth century, 'individual' as a noun was invariably used with reference to the wider group, e.g. in the (biological) sense of 'an individual' as a member of a species: '[the word was] rarely used without explicit relation to the group of which it was, so to say, the ultimate indivisible division.' Thus the emphasis – which would have been implicit even were it not made explicit – was invariably

³⁵ Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana Press, (1976) 1988), p.161.

upon the macrocosm, the essential unity-in-plurality within which an individual was naturally subsumed. Only in the course of the nineteenth century did this emphasis begin to reverse itself. Williams cites Charles Darwin as an example of this sea-change in the usage of the word:

In evolutionary biology there was Darwin's recognition (*Origin of Species*, 1859) that 'no one supposes that all the individuals of the same species are cast in the same actual mould'. Increasingly the phrase 'an individual' – a single example of a group – was joined and overtaken by 'the individual': a fundamental order of being.³⁶

This new emphasis became reified in the sphere of political thought during the nineteenth century. Liberal thinking came to regard society as made up of autonomous 'individuals' who then made more or less rational decisions to enter into economic or commercial relationships, while conservative thinkers such as Edmund Burke deprecated this new emphasis on 'the individual' and sought to preserve the sense of society as organic, stressing the importance of continuity and established hierarchies. Marx, meanwhile, 'attacked the opposition of the abstract categories "individual" and "society" and argued that the individual is a social creation, born into relationships and determined by them'.³⁷ Curiously enough, the conservative and socialist critiques of this 'new individualism' seem thus to arrive, albeit via opposing ideologies and aetiologies, at the same diagnosis of the disease it engenders: society as a mere aggregate of atomised, anomic individuals, lacking any organic sense of kinship with their fellows. For conservatives, the problem is caused by the loss of continuity and traditional deference to timeless hierarchies; for socialists, it arises

³⁶ Ibid., p.163.

³⁷ Ibid., p.164.

from the increasing encroachment of capitalism, from man's increasing subservience to the means of production and his consequent sense of alienation.

Lawrence, for his part, seems to occupy a succession of curiously contradictory positions in relation to all of this. In his recurring emphasis on the importance of the autonomous individual in terms of his inviolable selfhood and 'perfected singleness', one can detect elements of liberalism; yet he simultaneously rejects, in the strongest terms, liberal notions of benevolent idealism and the supposed virtues of democracy. In terms of the conservative perspective, he rejects hierarchies of social class as superficial, merely contingent, bearing no relation to a person's inherent worth; yet, while never explicitly endorsing fascism as the term is generally understood, he constantly yearns for a 'natural' aristocracy of the soul, for a social – even spiritual – hierarchy which would surely emerge if only every individual would give way to a spontaneous recognition of his or her rightful place within the God-given scheme of things. In terms of socialism and Marxism, Lawrence frequently rails against the tyranny of 'the money system' and expresses his rage against the machine; yet simultaneously, just as he rejects fascism, he rejects communism as merely another form of machinery. Terry Eagleton, in his book *Criticism and Ideology*, sees these contradictions in Lawrence as having arisen from:

...a contradiction within the Romantic humanist tradition itself, between its corporate and individualist components. An extreme form of individualism is structural to Romantic humanist ideology – an application, indeed, of organicism to the individual self, which

becomes thereby wholly autotelic, spontaneously evolving into 'wholeness' by its own uniquely determining laws.³⁸

As Eagleton sees it, this contradiction gave rise to Lawrence's 'perpetual oscillation between a proud celebration of individual autonomy and a hunger for social integration'.³⁹

Thus we can trace Lawrence's preoccupation with duality across a continuum: from his personal psychology and the circumstances of his upbringing, through the realm of interpersonal relationships, and outwards into the wider political and philosophical spheres. This extrapolation from personal experience into an assumption of universal significance can be traced from Lawrence's childhood divisions onwards into the legacy self-consciousness, inhibition and isolation which was their outcome, and further into his overarching concern with the idea of reintegration and how it might be attained in personal, philosophical and political terms.

Allness and Oneness: Lawrence and Religion

In his quest for reintegration, Lawrence eventually had recourse (in *Apocalypse*, his last book) to the idea of religion in the widest sense of the word, i.e. as in 'religio',⁴⁰ a 'binding back' or reintegrative act of connection. The OED gives warrant for this interpretation, citing the Latin word 'religare' as the etymological root of the word religion which is now most widely accepted. To 'relegate' is to bind (up or) back, and also carries the meaning 'to bind together or unite (people)', i.e. to reinstate man as 'an individual' rather than 'the individual'. As we shall see,

³⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p.158.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁴⁰ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, Mara Kalnins (ed.) (London: Penguin Books Ltd, (1931) 1995), p.190.

Lawrence's recourse to the etymological derivation of the word 'religion' corresponds with a willingness to go beyond the bounds of organized religion in search of some underlying impulse common to all of man's attempts to attain a sense of connectedness with the cosmos. Lawrence's conception of religion is thus happy to embrace what he called in *Apocalypse* the 'impious pagan duality' of such early Greek thinkers as Xenophanes and Herakleitos, which he contrasts elsewhere with 'the later pious duality of good and evil',⁴¹ or the kind of the 'grocery-shop morality' espoused by the Bible-mongers mentioned earlier. In pursuit of a formulation for this all-embracing conception of religion and God, Chong-Wha Chung, in his 1989 essay 'In Search of the Dark God: Lawrence's Dualism', quotes Paul Tillich's inspiring definition:

...the deepest ground of our being and of all being, the depth of life itself. [...] The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is *God*. The depth is what the word *God* means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without any reservation. Perhaps, in order to do so, you must forget everything traditional that you have learned about God, perhaps even that Word itself. For if you know that God means depth, you know much about him.⁴²

Lawrence believed that when man's existence was characterized by a more sociocentric awareness, when 'men still lived...like flocks of birds on the wing...an

⁴¹ Ibid.; D H Lawrence, *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, in *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*, Simonetta de Filippis (ed.) (London: Penguin Books, (1927) 1999), p.56.

⁴² Chong-Wha Chung, 'In Search of the Dark God: Lawrence's Dualism' (1989), in Peter Preston & Peter Hoare (eds.), *D H Lawrence in the Modern World*, p.76. The quotation is taken from Paul Tillich's *The Shaking of the Foundations*, (1962).

ancient tribal unison in which the individual was hardly separated out, then the tribe lived breast to breast, as it were, with the cosmos [...] the whole cosmos was alive and in contact with the flesh of man, there was no room for the intrusion of the god idea'.⁴³ That which later became the 'god idea' was presumably thought of, however unconsciously, as present in the world – but needed not to be *spoken* of. God was *unspoken*, antecedent to articulation. Lawrence associated the introduction of the 'god idea' with man's lapse into the alienation of self-awareness, his partaking of the Tree of Knowledge rather than the Tree of Life. In this post-lapsarian state, man must needs 'invent', as it were, a self-consciously derived God-concept in an attempt to span the resultant chasm, to 'intervene between [himself] and the cosmos'.⁴⁴ The attempt fails, for the end result is no more than a personal relationship with a personal God, where the word 'personal' carries all the pejorative overtones which Lawrence frequently ascribed to it: '... the little petty personal adventure of modern Protestantism and Catholicism alike, cut off from the cosmos...'⁴⁵ Richard Rorty, relating this insistence on 'a sense of mystery and wonder in regard to anthropomorphic but nonhuman powers' to Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, states: 'A Greek sense of wonder requires us to think that there is something sufficiently like us to be enviable but so superior to us as to be barely intelligible.'⁴⁶

Deprecating as he did this personalized element in religion, Lawrence was concerned to reintroduce the holistic conception of religion, to 'bind back' our religious sense into the all-embracing supra-personal apprehension he felt had been lost, for 'when our religious responses are dead, or inactive, we are really cut off from

⁴³ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p.130.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.75.

⁴⁶ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999), p.52.

life, because the deepest part of our consciousness is not functioning'.⁴⁷ To this end, he abjured the self-conscious abstractions and petty dogmatism of organized religion and sought to express his heartfelt conviction in the most concrete of terms:

To the ancient consciousness, Matter, Materia, or Substantial things are God. A great rock is God. A pool of water is God. And why not? The longer we live the more we return to the oldest of all visions. A great rock *is* God. I can touch it. It is undeniable. It is God.⁴⁸

What is striking to the reader in all of this is Lawrence's extraordinarily atavistic capacity to engage with this sensuous apprehension of Oneness, this ability to attune himself with that which was once itself, however distantly, a profound state of attunement. It is in this sense, I suggest, that Robert E Montgomery speaks of 'the visionary D H Lawrence', for Lawrence appears to stand amidst the dis-integrated shards of man's present-day (self-)consciousness, and yet, Janus-like, is able to look back to an age which preceded this tragic discontinuity, and forward to a new epoch in which man's sense of integration might – indeed must – be regained. An early indicator of this capacity is found in the young Lawrence's 'uncanny empathy... with wild things. [...] He found he could move joyously and unselfconsciously in the natural world'.⁴⁹ Small wonder, then, that Lawrence's religious exhortations should find expression in terms of flocks of birds, rocks and pools of water. His affinity with nature was no doubt crucial to what Martin Jarrett-Kerr referred to as Lawrence's 'sense of the kinship of being, his intuitive knowledge of hierarchies profounder than the visible'.⁵⁰ Jarrett-Kerr, noting Lawrence's insistence on depicting elements of the

⁴⁷ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p.155.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.95, [Lawrence's emphasis].

⁴⁹ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years, 1815-1912*, p.106.

⁵⁰ Martin Jarrett-Kerr, *D H Lawrence and Human Existence* (New York: Chip's Bookshop, (1951) 1978), p.151.

natural world animistically, suggested – not altogether facetiously – that ‘there should be a word “animistically”’.⁵¹ I will relate this quality of Lawrence’s thinking to Richard Rorty’s idea of ‘contingency’.

Lawrence’s advocacy of religion as a state of instinctive attunement attracted the criticism of T S Eliot, who dismissed as ‘fundamentally chimerical’ Lawrence’s attempt ‘to go as low as possible in the scale of human consciousness, in order to find something that he could assure himself was real’.⁵² It is fair to say that in terms of their respective backgrounds and religious and intellectual propensities, there could hardly be two more antithetical characters than Eliot and Lawrence. In a series of lectures published in book form as *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*, the austere Anglo-Catholic Eliot (having announced that he had ‘ascended the platform of these lectures only in the role of moralist’) referred to Lawrence’s ‘deplorable religious upbringing’ and goes on to describe him as ‘an almost perfect example of the heretic’.⁵³ Such religious and moral criticisms, however, have an air of class snobbery about them, and can hardly be seen in isolation from Eliot’s wider disdain for what he saw as Lawrence’s relative lack of formal education and limited intellectual capacity. Lawrence, for Eliot, lacked ‘intellectual and social training’ and ‘the critical faculties which education should give’, and had ‘an incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking’.⁵⁴

Reading Eliot’s lectures alongside (for example) Lawrence’s essay ‘Surgery for the Novel – or a Bomb’, one can hardly wonder at Eliot’s scepticism as to Lawrence’s intellectual capacity, for a comparison of the two works is a revealing

⁵¹ Ibid., p.123.

⁵² Ibid., pp.117-8. The quotation is from T S Eliot’s *Revelation*, 1937.

⁵³ T S Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), pp.12, 38 & 58.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.58 & 59.

essay in stylistic contrast. Eliot proceeds by way of what seems an exhaustive – even exhausting – ratiocinative deliberation. His prose is reliably supplied with punctilious discriminations and distinctions, and regularly halts in order to deliver qualifications and reservations on either side of his set route. The intended effect is presumably a sense of intellectual inevitability which appears all the more persuasive because it is seen to make such a display of flexibility and fair-mindedness. One feels one has an obligation – and yet simultaneously a curious disinclination – to consider oneself persuaded by such a detached and methodical approach, which is so different from Lawrence’s anarchic tossing of squibs. In fact, the sensitive reader can easily wonder whether Eliot’s show of procedural exactitude is any less tendentious than Lawrence’s openly rabble-rousing style of persuasion. David Ellis suggests that Lawrence would have felt ‘impatience with the Flaubertian doctrine of impersonality [and] its updated version in T S Eliot’s famous distinction between the man who suffers and the mind which creates’; and Lawrence indeed referred to such impersonality and detachment as ‘classiosity [which is] bunkum, but still more, *cowardice*’.⁵⁵ There seems little prospect of an accommodation between Lawrence’s emotive subjectivism and Eliot’s stern objectivism.

Even so, Lawrence knew that, however paradoxical it may seem, his clarion call towards the ‘way of affirmation’ could never be viable unless it took account of man’s seemingly ineluctable propensity for intellection, the way of question: ‘Man is a creature of dual consciousness. It is his glory and his pain.’⁵⁶ In his essay ‘On Human Destiny’ (1924), he conceded that we must ‘... accept our destiny. Man can’t live by instinct, because he’s got a mind... Man has a mind, and ideas, so it is just

⁵⁵ David Ellis, *D H Lawrence: Dying Game, 1922-30* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.383 & 686-7. The emphasis is Lawrence’s own.

⁵⁶ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p.192.

puerile to sigh for innocence and naïve spontaneity... You've got to marry the pair of them...'⁵⁷ – by which he meant emotions and the intellect. Montgomery, too, declares that any process of reintegration can never be 'a matter of simply returning to the Greeks [such as Heraclitus]. That is an impossibility, given well over two thousand years of the history of consciousness. The synthesis must be restored at a higher level incorporating all that has gone before'.⁵⁸

Having considered Lawrence's take on religion (in the widest sense of the word), we see how his preoccupation with duality spread outwards into every area of his thinking: personal consciousness, personal relationships, societal relationships, and further into the realms of philosophy and religion. The problem of duality loomed ever larger in Lawrence's thinking, seemingly paradigmatic of his entire way of being in the world. His only hope of reconciling this duality would be his artistic imagination, via which he would creatively reconcile the terms of yet another duality: the baneful division which Lawrence saw as having sundered poetry from philosophy.

Conclusion: Lawrence as Poet and Philosopher

An important tenet of the sheer expansiveness of Lawrence's religious credo is that art and religion are alike in their operation. He states that when our religious responses are dead, 'we try to take refuge in art' – as if to imply that such recourse is in vain. But he goes on to declare that '...to my mind, the essential feeling in all art is religious, and art is a form of religion without dogma. The *feeling* in art is always religious, always'.⁵⁹ The sole criterion of true art is that the 'soul is moved to a certain fullness of experience'. The sense of fullness arises from transcendence of the

⁵⁷ D H Lawrence, 'On Human Destiny', from *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, Michael Herbert (ed.) (Cambridge University Press, (1915) 1988), p.209.

⁵⁸ Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p.107.

⁵⁹ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p.155.

false distinction between feeling and thought – which is itself necessarily a precursor of the distinction between poet and philosopher. The experience is religious in that it ‘puts us curiously into touch with life’ and thus fulfils the ‘binding together’ function implicit in the idea of religion. The only people for whom the attempt to ‘take refuge in art’ is doomed are those who have indeed ‘lost their religious connection’. In Lawrence’s view, these alienated souls ‘find [in art] a great deal of pleasure, aesthetic, intellectual, many kinds of pleasure, even curiously sensual. But it is the pleasure of entertainment, not of experience’⁶⁰ – and the experience missed by such dilettantes is the sense of connection which is intrinsic to all true religious experience, as Lawrence makes clear: ‘Once you have felt a real glimpse of religion, you realise that all that is *truly* felt, every feeling that is felt in every true relation, every vivid feeling of connection, is religious, be it what it may, and the only irreligious thing is the death of feeling, the causing of nullity...’⁶¹ What the ‘poetic and religious consciousness’ have in common is ‘the instinctive act of synthesis’ – and it is in this sense that Anthony Burgess, in relation to Lawrence’s ‘big ramshackle philosophy’, called Lawrence ‘that best kind of philosopher, a poet’.⁶² (I will argue that in terms of Richard Rorty’s philosophy, Lawrence will prove to be the best kind of pragmatist: one who finds that the traditional philosophical tools are simply inadequate for the job before him, and who is thus prompted to fashion new tools from whatever materials are contingently to hand.)

What lies at the heart of Burgess’ almost casual remark is made explicit by Montgomery, the subtitle of whose book is (significantly) *Beyond Philosophy and Art*: ‘In order to understand Lawrence, we must... transcend our normal categories.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² D H Lawrence, *D H Lawrence and Italy: Twilight in Italy, Sea and Sardinia and Etruscan Places*, Anthony Burgess (introduction), p.xi.

This requires an extraordinary effort of thought, but without it we cannot grasp Lawrence in his wholeness. Without a fundamental reconceptualizing of art and philosophy we will be left with a false dichotomy and a false choice between the prophet and the poet.⁶³ Rorty has written of the ‘quarrel between poetry and philosophy’, tracing it to ‘the tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of contingency’.⁶⁴ In this respect, Lawrence emerges as one for whom such tension found expression in his writing, as in (for example) *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, where he transmutes the poetry of everyday contingency into his idiosyncratic universalist philosophy. As Michael Black notes, ‘[Lawrence] was born with, and miraculously managed to carry into adult life, an undissociated sensibility’.⁶⁵ The choice of phrase is ironic, given T S Eliot’s criticisms of Lawrence’s work and his alleged ‘incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking’, for Montgomery suggests that Eliot was ‘himself a victim of the “dissociation of sensibility” he did so much to popularize’.⁶⁶

Lawrence’s problems with boundedness were, it could be argued, the same thing as his undissociated sensibility: his task would be to overcome the problematical elements which could make the world such a difficult place for him and channel his unboundedness into more fruitful directions. This effort could never have been, for Lawrence, a process of abstract intellectualism: to find his philosophy, he had to find out how to live it – and thus, in his most effective writing, life and ideas flow seamlessly together. As Montgomery notes, Lawrence, in such moments, succeeds in:

⁶³ Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p.5.

⁶⁴ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, (1989) 1999), p.25.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p.69.

⁶⁶ Quoted *ibid.*, pp.226 & 223.

[bringing] ideas into relationship with life. Ideas are put forth; they are tested by life and by dialogue with others; and out of this interaction of life and thought new ideas emerge to be tested in their turn in a ceaseless process that knows no terminus. This is what Jaspers calls ‘thinking by means of real dialectic’, in which each position must be lived through with one’s whole being...⁶⁷

Indeed, Lawrence is known to have been of the opinion that his books are not to be thought out, but lived out.⁶⁸ In all of his writings – not merely in his novels – Lawrence undertook what he saw as his task as a writer ‘to rescue human consciousness (and in particular the idea of human individuality) from the clutches of merely scientific understanding’.⁶⁹ To this end, Lawrence will renounce exposition and theorizing in favour of this dialectical approach, as I will show in my discussion of the Chatterley novels. As Montgomery notes, Lawrence shared with Nietzsche this preoccupation with reunifying the sundered elements of man’s nature so as to discover new ways achieving our human being:

Nietzsche and Lawrence see it as their life’s task to recover the unity that the Greeks experienced, so heal the split between man and nature, man and man, mind and body, art and philosophy. It is not a matter of simply returning to the Greeks. That is an impossibility, given well over two thousand years of the history of consciousness. The synthesis must be restored at a higher level incorporating all that has gone before.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p.112.

⁶⁸ L D Clark, *The Minoan Distance: The Symbolism of Travel in D H Lawrence* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1980), p.67.

⁶⁹ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Early Years, 1815-1912*, p.183.

⁷⁰ Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p.107.

My overall argument will be that Lawrence's instinctive needs – for unity, for reconciliation, for some coherent sense of selfhood – derived inevitably from the damaging circumstances of his early life and their legacy of the 'family romance' as Lawrence's enduring emotional paradigm. The resulting pain and emotional immaturity left Lawrence in a seemingly insoluble dilemma: yearning for the wholeness he imagined as both lost and yet attainable – but thwarted by the realisation that whatever one attains necessarily loses the allure of the lost. 'A Modern Lover' is an early attempt by Lawrence to work through his frustration, addressing as it does the sad truth that a romantic imagination may deal in pearls of great price, but it cannot afford mundane realisation. Even so, by tracing Lawrence's successive reworkings of the same paradigm – in *The Ladybird*, *The Escaped Cock* and the Chatterley novels – I will show that Lawrence's personal progress is always inseparable from his philosophical progress. It is in this sense that Lawrence's achievement 'does justice to our feelings' by discovering a language of contingency which brings together that which is most personal with that which is most profound in its implications.

Chapter Three

Lawrence's Early Philosophy

Introduction

In terms of the cross-section I wish to take through Lawrence's thinking, the self-consciously philosophical writings dating from the time of the First World War are most significant. These include 'The Crown' and 'The Reality of Peace' – and also much of Lawrence's personal correspondence dating from this time. To examine both the overt philosophizing and the expounding of the same ideas in Lawrence's letters is to see that they are in fact one: the most abstruse and apparently unworldly philosophizing is actually found to be of a piece with a great deal of personal manipulation and unwarranted trespass in the lives of other people. Drawing on Dervin's analysis of Lawrence's formative years and the behavioural patterns shaped therein, the behaviour of the messianic wartime Lawrence can be seen as analogous to the neurotic style of personal interaction he first sought to address in 'A Modern Lover': the same emotional dynamic becomes exaggerated and universalised by Lawrence's war-hysteria and eventually takes a dreadful toll on his personal life.

Lawrence's inability to maintain a workable differentiation between inner and outer or self and world means he was condemned to take the Great War both personally *and* apocalyptically; for in Lawrence's mind the war was (as Dervin notes) 'a sort of realized nightmare: as if the world were persecuting him by acting out his worst unconscious fears'.¹ Indeed, the title of Paul Delany's chronicle of these events – *D H Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and his Circle in the Years of the Great War* – is aptly chosen. With self and world disastrously confused in Lawrence's thinking, there were seemingly no effective boundaries to differentiate 'the writer',

¹ Daniel Dervin, *A 'Strange Sapience': The Creative Imagination of D H Lawrence* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), p.45.

‘his circle’, and ‘the Great War’ – I hope to show (by way of highlighting the problems Lawrence had to overcome) how all three elements were drawn into the same nightmarish confusion. Lawrence’s attempts to order the world are a more ambitious, scaled-up version of his interpersonal behaviour, and his early philosophy – especially his doctrine of polarity – can be read largely as a self-justificatory metaphysical theorization of the kind of neurotic oscillations we have seen in ‘A Modern Lover’.

In his search for something that will lessen the pain of his *inner* reality, Lawrence entertained hopes of utopian reorderings of *outer* reality: he hoped to found an elect community called Rananim, which will eventually culminate in no less than the ultimate regeneration and reconciliation of the whole of humankind. He ‘cast himself in the saviour-redeemer role as the founder of a nobler kingdom’, and Dervin notes how these utopian wishes were born of ‘panic, hysteria and grandiosity’, for ‘inner and outer reality [became] hopelessly confused’.² Characteristically, Lawrence’s response to his own emotional crisis is ‘inseparable from his response to the wider cultural malaise’.³ It follows there could be no sustainable distinction between Lawrence’s style of personal interaction and his philosophizing, since it all emanated from the same crisis. Accordingly, Lawrence’s early philosophy was a kind of ‘courtship’ whereby he sought to recruit influential individuals to his cause. We may think of Lawrence’s ‘recruitment’ not only in the obvious sense of enlisting other people, but also in terms of its etymological root of *recrescere*, to grow again. This is clearly Lawrence’s unconscious motivation and deepest need at this time – for in terms of his emotional development, his original ‘growing’ has in some sense miscarried. By now, rather than striving for psychic integration by attempting to

² Ibid., p.32 & 45.

³ Ibid., p.146.

merge with another person (which attempts have proved so repeatedly painful), Lawrence believes he will achieve it by integrating himself with all of humanity (though on some level he realises he will have to unify humanity as part of the same movement by which he subsumes himself therein).

Thus Lawrence's idea of 'religio', of binding together, is seen here in an early and somewhat naïve manifestation. Lawrence will bring about the unity of mankind through prophecy, even though he apparently considers that this will, to some extent, entail the setting aside of the most potent element of his art: perceiving the fate of the world to be in his hands, Lawrence – at this point a misguided philosopher-poet – believes philosophy to be more urgently important than poetry. In a March 1915 letter to Gordon Campbell, Lawrence explicitly sets out his philosophical mission:

You see we are no longer satisfied to be individual and lyrical – we are growing out of that stage. A man must needs know himself as his whole people, he must live at the centre and heart of all humanity, if he is to be free. [...] Because each of us is in himself humanity. You are the English nation.⁴

Lawrence's gift for empathy, for evoking the sheer quick and contingency of immediate personal interaction, for what is indeed 'individual and lyrical', is here rejected as inadequate precisely *because* it celebrates what is unique and local. He writes to William Hopkin in September 1915: 'Art after all is indirect and ultimate, I want this to be more immediate.'⁵ In what is an understandable though ultimately false move, Lawrence hopes to bypass the fragmentary and bid directly for universality:

⁴ Ibid., p.300.

⁵ Ibid., p.391.

...art which is lyrical can now no longer satisfy us: each work of art that is true, now, must give expression to the great collective experience, not to the individual. So a Rembrandt picture is what each man separately sees for himself. But a Fra Angelico *Last Judgement* – or the Aeschylus trilogy is what a nation, a race sees in its greatest, collective vision. Now we need the great, collective vision, we have accumulated enough fragmentary data of lyricism since the Renaissance.⁶

In terms of Lawrence's philosophical journey, this approach will prove to have been entirely misconceived: his thinking will achieve the quality of a great collective vision in the Etruscan sketches – whose sheer evocative power will, ironically, prove to be fragmentary and lyrical enough. Lawrence's Etruscan philosophy is founded on its sense of the contingent – and any great, collective vision must, it would seem, include what is contingent. Lawrence's wartime confusion concerns the nature of immediacy: what will eventually prove most immediate in Lawrence's thinking will not be that which strives to be most prophetically 'universal'. Again ironically, a passage in 'The Study of Thomas Hardy' – a work-in-progress which, in 1914, Lawrence revised and expanded into the first version of his philosophizing – well describes the trap into which Lawrence himself falls:

It is the novelists and dramatists who have the hardest task in reconciling their metaphysic, their theory of being and knowing, with their living sense of being. [...] The metaphysic must always subserve

⁶ Ibid., p.301.

the artistic purpose beyond the artist's conscious aim. Otherwise the novel becomes a treatise.⁷

In the several reworked versions of his wartime philosophy, Lawrence's conscious aim *is* a metaphysic that he can expound in a treatise. It is as if, convinced that the exigencies of wartime demand no less than his unmediated intervention, Lawrence strives to be something 'more' than (say) a novelist so as to exempt himself from the requirements of artistic mediation. Dervin notes the high cost of such misguided effort: for 'in [his] struggle to realize the [utopian] fantasy directly, the artist in him is nearly eclipsed, and the fantasy itself veers treacherously near delusion'.⁸

Despite these assertions, Lawrence continued to write fiction throughout this period, and would doubtless have regarded *The Rainbow* as falling under the rubric of 'lyrical' art. In such declarations as the above letter to Campbell, Lawrence is, we infer, seeking in advance to make out a special case for his philosophy to be *received* as having universal import: he longs for it to bring about his ideal of collectivity and hopes others will respond to it accordingly. Lawrence expects to be exempted from the rigours of academic philosophy and its stringency over terminology and accepted instead as a great visionary, one who transcends mere fragmentary lyricism – yet as we have seen in Lawrence's 'Surgery...' essay, even his philosophy works best when it is fragmentary, contingent, playing on particularity and striking up sympathetic resonances with his readers. Nevertheless, the Lawrence of this period clung to his pretensions to established philosopher-status, as we see in a rather testy letter to Donald Carswell:

⁷ D H Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914), in Bruce Steele (ed.), *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p.87.

⁸ Daniel Dervin, *A 'Strange Sapience'*, p.21.

If you would care to, I wish you would read the essays [*Studies in Classical American Literature*] I left with Catherine. You will say I repeat myself – and that I don't know the terms of real philosophy – and that my terms are empty – the empty self – so don't write these things to me, I know them beforehand, and they make me cross. None the less, read the essays and see if you find anything in them.⁹

Regarding Lawrence's attitude to philosophy as being supposedly distinct from lyrical art, the final word can be given to Philip Heseltine. He was, so to speak, one of Lawrence's 'second line' recruits: one of a mixed bunch of rather unstable personalities, the likes of which Lawrence cultivated for a time after his 'first line' recruits (such as Bertrand Russell and Cynthia Asquith) had managed to distance themselves by whatever means. Yet Heseltine, in spite of his volatility, was perceptive enough to be able to describe Lawrence in the following terms:

He is a very great artist, but hard and autocratic in his views and outlook, and his artistic canons I find utterly and entirely unsympathetic to my nature. He seems to be too metaphysical, too anxious to be comprehensive in a detached way and to care too little for purely personal, analytical and introspective art. His views are somewhat at variance with his own achievements.¹⁰

In his state of confusion and distress, the Lawrence-philosopher finds the world is difficult to woo. He cannot help but project his psychic rift onto the world, and in his letter to Campbell he reveals his sense of personal disintegration by

⁹ James T Boulton & Andrew Robertson (eds.) *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume III 1916-1921* (Cambridge University Press: 1985), p.278.

¹⁰ Paul Delany, *D H Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press Ltd, 1979), p.199. The quotation is taken from a letter from Heseltine to his friend, the composer Delius.

appearing to hold contradictory positions simultaneously. On one hand, he expounds his theme of collectivity, insisting to Campbell that ‘L’État *c’est moi*’ (Lawrence’s emphasis) and even extrapolating the idea into ‘La race *c’est moi* – La race humaine, *c’est moi*’. On the other hand, such a notion of collectivity is revealed as no more than the dream of a damaged and frustrated man, a consoling fantasy of finding the holy grail of integration:

That which exists as the ostensible English nation is a mass of friable amorphous individualities. But in me, and in you, is the living organic English nation. [...] It is not that I care about *other people*: I know that *I am the English nation*...and that this which exists ostensibly as the English nation is a falsity, mere cardboard.¹¹

Thus Lawrence’s mystical notion of the unity of humankind, or even of England, appears on this showing to consist of Lawrence and his friend Gordon Campbell: only such elect souls, it seems, can be dependably thought of as ‘living’ and ‘organic’ enough to embody Lawrence’s longed-for collectivity; for the rest, there is only the ugly ostensibility of such ‘other people’ as will never consent to be recruited into helping Lawrence heal his psychic injuries. They are insufficient because Lawrence himself is insufficient; in his room full of mirrors, he sees himself everywhere. His problems are still with boundedness: he is himself the whole English nation, but he still needs other people – and those other people are stubbornly individual and uncooperative. Nevertheless, we can here discern once again Lawrence’s preoccupation with the dual meaning of ‘individual’, its capacity to imply both indivisible unity and insurmountable separateness.

¹¹ Ibid.

In the same letter to Campbell, we see more clearly what function the term 'religion' currently serves for Lawrence. He declares that his conception of the 'living organic English nation' is 'not politics – it is religion'. Though he does not mention the etymological derivation he will eventually cite in *Apocalypse*, the idea of 'binding together' is already apparent, for it seems that private, subjective religion is anathema: 'I was purple with rage over your talk of "religion" – as if religion were some private little concern of your own. These private little religions, they are more dirty than a private property.' Yet having attacked Campbell for his allegedly self-referential take on religion, Lawrence seems to protest too much in the other direction when expressing his 'collective' sense of religious commitment. The following passage is worth quoting in full for what it reveals of Lawrence's recruitment hysteria:

You see it really means something – I *wish* I could express myself – this feeling that one is not only a little individual living a little individual life, but that one is in oneself the whole of mankind, and ones fate is the fate of the whole of mankind, and ones charge is the charge of the whole of mankind. Not me – the little, vain, personal D H Lawrence – but that unnameable me which is not vain nor personal, but strong, and glad, and ultimately sure, but so blind, so groping, so tongue-tied, so staggering. You see I *know* that if I could write the finest lyrical poetry or prose that ever was written, if I could be put on the pinnacle of immortality, I wouldn't. I would rather struggle clumsily to put into art the Great Law of God and Mankind – not the empirical discovery of the individual – but the utterance of the great racial or human consciousness, a little of which is in me. And if I

botch out a little of this utterance, so that other people are made alert and active, I don't care whether I am great or small, or rich or poor, or remembered or forgotten. What is it to me. Only there is something I *must* say to mankind – and I can't say it by myself – I feel so dumb and struggling. But it is The Law we must utter – the New, real Law – not subjective experience.¹²

Lawrence has been, so to speak, insufficiently born unto himself: he is not an integrated individual with a dependable sense of autonomy or personal boundedness. He thus exhibits a regressive urge to return to the safety of the womb – the state of antecedent harmony which Dervin calls the pre-object environment. With this in mind, Lawrence's unconscious wish is that other people form a matrix for him. This is the impulse behind Lawrence's present yearning for collectivity, and the source of his anger towards the mere aggregate of 'friable amorphous individualities' who will not consent to be thus subsumed. Endlessly through his wartime letters he makes strikingly explicit reference to people's refusal to *coalesce* for him. He complains to Cynthia Asquith:

'There are so many people, but none of them have any real being. They are all inconclusive and unresolved, as if they had no absolute existence at all anywhere, but were only sorts of small relative natural phenomena, all of them, without souls.'¹³

Elsewhere, people are 'amorphous entities', like 'sands of the desert', which fate Lawrence calls 'the most wretched form of undying death'.¹⁴ He complains to his

¹² Ibid., p.302.

¹³ Ibid., p.399.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.426.

Russian friend Koteliansky, 'People are not homogeneous or even coherent',¹⁵ and concludes despairingly to Cynthia Asquith: 'I am so sick of people: they preserve an evil, bad, separating spirit under the warm cloak of good words.'¹⁶ In April 1917 – late in Lawrence's nightmare phase and into the time I shall refer to as his 'dying' – Lawrence wrote to Mark Gertler expressing the frustration he felt at having failed to recruit the world:

I wish one could *do* something: I wish one could see where to lay hold, to effect something fresh and clear, just to begin a new state. You say 'it is life, life is like it.' But that is mere sophistry. Life is what one wants in one's soul, and in my soul I do not want this wretched conglomerate messing, therefore I deny that it is life at all, it is only baseness and extraneous, sporadic, meaningless sensationalism.¹⁷

Ironically, it will not be until Lawrence's psychic 'death' and re-emergence from the tombs of ancient Etruria that he will be able to reconceive himself and the world in such a way as to reconcile self and world. Only then can 'conglomerate messing' be embraced for its own sake as the plurality of sheer contingency, as something Lawrence can celebrate as the quick of all the cosmos – indeed, as something analogous to Dervin's 'harmonious mix-up'. Moreover, it is only following his Etruscan experience that Lawrence can move on to a view of mankind which sees other people in terms similar to those of Rorty's idea of 'solidarity'. Beginning tentatively in *The Escaped Cock*, solidarity will come to be seen as something which is built outwards from the individual, rather than the sort of *en masse* collectivity which a self-appointed prophet of mankind presumes to impose

¹⁵ Ibid., p.666.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.378.

¹⁷ *Letters III*, p.110.

from above. In the meantime, we might carry forward the idea of Lawrence during his nightmare phase as literally disingenuous: as not yet 'freely born', not yet having achieved via his art the engaging sense of artlessness which characterizes his mature philosophy. In this earlier state, knowing at some level that he needs to recruit himself, Lawrence misguidedly aims to recruit everyone else, and the idea of Lawrence as disingenuous fairly captures the extent of his manipulateness during this period.

'The Crown'

Against the background of Lawrence's emotional state, his wartime philosophy can be seen as a reflection of his sense of personal strife. The governing idea of 'The Crown' is that the Lion and the Unicorn (in their familiar heraldic opposition beneath a crown) represent poles of opposition, with the crown presiding over them as the 'third thing' – it is the fruit of their eternal strife, for it is ever predicated upon the *balance* of contention beneath it, and thus ever in peril lest one half of the duality should prevail over the other. The psychological implications are clear enough, as Lawrence, however unconsciously, seeks to make a virtue of his psychic divisions. Yet one is struck by the fact that the 'The Crown', though it is a sustained elaboration of the idea of harmonious opposition, seems to have no practical application to the world – despite the sense of urgency which fuelled the writing of Lawrence's wartime philosophy. Delany notes that while 'The Crown' is 'unified', it is also 'abstract and elliptical',¹⁸ as illustrated in Lawrence's most succinct statement of its central theme: 'The crown is upon the perfect balance of the fight, it is not the fruit of either victory. The crown is not prize of either combatant. It is the *raison*

¹⁸ Delany, *D H Lawrence's Nightmare*, pp.148-9.

d'être of both. It is the absolute within the fight.¹⁹ One imagines it must have struck Lawrence's intended acolytes that such a nicely worked picture of polarity, however internally coherent, was too abstract to offer any *purchase* on the world. Lady Cynthia Asquith must have said as much to Lawrence, as can be inferred from another of his petulant responses to any such criticism of his philosophy: 'I see you also are rather hostile to what I say, like everybody else. But I didn't write for "average stupidity". And the Lion and the Unicorn are at any rate better than "the universe consists in a duality, but there is an initial element called polarity etc. etc."' ²⁰ This was written in October 1915 and suggests that Lawrence's attempts to theorize his psychic division into a universal principle were already floundering. A week earlier, he had attempted (in a letter to Eleanor Farjeon) to rescue another of his models of polarity from a similarly baffled response:

Can you not see that if the relation between Father and Son, in the Christian theology, were only *love*, then how could they even feel love unless they were separate and different, and if they are divinely different, does this not imply that they are divine opposites, and hence the relation *implied* is of eternal opposition, the relation *stated* is eternal attraction, love. I hope this doesn't seem confused: I think it is quite clear really.²¹

What is clear both here and in 'The Crown' is Lawrence's lack of a sufficient sense of personal integration – of any adequate awareness of *boundedness* as an individual who is capable of managing inner and outer reality and sustaining a

¹⁹ D H Lawrence, 'The Crown' (1915), in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p.262. (Further page numbers cited in the text refer to this edition.)

²⁰ George J Zytaruk & James T Boulton (eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume II, 1913-16* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.411.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.408.

workable differentiation between them. In his personal relationships, the fundamental impulses of attraction and opposition are confused and unstable, even unmanageable – which unmanageability he has, in his anguish, attempted to map onto the Father and Son of Christian theology. If ‘The Crown’ stands as evidence in support of any notion of polarity, it does so by the way in which it reveals the author’s alarming oscillations between self and world – it is a painful declaration of distress and instability. In the confused world of ‘The Crown’, Lawrence’s self can be externalized instantly into a universal generalization, while the universe is just as readily internalized for purposes of self-illustration and self-validation. As Delany writes of ‘The Crown’, Lawrence is ‘now... weary of man’s social forms and even of the shapes and textures of the external world. Like Melville’s Ahab he asserts that “all visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks”, and aspires only to “strike through the mask”’.²² Forms, shapes, textures, masks, even man himself – everything becomes de-realised as Lawrence strives to articulate his besetting sense of personal incoherence.

Lawrence begins ‘The Crown’ with an extended treatment of the Lion/Unicorn theme before switching to another polarity, that of light/dark, and then ponders the nature of the consummation – or lack of it – which is the putative point of these polar oppositions. When Lawrence’s ‘self’ finally appears, it does so diffidently, hiding shyly amidst the first person plural before emerging to stand singly in an admission of insufficiency, of non-consummation:

It may be that our state of life is itself a denial of the consummation, a prevention, a negation; that this life is our nullification, our not-being.

It may be that the flower is held from the search of the light, and the

²² Paul Delany, *D H Lawrence’s Nightmare*, p.149.

roots from the dark, like a plant that is pot-bound. [...] We have forgotten our goal and our end. [...] This is evil, when that which is temporal and relative asserts itself eternal and absolute. This I, which I am, has no being save in timelessness. In my consummation, when that which came from the Beginning and that which came from the End are transfused into oneness, then I come into being, I have existence. Till then I am only a part of nature: I *am* not. [...] Thus the false I comes into being: the I which thinks itself supreme and infinite, and which is, in fact, a sick foetus shut up in the walls of an unrelaxed womb. [pp.272 & 279]

Such moments make for painful reading. It is as if, conscious that he has not yet been born unto himself, Lawrence the 'sick foetus' frustratedly resorts to self-excoriation as a poor substitute for his longed-for psychic birthing. Predictably, there follows an act of displacement: having identified his own shortfall, Lawrence turns it into an accusation against the world. The 'I' again becomes 'us' and then 'they', and it is now *the rest of the world* which persists in a state of non-consummated 'cabbage'-like stasis:

If I say that *I am*, this is false and evil. I am not. Among us all, how many have being? – too few. [...] Very few men have being at all. [...] Whether they live or die does not matter: except in so far as every failure in the part is a failure in the whole. Their death is of no more matter than the cutting of a cabbage in the garden [...] The cabbage is a lie because it asserts itself as a permanency, in the state wherein it finds itself. [...] They say: 'We are the consummation and the reality, we are the fulfilment.' This is pure amorphousness. [p.272-3]

We have seen already how ‘amorphousness’ is the charge Lawrence invariably lays against those he perceives as refusing recruitment. Indeed, whereas we have seen ‘La race humaine, c’est moi’ as the optimistic expression of Lawrence’s recruitment-ideal, in ‘The Crown’ he asserts ‘Après moi le Déluge’ (p.280) as its pessimistic counterpart.

More promisingly, ‘The Crown’ takes issue with such conceptual abstractions as are deployed in the widest cultural and societal senses and explicitly associates them with the problem of personal unborn-ness. Society itself becomes the unyielding womb; and abstract concepts are inadequate because, in a particularly Lawrentian sense, *conception itself* has proved inadequate: discursive knowledge, notwithstanding its endless capacity to generate concepts, has failed to make Lawrence’s world habitably coherent, for he has no coherent *self*-concept with which to inhabit it. In his pain of insufficiency, Lawrence rails against the most fundamental conceptions of a world which has failed to do justice to his *own* conception and has thus, so to speak, miscarried him:

All absolutes are prison-walls. These ‘laws’ which science has invented, like conservation of energy, indestructibility of matter, gravitation, the will-to-live, survival of the fittest: and even these absolute facts, like – the earth goes round the sun – or the doubtful atoms, electrons, or ether – they are all prison-walls, unless we realise that we don’t know what they mean [...] As for the earth going round the sun: it goes round like the blood goes round my body, absolutely mysteriously, with the rapidity and hesitation of life. [p.287]

This is a forthright enough challenge to discursive knowledge, and Lawrence’s present position can be summarized as follows: we have the world wrong. for it is all

misconceived. Facts are rendered factitious, and the physical laws which we generally understand as governing the material universe are made to look provisional – not entirely rejected, but nevertheless refused epistemological certainty (or ‘prison-wall’ status) by Lawrence’s insistence that ‘we don’t know what they mean’. This fundamentally Lawrentian quarrel with conceptual absolutism is still, as yet, a fraught enough business for him; but his angry scepticism will at last mellow into the kind of pragmatic open-mindedness which will characterize his later works such as *The Escaped Cock* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Richard Rorty has suggested that the real worth of philosophy lies not in the discovery of irrefutable absolutes but in the way it allows us to re-describe the world – and it is indeed Lawrence’s talent for re-description which will emerge as his strongest philosophical suit. What is most valuable in Lawrence’s early philosophy (as seen here in ‘The Crown’) is the way in which it relativizes the world – ‘frees it up’ from conceptual constraints – so as to clear the way for his later philosophy. Though the end result of Lawrence’s progress cannot yet be discerned, his compulsive unmaking of the world in its present conception will eventually clear the way for his new conception.

‘The Reality of Peace’

Mark Kinkead-Weekes, commenting on Lawrence’s ‘Peace’ essays, captures this positive aspect of Lawrence’s prose: ‘In the depths both of his misfortune and the war, Lawrence the religious man is all the more passionately convinced that the impulse of renewal will always come, and moreover that it has only to be accepted, in full submission to the unknown, for change to be instantaneous and the way forward to reveal itself.’²³ Read in isolation, ‘The Reality of Peace’ is most inspiring in terms

²³ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912-1922* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.369.

of its willingness to sweep away the old in the strong conviction that the new, though as yet unknown to us, will reveal itself. Lawrence urges that ‘we must give up our assurance, our conceit of final knowledge, our vanity of charted right and wrong’ [pp.28-9] – and asks rhetorically:

Who can choose beforehand what the world shall be? All law, all knowledge holds good for that which already exists, in the created world. But there is no law, no knowledge of the unknown which is to take place. We cannot know, we cannot declare beforehand. [p.27]

None of us know the way. The way is given on the way. [p.28]

In the light of Lawrence’s subsequent progress, there is much here that is oddly prescient – as though Lawrence has here spoken more truly than he could have known at the time. It will not be until much later, when the Lawrence-prophet has finally forsworn all that he has chosen beforehand – prophetic utterance and mystical essentialism – that the way forward will reveal itself to him. In the meantime, a reading of the biographical context of the ‘Peace’ essays reveals that there is still too much of disingenuousness in Lawrence’s approach, for the ‘Peace’ essays have passages of lulling, insinuating suggestiveness which too closely parallel his letters to ‘disciples’ such as Ottoline Morrell and Cynthia Asquith. Lawrence still hopes to manipulate the world into harmony, and there are still elements of courtship (and even seduction) in his ‘recruitment’ rhetoric from this period. Since Lawrence’s philosophy is still, at this stage, an exaggeration of his personal behaviour as fictionalized in the character of Cyril Mersham in ‘A Modern Lover’, seduction veers towards mass indoctrination, and there are passages in ‘The Reality of Peace’ which are reminiscent of the language used by religious cults to recruit new members:

We can only come at length to that perfect state of understanding, of acquiescence, when we sleep upon the living drift of the unknown [...]

The pattern is woven of us without our foreknowing, but not without our perfect unison of acquiescence [p.27] ...if, in our heart of hearts, we can find one spark of happiness that is absolved from strife, then we are converted to the new life the moment we accept this spark as the treasure of our being. This is conversion. If there is a quick, new desire to have new heaven and earth, and if we are given triumphantly to this desire, if we know that it will be fulfilled of us, finally and without fail, we are converted. [p.33]

Such talk of conversion and acquiescence may be well enough in isolation, but there are disturbing parallels between this language and Lawrence's letters to Ottoline Morrell. Lady Ottoline Morrell was an important figure in the 'Bloomsbury group' of artists and intellectuals and a patroness of the arts – and became central to Lawrence's 'Rananim' fantasy. She had 'sought out [Lawrence] because she admired his work',²⁴ and – initially at least – proved equally susceptible to his recruitment rhetoric. A close parallel can be traced between the enticing lullaby-language of Lawrence's 'The Reality of Peace' and the tone of his letters to Ottoline. In the former, Lawrence insists we must 'sleep in faith... we must be given in faith, like sleep', and he repeatedly foregrounds words such as 'lapse', 'yield' and 'accept gently' [p.29]. In a letter of 7th December 1915 to Ottoline he deploys similar terms – but there is now a disturbing personal undercurrent:

Do not struggle with your will, to dominate your conscious life – do not do it. Only drift, and let go – let go, entirely [...] Let all knots be

²⁴ Ibid., pp.187-8.

broken, all bonds unloosed, all connections slackened and released, all released... only sleep in the profound darkness where being takes place again. Do not keep your will in your *conscious* self. Forget, utterly forget, and let go. Let your will lapse back into your unconscious self, so you move in a sleep, and in darkness, without sight or understanding...

Elsewhere he is more insistent:

It is not your brain you must trust to, nor your will – but to that fundamental pathetic faculty for receiving the hidden waves that come from the depths of life, and for transferring them to the unreceptive world. It is something which is unrecognised and frustrated and destroyed. [1-3-15]

There are, of course, echoes here of the ‘Hermione’ episode from *Women in Love*, with Lawrence seemingly intent on manipulating his subject into some preconceived notion of spontaneity. With his Ranim project very much in mind, Lawrence was even willing to laud Ottoline as a priestess and prophetess. He announced to Ottoline in February 1915:

I want you to form the nucleus of a new community which shall start a new life among us [...] We will found an order...’ [1-2-15] Why don’t you have the pride of your own intrinsic self? Why must you tamper with the idea of being an ordinary physical woman – wife, mother, mistress. Primarily, you are none of these things. Primarily, you belong to a special type, a special race of women: like Cassandra in Greece, and some of the great women saints. They were the great

media of truth, of the deepest truth: through them, as through Cassandra, the truth came as through a fissure from the depths and the burning darkness that lies out of the depth of time. It is necessary for this great type to re-assert itself on the face of the earth. It is not the Salon lady and the blue stocking – it is not the critic and judge, but the priestess, the medium, the prophetess. [1-3-15]

What is significant is the way in which Lawrence's wartime philosophy – though apparently benign enough in itself – simultaneously manifests itself in particularly damaging behaviour towards others.

The circumstances of the final estrangement between Lawrence and Ottoline hardly matter here. What is significant is that Lawrence, attempting to mix philosophical exploration with personal manipulation, is forced to learn painful lessons in the personal sphere – lessons which will eventually be incorporated in his later philosophy. Kindness, touch and spontaneity – qualities I will associate with Rorty's 'solidarity' – at last come to be valued precisely because the mature Lawrence has had bitter experience of their opposites. Through such personal disasters, Lawrence will discover the kind of self-integrity and seamliness which will emerge from the Etruscan phase of his philosophical progress. He will then, via his fiction, seek to develop these discoveries in newer versions of the Lawrence-hero. In his novella *The Escaped Cock*, Lawrence will depict a Lawrence-hero who must learn the art of touch – and I will suggest in my reading of *The Escaped Cock* that it is no coincidence that the story also features a 'priestess' figure, with whom the Lawrence-hero must learn to interact with more of kindness and circumspection than has characterized Lawrence's ill-starred relationship with Ottoline Morrell.

There is one other personal element to be carried forward from this early phase of Lawrence's progress: his involvement with Lady Cynthia Asquith. This relationship will have significance for two of Lawrence's later works which I will consider – *The Ladybird* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Cynthia Asquith was clearly a figure of major importance to Lawrence's 'Family Romance', in terms of both a marked infatuation with her at the personal level, and also in terms of Lawrence's hopes of reordering the wider world. She was an aristocratic English lady and noted 'society beauty' and had obvious appeal in that respect; moreover, she was the prime minister's daughter-in-law, and as Delany notes, 'her closeness to the centre of power sustained [Lawrence's] hope that through her something might still be achieved in the political realm'. [p.105] More ominously (in the light of Lawrence's manipulative tendencies) she had a son, John (aged four at the time she met Lawrence), who was in some sense abnormal – today he would probably be diagnosed as autistic. Lawrence, rather dubiously, used John's illness as a means of gaining influence over Cynthia. A letter written by Lawrence in May 1915 reveals how he effectively used John's illness as leverage to force Cynthia's recruitment:

...long before John was ever born or conceived, your soul knew that, within a hard form of existing conditions, of the existing world, it was like a thing born to remain for ever in prison: your own soul knew, before ever John was possible, that it was itself bound in, like a tree that grows under a low roof and can never break through, and which must be deformed, unfulfilled. Herbert Asquith must have known the same thing, in his soul. [...] Now the soul which was born into John was born in the womb of your Unbelief and from the loins of its father's Unbelief [...] You learn to believe, in your very self, that we

in England shall unite in our knowledge of God to live according to the best of our knowledge – Prime Ministers and capitalists and artisans all working in pure effort towards God – here, tomorrow, in this England – and you will save your own soul and the soul of your son. Then there will be love enough.²⁵

As Delany concludes, ‘in effect, Lawrence was advising Lady Cynthia she could not be a good mother to her son until she had changed her own spiritual condition’.

[p.105] Lawrence is even, I suggest, seeking to displace his own distress onto John Asquith so as to position Cynthia as potentially holding the cure for both of them; for in choosing such terms to describe the supposed deficiencies of John’s spiritual provenance, Lawrence seems as though he is in fact describing himself.

In November 1915 John Asquith featured in another Lawrence letter, one which Delany describes as ‘a false step in his recruiting drive for Florida [the latest proposed Rananim location] that showed how erratic his judgement of others had become’. [p.170] In effect, Lawrence gave Cynthia to understand that in due course she and her children should leave England to live with him in Florida:

I want you to reserve to yourself, always, the choice, whether you too shall come to America also, at any time. [...] You must not let [your children] be drawn into this slow flux of destruction and nihilism, *unless they belong to it*. If John becomes wicked, within the flux, then take him away into a new life: never mind how much it costs.²⁶

²⁵ *Letters II*, p.338.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.437-8.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cynthia's husband Herbert is referred to in the same letter in terms which suggest that Lawrence regarded him as an obstacle to the former's hopes of bringing the Family Romance fantasy to any sort of realisation:

Your husband should have left this decomposing life. There was nowhere to go. Perhaps now he is beaten. Perhaps now the true living is defeated in him. But it is not yet defeated in you. You must watch your children, and the spirit of the world, and keep the choice of the right always in your own hands...²⁷

Such attention to Lawrence's personal relationships would hardly be warranted were it not for the fact that Lawrence's self/world conflation meant that his personal development was always inseparable from his philosophical progress – for his personal style of relating to others was continuous with his orientation toward the wider world. Accordingly, the Lawrence / Cynthia / Herbert Asquith triangle will feature in two of Lawrence's later works (*The Ladybird* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), both of which are fictional reworkings of the love-triangle, and both of which mark significant stages in Lawrence's developing philosophy: *The Ladybird* is Lawrence's failed attempt to reinstate essentialism, while the Chatterley novels see Lawrence working out a standpoint which I shall equate with Richard Rorty's idea of 'solidarity'.

²⁷ Ibid.

Chapter Four

Lawrence and Bertrand Russell

Lawrence and Russell

Lawrence's early propensity for mixing abstruse prophecy with personal manipulation eventually broke down following his association with the Cambridge philosopher and academic Bertrand Russell; for it was in the figure of Russell that Lawrence's two tendencies met head-on. Lawrence would have seen Russell as a potentially valuable recruit: susceptible enough (at least initially) to Lawrence's prophetic enthusiasm, and with enough status in public life to hold out real hope of effecting change in that sphere. Though it all went badly wrong, the history of their association can be read as a case-study exemplifying the problems Richard Rorty has identified in contemporary philosophical discourse – problems which Lawrence eventually surmounted in ways which strikingly accord with Rorty's own recommendations. The problems with which Lawrence struggled during his association with Russell – concerning such matters as essentialism, subjectivity, individuality and collectivity – all proved to be formative in the development of Lawrence's thinking.

Russell's autobiography (written many years after his involvement with Lawrence) is notable for the rather waspish tone with which he recalls Lawrence. He states that his 'acquaintance with Lawrence was brief and hectic, lasting altogether about a year'.¹ He recounts how they had been brought together by Ottoline Morrell, who (as he somewhat ungraciously puts it) 'admired us both and made us think that we ought to admire each other'. Yet Ottoline's instinct may not have been entirely misplaced, for Russell is honest enough about the impression Lawrence first made on him: 'I felt him to be a man of a certain imaginative genius, and, at first, when I felt

¹ Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, (1967-9) 2000), p.243.

inclined to disagree with him, I thought that perhaps his insight into human nature was deeper than mine.’ It seems there were, at least initially, promising affinities between the two men. As Russell recalled: ‘I agreed with [Lawrence] in thinking that politics could not be divorced from individual psychology.’² Moreover, in describing his 1915 book *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, Russell stated its basic premise in terms which would surely not have been anathema to Lawrence – and which, indeed, probably reflect the latter’s influence on the work: ‘In it I suggested a philosophy of politics based upon the belief that impulse has more effect than conscious purpose in moulding men’s lives.’³ Though the two men eventually became estranged, the curious admixture of affinities and disparities which characterized their relationship doubtless sheds its own light on the nature of the divide between poetry and philosophy, and is worth examining from that angle.

Ray Monk, in his biography of Russell, points to the shared spirit of rebellion which first led to Lawrence and Russell joining forces. Both had become exasperated to breaking point not only by the War, but also by what Monk calls the ‘bloodlessness’ and ineffectuality of those who campaigned for peace. Both men, coincidentally, were finding themselves increasingly in the position of outsider: Lawrence was married to a German wife and was suspected of being a spy as well as a writer of obscene books; while Russell’s political activities were threatening to put him outside the pale of the Cambridge University establishment which employed him. Each man impressed the other with the fire of conviction and perhaps in different circumstances these two seemingly ill-sorted rebels might have struck up a powerfully complementary alliance. But again, the following quote from Monk points to the curious mismatch of language which seemed to divide the two men, and raises

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

questions as to whether and how such an apparent disjunction might ever have proved fruitful:

Lawrence's philosophical writing may be seen as a kind of mirror-image of Russell's fiction. For just as when Russell wrote fiction, he could not stop himself from writing as a philosopher, from lavishing more attention on abstract ideas than on people and places, so when Lawrence wrote philosophy, he could not stop himself from writing as a novelist, from expressing his thoughts, not through arguments, but through images.⁴

Lawrence, as we have seen in his 'Surgery for the Novel – or a Bomb' essay, had always been an 'e.g.' philosopher – notable more for his striking examples, disarming juxtapositions and compelling images than for any allegiance to logic or coherent structures of thought. Russell, as might be expected of a formally trained logician, was an 'i.e.' philosopher: even his fiction is marked by his prioritizing of abstract principles and premises over particularity of observation. The two men could even be said to have personified the sundering of poetry from philosophy, and the failure of two such men – who otherwise seemed such kindred spirits – to find a suitable language for the joint expression of their convictions can be said to point forward to the later Lawrence's preoccupation – particularly in the Chatterley novels – with finding the best *register* of language for making philosophical sense of the world.

I suggest the failure of the two men to cement an alliance stems from Lawrence's misconceived attempts to be even more 'a priori' than the merely logical Russell. Though Lawrence doubtless had a tendency to resort to this strategy on the spur of the moment when wrangling with others, his writings of this period show an

⁴ Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell 1872-1921* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), p.399.

increasing dependence on capitalized 'essence'-words. His fiction, philosophy – and especially his personal correspondence – become replete with words such as God, Truth, Knowledge, Love, the Absolute, the Infinite, and the Eternal. By deploying such unarguable verities, Lawrence would habitually seek to 'trump' Russell's more practical, socially reformist proposals. What Lawrence was seeking by resorting to such essentialisms was some kind of irrefragable grounding for his philosophy, an ur-knowledge so fundamental and totalizing in its scope as to compel unanimity from all who heard it uttered (not least those amorphous 'grains of sand' who had so far proved so unresponsive to the Lawrence gospel). A letter written by Lawrence to Ottoline in June 1915 shows how his thinking was becoming increasingly riven between prophecy and practicality – and his increasing agitation over Russell's failure to bridge the chasm and bring together the prophetic and the practical in a real-life, English 'Rananim':

I do want [Russell] to work in the Knowledge of the Absolute, in the Knowledge of Eternity. He will – apart from philosophical mathematics – be so temporal, so immediate. He won't let go, he won't act in the eternal things, when it comes to men and life. But now he will: now he is changing. He is coming to have a real, actual, logical belief in Eternity, and upon this he can work: a belief in the Absolute, an existence in the Infinite. [...] We must centre in the knowledge of the Infinite, of God. Then from the Centre each one of us must work to put the temporal things of our own natures and of our

own circumstances in accord with the Eternal God we know. [...] We mustn't lapse into temporality.⁵

In a similar vein he complains to Cynthia: '[Russell] won't accept in his philosophy the Infinite, the Boundless, the Eternal, as the real starting point, and I think, whosoever will really set out on the journey towards Truth and the real end must do this, now.'⁶ The confusions and contradictions seem irresolvable even before Lawrence and Russell have fairly begun. There is urgency and exhortation from Lawrence, as of a call to arms, with gung-ho words such as 'work', 'act' and 'now'. Yet, it seems immediacy and temporality are simultaneously vices, for the work which must be done so urgently in the here and now is properly the business of Eternity and the Infinite. If there is a gulf separating poetry from philosophy, there seems here to be an even wider one separating essentialism from simple contingency. Again, Lawrence will eventually find an answer to this in his later philosophy – one whereby what is most essential *is* what is most contingent.

Another important element in what I call the anterior turn in Lawrence's early philosophy is his attraction to the idea of the distant past. He constantly harks back in search of ever more profound (and hence more unarguable) essentialisms upon which to found his philosophy – and to that extent, his resort to the past will prove as unavailing as his search for philosophical absolutes. Nevertheless, this anterior turn in Lawrence's early thinking will eventually lead to the Etruscan phase of his philosophy – where, like much else in Lawrence's searchings, it will bear fruit of a quite different sort from that which he originally envisaged. The wartime Lawrence's

⁵ George J Zytaruk & James T Boulton (eds.) *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume II 1913-16* (Cambridge University Press: 1981), pp.358-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.363.

yearning for the distant past arose from a confluence of pressures and influences, as

Mark Kinkead-Weekes notes:

The landscape round Porthcothan spoke to [Lawrence] of worlds wholly other than the corrupt present: of what was un-English, pre-Christian and 'primitive' if one defined 'civilisation' as post-Socratic and rational. It was the supposed peak of Christian civilisation that had created the trenches and the hordes of enthusiastic young men rushing into them, [and it was] in the name of that civilisation that the attempt of a 'passionately religious man' to create a new prose for 'God' had been declared obscene and destroyed. [...] So...Lawrence began to ask Ottoline for books that would take him back *behind* the whole Graeco-Roman-Christian civilisation that was now so visibly coming apart.⁷

Lawrence's letters from this period contain numerous references to ancient civilizations and the lessons Lawrence insists we must learn from them. In September 1914 he wrote to Gordon Campbell:

I went to the British Museum – and I know, from the Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture – what we are after. We want to realise the tremendous non-human quality of life – it is wonderful. [...] Behind us are all the tremendous unknown forces of life, coming unseen and unperceived as out of the desert to the Egyptians, and driving us, forcing us, destroying us if we do not submit to be swept away.⁸

⁷ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912-1922* (Cambridge University Press: 1996), p.315.

⁸ *Letters II*, p.218.

Again, what Lawrence will find in antiquity (of the Etruscan rather than the Egyptian variety) will be rather different from his expectations at this stage. (By the time of the Etruscan sketches, Lawrence's expectations regarding essentialism and the distant past will in any case have altered somewhat. I will discuss this development in Lawrence's thinking below, in my study of *The Ladybird*.)

Mark Kinkead-Weekes notes how both Lawrence and Russell were in agreement as to the fundamental malaise of modern social living: the 'disintegration' (Russell's word) brought about by 'subjectivism'.⁹ Russell saw the remedy for subjectivism 'in reforming social institutions, in the belief that greater freedom would lead to greater happiness', while for Lawrence, the need was to delve deeper, to 'reawaken those inner impulses in human beings which were most radically opposed to subjectivity'.¹⁰ Russell wished to make people more mindful of the nature of the social institutions which bind them together; Lawrence wished them to abandon all such institutionalism and become *mindless*, for the ensuing state of mystical unity would render all thought of formal institution superfluous – social relatedness would simply manifest spontaneously. Freed from all preconceptions as to what such relatedness should be *like*, it would simply *be*. In his original proposal to Ottoline Morrell that she should 'form the nucleus of a new community', Lawrence had set out his vision for the new world:

...each one [of us] may fulfil his own nature and deep desires to the utmost, but...the ultimate satisfaction is in the completeness of us all as one [...] This present community consists, as far as it is a framed thing, in a myriad contrivances for preventing us from being let down by the meanness in ourselves or in our neighbours. But it is like a

⁹ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile*, p.241.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

motor car that is so encumbered with non-skid, non-puncture, non-burst, non-this and non-that contrivances, that it simply can't go any more. I hold this the most sacred duty – the gathering together of a number of people who shall so agree to live by the *best* they know, that they shall be *free* to live by the best they know. The ideal, the religion, must now be *lived, practised*. We will have no more *churches*. We will bring church and house and shop together.¹¹

Predictably, Lawrence would later balk at the implications of such spontaneity when it came to forging a manifesto with Russell. Whereas Russell saw the answer to society's ills in reforming social institutions so as to appeal to a sense of enlightened self-interest among the members of that society, Lawrence could not finally – when put to it by Russell – countenance such freedom for the masses. Instead, he panicked and fled into elitism, announcing to Russell: 'You must drop all your democracy. You must not believe in "the people".'¹² Nevertheless, there are several more elements here which will be reworked in Lawrence's later writings. There is the evident concern with spontaneity in relation to the dual meaning of individuality: would *genuine* spontaneity necessarily result in the pursuit of self-interest – or would it manifest in the benign collectivity of some kind of mystical union? There is Lawrence's preoccupation with social relatedness and the idea of community as something which ought to reflect the binding together implied by the 'ideal' of religio(n) – an idea which I will relate to Rorty's 'solidarity'. And in Lawrence's declaration of 'no more churches' – the idea that religion is something to be realised in the living moment rather than given over to mere organized observance – I suggest

¹¹ *Letters II*, pp.271-2.

¹² *Letters II*, p.364.

we see something in Lawrence's thinking which points forward to Rorty's recommendation that we ought to 'de-divinize' our philosophical discourse.

Lawrence and Heraclitus

With regard to Lawrence's own eventual move toward de-divinization, Bertrand Russell can be seen to have played a significant part in prompting Lawrence to move away from a religious mindset based solely on Christianity. Lawrence must have felt that his call for a more authentically anterior mode of discourse, 'religio-us' in the sense that *he* understood the term, had been answered resoundingly when Russell lent him John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* (1892). Here, among such pre-Socratic thinkers as Anaximander, Anaxagoras and Empedocles, Lawrence found inspiring precedents for the kind of elemental sweep and profundity which he felt should characterize all philosophical discourse. Here were philosophers who believed in a universe made up of elemental forces which separated out, warred against each other and yet still partook of an essential unity-in-discord. Kinkead-Weekes notes how, among these early Greek philosophers, it was Heraclitus who most appealed to Lawrence:

To Heraclitus, you must couple 'things whole and things not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things and all things issue from the one.' It was Heraclitus with whom Lawrence recognized the greatest affinity, delighting not only in the philosophical import of

what Heraclitus had to say, but also in the teasing aphorisms in which the latter's oppositions – like Blake's and Nietzsche's – were cast.¹³

Accordingly, in July 1915 Lawrence announced to Russell: 'I have been wrong, much too Christian, in my philosophy. These early Greeks have clarified my soul. I must drop all about God.'¹⁴ Such clarity gave rise to a renewed determination which he declared to Ottoline several days later:

Last time I came out of the Christian camp. This time I must come out of these early Greek philosophers. I am so sure of what I know, and what is true, now, that I am sure I am stronger, in the truth, in the knowledge I have, than all the world outside that knowledge.¹⁵

Turning to Burnet's book and the Heraclitean fragments therein, it is easy to see how Lawrence – famously exasperating and self-contradictory in debate – would have felt a sense of philosophical kinship with Heraclitus. Burnet describes the latter as having been 'headstrong' and given to 'a somewhat oracular style' of philosophizing, as evidenced by this fragment:

...although all things happen in accordance with the account I give, men seem as if they had no experience of them, when they make trial of words and works such as I set forth, dividing each thing according to its nature and explaining how it truly is.¹⁶

In keeping with Heraclitus' 'proverbially obscure'¹⁷ style, it is unclear here who is supposed to be doing the dividing and explaining – Heraclitus or his critics? The point may seem trivial, but I suggest Heraclitus is here providing Lawrence with an

¹³ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph T Exile*, p.245.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.364.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.366-7.

¹⁶ John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: A & C Black (1892) 1930), p.133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.131.

implicit critique of ‘i.e.’ philosophy: of the kind of *a priori*-ism which presumptuously ‘makes trial’ of imaginative or intuitive philosophy of the ‘e.g.’ type. (As Heraclitus notes elsewhere: ‘The learning of many things teacheth not understanding.’¹⁸) Burnet gives an insight into Heraclitus’ alternative mode of philosophical discourse: ‘He employs images without any indication of the point of comparison; and his frequent use of irony, oxymoron, and pregnant expressions makes the interpretation of isolated fragments very difficult.’¹⁹ On a facile level, one can easily imagine how Lawrence would have seized upon Heraclitus’ approach as setting a legitimizing precedent for his own brand of spiky didacticism. More significantly, one can see how he would have appealed to Lawrence as a valuable resource in re-evaluating established ideas about knowledge and consciousness. Burnet notes how in Heraclitus’ era: ‘There was as yet no such thing as a clear scientific prose style. Heraclitus could not find any but metaphorical language in which to express the new thoughts which had taken possession of his mind.’²⁰ More generally, in a discussion of a passage of Parmenides, Burnet makes a wider point about the early Greek philosophers and their worldview: ‘Does Parmenides refer to the world of sense or the world of ideas; concrete existence or abstract being; matter or spirit? Now, we have already seen more than once that all these questions would have been absolutely meaningless to an early Greek philosopher...’²¹ Lawrence, lost in a seeming void between poetry and philosophy, would have seen Heraclitus – whose thinking knew nothing of such divisions – as authorizing ‘anteriority’ in abundance.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.134.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.131.

²⁰ Ibid., p.132.

²¹ Ibid., p.189.

Thus Burnet's account of the early Greek philosophers would readily have appealed to Lawrence's diffuse yearning for a return to anterior wholeness: a universe which knows no distinctions between sense or ideas, concrete or abstract, matter or spirit, would naturally have suggested to him the lost Eden of pre-differentiation and its 'amniotic' feeling of wholeness and nurturance. Lawrence's 'problem' with boundaries, endowing him as it does with an intuitive sense of relatedness, is the origin of his sense of kinship with Heraclitus. Montgomery locates Lawrence within a nexus of like-minded thinkers:

Coleridge's...theory of Ideas is directly related to Plato's, and he describes the Reason as the power that enables human nature to stand 'in some participation of the eternal and the universal'. Heraclitus and Plato share the ancient Greek maxim that like can only be known by like, that 'if the Soul is to know the world, the world must ultimately consist of the same substance as Soul. [...] The mind participates [sic] the phenomena. It perceives the sun because it is itself of the same nature. As Lawrence said, 'I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me'. Or as Coleridge said, 'Never could the eye have beheld the sun, has not its own essence been soliform'.²²

Lawrence's instinctive sense of the underlying continuity of existence had at last, it seemed, found its validation.

Moving from Lawrence's personal psychology to matters more metaphysical, Montgomery traces further connections between the thinking of Heraclitus and Lawrence. For example, Montgomery discusses the concept of the 'concrete

²² Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence: Beyond Philosophy and Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.152. (The Lawrence quote is taken from *Apocalypse*, p.149.)

universal', describing it (in terms borrowed from Philip Wheelwright) as 'a participation of the particular in the universal reality that gives it its main significance' and noting how 'particular things bulge with significance, to whatever extent they participate in, coalesce with, a something more that is consubstantial with themselves'.²³ I have frequently used the term 'particularity' to describe Lawrence's unceasing celebration of contingent circumstance – his delight in evoking and extrapolating from particular details and instances towards an invigorating sense of universality – and it is this aspect of Lawrence's art that I will relate to Richard Rorty's emphasis on contingency. Burnet's reading of Heraclitus discovers a similar sense of universality, which subverts our habitual post-Socratic assumptions of an opposition between the specific and the universal:

From these [Heraclitean] fragments we gather that the truth which has hitherto been ignored is that the many apparently independent and conflicting things we know are really one, and that, on the other hand, this one is not something which does not admit of multiplicity, but that it is also many [...] Heraclitus...by denying of the One everything which would render it incapable of explaining the world, once more made possible a coherent cosmology.²⁴

Moreover, Heraclitus insists that all things are in a state of perpetual flux, 'unceasing and universal', wherein 'all things are in motion like streams', and 'nothing ever is, everything is becoming'.²⁵ On such a reading the very term 'metaphysical' is clearly called into question, for Heraclitus' universalizing conception of the cosmos allows for no fundamental discontinuity of essence whereby the physical realm can be

²³ Ibid., p.147.

²⁴ John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, pp.144-5.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.149-50.

subordinated to any other postulated realm of existence. Again, this points forward to the de-divinizing implications of Lawrence's late philosophy (as in *The Escaped Cock*), where the emphasis is on the phenomenal world as, so to speak, including everything – with no need to set up metaphysicality as a way of postulating and then validating things which are not included in the phenomenal world; for if the phenomenal world does indeed include everything, there is no need for self-servingly circular accounts of it which purportedly come from outside it.

Montgomery notes how concrete universals are 'the natural and usual terms of thought in a pre-sophisticated civilization'. He goes on to quote Wheelwright, who describes this elision of the distinction between the particular and the universal as 'the lack of an intellectual cleavage between subjective mind and objective matter, [for] mind "participates" in external reality in the same way that the particular participates in the universal'.²⁶ Montgomery goes on to note how this 'pre-sophisticated' worldview is manifested in totemism, in which phenomenon anthropologists such as Levy-Bruhl have discovered a far greater degree of complexity than that suggested by earlier theories in which a totem was assumed to be merely the 'badge' of a particular clan. Levy-Bruhl cites the following example, the like of which has particular resonance in the light of Lawrence's yearning for 'unanimity' and 'blood consciousness':

The Bororo tribe of Northern Brazil...believe that they are at one and the same time human beings and red parakeets, that the relation between them and their totem animal is one of actual identity extending to the many members of a totemic group. The primitive experiences a community of essence in which the actual individual, the

²⁶ Robert E Montgomery, *The Visionary D H Lawrence*, p. 148.

ancestral being living again in him, and the animal or plant species that forms his totem, are all mingled. To our minds, there are necessarily three distinct realities here, however close the relationship may be. To the primitive minds, the three make but one, yet at the same time are three. For the totemic or participatory mind there is no problem of the one and the many, there is no difficulty with more than one object occupying the same space at the same time, and there are no abstract concepts to contradict one another. There is instead a community of essence in which all things participate, with which they merge and coalesce.²⁷

Though it may seem a long way in cultural terms from such ‘primitive’ tribal beliefs to D H Lawrence’s philosophical struggles, the latter’s intuitive understanding of ‘community of essence’ eventually finds its expression. I will later relate this aspect of Lawrence’s thinking to Terry Eagleton’s discussion of the idea of ‘transformative continuity’: the idea that we are, as human beings, necessarily continuous with the rest of the phenomenal world – and that we should therefore, as *linguistic* beings, use language to articulate the world in ways that reflect rather than deny that continuity.

It follows that the language which reflects ‘community of essence’ and ‘transformative continuity’ is quite likely to be at odds with the language of rationality and logic, of categories and concepts, with which we commonly articulate the world; and it is this element of contradiction which Lawrence, it seems, could not help but embody. At his most exasperating, he can seem contradictory for its own sake: temperamentally predisposed to be a gainsayer of any and all established doctrines, a philosophical *franc tireur* who will readily abandon his current position if

²⁷ Ibid., p.149.

he spies better ground from which to attack another. Bertrand Russell would eventually lose patience with this tendency. Yet once again, Montgomery reveals fascinating precedents for what can easily seem to us such an exasperating predisposition for polemics, for ‘saying against’ for its own sake. Writing of the ‘law of participation’ – another way of expressing the idea of community of essence – he states:

The law of participation...exhibits a number of striking similarities with the polaric [sic] thinking that is the subject of this study. First of all, primitive thinking does not bind itself down, as our thought does, to avoiding contradiction. For the primitive, phenomena can be, though in a way incomprehensible to us, both themselves and something other than themselves.²⁸

The natural medium for Lawrence’s ‘contradiction’, is, of course, language. It is in the light of ideas such as the participatory mode of consciousness and community of essence that Michael Black is able to describe Lawrence as ‘one of the few speakers in the twentieth century of an age-old lost language, which he has recovered... He was born with, and miraculously managed to carry into adult life, an undissociated sensibility’.²⁹

Language, then, can mediate between the lost, pre-ratiocinative, holistic mode of awareness and the besetting sense of separation and conceptual constraint which is our own diminished inheritance, for ‘the participatory mode of the primitive mind persists in the poetic mode of thinking of times thereafter’.³⁰ It is through their use of language and symbolism that Lawrence’s kinship with Heraclitus becomes clear.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 149.

Montgomery notes how Heraclitus was possessed of ‘an intuitive power combined with a symbolic imagination that creates symbols with a unique ability to seize upon and express the most hidden and elusive aspects of reality’.³¹ He goes on to quote a passage in which Nietzsche celebrates Heraclitus’ extraordinary aptitude for lateral and apparently illogical thinking – a passage which curiously prefigures Lawrence’s philosophical wrangles with Bertrand Russell:

Heraclitus’ regal possession is his extraordinary power to think intuitively. Toward the other type of thinking, the type that is accomplished in concepts and logical combinations, in other words toward reason, he shows himself cool, insensitive, in fact hostile, and seems to feel pleasure whenever he can contradict it with an intuitively arrived-at truth. He does this in dicta like ‘everything forever has its opposite along with it’, and in such unabashed fashion that Aristotle accused him of the highest crime before the tribunal of reason: to have sinned against the law of contradiction.³²

More mundanely, Richard Rorty suggests (as I discuss later) that *real* philosophical progress should, by this stage in the history of philosophy, be thought of in terms of re-describing the world rather than a pursuit of ‘Truth’. In Rorty’s pragmatic view, truth is a property of sentences rather than something that is ‘out there’ in the world waiting to be discovered. Stanley Fish has warned of the dangers inherent in claiming that ‘it is possible to specify a level at which language correlates with the objective world’ – and points up the way in which such claim-making has implications in terms not only of what we shall deem to be truth, but also what we deem to be literature:

³¹ Ibid., p.143.

³² Ibid., p.142-3.

The claim is a far reaching one, because to make it is at the same time to make claims about the nature of reality, the structure of the mind, the dynamics of perception, the autonomy of the self, the ontology of literature, the possibility and scope of formalization, the stability of literary (and therefore of non-literary) texts, the independence of fact from value, and the independence of meaning from interpretation. It is not too much to say that everything I write is written against that claim, in all of its consequences and implications.³³

The mature Lawrence-philosopher became just such a ‘writer-against’: one who deploys language in such a way as to subvert conventional assumptions about philosophical truth and literary form. By the time of the Chatterley novels, Lawrence will be very much concerned with language-as-redescription: a way of rejecting – or ‘contra-dicting’ – the terms in which the opposition’s argument is expressed rather than arguing within the frame of reference imposed by those terms.

Lawrence and ‘The State’

The effect of Lawrence’s reading of Heraclitus would, as I discuss below, run very deep. But Lawrence’s intensified sense of the world as being a Heraclitean flux – an ‘allness-in-oneness’ – would predictably prove to be of no help to him in the business of drawing up a manifesto with Bertrand Russell. The nearest the Lawrence of 1915 could get to such an ideal of unifying spontaneity or allness-in-oneness in human society was by way of a kind of localized or intercellular democracy which

³³ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.97.

would, contradictorily enough, culminate in a dictator. This sort of quasi-political ‘contra-diction’ is decidedly *not* Lawrence’s forte – as one senses as he expounds the idea to Russell in a letter of July 1915:

I don’t want tyrants. But I don’t believe in democratic control. I think the working man is fit to elect governors or overseers for his immediate circumstances, but for no more. You must utterly revise the electorate. The working man shall elect superiors for the things that concern him immediately, no more. From the other classes, as they rise, shall be elected the higher governors. The thing must culminate in one real head, as every organic thing must – no foolish republics with foolish presidents, but an elected King, something like Julius Caesar. [...] It isn’t bosh, but rational sense. The whole thing must be living.³⁴

Lawrence’s insistence on the notion of a correspondence between society and a living organism reflects what Dervin has called Lawrence’s ‘cognitive style based on macro/microcosmic correspondence between self and world’.³⁵ Yet what is most striking is the increasing desperation with which he exhorts Russell to devise a manifesto for a society which, if Lawrence’s messianic utterances be true, ought to arise (or, indeed, to have already arisen) spontaneously. Another letter of July 1915 shows Lawrence’s macro/microcosmic mindset – which, in this context, is revealed as an inability to create and maintain adequate boundaries between inner and outer reality – leading him into hopeless confusion. He now refers to his longed-for state of wholeness, of integration of self and world, as simply ‘the state’ (for, after all, we

³⁴ *Letters II*, p.371.

³⁵ Daniel Dervin, *A ‘Strange Sapience’: The Creative Imagination of D H Lawrence* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), p.38.

recall how 'L'État c'est moi'), and duly exhorts Russell to conceive what is practically inconceivable:

You must work this out in your own way. But you must do it [...] You must get this into your lectures at once [...] A new constructive idea of a new state is needed *immediately*. Criticism is *unnecessary*. It is behind the times. You *must* work out the idea of a new state, not go on criticizing this old one.³⁶

As Russell recalls in his autobiography, the word 'must', in the above letter, was underlined thirteen times. Kinkead-Weekes notes Lawrence's 'simple-mindedness of so generalizing from the individual to the state [...] The state is not just the individual writ large'.³⁷ Though the worst is yet to come, Lawrence's nightmare has, on this evidence, not far to run.

With no prospect of agreement on how to proceed, the alliance between Lawrence and Russell foundered. The acrimony of their parting can be attributed to Lawrence's growing sense of psychic endangerment and his frustration at Russell's perceived unwillingness to help him. Lawrence describes the escalating crisis in terms which reflect his regressive urge toward some kind of sustaining matrix. What is significant here in terms of Lawrence's philosophy is the increasing sense of instability in his experience of the physical world, as he pleads with Russell to stay with him 'in the darkness'. Even six months before the final break, Lawrence writes to Russell in terms which will, by the time of the Etruscan sketches, come to seem strikingly prescient:

³⁶ *Letters II*, p.365.

³⁷ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile*, p.190.

...sometimes I am afraid of the terrible things that are real, in the darkness, and of the entire unreality of these things I see. It becomes like a madness at last, to know one is all the time walking in a pale assembly of an unreal world – this house, the furniture, the sky and the earth – whilst oneself is all the while a piece of darkness pulsating in shocks, and the shocks and the darkness are real [...] I wanted to write this to ask you please to be with me – in the underworld [...] I feel there is something to go through – something very important. It may be it is only in my own soul – but it seems to grow more and more looming, and this day time reality becomes more and more unreal, as if one wrote from a grave – or a womb – they are the same thing, at opposite extremes.³⁸

It is clear that some kind of breakdown is at hand – as though the sheer power of Heraclitean thought to disperse all conceptual boundaries has taken hold of Lawrence's mind. Having found the existing world inadequate to sustain him, he has embraced a philosophy powerful enough to sweep it away; in consequence, Lawrence's already fragile sense of boundedness begins to break down altogether. For Heraclitus, 'the one is made up of all things and all things issue from the one'.³⁹ For Lawrence, the implication is that it becomes increasingly difficult for him to distinguish between inner and outer reality. In psychological terms, Lawrence's letters of this period indicate that his distress has culminated in a series of 'dissociative episodes' which are symptomatic of those with Lawrence's narcissistic personality type. In such episodes, the world becomes strangely unreal (a 'pale assembly') and one feels in danger of 'falling through' reality into nothingness. There

³⁸ *Letters II*, p.307.

³⁹ Quoted by Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile*, p.245.

is indeed ‘something [for Lawrence] to go through’, and the experience will, surely enough, take place in the underworld: in the tombs of ancient Etruria, where Lawrence’s womb/tomb conflation will become a source of strength to him. The darkness will no longer be a thing of terror.

The eventual demise of the Lawrence-prophet is, in the event, a death by alienation and estrangement. In November 1916 he declares to E M Forster: ‘I think it would be good to die, because death would be a clean land with no people in it: not even the people of myself.’⁴⁰ He writes elsewhere of experiencing ‘a curious moral and physical incapacity to move towards the world’, and describes this strangely irresistible sense of withdrawal as a process in which ‘one’s self seems to contract more and more away from everything, especially from people... a kind of wintering’.⁴¹ All hope of recruiting other people is at an end. Lawrence’s relationship with Cynthia Asquith founders entirely, and in November 1916 he writes to her: ‘I am I and you are you, and all heaven and hell lies in the chasm between. Believe me, I am infinitely hurt by being thus torn off from the body of mankind [...] you are you, I am I – there is a separation, a separate, isolated fate.’⁴² (This is the feeling of philosophical and personal alienation which Lawrence will subsequently work through in *The Ladybird*.) He is, so to speak, not currently ‘in touch’ with anyone – though the extent of his agony belies the casual air of colloquialism normally associated with that phrase. The rest of Lawrence’s philosophical life will depend upon the need to achieve the genuine simplicity and reciprocity of ‘touch’.

In the meantime, Lawrence’s sense of exile has, by September 1918, become absolute. He declares to Robert Nichols: ‘Yes, I am very nicely stranded – like a fish

⁴⁰ James T Boulton & Andrew Robertson (eds.) *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume III, 1916-21* (Cambridge University Press: 1985), p.21-2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.44 & 197. The letters are to Catherine Carswell and Cecil Gray respectively.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.32 – letter dated 15th November 1916.

chucked up above high-water mark, and gasping. Humanity spits me out, and I spit humanity out.’⁴³ The show of retaliation merely points up Lawrence’s feeling of helplessness. Nevertheless, there follows a period in which Lawrence, his days as a prophet of essentialism now behind him, embraces a new awareness of contingency. It is this philosophical ‘climb-down’ which clears the way for Lawrence’s mature philosophy. In a letter to his friend Koteliansky, Lawrence concedes that his former beliefs, rather than gaining him absolute philosophical dominion over the world, have by now left him quite without purchase on it. With no alternative in sight, he now turns instead towards an entirely different conception of the world – a world of contingency which he will subsequently explore further in his Etruscan sketches: ‘There is another world of reality, actual and mystical at once, not the world of the Whole, but the world of the essential now, here, immediate, a strange actual hereabouts, and no before and after to strive with: not worth it.’⁴⁴ Lawrence’s shift from essentialism to contingency is underway. Now, Lawrence attempts no distinction between what is actual and what is mystical: all is immediate, and Lawrence no longer lays claim to any metaphysical realm of ‘before and after’ as a source of didactic authority over the world. The only capitalized abstraction here is ‘the Whole’, but Lawrence no longer pretends to be a prophet on behalf thereof. The world is now, simply, the ‘phenomenal world’ – the discovery of which Lawrence will dramatize in *The Escaped Cock*.

As with each stage of Lawrence’s progress, his growing sense of the world’s contingency (as expressed in his letter to Koteliansky) is eventually given expression in essay form. The ‘Democracy’ essays of 1919 read as a welcome return to Lawrence’s most effective register of philosophical writing: the unselfconsciously

⁴³ Ibid., p.281

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.163 – letter dated 23rd September 1917.

'e.g.' style of the 'Surgery...' essay. Now, instead of propounding numerous essence-words of the Truth/Eternal/Infinite variety, Lawrence deliberately undercuts all such essentialist notions. The choice of 'Democracy' as a title for his essay emerges as a sardonic comment on his past pretensions, for democracy – along with *all* such ideal reorderings of society – is now seen as a waste of time: along with 'public being [and] universal self-estimation', republicanism, bolshevism and socialism, democracy is now just another of the 'mad manifestations of en masse and One-Identity'.⁴⁵ Though Lawrence's downright rejection of any and all existing political arrangements is familiar enough – it had long since driven Bertrand Russell to despair – there is a sense that Lawrence is at last coming to see himself as implicated in the same malaise. His sense of self/world conflation has seen him strive to impose his own version of Oneness on the world – but he now realises that this, too, is an ideal – an abstraction:

This is all the trouble: that the invented *ideal* world of man is superimposed upon living men and women, and men and women are thus turned into abstracted, functioning mechanical units. [...] Ideals, all ideals and every ideal, are a trick of the devil. They are a superimposition of the abstracted, automatic, invented universe of man upon the spontaneous creative universe. [...] Every attempt at pre-ordaining a new material world only adds another last straw to the load that already has broken so many backs.⁴⁶

The Lawrence of the past, who has so yearned for the anterior wholeness of 'En-Masse', of 'L'État *c'est moi*', has now become disillusioned with all such totalizing ideals, whether political *or* metaphysical. After so much prophetic intensity from the

⁴⁵ D H Lawrence, 'Democracy', in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.73.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.69 & 83.

Lawrence who sought to fill the world with disciples, the following passage is a refreshing and rather endearing statement of *mea culpa*, and is worth quoting in full:

It is only the old dogma. All things emanate from the Supreme Being. All things, being all emanations from the Supreme Being, have One Identity. [...] It is very nice, theoretically. [...] The One Identity... is the subtlest means of inflating the consciousness. But when you have inflated your consciousness to infinity, what then? Do you really become God? When in your understanding you embrace everything, then surely you are divine? But no! With a nasty bump you have to come down and realise that, in spite of your infinite comprehension, you are not really any other than you were before: not a bit more divine or superhuman or enlarged. [...] The big bump of falling out of the infinite back into your own pair of pants leads you to suspect that the One Identity is not *the* identity. There is another, little sort of identity, which you can't get away from, except by breaking your neck. [...] It is what you are when you aren't yourself. It is what you are when you imagine you're something hugely big – the Infinite, for example. And the consciousness is really capable of arriving at the illusion of infinity. But there you are! [...] It was all only an excursion. It was wearing a magic cap. You yourself invented the cap, and then puffed up your head to fit it. But a swelled head at last begins to ache, and you realise it's only your own old chump after all. All the extended consciousness that ranges the infinite heavens must sleep under the thatch of your hair at night: and you are only you [...] It is a bubble, the One Identity. But chasing it, man gets his education. It is his education process, the

chase of the All, the extension of consciousness. He *learns* everything: except the last lesson of all, which he can't learn till the bubble has burst in his fingers. The last lesson? Ah, the lesson of his own fingers: himself: the little identity; little, but real. Better, far better, to be oneself, than to be any bursting Infinite, or swollen One-Identity.⁴⁷

Lawrence's acceptance of his own finitude has been accommodated with self-deprecating humour and deliberate bathos – for it is indeed a long fall, all the way from the Infinite back into 'your own pair of pants'. Lawrence's emotional paradigm of self/world conflation – of himself as being continuous with the world in the presumptuous sense that he is therefore the world's equal – has come down to earth with a bump: there is the phenomenal world, of which he is part. That is all there is and ever will be; and for Lawrence's later philosophy, it will be enough. Though his sense of himself as being continuous with the world – his deepest psychological paradigm – will stay with him, it will be reworked. The lesson of contingency has been learned, and there will be a new sense of humility.

That said, Lawrence's renunciation of essentialism has yet to go through a further stage. We have seen (for example, in 'A Modern Lover') how Lawrence characteristically 'sheds [his] sicknesses in books – repeats and presents again [his] emotions, to be master of them'. He returns to past situations and reworks them in fiction, for it is by repeatedly reworking them that he seeks eventually to resolve and incorporate their emotional legacy. In *The Ladybird*, this happens on two levels. Firstly, it sees Lawrence attempt to set up his own brand of 'dark' essentialist philosophy as an alternative to what he regards as the failure of existing (or 'white') philosophical idealism. Secondly, *The Ladybird* sees Lawrence once again returning

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.70.

to his Family Romance fantasy and reworking his failed 'courtship' of Cynthia Asquith. Though the Lawrence-hero of *The Ladybird* will, in a sense, prevail on both fronts, these twin victories will prove to be rather tellingly hollow ones.

Chapter Five

The Death of Idealism:

The Ladybird

Introduction

More than a decade after he had written 'A Modern Lover', Lawrence wrote *The Ladybird*. The two tales are set in vastly different social milieus, reflecting the distance by which the Lawrence of 1921 had outgrown his origins. Nevertheless, *The Ladybird* sees Lawrence reworking the same emotional paradigm seen in the earlier story: the 'Family Romance' fantasy which unites the four narratives I shall consider ('A Modern Lover', *The Ladybird*, *The Escaped Cock*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*). While the female protagonist in 'A Modern Lover' was clearly a fictionalized version of Jessie Chambers, the central female character of *The Ladybird*, Daphne, is modelled on Lady Cynthia Asquith. *The Ladybird* is in fact a much-extended version of Lawrence's earlier 'word sketch' of Cynthia, 'The Thimble' – a depiction which Cynthia herself conceded was disconcertingly perceptive, commenting that 'some of [Lawrence's] character hints are damnably good'.¹ As always, Lawrence's concerns both personal and philosophical are run together. In *The Ladybird*, not only will the Lawrence-hero prevail over his love-rival: he will also embody the triumph of Lawrence's 'dark' philosophical essentialism against the pernicious 'white' idealism represented by Daphne's uxorious husband Basil (who is based on Cynthia's husband Herbert Asquith).

The story begins with a depiction of Daphne's mother, Lady Beveridge, as she goes about her charitable work of visiting wounded German prisoners of war in a London hospital. She, like Daphne and Basil, is arraigned by the narrator for representing the discredited ideals of the past. She is sardonically described as a 'little, unyielding Mater Dolorosa' whose ideals of benevolence and philanthropy are,

¹ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile*, p.279.

in such a debased world, simply outmoded: society now jeers at this ‘little, worn bird of an out-of-date righteousness and aesthetic’.² Daphne, too, is ridiculed as she aligns herself with this folly of superannuated stoicism by accompanying her mother on hospital visits. (In fact, Lawrence is known to have criticized Cynthia Asquith for volunteering to work as a nurse during the First World War, even to the extent of accusing her of ‘subscribing to the war’.³)

The degree of correspondence between Basil and Cynthia Asquith’s real-life husband is quite striking. Like Herbert Asquith, Basil is an officer of the British Army who returns to England having suffered facial injuries in the fighting – in both cases, Lawrence equated facial disfigurement with the terrible psychic damage which he saw as the inevitable price that would be paid by those who survived the carnage. Now, in both his personal correspondence and in *The Ladybird*, Lawrence insistently links idealism with war, mental illness (in the form of mania or nervous debility), and images of a ghastly, etiolated whiteness. In *The Ladybird*, Basil embodies this nexus of negative associations: he is everywhere associated with war, whiteness and death: he has a ‘curious deathly sub-pallor... like risen death’ (p.192). Again, there is a biographical footnote – in a letter written in June 1915, Lawrence thus describes Herbert Asquith, who had just returned from Flanders: ‘... all his soul is left at the war [...] He ought to die. It all seems horrid, like hypnotism.’⁴ Thus Basil is appropriately ‘gaunt’, and ‘white-faced’ (pp.199 & 197), spiritually exhausted by his efforts to come to terms with his war experiences by recourse to the same obdurate idealism which has led to war in the first place. Speaking to Count Dionys of the war as ‘an ordeal

² D H Lawrence, *The Fox • The Captain’s Doll • The Ladybird*, Dieter Mehl (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.157-8. Subsequent page references in brackets in the text are to this edition.

³ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile*, p.367.

⁴ Quoted in Kinkead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence: Triumph to Exile*, p.238.

one had to go through', Basil nevertheless reveals how keen he is to idealize its outcome:

...you arrive at a higher state of consciousness, and therefore of life. And so, of course, at a higher plane of love. [...] As a matter of fact, I think the war has opened another cycle of life to us – a wider ring.
[p.198]

Further highlighting the story's theme of idealism, Basil – who has 'taken his degree in philosophy' (p.200) – is shown as one who is given to expounding his manic idealities in a 'combustion of words'. He is thus an example of what Lawrence elsewhere described as 'a man begotten and born from the *idea*... the ideal self... created from his own Logos... out of his own head'.⁵ Five times in two pages, Basil uses the phrase 'it seems to me...' (pp.200-1); as his logorrhoea pours forth, he is 'quite unaware of anything but his own white intensity' (p.200). But again, he is representative of what the early Lawrence-philosopher had long seen as a wider malaise:

A curse on idealism. A million curses on self-conscious automatic humanity, men and women both. Curses on their auto-suggestive self-reactions, from which they derive such inordinate self-gratification.⁶

In line with Lawrence's strategy of eliding the philosophical with the personal – 'humanity' with 'men and women' – *The Ladybird* duly depicts for us the curse of 'auto-suggestive self-reaction' via Basil's relationship with Daphne (while also revealing Lawrence's prurient fixation over the Asquiths' marital relationship). Basil

⁵ D H Lawrence, 'Democracy', Part III – Personality (1919), in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, p.75.

⁶ D H Lawrence, 'Education of the People', Part VII (1920), in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, pp.131-2.

repeatedly rhapsodizes at Daphne and her ‘immortal’ beauty and abases himself before her, calling her his ‘goddess’ and working himself into an ‘awful outpouring adoration-lust’ until his face is ‘white with ecstasy’ (p.195). Yet the effect of this self-conscious uxoriousness is harmful even to the object of worship: it leaves Daphne feeling ‘worn and soulless’, like a ‘prostitute goddess’.

As a counter to this misplaced idealism, Lawrence offers us Count Dionys, the displaced bohemian nobleman. The Count, at his entry into the narrative, is wounded and a prisoner of war. With what little strength he has left, he longs for death and the destruction of the world. He extols his ‘God of destruction’ and declares to Daphne that this god is ‘a man’s God’ who ‘throws down the steeples and the factory chimneys’ (p.186). As he exhorts Daphne to ‘wait... only wait’ for the destruction which is sure to come, one can detect the sense of imminent doom which a reading of Heraclitus – especially against the backdrop of the Great War – would have engendered in Lawrence: ‘There is a certain order and fixed time for the change of the cosmos in accordance with some fated necessity.’⁷ By implication, both religion and capitalism are to be overthrown to make way for the world to come: a world in which some ‘natural’ aristocrat – not unlike the Count himself – will be chosen by the masses to be their leader. Lawrence’s reading of Nietzsche is also evident here (however facile its application): the Will to Power is the supreme duty of the *Übermensch*, for he alone can fill the void left by the ‘death’ of the God of Christianity. But in practice, the Lawrence-hero of *The Ladybird* has no destructive force beyond the merely figurative. He has only the ‘little eternal hammer’ of his ‘red, dark heart’ which makes ‘a thin sound of cracking’ as it ‘hits on the world of

⁷ Charles H Khan, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1979) 2001), Fragment XLIIIB, p.49.

man' and 'the things that men have put up' (p.186-7). Though the imagery is suggestive enough of Lawrence's quarrel with the conceptual orderliness of a world which has proved so unresponsive to his gospel, the Count's petulance actually has no more purchase on the brute reality of that world than had Lawrence's gospel. Its disruptive intent is ineffectual and unfocussed, as the following passages reveal:

He stood still and made her listen [...] And she could easily have believed that she heard a faint fine shivering, cracking, through the air, a delicate crackling noise. [...]

'Don't you think it is rather silly,' she said, 'to set your heart on destruction? There's been destruction enough, surely.'

'Indiscriminate, ridiculous cannon. But the acute destruction hasn't begun yet...' [pp.187-9]

The feeling here is that Lawrence is, on some level, arguing both for and against his own philosophical position: putting forth his 'dark' philosophy as the only viable alternative to established idealism – and simultaneously acknowledging the 'rather silly' notion of it having any pragmatic application to the world. The element of pragmatism will, alas, not emerge until much later in Lawrence's thinking (and via a very different Lawrence-hero) in the Chatterley novels.

Lawrence's take on 'natural' aristocracy emerges as similarly wishful in its thinking, for once again the reader has a curious sense that the narrative is as much concerned with investigating its own implausibilities as it is with validating its ostensible position. With due portentousness, Count Dionys delivers himself of the following to Basil: 'At a certain moment the men who are really living will come beseeching to put their lives into the hands of the greater men among them,

beseeking the greater men to take the sacred responsibility of power' (p.102). The Count is one such 'greater man' – not on account of any hereditary entitlement, but because he is a 'natural aristocrat': '[one] whose soul is born able, able to be alone, to choose and to command' (p.202). (Again, the influence of Heraclitus can be discerned: 'It is law... to obey the counsel of one.'⁸) Accordingly, the Count's postulated recognition by the masses is rendered in terms of biblical profundity, reflecting Count Dionys' prophetic status: 'Take our life and our death in your hands, and dispose of us according to your will. Because we see a light in your face, and a burning on your mouth' (p.202). Lawrence, perhaps mindful of former followers who subsequently proved to be too independently-minded (Bertrand Russell being the most obvious example), goes on to spell out the absolutist conditions of the natural aristocrat's assumption of leadership: 'If you choose me, you give up forever your right to judge me. If you have truly chosen to follow me, you have thereby rejected all your right to criticise me' (p.203). Again, Lawrence seems intent on establishing that this would work – if only in a work of fiction.

Dionys as 'Mere Sham'

If Count Dionys' claim to worldly authority looks to be a precarious one – and the narrative seems repeatedly to acknowledge that it *is* so – then its precariousness stems from the narcissistic nature of the Lawrence-hero. I wish to consider the twin 'pillars' upon which the Count's credibility is founded, for these narcissistic traits, like the Family Romance itself, can be traced through the various Lawrence characters I will discuss. Briefly, these two characteristics are: some kind of 'outlaw', bohemian or other charismatic 'outsider' element relating to the Lawrence-hero's

⁸ Ibid., p.59.

background, which renders him in some sense separate from (and implicitly superior to) those around him. Secondly, there is a self-dramatizing (and implicitly self-pitying) aura of having ‘died’ in some sense, which again entitles him to higher status inasmuch as this death-experience is represented as having conferred wisdom or special insight upon the Lawrence-hero. These same traits are found in successive versions of the Lawrence-hero, from the Cyril Mersham of ‘A Modern Lover’, through *The Ladybird* and *The Escaped Cock*, and finally through to the Parkin/Mellors character of the three versions of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. The same emotional dynamic is played out by each of these figures. For this reason I wish to sketch out the similarities and differences among these four of Lawrence’s fictional selves.

Cyril Mersham, as a fictionalized version of the callow Lawrence who once courted Jessie Chambers at Hags Farm, naturally has few of the trappings associated with Lawrence’s messianic phase – yet the relevant character traits can nevertheless be discerned in prototypical form. Mersham speaks to Muriel’s family using ‘English that was exquisitely accurate, pronounced with the Southern accent, very different from the speech... of the home folk’ (p.32). Count Dionys uses English which, despite its foreign inflection, is arguably no less exquisite: its very stiltedness and lack of idiomatic facility seems a pretext for the hero’s showy punctiliousness and smug laconicism. There is indeed little to separate the Mersham who ‘plays ball with bombs’ while bantering with his love-rival from the Bohemian Count who ‘[squibs] philosophical nonsense’ with Basil during their sublimated fight over Daphne – for both these heroes have their ‘unbreakable armour of light irony’ (‘A Modern Lover’, p.32). Such dislocations and disparities of speech are found in all versions of the Lawrence-character, and always mark him as separate from those around him – in

some sense an 'exotic'. The hero of *The Escaped Cock* speaks relatively little, and the Christ-like humility of his utterances places him above 'the little life' of peasants and slaves. By the time of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the same self-defensively separative technique has (of necessity) been reversed: the Parkin/Mellors character frequently distances himself from the upper-class characters by wilfully exaggerating his working-class accent to the point where Connie struggles to understand it.

But there is, perhaps, more to Count Dionys than mere philosophical nonsense. He is clearly an adherent of Heraclitean doctrines. The following passage (in which the Count expounds more of his philosophy to Daphne) is worth quoting at length, for its implications will prove central to all of Lawrence's subsequent thinking:

This is what I was taught. The true fire is invisible. Flame, and the red fire we see burning, has its back to us. It is running away from us [...]
The yellowness of sunshine – light itself – that is only the glancing aside of the real original fire. [...] There would be no light if there were no refraction, no bits of dust and stuff to turn the dark fire into visibility...and that being so, even the sun is dark [...] And the true sunbeams coming towards us flow darkly, a moving darkness of the genuine fire. The sun is dark, the sunshine flowing to us is dark. And light is only the inside-out of it all [...] We've got the world inside out. The true living world of fire is dark, throbbing, darker than blood. Our luminous world that we go by is only the white lining of this. [p.180]

The Count's curiously inverted cosmogony evokes well the Heraclitean doctrine that 'all things are requital for fire, and fire for all things, as goods for gold and gold for

goods'.⁹ Charles Kahn reads in this fragment Heraclitus' suggestion of 'a cycle in which fire occupies a dominant position at the end as at the beginning... a pattern of cosmogonic emergence of all things from fire balanced by a similar process in reverse'. Such a notion of universal flux (*panta rhei*: 'all things flow') is, of course, equivalent to ideas put forward by Montgomery as relevant to Lawrence's thinking: that is, ideas of community of essence and universal participation. For Kahn, the dominant image in this Heraclitean fragment is that 'fire possesses a unique and universal value, like gold in a land that has never heard of silver [...] The essential point is that fire is worth "all the rest" (*ta panta*)'. The idea of 'requital for all things' invokes an order of cosmic equivalence lying beyond material appearances and the conceptual categories with which we habitually order them, and Lawrence's 'turning inside out' of ostensible materiality in favour of 'the genuine fire' is surely just as radical. Another Heraclitean fragment holds that 'the hidden attunement (*harmonie*) is better than the obvious one'¹⁰ – and Kahn's suggestion that 'the range of meaning for *harmonie* is too wide for any one rendering to be adequate' again suggests the universality of 'all things' as 'requital' for the single element of fire.

Of course, such universality may well seem definitionally too diffuse to serve any useful purpose to modern readers: Heraclitus, examined by the cold light of twenty-first century rational scepticism, can easily seem an anachronism whose ideas have no possible relevance beyond the realm of ancient Greek philosophy. By implication, Lawrence's espousal of the same ideas would appear equally irrelevant. Yet Charles Kahn reverses this position, suggesting that 'by the ambivalent and enigmatic quality of his utterance [Heraclitus] lends himself as few authors do to the

⁹ Ibid., fragment XL, p.145.

¹⁰ Ibid., fragment LXXX, p.202.

free play of interpretation'¹¹ – and, by implication, to endless *re*interpretation. As Kahn states: '[Heraclitus] will speak to us only insofar as we are able to articulate his meaning in our own terms... it is we who must provide the hermeneutical metalanguage within which today's interpretation must be formulated.'¹² I wish to suggest that Kahn's position regarding the protean plurality engendered by Heraclitus' 'lexical and syntactic indeterminacy'¹³ is borne out by recent discoveries in physics. As recently as December 2003, astronomers have been announcing startling findings in their investigations of the 'known' universe:

Around 73% of the universe is made not of matter or radiation but of a mysterious force called dark energy [...] Around 200bn galaxies, each containing 200bn stars, are detectable by telescopes. But these add up to only 4% of the whole cosmos. [...] Around 23% of the universe is made up of another substance, called 'dark matter'. Nobody knows what this undetected stuff could be, but it massively outweighs all the atoms in all the stars in all the galaxies across the whole detectable range of space. The remaining 73% is the new discovery: dark energy.¹⁴

I do not, of course, wish to suggest that the hermeneutical metalanguage of present-day physics and astronomy should be taken as finally having 'proved' Heraclitus true. Any such claim to finality or definitiveness would, by definition, invalidate rather than underscore Kahn's case for the ever-evolving relevance of Heraclitus as a thinker. Future ages will no doubt find themselves quite well able to furnish Heraclitus with still further interpretive frameworks. Yet the idea of 'dark'

¹¹ Ibid., p.87.

¹² Ibid., p.88.

¹³ Ibid., p.91.

¹⁴ Tim Radford, *Guardian* 19th Dec 2003: p.1.

matter and ‘dark energy’ as major constituents of the universe is quite startlingly congruent with Lawrence’s cosmogony as expressed in *The Ladybird*. It also legitimizes Lawrence’s complaint in *Apocalypse* regarding contemporary views of the universe: namely, the scientific reductivism which, in his opinion, had degraded the cosmos from the magic of ‘zodiacal’ space into the mere ‘human chemical factory’ and unthinkable emptiness of ‘astronomical’ space. It is this Heraclitean ‘clue’ which, I suggest, matters most in *The Ladybird*. That, and the fact that it marks the Lawrence-hero’s last foray into personal manipulateness as a way of gaining purchase on the world.

If the ‘quick’ of Lawrence’s Heraclitean understanding is clearly evident in *The Ladybird*, so too is an element of misuse which still impedes its further progress: that of personal intrusion and lack of boundedness. Though the idea that ‘all things are one’ must have implications for the realm of personal interaction – indeed, the case could hardly be otherwise – Lawrence’s philosophy has still to incorporate the deeper understanding of personal boundedness which he will come to call ‘touch’ and ‘spontaneity’. Though the Count’s Heraclitean wisdom has its fascination, such esoteric knowledge is not meant for mere narcissistic self-adornment and the unseemly manipulation of others. Dionys asks of Daphne, ‘When you knew me [formerly], you would not have thought me a man invested with awful secret knowledge, now would you?’ (p.180). Perhaps fearing an answer in the negative, he goes on to ply her with the following account of himself: ‘Consider me. I used to think myself small but handsome, and the ladies used to admire me moderately, never very much. A smart little fellow, you know. Well, that was just the inside-out of me. I am a black tom-cat howling in the night, and it is then that fire comes out of me’ (p.181). The Count then crassly attempts to legitimize his attempted seduction of

Daphne by aligning it with his Heraclitean philosophy – claiming that Daphne’s beauty and ‘white’ love for her husband is only ‘the reverse, the whited sepulchre of the true love, [while] true love is a dark, a throbbing together in darkness’ (p.180). Count Dionys, the Heraclitean Lawrence-hero, has his philosophy of the world – but it is still, it seems, too much concerned with the world and his wife. Lawrence must at last learn there is a difference between unmaking the world and unmaking the people in it.

The dramatic high-point of *The Ladybird* is the night-time encounter between Count Dionys and Daphne, which takes place in the latter’s bedroom (to which the former has been, as it were, supernaturally summoned by the Count’s unearthly singing). Their encounter in darkness is set in contrast to ‘the day-mood of human convention’ (p.215) and culminates in an extraordinary and unconvincing *tableau* which again seeks to locate the Lawrence-hero within the realm of anterior wisdom:

Then suddenly he felt her fingertips touch his arm, and a flame went over him that left him no more a man. He was something seated in flame, in flame unconscious, seated erect, like an Egyptian king-god in the statues [...] He felt her brow and hair against his ankles, her face against his feet, and there she clung in the dark, as if in space below him. [p.216].

But the Count acknowledges to Daphne that in ‘this life’ they have ‘nowhere to go’, and he consoles himself with the knowledge that he is ‘master of the afterlife’ and will consequently win Daphne in death. In the meantime Daphne must acknowledge herself as ‘the night-wife of the ladybird’,¹⁵ with her marriage to Basil effectively over inasmuch as it has been transposed by the Count’s intervention into a sister/brother

¹⁵ The eponymous ladybird is the symbol of the Dionys family crest.

relationship. She is given the following instructions: 'If you have to give yourself to your husband, do so, and obey him. If you are true to me, innerly, innerly true, he will not hurt us. He is generous, be generous to him' (p.220). Yet the Count is really Cyril Mersham all over again: the Lawrence-figure, compelled almost in spite of himself, contrives an empty victory over his love-rival – and then quits the scene. He has no further relevance nor role he can play, and hence he has nowhere he can go but out into the darkness. Daphne is left in the same emotional impasse as the Muriel of 'A Modern Lover'. The narrative's attempt to represent this state of dereliction as Daphne's release from 'neurotic... fretful self-consciousness' (p.212) into blissful reverie is – in the specific senses in which I shall use these words in relation to the Chatterley novels – both immoral and unkind:

She would not have contradicted him, no, not for anything on earth: lest, contradicting him she should lose the dark treasure of stillness and bliss which she kept in her breast even when her heart was wrung with the agony of knowing he must go. [p.219]

Even so, the departing Lawrence-hero of *The Ladybird* does return in some sense, for he can arguably be traced through to the 'man who had died' in *The Escaped Cock* – a man who has, as it were, reached the 'afterlife'. *The Ladybird* also points forward to the Chatterley novels. There is mention of 'a gamekeeper' (a recurring motif in Lawrence's work, first explored in *The White Peacock*) who is employed at Daphne's childhood home, Thoresway:

She could have loved him, if she had not been isolated beyond the breach of her birth, her culture, her consciousness. Her *consciousness* seemed to make a great gulf between her and the lower classes, the unconscious classes. She accepted it as her doom. She could never

meet in real contact anyone but a super-conscious, finished being like herself: or like her husband... [p.211 – Lawrence's emphasis]

The issues raised thus far in Lawrence's journey – issues of physical and moral integrity, 'touch' in the sense of honest and spontaneous interrelation, (super-)consciousness, social class, individuality and subjectivity – are all to be addressed and reconciled in Lawrence's later tales. *The Ladybird* was described by one contemporary critic as '[straining] at its mooring in the real',¹⁶ and F R Leavis conceded that its outcome was 'out of all ostensible relation to actuality'.¹⁷ This is a measure of the Lawrence-prophet's failure thus far to gain any purchase on the real world – he finds he still has no option but to quit the philosophical stage, and Count Dionys duly acknowledges to Daphne that he has 'no future in this life' (p.216). Ironically it is Basil who, in the course of the philosophical wrangling which so often sees him bested by Dionys, makes the statement which will come to resonate throughout all that will follow of Lawrence's journey: 'Reality... is only one thing, really. It is a contact between your own soul and the soul of one other being, or of many other beings. Nothing else can happen to man' (p.199). This will serve as the last word on *The Ladybird*, for it points forward to the lesson which Lawrence learned to call 'touch'.

¹⁶ Dieter Mehl (ed.), in D H Lawrence, *The Fox • The Captain's Doll • The Ladybird*, Introduction pp.xxxii-xxxiv. Arthur McDowall's review appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 22nd March 1923.

¹⁷ F R Leavis, *D H Lawrence: Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, (1955) 1994), p.73.

Chapter Six

From Prophecy to Contingency:

Lawrence and Etruria

Introduction

One of the most important of Lawrence's excursions in search of a more integrated conception of human existence was his trip in March and April of 1927 to the ancient Etruscan burial sites in the Tuscany region of central Italy. It was perhaps the most significant influence on Lawrence's thinking in the final years of his life: Billy T Tracy, in his book *D H Lawrence and the Literature of Travel*, contends that 'Lawrence's Etruscan experience, which encompassed two trips and endless musings, was the major one of his last four years. Its effect is perceptible in nearly everything he wrote after 1926'.¹ Lawrence's reactions to the Etruscan tombs – which he described in a letter written in April 1927 as 'far more alive and twinkling than the houses of men'² – had a profound effect on his attitude to his own death as his failing health made it increasingly clear to him that he had not many years remaining. For as David Ellis notes, the Etruscans exemplified for Lawrence a people who had 'the right attitude to life' in their 'refusal to succumb to gloom', and it was 'only superficially a paradox that this attitude was manifested, could now in fact only be glimpsed, in their attitude to death'.³ As with Lawrence's previous forays into the genre of travel writing, his Etruscan excursion was one of the imagination as much as mere physical travel.

The book is only half completed in terms of Lawrence's original project of a collection of twelve sketches, ill health having forced him to abandon his itinerary at what would have been roughly the midway point of Volterra. Yet as Ellis notes,

¹ Billy T Tracy, *D H Lawrence and the Literature of Travel* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), p.94.

² James T Boulton and Margaret H Boulton (eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume VI, 1927-28* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.28.

³ David Ellis, *D H Lawrence: Dying Game, 1922-30* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.351.

‘even as it stands *Sketches of Etruscan Places* is still one of Lawrence’s best and indeed most coherent texts’.⁴ In terms of the overall progression in Lawrence’s thinking which I wish to trace, the Etruscan phase is indeed complete as it stands: it sees Lawrence finally renounce essentialism in favour of a position which is consonant with Richard Rorty’s notions of contingency and irony, and thus it marks what is arguably the most important turning point in Lawrence’s developing philosophy. Many of the themes addressed in *Etruscan Places* figure in Lawrence’s later works such as *The Escaped Cock* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* – and as Tracy notes, to read these late works ‘without understanding what the Etruscans meant to Lawrence would be as hazardous as reading his early work without knowing that he had grown up in Eastwood as the son of a coal miner’.⁵

Before descending with Lawrence into the Etruscan tombs, it is worth recalling the extent of Lawrence’s despair during the worst of his ‘nightmare’ phase. In his letters to Bertrand Russell, a terror-stricken Lawrence pleaded with his erstwhile disciple to be with him – in the ‘darkness of the underworld’. Lawrence wrote of his fear both of the things that are unseen in the darkness, and the ‘entire unreality’⁶ of the things he can see. It was clear by then that Lawrence’s unresolved problems relating to the ‘pre-object’ environment (as identified by Daniel Dervin) could not be much longer outrun. ‘Darkness’ (in the most general sense) represents for Lawrence his longed-for return to the safety of the womb – and simultaneously his fear of annihilation. The Russell letters have given vivid expression to Lawrence’s terror, while *The Ladybird* has been Lawrence’s attempt to extol darkness as a way of escaping from the troubling contingencies of life and personal relationships. What

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Billy T Tracy, *D H Lawrence and the Literature of Travel*, p.94.

⁶ George J Zytaruk & James T Boulton (eds.) *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence. Volume II, 1913-16* (Cambridge University Press: 1981), p.307.

Lawrence needs is a reconciliation between these contradictory ideas of darkness and the underworld. I suggest it is by keeping this sense of Lawrence's overwhelming need uppermost in mind that the reader can best appreciate Lawrence's response to the ancient Etruscan tombs.

Visiting the site of the ancient Etruscan city of Tarquinia, Lawrence sees, in the 'rough nothingness'⁷ of a bleak hillside, a little flight of steps leading down into the ground. He and his companions descend underground. A lamp flickers and smells, and at last begins to shine in this 'dark little hole underground' (p.44). As his eyes grow accustomed to the change of light, Lawrence realises he is in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing – so-called because of the paintings on the walls. What follows is an extraordinary confluence of Lawrence's artistic vision with that of an unknown artist of ancient Etruria, as the former describes the work of the latter. The following passage is worth quoting in full for its sheer vitality:

...in the dimness, as we get used to the light, we see flights of birds flying through the haze, rising from the sea with the draught of life still in their wings. And we take heart and look closer. The little room was frescoed all round with sea and sky of light, birds flying and fishes leaping, and fragmentary little men hunting, fishing, rowing in boats. The lower part of the wall is all a blue-green of sea with a silhouette surface that ripples all round the room. From the sea rises a tall rock, off which a naked man, shadowy but still distinct, is beautifully and cleanly diving into the sea, while a companion climbs up the rock after him, and on the water a boat waits with rested oars, in it three men

⁷ D H Lawrence, *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*, Simonetta de Filippis (ed.) (London: Penguin Books, (1927) 1999), p.44. All page references in the text are to this edition.

watching the diver, the middle man standing up naked, holding out his arms. Meanwhile a great dolphin leaps behind the boat, a flight of birds soars upwards to pass the rock, in the clear air. [p.44]

What matters most here is the extraordinary sense of the *simultaneity* of life – of life as a condition and expression of the phenomenal world, from which life is somehow inseparable. One feels that Lawrence is sharing with the Etruscan artist in the participatory mode of consciousness which sees the physical world as a vast continuum, in which death is as much a condition of participation as life itself – for death, here in the Etruscan tombs, is celebrated as participation by other means. Lawrence is here, in a sense, finally ‘born’ – for he comes to accept his sufficient selfhood in the world, and the concomitant knowledge that his awareness of self and world cannot but last him a lifetime. Thus there is no ‘falling through’ into the darkness of the underworld, for the cosmos includes everything. Darkness and the underworld are, for Lawrence in ancient Etruria, guarantors of life.

Accordingly, Lawrence now sees evidence everywhere in the Etruscan tombs that life and death are as much of a continuum as the rest of the phenomenal world. The tombs, for Lawrence, represent ‘the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness, and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or the soul in any direction’ (p.19). Death, for Lawrence’s Etruscans, was ‘a pleasant continuance of life’, and ‘everything was in terms of life, of living’. There are telling images in the *Sketches* of the tombs, ‘like bulbs’, underground, and of the dead ‘[lying] buried and quick, as seeds, in their painted houses underground’ (pp.13 & 33-4). Lawrence notes also that there is to be found, by the doorway of some of the tombs, ‘a carved stone house, or a stone imitation chest with sloping lids like the two sides of the roof of an oblong house’ (p.20). He notes the similarity of these boxes with the ‘Noah’s Ark’ toys of his

childhood and declares: 'And that its what it is, the Ark, the arx, the womb. The womb of all the world, that brought forth all the creatures. The womb, the arx, where life retreats in the last refuge [...] There it is, standing displaced outside the doorway of Etruscan tombs at Cerveteri' (p.20). Though Lawrence's observation passes by easily enough in the overall air of 'homeliness and happiness' (p.16) which he has found in the tombs, the moment is surely a significant one in terms of the cross-section I am taking through Lawrence's development. Womb and tomb are both now seen in terms of the same life-affirming proposition, and Lawrence's selfhood is at last able to stand between them, the 'third thing' which is true individuality: differentiated from the whole, yet simultaneously instantiating that whole.

On Contingency

It is this sense of there having at last taken place a resolution of Lawrence's existential crisis which clears the way for his subsequent celebration of contingency as a philosophical principle – the most striking outcome of Lawrence's Etruscan experience. In the section entitled 'The Painted Tombs of Tarquinia I', Lawrence arguably reaches the fullest expression of the reintegratory mode of writing to be found in his Etruscan sketches. Walking back to town after visiting the Tarquinia tombs, Lawrence muses on the strange impact the figures in the tomb paintings have had on him. He reflects that the dancing figures seem as if they 'drew their vitality from different depths, that we are denied', and that the animal figures have 'a haunting quality... they get in the imagination, and will not go out' (p.56). He meditates on 'the myriad vitalities in wild confusion, which still is held in some sort of array' (pp.57-8). There follows an inspiring passage in which Lawrence launches

into an evocation of cosmic interrelatedness based on the ancients' belief in augury, which Lawrence believed was, in turn, predicated upon a capacity on the part of the augur to read signs and portents from aspects of outer reality by attuning himself to the universe via a religious act of attention. Taking his cue from one of the tomb paintings, Lawrence writes:

Birds fly portentously on the walls of the tombs. The artist must often have seen those priests, the augurs, with their crooked, bird-headed staffs in their hand, out on a high place watching the flight of larks or pigeons across the quarters of the sky. They were reading the signs and the portents, looking for an indication, how they should direct the course of some serious affair. To us it may seem foolish. To them, hot-blooded birds flew through the living universe as feelings and premonitions fly through the breast of a man, or as thoughts fly through the mind. In their flight, the suddenly-roused birds, or the steady, far-coming birds moved wrapped in a deeper consciousness, in the complex destiny of all things. And since all things corresponded, in the ancient world, and man's bosom mirrored itself in the bosom of the sky, or vice versa, the birds were flying to a portentous goal, in the man's breast who watched, as well as flying their own way in the bosom of the sky. If the augur could see the birds flying in his heart, then he would know which way destiny too was flying for him. [p.61]

The immediate, grounded, non-metaphysical revelation of a world in which 'all things correspond' is, I suggest, a major philosophical breakthrough for Lawrence. What makes it so is the concomitant realisation that such a realm of unfathomable correspondence is best evoked contingently. It is not something to be

propounded by a self-appointed prophet or 'saviour of the world' who belabours people with capitalized essence-words such as 'Truth', 'The Infinite' or 'Eternity' in the expectation that the world will duly reorder itself at his behest. Lawrence's Etruscan augur is simply someone who is adept at paying a certain kind of attention to the world: a kind of mindfulness which, so to speak, sees all the way through the phenomenal world and is thus attuned to orders of relatedness which can never be accessible to the 'factual' or 'common sense' view which, having seen the world's surface, presumes to have seen it all. Thus, though Lawrence's sketches are not overtly universalizing in their intention, they somehow have the feel of including everything: they have a strangely atemporal sense of relevance, and an oddly – almost accidentally – panoptic quality. They 'see all' because they know how to see the quickness that is contingency. Lawrence's evocation of ancient augury is, in the sense I have been using the term, a cross-section through the continuum of reality – an imaginative, creative one, which sees all because it celebrates contingency (the flight of birds) as instantiating deeper levels of significance (the flow of blood, the stream of consciousness). Lawrence actually goes on to claim for augury no less than an equivalence with the kind of present-day rational, 'scientific' modes of knowing – those which would no doubt consider such augury to have been no more than a risible superstition:

The science of augury certainly was no exact science. But it was as exact as our sciences of psychology or political economy. And the augurs were as clever as our politicians, who also must practise divination, if ever they are to do anything worth the name. There is no other way, when you are dealing with life. And if you live by the cosmos, you look in the cosmos for your clue. If you live by a

personal god, you pray to him. If you are rational, you think things over. But it all amounts to the same thing, in the end. Prayer, or thought, or studying the stars, or watching the flight of birds, or studying the entrails of the sacrifice, it is all the same process, ultimately: of divination. All it depends on, is the amount of true, sincere, religious concentration you can bring to bear on your subject. An act of pure attention, if you are capable of it, will bring its own answer. [p.61-2]

Lawrence implicitly gives a nod of deference toward the idea that rational, scientific exactitude is assumed to be a good thing in terms of our knowing the world; but at the same time, he blurs the distinction between the possibility of knowing the world exactly through scientific means, and the possibility that there are other, perhaps more fruitful ways of looking at reality. What Lawrence calls 'our sciences of psychology or political economy' are examples of what Richard Rorty calls 'vocabularies': modes of discourse which delineate the world in certain, internally coherent, self-reinforcing ways. Yet Lawrence's insistence that 'it all amounts to the same thing, in the end' is a reminder that there are available to us a multitude of ways of transecting the continuum of physical reality. *All* such ways afford us a different cross-section through the phenomenal world:

Man is *always* trying to be conscious of the cosmos, the cosmos of life and passion and feeling, desire and death and despair, as well as of physical phenomena. And there are still millions of undreamed-of ways of becoming aware of the cosmos. Which is to say, there are millions of worlds, whole cosmic worlds, to us yet unborn. Every religion, every philosophy, and science itself, each has a clue to the

cosmos, to the becoming aware of the cosmos. Each clue leads to its own goal of consciousness, then is exhausted. [p.176]

The implication would seem to be that, in the light of an awareness that there exists such a vast multitude of possible cross-sections through the physical universe, what now become most important are the human purposes and assumptions we bring to bear when choosing what kind of attention we will pay to the world. Whether they be conscious or unconscious, our needs, intentions and orientations inevitably inform our choice of viewpoint, and some views of the world are better suited to certain *kinds* of human purpose than other views – and all the while, it is our sense of human *kindness* which should inform our sense of purpose. What we bring to our searches through reality cannot but have a bearing on what we will find – and there are, as Lawrence suggests, as many worlds to find as there are ways of searching for them:

The science of the augur and the haruspex was not so foolish as our modern science of political economy. If the hot liver of the victim cleared the soul of the haruspex, and made him capable of that ultimate inward attention which alone tells us the last thing we need to know, then why quarrel with the haruspex? To him, the universe was alive, and in quivering *rapport*. To him, the blood was conscious; he thought with his heart. To him, the blood was the red and shining stream of consciousness itself. Hence, to him, the liver, that great organ where the blood struggles and ‘overcomes death’, was an object of profound mystery and significance. It stirred his soul and purified his consciousness; for it was also his victim. So he gazed into the hot liver, that was mapped out in fields and regions like the sky of the

stars, but these fields and regions were those of the red, shining consciousness that runs through the whole animal creation. [p.62]

This hardly amounts to a recommendation that we should take to disembowelling birds in order that we might have a better understanding of the world, or that we should instead seek out others whom we take to be more alive than we are to the nuances of interpreting birds' internal organs. It may well be that we can think of no worthwhile human purpose that would be served by seeking to adopt the worldview of an Etruscan augur (which fact does not in itself rule out the possibility that future generations might find themselves wishing to act upon just such a sense of purpose). But Lawrence's mythopoeic imagining here makes the point that there are a multitude of ways of being alive to the world, and that it is the mindfulness of our attunement to the world which determines the quality of our human being within the possible worlds we make for ourselves. It is on *this* level that Lawrence's philosophical writings matter. And as Michael Bell notes:

Lawrence's fiction is inescapably philosophical. It explores modes and qualities of being, and consciousness of those modes and qualities. Whether any one of these modes can be proven to have existed in a particular time and place is less significant than its comprehensibility or value as a psychic potentiality for us now.⁸

Lawrence suggests, for instance, that the Etruscan way of human being – alive, spontaneous, and insouciantly at ease in the world – was far more appealing than the greedily oppressive Roman civilization which wiped out ancient Etruria. Clearly, Lawrence's generalizations do not lie within the ambit of serious historical investigation, verification or instantiation, which concerns (as we have seen) he

⁸ Michael Bell, *D H Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.3-4.

preferred to reject outright. What matters in the Sketches is ‘psychic potentiality’ of seeing ancient Etruria as a palimpsest which reveals clues as to how we might humanly flourish in the present. Such a mode of seeing is not about the minutiae of historical fact-gathering.

On Seeing

Though we no doubt find it rational (and therefore ‘natural’) to assume that avian anatomy is more properly the province of ornithologists than augurs, Lawrence puts forward the idea of living creatures as ultimately unknowable to our present-day, scientific, ‘kodak’ idea of knowledge – an idea which is deliberately set against positivist assumptions which seek to determine such creatures in scientific terms. In the following passage, in which Lawrence muses upon the painted horses he has seen in a Tarquinian tomb, the term ‘horsiness’ is deliberately *unscientific*:

...so that one asks oneself, what, after all, is the horsiness of a horse? What is it that man sees, when he looks at a horse? What is it, that will never be put into words? For a man who sees sees not as a camera does when it takes a snapshot, not even as a cinema-camera, taking its succession of instantaneous snaps; but in a curious rolling flood of vision, in which the image itself seethes and rolls; and only the mind picks out certain factors which shall represent the image seen. We have made up our minds to see things as they are: which is camera vision. But the camera can neither feel the heat of the horse, his strange body; nor smell his horsiness; nor hear him neigh. Whereas the eye, seeing him, wakes all our other sensual experience of him: not

to speak of our terror of his frenzy, and admiration of his strength. The eye really 'sees' all this. It is the complete vision of a child, full and potent. But this potent vision in us is maimed and pruned as we grow up, till as adults we see only the dreary bit of the horse, his static external form. [pp.127-8]

This regression – from the naively synoptic vision of the child to the supposedly mature outlook of the adult whose educated gaze can only systematize and schematize the world into static externalities – marks the loss of our capacity to pay attention to the world in ways which enhance our human being. We are concerned to see things accurately, even exactly, because our human purposes have so long been predicated on the notion of seeing things 'as they really are' – that is, in accordance with 'the facts', which are already 'there' and whose pre-existent status is duly confirmed upon our 'discovering' them. But this particular version of 'seeing things as they really are' is only that: a version, which, for Lawrence, actually lacks the fullness and potency of the child's version of 'seeing things'. The adult version of seeing things is actually self-impeded by its insistence on accuracy of delineation and veracity to the factualness of whatever is under scrutiny. Such a preoccupation with detail and exactitude actually runs counter to the spirit of contingency. It may usefully serve various human purposes, but it necessarily denies imagination and creative synthesis. It is not a holistic way of seeing the world. Richard Rorty draws attention to the pervasive extent to which, in our encounters with reality, we rely on metaphors of visual acuity, 'mirror-imaging' and photographic realism (which metaphors Lawrence is explicitly attacking). In explaining why he chose 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature' for the title of one of his books, Rorty had this to say:

It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions. The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, non-empirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself.⁹

Lawrence, instinctively reacting against the reductiveness imposed by ‘kodak’-style representationalism, goes on to extend his idea of our human selves as continuous with the rest of the world. In the following passage, the key Lawrentian ideas of human/animal interfusion, unity-in-opposition and blood-consciousness are all brought together:

The human being, to the Etruscan, was a bull or a ram, a lion or a deer, according to his different aspects and potencies. The human being had in his veins the blood of the wings of birds and the venom of serpents. All things emerged from the blood-stream, and the blood-relation, however complex and contradictory it became, was never interrupted or forgotten. There were different currents in the blood stream, and some always clashed: bird and serpent, lion and deer, leopard and lamb. Yet the very clash was a form of unison, as we see in the lion which also has a goat’s head. [p.122-3]

This evocation of a mysterious swirl of human and animal attributes is an aspect of Lawrence’s writing which I will later relate to an idea expounded by Terry

⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1999). p.13

Eagleton in his book *After Theory*. There, Eagleton takes up the notion of ‘transformative continuity’: our human selves are – whatever else we might conceive them to be – essentially *animal* selves. There should be no absolute conceptual divide between human and animal life, for we must construct our human selves primarily out of a respect for the sanctity of all life – and for the material world which is itself by no means discontinuous from life. Neither human nor animal life should be thought of as essentially disjunct from the rest of materiality. The ‘transformative’ element of this idea relates to our human capacity for language. We are linguistic beings, and thus have the capacity to transform ourselves in ways which non-linguistic beings cannot. But we err, in exercising our linguistic capability, if we transform ourselves in such a way as to sunder ourselves from the rest of the phenomenal world. Our linguistic freedom should be in the cause of celebrating and preserving our awareness of our continuity with the world and our humanity – our *humankind*-ness. Lawrence can be said to have anticipated this idea of transformative continuity in much of his writing, notably in the *Etruscan Sketches*. The idea of the interfusing of animal and human attributes is given its most overt expression in a startlingly evocative passage which again emphasizes the theme of interrelatedness generally and also introduces another of Lawrence’s favourite themes, that of ‘outline’ (to be discussed below):

It must have been a wonderful world, that old world where everything appeared alive and shining in the dusk of contact with all things, not merely as an isolated individual thing played upon by daylight; where each thing had a clear outline, visually, but in its very clarity was related emotionally or vitally to strange other things, one thing springing from another, things mentally contradictory fusing together emotionally, so that a lion could be at the same moment also a goat,

and not a goat. In those days, a man riding on a red horse was not just Jack Smith on his brown nag; it was a suave-skinned creature, with death or life in its face, surging along on a surge of animal power that burned with travel, with the passionate movement of the blood, and which was swirling along on a mysterious course, to some unknown goal, swirling with a weight of its own. [p.124]

By this stage of Lawrence's Etruscan adventure, one can hardly help but be struck by the sheer scope of his philosophizing. He has, so to speak, covered 'life, the universe, and everything' – to use a popular phrase which has become shorthand for the layman's facetious view of philosophy as a business of ridiculous ambition, self-generating complexity and incompatible theories. Lawrence, in contrast, has rendered space, time and consciousness as homogeneous, and has blurred living things into a dynamic life-continuum until both animal and human attributes and potentialities have become phantasmagoric, an endlessly mutable menagerie of the imagination. It is fair to ask if and where this unschooled 'ramshackle' Lawrentian philosophy has any relation to established philosophical thinking. It is fair to ask if Lawrence is even worthy of consideration in terms of 'Philosophy' seen as an exhaustingly difficult academic discipline which has, over centuries, produced such a vast corpus of work. Perhaps a clue lies in the very fact that philosophy, having produced such a huge body of writing, has coincidentally fissured into an apparent Babel of incommensurable specialisms – until even the most ambitiously totalizing philosophical discourses and proposals seem merely to add to the existing sense of confusion and cross-purpose (as the Lawrence-prophet of yore found to his cost). I argue that Lawrence, in the scope and import of his writing, *is* a philosopher, and his refusal to confine himself to the strictures of a particular philosophical vocabulary – in a world where there are many

particular philosophical vocabularies – does not in itself disqualify him from consideration. In a world which has long since been philosophized into confusion and disparateness, there must needs be a writer who can write the world and humanity back into wholeness. This is the purpose of the mature Lawrence. Jonathan Glover, in his 1988 book *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity* (many of the concerns of which are similar to Lawrence's own), gives warrant for a view of philosophy which seeks pragmatically to retrieve the subject from the exclusive province of specialist philosophers. He offers this defence for having presumed to yoke together such weighty words as 'philosophy' and 'psychology' in the title of his rather slim volume:

There is a kind of intimidation that makes thinking for yourself seem hopeless. It might take five years to get on top of the logical and semantic techniques used in current philosophy. It might take five years to get on top of Kant's philosophy. It might take between ten years and eternity to get on top of Hegel's philosophy. If these are all preconditions of worthwhile thinking about these questions, the project is probably not worth starting. A little casualness can be liberating.¹⁰

There seems no doubt that one of the key attractions Lawrence found in things Etruscan was the relative dearth of scholarly knowledge about this ancient culture, which dearth would indeed have been, in Ellis's words, 'a help to Lawrence's lyrical evocation of Etruscan life'.¹¹ Due to the passage of time and the fact that the ancient Etruscans left no written account of their culture, they were, in a sense, already 'deconstructed' and thus a palimpsest ready to receive Lawrence's imaginative

¹⁰ Jonathan Glover, *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity* (London: Penguin Books, (1988) 1991), p.12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

recreation. Billy T Tracy quotes William York Tindall's rather mischievous suggestion that '[Lawrence] chose the Etruscans because nobody knew much about them, and therefore his imagination could be "more than ordinarily unimpeded by fact"'¹² – alluding to Lawrence's insouciant capacity to allow or disallow 'facts' in accordance with their usefulness as adjudged by one paramount consideration: the touchstone of his creative imagination. In a letter (written as early as 8th June 1926) to Millicent Beveridge concerning his proposed Etruscan travel book, Lawrence avowed his intention to 'just... start in and go ahead, and be damned to all authorities! There really is next to nothing to be said, *scientifically*, about the Etruscans. Must take the imaginative line...' ¹³ It is entirely characteristic of Lawrence that his interest in Etruria was a search for an imaginative space replete with creative stimuli rather than an ordered body of historical 'knowledge' already nailed down by academic rigour.

More On Contingency

This being the case, Lawrence was notably keen to emphasize the *contingent* quality of the Etruscan civilization – indeed, he goes so far as to reject the idea of their ever having been anything so monolithic as the phrase 'Etruscan civilization' would seem to imply. For Lawrence, the Etruscan cities formed a loosely linked 'confederacy' [p.47]. He imagines the language of each city to have been in some degree different from that of the other cities ('each district speaking its own dialect and feeling at home in its own little capital' – p.47), but with enough similarity for the inhabitants of different cities to understand each other. There was, Lawrence insists,

¹² Billy T Tracy, *D H Lawrence and the Literature of Travel*, p.91.

¹³ James T Boulton and Lindeth Vasey (eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume V, 1924-27* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.473.

‘never an Etruscan nation’ as such [p.27]. He even celebrates the ephemerality of the Etruscan cities and temples: being built of wood, they ‘vanished completely as flowers’ [p.32]. It is this quality which Lawrence contrasts with the brute mechanism and cruel suppression he associates with the Roman civilization which all but effaced the Etruscan way of life:

Myself, I like to think of the little wooden temples of the early Greeks and the Etruscans: small, dainty, fragile, and evanescent as flowers. We have reached the stage where we are weary of huge stone erections, and we begin to realise that it is better to keep life fluid and changing, than to try to hold it fast down in heavy monuments. [p.32]

Accordingly, Lawrence now extols contingency over prophecy – a remarkable progression from the universalizing didacticism of his messianic phase. Contingency and diversity now become the energy which infuses his philosophical thinking, and all absolutist doctrines – including his own – are now rejected. Anteriority is no longer a repository of awful, secret knowledge as suggested by Count Dionys, the Lawrence-hero of *The Ladybird*. There is no ancient, monolithic religion to be revived and brutally enforced, as in *The Plumed Serpent*. Lawrence now has an altogether different idea of anteriority: ‘To get any idea of the pre-Roman past, we must break up the conception of oneness and uniformity, and see an endless confusion of differences. [The Romans] were too dominated by their lust for conquest and expansion to pay real attention to life’ (p.47). Lawrence, the former prophet of world salvation, now declares: ‘Why has mankind such a craving to be imposed upon! Why this lust after imposing creeds [...] Give us things that are alive and flexible [...] What one wants is to be aware...’ (pp.33-4). Lawrence sees the ancient Etruscan artefacts as things best appreciated in their original context, where one can appreciate

them in terms of their 'complex of associations' (p.34). Thus he deplors the 'Roman' compulsion to 'rape everything away' from their original settings and regiment them in museums where they can be better 'understood' in scientific terms.

Sir Isaiah Berlin, in his essay 'The Concept of Scientific History', has much to say that would support Lawrence's rejection of the scientific approach to history in favour of 'the imaginative line'. Berlin rejects the teleological and nomological presumptions of much historical writing whereby we conceive of the 'stream of history' or the 'march of progress' as 'something possessing a certain objective pattern that we ignore at our peril'.¹⁴ He emphasizes the necessarily contingent nature of the material with which even the most scientific historians must work:

...the facts to be fitted into the scientific grid and subsumed under the adopted laws or model (even if public criteria for selecting what is important and relevant from what is trivial and peripheral can be found and employed) are too many, too minute, too fleeting, too blurred at the edges. They criss-cross and penetrate each other at many levels simultaneously, and the attempt to prise them apart, as it were, and pin them down, and classify them, and fit them into their specific compartments, turns out to be impracticable.¹⁵

Echoing Lawrence's declaration that what he wants from his Etruscan trip is an experience rather than a guided tour, Berlin dismisses the classificatory approach to history in favour of the idea that 'the total texture is what we begin and end with'. Lawrence's view of ancient Etruria is most concerned to emphasize the human

¹⁴ Sir Isaiah Berlin, 'The Concept of Scientific History', in Henry Hardy and Roger Hausser (eds.) *Isaiah Berlin: The Proper Study of Mankind - An Anthology of Essays* (London: Pimlico Books, 1998), p.22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.34.

element, and is not a casual alternative or poor relation to ‘serious’ history. It is an imaginative approach which accords with Berlin’s conception of true historical explanation, which has more to do with ‘moral and aesthetic analysis’ than fact-gathering, for:

... it presupposes conceiving of human beings not merely as organisms in space, the regularities of whose behaviour can be described and locked in labour-saving formulae, but as active beings, pursuing ends, shaping their own and others’ lives, feeling, reflecting, imagining, creating, in constant interaction and intercommunication with other human beings: in short, engaged in all the forms of experience that we understand because we share in them, and do not view them purely as external observers. This is what we call the inside view.¹⁶

The quality which Berlin most prizes in a historian – and which Lawrence can be said to have possessed in abundance – is:

...a capacity for integration...a sense of the unique fashion in which various factors combine in the particular concrete situation, which must at once be neither so unlike any other situation as to constitute a total break with the continuous flow of human experience, nor yet so stylized and uniform as to be the obvious creature of theory and not made of flesh and blood.¹⁷

A capacity for integration implies the ability to ‘see through’ the continuum of reality in the way Lawrence did: to see it as something which affords us millions of potential worlds, and yet simultaneously to see it as something of which we can

¹⁶ Ibid., p.49.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.56-7.

forever make satisfyingly and sustainingly *human* sense. To be able to see through reality with such dual awareness is to be skilful at taking creatively human cross-sections through that reality. For a naturally talented integrationist such as Lawrence, the sheer plurality of the phenomenal world is, at the last, *neither* paralytically beyond our comprehension *nor* reducible to a set of accredited facts. In a passage which could have been written with Lawrence's *Etruscan Sketches* in mind, Berlin declares:

The capacity for associating the fruits of experience in a manner that enables its possessors to distinguish, without the benefit of rules, what is central, permanent or universal from what is local, or peripheral or transient – that is what gives concreteness and plausibility, the breath of life, to historical accounts.¹⁸

Such a view gives full warrant to Lawrence's mythopoeic reading of ancient Etruscan culture and his refusal of the constraints which attend upon a drily factual approach to history. The capacity to conceive of history *artistically* involves, as Michael Bell notes, 'some superhistorical detachment, the capacity to stand outside the motivating passions while understanding them with dramatic inwardness, and also a touch of unhistorical commitment'.¹⁹

Richard Rorty

Richard Rorty also gives warrant for the kind of imaginatively synthesizing energy found in Lawrence's unconventional style of philosophy. In *Apocalypse* Lawrence defended his own approach in these terms: 'It matters so little to us who

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57.

¹⁹ Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.33.

care more about life than about scholarship, what is correct or what is not correct [...]

I don't care *what* a man sets out to prove, so long as he has given me a real imaginative experience by the way, and not another set of bloated thought-forms' (p.50). In *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Rorty states: '... we see both intellectual and moral progress not as a matter of getting closer to the True or the Good or the Right, but as an increase in imaginative power.'²⁰ In *Consequences of Pragmatism* he also extols a unifying approach to philosophy as more useful than an aridly theoretical, over-specialized one. Lawrence would surely have endorsed the following call for philosophical pragmatism:

What people *do* believe is that it would be good to hook up our views about democracy, mathematics, physics, God, and everything else, into a coherent story about how everything hangs together. Getting such a synoptic view often does require us to change radically our views on particular subjects. But this holistic process of readjustment is just muddling through on a large scale. It has nothing to do with the Platonic-Kantian notion of grounding.²¹

Following the disaster of his prophetic phase, Lawrence's philosophical thinking will, at least on a casual view, have much more to do with 'muddling through' than with essentialist grounding. Yet it will nonetheless be seen to have its holistic implications, even though his overt pretensions to reordering the world have long been abandoned in favour of the 'Etruscan' qualities of spontaneity and insouciance.

Taking up Rorty's idea that intellectual progress necessarily involves an increase in imaginative power, we might say that our habitually *practical* mindset is

²⁰ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.87.

²¹ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, [1982] 1998), pp.168-9.

based on what Rorty calls ‘the claim that the world splits itself up, on its own initiative, into sentence-shaped chunks called “facts”’²² – a presumption which arguably says more about our casual inattention to the use of human language than about the nature of the world. We presume that (in Rorty’s phrase) our language ‘cuts nature at the joints’,²³ *describing* elements of reality in such a way that we unconsciously assume ourselves to be *circumscribing* them: tracing their outlines, which we then assume to be the shapes of pre-existent ontological ‘givens’. We ought instead to regard the truth of even the most brutish of facts as something more provisional and language-based than is common practice:

We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there [...] To say that truth is *not* out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations.²⁴

On such a reading, the ‘truth’ or otherwise of Lawrence’s imaginative universe – hippocampi, chimaera, strange mergings of human/animal attributes, space-as-consciousness – becomes an intriguingly open question. Rorty’s critique of epistemology in its typical ‘correspondence theory’ guise is similarly liberating in its implications. He, too, blurs our habitual categorizings by setting up an apparent distinction between man-made and natural ‘things’ – which distinction he then problematizes. He cites ‘a bank account’ as an example of something man-made: no more than a social construction, evidently enough. He then cites ‘a giraffe’ as

²² Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1989] 1999), p.5.

²³ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 1999, p.xxvi

²⁴ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, pp.4-5 (my emphasis).

exemplifying an object in the natural world. His relativizing reappraisal of such an apparently rational distinction makes for exhilarating reading:

Bank accounts are made, giraffes are found. Now the truth in this view is simply that if there had been no human beings there would still have been giraffes, whereas there would have been no bank accounts. But this causal independence of giraffes from humans does not mean that giraffes are what they are apart from human needs and interests. On the contrary, we describe giraffes in the way we do, *as* giraffes, because of our needs and interests. We speak a language which includes the word 'giraffe' because it suits our purposes to do so. The same goes for words like 'organ', 'cell', 'atom', and so on – the names of the parts out of which giraffes are made, so to speak. All the descriptions we give of things are descriptions suited to our purposes. No sense can be made, we pragmatists argue, of the claim that some of these descriptions pick out 'natural kinds' – that they cut nature at the joints. The line between a giraffe and the surrounding air is clear enough if you are a human being hunting for meat. If you are a language-using ant or amoeba, or a space voyager observing us from far above, that line is not so clear, and it is not clear that you would need or have a word for 'giraffe' in your language. More generally, it is not clear that any of the millions of ways of describing the piece of space-time occupied by what we call a giraffe is any closer to the way things are in themselves than any of the others. Just as it seems pointless to ask whether a giraffe is really a collection of atoms, or really a collection of actual and possible sensations in human sense

organs, or really something else, so the question, ‘Are we describing it as it really is?’ seems one we never need to ask. All we need to know is whether some competing description might be more useful for some of our purposes.²⁵

Such an account runs counter to our ‘commonsensical’ conviction that a giraffe, if there is one there, must be self-evidently there. It is notable, too, that Rorty’s destabilizing of ‘that-which-is-known’ simultaneously problematizes the idea of ‘that-which-knows’: as much as it may seem flippant to speak of language-using ants, amoebas and space voyagers, the very idea of our isolate selves as independent, hermetic ‘knowledge collection-units’ has been implicitly dispersed, decentred. ‘That-which-knows’ now becomes diffused along with ‘that-which-is-known’: the assumed relationship between an isolated object of knowledge and the individual subject who ‘knows’ it is suddenly made to seem less certain – and the word ‘individual’ is again made to pivot between its opposing emphases. When Lawrence states that in ancient Etruria ‘the active religious idea was that man, by vivid attention and subtlety... could draw more into himself, more life’, any supposed division between man and the cosmos is breached, transcended. Mankind becomes more like to the cosmos. Again, in relation to this questioning of the idea of the ‘me-inside’ – wielding my assumed status as final arbiter of what shall count as reality and purporting thereby to know ‘that-which-is-outside’ – Rorty detects a language-effect in play:

Because every belief we have must be formulated in some language or other, and because languages are not attempts to copy what is out there, there is no way to divide off the contribution to our knowledge

²⁵ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pp.xxv-xxvi.

made by the object from the contribution to our knowledge made by our subjectivity.²⁶

This is a pragmatist belief which would have been familiar to Lawrence from his reading of William James's *Pragmatism*, in which James emphasizes the creative element in our 'cognitive life': 'We add, both to the subject and to the predicate part of reality. The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands [...] Man engenders truths upon it.'²⁷ Thus we see the worth of Lawrence's emphasis on the importance of the 'way of affirmation' – and the danger of relying solely on the 'way of question', which condemns us to syllogistic blind alleys and chains of 'therefores'. The resulting body of knowledge, as Lawrence intuitively understood, does not 'link up' with the rest of our experience: it is disintegratory, characteristic of astronomical rather than astrological space, denying 'the whole man'. Lawrence's mythical Etruscan creatures, his augurs and haruspices and their understanding of cosmic correspondence, his seething chaos of animal / human attributes – these symbolic mergings all serve to erode what Rorty calls the 'distinction between inside and outside', and Lawrence's organicist notion of blood-consciousness surely equates with what Rorty calls the 'biologistic' view.

Touch

Lawrence's thinking is, by the time his Etruscan philosophy is in full flow, invoking chaos and denying stability. Touch, blood, dance, consciousness: these are all blurring together, eluding their own definitions so as to fuse in a flux of perception

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ William James, 'Pragmatism and Humanism', in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, Giles Gunn (ed.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, (1907), 2000), p.112.

akin to that which (in Lawrence's imagination) the animals know – an unselfconscious, pan-perceptive, pre-conceptual awareness of flow, motion, and fleeting contiguity. Lawrence states elsewhere that consciousness itself should be 'a flow from within outwards. The organic necessity of the human being should flow into spontaneous action and spontaneous awareness, consciousness'.²⁸ Though it seems paradoxical at first, Lawrence's 'touch' transcends our mundane definition of mere physical surface contact because it always implies this 'flow from within'. A passage from the first Tarquinia sketch makes this explicit. Having eulogized the painting of the dancing figures and celebrated its depiction of touch as 'one of the rarest qualities, in life as well as in art', he notes the failure of more established artists to capture the quality of touch in their own work:

In pictures especially, the people may be in contact, embracing or laying hands on one another. But there is no soft flow of touch. The touch does not come from the middle of the human being. It is merely a contact of surfaces, and a juxtaposition of objects. This is what makes so many of the great masters boring, in spite of all their clever composition. Here, in this faded Etruscan painting, there is a quiet flow of touch that unites the man and the woman on the couch, the timid boy behind, the dog that lifts his nose, even the very garlands that hang from the wall. [...] The Etruscan artist seems to have seen living things surging from their own centre to their own surface. [pp.54 & 124]

²⁸ D H Lawrence, 'Review of *The Social Basis of Consciousness* by Trigant Burrow' (*Bookman*, (New York, November 1927) Taken from Lawrence, D H, *A Selection from Phoenix*, A A H Inglis (ed.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, (1936) 1968 & 1971), p.469.

Such passages prompt us to look beyond our habitual idea of one thing ‘touching’ another in mere physical contiguity – we must find some sense of touch that comprehends the dimension of depth. Etymology perhaps provides us with a clue. I have used the word ‘contiguity’ as synonymous with the everyday sense of touch. ‘Contiguity’ is from the Latin root *contingere*, to touch on *all* sides, come into contact. The same root gives us the word ‘contingency’. This gives us the element of touch – and also (according to the OED) ‘the condition of being free from predetermining necessity in regard to existence or action; hence, the being open to the play of chance... being subject to chance and change... a conjuncture of events occurring without design... being at the mercy of accidents... incidental’. This happy freedom from predetermining necessity sounds very much like the qualities of spontaneity and insouciance which Lawrence associates with ancient Etruria. It is the kind of touch and insouciance which can be described in the work of an artist of ancient Etruria – as Lawrence discovers as he studies a centuries-old tomb painting:

The white horse, for example, has had its drawing most plainly altered. You can see the old outline of the horse’s back legs and breast, and of the foot of the rider, and you can see how considerably the artist changed the drawing, sometimes more than once. He seems to have drawn the whole thing complete, each time, then changed the position, changed the direction, to please his feeling. And as there was no india-rubber to rub out the first attempts, there they are, from at least six hundred years before Christ: the delicate mistakes of an Etruscan who had the instinct of a pure artist in him, as well as the blithe insouciance which makes him leave his alterations for anyone to spy out, if they want to [...] The subtlety of Etruscan painting, as of Chinese and

Hindu, lies in the wonderfully suggestive *edge* of the figures. It is not outlined. It is not what we call 'drawing'. It is the flowing contour where the body suddenly leaves off, upon the atmosphere. The Etruscan artist seems to have seen living things surging from their own centre to their own surface. [pp.123-4]

This description is pleasant enough if read as a bit of 'local colour' in a passage of travel writing. Yet it contains an idea which is at the very heart of Lawrence's philosophical and psychological development. The most important lesson that Lawrence has learned is that of 'leaving off'. With the acceptance of this one idea, Lawrence's orientation to the whole world changes. The importunate Lawrence-prophet in his dealings with Ottoline, Cynthia and Bertrand Russell; the callow Cyril Mersham who could not master his compulsion to elicit responses which he had no heart to reciprocate; the exotic bohemian Count Dionys, who claimed so pitifully to wish for death but who could not forbear to meddle with life – none of these characters knew when to 'leave off'. One cannot, in fact, know the Lawrentian idea of touch without instinctively knowing the sense of self-containment which is a condition of sufficient selfhood. To be a true individual, one must indeed surge from one's own centre; one must also know how and when to leave off – how to leave the sensitive, suggestive edge of selfhood 'upon the atmosphere'.

Accordingly, the Lawrence-hero of the Etruscan sketches (that is, the *real* D H Lawrence) has about himself a strange new quality of easefulness and self-containment. It is as if Lawrence's travelling companion, the Buddhist Earl Brewster, is the ideal mentor for Lawrence during this phase of the latter's development. Brewster, like an ancient Etruscan, is present as part of the scene – individually, but not personally. He is unobtrusive. Often he seems oddly to have receded altogether

from Lawrence's account, as if he is only 'there' by inference; yet even then, he seems as though he is still somehow helping to facilitate the air of congeniality and lightness. Matching the easy mood, Lawrence's responses to the people he meets – Etruscan peasants, an inn-keeper's insouciant young son, a rather serious-minded German student of archaeology – are perceptive yet kindly, truthful yet temperate. In these encounters there is none of the coercion and invasiveness of Lawrence's prophetic phase. No one need be recruited as a disciple. Lawrence has learned to leave off. He is learning to dance. Thus there need be no criticism of the heterogeneity or 'hybridity' of Lawrence's 'travel writing' as it moves from profound philosophical meditations to seemingly trivial interactions with the present-day inhabitants of Tarquinia and Cerveteri. Lawrence's Etruscan sketches truly see into the life of things. Profundity and triviality are found to be of a piece: all is comprehended within Lawrence's creative cross-section through time and space. The result is freedom – *individual* rather than personal – as Lawrence learns the art of living in his own skin. He achieves a sense of selfhood – his portion or 'share' in the world. His new sense of boundedness guarantees his participation.

There is a popular standard reading of the Etruscan sketches which celebrates Lawrence's idea of touch as being something which dissolves boundaries, as something which goes beyond mere surfaces, as something which suggests a wonderful new freedom because it can make boundaries disappear. As has been said above, Lawrence's Etruscan sketches do have a quality of being complete in themselves, and I would not wish to deny this standard interpretation of 'touch' to any casual reader who happens to read Lawrence's sketches in isolation. But in the wider context of the cross-section I am taking through Lawrence's life and thought, touch actually means the opposite of the standard interpretation. It is *not* a business of

dissolving and dispersing boundaries between oneself and others – it has to do with learning how to *form* those boundaries, which are in fact a necessary condition of Lawrentian touch. Though the art of such touching is ultimately a joyful and spontaneous one – as in the Etruscan dance – it will be, for the Lawrence-character, a skill most painfully acquired. That much is made clear by a reading of *The Escaped Cock*, in which we will see a new version of the Lawrence-hero who, having done more than his share of interpersonal trespassing, is brutally forced to ‘leave off’ other people, and who must then slowly and painfully learn the art of touch. This will be the next stage in Lawrence’s progress.

Chapter Seven

Irony: The Escaped Cock

Introduction

Lawrence's enforced withdrawal from relatedness – the 'death' of his messiahship and the subsequent dissolution of his reality – has been painful enough, but it has at least led him to his immersion in the culture of ancient Etruria. There, stripped of his messianic pretensions, Lawrence finally achieved the free play of his undissociated sensibility and discovered the full import of Heraclitean knowledge as a force for unmaking and remaking the world. Nevertheless, though Lawrence has found that much solace, the maturation of his philosophy will not be complete until he has negotiated a return to relatedness. Tomb will have become womb when Lawrence has fully emerged from the 'pre-object environment' of pre-conceptual non-differentiation with a newly determined sense of self-integrity and the ability to manage 'touch' in the everyday, discursive world. Appropriately enough, it was Earl Brewster – Lawrence's companion in the Etruscan underworld – who furnished Lawrence with the image which would inspire the latter's tale of resurrection. David Ellis records how, while Lawrence and Brewster were in Volterra in 1927, 'they had passed a little shop, in the window of which was a model of a white rooster escaping from an egg. Brewster remembered saying that this toy, an Easter gift for children perhaps, suggested a title: "The Escaped Cock – a story of the Resurrection."' ¹ It was Brewster to whom Lawrence outlined the premise of the story in a letter dated the 3rd May 1927:

I wrote a story of the Resurrection, where Jesus gets up and feels very sick about everything, and can't stand the old crowd any more – so cuts out – and as he heals up, he begins to find what an astonishing

¹ David Ellis, *D H Lawrence: Dying Game - 1922-1930* (Cambridge University Press: 1988), p.356.

place the phenomenal world is, far more marvellous than any salvation or heaven – and thanks his stars he needn't have a 'mission' any more.²

Because of the controversial nature of the story – the 'Christ' figure is not divine but simply human, and the eponymous 'escaped cock' is an obvious sexual pun – it was published (in a shorter version) under the title of 'The Man Who Died'. At this point I wish to establish the idea that the Christ-figure of the story is, beyond reasonable question, another Lawrence-figure. Lawrence, characteristically, would have seen nothing remotely blasphemous in suggesting such a correspondence: in an essay entitled 'The Risen Lord' (which is effectively a polemical setting-out of the ideas which *The Escaped Cock* renders in fiction) he declared that 'we have to remember... that the great religious images are only images of our own experiences, or of our own state of mind and soul'.³ It is unsurprising that images of Christ and the Resurrection would have occurred to Lawrence as analogous to his own situation, for as David Ellis notes, the problems facing the Jesus-figure in *The Escaped Cock* are 'similarly problematic'⁴ to those which faced Lawrence after the death of his own messianic phase and the increasing deterioration of his physical wellbeing.

Further evidence points up the degree of correspondence between the 'man who died' and Lawrence himself. In a letter written in late August 1928 Lawrence revealed the extent to which he identified himself with the Christ-figure of *The Escaped Cock* – and his consequent reluctance to submit such a painful exercise in self-disclosure to publication and the likelihood of a hostile reception: 'Why expose

² Ibid.

³ D H Lawrence, 'The Risen Lord', in Warren Roberts & Harry T Moore (eds.), *Phoenix II: Uncollected, Unpublished & Other Prose Works by D H Lawrence* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1968), p.571.

⁴ David Ellis, *D H Lawrence: Dying Game*, p.357.

my sensitive things gratuitously? And this story is one of my thin-skinned ones...'⁵

There is textual as well as biographical evidence, for the description of the man's appearance clearly suggests another Lawrence-hero. His face is 'worn, hollow, and rather ugly', even though the priestess (the other main character) is subsequently able to discern 'the strange calm candour of finer life in the whole delicate ugliness of the face'.⁶ Moreover, we are informed that the man's face is 'dead-white', with 'the black beard growing on it as if in death': the similarity between the man lying in the tomb and Count Dionys lying in his hospital bed is unmistakable. What we are witnessing is, on one level, the Count's promised 'return in the after-death'.

Notwithstanding the apparent implausibility of such a narcissistic character as Dionys being transfigured into a vision of Christ-like humility, *The Escaped Cock* will be seen to reveal further correspondences beyond those of mere physical appearance. Further, I will seek to make the case that this quality of humility which is so dramatically presented in *The Escaped Cock* corresponds with Richard Rorty's use of the word 'irony'.

Part I

At the first depiction of the Lawrence-figure in *The Escaped Cock*, it is made clear that his death has been a painful though necessary release from a maladaptive style of relating to the world. He has been 'put to death' for his presumption in seeking to impose his own brand of salvation on the world, and the narrative makes

⁵ Ibid., p.424.

⁶ Keith Sagar (ed.), *D H Lawrence: Short Novels* (London: Penguin Books, [1982] 2000), pp.558 & 582. All bracketed page references in the text are to this edition.

explicit both the radical extent of his enforced withdrawal from reality and his pained reluctance at the prospect of having to re-engage with it:

He resented already the fact of the strange, incalculable moving that had already taken place in him: the moving back into consciousness. He had not wished it. He had wanted to stay outside, in the place where even memory is stone dead. [p.556]

The move back into consciousness is actually a movement into a new mode of conceptualizing the world – one which has now been freshly informed and invigorated by Lawrence's immersion in the tombs of Etruria. Accordingly, the Lawrence-figure must overcome his 'sickness of unspeakable disillusion' (p.557) – that is, the trauma associated with the overthrow of one's entire conceptual world – and begin again from first principles. The participatory mode of consciousness must, after all, regain participation, free of past impediments. Indeed, when the cock of the story's title breaks free of the 'cord of circumstance' which has held him tethered and lets forth 'a loud and splitting crow' (p.556), it is no *mere* coincidence that the man in the tomb – who is nowhere within hearing distance – awakens from his oblivion. For cock and man are coessential within the swirl of 'myriad vitalities' as celebrated in the Etruscan sketches: that is, cock and man correspond within the boundless interplay of animal potentialities of which all life partakes.

Nevertheless, even boundlessness must be negotiated into contingency before the touch of participation can be achieved, for contingency *means* 'touching on all sides'. The man who died has, so to speak, had a holiday from apprehension of the world – taking the word 'holiday' to be imbued with all the seriousness of 'holy day' – and following his period of 're-creation', now has the opportunity as well as the life-responsibility to apprehend the world anew. Appropriately, the man begins by

rediscovering the phenomenal world – and his necessary degree of separation from it – at a quite fundamental level, and marvels at what he finds. Though it is with ‘unspeakable pain’ that he feels his ‘wincing’ feet ‘touching the earth again... the earth they had meant to touch no more’ (p.557), the wondrous process of re-engagement has begun. The unavoidable painfulness of this process is made literal by the man’s bodily fragility: the slightest touch is painful, for the man’s nascent sense of selfhood and separation is not yet robust enough to withstand anything more. His struggle towards the integrity and sufficiency of self-containment is the story of *The Escaped Cock*.

Appropriately, there is a new and balanced emphasis on the body as a locus of experience which is at once bounded by itself, and at the same time at one with the ‘the infinite swirl’ (p.574), of which the human body is now seen as being a part, and yet apart from. The man conceives of his resurrection as having been the achievement of just such a sense of personal homeostasis: ‘Risen from the dead, he had realised at last that the body, too, has its little life, and beyond that, the greater life’ (p.568). This new participation is clearly *not* the ‘confusion’ in the phenomenal world which had previously ‘blinded’ the man (p.571). Intuitively more confident and less arrogant now in his mode of participation, the reborn man discovers that he has acquired a finer sense of discrimination: ‘He felt the cool silkiness of the young wheat under his feet that had been dead, and the roughishness of its separate life was apparent to him’ (p.559). Though the occasion be mundane enough (bare feet on wheat), what is portrayed for us here is a momentous reorientation of self toward the physical world. Even the apparent ineptitude of ‘roughishness’ seems to suggest an entirely fresh telling of the world. Indeed, the word ‘Creation’ – as both noun and verb – would not be out of keeping with the profundity of what has come to pass here.

Even so, the realisation of such profundity now brings with it a countervailing sense of proportion – quite literally in the etymological sense of ‘in respect of (his or its) share’. Musing to himself, the man resolves that he now wishes only ‘to take my single way in life, which is my portion. My public life is over, the life of my self-importance’ (p.565). We infer that this new awareness of ‘portion’ is not to be understood in terms of paltriness and limitation, but rather as *share* – that is, the kind of portion which guarantees one’s participation in the whole. Recalling his former life, the man admits that he ‘gave more than [he] took’ (p.565). Though there may at first appear to be a hint of disingenuousness and self-pity in this moment of *mea culpa* (as though he might be suggesting that his only sin lay in having been generous to a fault), the man goes on to acknowledge that there is such a thing as ‘the *greed* of giving’ (p.566, my emphasis). Returning to the tomb he meets one of his former disciples, Madeleine, who is clearly intended as a representation of Mary Magdalene. She too has undergone a change. The man recalls her as having been ‘the old, wilful Eve, who had embraced many men, and taken more than she gave’ (p.565). Now, however, he sees that ‘the other doom was on her. She wanted to give without taking. And that too is hard, and cruel to the warm body’ (pp.555-6). Again, the emphasis on the integrity and sensitivity of the body effectively repudiates *both* cruelties: once achieve the delicate equilibrium of true individuality, and giving and taking are found to be of a piece – they partake of the same motive.

To read *The Escaped Cock* as a parable – the story of a man whose ‘greed of giving’ and pretensions toward universality lead to a painful lesson in humility and the reality of bodily finitude – is to invite comparisons between the man who died, Lawrence, and Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. At the outset of *King Lear* it is obvious that Lear’s megalomania has led him into a disordered sense of ‘portion’: he presumes the

world is his to give away, and in his own 'greed of giving' his aim is clearly to extract a *disproportionate* tribute from each of his daughters. In Terry Eagleton's reading of the play, Lear '[exemplifies] the megalomania of absolute sovereignty, which imagines that it is omnipotent partly because it has no body'.⁷ Caught up in his fantasy of disembodiment, Lear deludedly believes he can cast off the fruit of his own body, Cordelia, when she refuses to pay him any tribute that is not 'according to [her] bond' – which is that of a faithful and loving daughter. Eagleton summarizes the lesson of personal boundedness – or 'materialist morality' – which is at the heart of *King Lear*:

Lear believes [at the start of the play] he is everything; but since an identity that is everything has nothing to measure itself against, it is merely a void [...]. In the course of the drama, Lear will learn it is preferable to be a modestly determinate 'something' than a vacuously global 'all'.⁸

Lawrence's 'The Risen Lord', the 'essay' version of *The Escaped Cock*, confirms that this is the same lesson learned by the man who died; for it makes plain Lawrence's conviction that when Jesus rose from the dead, the fulfilment of his resurrection was the formation of a bond: 'He rose to take a woman to Himself... and to know the tenderness and blossoming of the twoness with her; He who had been hitherto so limited to His oneness, or His universality, which is the same thing'.⁹ As the man who died confesses to Madeleine, his past life has seen him seeking to 'embrace multitudes... I who have never truly embraced even one' (p.565). The similarity

⁷ Terry Eagleton, 'Living in a Material World', in *The London Review of Books*, (London: Nicholas Spice) vol.25 no.18, 25 September 2003, p.35. The material quoted is part of an extract from Eagleton's *After Theory*, published by Allen Lane, 2003.

⁸ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin Books, (2003) 2004), pp.179-80.

⁹ D H Lawrence, 'The Risen Lord', p.575.

between Lear, the man who died and Lawrence himself is clear when we recall the latter's 'Democracy' essay:

The big bump of falling out of the infinite back into your own pair of pants leads you to suspect that the One Identity is not *the* identity. There is another, little sort of identity, which you can't get away from, except by breaking your neck. [...] All the extended consciousness that ranges the infinite heavens must sleep under the thatch of your hair at night: and you are only you...¹⁰

Both Lear and the man who died accordingly discover themselves to be 'the thing itself' – they learn the lesson that 'unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal...', and they are, after all, only themselves. The man is in the same situation as Lear and Gloucester in Shakespeare's *Lear*, as described by Eagleton:

[Lear] has discovered his flesh for the first time, and along with it his frailty and finitude. Gloucester will do the same when he is blinded, forced to 'smell his way to Dover'. He must learn, as he says, to 'see feelingly' – to allow his reason to move within the constraints of the sensitive, suffering body.¹¹

Thus divested of his usual habits and capacities, the man who died must seek accommodation in his new world wherever he may find it – even if it be with peasants. Indeed, much of the fascination of *The Escaped Cock* (apart from the Isis/Osiris theme in Part II of the story, discussed below) lies in its investigation of the possibilities and implications of reaching an accommodation (in the widest sense)

¹⁰ D H Lawrence, 'Democracy', in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 70.

¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 183.

with 'the little day, the life of little people' (p.583). In the meantime all is immediacy, for the man still has to engage fully with the phenomenal world, and the emphasis must be on attaining a sense of boundedness and self-sufficiency felt in starkly physical terms: 'For my reach ends in my finger-tips, and my stride is no longer than the ends of my toes' (p.565). It is significant that, at the outset of his journey of discovery, the man is accompanied (as it were) by his cock, which '[cranes] his head excitedly, for he too was adventuring out for the first time into the wider phenomenal world, which is the stirring of the body of cocks also' (p.571). There will be no gospels, grand narratives or overarching abstractions to order the world at the behest of either man or cock. In Rorty's terms, they are both now subject to 'time and chance' and must shift for themselves, learning to negotiate the contingency of a world which literally 'touches on all sides'. The effort – and the skill – will be that of fashioning new worlds of structure and connection, acknowledging the provisionality which is the price paid to the 'quick' of life, yet all the while aware of the timelessly 'religio-us' element which is definitionally implicit in all true relatedness.

It is in striving to evoke this paradoxical balance – between a sense of immediate, living relevance, and the sense that such relevance and immediacy is simultaneously eternal, a never-endingly necessary part of being human – that *The Escaped Cock* daringly overthrows the traditional view of Easter wherein Christ is seen as 'superhuman' – a god whose resurrection is an affirmation of human life, yet whose subsequent ascension into heaven is seemingly a denial thereof. Janice H Harris notes how the story of *The Escaped Cock* 'realistically explains the uncanny': the Christ-figure never actually died – the soldiers 'simply took him down too soon'.¹²

¹² Janice H Harris, 'The Many Faces of Lazarus: The Man Who Died and Its Context', in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *D H Lawrence: Critical Assessments III* (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information Ltd, 1992), p.357.

When the man who died – whose dying-away has been from humankind rather than his own life – encounters two of his former disciples, he gently guys their credulity as to the fate of their erstwhile saviour. When they declare that ‘in a little while [he] will ascend unto the Father’ (p.572), he seems mildly amused at their insistence that the very flesh of ‘him who would be king’ will rise up into the sky. Like Lear, the man must make his pilgrim’s progress from kingliness to simple kindness. Thus the story disavows the trickery of transcendence which insists upon abstractions in the sky such as the disciples’ ‘Father... in Heaven, above the cloud and the firmament’ (p.573). Lawrence is here dramatizing the lesson of his own failed messiahship, which, in seeking to overthrow the tyranny of lifeless abstraction, insisted on its own strain of high-flown abstractionism.

Curiously enough, Terry Eagleton’s critique of cultural theory calls to mind some of the failings of Lawrence’s messiahship which *The Escaped Cock* seeks to address. Eagleton notes that it is insufficient to be ‘dogmatic about essences, universals and foundations, and superficial about truth, objectivity and disinterestedness’. He goes on to define disinterestedness as ‘not viewing the world from some sublime Olympian height, but a kind of compassion or fellow-feeling. It means trying to feel your way imaginatively into the experience of another, sharing their delight and sorrow without thinking of oneself’.¹³ Thus *The Escaped Cock* is an exercise in the renunciation of all exorbitant claim-making in favour of ‘fellow-feeling’: the simple reciprocity and self-containment of ‘touch’ as opposed to the mania of recruitment. Though the story works towards this end rather than finally achieving it, the sense of a major reorientation having taken place is evident. When Madeleine looks into the eyes of the man who died and sees ‘the vast disillusion... and

¹³ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p.133.

the underlying indifference' (p.566), one senses that the indifference in question is more than mere disregard, and surely of a more convincing kind than the disingenuousness of Lawrence's May 1915 letter to Gordon Campbell:

*I wish I could express myself – this feeling that one is not only a little individual living a little individual life, but that one is in oneself the whole of mankind, and ones fate is the fate of the whole of mankind, and one's charge is the charge of the whole of mankind. Not me – the little, vain, personal D H Lawrence...*¹⁴

The whole of mankind is no longer, we infer, the charge of the man who died, any more than it would appear to have been the charge of the Lawrence who wrote *The Escaped Cock*. (As the man who died is moved to reflect: 'A dangerous phenomenon in the world is a man of narrow belief, who denies the right of his neighbour to be alone...' – p.573).

Though in the second part of the tale the man will, in recollection, repine against 'the unjust cruelty against him who had offered only kindness' (p.593), the tenor of the story suggests that the 'kind-ness' offered by the Lawrence-prophet of the past has been of the wrong sort: the selfsame 'greed of giving' which the story now presents as being as reprehensible as any other sort of greed. In the words of 'The Risen Lord', when Jesus rose triumphantly from the dead he rose 'triumphant above all over His own self-absorption, self-consciousness, [and] self-importance'.¹⁵ What must now be accomplished, as much by Lawrence as by the man who died, is not to be 'in charge' of the whole of mankind, but to get 'in touch' with it. The nature and implications of this 'getting into touch' will be explored in part II of *The Escaped*

¹⁴ George J Zytaruk & James T Boulton (eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume II, 1913-16* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.302.

¹⁵ D H Lawrence, 'The Risen Lord', p.575.

Cock (discussed below); but in the meantime we may infer that, however it might manifest itself, it will partake of the seemliness and circumspection implicit in Cordelia's modest determination to honour her father 'according to [her] bond'. It will necessarily renounce the strain of exorbitancy to which Lawrence and Lear have arguably both been party. G K Hunter, in his discussion of *King Lear*, notes that the bond in question is more than merely 'the bond of nature which ties child to parent'; for "bond" is also "a uniting or cementing force". It is that *bond* of natural sympathy which makes man-kind "kind" in the modern sense of the word'. Bond is inseparable from what Hunter calls 'that social solidarity of human beings that Shakespeare calls "kind"',¹⁶ and also, I suggest, accords with Rorty's own conception of solidarity.

Such a focus on the *kind* of words we use – and sometimes abuse – to describe kindness points up once more the constitutive effect of language, whereby meanings of words are negotiated into currency for purposes of human transaction. Richard Rorty refuses to regard language as holding up a 'mirror to nature' so as to reflect pre-existing essences; and even though Shakespeare himself is said to have used the word 'kind' to denote (among other things) 'Nature in general or in the abstract, [the] established order of things',¹⁷ our present sense of the contingency of language means we cannot depend on the essential naturalness, establishment or sense of order which is here presupposed on Shakespeare's behalf. Kindness cannot be thus taken for granted. Indeed, one might regard the entire thrust of *The Escaped Cock* as pointing to the fact that kindness is not 'God-given' in the sense that it can be imposed from above by way of the world-ordering idealisms of religion. Even romantic Lawrentian images of life and love as 'forever at the flame-tip' of human existence are not

¹⁶ G K Hunter (ed.), introduction to *William Shakespeare: King Lear* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), pp.33 & 13.

¹⁷ C T Onions, *A Shakespeare Glossary* (Oxford University Press, (1986) 1988), p.148.

fundamentally in disagreement with Rorty's more mundane conception of solidarity as something 'done daily', something we should keep sight of in our everyday lives because we think it makes our world a better, kinder, more human place. In *The Escaped Cock* Lawrence tentatively seeks just such an accommodation with what the narrator calls 'the life of the little day, the life of little people' (p.589).

In line with this tentativeness, *The Escaped Cock* reveals a new reticence with regard to spoken language. In the course of the main protagonist's encounter with his former disciples, we see that silence has been discovered as a virtue: 'The man who had died said no more, for his say was over, and words beget words, even as gnats' (p.573). There is evidence here which seems to confirm that Lawrence's descent into the Etruscan tombs has been, among other things, a flight from the sheer vexatious verbosity which his messiahship had latterly become. (One might recall here his endless wranglings with Bertrand Russell.) Reflecting on the demise of his mission, 'his fever to save [people] and be saved by them' (p.570), the man who died reflects:

The Word is but the midge that bites at evening. Man is tormented with words like midges, and they follow him right into the tomb. But beyond the tomb they cannot go. Now I have passed the place where words can bite no more and the air is clear, and there is nothing to say... [pp.570-1]

Having reached the blessed tranquillity of wordlessness, the man can now enjoy 'his immortality of being alive without fret' – that is, without fretting on his own account *or* fretting at others. Like Lawrence, he has discovered the truth that words, like gnats and midges, can be maddeningly ubiquitous and just as ephemeral. Nevertheless, we necessarily use words to fashion our human world, even while the word 'fashion' itself can imply ephemerality. The lesson apparently learned here is

that we must be duly attentive to the *worth-whileness* of what we fashion with words, and guard against what is facile and factitious. Thus we need to establish an *economy* of worthwhile words while guarding against linguistic inflation. Lawrence seems self-consciously to be coming to terms with these considerations in *The Escaped Cock*. Indeed, beyond its daring appropriation of the biblical account of the Resurrection, the story's most striking aspect is the way in which its 'biblical atmosphere'¹⁸ serves to delimit the spoken word: set in the contextual flatness of such 'bible story' stylization, even everyday speech seems to give way to a manner of self-consciously circumscribed utterance in which words are 'said unto' as much as said. This is most notable during the second part of the story (written more than a year after the first part), during the almost ritual exchanges between the priestess of Isis and the man who died.

Part II

Unless we take the Osiris element of Part II to be a purely mythic element in the story's depiction of a man's search for self-integrity, *The Escaped Cock* can easily appear to be in bad faith: Christ dies away from his divinity and is resurrected as an ordinary man, only to discover (perhaps relievedly) that he happens to be some other god after all. The sense of the story's having taken a rather dubious ideological u-turn is reinforced when we recall its early insistence on the primacy of the phenomenal world and its concomitant rejection of the supernatural. Even from the outset, on the evidence of the first part of the story, it seemed that the man who died, although now avowedly an ordinary mortal, felt a marked disinclination toward any sense of solidarity with other ordinary mortals such as the peasants who give him shelter. The

¹⁸ David Ellis, *D H Lawrence: Dying Game*, p.356.

narrative awkwardly grants them participatory status in the phenomenal world – but it seems it can only do so from the safety of a self-protective preciousness which threatens to *deny* the man participation in that same world:

He saw them as they were: limited, meagre in their life, without any gesture of splendour and of courage. But they were what they were, slow inevitable parts of the natural world. They had no nobility...

[p.560]

Elsewhere, when the man perceives the peasants to be greedy and cunning, he magnanimously concludes: ‘Yet even this was as men are made’ (pp.568-9). This can easily read as a dispiriting condescension passed off as a Christ-like compassion: all-seeing in the scope of his newly updated wisdom, the man can afford to be benignly tolerant of human imperfection. It would seem that the Lawrence-hero cannot quite yet come to terms with his common humanity. When he decides that the peasants ‘would respond best to gentleness, giving back a clumsy gentleness again’ (p.560), it is clear that his gentleness is *not* quite kindness: he cannot bear to be the same ‘kind’ of person as the peasants, and takes refuge in a comforting sense of superiority which he knows they can never attain. Language, though it has been retrieved from the excesses of messianic enthusiasm, is not yet fully in the service of solidarity.

Janice H Harris has written of this problematic element within *The Escaped Cock*. Indeed, she notes that the man who died, in his dealings with the peasants, ‘has his *own* greed, cunning, incapacity for affection, and tendency to manipulate’.¹⁹ In her reading, the ‘condescension and aversion [the man who died] feels towards the peasants’ is especially marked in his attitude toward the woman, for ‘his attitude to

¹⁹ Janice H Harris, ‘The Many Faces of Lazarus’, p.359 (my emphasis).

her includes class but goes beyond it to gender, [and] parallels his attitude toward the other woman in the tale, Madeleine'. She traces the parallel as follows:

Madeleine wants to fall at his feet, devote herself utterly to him; the peasant woman, in behaviour presumably appropriate to her class, simply serves him silently, 'her soft, humble, crouching body' wishing for his touch. But... he responds only with a weary preference not to.²⁰

Though the story can be read here as espousing a new sense of seamliness and a wish to avoid what the narrative describes as the 'vast complexity of entanglements and allurements [...] and circumstance and compulsion everywhere' (p.574) – which scenario could easily describe the trail of doomed involvements and painful estrangements left behind by Lawrence and his fictive counterparts in the past – there is admittedly a feeling that the fullness of maturity has not yet been achieved. At least in the early part of the story, the man's repeated invocation of Christ's *noli me tangere* is ambivalent at best. On a charitable view it can be read as a humble admission of past inadequacies: a self-conscious withdrawal from the inevitable 'complexity and 'circumstance' of contingency until such time as greater self-awareness can allow for a more constructive engagement. Viewed in the context of the elements of condescension described above, however, this declarative renunciation of 'touch' can sound like little more than the peevishness and self-pity which attends upon Lawrence's sense of martyrdom. (One recalls the wounded Count Dionys and the staginess of his self-pitying death-wish in *The Ladybird*.) Even so, *The Escaped Cock* marks a progression: gone is the aristocratic arrogance of Dionys, compared to which even the imperfect humility of the man who died is a welcome relief. The man's ambivalence marks a process of necessary reappraisal and

²⁰ Ibid.

transition, for even while he looks on so much of the world with repulsion, ‘dreading its mean contacts’ (p.574), he sees that it is ‘bright as glass’, and reflects: ‘It was life, in which he had no share any more...’ (p.561).

These problems – the apparent division between the greater and the lesser life, and the need to find a register of language that might narrow rather than widen that divide – are prominent in *The Escaped Cock*. Part II of the story seeks to address them by recourse to the inspiration Lawrence found in the tomb paintings of ancient Etruria. In particular, there are two set pieces or ‘*tableaux vivants*’ which closely resemble the paintings in both depiction and mood, and in both *tableaux* the spoken word is either absent altogether or too far away to be audible. Freed from the burden of discursive speech, these scenes serve as meditations on the nature of the putative ‘division’ between greater and lesser, on what mode or modes of consciousness might serve to unite them, and on the possible meanings of participation, kindness and solidarity in a setting which is, as it were, at only one remove from the Etruscan paintings. If the conclusions Lawrence draws from these meditations appear to be tentative, overly qualified, or only of limited relevance to the present, then this simply bespeaks the difficulty of the task at hand. It is, after all, a long way from ancient Etruria back to the Nottinghamshire coalfield of the early part of the twentieth-century. But the journey from the Etruscan sketches to the Chatterley novels is under way, and *The Escaped Cock* is Lawrence’s way of negotiating two such apparently disparate cultural milieus into the same moral universe.

The first tableau opens part two of the story and is set in a ‘Mediterranean’ (p.575) landscape which the narrative renders in painterly fashion. A wooden temple stands on a peninsula, set against the golden afternoon sun; the sea is ‘almost indigo’, crested with white, and the wind ‘[brushes] the olives of the slopes with silver’. The

priestess of Isis, in a yellow robe, stands within a grove of pine trees; she will witness what follows, as will the man who died (though from a different vantage point).

Lawrence rounds off his initial scene-setting with the idea that 'all was part of the great sun, glow and substance... of the sea' – and one is reminded of the frescoes in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, the sheer vitality of which made such an impression on Lawrence in Tarquinia. The following passage is worth quoting at length for its celebration of the same principle of participation – the mysterious sense of all things corresponding in a Heraclitean flux or 'infinite whirl' (p.574) – which Lawrence evoked so vividly in the 'augury' passage of his Etruscan sketches:

Crouching in the rocks above the dark water which only swung up and down, two slaves, half-naked, were dressing pigeons for the evening meal. They pierced the throat of a blue, live bird, and let the drops of blood fall into the heaving sea, with curious concentration. They were performing some sacrifice, or working some incantation. The woman of the temple, yellow and white alone like a winter narcissus, stood between the pines of the small, humped peninsula where the temple secretly hid, and watched. [p.575]

Thus far, the emphasis is on the slaves' participation in an essential continuity. On one level they are merely dressing pigeons for a meal; yet this mundane chore apparently absorbs them both in a trance-like mood of sacerdotal intensity. The act is religious, for it binds the slaves together. Their participatory mode of consciousness effaces their *personal* subjectivity, they are thus individual in the collective sense, and all is harmony. At this point the slaves themselves appear sufficiently to embody both the greater and the lesser life, which are as much commingling as blood with sea. In contrast, the priestess does *not* participate. Standing alone, she represents the cold,

static isolation of narcissistic aloofness; her preoccupation with the esoteric has its issue in a contempt for anything she sees as exoteric. There follows a sudden movement:

A black-and-white pigeon, vividly white, like a ghost, suddenly escaped over the low dark sea, sped out, caught the wind, tilted, rose, soared and swept over the pine-trees, and wheeled away, a speck, inland. It had escaped. The priestess heard the cry of the boy slave [...] He raised his arms to heaven in anger as the pigeon wheeled away, naked and angry and young he held out his arms. Then he turned and seized the girl in an access of rage, and beat her with his fist that was stained with pigeon's blood. [pp.575-6]

It is at this point that the priestess sees the man watching the scene from a distance, and the tableau takes on a triangular configuration: the 'greater' life of Isis and the man (who is, as will soon transpire, her lost Osiris) now stands witness to the unwitting 'little life' below them. Though the story is soon to interrogate facile assumptions regarding greatness and littleness, the episode develops in a way that is unedifying from any standpoint. The boy's rage erupts as lust. He rapes the girl. Then, guiltily looking upwards, he sees the priestess and the man – and flees the scene. As Janice H Harris notes, it has been 'a pathetic, cruel scene in itself',²¹ though I wish to develop and extend her subsequent assertion that 'its cruelty is matched by the response of the man who died and the priestess'. It is true that neither of them seeks to intervene, and the contempt felt by the priestess as she turns away from the scene is made explicit ('Slaves! Let the overseer watch them. She was not interested...' – p.577). Moreover, the narrator makes it quite clear elsewhere in this

²¹ Ibid., p.361.

second part of the story that the man feels the same degree of disdain toward the slaves. Nevertheless, that disdain is noticeably *not* given expression in this scene: we are not told of any response on the part of the man. I wish to suggest that this moment of reticence is a significant outcome of Lawrence's meditation upon the incident he has just set before us: as the man observes the behaviour of the slave, we are actually seeing the Lawrence of the present shamefacedly confronted by the 'ghost of Lawrence Past'.

If we 'rewind the tape' (so to speak) to the beginning of the scene, we see the dreamlike harmony of all things in correspondence: this is Lawrence's longed-for 'mindless unity' of pre-conceptual existence, free from the disruptive influence of human subjectivity. It seems Lawrence's purpose here is to isolate, with forensic precision, the exact moment when human subjectivity supervenes upon that which is ineffably congruous – and somehow offends against it. The slave, who had moments earlier been depicted as being at one with the overall harmony of the scene, is enraged when one of the pigeons escapes. His anger sorts ill with the prevailing mood and violates the principle of participation: for indeed, just as much as the escaped cock of the first part of the story, the escaped pigeon is surely part of 'the seethe of all things' (p.572), for contingency is 'what befalls' as well as 'what touches'. Even the sacrificed pigeons have, in this context of ritual participation, escaped: they have 'put off the cloak' of particular manifestation and their essence is now intermingled with the myriad vitalities of the sea. Thus it seems the slave's anger can have no place within the sanctity of the scene.

The boy, it seems, has simply 'lost it': whatever the precise nature of the participatory mood which earlier subsumed him, he has suddenly found himself out of 'touch' with that contingency which touches on all sides – and the outcome has been

sordid and upsetting. His participation became falsified at the very instant when some element of contingency offended against his *self-conscious* idea of how *someone else* ought to participate, and he lashes out at that person in an unwarrantable act of trespass borne of frustration. We have, I suggest, been here before. And I further suggest it is no mere coincidence that the man's appearance has coincided exactly with the moment when the tableau became a crime scene. Nor is the presence of the priestess entirely accidental. Recalling Lawrence's comment that *The Escaped Cock* was one of his 'thin-skinned' tales, it seems we have witnessed one of his moments of painful self-arraignment. Lawrence once lauded Ottoline Morrell as goddess and priestess; but, in the event, she would not conform sufficiently to Lawrence's 'Rananim' fantasy of participation, and was duly subjected to Lawrence's manipulation and abuse. Lawrence's rage erupted as outrage – the moral equivalent of what we have just seen played out in physical terms between the slaves. Well might the 'priestess'-figure of *The Escaped Cock* turn away from the scene in disgust. As for the man, the narrative has nothing to say of *his* exit from the tableau – nor need it have, for in moral terms he has already fled along with the wretched slave-boy.

This tableau has been a necessary prelude to the subsequent interaction between the man who died and the priestess of Isis. In the rape scene, Lawrence has dramatized for himself, in explicitly *physical* terms, the crime he must now avoid committing in *mental* terms. The lesson he must remember is summarized in one of his poems from *Pansies* (1929) called 'Touch':

... if, cerebrally, we force ourselves into touch, into contact,

physical and fleshly,

we violate ourselves,

we become vicious.²²

The slave boy became vicious (in more than one sense) at the point where his participation in contact became cerebral: when he allowed it to become a self-conscious, self-referential *idea* of how that contact ought 'ideally' to manifest itself. He then (in the terms of the poem) forced himself into contact, and in violating another person, violated himself. Lawrence now has a difficult task: he must investigate the nature and viability of a mode of contact which happens *spontaneously*, without the insinuating element of mentality which degrades that contact from insouciance into manipulation and compulsion. (As with 'spontaneous', 'insouciance' is a favourite Lawrence-word. He uses it *not* in its acquired sense of 'casualness' or 'heedlessness', but in its etymological sense: that is, the opposite of the Latin *sollicitare*, to disturb or agitate.) The difficulty for Lawrence is evident: as author of *The Escaped Cock*, he must self-consciously create a character who self-consciously tries to relate to someone in such a way that self-consciousness does not obtrude itself. To achieve this, he will once again draw inspiration from the art of ancient Etruria.

Janice H Harris notes a problematic inconsistency of presentation in the 'Isis/Osiris' encounters which are the centrepiece of Part II of the story. There is undoubtedly a sense in which their relationship is delimited, not least in the way their spoken exchanges are confined to the mode of rarefied 'Bible utterance' I described earlier. In Harris' reading of the characters' intercourse, 'each is and must be a total unknown to each other'.²³ Reading her analysis of the problem, I suggest it is her use

²² Vivian de Sola Pinto & F Warren Roberts (eds.), *D H Lawrence: Complete Poems* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., [1964] 1993), p.468.

²³ Janice H Harris, 'The Many Faces of Lazarus', p.363.

of the words 'stylization' and 'flatness' which provides the clue to Lawrence's intentions:

It may be asked whether the tenor of their relationship is understandable within the conventions of fabulation. Might the lack of personal engagement between the priestess and man be attributed to the general stylization and flatness of character in fable? I believe fabulistic conventions could help us to formulate Lawrence's intentions in this tale were the tale more consistently a fable. A key difficulty here is the characterization of the hero. He is not sufficiently flat or stylized. We know his history, his thoughts, his plans. He is developed in too much psychological detail for us to see him simply as a figure of sun or returning spring. The priestess is more stylized. But, because she must interact with a realistically developed partner, she ends up appearing stilted, affected. The same is true of their relationship. Because the man is too round a character, their stylized intercourse seems posturing.²⁴

There is nothing here with which I would disagree. Rather, I wish to locate Lawrence's intentions in *The Escaped Cock* within the wider context of his enduring efforts to 'shed his sickness'. The man who died is an 'Etruscan' Lawrence-figure, by means of which Lawrence is seeking to negotiate his way into the roundedness of achieved selfhood. To do this, he starts from the two-dimensional simplicity of his beloved Etruscan tomb paintings: flat, frieze-like scenes in which the human figures are not fleshed out with 'personalities' which would have the effect of differentiating and detaching them from the harmony of the scene, the other elements of which

²⁴ Ibid.

would then become mere backdrop. There *is* no backdrop to these enigmatic visions, for the human figures do not participate in the whole any more than do any *other* elements of that whole. Such figures are simply part of the ‘infinite seethe’. They are, so to speak, *individual* from it, as opposed to personally distinct from it. As such, they provide Lawrence with a blank template of selfhood, free from the horrid entanglements and compulsive interferences of the past. His ‘Etruscan’ self can now be tentatively filled in (or ‘filled out’ into three dimensions) as Lawrence’s cautious instinct directs him – but he always has the option of receding himself into the flatness of fabulation whenever the free play of contingency and the complexities of interpersonal involvement are felt as becoming threatening.

This, I suggest, accounts for the element of generic confusion which Harris detects in the second part of *The Escaped Cock*: it arises from the nature of the difficult negotiation Lawrence has undertaken. He has, indeed, already signalled his intention in Part I: during the encounter with Madeleine, the narrative describes the man who died as having shed his ‘enthusiasm and burning purity’, which has given way to ‘a greater indifference to the personal issue, and a lesser susceptibility’ (pp.566-7). A more general declaration follows: ‘Whatever came of touch between himself and the race of men, henceforth, should come without trespass or compulsion’ (p.570).

Of course, the contradictions inherent in Lawrence’s undertaking are all too evident, and his problem here is neatly summarized in another of his poems on touch:

To proceed from mental intimacy
to physical is just messy,
and really, a nasty violation,

and the ruin of any decent relation between us.²⁵

The poem in question is called 'Let Us Talk, Let Us Laugh' – yet the interactions between the man and the priestess fall a long way short of Etruscan-style spontaneity. So self-conscious is Lawrence's wish to *avoid* any suggestion of self-conscious 'mental intimacy' in his development of the 'decent relation' between man and priestess, he is obliged to depict every aspect of their intercourse as having all the formal rigour of classical ballet – the result being almost mechanical. Again, the narrative insistently plays up the fact that the man has no agenda, ulterior motive or element of premeditation in his encounters with the priestess, other than that of simply 'seeking shelter'. But it so happens that this priestess has devoted her life to the search for her lost Osiris (who, predictably, the man is soon discovered to be) and has built a temple specially for him. If it is *her* search, and *her* temple, the element of premeditation is effectively hers: Lawrence has simply projected the ulterior motive onto the other party.

The move is, to be fair, a familiar one. In *The Ladybird* Dionys was all aristocratic punctiliousness toward Daphne at the outset, feigning to want simply to be left alone to die; and the gamekeeper of the Chatterley novels will initially make a show of being stubbornly private, and quite without any presumption of intimacy toward Connie. Dionys, the gamekeeper and the 'man who died' are *all* marked by the 'death-aloofness' (p.586) left by the memory of past hurts, and the show of resistance against the heroine proves always to be – however unconsciously – strategic. But this is Lawrence, and again, I suggest that his emotional paradigm never actually changes. For Lawrence, change comes through his continual fictive

²⁵ D H Lawrence, 'Let Us Talk, Let Us Laugh', *Collected Poems*, p.470.

reworkings of that paradigm and his determination to see it repeatedly played out in different moral terms. Thus the Lawrence-hero must always return for another 'essay' in relatedness. The element of self-effacement among these successive Lawrence-figures may be too self-conscious to be quite convincing, but the growing awareness of the need for self-containment is evident. That this has yet to be achieved in the personal realm is evident in *The Escaped Cock's* insistent repetition of *noli me tangere*: touch needs boundaries on *both* sides, and where this need is not met, the resulting violation will at length cause pain in both directions. The man who died is, like Lawrence, still too 'thin-skinned' in his sense of selfhood. Yet if the man's cry of *noli me tangere* is on one level indicative of a lingering immaturity and defensiveness, at least it serves simultaneously to limit further damage to others.

As part of Lawrence's journey to relatedness, *The Escaped Cock* must, of course, pay attention to the public as well as the personal realm. The working-outwards toward kindness will be the next stage. Again, Lawrence's 'Etruscan' sea-shore provides the setting for the main protagonist's meditation – for it is the littoral interface between the 'great seethe' of cosmic vitality which is the sea, and the 'little life' of those on land: the slaves who wash clothes, catch fish and mend nets. On the morning of his first meeting with the priestess (during which she suggests to him that he is her Osiris), the man who died wanders down to the shore, musing to himself: 'Shall I give myself into this touch? Men have tortured me to death with their touch...' There follows a moment which is at once an act of communion and implicit contrition:

He prised small shell-fish from the rocks, and ate them with relish and wonder for the simple taste of the sea. And inwardly, he was

tremulous, thinking: Dare I come into touch? For this is farther than death. [p.585]

As the man partakes, as it were, of the body and blood of the sea (thereby symbolically merging himself with ‘the swaying ocean of life’ – p.563) and ponders the horrors attendant upon the abuse of touch – which abuse has been perpetrated as much by himself as by others – the reader may hope that what follows will reflect a holier communion than those which have disfigured the past. At the evening of the same day, the man sits overlooking ‘the little shore’ where ‘everything happened’: the second tableau, where the man meditates upon the nature of the ‘little life’, is about to be set forth.

What is emphasized in this tableau is the slaves’ absorption in their everyday tasks. Slave women wash linen, other slaves clean fishing nets, an old man washes fish at the water’s edge, and there is a lulling insistence on the humming unison which binds these people together. The words used to describe them – absorbed/absorbedly, unseeing, unheeding, heedless, rapt – pay tribute to a mode of participatory consciousness which makes these people essentially ‘of a kind’. As much as they may be seen as ‘the lesser life’, the tableau implicitly acknowledges that their ‘small consciousness’ (p.583), though it may appear to take no heed of the morrow, nevertheless appears to be sufficient unto the day. Indeed, there seems to be a concomitant acknowledgement that those who are positioned *above* the life of the shore – whether spatially, or in terms of social status, or both – are somehow debarred from participation. A Roman ‘overseer’ or steward arrives with his employer, the mother of the priestess. They look at the shore-scene and ‘[see] it all, at a glance’ (p.588). They see also see the man, who sees them discussing him with hostile intent. His position (of which I shall say more later) seems at this stage to be one of

unworkable ambiguity: he is the god Osiris overlooking the scene, yet he is treated with contempt by slaves and cannot participate even in their little life.

As with the first tableau, the narrative stages a moment of interruption in which the mood of mindless unity or collective consciousness is broken in upon by an element of discursive or non-participatory consciousness:

Then down the rock opposite came two naked slaves trotting with huge bundles...on their shoulders, so their broad, naked legs twinkled underneath like insects' legs, and their heads were hidden. They came trotting across the shingle, heedless and intent on their way, when suddenly the man, the Roman-looking overseer, addressed them, and they stopped dead. They stood invisible under their loads, as if they might disappear altogether, now they were arrested. [p.589]

Given the negative connotations which the word 'Roman' has acquired in Lawrence's post-Etruscan lexicon, we may infer that the narrative's effacement of the slaves' personality into insect-like anonymity is actually benign: it does not rob them of their individuality, but rather affirms it. It is the Roman overseer who, by his 'arrest' of them, stops their participation in the whole. He obtrudes the element of *sollicitare* – disturbance, agitation – which threatens to obliterate them altogether. Again, Lawrence is seeking insight into difficult issues by allowing them to be played out in fictional scenarios which might not yield him direct answers, but which nevertheless afford him time and space in which to meditate. What emerges from this tableau is the realization that overseeing and overlooking can sometimes amount to the same thing.

Various strands of Lawrence's experience weave their way into this episode of *The Escaped Cock*. One recalls the circular arguments with Bertrand Russell over the nature of 'subjectivity', the overdevelopment of which both men had concluded to be the bane of the modern world. Lawrence, during his messiahship, presumed to remedy this over-subjectivity – the *divisive* or 'bad' sense of individuality – by overseeing the didactic imposition of a participatory mode of consciousness. Here in *The Escaped Cock*, Lawrence meditates on the truth that such participation can never be imposed: to set oneself up as a cure for excessive subjectivity is immediately to fall victim to the malaise. To insist on enforcing unity is to be caught in contradiction, for one must simultaneously insist on the division which justifies one's status as enforcer. Neither the man who died nor the Roman-looking overseer 'share in' the communion of the life of slaves; and as the man looks over the little life below him, the positive inference is that he is learning to avoid overseeing *and* overlooking it. Again, it is the same lesson learned by Lear:

'O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, Pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them...'²⁶

The superflux need not necessarily be pecuniary – neither Lear nor the man in *The Escaped Cock* have any wealth to bestow – but wretches can be paid another kind of consideration. They can be included in kindness.

²⁶ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, G B Harrison (ed.) (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p.100. (Act III Scene 4, lines 21-4).

Having acknowledged the contradiction inherent in trying to compel unity, it is simple – thought by no means simplistic – for the man who died to conclude that compulsion is unkind. As Lawrence concedes via the man: ‘It is always so, with compulsion. The recoil kills the advance’ (p.570). Admittedly, *The Escaped Cock* can be maddeningly inconsistent in its progress. Apparent advances toward insight and mature reappraisal are repeatedly killed by the narrative’s recoil into snobbery and aloofness with regard to the ‘little life’. It seems both Lawrence and the man who died are at times too thin-skinned in their nascent sense of selfhood to have the courage of their own progress – but both have already paid a crucifyingly high price for their aloofness. As Terry Eagleton notes in his discussion of objectivity and morality:

Objectivity does not mean judging from nowhere. On the contrary, you can only know how the situation is if you are in a position to know. Only by standing at a certain angle to reality can it be illuminated for you. The wretched of the earth, for example, are likely to appreciate more of the truth of human history than their masters – not because they are innately more perceptive, but because they can glean from their own everyday experience that history for the vast majority of men and women has largely been a matter of despotic power and fruitless toil. [...] Ethics is about excelling at being human, and nobody can do this in isolation [...] ‘Moral’ means exploring the texture and quality of human behaviour as richly and sensitively as you

can, and...you cannot do this by abstracting men and women from their social surroundings.²⁷

This has been very much the lesson of Lawrence's Etruscan experience, for he drew the same conclusions regarding the despotic power of the Romans, their ruthlessly 'objective' imposition of conformity, and their destruction of the liveliness and diversity of ancient Etruscan culture. *The Escaped Cock* seeks to negotiate this lesson of humility back into the twentieth century. Here we may recall Daphne in *The Ladybird*, musing about the gamekeeper whom 'she could have loved', had he only been a 'super-conscious' being like herself. Again, in *The Escaped Cock* one can see that the journey back to the Nottinghamshire of the Chatterley novels – and the eventual shedding of super-consciousness, as in 'the life of the mind' – is not only in prospect, but underway.

The second tableau concludes with the following meditation from the man who died: 'It was the life of the little day, the life of little people. And the man who had died said to himself: "Unless we encompass it in the greater day, and set the little life in the circle of the greater life, all is disaster"' (p.589). Again, the ambiguity of 'encompass' points to the transitional quality of *The Escaped Cock*. Is the image one of containment, with the greater life imposing a necessary control and constraint on the little life? Or does it serve to emancipate the little life, according it a centrality which by no means subordinates it?

Whatever inferences can be drawn from *The Escaped Cock's* meditations on the nature of greater and lesser, it ends in familiar fashion for those who have read 'A Modern Lover' and *The Ladybird*: the Lawrence-hero, having prevailed over the heroine almost in spite of himself, must, it seems, escape into the darkness. But the

²⁷ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, pp.135-6.

mood of the parting scene is, at least and at last, more life-affirming than those of the past: the priestess is carrying the man's child, and the man declares that he will return to her, 'sure as spring' (p.599). We have, it seems, moved on from the morbidity of Dionys, Daphne and death. It is thus unfortunate that the plot device which ends the story necessitates the portrayal of the slaves once again as sly, conspiring wretches. Not for the first time, there is the feeling that a Lawrentian recoil has undone such advances as the story has made elsewhere. Lawrence has sought, in *The Escaped Cock*, to address his habitual chariness of the 'little life' – and has made progress. Yet the story seems to end on a note which confirms rather than overcomes his aversion. Thus the reader might well wish that Lawrence could have found the time to rewrite the story and reconcile such ambivalences. But *The Escaped Cock* has been Lawrence's 'Etruscan' story. Like the Etruscan artist, he is content to 'leave off' when the feeling takes him – knowing he can begin again when moved to do so, and only then. He will indeed do so in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which is (as I will discuss) very much Lawrence's Etruscan novel. In the meantime, the question of the 'lesser life' remains emphatically in the frame, and Lawrence's desire to be 'alive without fret' dictates that it will remain so until some form of accommodation can be reached. The possibility of such an accommodation will now be considered in relation to Richard Rorty's idea of 'irony'.

Lawrence and Irony

If Lawrence's Etruscan experience corresponds with the element of 'contingency' in Rorty's suggested trinity of contingency/irony/solidarity, then *The Escaped Cock* marks Lawrence's embracing of irony as a necessary stage in his own

philosophical journey. Rorty sees all human beings as having a ‘final vocabulary’, which he defines as:

A set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives [...] It is ‘final’ in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse [...] A small part of a final vocabulary is made up of thin, flexible, and ubiquitous terms such as ‘true’, ‘good’, ‘right’, and ‘beautiful’. The larger part contains thicker, more rigid, and more parochial terms, for example, ‘Christ’, ‘England’... ‘the Church’... [and] ‘kindness’.²⁸

We have seen how, faced with personal difficulties and the underlying sense of panic caused by the First World War, Lawrence grew increasingly to feel that a serious burden of doubt had come to oppress what was, at that time, his ‘final vocabulary’. His efforts to revitalize and reinstate the terms of that vocabulary had become both increasingly circular (witness his arguments with Bertrand Russell) and at the same time ever more wide-ranging as he attempted to find some external validation (for examples, in history, psychology and theosophy) which would serve to shore it up. At this point in Lawrence’s progress, the conscious aim of his search was still the sense of existential reassurance he believed would issue from a freshly validated essentialism; and yet – ironically enough – it could be argued that he already satisfied at least the first (and increasingly the second) of the three conditions which constitute Rorty’s definition of the ironist:

²⁸ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.73.

I shall define an ‘ironist as someone who fulfils three conditions: (1) She²⁹ has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself.³⁰

Through the course of *The Escaped Cock* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence’s philosophical thinking moves away from essentialist yearnings for an irrefutable ‘ur-vocabulary’ toward a contingent and pluralistic view of vocabularies as things which are more or less useful for the fulfilment of human purposes – a view which acknowledges that such things as ‘usefulness’, ‘fulfilment’ and ‘human purposes’ are themselves negotiated and determined contingently by the interplay of competing vocabularies. Lawrence’s final position (as espoused in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*) will be in line with the third condition of Rorty’s idea of the ironist: ‘Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal meta-vocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one’s way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old’³¹ – and I shall argue that Lawrence, particularly in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, does offer his

²⁹ Rorty commonly uses the female personal pronoun in his examples. Though I am quoting such examples in relation to D H Lawrence, I have forborne to substitute the words he/his for numerous instances of she/her.

³⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.73.

³¹ Ibid.

readers a new vocabulary which he ‘plays off’ against the exhausted vocabularies of the past.

In the meantime, *The Escaped Cock* marks Lawrence’s renunciation of his assumed status as prophet of essentialism. In Rorty’s terminology, Lawrence here renounces the role of ‘metaphysician’:

The metaphysician is someone who takes the question “What is the intrinsic nature of (e.g., justice, science, knowledge, Being, faith, morality, philosophy)?” at face value. He assumes that the presence of a term in his own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which has a real essence [...] He does not question the platitudes which encapsulate the use of a given final vocabulary, and in particular the platitude which says there is a single permanent reality to be found behind the many temporary appearances. He does not re-describe but, rather, analyzes old descriptions with the help of other old descriptions.³²

The ironies begin to multiply: Lawrence’s reiterated refusal to write upon the subject of ancient Etruria by rehashing the ‘old descriptions’ left by scientific historians – those who have sought to establish history as ‘a single permanent reality’ by getting beyond appearances – seems to cast such scientific historians in the role of metaphysicians. Lawrence – an inveterate re-describer of everything – can be said to have finally renounced essentialist metaphysics when he expressed his determination to re-describe ancient Etruria *not* in terms of the ‘final vocabulary’ of scientific history, but by embracing the openness of a contingent view which values the free play of appearance over positivist insistency on a single, permanent, authorized

³² Ibid., p.74.

historical account of the world. Like Rorty's ironist who renounces 'the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies', Lawrence had at last connected with the freedom and energy inherent in the realization that 'anything can be made to look good or bad by being re-described'.³³ It is, I suggest, this irresistible urge toward re-description which ultimately defines Lawrence as far better suited to the role of ironist than that of metaphysician. Indeed, even as far back as the youthful Lawrence's agonizings over his Christian faith and on through his circular arguments with Bertrand Russell, one can detect the strain of restlessness which Rorty characterizes as the inevitable lot of the ironist:

The ironist spends her time worrying about the possibility that she has been initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game. She worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being. But she cannot give a criterion of wrongness. So, the more she is driven to articulate her situation in philosophical terms, the more she reminds herself of her rootlessness...³⁴

It is worth emphasizing here that there is nothing casual or contrary to notions of moral seriousness in such an idea of irony. For there is an easy assumption into which we may fall at this stage: namely, that the metaphysician must be more 'serious' than the ironist, for the former is concerned to discover what is fundamentally and irrefragably important to us as human beings, whereas the latter can afford to be relativistic or even cynically expedient to such an extent that there is, after all, nothing *really* important. Nothing, I suggest, could be further from

³³ Ibid., p. 73.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

Lawrence's nature. Given his sense of rootlessness (itself a product of his less-than-perfect socialization) and his constant 'worrying away' at the language of religion and morality which had formed his character, casualness and expediency would never have been open to him. On the contrary, if anything can be made to look good or bad by being re-described, Lawrence personified the importance which attends upon the role of re-describer. The things we choose as good, and the re-descriptions which we choose as being most in keeping with what we hold to be good, are matters of moral choice; and one might argue that there can be nothing more important than the things we *humanly* hold to be good. In *The Escaped Cock*, Lawrence chooses to re-describe the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection in such a way as to foreground something which *he* holds to be supremely good: the fact of our human being within the phenomenal world. *The Escaped Cock* insists that there is nothing metaphysical about that fact – but Lawrence's ironic re-description nonetheless has the effect of insisting that our simple humanity is something to be revered.

The furore which met the tale on its publication (concerning its allegedly blasphemous import) can perhaps be best looked at in the light of Rorty's dictum that 'the opposite of irony is common sense', for common sense is 'the watchword of those who unselfconsciously describe everything important in terms of the final vocabulary to which they...are habituated'.³⁵ It is just this 'common sense' which Lawrence instinctively deplored in those purveyors of Christianity which he called the second-rate 'grocer-shop' moralists: those for whom there is no possible objection to (or dissatisfaction with) their chosen 'final vocabulary' which cannot be repudiated with a platitude formulated in the same vocabulary; for it is a vocabulary in which words like 'God', 'divine', and 'faith' have been objectivized to the point where it is

³⁵ Ibid., p.74.

pointless to think about them. They too easily serve to obviate thought, in the sense that 'common sense' is too often that which makes sense *to* us by dint of already having made that sense *for* us. Lawrence, as we know, long held on to the hope that such essence-words could be renewed or enhanced and thus rehabilitated in the cause of promoting unity among his followers; but the imposition of such a 'common sense' of unity is not the same as vital participation: our truest sense of what is common to our human selfhood must be renewed and kept current if it is to be kept vital.

The commonsense view of the Easter tale is, of course, predicated on the idea that Jesus Christ was 'God made man'. *The Escaped Cock* is Lawrence's ironic revision of the Easter story, in which he communicates his radically *uncommon* sense that the 'man who died' was, after all, simply a man. The curious effect of Lawrence's ironizing is paradoxically to make the tale more compelling. The commonsense (conservatively Christian) view insists that the man has been a god all along (the only possible explanation for a dead man coming back to life) – whereupon the idea of 'god made man' falls into self-refutation. For Lawrence, the idea of 'god made man' cannot be allowed to stand as an imposture on the credulity and readiness to reverence of such men as are not (so to speak) self-consciously gods in disguise, but merely men. By doing away with this detrimental element of disguise (the practical effect of which is to present us with a god in costume), Lawrence makes the simple point that whatever we mean by 'God' must be *inherent* in man.

Though I will in due course have more to say about the implications of Lawrence's late philosophy in terms of Rorty's recommendation that we ought fully to 'de-divinize' our philosophical discourse, what matters at this stage is the way in which Lawrence's renunciation of metaphysicality (in *The Escaped Cock*) sets free his talent as an ironist – a writer who genuinely re-describes things, as opposed to one

who merely rehashes the terms of old descriptions. If an ironist is (as Rorty states) one who realises that ‘anything can be made to look good or bad by being re-described’, there is obvious irony in the realization that Lawrence’s supposedly blasphemous re-description of the Resurrection actually makes the Easter tale look, if anything, better rather than worse. By insisting that man cannot be discontinuous from whatever he sincerely means by his expression of ‘God’, the spirit of Lawrence’s revivifying treatment of the Resurrection story is entirely in keeping with the idea of life made new.

Lawrence and Metaphysicality

It is debateable, of course, whether Lawrence – even at his most ‘blasphemous’ – can ever be said *fully* to have renounced his nonconformist upbringing, or Christianity in general, or metaphysicality in the widest sense of the word. Such a debate would involve an examination of the extent to which Lawrence ever explicitly declared himself as having arrived at a post-metaphysical worldview; and that examination would have to take in the general direction of Lawrence’s late philosophy – the implications of which Lawrence himself may never have fully thought through. Certainly such an examination of Lawrence’s thinking would be hard put to establish any dependable degree of consistency in his use of terms which might broadly be thought of as metaphysical, and that difficulty is arguably present to some extent in *all* phases of Lawrence’s writing career. Nevertheless, given the explicitness with which *The Escaped Cock* raises questions as to viability of metaphysicality as a worldview, I wish to suggest that the story shows how Lawrence’s late thinking lay clearly in the direction of post-metaphysicality.

In etymological terms, what is physical is natural: the root of the word ‘physical’ is ‘*physic*’, meaning ‘nature’. ‘Meta’, of course, means ‘above’. Therefore that which is metaphysical is that which is ‘above nature’. It would no doubt be an overly facile repudiation of metaphysicality to state, on those grounds, that what is metaphysical is therefore what is definitionally unnatural; such a statement would then entail a debate about what we mean by ‘nature’. Yet Lawrence, in *The Escaped Cock*, raises such questions: he seems to insist that anything which has its being in the phenomenal world ought not to ‘get above’ itself: whether it be a cock or a man or even a saviour of the world, it can only really *be* in the world while it *participates* in it. To strive to do more is to die from the world. At that rate, it would be fairer to describe Lawrence’s late philosophy as leading to a position which might be called that of the ‘ultraphysician’: one who, rather than positing the existence of a higher realm than that which is thereby relegated to the merely physical, constantly re-emphasizes the physical – so that our attention is continually brought back to the realization that there is always *more* of the physical world than our conceptual cross-sections can ever make available to us. There is always more *there* than that portion of physicality which we are currently making ostensible to ourselves – for that portion, if it does justice to our humanity, *ought* to be thought of as affording us a share in an infinitely greater whole.

Etymologically, what we make ostensible to ourselves – by choosing vocabularies with which we articulate our selves and our world – is literally that which we ‘stretch out to view’. What we make of the world is what we conceptualize – what we choose (however unconsciously) to extrude from the continuum of physical reality. Once we presume that some such extruded version of reality ‘tells the whole story’ – in the sense that we come to regard some particularly favoured account of the

world as being *equivalent* to the world – then our act of extrusion becomes one of abstraction (which, as we have seen, Lawrence considered a deplorable error). Our favoured version then presumptuously denies the complexity and continuity of the physical world. Our ostensible version of reality has become ostentatious: it ‘gets above’ itself. We have then described some portion of reality which no longer does justice to the whole because we have *detached* it from the whole – we have now (to anticipate a recurring image in the Chatterley novels) ‘cut it off from the tree’. Now, ‘portion’ no longer implies ‘share’: it implies partiality, meagreness and want. This is wrong. Just as our language can never become so *transparent* to us in our dealings with the world that we can afford eventually to do away with language, neither can our language ever become so substantially *equivalent* to the world that we can afford to do away with the world instead. Such partial accounts inevitably come to seem unsatisfactory to us. And then, we are wont to sense an emptiness, a longing, a feeling that there must be something *more* – something ‘above’ the physical world.

The remedy for this malaise is *not* to postulate the metaphysical as a means of consoling ourselves, but to reinvigorate the way in which we pay attention to the physical. (In *The Escaped Cock*, this realization is personified by the man who died, who rejects the idea of metaphysical ascension in favour of a new sense of his own groundedness within the phenomenal world.) To move from metaphysician to ultraphysician – a move I suggest Lawrence eventually made – is to shift the focus of our attention from what is ‘above the physical’ to what is ‘beyond the ostensible’. For the physical realm is a continuum which *does*, after all, include everything, and we do it justice *not* by postulating ‘higher’ things which are definitionally not part of it, but by paying it a different kind of attention – a *new* kind of attention, for paying attention in a new way will yield us new meaning, a new way of making sense of the world.

This is the lesson learned by the man who died – who has not, after all, ascended into a metaphysical Heaven, but who has instead been ‘brought back to earth’ with a renewed capacity to apprehend the phenomenal world. An emphasis on contingency fosters just such a healthy sense of the provisionality of our sense-making. The metaphysician is an absolutist, insisting on essences; the ultraphysician is an ironist, in the sense that he understands the importance of re-description to our endlessly human process of making meaning out of reality.

Of course, at this point in the argument, the metaphysician can always resort to circularity: he can always claim that ‘beyond the ostensible’ *must* mean the same as ‘above the physical’, and that to speak of what is beyond ostensibility therefore constitutes a *de facto* reinstatement of metaphysicality. By definition, the metaphysician is one who will always claim that we cannot hope to describe what is important – really, fundamentally, *essentially* important – without resort to some postulated metaphysical realm with metaphysical things in it. But it is implicit in the ironist’s position that the metaphysician will always have the right to re-describe the ironist’s re-descriptions – even while any self-respecting metaphysician will doubtless reject the imputation that his account of the world is just another available version of events (and perhaps not even a very persuasive one at that). Given that it is the business of the metaphysician to deal in irrefragable profundity and ultimate ‘Truth’, he is obliged to reject the suggestion that he is simply trying to outflank the ironist’s position by making his version ‘look better’ than hers. Indeed, he will necessarily consider himself as having refuted any such suggestion. Metaphysically speaking – for he denies himself any other vocabulary – he must always insist that profundity trumps mere contingency and, on that basis, will expect to win every trick. And my

likening of the whole question to a game of cards is itself, of course, just another outflanking strategy – though hopefully an illustrative one in the present context.

The Lawrence-prophet was, most obviously in his dealings with Bertrand Russell, the sort of metaphysician I have described above: he repeatedly sought to trump Russell's practicality with some item of facile, question-begging profundity. But it is to Lawrence's credit that he eventually abandoned this circular strategy in favour of contingency. Though the world will ever be ultimately untellable in the sense that it will always exceed our possible vocabularies, we err in hiving off the sheer plurality of the world into something we deem Ineffable – not least because it is hard to find anything useful to say about the Ineffable. We do better fearlessly to favour the world's openness, to maintain that it remains ever available to us for fresh telling. If no one can ever give a definitive account of the world, at least no one can ever have the last word on it. This is Lawrence's message in *The Escaped Cock* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Conclusion

Following on from the post-metaphysicalist implications of *The Escaped Cock*, the story's lesson has its more general import for Lawrence's development as a philosopher. Vocabularies of transcendence – indeed, of Ascension – exhort us to make sense of the world and our place within it more reverentially than we otherwise might. To the extent that they seek to elicit a heightened level of attention from us, such vocabularies are clearly benign in their intention. But they characteristically function – or *eventually* come to function – by 'looking upwards' to something which is necessarily higher than our contingent human selves. By their very process of

enshrining their elevatory terms within our language, such vocabularies are inherently hazardous. They exhort us to ‘get above’ ourselves and implicitly invite us to believe that we will, at some stage, be entitled to regard ourselves as having succeeded. By then, elevatory terms have become merely the elevated terms of a vocabulary which is thereby devalued, for it has become the everyday currency of moral commerce for Lawrence’s second-rate ‘grocer-shop’ moralists. What is at first edifying becomes, in time, an edifice, and can no longer elicit quite the same quality of creative energy as went into building it. Once built, our grand vocabulary no longer requires that level of attention. It lends itself to unreflective usage, and originality gives way to mere observance. Lawrence, by overzealously seeking to re-appropriate the terms of just such a devitalized vocabulary so as to impose them anew on the world, disastrously ‘got above’ himself. *The Escaped Cock* has been the dramatization of his philosophical climb-down to the level of contingency.

Whereas vocabularies of transcendence work by moral exhortation and logical imposition, the language of contingency is dialectical. It works by persuasion rather than proposition. Rorty defines this dialectical approach as ‘the attempt to play off vocabularies against one another, rather than merely to infer propositions from one another, and thus as the partial substitution of re-description for inference’.³⁶

Lawrence’s most effective philosophical writing is that which works by the insistent substitution of contingency for metaphysicality and essentialism – the robustness of the ‘Surgery for the Novel...’ essay and the blunt physicality found in the ‘Democracy’ essays stand as cases in point. In this respect, Lawrence-as-ironist stands comparison with Rorty’s portrayal of the mature Hegel:

³⁶ Ibid., p.78.

Hegel's so-called dialectical method is not an argumentative procedure or a way of unifying subject and object, but simply a literary skill – skill at producing surprising gestalt switches by making smooth, rapid transitions from one terminology to another. Instead of keeping the old platitudes and making distinctions to help them cohere, Hegel constantly changed the vocabulary in which the old platitudes had been stated; instead of constructing philosophical theories and arguing for them, he avoided argument by constantly shifting vocabularies, thereby changing the subject [...] He dropped the idea of getting at the truth in favour of the idea of making things new. His criticism of his predecessors was not that their propositions were false but that their languages were obsolete.³⁷

To reach his late philosophy, Lawrence has crossed a divide: that between the metaphysician and the ironist – and Rorty's contrasting of the two positions makes clear the extent of that divide:

Metaphysicians believe that there are, out there in the world, real essences which it is our duty to discover and which are disposed to assist in their own discovery [...] By contrast, ironists do not see the search for a final vocabulary as (even in part) a way of getting something distinct from this vocabulary *right*. They do not take the point of discursive thought to be knowing, in any sense that can be explicated by notions like 'reality' [or] 'real essence'.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., p.79.

³⁸ Ibid., p.75 (Rorty's emphasis).

In *The Escaped Cock*, I suggest the man who died can be seen as embodying this spirit of post-metaphysical, ironist humility. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence the ironist will dramatize this renunciation of essentialism by playing off vocabularies against one another. Metaphysical and essentialist vocabularies will be dialectically set against vocabularies which speak of contingency and simple groundedness in what is human; and Lawrence, for all his passionate advocacy as the author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, will show his willingness to abide by the outcome of such an open contest – without resort to metaphysical essence-words. Language will now become a matter of making rather than finding; for in this late flowering of Lawrence's philosophy, vocabularies of diversification and novelty – of looking anew at the world – will prevail over vocabularies of antecedent truth. In Lawrence's last novel, the 'man who died' will, by way of ancient Etruria, find himself cast in the role of gamekeeper in Lawrence's contemporary Nottingham. Here, like the central character of *The Escaped Cock*, the main protagonist will have to shift for himself – and he must do so as nothing more nor less than a human being alive in the phenomenal world.

Chapter Eight

The Road to Wragby Wood: Lawrence's Philosophical Journey to Pragmatism

Introduction

Lawrence's personal and philosophical journey has so far been an extraordinary one by any standards: from a Nottinghamshire mining village to literary acclaim and his adoption by the English aristocracy, and then the personal nightmare which took him (to use the title of Mark Kinkead-Weekes' biographical volume) from triumph to exile. Only after his exile had taken him through space and time to ancient Etruria could Lawrence's participatory mode of consciousness find the sense of validation it needed before it could return to the world. Much had been suffered and much prophetic baggage abandoned along the way, but much insight had been gained. Nevertheless, a reading of *The Escaped Cock* can leave the reader feeling that the 'Lawrence-hero who died' will not fully and finally have come back to life until he comes back from exile. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is often described as Lawrence's 'Etruscan' novel, for it is in his last novel that he, so to speak, brings it all back home. The Lawrence-hero must in some sense re-engage with his roots – and if the philosophical lessons of ancient Etruria cannot be transposed into twentieth-century Nottingham they will arguably be exposed as escapist historical fantasy with no more purchase on the world than Lawrence's Egyptiana of *The Ladybird*. I intend to show that Lawrence succeeded in this act of transposition, achieving a sense of vital continuity where the effect could so easily have been one of awkward anachronism.

Though the novel has its undoubted philosophical import, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* would not be a D H Lawrence novel without the personal element – in which sphere it arguably takes up from where *The Ladybird* left off. The latter work was Lawrence's fictive 'essay' in winning Lady Cynthia Asquith away from Herbert Asquith. Though Count Dionys can be said to have prevailed over his love-rival, he

can hardly be said to have won the day: his triumph over Daphne could be figured only in terms of such darkness and death as hardly fitted it for the light of day, and its horrific emotional parasitism somehow made it a victory more distressing than any defeat. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* will be another reworking of Lawrence's 'Family Romance', which, while controversial enough in terms of the moral standards of its time, at least has about it a kind of defiant decency. That this is another essay in the emotional direction of Cynthia Asquith is confirmed by Paul Delany, who outlines the biographical correspondences between the marriages of the Asquiths and the Chatterleys:

In both cases they married when the bride was twenty-three, the groom twenty-nine; Connie, like Lady Cynthia, is of Scots ancestry; Clifford, like Herbert Asquith, has an older brother who is killed in 1916, is shattered by a war wound, and dabbles in literature.¹

Though *Lady Chatterley's Lover* will see Lawrence boldly reconfiguring this basic 'love triangle' as a means toward achieving a sense of personal reconciliation, I wish to begin by examining the novel's wider philosophical force – for it is this which enables Lawrence to depict a process of maturation at the personal level.

Philosophy

In his 1923 essay 'Surgery for the Novel – or a Bomb', Lawrence declared that 'it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split', and went on to declare that 'the two should come together again – in the novel'.² Dennis

¹ Paul Delany, *D H Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press Ltd, 1979), pp.171-2.

² D H Lawrence, 'Surgery for the Novel – or a Bomb', (1923), in A A H Inglis (ed.), *D H Lawrence: A Selection from Phoenix*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin [1968] 1971), p.193.

Jackson notes how Lawrence's intention in writing *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was to remedy this perceived split, for 'Lawrence intended [it] as an assault on the tradition of scientific rationalism which Socrates and Plato had initiated'.³ Of course, given the kind of developments in present-day physics which I have earlier mentioned – whereby we are now told that the greater part of the universe is made up of undetectable dark matter – Lawrence's intuitively holistic orientation to a cosmos in which 'all things correspond' now seems strikingly prescient. While scientists debate the nature of a universe which now seems oddly cognate with Count Dionys' mysterious cosmogony of 'dark fire', the very concept of scientific rationalism would appear to be up for renegotiation. Current scientific thinking seems to lend new persuasiveness to Lawrence's insistence that the 'real' universe is dark, and that the portion of it that we can see is only the 'inside out' of it. Noting that 'dark matter' or 'dark energy' is now thought to make up ninety-five percent of the mass of the universe, one recent commentator states:

In the same way that the quantum revolution of the early twentieth century showed that Isaac Newton's classical physics was not wrong but just a good approximation that applied [well] to everyday experience, physicists will soon show that their subject, represented by the standard model, looks only at part of the picture.⁴

Faced with this hiatus, physicists now posit the existence of more kinds of particles making up the universe than previous theoretical models have comprehended. Graham Ross, a theoretical physicist at Oxford University, suggests that scientists now expect to find 'a whole zoo of particles, which are the supersymmetrical partners

³ Dennis Jackson, 'Lawrence's Allusive Art in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', (1985), in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *D H Lawrence: Critical Assessments III* (Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information Ltd, 1992), p.152.

⁴ Alok Jha, *Guardian* 'Life' supplement, 7th Oct 2004: p.4.

of the ones we have seen'. We have not 'seen' the supersymmetric particles which are thought to make up the dark matter of the universe because they 'do not "shine" energy that we can see'.⁵

I suggest these ideas accord quite strikingly with Lawrence's thinking as expounded in *Apocalypse* and by Count Dionys in *The Ladybird*: we cannot see the universe's 'real' fire because it is dark and therefore invisible; the light we see is only the outermost manifestation of the underlying reality. Rather than confine himself to the particular view afforded us by the particles we happen to be able to see, Lawrence is indeed after 'the whole zoo'. Graham Ross goes on to say that he considers 'supersymmetry... to be much more speculative than what went before. If it should prove to be the case, it will be a wonderful realization of human imagination'.⁶ Such a statement, made by an eminent physicist, surely implies enough of a paradigm shift to be able to accommodate Lawrence's idiosyncratic cosmogony. On such a reading, Lawrence's instinctive ideas – of the cosmos being a vast swirl of interrelatedness, and physical reality as a continuum which is potentially open to endlessly new perception – cannot be regarded as irrational merely because they are imaginative.

Though the further speculations of particle physicists clearly lie beyond the scope of this study, we cannot humanly be less than concerned in the physical universe wherein we have our being, and Lawrence expresses (in his 1929 essay 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*') his conviction that we are not, in our present mode of consciousness, fully *relating* to reality:

'It is a question, practically, of relationship. We *must* get back into relation, vivid and nourishing relation to the cosmos and the universe

⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, p.5.

⁶ *Ibid.*

[...] It means a return to ancient forms [...] The last three thousand years of mankind have been an excursion into ideals, bodilessness, and tragedy, and now the excursion is over [...] Now, after almost three thousand years, now that we are almost abstracted entirely from the rhythmic life of the seasons, birth and death and fruition, now we realise that such abstraction is neither bliss nor liberation, but nullity.

[...] Now we have to re-establish the great relationships...⁷

Of course, such ideas tend readily to float away into mystic insubstantiality, becoming abstractions in themselves. But my concern will be to keep the import of Lawrence's philosophical thinking grounded in immediate contingency and the particularity of the present, in keeping with Lawrence's apparent intention in writing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In the meantime, the point to carry forward is one which, of itself, implies no necessary resort to paganism or mysticism. It is simply this: if our present mode of consciousness and ways of perceiving reality are now found to be accessing no more than a fraction of the raw stuff of that reality, then the discovery – even by inference – of this undiscovered realm ought to instil in us a degree of reticence with regard to our ideas of relatedness. Lawrence's evocation (in the Etruscan 'augury' scene) of a world in which 'all things corresponded' is given fresh philosophical point: we are moving in a matrix of unfathomable interdependencies and our ideas of relatedness need rethinking from the ground up. Thus when Lawrence speaks of our need to 'get back to the rhythm of the cosmos'⁸ it is a matter of pragmatism rather than esoteric mystification. It is just such a project – of rethinking relatedness – which Lawrence undertakes in his successive versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

⁷ D H Lawrence, 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' (1929), in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Penguin Books, (1928) 2000), pp.330-31. (All page references in the text are to this edition.)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.328.

There can be little doubt that the Chatterley novels, notwithstanding their deliberate celebration of contingency at the expense of abstraction and aestheticism, deserve to take their place as philosophical works. Wayne Burns, in an essay entitled '*Lady Chatterley's Lover: A Pilgrim's Progress for Our Time*', quotes extensively from a 1925 letter to Carlo Linati in which Lawrence makes a defiant case for his artistic credo:

Do you think that books should be sort of toys, nicely built up of observations and sensations, all finished and complete? I don't [...] I can't bear art that you can walk round and admire [...] An author should be in among the crowd, kicking their shins or cheering on to some mischief or merriment [...] You need not complain that I don't subject the intensity of my vision – or whatever it is – to some vast and imposing rhythm – by which you mean, isolate it on a stage, so that you can look down on it like a god who has got a ticket to the show. I never will: and you will never have that satisfaction from me [...] Whoever reads me will be in the thick of the scrimmage...⁹

Though it may well seem at first that such a boisterous approach would detract from *Lady Chatterley's Lover's* status as a work of serious philosophical import, Dennis Jackson has been concerned to point to the novel's widely allusive quality so as to locate it within an ongoing tradition of philosophical discourse: 'These allusions to classical writings, to Plato's *Dialogues*, to the Bible, and to works by various British,

⁹ Wayne Burns, '*Lady Chatterley's Lover: A Pilgrim's Progress for Our Time*' (1966), in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p.85.

American, and continental writers... allow Lawrence to bring past and present into collocation [and] encourage the reader to take the story “philosophically”.¹⁰

Neither is there any doubt that the philosophy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has more to do with scrimmaging and shin-kicking than with lofty pronouncements: there is an obviously provocative – and even today, perhaps notorious – earthiness and physicality within the language of the novel which is inseparable from its message. This earthiness of language (which is by no means exclusively sexual) is deliberately contrasted with the arid philosophical and moral abstractions favoured by Clifford Chatterley in his Wragby drawing-room, to which he has apparently withdrawn from all sensuous engagement with the world in favour of dispensing such emptiness to his wife and circle of cronies. In thus setting such fresh, human, vital language against the language of deadness and degeneracy, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* accords with Richard Rorty's suggestion that the point of contemporary philosophy should be 'to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth'. He considers that the function of philosophy should be 'reactive, having sense only as a protest against attempts to close off conversation by proposals for universal commensuration through the hypostatization of some privileged set of descriptions'.¹¹ For Rorty, the latter outcome would constitute a 'freezing-over of culture' and 'the dehumanization of human beings'. Lawrence – reactive as ever – aims to strike a blow for our re-humanization by setting our simple, honest, bodily physicality above the sickness and effeteness of Wragby, where Clifford's over-sophisticated conversation so often serves to 'close off' and 'freeze over' human experience by submerging it under false pieties, empty poeticism and dead sentimentality.

¹⁰ Dennis Jackson, 'Lawrence's Allusive Art in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', *Critical Assessments III*, p.168.

¹¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.377.

Continuity

Though Clifford and his abstractionist mindset represent an important position within the novel's philosophical dialectic, it is clearly a negative one, and I wish to approach *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from the positive direction: as a continuation of Lawrence's Etruscan adventure. Etruria was a necessary 'time-out' for Lawrence at the end of his personal nightmare. His Etruscan discoveries afforded him the opportunity to reorientate himself within reality – a process much like the one he described to Catherine Carswell in 1922 whereby 'one must for the moment withdraw from the world, away toward the inner realities that *are* real: and return, maybe, to the world later, when one is quiet and sure'.¹² As much as Mellors and Connie are engaged in a 'search for physical and philosophical reorientation' and a 'journey toward rebirth',¹³ the same is, of course, true of Lawrence himself. Given that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is so clearly Lawrence's 'Etruscan' novel I propose to move freely between the three versions, regarding it as a 'work in progress' which exemplifies the unfinished quality Lawrence extolled in his letter to Carlo Linati by the way in which it shares in the artlessness and spontaneity Lawrence found so appealing in the Etruscan tomb paintings.

Further 'Etruscan' qualities about *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are worth emphasizing before moving to a closer examination. Ancient Etruria afforded Lawrence the opportunity to immerse himself in what I have called cosmic continuity. In psychological terms, this is the realm Daniel Dervin described as 'pre-object' because it precedes the capacity for differentiation. In the Etruscan sketches, the destabilizing sense of cosmic swirl has been evoked in terms both elemental and vital:

¹² Quoted by Michael Squires in '*Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "Pure Seclusion"', in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p.112.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.114.

land, sea, air, blood, consciousness, time, attributes both animal and human – all have been dissolved into a mysterious continuity by the exhilarating free play of Lawrence’s undissociated sensibility so that humankind is seen as continuous with what Lawrence called ‘the circumambient universe’. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the same feeling is engendered by the fluidity of form which John Lyon notes in his 1990 introduction to the third version:

It is marked...by an extraordinary and disturbing fluidity of voices, tones and registers – a fluidity which ‘throws’ the reader, challenging any distinctions we may have between the serious and the trivial, between what does and what does not matter, between what requires reverence and what invites mockery.¹⁴

As we have seen particularly in Lawrence’s case, a talent for fluidity is not always necessarily a blessing. His Etruscan pilgrimage was, as it were, forced on him by the personal nightmare which followed upon his failure to negotiate adequate boundaries in his social world. Sequestered from other people in the relative seclusion of his Etruscan explorations, he found a safe and sustaining medium in which to give full expression to his participatory mode of consciousness. Having at last recruited himself (rather than everyone else), his artistic orientation became a ‘curve of return’ to the world from which he had been exiled. To be effective in terms both personal and artistic, Lawrence’s temperamental fluidity and vulnerability must now be brought back to the world in the shape of a new Lawrence-hero, so that a new concept of boundedness can be affirmed. This process of renegotiating boundaries needs humility and honesty and is unavoidably a painful one (as a reading of *The Escaped Cock* has already revealed). But the profit on such suffering is a *new* kind of

¹⁴ John Lyon, introduction to D H Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (London: Penguin Books, (1928) 1990 edition), p.viii.

freedom from constraint: now that the achievement of genuine selfhood is all, no existing boundaries of knowledge or morality need be taken as self-validating or sacrosanct. As I hope to show later (in a section on the moral implications of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), this freedom is distinct from licence, for it brings with it the responsibility of knowing there can be no new construction without ramification and moral consequence.

Given this imperative of negotiating boundaries, there is no real contradiction between John Lyon's point about the stylistic fluidity to be found in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and another characteristic of the novel noted by Michael Squires (in his introduction to a later edition):

The novel insists on enclosures – a hut, a secret clearing, a cottage, a private wood, an enclosed yard, a bedroom shielded from entry, a woman's secret body – all offering protection not only from intrusion but also from psychological pain.¹⁵

Such enclosures are an imaginative resource for Lawrence as he seeks to recreate the restorative sanctuary of the Etruscan tombs within a contemporary English landscape. These manifestations of enclosure take the raw stuff of reality and construe it anew, bringing much-needed reassurance that chaos *can* at last be made manageable. But at the same time, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* vehemently insists that our notions of enclosure – of boundedness and self-integrity, and of what can and cannot be legitimately possessed and participated in – must all be held up to question. The novel indeed insists on enclosures, but it also insists that *no* enclosures, of however long standing, should necessarily be regarded as sacrosanct. In version two, Connie is

¹⁵ Michael Squires, introduction to D H Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Penguin Books, [1928] 1994 edition), p.xxiv.

struck by this paradoxical nature of enclosure as she returns to Wragby after a walk, having picked some flowers:

[The daffodils] belonged to their own outdoor world. It seemed so unfitting to take them inside the walls of Wragby. Walls! Walls! How weary she was of walls! Yet how she needed their shelter...
[p.302]

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the most imposing edifices are somehow the least edifying: Wragby Hall, Tevershall's assortment of churches and chapels – these are walls which seem to sag like wet cardboard, standing for little more than a pervasive sense of transience and hopelessness in a landscape where 'one meaning blots out another' (p.156, version three). The paradox lies in the ultimate provisionality of all enclosures and boundaries. They are necessary, yet they must be negotiated in more than one sense: not merely as obstacles (though they must, at the least, serve to obstruct worse evils), but as vital areas of consensus which must be maintained at the cost of constant *renegotiation*. No state of enclosure – physical, moral or aesthetic – is a privilege to be taken for granted. Like King Lear and 'the man who died', Connie and Mellors are forced to acknowledge their common humanity amid the world's contingency and seek accommodation as best they can. The works in which these characters figure all personify Kingsley Widmer's idea that 'art should not be a precious object but the sensitive entry into a crucial larger experience of redemptive importance'.¹⁶

Artlessness – in the sense of art without preciousness – is an important element in the *Chatterley* novels. What the language of Lawrence's Etruscan novel must conjure

¹⁶ Kingsley Widmer, 'The Pertinence of Modern Pastoral: The Three Versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' (1973), in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p.97.

for us is that sense of vital and material continuity in which all things correspond. This implies a pre-verbal realm of experience which tends naturally to outrun the element of discursive restraint which we associate with other types of language. Lawrence's challenge is therefore to use language to create a novel in which the art must be free of artifice – an art which has about it something of the naivety and directness of ancient Etruscan art. This naturally suggests the need for a style of language which is, in the widest sense, poetic – achieving its effect via connotative richness rather than dryly denotative objectivity. As we have seen, language is constitutive of reality and can therefore constitute our reality in different ways. Though I have hitherto used the word 'discursive' in terms of its association with 'discourse' – that is, pertaining to an authorized and normative mode of language which is used to conceptualize reality – it is a word which usefully carries more than one sense. Besides its rigidly objective meaning of 'passing from premisses to conclusions, proceeding by reason or argument, ratiocinative', in its less regulative guise it means 'running hither and thither, passing irregularly from one locality to another'. The *Chatterley* novels derive their energy from just such a free-ranging approach, moving between their various milieux in a series of tableaux – a narrative strategy already seen in *The Escaped Cock*.

Kingsley Widmer makes a persuasive case for Lawrence's success in achieving this spontaneous quality. He notes that for Lawrence, the most exalted purpose of novel-writing was 'to catch the "spontaneous flow", the sympathetic record, of the authentic physical-emotional relatedness of persons and places'.¹⁷ In order for the 'moral novelist' to be 'a vitalistic recorder with impassioned prophetic-conversion purpose', he must be, in Widmer's prescription:

¹⁷ Ibid.

...relatively unselfconscious, responding with intensity and immediacy to the flow and feeling of the fictional experience, pursuing its physical and emotional realities rather than its rhetorical extensions, [which means] avoiding the temptations to clever involution, verbal ornateness...and other self-aware probing and play so characteristic of modernist literature. Therefore one should write, as it were, straight-on, dealing with uncertainties by replacing rather than revising [...] Better, as Lawrence saw it, to come back fresh to the vivid relationships than to polish up and otherwise manipulate the verbal by-product.¹⁸

This unselfconscious and self-revealing approach accords entirely with the supposedly 'primitive' working methods of Lawrence's Etruscan artists: to express oneself freely, and immediately to do so again if some newer inspiration spontaneously supervenes on the first expression, with no concern to erase the traces of one's first attempt, but to leave the fruits of the creative process in plain view, and to 'leave off' when it is done. Like the Etruscan tomb paintings, the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are happy to show the marks of their own making, which lends them an appealingly candid quality.

A simple descriptive passage taken from the first version – even though this version predates Lawrence's 1927 Etruscan trip – can be taken as exemplifying this sense of vital continuity. Connie, disaffected and depressed by the emptiness of her life at Wragby, likes to escape into the woods and find solace in nature: 'Along the little paths the primroses showed their pale, happy candour. And Constance felt

¹⁸ Ibid.

thrilled and happy to be in the wood, in the sound of the wind.’¹⁹ Though this is apparently simple – and arguably veers toward triteness in the first sentence – there is much of importance here. ‘Little paths’ suggests a realm of innocent experience for Connie, away from Clifford’s stultifying misappropriation of her life and rigorous policing of her thoughts. ‘Pale’ suggests the vulnerability of flowers in the face of mankind’s incursions, whether the latter take the form of Roman armies or Clifford’s mechanical wheelchair. ‘Happy candour’ could easily be taken as facile anthropomorphism, yet there are richer implications. ‘Happy’ suggests ‘hap’: that is, the simple contingency of the primroses – and Connie – just ‘happening’ to be there; and the fact of their happening together suggests a sense of *participatory* consciousness in which all things correspond. Connie is thrilled because her participation has put her in touch with life, and she is thus ‘in’ both the wood and the wind in a deeper sense than that of mere physical location. ‘Candour’ means ‘not hiding one’s thoughts’: both Connie and the primroses are alive, insouciantly – and with no thoughts to hide, they have no ulterior motive to cloud their issue.

Throughout the *Chatterley* novels, Lawrence is clearly fascinated with the idea of isolating the moment when such simple participation is disrupted by the intrusion of abstractive consciousness: that fatal point in the flow of vital relatedness when ‘ideas’ – even ideas as to what such relatedness ought ‘ideally’ to be like – destroy the feeling of pre-ratiocinative harmony. (The ‘rape scene’ in *The Escaped Cock* has been a case in point.) Having lost his share in relatedness by allowing himself to be swept away by his own prophetic zeal as to how things *should* be, Lawrence has escaped to Etruria and discovered insouciance. The latter idea is clearly not one that can be propounded with prophetic insistency: it must be introduced delicately rather

¹⁹ Dieter Mehl & Christa Jansohn (eds.), *D H Lawrence: The First and Second Lady Chatterley Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Version One, p.29.

than declaimed, drawing on all the innocence and artlessness of the scenes depicted in Lawrence's beloved Etruscan frescoes. Appropriately, Lawrence uses the tableau style of depiction, simply instantiating his idea as a moment of *gestalt* rather than pursuing it via logical argument. A key tableau here is the scene in which Connie happens upon the gamekeeper as he is washing himself outside his cottage. This scene, though much abbreviated in the final version, is given a fuller depiction in version two.

Lawrence begins with a *tabula rasa* in which human consciousness is explicitly absent: Connie ventures out into the park in the 'suspended softness' of a wet afternoon in which 'it seemed as if the world had gone unpeopled [...] This afternoon, there were no people on the natural earth' (p.262). Connie's own subjectivity is in abeyance: she walks 'dreamily' in the wood, in 'the soft, living melancholy of rest, of passivity'. She is vaguely aware that 'she might meet the gamekeeper'; but at the same time, and with no *real* contradiction, she knows with 'deep, dim feeling' that there is 'no-one in the wood'. She then passes through the gateway into the gamekeeper's yard – and suddenly finds herself almost within touching distance of him as he is busy washing himself. Withdrawing hastily before he can register her presence, she finds herself suddenly weak, and sits down amid the wetness of the wood while she recovers herself. The implication is that she has not been *entirely* mistaken in her assumption that there was 'no-one in the wood': the gamekeeper's subjectivity has been in a similar state of abeyance to her own. Absorbed as he is in the activity of washing himself, his 'upper', ratiocinative consciousness has been temporarily suspended. He, too, has been in a state of pure participation, with no divisively egoistic 'self'-consciousness to separate him from the synergy of a scene which is trivial in one sense, yet which nevertheless implies so

much more than its mere surface detail. The wetness of wood, woman and man symbolizes the spirit of continuity, for it is here the medium in which all creation is immersed.

So far, the incident has been mundane enough. But the effect it has on Connie shows Lawrence's wish to reinvest the mundane with the sense of *anima mundi*: the idea that even what is most ordinary can and should be thought of as sharing in a community of essence with all that we tend unreflectively to assume is of higher importance. The artlessness of the tableau is salutary in that it reminds the reader that if art is to be considered worthwhile because it enables us to gain access to some putative realm of 'higher' things, it can hardly do so by insisting on hiving off that which it deems higher from that which it is concomitantly obliged to dismiss as 'lower'. There is therefore no real disjunction between the apparent mundanity of this woodland encounter and Lawrence's subsequent description of its effect on Connie, which is rendered in terms of religious profundity:

She had seen beauty, and beauty alive. That body was of the world of the gods, cleaving through the gloom like a revelation. And she felt there was God on earth; or gods. A great soothing came over her heart, along with the feeling of worship. The sudden sense of pure beauty, beauty that was active and alive, had put worship in her heart again. Not that she worshipped the man, nor his body. But worship had come into her, because she had seen a pure loveliness, that was alive, and that had touched the quick in her.

Parkin's body, though apparently unremarkable in itself, unconsciously participates in a wider order of being. Yet this idea of participation does not *transcend* the physicality of the body, for the body's physicality is the very guarantee of its wider

participation: as discussed earlier with reference to the lessons of *King Lear* and *The Escaped Cock*, the body exists *proportionately* within the phenomenal world; and its due portion is not to be thought of in terms of delimitation or lack, for it is this sense of portion which guarantees the body's share in the whole. And it is this binding together effect which is, of course, religious in the widest sense.

In contrast to the artless quality of such scenes, Lawrence sets the artificiality of Clifford and Wragby Hall. Clifford is (for reasons I shall later discuss more fully) incapable of participation. His very existence has an entirely secondary quality. Incapable of what is first-hand, he develops an insatiable hunger for the world's compensatory by-products: his mines literally produce and market such by-products; his writing is empty of artistic merit, and is intended merely to extract literary reputation from the world; he cannot love his wife on any level, but extracts what he can from Connie by sheer force of will, using moral hypocrisy and manipulative sentimentality to feed off her life. His responses to experience are, as Dennis Jackson notes, 'neither immediate nor vital, but indirect, literary and cerebral [and] substitute words for feelings'.²⁰

An episode in the first version explicitly makes a plea for art as a pathway to immediate apprehension – as something which leads to a deeper, earthier, more *participatory* mode of consciousness as opposed to Clifford's preening himself in the midst of all that is second-hand and spiritually exhausted. Connie brings some flowers to Clifford, who uses them as an occasion to indulge his fondness for literary allusion:

²⁰ Dennis Jackson, 'Lawrence's Allusive Art in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p.146.

‘Do you know [he said], I don’t think we should care half so much for flowers, if it weren’t for the lovely things the poets have said about them.’ She stopped suddenly. Was it true? It was only half true. The things poets said had indeed opened doors, strange little doors to the flowers, through which one could go. But once passed through the poet’s gate, the flowers were more flowerily unspoken than ever.

[p.33]

It is, of course, easy for us as readers to fall into the self-satisfied assumption that we are more ‘in touch’ with flowers than the poeticizing Clifford. But if, as we read *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, we flatter ourselves that our appreciation of flowers is thereby made realer, purer, somehow more highly attuned to some ineffable essence of floweriness than Clifford’s vicarious response – then we are merely dealing in the same abstraction while claiming that our brand is purer than that offered by the competition. We have effectively strapped ourselves into Clifford’s conceptual wheelchair. If it *is* true that poets can open doors through which our consciousness can pass, the positive response is for us to pass through such doors when they are opened for us; otherwise what poets say is indeed, as Connie realises, only half true: ornamental quotation is an excuse *not* to pass through ‘the poet’s gate’ and experience the further truth of poetry.

Such cosmetic aestheticism, viewed in terms of opposition between the ‘two ways of knowing’ which became Lawrence’s overriding concern in later works such as *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *Apocalypse*, is thus seen to take its place alongside the mental, rational, scientific mode of knowing. Clifford Chatterley exemplifies the way in which aestheticism can misappropriate poetry for the sake of reductiveness. Such a debased form of knowingness is actually opposed to the poetic, imaginative, religious

way of knowledge. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can be read as Lawrence's pragmatic attempt to realign these modes of knowing by reinvigorating our experience of 'floweriness', or more generally, of the spontaneous efflorescence of trees and flowers – an idea which figured prominently in the Etruscan sketches, where daisies are celebrated for the way in which, despite their individual fragility, their individuality can be said to outlast empires. Dennis Jackson notes how Lawrence (in *A Propos*) explicitly pleaded for us to return to the myths of the old vegetation gods such as Attis, Demeter and Persephone: 'We've got to get them back, for they are the world our soul, our greater consciousness, lives in.'²¹ I wish to suggest that such an approach is actually more pragmatic than it may first appear, at least in the sense that such myths exhort us to pay profounder attention to the mundane world.

An avowed pragmatist would not, of course, allow the 'truth' of supernatural gods to be anything more than the effect of a certain kind of vocabulary – his scepticism would, in that respect, parallel that of 'the man who died'. Even so, I wish to suggest that the pragmatist is not, on those grounds, necessarily forced into allowing the idea of vegetation gods purely on a utilitarian or instrumentalist basis – as if to say: 'Of course, Attis and Demeter don't really exist, but it might be useful if we behaved as though they do.' The passionate conviction of Lawrence's writing – especially in *The Escaped Cock* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – suggests something much more compelling. Even a pragmatist can feel passion, just as the sight of a man washing his body can inspire a woman to a sense of worship. 'Worship' – a word repeated several times to describe Connie's wondering reaction to just such a sight – means 'worth-ship'; and there must surely be that in our world and in ourselves which we hold to be worthy of wonder, otherwise words such as wonder and worship might

²¹ Quoted by Dennis Jackson in 'Lawrence's Allusive Art in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p. 165.

as well be deleted from the dictionary. The pragmatic lesson of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is that there need be no recourse to spiritual or aesthetic accessories to prompt such reverence toward the everyday world – for the novel advocates a shift of consciousness whereby we simply pay a different kind of attention to what is already there.

Of Trees

For a clue to the nature of this attentiveness, I wish to pay particular attention to the trees in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Wragby Wood is central to the novel as a site of contested meaning and has throughout its history fulfilled various functions: it has seen hunting by royalty, poaching by Robin Hood, and it ‘remembers... monks padding along on asses’ (p.43). Wragby Wood has been cut down to provide timber for coalmining and trench warfare, and what remains of it will provide sanctuary for the fugitive Connie and Mellors, even while it furnishes Clifford Chatterley with his narcissistic sense of proprietorship. More generally, the ‘tree’ image is central to the philosophical import of the novel, as indicated by Lawrence in his ‘A Propos’ essay: ‘Vitality the human race is dying. It is like a great uprooted tree, with its roots in the air. We must plant ourselves again in the universe.’²² *Lady Chatterley's Lover* dramatizes this imperative and also points toward its fulfilment; and it is at the epistemologically deeper level implied by the idea of rootedness that the trees of Wragby Wood deserve consideration, as well as at the surface or narrative level.

The journey into the vitality of the wood begins from without – and the image of Constance Chatterley alone in her bedroom in Wragby Hall is a good starting point, for it evokes compellingly enough the idea of ‘without’. She stands naked before the

²² D H Lawrence, ‘A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*’, p.330.

mirror, and despairs at her body's 'greyish and sapless' look (p.70). Again, there are echoes here of Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

She that herself will sliver and disbranch

From her material sap, perforce must wither,

And come to deadly use...²³

Lawrence describes Connie's body as 'going meaningless... so much insignificant substance'. Connie realises that it is her life at Wragby – the abstractive 'mental life' of Clifford and his cronies, in which she is held captive – which has 'defrauded [her] even out of her own body' (p.71). She is not participating: her very existence has become abstracted from the myriad vitalities evoked in Lawrence's Etruscan sketches and her life has no share in the vital community of essence. The resulting sense of disconnectedness and dysphoria – which she tries to dismiss as 'just restlessness' – actually borders on panic:

She would rush off across the park and abandon Clifford, and lie prone in the bracken. To get away from the house – she must get away from the house and everybody. The wood was her one refuge, her sanctuary. But it was not really... because she had no connection with it. It was only a place where she could get *away* from the rest. She never really touched the spirit of the wood itself – if it had any such nonsensical thing. [p.20]

Unfortunately for Connie at this stage, a desperate impulse to abstract oneself from abstraction is not the same thing as getting back into connection. But the nature and means of achieving that sense of connectedness – along with concomitant questions

²³ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, G B Harrison (ed.) (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p.100. (Act IV Scene 2, lines 30-2).

which arguably do justice to both spirituality *and* nonsensicality – will be the central issues of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Even though Connie is not 'in touch' with the trees, Michael Squires (in his study of the pastoral elements of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) notes how 'their silent vitality attracts her because she seeks reaffirmation in some code of positive values [...] At the heart of nature she discovers the beginnings of such a code'.²⁴ Two important points emerge here. Firstly, it will be seen that 'the heart of nature' is *not* somewhere magically distinct from the rest of the world: quaint notions of sylvan idylls in enchanted rustic retreats too easily trivialize the import of pastoral and detract from its pragmatic value. Such stereotypes are predicated on the simple fact of geographical separateness and consequently seem to suggest mere escapism as the whole point of the pastoral exercise. I hope to show that the revitalizing power of what can loosely be called 'pastoral' has as much to do with everywhere as elsewhere, and that Lawrence's Etruscan sketches are thus pastoral in their implication. Secondly, the truly pastoral excursion, if it is to have some significance beyond escapist fantasy, must stand in some positive relation to the idea of a 'code of positive values'; there must be some discernible moral dividend that can be brought back to the non-pastoral world if the pastoral 'elsewhere' is to stand in any significant relationship to 'everywhere'. I hope to show that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is an argument in favour of what Terry Eagleton calls a 'materialist morality'.

In philosophical terms, the successive versions of what finally came to be called *Lady Chatterley's Lover* insist on the same sense of 'cosmic continuity' which infused the Etruscan sketches. The following passages (from the first and second versions respectively) show the effect:

²⁴ Michael Squires, '*Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "Pure Seclusion"', in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p.116.

All her body felt like the dark interlacing of the boughs of an oak-wood, softly humming in a wind, and humming inaudibly with the myriad-myriad unfolding of buds. Meanwhile the birds had their heads laid on their shoulders, and slept with delight, in the vast interlaced intricacy of the forest of her body. [p.39] The trees seemed to be bulging at anchor on a tide, and the heave of the slope of the park was alive. She herself was a different creature, sensitive and alert, quietly slipping among the live presences of trees and hills and a far-off star. [p.382]

Though it must be conceded that Lawrence's most direct evocations of this continuity are perhaps less effective when viewed in isolation from the *Chatterley* novels' cumulative burden of implication, the sheer unifying energy of these moments is both undeniable and worthy of further consideration. Lawrence wishes to evoke the idea that what is alive partakes of a community of essence, an interrelatedness of unfathomable complexity which accords with the Heraclitean idea of 'flux'.

On such a reading, the role of poets and philosophers – which truly is a singular one, if (as Lawrence insists) poetry and philosophy should never have been split – is to 'know' the unknowable portion of reality on our behalf and to bring it to our awareness through artistic creation. When Lawrence blurs the boundaries and draws mysterious correspondences between Constance Chatterley and the trees of Wragby Wood, this is not facile anthropomorphism or mere 'pathetic fallacy'. Rather, it is a different order of sense-making from that which we habitually associate with rationality – one which suggests and even insists that there may be more to the idea of an enchanted forest than our over-regulated, rational minds can ever accommodate. Vision need not be merely optical to be of worth: 'kodak'-vision, as

Lawrence realised, is not real – what it registers is only the appearance of what is real. Indeed, the assumption that reality is what we can plainly ‘see’ to be true – with the concomitantly scientific assumption that we are ever learning to ‘see the truth’ with increasing clarity – is self-deluding. As Rorty suggests, rationality does not enable us to ‘hold up a mirror to nature’ so that we can see it all reflected in our minds with ever greater accuracy. What Connie thinks of as the ‘spirit of the wood’ is not, on a pragmatic view, necessarily nonsensical: its ‘spirit’ could be said to be simply its share in the pre-conceptual order of reality.

This realm of relatedness, though it can be intuited by such as Heraclitus, or an ancient Etruscan artist, or D H Lawrence – and even postulated by modern physics – does not lend itself to direct conceptual apprehension. We do not, after all, ‘see’ reality in that way. As Lawrence would have said, you cannot ‘lay salt on its tail’. Even the reverential institution of the *idea* of the wood having a spirit will not adequately serve to tell such a truth; for the truth of such an idea can only ever be in its perpetual *retelling*. The spontaneous stream of derivation has value, whereas what is derivative does not: self-conscious poeticisms about nature are, we recall, the stock-in-trade of Clifford Chatterley and his ready-made abstractions.

Given its depth of philosophical import, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is nothing less than a call for the world’s renewal. Though this cannot but sound ambitious, it is a long way from the misguided propheticism which Lawrence so dramatically renounced in *The Escaped Cock*. Instead of seeking to renew the world through top-down imposition, Lawrence’s revitalizing energy now comes from the ground up – and even from below, since even our unreflective assumptions regarding the nature of groundedness are implicitly held up to question in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. In simple terms, the *Chatterley* project urges us to look anew at the raw stuff of what is

contingently 'out there'; for if our act of reconsideration can be sufficiently radical – a re-visioning of reality rather than a mere revising, extending and elaborating of what we think we already know about it – such a looking-anew can yield us new cross-sections through reality. And in pragmatic terms, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* seeks to persuade us that a new cross-section through reality will better serve our human purposes – not least because the novel's epiphanic power is sufficient to persuade us that there are human purposes available to us which are other and better than those we currently pursue.

The trees of Wragby Wood are again a case in point. Version three of the novel explicitly contrasts them with the 'harsh insentience of the outer world' (p.65), and Connie experiences something of their mystery and timelessness:

She liked the *inwardness* of the remnant of forest, the unspeaking reticence of the old trees. They seemed a very power of silence, and yet, a vital presence. [...] Perhaps they were only waiting for the end: to be cut down, cleared away – the end of the forest; for them, the end of all things. But perhaps their strong and aristocratic silence, the silence of strong trees, meant something else. [p.65 – Lawrence's emphasis]

Lawrence emphasizes the idea of the trees' inwardness. I suggest we err in assuming this to be their 'essence' in the sense of some irreducible, ideal quality of 'tree' which is irrefutably, ontologically 'out there' in the universe, existing in trees but independently of our experience of them. Such a putative essence is like the rainbow's end: its apparent 'there'-ness is an effect of the standpoint from which we perceive it – for if we try to move towards it, it cannot but appear to be elsewhere. Rather, the inwardness of the trees is their participation in the flux of being: their

share in the seven-tenths of the 'dark matter'. If we are minded to speak glibly or sententiously of trees, unreflectively arrogating them in the service of our pre-existing concept of 'trees', we ought instead to think of Clifford and the way he abstracts Wragby Wood into an idea which gratifies both his sentimentality and his greed of ownership. Rather than arrogantly hiving off the idea of 'trees', we would do better to share in the trees' reticence: for as Rorty suggests in relation to the word 'giraffe', we ought not to assume that when we use the word 'tree', we are 'cutting nature at the joints'.

Significantly, Lawrence does not speak of the trees in terms of solidity and permanence (in fact, it is the precariousness of their existence which is emphasized). Instead, he speaks of their silence and 'vital presence'. Their existence is, in an important sense, as contingent as our subjective awareness of them – even while their timelessness can be said to approach eternity. The trees of Wragby wood seem as though they are held in existence as the fruit of Lawrence's creative cross-section through reality – and he happens to afford us a kindly cross-section, which does not entail the reduction of trees to timber or mere property. The trees are at once eternal and ephemeral; for Lawrence achieves, via a heightened mode of attention, a balance in which the trees are perceived but not taken for granted – thus their existence, in that sense, depends on ours as perceivers of them. Accordingly, the vexed question of subjectivity is here dispersed: in the above passage, the trees are as subjectively present as Connie and are seemingly as capable of bearing human attributes – even while the repetition of 'perhaps' is enough to remind us that we should not presume to know even what those attributes might be. Whereof one cannot speak definitively, one is arguably better advised to share in the reticence thereof – even if that reticence can be sustained only for a meditative interlude.

Even so, it would be a poor pragmatist whose circumspection about the word 'tree' led him to subsume 'dendrology' under 'metaphysics'. Admittedly, the tree, like the giraffe, is only 'there' in the sense that we can consensually use human language to demarcate the existence of a tree as a nexus of potential 'tree-like' sensory experiences. As Richard Rorty demonstrated with his hypothetical 'alien from outer space', we must be mindful that a different (that is, non-human or culturally 'other') orientation toward the flux of reality would by no means necessarily hive off exactly the same area of materiality that we designate as 'a tree' and reify it into an isolate conceptual entity. At that rate, the word 'tree' is more like negotiable currency than eternal truth. Nevertheless, we all trade in the idea of 'tree' without much haggling over what a tree is. The important point is that, even while the word 'tree' is used profitably enough by all of us, there is *not* some ontological verity or essential quality of 'tree' which exists outside of our linguistic consensus. In language terms, there is no mysterious destiny which shapes the ends of trees: we rough-hew them as we may, according to present human purposes, which can change radically if our way of perceiving the world changes – and our way of perceiving the world *is* the way we articulate it. In that sense, the world changes when we choose to change what we say about it. This is Lawrence's point in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The trees of Wragby Wood change as human purposes change. The trees can reflect and embody our creative sense of participation in the world – or they can be cut down and used for pit props and trench warfare, abstracted from the world by the same destructive processes by which we abstract ourselves from it.

This is the heart of Lawrence's mature philosophy as set out in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Though the third version is far closer to novelistic showing than philosophical telling, there is a passage in the second version which gives the reader a

compellingly immediate sense of a mode of consciousness which intuitively participates in the flow of reality:

The quick of the universe is in our own bodies, deep in us. And as we see the universe, so it is. But also, it is much more than we ever see or can see. And as the soul changes in us, turns over with a new creative move, the whole aspect of things changes. And again we see the universe as it is. But it is not as we saw it before. It is an utterly new reality. We are clothed with a new awareness, in a new world. The universe is all the things that man knows or has known or ever will know. It is all there. We only need become aware. [p.82]

Again, we see the delicate equilibrium implied by Lawrence's creative act of attention to the world: trees (like daisies) are eternal, and will outlast mankind; and yet, at the same time, they somehow depend on our awareness of them – on how we articulate them, how we *say* them into being. Lawrence's evocation of our vital inseparability from the infinite swirl implies the need for a richer, more creative way of attending to the world. And this implies a more mature and poetic understanding of the role of language. Radical questions arise. How should we articulate the world? What should we say about it? It would exist without us; yet it changes as we change what we say about it. If what we say about the world is so important, presumably we should think before we speak. But how should we think about the world? As Lawrence puts it: 'How does one think, when one is thinking passionately? Not in words at all, but in strange surges and cross-currents of emotion which are only half-rendered by words' (p.133, version one). As Connie realised in relation to flowers, only a genuinely poetic empathy with the world can hope to render 'the other half' of human experience. Thus Lawrence's message in regard to consciousness is a plea for

a particular *kind* of consciousness: one which has shed its compulsion to lay hold of life, and which, in a kindlier manner, acknowledges the reality of participation. Such an acknowledgement entails a more delicate and circumspect apprehension of the world, as Lawrence advocates in a passage from version two:

Whoever wants life must go softly towards life...softly, gently, with infinitely sensitive hands and feet, and a heart that is full and free from self-will...[one must] approach life again. [...] With quietness, with an abandon of self-assertion and a fullness of the deep, true self one can approach another human being, and know the delicate best of life, the touch. [p.323]

This is the role of the gamekeeper in each version of the novel. He is, so to speak, ‘the man who died’ resurrected in the landscape of early twentieth-century Nottinghamshire. He has the same humble determination to abjure all past misappropriations of life and ‘come at’ it again cleanly in search of some liveable accommodation therewith. Michael Squires, in his study of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, notes this element of retreat from the world as being the first stage of ‘the pastoral pattern of retreat-reorientation-return’.²⁵ In all three versions there is much emphasis on the emotional damage suffered by the gamekeeper in the past: his ‘big wound from old contacts’ means that he is frequently described using words such as ‘recoil’, ‘refuge’ and ‘alone’. Squires describes the process of retreat and reorientation in the following terms: ‘Thus Mellors, in retreating to the secluded wood, gradually becomes *like* the wood – silent and strong and vital, yet similarly scarred – showing again the interaction of landscape and mind in the pastoral novel.’²⁶ Again, this goes beyond pathetic fallacy. The trees are not a mere Disneyesque backdrop made to

²⁵ Ibid., pp.123-4.

²⁶ Ibid., p.119.

match the mood: Mellors' 'like'-ness to the wood is here a genuine community of essence – 'like *with*' is perhaps a better expression than 'like to'. The trees, participating as they do in the continuum of reality, embody elements of consciousnesses past and present. It is in *this* sense that the trees of Wragby Wood can be said to 'remember' the days of Robin Hood; and it is in this sense that the trees, though their days may in one sense appear to be numbered, share in what is ultimately timeless. As Squires notes:

By dissolving time and memory, the *locus amoenus* approaches eternity [...] The intersection of the *locus amoenus* and the present moment has the mystical power to unfetter the communicant.²⁷

Mellors retreats to the wood in order to regain his individuality in both senses of the word: in the singular sense as he sheds past selves and past involvements, and in the collective sense as the pastoral experience renews and restores his capacity for relatedness. Connie's resort to the wood has served the same dual purpose. But a restored capacity for relatedness naturally implies a process of moving forward from the pastoral interlude and facing anew the outside world and the future. As Squires states, 'the pastoral is most effective when it remains an interlude'.²⁸ Reorientation must be followed by a return, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a continuation of the process of renegotiation Lawrence tentatively began in the Etruscan sketches and developed in *The Escaped Cock*. Though this continuation must necessarily work its way towards a wider world and a recognisably realistic present (with all the banality of circumstance and petty hindrance from which the pastoral refuge was a necessary retreat), I wish to show that the sense of contingency and epistemological freedom implied by the pastoral element within *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is immediately

²⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 123.

relevant to all of the novel's other concerns. Meditations on the nature of trees (or even giraffes) will be to no avail unless the lesson of participatory consciousness can be brought to bear upon pressing questions regarding human purpose, morality, sexuality and wider solidarity, both within the fictional world of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the world inhabited by its readers.

Of Human Purposes

'Human purpose' will serve as a collective term for the kind of existential questions with which *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is concerned. Though it is a vague enough definition, it is at least pragmatically so: it presupposes that there is a kind or way of being in the world which we can usefully call *human* being; and while the word 'purpose' allows for the apparently inevitable sense of conscious intentionality which we somehow feel to be part of the human condition, it does not presuppose what human purpose actually is or should be. Though we cannot assume, of course, that such circumspection affords us a degree of detachment which will in turn afford us an Archimedean degree of leverage on the world, it will do as a sufficiently neutral starting point. Lawrence's concern is (as it has long been) the point at which intentional or *self*-conscious human consciousness supervenes on what has hitherto been a state of *unconscious* participation. As with the rape scene in *The Escaped Cock*, it is the point at which a disruptive purposiveness seems to cast its shadow over our insouciance and makes us the opposite: solicitous, in the sense that we are overtaken by *caring* about things – even, and even especially, caring about our very awareness that we are no longer unconsciously participating. By this stage, consciousness itself seems inexplicably to exist at the expense of our human well-being. Terry Eagleton, in a chapter of his book *After Theory* entitled 'Truth, Virtue

and Objectivity', identifies the problem which arises from this apparent surfeit of consciousness:

All men and women are in pursuit of well-being, but the problem lies in knowing what this consists in. Perhaps it means something different for everybody, or for every period and culture. It is because what counts as well-being is far from clear that we need elaborate discourses like moral and political philosophy to help unravel it. If we were transparent to ourselves, there might be no need for these esoteric ways of talking. We might be able to know what it was to live well just by looking into ourselves, or simply by instinct.²⁹

I suggest the idea of transparency is a useful one, for it accords with Lawrence's pre-objective evocations of cosmic continuity, where nothing is as 'there' as we once thought. It accords, too, with the idea behind the title of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*: our assumption that 'Nature' conveniently reflects us to ourselves has long since outlived its usefulness. To replace reflection with transparency is, of course, to substitute one ocular metaphor for another: where previously we saw our 'selves' reflected, we now see through ourselves. Nevertheless, this act of substitution is again a pragmatic one. It suggests that our habitual metaphor of reflection has been a source of mischief inasmuch as the selves we have seen reflected by nature have somehow always been the selves we have expected to see; and it implies that we should instead be less complacent in our ideas as to what we are and where we stand in the order of being. We must look into ourselves and be prepared to 'see' transparency, however counter this runs to our assumptions regarding the relative solidity of selfhood. Eagleton, citing an idea of

²⁹ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin Books (2003) 2004), p. 110.

Martin Heidegger, notes that ‘to live authentically is to embrace our own nothingness, accepting the fact that our existence is contingent, ungrounded and unchosen’.³⁰

Though it is perhaps unnerving to think of ourselves as being no more essentially ‘there’ than Rorty’s giraffe, we must hold onto our selves (and our nerve) at this point. Just as it would be a poor pragmatist who could bring himself to say nothing about the word ‘tree’, it would be an equally poor pragmatist who sought to remedy a perceived excess of human self-consciousness by doing away with his own body – and the message of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is surely that the body is part of the solution rather than the problem. In Rorty’s expression, the body now becomes more ‘in point’: it is now seen as more centrally relevant to our ideas of consciousness than has been hitherto supposed.

Where Rorty writes of giraffes and Lawrence writes of trees so as to relativize human self-consciousness, Eagleton compares human beings with toads in terms of their respective ways of being in the world, and seeks thereby to isolate the point at which we begin to differ – or begin to *think* ourselves different – from animals. In the course of his comparison Eagleton cites a quotation from Alasdair MacIntyre which usefully brings together our present concerns: ‘Human identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity.’³¹ We are, in *that* sense, only different from animals to the extent that we literally ‘think ourselves different’. It is possible to think ourselves in the other direction, without the negative overtones usually associated with the idea of people ‘becoming like animals’. One thinks here of Lawrence’s Etruscan sketches in which he constantly blurs human and animal attributes, insisting all the while that our human physicality – our particular *kind of* bodied-ness – does not separate us from the vital swirl but rather guarantees our

³⁰ Ibid., p.210.

³¹ Ibid., p.155. The quotation is taken from Alasdair MacIntyre’s book *Dependent Rational Animals*.

participation in it. Furthermore, to acknowledge and embrace the fact that our physicality entails our animality is by no means to abdicate our responsibilities as moral beings. Again, such acknowledgement emerges as the precondition of our capacity to *be* moral. Macintyre observes:

‘It is the mortal, fragile, suffering, ecstatic, needy, dependent, desirous, compassionate body which furnishes the basis of all moral thought [...]

It is because of the body, not in the first place because of Enlightenment abstraction, that we can speak of morality as universal’.³²

The link between the our physical and moral selves is, in fact, our bodies, for they are the ultimate guarantee of our ‘kind’-ness.

Eagleton’s celebration of toads gives the reader an appealing and accessible glimpse of what consciousness might be supposed to be like when it is purely participatory:

[Toads] know by instinct how to do what it is best for toads to do. They simply follow their toad-like nature, and for them to do this is for them to prosper. It is to be a good toad rather than a bad one, living a fulfilling, toad-like existence. Good toads are very toad-like.’³³

Though there is something of flippancy in Eagleton’s style here (as indeed there is in much of Lawrence’s most serious philosophising), it is well-suited to its purpose: to show a simple and self-sufficient transparency of consciousness which is free from the sort of reflexive mental interventionism which seems to bedevil and betray human consciousness. Having postulated such a benign state of toad-like insouciance,

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p.110.

Eagleton goes on to isolate the crucial stage where human consciousness becomes more complex than that of toads, and he does this by carrying forward the idea of what it is to be ‘good’:

[The goodness of toads] is not the kind of goodness you can congratulate them on, however, since being toad-like is something they can’t help being. It is not an achievement. Toads do not win medals for being toads. You can have a good toad, but not a virtuous one. On one view...human beings have to work fairly hard to become human beings, and so can indeed be congratulated on being human. Because we are able to be false to our natures, there is some virtue in our being true to them.³⁴

Though the pragmatist will necessarily have reservations about the essentialist implications of a phrase such as ‘human nature’, he will surely have no such misgivings about the naturalness of Eagleton’s toads; and if we cannot conceive of a comparably natural *human* state of being, the word ‘nature’ loses its meaning and ceases to do any work for us. Since we wish pragmatically to hold onto the worthwhileness of believing that there *is* ‘human nature’, the word ‘virtue’ (having its roots in both ‘man’ and ‘worth’) becomes important. Toads cannot help being toad-like: if this is because they simply do not know any better, then at least they do not know any worse. People can and often do know worse, often while insisting that they know better than others. Such people are wrong, false, immoral, and lack virtue. If they are false as human beings, they are not being human. If they are not part of human kind, they are degenerate, for they have departed from kind. If we keep the word ‘virtue’ clear of all associations with conventional codes of morality – just as the word ‘good’

³⁴ Ibid.

carries no moral overtones in relation to toads – to live a virtuous life is to conform to what Eagleton sees as the Aristotelian definition of virtue: ‘the technique or know-how of being human.’³⁵ This has been the lesson learned by ‘the man who died’ in *The Escaped Cock*: he died from his pretensions toward being something higher than human and thereby discovered the ‘virtue’ inherent in being a naked human being who simply participates in the phenomenal world. Though it is ironic in view of the furore which surrounded its publication, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is similarly an exercise in discovering what it is to be a virtuous human being.

Eagleton goes on to suggest that a virtuous human being is one who is ‘flourishing’, for ‘the freedom... to be at one’s best without undue fear... is a vital condition of human flourishing’.³⁶ In a passage which brings together all the elements in Rorty’s trinity of contingency, irony and solidarity, Eagleton makes a case for the kind of freedom necessary for people to flourish and be virtuous – a freedom which axiomatically cannot be associated with immorality or indecency of any kind, and which arguably equates with the kind of freedom and self-realization sought by Mellors and Connie in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Writing of freedom and the way in which it is related to love and ‘the act of relationship itself’, Eagleton declares:

To be granted this kind of freedom is to be able to be at one’s best without undue fear. It is thus the vital precondition of human flourishing. You are free to realise your nature, but not in the falsely naturalistic sense of simply expressing an impulse because it happens to be yours. That would not rule out torture and murder. Rather, you realise your nature in a way which allows the other to do so too. And that means that you realise your nature at its best – since if the other’s

³⁵ Ibid., p.125.

³⁶ Ibid., p.170.

self-fulfilment is the medium through which you flourish yourself, you are not at liberty to be violent, dominative or self-seeking, [for] you cannot really have this process of reciprocal self-realization except among equals.³⁷

This, I suggest, expresses the sense of freedom and joy which Lawrence found in the depictions of Etruscan dance: to be free, and flourishing, and realizing one's human self insouciantly and reciprocally with other selves of human kind and with equal kindness. Lawrence's 'spontaneity' and 'touch' accord entirely with Eagleton's ideas of freedom and reciprocity, and it is with a sense of relief that the reader of Lawrence who has endured the horrors of *The Plumed Serpent* finally discovers what Lawrence finally discovered: that blood consciousness need not be, after all, a harrowing ordeal of coercion and cruelty, but rather one of natural consanguinity and mutual flourishing among our selves and the rest of the phenomenal world. Thus *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is an enquiry into the nature of human flourishing – wherein Clifford's refusal to flourish is the price he must pay to preserve a wretchedly parasitic, degenerate existence which robs others of their right to flourish, while Connie and Mellors are willing to seek their flourishing at any cost. Eagleton, carrying forward this idea of human flourishing, offers a definition of human nature which avoids the pitfalls of essentialism and also encapsulates the lesson of Lawrence's failed messiahship and 'leadership' period:

Our function is to be functionless [and] to realise our nature as an end in itself. We need the word 'nature' here to avoid having to say 'realise *ourselves* as an end in itself', since a good deal of what we are

³⁷ Ibid.

capable of should by no means see the light of day. So 'nature' here means something like 'the way we are most likely to flourish'.³⁸

Thus our tentative definition of human purpose must include the idea that there is such a thing as human nature – something which is not presumed to be an ontological essence, but rather something which is held sacred by the quality of intentionality which constitutes those purposes we shall regard as human. And though *The Escaped Cock* has implied that the terms of our philosophical discourse should be de-divinized, we have seen how the tale effectively *re*-divinized them: there *must* be something we hold sacred in our idea of what Eagleton calls our human flourishing. And so long as the sanctity of human life is thought of as a worthwhile human purpose – as Lawrence insists it should – kindness will be thought desirable while degeneracy will not. For if there is to be any point in saying that it is natural to be human, then there must be human purposes which we are to think of as natural. If human life is to be held sacred, then not everything that people are capable of doing should be regarded as falling within the ambit of human flourishing. Kindness, by definition, has its limits.

Such a definition of human purpose is content to be descriptive – even evocative – rather than normative, and is pragmatically more concerned with what we humanly *do* than with what we might wish to claim we essentially *are*. If humanity cannot be expressed as some mysterious ontological essence or 'given', then human purposes – and therefore humanity itself – become subject to free and open debate between competing vocabularies. This is, to say the least, unsettling. We may prefer the relative security of believing (or hoping) that there is something about being human which is essentially indisputable or divinely ordained. But the price of human

³⁸ Ibid., p.120.

kindness is eternal vigilance and a willingness to defend one's conception of what it means to be human. Lawrence's purpose in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is to express just such a willingness. Accordingly, he sets languages of human kindness against languages of cruelty, exploitation and degeneracy, and is willing to abide by the outcome. Language, it becomes clear, is crucial to our humanity.

Kindness

Inevitably, Eagleton's definition of human nature – as that which is congruent with our human flourishing – raises questions as to the nature and function of human language. There is an inescapably human irony in finding that 'we need the word "nature"'³⁹ to express the functionless nature of our being. That irony inheres in the very fact of our linguistic being. The inception of language is coincident with what I have called the moment of supervention – that seemingly inescapable instant where our thinking becomes a self-conscious thinking *about*. This cannot be otherwise, since we must use language to construct possible worlds to live in. So we cannot, it seems, share in the happy candour of primroses or the self-realization of toads without arguing in favour of so doing. But to acknowledge as much is by no means to compromise happiness or self-realization, as though the states we are describing when we use those words must somehow be suspect if they have to be the subject of argument. Happiness and self-realization are not debateable in *that* sense. As moral beings, we hold to the conviction that although happiness has to be argued towards, our moral sense is sufficiently developed to enable us to recognise happiness 'when we get there'; and we must concomitantly hope that we will not be seduced along the way into some lesser state to which we are then condemned by self-delusion,

³⁹ Ibid.

perversity or compulsion. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is nothing if not an argumentative novel, and its subject is the way (or rather, ways) in which language supervenes on consciousness and makes possible different worlds – some of which are *arguably* better than others, and therefore worth arguing *for*. Eagleton, in a passage which could have been written about *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and its status as a work of philosophy, notes the inevitability of this simultaneous sparking of language, argument and possibility:

Because we are linguistic animals, our nature, if we have one at all, is far more tractable and complicated than that of toads. Because of language and the cultural possibilities it brings in its wake, we can transform what we are in ways that non-linguistic animals cannot. To discover what we are, to know our own natures, we have to think hard about it; and the result is that we have come up over the centuries with a bewildering array of versions of what it is to be human [...] The history of moral philosophy is littered with rusting, abandoned models of the good life.⁴⁰

Lady Chatterley's Lover puts forward its own vision of humanity, and does so at the expense of a version which it depicts as degrading, false, and fit for nothing but abandonment. These versions might respectively be called the participatory and abstractive models. Lawrence, in arguing for the participatory model (as he does in both *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and his essay 'A Propos'), shows that it is vitally important for us to pay attention to the way in which we use language to construct ourselves – or as Eagleton puts it, linguistically to 'transform what we are'. For if we *can* instinctively infer that our human existence is something that has its being within

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.110-1.

an ineffably wider harmony, then our acquisition of language need not *necessarily* imply our expulsion from that Edenic state. If language, with all its attendant complexities of argument and possibility, can conveniently be gathered under the heading of ‘the mental life’, Lawrence plainly identifies (via his most obvious spokesperson in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Tommy Dukes) the trap we must avoid:

While you *live* your life, you are in some way an organic whole with all life. But once you start the mental life, you pluck the apple. You’ve severed the connection between the apple and the tree: the organic connection. And if you’ve got nothing in your life *but* the mental life, then you yourself are a plucked apple, you’ve fallen off the tree. [p.37]

The obvious conclusion to draw – and it is one which, in the light of my foregoing discussion of the trees of Wragby Wood, can now be drawn with a peculiar sense of literality – is that we are wrong to use language and its ratiocinative capability to cut ourselves off from the tree. We should not abstract ourselves from participation in the phenomenal world. And the only way we have to avoid falling into the trap of abstraction is to use language so as to argue in the *other* direction: to use it to affirm our relatedness to the whole – our *like*-ness to trees – and to explore possible ways of expressing our naturally consequent feeling of kindness as part of the phenomenal world. Eagleton conjures the exhilarating sense of possibility inherent in language while simultaneously indicating the potential pitfall where we stand to lose our very identity – for it is where we are at risk of losing our assurance of sameness:

To acquire language involves a quantum leap which transfigures one’s entire world, including the world of one’s senses. It is not just being

an animal with a linguistic bonus. Yet Alasdair MacIntyre is surely right to insist that even as cultural beings, 'we remain animal selves with animal identities'. Between the non-linguistic and the linguistic there is what one might call transformative continuity.⁴¹

Lawrence's preoccupation with consciousness arises from what he saw as humankind's recurring failure to negotiate this transformation from the animal to the human, resulting in a discontinuity between the two whereby we 'cut ourselves off'. As early as 1919 he had written of 'this struggle for verbal consciousness' which is 'a very great part of life. It is not superimposition of a theory. It is the passionate struggle into conscious being'.⁴² He further describes the malaise in his 'Apropos' essay:

Culture and civilisation have taught us to separate the word from the deed, the thought from the act or the physical reaction. We now know that the act does not necessarily follow on from the thought. We now know that the act does not necessarily follow on the thought. In fact, thought and action, word and deed are two separate forms of consciousness, two separate lives which we lead. [p.307]

The passion of Lawrence's preoccupation with this bedevilling sense of separateness arose both from the feelings of estrangement which were his childhood legacy and the subsequent disaster of his attempts to use language to enforce participation via manipulative recruitment of others. His efforts to achieve worldwide harmony by means of self-conscious linguistic intervention backfired, for he succeeded only in exacerbating his sense of *discontinuity* from the world. But the lesson of Lawrence's

⁴¹ Ibid., p.157.

⁴² D H Lawrence, 'Foreword to Women in Love', in D H Lawrence, *Women in Love*, David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey & John Worthen (eds.) (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.486.

failure does have value for us inasmuch as it forced him to achieve his personal 'transformative continuity' by other means. The message he emerged with, in the person of 'the man who died', is a simple one: we can say what we will, but we ought never to have the will to say ourselves into separateness by trying to impose our will on others. We can call the alternative kindness, continuity, participation, or solidarity; but as with happiness, we can only argue in favour of it, using the language we choose as befitting it, and hope we will recognise it when we achieve it.

At that rate, the nature of the good life and how best to achieve it become matters of negotiation. Though Lawrence the pragmatist learned to reject the abstract idealism of capitalized essence-words like Goodness and Truth, his was an abiding preoccupation with the possible meanings of such words. His mature philosophy can easily be criticized (as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* often is) for its failure to provide us with a comprehensive vision of social and spiritual regeneration; and admittedly, wistful vignettes of happy country crafts-folk, with men in red trousers sitting on homemade wooden stools or dancing around maypoles, are hardly inspiring in terms of immediate practicability. But neither are they the point of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: the novel's ultimate 'good' (though our sophistication as readers can easily mislead us into overlooking it) is actually to be found in its discovery of our likeness to trees and flowers and even new-born chicks, in our innate wish to flourish as they flourish, and in our need to remain mindful of our continuity with the world as we transform ourselves, using language, into humankind. As Mark Spilka notes:

Lawrence projects no social program [in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*], but a change in the mode, condition, or quality of individual being. To 'make the future', he would rouse us all to life – to individual life.

Admittedly, this does not solve the problems of the future, but it does make them worth solving.⁴³

Such a solution can only be the fruit of a right orientation on our part, an act of faith which is willing to 'make the future' out of the present, with no supernatural guarantees to underwrite that faith. The truth of Lawrence's vision in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is entirely consonant with the spirit of contingency in Eagleton's comments on the idea of absolute truth:

Absolute truth does not mean non-historical truth: it does not mean the kind of truths which drop from the sky [...] On the contrary, they are truths which are discovered by argument, evidence, experiment, investigation. A lot of what is taken as absolutely true at any given time will no doubt turn out to be false. Most apparently watertight scientific hypotheses have turned out to be full of holes. Not everything which is considered to be true is actually true. But it remains the case that it cannot be just raining from my viewpoint.⁴⁴

Surely enough (using that expression to suggest relative usefulness rather than absolute surety), what was once the 'absolute' scientific truth of the universe has turned out to be full of holes. There would seem to be much more 'there' than has hitherto been supposed. When the Lawrence who wrote *Apocalypse* extolled the fullness of zodiacal space over the vast stretches of emptiness posited by the astronomical view of space, he spoke more surely – and surely more usefully – than most people might have supposed at the time. Though the truth of his vision is, of course, no more absolute than any other, Lawrence's favourite image of the rainbow

⁴³ Mark Spilka, *The Love Ethic of D H Lawrence* (Indiana University Press, 1955), pp.193-4.

⁴⁴ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, pp.108-9.

can usefully be used to illustrate the elements of contingency and negotiation which writers such as Rorty and Eagleton see as inseparable from our pursuit of truth. The rainbow is 'there' from our particular standpoint. We instinctively feel that it is beautiful and uplifting and therefore good, and that it is therefore an experience to be shared with others. Nevertheless, we realise that there are other people, standing some distance from us in various directions, who are quite likely to be seeing other rainbows; and we realise that the rainbows they are seeing might be just as beautiful and just as real to them as the one we are seeing. But some people will not be in a position to see a rainbow; and we might, kindly, feel that they might enjoy the experience and feel similarly uplifted by it. Thus we might invite them to share our vision. And even while there are other people who can already see a rainbow from where they are standing, we might think ours is a particularly good piece of ground from which to view a rainbow – one which provides us with an especially advantageous viewing point, or which sets our particular rainbow against a more pleasing backdrop. Some may accept our invitation, while others remain unpersuaded. Some may invite us to share *their* viewpoint so that we can appreciate the relative merits of their rainbow. Others may have no interest at all in rainbows, or dismiss them as illusory or as works of the devil, and we may feel regret at their lack of enthusiasm even while we try to empathise with them. Still others (perhaps like Clifford Chatterley) may consider that rainbows are far better appreciated in paintings and poetry than at first-hand.

So far, our willingness to acknowledge and accommodate others' ideas regarding rainbows – what Rorty would call our liberal irony – could easily be taken for the kind of hand-wringing liberalistic relativism in which any and all possible views of or about rainbows must be deemed acceptable for fear of causing offence to

the hand-wringers or the sort of minorities which they choose to pick out for displays of favouritism. But this would be a long way removed from Lawrence's brand of shin-kicking argumentativeness as found in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; and Terry Eagleton makes the point that our knowledge of the contingent nature of truth by no means rules out passionate advocacy:

The opposite of intellectual authoritarianism is not scepticism, lukewarmness, or the conviction that the truth always lies in the middle. It is a readiness to accept that you may cling to your basic principles quite as fervently as I do to mine. Indeed, only by acknowledging this am I going to be able to worst those Neanderthal prejudices of yours.⁴⁵

Again, Eagleton (like Lawrence) uses flippancy to make the point. As with Rorty's irony, Eagleton's position allows for a quality of steadfastness – a determination to hold to certain basic principles as the 'bottom line' which underwrites every other aspect of one's moral behaviour – without mistaking one's steadfastness as a justification for moral absolutism or political correctness. Though we will hold to ideas of human kindness and solidarity, we accept that there will always be differences. But once again, Eagleton rescues this position from apparent impasse by asserting that even our differences imply our human likeness – if only in the curious way in which the fact of our differences seems to imply the existence of a deeper level at which we *agree* to differ. Again taking an example of animality as usefully analogous in the sense that animality is continuous with our humanity, Eagleton offers the following:

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.201.

We have no quarrel with stoats [...] Stoats cannot affirm their difference from us. They do not have the concept of difference. Only someone with whom you can communicate can affirm their difference from you. Only within some kind of common framework is conflict possible. Socialists and capitalists, or feminists and patriarchs, are not at daggers drawn if they are simply speaking about different things. Difference presupposes affinity. The shared nature which makes for murderous contention, however, also makes for solidarity.⁴⁶

Thus our concept of differing in some *absolute* way from other people is constructed inasmuch as it is, in the terms of the present argument, ultimately impossible to be utterly different from other ‘kinds of people’ – for the very idea of humankind-ness does not comprehend the possibility of such utter difference. If Alasdair MacIntyre’s idea of our human continuity with animality ultimately implies that we are in some sense not *that* different even from stoats, then our sense of differing utterly from other people is put in context. This sense of animality must, by definition, be something we carry forward through the process of our transformative continuity – for if we fail to carry it, we do not achieve that continuity. It must be preserved, even though the supervention of language and our consequent ability to construct linguistic selves necessarily entail the possibility of difference. Indeed, we must embrace not only the possibility, but even the *likelihood* of such difference – so long as we preserve the element of like-ness. For as long as we can we can construct selves which seem different from other selves, further construction will always be a possibility for both sides, and difference need never mean the same as unlike-ness in the sense of unkindness. Humankind is all that should matter to us as human beings –

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.158-9.

for if we achieve it, we will not be discontinuous from the phenomenal world. As Eagleton concedes, 'it looks as though we simply have to argue with each other about what self-realization means; and it may be that the whole business is too complicated for us to arrive at a satisfactory solution'.⁴⁷

Tommy Dukes, Lawrence's spokesperson in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, argues accordingly – in favour of a future in which human beings will live in a 'democracy of touch' (p.75) which will constitute a 'field of consciousness'. He also argues *against* our present condition, in which we are only 'cerebrating makeshifts, mechanical and intellectual experiments'. Though much of Dukes' advocacy consists of prosecuting the status quo rather than defending specific alternatives, it is less negative than it might first appear. Our intellect is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, nor is a willingness to experiment. Mechanism is something we can choose to reject if it can be shown to run counter to our flourishing; and the idea of ourselves as 'cerebrating makeshifts' – once taken out of the context of Dukes' rather despairing speech – is arguably rather appealing: it suggests spontaneity, and a healthy sense of provisionality and adaptability as we carry on the work of continuously making our human selves and making our selves human. Thus Lawrence at least encourages us to believe that it is possible to argue constructively (even while an inattentive reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can easily mistake its constructive energy for wholesale iconoclasm). Michael Squires echoes this idea of construction in his introduction to the final version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

In each subsequent version the [two main] characters are better able to construct a fully human self out of the possibilities around them.

Connie and Mellors have an enduring significance...because they

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.123.

shape their code of morality not *out* of their culture's materials but *apart* from them; they are hostile to impediments, averse to what is counterfeit, appalled by what is cheap, whether of body or mind. At the same time they retain their humanity and their personal integrity by demanding to be re-rooted in the most regenerative experience possible – the sexual.⁴⁸

Abstraction

As Squires notes, what emerges most strongly in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is the determination of the central characters to negotiate themselves into an authentic and viable way of being and their courage in pursuit of that goal. These are qualities we associate with Lawrence himself and his pursuit of self-realization. The important point is that, however far afield the pursuit takes the protagonists, the goal is always (or should be) one of return – toward participation and kindness rather than abstraction and isolation. Again, this is Lawrence's intention as much as it is the one shared by Connie and Mellors, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is willing to argue quite vehemently about what is true and what is false. Again, Lawrence's combativeness – his willingness to get 'in among the crowd' – is by no means out of keeping with the contingent nature of the truth for which he is willing to fight. As Eagleton notes, even-handedness need not always be 'in the service of objectivity', for there are situations in which 'true judiciousness means taking sides'.⁴⁹ Though we cannot help but argue about truth, we must at least hold on to our instinct that what is 'true' is also, so to speak, 'honest to goodness'. Lawrence's polemical style in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* targets three impediments to self-realization which are also

⁴⁸ Michael Squires, introduction to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, pp.xxx-xxxii.

⁴⁹ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p.137.

arraigned by Terry Eagleton in his book *After Theory*. They are cultural sophistication, technology and human will, and I will consider each in relation to Lawrence's novel.

We have noted the importance Lawrence attaches on our physicality in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – the idea that we cannot humanly flourish unless we are doing so in our bodies – is the lesson learned by Connie in front of her mirror. Thus the body is seen as the precondition of our moral nature, for our physical selves embody our kindness. As Eagleton notes, 'the link between the natural and the human, the material and the meaningful, is morality. The moral body, so to speak, is where our material nature converges with meaning and value'.⁵⁰ However, our linguistic turn by no means guarantees that the element of transformative continuity – the continuation of our animal selves into the human selves we construct with language – will successfully carry through into the selves we construct. Language can be used oppositely: we can use it to *deny* our likeness to others, by insisting that others remain Other. Noting the frequency of this failure of transformative continuity, Eagleton states: 'What may persuade us that certain bodies lack all claim on our compassion is culture. Regarding some of our fellow humans as inhuman requires a fair degree of cultural sophistication. It means having literally to disregard the testimony of our senses.'⁵¹ This is clearly the malaise figured in Clifford Chatterley, who perversely rejects all sensuous engagement with the world in favour of his hermetic sophistication and effeteness, and who resolutely declares his essential unalike-ness to the pit-workers of Tevershall village.

Clifford's abuse of language in the service of abstraction might not be such a problem if it were confined to Wragby and his circle of literary cronies. But the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.157.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.156.

problem of language's failure to effect our transformative continuity is a pervasive one, affecting every sphere of human experience. Lawrence makes the point clear in a passage which, while perhaps appearing at first too homely and informal to be of any great philosophical import, shows how the power of language to devalue human experience is by no means exclusively at the disposal of cultured elites. The passage consists of Connie's musings as she makes her way 'home to Wragby':

'Home!' It was a warm word to use for that great weary warren. But then it was a word that had had its day. It was, somehow, cancelled. All the great words, it seemed to Connie, were cancelled for her generation: love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, all these great dynamic words were half-dead now, and dying from day to day. Home was a place you lived in, love was a thing you didn't fool yourself about, joy was a word you applied to a good Charleston, happiness was a term of hypocrisy you used out of cant, to bluff other people [...] As for sex, the last of the great words, it was just a cocktail term for an excitement that bucked you up for a while, then left you more ragged than ever. Frayed! It was as if the very material you were made of was cheap stuff, and was fraying out to nothing. [p.62]

As with the idea of us cutting ourselves off from the trees, there is a disturbing literality in Lawrence's '... the very stuff you were made of'. For the worlds we construct for the selves we simultaneously construct are too often abstractive worlds, and we can only inhabit them as abstracted selves. We have transformed our animal selves *discontinuously* into the human, using language to sever ourselves from reality. If humanity is not to be a part of the world, it must be apart *from* it. The raw stuff of reality will, of course, still be there – it cannot be otherwise. But now, in our state of

discontinuity, the words we use to describe reality somehow seem not to refer to anything real – we have no vital connection to the things we mean, and therefore cannot really, *humanly* mean them. They are not *true* words – because they are not ‘honest to goodness’. Life becomes an attenuated affair: ‘All that really remained was a stubborn stoicism... in the very experience of the nothingness of life, phase after phase [...] Always this was the last utterance: “So that’s *that!*”’ Our abstracted selves are indeed ‘cheap stuff’, for our fraying-out to nothing is the price we must pay for our discontinuity: we are no longer using language to keep ourselves woven into the fabric of existence.

Besides culture and language, technology is seen in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* to be abstraction by other means. Eagleton sees technology as of a piece with the rest of our culture in that it can be used to ‘interpose itself between human bodies. Technology is an extension of our bodies, which can blunt their capacity to feel for one another’.⁵² The obvious example in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is Clifford’s mounting obsession with his coal mines. The pit workers are necessarily dehumanized in his scheme of things, subordinated as they are to the workings of the machine. Trees have been abstracted from Wragby Wood to make pit props, and the pit compounds the process by abstracting coal and defacing the landscape. Clifford is concerned to maximise his coalmining profits by processing and selling the by-products – the process of abstraction is thus drawn out even further. Technology in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* has the same effect as Clifford’s cultural sophistication and use of language: it is used to extract more than is needful or proportionate – which is, in a sense, more than can ever really *be* there; and in doing so it makes everything less, leaving emptiness, redundancy and second-handedness behind it. Clifford’s

⁵² Ibid.

obsessive ‘listening-in’ to the radio, ‘with a blank, entranced expression on his face, like a person losing his mind’ (p.110), presents the reader with a perfect picture of this horror of endless abstraction.

There is something wilfully perverse in this processing of the very stuff of life into something so unsustaining, and human will is the third factor which Eagleton sees as distorting us from our true human selves. He notes ‘desire’ as something distinct from animal impulse – as something which can alienate us from our animality and thus pervert us from our true course, yet which (along with language) is another inescapable factor in our capacity to transform ourselves:

Human bodies are not self-sufficient: there is a gaping hole in their make-up known as desire, which makes them eccentric to themselves.

It is this desire which makes us non-animal: wayward, errant, unfulfilled. If we lived like wild beasts, our existence would be far less askew. Desire infiltrates our animal instincts and twists them out of true. Yet it is because of desire, among other things, that we are historical creatures, able to transform ourselves within the limits of our species-being. We are able to become self-determining, but only on the basis of a deeper dependency. This dependency is the condition of our freedom, not the infringement of it.⁵³

Eagleton further notes that it is our capacity to be ‘historical’ beings which gives rise to our teleological tendency: we think ‘we look as though we are going somewhere’ and tend to misread this sense of forward movement through time, forgetting that it is ‘all for its own sake’.⁵⁴ This is Clifford’s error: misconceiving his human capacity to

⁵³ Ibid., p.189.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.115.

have his existence simply within the stream of things, he is preoccupied with his standing in some grandly important scheme of things. He desires literary reputation, technological progress, money, power, and to perpetuate his name through posterity even at the price of illegitimacy. His efforts to impose his will on the world are akin to a Romanesque appropriation of history, for he selfishly desires power, reputation and personal aggrandizement at the expense of Etruscan-style participation.

To seek to abstract from the world a sense of selfhood which exceeds one's portion is self-defeating, as Clifford's worsening moral degeneracy reveals to the reader of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. To seek for selfhood beyond one's share is an act of moral dereliction, for in seeking beyond the bounds of one's due portion one is inevitably forced to abandon it: such a desperate self-seeker condemns his- or herself to exile. As Eagleton notes, 'to exist independently is to be a kind of cipher, [for] the self-willed have the emptiness of a tautology'. Such a failure of transformative continuity is a form of false consciousness – a profitless act of self-abstraction which seeks to gain the world at the expense of self: 'The will... confronts one enormous obstacle: itself. It can bend the world into any shape it pleases, but to do so it needs to be austere, unyielding, and thus exempt from its own fondness for plasticity. This austerity also means that it cannot really enjoy the world it has manufactured.'⁵⁵ This is Clifford's mania: caught up in his narcissistic pursuit of an acceptable version of himself, he unyieldingly seeks to make the world in his image so that it will reflect the self he has chosen. But even where these efforts succeed, the effect is deadly – for success feels like a validation of the seductive *idea* of self, and the mischief is thus compounded: life itself becomes utterly distorted by the desperate need to keep the reflection stable. This is a humanly untenable position, as evidenced by Clifford's

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.189-90.

eventual moral inversion and collapse into degeneracy. Eagleton suggests that ‘for freedom from limit to flourish, then, the will which thrusts us beyond those limits has to go’.⁵⁶ This is arguably the lesson learned by Mellors: seeking only self-protective isolation in the aftermath of past hurts, he has wilfully kept himself free, outside the limits of participation; but he knows he must eventually find his way back if he is to flourish.

Clifford

As always with Lawrence, there is no such progress on the wider philosophical front without a concomitant ‘shedding of sickness’ on the personal front. Again, with Lawrence, this always involves the discarding of past selves; and curiously in this context, the character of Michaelis (who appears only in the final version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*) is seen to have something of the *revenant* about him. Though he is known to be partly based on an acquaintance of Lawrence (the writer Michael Arlen), he can readily strike the reader as being an updated version of the Cyril Mersham of ‘A Modern Lover’. Though Michaelis is ostensibly a member of Clifford’s literary circle, his ‘lone dog’ nature is such that he cannot help but keep his distance from them – in the same way Mersham did with Muriel’s family. Michaelis is described as being ‘millions of degrees remote from his hosts, but laconically playing up to them to the required amount, and never coming forth for a moment’ (p.28). Again as with Mersham, his attitude to women is ambivalent. He is ‘not ungrateful’ for ‘occasional love’ – indeed, he is ‘poignantly grateful’ to Connie for their lovemaking and is often enough ‘burning to come to her again’. But at the same time ‘his outcast soul’ knows it will ‘keep *really* clear of her’. Michaelis the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

‘ownerless dog’ can never fully relate to a woman, but nevertheless has the same Mersham-like tendency to return to his own emotional vomit. He represents Mersham’s personal inadequacy and veneer of metropolitan sophistication carried through to a level of success which, upon examination, turns out to be appropriately worthless in terms of the void self he has become.

Though Lawrence’s ‘doglike’ depiction of Michaelis is cruel enough, the latter can be seen as having his place in a long line of discarded Lawrence-heroes. To consider Michaelis in that light is to see Lawrence’s cruelty as courageous in that it is largely self-directed – and Lawrence’s episodes of self-arraignment *were* always characterised by their painful honesty. Diana Trilling sees the final version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* as being far crueller than the first, and observes: ‘If the novel in its final form is in many ways horrible, it is still the novel Lawrence had to write – a fierce truth toward the end of a lifetime spent in search of truth however unpleasant.’⁵⁷ That such unpleasant truths are sometimes about oneself is itself, of course, an unpleasant truth – but it is not one that Lawrence ever shied away from. Instead, he ‘shed his sicknesses’⁵⁸ in books, and Clifford Chatterley emerges as another failed essay in selfhood – or rather, he functions as a kind of ghastly repository for such elements of personal behaviour as Lawrence realised could not finally be incorporated in any viable version of self.

Thus once again, though the depiction of Clifford is cruel, it reveals Lawrence at his most scathingly self-honest. When Clifford the war casualty is described as having been ‘shipped home’ from France ‘more or less in bits’ – which then

⁵⁷ Diana Trilling, introduction to Dieter Mehl & Christa Jansohn (eds.), *D H Lawrence: The First and Second Lady Chatterley Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. xxxii.

⁵⁸ George J Zytaruk & James T Boulton (eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume II, 1913-16* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 90 (letter to Arthur McLeod, October 1913).

miraculously ‘seemed to grow together again’ (p.5), the tone seems casually cruel. But Lawrence, in thus constructing the character of the self-consciously literary Clifford, is actually constructing a fictional character from (in Horace’s phrase) his own psychic *disjecti membra poetae*. It is in terms of this realisation that the reader of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* can readily assent to Kingsley Widmer’s assertion that Lawrence ‘loads Sir Clifford... with negative functions’.⁵⁹ As much as there is an element of Lawrence triumphing over Herbert Asquith in the character of Clifford Chatterley, the construction of that character is simultaneously Lawrence’s act of *mea culpa*.

Clifford is emotionally manipulative in his relationship with Connie. His parasitical attachment to her clearly has nothing to do with love – if love is taken to mean the kind of reciprocal self-realization which necessarily involves the other’s flourishing as much as it does one’s own. His dominion over Connie is an imposition of will, which Lawrence describes (in version one) as a ‘pure, almost spiritual coldness... that slowly edged itself to its own ends, like a serpent’ (p.54). Its effect on Connie is insidious and destructive:

The white irreproachable purity of will, that would subjugate her ultimately into nothingness. Yes, in time she would become just a half-animate automaton worked entirely from Clifford’s will, coming as he willed, going as he willed, thinking only the thoughts he released into her mind, feeling only the feelings he allowed to come forth. And all the time, he would appear so selfless, so considerate, so utterly quiet and unassuming. He would seem to leave her absolute liberty. Never would he utter a command, never would he say *you must!* *You*

⁵⁹ Kingsley Widmer, ‘The Pertinence of Modern Pastoral: The Three Versions of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*’ (1973), p.100.

shall not! I do not allow it! Never! He would always seem to leave her entirely mistress of her choice. And all the time he would subtly have stolen all choice from her, she could only choose as he willed.
[p.54]

The passage is worth quoting in full for the way in which it addresses the Lawrence-behaviours of the past. Connie, in this depiction, is a reappearance of the Lady Ottoline Morrell / Hermione Roddice figure. Whereas Hermione was castigated by the Lawrence-figure for being false in her spontaneity – as it were, no more than a ‘half-animate automaton’ – she is now, in the character of Constance Chatterley, acknowledged as the victim. If Connie’s spontaneity has been falsified, it is because she is under the control of the Lawrence-figure in the above passage: Clifford Chatterley. As Connie realises, ‘Clifford’s heaven of... pure abstraction’ – his Rananim, so to speak – turns out to be ‘still another heaven established on bullying!’ (p.26). Clifford is, in other words, a cunning recruitment specialist: like Dionys with Daphne, Clifford’s spiritual subjugation of the other person is not love – it is parasitism. As with Dionys, Clifford’s controlling behaviour feigns to be in the interests of the other person’s self-realization, but effectively thwarts it. This is of a piece with Clifford’s literary efforts, which further entrap Connie in what Keith Sagar calls ‘a relationship of mental intimacy – a mutual absorption in Clifford and his work, composition. But the stories have no substance...’⁶⁰. We infer that they are not so much creative as cunningly contrived, the manipulation of words by a confirmed ‘mental lifer’ who thereby seeks to manipulate others’ responses. As Mark Spilka notes, Clifford’s writing is ‘smart, spiteful [and] pointless’.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Keith Sagar, *The Art of D H Lawrence* (Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 181.

⁶¹ Mark Spilka, *The Love Ethic of D H Lawrence*, p. 179.

Since the idea of ‘touch’ is so central to Lawrence’s later writings, it is worth juxtaposing two episodes from the Chatterley novels in order to see how one of them affirms touch while the other denies it. Lawrence shows how touch can be natural and spontaneous, but also how it can be corrupted by the three intervening factors identified by Eagleton – human will, cultural sophistication and technology. A passage in version one disturbingly evokes the first two of these, and shows the insidious circularity of human will and intellectual sophistication when it works to separate us from our participatory selfhood. In the episode from version one, Clifford has been reading Plato’s *Dialogues* and is preening himself on having discovered an appreciation of ‘touch’ which is as real as any knowledge:

Knowledge, nothing but mental knowledge! But Columbus discovering America was nothing to those early Greeks discovering that they’d got logical, reasoning *minds*. It impresses me, even now! Because, of course, my hand holding your hand seems to me as real as thought...It is as important as a piece of knowledge, don’t you think?

[p.9]

There is, as yet, nothing which sorts ill with the ideas of likeness and participation which have been considered thus far. It is only when Clifford’s emotional insufficiency compels him to take the *idea* further that he exceeds his portion of humankind and therefore, as it were, loses his share. Estranged from his own life, he is forced to clutch at ideas of immortality and clings to Connie by way of compensation for what he has lost. Lawrence captures well the moment when Clifford’s moral incapacity banishes him from participation and drives him into a dreadful dependency:

My hand holding your hand! After all, that's life too! And it's what one couldn't do, after death. [...] Though perhaps, of course, there would still be some sort of connection, some sort of clasp, perhaps more vital really. Perhaps I could still keep hold of your hand, even if I were dead. What do you think? [p.10]

There is a definite sense that Lawrence is here working simultaneously on two fronts. In general terms, he is once again concerned to isolate the (still problematic) moment of supervention and to ponder the seeming impossibility of avoiding it: the truth to be found in human hand-holding is more real than any knowledge, and the knowledge that this is so seems instantaneously to become worth so much more than holding hands. In personal terms, the culmination of this episode once again sees Lawrence addressing past behaviours by 'shedding' them via Clifford Chatterley:

His strong hand gripped her hand weirdly. She saw in him the triumphant thrill of conquest. He had made a weird conquest of something! [...] Was he so triumphant? What about herself, and *her* life: *her* bodily life? What about her own hand, that he gripped as if it were some trophy he would carry off to the other side [of] the grave?
[p.10]

The phrase 'what about her own hand' reveals that Clifford's touch is not of reciprocity but of mere attachment. It is egotistical and entirely neglectful of Connie's needs, and Connie realises 'how ravished one could be without ever being touched! Ravished by dead words become obscene...' (p.94). Clifford is seen to exhibit the same ghoulish emotional greed and triumphalism as Count Dionys, but in Clifford's case there is no attempt on Lawrence's part to create for himself a darkly heroic fictional counterpart: Clifford is simply repellent, representing emotional traits

now disowned by Lawrence. The episode is actually a tableau of narcissism.

Clifford's war injuries represent the narcissist's incapacity to inhabit his own body as others inhabit theirs, and his insistent intellection shows why this has come about: the narcissist has learned to perceive his body as a liability because it is constantly under threat; there is a consequent overinvestment of the libido in the controlling ego at the expense of the body. The narcissist is, as it were, driven up into his head. The body cannot experience 'touch' in terms of normal response; other bodies are desperately sought for stimulus and sensation so as to make up the deficit. This touch is not reciprocity but rapacity. There is appetite, but no satisfaction, because the mind becomes fixated on a craving which only the body can satisfy – and the narcissist's body is unavailable, either to himself or the other person. Clifford is doomed to suffer a tantalizing *idea* of touch which no amount of grasping – whether at mental conceits or others' bodies – can ever satisfy.

In versions two and three there is a scene which evokes a contrastingly spontaneous idea of touch. It occurs in a conversation between Connie and the Chatterleys' housekeeper, Mrs Bolton, whose husband has died in a pit accident some twenty-three years earlier. The widow speaks of her feelings through the course of her bereavement: "It was as if my *feelings* wouldn't believe he'd gone. [...] The touch of him! I've never got over it to this day, and never shall. And if there's a heaven above, he'll be there, and will lie up against me so I can sleep. [...] It's terrible, once you've got a man into your blood!" she said' (p.163, version three). Clearly struck by the unsophisticated sincerity of such feelings as have been quite absent from her own marriage, Connie asks, 'But can a touch last so long?' Mrs Bolton replies, 'Oh my Lady, what else is there to last?' Though the suggestion of touch enduring beyond death is similar to that expressed by Clifford, the response

evoked in the reader by these two scenes is quite different. If these scenes are different in kind, I suggest the difference *is* one of kindness – for the quality of kindness is absent from the first scene and present in the second.

This ‘difference of kind’ is at the heart of Lawrence’s message. If there *is* all the difference in the world between Clifford’s ghoulishly invasive mental contortions and the simplicity of a touch which outlasts all else by virtue of its insouciance, then this is so because these differing conceptions exist in different worlds. Along with our self-consciously linguistic capacity to *make* different worlds, and our concomitant ability to conceive of ourselves as existing historically, we have choice: for a contingent universe, in which space, time and matter itself can never really be known, but which nevertheless contains (as Lawrence said) ‘all that man knows or has known or ever will know’, necessarily entails human choice. The only world we can know – in the sense of ‘be living in’ – is thus the one which we currently hold in the ‘quick’ of our consciousness. In his book of travel writing, *Mornings in Mexico*, Lawrence made an impassioned and appealing case for the paradoxical eternity of this ‘flame-tip’ momentaneity of apprehension:

Why think outside the moment? And inside the moment one does not think. So why pretend to think? [...] Strip, strip, strip away the past and the future, leave the naked moment of the present disentangled. Strip away memory, strip away forethought and care; leave the moment, stark and sharp and without consciousness. The instant moment is for ever keen...⁶²

The episode between Connie and Mrs Bolton thus raises fundamental questions: in a universe which exceeds our every attempt to subordinate it to our epistemological

⁶² D H Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico* (London: Penguin Books, (1927) 1974), pp.35-6.

categories and concepts, can a case not be made for the existence of an order of ‘mysterious’ affinities and continuities which transcends our habitual notions of space and time, so that a natural response to ‘touch’ *would* be to ask ‘what else is there’? If we can see ourselves historically without our habitual presumption of teleology – of having our place in some grand narrative of progress – could we not know a ‘quickness’ of simultaneity wherein it is the fleeting moment which is momentous, rather than the march of history? If such a case *can* be made, then surely we can make it if only we have regard to the quality of our case-making. We can know such a world, but not at the ruinous cost of Clifford’s endlessly reflexive, self-conscious *knowingness*. Again, in *Mornings in Mexico*, Lawrence captures well the necessary purity of engagement: ‘Nothing but the touch, the spark of contact. That, no more. That, which is the most elusive, still the only treasure. Come, and gone, and yet the clue itself.’⁶³

Mrs Bolton, though shrewd enough in her own way, is unsophisticated enough to have known something more truly than can ever be the case with Clifford and his copy of Plato. Though she will later become a willing enough accomplice in Clifford’s indecency of knowing, Mrs Bolton can at least claim to have known another person in the true, insouciant sense. She is thus a Janus-like figure between the two ways of knowing, and the eventual corruption of her self-integrity into the unseemliness of her involvement with Clifford points up the moral lesson of the two contrasting episodes of touch: one cannot enforce another’s participation or intervene in another’s self except at the cost of the other’s self-realisation; nor can one be the owner of another’s self, for this exceeds one’s own share and can therefore only be at the cost of one’s own participation. Though the lesson may, when expressed in such

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.51.

terms, appear to be an affair of excessive regulation, this is not the case – for Lawrence saw the selfsame lesson made simple in the unsophisticated depictions of Etruscan dance. In the dance, insouciance is definitionally not something one has to *care* about.

As the allusion to Etruscan art suggests, the case in question is one which is better made by showing than by telling, and this is Lawrence's aim in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: to show the reader a way of flourishing in the world which is unhindered by human will, cultural sophistication and technology. Significantly, it is technology (in the form of coalmining) which killed Mrs Bolton's husband – the same technology of abstraction which is now under the ownership of the wilful and sophisticated Clifford Chatterley. Michael Bolton's death in a mining accident is shown in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to be more than a mere plot detail. It is emphatically figured as having been the result of some deeper antipathy between the sensitive nature of the man and his *denaturing* occupation. Mrs Bolton tells Connie:

When you come to know men, that's how they are: too sensitive, in the wrong place. And I believe, unbeknown to himself, he hated the pit: just hated it. He looked so quiet when he was dead, as if he'd got free. [...] It just broke my heart to see him, so still and pure looking, as if he'd *wanted* to die... [p.163]

Given that technology is one of the malignant influences identified in Terry Eagleton's account of our present woes, one could no doubt read the death of Michael Bolton in Marxist terms – as a parable showing the effects of capitalism. A worker, alienated (in every sense) from the means of production, is forced into a way of living which proves to be a way of dying, for the owners of the means of production are out to make a killing at any cost to others. But again, a contingent view of the universe

involves an altogether deeper level of materialism than the merely political, and Eagleton's idea of 'materialist morality' implicitly helps bridge the gap between the ontological and the moral/political. Though surface politics will always be there – in the sense that there must always be a return from the deeper engagement of the pastoral interlude – the reader of Lawrence's late writings will hopefully return to such considerations with a renewed appreciation of the material *continuity* of existence.

Not only are there parallels between Clifford and Lawrence in terms of personal manipulateness – there are parallels between Clifford's business activities and Lawrence's messiahship. Clifford repeatedly insists that his coalmining activities are in the service of some 'greater good' than mere self-aggrandizement. The more extensive his mining interests become, the more 'good' the world will enjoy – for the world will be able to enjoy more of the by-products to which it is gradually being reduced. The process is actually degrading the world; and given the likeness between the world and the people in it, the same process unavoidably degrades people. It is unkind. Accordingly, the people of Tevershall are being turned into by-products of the industrial process, robbed of their lives even while Clifford insists that he is benefiting them by providing them with their living – as if this were somehow *more* of life than they would otherwise have enjoyed. This show of altruism is of a piece with his intrusive solicitousness towards Connie. It is of a piece, too, with the Lawrence-messiah's contradictory show of self-effacement ("Not I, the petty, personal D H Lawrence...") as he went about the business of recruiting the world: such behaviour is now acknowledged, via the character of Clifford Chatterley, to have been ultimately self-serving. As such, it was self-deluding, for one cannot truly be said to be serving one's self when one's behaviour is so much at the expense of other

selves. To behave in such a manner is to die to one's self – as previously dramatized by Lawrence via the character of 'the man who died'. Rananim, brought about by and for the purpose of extracting from the world and other people what one feels will fill up one's sense of emptiness, would doubtless – in *that* sense – have proved to be another Tevershall village.

It is against this backdrop of Lawrence's self-arraignment that the remaining 'bits' of Clifford Chatterley fall into place. In version two, Lawrence continues the process of exorcising his messianic pretensions (a process already seen in *The Escaped Cock*) by offloading his egoistic behaviour onto Clifford, who insistently '[harps]... on the problem of immortality, and on the reality of mystical experiences':

He had had mystical experiences – sort of exaltations and experiences of identification with the One. Constance mistrusted these experiences terribly. They always seemed to her conceited, egoistic, anti-life. But he insisted on them: and insisted that the necessity for everyone was to have this mystical experience of identification with the One – which seemed to him like pure light – and to bring this experience with them down into life again. [p.297]

Even Mrs Bolton is subjected to Clifford's mystical exhortations – yet even she can see they are merely 'a new sort of subtle, sublimated arrogance, superiority, and bossiness'. Connie concludes that Clifford's 'Mystic One' is like 'a great pompom on the top of his cap, to show his personal superiority and importance' (p.298). The trivializing image immediately recalls Lawrence's essay on 'Democracy', where Lawrence used similar language to deride such self-deluding solipsism. Moreover, when Clifford egoistically insists that others should bring their mystical experience 'down into life again' for his own gratification, this involves a similar process to his

coalmining: he wishes to extract from others' lives whatever he can induce them to extract from life on his behalf. The Lawrence-messiah's Rananim conscripts are seen to have been serving the same purpose as the miners of Tevershall village – a realisation which Lawrence now acknowledges.

Again, I wish to emphasize that in making Clifford Chatterley out of an aggregate of his own past maladaptive behaviours, Lawrence is, however consciously, identifying *one* problem, which is at the root of all the ills in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The problem is an attitude of mind – an orientation of consciousness which, pragmatically speaking, is not in the interests of our flourishing because it abstracts us from ourselves and hence from our participation. We have seen how, in the Etruscan tombs, Lawrence finally won his way through to a contingent view of the universe which reveals an underlying continuity in all things – a view of the world which, if it does not *detract* from the idea of 'The One', avoids doing so by refusing to *abstract* the world into Oneness. There is an insouciance which does not presume to enforce or police participation, but simply participates, knowing that we are all in the dance. In a disturbing passage from version two of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence shows both the ultimate continuity of our selves with the rest of the universe – our inescapably material like-ness to it – and the horror of a self which has been *self-consciously* abstracted from that continuity:

Connie held her breath to see the curious intensity with which, when he roused again from his depression, [Clifford] entered into the serious business of rejuvenating the mines, *to make them pay*. He seemed to lose his consciousness of everything else. [...] He was gone, he was no longer a human being, but an elemental, caught up in a weird inspiration, a *raptus*. [...] And his soul...had passed into a weird

permanent ecstasy, the long-enduring ecstasy of the struggle with uncanny Matter. It was as if he fused himself into the very existence of coal and sulphur and petroleum and rock, and lost his humanity, as the trolls have lost theirs, in iron. It was not the human mind triumphing over matter, as in real science. No, he had gone beyond that. It was the human soul worshipping in ecstasy at the mystery of Matter [...] A great portion of his consciousness seemed to have lapsed out, like a flame blown out. And what remained of him was this idolatrous ecstasy at the shrine of Matter. [p.536]

Many of our present concerns – the contingency of self, abstraction and alienation, and the ultimate inseparability of materiality and morality – are brought together in the above passage. The ‘great portion’ which has lapsed out of Clifford’s consciousness is his selfhood and thus his humanity. Having lost his humanity, his urge is indeed ‘to make them pay’: Clifford’s attitude to the world is now to seek compensation by extracting vengeful retribution; and in thus degrading all that is around him, he reduces himself to an elemental – as if he himself were no more than the elements of the earth. In a grim sense this has become true in Clifford’s case, for we can never *finally* abstract ourselves from the universe: even if we wilfully deny our own humanity, the universe will absorb what remains. As an aggregate of Lawrence’s past maladaptive behaviours, Clifford seems also to exemplify the geological sense of ‘aggregate’. As if to underscore the moral implications of the above passage, Lawrence invokes ‘Matter’, and we recall the word’s relationship with ‘matrix’: matter is that from which all else issues and has its being. The above passage speaks of matter in terms of both worship and idolatry; and as we recall the repetition of ‘worship’ in Connie’s response to her visit to Wragby Wood and the

sight of the gamekeeper washing himself, we see the difference in attitude – in consciousness – between Connie’s sense of the worship implicit in participation, and the idolatrous perversity which has stemmed from Clifford’s rapacious mental interventionism.

Other clues point to Clifford Chatterley as Lawrence’s disowning of character traits which could not finally be owned. Though there is a mood of dysphoria which drifts among the novel’s three main characters like a miasmal cloud, it is Clifford who must finally own it so that the other characters can move forward. Thus he spends hours in ‘the ashy silence of a sort of burnt-out resentment’, nursing his ‘deep, compelling grudge... against the entire creation’, a ‘net-work of nerves... fear and gloom’ (pp.290, 452 & 348). There is an obvious admission of narcissistic manipulateness in version two, as Clifford directs Mrs Bolton repeatedly to move a jar of narcissus on a bureau until they catch the light to his satisfaction. Other scenes – of Clifford flirting with the housekeeper as they play chess, and of the ‘voluptuous pleasure’ they share while she shaves him – reveal a disturbing unseemliness which is a failure to negotiate the kind of boundaries which enable the proper flourishing of self and other.

Again, the message of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is to do with the making of such boundaries and moral enclosures and the kind of contingently aware consciousness which enables us to do so. We are humanly bound to be (in the phrase Lawrence gives to Tommy Dukes – p.75) ‘cerebrating makeshifts’: alive to the continuous necessity of negotiating our selves and our boundaries, and likewise alive to the provisionality of all that we negotiate. What is of value must be kept in currency at the cost of constant *renegotiation*, and the only true indicator of our current market value is our moral nature as material beings. At that rate, the

contingent morality which is found in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is worth more than hypocritical moral conventionality of Clifford Chatterley, and its value is higher than any charges of casualness or relativism which can be levied against it. As Clifford's emotional regression slips ever further into infantilism, the reader is made to understand that the crumbling rooms of Wragby Hall are playing host to worse moral trespasses than Wragby Wood has ever witnessed.

Clifford's final 'exaltation of perversity' – in which he becomes a 'child-man' in the arms of Mrs Bolton – sees her identified by the narrator as 'the Magna Mater' (p.291). Under her will and influence, Clifford eventually proves to be uncannily astute as a businessman: he becomes inhumanly at one with materialism, able to abstract more and more profit from the abstraction of mining. Thus his reduction to gross materiality is figured as complete, for the term 'Magna Mater' collapses together all the senses of matter, mother, and matrix. The oneness of materiality seems to have been finally achieved, but this horrifically reductive unification has been at the cost of Clifford's human self: he '[lets] go all his manhood' (p.291). Earlier in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he had claimed that 'emotions that are ordered and given shape are more important than disorderly emotions' (p.139). In attempting to order emotion to the point of denying its proper expression, he has himself become emotionally disordered. Being in every sense crippled, he could not join in the dance. In a passage which chimes well with Eagleton's emphasis on our materiality – our creaturely human nature – Lawrence describes the problem in version two of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

The disaster is... that mankind can never accept the whole of the dream of passion, which is the dream that underlies and quickens all our life. Always and invariably man insists that one meagre and exclusive

aspect of the great dream is all the dream. [...] If man could once be reasonable enough to know that he is *not* a creature of reason, but only a reasoning creature, he might avoid making himself more prisons. Man is a creature, like all other creatures. And all creatures alike are born of complex and intricate passion, which will forever be antecedent to reason. [pp.344-5]

The final scenes between Mrs Bolton and the infantile Clifford – as they huddle together far into the night, playing cards so that Clifford can abstract his own sixpences from her – take their place in a line of dubious late-night encounters between the Lawrence-hero and a female character. One thinks of Cyril Mersham with Muriel in ‘A Modern Lover’, Count Dionys and Daphne in *The Ladybird*, and the ‘man who died’ leaving the priestess in uncertain circumstances under cover of night. The trajectory of those three tales has taken the reader through the callowness of youth to a Lawrence-figure intended to be altogether more heroic, then on to something of an atoning humility, however theatricalized. This recurrent Lawrence-of-the-night is, however, at last abandoned in the shape of Clifford Chatterley. He is acknowledged as pathetic and his narcissistic manipulateness is finally disowned. Mellors – though himself hardly a conventionally heroic figure – represents all that can be usefully retrieved from the Lawrence-heroes of the past, and only he is capable of moving forward into the future, however uncertainly.

Sex and Morality

Given Lawrence’s concern over the complexities of human passion and the negotiation of boundaries in relation to the expression thereof, it is inevitable that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* should be concerned with sexuality – though it is too facile

to say that the novel is 'about sex'; for it is not more about sex than it is about life. It may, of course, sound equally facile to say that it is 'about life' – but *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is certainly so in the sense expressed by Lawrence in his essay 'Why the Novel Matters'. In it, he extols the novel as 'the one bright book of life', the 'tremulation' capable of making 'the whole man-alive tremble'.⁶⁴ Given the emphasis on the contingency and continuity of our existence as material beings which is at the heart of Lawrence's late philosophy, life is seen as just such a continuum: nothing is mundane, for the mundane comprehends the whole world, everyday life should be alive the 'tremulation' of its own quickness, and the novel should be of a sufficient amplitude both to reflect and to foster our instinctive awareness of what Lawrence called that 'complex and intricate passion'. That being the case, there ought to be available to us, in the worlds we make for ourselves, a vital accommodation of sexuality which is not discontinuous from our wider orientation within the order of being. If we wish to seek for such an accommodation, we ought to take Lawrence's advice and be reasonable: that is, we must accept that we are *not* creatures of reason, but only reasoning creatures. To acknowledge as much is to see the reasonableness of having due regard to the element of passion which is forever antecedent to reason. Kingsley Widmer describes the desired accommodation as 'a simpler and more natural code of values consisting of sensual consciousness, passion, and tenderness'. These should be the makings of our morality if we hope to address what Widmer sees as 'the most basic question in Lawrence's ethos: how shall people

⁶⁴ D H Lawrence, 'Why the Novel Matters' (1926), in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, Bruce Steele (ed.) (London: Grafton Books, (1923) 1986), p. 169.

be saved, be made “man-alive”, in an emotionally counterfeit and destructive society?’⁶⁵

Once again, the search for an answer begins, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, among the trees of Wragby Wood, where the main characters go to escape Clifford's counterfeit and destructive world. Though it may seem to us that trees will not be of much use in deciding matters of human sexual morality, the act of pastoral engagement renders them sufficiently ‘like’ us to make them a reasonable enough starting point: a meditation on the nature of being ‘tree-alive’ may well provide a useful introduction to the moral implications of being ‘man-alive’. The trees are indeed alive, and they are amoral in the only true sense of the word: they do not have their being within the sphere of moral sense, and are therefore not to be characterized as good or bad, moral or immoral. They thrive to the full extent of their nature, seeming to flourish as individuals even as their collective individuality guarantees their participation in the whole, and all the while they are (we surmise) without notions of guilt or censoriousness or moral prescriptivism. As pastoral participants, we sense an instinctive rightness in this state of affairs, and indeed, as Michael Squires notes, ‘the pastoral of happiness... is conceived as an absolute acceptance of the law of instinct, with no sense of guilt nor any regard for its consequences’.⁶⁶ The trees can throw off ‘reckless limbs’ (p.94) *because* they can be careless of consequences – insouciant, so to speak. We conceive of trees as having no concept of guilt, nor any use for one – for they do not and cannot behave in ways which run counter to their own tree-like nature. Nor is this a result of any moral obligation or

⁶⁵ Kingsley Widmer, ‘The Pertinence of Modern Pastoral: The Three Versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*’ in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, pp.113 & 96.

⁶⁶ Michael Squires, ‘*Lady Chatterley's Lover*: “Pure Seclusion”’, in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p.120.

exhortation. As with Eagleton's toads, if trees cannot be false to their own nature, there is no virtue in them being true to it.

If our human transformative continuity could be effected just as seamlessly – if our human nature could be just as uncomplicatedly 'like' to all of life – then words like 'reckless' and 'insouciant' would serve us perfectly well in terms of our own flourishing. The innocence of Eden would be, so to speak, our birthright – for as Eagleton states, 'morality is all about enjoyment and abundance of life'.⁶⁷ But in our linguistically complexified state, our achievement of existential continuity or 'community of essence' is by no means guaranteed. We have to argue about what being human means, and our capacity to argue ourselves towards a multiplicity of versions of 'human being' seems often to be more of a liability than a guarantee of our freedom and flourishing. Our sense of having an identity so often becomes a matter of insisting on difference instead of sameness, and we thus become defensive and 'un-kind': we perversely argue for our discontinuity from the rest the world. The dual meaning of 'individual' has been lost. Lawrence identifies this failure of our transformative continuity with startling specificity in his 'A Propos' essay, which he described as his 'prolegomena... to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*':

Man has little needs and deeper needs. We have fallen into the mistake of living from our little needs, till we have almost lost our deeper needs in a sort of madness. There is a little morality, which concerns persons and the little needs of man: and this, alas, is the morality we live by. But there is a deeper morality, which concerns all womanhood, all manhood, and nations, and races, and classes of men. This greater morality affects the destiny of mankind over long stretches of time,

⁶⁷ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p.141.

applies to man's greater needs, and is often in conflict with the little morality of the little needs. [p.329]

It is this failure of continuity – the sundering of our moral natures into the apparent irreconcilability of these ‘little’ and ‘deeper’ moral agendas – which makes the idea of self-interest into a needlessly contradictory affair. Within the deeper morality, self-interest could not be selfish, for a moral awareness of sufficient depth and development would naturally be alive to our human interestedness in *other selves* – that is, our share in the totality. We would perceive ourselves to be individual within it, yet at the same time sufficiently and securely individual *from* it. True self-interest would therefore perceive no disjunction between the ‘little needs’ and the ‘deeper needs’, for if true self-realization implies a corresponding process among *other selves*, then our two sundered moralities once again become co-extensive. Our world would be more like Lawrence's cosmic swirl, in which all things correspond. To achieve such a state, we must aspire to the ‘virtue’ which trees evidently do not need.

Yet the message of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (and also Terry Eagleton's argument) is that our deeper morality – our virtue – is not primarily a matter of self-denial but of self-fulfilment: the emphasis is positive, for morality would be a living expression of our moral nature rather than a matter of conventionality enforced by threats of punishment and opprobrium. As Eagleton notes, ‘any thriving form of life will have its obligations and prohibitions. The only problem is that you may then come to identify morality with the obligations and prohibitions rather than with the thriving’.⁶⁸ In a further quote which has particular relevance to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Eagleton states: ‘Love is a notoriously obscure, complicated affair, and moral

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

language is a way of trying to get what counts as love into sharper focus'. At the same time, he states that 'there can be no love without law'⁶⁹ – not in the sense that love can be enforced by legislation or proscription, but in the sense that *true* self-realization is sufficient unto itself and therefore self-regulating – definitionally, it could not include things that are not in keeping with itself.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is clearly concerned as to 'what counts as love'.

With that in mind, it is a novel which is willing to begin from the ground up – with the thriving of trees and the flourishing of flowers – in its investigation into the nature of human love. Only a mindset which equates 'ground' with 'dirt' could reasonably think of it as a dirty novel, or one which is unhealthily preoccupied with sex – it is a question of our orientation as readers. The Latin for 'ground' is *solum*, which yields us the word 'soil', which in turn suggests fecundity for some and foulness for others. The much-celebrated 'earthiness' of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* should therefore not be taken out of context, for the novel is concerned to establish sex as something which is not discontinuous from flourishing in general. Given that degree of concern, Lawrence was not one to shy away from what he saw as a necessary degree of corrective emphasis. What matters about *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, from our present-day perspective, is the significance of its power of transformative continuity: it strongly instantiates Eagleton's idea that we make our available worlds via our linguistic capacity, and that a powerful retelling of human sexuality is in that sense a remaking of it. Language is constitutive – which makes our choice of language of utmost importance. *Pace* Larkin, sexual intercourse did not begin in 1963, 'after the end of the Chatterley ban' – but the very fact that Larkin could, in 1967, make such a

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

jocular reference to a novel written some forty years earlier, sufficiently testifies to *Lady Chatterley's Lover's* groundbreaking retelling of human sexuality.

Such retellings, of course, make worlds which are themselves subject to being retold, and Lawrence's last novel has duly taken its place in that process – not least in its particular telling of human sexual behaviour. Many critical cross-sections have transected it since its initial reception, and its fecundity has inevitably fallen foul of some interpretations. John Lyon notes how '[*Lady Chatterley's Lover*] is perhaps now paying the price which the passage of time exacts from any form of extremity, originality or idiosyncrasy of thought – a degree of absurdity and silliness'.⁷⁰ Rather than take issue with such positions as have thus far gone to make up the novel's critical history, I suggest *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can be approached by the reader pragmatically and profitably in the same spirit of open-mindedness in which Lawrence approached ancient Etruria. Accordingly, the novel's handling of sex can be seen as more concerned with simple reciprocity than with any glorification of 'the phallus'. At the novel's heart, there is a willingness to see sex as part of the swirl of myriad vitalities – to set it free from previous tellings and make it continuous with the rest of creation. Paradoxically, it is Lawrence's 'issues' with boundedness which both enable him – even oblige him – to transcend established boundaries and then, of necessity, to negotiate new accommodations into being. That said, there is no doubt that when it comes to the depiction of sex, much of Lawrence's language of passionate transcendence has long since lent itself to parody. Yet there is no denying the liberating energy of a passage such as this one from version two:

At moments she flamed with desire for him, like a volcano, streaming
with lava, and he was the only thing that mattered in the world. Then

⁷⁰ John Lyon, introduction to D H Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Penguin Books, [1928] 1990 edition), p.vii.

in a few minutes she had changed to an infinite tenderness, like the soft ocean full of acquiescent passivity, under the sky which was the male embrace. He was like the sky over-arching above her, like a god that was everywhere. And then, having tasted this mood in all its ecstasy, she shook it off, and became herself, free, and surcharged with power like a bacchanal, like an amazon. [p.343]

Admittedly, the male author's adoption of the female viewpoint can itself be condemned as an act of appropriation. But it can also be praised as an effort at imaginative empathy, and in favouring as it does the female perspective it arguably achieves an appealing balance between power and passivity, female and male. Much of the sexuality in the Chatterley novels is written in terms of enfoldment rather than penetration, and Lawrence's idea of the two lovers lying in 'the perfect sleeping circle of the male and female, phallic body' (p.441) is one of mutuality rather than male domination. Another image is of Connie 'enclosed... in the phallic circle, and she was like the yolk of the egg, enclosed' – and again, there can be no position which simultaneously criticizes images both of female-as-enclosed *and* female-as-penetrated. One cannot condemn boundedness and enclosure from both inside *and* outside without disallowing the very ideas of accommodation and relatedness. That such a relationship *is* achieved by the lovers is noted by Michael Squires, who notes that they succeed in '[locating] themselves, enclosed and encircled, with the "phallic body"', and thereby find themselves 'enriched [and] released from the confines of their earlier loneliness, having eased their spiritual isolation'.⁷¹ Enclosure and encirclement – achieved mutually and insouciantly, in the true spirit of 'touch' – is simultaneously freedom and enrichment.

⁷¹ Michael Squires, introduction to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p.xxv.

The lesson learned by Lawrence at the personal level is clear. The achievement of touch is a process of self-realization which is complementary to the other's self. Touch is no longer claimed as a benign 'third thing' which somehow arises from the ruinous interpersonal dialectic of polarity – a doctrine which too often served to legitimize Lawrence's tendency to oscillate between trespass and desertion. One of the happiest expressions of the idea of blood consciousness in the later Lawrence – which, as it happens, does not actually use the term – occurs in the 'A Propos' essay:

The blood of man and the blood of woman are two eternally different streams, that can never be mingled [...] But therefore they are like the two rivers that encircle the whole of life [...] and in marriage the circle is complete, and in sex the two rivers touch and renew one another, without ever commingling or confusing. We know it. The phallus is a column of blood, what fills the valley of blood of a woman. The great river of male blood touches to its depth the great river of female blood, yet neither breaks its bounds. It is the deepest of all communion, as all the religions, *in practice*, know. [...] Two rivers of blood... two distinct eternal streams, that have the power of touching and communing and so renewing, making new one another, without any breaking of the subtle confines, any confusing or commingling. [pp.324-5.]

Such an evocation of truly *human* sexuality makes arguments over genitalia look redundant. And the idea of there being 'subtle confines' – boundaries which permit communion but not confusion – is the lesson to be carried forward, for such confines are now found to be a pre-condition of touch. Past failures in achieving boundedness have forced Lawrence to a pragmatic resolution: if the conceptions of the past have

failed, new and truer conceptions must be brought into being. This has necessarily meant a return to philosophical first principles, but the profit on Lawrence's enforced exile from relatedness is a paradoxical kind of freedom: in his search for the 'subtle confines' he can be without any of the constraints of conventional morality, for he now has a moral obligation to something far more profound. Once again, language is – cannot *but* be – vital. For if, as Eagleton says, moral language is a way of trying to get 'what counts as love' into sharper focus, moral language in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* stands in the same relation to love as poetry stands to flowers: it is either a genuine expression of living morality-in-the-making, or it is mere lip service – an empty resort to past moral formulations which allows moral negligence in the present. Our moral language is either a genuine bringing together of what Lawrence saw as our sundered moralities of shallowness and depth, or it is an excuse to 'make do' with the 'little morality' of self-interest.

This move to reunite the two moralities of the 'A Propos' essay is in line with Lawrence's wider intention to reunite philosophy with the novel. We have seen in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* how poetry should be a means *toward* our experience of flowers. This must not be reversed: immediate experience of flowers should not be an occasion for such self-conscious displays of poeticism as take us *away* from flowers. Poetry should facilitate participation, and communing with nature should be a genuine experience of our continuity with, or our likeness to, the rest of creation; and if that statement sounds unpersuasive, then this is doubtless because 'communings with nature' is a cliché. Nevertheless, the truth which lies beneath the deadness of such a phrase is one that is worth keeping alive by fresh telling. It is not one that is best served by ready-made blocks of words which no longer tell the truth, however effective such lumps of linguistic concretion have proved in the past. In the

contingent worlds we make with language, such truths can only ever *be* in the (re)telling, and this holds just as true for the language of moral awareness as it does for the language of sensory perception – for those languages should never have been sundered..

To see Lawrence bringing the ‘two moralities’ together is to see him giving material groundedness to moral language – the outcome being akin to Eagleton’s idea of a materialist morality. If we feel that flourishing is worthwhile for its own sake, we cannot be that far from flowers. Our material nearness to flowers is the same as our likeness to them; and our likeness to flowers should itself be akin to our kindness to other people, for what is materially true is morally true. This means that moral language is continuous with poetic language, even though this renders our language of morality liable to the same misuse. Wayne Burns notes how *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* exposes ‘the deadliness of the conventional purity and conformity that would deny or destroy our sympathetic consciousness’,⁷² and Lawrence uses the novel to attack false morality on all sides. He condemns ‘the false sexuality, which is of a rasping egoism, and the false social virtue, which is utter humiliation’ (p.304, version two). The suggestion is that genuine morality should arise from our being alive to the ‘subtle confines’ – the sense of boundedness and due portion which should characterize our every level of awareness. Morality is in the making, and must be found rather than founded, for a spontaneous and insouciant moral awareness can no more be codified than it can be falsified. Once morality has hardened into what Terry Eagleton calls the ‘imposing’⁷³ conception of morality, it has necessarily lost its vitality – for however imposing it looks, it can only do so at the cost of negative elements of imposition and imposture.

⁷² Wayne Burns, ‘*Lady Chatterley’s Lover*: A Pilgrim’s Progress for Our Time’ (1966), p. 96.

⁷³ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 154.

Again, it is Clifford Chatterley who bears the weight of Lawrence's disavowal of past misdemeanours. It is Clifford who appropriates and wields the imposing morality-words in the service of his megalomania (especially later in the novel, when Connie's escape with Mellors threatens Clifford's dominance). Clifford's morality-words – about marriage, about the *noblesse oblige* of providing employment for the masses, about the historical grandeur of Wragby Hall and the sanctity of 'the Chatterley name' – are commonly found among capitalized essence-words: that is, they all too easily lend themselves to such acts of misappropriation and manipulation as were typical of the Lawrence-messiah. (As Lawrence notes in the Etruscan sketches, there is a 'power of resistance to life' which uses morality 'as a cloak for its inner ugliness'.⁷⁴) There is accordingly something of the Lawrence-messiah of old in the figure of the 'almost wistfully moral' Clifford (p.296), whose wistfulness has about it the calculating watchfulness of one who manoeuvres conventional moral precepts like chess-pieces. His interactions with other people are characterized by his use of moral gambits aimed at outmanoeuvring them. Thus it is unsurprising that he uses imposingly moral language to manoeuvre Connie towards committing adultery so as to provide him with an heir and thus preserve 'the Chatterley name'. Only when he learns that she is pregnant *by Mellors* does he accuse her of perversion, depravity, and running after 'the *nostalgie de la boue*' (p.296).

Thus *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as an enquiry into the nature of materialist morality, inevitably raises the issue of moral relativism. As Clifford's attitudes show, it is not always the 'imposing' moral position which is the most genuine. But to argue that conventional morality is sometimes a cover for expediency and hypocrisy is not in itself an argument in favour of perversion and depravity. Less sensationally, the

⁷⁴ D H Lawrence, 'The Painted Tombs of Tarquinia I', in Simonetta de Filippis (ed.), *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays* (London: Penguin Books, (1992) 1999), p.56.

message of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is simply this: that to criticize the institution of imposing, capitalized 'morality-words' is *not* necessarily to advocate the complete abandonment of our moral concerns. To argue that the moral status quo appears to be less than best suited to our flourishing is implicitly to argue in favour of something better – and the urge to negotiate 'something better' is not compatible with the idea that 'anything goes', or that any given position in relation to moral affairs must be as moral and therefore as good as any other. Language is obviously crucial here, and there is nothing casual or relativistic about saying that 'it all depends on what we mean' when we use the terms of moral language. In the business of negotiating moral meaning, it is the quality of our intentionality – in terms of our willingness to be alive to what is humanly true and 'honest to goodness' – that matters. In the widest sense, 'perversion' is a turning away from the right course or aim. It is the opposite of truth, as degeneracy is the opposite of kindness. It is not right because it is neither good nor true. Assuming that what is right is what *is* good and true, both for our selves and for others, it follows that our striving toward a *vital* consensus as to what we will regard as rightness is more to the point than seeking to impose devitalized morality-words from the authorized safety of entrenched positions.

In support of the idea that there can be no morality without vitality, Terry Eagleton draws an interesting contrast between moral authoritarianism and 'moral anarchy':

It is only authoritarians who fear that the only alternative to their own beliefs is no beliefs at all, or any belief you like. Like anarchists, they see chaos all around them; it is just that the anarchist regards this chaos as creative, whereas they regard it as menacing. The authoritarian is

just the mirror-image of the nihilist. Whereas true meaning is neither carved in stone nor a free-for-all, neither absolutist nor laissez-faire.⁷⁵

This conveys the moral import of Lawrence's late philosophy. Only by shedding the authoritarianism born of his fear of chaos was Lawrence able to discover chaos at a deeper level – the creative chaos of the Heraclitean flux. With his capacity for 'true meaning' thereby enhanced, the Lawrence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* became the epitome of the creatively and morally responsible anarchist: for nihilistic authoritarianism, along with much other philosophical and personal baggage, has been left behind in the shape of Clifford Chatterley. As a true pragmatist, Lawrence has forsworn ritual allegiance to essences and moral absolutes – in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, all of those capitalized 'great words' have indeed been cancelled. But this is only in the sense that 'the great words' are those which, over time, tend to become less effective in our fashioning of the subtle confines – they become blunted tools and lose their edge of subtlety, leaving only the feeling of confinement. In his portrayal of sexuality and relationships generally, Lawrence has sought to create a vitally contingent sense of rightness – one that does justice to the immediacy of individual human flourishing. In doing so, he has – again, pragmatically – sought to make this *vital* morality look more appealing to his reader than moribund moral entrapments which only constrict and distort our humanity.

Solidarity and Kindness

Since *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is less about sexuality than it is about continuity (in the sense of Eagleton's 'transformative continuity'), its orientation must

⁷⁵ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p.96.

eventually be outwards into the wider world. The pastoral interlude has been a means of re-engagement with a cosmos in which ‘all things correspond’; but a sense of ‘subtle confines’ must be shown to be negotiable into a wider solidarity if it is to be useful in the everyday material world. Our animal like-ness must be – or *should* be – akin to our humankind-ness at the societal level. Though *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is often criticized for its lack of a comprehensive vision of social regeneration, such criticism is typically aimed at the narrative aspect of the novel: the eventual emergence of Connie and Mellors into a new relationship with the wider world is only hinted at – and even then, the novel dwells on the attendant problems and impediments rather than any imminent likelihood of the lovers’ flourishing. There is no conventional happy ending. Nevertheless, to view *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* as philosophical discourse (as Dennis Jackson suggests we should) is to see that it unceasingly addresses itself to questions of continuity and humankind-ness and how such qualities might best be given expression in the modern world.

The notion of how best to give expression to kindness is foregrounded throughout the three versions of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. During a ‘gorgeous talk’ among Clifford’s bloodless cronies about the future of ‘love’ (which, grimly rather than gorgeously, looks ahead to a loveless, sexless, degenerate, post-human future in which what passes for humanity is now manufactured in test tubes), a despairing Tommy Dukes throws in the following: ‘Blest be the tie that binds / Our hearts in kindred something-or-other’ (p.36, version three). The allusion is to the words of the hymn written by the Revd John Fawcett, and Dukes’ rather sorry half-quotation could easily stand as the epigraph to Lawrence’s last novel, for it encapsulates a failure fully to express *kind-ness*. Later in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Mellors alludes to the same lines (significantly, after making love with Connie), and is more nearly accurate in

giving ‘in kindred love’ as the conclusion of line two. The ‘something-or-other’ in question is actually (in Fawcett’s original) ‘Christian love’, but the novel’s deliberate misquotations point to what Lawrence saw as the failure of contemporary Christian discourse to give full expression to kindness. In a curious correspondence with Eagleton’s idea of the need for us to maintain our *continuity* as we create our human selves in the world, Lawrence twice uses the word ‘continuity’ in relation to human consciousness. He writes of how the ‘new England’ of industry has blotted out the agricultural ‘old England’, and notes that the ‘the continuity is not organic, but mechanical’ (p.156); and writing of the disenfranchised and disaffected ‘new collier lads lounging into the Pally or the Welfare’, he notes that there seems ‘a gap in the continuity of consciousness’ (p.159). In other words, Lawrence perceived a clear failure of transformative continuity in contemporary society – we have somehow become distracted and thus *abstracted* from our participatory nature; and by the time of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence was not prophetically but *pragmatically* concerned to address this problem and its potential solution.

Since a pragmatic approach sees value in investigating failure and falsity as pointers to what we might find to be true and workable in human terms, there is much emphasis (in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and its accompanying ‘A Propos’ essay) on the self-conscious commodification of kindness. No longer simply a word we use to mean our ‘like’-ness, kindness finds itself on the trading-floor: it has become an item associated with acquisition and personal advantage, a means of co-opting and buying-out other people rather than an expression of our natural, due portion. In the best tradition of the pragmatist who makes his case look good partly by making another position look bad enough to be worth avoiding, Lawrence draws our attention to the unprepossessing nature of the moral status quo in a way that is oddly disorientating,

challenging as it does our unreflecting assumptions as to what counts as humankindness:

While 'kindness' is the glib order of the day – everybody *must* be 'kind' – underneath this 'kindness' we find a coldness of heart, a lack of heart, a callousness, that is very dreary. Every man *is* a menace to every other man [...] Individualism has triumphed. If I am a sheer individual, then every other being, every other man especially, is over against me as a menace to me.⁷⁶

This is an indictment of our current way of human being – for our investment in others should not be of the calculating sort, since this form of self-interest is (as we have seen) self-defeating. Lawrence the pragmatist is saying, in effect: 'Look: this is how – and therefore what – we currently are, for the quality of our human being is not distinct from our human doing.'

All three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* duly take to task contemporary manifestations of 'kindness'. In version one, Connie reflects on the way Clifford's aristocratic peers always 'make a point' of being kind to Clifford on account of his disability, and wonders what it means 'to make a point of being kind' (p.47) – as though kindness were a charitable donation or a charge payable to politeness. By version two, the 'determination to be "kind"' is associated with 'ghastly people with relentless wills and spiteful motives', who have 'a determination to get the better of life' even while they are 'satisfying themselves by knowing better' (p.301). By version three, kindness is altogether gone from 'the England of today', for what is lost at the level of self is inevitably lost from society at large:

⁷⁶ D H Lawrence, 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', p.332.

[England] was producing a new race of mankind, over-conscious in the money and social and political side, on the spontaneous intuitive side dead, but dead. Half-corpses, all of them: but with a terrible insistent consciousness in the other half. [...] Ah God, what has man done to man? What have the leaders of men been doing to their fellow men? They have reduced them to less than humanness, and now there can be no fellowship any more! [...] The fellowship [is] dead...there [is] only apartness, and hopelessness... [p.153]

Personal consciousness, political leadership, even religion – all are called to account here, for the use of God’s name is impassioned rather than gratuitous. Lawrence’s use of the word ‘fellowship’ implicitly refers to Fawcett’s hymn, lines two and three of which declare: ‘The fellowship of kindred minds / Is like to that above.’ In his ‘A Propos’ essay, Lawrence is more explicit in his sorrow over the demise of organized religion in the sense that it no longer binds people in fellowship. The result, says Lawrence, is ‘a poor, blind, disconnected people with nothing but politics and bank-holidays to satisfy the eternal human need of living in ritual adjustment to the cosmos in its revolutions, in eternal submission to the greater laws’ (p.328). There is indeed something gravely wrong with the body politic when it is half-dead. Words such as ‘poor’, ‘blind’ and ‘disconnected’ recall *King Lear* and its disordered, unkind realm; and in the context of Lawrence’s jeremiad, the phrase ‘bank holiday’ appears as an ironic oxymoron: ‘holy days’ are now organized for the benefit of the money-changers rather than the worshippers – as though money has indeed acquired more ‘worth-ship’ than the kindness of ‘religio’.

It is at this point – on the way back to the exigencies of the outside world – that Lawrence is forced to acknowledge the existence of politics. Whereas Lawrence

the prophet finally fell out with Bertrand Russell over the latter's preference for practical social initiative over mystic essentialism, the later, more pragmatic Lawrence is aware that politics cannot be disregarded simply because it is thought to be failing us in its present form. Neither can politics be simply bypassed by the imposition of authoritarianism, for as Lawrence discovered in *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*, authoritarianism cannot be but political. As much as Lawrence might lament (in the above quote from the 'A Propos' essay) the idea that the 'social and political side' of human consciousness has become dissociated from the 'spontaneous intuitive side', his role as an artist is to show that there can be no *ultimate* failure of transformative continuity between our 'animal' selves and our linguistically constructed social selves: his talk of division is an impassioned call to attention, but life itself can never, by definition, be 'half corpse'. The Lawrence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* thus anticipates the slogan which holds that 'the personal is political', for his critique of contemporary sociality never gets above itself. He champions our individual humanity and attacks the evil that makes any of us less than individually human – but now, rather than resort to mystic essentialism or naïve political/religious nostrums, Lawrence the artist and pragmatist simply points up the insufficiency of our present arrangements. Thus there is much use of the word 'dismal' in Lawrence's depictions of the ugliness of Tevershall; for these are indeed 'evil days' – gloomy, malign and unpropitious – in which we so signally fail to effect our transformative continuity within the world. Writing of the grim social stand-off between working class and aristocracy in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence describes it in the following terms: 'Gulf impassable, breach indescribable... A strange denial of the common pulse of humanity' (p.14), and 'the utter death of the human intuitive faculty' (p.152).

There is no need for Lawrence to bring politics any more explicitly into this picture, for the very depiction of such a denial of humankind-ness cannot but be political in its implications. Clifford embodies this denial in his attitude to the Tevershall miners: he sees them as less than human – ‘objects rather than men (p.15) – and worth no more than their function within the industrial machine: “‘I believe there is a gulf and an absolute one, between the ruling and the serving classes. The two functions are opposed. And the function determines the individual’” (p.183). This is an outright denial of solidarity, and such a denial can only be sustained at the cost of a rigidity of thought which is in turn a denial of spontaneity. Terry Eagleton sets this self-conscious valorization of functionality over equality within a wider historical context:

Modern history makes it especially hard for us to think in non-instrumental terms. Modern capitalist societies are so preoccupied with thinking in terms of means and ends, of which methods will efficiently achieve their goals, that their moral thinking becomes infected by this model as well.’⁷⁷

Instead of genuine self-fulfilment, capitalism offers meretricious opportunities for competitive self-delusion and distractions of the ‘lifestyle’ variety – a tendency presciently noted by Lawrence in his descriptions of the youth of Tevershall, who seem somehow dispirited and demeaned in their mania for buying clothes, ‘jazzing’ and going to the cinema. There is nothing paradoxical in Eagleton’s assertion that ‘the idea of fulfilling your nature is inimical to the capitalist success ethic. Everything in capitalist society must have its point and its purpose’⁷⁸ – including the

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.123.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.115.

materialist cravings which inflame rather than assuage one's feelings of dissatisfaction, emptiness and inequality.

Eagleton goes on to suggest a notion of equality which arguably does justice to Lawrence's 'common pulse of humanity' without lapsing into the facile homogenization of the sort of 'mindless unity' which was Lawrence's early dream of relatedness: 'Treating people in an equal manner does not mean treating them as if they were all the same; it means attending even-handedly to each individual's unique situation. Equality means giving as much weight to one individual's particularity as another's.'⁷⁹ Ironically, such a formulation would readily have lent itself to misappropriation by the Lawrence-prophet, for at first glance it appears to allow for 'aristocrats of the soul' – such as Lawrence once considered himself – to achieve a 'natural' ascendancy which then allows them to impose unity on the masses. But our idea of kindness does not sort ill with consideration, and there is no reason why consideration need not be particular. The lesson learned by Lawrence (and clarified through the successive versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) is this: that for the achievement of a workable accommodation of our humanity, there can be no class of persons which is more equal than any other class, and no class of people who can be reduced to mere drones – whether it be to serve as Rananim disciples or pit-workers. As Richard Hoggart notes in his introduction to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: 'We are responsible towards one another... we may use neither ourselves nor others as things.'⁸⁰ Selfhood is for all, whatever difficulties attend upon the negotiation of that selfhood into wider solidarity. The discursive or linguistic element of consciousness – which is the origin of our sense of ourselves as being capable of individual

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.147.

⁸⁰ Richard Hoggart, introduction to the 1961 edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, reproduced as an appendix to D H Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Penguin Books, [1928] 1990 edition), p.340.

particularity – cannot be denied or suppressed in each other, any more than we can suppress it in ourselves. It must be incorporated into selfhood and, however self-consciously, made reflexive: steered back in the direction of our like-ness – that is, towards other selves. For it seems the first principle of ‘best rule’ is not, after all, best predicated on notions of aristocracy, but on ideas of common identity. ‘Sameness’ is not a question of elitism and exclusivity – of ‘people like us’ – but of empathetic engagement, and our likeness to others is not to be achieved and maintained at the cost of emphasizing our difference from certain ‘Other’ others – for the element of ‘unlike’ is here too close to ‘dislike’.

Accordingly, the question of social class – though it has been much vexed through the course of the Chatterley novels – is ultimately put aside. Michael Squires, noting this supersession of class distinction as a characteristic feature of pastoral, observes: ‘*Lady Chatterley’s Lover* opens with a latticework of class distinctions and then strips these away as the characters discover their true identities.’⁸¹ One’s true identity turns out to be one’s capacity to be the ‘same as’ others, regardless of class boundaries. This is the lesson learned by Connie and Mellors. To lose one’s identity is to lose this capacity for being the same as other people – and this is the fate which befalls Clifford, who loses his human identity to the extent that his likeness to the world is reduced to a matter of mere chemical constituency. This is the price exacted by such exclusivity, and exclusivity in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is not solely the preserve of the upper classes: the gamekeeper is, at the outset of each version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, determinedly rebarbative in his efforts at self-protection. But in his case, solitude is a necessary prelude to a truer expression of likeness than has been

⁸¹ Michael Squires, ‘*Lady Chatterley’s Lover*: “Pure Seclusion”’, in Ellis, David & De Zordo, Ornella (eds.), *Critical Assessments III*, p.124.

achieved in the past – a movement outwards which, whatever the difficulties of its realization, will necessarily override questions of class distinction.

Moving Outwards

Lady Chatterley's Lover is frequently criticized for its apparent evasiveness over the question of the return to the wider world which is the customary conclusion to the pastoral episode. Whatever Lawrence's criticisms of Tevershall and industrial technology, his alternative vision of guildsmen dancing around maypoles (as imagined by Mellors in his letter to Connie) is too fanciful. Lawrence, though having overcome his obsession with aristocracy, still looks uncomfortable and unconvincing as a *de facto* socialist. His diffidence toward the wider world is still apparent, and finds expression in Mellors' longing to escape altogether from civilization and its trappings – along with a gloomy acknowledgement that this is no longer an option:

Couldn't one go right away, to the far ends of the earth, and be free from it all? One could not. The far ends of the earth are not five minutes from Charing Cross, nowadays. While the wireless is active, there are no far ends of the earth. Kings of Dahomey and Lamas of Thibet listen in to London and New York. [...] The world is a vast and ghastly mechanism, and one has to be very wary, not to get mangled by it. [p.281]

This is of a piece with Lawrence's general dislike of technology as abstractive – as something which cannot be 'like' life because it can only be static. He sets the idea of mechanism against that of nature. (Lawrence decried the new technology of cinema for precisely that reason: the 'movie' is only a mechanical succession of still images, and so its apparently lifelike quality is only illusory.) The inference is that

Lawrence's work raises questions as to what is organic and what is mechanical. Indeed, the overall question appears to be concerned with what we are prepared to regard as 'Nature'. As Eagleton sees it, nature is what we would see if we were transparent to ourselves. If we can imagine such a state of transparency, the likelihood is that we would see human nature as being in no way discontinuous from the flux of reality, and that our use of language would therefore be – as is the best of language in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – a reflection of our likeness to the world and an expression of our contingent existence in it. (Thus, at last, the sense of 'self/world' conflation – which Daniel Dervin has identified as Lawrence's lifelong psychological paradigm – comes to be associated with creativity rather than vulnerability and strife.)

Since language makes it possible for us to construct different selves – including selves which are discontinuous from the world – language entails a responsibility for us to negotiate our way towards versions of selfhood that are compatible with human flourishing. This will not make the world into a garden of Eden or mean that nature will no longer be red in tooth and claw; but an analogy from the animal kingdom (similar to Eagleton's example of toads) may be useful here. It is fatuous for us to describe a cheetah as cruel, for it is amoral in the true sense of the word. It appears to us to be supremely well-fitted for the accomplishment of cheetah-like purposes. We surmise that its being in the world is not complicated by a surfeit of self-consciousness or subjectivity, for cheetahs seem not to identify themselves in that way. In the wild, cheetahs are suited to their habitat and naturally pose no threat to it – as such, they have no problem in expressing their likeness to the world. Knowing no way of being unlike themselves, they have neither the capacity or necessity to get together and discuss alternative ways of being. It is language which

gives us that option, and language which brings with it the responsibility which attends upon our being able to choose.

Lawrence's writings – especially *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – have come to seem strikingly prescient now that ecological concerns are forcing their way into our consciousness. With simplicity and immediacy, Lawrence shows that relations of integrity and wholeness can be achieved between people, and that such relations are like in kind to those which are possible between people and the world. He also shows how certain factors – the very factors identified by Terry Eagleton – have the power to abstract us from that relatedness. Language, cultural sophistication, technology – all can be used to deny relatedness, even while they have the power to enhance it. They *can* be kindness by other means, making our world and a place for us within it; alternatively, they can be used to unmake the world, thereby denying us a place in it. Culture (in the widest sense) should be the workshop in which we fashion our transformative continuity, making ourselves a world in which, as Lawrence maintained was once the case, 'all things correspond'. Terry Eagleton puts the same case in terms which speak both of practical possibility and pressing moral imperative:

Universality today is in one sense a material fact. The fact that we have become a universally communicative species – a fact which, by and large, we have capitalism to thank for – should lay the basis for a global order in which the needs of every individual can be satisfied. The global village must become the co-operative commonwealth. But this is not just a moral prescription. 'Ought' implies 'can': the very resources which have brought a global existence into being have also made possible in principle a new form of political existence. [...] Just because of some of the technologies developed by capitalism, we now

have the material basis on which it might be realized. In fact, if we do not realize it we might end up with no material basis at all.⁸²

Technology therefore cuts both ways. It can be in the service of solidarity, facilitating touch in hitherto undreamt-of ways; or it can serve insularity, alienation and degeneracy by seeming to have the power of obviating touch. For a frighteningly far-seeing instance of the latter scenario, we need only bear witness to the sexless, dehumanized perversion of the reproductive process envisaged for the future by Clifford's sophisticated clique – a process which embryologists are perfecting even as I write. The key to all this lies in the quality of intentionality and *human* awareness which we bring to bear on the use of such technology. Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with the technology of printing and distribution very much at the forefront of his mind; and it is, moreover, a novel which ends with a letter written by one character to another – a letter which will presumably be forwarded via a technologically sophisticated postal system. It is not the element of sophistication but the orientation that matters – for sending a letter can mean 'keeping in touch' with someone, just as it can be a means of keeping one's distance. So it is with language and culture in general. If we read the Etruscan dance of Lawrence's *Sketches* as involving a degree of cultural sophistication – it has musical accompaniment, at least some element of formalization, and is depicted in paintings – we nevertheless infer that it is an inherently *social* activity: it is a dancing with and towards, rather than a dancing alone or away from others who happen not to fit with one's inverted worldview.

Lawrence's early horror at the thought of people becoming increasingly 'amorphous', with no more social cohesion or kinship than grains of sand, was, we

⁸² Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 161.

saw, not entirely unrelated to his capacity to disrupt boundaries in search of new ways of engagement. Disruption and dispersion in one dimension can imply creative realignments and regroupings in another, and a sense of amorphousness is not, after all, necessarily at odds with the sense of creative Heraclitean flux which Lawrence had so earnestly sought. One simply needs to have the courage of one's sense of the chaotic, and to trust that, with a right spirit, new accommodations can be found and new boundaries negotiated – always with a view to human kindness. But chaos must mean everyone has a say: one cannot, after all, be an Etruscan *lucumon* in possession of esoteric wisdom about 'the way things should be' for other people, for to become thus elevated is simultaneously to become 'the man who died' away from kinship. Given that we are a universally communicative species, what is in our best interests is not esotericism but universal participation, for this is what holds out the best hope of binding people together, as Terry Eagleton notes:

Once everyone can be in on the political act... we can expect conflict, argument, difference and dissent to thrive. For one thing, there would be a great many more people able to articulate their views and gain a public hearing. The situation would be exactly the opposite of some anodyne utopia.⁸³

Favouring creative anarchy over oppressive authoritarianism and political correctness, this formulation is a long way removed from the prophetic Lawrence who sought to prescribe his utopia of Rananim as an opium for the masses – but it accords entirely with the kind of shin-kicking rebelliousness which Lawrence would later champion as the legitimate business of the novel; for Lawrence was always more convincing as a polemicist than as a prophet. Eagleton further notes how:

⁸³ Ibid.

...so much culture and civility have their roots in unhappiness and exploitation. We have come to recognize culture in the broader sense as an arena in which the discarded and dispossessed can explore shared meanings and affirm a common identity.⁸⁴

I suggest *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as a novel, stands as a cultural artefact which exemplifies this broader sense of culture – not least by the way in which it takes issue with the inbred conception of culture embodied by Clifford Chatterley. As a philosophical work, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can be best viewed in the light of Richard Rorty's suggestion that 'Philosophy' (as the term has been traditionally understood to mean an academic discipline) should now be considered of less importance than a plurality of written genres which includes novels, ethnographies, travel writing, reportage, web-based journals, etc. – for in Rorty's view, these genres are more suited to sensitizing us to the pain of others and thus 'do the job which demonstrations of a common human nature were [formerly] supposed to do'. He further notes that 'solidarity has to be constructed out of little pieces, rather than found already waiting, in the form of an ur-language which all of us recognize when we hear it'.⁸⁵ *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, emphasizing as it does the 'little pieces' – trees, flowers, contingently existing human beings, humankind-ness over and above cruelty and degeneracy – undoubtedly has its wider philosophical import. In its own contingent way, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* arguably says more about what it means to be human than many a conventional philosophical treatise.

Conclusion

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.97.

⁸⁵ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.94.

There is an episode in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which points up these paradoxes of abstraction and participation, intellection and spontaneity, esotericism and exotericism, and the potential of language to take us in either direction: towards the dance, or away from it. Connie returns to Wragby Hall after meeting Mellors in the wood and finds Clifford preening his intellectualism by poring over a book by the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, published in 1926 and entitled (felicitously enough, given Lawrence's present philosophical concerns) *Religion in the Making*. The passages which Clifford quotes to Connie stand in an oddly paradoxical relationship with Lawrence's late philosophy:

[The universe] is slowly passing, with a slowness inconceivable in our measures of time, to new creative conditions, amid which the physical world, as we at present know it, will be represented by a ripple barely to be distinguished from nonentity [...] The present type or order in the world has risen from an unimaginable past, and it will find its grave in an unimaginable future. There remains the inexhaustive realm of abstract forms, and creativity, with its shifting character ever determined afresh by its own creatures, and God, upon whose wisdom all forms of order depend. [pp.233-4]

The narrative holds these passages up for deflation, if not outright derision: Connie dismisses Whitehead's words as 'priggish little impertinence' and declares the author to be 'spiritually blown out'. Even Clifford is somewhat abashed by the vigour of her response, and concedes: 'I must say, it is a little vaguely conglomerate – a mixture of gases, so to speak.'

Yet I suggest there is nothing in Whitehead's thinking which is at odds with the Lawrence who wrote the Etruscan sketches and later *Apocalypse*. The passages

from Whitehead actually parallel the Lawrence passage from version two of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (quoted above) in which Lawrence extols the ever-protean plurality of a universe which *is* as we see it, but which can always be seen afresh. The idea of the physical world as 'a ripple barely distinguishable from nonentity' sufficiently conjures a sense of the world's contingency; the 'shifting character' of an 'inexhaustive realm of abstract forms' is near enough analogous to the Heraclitean flux; and the idea of 'religion in the making' is arguably the whole point of Lawrence's philosophical journey. What actually generates the sense of paradox here is Lawrence's ironic contextualization of Whitehead's writing. Connie has just returned to Wragby Hall after running naked in the rain with Mellors in Wragby Wood, and is made to listen to Whitehead's words as they are quoted by Clifford Chatterley, who is – in more senses than the merely literal – incapable of running naked in the rain, for all such natural and spontaneous self-expression is long since dead to him. If there is no fundamental opposition between Whitehead's words and the exuberantly flippant physicality with which Connie rejects them, what we are witnessing is Lawrence's staging of what Rorty regards as typical characteristics of the ironist: the 'realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being re-described', and the ironist's consequent 'renunciation of the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies'. Connie, newly confident, has become one of those ironists who is 'never quite able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of themselves'.⁸⁶ In choosing between vocabularies, we have no recourse to criteria which are not themselves formulated in vocabularies – we cannot compare

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.73-4.

vocabularies with ‘the original’, but only with each other. Lawrence’s purpose in the Whitehead episode is to encourage the reader to compare vocabularies of metaphysical profundity and contingent physicality. Connie rejects the former and embraces the latter as Clifford never can: his sense of existential terror makes his mortality a personal threat, and thus he seeks refuge in a ‘final vocabulary’ – such as the Whitehead passage – which will allow him the last word in all matters of life and morality. He refuses to use language to effect his transformative continuity from the animal to the human, for both realms must accept mortality as the price of being alive; as we have seen, Clifford’s final recourse is effectively to reject both mortality *and* life by transforming himself, as it were, into base elements.

In terms of vocabularies, the key to the Whitehead episode is found in a statement from Whitehead which Clifford quotes to Connie: ‘The universe shows us two aspects: on one side it is physically wasting, on the other it is spiritually ascending.’ There is nothing inherently bad or wrong about the idea of spiritual ascension, at least insofar as it indicates a sense of human aspiration. But it is, Lawrence appears to suggest, an idea which has long since succeeded too well: we have come to use words like ‘spiritual’ and ‘ascension’ to point to something above ourselves – something which indeed seems to leave us physically wasting in the sense that we become ‘cheap stuff’. Whitehead’s well-meant numinosity is just the sort of ‘ur-language’ which, as Rorty rather wearily suggests above, ‘all of us recognize when we hear it’. But such ur-languages do not foster solidarity or serve to unite us as individuals. We *cannot* get above our human selves, and to use our vocabularies expressly to point upward toward something humanly unattainable is expressly to claim that we cannot express this putative ur-quality in our very physical selves.

Connie's scepticism thus mirrors that of the 'man who died' when his former disciples spoke of 'the Ascension', for the idea of rising above our bodily selves by divine proxy is simply an exhausted metaphor. As Connie defiantly declares to Clifford: 'Give me the body' (p.234). Pragmatically speaking, we need something more than exhausted metaphors to serve the purpose of binding us together – for religion must indeed be 'in the making', a matter of vital evocation rather than moribund exposition. Whitehead's book is not fundamentally at odds with Lawrence's intentions; but Lawrence has already undergone his Etruscan immersion in universality and is keen to continue on his 'curve of return' to the phenomenal world. A book written by a Cambridge philosopher, having been taken up by a morally degenerate dilettante like Clifford Chatterley for purposes of pretentious quotation, is too far removed from immediacy to be useful. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has, of course, long since been available for similar misappropriation: the act of reading it can too easily be assumed to bring the reader closer to what is natural and thus more worthily human than Clifford Chatterley. But at the same time, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* will not let itself be so easily co-opted, for it insistently implies that reading a book can never be as much fun as running naked in the rain with someone you love. One must still, as it were, go *through* the poet's gate. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is arguably a religious book in the truest sense. Reading it should be a more truly religious experience than perfunctory churchgoing on a Sunday: that is, our reading should not be a pretext upon which to neglect any further observance.

It is for this reason that the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can be forgiven their apparent naivety of style: immediacy is all. Though it may seem to lack philosophical focus, the novel's quickness is 'all there'. Ancient Etruscan paintings, though apparently naïve in their freedom of rendition, are able to convey 'the thing

itself'. They are capable of doing so in their own terms. Though lacking the accuracy and precision of photography or perspective drawing, they nevertheless afforded Lawrence a fresh cross-section through reality. He offers us the same in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. His last novel can be said to address itself to literature, philosophy, psychology, sexuality, sociology, history, ecology, mysticism and physics – and brings academic rigour to bear on none of these disciplines. But such rigour can too easily mean the sort of moribund inflexibility which fails to do justice to the 'whole man-alive'. The 'whole man-alive' is better served by a holistic conception of the world which realises that contingency includes everything – as Lawrence declared in his essay 'Morality and the Novel':

...life *consists in* this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. This is how I 'save my soul', by accomplishing a pure relationship between me and another person, me and other people, me and a nation, me and a race of men, me and the animals, me and the trees or flowers, me and the earth, me and the skies and sun and stars, me and the moon; an infinity of pure relations, bit and little, like the stars of the sky...⁸⁷

I suggest that an envisioning of such pure relatedness sees – pragmatically, rather than romantically – no *essential* discontinuity between another person, a flower, and a star. It is in this sense that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* brings the spiritual and the physical together – not, I suggest, in some clichéd marriage of those two terms as they are commonly understood, but far more compellingly: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* insists that there *is* only the physical, and calls upon us to be duly respectful of that fact – indeed, to revere that fact with no less reverence than is

⁸⁷ D H Lawrence, 'Morality and the Novel', in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p.150. (Lawrence's emphasis.)

customarily deemed appropriate to such things as we habitually hive off from ourselves by dint of deeming them 'spiritual'. 'Bit and little' comprehends the infinite, and vice versa. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence evokes at every turn the unfathomable interdependencies of the world, and at the same time exhorts his readers to *live* in that world and act accordingly: as people who are alive to the power of that evocation and the reality of that interdependency, and who are willing to *do* and *be* something which does justice to the world. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is thus a call toward solidarity – the third term in Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

Chapter Nine

Solidarity: Lawrence's Late Philosophy

Introduction

Philosopher Richard Rorty has suggested that we should give up on the search for ahistorical foundations which will somehow guarantee whatever we choose to believe on their basis. There is no end to such question-begging, and we do better to embrace the contingency of our believing rather than to give in to ‘the temptation to look for an escape from time and chance’.¹ Lawrence’s philosophical journey eventually brought him to the same orientation (‘conclusion’ being rather too definitive a word to do justice to the spirit of contingency). The Lawrence-prophet’s misguided insistence on reinstating essentialism steadily gave him less and less purchase on the world, until the discovery of contingency – as being worthwhile in itself, rather than a mere holiday from essentialist profundity and the rigours of rationality – came as a necessary release. Time and chance do, after all, include everything.

Accordingly, Lawrence’s celebration of ancient Etruscan culture derived much of its energy from his iterative evocation of the ephemerality and diffuseness of that culture. Lawrence’s Etruria was a loosely-knit confederation of tribes, having about them just enough of ‘likeness’ to allow for their mutual flourishing and solidarity, but not enough to solidify them into a monolithic historico-cultural entity. It would be just such an entity (in the shape of the Roman empire) which would eventually ‘destroy’ the ancient Etruscan culture – at least in terms of the grandly teleological narrative which Lawrence considered it was the business of ‘scientific historians’ to propound. Recalling Lawrence’s affirmation in the Etruscan sketches that daisies can and *do*, in a sense, outlast empires, we might say that the twelve Etruscan tribes were

¹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. xiii.

‘like’ to a patch of daisies heedlessly crushed by the cruel ‘Roman’ mechanism of Clifford Chatterley’s wheelchair.

The foregoing analogy is actually far-fetched enough to be useful in this context insofar as it points toward a contingent and multivalent idea of knowledge – one which works by being alive to the ‘like’-ness of things rather than relying on factuality and rigid categorization, and which indeed has more to do with orientation than conclusion. For we know the world in an associative rather than an objective manner: we cannot know it absolutely, but only *relatively* well – which ought, for human purposes, to be well enough. To do justice to the quickness which Lawrence saw as life itself, our capacity to know the world should likewise be thought of in terms of a stream of sense-making; for what we know *is* what we make – not what we find as antecedently existing. What we ‘find’ to have existed in the historical past is *not* some sort of ontological holy grail of anterior wisdom – for what we most find in such a journey to the past is the startling quickness of such human sense-making as has preceded us. Such makings, taken in a right spirit, cannot but lend themselves to our process of making in the present.

Thus when Lawrence descended into the Etruscan tombs, what he ‘found’ there was not the kind of dark, awful, secret wisdom he had once ascribed to civilizations of the past (as in *The Ladybird*), but rather something having to do with his own poetic making in the present. His immersion in past ways of knowing the world did not, after all, yield him any omniscient authority in the present – but neither did it impose any imaginative constraints on his rediscovery of the present. Past ways of knowing the world are worthwhile to the extent that they inform and inspire our present knowing of the world – which can *only* ever be in the present. What Lawrence found in Etruria was simultaneity rather than anteriority. My purpose in

this section is to show that a contingent sense of knowing the world has implications for the way in which Lawrence came to believe that people should strive toward touch and spontaneity (and, in Rorty's sense, solidarity) in knowing each other: that is, by nurturing a sense of inclusivity which favours the 'like'-ness of other people, rather than maintaining an exclusivity which insists on the 'same'-ness of others.

Lawrence, having discovered this liberating contingency of knowing, strove ever afterwards to keep alive in the minds of his readers a sense of the precariousness of what he had found. Ever afterwards in Lawrence's writings, the joys of Etruscan-style spontaneity would be under threat from the mechanism of conquering empires, class divisions, sophistication, degeneracy, effete-ness, scientific historians, astronomers, motorized wheelchairs, and pit-heads which stand for the dehumanization of men. Nonetheless, Lawrence would ever afterwards insist that the daisies keep springing up: contingency may exist precariously, yet paradoxically it cannot help but prevail over that which would deny it. In a further paradox, what denies (or is misused for the purpose of denying) contingency is often – as in the case of Clifford's flowery poetry – that which has been set up to honour it. This is the abstraction which denies rather than affirms our humanity. What is immediate to us – what touches us – is necessarily important to us, and what is humanly important to us is worthy of our respect. But respect is too readily abstracted into reverence, and reverence at length becomes the worship of something we can only communicate by dint of putting it beyond our human selves, and we are once again on the same essentialist treadmill toward the unattainable – a pursuit which was nearly the death of Lawrence. As Lawrence discovered via his striving toward some sustaining notion of human relatedness, our interpersonal wealth consists in the sharing thereof, and is not best realised by making it into a golden calf that we worship as being 'above'

ourselves – for as Moses’ angry descent from Mount Sinai implied, the ‘real Truth’ is always higher still.

The biblical allusion recalls Lawrence’s frustrated sense that the language of Christianity had itself, by his time, fallen into the hands of those second-rate ‘grocer-shop’ moralists who complacently mistook it for something higher. Its ‘religio’-us function of binding us together had become debased into petty denominationalism and perfunctory observance. Lawrence’s culminating idea – like Richard Rorty’s – implies that we should give up not only on such outworn essentialist vocabularies, but also on the very idea of there being a ‘something higher’: that is, a chimerical ‘Real Truth’ which, it seems, we must always put beyond ourselves as a guarantee of our existential authenticity – always with the concomitant effect of making what is immediately at hand look substandard and somehow fraudulent. As Lawrence expresses via Connie in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the ensuing feeling is that our very selves are made of ‘cheap stuff, frayed out to nothing’ and that the ‘great words’ seem all to have been ‘cancelled’, so that their very mention elicits only the resigned stoicism expressed by the phrase, ‘So that’s *that!*’ (p.62). By that stage, it would seem that – whatever we are using the ‘great words’ to mean – we are not meaning things very well. The ‘essential Truth’ we insist on putting beyond our selves somehow falsifies the selves it leaves behind, and is thus a poor investment of our capacity to mean – for the setting-up of such an idea of Truth is, even when it is well-meant, indicative of nothing demonstrably more than an urge to mean well. In Eagleton’s terms, it is a failure of our capacity as linguistic beings to effect our transformative continuity from our animal to our human selves. Richard Rorty advocates, instead of such a seeking after ‘Truth’:

... our [giving] up the attempt to hold all the sides of our life in a single vision, to describe them with a single vocabulary. It would amount to a recognition of...the fact that there is no way to step outside the various vocabularies we have employed and find a metavocabulary which somehow takes account of all possible vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling. A historicist and nominalist culture of the sort I envisage would settle instead for narratives which connect the present with the past, on the one hand, and with utopian futures on the other. More important, it would regard the realization of utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias, as an endless process – an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth.²

The vocabulary of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, though it has itself been in some respects superseded, does much to celebrate honest contingency as more vital than the enervating metavocabularies of culture and morality which are Clifford Chatterley's stock-in-trade. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* exemplifies the idea – as was argued at the time of the famous obscenity trial – that the novel as a genre is a more than capable vehicle for moral expression. As Lawrence saw it, the novel was our best hope of holding all the sides of life in a single vision: not in a determinedly totalizing way, but in a creative way. In that sense, Lawrence's favoured genre takes its place in a progression noted by Rorty:

The novel, the movie, and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress. In my liberal utopia, this replacement

² Ibid., p.xvi.

would receive a kind of recognition which it still lacks. That recognition would be part of a general turn against theory and toward narrative.³

The first sentence of this passage once again suggests that element of Lawrence's thinking which was always 'of its time', for in Lawrence's worldview there seems to have been an absolute disjunction between the novel (as something which has the capacity to renew life) and the movie (as something which can only ever falsify it) – and there can perhaps be no legislating against the historico-cultural tendency whereby one man's meaning is another man's abstraction. But Lawrence's thinking, having been progressive enough to recognize that sermons and treatises had been superseded by the novel, would doubtless have realised in time that this process of generic supercession will necessarily force its own progress. As Lawrence noted in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, one meaning inevitably overwrites another, and we may readily envisage that there will always be new genres and vocabularies in which we will seek to 'tell it how it is': in Rorty's utopia, this will simply mean narrativization rather than theorization (just as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* pointedly overturns theory and aestheticism in favour of storytelling). The implication seems to be that we should try (however counter-intuitive it may seem to our essentialist yearnings) to get a pragmatically *sensible* sense of what we mean by 'Meaning'. Richard Rorty, via his idea of the de-divinization of meaning, helps us to understand and work through the sense of frustration which attends upon the apparent cancellation of the 'great words'. For in his view we should give up the effort of perpetually trying to reinstate them and instead abandon them to their natural tendency to self-cancellation. Words are, as Lawrence understood, like leaves thrown off the tree.

³ Ibid.

De-Divinization

Rorty's recommended de-divinization suggests that 'we need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there'. In a move which curiously recalls the post-essentialist humility of Lawrence's 'Democracy' essay, Rorty sets aside the idea of truth as some kind of ontological verity:

To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations.⁴

As Lawrence discovered the hard way, one may readily hold forth about 'Truth', or 'Oneness', or 'Creation' – but there eventually follows a sense that one's totalizing ambitions have been self-defeating because they have necessarily denied themselves any contingent relationship to what is commonsensically 'out there' in the phenomenal world. This was the cause of the break-up between Lawrence and Bertrand Russell, who constantly found that his determination to address the immediate practicalities of human society was simply outbid by the immature Lawrence's fondness for easy essentialisms. Thus Lawrence eventually decided – with characteristic disregard for the exactitude of formal philosophical procedure that there was, after all, no such essential, universal 'Truth' about which it would be worthwhile for him to pontificate:

⁴ Ibid., pp.4-5.

The big bump of falling out of the infinite back into your own pair of pants leads you to suspect that the One Identity is not the identity. There is another, little sort of identity, which you can't get away from, except by breaking your neck. [...] All the extended consciousness that ranges the infinite heavens must sleep under the thatch of your hair at night: and you are only you...⁵

The point at issue here is obviously our working idea of 'identity': to say that 'everything is mysteriously the same as everything else' is perhaps to succeed in setting up a 'One Identity'; but it is likely to be less appealing (and commensurately less interesting) to us than hearing a poet evoke the feeling that some particular aspect of the world is curiously and contingently *like* to some other aspect of the world. Universalizing, declarative certainty somehow works less well than the particularizing effect of suggestive affinity. For Lawrence, *like*-ness in the sense of creative affinity was always a more compelling proposition than that of mere mathematical equation. In this respect, Lawrence's Etruscan discovery of a world in which 'all things corresponded' is only the beginning: it is an inspiring way of freeing up the world from its conventional boundaries – but the resulting sense of universality should be thought of in terms of its 'worth-ship' rather than worship. It is *not* an excuse to escape from the world into a comfortably cloudlike transcendence, but a cue for us to begin remaking the world in worthwhile ways. For in freeing up the world from the constraints of over-conceptualization, Lawrence's evocative universalizing of space and time frees *us* up for the business of finding fresh and appealing correspondences. Everything becomes once more the 'raw stuff' of physical reality and thus available to us for the process of sense-making. What matters now is not escapist universality, but

⁵ D H Lawrence, 'Democracy', in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.70.

our skill in weaving new and appealingly human patterns of interrelatedness from the stuff at hand, and it is for *this* that we cannot humanly help but develop vocabularies. Lawrence came to see universality and transcendence (as in the ‘One Identity’) as abstractions which he had overvalued *as ends in themselves* – for it is this childish ‘fondness for beyondness’ which he came to see as the cause of our overlooking (rather than revering) what is contingently at hand.

As Lawrence discovered in his pursuit of the ‘One Identity’, some sentences are truly not worth making in terms of what they identify as truth, and his Etruscan adventure revealed to him that even universality (with a *small* ‘u’) is best evoked contingently – for lower-case evocation works better than capitalized insistence. Rorty emphasizes that, while individual sentences can be true, vocabularies cannot – for vocabularies are best considered in terms of usefulness rather than truth. To say that ‘White wins’ is to say a true thing, given that the game has been played in accordance with the rules of chess. The sentence corresponds with a verifiable state of affairs ‘out there’ in the world, and we may consequently expect such a sentence to be understood and agreed with by others to whom we utter it. But the correspondence theory of truth does not appear to extend beyond the degree of consensus which we commonly expect such immediately referential sentences to generate. Such contextually-warranted assertabilities seem ‘true’ to us *because* they are localized, delimited in their presumptive scope. But to declare that ‘the Cosmos is an Infinite Oneness’, or that ‘Truth is Universal’ (or even that ‘Fischer’s triumph over Spassky symbolized the triumph of Western democracy over Soviet communism’) is to lose the element of immediate reference to a workably consensual state of affairs in the world. Such sentences are therefore not so much worthwhile statements as compliments paid to kinds of vocabulary which have been deemed useful (or perhaps

usefully impressive) in the past – vocabularies having to do (in the examples given) with metaphysicality or political ideology. It seems that such vocabularies arise by way of an unconscious process of conflation between the first kind of sentence and the second – for once we have assumed the world to be chock-full of facts, we unconsciously assume language to be a medium that we use to ‘get at’ them. But the attempt to move upwards from individual sentences of workably grounded, consensual specificity into entire vocabularies – while hoping that the desirable element of groundedness will survive in the upper atmosphere – inevitably fails, for such attempts always launch ‘fact’ into factitiousness: *facere* reveals itself to be indeed a matter of what we do and make, rather than a process of establishing things that exist independently of our perceptions. The process of instituting vocabularies is therefore not one of objective investigation – it is one of subjective extrapolation.

Rorty notes:

We [should] not be tempted to confuse the platitude that the world may cause us to be justified in believing a sentence to be true with the claim that the world splits itself up, on its own initiative, into sentence-shaped chunks called ‘facts’. But if one clings to the notion of self-subsistent facts, it is easy to start capitalizing the word ‘truth’ and treating it as something identical either with God or with the world as God’s project. Then one will say, for example, that Truth is great, and will prevail. This conflation is facilitated by confining attention to single sentences as opposed to vocabularies. For we often let the world decide the competition between alternative sentences [...] In such cases, it is easy to run together the fact that the world contains the causes of our being justified in holding a belief with the claim that

some non-linguistic state of the world is itself an example of truth, or that some such state ‘makes a belief true’ by ‘corresponding’ to it. But it is not so easy when we turn from individual sentences to vocabularies as wholes. When we consider examples of alternative language games – the vocabulary of ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson’s, the moral vocabulary of Saint Paul versus Freud’s, the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle, the idiom of Blake versus that of Dryden – it is difficult to think of the world as making one of these better than another, of the world as deciding between them.⁶

Lawrence’s later philosophy is all to do with the free play of vocabularies: his boisterous talk of bumping and shin-kicking and pairs of pants is deliberately set against the capitalized essence-words of ‘Infinite’ and ‘Truth’ as a way of countering such discourse – not least by making his alternative vocabulary sound like more fun. Lawrence eventually found that such playful irreverence was a good way of changing the subject, for changing the subject had come to seem a better idea than arguing within the constraints of an exhausted essentialist vocabulary – a vocabulary which he had formerly sought to revitalize before finally giving up the attempt. *The Ladybird* was Lawrence’s experimental attempt to win at philosophical absolutism as if it were a game of chess: the ‘dark’ knowledge of Count Dionys was set against the ‘white’ consciousness of Basil – but the world disobligingly refuses to be exclusively black or white and thus does not provide the rules upon which any such game can be decided. The outcome was neither victory nor enlightenment, but simply Daphne’s exasperated boredom at having to listen to two men ‘squibbing philosophical nonsense to one another’ (p.205). Vocabularies, whether conceived of as black or white, are tools.

⁶ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.5.

Any such vocabulary is inevitably question-begging, for its very purpose is to institute assumptions on behalf of its users and those to whom they wish to appeal. Such a vocabulary is an accretion of consensus, made up of such sense-making as has already been made and subsequently accepted as authoritative.

The lesson to be learned from Lawrence's journey would seem to be that essentialism is neither interesting nor useful – for existing vocabularies are superseded *not* by an appeal to what is 'essentially' true, but by such other vocabularies as come to be regarded as more interesting and useful than those which precede them. As Lawrence learned, there is no point in seeking to overwrite existing vocabularies by invoking the 'Ineffable' – for the simple reason that it is impossible to say anything worthwhile about it. The act is merely gestural and self-negating. To say that something is ineffably meaningful is meaningless, for it is merely to say that you do not know what you mean, or have not yet thought of anything worth meaning (while perhaps hoping to give the impression that you *have*) – or even that you would rather be spared the bother of meaning anything at all. It is a way of signifying nothing while accoutred in a panoply of significance. While physicists can now somehow perceive that there is more of the world 'out there' than we can humanly perceive, reverential platitudes about 'the Mystery of the Absolute' amount to nothing more than an admission that we have not yet thought of anything worth saying about what we think we currently *can* perceive of the world. A meaning that cannot be expressed is a meaning that is not meant. It is arguably impossible to feel inexpressible joy (though it would no doubt be mean-spirited to take issue with someone who claimed to be in a state thereof). Nevertheless, not everyone who feels joy is a poet. It is quite acceptable for the rest of us to feel sufficiently moved to the point where we are 'lost for words', or to reach for a volume of poetry if so inclined.

Indeed, it may well be the volume of poetry which has occasioned our feeling of joy. But to reach for the Racine (as does Clifford Chatterley) because it is somehow thought to express inexpressible quiddities on our behalf is, at the last, to find ourselves once again standing with Constance Chatterley at the threshold of the 'poet's gate': wondering whether the purpose of poetry is to bring real, actual flowers *to us*, or to put them effectively *beyond us*. It can be made to serve either purpose. Lawrence, at last, chose contingent evocation over absolutism and aestheticism, for it is by evoking the contingency of flowers that poetry touches us – not by abstracting them away from us.

This sense of aporia between essentialism and contingency is, in Rorty's view, occasioned by our superstitious insistence or 'intuition' that the truth is 'out there': the feeling that 'it would be *hybris* [sic] on our part, [or] risky and blasphemous, not to see the scientist (or the philosopher, or the poet, or *somebody*) as having a priestly function, as putting us in touch with a realm which transcends the human'.⁷ We can easily feel we are being negligent to the point of blasphemy if we are not genuflecting toward something – anything – which we can claim to be beyond our selves. Much of the contemporary criticism of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was duly of the *nostalgie de la boue* variety, for the novel must have seemed at the time as if it insisted on doing without, or even doing away with, everything which people intuitively feel (or, at least, consider that *others* should feel) to be sacred. But it is implicit within Lawrence's eventual rejection of essentialism that there is *no* ineffable mystery towards which we have an obligation to set up and maintain vocabularies of belief or worship, for the effort involved is a distraction from the work at hand. Connie's derisive rejection of Clifford's quotations from Whitehead declares as much. Rorty

⁷ Ibid., p.21.

even goes as far as suggesting that we do away with the idea of having a mysterious thing called ‘intuition’, for it has actually become an impediment to immediate apprehension:

On the view I am suggesting, the claim that an ‘adequate’ philosophical doctrine must make room for our intuitions is a reactionary slogan, one which begs the question at hand. For it is essential to my view that we have no pre-linguistic consciousness to which language needs to be adequate, no deep sense of how things are which it is the duty of philosophers to spell out in language. What is described as such a consciousness is simply a disposition to use the language of our ancestors, to worship the corpses of their metaphors.⁸

Again, I wish to suggest that Lawrence implicitly reached a similar philosophical position in *The Ladybird*. Lawrence’s dramatic staging of an episode of pre-linguistic consciousness – the apotheosis of Count Dionys into an Egyptian ‘king-god’ – is a philosophical failure, albeit an instructive one. There is nothing conducive to human solidarity to be discovered there, and nowhere to go afterwards. Dionys duly quits the stage. Lawrence’s disposition to plunder the metaphors of ancient Egypt was exhibited in *The Ladybird* – and was found to be unworkable. It was duly abandoned and was safely beyond recall by the time he reached the Etruscan tombs. In this respect, Lawrence’s fondness for the idea of the Etruscan *lucumones* – those Lawrentian keepers of what Rorty calls the ‘priestly function’ – can be seen as ambiguous. Lawrence’s fondness for the role of Etruscan *lucomon* (or at least his idea of it) can be read either as Lawrence’s lingering insistence that there must be some such anterior wisdom *somewhere* – or as his eventual realization that there is

⁸ Ibid.

nothing that can be said by, nor anything worth saying about, such postulated ineffability. Certainly, on the evidence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence had long since dispensed with the idea of priestly function.

The implication would seem to be that there *is* no heightened state of anterior awareness which can guarantee our subsequent sense-making by virtue of being mysteriously separate from it, for we are simply postulating something which we simultaneously guarantee is unavailable to us for the purpose at hand – namely, that of making sense of the world. It is an idea we can make sense neither *of* nor *with*. Sensibly speaking, there *is* no higher consciousness which mysteriously informs our subsequent sense-making, and to ‘sense’ that there *is* is to make *non*-sense rather than sense. There is, after all, only the moment of supervention wherein our linguistic, human consciousness effects – or fails to effect – our transformative continuity from our animal selfhood to our human selfhood. It is therefore self-deluding of us to think that there must be something mysteriously unthinkable – which then precedes and thereby guarantees that very thought. We must give up our fondness for the comforting sense of validation to be had from such circularity. We cannot be aware of anything we have not sensed, any more than we can make sense of anything we are unaware of.

One effect of Lawrence's increasing dissatisfaction with (and later rejection of) anteriority has been clear enough in the Etruscan sketches: spontaneity becomes more important. Lawrence's evocations of Etruscan dance have a vitality which far outstrips the staginess of the *lucomon* scenes, for dancing does away with the burdensome necessity of antecedent authorization. One need not, after all, be steeped in the wisdom of the ancients in order to dance – any more than one's dancing need necessarily be construed as repudiating wisdom or ancientness *per se*. It depends on

what one means by wisdom. There *must* be that of spontaneity which is simply 'in the moment'. Spontaneity does not mean that simplicity and momentousness cannot go hand in hand. And it accords entirely with the de-divinizing trend of Lawrence's later philosophy that spontaneity is something that happens *freely*, of one's own accord – as the etymological root (the Latin *sponte*) indicates. It is not, finally, something that can be dispensed and ordered by anyone on behalf of others – whether the 'anyone' in question be an ancient Etruscan *lucumon*, an overbearing school-inspector, a Bohemian count or a self-appointed prophet.

To accord renewed importance to spontaneity is to declare that it deserves attention; but the business of expressly attending to spontaneity can be (as we have seen in Lawrence's life and writings) a fraught and contradictory one. As we have repeatedly seen in Lawrence's life and work, attention of the wrong sort is actually fatal to spontaneity. It is far better to evoke spontaneity than to impose it, and this is Lawrence's purpose in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: to show two people learning to attend to their human selves, for to be truly 'one's self' is naturally and freely to be 'of one's own accord' – and spontaneity happens, without recourse to antecedent wisdom or higher consciousness.

Rorty further suggests that we do away not only with notions of anteriority and pre-linguistic consciousness, but also with the 'quasi divinities' which we postulate as mediating between us and the 'Beyond' – for if there is no such hidden realm, we do not need such intermediaries. Contingency means there can and should be an end to our disposition for putting what is worthy – that is, what we consider has 'worth-ship' – *beyond* ourselves:

Once upon a time we felt a need to worship something which lay beyond the visible world. Beginning in the seventeenth century we

tried to substitute a love of truth for a love of God, treating the world described by science as a quasi divinity. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century we tried to substitute a love of ourselves for a love of scientific truth, a worship of our own deep spiritual or poetic nature, treated as one more quasi divinity. [My] line of thought... suggests that we try to get to the point where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything* – our language, our conscience, our community – as a product of time and chance.⁹

In other words, Rorty is suggesting that we get off the essentialist treadmill and resist the temptation to replace one vocabulary of enshrinement with another. These historical shifts from one ‘quasi divinity’ to the next are less suggestive of progress than of *process*: they do not, in Rorty’s view, bring us ever nearer to the ‘truth’ about the world, but are more like ways of re-opening the world to fresh apprehension. This is reminiscent of Lawrence’s insistence (in *Apocalypse*) that in the days when ‘the whole cosmos was alive and in contact with the flesh of man, there was no room for the intrusion of the god idea’.¹⁰ A contingent universe – one that is felt as being ‘in contact with the flesh of man’ – is less susceptible to the intervention of ‘god ideas’ or ‘quasi divinities’. (Thus Rorty’s complementary ideas of contingency and solidarity are, in a sense, religion by another name: serving the ‘binding’ function but with no concomitant insistence on ‘the god idea’.) Having moved away (or died away) from ideas of anteriority, transcendence and beyondness, what remains in Lawrence’s vision is the idea of man in contact with the phenomenal world (as in *The Escaped Cock*). What then comes into focus is what I have called the moment of supervention

⁹ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁰ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, Mara Kalnins (ed.) (London: Penguin Books Ltd, (1931) 1995), p.130.

– the point at which our human, sense-making, linguistic subjectivity either succeeds or fails in effecting what Eagleton calls our transformative continuity.

It is at this point of incipient sense-making that traditional philosophy insists on interpolating the ‘perennial’ problems – the ones which supposedly arise as soon as one reflects. But these problems can be made optional: dissolved (rather than solved) by paying a different sort of attention to the world. The language we bring to the business of creating our linguistic selfhood – itself something which can only be realised in terms of *other* selves – is either a reflection of our animal/human ‘like’-ness, or it is not. The vocabulary we choose can be one which fosters self-creation and kindness, or it can be a language which can indeed – by articulating a notion of human selfhood which lies beyond ourselves – make us feel as though our very selves are made of (as Lawrence called it) ‘cheap stuff’. The difference would seem to lie in a willingness to do without the sort of quasi-divinities which we tend to enshrine in ‘great words’; for it is the very act of putting such things *beyond* our selves which leads to the feeling that the objects of our enshrinement have indeed become somehow cancelled. Though the act of taking issue with a statement such as ‘God’s Creation is Divine’ can itself seem like one of life-denying cancellation, it need not be: take away the idea of there being a white-bearded ‘Divine Watchmaker’ in the sky, and the statement becomes something like ‘contingency is endlessly wonderful’ – or even ‘the world is phenomenal’. By the same token, words like ‘Love’ and ‘Truth’, once quasi-divinized, are abstracted from us, and seem to have little to do with the immediacy of solidarity which Lawrence learned to call touch. What remains, after the abstraction process, is the desolate sense of second-handedness represented by Clifford Chatterley as he desperately rummages for comfort among his self-consciously literary, aesthetic, political, philosophical and moral vocabularies.

Lawrence and Religion

Of course, Rorty's idea of de-divinization itself raises the question of religion – questions as to its status and relevance. So, too, does Lawrence's conception of a cosmos which has not yet been intruded upon by 'the god idea'. Rorty's idea of solidarity can be said to embody a paradox: it suggests a way of binding people together and is therefore religious – though secularly so. Yet even when viewed in the light of the de-divinizing tendency of Rorty's thinking, I suggest there is something amiss when the word 'religion' has to be extended into something like 'religion-in-the-widest-sense-of-the-word'. Besides being unwieldy, such a construction somehow looks as though it fails to do justice to either religion, wideness, *or* sense. It seems to imply a failure of religion – as though the latter has become too feeble to stand without assistance. Yet I suggest the failure is not on the part of the word itself, but of our capacity to *mean* with it. To feel as much is to feel a sense of kinship with Lawrence when, as a young man, he felt moved to reject the Christianity which had done so much to form his character and outlook: his rejection was a qualified one in the sense that he never truly rejected the language of Christianity. He rejected the debasement of those terms into currency fit only for second-rate 'grocer-shop' moralists – those clergymen and teachers who, in Lawrence's view, wielded the language of Christianity without ever doing justice to the sense of 'worth-ship' which should attend upon the use of that language.

The implication – as suggested by the fact that Lawrence never *finally* renounced the vocabulary of Christianity – is *not* that we should resort to a wholesale abandonment of the terms associated with religion. It would clearly be contradictory to suggest that we should abandon the word ‘religion’ in favour of ‘solidarity’ because the latter binds us together while the former does not. If, as Constance Chatterley at one point wearily reflects, all the ‘great words’ – love, joy, happiness, home – seem to have been ‘cancelled’, the obvious implication is that there would be no end to our jettisoning of those words which strike us as having declined from ‘worth-ship’ into worthlessness. If such words have ceased to be effective in our process of transformative continuity, it would be strange indeed to infer on that basis that words like ‘love, joy, happiness [and] home’ should – along with ‘God’, ‘Truth’ and ‘Divine’ – be deleted wholesale from our dictionaries. A more constructive inference would be that it is not the words themselves which have lost their meaning: it is our capacity to mean *with* them.

This is where the mature Lawrence’s way of *re-divinizing* the terms of religion by ‘bringing them back to earth’ (as in his reworking of the Resurrection story in *The Escaped Cock*) is not necessarily at odds with Rorty’s idea that we should *de-divinize* the terms of our philosophical discourse. Lawrence’s eventual conclusion was that we should forbear to set up words and vocabularies which insist that there is ‘Truth’ existing somewhere *outside* the world – for such ideas become those graven images and golden calves by recourse to which we effectively put our religious nature *outside* of our human selves. Instead, we should re-invest our linguistic capacity to transform our human selves *within* the phenomenal world. It is in terms of that recommendation that Lawrence could fairly be described – as John Worthen has

recently described him – as ‘religious without religion’.¹¹ Lawrence, describing his conception of the religion of Native Americans, wrote:

There is strictly no god. The Indian does not consider himself as created, and therefore external to God, or the creature of God. To the Indian there is no conception of a defined God. Creation is a great flood, forever flowing, in lovely and terrible waves. In everything, the shimmer of creation, and never the finality of the created... Everything, everything is the wonderful shimmer of creation, it may be a deadly shimmer like lightning or the anger in the little eyes of the bears, it may be the beautiful shimmer of the moving deer, or the pine-boughs softly swaying under snow... There is, in our sense of the word, no God. But all is godly.¹²

Lawrence’s evocation of ‘Creation’ sounds very much like the sense of contingency which I have elsewhere described as cosmic continuity. Creation here is reminiscent of the myriad vitalities of the Etruscan sketches – and it *does* include everything, for Lawrence uses the term here to describe a contingent world in which ‘all things correspond’. Within such a worldview, human beings are not external to ‘God’, for there is no God as such – but all things are nevertheless godly. Again, it is the shift of emphasis, the move from capitalized essentialism to lower-case contingency, which at once de-divinizes the world – and re-divinizes the language with which we conceive the world. If there is no God as such, there is godliness, which, *contingently* evoked rather than *essentially* institutionalized, becomes a matter of immediate expression rather than one of perfunctory observance.

¹¹ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p.49.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.306.

Taking further these ideas about Lawrence, religion, and questions of de-divinizing and re-divinizing our language, it is worth conceding here that the word ‘divine’ *does* actually mean ‘pertaining to a deity’. On that definition, it is clearly contradictory to suggest that the ‘deity’ element can simultaneously be taken out of language *and* reinstated. Even so, ‘divine’ is a verb as well as an adjective: the verb ‘to divine’ implies an act of divination, which realization itself recalls the ‘augury’ passage of Lawrence’s Etruscan sketches. It recalls the world imagined by Lawrence as a place in which ‘all things correspond’ – a world in which the divine has not yet been hived off into the supernatural. To think of ‘divine’ as a verb is thus once more to shift the emphasis onto contingent evocation rather than the setting-up of some deity-as-abstraction. Again, it may be that Lawrence’s view is taken as implying animism – in the sense of ‘the attribution of a living soul or supernatural power to plants, inanimate objects and natural phenomena’ – in which case words like ‘soul’ and ‘supernatural power’ seem implicitly to reinstate once more the idea of a presiding deity. Yet the root of the word animism – that is, *anima* – ultimately yields all of the following meanings: air, breath, life, soul, mind. I therefore suggest that the word animism is of a sufficiently broad derivation to allow for the idea that Lawrence’s late philosophy could be called ‘secular animism’. In support of that claim, I will leave the last word to the Lawrence of *Mornings in Mexico*, who wrote:

The animistic religion, as we call it, is not the religion of the Spirit. A religion of spirits, yes. But not of Spirit. There is no One Spirit. There is no One God. There is no Creator. There is strictly no God at all: because all is alive. [...] There is the great living source of life: say

the Sun of existence: to which you can no more pray than you can pray to Electricity.¹³

This indicates a huge shift in Lawrence's thinking: from the prophet of essentialism who was so given to capitalizing words so as to gain the philosophical upper hand, to the ironist who celebrates contingency and pluralism: who celebrates not 'God', but rather a world in which 'all is alive'. To divine that all is alive – without reference to any 'God idea' – implies a kind of divination in which there is, so to speak, divinity without deity. Such a world of myriad vitalities suggests a cosmos which indeed needs no recourse to 'god ideas' or 'quasi divinities'. By this stage in Lawrence's journey, his implicit derision of the idea of praying to 'Electricity' – as though we might superstitiously (mis)take electricity as just such a quasi divinity, or even as one of Lawrence's mystical, capitalized essentialisms of yore – can be read as a self-ironizing rejection of the Lawrence-prophet of old. If the mature Lawrence had become religious in a secular sense, he also became so in the most widely literal sense. In his last book, *Apocalypse*, he wrote: 'Once you have a real glimpse of religion, you realise that all that is *truly* felt, every feeling that is felt in true relation, every vivid feeling of connection, is religious...'¹⁴ Only connect, truly and vividly – and religion is realised implicitly, with no resort to 'God ideas'.

Language and Solidarity

The Escaped Cock and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* clearly take issue with the idea that we can set up any single vocabulary of essentialism or enshrinement, and

¹³ D H Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico* (London: Penguin Books, [1927] 1974), p. 74.

¹⁴ D H Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p. 155.

insistently foreground the idea of there being *different* vocabularies – different registers and ways of meaning – available to us. If our linguistic capacity means that language is crucial to the moment of supervention when our subjective self-creation happens, then the quickness of that process is all-important. The vocabulary with which we choose to effect our transformative continuity becomes crucial. Immediacy is at a premium. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* insists on this – though of course its insistency is not of the sort which takes issue with other vocabularies by meeting them on their own ground. There is less of confrontation than subversion. The grand but misappropriated vocabularies of Clifford Chatterley are simply juxtaposed with those of Connie (whose process of self-creation enables her to progress from the language of bitter denial to a more confident, light-hearted mockery of Clifford's canting hypocrisy) and Mellors (whose frequent resorts to local dialect come to have less of bitter self-protection about them and more of confident self-assertion). The 'great words' of edifying philosophical discourse are repeatedly undermined by these contingently grounded vocabularies, which strike the reader as touching the world more nearly and honestly – more *morally* – than the sort of overarching pronouncements which purport to enshrine timeless truths and moral worthiness. As Lawrence declared in his Etruscan sketches: 'Why has mankind had such a craving to be imposed upon! Why this lust after imposing creeds... the thing becomes an imposition and a weariness at last. Give us things that are alive and flexible, which won't last too long...' ¹⁵ This restlessness against absolutism and monumental conceptualization accords with Richard Rorty's intention with regard to the vocabulary of philosophy as it has been traditionally understood:

¹⁵ D H Lawrence, 'Tarquinia' (1927), in *Sketches of Etruscan Places and other Italian Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.33.

...I need to argue that the distinctions between absolutism and relativism, between rationality and irrationality, and between morality and expediency are obsolete and clumsy tools – remnants of a vocabulary we should try to replace. But ‘argument’ is not the right word. For on my account of intellectual progress as the literalization of selected metaphors, rebutting objections to one’s redescription of some things will be largely a matter of redescribing other things, trying to outflank the objections by enlarging the scope of one’s favourite metaphors. So my strategy will be to try to make the vocabulary in which these objections are phrased look bad, thereby changing the subject, rather than granting the objector his choice of weapons and terrain by meeting his criticisms head-on.¹⁶

Though Lawrence’s writing clearly predates Rorty’s work, I suggest that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* stands as an early exemplar of the kind of philosophizing Rorty has in mind. The ‘Whitehead’ episode is once again a case in point. Connie’s flippant responses to Clifford’s quotations are, on the face of it, not entirely serious. They appear to lack gravity. But the distinction between triviality and importance is perhaps one that should take its place in Rorty’s list of those binary oppositions which we ought to reappraise – for it is found to be another ‘clumsy tool’. In etymological terms, trivial things were once ‘such things as may be met with anywhere, commonplace’; only later did this sense of the word become synonymous with that of ‘being of small account, paltry, unimportant’. But *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* does nothing if not insist on the mundanity of the world – even while it insists that there can be nothing more important to us than the phenomenal world and the contingently

¹⁶ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.44.

existing human selves it contains (as was discovered by the 'man who died'). By the same token, 'banal' originally meant 'open to all the community' – thus banality, too, is a word which need not be thought of as *definitionally* opposed to notions of importance. Rather, the later sense of banality indicates a failure to do justice to things which are important precisely *because* they express the idea of community. Triviality cannot but imply contingency – yet the things which matter most are paradoxically found to be those things which are contingently to hand, for they are by no means without import. In that sense, Connie's preference for running naked in the rain with her lover is not *opposed* to anything said by Whitehead: but Lawrence makes things like running, nakedness, rain and love seem like much more fun, and in that sense more vitally important to our awareness, than the *de-mentia* of second-hand bookish philosophizing which keeps the reader at a succession of safe removes from the world. The 'life of the mind', when it denies human bodiedness, is indeed a dreadful abstraction.

The creation of a new vocabulary is not a process of adding something new to existing vocabularies so as to 'fine-tune' them all into commensurability. New vocabularies, as Rorty notes, are not 'discoveries of a reality behind the appearances, of an undistorted view of the whole picture with which to replace myopic views of its parts'.¹⁷ Such totalizing visions are, as Lawrence learned the hard way, best left to philosophers of a more prophetic strain; only in a utopia (such as Rananim) can all previous vocabularies be magically made to entail each other. Lawrence was, after all his unavailing efforts, simply a poet who happened to believe that poetry and philosophy should never have been sundered. Richard Rorty offers us a possible description of the way in which Lawrence can be said to have reunited them:

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 12

A poet... in my wide sense of the term – the sense of ‘one who makes things new’ – is typically unable to make clear exactly what it is that he wants to do before developing the language in which he succeeds in doing it. His new vocabulary makes possible, for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose. It is a tool for doing something which could not have been envisaged prior to the development of a particular set of descriptions, those which it itself helps to provide.¹⁸

Thus it seems the poet and the philosopher cannot be separated except in a pedantic, semantic way. Rhyme and reason are not inherently antithetical, for both can be thought of as ways of spontaneously likening one thing to another. Rhyming and reasoning are (or ought to be) both to do with discovering fresh and appealing correspondences in the world – correspondences which strike us as offering useful ways of relating to the world and the people in it. Language is not a medium which we use to describe some transcendent meaning in the outside world or to express some truth which we claim as antecedently inside us; for this would seem to suggest that if we could only make our language transparent enough, we could discard it. The very fact of its having been found adequate to such a task would promptly render it useless. Poetic language is simply a useful way of suggesting affinities, an exploration in sense-making of a kind which might make sense only in the light of the sense it makes for itself. I have used ‘sense-making’ as a term which hopefully captures the sheer openness which the phenomenal world offers our consciousness at the moment of supervention. Used to indicate the quickness of consciousness in which we ‘lay hold’ of the world, ‘sense-making’ hopefully suggests apprehension without arrogation – an openness of response to the world which is free of self-

¹⁸ Ibid., p.13.

conscious purposiveness. As such, sense-making is a term sufficiently wide to suggest that there is indeed no necessary distinction between poetry and philosophy, and that we *can* achieve a synthesis of our sensory apprehensions which effects our linguistic self-transformation from the animal to the human with the kind of continuity which Terry Eagleton has seen as being so vital.

In the light of the idea of there being no necessary distinction between poetry and philosophy, perhaps the word 'poietic' could and should be accorded wider currency. It means 'creative, formative, productive, active'. Though 'poietic' is now listed by the *OED* as rare, the entry for this word offers an illustrative quotation from as recently as 1905: 'As its organization becomes settled and efficient the State loses its poietic activity.' This does indeed suggest a sense of loss, as if poor poiesis feels itself no longer welcome once organization and efficiency have come to drive it out of the State. But our 'State' is, of course, more than just our present political arrangements. Our 'State' is all of our human being, and there are (or ought to be) things in it which should not be put asunder – as Lawrence understood when he said that poetry and philosophy should never have been split. Likewise, poiesis and poesy should be identical. Clifford Chatterley is a warning of what happens when poietic and poetic – which, after all, share the same root of 'to do, to make' – become separated. Long since lost to all that is creative and formative, he becomes ever more manically productive and active. Production, organization and efficiency – which are surely not *by themselves* poietic – become all to him; while poetry – which must just as surely be productive and active if it is to be creative and formative – is relegated to aestheticist posturing. The implications are serious: lose the organic unity which is at once poietic *and* poetic, and the world becomes disordered. Where once were trees and flowers, there are now pit-heads and slag heaps. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* forces

the reader to consider whether materialist progress *really* affords us the best of all possible worlds. We choose among our possible worlds when we choose how we will transform ourselves as linguistic beings, and language is at the heart of our choosing. When we choose how we will give utterance to what we are like, we choose what our world will be like. Degradation and degeneracy are optional, but we err in choosing vocabularies which make them look preferable.

Thought of as an ‘affinity-engine’, language lends itself to our process of self-creation in relation to other selves as well as to the world – which is akin to saying that language is a tool we can use for fashioning kindness out of likeness. Thus, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, when Lawrence portrays Connie as having a capacity to feel a likeness to trees while Clifford does not, it is not an occasion for philosophical quibbling. There is no need for antecedent justification or chains of ‘therefore’ clauses, nor even any need to cite traditions of pastoral or invoke ancient tree-gods. The suggested affinity, contingently evoked, appeals to the reader – *touches* another human self – or it does not. We can, if we choose, prefer Connie’s newly-discovered way of being in the world, as being something far better than the barrenness which has preceded it. For if we creatively apprehend the world as one in which ‘all things correspond’ – where the sheer potentiality of that correspondence is something which itself corresponds to the quality of our attunement to the world – we do well to choose those correspondences which nurture rather than deny our self-creation. Like the Etruscan dance, we can *choose* to join in.

In a review of John Worthen’s recent single-volume biography of Lawrence,¹⁹ the poet Andrew Motion writes of the ‘quite phenomenal energy and excitement’ to be found in this immediate quality of much of Lawrence’s writing, noting in particular

¹⁹ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (London: Allen Lane, 2005)

the ‘brilliant evocations’ of ‘bats, snakes, bugs, flowers [and] swifts’ to be found in Lawrence’s poetry.²⁰ He tempers this praise of Lawrence’s poetic evocation with a caveat: ‘its relentless attention to things-in-themselves can hinder the philosophic mind.’ This is no doubt true – if one conceives of the philosophic mind in terms of the grand tradition of Western philosophy as represented by Plato, Descartes and Kant. But the lesson of Lawrence’s Etruscan experience is that it is this very sense of ‘things-in-themselves’ which is truly inseparable from matters of philosophical import. Where the young Lawrence’s poetry tended to be self-consciously over-elaborate, his most striking poems are those which are stripped back to the essentials. As befits his achievement as a philosopher-poet, Lawrence’s philosophy follows the same trajectory as his poetry: from self-conscious essentialism to a realization that what is most essential is that which is most contingent. Thus the extraordinary feeling of palpability to be found in Lawrence’s best poetry presents him as a ‘xenophysician’ rather than a metaphysician: one who makes the physical world seem magically new to us, by making what is so very tactile seem so very suggestive to our imagination. To emphasize the phenomenal world in this way is to reverse the process of philosophical abstraction, for it is to weave a sense of worthwhile-ness back into the fabric of the mundane world. Like time and chance, the phenomenal world *does* include everything.

Notwithstanding his caveat regarding ‘the philosophic mind’, Motion goes on to note that Lawrence’s evocations of the natural world ‘express a gigantic network of sympathies, held together in an extraordinary focus of concentration’. Again, this extraordinary sense of the world’s interrelatedness *is* philosophical import by other means. This is Lawrence the ‘ultraphysician’, always taking us beyond what is

²⁰ Andrew Motion, *Guardian* ‘Review’ supplement, 5th March 2005: p.10.

ostensible to the wealth which lies behind it. And again, this has been Lawrence's Etruscan achievement – to evoke the feeling of cosmic relatedness, of a world in which 'all things correspond', by focussing on a fresco, a vase, or a flower. And it is our latent awareness of the world's inexhaustible interrelatedness and untellable affinities which the Lawrence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* sought to expand into 'a gigantic network of sympathies', so that our notion of sympathy becomes a continuum which ranges from that which is simply phenomenal to that which is animal and thus to that which is human. Thus our transformative continuity is effected in language, and the sheerly tangible, phenomenal world becomes by no means disjunct from what we consider to be our shared humankind-ness. Solidity is not separate from solidarity, for they share the same root.

Lawrence's art of drawing fresh correspondences can be related to Richard Rorty's (and Terry Eagleton's) view of the purpose of language. Rorty emphasizes the centrality of metaphor – the process of likening things to other things – as being synonymous with language itself, for there is no reference point existing outside the process which affords us an epistemological benchmark against which we can judge the worth of our particular instances of likening: 'The world does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors... we can only compare languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called "fact".'²¹ Metaphors are not something that can be used to get nearer to any absolute truth, either outside in the world or inside ourselves. In a passage which is curiously apposite to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Rorty notes that positivism and Romanticism are mirror-images of each other in terms of their attitude toward metaphor:

²¹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.20.

The Platonist and the positivist share a reductionist view of metaphor: they think metaphors are either paraphrasable [sic] or useless for the one serious purpose which language has, namely, representing reality. By contrast, the Romantic has an expansionist view: he thinks metaphor is strange, mystic, wonderful. Romantics attribute metaphor to a mysterious faculty called the 'imagination', a faculty they suppose to be at the very centre of the self [...] Whereas the metaphorical looks irrelevant to Platonists and positivists, the literal looks irrelevant to Romantics.²²

Both attitudes fall into essentialism, for the positivist sees language as becoming increasingly 'true' to an outer reality, while the Romantic sees language as something which strives to get closer to an inner reality called Imagination, Self, Spirit or Soul. The later Lawrence plays these essentialist vocabularies off against each other – for as Rorty notes, we can only *compare* languages and metaphors with each other. In growing desperation, Clifford Chatterley oscillates between the vocabularies available to him – deploying the language of positivist scientific progress on the one hand, then preening himself with the language of Romantic self-realisation on the other. In contrast, Lawrence's disruptive style of narration presents us with a vocabulary which becomes a 'third thing' – one which owes nothing to notions of the 'Truth' of the outside world *or* of one's immortal soul, but simply celebrates contingency, spontaneity and touch. As such, Lawrence's later writings create a new vocabulary *not* by discovering antecedent 'Truth' (of either the transcendent or the immanent variety), but simply through a willingness to discover what his new vocabulary might be good for. Though Lawrence's 'ramshackle' philosophizing so often seemed

²² Ibid., p. 19.

promiscuous in the way it ransacked and reconfigured existing philosophical discourses, it eventually succeeded in *creating* as much as fulfilling its own purpose; and given that we cannot objectively test its validity but only compare it with other vocabularies, it is Lawrence's role as poet to present us with a vocabulary which his readers will – hopefully – find *comparatively* appealing.

Identification and Difference

It is ironic that Lawrence, who for so long clung to notions of there being essential Truth and an 'aristocracy of the soul', should eventually come to embody the philosophical position advocated by Richard Rorty: that of the 'liberal ironist'. For Rorty, the 'liberal' element consists of the simple conviction that 'cruelty is the worst thing we do'. In a formulation of equal simplicity, he describes the 'ironist' as:

...the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central belief and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. Liberal ironists are people who include among these ungroundable desires their own hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease.²³

For Lawrence, the journey towards his final 'facing up' to contingency has been long and difficult, and there has been cruelty along the way – both in life and in fiction. Attempts to institute new hierarchies of power in the world – whether political or metaphysical or some hybrid of the two – have foundered, and people have been

²³ *Ibid.*, p.xv.

hurtfully manipulated along the way. As Shakespeare's *Lear* discovered, there is little enough comfort to be had from wielding power and manipulating other people – both are ways of exceeding one's share or portion, and are thus cruel because they are unkind. Though the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* work their way through a weight of indignation with regard to social class, and it seems the gamekeeper cannot help but work his way through the kind of hurtfulness which is the legacy of 'old wounds from past hurts', both class hostility and bitter personal defensiveness must finally be shed; for they are found, at the last, to be illiberal. One does better to express kindness contingently, for no better reason than the conviction that it is a better means of self-creation than is cruelty. And if 'no better reason' sounds like an insufficient moral grounding for one's beliefs and behaviour, it is nevertheless reason enough; for as Rorty notes: 'For the liberal ironist, there is no answer to the question "Why not be cruel?" – no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible.'²⁴

With no theological or metaphysical underpinning to legitimize this belief, one must paradoxically find the courage of one's relative conviction. The ironist, while alive to the contingency of his believing, nevertheless has the right to feel that there is *something* worth standing for. Rorty turns to Isaiah Berlin (whose essay 'The Pursuit of the Ideal' I have earlier considered) for a statement which suitably frames this moral challenge:

To realise the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly, is what distinguishes a civilized man from a barbarian. To demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a

²⁴ Ibid.

symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity.²⁵

On such a view, contingency and conviction are by no means antithetical, for the resulting position is not one of moral relativism but of mature flexibility and responsiveness to the relative validity of others' convictions – even while the liberal ironist, unflinching in his conviction that cruelty is the worst thing we can do, might well give up his life in defence of that conviction. Contingency calls for courage. For the liberal ironist acknowledges that the vocabulary in which he states his highest hopes is a contingent one and therefore one which refuses him the comforts of certitude. Though the moral worth of such a vocabulary consists only in its very quickness, it is nevertheless the vocabulary of the liberal ironist's conscience, and he regards that moral equipoise which balances contingency with conviction as the highest goal. As Rorty states, 'freedom as the recognition of contingency' should be 'the chief virtue of the members of a liberal society', and the culture of such a society should aim at curing us of our 'deep metaphysical need'²⁶ for structures of belief which deny contingency by seeming to hold out the promise of something more solidly grounded. Tommy Dukes' 'democracy of touch' sounds a tentative enough proposal when put forward in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (p.75), but it is our attempts to enshrine vocabularies at a level *above* the solidarity of touch which make us into 'cerebrating makeshifts' – for such abstract vocabularies are themselves necessarily provisional, since (as we have seen) there is ultimately no deciding between them. They are better simply set aside. We do better to begin (as did the 'man who died') with no more than the phenomenal world beneath our feet and our knowledge of other

²⁵ Ibid., p.46. The quotation is from Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty*; the first sentence is itself a quotation from Joseph Schumpeter.

²⁶ Ibid.

human selves – rather than entomb ourselves in totalizing structures of belief which offer to make the world manageable by (in Rorty’s sense) divinizing it. It is in this sense that Dukes says we must ‘roll away the cerebral stone’.

Of course, the idea of regarding ‘other human selves’ as a touchstone of morality – as suggested by both Rorty and Eagleton – itself threatens to lapse into essentialist pieties relating to ‘human nature’. Once we attempt to enshrine contingency in ideas of ‘our essential humanity’, we are once again universalizing. To state that there is an essential human nature is easy and sounds natural, for nature cannot *but* be natural; but the statement instantaneously entails as a consequence the word *inhuman*, which will then serve to describe all the human behaviour which we regard as *unnatural*. Rorty’s emphasis on contingency implies that the ‘we regard’ element of unnaturalness necessarily makes what is ‘unnatural’ itself a matter of contingency: a matter of cultural and historical circumstance. What is natural is something that has to be argued about. If it is thought natural for us to regard a woman who owns a black cat as being unnaturally in league with the devil, then burning her at the stake might seem a natural thing to do. But if we hold to the idea that cruelty is the worst thing we can do, then burning people at the stake is unkind and therefore inhuman. Being a natural human being becomes ‘a matter of transient consensus about what attitudes are normal and what practices are just or unjust’,²⁷ but there is clearly nothing casual about such transient consensus. It is worth arguing over. The wish to avoid such argument by escaping from the difficulties implied by contingency – including the difficulty of deciding what it means to be human – is understandable. But seeking such an escape means striving for newer, more reassuring versions of essentialism rather than turning around and facing contingency

²⁷ Ibid., p.189.

full-on. Taking the Holocaust as an example of what can happen when arguments about ‘what counts as being human’ get out of hand, Rorty states:

...at times like that of Auschwitz, when history is in upheaval and traditional institutions and patterns of behaviour are collapsing, we want something which stands beyond history and institutions. What can there be except human solidarity, our recognition of one another’s common humanity? I have been urging...that we try *not* to want something which stands beyond history and institutions.²⁸

Thus, rather than asking whether the other person believes and desires what we believe and desire, it is more to the point to ask: ‘Are you suffering?’²⁹ What ‘we’ (that is, we who complacently assume ourselves to be right-thinking people) want is too often what we too easily assume to be ‘natural’. Surely a capacity to feel pain is a more trustworthy index of our commonality. Though a pragmatist, having forsworn essentialism, will not wish to instate ‘Evil’ as an ontological essence, there can be no doubt that corruption, exploitation and outright abuse do exist in the world. People do these things to each other. But we nevertheless hold to the idea – the truth – that it is wrong for people to treat each other in such ways. It is wrong – and in that sense *untrue* – because it is *unkind*, and therefore less than human. Kindness does not mean tolerating, encouraging or incorporating degeneracy – for that which is degenerate is, by definition, that which has departed from kind. In my chosen vocabulary, kindness and degeneracy are the opposite of each other. And whereas I cannot express that conviction in anything more than my chosen vocabulary, I will reject to the utmost any vocabulary which tries to make degeneracy look like kindness by other means. Though I am self-avowedly no more than an ironist, I will try, like Lawrence, to make

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p.198.

my vocabulary look better than the one the opposition is seeking to institute – even if the opposition has managed to appropriate all the mechanism of institution with which to impose its vocabulary. If I cannot stand to see the word ‘kindness’ deleted from my dictionary, neither will I allow the word ‘degeneracy’ to be effaced from it, no matter how subtly or surreptitiously. Such vigilance over the use of language is paramount; for, as Lawrence understood, we cannot rely on the heavens to tame vile offences: it is by attending to language that we preserve kindness, thus ensuring that humanity is *not* allowed to prey on itself, like monsters. As Rorty notes: ‘A conviction which can be justified to *anyone* is of little interest. Unflinching courage will not be required to sustain such a conviction.’³⁰

Solidarity, then, must stand for something – which means there are things to which it will be opposed. Were that not the case, solidarity would amount to nothing more worthwhile than the Lawrence-prophet’s efforts to subsume everything into oneness. As Lawrence came to realise:

It is the eternal paradox of human consciousness. To pretend that all is one stream is to cause chaos and nullity. To pretend to express one stream in terms of another, so as to identify the two, is false and sentimental. The only thing you can do is to have a little Ghost inside you which sees both ways, or even many ways. But a man cannot *belong* to both ways, or to many ways.³¹

This, I suggest, is the kind of solidarity which does *not* equate ‘identity’ with ‘sameness’. And I further suggest that it is in this sense that solidarity be seen as something to be achieved via (as Rorty calls it) ‘imaginative identification with the

³⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.47.

³¹ D H Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico* (London: Penguin Books, (1927) 1974), p.55.

details of others' lives, rather than a recognition of something antecedently shared'.³² Rather than having recourse to universalism (whether religious or secular), the liberal ironist will trust to the notion that cruelty and humiliation are the worst things we can do to each other, and will seek to ground the idea of 'each other' at the level of the local rather than the universal. It is, after all, our similarities with respect to pain and humiliation which facilitate identification, rather than high-flown abstractions about the sanctity of our 'essential' humanity – which Rorty sees as 'a philosopher's invention, and awkward attempt to secularise the idea of being one with God'.³³

Accordingly, *The Escaped Cock* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are everywhere concerned with individual lives and individual pain. They are concerned with the ways in which individual lives touch the world, and how they touch each other in ways that reflect the dual meaning of the word 'individual'. They acknowledge that there is cruelty, manipulation and exploitation in the world, and that these are things which happen between individuals; for when these things happen on a larger scale, they do so by means of legitimizing abstractions such as class divisions, established religions, totalitarian regimes and political correctness. Anything which purports to 'get above' a sense of contingent groundedness and *individual* susceptibility to pain – whether the escape be effected by ideas of a man whose body ascends into the sky, or utopian visions of the future, or even *dystopian* visions of the future – is shown as out of touch. Such abstractions *deny* identification with the details of others' lives and thus have more to do with the problem than the solution; for in pragmatic terms, what is universal turns out to be less useful to solidarity than what is immediately to hand.

Rorty sees no harm in abstractions – such as 'child of God', or 'humanity' [or] 'truth for its own sake' and 'art for art's sake', or even 'absolute truth' – provided that

³² Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.190.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.198.

they are seen in the right way: as providing a ‘fuzzy but inspiring *focus imaginarius*’.³⁴ He suggests ‘we need to realise that a *focus imaginarius* is none the worse for being an invention rather than... a built-in feature of the human mind’, and that problems only arise when ‘a handy bit of rhetoric is taken to be a fit subject for “conceptual analysis”, when *foci imaginarii* are subjected to close scrutiny’. I suggest that Lawrence, after the disaster of his prophetic phase, was all too aware of the dangers of those abstractions which are so alluringly ‘fuzzy but inspiring’ at the level of the sublimely universal. He finally preferred to be ‘fuzzy but inspiring’ at the level of the contingent, phenomenal world, as experienced by individual human selves. Though it may well sound inspiring (and, indeed, fuzzy) to write about ‘Humanity’s Oneness with Nature’, it is arguably far more effective to write about the experience of a woman who enters a wood and feels a strange sense of community with trees, flowers, and a man she happens to see washing himself. Such moments of gestalt arguably say more about – indeed, do more to *effect* – our transformative continuity: our need linguistically to create human selves which are not discontinuous from the rest of life.

Rorty, in his insistence that ‘we have to start from where *we* are’, suggests that we keep in mind a slogan: ‘We have obligations to human beings simply as such.’³⁵ The success of Lawrence’s philosophical journey is, I suggest, the success with which he was able to win through to a sense of contingency which focussed *less* on abstract ideas of moral obligation or human nature and *more* on the element of ‘simply as such’; and the measure of that success is the extent to which, in celebrating the third term of Rorty’s formulation, Lawrence enhanced and invigorated our notions of the first two terms. Indeed, though the ending of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* has often been

³⁴ Ibid., p.195.

³⁵ Ibid., p.196. (Rorty’s emphasis.)

accused of being inconclusive and evasive, it seems to insist – by dint of its very delimitation – on the fact of two people who have no moral option but to start from where they are and learn to be human in the world, leaving behind what is inhuman and subhuman. Thus to effect their transformative continuity, they must be human beings ‘simply as such’. Arbitrary impediments – such as class division, conventional morality, aesthetic and philosophical abstraction – are made to look beside the point, for such hindrances to spontaneity and touch no longer have any purchase on Connie and Mellors. But by the same token, the Lawrence-hero must finally be free of all obstacles arising from preconceived ideas of how the other person *should* be: self-deluding notions relating to metropolitan sophistication (which disqualified the Muriel of ‘A Modern Lover’), spontaneity (which disqualified the Hermione of *Women In Love*) and ‘dark’, anterior wisdom (which imposed a living death on the Daphne of *The Ladybird*) have all been shed. ‘Simply as such’ is the beginning of identifying *with*, and an end to the Lawrence-hero’s insistence that the other person must be identical *to*. Humanity is, after all, the person next to you – not (as with Lawrence’s involvement with Ottoline, Cynthia and Bertrand Russell) as a means of forcing one’s idea of ‘Humanity’ upon the wider world, but rather because the person next to you is, after all, a human being ‘simply as such’.

Lawrence’s achievement is his bringing together of philosophy and poetry. Considered in purely epistemological terms, Lawrence’s Etruscan philosophy addresses the ultimate unknowableness of a universe which is only ever partially accessible to human perception, and the knowledge that our sense-making can only *ever* be an act of abstraction. This is not an intuition: there really *is* more there than we can ever conceive of. Everything we ‘think we think’ is an available cross-section through the Heraclitean flux, a contingent configuration of sensuous experience. In

poetic terms, Lawrence brings to consciousness a pragmatic realization that some of our abstractions better serve our human being than do others, and that an imaginative identification with the suffering of (in Rorty's phrase) 'other, finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings' provides the basis for what is arguably the best kind of sense-making of which we are humanly capable. The notion of 'argument' pertains both to poetry and philosophy – and to the reintegrationist spirit of Lawrence's writing. In this respect, Lawrence's final philosophical position suggests something of Habermas' idea of 'communicative reason' as being something we should regard as more vital than institutionalized rationality – as an acknowledgement that we must honour the quickness of our process of *making* sense, rather than lapse into the unresponsiveness which attends upon complacent assumptions or fraudulent claims that we are *finding* sense which has mysteriously pre-existed our apprehension of it. We should be, as Rorty suggests, 'content to call "true" or "right" or "just" whatever the outcome of undistorted communication happens to be, whatever wins in a free and open argument'.³⁶ With no ready-made, authorized philosophical standpoints available whence to corner the argument, freedom and openness become our best guarantees that we will choose the best metaphors with which to create our selves. 'Language speaks man', and human beings cannot escape their historicity – Rorty declares that 'the most they can do is to manipulate the tensions within their own epoch in order to produce the beginnings of the next epoch'.³⁷ And as John Worthen notes, '[Lawrence] intuitively worked his way into the concerns and anxieties of his contemporaries', and 'continues to trouble and delight us' with his re-telling of the world.³⁸ This is entirely in keeping with Lawrence's credo as a novelist, as exemplified by *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: to put on a 'shin-kicking', in-among-the-

³⁶ Ibid., p.67.

³⁷ Ibid., p.50.

³⁸ John Worthen, *D H Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider*, p.xxvi.

crowd performance – one which is true to the cause of creative consequence rather than one which aspires to the status of a finished cultural artefact and thereby hopes to win for itself an easy, trouble-free endorsement from the cultural and moral *status quo*. Just as Lawrence finally learned how to identify with others, he learned how to have his differences with others.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

In creating a vocabulary whose purpose thus turned out to be the discovery of its own purpose, Lawrence can truly be said to have reached the kind of liberalism advocated by Richard Rorty – though the word ‘liberal’ can, of course, easily look incongruous when applied to Lawrence. His high moral seriousness had nothing of the *laissez-faire* about it (notwithstanding the furore which met the supposed immorality of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*); and though he effectively ‘de-divinized’ religion (as in *The Escaped Cock*), the vocabulary of Christianity would always remain a source of inspiration in his creative revisioning. Nevertheless, Lawrence’s final achievement is the liberal ironist position which recognizes that *no* vocabulary – not even that of Christianity – can ever be finally justified. One cannot hope to reinstate the old vocabularies of essentialism; nor can one hope to invent a new vocabulary which will refute every other vocabulary, thereby setting everything to rights. One cannot win the argument by driving the opposition ‘up an argumentative wall’; and even *this* liberally ironic position is itself subject to the same provisionality. As Rorty says, one cannot claim that ‘liberal freedom has a “moral privilege”’ which other positions lack, for ‘any attempt to drive one’s opponent up against a wall in this way fails when the wall against which he is driven comes to be seen as one more vocabulary, one more way of describing things’. In a formulation which seems to come close to the heart of the Lawrence who wrote *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Rorty declares:

We need a redescription of liberalism as the hope that culture as a whole can be ‘poeticized’ rather than as the Enlightenment hope that it can be ‘rationalized’ or ‘scientized’. That is, we need to substitute the hope that chances for fulfilment of idiosyncratic fantasies will be

equalized for the hope that everyone will replace ‘passion’ or fantasy with ‘reason’.¹

In this respect, Lawrence qualifies as the sort of ‘cultural hero’ recommended by Richard Rorty: one who matches Harold Bloom’s notion of the ‘strong poet’.² Though Lawrence’s heroism was hard-won, he eventually came to represent the kind of ideal liberal polity envisaged by Rorty:

Such culture would not assume that a form of cultural life is no stronger than its philosophical foundations. Instead, it would drop the idea of such foundations. It would regard the justification of liberal society simply as a matter of historical comparison with other attempts at social organization – those of the past and those envisaged by utopians.³

The foregoing quotation is simple enough as a statement, but it actually covers the whole of Lawrence’s philosophical journey. The early Lawrence saw around him a world desperately in need of foundations: one in which people seemed to be, in whatever sense, divorced from their own lives – in the literal sense associated with the First World War, and in secondary senses pertaining to the sort of mechanization, industrialization and debasement of mass culture which Lawrence saw as making people into ‘cheap stuff’. Lawrence fought hard for some form of redemptive foundation, and almost destroyed himself in the process. What followed was Lawrence’s discovery, in the tombs of Etruria, of the worth of historical comparison in relation to social organization; and what followed *that* was the idea of social organization as something which is neither founded from below or imposed from

¹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.53.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

above, but which is created at the human level, contingently and consensually. The envisaging of utopias is, after all, not best left to self-appointed prophets, but to strong poets; for it is the latter who have the power to bring us to our senses. Lawrence the poet renounced ideas of anteriority and capitalized essence-words, accepting instead that there is no such available foundation for our sense-making, no adjudicating authority which can be ascribed either to mystical, antecedent wisdom or *post hoc* structures of objective rationality.

Thus there is, at the last, no dual consciousness. On the view I have taken of Lawrence's philosophical progress, he came to accept as much. Our wish for anterior knowledge – our 'intuition' that there *is* such knowledge to be had – is simply an expression of our disappointment at the realization that our hopes of objective rationality are equally unfounded. There is no duality, but simply unity. Lawrence's 'third thing' (as befits the third term of such a trinity) simply reaffirms the first thing – the thing that was there all along – which is our spontaneous apprehension of the world and the quality of the humankind-ness we can bring to that process of apprehension. Thus it is scarcely a criticism of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to say that it lacks 'vision' – or '*a* vision' – for Lawrence's last novel enacts the idea that we ought to see the world contingently, without recourse to unifying visions. And though this new orientation to the world may well be visionary in its own terms, those terms necessarily imply that Lawrence's vision is itself, after all, no more than another suggestion: without any possibility of ontological verification or hope of 'grounding' itself, but simply holding out the hope of appealing to its readers as a good idea – a good way of being human in the world. It is still for the reader to decide whether or not to go through 'the poet's gate'.

Though we may well balk at the relativistic implications of allowing ourselves to be drawn towards something simply because it seems like a ‘good idea’ – one which, however appealing, does not appear to afford us the reassurance of a time-honoured, edificial structure of moral or rational belief – it is finally the ‘strong poet’ who must afford us that reassurance. There is no neutrality or ‘first philosophy’ which enables us ‘to first get straight about language, then about belief and knowledge, then about personhood, and finally about society’.⁴ Rorty suggests that our allegiance to social institutions should be seen ‘as no more a matter for justification by reference to familiar, commonly accepted premises – but also as no more arbitrary – than choices of friends or heroes, [for] such choices cannot be preceded by presuppositionless [sic] critical reflection, conducted in no particular language and outside of any particular historical context’.⁵

Ironically, the kind of open-mindedness Rorty advocates with regard to social institutions is strongly reminiscent of Bertrand Russell’s lecture series – which had been intended as a basis of collaboration between Russell and Lawrence. The latter was at that stage, alas, still too intent on anteriority, presupposing himself to be a spokesperson on behalf of the presuppositionless. Yet Lawrence eventually came to see that social institutions *are* as contingent as Russell had perceived them to be; and the two men’s respective vocabularies, though they appeared at the time too disparate to be mutually comprehensible, can be said ultimately to have led to a ‘third thing’: Lawrence’s late philosophy. Though Lawrence the poet and Russell the philosopher had seemed so ill-suited to each other at the time, it can nevertheless be argued that their association bore fruit in the longer term. Rorty recommends that we should in fact ‘cancel out the difference between the revolutionary and the reformer’, and

⁴ Ibid., p.55.

⁵ Ibid., p.54.

further suggests that ‘one can define the *ideally* liberal society as one in which this difference *is* cancelled out’.⁶ Such a society is:

...one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than force, [and] by the free and open encounters of present linguistic and other practices with suggestions for new practices. This is to say that an ideal liberal society is one which has no purpose except freedom, no goal except a willingness to see how such encounters go and to abide by the outcome.⁷

The spirit of Lawrence’s later work – particularly in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* – is entirely in accordance with this formula. In that respect, we can say that Bertrand Russell set Lawrence an example of individual courage in the cause of freedom, for Lawrence’s burning prophetic intensity and urging of revolution actually masked a retrogressive yearning for comforting dreams of lost unity. Moreover, Lawrence’s vocabulary did not – and never would – lend itself to the drawing up of specific social policy. But it would, in time, become tempered – losing its overweening presumption and channelling its urgency into a poetically persuasive evocation of two people – Connie and Mellors – who are indeed finally willing to embrace freedom, willing to ‘see how the encounter goes’, and willing to abide by the outcome. In that sense, Lawrence’s shocking new vocabulary did indeed cancel out the difference between the revolutionary and the reformer.

Rorty sees social and cultural progress as just such a succession of vocabularies, a process whereby those vocabularies which eventually achieve

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.60.

⁷ *Ibid.*

succession are those whose utility can be explained only retrospectively.⁸ Such vocabularies necessarily have an exploratory feel about them, for their very formation is simultaneously a formulation of their own purpose. A given vocabulary (whether it be that of Newtonianism or Romanticism) becomes a tool whose purpose was originally unknown – but it comes to be recognized as such a tool *only* if the purpose which it serves comes to be regarded as useful. Rorty declares:

We cannot see [such a vocabulary as a tool] while we are still in the course of figuring out how to use it. For there are as yet no clearly formulatable ends to which it is a means. But once we figure out how to use the vocabularies of these movements, we can tell a story of progress, showing how the literalization of certain metaphors served the purpose of making possible all the good things that have recently happened. Further, we can now view all these good things as particular instances of some more general good, the overall end which the movement served. [...] Christianity did not know that its purpose was the alleviation of cruelty, Newton did not know that his purpose was modern technology, the Romantic poets did not know that their purpose was to contribute to the development of... political liberalism. But we now know these things, for we latecomers can tell the kind of story of progress which those who are actually making progress cannot. We can view these people as toolmakers rather than discoverers because we have a clear sense of the product which the use of those tools produced. The product is *us* – our conscience, our culture, our form of life. Those who made us possible could not have

⁸ Ibid., p.55.

envisaged what they were making possible, and so could not have described the ends to which their work was a means. But *we* can.⁹

Again, I suggest Rorty's 'story of progress' can best be thought of as a *process*: not a teleological homing-in on some final and all-commensurating idea of 'Truth', but a succession of movements which make possible 'good things' by continually freeing us up from burdens of accreted orthodoxy and re-opening the world to fresh interpretation. Our sense of ourselves as having made progress is not something which is entirely illusory; but neither is it something to be thought of as teleologically foreordained. History is not nomological progression but narrative explication – thus Rorty speaks of a *story* of progress, in which progress is a 'figuring out' of what is possible and worthwhile. Such a story of progress is not climactic but endlessly episodic; it does not lead to a conclusion, but rather leads to the openness of contingency. The 'product' of such a story is not, after all, some philosophical or conceptual *end-product*, for it is a story which is still in the telling. Its most valuable product is a renewal of the raw materials of our sense-making.

My overall argument has been that Lawrence, as wisely foolish a philosophical toolmaker as one might hope to imagine, had no *clear* sense of the sort of progress which his personal odyssey would bring about, or what good the story of his philosophical development would eventually prove itself useful in the service thereof. In setting himself up as a prophet of Truth, Humanity and the Cosmos, he did know that he would discover something as simply profound as our likeness to each other, and thence to animals, trees and flowers – indeed, our likeness to the world. In championing essentialism, he did not know that he would conversely discover contingency as a philosophical principle sufficient unto itself. In berating other

⁹ Ibid. (Rorty's emphases.)

people into preconceived notions of spontaneity – and then cruelly berating the results – he did not know that he would at length discover spontaneity as something insouciant, something as simple and as lively as an Etruscan dance, and quite without cruelty. Only in the long run did Lawrence’s often unnervingly misdirected talent for transgressing boundaries become a reverence for the creation and honouring of boundaries – a creative process capable of making boundaries newer and truer to our human selfhood than the limitations of the past. In seeking to impose conformity with whatever degree of manipulateness, Lawrence did not expect to discover that our capacity to be different from each other is continuous with the inevitability of our being humanly *like* each other. In pursuing some notion of mysterious anterior wisdom, he did not know that he would find people of the past simply making sense of the timeless present. In seeking to re-divinize the vocabulary of Christianity, he did not know that he would end up *de*-divinizing it – thereby achieving the paradoxical understanding whereby what is most profoundly ‘religio-us’ is also that which is purely contingent and curiously non-metaphysical. In arguing for a duality of human consciousness, he did not know that he would (re)discover that there is *only* the vital flame-tip quickness of consciousness – the only consciousness in which we can truly say we know the world – thereby making of that supposed duality the ‘third thing’ which paradoxically yet poetically reaffirms unity.

Though Lawrence did not *clearly* know these things – or perhaps only apprehended them with the strong poet’s creative imagination – ‘we latecomers’ can understand that the product of his poetic making has indeed been us, in terms of our conscience, our culture, and – given Lawrence’s impact and importance as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century – our form of life. In that sense, it is open to us as readers to discover Lawrence’s achievement in the same spirit with which he

discovered the art of ancient Etruria – whose artists could not have known that one outcome of *their* creative making would be the mature philosophy of D H Lawrence himself.

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