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The Ancient Imagination of D. H. Lawrence

DONALD GUTIERREZ

“Civilisation? it is revealed rather in sensitive life than in inventions: and have we anything as good as the Egyptians of two or three thousand years before Christ as a people? Culture and civilisation are tested by vital consciousness. Are we more vitally conscious than an Egyptian 3000 years B.C. was? . . . Probably we are less. Our conscious range is wide, but shallow as a sheet of paper. We have no depth to our consciousness.”

—D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*

D. H. Lawrence has often been regarded, sometimes derogatorily, as a primitivist writer. A central aim in this essay is to elaborate a term and concept—hylozoism—that I feel is more effective and accurate than terms like primitivism and animism in depicting a key area of Lawrence’s creative imagination. Examples of hylozoistic theory in some of Lawrence’s nonfiction prose are cited, then a few parallels to it are traced in pre-Socratic societies from the evidence of scholars of antiquity. I then examine four of Lawrence’s novels (*Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love*, *St. Mawr*, and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*) in the light of this concept. In the *St. Mawr* section, I attempt to relate a hylozoistic analysis of the novella to Lawrence’s complex and, in this work, ambivalent, spirit of place, one of the cardinal dimensions of his most significant work. Although Lawrence may have divined some facets of an “Old World” mind, what counts even more is that, as I hope to show, he has through his hylozoism added new (and old) resources to the imaginative life.

The term hylozoism refers to the archaic pre-Socratic conception that all matter is alive, or that life and matter are indivisible. This doctrine has been traditionally subsumed in Lawrence’s work under

animism or primitivism. Using these terms tends, however, to confine their meanings to something either clinically archaeological or irresponsibly savage. As such, a built-in depreciation of Lawrence's writings in which these traits appear inevitably occurs, especially in critics with markedly rationalist or Christian values. "Hylozoism," on the other hand, would encompass not only a conception of inorganic matter or forms of thought of less "complex" minds or societies. It would also envelop a striking and possibly ancient mode of thought as well as a dazzling sense of interpenetration between man and nature conspicuous in the works of certain literary artists and philosophers.

Hylozoism and animism can be differentiated further. Animism endows inanimate objects with animation, or even with a soul. If hylozoism can include this meaning, it also bears in its philosophical and religious facets a character of interrelatedness or even interchangeability between the animate and the inanimate not conveyed in the meanings of animism. And whereas animism is in anthropological literature associated with primitive societies, hylozoism could be regarded as a more suitable term for a portion of the religious and philosophical vision of such advanced civilizations as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and pre-Socratic Greece.

Lawrence felt that ancient man *thought* differently from "Socratic" man on to our time. He dramatizes this kind of thinking, among other places, in a discussion of the religion of the Indians of the Southwest:

It was a vast old religion, greater than anything we know: more starkly and nakedly religious. There is no god, no conception of a god. All is god. But it is not the pantheism we are accustomed to, which expresses itself as "God is everywhere, God is in everything." In the oldest religion, everything was alive, not supernaturally but naturally alive. There were only deeper and deeper streams of life, vibrations of life more and more vast. So rocks were alive, but a mountain had a deeper, vaster life than a rock . . . the whole life-effort of man was to get his life into contact with the elemental life of the cosmos, mountain-life, cloud-life, thunder-life, air-life, earth-life, sun-life. To come into immediate *felt* contact, and so derive energy, power, and a dark sort of joy.¹

This mentality represents for Lawrence a repressed and forgotten mode of fulfilled being. In some respects it resembles a Romanticist and atavistic vitalism. The Romanticist cast derives from an obliteration of the subject-object division essential to logical thought. But this obliteration, which places areas of Lawrence's work close to some of Norman O. Brown's concerns, would also subsume both Lawrence and Brown under the long and persistent tradition of philosophical monism

(which is noteworthy in view of Lawrence's dualistic predilection for polarities).

A charge frequently made by formalist literary critics is that the theory of mind implicit in some of Lawrence's art is atavistic. Lawrence *can* be politically, socially, and sexually conservative, perhaps even reactionary (as in the ritual theocracy in *The Plumed Serpent* or the elitist anti-individualism of *Apocalypse*). Yet he elaborates and exalts sensitization to the self and to the Other too profoundly and persistently to be justly called a reactionary, let alone a Fascist. Considering Lawrence's ideas about, and his fictional use of, the ancient pre-Hellenic mind offers as good a means as any of weighing accusations of intellectual barbarism against him.

A vivid formulation of these ideas appears in his posthumous book *Apocalypse*:

We have lost almost entirely the great and intricately developed sensual awareness, or sense-awareness, and sense-knowledge, of the ancients. It was a great depth of knowledge arrived at direct, by instinct and intuition, as we say, not by reason. It was a knowledge based not on words but on images. The abstraction was not into generalisations or into qualities, but into symbols. And the connection was not logical but emotional. The word "therefore" did not exist. Images or symbols succeeded one another in a procession of instinctive and arbitrary physical connections—some of the Psalms give us examples—and they "get nowhere" because there was nowhere to get to, the desire was to achieve a consummation of a certain state of consciousness, to fulfill a certain state of feeling-awareness.²

Lawrence develops his conception of this mythic mind further by contrasting it with our modern mind:

All our mental consciousness is a movement onwards, a movement in stages. . . . On and on we go, for the mental consciousness. Whereas of course there is no goal. Consciousness is an end in itself. . . .

While men still thought of the heart or the liver as the seat of consciousness, they had no idea of this on-and-on process of thought. To them a thought was a completed state of feeling-awareness, a cumulative thing . . . in which feeling deepened into feeling in consciousness till there was a sense of fulness.³

Lawrence is suggesting that this Old World mind is qualitative and "organic," rather than quantitative and "linear," like the modern mind. The relationship of this theory of mind to an aesthetic need not be further commented on here, beyond alluding to its partly symbolist aspect. What becomes relevant at this stage is evidence from students of

preclassical antiquity about the nature of the ancient mind that might bolster Lawrence's speculations.

According to Henri Frankfort, the mind of ancient man did not make the inner-outer, subject-object divisions basic to our thinking:

. . . the realm of nature and the realm of man were not distinguished.

The ancients . . . saw man always as part of society, and society as imbedded in nature and dependent on cosmic forces. For them nature and man did not stand in opposition and did not, therefore, have to be apprehended by different modes of cognition . . . natural phenomena were regularly conceived in terms of human experience and . . . human experience was conceived in terms of cosmic events. . . .

The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an "It"; for ancient—and also for primitive—man it is a "Thou."⁴

Hylozoism, however, should not be confused with anthropomorphism. Frankfort points out that primitive man (by which he means early civilized man) did not cope with natural phenomena by attributing human qualities to the nonhuman: "Primitive man simply does not know an inanimate world. For this very reason he does not 'personify' inanimate phenomena nor does he fill an empty world with the ghosts of the dead, as 'animism' would have us believe."⁵ Lawrence would have supported this formulation, as he would have the following one: "The world appeared to primitive man neither inanimate nor empty but redundant with life; and life has individuality, in man and beast and plant, and in every phenomenon which confronts man—the thunderclap, the sudden shadow, the eerie and unknown clearing in the wood, the stone which suddenly hurts him when he stumbles on a hunting trip" (*ibid.*). The Egyptologist John A. Wilson, discussing the ancient Egyptians, also supports Frankfort's hylozoism: "The phenomenal world to him was not 'It' but 'Thou.' It was not necessary that the object become finally superhuman and be revered as a god before it might be conceived in terms of 'Thou' . . . The Egyptians might—and did—personify almost anything: the head, the belly, the tongue, perception, taste, truth, a tree, a mountain, the sea, a city, darkness, and death."⁶

If we compare this passage with the following hylozoistic one from Lawrence's *Apocalypse*, the evidence of Lawrence's stunning intuitiveness mounts:

Today, it is almost impossible for us to realize what the old Greeks meant by god, or *theos*. Everything was *theos*; but even so, not at the same moment. At the moment, whatever *struck* you was god. If it was a pool of water, the very watery pool might strike you: then that was god; or a faint vapour at evening rising might catch the imagination: then that was *theos*; or thirst might overcome you at the sight of the water: then the thirst itself was god . . . or you felt the sudden chill of the water as you touched it: and then another god came into being, the "cold"; and this was not a quality, it was an existing entity, almost a creature, certainly a *theos*. . . . Even to the early scientists or philosophers, the "cold," "the moist," "the hot," "the dry," were things in themselves, realities, gods, *theoi*. And they *did things*.⁷

Not all of this conjecture by Lawrence was intuition or independent speculation. He had been deeply influenced by John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* (1892). Burnet cites a number of pre-Socratic Greek philosophers like Anaximander, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus, who still thought in part like the very ancient peoples, those Chaldeans, Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and others who roused Lawrence so. The "*theos*" passage above is undoubtedly indebted to Burnet. But a comparison of texts would readily show that, though Lawrence did on occasion borrow, he creatively transformed what he borrowed into something his own.

This is not the place to examine these Greek thinkers as a major source of Lawrence's dualism. Burnet's elucidation of the Milesian philosopher Anaximander's concept of strife is typically "pre-Lawrencean" and centrally hylozoistic: "Anaximander started . . . from the strife between the opposites which go to make up the world; the warm was opposed to the cold, the dry to the wet. These were at war, and any predominance of one over the other was 'injustice' for which they must make reparation to one another at the appointed time."⁸ It is hard to conceive of a more vitalized cosmos than this one. That hylozoism had a great impact on thinkers who personally tutored some of the great Hellenic philosophers suggests its vigor and quality as a form of thought.

The animism and vitalism usually found in Lawrence's fiction in socially isolated situations can perhaps be traced to a kind of cognition that might once have been societal in scope. I am not trying to suggest that *Sons and Lovers*, for example, contains elements of hylozoism which, if properly expanded, would transform the grievously imperfect world of Lawrence's Bestwood into the dancing, realized one of *Etrus-*

can Places. Yet a kind of "sense-awareness," which is expanded to the proportions of polity and cosmogony in *Etruscan Places* and *Apocalypse*, is present in *Sons and Lovers* and other works in the Lawrence canon. In the form, further, of Lawrence's uncanny hylozoistic awareness, it assumes an impressive variety of significances in his art.

One of the functions of hylozoism in Lawrence's fiction is to intensify and symbolize the plight, inadequacies, and deeper feeling-states of the characters. And it does so by engaging nature in a special way. After the Chapter One scene in which Mr. Morel has locked his wife out following one of those acrid Morel family quarrels, we discover Mrs. Morel facing nature: "The presence of the night came again to her. . . . She glanced round in fear."⁹ This "presence" and her fearful reaction suggest something animate or alive in the immediate environment. The moon is described as "streaming high in face of her, the moonlight standing up from the hills in front, and filling the valley . . ." (*SL*, p. 24). As the sexual symbols in this passage embody nature, one senses a humanizing relation developing between an adult masculinized presence, and two female recipients in the form of the valley and the husband-abused woman. The phallic character of nature is elaborated: "The tall white lilies were reeling in the moonlight, and the air was charged with their perfume, as with a presence . . . They seemed to be stretching in the moonlight" (*ibid.*). Mrs. Morel breathes deeply of the yellow pollen in the flowers. The fact that they make her dizzy prefaces one of the most hylozoistic sequences in all of Lawrence's writing:

Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon. (*Ibid.*)

This crucial passage represents a symbolic (if temporary) union of Mrs. Morel and nature. As she is pregnant at the time with Paul, the artist figure in *Sons and Lovers*, what occurs here is the abandonment of the biological father and the assumption of nature as Paul's father. A result of this symbolic commingling is that nature, rather than a human father, will be one of Paul's sources of authority and self-confirmation. The hostile, competitive relations with his real father, and Paul's pre-natural sensitivity to nature and to life essence and growth, will emerge as a pivotal conflict and motivation in the novel. This de-pater-nalized child of nature will experience a closeness to his mother, a

distancing from his father, and an empathy with nature integral to his acute aesthetic sensibility and to his developing emotional crisis. Paul will thus be heavily burdened with sacrifice and ambivalence in primary relationships, key conditions in *Sons and Lovers*. But the burden is a gift as well, a calling to art.

Other hylozoistic elements in the novel aid in revealing Paul's inevitable confusion about women and love. The "mother in the mind" will always be present in his relations with young women, splitting his libidinal energy between mother and young women, making a mother-lover of each, if in a different way. On a trip to the oceanside with Mrs. Morel, Miriam, and others, Paul undergoes *his* hylozoistic experience of the moon: "The whole of his blood seemed to burst into flame, and he could scarcely breathe. An enormous orange moon was staring at them [Paul and Miriam, alone on the beach] from the rim of the sandhills. He stood still, looking at it" (*SL*, p. 178). "'What is it,' murmured Miriam, waiting for him. . . . His blood was concentrated like a flame in his chest. But he could not get across to her. There were flashes in his blood . . . 'What is it?' she murmured again. 'It's the moon,' he answered, frowning . . . The crisis was past" (*ibid.*). It, of course, is and is not the moon. Representing Miriam and his mother, the two moons also "embody" his passion for both, a passion thus clogged by Paul's unnaturally close attachment to his mother, and by the blending in his mind of mother and girl. Nature has been incorporated into Paul's warped sexual and emotional makeup, suggesting one method used by Lawrence to universalize the plight of his characters. Paul's failure to tell Miriam exactly what is bothering him ironically echoes the key theme and value in *Sons and Lovers* of realization. For what this symptomatic scene discloses is *non-realization* as non-communication.

One of the crucial hylozoistic passages in *Sons and Lovers* can be located in the famous "peewits" scene between Paul and the sensuous Clara:

All the while [that Paul and Clara are making love] the peewits were screaming in the field. When he came to, he wondered what was near his eyes, curving and strong with life in the dark, and what voice it was speaking. . . . The warmth was Clara's breathing heaving. He lifted his head, and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him; and he put his face down on her throat, afraid. What was she? A strong, strange, wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was

hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars. (*SL*, p. 353)

“Clara,” we are soon told, “was not satisfied.” And though it can readily be shown that Paul is at least as much to blame as Clara for the failure of their love, this passage could nevertheless be pivotal in deciding whether Paul survives at the end of the novel. Does the kind of self-transcending power Paul experiences here carry him beyond the profound psychic menace of his Oedipal fixations? Further support for this reading can be interposed here:

To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them always, gave them rest within themselves. If so great a magnificent power could overwhelm them, identify them altogether with itself, so that they knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass blade its little height, and every tree, and living thing, then why fret about themselves. They could let themselves be carried by life. . . . (*SL*, p. 354)

This last “could” is pivotally ambiguous for the outcome of the novel, but it should be clear that this “life” which could “carry” them and enhance their potential being resides in their realizing the fullness of life embodied in the whole natural environment, and their place in it.

Although other significant hylozoistic scenes can be located in *Sons and Lovers* (such as the one late in the novel in which Paul identifies Clara with some irises), a masterful sequence occurs in the terrifying last page of the novel. Having lost his mother through death, Paul seems to have lost everything. His grip on life is feeble. Alone in the country at night, Paul is on the verge of “falling into” the universe: “On every side the immense dark silence seemed pressing him, so tiny a spark, into extinction” (*SL*, p. 420). The cosmos, as if in retaliation for his excessive closeness to his mother, traumatizes his sense of dereliction and despair. The infinite night void and his mother become one. And, “as his soul could not leave her,” he seems almost certainly destined for either mortal or psychic extinction. But Paul instead walks back to the lighted town; he is somehow reoriented toward a father principle. That “somehow” provides substance for the continuing controversy among readers and critics: does Paul truly survive, or has Lawrence concocted a happy ending, a “fiction” of Oedipal survival? The question to be considered, then, is whether that force in and of the dark, “curving and strong with life,” can successfully counter another crucial dark force in *Sons and Lovers*.

Primary psychic energy can, as we know from depth psychology, assume both affirmative and threatening shapes in the same individual, depending on the situation. There is no reason why the new life incorporated in Paul's love or passion for Clara is necessarily canceled by the death-impulses he feels after making love to Miriam. Darkness against darkness. The hylozoistic acceptance of nature at large develops a protective "darkness" against the vast spatial darkness at the end of the narrative. Whatever oppositions can be detected among the pairs of women (Miriam versus Clara, Miriam and Clara, for different reasons, versus Mrs. Morel), perhaps a more rudimentary and critical antithesis in the novel is that of mother versus mother. Parents of course represent both supportive and menacing images in a child's mind. Nor is the gift of life offered Paul by Mrs. Morel and Miriam and Clara (and Mr. Morel) a diminution of the familial pain and fury and terror with which Paul and the novel itself are so shaken. It will be a fierce struggle for Paul, but he has a real chance for life. The ending of *Sons and Lovers* is open indeed.

Women in Love is another novel with a hylozoistic moon scene. In the chapter entitled "Moony," Lawrence represents an image of the moon in a pond at night as the primordial matriarchal deity Cybele or Syria Dea. I propose, however, to deal with the concluding three chapters of the novel ("Continental," "Snowed Up," "Exeunt"), as this section of *Women in Love* is a novelistic tour de force of Lawrence's abiding idea of the spirit of place.

The three chapters represent the culmination of relations of what Mark Schorer has called the death couple (Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich), as distinguished from the "life" couple (Ursula Brangwen and Rupert Birkin).¹⁰ Given Lawrence's sense of the role of setting in consummating the fate of human beings, this isolated Alpine region is the inevitable location for the resolution of this narrative. Its sheer frozen finality and abstractness objectify the drives toward perversity and destruction moving within these people. Although ironically described as a cradle, this snow-and-ice terrain is a symbolic grave. Its hylozoistic character is hinted at early in the sequence, as is its sense of being at the extremity of *human* place: ". . . the tiny railway station of Hohenhausen [was] at the end of the tiny valley railway. It was snow everywhere, a white, perfect cradle of snow. . . ." This "cradle" is also referred to several times as "the navel of the earth." In its entirety, however, the passage accentuates the nihilistic character of this setting and the implicit end of the individuals trapped within it:

In front was a valley shut in under the sky, the last huge slopes of snow and black rock, and at the end, like the navel of the earth, a white-folded wall, and two peaks glimmering in the late night. Straight in front ran the cradle of silent snow, between the great slopes that were fringed with a little roughness of pine trees, like hair, round the base. But the cradle of snow ran on to the eternal closing-in, where the walls of snow and rock rose impenetrable, and the mountain peaks above were in heaven immediate. This was the centre, the knot, the navel of the world, where the earth belonged to the skies, pure, unapproachable, impassable. (WL, pp. 390–91)

All the verbal motifs of menace and entrapment by nature (“huge slopes,” “black rock,” “eternal closing-in,” “impenetrable,” “impassable”) objectify the incarceration of Gudrun, Gerald, and the artist Loërke in the maze of their own perverse natures. But this condition should be seen as more than symbolic projection in view of that pivotally hylozoistic “navel.” These doomed individuals are affixed to a “world body” from which, paradoxically, they are also cut off, and (unlike Lawrence’s Etruscans—Egyptians—Babylonians) from which they derive no vitality. Gudrun thinks she is vitalized by the mountain peaks and the infinity of snow and ice, but considering the emphatic association of these elements with biological and spiritual death, her new release is a liberation into death.

The impact of this cold terrain on Gerald is more overtly negative. He not only feels the loss of Gudrun to this symbolic landscape, but both landscape and his increasing alienation from Gudrun are continually emphasized in images of coldness: “She was completely gone, and there was icy vapour around his heart” (WL, p. 391). Later, in the chapter “Snowed In,” when told “coldly” by Gudrun (after Birkin and Ursula have left for Italy) that he loves her very little, “His heart went icy at the sound of her voice” (WL, p. 433). And a kind of death occurs in Gerald when Gudrun cruelly tells this man almost insane with sexual passion for her that he will *never* love her, and that he must “Try to love me a little more, and to want me a little less” (WL, p. 434). Although Gerald generates warmth in the climactic scene when he attempts to strangle Gudrun, he is revolted by his murderous lust, and wanders listlessly off to die in the “cradle” of snow.

But the primary manifestations of hylozoism in this Alpine sequence of *Women in Love* are negative. Rather than the inanimate becoming animate, the very opposite occurs. Human life becomes inanimate, human beings become matter. Such is the outcome for the three “death” characters in the final chapters of *Women in Love*.

This end is intimated throughout the novel (Gerald, for example, getting his fingers crushed in his machinery), but it emerges openly as an attitude in Gudrun herself toward Gerald:

She looked at Gerald. He was wonderful like a piece of radium to her. She felt she could consume herself and know *all*, by means of this fatal, living metal. She smiled to herself at her fancy. And what would she do with herself when she had destroyed herself? For if spirit, if integral being, is destructible, Matter is indestructible. (WL, p. 387)

In "Continental," she temporarily sees Gerald as "a perfect instrument" through which ultimately to control the world ("he would clear up the great muddle of labour and industry" [WL, p. 408]). She likens him to Bismarck, and regards herself as the Woman behind the Great Man. But this fantasy of power is punctured by a quality endemic to her, and visible from the beginning of the novel: "Everything turned to irony with her: the last flavour of everything was ironical" (WL, p. 408). Empires are not built by ironists, and what Gudrun will settle for is a death-in-life non-relation with the ironic nihilist Loërke in a Germany soon to go Nazi. All that is left of the future to these two "artists" are jokes about "some mocking dream of the destruction of the world by a ridiculous catastrophe of man's invention: a man invented such a perfect explosive that it blew the earth in two . . ." (WL, p. 444). Again, it is significant that the hylozoism latent here takes the form of man—"animated" matter destroying both man and the earth.

Should it be thought that Gudrun herself escapes this degradation of man into matter, Lawrence shows Gudrun alone with herself in a terrifying depiction of a woman at the edge of disintegration:

The thought of the mechanical succession of day following day, day following day, *ad infinitum*, was one of the things that made her heart palpitate with a real approach of madness. The terrible bondage of this tick-tack of time, this twitching of the hands of the clock, this eternal repetition of hours and days—oh God, it was too awful to contemplate. And there was no escape from it, no escape. . . . Oh, how she suffered, lying there alone, confronted by the terrible clock, with its eternal tick-tack. All life, all life resolved itself into this

Gerald could not save her from it. He, his body, his motion, his life—it was the same ticking. . . . (WL, p. 456).

Both master and mistress of mankind and matter—evil *Lucumones*, or just *Lucumones*?—have themselves virtually become matter in a devastating rendition of the end of willful, dominating individuals.

If the hylozoism in *Women in Love* adds to a depth and complexity

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of meaning not matched in Lawrence's later writings, it still figures importantly in such works as *St. Mawr* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Although *Kangaroo* is not part of Lawrence's better work, it features among its merits a variety of striking descriptions. Early in the story the Lawrence persona, Somers, pondering why he had even come to Australia, goes for a walk in the wild bushland. This turns out to be more than an Englishman's idea of a stroll. As Somers-Lawrence walks into this terrain, he begins to experience strange sensations. He is accompanied by "a huge electric moon," the tree trunks resembling "naked pale aborigines": "He had looked so long at the vivid moon, without thinking. And now, there was something among the trees, and his hair began to stir with terror, on his head. There was a presence."¹² What Lawrence has in mind soon emerges:

. . . the horrid thing in the bush! He schemed as to what it would be. It must be the spirit of the place. Something fully evoked tonight, perhaps provoked, by that unnatural West-Australian moon. Provoked by the moon, the roused spirit of the bush. He felt it was watching, and waiting. Following with certainty, just behind his back. . . . It was not tired of watching its victim. . . . It was biding its time with a terrible ageless watchfulness, waiting for a far-off end, watching the myriad intruding white men. (*Ibid.*)

This hylozoistic "presence" begins to resemble a presence or atmosphere found in Lawrence's American writings. Nor is this resemblance accidental. Both Australia and the United States are, for Lawrence, lands in which the settling by immigrants was accompanied by violence toward the earlier inhabitants and rapid, superficial assimilation of the area. "The spirit of place," states Lawrence, in *Sea and Sardinia*, "is a strange thing. Our mechanical age tries to override it. But it does not succeed. In the end the strange, sinister spirit of the place, so diverse and adverse in differing places, will smash our mechanical oneness into smithereens. . . ."¹³ This tendentious, vengeful hylozoism becomes one of Lawrence's central perspectives in his American writings. Lawrence may also have been overwhelmed by the vast, rather awesome sense of space he encountered in Australia and the Southwest, after the compact and ordered character of space in England. That he could be sensitive, even hypersensitive, to vast spaces is evident from the final night-sky scene in *Sons and Lovers* considered earlier in the essay. But by the time Lawrence arrives in New Mexico, and makes his memorable declarations about the area—"I think New

Mexico was the greatest experience from the outside world that I have ever had. It certainly changed me forever"¹⁴—space becomes the zone of the new life, not only a possible ending of the old.

One of the most salient examples of hylozoism in all of Lawrence's work is located in the Las Chivas ranch sequence near the end of *St. Mawr*. Brilliantly descriptive, this long passage has been considered problematic when viewed as part of the entire narrative. The stricture that the stallion St. Mawr is rather abruptly dropped from the story has been countered in one way or another. I believe that St. Mawr belongs to a hierarchy of transvalued, preternatural values that, ascending from such ministers of Pan as Lewis and Phoenix to the level of vitalism represented by the horse, culminates in a spirit of place located around the Lawrence ranch on Lobo mountain northwest of Taos. This hierarchy, helping to structure the story, also helps to dispose of the stallion.

My objection to *St. Mawr*, besides the excessive cruelty to straw men like Rico and the tiresome narrator-jeering, resides in a disparity between two kinds of hylozoism found in the last pages. *St. Mawr* concerns the quest of a modern woman for a vitalizing source in a barren world. One can disagree with F. R. Leavis' claim that *St. Mawr* represents such a quest at the level of art achieved in "The Waste Land." Yet Lawrence's novella, too, is concerned with depicting in England and America an overwhelming sterility in twentieth-century society and in the man-woman relationship, and, in consequence, with a pursuit of new sources of being. The questing heroine, Lou Witt, and her obnoxious mother see one of these sources in the stallion, who serves as a precursory agent of some deeper nonhuman state of being that looms near the end of the story. The sensibility celebrated in *Etruscan Places*, *Apocalypse*, and the essay "New Mexico" is prefigured in a powerfully numinous description of St. Mawr:

Why did he seem to her like some living background, into which she wanted to retreat? When he reared his head and neighed from his deep chest, like deep wind-bells resounding, she seemed to hear the echoes of another darker, more spacious, more dangerous, more splendid world than ours, that was beyond her. And there she wanted to go.¹⁵

St. Mawr centers on Lou's progression toward that "darker, more spacious, more dangerous, more splendid world." Indeed, all these adjectives would accurately depict for Lawrence some portion of his Chaldean-Etruscan cosmos, and, in this sense, the ancient world looms, if only implicitly, behind the debased modern one. Lou, abandoning both her devitalized husband and her vitalized horse, finds the chal-

lenge to, and potential fulfillment of, her spiritual meaning in the mountains of northern New Mexico. What follows is a masterful thirteen-page description of this environment (and of the failure by earlier settlers to master or adjust to it). Few depictions of natural environment reveal as acute a sense of the subtler nuances of presence of a place as does this episode in *St. Mawr*. It is just here that Lawrence's hylozoism fully emerges, for his projecting of feeling (to put it from a rationalist perspective) into external reality brings that reality newly alive. But this is only one way of saying that the viewer (or reader) is also newly vivified. So many people, Lawrence used to say, look but so few see.

A critical problem in *St. Mawr* can, however, be seen in the fact that its two hylozoisms, one negative, the other positive, appear to be unreconciled. We are first told by the distanced narrator of the "un-created Rocky mountains, preying upon the will of man . . . slowly wearing down . . . his onward-pushing spirit" (*SM*, p. 144). This anti-human yet almost humanly malicious negativity in nature is amplified several times: "Never sympathetic, always watchfully on their guard, and resistant, they hedged one in with the aroma and the power and the slight horror of the pre-sexual primeval world. The world where each creature was crudely limited to its own ego, crude and bristling and cold, and then crowding in packs like pine-trees and wolves" (*SM*, p. 146). This emphasis culminates in an unforgettable passage of negative hylozoism:

The underlying rat-dirt, the everlasting bristling tussle of the wild life, with the tangle and the bones strewing. Bones of horses struck by lightning, bones of dead cattle, skulls of goats with little horns: bleached, unburied bones. Then the cruel electricity of the mountains. And then, most mysterious but worst of all, the animosity of the spirit of place: the crude, half-created spirit of place, like some serpent-bird for ever attacking man, in a hatred of man's onward-struggle towards further creation. . . . The vast and unrelenting will of the swarming lower life, working for ever against man's attempt at a higher life, a further created being. (*SM*, pp. 152-53)

Yet, after such a vividly ominous interpretation of Lou's new surrounding, Lawrence, on the last page of the story, has her say this:

"There's something else even that loves me and wants me. . . . It's a spirit. And it's here on this ranch. It's here, in this landscape. It's something more real to me than men are, and it soothes me, and it holds me up. I don't know what it is, definitely. It's something wild, that will hurt me sometimes and will

wear me down sometimes. I know it. But it's something big, bigger than men, bigger than people, bigger than religion. It's something to do with wild America. And it's something to do with me. It's a mission, if you like. . . ." (SM, pp. 158–59)

Is Lou herself confused? That Lawrence might not be is suggested by the caustic presence of Lou's mother, who derides the whole ranch idea, as well as by Lou's own significant qualifications ("It . . . will hurt me sometimes."). This "wild spirit" certainly wants Lou, but the evidence of the narrative might convince the reader of a contradiction between narrator and protagonist interpretations of the setting.

Nevertheless, the aesthetic properties in *St. Mawr* at least reduce this contradiction, especially if we discern some distance between Lawrence and Lou. Lawrence could be suggesting that Lou's hylozoistic enthusiasm is partly a delusion. Her search for realization might still be far more rigorous than she is aware (which is not to suggest that Lawrence does not take Lou seriously); in this respect the negatively rendered environment is appropriate. Also the unresolved ending is typical of Lawrence's fondness for subordinating fictional endings to carefully tilted lifelike non-endings. Whether Lou (and the reader) is fulfilled or defeated by the spirit of place is in part determined by the future of the reader.

But the problem remains, and I think it arises from an honesty in Lawrence's response to place that he could not fully accommodate to the aesthetic pattern embodied in Lou's final, if untested, dedication. Part of himself at this time wanted what Lou wanted—some exaltation of being beyond one's present, finite, sexual nature. That desire was so strong that it made Lawrence go against his deep sense of the animosity latent in the American place. Authorial ambivalence about place flaws this novella, but it also endows it with an aesthetic of vitalist restlessness about self and surroundings typical of Lawrence and of modern life as well.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is Lawrence's last major fictional statement about place. The place now becomes England, but it is England as a microcosm of Europe, of all twentieth-century industrialized societies. Some of the key words in this novelistic romance—touch, tenderness—should function by now as importantly creative terms in modern culture. But another set of terms from this novel has not quite received its due. It appears in one of those haunting entrance-to-nature moments with which this novel abounds. Connie Chatterley has come to the

gamekeeper's hut only to find it empty. Sitting on the porch steps, she responds to the natural setting:

Old oak trees stood around, grey, powerful trunks, rain-blackened, round and vital, throwing off reckless limbs. The ground was fairly free of undergrowth, the anemones sprinkled, there was a bush or two, elder, or guelder-rose, and a purplish tangle of bramble; the old russet of bracken almost vanished under green anemone ruffs. Perhaps this was one of the unravished places. Unravished! The whole world was ravished.¹⁶

Ravishment versus the unravished. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* this polarity suggests the mining town Tevershall and Wragby Wood, respectively, with the owner of Wragby as chief ravisher. Hylozoism is present in an implicit Mother Earth metaphor of a world brutally raped, as the novel bears out, by mechanistic man. But the ravishment is more complex than this. Clifford Chatterley too, that Industrialist-rapist, has himself been "ravished" in the disordered "machinery" of the First World War, his body mechanized from the waist down. He has been partly converted to matter, and perhaps the only excuse we can accept for Lawrence's unremitting cruelty toward Clifford is the fact that even as half-man, half-machine Clifford persists in inflicting his exploitative will on society, his workmen, and the earth.

What remains unravished is associated by Lawrence with ancient and medieval England:

There was a certain pathos. The wood still had some of the mystery of wild, old England; but Sir Geoffrey's cuttings during the war had given it a blow. How still the trees were, with their crinkly, innumerable twigs against the sky, and their grey, obstinate trunks rising from the brown bracken! How safely the birds flitted among them! And once there had been deer, and archers, and monks padding along on asses. The place remembered, still remembered. (LCL, p. 43)

A certain realism is asserted here. Lawrence's "sacred wood," already small, is steadily shrinking, due to the dependence of society in peace and especially in time of war on extractive industries like coal mining.

In few of Lawrence's fictions is the sense of the animate and inanimate so polarized as in this novel, a condition conducive to melodrama. Yet his animization of the remaining bits of "unravished" earth is sufficiently evocative to make one partly concede to the somewhat black-and-white characterization and confrontation of mechanizing ravishers and purposely isolated individuals like Connie and Mellors:

Connie walked dimly on. From the old wood came an ancient melancholy, somehow soothing to her, better than the harsh insentience of the outer world. 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. They, too, were waiting: obstinately, stoically waiting, and giving off a potency of silence. 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. (*LCL*, p. 67)

Lady Chatterley's Lover attempts to validate this hylozoistic and Druidic sense of the English, the modern, place in the sensually magnified relationship of the lovers. Sexual love is only, is perhaps by this vision the only, way of remaining unmechanized. Unravished nature, with its "nobility" and inwardness and potency, thus becomes sexualized place. Unified sexuality and nature create a "vital presence." Connie and Mellors bear an ancient sensibility, less in their mode of consciousness than in the very substance of their living, of what they are trying with all of their being to preserve in a dwindling zone of authentic existence. We are told early in the novel that "The people were as haggard, shapeless, and dreary as the countryside, and as unfriendly" (*LCL*, p. 11). This societal condition has certainly not improved by the end of the novel. Clifford may be profoundly chagrined by his impotent life, but he and his kind live on. The lovers flee to Canada, but Canada too will undoubtedly experience the "bad time" predicted by Mellors. All that remains is a warm wisp of hylozoism—"the little forked flame between me and you."

I feel that Lawrence is not to be taken lightly in his empathetic reconstructions and vivid interpretations of the ancient past. He possessed an uncanny capacity for projecting himself into exotic times, places, states of mind, and levels of organic and inorganic phenomena. Lawrence's projections were occasionally accompanied by some of his own personal terrors and wrath and ugliness, but in view of the depths he was plumbing, the appearance of dregs should not be surprising. What perhaps should be surprising is that time after time he emerges with a coherent vision in his art and thought, with a component of experience censured in most of us because, given our psychic constitution and what Western society has traditionally regarded as the boundaries of consciousness and sanity, it would constitute a dangerous extreme.

THE ANCIENT IMAGINATION OF D. H. LAWRENCE

Ultimately, hylozoism involves more than a cast of mind or a sense of environment. It concerns the nature of being. As Lawrence puts it in his first travel book, *Twilight in Italy*, the question is not, to be or not to be, but how to be. Lawrence is an ontological artist. His concern with being, and thus, unavoidably, with nonbeing, occupies the center of his work. Lawrence is not trying to be exotic or unconventional in his treks into the Australian bush, northern New Mexico, the Alps, the Etruscan tombs, or the Mesopotamian mind. He is fascinated by out-of-the-way places and modes of thinking, and, thus, of being, because the twentieth century has dangerously constricted our sensibility between "mentalism" and sensationalism. The consequence, Lawrence felt, is an inability to feel, to imagine, and thus to relate, not only to mountains, but to other human beings. We best describe the occasionally elitist Lawrence not as a libertarian mind, but as something more radical, a liberating imagination:

We can never recover an old vision, once it has been supplanted. But what we can do is to discover a new vision in harmony with the memories of old, far-off . . . experience that lie within us. So long as we are not deadened or drossy, memories of Chaldean experience still live within us, at great depths, and can vivify our impulses in a new direction, once we awaken them.¹⁷

¹ "New Mexico," in D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 187.

² D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (1930; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1966), pp. 76–77.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

⁴ Henri Frankfort, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1949), pp. 12–13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷ Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, pp. 84–85.

⁸ John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 53–54.

⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 23. Subsequent quotations from *Sons and Lovers* will be from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *SL*.

¹⁰ "Women in Love and Death," in D. H. Lawrence: *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Mark Spilka (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 53.

¹¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (1921; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 387. Subsequent quotations from *Women in Love* will be from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *WL*.

¹² D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (1923; rpt. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 19.

¹³ D. H. Lawrence and Italy (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 55.

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¹⁴ "New Mexico," in D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Essays*, p. 181.

¹⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *St. Mawr* (1925; rpt. New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 26–27. Subsequent quotations from *St. Mawr* will be from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *SM*.

¹⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 98. Subsequent quotations from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* will be from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *LCL*.

¹⁷ D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* (1936; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 301.