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D.H. Lawrence and the Anticipation of the Ecocritical Turn

The King in Exile: Ecocriticism, Lawrence and Animals

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Abstract

According to Timothy Morton Lawrence's "ecological awareness" has a fivefold basis: a rousseau-esque critique of civilization, the cultural pessimism of the late nineteenth century, the experience of growing up in an environment profoundly affected by industrialization, his religious background, and the First World War. With this point of departure, he sought alternative solutions in the periphery as opposed to the centre, in the body rather than the spirit, and in instinct rather than the intellect. Lawrence's ambition was to achieve a "reintegration of matter and spirit" (James Krasner) that required a redefinition of man's traditional supremacy in relation to the rest of creation. Thus long before the modern ecological awareness Lawrence preaches a new and alternative approach to nature, which is in opposition to the western tradition and which anticipates such ecocritical labels as "slow violence" (Rob Nixon), "environmental generational amnesia" (Peter Kahn Jr.) and "the dignification of the overlooked" (Lawrence Buell). In an attempt to examine this alternative approach with a specific focus on the role of animals in Lawrence's writing, the paper will pay particular attention to the poem "Snake" and the novella *The Fox*.

Index terms

Keywords: instinct, respect, body, male, fox, snake

Full text

- ¹ Lawrence's "ecological awareness"¹ was not just inherited from the Romantic literary tradition: it is also rooted in theological visions of apocalypse and millennium that served as a template for the natural destruction that surrounded him. Through a combination of these different impulses, Lawrence adopted a discourse that points with

remarkable clarity ahead to perspectives from a hundred years later in the debates about climate change and the fears of an approaching environmental collapse.

2 With a profound scepticism with respect to any form of institutionalised religion, he sought alternatives in pre-institutionalised myth and religious practice. This is evident not only in his interest in the comparative anthropology of James Frazer and others, in the essay “Pan in America” and not least in his final work, *Apocalypse*, he also tries to penetrate a time when religion provided the individual with an immediate and instinctive contact with the forces of the cosmos. For Lawrence this contact was a prerequisite for the respect for creation that was necessary to ensure a genuine reorientation enabling us, as we now know, to save our planet as well as our civilisation.

3 A further element of Lawrence’s ecological awareness was a movement away from the centre to the periphery, with the centre invariably associated with political and religious institutions that undermined a contact with nature in the first place. His life in exile, in other words, became a continuous journey away from a centre that cannot hold. Since the experiences of the War, in particular, Lawrence came to see his native England – the “fractured dystopia” (McCarthy 2015, 115) – as epitomising this centre. The conflict between centre and periphery, moreover, is also intimately connected with the notion of the “spirit of place,” with the periphery denoting the rootedness and the unique sense of identity to be found in the spirit of a particular place. In *Studies of Classic American Literature*, Lawrence claims that

[e]very people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality (Lawrence 1986, 12).

Everything and everyone ultimately depend on such a unique sense of connection in order to acquire a truly distinct sense of self. What is more, while distinguishing sharply between body and spirit, our civilisation sees the spirit as superior to the body, and intellect as superior to instinct. Thus, seeing spirit and intellect, represented by Christianity and science respectively, as the driving forces behind the modern world, Lawrence rejected their supremacy and sought a “reintegration of matter and spirit” (Roger Ebbatson, quoted in Krasner 1992, 162). In explaining this idea, which is central to Lawrence’s vision, James Krasner turns to Einstein’s field theory, which sees nature as “fields of energy in which bodies are defined by forces and make forces visible” (141). This is why Lawrence’s characters are alive only when being attracted and repelled from each other, that is when they are under the influence of the *élan vital*. As opposed to Christianity, Lawrence wanted to reinstate the body as something wonderful and valuable rather than as a vessel of sin and damnation. And more importantly: he extended this view to a communication between all creatures – to men, birds, beasts and flowers. This is also the reason why Lawrence’s works are full of a constant interplay between man and everything natural, in a pan-natural field of energy. It is also the reason why sex plays such a central role in his vision: the sexual act shows more explicitly than any other how body and soul are two sides of the same coin, how both are necessary elements in the coming together and the coming apart of love as well as life.

4 Essentially, then, Lawrence denies the contrast between man and nature. He distances himself from the idea of man as a being with a unique and separate position, and from the idea of nature as man’s field of unlimited exploitation. Rather man has to find his proper place *in* nature, interacting with it on its own terms and with humility. It is this humility that makes Lawrence approach animals, and even plants, with respect and openness, learning from nature rather than teach it to obey. Lawrence’s most uplifting characters are the ones that accept animals and plants and the cosmos as they really are.

They also see other human beings as creatures in touch with the forces of nature, experiencing nature through the body.

5 Lawrence calls for a Rousseauesque, and Nietzschean, transition from culture to nature.² Culture encompasses all the qualities that our civilisation has come to regard as admirable, such as science, rationality, education, refinement, humanity and spirituality. Nature, on the other hand, denotes primitivism, animalism, instinct and intuition.

6 Culture, furthermore, is regulated in accordance with principles conceived entirely by man, whereas nature, as man is confronted by it, has a twofold quality. It is partly under man's control and/or comprehension, and man has almost from the beginning tried to expand this sphere, first with the help of religion, and later with the help of science and technology. These have, deep down, been instruments for controlling nature, either physically or spiritually or both, very much in line with the common interpretation of Genesis. However, to a significant degree nature is *not* under man's control, and Lawrence's ecological awareness is precisely a fear, vocalised through a secular form of Christian apocalypticism, that nature might gradually turn the tables; in short, that nature might wreak its revenge for man's abuse of it by turning its fury back on man and undermining his very existence – a notion highly recognizable to the twenty-first century, but perhaps also reminiscent of the medieval “great chain of being” as exemplified in Shakespeare's tragedies. Man, in other words, needs to accept his role as a subordinate creature rather than as the master of creation, and urgently if he is to avoid a self-inflicted apocalypse.³

7 Thus because of man's lack of humility, Lawrence outlines an opposition, or even a battle to the death, between human civilisation and the part of nature that is still capable of retaliating. This fear is most clearly stated in *Study of Thomas Hardy* and in the “Industrial Magnate” chapter of *Women in Love*. In the latter, Gerald's radical reorganization of the mines is described as “the first great step in undoing” (Lawrence 1987, 231). Gerald is a destructive force on a par with, and closely related to, the force of the War itself, with its transformation of science and technology into an array of weapons with a destructive power beyond human comprehension. Actually, in this War-time novel that hardly mentions the War, it is not unreasonable to see Gerald – “a soldier, and an explorer, and a Napoleon of industry” (*ibid.*, 64), and whose name means “rule of the spear” – as the very personification of the War. As a matter of fact, the only source of hope lies in the prospect of these forces being drawn towards their own doom, so that they might give room to new germinations or beginnings, as Lawrence suggests in the first few lines of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

8 As opposed to the War's sudden and literally explosive brutality, however, the gradual “undoing” for which Gerald is responsible fits the phrase “slow violence” coined by the ecocritic Rob Nixon in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2013), which tells how industrialism almost imperceptibly consumes and destroys the natural environment (Voie 2017, 29-30). In “Pan in America,” Lawrence similarly uses a metaphor of war and violence, namely that of *conquest*. “What are we going to do,” he asks, “with a conquered universe?” And in the penultimate paragraph of the essay, he adds, with almost frightening relevance to the situation a hundred years later:

Because when all is said and done, life itself consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe; – sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything – and not in a ‘conquest’ of anything by anything. Even the conquest of the air makes the world smaller, tighter, and more airless. (*Mornings* 2009, 164)

Lawrence's diagnosis of the way in which the modern world is departing, step by step, from an organic and immediate contact with the natural world is reminiscent of such phenomena described by ecocritical theory as “environmental generational amnesia” and “shifting baseline syndrome.” Both of these phrases – the former coined by the

psychologist Peter Kahn Jr. and the latter by Daniel Pauley – suggest how the environmental memory of each new generation adapts to the negative changes, including the loss of species, habitats etc., that have taken place since the previous generation, so that the memory of previous states of the environment is gradually lost (Kahn Jr. 2002). Towards the end of his life, in other words, Lawrence is sounding a clarion call for us not to forget how our entire way of thinking has been disconnected from rootedness in an organic, living cosmos. Again, it is the urgency of this message that dominates his last major work, *Apocalypse*.

9 This slow violence invites another term commonly used for the entire modern experience, namely *alienation*. Although the term is primarily applied to an overall sense of cultural pessimism, its roots in Marxist political philosophy are highly appropriate, because in *Women in Love*, it is just as applicable to Gerald as it is to the miners he employs. Having embraced the “pure machine-principle of perfect co-ordination into one pure, complex, infinitely repeated motion” (Lawrence 1987, 228), which is precisely the origin of his miners’ sense of alienation from their role as workers, *he* has suffered the same fate. Gerald’s gradual descent into despair takes place against a growing realisation that he has lost contact with his own sensibility. His conquest has made him hollow at the core. Therefore, his attraction to Gudrun, and especially his nocturnal visit to her bedroom in the chapter “Death and Love,” shows how this realisation leads him into existential despair with Gudrun as his only hope of recovering a sense of meaning and purpose. Nor is it a coincidence that he seeks Gudrun with an almost blind determination to make love to her, even if it appears to happen half against her will. It is as if he instinctively perceives that a sense of sanity and coherence that can only be re-established *through the body*.

10 In line with Lawrence’s relentless apocalyptic logic, however, Gerald is destined to run his course to the bitter end. Thus his claim during his search for his drowned sister in the chapter “Water Party” that “you can’t put a thing right, once it has gone wrong” (*ibid.*, 184) is a foreshadowing of his own later death in the Alps, because he is himself an inevitable part of his family’s and his own kind’s downward spiral. From an ecocritical point of view, this could obviously be interpreted as a confirmation of the irreversibility of the destruction he embodies and is responsible for, just as it could be interpreted, within the religious framework of Lawrence’s childhood, as part of history’s inevitable and divinely ordained journey from Creation, via the Fall to the Day of Wrath. Thus, it is hardly surprising that one of Lawrence’s working titles for the novel was *Dies Irae*.

11 Finally, when regarding *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* as the one work it was intended to be from the beginning, one can see Gerald’s frozen body at the end of the novel as the ultimate anti-pastoral, the strongest possible opposition to the early Brangwens. Indeed, there is an interesting similarity – and contrast – between the deaths of Tom Brangwen in the former novel and Gerald Crich in the latter. The former, happily inebriated, is conducted home by his trusted mare, only to slip helplessly but also unconcernedly into the ultimately life-giving waters of the flood. Tom Brangwen’s death is, essentially, not tragic, but part of an organic cycle. Gerald, on the other hand, having faced his own existential emptiness, meets his destiny in the same element, but in its deathly, frozen form, with no promise of regeneration.

12 It is against this background that Lawrence increasingly comes to focus on non-human nature as a potentially constructive source of hope and renewal, or, more bleakly, as the only dimension in the early twentieth-century world where hope is not entirely futile. And the part of non-human nature, furthermore, with which man has the greatest chance of obtaining some kind of communication, is obviously his closest relatives, namely the animals. For Lawrence, animals are almost a kind of missing link or last hope. Again, he sees this element of hope against the background of a long religious and

cultural tradition that has hypothesised an unbridgeable gulf between the two groups of creatures. But he also does it against the background of Darwin, who only a generation before Lawrence's birth had contributed to a possible healing of this lost connection with a theory that defined man as an animal. As a result, Lawrence was forced to handle two contradictory perceptions of the relationship between animal and man.

13 How, then, does Lawrence go about his attempt to establish a sense of communication between man and beast? Typically, he challenges anthropomorphism based on man's assumed supremacy. Instead he seeks to *theriomorphise*.⁴ In other words, he is interested in the animals in their own right, as animals. His intention is not even to compare man and beast, but to explore if the animal, in its separate, non-human existence, possesses qualities that man, in his other sphere, may learn from or be inspired by. A further implication is that Lawrence, with his trust in the value of instinct, is suggesting that it is potentially worthwhile for man to explore his animality rather than to continue searching for an idealized humanity.⁵

14 Western culture in its traditional form has, furthermore, made any worthwhile dialogue between man and beast impossible, simply by postulating that animals operate purely from instinct, and lack language, rationality, intelligence; in short the ability to *think*, which is precisely the quality on which genuine human dialogue depends. Thus, a dialogue with animals is only possible through those channels that we have in common with them: instinct, emotions. But in order to establish or re-establish this dialogue, man cannot fall back on his superiority; on the contrary, he will have to give it up, and approach nature, and its most immediate representatives, the animals, with a new humility. He will have to accept, in other words, that on this particular level of communication, they are equal.

15 It seems appropriate, at this point, to introduce some relevant concepts from recent ecocritical writing. In his foundational book *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Lawrence Buell, for instance, introduces the concept of "the dignification of the overlooked" (184), to denote "the heightened sensitivity to the treatment and feelings of brute creation" (*ibid.*), a phenomenon Buell first discovers in James Thomson's pre-Romantic work *The Seasons*.⁶ It is precisely this "dignification" that Lawrence, too, offers the animals, returning to them the dignity that the Christian anthropocentric tradition has taken away from them.

16 Scott Slovic has introduced the concept of "appreciating the unappreciated" to denote a similar phenomenon. The terms "ecophobia" and "biophobia" furthermore, are similarly used for the widespread fear of or hostility towards specific animals, such as the wolf, in itself a product of two thousand years of cultural conditioning. Not least in his poetry, Lawrence repeatedly focuses on animals that are traditionally burdened with negative associations, such as foxes, snakes, mosquitos and bats, that is animals that man – or at least western man – would almost intuitively want to kill or eradicate. Even more explicitly, they are often seen as personifications of evil, and symbolic of the devil himself. It seems that he deliberately chooses these particular creatures to challenge, redefine and sometimes reject established values in the Christian tradition.⁷ Thus once again, he uses them as part of a critique of western civilisation and as part of his iconoclastic revaluation of values, in which the animal world represents a potential bridgehead to viable alternatives.

17 This is perhaps most conspicuous in the poem "Snake," where he takes the very animal that personifies evil, and accepts "him" – rather than "it"⁸ – as being on an equal footing with himself. In *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard, quoting John Berger's essay "Why Look at Animals?" calls attention to the fact that "animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of

what separates us from them” (Garrard 2004, 139). In “Snake,” however, the conventional relationship between man and animal is, if not reversed, then at least balanced, as the speaker – not necessarily the poet himself – is also very explicitly being observed and examined by the snake.⁹

18 And while the snake thus exerts *his* power over the speaker by, among other things, relegating him to the position of “second-comer” (l.15), who “must wait, must stand and wait” (l.6), and by looking at him “vaguely” (l.17) and apparently without fear, the tables are almost turned: the speaker, at least in his afterthought, welcomes the authority of the snake’s gaze; he is prepared to submit to it because he has come to accept that it may carry some knowledge or wisdom that he himself does not possess. Indeed, the snake “looked around like a god” (l.45), and the speaker feels “so honoured” (l.34), and even regards him as a potential redeemer or harbinger of a new dispensation, almost like Yeats’s beast, slouching “towards Bethlehem to be born.” Furthermore, it is difficult, in the context of the Christian tradition, to imagine any encounter between man and snake without being reminded of the archetypal episode. The poet’s sympathy for and fascination with the snake is a reminder of Eve’s temptation, but with an inverted, travestied meaning. The speaker finally sees the snake – the Christian incarnation of evil – as an uncrowned king, “[n]ow due to be crowned again” (l.70), very much like Christ himself at the end of history.

19 Another interesting feature of the poem is how the text is a later verbal reflection on an entirely *silent* or non-verbal encounter. As suggested above, the poet is forced to accept, or chooses to accept, an encounter on the snake’s conditions, which exclude a verbal exchange. As a matter of fact, the poet is at a positive disadvantage, as the snake, being silent, is in its element and apparently has no qualms about the situation, whereas the poet is prevented from using his superior means of communication, namely language, which again produces a fundamental discomfort in him. Indeed, this realisation of being handicapped or placed in an inferior position in relation to the snake seems almost subconsciously to trigger the speaker’s “sort of horror” (l.52) as the snake is leaving: “I put down my pitcher, / I picked up a clumsy log / And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter” (ll.55-57). This act, which the speaker afterwards regrets, shows how his upbringing somehow reawakens and demands a reaction in line with its expectations. In *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard draws attention to Erica Fudge’s discussion in her book *Perceiving Animals* (2000) of the tradition, which goes back to the 1500s and 1600s, of bear, horse and bull baiting etc. Fudge sees this tradition as reflecting a need to perpetually “reassert human dominance over, and separation from, the animal kingdom” (Garrard 2004, 142).

20 The speaker’s reaction in “Snake” is reminiscent of at least two scenes from *Women in Love* involving Gerald Crich in the act of suppressing an animal: the mare at the train crossing and Bismarck the rabbit during Gudrun’s stay at Shortlands. According to Fudge, “[t]o watch a baiting, to enact anthropocentrism, is to reveal, not the stability of species status, but the animal that lurks beneath the surface. In proving their humanity humans achieve the opposite. The Bear Garden [where bears were torn apart] makes humans into animals” (quoted in Garrard 2004, 142). In subduing the animals, Gerald essentially attempts to fight the fear of his own animal instincts; he is becoming a caricature of his own humanity; by suppressing what is non-human, the “beastliness” of the animal backfires, and he becomes precisely that which he tries to suppress.

21 As mentioned above, Lawrence’s writing exhibits a kind of equality between man and beast; animals are not just symbolic attachments, but actual characters playing a role on an equal footing with the human characters. In *St. Mawr*, for instance, this is very obvious, where the stallion even provides the title of the novella, and where effectively he and Lou Witt are the two protagonists, or, alternatively, St. Mawr, Lou and Rico form the

story's main triangle. But even in a short story like "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," there is a relationship between the three brothers and the work horses that makes it difficult to decide who figure most prominently as characters in the story. In effect, they are perfectly parallel, and symbolic of each other, and represent the same basic qualities; they are working creatures who accept the fact that everything is over, and they calmly move on to take on new tasks, in sharp opposition to Mable, who, on her part, is similarly paralleled by the bitch.

22 *The Fox* is another novella where the animal acquires even more of the quality of a full-blown character, and where Lawrence explores the relationship between man and beast in surprising and intriguing ways.¹⁰ Probably the most striking feature of this story is the doubling of the fox and the young soldier, Henry Grenfel. The two are once again characters of equal weight and significance to the narrative; one moment the fox is identified with the man, and the next moment the man with the fox, which together throws the reader into confusion as to who personifies whom. And Lawrence's intention seems to be precisely to blur the distinction between them.

23 The story is clearly an exploration of sexuality and gender, and at the same time a rewriting of the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, in which the fox in a rather peculiar fashion replaces the wolf as well as the hunter, with a dual or ambiguous masculinity. Initially in the story, the fox is the conventional "demon" that "carried off the hens under the very noses of March and Banford" (Lawrence 1992, 9). He is, in other words, the hunter; but he is also being hunted by March. On the other side, there is the highly ambiguous, apparently lesbian, couple of March and Banford. Lawrence creates, in other words, a constellation of two pairs of male and female characters, with both pairs containing a hunter as well as a hunted, or a pursuer as well as a pursued. And one of these characters is a fox.

24 Despite the fact that the story is concerned with relationships between human characters, however, the fox injects into these relationships an animal dimension that goes far beyond a conventional animal symbolism. Lawrence is trying to explore a setting and a gallery of characters that truly throw animals, primarily represented by the fox, and human beings together on an equal footing, and that ignore the otherwise unbridgeable gulf between them. This provides the novella with a strong ecocritical dimension, and thus also with a perspective that is profoundly unfamiliar. In some ways it is perhaps the strangest and most experimental of all Lawrence's animal texts. In the following, an attempt will be made to disentangle the complex web of the story, which tries to juggle at least three different binary pairs: man vs. animal; male vs. female; and rationality vs. instinct. It is an open question whether Lawrence himself knew exactly where the story was taking him.

25 As in "Snake," the setting of the story contains from the start a vague echo of Genesis; Bailey Farm is immediately perceived by the reader as an isolated Garden of Eden, with its many animals, two human beings, and the evil intruder: the fox "slid along in the deep grass; he was difficult as a serpent to see" (*ibid.*). Similarly, the first encounter between March and the fox is strikingly reminiscent of that between Eve and the serpent. The scene is charged with an intense erotic energy, which serves as an equally intense temptation for March, who is already half hypnotised by the atmosphere at the edge of the wood; she is in an "odd, rapt state, her mouth rather screwed up. It was a question, whether she was there, actually consciously present, or not" (10). She looks into the forest, where "the naked, copper-like shafts and limbs of the pine-trees shone in the air" (*ibid.*). And then:

She lowered her eyes, and suddenly saw the fox. He was looking up at her. His chin was pressed down, and his eyes were looking up. They met her eyes. And he knew her. She was spellbound. She knew he knew her. So he looked into her eyes, and her

soul failed her. He knew her, he was not daunted (*ibid.*).

Thus the erotic energy is also at the same time a profoundly animal energy; this is March's encounter not just with the male but with the non-human, and it is not clear from the story whether these are one and the same or inherently different. However, as in "Snake," the animal features are strongly underlined; the element of *sight*, for instance, and of eyes meeting each other, is essential. The eye is not just the "window of the soul"; it also opens a non-cerebral and non-verbal channel of possible communication between man and beast.¹¹ It is, essentially, through the wordless eyes that March and the fox establish a connection. As suggested, the fox furthermore represents a masculine force that challenges March's ambiguous femininity, and as with the snake in Genesis, she – who carries a gun – is literally disarmed and succumbs to his power. Lawrence clearly plays on the double meaning of "knew," intimating an erotic attraction she is unable to resist. She is "possessed by him" (11), and as she is standing there, surrounded by the powerful natural presences of the moon and the pine trees – the one moving through space, the other rooted in the ground – "her heart beat to the fox," which "dominated her unconsciousness" and "came over her like a spell" (11-12).¹² At the same time Banford is calling for her: thus, armed with the phallic but ultimately impotent gun, she is being pulled in the direction of the male as well as the female, while struggling to come to grips with her own identity and sexuality. But again, Lawrence is exploring a communication that is neither animal nor human, but both.¹³ And there is clearly a deeper and more mysterious quality to the encounter between March and the fox than that between male and female human beings. The fox, in other words, is something more than a "symbol" of the male; he is a male force, but he is also a fox, which again means an *other* that March will never fathom.

26 The moment Henry – the young soldier, also with a gun – arrives, this attraction is immediately transferred to him; March "stared at him spell-bound," and immediately "to March he was the fox" (14). Even such a basic animal feature as smell becomes a decisive factor: "She could at last lapse into the odour of the fox," while the youth "sent a faint but distinct odour into the room, indefinable, but something like a wild creature" (*ibid.*). Thus, there is a basic, animal-like communication through the primary senses of sight and smell, in combination with a verbal communication that appears to be minimal.¹⁴ March meanwhile recedes with contentment "in her corner like a passive creature in its cave" (*ibid.*), suggestive of the vixen safely protected in her lair.

27 March's subsequent dream of the fox suggests precisely the attraction and the repulsion she feels at the young man's presence, and the emotional struggle that is taking place in her subconscious. She is drawn to his song, and she wants to touch him, but when she stretches out her hand, he bites her wrist, and his tail brushes across her face as if with fire (20). And with Henry's sudden realisation that he wants to marry March, the tables have been turned: it is now the man/fox, that is hunting March: "He would have to catch her as you catch a deer or a woodcock when you go out shooting" (23-24). This battle between the hunter and his prey, however, is not a procedure based on a rational plan; it is a fate, a mutual inevitability, shared by both of the parties involved, and profoundly coloured by the fox's animal presence.

28 So far, the two women have lived in a kind of symbiotic, wordless relationship, but it is now March and Henry who have the deep, instinctive communication. When Henry proposes to March as they are working outside, it is "as if he were producing his voice in her blood" (25). The intense exchange between the two, which makes March feel "as if she was killed" (26) is once again interrupted by Banford's calling them in to tea, and the pull towards the feminine qualities she represents. But inside, too, the male has taken charge, and Banford resents bitterly the quietly reading Henry "with knees wide apart" (28), a sure sign of extrovert masculinity.

29 Henry's gloating pride the next morning, however, is soon undermined. Banford starts convincing March of the impossibility of the match, but once again it is the fox that plays the key role as Henry, not understanding the consequences of his act, shoots the fox. From then on, Henry is slowly losing his power over March, while Banford step by step wins her back. The dead fox, hung up by its heels in the shed, and later skinned and nailed up on a board "as if crucified" (42), is "a strange beast to [March], incomprehensible, out of her range" (41). With this grotesque analogy between the fox and Christ, March is caught in a crossfire between a conventional conscience, on the one hand, and the animal impulses, on the other, and Henry's killing of the fox may be seen, not just as his unconscious and unintentional suppression of his own masculinity, but also as the murder of the animal within him.¹⁵

30 In the next dramatic climax of the story, too, in what is essentially a murder, there is also an intimate connection between man and nature. Indeed, Henry, who has already killed the fox, paralysing the power of his own male mystery, now turns the pine tree into a murder weapon to eradicate Banford, his rival in love, and thus literally and fatally cuts one more connection to his natural rootedness. However confusedly and subconsciously, he tries to achieve his goal, not unlike Gerald, through violent means rather than by acting in harmony with nature. It is, in other words, a murder of revenge and jealousy. He finally wins March; they do marry, but "[s]omething was missing. Instead of her soul swaying with new life, it seemed to droop, to bleed, as if it were wounded" (67). It is almost as if his acts of killing the fox and cutting the tree have had a direct impact on March herself. And that is the ambiguous note on which the story ends: a hesitant, or even impotent, promise of a new life in Canada. Regardless of the ending's promise, however, the story is a peculiar exploration of two characters whose identities and destinies are inseparably woven together with non-human nature. And it is a story in which man and nature are interacting on an equal footing; where the traditional hierarchy of man and beast has lost its relevance.

31 Lawrence, then, is fundamentally a Nietzschean iconoclast; he wants a revaluation of values, and for him the animal world represents a doorway that leads to a potentially alternative set of values. This is the reason why his works are packed with animals of all kinds – domestic as well as wild; they represent a register of behaviour and reactions that might give man an entirely new understanding of himself and his role on this planet. And this general approach could be extended even further, that is to plants, because these, too, provide for Lawrence a bridgehead to another reality worth exploring. At a first glance, there is something almost scientific in the intensity with which he frequently examines flowers and trees, but on closer inspection he is clearly looking for something entirely different from what the scientist is looking for. For Lawrence, these objects have the potential to reveal a life secret, an existential dimension to which the analysing and fragmentising scientist is blind. In "Pan in America," for instance, he produces what amounts to a panegyric of the tree: "I am conscious that it helps to change me, vitally. I am even conscious that shivers of energy cross my living spasm, from the tree, and I become a degree more like unto the tree, more bristling and turpentiney, in Pan" (Lawrence 2009, 158-9).

32 To conclude, Lawrence reaches further and further back, to what might be seen as a point of convergence between nature and culture,. And so, at the end of his life, in *Apocalypse*, he is going back to the earliest beginnings; in the same way his exploration of Mexico, Etruria etc. attempted to reach further back than any European culture. There is an element of despair in this, and, one might argue, a lack of realism, but there is also a profound honesty in it, and an attempt to strip his European legacy of all its lies and deceptions. Thus Lawrence turns to trees, animals, instincts, the sun, the moon and the stars, that is everything natural, genuine and untouched, either immediately close or

infinitely far away. As Anne Ehlert points out, farm life still echoes this genuine quality: the udder of the cow or the tree trunk against one's back (Ehlert 2001, 115). Thus, primitivism and nature are two sides of the same coin. This does not necessarily mean that nature is good, but it is better than what we have; it is, furthermore, the only thing we have to fall back on, for the simple reason that non-nature, that is science, industry and Christianity, has failed or is failing, as it must. Similarly, the concept of the "spirit of place" is just another phrase for nature and primitivism. Being a natural creature, man must retain his bond with nature; nature is where we belong and where we might find meaning, which again means that our life has to be linked to a place that keeps us rooted. The modern world is in a sense placeless; it pretends that place and rootedness do not count, and that man can live perfectly well without them. Modern urban existence presupposes that it is possible to live a full life in a flat on the tenth floor in an urban anthill, that is, in a place that has severed all connection to nature.

33 Ultimately, Lawrence never comes to a halt or a conclusion; neither does he want it. But he *knows* that his own European culture, with science and progress, is *not* the way forward. To him, this culture is truly dead, simply because it has departed further from nature than any other culture on the planet.¹⁶ However rattled and shaken, his wish and his vision for the dynamic mystery of Life with a capital L remain, even as his own life is coming to an end. As he put it in "Pan in America" in 1924, in a rhetorical question that possibly also contains an element of uncertainty: "What can a man do with his life but live it? And what does life consist in, save a vivid relatedness between the man and the living universe that surrounds him" (Lawrence 2009, 160).¹⁷

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Notes

1 The phrase was invented by Timothy Morton, underlining the strong sense of mutual interdependence of all living things (Morton 2012).

2 See McCarthy 2015, ch. 4, which provides an interesting discussion of how the year 1928, including the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, represents a powerful swing in the modernist movement towards ruralism.

3 More recently, similar ideas have been expressed by the American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, for instance in his book *Landscapes of Fear* (1979).

4 Lawrence's interest in the theriomorphic goes, according to Christopher Pollnitz, all the way back to his reading of Gilbert Murray's *The Four Stages of Religion* in 1916 (Pollnitz 1982, 22-23). See also Kenneth Inniss's *D.H. Lawrence's Bestiary* from 1971.

5 See a more recent expression of similar ideas in David Abrams's *Becoming Animal* (2010).

6 See also Terry Gifford's discussion of Thomson in his discussion of pastoral in Westling (ed.) 2014, ch. 1.

7 Ted Hughes's use of the raven may perhaps be seen as a similar example.

8 See Jacques Derrida's discussion of the personal pronoun in his discussion of "Snake" (Derrida 2009, 319).

9 The poem has of course been subjected to readings that regard the snake as well as the first-person narrator in a very different context. See for instance Sagar 2007, 89-101 and Booth 2008, 79-95.

10 The following discussion will exclusively be using the final version of the novella.

11 The scene is reminiscent of a passage from Aldo Leopold's famous *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), where he describes his own encounter with a wolf he has just shot: "We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since that there was something new to me in those eyes – something known only to her and to the mountain" (130).

12 March experiences the same pull towards the forest as Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

13 Kenneth Inniss distinguishes, in Lawrence's bestiary, between "[a]nimal as 'other'", "[a]nimal as emblem or archetype," and "[a]nimal as creative symbol" (Inniss 1971, 14-15). "The Fox" is perhaps an example of a text where these partly merge into one.

14 Ref. the totally non-verbal communication in "Snake." See also Elise Brault-Dreux's similar perspective on "Fish" (Brault-Dreux 2012, 29) and Carrie Rohman's on "Tortoise Shout" (Rohman 2012, 174).

15 As Carrie Rohman points out, for Lawrence there is also a close and interesting connection between crucifixion and the sexual act (Rohman 2012, 175).

16 In this sense, Lawrence anticipates such radical, late twentieth-century concepts as Bill McKibben's "the postnatural" and "the end of nature," the latter of which is the title of his first book from 1989.

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