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Between Letters

D.H. Lawrence, the Nonhuman
and the 'Life of Writing'

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December 2017

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to any other University for the award of any other degree.

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Between Letters: D.H. Lawrence, the Nonhuman
and the 'Life of Writing'

Summary

This thesis begins with the claim that to fully recognise the notion of 'life' in D.H. Lawrence's writing, we must radically reconsider the ways in which we approach his texts. I argue that Lawrence's 'life' cannot be confined to the auto/biographical life of an author, or to merely anthropocentric concerns, but extends to the nonhuman and what I propose to call the 'life of writing'. The majority of Lawrence scholarship—in limiting its readings to the auto/biographical, humanist, narrative and character-based—has effectively worked to disavow and neutralise the elements of his writing that are most strange, hidden, unfathomable, contradictory, nonhuman, unconscious, resistant, disruptive, and, ultimately, *dangerous*. Each of my critical chapters and creative sections explores and seeks to avow the nonhuman, dangerous, unknowable life of Lawrence's oeuvre, approaching his texts with a focus on letters (epistolary and alphabetic) and nonhuman (as well as human) life. My reading of Lawrence works to foreground the materiality of his writing, that which takes place *between letters*, exposing a semantic playfulness and experimentation in his texts that has long been ignored or insufficiently appreciated. My first chapter reads the question of life and animation in Lawrence's letters (which have rarely been studied by scholars outside of their relation to Lawrence's biography and the exegesis of his novels and other work). My second chapter looks at plants and writing in *Sons and Lovers*, considering how the presence of a kind of vegetal life in the novel works to undermine traditional concepts of narrative and character. In Chapter Three, I investigate the ways in which Lawrence writes against himself, his own narratives. Reading the novella *St. Mawr*, I demonstrate that material, crypt-like elements of the writing work to resist the kind of teleological reading to which the text is usually subjected. In my fourth and final chapter, I think about the way the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* produce uncalculated effects in order to ensure their own survival, living on like postcards that never fully reach their destination.

In addition to this critical investigation, my thesis includes a creative writing element. Taking inspiration from Lawrence's letters and postcards, I seek to countersign him through a series of fragmented postcards that play with the various features of 'the life of writing' explored in the critical part of my thesis. These postcards are interspersed between the chapters in five sections ('Eastwood', 'Croydon', 'Sicily', 'Zennor', 'Texas'), responding to and in dialogue with certain Lawrencian gestures and tropes. They acknowledge a sense of Lawrence's (and my own) auto/biographical life in the sense that they are often written from the places he lived or visited (which I also visited as part of my research), while always drawing *away* from notions of authorship, narrative and human lived experience, towards a more impersonal, unconscious, nonhuman life of writing.

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Abbreviations

Texts by D.H. Lawrence

<i>Apocalypse</i>	<i>Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation</i> , edited by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
<i>Chatterley</i>	<i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> , edited by Michael Squires (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
<i>Classic American</i>	<i>Studies in Classic American Literature</i> , edited by Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
<i>England</i>	<i>England, My England and Other Stories</i> , edited by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
<i>Haystacks</i>	<i>Love Among the Haystacks and Other Stories</i> , edited by John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
<i>Kangaroo</i>	<i>Kangaroo</i> , edited by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
<i>Ladybird</i>	<i>The Ladybird, The Fox, The Captain's Doll</i> , edited by Dieter Mehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
<i>Letters, I</i>	<i>The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume I, September 1901–May 1913</i> , edited by James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
<i>Letters, II</i>	<i>The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume II, June 1913–October 1916</i> , edited by George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
<i>Letters, III</i>	<i>The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume III, October 1916–June 1921</i> , edited by James T. Boulton and Andrew

	Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
<i>Letters, V</i>	<i>The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume V, March 1924–March 1927</i> , edited by James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
<i>Letters, VI</i>	<i>The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume VI, March 1927–November 1928</i> , edited by James T. Boulton and Margaret Boulton with Gerald M. Lacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
<i>Letters, VII</i>	<i>The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume VII, November 1928 – February 1930</i> , edited by Keith Sagar and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
<i>Mornings</i>	<i>Mornings in Mexico and Other Essays</i> , edited by Virginia Crosswhite Hyde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
<i>Peacock</i>	<i>The White Peacock</i> , edited by Andrew Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>Phoenix</i> , edited by Edward D. MacDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936).
<i>Poems</i>	<i>The Poems, Volume I</i> , edited by Christopher Pollnitz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
<i>Prussian</i>	<i>The Prussian Officer and other stories</i> , edited by John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
<i>Psychoanalysis/Fantasia</i>	<i>Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious</i> , edited by Bruce Steele (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
<i>Rainbow</i>	<i>The Rainbow</i> , edited by Mark Kinkead-Weekes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<i>Reflections</i>	<i>Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and other essays</i> , edited by Michael Herbert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
<i>Sea</i>	<i>Sea and Sardinia</i> , edited by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
<i>Serpent</i>	<i>The Plumed Serpent</i> , edited by L. D. Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
<i>Sons</i>	<i>Sons and Lovers</i> , edited by Helen Baron and Carl Baron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
<i>St. Mawr</i>	<i>St. Mawr and other stories</i> , edited by Brian Finney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
<i>Trespasser</i>	<i>The Trespasser</i> , edited by Elizabeth Mansfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
<i>Virgin</i>	<i>The Virgin and the Gipsy and Other Stories</i> , edited by Michael Herbert, Bethan Jones and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
<i>Women</i>	<i>Women in Love</i> , edited by David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Other Texts

<i>OED</i>	Oxford English Dictionary Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). http://dictionary.oed.com
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Introduction

Reading Between Letters

‘I must write to live’ (*Letters*, II, 143). In these words, written in a letter to Edward Garnett in 1914, the connection drawn by D.H. Lawrence between life and writing might be viewed, not just as a confession of how writing had become his only financial means of survival, but also as an invitation to his reader to imagine that something about writing *itself* is indissociably linked to life and the living. For Lawrence, writing and life appear to be *vitally* intertwined. But how can or should we read Lawrence’s ‘life’? How do we live *with* Lawrence? In order to answer such questions, this study seeks to be an anomalous work of life writing: it moves towards and around the strange question of ‘life’ in Lawrence’s oeuvre. While it is perhaps nothing new to read Lawrence in terms of his life, my contention here is that we have barely begun to reckon with what is inherently living about his writing. In the following pages, I explore the claim that in order to fully recognise or be alive to Lawrence’s ‘life’ we need to radically reconsider the ways in which we approach his texts.

*

Lawrence lives between letters: this phrase is first of all a challenge to certain orthodox ways of reading that still persist today. It names a desire to read what has fallen *between* the cracks of literary criticism: modes of life in Lawrence that have gone largely unacknowledged or unappreciated. In response to what I see as a profound lack in Lawrence criticism, this thesis seeks to avow Lawrence’s own contention that ‘nothing is wonderful unless it is dangerous’ (*Phoenix*, 324). What might he mean by this? The phrase comes from a 1923 review of *A Second Contemporary Verse*

Anthology (1923, edited by Charles Wharton Stork), in which Lawrence indiscriminately pours scorn upon the poems he reads. He calls them ‘candy: sweet nothings, tender trifles, and amusing things’, surmising that ‘the spirit of verse prefers now a “composition salad” of fruits of sensation, in a cooked mayonnaise of sympathy’ (*Phoenix*, 322). For Lawrence, the poems of the *Anthology*, in their mawkish preoccupation with human ‘sympathy’, actively work to mask what he calls ‘the element of danger’: the fact that ‘man is always, all the time and forever on the brink of the unknown’ (*Phoenix*, 323). It is, I believe, with these Lawrencian notion of the ‘dangerous’ and the ‘unknown’ that we might draw closer to his ‘life’, tentatively moving towards a transformation of the ways in which this canonical author is typically read.

As I have already suggested, the question of how to read Lawrence’s ‘life’ is by no means a new one. Indeed, it might even be said to be at the heart of most critical engagements with Lawrence from the past one hundred years or so. The most famous and influential reader of Lawrence is probably F.R. Leavis, whose writing about Lawrence (most notably in *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1947), *The Great Tradition* (1948), and *Thought, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in D.H. Lawrence* (1976)) has had an immeasurable impact on the way Lawrence is typically read in literary studies. Perhaps the most important aspect of Leavis’s criticism, at least from the perspective of this thesis, is the way that it frequently associates Lawrence with the words ‘vital’ and ‘vitality’. Leavis suggests that, in Lawrence, ‘we have on the one hand the technical originality of the creations, and on the other their organic wholeness and vitality’.¹ Elsewhere, he praises Lawrence’s ‘splendid

¹ F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), 27.

human vitality'.² Leavis is also perhaps one of the first readers to think of Lawrence in terms of some kind of 'creative flow'.³ This he relates to a Bergsonian notion of an originary animating principle, or 'creative *élan*'.⁴ In Leavis's critical discourse, 'vitality' and 'flow' become by-words for a kind of essential life-force that exists in Lawrence's writing and philosophy. By tapping into this *élan vital*, Lawrence's 'greatness' or 'genius'⁵ becomes that of a sort of messianic life-restorer: he brings lapsed modern humanity *to life* again. As Leavis argues in his introduction to *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, Lawrence's achievement as a writer renews our 'faith in the creative human spirit and its power to ensue *fullness of life*'.⁶ Such claims have prompted the critic Gerald Doherty to describe the 'Leavisite' tradition of Lawrence criticism as that which 'for so long identified Lawrence with the kind of organicist notions of a natural completeness and wholeness'.⁷

While Leavis's (albeit rather unspecific) sense of some kind of essential, vital *flux* in Lawrence's texts is important for this study, it is the appropriation of this textual 'life' for the purposes of *human* redemption and a return to 'fullness' or 'wholeness' that this thesis seeks to call into question. While Leavis laments what he sees as the 'failure of criticism [...] in respect of Lawrence'⁸, we might say that his own readings and, by extension, the innumerable 'Leavisite' works of criticism⁹

² F.R Leavis, *For Continuity* (Cambridge: The Minority Press, 1933), 140.

³ Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 171.

⁴ Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 28.

⁵ These words are both used liberally throughout *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*.

⁶ Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 15, my emphasis.

⁷ Gerald Doherty, *Theorizing Lawrence: Nine Meditations on Tropological Themes* (Oxford: Peter Lang International, 1999), 145.

⁸ Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 21.

⁹ See, for example, Michael Black's suggestion that Lawrence's novelistic personality is 'an organic one which posits growth' and that his writing seeks 'access to or recovery of an original wholeness' (*D.H. Lawrence: The Early Philosophical Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1992), 36, 128); Bethan Jones's focus on the important of 'organic connection' in Lawrence's

that have grown in the wake of his writings, also fail, in their own way, to countersign some aspect of Lawrence's 'life'—particularly what might be viewed as the more troubling, *inhuman* elements of his writing. The sense of Lawrence's 'vitality' as ultimately soteriological, organic and tending towards 'wholeness' is one that effectively *neutralises* the sense of what is dangerous, unpredictable, fragmentary or unfinished about his texts. Indeed, the Leavisite approach might be characterised in terms of Lawrence's own analogy in his introduction to Harry Crosby's *Chariots of the Sun*: 'In his terror of chaos, [Man] begins by putting up an umbrella between himself and the everlasting whirl' (*Phoenix*, 255). In contrast to this protective metaphorical 'umbrella', he notes that 'all true poetry is most subtly and sensitively chaotic, outlawed'—which is to say, living *dangerously* (*Phoenix*, 260). This sense of the perpetually 'outlawed' is consistently disavowed by Lawrence criticism: it cannot live with the possibility that something might remain unsecured or unknowable, that something in his writing might be essentially *unstable*.

Another 'tradition' that relies heavily on a profoundly humanist and holistic sense of 'life' is one that Linda Ruth Williams has termed the 'overbearing bio-critical history' of Lawrence scholarship.¹⁰ Leavis, who viewed Lawrence's achievement as all the more impressive due to his working class background, argues

writing and 'the necessity of living in organic wholeness' (see *The Last Poems: Shaping a Late Style* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 79 and *passim*); Jack Stewart's emphasis upon an essential Lawrencian 'vitalism' in *The Vital Art of D.H. Lawrence: Vision and Expression* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); even, perhaps surprisingly, Leo Bersani's essay on Lawrence in *A Future for Astyanax* might be seen as working in this tradition, in his sense that 'The fact which most interests Lawrence about human beings is the extent to which they are being carried along by either currents of life energy or currents of death energy' (see *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), 164).

¹⁰ Linda Ruth Williams, *D.H. Lawrence* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), 3.

that ‘it is impossible to study the work and the art without forming a vivid sense of the man, and touching on the facts of his history’.¹¹ From the contemporaneous Oedipal readings of Lawrence’s life drawn from *Sons and Lovers* to the more recent Cambridge three-volume biography¹², Lawrence has long been the subject of biographical scrutiny. Indeed, Lawrence might be said to be one of the most *biographised* writers of the twentieth century.¹³ In turn, his texts (from the manifestly ‘autobiographical’ letters, to the poems and novels) are commonly treated of as works of ‘life writing’¹⁴—as auto/biographical artefacts that serve to tell us more about their author’s conscious intentions, beliefs, desires, feelings and so on.

However, contrary to Leavis’s rather unnuanced notion of being able to

¹¹ Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 15.

¹² See John Worthen, *D.H. Lawrence: the Early Years, 1885–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Mark Kinkead-Weeks, *D.H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1913–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Ellis, *D.H. Lawrence: The Dying Game, 1922–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹³ In the last fifteen years alone there have been at least ten critical studies published which have a strong biographical focus. See Andrew Harrison, *The Life of D.H. Lawrence* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2016); David Ellis, *Love and Sex in D.H. Lawrence* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2015); John Beer, *D. H. Lawrence: Nature, Narrative, Art, Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Michael Squires, *D.H. Lawrence and Frieda: A Portrait of Love and Loyalty* (London: André Deutsch, 2008); David Ellis, *Death and the Author: How D.H. Lawrence Died and was Remembered* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); John Worthen, *D.H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (London: Penguin, 2005); Keith Sagar, *The Life of D.H. Lawrence: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Chaucer Press, 2003); Michael Squires and Lynn K. Talbot, *Living at the Edge: A Biography of D.H. Lawrence and Frieda von Richthofen* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Jeffrey Meyers, *D.H. Lawrence: A Biography* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002). Moreover, in addition to the numerous ‘pure’ biographies of his life, it could be argued that the majority of work in ‘Lawrence Studies’, even today, has one eye on his personal life.

¹⁴ This relatively new term has been employed in a kind of rebranding of the bio-insatiability of literary studies in recent years. Margaretta Jolly, editor of *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, notes that while the term ‘life writing’ is both flexible and protean in its uses, it generally ‘encompasses the writing of one’s own or another’s life’ while also relating to ‘a literature that foregrounds the shape of a single life and its span’. See Margaretta Jolly, ‘Editor’s Note’, *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, edited by Margaretta Jolly (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), ix.

form a ‘vivid sense’ (singular and *whole*) of ‘the man’, more recent biographical studies have acknowledged that there cannot be a ‘final word’ on Lawrence’s life.¹⁵ John Worthen, for example, notes that, in the three-volume Cambridge biography (each volume written by a different author), ‘Three Lawrences’ are produced.¹⁶ And yet, Worthen goes on to qualify this idea, suggesting that the biographers work hard to protect against the ‘danger [...] of dissonant or even contradictory answers to the question of who Lawrence was’.¹⁷ This fear of the dangerously ambiguous or ‘dissonant’ seems itself contradictory when considering a writer in whose texts radical inconsistencies, or what critic Doherty calls ‘disjunctive effects’¹⁸, constitute a performative essence. Not only do such presentations of Lawrence ‘the man’ lead us away from his insistence on the idea that ‘man is [...] forever on the brink of the *unknown*’, it also suggests that Lawrence’s own famous dictum ‘Never trust the artist. Trust the tale’ (*Classic American*, 14) has, ironically, become one of the least heeded instructions in the history of criticism. My aim here is not to entirely disregard the intentional, historical or biographical—these are of course significant aspects of all literary creations—but to question their dominance: both in Lawrence studies and literary criticism more generally. For however important we might view Lawrence’s life and lived experience for the development of his literary project, to afford it such precedence in reading him is to obscure and disavow the *material life* of the texts themselves.

Leavis’s sense of Lawrence’s ‘genius’ has, oddly enough, also given birth to a whole series of readings that are based on an interrogation of his authorial intentions. In apparently stark contrast to the adoration of Leavis (and Lawrence’s

¹⁵ Worthen, *The Early Years*, xiii.

¹⁶ Worthen, *The Early Years*, xiii.

¹⁷ Worthen, *The Early Years*, xiii.

¹⁸ Doherty, 146.

many biographers), feminist, postcolonial and social criticism from the late 1960s onwards (starting, perhaps, with Kate Millett's 1969 'exposure' of Lawrence in *Sexual Politics*) has portrayed Lawrence as an aggressively 'counterrevolutionary'¹⁹ writer, whose texts are seething with a kind of vicious misogyny, homophobia, racism and fascism.²⁰ While such interventions are, I believe, always necessary and ongoing in literary studies, it is clear that what this 'tradition' of reading Lawrence shares with both the 'biographical' and 'Leavisite', is a powerful belief in some essential notion of Lawrence 'the man' who is made synonymous with the texts signed, produced and gathered under the name of 'Lawrence'. The 'strains' of scholarship that I have touched upon here are all connected in the way that they treat of Lawrence's writing in a resolutely teleological manner, always working to privilege meaning over form, plotting over language, author over text. This is perhaps not just a matter of what Earl G. Ingersoll calls 'the impulse to privilege the author's life, or biography, over the fictional text', but also, I would argue, an aggressively logo- and anthropocentric refusal of anything uncertain or unknowable, nonhuman or other: that is to say, anything that falls outside of our ability to master it.²¹

This brings us on to another clear trait of these predominant 'strains' of reading: the fact that they, for the most part, staunchly reject approaches to

¹⁹ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977), 239.

²⁰ See, for example, John Carey's contentious book, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), which links Lawrence to a kind of Nietzschean fascist (and eugenicist) desire founded on a 'hatred' of democracy and the working classes. More recently, in an essay on the egregious primitivism of *Sea and Sardinia*, the postcolonial theorist Robert J.C. Young, calls Lawrence an 'English Nietzsche, abhorring the mixed-race mongrels of modernity'. See Young, 'Restless Modernisms: D.H. Lawrence Caught in the Shadow of Gramsci', *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology and Modernity*, edited by David Bradshaw, Laura Marcus and Rebecca Roach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 71.

²¹ Earl G. Ingersoll, *D.H. Lawrence, Narrative and Desire* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001), 144.

Lawrence that might be viewed as ‘theoretical’, particularly anything carrying a whiff of the ‘poststructuralist’ (a heavily-contextualised version of psychoanalysis is often, grudgingly, allowed to the table, as are certain, historicist elements of feminism and queer theory). Today, such ways of thinking or reading appear to be almost taboo in the discussion of Lawrence’s work. For example, in his introduction to the collection of essays in *New D.H. Lawrence* (2009), Howard J. Booth writes triumphantly about the way that Lawrence’s texts ‘resisted easy capture by literary theory as deployed in the 1980s and early 1990s’.²² The depiction of literary theory as a kind of weapon—‘deployed’ by some war-mongering enemy that sought to ‘capture’ Lawrence for its own purposes—is both short-sighted and disingenuous.²³ And yet it is also very telling in its allusion to something apparently *dangerous*, something that must be ‘resisted’ or repressed because of what it might *do* to the humanist and logocentric ways of reading Lawrence.

*

More recently, partly as a response to the largely humanist and anti-theoretical stances of earlier criticism, there has been a renewed critical interest in the question

²² Howard J. Booth, ‘Introduction’, *New D.H. Lawrence*, edited by Howard J. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 1. Although he is not explicit on the point, when Booth speaks of ‘forms of theory informed by Saussure and the “linguistic turn” more generally’ (3), we might well assume he is referring to poststructuralist theory and, more specifically, to deconstruction. Another example of this resistance to ‘theory’ can be seen in Michael Bell’s *Language and Being*, which claims that ‘acquaintance with [structuralist, post-structuralist and deconstructive] thought has not so much alerted people to Lawrence’s own awareness of language as draw him into their own essentially alien, and misleading preoccupations’ (see *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2).

²³ It might be useful in this respect to call on Geoff Dyer’s notion in *Out of Sheer Rage* (1997) that all criticism is, in a sense, heterogeneous to literature. Dyer says of the *Longman Critical Reader on D.H. Lawrence* (which included essays by Lydia Blanchard, Daniel Schneider and ‘Old Eagleton’: ‘I burned it in self-defence. It was me or the book because writing like that kills everything it touches. That is the hallmark of academic criticism: it kills everything it touches’. See Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: in the Shadow of D.H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), 103.

of 'life' in Lawrence's texts. This has perhaps been most compellingly explored in relation to nonhuman animals, posthumanism and ecology. While this interest might be traced back to Margot Norris's work, in *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (1985), on Lawrence as a 'biocentric' writer²⁴, recent criticism has established Lawrence as an important thinker of nonhuman life and a forerunner to radical ecocritical thinking. However, perhaps inevitably, many of the readings in this field still present Lawrence as a writer of *organicity* and 'fullness', reading his writing about nonhuman others in terms of a kind of homogeneous, undifferentiated 'deep ecology'. Jack Stewart, returning to a distinctly Leavisite sense of 'Nature' as a redemptive force, speaks of the 'vital awareness' Lawrence 'retrieves' from the nonhuman environment.²⁵ Other critics, influenced by an ecocritical discourse of 'interconnectedness', identify moments of sympathy and oneness with nonhuman life. For example, the prominent Lawrence scholar, Keith Sagar, argues that Lawrence's writing espouses 'the deeper ecology of a different consciousness, a wholeness, an atonement, a being in touch'²⁶, while Sarah Bouttier tracks 'moments of empathy'²⁷ in Lawrence's textual encounters with nonhuman animals. Kirsty Martin similarly views Lawrence as interested in a deep ecological connection, arguing that he becomes 'ever more interested in how people's feelings can be in tune with the energies of the natural world'.²⁸ Thus, while we should welcome all criticism that moves away from a purely anthropocentric reading of literary texts,

²⁴ See Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst and Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

²⁵ Jack Stewart, 'Flowers and Flesh: Color, Place, and Animism in *St. Mawr* and "Flowery Tuscany"', *D.H. Lawrence Review* 36:1 (2011), 99, my emphasis.

²⁶ Keith Sagar, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature: From Homer to Hughes* (London: Chaucer, 2005), 307.

²⁷ Sarah Bouttier, 'The Way to a Fish's Heart: Non-Human Emotion and Emotional Tone in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*', *Etudes Lawrenciennes*, 43 (2012), 98.

²⁸ Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 133.

these critical works clearly do not stray far enough from the conventional (and necessarily humanist) idea of Lawrence as a writer of redemptive 'wholeness' and sympathy.

Yet elsewhere, and more important for this study, nonhuman animals in Lawrence are read as forces working to disrupt humanist thinking. In one of the first books to persuasively read Lawrence's work vis-à-vis the 'animal turn' in literary studies, Philip Armstrong observes that the animal in Lawrence 'remains a recalcitrant element in the field of calculable and predictable outcomes dictated by civilized modernity'.²⁹ Reading Lawrence in relation to Darwin's radical ideas about species, Carrie Rohman argues that animals embody a dangerous force of otherness that 'stalks' the human subject, effectuating a 'destabilization of the traditional subject-who-knows'.³⁰ While, admittedly, Armstrong and Rohman still respectively return to a soteriological discourse (with the former arguing that, for Lawrence, 'animality, at its most wild and untamed, was not the enemy of humanity, but its possible, perhaps its only, salvation'³¹ and the latter speaking of Lawrence's 'recuperative gesturing toward animality'³²), it is their shared sense of something 'recalcitrant', 'incalculable' and 'destabilising' in Lawrence that I wish to develop further, following an otherness that cannot readily be contained or co-opted. More recently, Elise Brault-Dreux, reading poems from Lawrence's *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, notes that 'while Lawrence celebrates the sensual experience of

²⁹ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 145.

³⁰ Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2009), 26.

³¹ Armstrong, 143.

³² Rohman, 26.

his substance in nature, the latter remains beyond intellectual grasp'.³³ We might say that Lawrence is writing at the brink of something, peering into the abyss of that which keeps 'beyond intellectual grasp', refusing to be recuperated and made whole. Moreover, the sense of something 'beyond intellectual grasp' gives the lie to the popular idea of Lawrence as 'prophetic'³⁴, as a man with a message. Instead, Lawrence's own celebration of 'sensual experience' demands, as Nicholas Royle argues, that we 'veer with Lawrence': attending in radically new ways to 'the texture and detail of his language'.³⁵ While this attentive, 'veering' reading clearly shares something with Leavis's notion of Lawrence's 'creative flow' it also works to disrupt the reductive essence of this idea, perhaps coming closer to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's claim that Lawrence's writing constitutes 'an infinity of *different* and even *contrary* flows'.³⁶

Building on the work of Royle, and Deleuze and Guattari, I argue that in order to countersign what is ambiguous, unknowable or differential in Lawrence, we must further recognise and read the aspects of Lawrence's writing that have been most clearly disavowed by the dominant anthropo-phallogocentric modes of

³³ Elise Brault-Dreux, 'Responding to Non-Human Otherness: Poems by D.H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield', *D.H. Lawrence Review*, 37:2 (2012), 6.

³⁴ Following Leavis, writers such as George A. Panichas celebrate Lawrence's 'heroic impulse, personal and prophetic' (see *The Critic as Conservator: Essays in Literature, Society and Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 78). On the other hand, Jonathan Dollimore mocks Lawrence for painting himself as 'prophetic', accusing him of being 'megalomaniac and paranoid' (see *Death, Desire and Loss in the Western Canon* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 269). This notion of Lawrence as 'prophetic' can be traced back to E.M. Forster (whose sense is far more complex than either Panichas and Dollimore allow for, as I will outline below) and John Middleton Murry (see Robert E. Montgomery, *The Visionary D.H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2–3).

³⁵ Royle, 182.

³⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 35.

Lawrence criticism: the nonhuman and the material ‘life’ of writing. In foregrounding these elements, I seek to address, insofar as it is possible to do so, that which is most hidden, unconscious, unfathomable, contaminating, autoimmune, resistant and disruptive about Lawrence’s writing. These singular effects of writing, which I view as paramount for understanding and experiencing Lawrence’s ‘life’, enable me to begin to develop or inaugurate new ways of writing about Lawrence: *between letters*.

*

The formulation ‘between letters’, which comes from an essay by Jacques Derrida on Edmond Jabès, watches over this study and my reading of Lawrence, as does a kind of ‘deconstructive spirit’ that I find to be very close to something Lawrencian.³⁷ ‘Between letters’ is a reading between the lines of Lawrence: it entails the desire, acknowledged by Doherty, to ‘short-circuit [...] those easy identifications [of Lawrence’s writing] that, while they absorb the reader into the text’s machinations, blind him/her to how the text works’.³⁸ This calls for a shift away from the traditions of reading Lawrence’s texts merely in terms of what they *declare* and towards a thinking of what they *do*—their performativity.

‘Between letters’ is also a reading *to the letter*, a turning towards or into the literal matter of Lawrence’s texts, the *body* of his writing. In her important reading of Lawrence in *D.H. Lawrence: Thinker as Poet* (1997), Fiona Becket attends to ‘a particular body of language and thought within Lawrence’s oeuvre where the metaphorical, the poetic and the philosophical are intricately enmeshed’.³⁹ She

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1997), 71.

³⁸ Doherty, 5.

³⁹ Fiona Becket, *D.H. Lawrence: The Thinker as Poet* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1997). 3.

suggests that Lawrence must be read on a formal level, because it is *through* writing, its singular creative processes, metaphors, linguistic and syntactical formulations, that Lawrence produces ideas, thoughts and meanings. This is a way of thinking about meaning and matter that Lawrence himself was profoundly invested in. For example, Jeff Wallace notes that Lawrence's famous essay on Paul Cézanne traces 'a movement towards abstraction, within which it is the substance of paint itself that is foregrounded—a reflexive turn towards the means of representation, rather than an embrace of a materiality beyond representation'.⁴⁰ In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E.M. Forster, a very intuitive reader of Lawrence, anticipates both Wallace's and Becket's readings through his association of Lawrence's texts with a kind of 'prophetic' song:

[The prophetic novelist's] theme is the universe, or something universal, but he is not going to 'say' anything about the universe; he proposes to sing, and the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction is bound to give us a shock [...]; the singer does not always have room for his gestures, the tables and chairs get broken, and the novel through which bardic influence has passed often has a wrecked air, like a drawing-room after an earthquake or a children's party. Readers of D.H. Lawrence will understand what I mean.⁴¹

The notion here of 'the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction' is, in part, related to the *matter* of literary texts. It moves towards the question underlying literary criticism: 'what is literature?' Forster asks the reader to try to put 'common sense' aside for the moment, for the thing he is referring to does not make sense, it does not produce neat novelistic knowledge. It moves us closer (although Forster is unlikely to have put it this way) to the dangerous materiality of writing. This is, he seems to imply, something that a focus on 'song' can teach us to read. But what *is* 'song'? In *Without Mastery* (2014), Sarah Wood observes that:

⁴⁰ Jeff Wallace, *D.H. Lawrence, Science and the Posthuman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 14.

⁴¹ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 2005), 116.

song is a pole of language the furthest from the rhetorically sustained thoughtfulness of realism. An experience of voice carries the listener off. Song asks to be heard, it will not be separated from itself in order to be appropriated in commentary or paraphrase.⁴²

A song (which is perhaps also to say a poem, a novel, or *aspects* of a poem or novel—but *not*, I would argue, all novels, all poems) can only be heard, experienced, but never apprehended objectively from a place external to it. The act of ‘singing’ throws language into its most formal manifestation. A song confines you to the moment of listening (or reading). It is what Derrida, speaking on the writing of Cixous, names as the moment ‘when literature becomes an enchanting chant’.⁴³ We are enchanted by Lawrence’s ‘prophetic’ song, the prophecy of which can never be extracted from the writing: there is no ‘take away’ meaning—no psycho-biographical knowledge, no messianic message—to be gleaned from his texts. Thus, by extension, Lawrence’s readers can only gain (temporary and experiential) access to those ideas through reading the writing closely, attending to the language and syntax, its differences and repetitions, the homonyms and syllabic playfulness of his writing. ‘Between letters’, then, would be what occurs when letters converge, coincide, resonate, connect in surprising ways, make new and unintended meanings.

But it is also important to recall that Forster associates the ‘song’ of writing with something actively destructive and dangerous in Lawrence’s novels, although we might extend it to all his poetic or literary writing (which is to say, I think, everything he wrote—including, or especially, his letters). Forster is partly affirming Lawrence’s position as ‘prophet’ while simultaneously suggesting that his ‘song’

⁴² Sarah Wood, *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 16–17.

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say...*, translated by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 5.

works to destroy his own prophecy. It's as if the song, the body of the writing, were a symptom of some *autoimmune* quality in his work, a writing that wishes to destroy its own narratives, characters, transcendental message. In this study, I seek to extend and develop this implication, arguing that Lawrence's writing, for all its affirmation of vitality and life, contains its very own version of what Sigmund Freud calls, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), 'the death drive': the notion that the aim of all life is death.⁴⁴ Throughout this thesis, Lawrence is figured as a writer with a singular death drive, one who writes *against* himself. As such, my readings of his work necessarily move between notions of textual confluence, intertwining or ingrowth, crossing, grafting, flowing *and* of interruption, division, diverging, wounding, death. Any feeling of *sympathy* that we find in Lawrence's work is always haunted by the writing's own disunity, its own propensity for breaking off.

The kind of autoimmune drive that Lawrence's writing partakes in is, in part, related to a sense of his writing's performativity, what it does to its readers, its author and, more strangely perhaps, to *itself*. J. Hillis Miller argues that a kind of incalculable (and therefore potentially dangerous) life is the law of any medium, any letter, telegram, essay, poem, novel—any writing at all:

A medium decisively determines what can be said by way of it. That means that the medium is not just a purveyor of constative facts. Something embodied in the tekne of a given medium is performative. It makes something happen. [...] It does something with words or other signs, rather than just transmitting a message.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, Volume XVIII, translated and edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1981). For further elucidation of the links between Lawrence's writing and Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, see the chapter on 'The death drive' in Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 84–106.

⁴⁵ J. Hillis Miller, "The Medium is the Maker": Browning, Freud, Derrida and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies', *Oxford Literary Review*, 30:2 (2008), 171.

A medium, Miller suggests, has the potential to *animate* itself, performatively producing unpredictable, and often unintended, effects. Something *more than* (or in place of) a missive's message—the strange side-effects of language—is always at work. These effects are often ones that the writer has not intended, being unavoidable forces engendered by the technology of writing that s/he merely partakes in. The focus in this thesis on his medium as a 'maker', that is to say a performative utterance, reveals a Lawrence or Lawrencian writing that is dangerously provocative: it does something that cannot be explained away biographically, or through any historical or social factors, nor is it a question of *essence* or vitalistic life—for it consistently operating in new and unforeseen ways.

These ideas find their fullest exploration in Chapters Two and Three, which both read the elements of textual resistance in Lawrence's writing, examining the ways in which they play havoc with the humanist narratives that his work has so readily been saddled with. In Chapter Two, I read *Sons and Lovers* as a series of 'floral disorders', considering the ways in which the plantlife and vegetal metaphors of Lawrence's early novel operate as a kind of anomalous growth or obstruction in the text's apparent surmounting and mastery of its own dangerous 'sicknesses' of virginity and incest. My reading of the novella *St. Mawr* (1925), in Chapter Three, grows out of this disruptive growth. Here I consider how the formal elements of the text (particularly its curious work of naming) function in ways that profoundly disrupt their own 'easy identifications', the text's overriding vitalist and primitivist narratives. In both chapters we find a series of weird life (or life-death) forms that cannot survive in any psycho-biographical or narrative-based study of Lawrence,

and cannot be found in any so-called ‘message’ or ‘take away’ maxim about his work. Rather, they *endure* only in his writing, his letters.

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‘Between letters’ is a phrase that vibrates with the double meaning of the word ‘letters’, invoking not only the alphabetic elements of writing but also *epistles*. Reading Lawrence ‘between letters’ therefore also entails an encounter with his epistolary writing. Despite the publication by Cambridge University Press of the collected *Letters of D.H. Lawrence* (published between 1979 and 2001) these texts have received very little consideration by literary criticism. Lawrence’s letters are most commonly recruited for psycho-biographical purposes or for supporting contextual claims made about literary texts. Needless to say, they are almost never submitted to any kind of close reading, let alone treated as works of literature in their own right. In a way, this is to be expected: epistolary writing has long been viewed as an auto-ethnographical practice, associated with the personal, private or lived experience—categories that have more recently come to fall under the critical term of ‘life writing’. And yet some critics have argued that there is a clear link between Lawrence’s epistolary project and his ‘vitality’. Jack Stewart, for example, observes that Lawrence ‘lives in his letters’⁴⁶ and, furthermore, argues that ‘the challenge of conveying the natural world [in his letters] exercises Lawrence’s linguistic ingenuity to the maximum, making his letters literary texts’.⁴⁷ As a way of building on such ideas and in response to the wider lack of critical attention to Lawrence’s letters (and, by extension, epistolarity more generally), Chapter One of this study calls for a reassessment of his substantial epistolary practice. I argue that

⁴⁶ Jack Stewart, ‘Colour, Space, and Place in Lawrence’s letters’, *D.H. Lawrence Review*, 29:1 (2000), 19.

⁴⁷ Stewart, ‘Colour, Space, and Place’, 20.

if we are to take seriously the notion of 'life' in his oeuvre, we must begin to examine and extend the limited conception of letters as simply 'life writing', as reserved for a conventional sense of auto/biography, which is to say human life. Reading the weird textual manoeuvres that are mobilised by Lawrence's epistolary medium, we find that not only are the letters frequently *about* different forms of life (particularly the *nonhuman*), they also perform life, they seem to *be alive*, animated with an uncanny 'life of writing'.

But reading 'between letters' in Lawrence also means thinking about letters and literature in another way: it involves an engagement with the idea that all writing (be it a poem, short story, novel or essay) is perhaps inherently epistolary in nature. I am interested here in the different ways in which Lawrence's writing foregrounds and plays with a sense of what Derrida, in 'Envois', sees as the fact that 'a letter *does not* always arrive at its destination [...] and when it does arrive its capacity not to arrive torments it with an internal drifting'.⁴⁸ The 'letter' that Derrida is referring to is both epistle and alphabetic letter: any significant mark is necessarily 'tormented' by some kind of 'internal drifting'. This possible non-arrival is related to what Derrida elsewhere calls 'the irremediable detour of the letter', referring to the work of continuous deferral of a letter's meaning and intended destination, which engenders a sort of endless provisionality and irreducibility.⁴⁹ While his writing has rarely been recognised as containing the same kinds of semantic play for which Joyce's work is celebrated, I explore the idea that Lawrence's texts are at once afflicted and set adrift by their own textual scattering

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'La facteur de la vérité', *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 489.

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Aphorism Countertime', translated by Nicholas Royle, *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 420.

and dissemination, their own strange work of deferral. Attempting to read the many detours of language and meaning that make up the ‘life’ of Lawrence’s writing would recalls Royle’s sense of ‘veering with Lawrence’ and is also related to what Deleuze and Guattari, taking their cue from Lawrence and other Anglo-American authors, call the ‘*ligne de fuite*’ (usually translated as ‘line of flight’), where ‘*fuite*’ denotes fleeing, escaping, evading or equivocating but also leaking, *flowing out*.⁵⁰ These readers of Lawrence are among the few to bear witness to what is incessantly contradictory, disruptive, divergent about reading Lawrence: they attest to the experience of encountering, to borrow a phrase from Hélène Cixous, his ‘escaping texts’.⁵¹

Finally, Derrida’s sense of the ‘irremediable detour of the letter’ also relates to what I see as the spectral futurity of Lawrence’s texts. In the context of the Romantic poets’ (specifically John Keats’s) palpable desire for living on through writing, Andrew Bennett speaks of the way in which certain texts write towards a ‘reading after death—the “posthumous life” of writing, but also the posthumous life of reading’.⁵² The contretemps that is generated by such ‘reading after death’ is something that relates not only to the ghostly addresses of poetry, but also to the strange experience of reading a writer’s posthumous letters, which are always intended for someone else. This powerful anachronistic life of the ‘posthumous’ experience is, I believe, paramount not only for considering how Lawrence’s texts work, but also for thinking about the ways in which his ‘life of writing’ cannot

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 9 and passim.

⁵¹ See Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, translated by Catherine A.F. MacGillivray (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁵² Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8.

simply be consigned to history and social contexts, but remains radically *contemporary*. For Bennett's 'reading after death' is also perhaps about how texts read us, performatively working on us with their uncanny afterlife: here, now, today. These questions are further explored in Chapter Four of this thesis, where I read Lawrence's poems from the 1923 collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* as texts that live on, escaping or growing beyond the life (and death) of their author. These texts generate their own *afterlives*: mutating and changing and generating, by way of their wild materiality, a whole series of unpredictable reading effects that take place in the present, as we read them.

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Between letters, then, we find a very different species of 'life' to the one usually associated with 'Lawrence', the man and author. This is not, or not merely, human: there is a 'life of writing' that exceeds anthropocentric thought and praxis. Following such important interventions, the thinking of 'life' in this study necessarily entails an encounter with the many mammals, reptiles, birds, insects and even flowers and trees that we find throughout Lawrence's oeuvre. These numerous examples bear witness to Lawrence's claim, as he states in a letter to Forster in 1914, that: 'We are tired of contemplating this one phase of the history of creation which we call humanity. We are tired of measuring everything by the human standard' (*Letters*, II, 265). He expands upon this idea in the 1923 essay 'The Proper Study':

You can't get any more literature out of man in his relation to man. Which, of course, should be writ large, to mean man in his relation to woman, to other men, and to the whole environment of men; or woman in her relation to man, or other women, or the whole environment of women. You can't get any more literature out of that. Because any new book must needs be a new stride. (*Phoenix*, 722)

Lawrence seeks ways of writing and thinking, about life and literature, that are not

limited to some notion of *homo mensura*—the idea that human relationships, human scales, human values and modes of perception are the most important way of experiencing the world. Lawrence’s writing is perhaps most dangerous in the way that it wants to subvert the ‘human standard’, which is perhaps to say human subjectivity. As Wallace argues, Lawrence was fundamentally ‘in tune with contemporary, post-Darwinian science in its critical interrogation of all aspects of the “human”’.⁵³ In this sense, Lawrence explicitly prefigures contemporary debates about the place of nonhuman life in literature and the humanities. For example, Cary Wolfe has criticised the fact that humanities scholars, even critics working in the growing field of ‘Animal Studies’, still operate within a blindingly humanist context. Wolfe calls for new modes of criticism in which ‘the place of literature is radically reframed in a larger universe of communication, response, and exchange, which now includes manifold other species’.⁵⁴ In my reading of Lawrence, this kind of movement towards or ‘response’ to an inhuman or nonhuman mode of perception is at the heart of his textual philosophy. It is to do with attending *to* nonhuman life, which he does in so many of his texts, but also a matter of attending *like* nonhuman life, of actively thinking, reading and writing as if ‘man’ were not the measure of existence.

This first of all manifests itself in a palpable ethical dimension or theme in Lawrence’s writing. Many of Lawrence’s texts deal with human cruelty towards nonhuman animals and the destruction of the nonhuman (and human) world; for example, the cat caught in a poacher’s trap in *The White Peacock* (*Peacock*, 12–13), Gerald Crich’s brutal treatment of his horse in the ‘Coal-Dust’ chapter of *Women in Love* (*Women*, 110–13), Flora Manby’s plan to geld the stallion in *St. Mawr* (see *St.*

⁵³ Wallace, 18.

⁵⁴ Cary Wolfe, ‘Human, All Too Human’, *PMLA*, 124:2 (2009), 571.

Mawr, 95, 114), the killing of the fox in *The Fox* (*Ladybird*, 39–41), and the murder of the mole in the short story ‘Second Best’ (*Prussian*, 117, 120).⁵⁵ Indeed, Lawrence’s writing frequently hints at the notion that violence towards and sacrifice of the nonhuman underpins human existence. As Lettie Beardsall in Lawrence’s first novel, *The White Peacock*, succinctly puts it: ‘if we move the blood rises in our heel-prints’ (*Peacock*, 13).

But apart from the ethical questions that Lawrence’s writing clearly provokes, there is also something stranger going on in his texts with regard to the nonhuman. Lawrence’s writing seeks, in its materiality, some kind of nonhuman life which cannot be simply digested or read. Lawrence persistently engages with the idea that writing itself, or what Derrida (reading Cixous) calls the performative ‘*might*’⁵⁶ of writing, is more (or less) than human. In each of the critical chapters of this study, I consider different ways in which a form of nonhuman *textuality* works as a threatening and disruptive force in Lawrence’s writing, upsetting the task of reading and our human desire to know. In this way, the writing perhaps comes to embody a blow to human sovereignty, performing, in and through writing, Freud’s sense that the (human) ‘*Ego is not master in its own house*’.⁵⁷

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Up until now, I have been placing a lot of emphasis on the second part of the phrase ‘between letters’, considering the material and nonhuman work of letters in Lawrence’s texts, but have said much less (at least explicitly) about the question of

⁵⁵ Questions about ethics and animality are also raised in a number of his essays, most notably perhaps in ‘Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine’ (1925) (see *Reflections*, 347–64), but also ‘Man is a Hunter’, wherein he decries the tradition of the hunting of songbirds in Italy (see *Phoenix*, 32–4).

⁵⁶ Derrida, *H.C. for Life*, 3 and *passim*.

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, ‘A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, Volume XVII, translated and edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 143, *emphasis original*.

the 'between'. Derrida's 'between' is typically duplicitous, as equivocal as a dash or ellipsis. 'Between' is a connective word and this thesis is clearly engaged with the ways in which Lawrence's writing makes links *between* apparently oppositional or discrete categories, such as life and death, human and nonhuman, the animate and inanimate, 'nature' and *tekne*. And yet, if we return to Derrida's essay on Edmond Jabès where the phrase 'between letters' first occurs, we are reminded that 'between' is also a kind of lacuna or interval. Derrida enigmatically claims that 'death strolls between letters'.⁵⁸ 'Death', which might be another name for the abyssal blank space that necessarily exists between letters, *lives* (or 'strolls') on the other side of reading and meaning, while also being the very thing that makes signification possible: there is a necessary absence or unknown space that makes *life live*.

Derrida's sense of the 'between' here is, I propose, closely related to the dangerous Lawrencian 'unknown', or what we might begin to think of as the *unconscious* life of writing. In a letter to his friend Lady Cynthia Asquith (28th November 1915), Lawrence upbraids his friend for adhering to:

the conscious life [which] is no more than a masquerade of death: there is a living unconscious life. If only we would shut our eyes: if only we were all struck blind, and things vanished from our sight: we should marvel that we had fought and lived for shallow, visionary, peripheral nothingness. We should find reality in darkness. (*Letters*, II, 455)

As his writing in both *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia and the Unconscious* makes clear, Lawrence's notion of the 'living unconscious life' differs in many ways from Freud's definition of the unconscious.⁵⁹ For Lawrence, the notion of the unconscious is not only a way of describing a region of the human psyche.

⁵⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 71.

⁵⁹ For further elucidation of Lawrence's complicated and ambivalent relationship to Freud's psychoanalytic writings see Jennifer Spitzer, 'On Not Reading Freud: Amateurism, Expertise and the 'Pristine Unconscious' in Lawrence', *Modernism/modernity*, 21:1 (2014), 89–105; and Becket's *D.H. Lawrence: The Thinker as Poet*.

Rather it is a figure for something that is beyond the human and, as such, beyond subjectivity, conscious life, intentionality, the bio-historical. Lawrence writes in a letter to Gordon Campbell in 1915 that what his writing seeks is ‘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’ (*Letters*, II, 302). We see in this letter a kind of performative contradiction, an embodiment of the tensions at work in much of Lawrence’s writing between the personal, the willful and intentional (often characterised by the peremptory and/or impassioned tone of Lawrence’s letters and critical writings) and the erasure of the self, the movement towards a depersonalised, unconscious materiality.

In this way, Lawrence draws very close to the work and ‘philosophy’ of his friend, Katherine Mansfield, who, in her own words, sought ‘the defeat of the personal’.⁶⁰ Bennett, reading the profound commitment to ‘impersonality’ and ‘impersonation’ in Mansfield, speaks of the ‘impossible, paradoxical task as a writer’ that Mansfield sets herself, ‘the task of “facing” the human truth of the self as unknowable: she presents herself with the task of writing the unknown, with articulating the “living mind” as, pre-eminently, that which cannot be known, cannot be articulated’.⁶¹ It is this kind of essential contradictoriness that underpins my notion of the ‘life of writing’ in Lawrence: it is something which oscillates between two poles, a writing of the interval (a figure that I discuss in more detail in Chapter One) that lives between readability and the unreadable, between certainty and groping in the dark. In *Thinker as Poet*, Becket suggests that “‘the unknown’ is a

⁶⁰ Quoted in Andrew Bennett, *Katherine Mansfield* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), 19.

⁶¹ Bennett, *Katherine Mansfield*, 21.

felt quality in Lawrence's metaphysic which is quite unavailable to analysis'.⁶² While I concur with her sense of the 'unknown' in Lawrence as that which confounds analytical reading, I argue that this is something, being firmly rooted in a material literality, that also exceeds, overgrows or *floods* any notion of a 'metaphysic'. To read and write about life in Lawrence is to experience the dark, unknowable quicksand of a kind of unconscious *writing*, or even an unconscious *of* writing. To read Lawrence is to meet him at the brink.

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'Between letters' is, finally perhaps, the name for the intersection between the creative and the critical. In 'Telepathy', Derrida notes that 'not to respond is not to receive'.⁶³ My desire is to *receive* Lawrence in a way that avows a kind of non-reception of his 'unnameable' signature. The 'creative' sections of this thesis are, in some part, influenced by Geoff Dyer who, in his creative nonfiction work on Lawrence, *Out of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of D.H. Lawrence* (1997), sets out to write, in his own words, 'a serious academic book on Lawrence', and finds that the only way to respond to him faithfully is to 'take the imaginative line' (which is what Lawrence says about his own approach to writing about the Etruscans).⁶⁴ The intended irony of Dyer's book is that by *failing* to write about him, Dyer is making the most Lawrencian gesture possible. He comments that 'by *straying*, I liked to think, I was following Lawrence's direction to the letter'.⁶⁵ Dyer wanders out of the bounds of the traditional academic work by letting himself be bound by Lawrence, bound to Lawrence, bound for Lawrence: like an impossible destiny. The idiom 'to

⁶² Becket, 4.

⁶³ Jacques Derrida, 'Telepathy', translated by Nicholas Royle, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 234.

⁶⁴ Dyer, 105.

⁶⁵ Dyer, 175.

the letter' refers to doing exactly what one is told, to follow orders precisely. But we quickly see that following also means opposing, mapping resistances and digressions. Royle suggests something similar in his reading of Lawrence, noting that, in order to 'avoid falling into the "twiddle-twaddle" category that Lawrence assigned much if not all literary critical writing [...] it is necessary to veer in a singular way, not to toe the line but to jump or fly off somewhere, differently'.⁶⁶ The singularity of Lawrence's literary project demands its own singularly 'imaginative' and differential response. As such, the creative part of my thesis seeks to be as much a *reading* of Lawrence as the other 'critical' sections, but one that often veers *away* from him in order, perhaps, to read him better. My own 'creative' responses play with this mode of (not) writing with Lawrence, of veering with and away from him in the same gesture: they form a writing in and of the interval, a writing of the in-between, the not-quite or as-yet.

Taking inspiration not only from Lawrence's own letter-writing practice but also from other works of 'creative criticism' (such as Derrida's 'Envois' (1980), Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977) and the work of Cixous), the 'creative' part of this thesis is made up of a series of 'postcards' that explore, respond to and, in turn, seek to provoke reflections on the critical discussions found in the rest of the study. This 'creative' element is divided into five sections: 'Eastwood', 'Croydon', 'Sicily', 'Zennor', 'Texas', which constitute a travel diary of sorts: the 'I' of the postcards attempts to follow Lawrence, visiting Eastwood where he was born, Taormina on Sicily, the village of Zennor in Cornwall, Croydon Library where he sometimes wrote, and Austin, Texas, where many of his letters are archived. These 'postcards' are written as a ghostly 'response' to Lawrence and,

⁶⁶ Royle, 180.

somewhat periphrastically, take the address of a ‘you’ who is, at times, ‘Lawrence’ and, at other times, something in or about Lawrence’s writing. This study is concerned with a writing of the interval, the space of Lawrence’s ‘unknown’ or ‘unnameable’, and, as such, the creative sections of my thesis live in the intervals *between* my critical chapters. They occupy the unconscious spaces that sit between two readings, spaces that perhaps make the readings more alive in their very proximity to the brink. And yet, by bookending the critical chapters (the thesis begins and ends with a ‘creative’ section), these sections also have the effect of potentially turning the critical chapters themselves into intervallic, negative spaces of thought. In an exploration of Lawrence’s remark that ‘it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split’ (*Phoenix*, 520), one of my aims in this thesis is to demonstrate that there can be no hierarchy in place between the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’: both responses to Lawrence’s writing are equally necessary.

Lawrence’s so-called travel-diary, *Sea and Sardinia* (1923), is a book that I discuss only cursorily in this thesis, and yet it haunts the whole of my text, particularly my ‘creative’ sections. As well as the many remarkable descriptions of nonhuman animals, plants and inanimate life, and its fascination with material surfaces (films, masks, costumes, fabrics, veils), *Sea and Sardinia* has an intimate relation to the idiosyncratic formal elements of my project. Lawrence’s text is broken up into postcard-like snippets, all demarcated by a mysterious line in the middle of the page:

What is the meaning of this line? Is it a cut? A slash? A cord or rope? Something that moors us to life, *or* that cuts us off, separates us? It looks to be the finest of all

lines, just a narrow and inconsequential mark on the page and yet, like every mark, it is also an aperture, a scrawl of darkness, some glimpse into elsewhere. In *Sea and Sardinia*, this line is perhaps the text's 'between', its unknowable space. I appropriate this device in my own creative writing sections, where a similar aperture or line designates the edge of a new 'postcard'—working to cut off or dislocate each text from the previous and following, while also connecting the different 'missives' by (paradoxically) comprising two 'edges' at once. Finally, the non-chronological trajectory of the thesis and placement of the various creative sections between the critical chapters, necessitates a backwards or circuitous reading. Contrary to my opening gambit in this introduction, this thesis does not exactly seek to be a piece of 'life writing', but rather myriads of living writings, taking many forms and directions in an attempt to map the shifting, meandering and fluctuating contradictoriness and ambivalences of Lawrence's writing. These engender a sort of echo-work, the sense of something that will not stay still in arguments or concepts, something that always drifts or flies off from its intended course, like an animated epistle.

Eastwood

10th April

No idea where to begin with you. *Eastwood*, a voice seems to say, tiny and far away, like an almost imperceptible knocking on the sides of a tomb. *Here I am—*

On the train up from Kings Cross—took out my notebook and wrote the words ‘the life of’. *The life*—of what? I really can’t be certain. Saw giant cooling towers like mountains and the landscape was so flat it looked strangely truncated—foreshortened like an eighteenth-century theatre set. Everything I could see from the train—the little houses and sporadic clumps of trees, hawthorn and blackthorn bushes,

fences and dry-stone walls and pylons and silos and water towers and heaps of shit and tractors and generators—it all appeared bunched together in space, flattened out, as if each part were made of thin, painted cardboard. As we passed through this weird compacted landscape I dipped in and out of a book of short stories by Ali Smith and, by chance, your name appeared. A woman in the story calls you ‘the delivery man’. DHL Express. It’s a joke, of course—but I was left wondering—is that you? Have you arrived?

I’ve never been up here before—tho’ I’ve got Nottinghamshire blood from my father’s side. I’ve been told my ancestors made lace—stockings and doilies and bedspreads to sell in the Lace Market in Nottingham. There is a small cemetery where they are all buried but no one can remember which one.

The hotel is a pub: The Sun Inn. The page on booking.com said it was featured in *Sons and Lovers*. Suns and Sons. But I couldn't find any trace of it. Makes me unfathomably happy, this missing or fabricated reference, this not-finding-you. The pub is a large eighteenth century red brick building, not ugly, but plastered with posters advertising nondescript grilled meats and sports channels. You would think me naïve, idiotic, the way I'm automatically charmed by the broadness of the voices here, being called 'ducky' when I buy a glass of syrupy red wine from the bar.

Just now, in the shower, which is grimy with old soap and black mildew, I sang Joni Mitchell, as if someone was listening, the words coming back to me in a hollow echo around the pink bathroom and mixing with the noise of the bar downstairs, waves of laughter, a TV blaring Premier League results. I was singing the line: *songs are like tattoos*. Trying (and failing) to make my voice go from low to impossibly high in one breath like Joni does. Wondering what she means...

because in some ways everything you wrote was a song. You are nothing but *song*! So many indelible echoes...

Suddenly remembering what you wrote about the coal dust under the miner's skin. In *Sons and Lovers*, I think. I was once in love with that idea, reading you for the first time. Dark carbon shining through the man's bare flesh, the most ancient tattoo in the world. Now I think I'd call it the eternal bruise of a song.

11th April

I don't know where I'm going with it, that's the terrifying thing. Why write to the dead like this? It's the middle of the night and I've come to sit, naked, in the low bay window of this cold bedroom, the net curtains pulled back, looking across at the sugarloaf hill in the distance. I instinctively think of it as the one you walked up on that cold February day, writing to KM about those myriad trails and tracks of animals—the field-mice, rabbits, hare, fox, mole, pheasant,

wood pigeons, the *splendid little leaping marks of weasels*. How could you possibly read them all? I am drifting off now and all those trails begin to form a strange kind of filigree over my mind, I try to follow them all, including the footmarks you too must have made going up the hill, but I get lost in the heavy snow, blinded, groping about on the cold ground—

Just woke up with the thought that this is the wrong place, isn't it? It's the wrong hill, the wrong earth...and you,
You are the wrong person.

Night again and I am back in my room, drinking lukewarm wine bought from the Morrison's superstore over the road. I'm reading *The Lost Girl* and Alvina Houghton has just found out she'll be playing piano at the "cinematograph": *She burst out laughing. And at the same time... she cried as if her heart would break. And then all kinds of comic and incongruous tunes came into her head.* It's silly and moving and it makes me realise that the name 'Alvina' almost contains the word 'alive'.

This afternoon I visited the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum, where a pink-cheeked woman showed me around the house with enthusiasm—grateful, I think, for the rare interest. She asked if I'd read any of your books. A couple, I shrugged, not telling the truth, trying to look cool and inscrutable in the face of all that feverish energy. She really had no idea. I think of the hours (my life and yours). And the *words*

The enthusiastic woman—"Christine", it said on her name badge—led me to a small room on the first floor of the house, where she switched on a flat screen TV which stood in the centre of the room. It was warm in there and I noticed we were both sweating, and yet I had no choice but to stay and watch the eleven-minute documentary called 'The Life of Lawrence'. *The Life of*. The words made me snort with laughter and I thought of Alvina's *comic and incongruous tunes*. And then, like a cinematograph show, there you were on the screen—or rather photographs of you. First with F, then as a boy with your mother, then a school photo,

then wearing a funny prim moustache with KM and JMM, then sitting on a bench looking skinny and worn out, and then on the Kiowa ranch with F again. The film kept on zooming in and out of the photographs while a disembodied male voice with a Nottingham accent spoke over the top, giving us the key facts in chronological order. Then there was a photograph of the sculpture Jo Davidson made of your head just before you died, your bearded sharp chin and cheeks like dark caverns. The way the camera zoomed and travelled across the grey faces lent an eerie animation to the images—you

became a kind of puppet dancing slowly on the screen, growing and shrinking, tripping back and forth

—*alive*. After the film Christine took me on the tour of the rooms and their objects, few of which have anything to do with your family but have been put there to give us a sense of what it would have been like in “your” day. Things like: a piece of pink carbolic soap, a lace tablecloth, two ceramic spaniels facing each other. In the gift shop they sold larger-than-life masks of your head, from a photograph taken at an angle, with eyeholes cut out and a ribbon to go around the ears. And then a picture of a group of children all wearing the masks on what looked like an Easter-egg-hunt. I bought these postcards of you and F laughing together—what about? I’m dying to know. The image is out of focus and it looks like you are both vibrating with pleasure, the air around you is pixellated bliss...

12th April

The leaflet I picked up in Eastwood library (sad, brown-carpeted building with shelves and shelves of tattered Penguin editions of everything you ever wrote) calls the walk ‘In the Footsteps of D.H. Lawrence’. It sounds about right, making me think of your footprints in the snow. Is that what I’m doing here—following in your footsteps? The map first of all sends me along trail of penny-

sized phoenix emblems, embedded into the pavements of Eastwood. I go past The Victory (an old Working Men’s club with grubby brown windows and smoke-stained net curtains) and down a narrow and overgrown alleyway—with Japanese knotweed and brilliant cerise

valerian bursting through the tarmac and brick walls—following the trail onto a country path, flanked by elder, hawthorn, blackthorn. Then I come to real greenness, an open field: climb a

stile, half-rotted and teetering, turning into a wood of young beech with trunks of grey elephant-skin and soft human limbs. You once said beeches were like Maggie Tulliver's arms. Or was it the other way round? It reminds me that I've never seen your arms. I try to imagine your body hidden under all those layers of woollen Edwardian clothes. Only your face is not hidden—and, in a way, that's hidden too. You write to AL in America and tell her *I've grown a red beard, behind which I shall take as much cover henceforth as I can, like a creature under a bush.*

How can I even tell it's *you*?

In the beech wood the ground is thick with bluebells, late this year, glowing in the dark light of the trees and the scent is everywhere—astonishing and queer. If only you could smell it. The scent makes me know what it must be like to be a moth, swooning in this thick air—I wonder if I'll ever recover—I am wounded, tattooed, by this blue perfume...

You are a burr that sticks to me as I pass. It is not something you are but something you do that attaches itself to me, gets inside. Walking, I compose sentences in my head, some of them letters to you, letters by way of you—of which I remember almost nothing apart from the certain impossibility of walking and writing. And yet

13th April

Woke up early and took a bus towards Nottingham, just to get out of

dismal Eastwood. The bus wound through villages and towns of neat little terraces, hanging baskets, variegated shrubs. A pub called the *Lady Chatterley*. As the bus passed through a bright valley, something compelled me to press the bell and I found myself on a deserted road, which I followed back along the bus route for about half a mile, regretting my decision to get off. I came to a huge cemetery, probably Victorian, perched on a large slope across from which the landscape rose up and seemed to sweep like a wave across the sky. How could I have missed this from the bus? Underneath the hill are rows of terraced

houses, sloping down into the valley and reappearing on the other side. The place seemed completely deserted as did the town I had just walked through. But as it was sunny I was feeling confident and cheery and so passed between the lilac bushes and clumps of Spanish bluebells in flower at the gates, taking a path to my left which hugged the lower walls. I walked slowly, stopping to copy down some of the names engraved on the stones. George Luck. Emilia Rummage. I disturbed a magpie, who swung up from behind a cross, flashing its hidden blueness at me. Henry Tingle. Elizabeth Chance. At the end of the path was a little blue sign on which was written:

PLEASE BE AWARE
of dangers in the cemetery such as uneven
ground, open or sunken graves and hazards
concealed by vegetation. Be mindful that
all memorials have the potential to harm by
virtue of their size, weight and condition.

I turned right up the slope where shaggy cypresses and silent yews—some tall and upright, others crooked and dragging on the earth—

grew haphazardly. One yew tree in particular was sprawling and twisting upon itself in the most curious manner, its red-skinned branches casting about like a sea creature. It was completely hollow in the centre, forming a weird crypt. It must have been hundreds of years old. And yet the cemetery itself did not seem as old as all that. There were even quite a few new graves. These new gravestones were often in highly polished pinkish-red or black marble. Henry Pierce. Lilla Pickwood. Frank Hide. One of these was dog-shaped—some sort of terrier—and another a large open book with the names and birth- and death- dates of the two dead people written on either side. Walter Sparrow and Mary Sparrow.

I suddenly felt certain that I was being followed. I thought I could hear the rasping of a small dog close behind me, but I looked back to see it was only a cluster of dead daffodil heads, their crisp flowers fussing at each other in the breeze, laughing and panting voicelessly at my retreating shadow. I passed an area with only small graves. Sarah Ruffle. William Winter. One child was just four days old when she died and the miniature headstone read: *be my last thought*

On the graves were little trinkets and toys, weathered and washed out by sunlight, but still looking uncannily cheery, a grinning gnome, Dennis the Menace stickers, some smiling bees on sticks, hovering over a patch of plastic daisies. A huge rook floated past my face and dropped down into the centre of a child's grave, piercing the earth with its hooded beak. Hannah "Tiny" Cook.

Came to a fork and took a stony path to the right, which eventually curled around itself into an area of densely packed headstones. Here the graves all seemed much older. Some of them were quite grand—

one, a large angel pointing to the sky and another lounging against a crucifix. But their faces had been deeply eroded and were covered in spongy silver lichen, giving them a look of underwater creatures, unfamiliar and remote. I tried to read the names on the stone, but any names here had been eaten away, by acid rain and time. The lichens formed weird patterns, sometimes faces, eyes and mouths, scowling or smiling wistfully—seeming to relate a message about the anonymous dead life that the stone marked out. I realised I hadn't thought about you for hours.

Hippolyte Charles. James Wasp. Alma Swadling. Olive Edwards. Mary Pitcher. John Silkstone. A squirrel: shadow-tailed and swimming over the grass. *I shall but love thee better after death.*

On one side of the path the grass had been cut and the drying blades lay across the graves like a quilt. Someone had been at it with a strimmer quite recently and the cut-herb scent teased at my nose. Whoever it was had cut the heads off not only the daffodils past their best but also the tops of the pansies and polyanthuses and gaudy geraniums that had been planted on some graves. The decapitated plants could be seen squatting miserably under the mantle of cut grass and their heads scattered on the ground. But on the other side of the path, the grass was growing long and flashing green, peeping with daisies and buttercups, dandelions and thistles, even a cowslip—its flowerheads like tiny lungs. They all look uncannily luscious, darkening the old headstones

In the middle of everything this was an enormous cherry tree heavy with blossom. Starlings exploded from out of the long grass as I made

my way towards the tree. But—so strange—at first I couldn't work it out. Half of the silvery branches gleamed with a milky cloud of blossom while the others were thick with pillowy purple flowers. I thought at first that two trees had somehow wound together. But then I saw that it was the same tree, and that one of the strains had been grafted on, like a new limb. It would have been

impossible to say which came first. As I stood beneath it the tree seemed to swallow me, blocking out the sky and earth. It was almost too odd to look at, I couldn't take it all in, it seemed to grow and pulse before my eyes, the blossom becoming an almost demonic force, I began to feel faint, as if the earth was moving in two directions at once, like the feeling just before an eclipse, my limbs going soft and tiny vibrations like electric shocks, like little pinpricks, coursing through

when I open my eyes I am lying in a low grassy grave, which is so much like a bed, but too short for me and my feet poke over the end—and above me the blossom is falling down slowly, so slowly that the myriad petals appear suspended, so slow and still, as if it's the air around them that is swaying *slowly* with such ghostly intent

It was growing cold now—the sun gone, leaving everything in dull greyness. The measly little graves that were so benevolent and fascinating before, offering themselves up to be read and inspected, now seemed mean, even hostile. I got up and brushed the cherry petals from my body and hurried back on to the path, trying to remember which way I came from. But it looked like a different place altogether and I recognised nothing. I began to feel quite afraid wondering what on earth I was doing here.

two jackdaws scatter before me, making me jump with the soft snick of feathers fanning out

I took a path that ran down the hill, towards where I thought I had come in. But as I reached the bottom, I quickly saw that this was the wrong place, there was no gate, only an ivy-shrouded dry-stone wall. I turned wildly on the spot not knowing where to go. I took a small path to my right and suddenly in the distance I could hear high-

pitched screaming, coming together in strange harmonic waves, reverberating around the shadow-cloaked hills. I happened to look back up the path I had just come down and saw that now there really was someone behind me. It was only the man with the strimmer but panic consumed me—I broke off the path and scrambled over the rows of dangerous sunken graves and their hazards concealed by

vegetation, making it to the old wall and with strength that seemed to come from elsewhere I grabbed fistfuls of ivy and hauled my body over. I cut my hands on the vertical shards of flint that had been placed at the top of the wall and the blood dripped thickly onto my jeans. The awful screaming was nearer here. I realised with a small laugh that it was lunchtime and the sound was only children in a school playground. But still it echoed in my ears like the sound of some kind of massacre, mixing with the laughter of magpies and

14th April

You make me wonder: is there a DNA of writing? A DHL express?

Your name is erased and reinscribed every time I write like this. You are the reverse of those eroded gravestones, with their anonymous bones lying beneath. Your name is everywhere but your body has escaped

15th April

on the train home from Derby—life speeding past—farms and banks of grass, burial mounds, bracken, motorways, allotments, paddocks, skylarks rising, squat houses, stubby black cows and sheep with fattening lambs, glossy black Arab mares in the fields swatting flies with their tails, horse chestnut trees already in leaf—and suddenly that strangely flat, foreshortened landscape again—and the cooling towers, those huge grey goddesses looming over the railway—breathing out their steam-clouds. I close my eyes and dream of great white volcanoes, puffing plumes of earthy smoke

Chapter One

Coming to Life

Animating Lawrence's Letters

I could fill six pages with *clear* memories.
Not those wilted, mummified images one
usually calls memories, but moments of
life coming to life again, as in the theatre
where lives are re-enacted every day, with
vigour, flesh, voices.
(Hélène Cixous)¹

The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, published over about twenty years by Cambridge University Press, constitutes more than six thousand extant letters written by Lawrence. We might imagine that there are hundreds, if not thousands, more which have been lost. But how should we read this huge body of epistolary writing? And what might these letters tell us about *life*? From the first publication of the *Selected Letters* by Lawrence's friend, Aldous Huxley, in 1932, up until Cambridge's 'complete' editions, the letters have been treated in much the same way. That is, they have been predominantly viewed as pieces of 'life writing'. While Huxley's introduction to the 1932 collection is both intimate and, at times, moving, it is perhaps most striking for the fact that it says almost nothing about the singular nature of the letters themselves—their style, language, content—focusing instead on Lawrence's personality and biography.² More recently, one reviewer of the *Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Amativa Banerjee, insisted that 'the letters

¹ Hélène Cixous, *Abstracts and Brief Chronicles of Time: I, Los, A Chapter*, translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 10.

² See Aldous Huxley, 'Introduction', *Selected Letters of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1932), ix–xxxiv.

themselves reveal a unique *autobiography* of Lawrence'.³ For Huxley and Bannerjee, and many critics in between⁴, Lawrence's letters are only useful insofar as they tell us about his life or the contexts of the production of his literary texts.

Lawrence clearly had many complex personal reasons for writing so many letters, perhaps relating to the fact that he spent most of his short life ill (with various bouts of pneumonia, malaria and the tuberculosis that eventually killed him), or living in isolated and remote places (as when he and Frieda lived in Australia or New Mexico in the 1920s). Letters provided a way for him to express himself when he had few other means to do so. To meditate on these points seems to keep us in safe territory, keeping close to the auto/biographical. But beyond these practical and personal motivations, I want to suggest that there might also be something about the epistolary form which is important not only for Lawrence's sense of literary creativity (within and beyond letters) but also his desire to discover or articulate *through writing* what 'life' is.

Towards the end of his life, in 1929, Lawrence writes to the Welsh novelist Rhys Davies: 'This letter is my most serious contribution to literature these six weeks' (*Letters*, VII, 309). While this is clearly a morbid joke at his own expense, remarking on his frustrating inability to write other works of 'literature' due to illness, we might also take something more serious from this with regard to the notion of letters as literary objects. Lawrence's letters not only function as micro-narratives (they consist of an opening, a middle and an ending, and necessarily include a narrative voice), they are also powerful examples of *poetic* and *dramatic* performativity. These texts, I suggest, might be viewed as both rehearsal space and

³ Amativa Banerjee, 'The Cambridge Edition of D.H. Lawrence's Letters', *English Studies*, 84:3 (2003), 233, emphasis original.

⁴ Another clear example of this is James T. Boulton's article 'D.H. Lawrence: Letter Writer', *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 29:1 (1985), 86-100.

literary performance at once, as if imbued with some originary breath of literature.

With Lawrence's letters we find ourselves in the departure lounge of writing. In *Out of Sheer Rage*, one of the few texts to acknowledge the importance of Lawrence's epistolary project, Geoff Dyer argues that Lawrence's literary writing 'urges us back to the source, to the experience in which it originates', identifying in the letters what he calls the 'pre-echoes' of literary texts.⁵ Dyer's comments are reminiscent of Hélène Cixous's observation in the *prière d'insérer* of her novel/memoir *Manhattan: Letters from Prehistory* (originally published in French in 2002) that letters are 'prehistory of literature: a supplementary oeuvre, or manoeuvre'.⁶ 'Manoeuvre' is a slippery word. It means plotting, choreography, manipulation, *craft*, relating to manual labour and handwriting, originating from the French '*main*' (hand) and '*oeuvre*' (work). But 'manoeuvre' is also etymologically related to 'manure', which, in addition to the typical association with the dung of animals, means working the soil, tilling the earth. 'Manoeuvre' therefore speaks of the letter's closeness to the earth: it is of the earth and moves upon the earth. As Emily Dickinson succinctly puts it in a poetic letter of 1885: 'A letter is a joy of earth—/It is denied the Gods'.⁷ In the context of Lawrence's epistolary practice, I argue that the earthly and earthy 'joy' of his epistles is not only a matter of certain letters relating—like supplementary or preparatory sketches—to particular poems, short stories or novels (mostly in terms of their *content*) in a writer's oeuvre, but rather that they engage us in new 'manoeuvres' of thinking, reading and writing about life and literature.

⁵ Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Canongate, 1992), 115.

⁶ Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan: Letters from Prehistory*, translated by Beverley Brie Brahic (New York: Fordham University press, 2007), iii.

⁷ Emily Dickinson, '1639', *Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 672.

As I seek to demonstrate in this chapter, Lawrence's epistolary texts also embody certain ways of thinking about *nonhuman* forms of life and their relation to writing. Many of the letters focus on encounters with nonhuman animals and plants (and even fungal life). But this is only part of the story. The reference to 'animation' in the title of this chapter invokes a notion of animality but also, more broadly, the *anima* or breath of life, hinting at something essentially animistic in Lawrence's writing—an *animistic écriture* perhaps. And yet it might be fair to say that Lawrence's letters have never been truly *animated* by critical readings, or at least investigated in their own right as texts with a life of their own, or even as texts *about* life and animation extending far beyond the merely human. As such, I seek to animate a critical engagement with Lawrence's letters and by doing so, demonstrate that the letters open up onto a radical rethinking of the notion of 'life' in Lawrence's texts, highlighting the irony that what is, today, called 'life writing' is predominantly based on the study and writing of *human* auto/biography and the dialectical oppositions of life and death, the organic and the mechanical, the animate and the inanimate.

As we will see, 'life' in Lawrence is not purely animal, vegetal or even, properly speaking, *living* (at least, in the received, dialectical sense of this word): it cannot simply be related to some kind of immanent and organic vitalism.⁸ David

⁸ Here I am, in part, challenging the limited notion, held up by many critics, of Lawrence's essentially 'organic' and 'unified' life-force, beginning with Leavis's claim about the 'marvellously organic and comprehensive totality' of Lawrence's writing (see *Thoughts, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976), 77) but also found in the following writers: Peter Balbert's emphasis on the importance for Lawrence of a dialectical 'organic connection from the singled out self to the essential energy "beyond"' (see *D.H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 47); Bethan Jones's sense of an 'organic connection' in Lawrence (see Jones, 79 and *passim*); see also Leo Bersani's claim that 'The fact which most interests Lawrence

Wills's neologism 'inanimation' (from his 2016 book of the same name) might be a way of beginning to shift our thinking about what Lawrence's writing is up to.⁹ 'Inanimation' strangely denotes '*what is inanimate in animation*' and 'the extent to which *the inanimate animates*': the notion that life does not only proceed from organic origins, but can be animated by all sorts of technological, mechanical, abiotic and sterile sources—even, or especially, so-called 'dead' writing.¹⁰

In what follows, I read four extracts from letters which I believe elucidate the importance of nonhuman life, literary performativity and animation (as well as *inanimation*) in Lawrence's project. These readings do not pretend to be in any way an exhaustive interpretation of what Lawrence's letters are up to. At the same time, I hope to show that these particular extracts are also powerfully representative. This chapter is predominantly about letting the letters speak for themselves, rather than trying to impose a specific theoretical reading or historical grid onto them—allowing their linguistic quickness, surprises of syntax and conjuring power of words to spring forth. I wish to show that the letters are not just a superfluous *hors d'oeuvre* to a more serious literary project but are key texts for thinking about what is disruptive, queer and strangely indeterminate about other areas of Lawrence's writing, particularly the poems, short stories and novels.

Half-Born Letters

In 1915 Lawrence writes a letter to his friend Cynthia Asquith from the English seaside town of Littlehampton, where he is spending a few days with his wife,

about human beings is the extent to which they are being carried along by either currents of life energy or currents of death energy' (see *A Future for Astyanax*, 164).

⁹ See David Wills, *Inanimation: Theories of Inorganic Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Wills, x, emphasis original.

Frieda. World War I is at its height and Lawrence fears being conscripted, despite his miserably ill health. Frieda desperately misses her young children (whom her former husband has forbidden her from seeing) causing much friction between her and Lawrence. These might be the historical and auto/biographical contexts of the letter, but, as we will see, the letter itself seems to resist any kind of biographical, or even strictly human, attempt at reading. Foregoing any preamble, it begins like this:

We have lived a few days on the sea-shore, with the waves banging up at us. Also over the river, beyond the ferry, there is the flat silvery world, as in the beginning, untouched: with pale sand, and very much white foam, row after row, coming from under the sky, in the silver evening: and no people, no people at all, no houses, no buildings, only a haystack on the edge of the shingle, and an old black mill. For the rest, the flat, unfinished world running with foam and noise and silvery light, and a few gulls swinging like a half-born thought. It is a great thing to realise that the original world is still there—perfectly clean and pure, many white advancing foams, and only the gulls swinging between the sky and the shore: and in the wind the yellow sea-poppies fluttering very hard like yellow gleams in the wind: and the windy flourish of the seed-horns. (*Letters*, II, 375)

How might we begin to read such a piece of writing? How to find a human footing on a text that is ‘running with foam and noise and silvery light’? Already our sense of what life writing, and letters as life writing, means, begins to shift. Aided by the present participle (and as Figures 1 and 2 show, the fluid gesture of his handwriting), the movement of the water and foam—‘running’, ‘coming’, ‘advancing’—the gulls—‘swinging’—and the yellow sea-poppies—their ‘windy flourish’ ‘fluttering’—creates an overwhelming sense of immediacy and quickness. In an early letter to Blanche Jennings (6th March 1909) Lawrence comments that ‘My letters are always momentary—moody, if you like to be nasty’ (*Letters*, I, 119). The avowal of the ‘momentary’ is first of all bound up with a desire for presence through writing. In the essay ‘Poetry of the Present’ (1919), Lawrence

calls for a poetry of 'the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now' (*Poems*, 646). The 'immediate present' can also, as Esther Milne suggests, be viewed as essential to epistolary correspondence: 'writers and readers of letters often admit a desire for unmediated communication'.¹¹ This epistolary desire for the 'unmediated' and 'immediate' moment clearly links to a wider modernist aesthetic. In his desire for writing the 'Now', Lawrence connects, in particular, to Virginia Woolf's literary meditations on 'the moment', not only in her poetic essay 'The Moment: Summer's Night' (where she speaks of a momentariness, in many ways echoing the kind in Lawrence's letter to Asquith, that is 'laced about with [...] weavings to and fro, these inevitable downsinkings, flights'¹²) but also, it could be argued, in almost everything she wrote. Lawrence, like Woolf, is interested in creating, to borrow Cixous's phrase, 'moments of life coming to life again' through writing and reading.

But Lawrence's sense of his own letters' 'momentariness' is not only related to this idea of 'writing to the moment'. Rather, as we will see, it is to do with a kind of oscillating or contradictory movement (and this is where the *moodiness* comes in) between ideas and attitudes, between images and metaphors—like the swinging of seagulls. This momentariness can be palpably felt in the letter to Asquith: Lawrence's epistolary writing gives the experience of immediacy, of modernity (*modernus* literally means 'just now'), of celerity and quickness, the quick of life. It is perhaps also a guide for how Lawrence himself demands to be read: from one moment to the next.

¹¹ Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (New York, London: Routledge, 2010), 17.

¹² Virginia Woolf, 'The Moment: Summer's Night', *The Moment and Other Essays*, edited by Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1947), 10.

~~Feb~~ Littlehampton¹ - Tuesday
[Aug. 1915.]

My dear Lady Cynthia,

We have lived a few days on the sea-shore, with the waves banging up at us. Also over the river, beyond the ferry, there is the flat silvery world, as in the beginning, untouched: with pale sand, and very much white foam, row after row, coming from under the sky, in the silver evening: and no people, no people at all, no houses, no buildings, only a haystack on the edge of the shingle, and an old black mill. For the rest, the flat unfinished world running with foam and noise and silvery light, and a few gulls swinging like a half-born thought. It is a great thing to realise that the original world is still there - perfectly clean and pure, many white advancing foams, and only the gulls swinging between the sky & the shore: and in the

Figure 1. Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, page 1. Harry Ransom Center.

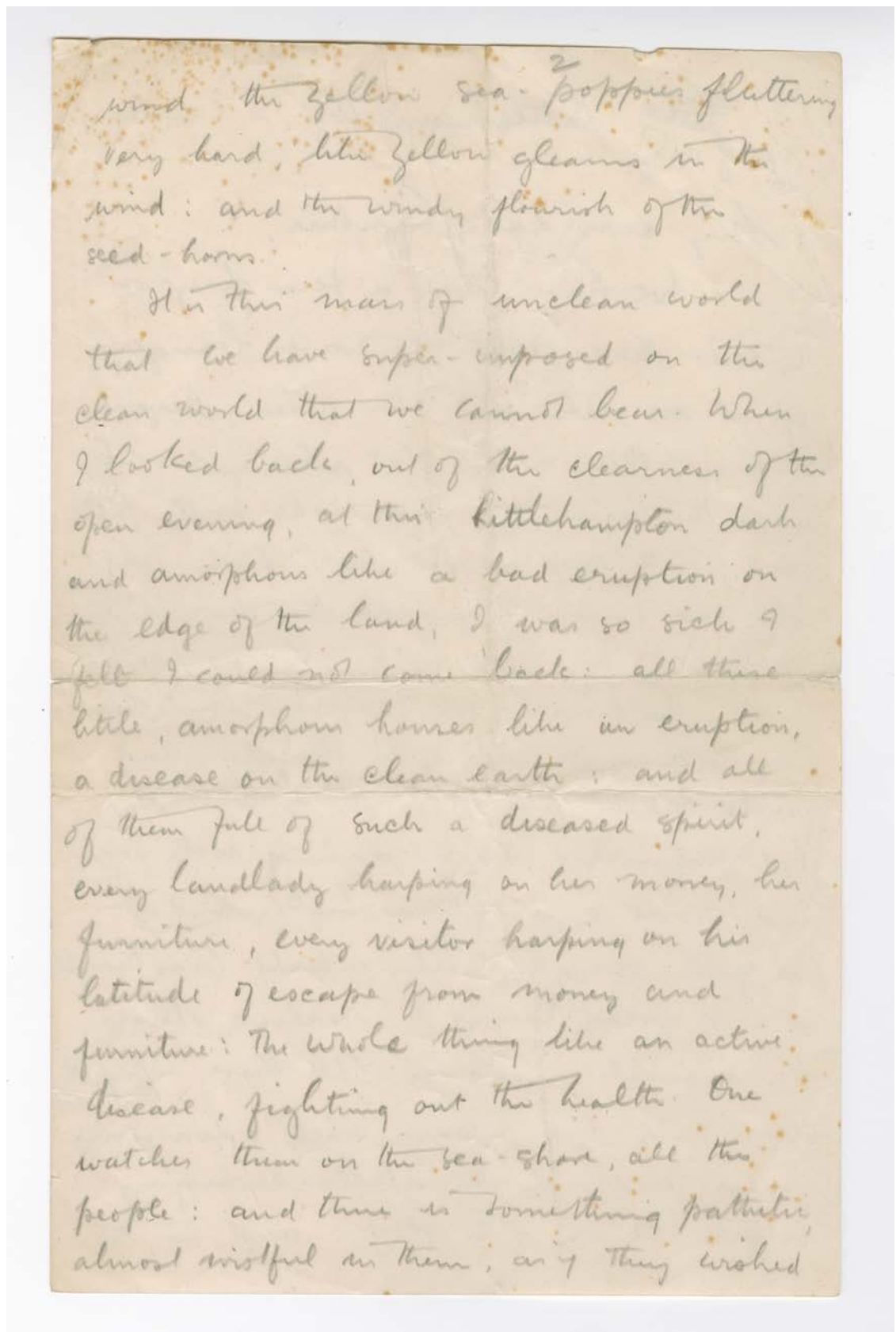


Figure 2. Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, page 2. Harry Ransom Center.

In this letter there is also a marked shrinking of the human world: the infamously misanthropic Lawrence relishes the fact that there are ‘no people, no people at all’. In ‘The Bad Side of Books’ (written as an introduction to Edward D. McDonald’s 1925 *A Bibliography of D.H. Lawrence*), Lawrence complains that ‘to the vast public, the autumn morning is only a sort of stage background against which they can display their own mechanical importance’ (*Phoenix*, 234). The Littlehampton letter, however, appears to radically readjust this common anthropocentric staging. Here the nonhuman environment, rather than functioning as a *background* for speaking about human relations and affects, is not only foregrounded, but is shown to be an pervasive, outlandish force. The effect of Lawrence’s remarkable letter is perhaps primarily one of being thrown into another world, an alien place, to which it would be difficult to ascribe the name ‘Littlehampton, England’ or indeed the year ‘1915’. Instead, Lawrence transports us to some ancient yet urgently present scene: initially through the sparse savageness of the landscape he describes (which contains ‘no houses, no buildings’) but also in the archaic time he seems to be evoking, which is both happening right *now*, in the present, absolutely modern, while also being very ancient ‘as in the beginning’ when everything was ‘perfectly clean and pure’.

Yet the human domain is not entirely wiped-out from this scene: evidence of human life appears in a ‘haystack at the edge of a shingle, and an old black mill’. Instead, there is a kind of *decentring* at work in the text, which pushes human life to the margins, making the traces of humanity just another transitory detail in this strange scene of reading. Rather than a post-human or post-apocalyptic world, Lawrence presents us with something that looks rather more *prehistoric*: a view of Earth in which the human is not at the centre and never has been. This image of a

‘perfectly clean and pure’ scene might initially appear to be a—rather naïve—desire for the ‘comprehensive Pan, the All’ that Margot Norris associates with Lawrence.¹³ Or it might be linked to the sense of ‘therio-primitive epiphany’¹⁴ that Philip Armstrong has, more recently, related to Lawrence’s writing about nonhuman animals. However, as we read on, this apparently prelapsarian note is undermined and effaced by the way the ‘untouched’ world is in fact contaminated by something that is not-quite-complete: a ‘flat, *unfinished* world’ inhabited by gulls that resemble ‘*half-born* thoughts’. This opens up the apparently ‘pure’ scene to newness and the unforeseeable, to a paradoxical mode of *absolute provisionality*.

The provisional was an important aspect of Lawrence’s literary *modus operandi*: he rewrote most of his novels at least three times, if not many more. So despite his purported identification with some kind of unity and wholeness (particularly within the Leavisite tradition of Lawrence criticism), it is the sense of the fragmentary, transitory and non-teleological that dominates here, a kind of uncertain life force which lives in the ‘unfinished’ writing itself. We might recognise this as related to ‘flux’—a term often used by Lawrence to speak about the flowing, flood-like impermanence of life which he describes in ‘Poetry of the Present’ as the ‘the face of running water [...] the face of the unfinished tide’, forming an ‘unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the sheer present, poetry whose very permanence lies in its wind-like transit’ (*Poems*, 648, 647). We see manifestations of this already at work in the letter to Asquith, particularly the ‘wind-like transit’ of everything he describes, the coming and flowing of the tide: ‘ungraspable’ because it refuses to stay still on the page as we read.

¹³ Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst and Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 181.

¹⁴ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), 157.

Lawrence's notion of an 'unrestful, ungraspable' writing is a key precursor to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who not only adapt his terminologies but also perhaps appropriate his 'half-born' style as a way of describing and performing their work of 'schizoanalysis'. Deleuze and Guattari's new-old species of 'analysis' functions, they say, by 'taking apart egos and their presuppositions; liberating the prepersonal singularities they enclose and repress; mobilizing the flows they would be capable of transmitting, receiving, or intercepting'.¹⁵ Reading an extract such as this, we might conclude that the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari is in effect a form of 'applied Lawrence'. Their sense of the 'mobilizing of flows' and the liberation of something 'enclose[d] and repress[ed]' recalls Lawrence's letter to Asquith and the 'advancing foams [...] row after row', the primal scene of decentredness that he conjures up. For, long before Deleuze and Guattari come along to theorise it, Lawrence's writing is playing with the idea of textual flux as a way of undermining and undoing human 'egos and their presuppositions'. Indeed, as we will see, Lawrence's writing frequently deploys a radical and singular subversion of the personal, the historical and auto/biographical, through its unfinished, disorganised and *flowing* idiom.

The Littlehampton letter's powerful sense of provisionality—as some kind of life-force or flux—is more explicitly developed by Lawrence in much later texts, particularly in his writings on the animistic religions of the indigenous peoples of North America and Mexico. In the essay 'Indians and Entertainment' (written in 1924), Lawrence remarks that for the Native Americans '[c]reation is a great flood, forever flowing, in lovely and terrible waves. In everything the shimmer of

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 362.

creation and *never the finality of the created* (*Mornings*, 66, my emphasis). While 'Indians and Entertainment' was written many years after the Littlehampton letter, it seems to speak of the same desire for the unfinished, for flux, that which is ever-changeable and still to come. There is a striking similarity in the language used in both texts—which is also a consistent, even constant, motif across more or less *all* of Lawrence's writing—particularly the imagery of water and waves ('forever flowing', 'row after row', 'many white advancing foams') and the uncanny 'shimmer' of life, echoing the 'silvery world' and the 'gleams' of the yellow sea-poppies. Thus the 1915 letter strangely anticipates Lawrence's aesthetic and philosophical encounter with the Hopi religion many years later.

In its focus on 'creation', 'Indians and Entertainment' also alludes to the question of Lawrence's processes of 'creativity'. For the 'flat, silvery world' that Lawrence evokes might also be read as the flat, white page of a letter, the 'subjectile'¹⁶ (ground, background or support—usually of artistic painting) of any piece of writing. As Dyer argues, many of the letters become spaces for 'uncreated' literary life. He remarks that, in certain letters:

one has the very first touch of a poem. It is like watching a fire and seeing the first lick of a flame along a log: you think it is about to catch but then it vanishes. You watch and wait for the flame to come back. It doesn't—and then, after you have stopped looking, the flame flickers back again and the log catches.¹⁷

Not only does he avow the 'half-born' nature of Lawrence's epistolary practice here, Dyer also seems to recognise that there is something dangerously unpredictable and unforeseeable about the letters and their relationship to his

¹⁶ See Jacques Derrida's reading of the function of the subjectile (particularly in the work of Antonin Artaud) in the essay 'Maddening the Subjectile', *Yale French Studies*, 84 (1994), 154-171. Derrida observes that, in Artaud, the subjectile, which is presumed to be an apparently neutral or passive backdrop for painting, 'betrays' the artist, manipulating the work of art in unforeseen ways (157 and *passim*).

¹⁷ Dyer, 112.

literary oeuvre. The writing, like a flame, appears to have a life of its own, one that might roar into an unstoppable blaze at any moment. This further suggests that Lawrence's texts set fire to their own limits—they burn *into* or make cinders of each other—so that it becomes impossible to pinpoint where a letter ends and a poem (or novel, short story) begins. This idea is voiced by Lawrence (once again in 'The Bad Side of Books') when he writes: 'What do I care for first or last editions? [...] To me, no book has a date, no book has a binding' (*Phoenix*, 232). For him every piece of writing remains provisional, even after its publication: there are no 'final' versions in Lawrence's oeuvre, despite what publishers would have us believe. 'The Bad Side of Books' is itself written like a letter, not dissimilar in tone from the Littlehampton letter, from 'the foot of the Rockies, looking at the pale desert disappearing westward', corroborating the sense that provisionality is something best expressed or encapsulated in an epistolary form (*Phoenix*, 232). Letters begin to look like some kind of nursery or incubation zone, inhabited by pre-literary formations, the seeds (like the 'seed-horns' of the yellow sea-poppies) of some poem, story or novel that has yet to germinate.

These seeds also lead us down to the molecular level of Lawrence's writing, where we find a mobilisation of repeated and scattered words, letters, syllables and phonemes. The short passage repeats several words and phrases ('silvery', 'wind', 'row', 'foam', 'gulls swinging', 'flat', 'world', 'shore', 'sky') while also making audible correspondences between the letters of words such as 'ferry' and 'flat silvery'; 'row' and 'foam' and the repetition of 'no'; the insistence of *or* in 'horn', 'born', 'shore'. There is also the almost monotonous echo of 'ing', heard not only in the present participle verbs ('banging', 'coming', 'swinging', 'running', 'advancing', 'fluttering') but also in 'beginning', 'evening', 'shingle', 'buildings'.

These open vowel sounds seem to punctuate the writing, creating a swaying, trance-like rhythmicity.

We might read this repetition and play of phonemes as anticipating, in some mystical way, the chanting and rhythmic dancing of Native American ceremonies, which Lawrence observed in New Mexico. Lawrence was fascinated by the 'heavy rhythmic stamp' and 'low, sombre, secretive chant-call' (*Mornings*, 86) of the Hopi Snake Dance and the beating of the drum, which was like 'a heart beating with insistent thuds' (*Mornings*, 63). Luke Ferretter has noted that, in Lawrence's own interpretation of the snake dance, each feature or detail acted as a 'means of coming into closer contact with the dark sun at the centre of the earth'.¹⁸ In the letter from Littlehampton, written long before Lawrence ever encountered the Hopi tribe, it appears that Lawrence is already trying to get closer to the nonhuman world through the repetition of certain words and syllables, which accumulate to form a weird 'chant-call' or heartbeat of letters. Lawrence's use of repetition has been both ridiculed and lauded by critics in equal measure over the years.¹⁹ Yet rather than viewing the repetitiveness of his writing as evidence of either his stylistic failure or success, we might see it as essential to a unique *animistic* mode of writing that seeks, like the chanting and drumming of the Hopi

¹⁸ Luke Ferretter, *The Glyph and the Gramophone: DH. Lawrence's Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 57.

¹⁹ For example, one contemporary critic, writing in the *Star* in 1915, complains that, in *The Rainbow*, the 'thud, thud, thud of the hectic phrases is intolerably wearisome. They pound away like engines, grinding out a dull monotonous tune of spiritless sensuality'; similarly, Lawrence's friend, Catherine Carswell, in a 1915 review of *Sons and Lovers*, writes about his 'distressing tendency to the repetition of certain words and a curiously vicious rhythm' (see R.P. Draper (ed.), *D.H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1970), 93, 101). W.H. Auden, in his evaluation of Lawrence's poetry in *The Dyer's Hand*, is far more favourably disposed, suggesting that, '[i]n his poetry he manages to make a virtue out of what in his prose is often a vice, a tendency to verbal repetition' (*The Dyer's Hand* (London: Faber, 2012), 206).

ceremonies, to speak to the living world beyond the human 'subject'. Here life writing is not only transformed into something that reaches beyond the human auto/biographical sphere, but is also that which calls life forth, addressing it in order to call it into being through the power of a certain provisional and incantatory epistolary force.

Furthermore, like the other that he is calling up from beyond the limits of language, Lawrence is himself 'half-born' in this enchanting call of writing. For there is no determinate 'Lawrence' for us to keep hold of—the 'we' he speaks of at the start of the letter quickly becomes intertwined with the swinging gulls, foam and waves, the fluttering sea-poppies. We might, without subjecting Lawrence to any kind of graphoanalysis, look briefly at his *handwriting* as a way of thinking about the inextricable interlacing of writer and writing. In the letter (see Figures 1 and 2) we see that words are joined up by the strokes of 't's and the dots of 'i's, both merging with a letter from the next word. This creates a sense of movement: a wind-swept gesturing (particularly at the top of figure 2) that emulates or countersigns the scene Lawrence is trying to get down in words. In Figure 1 especially, the writing seems to course forwards in little waves, in words such as 'beginning', 'coming' and also 'running', which visually reproduce the tiny wavelets it is describing—no longer in words but as little sketches of the water's rolling movement. Such material *wavering* is mirrored in what Garrett Stewart would call the 'transegmental drift' or 'transegmental spreading'²⁰—terms denoting the way that words drift, spread into and away from their neighbours and themselves—that Lawrence's letter seems to conjure in the playful movement from 'seagull's wing' to 'seagulls swing'. Thus Lawrence's 'own' writing—in its

²⁰ See Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley, LA and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 177 and *passim*.

syntactical and linguistic vicissitudes, but also in the visual materiality of the handwritten text—becomes almost indistinguishable from the ‘windy flourish of the seed-horns’ (denoting thriving or blossoming *and* an extravagant gesture, a stylistic element) and the seagulls’ ‘swinging [and *winging*] between the sky and shore’.²¹

All of these factors work towards a dispersal of the letter’s point of view, eroding, like a tide, its own biographical use-value. We see this undermining of the individual human perspective and life constantly at work in Lawrence’s texts. For example, when he is set the task of writing about the creation and achievements of his own literary oeuvre in the introduction to McDonald’s *Bibliography*, Lawrence seems incapable of beginning to write without first *decentring* his human self:

There doesn’t seem much excuse for me, sitting under a little cedar tree at the foot of the Rockies, looking at the pale desert disappearing westward, with hummocks of shadow rising in the stillness of the incipient autumn, this morning, the near pine trees perfectly still, the sunflowers and the purple Michaelmas daisies moving for the first time, this morning, in an invisible breath of breeze, to be writing an introduction to a bibliography. (*Phoenix*, 232)

In the act of writing, Lawrence is himself ‘disappearing westward’ into the ‘pale desert’ amongst ‘Michaelmas daisies’. His writing is coming to life, respiring with the ‘invisible breath of breeze’. We begin to see that, in Lawrence, the idea of ‘life writing’ is transformed, denoting writing that attends to all forms of life, not only human, and doing so in a way that is itself *animated*—in its provisionality, its uncreatedness, its calling out to life.

²¹ ‘Swing’ means both ‘to waver, vacillate; to change from one condition or position to the opposite’ and—in an obsolete form—‘to toil or labour’ (*OED*), evoking the crafting and handiwork of a letter.

Writing in the Intervals

Returning to Cixous's sense that letters are the 'prehistory of literature' and what, later on in *Manhattan*, she calls the 'understory of writing, before the appeasement'²², I want to begin to travel further down into the provisional spaces of Lawrence's epistolary writing. Moving away from the gleaming, affirmative world of the Littlehampton letter, we might move towards something equally wild but perhaps more dangerous. Both 'prehistory' and 'understory' seem to name a kind of burrow of writing, a chthonic or unconscious space which precedes the final (and necessary) domestication of the written object. My reading in this section tunnels between two letters, respectively addressed to Mark Gertler and S.S. Koteliansky, and both of which written while Lawrence and Frieda were living in Zennor, Cornwall. I will begin with the later letter in order to enact a kind of reading backwards, deploying a meandering or snaking reading that might lead a text back to its own 'understory'. In this second letter—written on 25th November 1916 to 'Kot', a Russian translator and editor—we find ourselves in a strange kind of epistolary burrow:

This is a kind of interval in my life like a sleep. One only wanders through the dim short days, and reads, and cooks, and looks across at the sea. I feel as if I also were hibernating, like the snakes and dormice.—I saw a most beautiful brindled adder, in the spring, coiled up asleep with her head on her shoulder. She did not hear me until I was very near. Then she must have felt my motion, for she lifted her head like a queen to look, then turned and moved slowly and with delicate pride into the bushes. She often comes into my mind again, and I think I see her asleep in the sun, like a Princess of the fairy world. It is queer, the intimation of other worlds, which one catches.
(*Letters*, III, 40)

²² Cixous, *Manhattan*, 84.

In this letter, Lawrence seems to have vacated his own 'life' altogether—he is barely living, or living only in 'a sleep'. *This* is a kind of sleep-writing. This idea is also suggested by the deictic use of 'this' in the first sentence, which might refer to 'this' time in Lawrence's life, but also creates a *burrow*, seeming to refer also to the time of 'this' letter or even paragraph, the one he is in the process of writing: this interval. It provokes the question: how might a letter, or writing itself, be a kind of 'interval'? 'Interval' (from the Latin *intervallum*) originally denoted a 'space between palisades or ramparts' (*OED*), a kind of no-man's-land between structures of self-defence. In this letter the 'ramparts' might correspond to letter-writer and addressee, Lawrence and Koteliansky, but also perhaps the categories of auto/biography and literature. Thus the letter becomes a ghostly ever-present 'here', the intervallic matter that exists between writer and reader, life writing and the literary, a secluded burrow in which to hibernate 'like the snakes and dormice'.

There is also a sense in this letter of the interval as a space of unconscious life in the way Lawrence describes his somnambulistic activities: 'One only wanders through the dim short days, and reads, and cooks'. As this letter itself wanders, it becomes reminiscent of Lawrence's suggestion, in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, that writing is primarily an unconscious activity wherein 'novels and poems come unwatched from out of one's pen' (*Psychoanalysis/Fantasia*, 65). This relates to his reading of Melville, who, he suggests, 'invariably wrote from a sort of dream-self' (*Classic American*, 125), prefiguring Derrida's characterisation of Cixous: 'she writes by dream'.²³ Lawrence's texts teach us that some writing takes place in and by way of such unconscious, oneiric intervals, coming of its own

²³ Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say...*, translated by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 75.

accord, like the female adder that ‘often comes into [Lawrence’s] mind again’. As such, we might read this letter as a powerful manifestation of (as I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis) Lawrence’s tautological ‘living unconscious life’.

In a similar vein, we might consider what Lawrence wrote to Bertrand Russell, just a few months after the ‘interval’ letter: ‘Do for your very pride’s sake become a mere nothing, a mole, a creature that feels its way and doesn’t think’ (*Letters*, II, 547). Lawrence seems to be affirming here that life—the impersonal, ‘unnameable’ life of the ‘not me’—is something that takes place in burrows, in the undergrowth, in unconscious darkness. It is blind or blinded but also, perhaps, *blinding* in its dark *impersonality*. The letter to Koteliansky is similarly committed to some kind of impersonality: not only in its sense of the intervallic but also its curious movement between ‘one’ and ‘I’. In this movement, differential, incongruous selves are generated: the auto/biographical ego is shown to be manifold, refracted. ‘One’ has the effect of universalising the action of reading, cooking and looking ‘across at the sea’, making it difficult to pin down *who* exactly is doing these things. The next sentence makes this far stranger, for it suggests that the ‘I’ of the text is in hibernation (‘I feel as if *I* also were hibernating’). Hibernation in animals and plants is a dormant state, which is half way between life and death, between being and not-being: ‘half-born’, perhaps. Lawrence’s is a hibernating writing. In its dormancy, the hibernation of the ‘I’, this letter forms a hidden epistolary burrow that biography cannot gain access to. Or rather, we might say that, in this letter, while the human ‘I’ is asleep, we are able to glimpse another mode of perception and writing, foreign and fragmented like the ‘intimations of other worlds, which one catches’. Moreover, like the beautiful adder of whom Lawrence dreams, there is the suggestion of something profoundly

dangerous asleep in this writing: the 'I' is left defenceless, there are no protective 'ramparts' in this intervallic textuality.

What, then, is the significance of Lawrence's burrowing dream-creature, his sleeping female adder who seems to visit (and is visited by) the writer in 'this' strange waking-sleep? An adder is a venomous snake, part of the viper family, and the only poisonous snake in Britain. 'Viper' is a contraction of the Latin *vivipara* (made from *vivus*: 'alive, living') and *parere*, 'to bring forth, give birth to'. Adders are thought to carry this name because they bear live young (rather than lay eggs as many other snakes do). In the context of Lawrence's writing, we might extend this etymology of 'viper' (as a living birth), to name a life force that *gives birth* to a life-long literary interest in snakes. Before the Zennor encounter there is only one reference to a snake or snakes (as far as I am aware) in Lawrence's writing. This occurs in the 1912 novel *The Trespasser*, set on the Isle of Wight, where the sea is described as 'creep[ing] nearer, nearer, like a snake which watches two birds asleep. It may not disturb them, but sinks back, ceasing to look at them with its bright eye' (*Trespasser*, 68). The similarity of this scene to the man-adder encounter in the Zennor letter is quite remarkable—but in the later example, it is Lawrence who is the menacing watcher, regarding the sleeping creature with his 'bright eye' of writing.

Snakes, and snakes-as-letters, 'hibernate'—which also suggests (if we acknowledge the word's hidden 'natal' form) *gestate*. In a letter to Asquith about her husband's war-poetry, written on the same day as the Koteliensky letter, we see that Lawrence is unable to shake the image of the snake: 'it is the writing of a poet, thank God. Only let him burst through the dry dead old self that is on him, like a snake, come out of his fresh, real self' (*Letters*, III, 38). Like Herbert Asquith

who must 'burst through' and 'come out of his fresh, real self', the address encounter seems to open up to a whole series of writings haunted by snakes: from the dead adder in *St. Mawr* (1925) which is the cause of a near-fatal accident (*St. Mawr*, 77–8), to the novel *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), where Lawrence's protagonist Kate Leslie, sees Mexican sculptures of 'snakes coiled like excrement [an odd mirror-image of the female adder 'coiled up asleep'], snakes fanged and feathered beyond all dreams of dread' (*Serpent*, 79).

The most well-known of the adderish iterations of Lawrence's oeuvre is undoubtedly the poem 'Snake'. In 'Snake', the female adder mutates or evolves somewhat, she takes on a different aspect and gender: no longer 'brindled' but 'golden', no longer English but Italian, no longer a 'queen' but a 'king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld' (*Poems*, 305). Yet she can still unmistakably be seen as a textual relative or precursor of the creature that the poem's speaker sees before him at his water trough. Thinking about the speaker of the poem's notion of being a 'second comer' to his 'water-trough' (*Poems*, 303), Dyer asks:

Who can say when a poem begins to stir, to germinate, in the soil of the writer's mind? There are certain experiences waiting to happen: like the snake at Lawrence's water trough, the poem is already there, waiting for him. The poem is waiting for circumstance to activate it to occasion its being written.²⁴

Dyer's notion of the poem 'waiting for circumstance to activate it' recalls Walter Benjamin's image in 'The Storyteller' of 'those seeds of grain that have lain for centuries in the airtight chambers of the pyramids and have retained their germinative power to this day'.²⁵ Benjamin's analogy relates to Cixous's notion of

²⁴ Dyer, 113.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', translated by Harry Zohn, *Selected Writings, Volume III: 1935–38*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 148.

the ‘prehistory of literature’—it speaks of a text’s hibernation, its ability to wait, like an animal or plant biding its time, to live again. In the context of Lawrence’s letters, we might also call this an ‘unconscious of literature’, a space of literary pre-echoes or seeds. Like a latent unconscious force, the address represents something lying dormant or inert, ready to come to life at some later appointment—or perhaps *never* to slither forth into consciousness, never to germinate.

‘Snake’, the poem, might therefore be itself called a ‘second comer’, born-again out of the seeds of its own prehistoric writing. Towards the end of the poem, the poisonous snake that the speaker watches drink his water, disappears into a hole after the man throws a ‘clumsy log’ at it:

Writhed like lightning, and was gone
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination. (*Poems*, 304)

In these lines, the poem shares something of the letter’s sense of a holed-up space of enchanted and fascinating writing: an underground ‘understory’, as Cixous might say, where snakes are spirit-royalty who live beneath the earth of writing. The ‘black hole’ in ‘Snake’ is both a figure for the unconscious and for some sort of repressed or hidden anality, which Lawrence’s many snakes ineluctably allude to.

Another significant, but much less familiar, example of the weird and threatening ‘queerness’ of snakes, is the 1922 short story ‘England, My England’, which seethes with references to serpents. In this story, a newly-married couple, Egbert and Winifred, move to Crockham Cottage, somewhere in Hampshire near the South Downs (although it was written while he was living at Greatham in neighbouring West Sussex), a place which is at once idyllic and dangerously wild,

an insidious wildness that will eventually blight the lives of everyone in the family. ‘Strange’, we are told, ‘how the savage England lingers in patches: as here, amid these shaggy gorse commons, and marshy, snake-infested places near the foot of the south downs’ (*England*, 5). Here, snakes make up part of what Robert Macfarlane would call the ‘English eerie’—the unsettling, uncanny and potentially dangerous elements lurking in and *infesting* the common picturesque and pastoral vision of the ‘English countryside’.²⁶ This ‘savage’ eeriness in the story intensifies when we learn that:

Crockham had changed their blood: the sense of snakes that lived or slept even in their own garden, in the sun, so that he, going forward with the spade, would see a curious coiled brownish pile on the black soil, which suddenly would start up, hiss, and dazzle rapidly away, hissing. (*England*, 8)

In this long and winding sentence, something strange happens from one side of the colon to the other. After the colon we think we are going to get an explanation—some reason or detail of what had ‘changed their blood’—but the example we are given, the moving image of the snake that ‘would start up, hiss’ and then ‘dazzle rapidly away, hissing’, seems to wind in upon itself, in the rhyming of ‘coil’ and ‘soil’, the repetition of ‘hiss’, becoming dizzyingly *agrammatical* in its spiralling of clauses. Here again, in the weird ‘black soil’ and ‘brownish pile’ (recalling the image of ‘snakes coiled like excrement’ in *The Plumed Serpent*), and the fear of the phallic snake that ‘starts up’, there is an overwhelming sense of some sort of anal horror *and* desire. We might say that at the heart of Lawrence’s singular writing—the provisional aesthetic born in epistolarity—there lives a ‘curious’, dangerous snake. We see this in such snaky recurrences in his

²⁶ Robert Macfarlane, ‘The Eeriness of the English Countryside’, *Guardian* (10th April 2015). <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/10/eeriness-english-countryside-robert-macfarlane>. Consulted 1st May 2017. [08:22 GMT]

oeuvre, which work backwards to draw out what is potentially very threatening about Lawrence's 'beautiful' female adder: what is lurking, 'queer' and venomous behind the letter-writer's apparently innocent sense of wonder.

Snakes in 'England, My England' are also opposed, both literally and figuratively, to human connection and fellow feeling, traits which, in the Leavisite tradition of Lawrence scholarship, have been typically associated with the affirmative Lawrencian gesture. Egbert, we learn, is:

Always moving on—from place to place, friend to friend: an always swinging away from sympathy. As soon as sympathy, like a soft hand, was reached out to touch him, away he swerved, instinctively, as a harmless snake swerves and swerves away from an outstretched hand. Away he must go. (*England*, 25)

Away: this is the life of a (harmless) snake, a movement of 'swerving' which is heterogeneous to the connectedness of 'sympathy'. Again we might pick up the work of 'transegmental drift' in 'always swinging', which can be heard as 'always winging'—making Egbert both a land animal, the most lowly creature, closest to the earth (in Genesis, God condemns the snake to slither forever on the earth: 'upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life'²⁷), but also the most high, a 'winging' bird or bat, *swerving* through the air. Kirsty Martin's recent book, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy* (2013) argues that, 'a level of instinctive, intuitive sympathy remains essential to Lawrence'.²⁸ But in his snake-writing (by which I mean the many references to snakes in his oeuvre but also the snake-like coiling and winding of his prose), we see that Lawrence, like Egbert, is always 'swerving' or 'swinging' away from anything like human 'sympathy' or affect.

²⁷ Genesis 3:15, *The Bible: King James Version* (London: Penguin, 2006), 5.

²⁸ Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 134.

This sense that Lawrence's very writing might be in some way snake-like is particularly evident when we turn our focus to the second Zennor letter, written just after Lawrence *first* encountered his female adder, in the spring of 1916. In this letter, addressed to the painter Mark Gertler, there is much more of a focus on the snake's movements and body (perhaps more painterly to suit his addressee's sensibility), leading us to further consider the way she seems to worm herself in to all sorts of unexpected burrows:

The sun is very hot, it is like summer. Yesterday I saw an adder sleeping on the grass. She was very slim and elegant, with her black markings. At last she was disturbed, she lifted her slender head and listened with great delicacy. Then, very fine and undulating, she moved away. I admired her intensely, and I liked her very much. If she were a familiar spirit, she was a dainty and superb princess. (*Letters*, II, 599)

In this passage we begin to see how the snake becomes such an unforgettable, haunting, 'familiar spirit'. These descriptions recall the seductive charm of the ur-snake, the devious tempter in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 'the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field'; in Milton's *Paradise Lost* the serpent is 'wily'.²⁹ While (unlike her Biblical counterpart) this particular snake does not *speak* as such, Lawrence notes her 'black markings', which serve as a kind of hypnotic writing—a message or postcard, perhaps, that intercepts or interrupts Lawrence's own letter, compelling him to countersign her. Reading the patterns and movements of her body attentively, Lawrence is seduced by the snake's alluring writing: his prose seems to *writhe* with admiring pairs of adjectives: 'fine and undulating', 'dainty and superb', 'slim and elegant', 'slender' and 'delicate'. Language itself *undulates* between these rhapsodic and gyrating descriptions. But there is also a sense that the writing (in a fit of ophidiophobia perhaps) runs away

²⁹ Genesis 3:1–2, 5; John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 209.

with or from itself, unable to really say what the adder is or is *like*, ending only with the rather flat or unimaginative image of a 'princess', which, as we have already seen, gets recycled in the later letter.

Lawrence's apparent inability to record the snake is reminiscent of Dickinson's attempts to describe her 'Narrow fellow in the grass'. In her poem we share the unsettling experience of the speaker who mistakes a serpent for a piece of rope or leather:

But when a Boy and Barefoot
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone—³⁰

There is no evidence that Lawrence was at all familiar with Dickinson's poetry, but their writings, particularly about animals and plants, share a very similar aesthetic of enchantment and an often chillingly perceptive attentiveness to the nonhuman world. Like the speaker of Dickinson's poem, Lawrence wants to say what the addressee *is*, using more and more adjectives. He wants to catch her but she, too, 'wrinkle[s] And [is] gone', untouchable in her otherness. In both Dickinson's poem and Lawrence's writing, snakes appear to be something uncannily phallic (Dickinson's speaker is, tellingly, 'a boy') while also working to 'unbraid' or unravel the desire for mastery and subjectivity that constitutes phallogocentrism. All that Lawrence and Dickinson's 'boy' 'catch' in the wake of their snakes are those 'queer [...] intimations of other worlds', glimpses and fragments of hidden, unknowable life.

³⁰ Emily Dickinson, '986', *Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 459–60.

The snakes that Lawrence and Dickinson turn loose in their writing represent textual forces of undulation, perhaps akin to what Cixous calls a letter's 'manoeuvre'. Lawrence's female adder tells us something about the letter's capacity to craftily change tack, always plotting to turn away from its destination, to engender new addressees and modes of address, burrow into new texts, engendering a weird proliferation of nonhuman gestures and earthy intimations. The letter's manoeuvre is also, as I suggested earlier, something dangerous, in its propensity for unravelling subjectivity. And, it must be noted, '*manoeuvre*' contains a snakelike *venom*—a risk of death, or at least a nasty, unexpected bite. Lawrence writes in another manoeuvre: 'when I see a snake winding rapidly in the marshy places, I think I am mad' (*Letters*, II, 339). This winding and marshy madness is perhaps what takes place in the intervals between the two letters, between spring and early winter, and the movement between addressees (in this case Kotliansky and Gertler, but also us, the ones who intercept the letters after the fact). The address is always deferred: she *errs* as she manoeuvres. Since this first snake letter, Lawrence's initial encounter with the snake, the address's *address* has also *erred*. She does not keep still in language or genres, she proceeds to return, haunting Lawrence's writing in so many winding and latent forms. Finally, it might be said that the adder's letters are always addressed to another, neither to Gertler nor Kotliansky, but to someone or something with no fixed address, who cannot be determined or destined towards.

Uncanny Life

In September 1927 Lawrence and Frieda were living in Irschenhausen near Munich, staying for some weeks in a house owned by Frieda's sister (Else Jaffe-

Richthofen). From this Bavarian Alpine retreat, Lawrence writes to the Wilkinsons, a family of puppeteers³¹ who were the Lawrences' neighbours for almost two years when they lived at the Villa Mirenda, just outside of Florence. The letter begins quite benignly, with a discussion of the weather, but quickly descends into a mass of chaotic descriptions that seem to leap off the page as you read it. Here is an extract:

We lead an uneventful life—the mountains come and go and lovely is the show—sort of thing [...]—The woods are simply uncanny with mushrooms, all sorts and sizes and shapes and smells, in camps and circles and odd ones—the brightest red, the whitest white, the blackest black, the seaweediest green—and we pick the little orange-yellow ones and eat them fried in butter.—The dark blue autumn gentian is out—and the deer are about—little roe-buck—they fly across the paths just like a Persian picture—and then they stop fascinated by my famous little white jacket. The jays are so cheeky they almost steal the tears out of your eyes. I really like it here—but when it's dark and rainy then you sing: 'A little ship was on the sea'—for the oceans of old Time seem to sweep over you. (*Letters*, VI, 158)

After sweeping aside the familiarly Wordsworthian 'The Rainbow comes and goes, / And lovely is the Rose'³² (through which Lawrence seems to be at once affirming and lampooning his own propensity for Romanticism), the letter quickly adopts a much stranger way of looking at the nonhuman world, taking on a weirdly *animistic* character. While Lawrence's personal interest in aboriginal religion and animism has been critically mapped, by Ferretter and others, little has been done in the way of demonstrating how this animistic thinking relates to the formal and linguistic aspects of his writing. Ferretter regards animism in Lawrence's texts as thematic, often evaluating how accurately Lawrence portrayed Native American religion, and discussing the novellas *The Woman Who*

³¹ Arthur Wilkinson, to whom this letter is addressed (along with his wife, Lilian) is described by Lawrence as a 'puppet-show man' (*Letters*, VI, 168).

³² See William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', *Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 297.

Rode Away and *St. Mawr* in terms of how animism is used in these texts as a kind of plot device or philosophical backbone to the texts.³³ However, my contention here is that animism cannot just be read as the theme or content of Lawrence's writing. Rather it is detectable on another level of textuality: in his syntax, language, rhetoric, and so on.

In this letter to the Wilkinsons, for example, the sense of the animistic is perhaps most conspicuous in the description of the woods as 'uncanny with mushrooms [...] in camps and circles and odd ones'. This is an odd formulation, not only in terms of its grammar, but also in the evocation of uncanniness—of something, in Schelling's definition, 'that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.³⁴ The striking fungal image is repeated in a letter written a day earlier to his sister-in-law, Else Jaffe, where Lawrence notes: 'The woods are simply populated with mushrooms, all sorts, in weird camps everywhere' (*Letters*, VI, 157). What is perhaps most *uncanny* about both of these descriptions, then, is the notion that the mushrooms seem to be vividly animate, setting up 'in weird camps' about the wood, 'populating' it, as if they were warriors before a battle. Such magical and anthropomorphic thinking is key for understanding Lawrence, a writer who never let go of the belief (which he insists upon in his essay on Edgar Allen Poe) that 'all material things have a form of sentience, even the inorganic' (*Classic American*, 77). Making yet another Dickinsonian comparison, we might think here of her strange image 'the

³³ See Luke Ferretter, *The Glyph and the Gramophone: DH. Lawrence's Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³⁴ Quoted in Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII, edited and translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 224.

Mushroom is the Elf of Plants'.³⁵ The anthropomorphic animation of the mushroom in both Lawrence and Dickinson's writings is the work of a subtle poetic turn, an attempt to capture the protean character of a fungus in writing. By employing such anthropomorphism, Lawrence (along with Dickinson) interrogates its limits—that is to say the limits of knowing and representation of the nonhuman other—and, by doing so, we might say he also *writes* at the limits or brink of the human. For, on one hand, anthropomorphism tells us almost nothing (being only a mirror of the human), on the other hand, it can be employed to open up the field of thinking about nonhuman life. Mushrooms have their own life, Lawrence is suggesting, a life which cannot (and, conversely, can *only*) be accessed through human metaphors. Not only does Lawrence's letter foreshadow recent scientific discoveries concerning the sentience of mushrooms³⁶, it also suggests something about the relation between writing and animism, the singular and even *magical* way language can animate its subject, making everything new and strange, while also gesturing towards a kind of unconscious or intervallic thought. With his mushrooms, Lawrence leads us back into the undergrowth to something which cannot fully be interpreted or read.

In Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, mushrooms are an analogy for limitless and irretrievable aspects of the work of dreams. Freud's mushrooms are hidden in a little footnote, where he discusses 'the spot where [the dream] reaches down into the unknown':

³⁵ Emily Dickinson, '1298', *Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber), 565.

³⁶ Mycologist Paul Stamets calls the mycelium, the fibrous underground web of connected tissue from which mushroom 'fruits' emerge, 'an exposed sentient membrane, aware and responsive to changes in its environment'; *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Save the World* (Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 3.

The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.³⁷

The mushroom-like nature of dreams, or ‘dream-thoughts’, makes them finally unreadable, for they ‘cannot [...] have any definite endings’. If we follow a dream, we find ourselves in the vast tangle of the mycelium, the weird connective tissue that is the real, underground life of fungi (the mushroom is merely a fruiting body that grows up in order to reproduce). The passage from the Wilkinson letter is itself a kind of dream-theatre, a thinking (or dreaming) about unknowable nonhuman life, which disperses the human or analytic work of reading through a kind of ‘intricate network’ or ‘meshwork’ of descriptions. Everything is sinuously connected by the dashes, *between* which grow strange descriptions and metaphors, mushroom-like. Geoffrey Bennington, reading Hegel, describes the figure of the fungal as relating to a kind of ‘pre-dialectical growth’³⁸, an idea which is perhaps analogous to Freud’s characterisation of the unconscious as knowing no negation, no contradiction. This letter to the Wilkinsons similarly creates this kind of ‘pre-dialectical’ or unconscious mushroom-effect: it invites us to read it with a non-oppositional mode of reading, a reading which does not pit writing against life, or the inanimate against the animate, but instead makes the text balloon with little pockets, its own mushrooms of animated writing.

Furthermore, Lawrence’s letter plays at the limits between reality and fiction—it unleashes a kind of *magic*. In *H.C. For Life*, Derrida argues that ‘the effect, both affective and effective, of a performative is always magical in

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume IV (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 525.

³⁸ Geoffrey Bennington, ‘Personal Growth’, *Oxford Literary Review*, 23 (2001), 144.

appearance. It always operates as if by an enchantment'.³⁹ This connects to the forms of enchantment that Lawrence conveys in the Irschenhausen scene: the encampment of mushrooms, the mountains that 'come and go', the jays who steal your tears (like tricky, bewitched creatures from Aesop's fables), and the deer who leap so fast they seem to fly through time and space. As we consume Lawrence's mushrooms, we are subject to a kind hallucination or waking-dream, a palpable *mushrooming* of imagery or description that momentarily puts us under its spell. Here and elsewhere, Lawrence's writing produces an effect (at once real and illusory) of delirious fascination, because, as his letters demonstrate, it appears to make itself magically come to life: it is writing that performatively imbues *itself* with a living spirit, something that the Wilkinson's, as puppeteers, might well have appreciated.

To change tack slightly (like 'a little ship [...] on the sea'), we might begin to think this about this illusory or hallucinatory nature of the text in relation to something more inorganic, in terms of an attention to the mechanical, to automatism or (keeping the letter's addressees' profession in mind) a *puppetry* of writing. We read this mechanisation, first of all, in the writing's sense of listing or recital and the slightly contrived rhyming (perhaps inaugurated by the parodic Wordsworth echo at the start) of lines such as 'the dark blue autumn gentian is out—and the deer are about'. This turning-machine of the text is also at work in the way the scene is framed as a 'Persian picture'. Ancient Persian painting is distinctive in its highly stylised depiction of hunting scenes (and other royal activities), using a foreshortened, flattening out of perspective. This 'Persian picture' allusion does something to the Irschenhausen scene and its 'roe-buck'

³⁹ Derrida, *H.C. for Life*, 112.

deer: they become suddenly unreal, inanimate, turned into a painting, a flat and motionless tableau, re-staged far away from the German mountains, in another time and place altogether. Rather than animation, this seems to be a strange case of *inanimation*, in its foregrounding of the inorganic, inanimate and technological nature of writing. The roe-buck become like puppets whose strings have just been cut, exposing them for what they are—motionless words on a flat page. And yet, this mechanicity is not opposed to the passage’s magical performativity, its sense of being wildly alive with motion, gesticulation and uncanny sentience. Rather, these apparently dialectical elements—the mechanical and the animate, the living and the technological—are essential to the gesture of Lawrence’s prose, coming to resemble a kind of anthropomorphic *puppetry* of writing.

There is a well-documented link between puppets (and automata, dolls) and writing. Kenneth Gross’s *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (2011) draws a specific link between puppetry and writing, arguing that ‘a theory of puppets might be a theory of literature, as well as a theory of life’.⁴⁰ With all his talk of vitality and ‘living life’, it might seem somewhat perverse to associate Lawrence’s writing with puppet drama, which, as Gross suggests, ‘is a theatre in which dead things, even a kind of dead acting, are asked to reanimate the stage’.⁴¹ But Lawrence clearly also possessed a kind of subtle fascination for puppetry, and weird descriptions of marionettes and dolls appear at many points in his fiction and non-fiction writing. Following some of these examples, we might begin to think about how the notion of what Gross calls ‘dead acting’ might actually underpin Lawrence’s ‘life of writing’: Lawrence’s letters inspire a thinking of

⁴⁰ Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: an Essay on Uncanny Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 9.

⁴¹ Gross, 5.

writing as a kind of puppet-art, not only in the fact that they are (all but a few) brought into being with the aid of hands but, more importantly, in the way that they animate that which seems to be inanimate, absent (the time and place from which Lawrence is writing) or dead (marks of writing itself).

Lawrence mentions attending a puppet show in Baden-Baden a month after the letter to the Wilkinsons, but he had also been to other shows, most notably in Palermo, Sicily.⁴² It is telling that a description of a puppet show makes up most of the final section of *Sea and Sardinia* (1921) and clearly has a profound effect on Lawrence. On seeing the puppets moving on stage he writes:

At first one is all engaged watching the figures: their brilliance, their blank, martial stare, their sudden angular gestures. There is something extremely suggestive in them. How much better they fit the old legend-tales than living people do. Nay, if we are going to have human beings on the stage, they should be masked and disguised. For in fact drama is enacted by symbolic creatures formed out of human consciousnesses: puppets if you like: but not human *individuals*. Our stage is all so wrong, so boring in its personality. (*Sea*, 189)

Here Lawrence conceives of puppets as somehow more real than human actors could be, even more alive or animate. Moreover, this scene calls attention to ‘something extremely suggestive’ in the puppets, they seem to be hyper-salient, to signify more, manifesting some entirely other existence. This is perhaps related to the way that puppets dislodge what Lawrence sees as the ‘personality’ of ‘our stage’—by which he is referring not only, presumably, to modern, Western European theatre productions, but to the *human* on stage more generally. Puppets are perhaps another way of expressing the ‘not *me*’ or the ‘unnameable me’: a ‘me’ that is somehow more *me*, more alive, by gesturing towards some dark secret of the unconscious, the ‘intimation of other worlds’, perhaps. Here again we can see

⁴² Lawrence also reviewed *The Peep Show*, a book by Walter Wilkinson, the brother of Arthur Wilkinson, on life as a travelling puppeteer (See *Phoenix*, 372–6).

how Lawrence anticipates and heavily influences Deleuze and Guattari's theory, as we discussed earlier, of 'prepersonal singularities', in this powerfully performative puppetry that would precede any notion of auto/biographical human storytelling.

Earlier in *Sea and Sardinia* there is a sense that Lawrence is playing with a similar kind of *inanimation* to that which operates in the Irschenhausen letter. Attending a Carnival parade in the Sardinian capital, Cagliari, Lawrence is fascinated and horrified by the masked carnival-goers:

Little bunches of maskers and single maskers danced and strutted along in the thick flow under the trees. If you are a mask you don't walk like a human being: you dance and prance along extraordinarily like the life-size Marionettes, conducted by wires from above. That is how you go: with that odd jauntiness as if lifted and propelled by the wires from the shoulders. (*Sea*, 61)

The 'jauntiness' of these 'maskers' engenders a kind of intellectual uncertainty, opening up to the frightening idea that they might not really be human but inhuman 'marionettes', being 'conducted by wires from above'. The weird idea of turning humans into puppets can also be seen elsewhere in Lawrence's writing. For example, in the novella *The Captain's Doll* (1923), a woman called Hannele creates a puppet or doll of the man she is in love with as a way of trying to pin down his 'incalculable presence' (*Ladybird*, 83). Yet the doll she creates seems to be even more real than the man himself. Hannele's friend, Mitchka, upon seeing the puppet exclaims: '*Him!* It is him! No—no—that is too beautiful! No—that is too beautiful, Hannele. It is him—exactly him' (75). Then Mitchka seems almost frightened: "No," [Mitchka] whispered to herself, as if awe-struck. 'That is him. That is him'" (76). The mechanical repetition that the sight of the puppet induces in Mitchka adds to the uncanniness of its hyper-real, vivid life. Reading these examples of puppet-life in Lawrence, we might begin to see that Gross's attempt

to define ‘uncanny life’ falls somewhat short—ultimately because it views puppets, in all their strange animation, as always related to human agents and intentionality, the work of human hands and minds. Contrary to Gross’s sense of the life of puppets and writing, puppetry in Lawrence’s letters and literature is rather to do with a writing that manipulates *its own* strings, taking on its own ‘incalculable presence’, a sheer life of its own. And, what’s more, this uncanny life is something *inorganic*, it is something machine-like and technological, the machine at the heart of all writing. Lawrence, we might say, writes at the borders of writing and life: turning life into (inanimate) writing while, simultaneously, making writing come to life.

Paul de Man, in his reading of puppets in Heinrich von Kleist’s ‘*Über das Marionettentheater*’ also relates the question of marionettes to writing, arguing that:

the machine is like the grammar of the text when it is isolated from its rhetoric, the merely formal element without which no text can be generated. There can be no use of language which is not, within a certain perspective radically formal, i.e. mechanical, not matter how deeply this aspect may be concealed by aesthetic, formalistic delusions.⁴³

De Man’s sense of an autonomic machine of materiality can be seen working in certain formal aspects of Lawrence’s letter to the Wilkinsons. One important, and puppet-like, example of this is Lawrence’s idiomatic use of the dash, the punctuating mark that decorates this passage in a seemingly impulsive and haphazard way. Lawrence appears to replace punctuation, especially full stops (which might denote an endpoint, finishing, a kind of small, punctual death) with these striking dashes. The dash, unlike the full stop, is a mark of speed (as its name suggests) and often implicated in aposiopesis, the figure of speech that denotes a sudden cutting off in mid-sentence. Lawrence uses dashes in a singular way—

⁴³ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figurative Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 294.

Christopher Pollnitz calls them ‘a Lawrence idiosyncrasy’⁴⁴—yet little has been said about how they are put to work in his texts and what effects they produce. It might be helpful, therefore, to attend to what critics have said about another writer’s prolific use of the dash. Deirdre Fagan describes Dickinson’s idiomatic dashes as ‘a thread between the sayable and the unsayable, a caesura between life and death, a pause, a gasp, sometimes a chasm over which one must make a leap of understanding’.⁴⁵ Moreover, the dash signals the absent presence of an ‘unutterable word’.⁴⁶ While I do not want to suggest that the respective use of dashes by Lawrence and Dickinson amounts to the same thing or has exactly the same meaning, Fagan’s reading of Dickinson might shed some light (or perhaps darkness) on Lawrence’s deployment of this enigmatic mark. The ‘leap of understanding’ that the dashes force the reader to make, is like the roe-buck deer who ‘fly across the paths’, and across the page of the letter, too—they are the strings that enable the text to move at such speed and in such a lifelike manner. On one hand, the dashes become like puppet’s strings (‘a caesura between life and death’), vivifying the ‘dead’ text, making writing jump up and speak to us. Yet on the other hand, a dash suggests an omission, an interruption, an ‘unutterable word’, as if there were other things (far stranger than a sentient encampment of mushrooms) hiding in the undergrowth of Lawrence’s text, things that have yet to come to light: still to be written. The dashes also form a connection with *Sea and Sardinia*, which is a text similarly held together by the strings of a marionette, the mysterious mark that draws a line, or line-break, between each of the sections:

⁴⁴ Christopher Pollnitz, ‘D.H. Lawrence’s *Last Poems*: Taking the Right Tack’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 23:3/4 (2000), 514 (n53).

⁴⁵ Deirdre Fagan, ‘Emily Dickinson’s Unutterable Word’, *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 14:2 (2005), 70.

⁴⁶ Fagan, 72.

This line is a relative of the fast little dashes that Lawrence employs in abundance—but it is slower, longer, an extended silence. In this sense, as I have suggested before, the black mark of the dash on the page is similarly a kind of aperture or cut, into another world perhaps, a glimpse into another life—a life line. Every time we encounter the dash or line, something is simultaneously cut off and revealed, an interval is marked out. Here Deleuze and Guattari's '*ligne de fuite*' becomes, in Lawrence's English idiom, *a dash for it*—

This suggestion of otherworldliness is further alluded to in the final few sentences of the passage from the letter: 'the jays are so cheeky they almost steal the tears out of *your* eyes. I really like it here—but when it's dark and rainy then *you sing*: 'A little ship was on the sea'—for the oceans of old Time seem to sweep over *you*'. Here the speaker, the one who signs 'Lawrence', brings another 'incalculable presence' into the letter by turning towards a spectral 'you', who is not quite the letter's addressee and not quite Lawrence himself. Initially, this produces a division, Lawrence is at once 'I' and 'you', and the letter seems to foreground the scattering of a single, unified ego. 'You' comes to act as an address to the indeterminate reader of the letter: the Wilkinsons, me, or *you*. This turn to some unseen 'you' tells us something about the paradox of address more generally. When we speak, write, it is always towards some 'you', but not, perhaps the one who is the intended addressee. Some 'you', in the infinitely plural, always intercepts. In 'The Bad Side of Books' Lawrence gives voice to this idea: 'One writes, even at this moment, to some mysterious presence in the air. If that presence were not there, and one thought of even a single solitary actual reader, the paper would remain forever white' (*Phoenix*, 233). His deictic 'even at

this moment’ is telling: it suggests that any act of writing, *even this one*, in which ‘one’ (again Lawrence depersonalises or *impersonalises* himself, doing away with the subjective ‘I’) participates, whether it be a letter, novel, poem or introduction to a book, can never be addressed to one single reader. It is necessarily always written (whether the writer knows it or not) towards ‘some mysterious presence in the air’, one who is not unified, but rather plural, scattered, spectral. As Derrida argues in ‘Envois’, a letter, as soon as it is dispatched, becomes ‘immediately dispersed or multiplied’, ‘a divided echo of itself’.⁴⁷ Lawrence’s letter is inundated by the unlocatable ‘you’, which seems to emerge—like a mushroom or animated puppet—out of ‘the oceans of old Time’, some kind of ancient past that floods any possibility for auto/biography or ego, carrying us off on its enchanted tide—

Postcards in the Snow

Thus far we have experienced the ways in which Lawrence’s life goes beyond the human auto/biographical parameters assigned to it by contemporary critical discourse. ‘Life writing’, as we know it, is transformed in and by the letters, coming to mean a writing that is provisional, performative, incantatory, *inanimated*. In the final section of this chapter, I seek to collect these traces of life in a reading of one of Lawrence’s finest and perhaps most poetic letters. Written in 1919, while Lawrence was convalescing from a serious bout of pneumonia that almost killed him, this letter extends the notion of the ‘life of writing’ even further in the way it attends to nonhuman writing itself, imagining nonhuman letters as powerful forms of life writing life. On Sunday 9th February 1919, he writes to Katherine Mansfield:

⁴⁷ Derrida, ‘Envois’, 79.

I climbed with my niece to the bare top of the hills. Wonderful to see the footmarks on the snow—beautiful ropes of rabbit prints, trailing away over the brows; heavy hare marks; a fox so sharp and dainty, going over the wall; birds with two feet that hop; very splendid straight advance of a pheasant; wood-pigeons that are clumsy and move in flocks; splendid little leaping marks of weasels, coming along like a necklace chain of berries: odd little filigree of the field-mice; trail of a mole—it is astounding what a world of wild creatures one feels around one, on the hills in the snow. From the height it is very beautiful. The upland is naked, white like silver, and moving far into the distance, strange and muscular, with gleams like skin. Only the wind surprises one, invisibly cold; the sun lies bright on a field, like the movement of a sleeper. It is strange how insignificant, in all this, life seems. Two men, tiny as dots, move from a farm on a snow-slope, carrying hay to the beast. Every moment, they seem to melt like insignificant spots of dust. The sheer, living, muscular white of the uplands absorbs everything. Only there is a tiny clump of trees bare on the hill-top—small beeches—writhing like iron on the blue sky.— (*Letters*, III, 328)

On one hand, this letter is describing the near-absence of any life: this is a ‘bare’ place, marked only by ‘footmarks’, traces which are left behind by creatures no longer on the scene. Lawrence writes that ‘it is strange how insignificant, in all this, life seems’—as if life were happening somewhere else, over the hill, where two men ‘seem to melt like insignificant spots of dust’. And yet, on the other hand, this is perhaps one of the most living texts in Lawrence’s oeuvre. Just as with the mushroom-populated letter to the Wilkinsons, this missive to Mansfield has an animistic quality to it, partly in the way it seems to make an apparently absent or inanimate world appear present and alive. Nicholas Royle, one of the only critics to attend closely to Lawrence’s letters, suggests that this letter to Mansfield is ‘a powerful instance of how letter-writing itself might be thought about in terms of poetico-literary performativity.’⁴⁸ We read Royle’s notion of ‘poetico-literary performativity’ in the idiomatic immediacy of the letter, which creates a strange sense that the text is itself ‘sheer, living’, quick with animal, but also *inhuman*,

⁴⁸ Nicholas Royle, ‘Poetry, Animality, Derrida’, *A Companion to Derrida*, edited by Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), 530.

movement. This is clearly at work in the descriptions of the animal marks that bring to life and make present the absent creatures. As he writes (and we read) the rabbits are ‘trailing away over the brows’, a fox is ‘going over the wall’, a weasel is ‘leaping’ and ‘coming along’. This performative making-present recalls the paradoxical logic of letters more generally. As Janet Gurkin Altman aptly puts it: ‘Epistolary discourse is the language of the “as if” present’.⁴⁹ By attending so carefully to the trails in the snow, Lawrence engages the magical and epistolary force of the ‘as if’, summoning the missing creatures in and through a spectral life writing.

As we have seen before, Lawrence writes life: calling forth the animality of the mark to leap, hop and trail before us. But that is not all: this letter also teaches us that *life itself writes life* (to echo the repeated tautologies at the end of this passage: ‘life itself is life—While we live, let us live’). For it would be impossible to read this letter simply as Lawrence’s *own* writing, coming from a single, human author. Rather, this letter is made up of so many other marks. It is a catalogue of carefully observed scraps and traces of animal and other nonhuman writings. First of all, we have the many inscriptions in the snow, which enter the letter like a kind of cacophony of silent cries. They are at once very readable (Lawrence can, astonishingly, make out and identify the bearer of each ‘footmark’), while also appearing to lead us up the garden path of reading, leading nowhere but ‘away over the brows’. The ‘necklace chain of berries’ of the weasel’s leaping marks can also be seen as a kind of *chain* of signifiers, a chain of living metaphors that carry us off into unknowable territory, they are always one footmark ahead (and this is perhaps what makes them *live*). Then there are the ‘small beeches’ which are

⁴⁹ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 141.

‘writhing like iron *on* the blue sky’, as if the sky itself were a piece of paper or subjectile onto which a message is inscribed. It would not have escaped Lawrence, with his keen eye for tiny marks, that ‘writhing’ is just one letter away from ‘writing’ (Lewis Carroll’s Mock Turtle also makes this punning elision, when the creature claims to have been taught ‘Reeling and Writhing’ at school).⁵⁰ And reading the writhing description of the walk, it is as if everything around him is made up of an intricately woven *text*, like ‘frost-foliage’ and the ‘filigree of a field-mouse’. ‘Filigree’ is ‘jewel work of a delicate kind made with threads and beads, usually of gold and silver’ (*OED*), coming from the Latin *filum* (thread) and *granum* (seed). This etymology leads us back to the *strings* of the uncanny life of the puppet, as well as the infinitesimal seeds or grains of Lawrence’s writing, his phonemes and letters. The ‘filigree’ of Lawrence’s letter can be traced in the alliterative work of ‘frost-foliage’ and ‘*filigree of the field-mice*’, ‘ropes of rabbit prints’ and ‘heavy hare marks’. The threading ‘foliage’ of the writing here indicates a kind of puppet-like animism at the smallest scale of the text, which draws the reader into the letter’s material literality, its own mark-making upon the snow-white page. The intricate pattern of letters formed might initially be thought of in terms of Walter Pater’s sense of the ‘perfectly accomplished metal-work’ of ancient Greek sculpture, which he sees as the dawn of Western art.⁵¹ And yet Lawrence’s letters also seem to elude this traditional sense of the well-wrought and idealised artwork, in that they intertwine and make meaning in unforeseeable ways, like unpredictable puppets, shaking off the work of their writer in order to wreath their own, ever-writhing semantic filigree.

⁵⁰ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: Penguin, 1998), 85.

⁵¹ Walter Pater, *Greek Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 232.

In this careful attention to the many nonhuman inscriptions around him, Lawrence's letter bears a strong resemblance to a passage of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay 'Goethe; or, the Writer':

All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches in the mountain; the river its channel in the soil; the animal its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf its modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or stone. Not a foot steps into the snow, or along the ground, but prints in characters more or less lasting, a map of its march. [...] The ground is all memoranda and signatures.⁵²

We know that Lawrence read and admired Emerson and the two writers certainly share a particular way of perceiving and thinking about life. We might read Emerson's passage as a kind of manifesto on life writing, a new, yet very ancient, 'life of writing' in which it is recognised that everything signs its own life, where the human autobiographical signature (if there can ever be said to be 'one') is just a tiny 'scratch' amongst a whole world of other living writings. Emerson's and, in turn, Lawrence's, description of nonhuman signatures, foreshadows Derrida's radical move of opening writing up to an 'unbounded generalisation', not limited to a certain tradition of human communication and meaning-production.⁵³ In this move, the lines or distinctions between the animate and inanimate, life and death, human and nonhuman/inhuman, are ineluctably disturbed, destabilised—they simply cannot hold.

Furthermore we might see the 'scratches', 'sculptures' and 'epitaphs' that Emerson observes on the earth and, in turn, the pieces of writing Lawrence reads in the snow and sky, as new-old species of epistles, communications, letters, or,

⁵² Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Goethe; or the Writer', *Representative Men: Seven Lectures*, edited by Douglas Emory Wilson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 151.

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, 'The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations', translated by Kathleen McLaughlin, *Philosophy in France Today*, edited by Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 40.

more precisely, postcards. In 'Ulysses Gramophone', Derrida argues that 'any public piece of writing, any open text, is also offered like the exhibited surface, in no way private, of an open letter, and therefore of a postcard'.⁵⁴ In light of this, the animal 'trails' can be read as a series of postcards intercepted by Lawrence, 'public pieces of writing' singularly signed off by their animal authors and open for all (hunting animals, prey animals, poachers, scientists, poets) to read—if not necessarily to fully interpret or comprehend. 'Life writing', the apparently human praxis of auto/biography, is transformed once again to denote a *mesh* of nonhuman epistolary writings, a strange underground network of telecommunications—one that is not limited to the life of animal marks, but also includes the 'living, muscular white of the uplands', the 'invisibly cold' wind, and 'the sun' that 'lies bright on a field, like the movement of a sleeper'. These all imprint their own uncanny marks upon Lawrence's writing. Not only do these inhuman marks or addresses of life multiply the number of (silent yet thronging) 'voices' in the text, making it impossible to pick out any unified and single 'Lawrence', they also extend the notion of life writing to mean something altogether more 'true' to life. What we are left with is a series of snowy footmarks, disappearing into the unknown, scattered like the spores of uncanny mushrooms or the seeds of yellow sea-poppies, dispersing in the wind—

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Ulysses Gramophone', *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 260.

Croydon

9th June

Stagnating here. I am beginning to understand your restlessness.

I'm warding something off, not letting it get near. I ask myself again and again: how can I tell you're not an impostor? For I cannot see you, hear you—only read you and write you...

11th June

After my grandmother died I found an unfinished postcard in her bureau. On the picture side was a photograph of a Danish beach, mottled with seaweeds and white pebbles. On the message side, in my grandmother's handwriting, were the words 'Dear fox' (*Kære ræv*). What was she going to say next (if anything)? Is there a fox to whom we write all our secret letters?

15th June

Really no closer at all. Losing track of your scent more and more, with each word I read. I'm sure they're chasing someone else, a different DHL altogether. And who am I left writing to? In this very moment. I feel dull as a hound, overbred, thick-pawed—

19th June

And this is not exactly where I had imagined myself. In some ways, like you, I was forced to come back here, to London. It's the wrong season for hibernation but some days I don't leave my room until I'm sure there's no one else in the house. You've got me at my most misanthropic. It's fitting,

I suppose. But sometimes, caught off guard, in moments of distraction—I hear it, touch it with my ears and eyes, your enchanting chant, this burning song of writing:

dreamed she heard a singing outside which she could not understand, a singing that roamed round the house, in the fields, and in the darkness. It moved her so that she felt she must weep. She went out, and suddenly she knew it was the fox singing. He was very yellow and bright, like corn. She went nearer to him, but he ran away and ceased singing. He seemed near, and she wanted to touch him. She stretched out her hand, but suddenly he bit her wrist, and at the same instant, as she drew back, the fox, turning round to bound away, whisked his brush across her face, and it seemed his brush was on fire, for it seared and burned her mouth with a great pain

24th June

Near the house here in Purley is a small, scruffy wood where people take their dogs to shit and chase squirrels. But the wood is also full of burrows that I would love to shrink myself into. Foxholes and rabbit burrows, even a badger's sett

25th June

the sense that, beneath all the concrete, there are creatures working underground, making space for themselves, living and dying as I write. I've just read your story 'Second Best' for the first time. Reading it I felt as if it has been waiting for me up ahead, for who-knows-how-long? It flattens me out. I too feel like a mole afraid to emerge from the earth, in case someone is lying in wait there with a cane, ready to crush me. You told BR to *become a mere nothing, a mole, a creature that feels its way and doesn't think*. In 'Second Best', your mole bites and is killed for it. But he

leaves his blood on the page. I cheer on the moles that disrupt the neat,
short lawns of Purley with their earthy fairy rings

30th June

and to somehow record the effects of you. But as soon as I come to write
it down, you have disappeared underground again. I'm lying in bed and
outside at the clouds rolling past, they read me with their indeterminate
shapes, making me read them. Weird paradoxical mole, you are

Nothing I read makes any sense to me. I feel as if I've stumbled onto the
wrong set. A film set, I mean, for the biopic of your life. They'd put the
child-you in shabby tweed and show him writing hurriedly by the window
looking out at the meadows and hills, while your mother called out 'Bert,
Bert!' from another part of the house and the swell of strings suddenly
rises with emotion. I'm getting carried away. No, if I were to make a film
of you it would look like

and every frame veiled with gossamer—

2nd July

Writing from the British Library. People seem to like the rituals of the
place—the stupid, wasteful plastic bag, remembering the one pound coin

for the locker, the pencil—I don't know why but it all makes me so angry
I often fantasise about running wild in the archives and reading rooms,
burning the air with brushes of maddening dream-song, biting anyone
who touches me

But just now I found something—a letter. It's in an odd file of
disorganised papers, muddled early poems, other people's recollections,
acerbic notes to your agent and editors—"important" things, the kind
they all pore over. And then *this letter*. It's the one to MG about the snake
and the seagull in Zennor up on the hill. But I'm overwhelmed by this
letter, the seagull that comes like a messenger, the adder sleeping on the
grass, the subtle spell of it. Everything seems to be

performing for you, like a conjuring show, everything reveals to you its
magic. Or it's as if you have a special trick. It's not just attention.
Wonder, perhaps. You called wonder a *sixth sense* and I think that for you
it really was. A device for reading and receiving the world.
Wondereading, perhaps. The thing is, there's no telling what you might
let in.

As ED says it's—*not precisely Knowing / And not precisely Knowing not*. Gets
us in knots as we read. That's your game

but it's not just the message of the letter that does this—it's also your
writing on the old paper, in pencil—a pencil that clearly needs
sharpening—the trace of the lead, glossy with age, being pressed hard into
the paper and the script is big, filling the page with generously sweeping
characters. As I read the lines become snakes before my eyes curling up
and unwinding, trying to make their bodies resemble letters, often failing
completely, forming unreadable words, wandering off the sheet. Do you

move like an adder so that they cannot catch you? You make them tremble with

Was ordered by the man at the desk not to photograph anything in your file. But I've seen other people photographing all sorts of things—medieval manuscripts, birth certificates. It's weird that it's only yours that must keep its aura. I rarely break the rules but the librarian's now deep in whispered conversation with the security guard, their heads close together and their mouths smiling. I take out my phone from my pocket and—there—it's done. I have you

3rd July

never seen an adder sleeping in the sun—but I've seen a grass snake basking in a flowerbed. And once there was a slow worm on the patio at the summer house and my grandmother's dog, a toy poodle called Trine, was tormenting it as it writhed over the pine needles scattered on the patio, not able to get enough traction to free itself. Trine was pawing at it and angling with her jaws for the putty-smooth body and the slow worm suddenly rose up, the front half of her body lifting as if for an instant charmed,

dreaming she was more than she was, thinking for a moment that she was a viper, a real snake with all the venom of an address. This seemed to throw the poodle off, and the slow worm seized her chance and dropped her tail, losing herself on the pine-flecked patio—and the rest of her squirmed off and was gone in a hole in the earth. Away!

7th July

If I have to read another word about your 'vision' or 'genius'...

I too must leave off a part of myself to go with you—but which part goes where? There must be a kind of bliss in letting drop your own tail, letting a part of you stay in the wolf's mouth. Having the best of both worlds,

living and dying in one breath. Starting to get the hang of this, don't you think?

12th July

writing now on the top floor of Croydon library. I took the bus here from Purley, past the charity shops and public schools, the Swan and Sugarloaf pub which is now a Tesco. You are altogether much closer here. In the library is a kind of soft chaos. It is a wild place that hums with electric lights and photocopiers and old pcs. Many people here, despite the signs designating 'Quiet Study', speak in a constant low gurgle that is dampened by the books and pleather

armchairs. This bedrock of sound is interrupted sometimes by a singular cry, of real pain or anguish, or barks of frustration at the speed of the computers here, which are slow to log on and the mouse frequently disappears as you drag it across the screen. There is a man—I've seen him before—who is always defending himself to (or against) some unseen person or voice, always swearing it wasn't him, begging to be absolved, and then indignant, becoming agitated, the argument reaches a crescendo and he'll suddenly shout out, something intelligible but seething with hurt, clenching fists in the air and making the knuckles strain and whiten. I watch him carry out this operation most days, as he rifles through the day's newspapers, not really reading, but piling them up anyway. I want to get so close to you that I can no longer read you.

On the way out, I stop by the library notice board in the foyer because I see your face. I'm not seeing things, it's really you—one of those early photographs with a high collar and cropped hair, probably when you were working as a teacher in Croydon. You look blond and benevolent, girlish, as if you're about to say something. The picture is part of a poster

that charges us to 'Discover the History of Croydon!'. There's another sepia image showing the old tramline, and one of the old high street. Your face is half-occluded by a flyer pinned on top of it, advertising a 'Bat Walk' around a local park. I take down the email address.

14th July

I think I've started sleepwalking, too. This morning I found myself just outside the garden door, crouching down in bare feet, and holding an empty snail shell in my hand. I had been dreaming I was at a food market in Paris, where the live snails were bagged up together in red plastic net bags. They were moving in a sticky surge—I could hear the viscous noise of them—with only each other's bodies for traction. In their place I would have gone into my shell and stayed there, waited for death. But those snails, they never stopped looking for a way out.

You're far too quick for snails and yet there's something so like a snail about you, the weird impermanence, the shrinking back and the fixing to anything you touch, the marks you leave everywhere. For snails must stick to something, they can't help but make a track wherever they go. They have to curl into their shells to be free from the burden of recording themselves. Perhaps when the snail goes inside it goes somewhere else, becomes something else, lives anonymously

Later when I undressed for the shower, I noticed that my body was covered in tiny silver tracks, intersecting paths, all over my flesh, an unreadable message. It washes off easily with shower gel, but for the rest of the day my skin seems to sting with the memory of those mysterious glistening trails.

18th July

Am the first to arrive at the recycling bins on the common, the meeting point specified in the email. I stand and wait and feel alone in the evening gloom. And listen. Half a dozen caravans are parked in the field to my left and a generator hums and rattles hoarsely. A dog barks. From the golf clubhouse further down the road, a covers band is playing old songs. A woman's voice sings: 'wake me up before you...I bet you think this song is...don't leave me ha-a-a-a-ning on the...' A blackbird competes, trilling loudly into the half-dark.

When everyone is here, Emma Keane introduces herself. I know from the email that she spells her name K-E-A-N-E but nevertheless it strikes me as entirely fitting for someone who spends her evenings tracking bats. 'Keen' is enthusiastic, for sure, but its ancient meaning is bold, brave, cunning. Sharp-witted. Eager-eared. What keen level of hearing would it take, I wonder, to hear the imperceptible difference between 'Keane' and 'keen', the silent force of the letter 'a'? What new species of attention would be necessary? This question: it is the reason I've come, it teases at my mind like some microscopic moth, an infinitesimal reverberation. A tiny pulsing heart...

Now EK passes around eight fist-sized rectangular black boxes. They resemble old mobile phones and each one has a screen and two dials labelled 'volume' and 'frequency'. 'These', she explains, 'are bat detectors. They work by detecting and translating bats' echolocation in real time to a frequency audible to human ears'. Dull, slow humans ears. She says she can't promise you'll pick up any bats tonight, let alone see them. 'I'm afraid these things are always down to chance. The wind, temperature, timing, you know

...' she trails off, going silent for a moment, then continues. 'But in this area we are most likely to hear the Common Pipistrelle: *Pipistrellus Pipistrellus*'. As Emma Keane emits these strange syllables, this foreign name, some old, old feeling repeats itself, echoes, pips, dances, forming its own synesthetic song before my eyes. I bounce it around in my mouth like an insect, hungry for it.

Following the group but speaking to no one, I walk along the edge of the golf course beneath the horse chestnuts and copper beeches. There used to be an avenue of elms here. But there are huge lime trees and sessile oaks. At one point we pass through a growth of pine trees, scattering clouds of neon yellow pollen into the twilight

others speak together in whispers and fiddle with their bat detectors, tuning and detuning, making the machines stutter. *Pip*, I say silently to myself, closing my eyes with something like anticipation. Or prayer...My whole body is taut and alert now, an extension of the receiver in my hand, the little black box which has just started to rap and knock like a conjurer, a nineteenth century table-turner, or perhaps it's closer to some kind of gluey bubbling, as if someone were telephoning from deep underwater: I look up into a space between the trees and, like floaters in your eyes, barely perceptible but plainly there, *there*, so quick I can't even focus, the bats appear, quick drops of ink against the sky, there and there and

then, as if from nowhere, I pick up something new, a vivid crowd of voices from out of the air, the words come to me, like incantations, words, words I wish could be mine and mine again—

describing in the air black glove thrown in the and not a song pervade his lips and you think little lumps that fly in air and have voices indefinite wildly vindictive his small umbrella quaintly halved his eccentricities dark air-life looping pipistrello! drone re to their detailing tee disgusting rags or none perceptible a rare ear, our aery Yahweh like an old rag to sleep pipistrello! bats!

Then—in a word—they are gone. But in my hand the machine still sings and sings madly into the night

Chapter Two

The Growth of the Novel Reading Floral Disorders in *Sons and Lovers*

growth grows and, growing, grows out or in, grows over, overgrows. Growth will grow growths, simply by growing. Outgrowth is a necessary possibility of growth, there's no simple growing out of growth [...]. Growth is parasited by growth itself, aliens growing always within, growing out.¹

Reading and writing about Lawrence can give rise to strange kinds of growth. This chapter is one of these: it concerns the growth of *Sons and Lovers*. But what manner of growth are we speaking about here? It is first of all, perhaps, a question of growing out of something: *growing up*. For F.R. Leavis, who unstintingly applies the term 'great' to many of Lawrence's works, *Sons and Lovers* clearly does not achieve this revered status. He effectively dismisses *Sons and Lovers* as a 'lesser novel', omitting it from *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955) on the grounds that it is not of the same 'major achievement' as *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.² Remarking that 'with *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence put something behind him'³, Leavis appears to view the novel as a kind of necessary evil, a working-through of what he terms 'the acute emotional problem or disorder which queered [Lawrence's] personal relations'. This textual development eventually leaves the writer 'freed for the work of the greatest kind of artist'.⁴ Lawrence himself appears to corroborate this

¹ Geoffrey Bennington, 'Personal Growth', *Oxford Literary Review*, 23 (2001), 150.

² F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 18.

³ Leavis, 19.

⁴ Leavis, 19.

reading when, in a well-known letter to Arthur McLeod, he says of *Sons and Lovers*: 'one sheds ones [sic] sicknesses in books—repeats and presents again ones emotions, to be master of them (*Letters*, II, 90). In a 1916 review essay on the novel, 'A Freudian Appreciation', Alfred Booth Kuttner (who could not have known about the contents of the McLeod letter) makes a similar claim to Lawrence, remarking that 'out of the dark struggles of his own soul he has emerged as a triumphant artist. [...] He cures himself by expression in his art. And by producing a catharsis in the spectator through enjoyment of his art he also heals his fellow beings'.⁵ It would appear that *Sons and Lovers* is a *necessary* growth.

But what is it that Lawrence must, as Leavis says, 'put...behind him' in *Sons and Lovers*? What are the 'disorders' out of which the novel must grow? The first, and perhaps most critically-scrutinised, of these is related to the novel's exploration of what Lawrence names the 'incest-craving' (*Psychoanalysis/Fantasia*, 10 and *passim*). As Daniel Weiss's oft-cited book, *Oedipus in Nottingham*, states 'the Oedipal situation, as Freud describes it, prevails in the novel'.⁶ Frieda Lawrence also famously referred to the text as 'a sort of Oedipus'.⁷ In its apparently Freudian narrative of infant psychosexual development, *Sons and Lovers* must pass through the Oedipal stage in order to emerge as (in the banal terminology of pop-psychology) a 'healthy growth'. But the 'struggles' of the novel are clearly also related, as Tony Pinkney has argued, to an overwhelming sense of 'rabid virginity'

⁵ Alfred Booth Kuttner, 'A Freudian Appreciation', *D.H. Lawrence: Sons and Lovers*, edited by Gamini Salgado (London: Macmillan, 1969), 94.

⁶ Daniel Weiss, *Oedipus in Nottingham* (Seattle: University of Nottingham Press, 1962), 16.

⁷ Quoted in John Worthen, *D.H. Lawrence: The Early Years: 1885–1812* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 443.

that 'creates most of Paul's difficulties', and must therefore be expelled.⁸ Virginity, like incest, is figured as something that the novel must grow out of. In each case, it is a matter of recognising or reinstating certain cultural prohibitions, and subsequently repressing that which is tabooed. The novel's narrative mastery of these 'disorders' is both 'internal' (in the story of Paul Morel's personal growth) and 'external' (Lawrence's 'growth' and 'emerg[ence] as a triumphant artist', as well as the *healing*, as Kuttner suggests, of Lawrence's readers). We might conclude from this that *Sons and Lovers* is a true work of 'life writing' not only in its clear employment of autobiography, but also in the sense that it appears to trace the surmounting of its author's own 'sicknesses', functioning as a kind of therapeutic tool in Lawrence's own 'real life' *Bildungsroman*.

And yet, as Leavis's palpable sense of unease about the novel attests, in seeking to 'shed' his developmental afflictions in and through *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence has perhaps also planted the seeds of something that cannot be so easily mastered or grown out of. As my epigraph from Geoffrey Bennington's weird growth of an essay, 'Personal Growth', suggests, growth is not something that can be controlled, contained, simply grown out of, or that emerges 'fully grown'. Growth is always 'parasited' by its own *outgrowth*. In this chapter, I begin to grow towards the idea that the growth of *Sons and Lovers* might be just as much about some *impossibility* of growing or growing up: a dangerous growth in the work of 'healthy' growing. This is not a natural or organic growth, as the readings of Kuttner and Leavis (and others⁹) appear to suggest, but rather a kind of weird

⁸ Tony Pinkney, *D.H. Lawrence* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 33.

⁹ See, for example, Ronald Granofsky's organicist reading of 'Paul's growth as an artist and a man' and the ways in which 'growth and transformation are always important in Lawrence's exploration of individual development' (*D.H. Lawrence*

overgrowth, ingrowth or outgrowth.

In many ways, *Sons and Lovers* appears to be the most *human* of Lawrence's novels—particularly in its outward concerns with human relationships and growing up, and its enlightenment narrative of mastery (of nature, tabooed sexuality, virginity, affect, art). But this is also a novel that contains a dangerous undergrowth of nonhuman life. In the following pages, I explore the ways in which the 'disorders' of Lawrence's writing—namely the 'bad' growths of virginity and incest—are bound up with another kind of growth in the novel: that of plant life, especially flowering plants. Reading the plants of *Sons and Lovers* there is a sense that, while the novel might outwardly seek to be a cathartic work (for both author and reader), the life of the novel, its *vegetal life of writing*, refuses to operate in such a simply therapeutic and progressive way.

*

While it contains very few nonhuman animals (a horse, a chicken, 'Bill' the bull-terrier, a few cows—none of which are described or considered in much detail), *Sons and Lovers* is overgrown with flowers. Whether collected in a posy given by Paul Morel to his mother, adorning the letters William Morel receives from his many lovers, or growing wild in the woods near Willey Farm, flowering plants are everywhere in the novel. The many flowers of Lawrence's early writing, up until and including *Sons and Lovers*, have a particular cultural significance that is rooted

and Survival: Darwinism and the Fiction of the Transitional Period (Montreal, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 31, 33); also Phil Joffe's notion that Paul Morel is 'a vital hero who struggles to free himself from the forces of circumstance [...] in search of an enlargement of life's possibilities' ('*Sons and Lovers: The Growth of Paul Morel*', *CRUX: A Journal on the Teaching of English*, 20:3 (1986), 49); the idea of 'personal growth' is also implicit in Thomas Jeffers's notion that *Sons and Lovers* 'one of the supreme *Bildungsromane* in English' (see *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 135).

in both Romantic textual theories and Victorian symbolism.¹⁰ First of all, Lawrence's vegetal metaphors might be read in terms of the Romantic conception of the 'organic form' of literary texts. This idea has a long history in eighteenth century thinking but was perhaps most famously adopted by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in order to speak about the innate or vital unity of certain kinds of poetic writing.¹¹ Coleridge writes that, in Shakespeare's texts, 'all is growth, evolution, *genesis*—each line, each word almost, begets the following': the work of art is like a plant that grows spontaneously, 'effectuat[ing] its own secret growth'.¹² These notions of naturalness, harmony and unity seem to grow into the enlightenment narrative of growing up with which *Sons and Lovers* has been so closely associated. Indeed, a couple of years after the publication of *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence writes to his agent J.B. Pinker 'a novel, after all this period of coming into being, has a definite *organic form*, just as a *man has when he is grown*' (*Letters*, II, 327, my emphasis).

The novel's flowering plants, in turn, appear to be firmly planted in the conventional Victorian encoding of 'the language of flowers'¹³, in which certain

¹⁰ In later novels and short stories, perhaps because Lawrence had read the Futurist works of F.T. Marinetti, Paolo Buzzi and Ardengo Soffici (which he read in the summer of 1914), the symbolism that underpins the narratives is closer to that of the physical and mechanical, to that which we see in the celebrated letter to Edward Garnett about 'allotropic states' (*Letters*, II, 182). By the end of *Sons and Lovers*, Paul Morel turns to and embraces the city's gold 'phosphorescence', its artistic electricity, doing away with the botanical or biological in favour of, as he writes in the letter to Garnett, 'that which is physic' (*Letters*, II, 182).

¹¹ See Daniel Stempel, 'Coleridge and Organic Form: The English Tradition', *Studies in Romanticism*, 6 (1967), 89-97.

¹² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, quoted in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 171, 172.

¹³ See, for example, *The Illustrated Language of Flowers*, published by Routledge in 1866. The editor of this ephemeral little book, L. Burke, writes in her preface that 'the meaning attached to flowers, to have any utility, should be as firmly fixed as

flowers come to symbolise idealised, essential (and often *human*) properties, characteristics or values. Kate Millett argues that *Sons and Lovers* liberally employs the (profoundly sexist) ‘classic dilemma of the lily-rose choice’.¹⁴ In the traditional ‘lily/rose dichotomy’, the lily represents virginity and purity¹⁵, while the rose typically stands for sexual desire and seduction. This, in Millett’s view, is the novel’s way of conventionally arranging (as in a contrived bouquet) its female characters: ‘Miriam is Paul’s spiritual mistress, Clara his sexual one’.¹⁶ The arrangement is deemed particularly unfair to Miriam Leivers (and, in turn, her real-life counterpart Jessie Chambers), who can only ever grow into ‘the tired old lily of another age’s literary convention’.¹⁷ More recently, Blake Morrison, in a *Guardian* article on the ‘*Sons and Lovers*: a century on’, has noted that:

At times *Sons and Lovers* is almost too deliberate, too symbolic, too controlled. The episodes in which the three most important women in the novel, Mrs Morel, Miriam Leivers and Clara, respond to flowers, for instance, and thereby reveal their different characters, are so carefully patterned as to risk losing the “felt life” that Leavis thought Lawrence’s greatest gift.¹⁸

In such ways the novel is apparently engaged in a work of metaphorical *enclosure*, a kind of walled-in garden of meaning, one that is strictly guarded by the unity of floral metaphors and symbolism. In *Sons and Lovers*, every plant is blossoming with (conventional and clichéd) signification: it seems that no flower can grow in

possible’. See L. Burke, *The Illustrated Language of Flowers* (London: Routledge, 1866), 3.

¹⁴ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977), 254.

¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that in Burke’s *Illustrated Language of Flowers*, the lily, in addition to ‘purity’ and ‘sweetness’ is also associated with ‘coquetry’, ‘majesty’, ‘falsehood’, ‘gaiety’, ‘return to happiness’. These divergent meanings and referents suggest that a text’s floral signifiers cannot simply be aligned with such reductive symbolism as Millet’s ‘lily-rose choice’.

¹⁶ Millett, 252.

¹⁷ Millett, 254.

¹⁸ Blake Morrison, ‘*Sons and Lovers*: a century on’, *Guardian* (25th May 2013). <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/25/sons-lovers-dh-lawrence-blake-morrison>. Consulted 18th May 2017. [09:00 GMT]

the novel without being gathered up by its master-narrative.

As such, flowering plants—and their metaphorical and formal functions—appear to be intertwined with the novel's developmental 'sicknesses'. In this regard, Dorothy Van Ghent has written about the way the text foregrounds 'an *organic disturbance* in the relationships of men and women'.¹⁹ In order to move on, to grow out of such 'disturbances', it seems that Lawrence had to *cut away* the organic metaphors of his writing. After completing *The White Peacock* (which, true to vegetal form, he initially wanted to name 'Tendrils Outreach' (see *Letters*, I, 167)), he wrote complaining to his agent, J.B. Pinker, that: 'I shall never do anything decent till I can grow up and cut my beastly long curls of poetry' (*Letters*, I, 167). This desire to 'grow up' artistically is symbolically (and literally) enacted early on in *Sons and Lovers*, in a memorable episode in which Walter Morel chops off William's baby hair, causing a deep rift between the father and Mrs Morel (as if he had unceremoniously cut the umbilical cord between her and her infant son). Mrs Morel is shocked to see 'a myriad of crescent-shaped curls, like the petals of a marigold scattered in the reddening firelight' (*Sons*, 23). This early scene appears to pave the way for the novel's surmounting of both the childish 'curls' of writing, its florid adolescent 'disorders', and the intense, quasi-incestuous mother-son connection that is an essential aspect of the novel's 'sickness'. As such, we might consider the ways in which these adolescent flowers, along with the novel's formal organic metaphor, are apparently overcome or cut off in the novel, and how this is closely connected to the desire to overcome other 'disorders', most notably virginity and incest—that which Lawrence must 'put behind him' in order to grow up.

¹⁹ Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On *Sons and Lovers*', *D.H. Lawrence: Sons and Lovers*, edited by Gamini Salgado (London: Macmillan, 1969), 114, my emphasis.

However, as we will see, flowers also work to outgrow this easy, healthy narrative of growth. When Coleridge speaks about ‘secret growth’, it is in terms of an organic unification of a text, a naturalness that cannot be touched by human *tekne*. And yet his terms also suggest something that might *grow* in spite of the work’s unity, growing in or over the work’s natural (and ‘healthy’) parameters. Plants (whether we encounter them in texts or in ‘nature’) have an uncanny life of their own. Claudette Sartiliot, in her book on metaphoricity and flowers, *Herbarium/Verbarium* (1993), seeks to grow the discourse of plants and textuality away from what she names the ‘classical floral tradition of the emblematic uses of flowers’, avowing that the place and meaning of flowers in literary and philosophical writing is always necessarily unstable and aleatory.²⁰ Sartiliot argues for ‘the impossibility for the metaphor of the flower to remain in one particular and predetermined locus’, relating this incalculable and multiple ‘identity’ of flowers to Jacques Derrida’s notion of the *dissemination* of meaning (which plays on the ‘semes’ of both seeds and signs).²¹ She notes that, when we read them, ‘flowers appear only to disappear, are present only as they metamorphose themselves endlessly into other things’.²² Plants, especially flowering plants, are therefore not only passively metaphorical but actively work to trouble their own symbolic function, opening up to a new kind of textual life. Despite their apparently passive and inert character, flowers are able to produce particularly troubling textual forces. This is something which Lawrence himself seems to recognise when he names his 1929 poetry collection ‘pansies’—turning Pascal’s *Pensées* into a series of English thought-flowers. *Pansies* is a collection of sharp,

²⁰ Claudette Sartiliot, *Herbarium Verbarium: the Discourse of Flowers* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 3.

²¹ Sartiliot, 2.

²² Sartiliot, 17.

disruptive little blooms: they are irreverent and odd, often jarring and sometimes tediously bullying. In the introduction to the volume, Lawrence tells us that ‘in the perfume’ of his thought-flowers, ‘there hovers still the faint strange scent of earth’ (*Poems*, 663). With his ‘strange’ little annoyances, Lawrence desires to create something profoundly dangerous: floral disorders that work to sour the ‘sickly sweet’ scents of modern life (*Poems*, 664). This is related to his sense elsewhere of wanting to ‘write bombs’ (*Letters*, II, 547). Perhaps *Sons and Lovers* is a book of flower-bombs.

The impulse to make writing dangerous is explored by Sianne Ngai in *Ugly Feelings* (2005), where she observes that certain works of art ‘*desire* to be disgusting, contaminating, unignorable, intolerable’²³, seeking to ‘occupy the position of the disgusting and unconsumable [...] because it so insistently *obtrudes*’.²⁴ In its obtrusiveness, Ngai argues, disgust is a powerful critical and artistic tool. While Leavis perhaps hides his disgust of *Sons and Lovers*, we might read traces of this affective response in his sense that the text is a kind of ‘problem’ or ‘disorder’. In his repudiation of the text, then, Leavis effectively points to its power and strangeness as a work of art—illuminating some aspect of it that remains *intolerable*. Following Ngai and Sartiliot, I wish to trace the ways in which the text’s ‘floral disorders’ work as a kind of obtrusion in the narrative, a semantically parasitic or contaminating growth that cannot be grown out of. In this reading, I seek to extend Kimberley Coates’s claim that, instead of simply working to close down and master its disorders, *Sons and Lovers* grows them: ‘rather than *sublimating* its perversions, the novel *exposes them and exploits them* (however covertly) as

²³ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 352.

²⁴ Ngai, 349, emphasis original.

absolutely essential to the development of Paul Morel's aesthetic consciousness'.²⁵

Reading Lawrence's vegetal metaphors, we find ourselves in a series of disordered flowerbeds, florid battlegrounds, weird patches of overgrowth, dangerous gardens and pockets of perversity: sites of troubling and intolerable excess, where metaphors grow beyond themselves and horrible ghosts emerge violently from the undergrowth.

Overgrowth: Metaphorical Defloration

In this section, I begin to think about the ways in which flowers possess a double function in *Sons and Lovers*: they are at once figured as markers of the text's 'disorder' of virginity, which can be pruned away for the purposes of healthy grow, *and* as radically disordering this cathartic process. This double-growth is entangled in the question of metaphor. Gerald Doherty reads *Sons and Lovers* as a kind of dialectical battle between literal and metaphorical language: 'in *Sons and Lovers* metaphor works to subvert the closed spatial relations which its literal language entails. Metaphor opens up space, delimits boundaries, creating new "dangerous" freedoms of expression and action'.²⁶ This dialectic corresponds to a semantic movement between enclosure and openness, in which the novel 'insistently oscillates between claustrophobic, protective enclosures and unlimited vistas, "black holes" in the text that induce agoraphobic apprehension and dread'.²⁷ The 'black holes' that Doherty identifies are strange pockets within the

²⁵ Kimberley Coates, 'Eros in the Sickroom: Phosphorescent Form and Aesthetic Ecstasy in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 38:2 (2008), 146, my emphasis.

²⁶ Gerald Doherty, 'The Dialectics of Space in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 29:2 (1993), 328.

²⁷ Doherty, 329.

text where language takes on new resonances. And yet we might also argue that much of Lawrence's metaphorical work in the novel has the effect of enclosure and repression, particularly in the way it replants the limited, conventional metaphorical schema of flowers as corresponding to virginity. This is clearly at work in many of Lawrence's early works, particularly his poems, which tend towards a metaphorical correspondence between flowering plants and virginal women, as well as seeming to reproduce a conventional Victorian aesthetic.²⁸ *Sons and Lovers* initially appears to be an extension of this symbolic work in the way that virginity is consistently aligned with plant metaphors.

For most of the second part of the novel, Paul moves between Miriam and his mother, who both become preternaturally virginal in their textual representation, competing for Paul's attention through a kind of metaphorical chastity. For example, when Miriam and Paul first meet at Willey Farm (after he has just come out of the woods with his mother, picking flowers for her like a lover), we read the following exchange:

He was in the garden smelling the gillivers and looking at the plants, when the girl came quickly to the heap of coal which stood by the fence.

"I suppose these are cabbage roses," he said to her, pointing to the bushes along the fence. She looked at him with startled, big brown eyes.

"I suppose they are cabbage roses, when they come out?" he said.

"I don't know," she faltered. "They're white, with pink middles."

"Then they're maiden-blush."

Miriam flushed. She had a beautiful warm colouring.

"I don't know," she said.

"You don't have *much* in your garden," he said. (*Sons*, 154)

Here the flowers of the Leivers' garden appear to represent Miriam's blushing

²⁸ See, for example, 'A White Blossom' (composed circa 1911) where we read about a woman who is like 'A tiny moon as small and white as a single jasmine flower' who 'shines, the first white love of my youth, passionless and in vain' (*Poems*, 36); or 'Letter from Town: The Almond Tree' (composed 1909), where the speaker says: 'You promised to send me some violets [...] / Sweet dark purple, and white ones mixed for a pledge / Of our early love that hardly has opened yet' (*Poems*, 27).

virginity while also foreshadowing her sexual frigidity and lack of sensuality (“You don’t have *much* in your garden”). Mrs Morel presents her own version of this when she excitedly calls Paul into the garden to show him a group of blue scillas, or ‘Glories of the Snow’, emphasising their virgin qualities: ‘not nipped, not touched’ (*Sons*, 199). This example, among others, seems to bolster the novel’s fantasy of the mother’s virginity (a fantasy which is fulfilled on Mrs Morel’s deathbed, as ‘she lay like a maiden asleep’ (*Sons*, 443)).²⁹

As I have already suggested, Paul (and, in turn, the novel) must grow out of this virginal mode of expression in order to effectuate his own healthy growth. We are told that ‘a good many of the nicest men he knew were like himself, bound in by their own virginity’ (*Sons*, 323). As a sort of response to the emblematic virginites presented to him (and to his own), Paul spends the novel picking flowers, cutting them down. There are many scenes which show Paul gathering a posy, usually for his mother, Miriam or Clara. Clara asks Paul, as he is ‘scientifically’ plucking a bunch of flowers, ‘what right have you to pull them?’, to which he replies ‘because I like them, and want them—and there’s plenty of them’ (*Sons*, 278). In another example, we hear that ‘he loved [cowslips], but as if they were his and he had a right to them. [...] The flowers were very fresh and sweet. He wanted to drink them. As he gathered them, he ate the little yellow trumpets’ (*Sons*, 278). These lines are almost a parody of human male chauvinism and anthropocentric mastery, while also providing a way for Lawrence to both figuratively and literally *deflower* his own text. Paul’s greedy act of consumption seems to quickly dispatch with the problem of virginity, making the way for the novel’s ‘literal’ defloration in ‘The Test on Miriam’, and Paul’s sensual ‘Release’

²⁹ These examples also clearly correspond to the poem ‘The Virgin Mother’ written around January 1911 (see *Poems*, 66).

with Clara later on.

But virginity is also revealed to be a kind of growth, something altogether more unmasterable, and much closer to Doherty's sense of dangerous and excessive metaphoricity, a 'black hole' of sorts. That which is desirable and apparently easy to consume is also shown to be disgusting, monstrous, intolerable, extending both the symbolic schema and the question of virginity beyond their limits. In order to quickly get to the bud of this floral matter, we must follow Miriam, as she leads Paul into the woods, desiring to show him 'a certain wild-rose bush she has discovered' (*Sons*, 195). After some anxious searching, the rose bush appears before the two lovers, like a weird growth:

The tree was tall and straggling. It had thrown its briers over a hawthorn-bush, and its long streamers trailed thick, right down to the grass, splashing the darkness everywhere with great spilt stars, pure white. In bosses of ivory and in large splashed stars the roses gleamed on the darkness of foliage and stems and grass. Paul and Miriam stood close together, silent, and watched. Point after point the steady roses shone out to them, seeming to kindle something in their souls. The dusk came like smoke around, and still did not put out the roses.

Paul looked into Miriam's eyes. She was pale and expectant with wonder, her lips were parted, and her dark eyes lay open to him. His look seemed to travel down into her. Her soul quivered. It was the communion she wanted. He turned aside, as if pained. He turned to the bush.

"They seem as if they walk like butterflies, and shake themselves," he said.

She looked at her roses. They were white, some incurved and holy, others expanded in ecstasy. The tree was dark as a shadow. She lifted her hand impulsively to the flowers; she went forward and touched them in worship.

"Let us go", he said.

There was a cool scent of ivory roses, a white virgin scent. Something made him feel anxious and imprisoned. (*Sons*, 195-6)

At first the virginal roses are like a mirror held up to both Miriam and Paul, confirming their 'pure' yet 'imprisoning' virginity. We see how the flowers are blooming with meaning, upholding both Miriam and Paul's virginity in their 'ivory' and 'pure white' petals, 'incurved and holy', and the 'white virgin scent'

given off by the bush. Miriam wants Paul to consume the plant with her, perhaps as a way of metaphorically consuming their shared virginity. The plant supplements their 'communion' and Miriam stands with lips 'parted', ready to receive it.

But the scene also gives off a palpable sense of unease. It becomes too much: Paul 'turned aside, as if pained' and 'something made him feel anxious and imprisoned'. The floral metaphorical veil of this virginal 'communion' seems to both hide and draw attention to something quite disturbing and overcharged at work in this scene. The rose-bush, which both enacts the metaphor of virginity and the virginity of metaphor, begins to overspill its boundaries. It exhibits an uncanny growth of its own, growing towards the kind of 'dread' that Doherty reads in the novel. This plant does not keep to itself but rather throws its body over, across and into another plant, reaching into the undergrowth. It is an entanglement of mixed metaphors: flowers gleam like 'stars', while also becoming liquid, 'splashing' and 'streaming'. The flowers even appear to change species, becoming animate. As Paul, turning to the roses, observes: 'they seem as if they walk like butterflies, and shake themselves'. We usually think of butterflies flying, not walking—so this simile further deforms its subject, withholding any direct point of reference. This relates to Satiliot's sense that flowers 'are present only as they metamorphose themselves endlessly into other things'. There is certainly the suggestion here that, as the plant-based philosopher Michael Marder has recently argued, plants are never "'themselves" as such' and that plant life is essentially 'free [...] to be otherwise than it is'.³⁰ This rose bush *freely* 'trail[s]' and 'straggl[es]' beyond itself, overgrowing its metaphorical functioning, becoming other than

³⁰ Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: a Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 12.

‘itself’. But the scene also says something about the inherent instability of the concepts of metaphoricity and virginity. Lawrence seems to build up the floral metaphors in order to ‘kindle’ a kind of overflowing, or rather *overflowing*, of Victorian and Romantic symbolism and forms. Similarly, the notion of virginity is figured as a kind of unpleasant excess—something that ‘imprisons’ but also engenders a terrifying overgrowth—in the way that the metaphorical markers of virginity become *unreadable*, appearing, as Sartiliot says, in order to ‘disappear’.

In this sense, Lawrence’s novel anticipates Freud’s ‘findings’ in his 1917 essay, ‘The Taboo of Virginity’. This text, it should be noted, only relates to female virginity—male virginity is neither acknowledged by Freud nor by any of the writers he consults. Freud’s text speculates on the possible reasons for the existence in primitive human cultures of virginity as a taboo (something which appeared to contrast with the contemporary Western valorisation of maidenhood), concluding, unsurprisingly perhaps, with the ‘fear of castration’.³¹ But on the way to castration anxiety and penis envy, Freud touches upon some other possibilities that are perhaps more interesting for our reading of Lawrence here. In addition to the ‘taboo of blood’, Freud gives another reason, one that he deems ‘unconcerned with sexuality’, related to the idea that ‘primitive man is prey to a perpetual lurking apprehensiveness [...]’. This apprehensiveness will appear most strongly on all occasions which differ in any way from the usual which involve something new or unexpected, something not understood or uncanny’.³² The virgin is therefore perhaps taboo because she is unknowable—*impenetrable* both in the

³¹ Freud illustrates this potential ‘the hostile reaction released by the violation of [a woman’s] maidenhood’ with examples of Judith, ‘the woman who castrates the man who has deflowered her’. See Sigmund Freud, ‘The Taboo of Virginity’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XI, edited and translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 209, 207.

³² Freud, 196–7.

sexual and epistemological senses. Virginity becomes the mark of something terrifyingly unreadable: it is a kind of 'black hole', one which can never be known—for to 'know' it, would be to deflower it, erase it.

In Lawrence's novella *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, virginity is similarly presented as a kind of secret growth. We learn of the 'dark, tremulous, potent secret of [Yvette Saywell's] virginity' (*Virgin*, 39), and that an encounter with Yvette is 'like walking in front of those autumn mists, when gossamer strands blow over your face. You don't quite know where you are' (*Virgin*, 38). Virginity is a kind of abyss, Lawrence seems to say, but also something revoltingly excessive. While Yvette's virginity is shrouded in weird 'gossamer strands', the virginity of *Sons and Lovers* can only be known or looked at through the text's metaphorical flowers, flowers which, as the rose-bush scene suggests, are in some way impenetrable. Fear of that which is 'not understood or uncanny' seems to be at the heart of the novel's desire to surmount its disorder of virginity, while also being a kind of avowal of the insurmountable.

Both Paul and Miriam suffer from excessive chastity: Paul 'told himself it was only a sort of *overstrong virginity* in her and him which neither could break through' (*Sons*, 322, my emphasis). This also relates to the way in which Miriam and her mother, Mrs Leivers, are respectively described as possessing 'eternal maidenhood', and having 'the great brown eyes of a maiden who was nearly scared and shocked out of her virgin maidenhood, but not quite, in spite of her seven children' (*Sons*, 323). This 'eternal' virginity, strangely enough, relates back to Coleridge's notion of textual 'organic form', by which 'each line, each word almost, begets the following'. Coleridge seems to be saying that the 'organic' text needs nothing or no one: it is wholly self-sufficient, even capable of

parthenogenesis, like Mrs Leivers (and also perhaps Mrs Morel): it effectuates its own virgin reproduction or growth, letting no outside influences touch its chaste organicity. And yet these 'eternal' virgins also produce an excess of virginity that floods virginity's metaphorical boundaries, growing wild and dangerous, 'overstrong'. This is not confined to the closure and unity of Coleridge's 'organic form' but grows out, becoming a profusion of the text's 'secret growth', a growth that has grown out of control. The contradictory nature of virginity can further be heard in the sense that, in Miriam, 'everything was gripped stiff with intensity, and her effort, overcharged, closed in on itself' (*Sons*, 184). Virginity, in *Sons and Lovers*, is therefore both a lack of growth (an 'imprisonment' to be 'broken through') but also, as the spilling rose-briers suggest, an *overgrowth* (something too fertile, too mature).

The dangerous excess of virginity can be more clearly seen in a later episode, in the 'Defeat of Miriam', where, on a spring day, Miriam and Paul walk in the garden at Willey Farm and have an erotic encounter with an abundance of floral metaphors:

Round the wild, tussocky lawn at the back of the house was a thorn hedge, under which daffodils were craning forward from among their sheaves of grey-green blades. The cheeks of the flowers were greenish with cold. But still some had burst, and their gold ruffled and glowed. Miriam went on her knees before one cluster, took a wild looking daffodil between her hands, turned up its face of gold to her, and bowed down, caressing it with her mouth and cheeks and brow. He stood aside, with his hands in his pockets, watching her. One after another she turned up to him the faces of the yellow, bursten flowers appealingly, fondling them lavishly all the while.

"Aren't they magnificent?" she murmured.

"Magnificent! it's a bit thick—they're pretty!"

She bowed again to her flowers at his censure of her praise. He watched her crouching, sipping the flowers with fervid kisses.

"Why must you always be fondling things!" he said irritably.

"But I love to touch them," she replied, hurt.

“Can you never like things without clutching them as if you wanted to pull the heart out of them? Why don’t you have a bit more restraint, or reserve, or something?”

She looked up at him, full of pain, then continued slowly to stroke her lips against a ruffled flower.[...]

Rhythmically, Miriam was swaying and stroking the flower with her mouth, inhaling the scent which ever after made her shudder as it came to her nostrils. (*Sons*, 257)

How should we read the flowers in this passage and the ‘lavish’ performance of ‘caressing’, ‘clutching’, ‘sipping’, ‘kissing’, ‘stroking’, ‘inhaling’ and ‘fondling’ that they seem to provoke? The singular power of this scene perhaps derives from the sense that Miriam’s actions here are both innocent (after all, what could be more innocent than smelling a clump of daffodils on a spring day?) and a surplus of innocence that extends towards its opposite, becoming something profoundly perverse. Miriam reveres the flowers in a kind of holy worship (echoing the ‘communion’ from the rose-bush scene): she ‘bows down’, going ‘on her knees’ as if in prayer. With these daffodils, she appears to be repeating Wordsworth’s all-too-familiar poetic gesture, his admiration of the ‘host’ of ‘ten thousand’ ‘dancing Daffodils’ he encounters, which return to him later in a blissful reverie: ‘when my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the Daffodils’.³³ In her weird, rhythmic ‘swaying’, Miriam is also perhaps parodying Wordsworth’s pleasure, taking it too far, she overdoes it, goes overboard. Paul is clearly nauseated by her ‘fondling’ of the flowers and her exaggerated ‘praise’ of them: he describes her language as ‘a bit thick’, as if, in its hyperbolism, her tongue had *grown* in her mouth, plantlike. Leo Bersani claims that ‘Lawrence’s disgust with female

³³ William Wordsworth, ‘I wandered lonely as a Cloud’, *Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 303.

sexuality seems [...] undeniable'.³⁴ Such 'disgust' is clearly, in part, at work in this violent exchange, in the repudiation of Miriam's sexual expression, which is supplemented by the oddly 'craning' and 'bursten' daffodils. But Paul's disgust is perhaps also related to the dual excess and impenetrability of the metaphors of virginity.

In a series of gestures that wildly exaggerate Paul's eating of the virginal cowslips, Miriam literally ingests the daffodils, 'sipping' and 'stroking the flower with her mouth', while also eating with her eyes and fingers, engendering a kind of polymorphic perversity. It's as if she wanted to increase her virginal representation to the point of bursting. At this point we might return to Ngai's notion of 'ugly feelings', particularly the question of how disgust is generated. Reading Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.* (where a woman kills and tries to eat a cockroach) and a work by the American poet Bruce Andrews, *I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up* (a collection of poems which overflow to bursting point with images from consumer culture), Ngai traces two processes in which a text makes itself disgusting, contaminating, intolerable. She notes that both texts mobilise a thematic and textual *gorging*, remarking that 'whereas G.H. eats the intolerable in an unsuccessful effort to keep it down, *Shut Up* gorges on the alluring in order to throw it up'.³⁵ In its extravagance and unrestrained semantic floridity, the daffodils episode from *Sons and Lovers* similarly appears to enact a scene of insatiable *gorging*—a gorging that is at once related to the alluringness of floral metaphors and the intolerability of virginity. Miriam and, in turn, Lawrence's *writing* gorges on (and vomits up) its own floral imagery and

³⁴ Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1976), 171.

³⁵ Ngai, 353.

representation of chaste virginity. For in this weird moment, Lawrence's language becomes truly florid: it is, as Paul would say, 'a bit thick'. We hear this thickness in the overwrought phrasing of the passage: the daffodil's 'face of gold', which is 'gold ruffled and glowed', the way Miriam is described as 'fondling them lavishly'. The noun 'ruffle' refers to a 'disorder, disturbance' (*OED*), something that interrupts the peace (and Paul clearly has his feathers ruffled here), as well as being a 'vibrating drum beat' (*OED*), compelling Miriam to 'sway' 'rhythmically'. This intergrowth of images is also related to the alliteration and repetition of the writing, which can be heard in 'crouching', 'clutching', 'cluster', 'caressing' and 'craning'; the rhyming pattern of 'gold' and 'cold'; the insistence of words such as 'fondling', 'wild', 'cheeks', 'stroking'. It's almost as if Lawrence were presenting the reader with a bunch of 'overcharged' linguistic flowers, giving us no choice but to 'inhale' their overpowering letters.

This act of metaphorical gorging is clearly also one of autoeroticism. Firstly, the new blooms that Miriam consumes are 'wild-looking', suggesting that they are (as she is) untouched, pure. Secondly, daffodils are lilies (genus *Narcissus* and plant family *Liliaceae*), the Victorian symbols of chastity. As such, by kissing and fondling the flowers she is enacting a kind of auto-affection, touching *herself* in a way that excludes Paul (like a weirdly parthenogenetic text). We read elsewhere that, to Miriam,

flowers appealed with such strength she felt she must make them part of herself. When she bent and breathed a flower it was as if she and the flower were loving each other. Paul hated her for it. There seemed a sort of exposure about the action, something too intimate. (*Sons*, 173)

Here, the very act of inhaling a flower's scent is presented as a weird cross-species act of lovemaking. And yet it is also an act of self-love, in the way that Miriam makes the flower 'part of herself' *before* 'breath[ing]' it. We see this also in the

daffodils episode, particularly in the way the ‘cheeks’ of the daffodils correspond to Miriam’s ‘cheeks’, against which she ‘strokes’ the flowers. (We might also think again of Wordsworth’s daffodils that later ‘flash upon that inward eye’³⁶, as if they have become part of him, or inscribed themselves upon his mind like a strange floral writing.) In these moments of autoerotic floral gorging, Miriam effectively *deflowers herself* with flowers. In the way the daffodil seems to ‘come’ to her nostrils with its scent, there is a suggestion that she is losing her virginity to the plant, particularly as henceforth (as if some line has been crossed) she will ‘ever after’ feel a ‘shudder’ at its fragrance.

When Paul finally does ‘deflower’ Miriam later in the novel, the moment is already contaminated by these earlier floral deflorations. Just before the couple ‘go inside’, Miriam (and, by extension, Lawrence) can’t help but have one last sniff at the flowers of virginity: ‘as she put her face down into the marigolds, it was all overcast with a yellow shine’ (*Sons*, 333). This floral ‘shine’ works to effectively ‘overcast’ their lovemaking, which contains nothing like the ecstasy of the novel’s *floral* deflorations. We might also say that Paul ends up making love to a flower, or at least that he cannot access Miriam’s virginity due to the floral metaphors that cover her face with ‘a yellow shine’. This brings us back to the notion of the unknowability of virginity: it hides itself, making a secret of itself, veiling itself in weird flowers. Rather than being surmounted, deflowered once and for all, the novel’s virginity grows, extending itself, until it becomes intolerable, destabilising its own necessary mastery of virginity.

The logic of this is impossibly circuitous: Miriam deflowers *herself* through her own flowers of writing and Lawrence’s text, in turn, deflowers its ‘disorder’ of

³⁶ Wordsworth, 303.

virginity through floral metaphors. In its excessive floridity, the text presents florescence as a kind of defloration—but one that keeps virginity weirdly intact, growing a dangerous parthenogenetic virginity within its acts of deflowering. This entanglement of florescence and defloration—the way they work to undo and re-establish each other in the same metaphorical movement—engenders a kind of textual aporia that cannot be grown out of. Each time a flower deflowers, it also produces more flowers, more impossible virginity. It monsters Coleridge's sense of 'organic form', in which 'each line, each word almost, begets the following', by begetting more and more flowers, exceeding its metaphorical and formal limits. To return to Doherty's 'dialectics of space', we might say that plant life overgrows the dialectical workings of the text, creating spaces where claustrophobia and agoraphobia share a bed, where things are simultaneously tightly closed and thrown wide open. Metaphoricity constantly gorges on itself, deflowers itself, in order to give birth to itself over and over. The text, like Paul, reaches for defloration again and again, but finds only flowers.

Ingrowth: the *Scent* of Incest

As I have already suggested, the Freudian Oedipal question has long been associated with *Sons and Lovers*, with critics portraying the novel as a stage in Lawrence's (masculine and artistic) development to be passed through or grown out of. By writing a novel that explores tabooed mother-son love, Lawrence seems to be symbolically enacting a transition from nature to culture, by way of the working-through and eventual shedding of the possibility of incest. In this process,

Lawrence also moves from the organic 'language of flowers' towards a more modern 'phosphorescence' (*Sons*, 464). The novel's final words voice a decision to turn away from the mother and incestuous love ('he would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her' (*Sons*, 464)) but goes towards one of the most modernist of tropes: 'he walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly' (*Sons*, 464). This movement seems to anticipate the notion, in twentieth century anthropology, psychoanalysis and critical theory, that the incest prohibition is at the heart of human culture, it is the necessary interdiction that engenders what Derrida calls, following Jean-Jacques Rousseau, '*the birth of society*'.³⁷

In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, in an attempt to repudiate, in one swipe, the Freudian notions of the Oedipus complex and the wish-fulfillment of the dreamwork, Lawrence speaks about the nauseating experience of incest dreams:

In the case of the boy who dreams of his mother, we have the aroused but unattached sex plunging in sleep, causing a sort of obstruction. [...] The truth is, every man has, the moment he awakes, a hatred of his dream, and a great desire to be free of the dream, free of the persistent mother-image or sister-image of the dream. It is a ghoul, it haunts his dreams, this image, with its hateful conclusions. And yet he cannot get free. As long as a man lives he may, in his dreams of passion or conflict, be haunted by the mother-image or sister-image, even when he knows that the cause of the disturbing dream is the wife. But even though the actual subject of the dream is the wife, still, over and over again, for years, the dream-process will persist in substituting the mother-image. It haunts and terrifies a man. (*Psychoanalysis/Fantasia*, 180)

Fiona Becket notes that in relation to Freud's Oedipal theory, 'Lawrence is in

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 267. It should also be noted that the incest prohibition has been figured, particularly in psychoanalysis, as important for gender formation, something which seems to correspond further to the novel's character of (masculine) *Bildungsroman*. It might be argued that through the mastery of incest, Paul (and in turn Lawrence, the writer) is finally able to assert his virile and lone masculinity (which no longer needs mothers or women to give it meaning), what Millett calls the 'later godlike and indifferent Lawrentian male' (see Millett, 250).

danger of feeling given away, and the books on the unconscious may be in part an attempt to resist this degree of exposure'.³⁸ But what Lawrence, perhaps inevitably, does in his discussion of incest dreams is to 'expose' himself even further. In this passage, the incest dream (and its 'mother-image') has become an unhealthy growth, an 'obstruction'. In the vehement desire to be free of the 'ghoul' of incest, Lawrence is effectively affirming the existence and *persistence* of the ghoul. The ghoul multiplies herself, arriving 'over and over again, for years', haunting rationality ('even when he *knows* that the cause of the disturbing dream is the wife') but also, we might infer, masculinity ('it haunts and terrifies a man'). As Derrida suggests, in its otherness to enlightenment rationality, signification, production of meaning and gender formation, incest is also profoundly dangerous: it is 'that which would destroy in one blow the entire system of signs'.³⁹

Lawrence's veiled confession in *Fantasia*, with its language of haunting and obstruction, is useful for thinking about what I want to call the *ingrowth* of *Sons and Lovers*. The novel, as we will see, works to keep incest in the undergrowth, a place where it retains its aesthetic and affective force, even losing its strict attachment to the human. Like virginity, incest is figured in the text through a series of vegetal metaphors: throughout the novel, flowers work to supplement and facilitate an otherwise unspeakable and forbidden Eros between Paul and his mother. In one example, Paul and Mrs Morel are on their way to Willey Farm and find themselves in a wood:

They found a little gate, and soon were in a broad green alley of the wood, with a new thicket of fir and pine on one hand, an old oak glade, dipping down on the other. And among the oaks the bluebells stood in pools of azure, under the new green hazels, upon a pale fawn floor of oak-leaves.

³⁸ Fiona Becket, *D.H. Lawrence: The Thinker as Poet* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1997), 61.

³⁹ Derrida, 266.

He found flowers for her.

“Here’s a bit of new-mown hay,” he said, then again he brought her forgetmenots. And again his heart hurt with love, seeing her hand, used with work, holding the little bunch of flowers he gave her. She was perfectly happy. (*Sons*, 153)

This moment appears to employ organic descriptions in order to show an erotic entanglement between mother and son. The alliterative (‘fawn floor’, ‘found flowers’) and repetitive (‘oak’, ‘green’, ‘hand’) devices at work in Lawrence’s language simulate their intertwined feelings. Even the landscape performs a movement of *ingrowth*: the ‘glade’ is ‘dipping down on’ the ‘thicket’. This flower-writing also gives the sense of *sense itself* overgrowing in a dizzying and even dangerous way: we can’t quite get our grip on the overwhelming scene before us. Plantlife, in its apparently ‘perfect’ naturalness, is that which threatens to pull Paul and his mother down into the pre-human non-differentiated space of ‘ecstasy’: before the prohibition, where incest would not be incest.

This notion of the novel’s flowers supplementing or making possible a prohibited incestuous connection is perhaps most clearly observed in two scenes that take place in the garden. The first of these (coming later in the novel, when Paul is twenty-four) occurs late one evening, as Paul is working ‘feverishly and mechanically’ in the Morel family kitchen (*Sons*, 337). Suddenly something arrives to seduce him away from his work:

Through the open door, stealthily, came the scent of Madonna lilies, almost as if it were prowling abroad. Suddenly he got up and went out of doors.

The beauty of the night made him want to shout. A half-moon, dusky gold, was sinking behind the black sycamore at the end of the garden, making the sky dull purple with its glow. Nearer, a dim white fence of lilies went across the garden, and the air all around seemed to stir with scent, as if it were alive. He went across the bed of pinks, whose keen perfume came sharply across the rocking, heavy scent of lilies, and stood alongside the white barrier of flowers. They flagged all loose as if they were panting. The scent made him drunk. He went down to the field to watch the moon sink under.

A corncrake in the hay-close called insistently. The moon slid quite quickly downwards, growing more flushed. Behind him the great flowers leaned as if they were calling. And then, like a shock, he caught another perfume, something raw and coarse. Hunting round, he found the purple iris, touched their fleshy throats and their dark, grasping hands. At any rate, he had found something. They stood stiff in the darkness. Their scent was brutal. The moon was melting down upon the crest of the hill. It was gone, it was dark. The corncrake called still. (*Sons*, 337–8)

This scene, and the connotations of sexual violence that it generates, might first appear to be related to Paul's sexual frustrations, directed at Miriam. After returning to the house from the garden, Paul tells his mother: 'I shall break off with Miriam' (*Sons*, 338). But if we enter the garden, following its 'prowling' scents', the *calling* of its flowers and the weird moments of 'crossing', it is clear that something far stranger is at work. Moreover, if we compare Paul's experience to the following episode, which is perhaps one of the most celebrated and critically discussed in the novel, we find that there is an unmistakably incestuous collusion between the two passages. The descriptive correspondences between these two scenes initially appear to erase the temporal and physical distance between them: they form a kind of *ingrowth*, unleashing and making possible a tabooed erotic encounter. Heavily pregnant with Paul, Mrs Morel finds herself in the garden, locked out of the house by her drunken husband during a violent argument. After wandering about the flowerbeds for some time in a 'delirious condition' (*Sons*, 33), she suddenly

became aware of something about her. With an effort, she roused herself to see what it was that penetrated her consciousness. The tall white lilies were reeling in the moonlight, and the air was charged with their perfume, as with a presence. Mrs Morel gasped slightly in fear. She touched the big, pallid flowers on their petals, then shivered. They seemed to be stretching in the moonlight. She put her hand into one white bin: the gold scarcely showed on her fingers by moonlight. She bent down to look at the binful of yellow pollen; but it only appeared dusky. Then she drank a deep draught of the scent. It almost made her dizzy.

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. [...] And out of the silver-grey fog of darkness came sounds vague and hoarse: a corncrake not far off, sound of a train like a sigh, and distant shouts of men (*Sons*, 34–5)

Not only does this moment give us Paul's origin in the womb, it also shows us a kind of origin of the possibility of and desire for incest. This scene has often been the centre of critical discussion on the novel, particularly for its Oedipal connotations. For example, Keith Cushman and Earl Ingersoll describe this 'moonlight and lilies scene' as a 'metaphorical field [that] unifies mother and unborn child'.⁴⁰ But this moment of harmonious unification is also profoundly dangerous in the way that the human characters lose themselves, they 'melt' together in the 'mixing-pot of moonlight'—they are shown to be part of a much larger 'swoon', an ecological swoon. The garden becomes a space akin to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of a pre-societal 'festival' which, Derrida explains, 'is the moment of pure continuity', where differences are completely erased (or have yet to be articulated, formed).⁴¹

The later episode, occurring when Paul is 'grown', appears to repeat or return to the earlier primal scene of the garden: Paul enters the garden in order to return to his origin. In order to reach his mother, Paul must 'cross' several lines: 'a dim white fence of lilies went *across* the garden [...]. He went *across* the bed of pinks, whose keen perfume came sharply *across* the rocking, heavy scent of lilies, and stood alongside the white barrier of flowers'. The mother-son consummation is first of all indicated by the correspondences between the 'moonlight' and mysterious 'Madonna lilies' in both episodes, which seem to travel through time

⁴⁰ Keith Cushman and Earl G. Ingersoll, *D.H. Lawrence: New Worlds* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), 115.

⁴¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 263.

in order to connect Paul and Mrs Morel. In some senses, the later scene is an exaggeration or overgrowth of the first. Mrs Morel is made 'dizzy' by the scent of lilies, while it makes Paul 'drunk'. Then there is also the intrusive sound of 'a corncrake not far off', which, in Paul's scene, becomes more 'insistent', it 'called *still*'. When Mrs Morel finds them, the flowers 'seemed to be stretching in the moonlight, while Paul finds that the flowers, suggestively, 'stood stiff in the darkness'.⁴²

In another example of overgrowth, we might note that, in Mrs Morel's garden experience, the word 'scent' appears twice but, by the time it drifts into Paul's scene, it has multiplied, appearing five times in just two paragraphs. What is 'scent' doing in and between the ingrowth of these scenes? 'Scent' seems to carry the incestuous desire from one scene to the next. While, the word 'incest', unsurprisingly, never appears in the novel, it is perhaps substituted by its near anagram, 'scent'. It is as if Gertrude has sent the scent of incest (in the maternal 'Madonna' lilies) to seduce Paul, to bring him back to the mother, to this originary prenatal scene. The scent of lilies that enters the human *oikos*, 'prowling abroad', acts as a kind of envoy, seducing Paul to enter the prehuman garden, where his mother awaits (albeit twenty-four years earlier). He not only becomes intoxicated *like* his mother, but *by* his mother, her scent. The scents, in the later scene particularly, have violent overtones, which grow as the scene develops: first, there is the 'heavy, rocking scent of lilies', suggesting an infant's rocking cradle (as when he finds out his mother has cancer, Clara 'rocked [Paul], soothed him like a child' (*Sons*, 421)); this first scent is interrupted by the 'keen' fragrance of pinks,

⁴² This is also related to Mrs Morel's notion (in reference to her first son, William) that 'she only wanted him to be himself, to develop and bring to fruit all she had put into him. In him, she wanted to see her life's fruition, that was all' (*Sons*, 77). The mother ripens through the son, *growing into him*.

connoting sharpness but also a sudden desire, eagerness; and finally, 'like a shock, [Paul] caught another perfume, something raw and coarse', 'the scent was brutal'. This final scent of irises pulls Paul down into the incestuous undergrowth. It evokes the 'faint strange scent of earth' of *Pansies*, and the sense, in Lawrence's short story 'The Old Adam' (written in 1913 but first published posthumously in 1935) that irises have a 'brutal, carnal scent' (*Haystacks*, 75). In an early poem, 'Scent of Irises' (composed in 1910), Lawrence writes about the 'faint, sickening scent of irises' and the way it distorts his pupils in the classroom to a 'broken pattern, amid purple and gold and sable' (*Poems*, 56). The irises have a similarly shattering effect on Paul: they make him lose his grip on human laws. Mirroring Mrs Morel, who 'touched the big, pallid flowers on their petals, then shivered', Paul takes some flowers in his hands and 'touched their fleshy throats'. This image reproduces another from about twenty pages earlier, when, while embracing Mrs Morel, Paul 'stroked his mother's hair and his mouth was on her throat' (*Sons*, 252). The violence of the flowers' 'dark, grasping hands' connects 'throat' to 'throttle', suggesting that Paul and his mother almost strangle each other in this floral unification. For this is a scene, not only about loving the mother, but also about killing (and, perhaps, being killed by) her, as a way of *doing away* with the danger of incestuous love. This metaphorical killing is literally enacted by Paul at the end of the novel, when he gives his mother an overdose of morphine (*Sons*, 437–42).

The incest prohibition is a cultural story of *origins*: it is the confirmation or invention of parental or familial connections and, in turn, 'society'. By returning to this originary moment—the very source of the possibility of incest, where Paul can almost literally return to oneness with his mother—the novel is, in theory,

able to prune away its own perverse desires and disorders. At the end of Paul's olfactory and incestuous adventure in the garden, he picks a flower (which has, up until now, been the vehicle for the mother-son passion) and returns to the house, where he proceeds to eat it: 'He put the flower in his mouth. Unthinking, he bared his teeth, closed them on the blossom slowly, and had a mouthful of petals. These he spat into the fire, kissed his mother, and went to bed' (*Sons*, 338). This has echoes of Paul's 'scientific' act of eating the 'yellow trumpets' of cowslips as a way of symbolically surmounting—and, at the same time, gorging upon—virginity. We might return once again to Ngai's reading of Lispector's *Passion According to G.H.* and the way that 'G.H. eats the intolerable in an unsuccessful effort to keep it down', forming a text that 'occup[ies] the position of the disgusting and unconsumable'. The flower, which is the vehicle for dangerous incest, must be swallowed in order to be *kept down*, in order to shed, once and for all, the excessive incest that the garden represents. To swallow the flower is therefore to swallow the scene's flower-embedded incest. And this metaphorical repression appears successful: Paul can now kiss his mother quite innocently and go 'to bed' without the ghoulish watching over him. However, like G.H. and the cockroach, Paul cannot quite get the flower down—the action cannot be completed and the petals are 'spat into the fire' in order to hide the evidence.

What makes the incest of the novel so difficult to swallow or keep down? If we return to the two garden scenes, which initially appear to be like two peas-in-a-pod, we find the answer to this lies in the scene's flowers. As has already been suggested, growth outgrows itself. By affirming his own origin, Paul also works to outgrow it. This can, first of all, be seen in the fact that the flowers, which are supposed to metaphorically designate the incestuous relation, constantly change

shape: Gertrude penetrates a lily but Paul responds with an iris, and, finally the pink that is swallowed and spat onto the fire. Incest is constantly *deferred* between flowers. These flowers are weirdly ingrown: they erase the origin of incest by supplanting it. This is perhaps a case of what Ellen Pollak, in her work on *Incest and the English Novel* (2003), calls ‘intercestuality’.⁴³ While Pollak reads this concept in mid- to late- eighteenth century fiction, *Sons and Lovers* similarly engages in the logic that incest ‘comes to signal the absence of origin that haunts all textuality’.⁴⁴ Or as Derrida argues ‘we are always short of or beyond the limit of the festival, the origin of society’.⁴⁵ Paul’s inability to seek out the originary *bud* of maternal incest means that it cannot, finally, be surmounted.

The disturbing absence of origin that we find in the two garden scenes is also presented in another way, through a kind of essential diffusion: the *spraying* of the novel’s scented incest. Catherine Maxwell, in her work on fragrance in nineteenth century literature, has noted that ‘perfume hovers over that ambiguous ground between flesh and spirit’.⁴⁶ Perfume is a kind of spectral writing in the way that it leaves a flower’s body, moving like a messenger or letter through the air.⁴⁷ In the garden of *Sons and Lovers*, for example, the Madonna lilies are able to leave their vegetal bodies and become spirits ‘prowling abroad’. The scented ghost that ‘prowls’ through the garden is the ‘ghoul’ of Paul’s mother, and Paul is drawn to

⁴³ Ellen Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel, 1684–1814* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 130.

⁴⁴ Pollak, 24.

⁴⁵ Derrida, 267.

⁴⁶ Catherine Maxwell, ‘Scents and Sensibility: The Fragrance of Decadence’, *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, edited by Jason D. Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 206.

⁴⁷ Lawrence explores this link between the fragrant and the ghostly in his short story ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’ (published in 1911), in which the ‘cold, deathly smell of chrysanthemums’ (which, being cut, are only half-alive) pervades the viscosity of a story about a dead man’s body (*Prussian*, 193–4).

her incestuous scent like an unthinking *insect*. (Mrs Morel also perhaps makes an incestuous insect of herself when she enters the flower: ‘she put her hand into one white bin’.) But the mother, the originary scent, is also shown to be already scattered in her correspondence to the garden’s scents. We initially get a whiff of this in the way that Mrs Morel’s garden scene is pervaded by a ghostly sense of something that is at once there and not there—for the air is described as ‘charged, *as if* with a presence’. The slippery ‘as if’ suggests that the flowers and their incestuous scents are only-just or not-quite present, never exactly what (or who) we perceive them to be. The scents cross over from the vegetal to the world of the airborne, to the realm of ghosts, or *ghouls*, which are s(c)ent off, like untraceable dead letters.⁴⁸ The scents of the scene both mark the moment of incestuous consummation and spray it ever outwards. At the end of the novel Paul is lost because his mother, in death, ‘was gone abroad into the night, and he was with her still’ (*Sons*, 464) but ‘she was gone, intermingled herself’ (*Sons*, 464). The son’s problem is that the mother, the very notion of the mother, has been diffused into the air, sprayed like perfume: she is scent s(c)ent into the air.

The occlusion of incestuous origin is also at work in the scent-like scattering of *writing* of the passage, which reveals a shifting and shadowy convergence between its own letters, phonemes and syllables. This occurs in

⁴⁸ This notion of the *sending* of scent is presented in a deceptively simple way in an early episode of *Sons and Lovers* in which the young Paul becomes enraptured by various floral scents adorning the love letters of his brother William, which ‘hung on a file at the top of the kitchen cupboard’ (*Sons*, 79). Even more enchanting to Paul than the ‘pretty little embellishments to the love-letters’, the ‘thistles [...] swallows and forget-me-nots and ivy sprays’ (*Sons*, 80) are the floral perfumes of ‘Jockey Club’ and ‘Cherry Blossom’ *sprayed* upon the letters by William’s lovers (*Sons*, 79–80). In this scene of olfactory reading, the scents detach and *grow away from* the letters’ messages and senders, forming their own strange love letters, which are perhaps more seductive because both their origin and destination is in question.

certain repetitions of sounds, for example in ‘*hills and lilies*’ and the ‘*white*’ lilies and ‘*moonlight*’, imbuing the passage with an odd echoing quality that makes it difficult for the reader to settle on one image or word. We hear, in a kind of homonymic collision, that ‘the *air* was charged with *their* perfume’, suggesting that the perfume is already a ‘presence’ in the air, the *air* already a molecular component of ‘their’ (the flowers’) bodies. This scattering is also heard in the insistent alliteration of formulations such as ‘*mixing-pot of moonlight*’; ‘*pallid flowers on their petals*’; ‘she *drank* a *deep draught* of the scent’; ‘*leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile*’; ‘all *swum* together in a kind of *swoon*’. The effect of such alliterative foregrounding of letters and sounds is that words, like plants, are shown to be always more than themselves, for they are subject to the erotic whims of their letters (alphabetic and epistolary), compelled to cross their own borders and cross-fertilise or germinate with or in their own incestuous language. Incest becomes that which is at once everywhere and nowhere, wafting through the novel like a horrifying dream that cannot be put to bed (or is put to bed incessantly, again and again).

This crossing and dissemination of language is perhaps most strangely at work in the way that the ‘lilies were reeling’. The word ‘reeling’ first of all suggests a staggering movement, while also creating the impression that the flowers are fishing, seductively *reeling* in their prey. Garrett Stewart’s notion of ‘transegmental spreading’⁴⁹—which was touched upon in Chapter One and is even more pertinent in this vegetal context, particularly in the sense of words *growing* into each other like amorous plants—would also give us the bizarre notion that the flowers ‘were eeling’, with ‘reeling’ losing its ‘r’ to the final syllable of the preceding word.

⁴⁹ Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley, LA and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 177.

'Eeling' suggests a different kind of life, as if the flowers' perfume had become an electrified fish, 'charging' the air with scent, further *revealing* the writing's ghostly lack of origins or final, grown up growth. Stewart's 'transegmental spreading' of language is an idea that might underpin what is happening in the narrative of *Sons and Lovers* more widely: nothing is itself, everything is growing together, being always part of another plant, the sprayed perfume of a flower from elsewhere. It is, finally, a kind of ingrowth of *writing*, growing out of tabooed incest, which, in turn, lets incest go to seed. It cannot be fully surmounted, it must always haunt its own writing, like a 'brutal' ghoul. The flowers of Lawrence's language, his vegetal metaphors, proliferate and disperse, entering the air of his oeuvre, spraying their incest-scented molecules (letters, phonemes, syllables) into the night of writing.

Outgrowth: A Posy of Letters

In this little outgrowth, I will try to gather together some of the overgrown, diffused and prowling flowers of the text into some sort of anomalous bunch or posy. By reading the novel's plantlife, we find a wildly contradictory text—one that is both imprisoned and thrown open, contained and excessive, driven both by equal amounts of desire and disgust. We are left hovering, like a weird phantom or ghoul, between virginity and deflowering, incest and its prohibition. The spectral lines that work to distinguish between the healthy and unhealthy, sickness and cure, metaphor and literality, are shown to be dangerously overgrown. In *Sons*

and Lovers this is, ultimately perhaps, a question of nonhuman textuality and the 'life of writing'. In each of the examples I have dug up, we find that, as the text's 'disorders' are apparently surmounted, they make an imprint or trace, a weird and unpredictable plant writing that can never quite be uprooted. Unearthing the plantlike 'perversions' of the text, flowers are revealed to be the unstable metaphorical bed of the novel's tabooed disorders. They engender a growth of weird textual effects that operate both within ('organically', we might say) and outside of the novel—growing beyond, towards their reader.

All we are left with, after reading is done, are Lawrence's inscrutable flowers of writing. We might think here of the speaker of Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'The Question', who spends the poem collecting poetic 'flowers' and, finally, declares: 'Methought that of these visionary flowers/ I made a nosegay'. The speaker then seems to turn to the reader, performatively holding out the bunch of floral words to her or him, saying: 'I hastened to the spot whence I had come, / That I might there present it! Oh! to whom?'.⁵⁰ In this moment, the poem grows beyond its own 'organic form' by offering itself, like a literal (and letter-like) bunch of flowers to the reader. Like Shelley's poem, we might finally read *Sons and Lovers* as a ghoulish bunch of flowers proffered to us, the text's readers, to inhale and gorge upon: making us outgrow the scene of reading, hover ambivalently over its letters, let ourselves become lost in the *scent sent*...

⁵⁰ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Question', *Selected Poems*, edited by Humphrey Milford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 418.

Sicily

28th April

On the way from Palermo. Writing is almost impossible, the road is so meandering and I am wracked with nausea. The coach has that sour-sweet coach smell, like rotting fruit. As the bus snakes up and up, the land falls away into profound valleys and ancient grey lava-bedded gorges beneath us. Crows circle with wide-open palms, mounting and revolving on the hot air currents. Sheep are grazing on the mountainside and cows, with bells around their dewlapped necks, stand in inexpressive clumps. Two shaggy black-and-white goats stand eating upon a near-vertical slope and I think of your nanny goat, *smiling with goaty munch-munch*. Their feet are magnetic upon the earth

on the horizon, mountains appear, dark blue against the clouds. I try to predict and trace our trajectory across the peaks, dreading the winding, vertiginous turning, acceleration and breaking, the swinging of the bus's rear end. She rattles and heaves over every bump, as we look down into the valley below, hundreds of feet of a sheer-drop, with only wild fennel plants to break the fall. I am scanning the landscape through the cloudy double-glazing, wanting to see the volcano. I think I catch her a dozen times, but each time, as we approach, it's merely an ordinary rocky outcrop, a phantom—

must tell you—have just seen her. Or rather a masked glimpse of her—Etna—and it's just like you said. Then, to our left, I notice a strange formation of clouds, they seem to take on a veined appearance, and there is an expanse of light, flashing mist. I realise with a great jolt in my body that those streaked bands of cloud are not clouds at all, but the great expanse of

snow covering the peak of Etna. She fills the whole horizon with anaesthetizing whiteness, her huge, sloping body like some giant shrouded slug perched high above us. Everything here, near us is resplendent green and brown and yellow. While Etna is always somewhere else, veiled, unseeable. It's an impossible experience, being divided like this. *A metempsychosis* you called it.

30th April

now in Taormina in a long, shadowy room on the ground floor of the Casa Rupilio and mopeds screech past all day long on the tiny street. It is aptly called via Dionisio: Dionysus Street. First night's sleep here interrupted by the mopeds and the coldness of the air conditioning, the whirring noise it makes, like a pigeon flapping her wings in panic. From the high breakfast terrace of the Casa Rupilio I can watch birds dart and dive against the distant backdrop of Etna's

slopes, like a puppet show. Nino, the proprietor, brings the *colazione*—sickly Italian cakes and fruit—and stands watching as I eat. An old woman in an apron, his mother perhaps, sometimes comes and watches, too. Each time I look up from my cakes or blood oranges or coffee they smile kindly at me and gesture with wide arms towards the smoking volcano, in case I have somehow missed her. Below us, the town hums with cars and building works—and everything seductive smelling of jasmine

1st May

No luck yet. Reading *Apocalypse* under a magnificent stone pine tree, with its ornate scales of bark and drooping arms reaching out over the precipice, hundreds of metres above the sea. I can see down to the Isola Bella, a little

islet made of rocky clusters, said to be the rocks thrown by the blinded Polyphemus when Odysseus made a run for it. Thick pillows of cloud engulfing Etna, her silent presence. I see your thin body in my mind's eye, walking down the Corso Umberto in a rage, a quick demon. You are, I often like to think, some kind of jay, biscuit-coloured and sky blue, scavenging on the fennel-feathery mountainside, pouncing and then—in a flash—*gone*

This morning, in the Piazza IX Aprile—hundreds of Alpine swifts sweeping around the scarp beneath the town, nosediving and plunging to catch insects on the wing. They never seem to pause or land—and their white backs and the angle of their wings makes them look like shrunken aeroplanes. I try to take a picture of them with my phone but it just comes out etiolated and blurry, with a smudge of turquoise sea beyond. The swifts escape, resist. They can live on the wing for up to six months, never once touching down, never landing for a moment. They are like my wandering train of thought these days, my half—

compositions, half-letters, or the telephone calls I never make. Going nowhere, anywhere, but so specifically *there*. Perhaps they are postcards, too, with fast hearts. Dead letters alive. My irresistible desire to capture them—I take my camera-phone and try to focus the lens, to shoot them still, keep them forever—but suddenly I am trembling, as if an earthquake shakes my body, as if Etna were erupting and exhaling, and everything—the mountain, the paddle-cacti, the Ionian sea, the chess-board piazza, the statuette of the Virgin Mary, the tiny swifts, the shadow of Calabria, the rocky Isola Bella, umbrella pines and yellow mimosa trees, everything violently turning together, pitching and soaring, pouring out, spilling, falling to earth—

2nd May

The house you and F lived in, the Fontana Vecchia, came as a surprise and I stood before the building for some moments without seeing or knowing it. Had been walking slowly up the hill of via David Herbert Lawrence (!) watching the swifts come and go from under the eaves of the roof of your pink house with pine-green shutters, moving in quick white flashes, pipping like bats, back-and-forth from their nests and the insect-teeming air—so perfect that they haunt this place, your place—and on the high bank opposite the house grow huge prickly pear plants bearing yellow-red fruits, tall spiky palms and sherbet-coloured creepers, purple bougainvillea carpeting the ground, making me forget you for some time in its weird perfume...

but so many plants too that I don't recognise, can't even begin to name. Today new buildings and cars surround and crowd the old fountain house, stray cats lurk around the bins. Bony and flea-mangy, they shy away from human hands. After photographing your house from every angle, I went to buy a single *sanguinello* from a man on via Fontana Vecchia. I'm eating it as I write and it's bleeding red onto my dress. On the Corso Umberto, before leaving, I bought a postcard from the 1920s depicting three horned and smiling goats—one standing and two lying with their legs folded up neatly beneath them—all with long, twisted horns, growing out in all directions—while three American women tried on pastel-coloured sweatshirts emblazoned across the chest with the word 'ETNA'.

3rd May

There's a ruin, an old Byzantine-Muslim-Norman *castello*, on the steep rocks above Taormina, just outside the village of Castelmola. It was a steep climb but I made it—now drinking coffee on a high terrace overlooking a

modest piazza and its simple 1930s church. An old man is watching me suspiciously from his balcony as I sit writing to you. Earlier, at the *castello*, I stood on the high ruins in the glimmering heat and watched the coastline snaking south to Catania and beyond to Syracuse. The heat was beating in my temples, through my body. I sat down to rest on a piece of the castle fortification, shaded by a pine tree's unruly

parasol. It wasn't lunchtime but I opened up my pack of food—tomatoes and some hard Sicilian bread. Rustling the paper, I must not have heard her arrive but, when I looked up, there stood a goat, a nanny goat, a short distance from where I was sitting. She was nosing at some acacia leaves hanging down from over the side of a wall, but eyeing me at the same time with her straight black slit of a pupil. She was a pure demon, with a curtain of long white hair and a dappled face. She seemed to notice my food, losing interest in the acacia and came trotting sideways

towards me—feigning nonchalance. I realised that I had in my diary the old postcard of the three horned goats, smiling. I had written to you on it. I took it and held it out to her. As she came closer I could smell her warm straw smell, the hairy smoky scent. Her horns rose in ornate spirals, conch-like from her lumpy forehead. For the first time in days I spoke to someone (with Nino and his mother I don't speak, only gesture wildly), I spoke to the nanny goat: *Look, they are just like you*, I said. In response to my words, she crinkled her nose and leant forward, taking a quick bite from

the picture and then swiftly another, and another, her velvety mouth caressing the edges of the old paper. I let her eat the whole thing out of my hand, feeling her hot breath become fast against the skin of my palm. And then she turned from me abruptly and hauled her bony legs up to a higher

spot of the castello—looking back down at me for a moment with her curious blankly smiling face.

Goats: *They obsess the rocks...* That's the French poet Francis Ponge. His poems have the same goatlike tendencies as yours—refusing to keep still, munching everything until they are done

now the church bell rasps one o'clock, scratchy and loud. Here they sell bottles of almond wine, and some tourists, on a day trip from a huge cruise liner anchored out in the bay, come to taste it and laugh at the numerous phallic ornaments that cover this odd little café. I bought an almond-paste cake and, as I ate, thought of your iron-limbed almond trees, with telegraph-wire-branches, *climbing the slopes* and *telephoning the roar of the waters-over-the-earth* and that funny chant of a poem, like a telegram from some other life—

3 p.m. Clouds are so thick and low now that they envelop the old *castello*. A blackbird has jumped up from below to sing on the balustrade. The sound is sharp enough to cut me. I wish you could hear it—you would know exactly what to write.

4th May

You called her *white, witch-like* but up close she is not white or misty or glowing like a *crystal wall*. With my feet now touching her (wrapped in sandals and polyester socks bought from the Etna souvenir shop) all is maroon and purple, like ripe bruises, black and grey and dust—as close to

moonflesh as you'll ever get. It is something like hell, this uncanny darkness all over and the patches of snow with their sinister, blinding glare against the black, brittle rocks. I pick up some igneous parings to take home but they crumble in my fingers almost immediately, scattering like ashes...

the craters of Etna are Roman amphitheatres, torture pits, pretending benevolence. I circumnavigate two of the smaller craters, peering down into the weird cones, feeling as if every step disturbs the deep-sleeping magma. Magma is a beautiful word for something so malevolent. Yet it means 'kneading'—it's Greek. Moulding or shaping. A forming substance, deforming. Magma. *Make me*, it seems to say

Have discovered something about Etna: she absorbs all sound. Walking in single file along a crumbling crater lip the people shout to each other, hearing nothing. I saw a man throw a lava rock down into the steepest crater and it landed silently. Someone in me, someone more superstitious and animistic than me, felt afraid of angering the volcano with these petty human impertinences—schoolchildren joking around, couples kissing each other, a woman doing the moonwalk for her children.

Not much can survive up here, only some tough mountain grass, some bony trees, shivering in the icy tramontana wind. Little life. This, right here, is where you feel most inaccessible. As if Etna has absorbed you, too. There is no longer any 'you' to be certain of up here. I feel as if I'm only writing to some presence in the air, a wormlike floater in my eye, at the edge of the world.

On the road up the mountain, the coach driver stopped to let us photograph rooftops and garden furniture jutting out of the basalt—all that

remains of these homes after being frozen in lava, devoured. It's a kind of eating, what the mountain does. She eats herself again and again. A kind of reverse autophagy, for she feeds by regurgitating, eating from the inside out, and then makes herself again out of her own hot viscera. She reminds me of you, living inside-outside her self—like the cave swiftlet in Asia that makes its nests from its own saliva. You, too, eat your own words, your own body

but if one looks closely there is *always* life, making a secret of itself. Sometimes, yellow-green finches flit between the rocks: there are ladybirds and a stray dog or two. One of these, wolfish-looking, trots towards me. He is haggard but very large and the same colour as the lava rock. He stops some metres away and I'm afraid he might bark or try to bite me. Instead he jumps back sharply and cowers as if I would kick him or pelt him with pieces of lava, as if that's all he knows of human contact.

On the way down and it is like escaping from hell. On the slopes all around are luminous asphodels. Three buzzards career about in the shifting air.

5th May

Can't sleep for thinking about you. When people here have heard of you I feel so proud, as if I were your mother. And it does feel like that, at times, as if I'm giving birth to you, slowly, as if you'd never lived before this very moment. But when I write to you like this it's not ever to the 'you' that they're all thinking of—it's to the you already vibrating in me, the you that has always resonated here, inside, since before the beginning

5th May

Taormina again. Am writing my postcards from the Etna souvenir shop and eating almond granita, which shoots pain into my gums. All the postcards I bought depict Etna from various angles—as seen from the Teatro Greco; or with the sea glittering in the foreground; one with a smiley face drawn on and a speech bubble saying something in Italian, the others are mostly taken at night with the volcano in full eruption. The lava spilling out reminds me of tomato soup and boiling marmalade in the pan. Alpine swifts maraud the square as I write. Everything happens as I write. An American couple eats spaghetti Bolognese. Some teenaged girls are taking pictures of themselves eating pizza. I never write what I want to.

there's a curious *film* of unreality over everything this afternoon. I can only follow you so far. Without losing myself. It's dangerous. This morning I read your Sicily letters for hours, trying to make some connection. At last, something dawned on me when I read this to Mrs Brett Young: *Our plans are still indefinite, feel I can't come to any decision. In this climate one's very psyche is like a jelly that won't set: flux, flux, invariable flux: mind you don't spill it.—I feel a bit myself as if I'd been spilled out of my old jug, and can't quite pick myself up.—E don' know where 'e are.*

Yes, mind you don't spill it. But it's too late for that...

you ask her, in a postscript: *Did you pick the capers, or let them flower?*—and the question blooms with meaning.

6th May

Had the strangest dream. Sitting on the breakfast terrace at night—alone. There was not much wind this evening and countless moths and mosquitos, and other dusk-flyers I hadn't yet learned the names of, were weaving purposefully towards the candle, which flickered as I removed

your letter from its envelope. You had begun without address: *There has been a curious subtle mystic*

invisibleness in the days, a beauty that is not in the eyes. I tried to read on but grew distracted by the soft hiss of moth-wings and how quickly the frail bodies became coated in the liquid wax as they struggled to get free. I was struck by the thought that, for us, it would be like stumbling into boiling treacle. Then something dark, larger and much swifter than a moth darted in front of the candle, forming—for a split second—a jagged shadow—puppet on the page. *A bat:* taut and precise in its singular movement, swooping down to snatch the insects before they reached the flame. The creature was too quick for

me to fix my gaze but, in the candlelight, I caught a glimpse—like a bright snapshot—its tiny puckered face, grimacing. As it dipped down, the light filtered through its veined wings, recalling smooth vellum and dead leaves. I wanted to return to your letter but my eyes would no longer focus on the text. Now I could only read three words over and over: *benediction, attention, trembling—*

6th May

last day in Sicily. Visited the Fontana Vecchia once more this morning. A dog was standing in the neighbouring garden behind a fence and barking madly as I passed, setting other dogs in the area barking. The sound echoed around the mountain in a mad chorus. A couple, perhaps English, walked by as I was photographing the front of the villa, the mottled pink walls and deep green shutters, always closed. They stared, perplexed (I think) by my intense interest. Only you understand such things, the importance of

attention. That's what I tell myself anyway—that you're like me. But, the truth is—

I really don't know the first thing about you.

Perhaps I am too late (or early?) for the cyclamens and salvia flowers and hibiscus...

The couple stopped a little further ahead to photograph a sulphur-yellow Piaggio scooter. I tried to imagine where the family of goats stood, the inky black kids, *like spurts of black ink*, or how the old water trough would have looked, or where the almond tree dropped its blossom—or the hole that the snake disappeared into when you threw a log at it. They are here but hide themselves away.

As I wait for the bus to take me back to Palermo, I talk to the lizards (grass-green creatures that tip their heads like a question-mark) and stray cats, missing home now, tired of roaming about, chasing you. I would never want to meet you, I tell myself.

On the plane. Sea of clouds beneath. Just had the weirdest thought—that you had been reincarnated as a female goat. Always escaping up a tree, urinating in disdain every time someone looked at you

Chapter Three

Against *St. Mawr* Phantasms of Reading

He had a passion for destroying his own writing.
(Frieda Lawrence)¹

What might it mean to read *against* Lawrence? ‘Against’, first of all, names a kind of hostile offensive or defensive opposition. No doubt my reading of Lawrence in this thesis sometimes entails some sort of treachery, at least to a certain *kind* of Lawrence, certain ideas or aspects of his philosophy. But my reading also seeks to oppose or be resistant to the dominant modes of Lawrence criticism that work to pacify some force in his writing, that which tries to uncover once and for all the *secret message* of his oeuvre. My desire to read against therefore corresponds to the main concern of this thesis, namely to rethink and get *closer* to the notion of ‘life’ in the context of Lawrence’s writing. For ‘against’ can also refer to an intimate degree of closeness, touching up *against* something, getting unthinkably near.

For Lawrence, as we have seen, a text can live, it can be animated and alive. However, as he suggests in his critique of the Book of Revelation in *Apocalypse*, it also has the strange ability to *perish*:

A book lives as long as it is unfathomed. Once it is fathomed, it dies at once. It is an amazing thing, how utterly different a book will be, if I read it again after five years. Some books gain immensely, they are a new thing. They are so astonishingly different, they make a man question his own identity. [...] The real joy of a book lies in reading it over and over again, and always finding it different, coming upon another meaning, another level of meaning. (*Apocalypse*, 60)

¹ Frieda Lawrence, ‘*Not I, But the Wind...*’ (Santa Fe: Rydal Press, 1934), 133.

Lawrence's wonderful sense of the transformation engendered by texts in rereading calls to mind Harold Bloom's definition of the canonical. Bloom remarks that 'one ancient test for the canonical remains fiercely valid: unless it demands rereading, the work does not qualify'.² But Lawrence is not just speaking about canonisation here or the notion of what makes a literary text 'great'. Rather he is saying something about the question of the life of a text and the strange idea that a book's ability to be 'fathomed' amounts to its *death*. The verb 'to fathom' is, today, most commonly used in the sense of 'to get to the bottom of, dive into, penetrate, see through, thoroughly understand' (*OED* 4.b). But Lawrence's notion also leads us to the original meaning of 'to fathom': 'to encircle with extended arms' (1.a.) or 'to clasp or embrace (a person)' (1.b.), both of which relate to the noun 'fathom', denoting 'grasp, power' (1.b). Thus, paradoxically, for a work to be embraced, understood and accepted by a culture—effectively to become *one* with it, locked in its epistemological grip—marks its own *end*. For Lawrence, a text's life force is indissociable from its mutability, its ability to change, and to change its reader, to make her question her 'own identity' each time she meets it. The kind of living text that Lawrence is speaking about is slippery, it resists the open embrace of cultural comprehension and acceptance. It is a shape-shifting thing that changes its form too often to be held on to.

These seemingly paradoxical notions about the life and death of texts—we might say their *survival*, their ability to live on, to continue regenerating and becoming 'a new thing', as Lawrence says—are very close to the theory of the

² Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York, San Diego and London: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 30.

‘double condition’³ of texts that Derrida puts forward in the essay ‘Biodegradables’: that is, their necessary propensity for both ‘biodegradability’ and ‘(non)biodegradability’. Derrida, like Lawrence before him, is interested in how texts might be in some way put to death through a cultural embrace, or a final *reading*:

In the most general and novel sense of this term, a *text* must be “(bio)degradable” in order to nourish the “living” culture, memory, tradition. To the extent to which it has some sense, makes sense, then its “content” irrigates the milieu of this tradition and its “formal” identity is dissolved.⁴

To the extent that a text is readable, fathomable, comprehensible, it feeds its readers and the culture it enters into more generally. The text is no longer a text, it would seem, but rather a paraphrasable set of meanings and ‘sense’, or process of sense-making, that can be understood by a particular ‘culture, memory, tradition’. While the culture that assimilates a text is ‘living’, the text itself is entirely ‘dissolved’. It keeps neither its singular context nor formal identity—which is to say its language, syntax, letters: in short, its materiality. Reading in this context comes to resemble a kind of process of decomposition or digestion, or as James Strachey, in his 1930 essay on reading as cannibalistic and coprophagic desire, suggests, reading is ‘a way of eating another person’s words’.⁵

In contrast to such consumption, Derrida speaks of the way that texts must and do resist this cultural embrace by being ‘nonbiodegradable’. He says that in order to live on, to retain some life of its own, a text must be ‘inassimilable, kept in reserve, unforgettable because irreceivable, capable of inducing meaning

³ Jacques Derrida, ‘Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments’, translated by Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry*, 15:4 (1989), 856.

⁴ Derrida, 845.

⁵ James Strachey, ‘Some Unconscious Factors in Reading’, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 11 (1930), 327.

without being exhausted of meaning, incomprehensibly elliptical, secret'.⁶ Something about a text, as Lawrence also suggests, cannot be fully received and understood, it hides itself through some species of endless ellipsis, keeping in *reserve* its ungraspable 'secret'. This force of resistance is bound up with a text's relation to the singularity of naming for, as Derrida says in the same essay, 'every work survives *like and as* a proper name'.⁷ A proper name outlives the organic (which is to say biodegradable) body of its bearer, surviving as the *least* decomposable or fathomable element of a person, animal or text.

Thus in this chapter I want to ask: to what extent does Lawrence's oeuvre resist reading? In what ways is it *against*—against the assimilation of its reader, but also, perhaps, *against itself*? My case study and singular example will be Lawrence's relatively late novella *St. Mawr* (1923)—a text whose title is a proper name, the name of an animal, a living thing, the horse St. Mawr. In this chapter I make the case for reading against *St. Mawr*, by which I mean against the dominant, organic and fathomable reading the text appears to feed to us. This apparently counterintuitive move seeks to bring out the ways in which *St. Mawr* is perhaps already written against its own narrative and content. It is a question of how Lawrence's oeuvre undermines or consumes itself, but also—very much like St. Mawr, the horse—does not let itself be *mastered*. To be against *St. Mawr* is to want to save it, or to let it save itself—not in a redemptive, religious, soteriological sense of 'save' as *deliverance*, but in the sense of preservation, retention, reserving.

My aim in all of this is to consider and form a critique of the dominant modes of reading Lawrence, through a reevaluation of the text as ineluctably mutable, unfathomable, indigestible and recalcitrant. E.M. Forster argues in

⁶ Derrida, 845.

⁷ Derrida, 824, emphasis original.

Aspects of the Novel: 'the more we look at a story [...] the more we disentangle it from the finer growths that it supports, the less we shall find to admire'.⁸ And yet it is through such a 'disentangling' mode of reading that *St. Mawr* has been subject to ever since its publication. The meaning of *St. Mawr*/St. Mawr has been consistently reined in and made to tread the path of a very specific set of signifiers and 'milestones'—in a sort of interminable hermeneutic dressage.

'Against *St. Mawr*' also means thinking about what happens to *bodies*: both the singular body of the horse, St. Mawr, and the body of the text that bears this name. *St. Mawr*, as I want to demonstrate, teaches us how to countersign a body in a way that lets its name, and the letters of its proper name, live. In wishing to read against, I am concerned with how to be more faithful or close to the name and body of Lawrence's writing, to what is really going on in the strange and phantasmagorical texture of his language and syntax, the nonbiodegradable elements of his letters. For reading *against* Lawrence might actually be a case of 'straying', as Geoff Dyer puts it, in order to 'follow [...] Lawrence's direction to the letter'.⁹ This is also the logic of Nicholas Royle's notion that 'you have to read Lawrence *veering*'¹⁰ and the sense that 'veering with Lawrence' entails a close attention to 'the texture and detail of his language'.¹¹ The reading of *St. Mawr* that follows here can be seen as part of a new critical attentiveness to the Lawrencian letter (perhaps even seeing a 'Joycean' semantic playfulness in his writing): a critical legacy that includes Royle, Dyer, Fiona Becket and, to some extent, the

⁸ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 2005), 41.

⁹ Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: in the Shadow of D.H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), 175.

¹⁰ Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 179.

¹¹ Royle, 182.

work of Gerald Doherty, but is in many ways still to be established, still to be thought.

Reading ‘On Message’

Against my title, I initially propose to think about what it is to be or read ‘with’ *St. Mawr*. This would perhaps be a question of following a certain narrative drive at work in the novella: reading *St. Mawr* ‘on message’, like a politician who must toe the party line. It is a question of certain readers’ desire to paraphrase, to consume and digest a plot—one, moreover, that the text appears to neatly lay out for them—to *the end*. This plot, to summarise or paraphrase very briefly, reads something like this: a young and newly (yet rather unhappily) married woman, Lou Carrington, buys a stallion, St. Mawr, for her husband, Rico (Sir Henry Carrington). St. Mawr, however, is a wild, troubled and unpredictable creature, who once killed a man and eventually badly injures Rico when he crushes him on the return ride from a Shropshire landmark called the Devil’s Chair. But for Lou, who is mesmerised by the horse, St. Mawr becomes the only ‘substantial reality’ of life, seeming to come from ‘another world, an older, heavily potent world’ (*St. Mawr*, 35). The horse appears far more *actual* than the ‘bare faced unrealities’ Lou meets at dances, who are described as phantasmagorical ‘wraith-like’ demons, uncannily ‘slithering’ (rather than dancing), and robotically repeating the same inane phrases such as ‘*Isn’t this the best ever!*’ (*St. Mawr*, 42). The novella’s narrator informs us that ‘[s]ince [Lou] had really seen St. Mawr looming fiery and terrible in an outer darkness, she could not believe the world she lived in’ (*St. Mawr*, 42). Threatened with castration or even death after the accident with Rico, St. Mawr is surreptitiously taken by Lou and her mother to Texas, where he is left behind on a

ranch. By the end of the novella Lou seems to have assimilated or appropriated St. Mawr's savage wildness, deciding to buy a dilapidated and packrat-infested ranch in the harsh and barren New Mexico desert and to relinquish all human relations.

In the very first review of the novella, Gerald Bullett remarks: 'Not content with story-telling [Lawrence] is now very definitely a man with a message'.¹² If we follow the novella's narrative, as I have just done, *St. Mawr* certainly appears to contain a very definite message, like a telegram spelling out an unmistakable order to anyone who might intercept it. The narrative reads as a communiqué from the nonhuman world, either in the form of or carried by the horse St. Mawr. The purpose of such a communiqué would be to remind its human protagonist of the presence of an untainted and organic animal 'reality' so as to redeem her from the mechanical, phantasmatic human world she inhabits. This is the kind of 'message' proposed in F.R. Leavis's influential reading in *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*. Leavis considers *St. Mawr* to be a moral tale, one which communicates to its flawed human readers 'the purpose, the mystery, the deep impersonal urgency of life that will serves and that gives will and the individual life a meaning, and saves them from the horror of automatism'.¹³ Leavis's account of the text's dual and opposing forces of animal vitalism and human mechanism has paved the way for a long line of Lawrence scholarship that more often than not takes a dialectical (and, just as often, an *allegorical*) view of the text's narrative teleology.

Such readers have been inclined to take part of the horse's name, and its *saintliness*, quite literally. For example, for Keith Sagar and Melissa Partridge, the horse is an apostolic figure, bearing some ancient missive for Lou to read:

¹² Quoted in Brian Finney, 'Introduction to *St. Mawr*', *St. Mawr and Other Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), xxxvii.

¹³ F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 51.

St. Mawr's role in the story [is] exactly that of Evangelist in *Pilgrim's Progress*, who awakens Christian [...] and shows him the way towards new life. [...] Lawrence, too, uses the archetypal myth of the spiritual journey, and once Lou is embarked upon it, St. Mawr can lapse back into being an ordinary horse, rather than a *messenger from the Gods*.¹⁴

This comparison of *St. Mawr* to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* emphasises that, in this tradition of reading, St. Mawr is often a highly symbolic figure, whose meaning is limited to the message of 'spiritual journey' (or savage pilgrimage) he ostensibly transmits. Sagar and Partridge argue that, for Lou (like Bunyan's Christian) '[t]he arrival of St. Mawr changes everything'.¹⁵ We might infer from this that the *arrival* of *St. Mawr* (the novella), in turn, 'changes everything' for its human readers, who assimilate its spiritual message.

Margot Norris, in *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (1985) makes the case for a more rigorous reading of *St. Mawr* that does not reduce the nonhuman hero of the text, St. Mawr, to a merely allegorical status. Norris sees in the novella 'nothing less than the dismantling of an anthropocentric ontology', placing Lawrence in what she terms the 'biocentric' tradition of writers and artists (along with Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Max Ernst) who refuse to make animality subordinate to humanity.¹⁶ Rather than simply lead humans to a transcendental truth, the function of the horse, for Norris, is to interrogate and threaten—through a kind of 'ontological ghost story'¹⁷, a haunting sense of animal otherness—the dominant human mode of being. This argument admirably opens up the possibilities of the text to encompass nonhuman life, possibilities that go beyond the anthropocentric dualisms proposed by so many readers before her.

¹⁴ Keith Sagar and Melissa Partridge, 'Introduction', *D.H. Lawrence: The Complete Short Novels* (London: Penguin, 2000), 28.

¹⁵ Sagar and Partridge, 28.

¹⁶ Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst and Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 170.

¹⁷ Norris, 172.

However, Norris's argument runs into difficulty when it becomes clear that she, too, gets where she is going by following the novella's narrative and its sense of a kind of journeying *progression* towards the goal of human redemption. She suggests that the human protagonist, Lou, moves from the state of Freudian uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*)—which is, Norris suggests, an *effect* of the repression of our natural animal instincts—to a familiar '*Heimkehr*', a homecoming, the return to homeliness (and, as a direct consequence, the elimination of all uncanny effects in the text). Furthermore, she argues that this metaphysical journey is 'inscribed within the *narrative and philosophical trajectory* that spans Lou's homelessness at the beginning of the story [...] and her homecoming announcement [...] upon arrival at Las Chivas'.¹⁸ Thus we see that, in the attempt to accentuate St. Mawr's disruptive animal otherness, Norris effectively contains and even *dissolves* it through her own inevitable return to the nourishing familiarity of 'home'.

Norris and other readers' critical focus on the 'narrative and philosophical trajectory' towards an ontological 'homecoming'¹⁹ might be seen to partake in

¹⁸ Norris, 176, my emphasis.

¹⁹ Other explicit examples of this include Francisco LaRubia-Prado's sense that 'in St. Mawr, one of the horse's most significant roles is to guide humans to return home' (see *The Horse in Literature and Film: Uncovering a Transcultural Paradigm*, (Lanham, New York, London: Lexington Books), 192); Virginia Hyde views the New Mexico ranch as the 'object of [Lou's] quest' (see 'To "Undiscovered Land": D.H. Lawrence's Horsewomen and Other Questers', *Women and the Journey*, edited Bonnie Frederick and Susan MacLeod (Washington: Washington State University Press, 1994), 183). A kind of 'homecoming' is implicit in Sagar and Partridge's sense of 'arrival', as well as Matthew Leone's notion that '*St. Mawr* is concerned with the undialogic virtues of finish, and of "finishing off"' (see *Shapes of Openness: Bakhtin, Lawrence and Laughter* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 141) and Jack Stewart's suggestion that Lou 'discovers a new potential by interacting with the whole animate, encircling landscape; it gives her a sense of belonging she had never known in alienating civilization' ('Flowers and flesh: color, place, and animism in *St Mawr* and "Flowery Tuscany"', *D.H. Lawrence Review*, 36:1 (2011), 99).

what Lawrence himself views, in *Apocalypse*, as the Judaeo-Christian mode of narrativisation. He argues that:

we [humans in the Judaeo-Christian tradition] always want a ‘conclusion’, an end, we always want to come, in our mental processes, to a decision, a finality, a full stop. This gives us a sense of satisfaction. All our mental consciousness is a movement onwards, a movement in stages, like our sentences, and every full stop is a mile-stone that marks our ‘progress’ and our arrival somewhere. (*Apocalypse*, 93)

The ‘sense of satisfaction’ here is that of a structuralist teleology, one which desires both ‘progress’ and ‘arrival’, endpoints and signification. Lawrence compares this process to a mode of reading or writing that always seeks the terminality of the ‘full stop’, every sentence of a text becoming a kind of mini-narrative from out of which a conclusive meaning can be drawn. The underlying implication of this is that there is something decidedly *anthropocentric* (whatever the intention) in the practice of obdurately following a text’s ‘movement onwards’ towards the desired ‘finality’ of *Heimkehr*. It gives way to what Lawrence elsewhere in *Apocalypse* calls the Christian scribes’ proclivity for ‘making things safe’ through a certain narrative orientation (*Apocalypse*, 97). For such a mono-theological (and therefore *human*) mode of reading necessarily pacifies what is other in a text in order to come to a ‘finality’, only attending to those bits of writing that are *fathomable* and therefore *nourishing* to human culture.

This desire-to-be-nourished can even be found in more recent readings of the novella coming out of the field of ‘Animal Studies’, which, closely following Norris, have focused on Lawrence’s decentring of an anthropocentric viewpoint. For example, Philip Armstrong has argued that, rather than a ‘messenger from the Gods’ (as Sagar and Partridge suggest) the horse acts as a messenger from *nature* itself. He notes that for Lawrence, like other modernist writers, ‘[a]nimality, at its most wild and untamed, was not the enemy of humanity, but its possible, perhaps

its only, salvation'.²⁰ Similarly, Carrie Rohman speaks of 'the recuperative gesturing toward animality in Lawrence's work', which she sees as particularly at work in *St. Mawr*.²¹ She argues that '[t]he animal in Lawrence's universe thus becomes a source for an alternative form of consciousness that can redeem a human culture faced with its own increasing mechanization and alienation'.²² In these readings, there remains a strict keeping to the narrative path I glossed in the beginning of this section. The letter that is St. Mawr/*St. Mawr* (the horse and the text itself) seems to partake in the evangelical logic of many Lawrence critics, the belief in some transcendental communication to be found *under the surface* of his hallucinatory texts. What invariably comes out of this following of the novella's narrative is a teleo-soteriological reading, one in which the human (whether it be Lou Carrington, the human reader or human *culture* more generally) is, to use Derrida's term, 'irrigated' by the message of the horse St. Mawr, which is also to say the message of the novella *St. Mawr*. Thus to be *with* a text is, paradoxical as it might sound, to *separate* it from itself in order to 'dissolve' its formal elements and assimilate its meaning into a culture.

After this assimilation has taken place, we no longer have any need for the animal, St. Mawr, or even the material *text* of Lawrence's narrative. As Norris says in her reading of the novella: 'Once the fourth dimension is reclaimed, St. Mawr, horse and novella, may be lost and forgotten'.²³ This recalls something W.H. Auden says in his reading of William Blake and Lawrence as 'apostles':

²⁰ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), 143.

²¹ Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2009), 26.

²² Rohman, 101.

²³ Norris, 175.

‘once I have learned his message, I cease to be interested in the messenger’.²⁴ This would be equivalent to the ‘death’, as Lawrence calls it, of the text that is ‘fathomed’. A letter’s arrival, the delivery of a message (if such a thing were possible) makes the text, its *form*, entirely redundant. All that remains is the message or meaning. This idea is perhaps analogous to that which Freud claimed for psychoanalysis and its ‘talking cure’ (but was less able to provide evidence for in practice), namely that once the analysand, facilitated by the analyst, makes conscious her unconscious and repressed thoughts, feelings, desires, experiences and memories, she will, in theory, be cured. By the same token perhaps, once humans accept and embrace the message of St. Mawr/*St. Mawr*, they too will be ‘cured’ of their mechanistic and contrived maladies. St. Mawr, in his disappearance towards the end of the novella, seems to become ‘lost and forgotten’—he has perhaps decomposed or been eaten in order to *nourish* Lou—and, in turn, the novella’s human readers as we enact our own *Heimkehr* in *St. Mawr*’s final pages. And in this pilgrimage, the ghosts of mechanical humanity, the slithering phantasmagorical ‘wraiths’ of London society, are also done away with. These ghosts that were conjured by the text now appear to return to the earth, to their final resting place: lifeless and forgotten.

Wrong Side of the Road

In the rest of this chapter, I want to explore the idea that there is something missing from this neat, and ultimately redemptive, dialectical progression from human to animal, strange to familiar, phantasm to reality: something that *survives*

²⁴ W.H. Auden, ‘D.H. Lawrence’, *The Dyer’s Hand* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 277–8.

the ceremonial putting-to-death of a text through reading. It is there in the dreamlike uncanniness, the ghost story that Norris reads in *St. Mawr* (before she sets about dissolving it in search of home). It is something, like *St. Mawr* himself, that escapes the hermeneutic knife, resisting death. It is flighty, unpredictable and thwarts all attempts at paraphrase. It is perhaps related to the name, the proper name of the text, that which constantly transforms while always remaining the same shape, surviving beyond itself. In order to attend to and perhaps even countersign these troubling elements of the text (and, on the way, discover some truer 'dismantling of anthropocentric ontology') we would need a radically new way of reading *St. Mawr*. This would be a reading that did not simply reinstate the Judaeo-Christian teleology of narrative linearity: there would be no *Heimkehr*, or not one that we would be able to recognise as such.

How, then, might *St. Mawr* resist the readings that it has up until now been saddled with—or even the reading it appears to saddles itself with, that which its content and narrative offer up to us and ask us to partake of? As a point of departure for thinking about this we might return once again to Lawrence's *Apocalypse* and to what, in this text, he terms the 'pagan manner of thought' (*Apocalypse*, 96). Lawrence uses this notion to interrupt and break open what he sees as 'our time-continuum method', a narrative slavishness which compels us to always 'trail wearily on over another ridge' (*Apocalypse*, 97). We 'trail' a text like a horse until it is half-dead with exhaustion, over ridges of signification until we reach a Reading, a means of paraphrase, an understanding of a text that means its *proper name* can be disposed of. In resistance to this, he argues, we must 'drop our own manner of on-and-on-and-on-and-on, from a start to a finish, allow[ing] the mind to move in cycles, or to fly here and there over a cluster of images'

(*Apocalypse*, 96–7). Lawrence exhorts us to begin to read (and, we might glean from this, read *him*) with more erratic, anti-narratological gestures—either in the pagan mode of ‘cycles’ or, as an animal, by sprouting wings and ‘flying here and there’.

We might already begin to see a demand for such a gesture in the content of *St. Mawr*. For example, when Rico, in a fit of rage, spontaneously saddles and rides the stallion to Corrabach, the country house of Flora Manby, we read that he is ‘trying all the time to rein in the horse’ but ‘the devil was in [St. Mawr]. He would turn down every turning where he was not meant to go. He reared with panic at a furniture van. He *insisted* on going down the wrong side of the road’ (*St. Mawr*, 49). This chaotic ride is reminiscent of Lawrence’s sense of ‘allow[ing] the mind to move in cycles, or to fly here and there over a cluster of images’. Fiona Becket has remarked that ‘most of the time, in his writing, Lawrence is showing the reader how he, Lawrence, needs to be read’.²⁵ And on the wild ride to Corrabach, it is as if the text is hinting at how we might read (or ride), *following* St. Mawr closely: in a devilishly resistant, ‘rearing’ and ‘wrong’ way. Nicolas Rand, in the introduction to his translation of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*, writes that the major contribution of the authors is their attempt ‘to create avenues for reading where previously there were none’.²⁶ My reading of *St. Mawr* is similarly one that seeks to institute and pursue radically new paths of reading. Rather than obediently following the soteriological (and ultimately anthropocentric) narrative of ‘spectral’ human versus ‘real’ animal, we might find ourselves in a series of *cul-de-sacs*, blind roads that turn back on

²⁵ Becket, 23.

²⁶ Nicolas Rand, ‘Translator’s Introduction: Toward a Cryptonomy of Literature’, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonomy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), li.

themselves, perhaps akin to Martin Heidegger's notion of *Holzwege*²⁷, moments in the text that veer off the straight road, break away from traditional paths of reading.

Lawrence's sense of the 'pagan manner of thought', and the idea of going down the 'wrong side of the road' as an essentially anti-narrative mode, seems to anticipate in many ways Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's reevaluation, in their essay 'The Forms of Violence', of the sculpture of the ancient Assyrians (who originally held pagan beliefs). Bersani and Dutoit similarly problematise what they call the 'pacifying power of such narrative conventions as beginnings, explanatory middles, and climactic endings', which, in the context of Assyrian art, produce a reductive narrative of unmodulated violence.²⁸ They seek to 'safeguard [Assyrian sculpture's] disruptive power from the domesticating effects of historical interpretation'.²⁹ Against the 'narrative conventions' of such a mode of interpretation, Bersani and Dutoit argue that in the sculptures they examine there are 'various kinds of formal play' that act as 'visual abstractions which disrupt the spectator's reading'.³⁰ These 'abstractions' consist of such elements as doubling and repetition, disconnection or interruption of a line or pattern, connections between apparently dissociated parts of an image. All of these elements culminate in a 'profusion of forms'³¹, forms that move '*beyond* the climactic point', the ostensible 'dramatic centre' of a piece.³² This perhaps creates a different kind of violence: a violence against *reading* that works to produce multiple, incongruous

²⁷ *Holzwege* is the title of a 1950 work by Martin Heidegger, literally translated in English as 'wood-ways' but often given as 'off the beaten track'.

²⁸ Leo Bersani and Ulysses Dutoit, 'The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture', *October*, 8: Spring (1979), 21.

²⁹ Bersani and Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence* (New York: Schocken, 1985), viii.

³⁰ Bersani and Dutoit, 'Forms of Violence', 19.

³¹ Bersani and Dutoit, 'Forms of Violence', 19.

³² Bersani and Dutoit, 'Forms of Violence', 18, emphasis original.

and ever-shifting reading effects by significantly ‘devaluing the content of any one scene’.³³

These attributes of Assyrian sculpture might also provide a way of thinking about the nonhuman elements of writing that we have been discussing in previous chapters: the means by which a text might *live* in order to circumvent certain human constructs and expectations. Lawrence himself appears to be aware of this radical potential of ancient sculpture when he writes to Gordon Campbell in 1914: ‘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’ (*Letters*, II, 218, emphasis original). This ‘quality of life’ is ‘tremendous’, it makes us tremble with wonder before it. Like Lawrence, Bersani and Dutoit also appear to be ‘after’ the material gestures of a species of nonhuman phantom or phantasm that haunts and undermines a text’s narrative and message. This haunting can only be constituted by the *body* of a text (be it a sculpture, novel, novella, poem or painting, or any other form of writing), the proper name which necessarily outlasts the work of biodegradability.

It might be useful to include in this discussion some consideration of Jacques Lacan’s insistence on materiality over meaning in his refiguring of Freudian psychoanalysis. Colette Soler notes that, in Lacanian psychoanalysis,

the letter is enjoyed in and for itself, it becomes an object of *jouissance*. It is not so much that *jouissance* is the referent of the letter, it is rather that the letter is an element of language that is enjoyed. Hence, Lacan’s very frequent recourse to writers and to literature, in which—and here he differs from Freud—he does not so much seek to recapture the message of the unconscious as its very materiality, that is to say, its letter.³⁴

³³ Bersani and Dutoit, ‘Forms of Violence’, 21.

³⁴ Colette Soler, ‘The paradoxes of the symptom in psychoanalysis’, *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 92.

It is the text's materiality, its literal body, which pushes against, or resists, reading 'on message'. What Lacan reveals to us is a letter *without* message, a thing that tells us nothing, yet is nevertheless a thing of pleasure, of *jouissance*. This relates to the 'joy' that Lawrence describes as taking place in the event of rereading, bound up with the force of the letter, its living form and *transformative* potential, its propensity for coming and coming back: again and again. The libidinal undercurrents of a reading-for-the-letter are also present in Bersani and Dutoit's writing on Assyrian sculpture, which Garrett Stewart defines as the advocacy of 'an erotics of style deriving pleasure across the play of form'.³⁵ Thus in reading *St. Mawr* we might also begin to tap into a kind of phantasmatic *jouissance*—a pleasure that is perhaps viewed as *illicit* in its susceptibility to anasemia—that the more saintly and redemptive readings we have been looking at desire to neutralise.

Following these playful, erotic and non-human models, a reading 'against' *St. Mawr* would have to begin with an *intimate attention* to what is happening in the material body of Lawrence's writing—that is to say, his singular idiom, his *letters*. 'Against *St. Mawr*' would therefore not only be the name of a kind of anti-reading, it would also denote a method of reading up close to *St. Mawr*, getting into the cracks of the text, zooming in on the microscopic formal elements, the disruptive litter of the writing, to which most critical readings of Lawrence will not, or simply *cannot*, attend.

³⁵ Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratology of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 20.

Writhing Writing

I would like to begin my reading of *St. Mawr* by focusing on an important moment in the text where Lawrence's language, his metaphors and imagery, throws off its own narrative reading. This happens, as we will see, at many points throughout the novella. But perhaps the most memorable and disorienting of these occasions occurs on the riding trip to the Devil's Chair. This might even be said to be one of the 'central' scenes or images in the novella, an episode that initially appears to function by feeding or nourishing the notion that the text represents 'a battle between two worlds' (*St. Mawr*, 35): in other words, it appears to present the dialectical opposition between the wraithlike human society—'masquerading as the ideal, in order to poison the real' (*St. Mawr*, 79)—and the 'natural creation' that *St. Mawr* represents (*St. Mawr*, 80). But, as Bersani and Dutoit note of Assyrian sculpture: 'one's interest moves between the geometric and the anecdotal at the very point at which the anecdotal centre of the scene is being most strongly emphasised'.³⁶ In line with this notion, it is precisely in the 'anecdotal centre' of the Devil's Chair episode—the struggle that ensues between mechanical man and wild animal when *St. Mawr* shies and is pulled down by Rico—that our ability to read the text seems to go awry and the writing takes an hallucinatory turn. Here is *St. Mawr* on the ground:

a pale gold belly, and hoofs that worked and flashed in the air, and *St. Mawr* writhing, straining his head terrifically upwards, his great eyes starting from the naked lines of his nose. With a great neck arching cruelly from the ground, he was pulling frantically at the reins, which Rico still held tight.—Yes, Rico, lying strangely sideways, his eyes also starting from his yellow-white face among the heather, still clutched the reins [...] *St. Mawr* gave a great curve like a fish, spread his fore-feet on the earth and reared his head, looking round in a ghastly fashion. His eyes were arched, his nostrils wide, his face ghastly in a sort of panic. He rested thus, seated

³⁶ Bersani and Dutoit, 'Forms of Violence', 21.

with his fore-feet planted and his face in panic, almost like some terrible lizard, for several moments. (*St. Mawr*, 76–7)

At this moment, when St. Mawr lashes out—dancing and pulling and rearing—Lawrence’s writing also lashes out, allowing for a more ‘pagan manner’ of thinking and reading, or what Bersani and Dutoit call the ‘mobility of the viewer’s response’.³⁷ Something diverts our view of St. Mawr³⁸: his apostolic message, that of autotelic and redemptive animality, is *distracted* in its delivery by certain descriptions of the horse that show St. Mawr to be not quite himself. Rather, he is always more and less than St. Mawr: with his ‘flashing’ hooves and exposed ‘pale gold belly’ he becomes a shape-shifting thing. First he gives ‘a great curve like a fish’, a simile which is repeated some paragraphs later in the description of ‘the evil straining of that arched, fish-like neck’ (*St. Mawr*, 78). Then he becomes a ‘terrible lizard’, like a dinosaur from some long-forgotten prehistory. His hooves are first of all mechanical, metal things that ‘flashed’ and ‘worked’ in the air like a machine, but then they become ‘feet’, an ambiguously anthropomorphic designation. In this St. Mawr becomes excessive, exorbitant: he is like a great mouth that swallows all sorts of animal imagery and draws it into his word-body. Far from symbolising some wholeness, St. Mawr is shown to be a figure of overdetermination, his own message interrupted and divided by a series of animal signifiers.

³⁷ Bersani and Dutoit, ‘Forms of Violence’, 19.

³⁸ Indeed two of the characters in this scene, after seeing Rico pull the horse down on top of him, are described as ‘distracted’ by the spectacle: Elsie Edwards stands beside her injured husband (who has just received a kick in the face from St. Mawr) ‘pleading distracted’, Lou also stands aside half-watching the scene and ‘pleading, distracted’ (*St. Mawr*, 77).

This trans-species shape-shifting is further seen when Lou, riding home to fetch a doctor for the injured Rico, discovers what might be the origin of St. Mawr's fright when her own horse shies from something lying in the heather:

“A snake!” she said wonderingly.
And she looked closer.

It was a dead adder that had been drinking at a reedy pool in a little depression just off the road, and had been killed with stones. There it lay, also crumpled, its gold-and-yellow back still glittering dully, and a bit of pale-blue belly showing, killed that morning! (*St. Mawr*, 77–8)

In this passage we see that when St. Mawr falls onto Rico, crushing him, he takes on the attributes of the dead snake: his ‘pale gold belly’ mirrors the adder’s ‘pale-blue belly’ and ‘gold-and-yellow back’, his hooves ‘flashed in the air’ like the ‘glittering’ of the snake’s body, and he ‘writhes’ as if trying to bring the dead adder back to life, by twisting and slithering on the earth like a serpentine creature. ‘Writhe’, as discussed earlier in this thesis, is a verb that contains ‘write’. We might say that St. Mawr, when he writ(h)es on the ground, moving from metaphor to metaphor, is also engaged in writing or *re*writing himself, erasing his own horse-body, and, in turn, rewording his ‘message’ in order to compose a new and monstrous play of images and meanings.

In his snakelike writhing, and other metamorphoses, the horse is no longer purely equine (and therefore autotelic, that is to say, self-enclosed and without prosthesis) but is contaminated by other species, becoming a kind of fantastical or mythical creature, a chimera, made up of many heterogeneous parts of other non-mammalian species. St. Mawr/*St. Mawr* lives by moving between categories and genres like a slippery fish, snake or lizard—or a glossy wild horse. This might be related to what, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (in a reading of Lawrence’s tortoise poems), Deleuze and Guattari designate the ‘anomalous’ which they say ‘is neither an individual nor a species; it has only affects, it has neither familiar or

unsubjectified feelings, nor specific significant characteristics'.³⁹ What *St. Mawr* (and, by extension, *St. Mawr*) is cannot be held together by the centralising and unifying notions of character, species, and plot. All of this is put into question by Lawrence's own 'anomalous' writing. What we get instead, to put it in Lacanian terms, might be seen as a collection of *jouissances*, the pleasurable movement and geometry of letters, or lines of desire that writhe back-and-forth beneath the veil of the text's 'content'. This experience is described perfectly by the narrator in the latter part of the novella, when Lou and her mother arrive in Texas: 'One moved from dream to dream, from phantasm to phantasm' (*St. Mawr*, 132). Recalling Becket's observation that 'most of the time, in his writing, Lawrence is showing the reader how he, Lawrence, needs to be read', we might begin to read this formulation from the novella as a kind of surreptitious guide for rereading *St. Mawr*—or at least as a description of itself, its writhing between metaphors.

In its movement from 'phantasm to phantasm', *St. Mawr*/*St. Mawr* comes to resemble the deceptive surface of a lake or river, beneath which is a system of underground caves and meandering currents. And the text's horse also diverges and flows over into other streams and rivers: he is overtly intertextual, alluding to and recapitulating descriptions from other texts in Lawrence's oeuvre—such as the symbolic snake of Quetzalcoatl in *The Plumed Serpent*, the fantastical 'fairy' snake of the letters to Mark Gertler and S.S. Koteliensky (as discussed in Chapter One), the snakey description of a pony in *Kangaroo*⁴⁰, poems such as 'Snake',

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 270.

⁴⁰ 'A cream-coloured pony, with a snake-like head stretch out, came cropping up the road, cropping unmoved, though Richard's feet passed within a few yards of his nose. Richard thought of the snaky Praxiteles horse outside the Quirinal in

‘Fish’ or ‘Lizard’. The intertextual correspondences here engender a further series of displacements, by which it becomes impossible to get to the bottom of *St. Mawr*, to determine where the real St. Mawr begins: is he *here* or somewhere back in time, in a poem or a letter written years earlier?

Raw Reading

I want us to get even closer to *St. Mawr*, to go beyond Lawrence’s imagery, into the very flesh of his writing. We are first introduced to St. Mawr at Mr. Saintsbury’s stables in London when Lou goes to visit her sorrel mare, Poppy. Apart from his skittish behaviour and the way he does not like to be touched (let alone *embraced*, for ‘he drifted away from her, as if some wind blew him’ (*St. Mawr*, 30)), perhaps the strangest thing about St. Mawr is hinted at when Lou asks Mr. Saintsbury about the horse’s disposition:

“Has he got any tricks?” she asked.

“Not that I know of, my Lady: not tricks exactly. But he’s one of these temperamental creatures, as they say. Though I say, every horse is temperamental, when you come down to it. But this one, it is as if he was a trifle raw somewhere. Touch this raw spot, and there’s no answering for him.”

“Where is he raw?” asked Lou, somewhat mystified. She thought he might really have some physical sore. (*St. Mawr*, 28)

What does it mean to be a ‘trifle raw’? Where is St. Mawr’s ‘raw spot’? ‘Raw’ in the most common usage means uncooked but it can also, in a related but obsolete sense, mean ‘of a substance in the stomach or blood: undigested, unassimilated; not fully digested. Also: (of bodily fluids) containing undigested material; (of the process of digestion) incomplete’ (*OED* sense 1.b.). ‘Raw’ names something that

Rome. Very, very nearly those old snaky horses were born again here in Australia: or the same vision come back’ (*Kangaroo*, 379).

cannot be processed, it is whatever remains in the stomach (maw) of a text (and its readers). In this sense the horse's 'raw spot' corresponds to Derrida's notion of the 'nonbiodegradable' text or aspect of a text, that which survives by its resistance to being digested or assimilated. Indeed the word 'raw' is itself resistant to assimilation, as Lou's 'mystified' response indicates, for she takes it to refer to a 'physical sore', as in the sense of 'raw' as 'exposed flesh', or 'a raw place on the skin' (*OED* senses 3. a. and b.). And, although this is not exactly Mr. Saintsbury's meaning, Lou is right in thinking that it is a question of something 'physical', something that concerns St. Mawr's body. The ambiguity of 'raw' leaves something to be thought or fathomed; the 'raw spot' is a corporeal, material *wound* that cannot be seen, and yet it marks the text in innumerable ways, not least in the horse's own name: St. *Mawr*. And it is not only St. *Mawr*—the horse—who is afflicted by a 'raw spot' (whether physically or figuratively) but also, by metonymic extension, *St. Mawr*—the novella—which must also be a 'trifle raw' somewhere.

From the first time we meet St. Mawr at the stables with Mr. Saintsbury, there is some secret collusion or conspiracy between letters and names working in the text, a ghostly correspondence that troubles the very possibility for a reading-for-the-plot. As I have been suggesting, critics of *St. Mawr* tend to have a taste for narrative and, we might add, horsemeat seems a particularly easy bite to digest. And yet, as I wish to demonstrate, this is a text that also warns us against such quick consumption, for it litters itself with all sorts of tough, gristly and *raw* morsels—pieces of words that get stuck in the maw or, at other points, get regurgitated whole. From the moment we read the title of the novella and the

almost unpronounceable name it bears, there is some other force or forces steering the course (or horse) of reading.

The mystifying effect of the ‘raw spot’ is first of all one of secrecy and sealing up. There are things we cannot know about St. Mawr, places where, as Mr. Saintsbury remarks, there is ‘no answering *for* St. Mawr’ and where *St. Mawr* gives us no answers, throws into confusion the very possibility of answering. We might see this secret, inassimilable, morsel of hard gristle, the indigestible ‘raw spot’ of St. Mawr/*St. Mawr*, in terms of a *crypt*—particularly in the context of Abraham and Torok’s work on crypts and cryptonyms in their study of Freud’s ‘Wolf Man’. The crypt, in Abraham and Torok’s work, is a kind of hidden and buried monument that lives on, like a proper name that outlives its one-time bearer. Abraham and Torok show that language can form crypts (cryptonyms) and work in cryptic ways. These are magic words that live ‘beyond grasp’⁴¹ in the unconscious, but nevertheless work and repeat on their subject in strange ways, returning and turning, in a ‘cryptonymy’ of puns, homophones, metonyms. Abraham and Torok describe the complex play of words and images in the case of the Wolf Man in a cryptic little poem which comes at the very end of their study:

*His laughter: his words brought to light, “cracking words” that
restore life. Word of magic, word of panic, word of iniquity
...inseparable companions, they create and recreate the poem of
the tomb deep within. Black, their humor rises, white, their pain recoils, but for
pleasure they are mute. From beyond the
tomb, pleasure...nevertheless!*⁴²

The Wolf Man’s words are ‘cracking words’, disruptive and shattering linguistic forces, that actually work to magically ‘restore life’ in spite (or, rather, *because*) of

⁴¹ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, translated by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 83.

⁴² Abraham and Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*, 83, emphasis and lineation original.

their being interred in ‘the tomb deep within’. Despite their birth in ‘panic’ and ‘iniquity’, they are also words of pleasure (‘nevertheless!’), just as Lacan finds *jouissance* in the materiality of the letter of the unconscious. This, I want to suggest, corresponds in many ways to how *St. Mawr*, the novella, lives and lives on: it, too, is a series of ‘inseparable companions’ that ‘create and recreate the poem of the tomb deep within’, the ‘raw spot’ at the heart of writing. In this way we might wonder about certain cryptic ‘raw spots’ in *St. Mawr* that might serve to ‘restore life’ to the text, to let it survive and live on, make it vibrate with non-narrative pleasures. Thus our reevaluation of *St. Mawr* must look at the ways in which Lawrence’s writing strives to make itself cryptic, both in the ways it toils to turn in on itself like a mollusc into its shell, and the ways in which it proliferates, spraying or spewing parts of itself in order to form its own incongruous letter-poem.

Mawr Than a Name

In the sense of excess and profusion produced by the horse’s anomalous body and the touching of his ‘raw spot’, we might begin to hear *St. Mawr*’s name, and the name of the novella itself, with a new kind of resonance. *St. Mawr*: what’s in a name? Despite it being both the title of the novella and its non-human protagonist, very few critics have noted its strangeness, let alone viewed it as important for reading the texts. Those who *have* picked up on it, have tended, after tracing its possible provenances and finding little there to bite on to, to shrug their shoulders and say no more. The word ‘mawr’, Keith Sagar tells us, is Welsh for ‘big’ or

‘great’’.⁴³ Thus the ‘St. Mawr’ initially appears to be simply descriptive, constatively naming the stature and power of the horse, in opposition to his weak human masters. But Sagar goes on to note that, in her memoir of Lawrence, ‘[Dorothy] Brett [who initially typed the novella] says that Lawrence’s pronunciation of St Mawr was Seymour, a surname which derives from the Norman French de St Maur’.⁴⁴ This idiosyncratic pronunciation reveals a punning quality to the name which is pivotal for our anti-narratological reading of the text. This begins with St. Mawr/*St. Mawr*’s homophonic relation to the determiner ‘more’ (and, as we will come to later, ‘maw’) and the workings of *profusion* in the novella: the repetitions, substitutions, metamorphoses and proliferations, which are related to the excess, exorbitance and remnants of the letters ‘m’, ‘a’, ‘w’, ‘r’.

In St. Mawr we see more than we should, as when Lou notes that ‘he was a stallion. When she realised this, she became *more* afraid of him’ (*St. Mawr*, 28–9, my emphasis). Later we are told that, on the near-fatal riding trip to the Devil’s Chair, ‘Lou, from a little distance, watched the glossy, powerful haunches of St. Mawr, swaying with life, always *too much life*, like a menace’ (*St. Mawr*, 75, my emphasis). Indeed the name St. Mawr (in its guise as ‘Seymour’) might be heard as a command, to readers of the novella, to *see more* life in St. Mawr, to see, as the narrator suggests, a ‘darker, *more* spacious, *more* dangerous, *more* splendid world than ours’ (*St. Mawr*, 41, my emphasis). There is more to *St. Mawr* than meets the eye (or ear). From the moment we first hear it (given a ‘Welsh twist’ by Mr. Saintsbury) the name seems to drop hints about how we might re-read the text. And to ‘see more’, I would argue, is not just to see *beyond* the text to some

⁴³ Keith Sagar, *D.H. Lawrence: A Calendar of his Works* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 139.

⁴⁴ Sagar, 139.

transcendental message of redemption and restitution, but rather to see more *in* the text itself. This would perhaps entail a seeing or reading with a non-human eye. But it might also open up to an experience of non-seeing. As is suggested by Lawrence's apparently contradictory use of 'darker' with 'splendid' (from the Latin *splendidus* meaning 'shine, to be bright'), the effect of seeing more (and seeing Mawr) is at once a revelation—the possibility of new sight and sound—and a profound experience of obfuscation, of what cannot be perceived or discerned, that which remains in the darkness of the crypt.

This double movement of the text can further be seen in the work of the textual incisors formed by the various homonyms of 'mawr', which appear all over the novella. For example, we learn quite late in the novella (when he speaks of himself in the third person to Mrs. Witt) that the groom Lewis's given name is 'Morgan', a fact which adds a new dimension to the close relationship he has with St. Mawr—for it is as if they are literally cut from the same phonetic cloth (*St. Mawr*, 107). But this part of the horse's name also finds its way into other characters. 'Maw' is a part of 'mawther', an archaic term for 'a girl or young woman' (see *OED*), which might refer to Lou Carrington and her childish 'gamine knowingness' (*gamine* is French slang for a child, or street urchin) (*St. Mawr*, 22). Yet the word is actually derived from 'mother' (and we might note here that the Danish and Norwegian word for mother is 'mor'), and the mother is another powerful force in the text. Indeed St. Mawr might in many ways be seen as a counterpart or double of Lou's mother, Mrs. Witt. This is suggested by Rico's derogative nickname for her of 'Belle-Mère', which is French for 'mother-in-law' but also carries the horsey pun of 'bell-mare' (Mrs. Witt plays on this, mockingly asking Rico: 'If I'm the bell-mare, are you one of the colts?' (*St. Mawr*, 48)). Like

St. Mawr, Mrs. Witt exhibits a singular kind of vigilance and attention, she ‘kept track of everything, watching as it were from outside the fence, like a potent well-dressed demon, full of uncanny energy and shattering sort of sense’ (*St. Mawr*, 24). This movement across characters of the homonyms of ‘mawr’, works to untether the horse from a unified character-based meaning and demonstrates that the text is made up of many deviating paths and perspectives, all of which lead nowhere but back to the novella’s own cryptic title.

Furthermore, the word ‘maw’, a morsel but also a homonym of ‘Mawr’, has its own animal connotations, for it can denote ‘the throat or gullet; the jaws or mouth of a voracious animal or (occas.) of a gluttonous or insatiably hungry person’ (*OED*, 3.a.). Fittingly, there are a glut of mouths and a constant sense that something is being eaten by the text’s many maw/rs, which we see not only when the horse ‘bared his teeth’, but also in Rico’s smile, his ‘curved mouth thrilling to death to kiss’ (*St. Mawr*, 34) and when he is angry ‘his upper lip lifted from his teeth, like a dog that is going to bite’ (*St. Mawr*, 26); there is the stable manager, Mr. Saintsbury, who smiles with his ‘old maid’s mouth, and showing all his teeth’ (*St. Mawr*, 27); and even Lou’s ‘odd little *museau*’ (*St. Mawr*, 21), which is the French word for an animal’s muzzle or snout, has a biting quality to it. Towards the end of the novella, in the long description of the New Mexico ranch (Las Chivas—‘The Goats’), many *maws* threaten the existence of the human inhabitants of the desert and mountains. For example, the insatiable appetites of the goats, known as ‘fire-mouths’ because ‘everything they nibble dies’ (*St. Mawr*, 142), the fierce ‘fang-mouthed’ (*St. Mawr*, 148) plants of the desert, ready to sting or plant their thorny teeth into a gardener’s hand, the pack-rats, black ants and ‘pests of flies’ that swarm after and gorge themselves upon the rancid ‘cast-out

whey' from cheese-making (*St. Mawr*, 142). Thus the novella ends in a kind of theatre of devouring, starting with the very name of the text, straight from the horse's mouth. But, in contrast to Strachey's assertion that reading is 'a way of eating another person's words', Lawrence's writing invites the idea that the words are already *eating themselves*. We hear from Mr. Saintsbury, in the very first encounter with *St. Mawr*, that the horse is 'eaten up with his own power' (*St. Mawr*, 29). This is perhaps a way of thinking about the novella more generally, as something that is autophagous, against itself, gnawing and mawing away at its own narrative, squirreling away secret letters inside its giant, ravenous maw. And to read *St. Mawr* is to fill one's own mouth with 'mawrs', to choke and stumble over, but also to take *pleasure* in, all the iterations of these letters.

Finally, the self-disruptive rhyming chain of words and homonyms in the text lead us to the fact that has been staring us in the face from the title page of the novella, hidden in plain sight all the while: that the insistent 'awr' of *St. Mawr* is already a part of Lawrence's *own* name. It should also be noted that Frieda, in her letters, often refers to Lawrence as 'Lawr', offering up the possibility that the horse's name is not just arbitrary or coincidental.⁴⁵ This weird correspondence suggests that what is happening with letters in *St. Mawr* is something essential to the Lawrencian signature: it is something key to thinking about the singular literality of every novella, short story, poem, novel or essay that Lawrence wrote. We might say that that which inaugurates or makes possible the strange play of 'awr' in *St. Mawr* is the *law* of Lawrence.

⁴⁵ See, for example, a note that Frieda adds to the end of Lawrence's letter to Dorothy Brett, in which she refers to Lawrence as 'Lawr' four times (*Letters*, V, 349–50).

Strainge Interiors

As I suggested earlier, *St. Mawr* confounds its own narrative not only by being *more* than itself, but also by striving to become less. Something in *St. Mawr* hides away, out of the grasp of human reading. It might be noted that, as well as a voracious mouth, ‘maw’ also, perhaps more commonly, denotes ‘the stomach of an animal’ (*OED* 1.a.) (recalling the ‘pale gold belly’ of the horse and the ‘pale-blue belly’ of the snake he imitates); and in a figurative but related sense ‘the inaccessible interior of a country’ (1.c), a place that is too dense to be reached or fathomed. In this we hear once again the unreadable ‘raw spot’ and the linguistic crypts of Abraham and Torok. For while ‘Mawr’ seems to open up to so many things *more than* itself, it also closes in on itself, like a snake swallowing its own tail, making an impossible crypt of its own body.

These notions of eating, swallowing and interiority link to a psychoanalytic theory of mourning as proposed by Abraham and Torok. In the essay ‘Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation’, the writers make a distinction between two processes of mourning, ‘introjection’ and ‘incorporation’. ‘Introjection’, in Abraham and Torok’s refiguring of the word (it was first used in a slightly different sense by Sandor Ferenczi), is akin to what Freud would call ‘normal’ mourning, corresponding to a kind of biodegradability of the other, an assimilation of the lost love object into the self. ‘Incorporation’, on the other hand, is part of what Freud describes as the illness of ‘melancholia’, and what Abraham and Torok also refer to as ‘preservative repression’.⁴⁶ In incorporation, the love

⁴⁶ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, ‘Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation’, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, edited and translated by Nicholas Rand (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 135.

object is taken in but, rather than being assimilated, is kept inside as a kind of crypt. As Abraham and Torok argue, ‘when, in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the love-object we miss, this means that *we refuse to mourn*’.⁴⁷ We might say that certain critics wish to introject the Lawrencian text, that is to say assimilate and digest as an extension of the self and its ideologies. But the text of *St. Mawr*, its *letters*, are the crypt of an impossible or refused mourning, they stick in the throat of narrative.

There are certain episodes in the text that invite us to think even further about *St. Mawr*’s forming of closed-off crypts and cryptonyms, its *refusal* to be assimilated or absorbed. For example, on the Devil’s Chair trip, when the groom, Lewis, tries to calm the horse down, St. Mawr seems to coil into himself: ‘When Lewis drew a little nearer he twitched and shrank like a shaken steel spring, away—not to be touched’ (*St. Mawr*, 77). After the accident at Devil’s Chair, when Lou is watching St. Mawr, she ‘realised now how his sadness recoiled into these frenzies of obstinacy and malevolence’ (*St. Mawr*, 84). St. Mawr’s shrinking is a turning away from the human touch, the human embrace, a refusal to be comforted or have his panic neutralised. The fact that he is like a ‘steel spring’, suggests a capacity to expand, be malleable, even useful to humans, but that he always strives to return to the shrunken, tight, enclosed form. St. Mawr’s recoiling is perhaps also the text’s recoiling, the text’s own ‘frenzies of obstinacy and malevolence’, its own stubborn refusal to be fathomed by its human readers. Mrs. Witt is also described in this way, and on the journey across the Atlantic from England to America, the narrator tells us: ‘Mrs. Witt hated the sea, and stayed, as a rule, practically the whole time of the crossing in her bunk. There she was now,

⁴⁷ Abraham and Torok, ‘Mourning or Melancholia’, 127.

silent, shut up like a steel trap, as in her tomb' (*St. Mawr*, 127). Mrs. Witt is herself a kind of crypt that keeps her secrets, silently, as if she were a 'steel trap'.

But this recoiling tomb-effect can also be discerned, more strangely perhaps, on the *formal* level of the text and its play of letters, particularly in relation, once again, to the material *name* of *St. Mawr*. This time it is not a matter of the *profusion* engendered by the moreishness of the syllable 'mawr', but in what is missing or absent from the horse's name: the letters 'a', 'i', and 'n', which are condensed in the abbreviation of 'Saint' to 'St.'. Each time we read 'St.' something escapes. There is something confounding in the dot, the full stop, indicating that a kind of condensation has taken place, cutting off the horse's name from itself, in an elision that cannot be traversed. Something 'shut[s] up like a steel trap' when we verbalise the two letters together—*st*—the pronunciation forces us to clamp our teeth (or maw) and hiss out a snake-like sound, a secretive shushing.⁴⁸ This suggests that there is something hidden or coded, something about both the horse and the novella that refuses to show itself, a place, a group of letters, located in St. Mawr's very own name, that cannot be digested, analysed, read. Every time we read the name 'St. Mawr' something escapes our reading. It is inaccessible not just to the humans of the novella, but to anyone reading the text. It would seem that the name 'St. Mawr' is both the way into the text, the entrance hall, so to speak, the readable written name and text, while also being the deep, dark interior, its secret internal passageways and black holes (like condensing full stops) that suck all meaning into them.

⁴⁸ This hissing-effect can be heard when reading the shape-shifting Devil's Chair episode, where it is as if writing were *stuttering* as we read the letters 'st' in 'straining' and 'strangely', the repetition of 'ghastly', St. Mawr's 'wide nostrils' and the 'stones' that killed the adder in the heather (*St. Mawr*, 76–8).

But what about those letters which have disappeared, broken free from their word-moorings? We might say that while ‘St.’ wishes to close down the text to make crypt-like cavities in the discourse of *St. Mawr*, ‘a-i-n’ strives and struggles, exploding all over the text. From this hidden, interior maw of a word, there comes a spewing out or vomiting up of letters, a regurgitation of verbal effects, scattered throughout the text. ‘Ain’ is like a phantom limb that rears up in all sorts of surprising places, it is the ghost of a word, something which should have remained hidden but repeatedly, and uncannily, makes itself heard. Returning once again to the Devil’s Chair passage, we begin to see the kinds of irresistible effects that are caused by this phantasmatic syllable. I am, first of all, thinking of the homophonic ‘ain’ effect at work in ‘reins’ and ‘straining’ in the passage quoted earlier (‘St. Mawr [...] *straining* his head terrifically upwards, [...] he was pulling frantically at the *reins*, which Rico still held tight.—Yes, Rico, lying strangely sideways, [...] still clutched the *reins*’). At first glance, this description seems to emphasise and affirm the human-animal dialectic of the narrative: Rico, the mechanical human, is pulling the reins, while St. Mawr strains to be free of him. Yet something in the repetition and complicity between ‘reins’ and ‘straining’ creates a sense of the parallel geometric lines and concordances that Bersani and Dutoit observe in Assyrian stone reliefs. The pattern of sound created by these words are multiplied later in the scene when we hear of Rico’s twisted position beneath the horse—‘lying *strangely* sideways’—and, a couple of paragraphs later, the way he bites ‘his lip with *pain*’ and ‘fell prostrate *again* in a *faint*’ (*St. Mawr*, 77). Thus Rico and St. Mawr are not opposing forces but are mysteriously part of the same geometric collusion of signifiers, that *leaks out* of the tomb-like condensation of ‘St.’.

These ‘ain’ effects are also acting upon the text even *before* the horse St. Mawr ‘arrives’ (as Sagar and Partridge say) on the scene of the novella. Indeed, we already hear it working in the third paragraph of the novella’s opening, in the description of Lou as possessing a ‘quaint air’ and ‘quaint brown eyes’, and shortly after when we hear about Rico’s trivial ‘*paintings*’, his ‘restrained correspondence’ (*St. Mawr*, 22) with Lou or the fact that he only ‘entertained clever and well-known people’ (*St. Mawr*, 24). Indeed Rico, who is, in narrative terms, the antithesis of St. Mawr, is in fact the character most afflicted by these ‘ain’ effects: ‘in *vain* Rico squirmed [...]. In *vain* Rico protested that he couldn’t ride’ (*St. Mawr*, 26). As such, ‘St.’ and its escapee letters cause us to lose track of any logical temporality in the narrative, for *St. Mawr*/St. Mawr already begins before it/he begins—in the way that he lays down cryptic pieces of himself long before (and after) we read about him. This disorienting profusion of names and genres in the text, works to completely refigure the sense of home in the final section. For how can the text’s humans—Lou Carrington, Mrs. Witt, or even the readers of *St. Mawr*—experience any kind of return to a *pure* or *natural* animal world when that world (symbolised by St. Mawr) is always already broken up and scattered all over the text?

Each of the cryptlike formations that live in the raw name (the written body of *St. Mawr*) opens up reading to a more-than-contradictory logic, a differential contiguity. St. Mawr’s name, with all its homonymic mobility, its way of getting into all sorts of cracks in the narrative, worms its way into the language of the novella, deeply complicating the narrative reading, by working *against* itself, like a counter-current. What, at first, appeared to be two dialectically opposed ‘worlds’ (the human and animal, the social and the natural) are shown to be already conjoined, touching and interlacing in the mesh of linguistic

overdetermination that constitutes the novella. This correspondence of apparently disparate worlds creates a new reading or set of readings whereby such elements as character, temporality, cause-and-effect, which are essential features in the logical progression of a plot and narrative, are shown to be already interrupted and contaminated from the beginning. As such it might be read as what the narratologist Brian Richardson would term an '*unnatural* narrative', 'a series of contradictions that preclude the possibility of a single, self-consistent narrative'.⁴⁹ *St. Mawr* is certainly unnatural, denatured, machine-like—but a machine which is nevertheless alive, animated, dancing. The letters of *St. Mawr* cannot be reined in for the purposes of narrative; rather they undo the very possibility of narrative, by forcing the reader to move, oscillating or skidding, back and forth across the text, just like the ghostly, mechanical 'wraiths' that Lou so despises.

At the end of the novella, this spectrality, instead of being dissolved, is more raw than ever. As the 'New England wife' (the previous owner of Las Chivas, along with her husband) looks across at the mountains and valleys surrounding the ranch she sees 'another valley, like magic and very lovely, with green fields and long tufts of cotton-wood trees, and a few long-cubical adobe houses, lying floating in shallow light below, like a vision' (*St. Mawr*, 146). Here there are valleys within valleys, like some kind of impossible Escher creation, in which houses 'float' and all is 'like a vision', an hallucination. In this mirage-like pattern of valleys, we might find a version of Roland Barthes's description of a 'reader', who must read as if strolling through a strange valley,

at the bottom of which runs a *wadi* (I use *wadi* here to stress a certain feeling of unfamiliarity). What he [the reader] sees is multiple and irreducible; it emerges from substances and levels that are heterogeneous

⁴⁹ Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative: Theory, History, and Practice* (Columbia: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 57.

and disconnected: lights, colors, vegetation, heat, air, bursts of noise, high-pitched bird calls, children's cries from the other side of the valley, paths, gestures, clothing of close and distant inhabitants.⁵⁰

Barthes's '*wadi*' is a place where many things are competing to be read, where things 'burst' forth in what he names a 'stereophony' of substitutions and displacements. It is in many ways reminiscent of Lawrence's description of the New Mexico desert where 'the alfalfa field was one raging, seething conflict of plants trying to get hold' (*St. Mawr*, 147). In this landscape of reading, no one signifier can gain ascendancy over the others, and this produces an unfathomable text, striving with contradictions, always heterogeneous to and disconnected from itself. As readers all that we can do is move 'from dream to dream, from phantasm to phantasm'. Lawrence, in contrast to the message of unmediated animality that the text seems to proffer, is telling us that there is no 'reality' here, no homecoming to be found 'outside' of the text's slippery letter-effects. On the level of letters and phonemes in the text, we see a process of interminable substitution at work, a process which endlessly contaminates meaning by making letters refer to yet more letters without ever reaching a final point of signification. This, in turn, has a disastrous effect on the possibility of a 'biodegradable' message, for the final meaning that the text leads us towards is fundamentally fragmented by the unstoppable work of endlessly signifying *chain*-letters. *St. Mawr* becomes a kind of eternal dream, littered with its very own phantasms of reading.

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, critics such as Sagar, Partridge and Norris generally view the last section of the novella as linking the 'disappearance'

⁵⁰ Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', *Textual strategies: Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism*, edited by J. Harari (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 78.

of St. Mawr with Lou's so-called *Heimkehr*, her arrival in the wilderness of Las Chivas Ranch. It is at this point, many critics suggest, that Lou cuts the reins of the mechanical unreality of human society. But when we read through the strange chains of letters, the textual phantasm of Lawrence's writing, we find that St. Mawr (or at least some morsels of him) does not in fact disappear from the final part of the narrative. For example, at the end of the novella, we read that 'Out of the mountains came two breaths of influence: the breath of the curious, frenzied energy, that took away one's intelligence as alcohol or any other stimulus does: and then the most *strange* invidiousness *that ate away the soul*' (*St. Mawr*, 144, my emphasis). The mountains echo back to the autophagous multi-mawed text, that which eats away at itself, using its very own name. Again we have the sense that something is eating away at the text, its message or 'soul'—while always preserving the 'strange' and 'invidious' materiality of the writing—the name which remains like ancient 'mountains', unconquerable and dangerous to human reading. We are reminded again of Mr. Saintsbury's idea that the horse (and, by metonymic association, the text) is 'eaten up with his own power'. And it is with Mr. Saintsbury that we must end up, when all has been chewed over—for it is in Mr. *Saintsbury*'s name that we find the only instance of the word 'saint' in its unabbreviated and unfragmented form, as well as the hidden word 'bury' (which takes us back down into the *buried* crypt of letters). This decidedly minor character, depicted as rather foolish and of apparently little importance to the plot, is suddenly imbued with great significance (in another example of how the text seems to shrink and inflate, multiply and erase), almost as if *he* were leading the signifying *chain* of saints across the text, marching (albeit haphazardly) against the reductive and redemptive narrative of *St. Mawr*. After all, it is Mr. Saintsbury who

points us to the ‘*raw spot*’, it is he who seems to understand, more than anyone, the dangerous nature of this horse-shaped crypt: for it lives, entirely undigested and exposed, in his very own name. *St. Mawr* is a text written against itself, it eats itself while preserving itself, spews out its own name in hard, indigestible bits, at once occluding and announcing its name everywhere and without end. It hurts itself for the sake of its own survival, its own life. What kind of *saint*, then, is the animal St. Mawr, the novella *St. Mawr*? Perhaps he/it would be the living saint of letters.

Zennor

11th September

I already know it so well, as if from a dream or past life. This place makes me hum with silence: that real kind of silence that gets inside, fills the body's empty spaces, makes a conch of you. And here, too, the skylarks that seem to follow me everywhere and I can never quite see—their trilling, clattering calls come from every direction, reaching my ears like spirit telephones—ceaseless and unlocatable fronds of sound—

Searched for your cottage and its neighbouring tower-house where KM and JMM lived but cannot, of course, work out which one it is. These Cornish granite houses all look the same, heavy and dark, tomb-like. So I follow you up Zennor Hill, to where you saw the adder sleeping, up to where the rocks emerge naked and grey out of the heather tufts. It's not exactly a place to see, more to see from— out, down, up.

The tallest crag is a huge, bunched fist, twisted and knuckly. I am not a good climber and was trembling with exhaustion by the time I reached the top. At the top of the rock—the most uncertain joy. Half-dead, sprawled upon the plateau, one cheek against the technicolour lichens, loving their scaly froth, their half-living, some of them charcoal and burnt grey, some orange-green or pale earthy, some brown like a snail or bright like gorse-flowers—it feels like a birthplace, this. Or else some half-

At the top of the tor, the wind-keen takes over from the ever-present larksong. *Tor*: I roll the word around. It is so like tear or tear, tear and tear: in Danish it is a little sip or taste (*en tor*) and in Welsh (*tŵr*) it names a belly, but also a breach, an interruption—a place where the earth splits open and grey rocks come tumbling out. I wish I had the proper language to read these fat bellies of granite secrets, close-bitten half-moons. Huge slabs lying on top of each other, like bodies—stacks of prehistoric

flesh. On the sunny moor below, bumblebees and burnet moths flit promiscuously between heather tuft, furze bristle. But, up here, the wind drives hard, makes my thin jacket whip into wings behind me, threatening flight. Looking down and thinking it would be so easy to jump—

It's the day you were born, one hundred and thirty years ago. Hadn't exactly planned this but now I'm taking the copy of your letter from my pocket, photographed in secret in a corner of the British Library reading room. No need to read it (I have the thing by heart), were it not for the untraceable twist of your handwriting, your singular, quick manoeuvre. I whisper your words into the rock, an incantation: *It is very lovely here. I am sitting with my back against a boulder, a few yards above the houses, below, the gorse is yellow, and the sea is blue. It is very still, no sound but the birds and the wind among the stones. A very big seagull just flew up from the east, white like lime-stone, and hovered just in front of me, then turned back*

into the sky. It seemed like a messenger. My voice sounds small and weird beneath the shout of the wind: up here, out in the open, the words seem to come from some other mouth. As if from the flecks of gulls, the scattered skylarks, the heathers, the lichen, the rolling clouds, the Atlantic Ocean booming. From here I can see across the bay to an ancient tin mine, long-

abandoned. I can't see but I know it must go deep into the earth, out of sight. On the moor below dark spectres of bumblebees still roam about in shards of sunshine and

there are mushrooms here, too—tawny grisettes sit in uneven brown clumps, musk-sticky with veiny gills beneath their fragile lids—lone yellow-stainers inhabit banks in so many shapes and sizes—under pine needles I spy a single fly agaric, rabbit-white and scarlet, its parasol maggot-nibbled—and, much later, a ring of psilocybes, delicate and tempting. I remember being small and hiding behind the climbing frame at school searching for overripe earthballs—

truffles like old dusty potatoes—cutting into them with the sharp end of a pair of compasses—looking for the curdled ink inside, the mysterious blue caviar—but instead, grey ashy spores came streaming as out of a wound—scattering into the air and into lungs. I am still clutching your letter of so long ago—

—seems like a messenger

Chapter Four

The Afterlives of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*

Meanwhile, right now, the ashes of
DH Lawrence could be anywhere.
(Ali Smith)¹

Can a ghost be attributed?
(Jacques Derrida)²

Ali Smith's recent short story, 'The Human Claim' (published in 2015 in the collection *Public Library*), asks us to think about the ashes of D.H. Lawrence. The narrator of the story ('Ms Smith'), having read a biography of Lawrence, can't get him, and his provocative antagonisms, out of her head: 'Sitting on the train a few weeks later I was still preoccupied with him, his little red beard jutting in fury at all the patriotic clichés'.³ But most of all, she notes, 'it was the story of what may have happened to his body five years after his death that I couldn't stop thinking about'.⁴ This is the story of his ashes that Frieda sent her new husband, Angelo Ravagli, to collect from Vence in the South of France, where Lawrence died and was buried. Frieda gave Ravagli the unpleasant task of having the body exhumed and cremated so that she could put the ashes in a vase in a shrine on the Kiowa Ranch at Taos. But, after Frieda's death, Ravagli confessed that he (to some extent understandably) 'threw away the DH cinders'.⁵ 'D.H. Lawrence' becomes 'DH cinders' and those infinitesimal pieces of him are cast into the world. Smith's narrator says: 'Imagine

¹ Ali Smith, 'The Human Claim', *Public Library* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), 94–5.

² Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions', *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 381.

³ Smith, 78.

⁴ Smith, 78.

⁵ Angelo Ravagli, quoted in Smith, 86.

the ashes of Lawrence shaken into the air, dissolving in the ocean'.⁶ But Smith's 'The Human Claim' is also the story of modern bureaucracy and corporate power, the incomprehensible and impenetrable world of banks and big business. The narrator receives a letter from her credit card company. After frustrating and somewhat Kafkaesque correspondences with Lufthansa (the airline) and Barclays (the narrator's bank), Smith falls asleep and dreams the following dream:

Meanwhile, in my sleep, the freed-up me's went wild.

They spraypainted the doors and windows of the banks, urinated daintily on the little mirror-cameras on the cash machines. They emptied the machines, threw the money on the pavements. They stole the fattened horses out of the abattoir fields and galloped them down the streets of the small towns. They ignored traffic lights. They waved to surveillance. They broke into all the call centres. They sneaked up and down the liftshafts, slipped into the systems. They randomly wiped people's debts for fun. They replaced the automaton messages with birdsong. [...] They were winged like the seeds of sycamores. There were hundreds of them. Soon there would be thousands. They spread like mushrooms. They spread like spores. There would be no stopping them.

Meanwhile, that snake that Lawrence threw the log at disappeared long long ago into its hole unhurt, went freely about its ways, left the poem behind.

Meanwhile, right now, the ashes of DH Lawrence could be anywhere.⁷

Smith's story is saying something, I believe, about the possibility of Lawrence's writing, about its future, and how it might still possess a disruptive and agitating potency today. For Smith, this is a force that 'free[s]-up' certain parts of her, which come to scatter like seeds or mushroom spores, righting injustices and causing disruption to the structures of control that are everywhere today. The 'moral' of Smith's short story is perhaps this: Lawrence, or some elements of Lawrence, are still wild, disorderly and disordering, dangerous to normalising institutions, to neoliberal and normative practices. His writing ignites (as it does in Smith's narrator's dreams) certain forms of resistance, both discursive and concrete. The

⁶ Smith, 87.

⁷ Smith, 94–5.

power of Lawrence's ashes is that their whereabouts is entirely unknown: '*right now*, the ashes of DH Lawrence could be anywhere'. And this, as Smith alludes to in her evocation of 'Snake', is also the fate of the body of his writing. We are not done with Lawrence, his texts. Writing is also a place of 'freed-up me's', drifting in the air or floating across the ocean, going anywhere at all.

In many ways this idea takes us back to a thinking of letters and postcards. Smith's 'freed-up me's' and the 'DH cinders' are like letters that have not reached their destination, and therefore do not finish operating: their meaning and force remains unpredictable, unstable and, crucially, unfinished. In Chapter One, we saw how Lawrence's letters exhibit a life in excess of both their sender and addressee. These texts endeavour to find a poetic language in which to encounter a nonhuman mode of living and writing, a language which performatively summons life, making itself stir with animation long after its sender and addressee have died. This performativity, which functions as a puppet-like 'manoeuvre', is bound up with Derrida's conception of the letter's 'fatal necessity of going astray'.⁸ Smith's notion of Lawrence's ashes that 'could be anywhere' or the snake that escapes from the poem seems to play with these ideas of the necessary possibility of straying and non-arrival. The 'fatal necessity' is perhaps simply another way of saying *living on*.

In this chapter, I want to think more about this idea of living on, staying alive, and a text's afterlife, which Smith's story implies and we looked at in terms of the questions of resistance and self-destruction in the previous chapter. I will consider the ways in which Lawrence's texts survive, continuing to produce powerful effects long after their author has died. In this chapter I look at Lawrence's poems, the poems from the collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923).

⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Envois', *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 66.

Initially, and in a rather prosaic sense, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*—composed over the years 1920–23, during an intensive period of travelling—might be viewed as a series of postcards sent to and from the various places Lawrence and Frieda visited (among others: Venice, Florence, Sicily, Australia, Ceylon, New Mexico). The poems are an idiosyncratic field-guide to the flora and fauna of these regions, recording, in a series of peculiar taxonomic categories, the ‘Fruits’, ‘Trees’, ‘Flowers’, ‘Evangelistic Beasts’, ‘Creatures’, ‘Reptiles’, ‘Birds’, ‘Animals’ and ‘Ghosts’ Lawrence encounters. Yet they also behave like postcards in the way they function as shrunken, concentrated and open (which is to say *public*) letters, often directly *addressing* their nonhuman subjects. And, most significantly for this thesis, they are postcard-like in that they seem to be concerned with quickness: the ways in which writing lives and, more strangely, *lives on*.

I wish to begin to read the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* as—to borrow a formulation from Lawrence—‘post-mortem effects’ (*Classic American*, 174). This odd phrase is coined by Lawrence in his discussion of Walt Whitman in *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Like much of Lawrence’s writing on Whitman, ‘post-mortem effects’ vibrates with ambivalence. He elaborates on the phrase by saying that ‘Walt’s great poems are really huge fat tomb-plants, great rank graveyard growths’ (*Classic American*, 174). At first this might not appear to be an expression of admiration more than one of disgust: it appears to say that Whitman’s writing is somehow dead or perhaps it is a writing that feeds off death. But there is also a sense here that Lawrence sees something in Whitman’s ‘great’ poetry (and other ‘great’ poets) that goes beyond the immediacy and ‘pure present’ (see ‘Poetry of the Present’; *Poems*, 645–9) that he valorises elsewhere, something which is always *after* life. And yet it is not quite dead either: it is life after life. Lawrence is perhaps

inviting us to think about a kind of poetic afterlife and the fact that even after death, Whitman's poems continue to sprout and flourish, grow and change, outmanoeuvring their writer and the scene of writing (what we might call their 'original' context).

This idea relates to something Gilles Deleuze, in his essay 'Literature and Life', says about literary writing, namely that it 'moves in the direction of the ill-formed or the incomplete [...]'. Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience'.⁹ Writing always lives beyond or after life. Deleuze's remark affirms what we have been saying about 'the life of Lawrence', particularly in relation to Lawrence's epistolary and poetic practice. Lawrence's letters animate beyond their moment of writing, their expression of human 'lived experience', taking on its own indeterminable life. Moreover, 'lived experience', which is claimed by some as the central tenet of so-called 'life writing'¹⁰, is suggested by Deleuze to be somehow alien or heterogeneous to literary or poetic writing. Writing is perhaps another species of experience altogether, one that grows in the spaces between life and death. Literary writing cannot finally record or express a particular life or set of finished experiences because it necessarily tends towards the 'ill-formed or the incomplete', always going 'beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience', continuing to live and make live in unforeseeable ways.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, 'Literature and Life', *Critical Inquiry*, 23:2 (1997), 225–230.

¹⁰ See, for example, Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, 'Letters as/not a genre', *Life Writing*, 1:2 (2005), 91–118. In this essay Jolly insists that letters have 'an interest as life writing that can take us close to individual experience and historical determination' (93), suggesting that 'experience' and 'historical determination' is what life writing can and should provide us with—as if these were the primary objects of reading.

Deleuze's sense of 'the ill-formed or the incomplete' has particular resonances for reading Lawrence's poetic writing which has often been described in terms of the unfinished and even poorly-crafted. Sandra Gilbert, in her book on Lawrence's poetry, *Acts of Attention* (1972), reads the poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* as 'essayistic', noting that '[t]he style of the [...] poems is from the first casual, improvisational, unfinished: a style that functions not only as a means of communication but as a process of discovery'.¹¹ While, for Gilbert, Lawrence's 'essayistic' mode is something productive and a means of 'discovery', earlier critics were far more hostile to this perceived 'style'. The literary critic Arthur Waugh, writing in 1919, remarked that Lawrence's poetry was 'without regard for the restraints and responsibilities of prosody or technique'.¹² Waugh was the father of Evelyn Waugh, who (following in his father's footsteps perhaps) later said of Lawrence: 'Philosophically he was rot [...] and as a craftsman he was frightful'.¹³ In 1952 the American critic R.P. Blackmur went further than the Waughs in denouncing Lawrence's style, claiming that his poetry was 'work written out of a tortured Protestant sensibility and upon the foundation of an incomplete, uncomposed mind'.¹⁴ Later in the same essay, Blackmur argues that Lawrence 'left us the ruins of great intentions; ruins which we may admire and contemplate, but as they are ruins of a life merely, cannot restore to poetry'.¹⁵ Blackmur's notion of 'ruins' perhaps shares something with Lawrence's own reading of Whitman's

¹¹ Sandra M. Gilbert, *Acts of Attention: The Poems of D.H. Lawrence* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1990, second edition), 132.

¹² Arthur Waugh, 'Mr. D.H. Lawrence', *Demon Liberated*, edited by Amativa Banerjee (Houndmills, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), 93.

¹³ Evelyn Waugh and Harvey Breit, 'An Interview with Evelyn Waugh', *New York Times Book Review* (March 13 1949), 23.

¹⁴ R.P. Blackmur, 'D.H. Lawrence and Expressive Form', *Language as Gesture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1974), 286.

¹⁵ Blackmur, 300.

‘tomb-plants’ (and Smith’s fascination with the ‘DH cinders’), which might similarly be described as ‘ruins of a life’. In ‘Biodegradables’, Jacques Derrida also uses the metaphor of a ruin, in order to think about the persistence and survival of certain literary works:

For me, the duration of these words is like the solitary persistence of a wreck. Its form run aground is stabilized in the sand. One might see it surge up through the morning fog in the manner of a damp ruin, jagged, covered with algae and signs. A chance as well for the deciphering to come when the thing resists. The promise of work and reading, at least for a little while.¹⁶

For Derrida, the ruin, being covered with ‘algae and signs’, comes veiled in a *surging* life, or afterlife—a life that arrives to inspire ‘the promise of work and reading’. This green growth, this posthumous algae and the signs that accompany it, constitutes an assemblage, a decentring plural growth, flourishing on the ‘run aground’ form of a long-forgotten wreck, itself a kind of ‘tomb-plant’. Derrida’s ruin is a broken signifier whose original form can only be imagined, dreamed of—through ‘the morning fog’—but never fully pieced together. It is something which both resists and, in its very resistance, offers up a wealth of reading. It is a wrecked form that whispers the secrets of some life, while also always withholding what it knows. A ruin is perhaps also a letter or postcard from long ago, sent through the ages, its destination erased and its meaning altered by time, by the shifting sands of context. We intercept it and it seems to address us and, not knowing what it is we read, we let it live.

We might say that in his notion of Lawrence as a writer of the ‘ruins of a life’ Blackmur has, quite unwittingly, hit the nail on the head, particularly when it comes to reading poems such as those from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. For it is in

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, ‘Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments’, translated by Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry*, 15:4 (1989), 812.

their status as 'ruin' that the poems continue to animate, to grow and cover themselves with an assemblage of algae-like and endlessly proliferating signs. In light of this, we might start to consider the ways in which Lawrence's poetry moves towards the future, *leaving itself*, like a bequest, a wreck or a 'graveyard-growth', to the coming 'discovery', as Gilbert has it, of the other's reading. This is partly related to what Andrew Bennett has termed, in relation to the desire of Romantic poets and poetry, the 'textual' or 'secular life-after-death'.¹⁷ Bennett views this phenomenon or desire as being 'articulated most intensively at a particular historical moment—the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century'.¹⁸ While Lawrence's oeuvre clearly connects to Romantic aesthetics and ideology in many important ways, his mode of living on is, however, exceptionally *modern* in the play of its semantic gestures, and, in the end, singularly Lawrencian. It is here and now, in the morning fog of Lawrence's writing, that we must receive the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and begin to read the strange *promise* of their afterlife....

Undeliverable Telegrams

One of the most postcard-like poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* is the little and relatively little-discussed poem 'Bare Almond Trees'. This poem, and the trees it describes, are key for understanding the important link between Lawrence's letters and his poetry, for seeing the epistolary desire of these poems, which is also related to the philosophy of life and afterlife generated by his writing. 'Bare Almond Trees' was written in December 1921 and concerns a group of trees that the poem's

¹⁷ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12.

¹⁸ Bennett, 16.

speaker encounters near Taormina, on the slopes of Mount Etna. The poem, from the start, describes the uncanny animation of these trees, which appear to be under some kind of enchantment:

Wet almond trees, in the rain
Like iron sticking grimly out of the earth;
Black almond trunks, in the rain
Like iron implements twisted, hideous, out of the earth,
Out of the deep, soft fledge of Sicilian winter-green
Earth-grass uneatable,
Almond trunks curving blackly, iron-dark, climbing the slopes.
(*Poems*, 253)

The most remarkable thing about this description is the way that the trees seem to transmutate from the vegetal to (inanimate) metal, becoming like ‘iron sticking grimly out of the earth’, a dead thing. And yet it is as ‘dead’ metal that the trees paradoxically come alive, it is in their ‘iron-darkness’ that they set about ‘climbing the slopes’. The grammar of this first stanza is odd—the verb ‘to be’ is missing, and it’s as if the syntax is itself ‘twisted’ around the incantatory words ‘wet almond trees’, ‘black almond trunks’. Language becomes tree becomes metal. After this description of the trees zoo- or anthropomorphically ‘climbing the slopes’, the poem takes an odd turn, turning to address its subject, in a series of direct questions:

What are you doing in the December rain?
Have you a strange electric sensitiveness in your steel tips?
Do you feel the air for electric influences
Like some strange magnetic apparatus?
Do you take in messages, in some strange code,
From heaven’s wolfish, wandering electricity, that prowls so constantly
 round Etna?
Do you take the whisper of sulphur from the air?
Do you hear the chemical accents of the sun?
Do you telephone the roar of the waters-over-the-earth?
And from all this, do you make calculations? (*Poems*, 253)

Richard Ellmann, speaking about Lawrence’s poetry, notes that ‘Nature for Lawrence is pullulating; his landscapes, his flowers, his animals have radiant nodes

of energy within them, and he sets up an electric circuit between them and himself'.¹⁹ The 'electric circuits' Ellmann describes might, in the context of 'Bare Almond Trees', be more accurately thought of as magical and living *telegraphic* circuits or networks. For it is not simply some vitalist or vaguely essential energy that gets passed between him and his poetic subject, but rather, as the poem suggests, it is 'whispers', 'messages', 'codes': which is to say, *writing*. Like some of the letters we looked at in Chapter One (in particular the letter to Katherine Mansfield), 'Bare Almond Trees' is in many ways a radical act of branching out towards a nonhuman mode of writing. In his interrogation of the almond trees and the weird interactions of the elements on Mount Etna, Lawrence invites us to think through what, following Derrida, we named the 'unbounded generalisation' of Lawrence's life writing. The speaker of 'Bare Almond Trees' comes to figure the trees as telegraph poles that receive and read encoded messages from their environment. All elements here are attributed with a means of communication: the sun corresponds with its earthly environment using 'chemical accents', nuances of voice and speech; there is a 'whisper of sulphur' in the air, as if the volcano herself were speaking; 'wolfish, wandering electricity' sends messages 'in some strange code'; and a rapid telephonic connection can be made to 'the roar of waters-over-the-earth'. The slopes of Etna are all alive and communicating directly with the machine-like almond trees.

Lawrence's poem, mirroring the tress, also seeks to become a tree-like reading device in the form of a telegraphic address, a way of connecting the poem's speaker to the Sicilian almond trees and beyond, seeking to be a kind of recording device, a machine for picking up nonhuman calls, preserving them in writing for all

¹⁹ Richard Ellmann, 'Lawrence and his Demon', *Demon Liberated*, edited by Amitava Banerjee (London: Macmillan, 1990), 197.

to read, experience, understand. David Trotter, one of the few critics to have commented in detail on this poem, notes that the lines ‘cautiously extend their own length in search of answers, flexing multisyllabic technical terminology’.²⁰ Thus the very *matter* of the poem, its syllables and line-lengths constitute its technological force, its ability to summon the other (in this case the almond trees) through writing.

The poem’s presentation of a specifically nonhuman telecommunication system is related to what Fiona Becket calls Lawrence’s desire for the ‘possibility of an unmediated “connection” with the cosmos, which modern “mental-consciousness” [...] challenges and, ultimately, destroys’.²¹ We see this desire at work in Lawrence’s reading of Melville, whose

bodily knowledge moves naked, a living quick among the stark elements. For with sheer physical vibrational sensitiveness, like a marvellous wireless-station, he registers the effects of the outer world. And he records also, almost beyond pain or pleasure, the extreme transitions of the isolated, far-driven soul, the soul which is now alone, without any human contact. (*Classic American*, 155)

What Lawrence marvels at in Melville is how he relates to the world in a way that appears unmediated and direct: ‘naked, a living quick among the stark elements’. And it is, moreover, something that might only be accessed by shedding ‘any human contact’, as Melville ostentatiously does in ‘Typee’. Melville’s body acts as a ‘marvellous wireless-station’ in its speed, its quickness, and the sense that it takes in *messages*—it ‘registers the effects of the outer world’ and ‘records’ his own soul’s ‘transitions’ for the world to read. In Lawrence’s reading, Melville might be seen as a kind of spiritualist medium—but instead of making contact with the dead, he

²⁰ David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 30.

²¹ Fiona Becket, ‘Lawrence, Language and Green Cultural Critique’, *New D.H. Lawrence*, edited by Howard J. Booth (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2009), 151–2.

communicates with the animated inhuman world. For Lawrence, modern humans have 'lost' this telegraphic relation to the earth and cosmos. This is an idea that Lawrence further develops in the novel *Kangaroo* (written in 1922 and published in 1923, the same year as *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*) in what he names 'vertebral-telegraphy': a kind of telepathic force, a mode of transmission far superior to the dull 'herd instinct' of human animals, most keenly sensed in sperm whales and birds.²²

We might conclude, then, that 'Bare Almond Trees', and other poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, seek to bring about an absolute *reconnection* with nonhuman animals, plants, minerals, even other time-zones and lifetimes. To this effect, W.H. Auden has observed that Lawrence's best poems are 'always concerned intensively with a single subject, a bat, a tortoise, a fig tree, which he broods on until he has exhausted its possibilities'.²³ Auden's remarks paint a poet who intensely desires to know his 'single subject', to find a way to call forth the other, in order to translate her, to read her, without overlooking a single element or possibility of her being. Such 'exhaustion' is implied in 'Bare Almond Trees' in the way the poem seems to desire the *calculable*: it wonders if the almond trees, like a dendritic computer, 'make calculations' while also, in the same breath, seeking to make its own calculations about the trees' sum and substance. In this way the speaker's wandering (yet very specific) questions to the almond trees recall the list-like (and exhausting) incantations that occur in Whitman's poetry, particularly

²² The narrator of *Kangaroo* calls this 'a complex interplay of vibrations from the big nerve-centres of the vertebral system in all the individuals of the flock, till, click!—there is unanimity...This vertebral telepathy is the true means of communication between animals' (*Kangaroo*, 329–30).

²³ W.H. Auden, 'D.H. Lawrence', *The Dyer's Hand* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 204.

‘Song of Myself’.²⁴

And yet there is also a sense that the poem is about the *loss* of connection, an inability to communicate. In contrast to Auden’s sense of ‘exhausted [...] possibilities’ we might think about the way the poem’s questions are also an embodiment of an incomplete and unfinished growth, tending towards the unanswered, unknowable and (recalling the strange botanical growths in Chapter Two) the unmasterable. Where Whitman is full of certainty and unshakable will, Lawrence’s poem remains questioning: it sends out its dendritic-poetic lines, only to pull them back sharply, unanswered. The poem’s questions might even be read as interrupting each other, as if they were the multiple crossings of telegraph wires, messages that intercept each others’ trajectories, diverting each others’ passage. The only answers that the poem appears to provide, in its fourth and final stanza (directly following the ‘question’ stanza), simply enact a return to the poem’s beginning:

Sicily, December’s Sicily in a mass of rain
With iron branching blackly, rusted like old, twisted implements
And brandishing and stooping over earth’s wintry fledge climbing the
slopes

²⁴ For example, the following section from ‘Song of Myself’ demonstrates Whitman’s questioning repetition and the resolution in the form of an answer that always seem to follow:

Have you reckon’d a thousand acres much? have you reckon’d
the earth much?
Have you practis’d so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the
origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are
millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor
look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the
spectres in books

Walt Whitman, ‘Song of Myself’, *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 2004), 64–5.

Of uneatable soft green! (*Poems*, 253)

In the repetition of phrases and words from the first stanza—‘soft fledge of Sicilian winter-green / Earth grass uneatable’ becomes ‘slopes / Of uneatable soft green’; ‘Like iron implements twisted, hideous’ becomes ‘rusted like old, twisted implements’—the syntax has become even more ‘twisted’, but nothing has been ‘calculated’. Everything in the poem is still held in suspended speculation. The telegram does not reach its destination. Nothing is exhausted: the trees continue to climb the slopes, undeterred.

This sense of unresolved speculation, this hovering question that so often marks Lawrence’s writing, is close to what Derrida sees as the work of ‘indecision’ in the poetry of Paul Celan. Derrida remarks that the irresolution at play in Celan’s writing is a performative force that

seems to interrupt or suspend the decipherment of reading, though in truth it ensures its future. Indecision keeps attention forever in suspense, breathless, that is to say, keeps it alive, alert, vigilant, ready to embark on a wholly other path, to open itself up to whatever may come, listening faithfully, giving ear, to that other speech. [...] Interruption is indecisive, it undecides. It gives breath to a question that, far from paralyzing, sets in motion. Interruption even releases an infinite movement.²⁵

Derrida is saying something here about poetry as a force of interruption—a life born from a fatal cut or wound. Interruption and suspension are allies of death and yet they are also, paradoxically, the very things (in their disruption of an exhaustive connection with, or knowledge of, the other) which ensure a text’s survival. Derrida’s idea that ‘interruption even releases an infinite movement’ can, as I hope to demonstrate, already be found at work in many of the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. While he is clearly a very different kind of poet from Celan, we might

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, ‘Rams’, translated by Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski, *Sovereignities in Question*, edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 146.

nevertheless see Lawrence's signature as one that similarly strives towards a productive indecision, consistently cutting itself off as it proceeds.

In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* Lawrence, addressing his readers, speaks about the necessity of being misread: 'There is no straight path between you and me, dear reader, so don't blame me if my words fly like dust into your eyes and grit between your teeth, instead of like music into your ears' (*Psychoanalysis/Fantasia*, 72). Lawrence addresses his reader directly, while, paradoxically, avowing the fact that there is 'no straight path between you and me': the address is always interrupted, contaminated by its own *gritty* indetermination, its necessary distance and dust-like dissemination of sense. In any medium of address, be it a poem or a postcard, words ineluctably change their qualities and meanings along the crooked slope between writer and reader, between death and life. 'Bare Almond Trees' is doing something similar in its unaccountability, its refusal to create a 'straight path' from question to answer, from sender to addressee.

In another tree-poem, 'Cypresses', we see that a poem can also be used as a way of 'telephoning' other time-zones, even the ancient past. 'Cypresses' acts as a connective cord to the time of Lawrence's beloved Etruscans, with whom he wants to 'come to dark connection' (*Poems*, 250). However, in seeking this 'connection', the poem also further unravels Lawrence's avowed desire for a telegraphic poetry. 'Cypresses' reminds us that poems, as mediumistic or telegraphic devices, are also necessarily made in *language*, and that language, as a medium, does not always behave as we might want it to:

Folded in like a dark thought
For which the language is lost,
Tuscan cypresses,
Is there a great secret?
Are our words no good?

The undeliverable secret,
Dead with a dead race and a dead speech, and yet
Darkly monumental in you,
Etruscan cypresses. (*Poems*, 249)

Here the word ‘cypresses’ names the medium-like instruments for communing with the dead that stand before the poem’s speaker—that is, the *trees* themselves—while also invoking the poem that goes by the name of ‘Cypresses’. It means that the telegrammatic message that moves between the Etruscans and the poem’s speaker is constituted by the words of ‘Cypresses’, which, as the poem avows, are inadequate, they cannot reach the lost language of the past. And even if they *could* translate the ancient language of the Etruscans, this would not alter the fact that ‘words are no good’. That is to say, words cannot finally be employed in the production of presence, for they go astray, veer away on their own unpredictable path, steered by the fact of an ‘undeliverable secret’ at the heart of all writing, all life. This takes us back to the question of the ruin, the wreck of ancient letters, or the ashes that cannot be reconstituted (or even located). Reading the ‘darkly monumental’ ‘Cypresses’, we become like the traveller in Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’, who tries to read a lost life ‘stamped on these lifeless things’, the ‘colossal Wreck’ of a forgotten civilisation.²⁶ Like this traveller, all we have is the name ‘Cypresses’ and the cryptic words of the poem, that work like a spiritualist medium to both intercept and constitute the spectral ‘undeliverable secret’. It brings us back, like a recoiling tendril, to the ‘infinite movement’ that Derrida speaks of in relation to ‘indecision’. The trees keep the speaker guessing and, in turn, the poem keeps *us* in the dark—‘folding’ us into it ‘like a dark thought’—where it harbours a fugitive writing that is unknown even to the ones who ‘keep’ it. (This recalls the sense of Lawrence’s being

²⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Ozymandias’, *Selected Poems*, edited by Humphrey Milford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 358.

a 'hibernating' writing, tending towards unconscious thought.)

All of this resonates with Whitman's 'huge fat tomb-plants'. For this is what these typical churchyard trees, the 'Cypresses', are: they can only ever be 'darkly monumental' or 'graveyard growths', sealing themselves up, like a crypt of writing, an always 'undeliverable secret'. We might, in this context, think about William Wordsworth's poem, 'Yew-Trees' (also traditional 'graveyard growths'), in which the speaker describes one tree 'in the midst / Of its own darkness' while others invite the 'ghostly shapes' of 'Fear and trembling Hope, / Silence and Foresight; Death the skeleton / And Time the shadow' to meet 'at noontide'.²⁷ In both the Lawrence and Wordsworth texts, trees outlive and cast a shadow over all human feats and progress. They evoke human transitoriness and death, both in their ability to live on with a 'Silence and Foresight' that sees a future we will never come to witness, *and* in their manner of keeping in the 'shadow', of sealing up into the form of an unreadable ruin, all they have borne witness to. The corresponding ways in which Lawrence's trees harbour some 'dead speech', 'undeliverable' like dead letters, and Wordsworth's poem focuses on 'growth / Of intertwined fibres serpentine / Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved'²⁸, say something about the trees' very (in)growth being a sort of forever-incommunicable writing. This work of poetic sealing is perhaps what Derrida in 'Che cos' è la poesia?' describes as 'writing in (it)self', which is also 'like an animal on the autoroute rolled up in a

²⁷ William Wordsworth, 'Yew-Trees', *Major Works*, edited Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 335.

²⁸ Wordsworth, 335.

ball’—instinctively guarding its fragile secret, which is also its own body (of writing).²⁹

We find a further embodiment of the double work of connection-interruption in a sketch Lawrence made for the cover of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (Figure 3). While perhaps confirming the idea that Lawrence was a far better poet than draughtsman, this sketch also tells us something about how he viewed the collection as a whole. In this rather naïve sketch, the many nonhuman subjects and addressees of the *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* poems congregate on the page in a kind of visual rendering of the essay ‘Poetry of the Present’, in which Lawrence calls for the ‘rapid momentaneous association of things which meet and pass on the forever incalculable journey of creation’ (*Poems*, 647). At the centre of the page is a tree, perhaps one of the almond trees from Lawrence’s poem. Its limbs are twisted and reaching out, physically connecting, like a telegraph station, all the poem-creatures with its wiry arms—as if it were a reading machine put to work by Lawrence, in his quest for an immediate relation to life. The tree is perhaps also a representation of the poet himself, a (rather phallic) figure at the centre of the cosmos, making his linguistic recordings of all the creatures he holds at his fingertips.³⁰ And yet the drawing also says something about the way the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* work upon each other as forces of interruption. The tree’s branches seem to meld with or be formed by a bat or snake or bird, and it bears several different fruits (grapes, pomegranates, perhaps figs), becomes more than itself, shrouding itself in

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, ‘Che cos’ è la poesia?’, translated by Peggy Kamuf, *Points...Interviews, 1974–94*, edited by Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 298.

³⁰ It is worth recalling here that Lawrence wanted to name his first novel, *The White Peacock* ‘Tendril Outreach’—or ‘Outreaching Tendrils’ or ‘Outreach of Tendrils’, adding that ‘Tendrils’ is what George [Saxton] is always putting forth’ (*Letters*, I, 167). This says a lot about how Lawrence viewed his writing, as a series of shoots or growths, new life reaching out into the world.

the images of other animals and plants. Our gaze cannot focus on any one creature or plant without being drawn towards another tail, tendril, wing or face. There is a disarray of creatures and plants all appearing to overlap and intrude upon each other. Despite the benign smiles of the snake and tortoise, there is a kind of violent chaos in their frenzied thronging on the page, each vying for attention, clamouring to be noticed. Reading *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, it is difficult to stay still, to read one poem at a time, the poems appear strangely at odds, striving to interfere with each other (we will think about this more later, particularly in terms of the surprising intertextual correspondences between some poems and the *antagonistic* relations between others).

The sense of life that both this sketch and Lawrence's poems generate is also related to the disarming and arresting quality of *faces*. Lawrence's attention to nonhuman faces anticipates the moral and ethical questions opened up by Emmanuel Levinas, when he says 'I don't know if a snake has a face'.³¹ For Levinas, the face is the thing that provokes and demands an ethical response from the other, and yet the face is something that he believes (albeit tentatively) only humans possess. Lawrence, in contrast to Levinas's apparent anthropocentrism, is in no doubt that snakes and many other nonhuman animals (and perhaps even *trees*) have faces (we might call up the 'address' letter from Chapter One as further evidence of this). We encounter this idea throughout *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* in the way the language seems to zoom in and linger over the singular aspects of nonhuman physiognomies, as if surprised or even mesmerised by their features. Examples of this include the way the speaker of 'Baby Tortoise' describes the

³¹ Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas', *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 171–2.

‘impervious mouth’ and ‘soft red tongue, and thin hard gums’ of the creature, suddenly realising what these features constitute: ‘*Your face, baby tortoise*’ (*Poems*, 306, my emphasis); in ‘Autumn at Taos’ we read about the ‘fish-fanged, fierce-faced’ visage of an otter (*Poems*, 360); and in ‘Mountain Lion’ the speaker describes a dead lioness’s ‘round, bright face, bright as frost’ and the ‘Dark, keen, fine rays in the brilliant frost of her face’ (*Poems*, 351). The word ‘keen’ is related to pain and grief (from the Irish *caoinim* ‘I wail’), and here it is the speaker’s attention to the animal *face* that provokes such a *keen* sense of regret and loss. We might read many of the poems from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* as living laments for the many acts of cruelty committed by humans towards other animals—not only in terms of killing them for meat, clothing, drugs and so on, but also in the carno-phallogocentric (denoting the inherently sacrificial structure of meaning-making and human subjectivity) practices of writing and reading. In Lawrence’s sketch, the nonhuman faces, these avatars of poetic animals—of the kangaroo, lion, bat, bird, snake, tortoise, ox—are not just appealingly cute, but act as performative forces that all seem to vie for our ethical consideration, our care of reading. Finally, something about Lawrence’s drawing, and its representation of poetic life, invites us to consider *the face of a poem* and what kind of reading it might demand of us.

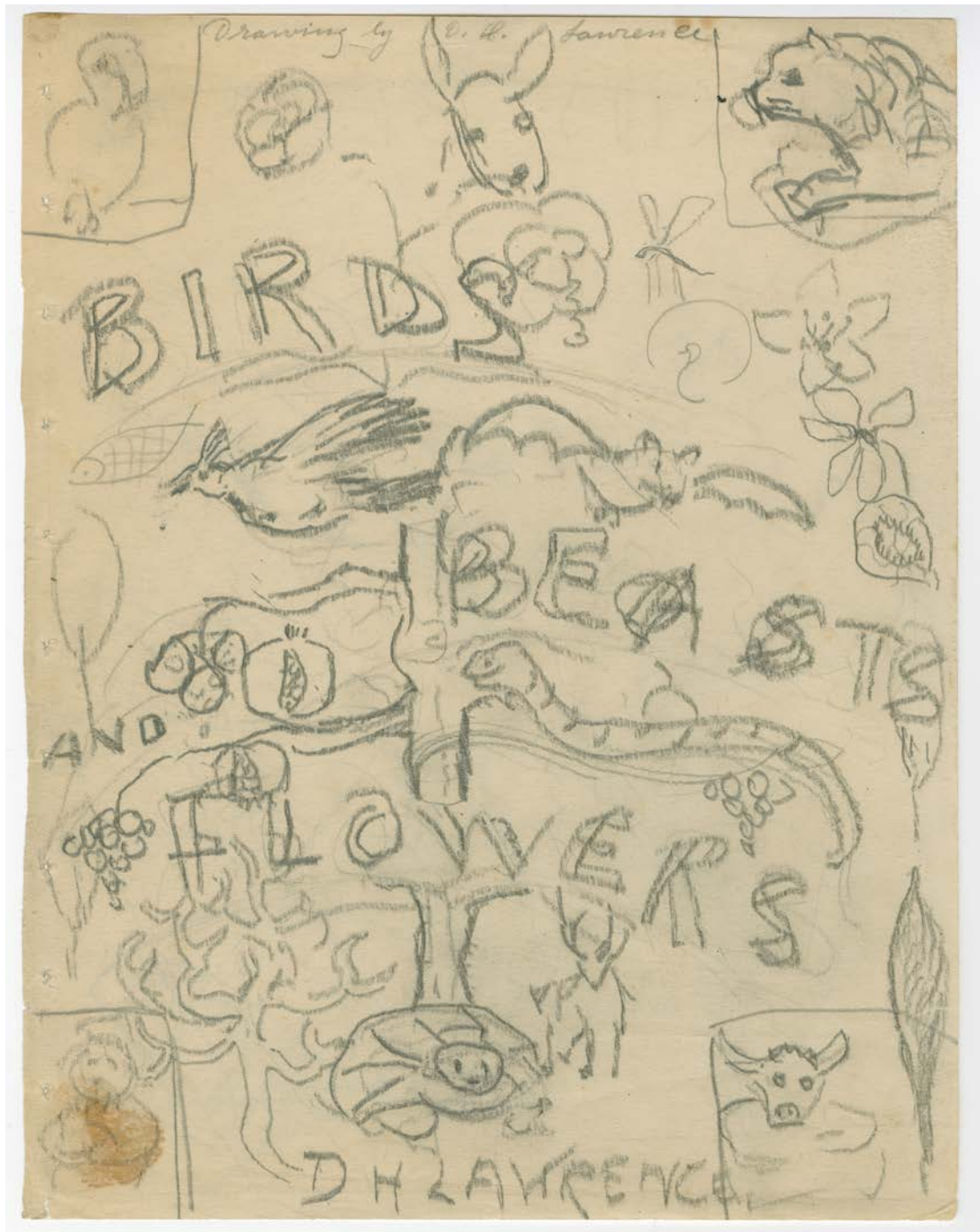


Figure 3. D.H. Lawrence, sketch for *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, 1922. 21.3 x 16.5 cm. Harry Ransom Center.

Poetics of the Echo: 'Bat'

In the poem, 'Bat' (written in September 1921 while Lawrence was visiting Florence and first published in 1922 in *The English Review*), the poetic writing works upon the reader in a number of strange ways in order to ensure its own afterlife. In the first half of the poem we see the workings of something very similar to the 'Bare Almond Trees' and the telegraphic desire of writing:

At evening, sitting on this terrace,
When the sun from the west, beyond Pisa, beyond the mountains of
Carrara
Departs, and the world is taken by surprise....

When the tired flower of Florence is in gloom beneath the glowing
Brown hills surrounding....

When under the arches of the Ponte Vecchio
A green light enters against stream, flush from the west,
Against the current of obscure Arno.... (*Poems*, 294)

From the first line of the poem ('at evening, sitting on this terrace') we get the sense of the immediate moment that the poet is trying to recreate, through the fixing of time and the use of the deictic 'this'. It compels its reader to be in two places at once, two places that the poem also inhabits: at once the 'here' that is evoked by 'sitting on *this* terrace', 'under the arches of the Ponte Vecchio', but also the 'here' of the poem itself, the irreducible time of 'now' that every poem necessitates each time it is read anew. It also reenacts the tone of the postcards Lawrence wrote when he first arrived in Florence, in which he emphasises the here-and-nowness of his writing. For example: 'Here I am for the moment in Florence' (*Letters*, III, 418); 'Am here in the rain' (*Letters*, III, 419); 'Here I sit in my room over the river Arno, and wait for Mrs Lawrence' (*Letters*, III, 420) in a letter to Cecily Lambert, from Florence: 'Here I still sit in my room over the river, which is swollen with heavy rain' (*Letters*, III, 422). This is perhaps the classic 'wish you were here' of the

postcard, which Peter Schwenger notes ‘can be read metaphysically, in terms of desire and presence’.³² It is the *wish* to locate oneself, while also bringing the postcard’s addressee closer. It reinscribes the sense of the ‘momentary’ and ‘immediate’, produced performatively in some of the letters we discussed in Chapter One, recreating the time and place of a text’s annunciation. But in the next part of the poem the reader’s experience is rendered rather more disconcerting:

Look up, and you see things flying
Between the day and the night;
Swallows with spools of dark thread sewing the shadows together.

A circle swoop, and a quick parabola under the bridge arches
Where light pushes through;
A sudden turning upon itself of a thing in the air.
A dip to the water.

And you think:
“The swallows are flying so late!”

Swallows? (*Poems*, 294)

In this interval ‘between the day and the night’ something quite unsettling occurs. A second person pronoun is introduced onto the scene, a ‘you’, which is perhaps a more surprising turn of events than the shadowy arrival of the bats themselves. The ‘sudden turning of itself of a thing in the air’ describes what the poem’s reader must do, she must turn to herself and think: ‘The swallows are flying so late!’ But who is really thinking this, who *speaks* this thought? Who do you think ‘you’ are? More than simply an immediate, swift telegram to the other which captures a moment in time, the poem seeks to make ‘you’, the reader, its object *and* subject of reading. Just like the mistaken swallows, ‘you’ are not what you seem, for you are now also the poem’s speaker, the one who sits on the banks of the Arno, ‘on this terrace’. By

³² Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 5.

saying 'And you think', the speaker becomes one with the reader, makes the reader read through his eyes, hear through his ears. This stretches the possibilities of Lawrence's telegraphic poetics, moving it towards something like a telepathy or transference of thoughts, a mind-reading writing. The poem reaches out of itself (like the limbs of the almond trees), but also lures 'you' into its shadows with 'spools of dark thread'. For in 'Bat' the path towards the other appears to be forged by a desire to consume, to *swallow* the other, obliterate by devouring or absorbing 'you' into itself. This gives 'wish you were here' a darker, more literal spin—it says to its addressee: wish *you* were *here*, inside me, become part of me. The poem desires for you to lose yourself, become its speaker, become wholly other.

What does all of this have to do with the bats that are the eponymous nonhuman subjects of this poem? Bats, as the poem suggests, move with great celerity, like poetic telegrams. They take the evening 'by surprise' in their immediate arrival, their movement like a 'quick parabola', mathematically calculated and precisely timed to occur 'between day and night'. But the poem's desire to become one with its reader is also related to the bats' hunting (that the poem's 'you' is made to watch as s/he reads) and what the speaker calls their 'wildly vindictive' voices (*Poems*, 295). In 1944, the groundbreaking—or rather *air*breaking—Harvard zoologist Donald Griffin published his discoveries on micro-bats' (as opposed to fruit-eating mega-bats) bio-technology for hunting in the dark (which they always do *on the wing*). 'Bats', Griffin reveals in his seminal paper on the subject,

emit a supersonic cry (inaudible to human ears because its frequency is from 30,000 to 70,000 c.p.s [cycles per second or hertz]) and orient themselves by means of the echoes of this cry which return to them from any obstacles which lie ahead. Since there is no convenient term available to describe the

process of locating obstacles by means of echoes, I suggest the word *echolocation*.³³

There is something wonderfully poetic in the formulation of Griffin's neologism, *echolocation*: far more compelling than say, biosonar, in its performative description of call and response. The word echoes inside itself with its miniscule pattern of 'o's, seeming to imitate the bats supersonic cries, bouncing off their surroundings, and returning (like a kind of telegraphic response) an (almost) immediate, mimetic coded message about life. Like the telegraphic trees of 'Bare Almond Trees' bats literally *read* their environment, sending and receiving messages to and from the world.

This is something that poets already understood, long before the science evolved to describe it. Emily Dickinson's bat poem, written in 1876, already clearly suggests that there is more to bats than meets the ear:

The bat is dun, with wrinkled Wings—
Like fallow Article—
And not a song pervade his Lips—
Or none perceptible.³⁴

The poet says with assurance, 'not a song pervade [the bat's] lips'. We might think that this is down to her lack of scientific knowledge about bats, but, in fact, her poet's ear is far keener than many scientists of the time—for she can hear precisely that which cannot be heard. In one swoop of syntax Dickinson turns her previous statement back on itself with the words: 'Or none perceptible'. It comes like an

³³ Donald Griffin, 'Echolocation by Blind Men, Bats and Radar', *Science*, 100:2609 (1944), 589. Over sixty years after Griffin's coining of the term, scientists are still reckoning with the many varied and complex forms and uses of echolocation in different species of bats and other animals. For example, a recent zoological study suggests that bats have their own echolocative signature and that they use this to communicate with each other in the darkness.

³⁴ Emily Dickinson, '1575', *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 653.

uncertain whisper, a voice from elsewhere, almost demonic in its divergent echo. Particularly powerful is the little word ‘or’ which leaves us oscillating between the two sentences, unable to decide between one *or* the other. If no song is perceptible, how can the speaker know of it? We are back in the realm of telepathy, of the impossible knowledge of the ‘song without sound’. Lawrence, writing in 1921, would, like Dickinson, not have been aware of the science of echolocation or biosonar. Yet it is as if Lawrence’s bat poem similarly possesses an almost telepathic sense of what the bats are up to, for the writing (particularly that weird, carnivorous use of the second person address) imitates or takes on their chiropteran mode of reading-hunting, which reverberates throughout the poem. For in its attempt to devour the other, to become one with ‘you’, there is a sense that ‘Bat’ (as its title already promises) actually *becomes* a hunting bat. It wants to consume you, like a bat, using its echolocative cries to home in on its unsuspecting prey.

However, I also want to explore how the poem’s bat-ness, its unpredictable nonhuman life, might write *against* itself, working to trouble or interrupt its own desire for quasi-telepathic reading. For in the second half of the poem, its swift writing begins to come undone—we might say it begins to *consume itself*, making a ghost, or host, of its own body. This coincides with the poem turning to the bats themselves, in order to describe them, record them and know them:

Dark air-life looping
Yet missing the pure loop....
A twitch, a twitter, an elastic shudder in flight,
And serrated wings against the sky
Like a glove, a black glove thrown up at the light
And falling back.

Never swallows!
Bats!
The swallows are gone.
(*Poems*, 295, emphasis original)

At first it seems that the repetition of ‘Bats!’ (which occurs five times in the second half of the poem, in three of these instances followed by the exclamation mark) is an emphatic attempt to summon the bats forth, using a version of their own echolocative gesture as a way of catching and pinning down (with the sharp point of an exclamation mark) these elusive and shadowy animals, making the poem *bat* with their presence. The exclamation marks evoke the celerity of a telegram, acting out immediacy as quickly as the dash and dot of an encoded message.

However, in the repetition of ‘bats!’ we also begin to see the disruptive power of the work of the echo, the very thing that makes the biosonic connection possible in the first place. In *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton critiques what he calls ‘ecomimesis’, the illusion, often employed in writing about a nonhuman environment (such as in Romantic poetry and other so-called ‘nature writings’), of direct representation, or accurate translation of a ‘present’ environment—a version of which can be seen in the first three stanzas of ‘Bat’. It is what Geoff Dyer calls the ‘as I look up from my desk’ genre of sentences (although in ‘Bat’ it is closer to ‘as *you* look up from *your* desk’).³⁵ Morton argues for ‘[a] poetics of the echo [which] interferes with the fantasy that ecomimesis is immediate. This immediacy must be an illusion that the narrator manages to pull off, with varying degrees of success’.³⁶ Immediacy and mimesis are impossible desires, illusory tricks of writing. As Hélène Cixous suggests: ‘I want to *write in the present*. Now one cannot write in the present because one writes after the present’.³⁷ Writing is always an after-effect, an echo of life, a ‘tomb-plant’. This after-effect can

³⁵ Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: in the Shadow of D.H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), 94–5.

³⁶ Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 68.

³⁷ Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* translated by Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1997), 78, emphasis original.

be heard in the insistent echoing of the syllable ‘bat’. ‘Bat’, rather than presenting the animal ‘here and now’, summoning it like an ecomimetic medium before our very eyes, produces a weirdly disorientating experience of reading. For in their echoing repetition, the bats are always here and there, never settling in one place—‘*hic et ubique*’ as Hamlet says of his father’s echoing ghost.³⁸ Indeed there is something decidedly ghostly about the presentation of these creatures, the way we are only able to read them through a kind of linguistic shroud—the many strange metaphors produced by the poem. For the bats evade capture in language, they take on disguises, become inert human objects—‘a black glove thrown up at the light’, a ‘serrated’ bread knife, an ‘elastic’ band. They seem to ‘twitter’ and ‘twitch’ between swift animation and inanimate lifelessness, suggesting that the poem struggles to keep a direct, living connection with its subject. Blink and the bats are gone. ‘Dark air-life looping / Yet missing the pure loop....’ comes to describe the poem’s own interrupted flight path, the way its language consistently misses what it appears to be aiming for. Something does not make it through transmission, it escapes the jaws of immediate reading and writing: just a morsel, a bit, ‘*Bats!*’

The poetics of the echo are also at work in the way Lawrence’s language plays on the (inaudible) peeping sound of a bat, in the little syllable ‘pip’, which is contained in the Italian name for the animal:

Pipistrello!
 Black piper on an infinitesimal pipe!
 Little lumps that fly in the air and have voices indefinite, wildly vindictive
 Wings like bits of umbrella.

Bats! (*Poems*, 295)

³⁸ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by G.R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1.5.164.

‘Pipistrello’ is etymologically connected to ‘piper’ and ‘pipe’, through the Latin root *pipare* meaning ‘to squeak or chirp’. ‘Pip’ therefore applies to both the ‘black *piper*’ itself (*pipistrello*) and the instrument the creature uses to make its echolocative ‘pip’ (its ‘infinitesimal *pipe*’). Incidentally, these ‘pips’ also return us to the technology of wireless telegraphy, the ‘pips’ being another name for the Greenwich Time Signal, introduced to BBC radio in 1924 (just a year after the poem was published) to mark the precise start of each hour and is also the sound we hear when we telephone the talking clock. The pips of time give listeners the illusion of the immediacy and temporal accuracy of radio wave broadcasting, of life in the apparently purely present moment. In *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time*, Jay Griffiths points out that the ‘pip pip pip of the atomic clock’ is heterogeneous to ‘the earth’s unreliable time’, which is ‘too inaccurate for modernity’s time measurement’.³⁹ So the ‘pip’ names a distortion, an impossible desire. While, on the radio, the pips are used to indicate so-called *real time*, the precise here and now of Greenwich Mean Time, Lawrence’s poetic pips serve to obscure the bat by making the language used to describe it stutter with the bats’ own calls, which is much closer to the ‘unreliable time’ of the earth. In the poem ‘Bats!’ and ‘pips’ are batted forward and back, creating a kind of living echoscape, coming straight from the mouth of the earth. Morton’s ‘poetics of the echo’ can be heard both in the poem’s attempts to echo and *imitate* its environment, but also in the echoing effects at the heart of Lawrence’s language and writing.

We might note that ‘pips’ are also seeds, recalling, first of all, the ‘Fruits’ section of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, but also suggesting the scattering of language that Lawrence’s writing foregrounds, or the letters and phonemes that sow

³⁹ Jay Griffiths, *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time* (London: Flamingo, 1999), 1–2.

themselves, producing strange growths across his oeuvre. The infinitesimal yet troublesome seeds can also be ‘heard’ in the idiosyncratic use of ellipsis in the line ‘Yet missing the pure loop....’ and the ecomimetic lines we discussed at the start of the poem (‘Brown hills surrounding....’; ‘Against the current of the Arno....’; ‘the world is taken by surprise....’). This takes us back to the notion of suspension as a vital element in Lawrence’s poetic signature. As Derrida says in ‘Rams’, such poetic features work to suspend, but also invite reading: ‘Caesura, hiatus, ellipsis—all are interruptions that at once open and close. They keep access to the poem forever at the threshold of its crypts’.⁴⁰ In ‘Bat’, the marks of omission (made from the humble little seeds or *pips* of writing, the dot or point) profoundly dislocate the notion of ‘here’ that they seek to sustain. They create an absence in the mimetic description, an unknowable lacuna that is also, as Derrida suggests, a kind of crypt from out of which living creatures might emerge. Despite the sense of immediate presence created by the ‘here’ and ‘now’ of the writing, something remains unsayable or hidden, something has been lost in transmission and replaced by four little dots, like some unreadable Morse code. This is the lag of echolocation, the ghostly echo in the telegraphic machine—the ghost of all writing, perhaps.

Echolocation might be a way of describing Lawrence’s poetic practice more generally, particularly in what occurs *between* poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, as intertextual iterations. This can be seen, for example, in the two poems we have been looking at so far, in the way ‘Bat’ echoes the acronym of ‘Bare Almond Trees’ (B.A.T.). This might be dismissed as a mere textual coincidence, an accident of letters. But we could perhaps read it as the mark of a kind of subatomic or

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, ‘Rams’, translated by Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski, *Sovereignities in Question*, edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 157.

underground network in Lawrence's poetry in which, in a subtle collusion of letters, everything is echolocated through allusion and imagery, the play of syllables and homonyms, repetition and metaphor. Lawrence's oeuvre begins to resemble a secret echo-chamber in which words and images are *batted* back and forth, like calls and responses, never quite settling in any poem, but living like unreadable codes in many places at once. This idea is close to the observation made by the critic and novelist Amit Chaudhuri when he speaks of the 'intertextual play of representations scattered over [Lawrence's] poems' in which 'borrowings' take place from poem to poem, so that bits of a mannequin (if we take these creatures to be such) [...] travel as textual cargo, and may reappear in another poem, fitted onto another mannequin'.⁴¹ Chaudhuri here emphasises the materiality of the poems, their 'textual cargo', while also taking us back to the idea, with the 'mannequin', of the notion of the 'uncanny life' of puppets which I discussed in Chapter One—for Lawrence's 'bits of a mannequin' 'travel' on their own without the aid of human manipulation, like weird marionettes, forming a network of interactions that far exceed any purely human mode of communication.

The notion of puppet-like materiality is perhaps most clearly seen in the final few sections of the 'Bat':

Bats!

Creatures that hang themselves up like an old rag, to sleep,
And disgustingly upside down.

Hanging upside down like rows of disgusting old rags
And grinning in their sleep.
Bats!

In China the bat is symbol of happiness.

⁴¹ Amit Chaudhuri, *D.H. Lawrence and 'Difference': Postcoloniality and the Poetry of the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69.

Not for me! (*Poems*, 295)

Here we have the sense, particularly in the line ‘Creatures that *hang themselves up* like an old rag, to sleep’, that these marionettes animate *themselves*. ‘Hang themselves’ also, however, suggests suicide or self-harm. It speaks of the way the poem ties itself up, interrupts its own life, gags itself with ‘disgusting old rags’. Something is finished, done for (but it is perhaps not the ‘Bats!’, for they appear to have escaped, leaving behind only ‘old rags’). By its final line, the subject of the poem has moved from ‘you’ to ‘me’, turning back into itself, sealing itself up, returning to its sender, like an echo coming back to the ears of the one who calls...

On the Hoof: ‘She-Goat’ and ‘He-Goat’

In this section I want to return to the idea that Lawrence’s poems engender a lasting ethical imperative. To do this I will focus on a pair of poems: ‘She-Goat’ and ‘He-Goat’, both of which mobilise a series of weird hircine resistances, powerfully opposing their human speaker or writer. I begin with ‘She-Goat’, a poem about the struggles between the poet-narrator and a domesticated female goat. In this poem, we initially hear a male speaker attempting to assert his (human and phallic) ownership and hermeneutic mastery over the female animal, telling us that ‘she was bought at the Giardini fair, on the sands, for six hundred lire’ (*Poems*, 337). He calls her ‘an obstinate old witch’ with an ‘obtuse, female sort of deafness’, who’s just ‘the ugly female’; she is simply ‘bête’, he says (*Poems*, 337). The conflation of animality and femaleness under the term ‘bête’—which, in French, denotes both ‘beast’ and stupidity, *and*, moreover, is a feminine noun—is not unsurprising in its attempt to reduce the force of the other, to subsume or consume her in the satisfying morsel of this little feminine word. ‘That’s her’ he later declares triumphantly, as if having

managed to successfully read her, to telegraphically pick up and decipher her signifiers (*Poems*, 338).

But goats, while being one of the first nonhuman animals to be enslaved by humans, also have a reputation for roguishness: they are hard to contain with fences or ropes, they eat everything they come across, they shit on boundaries. True to her enigmatic goatness, the she-goat baulks at her master and withdraws to perch high in an acacia tree. In this moment, something weird happens to the narrator's previously self-identical and assured phallic reading head:

Queer it is, suddenly, in the garden
To catch sight of her standing like some huge, ghoulish grey bird in the
air, on the bough of the leaning almond-tree,
Straight as a board on the bough, looking down like some hairy horrid
God the Father in a William Blake imagination

Come down, crapa, out of that almond tree!

Instead of which she strangely rears on her perch in the air, vast beast,
And strangely paws the air, delicate,
And reaches her black striped face up like a snake, far up,
Subtly, to the twigs overhead, far up, vast beast,
And snaps them sharp, with a little twist of her anaconda head;
All her great hairy-shaggy belly open against the morning.

At seasons she curls back her tail like a green leaf in the fire,
Or like a lifted hand, hailing at her wrong end.
And having exposed the pink place of her nakedness, fixedly,
She trots on blithe toes. (*Poems*, 337–8)

Much could be said about the word 'queer' here, and the uncanny force it comes to possess in the poem. The 'she-goat' is a queer animal because she does not conform or stay put, there is a threatening fluidity about her behaviour, but also her body. Queerness emerges in conjunction with a kind of derangement of scale, as the goat becomes a 'huge, ghoulish / grey bird in the air' that dwarfs, or rather, *shrinks* the narrator. Not only can he not command her to come down from the tree, he appears to be physically shrinking from her, but also figuratively, in fear and

disgust. For the poem's speaker the goat becomes *excessive*, uncontainable, both more and less than herself. She hides herself away, 'far up' in the tree, proliferating a screen or veil of signifiers in the forms of other animals (as when she 'reaches her black striped head up like a snake', her 'anaconda head', while 'rear[ing] on her perch' as if she were a *bird*). Through these readings, not only is the she-goat manifestly heterogeneous to herself (we can no longer say 'that's her' as the speaker tries to), she exceeds the bounds of her own species, and therefore her own poem and its title of 'She-Goat'. She also becomes overtly intertextual by alluding to and echoing other poems in the collection—such as 'Bare Almond Trees' (she retreats into an almond tree, becoming a part of it), 'Snake' (see *Poems*, 303–5), 'The Blue Jay' (who sits 'immense above the cabin' 'laughing' at the speaker and his dog below; *Poems*, 326–7), or the monstrously oversized 'Humming Bird' ('Probably he was big / As mosses, and little lizards, they say, were once big. / Probably he was a jabbing, terrifying monster'; *Poems*, 324). The effect of this is that we are constantly moving back and forth between poems, chasing our own tails, never able to settle anywhere, to read any text once and for all.

Lawrence seems particularly taken by his own 'snake' metaphor. He repeats the image (which, as I suggested in Chapter One, has a textual history of *straying*), trying to affirm and secure it, to set it in stone. It's as if the poet—perhaps to compensate for or supplement his palpable sense of shrinking—seeks to textually decapitate the female goat, *through reading*, and to replace her head with a huge prosthetic anaconda's head, a kind of quasi-Medusa, uncannily phallic. As Freud suggests, in his little text 'The Medusa's Head' (from 1923—coincidentally the same year as this poem was published), 'the erect male organ has an apotropaic

effect'.⁴² But, as Freud goes on to observe, the Medusa's head doesn't just mirror the snake-like phallus, but is also linked to the 'terror of castration' which comes about 'when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair'.⁴³ Here the form of the Medusa's head is related to the *female* genitals, hairy and castrated, terrifyingly unreadable to the young male child who 'catches sight' of them (like Lawrence 'catches sight' of the 'queer' goat in the tree). This vaginal Medusa's head doubles itself when the goat displays her 'great hairy shaggy belly' to Lawrence, 'exposing' as he says 'the pink place of her nakedness'. Thus she thwarts his attempt to read her as a single snake's head, the reflection of his phallic power. Freud also reminds us that 'we read in Rabelais of how the devil took to flight when the woman showed her vulva'.⁴⁴ The devil shrinks away, in fear or disgust from the clitoris, which might look like a shrunken phallus, and therefore marks danger, the danger of castration. This fear of castration causes the phallus, ironically, to shrink, to shroud and veil itself in its skin, *hiding* in order to be safe. Thus the 'She-Goat' frightens off her reader.

As the poem advances, it also draws back, becoming more hesitant, uncertain and repetitive, echoing or ghosting itself. For example, in the following lines which come towards the end of 'She-Goat':

Then she leaps the rocks like a quick rock,
Her backbone sharp as a rock,
Sheer will.
Along which ridge of libidinous magnetism
Defiant [...]
Libidinous desire runs back and forth (*Poems*, 338)

⁴² Sigmund Freud, 'The Medusa's Head', *The Standard Edition of Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVIII, edited and translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1974), 274.

⁴³ Freud, 'The Medusa's Head', 273.

⁴⁴ Freud, 'The Medusa's Head', 274.

The goat's back is now a sharp 'rock': another repeated word, causing a stutter or seismic trembling of the poem's bedrock. She moves between the living and lifeless, from goat to stone, becoming a mountain of 'sheer will', a sheer rock-face, blank and impassive. The way Lawrence describes her backbone as a 'ridge of libidinous magnetism' is reminiscent of the way that Derrida, in the essay 'Living On/Borderlines', describes the 'unreadable': 'the unreadable is not the opposite of the readable but rather the ridge [*arête*] that also gives it momentum, movement, sets it in motion'.⁴⁵ Derrida's ridge, the *arête*, is to do with something that stops and arrests us 'defiantly'—another species of interruption—while also making us move, read, write, a 'libidinous magnetism', a force of desire and necessity. One might in this context hear Celan's notion in his lecture, 'The Meridian', that a poem 'is lonely and *en route*'.⁴⁶ In 'She-Goat' the poem's loneliness becomes a kind of libidinal desire that is magnetically drawn to its reader, while also seducing us to come towards it. It seems to echo the 'wolfish, wandering' and electrically-charged missives that 'Bare Almond Trees' picks up in its telegraphic network. The magnetic metaphor used by Lawrence here seems, furthermore, to say something about the *ambivalent* power of Lawrence's poetry more generally. It is made up of differential forces, at times working in polar-opposite directions—at once attractive, seductive, responsive, exposing themselves to be devoured, *and* radically resistant, secretive, always circumventing the human work of reading.

In the poem 'He-Goat', we see the male speaker's incessant (yet thwarted) desire from another perspective. Here the human master is reincarnated as a virile

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Living On/Borderlines', *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), 95.

⁴⁶ Paul Celan, 'The Meridian', *Collected Prose*, translated by Rosemarie Waldrop (New York: Routledge, 2003), 49.

and horny male goat. At first, it seems that the billy goat encountered by the poem possesses the telegraphic power of immediate annunciation:

Splendidly planting his feet, one rocky foot striking the ground with a
sudden rock-hammer announcement,
I am here!
And suddenly lowering his head, the whorls of bone and of horn
Slowly revolving towards unexploded explosion,
As from the stem of his bristling, lightning-conductor tail
In a rush up the shrieking duct of his vertebral way. (*Poems*, 334)

This goat also has much in common with 'Bare Almond Trees', in his apparent ability to conduct electricity (with his 'bristling lightning-conductor tail'), and echoes the 'vertebral telegraphy' of *Kangaroo*. The self-proclaiming 'I am here!' sounds like an inversion of the gendered '*That's her*' from the previous poem. When the goat makes this biblical, Moses-esque announcement upon the 'ground'—with 'one rocky foot', which is also, at the same time, a 'rock-hammer', that wants to shatter the rocky 'ridge' of his female counterpart—he seems to *become* the ground, taking on an immanent and omnipresent force. Once again, the exclamation point seeks to *remark* presence, to inscribe the 'here and now' with telegraphic speed. For the he-goat's 'libidinousness' desires *contact*, like the finely welded stems of the almond trees, it seeks to become *one*, not with the sun, air and earth, but with the female goats: 'With his needle of long red flint he stabs in the dark / At the living rock he is up against, the female backed up against him' (*Poems*, 335). But, like the phallic reader that wants to master his female subject, the he-goat is left chasing his own tail:

He will never *quite* strike home, on the target-quick, for her quick
Is just beyond range of the arrow even of his ice-cold sperm that he hurls
From his leap at the zenith in her, so it falls short of the mark, far
enough.
It is over before it is finished.
She, smiling with goaty munch-mouth, Mona Lisa, arranges it so.
(*Poems*, 335)

The female goat's sex is called 'her quick': it is the essence of her life force, her vital centre. And this is the part of her that the male goat is after, but 'will never *quite* strike'. This reproduces the speaker of 'She-Goat's' inability to read the Medusa-like 'hairy-shaggy' underbelly of his pet goat, but also draws us back to the question of epistolarity. We might say that the he-goat is like a postcard, burdened by his 'fatal necessity of going astray', an idea which is even more pronounced in the following verse:

Sniffing forever ahead of him, at the rear of the goats, that
 they lift the little door,
 And rowing on, unarrived, no matter how often he enter:
 a big ship pushing her bow-sprit over the little ship
 Then swerving and steering afresh
 And never, never arriving at journey's end, at the rear of the female ships.
 (*Poems*, 334)

In his inability to reach his carnal 'journey's end', the he-goat seems to play out Freud's contention that 'something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realisation of complete satisfaction'.⁴⁷ Freud, of course, limits himself to *human* sexuality here, but 'He-Goat' suggests that this notion could be extended to include the 'unfavourable' or incompatible element of the 'sexual instinct' in all its (human, nonhuman and *textual*) guises. Like bats that feed on the wing, never landing to eat or rest while they hunt, Lawrence's goats gesture towards a libidinous reading and writing that would be 'forever' *en route*—or, more accurately, *on the hoof*—'never arriving at journey's end'. The goat-as-ship metaphor here recalls Lawrence's later poem 'The Ship of Death' (published posthumously in 1933 in *Last Poems*), where a non-teleological image of death is presented: 'There is

⁴⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XI, edited and translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 188–9.

no port, there is nowhere to go / only the deepening black darkening still' (*Poems*, 632). 'He-Goat', and later 'The Ship of Death', might be seen as poetic manifestations of Lawrence's ideas about the falsity of Christian-humanist notions of time and narrative in *Apocalypse*:

We always want a 'conclusion', an end, we always want to come, in our mental processes, to a decision, a finality, a full stop. This gives us a sense of satisfaction. All our mental consciousness is a movement onwards, a movement in stages, like our sentences, and every full stop is a mile-stone that marks our 'progress' and our arrival somewhere. [...] We torture ourselves getting somewhere, and when we get there it is nowhere for there is nowhere to get to. (*Apocalypse*, 93)

Thus, long before he developed his thinking in *Apocalypse* (which was one of the very last things he wrote), we see this resistant philosophy taking form in the material body of Lawrence's 'swerving' poetry, which is always 'rowing on, unarrived'. This once again recalls Freud's notion of satisfaction as being somehow heterogeneous to desire and sexuality: 'finality' and 'full stop' evoke the desired endpoint of orgasm, which is also the end of desire, the *arrival* of coming. In contrast to this, we have the endless frustration of never really arriving anywhere 'for there is nowhere to get to': desire carries on, through writing—even after death. We might therefore think of 'He-Goat' as a poem that makes desire come alive each time it is read. Thus, contrary to Auden's reading, Lawrence's poetry lets us experience the *inexhaustible* life of both desire and reading. It is perhaps a matter of what Leo Bersani, in a recent talk, spoke of (incidentally in relation to Lawrence's *Women in Love*) as the 'inherent non-completion of essayistic thinking and writing'.⁴⁸ This recalls the provisionality of Lawrence's letters but also aptly describes the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, which similarly possess this

⁴⁸ Leo Bersani, 'Force in Progress', unpublished talk, University of Sussex (October, 2015).

‘essayistic’ quality in the way that they stubbornly remain in the blissful throes of creation, never settling or reaching a full stop—

Postmarks

The poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* are after life, they hunt it down, want to consume it, touch it, read it, *here and now*. But they are also always *after*, like the echo of a living cry. In each of the poems I have looked at, there is a dual movement at work. The poems are at once a celebration of the notion of telegraphic immediacy, of a living, instantaneous moment, alongside the echo of a *contretemps*, a straying, a sense of being always on the wing or hoof, ‘always missing the pure loop’. Both sides of this—immediacy and the echo, singularity and repetition, life and death—are crucial to Lawrence’s writing, and exist not in opposition, but as two sides of a postcard, working to constantly undo and interrupt each other, always making *here and now* refer to somewhere else, some other time and place—their own unforeseeable futures, perhaps.

But what *remains* after all of these echoes, evasions, misfirings, reroutings, swervings? What, if anything, are we left with? This seems to be the question at the heart of one of Lawrence’s most anthologised poems, ‘Mosquito’. This poem—which opens by asking the insect ‘How did you start your tricks/ Monsieur?’ (*Poems*, 287)—gives a strangely intimate account of the encounter between a man and a mosquito, both of whom are trying to catch and evade capture by the other. They are two ‘Monsieurs’ (although, strictly speaking, this mosquito should be addressed as ‘Madame’, as it is only female mosquitoes who bite), two men, but also two mosquitoes, working to destroy each other. This is illustrated in the way the speaker asks the mosquito:

Can I not overtake you?
Are you one too many for me
Winged Victory?
Am I not mosquito enough to out-mosquito you? (*Poems*, 289)

There is a double desire at work in the poem: the mosquito wants to become one with the man, to drink his blood, and the man wants to become mosquito in order to out-mosquito the insect. In the end, they both seem to succeed: the mosquito bites the man—‘Sucking live blood, / My blood’ (*Poems*, 288)—and the man squashes the mosquito, saying, in the last three lines of the poem:

Queer, what a big stain my sucked blood makes
Beside the infinitesimal faint smear of you!
Queer, what a dim dark smudge you have disappeared into! (*Poems*, 289)

When we come to the final exclamation mark of the poem, the mosquito has disappeared into a ‘dim dark smudge’ and the poem called ‘Mosquito’ has disappeared along with it. And after the doublings and evasions related in this poem, all that is left is a bloody mark: an indelible ‘stain’ that combines the blood of both the human and mosquito, making it impossible to say where the human ends and the nonhuman animal begins. The ‘stain’, or ‘smudge’, which is a residue of life, also represents the poem we have just read, its own medium. We might call it a *postmark*, a stamp that allows the dead writing of the poem to travel through time and space. It’s as if the mosquito must die in order to keep itself alive, to bequeath its body to our reading.

Lawrence complains in a letter to Edward Marsh that ‘My wife has a beastly habit of comparing poetry—all literature in fact—to the droppings of the goats amongst the rocks—mere excreta that fertilises the ground it falls on’ (*Letters*, II, 105). Frieda’s desire to dismiss poetic writing as shit, only useful for its biodegradable properties, is nothing new: it is part of the tradition of what Derrida

calls ‘the repression of writing’, which lets us ‘exclude or [...] lower [...] the body of the written trace as a didactic and technical metaphor, as servile matter or excrement’.⁴⁹ But the notion of poetry, and writing more generally, as faeces becomes another way to think about the materiality of Lawrence’s poems, the sense of something—unpleasant and abject but also *necessary*—left behind after life has left the scene. In a reading of ‘dust’ (which is often taken to mean ‘excrement’) in Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*, Nicholas Royle suggests that the motifs of shit and waste in the novel are ‘inseparable from the question of remains, remnants, traces’.⁵⁰ That is to say, excrement, rather than being just a metaphor employed to *repress* the force of writing, is indissociably linked to the *postmarks* or afterlife of a text.

In the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* such ‘droppings’ take on various litter-like guises, corresponding to different bodily discharges and waste materials—which form a whole post-Dickensian dustheap of remains. This sense of waste matter can, first of all, be read in that ‘queer’ bloody ‘stain’ and ‘dim dark smudge’ of ‘Mosquito’, which is all that remains of both the living speaker and the insect. We might also read it in the misfired ejaculations, the ‘ice-cold sperm’ of the ‘He-Goat’ as he fails to mate with the females. In a clear link to this liquid metaphor, the ‘She-Goat’'s offspring are presented as ‘adorable spurty kids, like spurts of black ink’ (*Poems*, 338). This striking description seems to equate the she-goat with an octopus or squid that also shoots out ‘spurts of black ink’ in order to shrink itself away, to hide behind a veil or shroud. The goat’s kids, unreadable in their void

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1997), 197.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Royle, ‘Our Mutual Friend’, *Dickens Refigured: Bodies, Desires, and Other Histories*, edited by John Schad (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 52.

blackness, are her writing, her animal secretion—not least because of their comparison to ‘black ink’, alluding to the very materiality of the trace or mark, the thing that makes any writing possible. This connects to the description in *Sea and Sardinia* of what Lawrence calls goats’ ‘ill-mannered reply’: ‘if one looks back at them, and perhaps speaks a word to them, they almost inevitably crouch down to make water, self-consciously (*Sea*, 123). Coming in spurts, small ejaculations, or streams of urine, the goats produce a writing that is always fluid, in flux, divisible and therefore cannot be possessed or mastered by reading. Similarly, in ‘Bat’, every attempt to call the bats finds us left only holding a ‘glove’, an ‘old rag’, a ‘serrated’ knife, discarded objects in a workshop of poetry, long-since abandoned. In the poem ‘Turkey Cock’ the postmark is formed by the turkey’s wattle, the bit of ‘queer dross shawl of blue and vermillion’ (*Poems*, 321) covering the bird’s head and throat, like an uncanny veil. A similar thing is happening in ‘Baby Tortoise’ in the way the poem’s speaker describes the little reptile as ‘Resting your head half out of your wimple’ (*Poems*, 307), as if it were wearing a headdress like a nun. Or it is seen in the skin and flesh of the ‘Peach’: ‘wrinkled with secrets / And hard with the intention to keep them’ (*Poems*, 232). Everything in these poems becomes covered as if in a veil of wasteful metaphor, a writing which is inanimate, *after life*, while also strangely alive. Considering the many remnants discarded in and by *Birds Beasts and Flowers*, we might say that Lawrence’s poetic writing *defecates* on the Western tradition of ‘the repression of writing’. For in the poems we have been looking at, Lawrence’s ‘droppings’ of writing, are not semantically ‘servile’ or ‘technical’. Rather, they are *resistant* to servitude, both artful and unpredictably performative.

In relation to this sense of performative wastefulness, we might consider Katherine Mansfield's reaction to Lawrence's novel *Aaron's Rod* (1922): 'there are certain things in this book I do not like [...]. They are trivial, encrusted, they cling to it as snails to the underside of a leaf [...] and perhaps they leave a little silvery trail, a smear, that one shrinks from as from a kind of silliness'.⁵¹ Mansfield dismisses certain aspects of the novel as 'not important' or 'trivial', as mere waste matter, while also avowing their performative force: she 'shrinks from them', recoiling as if in fear, confusion or disgust, she cannot bear to read. By way of conclusion, and with Mansfield's sense of Lawrence's 'little silvery trail' in mind, I want to look at an extract from the poem 'Sicilian Cyclamens'—a bit or bite of a poem, at once swifter (more telegraphic in its *shrunk* concentration of language), and much *slower* and more shrinking than any of the poems we have been discussing:

Slow toads, and cyclamen leaves
 Stickily glistening with eternal shadow
 Keeping to earth.
 Cyclamen leaves
 Toad-filmy, earth-iridescent
 Beautiful
 Frost-filigree
 Spumed with mud
 Snail-nacreous
 Low down. (*Poems*, 264–5)

This poem is ostensibly a description of cyclamen plants, but looking more closely, we see that we are reading the sticky traces of something hidden, something which is no longer present *in* the poem: a snail. Although the speaker has arrived too late (coming *after* life), we know the snail has been here from its 'snail-nacreous' trail, which marks the missing animal: the absent, ghostly figure of this text. The snail's

⁵¹ Katherine Mansfield, *The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield*, edited by John Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1939), 156–7.

traces can be heard in the *cycl*ing of the poem's 'cyclamen', and cyphering of letters in the soft 's'es and 'c's disseminated throughout. They form a poetic 'frost filigree', as Lawrence puts it (repeating an image from the earlier letter to Mansfield), a minute pattern of sounds heard in 'slow', 'sticki/ly glistening', 'spumed', 'snail-nacreous', 'frost', 'leaves', 'iridescent'. This sibilance is sluggish, snailing its way through the text, spreading sticky 'spume' over every word, rendering everything 'filmy', half-hidden under a thin, translucent skin. We become stuck to the text, unable to get out of the gluey fabric of 's's, unable to read it from any metapoetic position. In recording these microscopic 's's, the poem also starts to resemble a Medusa's head of snails, rather than phallic snakes—for unlike the she-goat, the snail's gender remains undecidable (as most snails are hermaphroditic).

In the lines I have quoted, we might note that there is no first person pronoun, no human 'I' that tries to assert itself through writing. Instead, Lawrence's poetic lines start to behave like a snail, reaching out and shrinking back into single-word lines, stopping and starting abruptly. Lawrence's literary gesture or event is perhaps, finally, a gastropod one. Intercepting such a poem, or fragment of a poem, we are able to read the intricate lines of its shell, even learn them 'by heart', keep them with us. And yet something, some life, always shrinks away into its own 'eternal shadow'. The snail of writing shrinks away, out of sight, as we vainly try to shine our hermeneutic light upon it.

Lawrence's poems are living contradictions: they betray their author by cutting his poetic telegraph wire, interrupting the line, in order to grow into and away from themselves, convolving themselves further and further, becoming almost unrecognisable. And at the same time, they leave themselves open to all sorts of new questions, creating so many new *faces* of meaning, seeming to desire and call

for a thinking of telegraphy beyond the human, beyond the subject. They are themselves the growths, droppings, echoes, debris, wattle, blood, sperm and spume left on the paper for all to read. Or perhaps they are Lawrence's ashes, scattered in the air, unleashing their dangerous forces onto anyone who intercepts them. There is a ghostly life that hovers over, or grows out of, Lawrence's poems—something that carries on producing effects long after him, long after the moment of his writing. This life is in part constituted by the ghosts of the nonhuman animals and plants to which the poems address themselves (goats, tortoises, birds, dogs, and so on). But it is also, more strangely, the ghost of writing itself, its own ability to live beyond life. Thus the ghostly 'post-mortem effects' that live in Lawrence's poetic writing are also the ghosts of letters, of so many interrupted communications, derailed missives, and divergent writings: *ghostcards*...

Texas

10thOctober

I am awake and it's afternoon already. The window of my Airbnb bedroom frames a silhouette. The form is something so familiar, like an image of yours—an almond or fig tree—stretching out its stems to read the air for messages, telegrams, electronic mail. I have never felt so alone.

I lie sleepless, listening to cicadas and urgent sirens and feeling the jetlag in my body—as if splinters of time were entering me and winding me up like a clockwork toy, then reeling me backwards through the night. Male cicadas sing like a chainsaw. The first time I heard it, I was afraid, thinking there can surely be no explanation for such a sound. It is a song of no mouth.

the heat—like a bath, but prickly, stinging my flesh. My legs make a horrible rasping noise as I peel them apart, trying to find a comfortable position. The fan above my head beats its wings, mesmerising, a nightmare from some Vietnam war film. It is perhaps a helicopter thrashing or a spinning dragonfly or the fast, transparent filigree of a singing male cicada.

On the plane to New York, read *Mornings in Mexico*, trying to translate myself into this new continent. *Strange*, you write, *that we should think in*

straight lines, when there are none...The straight course is hacked out in wounds, against the will of the world. At JFK a huge storm delayed the flight to Austin. I sat in the departure lounge, awake in the wrong timezone, watching forked lightning shatter the sky over the city. Even lightning bolts bend and diverge on the way
to
earth

13th October

I spent the morning in the Harry Ransom Center reading room, sifting distractedly through your archive—your letters and postcards, manuscripts of poems, diaries, drawings, shopping lists—eyeing the other people in here, all so intent and purposeful, industrious, apparently on a straight path, knowing what they’re about. Compared to them I seem almost absent, practically elsewhere. To pass the time, I search for you. But you are not—never have been—here.

16th October

All those traces of life piled together in boxes, thirty-five of them. At first, seeing the writing, the fragility of smudged pencil marks on the thin, brown paper, gave me a jolt, a stab of emotion—a kind of nostalgia, without referent. But this feeling, too, has worn off in the heat. Only sometimes now do I sense something—some flighty, unpredictable movement in the shifting gait of your letters. They are small and scratchy—so cramped—and then big and looping, and romantic. And suddenly serious and slanted. I can see it now, how beautifully you sign: the ‘D’ winding to ‘H’ in a whiplash strike, which contorts like a serpent to meet the violent ‘L’.

I picked up these four old postcards of American snakes in a junk shop on South Congress Avenue. This one's an Eastern Yellow-Bellied Racer. Feeds by day. Often vibrates tip of tail before dashing for cover, and makes buzzing sound in dry leaves (which can be mistaken for rattle of rattlesnake). If cornered, will strike vigorously. I'm saving the other three for a rainy day...

18th October

Went this evening to see the famous colony of Mexican free-tailed bats that live under South Congress Bridge. I walked through the early evening tarmac heat and the glowing, darkening city. A few other tourists were already sitting on the grassy bank of the Colorado River, the place where people gather to watch them. I sat down and read your bat poems from BBF. *Bats!* I waited and read until it became late and too dark to read, anxious because my Airbnb was two bus rides away and in a 'bad' part of town. More people arrived, but no bats. *Bats!* And still the bats did not come

19th October

This morning, walking along Airport Boulevard, on a dirt track that barely passes for a pavement, I see something spread out in front of me, blocking the way. It has a Labrador-brown body with little splayed feet, wrinkled ankles and one wing open like a twisted human hand, dainty mouse-ears. A bat, dead, kissing the stones. Its face turned from the world. I think of your great fear of bats, and the poem that begins with a spectral address, a letter to 'you', in which you write, almost telepathically: *Look up, and you see things flying / Between the day and the night.* I somehow see it now more clearly, this morning, in the presence of the dead creature. But *who* is/are you? I will never stop asking this...

21st October

Read a funny extract from CC who talks about how you played Hebridean folksongs on the piano in Zennor and hollered along like a seal. This cheered me up, cooled me down. I downloaded a recording of the songs and listened to them, pretending to read through DB's tedious 'Memoir of Lawrence'. The songs are about mermaids and selkies, shipwrecks and bens, being in love with more than one lad at a time. And they are over in a flash, each one just a minute or so long (some just twenty-five or thirty seconds). One song's about dancing to your shadow because life is hard and sad but, still, it's fine to be living. I think that's what reading you is like. Dancing over the brink. It reminds me of the silly thing they write at the front of the old Penguin editions: 'Lawrence spent much of his short life living'. There is life and then there's *life*—

24th October

It's odd to think I'm here because of you. You would hate it, I think—the malls and food trucks, hipsters and SUVs, the prim bungalows. And yet for all the cars and roads and skyscrapers there remains a sense of wildness about the city. Possums pick over the bins every night with baby's hands, their marbles eyes gleaming. There are terrapins and moonlike flowers that only open at night. And the heat—which, still feels monstrous, uncanny—like drowning in a bath each time you step outside. It dulls all comprehension. And all around me in the air I can hear sad songs

the whistling and mechanical whooping of unknown birds—that I now know are called grackles. They look almost like our starlings but larger and unspeckled, shrunken velociraptors—the yellow eyes and odd

cocking of the head. There are creeks, too. Odd little bodies of water that appear and seem to go nowhere—but always imply some sort of untold menace

25th October

In the archive today I found a photograph of you, taken in Mexico. It is quite well known (adorning cover of books you would probably spit at) and I have seen it before several times, tho' never really looked at it. You are smiling awkwardly, sitting at a desk, your face and body slightly out of focus, your suit too big again. Beside you, taking up almost half of the frame of the photograph, is a large plant. I think it's *monstera deliciosa*, the Swiss Cheese Plant (which is actually native to Mexico). Leaves like great open fingers. Next to your faded, overexposed face, smiling like a boy, the plant looms, seems to overshadow the man, the one they call 'Lawrence'. I'd never noticed how uncertain you sometimes look, so far away, all the ego gone out of you.

Ever since I started writing to you like this, I've been having this same dream: I am sitting on the blue swing my grandfather made for me, suspended on pine branches. The bristling trees seem to rattle like a snake when the wind blows. As I'm swinging, I feel something cool and thick, like golden syrup drop onto my head. It is accompanied by a scent that seems to undo me. I touch my hair and realise it is pine resin, falling from the trees that surround me. They want to keep me. The sticky sap is falling thick and fast now. I try to move but my hands are stuck to the ropes of the swing with the gluey pine substance. I know it will engulf me and I will become locked in an amber shell, just like the fly in my mother's pendant necklace. I dreamed it again last night, the coolness of the Scandinavian forest...

I woke up thinking: can a fossil change its shape?

30th October

I took the bus to 6th Avenue to meet some people from the HRC. They were at a dance place that played live country and bluegrass. Women wearing Stetsons were dancing in rows, crossing their legs and twisting and jumping, all in perfect unison. It was so odd to see them moving together like that, suddenly like strange machines or puppets. I was enjoying myself, drinking the sickly American beer and feeling alive. Then a different kind of music began and everyone was up and dancing in partners, a dance I didn't know but I wanted to be a part of it, to become part of the fast yet

melancholy songs. An old man in cowboy boots asks me to dance and I whirled clumsily around the room with him. I was so awkward, shifting my feet at the wrong time, spinning in the wrong direction—he laughed at me, but kindly, saying 'y'all get the hang of her soon 'nough'. The bar was suddenly full of people. I couldn't see the others I came with and I felt nauseous from the sweet beer. In the street outside people were already in masks and costumes for

Halloween. Earlier in the day I'd seen carved pumpkins, a handful outside of every house, as well as plastic ones, glowing. Some of the houses are covered in a kind of gossamer thread, cobwebby plastic. I crept down the avenue, trying to head for the bus stop but the street was crowded with ghouls and clowns, a group of ponies, a dead

basketball team, Prince, bats, satyrs, a demonic dentist, everywhere I turned horrible blood-soaked masks and painted faces, skulls, devils, spectres, shadows, apparitions...

It wasn't the costumes so much as what they were hiding: the unspeakable truth of

beside myself with fear. Needed to find my way back to my Airbnb but drifted pointlessly through a maze of dark roads. Somehow I ended up on the South Congress Bridge. The Colorado River was fat beneath me, moving fast like slick oil. I put my feet up on the railing and leaned over, letting my hands glide out to the side and into the air. I had the feeling someone might come and push me off—for some reason I thought it would be you. I told myself, this is the closest you'll ever get

31st October

So many scrambled dreams, as if I'd picked up a bunch of messages not intended for me. Something about tendril-like arms holding something away, an angry woman, a gift or sexual desire. There was a tidal wave and volcanic eruption and goats in a restaurant. I wanted to cross the mountain, or perhaps I had to decide something. Woke up at 4 a.m. in a terrible fright and my womb was searing with pain.

In the archive today with bad hangover. What I'm doing has never appeared more meaningless. I think there's going to be a storm soon: the sky is ink purple and fat with clouds. This morning I found one of your last letters to EB, written six days before you died: *I'm rather worse than better—doesn't suit me here—have awful bad nights, cough and pain—and seems they can't do anything for me.* Wept and wept reading those

words, my throat burning and aching, trying to hold in my thick sobs in the quiet reading room, the tears almost dropping down and making the faded ink of the letter run. I have come outside to sit by a pond on the UT campus. Here they call it a lake and in it are dozens of terrapins. You can't see them at first because they sit completely motionless, as if they were inanimate objects. They sit on a dead branch, or peer up out of the water, their faces like pigs' snouts, eyes like fish eggs

My last night here and just woke to violent flashes filling the room. At first I thought that someone was standing and taking a photograph above me on the bed, with one of those old-fashioned bulb cameras. But then heard the thunderclaps, the rain beating against the metal roofing—now drumming so hard I can't get a second's rest, or perhaps I am sleeping intermittently, my dreams filling with the weirdest animations. I think I dreamed that

a big horse was running wild through the house, up and down the stairs, eyes starting from its head like golf balls. The creek at the bottom of the garden is now a rushing river, an alarm is ringing somewhere, sirens screaming, my phone starts singing out in a tone I've never heard before and then the screen flashes a message:



Tornado Warning in this area until 6:00 AM
Take shelter now

At the airport now, somehow made it here through the downpour. But the woman at the check in desk said the control tower is flooded and no airplane is leaving this place (let alone any letter). Until now I've never stopped to think where all of these postcards that I write to you wind up. In the taxi, I looked out and saw a whole trailer park afloat, crocodiling along in some ghostly convoy. On the news they are showing footage, torrents of foaming cappuccino water inundating Austin and beyond, to San Marcos and San Antonio, places I have never been to. They are already calling this the 'Halloween Floods'.

I'm writing on the snake postcards as it's all I've got left. Prairie ringnecked: Many scattered black spots beneath on orange background which becomes coral red under tail. If disturbed, a ringneck will often twist into a tight upside-down coil. At times constricts prey.

On screens above my head the 24 Hour News channels report a possible tornado (yet nothing was recorded, nothing is certain) in a town called D'Hanis, just west of San Antonio. We all stand and watch hallucinatory images of a trailer truck planted on top of a Holiday Inn Hotel and the roof of a sports stadium ripped clean off. Only a tornado could have done this but

I think of the letter to GC where you write:

Behind us all are 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. But letters are no good. We should drift away, if we have a bit of hope in common, and a bit of courage.

Is *this* what you meant?

even the airline-staff appear to have jumped ship. There are hundreds of people sheltering here now—some in tears, or yelling into phones—but most just staring blindly at the television screens. Like huge iguanas sitting motionless on a rock, something out of Ballard's *Drowned World*. How prophetic

1st November

HC says that if she were dying, hearing the right piece of music would keep her alive. The right turn of phrase too, the right poem, word, whispered in a voice invisible to death. But I wonder if it works the other way, a song, a poem, a name that could kill you in the blink of an eye, a blissful venom, a letter-bomb—

Red-Bellied Water Snake. Dull rusty brown to chocolate above. Harmless but too often mistaken for venomous cottonmouth water moccasin. Quick to escape into water. Excellent swimmer and diver.

woke up, just a moment ago, thinking about *The Virgin and the Gipsy*—your book of floodwriting. The bit where Yvette is standing on the banks of the river Papple and, hears the Gipsy shouting and *to her horror and amazement, round the bend of the river she saw a shaggy, tawny wave-front of water advancing like a wall of lions. The roaring sound wiped out everything. She was powerless, too amazed and wonder-struck, she wanted to see it.* She's compelled to look at the water, she is paralyzed, seduced: *powerless and wonder-struck, she wanted to see it.* It's an animal too, the flood. It can't be tamed and if Yvette is not dragged away by the

Gipsy, she will drown. But *she wanted to see it*. That's what frightens me the most

Something is happening now—it's all coming to an end. People are moving, announcements being made. They tell us the floods are subsiding, it's going to be OK. But I can't help but think that the worst is still to come... I can't help but think of the terrapins in the pond at UT—where will they be swept to?

Reading (with) you the danger is never done with, I'm pricking my ears, on the alert. My whole life—drawing nearer and nearer to this brink...

Western Cottonmouth: Aquatic. Retreats in water. If annoyed, flashes open white mouth. Seek medical aid if bitten.

I swear to you—I'm barely here at all. It's almost as if you're the one writing this

2nd November

and all that will be left after the deluge are these bits, morsels, dead letters, dead writing—this pointless, indeterminate groping in your direction—and in my twilight reveries—for I no longer know if it is day or night—I receive visions—they are alive with impish creatures who lead me into the floodwaters outside—they seem to come from

out of my own prehistory, these dreams-in-disguise and

to my great surprise, it is you—yes, *you*—the arch-imp, the one who draws me towards the flood, like those crazy weather-hunters, the storm-chasers who follow the eye of the tornado, this ecstatic death driving—down we go in a stolen car, down into a tunnel rushing with sepia water, ignoring all the flashing warning lights and flood barriers—as if all you ever desired was to—

Coda

D.H. Lawrence's Tail, or The Last Words of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—

What last words can there be for Lawrence? In these, my last words or coda (from the Latin *cauda*, meaning 'tail') of the thesis, I wish to suggest that Lawrence's oeuvre radically upsets the notion of last words, putting into question our ability to make a conclusive last word out of *him*. I have been coming to this point all along, demonstrating it through a series of Lawrencian gestures, figures and tropes: be it in the life of growths, goats, or ghostcards, the *law* of Lawrence is something which always lives on, haunting his writing and, in turn, those who read it.

As a way of drawing this thesis to some kind of necessary but impossible close, I wish to read the last words of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), a text which I have so far said relatively few words about. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is often thought to constitute Lawrence's last words, being one of the final things he wrote and published before his death in 1930. Lawrence himself saw it as his masterpiece, his ultimate words to the world, writing to Martin Secker that the novel was 'a bit of a revolution in itself—a bit of a bomb' and, in a later letter, 'a kind of bomb [...] but a beneficent one, and very necessary' (*Letters*, VI, 308, 316). And yet, in contrast to this sense of finality (and even *fatality*), reading the last few pages of Lawrence's novel we start to see that there can perhaps be no end to reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and, by extension, no end to reading Lawrence.

Lady Chatterley's Lover ends with a letter. Up until this point, the novel has dabbled in epistolary sequences—including, when Connie Chatterley goes to Venice, a series of letters between her, Clifford Chatterley, Mrs Bolton and Oliver

Mellors (*Chatterley*, 261–71). We also read the letter that Connie sends Clifford to end their marriage (*Chatterley*, 288). But this final letter is somewhat different, both in its intimacy (it is a kind of love letter from Mellors to Connie, who is now pregnant with his child) and its strange form and position in the novel. In his introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Michael Squires comments on the third version's addition of this letter: 'By closing the final version with an eloquent letter from Mellors to Connie, Lawrence shapes both the opening and the closing of the novel with long, distancing perspectives. The closing letter, tentative yet hopeful, offers to resolve the novel's tensions' (*Chatterley*, xxvii). Thus the letter might be seen to offer some sense of closure, some finality through formal return. But thinking back to the many escaping, resistant, performative texts (the letters, novels, stories and poems) I have been following in this thesis, and the strange work of Lawrence's textual *life*, it seems highly probable that Squires's redemptive sense of the novel's *resolution* cannot be the whole story.

I wish to briefly turn to this letter in order to suggest that the last words of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are like a powerful sting (or explosive device) in Lawrence's tail, one that interrupts the neat 'resolv[ing]' of 'tensions' that Squires reads at the end of the novel. Like much of what we have been looking at in this thesis, these last words are not quite what they appear: they contain their own secret life force. This letter is first of all remarkable in the way that it seems to come totally unannounced, without introduction, warning or explanation in the preceding narrative. It is stuck on at the end of the novel, strapped to the body of the text, a found or foreign object, establishing a kind of halfway space, a no man's land, outside of the diegetic structure. It is in some ways like Mellors himself (its

assumed author) who first enters the novel ‘like a sudden rush of a threat out of nowhere’ (*Chatterley*, 46).

The second striking thing is that the letter lacks any kind of formal epistolary address: there is no ‘Dear Connie’, as we would expect, or any other kind of opening greeting. Lawrence admires this lack of formal attribute in one of his early correspondents, Blanche Jennings, writing to her: ‘So you have had the blissful courage to shed that formality—that “Dear—,”—that “My dear—” greeting which is like being kissed by one’s Auntie in the street. You are delicious’ (*Letters*, I, 51). In Lawrence’s notion of ‘blissful courage’ and his flirtatious remark of ‘you are delicious’, there is a suggestion of some kind of intense pleasure engendered by the lack of address, a sense of jumping in at the deep end—far removed from the tedious obligation of ‘being kissed by one’s Auntie in the street’. This is an experience of *bliss* that lives outside of predetermined structures and narratives, a new kind of sensation that comes with shedding propriety. ‘Bliss’ is how the English translator of Roland Barthes’s *The Pleasure of the Text*, translates the (untranslatable) French word ‘*jouissance*’. For Barthes, whereas ‘pleasure can be expressed in words, bliss [*jouissance*] cannot. Bliss is unspeakable, inter-dicted’.¹ In the sense of the ‘inter-dicted’, we might infer that bliss is what lives *between letters*, in the silence of the blank page. While *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is clearly not *silent* about sexual pleasure, we might read its three hundred pages or so as constituting an attempt (already pre-destined to fail) to find a language for the unspeakable—*bliss*. The letter’s own ‘blissful courage’, its playing with silence and form, seems to silently echo the more fluid and volatile metaphors given in the moments when Connie experiences what Gerald Doherty has called ‘the

¹ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 21.

depersonalizing excess of the orgasm'.² We see this in the hallucinatory descriptions of Connie's coming, which sometimes take on an oceanic correspondence³ and, at other times, return us to the vegetal metaphors that we saw in *Sons and Lovers*: 'She was gone into her own soft rapture, like a forest soughing with the dim glad moan of spring, moving into bud' (*Chatterley*, 138).

For Derrida, like Connie, the force of *jouissance* is less a matter of 'final orgasm' than 'a series of orgasmic tremors, of enjoyments deferred as soon as obtained, posted in their very instance'.⁴ This is a pleasure without beginning or end, repeating the amorphous texture of Connie's orgasms earlier in the novel, while also recalling the 'half-born' world, 'running with waves and foam', of the letter to Cynthia Asquith that we spoke about in Chapter One. Moreover, it is also an *epistolary* pleasure, taking the structure of a letter that is 'deferred as soon as obtained, posted in their very instance'. In each of my readings of Lawrence's writing, this sense of blissful deferral, and its excessive loss of subjectivity, has been insistent: appearing in the letters' provisional and puppet-like animation, the overgrowing of flowers of *Sons and Lovers*, the phantasmatic scattering of names in *St. Mawr* and the escaping poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* who live beyond their author and moment of writing.

This sense of deferral is heightened by the fact that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* it- (or him-) self ends in aposiopesis, as if cut-off-in-mid-sentence. These are the very last words of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

² Gerald Doherty, *Oriental Lawrence: The Quest for the Secrets of Sex* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 7.

³ For example, in her orgasmic bliss, 'it seemed she was like the sea, nothing but dark waves rising and heaving, heaving with a great swell, so that slowly her whole darkness was in motion, and she was Ocean rolling its dark, dumb mass' (*Chatterley*, 174).

⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Envois', *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 397.

“Now I can’t leave off writing to you.

“But a great deal of us is together, and we can but abide by it, and steer our courses to meet soon. John Thomas says good-night to lady Jane, a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart—” (*Chatterley*, 302)

The letter’s end, the end of the letter, does not end or, at least, not as it should. After the writer says (in another avowal of the bliss of writing) that ‘I can’t leave off writing to you’, the letter suddenly ends very abruptly without signing off, leaving a seed of uncertainty about the identity of its sender. While, on the level of narrative, it is not unreasonable to interpret this as a letter from Mellors, we are also left with the sense of a text that does not have a single origin or endpoint. Rather it is an unsigned artefact that floats, cast off, set adrift at the end of the novel. In the end, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* seems to be about something powerfully anonymous, the anonymous power of letters. In a 1925 pamphlet, E.M. Forster writes that ‘all literature tends towards a condition of anonymity [...]. Literature wants not to be signed’.⁵ For all his assertion of self, we find that Lawrence’s writing is a singular example of this idea. There is a kind of radical secrecy at work, not only in the voiced quest for the ‘impersonal’, the ‘not *me*’, but also in the secret growths of language and letters that contaminate his texts.

But what does all of this tell us about Lawrence’s last words? The *Chatterley* letter, up until its final words, has had a distinctly apocalyptic tone to it. Mellors is already predicting the end of the world: ‘The men are very apathetic. They feel the whole damned thing is doomed, and I believe it is. And they are doomed along with it’ (*Chatterley*, 299); and ‘there’s a bad time coming. There’s a bad time coming, boys, there’s a bad time coming! If things go on as they are, there’s nothing lies in the future but death and destruction’ (*Chatterley*, 300). But in contrast to this teleological notion of apocalypse (which, as we have seen,

⁵ E.M. Forster, ‘Anonymity: an Enquiry’ (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), 14.

Lawrence repudiates throughout his writings), there is also a radical sense of openness, both throughout and in the final words of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a sense that we are by no means done here. While Squires suggests that the 'loose ends' of the text are resolved, I would argue that we are left with far more questions and, in the unfinished, suspended sentence at its end, the suggestion of something unforeseeable and unpredictable to come. That the novel finishes on a *dash* indicates that there is something left to be said, something unsayable or 'unutterable', blissful therefore, but also perhaps something that is still to come, still unknowable.⁶

Sarah Wood remarks that texts which leave us without a sense of an ending 'behave' like 'a slow worm', whose tail breaks off when it is attacked: 'We read them hungrily, as if to death, but they break and a portion, an envoi or concluding part gets away'.⁷ The figure of the slow worm is apt for Lawrence, not only in the context of my earlier discussion of his snake-like writ(h)ing, but also in its strange sense of breaking off. Wood's 'envoi' here can be read in at least two ways. The first is in the sense of conclusion: 'envoi' traditionally denotes an author's concluding words or a short stanza at the end of a ballad. An 'envoy' is also a messenger or representative, usually sent on a diplomatic mission. Both of these meanings are born out of the earlier sense of 'envoi', which is to do with sending: the French verb 'envoyer' means 'to send' and comes from *en voie* 'on the way'. So a conclusion is perhaps always also a sending forth, a send-off, a

⁶ This can also be read in the letter's allusion to the portentous 'child' that Connie is carrying ('there you are, going to have a child by me' (*Chatterley*, 300)) and the fact that, earlier in the novel, Mellors's declares: "I've a dread of puttin' children i' th' world," he said. "I've such a dread 'o th' future for 'em'" (*Chatterley*, 278). But the birth of a child is also a thing to be dreaded itself, it is the dreadful, unforeseeable future.

⁷ Sarah Wood, *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 78.

dispatch, always on the way and never quite arriving: it is something that goes off, like a slow worm wriggling away, goes towards but also writhes away from the other (as Egbert does in 'England, My England')—and is therefore not really a 'conclusion', in the terminal sense, at all. This, at least, is what is happening at the end of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: we are given a send-off without any real or satisfying denouement, everything is suspended in a letter, a letter that very possibly hasn't reached its implied addressee. The anonymous form of the letter also suggests that its addressee is the one that reads it, who intercepts it at the end of the novel: each and every reader. Mellors's letter, and by extension the novel itself, is about something that radically tends towards the future. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in turn, becomes an affirmation of the way in which Lawrence's oeuvre more generally resists closure.

The letter's alliterative final phrase—'a hopeful heart'—hovers between sentiment and something far stranger. On one hand, it is meaningless banality and, on the other hand, it gestures to some kind of disquieting, destructive hope at the *heart* of Lawrence's oeuvre. We might return here to Lawrence's striking description of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the letter to Secker as 'a kind of bomb [...] but a beneficent one, and very necessary'. This paradoxically 'beneficent' bombing connects to what Peter Schwenger, in his book *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word* (1992), calls a 'hope [that] is not smugly comforting; it involves death as well as life, and at least as much loss as gain'.⁸ This conception of hope is connected to a sense of dangerous unforeseeability, but is also concerned with the life of writing. Schwenger, reading the 'explosive' writing of Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, argues that 'the very sliding of signs, the radical instability of

⁸ Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 141.

language, can be a principle of hope'.⁹ As I have been suggesting throughout this thesis, Lawrence's letters, the living elements of his writing, are far more playful, animated and, crucially, *unstable* than the majority of readings of his work have allowed for. We might finally think about the many radical resistances to reading that I have been attempting to map in this study as constituting the hope of a bomb, a letter-bomb that Lawrence addresses to the world, sends to the future. As Lawrence's readers, it is necessary to reckon with the idea that his letters are somehow still to come, still to go off.

The dash at the end of the letter is, in the end perhaps, the touch paper that sets off this textual bomb. Like the anonymous writer of the letter at the end of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, this thesis ends 'with a hopeful heart—'. And yet this is not a feeling of hope that can be subsumed in some redemptive or humanist narrative. Rather it is the hope of the slow worm who dismembers herself in order to escape: a blind hope, a dangerous hope. This little textual trace of hope, which is Lawrence's very own 'tail', his inconclusive coda, is all that remains, when he makes a snake-like *dash for it* towards a new life—

⁹ Schwenger, 149.

Postbox Index

- p. 34 *splendid...* *Letters*, III, 328.
She burst... *The Lost Girl*, edited by John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 99–100.
- p. 37 *I've grown...* *Letters*, II, 224.
- p. 90 *dreamed she...* *Ladybird*, 20.
become... *Letters*, II, 547.
- p. 92 *sixth sense...* 'Hymns in a Man's Life', *D.H. Lawrence: Late Essays and Articles*, II, edited by James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 132.
not precisely... Emily Dickinson, '1331', *Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 577.
- p. 98 *describing in...* Emily Dickinson, '1575', *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 653.
black glove... *Poems*, 295.
and not a song Dickinson, '1575', 653.
and you think 'Bat', *Poems*, 294.
little lumps... 'Bat', *Poems*, 295.
and have... 'Bat', *Poems*, 295.
his small.. Dickinson, '1575', 653.
his eccentricities Dickinson, '1575', 653.
dark air-life... 'Bat', *Poems*, 295.
pipistrello! 'Bat', *Poems*, 295.
drone re... Les Murray, 'Bats' Ultrasound', *Collected Poems* (North Ryde NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1991), 224.
disgusting rags *Poems*, 295.
or none... Dickinson, '1575', 653.
a rare ear... Murray, 'Bats' Ultrasound', 224.
like an old... 'Bat', *Poems*, 295.
pipistrello! bats! 'Bat', *Poems*, 295.

p. 134 <i>smiling with...</i>	'He-Goat', <i>Poems</i> , 335.
p. 135 <i>metempsychosis</i>	<i>Sea</i> , 8.
p. 139 <i>They obsess...</i>	Francis Ponge, 'The Goat', <i>Unfinished Ode to Mud</i> , translated by Beverley Bie Brahic (London: CB Editions, 2008), 134.
p. 139 <i>telephoning...</i>	'Bare Almond Trees', <i>Poems</i> , 253.
<i>white</i>	<i>Sea</i> , 7.
<i>crystal...</i>	<i>Sea</i> , 7.
p. 142 <i>Our plans...</i>	<i>Letters</i> , III, 567.
<i>Did you...</i>	<i>Letters</i> , III, 567.
p. 143 <i>There has...</i>	<i>Letters</i> , III, 163.
p. 144 <i>like spurts...</i>	'She-Goat', <i>Poems</i> , 338.
p. 184 <i>It is very...</i>	<i>Letters</i> , II, 599.
p. 232-3 <i>Strange...</i>	<i>Mornings</i> , 49–50.
p. 234 <i>Look up...</i>	'Bat', <i>Poems</i> , 294.
p. 238 <i>I'm rather...</i>	<i>Letters</i> , VII, 650.
p. 240 <i>Behind us...</i>	<i>Letters</i> , II, 218.
p.241 <i>to her...</i>	<i>Virgin</i> , 69.

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