

D. H. Lawrence and the Dialogical Principle: "The Strange Reality of Otherness"

M. Elizabeth Sargent and Garry Watson

We have thought and spoken till now in terms of likeness and oneness. Now we must learn to think in terms of difference and otherness.

—D. H. Lawrence (*The Symbolic Meaning* 17)

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou). To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. I cannot manage without another; I cannot become myself without another.

—Mikhail Bakhtin (Appendix 287)

LAWRENCE AND DIALOGISM

In 1991 Jonathan Dollimore characterized D. H. Lawrence as an "increasingly disregarded and often despised writer" (268). All the evidence indicates that Dollimore was not exaggerating. Over the last couple of decades, Lawrence's reputation among those who teach literature in higher education has been in sharp decline. Thus, the idea that he might have anticipated an important part of our current literary, cultural, and critical agenda will probably strike most readers today as being, on the face of it, highly implausible.

If, however, as S. P. Mohanty claimed in 1989, "the celebration of difference and heterogeneity" and "the assertion of plurality as opposed to reductive unities" are two

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of three ideas that “have animated almost an entire generation of literary and cultural critics” (3), Lawrence deserves to be seen as helping to inaugurate those animating ideas, as the two passages juxtaposed above make clear. Perhaps the fact that an “emphasis on discontinuity” (3) is, according to Mohanty, the third of this trio of animating ideas may help explain a tendency to overlook some of the earlier thinkers who have also celebrated difference and heterogeneity, who have also questioned reductive unities. It’s true that there has been no reluctance over the last three decades to acknowledge the influence of Mikhail Bakhtin on our thinking about the dialogical imagination. But what about the pioneering work done in this area by Martin Buber and D. H. Lawrence?

Denying that some of Lawrence’s work is indeed as embarrassing and as offensive as his critics have maintained would be as foolish as continuing to ignore the contribution he can make to our thinking on many of the issues that now concern us. However, it is now time to investigate the second half of this proposition. And as we prepare to do so, we might bear in mind the possibility that those who are most sensitive to otherness may be precisely the ones who—possibly because of a greater vulnerability on their part—occasionally succumb to irritation with and fear of it.

Thus, the main focus in this essay is on Lawrence—and in being taken seriously as an original thinker, Lawrence faces one obstacle Bakhtin and Buber do not face: he is thought of primarily as a novelist. The critics to whom Mohanty refers are mainly theorists. So it’s worth recalling that, on the one hand, it was of course a novelist, Dostoevsky, from whom Bakhtin largely derived *his* theory while, on the other, besides being a novelist, Lawrence was also both a critic and a theorist of the novel. And, as outlined especially in his six crucial essays on the subject (all of them now usefully collected together in the Cambridge *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*), Lawrence’s theory of the novel is in many ways uncannily close to Bakhtin’s. Let us look at a few examples, the first from “Why the Novel Matters”:

Me, man alive, I am a very curious assembly of incongruous parts. My yea! of today is oddly different from my yea! of yesterday. My tears of tomorrow will have nothing to do with my tears of a year ago. If the one I love remains unchanged and unchanging, I shall cease to love her. It is only because she changes and startles me into change and defies my inertia, and is herself staggered in her inertia by my changing, that I can continue to love her. If she stayed put, I might as well love the pepper pot. (196–97)

What, to begin with, is this definition of the “I” (as an “assembly”) if not a way of discussing polyphony (or multi-voicedness)? And what more appropriate way of describing the relationship that Lawrence is talking about here—in which he and his lover (two assemblies) are constantly changing one another—than the word *dialogical*?

In the second example, taken from “Morality and the Novel,” we see that, as Lawrence understands it, what chiefly characterizes the novel is the special way in which it handles such relationships:

The novel is the highest complex of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance. If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.

Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality. (172)

For Lawrence, the future of the novel was inextricably bound up with the fact that it was "so incapable of the absolute. In a novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all . . . [E]verything is true in its own relationship, and no further" ("The Novel" 179, 185). He theorized the inherently dialogical nature of novelistic thinking, simultaneously working to redefine what (in the words of T. S. Eliot, who was judging Lawrence incapable of it) "we ordinarily call thinking," and insisted on every great novel's being a unique, irreducible, complex, embodied thought. In "The Future of the Novel," he put it this way:

Plato's Dialogues . . . are queer little novels. . . . [I]t was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split. They used to be one, right from the days of myth. Then they went and parted, like a nagging married couple, with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and that beastly Kant. So the novel went sloppy, and philosophy went abstract-dry. The two should come together again, in the novel. (154-5)

Lawrence frames this understanding of the novel—of dialogical and embodied modes of thinking and being—in explicitly ethical terms. If either side of an opposition in any vital dialogue is given an unfair advantage, the novelist is immoral, guilty of foul play. He argues that the serious writing of novels can make one's seeing and thinking so dialogical that all one's work, in either fiction or nonfiction, acknowledges an ongoing tension between opposing points of view, other ways of seeing, being, believing, acting—while yet continuing to affirm and explore one's own. His experience as a novelist led him to such formulations as "art speech is the only truth" (*Studies* 8) and "all vital truth contains the memory of all that for which it is not true" (*Letters* 2: 247), but these statements can only be understood in context—that is, in the context of Lawrence's continuing ethical and political commitment to fiction as a powerful and irreplaceable mode of thought, in particular a mode of thought capable of exploring and rendering the reality of otherness, of operating by—while simultaneously probing—the dialogical principle.

In the circumstances, then, we ought not be too surprised to discover that, in recent years, thanks in part to essays on Bakhtin and Lawrence by Avrom Fleishman and David Lodge, as well as to Wayne Booth's dramatic reassessment, the idea that Lawrence's novels are actually structured dialogically (rather than monologically) has established itself as a truism within Lawrence scholarship. Confessing that he had formerly fallen into the very trap he had often warned against, of assuming "that a character's words and judgments belong to the implied author," Booth now recognizes that

in such novels as *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* "Lawrence was experimenting radically with what it means for a novelist to lose his own distinct voice in the voices of his characters, especially in their inner voices":

Again and again Lawrence simply surrenders the telling of the story to another mind, a mind neither clearly approved nor clearly repudiated yet presented in a tone that seems to demand judgment. I don't know of any novelist, not even Dostoevsky, who takes free indirect style further in the direction of sustained surrender to a passionate mimesis giving us not two clear voices, the (silent) author's and the independent character's, but a chorus of voices, each speaking with its own authority. ("Confessions" 446-47)

And, as Booth also notes, "[i]t is a mistake . . . to talk of Lawrence's deliberately blurred handling of point of view as 'simply' a technical innovation: it is a powerful *ethical* invention" (450).

Yet while this insight into the dialogical nature of Lawrence's novelistic imagination marks a major development, it has so far had little impact outside the restricted circle of Lawrence scholars. As Joan Peters has pointed out, the much more common assumption is still that "Lawrence is a single-voiced metaphysician" whose novels are "monological allegories of his own personal sexual and social beliefs" (205). What would now seem to be called for, therefore, and what this essay tries to provide, is something no one has yet produced: an attempt to build on the (still mostly overlooked) insight into Lawrence's dialogism in such a way as to demonstrate the vital contribution this author can make to the rethinking of ethical questions now going on in the wider field of literary and cultural studies at large—and not only, incidentally, in his novels but also in his critical and philosophical writings, which are often every bit as dialogical and informed by an ethics of alterity as his fiction. In fact, before going any further, we should direct our attention to a few crucial passages taken from a variety of the genres in which Lawrence worked, all of which might be said to play variations on the claim he makes in his essay "Democracy" (1919): that "the fact upon which any great scheme of social life must be based . . . is the fact of otherness" (78). What ought to be made of this claim? Observe first that it is closely followed in the same essay by this:

When I stand with another man, who is himself, and when I am truly myself, then I am only aware of a Presence, and of the strange reality of Otherness. There is me, and there is *another being*. That is the first part of the reality. There is no comparing or estimating. There is only this strange recognition of *present otherness*. (80)

And we can judge how significant Lawrence considers this reality to be by his belief that it gives us "the first great purpose of Democracy: that each man shall be spontaneously himself—each man himself, each woman herself, without any question of equality or inequality entering in at all; and that no man shall try to determine the being of any other man, or of any other woman" (80).

"Democracy" is by no means the only work in which he makes us aware of the vital importance he attaches to "the fact of otherness." As J. C. F. Littlewood argued back in 1976, the earliest major evidence of Lawrence's "breakthrough"—when that is understood as his discovery of "his new relation to all that was not himself" (47)—is to be found in the final revisions he made in 1914 to two stories, "Odour of Chrysanthemums" and "Daughters of the Vicar." The evidence appears most dramatically in the passage near the end of the former in which Elizabeth Bates contemplates the naked body of her dead husband and realizes "what a stranger he was to her":

She looked at his face, and she turned her own face to the wall. For his look was other than hers, his way was not her way. She had denied him what he was—she saw it now. She had refused him as himself. ("Odour" 197, 198)¹

In this passage, Littlewood claimed, "we have the characteristic Lawrentian intuition, that of the otherness of other life, making its first appearance in his work . . . and doing so before it becomes a *doctrinal* truth in his writings" (18). But if this marks its first major appearance, from this point onward examples of Lawrence's preoccupation with otherness abound. Let us briefly consider two more, the first from a piece of literary criticism, the second from a novel.

In November 1918, the first version of what was to become the opening chapter of *Studies in Classic American Literature* appeared in the *English Review* as "The Spirit of Place." In it Lawrence contests the view that "we" (that is, he and his English readers) "should regard American literature as a small branch or province of English literature" (*The Symbolic Meaning* 16). What, he maintains, he and his readers need to understand is that "the quality of life-experience, of emotion and passion and desire, . . . has changed . . . in the English-speaking Americans." And not just changed. For in Lawrence's view, "the familiar American classics, of Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, or Fenimore Cooper" have "surpassed and exceeded" the English. What the latter therefore have to realize is that their "way of feeling" has been "superseded." So that instead of assuming they already know what it has to offer them, the English would do better to "study" American literature in the hope of learning from it—something, Lawrence implies, that is more likely to occur if they read it in the defamiliarizing ways he recommends:

We have thought and spoken till now in terms of likeness and oneness. Now we must learn to think in terms of difference and otherness. There is a stranger on the face of the earth, and it is no use our trying any further to gull ourselves that he is one of us, and just as we are. There is an unthinkable gulf between us and America, and across the space we see, not our own folk signalling to us, but strangers, incomprehensible beings, simulacra perhaps of ourselves, but *other*; creatures of an other-world. The present reality is a reality of untranslatable otherness. (17)

And again, the point is that if they want to live in the present and not "in a state of confusion," the English must accept the fact that the Americans are indeed "strangers"

who have something to teach them: specifically, “the best approach to the knowledge of this othering” (17).

Consider next the central role that the concept of otherness or difference is made to play in the developing argument of *Women in Love* (1921). For instance, at the end of “Moony” when the Brangwen sisters are walking along a lane and see “a robin sitting on the top twig of a bush, singing shrilly” (263), Gudrun reacts first by deciding that the bird looks as if “he feel[s] important” (263). Infected by Gudrun’s irony, Ursula then proceeds to delight her sister by suggesting that he is “a little Lloyd George of the air!” And we are told that for days afterwards “Ursula saw the persistent, obtrusive birds as stout, short politicians lifting up their voices from the platform, little men who must make themselves heard at any cost.” But she then experiences a revulsion of feeling and her attitude changes:

Some yellow-ammers suddenly shot along the road in front of her. And they looked to her so uncanny and inhuman, like flaring yellow barbs shooting through the air on some weird, living errand, that she said to herself: “After all, it is impudence to call them little Lloyd Georges. They are really unknown to us, they are the unknown forces. It is impudence to look at them as if they were the same as human beings. They are of another world. How stupid anthropomorphism is! . . .” (264)

What is going on here if not a lesson in how “to think in terms of difference and otherness”? In fact, much of the novel is devoted to teaching us to think in these terms, the crucial passage being the “Breadalby” chapter in which Rupert Birkin takes issue with Hermione Roddice’s contention “that in the spirit we are all one, all equal in the spirit, all brothers there.” “It is,” Birkin insists, “just the opposite. . . . We are all abstractly or mathematically equal, if you like. . . . But spiritually, there is pure difference and neither equality nor inequality counts. It is,” he then claims, “upon these two bits of knowledge that you may found a state” (103). And, if this reminds us of the passage we have just looked at from “Democracy,” the resemblance becomes even stronger as Birkin continues:

But I, myself, who am myself, what have I to do with equality—with any other man or woman? In the spirit, I am as separate as one star is from another, as different in quality and quantity. Establish a state on *that*. One man isn’t any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically *other*, [so] that there is no term of comparison. (103–4)

Incidentally, Hermione is not the only one to disagree with Birkin on this point. Gerald Crich also refuses “to accept the fact of intrinsic difference between human beings” (209), and we are surely meant to feel that this is part, at least, of the reason Gerald conspicuously fails to achieve that fulfillment “in difference” that is prophesied in the “Man to Man” chapter (201) and that we see Birkin and Ursula experiencing at the end of “Excuse” (“For she was to him what he was to her, . . . palpable, real otherness” 320). At the same time, however, it is important to add that Gerald’s com-

plexity and enormous attractiveness—not only to Birkin but to the other characters and to the reader as well—makes it impossible for us to read *Women in Love* as Birkin's tract. Gerald is in a sense the essential criticism of Birkin, all that Birkin is not—which must be why Birkin continually hopes for a committed friendship with him throughout the novel, why he is so devastated by (and feels so much to blame for) Gerald's death at the close.

What such passages—and, in the case of *Women in Love*, the very structure of the novel—demonstrate is that Lawrence often practiced an essentially novelistic mode of thought that was centrally concerned with the ethical and political implications of otherness or difference. And this being the case, it would seem reasonable to suppose that we might understand Lawrence better if we were prepared to familiarize ourselves with other practitioners of the mode of thought he practices, as well as with some of the questions raised and problems posed by this mode of thought. Of course, the process can work both ways: if some of the currently better-known theorists of difference can deepen our understanding of his work, Lawrence, in turn, can sometimes manage to illuminate theirs, too.

The following sections attempt to break new ground by providing an unusual—a Lawrence-centered—introduction to this particular field and to some of the problems and questions we can expect to encounter and confront as we explore it. We start off by situating Lawrence within the developing history of the dialogical principle; we then look at some of the ways in which Lawrence's thought on this topic both resembles and differs from the thought of such major theorists of otherness and dialogism as Buber and Levinas, as well as Bakhtin; and finally we consider what seems most problematic in the project these writers are participating in. A final section then addresses the question of how this new way of situating Lawrence can radically transform our reading of him.

THE DIALOGICAL PRINCIPLE AND THE QUESTION CONCERNING ITS HISTORY

As Tzvetan Todorov admits in his book on Bakhtin, the latter "was neither the first nor the only one to emphasize the constitutive character that the I-thou relation has for individual existence" (117, n. 1). According to Emmanuel Levinas, "[i]t is Buber who identified that ground, saw the theme of the Other, the *Du*, the *Thou*" ("Philosophy" 119). And, indeed, Buber's *I and Thou* was published in 1923, six years before Bakhtin's first major book, *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Work*. On the other hand, in his later essay on its history, Buber was to claim that the dialogical principle "has undoubtedly been glimpsed" in all ages ("History" 209). Lawrence, in his "Study of Thomas Hardy" (written in 1914 but only published in full posthumously in 1936), locates the decisive move toward a liberating recognition of otherness in early Christianity—more

specifically, in the commandment to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (63–64) and in Christ’s “doctrine of the other cheek.”²

Buber’s “The History of the Dialogical Principle” obviously does not pretend to be more than a sketch, drawing our attention to the significant contributions made by a small number of figures from Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (the “I is impossible without the Thou”) in 1785 through Ludwig Feuerbach in the early nineteenth century to Buber himself and some of his contemporaries around the time of the first World War (209, 210, 211). Nevertheless, for all its brevity and however striking its omissions, it marks a beginning. It suggests the possibility, at least, of a history that would mark the stages in which various aspects of this principle have been gradually thought through and brought into consciousness, a history that would unearth a tradition of reflection on the problematic nature of otherness or difference. And, in fact, in the last couple of decades—in, for example, among others, Todorov’s books on Bakhtin, on the conquest of America, and on diversity and exoticism in French thought—such a history has started to be written in more detail.

How, then, does Lawrence fit into this history in progress, this history still in the process of being both written and made? In the first instance, he belongs alongside Buber and Bakhtin—both of whom, even though they lived much longer than he did, were his contemporaries for a while. All three of these thinkers should be seen to occupy a crucial place in this history. To a large extent, they may even be said to have inaugurated it. After all, it is one thing to get—as many earlier figures did—a *glimpse* of the dialogical principle and quite another to see it as steadily as, in their different ways, in the second and third decades of this century, Lawrence, Buber, and Bakhtin were to see it—in such a way as to enable each of them to assign it a central place in their thinking. And Levinas can usefully be discussed in this connection, too; after all, it is his work that is currently doing the most to generate interest in the possibility of a postmodernist ethics based on an affirmation of otherness. In addition to this, it may be worth recalling that, if Buber and Bakhtin were contemporaries of Lawrence, Levinas was—in his turn, during a later period—a contemporary of theirs.

LAWRENCE IN RELATION TO BUBER, BAKHTIN, AND LEVINAS

The wild, brilliant, alert head of St. Mawr seemed to look at her out of another world . . . the large, brilliant eyes of that horse looked at her with demonish question. . . . “Meet him half way,” Lewis [the groom] said. But half way across from our human world to that terrific equine twilight was not a small step. (Lawrence, *St. Mawr* 30, 35)

Here, on this little ranch under the Rocky Mountains, a big pine tree rises like a guardian spirit in front of the cabin where we live. . . . It gives out life, as I give out life. Our two lives meet and cross one another, unknowingly. . . . Of course, if I like to cut myself off, and say it is all bunk, a tree is merely so much lumber not yet sawn, then in a great measure I shall *be* cut off. . . . One can shut many, many doors of receptivity in oneself. . . . I prefer to open my doors to the coming of the tree. (Lawrence, “Pan” 24, 25–26)³

Referring in a 1957 essay to the "sphere of the interhuman . . . in which a person is confronted by the other," Buber explains that he calls the "unfolding" of this sphere "the dialogical" ("Elements" 75). He then makes it clear that, as he sees it, it is our responsibility to *make* the other present to us (or, at least, to make the other *as* present to us as it is possible to be).

To be able to do that, we need to develop "a capacity" which (in 1951) Buber claims is "possessed to some extent by everyone" ("Distance" 70), the capacity to imagine "the real," something that entails "not a looking at the other, but a bold swinging—demanding the most intensive stirring of one's being—into the life of the other" ("Elements" 81). Together with "the *wish* of every man to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men," this "innate capacity in man to confirm his fellow men" is part of the twofold "basis of man's life with man." And the fact, according to Buber, that it "lies so immeasurably fallow constitutes the real weakness and questionableness of the human race: actual humanity exists only where this capacity unfolds" ("Distance" 67–68).

For Lawrence, too, the interhuman was every bit as important as it was for Buber. But at the same time, as Lawrence understands it, the dialogical is by no means restricted to the realm of the *interhuman*. In fact, for him, the dialogical extends into "an infinity of pure relations" between the self and the "whole circumambient universe": between "me and the animals, me and the trees or flowers, me and the earth, me and the skies and sun and stars, me and the moon . . . [m]e and the timber I am sawing . . . me and the dough I knead for bread" ("Morality" 172). Thus, for example, after she has noted how the poems in his *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* are "essays of discovery, processes of definition, with Lawrence a metaphysical or metaphorical Linnaeus cataloguing the varieties of otherness in nature," Sandra Gilbert comes to the realization that the "meditation upon cypresses" that opens one of the sections in that book is, "in fact, an attempt at dialogue with them" (329, 343).

It is worth noting, therefore, that for Buber also the other doesn't have to be human. As Levinas reminds us, "[a]lthough Buber gives privileged status to the interhuman *I-Thou* . . . , he also gives consideration to the meeting as a relation to God and to things"—such things as "[t]he tree," for example, which, as Buber understands it, "can face me in person, speak to me and elicit a response" ("Martin Buber" 30). Or as the animal Buber tells us about in an early essay: "[w]hen I was eleven years of age, spending the summer on my grandparents' estate, I used, as often as I could do it unobserved, to steal into the stable and gently stroke the neck of my darling, a broad dapple-grey horse." In retrospect, it seems to him that what he "experienced in touch with the animal was the Other," who "let me approach, confided . . . to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of *Thou* and *Thou* with me" ("Dialogue" 23). This can remind us of the relationship that Lou Witt enters into with the horse in Lawrence's novella, *St. Mawr* (1925). Admittedly, *St. Mawr* is no "darling," but the relationship

Lou freely enters into with this horse radically calls into question her sense of reality itself. What else can we call it, therefore, if not a dialogical relationship?

Of course, from Lawrence's point of view, such relations can best be explored in the novel, and this is where he and Bakhtin are most in agreement—except that the dialogical relations that interest the latter belong more exclusively to the realm of the interhuman. That aside, however, there is a striking similarity between Lawrence's and Bakhtin's views on the novel. As Bakhtin sees it, the “novel is not merely one genre among other genres”—it is “the only developing genre,” its development being “a function of the deepening [throughout the centuries] of dialogic essence, its increased scope and greater precision” (*Dialogic* 4, 300). Or as Lawrence puts it in “Why the Novel Matters,” “only in the novel are *all* things given full play” (198). So we can apply to Lawrence what Booth says of Bakhtin: for him too the novel is the “one grand literary form that is . . . capable of a kind of justice to the inherent polyphonies of life” (Introduction xxii). Furthermore, as is true for Bakhtin as well, some of Lawrence's favorite examples of the novel are works with which the genre is not ordinarily associated. For Bakhtin, for instance, “the Socratic dialogues” mark an “essential step in the evolution of the novel” (*Dialogic* 22) and we have seen that for Lawrence “Plato's Dialogues . . . are queer little novels” (see too “The Novel” 181 and also “Why” for the argument that “the Bible is a great confused novel” 195). In short, as Booth says about Bakhtin, Lawrence also encourages us to “think of ‘the novel’ not as some formalists would do, not as the actual works that we ordinarily *call* novels but rather as a tendency or possibility in literature” (Introduction xxii).

But even though Lawrence shared Bakhtin's faith in the novel while also firmly believing in the *possibility* of our entering into an infinity of dialogical relations, he did not—any more than Buber—share the kind of optimism Bakhtin expresses when he says that “[l]ife by its very nature is dialogical. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth” (Appendix 293). If this were in fact so, how could we distinguish between the dialogical and the monological? As Todorov points out, it is one thing to see every discourse as being “caught up in intertextual relations” (107) and quite another, surely, to claim that it is therefore dialogical. Far from its being practically inescapable, something one simply can't help but engage in, Buber understands dialogue as the kind of meeting between self and other that is fatally *easy* to avoid, that is the last thing we can take for granted. In other words, if, as he sees it, “[h]uman life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings” (“Distance” 69), Buber believes that in practice “genuine meetings” are rare.

On this issue, Lawrence seems much closer in spirit to Buber than to Bakhtin. And so, for that matter, does Levinas, who, as Jill Robbins has recently noted, sees the self as habitually seeking “to suppress alterity” (141). Yet, at the same time, if we now turn to look a bit more closely at Levinas—who (as mediated through Derrida) has become in recent years probably *the* major influence on current thinking on difference and otherness—what is immediately likely to strike us is how much more severe he sounds than

Buber and Lawrence. For Levinas, the awakening "by the other" is equivalent to "getting sobered up" (*Ethics and Infinity* 122); in the "order of responsibility . . . the gravity of ineluctable being freezes all laughter" (*Totality* 200). As Michael Smith (one of his translators) puts it, "Levinas's criticism of Buber's account of the 'I-Thou' relation is that it is equal, symmetrical and reversible." And if we ask what is *wrong* with that, we are immediately told (by the same translator), that "[w]ithout the other's being 'first,' and above myself, there can be no ethical relation" (xxi). Or as Levinas himself expresses it in a conversation with Philippe Nemo, "the intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation. In this sense, I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair" (*Ethics and Infinity* 98). "That means," says Nemo a moment or two later (and one can almost hear him gasp as he registers the idea), "that if the others do not do what they ought to do, it is owing to me?" After which, once Levinas has agreed that that is what it means, Nemo's gasp becomes audible as he exclaims, "You go that far!" To this Levinas implicitly confesses that he has no choice, since he is committed to the belief that "I am responsible even for the Other's responsibility." His sole concession is that "[t]hese are extreme formulas which must not be detached from their context" (99).

This is indeed enough to make anyone gasp. Or even tremble. As Sean Hand puts it, in his introduction to *The Levinas Reader*, this is "a thought that, in the words of Jacques Derrida, 'can make us tremble.' Its challenge," Hand adds, "is an excessive one: a mode of being and saying where I am endlessly obligated to the Other" (1). What ought we to make of this? It would be too easy simply to conclude that Lawrence would have found Buber's conception of a reciprocal, "equal, symmetrical and reversible" "I-Thou" relation more desirable—because in the end more realistic and sustainable—than Levinas's proffered alternative. No doubt he would have done so—and indeed did do so—some of the time, but not *all* the time. What we need to remember is that for Lawrence everything depends on the place, time, and circumstance. So that in "St. Mawr", for example, the horse after which this work is named first appears to Lou Witt, in England, as a particularly impressive embodiment of otherness ("He was some splendid demon, and she must worship him" 31), whereas later on, when the same horse arrives in America, he follows "at the heels of the boss's long-legged black Texan mare, almost slavishly" (132). At this point Lou leaves St. Mawr behind and moves on until, at the end of the novella, she is getting ready to settle on her New Mexican ranch in the hope of encountering "a wild spirit" (155). As she explains to her mother, this is her way of trying "to live differently," "to live for something that matters"—in effect, she is doing what Derrida (in Levinasian mood) calls "waiting on the coming of the other" ("Villanova" 24).

Or consider the description, in the opening chapter of *The Rainbow*, of the state Tom Brangwen is in shortly before he goes to propose to the Polish lady, Lydia Lensky:

during the long February nights with the ewes in labour, looking out from the shelter into the flashing stars, he knew he did not belong to himself. He must admit that he

was only fragmentary, something incomplete and subject. There were the stars in the dark heaven travelling, the whole host passing by on some eternal voyage. So he sat small and submissive to the greater ordering. (40)

But if this relation to otherness is clearly nonsymmetrical, Tom is also involved in a reciprocal—equal, symmetrical, and reversible “I-Thou”—relationship with Lydia, whose otherness is repeatedly stressed, as, for example, in the last paragraph of the chapter where we are told that “[h]e could not bear to . . . know the utter foreignness between them, know how entirely they were strangers to each other” (48). At the same time, what they have in common—the fact that both relationships are ones in which both Tom and Lydia know they do “not belong to [themselves]”—is just as significant as what distinguishes them. What, according to Levinas, “is absolutely other . . . not only resist[s] possession,” it “contests it” (*Totality* 38). And with this Lawrence clearly agrees. For him too “[t]he presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world” (*Totality* 75–76).

Except for one thing. Lawrence may be every bit as critical of the possessive mode as Levinas, but he is not against enjoyment, whereas Levinas often seems to be, claiming, for example, that “[n]ourishment . . . is the transmutation of the other into the same” and that this is “in the essence of enjoyment” (*Totality* 111). In a similar vein, Levinas declares that “truth is neither in seeing nor in grasping, which are modes of enjoyment, sensibility, and possession” (172). Yet, even so, it may still come as something of a shock to learn that, as he sees it, the other characteristically “provokes my *shame* and presents himself as dominating me” (emphasis added):

Conscience welcomes the Other. It is the revelation of a resistance to my powers that . . . calls in question . . . my glorious spontaneity as a living being. Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent. (84)

Quite simply, this is *not* where morality begins for Lawrence. Unlike Levinas, the “calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other” (*Totality* 43; qtd. in Robbins, 5; see also 111) is not what Lawrence calls “ethics.” But then, again unlike Levinas (*Totality* 43), Lawrence does not automatically associate spontaneity with the ego either. He would have found it contradictory and perverse to refer, as Levinas does, to “the carefree spontaneity of my naïve perseverance” (“Ethics as First” 86). Conscious as he was of how the process (“the all-too-difficult business”) by which we come “to our spontaneous-creative fullness of being” (*Psychoanalysis* 249) is never something we can take for granted, Lawrence thought of *carefree* spontaneity—when it occurred—as something we should treasure.

In temperament, Lawrence and Levinas are clearly very different. So much so that it is tempting to see them in terms of the contrast Derrida drew in 1966 between “the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play

whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world . . ." ("Structure" 292). Not that there is anything particularly nostalgic or Rousseauistic about Levinas. It is true, however, that it is for him, as Jill Robbins says, "as if anything that *plays* were ethically suspect" (50), while we can often find a joyous and sometimes Nietzschean affirmation of play in Lawrence. By contrast, Levinas's thinking often seems both sad and—as is clearly indicated by the line he likes to quote from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: "We are all guilty . . . and I more than the others" (qtd. in *Ethics and Infinity* 98)—determinedly guilty.

Perhaps this temperamental difference can be at least partially understood with reference to something Levinas says in one of his essays on Buber: "We may well ask ourselves whether clothing the naked and feeding the hungry are not the true and concrete access to the otherness of the other person—more authentic than the ether of friendship" ("Martin Buber" 33). Elsewhere Levinas claims that "Moses and the prophets are not concerned with the immortality of the soul, but with the poor one, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger" (qtd. in Robbins 47). In the light of these two remarks, we can perhaps say that Levinas seems characteristically more concerned to see the other in the guise of various poor ones—the naked and the hungry—than in the guise of the friend. So the answer to Richard Cohen's question—"Is his yet another, perhaps subtler, return to slave morality . . . ?" (3)—may have to be affirmative. But it does not therefore follow that we have to reject it. Whatever Nietzsche might have thought, such a morality is necessary. It is just that on its own, it is not enough. So while it may be true to say, as Robbins does, that "[w]ithin recent Continental philosophy, Emmanuel Levinas has decisively renewed the question of the ethical" (xiii) and while it may therefore make some sense to see postmodernist ethics as being best represented by Levinas—a claim made by Zygmunt Bauman (84) and endorsed by Jeffrey Nealon (131)—Philippe Nemo is surely going too far when he maintains that Levinas is "without doubt the sole moralist of contemporary thought" (viii).

There *also* ought to be room in contemporary thought for the very differently inflected—the much more joyful, playful, and carefree—ethics of alterity that we find in Lawrence. Michael Smith's assertion that "[w]ithout the other's being 'first,' and above myself, there can be no ethical relation" (xxi) ought to be unacceptable to us. One of the reasons we need to (re)read Lawrence—as well as Levinas (and Buber and Bakhtin and others)—is precisely to remind us that this is by no means the *only* kind of ethical relation we can have with otherness.

But even if it is broadened to make room for Lawrence and the kind of ethics *he* practices, the contemporary ethical project that attempts to make "difference" and "otherness" into wholly positive terms still runs, sooner or later, into a serious problem, which we now need to confront.

THE NEED FOR COMMONALITY AS WELL AS DIFFERENCE:
DOLLIMORE AND MOHANTY

After conceding some appreciation for “the way progressive movements in our time have turned things around, and begun positively to identify the difference of the other” (329–30), Dollimore nevertheless urges us to “distrust” both the concept of “difference” (sexual or cultural difference) and the related concept of “the other” (249). As he sees it, the problem with theories of *sexual* difference is that—because they tend to be “[b]eholden to an anatomically derived, heterosexually structured, and all-embracing dualism”—they can “only conceive of homosexuality as a disavowal of that very difference which is assumed to be fundamental to social, psychic, and sexual organization” (329). And the problem with theories of *cultural* difference is that they run the risk of foreclosing on otherness even as they affirm it (332).

Luce Irigaray is the contemporary theorist who has probably argued the most forcefully and eloquently for the importance of *sexual* difference. In the face of what she calls a powerful and widespread tendency to annihilate “the other in the illusion of a reduction to identity, equality and sameness,” Irigaray insists that what we need to recognize is the fact that “the ultimate anchorage of real alterity” is to be found in the difference “between man and woman.” In Irigaray’s view, so long as “*the other of sexual difference is not recognized or known*” (“Questions” 181; emphasis added)—or so long as we have not yet adopted an ethics of sexual difference—all talk of otherness is suspect and we risk discovering that “[i]t is not the other we are really dealing with but the same” (*I Love to You* 61).

But how can we affirm the value of sexual difference or otherness without privileging the *hetero* over the *homo*?⁴ Surely it ought to be possible to conceive of homosexuality as “a positive difference” (Dollimore 332) in its own right. We think the answer to Irigaray’s question—“Is there otherness outside of sexual difference?” (“Questions” 179)—is yes. But it is possible to say this while still agreeing with Irigaray and Lawrence⁵ that we do nevertheless urgently need to work toward an ethics of sexual difference.

As for Dollimore’s other point, no doubt it is always possible to unintentionally foreclose on otherness, even while one is trying to affirm it. All one can do here is try to be as aware of the danger as possible, and with this in mind, it’s worth noting that it can never be enough merely to *affirm* difference or otherness: we also need to avoid the kind of affirmation that is accompanied by an entirely negative evaluation of sameness, insisting not only that “the other is not us” but that it “is quite possibly not even *like* us” (Mohanty 4). By way of explaining what he has in mind, Mohanty quotes passages from Michel Foucault, Hélène Cixous, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. But since Lawrence also occasionally indulged in the kind of overstatement that an awareness of the need to respect otherness can sometimes produce—as, for example,

in his already-noted claim that "[t]he present reality is a reality of *untranslatable* otherness" (*The Symbolic Meaning* 17; emphasis added)—we could easily add his name to this list as well. Basically, then, Mohanty argues that when the idea of difference is radicalized to this degree—to the point of "radical untranslatability" (21)—it threatens to turn into a form of relativism that can easily lead to "sentimental charity" that "may in fact hide a more fundamental indifference" (23, 25). In other words, "there is nothing in its logic that necessitates our attention to the other" (23) and "I end by denying that I need to take you seriously" (14). So if "we are to deal seriously with other cultures and not reduce them to insignificance or irrelevance, we need," according to Mohanty, "to begin by positing the following minimal commonality between us and them: the capacity to act purposefully, to be capable of agency and the basic rationality that the human agent must in principle possess" (21). As Mohanty sees it, this "cross-cultural commonality" provides us with "a minimal account of the human" (21) and constitutes "one limit our contemporary political notions of difference and otherness need to acknowledge and theorize" (24).

Mohanty's desire to have us acknowledge such a limit is understandable, yet at the same time, it has to be recognized that one effect of Buber and Lawrence's encounters with the nonhuman other is to make it more difficult than it might otherwise be for us to do this. Rather, then, than trying to ignore this difficulty, it seems better to confront it head-on by applying to Buber and Lawrence something the philosopher Ian Hacking has recently said of John Coetzee: namely, that they were "working and living at [what is now] the edge of our moral sensibilities about animals [and other nonhuman others]. Much," Hacking adds about this situation, "is fluid, changing, being created" (22). Hacking is reviewing two books, the main one being Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, a book that contains two lectures delivered by Coetzee and five responses to it. The lectures are philosophical dialogues in which the fictionalized Elizabeth Costello, an elderly novelist, defends her views on animal-human interactions. Both Coetzee's lectures and some of the responses they have provoked are relevant to this discussion in a number of ways.

For one thing, Costello starts off by explaining why standing in front of her lecture audience on this occasion makes her feel a bit like the central protagonist of Franz Kafka's "Report to an Academy," the "educated ape, Red Peter, who stands before the members of a learned society telling the story of his life—of his ascent from beast to something approaching man" (18). And as Hacking (but not Coetzee) notes, Kafka's story was first published "in 1917 in Martin Buber's journal *Die Jude*" (22). Or consider the way in which Costello takes issue with an essay by Thomas Nagel called "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" What she thinks Nagel fails to realize is first that "[t]o be a living bat is to be full of being," second, that "being fully a bat is [therefore] like being fully human, which is also to be full of being," and third, that "[o]ne name for the experience of full being is joy" (33). So, according to her, the question we should

be asking is not “Do we have something in common—reason, self-consciousness, a soul—with other animals?” but rather, How can we think ourselves into their place? (34) And her answer is that we need to open our hearts:

The heart is the seat of a faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us to share at times the being of another. Sympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object, the “another,” as we can see at once when we think of the object not as a bat (“Can I share the being of a bat?”) but as another human being. . . . [t]here is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. (34–35)

Costello’s approach is clearly much closer to Lawrence’s here (the Lawrence who wrote, among other things, the poems “Bat” and “Man and Bat”) than it is to Levinas’s, but the main reason for citing her is for the powerful invitation she issues to us to join her in her boundary crossings—to join her and also, we should no doubt add, those who think like her, especially, for example, Barbara Smuts, a professor of psychology and anthropology at the University of Michigan, who explains to us how she has managed to experience with baboons (and also with her dog Safi) “a joyful intersubjectivity that transcends species boundaries” (114).⁶ As Hacking observes, it is difficult when reading Smuts—and her argument that it makes sense to treat animals not just as persons (“here personhood connotes a way of being *in relation to others*”) but also as potential “friends” (118–19)—not to feel the “species barriers diminish[ing]” (Hacking 24).

Whether or not, in the face of this fluid and changing situation, Hacking is right to claim that “[o]ne positively *ought* to hold incompatible opinions as one works and lives one’s way through to their resolution,” we probably do need, as he says, “to broaden our sympathies in ways that we do not well understand” (22, 26). And so, in these circumstances, Mohanty’s insistence—that we can only hope to take the other seriously insofar as we first admit to sharing “a minimal conception of rationality” (18) and, on that basis, are then prepared to enter into a “genuine dialogue” (12, 14), the kind in which we are willing in principle both to change ourselves and also, conceivably, to change the other—seems acceptable (keeping in mind the *nonhuman* as well as the human other) only if it is understood that we are working with a much broader (in particular, less language-centered) sense of “rationality” than the word is ordinarily taken to allow. Scientist Michael Polanyi’s insistence on the creativity, inventiveness, and purposive behavior of rats and earthworms, even of one-celled organisms (336–38, 381–84, 387–90, 397–98), suggests that these are themselves profound forms of responsive rationality, for instance.

But the points about the necessity for change and Mohanty’s understandable concern for other cultures are clearly crucial, so it seems appropriate to underline them by noting here first that not only did Lawrence believe “we must learn to think in terms of difference and otherness”; he also believed that the point of such learning

is to allow oneself to be changed by the experience. And second, perhaps the most striking example of his openness to change is to be found in the *central* idea of his *Studies in Classic American Literature*: that "the old white psyche has to be gradually broken down before anything else can come to pass" (70). According to Lawrence, it *has* to be broken down so that "we can open out a new great area of consciousness, in which there is room for the red spirit too" (57). For Lawrence, the death that matters most in modern times is not the one announced by Nietzsche (the death of God), but the death "of our white day," of the "white epoch," of "civilization" and "race" (169)—the death, in other words, of "the old [and world-dominating] white psyche"—in order to create a psyche that will make room not just for the "red spirit" but for all the other colored spirits (black, yellow, brown, and so on) too (169). So in the circumstances, the fact that he still retained (perhaps inevitably, given the time in which he lived) some of the old colonial (and even racist) attitudes is surely less significant than the fact that if, as has recently been suggested, postcolonial criticism may be modernism's last "post" (Slemon), then Lawrence was one of the first to occupy it.

We are now ready to tackle the question, "What difference should this new placement of Lawrence make to our reading of his work?"

REREADING LAWRENCE

To avoid one possible misunderstanding at the outset, a recognition of Lawrence's commitment to an ethics of alterity may generate more rewarding readings, but it is not likely to make his work any easier to come to terms with. There are clearly difficult areas—and not just in such obviously problematical novels as *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, and *The Plumed Serpent*, but in many of his works. One of these, of course, is the treatment of the sculptor Loerke in *Women in Love*. A close examination of this example—which seems especially important to look at here because of the way in which it raises the question of possible racism—will demonstrate the kind of care that often needs to be exercised in dealing with Lawrentian difficulty. Before we look at Loerke directly, therefore, it may be useful to notice how one of the subtlest, most sympathetic, and most penetrating of Lawrence's recent commentators, Anne Fernihough, has responded to Lawrence's portrayal of him.

Arguing that the "anti-imperialism implicit in Lawrence's critique of 'white consciousness' is central to his aesthetics" (*D. H. Lawrence* 13), Fernihough is nevertheless troubled by what she calls "the anti-Jewish rhetoric surrounding the figure of Loerke in *Women in Love*" (9). Understandably so if the rhetoric in question is indeed "anti-Jewish." But is it? Certainly "[i]t is no accident . . . that Loerke . . . is Jewish." But Fernihough follows this with the claim that "Lawrence's descriptions of Loerke constitute a catalogue of the anti-Jewish commonplaces that pervaded the work of [Werner] Sombart and others at this period" (27). And by way of substantiating this claim, she first

gives us some examples of these “commonplaces” in Sombart and then asks us to compare them to the descriptions of Loerke she cites and comments on in the following:

“Loerke, in his innermost soul, was detached from everything, for him there was neither heaven nor earth nor hell. He admitted no allegiance, he gave no adherence anywhere . . .”; elsewhere he is “quick, detached,” “everywhere at once.” He is linked to the process of “disintegrating the vital organic body of life” and frequently the terms associated with him are resonant of this disintegration: he mocks “with an *acid* ridicule” [Fernihough’s italics]; he is a “mud-child,” “the very stuff of the underworld of life”; in his eyes he has “the black look of inorganic misery”; he knows “the subtle thrills of extreme sensation in reduction . . . the last subtle activities of analysis and breaking-down.” This is accounted for in terms of the fact that, as a Jew, Loerke has reached a more advanced stage of the racial life-cycle: he is “further on than we are,” “the wizard rat that swims ahead.” In attributing an “acid ridicule” to Loerke, Lawrence is drawing on the imagery of disintegration which had become such a staple part of *volkisch* discourse. Terms such as “disintegration” (*Zersetzung*) and “decomposition” (*Dekomposition*) were used to imply the erosion or crumbling of “natural” bonds through industrialization, but also the penetrating, “acid” forces of the intellect and critical analysis. (28)

As Fernihough understands it, the point about Lawrence’s use of such language to characterize Loerke is that it shows Lawrence was in the grip of a “*volkisch* organicism” (27), at least during those passages in which Loerke appears. And she immediately goes on to find “[t]he same kind of organicism . . . at work in Lawrence’s reaction to Mark Gertler’s painting, *Merry-Go-Round*, in a letter dating from the same period.” Here is the excerpt she herself quotes from this letter followed by her one-sentence comment on it:

“You are all absorbed in the violent and lurid processes of inner decomposition: the same thing that makes leaves go scarlet and copper-green at this time of year. . . . It would take a Jew to paint this picture. It would need your national history to get you here, without disintegrating you first. You are of an older race than I, and in these ultimate processes, you are beyond me, older than I am. But I think I am sufficiently the same, to be able to understand.”

Lawrence includes himself, and indeed the whole of Western civilization, in this process of decay, yet the consequences of his position hardly need underlining. (28–29)

But to begin with, what *is* Lawrence’s “position” here?

Surely the first thing to note about his remarkable letter to Gertler is that it is written in praise of the latter’s painting, which Lawrence passionately admires, calling it “the best *modern* picture I have seen: I think it is great, and true.” “I think,” he tells Gertler, “this picture is your arrival—it marks a great arrival.” And a bit further on: “I must say, I have, for you, in your work, reverence, the reverence for the great articulate extremity of art” (*Letters* II: 660–61). Lawrence is *so* impressed that he feels words fail him and he apologizes for this fact twice, the first most revealing apology coming immediately after the passage Fernihough quotes: “This all reads awkward—

but I feel there ought to be some other language than English, to say it in. And I don't want to translate you into ideas. . . ." Here, in his reaching out to Gertler ("I think I am *sufficiently* the same, to be able to understand") together with his reluctance to "translate" him (at least "into ideas," "because I can see, you must, in your art, be mindless and in an ecstasy of destructive sensation" [660]), is a good illustration of what it means to respect otherness.

But how *can* Lawrence admire the fact that Gertler has gone "beyond" him in his exploration of the "ultimate processes" of "inner decomposition"? How, in other words, can he turn what is ordinarily thought of as a negative ("decomposition" or "disintegration") into a positive? He can do so first of all because of his belief that at our best we are "thought-adventurer[s]," that our lives are or ought to be "endless venture[s] into consciousness" ("Books" 731). And secondly because of his commitment to the kind of "revolution" ("in thought and ethics") that Luce Irigaray has recently been calling for (*Ethics* 6).

There is, however, no denying that Lawrence's commitment to such a revolution does have disconcerting and unsettling consequences and often makes it difficult to read him, to locate his "position." For example, most writers who would compare someone to a rat in the sewers would presumably mean us to see such a comparison as a damning criticism. But with Lawrence things are not so simple. Consider the following extract from an exchange between Birkin and Gerald on Loerke:

"He is a good many stages further than either you or I can go."

"Yes, but stages further in what?" cried Gerald, irritated.

Birkin sighed, and gathered his brows into a knot of anger.

"Stages further in social hatred," he said. "He lives like a rat, in the river of corruption, just where it falls over into the bottomless pit. He's further on than we are. He hates the ideal more acutely. He *hates* the ideal utterly, yet it still dominates him. I expect he is a Jew—or part Jewish."

"Probably," said Gerald.

"He is a gnawing little negation, gnawing at the roots of life."

"But why does anybody care about him?" cried Gerald.

"Because they hate the ideal also, in their souls. They want to explore the sewers, and he's the wizard rat that swims ahead."

Still Gerald stood and stared at the blind haze of snow outside.

"I don't understand your terms, really," he said, in a flat, doomed voice. "But it sounds a rum sort of desire."

"I suppose we want the same," said Birkin. (428)

Though there is much that is distressing about the way in which Loerke is portrayed here and elsewhere in the novel (including, for example, his negativity), it is also true, here as elsewhere, that there is much to admire about him (again including his negativity, but also the fact that he too is a "thought-adventurer," who has in some ways managed to explore further ahead than Birkin).

It is clear that what sounds like “a rum sort of desire” to Gerald is something Birkin is quite familiar with. And indeed, so is Ursula if we judge by the attraction she feels for the young man who “had some of the fineness and stillness and silkiness of a dark-eyed, silent rat” (358)—“he was somewhat indomitable and separate, like a quick, vital rat. He had a queer, subterranean beauty, repulsive too” (361). So, too, is Lawrence, as we can see not just in this novel, or in the abandoned Prologue to it—in which he struggles to explain the desire Birkin feels “for a strange Cornish type of man, with dark eyes like holes in his head, or like the eyes of a rat” (505)—but also in his portrayal of Maurice Magnus as “a courageous, isolated little devil, facing his risks, and like a good rat, *determined* not to be trapped” (Introduction 99):

He went through vile experiences: he looked them in the face, braved them through and kept his manhood in spite of them. For manhood is a strange quality, to be found in human rats as well as in hot-blooded men. Magnus carried the human consciousness through circumstances which would have been too much for me. I would have died rather than be so humiliated. I could never have borne it. . . .

And yet, humanity can only finally conquer by *realising*. It is human destiny, since Man fell into consciousness and self-consciousness, that we can only go forward step by step through realisation, full, bitter, conscious realisation. (99–100)

In their discussion of the nineteenth-century sewer, Stallybrass and White claim that, after first emerging “as the demonized Other,” the rat’s transgression of “the boundaries that separated the city from the sewer” then made it into “a source of fascination as well as horror” (143). But as we have just seen, Lawrence is not just *fascinated* by the figure of the rat: he positively admires its spirit. As he makes clear by his insistence that “manhood” can be found “in human rats,” Lawrence is no more interested in demonizing the rat than he is in demonizing the snake, whom he treats, on the contrary, as “one of the lords / Of life” (“Snake” 351). As Deleuze and Guattari so nicely put it, Lawrence is one of those writers (they are thinking specifically of his “Tortoise” poems) “who leave us troubled and filled with admiration because they were able to tie their writing to real and unheard-of becomings” (244).

For Lawrence, then, otherness is *always* something to be respected, at least in principle. So that if he at times fails to respect it in practice (by putting “his thumb in the scale” and pulling “down the balance to his own predilection”), he is guilty by his own lights of what he himself calls “immorality” (“Morality” 172).

This makes it all the more regrettable when, as has happened so often over the last few decades, critics fail to respect *his* changing otherness. Especially since this invariably means that they are also forgetting the warnings we all issue to one another these days about the dangers of essentialism. In effect, what Lawrence’s current reputation does is deny how changeable he is by essentializing him—or, to use his own words, by turning him into a kind of “pepper pot” that conveniently stays put. There is, of course, no point in denying that he is sometimes sexist and politically reac-

tionary—and not just by today's standards but also by the standards of his own time. But as Deleuze, at least, saw,⁷ Lawrence is also a writer working at the edge of advanced thought, and again, not just by the standards of his own time but also by the standards of today.

In the circumstances, then, it seems necessary to end up by tackling the question of Lawrence's current reputation and to do so by looking at how he is presented in the influential 1990 anthology *The Gender of Modernism*: in such a way as to make it all too easy for readers to see him as nothing more than the sexist and politically reactionary pepper pot he occasionally could be, and this in spite of the fact that the editor of the volume herself, Bonnie Kime Scott, is so careful *not* to do so in her sensitive introduction to the short section on Lawrence. Her brief and balanced introduction is nevertheless longer than the two selected Lawrence pieces combined, "Matriarchy" and "Cocksure Women and Hensure Men"; according to Scott, both essays "advocate a male position of power in postwar society" (221), both being written during what has for a long time now been referred to as Lawrence's "leadership phase."

Now if this were true, one might still question the wisdom—as well as the fairness—of choosing to represent Lawrence to readers who have been prepared over the last few decades to expect the worst of him by *two* such pieces. Especially given the goal of Scott's anthology, to redress the balance that made modernism seem for so long like the province of a few major male geniuses alone and to show how gendered modernism has been from the start, why not select at least one piece that would reveal Lawrence's own frequent questioning of gender roles, his explorations of sexual difference, and his criticism of the exercise of male power and mastery? He was, after all, a trenchant critic of "that passionate desire for the mastery of the medium of narrative, that will of the writer to be greater than and undisputed lord over the stuff he writes" that in his short piece on Thomas Mann ("German Books" 308) he associates with the work of Gustave Flaubert.⁸ So if, for example, we accept Kristeva's definition of the phallic position in terms of an attitude toward language—"in a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a 'phallic' position"—then it ought to be recognized that Lawrence is one of those writers whose work "calls into question the very posture of this mastery" (165); Scott raises the issue of "symbolic language associated with the phallus" herself early in her introduction to the anthology, referring the reader to Kristeva (3). As Fernihough puts it, Lawrence repeatedly "challenges the 'phallic' position" (Introduction xxvii). And indeed, even when Lawrence *celebrates* the symbol of "the phallus," as in his late *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, he does so by challenging the way in which it is ordinarily understood, celebrating it—in its mysterious changeability—for its opposition to "empire and dominion" (20) and clearly differentiating it from the "huge stone erections"—"man's ponderous erections" (32)—that the Fascists, "heirs of empire and world power" (31), loved so much.

But *is* it true that “Matriarchy” and “Cocksure Women and Hensure Men” “advocate a male position of power”? Let’s look at some extracts from the opening five paragraphs of “Matriarchy” first:

Whether they are aware of it or not, the men of today are a little afraid of the women of today; and especially the younger men. They not only see themselves in the minority, overwhelmed by numbers, but they feel themselves swamped by the strange unloosed energy of the silk-legged hordes. Women, women everywhere, and all of them on the warpath! The poor young male keeps up a jaunty front, but his masculine soul quakes. . . .

Being frightened, he begins to announce: Man must be master again!—The *must* is all very well. Tommy may be master of his own little Elsie in the stronghold of his own little home. But when she sets off in the morning to her job, and joins the hosts of her petticoatless, silk-legged “pals,” who is going to master her? Not Tommy! . . .

[The modern young man] talks rather bitterly about rule of women, monstrous regiment of women, and about matriarchy, and, rather feebly, about man being master again. He knows perfectly well that he will never be master again. John Knox could live to see the head of his monstrous regiment of women, and the head of Mary of Scotland, just chopped off. But you can’t chop off the head of the modern woman. . . .

So we are in for the monstrous rule of women, and a matriarchy. . . . This seems the last word of horror to the shuddering male. . . . Woman cracks the whip, and the poor trained dog of a man jumps through the hoop. Nightmare! (224–25).

As Scott sees it, what we have here is Lawrence embracing “(however bemusedly) the conservative orientation of John Knox, complete with his horror of a ‘monstrous regiment of women’” (221). But this is surely not true. The problem is that, though Scott recognizes that both the essays she reprints “scintillate with tense humor and are masterful as written performance, so much so that they seem more like ironic textual play than argument” (221), she fails to notice or at least to comment on the fact that “Matriarchy” is written from at least two points of view, that it stages a dialogical encounter. On the one hand, we have the “modern young man,” who is frightened by the “modern woman,” whom he sees as threatening to rule over him. On the other, we have Lawrence, who views the young man’s fear with a great deal of irony (“his masculine soul quakes,” “the shuddering male,” “the poor trained dog of a man,” “Nightmare!”). And arguably we have a third voice, the woman’s, caught convincingly in outbursts or quotations: “Not Tommy!” or “Woman has emerged, and you can’t put her back again. And she’s not going back of her own accord, not if she knows it” (224–25).

It is not, as Scott would have it, Lawrence but rather the young man who thinks of women as “silk-legged hordes.” And similarly, when we are told that “we are in for the monstrous rule of women,” the context makes it clear that this is *not* the way Lawrence thinks, it is the way the young man (who “talks rather bitterly about . . . [the] monstrous regiment of women”) thinks.

Scott notes that toward the end of the piece the “all-male club is offered as evidence of man’s need for separate sanctity” (222). But how seriously are we meant to

take this? "We can imagine," Scott says, "Lawrence's horror at recent American legal rulings against such exclusive associations, notably for their exclusion of business-women" (222). But the idea that Lawrence might have viewed this later development with horror is highly implausible, especially given the accurate information Scott includes in her introduction to the section on Lawrence. Not only does he never seem to have shown the remotest interest in joining such clubs himself, there is a good deal of evidence that throughout his life Lawrence preferred the company of women to that of men and had a much larger "network of female colleagues" than of male ones (217; see also 218–20). As Carol Siegel has recently argued, "his unusual dependence on and identification with women" can help to explain why he sometimes felt the need to assert his masculinity, the last thing that he personally could take for granted—to assert it, moreover, in ways that were to strike some of his friends in later life as being expressive of what they took to be "‘immature,’ working-class attitudes towards women" (44). And if, as Siegel says, the Lawrence who sided with writers like Emily Brontë "who celebrated woman's aggressiveness" (79) was *sometimes* (unlike most men of his age, who were *usually*) "attracted by the idea of curing women's rage into quiet submissiveness," we ought not forget that "Ursula in *Women in Love*, March in *The Fox*, Hannele in *The Captain's Doll*, Harriet in *Kangaroo*, and Kate in *The Plumed Serpent* never give in to their lovers' demands for their submission" (84).

It's worth noting here that Siegel's examples inconveniently come from Lawrence's so-called leadership phase, a formulation Scott takes on from Simpson, Nixon, and Ruderman (among others—it has long been a truism in Lawrence studies; Scott does briefly note two dissenters, Spilka and Oates, in a footnote). According to this schema, Lawrence did change, but only once: World War I combined with the suppression of *The Rainbow* "made Lawrence a reactionary in regard to women and the feminine, according to Simpson" (Scott 220). Scott cannot be blamed for the fact that the convincing refutation of this over-simple formulation—which might actually be seen to be a good example of the kind of reductive unity Mohanty refers to—was not made until after the publication of her anthology. In 1991, not only Siegel's book, but Worthen's also, assimilating the major research of the ongoing Cambridge editions of Lawrence's work, began the process of making it impossible to see a straightforward progression of Lawrence's thought in this way:

[t]he whole shape of his post-war novel writing has changed. No longer is it possible to set *The Lost Girl* on one side as an aberration in his work, and see his significant development as that from *Aaron's Rod* to *Kangaroo* to *The Plumed Serpent*—the so-called (and very misleadingly called) 'leadership novels.' " (Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence* 57)

Yet the force of Scott's introduction is precisely this: that Lawrence once challenged traditional gender roles but after World War I completely abandoned his earlier vision, thus giving the two late essays Scott chooses—written and published in 1928 and 1929, during the last two years of his life—the weight of last words. At least part of

the irony of this situation is that Lawrence—impotent since 1925, ill and dying, and desperate to accumulate a nest egg to support Frieda after he was gone—is thus “placed” by some of the journalistic pieces he dashed off quickly in order to earn money, having learned that he could earn as much for one such article as he could for a published short story or novella. Of course, it was *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, which he insisted on publishing himself in Italy, that finally earned enough after his death to guarantee that Frieda (who had never shown the least inclination to work—Lawrence might have been less worried for her if she had!) would never want (cf. Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: A Literary Life* 154–55, 164–65).

Of “the two kinds of femininity”—the “demure” and the “dauntless”—that Lawrence describes in “Cocksure Women and Hensure Men” (228), Lawrence consistently favored the latter, in his life as in his fiction. As Siegel reminds us, in women as in men, “the self-assertive manner” was invariably the one “he trusted most” (17). All the more reason, therefore, to regret the fact that he is represented in *The Gender of Modernism* by an essay in which he momentarily loses his nerve and allows himself to be infected by the fear of the modern young man who can only deal with the dauntless woman by mockery, by turning her into a cocksure woman. How much more challenging it would have been—and also encouraging to those of us, men and women, who would like to find a bit more courage, to be a bit more dauntless—if room could have been found as well for the Lawrence who celebrates the dauntless modern woman (a Lawrence that Scott clearly knows and appreciates as well), as he does, for example, so unforgettably through Birkin’s eyes in the “Mino” chapter of *Women in Love*.

As Birkin stands before Ursula—“smiling in frustration and amusement and irritation and admiration and love”—he reflects that she is “so quick, and so lambent, like discernible fire, and so vindictive, and so rich in her dangerous flamy sensitiveness” (151). Not surprisingly, therefore, we are told moments later that Birkin “was almost afraid of the mocking restlessness of her splendid face. Here was one who would go the whole lengths of heaven or hell, whichever she had to go.” But as the next sentence makes clear, this is not quite accurate. Birkin is not *almost* afraid, he is afraid—“afraid,” as who would not be, “of a woman capable of such abandon, such dangerous thoroughness of destructivity. Yet he chuckled within himself also” (154). In this case, the fear is not incapacitating. Birkin can live with it. Both Ursula and Birkin have found precisely the kind of partner they need and want, the exact reverse of a docile or demure pepper pot, the kind of dialogical other who can be counted on to startle one into change and to defy one’s inertia, the kind of partnership, built on respect for otherness as well as commonality, on which one could begin to found not only a family or a community, but perhaps even a state.

This is the Lawrence more readers should know about, the Lawrence who belongs with figures like Buber, Levinas, Bakhtin, and Irigaray in our evolving history of the dialogical principle and in our continuing attempt to understand the dialogical and its political and ethical importance.

NOTES

1. Page references are to the Cambridge editions of Lawrence's work, if such editions have been produced (most of Lawrence's work is now available in Cambridge University Press editions; Penguin Cambridge University Press texts retain the same pagination).

2. For example: "The hardest thing for any man to do is for him to recognise and to know that the natural law of his neighbour is other than, and maybe even hostile to, his own natural law, and yet is true. This hard lesson Christ tried to instill in the doctrine of the other cheek. Orestes could not conceive that it was the natural law of Clytemnestra's nature, that she should murder Agamemnon for sacrificing her daughter, and for leaving herself abandoned in the pride of her womanhood, unmated because he wanted the pleasure of war, and for his unfaithfulness to her with other women. Clytemnestra could not understand that Orestes should want to kill her for fulfilling the law of her own nature. The law of the mother's nature was other than the law of the son's nature. This they could neither of them see, hence the killing. This Christianity would teach them: to recognise and to admit the law of the other person, outside and different from the law of one's own being. It is the hardest lesson of love" ("Study" 124).

3. This pine tree is the subject of Georgia O'Keefe's painting, *The Lawrence Tree*.

4. See in this connection Allison Weir's argument that the use by both Kristeva and Irigaray "of the term 'homosexual' to refer to a pathological condition—the system of male domination based on a repudiation of women—is offensive and unnecessary" (169).

5. To begin to understand the importance Lawrence attaches to sexual difference, one should perhaps turn first to the opening of *The Rainbow* where we are told that the Brangwen "women were different" (10). Whereas their men "faced inwards to the teeming life of creation, which poured unresolved into their veins," the women "set out to discover what was beyond, to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom" (11)—the women need "the wonder of the beyond . . . before them" (13). As that last reference to "wonder" suggests, Irigaray and Lawrence have a good deal in common. Thus, for example, we find Irigaray arguing that because it allows the "other, male or female," to "surprise us again and again, [to] appear to us as *new, very different* from what we knew or what we thought he or she should be," wonder "is indispensable not only to life but also or still to the creation of an ethics" ("Wonder" 74). Coming "[b]efore and after appropriation," "[w]onder," Irigaray maintains, "must be the advent or the event of the other" (75). Or, as Lou Witt puts it in *St. Mary*: "I want the wonder back again, or I shall die" (62).

6. In a similar vein, Hacking cites Vicki Hearne's account of how, while working with a search-and-rescue dog, "one relates to it as part of an 'I-Thou' pair" (24); see also what Hearne says about "intelligent responsiveness" in her "Can an Ape Tell a Joke?" essay.

7. See the important comments on Lawrence scattered throughout Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical*. In the latter, see especially the preface Deleuze wrote for the French edition of Lawrence's *Apocalypse* ("Nietzsche and Saint Paul, Lawrence and John of Patmos") and also the chapter titled "To Have Done with Judgment," in which Spinoza is said to have carried out the critique that broke with the Judeo-Christian tradition of judgment and Lawrence is named as one of the "four great disciples" (along with Nietzsche, Kafka, and Artaud) who take up this critique "again and push it further" (*Essays* 126).

8. James Clifford notes how, for Bakhtin, "Dickens, the actor, oral performer, and polyphonist, must be set against Flaubert, the master of authorial control moving godlike among the thoughts and feelings of his characters. Ethnography," Clifford then claims, "like the novel, wrestles with these alternatives" (137).

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