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A GREAT SENSE OF JOURNEYING

TRANSPORT AND CULTURAL TRANSITION IN THE NOVELS OF D. H. LAWRENCE A THESIS OVERVIEW

BY: ANDREW F. HUMPHRIES

This study of D.H. Lawrence's fiction in relation to a period of rapid transport modernization and cultural dislocation is an approach to repositioning his work through a new socio-historical, or to be more exact, techno-historical lens. It roots his often highly idiosyncratic observations of human interaction more firmly within the context of

a his awareness of the impact of modernity and technological change. I will aim here to give a sense of the argument of the thesis and my approach to transport in each novel and conclude with an example of the way in which I have integrated the use of transport to explore contextual themes for one novel in particular.

ARTICLE ONE

Transport in this period and in Lawrence's major novels is very much a cultural statement. Lawrence recognized his era, between 1885 and 1930, as one of accelerated motion and cultural upheaval. His major novels integrate transport as a symbol of the cultural shifts of the period that his protagonists must negotiate. The study of transport in Lawrence's major novels—the recurrence of motor-cars, trams, boats and trains in particular, in which significant encounters take place or moments of transience or realization recorded—places Lawrence as central to his time and presents him as a writer whose awareness of the interrelationship between human and technological development in the early decades of the twentieth-century is searching and significant. My main focus was on the major novels *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) which provide evidence of Lawrence's consistent involvement in his narratives of transport or transport allusion to explore the relation-

ship between individual travel and cultural transition.

In Lawrence's major novels transport represents his ontological dialogue with the world he lived and travelled in. It shows that Lawrence was as much interested in the realism of transport—its workings, its connections and its technological affiliations to a twentieth-century culture becoming more mechanical and scientific—as he was versatile in the use of transport to enhance his theme. Transport privileges the sense of human life as a journey and as a motion of vital flow. For Lawrence, it seems, transport is more than an instrumental function but an essence of life that reflects the inner journey which encourages spiritual and cultural exploration. His major novels make transport journeys central to life's most urgent questions about identity and survival. Transport is engaged to reflect not only Lawrence's own sense of his ongoing journey but also to reflect significant cultural movements of the time related to gender, race, war, and health. Whereas in *Sons and Lovers* this reflec-



tion is about the impact of industrial society upon individual aspiration, in *The Rainbow* it becomes part of Lawrence's exploration of female dissent against established male structures. In *Women in Love* Lawrence positions transport as paradoxically both a deadly and transcendental agent in

the struggle to fight free of the stasis that war inflicts upon both transport freedom and personal travel. In *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence moves beyond the impact of war, to see transport regain its agency of travel through encounter with cultural otherness. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* transport shifts to become largely negative, mechanical and in opposition to the positive culture of organic regeneration and vulnerable human tenderness that the novel prioritizes. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* also reflects how Lawrence's own ill health increasingly made transport problematic in the final years of his life.

Transport and Historic Change

While transport was a technological development it was also a movement for change that integrated with how people related, lived and thought in Lawrence's time. Linking travel with the emergence of modernism, Helen Carr relates how by 1890—five years after Lawrence's birth—transport had become integral to cultural movement

ARTICLE ONE

and inextricably tied to societal and global infrastructures:

Railroads criss-crossed Europe and beyond and, as liners grew faster and more luxurious, steamship companies produced a crop of shipping millionaires. Increasing ‘ease of locomotion’ was not, however, simply the product of disinterested technological advance, and those on the move not only bands of tourists. Improvements in transport were fanned by, and helped to fan, the empire building, trade expansion and mass migrations of the late nineteenth century.¹

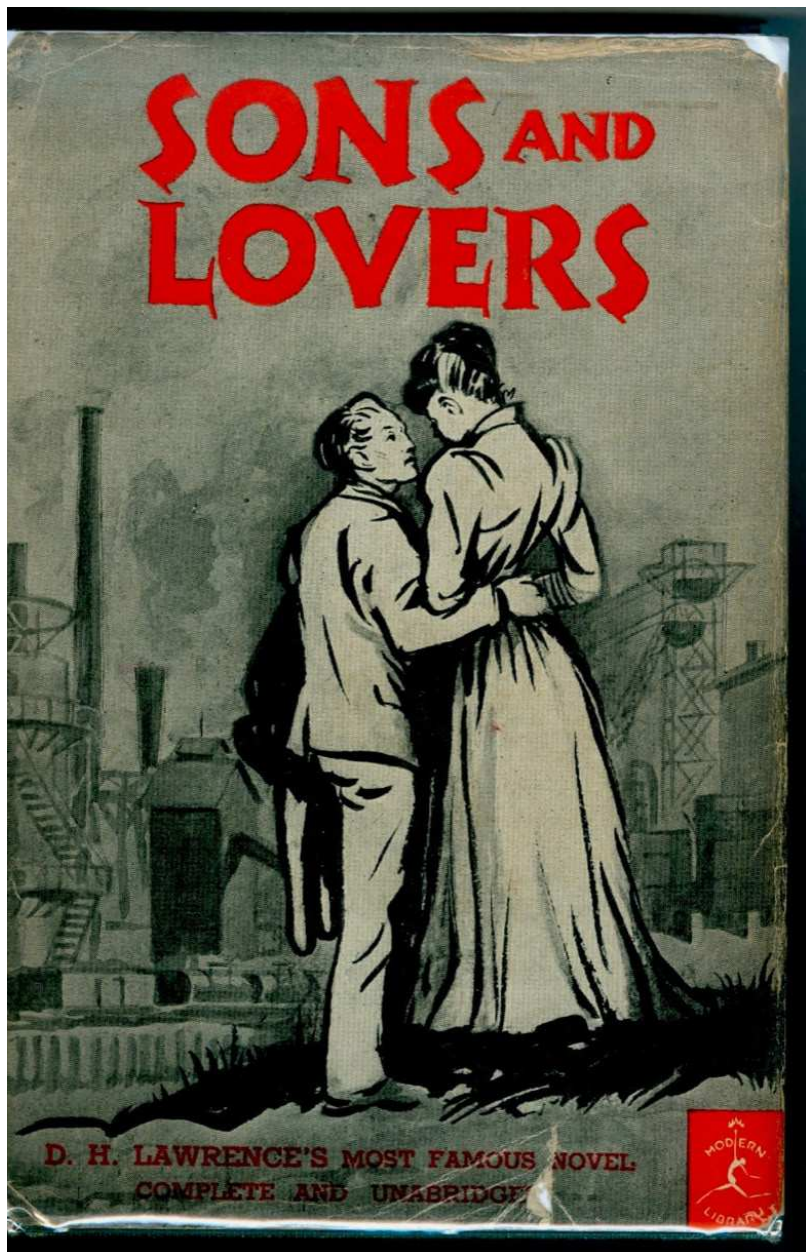
Lawrence’s major novels reflect this integration of transport and change. In these novels, transport infuses the narrative exploration of place, society, gender and cultural otherness but also positions the protagonists in relation to wider cultural movements like industry, technology, Empire, and war.

As part of the discussion of Lawrence’s works my thesis draws upon sources contemporary to Lawrence’s lifetime—including the work of artists like *The Futurists*, and philosophers such as Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger. It also relates Lawrence’s representations of transport to historical studies which indicate where Lawrence’s representation reflects or confronts prevailing cultural trends.

In its very public symbolism and instrumentalism, transport in Lawrence juxtaposes the individual journey with societal or cultural movement. This juxtaposition is particularly evident in Lawrence’s response to the paintings in the Etruscan tombs which he visited in April 1927:

Fascinating are the scenes of departure, journeying in covered wagons drawn by two or more horses, accompanied by the driver on foot and friend on horseback, and dogs, and met by other horsemen coming down the road. Under the arched tarpaulin tilt of the wagon reclines a man, or a woman, or a whole family: and all moves forward along the highway with wonderful

¹ Helen Carr. ‘Modernism and Travel 1880-1950.’ *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp 70-86.



slow surge....This is surely the journey of the soul. It is said to represent even the funeral procession, the ash-chest being borne away to the cemetery, to be laid in the tomb. But the memory in the scene seems much deeper than that. It gives so strongly the feeling of a people who have trekked in wagons, like the Boers, or the

Mormons, from one land to another.²

The synthesis of Lawrence's interest in transport as a place of cultural encounter with his conviction that it carries the spiritual renewal of the individual soul, even beyond death, articulates a key feature of his novels from *Sons and Lovers* onwards.

Transport, War and Sexual Mobility

Transport as the point of negotiation for issues relating to cultural transition forms the central focus of my approach to each of the novels discussed. *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, for example, confront shifts in gender space and power in a rapidly industrializing world in which transport, as the extension of industrial patriarchy, first enhances male mobility at the expense of female space, then, in *The Rainbow*, enframes journeys of female liberation and empowerment. In *Sons and Lovers* the

² D H Lawrence 'Volterra' *Sketches of Etruscan Places* [1932] and *Other Italian Essays*. Ed. Paul Eggert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 157-72.

ARTICLE ONE

privilege of male mobility in Paul Morel is explored through transport episodes that reveal the impact of an aggressive industrial culture upon male aspiration and the imprisoning consequences of that culture for women's mobility against a background of suffragette dissent. Transport in *The Rainbow* reflects cultural change across three generations from 1840 until the First World War and engages the female aspiration for greater mobility in the male world. The particular focus in this novel is upon Ursula Brangwen whose emergence in the final third of the novel from child to woman coincides with the rapid urbanization and mechanization of transport during the period 1885 and 1905. Lawrence shows how this environment impacts upon the pace of social interaction and relationship, first through Ursula's electric tram rides as a novice teacher, then from her embattled school classroom and afterwards in the course of her turbulent relationship with the army engineer Anton Skrebensky. Her development into adulthood coincides with an acceleration of transport as part of the

growing mechanical and industrial networks of the male industrial and imperial culture that Anton embodies and which she finally rejects.

Ursula reappears as one of four protagonists in the next novel *Women in Love*, written between 1916 and 1919, which explores the war subtexts in a 'civilized' society in which transport is co-opted to fulfill or represent what Lawrence at this time saw as the apocalyptic and destructive desires of European society. It traces transport as a metaphorical and literal force that expresses a cultural shift of peacetime transport towards wartime combative intent, reflected, in fact, in the actual conversion of trains, motorized vehicles, trams and horses as well as ocean liners to meet the immediate demands of First World War mobilization. Focusing particularly on metaphorical representations of war and, in particular, of naval conflict, the discussion also explores Lawrence's use of transport in the relationship between Ursula Brangwen and Rupert Birkin to express transcendent possibilities in opposition to the spirit of war and nega-

tion that the Gerald Crich-Gudrun Brangwen relationship exposes.

From Cultural Otherness to Dystopian Vision

In *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence places transport at the center of encounter with otherness and cultural difference. The novel epitomizes, through Kate Leslie's life-changing journey, the tension between the invasive materialism of the modern technological world represented by America and the desire for cultural revision that is at the heart of post-revolutionary Mexico and intersects, problematically, with Kate's tourist-traveller quest to belong. Transport becomes, in one sense, the iconic symbol of revolution and dictatorship and in another the dissentient counterforce to such oppressions with its links to natural landscape and indigenous history. The representation of boat journeys in opposition to motor-car rides or militaristic train invasions, for example, establishes a tension in the novel between motions of primitive belonging

and the mechanics of modern and materialist imperialism. Such a tension invites postcolonial considerations but also repositions Lawrence's fictional use of transport in the mid-1920s to serve as something essentially numinous that enframes movements of cultural change but also explores the uncharted territory between material and spiritual worlds.

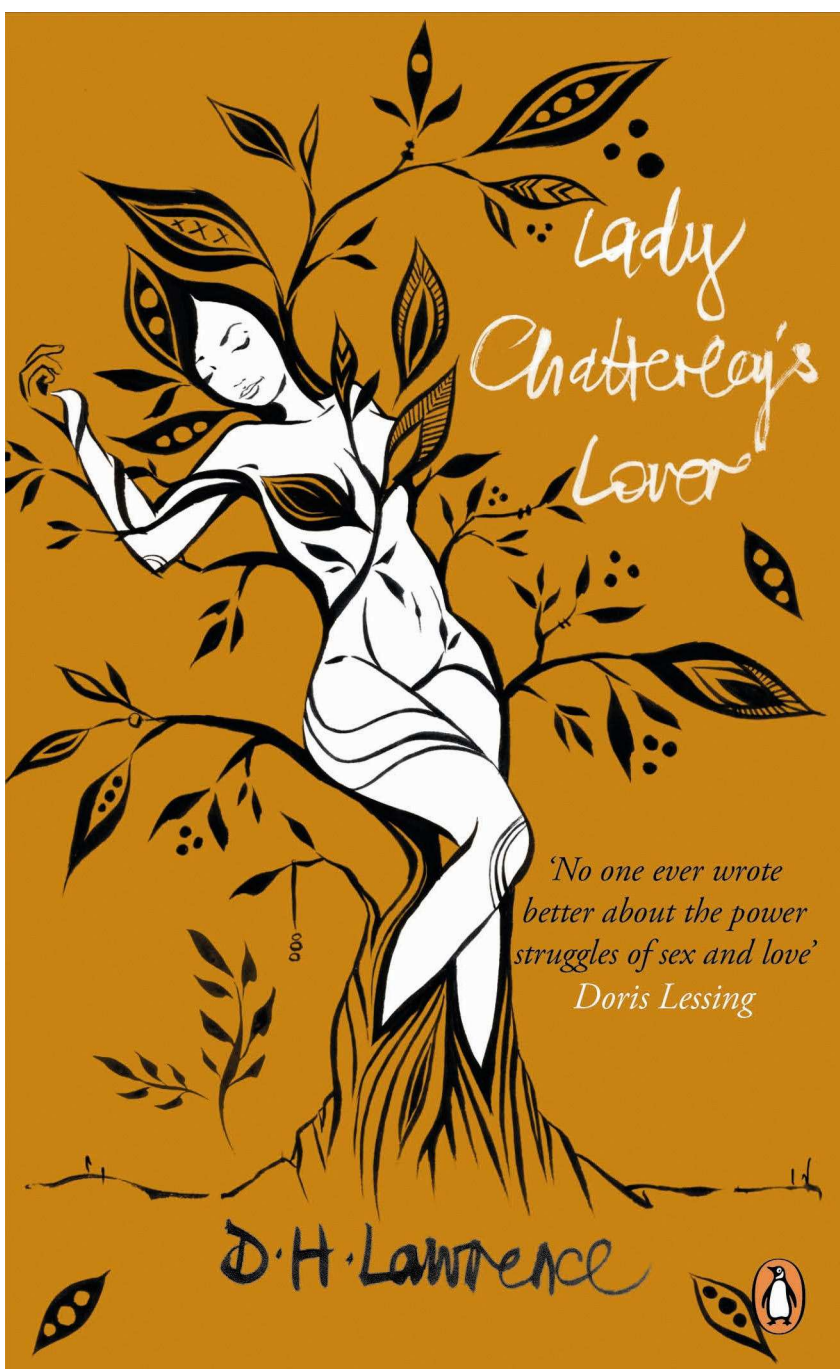
Lawrence returns 'home' with his final novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* where transport is positioned less as the enframer of cultural exploration than as a hegemonous alien power associated, paradoxically, with both post-war disability and futuristic and mechanical anti-human solutions. Transport becomes, it is argued, part of a pervasive and powerful mechanical dystopia that is part of the mobilizing post-war world. This modernist force is alienated, ultimately, by the novel's focus on the organic-regenerative love that is Constance Chatterley and Oliver Mellors's culturally-redemptive force at the novel's centre. Instead of enframing human mobility and destiny, transport in this novel, perhaps anticipating the

ARTICLE ONE

dehumanizing utilization of machines and vehicles by the Nazis only a decade after Lawrence's death, threatens to oppress human naturalness, instinct and survival. Transport is an invader. Mellors nightmare world is represented by the noise of grow-

ing industrial traffic from Stacks Gate colliery just beyond his woodland retreat at Wragby. This mechanical transport demon invades paradise, however, in the guise of the disabled Sir Clifford Chatterley's motorized bath chair that tramples the bluebells under its wheels. Through a close examination of the motor-car as a focus for automotive mobility in the novel, the chapter looks in particular at Clifford's motorized chair as a symbolic car and Connie's car ride to Uthwaite as a journey of enlightenment and, finally, at Hilda Reid, Connie's sister, as a female car-driver whose position at the wheel provokes Lawrencian concerns about gender role and sexual dislocation. Disability and post-human considerations position transport in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as a force that is powerful but culturally disabling. Modern transport becomes a symbol of the disabling forces of modern society masquerading as progress but destroying human essence and relationship in a world crippled emotionally by the impact of the First World War.

Lawrence presents a dislocation in



post-war England that he witnessed first-hand. The division between the fast modernizing world that transport epitomizes and the idealized pre-technological world of rurality in Wragby wood is also the central tension of Lawrence's essay '*Return to Bestwood*', written after his return from Italy to Derbyshire just after the General Strike of 1926. One passage in particular is worth consideration for a transport-countryside duality that becomes central to Lawrence's final novel:

"And there is still a certain glamour about the countryside. Curiously enough, the more motor-cars and tram-cars and omnibuses there are rampaging down the roads, the more the country retreats into its own isolation, and becomes more mysteriously accessible. ...The roads are hard and metalled and worn with everlasting rush. ...And yet the fields and the woods in between the roads and paths sleep as in a heavy, weary dream, disconnected from the modern world."³

3 D H Lawrence 'Return to Bestwood.' *Phoenix II: Un-collected, Unpublished and Other Prose Works by D*

Gender, Sex and the Motor-car in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

A brief focus on a section of my approach to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* gives a sense of how transport is applied to discussions of narrative interest in my thesis. Towards the end of the novel Constance Chatterley and the gamekeeper Oliver Mellors have spent the Spring making love secretly in Wragby wood and now in July Connie is planning to leave her disabled war veteran husband, Sir Clifford Chatterley, to live with Mellors. The intrigue involves a mode of transport both convenient and mistrusted by Lawrence: the motor car. Connie's divorcee elder sister Hilda Reid is driving down from Scotland to collect Connie, to drive her to Venice for a holiday to recover her health but also, with the impotent Sir Clifford's blessing, to find a suitable male to provide her with an heir to the Wragby estate. The disapproving Hilda reluctantly agrees to aid Connie's final tryst with Mel-

H Lawrence. Ed. Warren Roberts and Harry T Moore. London: Heineman, 1968, pp 257-66.

ARTICLE ONE

lors by driving her to the wood to meet him and return the next morning to collect her sister from the gamekeeper's cottage.

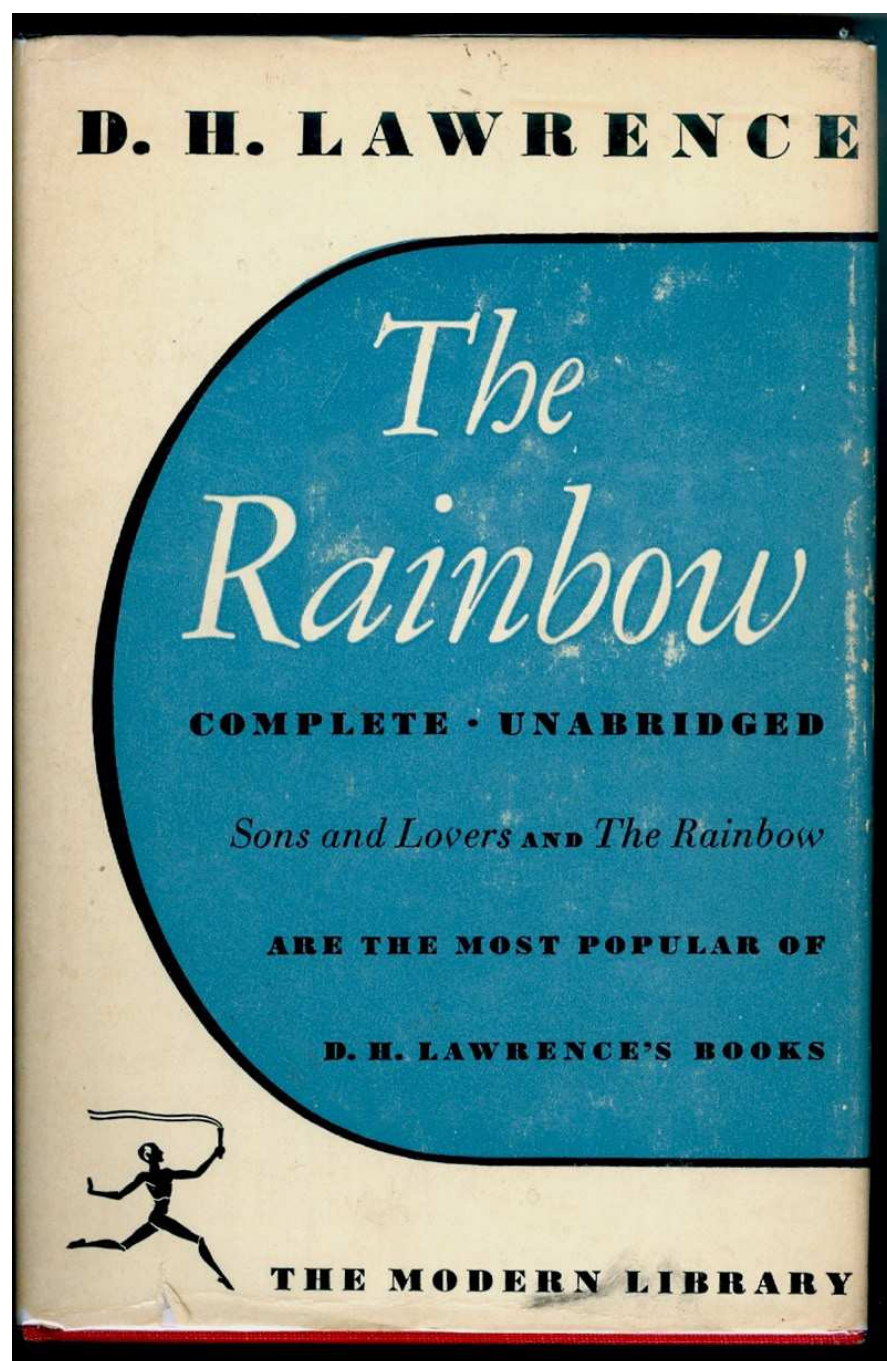
As Hilda returns with the car to the edge of the wood to take Connie on her journey, Hilda's vexation about lost time contrasts with Connie's face 'running with tears' as she climbs into the passenger seat. Hilda insists Connie put on the 'motoring helmet with the disfiguring goggles' and the 'long motoring coat' as Connie re-enters the world wearing a 'disguise'—in contrast to the honest nakedness of her love for Mellors in the wood.⁴ Connie's apparel assimilates her into car culture as if to accentuate her 'betrayal' of Mellors and his world. She becomes a 'goggling, inhuman, unrecognizable creature' whose disguise reconnects her with the machine-human world of Clifford which she has been attempting to escape (252).

For Connie, leaving Mellors is sudden and 'like death' (252). The car 'heave[s] out of the lane' as if the effort to pull away expresses this horrendous moment for Connie. Her grief is opposed in mood by Hilda's more objective 'business-like motion' as she starts the car (252). Tenderness and mechanism—opposite poles of the novel—are personified in the sisters as they drive away, encapsulated in their contrary sense of automobility—Hilda socially mobile, Connie humanly centered. In this, however, Lawrence has exaggerated the social trend to favour Mellors' stance. Hilda's impressiveness and Mellors' resistance to it might be put in better context if one considers how motorcars in the 1920s symbolized woman's commonality as autonomous travelers. Women were no longer simply passengers. They dressed to show that mobility was their autonomous right. The historian Virginia Scharff indicates that, 'whether a sedate housewife or a high-spirited jazz baby, the woman motorist of the twenties announced with her very clothing that she took mobility for

4 D H Lawrence. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* [1928] and *A Propos of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover.'* [1930]. Ed. Michael Squires. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp 251-2. All subsequent quotation from the novel indicated by parenthetical references in the text.

granted' (135). In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, however, Lawrence is also concerned about an insidious cultural sickness whereby society becomes unable to recognize the disfiguring impact of technology upon human behavior. In this light, at that moment, Connie's disfiguring outfit and goggles threaten to implicate her in a wider cultural sickness that distorts gender and draws her away from Mellors and Wragby wood's regenerative power. For Mellors, at least, the natural female and the modern woman cannot coincide. The Historian L K J Setright comments about early motor-ing fashions that 'some ladies, anxious to preserve a complexion that did not really belong outdoors, would adopt a kid-lined full-face mask of leather. They and others might keep their eyes protected from the dust by a talc or mica visor incorporated in the veil; others, like their menfolk, adopted goggles. Early cartoons, posters, and anti-motoring propaganda, made much of the anonymity offered by these goggles to present their ferocious and faceless wearers as devilish unworldly fiends terrorizing

the highway—an allegation that was not often true, but often enough.'⁵ When Hilda insists that Connie wear the clothing of mechanical travel and rushes her off to the jazzy metropolises of Europe, Connie's womanhood is, Lawrence implies, temporarily disabled.



ARTICLE ONE

On the trip through Europe to Venice, Connie's awareness of the superficiality of the weary London and Paris metropolises strengthens her sense that she is motoring away from her center. This sense of social mobility desperately sought by the young people of the 1920s and represented in the fiction of F Scott Fitzgerald and Evelyn Waugh, among others, is challenged by Connie's desire to be 'still' at Wragby and escape the 'tourist performance of enjoying oneself' with the 'swarming holidaying lot', the 'joy hogs' and the 'riff-raffing expensive people' (Lady 256). The distinction between stillness and frantic but superficial traveling is central to Connie's unease. She is also pregnant. This gives her future some sense of fixity which her sister's car-driven perpetual motion at this point contradicts. Transport and the fast-moving transport world of social opportunity contradicts the centeredness of human relationship and potency of Connie's pregnancy, as well as her love for Mellors.

Mellors is more explicit about this opposition to the impotency of the human

machine against the potency of organic woman. In Chapter 15 he tells Connie that the working people's obsession with money has taken the "spunk" to leave them "all little twiddling machines" (217). Transport becomes a central target of his attack as "motor-cars, cinemas and aeroplanes suck the last bit" out of a "generation... with indiarubber tubing for guts and tin legs and tin faces" (217). The human subjection to the machine extends to love and sex, for Mellors, who asserts that "what is cunt but machine-fucking!—It's all alike. Pay 'em money to cut off the world's cock" (217). The sex act for this generation, suggests Mellors, is not distinct from their riding of motors or motor-bikes. It has no recognizable humanity and contrasts with Connie and Mellors' lovemaking. Sex for the modern world, Mellors suggests, is part of a collective mechanical urge rather than the distinct individual human rite of passage and tenderness enacted by the lovers in the wood at Wragby. Lawrence's distinction in his major novels between moments where transport enhances human life and

moments where human life is reduced to the mechanical is a recurrent and important one. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the overwhelming presence of mass transport over individual travel is indicative of the modernization Lawrence encountered on his visits to post-war England between 1924 and 1926.

Transport as Spiritual Metaphor: the Journey Beyond Illness and Death

Transport was integral to Lawrence's own life as one of necessary motion. Lawrence looked to transport to renew his vital connection with the world. He told his friend Mabel Luhan, in a letter on 19 December 1928, that he had become 'a bit unstuck from the world altogether'—a likely euphemism for the impact his debilitating illness had on his travel—and he waited 'to see what breeze the gods will blow into our sails, to start us on a new move.'⁶ Motion

and health become synonymous. While he invested transport in his novels with the mythic power to transform static life situations, his own transport during his final years was problematic. Illness put his ideals of transport as a spiritual agent of renewal under increasing strain. His letters between 1928 and 1930 dwelt frequently upon the difficulty of travel as if this difficulty reduced Lawrence, physically and spiritually, as illustrated in this letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan on 2 March 1929:

It's no good, I really don't think I'm well enough, with this cough, to come to America and stand the racket of journeys and seeing people. It makes me very mad. I am better—I am really quite well and quite myself so long as I stay fairly quiet. But as soon as I begin taking journeys, even going to Toulon and doing a bit of shopping and running round, I feel rather rotten and cough more. ...Some connection with the current world broke in me two years ago, and now I have to be different. I feel my inside energy just about the same. It's my outside energy I can't manage. And so I'm

⁶ *The Letters of D H Lawrence, Volume VII: 1928-30*. Ed. Keith Sagar and James T Boulton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 199, p203.

ARTICLE ONE

afraid of the long journey and all the people—and possible unpleasantnesses with authorities or public.

The distinction between ‘outside energy’ and ‘inside energy’ reflects ambivalence in Lawrence’s major novels about transport experience as a reflection of the inner journey. It was important for Lawrence, finally, that the inner journey continued in spite of the frailties of the dying frame. The Etruscan tombs showed Lawrence that death was not a termination but a process that perpetuated the ritual passages of life. This is concretely expressed through transport by the Etruscan tombs that Lawrence visited just as it is in the final lines of his poem *The Ship of Death* (1929), when the poet urges ‘Oh build your ship of death, oh build it! /for you will need it. / For the voyage of oblivion awaits you’.⁷ The boat symbolizes the intangible ‘oblivion’ and makes it real. In Lawrence’s novels transport is called upon to give body to the intangible or the ab-

stract, as Birkin and Gerald’s conversation in the train to London in *Women in Love* or Kate Leslie’s spiritual boat journeys in *The Plumed Serpent* reveal.

Death was the final transport Lawrence confronted when he finally succumbed to that most immobilizing of illness, tuberculosis, in March of 1930 after more than a decade of living in motion. His transition from this world to the next, which he prefigures in his poem *The Ship of Death*, seems to crystallize a transport dynamic that emerges through his major novels: the search for the synthesis of physical and spiritual travel as the essence of human development and cultural survival. Transport, for Lawrence, must extend beyond a mechanical instrumentality that imprisons the soul and must begin to enframe and motivate the vital flow of life towards new encounters. The philosopher Henri Bergson’s definition of mobility reveals that Lawrence’s positioning of transport as a force for cultural transition was integral to a world after 1900, predicated upon flux rather than stability:

There is a reality that is external and

⁷ D. H. Lawrence: *The Complete Poems*. Ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts. London: Penguin, 1977; reprinted 1994, pp 106-07.

LAWRENCE'S POSITIONING OF TRANSPORT AS A FORCE FOR CULTURAL TRANSITION WAS INTEGRAL TO A WORLD AFTER 1900

yet given immediately to the mind...This reality is mobility. Not things made, but things in the making, not self-maintaining states, but only changing states, exist. Rest is never more than apparent, or, rather, relative. The consciousness we have of our own self in its continual flux introduces us to the interior of a reality, on the model of which we must represent other realities. All

reality, therefore, is a tendency, if we agree to mean by tendency an incipient change of direction.⁸

This sense of a culture necessarily in flux is crucial, also, to Lawrence. It is this view of the world that positions transport as a central agent of mobility and change. While Bergson portrays transition as a cultural norm rather than a disruption, Martin Heidegger, in his positioning of technology in the modern world as a form of 'enframing,' also clarifies, it seems, the challenge that transport poses in Lawrence's novels: Enframing means the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology and that is itself nothing technological. On the other hand, all those things that are so familiar to us and are standard parts of assembly, such as rods, pistons, and chassis, belong to the technological. The assembly itself, however, together with the aforementioned stockparts, fall within the sphere of technological activity. Such activity always merely responds to the chal-

⁸ Henri Bergson. *Introducing Metaphysics*. 1903. Trans. F L Pogson. London: Alibron. 2005, pp 49-50.

lenge of enframing, but it never comprises enframing itself or brings it about.⁹

Heidegger's distinction between the lifeless and the living technological frame comes close to the way Lawrence's protagonists use transport in his major novels to enhance or problematize the ontological questions posed by the world around them as part of an ongoing journey. Rather than remain merely technological, transport must enframe the protagonist's quest for the essence of life. In this quest for greater understanding about the human condition and about human relationships in a world of flux and dislocation, Lawrence's novels explore transport's growing impact upon early twentieth-century life as a central yet ambivalent dynamic of cultural transition.

9 Martin Heidegger 'The Question Concerning Technology'. *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*. Ed. David Farrel Krell. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp 311-41.

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