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**FROM CORNWALL TO NEW MEXICO:
PRIMAL CULTURES AND BELIEF IN LAWRENCE**

MARGARET STORCH

Lawrence arrived in Cornwall in late 1915 in a low psychological state, wounded by the banning of *The Rainbow* (1915), his most powerful and original work to date, and in despair at the continuing devastation and loss of life wrought by the war. His reputation as a prominent young writer was damaged and his prospects for making a living for himself and Frieda weakened. On this Atlantic extremity of Britain, however, Lawrence felt himself geographically a little closer to Rananim, a destination he then imagined as being located in Florida, where he aspired to find a secluded place to establish a small community of friends – particularly male friends, since in this phase of his life he felt a particular need for close male friendships. He found a positive element in his exile: “Here one is outside England, the England of London” (2L 494). Cornwall was a stage in a westward journey away from England and its current cynicism and wartime corruption. Lawrence remained hostile to England for the rest of his life. In Cornwall and later in Mexico, he developed an affinity for pre-Christian, pre-historic cultures, most immediately the Celtic, with which his surroundings were imbued.

Lawrence and Frieda spent their first two months in Cornwall in Porthcothan on the north coast, looking out over the Atlantic. Cornwall, battered by storms in the winter months, was beautiful and terrible. It appeared to Lawrence pre-Christian, still imbued with the spirit of Druidism and Celtic magic. He was drawn to the sense of primeval darkness imparted by the massive rocks that characterise the landscape: “O I love to see those terrifying rocks, like solid lumps of the original darkness, quite impregnable: and then the ponderous, cold light of the sea foaming up” (2L 519–20).

Lawrence often refers to the Cornish people disparagingly, yet at the same time is drawn to them. He feels that “there is left some of the old sensuousness of the darkness ... a sort of flowing together in physical intimacy, something almost negroid” (2L 520), a feeling that recalls his powerful childhood memory of the male community of coalminers: “the curious dark intimacy of the mine” and “the lustrous sort of inner darkness, like the gloss of coal” (LEA 290).

In early March 1916 the Lawrences moved further west down the coast to Higher Tregethen, near Zennor, an isolated hamlet where they lived modestly until October 1917. Here Lawrence’s thoughts of “sensuous darkness” may have been stirred by a familiar element in the landscape. Since the Bronze Age Cornwall had been a centre for tin mining, an industry of heightened importance in 1916 for its contribution to the war effort. In recent decades, however, foreign competition had caused a local decline, leading to the closure of many Cornish mines and the migration of Cornish miners elsewhere, often abroad. The short story ‘Samson and Delilah’, set in the first year of the war (EME 112) and originally entitled ‘The Prodigal Husband’, was completed as Lawrence was working on drafts of *Women in Love* (1920) in Zennor. It was the only story with a Cornish setting he wrote (EME xlii).

The central figure of ‘Samson and Delilah’, who has the distinctive Cornish name of Nankervis, walks on a wintry night towards the Tinner’s Rest Inn, a thinly disguised version of the Tinner’s Arms in Zennor. On his way he passes the “Tall, ruined power-houses of tin-mines” and “The lights of many miners’ cottages” (EME 108), reminiscent of the pit-head structures and the communal lives of miners that were part of the fabric of Lawrence’s boyhood. At the inn the miners sit together in harmonious camaraderie, playing cards and leaving as a group. Unlike the four soldiers who enter later, they are not differentiated as individuals. The evocation of miners’ lives briefly links Lawrence’s past with a new unfamiliar place, but it is soon submerged in the remote rural life and the Celtic environment.

What Lawrence is coming to conceive of as Celtic characteristics are noted in the innkeeper's daughter, Maryann, who has "the immature softness and mindlessness of the sensuous Celtic type" (*EME* 110), reflecting Lawrence's belief in blood-consciousness, the superior wisdom of the blood and the flesh over the intellect that he had first articulated in Gargnano, Italy, where he found that "The people are so unconscious" (*IL* 503–4). Nankervis's blood relationship to Maryann and his own Celtic nature are adumbrated in his "mindless curiosity" as he gives her his order (*EME* 110). The traces of Cornish speech remaining in his voice also betray his origin. The landlady at the inn, his estranged wife Alice Nankervis, tells him she had heard reports of him in "Butte City and elsewhere" (*EME* 120), a location in the North West United States, during his absence, an allusion to a scattered network of Cornish expatriates in far-flung places.

As in the biblical story of Samson, the physical strength of Nankervis is emphasised, with reference to "his powerful body" (*EME* 117). His abandoned wife manifests the shrewdness and resourcefulness of Delilah. When Nankervis refuses to leave the inn at closing time, like the Philistines at the injunction of Delilah, the soldiers tie up Nankervis and carry him outside, where they loosen a knot and leave him to struggle free. He is later able to walk through the now-unbolted door and join Alice, who is neither surprised nor alarmed, in the kitchen. Alice displays Delilah's cunning in manipulating the door's function as a barrier and then as an entrance, according to her convenience and desire. She passively accepts his sexual overtures and his comments about the erotic quality of her "handsome flesh" (*EME* 121). The story ends with a suggestion of impending sexual coercion – "A darn fine women. Puts up a darn good fight" (*EME* 122) – as Nankervis places his hand between his wife's breasts. There is an implication that the woman had unbolted the door for him for that purpose and welcomes his advances. This is one of a number of works of fiction by Lawrence, including the chapter 'Death and Love' in *Women in Love*, which he was writing at the time, where a man subjects a

woman to violence. Less common, however, are works where a woman seems to court “danger ... perhaps, because of [the man’s] beauty ... which she could not bear to forfeit” (*EME* 121). Lawrence also alluded to the story of Samson in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), where Ramón, in preparation for Cipriano’s installation as the god Huitzilopchtli and subsequent marriage to Kate as Malintzi, ceremonially binds Cipriano’s limbs and also blindfolds him in imitation of the blinding of Samson (*PS* 367–9). In ‘Samson and Delilah’ too, the binding of Nankervis could be seen to have a ceremonial significance relating to exoneration of Nankervis’s guilt in abandoning his wife.

On arriving in Cornwall, Lawrence’s own mental distress at the abrupt change in his circumstances appears to have continued for some time. In February 1916 Lawrence wrote to Murry: “I myself am always on the brink of another collapse. I begin to tremble and feel sick at the slightest upset ... Do be mild with me for a bit” (*2L* 549). Two weeks later, soon after the move to Zennor, Frieda wrote to Katherine Mansfield, “Lawrence has had a bad time ... Some of the *wonder* of the world has gone for him” (*2L* 571). Cornwall became Lawrence’s refuge or “lair” (*3L* 42). In August he declared himself unable to venture into the world beyond: “I cannot come to London – I am *much* too terrified and horrified by people – the world – nowadays” (*2L* 640).

Under psychological stress and in response to the dramatic terrain that surrounded him, Lawrence’s view of the world and ways of thinking underwent change. He had become sceptical about the religion of boyhood by the time he was a student at University College Nottingham (*IL* 36–7, 39–41), doubting religious teachings and the existence of a god who allows human suffering. For some time, sharpened by his philosophical discussions with Bertrand Russell during 1915 and his readings in the pre-Socratic philosophers, notably Heraclitus, he had sought a wider basis for religious faith than Christianity. In late 1915, shortly before he left London for Cornwall, Lawrence wrote ‘The Crown’, six essays concerning the disintegration of society resulting from the war, that

reveal something of Lawrence's state of mind about war and religion: the conflict in Europe has brought about a state of chaos and darkness in contrast to a Christian vision of a harmonious universe (*RDP* 259–61). This notion of a dark cosmic state of flux is remote from any sense of redemption. The third essay in 'The Crown', 'The Flux of Corruption', is integral to the pessimism of *Women in Love*.

In Cornwall, partly through proximity to the composer Philip Heseltine, who spent time with him there, Lawrence became interested in Madame Blavatsky and the occult, and extended his reading in pre-Christian and non-Western religion and mythology. Dr David Eder, a friend who was a Freudian and had interests in the occult, stimulated Lawrence's interest in Blavatsky.¹ Heseltine was also a student of Celtic cultures, although the young Cornish farmer William Henry Hocking would have been Lawrence's main source of information about local Celtic lore and myth. Awareness of the ancient cultures that surrounded Lawrence in Zennor contributed to the development of new dimensions of thinking. Perhaps also on account of the predominant Western, rationalist values of an establishment that professed Christian ethics but directed war policy and the use of deadly mechanised weapons of war, Lawrence developed an affinity with pre-Christian, pre-historic cultures, and, most notably at this moment in his life, the Celtic.

During his time in Cornwall, Lawrence's desire for close male friendships became more marked. Birkin's wish for *Blutbrüderschaft* with Gerald in *Women in Love* reflects Lawrence's own wish for the bond of close friendship he initially sought with John Middleton Murry, during the time when Murry was living at Zennor. Lawrence's relationship with Hocking is also sometimes assumed to be homoerotic or even homosexual in nature. In his psychoanalytic study of Lawrence, James Cowan considers these inclinations to be a consequence of the period of severe crisis Lawrence suffered during his time in Cornwall.² He characterises the attractions Lawrence felt not necessarily as homosexual desire but rather as a wish to relate to a loving father, a

relationship that had been denied him in earlier life on account of his over-identification with his mother.³ Crises from early life, such as a damaged relationship with a parent, can be revived by a severely traumatic adult experience, such as Lawrence suffered during his early time in Cornwall.⁴ Mark Kinkead-Weekes considers that although there was probably same-sex attraction between Lawrence and Hocking, it is unlikely they had a sexual relationship.⁵ Frieda suggested in a letter to Murry in 1953 that Lawrence may have tasted “the forbidden fruit” with Hocking.⁶ In *Kangaroo* (1923) the Hocking figure is given the phallic name of John Thomas. This implies at least an intimate male friendship. A significant aspect of Lawrence’s attraction to Hocking is the young farmer’s association with Celtic culture: “There is something manly and independent about him – and something truly *Celtic* and unknown – something non-christian, non-European, but strangely beautiful and fair in spirit, unselfish” (2L 664).

Lawrence’s desire for close male friendship was strong, and especially so at certain periods of his life, notably in Zennor and also in Mexico as reflected in the grandiose or idealised figure of Ramón and his bond with Cipriano.⁷ Same-sex inclinations are suggested in other Lawrence works, such as the bathing episode in *The White Peacock*, and some early biographical details.⁸ The cancelled Prologue to *Women in Love* offers insight into the torment of conflicted desire. Lawrence writes about both the anguish of contradictory erotic feelings and the strength of desire for men as experiences he understood well. The dark-eyed type of man Birkin is drawn to is “a strange Cornish type of man, with dark eyes like holes in his head ... and full, heavy, softly-strong limbs” (WL 505), which can be associated with Hocking. Indeed, a photograph of Hocking shows a figure with characteristics of the dark Cornish man Lawrence describes.⁹

Lawrence took a special interest in Hocking for a while, recognising his intellectual curiosity, thwarted by a background of “centuries of sensuous culture”, as Lawrence described it in a letter to Barbara Low in August 1916 (2L 642). The phrase oddly

suggests some incipient kinship with the West African statuette in *Women in Love*, the work that Lawrence was writing during the same period. He seems to suggest that in the case of the African female figure the primitive state of mind involves feeling rather than deliberate thinking: “She knew what he [Birkin] himself did not know. She had thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge behind her” (WL 253).

Marianna Torgovnick’s response to this passage is that it is an example of “expressionist misreading”.¹⁰ Like many Westerners of his time, and even of our own, Lawrence tended to see art of Africa and Oceania as primitive and also erotic, Torgovnick says, as a misinterpretation of the cultures that produced the works.¹¹ Torgovnick states that in *Women in Love* the primitive, represented by the African statuette, is feminine and degenerative, whereas in *The Plumed Serpent* the primitive is masculine and regenerative.¹² The association of the female statuette with Hocking may then suggest Lawrence’s attraction to him in a way that threatens his own sense of his sometimes fragile masculinity.

During his stay in Zennor Lawrence began work on *Studies in Classic American Literature*, in which he explored works that at the time had barely been studied as literature even by Americans. Versions of eight of these essays were serialised in *The English Review* between 1918 and 1919 and all were extensively revised in 1923 at Kiowa Ranch. The final work was published in America in 1923 and in England in 1924. Lawrence had known some of the works explored in the essays from childhood, notably the *Leatherstocking Tales*.¹³ His keen enthusiasm for Fenimore Cooper is evident, as it is for Melville’s and Dana’s evocations of the long voyages in southern seas and the power of oceans, especially the Pacific Ocean, “the home of all the waters” (SCAL 289). In the earlier versions of the *Tales* in particular, Lawrence vividly evokes the close male friendships between men of different races, Ishmael and the Polynesian Queequeg in *Moby-Dick* (SCAL 296–7) and Natty Bumppo, the white huntsman, and the Indian Chingachgook in Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* (SCAL 215). Such mixed-race

male relationships became compelling to Lawrence himself. A strong element in his attraction to Hocking lies in the allure of his Celtic heritage. Later, in *The Plumed Serpent*, Ramón is a charismatic Mexican leader, compelling and attractive both to men and to women. Lawrence ascribes the same fascination with exotic races to Cooper, who, he said, “dreamed his true marriage with the aboriginal psyche” (SCAL 217). However, such speculations do not appear in the revised *English Review* version, nor in the later published version of the *Studies* of 1923–24, which Lawrence rewrote extensively for American readers.

Kangaroo is Lawrence’s account of his residence in Australia in 1922, and is also in part a distillation of his years in England during the Great War, in London and in Cornwall. The period of twenty-one months he spent in Cornwall was a respite from the war but one where Lawrence remained always aware of its horror and its catastrophic effects. His recollections are conveyed by Richard Lovatt Somers, Lawrence’s surrogate in *Kangaroo*. Somers absorbs Celtic lore and culture during the long hours he spends with John Thomas (based on Hocking). They work together all day “with the savage moors all round, and the hill with its pre-Christian granite rocks rising like a great dark pyramid on the left, the sea in front” (K 236). John Thomas “loved a half-philosophical, mystical talking about the sun, and the moon, the mysterious powers of the moon at night, and the mysterious change in man with the change of seasons, and the mysterious effects of sex on a man” (K 236). Somers also recalls an occasion when he lay alone on the sheaves of corn as night fell and imagined himself “Over the border, in that twilight, awesome world of the previous Celts”. He experiences “The spirit of the ancient, pre-Christian world ... invade him in the savage dusk”, and in this state he feels he is initiated into “the mystery of blood-sacrifice” (K 237).

The strength of Lawrence’s continuing awareness of pre-Christian Celtic culture and of Cornwall in *Kangaroo* also emerges in the narrative of the Somers’s lives in and near Sydney. William James Trewhella, known as Jaz, brother-in-law to the Somers’s

neighbours, is Cornish. He is initially described as looking Irish with an emphasis on his Celtic heritage (*K* 29–30). Having suffered poverty and deprivation in his childhood in Cornwall, Jaz is dismissive when Somers mentions the “magic in the atmosphere” he himself recalls from Cornwall (*K* 61). Jaz’s sense of the “magic”, however, proves actually to be alive when he recognises in Harriett/Frieda “the queen that slumbers somewhere in every Cornish imagination ... The Celt needs the mystic glow of real kingliness. Hence”, reflects Somers, “his [Jaz’s] loneliness in the democratic world of industry, and his social perversity” (*K* 71). The Cornish spirit becomes an emblem of genuine social values in the diminished modern world. Some of the potency of Celtic culture is now weakened for Jaz, but for Lawrence it is a defence against drably prosaic contemporary society. This contrast between the significance of primitive cultures and the shallowness of Western culture in the 1920s became dominant in Lawrence’s thinking and judgment, for example in *St. Mawr*.

Jaz has uncertain loyalties to each of the two political groups in the novel: the Socialists, led by Struthers, and their bitter opponents, Kangaroo’s Fascist Diggers. Somers comments to Kangaroo that “Celts—Cornish, Irish—they always interest me”, to which Kangaroo responds that Trewhella, like his kind, is “the instinctive traitor” (*K* 206). In his reply Somers voices Lawrence’s commitment to Celtic people: “They don’t believe in our gods, in our ideals. They remember older gods, different ideals ... They are nearer the magic of the dark world”. Here “dark” has profound significance related to the “Tuatha De Danaan”, the ancient Irish gods who existed in the “proper dark”, the prehistoric time before the golden age.¹⁴ Lawrence first used the term “Tuatha De Danaan” in the poem ‘Mutilation’, written in Wolfratshausen in 1912, where he referred to the “Tuatha De Danaan” as “Magnificent ghosts of the darkness” (*Poems* 172–3). Lawrence probably knew about the mythical Irish gods from his reading of Yeats’s “Celtic Twilight” works of the 1890s. Somers is also unable to commit himself to the Socialist leader, Struthers. Following an encounter with Struthers

he reflects on the emptiness of Christian teaching as the underpinning of Socialism: "He wanted men once more to refer the sensual passion of love sacredly to the great dark God, the Nameless, of the first dark religions" (K 202). The leader of each political faction fails because neither is responsive to the deep forces of spiritual power.

Lawrence continued to pursue the idea of a place where he could live in a small community among chosen friends, but the realities of his finances, the great barriers set up by the fact of war, and the unwillingness of others to share his utopian aspiration made it unattainable. After spending several years in southern Europe, then travelling not westward but eastward to Ceylon and Australia, he and Frieda eventually reached America, where they went to Taos, New Mexico, close to Taos Pueblo, in September 1922 at the invitation of Mabel Dodge Luhan. Witter Bynner, in whose house in Santa Fe the Lawrences spent their first night in New Mexico, commented later: "Lawrence [was] always seeking a farm as a headquarters for a group he could head".¹⁵ Lawrence's last appeal to his closest friends to join him in Taos was at the ill-fated Café Royal dinner in December 1923 when only Lady Dorothy Brett agreed to accompany him.¹⁶

In the American Southwest and in Mexico, particularly upon his return from Europe in March 1924, Lawrence found a degree of fulfilment in a new world. However, after his arrival in New Mexico in September 1922, Lawrence came to realise that many of his previous impressions of America, conspicuously those of Indians, did not correspond with the reality. He gradually came to recognise that the lives and beliefs of Indians in New Mexico and beyond differed from the simplistic stereotypes he had absorbed from Cooper, and that the cultures of even different tribes in the same region were quite distinct. Within a few weeks he requested a typescript of *Studies in Classic American Literature* from his agent in London and began rewriting. The essays were less well received in America than they had been in England. Although they were the first comprehensive study of American literature, to many in

America they did not seem appropriate in approach and language. Lee M. Jenkins quotes indignant comments by some American readers and critics, such as “D. H. Lawrence Bombs Our Literary Shrines”, and the objection that, as a foreigner, Lawrence gives “a criticism of a life of which [he] knows nothing”.¹⁷ In the second version, Lawrence removed the “esoteric” psychological material from the original and used more popular language, often amounting to slang.¹⁸ He completed the revised version in New Mexico in 1923.

From early in his life Lawrence had had an enthusiastic interest in the American West, from Buffalo Bill and the Wild West to “Red Indian” shows and entertainment, all strengthened by his enthusiastic youthful reading of Cooper. Although he soon realised that the reality was different from his earlier impressions and more complex, his romanticised expectations did not entirely disappear. Wayne Templeton has demonstrated Lawrence’s lack of deep understanding of the complexities of Indian life and culture and of the differences between the cultures of distinct tribes, partly as a result of his ignorance of Indian languages and thus of cultural distinctions.¹⁹ In addition, Lawrence was inclined to see Indian life as static. Neil Roberts notes that Lawrence tended to regard indigenous peoples as unchangingly part of the land, as if history and cultural evolution bring “a future for the white man” only.²⁰

In ‘Indians and an Englishman’, published in the *Dial* in February 1923, Lawrence records his responses to a festival at an Apache reservation that he visited just a few days after his arrival in Taos. He writes with some humour about his own shock, as a European brought up on Cooper, when he is confronted with actual Indians, and he also observes the incongruity of the cultural mélange of the attire of some of the Indian men, sitting in a circle around the fire where an old man chants a lengthy traditional narrative. Some of the men smoke or chew gum, wearing tribal clothing or casual American dress, yet at some level they are all absorbed in the ritual. Lawrence experiences “a deep pathos” for the “old bronze-resonant man with his eyes as if glazed in old

memory” (MM 119). He feels a bond with the ancient culture transmitted by this figure:

I don't want to live again the tribal mysteries my blood has lived long since. I don't want to know as I have known, in the tribal exclusiveness. But every drop of me trembles still alive to the old sound, every thread in my body quivers to the frenzy of the old mystery. (MM 120)

Upon returning to New Mexico in March 1924 following a brief visit to Europe, Lawrence was more deeply integrated into life in the Southwest and then in Mexico. He worked hard to make Kiowa Ranch, now renamed for the Indian tribe that had lived in the area, more solid and hospitable. Before returning to Mexico in October, he and Frieda, together with Dorothy Brett, lived at Kiowa, in the only residence he and Frieda ever owned. There he appears to have found peace and a sense of community. For a brief period, Lawrence had possibly come as close as was likely to achieving his ideal of Rananim. In July he wrote to Rolf Gardner:

Here, when we have the camp just above the cabin, under the hanging stars, and we sit with the Indians round the fire, and they sing till late into the night, and sometimes we all dance the Indian tread-dance – then what is it to me, world unison and peace and all that. (5L 67)

The developments in Lawrence's philosophy and religious views that began in Cornwall and Australia evolved further in the American Southwest and in Mexico. He internalised elements of the culture of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and also of what he referred to in *The Plumed Serpent* as “that timeless, primeval passion of the prehistoric races” surviving in Mesoamerican Indians in Mexico (PS 117). He came to associate other pre-colonial, pre-Christian cultures with the same primitive power. Kate Leslie's Irish-Celtic heritage gives her some access to that dimension: “Ah

the dark races! Kate's own Irish were near enough, for her to have glimpsed some of the mystery" (PS 148). Later, as the goddess Malintzi, she has a more emphatic connection with the prehistoric dark gods: "Kate was more Irish than anything, and the almost deathly mysticism of the aboriginal Celtic or Iberian people lay at the bottom of her soul" (PS 415). We learn more about Kate's Irish-Celtic associations in *Quetzalcoatl*, the earlier version of the novel, than in *The Plumed Serpent*.²¹ Her husband had deep patriotic ties to Ireland, but Kate's own bonds, through her aristocratic Anglo-Irish family who reside in England, are less convincing: she does not manifest the deeper spirit of cultural renewal central to the revivalist movement of the late nineteenth century.²² Lawrence recognises that the presence of the dark Celtic gods is hidden, and asserts they cannot be extinguished: "Ireland would not and could not forget that other old, dark, sumptuous living. The Tuatha De Danaan might be under the western sea. But they are under the living blood too, never quite to be silenced" (PS 415).

Torgovnick observes that in *The Plumed Serpent* it is the male who embodies the primitive. Torgovnick is referring here to the regenerative image of the idealised noble savage, the aspect of the primitive Lawrence derived from nineteenth-century sources.²³ This is evident in the enhanced status of Ramón and Cipriano, contrasted with that of Kate, as a woman. The strong independent woman of the earlier part of the novel, her power now enhanced by association with the dark Celtic gods, is nevertheless diminished alongside "the old, terrible bond of the blood-unison of man" (PS 417). Kate, although soon to be installed as a goddess, rides to her marriage ceremony side-saddle on a donkey while Cipriano goes ahead on a black Arab horse (PS 319). Towards the conclusion of the novel, as Kate ponders her options about staying in Mexico, it seems the strong woman is restored. Lawrence however introduces the deeply misogynistic image of a "grimalkin" (PS 438), a repugnantly negative term applied to unmarried women over fifty who are seen as grey and repellent, to each other and to men. It serves as a threat to motivate Kate to abandon her intention of

visiting her family in England and remain in her marriage to Cipriano. The term, meaning essentially a witch, is applied to a powerful woman as a device to undermine and control her.

In January 1924, two months before leaving England to return to New Mexico, Lawrence stayed briefly with the painter Frederick Carter in Pontesbury, Shropshire. There he visited an ancient rock formation known as the Stiperstones, imbued with sinister legend, which included the Devil's Chair. This ill-omened setting – “where the spirit of aboriginal England still lingers, the old savage England” (*SM* 73) – inspired a central episode in the novella *St. Mawr*, as the site of the horse's symbolic defeat of Rico's masculinity. This renewed contact with ancient English lore and dark magic, combined with Celtic and Native American culture, led to the composition of *St. Mawr*, a powerful critique of the decadent culture that Lawrence had recently observed in Europe. He completed the novella at Kiowa Ranch, between his first and second visits to Mexico, at the same time and in the same frame of mind as when he was reflecting on the essay ‘Pan in America’.

‘Pan in America’ invokes the spirit of the ancient god Pan, not the sanitised pantheism of Wordsworth or Emerson, but a demon, an uncompromising pre-Christian power of nature. The formidable presence of Pan is at one with the spirit of prehistoric Celtic and Meso-American cultures. It seems to Lawrence that in America, a vast continent that was largely unpopulated, especially by Christian Westernised peoples, “the oldest of all old Pan is still alive” (*MM* 157). The spirit of the god is chiefly found in vegetable nature, where no animals or other humans are present. The huge emblematic pine tree that “rises like a guardian spirit” in front of Lawrence's house embodies this power: “The tree has its own aura of life ... still within the allness of Pan” (*MM* 157–8). To Lawrence the tree is a live being to which he has a profound attachment.

In *St. Mawr* Lawrence delivers a devastating criticism of the superficiality of contemporary Western European society, in part by contrasting it with the values of primitive cultures, Celtic and Native American. Only *St. Mawr* – the indomitable stallion with his

“lovely red-gold colour, and a dark, invisible fire [that] seemed to come out of him” (*SM* 28) – is an ideal virile male who cannot be mastered or controlled by any man except one of equal male energy. With an uncanny mystical power, St. Mawr undermines Rico’s masculinity, initially in Hyde Park and finally at the Devil’s Chair.²⁴ Lou Carrington, Lawrence’s spokesperson, is an unrelenting critic of the frenetic seeking after pleasure Lawrence loathed in Western Europe in the early 1920s: “Everything intensely thrilling, and so innerly wearisome” (*SM* 45). As Carol Siegel notes, Lawrence assigns a woman, Lou, the power to be the voice of criticism and the keeper of values.²⁵ In this society men have no spunk. Lou’s husband Rico’s superficiality and lack of male strength are reflected in his preference for cars over horses, illustrating Lawrence’s judgment in ‘Pan in America’ that modern man has allowed “engines or instruments” to “intervene between him and the living universe”(*MM* 162). Through Rico, a fashionable artist, Lawrence also skewers the contemporary “abstract” painters, such as Duncan Grant, whose work he considered symptomatic of the superficiality and decadence of the time. At his first sight of the magnificent red horse, Rico’s response is: “He’d be marvellous in a composition. That colour!” (*SM* 33). He is portrayed as a painter who perceives life in terms of form rather than apprehending the living vitality and character of what is before his eyes. Seeing Lewis and the horse together, he envisages another modish painting: “They’d be *so* amusing to paint: such an extraordinary contrast!”²⁶

In New Mexico and finally at Las Chivas, Lou seeks genuine masculinity in an ancient culture. St. Mawr’s two grooms, the Celtic-Welsh Lewis and the half-Navaho, half-Mexican Phoenix, both have prehistoric and pre-Christian ancestry associated with authentic masculinity which is at the core impervious to Western female power. Lewis, alluded to as “the little aboriginal” (*SM* 34), is an unassailable male. His “uncanny pale-grey eyes” (*SM* 37) suggest an association with a mystical realm. Always impeccably proper in his role as a groom and a servant to Mrs Witt, he never

yields to her in his masculine nature. He tolerates having his hair cut, but refuses to allow female interference with his inviolate male beard (*SM* 57–8). Similarly, his rejection of marriage comes from his male pride: “He did not want to touch her, nor to be touched by her. He kept his spirit there, alert, on its guard, but out of contact” (*SM* 106). Phoenix has been corrupted by Western values, even more so when he returns to America. He resembles Rico in his “childish, spellbound absorption in the motor-car, or in the moving-pictures, or in an ice-cream soda” (*SM* 136), but retains some of his aboriginal heritage. Lou briefly considers taking Phoenix as a mate but realises he would never respect a white woman. He responds only to “the almost watery softness of the Indian woman’s dark, warm flesh” that his nature as “an old, secretive, rat-like male”.

Lou’s Las Chivas ranch closely resembles Lawrence’s Kiowa, down to the pine tree that towers in front of the house: “a bristling, almost demonish guardian ... A passionless, non-phallic column” (*SM* 144). Lou’s chosen idyllic place is not a community, nor does she seek one. She serenely contemplates a life of isolation in communion with nature, knowing that some spirit of wild America, to whom her “sex is deep and sacred” (*SM* 155), needs her. If she does take a man it will have “a meaning and a mystery that penetrates my very soul”, but he will not be a sexual being. David Ellis suggests that Lou’s frame of mind may reflect Lawrence’s own renunciation of sex at the time, referring to the situation at the end of his short story ‘The Border Line’ that may express Lawrence’s reaction to Frieda’s assumed affair with Murry in late 1923.²⁷

Siegel sees the conclusion of *St. Mawr*, when Mrs Witt joins Lou at Las Chivas, as the anticipation of “the modern feminist dream of women’s community”.²⁸ This is a compelling image but seems transitory. Mrs Witt appears only to be visiting Las Chivas, not residing there, while Lou is resolved to remain alone unless a perfect man appears. Lou, a strong woman who has destroyed lesser puny males, now waits passively, knowing that a Pan-like spirit, “something to do with wild America”, wants her and loves her. She

awaits an ideal Lawrentian male, and at this final moment realises the perfect man will not appear. She is a woman held inviolate in perfection, jealously protected from the possession of a man who does not meet the highest ideals of masculinity.

The power of primitive cultures was of most intense importance to Lawrence during the periods he spent in Cornwall in late 1915–1917 and in Mexico in early 1925. Both were times of crisis and anxiety, in Cornwall on account of the war and cataclysmic changes to his life and in Mexico because he was seriously ill while he worked to complete *The Plumed Serpent*. In both periods he felt vulnerable and, it seems likely, uncertain about his masculinity. Some evidence of his anxiety is apparent during the time he spent in Cornwall, when he felt a need for close relationships with men, and in Mexico, reflected in the sometimes idealised relationship between Ramón and Cipriano. That relationship, however, was weakened by the presence of Kate as a woman sometimes intervening between the men. Lawrence's desire to bond with men was less urgent at this later time. As James Cowan says, Lawrence's need for close male friendship in Cornwall was a reaction to his extreme anxiety at the disintegration of his earlier self. After his return to Europe, on the evidence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, his orientation was heterosexual, but concern about his impotence probably dominated.

Despite his religious upbringing, Lawrence was a heretic in the sense that he did not accept the doctrines of the religion of his childhood, and did not think about religion in an orthodox way. He did, however, recognise the centrality and importance of religion in other cultures, as exemplified in his accounts of the Sprouting Corn and the Rattle-Snake Dances of Indians in the American Southwest. His creation of the religion and society of *The Plumed Serpent* sprang from his sympathetic ability to enter into the world and imagination of different cultures, including, as well as the Celtic and Mesoamerican, peasant cultures of Southern Europe, and the Etruscans. His philosophical and courageous approach to his own death confirms his belief in life and humanity.

¹ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 298.

² James Cowan, *Self and Sexuality* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2002).

³ *Ibid.*, 32–3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵ Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912–1922*, 378–81.

⁶ Paul Delany, *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and His Circle in the Years of The Great War* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1979), 312.

⁷ Cowan, *Self and Sexuality*, 58.

⁸ John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years, 1885–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 156–8.

⁹ John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), Illustration 18.

¹⁰ Marianna Torgovnick, *Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990), 161.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125–9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 159, 163–8.

¹³ Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years*, 110.

¹⁴ See Sinead Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 59, 82; and Patrick Lonergan, 'J. M. Synge, Authenticity, and the Regional', in *Regional Modernisms*, eds Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013), for examples such as James Joyce's story 'The Dead', where references are made to the primitive spirit of the West of Ireland.

¹⁵ Edward Nehls, ed., *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography. Volume Two, 1919–1925* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1957–59), 171.

¹⁶ David Ellis, *D. H. Lawrence: Dying Game, 1922–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 148–52.

¹⁷ Lee M. Jenkins, *The American Lawrence* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2015), 28

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30–1.

¹⁹ Wayne Templeton, "'Indians and an Englishman': Lawrence in the American Southwest', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, vol. 25.1–3 (1993–94), 14–34.

²⁰ Neil Roberts, *D. H. Lawrence, Travel and Cultural Difference* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 76.

²¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Quetzalcoatl*, ed. Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1995), 315.

²² Mattar, *Primitivism, Science and the Irish Revival*, 59.

²³ Torgovnick, *Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, 159, 162–4.

²⁴ See for example, Gemma Moss, “‘A Beginning Rather Than An End’: Popular Culture and Modernity in D. H. Lawrence’s *St. Mawr*”, *Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies*, vol. 4.1 (2015), 119–39, 128.

²⁵ Carol Siegel, ‘*St. Mawr*: Lawrence’s Journey Towards Cultural Feminism’, *D. H. Lawrence Review*, vol. 26.1-3 (1995–96), 275–86.

²⁶ See also Margaret Storch, ‘Abstraction and the “Heat of Life”: Lawrence and Contemporary Art’, *D. H. Lawrence Review*, vol. 40.1, 21–36.

²⁷ Ellis, *D. H. Lawrence: Dying Game*, 193–4.

²⁸ Siegel, ‘*St. Mawr*: Lawrence’s Journey Towards Cultural Feminism’.