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**TIME, PLACE AND HISTORY IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S
TRAVEL WRITING**

NEIL ROBERTS

Lawrence largely pre-empted the terms in which his travel writing was to be discussed by coining the phrase “spirit of place”, which he used first in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (serialised in 1918–19), and repeated in *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), *England, My England* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923), *St. Mawr* (1925) and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). Place is an ideological concept for Lawrence because it insists on diversity, resisting the homogenising drive of modernity. In *Sea and Sardinia* he writes, “In the end the strange, sinister spirit of place, so diverse and so adverse in differing places, will smash our mechanical oneness into smithereens” (SS 57) and in *St. Mawr*, less triumphally, “the crude, half-created spirit of place, like some serpent-bird forever attacking man, in a hatred of man’s onward-struggle towards further creation” (SM 150). In *The Plumed Serpent* he goes so far as to identify the spirit of place with the culture of pre-conquest Mexico, suggesting a power that is greater than and impervious to time and history: “the great folds of the dragon of the Aztecs, the dragon of the Toltecs winding around one and weighing down the soul” (PS 50).

A strong sense of place, above all of his native region, is of course a major feature of the fiction Lawrence had written before he formulated the concept of “spirit of place”. But, at least in the more mature of these works, the representation of place is deeply historicised: consider the openings of *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and *The Rainbow* (1915). Sometimes in his travel writing he appears to be constructing place as an ahistorical or trans-historical force, as for example when he describes Sardinia as a place of “remote, ungrappled hills rising darkly, standing outside of life” where his

soul thrills to “the frost among the tangled, still savage bushes” (SS 135, 117). Its people are correspondingly, unlike other Europeans, still “hardy” and “indomitable”, they have never been “subdued” by foreign powers and live “outside the circuit of civilisation” (SS 63, 9). But his travel writing is richest when his sense of place is charged by a historical perspective, above all the impact of modernity on what are still in many ways peasant societies.

In contrast to other places that he wrote about, Lawrence spent only a week in Sardinia. His invariably vivid sketches of its inhabitants were based on single meetings. But even here he realised that the natives were not completely exempt from the effects of time and modernity. In Mandas he meets a group of railway workers, one of whom bursts out with: “At Mandas one does *nothing*. At Mandas one goes to bed when it’s dark, like a chicken. At Mandas one walks down the road like a pig that is going nowhere. At Mandas a goat understands more than the inhabitants understand. At Mandas one needs Socialism” (SS 79). In his other travel writing, from his first sketches in Germany in 1912 to the narratives of life in Oaxaca in 1924, he gave us a series of portraits of people whose lives, like those of the Morels and Brangwens, were in the grip of historical change.

In *Twilight in Italy* (1916) there is a potential novel in the figure of the Lawrences’ landlord in Gargnano, Signor Pietro di Paoli:

a little, shrivelled man, with close-cropped grey hair on his skull, and a protruding jaw, which, with his gesticulations, always makes me think of an ancient, aristocratic monkey. The Signore is a gentleman, and the last, shrivelled representative of his race ...

He loves to speak French, because then he feels grand. He has a queer, naïve, ancient passion to be grand. As the remains of an impoverished family, he is not much better than a well-to-do peasant. (TI 114)

Signor di Paoli's every gesture signifies the historical change that has demeaned his status. Such a figure could easily be lampooned as an effete, pathetic snob, but Lawrence's portrayal is deeply sympathetic. The word "naïve" is always a marker of sympathy in Lawrence, and this is a strange and distinctive naïvety, being a sign of Pietro's breeding. This quality is dramatically portrayed as he removes the malfunctioning spring on his door: "a grey, shaky, highly-bred little gentleman, standing on a chair with a long screw-driver, whilst his wife stood behind him, her hands half-raised to catch him if he should fall" (*TI* 122). His origins are not those of a man who would have to fix his own door. He strives to maintain his dignity and even his manhood in this reduced condition, but depends on his wife. She is also vividly brought before us together with speculation about their relationship: "She subdued her flame of life to the little padrone ... She supported him with her flame ... But she did not believe in him".

In the later chapters of *Twilight in Italy* – written, perhaps significantly, after the outbreak of war – the burden of history is much heavier. As Stefania Michelucci has written, these essays are "characterized by an increasingly sombre tone which seems to issue from Lawrence's awareness that the uncontaminated nature of the lake and mountains surrounding it already belong to the past".¹ The dominant theme of these essays is the economic necessity of emigration – temporary or permanent – to America. Lawrence's comparative distance from the events he narrates in these chapters may also account for a marked difference in mode. The first three chapters, 'The Spinner and the Monks', 'The Lemon Gardens' and 'The Theatre', are revisions of sketches that he had written on the spot in 1913. Their mode, epitomised by the incident of Signor di Paoli fixing the door, is one of vivid, detailed observation. The later chapters by contrast, including those set in San Gaudenzio, seem to have been written afresh in 1915, two years after Lawrence's residence there. The mode in which he writes is much more speculative. When Lawrence writes of Paolo and Maria Fiori, "He never opposed or contradicted her, but stayed apart ... But

sometimes Paolo went into a rage, and then Maria, everybody, was afraid”, or “fairly often on a Sunday Paolo got drunk”, one would never guess that the Lawrences spent a mere eight days at San Gaudenzio (*TI* 162, 163).

Indeed, one could go so far as to describe the mode in which Lawrence describes the Fiori family as allegorical. Paolo represents the immemorial peasant life. He is fatalistic about physical hardship and restricted horizons. He has a quasi-religious respect for those (including the Lawrences) whom he considers “Signoria”. This respect is often misdirected, but Lawrence approves of it in principle. The couple are conceived as opposites. Paolo has “a subtle intelligence in feeling” but “the mind was unintelligent”; Maria “was much sharper and more adaptable to the ways of the world” but also “much coarser, more vulgar” (*TI* 157–8). Lawrence may have drawn on this contrast between the conservative man and the outward-looking woman when imagining the male and female Brangwens in the early pages of *The Rainbow*.

In their first child, Giovanni, “the fusion of the parents was perfect” (*TI* 157). He was “beautiful, gentle, and courtly like Paolo, but warm, like Maria ... He stood straight and tall, and seemed to look into the far distance with his clear grey eyes. Yet also he could look at one and touch one with his look, he could meet one” (*TI* 158). The antitheses that distinguish Paolo and Maria from each other, in Giovanni form a harmonious whole. He represents the ideal potential of their marriage – the potential of their elements, untouched by history.

In the second brother Marco, however, this harmony has been broken. “[T]here was some discrepancy in him. He was not unified, he had no identity ... There was such a split, a contrariety in his soul, one part reacting against the other” (*TI* 158). The allegorical significance of this difference emerges in the sentence, “It was when Marco was a baby that Paolo had gone to America”. For these Italian peasants, as we shall see, the significance of going to America – indeed the very meaning of America – was very different from what it was soon to be for Lawrence himself.

America is the sign of the historical forces, the forces of modernity, that are undermining the old peasant order. According to Lawrence, it was Maria who motivated Paolo's American exile to work in the gold mines. "She had departed from the old static conception" (TI 159). Though he spent five years in California, Paolo "never really left San Gaudenzio" (TI 163). His soul, polarised to the peasant way of life, is impervious to modernity. Paradoxically, it was Maria who "suffered more bitterly" (TI 163): in a curious turn of phrase (given that she was the motivator), "Paolo had deserted her, she had been betrayed to other men for five years" (TI 164). This twist on the idea of sexual betrayal may of course reflect Lawrence's feelings about Frieda and Ernest Weekley.

The rumours of Maria's infidelity during Paolo's absence allow Lawrence to write, about their third child, "I could never believe Felicina was Paolo's child. She was an unprepossessing little girl, affected, cold, selfish, foolish" (TI 164). Although Lawrence acknowledges that Paolo and Maria were "warm and natural" to her, he asserts that "they did not love her in their very souls, she was the fruit of ash to them". Maria insists that Felicina was born a year after Paolo returned from America, but Lawrence's insinuation suits his allegorical scheme of progressive disintegration, of which America is the sign. In Felicina evidently the peasant virtues that are preserved in Paolo and animate Giovanni are extinct.

By the time of the Lawrences' visit even Giovanni, the harmonious offspring of Paolo and Maria, "would go to America ... The world was not San Gaudenzio to Giovanni" (TI 164). According to Paul Eggert's researches he did not go to America: he once planned to go to Australia but "remained a peasant farmer in San Gaudenzio" (TI 290). We can see the schematic hand of Lawrence's allegory here. While the Lawrences were in San Gaudenzio they were accompanied by Tony Cyriax, a friend of the Garnetts, who stayed there for several months and wrote her own account, *Among Italian Peasants*, published in 1919, three years after *Twilight in Italy*. Cyriax got to know the family much more intimately than Lawrence, but her account of the characters of

Paolo, Maria, Giovanni, Marco and Felicina, and of the family dynamics is very similar to his. She does not, however, link the progressive degeneration of the family's relationships to Paolo's residence in America. Lawrence has made the same observations as Cyriax, but given them an historical significance.

In *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) – in the part of that book which actually is about Mexico, the first four chapters set in Oaxaca – Lawrence's awareness of the effect of historical change comes up against and triumphs over his predilection for the essential and unchangeable otherness of foreign people. These chapters are held together by a tender and moving portrayal of the servant or "mozo" whom the Lawrences inherited with their house in Oaxaca, the young Zapotec Indian Rosalino. Lawrence characterises Mexican Indians with reference to the Aztec myth of the goddess Tonacaciuatl who gave birth to "a razor-edged knife of blackish-green flint" (actually obsidian; *MM* 35). He accounts for their disconcerting and uncommunicative otherness by being "sons of incomprehensible mothers" with "stiff little bodies as taut and as keen as knives of obsidian" (*MM* 36). Rosalino he concedes to be a little different, with "a certain sensitiveness and aloneness, as if he were a mother's boy" (*MM* 35): the first sign of his kinship with the author. At first Lawrence thinks this might because he has "a distant strain of other Indian blood, not Zapotec" (in manuscript he revealingly wrote "Spanish blood") but this lazy racial thinking is soon overturned.

Later in the essay Lawrence becomes exasperated because Rosalino obstinately refuses to help carry furniture and incomprehensibly alternates between happy contentedness and gloomy homesickness for his native village. "The Indian gloom, which settles on them like a black marsh-fog, had settled on him ... The flint knife" (*MM* 41–2). This sounds, as Lawrence does at times, like the complacently confident colonialist explanation of the native, which really explains nothing. But Lawrence is actually setting himself up for a lesson. Lawrence visited Mexico only a few years after the supposed end of the Mexican revolution, and

sporadic political violence continued. Pancho Villa was assassinated only a few days after the end of Lawrence's first visit, in July 1923; he left Mexico for the second time, in December of that year, via the port of Veracruz just before it was occupied by the rebel army of Alfonso de la Huerta. On the train on which Lawrence and Frieda travelled to Oaxaca in November 1924 there were twenty soldiers to guard forty passengers (5L 166).

At the end of 'The Mozo' Lawrence discovers that Rosalino's village had been caught up in de la Huerta's revolt, when the rebels tried to press men into military service. Rosalino refused, and as a consequence "the recruiting soldiers beat him with the butt of their rifles till he lay unconscious, apparently dead" (MM 44). He still suffers from an injured back. This, Lawrence realises, "explains his fear of furniture-carrying, and his fear of being 'caught'". In the most revealing moment in this sketch Lawrence writes, "He is one of those, like myself, who have a horror of serving in a mass of men" (MM 43). Echoes of his Cornwall experience reverberate, seven years later in remote Oaxaca: as he wrote from Higher Tregerthen in June 1916, in response to one of his military medical inspections, "this terrible glamour of camaraderie ... is a decadence, a degradation ... I could not *bear* it – I should die in a week if they made me a soldier" (2L 618).

For all this acute awareness of the effect of history on his Italian and Mexican subjects, Lawrence the narrator of these essays appears exempt from history. He is the privileged traveller with the world at his disposal, free to observe and pass on. In this respect he is the typical British travel writer of the early twentieth century, like Norman Douglas in *Old Calabria* (1915) or Aldous Huxley in *Along the Road* (1925). In *Twilight in Italy* his social position is an important element in the narrative. He and Frieda were desperately poor, living in Gargnano partly because they could not afford Riva on the Austrian side of the border. But once settled in Gargnano the miner's son and former elementary school-teacher is a "signore", a gentleman. Signor di Paolo considers his request to Lawrence to help him with his faulty door-spring "an affair of gentlemen"

(*TI* 123). When Lawrence goes to the theatre he has to “make bows all round” to the village elite who like him occupy boxes (*TI* 133); when he stays up the hill in San Gaudenzio Maria tries to keep him away from disreputable characters: “They are not people for you, Signore. You don’t know them” (*TI* 173). As Lawrence wrote in a letter, “I am a howling gentleman and swell here” and the German landlady of a hotel was “*fearfully* honoured at the thought of coming to afternoon coffee” (*IL* 466). His absence from the performance of *Hamlet* would make it “a bitter occasion” to Enrico Persevalli, the leader of the acting troupe (*TI* 142). This is the man whose London acquaintances were only recently describing him in this style: “a very ‘everyday young man’, with a small, drooping moustache, carefully brushed hair and heavy clumpy boots”, as if he were Leonard Bast in Forster’s *Howards End*.² (Leonard Bast also has a “drooping moustache”: perhaps this was a class stereotype in Edwardian England.)³ Lawrence enjoys the same freedom and social status in *Sea and Sardinia* and of course in *Mornings in Mexico*, where he and Frieda occupy five large rooms around a courtyard and employ a servant. Above all, he is free to leave or to stay. In ‘The Return Journey’, the final essay in *Twilight in Italy*, which is about Lawrence’s second visit to Italy in September 1913, he narrates his meeting with a young man from Streatham (not far from Croydon where Lawrence had been a schoolteacher less than two years earlier), who has exhausted himself by packing as much walking as possible into his short holiday. Later Lawrence thinks about him on his way home and reflects, “Thank God I need not go home: never, perhaps” (*TI* 218). On this journey he is even able to disguise his identity, just because he feels like it. At a place where he stops for tea he pretends to the two old ladies who run it that he is the son of an Austrian doctor “walking for my pleasure through the countries of Europe” (*TI* 208). He explains that he says this because “I did not want to be myself” (*TI* 209): the ultimate freedom of the unencumbered traveller.

Lawrence wrote three travel books about Italy and it is an important setting in two of his novels. This is not surprising given that he spent a total of about five years in the country. His eleven months in Mexico resulted in a novel set entirely in the country, the sketches in *Mornings in Mexico*, and one of his most important short stories, 'The Woman Who Rode Away' (1925). He wrote two novels set in Australia, a country where he lived for only three months. By contrast, nearly two years' residence in Cornwall produced only two short pieces of writing set in the county: thirty pages of *Kangaroo* (1923) and the fifteen-page story 'Samson and Delilah' (1917).⁴

However, the time that Lawrence spent in Cornwall was just as formative as his periods of residence abroad. The critical point I want to make about it is that his experience while in Cornwall could not have been more different from that of the free, privileged traveller who narrates his travel books. That persona is not of course an entirely accurate representation of the Lawrence who lived in Italy and Mexico. He did, as a matter of fact, have to go home from Italy because of Frieda's distress about her children. He finally left Mexico because of a severe breakdown in his health, which he blamed on living in Oaxaca, and he was so sick that he was nearly refused entry into the United States. Life at the place he loved most of all, his ranch in New Mexico, became too harsh for him, especially in winter, though he never gave up dreaming of returning. But none of these constraints compared in severity to the shackles that history imposed on him between 1915 and the end of the war, most of which time he was living in Cornwall. For the first time we see a Lawrence who seems defeated by history, who seeks retreat and isolation rather than engagement. Although he had proposed the idea of Rananim, the ideal community of a small number of like-minded people, some time earlier, it was in Cornwall that it came to dominate his thinking about the future, and it was in Cornwall, thinking about America, that he began to develop the idea of "spirit of place".

'The Nightmare' chapter of *Kangaroo* is unusual in Lawrence, in being an example of formal analepsis, or retrospective narrative. Perhaps the closest other instance is 'The Industrial Magnate' chapter of *Women in Love* (1920), which is also an account of, in Lawrence's opinion, a disintegrative historical process, and perhaps not coincidentally was written in Cornwall. Both analepsis and its opposite prolepsis, or anticipatory narrative, run counter to the usual spirit in which Lawrence writes, because they close off possibility. Prolepsis tells us in advance what the outcome of a narrative will be, as when Forster writes early in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), "It was in this house that the brief and inevitable tragedy of Lilia's married life took place".⁵ In the case of analeptic or retrospective narrative we already know the outcome before it is narrated. This is incompatible with Lawrence's conception of the novel as a "thought-adventure" (ironically it is in 'The Nightmare' chapter itself that he calls Somers "a thought adventurer" [K 238]) in which he is genuinely uncertain how the narrative will develop, as when he began *Women in Love* in 1916 and wrote, "I have begun a new novel: a thing that is a stranger to me even as I write it. I don't know what the end will be" (2L 604). He probably felt like this about *Kangaroo* as a whole, especially about Somers's involvement with the Diggers, but he cannot have felt it about 'The Nightmare' chapter, in which he is revisiting the phase of his life when history pressed him most severely, and he knew all too well what the end would be.

The chapter is full of statements that frame and close off the narrative with knowledge both of the historical outcome and of Lawrence's personal history:

Awful years—'16, '17, '18, '19—the years when the damage was done. The years when the world lost its real manhood. (K 213)

It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter of 1915-1916 the spirit of the old London collapsed ... The integrity of

London collapsed, and the genuine debasement began, the unspeakable baseness of the press and the public voice, the reign of that bloated ignominy, John Bull.

No man who has really consciously lived through this can believe again absolutely in democracy. (K 216)

But it was not till afterwards that he learned that the watchers had lain behind the stone fences, to hear what he and Harriett talked about. (K 218)

The English soul went under, in the war, and as a conscious, proud, adventurous, self-responsible soul, it was lost. (K 222)

Writing like this is the consequence of Lawrence being, if not defeated, then uniquely constrained by a force that he could at best passively resist. The chapter is prompted by the fear that Somers feels in the streets of Sydney after his penultimate, menacing encounter with Kangaroo. Somers's refusal of engagement, the novel's open-endedness, Somers and Harriett leaving Australia "like broken attachments" (K 358) are counterpointed with the conditions that entrapped Somers and Lawrence during the war.

Ottoline Morrell honourably excused Lawrence's vitriolic excesses to Bertrand Russell in these terms: "He *is of course really in the Power of the Authorities* in a way we of the upper classes are not".⁶ He was not the only person of working-class origins to be persecuted because of his resistance to the war, but he was the only one to have written a great novel which was banned because, in the words of one reviewer, "A thing like *The Rainbow* has no right to exist in the wind of war".⁷ William Hazlitt wrote, in mitigation of Wordsworth's sourness of temper and narrowness of mind, "To have produced works of genius, and to find them neglected or treated with scorn, is one of the heaviest trials of human patience".⁸ If this excused Wordsworth's less pleasing characteristics, how much more mitigation could Lawrence claim in 1916! Lawrence went to Cornwall to a large extent because he could not afford to

live anywhere else. He was poor because *The Rainbow* had been banned and it was consequently difficult for him to publish anything else. And the banning of *The Rainbow* had been made much more likely by the militaristic and anti-individualistic atmosphere in which it was published. In other words, it was largely because of the war and “*the Power of the Authorities*” that Lawrence was in Cornwall in the first place.⁹ His eventual expulsion, given his German wife, outspoken anti-war views and unconventional friends, was equally over-determined.

But there is another narrative of Lawrence's time in Cornwall, the one told in his letters, and not surprisingly time and history figure rather differently in this story told without hindsight. Lawrence initially thought of Cornwall as the first step towards America, specifically Florida. Florida was never a very real place in Lawrence's imagination, as New Mexico was to be when he was later invited by Mabel Luhan. Florida is little more than another name for the ideal community of Ranim, though Lawrence increasingly felt that this community could not be established in England. His early letters about his move to Cornwall are full of a rather feverish hope for a new world: “Let us all live together and create a new world”, “we begin the new life in Cornwall”, “in Cornwall and Florida; the germ of a new era”, and, on the day of his arrival in Porthcothan, “This is the first move to Florida. Here already one feels a good peace and a good silence, and a freedom to love and to create a new life” (2L 482, 487, 489, 491). On the same day he answers the question, “Is there a Florida?”: “There is a Florida to be – it must be so ... Here one stands on tiptoe, ready to leap off” (2L 492).

There are a number of striking features of these letters. One that is most relevant to my theme is their strong orientation to a future. Another is that “Florida” is merely a name for this future. The future is not a temporal entity determined by the past and present. On the contrary, it is the repudiation of the past, at least of the personal and historical past, and it has to be willed: “There is a Florida to be – it must be so” (2L 492). Immediately before moving

to Cornwall, when Lawrence was staying with his sister in Derbyshire, he wrote:

One's people are the past – pure, without mitigation. And it is so hard to get to the future: and one *must* look to the future: one must create the future. That is why we go to Florida: a new life, a new beginning: the inception of a new epoch. (2L 488)

Cornwall figures as a prelude to – and, as we shall see eventually, an alternative to – Florida both temporally and spatially: it is as if Lawrence imagines himself literally “leap[ing] off” the Cornish coast to cross the Atlantic (2L 492). Throughout these letters, and even more strongly when Lawrence moved westward to Zennor, one hears a distinctly millenarian note – the “new heaven and new earth” of the Book of Revelation (21.1). The abolition of the secular world in John’s vision is the obvious model for Lawrence’s repudiation of historical reality.

Although Lawrence’s writing in the first weeks of his residence in Cornwall is so resolutely oriented to the future, this temporality is complicated by a strong sense of the past: not, however, the personal and historical past that he has repudiated. “I like Cornwall very much: it is so uncivilised, unchristianised ... It is always King Arthur and Tristan for me ... I am very fond of that pre-Christian flicker of civilisation. But I hate Malory: I hate the Grail and chivalry – lies” (2L 496). This is not an historical but a mythical past, derived more from Lawrence’s earlier reading than from direct experience of his environment, and one that he is careful to separate from its Christianised elements, which belong to history. Again, “it belongs still to the days before Christianity, the days of the Druids, or of desolate Celtic magic and conjuring ... Here I think my life begins again – one is free” (2L 493). This is what the anthropologist Mircea Eliade calls “*illud tempus*”, the mythical past which is also eternally present.¹⁰ In contrast to the imprisoning historical and personal past it leaves him free to “begin again” – it is consonant

with the equally transcendent millenarian future that pervades these letters.

However, Lawrence had already made travel to Florida impossible, at least in the near future. At this stage in the war men were required to “attest” their willingness to be conscripted, by undergoing a medical examination. The Lawrences had passports, but to be free to leave the country he had to attest in the almost certain knowledge that he would be exempted. On 11 December 1915 he went to a recruiting station at Battersea Town Hall but “hated it so much, after waiting nearly two hours, that I came away” (2L 474). He felt that it was “vile and false and degrading, such an utter travesty of action on my part, waiting even to be attested that I might be rejected”. After this he felt that he had “triumphed ... It is only the immediate present which frightens me and bullies me. In the long run, I have the victory”. Perhaps in the long run he did have the victory – after all, his work is still being read and discussed a hundred years later. But, as Mark Kinkead-Weekes says, Lawrence’s failure to emigrate to America in 1915 “was a turning-point which might have made his life very different”.¹¹ And, of course, his work. At this moment Lawrence was in what we might call a classic *Catch-22*. To “attest” his willingness to do something his whole self revolted from would be to submit to “the immediate present which frightens and bullies me” (2L 474) – but only by doing so could he escape to America. He feels “triumph” in his refusal to submit, but its consequence is that, for the rest of the war – for another three years – he remains vulnerable to the bullying powers.

A mere three weeks later he was writing from Cornwall: “I must own to you, that I am beaten” (2L 500). This change of feeling might have been the consequence of the serious illness that he suffered at the beginning of his residence at Porthcothan, combined with a belated realisation of the consequence of his refusal to “attest”. Now he was forced to admit that “There is no Florida, there’s only this, this England, which nauseates my soul”. Now Cornwall, which had initially been, metaphorically, a jumping-off

point for America, begins to supplant it in Lawrence's imagination. Another month on, in February, he writes, "The war, the whole world, has gone out of my imagination ... This Cornwall is very primeval ... It is like the beginning of the world, wonderful: and so free and strong. I feel as if all that Europe were so long ago and so disremembered. It does not exist in me any more" (2L 526). He is "afraid now of America", "afraid of the people", and his half-practical notion of settling in Florida has metamorphosed into a more frankly utopian dream of "a long voyage, into the South Pacific", anticipating his interest in Melville's *Typee*, of which he requested a copy a few months later (2L 527).

The sense of a westward orientation, implicitly or explicitly directed towards America, is revived later in February when Lawrence moves down the coast to Zennor: "I feel a new life, a new world ahead, for us – down towards Lands End there" (2L 551). Now America has become, for the time being at least, openly a metaphor: "I believe, if we cannot discover a terrestrial America, there are new continents of the soul for us to land upon" (2L 555).

The move to Zennor was associated in Lawrence's mind with the establishment of a community with John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield. Rananim was, for the time being, relocated to Cornwall and he wrote, with a disturbingly prescient metaphor, "We can be perfectly happy in Tregerthan [sic] Cottage, if only the world won't stare in at the windows with its evil face" (2L 566). He now envisages living at Tregerthen for "a long while, years" and significantly, for the first time, now that he is reconciled to staying in England he believes the war will end "before next summer" (2L 576). This is another sign of the wishfulness that permeates Lawrence's letters at this time.

The set of ideas, or feelings, about place that emerge in Lawrence's letters at the beginning of his time in Cornwall – Cornwall as a staging-post for America, as a substitute for America, the thought of moving further west along the coast reanimating his faith in "a new life, a new world ahead" (2L 551) – is perhaps the germ of a key aspect of the essay on 'The Spirit of Place' as

Lawrence conceived it in its first version, which may have been written in Cornwall and was certainly written by 1918 when he was still oppressed by the war. *Studies in Classic American Literature* probably originates in his reading of Melville's *Moby-Dick* in February 1916, when these feelings were very active.

In the first 'Spirit of Place' essay he explains the migration of Europeans to America by means of a theory of shifting polarities: the Middle Ages were shaped by a polarity between Rome and Germany; by the Renaissance this had been exhausted and the polarity shifted to Europe and America:

When the great magnetic sway of the mediaeval polarity broke, then those units which were liberated fell under the sway of the new vital currents in the air, and they were borne helplessly as birds migrate, without knowing or willing, down the great magnetic wind towards America, towards the centrality in the New World. So the first individuals were caught up and swept overseas in the setting of the great current. They had no choice, because the influence which was upon them was prior to all knowledge and all option. (*SCAL* 171)

This as it were involuntary migration is not at all the same as the "strange, almost frightening destiny" that drew Italians such as the 'John' of *Twilight in Italy* to America (*TI* 186). The America of *Twilight in Italy* is nothing but the mechanical, commercial, industrial, materialistic portent of "disintegration", as Lawrence puts it when writing about John. It represents enslavement to the historical process. When writing about going to America himself he is at pains to distinguish the land from the society. "The people and the life are monstrous" but "the *skies* are not so old, the air is newer, the earth is not tired" (*3L* 25). In December 1915 he had spoken of his American plans in precisely the involuntary terms that he was later to develop and theorise in 'The Spirit of Place': "I shall not go to America until a stronger force from there pulls me across the sea. It is not a case of my will" (*2L* 474).

Lawrence does not mention Cornwall in ‘The Spirit of Place’, but he does write that “Some races of Europe” were outside the “Latin-Germanic circuit” and “have lain from the beginning under the spell of the great western sea ... Among these are the Iberian and the Celtic” (SCAL 171).

These races have remained true to some principle which was contained in the African and the Druid realities, but which has had no place in the European Christian-social scheme. Therefore they placed themselves in a polarity with the great invisible force of America, they looked to their positive pole into the west, the land of the setting sun, over the great sea to the unknown America. Their heaven was the land under the western wave, the Celtic Tir na Og.

They knew of no America. And yet, in the most immediate sense, they knew America. They existed in the spell of the vital magnetism of the unknown continent. (SCAL 172)

Lawrence had never visited an Iberian or Celtic country other than Cornwall. His sense of the Cornish people’s hostility to the war may lie behind his belief that the Celts were outside the mainstream of European culture, and his assertion that “They knew no America. And yet, in the most immediate sense, they knew America” sounds very like his own feeling about America in early 1916. Above all this passage reflects the convergence of Cornwall and America in his imagination at that period.

Cornwall was a much more profound influence on Lawrence than the very small amount of direct writing about it would suggest. It may, as I have said, have inspired the very idea of spirit of place as it is articulated in the first version of *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Even more profoundly, it altered his relationship to time and history. Poised on this western peninsula between the Europe he increasingly loathed and the America that became more and more a dream or symbol of freedom, Cornwall was the place in which he tried to transcend history.

¹ Stefania Michelucci, 'Introduction' to D. H. Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), xxxvi.

² John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years, 1885–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 231.

³ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941), 109.

⁴ It should be added that echoes of Cornwall permeate *Kangaroo* through the character of Jaz Trewhella.

⁵ E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), 37.

⁶ Quoted in Paul Delany, *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1979), 207 (italics in original).

⁷ Quoted in Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 277.

⁸ William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age* (London: Oxford UP, 1904), 144.

⁹ Ottoline Morrell quoted in Delany, *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare*, 207

¹⁰ See for example Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (London: Routledge, 1988), 94.

¹¹ Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912–1922*, 285.