D. H. LAWRENCE'S THEATRE OF THE SOUTH - WEST

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I

I'm talking about plays: about *Altitude* and about *David*. But not only. I - stranger, foreigner - intend to talk about Lawrence in the South-West: about what he found here, and long after.

II

The fact that we all *know* that New Mexico was the greatest experience from the outside world which Lawrence ever had, and that 'the moment I saw the brilliant, proud morning ... something stood still in my soul, and I started to attend'[1] - this knowledge dazzles us to the fact that it actually took Lawrence some time to find out what kind of an experience he was having here. Those famous remarks about New Mexico were made more than six years after he arrived. This is what he wrote, just days after arriving:

> ...here am I, a lone lorn Englishman, tumbled out of the known world of the British Empire onto this stage: for it

1 *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (New York, 1936), p. 142.

> persists in seeming like a stage to me, and not like the proper world...[2]

In that essay, 'Indians and an Englishman', Lawrence makes the South-West a stage, a circus, a farce, and a comic opera. After a week in Taos he would tell Robert Mountsier (in the first hint of difficulties): 'If it doesn't *suit* me here, I shan't stay more than a month'.[3] Three days later he wrote to Earl Brewster in a very determined way about leaving:

> I don't know how long I shall stick it: probably, as a sort of lesson to myself, until the spring. Then I shall come away. But if I dislike it *too* much, I shall leave as soon as I decide that it is too much.[4]

What he was up against in Taos, of course, was Mabel Ganson Evans Dodge Sterne Luhan: I shall be looking at his version of her in *Altitude*. The letter to Brewster (an American) makes it clear how Mabel was the problem:

> What you dislike in America seems to me really dislikeable: everybody seems to be trying to enforce his, or her, *will*, and trying to see how much the other person or persons will let themselves be overcome ... I dislike that: and I despise it.[5]

2 *Ibid.*, 92.
3 *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. iv., ed. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield (Cambridge 1987), 300 [hereafter *Letters*, iv.]
4 *Letters*, iv. 305.
5 *Letters*, iv. 305.

Consider, therefore,the likelihood of Lawrence being back in Italy by early in November 1922, after (doubtless) a passing visit to England. No *Quetzalcoatl*, no *Plumed Serpent*, no *'Woman Who Rode Away'*, no *St Mawr*, no *Princess*, no *Mornings in Mexico*. No *Altitude*, no *David*. His next book would probably have been a very sour and very European rewriting of *Studies in Classic American Literature*: Taos having been (as Gudrun and Ursula fear marriage will be) an experience, but certainly undesirable, and likely to be the end of experience.[6] And Lawrence would never have had that 'greatest experience of the outside world' at all.

Mabel's extraordinary, theatrical self-obsession - her writing about Lawrence reminds me of a very young child in the way she acknowledges nothing in the world except her own desires - is perfectly described in Lawrence's letter to Brewster after his first few days here: 'People must be very insufficient and weak, wanting, inside themselves, if they find it necessary to stress themselves on every occasion .[7] He may have come to America for a new experience of the 'outside world'; what he *found* was the white world at its most theatrically impossible. Tony Luhan's house, in which he and Frieda lived during those first weeks, was a mere satellite of the big house, caught in the unending orbit of its drama. However, with the mountains also full in view, away

6 *Women in Love*, ed. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen (Cambridge, 1987), 7:21-8..

7 *Letters*, iv. 305.

beyond Mabel's house, the Lawrences' escape route was also clear.

The fact that together Frieda and he *did* manage to live their own lives near Taos in the winter of 1922 (up at Del Monte with the Danes), and then during 1924, up at Kiowa to rebuild it and make it habitable (Kiowa originally of course Mabel's ranch, so that she remained possessive of it even after giving it to Frieda): they lived their own lives without either compromising with Mabel, or finally quarrelling with her. Just riding away from it all would have been so tempting, and at different times both were tempted.... but the Lawrences did what they wanted, without ever being so ungrateful as to reject the person who was (after all) responsible for bringing them here, and who had enriched their lives in so many ways. How to enact gratitude to someone so self-willed, so bullying, without getting caught up in the whirling circles of her needs and fantasies? But they managed it.

III

It was not, however, an accident that Lawrence wrote so much theatre here in the South-West; for, in one sense, he had found himself thrown on to the stage constantly in the play into which Mabel insisted on writing him (as she wrote all the guests encircled in her compound, eating at her table). Her dedication of

her book *Lorenzo in Taos* to Robinson Jeffers very appropriately declares that she wanted to show in it 'how we felt and acted'.[8]

But if life with Mabel was at times tragi-comedy, farce and comic opera, what of Lawrence's experience of the Indians to whom she so ruthlessly directed him? Barely had he arrived before he was sent off with Tony to the Apache festival in Arizona. And then, of course, he wrote it up. He did not write what Mabel wanted, however, and she declared his account 'not very good'.[9] For not only did he declare Taos a stage, and by implication all its inhabitants merely players: he also argued that his experience as a contemporary Anglo did not touch Indian experience at any point.'The voice out of far-off time was not for my ears'. He ends up convinced that 'I don't want to go back to them, ah never ... I can't cluster at the drum any more'.[10] What he had thus started to attend to, in September 1922, was not (as the essay on New Mexico suggests) Indian religion: it was a certainty that his life, and Indian religion, did not meet or touch at any point which mattered.

This, of course, was heresy in Mabeltown, and it is worth stopping a moment to realise just how deeply it went against what peole in Mabel's circle believed: people like the writer Mary Austin and the Indian rights campaigner John Collier. And above all, Mabel was living with Tony Luhan, and would shortly be marrying

8 Mabel Luhan. *Lorenzo in Taos* (New York, 1932), p. [ix].
9 Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, p. 52.
10 *Phoenix*, ed. McDonald, pp. 98-9.

him - thus demonstrating in her own way the relationship of the races. It had been to help promote that relationship that she had persuaded Lawrence to come to Taos in the first place; she had told him 'all I could about Taos and the Indians - and about Tony and me'.[11] Accompanying that letter she sent 'an Indian necklace to Frieda that I thought carried some Indian magic in it ... In the letter I put a few leaves of *desachey*, the perfume the Indians say makes the heart light, along with a little *osha*, the root that is a strong medicine ...'[12] It was to Lawrence the writer who would write about the Indians that she was appealing, with Indian magic and medicine. It says, again, a good deal for Lawrence's self-possession that, instead, he wrote exactly what he wanted. So far as I can see, it took him more than a year, perhaps as long as eighteen months, to escape the certainty that his life, and Indian life, had nothing to do with each other. And even then, he was capable of the deepest cynicism about the ways in which Indian life *could* be viewed by whites: the white gaze made even the most extraordinary Indian ceremonies (like the Hopi Snake Dance) nothing but a kind of circus, here in what he called 'The great Southwest, the national circusground'.[13]

IV

11 Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, p. 4.
12 Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, p. 5.
13 'Just back from the Snake Dance', *D. H. Lawrence and New Mexico*, ed. Keith Sagar (Salt Lake City, 1982), p. 64.

What his two Taos plays do, in quite different ways, is record how his experience changed. The two-scene fragment *Altitude*, from June 1924, demonstrates his comic realisation that white people's reverence for (and belief in) the Indians is both hypocritical and unreal. What he shows there is a oddly comic version of what he was simultaneously writing in 'The Woman Who Rode Away'. In *David*, a year later, however, he would write one of his first deeply sympathetic imaginative accounts of Indian experience; the experience which in 1928 he would celebrate in his essay on New Mexico.

I hope you find this surprising. If you think of Lawrence's plays, you probably think them - like Katherine Mansfield - *'black* with miners';[14] quintessentally work from Eastwood. I saw *A Collier's Friday Night* on stage in London in 1968 - my first Lawrence play - and still do not forget the number of times men took off their boots, and put them on again, in the course of the evening: to say nothing of the moments when they were going round the stage with their lace-ends flapping.[15] That's social realism.

It probably comes as a shock, then, to realise that three of Lawrence's ten plays not only had nothing to do with miners but were either conceived - or actually written - within eighteen miles

[14] Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D.H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912-22* (Cambridge,1995), p. 479

[15] Royal Court Theatre, directed by Peter Gill

of this room; they were, in the second of the senses in which I am using the phrase, his theatre of the South-West.

Lawrence had last written a play in 1918: *Touch and Go*. That was the end of his English theatre. But when he and Frieda and Dorothy Brett got back here in March 1924, significantly the-one time actress Ida Rauh arrived too, to stay with Mabel. Ida and Lawrence talked about theatre immediately they met (he had met very few actors, even retired ones, in the course of his career); and it was with her, her son Daniel Eastman and partner Andrew Dasburg that the Lawrences took part in games of acting and charades at various times during the spring and summer of 1924. She was the first actress with whom he had a chance of doing this. Brett remembered how

> You [Lawrence] and Ida are the stars... you and Ida are in bed together, lying side by side under a blanket on the floor, and quarrelling as to who should get up, as you think you hear a burglar in the house. The quarrel is an exact replica of yours and Frieda's famous quarrels, and we are all ... helpless with laughter.[16]

Mabel Luhan also had happy memories of charades: Lawrence 'was so gay and witty when he was playing! He could imitate anything or anybody.'[17] One evening, according to Mabel,

[16] Dorothy Brett, *Lawrence and Brett* (Philadelphia, 1933), p. 125.

[17] Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, p. 68.

we acted a scene that represented me taking Tony to Buffalo to introduce him to my mother! Lawrence was my mother, Ida was I, and Tony was Tony! Spud was my step-father, Monty; and Frieda was 'a guest.' That was so funny we couldn't finish the act![18]

It sounds in fact a highly dangerous subject, concentrating as it did on the gap between the Anglo and the Indian. Humiliating Tony in public was never wise, either, and this scene was potentially explosive. Brett's account of the same evening records the explosion:

> We have a hilarious evening of charades. You are eager, alive, and full of fun. Even Tony is roped in: solemn, bewildered, he re-enacts with Mabel their marriage.
>
> 'I have married an Indian Chief,' announces Mabel [presumably Ida].
>
> 'No,' says Tony, with offended dignity, 'not a chief.' And he turns and walks solemnly out of the room, which brings the charade to an abrupt finish.[19]

The same danger of offence was however true of a good deal that they performed: Mabel remembered Lawrence and Frieda 'being Tony and me in the front seat of the car',[20] again a potentially explosive subject, with Frieda (I suspect) being Tony

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 190.
[19] Brett, *Lawrence and Brett*, p. 125.
[20] Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, p. 190.

Luhan (she had the figure for it) and Lawrence being Mabel. Mabel simply commented that 'We used to laugh until we were tired';[21] the theatricality of her own life could accommodate such ups and downs, though Tony could not.

V

The matter of Tony and Mabel, of the Indians and the Anglos, was something to which Lawrence returned. On 19 June 1924, he and Frieda and Brett came down from Kiowa for a visit to Taos, and met a number of Mabel's guests, including Clarence Thompson and Alice Sprague. The writer Mary Austin was either there at the time or had been there very recently. According to Mabel, the play's starting point had been Lawrence's annoyance with the word 'fine': "'Fine - fine - fine! That's all Americans have to say about themselves!" Lorenzo had scolded one day. "I'll show them."'[22] Brett, writing a few months after Mabel, told an elaborated version of the same story: how, one morning, 'there is no Amelia [in fact Emilia: Mabel's cook], so you and I [Lawrence and Brett], finding ourselves the first up, cook the breakfast. The others come in one by one, and each one, to your polite amused inquiry as to how they feel, say: "Fine--oh, fine!" On this theme you start, later, to write a play.'[23] Spud Johnson, a friend who was a regular visitor but not actually there in mid-June, offered a very

[21] *Ibid.*, p.190.
[22] Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, p. 177.
[23] Brett, *Lawrence and Brett*, p. 108.

different version of the play's origin: a group production. This would have been characteristic of Lawrence. He had done exactly the same while living with Frieda, Philip Heseltine and Dikran Kouyoumdjian in Cornwall, back in 1916: 'At night we write a play, which is rather fun ... all of us together, a comedy for the stage, about Heseltine and his Puma and so on.[24]' Nothing exists of that comedy, although I suspect that Halliday and the Pussum in *Women in Love* are its survivors. Spud believed that, for *Altitude*,

> [Lawrence] scribbled the opening lines on the back of a candy box one evening in Mabel Luhan's living room, with several friends present offering suggestions as to who the characters should be and what they should do and say.[25]

The joke about Americans saying 'fine', however, occupies only a few moments of the first scene; it is secondary to the individual self-images of the various characters, and in particular to the conflict between the white idealising of the Indians, and how they actually treat the Indians. The Mabel character unthinkingly and habitually tells the Indian Joe to do things:

> MABEL: Fetch a pail of water, Joe.[26]

When he brings the water, he is told

[24] *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. ii., ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge, 1982), 508, 501.

[25] D.H. Lawrence , *Plays*, ed. Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen (Cambridge, 1999), p. lxii.

[26] *Altitude*, *Plays*, ed. Schwarze and Worthen, 543:31

> MABEL: You can go and chop some wood if you like.

The stage direction runs: '(JOE *grunts and doesn 't like*)' - but as soon as he reappears, Mabel says to him:

> MABEL: Can you stay help wash dishes? Put some water in the kettle. [27]

Shortly afterwards, her husband Tony enters:

> MABEL: Like a fried egg?
> TONY: Yes, I think so.
> MABEL: Well get up and fry it then.[28]

All the time, she and Mary Austin are also insisting upon the Indians' natural superiority to the whites, and Mabel is given this devastatingly simple speech:

> MABEL: The Indians do feel fine. They always feel fine. That's because they live right. They've got something that white people haven't got. We've got to get it. That's what we're here for. That's what I married Tony for.

[27] Ibid. 544:24-5, 546:25-6.

[28] Ibid. 548:5-7

The parody of Mabel is here shading into simple truth; she herself might not have objected to this account. That's Mabel; this is Mary:

> MARY: I think the Indians are almost *always* right... Mabel, when you say the Indians have that wonderful thing that white people haven't got, I think *I* have it. --Joe, more wood on the fire.--The Indians have the rhythm of the earth ...[29]

She and Mabel thus collaborate in fantasies of Indian superiority, whilst treating them as servants. This is Mabel.

> MABEL: ... the Indians have *life*. They have *life*, where we have *nerves*. Haven't you noticed, Mary, at an Indian dance, where the Indians all sit banked up on one side, and the white people on the other, how *all* the life is on the Indian side, and the white people seem so dead. The Indians are like glowing coals, and the white people are like ashes.

Ida slyly asks her:

> IDA: Well Mabel, and which side are you on?
> MABEL: [Stage direction *'snorts'*] The Indian.

There are various protests - Spud saying

[29] Ibid. 547:34, 548:25-7

> SPUD: I don't know that I feel so *ashy* at an Indian dance...

and Clarence camply complaining that

> CLARENCE: I *certainly* don't get any glow from the Indians...

but Mabel rounds on them as betrayers:

> MABEL: Well, you all know what I mean. And you do *all feell it*. Anyway you *look* it.[30]

She is the target of some of Lawrence's wickedest impersonations of her behaviour and point of view: this is the Mabel he himself enacted in charades, for sure. She constantly rushes at things: the stove, the bacon, the coffee. She is full of energy for the Indian, for non-Anglo life, but when Clarence proposes going down to Taos Plaza in rose-coloured trousers, she is vehemently against it:

> MABEL: Think how the people will *jeer* and then talk. Another sign of vice from over here.[31]

But even that point is not quite as clear as she would like it. In the debate over rose-coloured trousers, she decides to ask Tony what he thinks of Clarence going out in them:

[30] Ibid. 543:37 - 544:13
[31] Ibid. 545: 32-3

MABEL: Let's ask Tony. He sees both sides. Tony ! Tony ! Clarence is going down to the Plaza in those trousers. What you think of it.

Tony's reply is characteristic:

TONY: Make a guy of himself, sure. [32]

- A lovely example of good, solid, rounded prejudice against the unconventional. The other Indian, Joe, the servant, is then asked for his opinion, and makes things even more confusing for the poor Anglos. What does he think of the trousers?

JOE: They're fine for a dance, for an Indian.[33]

For the lesser race, fine; fine for the silly things which Indians get up to, like dancing ... but they are not right for a *white* man!

Tony's status as Indian seer is also compromised by his choice of breakfast food when he finds there is no cook and no breakfast egg.

TONY: Well, I guess I eat a can of sardines.

[32] Ibid. 547: 1-4
[33] Ibid. 547: 8

Mabel is outraged by this cowardly act of submission to the tin-can culture of the white man:

MABEL: Tony, you don' want a can of sardines for breakfast.

Tony's response?

TONY: Guess I do!
MABEL: Oh dee--ar![34]

Mabel however finally gets Tony to

MABEL: ...explain how the Indians feel when they feel good...

and we may well anticipate something impressive: the moment of revelation is upon us, the whole scene has led up to it. This is what Tony says (stage direction: *chewing a sardine*):

TONY: Well - the Indians - they feel the sun. They feel the sun inside them, and they feel good. Like what the sun shine inside them, and they love everybody.

Ida's sarcastic question

IDA: Sunshine, Tony, or moonshine inside them?

[34] Ibid. 548: 21-24

is interrupted by Mary Austin, who is determined to explain the mystery of the Indians:

MARY: Let *me* explain what it is...[35]

The scene ends in chaos, with Spud entering with a bunch of poppies, Mabel giving orders, Elizabeth arguing, and Ida on the phone unable to hear. So much for the rooted wisdom of the Indian about the sun, to which Lawrence had started to attend![36]

If Mabel Luhan found all this funny, she must be given credit for a tremendous sense of humour; she is the target for some of Lawrence's wickedest impersonations. The Ida character asks what exactly what Mabel means by 'feeling fine': - 'Feeling up to the mark, and so on?' Mabel replies:

MABEL: Oh, no, none of those dreary things. I mean feeling good. You have that good feeling, don't you know, when you expand--and you make everybody around you feel wonderful. I know I do it myself. You can't help it--they've *got* to feel good, just because of the thing that's in you. You radiate life, and the people around you feel good. Haven't you seen me do it. Don't you feel it come from me?[37]

35 Ibid. 550: 8-14

36 Ibid. 550: 15-28. I would like to thank the six people who helped me with the readings in the lecture version of this essay: Jill Franks (Mabel), Lois Ascherman (Ida), Nora Stovell (Mary), Lou Greiff (Tony), Bruce Clarke (Joe), Howard Booth (Spud).

37 Ibid. 549: 37 - 550: 5

It's comic because it is sharp, realistic, unsatirical, just wickedly parodic.

The same is true of scene 2, in which the Spud Johnson figure is confronted by the 17 year old Elizabeth, who wants to have *fun*. She wants to go out riding -

ELIZABETH: Because it would be *fun*. Lots of fun.
SPUD: Not necessarily for me. I might be bored.
ELIZABETH: No you wouldn't be bored, Spud. Go on--let's do it. Think of the *fun*.
SPUD: But I tell you I don't like fun. I don't care for it.[38]

As he says towards the end of the scene,

SPUD: I always avoid fun, I can.

Ida asks him he wants to fall in love:

SPUD: Lo-o-o-ve! God, no! I'd rather take castor oil.[39]

Earlier in the piece, Ida, Clarence and Mabel have discussed Spud from their respective points of view:

IDA: Spud's queer this morning.
CLARENCE: Spud always seems queer, to *me*.

38 Ibid. 551: 28-32

39 Ibid. 553: 25-7

MABEL: Spud *is* queer. I wonder what it is. Whether we can't fix it.[40]

In the early 1920s, the word was just acquiring its modern meaning, and while Ida is probably only playing with the new meaning, Clarence obviously knows it very well. Mabel does not, however: a problem is just something that needs to be fixed.

But *Altitude* was strictly a *jeu d'esprit,* belonging wholly to the time and circumstance of its composition. I am just sorry that Lawrence did not write more in this vein; when he tried drawing-room comedy, he could do it almost effortlessly. And, in particular, the way even such a slight piece continually revolves around the subject of how the Indians are different, whether they are superior, how they might be superior, what might be wrong with the Anglos - this is characteristic. The play reminds me of the way Lawrence commented on E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, which he read within a couple of weeks of writing *Altitude*:

> At least the repudiation of our white bunk is genuine, sincere, and pretty thorough, it seems to me. Negative, yes. But King Charles *must* have his head off. Homage to the headsman.[41]

[40] Ibid. 549: 18-21

[41] *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence,* vol. v., ed. James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge, 1989), 143.

The bunk *he* was writing about in *Altitude*, however, was not only white bunk about themselves but white bunk about the Indians, as well as Indian bunk about sunshine.

VI

The larger question of what the North American Indian meant to Lawrence remained unanswered. In his essays 'The Dance of the Sprouting Corn' and in particular 'Indians and Entertainment', dating from April 1924, he constantly used comparisons with theatre to describe his sense of the difference of white consciousness from Indian - but first the essay on 'Pan in America', from May, and then the essay on the Hopi Snake Dance which he wrote in August 1924 represented a breakthrough in the ways they find of writing about animism: though he could not resist partnering the latter with the little essay Mabel Luhan so much hated, 'Just back from the Snake Dance-Tired Out'.[42] The short essay acts as a kind of lightning conductor, leading away all the negative reactions which Lawrence knew were part of his own honest reaction to Indians in America - the fact that, to the Anglo, Indians *are* often theatrical, *are* easily seen as just part of a show. The long essay is Lawrence's first attempt to describe what North American Indian animism might be like in practice. But his next attempt -demonstrated in ways that people actually talk and

[42] Published *Laughing Horse,* no. 11 (September 1924), 26-9; see Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos,* p. 268.

behave - is to be found in a most unexpected place: *David*, written in the spring of 1925.

'David', you say: 'that unreadable piece of Old Testament pastiche? What has *that* got to do with Indians?' I can only agree that it is *not* a good play. And yet...

VII

When Lawrence and Frieda finally got back to the ranch on 5 April 1925, Lawrence was still too sick to do much, following his illness after finishing *The Plumed Serpent*. For a long time the only thing he wrote, apart from letters, was *David*. Frieda remembered how

> it was spring and he lay on a canvas bed on the small porch outside the cabin and slowly, day by day his strength came back, he could hardly believe it. It seemed a miracle... The poignancy of "David" is partly a result of Lawrence's own escape from the valley of death .[43]

Writing in bed with his notebook propped up on his knees, using a pencil and not his customary fountain pen, at his usual speed Lawrence could have written the play in a week. But he was working slowly - Frieda said he was 'sleeping quite a lot of the time'[44] - and it took him about a month. He finally finished it on 7

43 *D.H. Lawrence's Manuscripts*, ed. Michael Squires (London, 1991), pp.173-4.
44 *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. v., ed. Boulton and Vasey, 233.

May. Within ten days, Ida Rauh had come up from Sante Fe to hear him read it aloud. She did not much like it, but did what she could to help him try and find a theatre group which might take it. No-one did, until a London society in 1927.[45] Full details of all this will be in the Cambridge *Plays*. I am just interested in the fact of Lawrence writing this play, of all things, as he came back to life in the quietness - what quietness - of the ranch during April 1925.

During that month, the Lawrences saw almost no-one - just the Hawk family, and Brett; but their constant companions were the Indian couple Trinidad and Rufina, who were actually living with them in the third cabin. Rufina helped in the house, and Trinidad outdoors. As soon as he was on his feet, Lawrence worked with Trinidad; and this he recalled in the 'New Mexico' essay:

> ...the Indian ... has still some of the strange beauty and pathos of the religion that brought him forth and is now shedding him away into oblivion. When Trinidad, the Indian boy, and I planted corn at the ranch, my soul paused to see his brown hands softly moving the earth over the maize in pure ritual. He was back in his old religious self and the ages stood still.[46]

The version of religion Lawrence had come to realise was one 'which precedes the god-concept', and - he argued - 'is therefore

45 See *Plays*, ed. Schwarze and Worthen, pp. lxxi-lxxiii, lxxv-lxxvi, lxxix-lxxxix
46 *Phoenix*, ed. Macdonald, p.147.

greater and deeper than any god-religion.[47] If any of you do not know the essay by Jung about the Taos Pueblo (written after his own visit in January 1925 - he just missed Lawrence) let me recommend it; it shows a sensitive European observing (on the one hand) the absolute secrecy with which the Pueblo Indians guarded their religion, and (on the other) the tremendous emotion which it involved. Jung sat on the roof of the pueblo with one of the chiefs, 'the blazing sun rising higher and higher':

> he said, pointing to the sun, "Is not he who moves there our father? How can anyone say differently How can there be another god? Nothing can be without the sun." His excitement, which was already perceptible, mounted still higher; he struggled for words, and exclaimed at last, "What would a man do alone in the mountains? He cannot even build his fire without him."[48]

It was exactly that awareness which Lawrence had also reached:

> The whole life-effort of man was to get his life into direct contact with the elemental life of the cosmos, mountain-life, cloud-life, thunder-life, air-life, earth-life, sun-life. To come into immediate *felt* contact, and so derive energy, power, and a dark sort of joy. This effort into sheer naked contact,

47 *Ibid.*
48 C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (London, 1963), p. 279.

> *without an intermedicuy or mediator*, is the root meaning of religion...[49]

But, I hope you are saying to yourselves, what has *that* got to do with a play which constantly addresses the Old Testament God?

VIII

It was actually Frieda who pointed out, about *David*: 'The outer form of the life of these old testament people Lawrence believed to have been much like the near Taos Indians'.[50] When you start to look, a great deal falls into place. The play may be Biblical Palestine, but it is actually set right here. The houses in the play are made not just of dried mud-brick but specifically of adobe; in front of them they have (a colonial word) a 'compound': 'the area in front of a native house'. The houses have flat roofs, true of both Palestine and New Mexico, but the bread is also 'flat' - he means tortillas. It is also a tented culture; outside the adobe houses, the tents are made of 'worsted'. Finally, when you go into the village of Bethlehem in scene iii, what do you find but a 'Plaza', exactly as you do here in the South-West. The 'Great White Bird' of Saul's madness is probably a version of the Eagle or Thunderbird in North American Indian mythology; but the whole outer form of life - including costume - is Indian. When Saul, possessed by the chants of religion at the end of the play, strips his clothes off; he

49 *Phoenix*, ed. McDonald, pp. 146-7.
50 *The Manuscripts of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. Squires, p. 174.

emerges *a dark-skinned man in a leathern loin-girdle* - in contrast with David, who is always described with the King James Bible word 'ruddy' - pinko-white Anglo, as against Saul's Indian self.

But it was not just the outer life for which Lawrence drew upon his knowledge of the Indians. The play demonstrates an old religion, and rule, and king, being supplanted by a new and specifically more modern civilisation: personal, individual, in a way which exactly parallels the cultural and religious change Lawrence saw destroying Indian culture. *David* was at last his work for 'the strange beauty and pathos' of Indian religion - the work which Mabel Luhan was so disappointed he had not done when he first came to Taos.

Having started by writing - of course - about 'God' and 'Lord', Lawrence gradually brought in another vocabulary altogether: 'Deep', 'Bolt', 'One', 'Might', 'Fire', 'Thunderer', 'Strength', 'Full', 'Dawn', 'Hope', 'Morning Wind', 'the bright horn', 'Night', 'Giver', 'day', 'Hill', 'Name', 'Kindler', 'Wave' and 'Sun'. So that where, for example, Samuel had originally asked 'Who knoweth the ways of the Lord?' Lawrence altered this to 'Who knoweth the ways of the Deep?' And so on throughout. His printers, however, although conscientiously making all these changes from 'Lord' to the animist language Lawrence continued to develop in proof, were determined to make all references to God which they could find start with capital letters, in the forms 'his' and 'him', 'thee' and 'thou', although Lawrence had not used capitals in his manuscript.

As a result, the printed text has up to now looked and felt far more Biblical than it ever should have done: 'the Lord poured his power over thee', for example, acquired a capital letter on the 'his' from the printer, which remained even when Lawrence changed 'Lord' to 'Deep'.

The animism of the play has hardly been noticed, as a result. Where it really counts, I think, is in the presentation of Saul. Saul, representative of the old, animist belief, dies in the play. But on two occasions he goes into religious ecstasies which are (to my mind) the most important things in the play; they represent Lawrence working his way deep into the consciousness of someone for whom animism was not a theory developed in an essay but a fact, developed in a fiction. David sings a psalm in scene ix, addressed of course to the 'new' God of Israel: David's God. It drives Saul wild: really wild, out of his mind, as he considers what David's new Anglo world will be like:

> Hath Saul no sight into the unseen? Ha, look! look down the deep well, how the black water is troubled ... And men shall inherit the earth ! Yea, like locusts and whirring on wings like locusts. To this the seed of David shall come, and this is their triumph, when the house of Saul has been swept up, long, long ago into the body of God. Godless the world! Godless the men in myriads even like locusts. No God in the air! No God on the mountains! Even out of the deeps of the sky they lured him, into their pit! So the world is empty of God, empty,

> empty, like a blown egg-shell bunged with wax and floating meaningless.[51]

That's just a taste of the ecstasy into which Saul works himself. Here he is, saner, in one of the fragments Lawrence cut from the play:

> There is no commandment from God, save one, which is the commandment of the fire: *Oh, take my flame into the fuel of your life.* - There is but one sin, to deny the flame of God its rushing leap in my body ...[52]

Lawrence had always been good at writing out of extreme states, and this is some of the most extraordinary writing he ever did. When at the end of the play Saul is overtaken by the rhythms of the chanting, he speaks the language of the tribal chief who believes in the sun as father:

> I will come up! Oh, I will come up! Dip me in the flame of brightness, thou Bright One, call up the sun in my heart, out of the ashes of the clouds of me. Lo! I have been darkened and deadened with ashes! Blow a fierce flame on me, from the middle of thy glory, 0 thou of the faceless flame. Oh, dip me in the ceaseless flame...[53]

51 *Plays*, ed. Schwarze and Worthen, pp. 488: 3-4, 488: 36 - 489: 4
52 Ibid. 584: 6-9
53 Ibid. 519: 15-20

And at this point he strips, and is seen as that *dark-skinned man:*

> ...I carry naught upon me, the long flame of my body leans to the flame of all glory! I am no king, save in the Glory of God. I have no kingdom, save my body and soul. I have no name. But as a slow and dark flame leaneth to a great glory of flame, and is sipped up, naked and nameless lean I to the glory of the Lord.[54]

This kind of writing strikes me as right on the edge of the possible, and might easily turn into pretentious nonsense. But I think it sustains a tremendous charge of energy as religious utterance.

IX

Having written those speeches, Lawrence took perhaps another eighteen months to develop a conscious understanding of what he meant. The essays he wrote for *Sketches of Etruscan Places* in 1927 would finally claim that

> The old idea of the vitality of the universe was evolved long before history begins, and elaborated into a vast religion... we see evidence of one underlying religious idea: the conception of the vitality of the cosmos...[55]

54 Ibid. 519: 31-35
55 *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*, ed. Simonetta de Filippis (Cambridge, 1992), 57:30-39.

Confirming that he learned this from his play, Lawrence drew a direct comparison with David: 'This was the idea at the back of all the great old civilisations. It was even, half-transmuted, at the back of David's mind, and voiced in the Psalms. But with David the living cosmos became merely a personal god."[56]

Such a distinction between an older, heroic, I would say Indian Saul, living instinctively the vitality of the cosmos, and a younger, cleverer, Anglo, self-conscious David, believing in a personal relationship with a personal God, was the culmination of a distinction which had been growing clear in Lawrence since 1922. Consequently, *David* became (paradoxically) the work of Lawrence's most steeped in the language of the Bible, and an attempt to get behind the Bible completely: to recreate the religion of the South-West: to recreate a myth of the past, to make us feel what religious belief might, once, have been. And it was New Mexico, for sure, which gave him the first clue for this new, recreative theatre: it *was* where he first began to 'attend'.

[56] Ibid. 58:8-11. Cf. another of the fragments from one of the deleted scenes from *David*: 'Is not the Lord with David?' 'Yea, but a little Lord, with a face like David's own ... ' (*Plays*, ed. Schwarze and Worthen, 584: 14-15).

WILLIAM MORRIS AND D.H. LAWRENCE, TWO DIFFERENT WAYS OF PREPARING THE FUTURE, BETWEEN UTOPIAN DREAM AND FLIGHT FROM CIVILIZATION, TOWARDS A POSSIBLE PAST, ONLY POSSIBLE FUTURE.

Adriana Corrado

I most certainly can't deny, right from the start, that my approach to Lawrence may have been flawed by my being Italian and, what's more, from the South of Italy, that very land where Lawrence sought out or pursued his myths, though to no avail, still hoping to find fresh traces of ancient civilizations kept alive within a society which he believed to be genuinely both pre-industrial and pre-middle class.

However, if at that time Lawrence was seeking his myth in Italy, Italy and the Italians, having only just reached their political unity through great effort, were pursuing very different models or myths, amongst which precisely those bourgeois ones which stem from the industrialization of a country and from which Lawrence himself was escaping. It was extremely difficult for him to realize and accept this, stubborn as he was in repeating phrases such as: "...the Mediterranean, so extremely young, the very symbol of youth ! And Italy, so reputedly old, yet for ever so child-like and naive."[57]

[57] D.H. Lawrence, "A Little Moonshine with Lemon" in *Mornings in Mexico and Etruscan Places*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977, p.92.