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**RESISTING 'DULL LONDON':  
NIETZSCHE AND NIHILISM IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S  
LEADERSHIP NOVELS**

STEWART SMITH

D. H. Lawrence's late short essay, 'Dull London' (1929), insists upon the nihilistic spirit of England's capital city.<sup>1</sup> Acutely sensitive to London's suffocating dreariness, Lawrence discerns a sense of "abject futility" overwhelming him (*LEA* 122). His critique of the city is underscored by his recollection of London's "thrilling" power twenty years previously: in contrast to the "vast and roaring heart of all adventure" it once was, Lawrence contends that the city, like its "monotonous" traffic, is "going nowhere" (*LEA* 121). He links London's nihilistic decline to the putative pursuit of comfort and well-being. In England, "the easiest country in the world", Lawrence claims, "you inhale the drug of easiness and niceness" and "your vitality begins to sink". Diverging from conventional literary portrayals of the modern metropolis, exemplified say by Charles Dickens, which render the city in terms of the suffering it inflicts, Lawrence critiques the idealisation of the values of "Nice, safe, easy" that serves to produce a collective state of deadening numbness.

'Dull London' calls attention to the power of the environment to penetrate the individual self. Sensing that his "life is dulling down to London dullness" (*LEA* 120), Lawrence claims that the city's dreariness, epitomised by pervasive aimless verbosity, threatens "the vivid flame of your individual life" (*LEA* 121). While his short essay points to the self's affective vulnerability in relation to the purposeless collective, it simultaneously illustrates Lawrence's concern with the import of feelings of efficacious agency, the denial of which is at the centre of his complaint about England's capital. For Lawrence contends that the "ceaseless" and

"intoxicating" chatter, which occurs "without the very faintest intention of a result in action" (*LEA* 122), makes him "feel like a spider whose thread has been caught by somebody, and is being drawn out of him, so he must spin, spin, spin, and all to no purpose" (*LEA* 121–2).

Lawrence's figuration of individual agency in opposition to the hedonically-orientated collective is anticipated in the earlier essay, 'Blessed Are the Powerful' (1925). There Lawrence contends that what matters is "doing what you really, vitally want to do", despite the fact that "most folks" understand "living" to consist in "jazzing or motoring or going to Wembley" (*RDP* 322–3). Indeed, while this point anticipates the assault on the pursuit of pleasure in 'Dull London', here Lawrence is more explicitly critical of this common propensity:

We want life. And we want the power of life. We want to feel the power of life in ourselves.

We're sick of being soft, and amiable, and harmless. We're sick to death of even enjoying ourselves. We're a bit ashamed of our own existence. Or if we aren't we ought to be. (*RDP* 323–4)

In light of Lawrence's articulation of his desire to supplant the prevailing hedonism with the value of feelings of potency, it is germane to invoke Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher of power whom Lawrence discovered whilst teaching and living in Croydon in 1909. Indeed, Lawrence's perception of "a gnawing uneasiness" (*LEA* 121) infiltrating the anaesthetised masses in 'Dull London' strikingly resembles Nietzsche's fictional prophet Zarathustra's description of those who pursue "herd happiness": the so-called "little" men "possess their virtue in order to live long and in a miserable ease", Zarathustra claims.<sup>2</sup> In the following discussion I will consider how Nietzsche's thought illuminates our understanding of Lawrence's presentation of London, and the metropolis more broadly, especially by appealing to what are considered to be Lawrence's most Nietzschean works, the so-called

“leadership” novels, *Aaron’s Rod* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923) and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926).<sup>3</sup> Coming to focus on Lawrence’s shifting usage of the notion of resistance and its cognate terms in his later fiction, I will argue that ‘Dull London’ articulates Lawrence’s anxiety about the overwhelming nihilistic threat posed to individuality by mass culture on the one hand;<sup>4</sup> I will claim that the essay subtly signals Lawrence’s frustration at the failure to exist in dynamic relationality *within* the collective on the other. I will begin by briefly outlining salient aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy with regard to individual-collective relations and his diagnosis of modern nihilism.

In his mature thought, Nietzsche provides a naturalistic description of the self to account for the experience of efficacious agency: one’s feeling of power depends upon one’s capacity to order conflicting instinctual energies into coherent form according to the “tyrannical” nature of a dominant drive.<sup>5</sup> The hierarchical composition of the self’s otherwise disorderly and destructive drives is central to Nietzsche’s conception of willing subjectivity and, as noted by Jacob Golomb, is anticipated with his earlier structure of the Apollonian-Dionysian dynamic in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872):<sup>6</sup> Apollo, “the *principium individuationis*” or principle of individual boundaries, provides form and meaning to the excessive force of Dionysian libidinal impulses.<sup>7</sup> The notion of difficulty, struggle or tension is therefore a key component of Nietzsche’s idea of the will to power: the “self” “enjoys an increase” in the “sensation of power” when it “enjoys the triumph over resistances” presented by competing drives or when surmounting external obstacles.<sup>8</sup> Notably, Lawrence suggestively valorises resistance relationships in ‘Dull London’ when he complains that, in England’s milieu of “nice” and “safe”, “there is almost nothing to resist at all” (LEA 121).

Nietzsche draws parallels between his account of subjectivity and his description of the nation state. Insisting that “our body is only a social structure composed of many souls”, Nietzsche applies this idea of the hierarchically-ordered self analogously to his

diagnoses of society to commend the necessity of tension and hardship.<sup>9</sup> For Nietzsche considers the self or community to be strong in "*unfavourable conditions*".<sup>10</sup> Such conditions may occur, for instance, when engaging with an external enemy or when experiencing shared struggles. By way of contrast, an "era of dissolution" occurs in a period of ease and plenty as individuals previously held together through common goals, hitherto determined by the rule of the strong types or drives, discharge accumulated energy in the pursuit of their own interests.<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche claims that after a brief flourishing of individualism "contrary drives and values ... struggle with one another and rarely leave one another in peace".<sup>12</sup> This development has consequences for individual and collective living:

the self-confidence of the community goes to pieces, its faith in itself, its spine as it were, is broken: consequently it is precisely these drives which are most branded and calumniated. Lofty spiritual independence, the will to stand alone, great intelligence even, are felt to be dangerous; everything that raises the individual above the herd and makes his neighbour quail is henceforth called *evil* ...<sup>13</sup>

Foreshadowing Lawrence's awareness of the fragile individual's relationship to the collective in 'Dull London', Nietzsche, through Zarathustra, proclaims that the mass of mediocre "little men" are "the greatest danger for the whole human future" insofar as they "have to crucify" the individual who strays from the herd when he "devises his own virtue".<sup>14</sup> In other words, the common man seeks the elimination of the individual who poses a threat to his security. Given that Nietzsche holds the "higher" individual as solely capable of conferring senseless existence with meaning, the herd's drive for peace amounts to a nihilistic act: "they crucify the whole human future!".<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche hence repeatedly calls for a necessary "pathos of distance" to exist between the "higher" creator type and the community.<sup>16</sup>

While I noted above how Lawrence describes the collective spirit of ‘Dull London’ diminishing individual “vitality” and “purpose”, he also provocatively juxtaposes imagery of mass destruction with his critique of the general comfort-seeking, hence implying that London represents a graver threat to individuality than that so far acknowledged. Evoking London’s proximity to the First-World-War battlefields, Lawrence observes that the London traffic “booms like monotonous, far-off guns, in a monotony of crushing something, crushing the earthy, crushing out life, crushing everything dead” (*LEA* 121). Modernity’s most brutal mechanical force, the “far-off guns” extinguishing “life”, are here connected to the relentless and aimless traffic that embodies London’s nihilistic movement. Lawrence’s resolve at the end of ‘Dull London’ to leave England’s capital may then be read as a self-preservational establishment of distance, the enactment of a Nietzschean defensive gesture of resistance. Capturing the individual’s adversarial relation to the group, Nidesh Lawtoo’s point that “Lawrence privileges the individual over the masses as a locus of resistance to the mechanical forces of modernity” is apt.<sup>17</sup> Rick Rylance anticipates this, though his awareness of Lawrence’s quest for collective fulfilment is also evident in his evaluation that, for Lawrence, “The collective become not a possibility to be realized but a threat to be resisted”.<sup>18</sup>

Critics have implicitly noted Lawrence’s negative representation of the collective element of life in London in *Aaron’s Rod*. Stefania Michelucci observes that Lawrence’s protagonist, Aaron Sisson, is “oppressed by London” while also arguing that the city has a disorientating effect which “causes him to lose himself” in his relationship with Josephine Ford.<sup>19</sup> According to Alastair Niven, “The same dullness” Lawrence describes in ‘Dull London’ “permeates the London of this novel”.<sup>20</sup> For Niven, Lawrence primarily conveys this dullness through his depictions of the London bohemian circle which Aaron encounters in the first half of the novel. Focalised through Aaron, the reader learns of the “expensive comfort of modern Bohemia” and the “old bohemian

routine", consisting of attending operas and consuming alcohol at evening parties, that allows the group to "sink away from the world", to distance themselves from life's hardships (AR 57). Bored, hedonically-orientated and struggling with existential crises, Jim Bricknell is a representative figure of the group and of London's decadence: he is accused of abandoning his self-responsibility by Rawdon Lilly, and Jim is subsequently compared to "a drunken man", existing in a "state of nauseas weak relaxation" (AR 81). Lilly's exhortation to Jim to imitate his admired Japanese, who "keep themselves taut in their own selves" according to Lilly, recalls Nietzsche's advocacy of self-discipline and his hostility to "*laissez aller*", of letting go of oneself.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding his success as a flautist and being accepted into the bohemian coterie, Aaron "found London got on his nerves" and "rubbed him the wrong way" (AR 130). His repudiation of the city and his resultant travel to Italy anticipates Lawrence's opposition to the city's stultifying comfort in 'Dull London' and yet captures the predicament of that essay. For while Aaron is "determined to clear out – to disappear" from London (AR 130), he nevertheless finds that his progressive breaking of "all the ties which united him with his own people" merely leads to "blank nothingness" (AR 178). Ultimately, despite the fact that Aaron resolves to "Let no new connection be made between himself and anything on earth", "the whole of Aaron's story reveals a character who could *not* live alone", as Mark Kinkead-Weekes notes.<sup>22</sup>

Lawrence's portrayal of London in *Aaron's Rod* is complex and contradictory. For instance, he depicts Lilly to be evidently stimulated by the "sense of friction ... from the streaming of people who meant nothing to him" in the city (AR 111). Notably, the imagery reinforces Lilly's state of self-possession and his essential isolation from the herd-like masses: he "was like a fox slipping alert among unsuspecting cattle". In this passage Lilly is also described enjoying the Thames, which "never failed to soothe him and give him a sense of liberty", and, starkly diverging from 'Dull London', "even the traffic" is a source of pleasure on Lilly's night

walks. Here, then, Lawrence does depict something of London's "vibrant life" in this novel despite the fact that, as Niven puts it, Lawrence "so loathed London himself".<sup>23</sup>

It is also the case that Aaron implicitly privileges London as a reference point when evaluating unfamiliar urban centres. For instance, when musing that the spirit of Milan "seemed depressed and empty", he notes that "the feeling of the city was so different from that of London" (AR 180). It may be remarked that there is a subtle difference between Aaron's view of Milan's "vacancy", that there seemed "something empty and depressing in the great human centre" (AR 180), and the earlier perceptions of London's "dark and deserted" core (AR 69). That is, while Bloomsbury Square is depicted as "phantasmagoric", it is also described as the "sinister ... dark, bristling heart of London" (AR 70): London's centre may be "horrible" and "unnatural" (AR 63), yet Bloomsbury Square possesses "dark" power, "like a savage wilderness in the heart of London" (AR 69).

Aaron's invocation of London as a fixed orientating point is also indicative of his own fragility, of his need to project a stable centre when such a fixture seems absent. For it is telling that Milan's nihilistic spirit overwhelms Aaron: "The curious heart-eating *ennui* of the big town on a holiday came over our hero. He felt he must get out, whatever happened. He could not bear it" (AR 180). As Michelucci observes, Aaron "is lost because he lets the spirit of place permeate his own personality, already so unstable and ill-defined".<sup>24</sup> Otherwise put, it is because Aaron himself is repeatedly portrayed as nihilistic, as lacking cognitive direction and prone to bouts of weariness, that makes him particularly susceptible to this form of affective contagion.<sup>25</sup> His departure from Milan is thus expedient, a necessary retreat to shore up his brittle Apollonian boundaries of individuation. It is also worth remarking that Aaron's sensitivity to the collective *ennui* and aimlessness of Milan is particularly heightened because it is "a national holiday" (AR 180): the connection between pleasure-seeking and meaninglessness central to Lawrence's account of 'Dull London' is apparent again.



This association of the pursuit of comfort and nihilism continues in his Australian novel, *Kangaroo*, as Lawrence again invokes London as a reference point from which to assess an alien urban centre.

When Lawrence first evokes London in *Kangaroo* it is to index Richard Lovatt Somers's ambivalent, largely disapproving response to Sydney. For Somers, Sydney is characterised by its absence of significance, its populace "working without any meaning, playing without any meaning" (*K* 28).<sup>26</sup> Sydney possesses, as a new-world democratic city, a feeling of "accomplished liberty" (*K* 27). Echoing Nietzsche's point that the relaxation of the "tremendous tension" between opposing forces precipitates cultural dissolution, Somers judges that the "great relief in the atmosphere, a relief from tension, from pressure" is symptomatic of an "absence of control or will or form". Somers's rejection of Sydney's "irresponsible freedom", or the "sense of do-as-you-please liberty", hence not only reverberates with Nietzsche's indictment of the distinctively modern issue of "*laissez aller*, of too great freedom", but it also evokes Lawrence's comment from 'The Crown':<sup>27</sup> "Remove the opposition and there is collapse, a sudden crumbling into universal nothingness" (*RDP* 256). In the context of this critique of Sydney's formlessness, Lawrence suggestively praises London, for it tacitly possesses form and hence significance by way of comparison: "Even the heart of Sydney itself—an imitation of London and Birmingham, without any core or pith of meaning" (*K* 27). By implication, London maintains the productive tension which he finds absent in Sydney and which is necessary for effective organisational structure.

In the later, highly autobiographical 'The Nightmare' chapter of *Kangaroo*, Lawrence's more explicit consideration of London is more damning as it emphasises the destructive power of the pathological collective upon the individual. In this oft-cited passage Lawrence adumbrates the point in 'Dull London' that the city has fallen from being "not only the heart of the world", but "the heart of the world's living adventure" (*LEA* 121):

In the winter of 1915–1916 the spirit of the old London collapsed, the city, in some way, perished, *perished from being a heart of the world*, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors. The integrity of London collapsed, and the genuine debasement began ... (K 216, emphasis added)

The similar phrasing in ‘Dull London’, written several years after this description, is suggestive of Lawrence’s continued sensitivity to the toll that the war years had on the metropolis. Nevertheless, despite the force of conviction contained in these generalising proclamations, Lawrence’s mediations of the city are coloured by recollections of occasions of deep personal distress during a period when, as Hugh Stevens notes, Lawrence figured “himself as a sacrificial victim”.<sup>28</sup> Here Lawrence observes a “wave of criminal lust” rising in war-torn London to “break the independent soul in any man who would not hunt with the criminal mob” (K 212). Lawrence therefore champions the few who self-consciously maintain self-responsible integrity and do not yield to being “swept away” in “some horrible flood” of collective emotions. Lilly’s claim in *Aaron’s Rod*, that it is only the “wakeful, self-possessed” individual who opposes the “horrible movement of the war” that engulfs the “asleep – or drugged – inert – dream-logged” majority, anticipates Somers’s description of what Lilly calls “base and obscene” group feelings spreading and infecting the individual (AR 118–19).

Lawrence’s portrayal of London’s war-time condition in ‘The Nightmare’ evokes Nietzschean and Freudian insights. Given Lawrence’s conviction that the home front itself comprised a genuine theatre of war in *Kangaroo*, in which predatory, aggressive impulses are unleashed with the collapse of London’s civilising institutions, Freud’s comment on the de-sublimation of anti-social instincts is pertinent: “war strips us of the later accretions of civilization, and lays bare the primal man in each of us”.<sup>29</sup> In Nietzschean terms, London’s disintegration into “a vortex of

broken passions" (K 216) signals the failure of a master drive or a ruling class to impose its command and organise the conflicting emotional or social elements. Resonating with this understanding, Lawrence castigates the authorities who fail to fulfil their role as masters:

The well-bred, really cultured classes were on the whole passive resisters. They shirked their duty. It is the business of people who really know better to fight tooth and nail to keep up a standard, to hold control of authority. Laisser-aller is as guilty as the actual, stinking mongrelism it gives place to. (K 217)

Again, Lawrence voices his hostility to the spirit of "laisser-aller", of "letting go", which he saw at the root of Sydney's "formlessness and chaos" (K 27). Moreover, in addition to his championing of the individual of "integrity" resisting the "vast mob-spirit", Lawrence here is convinced that society's leaders must confront and actively engage in the struggle against those who oppose and undermine their authority. Recalling Nietzsche's argument from above, that the collective will to annihilate the non-conforming individual intensifies as the community fragments, reinforces the narrator's view that mere "passive" resistance to these destructive, nihilistic forces is inadequate.

Nearly overcome, then, and propelled to recoil into defensive solitude, Somers's subsequent rejection of connection reverberates with Aaron's distancing from his community. For Somers considers that "He felt broken off from the England he had belonged to" (K 259) and now desires "To be clear of humanity altogether, to be alone" (K 265). The tension between the self's need for restorative isolation and the conflicting drive to be engaged with others in some form of purposeful collective activity dominates this novel. It is a strain that similarly comes to the fore in *The Plumed Serpent*, the last of Lawrence's leadership novels.

In *The Plumed Serpent*, in a passage strongly reminiscent of Lawrence's description of London's "mob-spirit" in *Kangaroo*,

Kate Leslie recalls the war years and the “cold collective lust” to destroy “the outstanding individuals” (*PS* 136). Here, as Kate meditates on the “paralysis of fear” overwhelming Sayula as it anticipates a bandit attack, she compares her present state to the feeling of “terror of the rabble that, mongrel-like, wanted to break the free *spirit* in individual men and women” during both the war and the Irish independence struggle (*PS* 136). Lawrence again conveys the individual to be affectively porous, vulnerable to overpowering collective feelings: as the dread possessing the villagers “communicates itself like some drug on the air” (*PS* 134), Kate is “lost, scattered, as it were, from herself in a horror of fear” (*PS* 137). In a further resonance of Lawrence’s description of war-time London in *Kangaroo*, Kate comes to the understanding that “Panic and murder never start unless the leading people let slip the control” (*PS* 137). Simultaneously signalling Mexico’s need for the constructive, Apollonian role of the Quetzalcoatl movement, Kate’s insight is revelatory of the novel’s presentation of the inadequacy of the country’s existing political and religious institutions.<sup>30</sup>

By way of contrast to such menacing and distressing experiences in Mexico, London’s easy dreariness is evoked at the novel’s denouement to highlight Kate’s chief predicament in the novel: she repeatedly oscillates with regard to her decision as to whether to remain in a cruel and dangerous environment or to return to the pleasant but barren existence of her former life, of which London is representative of that which is “so safe, so familiar, so normal” (*PS* 430). While the earlier version of the novel, *Quetzalcoatl* (1923), points to Kate’s scepticism and rejection of the religious revivalist movement, *The Plumed Serpent* suggests that she will accept her marriage to Cipriano and her apotheosis as the goddess Malintzi. In the later version, after musing nostalgically on London at Christmas together with reflecting on the promise of participating in “all the exciting gossip” back home, she decides to reject London’s comparative dullness (*PS* 430):

"Why should I go away!" said Kate. "Why should I see the buses on the mud of Piccadilly, on Christmas Eve, and the crowds of people on the wet pavements, under the big shops like great caves of light? I may as well stay here, where my soul is less dreary." (*PS* 439–40)

Notably, it is not London but Devon that is invoked to play this contrastive role to Mexico in the earlier *Quetzalcoatl* version. The move to a focus on London as the point of reference in the later version, combined with the protagonist's repudiation of her home country, may reasonably lead to the inference that these alterations were provoked by Lawrence's largely negative experience of returning to London in the period between completing the first version and rewriting *The Plumed Serpent*. Lawrence's letters of this period not only reveal a deep reluctance to leave the New World to return to England at the end of 1923, but also that his time spent in London served to cement his misgivings. For instance, while in London Lawrence wrote to Alfred Stieglitz, in terms prefiguring his analysis of the suffocating nihilistic spirit of the city in 'Dull London', that he felt that he was "buried alive, under the yellow air and the vast inertia" (*4L* 543). Elsewhere he is more scathing of London's populace, writing to Mabel Dodge Luhan that "I find that here in London they all *instinctively* hate me" (*4L* 556). The masses are excoriated as a threat, vindictively blocking his experience of agency. Again, he expresses this sentiment to Luhan: "everyone and everything trying to drag one back. They have no life of their own, and they want to drag one away from the life one would make" (*4L* 552).

It was also during this stay in London that Lawrence suffered from the disastrous attempt at the Café Royal to recruit friends and acolytes to join him in Mexico. This endeavour speaks of Lawrence's persistent desire to address his sense of isolation and come into purposeful connection with significant others. Lawrence's letter to Catherine Carswell, written several months later, conveys the enduring impact of the failure of this effort: "I

never forget that fatal evening at the Café Royal. That is what coming home means to me. Never again, pray the Lord" (5L 46–7). In sum, it is the sense captured in the letters that London, and England more broadly, represent a "dead past" for Lawrence that is made more emphatically in the second version of his "Mexican novel".

While the pull of England largely takes the form of Kate's imagined reconnection with her mother and her alienated children, in both the earlier *Quetzalcoatl* and in *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence demonstrates that Kate's proposed return home signals her acquiescence to a form of slow suicide. Charting differences between the two versions reveals that *The Plumed Serpent* makes this point more forcefully through its representation of London. In the earlier draft, Kate Burns's ultimate decision to return to "pale, almost ghostly" Europe (Q 307) is implicitly associated with the image of the snake, "disappointed" and "poisonous" "at its own failure to rise higher in creation", that leaves an indelible impression on Kate at the close of the penultimate chapter (Q 302).<sup>31</sup> In the final version of the novel the life-denying nature of returning home is more starkly apparent: shifting from the first version's focus on Kate's reflections on rural Devon and her return to her "tolerant" and "sensible" mother "in her old age" (Q 294), there is now the vision of an enclosed London world of the "grimalkin", the "horrible, elderly female" (PS 439).<sup>32</sup> Kate's decision to reject returning to London is contextualised by her fear of becoming one of these sexually predatory "modern women of fifty and fifty-five, those who have cultivated their ego to the top of their bent!" (PS 438). She reflects on the reality of her future in London: "And then what! to sit in a London drawing-room, and add to all the other grimalkins?" (PS 439). Despite the misogynistic overtones of this evaluation, there is the greater point to be made that Lawrence aligns these devouring, appropriating females with an extreme self-sufficiency, their sexual conquests serving the "lifelong lustful enjoyment of [their] own isolated individuality" (PS 438).

With reference to Nietzsche, it is possible to read Kate's dilemma to consist of a choice between two antithetical but pathological forms of collective life. Where, then, Mexico may represent excessive Dionysian forces, for it is populated by those who have "never been able to win themselves a nucleus, an individual integrity, out of the chaos of passions", and its dark masses are repeatedly portrayed threatening to overwhelm individual life, London expresses an extreme Apollonian culture (*PS* 135): the London grimalkin figure embodies the "invulnerable", "insentient" and "hard" individual coolly maintaining its boundaries of individuation (*PS* 429). The inadequacy of this latter mode of being, denying the "sensitive, desirous self" and organic connection with otherness (*PS* 429), is evinced by the narrator's view that, "As human beings", such women "went to pieces" (*PS* 438).

Through Kate's desire to extricate herself from the Quetzalcoatl movement and to "recoil upon her own individuality" in London (*PS* 437), Lawrence explores the modern individual's fear of existing in sensitive relationality with the other. Lawrence here presents the individual resisting connection through a fear of self-loss, or a dread of being absorbed by the other, borne from an exaggerated and mistaken notion of self-sufficient individuality. Here then there is a change in emphasis in Lawrence's account of subjectivity from that which I focussed upon in the above discussion. Having stressed the self's susceptibility to affective contagion, my reading of the Lawrentian self has so far broadly followed Lawtoo's assertion that "for Lawrence the soul ... is not a monadic, self-enclosed entity that, for better or worse, is open to the pathos of the other".<sup>33</sup> Now, at the conclusion of *The Plumed Serpent*, Lawrence is preoccupied with conveying the distinctly modern problem of the idealised self insisting on its own isolated self-containment, thus rigidly closing itself off to the other and foreclosing meaningful relationality.

Furthermore, in the context of his critique of the Western ideological hegemony of self-sufficiency in his Mexican novel,

Lawrence is deploying the idea of resistance in a way that inverts the more positive significance associated with the individual preserving itself against the pernicious collective. Paralleling the Mexicans' "ancient, fathomless resistance" to Ramón's leadership (*PS* 404), a resistance which derives from their state of "frustrated psychic development" as Michael Bell notes, Kate's reluctance to marry Cipriano is similarly registered: "This iron resistance inside her would prevent her living" (*Q* 293).<sup>34</sup> Resistance here signifies the negation of a reciprocal exchange of energy or affect that enables self-transformation for both parties. To take such resistance to the extreme is, for Kate, heralding the alternative life of a self-possessed grimalkin enclosed in a London drawing-room. That such a move is also indicative of the self's drive to avert the inevitable suffering from being porous in relation to the other, then it also entails a recoiling from resistance relationships. To put it another way, Kate's decision to remain signals, like Lawrence's implicit attestation of resistances in 'Dull London', her position of strength, her Nietzschean capacity to affirm herself not in spite of, but because of the feeling of engaging with others and surmounting oppositional forces.

To draw to a conclusion, London remained central in Lawrence's later fiction by acting as a reference point or comparative foil against which his narrators and characters appraised other metropolises. The city also features as a lens through which Lawrence examines human subjectivity in relation to the community. For instance, London is representative of a destructive, Dionysian mass culture engulfing fragile individuality in *Kangaroo*. It also embodies a dreary and deathly, highly-individuated Apollonian existence in *The Plumed Serpent*, one which precludes meaningful connection and personal transformation. 'Dull London' registers both of these dominant concerns. The essay articulates Lawrence's characteristic sensitivity to the power of his environment to signal that the city's nihilistic spirit provokes his withdrawal into isolation. The essay therefore clearly highlights Lawrence's adversarial reaction to the collective



and his hostility to London. At the same time, Lawrence's complaint regarding the absence of resistance relationships not only conveys a Nietzschean opposition to modern hedonic living but it also implicitly expresses Lawrence's desire to exist in dynamic relationality with the other. This desire to exist in connection, which entails the relinquishing of the urge to recoil into defensive isolation, reaches its apotheosis in Lawrence's final novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). In this work, Lawrence's depictions of the heightened erotic encounter exemplify the self's crisis of being in such terms: Lawrence conveys Connie Chatterley yielding to her lover, Oliver Mellors, on the one hand, while she is driven by a strong reactionary impulse to self-assertiveness on the other. It is when Connie surmounts the powerful "inward resistance that possessed her" that she achieves consummation, or self-transformation with and through the other: "the resistance was gone, and she began to melt in a marvellous peace" (*LCL* 173).

Although *Lady Chatterley's Lover* thematises the individual's need to abandon one's egoistic resistance to the other in the erotic relation, Lawrence largely defines the novel's protagonists through their capacity to resist the group. For Lawrence again presents the collective other, whether symbolised by "those evil electric lights and diabolical rattlings of engines" (*LCL* 119) or represented by the malicious gossip that surrounds the Connie-Mellors affair at the novel's denouement, as a pernicious force threatening to annihilate the vulnerable individual. Thus, the valorised expansive and regenerative connection achieved by the lovers, or their "tenderness", seems to be limited to the inner sanctum of Wragby wood. There is little room for the reader to conceptualise a centrifugal emotional energy transforming the hostile outside world, however tentatively. The protagonists' repeated awareness of their own isolation reinforces the fact that Lawrence is here unable to imagine the possibility of establishing a new mode of connection with the collective other, of the characters moving to fulfil what Lawrence calls the "collective self" in *Apocalypse* (*A* 147).<sup>35</sup> Even the novel's final affirmative statement, in which

Mellors attests to the “little forked flame” existing between the lovers, is suggestive of the import of this lack: “For me now, it’s the only thing in the world. I’ve got no friends, not inward friends”, the gamekeeper declares (*LCL* 300). The couple’s resolution to begin a new life on a remote Scottish farm therefore reworks the motif of departure and isolation that features so prominently in the novels I have discussed in this essay.

Given that Lawrence’s life and works so closely intertwine, it is possible to observe resonances between *Lady Chatterley*’s gesture of flight and the attitude that concludes ‘Dull London’.<sup>36</sup> For the tenor of the couple’s proposed departure strongly reverberates with Lawrence’s summative assessment in this short essay: “all there is to do is to go away” (*LEA* 122). It is a remark that subtly and poignantly speaks of Lawrence’s enduring frustration at being unable to realise himself in some form of meaningful “collective activity” (*PFU* 135).<sup>37</sup> Recalling Lawrence’s celebration of London being once “the heart of the world’s living adventure” serves to emphasise his deep sense of elegiac regret that the city has become nihilistic and disintegrative, that the capital impedes the individual from experiencing oneself as a powerful agent and simultaneously fails to provide the necessary conditions for realising one’s deeper “collective self” in purposeful contact with others.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence left London on 28 September 1926, with Frieda, for the final time; he completed the article ‘Why I don’t like London’ for the *Evening News* in June 1928 at Chexbres, Switzerland, which was published as ‘Dull London’ on 3 September 1928. For reasons of brevity, I will use the shorter title, the same title reprinted in *2P*. I define nihilism as a cognitive-affective phenomenon characterised by the absence of personal (or collective) significance, most notably through the lack of an individual (or collective) goal or project, and the corresponding feeling of weariness or exhaustion.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), 67.

<sup>3</sup> For alternative discussions of Lawrence's relationship to Nietzsche which focus on the "leadership" novels see Eleanor H. Green, 'Blueprints for Utopia: The Political Ideas of Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence', *Renaissance & Modern Studies* 18 (1974), 141–61, and Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 2013). Among more general studies of Lawrence and Nietzsche see, for instance, Colin Milton, *Lawrence and Nietzsche: A Study in Influence* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1987) and Daniel J. Schneider, *D. H. Lawrence: The Artist as Psychologist* (Lawrence, KS: UP of Kansas, 1984). While my focus here is on the "leadership" novels, Lawrence's final novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), similarly depicts hedonically-orientated mass culture as nihilistic. Indeed, echoing the language used in 'Dull London', Lawrence describes enjoyment as a "drug" in the episode of Connie's trip to Venice (*LCL* 259). The link between hedonism and nihilism is also apparent earlier in this episode (see *LCL* 254–5). Also see, for example, Mrs Bolton's account of working-class life in Tevershall (*LCL* 103–5).

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence, of course, celebrates resistance and cognates such as opposition, conflict, strife and tension throughout his corpus. For other critics on this theme see, for instance, Sarah Bouttier, 'Lawrence Between Resistance and Dissolution', in *Lines of Resistance: Essays on British Poetry from Thomas Hardy to Linton Kwesi Johnson*, eds Adrian Grafe and Jessica Stephens (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 55–69; William J. Fisher, 'Peace and Passivity: The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence', *SAQ* 55 (1956), 337–48; Yudhishtar, *Conflict in the Novels of D. H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Golomb, 'How to De-Nazify Nietzsche's Philosophical Anthropology', in *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?*, eds Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19–46, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), 16.

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 200.

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- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 121.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 123.
- <sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 229.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., 230.
- <sup>16</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 97.
- <sup>17</sup> Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 185.
- <sup>18</sup> Rick Rylance, 'Lawrence's Politics', in *Rethinking Lawrence*, ed. Keith Brown (Buckingham: Open UP, 1990), 163–180, 167.
- <sup>19</sup> Stefania Michelucci, *Space and Place in the Works of D. H. Lawrence* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 60.
- <sup>20</sup> Alastair Niven, *D. H. Lawrence: The Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), 135.
- <sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 188.
- <sup>22</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 650. Corroborating this point, see Aaron's discussion with Lilly on AR 246.
- <sup>23</sup> Niven, *D. H. Lawrence*, 135.
- <sup>24</sup> Michelucci, *Space and Place in the Works of D. H. Lawrence*, 62.
- <sup>25</sup> For further examples of Aaron as apathetic and weary see, for example, AR 151–2, AR 178, AR 180.
- <sup>26</sup> As Lawrence wrote to Else Jaffe, "They are always vaguely and meaninglessly on the go. And it all seems to empty, so *nothing*." (4L 263).
- <sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 112.
- <sup>28</sup> Hugh Stevens, 'Sex and the nation: "The Prussian Officer" and *Women in Love*', in *The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Anne Fernihough (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 49–66, 50. For a discussion of Lawrence's war time experience see Paul Delany, *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979).
- <sup>29</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Reflections upon War and Death', in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1963), 113.
- <sup>30</sup> I here echo Green's view that "Ramón is then the Apollonian principle of order which gives creative direction to such forces as would otherwise ... be unendurable or purely destructive": 'Blueprints for Utopia: The Political Ideas of Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence', 159.

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<sup>31</sup> Lawrence changes Kate's surname from Burns to Leslie in *The Plumed Serpent*.

<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Kate emphasises that she doesn't come from London or "any city" in *Quetzalcoatl* (Q158–9).

<sup>33</sup> Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 207.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence, Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 187.

<sup>35</sup> Points in the novel that illustrate this awareness include Mellors's lament about there being no "other men to be with, to fight that sparkling-electric Thing outside there, to preserve the tenderness of life" (*LCL* 120). Meditating on the condition of England, Connie also reflects that "Even in him [Mellors], there was no fellowship left. It was dead. The fellowship was dead. There was only apartness, and hopelessness, as far as all this was concerned" (*LCL* 153). In the context of discussing the genesis of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Michael Squires observes that Lawrence "abandoned hope for an economic or political revolution and retained faith only in a personal revolution of feeling": *The Creation of Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1983), 94.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence "Finished the proofs of *Lady C*" in June 1928 (*FLC* xiii), the same month that he wrote 'Why I don't like London'.

<sup>37</sup> On this point see, for instance, Lawrence's letter to Rolf Gardner from July 1926: "I should love to be connected with something, some few people, in something. As far as anything *matters*, I have always been very much alone, and regretted it" (*SL* 501).