Can fiction be modernist when it aims to help us to recapture a premodern, or even ‘primitive’, relationship with nature and with our own bodies, and dissolve boundaries between the self and the world? This is the question we must answer in considering D. H. Lawrence’s (1885–1930) conflictual relationship with literary modernism. In Lawrence’s most challenging statements about the purpose of the novel, he emerges as something like an ecological antimodernist, continuing a tradition of Romantic organicism which modernism often appears to leave behind.

The novel, in Lawrence’s view, goes astray when it affiliates itself with specific types of experimental modernism, because its real benefits derive from its potential to help us to resist the damaging effects of modernity. The novel’s immediate task might be to offer us aesthetic representations of the world in all its complexity, but this task, for Lawrence, is part of a greater project of cultural regeneration. In a series of essays written in 1923 and 1925, including ‘Art and Morality’ and ‘Why the Novel Matters’, Lawrence shows an unrestrained contempt for the modernist novel, at least as it is practised by some of his celebrated contemporaries. He argues that there are three categories of modern fiction: ‘serious’, ‘popular’ and ‘valuable’. ‘Serious’ and ‘popular’ fiction represent fiction as it is being written in the 1920s, and both derive from and propagate the self-consciousness which Lawrence regards as the great problem of modern culture. Self-consciousness, and here Lawrence is influenced by his reading of Friedrich Nietzsche, is an awareness of self as separated from the natural world, a mental condition arising from the influence of modern, rational, scientific thought, with its dualisms and harsh delineation of subject and object. In an early draft of an essay on John Galsworthy, Lawrence complains that the ‘real individual’ is destroyed by self-consciousness, which in turn is a product of what Lawrence calls ‘the social consciousness’. Modern ‘social individuals’ are diminished creatures, ‘always aware of the “you” set over against the “me,” always conscious of the “it” which the “I” is up against . . . The social consciousness can only be analytical, critical,
constructive but not creative, sensational but not passionate, emotional but without true feeling.’ Lawrence complains that the modern novel contains no ‘real individuals’. The modern novel is complicit in the process whereby ‘the real individual lapses out, leaving only the social individual’.  

Lawrence’s examples of ‘serious’ modern novelists include many of those we would now think of as defining ‘modernism’ – James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Dorothy Richardson – and their fiction is described as ‘dying in a very long-drawn-out fourteen-volume death agony, and absorbedly, childishly interested in the phenomenon’, a ‘dismal, long-drawn-out comedy’ made up of ‘self-consciousness picked into such fine bits that the bits are most of them invisible’. This modernist fiction is artificial, ‘senile precocious’, an unhealthy extension of adolescent absorbed self-consciousness into adulthood. On the other hand, popular novels (Lawrence’s examples include Edith Maude Hull’s *The Sheik* (1919) and Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* (1922) are spurious and conventional, ‘just as self-conscious’, only with ‘more illusions about themselves’. Their heroines and heroes are ‘lovelier, and more fascinating, and purer ... more heroic, braver, more chivalrous, more fetching’ than those in the ‘serious’ novel, and present a series of hackneyed identities in which the ‘mass of the populace “find themselves”’.  

Like Goldilocks, Lawrence finds his first two categories of ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ unhelpful precursors to the ideal third. The third category, of ‘real valuable fiction’, is what fiction should aspire to: this is a fiction which can reveal ‘life’. This revelation requires first a move into somewhere secret, private and dark, whence we will emerge renewed, cleansed and freshened. In ‘The Novel and the Feelings’, Lawrence argues that ‘unless we proceed to connect ourselves up with our own primeval sources, we shall degenerate’, and the novel – or at least the real novel – can help us in this process: ‘If we can’t hear the cries far down in our own forests of dark veins, we can look in the real novels, and there listen-in. Not listen to the didactic statements of the author, but to the low, calling cries of the characters, as they wander in the dark woods of their destiny.’ In Lawrence’s organicist metaphors self, nature and the novel are all harmoniously entwined: our veins are forests, fictional characters’ destinies are dark woods. A historical and cultural dimension is present in these metaphors, as the forest and the woods stand for the natural world in English and German ecological thinking; in England the woods are nostalgically equated with an old England which has been lost; in German ecological thinking the forest is often figured as the soul of the German people.

There is a paradox at work here, as Lawrence’s intentions for the novel are didactic, but he believes the novel’s success depends on its being, in essence, a nondidactic form. The novel is the key artform which will help us to escape degeneration by reconnecting us with our primeval sources. The reader
plays an important role in this process, as the reader must differentiate between inauthentic authorial views and the authentic voices of characters. If we ‘listen in’ in the correct manner, we will shed the harmful self-consciousness that Lawrence associates with modernity. On the other hand, modernist fiction’s efforts to trace the mental processes of sophisticated and self-conscious sensibilities destroy what Lawrence sees as the novel’s main strength.

Another paradox is present in Lawrence’s argument, because the novel – the literary form with which he is most identified – is itself a modern form, dependent on modern technology for its production and circulation, on modern education and a skilled workforce for its readership. In addition, the novel requires the felling of trees and the production of paper through modern industrial methods; put crudely, novels destroy the very trees they should be enabling us to discover. Lawrence’s polemic on behalf of the novel works alongside his more general attack on technological and industrial modernity, so it is not surprising that the examples he gives of the ‘real novel’ are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Plato’s Dialogues and Augustine’s Confessions, all narratives from a time before the invention of printing or the development of the novel as a genre. Lawrence’s frequent polemical statements arguing for a preindustrial social organization, if taken seriously, would rob him of his own vocation as effectively as state censorship did during the First World War. The ‘real valuable’ novel will save humanity from modernity, but only this modernity enables the production of the novel. The novel finds readers because the population has become literate, but universal education is abhorred by Lawrence as an institution which stops the child from growing up with a creative and imaginative relationship to the natural world. Lawrence’s views on education are implicit in several portrayals of teachers and unhappy school pupils (above all in The Rainbow, 1915), and are stated explicitly in ‘Education of the People’ and Fantasia of the Unconscious, a polemical essay of 1922. Here universal education is identified as ‘so uncouth, so psychologically barbaric, that it is the most terrible menace to the existence of our race’. Lawrence advocates that all schools should be closed for an indefinite period, ‘elementary education should be stopped at once’, and fathers should ‘see that [their] boys are trained to be men’, just as mothers should ‘see that [their] daughters are trained to be women’. The growth of and success of the novel, however, coincides with and depends on growth in rates of literacy brought about by modern education, and by the reduction in average working hours achieved by modern forms of labour and specialization.

Lawrence’s defence of the novel requires that it should be associated with a ‘natural’ humanity which modernity threatens to destroy. Lawrence
advances a vitalist and organicist aesthetic for the novel which conforms to criteria prominent in European aesthetics since their foundation as a discipline by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1735. Terry Eagleton notes how, for Baumgarten, ‘aesthetics mediates between the generalities of reason and the particulars of sense . . . [I]n their organic interpenetration, the elements of aesthetic representation resist that discrimination into discrete units which is characteristic of conceptual thought.’ Lawrence’s defence of the novel endows it with qualities remarkably similar to those that Baumgarten attributes to ‘aesthetic representation’; his aesthetic ideals for fiction have as much in common with Romantic organicism and Victorian realism – the ‘complex web’ of society as represented in George Eliot’s fiction – as with modernist radicalism. The ‘business of art’, Lawrence claims, ‘is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment’, and the novel is the best form to carry out this business, as the novel is the ‘highest complex of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered’. The novel captures the ‘interrelatedness’ of life, but ‘inherently is and must be’, Lawrence argues, ‘[i]nterrelated in all its parts, vitally, organically’. The novel ‘is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships. The novel can help us to live, as nothing else can: no didactic Scripture, anyhow.’ Lawrence’s views anticipate the central claims made for his fiction by the generation of admiring critics writing under the influence of F. R. Leavis: the novel is valuable because it can reveal ‘life’ to us. ‘The novel is the one bright book of life.’

Lawrence’s plea that we should not listen to ‘the didactic statements of the author’ is an idea frequently found in his writing. Its most celebrated appearance is the aphoristic command, in Studies in Classic American Literature (1923): ‘Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.’ One might follow W. B. Yeats, however, in asking, ‘How can we know the dancer from the dance?’ What parts of a novel are ‘tale’, and what parts are ‘artist’? Moreover, the advice to trust the ‘tale’ is problematic, as a ‘tale’ is not a person whom one can trust or be suspicious of. Does one trust the tale to tell the ‘truth’? Does one trust the tale’s presentation of events, or does one trust the view of human nature presented in the tale? Is ‘trust’ a mode of reading which does not require interpretation, and is miraculously free of the problems of interpretation? How do we trust a tale when it presents different and contradictory views of a character or a situation? And, as narrative theory has taught us that a tale is a particular ‘narration’ of a ‘plot’ – a series of events which can be thought of as different from the tale itself – if one trusts the ‘tale’, does one trust the ‘narration’ or the ‘plot’, the ‘fabula’ or the ‘sjuzhet’? It is unsurprising that Lawrence is often condemned for failing to follow his own advice. A common critical judgement prefers his short stories

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and short novels (such as *The Ladybird* or *The Captain’s Doll*, both 1923), which show off his narrative gifts at their best, to novels like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) or *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), in which the tale is supposedly smothered by the interfering voice of the artist.

Lawrence’s critical reputation has been going down a long slide since Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1970, toppled it off the lofty heights it reached under the influence of F. R. Leavis, for whom Lawrence was (in 1955) ‘incomparably the greatest creative writer in English of our time’, and ‘one of the greatest English writers of any time’. This fall might have been less severe if Lawrence had only done less, written less, and pruned his own ‘didactic statements’ from his prose. Even Lawrence’s most admiring readers find it hard to make sense of the great heterogeneous clutter which is his oeuvre. The high praise accorded *Studies in Classic American Literature* is accompanied by disdain for his *Study of Thomas Hardy*. His travel writing is much admired; his letters have received few critical assessments. His novels are regarded as uneven: most critics regard his novels of the 1920s as disappointing in comparison with his three most highly regarded novels, *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1921), all written in the previous decade (*Lady Chatterley’s Lover* has received a great deal of critical attention, but much of this attention has been less than admiring). Critics have admired his poetry, but figures such as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams are more highly esteemed as the most innovative poets of modernism. His philosophical essays, such as *The Crown* (1915), have few readers.

The enormous disparity in critical assessments of Lawrence’s writing is worth noting, not only because it suggests that his writing might vary in quality, but also because it arises from conflicting impulses at work within it. Readers who respond negatively to Lawrence’s interfering voice in his fiction echo views advanced, but not followed, by Lawrence himself. The novel’s ability to reveal ‘the trembling and oscillating of the balance’ will be threatened, Lawrence writes, if ‘the novelist puts his thumb in the pan, for love, tenderness, sweetness, peace’. If the novelist wants the novel to express the value of a particular ideal, like ‘peace’, the resulting work might fail to represent human relationships in all their complexity. These views are expressed frequently and persuasively. But, if one reads a range of Lawrence’s work, it is impossible not to view him as a writer who has not stopped with his thumbs, whose arms are plunged deep into the pan, up to the elbow, so palpable are his designs upon the reader. In ‘The Future of the Novel’ Lawrence claims that ‘it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split’. His claim here echoes the more famous claim made by T. S. Eliot in his 1921 essay ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ that ‘[i]n
the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered’ – though his examples of novelistic philosophy, or philosophical fiction, are much older than the seventeenth century. Echoing Eliot’s complaint that recent poets such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning ‘do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose’,22 Lawrence wants the philosophical and fictional aspects of the novel to be inseparable; this return to an older mode of writing before the mythical separation will enable a new mode of writing to emerge which can ‘present us with new, really new feelings, a whole new line of emotion, which will get us out of the old emotional rut’.23 Lawrence wants to return to what he sees as an older mode of writing in order to achieve something new.

Lawrence’s formulation of a novelistic aesthetics based on notions of organic form is consistent with his advocacy of organic social organizations and ways of living which will enable us to reconnect with ‘nature’. His organicism has a complex genealogy. Anne Fernihough has demonstrated its philosophical affiliations with late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century German organicist and völkisch philosophies.24 It also has a social and biographical provenance, as it is in part a response to Lawrence’s experiences of the industrialism of English coalfield society, and the social divisions and tensions of the collier community in which he grew up. Indeed, before one attempts to locate Lawrence’s modernism, one needs to acknowledge how Victorian he is. His fiction continues a project begun by George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, and continued by Thomas Hardy: an analysis of the impact of modern technologies on provincial communities, in which the ‘shock of the new’ was caused by the industrial revolution rather than by aesthetic revolutions. Lawrence was born and grew up in Eastwood, a mining village on the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border. His childhood gave him an intimate acquaintance with the rural industrialism of coalfield society, and his fiction describes the environment of the Midlands as one in which the traditional components of English pastoralism – flowers, trees and forests, water and pasture, country houses, cottages and gardens – brush up against the waste products and frantic activity of mines, steelworks and factories. These stark contrasts are explored in most depth in three key novels, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, all of which examine the impact of what Lawrence calls the ‘mechanical’ on the landscape and on our way of living. In these novels the modern has a demonic and fascinating power, an awful destructiveness.

*Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence’s last novel, offers his bleakest realization of the destructiveness of the industrial and the modern. The impact of modernity is shown through Lawrence’s portrayal of human lives and his descriptions of a ravaged landscape. Modern industrialism and modern war
are devastating in their impact on the Midlands coalmining community described in the novel. The First World War kills the elder of the two Chatterley brothers and cripples the younger, Clifford, who is shipped back from Flanders ‘more or less in bits ... the lower half of his body, from the hips down, paralysed for ever’. Clifford’s father ‘chop[s] down his trees and weed[s] men out of his colliery, to shove them into the war’ (11); the trees are used for ‘trench timber’ (42). Thus Lawrence connects the injuries to the natural world with injuries to the body. There is an awful continuity between the trenches and the mines. Mrs Bolton, the working-class woman who nurses Clifford, was widowed when her husband, aged only twenty-eight, ‘was killed in an explosion down pit’ (80).

Clifford Chatterley’s estate, Wragby, has a ‘fine old park of oak trees’ (13) and a wood with game and gamekeeper, but from the house ‘one could see in the distance the chimney of Tevershall pit with its cloud of steam and smoke, and on the damp, hazy distance of the hill the raw struggled of Tevershall village ... rows of wretched, small begrimed brick houses with black slate roofs for lids, sharp angles and wilful blank dreariness’ (13). (Here, the novel differs significantly from Sons and Lovers, since the coalminers’ houses are seen only ‘in the distance’, rather than from within.) The burning pit-bank emits a ‘stench’, a ‘sulphureous combustion of something under-earth: sulphur, coal, iron or acid’, which fills the house; the air smells of ‘sulphur, coal, iron, or acid’ and ‘even on the Christmas roses the smuts settled persistently’ (13).

Just as T. S. Eliot realized the linguistic excitement and literary energies that can be generated from a sordid, squalid, urban environment, Lawrence, in Lady Chatterley’s Lover, makes poetry out of the stuff of modern industry. The ‘utter soulless ugliness of the coal-and-iron Midlands’ yields, paradoxically, writing of great energy, stylistic toughness and novelty, which poetically captures the violent clashes of the industrial environment, its smells, its sounds, its textures, its awful visual splendours, – ‘the rattle-rattle of the screens at the pit, the puff of the winding-engine, the clink-clank of shunting trucks’, the ‘red blotches’ of the furnaces that ‘burned and quavered’ in the night (13). We are accustomed to descriptions of the bad air, the smogs, or fogs, of the city, whether the yellow fog which, in Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ (1915), ‘rubs its back upon the window-panes’, or, in Elizabeth Bowen’s The Death of the Heart (1938), the ‘fog’ which invades the houses of London, so that, in daytime, indoors, her young heroine, Portia, ‘could hardly see the rest of the room ... it was not like night but like air being ill’. Lawrence’s writing reminds us that this pollution also affects small towns and the rural landscape, where the mud is ‘black with coal-dust’, the miners’ cottages are ‘blackened’, and the skies fill ‘with a
whole array of smoke plumes and steam. The ‘open, rolling country, where
the castles and big houses still dominated, but like ghosts’ gives way to a
‘tangle of naked railway-lines, and foundries and other “works”’ and the
soundscape is violent, dominated by the ‘huge reverberating clank’ of iron,
‘huge lorries’ which ‘shook the earth’, and whistles which ‘screamed’ (155).
‘Nature’ is not an obvious retreat from modern industry, as modern industry
has contaminated the entire ecosystem.

Lawrence believes his critique of industrial modernity puts him at odds
with the literary and artistic movements of modernism, which he sees as
having a symbiotic relation with new technologies and what he calls the
‘mechanical’. Lawrence’s fiction, despite its political waverings and plethora
of contradictory political identifications, is fairly consistent in its diagnosis
of the ills of modernity. In The Rainbow and Lady Chatterley’s Lover we see
the same historical ‘grand narrative’ being presented. The narrator of the
latter novel tells us that England’s stately homes are abandoned and ‘are
being pulled down’, England’s cottages are replaced by ‘great plasterings of
brick dwellings on the hopeless countryside’. These changes are not hapha-
azard changes in a local environment but, the narrator suggests, representative
of a change in epoch, a change in ‘meaning’ itself. One grand order – the
‘organic’ – is supplanted by another – the ‘mechanical’:

This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls
wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the
cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One mean-
ing blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the
continuity is not organic, but mechanical. (156)

Here, Lawrence condenses history into a single opposition: between the
agricultural and the industrial, the organic and the mechanical. The impulse
is nostalgic and elegiac, but it is unclear whether the elegy is for mere
‘nature’, or for a preindustrial, hierarchic ordering of society dominated by
grand estates. According to this narrative, Lawrence’s fiction is ‘modern’
because it shows a consciousness of this process of change; it is written, as it
were, after the old meanings have been blotted out. And its central couple,
Connie and Mellors, can show us the way to a new organic continuity.

The relationship between Connie and Mellors is important for several
reasons. It involves a reawakening of the body, of the most ‘secret places’
of life. It involves a rejection of the conventional ordering of industrial
society (though their plans at the close of the novel, to run a small farm,
are hardly revolutionary). But the relationship is in itself a rejection of social
ordering, as it breaks down the boundaries of class. In the process, however,
it pushes them away from society; they do not respond to the problems of
modernity by bringing about social change, but by fleeing. (Ironically, this
gesture of flight – as exemplified by Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce’s 1916 *A
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* – can be seen as a characteristically
‘modernist’ response.) Connie, wife of the industrialist and aristocrat
Clifford Chatterley, forms a relationship with Mellors, a collier’s son who
has (like Lawrence himself) moved away from his working-class roots. As a
boy he won a scholarship to ‘Sheffield Grammar School, and learned French
and things’; during his career in the army ‘some Indian colonel took a fancy
to him, and made him a lieutenant’. His reading certainly makes him familiar
with the culture, science and politics of modernity: it includes ‘books about
bolshevist Russia, books of travel, a volume about the atom and the electron,
another about the composition of the earth’s core, and the causes of earth-
quakes: then a few novels: then three books on India’ (212). Together Connie
and Mellors embark on a discovery of nature and primitive sexuality which,
despite Lawrence’s own loathing of ‘self-consciousness’, has an intellectual
and philosophical genealogy in highly conscious modes of modern thought.
They are absolutely Lawrentian in their belief that an exploration of each
other’s ‘secret places’ can undo the contamination of the new mechanical and
industrial England. Mellors tells Connie, ‘An’ if I only lived ten minutes, an’
stroked thy arse an’ got to know it, I should reckon I’d lived one life, sees ter!
Industrial system or not!’ (223).

When Connie dances naked in the rain ‘with the eurythmic dance-movements
she had learned so long ago in Dresden’ (221), when Connie and Mellors
make love outside in the rain, when the lovers thread flowers through each
other’s genitals, we can recognize various social influences in their actions,
even as these actions are intended to help them to escape the social. Their
actions are flamboyant realizations of the ecological antimodernism of late
nineteenth-century English thinkers such as William Morris and John
Ruskin, or of Edward Carpenter, who lived with his male lover George
Merrill in the Derbyshire village of Broadway, writing books on sex and
sexuality as well as poems influenced by Walt Whitman in a little hut by the
brook at the end of his garden.  

Early in the novel we are casually given some information about events in
Connie’s youth which anticipate the central events of the novel. At the age of
fifteen – in 1910, according to the novel’s somewhat dodgy chronology –
Connie is ‘sent to Dresden . . . for music among other things’, and there,
with her sister Hilda, she lives freely with students, argues with men ‘over
philosophical and sociological and artistic matters’, and tramps ‘off to
the forests with sturdy youths bearing guitars, twang-twang! – they sang
the Wandervogel songs, and they were free’ (6). This Dresden sojourn is
significant for a number of reasons. Late nineteenth-century Germany
witnessed the formation of the Wandervo¨ gel movement, in which bands of youths would go hiking and tramping. William H. Rollins writes that hundreds of thousands of Germans ‘engaged in “life-reform” (Lebensreform) activities . . . vegetarians, nudists, temperance advocates, clothing- and lifestyle-reformers’. Various ecological movements began working with the concept of Heimat, or ‘homeland’, and in 1904, in Dresden, these movements were unified with the formation of the Bund Heimatschutz (League for Homeland Protection). This movement was an ecological response to the rapid industrialization of Germany in the late nineteenth century, and its intellectual and political ideas drew not only from German Romanticism but also from Morris and Ruskin. Its vision is remarkably similar to Lawrence’s and that of his fictional gamekeeper intellectual, Mellors. These movements are difficult to characterize ideologically, as their responses to industrialism vary from a conservative nostalgia to anticapitalist radicalism. One commentator notes that youth movements like the Wandervo¨ gel responded to the rapid changes of German industrialism with a belief in an ‘ideal image of pre-industrial peasant-dominated cultivated landscapes’. A more radical tendency was evident at the 1912 ‘Second International Heimatschutz Congress’ held in Stuttgart; in his opening address Carl Johannes Fuchs, a professor of national economy in Tübingen, claimed, ‘The really central problem of the Heimatschutz is simply one and the same in all modern civilized states: it is the struggle against a capitalism that mercilessly destroys what has grown up over time along with its beauty.’

This environmental activism was accompanied by other forms of activity which aimed at developing the individual’s relation to nature, such as reforms within education. Connie will have learnt her eurythmic dance movements at the Jaques-Dalcroze Institute at Hellerau, near Dresden, founded by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze in 1910. At the institute, which was internationally renowned, Jaques-Dalcroze’s various unconventional pedagogic methods were taught. His teaching used body improvisations and movements in order to learn rhythm and harmony. Different bodily movements correspond to various musical concepts; under the Jaques-Dalcroze method the body itself becomes a musical instrument. The teachings were important not only in education but also in expressionist dance: music, movement and therapy come together in the work of figures such as Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman.

At the close of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Mellors outlines a programme for reform, many of the elements for which – such as clothing reform, nudism and the use of dance and music – could have come from early twentieth-century German ecological political and cultural movements. Men should
wear ‘scarlet trousers’, ‘dance and hop and skip, and sing and swagger and be handsome’, and ‘learn to be naked and handsome . . . and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances, and carve the stools they sit on . . . Then they wouldn’t need money. And that’s the way to solve the industrial problem: train the people to be able to live and live in handsomeness, without needing to spend’ (299–300).

Despite Mellors’s utopian sentiments, Connie’s and Mellors’s discovery of nature differs from early twentieth-century environmental movements, in that they discover the wild as an isolated couple, rather than as part of any meaningful community. This movement from an emphasis on the community to an emphasis on the individual can be traced throughout Lawrence’s fiction. Although The White Peacock (1911), Sons and Lovers and The Rainbow – his three Nottinghamshire novels written before Women in Love – show tensions between individual and community, these novels also give some grounds to hope that these tensions might be resolved. In these three works of fiction, rural life, nature and agriculture evoke what Lawrence calls the ‘blood-intimacy’ of an organic community. The industrialism of coalmining threatens and works against this organic integrity, but the opposition between healthy rural communities and damaging industrialism leaves an ideal of organicism intact.

In Women in Love and in most of his subsequent fiction, however, Lawrence’s metaphysic of blood-consciousness no longer attaches itself to or works within any particular community. If it survives at all, it survives only as an unrealized ideal awaiting the discovery of or creation of a place in which it might be lived out; or within an individualism which is suspicious of community; or within sexual relations outside the dominant ordering of marital domesticity and familial life.

In Women in Love and in Lady Chatterley’s Lover, there is no continuity between the romantic couple and a broader canvas of social life, no symbolic linking of marital union with procreation and the institution of the family. In Women in Love Rupert Birkin asks Ursula Brangwen to ‘wander about for a bit’, to ‘set off – just towards the distance’; he tells her: ‘I should like to go with you – nowhere . . . That’s the place to get to – nowhere. One wants to wander away from the world’s somewhere, into our own nowheres.’ Connie and Mellors have plans that are equally vague. Mellors urges Connie, ‘Bit by bit, let’s drop the whole industrial life, an’ go back’ (219). The novel, however, gives no indication of how one might actually lead a preindustrial lifestyle, of where it is one should go back to.

It seems that Lawrence was much more skilled at expressing his angry disgust at modernity than he was at suggesting solutions to the problems he identified. In ‘A Propos of “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”’, he talks of our need to
‘get back into relation, vivid and nourishing relation to the cosmos and the universe’, a process which will take place through ‘the ritual of the seasons, with the Drama and the Passion of the soul embodied in procession and dance, this is for the community, an act of men and women, a whole community, in togetherness’. But the individualism, isolation and alienation of his fictional lovers go against any formation of community. Their discovery of sensuality leads to some kind of renewal and regeneration, but this is a regeneration of individuals, not a regeneration of society. It takes a utopian leap of the imagination to see how these stories of lovers cavorting naked in the woods will bring about cultural regeneration, but Lawrence, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, is prepared to make that leap. A striking authorial digression in that novel tells us:

> It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead. Therefore the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret places of life: for it is in the *passional* secret places of life, above all, that the tide of spiritual awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and freshening. (101)

Lawrence seems to be saying that reading his own novels will lead our sympathy away from ‘things gone dead’ into ‘new places’, and reveal for us ‘the most secret places’, unleashing a cleansing, freshening, spiritual awareness. What are these secret places, however? When Connie and Mellors are together in the woods, Lawrence tells us that Mellors touches the ‘two secret openings to her body’, ‘her secret places’ (223); later, in the scene (notorious among critics and readers of the novel) when the lovers have anal sex, Mellors is described as ‘[b]urning out the shames, the deepest, oldest shames, in the most secret places’ (247). Lawrence’s politics here are radical, idiosyncratic and fanciful. One way of understanding them is as a precursor to thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, whose blend of Marxism and Freudianism connected sexual repression with political and social repression. Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (1955) was enormously influential in the 1960s, the decade in which the ban on *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was lifted and the decade in which Lawrence was taken most seriously as a cultural critic. If we consider that it was not until the 1960s that ideas of sexual liberation came to be popularly connected with notions of personal liberation and social regeneration, then Lawrence’s novel, for all that it is rooted in the England of the 1920s, is strikingly radical for its own time, even if its belief in the messianic possibilities of sexual liberation now seems touchingly naïve and its vision of sexuality remains seriously discredited by subsequent
feminist criticism of Lawrence. If Millett’s *Sexual Politics* was the key text which began the decline in his critical reputation, Lawrence nevertheless was himself advancing an early version of sexual politics. And, if he is a key figure in the history of antimodernism, his fictional portraits of alienated individuals trying to find some redemption in the realm of personal relationships and sexuality remain central to modernism, and the way in which modernism is associated with a reimagining of the sexual self.

**Notes**