

**IN AND OUT OF LONDON D. H. Lawrence's Nightmarish
Experience (1914-1919)**
ENTRADA E SAÍDA DE LONDRES (1914-1919)
Experiência de pesadelo de D. H. Lawrence e sua paixão pela natureza

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Resumo

Este artigo propõe-se a analisar o que é considerado como o período mais difícil da vida de D. H. Lawrence. Mergulharemos nas razões pelas quais ele rejeitou os círculos intelectuais londrinos, seu estilo de vida e seus habitantes. Também olharemos o que estragou seu amor à primeira vista pela Cornuália, transformando-a numa experiência infernal. Em suma, enfocaremos o longo período (24 de junho 1914 – 14 de novembro de 1919) durante o qual Lawrence e Frieda foram obrigados a viver na Inglaterra em circunstâncias difíceis. É fácil entender que os anos que correspondem ao período da primeira guerra se transformaram em um pesadelo que marcou o casal para o resto da vida. A consequente decepção lançou uma sombra, especialmente em Lawrence, por toda sua vida. O que tornou tudo ainda pior a longo prazo foi a decepção originada da poluição que já empestava o ar por lá. De fato, ele tinha razão, uma vez que criamos uma nuvem de fumaça venenosa que permanece pairando sobre nós. A única solução, conforme Lawrence sábia e profeticamente sugeriu, poderia ser a reconexão com a natureza, respeitando-a e, certamente, ela devolveria o favor. Nesse ínterim, infelizmente, parece que ainda não percebemos que nossa atitude arrogante e desrespeitosa nos tenha levado quase ao ponto de autodestruição. Por mais surpreendente que seja, a propagação chocantemente rápida e violenta da pandemia de Covid-19, ao forçar os governos a imporem lockdowns e restrições rigorosas a viagens de país a país, tem revelado uma natureza fantástica e deslumbrante. Embora estejamos hipnotizados por isso, não temos a ilusão de que isso perdurará, porque a economia mundial precisa voltar à sua normalidade. De qualquer modo, acredito que seja hora de buscar resolver questões como aquecimento global, todos os aspectos de de poluição ambiental e seus efeitos nos ecossistemas e na saúde humana. Precisamos encarar que esta é talvez a última oportunidade de salvar a humanidade de total destruição.

Palavras-chave: D. H. Lawrence; I Guerra Mundial; Londres, Itália; Reconexão com a natureza; Preocupações contemporâneas

Abstract

This article aims to analyse what is widely considered the hardest period in D. H. Lawrence's life. We will look into the reasons why he rejected London's intellectual circles, the city's lifestyle, and its inhabitants. We will also see what spoilt his love at first sight with Cornwall, turning it into a hellish experience. In brief, we will focus on the long period (24 June 1914 – 14 November 1919) during which Lawrence and Frieda were forced to stay in England under difficult circumstances. Little wonder that those years, corresponding to the War period, became a nightmarish experience that would mark the rest of their lives. The resulting disappointment cast a shadow, especially on Lawrence, through all his life. What made things even worse in the long run was the disappointment deriving from the pollution which was already pestering the air there. Indeed, he was right since we have created a cloud of venomous fumes which keep hovering above us. The only solution, as Lawrence wisely and prophetically suggested, could be to connect back to nature and respect it, and certainly, nature will return the favour. In the meantime, unfortunately, it seems that we have not realised

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that our arrogant and disrespectful attitude has led us almost to the verge of self-destruction. However, surprising it may be, the shockingly violent and fast spreading Covid-19 pandemic, on forcing governments to impose lockdowns and stringent travelling restrictions even from country to country, has given nature a chance to be reborn and show itself in all its breathtaking beauty. Although we were mesmerized by that, let us not be under any illusion as we all know that it cannot last long because the world economy needs to get back to business as usual. Nonetheless, I believe it is high time that we took action to try to solve issues, such as global warming, all aspects of environmental pollution and its effects on ecosystems and human health. Let us face it, perhaps this is the last opportunity we have to save humanity from total destruction.

Keywords: D. H. Lawrence; World War I; London, Italy; Reconnection to Nature; Contemporary Concerns

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This article aims to analyse what is widely considered the hardest period in D. H. Lawrence's life. We will look into the reasons why he rejected London's intellectual circles, the city's lifestyle, its inhabitants and its polluted air. After visiting a few places around England, he eventually accepted an offer to move to Cornwall. Regrettably, although he liked the region very much for its primitiveness and uncontaminated nature, which are two key elements to understand the writer's life and art, that first idyllic contact was soon spoilt by growing tension and reciprocal mistrust between Lawrence, his wife Frieda and the local population.

Everything began in the long period, 24 June 1914 – 14 November 1919, when the Lawrences were forced to stay in England under difficult circumstances; those years became a nightmarish experience, which would mark the rest of their lives. Nevertheless, Lawrence's first impression of London, described in a letter (dated 9 October 1908), to his friend Blanche Jennings, does not sound negative at all:

I have also spent a week in London, pompous, magnificent capital of commercialism, a place of stately individualistic ideas, with nothing Gothic or aspiring or spiritual. [...] the pillared temples are banks and business houses. I felt remarkably at home in London, remarkably cheerful and delighted. [...] London is restful, as quiescent as a dinner with J. P.'s. [...] Also the people in London do not feel so strange; they are folk who have come down the four winds of Heaven to this centre of convergence of the Universe; [...] one naturally gravitates to London (LAWRENCE, 1979, p. 80).

Although Lawrence's first impression was positive, only three days after starting his teaching job in Croydon, a suburb seven miles south of London, he, according to his fiancée Jessie Chambers, was very sad to be away from his family and Eastwood, his hometown: "On his second day in Croydon Lawrence sent me [Jessie] a letter that gave me a shock. It was like a howl of terror. People were kind, he said, but everything was strange, and how could he live away from us all?" (LAWRENCE, 1979, p. 82). But as weeks passed, things seemed to get better. He wrote to Blanche:

I have got a new girl down here: you know my kind, a girl to whom I gas. She is very nice, and takes me seriously: which is un wisdom. [...] I have been out a good bit lately: to the theatre and so forth. [...] Really, I am very busy: either I am writing stuff, or going out, alone or with Miss H[olt], or rarely, reading or painting (LAWRENCE, 1979, p. 141-142).

Life was quite promising and became even better thanks to Jessie, who submitted some of Lawrence's poems to Ford Madox Hueffer, the editor of the English Review, in June 1909. He said to her, 'Send whatever you like. Do what you like.' (PR, p. 157) The reply to her initiative came by the beginning of August; Hueffer wrote to her, saying that he wanted to meet Lawrence in London as 'perhaps something might be done.' (*Ibidem*, p. 158) Thus, the path for the milieu of London publishers and writers was opened up.

As Lawrence returned to Croydon, when the new school term began, Hueffer entertained him to lunch in his London home. On that occasion, the young writer met some very important people such as Hueffer's partner Violet Hunt, H. G. Wells, and Ernest Rhys, the editor of Everyman's Library. A few days later, Violet invited Lawrence to the Reform Club where she introduced him to Ezra Pound. Hueffer recalls that Wells was saying to someone at Lady Londonderry's adjoining table, 'Hooray, Fordie's discovered another genius! Called D. H. Lawrence!' (I R, p. 52) London could have not been a better place for Lawrence because he had the chance to meet the right people who could help him to realise his dream of becoming a professional writer. The opportunity to do that was triggered during a visit to his parents when his former professor of French Ernest Weekley introduced him to his wife Frieda Von Richthofen. It was love at first sight. Two months later, on 3 May 1912, they met at Charing Cross Station in London and took a train to her country, Germany.

In the next few years, the couple would be going in and out of London. Their first long stay abroad was at Gargnano, a small village by Lake Garda (Italy), where they stayed from 19 September 1912 till 30 March 1913. A horrified Lawrence realised that the spreading of the English industrialization had already reached that natural 'paradise' and was not only causing the disruption of its natural order but was also changing people's mentality and habits as shown by the pressing anxiety to adapt to the new hectic modern rhythms. Most interestingly, here is what Lawrence thought about that while talking to his landlord Signor De Paoli in his peaceful lemon garden:

I sat on the roof of the lemon-house, with the lake below and the snowy mountain opposite, and looked at the ruins on the old, olive-fuming shores, at all the peace of the ancient world still covered in sunshine, [...]

I thought of England, the great mass of London, and the black, fuming laborious Midlands and north-country. It seemed horrible. [...]

And England was conquering the world with her machines and her horrible destruction of natural life. She was conquering the whole world. (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 132).

Henceforward, Lawrence began to be disillusioned. Notwithstanding his initial enthusiasm for Gargnano and its inhabitants, on 25 March 1913, he announced to his sister Ada that he and Frieda were going to travel to the south of Italy. After leaving Gargnano,

they spent some time separately between England and Germany and then moved to Lerici on the Italian Riviera where they enjoyed the whole winter in a pleasant climate. This was what Lawrence particularly loved about Italy, together with his flourishing nature and sun. Regrettably, to get married, they had to return to London where they arrived on 24 June 1914, but after just one week they took the opportunity to spend a weekend away at one of Lawrence's favourite places, The Cearne, Kent. In truth, he acknowledges his dislike for London, in a letter to Thomas Dunlop, reading, "We are very tired of London already, and very glad to be down here in the country". (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 192) Therefore, as soon as Frieda's divorce came through, they got married at the Kensington registrar's office on 13 July. Unexpectedly, and to their utter dismay, the authorities did not allow them to leave for Italy because Britain had just entered the Great War (4 August 1914). They must have felt like wild cats in a cage and began to ramble all over the country. A month after their wedding, they were in Chesham (Buckinghamshire) until 20 January 1915, then they moved to Greatham, Pulborough (Sussex). As clearly stated in a letter of 14 May 1915, to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Lawrence said what he detested most about London: traffic, crowds, the intellectuals' attitude, and the fashionable women, which, in his eyes, created an unpleasant atmosphere.

We were in London for four days: beautiful weather, but I don't like London. My eyes can see nothing human that is good, nowadays: at any rate, nothing public. London seems to me like some hoary massive underworld, a hoary, ponderous inferno. The dry, rocky ash. The fashions and the women's clothes are very ugly. (*Ibidem*, p. 339)

A visual representation of this quotation is offered by the picture below showing a traffic jam and a multitude of workers on their way to the City district. Both Lawrence and Frieda disliked that materialistic world and the humanless entities organised around impersonal, bureaucratic institutions, such as banks, which were only money- and property-oriented machines. London was the living metaphor of that 'inferno.'

Photo 1: London Bridge full of vehicles and pedestrians in the 1920s.



Consequently, instead of staying in town, they preferred to go away every time they could. We find them in a cottage in Chesham, Buckinghamshire for five months from August 1914 to January 1915, and then in Greatham, Sussex, from 15 January. Despite that, they regularly attended parties where they made friends with the high society, including Lady Ottoline Morrell and her lover Bertrand Russell, Katherine Mansfield, John Middleton Murry, and Lady Cynthia Asquith. Lawrence kept up a correspondence with all of them. Among those letters, there is one to Lady Ottoline (11 November 1915)

in which he tells her, still in a Dantesque vein, how shocked he was by the ghostly vision of people in the gloomy atmosphere of the underground:

I arrived home safely, in the rain, with my Hessians and my flowers. London *does* strike a blow at the heart. I must say: tonight in a black rain out of doors, and a tube full of spectral, decayed people. How much better and more beautiful the country is: you are very wise to be at Garsington (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 434).

Again, the scene described by Lawrence is visualised in the picture below, where we can see a crowd of passengers at a station in that period.

Photo 2. Busy train station, London, in the 1910s.



Only one year later, on 4 August 1915, we find the Lawrences at 1 Byron Villas, Hampstead, a very peaceful area of North London, where they would be staying until 21 December. Lawrence as usual could not refrain from expressing his strong antipathy for the city. Only after ten days there, he wrote to Lady Cynthia Asquith:

We must rid ourselves of this ponderous incubus of falsehood, this massive London, with its streets and stress of nullity: we must, with one accord and in purity of spirit, pull it down and build up a beautiful thing. We must rid ourselves of the idea of money (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 381).

Photo 3. Byron's Villa: Lawrence's flat photographed by Lawrenceans at the XIV D. H. Lawrence Conference, London 2017.



Despite his bad feelings, the writer managed to revise the last set of proofs of *The Rainbow* which was published by Methuen on 30 September. Just over one week later, the novel was prosecuted in an obscenity trial at Bow Street Magistrates' Court, in London, as a result of which 1,011 copies were seized and burnt. On 16 December, 1915, a desperate Lawrence, seeing no future for himself in England, wrote to Thomas Dunlop: 'We are going stormily on, as ever. Of course, you heard of the suppression of the *Rainbow*. That was a ridiculous affair, [...] But the whole thing is nasty and offensive.' (*Ibidem*, p. 477) Little wonder then that 'A strong sense of England coming to an end,' as Peter Preston says in his *Chronology*, increased Lawrence's 'desire to escape to the USA.' (PRESTON, p. 54) On 23 December, Lawrence and Frieda visited his sister Ada in Ripley (Derbyshire) to take part in a big family reunion. The next day, he said to Catherine Carswell how oppressed he felt by his family and the working class in general. After a week, he wrote to Bertrand Russell and told him that he wanted to experience a radical unknown change: 'We go to Cornwall on Thursday – 30th. [...] 'We are waiting to go to Florida, for the others. [...] Won't you come to Florida too? Do! It is hopeless to stay in England. Do you come and be president of us.'" (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 490)

The Lawrences in Cornwall – the 'Promised Land'.

Moving to Cornwall was the very beginning of their lifelong 'savage enough pilgrimage' around the world. John Middleton Murry, who had holidayed in Cornwall before, suggested that Lawrence and Frieda could stay temporarily in the house owned by J. D. Beresford, a novelist, whose wife wanted to give birth while in London. The Lawrences accepted the offer and moved to that big house, located on a hilltop overlooking the small

village of Porthcothan. They arrived there, on 30 December 1915, and were immediately fascinated by the place as testified by a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith:

We came here tonight – a nice old house with large clear rooms, and such wonderful silence – only a faint sound of sea and wind. It is like being at the window and looking out of England to the beyond. This is my first move outwards, to a new life. [...] This is the first move to Florida (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 491).

As usual, Lawrence's mood, on arriving at a new place, was euphoric. He had just left London, with its busy social life, and was particularly relieved to feel he could have a new start. For about two years, Cornwall seemed to represent the ideal alternative to the contemporary modern and highly industrialised world. In a letter to Barbara Low, dated 5 January, 1916, Lawrence says: "I like Cornwall very much: it is so uncivilised, unchristianised – despite the churches. It is always King Arthur and Tristan for me. [...] I am very fond of that pre-Christian Celtic flicker of civilisation". (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 496). It should be recalled, here, that Heseltine, their London friend, with his keen interest in all things Celtic, had inspired them to go to Cornwall. He even stayed with them for eight weeks happily sharing the pre-Christian primitiveness of the place, which was tuned in with Lawrence's philosophy of life. In those terrible Great War years, he thought that Cornwall, with its calm atmosphere, was a welcoming shelter far from the War, the London crowd with its highbrows and the governmental institutions. Lawrence as usual enjoyed close contact with nature. So, he loved walking along the coast, growing vegetables and flowers. Indeed, flowers were a favourite topic for his poetry in which he described them in detail thanks to his great knowledge of them and his capacity of observation. His many poems dedicated to flowers, which he wrote in Zennor, paved the way to the 'otherness of the natural environment'. Worth mentioning are the last two poems of *Look, we have come through!* (1917), and 'Craving for Spring,' and 'Frost Flowers'(scyllas and yellow-haired hellebore, jonquins, dim anemones / even the sulphurus auriculas / flowers that come first from the darkness, and feel cold to the touch, / flowers scentless or pungent, ammoniacal almost [...])

Incidentally, Lawrence liked Cornish women as much as flowers, but detested the local men whom, he said, did not deserve to live in that gynocium, a paradise on Earth. In his view, Cornish men were 'detestably small-eyed and mean—real cunning nosed peasants mean as imbeciles.' (LAWRENCE, 1981, Vol. I, 346) Despite that, he preferred Cornish people in general to the English whom he saw as an insane and warlike race apart. Be as it may, Lawrence and Frieda were enjoying their time in Porthcothan until the natural harmony of the place was broken by a practical problem when their hosts, the Beresfords, needed their house back. Consequently, they headed south to look for a new house on the coast where they soon found a place only fifty miles away. Lawrence was most enthusiastic about the place that he wrote to Jack and Katherine Murry on 24 February 1916: 'when I looked down at Zennor, I knew it was the Promised Land, and that a new heaven and a new earth would take place.' (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 550)

Photo 4. Zennor coastline.



The day after, he wrote Lady Ottoline Morrell a letter sounding virtually the same. On 28 February, the couple moved to the little town of Zennor where they first stayed at Tinnars Arms, a stone-built pub with a hotel that is still open to the public and virtually preserved as it used to be in Lawrence's time. However, since the rentals were quite high, they had to look for a more affordable place.

Photos 5-6. St. Senara's Church, and the sign of Tinnars Arms, Zennor.



It took them a week to find Tregarthen Farm, just a mile outside Zennor, St. Ives, which its owner Captain Short let out for five pounds a year. The cottage did not even have running water, there was only a wellspring on the nearby hill. Lawrence wrote to his landlord that it required refurbishing: 'We are very badly off now, because of the war, but if you will do one or two little things to the cottage, I will pay a fair share. Let us make the place properly habitable. It is so small, it needs to be made convenient.' (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 575). The job was accomplished by 17 March when they moved in. Lawrence loved it as much as he liked Zennor, a remote and peaceful place, untouched by modern civilisation, seven miles

south of St. Ives on the road to Lands End which he found even more protective than Porthcothan.

Photo 7. Tregarthen Farm, Lawrence and Frieda lived there, 17 March 1916 – 15 Oct. 1917.



It was in that area that Lawrence began to dream of founding the Ranamin, an idealistic, utopian community. (See picture of cottage nearby, bearing that name as a reminder of that.) He was quite sure that he had eventually found the right place where to settle down that he tried to convince Lady Cynthia Asquith and Ottoline Morrel to join him, in vain. Lawrence stubbornly tried also with Catherine Carswell, saying, “Heseltine stayed with us for eight weeks. He is one of us. Ask him to see you, will you [...]” (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 555) Without doubt he hoped Heseltine would convince her.

Photo 8. Rananim Cottage, Oct. 2017



Among a very few others, only the Bulgarian-born novelist, Michael Arken, whose original name was Dikran Kouyoumdjian, accepted the invitation. But Lawrence wrote to Ottoline Morrell that “Kouyoumdjian came on Monday and brought the atmosphere of London, most disturbing. How I loathed that London, that England out there. The only

thing to do, truly, is to turn ones back on it". (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 504) Finally, he succeeded with the Murrays, who arrived in Cornwall on 4 April and stayed at Higher Tregerthen for just two months, making a pathetic excuse that they found the north of Cornwall too bleak, so they moved thirty miles on the south coast. But on 18 April, the day after they moved to Tregerthen, John Murry received, out of the blue, an arrest warrant for failure to enlist even if he showed his medical certificate of rejection. Lawrence felt that a similar humiliating and depressing experience was looming ahead for him, too. In fact, Cynthia Asquith informed him that compulsory service was extended to married men. It did not take long before he was summoned by the medical board in the barracks at Bodmin. To his surprise, he received a kind treatment and told Barbara Low, 'I got my complete exemption because I was able, spiritually, to manage the doctors. [...] I said the doctors said I had had consumption — I didn't produce any certificate'. (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 623) In the meantime the war showed its fiercest aspect, with the terrible losses of lives on all sides, which made Lawrence lose hope for the future. In August, he shut up like a clam and rejected any contact with the outside world. He wrote to Amy Lowell:

Here we live very quietly indeed, being far from the world. Here we live as if on one of the blessed Isles, the moors are so still behind us, the sea so big in front. [...] It is so lovely to recognise the non-human elements: to hear the rain like a song, to feel the wind going by one, to be thrown against the rocks by the wonderful water. I cannot bear to see or to know humanity any more (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 645).

While Lawrence was nonchalant about the world beyond Zennor, Frieda as usual felt the need to visit her three children in London. On her return, after a week, due also to the approaching of a cold winter, she found her husband as sick and depressed as ever. Still, he managed to make a great achievement: the completion of *Women in Love* (1920) in seven months, resulting from three very different drafts and 666 pages of manuscript. It is interesting to note that Lawrence used his meeting with the London intellectuals and the aristocracy as a source of satirical material. Most relevant are the chapters 'Crème de Menthe' (VI), 'Fetish' (VII), and 'Gudrun in the Pompadour' (XXVIII) that recall the people, who, like Cecil Gray, resented the 'spiteful way' in which Lawrence caricatured his 'best friends.' He was very angry at Lawrence for ascribing to Heseltine (Halliday in the novel) his 'ludicrous or revolting peculiarities.' Given its pertinence to the main topic of this article, I have focused on the Bohemians' spirit because it evokes events that Lawrence had a personal, vivid memory of in places like the Café Royal, the hangout of the London Bohemians, whom he utterly disliked, having met them following the success of his third novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913). Here is a telling account that seems to characterise the Bohemian world in the first paragraph, Chapter VI of *Women in Love*:

They met in the café several hours later. Gerald went through the push doors into the large, lofty room where the faces and heads of the drinkers showed dimly through the haze of smoke, reflected more dimly, and repeated ad infinitum in the great mirrors on the walls, so that one seemed to enter a vague, dim world of shadowy drinkers humming within an atmosphere of blue seats to give substance within the bubble of pleasure (LAWRENCE, 1989, p. 62).

The image of the ‘vague, dim world of shadowy drinkers’, who paradoxically share their meaningless shallow lives with their counterparts in Beldover (i.e. Eastwood), representing ‘the world of powerful, underworld men who spent most of their time in the darkness’ (LAWRENCE, 1989, p. 115). In any case, nothing better than Gudrun’s point of view can tell us why Lawrence was out of tune with London:

Gudrun hated the Café, yet she always went back to it, as did most of the artists of their acquaintance. She loathed the atmosphere of petty vice and petty jealousy and petty art. Yet she always called in again, when she was in town. It was as if she *had* to return to this small, slow, central whirlpool of disintegration and dissolution: just give it a look (LAWRENCE, 1989, p. 380).

It will be interesting to highlight that, while Gudrun and her partner Gerald Crich gradually caused their destruction, her sister Ursula and Gerald’s friend Rupert Birkin were trying to build up a romantic and stable relationship. This cataclysmic atmosphere emerges also from the letters Lawrence wrote then to his friends, including this one to Catherine Carswell, dated 14 August 1916: ‘I can’t come to London – spiritually I cannot. Frieda wants to come, to go chasing her children. [...] But I cannot come to London – I am much too terrified and horrified by people – the world – nowadays.’ (LAWRENCE, 1981, p. 639-640). It seems obvious why the Lawrences wanted to be allowed to leave for Italy as soon as possible, although they knew the authorities would not let them go anywhere around England much less abroad. Yet, hope was rekindled when two young American journalists, Esther Andrews and Robert Mountsier, visited them in Higher Tregrethen in early November; under the influence of the latter, who seemed to be able to get them out of the country, Lawrence revived his idea to move to America. Regrettably, this hope lasted only a few days until a police sergeant cycled from St. Ives to Tregrethen on a rainy Christmas Eve. The officer checked Mountsier’s documents and returned later with an army officer for further questions. At the end of the week, Mountsier had to travel back to London, leaving Esther there. In *Kangaroo* (1923), Lawrence used the chapter ‘The Nightmare’ to transpose his experience to Cornwall, as when he says:

When Monsell [i.e. Mountsier] got back to London he was arrested, and conveyed to Scotland Yard: there examined and stripped naked, his clothes taken away. He was kept for a night in a cell—next evening liberated and advised to return to America. Poor Monsell, and was so very anti-German, so very pro-British. It was a blow for him (LAWRENCE, 2002, p. 224-225).

Of course, Lawrence was very angry at the unpleasant incident his friend Mountsier had gone through. Sadly, that was not all, he received a second summons for medical examination which he hoped to avoid by sending a request for exemption with a certificate. Since that did not work, he hoped that Lady Asquith’s father-in-law, the outgoing Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith, could help him out; unfortunately, the fall of such a highly influential politician made him lose any chance. No wonder that a furious and disappointed Lawrence wrote to her a fiery letter on 26 April 1917: ‘I spit on your London and your government and your armies. Pah, what are they, Lloyd Georges and Haigs [Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces] and such-like canaille?’ (LAWRENCE, 1984, p. 118). What made the situation even worse was the fact that things did not go well on the financial front either

because Lawrence was no longer a popular writer after his latest novel, *The Rainbow*, was banned. Consequently, he was so hopeless that he even asked Cynthia Asquith for any government job, anything to sustain himself and Frieda. Under such a distressing situation, his passion for nature proved to be vital support physically and morally. He even used the knowledge acquired in the fields to underscore the inner lives of his characters who were more often than not based on real people. Especially in the summer, he used to spend a lot of time at the Hockings' cottage at Higher Treggerthen. So, William Henry Hocking, whom Lawrence calls John Thomas (a common phallic pseudonym) in his *Kangaroo* adaptation of real events, says to Somers (Lawrence): 'I declare! [...] You look more like one of us every day.' (LAWRENCE, 2002, p. 232) Quite interestingly, William Henry's brother Stanley comments ironically in an interview given later:

That's a good one. We had another workman besides Lawrence, and Lawrence was only considered a boy compared to this other workman. Work 'went like steam' not because Lawrence was there. There were many days when he wasn't there, and work went on as usual". (WADE; HOCKING, 1973, p. 266).

The truth is that, although Lawrence used to help in hay-making he did not have enough stamina to spend a whole day on the fields; therefore, he left work every time he was inspired and went to drop his ideas on his typewriter. He and William Henry became such intimate friends that there were rumours they were having a homosexual relationship. Despite that, there is a broad agreement with Catherine Carswell's opinion of William Henry as a fine person:

A working man and a Celt, a man with a subtly pagan face, born in the shadow of these Druidical stones, yet English too, might, surely must, have some wordless understanding of one of the oldest of all human rites (LAWRENCE, 1984, p. 311).

In that particular summer, Lawrence and Frieda made friends also with another young man, a friend of Heseltine, Cecil Gray, a musician who was among the few people who accepted their invitation. He was tired of London and rented a house two miles from Treggerthen. He was the typical city man, an upper-class snob (some sort of Lockwood as described in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë), who was looking for a romantic isolated shelter, just like that he found on a clifftop, away from the hysterical urban life. Incidentally, Gray too is to be identified with a character in *Kangaroo*, James Sharpe, a young musician, who abhorred war like Lawrence: 'He had decided that if ever he were summoned to serve, he would just disappear.' (LAWRENCE, 2002, p. 233). Although Lawrence and Cecil were quite different in temperament, they got on well together (Lawrence confidentially addressed him 'Grigio', the Italian for grey). They became close friends and spent a lot of time together, thus arising the suspicion of the locals that they were homosexuals, though this friendship too was discarded soon. By contrast, what became a really serious issue was the suspicion that they might be German spies, causing the endless harassment of the military authorities that never left Lawrence and Frieda in peace. At first, through 1916, the persecution was light and bearable, but regrettably, the suspicion became more insistent, especially after Mountsier's visit. It is no wonder that anybody approaching them in that period was suspected of being a spy because Lawrence was the husband of a German woman, who was under ordinary surveillance as a "person of hostile origin." Meanwhile, the Germans

proclaimed unrestricted warfare on 31 January 1917, this change of strategy caught an unprepared British navy by surprise and very many ships were sunk by the German U-boats, including three ships between Lands End and St. Ives. What aggravated the Lawrences' position was the fact that the infamous Manfred von Richthofen, the "Red Baron," who was a distant cousin of Frieda, was becoming a mythical figure. On 29 April 1917, he killed five British pilots in combat, amounting by then up to fifty (they were going to be 80 altogether). To aggravate the situation the authorities knew that Frieda was regularly in contact with her family from which she received mail and papers like the *Berliner Tageblatt* (a Berlin daily political paper, which after being a liberal source of information during the Weimar Republic, was absorbed by the Nazis and stopped its publications in 1945). On the other hand, Lawrence was an idealist, who did not do anything to ingratiate himself with the police and the local people. Again, Somers reflects his position (LAWRENCE, 2002, p. 217). In his book, *Musical Chairs*, Gray confirms that Lawrence was irresponsible with his challenging attitude:

[He was] foolishly lax and indiscreet in speech when in the company of people whom he may sometimes wrongly have supposed to be trustworthy; and at that time he more than once expressed to me—and to others, no doubt—his intention of initiating a disruptive, pacifist and nihilist campaign in the industrial North, with a view to bringing about a speedy end of the War (GRAY, 1948, p. 129).

In effect, Lawrence was well aware that he was being spied by and that the police tampered with his letters; this most likely explains why he hardly made any references to the political scenario and the war. However exaggerated his sensation that virtually everybody spied on him and Frieda and denounced them to the police, there was indeed a kernel of truth. She was accused of signalling the U-boats at night until two coastwatchers caught her with a wrapped loaf of bread in her hands, which they seized thinking that it was a camera. In addition, in the words of Gray, one night, they were having a good time in his house when the police went to knock on his door. (This episode is recalled in further detail also in *Kangaroo*):

[...] after supper, when it was already dark, we were sitting around the fire amusing ourselves by singing German folk-songs (it must have been a horrible noise) when suddenly there came the peremptory hammering at the front door. I went to open it, but even without waiting for me to do so, the door was flung open and in marched half a dozen or so men with loaded rifles, who proceeded to search the house, saying that lights had been noticed flashing out to sea from my windows. Finding nothing incriminating on the premises, the intruders withdrew, with operatic gestures like a Verdi chorus, and blood-curdling threats to the effect that I would hear more of the matter (GRAY, 1948, p. 127).

Photo 9. Count House, now a Climbers' Club hut, Oct. 2017.



A few days later, on 11 October, three agents searched the Lawrences' house when both of them were out—according to the account in *Kangaroo*— letters, manuscripts, and the writer's address book were seized. The next morning, an army officer, the sergeant of the local police station in St. Ives and two detectives, went back. The police officer read them an order signed by Major-General Western of the Southern Command, Salisbury, declaring they had to leave Cornwall in three days; to report to the police within twenty-four hours after finding a new residence; and to stay out of Class 2 areas, corresponding to one-third of the English territory which included the whole coastline. On 12 October, Lawrence sent his last three letters from Zennor, informing about Cynthia Asquith, Pinker, and Cecil Gray whose letter reads:

Great trouble in the land – police raiding the house this morning – searching for God knows what – and we must leave the area of Cornwall by *Monday*, and not enter any prohibited area. – Come and see us at once. – I have not the faintest idea what it is all about – Curse them all (LAWRENCE, 1984, p. 167).

Due to the situation, Lawrence had no choice but to go back to the hated London intellectual clique. The Hockings drove the couple to St. Ives on Monday morning 15 October 1917. The expulsion came as a dreadful blow. Stanley Hocking recalled fifty years later:

The military officer and the police sergeant were there at the station to see that they got on the train. I remember that. The officials just stood there and said nothing. Nobody spoke. All these people are dead now (WADE; HOCKING, 1973, p. 2).

In the book aforementioned, Gray says that they were penniless. Therefore, he even had to pay for their train fares to London and had to ask his mother to host them in her flat at Earl's Court. The expulsion came as a terrible blow. The trouble was that Lawrence and Frieda did not gain people's sympathy, perhaps also because they lived in an isolated spot

which surely increased the typical Cornish distrust of the outsiders, the “intruders” as John Worthen describes them in his autobiography. On an unfortunate day in 1917, they were banned out of Cornwall and never returned.

Back to London (1917)

Quite surprisingly, in the first letter from London, dated 16 October 1917, Lawrence says to Catherine Carswell that he would rather go back to Cornwall, notwithstanding their bad experience there, than stay in London. Thus, confirming his absolute dislike of the city:

Last Friday, police raid and search the house, and we are ordered to leave Cornwall, to enter none of the areas in Class 2 [coastal regions] – report ourselves to police etc. [...]

It is very foul – I hate London – God knows how it will all work out. But I am going to try hard to get back to Cornwall. London seems in a bad state – everybody lost their souls – sickening (CARSWELL, 1981, p. 89).

On 17 October, a despairing Lawrence writes a vitriolic letter to Cecil Gray (here friendly addressed as Grigio), in which he expresses his absolute rejection of London:

Caro mio Grigio,

London is not to be thought of. – We reported to police here – they had heard nothing about us, and were not in the least interested – couldn’t quite see why we report at all. It is evident they work none too smoothly with the military. –Saw Cynthia Asquith last night – she will do what she can for us, she says.

But oh, the sickness that is in my belly. London is really very bad: gone mad in fact. It thinks and breathes and lives air-raids, nothing else. People are not people any more: they are factors, really ghastly, like Lemures, evil spirits of the dead. What shall we do, how shall we get out of this Inferno? (LAWRENCE, 1984, p. 169-170).

On 6 November, being on the brink of a psychological abyss, he wrote again to Grigio:

I have written direct to the War Office to be allowed to come back to Cornwall. If we can, we shall come: though there is no immediate hurry. I get irritated here, because I cannot read, not anything at all – not write (LAWRENCE, 1984, p. 179) .

This shows that Lawrence had mixed up feelings about Cornwall, though he found the region somewhat soothing. By contrast, Frieda was relieved to go away because she knew how much they loathed her as a German. Be that as it may, the truth lies as usual in the middle. The Lawrences were warmly welcome by Dollie Radford in her little house at 32 Well Walk, in Hampstead, London. Nonetheless, they did not feel at ease; so, after a week, they accepted the loan of Hilda Aldington’s big room at 44, Mecklenburgh Square,

Bloomsbury. Not surprisingly, they quite unwillingly joined their host's intellectual, fashionable circle, attending the last party on 11th November. After about two weeks, they moved to Gray's mother's little flat at Earls Court just before leaving London for good. Although Frieda remained there in an attempt to see her daughters, Lawrence decided to return to Mountain Cottage in Middleton-by-Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, and afterwards to Chapel Farm Cottage, Hermitage, near Newbury in Berkshire from where he once again wrote to Cecil Gray: 'I don't think I shall come to London.' (LAWRENCE, 1984, p. 199). At the time, Lawrence's only deliberate contact with the city was on business to see agents like J. B. Pinker and M. Secker. During one of his rare short visits to London, Lawrence wrote to Enid Hopkin from Acacia Rd. St. John's Wood, N.W. 8, on 14 August 1918, saying, 'London is horribly boring and stultifying. It is like living in a sort of vacuum. And we have to go out every evening – it is difficult to get things fitted in. [...] London is detestable.' (LAWRENCE, 1984, p. 273)

Regardless of his wishes, Lawrence was going to be obliged to stay another year in England before he could get permission to leave. We can just imagine how unbearable he must have found that situation. It is no wonder, then, that he took a ferry to France as soon as he could on 14 November 1919. He hardly ever lived in England again, except for some short visits to Hampstead, Nottingham and London between December and February 1923-24; and later, in October 1925, August/September in 1926. Sadly, two more extremely bad experiences loomed ahead: the seizing of his paintings at the London Warren Gallery and the banning of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. His disappointment was particularly complex, a mixture of sadness, anger and hurt for what man had done to man, and a nostalgia which is reflected in the cities like London as emerges in a few poems focused on the urban, industrialised reality such as *Town* in 1917, *The Factory City*, *City-life*, or in the late poem *In the Cities*, which belongs to the collection *Last Poems*. The description made of London is topical as if it had been written today. It will suffice to mention the apocalyptic vision Lawrence had of modern cities, including London:

In the cities
 there is even no more any weather,
 the weather in town is always benzine, or else petrol fumes
 lubricating oil, exhaust gas.

As over, some dense marsh, the fumes
 thicken, miasma, the fumes of the automobiles
 densely thicken in the cities.

In ancient Rome, down the thronged streets
 no wheels might run, no insolent chariots.
 Only the footsteps, footsteps of people
 and the gentle trotting of the litter-bearers.

In Mynos, in Mycenae
 in all the cities with lion gates
 the dead threaded the air, lingering
 lingering in the earth's shadow
 and leaning towards the old hearth.

In London, New York, Paris

in the bursten cities
the dead tread heavily through the muddy air
through the mires of fumes
heavily, stepping weary on our hearts (LAWRENCE, 1977, p. 703-4).

Finally, here is a most telling article “Why I don’t like living in London” which D. H. Lawrence wrote for *The Evening News* on 3 September 1928:

And the first half-hour in London, after some years abroad, is really a plunge of misery. The strange, the grey and uncanny, almost deathly sense of *dullness* is overwhelming. [...]

This is the nightmare that haunts you the first weeks of London. No doubt that if you stay longer you get over it, and find London as thrilling as Paris or Rome or New York. But the climate is against me. I cannot stay long enough. [...]

Now to feel like this about one’s native land is terrible. I am sure I am an exceptional, or at least an exaggerated case. [...]

Twenty years ago London was to me thrilling, thrilling, thrilling, the vast and

roaring heart of all adventure. It was not only the heart of the world, it was the heart of the world’s living adventure. How wonderful the Strand, the Bank, Charing Cross at night, Hyde Park in the morning!

True, I am now twenty years older. Yet I have not lost my sense of adventure. But now all the adventure seems to me crushed out of London. The traffic is too heavy. It used to be going somewhere, on an adventure. Now it only rolls massively and overwhelmingly, going nowhere, only dully and enormously *going*. [...]

And what does one do in London? I, not having a job to attend to, lounge round and gaze in bleak wonder on the ceaseless dullness. Or I have luncheons and dinners with friends, and talk. Now my deepest private dread of London is my dread of this talk [...] Utter inaction, and storm of talk. That again is London to me. And the sense of abject futility in it only deepens the sense of abject dullness, so all there is to do is to go away (LAWRENCE, 2014, p. 120-1).

I suppose all the above offers a clear enough picture about what made the Lawrences suffer during the war years, and why Lawrence, in particular, disliked London so much that the resulting disappointment cast a shadow on him through all his life. He realised that we were creating a cloud of venomous fumes which keep hovering above us. The only solution, as he wisely and prophetically suggested, could be to connect back to nature with great respect, hoping that it would return the favour. Indeed, we need to learn and accept that we are not alone on this earth: we should start giving back as much as we take in our different relationships with all the living creatures in the environment. Hence, we should redevelop our capacity for gratitude and humility since that would help us to recover the good values

of the past. At the same time, human beings should also give up the idea that, as superior intelligent beings, we are allowed whatever we like. It is most unfortunate that we have not realised yet that this arrogant attitude has led us almost to the verge of self-destruction. Now we should be more aware of environmental issues like global warming, marine pollution, human over-population, floods, etc.

However coincidental it may be, all that leads us inevitably to take into due consideration the worldwide disruption caused by the shockingly violent and fast spreading Covid-19 pandemic, which paradoxically unveiled such an amazing environment most of us had even forgotten the mere existence of. (See these two ironically relevant poems by Lawrence, 'Bat' and 'Man and Bat', which makes us think of the likely bat origin of the SARS-CoV-2 in a laboratory, in the Chinese city of Wuhan.) How can one ever forget empty, beautiful cities like Rome surrounded by a deafening silence, that created a sense of metaphysical hallucination? Likewise, other major capital cities such as Paris or Madrid almost came to a standstill, with virtually no cars on the road, fewer buses and underground trains, and no planes flying. Little wonder if that resulted in an unprecedented reduction of pollution. We have seen fish-eating birds return to the clearest ever seen waters of Venice. Nature seemed to make an open comeback, though in the meantime it has timidly withdrawn. Then, let's not fall from this paradisiacal, dream world down to the hellish one we are familiar with. I am sure Lawrence would be so happy about this apparent return of nature, and the slow down of the engines invented by men, which have turned human beings into 'machines' under their dominion (cf. his poem 'Man and Machine') as the frantic pace of modern life has slowed. Unfortunately, this is only a partial picture and one that is limited to the minority world of industrialised nations. Most of the world's biodiversity is found in the very low-income countries and emerging economies of the Southern Hemisphere where the economic impact of the pandemic is proving, as expected, to be devastating for human beings and the natural world alike. Let's hope that Lawrence's hopeless message about the danger of a dying world, as well as the slogan launched to mark the World Environment Day on 5th June 2020, will eventually be taken seriously: "It is time to wake up. To take notice. To raise our voices. It's time to build back better for people and the planet. This World Environment Day, it's Time for Nature."

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Illustrations

The pictures are courtesy of Nick Ceramella, who took them in 2017.