

A Punch in the Wind: Jim Bricknell Answers Back

John Turner

In his biography of Lawrence's middle years, Mark Kinkead-Weekes expresses his belief that the episode described in the chapter "A Punch in the Wind" in *Aaron's Rod*—the moment when Jim Bricknell punches Rawdon Lilly in the diaphragm—probably accords with an actual incident" in Lawrence's life (*TE* 434). Captain James ("Jack") White, D.S.O., the real-life model upon whom Jim Bricknell is based, really did visit Lawrence and Frieda at the Hermitage in the spring of 1918; and it was there, writes Kinkead-Weekes, that some such assault as the novel describes "probably" took place. His hunch is correct. In the first part of this paper I reprint Captain White's own account of the episode, which has hitherto escaped the attention of Lawrence scholars. Then in the second part I discuss that account in the wider context of *Aaron's Rod* and of White's autobiography *Misfit* (1930), in order to explore the antagonism between the two men and the reasons that led them to describe one another as "worth-while" opponents in the lists of ideological combat.

White's version of his assault upon Lawrence—which was not, according to White, a punch in the wind at all—is to

John Turner is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Wales, Swansea. His work on Lawrence includes an edition of *The Trespasser* for Penguin (1994), and an edition of the Frieda Lawrence-Otto Gross correspondence for the *D.H. Lawrence Review*.



be found in an article entitled simply “D.H. Lawrence” and published in the paper which A.R. Orage had launched in 1932 after his return from the United States, *The New English Weekly*, in the issue for 14 July 1932 (pp. 306-7). It was with this article that White was to establish himself as one of Orage’s regular contributors, with special responsibility for Irish affairs.

His immediate provocation to write on Lawrence was Philip Mairet’s recent review in *The New English Weekly* for 12 May of Mabel Dodge Luhan’s *Lorenzo in Taos*, and it is from this review that he quotes in the third and fourth paragraphs of his article below.¹ He had been stung, he says, by the “abstract” quality of Mairet’s metaphysical discussion of Lawrence’s dark gods into a more “concrete” political evaluation of Lawrentian individualism. In *Aaron’s Rod* Lawrence had depicted Jim Bricknell’s politics as vacuous and disintegrative, a mere diversionary ploy that enabled him to shirk the responsibilities of individual self-possession. But now, flamboyantly carrying the fight into enemy territory by taking JIM BRICKNELL as his pseudonym, Jack White is determined to set the record straight—to show that it is Lawrence whose ideas are disintegrative because, in his individualism, he shirked the responsibilities of the class-war into which he had been born. The abstractions that bourgeois critics were beginning to heap upon him were no more than he deserved for funkng the revolutionary implications of his anti-bourgeois position. “You cannot lift a basket by sitting inside it,” White says.

As *Aaron’s Rod* had mounted a serious critique of socialism, so White’s article mounts in return a serious socialist critique of Lawrence: the first of which I know. The ideological contest between the two men focuses upon the nature of the body, masculinity, sexuality, religion, and mental health, and is marked by a mutual antipathy that is in part an expression of their incompatible political positions. Like the two dead men in the traditional nonsense poem who, “back to back, faced each other,” White and Lawrence, the socialist and the individualist, reveal themselves as fellow-contraries who, even as they struggle, talk past one another into their own very different versions of the future.

I

I am Jim Bricknell, who, according to Lawrence in “Aaron’s Rod,” punched him in the wind.

I did not punch him in the wind, but let that pass. I did do him physical violence, after warning him that I would do so, unless he stopped doing moral violence to me. His account of the reason why I did him violence is accurate in the main. I was going to meet a girl. Lawrence attributed my doing so to “a maudlin crying to be loved.” I felt that did not cover the whole ground, asked him to stop, told him to stop, warned him what would happen if he did not stop, and finally stopped him more or less—chiefly less—as he describes.

Now, there has been a lot of discussion of Lawrence in abstract terms. “He worshipped the dark gods,” or he thought he did, while “some of the gods he worshipped in secret and in truth were not dark at all.” I want to talk about Lawrence in concrete terms, and, myself, Jim Bricknell, in concrete terms in relation to him.

First and foremost then, he was worth-while, a remark he once made of me before the “punch in the wind.” He was the sort of man who focused you. He was, as Mr. Mairet says, one of the men “who dramatise life, by whose means we apprehend ideas in ‘action.’” By his means I apprehended certain ideas long before they came into action in my life.

I remember him saying to me: “You will never be able to love a woman till you find your angel self in another man.” I hadn’t the least idea what he meant when he said it, yet it made a deep impression on me as something of terrific import. Since then I have discovered it to be literally true. It is not possible for me to love a woman, unless I can fall back on or call up supports, supports of my own regiment, so to speak, commanded by someone of my own, or superior, rank. The attack on or defence against a woman, especially in love, is too risky a business for me to venture upon without male support, without my angel self in another man to restore my manhood, when contact with femininity has taken the edge off it.

Lawrence either never himself acted on this priceless pearl of advice that he gave me, or he never succeeded in finding his angel self in another man. He was therefore always trying to drown his angel self in another woman, or, which is worse, the same woman.

If ever man knew that sex-love is war it was Lawrence; yet he was always trying to behave as if it were peace. His angel self would not drown—angel selves never will—and he hated Christ, because *He* had drowned once for all without the aid of a woman and risen again “One with the Father.” In “The Man Who Died,” he discounted the whole story and made Christ escape the Cross and forswear its folly to seek resurrection by the Lawrentian method.

But I become abstract myself. Lawrence was morbidly, viciously, childishly jealous; that's the plain truth. He was bound to be, because he wanted to master a woman and be mothered by her simultaneously. There was no place for any association with another man in Lawrence's woman.

Now let us come to the girl Lois I was going to meet. Surely I wanted to be loved, most men do; Lawrence most of all. Some men get over it, because they find it a dead-end. Lawrence never did. Lawrence lampooned himself in his caricature of me.

Lawrence was wrong and has been proved wrong. I wasn't sure he was wrong at the time, which is probably why I "punched him in the wind," for there is nothing so hypersensitive as an undistilled mixture of truth and falsehood; but it was for me to distil it, not Lawrence.

Events have distilled it. Years after the affair with Lois that Lawrence attacked so fiercely, when Lawrence was happily married and my own marriage was broken, I took a mate from the underworld and adopted, with her and for her, a child born in prison. The deep creative friendship with Lois remained, and through her the underworld child was fixed up in about as perfect conditions as are possible in this imperfect world. It bids fair to complete the withdrawal of her foster-mother from underworld conditions, where, after six years' effort, I had finally failed.

My failure cured me of mawkishness brought to its dead end. I punched Lawrence in the wind because I knew the mawkishness was there, but I felt the other thing behind it.

The other thing is Love,—the love Lawrence sought and never found, for the love that Lawrence sought is not confined to two persons at all, though I believe it needs two, fused to incandescence, to radiate its full light. But it is more, far more, than the union of two: it is the integration of many persons for the redemption of the future.

What Lawrence really sought in sex was the union of the microcosm and the macrocosm. Love rises above the instinctive and the emotional to the conscious, the creative evolution of the individual consciously fused with that of Society.

He never found the point of fusion, because he slurred over the opposition to be reconciled in individual and society alike. In the individual he sought for the secret of unity—of "togetherness," as he called it, back in the instinctive life without giving its full value to the conscious mental life as an inevitable to the higher and conscious "togetherness."

This slack thinking of his is very evident in his "Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover," where he praises Catholicism for maintaining the in-

dissolubility of marriage and treats Protestantism as the final expression of the lie of “apartness,” yet asserts, without explanation of the cause, that nearly all marriages today are what he calls counterfeit marriages. If that is so, surely the Protestant facilities for divorce are preferable to the indissolubility of the counterfeit. Why, his own book, on which he is commenting, treats of the dissolution of a counterfeit marriage which Catholicism would have maintained indissoluble!

The same error runs through all his thought, or rather his uncorrelated intuitions. Individual apartness is not a lie. It is a bridge from truth to truth, from instinctive “togetherness” to conscious “togetherness.” And the conscious “togetherness” must be hammered out on the anvil of the economic chaos, which is the self-cancelling culmination of conscious “apartness.”

The chaos arises when men are conscious enough to make machines but not conscious enough to control them in “togetherness.” The class-war is the compulsion to this higher togetherness. Lawrence shirked it. He hated the conscious mind and the machine which is its child. He was so near the class that are the slaves of the machine, he could not see that they alone have a compelling motive to become its masters.

In seeking the vital forces below his diaphragm Lawrence was really seeking the vital destiny of the class from which he sprang. But he had turned his back on what he sought. He did not dive deep enough for the dark gods nor rise high enough to control the switches of light to illumine the dark. He stayed in the middle with the middle-class intellectuals he despised; the worker in him poured scorn on their abstractions, their “dying of intellectual trickery and self-deception”; but you cannot lift a basket by sitting inside it; and he was inside. In revenge the middle-class intellectuals have made his corpse the container of the greatest avalanche of abstraction ever loosed.

Lawrence sought the power of Love, the concrete manifesting, renewing, redeeming, integrating power of Love.

He sought very much what I sought, what he wrote in blue pencil on the mantel-piece in “Aaron’s Rod” to summarise my quest.

Love is life.

Love is the Soul’s Respiration.

When you love, your soul breathes in.

When your soul breathes out, it’s a bloody revolution.

But he failed to find because he wanted to keep an aloof dignity in the search for a moving growing unity. He would not risk being a fool for Christ’s sake.

What is wrong with my fourth axiom on the mantel-piece? When the soul breathes out, here in a loveless world, one of two things must happen; either a bloody revolution to dissolve the loveless system, or a breathing through special persons, specially combined on a principle able to operate in spite of the opposition of the loveless system,—through it, yet above it.

For that, it must combine constructively the classes that, in the system, economically and therefore morally, sustain and destroy each other. In the instance I have given Love did that,—combined the overworld and the underworld for the future of a child. And the child remains as a link, a solvent of the class war, a magnet to combine the human qualities of each class that in their mutual interaction the class war destroys.

I know, though I can't convey it, that this came into being through the fragile promptings of sex, faithfully followed and fearlessly combined. On the road to this integration of love there is the disintegration of the lower instinctive and emotional love, the battle, the irretrievable division, which Lawrence describes so truly and so tragically in Aaron's reverie.

"The illusion of Love was gone for ever. Love was a battle in which each party strove for the mastery of the other's soul. So far man had yielded the mastery to woman. Now he was fighting for it back again. And too late, for the woman would never yield."

Of the personal love, the attempted completion of two persons by and in each other alone, that must become truer and truer as men and women become more individualised, more alive. For the more alive the man or the woman, the nearer is he or she to recognition of integral unity with all that lives, and love can be satisfied only in the manifesting integration.

Lawrence sensed that. But between the clue in physical desire and the crown in living fulfilment is a deep gulf fixed, the gulf between Dives and Lazarus.

Lawrence forgot Lazarus; sex must reconcile the class-war, not shirk it. No union of two human beings is possible, if they be really human, till it builds a plank into the bridge over the great gulf dividing humanity.

Lawrence reproaches himself after nursing Aaron.

"I wonder why I bother with him. Jim ought to have taught me my lesson. As soon as the man is really better, he'll punch me in the wind metaphorically, if not actually, for having interfered with him. And Tanny would say he was quite right to do it. She says I want power over them. What if I do?...Why can't they submit to a bit of healthy individual authority? The fool would die without me, just as that fool Jim will die in hysterics one day. Why does he last so long?"

I have tried to answer.

JIM BRICKNELL

II

When Jim Bricknell punches Rawdon Lilly in the wind in chapter VIII of *Aaron's Rod*, his action is portrayed as the histrionic "acting up" of a man whose love and hatred alike ring false; for Jim Bricknell, like almost everyone else in the novel, is suffering from hysteria. He is indeed the very paradigm of hysteria in a book which might properly be read as Lawrence's own *Studies on Hysteria*, participating in the widespread rethinking of that condition which followed upon medical experience with war-shock during the First World War. Deliberately Lawrence revises the familiar ideas and terminology of psychoanalysis in order to pursue his own interest in the state of *hysterics*, which he was to define later in characteristically untechnical and desexualised language as "emotions that have not the approval and inspiration of the mind" (*RDP* 205). Jim Bricknell's emotions throughout *Aaron's Rod* are shameful and factitious, and his "blow" to Lilly's diaphragm is "inspired" neither by a gust of real anger nor by rational disapprobation. It is worked up, hysterical, and hence it leaves him feeling sheepish. Josephine Ford damns him as "self-conscious and selfish and hysterical" (*AR* 68), and Lilly is no less dismissive: "Why does he last so long!" he exclaims, in sheer disbelief that a man so rotten with hysteria does not fall at once from the Tree of Life (*AR* 97).

Interestingly, however, White misread Lawrence's text at this point; he took the exclamation found in both Secker and Seltzer as a question, which then became the starting-point for his article: "Why does he last so long?" His self-vindication is in reply to an existential challenge that was never made; and this misreading, slight though it seems, nevertheless epitomizes White's general misunderstanding of Lawrence's comic and fictive purposes in *Aaron's Rod*.

In real life, White says, he did not punch Lawrence in the diaphragm; he did him physical violence, but of a different and unspecified kind. He does not then go on, however, to ask why Lawrence altered the facts to suit his fiction. For Mark Kinkead-Weekes, the comedy of Lilly's determination to hide his labored breathing provides "another extraordinary example, along with the Pompadour chapter in *Women in Love*, of Lawrence's ability to see and make a mockery of his own weaknesses" (*TE* 434). But this

is the biographer speaking and not the literary critic. Within the context of the novel, what Lawrence is mocking in Lilly is the windiness of his rhetoric—what Nietzsche might have called the *ressentiment* of his feelings, the incontinence of the spiteful, critical talk which is at times the exhalation of his soul; and by doing so, he is diagnosing Lilly too, alongside Jim, as suffering from the hysteria endemic in post-war Britain. Lilly's "weaknesses" are not merely personal shortcomings of character; they are symptoms of cultural contamination, which both connect him to his society and compel him to want to escape from it.

To read the novel biographically, therefore, is to see in Lilly an embodiment of "the misery and hystericalness" that, according to Lady Cynthia Asquith (98), beset Lawrence during the war, and that he hoped to cure by cultivating self-possession. To read it as fiction, in the tradition of the comedy of manners from which it springs, is to seek a quite different kind of cure within the quality of the writing itself, looking to the exemplary power of its author's creativity as an antidote to the national hysteria exemplified in Lilly.²

But there is a third, more compelling possibility, truer to the novel as a modernist text, and truer too to its existential uncertainty about the viability of categorical distinctions between the creative and perverse. To read the novel as a modernist fiction, complicating the traditional comedy of manners, is to discover an author who lays no claim to exemplary exemption from the contamination of his age, and who uses Lilly to explore his own sickness because he knows that no self-analysis can be undertaken without some kind of provisional fictional narrative to shape its hermeneutical and therapeutical quest. Lawrence wrote *Aaron's Rod* as "a letter to himself" (AR 264), and in chapter XIII he deliberately disrupted its fictional frame with an authorial outburst which allows us as readers, if we wish, to diagnose in him the same hysterical *ressentiment* that he depicts in his characters. Justified anger or hysterical rage? *Wie es Ihnen Gefällt*: but our reading of the novel must surely recognize the author's existential struggle with himself and the provisionality of any cure—indeed, of any diagnosis—that he might propose.

White's article, however, shows no interest in either the fictionality of Lawrence's novel or the provisionality of its solutions; nor does it concede the necessary fictionality—what Vaihinger was calling the "As If"—of all philosophical worlds. White is so earnest in his own defense, so set in his own beliefs, and so hasty to read Bricknell as Lawrence's unconscious lampooning of himself, that he fails to see that Lilly and Bricknell share

the same disease, and that *Aaron's Rod* is as much an essay in self-criticism on Lawrence's part as it is criticism of him. In misreading Lilly's *ressentiment*, and overlooking the comedy and fictionality of the novel, he fails to appreciate the true nature of Lawrence's existential struggle within it.

The fact that White's article is written under the pseudonym of Jim Bricknell is thus not an intellectual recognition of the fictive nature of all autobiography, but rather an expression of his own emotional need to dramatize his life—a life which he saw as “one vast gamble for some imaginative goal” in the face of an unimaginative world (White 92). A romantic like Conrad's Lord Jim, he might have taken Stein's well-known advice: “to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.” The nature of his gamble here is to confront Lawrence upon his own ground of *Aaron's Rod* and to prove him wrong. It is the completion of a process that had begun with Lawrence's declaration to White that he was a “worth-while” person, before going on to characterize him as a worthless *fainéant* in *Aaron's Rod*. Now the wheel has come full circle, and it is White's turn to argue that in fact it was Lawrence, “worth-while” though he was, who shirked the real work of life.

It was a gamble that White must have undertaken all the more obstinately in his knowledge that the chances were against him; for he knew that he was “odd.” His autobiography was called *Misfit*, and in it he confessed to “a general reputation for being odd” (133) which was corroborated in his own subjective sense of himself: “I feel I am odd” (105). The word, of course, was commonly in use at the time to denote the alienation and consequent disempowerment of individuals whose way of life and thinking set them apart from established conventions; but it seems no accident that Lawrence, who uses the word to great effect in *Aaron's Rod*, should first use it at the start of chapter III in order to introduce us to the Bricknell family:

It is remarkable how many odd or extraordinary people there are in England. We hear continual complaints of the stodgy dullness of the English. It would be quite as just to complain of their freakish, unusual characters. Only *en masse* the metal is all Britannia. (AR 26)

It was among the heterogeneous, shifting groups of Bohemia that Lawrence based his attack upon Britannia, sifting their behavior and ideas to see how far they promoted the *Umwertung aller Werte* that he believed necessary to

the regeneration of the future; and it was similarly to the future that White devoted himself. His “educative value,” he wrote, lay in the fact that he was one of the very few men to “have gone Nap, Boney, on an idea” (133)—to have “staked his all,” that is, like one of Stein’s romantics, by gambling his life upon a belief about himself and what he calls, with due irony at one point, his “messiahship” (185).

The belief on which White staked his all was certainly odd, both in its nature and its origins: he believed that Love could reconcile all earthly contradictions—between Protestantism and Catholicism, proletariat and bourgeoisie, Christ and Lenin—and that all individual sexual love was imperfect unless it furthered the processes of such reconciliation. It was a belief that he himself had acted out, he tells us in his article, by taking a lover from “the underworld,” adopting on her behalf a child born in prison and, thanks to the “Lois” mentioned in *Aaron’s Rod*, giving it a privileged upbringing that promised to achieve what sexual love alone had been incapable of achieving: the weaning of the woman, now his lover no longer, from her underworld connections. Love is here enlisted as an agent in the kind of social engineering that was so fashionable in the fiction and educational philosophy of the time; and the coercive rigidity of White’s program—what Lawrence would have called its idealism—distinguishes it sharply from the beliefs that Lawrence had recently dramatized in the reconciliation at the end of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

The origins of White’s belief in his mission as the prophet of Love lay in a moment of emotional crisis in 1904-5, at the time of the Russo-Japanese war, when as an Irish Protestant he had found himself balked in his desire to marry a Catholic woman. Exhausted by conflicting feelings, he fell into a troubled sleep from which he suddenly woke to feel “a most pleasurable sensation in the middle of my chest, as if I had drunk a strong liqueur” (64).³ It is a moment of epiphany such as is not uncommon in the literature of the time, and White saw it as an initiation into the mysteries of synchronicity, an ecstatic prefiguration of the new world order of Love that was emerging simultaneously from his own love for Dollie and from the distant conflicts of the Russo-Japanese war. “I’ll take you through,” Love promised him (66); if God was Love, then love too was God, and White’s ecstasy spoke with the voice of divine authority, assuring him that his marriage to Dollie would secure “the progressive transformation” of them both (73), even as the Russo-Japanese war was transforming the world around them.

Dollie, however, resisted divine transformation, and it was the frus-

tration of his failure with her that fuelled White's subsequent political development—a development which he saw as a working out within the conscious mind of the original Bergsonian intuitions of the “liqueur-sensation” in his chest:

the sexual, that is to say, the vital and passionate, nature of my wider impulse remained. It was more hungry, sharp, fierce from lack of a woman's understanding. Something that had started as physical in my body *was being hardened and pointed into a mind while still maintaining its centre of gravity and its passionate force in my body*. This is simple sense, so everyone will think it is nonsense. (154)

It is with the persistence of Lawrence himself that White grounds his thinking in bodily experience, so that revolutionary politics come to seem in him the natural flowering of psychosomatic integrity. “The impulse to action was always this sensation in my chest accompanied by a mental sensation of co-operation with a scientific law beyond my formulation or comprehension” (83). Normally, he thinks, the self-conscious mind makes for separation between people, while the body—“the seat of universal passions, the recipient of the great universal forces” (155)—makes for union; and it is natural therefore that the life-force should first enter the mind through the experiences of the body. It is our sexuality which commonly engenders that “cosmic or universal consciousness” (155) whose mission is to transform love from an instinctive and emotional feeling to a conscious, politicized power intent upon resolving the contradictions of our social and political experience.

These contradictions are structured in White's mind upon a gendered dualism not unlike that of Lawrence, though lacking the provisionality and openness to experience that characterized Lawrence at his best. Throughout *Misfit* the male principle is associated with introversion and the challenging spirit of Protestantism, while the female principle leans towards extraversion, compliance, and Catholicism; and the consequence of this, for White, is an endless tussle between Thought and Being in which the young male Thought is commonly overlaid by “Old Mother Being” (144). At a personal level he tackled these contradictions by denouncing the claustrophobia of a mutually destructive *marriage à deux*, where the woman's self-subordination to the man was predicated upon his initial self-surrender to her—“What he *can't* give up is *himself*” (99), White wrote of the real man—and at a political level by organizing the working classes into industrial and military cadres capable of resisting exploitation. “*The Irish prob-*

lem was the sex problem writ large,” White thought (160), and Love would solve them both. Hence his founding of the Irish Citizen Army in 1913-14, and later on his charring of the Irish Workers’ League in London; for, in the great vision that had been vouchsafed uniquely to him, Ireland had joined Japan to form the two poles “of a great predestined change, organic, universal, working everywhere from within” (156)—a change which would fashion a new and higher Liberty out of all those contradictory claims that presently cause so much personal and political tragedy in the world.

Lawrence, however, as White looked back at him from the vantage-point of 1932, seemed embedded in tragic contradiction, both in his sexual and political beliefs; and White’s article sets out resolutely to expose them. He begins with an analysis of Lawrence’s sexuality that will later serve to discredit his politics too. Lawrence, he says, was “morbidly, viciously, childishly jealous,” because “he wanted to master a woman and be mothered by her simultaneously.” It is fascinating to watch him unfold his own version of the situation described by Lawrence in “A Punch in the Wind”: he accuses Lawrence of a jealous and demeaning attachment to one particular woman, denying her the opportunity to enjoy relationships with other men; he accuses him of loving her so far as to surrender up his “angel self,” his proud independence as a man; and he accuses him of envious malignancy toward Jesus because Jesus had achieved such self-surrender without a woman’s help. He accuses him, in short, of infantilism, and a childish longing to be loved⁴; and the same infantilism, he implies, informs his wish to ground human relationships in the dark forces below the diaphragm, since these forces are no more than an ideological transformation of the working-class vitality which he had known in his childhood—a vitality which he was still anxious to recover despite his daily betrayal of it by his life among a bourgeois intelligentsia.

To White, however, Lawrence’s instinctualism, and the individualism to which it led, merely confirmed him as a class-traitor. Such beliefs were the last shifts of an alienated, *déclassé* intellectual who had “turned his back on what he sought,” unwilling to recognize that the vitality and the sense of community that he so much admired in working-class life could only fulfill their historical destiny if raised into consciousness and transformed by the discipline of a revolutionary politic. Lawrence wanted “togetherness” without the political responsibility needed to implement it; he shirked the historical challenge, and hence the immature, self-contradictory and disintegrative nature of his politics.

Clearly, in the mirror of White’s article, Lawrence emerges as a dis-

torted reflection of White himself; he is the disciple who has betrayed Love, the Other whose significance lies in his failure to bear witness to the truth prefigured and prophesied by White himself. He plays, that is to say, much the same role that the hysterical Jim Bricknell plays with regard to Rawdon Lilly in *Aaron's Rod*; and if we return to Lawrence's novel in the light of our knowledge of White, we can see that Lawrence clearly knew him well enough to recognize in him a fellow-contrary whose views were close enough to his own to require repudiation.

For indeed, as Mark Kinkead-Weekes has said, the two men "shared some important points of view" (*TE* 434): a sense of the primacy and religious significance of bodily experience; a dualistic view of gender; a profound hostility to bourgeois sexual and property relations; and an interest in alternative communities that might heal alienation. But their differences were significant too, and Lawrence characteristically chose to explore them by focusing upon the body rather than upon the body politic. Certainly he knew about White's politics, for Bricknell is presented as "a sort of socialist, and a red-hot revolutionary of a very ineffectual kind" who spends his time "wavering about and going to various meetings, philandering and weeping" (*AR* 73-74). His position on Ireland and Japan too is ridiculed (*AR* 75). Lawrence's tactic, however, is to test the worth of the political aim against the personal worth of the man who holds it—a highly subjective, individualist tactic that nevertheless highlights the contradictions in Jim's character and results in a novel whose psychological analysis is rich beside White's comparatively barren account of himself in *Misfit*.

Jim is, as we say, spineless. Lawrentian psychosomatics saw White's valorization of the "liqueur-sensation" in his chest as the expression of an idealism that denied the demands of the back and lower parts of his body. To constrain the ebb and flow of personal feelings into an ideology of Love was inevitably, in Lawrence's view, to consign desire and anger to the disintegrative formations of perversion; and the fictional embodiment of this is found in the long sprawl of Bricknell's gangling body. He may speak of Love and Socialism, but he is a man of disorderly, aggressive passions whose sexuality is aroused by thoughts of infidelity and whose anger batters on images of revolutionary destruction. Only love, he says, makes him feel alive; but the eating disorder from which he suffers betrays his perverse insatiability. Hunger haunts him with the spectre of his own non-being, which neither food nor love can exorcise; and the infantile regressiveness of his search for satisfaction is encapsulated in that wonderful moment at the opera when Lilly, disagreeable as ever, asks Jim whether he

would like “to be wrapped in swaddling bands and laid at the breast?” “Yes,” Jim replies with real malevolence, and “sprawled his long six foot of limb and body across the box again” (AR 52).

Doubtless this regressiveness in White himself had inspired Lawrence to that “terrific” oracular pronouncement whose impact had been so memorable: “You will never be able to love a woman till you find your angel self in another man.” The “angel self” was Lawrence’s metaphor to describe the religious self-fulfillment felt by the individual soul in creative union with other human beings. In *The Rainbow* that union had been found through sexual desire: Tom Brangwen had drawn upon a traditional hermaphroditic sense of an angel as “the soul of man and woman in one” in order to declare that “if I am to become an angel, it’ll be my married soul, and not my single soul” (R 129). But in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell of March 1915, Lawrence had discerned further possibilities: “It is all so difficult for each one to be his intrinsic self, each one of us to be the angel of himself in a big cause. We are the animals of ourselves also, but that when we are single, not when we are together, holding hands for the big cause” (L ii. 298). This distinction between the spirituality of the angel self and the animality of the sexual self provides the clue to Lawrence’s later pronouncement: White’s sexuality was so disordered that, before venturing to love a woman, he should first of all discover himself as a man through union with other men, maybe in political activity or maybe in the kind of religious discipleship that Lawrence was exploring in *Aaron’s Rod*.

White says that he found Lawrence’s advice “priceless”; but the Jim Bricknell portrayed in *Aaron’s Rod* has clearly not taken it. His “angel self,” even as it seeks salvation through Lilly, is perverted by his disorderly sexuality; and carefully Lawrence separates the sexual and theological love that White had coupled together in *Misfit*, in order to identify Bricknell’s theological position as a rationalization of his compulsion to commit adultery. For the bedfellow of Jim’s Love is Treachery. He may well say, with his mouth full of bacon, that self-sacrifice to the principle of Love is “the highest man is capable of” (AR 77); but in placing Judas alongside Jesus as “the finest thing the world has produced, or ever will produce” (AR 78), he discloses his hidden motives in all their malignancy. Nothing, he believes, can “ever” supersede this ancient cycle of love and betrayal; but his belief only serves to show the impermeability of perversion to anything genuinely, creatively new. For Jim, the drama of history came to a halt two thousand years ago, condemning all those who came afterwards to endless repetition of an old script. “Like to see the ball kept rolling,” he says, on

learning of the sexual musical chairs of his acquaintances (AR 74). White's autobiography may speak nobly of emancipating Love from the constrictions of *marriage à deux*, and his article commend male solidarity to the man in pursuit of a woman; but in *Aaron's Rod*, Lawrence has Jim Bricknell brazenly enter the Lilly household asking to be saved by the husband while aiming to seduce the wife. Clearly, behind all White's fine words and philosophy, Lawrence sensed a dangerous addiction to sexual triangles and the disruptive pleasures of sacrilege.

Small wonder then that, in *Aaron's Rod*, Lawrence should have described Jim's long body twisting in a chair as "looking like a Chinese dragon, diabolical" (AR 58). Small wonder too that, if the fictional charade of H.D.'s novel *Bid Me To Live* is as true to life as it seems, Lawrence should have cast White as the chorus of the damned, howling alongside the Serpent who was played by Frieda (H.D. 111-14). H.D. choreographed this charade as one brief scene in the "dance of death" that her friends were enacting all around war-time London, and in this she was perhaps following Lilly who had already damned them to "dance round their insipid hell-broth" in *Aaron's Rod* (AR 97). But whereas Captain Ned Trent makes only a brief appearance in H.D.'s novel, the disintegrative presence of Jim Bricknell, with his perverse and infantile need to be loved, broods over Lawrence's London like the very type of its own lost soul, the epitome of a national hysteria whose laughter and anger are born in shame and grow to rank excess in the absence of self-possession.

It is a devastating portrait that Lawrence has drawn, and it makes White's *lapsus* in misreading Lilly's exasperation seem almost legitimate. "Why does he last so long?": White's self-vindication in answer to Lilly's "challenge" unfolds its faith in revolutionary Christian Socialism by means of a revenge which, with aesthetic symmetry, returns the analysis of *Aaron's Rod* neatly back upon its author's head. As Lawrence in 1922 had shown Jim Bricknell's sexuality to be infantile, perverse, and treacherous, the source of self-contradiction in his politics, so now ten years later does White's article present Lawrence. But the symmetry is reversed, as in a mirror: if Bricknell was out of touch with the world because he was out of touch with the demands of his unconscious, Lawrence was out of touch with it because he was out of touch with the demands of consciousness. So in retrospect the individualist and the socialist stand face to face, each sharpening the edge of his own beliefs upon the grindstone of the other, talking past one another in discourses that, having evolved in mutual hostility, continued to provoke mutual misunderstanding. Certainly Lawrence is the better

writer, with a richer, more playful sense of the individual life; but although we may no longer wish to ground socialism in Love or the vagaries of our psyche-soma, White has nevertheless singled out, in this first socialist critique of Lawrence, the contradictions that beset any attempt to forge human togetherness without first hammering it out upon “the anvil of the economic chaos” which has caused our present alienation.

Notes

1 See Philip Mairet, “The Lawrence Enigma,” in *The New English Weekly* (12 May 1932) pp. 94-95. For the record, other Lawrence material in *The New English Weekly* from 1932-36 includes: Walter Allen, “A Note on the Poetry of Lawrence” (5.1.1933); J.S. Collis, “D.H. Lawrence’s War Book” (i.e., Huxley’s edition of the *Letters*, 23.2.1933); an anonymous review of *Studies in Classic American Literature* (8.6.1933); D.G. Bridson, “Lawrence as Dramatist” (17.8.1933); and Philip Mairet’s review of *Not I, But The Wind . . .* (1.11.1934). There are also reviews of *The Savage Pilgrimage* (21.7.1932) and *Neutral Ground* (13.7.1933); discussions of Lawrence, Freud, and Marx (by John Strachey, 5.1.1933) and of Lawrence, Eliot, and *Scrutiny* (12.6.1933); plus other brief references in articles and letters.

2 See my “Comedy and Hysteria in *Aaron’s Rod*,” in *Lawrence and Comedy*. eds. Paul Eggert and John Worthen (Cambridge UP, 1996) pp. 70-88, where I discuss the novel in this way and also explore Bricknell’s hysterics more fully.

3 Jack Grant—the hero of *The Boy in the Bush*, based upon another scapegrace Irishman, Jack Skinner—is similarly directed by an internal “glow” which is, he is told, “the spirit of God inside you” (BB 22). Perhaps in creating Grant, Lawrence had assimilated his memories of Jack White to what he had recently learned of Jack Skinner; certainly White might have recognized in Jack Grant an outsider and a buccaneering rebel much closer to his own idea of himself than Jim Bricknell had been.

4 This is one of the many places in *The New English Weekly* where discussions of Lawrence anticipate the argument developed by Judith Ruderman, in a depoliticized form, in her *D.H. Lawrence and the Devouring Mother* (Duke UP, 1984). Her discussion of Jim Bricknell’s orality is sharp (pp. 94-97), treating him as a projection of Lawrence himself rather than as a fictional response to the real-life White.

Works Cited

- Asquith, Lady Cynthia. *Diaries 1915-1918*. London: Hutchinson, 1968.
- H.D. *Bid Me To Live*. London: Virago, 1984.
- Kinkead-Weekes, Mark. *D.H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Lawrence, D.H. *Aaron's Rod*. Ed. Mara Kalnins. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- . *The Boy in the Bush*. With M.L. Skinner. Ed. Paul Eggert. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.
- . *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence: Volume II: June 1913-October 1916*. Ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981.
- . *The Rainbow*. Ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- . *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*. Ed. Michael Herbert. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- White, J.R. *Misfit: An Autobiography*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1930.