

## THE ALPS IN D.H. LAWRENCE'S THOUGHT AND THEOLOGY

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“I never expected the mountains” “You never expected the mountains? Pray, why not? They are always there.” “But I was never there before. I never knew they were there [...] I didn’t expect it like that.” (*AR* 155)

Thus Aaron Sisson addresses his host, having seen the Alps from the latter’s garden in Italy. He is neither the first nor the last Lawrence character to be deeply moved on seeing the Alps. Gudrun Brangwen, stepping out of the train in Hohenhausen, ejaculates: “my God, Jerry [...] you’ve done it now” (*WL* 398). She, Aaron, the Prussian Officer’s orderly, Mr Noon, and the Countess Hannele zu Rassentlow, are all moved by the Alps in ways which resemble Lawrence’s own (non-fictional accounts of his) experiences of them. His first Alpine view, like Mr Noon’s, was from the valley of the Isar, where he and Frieda lived in the summer of 1912 before crossing the Alps on foot. Thereafter the Alps recur in his life and writings. He was not only attracted to the moderate versions of North and South Europe - Bavaria and North Italy - which flank the Alps on either side, but often deliberately, on his oscillation between them, prolonged his journeys. In 1913, 21, and 27 he crossed the Alps both ways, and in 1928 in both ways twice; overall, in half the years of his life after 1912, he visited the Alps (see Appendices 1 and 2), and wrote about them repeatedly between 1912 and 1928 (see Appendix 3).

The Alps, crystal-like, focus several aspects of Lawrence’s thought – notably his binarism, his psycho-geography, and his conception of God. His responses to the Alps range from the visceral to the metaphoric, and frequently combine the physical and the metaphysical in a manner which is central to the worldview he developed at the time of his first acquaintance with the Alps (an early expression of it is in the Foreword to *Sons and Lovers*, written in January 1913 in Gargnano, the town reached

on the far side of the 1912 Alpine crossing). This article concentrates on two central aspects of Lawrence's Alpine psycho-geography: the Alps' horizontal location within Europe, and their vertical distinction from most of the rest of Europe. In practice, these involve respectively a greater concern with the relative and with the absolute; the article therefore moves from a greater concern with the human, to the divine.

By way of introduction it is worth observing a few generalities. Mountains and their valleys exist by virtue of mutual contrast, but mountains are not only intrinsically contrastive, but hold numerous opposites in tension. This aspect may have formed part of their appeal to Lawrence, who from his 1916 essay 'The Crown' onwards placed a strong emphasis on the relations of opposites. Those entailed by mountains include the following: they are locations in their own right, and dividing lines between other places (for example North and South Europe). They are paradigmatic of stability (they "*never* move - they are always there" writes Lawrence in a letter of 1913) (*IL* 552, 21 May 1913), but they are products of the earth's greatest convulsions ("It seemed as though some dramatic upheaval must take place, the mountains fall down into their own shadows") (*TI* 213). They posit threats to life, yet can also prolong it (Lawrence moved to a chalet at 4000 feet in Kesselmatte near Gsteig in July 1928, in order "to reduce my nuisance of a cough") (near orange point 66) (*6L* 474). Their peaks are "pure, unapproachable, impassable" (*WL* 401), yet can be topped by tourist hotels (as in *The Captain's Doll*). Tourists from Lawrence's period onwards could scale them either by making an effort and taking a risk which could kill them, or by avoiding effort and risk altogether; that is, they could be like the clerk from Streatham whom Lawrence encountered in a guest house on Lake Luzern, half-dead from exhaustion (*TI* 211), or they could ride by bus to the glacier above Kaprun (near blue point 45) in Tryol, as Hepburn and Hannele do in *The Captain's Doll*. They are places of sublimity, but also of much that is antithetical to this: the tamed sublimity of "the wrapper round milk chocolate", as Lawrence described the view from Luzern (*TI* 209); the cheery banality of the "Bergheil", loathed by Captain Hepburn; the boisterous fun of the *Schuhplattern* (*WL* 411, *MN* 249), the "ecstasy of physical motion, sleighing, skii-ing, skating" and "tobogganing" (*WL* 421, *TI* 215); the prosaic misery of being simply cold and wet, as he and Frieda often were on their 1912 crossing ("Nothing so awful as Alps when it rains", Lawrence wrote to Catherine Carswell in 1921) (*4L* 65); and the "utter cold materialism" of the Swiss, which struck Lawrence as early as 1913 (*TI* 194).

Mountains can limit experience, as Lawrence found of the Tyrolean woman whom he encountered after his night in a hay-hut, who ‘seemed rather deadened, as if this continuous silence acted on her like a deadening drug’ (*TI* 41); alternatively they are vivifying, as they are for Mr Noon, who first becomes “unEnglished” when contemplating “a long rank” of them, “bright in heaven”, from the Isar Valley (*MN* 107). Mountains can strengthen companionships: the friends of the Prologue of *Women in Love* find that “It was another world, another life [...] till each felt [...] the presence of his companions, like an essential flame” (*WL* 489). But they do this because of their capacity to impose a sense of isolation. They can delight the soul, as Mr Noon’s is delighted, or oppress it, as Ursula Brangwen’s becomes oppressed (*WL* 434). Alternatively they can reflect pre-existent emotional states; when Lawrence expresses delight in his love of Frieda in ‘First Morning’, written in Beuerberg, the mountains are held “proud and blithe/ On our love./ They stand upright on our love [...] We are the source” (*IP* 165). That similar landscapes can affect different people in different situations differently is apparent in the variation between Captain Hepburn’s distrust of Alpine sublimity, Aaron’s nervous excitement by it, Mr Noon’s rejoicing in it, Ursula’s revulsion from it, and Gudrun Brangwen’s consummation by it. These disparate aspects of mountains are all reflected, if not all reflected upon, in Lawrence’s writings on the Alps, and the contradictions which these contain.

From early in Lawrence’s engagement with the Alps, he interpreted them as a boundary line between North and South Europe - one of the earliest of the geographic binaries to which Lawrence was to give a spiritual interpretation. This binary first appears in the book which treats of Lawrence’s first and second Alpine crossings, *Twilight in Italy*, in relation to Germany and Italy. It is then extended in *Women in Love*, via Gerald and the Fetish in Halliday’s flat, to the arctic and Africa. Thereafter, the opening essay of *Studies in Classic American Literature* (‘The Spirit of Place’), written in 1918, likens the Germanic-Italian polarity in Europe to the Gallic-African polarity for Rome, and to the European-American polarity, which developed at the Renaissance (*SCAL* 174). In *Twilight in Italy* the thesis emerges that “When Northern Europe [...] is crying out for the Dionysic ecstasy [...] Southern Europe is breaking free from Dionysos, from the triumphal affirmation of life over death, immortality through procreation” (*TI* 200). Because of this, both Italy and the North are in twilight, as both try, with limited success, to become more like the other.

Within this complex Lawrence clearly positions himself as Northern. On reaching the South side of the Alps he is reminded of “das Land, wo die Citronen blühen” (the land where the lemons bloom): “It was wonderful on this south side, so sunny, with feathery trees and deep black shadows. It reminded me of Goethe, of the romantic period” (*TI* 221). That is, he self-consciously adopts the German Romantic perspective on Italy voiced in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*; the lyric quoted ends with the lines “Dahin! Dahin/ Geht unser Weg; o Vater, lass uns ziehn!” (Thither, thither,/ Is where our path goes; o father, let us move there!)<sup>i</sup> Lawrence did precisely that, on and off for the rest of his life, and typically felt “content, coming down into Airolo” (red point 21), seeing “how different the sun-dried, ancient, southern slopes of the world are, from the northern slopes. It is as if the god Pan really had his home among these sun-blackened stones and tough, sun-dark trees” (*TI* 222). Arriving in Riva (yellow point 5), Mr Noon feels that: “This was the real Italy [...] they had reached the land of painted ceilings, and they hailed it with joy” (*MN* 288). In Novara (black point, West of Milan), Aaron Sisson feels that “He was on the south side. On the other side of the time barrier”, “His old sleepy English nature was startled in its sleep” (*AR* 151).

The Alps therefore constitute a wall separating the North from the South: Mr Noon, standing in the valley of the Isar, sees “the long, watchful line of the ice-pale Alps stand[s] like a row of angels with flaming swords in the distance, barring us from the paradise of the South”) (*MN* 97). However, this is only the perspective from the plain. From within the mountains, they are perceived in their latitudinal depth, with an internal point of transition: “Turning the ridge on the great road to the south, the imperial road to Rome, a decisive change takes place” (*TI* 97). In “The Return Journey” Lawrence describes his journey over the Gotthard Pass (red point 20): “We were crossing in silence from the northern world to the southern” “over the ridge of the world” (*TI* 218). In *Mr Noon* this point is the Gemserjoch (in reality the equivalent was the Pfitscherjoch crossed by Lawrence and Frieda in 1912; yellow point 6): “This side still was Germany, with the north behind it. The other side was the southern Tyrol, all Italy in front. Even geographically, one can pass so definite a turning-point” (*MN* 265).

However, there are several complications in this binary. The Bavarians, who live on the North side of the Alps, are described as living in the “Heat of physical experience, which is a crucifixion” (*TI* 93), whereas the Swiss, to their South, are

characterized by “utter, soulless ordinariness, something intolerable” (*TI* 193). The Austrians are described in ways which fit better with the Italians than Germans, as ‘soft, vague, easy-going, not so fierce and hostile as the Bavarian highlanders’, but in North Italy Austrian territory is defined as Austrian and therefore as Germanic: “The station at Trento was still Austrian – there one was still on Germanic ground” (*MN* 281). Self-consciousness typically, within Lawrence’s thought, belongs to the North, but is found most of all in the schooled, “vulgar or sensational crucifixes” South of the Brenner Pass (*TI* 98), which are as far from the unselfconscious peasant crucifixes of Bavaria as from the Halliday’s mindless African Fetish in *Women in Love* (*TI* 98). Gerald Crich is characterized as arctic, and, like the mountains, likened to a tiger (“his back was tense like a tiger’s” [*WL* 75]; the Alps are “Tigers prowling between the north and the south” [*AR* 150]), but he is the most sensual and least spiritually refined of the quintet of *Women in Love*. His arctic aspect is in part correlated to the commercial and mechanistic spirit which Lawrence identifies in the urban Swiss, but which he does not find in the Alpine highlanders, who for him are the real mountain people.

The Alps do not, therefore, cleanly reproduce the North-South distinction over their latitudinal extent, nor does Lawrence amend his travel reports (of *Twilight in Italy*), nor his subsequent fictional representations of the Alps, in order to make them linearly conform to his emergent psycho-geographical thesis. Nor do the points of transition thus conform. Since both North and South are presented by Lawrence as possessing positive intrinsic value, and since the extremes of both arctic and African (in *Women in Love*) are presented as not only disintegrative but ultimately destructive, the turning points in the Alps might be thought of as intrinsically desirable points of balance. Stefania Michelucci, in her introduction to *Twilight in Italy*, argues that Lawrence was searching for “a balance, for a point where the two opposites meet in the line of perfection” (*TI* xxv), and points out that the middle land of the high Tyrol contains the crucifix which Lawrence considers one of the best (*TI* 98). In part the Alps do serve this function of mediation, and this may have constituted part of their appeal for Lawrence - but it constitutes only part of it. The crucifix to which Michelucci refers hangs in a valley. At the peaks, which Lawrence identifies as the precise turning points between North and South, the experiences which he and his characters experience are orientated towards perfection in an extreme, not to the

meeting of opposites in ‘stellar equilibrium’ (*WL* 148), nor even in that continuous clash which Lawrence valorises in “The Crown” and *Mr Noon*.

Moreover, that extreme has far stronger kinship with the North than the South. Since Gerald Crich is strongly identified with both the Arctic and the snow of the high Alps, the arctic plains are conflated with the Alpine peaks, and the North Pole with an area which falls within the temperate zone. Two factors help to mediate this conflation. First, Lawrence’s mentions of Wagner, whose characters are in part taken from Norse mythology but are often seen acting in the Rhineland or the Bavarian hills. For example, Gilbert Noon associates the Alpine with both the Northern and the Wagnerian when, climbing between Schaeftlarn and Maierhof, he finds “himself almost transportedly happy” in “a god-world” of ‘strange northern gods [...] It was hard not to believe in the old, white-skinned muscular gods, whom Wagner travestied. Surely Siegfried tramped through such spring meadows, breaking the gold-blond globe-flowers against his fierce, naked knees” (*MN* 200). Second, there is the mediating concept of the desert. Both the peaks and the plain, if snow-covered, are largely deserted of flora and fauna. In *Women in Love* and “The Return Journey” respectively, the peaks are described as a “terrible waste of whiteness” (*WL* 400) and a “desolate waste” (*TI* 215). The woman who lives in an isolated farm in the essay “Over the Hills” is described as speaking in “a high screaming voice [...] like a desert bird” (*MN* 246). This desertous aspect of the Alps may have been one reason why William Ivory and Miranda Bowen, in their 2011 BBC4 television adaptation of *Women in Love*, thought fit to shift the location of the ending to the South African desert. That move might alternatively be defended on the grounds that certain elements of Gerald’s character suggest the disintegratively sensual more than they do ‘snow-abstract annihilation’ (*WL* 254). This would mean that the Alps were being reinterpreted as combining the arctic and African extremes between which they form the dividing line. However, the desert as presented in the film is not so much sensually African as, in its infinitude and austerity, both arctic and Alpine.

On the other hand, despite the strong arctic elements of the Alpine extreme, the latter is not reducible to the arctic. Rather, the Alps have qualities which are *sui generis* - not so much by the abstract virtue of being border territory (although such areas typically have liminal qualities, which are distinct from both of the areas which they separate), but by the physical virtue of their altitude. When Lawrence first arrived in the Alps, he first attempted to understand these qualities through an

empathetic leap into the attitudes of their native inhabitants. In *Twilight in Italy*, he identifies the Tyroleans as the archetypal mountain people, and fear as their dominant attitude towards the mountains. For example, in “A Chapel Among the Mountains” he surveys the votive tokens given in thanks for the survival of physical accidents, and concludes: “They lived under the mountains where always was fear”, “First of all gods was the unknown god who crushed life at any moment, and threatened it always” (*TI* 31). Mary is openly thanked by the tokens – but, according to Lawrence, “that which had neither known nor suffered, the dread unnamed, which had aimed and missed by a little, this must be acknowledged covertly” (*TI* 34). Hence, in the valley of Klamm (yellow point 7), a sculptor of crucifixes whom Lawrence particularly admires sculpts in a way which propitiates death, and is obsessed with pain: “There is something crude and sinister about it, almost like depravity, a form of reverting, turning back along the course of blood by which we have come”, “an almost Russian, dark mysticism, (a worship of cruelty and pain and torture and death)” (*TI* 97). This mention of Russia complicates Lawrence’s psycho-geography still further, whilst suggesting another affinity between the wastes of peaks and of plains. But it also suggests a connection between the native Alpine peoples and Gerald, which helps to explain the otherwise rather enigmatic encounter between himself, stumbling towards death, and:

a half-buried crucifix, a little Christ under a little sloping hood, at the top of a pole. He sheered away. Somebody was going to murder him. [...] Yet why be afraid. It was bound to happen. To be murdered! He looked round in terror at the snow, the rocking, pale-shadowy slopes of the upper world. [...] This was the moment when the death was uplifted, and there was no escape. Lord Jesus, was it then bound to be – Lord Jesus? He could feel the blow descending, he knew he was murdered (*WL* 473).

Gerald has of course already been shown to have inherited his family’s sense of ill-fatedness, but this has never previously been shown as having any connection with Christ. In fact, it is not so much with Christ that he establishes contact at this point, as with the darker mysticism of “the dread unnamed”, which in his case is not going to take aim and then “miss” him (*TI* 34). There is no specification, beyond its

small size, of the crucifix which he sees; it is neither a Bavarian “peasant Prometheus-Christ” (*TI* 44), nor sensational-Italian. However, Lawrence attributes the same emotion to Gerald as to the carvers of the crucifixes of this area. Assuming that Hohenhausen is the Eckershofen of *Mr Noon*, and the actual Mayrhofen, he probably dies near the Pfitscher Joch (yellow point 6), from which the Zemm Valley crucifixes are just a few miles distant: “They all, when they carved or erected these crucifixes, had fear at the bottom of their hearts” (*TI* 44). The Christ of the crucifix which Gerald sees at the end of his life is evidence of a God who kills as well as saves. Loerke, on the other hand, associates Gerald himself with this God of vengeance when, at the bottom of the toboggan slope with Gudrun, he hears his voice “like a judgment in the whitish air of twilight”, calls on “*Maria!*”, and exclaims “you come like a ghost” (*WL* 470). This is a God associated with the very highest Alps. It is from such points that avalanches descend and floods originate. As in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, in which the boys feel threatened by a “Beastie” resident on a mountain-top, the source of death lies above. In “The Return Journey” Lawrence writes, of the villages above Luzern, “There, it seemed, in the glamorous snow, was the source of death, which fell down in great waves of shadow and rock, rushing to the level earth. And all the people of the mountains, on the slopes, in the valleys, seemed to live upon this great, rushing wave of death, of breaking-down” (*TI* 213).

But Lawrence also presents the high Alps as being, and guaranteeing, the eternal. This is not intrinsically contradictory of a sense of the mountains as a source of death, since sources of death, like Beasties, are themselves immortal. Moreover, the mountains emphasise by contrast the mortality of the humans who live on them. This is felt by the Bavarian peasants: “the ice and the upper radiance of snow is brilliant with timeless immunity from the flux and the warmth of life. Overhead they transcend all life, all the soft, moist fire of the blood. So that a man must needs live under the radiance of his own negation” (*TI* 93) However, this is a very different kind of connection between death and the mountains to that acknowledged in the Alpine chapel; that was bloody, this is crystalline.

A sense of the former is attributed by Lawrence to others – to Tyroleans, and to Gerald. It seems that he himself more strongly and directly felt the second. That is, a belief in “the unknown god who crushed life at any moment, and threatened it always” (*TI* 34) was one of the first of several localised beliefs which Lawrence attributed to people whom he encountered over the course of his travels. However,



unlike (for example) the beliefs which Lawrence intuited in the Native American Hopi<sup>ii</sup>, this was one from which he took little for his own religio-poiesis (that is, for his following of the “strange calling [of the Holy Ghost] like a hound on the scent, away in the unmapped wilderness”, in the phrase of ‘On Being Religious’) (*RDP* 192-93). The punitive God of the Alps is more purely negative a proposition than the God of The Woman Who Rode Away, which demands human sacrifice in order that new forms of human life may flourish. This detachment on Lawrence’s part from what he understood to be Tyrolean beliefs accords with the fact that of his characters who encounter the Alps, those who most resemble Lawrence (Rupert Birkin, Ursula Brangwen, Mr Noon, Captain Hepburn) experience no such an intuition. Rather, it is attributed to local people, and, briefly and implicitly, to Gerald. An apprehension of “the ice and the upper radiance of snow” as “brilliant with timeless immunity from the flux and the warmth of life” (*TI* 93), on the other hand, is felt by all of these characters. It is a more positive, and more reciprocal, experience. In the passage quoted above from ‘The Return Journey’, in which “the sides of the mountains” are “like the collapsing walls of a grave”, and the ‘source of death’ rushes “to the level earth”, it is also the case that there is a “flu upwards, that flows from the needle-point of snow to the unutterable cold and death”, “the radiant cold which waits to receive back again all that which has passed for the moment into being” (*TI* 213). In ‘The Crucifix across the Mountains’ Lawrence writes: “this our life, this admixture of labour and of warm experience in the flesh, all the time it is steaming up to the changeless brilliance above [...] This is the eternal issue” (*TI* 94). It is a kind of crystalline Nirvana.

Precisely this consummation is devoutly wished, and is achieved, by the orderly of ‘The Prussian Officer’. Throughout the story, the Prussian officer’s company moves towards the mountains. These are first mentioned as early as the third sentence, as a desirably cool and snowy contrast to the hot Bavarian plain on which they march: “But right in front the mountains ranged across, pale blue and very still, the snow gleaming gently out of the deep atmosphere” (*PO* 1). In the second paragraph, the orderly walks “on and on in silence, staring at the mountains ahead, that rose sheer out of the land, and stood fold behind fold, half earth, half heaven, the barrier with slits of soft snow in the pale, bluish peaks” (*PO* 1). Later, when he is marching with an extreme thirst, “That the snowy peaks were radiant among the sky, that the whitey-green glacier river twisted through its pale shoals, in the valley below,

seemed almost supernatural” (*PO* 10). After he has murdered his officer, ‘still, gleaming in the sky, [...] they shone in their silence. He stood and looked at them, his face illuminated” (*PO* 19). The next morning, he is dying, and again “the mountains ranged across the pale edge of the morning sky. He wanted them – he wanted them alone – he wanted to leave himself and be identified with them.” He has a fit, which throws him to the ground, but on returning to consciousness: “He roused onto his elbow and stared at the gleaming mountains. [...] He stared till his eyes went black, and the mountains as they stood in their beauty, so clean and cool, seemed to have it, that which was lost in him” (*PO* 20). That is the last he sees – the vision of ‘The Crucifix across the Mountains’, of man having “gone into [...] the radiant cold which waits to receive back again all that which has passed for the moment into being” (*TI* 93).

Brian Finney, in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Twilight in Italy*, rightly comments that the “unmoving mountains” “represent everything he lacks”, and that “Lawrence has fused the immediacy of human experience with the immutability of a nature to which the orderly belongs and to which he is returned only through his death at the end of the story”<sup>iii</sup>. Other critics have emphasised the orderly’s contrast to his officer; whereas the former is dark-eyed and warm, the officer is blue-eyed and in every sense cold – a contrast emphasised by the importance of their eye contact (“his dark eyes fixed on the other man’s dancing blue ones”) (*PO* 7). The officer’s last word is “Hot!” (*PO* 14), when he accepts a drink from the orderly. It might seem, therefore, that the officer is to be associated with the mountains, and the orderly with the plain, as Keith Cushman suggests<sup>iv</sup>. However, this being the case would imply mutual attraction between the officer and his orderly, rather than mutual repulsion. It would also suggest that other of Lawrence’s characters who find ecstasy in the mountains should be correlated to darkness and warmth – but, including as they do the Brangwen sisters, Hannele and Mr Noon, this is not the case.

On the other hand, Jannice Harris’s suggestion that “the mountains represent an ideal of integration that points out what is missing in both of these trapped soldiers”<sup>v</sup> does not fit with the fact that only the orderly feels any attraction to them. As argued above, the high Alps, despite their function as a borderline of North and South, do not function as their fusion. Brian Finney’s suggestion that “the two corpses lying side by side which together make up the same whole that the mountains have

come to represent” (Penguin *PO* xxxi) is not endorsed by the feeling of the story’s closing scene in the morgue, in which one person is decidedly dead, and the other is as though alive. They do not act in cooperation to make up a balanced whole.

These corpses should be read in relation to those variously seen and remembered by Rupert at the end of *Women in Love*. ‘The Prussian Officer’ was written (as “Honour and Arms”) in the summer of 1913. *Women in Love* was started around early 1915 and finished, in its first version, in October 1916 (the function of the Alps does not differ significantly from the first to the final revised version, completed in October 1921). These works’ climactic scenes, written at a maximum distance of three years, contain important correspondences. The Prussian officer’s orderly and Gerald Crich are strong young men in the environs of the Alps. They accompany, day and night, a person who has power over them and who increasingly enrages them. One day they seize this person’s neck in a sudden impulse to murder, whereupon they experience intense, voluptuous, sexual satisfaction: the orderly, “all the force of all his blood exulting in his thrust, [...] shoved back the head of the other man” (*PO* 15), whilst for Gerald, “That struggling was her reciprocal lustful passion in this embrace, the more violent it became, the greater the frenzy of delight, till the zenith was reached, the crisis” (*WL* 472). After this climax, both men die spiritually, and shortly afterwards die physically.

The difference in their deaths, however, correlates to the fact that the orderly, not Gerald, understands the sublime perfection of the mountains. Gerald toboggans with great physical intensity, and, on a day on which he goes for a long ski by himself, becomes “snow-burned, snow-estranged” (*WL* 460). However, as discussed above, he finally more resembles the Tyroleans, in their perception of the mountains’ threat, than the orderly (who is a lowlander). When Gerald turns to ice, this is a merely physical transformation, and he is left “dead, like clay, like bluish, corruptible ice” (*WL* 480). It is appropriate that he is not allowed to rest in the mountains, but is returned to England as a corpse, not a crystal. For Rupert, his body resembles that of an animal, “a dead stallion he had seen: a dead mass of maleness, repugnant”, in contrast to “the beautiful face of one whom he had loved, and who had died still having the faith to yield to the mystery” (*WL* 480). The latter, remembered face more resembles that of the Prussian officer, whose “black hair”, when he is found, is “giving off heat under the sun”, and whose body lies in the mortuary “looking as if

every moment it must rouse into life again, so young and unused, from a slumber” (PO 21)<sup>vi</sup>.

The orderly’s assumption into something perfect belongs to a particular order of religious experience. It fits with Birkin’s religious perception on contemplating the corpse of Gerald, insofar as he then feels that “the mystery which has brought forth man and the universe” is “a non-human mystery, it has its own great ends, man is not the criterion” (WL 478). However, it does not fit with Birkin’s intuition that this “mystery” is the “fountain-head” which can “bring forth miracles, create utter new races and new species”, and that “To have one’s pulse beating direct from the mystery, this was perfection, unutterable satisfaction” (WL 479). That is, for Birkin the supreme experience is to live one’s mortal life in correspondence with the infinitely creative life-force, whereas for the orderly, it is to be assumed into the crystalline eternal. Birkin’s conception has more resemblance to the moments of ecstasy reached elsewhere in Lawrence’s fiction through communion with other people - such as are experienced by numerous couples in *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, *Quetzalcoatl* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. The orderly’s ecstasy is more akin to that of Will Brangwen in Lincoln Cathedral, of which he finds the interior “perfect”. As the mountains offer life in death for the orderly, so life and death are combined in the cathedral: “the jewelled gloom folded music upon silence, light upon darkness, fecundity upon death” (R 187). Will is “absorbed by the height”, and “his soul remained, at the apex of the arch, clinched in the timeless ecstasy, consummated” (R 188). The Gothic arches are mathematically perfect, as (“almost”) is the peak above the “Gemserjoch” (Pfitscher Joch, yellow point 6) in Mr Noon’s apprehension:

For Gilbert, it was one of the perfect things of all his life, that peak [...] he wanted only one thing – to [...] look across [...] at that marvelous god-proud aloof pyramid of a peak, flashing its snow-stripes like some snow-beast, and bluing the clear air beyond [...] Other, blunter peaks rose about her. Yet she lifted her marvelous dark slopes clear, a marvelous prism of substance in the ether, rayed with her snow as with lightning-strokes. Beyond – and crystal – and almost mathematically pure. And he was satisfied – one of the eternal satisfactions that man can find on his life-way. He felt a pure, immortal satisfaction – a perfected aloneness. (MN 266-67)

Unlike the orderly, Mr Noon does not have to die in order to experience this consummation, any more than does Will in Lincoln Cathedral, or Birkin and Ursula during their ecstasy in “Excuse”. His experience is evidence that this kind of ecstasy can be experienced *within* a life, rather than only as its apotheosis. Various of Lawrence’s characters in addition to Mr Noon achieve this. However, their subsequent lives are differently affected by the experience.

One of the features of this mode of ecstasy, when experienced as part of life rather than at the moment of death, is that it allows one to contemplate one’s life with the detachment of literal and metaphoric elevation. Lawrence describes such an experience in ‘The Return Journey’, on the stretch between the Furka Pass (red point 19) and the Gotthard (red point 20): “I was free, in this heavy, ice-cold air, this upper world, alone. London, far away below, beyond, England, Germany, France [...] all beneath was so unreal, false, non-existent in its activity. Out of the silence one looked down on it, and it seemed to have lost all importance” (*TI* 217). The next morning, “standing looking round at the mountain-tops [...] I was jumping in my soul with delight. Should one ever go down to the lower world?” (*TI* 218). Indeed, unlike the young man from Streatham whom he has met, he knew that he perhaps never needed to return either to England or a job; his paid work, of the moment, was to express precisely that sentiment in the essay quoted. Ursula Brangwen, standing in a similar position, also feels disconnected from her past: ‘she wanted to have come down from the slopes of heaven to this place, with Birkin, not to have toiled out of the murk of her childhood and her upbringing, slowly, all soiled [...] She knew herself new and unbegotten, she had no father, no mother, no anterior connections, she was herself, pure and silvery’ (*WL* 409). On the same first evening’s walk, her sister thinks of “That old shadow-world, the actuality of the past – ah, let it go! She rose free on the wings of her new being” (*WL* 410).

As every mountaineer knows, it can be even more difficult and dangerous to descend than to ascend, and this is a more difficult kind of ecstasy to live on after than the inter-personal joy of Lawrence’s couples. As an example of the latter, after their communion in the ‘Excuse’ chapter of *Women in Love*, Birkin and Ursula “were glad, and they could forget perfectly. They laughed, and went to the meal provided. There was a venison pasty, of all things, a large broad-faced cut ham, eggs and cresses and red beet-root, and medlars and apple-tart, and tea” (*WL* 314). The syntax

of the sentence mirrors the pleasurable simplicity of their experience. Will's ecstasy in Lincoln Cathedral has no such happy coda; Anna aborts his ecstasy by pointing out the carved stone faces high up in the fabric of the building, and "His mouth was full of ash, his soul was furious" (R 190). Gudrun experiences "strange rapture" as she kneels before the window of her Gasthaus room, looks down from a peak, or toboggans; she "settled down like a crystal in the navel of snow, and was gone" (WL 401). One evening at twilight, "To her it was so beautiful, it was a delirium, she wanted to gather the glowing, eternal peaks to her breast, and die" (WL 446). Gerald treats her as Anna treats Will; "What does the twilight matter?" "Why do you grovel before it? Is it so important to you?"; "she winced in violation and in fury", "It is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my life. Don't try and come between it and me" (R 190; WL 447). Will is implied by the novel which contains him to have been in error: "He hated her for having destroyed another of his vital illusions [...] Yet somewhere in him he responded more deeply to the sly little face that knew better, than he had done before to the perfect surge of his cathedral" (R 190). *Women in Love* makes no such clear judgment of Gudrun. Gerald's challenge to her ecstasy is crude; he is able to point to no equivalent of gargoyles in the mountains, but merely to mock her for grovelling. The fact that, despite her protest to the contrary, "in reality, he had destroyed it for her, she was straining after a dead effect" (WL 447), does not mean that her experience had been illusory or faked prior to that moment. However, the novel as a whole is distrustful of the mountains. Ursula turns decisively against them, and orders her and Birkin's escape to the paradise of the South in order to develop their contrastively (to Gerald and Gudrun) healthy relationship. For Gudrun, on the other hand, the mountains are a *ne plus ultra*; her future life in Dresden holds no interest or promise within the novel. Moreover, since her ecstasy puts her beyond her relationship with Gerald ("the tears of her strange religion [...] put him to nought") (WL 401), it is the mountains, more than Loerke, that destroy the possibility of healthy development in their relationship.

The mountain ecstasies described in 'The Prussian Officer' and *Twilight in Italy* were written on location; the former was written and set in and near Irshenhausen (red point 15), from which the Alps are visible to the South, but after Lawrence had already crossed the Alps and experienced the ecstasy later attributed to Mr Noon. *Women in Love* was written largely in Cornwall and entirely in England. In this, a note of scepticism of the mountains comes in. Once he was free to travel again,

in November 1919, he wrote two works which concern them: *Mr Noon* (begun November 1920 and abandoned October 1922) and *The Captain's Doll* (begun October 1921, after the April of that year, in which he travelled from Florence via Switzerland to Baden-Baden). In both of these the action moves, at a certain stage in the story, from Bavaria to the high Tyrol. The former contains descriptions of the protagonist's "pure, immortal satisfaction" in "perfected aloneness" (MN 266-67). Yet the same narrator who relays this experience also demonstrates a vigorously im-pious attitude in much of the rest of his narration. As Melvyn Bragg, in his introduction of the 1985 Grafton edition of the novel, puts it: "He panders, flatters, scorns, teases, dismisses, bullies and badgers this poor reader, taking the scruff of the neck in one fist, the seat of the pants in the other and frogmarching him/her up and down the page"<sup>vii</sup>. This narrator loses his impiety when he describes Noon's ecstasies on real mountaintops; yet he displays vigorous scepticism towards metaphorical ones. He calls parodically on "Dear draughty uplift" to "bellow out our skirts and trouser-legs like zeppelin balloons, till we whirl [...] up into the sky, whence we can look down on our fellow-men [...] It's a risky thing to do, of course" (MN 198).

The metaphorical mountain-top to which Lawrence refers, from *Mr Noon* to *Fantasia of the Unconscious* to 'Climbing down Pisgah', is Mount Pisgah, from which the promised lands of various holistic conceptions of humanity are viewed: "universal love", "indulgent Pragmatism", vitalism, and psychoanalysis: "But Lord, I can't see anything. Help me, heaven, to a telescope, for I see blank nothing [...] I'm not going to try any more. I'm going to sit down on my posterior and sluther full speed down this Pisgah, even if it cost me my trouser seat. So ho! - away we go" (RDP 226). Even as early as *Women in Love*, Lawrence is vigilant of the dangers of seeing the South as a promised land from the vantage point of the Alps. When Birkin is recalled from Verona to the mountains by Gerald's death, and stands contemplating the spot on which the death occurred, he muses that Gerald might have gone on down to Italy: "He might! And what then? [...] Was it a way out? - It was only a way in again" (WL 478). Rupert and Ursula end the novel not in Italy but in disputation, back in Beldover. Of course, Pisgah is primarily for Lawrence a metaphoric mountain. However, the metaphor may have suggested itself to Lawrence in part precisely because of the spiritual elevation which he himself had experienced on Alpine mountains, and in the novella which Lawrence wrote at the same time as his

fictionalised Alpine crossing in *Mr Noon*, he subjects the Alps themselves to the anti-idealist critique voiced so frequently by *Mr Noon*'s narrator.

In *The Captain's Doll* Hannele and Hepburn visit a glacier above Kaprun in Tyrol (near blue point 45). Hannele has an extreme response to the crystalline finality of the mountain, which bears strong resemblance to the reaction of Will Brangwen in *The Rainbow* to Lincoln Cathedral (*R* 187). As Anna does for Will, Hepburn spoils her moment by questioning its basis, and does so using terms such as "uplift" with the same satiric force as the narrator of *Mr Noon*:

"I come to see the mountains, which are wonderful, and give me strength. And I come to see the glacier [...] You can do nothing but find fault even with god's mountains". A dark flame suddenly went over his face. "Yes," he said, "I hate them, I hate them. I hate their snow and their affectation." "*Affectation!*" she laughed. "Oh! Even the mountains are affected for you, are they?" "Yes," he said. "Their loftiness and their uplift. I hate their uplift. I hate people prancing on mountain-tops and feeling exalted. I'd like to make them all stop up there, on their mountain-tops, and chew ice to fill their stomachs. I wouldn't let them down again, I wouldn't. I hate it all, I tell you." [...] "You must be a little mad" she said superbly "to talk like that about the mountains. They are so much bigger than you." "No", he said. "No! They are not." "What!" she laughed aloud. "The mountains are not bigger than you? But you are extraordinary." "They are not bigger than me" he cried. "Any more than you are bigger than me if you stand on a ladder [...]" "They are less than me." (*CD* 137-38)

There is an echo of Lawrence's conceit of the descent from Pisgah in Hepburn's descent from the top of the glacier, where he has after all had a transcendent experience, and whither he must descend with exaggerated care (if not, in fact, on his "posterior") (*CD* 143; *RDP* 226). Back at the hotel at the glacier's foot, "Jews of the wrong sort" are described as imparting "a wholesome breath of sanity, disillusion, unsentimentality to the excited "Bergheil" atmosphere. Their dark-eyed, sardonic presence seemed to say to the maidenly-necked mountain youths: "Don't sprout wings of the spirit too much, my dear"" (*CD* 140). The relationship to which Hannele



soon thereafter consents with Hepburn is not certainly hopeful; Hepburn's mockery carries more weight than Gerald's of Gudrun, but less than Anna's of Will; Hannele's reciprocal mockery carries significant weight); nonetheless, the mountain ecstasy which Hepburn has destroyed is not allowed to stand as determinative, in the onward stream of her life.

*The Captain's Doll* is far more dismissive of the mountains' power than is *Women in Love*. The distance in their treatment of the Alps can be measured in the treatment of the Jews in each. Those of the novella are correctly sceptical and deflationary; Loerke, who in many ways resembles them, is sufficiently unaffected by the sublimity of the mountains to not mention them even satirically - but he is "of the wrong sort" not only in the conventionally snobbish sense in which the narrator of *The Captain's Doll* uses the phrase, but according to the *desiderata* of the novel as a whole. Immunity from Alpine sublimity is therefore a characteristic of the novel's least admirable character. Ursula realises that "this utterly silent, frozen world of the mountain-tops was not universal!" (*WL* 434) after she has *argued* with Loerke, and in leaving the mountains she is leaving also his brand of cynicism.

Lawrence continued to visit the Alps throughout the 1920s. However, having recreated his own greatest Alpine ecstasy in *Mr Noon*, and expressed his greatest scepticism of the same in *The Captain's Doll*, his period of intense engagement with the high mountains was over. He did not engage with the mountains of Mexico or New Mexico anywhere near as strongly. He made over half of his visits to the Alps during his last five years, yet he wrote next to nothing about them during this period. A probable reason for this is that his emphasis was now on the celebration of warm, physical life. Ferretter notes that Lawrence's interpretation of the Etruscans inverted that of the contemporary authority on the Etruscans, George Dennis, in emphasising their love of life as opposed to their obsession with death<sup>viii</sup>. His main reason for travelling to the Alps was, now, the prolongation of his own life. The vision of the Alps as a source of bloody death had never appealed to him, and his sense of them as guarantors of crystalline eternity no longer did so; in his dying, he had no such thirst as the Prussian officer's orderly.

The one exception to this literary disengagement is 'The Woman who Wanted to Disappear', an unfinished story of 1929, which, precisely in its reprisal of many of the themes of his earlier works, indicates the distance which he had travelled from his attitudes towards the Alps of the decade 1912-23. A stifled American housewife

wants to disappear from her family for a year, and moves to the top of an Alp. Her situation is partially that of Frieda in 1912, who climbed the Alps in escaping from a marriage, of Johanna in *Mr Noon*, who is a German escaping marriage to an American, and of 'The Woman Who Rode Away' who, in the story written four years earlier, climbs into mountain forests and meets a male native. However, she finds no sublimity in the mountains. The sentence 'She departed, took her journey, and found herself in an expensive hotel on the top of a mountain, along with a hundred-and-fifty other summer visitors' has the flippancy of the narrator of much of *Mr Noon* (VG 252). There is no more sublimity on her mountain than at the crowded Gasthaus by the glacier of *The Captain's Doll*. When she then drives up a different mountain, "Hundreds of cars were on the road, and all the hotels were rather full" (VG 252). Over the six years which separate *The Captain's Doll* from this story, Alpine tourism and car traffic would certainly have increased. Yet there is no suggestion that the heroine would be capable of experiencing Alpine sublimity (as for example Hannele is), even were circumstances otherwise. As she drives North into the "highlands" of Bavaria, she looks back and sees "the mountains standing away back to the south, naked and greenish as if made of glass, and slashed with snow" (VG 252-53). This is the last description of the Alps in Lawrence's fiction. It is casually done, and contrasts with the sublimity of his earlier descriptions: they are 'sky-slopes' which would let one "walk up the sky" (TI 40), ghosts (WL 409), "great thighs", amongst which Gilbert crawls "like a dwarf" (MN 251), a "queen" (MN 267), "a row of angels with flaming swords" (MN 97), "white-fanged" (AR 151), "Tigers prowling between the north and the south" (AR 150), and "marvelous striped skypanthers circling round a great camp" (AR 148). The woman who wanted to disappear literally, and Lawrence metaphorically, have turned their backs on the Alps. The woman still wants to climb, and drives into the Bavarian forest – but there is probably no tree line for her to cross, even had her car not broken down. Despite being German, she shivers with apprehension – as when she was a child - at being in "the bristling black forest" (VG 253); here Lawrence returns to the German-Italian polarity which had formed the context of some of his early thought about the Alps. Soon afterwards she stumbles across a man with "golden-brown eyes" full of "warmth" (VG 254), and it seems likely that Lawrence had conceived her development as an Alpine Lady Chatterley, with a man of Italianate warmth, in his wooden hut. The last sentence of the fragment is "Ah! Slowly the heat was penetrating through the plaster of the stove, and warming

her back” (*VG* 255). If there were such a development, there would be no icicle present at her consummation (unlike in ‘The Woman Who Rode Away’). However, it is not absolutely necessary that vivifying sex take place amongst trees and away from the high mountains. Frieda, and Mr Noon’s Johanna, demonstrate that it may take place even in the high Alps. At the very time that Gilbert is having his Alpine ecstasy, Johanna, rather than feeling icily abandoned, as Hepburn is by Hannele, and Gerald is by Gudrun, is making love to Stanley in a hayhut. That too is possible, in Lawrence’s conception.

The change in Lawrence’s thought and writing in the early 1920s has been characterised by critics in various ways: as a turning away from England, from Europe, from Christianity, towards America, towards desire for a strong leader, towards religiopoiesis – but not, heretofore, as a turn away from the Alps. However, this turn exists in synchrony with those others. The Alps, functioning as the border of North and South Europe, belong firmly to the Europe itself, and therefore to the Old World, beyond which Lawrence sought for further inspiration. They invite no kind of society, beyond the febrile, unsustainable camaraderie of Alpine huts. They are therefore no kind of location for Ranim, nor for the kinds of political experiments with which Lawrence’s imagination engaged in the 1920s. They offered a temporary, perfect, solitary ecstasy - but one which could threaten the continuation of quotidian life, the health of relationships, and the prolongation of life itself. The God towards which Lawrence reached in his religiopoiesis was changeable, creative, and hard to know – not fixed and transparent as Alpine ice. None of Lawrence’s late conceptions of death involve such a consummation as the Prussian officer’s orderly experiences. In *Apocalypse* Lawrence extols a relationship with a living cosmos to which one lives breast to breast; the various beasts to which Lawrence likened the Alps cannot be lived with breast to breast. One of the most celebrated of his poems concerning death, ‘The Ship of Death’, operates on a severely horizontal plain; in the landscape of his imagination close to death, there were no mountains to be climbed. It is therefore appropriate that the landscape of Vence (orange point 70), in the Alps of the French Riviera, is not that of the high Alps. These are mountains which acknowledge warm life, and which offered Lawrence the hope of prolonging it.

Yet the Alps had served certain crucial functions in Lawrence’s development. In their stupendous contrast to the rolling green hills which surround Eastwood they are central to Lawrence’s, and to Mr Noon’s, unEnglishing. A contemplation of their

physical qualities stimulates conceptions of the eternal and divine, in a way which perforce combines the physical and the metaphysical; this combination was to be central to the development of Lawrence's thought. The God of Congregationalist Christianity, with which Lawrence had been raised, was not accommodated by the high Alps, and if the conceptions of the divine which Lawrence went on to develop resembled neither those of the Tyroleans, nor those of the Prussian officer's orderly, they do owe something to the apprehension attributed to Birkin, near the top of the Pfifischer Joch, that it is "unutterable satisfaction" "To have one's pulse beating direct from the mystery" which is a "non-human mystery" with "its own great ends" (*WL* 478-79). The Alpine ecstasies experienced by the Prussian officer's orderly, the Brangwen sisters, Mr Noon and Hannele constitute some of Lawrence's finest writing, and the deflationary comments of Gerald and Hepburn do not overwhelm the effect of this prose for the reader, as they overwhelm the experience for the characters. Moreover, it is likely that such ecstasies constituted some of the greatest moments of Lawrence's life.

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## **APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE OF LAWRENCE'S VISITS TO THE ALPS**

(abbreviated titles given in bold at the left-hand-side are expanded in the list which follows; works are listed in the year in which work began upon them)

1912	May-June	Beuerberg (Ge)
<b>"CT"</b>	June-August	Icking (Ge)
	August	Walk with Frieda to Mayrhofen (Au)

	August-September	Sterzing (Au), whence to Riva (then Au - now It)
1913	April	From Verona via Innsbrück (Au) to München
<b>“CM”</b>	April-June	Irschenhausen (Ge)
<b>“RJ”</b>	August-September	Irschenhausen (Ge)
<b>“IE”</b>	September	Irschenhausen (Ge) to Schaffhausen (Sw),
<b>“PO”</b>		Zürich (Sw), Luzern (Sw), on foot over the Gotthard Pass (Sw) to Airolo (Sw), Bellinzona (Sw), and Como (It)
1914	June	Switzerland on foot: Aosta (It), Grand St Bernard Pass (It/Sw), Martigny (Sw), Interlaken (Sw), Bern (Sw)
1915		
<b>WL</b>		
1916		
1917		
<b>A’sR</b>		
1918		
<b>“SP”</b>		
1919		
1920		
<b>MN</b>		
1921	April	From Firenze via Switzerland to Baden-Baden
<b>“C’sD”</b>	July-August	From Baden-Baden via Konstanz (Sw) Bregenz (Au) to Zell-am-See (Au)
and		
1922		
1923		
1924		
1925	November	From Baden-Baden to Kastanienbaum near Luzern (Sw)
	November-February	Spotorno (It)
1926	April	Spotorno (It)
	October	Paris to Lausanne (Sw), then on via Milano to Firenze

1927	August	Firenze to Villach (Au) and on to Ossiacher See (Au), Annenheim (Au), Faaker See (Au), to München and Irschenhausen (Ge)
	September-October	Irschenhausen (Ge) to Baden-Baden
	October	Baden-Baden to Milano
1928	January	From Firenze via Milano, Passo del Sempione (Sw-It), and Aigle (Sw), to Les Diablerets (Sw)
	January-March	Les Diablerets (Sw) to Aigle (Sw) and Milano
	June-July	From Grenoble to Chexbres-sur-Vevey (Sw)
	July	Gstaad (Sw)
	July-September	Kesselmatte near Gsteig (Sw) to Baden-Baden
	October	Le Lavandou (Fr)
1929	July	From Firenze via Milano and Basel (Sw) to Baden-Baden
	<b>“WWWTD”</b>	
1930	February	Nice to Vence (Fr)

### **APPENDIX 3: APPROXIMATE DATES OF COMPOSITION OF WORKS CONCERNING THE ALPS**

1912 ‘Christis in the Tirol’

1913 ‘The Crucifix across the Mountains’

1913 ‘The Return Journey’, ‘Italians in Exile’, ‘The Prussian Officer’

1915-19 *Women in Love*

1918 ‘The Spirit of Place’

1917-21 *Aaron’s Rod*

1920-22 *Mr Noon*

1921 *The Captain’s Doll*

1929 ‘The Woman Who Wanted to Disappear’

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<sup>i</sup> "Mignon", Goethe p. 45.

<sup>ii</sup> Luke Ferretter points out that in Lawrence's essay "The Hopi Snake Dance", "Lawrence is interested less in representation of Hopi belief than in developing his own religious ideas on the basis of the images and concepts suggested to him by the *The Glyph and the Gramophone: D.H. Lawrence's Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 62.

<sup>iii</sup> Brian Finney, "Introduction", *Twilight in Italy and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 1997), xv-xvi.

<sup>iv</sup> *D.H. Lawrence at Work: The Emergence of the Prussian Officer Stories* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 170.

<sup>v</sup> Jannice Hubbarly Harris, *The Short Fiction of D.H. Lawrence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 95-96.

<sup>vi</sup> The orderly's name, 'schöner' ("more beautiful") is appropriate. Mrs Crich's declaration that "If I thought that the children I bore would like looking like" her husband in death, "beautiful as if life had never touched you", "I'd strangle them when they were infants" expresses what turns out to be an unfounded concern, as far as her eldest son is concerned (*WL* 334-35).

<sup>vii</sup> "Introduction", *Mr Noon* (London: Grafton Books, 1986), xii.

<sup>viii</sup> *The Glyph and the Gramophone*, 138-39; George Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1907)