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D. H. Lawrence in Valhalla

By MARY FREEMAN

MR. S. H. NULLE, being very fond of both D. H. Lawrence and fascism, has tried to get his two good friends together.¹ In doing this, he has approached fascism—through inadvertence or design—not as it exists but as its propagandists would have us believe from their window-dressing. Also he has lifted, with tendentious discretion, isolate phrases and paragraphs from Lawrence, and he has shown a most singular reluctance to consider material which could demolish his thesis. Moreover, that which he has drawn from Lawrence, when placed alongside the operational realities of fascism, makes Mr. Nulle's case a farrago of distortions and *non sequiturs*.

I must waive a discussion of the romantic and toplofty definition of fascism which Mr. Nulle succumbs to. Here it need only be remarked that he resonates to Lawrence's emphasis on the need of reconciling the supposedly divergent forces in man—the rational and the irrational—an emphasis which he presumably finds echoed in the fascist appeal to the irrational, to muscle-thinking. This purely nominal coincidence in terms is assumed by Mr. Nulle to place Lawrence in the same *patrie psychique* with fascism, although to the Nazi the irrational boils down to nothing more than *Bluden*—an etymological and intellectual monstrosity from which Lawrence would have recoiled with passionate aversion, however much he may have expressed something apparently similar when removed from its context.

Assuming for the moment that the intellect-emotion, rational-irrational dualism, inadvertently accepted by Lawrence's very attempt to reject it, is sound (although it is not), it might be suggested that the yearning for integration of personality does not necessarily lead one to the fascist

1. S. H. Nulle, "D. H. Lawrence and the Fascist Movement," *THE NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY*, February, 1940.

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lair. Waldo Frank may be mentioned as a man seeking integration, and yet by very different means politically and economically. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Aryan German *Gestalt* psychologists, who have for years been emphasizing a much more thorough and soundly-based conception of Lawrence's clamor for an integrated view of man, have found the "organic" tendencies of fascism incompatible and have become voluntary exiles.²

Nor does the desire to take man as a whole necessitate the exclusive establishment of the cult of irrationality, evidenced in the burning of books and in Hitler's term of crushing contempt, *Intelligenzler*, which has taken the fascists off the other end of the boat. One need only compare the following quotations from Lawrence and Hitler to recognize the cosmic difference between Lawrence's "blood-knowledge" and Hitler's muscle-thinking. Lawrence writes:

2. It is also desirable to understand, as evidently Dr. Nulle does not and as Lawrence himself did not, exactly what it is that Lawrence objected to in science as viewed by most literary intellectuals. To Lawrence science was merely the mechanistic science of the nineteenth century, a science from which nothing more could emerge than was represented by the properties of the individual elementary components, a science which offered nothing but the dreary, uncreative recombinations of particles, without anything essentially novel to hope for. But this is not what science has been for the last twenty years. It is not the science of *Gestalt* psychology or of atomic physics or of astrophysics of today. These contemporary conceptions reveal a cosmos of the most exciting and undreamed-of possibilities, because they recognize in the infinitude of combinations of even a finite number of elements an infinitude of relationships, of which every one is a genuinely creative novelty that is a priori wholly unpredictable from the components. Even such a humdrum compound as water is now seen as entirely different from the mere addition of the properties of hydrogen and oxygen, its essential properties being emergents from the relationships set up by the two elements rather than a mere addition of the properties of hydrogen and oxygen considered singly. When Lawrence spoke of science, he was thinking of Newton, Locke, and Hume, not of Einstein, Millikan, and Köhler.

To object to mechanism for its inadequacy and prosaic restriction of possibilities is one thing, but to denounce all science, as Lawrence has done, because he knows of no other, and to denounce intellectualism because he thinks it capable of nothing but the sterility of mechanism is quite another. Lawrence would probably have been the last man in the world to remain guilty of this had he taken the trouble to go beyond the science of his school days. For in contemporary science are found precisely the relational wholes, the unpredictable creative possibilities with each step in advance which Lawrence demanded of life itself. It would seem that, had Lawrence realized this truth, he would have called for more rather than less science and intellect for the enrichment of life, and certainly not for the sterile formula of fascism which denies opportunity to the intellect.

"... the thought adventure starts in the blood, not in the mind. If an Arab or a Negro or even a Jew sits down next to me in the train, I cannot proceed so glibly with my knowing.... I can just plank down the word Nigger, and having labelled him, finish with him! Or I can try to track him down in terms of my own knowledge. That is, understand him as I understand any other individual.... Or I can do a third thing. I can admit that my blood is disturbed, that something comes from him that interferes with my normal vibrations. Admitting so much, I can either put up a resistance to continue, because, after all, there is some peculiar alien sympathy between us.... This slight change in my blood develops in dreams and unconscious, till, if I allow it, it struggles forward into light as a new realization, a new term of consciousness...." And again he says that to be a man is "all the time to risk your own known self, and become once more a self you could never have known or expected."³

Let us observe Hitler stalking knowledge:

Once when I was walking through the inner city, I suddenly came across a being in a long caftan with black side locks. My first thought was: Is that a Jew? In Lenz they did not look like that. I watched him stealthily and cautiously, but the longer I stared at the strange countenance and studied it feature by feature, the more the question in a different form turned in my brain: Is that a German?

As always on such occasions, I proceeded to try to remove my doubts by means of books. For the first time in my life I bought some *anti-semitic* pamphlets for a few heller.⁴

May it not be ventured that Hitler's choice of "impartial" anti-semitic authority is revealing? This leads us to another contrast between our two figures. Consideration of motive is never beside the point.

Mr. Nulle heavily emphasizes Lawrence's uncompromising disgust with our contemporary civilization as leading

3. *On Being a Man*, 190, 194, 195, 199.

4. *My Fight*, 19. Italics by M. F.

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him directly toward the fascist bivouac. As an arrant partisan Mr. Nulle apparently feels that the only new stirring in the present world is fascism. Ergo, Lawrence was a prophetic voice paving the way for Hitler. He notes with triumph that "the enemies of Lawrence and fascism are one." Within certain limits this is true. But it could be said with equal vigor—if one selected material as carefully as does Mr. Nulle—that the enemies of Lawrence and socialism are one, or that the enemies of Lawrence and democracy are one, or even the enemies of Lawrence and of living men are one. The significant point is not that Lawrence and fascism had enemies in common, but why they had enemies in common. It is here that Lawrence and fascism most symptomatically part company.

More precisely, Mr. Nulle reminds us that Lawrence disliked democracy. But what, specifically, did Lawrence dislike in democracy? Of America he writes:

This is the land of the free! Why if I say anything that displeases them, the free mob will lynch me, and that is my freedom.⁵

Would Mr. Nulle suggest that Lawrence would be freer to displease authority under fascism? Secondly, Lawrence was disgusted, as Mr. Nulle has pointed out, by the preoccupation with obtaining the "world's gear" which he saw as an inseparable part of what he termed "democracy." But has the avidity for the world's gear of Nazi leaders escaped Mr. Nulle? Or does it cease to be avidity when the great can become fabulously rich and the humble must submit to forced labor for a bare existence? Is it delusory to believe that the gearing of Germany's entire economy to armaments has raised the sheer problem of securing food to an obsession for the ordinary man? This war economy—and let us note that according to Hitler and Mussolini war is the ordinary and proper condition of a nation—can scarcely meet Lawrence's demand that "money and work be as casual in human life as they are in a bird's life, damn it all," and

5. *Studies in Classical American Literature*, 4.

"What we want is life and trust, men trusting men, and making living a free thing, not a thing to be *earned*."⁶

And third, Lawrence feared the dependence of the "democratic" on courting the votes of the masses. He feared the attendant demagogy, the oversimplification of issues, the opportunity for the inferior but unscrupulous to push to the fore by a manipulation of prejudice and ignorance. He denied the absolute equality of man and confused that equality with the political equality of people. Hitler came into power, by his own boast, through the violation of every principle which Lawrence here desired, by appeal to sheer ignorance, confusion, and prejudice; and retains it by the stimulation of atavistic and low-brow impulses which Lawrence abhorred and feared in democracy where they are far more rudimentary. Lawrence's leader was to *lead* and not to depend upon a demagogic acceptance and exploitation of every foible that could serve opportunism. Mr. Nulle has blandly quoted Lawrence's ideas of a "proper ruling":

I think the artisan is fit to elect for his immediate surroundings, but not for the ultimate government. The electors for the highest places should be governors of the bigger districts—the whole thing should work upwards, every man voting for that which he more or less understands through contact—no canvassing of mass votes.

Aside from Lawrence's error in taking what he found in America as the quintessence of democracy, it is notable that his electoral scheme is precisely the reverse of fascism. However much Lawrence may have desired to modify the suffrage, he still wished to retain it, the change being only such as to give the authority of the voter more, not less, effect. But in fascism the voter has no authority; in fact, he is entirely eliminated. He has only responsibility toward those above to do as ordered from above. But authority is all downward, quite as one-sided as the responsibility for performance is all upward. Ironically enough, Lawrence's

6. Letter to Charles Wilson from Bandol, Dec., 1928, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, edited by Aldous Huxley.

above account resembles more nearly at least the paper organization of Soviet Russia than of any fascist country. What is one to think of Mr. Nulle's state of information if he is ignorant of this elementary fact? And if he is aware of it, then what is one to think of his candor?

It is, moreover, apparent when one takes into consideration the whole tenor of Lawrence's writings that his insistence on having artisans govern only that with which they come in direct contact arose from his conviction that abstractions are a poor source of knowledge, as well as from his distrust of the intelligence of the working class. To use Lawrence as Mr. Nulle has done in this connection is to make him an advocate for the fascist policy of playing providence with the people and treating them as barnyard animals—an indignity against humanity which Lawrence abhorred more strongly than anything else. Says Hitler: the German "shall learn to be silent not only when he is justly blamed, but to bear injustice in silence, if necessary."⁷ Says Lawrence, on the contrary, to the miners:

Stand on your own feet or you'll be put in compounds "like they keep Niggers in South Africa. And everyone of you'll have a little brass collar round his neck, with a number on it. You won't have names any more. And you'll go from compound to pit, and from pit back to compound But you won't be men. You won't even be animals a lot of numbered slaves... a new sort of slaves."⁸

If Lawrence praised the common man for his simplicity, it was not for this brand of simplicity which would leave him a voiceless, faceless automaton at the bottom while his fascist masters, exercising incredible power, pushed him around from the top.

In contrast to Lawrence's rebellion against inertia and submissiveness, we find Hitler gratified with it and demand-

7. *My Fight*, 169.

8. *Touch and Go*, 92.

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ing it as the basic condition for his social slot-machine. Hitler writes:

By its very nature an organization cannot stand unless leaders of high intellect [*sic!*] are served by a large mass of men inspired by sentiment. It would be harder to maintain discipline in a company of two hundred men, all equally gifted intellectually, than in one containing one hundred and ninety less gifted and ten with higher intellects.⁹

Thus Lawrence feared in democracy precisely the qualities which fascism deliberately nourishes: the humility and sycophancy toward authority, the destitution of imagination, and the ignorant cocksureness with its potentiality for destroying the non-conforming spirit. Even the literary apologists of fascism such as the Italian Futurists have scorned the individual man in their orgiastic identification with the machine. Mr. Nulle suggests that Hitler is Lawrence's Saint Paul. But it is strange that the disciple should so far have misread the master's gospel of *Noli me tangere* into meaning *Du bist nichts; dein Volk ist alles*.

Anyone familiar with Hitler's book, or Mussolini's for that matter, cannot fail to see it as a monument to successful evasion, trickery, and shuffling opportunism, as a text for manipulating the crowd by crowning their shortcomings and institutionalizing their basest fears, prejudices, and superstitions. Is this, then, the highest form of "truth," which, according to Lawrence, a nation shall pursue? Is this conducive to the truth between men which Lawrence urges? Writer after writer who has observed first-hand testifies to the effect of Hitler's regime on the German people. No one trusts anyone else, parents not even their children, and leaders not other leaders.¹⁰

Mr. Nulle quotes Lawrence's demand to "restore the world of natural men . . . emancipated from ancient fears

9. *My Fight*, 191.

10. Cf. Martha Dodd, *Through Embassy Eyes*; Nora Waln, *Reaching for the Stars*; and Erika Mann, *School for Barbarians*.

and frustrations," "the renaissance of the body or insistence on spontaneous living" as most characteristic of fascism. Were this kind of coupling of Lawrence with fascism a little travesty of Mr. Nulle's, it would be grim but thinkable, though rather extreme. But it is offered in deadly earnest, as is the view that for fascism the sin against the Holy Ghost is "violence to life." It is one of the singularities of admirers of fascism that statements do not mean what they say and acts are something other than themselves. If Hitler says anything, he says that death in battle, in obedience to the leader, is man's highest consummation. However noble this killing and being killed may be, it is not an abhorrence of "violence to life." Lawrence stressed fighting for what the individual really believed, not for what somebody else believed who gave the orders from above.

The following is a section from a letter written by Lawrence in 1916 to Lady Asquith. From this Mr. Nulle made a quotation, but at the same time he saw fit to neglect this significant anti-fascist sentiment: "I can never see how my fellow man should make me kill another man. Which then is my Fellowman? How shall I distinguish him? And you are quite right, I do esteem the *individual* [Italics by M. F.] above everything else."

Again Mr. Nulle makes much of Lawrence's interest in the heroic leader, without, however, indicating that the outcome was for Lawrence a repudiation of the fascist *Führerprinzip*. What is equally significant is that Mr. Nulle brushes aside, as obvious maladjustment, Lawrence's inability to portray that leadership clearly or to assume it himself. The essential point, Mr. Nulle, is not that he could not, but *why* he could not. We have read *Kangaroo* in very different ways. It is most extraordinary that Mr. Nulle should take the leader of this case-history of fascism to be Lawrence himself. For if the *Kangaroo* is supposed to voice Lawrence, then he is a singularly different Lawrence from the character who always bears the author's attitude in his other writings. Of course, it is a favorite trick of Lawrence's to send his vari-

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ous ideas battling in the guise of his characters and often to make each of several characters resemble Lawrence in some particular respect. But it is not difficult to tell which character says the writer's last words, and in *Kangaroo* this character is Somers and certainly not the Kangaroo. The whole book was the story of *why* Somers could *not* join a fascist movement.¹¹ Is it not strange that in Somers' inability to accept the movement Mr. Nulle did not recognize a demurrer on the part of Lawrence? Isn't it significant that Lawrence makes the nasty brawl between the Kangaroos and their victims the critical turning point in Somers' attitude? Here Lawrence realizes clearly the ominousness of fascism, to men of his individualistic stamp above all others, and he rejects it, despite the existence of a few paper points of compatibility, points held initially before he saw fascism in action. It is significant too that his next book about leaders is laid in Mexico, where mysticism is not so incongruous. For his own European folk he has rejected fascism. Then in *The Plumed Serpent* he tries to determine if these ideas will work in the more primitive society of Mexico. This time it goes better, without Kangaroo's top-hat and pince-nez; and Jack's unmystical cracking of skulls, but again Lawrence rejects it as an answer to his problem. It is a trait of Lawrence's that he never lets his ideas distort his characters or situations. His novels are like fingers to the blind. He feels and tests authenticity by means of them and does not hesitate to reject the false.

Mr. Nulle also fails to place in its proper significance the circumstance that after *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence ceased to emphasize the military leader, that he began to express doubts about leaders and what he had formerly regarded as their qualifications. Had Mr. Nulle seen fit to quote along with the praise of leaders in letters to Gardiner, Lawrence's equally important rejection of his own former

11. Note the resemblance of Lawrence's core problem, exemplified in *Kangaroo*, to Thomas Mann's, exemplified by "Tonio Kröger," (and, for that matter, in most of his other work. And Thomas Mann is conspicuously anti-fascist.

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conception of leadership, Lawrence's supposed advocacy of the *Führerprinzip* would have appeared far less unequivocal than Mr. Nulle allows us to believe. In the same year in a letter to the same Gardiner, Lawrence writes from Italy:

Yes, one can ignore fascism for a time. But after a while the sense of false power forced against life is very depressing, and you can't escape—except by the trick of abstraction which is no good.¹²

And why, it is permissible to ask, did Mr. Nulle overlook Lawrence's letter to Witter Bynner in the same year?

I sniffed the red herring in your last letter a long time: then at last decided it's a live sprat. I mean about the *Plumed Serpent* and "the hero." On the whole, I think you're right. The hero is obsolete, and the leader of men is a back number. After all, at the back of the hero is the militant ideal: and the militant ideal, or the ideal militant seems to me also a cold egg. We're sort of sick of all forms of militarism and militantism, and Miles is a name no more, for a man. On the whole I agree with you, the leader-cum-follower relationship is a bore. And the new relationship will be some sort of tenderness, sensitive, between men and men and men and women, and not the one up one down, lead on I follow, *ich dien* sort of business.¹³

It is not necessary to quarrel with Mr. Nulle's use of Lawrence's contempt for socialism, communism, and the Soviet Union, as Lawrence understood them. But that this contempt should necessarily make a fascist of him does not follow. What, precisely, did he object to in socialism? First, he feared man in the mass. But that was also his fear of democracy, where he perceived the menace of group standards to the individual. What individual variability is allowed under fascism, with its consummate regimentation of every possible act, emotion, and thought? He despised the materialism which he believed an emphasis on economic

12. *Letters*.

13. *Letters*, 719.

welfare would produce. Would the butterless and *Ersatz* economy of fascism yield something transcendental that Lawrence yearned for, or would it produce a more intense preoccupation with what Lawrence contemptuously spoke of as being able "to eat more sausage," and would there be a stimulation of "tenderness between men and men and men and women" or of mean grasping cunning when a loaf of bread has become the most convincing of arguments? In fact, there is good reason to hold that Lawrence—who dwelt ecstatically on venison pasty until the anemic soul of Middleton Murry winced and the Doctor who looks at literature with a jaundiced eye shouted "perverted"—would have much preferred the sausage to the shoddy transcendentalism of fascism.

Lawrence's third objection to socialism is that it accepted the machine and succumbed to the tempo of industrialism. Does Mr. Nulle find any lesser worship of the machine in Italy and Germany? And if German peasants are encouraged to consider themselves titled aristocrats of the soil, it is only because the millions tending the machines must eat. Furthermore, Mr. Nulle could gain much from getting around a bit more among his fascist confreres. From Marinetti and other Italian Futurists, who have remained in Italy to apologize for the fascist regime, he would learn the heights, the obsessive madness, to which the machine can be raised, particularly the machines of destruction which have become totemic deities.

Since Mr. Nulle quotes from the *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, perhaps he has read, although he does not choose to recall, this devastating Swiftian contempt; starting with a diatribe against England, Lawrence writes:

Onward Christian Soldier toward the great terminus where bottles of sterilized milk for the babies are delivered at the bedroom windows by noiseless aeroplanes each morn, where the science of dentistry is so perfect that teeth are planted in a man's mouth without his knowing it, where twilight sleep is so delicious that every woman longs

for her next confinement, and where nobody ever has to do anything except turn a handle now and then in the spirit of universal love.

This is the forward direction of the English-speaking people. (Have these lines given Aldous Huxley the idea for his *Brave New World*?) Now Lawrence proceeds to the Germans, whose city of light

lies direct behind us Reverse engines, and away, away to our city, where sterilized milk is delivered by noiseless aeroplanes, AT THE VERY PRECISE MINUTE WHEN OUR GREAT DOCTOR OF OUR FATHERLAND HAD DIAGNOSED THAT IT IS GOOD FOR YOU; where the teeth are not only so painlessly planted that they grow like living rock, but where the composition is such that the friction of eating stimulates the cells of the jaw-bone and develops the SUPERMAN STRENGTH OF WILL WHICH MAKES US GODS; and where not only is twilight sleep serene, but into the sleeper are inculcated the most useful and instructive dreams, calculated to perfect the character of the young citizen at this crucial period, and to enlighten permanently the mind of the happy mother, with regard to her new duties toward her child and toward our great Fatherland. [p. 95. All capitalizations Lawrence's.]

Mr. Nulle has lamented Lawrence's vagueness on "that other great fascist principle," "the *nation* as a spiritual organism." Do not these lines from *Fantasia* strike twelve most clearly on that very point?

Again in a diatribe against Soviet Russia, Lawrence says things which could be levelled against fascism:

Lenin says: "You are saved, but you are saved wholesale.

You are no longer men, that is bourgeois, you are items in the Soviet State, and each item will get its ration, but it is the Soviet State that counts; the items are of small importance, the State having saved them all"

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Then Lawrence asks, "... when wilt thou teach them to save themselves?"¹⁴ Would the same question dealing with the coolies and janissaries of Hitler and Mussolini be out of order?

If any categorical conclusion is justified, it is not Mr. Nulle's to the effect that fascism could satisfy more of Lawrence's demands than could any other social form, but that fascism would have outraged his sensitivity on more points than any other system could have done. The common ground between Lawrence and fascism is extremely tenuous and altogether on the negative side, comprised only of an acute awareness of and aversion to the obvious defects of our rudimentary democracy. Two men may alike detest fish, but does it follow that they will both prefer fried eggs? Lawrence's ideas do not run, as Mr. Nulle would have us believe, through open doors right into fascism. Even if Lawrence desired, as he once did and again later did not, a leader glorious and omnipotent, neither Hitler nor Mussolini could fill the bill. Even if Lawrence did call for a mystic "organic" unification of the social order, it must not be forgotten, as Mr. Nulle has forgotten, that Lawrence also demanded the greatest liberty possible for divergent individuals. That he never clearly envisioned a society that could achieve this, grew from his acceptance of the hoary fallacy that the psychology of the group is fundamentally different from the psychology of the individuals composing it.¹⁵ Thus he finds himself writing recipes to satisfy two divergent views of man. In combating the widely held view that the individual and society were necessarily set against one another, he gave a false credence to the very fallacy he fought, just as he paid inadvertent homage to the supposed intellect-emotion dualism. This real disbelief in man's wholeness led him to vacillate between an over-emphasis on the "organic" aspect of society and an insistence on the ultimate supremacy of man as an individual. As a result,

¹⁴ 14. *Pansies*, 29.

¹⁵ 15. Cf. Ellis Freeman, *Social Psychology, and Conquering the Man in the Street*, on the Group-Mind Fallacy.

Lawrence has been dismembered by persons like Dr. Nulle, who drag a limb into the fascist camp and call it Lawrence, and by the "artists" who hold the individual so sacrosanct as to be above it all. Aware perhaps of a discord in the beautiful fraternal amity which he had constructed between Lawrence and fascism, Mr. Nulle suggests that if Lawrence possibly didn't care for fascism and if he did make some skeptical remarks about the oppressive feel of Mussolini's Italy, then that arose only from the law of nature that prophets are greater than their achieved visions. A pretty tribute, especially when Mr. Nulle coyly adds that very probably Jesus wouldn't have liked "Christianity"! Isn't it more likely that Jesus did not advocate "Christianity"?

Disquiet

By HOWARD E. SYLVESTER

I'd not rest in such an earth as this is:
Murder and starvation and the mark
Of madness on us all—vast, blank abysses
Of utter dark.

Before I'd rot beneath such tragic air,
Where crumbling hope betrayed infects our worth,
I'd summon strength to burst my grave and dare
To flee from earth

To beat upon the silent gate of heaven,
Sounding and resounding till the din
Disturb the sleeping saints, the Lord God even,
And He take me in.