

THE BOY IN THE BUSH: LAWRENCE, LAND AND GENDER IN AUSTRALIA

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In the foreword to Izabel Brandão's *A imaginação do feminino segundo D.H. Lawrence*, Neil Roberts points out that D. H. Lawrence collaborated with many women friends and writers. Among English friends there was collaboration from a short story with Louie Burrows ("Goose Fair"), to novels such as *The Trespasser* with Helen Corke, and among writers based abroad examples range from an aborted story with Mabel Dodge Luhan about her life in New Mexico, to "the novel *The Boy in the Bush* with an apprentice writer Mollie Skinner" (Brandão: 1999: 11).¹

This intriguing theme – Lawrence's collaboration – led us to think of collaborating ourselves to work on a paper about *The Boy in the Bush*, a neglected novel that stemmed from joint work between Lawrence and an Australian woman writer who was practically unknown, and who only comparatively recently received her fair share of recognition for her part in this enterprise of writing a novel with the already well-known English writer D. H. Lawrence.²

Our intention is first to discuss the collaboration between Lawrence and Mollie Skinner, using as our main source Paul Eggert's "Introduction" to the Cambridge Edition

¹ See Brandão's *A imaginação do feminino segundo D.H. Lawrence* (1999) where Lawrence's novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are approached from a phenomenological standpoint, reading Lawrence's images of water and earth as indicators of his often misunderstood exploration of the feminine in his imagination. See also Brandão's "Amazons at War: Lawrence's Subversive Archetypes" (in Poplawski, ed. *Writing the Body in D. H. Lawrence* (2001: 55-66)) where some of Lawrence's remarkable female characters in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are discussed using as a theoretical framework a feminist revised Jungian approach.

² Paul Eggert, a Lawrentian scholar based in Australia, whom Brandão has contacted, has kindly informed her of a number of references relating to this novel that appear in our bibliography. Eggert suggested that there might be further references, "but actually there hasn't been much" (personal e-mail, dated 19 Feb. 2003). Eggert's comprehensive account of the genesis of *The Boy in the Bush* in his "Introduction" to the Cambridge edition of the novel, published in 1990, has been of invaluable help for our understanding of the process of collaboration between Lawrence and Skinner. We would also like to thank another Lawrentian scholar, Peter Preston, Director of D. H. Lawrence's Studies at Nottingham University, who has generously sent Brandão copies of the novel's criticism listed in our bibliography.

of *The Boy in the Bush*, published in 1990, which presents a comprehensive discussion of the collaboration itself. This is intended to give a background to the analysis of a book authored by two different writers whose perceptions of the starting points of the narrative found a certain harmony, despite their disagreement about the final outcomes of the narrative.

Secondly, we intend to present a few notes from an initial reading of the novel in the context of postcolonialism, understanding with John McLeod, author of *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000), that this is to read with an historical and cultural awareness that “Literary texts are always *mediations*: they do not passively reflect the world but actively interrogate it, take up various positions in relation to prevailing views, resist or critique dominant ways of seeing” (McLeod 2000: 144). Here is an obvious challenge to a reading of *The Boy in the Bush*, a novel written by a wandering English writer (wandering as a result of being quite an outsider in his own country) and an Australian woman writer who was educated in England and then returned to her native land. Their novel takes its starting point in the journey of a young Englishman, born from an English father and an Australian mother, and sent from England to Australia “because he was tiresome to keep at home”.³

Finally, we also intend to examine Lawrence’s use of nature in Australia as a locus for his central character’s search for a gendered identity that is in harmony with the nonhuman. In this journey he is forced to contend with what is presented as the Australian experience of life and death, love, hatred, animals, women and men in situations that challenge his own identity. Here our reading will be based on an ecofeminist approach to the novel. In defining ecofeminism Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy draw attention to its close links with postcolonial concerns:

[...] ecofeminism is based not only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism (Gaard and Murphy 1998: 3).

In *The Boy In The Bush* the narrative moves through issues of colonialism and class to come to focus, finally, on a challenging relationship between nature, women and patriarchy. But it takes its starting point in a jointly-gendered engagement with a narrative concerning the nature of Australia.

³ *The Boy in the Bush*, 19. All quotations from the novel are from the 1990 Cambridge edition.

I. D. H. LAWRENCE AND MOLLIE SKINNER: WHAT KIND OF COLLABORATION?

Mollie Skinner was a nurse for whom writing was a part-time activity, “tolerated but not encouraged by family and friends”.⁴ Before her death in 1955 she was to publish six novels. Lawrence met her while he and Frieda were in Australia in 1922 and stayed in “Leithdale”, the guesthouse run by Mollie Skinner. There he read her only novel published at that time, *Letters of a V.A.D.* (1918) and he encouraged her to write another one “prompted by his nocturnal excursions in the nearby bush” (Eggert 1990: xxiii). In her draft autobiography *The Fifth Sparrow*, Skinner recounts Lawrence’s conversation with her: “It frightens me – all the bush out beyond stretching away over these hills frightens me, as if dark gods possessed the place ... Why don’t you write about this strange country?” he said” (Eggert 1990: xxiii). So before it began, this collaboration had its inception in Australian nature, as perceived by the male collaborator.

After leaving Australia, where Lawrence seems to have had a creative enough stay (two novels and at least one poem were written), he maintained quite an intensive correspondence with Mollie Skinner from the USA.⁵ She sent him the typescript of her second novel *Black Swans* (published in 1925), which he read “with despair”. In his reply to her, he encouraged her to write yet another story: “Take the new book from the time when you became aware of what went on in this empty country. Know your characters, strip them to the bone. Away with fancy and sentiment, be spiteful” (Eggert 1990: xxiv).

Lawrence was trying to push Skinner to her utmost for, when she sent him her version of what became *The Boy in the Bush*, he wrote to her saying that she had “no constructive power [... but y]ou have a real gift – there is real quality in these scenes. But without form, like the world before creation” (*Letters*, Vol. IV, 495-96), and proceeds to propose collaboration:

If you like I will take it and re-cast it, and make a book of it. In which case we should have to appear as collaborators, or assume a pseudonym. – If you give me a free hand, I’ll see if I can make a complete book out of it. If you’d rather your work remained untouched, I will show it to another publisher (*Letters*, Vol. IV, 495-96).

⁴ Eggert, “Introduction” to *The Boy in the Bush* (1990), xxii. Hereafter page numbers are to be found in the text.

⁵ For a full account of Lawrence’s correspondence with Mollie Skinner, see Volumes IV and V of the Cambridge Edition of *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*. Eggert’s “Introduction” contextualises this correspondence.

In December 1923, Lawrence wrote to Seltzer saying that he “had a thrilled letter from Mrs Skinner, very pleased at our collaboration. She is nice” (*Letters*, Vol. IV, 544).

Skinner’s original version of the novel – ‘The House of Ellis’ – was renamed by Lawrence as *The Boy in the Bush*, a title he thought more suitable for the market. Unfortunately, according to Eggert, “no trace of any version of ‘The House of Ellis’ has been found” (Eggert 1990: xxviii).⁶ This prevents us from doing any sort of comparative study in order to find out differences between the two authors’ versions of the novel. What is known is comprehensively discussed in Eggert’s “Introduction” to the novel in the 1990 Cambridge edition of *The Works of D. H. Lawrence*, as already mentioned. There Eggert claims that “there is no doubt that, even after Lawrence’s rewriting of the story, *The Boy in the Bush* still reflects its origins in Mollie Skinner’s life and background” (Eggert 1990: xlv). According to Eggert, Skinner marked passages of what she considered to be Lawrence’s work, in a copy of the novel owned by Edward Garnett, Lawrence’s mentor. Her marked passages attribute to him alone “only one quarter of the novel”, although, since Skinner did this in an afternoon, the evidence is deemed less than definitive by Eggert (Eggert 1990: xlvi).

Initially, a mystery surrounded Skinner’s co-authorship of *The Boy in the Bush* at the time of its publication in England since Secker, its publisher, chose to print on the title-page only “D. H. Lawrence and M. L. Skinner”. The first reviewers assumed that the collaborator was a man (Eggert 1990: liv).⁷ It seems that this might well have been Secker’s intention for the commercial interests of the novel, perpetuating the centuries-old male preference for the invisibility of women, especially in publishing and intellectual circles.⁸ Later reviewers, who had discovered the jointly-gendered collaboration, minimized Mollie Skinner’s participation in the writing of the novel. H. C. Harwood, in *Outlook*, for example, referred to the “queer genius” of Lawrence, as opposed to Skinner’s “mildly pleasurable talent” (Eggert 1990: liv).

⁶ Researching the internet on an Australian site we have found out that Stephen Connors, author of *Postmodernist Culture* (1989), has been working on an edition of Mollie Skinner’s unpublished novel ‘The Land of Nod’, a story that was partly revised by Lawrence. See <<http://idun.tsc.adfa.edu.au/ASEC/postgrads.html>>.

⁷ According to Eggert, when the novel was first published in England, 47 reviews and notices were published, whereas in Australia there were 49. Other countries also published reviews: Argentina, France, India, and the U.S., among others.

⁸ Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, published in 1928, plays with the idea of women’s historical invisibility transforming her male character Orlando into a woman and narrating the mounting difficulties that this change of sex/gender may bring to the fore, including authoring a book.

With the passing of time Mollie Skinner's claims for her part in the novel increased as her significance for other Australian women writers increased. The *Sunday Times* interviewed Mollie Skinner (15 Feb 1925) who is reported to have said: "All the plot, except the very little last bit is mine, and I provided the local facts and colour. I love those people of my creation" (Eggert 1990: xlvi). In 1931, an Australian writer named Katharine Susannah Pritchard, commenting on a book about Lawrence by John Middleton Murry, wrote that he failed to "mention the name of the 'woman with whom, after all, Lawrence chose to collaborate. When he did so, few young writers did not envy M. L. Skinner'" (Eggert 1999: 223). For Pritchard, "one meaning of the novel [...] was the all-too-brief rise to fame of a fellow Australian talent" (Eggert 1999: 223). Later, in 1950, a note on the collaboration was published in which Mollie Skinner "claims to have written 'about three fourths of the book in question'" (Eggert 1990: xlvi).

Lawrence himself was aware of a possible debate concerning authorship. Their correspondence shows evidence of the strictness of his ethics, always referring to their collaboration, and making sure that, while he lived, Mollie Skinner received royalties for the novel which was published jointly by Secker in England (August 1924) and by Seltzer in the U.S. (September 1924). Lawrence was aware of the difficulty of this position for the unknown Australian writer. Whenever possible he took pains to publicly suggest his minimal participation in their collaboration while defending Skinner's work. In his "Note on Miss M. L. Skinner" written for the German edition of the novel, he says, "I wrote it all out again, altering freely. Some of the chapters and the whole of the end, after the return to Perth, are mine – the rest is Miss Skinner's material" (Eggert 1990: xlvi). In his preface to her novel *Black Swans*, Lawrence says that he had indeed rewritten the novel, but that he kept "the main substance of Miss Skinner's work ... the last chapters and anything in the slightest bit 'shocking' are, of course, my fault: not Molly Skinner's" (Eggert 1990: xlvi).

These last chapters to which Lawrence refers as "his fault" were written by him in January 1924, and they create a very different ending for the novel from that which Mollie Skinner imagined. Since these chapters concern issues of land and gender we shall return to this point later in this paper.⁹ For now it suffices to say that whilst both writers agreed that their collaboration was a successful one, their differences draw attention to the final chapters of the novel, as Mollie Skinner does in expressing her thanks to Lawrence for what he did: "You have been most kind and generous ... and I've got to forgive you for

⁹ See p.17.

those end chapters – because they are yours. And I do think you have *brought* it all *out* like a magician” (Eggert 1990: xlviii). As for Lawrence, he was not quite willing to undergo such an experience ever again, as he told his sister in a letter: “I doubt if I want to re-write another book, and re-create it, as I did *The Boy*” (Eggert 1990: xlviii), for this he regarded as a “*tour de force* which one can do once, but not twice” (Eggert 1990: li). Eggert’s judgement is that this novel was a “complete imaginative appropriation on [Lawrence’s part] of the ‘material’ he found in ‘The House of Ellis’” (Eggert 1990: lii). Eggert continues:

The facts, taken together, that the autograph manuscript is in his hand alone, and that he claimed the novel as a collaboration when he habitually (and modestly) underestimated the extent of his own assistance to other writers’ work, are strong evidence that he made the novel his own and, importantly, that he had accepted responsibility for it: it would be – it is – a Lawrence novel (Eggert 1990: liii).

The Boy in the Bush is thus one of the many collaborations Lawrence undertook in his career as a writer. This fact allows Eggert to propose the idea that collaboration was “mainstream” rather than “peripheral” for Lawrence, who

was unable to create from scratch; his plots are frequently based loosely on his own experiences or on those of his acquaintances and friends. If I am right that this kind of textuality is intrinsic in Lawrence then his habit of collaboration is simply merely another kind of stimulation – part of a continuum rather than different in kind (Eggert 1988: 162).

In any case, it is a fact that Lawrence collaborated with, and in some sense, as Neil Roberts claims, “depended” on women in his life and career. This might have led Lawrence to what Roberts calls his “resistance to the feminine”. Yet, “there are few male writers who so generously give voice to women, however much he may, at times, assert male dominance, his female characters resist it and rarely, if ever, give his men the final word” (in Brandão 1999: 12).¹⁰ But Eggert quotes two reviewers of *The Boy in the Bush* who complained about the novel’s portrayal of women, L. P. Hartley suggesting in the *Spectator* (13 September 1924) that they “have a prescriptive right to nonentity” (Eggert 1990: lv). So to what extent is Roberts’ statement true of this particular story rewritten by Lawrence from distinctively Australian material?

¹⁰ Note by Brandão: As a Lawrentian scholar, I can only agree with Roberts for this is an extended argument I have been developing throughout my years of research on Lawrence. This dates back to the mid eighties when I wrote an MA Thesis about “Relations of Dominance and Equality in D. H. Lawrence’s Works” (UFSC, Brazil, 1985, supervised by John B. Derrick) and continued throughout my Ph.D., titled “Female Archetypes in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*” (which was written under Neil Roberts supervision at Sheffield University, submitted in 1991). These research works have produced a number of articles, essays, and a book published in Brazil (1986, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2003) and elsewhere (Paris: 2000; England: 2001; and Italy: forthcoming).

II. *THE BOY IN THE BUSH: A FEW POSTCOLONIAL NOTES*

A land must have its ups and downs. And the first thing the old world had to ship to the new world was its sins, and the first shipments were of sinners (*The Boy in the Bush*, 10)

So hears Jack from his Australian mother in this novel set in the second half of the nineteenth century. The narrator is telling the story in the 1920s and referring to the arrival of one more of the sinners (12) shipped from England to Western Australia forty years before. The others were possibly part of Jack's family, like his grandfather who was one of the first to arrive in the colony.

“Our hero”, as Jack is addressed several times, is a wolf in sheep's clothing and his apparent sweetness on arrival masks a personality which is similar to John Russell (Jack) Skinner's, Mollie Skinner's brother, whom Lawrence met in passing while he was staying in ‘Leithdale’. Eggert suggests that in the story of Jack Skinner's life, Lawrence saw “a life of apparently aimless and unsuccessful drifting” as actually one that represented “an honest and resolute refusal to submit to ‘fixed’ convention” (Eggert 1990: xlv). With this in mind, Lawrence rewrote Jack's story: a rebellious young man sent to Western Australia – “where a man could be *really* free” (7) – to be initiated into manhood, and become “a Man, a wild, bushy man among men” (27).

For postcolonial literary criticism, “the reading of literary texts in relation to their historical, social and cultural contexts” is a desirable principle (MacLeod 2000: 144). We intend now to identify how some cultural contexts are made present (or absent) in *The Boy in the Bush*, and explore how this narrative may “*intervene* in the debates of its day and applaud or resist dominant views of the world” (McLeod 2000: 144). One such context can be detected through the first change undergone by Jack as soon as he arrives in Western Australia. He is “rebaptised” as “Beau”, or “Bow”, by Monica Ellis, one of the twin sisters in the family with whom he stays. This new identity is one of many that reveal Jack as someone fragmented and contradictory.¹¹ It is the “true colonial” (20) Mr George, who introduces the new character: “This is the young gentleman – Mr Grant – called in Westralia Bow, so named by Miss Monica Ellis [...] Call him Bow. Bow's his name out here – John's too stiff and Jack's too common!” (30). But in spite of this rebaptising, Jack

¹¹ For more information about multiple identities, see Moita Lopes (2002), who discusses masculinity in terms of how people exert their social identities which can be fragmented and contradictory. See also Bhabha's (1994) *The Location of Culture* for a discussion of hybrid identities, borders and related themes. Feminist theory and criticism also discuss the theme in relation to women, as in Sawicki (1998), Grosz (1994) and others.

“Bow” Grant keeps his “common” name. The changes that emerge as the deepest in him are more suitably revealed through his eyes. “It was his eyes that had changed most. From being the warm, emotional dark blue eyes of a boy, they had become impenetrable, and had a certain fixity. There was a touch of death in them” (295).

This is only learned after his return from his being lost in the bush after his killing of Easu, a born and bred rough Australian, who “disgraced” Monica Ellis by making her pregnant before Jack comes to marry her. (Amusingly, Lawrence points out that the name is actually mispronounced because it is really spelled Esau [68]). But Jack’s change is also seen in the way he treats people generally. From his Bedford upbringing nothing is left. He turns into what Aunt Matilda – another member of the Ellis family – considers as “the worst of the colonies [...] Our most charming, cultured young men, go out to the back of beyond, and they come home quite – quite – [...] uncouth” (314). It is the Australian bush, then, that is held responsible for transforming educated people into rough, wild men - that is, men whose experience has been sanctioned by some kind of wild law of nature. In Jack’s case, after his killing Easu, we understand why, in the beginning of the story, Lennie Ellis says that Rackett, an Oxford educated doctor living in the Australian farm land, “signs death certificates an’ no questions asked. *Y’ c’d do a murder, ‘n if you was on the right side of him, y’d never be hung. He’d say the corpse died of natural causes*” (56, our italics). Although Jack pleads innocence in his trial, for he shot Easu in “self-defence”, it is clear that Jack was in Rackett’s “right side”, for Easu was a hateful man and no-one in Wandoo seemed to like him. But the reader knows that Jack has premeditated the murder, for he realized that Easu “disgraced” Monica by forcing her to leave Wandoo due to her having become pregnant by a married man. So, when Jack stops at Easu’s farm, we know that he has a pistol with him. Easu only provides him with the excuse he is looking for by threatening to use an axe against him. This brings to mind a parallel killing in *Women in Love* where we learn that Gerald Crich as a child had accidentally killed his brother. There is a strong suggestion that in both killings Lawrence is evoking the Nietzschean theory of murder/murderee, by which, for a murder to occur, there is needed one who wants to murder and another one who wants to be murdered.¹² This idea seems appropriate to the killing of Easu in *The Boy in the Bush*, especially since Lawrence described Jack as “a sinner, a Cain”, someone “born condemned” (10). His killing of Easu is just a materializing of this Christian heritage.

¹² This theme is discussed in detail in Chapter III of Brandão’s unpublished Ph.D. thesis (“Female Archetypes in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*”, Sheffield University, 1991).

As for Rackett, being on his “side” implicitly means that if one is on the side of “home” (England), one is exempted from any crimes he or she might commit. Thus Rackett is characterized as “a species of rattlesnake that they kept tame about the place” (63). So the reader can understand why Tom says to Jack that “If [Dr Rackett] hasn’t got a disease of the body, he’s got a disease of the soul” (225). A representative of the colonizers, Rackett’s English snobbery is exposed when he tries to convince Mary that because her grandfather was an earl, “England is really your place”. Mary’s identification with Australia was expressed, we are told, “in a queer complacent way, as if there were some peculiar, subtle antagonism between England and the colonial, and she was ranged on the colonial side”. Rackett “half felt the antagonism. For he would never be colonial, not if he lived another hundred years in Australia” (133). Moreover, he is responsible for Lennie’s education, offering the reluctant pupil bits and pieces of poetry, Latin, and the language which he will never learn to speak “properly” in his future farming life in Australia. Significantly, Rackett’s alienation from Australia is expressed, in his own words, as an alienation from its nature: “I suppose [...] it comes from those unnatural stars up there. I always feel they are doing something to me” (133).

Jack’s stay with the Ellis family is marked by his intense attachment to them, something that is not true for his own family in England. His parents left him to be brought up by aunts who bullied him by promising Hell if he wasn’t a “good boy”. In Australia he finds in Tom a comrade, or a “mate”, which reinforces his adaptation to the laws of his new country. According to Eggert, Lawrence himself could not quite understand this feature of Australian life. Eggert explains what “mateship” means for the Australians:

Based ultimately on a convict resistance to authority, an assertion of equality and [...] rejection of British class superiority and their hierarchy, mateship was mythicized in the literature of the 1890s [...] and confirmed by the Australian troops’ experience in World War one. Mateship generated a code of ethics based on male bonding, a respect for ingenious or heroic ways of “making do” in adverse circumstances, a stoic, censoring of the softer emotions, and an intolerance of difference or of high achievement (Eggert 1999: 213).

Tom and Jack’s “mateship” is partly described by this characterization of the notion. Yet, according to Eggert, “Lawrence saw and valued the manly toughness and emotional self-sufficiency, but he rejected the assertion of equality it contained” (Eggert 1999: 213). The two characters become closely attached as they journey for over two years in the land of “the back of beyond”, trying to pursue some sort of wild, bush experience. Significant in this is the sexual initiation of Jack with a prostitute who “dearied” him in a

jamboree and for Tom, an obscure “marriage” to a certain Lucy who, it is hinted in one draft of the novel, was already married to someone else. This “bigamous” woman can be seen as a kind of counterbalance to Jack’s own bigamous proposal to Mary, at the end of the story. This reference to Lucy as bigamous was deleted by Lawrence’s English publisher.¹³ Secker’s reasons for the deletion might be, as Eggert claims, “less clear” than the legal care he had to take with other works by Lawrence. Yet, it might be possible to see in his censoring of Lucy’s bigamy, a kind of male fear of attributing to a woman a prerogative which was “rightfully” masculine, especially considering that the novel is set at the end of the nineteenth century and published in the first quarter of the twentieth century. So was Lawrence endorsing the view that women in the rural colony were seen as “loose” beings, not really socialised into the moral code established by the urban middle-class settlers represented by Aunt Matilda, or was he representing their independence?

The presence of transgressive female characters was not new in Lawrence’s work and considering that there is no account of Mollie Skinner making any complaint as far as this is concerned, we can possibly say that she accepted this transgressive behaviour as part of women’s initiation too. These characters seem to be beyond the social censorship that was on the surface of Secker’s cuts. We shall return to the changes in Skinner’s version of the novel later in the paper.

Jack and Tom’s ‘mateship’ is reinforced throughout the novel, and at the end of the story, when Jack strikes gold and changes identity again, becoming a “general” (a higher rank than his own father who was below this military rank). Tom comes uninvited to live with Jack and his new family, for Jack is now married to Monica who gave birth to twin boys by him, step-brothers to Jane, her daughter by Easu, now dead. After all, Tom says, “I was your first mate, Jack. I’ve never been myself since I parted with you” (310). Jack’s new identity is “a mixture of gold miner, a gentleman settler, and a bandit chief. Perhaps he felt a mixture of them all” (312). So this mixture reinforces the notion that Lawrence demonstrates that identity is not unified, but multiple and transitory.

Another feature of Lawrence’s work that is now associated with the postmodern is the use he made of official documents that he had come across while in Australia. This gives the story the character of experimentation related to Linda Hutcheon’s concept of

¹³ See Eggert’s “Introduction” for a full account of the deletions made in this and other works by Lawrence. He points out that Lawrence was not informed of some of the deletions. Secker did this to “‘objectionable’ passages in his editions of *Women in Love* [...] in order to avoid possible legal action or to satisfy the anticipated scruples of the circulating libraries” (Eggert 1990: xlii).

historiographical metafiction in post-modern narratives (Hutcheon 1988). The information borrowed by the narrative refers to the acquisition of land in the colony which originates from a book called *Western Australian Year-Book for 1902-1904* (1906), from which Lawrence researched the historical background to the colony (Eggert 1990: xxiii). This kind of experimentation seems to be new in Lawrence's approach to his writing of novels. The other "new" creative technique for Lawrence can be seen in the letters exchanged between Jack and his family and friends in England, something Jack did more out of obligation than pleasure. These letters provide an opportunity for a sense of ironic humour concerning the foolish attempt to count time chronologically as far as fiction is concerned. Lawrence was aware that in a novel set in the past everything can be known in advance of the actual narrative by the reader. Thus Lawrence, through the narrator, can make jokes at the expense of both the reader and the character. Since each letter from and to Australia/England took up to three months to reach its destination, when the news arrived, it was already three months old. One example of Lawrence's use of the ironic humour latent in this situation follows Jack's writing to his father asking for money to buy land. His father's reply is to be sent in February, but already in December, we learn about the negative reply Jack's father will send him. Here is the way the narrator brings the information to the reader:

Sea View Terrace
Bournemouth
2/2/83

Dear Jack,

[.....
.....]

I have no intention of sinking funds in the virgin Australian wild, at any rate until I see a way clear to getting some refund for my money [...]

Your affectionate father

G. B. Grant

But this is running ahead. - It is not yet Christmas, 1882 (106, our italics).

Eggert sees the narrator as someone who is "elusive, relishing his ironies, yet slippery, resisting identification with his audience" (Eggert 1996: 148). Eggert uses Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogism' to refer to "Lawrence's polarized imagining and thinking" (Eggert 1996: 136): "Because language is always a process of becoming... and is embedded in social and historical contexts, stratified 'languages' usually act in a novel as carriers of contrary ideologies, or world views" (Eggert 1996: 137). This can be clearly seen in this novel where many voices resonate, and experimentation seems to be part of the process of rewriting. It could be also be added here that the use of history alongside other

kinds of discourse in the literary text has an implication that leads the text towards the resignification of its contents. The sum of different discourses (here associated with the information taken from *Western Australian Year-Book for 1902-1904* and the letters which provide different voices) transforms the novel into an “impure” and “hybrid” text – many texts which are not one single and unified text but a multifaceted one, more akin with a postmodern perception of literature.¹⁴

III. TOWARDS A LAWRENTIAN CONCEPT OF NATURE

In Eggert’s account of Lawrence’s reception in Australia, he says that “Lawrence’s response to the Australian bush, to its plants, trees, and wild life is based on a refusal to divorce the human and the natural in its thinking about Australia” (Eggert 1999: 214). Such a perception suggests that Lawrence’s reading of the Australian land, especially in *The Boy in the Bush* itself, invites a reading from the discipline that is now called “ecocriticism”. In his definitive book *Ecocriticism* (2004) Greg Garrard, reaching for a way of expressing the continuing challenge of expressing “the refusal to divorce the human and in the natural”, returns to a Greek conception: “The Ancient Greeks proposed a virtue that combined the proper pride of a clever, resourceful animal with reasonable acceptance of the human place in a world we can neither predict nor control. They called it ‘megalopsuche’, which we translate roughly as ‘greatness of the soul’” (Garrard 2004: 179). Is this what Lawrence was feeling towards in the final images of his collaboration with the Australian writer who had a real story to tell?

How might the two collaborators be perceived as differing in their conceptions of the Australian land? For Eggert, Mollie Skinner had “a more conventional sense of her native land”, for

She had a vigorous pride in the achievements of the colony and later state of Western Australia, in the growing signs of civilization [...] in being related to the pioneers who had made such notable advances, and in egalitarian style which the harsh circumstances of Australian outback life had fostered. Hers was a reflection of the ethic prevailing when Lawrence visited Australia [...] Her ideal Western Australia was a place of freedom and of openness of horizon existing unproblematically with a white Anglo-Saxon culture modelled on “Home” – as Britain was then called. Australians

¹⁴ Note by Brandão: This insight is based on information taken from a doctoral thesis named “A estranha nação de centauros: uma representação do sujeito híbrido na ficção de Moacyr Scliar” by Antônio de Pádua Dias da Silva, on whose board of examination I was a member. The viva was on 27 July 2000, at my University (Federal University of Alagoas). The thesis reads a Brazilian contemporary writer using a cultural theoretical framework.

generally saw themselves as part of the British Empire and therefore proudly of British stock (Eggert 1999: 218).

For Lawrence, on the other hand, Australia is “a silent continent [...] He feels that Australia has never yet been loved enough. So far it has been treated crudely, more like a prostitute than a bride or a mother nation” (L. Esson quoted in Eggert 1999: 214). Such different perceptions help us understanding why Jack can feel so unattached to his own motherland (England) and so close to the Ellis family, representatives of the Australian spirit, people who led him to understand the meaning of family, something he felt he hardly had back in England, due to his having been brought up by his aunts who liked neither the task of bringing up an “impure” child whose mother had left him behind, nor the child himself.

For the purposes of this paper, we shall concentrate on three main thematic trends in Lawrence’s handling of Australian and human nature in this novel: the first is the notion of “border-beings” in relation to Jack and Hilda; second is the theme of bigamy as related to Jack, Mary, Monica and Hilda; third is the symbolic sense of both harmony and separation between the human and the non-human, as expressed by the image of the centaur, an image that is explicit in Jack’s relationship with his stallion, but implicit in Hilda’s relationship with her mare. This, it will be argued, points towards a dialectic which, at the same time that it separates man and woman, for they each need to commune with their own respective animal counterparts, also points towards the need for this as preparation for the ultimate encounter between man and woman that was the subject of the obsessive search that drove Lawrence’s career as a writer.

A) AUSTRALIA AS A BORDERLAND

Belonging to a given place, community, is accepted as strengthening a sense of identity and offering a necessary locus of stability from which individual identity can be evolved. Yet, in *The Boy in the Bush*, this stable sense of place is not really felt by most characters. Taking the foreign Jack, for example, whose identity, as already noted, is hybrid, fragmented, and never ‘complete’ in the sense used by Bhabha (1994), this finds its expression through his many names – John, Jack, Bow - marking the multiplicity of social identities adopted by him. He is one of those characters who belong to the Lawrentian gallery of outsiders, as illustrated by Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, to name just two. This means that Jack is a character who, from the very beginning of the novel, shows, instead of a sense of belonging, one of displacement, for he starts as an emigrant, rather than a settler

as his ancestors in the past have been. Being an emigrant reinforces the idea of mobility from which his identity is developed in the novel.

Facing Australia, his mother's country, which he learned to know through the stories she told him – Australia as an imaginary land, a dream-land – makes him consider this sense of belonging as something “So familiar, and so lost [...] Nobody could belong to [Australia ...] Suddenly he turned desirously to the unreality of this remote place” (8). This feeling turns sour when he remembers England: “his mind turned away from [England] in repugnance” (8). Hence, Australia's “unfenced spaces” are what make him understand his mother's “sense of space and lack of restrictions” (12). This seems to be the right place for what Lawrence seems to think of as “border-beings” like Jack, and like Hilda Blessington, a character we regard as having been developed rather purposefully in the writing of the last chapters to represent Jack's female counterpart.

The notion of border is understood by Bhabha as “a place of possibility and agency for new ideas” (in McLeod 2000: 218), due to its being a threshold where ambivalence and contradiction are always possible. John McLeod discusses Bhabha's notion of border as

the place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of crossing. At the border, past and present, inside and outside no longer remain separate as binary opposites but instead commingle and conflict. From this emerge new, shifting complex forms of representation that deny binary patterning. So, it is argued that *imaginative* border-crossings are as much a consequence of migration as the *physical* crossing of borders (McLeod 2000: 217).

Hilda and Jack are, in different moments of the narrative, described as border-beings - Jack because he comes from England, where he could not adjust and felt more at home with those who inhabit the margins of society, like the gypsies he enjoyed staying with, and because in Australia he had to adjust to a different place where he ultimately discovers that “‘Inside my soul I don't conform: can't conform. They would all like to kill the non-conforming me. Which is me myself’” (335). His sense of harmony only appears when he is riding on his horse (as symbolized by the image of the centaur – a hybridity of man and horse) and he is in contact with the Australian wilderness as represented by the bush.

The bush, where Jack learns about himself and where he has his initiation into manhood after his experience of disorientation arising from his killing of Red Easu, is a place where you have to “keep all your strength and all your wits to fight the bush” (21), for “there's something mysterious about the Australian bush. It is so absolutely still. And yet [...] it seems alive [...] as if it hovered round you to maze you and circumvent you”

(285). This leads to the notion of nature as a place of resistance, to use ecofeminist Stacy Alaimo's perception. According to her, nature is a place where "many struggles for power and being" (Alaimo 2000: 13) take place, especially the struggles of women. Jack struggles in the outback both with nature and with his notion of women. The idea of resistance might also be extended to what ecocritic Don Scheese refers to when he defends preserving wilderness for "political reasons": "as a refuge from authoritarian government [for] history demonstrates that personal liberty is a rare and precious thing" (Scheese 1996: 310). One cannot say that Jack is escaping for political reasons, but he is, indeed, escaping from an authoritarian and violent exploiter of nature and women whom he has killed. Easu's careless attitude to the land and his domineering relationship with his horse are not unconnected to his attitude towards women. He had a "bad reputation among the women of the colony [...] The women watched him out of the corner of their eye. They didn't like him" (114).

In addition, there is also the fact that when Jack has just arrived in Australia and is travelling with Mr George, he hears from this "true colonial" that the land will only mature when "a few of us [...] die – and decay! Mature – manure - that's what's wanted. Dead men in the sand, dead men's bones in the gravel. That's what'll mature this country" (23). So upon his escape from England Jack is immediately told that he must confront death in nature and its role in relationship to the land. Eventually he will start the search for his true identity in relation to this land that will lead to his acceptance of the death process as a strengthening of his identity. Crucial in this search is his meeting with nature, his facing and fighting with the bush, that echoes Birkin's search in *Women in Love* when he splits up with Hermione and hides in nature trying to find some peace of mind.¹⁵ In Jack's case, he escapes imprisonment for a killing, whilst at the same time he purifies himself from his deed by first getting intoxicated and ill, and then rising from near-death in the bush to become a new person:

All the time he had this strange desire to throw all his clothes away, even his boots, and be absolutely naked, as when he was born. And all the time something obstinate in him combated the desire. He wanted to throw everything away, and go absolutely naked over the border (288).

Ironically, his resistance to this desire to go naked saves his life, thus enabling him to develop his border identity. On his two year journey into the back of beyond with Tom,

¹⁵ In *Women in Love* Lawrence evoked a notion of harmony between humans and nature through Birkin when he and Hermione split up and Birkin goes out and finds himself among hyacinths and other green elements. Brandão has discussed this scene at length in her *A imaginação do feminino segundo D. H. Lawrence* (Edufal: 1999), 55-58.

Jack had realized that in the interior of Australia “you can move into regions outside of [human consciousness]” (230). In his crisis in the bush there was, preventing him from abandoning his clothes, “something deeper even than his consciousness” (288). It is from this moment that his identity as a border-being begins to take a stronger shape and he makes a new life, including a new kind of family life in the back of beyond, which he thinks of as a return to an elemental Old Testament life.

Hilda, in her turn, is a character who is characterised by Lawrence as “a real border-line being” (347). She is quite different from the women in the colony, especially Mary who, like many Lawrentian women (Gudrun is the best representative), because of social and cultural restraints, is placed in a position of envying men for their achievements in the world (“[men] can choose” (134), she says simply to Rackett). As a woman, Hilda was supposed to adjust to conventions such as marriage, a solution she rejects for her own life while implicitly indicating that she might accept Jack’s bigamous proposal, already discarded vehemently by Mary. Hilda is “independent”, for she has her own money, which aligns her with Virginia Woolf’s women who had “a room of their own” and some money to support their creativity. In Hilda’s case, it is not writing that she wants, but the freedom to do as she likes, even having a relationship with a married man, if she feels like it. Hilda left Australia for England where she was educated, and, like Jack, suffered from being bullied by her brothers and her tyrant father, as well as being marginalized. She tells him about her negative experiences (which match his) by describing “the governess who had mis-educated her, the loneliness of the life in London, the aristocratic but rather vindictive society in England, which had persecuted her in a small way, because she was one of the odd, border-line people who don’t, and *can’t*, really belong” (346), hinting that this might justify her possible acceptance of his proposal, at the same time that there is a clear criticism about England for its contempt for those who are foreign to its culture and values.

B) BIGAMY IN THE BUSH

Hilda’s strength as a character is only revealed significantly at the very end of the novel in the stallion/mare episode¹⁶, when she goes after Jack who is returning to his wife Monica and his children by her. The sexual undertone of the scene seems to be just the easiest way found by Lawrence to voice a symbolic approval of the illicit proposal of bigamy already made to Mary and that is now re-offered to Hilda. At this point it might be useful to recall that Lawrence while in London had rewritten the last chapters of the novel,

¹⁶ This episode, like others in this novel, recalls another one in *Women in Love* when Gerald Crich is violent to his Arab mare and Gudrun sees everything. This scene has already been discussed by Brandão using a feminist approach to Lawrence. See Brandão (1991, 1994, 1999, 2001).

and that Mollie Skinner accepted and forgave him the changes he made.¹⁷ Eggert points out that two changes Skinner proposed were rewritten by Lawrence, the first of which was “meant to soften Jack’s bigamous impulse (voiced earlier in chap. XXIV) by referring to it indirectly as ‘philandering’” (Eggert 1990: xli). Here is what Lawrence wrote to her:

You may quarrel a bit with the last two chapters. But after all, if a man really has cared, and cares, for two women, why should he suddenly shelve either of them? It seems to me more immoral suddenly to drop all connection with one of them, than to wish to have the two (*Letters*, Vol IV, 596).

Lawrence also wrote to both Secker and Seltzer instructing them to “make the alterations [Mollie Skinner] wishes: at least the smaller ones [...] Miss Skinner would also like the last chapter, & if possible, the last two chapters, omitted. A moi, ça m’est égal. Je m’en fiche de ce monde craintif” (quoted by Eggert 1990: xl). Yet, even if the proposal is softened, it is there, and implicitly accepted by the woman who voices her position about marriage:

‘I dislike the idea of marriage. I just hate it. I don’t think I’d mind men so much, if it weren’t for marriage in the background. I can’t do with marriage.’

[.....]
‘I might like to be a man’s second or third wife: if the other two were living. I would never be the first.’ (346).

This seems a rather heavy thumb on the scale on the part of Lawrence (considering that he rewrote the final chapters, and Skinner, though objecting, accepted the changes in the end: “And I do think you have *brought* it all *out* like a magician”, as already quoted here on pages 5-6). And yet, no one can blame Lawrence for time and again placing in women’s voices transgressive discourses. Every reader of Lawrence will recall Gudrun in the Alps revealing herself, in her most violent rejection of Gerald as she declares to Loerke - in front of everybody - that she is not married: “Bitte sagen Sie nicht immer gnädige Frau,” cried Gudrun her eyes flashing, her cheeks burning. She looked like a vivid Medusa. Her voice was loud and clamorous, the other people in the room were startled” (*Women in Love* 1987: 449). Hilda’s speech can be read as a sort of counter discourse of the accepted discourse in the colony, as illustrated by the game “Modern Proposals”, in chapter IX “New Year’s Eve”, in which marriageable women learn that marrying someone will lead them towards becoming men’s servants. During the game men, make “original” [sic] proposals to women, by telling them that they have socks to be mended, or stew to be cooked, or fowls to be fed by them. And even considering that, during the nineteenth

¹⁷ Cf. p.5 of this paper.

century, this was the norm rather than the exception, a feminist reading would see transgression on the part of Hilda in her refusal of the role of “wife” in exchange for a different one, which the story leaves open (again Lawrence leaves open doors) but which clearly differentiates between the role of wives (fit for reproduction, their “Eve” function), and of lovers (fit for pleasure, their “Lilith” function).¹⁸ Furthermore, one cannot simply accuse Lawrence of being uncritical of his own position as a writer who writes about polemical themes. He was aware of his “art” (and of his thumb):

If a character in a novel wants two wives – or three – or thirty: well, that is true of that man, at that time, in that circumstance [...] But to infer that all men at times want two, three, or thirty wives; or that the novelist himself is advocating furious polygamy, is just imbecility (Lawrence quoted in Eggert 1996: 147).

We believe that what really counts here is that, despite the opposition feminists might have for the imposition on women implicit in Jack’s conception of bigamy, it is possible to think of Hilda as a character who can be placed among Lawrence’s strongest women, those who have a mind of their own, separate from men, whom they regard as “mates” rather than, perhaps, enemies. In Hilda’s case, as already noted, she has her own money, and this alone sets her in a special and independent position: she might do as she pleases regardless of Jack or of any other man. Ecofeminists might point out that Hilda is empowered to choose to engage, or not, with Jack’s terms because she has her own confident relationship with nature. All she seems to need is such an excuse for disrupting a family tie like hers - a tie which will inevitably be severed if Mary marries Hilda’s tyrant father, as Hilda tells Jack that he probably will.

Here, we could add that in Lawrence’s rewriting of Mollie Skinner’s novel, it is implicit that the idea of re-writing a text from a slightly different colonial position “does more than merely ‘fill in’ the gaps perceived in the source-text. Rather, it enters into a productive critical dialogue” with it, as John McLeod claims (McLeod 200: 168). It is hard to imagine that Mollie Skinner might conceive of the North-West as Jack does, as “a big wild stretch of land” where, as he says, “with my wives and the children of my wives” they might raise “a new race on the face of the earth, with a new creed of courage and sensual pride” (337). If Lawrence might be associated most closely with Jack, in her need to ‘forgive’ Lawrence the end chapters, Skinner is closer to Aunt Matilda.

¹⁸ It could be said that Monica Ellis starts in a position of transgression, which makes her attempt to seduce all men around, from Jack to Red Easu, until she falls in disgrace by becoming pregnant by a married man. When Jack accepts her and her bastard daughter and marries her, she discards her lover (Lilith) function in favour of a mother (Eve) one, although she is far from being accommodated to that role. This will be developed in a later paper.

C) HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN: THE UTOPIAN CENTAUR

Perhaps his horse was the only creature with which he had the right relation. He did not love it, but he harmonized with it. As if, between them, they made a sort of centaur. It was not love. It was a sort of understanding in power and mastery and crude life (*The Boy in the Bush*, 339).

The way writers represent nature cannot be simply a ‘neutral’ or ‘innocent’ description. Their images reveal how writers construct the relationship between culture, nature and humans (Gifford: 1995: 15). In this novel, the distinctive nature of Australia is represented by the wild bush that transforms the main character into a harsh man only capable of finding a harmonious relationship when he is out in the bush riding on his horse, an activity that Lawrence shows his character to feel to be better than being in contact with either a woman or a man. The image of the centaur – half human and half animal – represents, in part, this sense of harmony between the human and the nonhuman, searched for by the male character. In the parallel lines running between Lawrence’s life and his art found in the letters he wrote whilst he was rewriting the novel, the horse metaphor is recurrent.

The mythical image of the centaur is age-old. Robert Graves claims that

the earliest Greek representation of Centaurs – two men joined at the waist to a horse’s body – is found in a Mycenaean gem from the Heraeum at Argos [...] The Centaur will have been an oracular hero with a serpent tail, and the story of Boreas mating with mares is therefore attached to him (Graves Vol. I 1988: 209-10).

This archetypal image seems to point towards some kind of harmonization between human and animal whilst it is also a representation of “a mythical figure that expresses the meeting, the conflict and the synthesis of the vital energy that is wanted without limit and the meditative, calm and inner wisdom” (Brunel 1997: 152). This image therefore represents a yearning for a difficult, if not impossible, lived dialogue.

Many writers, apart from Lawrence, seem to have dealt with the image of the centaur from the nineteenth century onwards, just to refer to modern to contemporary literature.¹⁹ In the Portuguese language one might illustrate this by reference to two writers: the Brazilian contemporary novelist, Moacyr Scliar Cabral, who wrote a novel called *O centauro no jardim* (“The centaur in the garden”) in 1980 and from Portugal the Nobel

¹⁹ See Pierre Brunel ed. (1988: 151-59) for an account of the myth in literature.

Prize-winning fiction writer José Saramago who wrote a short story named “Centauro” (“Centaur”) in 1994.

Saramago’s centaur is the last of the species that was destroyed by Hercules, and is condemned to wander around the world day and night – a loss of reference common to those who have hybrid and fragmented identities, who are destitute of a discourse, are divided in body and mind, and possess an enormous difficulty in coping with their instincts, as represented by the centaur’s division into two halves. One day he is chased by armed hunters and tries to escape. It is here that he meets and captures a woman. In his only speech to her, he pleads with her not to dislike him, to which she replies, “You’re a centaur. You exist”. She lays down and asks him to cover her and that is his last image: a shadow covering a woman’s body. The chase restarts and the centaur is driven to a cul-de-sac where he is forced to choose either to jump and die, or to surrender. He jumps into an abyss and his body as it meets the rocks, is separated, dismembered and his man half and his horse half forever split. This split is also seen in Scliar’s novel: the possibility of a dialogue of differences seems nearly unachievable - hence fragmented identities and conflict.

Lawrence’s centaur needs to be seen in a less apocalyptic light. However, we believe that a Lawrentian concept of nature can be seen as represented by a search for some sort of harmony in his image of the centaur. The Australian landscape - its “unfenced spaces”, its dis-encounters between men and women, the fight for dominance between men and animals, between men and men, and between men and women - is what transforms the narrative into an open field for the existence of a dialogue, tense and difficult as it may be, but still to be hoped for, despite the costs presented in the case of Jack.

Such a possibility was clearly in Lawrence’s mind at the time the novel was being written (and re-written), for in his letters he is preoccupied by this mythical creature. In a letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, for example, he writes: “Now call into action your common horse sense, of which you have your share, as I have mine, and use that. Don’t go back on your common horse-sense. It is the centaur’s way of knowledge. And if we come back into our own, we’ll prance in as centaurs, sensible, a bit fierce, and amused” (*Letters*, Vol IV, 555). As for the novel, Eggert refers to the new last chapter and says that it echoes a letter, published in 1924 as an article, in which Lawrence wrote: “It would be a terrible thing if the horse in us died forever: as he seems to have died in Europe” (Eggert 1990: xxxii). Eggert suggests that the new last chapter appears to have been “written at about the same

time. Jack finds a oneness with his horse, significantly named Adam, as if ‘he himself were the breast and arms and head of the ruddy powerful horse, and it, the flanks and hoofs’” (Eggert 1990: xxxii). It is as if Lawrence, as a collaborator using Mollie Skinner’s social narrative, had also been facing the challenge that Jack was described as facing early in the narrative: “He was in a strange bush, and by himself. And [...] he must find his way through” (83).

We agree with Eggert’s suggestion that Lawrence’s centaur apparently offered “a symbolic way out” of the disillusion expressed in Jack’s social isolation as a patriarch in the penultimate chapter of the novel, even if we consider that the centaur image implies a representation of a split in one’s identity, because Lawrence invests in it also as a symbolic hope for inner harmony. How far this is from the memory that when Jack arrived in Freemantle, he brought along an elegant “kit that included a brand-new pigskin saddle and bridle [...] from a smart shop in London” (7). A saddle and a bridle are, of course, equipment for domesticated creatures – that is how hybrid Jack Grant, English born with mixed blood, intends to approach wild Australia and find his way out of his old life.

An earlier part of this search for a way out, as represented by the final image of the centaur, is Jack’s learning how to deal with animals, men, and women. So he faces Stampede, a wild stallion that nearly kills him. Sexual undertones permeate the scene as a man tries to subjugate a horse and the animal rejects the subjugation. The language recalls *Women in Love* in relation to the Arab mare scene and the argument of domination as a “matter of wills”. When Easu’s brother has an accident, it is Jack who looks after him in his recovery. Jack’s learning how to deal with men and with horses was influenced by the words of a vet back in England who taught him that “for horse or man [...] it was a matter of will: of holding the other creature’s will with his own will. But gently, and in a kindly spirit” (74).

The main evidence of Jack’s having learned this lesson occurs as Jack defies Red Easu, and again Stampede is part of the show. Jack “didn’t care what happened to him. If he was to be killed he would be killed. But at the same time, he was not reckless. He watched the horse with mystical closeness” (120). As for Easu’s riding, it is seen as being “overpowering” because his approach to the horse implies the same violence he used in his treatment of women. Jack, on the other hand, has already become master of the animal for he had the “gift of adjustment”:

He adjusted himself to his horse. Intuitively, he yielded to Stampede, up to a certain point [...] Jack seemed to be listening with an inward ear to the animal, listening to its passion. After all, it was a live creature, to be mastered, but not overborne (120).

So Jack learns to command the animal by listening to it, adjusting to it as if it were part of him, in a mutual exercise of energy exchange. Thus the “trembling, spurting” animal becomes part of him. And this communion with the male animal is presented as the greatest achievement Jack could ever make in his life. His encounter with the animal means more to him than any other with another human being, especially women. That is when both man and horse are first described as the centaur:

[... Jack’s] face looking soft and warm with a certain masterfulness that was *more animal than human, like a centaur*, as if he were one blood with the horse, and had the centaur’s superlative horse-sense, its non-human power, and wisdom of hot blood-knowledge (121, our italics).

Yet, this sense of harmony suggested by the Lawrentian centaur in which human and non-human meet is only true as far as the man is concerned. Despite offering Hilda’s having her harmonious encounter with a mare too, Lawrence’s focus is on Jack - the scene is narrated from the male perspective, with Jack in control of the animal. His stallion is called Adam and this reference cannot be discarded, especially considering that he is presented as coming to feel like Abraham, one of the patriarchs, ready to take as many wives as he wishes, thus endorsing the idea of polygamy (and not just bigamy) in this novel. Eggert refers to the difference between Lawrence’s version and Skinner’s ending for the novel:

[Skinner’s] Jack journeys from Perth to Wandoo via Mad Jack Grant’s farm; he subsequently becomes lost in the bush, after having set out to find Monica who has disappeared in disgrace, and is found by Mary, Tom and Lennie; in being nursed back to health by Mary, he finds that she is the one he really loves after all [...]

Lawrence’s Jack, on the other hand, becomes lost only after killing Easu but then, after being nursed back to health, sets off again to find Monica, marries her, and goes after gold, nourishing, the meanwhile, his Patriarchal notions (Eggert 1990: xlix).

Hilda, the narrative demonstrates, is not in full control of her animal, and her proximity to a female centaur is only suggested to the extent that she is a border creature: “She looked at him with her round, bright, odd eyes, like an elf or some creature of the border-land” (346). So Jack and Adam, Hilda and her connection with the borderland and frontier, all lead to the idea that Lawrence was presenting, in the last two chapters of the novel, an open field of contradictory tensions rather than a resolution. Even as Jack is

rebuking himself for contemplating his dream of an Old Testament patriarchal utopia, it is being forcefully asserted. Ecofeminists will notice that this echoes the evidence that even as Jack is recognizing the “great deep well of potency which life had not yet tapped” (228) in the blood of women in Australia, he is ambivalently assigning to them the old patriarchal essentialism of “They are more *creatures* than men are. They’re not separated out of the earth” (328). And even as Lawrence was asserting by denying the Christian notion of patriarchy, he created another potential conflict, for centaurs, fairies and elves belong to a pagan tradition. Therefore, what seemed to be a problem solved, is in fact another one, implicit in the tension created between two different traditions which Lawrence typically balances for his own dialectical purpose. Hence, Lawrence’s concept of nature in *The Boy in the Bush* is one which points towards the need for some kind of harmonious encounter between human and non-human as necessary for the harmonious relationship between men and women. But this construction is also somewhat ambivalent. Although the image of the centaur points towards harmony, at the same time it evokes a split. This suggests the need for a difficult dialogue between body and mind, between the human and the nonhuman, between the animal and the consciousness, within all of which the encounter between men and women takes place. Indeed, this dialogue, represented in *The Boy in The Bush* by the final image of the centaur, means more than just a split in Lawrence’s works as a whole. It is the conflict *par excellence* of his *oeuvre*.

Finally, we would like to close this paper by voicing Lawrence’s criticism against his critics in 1925, one year after *The Boy in the Bush* was published: “I always find that my critics, pretending to criticize me, are analyzing themselves” (Lawrence quoted in Eggert 1999: 228).

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