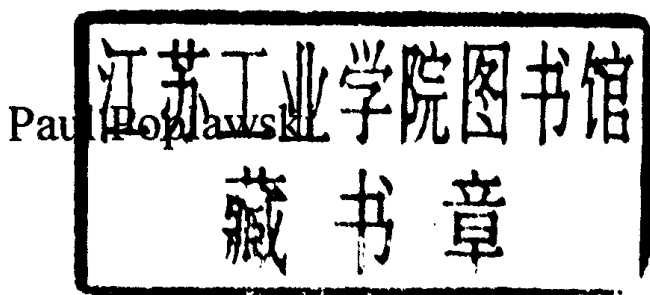


LANGUAGE, ART AND REALITY  
IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S  
*ST. MAWR*  
*A STYLISTIC STUDY*

BY PAUL POPLAWSKI

**LANGUAGE, ART AND REALITY  
IN D.H. LAWRENCE'S *ST. MAWR***

*A Stylistic Study*



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"Well, so many words, because I can't touch you. If I could sleep with my arm round you, the ink could stay in the bottle."

*Lady Chatterley's Lover*

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# ONE

## Introduction

### HORSE-SENSE, HORSE-HOOFS, HORSE-LAUGHTER

In an article written in the same year as *St. Mawr*,<sup>1</sup> Lawrence talks of the death of the "Great God Pan" as a metaphor for the death in modern times of man's creative vitality.<sup>2</sup> Pan, in the article, is imaged in terms of a horse and, more specifically, a centaur. In a letter written after *St. Mawr*, Lawrence admits that he had intended to make the story "a centaur story" but had left it as just "a horse story" out of cynicism over the possibility of "centaur"-manifestation in modern man.<sup>3</sup> What he meant by this, clearly, is not just that *St. Mawr* is a story about a horse, but that it is a story about what the horse, and the lack of "horse-ness" in humanity, represents for him. And, as Keith Sagar has suggested, Lawrence's pervasive use of the horse-symbol throughout his work urges us to view it as a concentrated focus and embodiment of many, if not most, of his "deepest and most lasting preoccupations."<sup>4</sup> A succinct and suggestive statement of what these preoccupations are is given in Lawrence's last work, *Apocalypse*:

Far back, far back in our dark soul the horse prances. He is a dominant symbol: he gives us lordship: he links us, the first palpable and throbbing link with the ruddy-glowing Almighty of potency: 'he is the beginning even of our godhead in the flesh and as a symbol he roams the dark underworld meadows of the soul . . . Within the last fifty years man has lost the horse. Now man is lost. Man is lost to life and power—an underling and a wastrel. . . . The horse, the horse! the symbol of surging potency and power of movement, of action, in man.<sup>5</sup>



In the "London Letter," Lawrence makes a special point of emphasising that while the horse traditionally symbolises "the passions," his image of a Pan-horse symbolises something much more complex, for which he gives us the term "sense":

Sense! horse-sense! Sound, powerful, four-footed sense, that's what the horse stands for. . . . First of all, Sense, Good Sense, Sound sense, Horse Sense. And then, a laugh, a loud, sensible Horse Laugh. After that, these same passions, glossy and dangerous in the flanks. And after these again, hoofs, irresistible, splintering hoofs, that can kick the walls of the world down.

Horse-sense, Horse-laughter, Horse-passion, Horse-hoofs.<sup>6</sup>

The overall context of the letter, of other essays Lawrence wrote in this period,<sup>7</sup> and of *St. Mawr* itself, defines for us what is meant by "sense" here: the spontaneous-creative power in man which enables him to achieve "a vivid relatedness" with "the living universe that surrounds him"—"the Pan relationship":

Because, when all is said and done, life itself consists in a live relatedness, between man and his universe: sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything . . . And whether we are a store-clerk or a bus-conductor, we can still choose between the living universe of Pan, and the mechanical conquered universe of modern humanity. The machine has no windows. But even the most mechanised human being has only got his windows nailed up, or bricked in.<sup>8</sup>

*St. Mawr*, then, is a novel about the lack of this "sense" in modern life and one woman's representative quest to rediscover it. The novel preaches a familiar Lawrentian text, of course. We are at the end of an era, and humanity is slowly but surely being sapped of its vitality by an obsessively cerebral and mechanical civilisation. Our only hope of salvation is to "bury the dead" (p.80) and begin all over again; to depart, like Lou, into the wilderness and begin a new "adventure into consciousness"<sup>9</sup> that will put us back into contact with the living universe and resurrect our creative vitality. Prefiguring the gleam of revelational light we meet in the eyes of St. Mawr, and in the landscape of New Mexico at the end of the story, Lawrence wrote, in late 1923: "We have to struggle down to the heart of things, where the everlasting flame is,

and kindle ourselves another beam of light. . . . A new germ of God-knowledge, or Life-knowledge."<sup>10</sup> And in similar vein he later wrote, in *A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"*:

Let us prepare now for the death of our present "little" life, and the re-emergence in a bigger life, in touch with the moving cosmos.

It is a question, practically, of relationship. We *must* get back into relation, vivid and nourishing relation to the cosmos and the universe. . . . Vitally, the human race is dying. It is like a great uprooted tree, with its roots in the air. We must plant ourselves again in the universe.<sup>11</sup>

From such a perspective, *St. Mawr* represents an attempt to write a myth-like story that can touch the collective consciousness of a whole culture. It is an attempt, focused through the psychology of an individual, and using what is perhaps the archetypal pattern underlying all traditional myths, to write a story which symbolically enacts the death and rebirth of vital life, and specifically the vital life of our civilisation. As a questing heroine, Lou Witt is thus two things simultaneously: she is both a thoroughly modern individual, fighting—against alienation, automatism and cynicism—for her own spiritual rebirth; and she is a representative type enacting a timeless ritual pattern prefigurative of a broader cultural death and rebirth. On both planes, though, she is shown to be searching for the "sound, powerful, four-footed sense" which will put her into a creative Pan relationship with "the living universe."

In order to establish the need for such sense, the tale must first, as it were, "kick the walls of the world down" to expose those deceits and deficiencies in modern life which urge Lou on to her mythic quest in the first place. This work of metaphoric demolition is carried out by the social satire in the tale, and it is precisely in the gaps made visible by the tale's "splintering" satirical activity that the mythic pattern outlined above takes coherent shape for us. The satire, that is, largely engenders the myth (though of course the myth gives orientation to the satire too).

The butts of social satire in the tale are many, but from the arrogant posturing and shallow materialism of the cosmopolitan rich and the bright young things of British high-society, to the hypocrisies of the gentrified clergy, and the petty provincialism of English village life, the idea is constantly and forcefully borne in upon us that life in modern society is empty, aimless, and sterile. No-one and nothing remains entirely

unmarked by this satirical critique, not even the heroine or the pseudo-heroic horse, and the satirical tone is never entirely absent from any part of the text. This tone is in fact a constitutive part of the "voice" or ethos of the novel as a whole. Within the fictional world its ubiquity is assured by the cynical and caustic wit of Lou's garrulous mother, Mrs Witt. Indeed, if anyone should be credited with the splintering hoofs "that can kick the walls of the world down," then it is clearly this "weapon-like," "steely horsewoman" (pp.25-6), whose worldly-wise pronouncements and sardonic comments on others keep constantly before us the failings of modern life. Though we must remember that she herself is a major object of satire too, for in her obsessively analytical, and self-frustrating, cynicism, she epitomises precisely that spiritual barrenness which is the main focus of the tale's critique of modern consciousness: unfortunately for her, she realises only too late that she stands on the inside of the walls she so eagerly helps to kick down.

As well as functioning in what can be called a mythic mode, then, the tale also functions in the more realist mode of social satire; and, figuratively, the satiric "demolition" of social façades clears the ground for the reconstruction projected by the mythic drama. Of course, to put it in such a schematic way considerably oversimplifies the complex interplay we experience between these two modes in the process of reading. Indeed, one of the chief triumphs of the novel is the degree to which it integrates the cynical mode of satire with the inspirational mode of myth without allowing either to control our response entirely. If the myth emerges from the satire then elements of that satire remain with it to the end; and, vice versa, if the parameters of the satire are defined by the myth, then the myth is part of the satire from the very beginning. To recognise this complexity is also to recognise a degree of ambiguity in the overall direction of the novel, and this should warn us away from any interpretation of it based on a categorical division between its mythic and satiric elements: horse-sense and horse-hoofs are, naturally, organically related.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, the text itself positively announces and sustains this ambiguity in what can be seen as a third, elusive and elliptical, but important, modal form which interferes in the operation of the other two and partially deconstructs their relationship. This can be called the mode of ironic comedy. While the satiric dimension of the story asks us to laugh at

aspects of what is represented in the fictional world, this mode asks us to laugh, on a different plane, at the pretensions of the work of art itself in its paradoxical attempts, first, to "anatomise" the anatomising, atomising consciousness of modern man and woman; and, second, to render a sense of "that great burning life" (p.60)—which must always already be gone before the ink has even reached the page, let alone dried on it—through the cerebral abstractions of linguistic art. We are asked to laugh, that is, at the self-confessing ironies of a modern work of literary art—of linguistic artifice—that criticises modernity, art, and language for their lack of "real" contact with the mythically-projected vitality of the "living universe." Such ironic self-confession manifests itself most obviously, as I shall show, in the linguistic playfulness and literary self-consciousness of the novel's flaunting of different genre-styles (something that contributes also to a more general undercurrent of self-reflexive questioning). There exists a form of deconstructive tension, therefore, between the text's avowed mythic seriousness about "burning" reality, and its self-doubting cynicism about the abilities of language and art to engage with this reality. To use Lawrence's own words to gloss this paradox:

No Word, no Logos, no Utterance will ever do it. The Word is uttered, most of it. . . . But who will call us to the Deed . . . ? It is the *Deed* of life we have now to learn: we are supposed to have learnt the Word, and alas, look at us. Word-perfect we may be, but Deed-demented.<sup>13</sup>

In these terms, *St. Mawr* represents a sincere mythopoeic call to "the Deed of life," but one that is inevitably compromised by its own ironic "Word-perfection."

But it is not fatally compromised, otherwise there would be no tension or paradox; and the tale's ironies are not conceived of tragically: the ironic mode is both partial and predominantly comic. Indeed, in the "London Letter" with which I began, as well as in a private letter of the same period, Lawrence stresses the importance of laughter in his conception of a life of "sense" and "Pan relationship," and he talks of the modern "disease" of seriousness:

I am sure seriousness is a disease, today. . . . So long as there's a bit of a laugh going, things are all right. As soon as this infernal seriousness, like a greasy sea, heaves up, everything is lost. . . . My Gods, like the Great God Pan, have a

bit of a natural grin on their face.<sup>14</sup>

Humour, laughter and a relaxed approach to life, what he liked to call "insouciance," are all qualities which Lawrence felt to be fundamental to truly spontaneous and creative life, and qualities which he thought were dangerously lacking in modern civilisation—"There is much more life in a deep insouciance, which really is the clue to faith, than in this frenzied, keyed-up care, which is characteristic of our civilization."<sup>15</sup> Hence the importance of stressing the humour of *St. Mawr*. For—another paradox—our laughter can partially seal the breach that the novel forces us to face between its literary language and the vital life of "sense" about which this language talks. In the contradictoriness of trying to render the life through the language, the generation of "spontaneous" laughter both underlines and undermines the contradiction. In responding to the collision of two incongruous principles, that is, our laughter momentarily synthesises them, ironically bridging the gap between our sense-reality and the abstract reality of the fiction. In *St. Mawr*, Lawrence's concept of "horse-sense" not only figures in outline within the fiction, it becomes embodied in the very operation of the novel's humour: the "horse-sense" is, so to speak, conveyed on the back of the "horse-laughter."<sup>16</sup>

But where do "horse-passions" fit into all this? The simple answer is that in *St. Mawr* they do not fit in at all. As I shall show in more detail later, what is oddly lacking in this mythic quest for the renewal of man's and woman's vitality as "a proud living animal" is any emotional or sexual passion between any of the human characters.<sup>17</sup> This, it seems to me, helps to account for the lack of any clearly rendered positives in the novel, for the lack of any specific elaboration of what a life of true sense might actually entail. It also provides another reason for Lawrence's calling the story a horse story rather than a centaur story, and it perhaps helps to explain why the resolution of the novel remains, as I shall argue, so fundamentally ambiguous.

Implicit in the foregoing comments about the modes of myth,<sup>18</sup> satire and comedy, is the suggestion that we can also usefully identify three distinct levels of discourse in the novel: the narrative level, which concerns the story of Lou's quest for a more fulfilling mode of existence, and which obviously also includes all her interactions and relationships with the story's other main characters; the rhetorical level of overt and

largely satirical comment on modern life; and the more covert formal level of rhetoric, where aspects of the novel's textuality reflect back ironically on its semantic intentions and engage us in a deconstructive "debate" on the limits of literary language. In the first part of my analysis, I shall discuss each of these "levels" more or less independently, as far as this is possible. In the second part, where I present a detailed linguistic analysis of the text, I shall organise my discussion around my three stylistic "modes."

Up to a point, one can see a degree of correlation between these two planes of analysis, with the narrative level being associated with the mythic mode, the rhetorical level with the satiric mode, and the level of formal rhetoric with the ironic mode. However, it would be far too schematic an approach to try to sustain such a correlation throughout, and I make no attempt to do this, despite the apparent parallellism of Parts I and II of my study (indeed, it is partly to dispel this impression that I start with the narrative level in Part I but with the mode of satire in Part II). In any case, my division of the text into "modes" and "levels" is largely metaphoric, and certainly only approximate in its attempt to identify and isolate important aspects and areas of the text for the purposes of analysis. At every stage of my discussion, my analytical commentary will be assimilated to an overall perspective which aims to be fully alive to the functioning of the text as a whole.

## METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this book is to provide a detailed and intensive stylistic analysis of *St. Mawr*, both for the intrinsic value of what such an analysis can tell us about the novel—as well as about Lawrence's linguistic and literary style more generally—and as a study in the application of stylistic method to a complete novel (a type of application that is only rarely attempted).

Stylistics as a literary-critical methodology is surprisingly under-represented in the mainstream of Lawrentian studies. "Surprisingly" because, given the almost universally acknowledged exuberance and force of Lawrence's language, and given also the superabundance of traditional content-based criticism on him, one would

have thought that this method of formal analysis would have been pounced on by Lawrence scholars both as being peculiarly apt for their subject and as offering a timely potential renewal of critical practices in a field of relatively entrenched positions. "In the mainstream" because, while it is true that the full potential of stylistics in relation to Lawrence does not seem to have been recognised by Lawrence scholars in the form of any major stylistic studies of his works, many non-Lawrentian theorists and practitioners of stylistics casually take this potential for granted in their frequent resort to extracts from his works for the purposes of example and illustration. This study, then, represents a small effort towards rectifying this state of affairs by trying systematically to tackle not just an extract or a short text but one of Lawrence's major fictions from a stylistic point of view. In doing this, I hope also to demonstrate the feasibility and value of stylistics in the study of longer works of fiction (stylistics already being relatively well-established as a useful means of illuminating short texts).<sup>19</sup>

Most broadly and simply, "stylistics," in a literary context, is "the study of literary discourse from a linguistics orientation."<sup>20</sup> More specifically, it is "the study of the relation between linguistic form and literary function";<sup>21</sup> or, in other words, the systematic study of the language of literary texts directed towards the elucidation of their overall *artistic* functioning. In some ways, stylistics is merely an extension of the methods (if not necessarily the theoretical assumptions) of traditional practical criticism in that, by drawing on the more systematic discipline of linguistics, it simply adds to these methods a greater analytical rigour in approaching "the words on the page," thereby enabling the critic "to sensitise his grasp of detail *together with* his grasp of structured wholes".<sup>22</sup> In general terms, then, stylistics, as the informing methodology of this book, can be defined straightforwardly as a literary-critical method of approach which strives to develop an overall account of the artistic significance of any particular text in close interaction with a detailed linguistic analysis of that text. Thus, the aim of this particular stylistic study is to develop a comprehensive critical account of *St. Mawr* in close interaction with a detailed linguistic analysis of that novel.

As the above suggests, and the morphological construction of the word emphasises it, stylistics involves elements of both literary criticism ("style") and linguistics ("istics").<sup>23</sup> If the linguist treats literature as "text," and the literary critic treats it as "message," then stylistics can be



further defined as the attempt to bridge the gap between the two by treating literature as "discourse," attempting to show specifically "how elements of a linguistic text combine to create messages, how, in other words, pieces of literary writing function as a form of communication."<sup>24</sup> In this light, stylistics can be seen as "a dialogue between literary reader and linguistic observer."<sup>25</sup>

This aspect of dialogue and double-focus can conveniently be stressed at this point in order to clarify stylistics' limitations. In particular, it should not be thought of, by virtue of its association with the procedures of linguistics, as a mechanically objective method of describing literary texts, even less as some sort of "scientific"—purportedly value-free—methodology. Both linguistics and stylistics, like any other method, inevitably have their own inherent structural biases (they look at certain things and ignore others); and stylistics, by its very nature as a tool of interpretation, also inevitably engages highly subjective choices and values at the most fundamental levels of operation. Furthermore, with stylistics there can be no "absolute" self-sufficient first principles, no definitive beginnings or endings in the constant to-and-fro of the "philological circle" of stylistic analysis.<sup>26</sup> We move constantly between those linguistic details which *we* decide to be worthy of study in a particular text, and the literary significance which *we* ascribe to them (and which in fact helps us to determine their importance in the first place); and we move inevitably between the types of linguistic analysis which we decide to undertake in any given instance, and the interpretative speculations which they give rise to *for us*. It is inevitable that the choices, decisions and judgements that we are constantly called on to make in this form of analysis are ultimately shaped and determined by our own uniquely personal perceptions of, and responses to, both the language and the literary experience which we are attempting to analyse (though it goes without saying that we should strive to be guided in our procedures by logic and reason). As Leech and Short argue, insight, "not mere objectivity," must be the goal of stylistics:

In both the literary and the linguistic spheres much rests on the intuition and personal judgement of the reader, for which a system, however good, is an aid rather than a substitute. There will always remain, as Dylan Thomas says, "the mystery of having been moved by words." . . . Linguistic analysis does not replace the reader's intuition, what Spitzer calls the "click" in the mind; but it

may prompt, direct, and shape it into an understanding.<sup>27</sup>

With the present study, it will be seen that my provisional "intuitive" interpretation of *St. Mawr* is presented at the beginning of my stylistic analysis in Chapters 2 and 3 (and to some extent also in Chapter 4), and that this is then used as the starting point for the more formal linguistic analyses contained in Parts II and III (and, again, to some extent in Chapter 4). These test, refine and modify that initial interpretation from a variety of stylistic standpoints and work together towards an overall stylistic appreciation of the novel seen as a sophisticated piece of literary discourse. My initial literary interpretation thus defines the essential nature and scope of my linguistic analysis, but that then reflects back on my interpretation, modifying *its* scope and nature.

Chapter 4 should be seen as a kind of transitional chapter where predominantly thematic interpretation begins to blend with formal analysis of the text, without however becoming entirely formalistic or systematically linguistic in its orientation—hence its being placed in Part I rather than Part II. Similarly, Chapter Eight is placed in a section of its own distinct from Part II in order to stress the converse transitional movement away from the pole of broadly "linguistic" analysis and back towards the pole of broadly "literary" interpretation. Thus the overall large-scale movement of my stylistic analysis is intended broadly to imitate the smaller-scale procedural mode of its constituent parts: moving from broad-based literary discussion towards linguistic-based formal analysis and back again to a newly-defined literary position.

In studying the stylistic values of *St. Mawr*, I adopt a broadly functional approach to literary language, deriving my general perspective, much of my terminology, and many of my analytical strategies from the functional grammar of M. A. K. Halliday as adapted and developed for the purposes of literary study by, principally, Leech and Short, Cluysenaar, and Widdowson.<sup>28</sup> Most important for my present purposes is Halliday's analysis of the major functions of language, as his tripartite differentiation of these defines the basic principle of organisation of my study. For Halliday, language has three distinct functions which are simultaneously operative in any linguistic utterance or expression: an ideational, a textual, and an interpersonal function; and it is by way of such a broad division of functions that I shall approach the literary functioning of *St.*