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“Reconfiguring Nature after Darwin: Skepticism and Sexuality in High Modernist Literature”

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Introduction

I begin with an observation by Nicolas Kristof:

[I]n the industrialized world, nature is a rarer and rarer part of our lives. Children for one thousand generations grew up exploring fields, itching with poison oak, and discovering the hard way what a wasp nest looks like.

But nature is more than this. When we think of nature we need to think of more than flowers, birds, rainforests, and wild animals in the jungle and even more than hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanoes. Rather we need to think, too, of the entire earth that has preceded us by billions of years, the planetary system, and the stars beyond.

This year, 2009, is the 150th anniversary of *Origin of Species* and is the 200th anniversary of Darwin’s birth. Even though Darwin had many important predecessors in pointing the way for scientific explanations of nature, including both the geologist Charles Lyell in his *Principles of Geology* (1830–1833) and Darwin’s contemporary Alfred Russell Wallace, who perhaps as much as Darwin invented the theory of evolution by natural selection, it was Darwin who taught us in *Origin of Species* that “each new species arose by descending with modification, from an ancestral species.”

The contemporary impact of Darwin’s two major ideas—evolution and natural selection—was mixed. As David Quammen writes, “The idea of natural selection seemed profoundly materialistic and gloomy—that is, it was both literally and figuratively dispiriting,” while evolution itself could be reconfigured as an upward teleology and “could be reconciled with belief that a divine Creator had established laws governing the universe, had set life in motion, had allowed species to change, and then—at some magical moment—had injected a spiritual dimension into the primate species that was later known (by its own self-naming) as *Homo Sapiens*.” (Quammen, *The Reluctant Mr. Darwin*, 206).

But this, as we now understand is a misreading of Darwinism. (Indeed, even as the nineteenth century progressed, orthodox beliefs were increasingly challenged). As Quammen notes, “Insofar as mutation and recombination [of existing genes—which are the main sources of variation—are accidental processes, variation is undirected by need or purpose. Mendelian inheritance prevents the results from being blended away” (228). Natural selection, then, is a mindless editing process.

Writing in the wake of the Darwinian revolution, modern authors stressed that we should think of humans not as linked to God in a great chain of being that rose upward from plants to animals to humans to angels to God Himself but rather as part of the natural world.

For many modernists as well as contemporary authors, the dichotomy between humans and animals breaks down. Humans are seen as the most sophisticated creatures in the natural world with larger, more effective brains and the ability to talk, but, nonetheless, more different in degree than kind from other animals. Thus, understanding human behavior—its desires, anxieties, and dimly acknowledged needs—in response to the world in which we find ourselves means understanding humankind as part of nature.

My argument stresses that as modernists address psychological and cultural complexities, nature in a post-Darwinian universe is less likely to be seen as in tune with human fulfillment and optimism and more likely to be an indifferent, if not hostile, presence. After looking briefly at diverse perspectives on nature in some late-nineteenth-century poetry and some darker views of nature in the modernist fiction of Hardy, Conrad, Woolf, and Forster, I will turn to Lawrence's and Joyce's more affirmative perspectives and examine how they, almost nostalgically and hopefully, align nature with sexuality, passion, intimacy, and love.

I shall be talking about high modernism from 1890–1940, with an emphasis on British and Irish high modernism. I shall follow my twin mantras “Always the Text” and “Always Historicize” and my credo that literature is by humans, about humans, and for humans. My focus will be on how humans interact with nature and on how humans define and are defined by their life in the natural world. My emphasis will be on a synthesizing overview of ways nature works in several modernist texts, with an eye to showing how major texts present nature in ways that not only shape plots and themes but also in ways that also enact the cosmology that underscores the imagined world of poems and novels.

What Is Modernism?

Modernism is paradoxically both an ideology of *possibility* and *hope*—a positive response to difficult circumstances—and an ideology of *despair*—a response to excessive faith in industrialism, urbanization, so-called technological progress, and the Great War of 1914 to 1918, called for a time the “War to End All Wars.”

It is not too much to say that modernism is a response to cultural crisis created in part by Darwin. Let us recall that *Origin of Species* appeared in 1859 and *Essays and Reviews*, which questioned the Bible as revealed history, in 1860. As Quammen puts it, these works asked: “Is there a glorious end for which evolution had produced mankind? Are humans in any sense uniquely ordained? . . . Or are we merely the most well adapted, cerebral, and successful species of primate that has ever lived” (*The Reluctant Mr. Darwin*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2006, 206). It is fair to say Darwin did the most to show the general public that the Bible as a historical document—that is, adding up the years of the patriarchs and arguing the world was less than 10,000 years old—was simply wrong.

In the period from 1865 to 1870, Karl Marx began to publish *Das Kapital*, Alfred Nobel invented dynamite, while Otto Von Bismarck and Benjamin Disraeli dominated Europe and colonialism expanded its reach. By the 1880s we have Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (1882, 1887)—with his contention that God is dead—as well as Krafft-Ebing's revolutionary texts on sexuality; we also have the beginnings of modern physics in the work of J. J. Thomson. All challenged absolutist theories of truth.

What do we mean by modernism, a term I am using to denote a period from approximately 1890 to 1940? Modernism as James Clifford notes, takes “as its problem—and opportunity—the fragmentation and juxtaposition of cultural values.” Thus modernism is a search for informing principles that transcend cultures *as well as* recognition of both the diversity and continuity of culture. Modernism sought to find an aesthetic order or historic pattern to substitute for the crumbling certainties of the past. Yet at the same time, modernists were aware that such order was elusive—as T. S. Eliot put it in *The Waste Land*, fragments to shore against the ruins of their present lives.

Modernism contains the aspirations and idealism of nineteenth-century high culture and the prosaic world of nineteenth-century city life. In high modernist texts, both are colored by an ironic and self-conscious awareness of limitation. Often, convictions are framed by or within an ironic stance, an awareness of the difficulty of fulfilling possibility. Prior to modernist questioning, the possibility of a homogeneous European culture existed.

Modernism goes beyond previous cultures in engaging otherness and questioning Western values. As Clifford notes, in 1900 “‘culture’ referred to a single evolutionary process,” but that idea of a single process changed as confidence in the idea of fusing Darwinian evolution to an upward evolving teleology began to falter, and that change is an important aspect of modernism. According to James Clifford,

The European bourgeois ideal of autonomous individuality was widely believed to be the natural outcome of a long development, a process that, although threatened by various disruptions, was assumed to be the basic, progressive movement of humanity. By the turn of the century, however, evolutionist confidence began to falter, and a new ethnographic conception of culture became possible. The word [“culture”] began to be used in the plural, suggesting a world of separate, distinctive, and equally meaningful ways of life. The ideal of an autonomous, cultivated subject could appear as a local project, not a *telos* for all humankind. (pp. 92–93)

Thus, *culture* becomes *cultures*.

Richard Lewontin has recently argued that part of the original appeal of Darwinism is that it was also used (or misused) to explain the survival of the fittest humans during the Industrial Revolution and aligned natural theory with political economy. Thus, what has been called Social Darwinism, an ideology that fused Herbert Spenser's phrase “Survival of the Fittest” with Darwin's concept of evolution to argue for a steady upward evolution. But what if this became a justification for competitive socio-economic or even racial success? “The theory of competitive socio-economic success,” according

to Lewontin, “is a theory about the rise of individuals and individual enterprises as a consequence of their superior fitness.”

Such diverse high modernist texts as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, Forster’s *Passage to India*, and Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* address this notion of the Survival of the Fittest. In particular, Conrad and Forster take an ironic stance to Eurocentric views of the fittest.

Paradigmatic Views of Nature in a Few Major Late-Nineteenth-Century Poems

Let us examine some examples of how some early modernists and their precursors approach nature.

Conflicting motifs in modernism are often the legacies, on one hand, of Wordsworth’s “Nature’s Holy Plan” [line 22, “Lines Written in Early Spring” (1798)] and, on the other, of Tennyson’s line “Nature, red in tooth and claw,” in “In Memoriam” (1849), Tennyson’s elegy and requiem to his friend Arthur Henry Hallam:

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation’s final law
Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw
With raving, shriek’d against his creed. (“In Memoriam,” canto 56)

Written before *Origin of Species* (1859), Tennyson’s lines were influenced by *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, an 1844 text published anonymously but by a Scottish journalist named Robert Chambers who questioned prevailing theological views.

Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach”—written in 1851 but published in 1867—is an important legacy for modernism. “Dover Beach” is an expression of anxiety and dubiety that the speaker sees imaged in nature: At first the speaker is inspired by the seascape—and the tide’s movement—to share its wonders with his beloved, but soon his stress is on past and present human ills. To Sophocles, the sea brought to mind “the ebb and flow of human misery” and the speaker, listening to its sound, thinks of it as a metaphor for “Faith’s. . . melancholy, long withdrawing roar.” Arnold’s speaker describes a world without “certitude, nor peace, nor love, nor light” where all we can have for solace is personal relationships. He concludes with a complex series of images which suggests the aimlessness of a society given to intellectual anarchy, cultural confusion, economic selfishness, and materialism: “And we are here as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight / Where ignorant armies clash by night.”

Before undertaking to discuss the complexities of modernism’s response to the natural world, it is a good idea to look briefly at Gerald Manley Hopkins, a convert to Catholicism who became a Jesuit priest; Hopkins’s views represent the orthodoxy that Darwin and his contemporaries were challenging. For Hopkins, we live in a beneficent natural world recalling the paradise we have lost and the perfection of the resurrection that awaits all true believers, although in his tortured dark sonnets he doubts if he is one of those worthy believers. (Perhaps self-flagellates might be a better term than

doubts for such Hopkins sonnets that begin with such lines as “No worst, there is None” or “I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark” or “No, I’ll Not carrion Comfort.”)

In “God’s Grandeur,” Hopkins not only attributes nature’s continual renewal to God, he appropriates industrial imagery to stress that God is omnipresent: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; / It gathers to a greatness like the ooze of oil Crushed.” Hopkins often felt guilty when he was diverted from pure spiritual feelings to admire the beauties of nature; often within a poem he breaks off from meditating on the beauties of nature or bemoaning man’s fallen state and recoils in the closing to pure devotional language. [In “Pied Beauty,” he begins, “Glory be to God for dappled things” and after praising the multifaceted wonders of nature—“all things counter, original, spare, strange; / Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)” he not only answers the previous question—that is, “who knows how?”—with “He fathers forth whose beauty is past change,” but he also steps forward and acknowledges in a wonderful trochee (that is, a double stress) that comprises the entire final line that these wonders derive exclusively from God: “Praise him.”] Thus, in the sextet of “God’s Grandeur,” after we have heard about man’s abuse of God’s creation—“all is seared with trade: bleared, smeared with toil,”—Hopkins expresses his faith that:

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
 And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.

“Because” enacts for Hopkins’s speaker a logical relationship between God’s presence and the wonders of the natural world as well as between, on one hand, man’s original and continuing sin and, on the other, God’s looking after his human brood in terms of the resurrection.

The rest of my lecture is, to an extent, an examination of modernism’s skepticism about that single word “because” in the preceding lines by Hopkins:

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.

Let us turn to Hardy’s “Neutral Tones,” where nature in winter is an image of the speaker’s loneliness, desolation, and sense of betrayal. The poem opens with precise, if archaic, diction in which the speaker bitterly describes a moment when—at least retrospectively—time stood still:

We stood by a pond that winter day,
 And the sun was white, as though chidden by God,
 And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
 —They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

On that day, he recalls “a grin of bitterness / Like an ominous bird a-wing” and we don’t know if he saw it then or sees it in his mind’s eye in light of ensuing events, but we do know now that this one meeting at the pond has become a debilitating, paralyzing traumatic memory:

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
and wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree.
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

It is almost as if the speaker were hyperventilating—indicated by the incremental “ands” as if he were struggling to contain and organize his memory—as he reluctantly recalls the awful day when his passion was frustrated. And what could be more effective at evoking his anger and disappointment in his former love and his disgust with a world in which insidious and invidious human behavior occurs than the punning “wringing with wrong” as if accursed nature in a malevolent universe had circled his world—“r-i-n-g-s”—including the setting frozen in his memory—and choked love out of it, that is, “w-r-i-n-g-s?”

Hardy (even more than Arnold) anticipates the angst and dubiety of Eliot and his wasteland—a crystallizing image of barren, desiccated, and sterile nature—in the 1922 poem of that name.

Hardy’s version of earth as a blighted star is his response to the premise that God’s creation is a holy plan. When Hardy uses the phrase “God’s Holy Plan” in the third chapter of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, he is specifically responding to Wordsworth, who, in line 22 of “Lines Written in Early Spring,” speaks of “Nature’s holy plan” [See Scott Elledge, *Norton Critical Edition of Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (New York: Norton, 1965) 19].

In Hardy’s indifferent, amoral cosmos, things turn out badly. A combination of what he calls in the poem “Hap” “crass casualty” or fate, social forms (marriage laws, economic inequality), and human behavior (obsessions, fixations, the mysteries of psychic needs) undermine human aspirations. Hardy is also responding to those Romantics and Victorians who, as my colleague M. H. Abrams has remarked, fuse “history, politics, philosophy, and religion into one grand design by asserting Providence—or some form of natural teleology—to operate in the seeming chaos of human history so as to effect from present evil a greater good” [M. H. Abrams, “English Romanticism: the Spirit of the Age,” in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970) 103].

Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush”—dated December 31, 1900—considered by contemporaries the last evening of the last day of the nineteenth century—is a searing lament for the dead century, alluding to how rationalism and science had undermined traditional faith. In “The Darkling Thrush,” Hardy uses ironically the traditional romantic image of the bird’s association with poetry, song, and joy (as in Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” and Shelley’s “To a Sky-Lark”). Hardy’s poem is almost a rebuke to what he sees as his predecessors’ naïve optimism and exaltation. Hardy grimly sees the departing century as a skeleton, and imagines the thrush throwing itself upon the gloom.

Hardy's speaker is puzzled by the thrush's optimism that he both distances and welcomes as an instinctive sign of life within a gloomy cosmos. The poem's most striking image—the century as a corpse—puts an elegiac inflection on nature. The speaker morbidly describes the desiccated bones of the last century's skeletal corpse as they stretch into this one:

The land's sharp features seemed to be
 The Century's corpse outleant,
 His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The Wind his death-lament.
 The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry.
 And every spirit upon earth
 Seemed fervourless as I.

The somewhat archaic word “Outleant” implies that corpse of the nineteenth century is outstretched into the twentieth century as well as being an archaic version of thinned down (playing on the word “lean” and echoing the speaker's stance in the poem's opening line, “I leant upon a coppice gate”). But something within nature is still alive singing of “joy illimited” and recalling Keats's Nightingale and Shelley's Skylark:

At once a voice arose among
 The bleak twigs overhead
 In a full-hearted evensong
 Of joy illimited.
 An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small
 In blast-beruffled plume
 Had chosen thus to fling his soul
 Upon the growing gloom.

“Flinging his soul” suggests suicide and a correspondent breeze with the speaker's own depressed mood: “And every spirit upon earth seemed fervourless as I.” But, in fact, the thrush's “ecstatic sound” represents a contradictory spirit to his perception of nature:

So little cause for carolings
 Of such ecstatic sound
 Was written on terrestrial things
 Afar or nigh around,
 That I could think there trembled through
 His happy good-night air
 Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew,
 And I was unaware.

The aged speaker is not ready to say that the thrush has caught the right note or that the poem will trumpet the thrush's happiness or joy. Lest we think of the last line as an important qualification if not demurrer, I would argue that the stress is on the speaker's unawareness of any cause for hope.

(We presume the speaker is living in 1902, the year of the poem's composition, even though the last line is followed in italics by 31 December, 1900). But encapsulating the thrush in juxtaposition to the skeleton creates a lyrical, performative even vibrant note to the frozen tableau of the opening stanza and takes a very tentative step to repairing the broken lyres.

I leant upon a coppice gate
 When Frost was spectre-gray,
 And Winter's dregs made desolate
 The weakening eye of day.
 The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
 Like strings of broken lyres,
 And all mankind that haunted night
 Had sought their household fires.

Let us step back and recall how Wordsworth had opened "The Prelude; or, Growth of a Poet's Mind": "Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze" (I.1) and how this blessed breeze, "the breath of heaven" would later act to "Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe / A renovated spirit singled out / . . . for holy services" (52–54). Wordsworth invokes his muse:

For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven
 Was blowing on my body, felt within
 A correspondent breeze, that gently moved
 With quickening virtue, but is now become
 A tempest, a redundant energy
 Vexing its own creation" (I, 31–8).

For Wordsworth, it is his creative imagination that will help him regain the lost paradise of childhood. Hardy surely has the opening of "The Prelude" in mind when he finds a "happy good night air" within the thrush's seeming suicidal stance.

The Modernist Novel

Perhaps more than his poetry, Hardy's novels give us a clearer picture of his world view and his concomitant view of nature.

In his novels, Hardy intensifies some aspects of his imagined world and distorts others to such an extent that he presents an alternative cosmology to Christianity and one with its own mode of operation. His cosmos is not organized in a benevolent pattern, moving toward fulfillment of a divine plan in which the Apocalypse will bring the Heavenly kingdom to deserving souls. For Hardy and, indeed, Conrad, the human condition is inseparable from the natural process that shapes that condition;

neither social forces nor a hypothetical moral or spiritual revolution will enable humans to affect that natural process, nor their position within it.

For example, in *Tess of the Durbervilles* (1891) Tess's innocence is unrewarded, but we might think, too, of a crucial passage in *Jude the Obscure* (1894). As a boy, Jude is punished for failing to chase birds out of Farmer Troutham's field; when he reflects on his boyhood disgrace, he momentarily adopts the narrator's mature perspective:

Events did not rhyme quite as he thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the center of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cells called your life, and shook it, and warped it. (I.ii.17)

The shift to the second person conflates Jude's and the narrator's voices and thus implies that the view of life as a hostile force, a mechanistic juggernaut attacking the vitality of a helpless cell, is the mature narrator's as well as young Jude's. We hear a resonance of the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century debate between those who believed life could be scientifically explained and were at times disparagingly called mechanists, as if they believed life were a mechanical process, and those who named themselves vitalists, because they believed a Life Force animates living creatures and made them fundamentally different from dead matter and in most ways from other living creatures. Often this Life Force derived mysteriously from God's will. Reluctantly perhaps, Hardy sides with the former.

Hardy and Conrad illustrate what (John A. Lester) has been has called the "dark response to Darwin:" "Man was now thought of as the helpless pawn of Malthusian biological drives of sex and hunger"—that is, as other animals—and caught up in a "reality" utterly inhuman and wholly unresponsive to his spiritual or imaginative aspirations (*Journey Through Despair, 1890–1914*).

I want to look further at Conrad's place in our narrative about high modernism and nature. Conrad did not accept the Neo-Lamarckian view—making a comeback in the 1880s and 1890s—that inherited acquired characteristics were propelling man to a higher quality of life or that humankind was evolving into a finer, more sensitive organism. Indeed, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—and elsewhere such as in his *Falk: A Reminiscence*, where the title character's instinct to live includes cannibalism—we see how Western man reverts to more savage practices than the so-called primitives.

We should first examine Conrad's ironic image of the cosmos as created by an indifferent knitting machine—an image he proposed in an 1897 letter to his optimistic socialist friend Cunninghame Graham:

There is a—let us say—a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold!—it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider,—but it goes on knitting. You come and say:

“This is all right: it’s only a question of the right kind of oil. Let us use this,—for instance,—celestial oil and the machine shall embroider a most beautiful design in purple and gold.” Will it? Alas, no! You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a knitting machine. And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself: made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. . . .

It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions,—and nothing matters. I’ll admit however that to look at the remorseless process is sometimes amusing.

Conrad uses this elaborate ironic trope to speak to the late-Victorian belief that the Industrial Revolution was part of an upwardly evolving teleology; this belief, sometimes called, as we have noted, social Darwinism, is a misreading of Darwin who implicitly questioned whether variations were part of a teleology. Conrad’s paradigmatic view of the world as something other than divinely ordered has important implications for how man regards nature. For Conrad, nature is a remorseless process reflecting his world view of an amoral indifferent cosmos. In such a cosmos, Conrad thinks each of us is locked into her or his own perceptions and that all values are ultimately illusions.

As Quammen puts it, “Natural Selection . . . undermined the whole notion of godly purpose . . . If variations are random then purposefulness . . . disappears from the living world” (206). According to Conrad, humankind would like to believe in a providentially ordered world vertically descending from a benevolent God—that is, to believe in an embroidered world. But we actually inhabit a temporally defined horizontal dimension within an amoral, indifferent universe—or what Conrad calls “the remorseless process.”

For Conrad nature—particularly the sea—enacts its indifference to man, indifference that on occasion takes on a seeming malevolent cast. In his 1902 novella *Typhoon*, the narrator describes how the ship is hit by a typhoon with what he calls “a senseless, destructive fury”: “The gale howled and scuffled about gigantically in the darkness, as though the entire world were one black gully. At certain moments the air streamed against the ship as if sucked through a tunnel with a concentrated and solid force of impact that seemed to lift her clean out of the water” (my 114); the narrator describes how the ship “was being looted by the storm;” even two of the lifeboats “had gone unheard and unseen, melting, as it were, in the shock and smother of the wave” (my 115).

Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) shows that nature is indifferent if not inimical to man and refutes the ideas of social Darwinism that mankind was evolving into something better and better and that history, too, was evolving. Conrad asks whether life in Africa was a stepping-stone toward higher development and/or whether darker people were savages in need of remediation and answers a resounding “NO” to both premises.

Whether in Malaysia or Africa, for Conrad, Western colonialism in the name of civilization despoils the people and the land it touches. As Marlow, Conrad’s central character and self-dramatizing narrator, puts it, “We were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed

inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil” (p. 95). Conrad understands that the natives are part not only of a common humanity but that humanity is itself part of nature: “They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar . . . The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future” (p. 96).

Marlow’s original epistemological stance, dependent not upon an idealized conception of the trading company’s commercial ventures but simply upon his belief that European civilization represents a tradition of humane values, was shaken. He began to realize that this version of civilization is not an “emissary of light” but an instance of exploitative imperialism at its worst.

Conrad demonstrates the folly of equating the jungle and those who live there with evil and moral darkness. Conrad plays on the clichés and shibboleths of his era, when Africa was the “dark continent”—the place of mystery and secrets as well as earlier less developed humankind—and the primitive continent where passions and emotions dominated reason and intellect. *Heart of Darkness* debunks the concept of the white man’s burden and shows how the concept of empire is a sham. Conrad shows that Kurtz’s “Exterminate the Brutes” is a stunning abandonment of the moral pretensions on which imperialism is based. Kurtz’s radical transformation exposes his reductive perspective and that of Marlow, King Leopold of Belgium, and other Europeans—indeed, all of us who would seek to adopt a stance whereby one culture views another from a stance of superiority.

(For his era, Conrad was avant-garde in acknowledging that at times Africans were more controlled and ethically advanced than Westerners; he, like another high modernist, the painter Gauguin, knew that native cultural practices and art—chants, dance, drumming—were alien to Western concepts of display, that native art was religious in function, linking daily experience to abstract beliefs, and that native art was used performatively in funerals, weddings, and initiation rites.)

Indicating with some irony that humankind may be devolving (not evolving), Conrad suggests that perhaps civilization corrupts native energy and Kurtz, the supposed emissary of light, devolves into the worst sort of exploitive imperialist, trading humans for ivory and shrinking heads to frighten off adversaries. We do not know how perceptive Marlow was when he met Kurtz, but as the narrator of events he *now* knows that Kurtz was without the restraint that even the helmsman and other cannibals had.

Let us turn briefly to Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), once thought of a country house novel but now one in which we realize that the effects of death and war are very much present. Here my focus is on nature’s indifference.

The *rereader* knows that for all her vitality, Mrs. Ramsay herself will soon be dead along with two of her children, and this casts a deep pall of sadness over the novel. Her death lends a special poignancy to her need, while living, to arrange marriages and to live her life through her children, for are not these activities futile efforts to impose order on life and thus to forestall death?

In part II, “Time Passes,” the narrator’s perspective becomes impersonal, detached, hawk-like. Death is an insistent presence. At first the “airs”—Woolf’s metaphor for indifferent, relentless time but also for the indifference of nature to human aspirations—have little effect on the family house when it is uninhabited. But, after the family fails to return, the “airs” begin to reclaim the house as their own, and the house and its contents decay. Part II responds to Mrs. Ramsay’s allegorical question, “What was the value, the meaning of things?” and the response is an echo of the Conrad’s.

Also in part II, the narrator does not speak of a benevolent order but of nature that is indifferent to human presence and aspiration, even as the human mind desperately needs to understand nature and discover its significance: “[I]t seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself . . . [T]he stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible” (p. 203).

Nature reclaims the house until the residents give word that they will return; then the house is described in terms suggesting rebirth: “some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place” (p. 210). With the return of people, the setting is humanized and given its meaning; in the absence of humankind, nature is chaotic. But the irony is that nature doesn’t change; what changes is human explanations and temporary human efforts to take back domestic place from relentless natural process.

Indeed, the narrative voice poignantly seeks to verbalize the responses of the nonverbal experience of “the mystic, the visionary”—is this figure another version of herself?—who regrets her failure to compose order from fragments and to discover meaning in the night and is denied an answer to such basic questions as “What am I, What is this?” (p. 198). In “Time Passes” the world is presented as an unreadable hieroglyph that cannot be allegorized except as impenetrable signifiers: “[I]t seems impossible . . . that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth” (p. 193).

Woolf is mocking the visionary romantic voice which proclaims with confidence that “good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules” (p. 199), or that nature contains “some absolute good” or has “a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind” (p. 199). For her, World War I has made such a quest impossible. The war undermines the position that we live in a benign cosmos, for seekers on the beach would find “something out of harmony with this jocundity and this serenity. There was the silent apparition of an ashen-colored ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath . . . It was difficult blandly to overlook them; to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within (pp. 201–2).

Let us turn to Forster’s *Passage to India* and his presentation of the Caves as something that the transcends human time

Beginning with Hardy and Conrad, the major British writers frequently examine the events of the narrative in the context of vast historical perspectives. Lawrence, Conrad, Joyce (and, of course, Yeats and Eliot) also dramatize the present through the lens of the past. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890) extended the range of the past beyond biblical time and even beyond historical time; later,

Jung's emphasis on archetypes stressed that all cultures share common anthropological experience and psychological traits. And Forster wished to show that, despite differences in breeding, customs, and values, a common heritage united mankind. (Crucial aspects of Forster's values rest in what he calls "the inner life" and the "unseen," both of which resist language.)

Let us think about nature's role in Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). In the first paragraph of part one, entitled "Mosque," of the three-part novel, Chandrapore is defined by the narrator, as if he were within the streets, in terms of what the city is not:

Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing-steps on the river front, as the Ganges happens not to be holy here; indeed there is no river front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The streets are mean, the temples ineffective The very wood seems made of mud, of mud moving. . . . [T]he general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life. (p. 2)

Until the eighteenth century, the fictional Chandrapore had some stature, but it seems to be in a long period of continuing decline as it devolves back to nature and the basic life that nature sustains. Those readers who know both the awesome beauty of India's geography and historical sites as well as the ugly contrasts will respond to the deliberate reductive bathos—what we might call the rhetoric of nullification, dominated by words like "filth," "mud," and "low"—with which Forster describes this place. Within this India there seems to be no distinction between Muslim and Hindu.

But in the second paragraph the narrator, adopting a hawk's perspective and changing his optics to a view from above, introduces the reader to a different world; on the first rise are the houses of the Euro-Asians, and on the second the English rulers, and from their perspective Chandrapore looks entirely different: "It is a city of gardens. It is no city, but a forest sparsely scattered with huts. It is a tropical pleasance washed by a noble river. . . . [Trees] soar . . . to build a city for the birds. Especially after the rains do [the trees] screen what passes below, but at all times, even when scorched and leafless, they glorify the city to the English people who inhabit the rise, so that new-comers cannot believe it to be as meagre as it is described, and have to be driven down to acquire disillusionment." (p. 3)

Notably, the civil station on the second rise is itself described by negatives as if to emphasize its kinship with the land below and the people which it suppresses: "It charms not" and the best the narrator can concede is that "It has nothing hideous in it" (p. 3).

Within the novel's first two paragraphs the narrator's perception of geography enacts the unbridgeable schism between the English and Indians, imperialists and colonial subjects. The triologue among the Ganges River, vegetation, and sky—among the mud of Chandrapore, the English perspective of "a city of gardens" from the hills above, and the indifferent sky representing the cosmos—mirrors the triologue between three cultures that is the essence of the novel. Describing the sky, the stars, and the sun, the last two paragraphs of the opening chapter move to an even more distant perspective, one that anticipates the narrator's cosmological perspective, which emphasizes the

diminutive nature of humans and their relatively short presence on earth not merely as individuals but as a species. And, after stressing the “prostrate earth” with “no mountains,” the chapter’s last sentence introduces the last crucial element of the novel’s geography: “League after league the earth lies flat, heaves a little, is flat again. Only in the south, where a group of fists and fingers are thrust up through the soil, is the endless expanse interrupted. These fists and fingers are the Marabar Hills, containing the extraordinary caves” (p. 4). Poignantly the narrator tries to anthropomorphize geography.

In *Passage to India*, the caves become a metaphor for the timelessness of the geological cosmos and for the nonverbal world that preceded and will outlast humankind. Like the geography of Hardy’s imagined Wessex, the caves are indifferent to human aspirations. Forster’s narrator’s description reveals the author’s imaginative effort and even personal agony. It is as if the caves resist human description even though we are told that they are “readily described”: “Nothing, nothing attaches to them and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend upon human speech” (p. 117). On the one hand, the caves depend upon oral and written language for their reputation and their significance. On the other hand, the very inadequacy of the language illustrates the mind’s limitations as it confronts the unknown. Writing about a match lit inside the caves, Forster’s speaker understands how we need to domesticate the sublime; thus, the narrator recoils to personification as a way of containing and comprehending the caves: “Fist and fingers thrust above the advancing soil—here at last is their skin, finer than any covering acquired by the animals, smoother than windless water, more voluptuous than love. The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire. The cave is dark again, like all caves” (p. 118). By placing human events in a vast geological context, Forster reduces their proportion and makes them an integral part of nature’s remorseless process.

Human Sexuality and Nature

Let’s look at a more positive view on nature. While not subscribing fully to an anthropocentric view of the universe, or to a divinely ordered universe on either the Hopkins or Wordsworth model, Lawrence and Joyce see humans as natural creatures with some capacity to shape their world by making the right choices. They stress spontaneity, sexuality, and passion as the essential part of humankind’s natural self that has survived utilitarianism and industrialism. Perhaps as reaction to Darwinism, they are at times looking back nostalgically to a tradition of the English pastoral which also attracted Forster and Hardy.

Even in the face of post-Darwinism, many of our modernist writers looked back to rural life—in this case, the myth of the English and Irish countryside—as a source of values. In *Howards End* (1910) Forster had written somewhat elegiacly, “In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect—connect without bitterness until all men are brothers” (p. 266). The problem is that all these writers are aware of the difficulty of recapturing a pre-industrial agrarian world in the face of a post-Darwinian world.

Lawrence and Joyce placed sexuality in the context of nature and thus partially reconciled nature’s apparent indifference with the fulfillment of humankind’s basic biological and physiological needs.

Let us first turn to Lawrence who, as much as any modernist, is heir to the romantic tradition of glorifying nature. Unlike his predecessors (with the possible exception of Hardy, Lawrence baldly

aligns nature with human sexual expression and uses images from nature to assign value to sexual expression.

In *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Lawrence's struggle to come to terms with his own experience is revealed in the novel's conflict between narrative incident and narrator commentary. This conflict reflects Lawrence's continuing re-evaluation of his own experience as he rewrote *Sons and Lovers* at a time when he was torn between the desire to be true to the sacred memory of his mother and the desire to respond to the views of his first lover, Jessie Chambers, and later of Frieda Weekley-Richtofen, the woman with whom he had an affair and then married in 1914 after her divorce from one of his former Nottingham University professors.

To come to terms with his autobiographical material, Lawrence tries to divide himself into two separate characters: Paul and the narrator. Paul, a former self and the embodiment of his past, is a subjective creation; Lawrence immerses Paul in a narrative that mimes crucial events of his own life, but does not ask Paul to judge himself scrupulously. That task is left to the narrator, the embodiment of the present self who is supposed to be an objective figure charged with evaluating and measuring Lawrence's former self and tracing his linear development. But this dichotomy breaks down as Lawrence's objective self becomes increasingly empathetic to his former self, Paul Morel.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence has his narrator represent the evolution of Paul's responses to nature and sex. When the narrator seeks to translate the silence of Paul's unconscious into nondiscursive rhythms and images, we see that Lawrence is completely empathetic with Paul, his younger self, and the narrative distance breaks down completely. The objective voice, the evaluative superego with his gently ironic view of Lawrence's younger self, is displaced by the urgent voice of Lawrence the visionary seeking to transport the reader into a sensual, vitalistic rapport with the young man who is finally discovering his long-repressed passionate self. For example, notice the passage in *Sons and Lovers* in which Lawrence renders Paul's and Clara's most successful sexual consummation, the one that takes place in the fields along the canal:

All the while the peewits were screaming in the field. When he came to, he wondered what was near his eyes, curving and strong with life in the dark, and what voice it was speaking. Then he realised it was the grass, and the peewit was calling. The warmth was Clara's breathing heaving. He lifted his head and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him; and he put his face down on her throat afraid. What was she? A strong, strange, wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars. (p. 353)

In such sexual and passionate moments, Lawrence is intruding into the silence of unconscious physiological experience and inviting the reader to participate directly in the sensual life of his characters. His metaphors seek to transform the space in which the sexual act or passionate moment occurs into a place where the texture of life is sensuous, physical, instinctive, and biological and where cognitive life is absent. Such metaphors, rather than creating objective correlatives, are lyrical

explosions whose rhythms and images are supposed to engage immediately the reader's libidinous self without the intervening cognitive process by which a reader usually transforms a narrative episode into signification. A sentence such as "They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars" implies that during the sexual act the power of the participants' libidinous energy displaces the diurnal world in which they dwell and makes their world—their sexual consummation—coterminous and spatially equivalent with the full natural world and the cosmos of which it is part; in a word, microcosm becomes macrocosm. When it works, as I believe it does here, Lawrence's style becomes his argument. Sexual intercourse enables the participants to become part of the natural world and the energy that breathes through it.

Unconsciously at first, but later quite intentionally, Mrs. Morel transfers her libidinous self—the night-time self that in spite of her rationality and pragmatism responds to the sensuality of flowers and moonlight—to her children because she finds her husband's social, public self wanting. The first chapter shows how she struggles between, on the one hand, the external norms that she has inherited from the Coppard tradition, and, on the other, her sensual and passionate potential. No matter how she would deny her biological self and renounce Morel, her libido expresses itself in her physical response to her husband and her narcissistic experience with flowers. As her orgasmic moment with the symbolically virginal lilies indicates (she "melts out" of herself into "a kind of swoon"), Mrs. Morel is no longer by the time chapter I ends completely dependent upon her husband to fulfill her sexual needs (p. 24). (Whatever Lawrence's intention, I think that the scenes in which Mrs. Morel, Paul, Miriam, and even Clara have passionate intercourse with flowers must be regarded in part as a function of their sexual frustrations.)

Lawrence uses positive natural imagery as a benediction to behavior of which he approves and negative imagery to indicate disapproval. Paul cannot find joy and fulfillment in an adult relationship because he is possessed by his mother. Something within him is always at odds with nature and thus he cannot achieve what Lawrence calls blood consciousness, the abandonment of will and reason and the surrender to his biological self. Thus, at one point, obtrusive ironic images from nature—four dead birds, and the remains of the cherries on which Paul and Miriam had fed (the ripened cherries had at first seemed foreshadowing of the young couple's sexual maturity)—suggest that the retrospective narrator takes a morbid view of the sexual consummation and regards it as merely another mutual act of desperation to blur Paul's and Miriam's fundamental incompatibility. Moreover, Paul discovers the stillness and inaction of death and the unknown, aspects of existence that Mrs. Morel has increasingly denied, but that his father instinctively knows. That his mother refuses to accept death reveals her fundamental incompatibility with nature.

Let us now turn to Lawrence's masterpiece, *The Rainbow* (1915).

The Rainbow is Lawrence's quest to rediscover mankind's instinctive, libidinous, biological potential, which he believed lay underneath the trappings of the social self that civilization has produced and that required humans to play acceptable roles. In *The Rainbow*—a family chronicle stretching over four generations—one strand of Brangwens (Tom, Anna, and Ursula) are regarded as Elect if not *ubermensch*, in part because they are in an organic relationship with nature, while another lesser strand along with most other people are regarded as *untermensch* because of their resemblance to what is ugly in nature.

Even as the opening renders the energy within nature and the humans who are inseparable from nature, it announces the hyperbole, myth, and process that are central to the novel's aesthetic. After the canal and the railroad are introduced, the familial, agrarian life is no longer possible. They feel that their world is anachronistic once industrialism touches it. They begin a quest for a richer life, for a life that contains an awareness of oneself and the world beyond the farm.

Lawrence goes beyond *Sons and Lovers* in the use of nature imagery to confer value on his characters' sexual responses and to make human sexuality a microcosm of the natural cycle of the cosmos. In a realistic novel, the following sentence, describing the widow Lydia's response to Tom Brangwen, would not mean much: "But she would wake in the morning one day and feel her blood running, feel herself lying open like a flower unsheathed in the sun, insistent and potent with demand" (p. 50). The gathering sexual energy of such words as "running," "lying," "open," "unsheathed," "insistent," "potent," and "demand" charges the sentence with implication and power independent of its syntactical meaning. Furthermore, "blood," "flower," and "sun" place the urgent sexuality in the context of nature's rhythms. The sentence's one metaphor, "open like a flower," suggests that the opening of the woman for sex is akin to the receptiveness of the flower to the fertilizing bee. Beginning with the first use of "feel," moving to "blood," and continuing through "potent" and "demand," the heavily stressed prose (suggestive of Hopkins's poetry) gathers to a crescendo the sentence's power and urgency. As if to mime the arousing of her unconscious self, "running" carries Lydia's awakened instincts through to "potent" and "demand." The onomatopoeia of "running" stands in a phonic tension with the slow, stately power of "potent with demand." Within the sentence the sexual act is encapsulated. Not only does the male sperm "run" to the awaiting female, but the male, who feels incomplete, turns to what Lawrence regards as the stronger physicality of the female. And this is exactly what happens in the action of the novel.

While the quoted sentence describes Lydia's passionate awakening, the sentence also anticipates the sexual act, which her arousal from sleep makes possible. Once Lydia becomes awakened to her instincts and passion, she stands in readiness for the male. Lydia's awakening becomes a standard, albeit not the only one, by which Lawrence measures the more complex psyches of Anna and Ursula. Lydia is representative of immersion in sexuality and family, immersion that becomes increasingly difficult as England moves from agrarian to industrial society. The purity and simplicity of analogies with nature in the above passage disappear from the novel when the sexuality of later generations is described.

Lawrence uses images and rituals from nature to confer or undermine value. The sheaf-gathering scene defines the essential problem between his third generation of lovers, Anna and Will. Like Hardy, who uses the May-dance in *Tess*, Lawrence knew that, within rural life, vestiges of primitive rites survived in England. He implies that the way forward may be to reach back to anthropological origins when man was comfortable with nature. Anna is defined in terms of extended space and of nature ("[S]he called . . . from afar . . . like a bird unseen in the night" [p. 119]), but Will is restricted by something within him that keeps him from fully participating in the pagan sexual dance. Will cannot lapse out of consciousness; his name defines the quality that holds him back: will. By will, Lawrence means an active need to assert one's consciousness upon the world, a need he recognized in himself.

Like her Brangwen forebears, Ursula, the fourth and last generation of Brangwens on which Lawrence focuses, is at ease in nature and open to experience.

In the closing scene, the pregnant Ursula rejects marriage to Skrebensky and overcomes despair by rediscovering not only her biological self, but also her potential to be alive passionately and sensually. The climactic rainbow—and what could be a more natural image than a rainbow?—represents not only hope for Ursula and for England, but represents an *enactment* of the aesthetic success achieved by writing the novel; Lawrence walks through the final arch to create anew in *Women in Love* (1920).

At the close, Lawrence and Ursula are inseparable. When she agrees to marry Skrebensky and have his baby, her capitulation to what Lawrence regards as obsolete conventions and traditions mimes his own fear that he, too, might lack the strength to break free. She confronts a herd of horses that represent the nature and its atavistic energy that he felt he needed to write *The Rainbow*.

The final vision is not only Ursula's but also Lawrence's. It is the moment to which the narrative and the narrator have moved. The novel has redefined God to be something remote, whose presence pervades nature but is indifferent to man's individual quest. Ursula thinks: "What ever God was, He was, and there was no need for her to trouble about Him" (p. 324). Yet God also becomes the name of each individual's fullest potential, the aspect of life that is immune to Dr Frankstone's mechanism: "I don't see why we should attribute some special mystery to life" (p. 440). When Ursula rejects, Dr Frankstone—with its echo of Frankenstein—Lawrence cast his lot with the vitalists who believed that all the processes of life could not be explained by chemistry, physics, and biology and there is something more, whether it be called a soul or a vital spark or energy.

Thus, Ursula is recognizing the god within herself when she understands that "Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity" (p. 441). Such an insight is an essential prelude to the ending. Although Genesis is Ursula's favorite book, and her grandfather's death in a flood established him as a Noah figure, she mocks God's command to Noah: "Be ye fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" (p. 323). Ursula must discover what Lawrence sees as the meaning of that myth—as a figuration of death followed by rebirth, despair by hope—if she is to carry out the Brangwen promise.

Ursula's vision of the rainbow is the fulfillment of God's covenant to Noah that he will never destroy the things of the earth, but is also an affirmation of what Lawrence called in the opening paragraphs the natural "wave [of life] that cannot halt":

And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven. (p. 495)

Ursula's vision is the fulfillment for Lawrence of the urgent quest that produced *The Rainbow*; it signifies the continuing possibility of transfiguration for all humankind in terms that stress their kinship with nature. Lawrence takes the worst case—the men of Wiggiston—and imagines them bursting forth with new life.

Lawrence's novel is the equivalent to Ursula's final vision, the rainbow that follows the terrible task of creation, a transformed life on earth where men will be alive passionately. Each of us humans, Lawrence believed, must discover the god within himself—god with a small “g”—or in different terms, rewrite the Bible for himself. And, to an extent, this is the lesson that all the modernists we have been discussing—excepting Hopkins—embrace.

Joyce Sexual Epithalamium (or Nuptial Song)

I shall conclude with *Ulysses*, published in 1922, the same year as Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Joyce transforms the ordinary events of one day, 16 June 1904, in the lives of his three major characters—Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom—into significant form. Leopold and Molly love each other but have a sexually dysfunctional marriage and she has committed adultery that very day with her business manager, Blazes Boylan (who is what the young people call a “studly guy”). While she has been flirtatious, this is the first consummated affair.

Ulysses is not only the centerpiece of modernism but also pulls together much of my argument about nature as an image of sexuality, spontaneity, and even the imagination. In Joyce, as in Lawrence, we as readers experience the visual sensation of nature; but even more than Lawrence or any of our other authors, with Joyce we experience the unprocessed feel, touch, and taste of nature, and that includes human biological processes.

Let us turn briefly to the final episode in *Ulysses* where Joyce presents Molly's wonderful soliloquy.

Joyce stresses that Molly is one with nature. We might recall that in *The Odyssey*—which Joyce is reworking in modern terms—Moly is the flower, which safeguards Odysseus in “Circe.” But here Molly is amoral and libidinous; her monologue is a lyrical explosion that comments on the prior intellectuality of the novel. The constant motion and energy of her prose enact the triumph of the “stream of life.” Associated with renewal in nature, mountains, flowers, fecundity, and sexuality, Molly becomes a metaphor for the stream of life.

I love flowers Id love to have the whole place swimming in roses God of heaven theres nothing like nature the wild mountains then the sea and the waves rushing then the beautiful country with the fields of oats and wheat and all kinds of things and all the fine cattle going about that would do your heart good to see rivers and lake and flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colours springing up even out of the ditches primroses and violets nature it is (U.781; XVIII 1557–63)

Her stream of consciousness—stream of consciousness is an metaphor taken from nature (by literary scholars by way of William James) for supposedly unedited spontaneous thoughts and feelings—becomes the ultimate metaphor for the process of nature as well as the libidinal energy that makes intellectual, spiritual, and artistic growth possible.

Within her mind, Molly, like her Homeric archetype Penelope, unweaves at night what she has woven by day. What Molly has woven by day is an affair with Blazes, but her reverie in bed, as she sleeps next to Bloom, reaffirms her commitment to Bloom. When Bloom becomes her primary focus at the end of her monologue, we can say that she slays other suitors—most notably Blazes Boylan with whom she had sex that afternoon. She recalls the passion and sensuality of her first outdoor love-making with Bloom on the Howth that has fed his reveries all day. She recalls when Bloom was, as Blazes is now, a lusty young man who wore a straw hat. Even though Blazes is a vigorous lover, she prefers Bloom: “I dont know Poldy has more spunk in him” (U.742; XVIII, 167–8).

It is worth remarking that Bloom—whose name suggests the blooming of flowers and who uses the pseudonym Henry Flower—in his illicit sexual correspondence has been comically and metaphorically associated with the sun—a traditional image of renewal throughout the novel. Stephen had inadvertently prophesied the coming of a new sun in terms of the traditional pun for Christ—s-u-n/s-o-n—when thinking of the biblical “darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend” (U.28. II.60). And as the humanistic hero representing respect for others, generosity of spirit, love, family values rather than bellicosity, xenophobia, and ethnic strife, Bloom is that son.

At the very end of “Ithaca,” the prior chapter, Bloom is identified as “Darkinbad the Brightdayler” (U.737; XVII. 2319–31). In a sense Bloom is Molly’s “new solar disc”—the rising sun as evening gives way to morning close to the longest day of the year—and first cause that she acknowledges each morning. Crucial to Molly’s acknowledgment of Bloom’s stature is her identification of Bloom with the sun; for this identification confirms, in terms of her personal needs and in terms of the novel’s evolving significance, the metaphorical value of Bloom that both Stephen and the cosmos recognized: a particular star moved in a way that only previously occurred at Shakespeare’s birth and his own as well as Stephen’s.

No sooner does Molly inquire about the First Cause of creation and associate it with the mystery of the daily sunrise (“who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all who ah that they don’t know neither do I so there you are they might as well stop the sun from rising tomorrow”), than she recalls Bloom’s and her climactic day on the Howth where she and Bloom had intercourse for the first time: “[H]e said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is . . .” (U.782.; XVIII 1557–63).

The ascendancy of Bloom at the climax of Molly’s reverie emphasizes his triumph:

O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the figtrees in the Alameda gardens yes and all the queer little streets and the pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the Jessamine and geraniums and cactuses

and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (U.783; XVIII, 1598–1609)

By transforming the sea into a positive sexual image (as opposed to Stephen's hydrophobia and obsessive association of the green sea with his mother's death), and appropriating flowers to her sexual reveries, Molly's crescendo is a means of exposing for the reader what has been nay-saying and life-denying in Stephen and Bloom. Does not the breathless movement of her language—emphasized by the increasing frequency of the resounding affirmative “Yes,” which is associated with her first intercourse with Bloom on the Howth—itsself mime their mutual orgasm? Isn't Joyce's point that Molly's orgasm and epiphany are one? Recreating her memory of the wonderful intercourse with Bloom on the Howth, the very moment that haunts and pleasures Bloom's memory, the ending is a performance, a celebratory enactment, and a passionate explosion of her sexuality. As she says “Yes” to Bloom, she joins Stephen, the various voices created by Joyce, the real Joyce who creates those voices to represent his fictional self, and the reader in saying “Yes” to Bloom's humanistic values and the potential effectiveness of those values. Within the lives of Molly and Bloom, “Yes” suggests the power of the imagination to evoke the presence of the potential fulfillment of the future.

Molly's menstruating, her agreeing to make breakfast the next day, and, perhaps most significantly, her returning at the end of her monologue and the entire novel to Bloom and their great sexual moment on the Howth on which Bloom focuses in “Lestrygonians” strongly implies the possibility that on June 17 a new cycle may begin.

Conclusion

Considerations of length have limited my discussion to British and Irish modernists, but I want to conclude with words of Razumikhin, often a Dostoevsky surrogate in *Crime and Punishment*: “the living process . . . the living soul won't listen to mechanics” and for that reason, he rejects the view that logic and social formulae do not allow for nature, including human nature: “Nature isn't taken into account, nature is driven out, nature is not supposed to be!” (*Crime and Punishment*, 256). It has been very much part of my argument that modernists understand that nature includes the irrational, the inexplicable human psyche, and the uncanny as well biological and instinctive needs of humankind.

High modernism (1890–1940) took an inclusive view of nature in which humans were seen less as creatures linked closely to God in a great chain of being and more as fellow natural creatures dwelling among other living things, albeit differentiated by greater brain power and ability to communicate. Stimulated by Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and historical criticism of the Bible, modern authors such as Hardy, Conrad, Woolf, and Forster were skeptical that we lived in a world shaped, in Wordsworth's words, by “God's holy plan,” and proposed in various nuanced views that instead humans inhabit an indifferent, amoral cosmos where nature is indifferent if not antagonistic to

human aspirations. (In T. S. Eliot's case, which for the sake of time we have given short shrift, the world is imaged as a desiccated wasteland.)

By describing sexuality in terms of images taken from the natural world, Lawrence and Joyce aligned human sexuality with nature and took joy in the alignment. They conceived sexuality as an expression of an instinctive and intimate alternative to the blights of industrialism and its effects, to loss of faith, and to materialism. But Lawrence and Joyce understood, with Hardy, Conrad, Woolf, and Forster, that to present nature in all its variety and diversity, one needs to include humans as natural creatures and to avoid the purely celebratory view of nature.

All of our writers except Hopkins redefined nature to foreground, humans. Each of them knew in his or her own way that Darwin had not only challenged the traditional creationist world view, but also opened the door to a richer view of who we are, namely creatures of nature. But even the most skeptical of them who might have the most dour view of the amoral cosmos also knew that as Lawrence put it, for humankind to survive, would need—if I may return to *The Rainbow*—"a new germination . . . a new growth" and that growth must come from within the human psyche and with the human ability to choose values as we confront the natural world.