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**A “BEGINNING RATHER THAN AN END”:
POPULAR CULTURE AND MODERNITY
IN D. H. LAWRENCE’S *ST. MAWR***

GEMMA MOSS

St. Mawr (written 1924, published 1925) is usually addressed in terms of Lawrence’s encounters with otherness and difference, as well as his broader critique of industrialisation. This article argues for the significance of popular culture in the novella to show how it also participates in the discussion of issues – around the self, culture and society – usually associated with Lawrence’s final period in Europe. By offering a new reading of the Devil’s Chair scene, that explores the importance of a “new dance tune” (*SM* 75) and extends arguments about Rico as “representative of modern civilized ‘life’” and its damaging effects, I examine how Lawrence critiques popular art, music and film as limiting peoples’ capacities for independent thought.¹ *St. Mawr* thus anticipates Lawrence’s claims about the effects of mass culture in *Pornography and Obscenity* (1929) and his exploration of the modern “psychological condition” in his 1927 ‘Review of *The Social Basis of Consciousness*, by Trigant Burrow’ (*IR* 332).

There have been few attempts to make connections between Lawrence and Frankfurt School Critical Theory, but doing so enables us to see what is at stake in the ending of *St. Mawr*. The possibility that individuals can resist the trajectory of modernity and the psychological impact of popular culture is kept open when Lou decides to live in isolation at the Las Chivas ranch. Existing criticism has been unable to find much that is positive in the text, but reading *St. Mawr* alongside T. W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin shows that Lawrence is considering the social problems caused by popular cultural forms and how it might be possible to contemplate a better future. Howard J. Booth describes

St. Mawr as depicting "a failed journey to find a better way of living" in which "difference and travel confuse rather than offer a possible site where something new and positive can emerge".² For Jerry Wasserman the novella is a pessimistic account of an atomised industrial society: Lou's "inability to provide a solution to the problem of community ... is the final failure of her vision".³ Paul Poplawski finds a "lack of any clearly rendered positives in the novel",⁴ while Jack Stewart arrives at an affirmative reading by focusing on Lawrence's animism and portrayal of the natural world, since the society inhabited by Lou Witt, Rico and their friends is so superficial she feels as though they are "not really alive" (*SM* 74).⁵ Lawrence addresses problems of modernity in *St. Mawr*, but the novella does more than give a negative account of society: by showing how individuals can become aware of the damage done by mass culture, Lawrence offers the possibility that people can consider an alternative, rather than surrender or despair.

St. Mawr has an unconventional narrative shape which contests the efficacy of traditional literary forms for communicating the subjectivities Lawrence explores. It begins, rather than ends, with a marriage and the most dramatic moment occurs in the middle, when Lou has a vision after St. Mawr crushes Rico on the group ride to the Devil's Chair. Novels, like symphonies, traditionally build up to a climax just before the end, not in the middle. As she rides back to the house to get brandy for the shaken Rico, Lou is overcome by a sense of evil in the world, in which man is a "parasite" on an earth that "stinks of corpses" (*SM* 80). The disorder in the plot, caused by the apocalyptic monologue that disrupts the narrative chain of events, communicates through form the isolation and lack of control that Lou feels since people are "inwardly bent on undermining, betraying" one another and "Directing all their subtle evil will against any positive living thing" (*SM* 79).

The novella participates in a cultural shift towards conveying the isolating and alienating conditions of modernity through form. This can be illuminated by reading the form of *St. Mawr* with Adorno's

analysis of Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositional technique.⁶ Carl Krockel has drawn parallels between the unconventional handling of tone and characterisation by Schoenberg and Lawrence respectively,⁷ but I want to make a broader claim that their departures from established structures respond to a radically altered way of life that requires different kinds of musical and literary representation. Adorno argues that Schoenberg cultivates disorder in his twelve-tone row, depicting isolation at the level of form by rejecting harmonic relationships connected to the rules of Western harmony, in which each note has a specific relationship to every other note in the scale, with specific functions. For Adorno, this works as an analogy for human individuals and interactions: the relationships of functional harmony mirror the strict social formations of the bourgeois society in which the musical form was produced. In twelve-tone music this structure is removed and the tones are relieved of their harmonic functions or positions so that the situation of the notes mirrors that of human individuals in modern society – newly isolated from relationships with other individuals.⁸

Schoenberg's music embeds these issues at the level of form, but Lawrence's novella also gives a sense of why the atomisation conveyed at a formal level has occurred. Within the unusual narrative trajectory, Lawrence presents a selection of "misfits" from different parts of the globe (*SM* 25), who find it difficult to relate to each other in a world that is rapidly changing through industry, commerce and travel. Lou is an American schooled in Europe, Rico an Australian heir who goes by an Italian nickname, and both are of the "drifting, artist sort" (*SM* 23). People come from different parts of the world and feel as though they belong nowhere, existing in states of separateness and isolation, rather than in the cohesive units of class, gender and family that had been social norms. As Booth notes, "*St. Mawr* displays a nostalgia for a world imagined as having had fixed racial groups and hierarchies of power".⁹ The social fragmentation conveyed through form is explored through the relationships between people, who become increasingly

unhappy and isolated. Societal cohesion has been completely eroded for Lou, who confides to Mrs Witt: "I don't want intimacy, mother. I'm too tired of it all" (*SM* 60), and then later, "A sort of hatred for people has come over me" (*SM* 117–8).

The social problems in *St. Mawr* are the product of popular culture, which "conjure[s] up" a fantasy world based around "enjoying oneself" and produces an increasingly alienated lifestyle based on ownership and consumption (*SM* 41, 42). Lawrence explores through Rico the psychological impact of consumer culture and its effects on relationships, sex and the body. Rico is "an artist—a popular artist" (*SM* 117), and the qualification "popular" is significant: although his portraits are not good they become "almost fashionable" because "he was almost fashionable" rather than through any talent or merit (*SM* 23). For Poplawski, Rico "being an artist" (*SM* 21) means he is only acting a part: his "inauthenticity as an artist functions as an index of his inauthenticity of being generally, and as a representative type he serves as a major focal point for Lawrence's critique of the inauthenticity of modern life as a whole".¹⁰ However, the importance of Rico's art as popular culture and, indeed, the function of popular culture in the novella more broadly have not yet been thoroughly investigated.

Rico conceives of life in the same language and imagery as he understands his "fashionable" paintings – mass culture informs how he relates to the world and constructs his own reality:

And that was Rico. He daren't quite bite. Not that he was really afraid of the others. He was afraid of himself, once he let himself go. He might rip up in an eruption of life-long anger all this pretty-picture of a charming young wife and a delightful little home and a fascinating success as a painter of fashionable, and at the same time 'great' portraits: with colour, wonderful colour, and at the same time form, marvellous form. He had

composed this little *tableau vivant* with great effort. He didn't want to erupt like some suddenly wicked horse. (*SM* 27)

Rico keeps himself subjugated to an idea of an appropriate lifestyle that he has acquired from popular culture. He thinks of his life as a painting that he is preventing himself from ripping apart by keeping his "life-long anger" under control (*SM* 27). The effort affects him at a somatic level – he is always "quivering" and exhibiting an "anxious powerlessness" (*SM* 31). It reduces his masculinity and sexuality: he does "not need emasculating" and is "deadly afraid" of being left alone with other women (*SM* 97, 117). Modern life, which is informed and shaped by popular culture, results in the loss of positive sexual relationships: Lou and Rico's marriage "without sex" is a "secret source of uneasiness and chagrin to both of them" (*SM* 24).

St. Mawr is part of a wider exploration of the problems associated with popular culture that Lawrence returns to and delineates more fully in *Pornography and Obscenity* (1929), where he argues that the "cheap and popular modern love novel and love film" mean that "the nervous and psychic health of the individual is more and more impaired" (*LEA* 243). The intrusion of capitalism into the private life of individuals is harmful, he argues: popular culture conveys a fantasy world, which encourages masturbation and negatively affects sexual relationships between people. Popular culture created for the masses produces generic desires and affords a form of exploitation: "The mass is forever vulgar, because it can't distinguish between its own original feelings and feelings which are diddled into existence by the exploiter" (*LEA* 238). Rico attempts to live out the fantasy world of his paintings in reality and exhibits the nervous ailments and lack of libido associated with masturbation or a repressed sexuality.¹¹ His existence is an imitation, rather than real life, and this makes Lou feel a "curious numbness" and that everything is "like a dream" (*SM* 41, 27). Lou and Rico thus exhibit what Lawrence describes in *Pornography and Obscenity* as "the terrible dreariness and depression of modern bohemia, and the

inward dreariness and emptiness of so many young people of today" (LEA 248).

Lawrence's attempts to philosophise the effects of art on the body have been read by Anneleen Masschelein as an influence on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's negotiations with psychoanalysis,¹² but the relationship between Lawrence's thought and Frankfurt School Critical Theory remains relatively undiscussed.¹³ Anne Fernihough has touched on the "surprising parallel" between Lawrence and "the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno", arguing that they share a Marxist interest in the organic and anti-capitalistic, anti-technology philosophies.¹⁴ Examining the effects of popular culture on Rico through Adorno's writing, we can see why, in Poplawski's words, Rico "cannot truly be an artist because he cannot truly be – he lacks the creative life-being necessary to creative art-seeing".¹⁵

For Adorno, as for Lawrence, popular art forms can have an effect on the body. Adorno identifies controlling or emasculating effects in the structure of popular cultural forms. Writing in 'Perennial Fashion – Jazz', which was published with other essays in *Prisms* (1967), Adorno sees popular music as:

the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment, a castration symbolism. 'Give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated,' the eunuchlike sound of the jazz band both mocks and proclaims, 'and you will be rewarded, accepted into a fraternity which shares the mystery of impotence with you, a mystery revealed at the moment of the initiation rite'.¹⁶

For Adorno, repetitive structures that can be easily remembered or forgotten produce regressive listening, or a docile sort of listening, that is an act of consumption rather than critical engagement. The music encourages listeners to appreciate it by promising social acceptance from others who enjoy it. The repetitive structure of the

music thus replicates the homogenised subjects that this process produces.

The regressive behaviour produced by art that is easily absorbed, without thought or engagement, means that Rico uses his energy attempting to conform to a fashionable yet superficial lifestyle, constructing his life like a “pretty-picture” instead of considering possible alternatives (*SM* 27). For F. R. Leavis, Rico is “representative” of the problems with modern life and incapable of being “anything but superficial”.¹⁷ This superficiality results from Rico’s emulation of popular culture, which is embodied in the paintings he produces. That he is a painter – specifically of superficial, popular paintings – is significant, because he deals primarily in surfaces and outward appearances. The adjectives “wonderful” and “marvellous” (*SM* 27), which he applies to his paintings, echo the empty, hyperbolic praise Rico is presumably accustomed to receiving, that imparts nothing of substance or critical interest about their value other than the ease with which they can be admired and assimilated. Rico lacks the capacity to think of his own paintings, and thus his own life, except in the terms used by others. He attempts to reproduce in reality the idea that has been imposed upon him by popular notions of what life should be, enticed by the (unfulfilled) promise of social acceptance: although “They wanted to fit in”, Lou and Rico do not “quite belong” anywhere (*SM* 23). They must be content with surface appearances: “Hence the little house in Westminster, the portraits, the dinners, the friends, and the visits” (*SM* 23).

Lawrence’s text offers something in addition to Adorno’s argument in ‘Perennial Fashion – Jazz’ about how popular culture affects individuals. Adorno’s approach is informed by psychoanalysis and Lawrence had reservations about psychoanalytic theory. While Adorno focuses on how the structures of artworks are damaging – unconsciously and through form – Lawrence investigates the damaged lives themselves. In his review of psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow’s book *The Social Basis of Consciousness* (1927), Lawrence argues that “to fit life every time

to a theory is in itself a mechanistic process" (*IR* 331). For Lawrence, it is how consumer culture and commodity fetishism affects specific individuals differently, and their relationships with each other, that is significant. *St. Mawr* explores the different ways a capitalist society structured around ownership and domination manifests itself: in relationships between people – and with animals – that are based around control and money. Lou's initial response to St. Mawr's beauty is the desire to own him and so she buys him. Lou and Rico's marriage is not a partnership but a battle, "a curious tension of will" in which "each was curiously under the domination of the other" and "As soon as one felt strong, the other felt ill" (*SM* 24). Lou believes everybody knew "how completely [Rico] was mastered" by her (*SM* 21).

Economic and material issues have a central role in *St. Mawr*, since Lou comes to understand that the problems of modernity are due to the "rotteness" of a society where "Production must be heaped upon production" so that mankind can "multiply itself million upon million" (*SM* 80). For Lou, modern life is characterised by imperceptible forces that control and harm people: she perceives humanity as being "ridden by a stranger" – with the potential to be powerful and magnificent like the horse St. Mawr, but violently dominated by invisible forces that hide the damage they inflict, which "Keep the haemorrhage internal, invisible" (*SM* 79). Similarly, for Adorno and Horkheimer economic and industrial modernity has produced an alienated subject: ever more efficient modes of production through the division of labour alienate the individual from the objects labour produces and the standardisation of commodities produces an increasingly predictable consumer response, so that society exists in a state of increasing domination over itself.¹⁸ The continuing success of society's domination over itself is dependent on the imperceptibility of its systems of control to the individual: "Concentration and control in our culture hide themselves in their very manifestation. Unhidden they would provoke resistance. Therefore the illusion ... must be

maintained”.¹⁹ The difficulty of perceiving how mass culture works on people is to have particular significance in the Devil’s Chair scene.

St. Mawr participates in a wider critique of industrialised modernity that can be seen in Lawrence’s writing around this period. The novella was written shortly after ‘Pan in America’ (1924), where Lawrence describes Pan as “life itself [which] consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe;—sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything” (*MM* 164) – but a force that has been absent in human beings since the beginning of the Christian era. In *St. Mawr* Lou sees and hears the “Great God Pan”, or “the god that is hidden in everything” (*SM* 65). For Lou, when *St. Mawr* “reared his head and neighed from his deep chest, like deep wind-bells resounding, she seemed to hear the echoes of another, darker, more spacious, more dangerous, more splendid world than ours, that was beyond her” (*SM* 41). *St. Mawr* causes Lou to acknowledge the “triviality and superficiality of her human relationships” (*SM* 31). Every man she has known is a disappointment in comparison, “a sort of – pan-cake” rather than the Great God Pan (*SM* 63). The horse *St. Mawr* is antithetic to modern humanity, since he represents a pure, active form of life from which people have become alienated. Rico, who is the anxious and subjugated victim of a vacuous consumer culture, is a demonic force for the horse. When Rico attempts to mount him, *St. Mawr* “jumped away as if he had seen the devil” (*SM* 68). For Lou, *St. Mawr*’s mistrust of Rico is the greatest evidence that the world of popular culture that Rico exemplifies and inhabits is not just dull or empty: it is dangerous and evil.

The emphasis Lawrence places on how popular culture encourages the uncritical acceptance of surfaces and outward appearances encourages a close reading of the Devil’s Chair scene that notes the significance and timing of a popular tune. During the group excursion to the Devil’s Chair, “which crowned the moor-like hills looking into Wales” (*SM* 67), *St. Mawr* unexpectedly rears up. Usually critics consider, as Keith Sagar does, that “*St. Mawr*

had in fact reared at an adder that had been killed that morning with stones".²⁰ Lou does see a dead snake when she begins to ride for help after Rico is injured, and this appears to be a logical explanation for St. Mawr's behaviour: the dead snake is a fairly transparent symbol for the damage done to nature. But being satisfied with surfaces and what is obvious is not enough: Lawrence has shown the dangers of appearances and a lack of independent thought in the prelude to this scene, through Rico's thoughtless acceptance and consumption of popular ideas. While the snake provides, after the event, a convenient excuse for his behaviour, St. Mawr rears specifically "At that moment" when Fred whistles a "new dance tune" for the second time:

They were riding along one of the narrow little foot-tracks ... Lou, from a little distance, watched the glossy, powerful haunches of St. Mawr swaying with life, always too much life, like a menace. The fair young man was whistling a new dance tune.

"That's an awfully attractive tune," Rico called. "Do whistle it again, Fred, I should like to memorise it."

Fred began to whistle it again.

At that moment, St. Mawr exploded again, shied sideways as if a bomb had gone off, and kept backing through the heather. (*SM* 75–6)

The tune is the blasphemy of popular culture against nature. For Adorno it is the repetitive structure of musical forms that produces regressive behaviour and, similarly, it is the repetition, the insistence of the tune again, that provokes the reaction from the horse, who "shie[s] sideways", trying to get away from the party. Rico is crushed as he pulls St. Mawr over backwards and Fred gets "a kick in the face" (*SM* 76).

Both the tune and the location are important in this scene. In 'The Spirit of Place' (1918), Lawrence writes of "some subtle

magnetic or vital influence inherent in every specific locality”, or a special connection between creatures and the land (*SCAL* 170). Wales is St. Mawr’s native land and the location at the Devil’s Chair – the Stiperstones ridge in Shropshire, a liminal space near the Welsh borders – is “one of those places where the spirit of aboriginal England still lingers” (*SM* 73). St. Mawr reacts to the intrusion of popular culture into his homeland and its spirit of place. It is at the very moment that Fred begins whistling the tune again, and in that very place, that St. Mawr “exploded” (*SM* 76). This puts an end to the tourism of the area by the party, which includes the Manby girls, who are so similar they are barely differentiated, and Fred, who is just a “fair young man” (*SM* 75). These people are the damaged and damaging products of the culture industry, convinced that these days are the “best ever”, having completely succumbed to what is expected of them in society: to consume, fit in and “have a good time” (*SM* 74). Rico and the Manbys are the kind of people that Adorno and Horkheimer gesture to when they say “culture now impresses the same stamp on everything” and “the culture industry as a whole has molded [people] as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product”.²¹ St. Mawr’s behaviour registers the profanity of their presence and their inane utterances, and the repetition of the repetitive dance tune is the final straw.

Following the Devil’s Chair incident Lou has an apocalyptic vision of a world full of evil, inhabited by cruel, alienated individuals. The incident rouses an ancient understanding in Lou, of the kind Lawrence describes as necessary in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922): “We’ve got to rip the old veil of a vision across, and find what the heart really believes in”, to return to an ancient consciousness last seen in the “great pagan world”, in which “men lived and taught and knew, and were in one complete correspondence over all the earth” (*PFU* 65, 63). For Lou the world is overrun with “the mysterious potency of evil” and she craves a way of living where people could “get their life straight from the source” (*SM* 61, 79). She rejects a life where she “would go on rattling her bit in the great machine of human life” with an “amiable

machine" for a husband (*SM* 94). The description of life in mechanistic terms recognises that industrial society is altering not just surroundings but people as well, making their lives "a rattling nullity" (*SM* 94). That Rico is an "amiable machine" points to the standardisation of people as well as the products they consume.²²

Through the experience at the Devil's Chair, Lou comes to a conclusion similar to that of Adorno and Horkheimer, for whom "the enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" and society is "alienated from itself".²³ But *St. Mawr* gives us a possibility that Critical Theory, and especially Adorno, does not allow. The potential for individuals to be awakened to the problems of modernity and resist its trajectory is kept open. For Adorno it is not possible to consciously resist systems of domination because they are imperceptible to the individual. Resistance must come from dialectical thinking or be at the unconscious level of form in art. Adorno is critical of the novel's ability to articulate useful resistance to the trajectory of modernity, for instance in the 'Dedication' to *Minima Moralia*, where he speaks of "those novelists" who "make people who are no more than component parts of machinery act as if they still had the capacity to act as subjects".²⁴

Lawrence's text avoids this criticism since the form of *St. Mawr* is integral to how it explores these problems. Although the Devil's Chair scene is the dramatic peak, the novella does not end there. There is more to life, Lawrence suggests, than the traditional novel form allows. For Booth, the form of *St. Mawr* only reflects contemporary subjectivity: "The uncertainty of the reader over the direction of the text when reading *St. Mawr* ... reflects the crisis in reading the world of late colonialism".²⁵ Yet the form of the novella does more than reflect the fragmented experience of modern life; more than show Lou coming to realise the "rottenness" of society. A reader can also be alerted to the problems of modern life by careful attention to the significance of the popular culture, rejecting the easy answer that it is the snake that causes *St. Mawr* to rear and

noticing instead that it is the “new dance tune” (*SM* 75). The form thus actively recruits readers to notice the regressive behaviour promoted by popular culture, so that they too can have an awakening similar to Lou’s. What follows shows that Lawrence is considering not only that it *is* possible to become aware of the problems in modern society but *how* it is possible to act afterwards and attempt alternative ways of living.

After the events at the Devil’s Chair, the novella explores the world and the culture industry through the lens of Lou’s heightened awareness of its problems. She comes to recognise mass production as the central evil in society and wants to escape the mechanical nature of capitalist production. She realises this is what she participated in during her life in Westminster and through “the money she spent to buy St. Mawr” (*SM* 138), and she decides to travel to Texas with Mrs Witt. In Texas, she links industrial production to art and culture by comparing the ranch to a film-set, identifying that both are efficiently produced in order to raise capital. She feels alienated in Texas because “she could not stand this sort of living in a film-setting, with the *mechanical* energy of ‘making good’, that is, making money, to keep the show going” (*SM* 132, emphasis added). Mechanical reproduction and mass culture is a key concern in Lawrence’s novella and it becomes so to Frankfurt School philosophy. Lawrence offers a critique of popular culture that also becomes a central tenet in Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936), which discusses the impact of increasing efficiency in modes of production and the development of cinema.²⁶ For Benjamin, “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be”.²⁷ Like Benjamin, Lou recognises the emptiness and insufficiency of cinema; the ranch is “like a cinematograph: flat shapes, exactly like men, but without any substance of reality, rapidly rattling away with talk, emotions, activity, all in the flat, nothing behind it” (*SM* 131). For Lou life on the ranch and the production of a film are both part of the pursuit of

money that she finds "so meaningless" and "so artificially civilised" (*SM* 131).

With the ranch like a film-set, the world and popular culture are becoming undifferentiated for Lou. She notices what Adorno and Horkheimer claim when they say: "The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry"; when "all mass culture is identical", "the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through".²⁸ This is increasingly true for Lou as the story progresses: even the cowboys are "just as self-conscious as Rico" and, although the ranch-boys lead a "hard, hard life, often dangerous and gruesome", mass culture has left its imprint on their minds; "film-psychology" has changed the way they think and "inwardly they were self-conscious film-heroes" (*SM* 131). Lou is left "scared at the emptiness of it all" (*SM* 131).²⁹ At times, the falsity of social life makes Lou feel as though she doesn't exist at all. She declares to the riding party on the hill: "We don't exist" (*SM* 74). Later, she elaborates: "I feel so unreal, nowadays, as if I too were nothing more than a painting by Rico on a millboard. I feel almost too unreal even to make up my mind to anything" (*SM* 115). Although Lou expresses feelings of unreality earlier in the novella, at this point she makes the connection (although not necessarily consciously) between popular culture and the destruction of her sense of self.

The erosion of subjectivity is what Adorno finds troubling in Schoenberg's music and what Lawrence's text avoids. When Lou feels as though she does not exist, she is close to what Adorno claims is achieved by Schoenberg's twelve-tone row, which is the complete obliteration of difference, individuality and subjectivity itself:

The new ordering of twelve-tone technique virtually extinguishes the subject. The truly great moments in late Schoenberg have been attained despite the twelve-tone technique as well as by means of it – by means of it because

music becomes capable of restraining itself coldly and inexorably, and this is the only fitting position for music following its decline; and despite twelve-tone technique because the spirit which thought it out remains sufficiently in self-control to penetrate repeatedly the structure of its technical components and to cause them to come to life, as through the spirit were ready, in the end, to destroy, catastrophically, the technical work of art.³⁰

Schoenberg's music threatens to destroy the idea of composition because the twelve-tone rows are pre-decided material which the composer can only organise in different ways. The technique removes much compositional choice by limiting any freedom over note selection, subjecting the notes to a system that is just as complete in its control as functional harmony. This virtual extinguishing of the subject is valuable because it reveals the true condition of modern subjectivity that is hidden by mass culture. In *St. Mawr*, it is the poster-girl of the culture industry, Flora Manby, who threatens the extinguishing of the subject when she offers to castrate or kill St. Mawr, depriving him either of the virile source of his active life or life itself, while Lou feels as though her very life and self are unreal, having been extinguished by living in an oppressive environment.

Through Lou's awakening to the problems of modernity, Lawrence is able to offer the prospect of the possibility of a change for the better. The journey that Lou takes is emotional and intellectual as well as geographical. She gradually acknowledges the limitations and lack of fulfilment offered by money and a society comprised of rootless, drifting individuals. She retreats to the Mexican ranch to get away from what other people call life, specifically modern entertainment and modern sex: "Wriggling half-naked at a public show, and going off in a taxi to sleep with some half-drunken fool who thinks he's a man" (*SM* 153). The socially accepted physical action associated with music – wriggling in small, restricted movements like a helpless, semi-naked creature

attempting to free itself – replicates the music's restraining, entrapping qualities. Dancing is merely the feeble expression of unfreedom, and modern masculinity is completely lacking. Pan and the force of nature do not just provide a contrast for the emptiness of modern life they are the only hope for something better. The only option for Lou is withdrawal to parts of the natural world that have not yet been dominated by mass culture and capitalism. This alternative is hard-won and bleak. Lou rejects all human contact apart from her mother and Phoenix's help as a servant. "As far as people go," she says, "I don't want any more. I can't stand any more" (*SM* 153).

Although Lawrence seems to be about to show us what the complete obliteration of the subject might look like, he has Lou save both St. Mawr and herself. He can then offer us the possibility of an alternative when she buys Las Chivas. Even her retreat from society is premised upon a further purchase. The deeply inimical natural environment of the ranch shows that while people can purchase many things, they cannot conquer all. For any hope for the future, one must go back to the fundamentals of life: the conflict between man and nature. Lou does not find an idyllic natural retreat. The ranch is bleak and unyielding, in conflict with itself as well as its human occupants: "The very flowers came up bristly, and many of them were fang-mouthed, like the dead-nettle ... The alfalfa field was one raging, seething conflict of plants trying to get hold" (*SM* 148). It is an "uncaring" place with a history of previous owners who have lost a "fight" with the land, trying and failing to work it for economic productivity (*SM* 146):

She had felt quite assured, when ... the wild water of the hills caught, tricked into the narrow iron pipes, and led tamely to her kitchen, to jump out over her sink, into her wash-basin, at her service. *There!* she said. I have tamed the waters of the mountain to my service.

So she had, for the moment.

At the same time, the invisible attack was being made upon her ... the grey, rat-like spirit of the inner mountains was attacking her from behind. (*SM* 147)

It may be difficult to appreciate how there can be any optimism embedded in the violent conflict between man and nature at the ranch. But human relationships offer no recovery or salvation in *St. Mawr*. “The individual”, as Lou thinks during her vision, “can but depart from the mass, and try to cleanse himself. Try to hold fast to the living thing, which destroys as it goes, but remains sweet” (*SM* 80). It is only after Lou realises what is wrong with modern life that she can choose to reject it by retreating to her patch of rural wilderness, and even the land only offers conflict. Lawrence’s optimism is subtle in the same way as that of Adorno: the people who appear optimistic, like Flora Manby and Rico, are in fact the real pessimists, because they refuse to believe that these days are not “the best ever” (*SM* 74).

Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* opens with the statement that “the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant”,³¹ leading scholars such as Jürgen Habermas to critique it as an “offensive, materialist theory of society” that is a “deeply pessimistic, wait-and-see philosophy of history aimed at making it through the winter”.³² The same criticism could be made of *St. Mawr* if we consider Lou’s retreat to the ranch for the “winter season”, as Rico puts it (*SM* 117), as a negative and pessimistic decision. However, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is about reclaiming some “positive concept of enlightenment”,³³ and to do that one must first dismantle the present conception of it to show why it is lacking, and then start again from nothing.

St. Mawr enacts this dismantling. Lou eventually finds civilisation completely hideous and thinks of “The mean cruelty of Mrs Vyner’s humanitarianism, the barren cruelty of Flora Manby, the eunuch cruelty of Rico. Our whole eunuch civilisation, nasty-minded as eunuchs are, with their kind of sneaking, sterilising cruelty” (*SM* 96). Society and individuals are so damaged that

supposedly positive categories are negatives: being a humanitarian is wrong in a world where people are mindlessly cruel, because it perpetuates an evil humanity. In *St. Mawr*, Lawrence shows a process of awakening happening to Lou, of the kind he discusses later in his review of Trigant Burrow's *The Social Basis of Consciousness*:

So long as men are inwardly dominated by their own isolation ... which after all is but a picture or an idea, nothing is possible but insanity more or less pronounced. Men must go back into *touch*. And to do so they must ... utterly break the present great picture of normal humanity: shatter that mirror in which we all live grimacing: and fall again into true relatedness. (*IR* 336)

Difficult as it might be to hold up a mirror to society and show its true, alienated, isolated gruesomeness – as Adorno argues Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique does – this is not enough for any hope for the future. Lawrence pinpoints what is wrong with society in order that something can be done about it. Rather than offering any definite solution, he offers the suggestion that the trajectory of modernity is not inevitable and that individual resistance is possible. It is necessary to retreat from the crushing pace of modernity; to accept the "true relatedness" of the conflict between man and nature (*IR* 336). The final disappointment of St. Mawr on the Texan ranch is important to the alternative that is offered, because it removes him from the privileged space Lou has given him. Even St. Mawr loses his mystery and power, degrading himself by following "at the heels of the boss' long-legged black Texan mare, almost slavishly" (*SM* 132). With St. Mawr revealed as fallible, Lou withdraws to Las Chivas feeling "absolutely broken" (*SM* 154). Yet as Mrs Witt says, being absolutely broken is "a beginning rather than an end" (*SM* 154). The ending of *St. Mawr* offers the possibility of rejecting modernity and starting again.

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¹ F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 228.

² Howard J. Booth, 'Lawrence in Doubt: A Theory of the Other and its Collapse', in *Modernism and Empire*, eds Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 197–223, 214.

³ Jerry Wasserman, 'St. Mawr and the Search for Community', *Mosaic*, vol. 5.2 (1971), 113–23, 122.

⁴ Paul Poplawski, *Language, Art and Reality in D. H. Lawrence's 'St. Mawr': A Stylistic Study* (London: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 6.

⁵ Jack Stewart argues that "Lawrence's animism was ... designed to overcome the mental illusion of separateness" that many of his characters feel by offering a connection with something vital: Jack Stewart, 'Flowers and flesh: color, place, and animism in *St. Mawr* and "Flowery Tuscany"', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, vol. 36.1 (2011), 92–113, 92.

⁶ See T. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2006), 45–6.

⁷ Krockel's reading equates tone and image (somewhat vaguely) arguing that Lawrence blurs the boundaries of the self, while Schoenberg blurs traditional tonality by creating dissonance: "Like Schoenberg's disruption of the tonal framework through dissonant tones, Lawrence destabilizes the reality of his narrative, and the individuality of his characters, through overlapping images with each other": Carl Krockel, *D. H. Lawrence and Germany: The Politics of Influence* (New York: Rodopi, 2007), 108.

⁸ In Adorno's words: "That the row uses no more than twelve tones is a result of the endeavour to give none of the notes, by means of greater frequency, any emphasis which might render it a 'fundamental tone' and thereby evoke tonal relationships ... With every new pitch the choice of remaining pitches diminishes, and when the last one is reached there is no longer any choice at all. The force exerted by the process is unmistakable": Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 72–3.

⁹ Booth, 'Lawrence in Doubt: A Theory of the Other and its Collapse', 214.

¹⁰ Paul Poplawski, 'St. Mawr and the Ironic Art of Realization', in *Writing the Body in D. H. Lawrence: Essays on Language*,

Representation, and Sexuality, ed. Paul Poplawski (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 93–104, 94.

¹¹ Lawrence's association between a lack of artistic competency and sexual self-control on Rico's part shows the persistence of normative constructions of masculinity from the nineteenth century, as discussed by Herbert Sussman, who explores "the social construction of Victorian manliness ... as self-discipline, as the ability to control male energy and to deploy this power not for sexual but for productive purposes": Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 11. Thomas Laqueur has discussed the precedent, since the eighteenth century, for considering masturbation as a "sign of something terribly amiss about a person, an institution, or a whole culture", and the connection between masturbation and the desires produced by the "commercial system" in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 185, 277.

¹² Anneleen Masschelein, "'Rip the veil of the old vision across, and walk through the rent": Reading D. H. Lawrence with Deleuze and Guattari', in Stephen Ross, ed., *Modernism and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009), 23–39, 23.

¹³ Paul Poplawski has made connections between Lawrence and Marcuse, arguing that Lou's vision of evil shows that "For Lawrence, as for Freud and Marcuse ... the energy of repressed desire ... acts as fuel for reactions of hate and anger towards others": Paul Poplawski, *Promptings of Desire* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 11.

¹⁴ Anne Fernihough, *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 40.

¹⁵ Poplawski, 'St. Mawr and the Ironic Art of Realization', 94.

¹⁶ T. W. Adorno, 'Perennial Fashion – Jazz', in *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson and Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 129.

¹⁷ Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 228.

¹⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1992), 22.

¹⁹ T. W. Adorno, 'On Popular Music', in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, eds Simon Frith and Andrew Godwin (London: Routledge,

1990), 308. It first appeared as T. W. Adorno, 'On Popular Music', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. 9 (1941), 17–48.

²⁰ Keith Sagar, *The Art of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966), 155. Sagar also discusses the shifting and ambivalent way Lawrence makes use of snakes in his texts, especially in the poem 'Snake' and *The Plumed Serpent*: Keith Sagar, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature* (London: Chaucer, 2005), 285, 289.

²¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 120, 127.

²² This is the thesis of another Frankfurt School theorist, Herbert Marcuse, who argues that the increasing mechanisation of society has resulted in a process of "instrumental rationalisation", or the shaping of the human will to the needs of a society that is structured around efficient capitalist production: "Mass production and mass distribution claim the entire individual, and industrial psychology has long since ceased to be confined to the factory". Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Abacus, 1972), 13, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 3, 121.

²⁴ T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 15.

²⁵ Booth, 'Lawrence in Doubt: A Theory of the Other and its Collapse', 214.

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Random House, 2011), 219.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 220. I am not suggesting that I agree with Benjamin's thesis entirely: an excellent discussion of the problems in the essay can be found in Robert Hullot-Kentor, 'What is Mechanical Reproduction?', *Things Beyond Resemblance* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), 136–53. By using this example, I intend to show that Lawrence is already foregrounding concerns that will become central studies in Frankfurt School philosophy.

²⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 126, 121.

²⁹ Linda Ruth Williams argues for the influence of the mediating qualities of cinema and technology on Lawrence's writing, suggesting that: "In representing its world as the world-in-movement, it privileges a tendency to chaos, its movements throw fragments outwards". Cinema is an inherently fragmentary experience because although it depicts the world it is disconnected from it and shows only a portion of it. Cinema lacks the ability to ground its audience; as a result it cannot offer an organic or unifying whole to its audience, and the possibility of this – if

not the absolute delivery – is something that Lawrence considers essential, as the end of the novella shows. Linda Ruth Williams, *Sex in the Head: Visions of Femininity and Film in D. H. Lawrence* (Michigan: Wayne State UP, 1993), 3.

³⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 69.

³¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3.

³² Jürgen Habermas, 'Nachwort', 280, quoted in Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 29.

³³ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xviii.