BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

OF D. H. LAWRENCE’S “THE LADYBIRD”

THE LADYBIRD” HAS NOT FARED particularly well at the hands of its critics. Most have approached it as though it is, or should have been, written in a “realist” mode. In an otherwise excellent recent article on “The Fox” and “The Ladybird,” Lawrence Jones comes to the conclusion that “‘The Fox’ is a much more successful story than ‘The Ladybird,’ more successful as a coherent symbolic structure, as an imitation and criticism of life, and as a rhetorical structure inducing an experience in the reader.”¹ Although this judgement does not express any opposition to symbolism per se, we can only conclude that in Jones’ view a symbolic work is the better if at the same time it can comfortably be read as “an imitation... of life.” Moreover, he apparently sees Lawrence as writing essentially the same kind of fiction in both tales.

By contrast, I agree with Lawrence himself that “The Ladybird” has more of “the quick of a new thing in it,” and that, pace Graham Hough, the new thing is not “the introduction of such an explicitly symbolical figure as Count Dionysus into a story of war-time England otherwise conceived in naturalistic terms,”² but a tale which is not in any way intended as naturalistic in its overall design. Critics have failed to see that “The Ladybird” simply is not to be understood as an example of mimesis or realism³ but creates its own symbolic, mythical world. Hough’s use of the word “naturalistic” is singularly unfortunate, as Zola, in explaining the concept of naturalism in Le Roman Experimental (1880) “urges the writer to imitate the scientist by observing reality (the how) without inquiring into its ultimate causes (the why)”⁴—virtually the opposite of what Lawrence is doing. One of the recent commentators is more accurate in asserting: “Realistically the narrative is ridiculous, allegorically, it presents the romantic mystique of Lawrence’s dark love.”⁵ But, if it is acknowledged that the mode is allegorical (though the word is too restrict-
ing), there seems to be no good reason for criticizing the story as not working on another level. Furthermore, it will be my contention that the critical failure to understand Lawrence’s design, or at least to be fair to it, is combined with—or perhaps the product of—ignorance of the materials he is building on and transforming.  

Lawrence’s tale is not realistic because he is mythmaking—because he would like to transform reality as we know it or think we know it. I deliberately say “or think we know it,” since I believe that Lawrence is not so much concerned to show that we can change reality itself as that we need to see reality differently—to become aware of a reality to which we are normally blind. Lawrence actually believed that “Religion was right and science is wrong.” Hence, though many of his findings may seem to us realistically ridiculous, Lawrence considered them true. The best place to examine the extremity of his views at the time he wrote “The Ladybird” is Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious, from which I derive the quoted statement (p. 182). His maxim about religion and science leads him to make the most extraordinary statements about what we commonly hold to be reality; for example, the sun “depends, for its heart-beat, its respiration, its pivotal motion, on the beating hearts of men and beast, on the dynamic soul-impulse in individual creatures” (FU 128). We may thus assume that the Count, as a sun-worshipper at the beginning of “The Ladybird,” has a literal rather than symbolic relationship with the sun, and that perhaps he gives to the sun as much as he derives from it, while what he receives from it is not, as we might think, extra-terrestrial warmth or light, but a re-charging of energy provided by “men and beast.”

Central to the Fantasia and the Psychoanalysis, as well as to “The Ladybird,” is Lawrence’s distinction between an “upper consciousness” and a “lower consciousness,” each seated in corresponding parts of the body. It is, above all, the purpose of “The Ladybird” to show us how we have lived too much from the upper consciousness and suppressed the lower consciousness, as well as how much more forceful the power in our bowels is than that in our brains. Lawrence’s message is concentrated around the relationship between the Count and Daphne. In accordance with what we are extensively told in the tracts, Lawrence shows that it is through a genuine sexual relationship that the lower consciousness can be released, as it should be, from the cramped and tortured state into
which the upper consciousness has forced it. The dark-light dichotomy in “The Ladybird” relates directly to the distinction between the two consciousnesses. In sex, the “dark forces of manhood and womanhood sparkle” from the hypogastric plexus (the female sensual sympathetic center of the lower consciousness) and the sacral ganglion (the male sensual volitional center, also in the lower consciousness; cf. FU 182). Clearly, Lawrence associates darkness with the lower consciousness and lightness with the upper (from which Daphne’s mother and her husband Basil live). As Lawrence assures us about the sexual polarity of man and woman, “The crisis of their contact in sex connection is the moment of establishment of a new flashing circuit throughout the whole sea: the dark, burning waters of our under-world rocking in a new dynamic rhythm in each of us” (FU 172 [Italics mine]).

The reference to “our under-world” is particularly useful, in that it firmly indicates to us that the Count in “The Ladybird,” who is “King in Hades” (p. 80), is therefore, the king of the lower consciousness and, thus, of the world of sex through which the lower consciousness is to be released. The Count himself progresses throughout the story. His eyes, “wide open” (p. 17), change to “keen” (p. 30)—a sign that his male sensual will is reborn, something also obvious (to Lawrence, at least) from the increasing prominence of his teeth (“the instruments of our sensual will,” [FU 57]).

There are, however, severe limits to the help that the Fantasia or the Psychoanalysis, as background to “The Ladybird,” can give us. It certainly is essential for the reader to know these tracts. For example, without them, one will not know how Lawrence comes to state (“The Ladybird,” p. 13) that Daphne’s “frustration and anger . . . made her ill, and made the doctors fear consumption.” Lawrence does make explicit that Daphne actually needed a “dare-devil” (p. 13), instead of her “adorable husband” Basil. But the reader may well wonder about the psychosomatic process that makes the doctors “fear consumption.” Lawrence explains the matter for us, “Any excess in the sympathetic mode from the upper centres tends to burn the lungs with oxygen, weaken them with stress, and cause consumption” (FU 55). But the tracts do not do sufficient justice to the all-encompassing mythical structure of “The Ladybird.”

It is one thing for the reader to be informed, in the Fantasia, about such things as the seat of the male sensual will but quite another for him.
to connect the almost casual reference to "our underworld" (FU 172—
where Lawrence is thinking of the lower consciousness) with the various
myths involving the underworld referred to by Lawrence (again, almost
nonchalantly) in the course of "The Ladybird."

In this respect, it will assist our reading greatly if we first of all
open our minds to the likelihood that Lawrence did intend "The Lady-
bird" to be predominantly mythical. It is significant that the story is
the first in a sequence of three. We should take Lawrence literally when
he claims that "The Ladybird" has most of "the quick of a new thing"
in it. We should remember that he claims that for the mass of people,
"knowledge must be symbolical, mythical, dynamic" (FU 73 [Lawrence's
italics]).

According to his preference, Lawrence not only offers "The Lady-
bird" as a fitting prelude to "The Fox" and "The Captain's Doll" (increas-
ingly "realistic" in mode) but, within "The Ladybird," places his charac-
ters within a spectrum ranging from what we may call "highly symbolical"
to "barrenly realistic." The status of a character depends on his/her abil-
ity to be reborn in the lower consciousness and to be released from the
shackles of the upper consciousness—notably from the tyranny of such
things as ideals, the life of the spirit, benevolence, the conventional notion
of "love," a belief in the virtue of democracy, etc. The Count, amongst
other things, therefore, *is* King of Hades; Daphne *becomes* a mythological
figure; Basil, although fascinated by the Count, is determined not to seek
his Lawrentian conversion and, therefore, is doomed to worship his wife
as a goddess at a distance, unable to be divine himself.

The basic mythical framework of "The Ladybird" is most easily
understood by reference to Sir J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which
we know heavily influenced Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, and others of
their generation. The passage in which Frazer most strikingly brings
the relevant—to us—materials together is this:

*Dionysus* was not the only Greek deity whose tragic story and ritual appear
to reflect the decay and revival of vegetation. In another form and with a
different application the old tale re-appears in the myth of *Demeter* and
*Persephone*. Substantially their myth is identical with the Syrian one of
*Aphrodite* (*Astarte*) and *Adonis*, the Phrygian one of *Cybele* and *Attis*, and
the Egyptian one of *Isis* and *Osiris*. (Italics mine)
All the mythological figures above appear in "The Ladybird"; Lawrence’s combination of the myths mentioned obviously derives from Frazer, and it is Frazer who provides the overall mythological framework within which Lawrence’s handling of other sources that we shall consider must be seen. This is true even of the Bible, since Frazer very likely inspired Lawrence with the dominant mythical idea of "The Ladybird"—that the resurrection of Christ should become the resurrection of Osiris. Lawrence, unlike Frazer, is not so much preoccupied with the importance of vegetation as with that of fertility and that of resurrection from death to life, notably in the flesh. Frazer, in distinguishing between the Christian myth and the "pagan" ones, expressed allegiance to the former rather than the latter; in Lawrence, that allegiance is reversed, but this does not do away with the fact that it was Frazer who taught Lawrence to see the Christian myth and the others as related—notably in that they all involved resurrection and (almost all of them) an important relationship between man and woman relating to that resurrection. This paper will show an overview of Lawrence’s meaning by considering the various materials which he primarily absorbed and with which he found himself agreeing or disagreeing.

Although Lawrence went, so to speak, to the source of things by ultimately confronting us with his own version of ancient, pagan myth which—at the same time—would re-interpret Christian myth, he was also, of course, reacting to beliefs which he saw as widely held in his time, and, interestingly, one of the ways in which he defines his reaction is by frequent allusions to Blake and Shelley and, more loosely but still significantly, Wagner.

In Lawrence’s first allusion to Blake, the Count says: “Ah, your ladyship, be wise, and make friends with your anger. That is the way to let your beauty blossom” (p. 33). The reference is to Blake’s "A Poison Tree," but Lawrence transforms Blake’s message to a not inconsiderable extent. Blake advocates telling one’s friend about one’s anger; as a result of which, one’s wrath will end. Not telling will cause the growth of the poison tree and the death of the foe. Clearly, Lawrence and Blake are at one in rejecting the Christian view that anger must be controlled and that love must take its place, but Lawrence goes further than Blake in seeing anger as a good thing, to be cultivated so that beauty may blossom (not something that will disappear if only one is frank about it).
Only a little further, Lawrence is again unmistakably remodeling Blake, as the Count considers that Lady Daphne’s “real you” is “the wild-cat invisible in the night, with red fire perhaps coming out of its wide, dark eyes” (p. 36), and sees himself as “a black tom-cat howling in the night, and it is then that fire comes out of me.” With reference to the Osiris myth, it is important to remember that the cat was sacred to the Egyptians, but this fact neatly coincides with Lawrence’s allusion to his primary debt—namely, Blake’s “The Tyger”—which to Blake was probably ambiguous in value but to Lawrence is a wholly positive symbol of experience. The image is again taken up as Lady Daphne is thinking of her husband Basil’s having gone through the awful “fire of experience”—such an experience (simply that of war, here) may be awful to her, but even she sees it as turning her husband into “something new . . . like a god” (p. 44). Unfortunately, Basil being what he is, his experience is not sexual in origin or essence (as the Count’s is); he does not get vitally reborn as a result of the war, and Daphne probably makes things worse by not seeing him as a cat in the night but instead as a Christ-like bridgroom, with whom she hopes to celebrate a “new, supernatural wedding-night.”

Lawrence is more one-sided than Blake in ignoring the Lamb of Innocence, but there are close similarities, particularly in the way both writers value experience and teach us to come to terms with what we commonly fear (sex, death—or seeming death—needed for rebirth). With our awareness of Lawrence’s debt to Blake thus established, we may feel confident that a number of other possible references to Blake move into the category of certainties. For example, in “Daphne . . . needed a daredevil. But in her mind she hated all dare-devils: she had been brought up by her mother to admire only the good” (p. 13 [Lawrence’s italics]). Lawrence’s rejection of mind is much more extreme than Blake’s, but he obviously believes that his own ideas of good and evil are sufficiently like Blake’s anti-Christian ones to warrant a similarly ironic use of words such as “devil” and “good.”

Blake, however, was opposing certain conventional notions which professed Christians in his time believed in (or so it seemed to him); and that Lawrence’s values were not identical to Blake’s appears from the fact that he puts forward as his ideal of a dare-devil something as un-Blakean as a “riotous . . . border soldier” (p. 13).

Most significantly, Lawrence derives his God from Blake, and it is his idiosyncratic version of the God of Wrath in Blake’s “Tyger”: “The
god of anger, who throws down the steeples and the factory chimneys. Ah, Lady Daphne, he is a man’s God, he is a man’s God” (p. 42). Lawrence’s god of anger in any case is not motivated by divine wrath (his anger appears to be that of a petulant child, although more vicious); most significantly, Lawrence takes Blake’s “All deities reside in the human breast” as an excuse for deifying, in his mythical reconstruction, no more than one extraordinarily narrow and hateful human emotion. But, despite the significant twist that Lawrence gives to Blake’s vision, it is surely no exaggeration to claim that an approach to Lawrence through Blake significantly aids our understanding of Lawrence’s mythmaking and, therefore, of central aspects of his artistry and meaning in “The Ladybird.” Such a statement could be made even more strikingly with regard to Shelley, whose influence on Lawrence (much though he tried to fight it off) has been one of the most curiously neglected facts of literary history.

One of the most crucial distinctions between Lawrence and Shelley is the former’s certitude that the divinity is located in the lower consciousness (which makes the bowels of man the center of the universe) as contrasted with the latter’s certitude that the One is located in Heaven. This is not to deny that Shelley sees a potent, inter-relationship between the One and man; for example, in Adonais, Keats’ spirit once made more lovely the loveliness (of the One) of which it eventually becomes a portion. Nevertheless, Shelley’s religious inclination is outwards and upwards, whereas Lawrence’s is inwards and downwards. Logically, Lawrence’s divinity is dark, whereas Shelley’s is white. Shelley, in Lawrencean terms, lived from the upper consciousness and had to be shown wrong by re-writing this important part of his myth.

One of the most revealing ways in which Lawrence does this is by his creation of the famous “dark sun,” the Shelleyan origin of which has gone unobserved. The image of the dark sun is designed to turn Shelley inside-out. To Lawrence, the refraction of the white radiance of Eternity through life’s dome of many-colored glass (Adonais LII) was unbearable: light, for sure, is refracted but only in the sense that there would be no light if there were not “bits of dust and stuff to turn the dark fire into visibility” (p. 35). The true living world, Lawrence asserts, is not that of Shelley’s Eternity, but is dark, not white, and “even the sun is dark.” “White” love (clearly associated with Shelley’s white radiance of Eternity) is to Lawrence only the reverse of true love, which is dark. It is this
kind of inferior “white” love which we see around us and mistake for the real thing. The role of the dark sun, Lawrence makes clear in various places, is primarily to replenish our lower consciousness, as happens to the Count, notably when Daphne (dutifully in her role as Isis to his Osiris) helps to revive him by putting him in the sun (p. 23). Obviously Lawrence’s sun has nothing of the force of Shelley’s One which tortures “the unwilling dross that checks its flight / To its own likeness,” but instead serves as an aid to man. The comparative feebleness of Lawrence’s sun appears not only from his re-writing of Adonais but also from his modeling him (yes, Lawrence’s sun is male) on Demogorgon in Prometheus Unbound (II, iv), whom Shelley oddly places in “the deep”—and who, therefore, can appeal to Lawrence, who no doubt saw the “deep” as the lower consciousness. Demogorgon can speak with some authority on “the living world,” and he is a “mighty darkness” from whom “rays of gloom / Dart round, as light from the meridian sun”; but it would be impossible to describe him with such religious fervor as the One in Adonais. One way in which Lawrence manages to give potency (artistically, at least) to his dark sun is by making him invisible; in this respect, he is not unlike Shelley’s white radiance but is unlike the all too physical Demogorgon, whom Shelley actually presents on stage.

By contrast with the Count, who is a true Lawrentian, Basil is a Shelleyan. His characteristic attitude towards his wife is spiritual love, from the upper consciousness. He has blue eyes (p. 38), and when Daphne receives letters from him before his return from the war his love and his life flow to her “as the beam flows from a white star right down to us.” Here, then, we have Basil presented as Adonais, having become the Keats-star which summons Shelley to Heaven at the end of his poem. Lawrence’s allusion to Adonais at this point is not only imaginatively superb but essential for us to grasp as a component in his mythmaking. Just before, Basil has appeared as “Dionysos” in Daphne’s imagination (p. 38). What Lawrence means, in applying such labels to Basil—rather than the Count—is that they are ironic misnomers in Basil’s case. The truly worthwhile mythical being, as created by Lawrence, is the Count (Dionys, Adonis), not Basil (Dionysos, Adonais). When Basil sees his wife again, his eyes burn “with a hard, focused light, whitish” (p. 47). While the Count rejects conventional love as a thing of upper consciousness, Basil clearly feels it is not spiritual enough and does not do sufficient justice to his
ideal of woman. Therefore, he declares that he does not feel love for her, but worship; and Daphne becomes Venus to him (p. 49). Here, Lawrence indicates that the situation is even worse than in *Adonais*. For in Shelley’s poem, the woman-figure still knows (in Lawrence’s view) proper respect for her man: Aphrodite (Urania in Shelley) proceeds to seek Adonais (Keats); but, although Isis-like, Daphne later learns to find the Count (Osiris, Adonis); Basil, at this point, converts her into a goddess (“like Isis, like Venus”) rather than have her tend upon his divinity.

Daphne herself, however, is well on her way to correct Lawrencean understanding even while she enjoys Basil’s worship, for re-meeting the Count (p. 53), she realizes, because of his presence, that her loyalty is to the Count’s world rather than her husband’s spiritual one: “I’m afraid I was as inefficient as most angels,” said she.”

A little later, she feels “the dark flame of life which seemed to glow through the cloth from his [the Count’s] body” (p. 54): Lawrence is re-writing Shelley’s poem about Asia, who through love transcends herself so that she becomes a spiritual, divine “Life of Life,” addressed as a “Child of Light,” whose “limbs are burning / Through the vest which seems to hide them” (*Prometheus Unbound*, II, v).

But while Daphne discovers that the divinity is dark, Basil grows more and more Shelleyan. His beloved becomes the purely spiritual *sister* of *Epipsychidion*, the Shelleyan ideal of the woman who speaks with the voice of one’s own soul. Lawrence is explicit about this notion, undoubtedly with such works as *Epipsychidion* and *Alastor* in mind: “We have made the mistake of idealism again. We have thought that the woman who thinks and talks as we do will be the blood-answer. And we force it to be so. To our disaster” (*FU* 172-73). In fact, Basil once again goes further than Shelley; he abolishes Daphne as a “blood answer” and tells her that “the sexual part has been a mistake. I had rather love you—as I love now” (p. 78). Not surprisingly, the “sexual part” is transferred to the Count; and Daphne, in accordance with the general mythical framework which Lawrence derives from Frazer, henceforth spends half of her life, with the Count, in Hades. The war, acting symbolically as a kind of “death” from which both men recover (though Basil only partly) is an experience that transforms them decisively in one direction rather than another; Basil seeks his solution in a Shelleyan spiritual heaven, while the Count, by contrast, lives from a sensual underworld.
Yet, despite Lawrence’s preference for the Count, it is significant that the Count possesses Daphne *only* in the dark Hades of sex. In this respect, Lawrence’s dislike of Shelley is somewhat more balanced in “The Ladybird” than in his treatises. There is some understanding between the Count and Basil at the end, probably suggesting that, although the Count is superior, Basil is entitled to the view that the Shelleyan “thought of eternity” (p. 81) helps him.

So far, we have examined various important *aspects* of Lawrence’s vision as a result of the study of his handling of his sources; although consideration of each source in turn has helped us toward an understanding of his overall design, we have only begun to consider that design in its totality, particularly as far as the situation—or the “plot”—of his tale is concerned. I have already referred to the essential mythical framework which Lawrence derived from Frazer, and our consideration of Shelley has gone some way toward exploring Lawrence’s use of that framework. I shall later examine further Lawrence’s treatment of ancient and Christian myth; but, meanwhile, I should like to suggest that the combination of the love-story and the light-dark dichotomy may well owe something to Wagner’s mythmaking, particularly in *Tristan and Isolde*.

That Lawrence knew and admired Wagner is well known enough; no one can read *The Trespasser* without an awareness of Lawrence’s constant preoccupation with the German composer and poet. There is even a Ph. D. dissertation on Wagner and Lawrence’s novels which, however, does not pre-empt our inquiry.19

The dominant debt of *The Trespasser* (which is earlier, and more explicitly indebted to Wagner, than “The Ladybird”) is to Wagner’s *Ring* and *Tristan and Isolde*. It is no coincidence, therefore, that these are the works, from the Wagner corpus, which most tangibly underlie “The Ladybird.” It would take us too far afield to try to examine Lawrence’s borrowings from the *Ring* in detail; moreover, I believe the impact of *Tristan and Isolde* to be far more important. Nevertheless, a brief discussion of the relationship between “The Ladybird” and the *Ring* will not be inappropriate.

Despite many conflicting interpretations, it seems clear that the *Ring* is essentially concerned with a struggle for power over the world. Notably, it shows the efforts of the elf Alberich and the human god Siegfried to destroy the old gods of the Valhalla. In Lawrence’s version, the
old world is at least as much “the world of man” (p. 43) as that of the God of Christianity. He appears to conflate Alberich and Siegfried as saviors; in Wagner, Alberich is hardly a successful lover, but he is a dark little creature from the bowels of the earth with obvious appeal to Lawrence as a model for the Count, who has elfish hair (p. 20), and who—like Alberich (and Siegfried for that matter)—is a smith, repeatedly talking about his hammer (pp. 42-43), an instrument of destruction in both Wagner and Lawrence. However, in both authors, the need for love is seen as central in the re-building of the world. In this respect, the Count, in his relationship with Daphne, bears some resemblance to Siegfried, in his relationship to Brynhilde; particularly striking is Brynhilde’s devotion, shown, for example, when she follows Siegfried into his death (cf. Daphne). It is interesting to note, as well, that Siegfried is the offspring of an incestuous relationship between brother and sister; the sexual relationship is an obvious contrast to the Platonic, Shelleyan one of Basil and his “sister” Daphne, which, Lawrence implies, will not save the world.

But Lawrence’s story more closely parallels Tristan and Isolde. Most conspicuous is, perhaps, the fact that, in both works, a “story” is actually less in evidence than a presentation of a situation and the states of being surrounding that situation. The lovers do react to events but are hardly in charge of them, or of their own inner promptings, which are those of the unconscious, for the most part, despite subsequent analyses during which some attempt is made (notably by Isolde and the Count) to gain awareness.

Isolde, like Isis or Daphne, is innately, though she does not at first know it, a healer. Prior to the plot (such as it is) of Tristan und Isolde, Tristan first came to Isolde in Ireland to be cured of a wound which he had incurred while slaying her betrothed, Morold. Like the Count, he was a political enemy, acting for King Mark of Cornwall, and one whom Isolde had personal reason to hate because he had killed Morold. But, when Isolde is about to kill Tristan in rage, Tristan looks up at her, and she drops her sword. The effect of the eyes is much emphasized by Wagner, and, no doubt, impressed Lawrence sufficiently to make a great deal of it in the case of the Count. The idea in both writers would appear to be that the woman, unconsciously, loves the enemy; and, presumably, neither Tristan nor the Count should be considered fully aware of the impact he is making. At the beginning of the action of Tristan and Isolde, Tristan, despite promises not to return, has come to fetch Isolde to be
King Mark’s bride. She believes, again in her conscious mind, that she hates him and gives him a potion to drink, which she supposes to be a drink of death. However, as soon as the potion is drunk by both, it transforms them into lovers. Wagner subsequently explains, or so it seems, that Isolde’s servant had substituted a love potion. However, his real point appears to be that the pair had been in love all along without being conscious of it; the drink is actually a mere piece of machinery, and the focus of Wagner’s attention, as in Lawrence’s case, is on the psychology of the lovers. In particular, Wagner explores at great length the notion that daylight is deceptive, that true love can exist only in darkness and, ultimately, is best fulfilled in death. This notion is at the core of Tristan and Isolde, as it is in “The Ladybird.”

The lovers are discovered by King Mark, a kindly but ineffective soul, who is treated by Wagner in much the same way as Lawrence deals with Basil. Mark expresses puzzlement but does not eventually wish to stand in the way of the lovers; and, in any case, Tristan, in proper Laurentian fashion, is not ashamed of his adulterous passion (it is adulterous in spirit, even though Wagner may well mean that Mark has not even yet touched Isolde). Wagner and Lawrence are virtually identical in paying some respect to the betrayed husband, or husband-to-be, while fully condoning the actions of Tristan and the Count. Tristan receives another wound, it is true, but Isolde again follows him—into the land of night and, eventually, death—to cure him.

Lawrence adopts many of Wagner’s details. At the end of “The Ladybird,” the language, dealing with the dark-light dichotomy, is often almost identical to Wagner’s in, notably, Act II, scene 2. Even the lantern which Daphne holds when she first hears the Count’s (quasi-Wagnerian?) singing (p. 71) is no doubt a parallel to Isolde’s torch, which gradually goes out during the love-duet about daylight, darkness, death, and love. Significantly, the climactic scenes in both works take place in utter darkness and are, ultimately, to be considered as preparations for death.

The Wagnerian situation could usefully be combined especially with the Christian myth and the Osiris one to bring out significance that Wagner either does not present to the reader or did not see. As I said before, the dominant mythical idea of “The Ladybird” is that the resurrection of Christ should become the resurrection of Osiris. The Count will not go to heaven but to the underworld; he will live on in the flesh; the
Virgin Mary should be replaced by Isis, Osiris’ nurse, sexual partner, and sister (again, Lawrence indicates that he disapproves of the brother-sister relationship of Basil and Daphne because it is one of spiritual love and non-sexual, not because it is incestuous).

The chief way in which Lawrence directs us to reconsider the Christian myth is by setting up a parallel contrast between Basil at Daphne’s feet (p. 47 ff.) and Daphne at the Count’s (p. 73 ff.). Without a study of the implications of these incidents, static and bizarre though they may at first seem, we might easily overlook Lawrence’s concern with the Christ-figure as something pervasive rather than just occasionally hinted at.

In both incidents, Lawrence is primarily thinking of a reconstruction of the Christian resurrection. Basil admits that “something of me died in the war” (p. 80). The “something” is no doubt his lower consciousness. For this reason, although he is resurrected in the spirit, he essentially (in Lawrence’s view) remains dead; the “white, focused light” of his spirit shines (p. 47), but, as Daphne realizes, this does not prevent him from appearing like death, “like risen death.” He is not part of the Count’s dark flame but of Shelley’s white radiance of eternity; and, therefore “White death was still upon him.” “He was different”—because no longer a sexual being and, therefore—according to Lawrence—like the Christ of the Bible, resurrected in the spirit only.

As Lawrence interprets John 20: 1-18, Christ’s instruction to Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not,” is clear evidence of his spirituality, to be complete once he is “ascended unto the father.” Daphne vaguely realizes that her husband has become a Christ-figure, to the extent that she can inwardly formulate the words from the Bible, and duly refrains from touching him.

In his reconstruction, Lawrence conflates the figure of Mary Magdalene with that of the sinful woman who washed Christ’s feet with her tears (Luke 7: 36-50). This new figure replaces the Virgin Mary and, moreover, is merged with Isis’ paying her respect to and healing, Christ-Osiris, a new Lawrentian Christ. The new Christ-Osiris is resurrected by bodily contact with a subservient woman. The general idea (viz., that the relationship between Christ and the Virgin Mary should be modified into an Osiris-Isis one) also underlies “The Man Who Died” (1931, first “The Escaped Cock,” 1929), but it is introduced here more subtly, and well before that rather crassly
explicit story, which is more generally taken as proof that Lawrence came
to rewrite the Christian myth and which has received undue attention in
comparison with "The Ladybird." In "The Man Who Died" Christ is
cruelly turned into Osiris, and the Virgin Mary is simply rejected for
Isis (or her priestess), so that the two myths are to a considerable extent
kept separate rather than the Christian one's being both retained and
imaginatively transformed. The exciting concept of using the woman
washing Christ's feet, as Isis restoring Osiris, is ignored in "The Man Who
Died." 23

Upon inspection, there is no doubt about what Lawrence is
doing to the Christian myth in "The Ladybird." Now that we have
graped the basic points, we can understand that Basil, kneeling at
Daphne's feet and kissing them, is offering an ironic travesty of what
Lawrence sees as proper. Basil is not only a spiritual man, he is but
wrong to lower himself before a woman whom he comes to regard
(equally wrongly) as a goddess. Moreover, the re-created Lawrentian
Christ that is, the Count differs significantly from anything one
would envisage the resurrected Christ of the Bible to be. Coming
to life through the flame which Daphne, touching him (unlike Mary
Magdalene, but like the sinful woman), produces from his lower con-
sciousness, he is "seated erect, like an Egyptian King-god in the
statues" (p. 75 [My italics]). Washing his feet with her tears, Daphne
gives what is due to the re-created Christ, and thus ensures that the
after-life, in "Hades," will be his. And this, in the Lawrentian myth,
is the only after-life in the dark region of the dead where the new
"Christ" will be (p. 75) "Father of the soul that would come after"
from the only place from which he can be, the "underworld" of the
lower consciousness.

It will now be necessary to trace a number of Egyptian elements
in the tale and place them within the context which it provides. While
doing this, we must remember that Lawrence is bringing associations to-
gether rather than making them mutually exclusive. For example, the
fact that Daphne, as Isis, is Osiris' wife in the underworld does not do
away with the fact that she is also Persephone, who spends part of the year
with the Count in his role as Hades (Pluto). In fact, Lawrence's amalgam-
ations are sanctioned by the practice of the ancient world itself, as Fra-
zer makes very plain. In what follows, I shall freely introduce mythical
ideas which Lawrence must have acquired from sources other than *The Golden Bough*, as well as from that great work; it has proved impossible to determine from just which books Lawrence, who was well read in mythology, collected various pieces of information, nor is it really necessary to do so, since books on mythology often repeat standard notions. What is certain is that Frazer’s grouping was Lawrence’s point of departure but that he went well beyond it.

The very conflation of Osiris and Pluto was one that occurred in the ancient world, being promoted by Ptolemy I, as the first Greek monarch of Egypt (305-283 B.C.), who probably wished his Greeks and Egyptians to worship one and the same god. Lawrence is, I think, less interested than Frazer in the kinship between Osiris and Persephone as vegetation gods than he is in the pairing of Osiris-Isis and Pluto-Persephone as models of relationships between men and women in relation to sex, fertility, and resurrection from death to life.

Specifically Egyptian in Lawrence’s story, however, is the preoccupation with the scarab and the sun. The title of Lawrence’s story is “The Ladybird,” which makes us think of “The Beetle of Our Lady,” as mentioned by the Count (p. 67). Lawrence does not mean, however, that we should worship the Virgin Mary. “Our Lady” is, rather, Isis, and we must shift our attention from the ladybird to the scarab which, tellingly, occurs on the Count’s thimble. (The creature is not, in fact, a ladybird but wrongly called so.) The thimble as such is probably not an important mythical symbol. It represents the old order, with reference to which Lawrence lamented in a letter concerning his earlier story “The Thimble,” written to Lady Cynthia Asquith (30.x.15) that we needed “a resurrection from the dead, we English, all Europe. What is the whole empire, and kingdom, save the thimble in my story?”; “The Ladybird” not only celebrates the old order, notably the Bohemian aristocrat Count Dionys, but also shows how it can be resurrected (significantly the Earl, Daphne’s father, is beyond salvation because he is English and a prey of democracy). I am unable to discover any traditional association that explains Lawrence’s symbolic use of the thimble. The serpent on the thimble is not easily traced to any particular culture, but Lawrence here and elsewhere clearly sees it—and it has been so regarded in many myths—as coming from the underworld, and thus the unconscious. It is phallic and sexual, and it is easily associated with resurrection be-
cause it sloughs its skin. His point is, again, that such a view of the serpent is right and that the Christian one is wrong. But the most important symbol on the thimble is the scarab, and its importance cannot, we find, be understood by pondering the significance of the thimble and the serpent; we must look for its meaning in ancient Egyptian culture.

The earl feebly tries to explain the meaning of the scarab:

'Do you know Fabre?' put in Lord Beveridge. 'He suggests that the beetle rolling a little ball of dung before him, in a dry old field, must have suggested to the Egyptians the First Principle that set the globe rolling. And so the scarab became the symbol of the creative principle—or something like that (p. 68).

We may be sure that Lawrence wants us to know more about the "sacred scarab" or "sacred beetle" than the Earl remembers from the works of the insectologist J. Henri Fabre (author of Insect Life, etc.). The Egyptians worshipped the sun as the God Ra—who was represented as a beetle—and not only as creator of the universe (the Earl's "creative principle—or something like that") but also, and at least as significantly, as the model of resurrection. The scarab is thus associated with the resurrection of the Count. In one of his functions, the Count is no doubt a sun god, Ra, or (since he also is a symbol of Osiris) perhaps Osiris' son, Horus, who was in many ways identical to Ra, and who, just as Osiris reigned in the underworld, was the god of the sky. It is also possible to associate Ra more directly with Osiris, if the latter's resurrection is thought of, not so much as meaning that he will live on in darkness as, eventually, in light. One's impression is that Lawrence, to some extent, separates the sun god (Ra, Horus) and the god of the underworld (Osiris), in that the Count, although he worships the sun, will probably continue to live in darkness rather than that he seems to be thought of as returning to light; as he explains "I have no power in the day" (p. 75). It was common to identify the living Pharaoh with Horus and to think of the dead Pharaoh as "assimilated to Osiris." However, Lawrence probably tries to combine Horus and Osiris by the concept of the dark sun. When, in February, Daphne decides to put the Count "in the sun" (p. 23), we might be inclined to think of the sun as Horus, separate from the Count as
Osiris, who, now that it is early spring, appears to be returned to life on earth. Probably, however, we must see what is happening here as a quasi-revival: the Count’s true existence is in the realm of death, and it would be our mistake if we considered it desirable for him to return to daylight. He does not need the light of day, since the sun is dark. Hence it is that the Count is presented as “seated in flame, in flame unconscious, seated erect, like an Egyptian King-god in the statues” (p. 75). Lawrence might be thinking here of the fanatical king Akhenaten, whose worship of the sun was obsessive, and who frequently had himself represented as sitting directly in the sun’s rays, but Lawrence’s point appears to be that the sun will be with one in the underworld, since it is dark. This is not to say, of course, that we do not receive the sun’s benefit on earth, only that we delude ourselves if we think that such benefit is to be associated with daylight, not with darkness.

Therefore, while there is nothing wrong with Daphne’s (Isis’) attempt to restore her damaged Osiris by exposing him to the sun, his body can only be made whole again in darkness. The Osiris myth is fairly closely followed. Like Osiris, who was murdered by his brother, Seth, the Count is injured by hostile action—not by a brother, it is true, but by people whom he had reason to regard as relatives, since Daphne’s mother “had known him when he was a boy, and only in the spring of 1914 he and his wife had stayed with Lady Beveridge in her country house in Leicestershire” (p. 11). As Isis, Daphne looks after him in order to bring him back to life; despite some rebellious moments, she does bloom in his presence (as daphne mezereum, the February daphne), and eventually becomes obedient, as Lawrence wished his women to be. This is appropriate in a heroine who must become like Isis, whom the Egyptians saw as an exemplary wife and nurse. Lawrence was no doubt familiar with the mysteries surrounding Isis in the Roman Empire. In these, there was emphasis on Isis’ seeking and finding Osiris (as Daphne does the Count); some say that sexual intercourse was part of the rites, symbolizing revival after seeming death.

At the beginning of the story, the Count is lying “quite still, with his eyes shut” (p. 10). It seems to Lady Beveridge that “He might be dead” (p. 11). The Count is, in fact, seeming-dead, like Osiris, and his quiet horizontal posture reminds one of the mummified Osiris: the em-
phasis on the face (p. 11) is fitting because, traditionally, this part of Osiris is visible. Meanwhile, I have also learned that the Count is a “Bohemian”—in other words, a gypsy—and as such is to be thought of as being of Egyptian origin.24 Lawrence is asking us to pay very close attention to his language, every word of which is worth pondering. Even Lady Beveridge notices what she calls the “primitive” element in the Count (p. 16) but is vague about his origin (“I suppose he must belong to one of those curious little aboriginal races of Central Europe” [p. 17]). Since the underworld is Osiris’ natural domain, it is logical for the Count to complain that people “draw me up, back to the surface” (p. 20).

It is Daphne’s task to make sure that he disappears below the surface again, into the underworld, where she will eventually join him forever, though, before her death, only intermittently. This is parallel to the myth, in that after his restoration by Isis, Osiris first lives in the underworld alone, until Isis herself dies and becomes the goddess who reigns with him in the underworld. Lawrence, no doubt, saw this situation as proper, in human terms. We may assume that he saw the man as living the new life of the lower consciousness before the woman could fully do so. She needed a longer period of learning. Of course, Lawrence realized that he would die before Frieda. Some have been inclined to see the ending as one in which “Lawrence is probably being true to his own experience with Lady Cynthia Asquith, finding a way of mythologising and giving value to a relationship in which his role, whatever he wished, had to remain limited.”25 I would suggest, instead, that Lawrence is mythologizing the central love triangle in his life, that of Frieda, her husband, and himself. His mythology would appear to rest on wishful thinking which we may reject as anti-feminist insofar as Frieda is expected to obey his orders (like sewing shirts); we may consider his attitude toward the Virgin Mary blasphemous and be appalled by his preference for the sinful woman and her physical worship of Christ. But this distaste is lessened if we see the deeper implications of the Osiris myth, which provided Lawrence with a way of coming to terms with death and separation from one’s beloved—a separation which would only be temporary. The celebration of adultery is less appealing, although it is modified by a curious tolerance of the husband. That tolerance, however, seems to be irrelevant if the story is primarily to be viewed as a version of the Osiris myth.

The answer is, I suggest, that Lawrence was not only concerned
with his death, and with separation from Frieda, but was also looking back at the time when he and Frieda “came through” and she left her husband. The only basic flaw in the artistry of “The Ladybird” is that Lawrence tried to conflate two incompatible elements; viz., (a) an adulterous situation in life, and (b) a separation from one’s beloved in death.

On the other hand, this conflation enabled him to contrast the “dark” Count and the “white” Basil. Without this contrast, it would have been more difficult to get across the message about dark love and the desirability of death. In all respects, the radicalism of Lawrence’s thought would have been much harder to convey.

To me, “The Ladybird” is far less important for its “thought” than as an astonishingly clever and gripping mythic artifact. It has not been possible, within the scope of one article, to deal with all elements of Lawrence’s mythmaking. I think, however, that I have identified most of Lawrence’s major sources and shown what he does with them. The basic framework should now be clear to readers who further wish to explore the background and meaning of “The Ladybird.” It yields more and more the longer it is studied, provided that one does not read it as though it were meant to be realistic and is willing to inform oneself about the mythic materials upon which Lawrence is building. At the same time, there is no merit in mere “source-hunting.” As we have seen, Lawrence wishes us to become aware of the significance of the traditions to which he gives such startling new life, destroys, transforms, and combines into a vision which is at once revolutionary and conservative, yet brilliantly coherent.

NOTES


2 Cf. The Dark Sun (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), pp. 205-06, where Hough quotes Lawrence’s statement and briefly discusses “The Ladybird,” which he regards as “a failure.”

3 F. R. Leavis, in D. H. Lawrence: Novelist (London: Chetwo & Windus, 1957), p. 64. typically—and influentially—misconceives the mode of the tale as though it is in the tradition of Anna Karenina, complaining about the ending, for example, that it “must affect us as something like an attempt to conjure the actual world, with its interests and problems, away.” The ending, however, is a perfectly logical conclusion to a tale which, all along, does not share Leavis’ kind of interest in “the actual world.”


6 It is a measure of the current lack of awareness of Lawrence's source materials that they are not dealt with in such popular handbooks as Pinion's or Philip Hobsbaum's A Reader's Guide to D. H. Lawrence (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1981), pp. 104-06. Even a mere listing of the main sources would have proved potentially useful to the many readers of such books; unfortunately, however, scholars have neither known which sources underlie "The Ladybird" nor bothered to find out.

7 I quote dates of publication only. In its final version, "The Ladybird" was apparently composed in December 1921. Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious dates from 1919-20 and Fantasia of the Unconscious from May-July 1921 (cf. Jones, pp. 2-3 and Pinion, p. 25). Both works were published together 1923 (rpt. London: Heinemann, 1971). We may assume that, when finishing "The Ladybird," Lawrence was still much preoccupied with his concerns in the tracts, particularly the significant Fantasia.

8 The preoccupation with the superiority of the "lower consciousness" to the "upper consciousness" if, of course, related to Lawrence's changed attitude toward his father and his mother. It is significant that the lower consciousness is not only thought of as located in the lower part of man's body but also as situated in the bowels of the earth, where, as a miner, Lawrence's father worked.

9 For an elaborate account of the function of the eyes and the teeth in the story, cf. Jones, pp. 7-11.

10 All quotations are from Three Novellas (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960; rpt. 1970). "The Ladybird" was first published by Martin Secker in 1923, together with "The Fox" and "The Captain's Doll."

11 For further discussion of the matter, especially as it concerns these authors, see John B. Vickery, The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

12 Cf. the abridged 1922 version (rpt. London: Macmillan, 1963, from which I quote [p. 517]). I have not been able to decide which of the several versions Lawrence knew. As Frazer explains, "the enquiry has branched out in more and more directions, until the two volumes of the original work [1890] have expanded into twelve."

13 Frazer refers to Easter ceremonies which resemble the rites of Adonis (p. 454); he speaks of a Christian tradition which "placed the death of Christ on the twenty-third and his resurrection on the twenty-fifth of March. If that was so, his resurrection coincided exactly with the resurrection of Attis" (p. 475); Frazer claims that we need not wonder that "the serene figure of Isis" should have roused in people's breasts "a rapture of devotion, not unlike that which was paid in the Middle Ages to the Virgin Mary" (p. 505). (The importance of this remark is that it draws a parallel between Isis and Mary and, thus, between Osiris and Christ.)
14 I refer to Geoffrey Keynes, ed., Poetry and Prose of William Blake (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1927; rpt. 1948), but we do not know which edition(s) Lawrence used, and all references to Blake in this essay can also readily be found in other editions, provided they contain the compositions on which Lawrence most drew: the Songs of Innocence and Experience and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.


16 I use Thomas Hutchinson, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley (London: Oxford University Press, 1904; rpt. 1925), which Lawrence may actually have used; although, as in Blake’s case, we do not know.

17 Note the language, which resembles Arnold’s famous comment on Shelley.

18 Presumably, Basil here assumes the role of St. Basil (c. 330-79), Doctor of the Church, also called Basil the Great, known for his asceticism and his influence on monasticism in the Orthodox Church.


20 In “Two Missing Pages from ‘The Ladybird’” (Brian H. Finney’s transcript of an omitted passage, in The Review of English Studies, 1973, 191-92), it is clear that the hammer, in Lawrence as in Wagner, is also to be used for constructive purposes. The Wagnerian influence is very striking in the reference to Daphne’s hair as being “like underwater gold” (p. 192); this can be no other than Wagner’s “Rhinegold,” which gives its name to the first part of his Ring. Lawrence combines Alberich’s lust for the Rhinemaidens with his lust for power. Significantly, Daphne has just quoted from Swinburne’s “The Garden of Proserpine,” a poem which, together with the “Hymn to Prosperpine,” is highly relevant to what Lawrence is doing and which reinforces the connection with Wagner (Cf. also especially Swinburne’s “Laud Veneris”).

21 This, like the Ring, can be studied in the edition by Ernst Eulenburg (London, n. d.; contains German-French-English and the musical score), or, more conveniently, in Stewart Robb’s translation (with English and German on facing pages; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1965).

22 Wagner’s adulterous passion for Mathilde Wesendonck (wife of a benefactor), which underlies Tristan and Isolde, of course appealed to Lawrence, who knew much about just this kind of triangle.

23 Cited by Pinion, p. 228.
24 Cf. the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s comments on *Bohemian* and *gipsy*.