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Book Review: Future Primitive

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D.H. Lawrence: Future Primitive. Dolores LaChapelle. Introduction by Thomas J. Lyon. Volume 6. Philosophy and the Environment. University of North Texas Press, Denton, Texas, 1996.

D.H. Lawrence was one of the most controversial authors of the first half of the twentieth century. His novels were considered bold by some and pornographic by others.

Dolores LaChapelle interprets D.H. Lawrence as an advocate of the deep, long-range ecology movement. She argues that only now, six decades after his death, are we able to understand what Lawrence was trying to tell us. The discourse of the deep ecology movement has developed since Lawrence's death in 1930 and provides a philosophical context for his intuitions.

Lawrence's intimate relationship with nature developed during his early childhood in a mining district of England that retained some of the 'old ways' - local, place-based knowledge.

LaChapelle shows that Lawrence had a deep relationship with trees, with the moon and with plants throughout his life. He searched throughout his life for cultures that still express the 'old ways.'

In his novels Lawrence was attempting to move beyond the rationalism and intellectualism of his contemporaries. LaChapelle argues that Lawrence was expressing the intuitions of a "future primitive." Human ecologist Raymond Dasmann coined the term "future primitive" to characterize primordial human experiences that have been submerged in modern industrial societies. In a provocative essay published in 1976, Dasmann wrote "I cannot see much hope for the future of either parks or people, unless some of the old sense of belonging to a natural world, of being a part of nature, and not hostile to it is restored."

Drawing on the work of ecologists and psychologists of the past several generations, LaChapelle shows that Lawrence's insights concerning eroticism, ritual, the erotic relationship between men and between men and women, and early childhood experiences in 'free nature' are relevant to our continuing search for harmonious and balanced living on the Earth.

The incredible vilification and persecution that many intellectuals and religious leaders heaped on Lawrence came from the fear that his critics had of the power of place, ritual, sexuality, pantheism, and spontaneous awakening to the joys of living. Lawrence's joy in his own polymorphous sexuality is expressed explicitly in his novels and essays.

LaChapelle clearly identifies with Lawrence's struggle to find a language to

express his intuitions. She shows parallels between her own experiences living among hardrock miners in the high mountains of southern Colorado, searching for intellectual justifications for her deep ecological intuitions and Lawrence's struggles to find a discourse to express the primitive while participating in the milieu of European intellectuals during the first decades of this century.

LaChapelle brings together extensive scholarship and a clear writing style to this book. Readers are rewarded with extensive commentary based on ancient philosophies and contemporary ecology that support the insights not only of D.H. Lawrence but the intuitions shared by many supporters of the deep, long-range ecology movement. This book will inspire supports of the movement who feel misunderstood or unable to express their intimate intuitions of deep ecocentrism when faced with the intensive political oppression of modern and post-modern society.

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