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### The resolution of conflict in the fiction of D. H. Lawrence.

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THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT IN THE FICTION  
OF D. H. LAWRENCE

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

William Sterett Bowmer

June 1941

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Title of Thesis: The Resolution of Conflict in the  
Fiction of D. H. Lawrence

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	ii
II. THE RESOLUTIONS OF CONFLICT	
A. Major Fiction . . . . .	1
B. Minor Fiction . . . . .	49
C. The Plays . . . . .	59
III. CRITIQUE	
A. Foreword . . . . .	62
B. The Question of Sexuality . . . . .	68
C. Materialism or Not . . . . .	91
D. Orthodox and Unorthodox Religiosity .	103
E. Art and The Artist . . . . .	107
F. Loneliness, The Masses, and World Weariness . . . . .	112
G. Configurations of the Ego . . . . .	124
H. The Man as a Political Animal . . . .	130
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	138

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of this thesis is twofold: first, to examine the resolutions of conflict in the fiction of D. H. Lawrence; then, to determine from these resolutions of conflict the motivating impulses of D. H. Lawrence as a man and artist.

The choice of this method seemed justified because it was at once the most inclusive and most precise procedure.

In the preliminary evaluation of the fiction it appeared that some inclusive standard must be set for every novel. The standard demanded must provide the possibilities of comparison among the various works and the clarification of Lawrence's art as a twentieth century product. Clearly the old tags of style analysis or a statistical survey of content in terms of character, plot and dialogue would be inadequate for the flexure and energy of Lawrence's fiction: the strict psychological and ideational impulses had already been explored.<sup>1</sup> The standard of method of evaluation decided upon was an examination of the resolutions of conflict. That is to say, an isolation

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<sup>1</sup> Son of Woman by John Middleton Murry, (Cape and Smith, New York, 1931); D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow by William York Tindall, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1939)

of the various means by which Lawrence brings peace, understanding, satisfaction or fulfillment to his characters. Sometimes, indeed, the resolution of conflict implies understanding for the reader rather than surcease for the troubled character. For example, the death of Crich in Women In Love can not be considered satisfactory from the point of view of that character; on the other hand, it is illuminating for the reader. In this thesis, in every case, resolution of conflict shall mean the disposition of problems.

It is, of course, a truism that there is no drama without conflict. And the fiction of D. H. Lawrence is highly dramatic. That is to say, it presents social and psychological tensions that strain for equilibrium. In the solution of any conflict much is told of the author and his times. A comparison of Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe and Odets' Waiting For Lefty in this regard might seem fatuous in the extreme but it serves to illustrate the mutations of human thought and experience. In fact the resolution of conflict might be said to be the definitive element of fiction for it involves the climax and the tapering off, the cumulative interpretation of the facts of the story and the final disposition of them. It has the virtue of being inclusive insofar

as the molecular processes of plot and character development are concerned. In other words, the resolution of conflict is a synthesis of all major elements.

The effort to be made in this thesis is to examine the resolution of conflict in Lawrence's most important fiction. This evidence will be correlated with the author's personality and career, as well as with his social background. Finally, on the basis of these facts, explanation will be given as to why the conflicts in the fiction were resolved as they were, and why the author was incapable of resolving the conflicts differently, either in literature or life.

It should be added that the resolution of conflict is not always a simple and easily determinable factor. This is particularly true of D. H. Lawrence whose regard for the mechanics of novel production was never high. Sometimes the climax and its ebbing are quick and violent; sometimes they stretch through many pages. But for the sake of clarity the resolution of conflict will here mean what is essential in solving the anxieties or compulsions that baffle and perplex the persons of the fiction.

It will be noted that one category of resolution has been entitled sexual frustration. On the face of it this nomenclature must seem contradictory, for

frustration can hardly be called a device which brings satisfaction or peace. Yet in D. H. Lawrence sexual frustration is such a frequent experience that it assumes the proportions of a concomitant resolution of conflict; for it represents a trial of sex as a means to solving social and personal problems.

Besides the novels, the most famous and characteristic of Lawrence's short stories and novelettes have been included for analysis. Finally, his three plays are judged in the same fashion.

Such special psychological questions as arise from the interpretation of the dreams in Aaron's Rod and Kangaroo have not been considered. The rationale was that a more elaborate examination in psychological terms was necessary than would benefit the general pre-suppositions of this thesis. Further, it was believed that the definitive aspects of Lawrence's mental and emotional behavior were sufficiently discussed in relation to the resolutions of conflict.

It is expected that this method of analyzing D. H. Lawrence will accomplish a clearer understanding of his literary achievements; for the resolutions of conflict, once revealed and considered, bring to a focus the personality of D. H. Lawrence and his environmental matrix. One deficiency of this method is its



neglect of the more purely aesthetic questions of style and craftsmanship. Although the method is not mechanical, it tends to be synthetic rather than analytical; and the result is an imbalance of content.

The primary sources for this thesis were, of course, the extensive writings of Lawrence. This included all fictional works, regardless of length or reputation, plays; essays on politics, psychology and religion; and finally the life span of his letters. In the discussion of the resolutions of conflict much of this was irrelevant, though interesting. To be included in this category, for example, were such works as Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Fantasia of the Unconscious. The major premises of the thesis were drawn from an acquaintance with the writings of Lawrence. But invaluable suggestions and details were obtained from the canon of works on Lawrence's life and work. Foremost among these were the works of Hugh Kingsmill, John Middleton Murry, Catherine Carswell, and William Y. Findall.

For more embracing sociological and psychological material, such general texts as John Dewey's Human Nature and Conduct, Dr. Karen Horney's The Neurotic Personality of Our Time, and Thorstein Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class were consulted.

## PART II

### THE RESOLUTIONS OF CONFLICT

#### A. The Major Fiction

##### 1.

The first novel D. H. Lawrence ever wrote was The White Peacock. Although he had written poems and essays this was his first important work in fiction. It was printed in 1911 and is characteristic of what may be called Lawrence's first period of craftsmanship. The work of this period is notable for its pastoral quality and for its interest in characters and events whose significance is limited to an interpretation of Lawrence's early life. There is, as a result, a certain health in narrowness, for the characters are not symbolic and there is no emphasis, as in later novels, on a world of total decay.

When it is said that this is an autobiographical novel, some qualifications must be made. That is, the pivotal character, Cyril, is clearly a portrait of D. H. Lawrence. Furthermore, the setting is that of Lawrence's youth, and in conjunction with the story of Cyril and Emily, anticipates large sections of Sons and Lovers. Of course, it is not as strict autobiography as Sons and Lovers since Lawrence has made his sister and his companions middle class characters circulating in a more

pretentious world than was true in fact, or in Sons and Lovers. On the other hand, the basic responses to life, civilization and nature which motivated Lawrence as a young man are clearly delineated.

The first third of The White Peacock is essentially a survey of a happy country existence with its complements of young friendship (George and Cyril), young love (Leslie and Lettie, Cyril and Emily), walks, parties, and rural livelihood. Cyril, a sensitive and delicate young man, is the counterpart of D. H. Lawrence. The scenes of the story are obviously taken from the locale Lawrence knew as an adolescent.

One character injected into this rambling autobiographical novel has no relation to the organic unity of the story. It is clear that Lawrence used this character, Annable, the brutal gamekeeper, because he was interesting personally for his brief career in the story is totally independent of other incidents or personalities. Yet the puzzle of this is solved when the remarks by and about Annable are analyzed, for they reveal attitudes and impulses which fascinated Lawrence the length of his life, and which he could never integrate. It is seen, then, even in this novel which is so purely autobiographical and uncomplicated by mature experience or disillusion that the young author was

attracted to special ideas and personalities which seemed to give unity to life. For example, Annable says in praise of his children, "They can be like birds, or weasels, or vipers, or squirrels, so long as they ain't human rot, that's what I say."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, although Cyril tends to speculation and the cultivation of mind, mindlessness and a primitive repugnance for civilization are very attractive to him. In fact, Annable is essentially an idealized figure who lives independently of the petty vexations of civilized and domestic life. He had been well educated and married to a wealthy girl but found the orthodoxy of conventional middle or upper class life suffocating. "He was a man of one idea: -- that all civilization was the painted fungus of rottenness."<sup>3</sup>

The story progresses. The happy young years are succeeded by maturity and responsibility. Lettie, the sister of Cyril, marries Leslie, a well-to-do young man of the community, although she is much attracted to George, Cyril's farmer friend. Here, of this marriage, the resolution of conflict involves

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<sup>2</sup> The White Peacock by D. H. Lawrence, (Duckworth and Co., London, 1924), p. 202

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 245

child-bearing, for Lettie says that her child shall be her career. Meanwhile, her husband has become immersed in politics; and her great wealth has not succeeded in developing Lettie but has only made her wasteful and affected.

Having reached that point in a woman's career when most, perhaps all, of the things in life seem worthless and insipid, she had determined to put up with it, to ignore her own self, to empty her own potentialities into the vessel of another or others, and to live her life at second hand. This peculiar abnegation of self is the resource of a woman for escaping the responsibilities of her own development.<sup>4</sup>

This is an important passage in any study of D. H. Lawrence for it indicates both his honesty and bewilderment in viewing twentieth century life among the middle and upper layers of society. In other words, at the beginning of his literary career when his experience was limited to village life and school teaching he sensed the profound question of personal entelechy in the modern age. Here in a story of simple, almost picaresque quality, the resolution of conflict for the lovely intelligent Lettie is--motherhood. Lawrence obviously has no notion of preaching or symbolising characters to represent universal truths. Yet in so personal and unconfounded a novel as this the problem

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<sup>4</sup> Lawrence, op. cit., p. 296

of what to do with a life to insure contentment has reached the stage of reflection. That the role of intense motherhood is not entirely satisfactory is indicated by Lettie's remark: "I seem full of passion and energy, and it all fizzles out in day-to-day domestics."<sup>5</sup>

The concomitant resolution of conflict is, then, an acceptance of boredom.

But the sense of a twilight maturity after a bright afternoon of youth is not limited to Lettie. Cyril was never able to have a complete understanding with Emily, the sister of George. He moves away to the city, and the old country existence assumes a dream-like quality which is enhanced by visits to the farm. Emily and Cyril are tied to one another by deep psychic threads but overtly there is little communion or intimacy. On one of his final visits Cyril finds Emily engaged to a young man of the neighborhood. He does not approve but cannot believe he should marry her himself. There is no resolution of conflict here, only dissatisfaction. But Lawrence is writing too close to his own experience to trick either himself or his readers with a happy ending.

George, the friend of Cyril, loves Lettie but marries, Meg, whose old grandmother owns a tavern. At

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence, op. cit., p. 301

the death of the grandmother, the tavern provides an easy living for George. He drifts into dissipation and gambling, always feeling lonely and futile. He, too, finds life not a satisfactory or creative process. Of marriage, anticipating Lawrence's own experience, he says: "I think marriage is more of a duel than a duet. One party wins and takes the other captive, slave, servant,--what you like."<sup>6</sup>

Meg bears him children but the wastefulness of his life and the hopeless love for Lettie are too appalling; the result is continual drunkenness. The story ends on a note of drunken delirium and the desire for death. The resolutions of George's conflicts are an acceptance of frustration, drunkenness and the desire for death.

The significance of this first novel is immense for the future development of D. H. Lawrence. In it are found the efforts of a talented and immature author to tell a pleasant autobiographical story. But insensibly the strictures of a complex environment and the artist's unerring sense of falsity and corruption make such a tale idyllic only when the aspects of physical nature are dealt with. The final answers for George

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence, op, cit., p. 304

and Lettie are death and boredom; for Cyril, a feckless detachment.

One final word from the novel reveals Lawrence's preknowledge that his relations with women would not or could not be complete. After an early morning bath with George the passage reads:

When he had rubbed me all warm, he let me go, and we looked at each other with eyes of still laughter, and our love was perfect for a moment, more perfect than any love I have known since, either for man or woman.

This cannot be interpreted seriously as homosexuality but must be treated as, even then, a passionate desire for some relation that would give unity and fullness.

## 2.

The Trespasser is the second in the sequence of Lawrence novels. It is probably the worst bit of writing the author has published. The plot and locale are quasi-idyllic; they reveal a strained and self-conscious effort to depict a pair of introspective lovers on a four-day beach holiday. The dialogue is full of sententious generalities on existence; the characters are hazy and essentially trite.

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence, op. cit., p. 150



Briefly, the story concerns the affair of Helena and Siegmund. This last is a married man, aged thirty-eight, burdened with four children and a wife that bores him. Siegmund goes on an outing with Helena but it is an unhappy and unsatisfactory experience for both. The spectre of Laurentian sexual inadequacy comes again. For, as Siegmund says of Helena, "She ought to be rejoiced at me, but she is not; she rejects me as if I were a baboon under my clothing."<sup>8</sup>

Then:

Helena had rejected him. She gave herself to her fancies only. For some time she had confused Siegmund with her god. Yesterday she had cried to her ideal lover and found only Siegmund. It was the spear in the side of his tortured self-respect.<sup>9</sup>

Siegmund and Helena love one another. But the pressure of family obligations is constant. The conflict is whether to live with Helena and be needed by the thoughts of neglect of family or to assume the familial obligations and be miserable for want of Helena's love.

Siegmund resolves the conflict by hanging himself.

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<sup>8</sup> The Trespasser by D. H. Lawrence, (Duckworth and Co., London, 1912), p. 49

<sup>9</sup> The Trespasser, p. 158

## 3.

Sons and Lovers is the most famous of all the books of D. H. Lawrence. Its simplicity of structure as a piece of autobiography,<sup>10</sup> its straightforward narrative, essentially unconfused by sub-plots, its closeness to common experience and its vivid portrayal of character and conflict give it a unity and impact lacking in every other major work of fiction by the same author. It must be assigned to the early phase of Lawrence's fiction, with The White Peacock and The Trespasser, for it is essentially a personal narrative. That is to say, it views personality and action in the confines of special, limited situations and not in relation to wholesale corruption or a systematized philosophy. For example, the chief problem of Paul Morel in Sons and Lovers is the struggle against his mother-attachment in trying to win through to a wholesome relation with women he loved. The impulses and collisions of this struggle are related only to the personalized, accidental conditions of the characters and locale (e.g. Mrs. Morel's disappointment in her worker-husband, the nearness of Miriam's farm to Paul's village). Yet when

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<sup>10</sup> Son of Woman, p. 6: "'The first part of Sons and Lovers,' Lawrence wrote in an account of himself not many months before he died, 'is all autobiography.'"

this novel is compared to the important works of a later period the differences can be instantly detected; for example, in St. Mawr the chief characters of Mrs. Carrington, Lou Carrington, Phoenix and Lewis have almost no personal identity but represent various symbols of a world considered to be wholly corrupt and mechanized.

Much has been written of Sons and Lovers to explain its autobiographical context. For the purposes of this paper its psychological implications will be delayed until a summation of D. H. Lawrence's personal problems is made.

Sons and Lovers tells of the family and circumstances of Lawrence's early life. The mother, Mrs. Morel (i.e. Mrs. Lawrence), of bourgeois stock marries a warm-hearted miner. But the Puritan, ambitious, unyielding nature of Mrs. Morel makes any real intimacy or love in the husband-wife sense impossible.

The pity was, she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have him the much that he ought to be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. She injured and hurt and scarred herself, but she lost none of her worth. She also had the children.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sons and Lovers by D. H. Lawrence (Modern Library, New York, 1936), p. 21

The result of this situation is that Mrs. Morel makes her children her entire interest, and in doing so creates for them---especially her sons---a total mother-dependency which can have no other outcome except debility and frustration in other human relations. How deep is this hold, and how insistent Mrs. Morel is in maintaining it may be seen from the scene when Paul (i.e. D. H. Lawrence) returns home late, after an evening with Miriam. His mother has waited for him, angry at his attentions to a young woman who constitutes a threat to her maternal domination. After a fearful display of temper and fear and tears, Mrs. Morel says,

"I can't bear it. I could let another woman--but not her. She'd leave me no room, not a bit of room--."

And immediately he hated Miriam bitterly.

"And I've never--you know, Paul,--I've never had a husband--not really--."12

Summing up this devastating relation, John Middleton Murray has said,

Sons and Lovers is the story of Paul Morel's desperate attempts to break away from the tie that was strangling him. All unconsciously, his mother had roused in him the stirrings of sexual desire; she had, by the sheer intensity of her diverted affection, made him a man before his time. He felt for his mother what he should have felt for the girl of his choice.13

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence, op. cit., p. 252

<sup>13</sup> Son of Woman, p. 13

If this be a correct interpretation, and it seems to be, judging from its application to the whole range of Lawrence's writing, it makes clear the conflict which is central in Sons and Lovers. To repeat, the conflict is Paul Morel's frantic effort to adjust himself emotionally to other women when his nature has already hardened to the mold of a mother-fixation. As Lawrence says in writing of himself,

He had come back to his mother. Hers was the strongest tie in his life. When he thought round, Miriam shrank away. There was a vague, unreal sense about her. And nobody else mattered. There was one place in the world that stood solid and did not melt into unreality: the place where his mother was. Everybody else could grow shadowy, almost non-existent to him, but she could not. It was as if the pivot and pole of his life, from which he could not escape, was his mother.<sup>14</sup>

E. T. (Miriam) reinforces this statement with her own observations.

The situation was simply that his mother had claimed his love, all the spontaneous tenderness without which 'love' is a mockery. And having given it to her fully and unreservedly Lawrence had in truth no love to give anyone else, so that his agonized reiteration of his inability to love me was nothing but a bare statement of fact. It was the ineluctable position in which he found himself.

It was difficult to understand this in those days, but it was what Lawrence meant when he offered to 'go over the ground again and explain.'

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<sup>14</sup>

Sons and Lovers, pp. 261-262

The incredible thing was the exclusiveness and incapacitating nature of the mother-love.<sup>15</sup>

The first act of the tragedy involves Paul and Miriam, the shy sensitive girl who did so much to encourage Paul's artistic impulses. This affair fluctuates between tenderness and insults in the special rhythm of Paul's forgetfulness and awareness of his mother. Typical is the remark which Paul addresses to Miriam.

You don't want to love--your eternal and abnormal craving is to be loved. You aren't positive, you're negative. You absorb, absorb, as if you must fill yourself up with love, because you've got a shortage somewhere.<sup>16</sup>

In Sons and Lovers the affair of Paul and Miriam continues through uncertainties and doubts. Finally there comes the humiliation of an unsatisfactory physical culmination.

He continued faithful to Miriam. For one day he had loved her utterly. But it never came again. The sense of failure grew stronger. At first it was only a sadness. Then he began to feel he could not go on. He wanted to run, to go abroad, anything. Gradually he ceased to ask her to have him. Instead of drawing them together, it put them apart. And

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<sup>15</sup> D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record by E. T. (Jonathan Cape, London, 1935), p. 185

<sup>16</sup> Sons and Lovers, p. 257

then he realized, consciously, that it was no good. It was useless trying: it would never be a success between them.<sup>17</sup>

The reason for the despair was the dichotomy of Lawrence's nature: physical desire pulling him toward love while he was spiritually enfranchised by his mother. In her narrative, E. T. has revealed that the actual physical consummation of Sons and Lovers was a wish-fulfillment necessary both to the continuity of the novel and to Lawrence's personal pride. However, for the purposes of consistency this is nearly a poetic distinction, for if, in life, Lawrence had experimented as his reflection, Paul Morel, did, the result would have been the same; the failure of Lawrence's marital relations indicates this clearly.

As J. M. Murry puts it,

The indulgence of their 'passion' was disastrous, because it was not passion at all. On both sides it was deliberate and not passionate. Miriam's charity was passionate, but she had no sexual desire for Paul; Paul's need for the release and rest of sexual communion was passionate, but not his desire for Miriam. Each was a divided and tortured being. Miriam strove to subdue her body to her spirit, Paul strove to subdue his spirit to his body. They hurt themselves and they hurt each other.<sup>18</sup>

The resolution of conflict for the fundamental struggle of this first episode is trial and frustration.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 342-343

<sup>18</sup> Son of Woman, p. 18

In other words the conflict is not resolved specifically: Lawrence is still bound to his mother, still is attracted to women of his own age. Miriam was an unsuccessful episode.

According to Sons and Lovers, Paul rebounds from Miriam to Clara, a married woman. But in this relation, too, there is little satisfaction. As Paul says to Baxter Dawes, Clara's former husband, "She never really hitched on to me--you were always there in the background. That's why she wouldn't get a divorce."<sup>19</sup>

Paul might have added that this relieved him of casting Clara off himself; for in Lawrence the male is doomed in any case. Paul's second attempt to adjust himself sexually is as futile as the first, and for the same reason. Of this particular event E. T. has said that the physical consummation alluded to is as mythical as that involving the Miriam of the story.

Meanwhile Paul's mother has died. The shock of her death temporarily drives out the striving for sexual balance and substitutes a more terrible problem; that is, how to live at all. "She (Mrs. Morel) was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this. And she was

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<sup>19</sup>

Sons and Lovers, p. 472



gone, intermingled herself. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her.<sup>20</sup>

This conflict is solved by the determination to live, not to follow his mother into the grave.

The chief conflict of Sons and Lovers, namely, the struggle of Paul to equate himself sexually though burdened by his mother dependency, is not resolved. It lapses into abeyance due to the frustration of the serious efforts to solve it; and due to the death of Mrs. Morel. In discussing this central aspect it can be said that the definitive episodes are those dealing with the relations of Paul, Miriam and Clara. There is no specific resolution of conflict that is left to the future; there is only trial and frustration--the essential question is delayed.

Why the conflict was not resolved, of course, depended on the irreconcilible elements contending; and on Lawrence's youth and immaturity. Nevertheless, that he was under the complete spell of his mother and made little effort to face the realities of her domination appears in E. T.'s story. She says that Sons and Lovers was a shock to her not only because it violated the true spirit of her relation with Lawrence, but because it

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Lawrence, op. cit., p. 491

idealized Mrs. Lawrence in contradiction to facts, and to the detriment of every other character in the book.

Hugh Kingsmill has made nearly the same observation:

The reader receives a different impression from Sons and Lovers from that which Lawrence wished to convey. Mrs. Morel, dying of cancer, does not emerge as her husband's victim, but as a person who has been devoured by her own maternal possessiveness and social ambitions. Her husband had attracted her physically, but as soon as that attraction is exhausted she makes him pay for her disappointed aspirations, social and intellectual, by turning him into the pariah of the home circle. With her sons she is equally ruthless, trying to center their emotions on herself by her ceaseless self-pity, and struggling to monopolize their love at the expense not only of their father but also of the girls by whom they are attracted. Morel, jovial and loving, lacks his wife's force, tenacity and quick-wittedness, and is to that extent her inferior. He needs to be supported by affection, and as he receives nothing but contempt he loses his self-respect, and outlawed by his wife and children, retaliates by exaggerating the coarse habits which offended their gentility. The tragedy of Gertrude and Walter Morel is that all the will is on one side and all the heart on the other.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.

Although Lawrence had been in Europe with Frieda nearly a year when Sons and Lovers was published, it belongs to his early period. The problems presented are considered for their own isolated interest and are not projected as significant in any but a limited social ambit. The acrid discontent with life and the passionate

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<sup>21</sup> The Life of D. H. Lawrence by Hugh Kingsmill (Dodge Publishing Company, New York, 1938), p. 13

desire to provide a categorical imperative for conduct which infuse the later novels are lacking in Sons and Lovers. The Rainbow, which was Lawrence's next major effort in fiction, bridges the gap between the tendencies of the earlier and later work. It is close to the category of The White Peacock and Sons and Lovers in that it is pastoral and unconfounded by large questions of political and social import; but it is similar to the late work in its emphasis on characters as symbols (e.g. Ursula as the sensuous, mindless woman) and in its treatment of sexual relations as an unending, exhausting, frustrating battle.

It must be remembered that The Rainbow is by no means complete in itself. Its sequel, Women In Love, not only brings to conclusion the conflicts begun in The Rainbow but as a work of art carries the thought and creation of Lawrence to the completest maturity of which he is capable; however, in this case, maturity does not connote greater excellence. Sons and Lovers seems a greater novel than The Rainbow because it is free of the vagaries and dissidence of The Rainbow.

Basically, The Rainbow is a story of three generations with reference to the love problems of each. The first of this series tells of Tom Brangwen and his

wife Anna. The match is successful in a formal way but both parties feel a serious lack that finds articulate expression in conflicts of will, and in what anticipates Lawrence's preoccupations of the future: indifference, anger, sexual misunderstanding. The resolution of conflict here is nothing more than a dull acceptance, within the bounds of married life, of a relation that is binding but not vital.

This phase is dispensed with early in the book to make way for the consideration of Will Brangwen (Tom's young cousin) and Anna, the daughter of Anna Brangwen by a first marriage. Of the early days of this marriage it is said,

Inside the room was a great steadiness, a core of living eternity. Only far outside, at the rim, went on the noise and the destruction. Here at the center the great wheel was motionless, centered upon itself. Here was a poised unflawed stillness that was beyond time, because it remained the same, inexhaustible, unchanged, unexhausted.<sup>22</sup>

But this satisfaction does not last. Between them come misunderstandings and bitterness, a repetition of the man-woman conflict so prevalent in Lawrence. Sexual frustration nags these characters. The desire to achieve unity approaches morbidity.

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The Rainbow by D. H. Lawrence (Modern Library, New York, 1932), p. 135

This was what their love had become, a sensuality violent and extreme as death. They had no conscious intimacy, no tenderness of love. It was all the lust and the infinite, maddening intoxication of the senses, a passion of death.<sup>23</sup>

The resolutions of conflict for these two characters, Will and Anna, are different. Anna finds peace in the bearing of children; Will simply accepts as final an unsatisfactory sexual relation.

The last half of The Rainbow is given over to the love-problems of Ursula, daughter of Will and Anna. She becomes attracted to a young army officer, Anton Skrebensky. The result is a fearful repetition of the struggle and disappointment incident to an incomplete sexual relation.

And at such moments, when he was mad with her destroying him, when all his complacency was destroyed, all his everyday self was broken, and only the stripped, rudimentary, primal man remained, demented with torture, her passion to love him became love, she took him again, they came together in an overwhelming passion in which he knew he satisfied her.

But it all contained a developing germ of death. After each contact, her anguished desire for him or for that which she never had from him was stronger, her love was more hopeless. After each contact his mad dependence on her was deepened, his hope of standing strong and taking her in his own strength was weakened.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 222

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 436-437

The final episode of this frantic and unpleasant relation follows:

He came direct to her, without preliminaries. She held him pinned down at the chest, awful. The fight, the struggle for consummation was terrible. It lasted till it was agony to his soul, till he succumbed, till he gave way as if dead, and lay with his head buried, partly in her hair, partly in the sand, motionless, as if he would be motionless now for ever, hidden away in the dark, buried, only buried, he only wanted to be buried in the goodly darkness, only that, and no more.<sup>25</sup>

So ends The Rainbow. As a novel it is formless and inchoate. The recurring theme in each of the three generations was sexual conflict; the resolution of that conflict was in every case essential frustration.

##### 5.

The novel which follows The Rainbow in point of time is its sequel, Women In Love. Ursula Brangwen is a central character in this novel as in The Rainbow. In Women In Love Lawrence has finally broken with the limited, pastoral, strictly autobiographical method which characterized his early work. Again the reader is made aware of the same terrific sexual discord which shattered the relationship of the preceding lovers: Paul Morel and Miriam, Tom Brangwen and Anna, Will

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<sup>25</sup>

Ibid., p. 452

Brangwen and Anna, Skrebensky and Ursula. The psychological cleavage which tortured Lawrence is still manifest.

But there is much else significant in this novel. For the first time Lawrence distills into his writing the sense of the great social and economic pressures of his time. Principally this is seen in his documented insistence on decay.

"...I abhor humanity, I wish it was swept away. It could go and there would be no absolute loss if every human being perished tomorrow. The reality would be untouched. Nay, it would be better. The real tree of life would then be rid of the most ghastly, heavy crop of Dead Sea Fruit, the intolerable burden of myriad simulacra of people, an infinite weight of mortal lies."

"So you'd like everybody in the world destroyed?" said Ursula.

"I should indeed."

"And the world empty of people?"

"Yes, truly."<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the book admits a wider range of character in the persons of Gerald Crich and Lady Hermione; and finally the chief characters of the drama take on a symbolic significance that makes them less plausible in terms of lay experience but more important from the point of interpreting Lawrence's unique philosophic concepts. For example, Ursula is the archetype of the mindless, sensual, insistent woman who forever

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<sup>26</sup> Women In Love by D. H. Lawrence (Modern Library, New York, 1938), pp. 143-144

creates a tension of will with her lover unless she is sensible enough to submit to him entirely. Catherine Carswell has said of the Characters of Women In Love,

I asked him (Lawrence) why must he write of people who were so far removed from the general run, people so sophisticated and 'artistic' and spoiled that it could hardly matter what they did or said? To which he replied that it was only through such people that one could discover whither the general run of mankind, the great unconscious mass, was tending.<sup>27</sup>

In general, Women In Love may be said to be the story of four young persons in their search for fulfillment or self-realization. Ursula learns to love Rudolf Birkin, an intelligent and sensitive school official who is goaded and troubled by the barrenness of his life as well as by the feckless people who inhabit his world. Birkin says to his friend Gerald Crich, a wealthy young industrialist,

"The old ideals are dead as nails--nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman--sort of ultimate marriage--and there isn't anything else."

"And you mean if there isn't the woman, there's nothing?" said Gerald.

"Pretty well that--seeing there's no God."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The Savage Pilgrimage, A Narrative of D. H. Lawrence by Catherine Carswell (Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1932), p. 38

<sup>28</sup> Women In Love, p. 64



Birkin's love, however, is an idea of two souls meeting somewhere in limbo; it is by no means the ordinary conception of love as a physical and spiritual intimacy. To Ursula he says, "So there is a final you and it is there I would want to meet you--not in the emotional, loving plane--but there beyond, where there is no speech and no terms of agreement."<sup>29</sup>

Apparently Ursula agrees to the validity of this tenuous experience and finds her satisfaction in it, too. In fact the boundaries of her life are considerably widened.

She had thought there was no source deeper than the phallic source. And now, behold, from the smitten rock of the man's body, from the strange marvelous flanks and thighs, deeper, further in mystery than the phallic source, came the floods of ineffable darkness and ineffable riches.<sup>30</sup>

For the sake of clarity in nomenclature this must be called a love beyond sex; in the words of Lawrence it was "neither love nor passion".<sup>31</sup> It is deeper than the phallic sources and must not be thought to be related to the phallic sources. The psychological explanation of this mystical and esoteric experience is inherent in the

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<sup>29</sup> Women In Love, p. 192

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 359

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 358

sexual experiences of the author. Unable to have a normal or creative relation with women, the novel presents him (in the guise of Birkin) as finding a new, more wonderful connection with a woman in a manner which negates sex and makes him a masterful "Egyptian Pharaoh" and his mate submissive and yielding, all conditions which were painfully absent in reality.

That Lawrence's sexual relations were unsatisfactory is borne out by all the friends who knew him; but more importantly, it was documented by himself, beginning with the terrible poem of marriage which starts,

The night was a failure  
but why not--?

In the darkness  
with the pale dawn seething at the window  
through the black frame  
I could not be free,  
not free myself from the past, those others--  
and our love was a confusion,  
there was a honor,  
you recoiled away from me.<sup>32</sup>

All through the novels which succeeded Sons and Lovers, Lawrence reveals himself as struggling for some fantastic mastery of his wife; and just as consistently is his wife shown to resist, and by that token, humiliate him. Mabel Dodge Luhan quotes Frieda Lawrence as saying

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<sup>32</sup> Look! We Have Come Through by D. H. Lawrence (B. W. Huebsch, New York, 1919), p. 30

that her husband was physically unattractive. In any case, Lawrence's pictures of himself in his novels show a frustrated and inadequate male. Finally, of course, such a novel as Lady Chatterley's Lover is inconceivable except as the product of the most terrible personal insufficiency.

There is one more circumstance to be enumerated for the resolution of conflict in Birkin's case. After the discovery of his new love beyond sex, in order to complete his breaking with orthodox customs and conventions, he decides to wander the world. "Let's wander off. That's the thing to do. Let's wander off."<sup>33</sup>

The other characters of the story are Gudrun, Ursula's sister and her lover, Gerald Crich. Crich is a cultivated young man, wealthy and successful in every conventional way. But he is hollow, really moribund with futility. There is no final satisfaction in his life with people, in his life as a businessman, in his life as a brother, son, friend, or lover. He comes to love Gudrun, finding in her beauty and general comprehension a pleasure that eased him completely.

He felt his limbs growing fuller and flexible with life, his body gained an unknown strength.

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<sup>33</sup> Lawrence, op. cit., p. 361

He was a man again, strong and rounded and he was a child, so soothed and restored and full of gratitude. And she, she was the great bath of life, he worshipped her.<sup>34</sup>

But this mood does not last. On an Alpine excursion Gudrun becomes dissatisfied with Gerald; she soothes him, indeed, but who will soothe and relieve her? She becomes interested in a decadent, cynical sculptor, one Loerke. This is the token of her complete disillusion with life as a whole, and her acceptance of an introspective anarchy which can only be classed as personal and philosophic nihilism.

In him (Gerald) she knew the world and had done with it. Knowing him finally she was the Alexander seeking new worlds. But there were no new worlds, there were no more men, there were only creatures, little, ultimate creatures like Loerke. The world was finished now, for her. There was only the inner, individual darkness, sensation within the ego, the obscene religious mystery of ultimate reduction, the mystical, functional activities of diabolic reducing down, disintegrating, the vital organic body of life.<sup>35</sup>

Gerald's protest against sexual frustration and Gudrun's interest in Loerke takes the form of a fight in the snow. After that he allows himself to freeze to death. The resolution of his conflicts was an attempt at sexual gratification--then suicide.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 394

<sup>35</sup> Women In Love, p. 515

As a final comment on this novel, J. M. Murry has written,

Women In Love is five hundred pages of passionate vehemence, wave after wave of turgid, exasperated writing impelled towards some distant and invisible end; the persistent underground beating of some dark and inaccessible sea in an underworld whose inhabitants are known by this alone, that they writhe continually, like the damned, in a frenzy of sexual awareness of one another; he (Lawrence) spends pages and pages describing the contortions of the first, the second, the third, and the fourth. To him they are utterly and profoundly different; to us they are all the same. And yet Mr. Lawrence has invented a language, as we are forced to believe he has discovered a perception for them. The eyes of these creatures are 'Absolved'; their bodies (or their souls: there is no difference in this world) are 'suspended'; they are 'polarised', they 'lapse out'; they have, all of them, 'inchoate' eyes. In this language their unending contortions are described; they struggle and writhe in these terms; they emerge from dark hatreds to darker beatitudes; they grope in their own slime to some final consummation in which they are utterly 'negated' or utterly 'fulfilled'.<sup>36</sup>

## 6.

The Lost Girl was written in 1920. It is the story of Alvina Houghton who breaks completely with the stuffy, middle class conventionalities of an English town. After she had reached maturity and completed her nurse's training, Alvina rots at home with her frail

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<sup>36</sup> Reminiscences of D. H. Lawrence by John Middleton Murry (Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1933), p. 216

father; she sings in the choir for diversion but her life is noticeably deficient in money and love. (She wanted, incidentally, "not mere marriage--Oh dear no! But a profound and dangerous inter-relationship.")<sup>37</sup> The primary problem throughout her early maturity is an unsatisfied desire for a lover.

One gap in the routine of mediocrity comes when her father buys a second-rate theatre and sets himself up as a cinema operator. Alvina plays the piano and associates with the vaudeville performers. By virtue of this bohemian, vulgar life she becomes declassee but the experience is more satisfactory for her than the stodgy bourgeois way of pretense and gentility.

While connected with the theatre she meets Kishwegan and her Natcha-Kee-Tawara troupe of dancing Indian Braves. One of the braves, Ciccio by name, is an Italian, and Alvina learns to love him. "It was the clean modelling of his dark, other-world face that decided her--for it sent a deep spasm across her."<sup>38</sup> It is important to note here that Ciccio is an exotic person, primitive, untouched by civilization. Alvina feels closer to his dark foreign nature than to any of

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<sup>37</sup> The Lost Girl by D. H. Lawrence (Thomas Seltzer, New York, 1921), p. 57

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 87

the personalities that are typically English or more familiar to the laity. After considerable coming and going, declarations of affection and signs of indifference, Alvina and Ciccio marry and start back to Italy in order that the background of their life may be as primitive and untouched as they. Alvina says fittingly of this affair, "His love did not stimulate her or excite her. It extinguished her." "She lived mindlessly within his presence."<sup>39</sup>

The section of Italy where Alvina and Ciccio lives is distinguished by a wild and barren physical terrain. The inhabitants are all peasants suitably free of any evidences of a mechanical civilization. Once, on awaking, Alvina is frightened by the strangeness of her new life. But with Ciccio again, "she felt his power and his warmth invade her and extinguish her. The mad and desperate passion that was in him sent him completely unconscious again, completely unconscious."<sup>40</sup> Finally, settled in the savagery and dirt so far from her English village, Alvina wonders if the peasant women all around her feel "the same helpless passion for the man, the same remoteness from

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<sup>39</sup> The Lost Girl, p. 195

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 201

the world's actuality."<sup>41</sup> In any case, she is happy and an expectant mother. Ciccio is called up for war-service but has made up his mind to return to her.

The resolution of conflict in this novel is an important prognosis of Lawrence's later work, for it contains his direct emphasis on exotic influences. Lawrence, it must be remembered, was an English miner's son married to a German aristocrat. Yet the surcease granted Alvina Houghton derives from her affair with the yellow-eyed, primitive Italian, Ciccio, who is obviously a creature of Lawrence's wish-fulfillment. This person could be no more credible to the post-war world as an example of human development than Alice in Wonderland or Frankenstein's monster.

It must be remembered, too, that this novel was produced after the searing experiences of the World War. Lawrence tends to ignore all the social problems of his time in this fiction but does deal specifically with the sterility of middle class respectability. The answer to this very actual sterility is, then, a love that "extinguished" Alvina and gave her a deep sense of "remoteness from the world's actuality". Ciccio, it is clear, is consistent from the point of view of character

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<sup>41</sup>

Ibid., p. 219



and effect. As an exotic human, and fanciful to a world numbed with wars and the horror of economic chaos, his effect in love is to enhance his dark alien personality by sending Alvina "completely unconscious". This resolution reflects a facet of the Lawrence schematism that has always been famous: the notion that love is a panacea for environmental ills. Or to put it otherwise, the sense that domestic and economic cares lapse into abeyance with the advent of sexual nexus. The "remoteness from the world's actuality" which Alvina felt was very necessary to make Lawrence's mysticism and confusion both palatable and credible in a post-war world gagged with inflation, revolts and the Treaty of Versailles.

## 7.

Aaron's Rod is perhaps the least conclusive of all Lawrence's novels; strictly speaking there is no resolution of conflicts for the chief conflicts remain unresolved. Yet efforts are made to answer puzzling questions of personal entelechy, and these must be addressed to understand the novel.

Aaron Sisson is ostensibly the prototype of Lawrence's father. He is a miner who plays the flute and is continually nagged by his wife and children.

To free himself from the trials of domesticity and a possessive wife he leaves home to wander on the face of the earth, supporting himself by musical activities. As the story unfolds it becomes increasingly clear that Aaron does not so much represent Lawrence's father as the recurrent image of a masculine D. H. Lawrence with the power to leave his wife.

Aaron's first experience with the broader aspects of human life outside his mining village evolves from his meeting with a decadent, bohemian group of intellectuals. One of them, Josephine, expresses her particular Zeitgeist: "I keep going on and on--I don't know what for--and It keeps going on and on--goodness knows what it's all for."<sup>42</sup> Later Aaron meets a man named Lilly who fascinates him. Lilly is manifestly a portrait of Lawrence himself; and his conflicts and problems are essentially the same as Aaron's (consistently, of course, since they are both the same person in life). An illustration of the relation between the two may be gained from the following definitive conversation. Aaron speaks first:

"But what's the good of going to Malta? Shall you be any different in yourself, in another place? You'll be the same there as you are here."

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<sup>42</sup> Aaron's Rod by D. H. Lawrence (Thomas Seltzer, New York, 1922), p. 78

"How am I here?"

"Why, you're all the time grinding yourself against something inside you. You're never free. You're never content. You never stop chafing."

Lilly dipped his potato into the water and cut out the eyes carefully. Then he cut it in two, and dropped it in the clear water of the second bowl. He had not expected this criticism.

"Perhaps I don't," said he.

"Then what's the use of going somewhere else? You won't change yourself."

"I may in the end," said Lilly.<sup>43</sup>

And that is precisely why the conflicts are unresolved. Lilly and Aaron both resent their wives.

(Lilly says of his wife: "She does nothing really but resist me: my authority, or my influence, or just me."<sup>44</sup>

The temporary solution for Aaron is to leave his wife and wander; Lilly may or may not leave his wife but in any case he wanders, too. Underneath the surface conditions of the novel is revealed a passionate desire to come to grips with self, to establish some personal peace by a lonely isolation. Yet in a conversation when Aaron tells Lilly of his view that love results simply because men are afraid of being alone, Lilly agrees. Later Aaron says,

"You can't keep on being alone. No matter how many times you've broken free....no matter how many times you've felt this...it wears off every time and you begin to roam around."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 206

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 208

<sup>45</sup> Aaron's Rod, p. 225

This is the expression of a highly personalized problem but it is inextricably woven with problems of the social order. These latter considerations are made pertinent by Aaron's contacts on his journey with emigres, dilettantes, revolutionists and aristocrats.

Both Lilly and Aaron agree that women should submit to men but in the novel no evidence of this as a reality is advanced. Lilly expresses, too, the desire that an aristocracy of worth should rule the world, but this is also an aborted issue. The story ends with Lilly telling Aaron that he should submit to the "greater soul in a man".

## 8.

Kangaroo was published in 1923, and it was probably composed during the early part of that year. Its locale is Australia where Lawrence lived for six months, but the overt action of the story is clearly imaginative and bears no actual similarity to Lawrence's career. It is typical of the later canon of Lawrence fiction in this respect, for it represents the author's effort to establish himself imaginatively in relation to the social and political epoch in which he lived.

The year 1923 was a significant one for world history. By that date the Treaty of Versailles was in

effect, Bolshevism had outlasted its enemies in Russia and fascism in Italy had come to power. Further, the spiritual exhaustion of the World War and the economic recovery that paralleled it were being felt. No real isolation from such trends was possible to any sensitive intellectual; and D. H. Lawrence, in his reading and wanderings, was made aware that the war had effected a change in social institutions that was nearly convulsive.

Although Kangaroo is full of mystical confusions and is palpably an autobiography of personal frustrations, throughout its meanderings and hazy plot runs the thread of political curiosity. The novel may be interpreted as a purely personal narrative; but close examination shows that here--once and for all--Lawrence grappled with the problem of integrating himself with specific political movements.

The protagonist of the story is Richard Lovatt Somers, really D. H. Lawrence. Somers, a writer, is living in Australia with his wife Harriet (i. e. Frieda Lawrence). The significance of Australia for the novel lies in the fact that it is a new, undeveloped country in contrast to the rigidity and surfeited caste-system of old Europe. Somers falls in with a workman, Jack,

who is a member of a fascist group of ex-soldiers.

Somers' first reaction to the political situation reflects his earlier, isolated attitude:

I really don't care about politics. Politics is no more than your country's housekeeping. If I had to swallow my whole life up in housekeeping I wouldn't keep house at all, I'd sleep under a hedge. Same with a country and politics. I'd rather have no country than be gulped in politics and social stuff.<sup>46</sup>

Somers revises his opinion later; the loneliness of his life, the gap between his affairs and the workaday millions presses him to seek some significant activity that will bind him as an individual to the social movements of the twentieth century. In a conversation with his wife, he says,

"...I feel I must fight out something with mankind yet. I haven't finished with my fellow men. I've got a struggle with them yet."

"But what struggle? What's the good? What's the point of your struggle? And what's your struggle for?"

"I don't know. But it's inside me, and I haven't finished yet. --To make some kind of an opening-- some kind of a way for the afterwards."<sup>47</sup>

But democracy is certainly not the way and the life. Somers says, "Oh, how I hate this treachery democratic Australia."<sup>48</sup> In one of Lawrence's own letters

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<sup>46</sup> Kangaroo by D. H. Lawrence (Thomas Seltzer, New York, 1923), p. 68

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 74

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 72

to his sister-in-law, Else, he writes of Australia:

This is the most democratic place I have ever been in. And the more I see of democracy, the more I dislike it. It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric lights and water-closets and nothing else. You never knew anything so nothing, nichts, nullus, niente, as the life here. They have good wages, they wear smart boots, and the girls all have silk-stockings; they fly around on ponies and in buggies--sort of low one-horse traps--and in motor cars. They are always vaguely and meaninglessly on the go. And it all seems so empty, so nothing it almost makes you sick.<sup>49</sup>

The fascist group tries to enlist Somers' active aid and participation. This is enhanced by the personal love of the fascist leader, an obese lawyer known as Kangaroo. Somers dawdles but never compromises himself. In speaking of the ideals the fascists share, he says,

"I believe that the men with the real passion for life, for living and not for having, I feel they now must seize control of the material possessions just to safeguard the world from all the masses who want to seize material possessions for themselves, blindly and nothing else."<sup>50</sup>

Somers' interest in the fascists lapses and he turns to the gradualist socialist faction led by Willie Struthers. It must be remembered that Somers' predictions for socialism would be weak, conditioned as

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<sup>49</sup> Not I, But the Wind by Frieda Lawrence (Viking, New York, 1934), p. 110

<sup>50</sup> Kangaroo, p. 111-112

they were by such attitudes as were expressed in his conversations with Jack. Jack, on one occasion, asks Somers,

"What do you think of Trades Unions, one way or another?"

"I dislike them on the whole rather intensely. They're just the nastiest profiteering side of the working man--they make a fool of him, too, in my opinion."<sup>51</sup>

A man with a strong anti-union bias could hardly be expected to behave as a militant socialist.

Somers, it is clear, cannot believe in either formal fascism or formal socialism; nor can he seem to embody his own activities in any party organization. The answer is one which Lawrence's writings have made famous: the integrity and indivisibility of self.

Somers wails,

Let me get back to my own self, hard and central in the centre of myself. I am drowning in this merge of harmlessness, this sympathetic humanity. Oh, for heaven's sake, let me crawl out of the sympathetic smear, and get myself clean again.

The only thing one can stick to is one's own isolate being, and the God in whom it is rooted. And the only thing to look to is the God who fulfills one from the dark. And the only thing to wait for is for men to find their aloneness and their God in the darkness. Then one can meet as worshippers, in a sacred contact in the dark.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 146

<sup>52</sup> Kangaroo, p. 328



This is mystic loneliness, deliberate isolation from worldly struggles, listening for the footfalls of the individual conscience. And suiting the deed to the word, R. L. Somers leaves Australia bound for America, another new land. Mystic isolation, then, is the resolution of conflict. Of course, the idea of withdrawal and contemplation is by no means confined to Kangaroo. During the World War in 1917, when Lawrence was confronted with the problem of peace agitation he wrote Catherine Carswell:

I felt, that as far as peace work, or any work for betterment goes, it is useless. One can only gather the single flower of one's own intrinsic happiness, apart and separate. It is the only faithful fulfillment. I feel that people choose the war, somehow, even those who hate it, choose it, choose the state of war and in their souls provoke more war, even in hating war. So the only thing that can be done is to leave them to it, and to bring forth the flower of one's own happiness, single and apart.

For those of us who can become single and alone all will become perfectly right. Don't be sad. In the innermost soul there is happiness, apart from everything.<sup>53</sup>

Lawrence's processes of rationalization are painfully obvious in this definitive quotation. As a sensitive man he was plagued by questions of social organization which he was unable to answer. Once he had convinced himself that "people choose the war" he

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<sup>53</sup> The Savage Pilgrimage, p. 86

had relieved himself of social responsibility, and mystic isolation was the only alternative.

## 9.

Lawrence wrote another book about Australia, this time in collaboration with M. L. Skinner who had asked his advice on her original manuscript. The title of the book is The Boy in the Bush and it concerns the life and times of Jack Grant, an English boy in the Australian bush. Although the novel is a product of two minds it unmistakably bears the touch of D. H. Lawrence.

Jack Grant is a strong, active young man who fearlessly loves, fights, and kills in the primitive Australian hinterland. Yet he is similar to D. H. Lawrence in his introspective doubts and agonies as well as in his distrust of simple love and friendship. In the bush Jack lives as a prospector. Later he kills his rival Esau and marries Monica whom he had always loved. Then he asks her sister Mary to be another wife to him, and the story ends with the prospect hinted that he may have still a third wife. It can be said that love or sex provides a resolution of some of Jack's conflicts. But there is more to the

settling of his bitter doubts, self-questionings, and misunderstandings than that naive device. For as a result of his private war on conventionality and simple bourgeoisification, Jack decides in favor of mystic isolation. Says he of himself, "He didn't want his fellow men. He didn't want that amiable casual association with them which took up so large a part of his life. It was a habit and a bluff on his part."<sup>54</sup>

Stemming from this craving and this dissatisfaction with life, comes a desire for and idealization of death.

Jack knew his Lord as the Lord of Death. The rich, dark mystery of death, which lies ahead, and the dark sumptuousness of the halls of death. Unless life moves on to the beauty of the darkness of death, there is no life, there is only automatism. Unless we see the dark splendour of death ahead, and travel to be lords of darkness at last, peers in the realms of death, life is nothing but a petulant, pitiful backing, life a frightened horse back to the stable, the manger, the cradle. But onward ahead is the great porch of entry into death, with its columns of bone-ivory. And beyond the porch is the heart of darkness, where the lords of death arrive home out of the vulgarity of life, into their own dark and silent domain, lordly, ruling the incipience of life.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The Boy in the Bush by D. H. Lawrence and M. L. Skinner (Thomas Seltzer, New York, 1924), p. 220

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 298

## 10.

The Plumed Serpent is D. H. Lawrence's most complete record of his responses to Mexican life. In it he carries to their conclusions the repetitions of thought and feeling which have been expressed in his novels through the war, and immediately afterward: horror of a mechanical world, delight in the primitive, sexual frustration, the yearning for a central purpose.

There is but one important character in the book, Kate. She is the wife of a deceased Irish revolutionary and is on a protracted visit in Mexico. Personally and philosophically Kate is dissatisfied with modern society; her life seems purposeless and empty, the people who surround her, dull and vapid. Furthermore, she objects to the mechanical concepts of Marxian socialism in relation to the Indians of Mexico. After seeing the famous Rivera murals she thinks,

In the many frescoes of the Indians, there was sympathy with the Indian but always from the ideal, social point of view. Never the spontaneous answer of the blood. These flat Indians were symbols in the great script of modern socialism, they were figures of the pathos of the victims of modern industry and capitalism. That was all they were used for: symbols in the weary script of socialism and anarchy.

Kate thought of the man polishing his oranges half an hour before: his peculiar beauty, a certain richness of physical being, a ponderous power

of the blood within him, and a helplessness, a profound unbelief that was fatal and demonish. And all the liberty, all the progress, all the socialism in the world would not help him. Nay, it would only help further to destroy him.<sup>56</sup>

At first Kate lives and breathes in Mexico with her European sensibilities but it is far from satisfactory. She thinks,

We must be born again...

And then, when she could escape into her true loneliness, the influx of peace and soft flower-like potency which was beyond understanding.... Above all things she must preserve herself from worldly contacts.... Only she wanted the silence of the other unfolded souls about her, like a perfume.<sup>57</sup>

On another occasion Kate says, "Give me the mystery and let the world live again for me!... And deliver me from man's automatism."<sup>58</sup>

With this burden of desire and sensitivity, Kate takes a bungalow in the heart of Mexico, far from the white tourist environment that has repelled her. Meanwhile she has come to know Don Ramon, the resurrector of a primitive religion whose god is Quetzalcoatl. In the words of Kate, who is paraphrasing Don Ramon's religious utterances, "We must take up the old, broken

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<sup>56</sup> The Plumed Serpent by D. H. Lawrence (Alfred Knopf Co., New York, 1933), p. 47

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 54-55

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 102

impulse that will connect us with the mystery of the cosmos again, now we are at the end of our own tether."<sup>59</sup>

In due time Kate becomes interested in the lieutenant of Don Ramon as a spiritual and physical companion. This is Don Cipriano, the leader of a supplementary religion identified with the ancient god, Huitzilopochtli.

Don Ramon is essentially autocratic as may be seen by the statement of his creed:

I would like to be one of the Initiates of the Earth. One of the Initiators. Every country its own Saviour, Cipriano: or every people its own Saviour. And the First Men of every people, forming a natural aristocracy of the world.<sup>60</sup>

The mystic, primitive religion is entirely satisfactory for Kate. The brutality, the blood-sacrifices, the cult of masculinity and its poetic expressions gave her the sense of fullness and health so lacking in her former old-world civilization. And so it can be said that this mysticism, this religiosity which is the creation of Lawrence's active imagination resolve the most distressing of Kate's problems.

Concomitantly, a love has flourished between Kate and Don Cipriano. The happy pair are married according to the unorthodox rites of Quetzalcoatl. As a result, "The hardness of self-will was gone, and the

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<sup>60</sup> The Plumed Serpent, p. 246

soft anemone of her deeps blossomed for him of itself, far down under the tides."<sup>61</sup> This, it is evident, was no ordinary union. In most fundamental respects it resembles the love beyond sex which proved so satisfactory for Ursula and Rupert in Women In Love. In a manner recalling Ursula's beatitude (p. 27) Kate,

...realised, almost with wonder, the death in her of the Aphrodite of the foam: the seething, frictional, ecstatic Aphrodite. By a swift dark instinct, Cipriano drew away from this in her...

By a dark and powerful instinct he drew away from her as soon as this desire rose again in her, for the white ecstasy of frictional satisfaction, the throes of Aphrodite of the foam. She could see that to him it was repulsive...

And she, as she lay, would realize the worthlessness of this foam-effervescence, its strange externality to her. It seemed to come upon her from without, not from within. And succeeding the first moment of disappointment, when this sort of satisfaction was denied her, came the knowledge that she did not really want it, that it was really nauseous to her.<sup>62</sup>

This variety of commerce, in connection with primitive religion, is the resolution of conflict.

## 11.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is the most notorious of Lawrence's novels. Yet it is not essentially different from the entire canon of his mature work. Presented

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 351

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 422

again is the bored woman anxious for some fundamental peace and satisfaction in life. In this instance the particular woman is Connie Chatterley, wife to Sir Clifford. In her hopes and final fulfillment she is the prototype of Kate of The Plumed Serpent and Ursula of Women In Love. Mellors, Sir Clifford's gamekeeper, who woos and wins and satisfies Connie with the "courage of his tenderness" is, in physique and disposition a later edition of Rudolf Birkin of Women In Love and of Count Psanek of The Ladybird; which is to say he is another composite of D. H. Lawrence.

The chief difference between Lady Chatterley's Lover and the preceding fiction is in its choice of language. That is, Lawrence in describing the physical and spiritual connections of his characters employs the exact speech of barroom and men's lavatory. The purpose of this is, of course, to give vividness to the situations. But in the words of the author there is a more impressive reason. "I want with Lady C. to make an adjustment in consciousness to the basic physical realities. I realize that one of the reasons why the common people often keep--or kept--the good natural glow of life, just warm life, longer than educated people, was because it was still possible for them to say\_\_\_\_\_! or



\_\_\_\_\_without either a shudder or a sensation."<sup>63</sup>

At any rate, Connie of the novel is withered and discouraged. Her husband and his friends seem cold and fatuously intellectual, the scope of her life non-creative. Mellors is a disillusioned human who hates the mechanical effects of modern life and particularly the sexually unsatisfactory women who have cluttered his life. The physical and emotional warmth that Connie and Mellors have been dissipating finds complement in their relations with one another.

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<sup>63</sup> The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Edited and with an introduction by Aldous Huxley (Viking Press, New York, 1923), p. 781

## B. The Minor Fiction

### 1.

The Prussian Officer is the most famous of all Lawrence's short stories. It is a precise, uninvolved psychological study of the behaviour of an officer and his orderly; and as such represents an early, non-societal aspect of Lawrence's work. The orderly is brutalized and degraded by the Prussian officer who, as a frustrated, hopeless individual, resents the health and vitality of his servant. Finally, in a burst of revenge, the orderly kills his captain, and later dies of thirst.

### 2.

England, My England is the ambiguous title of a post-war novelette. Egbert is a sensitive and attractive young Englishman who is unable to cope with the hard exigencies of modern economic life. He has a small income which permits him to be nominally independent. Furthermore, his wife is a wealthy, upper middle-class girl. Egbert's ineptitude for the economic struggle is in contradistinction to the poised efficiency of his father-in-law. In any case, Egbert becomes less capable of social and economic participation as the years draw

on. Finally, in desperation he enlists as a private in the army. The resolution of his conflicts is death.

## 3.

In The Captain's Doll two characters predominate: Countess Hannele, a worldly aristocrat, and Captain Hepburn, a handsome and world-weary officer. Clearly the Captain has found life a stale proposition and himself an uninteresting human. Says he,

"I count very rarely. That's how life appears to me. One matters so very little."

She felt quite dizzy with astonishment. And he called himself a man!

"But if you matter so very little, what do you do anything at all for?" she asked.

"Oh, one has to. And then, why not? Why not do things, even if oneself hardly matters. Look at the moon. It doesn't matter in the least to the moon whether I exist or whether I don't. So why should it matter to me?"<sup>64</sup>

Coupled with this fagged response to life is Captain Hepburn's penchant for astronomy. He admits to Hannele that his greatest freedom has come while gazing at the moon. After Hepburn's wife meets her death by the convenient expedient of a fall from a

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<sup>64</sup> The Captain's Doll by D. H. Lawrence (Albert and Charles Boni, New York, 1930), p. 42

window, the affair between Hepburn and Hannele proceeds with varying degrees of indifference, attraction and repulsion. Finally the Captain lays his cards on the proverbial table.

I want to be honored and obeyed. I don't want love.

Honour and obedience: and the proper physical feelings. To me that is marriage. Nothing else.<sup>65</sup>

If a woman honours me--absolutely from the bottom of her nature honours me--and obeys me because of that, I take it, my desire for her goes very much deeper than if I was in love with her, or if I adored her.<sup>66</sup>

Hannele is hesitant about making a marriage where honour and obedience seem to be the chief ingredients, but she accepts at last. The conflict is solved by the submission of the woman of the case.

#### 4.

The Fox is a story of love and marriage, complicated by world weariness and indecision on the part of the lady in question, March. She marries Henry, a man younger than herself. But the marriage gives her no sense of peace or integration.

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<sup>65</sup> The Captain's Doll, pp. 118-119

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 121

...The more you reached after the fatal flower of happiness, which trembles so blue and lovely in a crevice just beyond your grasp, the more fearfully you become aware of the ghastly and awful gulf of the precipice below you, into which you will inevitably plunge as into the bottomless pit, if you reach any further. You pluck flower after flower--it is never the flower. The flower itself--its calyx is a horrible gulf, it is the bottomless pit.<sup>67</sup>

The resolution of conflict is sex--with frustration. The story ends with a vague note of hope for a new life in a country far from England.

## 5.

The Ladybird is the narrative of the aristocratic Lady Daphne and her uncommon lover, Count Dionys Psanek, a small intense nobleman who very much resembles the author. Lady Daphne's husband returns from the war but in the eyes of his wife he is an altogether unsatisfactory person, representing as he does the feckless conventionality of the English squirearchy in the twentieth century. Count Psanek, on the other hand, is much more exciting. His lineage is traceable to the early families of Bohemia; and he, like Lady Daphne, finds the existence of an industrial and urban society very depressing. "But

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<sup>67</sup> The Fox by D. H. Lawrence (From The Captain's Doll), p. 222

the world of man, Lady Daphne--." His voice sank to a whisper. "I hate it. zz!" he hissed.<sup>68</sup>

Count Psanek has a good deal to say about love-- or his particular brand of it. And it is this brand which interests Lady Daphne to the point of sexual commerce. Says the Count in this regard, "True love is dark, a throbbing together in darkness, like the wild-cat in the night, when the green screen opens, and her eyes are on the darkness."<sup>69</sup>

Besides his unconventional views on love the count has specific recommendations on political organization.

At a certain moment the men who are really living will come beseeching to put their lives into the hands of the greater men among them, beseeching the greater men to take the sacred responsibility of power.<sup>70</sup>

The ideal recipient of power is of course the mystical count; yet he is too wise to believe that in this world power will be forthcoming. On account of his aristocracy and essential worth, however, death offers another possibility. To Lady Daphne he says,

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<sup>68</sup> The Ladybird by D. H. Lawrence (From The Captain's Doll), p. 273

<sup>69</sup> The Ladybird, p. 284

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 294

Now you are mine. In the dark you are mine.  
 And when you die you are mine. But in the day you  
 are not mine because I have no power in the day.  
 In the night, in the dark, and in death you are  
 mine. And that is forever. No matter if I must  
 leave you. I shall come again from time to time.<sup>71</sup>

The resolution of conflict is a confidence in or  
 hope for death; for much in the manner of Jack Grant of  
The Boy in the Bush, Count Psanek is a Lord of Death.  
 Lady Daphne also finds surcease in this concept of  
 death-power. Besides, there is the satisfaction accruing  
 from a love beyond sex: no one acquainted with contem-  
 porary love experiences could confuse their outlines  
 with the mystic circumlocutions of the count and his  
 aristocratic mistress.

## 6.

St. Mawr introduces a familiar Laurentian char-  
 acter. She is Lou Carrington who is healthy, wealthy,  
 and wise enough to despise twentieth century society;  
 and especially the inadequate male sex as a representa-  
 tive of that society. Lou is impressed by the horse  
 St. Mawr to the point of infatuation, and remarks to  
 her mother that "he strikes me as the first noble thing

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<sup>71</sup>

Ibid., p. 320

I have ever seen."<sup>72</sup> "What was his non-human question, and his uncanny threat? She didn't know. He was some splendid demon, and she must worship him."<sup>73</sup>

Lou's possession of the horse brings about the possession of two men as grooms: Lewis, a small, silent, other-worldly human with a strong contempt for mechanical England; and Phoenix, an Indian imported straight from America. For a while the pristine vitality of St. Mawr gives Lou a rest from her mental and emotional turbulence but spiritually he at last fails her when he gives evidence of an interest in an American mare. Lou's solution for it all is to buy a ranch in America that is miles from any kind of civilization. There she lives with her mother, the horses, and the aforementioned grooms. With this move all conventional hopes and ambitions are dissipated.

"I was rather hoping, mother, to escape achievement. I'll tell you--and you mustn't get cross if it sounds silly. As far as people go, my heart is quite broken. As far as people go, I don't want any more. What heart I ever had for it--for life with people--is quite broken. I want to be alone, mother: with you here, and Phoenix perhaps to look after horses and drive a car. But I want to be myself, really."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> St. Mawr by D. H. Lawrence (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1925), p. 36

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>74</sup> St. Mawr, p. 217



## 7.

In The Woman Who Rode Away Lawrence presents his readers with a white woman, bored by her husband and her life on the edge of a Mexican wilderness. Actually, "she is tired of the white man's god."<sup>75</sup> She rides a horse through the wilderness and is taken by a wild tribe of Indians who canonize her, in their fashion; and then make her a blood-sacrifice. Whatever the other implications of the story, it is clear that the real resolution of conflict lies in the primitivism and submission of women, symbolized by the sacrifice and the final sentence: "The mastery that man must hold and passes from race to race."<sup>76</sup>

## 8.

Life is a pretty stale proposition for Yvette, the Vicar's daughter, in Lawrence's story, The Virgin and The Gypsy. First, Mater (grandmother) is a domineering personality, and there's too little excitement;

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<sup>75</sup> The Woman Who Rode Away by D. H. Lawrence (Martin Secker, London, 1929), p. 75

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 75

finally, the boys who pay court are dull and unoriginal. All this is remedied by the presence of a gypsy. He is a primitive and exotic sort; and he has it in his favor that he looks at Yvette "as if he really, but really desired her."<sup>77</sup> Furthermore Yvette

...liked that mysterious endurance in him, which endures in opposition, without any idea of victory. And she liked that peculiar added relentlessness, the disillusion in hostility, which belongs to those after the war. Yes, if she belonged to any side, and to any clan, it was his.<sup>78</sup>

Actual consummation is denied Yvette and the gypsy, but the resolution of conflict is clear: love or sex with exotic concomitants supplied by a primitive personage unusual in an industrial society.

9.

The Man Who Died is Lawrence's interpretation of the resurrection of Christ. The story has it that Jesus (never specifically named) comes back to earth, disillusioned with his attempt to save mankind. The chief mistake, he reasons, is within himself: as a saviour he should not have emphasized asceticism and denial of

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<sup>77</sup> The Virgin and the Gypsy by D. H. Lawrence (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1930), p. 126

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 143

the flesh. This resurrection, this life after death, will allow him sexual gratification--the fatal deficiency of his teaching days. "Now he knew that he had risen for the woman, or women, who knew the greater life of the body, not greedy to take, and with whom he could mingle his body."<sup>79</sup>

The resolution is a priestess of Isis whom he comes to love. Thus revitalized, the man who died goes on his way.

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<sup>79</sup> The Man Who Died by D. H. Lawrence (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1931), p. 33

## C. The Plays

### 1.

The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd is a dramatic sequel to Sons and Lovers. Mrs. Holroyd and her children are brutalized and neglected by Holroyd, a drunken miner. The chief extenuating circumstance is that Mrs. Holroyd feels superior to her husband. Besides Holroyd insists that he needs alcohol to relax him after a hard day in the pit.

Accurately speaking, there is no resolution of conflict in the consistent dramatic sense. Holroyd is accidentally killed while at work. The play ends with Mrs. Holroyd expressing vague regrets about her unsatisfactory marriage. The resolution of conflict is accidental and undramatic, and by no means definitive.

### 2.

Touch and Go was written as Lawrence's contribution in dramatic form to the capital-labor question. The protagonist is really the young mine owner, Gerald Barlow, who is pitted against the miners in class struggle.

The crisis comes when the men go on strike in support of the demands of the mine's officer-workers.

One striker tells the men to expropriate their owners but a particular comrade argues against that because, "You'll set up another lot of masters, such a jolly sight worse than what we've got now."<sup>80</sup> At this point, Gerald and his friend Oliver appear on the scene; the strikers promptly assault them. When the smoke has cleared away, Oliver says,

I want every man to be able to live and be free. But we shall never manage it by fighting over the money. If you want what is natural and good, I'm sure the owners would soon agree with you.<sup>81</sup>

Oliver believes the workers wish to take money and property from one set and give it to another; to his way of thinking, and to Gerald's, this is no solution for the problems of class, economic or otherwise. As Gerald puts it, "About a new way of life, a better way all around--I tell you I want it and need it as much as ever you do. I don't care about money really. But I'm never going to be bullied."<sup>82</sup>

Thus the play ends. As in The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd there is no precise resolution of conflict

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<sup>80</sup> Touch and Go by D. H. Lawrence (Thomas Seltzer, New York, 1920), p. 92

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 102

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 102

except the vague implication that economic conflicts must be settled by spiritual or non-economic means.

### 3.

David is the last play Lawrence wrote. Its style is imitation Biblical English, and its continuity gives the ancient story of David's rise to power and Saul's decline. The chief incidents of that struggle are outlined: David and Goliath, Saul's jealousy, David and Jonathan. As a modern piece of work it shows no new interpretation of this Biblical story and no symbolism that would recommend itself to contemporary attitudes. Actually it seemed only to give scope to the desire of every author to revamp a classical myth or legend.

The resolution of conflict is by no means clear. David comes to power and Saul dies. But except for the completing of the anecdote and the necessity of applying an Aristotelian end to the beginning and middle, no significance can be attached to this exercise.

## PART III

### CRITIQUE:

#### A. Foreword

More than ten years after his death, David Herbert Lawrence exists as the most startling and misunderstood figure in world literature of the twentieth century. The remnants of the liberal and humane tradition of the nineteenth century, if Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad or John Galsworthy be cited, have been correctly judged and evaluated for their points in space and time; to the main body of critics these writers hold no essential mystery since their conclusions and personalities are so lucid in relation to their age and society. And if the post-war tendencies in literature are considered in light of the vast critical work done upon them, it will be clear that they, too, are readily understood. The stream-of-consciousness technique, the sensitivities of Aldous Huxley and Virginia Woolf, the social criticism of Dos Passos, the flux of Dadaism have had able exponents, detractors and critics.

But D. H. Lawrence, still widely read, is slandered and praised so often without either exactness or comprehension that he has assumed the proportions of a literary anomaly. For example, he has been accused of fascist rationales because of his repeated emphasis on

the power of blood and instinct as opposed to mind and intellect; and for his insistence on aristocratic principles of leadership.<sup>83</sup> Yet when John Strachey was a popular spokesman for communist ideology he wrote:

...in a kind of semi-conscious way he (Lawrence) had faith in the victory of the workers. Indeed, if you like to read them so, his novels with their recurrent theme of salvation for the lovely woman of the governing class by the worker who at once captures and rescues her, are myths of the young worker revivifying society; as, truly, the workers alone can do. His novels get their incomparable vitality from this theme.<sup>84</sup>

The confusion incident to an evaluation of D. H. Lawrence and his writings is traceable to several specific causes. First in order is the bewildering and complex psychological phenomenon of Lawrence as a man and practicing human being. He was a person not readily understandable in terms of conventional behaviour. Sickened by a mechanical civilization he spent a lifetime in flight and wandering only to find the primitive and savage places of his search as raw and corrupted as the world he had left, though differently so; uncertain of the breadth of his accomplishments and nagged by strident echoes from

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<sup>83</sup> D. H. Lawrence As Messiah by Granville Hicks, The New Republic, October 28, 1936

<sup>84</sup> The Coming Struggle for Power by John Strachey (Modern Library, New York, 1935), p. 211



his distance, conceived methods of social reorganization both for his own and society's regeneration. For himself he had dreams of an ideal colony of friends; for society as a whole he suggested a dictatorship of worth and a return to primordial mystical values. Because his plans seemed not practicable or attractive to his contemporaries, because he had no status as a political theorist, because of the doubts and confusions that racked him, and finally because he, himself, frequently lost faith in any prospect of health or dignity for the human race his desires for improvement were subject to a personal frustration that was wolfish in its bitter loathing of humanity. From this frantic revulsion would, in time, arise fresh longing for personal and social surcease. The unceasing oscillation between a passionate interest in improvement and its opposite, a wild hatred, was characteristic of Lawrence.

The distinction and flowage of his personality were not limited to hopes for a unique social system. A man of limited sexual vitality he was immensely attractive to women; burdened with a serious mother-fixation he was helpless without his wife; and though devoted to this wife, Frieda, he never ceased to quarrel with her nor did he ever forego an opportunity to vilify

her in his novels. The mindless, sensual female (e.g. Ursula of Women In Love) which Lawrence abhorred for her unsubmitive attitude and for her lack of understanding was taken from his wife. When it is said that Lawrence vilified his wife, it is understood that he did it indirectly: by portraying her in his novels as the symbol of the femininity he despised. All descriptions of Frieda Lawrence found in the supplementary reading (e.g. Mabel Dodge Luhan's Lorenzo In Taos or J. M. Murry's Reminiscences of D. H. Lawrence) conform to the portrait of such a woman as Kate of The Plumed Serpent or Tannie of Kangaroo.

Tormented by the suppression of his books and the attacks of philistine respectability he was made to suffer not only acute poverty but neglect and suspicion and slander. Under the immense pressures exerted by the government and the prejudices of orthodox publishing agencies he never compromised his attacks upon conventional morals or society. Yet his pride forced him to despise any disagreement with his esoteric and intuitive pattern of responses.

Since no man has ever more nearly revealed himself in literature, the problem of D. H. Lawrence's writing is directly the problem of the author's febrile

and personalized reactions to life. To be sure, every author reveals and expresses himself in his art form; but between the imaginative interpretation of human experience found in literature and the unconfused factors of mind and sensibility which bred that interpretation intervene devices of objectivity which mask the certain relationship subsisting between author and art. With D. H. Lawrence no such barriers hold. Writing for him was as natural an instinct as breathing, and the habits of formalism and deliberate, systematized art which characterized his contemporaries seemed to him just so many tricks and affectations. Writing for him was simple, effortless, unconfined by concepts of rigorous form or subject. Naturally, then, he expressed what was most vital to him: D. H. Lawrence's responses to the world of man and nature. But since his methods rejected formalism and the whip of scientific rationality, his novels represent unreservedly the streaming of his life and personality.

In every novel he identifies himself with at least one man or woman; their thoughts and expressions, even their actions are seen to be drawn from Lawrence's own experience. Sometimes he speaks directly through several characters in the same novel; occasionally he

pretends to an objectivity inconsistent with his autobiographical exposition, but the pose is soon dropped. An obvious example of this occurs in The Rainbow where Skrebensky begins as a simple, objective male and evolves slowly into D. H. Lawrence.

Still, it is not only the person of Lawrence which is necessary for an understanding of his fiction. The specific social and political environments of Lawrence's first thirty-five years of life (1885-1920) with their problems of industrialization and imperialist war were, after all, the definitive forces in the shaping of life and work. These decades and these forces, for all their whorls and fluctuations, showed specific tendencies to which Lawrence was sensitive: the sharpened antagonisms of the owning and working classes, the increasing concentration of wealth, the descending level of moral and intellectual vitality in the leisure and middle class groups, the total breakdown of orthodox liberalism and religion, the convulsions of failing economic systems. It was this tempestuous and changeful environment that shaped the genius of D. H. Lawrence; and the art of D. H. Lawrence is excellent or fantastic in proportion to its exact interpretation of this environment.

## B. The Question of Sexuality

If it is assumed that the resolutions of conflict just considered are definitive aspects of D. H. Lawrence's life and art, they may be said to codify his attitudes and aspirations and failures. Yet the impact of these resolutions makes them appear naive and exotic, the resolutions of conflict possible to only a highly neurotic or unworldly disposition; but, on the whole, inapplicable to any contingency of twentieth century life. Some of the recurring ones such as sex, mystic isolation or primitivism need only be recalled to make the puzzle of Lawrence's fiction even more evident. Added to these considerations, and likewise puzzling, is the dead weight of futility, despair, and catastrophe represented by the majority of the resolutions of conflict.

Although patent maxims or rules for the conduct of a better Christian life are the least requirements for great art, one stanchion of criticism remains from Oedipus Rex to The Studs Lonigan Trilogy: illumination of human experience. The twentieth century reader demands for his satisfaction that a serious interpretative relation shall exist between the action of literary creation and the extant social and physical universe.

How the wild and incredible resolutions of conflict in D. H. Lawrence can substantiate such a thesis

of criticism is by no means clear. Created, instead of historic or intellectual clarity on problems of human entelechy, is a never-never world where Mexican men become apotheosized and the spiritual despair of a game-keeper is made bearable by sexual congress with an unhappy lady of noble persuasions. The unreality of this dream-like disposition of plots involving humans of the pre- and post-war Europe belie Lawrence's own arrogations of his right to prophesy or ameliorate. Still it must be remembered that Lawrence's novels only extend and emphasize the actuality of Lawrence's life. The weird aspects of social amelioration which his novels present parallel exactly the turbidity of his own thinking. The following excerpt from a letter to Katherine Mansfield is only one of the many that might have been posed:

It is a great and foul beast, this world that has got us, and we are very few. But with subtlety we can get round the neck of the vast obscenity at last, and strangle it dead and then we can build a new world, to our own minds: we can initiate a new order of life, after our own hearts. One has first to die in the great body, then to turn round and lull the monstrous existing Whole, and then declare a new order, a new earth.<sup>85</sup>

Lawrence's faith in himself as a prophet and teacher was shared by his disciples. Mrs. Carswell

echoed the dim sentiments of the preceding passage when she wrote,

I believe that there not only may, but must be, a new way of life, and that Lawrence was on the track of it. In his own words he wanted "to put something through" by means of "a long slow, dark, almost invisible fight" with a victory that would come "little by little" and that could be interrupted only by death.<sup>86</sup>

These phrases so lacking in definition--"a new order of life", "a long slow, dark, almost invisible fight"--are themselves the indications of blurred social vision. When they, as hopes, are aligned with the resolutions of conflict in D. H. Lawrence the result is incongruous. For the curve of fiction from The White Peacock through Lady Chatterley's Lover can hardly be assessed as showing improvement in either personal or societal analysis. But this is no simple case which can be disposed of by derision; for, on examination, the novels and novelettes are found to contain some of the clearest psychological and social criticisms in twentieth century literature. Lawrence was neither a sentimentalist, an opportunist or a fool. On the contrary, modern existence was a horror which gave his talent unlimited scope for projecting the decay, the shallowness, the spiritual starvation incident to the

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<sup>86</sup> The Savage Pilgrimage, Preface, p. x

social institutions created by an industrialized world (e.g. war, property-holding) and the attendant psychological manifestations of boredom, sexual frustration, and the failure of creative effort.

The question arises as to how Lawrence could show such acumen in treating modern livelihood and at the same time propose such fabulous answers. Briefly, the reason seems to be that he was incapable of resolving his personal or literary conflicts in any but the most partial fashion already considered. That inability to act or to write other than he did needs careful analysis.

It will be observed that the psychological and social compulsions are not treated as separate items. Indeed, that would be false to the effort of proof about to be made: that Lawrence's psychological complexities were the result of specific social imbalances.

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The best known component of Lawrence's psychological unity has already been discussed. In any event, John Middleton Murry's analysis of his mother and woman dependency is consistent with both Lawrence's life and art. And for this reason there seems to be



little reason in questioning these facts. The evidence stands unquestioned that Lawrence had a mother fixation, coupled with critical physical limitations in the realm of sexual relations.

The Lawrence family was very poor. Mrs. Lawrence was derived of small-bourgeois stock and perhaps to that grouping owed her serious Puritan disposition. Her husband was a miner with no social pretensions whatsoever. The pair were obviously mismated but their problems would have been less intense had it not been for Mrs. Lawrence's keen social ambitions and sense of caste superiority. More money or social prestige would doubtless have consigned this pair to a mediocre, untroubled married life. But the grim poverty and the incompatibility of bourgeois and proletarian levels of response deepened the antagonisms between husband and wife; and the final result was an insecure and harassed household for parents and children.

Dr. Karen Horney, who has so keenly remarked the connection between psychological disabilities and social determinism, writes,

As I have already said, in those family situations which provide a fertile soil for the growth of an Oedipus complex, there is usually much fear and hostility aroused in the child, and their repression results in his developing anxiety. It

seems probable to me that in these cases the Oedipus complex is brought about by the child clinging to one parent for the sake of reassurance. In fact a fully developed Oedipus complex, as Freud has described it, shows all the trends--such as excessive demands for unconditional love, jealousy, possessiveness, hatred because of rejection--that are characteristic of the neurotic formation.

The rivalry between father and son, mother and daughter, one child and another, is not a general human phenomenon but is the response to culturally conditioned stimuli. It remains one of Freud's great achievements to have seen the role of rivalry in the family, as expressed in his concept of the Oedipus complex and in other hypotheses. It must be added, however, that this rivalry itself is not biologically conditioned but is a result of given cultural conditions and, furthermore, that the family situation is not the only one to stir up rivalry, but that the competitive stimuli are active from the cradle to the grave.<sup>87</sup>

D. H. Lawrence, according to this view, reflected in his anxiety, as a child, the hostility between his mother and father. The hostility, in turn, was due to the cultural and sociological factors already mentioned. To this resume it must be added that Lawrence was an extraordinarily sensitive human. That is to say, his mind was exceptionally and endlessly active; his sensibilities were rawly acute. His descriptions of natural phenomena and his interpretations of the psychological flux among people testify to the attenuated quality of his sensitivity.

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<sup>87</sup> The Neurotic Personality of Our Time by Dr. Karen Norney (Norton and Co., New York, 1937), pp. 160-161; p. 285

Upon the statement of Lawrence in one of his own poems he was "crucified into sex". The view of J. M. Murry and various other pure psychological interpretations hold that the incessant interest in sex and its consequent tortures derive entirely from the Oedipus complex and the resulting disequilibrium in social relations. Certainly the mother-fixation was vital to Lawrence's early career, and certainly, too, his physical limitations were severe. Yet the life-long obsession with sex is hardly understandable for so brave and intelligent a man only in terms of psychological and biological fixity.

Two more categories of evidence must be advanced before the solution appears. The first of these is Lawrence's tendency to idealize and glorify sex which oscillates so manifestly with his painful condemnations of sex. This fact has been very little considered by critics so far. Now the idealization of sex is perhaps the most apparent attribute of Lawrence's art; or at least it is the most conspicuous in terms of lay criticism. It has been said many times on the evidence of the novels and letters that Lawrence felt sex was an end in itself, that it was the most glorious and definitive experience of human life, that it was the touchstone

of happiness and the forger of personal integrity. Lawrence caused love or sex to be the resolution of conflict in not only Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Man Who Died, but in The Boy in the Bush and in many other stories and situations. And he wrote,

Kate had convinced herself of one thing finally: that the clue to all living and to all moving-on into new living lay in the vivid blood-relation between man and woman. A man and a woman in this togetherness were the clue to all present living and future possibility. Out of this clue of togetherness between a man and a woman the whole of the new life arose. It was the quick of the whole.<sup>88</sup>

The dramatization of this feeling is seen in the following short quotation:

Inside the room was a great steadiness, a core of living eternity. Only, far outside, at the rim, went on the noise and the destruction. Here at the centre the great wheel was motionless, centred upon itself. Here was a poised, unflawed stillness that was beyond time, because it remained the same, inexhaustible, unchanged, unexhausted.<sup>89</sup>

Opposed to this view is Lawrence's reviling of sex. Over and over again he castigates, directly and by implication, the association of men and women as well as physical consummation. For every reference to the ecstasy and creative powers of love or sex in D. H. Lawrence there

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<sup>88</sup> The Plumed Serpent, pp. 398-399

<sup>89</sup> The Rainbow, p. 135

are three references to the frustration, shame and self-betrayal incident to sexual participation. This revulsion is often indirectly given. For example, the resolution of conflict sometimes is a mystic isolation. Lou Carrington puts it clearly when she says to her groom,

I think you and Phoenix and mother and I might live somewhere in a far-away wild place, and make a good life: so long as we didn't begin to mix up marriage, or love, or that sort of thing into it. It seems to me men and women have really hurt one another so much, nowadays, that they had better stay apart till they have learned to be gentle with one another again.<sup>90</sup>

In Lady Chatterley's Lover there is a pervasive atmosphere of sex-horror that is especially pointed in Mellor's attitude on his former liaisons; in None of That, a short story, a sadistic concept of sexuality is proposed with the rape of an American woman by a bull-fighter and his group of Mexican thugs. Aaron, a chief character of one of the late novels, remarks bitterly, "I'm damned if I want to be a lover any more. To her or to anybody."<sup>91</sup> This is a strange contrast to the many protestations of the efficacy of love in bringing peace and beauty to life.

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<sup>90</sup> St. Mawr, P. 168

<sup>91</sup> Aaron's Rod, p. 77

Hugh Kingsmill has summed up this fear of and withdrawal from sex when he writes,

One's final impression of Mellors, as of all the other figures in whom Lawrence embodied himself, is that he regards an embrace as a fight in which he is likely to be counted out almost before his opponent comes within striking distance.<sup>92</sup>

It is here posed that Lawrence's vacillation between a glorification of sex and a vilification of it is traceable to the complexity of the world in which he lived; and which, as will be seen, he was never able to understand. Basically, this vacillation was a measure of his indecision. He was convinced of the wreckage of human life in the twentieth century; the general decay and frustration were clear to him. Yet he could not have his characters act upon political or material motives for these seemed too feeble to him. Sex was an easy antidote for human ills, and was particularly appealing to Lawrence because of his own deficiencies in that quarter.

The simple psychologists would have it that Lawrence's glorification of sex is only an indication of wish-fulfillment on his part; the horror of sex is a token of his personal inadequacies. Close examination reveals, however, that Lawrence's interest in sex is by

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<sup>92</sup> The Life of D. H. Lawrence, p. 235

no means constant. Although the resolution of conflicts is dominantly either love or sex in much of his work, it is observable that fluctuations occur. That is, in Kangaroo or The Plumed Serpent sex does not solve the problems of the characters except incidentally. On the other it is noticeable that in the last fictional works of Lawrence's life (The Man Who Died, Lady Chatterley's Lover) the sex resolution is unusually strong and clear.

The point must be made that Lawrence's obsession with sex transcended mere emotional yearning on his part. It connoted, in fact, a method of dealing with the major problems of human society. Sex was to him, on the grand scale, capable of resolving the animosities and disparities of modern civilization. This is made clear in Lady Chatterley's Lover when Mellors remarks,

You're right. It's that really. It's that all the way through. I knew it with the men. I had to be in touch with them physically, and not go back on it. I had to be bodily aware of them and a bit tender to them, even if I put 'em through hell. It's a question of awareness, as Buddha said. But even he fought shy of the bodily awareness, and that natural physical tenderness, which is the best, even between men; in a proper manly way. Makes 'em really manly, not so monkeyish. Ay! It's tenderness, really....Sex is really only touch, the closest of all touch. And it's touch we're afraid of. We're only half conscious and half alive. We've got to get into touch with one another, a bit delicate and a bit tender. It's our crying need.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Lady Chatterley's Lover, pp. 334-335

This is clarified in one of Lawrence's letters:

I think the only resourcing of art, revivifying it, is to make it more the point work of man and woman. I think the one thing to do, is for men to have courage to draw nearer to women, expose themselves to them, and be altered by them: and for women to accept and admit men. That is the start-- by bringing themselves together, men and women--revealing themselves each to the other, gaining great blind knowledge and suffering and joy which it will take a big further lapse of civilization to exploit and work out. Because the source of all life and knowledge is in man and woman, and the source of all living is in the interchange and the meeting and mingling of these two: man-life and woman-life, man-knowledge and woman-knowledge, man-being and woman-being.<sup>94</sup>

In another letter the emphasis is repeated:

"...after all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women."<sup>95</sup>

Lawrence's interest in sex was primarily a belief that it could bring about a new civilization. He was reduced to the panacea because of his anti-political, anti-scientific bias which forbade rationality in the solution of socio-economic problems. As he conceived it, sex was a universal human manifestation that, Freudian-wise (though Lawrence consistently denies his debt to Freud), compelled the multitudinous activities of human

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<sup>94</sup> Letters, p. 198

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 120



behaviour. It may be objected that the other great emotional urge of tradition, religiosity, might have been substituted for sex.

For him formal religion was a travesty of the dullest hypocrisy; the science he despised had robbed him of any confidence in it. That Lawrence vibrated between the poles of sex-eulogy and sex-scorn is explainable only in these terms. Denied a materialist view of life, despising scientific analysis he periodically convinced himself that the warm, creative flow of sex was the final answer to human confusion. But his maturity of experience and his unconscious distrust of so simple a solution made him seek other resolutions. In these seekings his latent contempt for sex is unbot-tled; partly because it seemed de facto unpleasant in common experience, partly because of its distasteful aspects as a cure-all for human ills. As his life wore on Lawrence became more embittered, torn as he was between a clear vision of human degradation, on the one hand, and his patent inability to solve either his personal or social problems of integration, on the other. His contempt for sex is a contempt for humanity; and a contempt for himself as unable to make sex bear the whole burden of social amelioration. In his bitterness he attempts

exotic resolutions. Yet their own insipidity (e.g. mystic isolation, primitive religiosity) displeases till, facing the end of his career, he is back on the points again: sex is the only answer to life's complexities.

It is in this fearful anxiety and disillusion that Lady Chatterley's Lover was written. The book is, in the words of Lawrence, "very tender". But a careful reading denies this egotistical comment. On the contrary, Lawrence's distrust of sex is felt all through, despite the ending, despite the overt statements that Connie and Mellors have fulfilled themselves by efficient management of the details of consummation. It is as though Lawrence were forcefully and masochistically trying to prove his argument of sexual beatitude as the mode of happiness. Not only is Mellors' hatred of former alliances a case in point but his brutality with Connie and his temperamental evasions of her are significant. Finally, of course, the unadorned street-language of the novel is made understandable: with all other resolutions of conflict found wanting, Lawrence bitterly wrings out the last agonized implications of the sex he had so long distrusted and so long worshipped.

The frantic treatment of sex in Lady Chatterley's Lover as it has been here explained gains more meaning

when it is recalled that the chief emphasis of the novel is on the social dislocations of the twentieth century. Mellors' detached and critical view of life is hinged to the insensitivity of modern mechanical civilization; likewise Connie is what she is, in pain and pleasure, because of the corruption of the environment she cannot abide. Thus the book issues in a venomous tirade against sex. Lawrence, the apostle of sex, ended his life with a revulsion against sex because alive and isolated he found it an insufficient answer to the world in which he lived; and because other answers, by the structure of his personality, were denied him.

This is a social interpretation; and by no means explains all of Lawrence's life and behaviour. The other evidence to be explained in social terms is Lawrence's relation to his mother and wife. Many persons have had early parental fixations which have been outgrown and forgotten. But D. H. Lawrence's morbid attachment showed no abatement in the years of his mother's life; and was continued by substitution with Frieda Lawrence until the day of his death.

The conclusion here is that such an attachment is a direct result of the chaos of social environment acting on an especially sensitive human. In other words, the psychological and biological fixation was confirmed and

enhanced by the bewildering complexity and confusion of the world Lawrence knew. In Sons and Lovers Lawrence has said,

There was one place in the world that was solid and did not melt into unreality: the place where his mother was. Everybody else could grow shadowy, almost non-existent to him, but she could not.<sup>96</sup>

The language here indicates more than a simple personalized affection; Lawrence found certainty, and refuge from his brutal environment in love for his mother. Sons and Lovers is understandable only within this frame of reference; its ending is pathetic only with these pre-suppositions. The strikes, poverty, social distinctions, terror of the unknown which infuse and thread through the novel are the stimuli which provoke the main response--mother-fixation. Lawrence makes this abundantly clear. Horror of his mother's aging and "wearing out" is horror of her lack of control; and by that token the dissolution of that certainty upon which he had so long depended. The death of Mrs. Morel is terrible because it leaves her son naked before the winds of social uncertainty.

Some sense of the effect of social forces on Lawrence is gained by his attitude on the World War. The confusion, hate and disruption incident to the war were for him a parade of nightmares. In Kangaroo, for example,

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<sup>96</sup> Sons and Lovers, p. 261

the shock of the war is vividly revealed: the slaughter and hysterical mores were unendingly horrible. And his attitude is given again and again throughout his correspondence. "The war finished me: it was the spear through the side of all sorrows and all hopes."<sup>97</sup>

This theme is more completely developed in the following passage:

War is a great and necessary disintegrating autumnal process. Love is the great creative process, like spring, the making of an integral unity out of many disintegrated factors. We have had enough of the disintegrating process. If it goes on any further, we shall have so thoroughly have destroyed the unifying force from among us, we shall have become each one of us so completely a separate entity, that sterile, hopeless, useless, like a dead tree. This is true, and it is so great a danger, that one almost goes mad facing it.<sup>98</sup>

Thus the war and its terrors haunted Lawrence. They were more items in the scale of uncertainty; and they were the items which reinforced the personal and psychological debilities with which he was already so heavily freighted.

After marriage, which was Lawrence's way of achieving certainty through a woman, he wrote,

Böcklin--or somebody like him--daren't sit in a cafe except with his back to the wall. I daren't

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<sup>97</sup> Letters, p. 221

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 270

sit in the world without a woman behind me...a woman I love sort of keeps me in direct communication with the unknown, in which otherwise I am a bit lost.<sup>99</sup>

The part about "the unknown" may be discounted as rhetoric; Sons and Lovers has sufficiently explained that the agonizing known was what drove Lawrence to the extremes of affection for women. The disorderly arrangements of spiritual and intellectual forces in contemporary society formed the matrices of Lawrence's fantastic dependence upon women: loneliness, war, mechanistic civilization, moral depravity, the lack of verities to support a creed.

In Aaron's Rod which is an imaginative expression of Lawrence's desire to leave his wife, Aaron says, "...You can't keep on being alone. No matter how many times you've broken free...no matter how many times you've felt this--it wears off every time, and you begin to look again."<sup>100</sup>

Here, then, is the answer, in social terms, to Lawrence's marriage. A woman and love were the only entities that promised him certainty; in his own experience this was true both for his mother and his wife.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 96

<sup>100</sup> Aaron's Rod, p. 102

Yet his intellect and sensibilities continued to be aware of the disorganization of industrial life. In his desire for peace he depended upon his wife; but the partial satisfactions such a reliance could give nagged endlessly. The result was social and matrimonial chaos. His sense of terror and the inability to deal with his world in its own terms traverse his letters and writings and frantic travel. The remark given by Mabel Dodge, as originally made by Lawrence when he was confronted with a stalled automobile, is the final comment on Sons and Lovers: "I am a failure. I am a failure as a man in a world of men..."<sup>101</sup>

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The frequent strains of quasi-homosexuality found in the works of D. H. Lawrence (Birkin and Crich of Women In Love, Don Ramon and Don Cipriano of The Plumed Serpent, Ursula and her teacher in The Rainbow) are explainable in other terms than frustration in marriage. Lawrence was forever looking for answers to social questions and the loneliness and isolation of his own life caused him to regard imaginatively close

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<sup>101</sup> Lorenzo In Taos by Mable Dodge Luhan (Alfred Knopf, New York, 1937), p. 36

relations between men as a possible solution (or, in the case of Ursula, between women). This is evident not only in Lawrence's own pathetic attempts at male intimacy (the young Cornish farmer of Kangaroo; and Cyril, described by Mabel Dodge Luhan) but in his whole doctrine of male supremacy and the organization of human life on oligarchic principles. To be consistent, male clannishness and male aristocracy are understandable only with women on a subordinate and excluded level. This is not to say that Lawrence's belief in aristocracy and male domination are results only of his desire for a new social order but to indicate that they are consistent with his philosophy; and that they are not simple results of personal or biological frustration. Lawrence could not rationally conceive of a society where sexual or social equality existed between men and women, and one implication was the kinship of aristocratic men.

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John Middleton Murry has assessed Lawrence's interest in a love beyond sex as a personal compensation for limited sexual vitality. In the immediate personal sense there is no doubt that Lawrence was

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wildly seeking a surcease and fulfillment from marriage that was continually denied him. On the other hand, Lawrence was the object of strong social forces over which he had no control and which he was forever trying to explain. The contradiction is similar to the one just summarised: he had recourse to fantastic resolutions of conflict which he found unsatisfactory but which, in the last analysis, were the only ones possible for him. It has been shown that Lawrence's disgust for sex was a very real quality; and that it proceeded from his inability to equate sex with the actuality of the twentieth century. The emphasis on a love beyond sex is nothing more than a continuation of this. Lawrence was fascinated by and dependent upon sex. Yet it could not give him peace any more than it could make sense as a fundamental readjustment in the cold light of lay experience. The result was to extend love into an esoteric, imaginative phase which deemphasized and transmuted the obvious sensual characteristics. In this fashion sex seemed more valid as a resolution of conflict. In other words, being more imaginative, more fictitious, it was further removed from the herd-instinctive manifestations of sex and consequently more attractive; besides, as a fantasy of unanalyzable features it could momentarily seem a satisfactory answer to poverty, boredom, stupidity, and ugliness.

One word must be added to this social interpretation of Lawrence's sex-obsession. It is clear that, with the lapse of religion as the centralizing component of man's life on earth, sex has become something of a unifier. That is to say, one centralizing emphasis of the twentieth century, insofar as general culture and enlightenment are concerned, is sex. To be sure this is a vulgar view, but religiosity was coin of the realm for the medieval masses. Today, it is a truism to announce, the theatres, the cinemas, the popular literature and entertainments of every variety concentrate almost entirely upon sexual disappointments, fulfillments and aspirations. Lawrence himself was horrified by this and derided it. Yet as a historical fact Lawrence often derided the ideas and practices he most perfectly represents. And the point here is that he--elaborately or not--is in the vulgar tradition of sex-influence. His novels, however intellectually and tenuously, emphasize spiritual and physical mating as the roots of happiness and regeneration. This tradition influenced Lawrence and he in turn contributed to it. In this instance, the difference between Hollywood's art and that of D. H. Lawrence is a difference of degree and not of kind. Without a rational philosophy

of any kind it was inescapable that he should view all life in personal terms. Sex was the most obvious and appealing form of personal nexus; and it had the added virtue of seeming to be uninfluenced by the flux of social and environmental forces.

### C. Materialism or Not

The predominant characteristic of Lawrence's resolutions of conflict is their highly individual and exotic quality. Setting aside sex for the moment, the methods of isolation and primitivism, for example, are impossible variants for all except the economically secure. Death, as another example, does not recommend itself to most on the grounds that Lawrence enunciated. These facts are by way of an introduction to the node of Lawrence's mental and emotional configurations--anti-materialism. In other words, the resolutions of conflict are all in contradistinction to any materialist view of life, whether the term implies gross or philosophic materialism. This avoidance of materialism as either an aim or explanation of human existence is simply an unblurred reflection of the intimate processes of Lawrence's consciousness.

It is obvious, of course, that Lawrence was perfectly free of any taint of gross materialism. Although in the last years of the twenties he played the stock market, his whole life was devoted to denouncing as swinish the pervasive greed and venality that underthrust the economic system of Europe and America. In fact, his vilification of Benjamin Franklin<sup>102</sup> was

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<sup>102</sup> Studies in Classic American Literature by D. H. Lawrence

really an attack on the idea of wealth as an estimable part of human organizations.

For the reasons just presented, philosophic materialism will be taken to mean an interpretation of life and natural phenomena in terms of knowable forces reducible to scientific analysis. In this sense Lawrence was violently anti-materialistic; in the positive aspect he was a mystic. This is nowhere better stated than in Aldous Huxley's introduction to the anthology of Lawrence letters:

Like Keats who had drunk destruction to Newton for having explained the rainbow, Lawrence disapproved of too much knowledge, on the score that it diminished men's sense of wonder and blunted their sensitiveness to the great mystery.

His dislike of science was passionate and expressed itself in the most fantastically unreasonable terms. "All scientists are liars," he would say when I brought up some experimentally established fact which he happened to dislike. "Liars, liars!" It was a most convenient theory. I remember in particular one long and violent argument on evolution, in the unreality of which Lawrence always passionately disbelieved. "But look at the evidence, Lawrence," I insisted, "look at all the evidence." His answer was characteristic. "But I don't care about evidence. Evidence doesn't mean anything to me. I don't feel it here." And he pressed his two hands on his solar plexus.<sup>103</sup>

This clear and unambiguous statement is corroborated a thousand times in the canon of Lawrence's work.

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<sup>103</sup> Letters, pp. xiv-xv

For example, "All the best part of knowledge is inconceivable."<sup>104</sup>

If, then, the reason for specific resolutions of conflict is this anti-materialism, the question presenting itself is, why did D. H. Lawrence embrace such an attitude? Nor is this a simple question when it is recalled how the twentieth century has been a stupendous age of science and how Lawrence was so very sharp in regard to decay and stupidity in modern existence; where, that is, he used completely objective methods. On the other hand, Lawrence was frantic to explain himself, isolate, and in relation to society.

The very beginning of Lawrence's life has been sketched. The very beginning of his life saw, also, the seed-time of his anti-materialism. His mother was of bourgeois stock and possessed ideas of social advancement for her children. His father was a miner, a man of great warmth and simplicity. Lawrence, toward the end of his life, wrote a bitter poem indicating what he thought was the result of this dichotomy of home influences.

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Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious by D. H. Lawrence (Martin Secker, London, 1931), p. 42

My father was a working man  
 and a collier was he,  
 at six in the morning they turned him down  
 and they turned him up for tea.

My mother was a superior soul,  
 a superior soul was she,  
 cut out to play a superior role  
 in the god-damn bourgeoisie.

We children were the in-betweens,  
 little non-descripts were we,  
 indoors we called each other you,  
 outside, it was tha and thee.<sup>105</sup>

From this it must appear that Lawrence felt himself able to accede to the philosophy of neither bourgeoisie nor proletariat. As Hugh Kingsmill explains it in commenting on Sons and Lovers,

His mother, Paul realized, wanted him to climb into the middle classes, and one of her objections to Miriam was that she was not a lady. Paul tried to persuade his mother that he liked "common people" best. From the middle classes, he said, one got ideas, but from the common people, life itself, warmth. Why, then, Mrs. Morel asked him, didn't he go and talk with his father's pals? They, Paul replied, were rather different. "Not at all. They're the common people. After all, whom do you mix with now--among the common people? Those that exchange ideas, like the middle classes. The rest don't interest."<sup>106</sup>

This revealing passage simultaneously gives Mrs. Morel's idealization of the middle classes and Paul's bewilderment at the necessity of choosing between those

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<sup>105</sup> Pansies by D. H. Lawrence

<sup>106</sup> The Life of D. H. Lawrence, p. 11

same middle classes and the "common people" his father so manifestly represents.

In any case, the effort to climb into the ranks of the bourgeoisie is an exercise in gross materialism. Social status is, in the last analysis, based on the particular hierarchic level of purchasing power. Lawrence was too sceptical of the aspirations and achievements of the petite bourgeois to wish to unite with them. On the other hand, his proud mother who had once known middle-class prestige encouraged her children to react against the working class situation in which they were reared. Meanwhile, of course, the middle classes of England, having long since ceased to be revolutionary groupings in any respect, were grown provincial, narrow-minded, appendages to the imperialist circles of British finance. The fatuous existence of this most unglamorous section of society could not fail to repel Lawrence spiritually and intellectually; and the necessity for entrance into the middle from the working class demanded conformity and money, neither of which D. H. Lawrence could or would give. In 1928 he said to Aldous Huxley: "How I hate the attitude of ordinary people to life. How I loathe ordinariness! How from my soul I abhor nice simple people, with their eternal price list.



It makes my blood boil."

The most banal impulses and aspirations connected with social and financial success were nauseating to Lawrence. Still, his mother influenced him to develop his talent and intelligence. This put a gap between himself and the ordinary workers of his locality, and automatically brought him in touch with the middle class intelligentsia. Ideas, talk, speculation about life-- these were the things that Lawrence was most interested in; and for all their shortcomings middle class persons were the only ones who could trade in these effects. Furthermore, Lawrence was bred to hate his father and, by implication, all that his father represented: a working class way of life. A sketch of this is given in Aaron's Rod when the coal miner's wife says,

If you cared for your wife and children half what you care about your union, you'd be a lot better pleased in the end. But you care about nothing but a lot of ignorant colliers who don't know what they want except it's more money just for themselves. Self, self, self--that's all it is with them--and ignorance.<sup>107</sup>

It can be safely and consistently concluded that such ideas were familiar to the Lawrence children due to Mrs. Lawrence's insistence on them. The paragraph is vitally important in regard to Lawrence's later

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<sup>107</sup> Aaron's Rod, p. 10

career. Mrs. Lawrence, as a woman with middle class aspirations, would naturally despise strikes or unions which were the working class instruments against the owning class. In fact, she undoubtedly saw in them costly and antagonistic elements which deprived ambitious children of money and middle class sympathy. Here, if ever, is a social issue which molded the young David Lawrence; linked to his mother by sympathy and affection he naturally despised what she despised, besides as has been noted, Lawrence's intellectual and artistic ambitions put a distance between himself and the working class.

Finally, from this paragraph, there is a clue to one of Lawrence's dominant attitudes on the working class: "...a lot of ignorant colliers who don't know what they want except it's more money just for themselves." Mrs. Lawrence saw her husband and his friends drink and idle on their wages. She was so hostile to them and their lack of obvious refinement that she did not understand that these were methods of release; release from the monotony of their jobs, from the struggle to live on tiny wages, from minds and sensibilities untrained and rampant. To her the trade union struggle was selfish, grossly materialistic, and an affair of ignorant men. This view was a distillation of her own arrogations of middle class

superiority. And it was this view that D. H. Lawrence cherished all his life. Trade unions were "just the nastiest profiteering side of the working man."<sup>108</sup>

That this was a highly individual notion of the subject may be recognized when Richard Wagner's comment on working class movements is recalled. "It is a deep and noble urge toward a life worthy of human beings--a life in which men will no longer be obliged to expend all their energy to secure the bare necessities of life."<sup>109</sup>

Hugh Kingsmill has given still a further conspectus of D. H. Lawrence in relation to the class struggle complex:

When he was fourteen, Paul went to work in Nottingham, in a factory which manufactured surgical appliances. His mother accompanied him to his first interview with his future employer, whom Paul at once hates. Afterwards his mother tells him he mustn't mind people so much. "They're not being disagreeable to you--it's their way. You always think people are meaning things for you. But they don't." Paul kept himself apart from the men workers at the factory, who seemed to him common and dull, but the girls all took to him, often gathering in a little circle while he sat on a bench and held forth.<sup>110</sup>

Thus while Mrs. Lawrence thought it sickeningly materialistic and selfish for miners to fight their

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<sup>108</sup> Kangaroo, p. 146

<sup>109</sup> Die Kunst und die Revolution by Richard Wagner (in Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen, Fritsche, Leipzig, 1872), V. III, pp. 38-41

<sup>110</sup> Life of D. H. Lawrence, P. 17

employer with a trade union for higher wages, she deemed it desirable for individuals to struggle for money and prestige as entrance requirements into the ranks of the middle class. Her fatal mistake of judgment, due, as has been discussed, to the correlation of forces in her marriage and background, was to vilify the necessary shilling materialism of the poor but to idealize the gross pound materialism of the middle and upper classes.

Young David Lawrence, as can be seen, early hated his employer and the wage-serving devices demanded by him. At the same time he despised the working men, whether struggling or quiescent. As an attenuation of his mother's belief he lumped all struggles for a higher standard of living into the same category; trade union struggles were grossly materialistic and so were the efforts of the small career men trying to be large career men. The recoil from all monetary struggles disposed Lawrence to consider himself formally a member of neither the owning nor the working nor the middle class. Later in life he came to know some of the Fabian Socialists at Croyden; but he detected in them the middle class pretensions and crassness he so despised and consequently was never seriously interested.

Though he disdained the aspirations of working class unity Lawrence's contempt for social and economic

careerism for the other brackets of society knew no bounds. The following passage, in a sense, sums up his whole view of advancement. The medium for the thoughts is Gudrun who is contemplating her lover Crich, musing that with him she might make a great stir in the world.

...she wished she were God, to use him as a tool.

And at the same instant, came the ironical question: "What for?" She thought of the colliers' wives, with their linoleum and their lace curtains and their little girls in high-laced boots. She thought of the wives and daughters of the pit-managers, their tennis parties and their terrible struggles to be superior each to the other, in the social scale. There was Shortlands with its meaningless distinctions, the meaningless crowd of the Criches. There was London, the House of Commons, the extant social world. My God!

Young as she was, Gudrun had touched the whole pulse of social England. She had no ideas of rising in the world. She knew, with the perfect cynicism of cruel youth, that to rise in the world meant to have one outside show instead of another, the advance was like having a spurious half-crown instead of a spurious penny. The whole coinage of valuation was spurious. Yet of course her cynicism knew well enough that, in a world where spurious coin was current, a bad sovereign was better than a bad farthing. But rich and poor she despised both alike.<sup>lll</sup>

The extreme exponents of philosophic materialism for the past seventy-five years have been the Marxists. They reject utterly any suggestion of supernatural in-

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Women In Love, p. 476

tervention in human life. Furthermore, their view of the trade union struggle is as a preface to revolution. It is envisaged that the working class will achieve in economic conflict both unity and political hardihood; and that the capitalist system of production and distribution will be subverted, and a new age of general culture, dignity and beauty will be realized. These facts are explained because, in the twentieth century, Marxist philosophy was polarizing all materialist tendencies. It has been noted that D. H. Lawrence never could make the distinction between gross materialism and philosophic materialism; that, in fact, he never credited Marxism with a humane or progressive system of values.

The dead materialism of Marx socialism and soviets seems to me no better than what we've got. What we want is life and trust; men trusting men, and making living a free thing, not a thing to be earned.

What's the good of an industrial system piling up rubbish while nobody lives. We want a revolution not in the name of money or work or any of that, but of life--and let money and work be as casual in human life as they are in a bird's life, damn it all. Oh, it's time the whole thing was changed, absolutely. And the men will have to do it--. You've got to smash money and this beastly possessive spirit.<sup>112</sup>

This passage reveals the ranting, unworldly concepts of Lawrence's philosophy. He was not a philosophic

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<sup>112</sup> Letters, p. 779

materialist but a hard pressed mystic. And his answer to Marxism was the only possible one under the circumstances. Had he admitted the Marxists struggled for more than trade union concessions and directed themselves to the construction of a free and intelligent order of society, Lawrence would have been deprived of his individualism. Therefore he accuses the materialists of a lack of true beauty or hope--aspirations he believed he alone possessed. Besides, if the Marxists seemed to be building a better world, Lawrence would have felt it necessary to justify them and participate; and that would have been impossible for reasons which will presently be enumerated.

#### D. Orthodox and Unorthodox Religiosity

Lawrence, as has been explained, could not ally himself with the predominant strain of materialist philosophy in his century. Yet, on the other hand, he could not feel confidence in formal Christianity.

He was always an extraordinarily sensitive and reflective person. This acuteness made him peculiarly liable to the terrors and frustrations which invaded his world. When it is recalled that Lawrence lived through the period of declining economic individualism, the rise of finance-capital imperialism, and the first world war, it is understandable that he craved some central purpose, some central faith. "Give us a religion, give us something to believe in, cries the unsatisfied soul embedded in the womb of our times."<sup>113</sup>

Lawrence's home was the scene of endless economic and social confusion; the acquaintance with the world of his maturity reinforced his dread of life. A society in chaos cast its refracted image of chaos.

As a child D. H. Lawrence attended the Congregationalist Church. His mother was devout and the young Lawrence seems to have been likewise. The hold of ecclesiastical symbolism and imagery was very strong,

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<sup>113</sup> Phoenix, The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence ed. by Edward D. McDonald (The Viking Press, New York,) p. 434



judging by their use and recurrence throughout his life. In the days of childhood and adolescence, the church and his mother's influence abated the terrors and uncertainties of life. But his mother was to die (and he to watch her die) and Darwinian rationality stole away the certainty of his religion. It must be remembered that, although Lawrence repudiated the formal scientific method, he had, as a young man, been a strong Darwinian. Later in life he broke with the rationalist school. Yet the Darwinian view had undermined his confidence in orthodox religions; and his own common-sense had been unable to equate the corporative church structure with any notion of spirituality. Whereas, in his youth, Lawrence had disbelieved in formal religion and believed in science, at maturity he disbelieved in both formal religion and science. "There was only one thing to do and he did it: he invented a private religion."<sup>114</sup>

In reference to this human phenomenon, W. Y. Tindall has said,

The religious temper seems to be native to many men. It is they who have found the age of science so difficult, and to their flight from materialism we must attribute the character of much modern art.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow, p. 15

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 17

Yet the "religious temper" is certainly not an isolated human attribute. Rather it seems to result from the sensitive and intelligent desire to have an embracing and consistent philosophy. Veblen has unflatteringly dubbed the conation of this quest the result of an "arrested spiritual development" when the quest takes a religious bent.

Lawrence found formal religion hypocritical and spiritless; and philosophic materialism only explained why trade unionists wanted more wages. The result philosophically was a mysticism that took the unknown and the unconscious of the wide universe for its province. Actually, of course, when Lawrence says,

One fights and fights for that living something that stirs way down in the blood, and creates consciousness. But the world won't have it. To the present human mind, everything is ready-made, and since the sun cannot be new, there can be nothing new under the sun. But to me, the sun, like the rest of the cosmos, is alive and therefore not ready-made at all.<sup>116</sup>

he means that life is unglamorous when considered materialistically, whether the method used is that of Freudian psychology or the economic interpretation of history.

This symptom of revulsion is not new. The whole canon of nineteenth century poetry is essentially an

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<sup>116</sup> Letters, p. 643

expression of horror against a world made dull and dirty by machine technique. William Morris was driven into socialism by his responses, but Lawrence was driven into mysticism. He knew at first hand the hapless lot of the British workers under capitalism; he knew, too, the fundamental futility of the palliative of higher wages. On the other hand he could not accept Marxism and philosophic materialism for the reasons already given. The religion that he invented was the religion of the unconscious.

## E. Art and the Artist

In primitive times and through the eighteenth century in England art, as we know it, was not a separate entity from workaday existence; the artists tended to be articulate worldly men rather than aesthetes and eccentrics. Shakespeare was a manager and actor, and Fielding a Bow Street Magistrate. But the aggressive bourgeoisie of America and England concentrated successfully on the tillage of profits throughout the nineteenth century and concomitantly stifled artistic criticism of their livelihood by an indifference to and persecution of all art except that which idealized the glories of the status quo. From these circumstances of repression grew, for many talented humans, the doctrine of "art for Art's sake", the pathetic rationalization of a simulated indifference. Plekhanov has categorized this by saying, "The tendency of artists and those concerned with art to adopt an attitude of art for its sake arises when a hopeless contradiction exists between them and their social environment."<sup>117</sup>

Shelley and Byron roamed away from England, periodically criticizing the aims and aspirations of

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Art and Society by George V. Plekhanov  
(Critics Group, New York, 1937), p. 48

bourgeois way of life. And D. H. Lawrence was their ideological descendent in the twentieth century.

However, the issues of domestic and international politics were more terrible in Lawrence's time. The middle class which the Romantics had so lampooned was being licked up by the working class, personally, and by the trusts, economically. Art had become the preoccupation of the college professors, dilettantes and bored ladies. The "hopeless contradiction" that Plekhanov mentions was more drastic, more rigid in Lawrence's epoch than ever before: for the exploitation of the workers was increased to the tempo of imperialist struggle. But it was the imbalance of all phases of social and economic life in the twentieth century that frightened Lawrence and embittered him. Specifically, it was the sense of antagonism between conventional society and himself as an artist that produced his individuality. He was an artistic person in a coal-mining community; yet he was as much repelled by the miners' lives and thoughts and hopes as he was by their indifference and personal alienation. The working class and their destiny of material gain, and perhaps conquest of the world as the Fabians and other Marxists promised, was unattractive. So Lawrence was alone in belief and

in fact. W. Y. Tindall has said of him: "He would have been unhappy at any time and in any society, but he found the present too much to endure."<sup>118</sup> Surely this is not so. The complex strands of Lawrence's unhappiness or maladjustment are determinable. Had the world in which he lived been lovely and free, he would have been as much a part of it as any man.

Still, he did not quite fit into the "art for art's sake" school; his precise knowledge of social corruption precluded any such airy flights of the imagination as Shelley took; and for the reason that the social corruption of Lawrence's world was more pervasive and more insistent. On the other hand, he does not slip into the school of the utilitarian concept of art, which Plekhanov has so aptly described:

The so-called utilitarian concept of art, that is, the tendency to regard the function of art as a judgment on the phenomena of life and a readiness to participate in social struggles, develops and becomes established when a mutual bond of sympathy exists between a considerable section of society and those more or less actively interested in artistic creation.<sup>119</sup>

Lawrence himself wrote, "I always say, Art for my sake! If I want to write, I write--and if I don't

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<sup>118</sup> D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow, p. 6

<sup>119</sup> Art and Society, p. 48

want to, I won't."<sup>120</sup> In other words, Lawrence falls midway between the "art for Art's sake" view and the utilitarian concept of art. His personal and social contradictions made this so. For while he was contemptuous of all mass opinions and mass efforts (art was to be his own private concern and pleasure) his mind could not cease to examine evidences of futility and decay from London to Taos. However much his work is, as Plekhanov phrases it, "a judgment on the phenomena of life" Lawrence's individuality and mysticism precluded any organized social struggle or any participation in Marxist activity; especially since this last was so consistently of the philosophic materialist variety.

This lack of integration, stemming from Lawrence's basic contradiction between his rational faculties and an irrational philosophy, explains the resolutions of conflict. For it is evident that D. H. Lawrence, caught on the points of a clear view of social insipidities and a mystical adjustment to that view, was incapable of consistent logic or political wisdom. Much of his writing is raving; much of it is confused. In the plays, for example, where a conspicuous climax and resolution of

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<sup>120</sup> Letters, p. 88

conflict cannot be burked or slurred, there is no resolution of conflict. The exigencies of a clear, unequivocal solution of the conflicts, projected by actors before an audience, was too much a task for Lawrence. In the novels and poems he could leave off with fantasy or suggestion, with a solution that was blurred or casual. But the drama is too conspicuous to be inexact. Lawrence's timeliest play, Touch and Go, a drama of class conflict, ends with both the employers and employees leaving a brawl with no hint of the final solution. For Lawrence's confusion made a resolution impossible; a mystic solution would have been bathos, a sexual one would have been a farce.



## F. Loneliness, The Masses, and World Weariness

Perhaps nothing more clearly reveals the extent of Lawrence's dilemma than his personal life of travel and isolation. After his meeting with Frieda he spent the remainder of his life in travel through Europe, Asia, Australia and North America. Nor was this a simple urge to see the world. Rather it was a frantic protest against the world's indifference to artistic individuality. Society was not congenial for artistry, and least of all for critical artistry. When the artist in question was not able to moor himself to any movement of socialist (materialist) persuasions, and when he so thoroughly despised the orthodox venality of the middle class, the only recourse was geographic escape and mystic isolation; that is, withdrawal from the social depravity and confusion, and vain efforts to find, by travel, new patterns of behaviour in Sicily, Ceylon and Mexico. As Lawrence himself phrased the case,

I hate the "public" and "people" and "society" so much that a madness possesses me when I think of them. I hate democracy so much. It almost kills me. But then, I think that "aristocracy" is just as pernicious, only it is much more dead. They are both evil. But there is nothing else, because everybody is either "the people" or "the capitalist".

One must forget, only forget, turn one's eyes from the world: that is all. One must live quite

apart, forgetting, having another world, a world as yet uncreated.<sup>121</sup>

It is thus made clear why such characters as Birkin of Women In Love or Alvina of The Lost Girl find wandering a means of alleviating the pain of a dreadful society ridden with machines, poverty and hypocrisy. The mystic isolation so closely linked with it is clarified by this passage, too. Lawrence had no place with "the people", "the aristocrats" or "the capitalists"; nor did he have any spiritual kinship with them. The answer was wandering and mystic isolation for himself, and for the people of his books.

The results of this detachment or isolation from the workaday strata of human society will be examined. First of all, though, in terms of personal adjustment, the continual wandering seems to have been unsatisfactory. Says Lawrence, "I find for myself, nowadays, that change of scene is not enough--neither sea, nor hills nor anything else; only the human warmth, when one can get it, makes the heart rich."<sup>122</sup>

This is explained more elaborately by the succeeding quotation:

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<sup>121</sup> Letters, p. 316

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 693

What ails me is the absolute frustration of my primeval societal instinct. The hero illusion starts with the individualist illusion, and all the resistances ensue. I think societal instinct much deeper than sex instinct, and societal repression much more devastating.<sup>123</sup>

Thus Lawrence sought to be alone, and yet was pained by the results.

Anything else is either a personal tussle or a money tussle: sickening: except, or course, just for ordinary acquaintance. One has no real human relations--that is so devastating.<sup>124</sup>

Can you (i.e. J. M. Murry) understand how cruelly I feel the want of friends who will believe in me a bit? People think I'm a sort of queer fish that can write; that is all, and how I loathe it. There isn't a soul cares a damn for me except Frieda--and it's rough to have all the burden put on her.<sup>125</sup>

Nor was Lawrence dissatisfied with the lonely role simply because it pained him personally. His artistic creativeness impelled him to have an audience; but, more than that, he wished to be a leader in the political, messianic sense. Over and over this is enunciated. "You see, I want to initiate, if possible, a new movement for real life and real freedom."<sup>126</sup> He

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<sup>123</sup> Letters, p. 450

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 693

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 194

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 259

wished to get away from the mechanical world because he hated and feared it; at the same time he wanted to preach to it. But since his leaving this same world was the condition for his not understanding it, there was a schism. He wished to get away from the mechanical world, but then, too, he wanted to change it. He could not change it unless he participated in its problems; but he could not participate in it because he found it too antagonistic.

Now the unyielding contradictions of Lawrence's life naturally affected his political thinking. Essentially Lawrence was a Romantic in his attitude toward politics. That is, he was a poetic human whose faculties of ratiocination were undeveloped in political and economic theory, much as were Wordsworth's and Tennyson's. This general disinclination for and indifference to political organizations was complicated by Lawrence's excessive mysticism; after his psychological writings his political writings are the most obscure and confusing of all his works. In Apocalypse he says Lenin is "evil",<sup>127</sup> in the Preface to Dostoevsky's The Grand Inquisitor he says of Lenin that he is "surely a pure soul".<sup>128</sup> And indicative

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<sup>127</sup> Apocalypse by D. H. Lawrence (Viking, New York, 1932), p. 25

<sup>128</sup> Phoenix, p. 287

of his confused political penchants is the opening line of one of his poems: "O! start a revolution, somebody!"<sup>129</sup>

His sense of political method was as blurred as his sense of political theory; a case in point is his hope for a dictatorship which is to arrive with "men beseeching greater men".

The fluctuating, contradictory remarks in Lawrence's political writings reveal once more the cleavage which has been previously stressed: between mysticism and a sensitive intellect that recorded the processes of decay. In the realm of politics this resulted in frequent revulsions against the human race. "I feel that people choose the war, somehow, even those who hate it, choose it, choose the state of war and in their souls provoke more war, even in hating war."<sup>130</sup>

Still Lawrence was living in an industrial twentieth century that all his travels could not evade. In Switzerland, Germany, Italy and America he was confronted with political uprisings, poverty, and mechanistic behaviour. His books, after Sons and Lovers, are increasingly weighted with surveys of wretchedness, social and

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<sup>129</sup> Letters, p. 780

<sup>130</sup> Savage Pilgrimage, p. 86

psychological. He could not forget these aspects of human life because his mind and sensibilities were too acute. For him there seemed no answer and no satisfaction except in more wandering and more mysticism. But these two failed him really as may be known from the frantic garbled works toward the end of his life. Only death could close the struggles of his insuperable contradictions.

Politically, in Kangaroo, Lawrence examines the prospect of his own participation in some extant social movement--socialist or fascist. The answer was, of course, negative. His contempt for materialist philosophy caused him to reject the socialists; his inordinate individualism, magnified fantastically by his lonely and febrile way of life, made a fascist group movement equally impossible. For Lawrence who was never able to maintain even friendship with a single man mass movements were naturally out of the question.

The last chapter on the political dreams was written in The Plumed Serpent, from which the last tatters of reality have been blown away to produce a social organization based on primitive religiosity with D. H. Lawrence in the person of a god-leader. This resolution of conflict is a case in point. Lawrence's answers to the corruption of modern society were unreal, anachronistic

and wholly bizarre. They were so because no other resolutions of conflict were possible to him. Common sense schemes for amelioration were all based on various acceptances of a materialist view of life; and these were closed to him, personally and philosophically. His resources of reform were necessarily mystic, and therefore necessarily absurd. Lawrence resolved the very real problems of his protagonists by the only methods left to him. Furthermore, his isolated artistic existence gave him freedom to rant and criticize without check, while at the same time it removed him from the centers of political reality. After Sons and Lovers he never again achieved, except incidentally, in the realm of fiction or character representation that supreme sense of vividness and penetration which comes from close association with human groupings. Succeeding the early years of authorship the characters of the novel became shadowy exponents of various pathologies. In the final pages of Women In Love, the four main characters, Gudrun, Crich, Ursula, and Rupert, interweave and fade so that it is nearly impossible to tell one from the other; and the motivations are correspondingly blurred. Lawrence, of course, protested that this was a new device for literature, and a progressive one,

because it was symbolical and more inclusive.<sup>131</sup> Yet the impression remains that the change from the earlier type of character and motivation was an inescapable corollary to the life and frustrations of the mature Lawrence.

Lawrence's political yearnings fluctuated as wildly as did his other hopes. The reason has already been indicated. He was driven to desire certainty among the mad activities of the pre- and post-war world. But all answers that would temporarily satisfy him would not ultimately seem valid. The recurring result was expressed in the following way:

I want to gather together about twenty souls and sail away from this world of war and squalor and found a little colony where there shall be no money but a sort of communism as far as necessaries of life go, and some real decency. It is to be a colony built up on the real decency which is in each member of the community. A community which is established upon the assumption of goodness in the members, instead of the assumption of badness.<sup>132</sup>

Florida was to be the haven for Lawrence's colonists. Here in the passion for escape and for a new life of friendship and beauty is the explanation of

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<sup>131</sup> "Somehow, that which is physic--non-human--in humanity is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element, which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent." Letters, pp. 199-200

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 219



primitivism in Lawrence's resolutions of conflict.

Whether primitivism is taken to be the gypsy of The Virgin and the Gypsy or the sacrifice in The Woman Who Rode Away, the social implications are exact: an inability to deal satisfactorily with the elements of twentieth century society. The only possibility for Lawrence, even in fiction, was withdrawal. In his personal career, which so closely approximates that of his characters, a dream of a colony of friends was the only variant left to him. And the withdrawal, Lawrence always explains, was to be reinforced by mysticism. This is consistent, for the mysticism that forced detachment was to be an integral part of the life of detachment. Following the curve of withdrawal, in Lawrence's writings, meant projection backward into the societies which were conspicuously free of what he deemed the modern evils of science, industry, and gross materialism. These societies were, in the positive sense, closer to the unsullied nature of trees, winds, flowers, and sea. The result: "Lawrence's favorite world was antediluvian; his second choice was the world of Egypt and Chaldea before 2000 B.C., and failing that, he contented himself with the vestiges of glory which he discovered in the archaic societies of

Etruscans, Hindus, Aztecs, and Mrs. Mebel Dodge Luhan's Indians."<sup>133</sup>

In relation to both his personal and literary primitivism, nothing is more revealing than the choice of persons Lawrence made for the Florida venture. Deprived, by inclination and livelihood, of association with the working and middle classes Lawrence went for companionship to intellectuals and aristocrats. In his letters he makes frequent reference to his specific colonizing plan to Lady Ottoline Morrell and Lady Cynthia Asquith. Bertrand Russell was once a colleague of sorts; and drifting through the world, and by virtue of his literary reputation, Lawrence came to interest a small section of the English aristocracy. Indeed, the aristocracy was the only group in society that consistently patronized him. But to expect Lady Morrell or Lady Asquith to contemplate a colonizing venture in Florida was a most unworldly attitude on Lawrence's part. Yet this was all of a piece, for Lawrence had no group to address himself to; that is, except the few intellectuals he could endure. The ladies who corresponded with Lawrence and praised him were simply exercising that age-old function of nobility which involves

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<sup>133</sup> D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow, p. 86

artistic dilettantism, much in the fashion that has raised Buchmanism to the level of a polite religion in the past several decades. The concept of aristocrats who entertained serious notions of social and personal reform was signal of Lawrence's confused understanding of both political issues and their solutions.

The other persons whom Lawrence expected or hoped to have participate were John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield, Donald Carswell, Catherine Carswell, Dorothy Brett, Aldous Huxley, Maria Huxley, and Koteliansky. Each of these middle class or upper-middle class intellectuals approximated to some extent Lawrence's own isolation and confusion. His own political acumen ran very thin when any practical political issues were at stake.

With his load of frustration and disillusion and personal exacerbation, it was inevitable that Lawrence would have moments and moods of the bitterest despair. The nihilism that marks Gudrun's attitudes in Women In Love is a sample of this. Beyond such nihilism and the denial of all health in life, one further extreme presented itself--death. This, too, Lawrence utilized to give his characters quietude and courage, for he himself quite plainly gleaned pleasure and inspiration

from the imaginings of a life beyond the grave. Unable to comprehend, to control or to change industrial civilization the resolutions of conflict for Daphne and Psanek of The Ladybird, for Jack of The Boy in the Bush, and for Crich of Women In Love are death or a hope for death. Lawrence was incapable of understanding human behaviour in terms of materialist or scientific motivations; that is to say, he was incapable of understanding phenomena in terms of cause and effect. His own philosophy of mysticism<sup>134</sup> could never make congruent his ideas and the extant world of human activity. Death and nihilism were the remaining variants.

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<sup>134</sup> "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect."  
Letters, p. 94

## G. Configurations of the Ego

Lawrence's mysticism has been discussed as the positive aspect of his revulsion for science and materialism, but a word is due on the specific causation. He wrote to Murry, "I am weary weary of humanity and human things. One is happy in the thoughts only that transcend humanity."<sup>135</sup>

But what, precisely, are the thoughts that transcend humanity? Once Lawrence had pleased himself with varying aspects of physical nature, he was left with his brand of religious mysticism. Yet, even excepting the obvious basis of personal and social frustration which produced this mysticism, the thoughts that transcend humanity seem very elusive. For Lawrence's mysticism always came round to two considerations, both intimately connected to him and in no sense transcendent: relaxation of the will, and efforts to get himself in touch with cosmic consciousness, whatever and wherever it was. In essence this meant an introspective and mystical examination of D. H. Lawrence by himself. There is no mistaking this in such a quotation as the following which is taken from a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell:

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<sup>135</sup> Letters, p. 413

Do not struggle, with your will, to dominate your conscious life--do not do it. Only drift, and let go--let go, entirely, and become dark, quite dark--like water which mows away all the leaves and flowers, and lets only the dark underground roots remain. Let all the leaves and flowers and arborescent form of your life be cut off and cut away, all cut off and cast away, all the old life, so that only the deep roots remain in the darkness underground, and you have no place in the light, no place at all. Let all knots be broken, all bonds unloosed, all connections slackened and released, all released, like the trees which release their leaves, and the plants which die away utterly above ground, let go all their being and pass away, only sleep in the profound darkness where being takes place again.

Do not keep your will in your conscious self. Forget, utterly forget, and let go. Let your will lapse back into your unconscious self, so you move in a sleep, and in darkness, without sight or understanding. Only then you will act straight from the dark source of life, outwards which is creative life.<sup>136</sup>

This is a familiar note throughout Lawrence's work, occasioned by the stresses of his existence in a chaotic and unfriendly world. The preoccupation with soul and the dark gods of the soul is indicated in the passage which concerns a male character of Glad Ghosts:

It is even not himself, deep beyond his many depths. Deep from him calls to deep. And according as deep answers deep, man glistens and surpasses himself.

Beyond all the pearly mufflings of consciousness, of age upon age of consciousness, deep calls yet to deep, and sometimes is answered. It is calling and

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<sup>136</sup> Letters, p. 290

answering, new-awakened God calling within the deep of man, and new God calling answer from the other deep. And sometimes the other deep is a woman...<sup>137</sup>

These selections by Lawrence may be profitably compared with the remarkable quotation which Plekhanov gives from the Preface to The Collected Poems of Mme. Hippus:

Are we to blame that each ego has now become a separate and isolated entity, severed from every other ego, and therefore incomprehensible and unnecessary to it? Our verses, which are the reflections of a momentary fullness of heart, are precious to each of us. But to one whose ego is distinct from mine, my prayer is meaningless and quite strange. The realization of their isolation separates people more and more from one another, and makes them retreat further and further into their own souls. We are ashamed of our prayers, and knowing that unfortunately we will never be able to communicate them to anyone else, we utter them beneath our breath, in inner speech and with allusions clear only to ourself.<sup>138</sup>

This was the declaration of a nineteenth century woman. In every particular it is the pattern of Lawrence's thought and spirituality. Yet the passage is deficient for Lawrence, inasmuch as the retreat into the depths of his own soul was sporadic and unsatisfactory, and constantly interrupted by his perviews of social corruption.

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<sup>137</sup> The Woman Who Rode Away, p. 252

<sup>138</sup> Art and Society, p. 76

Plekhanov, in commenting on the tendencies of mystic individualism, has this explanation to make:

When a man believes his own ego to be the sole reality, he cannot admit the existence of an objective relationship between this ego and the external world. He must either regard the external world as entirely unreal or real only in part, that is, to the extent that it coincides with the only "reality", his own ego. If such a man is given to philosophic speculation, he will say that the "ego" assists in the formation of the external world and imparts some of its own rationality to it; for a philosopher cannot rid himself entirely of reason, even if, for some purpose, such as religion, for example, he limits its prerogatives. However if such a man, who considers his own ego the sole reality is not given to philosophic speculation, he will simply give no thought to the question of how the ego creates the external world. He will then be disinclined to see in the external world even a particle of rationality; on the contrary, he will conceive the world as the product of "blind chance". And if it should occur to him to sympathize with a great social movement, he will invariably say, with Falk, that its success depends not upon the logical course of social development. but rather upon the "stupidity" of men, or, what amounts to the same thing, the "blind chance" of history.

Let us return to contemporary art. When a man is inclined to regard his ego as the only reality, then, like Mme. Hippus, he loves himself "like God". This is inevitable and perfectly understandable. One who loves himself "like God" will in his creative work be engrossed only in his own personality. He will be interested in the external world only insofar as it is related to the "sole reality", his precious ego.<sup>139</sup>

Lawrence, to be sure, was absorbed in the contemplation of his own ego. His mysticism is his statement

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<sup>139</sup> Art and Society, pp. 81-82



of this preoccupation and its results--mindless relaxation and a communion with the dark gods denied the rank and file of the western world. Such admiring preoccupation resulted, by turns, in a love of self which presented the soul of D. H. Lawrence as a god-like entity; and so derives finally the portrait of the man-god, Don Ramon of The Plumed Serpent. Yet Lawrence was harried in this, as in all efforts to integrate himself, by his awareness of social disequilibria. He tried valiantly to believe his own ego was the only reality but succeeded only partially; in the last analysis his retreats could not save him from his sense of reality.

This aspect of his contradictions appears plainly in Kangaroo. It will be remembered that the resolution of conflict in this novel was mystic isolation. However, clear as that theme is, the contrasting idea is touched on constantly.

He (i.e. man) is forced to live in vivid rapport with the mass of men. If he denies this, he cuts his roots. He intermingles as the roots of a tree interpenetrate the fat, rock-ribbed earth.

No man can really isolate himself. And this vertebral interplay is the root of our living: must always be so.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Kangaroo, pp. 354-355

Though Lawrence's isolation and mysticism gave him considerable relief, they were never final; and Lawrence himself was never free of the doubts induced by the restless intellect he had tried to subvert and cripple.

## H. The Man as a Political Animal

Much has been written about D. H. Lawrence's political views in reference to their fascist or non-fascist content. The mistake made by such a writer as John Strachey is to assume the pattern of extant fascism (or socialism) as a fixed point and judge Lawrence's writings as evidence of motion toward or away from that point. Lawrence was obviously a non-political thinker; one glance at his political writings indicates a confused, emotionalized sense of personal relationships masquerading as political theory. Lawrence, it must be admitted, would have been outraged by the actualities of Hitler and Mussolini.<sup>141</sup> Yet this is not to say that, because his own responses to political conditions were not exactly similar to formal fascist ideology, he had no basic fascist tendencies.

Fascism may be defined as a system of highly concentrated ownership of the means of production which dispenses with all liberal institutions and enforces an economy of scarcity for the working class, with violence. Fascism annihilates the trade unions and crumbles the middle classes into the ranks of the proletariat.

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<sup>141</sup> This point is the basis of an article on the political character of Lawrence: D. H. Lawrence in Valhalla by Mary Freeman, The New Mexico Quarterly, November, 1940

Essentially it represents the dominance of finance-capital in a highly concentrated and regimented form.

In the realm of ideas fascism, to support itself, promulgates specific attitudes. In general, these are as follows: mysticism in regard to the state and the aims of human existence; the need for a ruling aristocracy; a rationalized contempt for the middle classes and the proletariat and all their political expressions.

Now the economic factors which rendered fascism necessary to certain countries were unknown to Lawrence. His mind concerned itself with personal relations, not the complexities of economic theory. Was he a fascist or not?

John Dewey, in discussing the unity of human character, has said,

Character is the interpenetration of habits. If each habit existed in an insulated compartment and operated without being affecting or being affected by others, character would not exist. That is, conduct would lack unity being only a juxtaposition of disconnected reaction to separated situations. But since environments overlap, since situations are continuous and those remote from one another contain like elements, a continuous modification of habits by one another is constantly going on. A man may give himself away in a look or a gesture. Character can be read through the medium of individual acts.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Human Nature and Conduct by John Dewey (Modern Library, New York, 1930), p. 38

Thorstein Veblen has made the same observation in regard to the body of mores and folk ways of our society:

The code of proprieties, conventionalities, and usages in vogue at any given time and among any given people has more or less the character of an organic whole; so that any appreciable change in one point of the scheme involves something of a change or readjustment at other points also, if not a reorganization all along the line. When a change is made which immediately touches only a minor point in the scheme the consequent derangement of the structure of conventionalities may be inconspicuous; but even in such a case, it is safe to say that some derangement of the general scheme, more or less far-reaching, will follow. On the other hand, when an attempted reform involves the suppression or thorough-going remodelling of an institution of first-rate importance in the conventional scheme, it is immediately felt that a serious derangement of the entire scheme would result; it is felt that a readjustment of the structure to the new form taken on by one of its chief elements would be a painful and tedious, if not a doubtful process.<sup>143</sup>

The purpose of these quotations is to emphasize the unity of human character and activity. In Lawrence's case it is an illustration to show that his thoughts and writings can be summed up in an organic whole. Lawrence's character represents a unity but not integration. Insofar as politics is concerned, it is here posed that the drift, or the unity revealed by Lawrence's political thought, is very similar to what is known today as fascist ideology.

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<sup>143</sup> The Theory of the Leisure Class by Thorstien Veblen (Modern Library, New York, 1934), p. 201

The assumption is not that Lawrence was a conscious, systematic fascist but that, considering the leaning, the emotional tone, the mode of his work, there is a stronger affinity for fascist attitudes than for any other.

To begin, it is hardly necessary to repeat Lawrence's distrust of socialism. Yet he said in Kangaroo, "I come from the working people. My sympathy is with them, when it's with anybody."<sup>144</sup> Surely in the light of Lawrence's life and canon of writings such a remark must be interpreted as a gesture. Lawrence never associated with the working class when he could help it, nor did he ever wish to. Much in the same manner has Adolf Hitler protested that he is of humble origin and the champion of the oppressed. Lawrence had both contempt and pity for the working class, and nothing but scorn for such a political expression as socialism. Indeed, as he clearly says,

I don't believe in the democratic electorate. The working man is not fit to elect the ultimate government of the country. And the holding of office shall not rest upon the choice of the mob: it shall be almost immune from them.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Kangaroo, p. 49

<sup>145</sup> Letters, p. 239

Here, of course, democracy is considered as it affects the masses. But if socialism be considered as extension of working-class power, Lawrence was set against it. Hitler, too, has enunciated the same scorn of an electoral system. And when in The Plumed Serpent the god, Ramon, says, "About the great masses, I don't care,"<sup>146</sup> it is really D. H. Lawrence speaking.

Much as he despised and patronized the working class, Lawrence allowed it to worry him. Says Connie in Lady Chatterley's Lover,

The common people were so many, and really, so terrible. So she thought as she was going home, and saw the colliers trailing from the pits, grey-black, distorted, one shoulder higher than the other, slurring their heavy, iron-shod boots. Underground grey face, white of eyes rolling, necks cringing from the pit roof, shoulders out of shape. Men! Men! Alas, in some ways patient and good men. In other ways, non-existent. Something that men should have was bred and killed out of them. Yet they were men. They begot children. One might bear a child to them. Terrible, terrible thought! They were good and kindly. But they were only half, only the grey half of a human being. As yet they were "good". But even that was the goodness of their halfness. Supposing the dead in them ever rose up! But no, it was too terrible to think of. Connie was absolutely afraid of the industrial masses. They seemed so weird to her.<sup>147</sup>

To Lawrence, it is clear, the masses were equally weird and equally terrible. And the possibility of

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<sup>146</sup> The Plumed Serpent, p. 208

<sup>147</sup> Lady Chatterley's Lover, pp. 189-190

their revolt frightened him quite as much as it did Lady Chatterley. When Strachey says that Lawrence desired the hegemony of the working class (p. 60) he has forgotten that Lawrence hated even the elementary proletarian organizations of trade unions; and he has forgotten, too, that Lawrence looked to intellectuals and aristocrats for a knowledge of social drifts (p. 26). His prophylactic was Hitler's: a repressive bureaucracy. Interestingly enough, Hitler's concept of an aristocracy is very similar to Lawrence's. That is, Hitler was convinced that the feeble and pathetic qualities he saw among workers were instinct; consequently only an elite should rule. Lawrence has said on this subject,

Let us submit to the knowledge that there are aristocrats and plebians born, not made. Some amongst us are born fit to govern, and some are born only fit to be governed. Some are born to be artisans and laborers, some to be lords and governors. But it is not a question of tradition or heritage. It is a question of the uncontrovertible soul. If we have right spirit, even the most stupid of us will know how to choose our governors and in that way we shall give the nucleus of our classes.<sup>148</sup>

Mussolini and Hitler must yield to Lawrence for venomous contempt for the feudal and merchant aristocracy; further, the ideas of these fascist lords and of Lawrence on democracy of the English, American or

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Letters, p. 252



Australian variety are strikingly parallel. In a letter to his sister-in-law Lawrence wrote,

This (i.e. Australia) is the most democratic place I have ever been in. And the more I see of democracy, the more I dislike it. It just brings every thing down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric-lights and water-closets and nothing else. You never knew anything so nothing, nichts, nullus, niente, as the life here. They have good wages, they wear smart boots, and the girls all have silk stockings; they fly around on ponies and in buggies--sort of low one-horse traps--and in motor cars. They are always vaguely and meaninglessly on the go. And it all seems so empty, so nothing, it almost makes you sick. They are healthy, and to my thinking almost imbecile.<sup>149</sup>

Summing up these attitudes, it is apparent that Lawrence despised the old feudal aristocracy, democracy and socialism. On the positive side he delighted in mysticism, notions of a new aristocratic clique, the barbarian male domination of female, and a subservient working class with ascetic predilections. Thus in his formless, inchoate way Lawrence represented both the conflicts and the aspirations of the men who were to systematize these penchants into philosophic and political fascism.

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The basis of comedy and tragedy is lack of con-

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<sup>149</sup> Not I But The Wind, pp. 130-131

trol. Yet what can be said of D. H. Lawrence's life and thought? The disproportion which holds between his world and his explanations of that world is so monstrous that satire is an easy response. But the bravery of his protests against brutality and sloth and human futility lifts him from any ordinary pathos or stupidity. He combined in his mind and sensibilities all the chief artistic and social conflicts of a distraught world. Between the poles of thought and opinion, convention and subversion, he giddied madly; no doctrine could save or satisfy him. But his search for peace was as uncompromising as the **saga** of his life. That his immense talent and intelligence should be perverted to the instrumentalities of unbearable personal torture and final confusion indicates the lien that social anarchy holds on the culture of our time.

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