Chapter - 7

ART FOR MY SAKE

According to Frieda Lawrence, any new thing must find a new shape, and then afterwards one can call it “art.” “For Lawrence art and life were inseparable. He believed that art is the medium through which men express their deep and real feelings.”\(\textit{PII} 224\) That is perhaps why he declared: “My motto is art for my sake.”\(\textit{CL} 171\) Lawrence’s greatness is attributed to the fact that “at bottom he was not concerned with art.” He gave up, deliberately, the pretence of being an artist. The novel becomes for him simply a means by which he could make explicit his own thought adventure. His aim was to discover authority, not to create art… To charge him with a lack of form, or any other of the qualities which are supposed to be necessary to art, is to be guilty of irrelevance. “Art was not Lawrence’s aim.”\(\textit{Murry, Son of Woman} 173\)

If there is no separation between the man who lives and the man who creates, if he creates directly out of his living, making art the servant of life, then he has no possible use for the word “aesthetic.” Eliot’s use of it indicates, according to Leavis, a lack of wholeness, a denial of the need of the artist to be a person and to have a deep responsibility towards experience. As Lawrence wrote:

But best of all, if he could have known a great humanity, where to live one’s animal would be to create oneself, in fact, be the artist creating a man in living fact (not like Christ, as he wrongly said) — and where the art was the final expression of the created animal or man — not the be all and being of man — but the end, the climax. And some men would end in artistic utterance, and some wouldn’t. But each one would create the work of art, the
living man; achieve that piece of supreme art, a man’s life.

(CL 327)

Lawrence felt that art could serve man’s urgent need to reclaim his, essential being. Literature and painting, the arts, which Lawrence practiced and wrote about, have a corrective moral effect; by reviving the individuals capacity for direct mental responses, great art works can tear a hole in the curtain of mental consciousness and alter the way men recognize their lives thereafter. The novel particularly, Lawrence came to feel, “can inform and lead in the new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead.”(LCL 368)

Lawrence believed that a complete imaginative experience, which goes through the whole soul and body, can renew our strength and our vitality. He saw the novel as the utterance of the consciousness of the whole man, drawing the consciousness of the reader towards health, sanity that wholeness. “The Morality is not injected but discovered.” (Sagar, The Art 3)

However, Lawrence has generally been charged for not having art or technique. It was F.R. Leavis who defended him saying that “his genius is distinctively that of a novelist, and such he is as remarkable a technical innovator as there has ever been.”(Lawrence: Novelist 18) It is The Rainbow and Women in Love that most demand attention. The need is to get recognition for the kind of major achievement they are. Together they constitute his greatest work, or perhaps it is better to say that, in their curious close relation and the separateness, they are his two greatest works. They represent the enormous labour, the defining of interests and methods, the exploration, the technical innovation, on which the ease of the later work is based. However, this is not to dismiss Sons and Lovers which is certainly a work of striking original genius. But Sons and Lovers has not lacked attention, it has been widely appreciated, and the nature of its originality recognized. Remarkable as it is, its qualities and its achievement, on the one hand, are obvious enough,
and, on the other they are not, as Leavis writes: “such as to suggest that the author was going to be a great novelist.” (Lawrence: *Novelist* 20) The earlier book, *The White Peacock* is painfully cal low. In it Lawrence has no grasp of his emotional purpose, and is too much preoccupied with writing a novel: he feels obliged to transpose his experience into “literature” and doesn’t deal directly with what is at the centre of his own emotional life. There is a great deal of the literary and conventional in the style and the treatment; it is very much there, for instance, even in the gamekeeper theme, which provides one of the main interests in this extremely immature novel for a student of Lawrence who looks back from the later work. The advance to *Sons and Lovers* is one to the direct and wholly convention free treatment of the personal problem: the immense improvement, the success, is bound up with the strict concentration on the autobiographical. The other early novel, *The Trespasser,* is also, it appears autobiographically personal. It shows an unconventional power in the rendering of passion and emotion; the deadlock at Siegmund’s home has an oppressive reality; but, short as the book is, it is hard to read through, and cannot be said to contain any clear promise of a great novelist.

With *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence put something behind him. Not for nothing did he warn Edward Garnett not to expect anything else of that kind: “I shan’t write in the same manner as *Sons and Lovers* again.” (*CL* 272) Lawrence, as F.R. Leavis states, of course, has more than one subsequent manner, but what he is recognizing here is that he has put something behind him for good. The acute emotional problem or disorder which queered his personal relations and the play of his intelligence has been placed, has been conquered by intelligence, manifesting and indicating itself in creative art. He is now freed for the work of the greatest kind of artist.

It is *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* written during the next few years from early 1913 on — that prove him to be that. They prove it triumphantly and incontestably if the depressing fact of history had not been what it is: they
have had essentially no recognition at all. Not only has the supreme creative achievement they represent been ignored, the grossest untruths about Lawrence’s attitudes—untruths running clean counter to the spirit and actuality of that achievement; as of his work everywhere—have been freely current, and accepted generally for the unquestioned truth about him. Not only was his genius abusively denatured and its greatness denied while he lived; even after his death, which might have been expected to be followed by the irony of decisive recognition and a rapidly spreading enlightenment, the misrepresentation held the field for two decades.

For the grosser stupidities of our intellectual elite at Lawrence’s expense the explanation must be discernible to the English literary world of the last decades; but of course The Rainbow and Women in Love—to come back to these works in particular—can hardly have been altogether understood by anyone at first reading. They present a difficulty that is measure of their profound originality. Lawrence’s art is then so original in its methods and procedures that at first we again and again fail to recognize what it is doing or what it is offering—we miss the point. And this technical originality was entailed by the originality of what Lawrence had to convey. The important truths about human experience are not necessarily at once obvious. The importance of some is to be measured by the difficulty with which we recognize them. They have no place in our habits of conscious thought, and what we say and what we believe with our conscious minds ignores or denies them: Lawrence’s insight was penetrating and clear, and he was marvelously intelligent, and the worst difficulty we have in coming to terms with his art is that there is resistance in us to what it has to communicate—if only the kind of resistance represented by habit; habit that will not let us see what is there for, what it is, or believe that the door is open. F.R. Leavis says that: “learning to recognize the success and the greatness of Women in Love—was not merely a matter of applying one’s mind in repeated readings and so mastering the
methods of the art and the nature of the organization; it was a matter; too, of growing — growing into understanding.” (Lawrence: Novelists 20)

F.R. Leavis states that yet it remains true that the failure of criticism and of the cultivated in respect of Lawrence, the long unchecked prevalence of misrepresentation and malice, is a disgraceful chapter of English literary history. Even the book that makes the severest demand on the reader’s intelligence and power of self-readjustment is rich in what should surely have been convincing manifestations of supreme creative genius. And there is the long succession of tales, the consummations of so large a proportion of which, in all their wonderful originality, there can be no acceptable excuse for failing to perceive. And these things, the tales and all that should at once compel recognition in the novels, are enough and more than enough to dispose of the slanders that for decades have been current among the educated as the truth about Lawrence. He was certainly unfortunate in the phases of English literary culture and of the English literary world that have marked those decades. It has to be recorded, as among the adverse conditions that he had against him the major personal influence of the time — the major personal influence in the climate of literary opinion: that of T.S. Eliot. It was not that literary and intellectual fashions promoted by Eliot were inimical to the appreciation of Lawrence’s genius. The sad and undeniable fact is that Eliot did all that his immense prestige and authority could do to make the current stupidities about Lawrence look respectable. He talked of Lawrence’s sexual morbidity as of a done that needed no arguing. He made a point of denying that Lawrence could properly be called an artist. It is in keeping with this denial that he should have been able to pronounce Lawrence incapable of “what we ordinarily call thinking,” subscribing thus to the general view that, wherever Lawrence’s strength might lie, it was not, emphatically not, in intelligence.

It was not only Eliot to misunderstand Lawrence’s technical innovations, there were a host of others too, mostly blaming in the new critical vein his involvement with his characters. We have referred to earlier also the case of Mark Schorer’s critique of Sons and Lovers. Schorer claims that Lawrence
could not separate himself from Paul Morel. This critique appears to be very sound on the face of it, but only within new critical jacket, that a writer should be impersonal. In a way this is also an extension of Eliot’s theory of impersonality for which he blamed Lawrence for not having the technique or tradition. And therefore he could not surrender his personality. The outline of Schorer’s critique of *Sons and Lovers* is very clear in the essay “Technique as Discovery.” (Lodege 71-84) The following is the excerpt:

The novel has two themes: the crippling effect of a mother’s love on the emotional development of her son, and the ‘split’ between kinds of love, physical and spiritual, which the son develops, the kinds represented by two young woman, Clara and Miriam. The two themes should, of course, work together, the second being, actually, the result of the first: this “split” is the “crippling.” One should expect to see the novel developed, and so Lawrence. In his famous letter to Edward Garnett, where he says that Paul is left at the end with the “drift towards death,” apparently thought he had developed it. Yet in the last few sentences of the novel, Paul rejects his desire for extinction and turns towards, “the faintly humming, glowing town,” to life — as nothing in his previous history persuades us that he could unfalteringly do.

This discrepancy suggests that the book may reveal certain confusions between intention and performance. One of these is the contradiction between Lawrence’s explicit characterizations of the mother and father. It is a problem not only of style (of the contradiction between expressed moral epithets and the more general texture of the prose which applies to them) but of point of view. Morel and Lawrence are never separated, which is a way of saying that Lawrence maintains for himself in this book the confused attitude of his character. The mother is a “proud, honorable soul,” but the father has a “small, mean head.” This is the sustained contrast; the epithets are characteristics of the whole, and they represent half of Lawrence’s feelings. But what is the other half, Mark Schorer adds which of these characters is given his real sympathy — the hard self-righteous, aggressive, demanding mother who comes through to us, or the simple, direct, gentle, downright, fumbling ruined father? There are
two attitudes here. Lawrence loves his mother, but he also hates her for compelling his love, and he hates his father – with the true Freudian jealousy, but he also loves him for what he is in himself and he sympathizes more deeply with him because his wholeness has been destroyed by the mother’s domination, just as his, Lawrence Morel’s, has been.

This is a psychological tension which disrupts the form of the novel and obscures its meaning, because neither the contradiction in style nor the confusion in point of view is made to right itself. Lawrence is merely repeating his emotions, and avoids an austere technical scrutiny of his material because it would compel him to master them. He would not let the artist be stronger than the man. The result is that, at the same time that the book condemns the mother, it justifies her, at the same time that it shows Paul’s failure; it offers rationalization which place the failure elsewhere. The handling of the girl, Miriam, if viewed closely, is pathetic in what it signifies for Lawrence, both a man and artist. For Miriam is made the mother’s scapegoat, and in a different way—from the way that she was in life. The central section at the novel is shot through with alternate statements as to the source of the difficulty: Paul is unable to love Miriam wholly, and Miriam can love only his spirit. These contradictions appear sometimes within single paragraphs, and the point of view is never adequately objectify and sustained to tell us which is true. The material is never seen as material, the writer is caught in it exactly as firmly as he was caught in the experience of it. That’s how women are with me. So he might have said, and believed it, but at the end of the novel, Lawrence is still saying that, and himself believing it.

For the full history of this technical failure, one must read *Sons and Lovers* carefully and then learn the history of manuscript from the book called D.H. Lawrence: *A Personal Record*, by one E. T., who was Miriam in life. The basic situation is clear enough. The first theme—the crippling effect of the mother’s love, is developed right through to the end; and then suddenly, in the last few sentences, turns on itself, and Paul gives himself to life, not to death. But all the way through, the insidious rationalizations of the second theme have
crept in to destroy the artistic coherence of the work. A “split” would occur in Paul, but as the split is treated, it is superimposed upon rather than developed in support of the first theme. It is a rationalization made from it. If Miriam is made to insist on spiritual love, the meaning and the power theme one are reduced; yet Paul’s weakness is disguised. Lawrence could not separate the investigating analyst, who must be objective from Lawrence, the subject of the book, and the sickness was not healed, the emotion not mastered, the novel not perfected. All this, and the character of a whole career would have been altered if Lawrence had allowed his technique to discover the full meaning of his subject.

Schorer’s point is well taken but there are holes in it. When Lawrence wrote to his friend about Paul’s drive towards suicide, the novelist preferred life to suicide on second thought. Because if Paul in the end is shown moving towards life there may be a chance that he comes to understand life better as Birkin did, that it is not by a running away but by accepting it, putting trust in Miriam and distancing his mother, not drugging her. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* Lawrence questions whether the mothers are right in possessing in their sons.

And he finds that they are not themselves when they do the bidding of nature. As he says one parent, usually the mother is the object of blind devotion while the other parent, usually the father is the object of resistance. Thus major part of bearing the child and bringing him/her up belongs to the mother. Gertrude thus spoils her son’s relationship by loving him too much. Paul suffers from mother fixation. In Laurentian scheme of things the balance between parents and children should be maintained in the interest of a balanced growth of children.

Lawrence is often blamed for delineating perverse sexual relation, as if he has no art to qualify it, to give it a vision. In this regard Middleton Murry’s critique is perhaps the most damaging. In his article “The Nostalgia of Mr. D.H. Lawrence” he says: “Lawrence had all passion, vehement and burning, in
all its nakedness, but there is little art that could touch, get alone, and refine it.” (*Athenaeum*, quot. Andrews 22)

The crisis in the *Women in Love* occurs, as Murry further says in the chapter “Excurse,” wherein Birkin and Ursula are said to reach salvation in their sexual experience. Like many critics, earlier and later Murry is put off by the reference to ‘loins’, as if Lawrence is the only novelist who refers to sexual experience. If we read the chapter carefully we find in the end that both of them have touched the depth of their individual desires — receiving the maximum of unspeakable communication in touch, dark, positively silent — a perfect acceptance in yielding, mystery, the reality of that which can never be known, vital, sensual reality that can never be transmuted into mind content, but remains outside, the living body of darkness and silence and subtlety, the mystic body of reading. This is sheer poetry, for Ursula was fulfilled and so was Birkin. In Lawrence the need is to know what sex is? In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* also, Lawrence asks, as Philip Larkin also does, what is sex, really? (*FU* 81) He is diffident to answer these questions satisfactorily, but unlike Philip Larkin who defines it negatively in the poem that it is having a lion’s share, Lawrence says that it is a dynamic polarity between human beings and a circuit of force always flowing — a vivid relation between two adult individuals, a dynamic flow inevitably sexual in nature. He further says that the sex between man and woman consummates in the act of coition. Normally its function is pro-creation. Just a side show for the two sexes. For Birkin and Ursula on the other hand this experience was vital as they were fully awake as two individuals, not in possession of the dark forces of pro-creation. The two poles in this act come together, clash into a oneness. But these two individuals are separate again. So in coming together and then separating they remain their independent selves. They have no other purpose but their fulfilment to serve. According to Lawrence meeting and parting and yet remaining together and
separate is the great purposive activity. When man lose this deep sense of purposive creative activity he feels lost and indeed is lost.

Further, man must bravely stand by his own soul, his own responsibility as a creative Van Guard of life. And he must also have the courage to go home to his woman and become a perfect answer to her deep sexual call. But he must never confuse his two issues. Lawrence makes it clear that in a sexual act the two continue to balance each other. Moreover sex is not to be made perverse as if it were a general affair, something common. On the other hand it is an individual and unique affair and in it there is no superior or inferior. It is sacred because one surrenders one’s individuality to the great urge and for which he must surrender everything. Sex for Lawrence, thus is not to be vulgarized. It is a matter of belief, of trust of oneness, a surrender done honorably, in agreement with one’s soul’s deepest desire and this surrender is done in all purity. In the light of the above, Lawrence’s attempt to purify sex, to found man-woman relationship on the basis of perfect relationship is no mean achievement. This idealized version of sex is no mean achievement, for it is in the last degree, creative.

Lawrence’s sensitivity to twentieth century chaos was peculiarly intense and his passion for order was similarly intense but this passion and this sensitivity did not lead him to concentrate on refinements and subtleties of novelistic technique in the direction laid out, for instance, by James and Conrad. Hence, as readers first approaching his work, almost inevitably we feel disappointment and even perhaps shock that writing so often “loose” and repetitious and such unrestrained emotionalism over glandular matters should appear in the work of a novelist who is assumed to have an important place in the literary canon. As Francis Ferguson states: “There is no use trying to appreciate (Lawrence) solely as an artist; he was himself too often impatient of the demands of art, which seemed to him trivial compared with the quest he followed.”(Ferguson 328) Similarly Graham Hough comments: “Art conceived
in this way needs sensitiveness are every point, if it is to respond to the immediate of life before it has hardened into a formula or been analyzed into separate components.” (Hough 10) Art for Lawrence was something “spontaneous and flexible as flame” not restricted by artificial form (P221) because form is “imper sonal like logic” which is the outcome not of artistic conscience, but of “certain attitude to life.” (SL 626) As Lawrence states:

Tell Arnold Benett that all rules of construction hold good only for novels which are copies of other novels. A book which is not a copy of other books has its own construction, and what he calls faults, he being an old imitator, I call characteristics. I shall repeat till I am grey — when they have as good a work to show, they make their pronouncement ex cathedra. Till then, let them learn decent respect. (CL 399)

And that is where any consideration of his work as a novelist must ultimately arrive. Lawrence continually enlarges the boundaries of our consciousness, and “a judgment of his individual artistic achievement will in long run probably depend on the extent and the worth of the new territory acquired.” (Hough 9) Of course, with many novelists such kind of inquiry would be pointless. They are concerned with putting in order experiences of a kind we are already quite familia r with. Lawrence extends our experience; and to think about novelist of this kind at once lands us in difficulties. We cannot talk about technique for long, power of representation or even of moral insights; for we soon find that we are dealing with ideas and mental states that we have never clearly recognized till we meet them in this particular artistic context. As Dorothy Van Ghent writes: “We need to approach Lawrence with a good deal of humility about ‘art’ and a good deal of patience for the disappointment he frequently offers as an artist, for it is only thus that we shall be able to appreciate the innovations he actually made in the novels as well as
the importance and profundity of his vision of modern life.” (Quoted by Spilka, Essays 16)

In fact Lawrence’s aesthetic theory and critical practice are intensely moral rather than formal, technical or academic. His impatient dismissal of all the “twiddle-twaddle about style and form” (P 539) derives from an attitude which looks beyond style and form for the moral nature, the experience offered by literature. Style and form are important, but only to the extent they help in embodying the experience and not for their own sake. Yet Lawrence does not think of them as mere irrelevancies. Lawrence did value good style and form. But if literary work tended to expend human awareness, to give life a new direction and a new meaning, he was prepared to condone many flaws of form, style and technique. The main stream of modernist theory during Lawrence’s life flowed toward the depersonalization of art, while Lawrence grew more consistent in his view that the sensibility of the artist should appear unhindered and undisguised in his work. Lawrence argued that the writer should not attempt to efface himself, for deliberate anonymity in writing draws attention on author’s pretense of impartiality. A writer should speak without self-consciousness in his own voice which is the most honest articulation of his feelings.

Art is, to Lawrence, expressive of the “State of Soul” of the artist — but soul, not “personality.” Lawrence requires a writer to write from his individuality, his true creative self, not the attitudinizing ego which he terms “personality.” In “Democracy” Lawrence makes an interesting distinction between personality and individuality in relation to being. The true individuality of a person, that is, which makes him what he is, is essentially incommunicable. Personality is, on the other hand, “the transmissible effect of a man,” (P710) “his self-conscious ego” (P711) his self aware of itself, an ideal abstractions derived from the real living self but not it.
Obviously, for such “personality” Lawrence can have no place in literature. All genuine writing is “exploitation and blossom from the creative quick,” (P712) and not “the spurious self.”(P710) Thus Lawrence is, like Eliot, in favor of impersonality. But what Lawrence and Eliot means by personality is radically different. Eliot seems to equate, personality, individuality, and subjectivity, and, an exponent of tradition as he is, he is against a writer’s excessive individualism or indulgence in personality, for it exalts, “inner light” over the collective wisdom of tradition. Lawrence, a fierce fighter on behalf of the individual against what he repeatedly describes as “mass insanity,” still ranges himself against personality, for to him personality is only a unit in the aggregate mass of modern insane society. Rising above one’s personality, to Lawrence implies defying social convention and tradition and asserting one’s true self, one’s individuality.

To Lawrence the choice between personality and impersonality is not the same as the choice between subjectivity and objectivity. If a writer writes from his true individual self (as against his personality, his spurious self) his work will be truly objective (impersonal) as well as truly subjective (expressive of his true self). Lawrence quarrels with the Romantics because they are egoists. Excessive self-consciousness, whether in a novelist, or a fictive character, is, according to Lawrence a wholly damning quality. Even the most impersonal looking and apparently self-effacing writers — such as Joyce — appears to him to be suffering from the taint of self-consciousness.

A writer may be autobiographical and still unself-conscious or very self-effacing and still very self-conscious. In Lawrence’s view life and literature are so very close, so much so that he does not hesitate to apply to both of them the same criteria. Self-consciousness whether in a man, a novelist, or a fictive character is treated by Lawrence as equally reprehensible. The excessive self-consciousness of most modern writers, according to Lawrence, is solipsistic self-abuse, even if they outwardly pose to be committed—to self effacement or
impersonality in art. What he asks for is genuine impersonality or unself-conscious surrender to one’s individuality. In a word, in his view a truly subjective writer is truly impersonal one.

An examination of Lawrence’s works shows that he is a radical individualist: it implies both his own peculiarity and independence and at the same time his deep faith in the individual against the claim of deadening convention and a civilization which he is afraid is moving fast towards mass-organization. He stands for “a few pure and single men” rather than for humanity which is “one monstrosity of multiple identical units.”(P 687-688) As such he may be described as a “Romantic” — Gordon calls him “the last Romantic.”(Gordon 101) But he was against both — Classicism — in so far as it means a stress on self-effacement, well-thought-out style, and well wrought form — and Romanticism when, it implies a cult of personality. The only tradition to which he belongs is, in Murray’s words “the tradition of himself.”(Love, Freedom and Society 89)
SUMMING UP

In his massive *History of English Literature*, Hippolyte Taine complains of the preoccupation with vice and virtue in the English novel, to the neglect of man’s inner constitution. He concedes that moral qualities “are the finest fruit of the human plant”, but holds they are not its root — they give us our value, but do not constitute our elements, which are found instead in the realm of “primitive passions.” According to Taine:

A character is a force (he adds), like gravity, or steam... which must be defined otherwise than by the amount of weight it can left or the havoc it can cause. It is therefore to ignore man, to reduce him... to an aggregate of virt ues and vices; it is to neglect the inner and natural element. We will find the same fault in English criticism, always moral, never psychological,... we will find the same fault in English religion, which is but an emotion or a discipline; in their philosop hy, destitute of metaphysics, and if we ascend to the source... we will see all these weaknesses derived from their native energy; their practical education and that kind of severe and religious poetic instinct which has in time past made them Protestant and Puritan. (Quoted by Spilka, *Love Ethic* 8)

If Taine could have lived on into the present century, he would have noted, with some consternation that the first English novelist to explore man’s natural elements and to approach them through psychology and metaphysics, was Protestant by birth and Puritan (in a restricted sense) by disposition. To make the irony more complete, this novelist trained the full force of the English moral conscience upon the realm of “primitive passion.” In other words, he tried to c onnect the root of Taine’s metaphorical plant with the fruit, and to deal as much as possible with the whole organism. To tell us what man is organically, and to place value upon this, was to restore some sense of unity to
the human scheme. It was this special sense of unity, then which D.H. Lawrence brought to the English novel; indeed he found the very goal of life in the achievement of organic being, and the only major sin — its degradation or denial.

He is, driven by strong beliefs on sex, religion and politics, hence, likely to attract indiscriminate hostility or praise. Yet his severest and most clinical admirers fail to do him justice. By elaborating and maximizing faults they freeze and minimize his virtues. What Lawrence needs, is intelligently sympathetic criticism which concentrates on his achievements without blinking at his faults. Lawrence continually enlarges the boundaries of our consciousness, and a judgment of his individual artistic achievement will in the long run probably depend on the extent and the worth of the new territory acquired. Of course with many novelists this kind of inquiry would be pointless. They are concerned with putting in order experiences of a kind we are already quite familiar with. Lawrence extended our experience; and to think about a novelist of this kind at once, is not so easy. We cannot talk for long about technique, powers of representation or even of moral insights; for we soon find that we are dealing with ideas and mental states that we have never recognized till we meet them in a particular artistic context. Of course, we can set Lawrence against traditional moral habits. What he searches for, is a new kind of morality beyond any religion or sect. Belonging to the time of the Romantic Decadence, as a young man he responded to the diabolism and sexual disturbance of Baudelaire and of Beardsley, the voluptuous synaesthesia and erotic mysticism of Wagner; strove, better than Pater, to catch the transient and to burn with a hard gem like flame, dabbled in the occult and sketched out his own religion, though less thoroughly than Yeats; explored the primitive roots of man’s culture in the mythological and anthropological works of Frazer, Harrison and Taylor; and read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and prophesied cultural collapse, apocalypse, and a new life. It is this context to which he belongs, as much as to any tradition of Victorian moral earnestness. All helped to feed his profound yearning for a renewed mode of being in which man was
an organic unity, with his intellect and ego in harmony with his desires and feelings and with individual in proportional harmony with his community and natural world. And art, presenting the actuality of man’s physical existence and his relationship with other existence, provides a sense of identity with something “other” — lifeless, deathless — immanent in and transcending the stability of the phenomenal world.

Lawrence’s principle was that the function of literature is moral. But, he wrote in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, it is a “passionate,” implicit morality not didactic: it “changes the blood” before it changes the mind. He means that the arts are enactments, not sermons; they are experienced discoveries of moral or laws inherent in the very substance of our living. Since Lawrence believes, for example, that sexual love is not an enactment of biological and psychological but of moral and religious truth, as well, a novel imitating the progress of sexual love in a man and woman could not but be therefore, an actualization of moral and religious ideas. “Everything in the world is relative to everything else and every living thing is related to every other living thing.” *(P 590)* All Lawrence’s writing might justly be regarded as explorations within this premise.

Lawrence’s morals in relationships, as we have known from his essay “Morality and the Novel” centre around equitable relationship of sexes. This, he finds is the only way of having freedom from conflicts or to sublimate sex. That is why he seeks, a balance between the two. However, we find that he also feels that there is no norm; a norm is merely an abstraction. Suffice is to say the equilibrium is never perfect. Morality for him is a delicate act of adjustment. An adjustment that Lawrence claims is the highest achievement of the human race — the individual adjusted with other individual. That is all through his fiction he is concerned with establishing this equilibrium. Lawrence’s ethics underline adjustment of acts to ends — adjustment of internal to external relations and above all adjustment of one individual with another individual. It is the same justice, the right to each man to do as he pleases so long, he does not trespass upon the equal freedom of every other man. For D.H. Lawrence
writing was part of a unified effort to expand and perfect the entire arena of human experience. He allied his art with polemical attempts to engage other people in constructing, or at least considering, some form of comprehensive order that would make the world less difficult to live in. For many of his adult years he hoped to lead a vanguard of personal followers into a new world of physically liberated sensual experience by guiding them into accepting their non-rational selves and trusting the fundamental good nature of one another. He brought that effort and other themes of his life into his writing to make them subjects of direct analysis and experimentation; always recognizably autobiographical or self-dramatizing his novels directs our attention to his belief and pursuit of “ultimate marriage” or to his constant search for relationships in which spontaneous passion flow easily among people.

As in his very first novel *The White Peacock*, Lawrence presented a variety of such relations. In this novel a variety of themes and motives are stirring vaguely; some are hinted at and dropped, some are partly developed, and almost all reappear in Lawrence’s mature fiction. All the characters male or female are caught in a tangle of relationships and there is no balanced approach in relations. Although at the beginning of his career Lawrence himself was not clear of the cause of these maladjustments. Lawrence’s second novel *The Trespasser* as its title suggests gives a clear interpretation how man and woman, in assertion of their will become trespassers in each other’s life. It is a story of Helena’s tragic affair with Siegmund who commits suicide when his relations with his repugnant wife and with his adored mistress prove to be almost equally unfulfilling. Lawrence believed that the key to great self-realization is the body’s natural wisdom of its immediate desires and aversions. The person who achieves subtle awareness of his unconscious sympathies would fulfill his individual self through profound, active relations with other individuals, with nature and possibly with a recognized society. Neither Helena, nor Beatrice, even Siegmund can’t understand this and ultimately committed immoral act of suicide. For Lawrence act of love involves the nourishing sacred flow of life between man and woman that is what Lawrence
believed that love is a religious experience, a communism of the blood which brings renewed vitality of being. But in contrast to all this “counterfeit love” proves destructive and exhaustive; it stems, says Lawrence from purely mental feelings, from white cold, nervous, poetic “personal” desire, which exhausts the life flow with its frictional insistence. So the chief moral criterion for love in Lawrence’s world or for any emotional experience is this: does it affirm or deny, renew or destroy the sacred life within us? For it must be made emphatically clear that Lawrence saw all human engagements, sexual or otherwise, in terms of their effect upon the individual’s vitality.

In *Sons and Lovers* there is much more immediacy, realization, than in the callow and conventional earlier novels. It deals with disturbance in the relationship of man and woman — a disturbance of sexual polarities that is first seen in the disaffection of mother and father, then in mother’s attempt to substitute her sons for her husband, and finally in son’s unsuccessful struggle to establish natural manhood. Lawrence implies that when individuals transgress against the natural life-directed condition of human, the human animal — and this offense against life has been brought about by a failure to respect the complete and terminal individuality of persons — by a twisted desire to “possess” other persons, as the mother tries to “possess” her husband, then her sons, and as Miriam tries to possess Paul. Lawrence saw this offense as a disease of modern life in all its manifestations, from sexual relationships to those broad social and political relationships that have changed people from individuals to anonymous economic properties or to military units or ideological automatons.

Lawrence called for balance or polarity, as if between two oppositely charged entities or he placed the marriage unit itself in balance with the world of purposive activity — so that the protagonists of his novels must also be in tune, as it were, with the world around. Where the relationship is, that between a man and woman, there is a double reconciliation of opposites, for the man and woman are required not only to meet as opposites, but as we have seen, to reconcile the opposing qualities within themselves. The relationship is
envisaged as a meeting on equal terms of two people who have themselves achieved full individuality and transcend their duality in the balance that is attained between them. And if the woman (as mate or mother) is completely subjugated then the man will be alone, if he is subordinate and possessed, then his independent being will have been smothered. Better, as Lawrence suggests, to abandon “love,” the possessive sexual impulse, and for each to remain separate, self-possessed, but responsive to the other.

What is insisted on, however, time and again is both the fact of opposition and the necessity of its existence, to the point of turning the conflict into a raison d’être. In his essay, “The Crown,” and intermittently thereafter, the opposition are seen as strife, as an actual combat: “And there is no rest, no cessation from the conflict.” For we are two opposites which exist by virtue of our inter-opposition. Remove the opposition and there is collapse, a sudden crumbling into universal darkness. However, the metaphors of combat are pervasive; the first one used is that of the lion and unicorn fighting for the crown. And the fight is life itself. But think, if the lion really destroyed killed the unicorn: not merely drove him out of the town, but annihilated him! Would not the lion at once expire, as if he had created a vacuum around himself? They would both cease to be, if either of them really won the fight which is their sole reason for existing. The lion, the mind, the active, the male principle must always be at strife with the unicorn, the senses, the passive, the female principle. A victory for either side brings life to an end. The reconciliation can’t be affected by the victory of either side. It is not achieved by giving the victory to the spirit and making the flesh its willing subject, as Platonism and Christian morals enjoin. But neither can it be achieved by giving the victory to the flesh and allowing it to lead the spirit captive, a procedure of which Lawrence is often accused. For instance, when Hermione wants to love Birkin spiritually and Birkin to preserve his integrity has to reject her, she tries to knock his brain out. Farther back still, the unhappy Paul of *Sons and Lover* is in the foils of a “spiritual love” which should have been a happy physical relation, but can never become because of Miriam’s fixed spiritual will and his situation
is complicated because there is another woman, his mother, who also wants to possess his soul. Due to Miriam’s maidenly and spiritual nature she only desires his conscious self, calling him back from “the impersonality of passion” to “the littleness of the personal relationship.” The common element in all these admittedly complex and varying situations is a love which is cut off from the natural carnal roots of love, and continuous to exist simply as a function of the will. It is sterile in itself and becomes life-exhausting to whoever exercises it. Since it is something imposed on the object of love, not a reciprocal relation, it becomes inevitably a kind of spiritual bullying and must inevitably be rejected by anyone who wishes to preserve his individual being. One way of doing this would be for civilized man to return to a primitive tribal life before the spirit, the Logos, had yet emerged from the womb of the flesh.

The proper relation between the opposites is later described by Lawrence as polarity or star-equilibrium. It may be achieved, both between individuals and between the psychic forces within the individual, as the result of prolonged conflict; but when achieved, it is a state where conflict is transcended, a state of still tension life-sustaining and life-creating, forbidding forever the merging of opposites, and maintaining both in a state of natural complementary balance. However, Lettie-Lesile, Meg-George, Walter-Gertrude, Paul-Miriam-Clara all fail to achieve this balance. At the same time when Birkin wants Ursula something more than love, it is this that he is looking for. When Somers and Harriet are not fighting, when they are rightly together, this is what they achieve. It seems that this is no great matter, that it is simply the we-love-one-another-but-we-live-our-own-lives that are one of the common places of a certain type of modern marriage. But that is not what Lawrence meant at all. His married men and women most emphatically do not live their own lives: they are indissolubly bound and irrevocably depend on each other. But they never merge; each recognizes at the core of the other’s being an eternally separate spark. And the two poles are eternally opposed; the whole fruitfulness of the relationship depends on their opposition, yet its whole
integrity depends on moments when the sense of opposition has vanished. As Lawrence writes in his essay “Democracy”:

We cannot say that all men are equal... one man is neither equal nor unequal to another man. When I stand in the presence of another man, and I am my own pure self... when I stand with another man who is himself and when I am truly myself, then I am only aware of a presence, and of a strange reality of otherness. There is me and there is another being. There is no complaining or estimating. There is only this strange reorganization of present otherness. I may be glad angry, or sad, because of the presence of the other. But still no comparison enters in; comparison enters only when one of us departs from his own integral being, and enters the material - mechanical world. Then equality and inequality starts at once. (SE 92-93)

D.H. Lawrence fought throughout his life for the individual’s right to freedom. He was also aware of the vulnerability of human beings engaged in interpersonal relationships especially the sexual ones. So he made it a mission of his life to protect the sanctity of being of such vulnerable individuals. He dreamed of a sexual act in which the individuals die from their old ego and are reborn to a new life, each as master of his own soul, but united with his mate in profound tenderness, saved from all lust of power involved in sexual feeling, cleansed of all the elements of petty vanity which are a part of all erotics, but with their manly or womanly self-consciousness intensified. That is why his protagonists (both male and female) always appears to constitute a community of the elect: “A mark of this elect will naturally be the new man -woman relationship; for the woman was law and the man love, and just as these two epochal ethics will be transformed in the third, so will the two persons, man and woman, be, under the new dispensation, merged in a new relationship, and yet remain distinct.” (Kermode, Critical Quarterly 20) It has been well said: “In Lawrence’s imagination, two do not become one, but rather you have a strange insistence upon individuality and relationship upon balanced stars
which meet beneath the level of consciousness. The relation between the rock and myself is not one of a subject to an object, but rather an inter subjective transaction with a potentially for rapport. Lawrence dearly states that man and woman are not the broken fragments of the whole.”(WL200)

Lawrence transcends mere egotism here; he perceives that life takes place only in the individual and that it is the business of love, marriage, religion and social endeavor to bring about fulfillment in the individual. The central law of all organic life is that each organism is intrinsically isolate and single in itself. But the secondary law of life is this: that the individual can only be fulfilled through contact and communion with his fellow men and women. And of course the most vital contact of all occurs between a man and a woman, so long as it preserves the intrinsic otherness of each participant. Men live by love writes Lawrence, “but die or cause death if they love too much.” As Lawrence Writes in his essay “Democracy”:

> Each man shall be spontaneously himself, each man himself, each woman herself, without any question of equality or inequality entering in at all, and that no man shall try to determine the being of any other man, or any other woman. (SE 93)

The prime example of polarity is in human affairs is the polarity between sexes. The sex relation is only an instance of the polarity that runs through the universe — but it is primary for man. His very being, is the result of a sexual encounter, and in the sexual encounter he returns to his origins and finds his completest fulfillment. And our completest means of realizing prime reality is in sexual experience. If sex is not the primary fulfillment it is due a cultural failure in which we are nearly all involved, where sex goes into the mind. But sex becomes impure when it is directed from its primary function of mutual fulfillment to the instinct for pro-creation. It is decidedly not the motive behind sexual relation between man and woman. For him the experience of the participants in sex is always primary, and the child is a by-product. Lawrence does, however, seriously underrate the power of parental feeling and desire for
children; and he seems to have no concrete idea of the completion of a sex relation in children and the family. Though he spends a great deal of energy on the relations between parents and children, it is nearly always as its perversions and there is scarcely an instance in his novels of normal parental love. Since the central fact of human experience is the polarity between the sexes, the difference between man and woman is to be maintained and maintained as far as possible.

The great thing is to keep the sexes pure. And by pure don’t mean ideal sterile innocence and similarly between boy and girl. We mean pure maleness in a man, pure femaleness in a woman. (FU142)

Although the man’s and the woman’s roles are essentially complementary, opposition and conflict between them is to be expected. It should be admitted, indulged, never shirked or avoided. Any attempts to deny its existence or to suppress it in support of a pre-conceived moral or social ideal simply destroy emotional integrity and poison the springs of life. Lawrence never wavered in the belief that a male once chosen was chosen for life. His own wife was a divorcée, and so were many of his friends, but this did not prevent his viewing, that marriage was marriage, once and for all—not from any principle of external law, but from the nature of genuine human sexual relations in themselves. Undoubtedly, he made the reservation of hopelessly mistaken or inauthentic matches, as all who are not restrained by some overriding religious precept are likely to do. The remarkable thing, however, is his certainty that his principles of action would lead to durable, indissoluble alliances. No doubt an occasional row is better than suppressed resentment. At any rate, he sees marriage as permanent, and the permanence as a part of it raison d’être.

Lawrence brings us, a vivid sense of this ever-present conflict: by plunging into basic human complications, by emerging, eventually, in some new direction with new problems posed and old ones solved, exhausted, or laid
aside unsolved, he makes us face the full extent our own dilemmas. For as William Blake would have it, we never know what is enough unless we know what is more than enough. As it is not one to one relationship but infinity of relatedness. The balance is always flickering as it is a recurring movement from one extreme to the other, of forces within the individual but it aptly suggests the counterpoise which Lawrence believes to be necessary in personal relations - achieving organic beings through — an infinity of pure relation with the living universe. It seems scarcely accidental, then, that a man is born (incipiently) at the end of the *Sons and Lovers*; a woman is born (again incipiently) as *The Rainbow* ends; while in *Women in Love* a man and a woman meet and marry, and conceive a child some eight years later, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. So all his novels represent an impressive and decidedly artistic at tempt on Lawrence’s part to set forth the conditions of manhood, womanhood, and marriage, as he felt and understood them in his own life. Lawrence wanted what all want: a full life, a warm hearted relation with others, and no more pain than man can assimilate. If he thought it took a new mode of consciousness to achieve this, he conceived of this consciousness as springing from a source no more esoteric than man himself. Lawrence cut himself off from our traditional culture and our more doctrinaire reforms, but by so doing linked himself more firmly to man in the flesh.

Lawrence was not an incredible mystic; his grasp of human exchange was impressively sound. Indeed the resurrection or destruction of human soul, within the living body, was central to his work; and by resurrection Lawrence meant no more — and, in all fairness, no less than emergence into greater fullness of being. So he had often preached the need to awaken the phallic or bodily forms of consciousness in man; but more than this, he had always preached Holy Ghost life or the life of the self in its wholeness: the individual in his pure singleness, in his totality of consciousness. Only then will man live as an organic being in “organic connections” with one another and “the
circumambient universe.” It would be most appropriate to end the discussion with what were almost the last words of Lawrence:

…For man, the vast marvel is to be alive. For man, as for flower and beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive. Whatever the unborn and the dead may know, they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh… We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos… There is nothing of me that is alone and absolute except in my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself; it is the glitter of the sun on the surface of waters. (A 110)