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LAWRENCE'S PEOPLE:

Levels of Character in Three
of the Prussian Officer Stories

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Abstract

This thesis examines D.H. Lawrence's presentation of character in three stories from his first published collection, The Prussian Officer and Other Stories. Chapter One provides a brief historical survey of the criticism of Lawrence's work, and relates past misunderstandings of Lawrence's methods of characterization to present ones. It also attempts to explain what it is about Lawrence's art that provokes these misunderstandings.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four, through contextualised analyses of, respectively, "The Prussian Officer," "Daughters of the Vicar," and "The White Stocking," attempt to do justice to the detached, subtle, and discriminating intelligence that Lawrence demonstrates in his presentation of different levels of character. In particular, I draw attention to those distinctions he makes at the deeper levels, which critics have often ignored. Throughout, I consider the stories as firmly belonging to the body of Lawrence's great creative art.

Concluding the thesis is a brief afterword, which defends my particular method of approach to the stories. Such a method of contextualised interpretation is considered necessary to a sensitive appreciation of Lawrence's varied presentation of character.

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Chapter One: Introductory

This thesis is an examination of the ways Lawrence presents character in three short stories. Lawrence's methods of characterization still pose, I think, the biggest obstacle to an understanding of his fiction. A survey of the critical texts makes the point depressingly clear: misconceptions about his methods that were common when he was still alive are common now, despite the excellent criticism that has been written. The attitude that underlies these misconceptions can be summarised in one sentence: at the deeper levels of character, Lawrence's people are all the same. In the early criticism, this attitude was explicit. Nowadays one is not likely to find it anywhere stated, but, as I shall show, it is implicit even in the work of such recent and respectable commentators as Keith Cushman and Michael Black.

Among the early critics, John Middleton Murry exerted the most powerful influence on readers of Lawrence. In "The Nostalgia of Mr D.H. Lawrence," a review of Women in Love published in the Nation and Athenaeum, August 13, 1921, Murry began by praising qualities discernible in Lawrence's earlier work ("a sensitive and impassioned apprehension of natural beauty"; "an understanding of the strange blood bonds that unite human beings"; "a power of natural vision"), but he went on to declare that Lawrence "is an artist no longer," and to complain that "we can discern no individuality whatever in the denizens of Mr Lawrence's world."¹ In his influential book Son of Woman (1931) - described by Aldous Huxley as "that curious essay in destructive hagiography"² - Murry's criticism is vitiated rather than strengthened by his personal knowledge of, and animus towards, Lawrence. Each work becomes, in Murry's hands, another chapter of Lawrence's tormented autobiography. Murry's book was all the more influential thanks to the approving review given it by

the editor of the Criterion, T.S. Eliot (the tone of Eliot's review may be inferred from his sentence, "The victim and the sacrificial knife are perfectly adapted to each other"³).

The wealth of biographical material that was published in the years following Lawrence's death - Huxley's The Letters of D.H. Lawrence (1932), and memoirs by friends and acquaintances variously disposed towards Lawrence - enabled many critics to follow in Murry's wake. In the 1930's it became a critical commonplace to disparage Lawrence's powers of characterization. In The Spectator, November 18, 1932, Lord David Cecil could with complete confidence assert that "Mr Lawrence's strong individuality prevented him entering into other characters. His characters are expressions of varying aspects of himself."⁴ Such an assertion did not require substantiation; it was merely to state what most readers, already, took for granted. In a review of Phoenix (headed "Is Lawrence Neglected?") in The Saturday Review, October 31, 1936, Theodore Spencer affirmed that on "the descriptive level, Lawrence is a great writer," but unfortunately

the very intensity of his intuition, its demonic quality, kept him, when he went deeper than rabbits or places and tried to describe human beings, from seeing them except as examples of his own emotional problems. His characters lack the salt of objectivity. Further, in describing men and women he tried to go too far down into the dark sources of consciousness. Seeking for the fundamental springs of personality, he got below personality. He went under the Plimsoll line of identity. His novels are full of subtle human conflicts, but they are never conflicts which particularize his characters as human beings; they are examples of passions, of states of feeling, mostly in the abstract. His people, with one or two exceptions, are merely wells or rather geysers of instinct, acting from impulses so obscure that they dim, they don't illuminate, individuality.⁵

Spencer is worth quoting at some length because he brings together the related opinions about Lawrence that were commonly held at that time. The way he damns Lawrence by qualifying his praise is typical. What Lawrence had was not intelligence but "intuition," the keenness of which tended towards weirdness: it had a "demonic quality." This intuition was for the writer of nature-pieces an admirable thing to have, but it was of no use at all to the story-teller; it only got in the way. Lawrence's attempts at characterization only demonstrate what a "case" he was: his characters are nothing but "examples of his own emotional problems." They are certainly not credible as distinct individuals, because individuals are distinguishable at the level of personality, and Lawrence "got below personality." To "go too far down" is to find that, at bottom, we are all alike - a disastrous find, for the story-teller; he should confine his attention to the upper level.

Such a catalogue of misunderstandings - of unsubstantiated assertions posing as unanswerable facts - helps to explain why Lawrence was neglected. It allowed Stephen Spender, for instance, in The Destructive Element (1936), to praise "the descriptive passages in his novels, and the Nature poems in Birds, Beasts and Flowers," and to find the rest of his art "disappointing."⁶

The critical neglect, and the misunderstanding, continued in the 1940's. In "Some Notes on D.H. Lawrence" in The Nation, April 26, 1947, W.H. Auden wrote that "the poems in Birds, Beasts, and Flowers are Lawrence's greatest achievement," and he reiterated Spencer's criticism of Lawrence's characterization:

Like Blake, Lawrence was interested, not in "individuals," but in "states." In writing about nature or about strangers this does not matter, as these are only experienced as states of being, but it is a serious

drawback in writing fiction which cannot avoid the individual and his relations to other individuals over a stretch of time. ... we get bored with the lack of a character to bind the states together and give them uniqueness.⁷

One may discern, from the similar line taken by these different reviewers, the consolidation of a conventional opinion. But there were dissenting critics. Aldous Huxley, as I have already indicated, reacted against Murry; in his introduction to The Letters he declared that "Lawrence's biography does not account for Lawrence's achievement," and that "it is impossible to write about Lawrence except as an artist."⁸ Catherine Carswell's Savage Pilgrimage (1932) provided a sane corrective to some of Murry's grosser distortions, and E.M. Forster came out in protest against Lawrence's poor obituary press by saying "straight out that he was the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation."⁹ The most important of the dissenting critics was F.R. Leavis. Leavis first wrote on Lawrence in 1930, and those who have read the whole of his Lawrence criticism will have noted how his evaluation of individual works, and of their order of merit, changed over the years. But one theme remained a constant: Lawrence was a great creative artist, a great writer. In D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (1955), Leavis's stated aim was "to win recognition for the nature of his achievement as a novelist,"¹⁰ though he obviously did not regard the genius of the novelist as manifested only in the novels. The Rainbow and Women in Love are the only two he discussed at length; the other compelling instances he adduced of Lawrence's major art were some of the longer tales. In his chapter on Women in Love, Leavis refuted the criticisms Murry brought against the novel in the only way they could be refuted: that is, by critically examining the text itself. The very different characters, both major and minor, that he adduces from the novel are plain evidence that "no one could be in less

danger than Lawrence of forgetting the truth that life is a matter of individual lives."¹¹ But the nature of Leavis's enterprise meant that he needed only to examine a small number of works to make his point ("I thought that my actual choice was such as to make the particular examination of others not strictly necessary"¹²). Of the stories I examine in this thesis, "Daughters of the Vicar" is the only one to which Leavis devotes much attention; "The White Stocking" he gives one page, and "The Prussian Officer" is dismissed in a few sentences. His dismissal of the last story appears to be the result, at least in part, of an ignorance of the writing history of the Prussian Officer volume. Leavis finds it "surprising how large a proportion of that first volume ... is good," and he claims that "the title story and "The Thorn in the Flesh" are in an early Lawrence vein that he soon outgrew."¹³ In fact, as Keith Cushman points out, these "stories were the last to be written and the last to be revised."¹⁴ All the stories in the Prussian Officer, including those previously published, were revised, most of them extensively, before the volume's publication on November 26, 1914. The revised versions, then, may be judged as belonging to Lawrence's greatest creative phase - the phase that includes The Rainbow (the final version of which was completed a mere three months later) and Women in Love. Leavis's mistake was in supposing them to belong to an earlier phase - an almost inevitable error, given the state of Lawrence-scholarship at the time.

No one can now dispute that Leavis achieved his aim. The steady stream of critical texts that issued in the late fifties, the sixties and the seventies testified to a new - one can hardly say a revived - academic interest in Lawrence's art. Graham Hough's The Dark Sun (1956), which was rather overshadowed by Leavis's book of the previous year, attempted to provide a critical survey of the entire range of Lawrence's oeuvre. This allowed for

rather scanty coverage of the short stories that I examine. What criticism there is of them is, like Leavis's, impaired by a predisposition to regard them as representative of an earlier phase. And, despite his reading of Leavis, Hough could still refer to "a permanent interest of Lawrence in themes and states of consciousness rather than in the persons who move through them."¹⁵ Other influential books from this later period were Eliseo Vivas's D.H. Lawrence: The Failure and the Triumph of Art (1960), H.M. Daleski's The Forked Flame (1965), Keith Sagar's The Art of D.H. Lawrence (1966) and Emile Delavenay's D.H. Lawrence: The Man and His Work (1972). Yet apart from articles scattered among various literary magazines and quarterlies, the Prussian Officer volume still suffered from critical neglect.¹⁶ That is, it did until the publication of Keith Cushman's D.H. Lawrence at Work: The Emergence of the Prussian Officer Stories (1978). Cushman's book is a scholarly account of the process of revision by which Lawrence arrived at the final versions of the stories collected in the volume. He relies too much, however, on reference to biographical details to advance his case. An analysis of a particular passage will often lapse into something else which, whatever it is, is certainly not literary criticism. This sort of thing (the passage referred to is from "The White Stocking"¹⁷) is all too common:

This passage could be a description of the first two years of the marriage between Lawrence and Frieda. In fact it is a more apt description of their relationship than of the first years of marriage of Elsie and Whiston. ... Lawrence, whether or not he knows it, is speaking of himself.¹⁸

Cushman does not always reveal his attitude to Lawrence's art as explicitly as he does here. He reveals it implicitly, though, in what we notice as a continual movement of attention from the art to theoretical concerns,

particularly those expounded by Lawrence in the famous "carbon" letter to Edward Garnett of June 5, 1914.¹⁹ These concerns are indeed relevant to a consideration of Lawrence's presentation of character, and I will refer to them in the course of this thesis. But as I shall show, Cushman displays a tendency to assimilate scenes where he sees Lawrence employing his new theoretical vocabulary, without any regard for the differences the characters, in their uniqueness, bring to these scenes. In other words Cushman repeats in a rather less overt fashion Middleton Murry's approach, with the same neglect of Lawrence's art that this approach entails.

Michael Black's D.H. Lawrence: The Early Fiction (1986) provides a more perceptive commentary on the best stories from The Prussian Officer, and on Lawrence's other fiction prior to The Rainbow. We note the now familiar determination to regard these fictions as a prelude to Lawrence's greatest creative phase ("This book follows Lawrence's writing up to the point when it is generally agreed his maturity begins"²⁰), but we also note the determination not to read these fictions

as early expressions of ideas which later he expresses better. It seems dubious to me that important writers deal in ideas - though a reader may precipitate out an idea-like formulation. What the poet produces is collocations of words, figures of speech. Valéry called these the echoes in an internal cistern, dark reverberations which have shaped themselves as rhythms or phrases. For a novelist they come out both as imagery and as repeated gestures by his characters, repeated poses, groupings; a certain favoured scenery; related predicaments.²¹

Elsewhere, as I shall show, Black falls into over-emphasizing the repetitive element, much as the early critics had done; here, however, he captures the aspect

of Lawrence's art to which those critics, with varying degrees of hostility and incomprehension, had responded. Black stresses the creative writer's special use of language; of what Lawrence called "art-speech."²² The novelist is committed to a personal mode of expression different from that of rational discourse. Within the thought-world of a particular novelist, certain phenomena acquire an unusual significance; these phenomena will recur again and again in the art as the novelist develops and alters the significance he or she has found in them. The early critics looked at Lawrence's characters and found only sameness. In the course of this thesis I intend to show that where one finds sameness between characters, one also finds difference; that when a character appears most representative is when he or she also appears most unique. To achieve this intention I think it is necessary to enter into Lawrence's thought-world as deeply as one is able. Only in detailed examinations of the stories can both sides of the coin be plainly shown. With this end in mind, I have confined myself to close analyses of three stories: "The Prussian Officer," "Daughters of the Vicar," and "The White Stocking." I have chosen these three because they seem to me the best stories in the Prussian Officer volume, and to rank among the finest stories that Lawrence wrote. Further, these stories illustrate the diversity of mode, tone, and character that critics have tended to slight or overlook. From the sombre, intense evocation of the relationship between an officer and his orderly in "The Prussian Officer," to the light, quasi-comic portrayal of the eternal triangle in "The White Stocking," we have ever before us the flexibility and range of Lawrence's art.

Notes

- 1 W.T. Andrews, ed., Critics on D.H. Lawrence: Readings in Literary Criticism 9 (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971), pp. 20-22.
- 2 Aldous Huxley, introduction, The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Aldous Huxley (London: Heinemann, 1932), p. x.
- 3 H. Coombes, ed., D.H. Lawrence: A Critical Anthology (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), p. 241.
- 4 Andrews, p. 40.
- 5 Andrews, pp. 43-44.
- 6 Stephen Spender, The Destructive Element: A Study of Modern Writers and Beliefs (1936; rpt. Philadelphia, Pa.: Albert Saifer, 1953), p. 183.
- 7 Andrews, pp. 47-48.
- 8 Huxley, pp. x-xi.
- 9 Letter to the Nation and Athenaeum, March 29, 1930. For the full text of Forster's letter, see Coombes, pp. 218-19.
- 10 F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (1955; rpt. Penguin Books Ltd., in association with Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 14.
- 11 Leavis, p. 200.
- 12 Leavis, p. 15.

- 13 Leavis, p. 257.
- 14 Keith Cushman, D.H. Lawrence at Work: The Emergence of the Prussian Officer Stories (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), p. 202.
- 15 Graham Hough, The Dark Sun: A Study of D.H. Lawrence (1956; rpt. Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), pp. 27-28.
- 16 For a full-length attempt to remedy the neglect of Lawrence's short fiction in general, see Kingsley Widmer, The Art of Perversity: D.H. Lawrence's Shorter Fiction (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962). Widmer's book examines the stories from too restrictive a viewpoint to be useful for my purposes.
- 17 D.H. Lawrence, "The White Stocking," in The Prussian Officer and Other Stories, by D.H. Lawrence, ed. John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 158. All quotations from "The White Stocking," "The Prussian Officer," and "Daughters of the Vicar" will be taken from the Cambridge Edition, and page numbers will be given in the text.
- 18 Cushman, p. 161.
- 19 George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, eds., The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Volume II, June 1913-October 1916 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 182-84. All quotations from the letters will be taken from the Cambridge Edition, hereafter referred to in the text as Letters. Volume and page numbers will be given in the text.
- 20 Michael Black, D.H. Lawrence: The Early Fiction (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986) p. 23.

- 21 Black, p. 22.
- 22 D.H. Lawrence, "The Spirit of Place," in Studies in Classic American Literature, by D.H. Lawrence (1923; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 2.

Chapter Two: "The Prussian Officer"

"The Prussian Officer" controverts at a very ordinary level the claim that Lawrence's art is all disguised autobiography. It may be true that, as Keith Cushman suggests, the story was inspired by some scanty entries in a diary kept by Frieda Lawrence's father, when he served as an officer in the Franco-Prussian War.¹ At any rate, there is nothing in the story (apart from the details of the evoked landscape) that Lawrence could have observed or experienced at first-hand. Of course one can discuss the polarities in the story - mind and body, repression and spontaneity, conscious and unconscious - and then (leaving the story behind) discuss these as irreconcilable elements in Lawrence himself. A number of critics (see, for instance, Frieda's remarks in Not I, But the Wind ...²) have done so: a speculative, critically barren exercise, it seems to me. The presentation of character in this story has the impersonal stamp of Lawrence's great creative art. The drama, as it unfolds, is filtered through the consciousness of the two main characters, but Lawrence sees more than they do. The consequence of Lawrence's semi-dramatic narrative technique for us as readers is that though for most of the story we are within one character's or the other's perceptual frame, we can range more freely within those frames than the characters can themselves. We can ponder the significance of actions which they dare not ponder, and question motives which they dare not question; though we see through their eyes, we are not they. We come to see the captain and his orderly as representatives of two very limited and very different modes of being. But they are not merely representatives. Each mode of being is realised dramatically in character; the universal is grounded in the particular. The distancing effect and consequent relief that allegory would provide are not afforded us in this story.

We are within the orderly's perceptual frame in the story's opening scene. We are not immediately aware of this, as the description of a regiment of soldiers marching along a highroad begins with the third person plural pronoun: "They had marched more than thirty kilometres since dawn"; and the first paragraph concludes with a generalised perception of the soldiers' physical discomfort: "While the feet of the soldiers grew hotter, sweat ran through their hair under their helmets, and their knapsacks could burn no more in contact with their shoulders, but seemed instead to give off a cold, prickly sensation" (p.1).

If we read no further, we could easily assume the narratorial perspective to be omniscient. It appears deliberately to avoid confining itself to one individual, preferring to describe the soldiers' feelings en masse. The impression of an all-encompassing vision is reinforced by the panoramic description of the countryside the soldiers are marching through:

On either hand, the valley, wide and shallow, glistened with heat; dark green patches of rye, pale young corn, fallow and meadow and black pine-woods spread in a dull, hot diagram under a glistening sky. But right in front the mountains ranged across, pale blue and very still, the snow gleaming gently out of the deep atmosphere. (p.1)

This keen, wide-angle perception and the impressiveness of the evoked landscape diminutively place the regiment, and leave the individual out of count altogether. Yet both the second and third paragraphs begin with the third person singular pronoun, as if an individual has already been introduced. "He" (identified in the fourth paragraph as the orderly) has suffered a severe beating: he has "deep bruises on the backs of his thighs" (p.1). Although "it had made him sick to take the first steps," he seems determined to play down the severity and significance of

his injury: "What were they after all but bruises!" (p.1). This fobbing off can only succeed if he can shut off his feelings of extreme pain, and suppress any outward sign that might betray his pain to his fellows:

At the start, he had determined not to limp. ... and during the first mile or so, he had compressed his breath, and the cold drops of sweat had stood on his forehead. ... till now he had a tight, hot place in his chest, with suppressing the pain, and holding himself in. There seemed no air when he breathed. But he walked almost lightly. (p.1)

The man's coexistent sensations of cold and heat ("cold drops of sweat") suggest that he is feverish. One is reminded of the "cold, prickly sensation" produced in "the soldiers" by their knapsacks, which is described in the first paragraph. His breathlessness recalls another description from the first paragraph, which begins to appear, in hindsight, less neutral than it does on first reading: "The burnished, dark green rye threw off a suffocating heat, the mountains drew gradually nearer and more distinct" (p.1).

One now sees that this description is filtered through a super-sensitive perceptual lens - that of the hurt man. He perceives intensely, with a near-delirious clarity: the rye is "burnished," the heat "suffocating." This fever-pitch awareness of his surroundings is a self-protective mechanism. It enables the man to block off awareness of his inner sensation - his pain - which threatens to overwhelm him. Michael Black observes that "the mind which is keeping a grip on the world by seeing it so intensely is also unconsciously keeping a grip on itself. It is using the world to keep out any other consciousness"³ - though "mind" is an inappropriate choice of word, here; the "grip" is conveyed in very physical terms.

What, then, is one to make of the first paragraph's reference to the discomfort felt by "the soldiers"? In hindsight one can see that the description of the landscape is filtered through a particular man's perspective, but the private sensations felt by other men cannot be known from that perspective. Does this reference therefore constitute a switch to an omniscient point of view? One cannot be sure, but given the peculiar state of consciousness represented in the orderly, one can plausibly maintain that the perspective is still his. Later in the story, we read that he felt "as if all the other things were there and had form, but he himself was only a consciousness, a gap that could think and perceive" (p.11). I would suggest that it is as a thinking, perceiving gap that the orderly is present in the first paragraph. His awareness is so utterly directed outwards, away from his pain, that other, lesser discomforts are not recognized as pertaining to him; they are projected on to others. The kind of sensation (noted above) attributed to "the soldiers" supports this suggestion: heat and cold are commonly confused by a person with fever, and the orderly is feverish. The narratorial perspective is not as straightforward as one might first suppose it to be.

As the narrative filters through one character's consciousness, it demands from the reader an empathic response, an imaginative "feeling into" the character's plight. The in medias res beginning, however, provokes a demand of our own: for a context. Who has inflicted this injury, and how did it come about? Our active feelings of sympathy and curiosity draw us into the imagined world of the story. Obliquely, and still from the orderly's perspective, the narrative begins to hint answers to our questions in the fourth paragraph:

The captain's hand had trembled in taking his coffee at dawn: his orderly saw it again. And he saw the fine figure of the captain wheeling on horseback at the farm-house ahead, a handsome figure in pale blue uniform ... The orderly felt he was connected with that figure moving so suddenly on horseback: he followed it like a shadow, mute and inevitable and damned by it. And the officer was always aware of the tramp of the company behind, the march of his orderly among the men. (pp.1-2)

The narrative requires us to read actively; we must infer from what is given. That "the captain's hand had trembled" clearly implicates him in the beating. It is also a bodily betrayal of a suppressed tension. He too, it seems, is avoiding conscious recognition of what has happened. The "dawn" reference suggests that the beating occurred the previous evening. The public, official relationship between the two men is revealed, and the sense of a clandestine, invisible connection is also developed. The resplendence of the officer's uniform, and his substantiality (emphasized by the repetition of the word "figure"), negate the orderly's sense of his own substance; he feels "like a shadow" of the captain. The simile is saved from cliché by its range of suggestion. The orderly feels bound to the captain and dependent upon him, as a shadow is bound to and dependent upon its object. A shadow is "mute," having no life of its own, and "inevitable," as a complementary adjunct to what is real. But in what way is a shadow "damned"? The word is close enough in meaning to "inevitable" for it not to be incongruous, but it moves beyond mere elaboration of the image. It is a reflection on the connection, suggesting that it is somehow fate - perhaps fatal. On this note of foreboding, there is a sudden change of perspective, from the subordinate position of the orderly to the superior, dominant position of the captain. This switch does not break the tension; it intensifies it. The captain is as preternaturally aware

of his orderly as his orderly is of him. Something dark and unacknowledged obtains between the two men; an oppressive atmosphere envelops just the two of them. They are singled out from the rest of the regiment for our attention.

Thus it is only natural that, in the paragraphs that follow, we should be given more detailed descriptions of these two men. These descriptions serve a double purpose. They provide information about each man and his background, but they are also an unobtrusive moving backward, a flash-back to the real beginnings of the story. The orderly's bruises are the latest upshot of a deep-rooted conflict between these two very different characters.

The captain is the first to be described. This description partly issues through the orderly's perception: "His orderly, having to rub him down, admired the amazing riding muscles of his loins" (p.2). But from a more impersonal, omniscient perspective, the portrayal is fleshed out with details that the orderly is not likely to know: the captain is a Prussian, "but his mother had been a Polish countess. Having made too many gambling debts when he was young, he had ruined his prospects in the army, and remained an infantry captain" (p.2). The details of the captain's physiognomy, which are of course available to the orderly's perception, are not described from his perspective; he is, at this earlier stage, scarcely aware of the captain as another human being:

For the rest, the orderly scarcely noticed the officer any more than he noticed himself. It was rarely he saw his master's face: he did not look at it. The captain had reddish-brown, stiff hair, that he wore short upon his skull. His moustache also was cut short and bristly over a full, brutal mouth. His face was rather rugged, the cheeks thin. Perhaps the man was the more handsome for the deep lines in his face,

the irritable tension of his brow, which gave him the look of a man who fights with life. His fair eyebrows stood bushy over light blue eyes that were always flashing with cold fire. (p.2)

This description is appropriately like that of a portrait, which is lifelike, but not living. The various details - the stiffness of his hair, the reference to his "skull" (where we would expect "head"), the thinness of his cheeks, the coldness of his eyes - all contribute to an impression of death-in-life. These physical details are not merely emblems of hidden, mental qualities; Lawrence finds them interesting in their own right. To develop an understanding of his presentation of character requires thoughtful attention to these details. We learn not to pair them automatically with inner, mental characteristics. To gloss them over in that way is to disregard the deep significance that the human body and its processes have in Lawrence's fiction. Even when, as in this instance, a character seeks to repress this significance, it makes itself felt as a potent presence through the very act of repression. The captain is a man at war with himself; he has "the look of a man who fights with life."

In a later essay, "Morality and the Novel," Lawrence stresses the importance of relationships - especially man-woman relationships - to the living of a full life.⁴ The possibility of the captain's forming an abiding relationship with a woman has been thwarted by an army career, and by an inertness of impulse within him which impresses itself upon us as a lack:

He had never married: his position did not allow it, and no woman had ever moved him to it. His time he spent riding ... Now and then he took himself a mistress. But after such an event, he returned to duty with his brow still more tense, his eyes still more hostile and irritable. (p.2)

The captain's relationship with the men under his command is likewise "merely impersonal" (p.2). Yet he has a fiery temperament, which he constantly holds in check. The discipline and formalized relationships of army life provide a supportive milieu: "He knew himself to be always on the point of breaking out. But he kept himself hard to the idea of the Service"(p.4). "The idea of the Service" provides a focus for the captain's energies: he can thus repress and ignore those elements in his nature that the Service ignores. This is a tactic for survival of a limited kind, like Anton Skrebensky's dedication to the utilitarian ideal, or Gerald Crich's dedication to industry. Public zeal conceals an inner deadness. He withholds himself from personal contact with his orderly, "so that his servant knew practically nothing about him, except just what orders he would give, and how he wanted them obeyed. ... Then the change gradually came" (p.2).

The orderly unconsciously provokes this change. Indeed, it is his unconsciousness that constitutes the provocation. He is, from the description we have of him, the captain's complementary opposite - a corporeal manifestation of all that the captain has suppressed in himself: "There was something altogether warm and young about him. He had firmly marked eyebrows over dark, expressionless eyes, that seemed never to have thought, only to have received life direct through his senses, and acted straight from instinct" (pp.2-3). "Warm" is, for Lawrence, a powerful adjective of endorsement, and the description as a whole is certainly positive, contrasted with that of the captain. In a letter of January 17, 1913, to Ernest Collings, Lawrence had declared his "belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect" (Letters I, p.503), and this positive orientation towards physical aliveness and spontaneity is implicit in the description of the orderly. But, as often happens in Lawrence's work, the art qualifies the metaphysic: as he endorses the orderly's mode of being, he also places it. Living only

through his senses, perceiving without comprehending, the orderly is a limited being: one notices, in the following pages, the frequent use of adjectives such as "blind," "expressionless," and "unthinking" to describe him. Examples of different characters from other works of Lawrence's come to mind, where we register the same blend of approval and reservation. At the beginning of The Rainbow, the Brangwen men also perceived the world directly through their senses, without mediation from the organizing mental faculty: they "faced inwards to the teeming life of creation, which poured unresolved into their veins."⁵ The weight of reservation, here, depends on the evaluative stress we attach to the word "unresolved." Later in that novel, Ursula Brangwen provides the critique of Anthony Schofield: "All her life, at intervals, she returned to the thought of him and of that which he offered. But she was a traveller, she was a traveller on the face of the earth, and he was an isolated creature living in the fulfilment of his own senses."⁶ In Twilight in Italy, Lawrence describes "the beauty and completeness, the finality of the highland peasant,"⁷ where the critical note is introduced by the word "finality." The note is also apparent when he describes the old spinning-woman, who is "whole even in her partiality."⁸ In the letter to Collings, Lawrence is reacting so strongly to what he perceived as a modern obsession with things mental ("We have got so ridiculously mindful, that we never know that we ourselves are anything" [Letters I, p.503]), that he overstates his case for the neglected body. Instinct is much, but it is scarcely more the whole man - what Lawrence would call, in "Why the Novel Matters," "man alive"⁹ - than mind is. The orderly is, in a complementary sense, as limited a character as the captain.

The orderly's physical vitality provokes an unwilling response from the captain; it is "like a warm flame upon the older man's tense, rigid body," and the haughty captain "did not choose to be touched into life by his

servant" (p.3). The biblical reverberation unobtrusively recalls those passages from the gospels where the dead, through physical contact with a living being, are brought back to life - the raising of Lazarus by Christ, for example. But the latter-day Lazarus in this story refuses to be resurrected. Yet he does not send his orderly away: "He might easily have changed his man, but he did not" (p.3).

Why not? As we read between the lines of the following sentences, where we observe the orderly from the captain's perspective, it appears that the captain derives an almost masochistic pleasure from contemplating in another the qualities absent in himself:

He now very rarely looked direct at his orderly, but kept his face averted, as if to avoid seeing him. And yet as the young soldier moved unthinking about the apartment, the elder watched him, and would notice the movement of his strong young shoulders under the blue cloth, the bend of his neck. And it irritated him. To see the soldier's young, brown, shapely peasants' hands grasp the loaf or the wine-bottle sent a flash of hate or of anger through the elder man's blood. It was not that the youth was clumsy: it was rather the blind, instinctive sureness of movement of an unhampered young animal that irritated the officer to such a degree. (p.3)

The captain could not describe his feelings in quite this way: to do so would be to acknowledge the queer mixture of attraction and repulsion the orderly's presence stirs in him. Our apprehension slips beyond the emotion that the captain himself would admit he felt - "And it irritated him" - to the more comprehensive array of emotions that he suppresses (and which give his irritation its nervous intensity): pleasure, hate, and anger. The pleasure is implicit in the keen focus on the orderly's

comely physical attributes: "his strong young shoulders"; "the bend of his neck"; his "young, brown, shapely" hands. From what we know of the captain's superficial interest in women, we may infer that this pleasure is a suppressed homosexual desire, but there is more to it than that. The captain does not merely desire the orderly, he covets what the orderly represents: the free, instinctive, unconscious life. Yet he despises it also. The "animal" metaphor is a nexus for these conflicting emotions. It simultaneously conveys the contempt the captain, "a Prussian aristocrat" (p.2), feels for the peasant, and the attractiveness of the natural creature, which is unfettered by social restraints. Mingle contempt with desire, and sadism (in the militarily acceptable guise of "discipline") becomes a plausible sequel.

The orderly, unconscious of the captain as he is of himself, is at first oblivious of the effect his presence has on the other. The same military discipline which, in its blindness to the instinctive element, allows the captain to repress this aspect of himself, also allows the orderly free rein. Essentially, it leaves him alone: "The officer and his commands he took for granted, as he took the sun and the rain, and he served as a matter of course. It did not implicate him personally" (p.3). That is, until a small incident - a bottle of wine accidentally overturned - provokes a disproportionately angry response from the captain, which pierces through to the orderly's dormant consciousness. For the first time, he is conscious of the captain as a separate human being:

... the officer had started up with an oath, and his eyes, bluey like fire, had held those of the confused youth for a moment. It was a shock for the young soldier. He felt something sink deeper, deeper into his soul, where nothing had ever gone before. It left him rather blank and wondering. Some of his natural completeness in himself was gone, a little

uneasiness took its place. And from that time an undiscovered feeling had held between the two men. (p.3)

Lawrence conveys in this passage the beginning of a process of awareness which is unaccompanied by comprehension. Some of the terms are deliberately left vague, undefined: the orderly feels "something sink deeper," and "a little uneasiness"; between the two men there is now "an undiscovered feeling." The feelings rendered here are not crystallized concepts grasped by the mind; they do not emerge at that upper level. Rather, they are sensations felt as inner physical movements. All the orderly knows (and this at a subconscious level) is that he has had an unpleasant experience, one he would not like to repeat: "Henceforward the orderly was afraid of really meeting his master. His subconsciousness remembered those steely blue eyes and the harsh brows, and did not intend to meet them again" (p.3).

The unsettling effect his presence has on the captain is now reciprocated: "He began to feel a constraint in the captain's presence, and the soldier even more than the officer wanted to be left alone in his neutrality as servant" (p.3). The captain and the orderly are like two neutral atoms which ionize when each is brought in proximity to the other. But the orderly wants only to be left alone ("he felt he must get away" [p.4]). It is not fascination but military duty that keeps him near the captain; feeling "a little anxiety, he waited for the three months to have gone, when his time would be up" (p.3). Whereas the captain's conflicting feelings become more and more intense:

In spite of himself, the captain could not regain his neutrality of feeling towards his orderly. Nor could he leave the man alone. In spite of himself, he watched him, gave him sharp orders, tried to take up as much of his time as possible. Sometimes he flew into a rage with the young soldier, and bullied him. (p.4)

As the repeated phrase "in spite of himself" indicates, the captain is in the grip of perverse impulses which are beyond his control, and which he cannot admit to himself. The situation is a dangerous one, as the military code permits him a near-absolute authority over his orderly that would not be possible in civilian life. The orderly's response - or non-response - to this harassment is entirely characteristic. He "shut himself off, as it were out of earshot ... The words never pierced to his intelligence, he made himself, protectively, impervious to the feelings of his master" (p.4). One notices, though, the role his will now plays in preserving a mode of being that was previously natural to him. Only by deliberately remaining unconscious can he endure the captain's treatment of him. But this tactic drives the captain to more extreme behaviour, as it is the orderly's unconscious quality that he cannot abide. He craves conscious acknowledgement, and resorts to violent means to get it: "Once he flung a heavy military glove into the young soldier's face. Then he had the satisfaction of seeing the black eyes flare up into his own, like a blaze when straw is thrown on a fire" (p.5).

Lawrence has chosen his simile with care. It conveys the sense of an emotion already present (the fire is a fire before the straw is thrown on). One notices too how it contrasts the orderly's anger with the captain's. The captain's eyes are described in earlier passages as "always flashing with cold fire" (p.2), and "bluey like fire" (p.3); they burn with a cold, phosphorescent light. The orderly's eyes don't "flash," they "flare." The conveyed impression (strengthened by the word "blaze") is one of physical heat. These very different angers belie Theodore Spencer's claim that Lawrence's characters "are examples of passions, of states of feeling, mostly in the abstract."¹⁰ Lawrence is, on the contrary, very much concerned with relating emotion to character, and he is observant of how the same emotion is uniquely transformed as it is expressed through

different characters, according to their natures. At the deeper levels, his characters are still sharply individualized.

Spencer perceived that the emotions of Lawrence's characters are not always expressed at the level of personality (which, for Spencer, was also the level of individuality). What he did not perceive was that, for Lawrence, character embodied much more than personality. Emotions that the conscious personality may reject are not consigned to a vacuum; they are, rather, pushed to a deeper level of character, and experienced there. For example, the orderly's "instinct was to avoid personal contact, even definite hate. But in spite of himself the hate grew, responsive to the officer's passion" (p.5).

The hate described here is not entertained at a conscious level. Indeed Lawrence's phrasing - "in spite of himself the hate grew" - suggests an impersonal emotion, which issues through rather than from the orderly's being, and which defies his will to avoid it. But it is not an emotion "in the abstract"; it is distinctively his, and is plainly distinguishable from the officer's "passion" for him.

With its various possible connotations of love, sexual desire, and hate, "passion" is an apt word for the captain's feelings. That the orderly has a lover drives the captain "mad with irritation" (p.5). Again we note the peculiarly nervous, frictional force of his "irritation." The conflicting elements of his "passion" are grinding away at the consciousness that will not admit them: "He would not know that his feeling for his orderly was anything but that of a man incensed by his stupid, perverse servant. So, keeping quite justified and conventional in his consciousness, he let the other thing run on. His nerves, however, were suffering" (p.6). Lawrence's semi-dramatic narrative subtly conveys how a character can choose at

a subconscious level what he will recognize consciously. But this kind of double-think has its toll. The captain attempts to relieve his tension through casual sex, but only succeeds in aggravating it. His debauch "was a mockery of pleasure. ... At the end of it, he came back in an agony of irritation, torment, and misery. ... all his blood seemed to be corroding" (p.6).

At this point it may be appropriate to draw attention to a letter from Lawrence to Edward Garnett which is often quoted in relation to this story, and which has been adduced as an explanation of its violent episodes.¹¹ On about November 11, 1912, Lawrence wrote:

I have read the Jeanne D'Arc and looked at the Persian atrocity. I wanted to get into a corner and howl over the Jeanne D'Arc. Cruelty is a form of perverted sex. I want to dogmatise. Priests in their celibacy get their sex lustful, then perverted, then insane, hence Inquisitions - all sexual in origin. And soldiers, being herded together, men without women, never being satisfied by a woman, as a man never is from a street affair, get their surplus sex and their frustration and dissatisfaction into the blood, and love cruelty. It is sex lust fermented makes atrocity. (Letters I, p.469)

The first two sentences, which critics generally omit to quote, put the rest of Lawrence's remarks into proper perspective. The letter is a jotting down of his spontaneous responses to the reading matter that Garnett had sent him, and not an explanatory manifesto for his own writing. "Sex lust fermented" is evidently a factor in the captain's cruel treatment of his orderly, but it is not an explanation of that treatment. The captain's unsatisfactory affair with a woman and the "blood" reference (quoted above) have their parallels in the letter to Garnett, but the mixed feelings he has for his orderly are, as we

have seen, only partly sexual. The affair with a woman brings these feelings to flash point: it exacerbates, but does not cause them. In the second atrocity of the story, the murder of the captain, "sex lust fermented" is not even a factor: the orderly merely destroys first the man who would destroy him. As an explanation of the beating, the letter is reductive; as an explanation of the murder, it is irrelevant.

The beating of the orderly is immediately precipitated by his failure to answer a question: the captain demands to know why he has a pencil behind his ear. He has been writing his sweetheart a birthday-card message, but he cannot admit that; his relationship with her is his last refuge from the captain's harassment. This is not presented as conscious thought, but as a series of physical sensations. The orderly's "heart suddenly ran hot. He felt blind. Instead of answering, he turned dazedly to the door" (p.7). Neither does the captain pause to think. That he relishes the prospect of violence is plain: his "eyes were dancing, he had a little, eager smile" (p.7). In this sickeningly out-of-place anticipation we recognize his sadistic element. But the captain dares not acknowledge the incongruity. For his purposes, the near-levity of his expression, like the even tenor of his question, affords a façade of normalcy to his outrageous actions. Even as he satisfies his desire, he will not bring it out into the open.

The "unpleasant kind of power"¹² that F.R. Leavis complained of in the story is present in the description of the beating itself. The passive constructions emphasize the victim's helplessness and incomprehension; he does not even see his assailant:

As he was crouching to set down the dishes, he was pitched forward by a kick from behind. The pots went in a stream down the stairs, he clung to the pillar of the banisters. And as he was rising he was kicked heavily again, and again, so that he clung sickly to the post for some moments. His master had gone swiftly into the room and closed the door. The maid-servant downstairs looked up the staircase and made a mocking face at the crockery disaster. (p.7)

The oppressive intensity of the narration lifts suddenly in the last sentence, as we are provided with a momentary glimpse of an ordinary world. But the switch to the maid-servant's perspective also illustrates how remote from that world the two men, enclosed in their destructive relation, now are. Viewed from the outside, the beating is unremarkable: merely a case of corporal punishment meted out to an orderly by his superior officer. Such is the countenance the captain himself puts on the affair, when he awakes the following morning: "He had not done any such thing - not he himself. Whatever there might be lay at the door of a stupid, insubordinate servant" (p.9).

The orderly, for his part, knows what has happened - his physical senses tell him - but he cannot grasp it: "He was so young, and had known so little trouble, that he was bewildered" (p.9). Like a wounded animal in its den he lies in his bed, "covered up by the darkness" (p.9). His animal-like solitariness and his profound sense of violation isolate him from his fellows; he can confide in no one: "... he did not want anybody to know. No one should ever know. It was between him and the captain. There were only the two people in the world now - himself and the captain" (p.10). "It" remains undefined: obviously it refers to the beating, but it also takes in the sensed but uncomprehended significance the beating has for him.

His former unconscious absorption in the natural world has been shattered: he exists now only in a hateful relation to the man who has brought about this change. It is as if between the two characters there is now one life, which ebbs and flows from one to the other. This, at least, is how the orderly perceives it, as he serves the captain his morning coffee:

The orderly, as he saluted, felt himself put out of existence. He stood still for a moment submitting to his own nullification - then he gathered himself, seemed to regain himself, and then the captain began to grow vague, unreal, and the younger soldier's heart beat up. He clung to this sensation - that the captain did not exist, so that he himself might live. But when he saw the officer's hand tremble as he took the coffee, he felt everything falling shattered. And he went away, feeling as if he himself were coming to pieces, disintegrated. (p.10)

The feelings rendered here are not merely anterior to thought. Rather, Lawrence has intuited how a man in whom sensation has largely supplanted thought might feel in this situation: his initial sense of nothingness and defeat; then the gathering of a sense of self, and a corresponding de-realisation of the other man; finally, the shattering of this momentary triumph by the trembling of the captain's hand - an insurmountable reminder of what has occurred between the two men. To evoke these feelings as a series of mental occurrences would be to assign them, in this character, to where they clearly do not belong. Even "that the captain did not exist" is conveyed not as a proposition but as a sensation, presumably visual ("the captain began to grow vague, unreal"). In another character these sensations might erupt into an upper level of consciousness; in the orderly, they do not. As he marches along the hot road, his fixed purpose "to save himself" is not a mental resolution, but a "single, sleep-heavy

intention" (p.10). He had this intention before the beating, but now it has taken a new, ominous form. No longer can he shut himself off from his enemy. In the context of the above passage, self-preservation now requires the destruction of the other man: prey must become predator.

For the moment, though, the captain is in the ascendant. For the balance of power to shift, the orderly must pull himself together. As long as the orderly perceives the other man to be strong, he himself will remain weak:

He felt like a gap among it all. Whereas the captain was prouder, overriding. A hot flash went through the young servant's body. The captain was firmer and prouder with life, he himself was empty as a shadow. Again the flash went through him, dazing him out. But his heart ran a little firmer. (p.11)

One observes, here, how the narrative moves swiftly and easily between different levels of character. It conveys, at first, a "feeling," accompanied by an almost unrelated "perception": the orderly feels "like a gap among it all," and he perceives that the captain is "prouder, overriding." The "flash" that goes through his body is neither a feeling, exactly, nor a perception; it might more accurately be described as a physical "sensation." Then there is an organisation of his "feeling" and his "perception"; they become related propositions, conveyed as a kind of "thought": "The captain was firmer and prouder with life, he himself was empty as a shadow." Then the sensation comes again, and erases this thought, "dazing him out." And finally, there is again a "feeling": "his heart ran a little firmer." Lawrence sensitively distinguishes between these different levels, which a lesser writer might perceive as all the same. No doubt it was passages as this which disturbed Theodore Spencer, yet it is precisely when Lawrence is working at these levels

that he reveals an acute awareness of the nuances, and the distinctions to be made.

As the last sentence from the passage indicates, the orderly is beginning to accumulate a reserve of strength. Though almost immediately he again feels "submissive, apathetic" (p.12), his body is preparing for a counter-offensive; it is working itself free from the captain's dominating influence. The captain attempts to retain that influence by commanding the orderly to fetch him food and drink. The attempt fails, though the order is obeyed:

But it was only the outside of the orderly's body that was obeying so humbly and mechanically. Inside had gradually accumulated a core into which all the energy of that young life was compact and concentrated. ... There was a pain in his head, as he walked, that made him twist his features unknowingly. But hard there in the centre of his chest was himself, himself, firm, and not to be plucked to pieces. (p.13)

The orderly has regained a sense of his identity, which is not realised mentally in the head but felt "hard there in the centre of his chest." "Himself, himself firm" conveys a sense of triumph, but the desperate insistence of the repetition suggests how short-lived this triumph may be. Meanwhile, the balance of power has shifted. The orderly "had a curious mass of energy inside him now. The captain was less real than himself" (p.13). As Michael Black observes, "for this brief space he has evolved into a state in which he can act."¹³ And act he does, with murderous swiftness, when the opportunity presents itself. Again he is assailed by successive "flashes" of sensation, which he is now able to contain (though only barely): "... he clenched his fists, such a strong torment came into his wrists" (p.14). When the right moment comes, his instinct takes over and moves him, impels him forward;

he becomes a pure instrument of destruction: "And the instinct which had been jerking at the young man's wrists suddenly jerked free. He jumped, feeling as if he were rent in two by a strong flame" (p.14).

Eliseo Vivas criticised "The Prussian Officer" for what he called its "excess of immediacy,"¹⁴ meaning that Lawrence enters too fully into his imagined world. Leavis registered a similar note of reservation when he described the story's power as "unpleasant." Certainly Lawrence does not shrink from the physical details of the murder: there is the feel of the captain's "jaw already slightly rough with beard" in the orderly's hands; the "little cluck and a crunching sensation" as the captain's neck is broken; the "heavy convulsions" of his body; the blood trickling backwards from his nose into his eyes (p.15). The narrative does not gloss over the horror of the orderly's deed. Neither, however, does it describe the deed in a merely sensationalist manner. It demands that we think about the murder, as another kind (an extreme kind) of human experience. In Women in Love, Birkin posits the following relationship between a murderer and his victim:

"It takes two people to make a murder: a murderer and a murderee. And a murderee is a man who is murderable. And a man who is murderable is a man who in a profound if hidden lust desires to be murdered."¹⁵

Does the Prussian officer invite his own murder? What strikes Gerald as "pure nonsense"¹⁶ in the novel is less improbable in the story. The officer deliberately goes into a wood to take his refreshment, so as to meet the orderly away from the men; by screening their confrontation, he thus at least makes the murder possible. Murder is not a very common occurrence in Lawrence's fiction, so it is difficult to gauge how seriously Lawrence took

Birkin's formula. But a simpler variant of it - such as "Death is no accident. A person who dies has a profound, subconscious desire to die" - he evidently took very seriously, going by the various characters one can adduce from the fiction. I am thinking, in particular, of Egbert in "England, My England," Gerald in Women in Love, Cathcart in "The Man Who Loved Islands," and the woman in "The Woman Who Rode Away." In these characters, Lawrence dramatises what he perceives as a general human impulse, as it is manifested in individual human beings.

The characters adduced from other works have another factor in common. None of them (with the possible exception of the woman) has prepared, in Lawrence's phrase, a "ship of death."¹⁷ Each has a death-wish of some kind, yet death itself comes not as a final fulfilment but as a final disintegration. It is the culmination of a drawn-out process of dissolution.

The orderly's death is also of this sort. His end strikingly compares with Gerald's - a character who is the orderly's polar opposite. Gerald's near-strangling of Gudrun and the orderly's murder of the captain are conveyed in very similar terms (though in the orderly's "passion of relief" [p.15] sadism is strangely absent, contrasted with Gerald's "pure zest of satisfaction"¹⁸). These violent acts, for both men, register something final in their own lives. Neither can bear to return to the known world. Gerald, filled with misery and disgust, stumbles up the mountain, "sheering off unconsciously from any further contact."¹⁹ Wandering deeper into the wood, the orderly "could not bear contact with anyone now" (p.16). Both die of exposure, of different sorts: Gerald freezes to death; the orderly dies of sunstroke. The final phases of their lives follow quite similar patterns: yet we could scarcely find two more different characters in which these patterns are dramatised.

The orderly's exposure is not merely to the sun. The whole nightmarish conflict with the captain has brought him brutally in contact with all that which he is not: his "natural completeness in himself" (p.3), and his unconscious unison with the natural world, have been shattered by this exposure. As he wanders through the wood, his perceptions are a frightening chaos of discrete sensations. His final, dying perception is a vision of fulfilment, in which he realises his own limitedness:

Then again his consciousness reasserted itself. He roused onto his elbow and stared at the gleaming mountains. There they ranked, all still and wonderful between earth and heaven. He stared till his eyes went black, and the mountains as they stood in their beauty, so clean and cool, seemed to have it, that which was lost in him. (p.20)

This works both realistically and symbolically. The mountains have literally "that which was lost in him": coolness and water. They have the allure of an oasis. At a symbolic level, the orderly seems to recognize in the mountains the significance Lawrence attributes to them in Twilight in Italy. In that book, the mountains are said to "transcend all life, all the soft, moist fire of the blood. So that a man must live under the radiance of his own negation."²⁰ But one must qualify this parallel. The mountains, at the end of the story, are "between earth and heaven," and, at the story's beginning, "half earth, half heaven" (p.1) - suggesting a golden mean, not an absolute. "That which was lost in him" (and in the captain) is a balance between the unconscious and the conscious, an equilibrium of body and mind. In death, these opposing elements are brought together as they could not be in life:

The bodies of the two men lay together, side by side, in the mortuary, the one white and slender, but laid rigidly at rest, the other looking as if every moment it must rouse into life again, so young and unused, from a slumber. (pp.20-21)

Michael Black finds this "hint about the orderly's life after death ... opportunistic and sentimental, as if Lawrence wanted to soften the offence of the story."²¹ But surely there is no such hint implied. What this passage brings out is the essential difference between these two characters, even in death. The qualities that distinguished them in life distinguish them still. Lawrence demonstrates, in his portrayal of death, the same discriminating imagination he demonstrates in his portrayal of life.

Notes

- 1 See Cushman, p. 209.
- 2 Frieda Lawrence, Not I, But the Wind ... (London: Heinemann, 1935), p. 62.
- 3 Black, p. 212.
- 4 D.H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel," in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, by D.H. Lawrence, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 175.
- 5 D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (1915; rpt. Heron Books, by arrangement with William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1968), p. 3. All quotations from The Rainbow will be taken from the Heron Edition.
- 6 The Rainbow, p. 417.
- 7 D.H. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy (1916; Penguin Books Ltd., 1960), p. 12. All quotations from Twilight in Italy will be taken from the Penguin Edition.
- 8 Twilight in Italy, p. 31.
- 9 D.H. Lawrence, "Why the Novel Matters," in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, by D.H. Lawrence, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 194.
- 10 See Andrews, p. 44.
- 11 See, for example, Emile Delavenay, D.H. Lawrence: The Man and His Work, revised by the author and translated by Katharine Delavenay (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 196: "'Cruelty is a form of perverted sex,' is its keynote."

- 12 Leavis, p. 257.
- 13 Black, p. 219.
- 14 Eliseo Vivas, D.H. Lawrence: The Failure and the Triumph of Art (Northwestern University Press, 1960), p. 196.
- 15 D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love (1920; rpt. Heron Books, by arrangement with William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1968), p. 27. All quotations from Women in Love will be taken from the Heron Edition.
- 16 Women in Love, p. 27.
- 17 D.H. Lawrence, "The Ship of Death," in The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence, Volume II, eds. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp. 716-20.
- 18 Women in Love, p. 463.
- 19 Women in Love, p. 464.
- 20 Twilight in Italy, p. 11.
- 21 Black, p. 223.

Chapter Three: "Daughters of the Vicar"

In D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, F.R. Leavis wrote of "Daughters of the Vicar" that although "class-distinctions enter as a major element into its theme," they are not the theme itself: "Lawrence registers them as facts that play an important part in human life. The part they play in the given tale is a sinister one, and the theme is their defeat - the triumph over them of life."¹ Keith Cushman, in his examination of the process of revision prior to the tale's publication, makes essentially the same point as Leavis, but from a different angle. He argues that, in the published tale, Lawrence's interest in the problem of class-distinctions - an interest which survives from the earlier versions - gives way to his newly articulated interest in the deeper levels of humanity, and in the relations between people that occur at these depths. As a consequence, "the mode of 'Daughters of the Vicar' is somewhat mixed: the social commentary is finally transcended by the exploration of passion between man and woman."²

The triumph over class-distinctions is made possible by Lawrence's new understanding of character. The early versions of the tale end unsatisfactorily: Louisa's condescension towards her miner husband, and the correspondent willingness on his part to serve her, imply a reconciliation of class differences that is far from being a resolution. Cushman suggests that "Lawrence's own equivocal feelings figure in the somewhat ambiguous treatment of class in the early versions of the story."³ This seems to me to mistake the attitudes of the characters for those of the author. Lawrence identifies class-distinctions as a powerful, sinister enemy, just as he does in the published tale. The early versions testify, I think, to his artistic integrity: the unresolved endings are honest admissions of doubt that the enemy can be defeated.

Not until the revisions of 1914 could Lawrence see his way clear. His new metaphysic and its accompanying vocabulary enabled him to go beyond what a character "feels according to the human conception" (Letters II, p.183) - the sphere to which class-distinctions belong - to the impersonal, classless depths. At these depths Louisa and Alfred meet, and found a relationship that endures when their mundane, upper levels of self have returned. Thus does life triumph over class.

The first section of the tale establishes the context against which the later action unfolds. In a relaxed, expository fashion (what we are economically told, here, gets its dramatic definition in the course of the tale), Lawrence sketches in the historical backdrop, and the married life of Mary and Louisa's parents. The Lindleys take charge of the vicarage of Aldecross, where they are expected (as they themselves expect) "to live on a stipend of about a hundred and twenty pounds, and to keep up a superior position" (p.40). The note introduced by that last phrase is clearly ironic, but not satiric - it has not the cruelty of satire. Leavis observes that "the attitude implicit in the presentation of the drama is not one that goes with contemptuous exposure or satiric condemnation; it is more subtle and poised."⁴ One can see that the Lindleys' expectation is unrealistic, given their tiny income. They are critically placed by their confident faith in an upper class prerogative, but this placing does not preclude sympathy for their position. They are merely adhering to the conventions of an established social code which, in the new conditions a sudden influx of miners has introduced, no longer holds good. One notes Mr Lindley's personal failings: "He had no particular character, having always depended on his position in society to give him position among men" - but one notes also that the contempt the colliers feel for him is "preconceived" (p.41). As far as the colliers are

concerned, a clergyman is (regardless of the particular individual) a minor parasite on the community, a harmless archaism to be tolerated. Money is the new reckoner of a person's status, and before long "he was so poor, he had no social standing even among the common vulgar tradespeople of the district" (p.41).

Mr Lindley has neither the inner resources nor the desire to adapt to these new circumstances. One might compare him with a very different character in the tale, Alfred Durant, who, because of his attachment to his mother, "could not quite go his own way" (p.67). Alfred could not, as he grew up, shrug off the close attachment to the mother that properly belongs to childhood; as a result, he could not develop fully into manhood. No more can Mr Lindley abandon his almost feudal notions of class-superiority. Like Alfred, he is fixed in a particular mode, and stunted as a human being: "He dragged on, pale and miserable and neutral" (p.41).

Mrs Lindley is also denied what she perceives as her due. With no money to give it substance, her assumed class-superiority only goads the inhabitants of Aldecross; it does not compel their respect: "But her income was too small, the wrestling with tradesmen's bills was too pitiful, she only met with general, callous ridicule when she tried to be impressive" (p.41). Her hatred of her way of life is exceeded only by her fear of the consequences were it to be destroyed. Thus she too sticks to the devil she knows: "She hid, bitter and beaten by fear, behind the only shelter she had in the world, her gloomy, poor parsonage" (p.41). Like Alfred Durant, and like her husband, she reaches a kind of developmental impasse, but in her case this is more extremely manifested as a psychosomatic illness: "Gradually, broken by the suppressing of her violent anger and misery and disgust, she became an invalid and took to her couch" (p.41).

The Lindleys remain unintegrated members of the community, losing eventually "all hold on life" (p.42). The wretchedness of their existence is a consequence of what Lawrence calls, in "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," "the failure to establish and maintain the vital circuits between ourselves and the effectual correspondent, the other human being, other human beings ..."⁵ The Lindleys forsake human relationships for the sterile comfort of class-superiority. This barren legacy they pass on to their children, who are put "definitely and cruelly in the upper classes, apart from the vulgar around them. So they lived quite isolated. They were good-looking, and had that curiously clean, semi-transparent look of the genteel, isolated poor" (p.41). We see the appalling process of alienation undergone by the parents begin to repeat itself in the children, who "passed by their father's parishioners with mute clear faces, childish mouths closed in pride that was like a doom to them, and childish eyes already unseeing" (p.42). There is neither animus nor sentimentality in the presentation of this tragedy. Yet we cannot but sense a tone of deep indignation, akin to Blake's in his "Songs of Experience,"⁶ at the imposition of adult follies and prejudices upon children.

Mary and Louisa, the two eldest of the children, are from their first descriptions contrasted with each other. Mary "was a long, slim thing with a fine profile and a proud, pure look of submission to a high fate"; Louisa "was short and plump and obstinate looking. She had more enemies than ideals" (p.42). One contrast that Lawrence begins to establish here is between two different kinds of will. Mary's is the paradoxical will towards martyrdom - paradoxical because her juxtaposed qualities of pride and submission suggest both an utter disregard for self, and a supreme egotism. Her body is described as a "thing," something merely there; this, we later learn, is the significance she herself ascribes to it. Her religious zeal is wholly spiritual, divorced from the body and its

physical needs. Louisa's will is more rooted in the flesh. Her description suggests a practical person who knows what she wants, and who persists until she gets it - and if in the process she upsets people, so be it. Both sisters have, in their different ways, the courage of their convictions.

In Section II the Durants are introduced, as Mr Lindley does the round of his parish. This visit and its aftermath at the Lindleys' dinner table dramatically convey what we were told in Section I of the Lindleys, and of their standing in the community. One immediately notices the grudging nature of the hospitality extended to the clergyman by Mrs Durant: "'Oh is it you, Mr Lin'ley!' she said in a complaining tone. 'Go in'" (p.43). One also notices on his part the lack of basic sympathy for her, upon hearing that Alfred, her youngest son, has run away to join the navy. The scene is shrewdly and realistically observed: even as Mrs Durant bemoans her fate, she cannot resist slipping into self-melodramatisation: "'Ay, have I any trouble!' cried the elderly woman. 'I shall end my days in the workhouse'" (p.44). To which Mr Lindley's response is: "What could she know of poverty, in her little house of plenty" (p.44). This reflection is just, as far as it goes, but its tone of sour enviousness betrays Mr Lindley's incapacity to empathize with another's feeling. He is enveloped in an ever-present sense of the injustice done to himself.

Mrs Lindley is similarly self-engrossed, and incapable of charitable feeling. When, at dinner, Mr Lindley relates his news, only Louisa expresses regret at Alfred's departure. Behind the approval of the others is a rationalising morality. It is desirable that Alfred be removed from bad influences; the navy will remove him; it is desirable that he join the navy: "'You know, Louisa, he wasn't quite what he used to be,' said Miss Mary gently

and steadily. Miss Louisa shut her rather heavy jaw sulkily. She wanted to deny it, but she knew it was true" (p.47). To Louisa, what is good is not confined to what is logical: "For her he had been a laughing, warm lad, with something kindly and something rich about him. It had made her feel warm. It seemed the days would be colder since he had gone" (p.47). She is attracted to Alfred's warm, physical being, which to her is goodness.

These different attitudes to goodness are revealed more explicitly in the ways different characters respond to Mr Massey. His first appearance shocks even Mrs Lindley's etiolated sensibility into producing a spontaneous outcry: "'What a little abortion!' was Mrs Lindley's exclamation to herself on first seeing him, in his buttoned-up clerical coat. And for the first time for many days, she was profoundly thankful to God: that all her children were decent specimens" (p.48).

From a conventional viewpoint, this is not an admirable reaction. But it is an honest one, and her prayer of gratitude is presented unironically as the first genuinely religious impulse she has had for a long time. In presenting a distasteful judgement which is nevertheless a spontaneous, uncalculated response, Lawrence tests the reader's own attitude on what is morally good. As Mrs Lindley's heartfelt prayer follows her exclamation, one senses a link between spontaneity and true religiousness. But the mean calculatedness that has become habitual to her soon reasserts itself: "Still, at the back of her mind, she remembered that he was an unattached gentleman, who would shortly have an income altogether of six or seven hundred a year. What did the man matter, if there were pecuniary ease!" (p.49). She herself would sacrifice anything to maintain a superior position, and she has learned through hard experience that such a position can only be maintained with money to back it up. That Mr Massey

is a queer creature, both physically and mentally, does not matter so very much; his position is the important thing: "So she supported the little man as a representative of a decent income" (p.149).

Neither Mary nor Louisa is as obviously materialistic as this. Yet both know what it is to have the spectre of poverty always about them - how, in the constant struggle to make ends meet, every finer emotion and value can drop away: "The girls' hearts were chilled and hardened with fear of this perpetual cold penury, this narrow struggle, this horrible nothingness of their lives" (p.48). Marriage offers a possible way out, but "they met no eligible young men in Aldecross" (p.48). The sisters' eventual choices of their respective spouses are partly motivated by their different reactions against the callous, materialist ethos the vicarage represents.

Mr Massey, Mary's choice, is a well-to-do clergyman, recently graduated from Oxford. We are told that "he lacked the full range of human feelings, had rather a strong, philosophical mind, from which he lived," and that "his body was almost unthinkable" (p.48). Yet where Mary is concerned, these factors strangely count in his favour. To Mary, the body impedes the achievement of a pure spirituality; the abstract, cerebral Christianity of Mr Massey thus strongly appeals to her. Going about the parish, he "seemed to have no sense of any person, any human being whom he was helping: he only realised a kind of mathematical working out, solving of given situations, a calculated well-doing" (p.50). This accords with Mary's idea of goodness: "Seeing his acts, Miss Mary must respect and honour him. In consequence she must serve him" (p.50). For Louisa, on the other hand, who we remember "had more enemies than ideals," the instinctive, spontaneous reaction is the undismissible fact; it overrides any potential feeling she thinks she should have:

She was unable to regard him save with aversion. When she saw him from behind, thin and bentshouldered, looking like a sickly lad of thirteen, she disliked him exceedingly, and felt a desire to put him out of existence. And yet a deeper justice in Mary made Louisa humble before her sister. (p.50)

Thus does Lawrence carefully establish in the tale a tension between what is thought to be good and what is felt to be good. According to the conventional Christian code, Louisa's attitude towards Mr Massey is wicked. She knows this, and concedes in Mary's attitude a quality lacking in her own: "justice." The word aptly conveys the twin aspects of the rationalising morality I discussed earlier: what is morally good is decided by the reasoning intellect. Were Mr Massey the sole representative of this sort of morality, we should find it easy to reject. But in Mary it assumes a more heroic form. She is as repelled as Louisa is by Mr Massey, but unlike Louisa she can mentally overcome her aversion, and "give honour to his genuine goodness" (p.50). It is considerably more difficult to find fault with this model of Christian virtue. Mary's is not an easy road, and Mr Massey's repulsiveness only makes her choice seem more noble.

The sisters' differences over Mr Massey are most explicitly revealed in a conversation between them at the end of Section III. The context of this conversation is important. Louisa has just been with Mr Massey on a visit to the dying Mr Durant. Alfred's presence has made a vivid impression on her: "... it went through her with pride, to think of his figure, a straight, fine jet of life" (p.53). Contrasting with this impression is "the deeper dread, almost hatred, of the inhuman being of Mr Massey. She felt she must protect Alfred and herself from him" (p.53). Mary defends Mr Massey against Louisa's repeated attacks; according to her concept of Christianity, "he is really a Christian" (p.53). With Louisa, such a line

of defence carries little weight when it conflicts with what she feels in her heart:

"He seems to me nearly an imbecile," said Miss Louisa.

Miss Mary, quiet and beautiful, was silent for a moment.

"Oh no," she said. "Not imbecile -"

"Well then - he reminds me of a six months child - or a five months child - as if he didn't have time to get developed enough before he was born."

"Yes," said Mary slowly. "There is something lacking. But there is something wonderful in him: and he is really good -"

"Yes," said Miss Louisa. "It doesn't seem right that he should be. What right has that to be called goodness!"

"But it is goodness," persisted Mary. Then she added, with a laugh: "And come, you wouldn't deny that as well." (p.53)

For Mary, the good acts that Mr Massey performs make up for any deficiencies he has as a person. Louisa cannot abstract goodness from the tangible human being in this way: it violates her instincts. Hence her fear of Mr Massey: during his prayer at Mr Durant's bedside, he has drawn from her a response that faintly corresponds to his own brand of morality:

Mr Massey prayed with a pure lucidity, that they might all conform to the higher will. He was like something that dominated the bowed heads, something dispassionate that governed them inexorably. Miss Louisa was afraid of him. And she was bound, during the course of the prayer, to have a little reverence for him. It was like a foretaste of inexorable, cold death, a taste of pure justice. (p.52)

The "pure justice" that Louisa perceives as deadly is to Mary an ideal, which, through her marriage to Mr Massey, will come within her reach: "She would be good and purely just, she would live in a higher freedom than she had ever known, she would be free of mundane care, she was a pure will towards right" (p.56). The incantatory repetitions in this sentence suggest the role Mary's will has played in her self-deception. As for her body, that is mere currency in the marriage transaction: "She had sold a lower thing, her body, for a higher thing, her freedom from material things" (p.56). The kind of Christianity that she espouses, which downgrades the body and exalts the spirit, allows her to mistake prostitution for sanctity, slavery for freedom. With her body she has bought a financially secure, socially superior position, from which she can direct more effectively "her activity towards charity and high-minded living" (p.56). This is her repudiation of the selfish materialism of the vicarage. Yet one sees in her repudiation of it how much she has fallen under its shadow. Though her motives are ostensibly pure, Mary is, for all her high-minded idealism, as materialist and as class-conscious as her parents.

Louisa is morally outraged by Mary's marriage: "'I'd beg the streets barefoot first,' said Miss Louisa, thinking of Mr Massey" (p.58). Her moral sense has a wholeness that Mary's lacks: it encompasses the profound intuitions of the body that Mary seeks to deny. She is in no doubt that Mary, heroic though she may be, is wrong to marry Mr Massey: "So she, Louisa the practical, suddenly felt that Mary, her ideal, was questionable after all. How could she be pure - one cannot be dirty in act and spiritual in being. Louisa distrusted Mary's high spirituality. It was no longer genuine for her" (p.58).

But Louisa's stance is not merely one of negative opposition. Her bitter disillusionment with Mary is intensified by her father's hypocrisy and her mother's

cynicism about the affair, but from this disillusionment comes her great positive affirmation:

"They are wrong - they are all wrong. They have ground out their souls for what isn't worth anything, and there isn't a grain of love in them anywhere. And I will have love. They want us to deny it. They've never found it, so they want to say it doesn't exist. But I will have it. I will love - it is my birthright. I will love the man I marry - that is all I care about." (pp.58-59)

Michael Black observes that "it is a formidable will that she demonstrates,"⁷ but one notes that it is a will in concert with her deepest feelings. It is thus, in its application, in stark contrast to the will exhibited by Mary, which works to suppress and deny those feelings: "She would not feel, and she would not feel" (p.56). Keith Cushman passes over this important difference by assuming the exercise of the will, in Lawrence's characters, to be uniformly bad. Noting Louisa's "fixed will to love, to have the man she loved" (p.59), Cushman remarks that "only the experience of physical attraction and contact melts away this willfulness and puts the vicar's daughter squarely in the camp of life."⁸ Louisa's will is not melted away by her physical experience at all; in her the two are in accord with each other, not in conflict. How much this is so is illustrated by her attachment to Alfred Durant: "In the girl's heart the purpose was fixed. No man had affected her as Alfred Durant had done, and to that she kept. In her heart, she adhered to him" (p.66). Her will issues from a spontaneous, physical centre, "her heart"; it is not imposed downward from the mind, as Mary's is. In "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," Lawrence distinguishes between these two applications of the will, and he defines what, in his view, is the proper function of the mind. Mental consciousness, he says,

gives us plain indications of how to avoid falling into automatism, hints for the applying of the will, the loosening of false, automatic fixations, the brave adherence to a profound soul-impulse. This is the use of the mind - a great indicator and instrument. The mind as author and director of life is anathema.⁹

The sceptical reader might retort that the distinction, here, between "false, automatic fixations" and "the brave adherence to a profound soul-impulse" is merely rhetorical. But Lawrence claimed that his "pseudo-philosophy"¹⁰ was deduced from his art, and in "Daughters of the Vicar," he dramatised the vitality of the distinction.

Louisa's will is a tenacious one, as indeed it needs to be: the obstacles to relationship between Alfred and her are formidable. Some of these obstacles, such as class-differences and convention, are social. But these obstacles are used, by Alfred at any rate, to conceal the obstacles that exist at an individual level: the ones that have to do with the make-up of his particular character. As always, Lawrence remains a sensitive observer of the unique, human qualities his individual characters bring to a given social situation.

Alfred's various problems manifest themselves in his inability to assert himself simply and spontaneously. He has grown up "centralised, polarised in his mother" (p.78), and when confronted with other women, he is afflicted with crippling self-consciousness: he is unable to approach them sexually. So far, this seems very like a portrait of Paul Morel. Critics have often claimed that Paul Morel is a thinly disguised representation of Lawrence himself, and that Lawrence's characters are all the same: in this context it seems worthwhile to examine further the likeness between Alfred and Paul, to see whether Lawrence could maintain an artistic detachment from his characters, and at what level his characters are distinguishable from each other.

I propose to examine two apparently similar scenes: one from the novel, one from the tale. In each scene a character burdened with self-consciousness glimpses a stranger who, he imagines, does not bear such a mental load.

The first scene is from Chapter V of Sons and Lovers. As he scans the newspapers in search of his first job, the young Paul Morel momentarily looks out the window of the Co-op reading room and sees a brewer's waggoner atop his waggon:

The brewers' waggons came rolling up from Keston with enormous barrels, four a side, like beans in a burst bean-pod. The waggoner, throned aloft, rolling massively in his seat, was not so much below Paul's eye. The man's hair, on his small, bullet head, was bleached almost white by the sun, and on his thick red arms, rocking idly on his sack-apron, the white hairs glistened. His red face shone and was almost asleep with sunshine. The horses, handsome and brown, went on by themselves, looking by far the masters of the show.

Paul wished he were stupid. "I wish," he thought to himself, "I was fat like him, and like a dog in the sun. I wish I was a pig and a brewer's waggoner."¹¹

The second passage concludes Section VIII of "Daughters of the Vicar." Returned home after several years in the navy, Alfred Durant suffers from the feeling that "he was not a man, he was less than the normal man" (p.67):

He would have changed with any mere brute, just to be free of himself, to be free of this shame of self-consciousness. He saw some collier lurching straight forward without misgiving, pursuing his own satisfactions, and he envied him. Anything, he would have given anything for this spontaneity and this

blind stupidity which went to its own satisfaction direct. (p.68)

Both Paul Morel and Alfred Durant desire a simpler mode of existence, which they equate with freedom. At the same time, they recognise this mode as inferior: "stupid" retains its pejorative connotation. The waggoner is scarcely in charge of his beasts, which suggests that essentially he is of their order; if appearances were all, they would be his superiors. In Paul's wish to be "a pig and a brewer's waggoner," the conjunction blurs any distinction between the two creatures. In the comfortable assurance that he himself will never descend to this lowly state, Paul can allow himself the luxury of wistful envy.

Alfred's envy is more intense, but like Paul's it is undercut by counter-emotions. He would, ostensibly at any rate, exchange his state for a lower one - that of "any mere brute" - if it meant he would be rid of his self-consciousness. Relevant to this passage is Lawrence's well-known letter of January 17, 1913, to Ernest Collings. In this letter, Lawrence expresses a wish very like Alfred's: "All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind, or moral, or what not" (Letters I, p.503). One even notices a certain verbal equivalence, in the use of the adjective "direct" instead of the adverb: the effect is to accentuate the brute, unmediated response that is desired. And when, later in the letter, Lawrence says he likes to live in Italy because "the people are so unconscious. They only feel and want: they don't know" (Letters I, p.504), one recalls (a few paragraphs preceding the passage quoted above) Alfred "looking with curious envy at the swaggering, easy-passionate Italian whose body went to a woman by instinctive impersonal attraction" (p.67).

Nonetheless Lawrence does achieve and maintain in his art an ironic distance from the attitude he freely expresses in his letter. We have already seen dramatised, in "The Prussian Officer," the tragedy of a young man who "acted straight from instinct" (p.3). Paul Morel seems to recognise that the brewer's waggoner is not really free. Likewise Alfred Durant knows that it is not merely "spontaneity" that goes "to its own satisfaction direct," but also "blind stupidity": the collier cannot choose any other course of action because he is a slave to his immediate desires. The artist points in one direction in the letter, but in his art that direction is found wanting. Here is "the salt of objectivity"¹² that Theodore Spencer claimed Lawrence's characters lacked.

This does not, however, refute the related criticism that is brought against Lawrence's characters: that they are indistinguishable from one another. So far, Alfred Durant and Paul Morel appear to be very similar characters. A comparison of their respective positions in the scenes quoted above confirms Michael Black's observation of "related predicaments"¹³ in the fictions. But this relation is not a matter of mere repetition. The differences between these two characters, and between the scenes in which they appear, begin to emerge when one examines the differences in narrative technique. In the passage from the tale the narrative tends away from specificity towards greater generality, yet at the same time it portrays character at a greater depth than the passage from the novel. Lawrence noted this change in his narrative technique in a letter written on January 29, 1914, to Edward Garnett:

I have no longer the joy in creating vivid scenes, that I had in Sons and Lovers. I don't care much more about accumulating objects in the powerful light of emotion, and making a scene of them. I have to write differently. (Letters II, p.142)

Garnett had objected to the direction "The Sisters" (which later became two novels, The Rainbow and Women in Love) was taking. Apparently he thought the change from Lawrence's earlier method of presentation to be a change for the worse. But, as I have noted, Lawrence's declarations in his letters are often qualified by his art. Vivid scenes abound in his post-Sons and Lovers fiction; despite his disclaimer, the mode of dramatic presentation was never abandoned. What the letter signals is a new-found confidence in his powers to do other things as well. The passage from the novel could have come from the pen of any gifted, conventional novelist: through the eyes of the protagonist we look down (both literally and de haut en bas) on the brewer's waggoner; a vivid little scene is made of him, rounded off by a conscious (signalled by inverted commas) reflection on the part of the observer. The waggoner is evoked with deft, personalising touches: one notices, for instance, the carefully chosen detail of the white hairs glistening on his red skin, which tacitly conveys a porcine image.

Such details are absent in the passage from the tale: Alfred sees "some collier." Lawrence is not as interested, here, in creating a vivid scene as he is in the deep psychological processes going on within the character of the observer. He forsakes the kind of dramatic presentation that reveals what a character feels at a conscious, upper level, for a more direct, authoritative mode through which he can convey the feelings that a character may not be conscious of, yet nevertheless experiences. This mode necessarily requires a certain amount of "telling," as these deeper feelings are often not expressed by any outward sign (though they may be suggested by particular physical movements or gestures). Michael Black notes that "Lawrence has a peculiar calm authority over his people, just saying as from himself what is passing through them."¹⁴ This is demonstrated in the passage from the tale. At the uppermost level, Alfred envies the collier's lot: he yearns

"to be free of himself, to be free," and considers no price too high: "Anything, he would have given anything for this spontaneity ...". The character himself would not express his yearning in quite this way, but one can imagine him thinking, "I'd give anything to be like that man." Of course this does not convey to the reader the feelings of restlessness and frustration that would underlie such a thought. Lawrence's repetitions do. Here is his "calm authority over his people": he knows them better than they know themselves, and deeper.

Repetitions of another kind also work at this deeper level. In each of the three sentences quoted in the passage is essentially the same information. Alfred begins by envying the lot of "any mere brute," who in the second sentence is scarcely more particularized as "some collier." In the third sentence, the envied qualities, "spontaneity and ... blind stupidity," are abstracted from the man: one observes Alfred retreating from the reality of the brutish existence he desires for himself. In re-presenting Alfred's envy, Lawrence subtly suggests that it is the idea of a spontaneous, unthinking existence that attracts him, not the sordid reality. Even as Alfred most intensely desires such a mode, he retreats into its opposite.

One observes these same contradictory impulses of Alfred's in the thwarting (self-thwarting) of his sexual desires: "There were two things for him, the idea of women, with which he sometimes debauched himself, and real women, before whom he felt a deep uneasiness, and a need to draw away" (p.67). Again Lawrence avoids presenting us with a vivid scene. The episode in the drinking-house in Genoa is, like the above vision of the drunk collier, scarcely a scene at all. The main focus of attention is again directed at Alfred: Lawrence makes no attempt to dramatise "the girls" or "the swaggering, easy-passionate Italian" (p.67) as individuals. Alfred leaves the bar "imagining sexual scenes between himself and a woman," but "when the

ready woman presented herself, the very fact that she was a palpable woman made it impossible for him to touch her" (p.67). Despite his inflamed imagination, Alfred is repelled by casual sex. His willed attempts to overcome his sexual reticence by getting drunk enough to go to a brothel result in profound disillusion:

So several times he went, drunk, with his companions, to the licensed prostitute houses abroad. But the sordid insignificance of the experience appalled him. It had not been anything really: it meant nothing. He felt as if he were, not physically, but spiritually impotent: not actually impotent, but intrinsically so. (p.67)

Emile Delavenay, in characteristic fashion, remarks that "it is difficult not to suspect that the Lawrence who wrote these lines in 1913 is harbouring a certain anxiety concerning his sexual prowess."¹⁵ "These lines" were actually inserted by Lawrence in October, 1914, as he revised the page proofs for publication the following month. Within the historical context of the criticism of Lawrence's art, Delavenay's comment should come as no surprise. But that he could find in this cool, poised diagnosis of Alfred's condition, evidence of authorial anxiety at an unresolved personal problem, indicates an almost willed insensitivity to the tone of the words on the page.

A more pertinent criticism of Lawrence's writing, here, might be directed at an aspect I mentioned earlier: the "told" manner of the presentation. That Alfred's experience has a "sordid insignificance," and that he feels "spiritually impotent," are presented as a given; we are not shown these things. The narrative tone is authoritative, but, it might be objected, we are required to take too much on trust.

This would be a damaging charge if Lawrence's "telling" was completely divorced from dramatisation. But the "sordid insignificance" of bought sexual relationships gets its dramatic definition in Mary's marriage to Mr Massey - a passionless exchange of sex for financial and social gain. Alfred's "spiritual impotence," also, is dramatically revealed in his resistance to the challenge presented by Louisa of mature sexual relationship. The culminating dramatisation of this is the betrothal scene towards the end of the tale.

Alfred's "spiritual impotence" has its beginning in his childhood, as a feeling of self-consciousness which conflicts with a desire to be as like his masculine peers as possible: "Like the other boys, he had insisted on going into the pit as soon as he left school, because that was the only way speedily to become a man, level with all the other men" (p.66). This is against the will of his mother, "who would have liked to have this last of her sons a gentleman" (p.66). That he feels apart from his fellows is partly because of his mother's aspirations, but it is also because he has been unable to break his dependence on her. This dependence she rather despises, even if she has inspired it: "He was her baby - and whilst she loved him for it, she was a little bit contemptuous of him" (p.66). His attempts to be like his peers are self-defeating: even his drinking is a deliberated, self-consciously performed means to an end, not an end in itself. And so he joins the navy, presumably to put himself right away from his mother's influence. But the damage is done: the deference he has towards his mother he extends to all women. In the terms provided by the letter of January 17, 1913, to Ernest Collings, Alfred is unable to answer to his wants:

We cannot be. "To be or not to be" - it is the question with us now, by Jove. And nearly every Englishman says "Not to be." So he goes in for

Humanitarianism and such like forms of not-being. The real way of living is to answer to one's wants. (Letters I, p.504)

Alfred "goes in for" the piccolo, and "fixed ideas which he got from the Fabians" (p.68). He cannot "be"; his development as a human being has been arrested by his close attachment to his mother. Yet life in him is not a spent force, but a constrained one. It is freed, in a sense, by his mother's death, but it is the freedom of chaos: "It seemed as if life in him had burst its bounds, and he was lost in a great, bewildering flood, immense and unpeopled. He himself was broken and spilled out amid it all. He could only breathe panting in silence" (p.78).

Alfred's intense grief at the death of his mother is as movingly presented as Paul Morel's at the end of Sons and Lovers. But only in the last few sentences of that novel does Paul resist the urge to join his mother in death: "He would not take that direction to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly."¹⁶ Paul chooses life, but we can only conjecture how that choice will work itself out. It is beyond the boundaries of the novel. Alfred also emerges from his self-destructive grief, but the tale does not end there: "For a week he had the force to endure this suffocation and struggle, then he began to get exhausted, and knew he must come out. The instinct of self-preservation became strongest. But then was the question: where was he to go?" (p.78).

Alfred ponders this question in its geographical sense, and he decides that to emigrate is the answer. But the remainder of the tale addresses the question at a deeper level, and it is Louisa Lindley who provides the answer. The Oedipal theme that extended to the perimeters of Sons and Lovers is transcended in the tale. In the relationship

that forms between Louisa and Alfred, Louisa clearly does not resume where Mrs Durant left off. (In this the tale markedly differs from an earlier version, "Two Marriages."¹⁷) Keith Cushman argues that Lawrence, in his presentation of this relationship, is artistically rendering the changes wrought on his own life by the advent of Frieda:

Lawrence believed that his Oedipal problems had been fully and finally resolved through his experiences with Frieda. In "Daughters of the Vicar" he uses the familiar mother-son materials, but now he is using them retrospectively. Alfred's emergence from the domination of his mother through the love of Louisa Lindley imaginatively celebrates Lawrence's own coming through.¹⁸

Cushman praises the artistic detachment with which the tale is presented ("The prose of "Daughters of the Vicar" displays little of the inner struggle present in Sons and Lovers"¹⁹), and then seeks to account for this greater detachment by falling back on what we know of Lawrence's life. To suggest that the presentation of Alfred's experience "imaginatively celebrates Lawrence's own coming through" is to distract the reader's attention from the significance it has in terms of the work of art in which it occurs. Cushman's implicit, contradictory assumption is that Lawrence, even when he is writing most impersonally, is writing about himself.

Alfred's attachment to his mother is not the only obstacle to a relationship between him and Louisa. Another is the social barrier of class. Alfred uses this barrier in order to conceal his own personal inadequacy. After his father's death he reverts to his military bearing before her, and treats her as he would a superior officer:

Now he was not himself. He was the will which obeys set over against the will which commands. She hesitated over accepting this. He had put himself

out of her range. He had ranked himself inferior, subordinate to her. And that was how he would get away from her, that was how he would avoid all connection with her: by fronting her impersonally from the opposite camp, by taking up the abstract position of an inferior. (p.54)

This strategy is, as Louisa perceives, cowardice - an evasion of life and its concomitant responsibilities. Louisa knows what Mary does not know: that an abstract relation between two wills is a falsity that thwarts the possibility of real human relationship. One sees that class-distinction is a two-edged sword: it can be used against the socially superior, as well as by them. By adopting the role of servant, Alfred establishes a distance between himself and her. It is a failure of integrity on his part, signalled by the phrase "he was not himself."

It is service of a different kind that Louisa performs in the back-washing scene at the Durant cottage. Here, her act of physically attending to another human being bridges the gulf that separates them. Louisa is at first reluctant to serve in this way; the intimacy of contact is alien and distasteful to her: "Curious how it hurt her to take part in their fixed routine of life! Louisa felt the almost repulsive intimacy being forced upon her. It was all so common, so like herding. She lost her own distinctness" (p.72). Partly this is a class-bound reaction - the legacy of the vicarage. Partly it is a recoil of the self-enclosed, separate ego. These feelings are dissolved not by dialogue between her and Alfred (neither character speaks to the other) but by touch. The act of washing has a powerful symbolic value. It reveals to Louisa what Alfred is, the essential man beneath the outer layer of pit-dirt:

His skin was beautifully white and unblemished, of an opaque, solid whiteness. Gradually Louisa saw it: this also was what he was. It fascinated her. Her feeling of separateness passed away: she ceased to draw back from contact with him and his mother. There was this living centre. Her heart ran hot. She had reached some goal in this beautiful, clear, male body. She loved him in a white, impersonal heat. (p.73)

The love she feels for Alfred is "impersonal"; it issues from a deeper centre than the conscious ego. It has no more to do with her thinking self, with the outer shell of her personality, than it has to do with his. She has temporarily got beyond these things, relinquished them up in the face of her profound physical realisation of Alfred's mysterious being. For her the washing is a rite of passage, an initiation to a new kind of experience: "She had only seen one human being in her life - and that was Mary. All the rest were strangers. Now her soul was going to open, she was going to see another. She felt strange and pregnant" (p.73). As Michael Black observes, this has its Biblical parallel in the Annunciation.²⁰ Like Mary the mother of Christ, Louisa has had a revelation. But unlike Mary's, Louisa's revelation is not spiritual, but of the flesh. Even her "soul" is conveyed as something physically unfolding: it "was going to open." The underlying metaphor is sexual, yet the experience is profoundly religious.

Louisa's experience does not establish a permanent change of affairs. Lawrence skilfully traces the re-emergence of mundane sensibility, with its accompanying uncertainty and fear of disillusion:

"He'll be more comfortable," murmured the sick woman abstractedly, as Louisa entered the room. The latter did not answer. Her own heart was heavy with

its own responsibility. Mrs Durant lay silent awhile, then she murmured plaintively:

"You mustn't mind, Miss Louisa."

"Why should I?" replied Louisa, deeply moved.

"It's what we're used to," said the old woman.

And Louisa felt herself excluded again from their life. She sat in pain, with the tears of disappointment distilling in her heart. Was that all? (p.73)

When Alfred reappears, clean and dressed, the class-distance (which, before the back-washing scene, Louisa was reluctant to bridge) reasserts itself: "He looked a workman now. Louisa felt that she and he were foreigners, moving in different lives. It dulled her again. Oh, if she could only find some fixed relations, something sure and abiding" (p.73).

Louisa's earlier vision of Alfred was a physical one, unfixed by the verifying mind. She wants it to endure so that she can grasp it mentally, as an incontrovertible fact. As it stands, there remains the possibility that she has been deluded: the revelation was, after all, hers alone, and not shared by Alfred. It lacks confirmation. Alfred has a similar revelation as he watches Louisa writing; this time it is she who is oblivious:

As she sat writing, he placed another candle near her. The rather dense light fell in two places on the overfoldings of her hair till it glistened heavy and bright, like a dense golden plumage folded up. Then the nape of her neck was very white, with fine down and pointed wisps of gold. He watched it as it were a vision, losing himself. (p.75)

The similarity is in the loss of a sense of self in the contemplation of the physical fact of another human being, which is suddenly wondrous. But for Louisa, this gives rise to a feeling of relatedness towards Alfred,

which goes hand in hand with a recognition of his essential otherness (we are close to Birkin's theorising on man-woman relationships in Women in Love, here). For Alfred, however, the latter recognition is all, and from this recognition it is but a short step to see Louisa as an object to worship:

She was all that was beyond him, of revelation and exquisiteness. All that was ideal and beyond him, she was that - and he was lost to himself in looking at her. She had no connection with him. He did not approach her. She was there like a wonderful distance. (p.75)

The practical Louisa does not idealise Alfred: "... she loved even his queer ears" (p.73). Whereas Alfred's vision, which begins with the physical detail of Louisa's hair, ends by spiritualizing her almost out of existence. He can lose himself in worship, but not in flesh-and-blood relationship. He does not, he cannot conceive of Louisa as a possible mate. But change is in the air: the strange effect of Louisa's presence in the cottage, and Alfred's distress at his mother's illness, propel him further on life's journey, beyond the known and the safe:

He saw the stars above ringing with fine brightness, the snow beneath just visible, and a new night was gathering round him. He was afraid almost with obliteration. What was this new night ringing about him, and what was he? He could not recognise himself nor any of his surroundings. He was afraid to think of his mother. And yet his chest was conscious of her, and of what was happening to her. He could not escape from her, she carried him with her into an unformed, unknown chaos. (p.75)

As in his vision of Louisa, and partly as a consequence of that vision, the familiar is transfigured, becomes extraordinary. The old gives way to a new world, and his

place in this world becomes uncertain. Formerly he perceived his surroundings as static and fixed, as he himself was. Now he perceives them as in flux, and he knows only that he is a part of this flux. One is reminded of Tom Brangwen in the lambing-time, when "looking out from the shelter into the flashing stars, he knew he did not belong to himself."²¹ The self-important ego is hushed, and can anyway supply no answer to the question raised in the passage. The latter half of this question, "... what was he?" was pondered earlier by Louisa, who found an answer, of a sort, in the mystery of Alfred's physical being. Here, the sense of mystery and wonder is again present, but its focus, for Alfred, is conveyed by the whole question, "What was this new night ringing about him, and what was he?" - where the conjunction stresses the role that relationship with the "circumambient universe"²² plays in determining identity. As for his mysterious physical vitality, perceived by Louisa in the back-washing scene, one recognises it in the anguish he feels on his mother's account - a deep emotion that is emphatically of the body. His bodily responses, which include emotions as well as more ordinary sensations, are not dead, as they are in Mr Massey, or crushed, as they are in Mary.

It is this core of vitality in Alfred that attracts Louisa, but as long as he remains formally at her service, it eludes her: "He was so deferential, quick to take the slightest suggestion of an order from her, implicitly, that she could not get at the man in him" (p.74). He displays the same subordinateness towards Mary, when he fetches some things for Louisa from the vicarage. But Mary's response to it is different from Louisa's: he is met with benevolent approval, as a man who knows his place:

He felt abashed and humbled by the big house, he felt again as if he were one of the rank and file. When Miss Mary spoke to him, he almost saluted.

"An honest man," thought Mary. And the patronage was applied as salve to her own sickness. She had station, so she could patronise: it was almost all that was left to her. But she could not have lived without having a certain position. She could never have trusted herself outside of a definite place, nor respected herself except as a woman of superior class. (pp.75-76)

We have brought home to us the ugly truth of Louisa's outcry against the ethos of the vicarage: "They have ground out their souls for what isn't worth anything" (p.58). Mary's high idealism has this result. She has traded away life as it is lived in the body (hence her inability to perceive it in Alfred) for the barren abstraction of class-superiority.

Yet Mary has not quite "lost all hold on life," as her parents have done. Soon after Mrs Durant's death, Louisa invites Alfred to supper, and we learn that "Mary had proposed this to Louisa, disapproving of herself even as she did so. But she did not examine herself closely" (p.79). It is as if, in spite of herself and the choice that she has made, Mary has observed Louisa's genuine passion for Alfred and done what little she can to bring the two of them together. But the dinner is a failure, and only accentuates the social gulf between them. Alfred leaves as soon as possible, after enduring Mr and Mrs Lindleys' demeaning condescension, and wants more than ever "to go right away, to Canada" (p.79).

The stage is now set for the climactic scene of the tale, between Louisa and Alfred at the Durant cottage. I propose to examine the scene in detail, and then to discuss its aftermath, the concluding drama in the Lindleys' dining-room.

The scene at the cottage begins within the bounds of social convention. Again Alfred avoids meeting her as a human being: "There was the reserve, and the simple neutrality towards her, which she dreaded in him. It made it impossible for her to approach him" (p.80). Louisa strives to put him at ease: "'I'm afraid,' she said, 'that I wasn't kind in asking you to supper'" (p.80). This is a conciliatory gesture; the implied rebuke to her family allies her with his camp. But he misunderstands, and she must try again to convey her interest in him, and to elicit a response. The conversation staggers to a halt, and the response is not forthcoming; in observing the rules of social etiquette she has failed to make contact with his essential self, and that etiquette now decrees that she should make her departure: "And she knew that if she went out of that house as she was, she went out a failure. Yet she continued to pin on her hat; in a moment she would have to go. Something was carrying her" (p.81).

This "something" has already been dramatically conveyed in the tale: it is the mechanical obedience to the code of social behaviour that we have observed in Mr and Mrs Lindley, and in Mary. In the sentences that follow, the code is broken:

Then suddenly a sharp pang, like lightning, seared her from head to foot, and she was beyond herself.

"Do you want me to go?" she asked, controlled, yet speaking out of a fiery anguish, as if the words were spoken from her without her intervention.

He went white under his dirt.

"Why?" he asked, turning to her in fear, compelled.

"Do you want me to go?" she repeated.

"Why?" he asked again.

"Because I wanted to stay with you," she said, suffocated, with her lungs full of fire. (p.81)

The momentous transformation described in that first sentence is like that which takes place in the orderly in "The Prussian Officer," immediately prior to his murder of the captain: "He jumped, feeling as if he were rent in two by a strong flame" (p.14). Both transformations presage convention-shattering events. That one of these events is murder should give us pause: the natural force that may be unleashed in such circumstances can be a destructive one, depending on the individual concerned. In Louisa's case it is important to note that she, though "beyond herself," maintains a trembling control. The force which issues from the depths of her being (that is, from the self that our reading of Lawrence has attuned us to recognise as "other"), will be heard; but to be heard it must express itself through speech - a social (because public) rule-governed form of behaviour.

In this respect, Louisa's situation is analogous to Lawrence's as writer. He too must convey, in language, a sub-lingual flow of sensation. It is no accident that, in scenes such as this, the Lawrencean idiom is so much in evidence. "She was beyond herself" - what does this mean, exactly? How is Alfred "compelled," and to do what? One might reply that Louisa is suddenly transformed from the ordinary, social person who observes the rules of behaviour prescribed by society, into a being that doesn't; and that Alfred is compelled by her transformation and her transgression to meet her in a similar spirit. But these paraphrases are clumsy and incomplete, and in any case say different things. Lawrence's words point from language outward, to the incommunicable. To paraphrase them is, as it were, to reverse the pointers: it is to retrieve meanings (but not the same meanings) from the brink. In his essay "The Novel," Lawrence wrote that "in the great novel, the felt but unknown flame stands behind all the characters, and in their words and gestures there is a flicker of the presence."²³ "Felt but unknown" are

key terms here. In his own art Lawrence was, as Michael Black says, "not aiming at the social intelligence. His writing came from, and was aimed at, that point in the middle of a whole person which he called 'the breast,' even though he had to use words, taken in at the eye."²⁴ Lawrence warned against another kind of writing: "If you are too personal, too human, the flicker fades out, leaving you with something awfully lifelike, and as lifeless as most people are."²⁵ Lawrence favours, here, the sort of novel he himself was interested in writing ("that which is physic - non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element" [Letters II, p.182]). The flame-metaphor ties in with this interest, as this extract from the letter of January 17, 1913 to Ernest Collings makes clear:

I conceive a man's body as a kind of flame, like a candle flame forever upright and yet flowing; and the intellect is just the light that is shed onto the things around. And I am not so much concerned with the things around; - which is really mind: - but with the mystery of the flame forever flowing, coming God knows how from out of practically nowhere, and being itself, whatever there is around it, that it lights up. (Letters I, p.503)

"Mind," here, corresponds with that which is "too personal, too human," and the "flame" with "that which is physic - non-human, in humanity." And this "flame" was, to Lawrence, fundamentally a mystery: hence the metaphor. One feels this "flame" at work in Louisa, who speaks "out of a fiery anguish, as if the words were spoken from her without her intervention," and who feels "suffocated, with her lungs full of fire." Again, this is analogous to the creative process, as Lawrence described it, in a letter of February 24, 1913: "I always feel as if I stood naked for the fire of Almighty God to go through me - and it's rather an awful feeling" (Letters I, p.519).

Louisa is, however painfully, submitting to her profoundest impulses. As Birken says to Gerald in Chapter II of Women in Love, "It's the hardest thing in the world to act spontaneously on one's impulses - and it's the only really gentlemanly thing to do - provided you're fit to do it."²⁶

The difficulty lies at least partly in being able to distinguish these impulses from those which are socially conditioned. To Gerald's retort, "You think people should just do as they like," Birkin replies: "I think they always do. But I should like them to like the purely individual thing in themselves, which makes them act in singleness. And they only like to do the collective thing."²⁷ Alfred, in adopting the position of an inferior, is doing "the collective thing." But Louisa has roused him; her "other" self is calling to his, demanding a response:

His face worked, he hung forward a little, suspended, staring straight into her eyes, in torment, in an agony of chaos, unable to collect himself. And as if turned to stone, she looked back into his eyes. Their souls were exposed bare for a few moments. It was agony. They could not bear it. He dropped his head, whilst his body jerked with little sharp twitchings. (pp.81-82)

Alfred's mental consciousness is suspended, which is a precondition for a further suspension between the self that he is, and a new. To be so exposed to one another is physical torture for both of them, but still he has not met her challenge; she must ask a final, explicit question:

"Don't you want me?" she said helplessly.

A spasm of torture crossed his eyes, which held her fixed.

"I - I -" he began, but he could not speak. Something drew him from his chair to her. She stood motionless, spellbound, like a creature given up as prey. He put his hand tentatively, uncertainly, on her arm. (p.82)

The "something" that draws him is the opposite of that "something" which was carrying Louisa away earlier; "life," to use Leavis's large term (which, as he says, is given so concretely "its force in the tale"²⁸), unequivocally triumphs over the forces that oppose it. With that gesture of his hand, Alfred has made his choice; the essential meeting has been achieved. It signals for them both a transition to a new stage of their lives. Holding her, Alfred "felt himself falling, falling from himself, and whilst she, yielded up, swooned to a kind of death of herself, a moment of utter darkness came over him, and they began to wake up again, as if from a long sleep. He was himself" (p.82).

The implicit metaphor of a seed falling to earth and lying in darkness, then germinating and springing to new life, is one that Lawrence returned to in The Rainbow. The death of the former self, and the break with one's past, is like the seed casting off its outer husk - necessary for further life. Finally, Alfred "was with her. She saw his face all sombre and inscrutable, and he seemed eternal to her. And all the agony came back into the rarity of bliss, and all her tears came up" (p.82).

Alfred is "with her" at a deep level, beneath personality: his face is "all sombre and inscrutable." The word "agony" occurs throughout this scene; like "rarity of bliss," it teeters on the verge of purple prose. Keith Cushman finds "embarrassingly purple"²⁹ the sentence, "They were silent for a long time, too much mixed up with passion and grief and death to do anything but hold each other in pain and kiss with long, hurting kisses wherein fear was transfused into desire" (p.83). Lawrence anticipated this sort of criticism when he wrote, on April 22, 1914, to Edward Garnett, that he was "a passionately religious man, and my novels must be written from the depth of my religious experience. ... And my cockneyism and

commonness are only when the deep feeling doesn't find its way out, and a sort of jeer comes instead, and sentimentality, and purplism" (Letters II, p.165). The danger is, I think, averted in this scene. With its underlying theme of death, rebirth, and resurrection, the coming together of Louisa and Alfred is fully invested with a significance that may be properly called religious. Further, Lawrence can use words such as "agony," "bliss," "passion," and "grief" without bombast because he has already provided convincing dramatisations of these feelings in the scene and in the tale; they have their concrete definitions there.

As Louisa and Alfred regain normal consciousness, they become shy, "afraid of each other, afraid to talk," yet both are "glad"; Louisa "laughed for joy," and Alfred "was sharp with pride" (p.83). What the critic Martin Price observes of Birkin and Ursula's relationship in Women in Love is relevant here: "The surface gives way to reveal depth, then begins to reform anew with a consciousness of all that lies below it. The terms in which the self is conceived give way to new terms."³⁰ In Alfred and Louisa's case the lasting awareness which follows their moment of transfiguration cannot be called "consciousness"; it exists at a more primary, physical level: "... something was sound in his heart" (p.84).

What has occurred between Louisa and himself is comprehended not by his mind but "in his heart," and he can trust to that. This underlying surety gives him the courage to face the class-hostility of the vicarage, the following evening: "He was sure of Louisa, and this marriage was like fate to him. It filled him also with a blessed feeling of fatality. He was not responsible, neither had her people anything really to do with it" (p.84).

Alfred feels "not responsible" in the way that Tom Brangwen "knew he did not belong to himself." Where this marriage is concerned, "he must put himself aside: the matter was bigger than just his personal self. He must not feel. That was his highest duty" (p.84). This ironically parallels Mary's putting aside of her body and its claims: "She would not feel, and she would not feel" (p.56). Alfred's will identifies itself not with the self-insistent ego but with a greater, non-human will; insofar as he is the instrument of this will, he is not responsible. Or - to put it another way - to serve this will and not to obstruct it is his highest responsibility.

Mr Lindley, of course, conceives of responsibility as a different thing. For Louisa to marry Alfred, and then to continue living in the same parish, is in his view the height of irresponsibility:

"I mean that if you marry this man, it will make my position very difficult for me, particularly if you stay in this parish. If you were moving quite away, it would be simpler. But living here in a collier's cottage, under my nose, as it were - it would be almost unseemly. I have my position to maintain, and a position which may not be taken lightly." (pp.85-86)

The ethos of the vicarage is there revealed in all its ugliness and emptiness. He cannot take his position lightly; shabby though it is, he has sacrificed too much (in his marriage, and in his isolation from the rest of the community) to do that. Mary has sacrificed himself to gain a similar position. In repudiating this kind of self-immolation, Louisa has, from Mr Lindley's perspective, only demonstrated her selfishness: "I cannot understand why Louisa should not behave in the normal way. I cannot see why she should only think of herself, and leave her family out of count" (p.86).

F.R. Leavis provides the perfect judging comment: "This is addressed to Mary (she has protested that Alfred has his rights, and Louisa wants to marry him) - Mary, whose way the criterion of 'family' thus presents us as normal."³¹ The class-superiority of the Lindleys might be said to have the last word in the tale. Alfred remains steadfast in his resolve, but nevertheless defers to the Lindleys' arrogantly assumed authority:

"Come over here, young man," cried the mother, in her rough voice, "and let us look at you."

Durant, flushing, went over and stood - not quite at attention, so that he did not know what to do with his hands. Miss Louisa was angry to see him standing there, obedient and acquiescent. He ought to show himself a man. (p.86)

Louisa is angry with Alfred because he is again "not himself"; he has automatically accepted his assumed position of abstract inferiority. At the tale's end, the young couple's future is uncertain: emigration to Canada is projected. They have transgressed the rules of the society in which they live, and even without Mr Lindley's opposition, it is difficult to imagine them settling happily in the community. But between themselves, class-feeling is no longer an obstacle. They have got beneath the merely human plane to which this feeling belongs, and forged a relation at a deeper level. Lawrence's new conception of character enabled him to dramatically convey this deeper level of relation, and to show movement between it and upper levels in a subtle, discriminating way. One is also shown, in the various relations presented in the tale, the different ways in which these levels react against each other. Mr and Mrs Lindley seek to fulfil their surface desires for social and material advantage, and ruthlessly suppress the feelings within themselves that are not devoted to the attainment of these things. Mary, in deciding to marry Mr Massey, also denies her deepest impulses. Only

Louisa and, because of her example, Alfred, submit to these impulses; only in these characters does "life" triumph over class and convention.

Notes

- 1 Leavis, p. 75.
- 2 Cushman, p. 114.
- 3 Cushman, p. 85.
- 4 Leavis, p. 75.
- 5 D.H. Lawrence, "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," in Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, by D.H. Lawrence (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 244. All quotations from "Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious" will be taken from the Heinemann Edition.
- 6 See, for example, William Blake, "The Garden of Love," in Songs of Innocence and of Experience, by William Blake, introduction and commentary Sir Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), plate 44.
- 7 Black, p. 194.
- 8 Cushman, p. 115.
- 9 Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, p. 248.
- 10 D.H. Lawrence, foreword, "Fantasia of the Unconscious," in Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, p. 9.
- 11 D.H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (1913; rpt. Heron Books, by arrangement with William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1968), p. 90. All quotations from Sons and Lovers will be taken from the Heron Edition.

- 12 Andrews, p. 44.
- 13 Black, p. 22.
- 14 Black, p. 192.
- 15 Delavenay, p. 153.
- 16 Sons and Lovers, p. 420.
- 17 See "Appendix II," The Prussian Officer and Other Stories, ed. John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 209-46 for the text of this version.
- 18 Cushman, pp. 96-97.
- 19 Cushman, p. 96.
- 20 See Black, p. 190.
- 21 The Rainbow, p. 35.
- 22 D.H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel," in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, p. 172.
- 23 D.H. Lawrence, "The Novel," in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, p. 182.
- 24 Black, p. 20.
- 25 D.H. Lawrence, "The Novel," in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, p. 182.
- 26 Women in Love, p. 27.
- 27 Women in Love, p. 27.

- 28 Leavis, p. 76.
- 29 Cushman, p. 99.
- 30 Martin Price, Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 273.
- 31 Leavis, p. 98.

Chapter Four: "The White Stocking"

Of the three stories I examine in this thesis, only "The White Stocking" approximates the mode of comedy. In The Short Fiction of D.H. Lawrence, Janice Hubbard Harris discusses the story within the context of this mode. As a framework for her discussion of a group of stories, including "The White Stocking," she invokes Northrop Frye's distinction between the tragic and the comic: "Tragedy draws on the related qualities of inevitability and incongruity to create its effect of pity and fear. Comedy, by contrast, assumes freedom of choice and a congruence of actions and rewards to create its vision of movement out of an old world into a new."¹ This broad distinction enables Harris to make a number of interesting points, but ultimately it cannot be sustained in the light of this particular instance. "The White Stocking" is, in the light, deft handling of its subject matter, more comic than tragic; yet the three characters about whom the story revolves are presented, in their different ways, as limited beings incapable of choice.

The limitedness of these characters is implicit in F.R. Leavis's brief descriptions of them: "... Elsie Whiston, a pretty, feather-brained incorrigible little work-girl flirt, her ordinary good-natured husband, and Sam Adams, his grossly boulderish employer, once hers too, who continues to send her presents which she accepts behind her husband's back because she can't resist them." The characters are these things; they cannot be anything else. This does not mean that they lend themselves, in Lawrence's hands, to superficial treatment. Leavis goes on:

It might seem that such matter was susceptible only of the lightest treatment, playing only for a lightly engaged response - the reader's interest to be one of superior, if not cynical, amusement. In Lawrence's actual treatment there is lightness right enough; but it is the lightness that registers a fulness of engagement in the writer. This for him is without qualification human life.²

Jessie Chambers, in her memoir of Lawrence, similarly praised "his power to transmute the common experience into significance ... He did not distinguish between small and great happenings; the common round was full of mystery, awaiting interpretation."³ The "common round" in "The White Stocking" is the lower middle class domestic relationship of Ted and Elsie Whiston. Lawrence conveys the nature of this relationship at the beginning of the story, with a series of suggestive details. The opening sentence provides the first of these. "Teddilinks" (p.143), Elsie's pet-name for her husband, implies both affection and childishness; a harmless immaturity on her part which nevertheless may be seen (is seen, as the story progresses) as a trivialisation of an adult relationship. The impression of Elsie as a kind of child-wife is strengthened when, through Ted's eyes, we perceive her as she gets dressed:

She was a pretty little thing, with her fleecy, short black hair all tousled. He watched her as she dressed quickly, flicking her small, delightful limbs, throwing her clothes about her. Her slovenliness and untidiness did not trouble him. When she picked up the edge of her petticoat, ripped off a torn string of white lace, and flung it on the dressing-table, her careless abandon made his spirit glow. (p.143)

It is an attractive picture she makes, but the lively sexuality and carelessness that here make Ted's "spirit glow" are the same qualities that later provoke him to call her a "stray-running little bitch" (p.161). Quick vitality and carelessness are as intrinsic to Elsie's nature as they are absent in Ted's. That his spirit glows as he watches her suggests that he is warming himself at her life-flame, as does this: "They had been married two years. But still, when she had gone out of the room, he felt as if all his light and warmth were taken away, he became aware of the raw, cold morning" (p.143). There is a sense of insecurity in this dependence on her: if she has the light and warming properties of a flame, she has also a flame's inconstancy, and is not always there to be depended on. Whether she should be there is a question: such a dependence may be stifling, especially to a nature such as Elsie's. Yet she depends on him too, in a way this passage subtly dramatises:

"This fire's a slow-coach," he said.

"And who else is a slow-coach?" she said.

"One of us two, I know," he said, and he rose carefully. She remained clinging round his neck, so that she was lifted off her feet.

"Ha! - swing me," she cried.

He lowered his head, and she hung in the air, swinging from his neck, laughing. (p.146)

"He rose carefully" indicates his qualities of steadiness and consideration. Trusting to these qualities, Elsie can indulge her playful, frivolous bent; he can be responsible for her. Ted is "a slow-coach," Elsie flighty and irresponsible. The attraction each has for the other is in these opposing qualities, but the opposition also produces a tension, which at the end of the story sparks into violence. I have discussed a similar theme, dramatised through very different characters, in my commentary on "The Prussian Officer" (though in that story the

attraction is one-sided). In "The White Stocking" the two protagonists are, like the captain and his orderly, fixed in limited, opposing modes of being, but their limitations are different. At the story's commencement, Elsie's mode seems harmless enough. Her qualities of childishness and carelessness I have already discussed; associated with these qualities are her theatricality - "'Rise up,' she cried, turning to him with a quick wave of her arm - 'and shine forth'" - and her social pretensions: "He passed down the narrow little passage, which she called a hall ..." (p.143). By the second and third page of the story these qualities have become more harmful in their effects, as they shade into irresponsibility, deceit, and vanity.

This particular morning is Valentine's Day, and Elsie has got up earlier than usual because she anticipates a valentine from Sam Adams. He has sent her a white stocking (the significance of which is brought out later, in the flashback to the Christmas dance two years before), and in its toe is a pair of pearl ear-rings. In front of the mirror she puts on the ear-rings, and when Ted appears, diverts his attention to the other valentines she has received. Even without knowing of the ear-rings, his jealousy is roused: "'They've no right to send you valentines, now,' he said" (p.145). His jealousy is not ill-founded: she lies about the stocking, saying it is "a sample" (p.145), and she conceals the ear-rings upstairs. Worse, she compounds the lie by telling a partial truth. The scene begins in this way:

Over the breakfast she grew serious. He did not notice. She became portentous in her gravity. Almost it penetrated through his steady good-humour to irritate him.

"Teddy!" she said at last.

"What?" he asked.

"I told you a lie," she said, humbly tragic.

His soul stirred uneasily.

"Oh ay?" he said casually.

She was not satisfied. He ought to be more moved.

"Yes," she said. (p.146)

Elsie's taste for the melodramatic amuses; less amusing is her purpose not to reveal the truth - the whole truth - but to provoke her husband's easily aroused feelings of jealousy. "His soul stirred uneasily" tells us she has succeeded, but she does not know that: it is not a visible response, but an inner, physical disturbance, which contrasts with his surface-level unconcern. Elsie goes on:

"You know that white stocking," she said earnestly. "I told you a lie. It wasn't a sample. It was a valentine."

A little frown came on his brow.

"Then what did you invent it as a sample for?" he said. But he knew this weakness of hers. The touch of anger in his voice frightened her.

"I was afraid you'd be cross," she said pathetically.

"I'll bet you were vastly afraid," he said.

"I was, Teddy." (p.147)

Ted's cynicism shows he is no fool; he knows from experience what kind of game Elsie is playing, and he is angered by it as much as he is by admirers sending her gifts. And though Elsie fears his anger, she cannot resist provoking it further, thus gratifying her sense of her importance to him at the expense of his feelings. She tells him that she received another stocking a year previously, and - to deliver her final blow - that she has had a drink with Adams. Again Ted is not fooled by her contrite manner. His crude response indicates how deeply she has wounded him: "'You'd go off with a nigger

for a packet of chocolate,' he said, in anger and contempt, and some bitterness" (p.148).

Elsie's "confession" is really play-acting. She conveniently omits to mention the pearl ear-rings, and an amethyst brooch she received from Adams the year before. But her charade and her deceptions, though harmful to her relationship with Ted, still retain, in her, a peculiar innocence. When Ted is ready to go to work, she assumes the role of the injured party, and "allowed herself to be kissed. Her cheek was wet under his lips, and his heart burned. She hurt him so deeply. And she felt aggrieved, and did not quite forgive him" (p.148). Her innocence is displayed in that last sentence: in her thoughtless way she does not perceive how much she has hurt him, and she quite believes her own charade. It is not in her nature to reflect on the seriousness of her own offences. The only evidence of her feeling any moral disquietude about accepting the ear-rings from Adams is when she first puts them on: hearing Ted approach, "she started round quickly, guiltily" (p.145). And even then she is like a child, afraid of being caught misbehaving. Her thoughtless irresponsibility is summed up by her acceptance of the amethyst brooch: "She had not the faintest intention of having anything to do with Sam Adams, but once a little brooch was in her possession, it was hers, and she did not trouble her head for a moment, how she had come by it. She kept it" (p.158).

Elsie is not, according to her lights, unfaithful to Ted, but she rather insults his feelings for her by taking them so much for granted. This is wittily conveyed in the flashback to their courting days, when "she made splendid little gestures, before her bedroom mirror, of the constant-and-true sort.

'True, true till death -'

That was her song. Whiston was made that way, so there was no need to take thought for him" (p.149). That Ted

is made that way does not diminish the irony of that last sentence. Elsie can be sure of him (which, for her, translates into a feeling of unconcern), knowing that his concern for her remains constant. Their marriage takes this form:

She was quite happy at first, carried away by her adoration of her husband. Then gradually she got used to him. He always was the ground of her happiness, but she got used to him, as to the air she breathed. He never got used to her in the same way.

Inside of marriage she found her liberty. She was rid of the responsibility of herself. Her husband must look after that. She was free to get what she could out of her time. (p.158)

Lawrence's comedy is of a high order. The narration has an idiomatic flow, bordering on cliché yet, in fact, quite unlike it: the language is not stuck in a worn groove of expression. The tone avoids the pitfalls of the easy and the cheap: it is poised but not distant, lightly ironic but not cynical. What we are vividly told, here, is also convincingly dramatised. Elsie flaunts her new ear-rings throughout the morning, hoping they will be noticed by the visiting tradesmen, and she wears them down town in the afternoon, half-hoping to be seen by Sam Adams. And though she spares no thought for Ted, her behaviour is still reconcilable with, indeed dependent on, the relationship that abides between them: "He was the permanent basis from which she took these giddy little flights into nowhere" (p.149). Her shallow, unreal grievance against Ted is forgotten. His feelings, however, are much more than mere theatrical flourishes: deeply hurt by her revelations of the morning, "he hastened about his work, his heart all the while anxious for her, yearning for surety, and kept tense by not getting it" (p.149).

The tensions brought to the surface this Valentine's Day are also present, and have their origin, in the episode to which the narrative flashes back in Section II: Sam Adams's Christmas dance, held two years before. Like Valentine's Day, the dance is an occasion that permits sexual overtures to be made, within the bounds of recognised social conventions. Sam Adams welcomes Elsie at the door, and immediately makes himself felt as a sexual presence: "He seized her hands and led her forward. He opened his mouth wide when he spoke, and the effect of the warm, dark opening behind the brown whiskers was disturbing" (p.150). The small-talk that passes between them as he reserves dances with her has a sexual undertone as well: "'I should have to be pretty small to get in your mouth,' she said" (p.150). The mood is established for their first dance:

He was an excellent dancer. He seemed to draw her close in to him by some male warmth of attraction, so that she became all soft and pliant to him, flowing to his form, whilst he united her with him and they lapsed along in one movement. She was just carried in a kind of strong, warm flood, her feet moved of themselves, and only the music threw her away from him, threw her back to him, to his clasp, in his strong form moving against her, rhythmically, deliciously. (p.151)

Elsie yields up responsibility for herself to Adams as she revels in the sheer physical exquisiteness of the dance. Keith Cushman associates this passage with a passage in The Rainbow "in which the dance is used in the same way."⁴ The passage he refers to describes a dance between Ursula and Anton Skrebensky:

At the touch of her hand on his arm, his consciousness melted away from him. He took her into his arms, as if into the sure, subtle power of his will, and they became one movement, one dual movement, dancing

on the slippery grass. It would be endless, this movement, it would continue forever. It was his will and her will locked in a trance of motion, two wills locked in one motion, yet never yielding one to the other.⁵

Cushman remarks that "in The Rainbow, as in the revised "White Stocking," the dance liberates the powerful sexual energies of Lawrence's young heroine."⁶ I think this falsifies the significance of both these scenes. Both dances are sexually charged, but neither has a liberating effect. Neither are these dances "used in the same way." In the passage from The Rainbow, the dance encloses the two dancers, and within this enclosure a contest of wills is fought. In the passage from "The White Stocking," there is no contest; Elsie yields readily to Adams's power and attractiveness. In both passages, Lawrence's characters are engaged at deep levels of feeling, but they are very different engagements. Ursula maintains, in the dance, a fierce independence, whereas Elsie plainly doesn't. They are very different characters, and each stamps the scene in which she is involved with her own uniqueness. Cushman's account unjustifiably assimilates these differences.

In the passage that follows, Adams is presented as a satyr-like figure, using his mysterious power of attraction to accomplish his design on Elsie:

When it was over, he was pleased and his eyes had a curious gleam which thrilled her and yet had nothing to do with her. Yet it held her. He did not speak to her. He only looked straight into her eyes with a curious, gleaming look that disturbed her fearfully and deliciously. But also there was in his look some of the automatic irony of the roué. It left her partly cold. She was not carried away. (p.151)

Cushman seizes on the first four of these sentences, and comments:

Adams does not speak to Elsie, and his eyes have "nothing to do with her": this detail reflects the impersonality that is a central feature of the mature love ethic. In the dance Adams and Elsie have celebrated the cosmic energies of the universe together - but they have not attempted to know each other.⁷

But the last three sentences from the passage (which Cushman omits to quote) show, I think, what a distortion of the "mature love ethic" the relation between Adams and Elsie is. The impersonal element which Cushman notes is there, right enough; but in Adams it is inseparable from the cold calculatedness of the seducer. He can arouse and disturb Elsie in a way that Ted Whiston cannot, but, as Elsie perceives, he is not "there" for her as Ted is. Consequently she is "driven by an opposite, heavier impulse to Whiston" (p.151). Each man has distinct, opposing qualities which attract Elsie, and she is pulled between them, wanting in Ted what has aroused her in Adams:

"Aren't you going to play whist?" she asked.

"Ay," he said. "Directly."

"I do wish you could dance."

"Well, I can't," he said. "So you enjoy yourself."

"But I should enjoy it better if I could dance with you."

"Nay, you're all right," he said. "I'm not made that way."

"Then you ought to be!" she cried. (p.151)

Ted is "not made that way": he is not a dancer but (as his surname suggests) a whist-player. His steady sobriety is almost a reproach to her gaiety. It reminds

her to behave responsibly, even as he bids her to enjoy herself. And Elsie does not want to be reminded: dancing again with Adams "she felt a little grudge against Whiston, soon forgotten when her host was holding her near to him, in a delicious embrace" (p.151). Yet conscience drives her again back to Ted, who is playing cards. Fresh from her dance with Adams, Elsie is "too strong, too vibrant a note in the quiet room":

"Are you playing cribbage? Is it exciting? How are you getting on?" she chattered. He looked at her. None of these questions needed answering, and he did not feel in touch with her. (p.152)

That is, she is not "there" for him as he is for her. Lawrence sensitively conveys the subtle nuances of relationship, the ebb and flow of feeling between his characters. Elsie is slipping out of range of Ted's ability to influence her. Her meaningless chatter is not felt by him as a communication between them; it merely conveys her rousedness to Adams: "It moved him more strongly than was comfortable, to have her hand on his shoulder, her curls dangling and touching his ears, whilst she was roused to another man" (p.152). Michael Black observes that "this is a matter of the antennae, of receptivity to what is purely sensed ..." ⁸ Elsie's awareness of the "automatic irony" in Adams's look may be described in the same way. Characters unintentionally reveal themselves to others at this subliminal level, where awareness is not the less sensitive for being describable in the language of sensation, as opposed to the language of thought. Thus Elsie's perception "left her partly cold" (p.151), and Ted's "made the blood flame over him" (p.152). Characters may also communicate at this level when they are aroused to each other. In the passage that follows, the significant communication between Adams and Elsie occurs beneath the level of the conversation. Once again, in Adams's eye, "the curious, impersonal light gleamed":

"I thought I should find you here, Elsie," he cried boisterously, a disturbing, high note in his voice.

"What made you think so?" she replied, the mischief rousing in her.

The florid, well-built man narrowed his eyes to a smile.

"I should never look for you among the ladies," he said, with a kind of intimate, animal call to her. (p.152)

Again Adams is a satyr- or Pan-like figure, an enchanter, whom Elsie is powerless to resist: "She went almost helplessly, carried along with him, unwilling, yet delighted" (p.152). In the next dance they have together, Elsie feels "herself slipping away from herself" and into Adams's possession, so that "he seemed to sustain all her body with his limbs, his body, and his warmth seemed to come closer into her, nearer, till it would fuse right through her, and she would be as liquid to him, as an intoxication only" (p.153). The fusing aspect is emphasised throughout the passage describing this dance, which again belies Cushman's claim that the relation between Ted and Elsie is representative of Lawrence's "mature love ethic." One cannot, of course, confidently say what this ethic amounts to purely by reference to the fictional works, but surely Birkin is near the mark when he addresses this to Ursula, in Women in Love: "'What I want is a strange conjunction with you -' he said quietly; '- not meeting and mingling; - you are quite right: - but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings: - as the stars balance each other.'"⁹

There is no such balance between Elsie and Adams. It is clear that the loss of self Elsie experiences is a submergence of her identity within another, a fusion, which is not a prelude to the kind of relationship Birkin

posits, but in fact precludes such a relationship. In the "strange conjunction" Birkin seeks, the integrity of the individual is not diminished; each person is self-responsible. Elsie, as we have seen, has a characteristic tendency to put responsibility for herself in another person's hands.

This is not to deny the powerful force of attraction generated between her and Adams. The dance brings their feelings to a new pitch of intensity, so that they are held in check only by the presence of others in the dancing-room: "He bent over her. She expected his lips on her bare shoulder, and waited. Yet they were not alone, they were not alone. It was cruel" (p.153). Yet Elsie still has in her "a little grain of resistant trouble" (p.153). This is no doubt partly a twinge of conscience at her behaviour with Adams, but partly, also, a recurring sense of the "automatic irony" that underlies his passion. Lawrence presents Adams's feelings in this way:

The man, possessed, yet with a superficial presence of mind, made way to the dining-room, as if to give her refreshment, cunningly working to his own escape with her. He was molten hot, filmed over with presence of mind, and bottomed with cold disbelief. (p.153)

Swiftly and precisely Lawrence here presents three levels of character, which are coexistent yet quite distinct. On the surface Adams is relatively cool, "filmed over with presence of mind"; at this level he can plan how to have his way with Elsie. Barely beneath this level is his passion, "molten hot." And at bottom is the absence of any warm, sympathetic feeling, of commitment to her. The roué is penetratingly and revealingly defined.

Elsie is not blind to the cynical basis of Adams's passion, but her identity has become so bound up with his that any sense of a real, independent self

capable of relating to others is gone. When she and Adams go into the dining-room, where Ted is, "Elsie saw him, but felt as if he could not see her. She was beyond his reach and ken. A sort of fusion existed between her and the large man at her side" (p.153). This has its darker parallel in "The Prussian Officer," where the orderly, feeling inextricably bound to the captain as a consequence of his beating, has also the sensation of being invisible to others. Passing a flock of sheep, "he felt that the shepherd could not see him, though he could see the shepherd" (p.11). For Elsie and for the orderly, intimate contact with another human being gives rise to an exclusive identification with that being, thus preventing the possibility of other, more balanced relationships. But Elsie is not cowed or beaten, as the orderly is, and in her the sensation is a fleeting one. Lawrence traces its partial subsidence:

But she was growing cooler. Whiston came up. She looked at him, and saw him with different eyes. She saw his slim, young man's figure real and enduring before her. That was he. But she was in the spell with the other man, fused with him, and she could not be taken away. (p.154)

What Ted offers her is, as she perceives, "real and enduring"; it thus contrasts with the rather caddish passion offered by Adams. "That was he" is one of those pregnant Lawrencean summing up phrases which convey with simplicity and directness a penetrating insight. About Ted Elsie has, and need have, no illusions. There is no discrepancy between what he appears to be and what he is. But the phrase also carries a faintly dismissive connotation. Ted is these admirable qualities, and no more; he is fixed, known right round. No mystery pertains to him. Adams, who is less straightforward, she does not know in the same way. In any case, as the last sentence makes plain, Elsie's sudden, rather clear-eyed

perception of Ted makes little difference: the passive construction emphasises how incapable she is, now, of breaking free (should she even want to) of Adams's sway. In "fusing" her identity with his, she has lost the power to act independently and decisively. The note of reality which Ted introduces is almost unpleasant to her at this moment: "'Have you finished your cribbage?' she asked, with hasty evasion of him" (p.154). She fends off conscious acknowledgement of any hard facts that might threaten to shatter the delightful, trance-like state she is in:

"You don't want to be too free with Sam Adams," said Whiston cautiously, suffering. "You know what he is."

"How, free?' she asked.

"Why - you don't want to have too much to do with him."

She sat silent. He was forcing her into consciousness of her position. But he could not get hold of her feelings, to change them. She had a curious, perverse desire that he should not. (p.155)

Here it is the captain in "The Prussian Officer" who provides the parallel: "He would not know that his feeling for his orderly was anything but that of a man incensed by his stupid, perverse servant. So keeping quite justified and conventional in his consciousness, he let the other thing run on" (p.6). Elsie's character is of course very different from the captain's, but like him she can let a "thing run on" by refusing to confront it consciously. But the refusal itself must constitute a partial recognition, albeit a subconscious one. The sense of strain intensifies as Elsie, "almost lost to her own control" (p.155), becomes increasingly divided between the two rivals who seek possession of her: "She was nervous. Adams also was constrained. A tightness, a tension was coming over them all. And he was exasperated,

feeling something counteracting physical magnetism, feeling a will stronger with her than his own intervening in what was becoming a vital necessity to him" (p.155).

The situation is providentially defused by the incident involving the stocking. Mistaking it for a handkerchief, Elsie pulls it from her pocket and accidentally drops it to the floor:

For a second it lay on the floor, a twist of white stocking. Then, in an instant, Adams picked it up, with a little, surprised laugh of triumph.

"That'll do for me," he whispered - seeming to take possession of her. And he stuffed the stocking in his trousers pocket, and quickly offered her his handkerchief. (p.156)

This is anticlimactic in its effect - as no doubt Lawrence means it to be. There is something rather hollow about Adams's "triumph." The symbolic significance of his claiming the stocking is obvious enough, but the vicarious satisfaction it provides seems a feeble substitute for actual consummation. To his "That'll do for me," the reader adds mentally the implicit qualification: "For the time being."

Ted does not fully understand the significance of Adams's action, but he knows enough to be angry. He is angered more by Elsie's insistence that he do nothing, somehow recognising that this amounts, on her part, to a tacit acceptance of Adams. They leave the dance unnoticed, and walk a long while, Elsie sobbing that she doesn't want to go home. The form their reconciliation takes is shrewdly and movingly conveyed:

"Ted!" she whispered, frantic. "Ted!"

"What, my love?" he answered, becoming also afraid.

"Be good to me," she cried. "Don't be cruel to me."

"No, my pet," he said, amazed and grieved.
"Why?"

"Oh, be good to me," she sobbed.

And he held her very safe, and his heart was white hot with love for her. His mind was amazed. He could only hold her against his chest that was white hot with love and belief in her. So she was restored at last. (pp.157-58)

Elsie has, one surmises, momentarily glimpsed the events of the evening stripped of their glamorous illusion, and she is shocked at herself, and afraid. The glimpse reveals to her a dangerous element in her nature, which she fears may well be beyond her control. Hence her apprehensive "Don't be cruel to me": it is the equivalent of asking Ted to accept her as she is and not as she might be, and to take responsibility for her. Ted does not understand the full import of what Elsie says - "his mind was amazed" - but it is clear that he accepts the burden entrusted to him, and that he is qualified to do so. It is characteristic of Lawrence's handling of moments such as these that Ted commits himself wordlessly, his consciousness suspended. His "love and belief in her" are profound physical sensations, felt in his chest as heat; as a suitable mate for Elsie he is in sharp contrast to the cynically manipulative Adams, whose passion for her is "bottomed with cold disbelief" (p.153). The wayward Elsie has been restored to her proper guardian-lover, but her well-grounded fear challenges the finality of the phrase "at last": natural, uncontrollable propensities may easily resurface. The reconciliation that Ted and Elsie achieve here is not a permanent one.

In Section III of the story, Lawrence swiftly chronicles their subsequent marriage's two-year history, and thus returns us to the present. The uncontrollable element has indeed resurfaced, and established a dangerous

pattern, as she maintains a dalliance with Adams: "... she perceived he was in love with her, she knew he had always kept an unsatisfied desire for her. And, sportive, she could not help playing a little with this, though she cared not one jot for the man himself" (p.158).

Elsie's power of sexual attraction is to her a toy to be played with. She has a child's perspective on adult behaviour, and thus does not recognise (perhaps, as in the dance sequence, shields herself from recognising) the potentially grave consequences of that behaviour. She enjoys the thrill the innocent exercise of her power gives her, and that is all - the innocence, for her, being sufficiently embodied in her determination to have nothing illicit to do with Adams. Her innocence for us lies partly in her naïveté, and partly in her helplessness to behave any differently. Of course, to say that one cannot help behaving in a certain way can become an easy and habitual form of self-justification, but I do not think it is Elsie doing the justifying here: in her failure to perceive the gravity of her behaviour, the need for such a justification would not occur to her.

With the same guilelessness she accepts Adams's gifts of jewellery. Her concealment of these gifts from Ted is not so much the action of a wife with a guilty secret, as the action of a child, devising ways to keep objects it knows to be forbidden. Hence her juvenile stratagem to explain away the presence of the ear-rings: "She would pretend she had inherited them from her grandmother, her mother's mother" (p.159).

Concealed or unconcealed, Elsie's follies take their toll on her relationship with Ted:

Whiston came home tired and depressed. All day the male in him had been uneasy, and this had fatigued him. She was curiously against him, inclined, as

she sometimes was nowadays, to make mock of him and jeer at him and cut him off. He did not understand this, and it angered him deeply. She was uneasy before him. (p.159)

Both, then, are "uneasy"; the balance between them is lacking. "The male in him" suggests some atavistic, impersonal element in Ted that feels itself under threat - his "soul," perhaps, which earlier "stirred uneasily" (p.146). Elsie perceives he is "in a state of suppressed irritation," but "she could not help goading him" (p.159). She has the power to arouse strong emotions in men, and her nature is such that she inevitably exploits this power, the effects of which are gratifying to her. The stronger the aroused emotions, the more gratified she is - even though it may mean putting herself in a dangerous position. This is perilously close (with an eye to the violence that follows) to saying that Elsie is looking for a beating, and indeed as normally astute a critic as George Orwell, from his reading of the story, wryly "deduced the moral that women behave better if they get a sock on the jaw occasionally."¹⁰ Keith Cushman remarks that this is "an interpretation that might not have upset Lawrence."¹¹ It seems to me a cheap misrepresentation of what Lawrence wrote, and in the course of examining the relevant scene I hope to demonstrate this.

To begin with, Lawrence is, in Michael Black's words, "faithful to the nature of the imagined people."¹² This dispenses with the damaging generalising temper of Orwell's criticism. Ted and Elsie are not merely representatives of different modes of being; they are uniquely themselves. It follows that we cannot, without violating the text, abstract a general moral. Given the dramatic context, and these particular characters as we have come to know them, the action unfolds naturally and inevitably. It surprises, even shocks us, but it shocks convincingly;

Lawrence does not have his thumb in the scale. Both characters respond in entirely characteristic ways to the tension between them. Ted is filled with heavy, sullen anger, which outwardly appears as gloom, whereas Elsie is flippant, insouciant, seemingly gay. In a "little inspiration" (p.159) she dons the white stockings: "'Don't they look nice?' she said. 'One from last year and one from this, they just do. Save you buying a pair'" (p.159). Sexual taunting is her most effective means of striking at him, and almost despite herself she goes further. Her subsequent dance is a wordless declaration of her sexual autonomy; of self-assertion which is at the same time a negation and a rejection of her husband:

And she began to dance slowly round the room, kicking up her feet half reckless, half jeering, in a ballet-dancer's fashion. Almost fearfully, yet in defiance, she kicked up her legs at him, singing as she did so. She resented him. (p.160)

Michael Black suggests that "this other dance, the solo dance of the defiant woman, is the prototype of the one that Anna Brangwen dances before Will, as Anna Victrix."¹³ But in the scene from The Rainbow to which Black is referring, it is clear that it is not Will before whom the pregnant Anna dances, but "the Lord":

He watched, and his soul burned in him. He turned aside, he could not look, it hurt his eyes. Her fine limbs lifted and lifted, her hair was sticking out all fierce, and her belly, big, strange, terrifying, uplifted to the Lord. Her face was rapt and beautiful, she danced exulting before her Lord, and knew no man.¹⁴

It is true that, like Elsie, Anna dances the man's nullification, but the similarity ends there: Anna is not Elsie, and what a comparison of the two scenes brings out is, surely, the differences. Elsie's dance is an explicit taunt directed at Ted: in kicking up her legs

she is flaunting before his eyes the stockings given her by another man. There is, we scarcely need telling, "a real biting indifference in her behaviour" (p.160), but even this is a blow aimed at Ted; were he not there, the reason for her behaving like this would disappear. For Anna, on the other hand, Will's presence is purely an impediment: "'I don't do it for you,' she said. 'You go away.'"¹⁵ Her dance is a much more mysterious affair than Elsie's is, and Lawrence finely conveys its strangeness. Intrinsic to Lawrence's imaginative conception of a scene is an ever-present sensitive awareness to the particular natures of the characters involved. The individuals presented shape our response to the scene: they determine its significance and intensity. Scenes involving Elsie have an Elsie-flavour, and convey an Elsie-intensity, peculiarly her own.

We may better understand Elsie's dance, both in itself and as it takes its place in the organised work of art, by contrasting it with her dance with Adams in Section II. In both scenes, Elsie refuses to accept responsibility for herself. In her dance with Adams, she fuses her identity with his, gives herself up to him, and refuses responsibility that way. In her defiant solo dance before Ted, her impulse is seemingly in the opposite direction. But in Elsie this impulse resembles the stubborn wilfulness of the child that says to its parent, "I'll do as I like," in the knowledge that the parent will protect it from the possibly dangerous consequences of its behaviour: "'I shan't backfire them stockings,' she sang, repeating his words, 'I shan't, I shan't, I shan't'" (p.160). As Janice Hubbard Harris says, "Elsie has refused to recognise the depth and power of her own adult, sexual selfhood. ... she delights in seeing herself as a bright child, engaging and innocent."¹⁶ But to Ted she is an adult woman, his wife, and "every one of her sentences stirred him up like a red-hot iron. Soon it would be too much. And she was afraid herself; but she was neither conquered nor convinced" (p.160).

Convinced of what? His love for her, presumably: the intensity of his jealous rage is the index by which she measures his love. Again one notes her childish perspective on an adult relationship. Ted's blow, when it comes, does not entirely jolt her out of this perspective. Her final, mocking revelation - that Adams has been giving her jewellery - is for Ted the last straw:

He seemed to thrust his face and his eyes forward at her, as he rose slowly and came to her. She watched transfixed in terror. Her throat made a small sound, as she tried to scream.

Then, quick as lightning, the back of his hand struck her with a crash across the mouth, and she was flung back blinded against the wall. The shock shook a queer sound out of her. And then she saw him still coming on, his eyes holding her, his fist drawn back, advancing slowly. At any instant the blow might crash into her. (p.162)

Here is Orwell's "sock on the jaw," and we can see how inappropriate his flippant phrase is. Lawrence's sympathetic interest in his characters precludes the kind of cynicism Orwell's phrase implies. Michael Black draws a similar conclusion to Orwell's. With some reservations, he says, "one must admit that the whole drive of the story is meant to confirm the moral: that Whiston's masculine strength can from now on cradle Elsie's feminine waywardness and charm, even if it has to offer a salutary violence at the right moments."¹⁷ Black's account implies that Ted's "masculine strength" is judiciously enlisted to administer "a salutary violence" when it is needed, and that this is approved by the author. But in the scene it is clear that Ted's response is automatic; it has nothing to do with any conscious decision-making. The physical, violent impulse takes charge of him, not he of it. He is like a destructive machine set in motion. Lawrence does not endorse Ted's action, nor does he condemn it: he presents it, and in his presentation, Ted is

critically placed. His sort of spontaneity is, like the orderly's in "The Prussian Officer," a limited mode of being, because he is powerless to choose any other course of action.

The story's ending repudiates any pat conclusions. Ted's blow does not have the admonitory effect that Orwell and Black imply it has, as we see when Ted tells Elsie to fetch the jewels: "'I won't,' she wept, with rage. 'You're not going to bully me and hit me like that on the mouth'" (p.163). It may be that no action of Ted's can curb her behaviour. Ted seems to recognise the futility and inappropriateness of his blow when he brings down the jewels:

He looked at the little jewels. They were pretty.
 "It's none of their fault," he said to himself.
 (p.163)

By extension this reflection applies to Elsie, who is also "a pretty little thing" (p.143). Irresponsible creature that she is, Elsie will get into scrapes, and can no more be called to account for them than the jewels could be. To project, for a moment, beyond the end of the story - which is, after all, to do no more than Black does above - the couple's implied future is one in which, whatever Elsie's future behaviour may be, Ted will not hit her again. Ted's reflection is an acceptance of the woman he has married, and of the difference between her and himself. From this acceptance of difference his future relationship with her must proceed.

* * *

Afterword

It would, of course, be possible to disagree with my particular interpretations of "The Prussian Officer," "Daughters of the Vicar," and "The White Stocking." But any valid interpretation of these stories must, I think, be particular in the same sort of way. Accustomed to distinguishing between characters at the upper level of personality, critics have tended to overlook the subtleties and discriminations that Lawrence brings to the deeper, physical, impersonal level. To do justice to the distinctions Lawrence makes at this level requires a kind of analysis of passages that remains in touch with the dramatic contexts in which they occur. I have noted parallels where it has seemed justifiable and useful to do so, but even as one notes these, one's attention is drawn to the differences. Scenes and characters appear most like one another when they are isolated from their dramatic contexts. But experience does not exist in a vacuum. Only by examining Lawrence's characters within the context of the dramatic art in which they are presented, is one made vividly conscious of the ways these characters appropriate experience, transform it, make it uniquely theirs.

Notes

- 1 Janice Hubbard Harris, The Short Fiction of D.H. Lawrence (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1984), pp. 106-07.
- 2 Leavis, p. 258.
- 3 Jessie Chambers (E.T., pseud.), D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record (1935; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 198.
- 4 Cushman, p. 156.
- 5 The Rainbow, p. 316.
- 6 Cushman, p. 157.
- 7 Cushman, p. 156.
- 8 Black, pp. 235-36.
- 9 Women in Love, p. 139.
- 10 George Orwell, review of a paperback reprint of The Prussian Officer and Other Stories in the Tribune, November 16, 1945. Rpt. in The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume IV, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), p. 31.
- 11 Cushman, p. 164.
- 12 Black, p. 239.
- 13 Black, p. 238.

14 The Rainbow, p. 181.

15 The Rainbow, p. 181.

16 Harris, p. 111.

17 Black, p. 240.

Bibliographical Note

At present there is no satisfactory edition of Lawrence's complete works. Where possible I have cited the new Cambridge Edition, which is still in the process of completion, as it is the most scholarly and up-to-date. Quotations from Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, and Women in Love, works not yet available in the Cambridge Edition, have been taken from the Heron Edition, and checked for accuracy against the Viking Compass Edition (25 volumes, 1950-72). Editions of other works of Lawrence's that I have quoted from or referred to in this thesis are as listed below.

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