

AESTHETIC LITERACY AND MODERNITY:

A STUDY OF D.H. LAWRENCE'S WOMEN IN LOVE AND ITS RECEPTION

by

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AESTHETIC LITERARY AND MODERNITY :

A STUDY OF ~~THE~~ ~~THE~~ D. H. LAWRENCE'S WOMEN IN LOVE

AND ITS RECEPTION

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## ABSTRACT

Using D.H. Lawrence's Women in Love and its reception as a basis, this study analyzes the developing forms of modern aesthetic culture. The historical specificity of these forms is elucidated by establishing relationships between modernism and modernity, creation and reception, and aesthetics and socio-cultural theory. The concept of aesthetic literacy designates those historically and culturally dynamic attitudes, values, and sensibilities which readers bring to bear on literary works of art in order to determine their meaning and significance.

Each chapter covers a discrete aspect of the general problematic of modern aesthetic literacy. Chapter I outlines the historical context of modern aesthetic culture, with particular reference to the reception of Lawrence, and the methodological premisses of this study--specifically, the distinction between artistic and aesthetic values. Chapter II reconstructs the reception of Women in Love from its initial dismissal to its emerging canonization as a major work of art. This reception reveals both the aesthetically dynamic character of a work of art and the socio-cultural role and function of literary criticism. In contrast to the critically dominant tendency to underrate the generic specificity of the novel as a historical and cultural form, Chapter III reconstructs Lawrence's theory of the novel as a dialectic of cultural creation and cultural critique. On the basis of this theory, and particularly Lawrence's notion of "living relation," Chapter IV provides a reading of Women in Love. Lawrence's ambivalent attitude to modern society as destructive

and vital is analyzed in terms of the sexual relationships of the novel. It is concluded that Women in Love challenges readers to make aesthetic literacy commensurable with the modern cultural ideal of individual and social autonomy.

## PREFACE

A work of art cannot be separated from the history of its interpretations. This axiom not only informs the present study of D.H. Lawrence's Women in Love and its reception, but also literary scholarship in general. The conventions of literary scholarship require the critic to establish a relationship between his or her critical analysis and existing scholarship and literary-critical traditions. It is on the basis of this relationship that a given work of scholarship achieves validity and claims authority for itself. Underlying these conventions, albeit construed as dynamic and subject to consensus, is the assumption that an epistemologically distinct literary knowledge is possible. Although the present study would seem to confirm the conventions of literary scholarship, its intention is to interrogate the epistemological assumptions of these conventions. Because this interrogation takes the form of a critique of the conventions of Anglo-American literary scholarship, however, its logical structure may not be self-evident to the reader. In spite of the detailed attention I accord to the reception of Women in Love and to Lawrence's theory of the novel, my intention was not to develop a literary-critical theory which would culminate in a textual analysis of the novel. Rather, the explicitly critical and literary subject matter of this study provides the basis for a theoretical response to the crisis of

modern literary culture--the widening gap between the literary work of art and everyday lived experience. To put it differently, this study does not claim to provide a "literary" interpretation of Women in Love; rather, it seeks to provide a critique of the dominant forms of modern aesthetic culture. At the same time, this study seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Lawrence's theory of the novel and Women in Love for this critique. To assist the reader, it would be appropriate to briefly outline the essential moments of my argument and its underlying premisses.

My point of departure is the critique of modern literary theory as represented by the reception of Women in Love. Above all else, this reception highlights the historical development of literary theory as a movement away from cultural criticism and theory. Particularly in North America, this movement towards a distinctively literary theory was directed by the New Criticism. The historical achievement of the New Critics was to institute a closed system of literary-critical discourse through the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic criticism. Using both a neo-Kantian epistemology, which enabled them to posit the text as an object ontologically distinct from subjective (i.e. cultural and historical) determination, and a pragmatic ideology, which proclaimed the necessity for the rationalization and professionalization of literary culture, the New Critics confined the study of literature to textual criticism, thereby obviating the need for a theory of culture. Contrary to their widely accepted justification, what the New Critics displaced was not primarily biographical and philological criticism, but

liberal and left-wing cultural criticism. The central achievement of the New Criticism, even contrary to their often dogmatic and monolithic formalism, was the assimilation of a plurality of ideological positions within the paradigm of textual criticism. This process of assimilation can be seen, for example, in recent developments in literary theory such as reader-response criticism and poststructuralism. To be sure, the New Criticism as such can no longer claim any real symbolic power within the institution of criticism. However, there is little evidence that the separation of text from culture, so central to the New Criticism, has been overcome. Rather, "textualism" has become even more entrenched, absorbing formerly antagonistic elements within itself.

While the separation of text from culture constitutes the specific form of the crisis of contemporary literary culture, the solution does not lie in the denial of text in favour of culture. Such a solution is not only determinist and ahistorical, but also cannot avoid appealing to an ideal past, the world of Gemeinschaft where art, culture and society form an organic and unproblematical unity. The crucial issue is to recognize the autonomy of art as the historical achievement of modernity (i.e. the experienced life world of modern society), and to theorize new forms of aesthetic culture which take this autonomy as a point of departure. For formalist and postformalist criticism, however, the autonomy of art is taken as ontological, as a truth of art in general and thus irrespective of a given historical form of



culture. John Crowe Ransom, for example, had originally called for an "ontological criticism." But the autonomy of modern art is a historically specific achievement, inseparable from both the progressive rationalization (in Weber's sense) of modern culture and the artistic necessity to create a positive "world" in response to the negativity of the existing one. Nonetheless, the historical creation of art as an autonomous sphere of emancipatory values does not, in itself, constitute a crisis of aesthetic culture. As Lukács argues in The Theory of the Novel, the autonomy of art only renders it problematic. That is, the autonomy of art makes possible a dynamic and vital aesthetic culture by opening up a space between art and society, artist and public; it introduces indeterminacy into a relation formerly fixed by convention and tradition. It is precisely the indeterminacy of this relation which requires a distinction between artistic and aesthetic values, a distinction between the acts of artistic creation and aesthetic reception. In modern society the inner necessity of the artist to create new forms, as the very condition of art's legitimacy, inevitably places greater aesthetic demands on the receptive subject. And herein lies the source of the modern crisis of aesthetic culture. For when the receptive subject is unable to develop creative and imaginative relations between his or her life world and the work of art, then art either becomes irrelevant to that subject or it becomes reified as an object to be passively contemplated: it becomes fetishized as a sphere of beautiful or ugly appearances unrelated to the subject's cultural experiences and desires. In short,

literature becomes a text, or a series of texts, enclosed within a purely literary sphere of knowledge and experience.

To overcome the limits of what I call the "culture of criticism," it is necessary to theorize literature and art in relation to the cultural. At the same time, such a theoretical relationship must remain faithful to the historical achievement of modern art's autonomy. However, one does not have to begin ab ovo. The problematic character of modern culture, and especially aesthetic culture, was intensely felt by that generation of European intellectuals which includes such figures as Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. The "rediscovery" of these intellectuals by the English-speaking world over the last fifteen years can hardly be separated from the necessity to find new sources with which to respond to the deepening crisis of modern culture. Regardless of their differences, all these intellectuals saw the need to understand and theorize culture, while granting the aesthetic a crucial role in this theory, as a necessary basis for a critique of modern society. And just as the aesthetic illuminates and provides a "universal" ground for cultural theory, so this theory also illuminates the work of art in a way which art history and theory could not. More specifically, this tradition of aesthetico-cultural theory, which begins with a critique of Kant because he gives philosophical form to the existent, seeks to overcome at the level of theory the antinomic structure of modern society, especially the antinomies of art and society. It seeks to accomplish this project not by reconciling, but by problematizing

the antinomies as a dialectical relation. The fruit of this approach for aesthetico-cultural theory is that art's value becomes linked both to the critique of modern culture and to the human capacity and desire to create new cultural forms, to create history.

My reading of Lawrence's theory of the novel and Women in Love should be understood in relation to this tradition, and particularly to the work of the "young" Lukács. Indeed, it is my contention that Lawrence's aesthetico-cultural theory can be better understood from the perspective of this tradition. In my discussion of Lawrence's theory of the novel, therefore, I occasionally draw parallels with Lukács's "essay" because of the striking similarity of the two arguments. To be sure, Lawrence's thought is also informed by the tradition of English Romantic cultural criticism. But just as the significance of "poetry" for this tradition becomes increasingly inaccessible after Eliot's critique of Arnold, so the meaning of the novel, "the one bright book of life," in Lawrence's essays is misrecognized by contemporary literary critics. Accordingly, I have tried to demonstrate that Lawrence's theory is far more substantive than is generally recognized: it is not only a historically grounded critique of modern culture but also a theory of artistic creation and aesthetic response. It is within this theoretical context that Lawrence formulates his conception of the novel.

Let me conclude these remarks by clarifying the concept of aesthetic literacy. An adequate critique and theory of modern aesthetic culture must establish a relation between the autonomy

of art and the social-historical. In terms of verbal art, this relation can hardly avoid the issue of how we read literary works. Reading, however, is not a neutral "technology of the intellect," to use Jack Goody's phrase, but a socially and culturally contingent activity. It is, therefore, important to emphasize that a reader brings to bear on an aesthetic experience culturally specific expectations and values by which he or she makes sense of and judges that experience. Moreover, these expectations and values are themselves specifications of a more general structure of imaginary significations. To be sure, a work of art must be capable of altering expectations and values but not necessarily the structure which gives them coherence. Accordingly, one must distinguish different interpretations within a given structure of imaginary significations and different structures of imaginary significations. In this study, these different structures are designated as different modes of aesthetic literacy.

Throughout this study I have tried to maintain a consistent, but fluctuating, balance between the aesthetic, the cultural, and the social-historical. For this reason, the form of this study can best be characterized as essayistic. That is, following Lukács's elucidation of the essay in Soul and Form, the aesthetic--understood as works of art and their theory--is the point of departure for elaborating a critique of modern culture. Whereas for the literary historian or critic art's achievement of form is an end in itself, for the essayist form is the basis for a critical reflection on life.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION:

#### AESTHETIC LITERACY AND MODERNITY

##### I

Regardless of the idiosyncrasies of Lawrence's poetic, Women in Love typifies both the complexity of modern artistic form and the fateful reception of that form among the modern reading public. Initially conceived in late 1912 as part of a projected novel called "The Sisters," Lawrence did not put the finishing touches on Women in Love until 1919.<sup>1</sup> Its artistic scope can hardly be overestimated. Written over seven years, Women in Love expresses Lawrence's personal responses to "The Great War," to modern European intellectual and artistic culture, and finally to his evolving relationship with Frieda, his wife.<sup>2</sup> As Lawrence would write in his "Foreword" to the American edition: "This novel pretends only to be a record of the writer's own desires, aspirations, struggles; in a word, a record of the profoundest experiences in the self."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Women in Love is profoundly informed by an original theory of the novel which Lawrence developed not only through his fictional practice but also through the various essays on culture, art and the novel, collected posthumously in the two volumes of Phoenix. On the basis of this theory, Women in Love can be understood as a dialectic of critique and creation. While criticizing modern society as a dying world for which war was inevitable, Women in Love also seeks to give "life" form by

prefiguring a new world based on erotic--instinctual and intuitive--human relationships. The provocative character of Lawrence's novel, however, required a public willing to respond imaginatively to its negative critique of modernity and to its presentation of new feelings and new conceptions of life. But within his lifetime Lawrence saw little evidence of an aesthetic literacy which could nourish his work and vision.

Almost as an insult to the English publishers and reading public who had been virtually unanimous in their rejection of The Rainbow as obscene, Lawrence agreed to allow Thomas Seltzer, an American publisher, to distribute Women in Love as a limited edition for private subscribers in 1920. Throughout its seven year gestation, the novel assumed its shape through numerous false starts, revisions, rejections by publishers, and threatened libel suits. However, the mere fact of an American edition--now considered a copy text for a critical edition presently being prepared by David Farmer<sup>4</sup>--did not signal the end of Lawrence's problems with the English publishing industry. As a condition for publishing Women in Love (London, 1921), Martin Secker required Lawrence to alter several passages and names in order to avoid potential libel and obscenity suits and to improve the commercial viability of the novel. These alterations, however, did not mollify the English critics who had not forgiven Lawrence for the eroticism and pacifism of The Rainbow and were unwilling, by and large, to see Women in Love as little more than the product of a perverse mind.

Notwithstanding their hostility, to his contemporary critics

Lawrence was an enigma. They could not understand why a writer of his ability and intellect was so deeply antagonistic to the dominant values of English society. Beneath the critics' moral outrage against Lawrence's eroticism and social and cultural criticism, therefore, lies a profound sense of disappointment and betrayal. Although the critics felt little sympathy for Lawrence, especially after The Rainbow, they could never forget how his language and human sensitivity had seduced them. Lawrence's obituary in The Times clearly records this sense of betrayal:

Undoubtedly he had genius. He could create characters which are even obtrusively real. His ruthless interpretation of certain sides of the nature of women were recognized by some women to be just.... His powers range from rich simplicity ... to turbulent clangour, and from tenderness to savage irony and gross brutality.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the reviewer's moral self-righteousness, however, he cannot overcome his ambivalence to Lawrence. What accounts for Lawrence's almost demonic powers, allowing him to move freely across the moral spectrum? If there was that "in his intellect which might have made him one of England's greatest writers," why did Lawrence turn against England? The reviewer's answer to these questions is that Lawrence's literary behaviour is pathological; it is the behaviour of a man who had become the victim of a disease which, although originating somatically (tuberculosis), eventually crippled his moral being:

But as time went on and his disease took firmer hold, his rage and fear grew upon him. He confused decency



with hypocrisy and honesty with free and public use of vulgar words. At once fascinated and horrified with physical passion, he paraded his disgust and fear in the trappings of showy masculinity. And not content with words, he turned to painting in order to exhibit more clearly still his contempt for reticence.<sup>6</sup>

Leaving aside the reviewer's own lack of reticence, his remarks dramatically illustrate the contemporary attitude to Lawrence. Equally, the inability of the reviewer to articulate his hostility except through ad hominem attacks illustrates the disturbing impact Lawrence had on his contemporary public.

It is hardly coincidental that Lawrence's reputation as the enfant terrible of modern English literature would begin with The Rainbow, a novel published and banned in the midst of the war. Indeed, the decision to ban The Rainbow can only be explained in reference to the ideological meaning of the war. By the end of the nineteenth century England's coal and steel industries, the traditional basis of its economic power, were no longer competitive with those of Germany and the United States. As a consequence, they were forced to rely on markets in the Empire, the underdeveloped world, and at home. Abandoning national pride for self-interest, the ruling classes invested their capital in foreign industries, thereby accelerating economic decline. England, as Eric Hobsbawm notes, "was becoming a parasitic rather than a competitive economy, living off the remains of the world economy, the underdeveloped world, her past accumulations of wealth and the advance of her rivals."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most visible consequence of the transformation of England's economy was the accentuation of social inequality: by

1913 the top 1 percent owned 69 percent of the national capital.<sup>8</sup> As the wealth of the upper classes became more ostentatious, the lives of the poor and working classes became more desperate.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, with the emergence of the Labour Party, increasing labour unrest, and a series of government scandals, the traditional forms of power and control were losing their legitimacy. Combined with revolts in North and South Africa and the Balkans, and the suffragettes who, in the words of Reverend Joseph Bibby, "set fire to our ancient churches and noble mansions, and who go about our art galleries with hammers up their sleeves,"<sup>10</sup> England seemed on the verge of civil war. To England's political and economic elite, the First World War came as a relief. It provided a unique opportunity to release the increasing social tensions and to revitalize those moral conventions and institutions which supported the cultural authority of the elite. Regardless of the external causes of the war, it was, above all else, ideologically motivated by the desire to re-establish the traditional forms of domination. Even more, it extended a transformed everyday life into a sphere of action perceived as morally unproblematical. As Jan Patocka has argued, the war seemed an absolute necessity for a "new society of labour, discipline, production and planned construction, every aspect of which led to releasing more and more stored energy."<sup>11</sup>

It is significant, therefore, that the reviews of The Rainbow never mentioned Lawrence's pacifism or anti-militarism but rather concentrated on his critique of cultural values and the verisimilitude of his characters. This negative response to

Lawrence's cultural critique is, however, intricately connected to the war. Art was supposed to play an essential role in the war effort by affirmatively representing conventional values. James Douglas in Star, for example, advises Lawrence to "discover the oldest truth in the world--that man is a moral being with a conscience and an aim, with the responsibility to himself and to others.... The young men who are dying for liberty are moral beings. They are the living repudiation of such impious denials of life as The Rainbow."<sup>12</sup> And, in a more sympathetic vein, Clement Shorter in Sphere suggests that the "blue pencil of a friend might have made this book a better one as a work of art and a more legitimate one at a time when the circulation of novels must needs be discriminate."<sup>13</sup> For these critics the artist, no less than the soldier, has a public duty to perform:

Art is not anarchy. It is our servant, not our tyrant. Its might and majesty are too august to be abandoned to debasement. The artist is not his own law-giver. He must bow before the will of the generations of man. ... Art is a public thing. It is a dweller in the clean homes and swept streets of life. It must conform to the ordered laws that govern human society.<sup>14</sup>

In this highly charged political climate, art must demonstrate its loyalty through "its humanity, its imaginative intensity, or its humour."<sup>15</sup> Otherwise, the artist becomes no less a traitor than if he were an agent provocateur. And this is exactly how the critics interpreted The Rainbow. Robert Lynd in Daily News describes the characters as "lacking in the inhibitions of ordinary civilized life as savages" and reduces the novel to a "monotonous wilderness of phallicism."<sup>16</sup> Douglas, the most severe

critic, goes further and considers Lawrence's characters to be "immeasurably lower than the lowest animals in the Zoo. There is no kindness in them, no tenderness, no softness, no sweetness. They are maladies of the mind, growths upon the brain, diseases more horrible than the good honest diseases known to the pathologist."<sup>17</sup> The recurrent appeal to the civilized against the barbaric indicates all too clearly what the war meant and why Lawrence was so harshly condemned. Indeed, for the critics, the unquestioned genius of Lawrence who "possesses the heavenly gift of glamour" and can "weave veils of shimmering meretriciousness round unnameable and unthinkable ugliness" only accentuates his treason.<sup>18</sup> His crime, therefore, merits more than mere moral condemnation; it justifies the coercive use of State power: "Life is infinitely more precious than literature. It has to go on climbing up and up, and if literature strives to drag it down to the nethermost depths, then literature must be hacked off the the limbs of life."<sup>19</sup> Thus on November 13, 1915 Sir John Dickerson, the presiding judge at Bow Street Magistrates Court, officially declared The Rainbow obscene and ordered all copies to be appropriated by the police.

Even though Martin Secker would republish The Rainbow in 1926, albeit expurgated, Lawrence was never able to escape the hostility of the English public. And although Women in Love was spared the legal fate of its predecessor, it was dismissed as an insignificant novel for almost thirty years. Not until 1951 when F.R. Leavis judged it "so first-hand and searching in its comprehensiveness as to be beyond the powers of any novelist,"<sup>20</sup>

did Women in Love gain general acceptance as an autonomous and authentic work of art, neither reducible to its historical-genetic conditions nor to the determinate meanings attributed to it by a given reader or public. And, although the meaning and significance of Women in Love have varied considerably over the last thirty years, its status as a work of art has never been seriously jeopardized.

## II

What does it mean to say that Women in Love is a work of art? What are the aesthetic values of modern society which underlie this judgement? This present study seeks to illuminate these fundamental questions. As form, the work of art not only creates its own referents, its own autonomous "world;" it must also in-form and be in-formed by a public. The concept of artistic form is bivalent and dialogical; it simultaneously and reciprocally signifies artistic creation and aesthetic reception--the process by which form is born and the process by which form lives in diverse epochs and within receptive subjects. A printed text, regardless of the subjective intentions of its author, is not identical with a work of art. Rather, the aesthetic character of a text is a potentiality or, in Hegel's words, "an address to the echoing breast, a call to souls and spirits."<sup>21</sup> Thus a work of art must not only institute a world more "real" than the empirical reality it re-presents; it must also become instituted within a society as an aesthetic practice through the dynamic and vital act of public reception.<sup>22</sup> With admirable bluntness,

Arnold Hauser expresses this essential condition of aesthetic culture as follows: "A printed text achieves aesthetic reality only when read; unread, it remains a series of hieroglyphics."<sup>23</sup> But is reading per se the only condition necessary for a text to achieve "aesthetic reality?" Evidently not, otherwise unqualified consumption would furnish the criteria for the existence of an art work. Women in Love would thus have been a work of art from the moment it was first read. Significantly, however, many of its first readers unequivocally rejected the novel because it violated their aesthetic assumptions and values. One of the most extreme and malicious reviews was by Charles Pilley in John Bull. For him, Women in Love was not a novel but a "loathsome study." "I do not claim to be a literary critic," he writes, "but I know dirt when I smell it and here it is in heaps--festering, putrid heaps which smell to high Heaven."<sup>24</sup> The phenomenon of aesthetic reality must, therefore, rest on certain value assumptions: reading must be specified as aesthetic literacy. In short, a text achieves aesthetic reality when it embodies for the reader aesthetic values.

Aesthetic values must be clearly distinguished from artistic values, even if both are necessarily present within the work of art. Artistic values are constitutive of the created work; they are the formal criteria necessary for the artist to make a "world" internally consistent and unified. Artistic values have a double signification: on the one hand, they signify an artist's critical relationship to the conventions and traditions of art and, on the other, they signify how an artist transforms

historically given "raw material" into meaningful form. This conception of artistic values is not, however, transhistorical but applies only to the practice of artistic creation in modern societies. In "pre-modern" societies, by contrast, artistic values were essentially representational and contingent. Art's legitimacy rested on its capacity to represent a transcendent and fixed order of values taken either as immanent within empirical life or as constitutive of a hierarchical world. This is the world, for example, of Homer and Dante. Within this Weltanschauung, art is mimetic and thus cannot claim any authority for itself as an autonomous domain. The doctrine of mimesis does not mean that art is reduced to moral edification or propaganda, but only that its creation takes place within a closed world of "positive" values to be simultaneously affirmed and interrogated. Properly speaking, the concept of artistic values is alien to this world; it only emerges in a modern society--a self-consciously historical society which seeks to institute itself as a specifically human creation--where art is given the freedom to create its own values.

With the gradual decline of stable "referentials" (values, beliefs, traditions) and the corresponding differentiation and "rationalization" (in Weber's sense) of social life, art's legitimacy and being rests on its capacity to create an autonomous sphere of values, a non-contingent and self-referential world.<sup>25</sup> In The Theory of the Novel Georg Lukács has underlined the price that modern art pays for its freedom. He writes:

We have invented the productivity of the spirit: that is why the primaeval images have irrevocably lost their objective self-evidence for us, and our thinking follows the endless path of an approximation that is never fully accomplished. We have invented the creation of forms: and that is why everything that falls from our weary and despairing hands must always be incomplete. We have found the only true substance within ourselves: that is why we have to place an unbridgable chasm between cognition and action, between soul and all created structure, between self and world, why all substantiality has to be dispersed in reflexivity on the far side of that chasm; that is why our essence had to become a postulate for ourselves and thus create a still deeper, still more menacing abyss between us and our own selves.<sup>26</sup>

The modern artist confronts a world in which the universal ideal of autonomy is contradicted by the necessity of the economic sphere (capital) to generalize its particular values over society as a whole. Thus, just as much as the development of modern art represents the project to create positive values--art as intrinsically valuable in and for itself--it also requires the negation of the world. As Sandor Radnoti, a Hungarian scholar and former member of the Budapest School, puts it: "An artist is one who says 'no' to the world for he does not recognize his home in it; an artist is one who can say 'no' to the world for he creates a new one."<sup>27</sup> The freedom to create artistic values, however, not only results in a tension between form and representation; it equally engenders the legitimation crisis of modern art. That is, the inner necessity of art to create its own unique frame of reference simultaneously erects barriers to its reception, to its very status as a work of art. The modern public is thus confronted with the difficulty of articulating aesthetic values by which art's radical autonomy can be appropriated within the



sphere of cultural and social life.

Whereas artistic values are constitutive of the process through which the creative subject forms an autonomous world from the materials of empirical life and tradition, aesthetic values are constitutive of the process through which the receptive subject draws the work into a relationship with his or her life. This dialectic is necessary because an artistic form without receptive subjects would remain an abstract potentiality. But equally, an aesthetic consciousness deprived of adequate art works would result in an abstract formalism, a culture devoid of substantive content. Aesthetic values are neither autonomous from art nor can they be derived from art. It is equally mistaken to deduce aesthetic values from general moral and ethical principles as it is to consider aesthetic values as immanent qualities of the art works themselves. In the first case, as formalism does not hesitate to emphasize, the specificity of art as such disappears. On the other hand, the modern doctrine of immanence forgets that the receptive subject can never exist totally within a fictional world but must make sense of, and pass judgement on, the experience of that world from that frame of reference given to the subject as cultural tradition and socio-historical experience. In a general sense, aesthetic values stand at the crossroads between the subject's immediate experience of art and his or her existential values. Put somewhat differently, aesthetic values not only provide the criteria for aesthetic judgement but also orient the receptive subject to art as such. Moreover, because the modern art work denies the

subject a fixed and stable point of entry into its world, and because the very historical dynamic of modern society militates against stable referentials, modern aesthetic values are open-ended and, therefore, necessarily problematical.

Perhaps the clearest demonstration of the problematical quality of aesthetic values is the debate between "art" and "popular culture." What emerges from this debate, which has been going on since the middle of the eighteenth century, is that art can only be defined by what it is not. Thus Leo Lowenthal concludes from his important study of this debate that the "counter-concept of popular culture is art."<sup>28</sup> But the reverse is equally true precisely because there is no transcendental or fixed locus of values on which to ground aesthetic values. In modern society aesthetic values are secular and "disenchanted;" they have their source in the subject as a rational, sensual and historical being. As a consequence, aesthetic values only emerge from the subject's evolving experience of art, an experience mutually determined by the art work's "will" for specificity and autonomy and the subject's need to contextualize novelty within tradition, to legitimize his or her aesthetic expectations. As Theodor Adorno would put it in his Aesthetic Theory: "It is now taken for granted that nothing which concerns art can be taken for granted any more: neither art itself, nor art in its relationship to the whole, nor even the right of art to exist."<sup>29</sup> This problematical character of aesthetic values has profound implications for any history of modern art. For example, the history of the novel cannot be understood simply as the

autonomous development of a literary genre. Rather, the history of the novel is inseparable from the aesthetic transformation of popular culture into art. At the same time, this history would reveal the other aspect of aesthetic values--not just the transformation of the meaning of art but also the transformation of the meaning of an aesthetic sensibility. It is not just that the novel, say, matures as an artistic form--its development from picaresque to psychological exploration--but also that readers come to recognize that new and different aspects of their existence have an aesthetic significance. The novel makes this recognition possible. Aesthetic values are thus doubly determined: by the autonomous development of art and by the socio-historical development of human needs, themselves a consequence of the more general historical dynamic of modernity. An aesthetic sensibility can thus be described as a cultural disposition which looks to art as a means for satisfying historically evolving needs for intensive subjective experience--the experience of art as such--and for new ways of seeing and understanding the human condition. I characterize this sensibility as aesthetic literacy in order to capture the sense of both paideia, whereby the relationship between "art" and "culture" is grounded in the development of an individual's consciousness, and of a certain type of knowledge which transcends the experience of art. From this perspective, the raison d'etre of aesthetic values is to make the truth claims of art commensurable with the imaginary significations of modern society--culture in the widest sense. Accordingly, the project of modern aesthetic literacy is

inseparable from the cultural project of modernity: to discover a ground for human values compatible with the historical imagin-  
aire of individual and social autonomy.

### III

In modern society the institution of criticism directs aesthetic culture. Chapter II examines criticism's claim not only to a specialized knowledge of art but also through its various organs--the press, periodicals, books, schools and universities--to an essential aesthetic function. Criticism not only determines aesthetic values in general, but equally the aesthetic significance of particular works. It not only institutes aesthetic values and attitudes but constructs artistic traditions. The social function and justification of the critic within aesthetic culture is to mediate the relationship between the artist (even if conceived only abstractly) and the public: to aesthetically educate the public for art while evaluating the aesthetic adequacy of art works for that public. Nonetheless, criticism occupies an ambiguous position within aesthetic culture since it represents neither the creative subject nor the public. Criticism cannot adopt the perspective of the creative subject without negating its function as an institutor of aesthetic culture. Criticism cannot assume a privileged access to truth. To do so would both collapse the distinction between artistic creation and aesthetic response and deny the critic's cultural and historical contingency. Equally, criticism cannot adopt a position within the public without sacrificing its claim to a

specialized knowledge and thus an essential role in instituting an aesthetic culture. Rather, criticism can only remain faithful to itself by transforming and re-vitalizing the social space between the universal claims of art and the evolving dynamic of cultural needs and values. Through its judgements, criticism must not only help the public to understand the work of art, but also communicate why this understanding is necessary and important.

Every act of criticism is an act of signification which attempts to fix the aesthetic meaning and value of works of art within a particular life world. There is no absolute criterion of truth, however, external to the relation of the critic to the work. This is because, as Claude Lefort has argued, this relation is indeterminate. Confronted with the work, therefore, the critic must give a reading authority by implicitly or explicitly appealing to a referent by which the work becomes endowed with order and the critic with legitimacy. Lefort puts it this way:

[The critic] flees the indetermination which is the mark of reading. Behind the scenes, he gives himself a referent: the history of ideas, social history ... a system of values, etc.... At the same time, he himself assumes Power: he causes order to reign, he extracts from the work that which conforms to his thesis, eliminates the rest, and distributes statements as he pleases so as to make the work's coherence or contradictions most obvious.<sup>30</sup>

To put it differently, to avoid the indetermination which threatens its authority, criticism gives the impression that its judgements emerge organically from the work itself. The critic, then, appears only as only the vehicle and not the source of these

judgements.

In his analysis of the essay, Lukács considers the ironic distance between personal value judgements and objective understanding as constitutive of criticism. The critic, he claims, always speaks about the ultimate problems of life but

in a tone which implies that he is only discussing pictures and books, only the inessential and petty ornaments of real life--and even then not their innermost substance but only their beautiful and useless surface. Thus each essay appears to be removed as far as possible from life, and the distance between them seems the greater, the more burning and painfully we sense the actual closeness of the true essence of both.<sup>31</sup>

Lukács raises here the crucial dilemma of modern criticism: the difficulty of bringing the work of art into a relationship with life. By claiming to merely represent the immanent meaning of the work, the critic avoids responsibility for the life values inherent in that representation. Every act of criticism, implicitly or explicitly, posits not only a norm for art, or an artistic tradition, but also a life world for art. That life world can either be empirically existent or counterfactual: either art becomes an affirmation of contemporary society insofar as aesthetic values are realized there or art becomes a critique and prefiguration of a society yet to be realized. There is no way of avoiding this choice, regardless of the critic's intention to eschew value judgements.

In Chapter II I take up this dilemma of modern criticism by reconstructing the essential moments of the history of the reception of Women in Love. At the risk of generalization and

exclusion, I have characterized these moments as follows: (1) the initial reception, and condemnation, of the novel by representatives of the English "culture industry," to use the term developed by Adorno and Horkheimer;<sup>32</sup> (2) its re-evaluation and redemption by liberal cultural criticism as primarily represented by the work of F.R. Leavis; and (3) the appropriation of the novel by formalism, understood as the dominant paradigm of modern literary scholarship. My purpose in this chapter, therefore, is not to provide an exhaustive history of the novel's reception, but rather to illuminate a more general problematic of modern aesthetic literacy: the relationship between art an autonomous sphere of meanings and values and its general socio-cultural significance. Thus the reconstruction of a novel's reception not only illuminates the plurality of meanings and values of a particular work of art, Women in Love; it also illuminates the institutional process of literary canonization. To put it differently, the history of a work of art is not only inseparable from the history of its interpretations but also from the history of the institution of criticism. I conclude that the history of literary criticism in the twentieth century, as represented by the reception of Women in Love, reveals how mediated life values have become or, conversely, how elusive the value of art has become for modern society.

The failure of criticism to bring Women in Love into a critical relationship with life is nowhere more evident than in its refusal to theorize the novel as a historical and cultural form. This refusal is all the more significant given Lawrence's

claim that the novel is "the one bright book of life" and as a "tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble."<sup>33</sup> The very language of Lawrence's claim is symptomatic of the complexity of his theory of the novel, which I discuss in Chapter III. What is the difference between life and existence? What is the relation between the novel and life? What is the "whole man alive" and how does the novel make him "tremble?" These questions lie at the centre of his theory of the novel but, because Lawrence employs connotative, if not idiosyncratic, language, he seems to shun theoretical discourse. As a consequence, criticism has largely ignored his essays on the novel. At best, the value of these essays becomes limited to providing the critic with a glimpse into Lawrence's creative method and artistic intentions. When confronted with his novels, however, the critic maintains that they succeed as art only by overcoming the limitations of his theory. Relying on Lawrence's dictum to believe the tale and not the teller, criticism not only introduces its own conception of the tale but also conflates Lawrence's "metaphysic" or Lebensphilosophie with his theory of the novel. Yet, for Lawrence, a metaphysic does not in itself constitute a theory of the novel. A philosophy is a necessary condition of artistic creation and aesthetic reception, but a true philosophy must be dynamic: it must be subject to transformation as it is drawn into a relationship with the experience of writing and reading novels. An absolute or static philosophy, by contrast, cannot result in a novel but only a "didactic Scripture," nor can it allow the reader access to the deeper meanings of the novel.



That is, Lawrence's theory of the novel is a theory of cultural experience within which philosophy has a necessary role. As he puts it: "Men live and see according to some gradually developing and gradually withering vision. This vision exists also as a dynamic idea or metaphysic--exists first as such. Then it is unfolded into life and art."<sup>34</sup>

Lawrence's theory of the novel is more than a critique of didacticism--the superimposition of philosophy on experience. The very form of the novel, if "properly handled," is a critique of "modern civilization," understood throughout his essays as a logocentric culture which rationalizes the human being into separate spheres--especially spirit, mind, and body--each claiming absolute knowledge, and the power to dominate and control the "instinctual-intuitive consciousness." As life, however, the novel redeems humanity from this repressive rationalization because its imaginative source--the whole consciousness--makes possible the achievement of a living totality. "And being a novelist," Lawrence writes, "I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, because the novel can help the individual develop "an instinct for life," it provides the basis for overcoming the destructive limits of modernity, and of prefiguring a world yet-to-be.

For a generation of critics formed by an aesthetic literacy based on art's self-referential autonomy or what the New Critics called "ontology," Lawrence's identity between the novel and

life, between the novel and cultural critique, could only be interpreted as his manifest failure to theorize the novel. There is, however, an alternative tradition of aesthetics, primarily associated with the radical Enlightenment initiated by Fichte and Hegel, which does not respect a rigid division between a theory of art and a theory of culture. And it is significant that in The Theory of the Novel Lukács develops, albeit more rigorously and philosophically, an argument about the novel remarkably similar to Lawrence's own. Leaving aside the specific details of Lukács's argument, his remarks in the 1962 "Preface" illuminate the historical and intellectual context shared by both writers. He writes:

The Theory of the Novel is not conservative but subversive in nature, even if based on a highly naive and totally unfounded utopianism--the hope that a natural life worthy of man can spring from the disintegration of capitalism and the destruction, seen as identical with disintegration, of the lifeless and life-denying social and economic categories. The fact that the book culminates in its analysis of Tolstoy, as well as the author's view of Dostoevsky, who, it is claimed, 'did not write novels', clearly indicate that the author was not looking for a new literary form but, quite explicitly, for a 'new world'. We have every right to smile at such primitive utopianism, but it expresses nonetheless an intellectual tendency which was part of the reality of that time.<sup>36</sup>

For both writers, the novel not only provides a locus from which to criticize modernity but its very form expresses the ambivalence of modernity--the division between the creative subject who seeks to give form to life and the modern world of "second nature" which is lifeless and disintegrating. And just as Lukács defines the novel as a modern epic, a created totality,

so Lawrence considers it "the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered."<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, both theories of the novel depend on a positive conception of human life, not as a static norm or ideal model but as a natural need for creative development, and on a negative critique of modernity insofar as it deprives this need of adequate life forms.

Given the premisses and goals of the theories of the novel proposed by both Lukács and Lawrence, these theories cannot be properly characterized as literary theory. Neither Lukács nor Lawrence are proposing an interpretative method or theorizing the novel as a literary genre. In the most essential sense, they signify the novel as the process of creating a form for life against the reified conventions of modernity, a process equally relevant to the writer as well as the reader of novels. As a consequence, this approach to the novel is more accurately described as cultural theory or, more specifically, as a theory of modern aesthetic literacy. Thus for Lawrence, the question is not "what is a novel?" but "why does the novel matter?" And he can only answer this question by asking three further ones: "what is life? what is art? why do people write and read novels?"

Unlike Lukács, Lawrence did not write a single and self-contained text. His theory of the novel must be reconstructed from his various essays, some of which are only tangentially concerned with the novel. Moreover, because his theory of the novel is a theory of modern aesthetic literacy, it presupposes an ontology and an anthropology--a historical dialectic of civilization. That is, Lawrence attempts to ground both his

critique of modernity and his hopes for a "new life" on a conception of human nature according to which being and consciousness constitute an organic and dynamic whole. Modern civilization represents a destructive process because mind or "mental consciousness," which is only "a great indicator and instrument," becomes alienated from the whole and assumes power over it. By contrast, art is creative and re-creative because it aspires to achieve and reveal this whole, by becoming life. In short, Lawrence characterizes the history of modern civilization as the history of the conquest of rational self-consciousness over the "spontaneous self with its sympathetic consciousness and its non-ideal reaction," whose only ally is art. As he puts it:

The queen bee of all human ideas since 2000 B.C. has been the ideal that the body, the pristine consciousness, the great sympathetic life-flow, the steady flame of the old Adam is bad, and must be conquered. Every religion taught this conquest: science took up the battle, tooth and nail: culture fights in the same cause: and only art sometimes--or always--exhibits an interne-cine conflict and betrays its own battle-cry.<sup>38</sup>

Since art in general, and the novel in particular, signify both the redemption of the "pristine consciousness" and a critique of civilization, they cannot be approached directly; they cannot be assimilated through the epistemological categories of criticism. Because criticism seeks to produce a knowledge of art as a specialized and autonomous discourse, it stands in marked contrast to Lawrence's concern to theorize the relation between artistic creation and cultural renewal, the redemption of being through the reception of art. And for Lawrence, the novel only

becomes a genuine art form because it is capable of achieving the truth of life as dynamic relatedness and of exposing the rationalistic fictions of modern civilization as immanently destructive. Through a detailed analysis of Lawrence's most important essays on culture, art, and the novel, Chapter III attempts to elucidate the imaginative structure of his theory of the novel.

On the basis of the critique of literary criticism (reception) and Lawrence's cultural theory of the novel form, the concluding chapter of this study offers a reading of Women in Love. Although written between 1913 and 1919, Women in Love makes no explicit references to the war. Nonetheless, as Lawrence wrote in a letter to Waldo Frank, the novel "actually does contain the results in one's soul of the war: it is purely destructive, not like The Rainbow, destructive--consummating. It is very wonderful and terrifying, even to me who have written it."<sup>39</sup> Whereas The Rainbow ends with the hope of social regeneration, symbolized by the rainbow as "the earth's new architecture," Women in Love ends ambivalently in an argument, with Birkin insisting that his life can only be "complete, really happy" if it permits more than one kind of love, if it permits an "eternal union with a man." For Ursula, on the other hand, Birkin's conception of life is only "an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity." Thus the novel ends on a problematic and open-ended note. Birkin and Ursula have achieved a vital relationship but it is a private one, achieved at the cost of denying the world. Birkin wants a marriage that can contain life in its totality, which for him

had meant a love relationship with Gerald, but for Ursula this is an impossible ideal not just because of the homosexual undertones of that love but also because for her their relationship required a complete rejection of the empirical world of modernity. Birkin mourns not only the loss of Gerald but also of a larger connection to others. This need for a connection, for a community, however, becomes only an "ought" as the world seems incapable of abandoning its self-destructive path, symbolized by Gerald's suicide and Gudrun's decision to go with Loerke.

Both the on-going struggle between Birkin and Ursula and the structural division within the novel between life and death militate against any straightforward assessment of Women in Love as "purely destructive." To be sure, since the novel was written throughout the war, Lawrence was frequently dominated by moods of intense despair which were intensified by his economic situation, his political persecution, and his disenchantment with any political solution to the contemporary social and cultural crisis, as evidenced by his falling out with Bertrand Russell, the liberal aristocracy, and John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield. Indeed, Lawrence's mood of despair is manifested not only in such essays as "The Crown" and "The Reality of Peace" but also in the various titles he considered for the novel. Before deciding on his final title, for example, he considered calling it "Dies Irae," "The Latter Days," and "The Day of Judgement." To interpret the novel only in terms of the war, however, is one-sided.<sup>40</sup> Such an interpretation must inevitably deny the struggle of Birkin and Ursula to create a life against

the profoundly fatalistic conditions of modernity, and thereby reduce this struggle to futility. At the same time, according to Lawrence's own theory, a novel only becomes art when it achieves a dynamic wholeness in which all aspects of life, including death-in-life, are given full play. To claim that the novel can be reduced to a representation of Lawrence's mood of cultural despair, therefore, is tantamount to denying the novel a genuinely artistic legitimacy. The critical issue is, rather, to determine the novel's relation to its historical context--the war--in order to clarify the distinction between representation and the creative achievement of a living relation, irreducible to either Lawrence's unquestioned pessimism or the objective historical reality of the war.

Significantly, Lawrence did not want to give the novel a definite historical context. As he wrote in his "Foreword": "I should wish the time to remain unfixed, so that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters."<sup>41</sup> It would be mistaken, however, to accept this intention at face value. In fact, the novel is set in the pre-war years, in the same "world" as The Rainbow. Birkin introduces Gerald to London Bohemia, for example, as a former soldier who fought "in the last war," referring to the Boer War. In a fundamental sense, Women in Love is not about the experience of "The Great War" but about its causes.<sup>42</sup> To put it differently, the novel poses the question: was the war inevitable? As he reveals through the characters of Hermione, Gerald, Gudrun, and Loerke, Lawrence leaves no doubt about his answer. On the other hand, although Birkin and

Ursula are by no means immune from the cultural pessimism, self-hatred, and violence which pervade the novel, and did result in war, they are prepared to struggle against the forms of modern culture, and to create a fragile basis for a new world. The inherent negativity of modernity must not, therefore, be taken as an absolute fate; it is relatively indeterminate. To uncritically participate in modernity, as given, is to become resigned to its fate as nihilism; but to become critically conscious of the negativity of modernity and to struggle for radically different cultural alternatives is to transform modern society from a "second nature," whose laws have a mechanical immutability, to a world of historical creation, whose forms express explicitly human intentions and desires.

For Lawrence, the question of the inevitability of the war is inseparable from the meaning of sexual relationships, of marriage. Conversely, it is through love relationships that a character's deeper values and true responses to modernity are most fully revealed. In Women in Love he traces the developments of three different love relationships. With Birkin and Ursula, he tries to show how their relative success is based not only on an instinctual connection to each other but also on a rejection of the dominant values of modernity. With Gerald and Gudrun, Lawrence shows that their failure is inseparable from their unwillingness to confront the inherent destructiveness and alienation of modernity. Finally, Lawrence explores the friendship between Birkin and Gerald which, although ending tragically, points to a more general possibility of human relationships.



With all these relationships, success or failure is intricately linked to a critical response to modernity. The possibility of love, therefore, cannot be separated from the critique of modernity. It is this dialectic of love and critique that I explore in the final chapter.

In an age in which the "sexual revolution" has given way, on the one hand, to an increasing anxiety about the very possibility of enduring sexual relationships and, on the other, to the even greater fear of nuclear annihilation, and hence the difficulty of imagining a future, Lawrence's novel has far from lost its significance. Women in Love is thus a particularly fertile site for exploring modern aesthetic literacy. Its polemical character has made it difficult for critics to deny their value assumptions. And even though Women in Love has a more or less secure status as one of the canonical works of English modernism, it continues to provoke controversial responses from contemporary readers. In this respect, it is especially instructive to examine the initial response by the English culture industry. Lacking a sensitivity to the problematic of modern artistic form, and in desperate need of an "affirmative culture," to use Herbert Marcuse's term, the first critics underline an almost axiomatic definition of the modern artist: misunderstood by necessity and condemned to create works of art for a potentially universal public, but one effectively non-existent and essentially posthumous.<sup>43</sup>

Notes

<sup>1</sup>For details of the composition of Women in Love, see Charles Ross, The Composition of 'The Rainbow' and 'Women in Love': A History (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1979) and Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "The Marble and The Statue: The Exploratory Imagination of D.H. Lawrence" in Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt, ed. Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (London, 1968), pp. 371-418.

<sup>2</sup>The best analysis of the cultural, intellectual, and personal background to Women in Love is Martin Green, The von Richtofen Sisters (New York, 1974).

<sup>3</sup>D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix II, ed. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (London, 1968), p. 275.

<sup>4</sup>See David Farmer, "Women in Love: A Textual History and Premise for a Critical Edition" in Editing British and American Literature 1880-1920, ed. Eric Domville (New York, 1976), pp. 77-92.

<sup>5</sup>"The Theme of Decline," The Times (4 March 1930) in D.H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage, ed. R.P. Draper (London, 1970), pp. 322-23.

<sup>6</sup>"The Theme of Decline," p. 323.

<sup>7</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (London, 1968), p. 192.

<sup>8</sup>A.B. Atkinson, Unequal Shares (London, 1972), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>See Paul Thompson, The Edwardians (London, 1977), especially pp. 21-91. For a more contemporary perspective, see Robert Tressall's novel, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (London, 1914).

<sup>10</sup>Reverend Joseph Bibby, The War, Its Unseen Causes and Some of Its Lessons (London, 1915), quoted in John Zerzan, "Origins and Meaning of World War I," Telos 49 (Fall 1981), 113.

<sup>11</sup>Jan Patocka, "Wars of the 20th Century and the 20th Century as War," Telos 30 (Winter 1976-77), 118.

<sup>12</sup>James Douglas, review of The Rainbow, Star (22 October 1915) in Draper, p. 95.

<sup>13</sup>Clement Shorter, "Comment in 'A Literary Letter'," Sphere (23 October 1915) in Draper, p. 97.

<sup>14</sup>Douglas, p. 94.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Lynd, review of The Rainbow, Daily News (4 October 1915) in Draper, p. 91.

<sup>16</sup>Lynd, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup>Douglas, p. 93.

<sup>18</sup>Douglas, p. 95.

<sup>19</sup>Douglas, p. 95.

<sup>20</sup>F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (New York, 1955), p. 180 (hereafter cited as DHL).

<sup>21</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, Aesthetics, quoted in Arnold Hauser, The Sociology of Art, trans. Kenneth Northcott (Chicago, 1982), p. 437.

<sup>22</sup>Following Cornelius Castoriadis, I use the verb "to institute" to designate the activity by which the subject, individual or collective, brings about new relationships, perceptions, conceptions which, although originating in the imagination, result in an "instituted" socio-historical reality. For an extensive application of this concept see his L'Institution Imaginaire De La Société (Paris, 1975).

<sup>23</sup>Hauser, p. 430.

<sup>24</sup>Charles Pilley, "A Book The Police Should Ban," John Bull (17 September 1921) in Edward Nehls, D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography (Madison, Wis., 1958), p. 90.

<sup>25</sup>For an explanation of the concept of "referential," see Henri Lefebvre, Everyday Life in the Modern World, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (New York, 1971), pp. 110-27.

<sup>26</sup>Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 35-6.

<sup>27</sup>Sandor Radnoti, "Mass Culture," Telos 48 (Summer 1981), 30.

<sup>28</sup>Leo Lowenthal, Literature, Popular Culture and Society (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961), p. 6.

<sup>29</sup>T.W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, quoted in Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," New German Critique 22 (Fall 1981), 10.

<sup>30</sup>"An Interview with Claude Lefort," Telos 30 (Winter 1976-77), 90.

<sup>31</sup>Georg Lukács, Soul and Form, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup>The concept of the "culture industry" is most fully developed in T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cunningham (New York, 1972), pp. 120-67.

<sup>33</sup>D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix, ed. Edward D. Macdonald (London, 1936), p. 535.

<sup>34</sup>D.H. Lawrence, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious (New York, 1960), p. 57.

<sup>35</sup>Phoenix, p. 535.

<sup>36</sup>The Theory of the Novel, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup>Phoenix, p. 528.

<sup>38</sup>Phoenix, p. 769.

<sup>39</sup>"To Waldo Frank," 27 July 1917, The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Harry T. Moore (London, 1962), I, p. 519.

<sup>40</sup>The interpretation of the novel in terms of a war-time psychology is best represented by George Ford, Double Measure: A Study of the Novels and Stories of D.H. Lawrence (New York, 1965), pp. 164-207 and Scott Sanders, D.H. Lawrence: The World of the Major Novels (London, 1973), pp. 94-123.

<sup>41</sup>Phoenix II, p. 275.

<sup>42</sup>From a slightly different perspective, H.M. Daleski has also emphasized this aspect of the novel. He writes: "The War, as the viciousness of the fighting bit home by 1916, represented for Lawrence the disintegration of English civilization; and though the novel is apparently remote from the international concerns which agitated men at the time of its composition, it is, from one point of view, a novel of war, in that it explores the nature of the deep-seated disease in the body politic of which war is the ultimate death-agony. It is almost as if Lawrence carries out an autopsy on the still-breathing form of pre-war society." (The Forked Flame: a study of D.H. Lawrence [Evanston, Ill., 1965], p. 127.)

<sup>43</sup>See Cornelius Castoriadis, "Transformation sociale et création culturelle," Sociologie et Sociétés 11, 1 (avril 1979), 40.

CHAPTER II  
THE CULTURE OF CRITICISM  
THE RECEPTION OF WOMEN IN LOVE

I.

Following a lengthy series of negotiations with Lawrence over royalties and the alteration of certain passages "in order to remove any possible chance of misconstruction," Martin Secker finally published Women in Love in 1921. To say the least, the English critics greeted the novel with less than enthusiasm. While some were openly hostile and malicious, others preferred to trivialize the novel. For these critics, Lawrence's fate as a novelist had been sealed by The Rainbow. Women in Love was only a milder version. The Times Literary Supplement, where the first review appeared, set the tone of the novel's reception. "Mr. Lawrence's conception of love in Women in Love," wrote the reviewer, "is the same as it has been and needs but little definition outside his own pages. There, unfortunately, it is defined with jubilant brutality again and again."<sup>1</sup> In a more extreme vein, Charles Pilley, who entitled his review "A Book The Police Should Ban: Loathsome Study of Sex Depravity--Misleading Youth to Unspeakable Moral Disaster," drew an even more direct connection between The Rainbow and Women in Love. As far as he was concerned, the police should take appropriate legal action: "... like other civilized communities, we have laws against obscenity which must be rigorously enforced.... It is not enough

to keep a sharp eye upon picture-postcard shops and to terrorize small boys who chalk ribald nonsense on blank walls."<sup>2</sup> Similar sentiments were echoed by John Middleton Murry whose devastating review in Nation and Athenaeum hurt Lawrence very deeply. While respecting Lawrence's past work (unlike other critics), the qualities Murry found there had now "dissolved in the acid of a burning and vehement passion."<sup>3</sup> With considerable self-righteousness, Murry set out to prosecute Lawrence before the court of "civilization." He writes:

We stand by the consciousness and the civilization of which the literature we know is the finest flower; Mr. Lawrence is in rebellion against both. If we try him before our court, he contemptuously rejects the jurisdiction. The things we prize are the things he would destroy; what is triumph to him is catastrophe to us. He is the outlaw of modern English literature; and he is the most interesting figure in it. But he must be shown no mercy.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, Murry did not intend Women in Love to be legally prosecuted but he nonetheless takes the side of a repressive society. Finally, the review in Saturday Westminster Gazette should be noted. Here the critic dismisses the novel as sensationalist, a novel in which nudity, murder, death, and violence are purely arbitrary. Likening Women in Love to a well-known advertisement--"Mr. and Mrs. Smith, having cast off clothing of all descriptions, invite inspection. Distance no object"--the critic concludes that Lawrence's characters only take their clothes off "to give greater ease and intimacy to their interminable conversations, and to provide Mr. Lawrence with repeated opportunities for vivid pictorial records of chiaroscuro,

plein-air, genre and figure painting in words."<sup>5</sup>

Although Women in Love was spared the legal fate of The Rainbow, the contemporary critics, by trivializing and dismissing the novel, were more effective censors because they discouraged readers from ever opening its first page. Through the considerable power of the English culture industry, these critics managed to marginalize Lawrence more thoroughly than the courts, not by claiming that he was obscene but by dismissing him as an artist. Pilley's solution finally proved unnecessary. As for Lawrence, he lost interest in the public fate of his novel. In 1925 he would write:

Since The Rainbow, one submits to the process of publication as to a necessary evil: as souls are said to submit to the necessary evil of being born into the flesh. The wind bloweth where it listeth. And one submits to the processes of one's day. Personally, I have no belief in the vast public. I believe that only the winnowed few can care. But publishers, like thistle, must set innumerable seeds on the wind, knowing most will miscarry.<sup>6</sup>

What concerns me here is the practice of criticism itself: the relationship between its negative judgements and its aesthetic assumptions on the one hand, and its socio-cultural conditions--the culture industry--on the other. Only within this relationship can the contemporary rejection of Women in Love be understood.

Although Lawrence's contemporary critics generally agreed that Women in Love could not be considered a work of art, their reasons for arriving at this conclusion were different. To be sure, all these critics felt moral disdain, if not

disgust, upon reading the novel. Nonetheless, for the Times Literary Supplement and Charles Pilley, what disqualifies Women in Love as art is the moral inadequacy of its subject matter--human sexuality--which prohibits Lawrence from developing credible characters and an artistically viable style. For Murry and Saturday Westminster Gazette, on the other hand, it is not the moral substance as such but the absence of a controlling theme that renders Lawrence's novel an artistic failure, manifested in his inability to develop individualized characters and, more generally, a coherent narrative structure through which plot and event become linked. Because there is no controlling theme in Women in Love, these critics argue, Lawrence compensates either by arbitrarily introducing sensational events or by relying on an egocentric philosophy.

In the first argument, it is implicit that art requires a morally conventional subject matter. The subject of love cannot, therefore, be rendered morally problematical as human sexuality without destroying the very basis of art. The Times Literary Supplement notes how in Lawrence's conception of love there is "plenty of satanism ... and more hysteria. The physical mastery of love almost annuls the spiritual; and over this point Mr. Lawrence develops an enthusiasm, indeed a sort of theoretic frenzy which is (to be brief) unnecessary."<sup>7</sup> In his attack on Women in Love the critic takes for granted that love is an essentially moral and sentimental ideal whose physical reality must remain intimate, unspoken. Lawrence's "supersensual daemon," by giving sexuality a language, can only deny "true love as it is."



Moreover, when a novel seeks to annul the spiritual mysteries of love, the result can only be tedium: "Mr. Lawrence has a right to his opinions, but he has no right to produce a tedious book--and stripped of all the dogma of ether-erotics, life-motion, and so on, Women in Love is a dull, disappointing piece of work."<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting, en passant, Lawrence's remark that sentimentality, with its cult of the secret, "is a sure sign of pornography."<sup>9</sup> This remark applies equally to the defense of sentimental love and to Pilley's moral outrage which is motivated not only by a need to defend the status quo but also by a pornographic voyeurism. For him, the novel is an "epic of vice" whose characters are mad and sexually depraved. Although Women in Love cannot be art because it is a pathological study, deserving "some form of recognition from the Royal College of Physicians," its value as pornography is not thereby diminished. Pilley seems to genuinely relish in the "sheer filth" of "Gladiatorial" and Lawrence's "painstaking and thorough" descriptions of "certain loathsome forms of mental disease."<sup>10</sup>

These critics insist that there is a causal relationship between the immoral content of Women in Love and its technical failures as art. Lawrence's "satanism," his attraction to the perverse, necessarily limits his access to more purely technical values--notably style and characterization--through which beauty and truth are rendered. In particular, these critics chastize Lawrence for his "unconvincing pencraft" and for his inability to create credible characters, other than as "shadows of life and artificial flowers." The significant exception is Hermione in

whom there is "something of immense dignity ... which though her foibles bring her to the verge of ridicule, carries her past triumphantly. She, in the midst of all her artificiality, in all her masks and postures, is sincere."<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, the defense of Hermione is not solely motivated by aesthetic considerations since Desmond McCarthy, the chief reviewer for the Sunday Times and close friend of Ottoline Morrell (the model for Hermione), had interceded on her behalf to prevent an earlier version of the novel's publication. Nonetheless, the defense of Hermione's "sincerity" is ideologically consistent with the critic's unwillingness to accept the other major characters as credible. More generally, what makes the novel an artistic failure is not simply its erotic content and the recurring instances of violence, but also that it violates the critic's perception of reality.

Underlying the critic's condemnation of the novel is his denial of the bitterness of the war and the ensuing socio-cultural crisis in which, Lawrence believed, anyone who is "acutely alive is acutely wrestling with his own soul. The people that can bring forth the new passion, the new idea, this people will endure. Those others, that fix themselves in the old idea, will perish with the new life strangled unborn within them."<sup>12</sup> In denying Women in Love the status of art, the critic is both denying this experience of cultural crisis and aligning himself with the "old idea." Consequently, art's validity as subject matter and style depends on its capacity to represent the dominant cultural values: the value of sentimental love

becomes inseparable from a healthy, "civilized" society. Moreover, the denial of modern socio-cultural reality is simultaneously the denial of modern art's claim to autonomy. For these critics, aesthetic values are divided between pragmatic socio-cultural values and an abstract, but desperate, sensibility. That is, the technical values of characterization and "pencraft" are purely formal means for rendering this sensibility, a sensibility of comfort and affirmation. Accordingly, the critic concludes his review with the decree that "whatever a novelist's purpose his work must compel us to an eager interest in the world."<sup>13</sup> Aesthetic values thus become instrumentalized as propaganda when art only becomes legitimate as a crude mimesis.

Consider now how Murry and Saturday Westminster Gazette read Women in Love. Unlike the critics discussed above, these critics are not overtly opposed to morally unconventional subject matter; they only require that art have a subject matter, a controlling theme, and be recognized as such. For these critics, Women in Love does not have a controlling theme and as a result has no formal structure. The novel's presumed formlessness, in turn, justifies ridicule and "prosecution." For Saturday Westminster Gazette, Lawrence's use of "unpremeditated incident" clearly shows that his novel has no controlling theme. The only justification the critic can find for the lapis lazuli incident is that it conveys "the blindness of murderous irritation in terms which shall embrace the security of innocence."<sup>14</sup> Further, when Lawrence observes in the midst of a wedding party that Gerald killed his brother, the critic can only "giggle." At

issue here is not just Lawrence's intellectual ingenuousness, but also his failure to develop an adequate relationship between form and content. Because the recurrence of nudity and death seems to have no organic relationship to the novel, Lawrence can only compensate with "a wilder and ever wilder flinging about of heavy words, and closer and thickening closeness of reiterated phrase."<sup>15</sup> By far the greatest flaw in the novel, however, is Lawrence's inability to create distinctive characters. For the critic, both the men and the women merge with each other so completely as to be interchangeable. Gerald's death, as a consequence, becomes a desperate solution to a technical problem: "It is, perhaps, in a last effort to reintegrate their personalities [i.e. Gerald and Birkin] that Mr. Lawrence makes one of them die of a conversation in the High Alps.... It is certainly a new and original end, and in a novel when all the characters suffer the pangs of dissolution several times a week, possibly the only fitting one."<sup>16</sup>

Murry takes a similar, albeit more substantial, tack. For him,

Women in Love is five hundred pages of passionate vehemence, wave after wave of turgid, exasperated writing, impelled towards some distant and invisible end; the persistent underground beating of some dark and inaccessible sea in an underworld whose inhabitants are known by this alone, that they writhe continually, like the damned, in a frenzy of sexual awareness of one another. The creator believes that he can distinguish the writhing of one from the writhing of another.... To him they are profoundly different; to us they are all the same.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps because he felt implicated in the novel through the

character of Gerald, Murry is especially venomous towards Lawrence's characters. Throughout his review he consistently refers to them as dehumanized, androgynous "creatures." At one point, after complaining about the lack of individualized characters, he writes: "We should have thought that we should be able to distinguish male and female, at least. But no! Remove the names, remove the sedulous catalogues of unnecessary clothing--a new element and a significant one, this, in our author's work--and man and woman are indistinguishable as octopods in an aquarium tank."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the language that Lawrence uses to convey the characters' thoughts and feelings only exacerbates the problem: it is unintelligible, meaningless, and often precious. The problem of character and language are, however, a manifestation of a deeper problem: Lawrence's critique of the consciousness of European civilization in the name of a vital process of pre-European civilization. It is this process, according to Murry, through which the novel "forces" the reader. Murry as a humanist cannot accept this as a basis for a novel because "by the knowledge that we have we can only pronounce it sub-human and bestial, a thing that our forefathers had rejected when they began to rise from the slime."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in his Son of Woman (1930) Murry extended his critique by claiming that this process is not a genuine subject for art but rather an author's personal philosophy. The novel is "built on a lie, or on many lies" because it misrepresents Lawrence's private views as art and then claims universality for them. Thus Murry concludes his final assessment of Women in Love as follows: "Lawrence, in the

essential and vital argument of Women in Love behaves like a cheat. To behave like a cheat in these momentous issues of human destiny is to play Judas to humanity. The man who betrays himself in such issues betrays all men."<sup>20</sup>

Both Saturday Westminster Gazette and Murry dismiss Women in Love because they cannot see in it an appropriately artistic subject matter. Nonetheless, the inability to recognize a controlling theme, a genuinely formal structure, in an art work does not mean that one does not exist. For these two critics, this inability is a more or less deliberate misrecognition, an unwillingness to acknowledge that problematical sexual relationships are a legitimate subject matter, requiring the artist to conceptualize characterization and style differently. Lawrence was quite conscious of these formal requirements.<sup>21</sup> Not only did he attempt to develop a new approach to character, but he also claimed that his style of "continual, slightly modified repetition" gave expressive form to his belief that "every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing to-and-fro, which works up to culmination."<sup>22</sup> However, the very terms which accompany the misrecognition of Lawrence's artistic purpose--sensationalism and egocentrism--all too clearly reveal the critics' moralism which implicitly prescribes only certain subject matters as legitimate for art. While clearly more tolerant in their conception of subject matter than the Times Literary Supplement and Charles Pilley, they remain committed to the idea that art should represent positive moral values, normative social values. In this case, however, formal

values do not merely render a sensibility but also become the means for transforming unproblematical moral values into artistic coherence. The sphere of art is thus restricted to the representation of a socio-historically determined life world.

## II

It would be a mistake to consider the contemporary condemnation of Women in Love as simply the consequence of the critics' private moral and social values. Rather, the aesthetic judgments of the critics are intimately linked to their role and function within the culture industry. Indeed, it was only with the development of the culture industry that criticism emerged and assumed its rationale. Significantly, a modern culture industry was well established in England as early as the eighteenth century. By the beginning of the century, for example, the book trade was considered a model of entrepreneurial efficiency and by the end one of the major industries of the country.<sup>23</sup> Not only had the book trade introduced substantial technological innovations in print production; it had also developed a complex network of distribution and marketing. There was scarcely a town or market where books could not be bought in stalls and shops. Publishers or "booksellers" even went so far as to claim personal responsibility for the increase in literacy. James Lackington, a prominent bookseller of the time, wrote in his autobiography: "... I could almost be vain enough to assert, that I have been instrumental in diffusing the general desire for READING so prevalent among the inferior orders of society."<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century the English culture industry continued to expand, providing an array of printed material--including books, chapbooks, newspapers, news digests, religious tracts, self-help books, almanacs, travel stories real and imagined, romances, book reviews, and magazines like The Spectator, The Tatler, and Monthly Review--to an ever growing reading public.

Regardless of their rhetoric of cultural democracy, the object of the publishers was to increase their capital by expanding the literary market. And they could only expand the literary market by creating a need in the reading public for their products. To the publisher, the reading public is a body of potential consumers who must be encouraged to satisfy their cultural and aesthetic needs through the market, by regularly purchasing reading material. Yet these needs are not self-evident; they have to be created in a form which publishers are capable of satisfying. Specifically, they had to instill within the public a desire for popular literature which could be produced quickly and cheaply. The goal of the culture industry, in nuce, is to create a certain type of aesthetic literacy, a literacy of distraction and entertainment whereby readers would become less conscious of their private needs. Publicly oriented inwardness had to yield to a reification of intimacy.

Just as the culture industry forms and transforms the reading public, so it also transforms the writer's relationship to society. Throughout the eighteenth century writers gradually ceased to depend on aristocratic or court patronage for their



livelihood. They became professionals whose new benefactors were the reading public. Many writers, notably Samuel Johnson, welcomed this change because they would no longer be servants whose services could be dispensed with at the whim of a private individual. On the other hand, when the value of a writer is determined by purely economic criteria, then the writer is forced to choose between writing as a mere means of livelihood and writing as a creative activity arising out of the need for expression. In the former case, the writer is only producing commodities for an alien power, the culture industry, and thus is essentially a literary proletarian. As Marx puts it:

Milton produced Paradise Lost as a silkworm produces silk, as an activation of his own nature. He later sold his product for \$5 and thus became a merchant. But the literary proletarian of Leipzig who produces books, such as compendia on political economy, at the behest of his publisher is pretty nearly a productive worker since his production is taken over by capital and only occurs in order to increase it.<sup>25</sup>

Writing thus becomes abstract labour, a skill bought by publishers. Moreover, as the culture industry increases its power over society, the work of art must compete with the cultural commodity for a share of the market. The modern artist is therefore placed in a profound dilemma: either to participate in, and culturally reproduce, the platitudes of society or to defy these platitudes and become socially isolated.

By the end of the eighteenth century the basic form of modern aesthetic culture was more or less consolidated. That is, modern aesthetic culture became constituted by the divisions

between art and entertainment on the one hand, and between the intelligentsia and the general public on the other. Because of the increasing rigidity of these divisions, moreover, modern aesthetic culture assumes the form of crisis, not as a temporary phase but as its very essence. Lawrence, for example, considered the "lack of creation, and the stupendous amount of production" to be the direct result of an impoverished subjectivity.<sup>26</sup>

Lawrence's perception of the volume of literary production, and printed matter in general, was by no means unjustified. By 1929 the total annual sales of eight Sunday newspapers alone amounted to nearly ten million.<sup>27</sup> In addition to daily and weekly newspapers, the public could also read a variety of periodicals, widely diversified in subject matter, cultural tastes, and values. Apart from newspapers and magazines, the staple diet of the English reading public was fiction, available through the public libraries, the bazaars in large stores where cheap editions of popular literature could be bought, and the subscription or circulation libraries. While the poor and working classes would borrow from the public libraries, the middle and upper class would rent them from the subscription libraries of Boots, Mudie, and Smith.<sup>28</sup> An indication of the prominence of fiction in the reading diet of the English public is provided by the Report on Public Libraries (1927). While libraries carried substantially less fiction than non-fiction, only 22 percent of non-fiction was issued compared to 78 percent of fiction. And while these figures refer only to the 11 percent minority who used the public libraries, the same tendency probably occurred

among the middle and upper classes who used the subscription libraries.

What is particularly significant about the English reading public is both the content of its reading material and the fact that it rarely bought books, preferring to trust the aesthetic judgements of the libraries. The following sentiments by one reader give a flavour of the public's acceptance of cultural authority:

Out of the thousands of books published every year-- there are between 12,000 to 14,000--how on earth is the ordinary person to sift the sheep from the goats? Distinguished critics attempt to guide the public, but they are often hopelessly 'highbrow' and 'precious' and simply add to the general confusion and bewilderment.<sup>29</sup>

To the ordinary reader, the subscription libraries, and later the book clubs, provided a way out of this confusion. As a consequence, the subscription libraries were the primary sales outlet for the publishers. Far from being free, therefore, the English literary market was carefully controlled. The subscription libraries, guided by the advice of the critics, determined what people should read. To be sure, the subscription libraries selected books based on the public's conventional tastes for entertainment and distraction, but they also saw themselves as custodians of the dominant ideology. Consider, for example, the following advice given by a Mudie salesperson to a husband looking for suitable reading material for his wife:

... if a woman is taken up with the house all day, she doesn't want tales about married problems or

misunderstood wives--she knows enough about these already; she can't be bothered with dialect after a day's work, and historical novels aren't alive enough. What she enjoys is something possible but outside her own experience--you see if I'm not right.<sup>30</sup>

With this advice, the salesperson not only effectively eliminates the novel as a critical art form from the wife's reading experience, but also protects the husband from the potential consequences of this kind of reading.

The sheer volume of popular fiction consumed by the reading public prompted contemporary observers to characterize fiction as an opiate. Fiction was an artificial means for easing isolation and compensating for the emotional poverty and insecurity of everyday life. It enabled people to cope with their lives but it deadened their minds. A critic in New Age, for example, felt that the popularity of fiction among Mudie subscribers was simply a means for overcoming boredom. "Why does the backbone put itself to the trouble of reading current fiction?" he asked. "The answer is that it does so, not with any artistic, spiritual, moral, or informative purpose, but simply to pass the time. It prefers novelists among artists because the novel gives the longest surcease from ennui at the least expenditure of time and money."<sup>31</sup> It would be misleading, however, to limit the function of popular fiction to passing the time; it is an opiate in a larger sense. Popular fiction provided a continuity between work and leisure; it was sought as an escape from the monotony of work only to gain the strength to cope with it again. What the reading public looked for in novels was, in the words of one

reader, "real, lovable people who stay by one as friends and give one help."<sup>32</sup> What the public sought in fiction, in other words, was an emotional intensity for which there was no scope in everyday life. Moreover, popular fiction provided what an increasingly problematical morality could not: a vital emotional content. The daughter of Florence Barclay, a successful popular novelist, put the issue bluntly. The reading public, she claims, does not want a literary art so that their "critical faculties may be exercised," but ask "merely to be pleased, rested, interested, amused, inspired to a more living faith in the beauty of human affection and the goodness of God."<sup>33</sup> By providing just this kind of fiction which would reproduce conventional moral values and restore faith in the status quo, the subscription libraries performed a crucial ideological function within modern society.

Due to their economic and cultural power, the subscription libraries effectively determined the norms of literary production. Mudie, for example, was only willing to purchase Lawrence's The Lost Girl if certain objectionable passages were removed, a condition which strengthened Secker's bargaining position with Lawrence over how many copies of Women in Love he was prepared to print and how much he would pay Lawrence. Publishers were reluctant, therefore, to publish books unsuitable to the moral and literary tastes of the subscription libraries. Stanley Unwin, a well-known publisher, complained how "the present system tends to assist the circulation of indifferent and bad books, and to retard the circulation of really good books,

especially by those writers who have not yet established reputations...."<sup>34</sup> Publishers who challenged this system, moreover, could expect the ire of the critics. One reviewer of The Rainbow, for example, attacked the publisher for social irresponsibility. He complained that "no form of viciousness, of suggestiveness ... is not reflected in these pages.... The whole book is an orgy of sexiness. I write this strongly because I consider that publishers should protect the public, not the circulating libraries, which do it so unintelligently."<sup>35</sup>

Criticism became a profession vital to the growth of the culture industry by guiding the reading public through the increasingly congested mass of literary commodities. And yet criticism was much more than a guide. It sought to institute a distinctive type of literary culture by formulating an affirmative aesthetic literacy, a literacy based on aesthetic values fundamentally identical with the dominant social values. The ability of criticism to inform a reading public, so that its aesthetic and cultural needs could be satisfied by an affirmative and conventional literature, necessarily contributed to the power of the culture industry. At the same time, by virtue of its crucial function within the culture industry, criticism assumed the power to determine the fate of individual writers whose livelihoods and reputations were dependent upon its judgements. The contemporary judgement of Lawrence as a pathological genius, and even more the dismissal of Women in Love as an insignificant novel, all too clearly indicates the social and cultural power of the culture industry.

The goal of the culture industry, through the agency of criticism, is to artificially limit literary culture to pragmatic socio-economic interests. That is, its primary interest is to maximize profits by continually expanding the reading public. At the same time, this goal can only be realized if the culture industry can control the production of literature and its modes of consumption. When criticism seeks to determine appropriate tastes for literary commodities, however, specifically aesthetic values necessarily become problematical. Within the restricted domain of the culture industry, aesthetic values cannot be distinguished from socio-economic ones. Whether criticism values or devalues a particular work, its judgements always translate into the language of the market: aesthetico-cultural valuations only have meaning as the socio-economic behaviour of readers as consumers and the socio-economic value of writers as producers of cultural capital. Only within the culture industry can criticism claim a specialized and necessary function; only the culture industry gives criticism the power to make judgements and to formulate aesthetic and cultural values. Knowledge and understanding are at most secondary attributes of the critic and, as Theodor Adorno observes:

... the more they are lacking, the more they are replaced by Oneupmanship and conformity. When critics in their playground--art--no longer understand what they judge and enthusiastically permit themselves to be degraded to propagandists or censors, it is the old dishonesty of trade fulfilling itself in their fate.<sup>36</sup>

Criticism also reveals its economic determination in another sense. To the critic, a literary tradition always reduces

itself to an accumulation of literary texts, to a collection of literary commodities whose value is determined through consumption. Lacking adequate criteria for aesthetic judgement, criticism can only ground aesthetic values on consensus. Popular literature, accordingly, has the same relationship to literary art as objects of utility have to luxury items. While the value of popular literature is restricted to immediate utility as distraction, the autonomous work of art is no less valuable for its rarity, its capacity to outlive immediate use and to function as an object of contemplation. Either way, the critical dimension of art becomes subordinated to its function as a signifier of economic and ideological value. Far from being independent, therefore, the critic is the handyman of the culture industry. "He belongs to the establishment and fulfills, as the guardian of idées reçues," as Hauser has noted, "a vital task in the preservation of the dominant system."<sup>37</sup>

When criticism is bound to the culture industry, it maintains its position of power within society only to the extent that it can institute a literary culture consonant with the interests of the culture industry. Criticism can thus barely disguise its self-interests: its very existence and legitimacy are contingent upon the dominance of the culture industry within society. Were criticism to fail to institute a conventional and affirmative aesthetic literacy, its existential foundation would collapse. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to limit criticism to a purely economic function. The instituting of a limited literary culture presupposes an ideological relationship



to the totality of modern cultural and political life. By contributing to the reification of art and ideologically appropriate aesthetic attitudes, criticism simultaneously contributes to the formation of modern "false consciousness." Because this criticism has no critical relationship to modern society, its judgments and valuations necessarily become representations of interests external to art. The emancipatory potential of art to express a critique of the existent, and to embody an autonomous world which points to human possibilities yet to be realized, thus becomes abandoned to the pragmatic needs of society for affirmative images of itself. One need only recall James Douglas's inflammatory review of The Rainbow where he proclaims that art must "conform to the ordered laws that govern human society." When criticism seeks to limit art to a utilitarian and propagandistic function, it reveals its radical limitations. On the one hand, it calls into doubt the legitimacy of art as a creative form which cannot be reduced to a priori "laws" without resulting in its self-abolition. On the other hand, criticism calls into doubt its own legitimacy: its claim to a specialized knowledge and ability to make informed judgements. Precisely because of these limitations, criticism constantly threatens to become propaganda or censorship. It is thus incapable of instituting a literary culture beyond the limits established by the culture industry.

### III

Towards the end of the war a number of specialized literary

periodicals began to emerge. Their focus was English modernism, both pro and contra.<sup>38</sup> It was at this time, for example, that a series of pro-modernist periodicals appeared of which the most notable were the Sitwells' Wheels (1916-22), The Egoist (of which T.S. Eliot became editor in 1917), Frank Butter and Herbert Read's Arts and Letters (1917-20), and Athenaeum, later absorbed by Nation (of which Murry became editor in 1919). On the other hand, there were a number of periodicals which opposed modernism for its intellectualism and pretentiousness. The leading figure here was J.C. Squire who edited London Mercury, a very successful periodical which was able to maintain a loyal public throughout the 1920's, frequently reaching sales of 10,000. Moreover, during the war Squire and his friends, notably W.J. Turner and Edward Shanks, had managed to establish a network of contacts which gave them considerable influence in several papers, including the Observer and the New Statesman.

The reviews of Women in Love in the literary periodicals, as Murry's review indicates, reflect Lawrence's equivocal relationship to English modernism. Ironically, the anti-modernist critics, notably Rebecca West in the New Statesman and Edward Shanks in the London Mercury, were generally sympathetic to the novel, albeit with some substantial reservations. What is important about these two reviews is not the problems and disagreements they have with Women in Love but rather their essential equivocation, an equivocation that provides the reader with an opening to the novel rather than the closure found in the reviews discussed above. Of the two critics, West is certainly the more

moralistic and judgemental. She finds that Lawrence has "poor and uncorrected" ideas, is indifferent to that "quality of sincerity which is the highest form of decency," and is incapable of handling the emotional subtleties of character. Referring to Ursula's reaction to Birkin's body, for example, she argues that Lawrence is "unable to convey the spiritual incident save as a hot geyser of sensation."<sup>39</sup> Like other critics, she is bothered by Lawrence's lack of decorum. She characterizes his lovers as "the Yahoos of Eros" and of the lapis lazuli incident she writes: "This is not the done thing." Such blatantly class-bound moralism, however, does not prevent her from considering Women in Love "a work of genius" because, although Lawrence distorts the appearances of reality, the result is a greater perception of spiritual truth. For West, to object to an author's right to distort appearances can have little justification as an aesthetic judgement. If El Greco can claim this right, she argues, so can Lawrence. West thus challenges readers to re-evaluate their aesthetic values before passing judgement on the novel. If readers, she concludes, "can remain unmoved by Mr. Lawrence's genius it is more likely that they are actuated by a longing for the realism of Mr. John Collier."<sup>40</sup>

Although Shanks takes similar positions, he is the more perceptive critic of the novel. He recognizes, for example, that Lawrence's profound pessimism is combined with an equally powerful optimism. Moreover, of all the contemporary critics, Shanks is unique in that he seriously confronts the complexities of Lawrence's style and his ambivalent relationship to realism.

Lawrence is determined, according to Shanks, "to render the half apprehended, almost wholly incommunicable states of his characters, and, when he is describing their surroundings, distracted by this, he fumbles, he repeats himself, he blurs the image by attempting to infuse something he has failed to express elsewhere."<sup>41</sup> In this way, Shanks perceives a rationale to Lawrence's literary method, a rationale which explains the apparent formlessness of the novel. This rationale is the need to produce "an effect of real life lived by real persons." Although Shanks does not hesitate to refer to Lawrence as "childish" or to his characters as "abnormal," he maintains that the intent of this abnormality is to represent not reality, but the "belief that somewhere there must exist some appeasement for the intolerable yearning which possesses the mind of man."<sup>42</sup> Shanks, therefore, sees Lawrence as a courageous artist who may be wrong in his social and cultural criticism, but "out of his error comes a flame of poetry, smoky, strange and disconcerting as it may be, which is at least genuine and which is hardly paralleled by any novelists of his generation."<sup>43</sup>

These two reviews were, however, exceptional and it was not until the 1950's that a substantial re-evaluation of Lawrence in general, and Women in Love in particular, occurred. With the publication of Harry T. Moore's biography, The Intelligent Heart (1954), F.R. Leavis's D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (1955), Mark Spilka's The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence (1955), and Graham Hough's The Dark Sun (1956), the canonization of Lawrence had begun. With some justification, these critics could claim

responsibility for the "revival" of Lawrence. What they all shared was a commitment to a liberal tradition which sought in art, and especially the novel, an expression and exploration of a moral imagination no longer identical with conventional sentimentality but rather its critique. Lionel Trilling has conveniently described the importance of the novel for liberalism as follows:

For our time the most effective agent of the moral imagination has been the novel of the last two hundred years. It was never, either aesthetically or morally, a perfect form and its faults and failures can be quickly enumerated. But its greatness and practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it.<sup>44</sup>

The close relationship between liberalism and the defense of Lawrence can hardly be overstated. During his lifetime Lawrence had alienated both the culture industry and the English intelligentsia, among whom can be included Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Bertrand Russell, and the Bloomsbury Group. En passant, it is not insignificant that a positive review of Joyce's Ulysses appeared in the same issue of Times Literary Supplement in which Women in Love was reviewed. Nor is it insignificant that Lawrence's contemporary defenders--e.g. Arnold Bennett, E.M. Forster, and Aldous Huxley--were largely "traditional" figures drawn to the critical traditions of the nineteenth century with their optimistic faith in individuals, even when confronted with the tragic conditions of modernity. These traditions can be contrasted not just with the conventional values of the culture

industry but also with a conservative and cynical modernism which sought to escape from, or mollify, the negativity of modernity through an appeal to a pre-modern past or through a radical poetic of form through which art became a closed world of values. The significance of James, Conrad, and Eliot can be understood in this context. And it was this modernism which would provide the source for the emerging aesthetics of formalism. To be sure, to read Lawrence against this modernism and only in terms of his redemption of the individual is one-sided, if not a misrepresentation of his complex relationship to modernism. When Leavis--the major figure in the Lawrence revival--first wrote about Lawrence in 1931, for example, he thought his gift "lay not in thinking, but in experiencing." And even by the time he had become fully committed to Lawrence, Leavis never really recognized Lawrence's formal innovations in the novel. For Leavis, Lawrence's characters continued to retain the outer form of nineteenth century realism and naturalism. Similarly, Leavis paid little attention to Lawrence's distinction between symbol and allegory, the former remaining non-referential and non-representational, an implicit critique of logocentricity. "Fix the meaning of a symbol," Lawrence insisted, "and you have fallen into the commonplace of allegory."<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, there is little doubt that Lawrence touched a deep chord in the modern liberal sensibility, a sensibility which would eventually give him a permanent place on the twentieth century literary map. Mark Spilka is, therefore, mistaken to claim, as he did in a retrospective essay written in 1963, that the New Critical

aspects of the Lawrence revival "can be seen in the kind of morally-committed formalism it fosters."<sup>46</sup>

At issue here is how these "moral realists," to use Trilling's term, inaugurated a Lawrence revival. What were the aesthetic assumptions that informed their reading of Lawrence? Unlike both the culture industry and formalism, what these critics looked for and found in Lawrence was a coherent moral and humanistic vision. This judgement, however, is only possible if the critic posits an a priori relation between literature and culture whereby a moral sensibility can manifest itself in and through literary judgement. What these critics sought in Lawrence's work, and particularly in Women in Love, was an affirmation of their own moral sensibility. Their critical practice is at once an expression of this sensibility and a desire to engage Lawrence in a "criticism of life." This practice is quite different from the culture industry whose moral values are fixed and conventional. Equally, a liberal critical practice differs from formalism precisely because of the importance it accords to a moral tradition. For Leavis, only moral values produce great literature and are, therefore, aesthetic values. By contrast, "the enlightenment or aestheticism or sophistication that feels an amused superiority to them leads ... to triviality and boredom, and ... out of triviality comes evil."<sup>47</sup> The liberal moral tradition is thus a defense of a cultural sensibility which was being undermined by an increasingly influential formalism which, by spatializing literature through its notion of the autonomous and self-referential "text," divorced ethical and moral

judgements from literary criticism.

The liberal reading of Women in Love was both a critique of modern society and an affirmation of the possibility of a "coherent, satisfied life," to use Birkin's phrase, within that society. Specifically, these critics read Women in Love as a critique of modern society's morbid rationality and as an affirmation of the intrinsic otherness of the individual, here representing a transcendent cultural ideal. F.R. Leavis is the central figure here because he linked the redemption of Lawrence, and especially Women in Love, to the redemption of a morally committed liberalism. Of all the modern novelists, it was Lawrence who allowed Leavis to assert the continuing significance and relevance of liberalism. In Lawrence, therefore, Leavis found a consolation and affirmation of his own cultural values and it was through his analysis of Women in Love that Leavis most successfully articulated a modern "literacy of feeling," to use George Steiner's phrase.

Originally, Leavis found Lawrence's novels Romantic, merely personal, and hence felt no need to challenge Murry's judgement in Son of Woman. After reading Lawrence's letters, however, Leavis began to re-read his work, especially his essays. There he found the basis for a re-evaluation of Lawrence whereby the short stories, the novellas, and The Rainbow and Women in Love became not only his best work but the best work of the modern age. In his seminal essay on Women in Love, first published in Scrutiny (1951) and later re-published in D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (1955), Leavis found in Lawrence the "serenely triumphant reign



of intelligence--intelligence that, in creative understanding, transcends the personal plight that feeds it. It is the intelligence of a great creative artist whose imaginative achievements are, at the same time, the achievements of intelligence."<sup>48</sup> In Women in Love, this "intelligence," an essentially moral sensibility, results not only in a critique of modern civilization "so first-hand and searching in its comprehensiveness as to be beyond the powers of any novelist," but also an affirmation of "the individual life in its essential and inescapable relations with others."<sup>49</sup>

In contrast to Murry's biographical and psychological critique, Leavis wanted to establish Women in Love as "a case for literary criticism" by emphasizing Lawrence's "originality of method and style." However, consistent with Leavis's liberal aesthetic, formal artistic values can only become aesthetically significant as moral values. Accordingly, Leavis considers Women in Love a major work of art because its critique of modern civilization is linked to the socio-cultural norm of "disquality" or individual difference and to the aesthetico-cultural norm of "spontaneous-creative fulness of being." Women in Love is, therefore, a great work of art not only because of its subject matter, but also because Lawrence "perceives, experiences, and understands, and the strength of his thought lies in its sensitive adequacy to the perceptions, insights and realizations that it orders and states in epitomizing abstraction."<sup>50</sup>

Leavis argues that Lawrence's method is to dramatize the relation between the "individual psyche" and the "process of

civilization." By taking the psychological portrayal of the individual character as his point of departure, Lawrence can elucidate the meaning and significance of modern culture. For Leavis, Lawrence's dramatic method is grounded in the moral content of the individual psyche. How an individual acts in the world, forms personal relationships, makes choices, and even develops a self-consciousness, is a consequence of a given system of moral values. At the same time, although moral values are not socially determined, they do become embedded within socio-historical formations as cultural norms. And yet, following a liberal tradition which privileges a free consciousness, Leavis considers modern culture as fundamentally dualistic. Just as Arnold identified "Hebraism" and "Hellenism" as the two possible modes of culture in modern society, so Leavis argues for two opposed cultural norms which have their basis in the modern individual: the rational, egalitarian individual who is essentially identical with all other individuals versus the individual who is essentially "disequal," "intrinsically other," and whose consciousness is informed by "a constant, delicate sense of wholeness," a "spontaneous-creative fulness of being." Leavis argues that in Women in Love Lawrence presents these two cultural norms and shows their consequences in the lives of the individual characters. On the one hand, Lawrence diagnoses the failure or inadequacy of modern culture ("industrial civilization") by showing how it creates needs and desires which will not, and cannot in principle, allow individuals satisfaction in their work, whether that be managing coal mines (Gerald) or producing art

(Gudrun, Loerke), and in their personal relationships. On the other hand, Lawrence presents an alternative cultural norm through Birkin's married relations with Ursula, relations which demonstrate the moral truth of "disquality." Leavis puts it this way: "Birkin posits a relation that shall be, in its vitality, stable and permanent because the terms between which it subsists are real; the need or demand of neither of the two individuals who find fulfilment in the relation is of such a kind to deny the individual being of the one or the other."<sup>51</sup>

What underlines the negativity of modern culture, according to Leavis, is the Benthamite notion of equality. By identifying the human with the rational and by assuming that individual happiness depends upon each having an equal share of the material goods produced by society, utilitarianism concludes that industrial production can provide the basis for an enlightened civilization. Once human needs have been identified with the equal distribution of goods, then society must make production rational and efficient in order to achieve the goal of social equality. "The supreme end that commands Gerald," Leavis writes, "is the efficiency of the 'great social productive machine'."<sup>52</sup> This project, which Leavis characterizes as the "confident materialism of technologico-Benthamite civilization," necessarily implies the reification of material desires and equality as valuable in themselves and no longer connected to humanly adequate moral values. Moreover, as a social project, this reification can only be realized through a will, embodied within an economic and political structure, which imposes itself on society as a whole.

Finally, once this abstract will becomes the principle of domination in modern society, then the human desire for intrinsic meaning in life--the desire for "spontaneous-creative fulness of being"--becomes repressed.

Leavis claims that Women in Love shows how the repression of an essentially human, moral meaning in life results not only in a general cultural nihilism but also in moral, and in Gerald's case, physical self-destruction. Gerald is the "victim of mechanism--the usurping dominance of will and idea," itself a consequence of his "refusal of responsibility, of responsibility towards life."<sup>53</sup> Gerald and the Criches, Leavis points out, have more than a psychological interest for Lawrence. His portrayal of Gerald is intended to reveal the "large movement of civilization," to treat "the malady of the individual psyche as the process of industrial civilization." Gerald's importance, therefore, derives from his socio-economic position as industrialist, from his central position within society. Moreover, it is through Gerald that the significance of Hermione and Loerke--Gerald's intellectual and artistic equivalents--can be understood. Leavis observes that Hermione has a "kind of sympathetic antagonism" with Gerald while Loerke and Gerald "accept, from their different points of view, the triumph of mechanism, and the implicit reduction of human life to mere instrumentality."<sup>54</sup> What all these characters share, albeit to different degrees, is an impoverished subjectivity: they lack a "sense of meaning in life." This absence and its implications for modern culture are the focus of Leavis's critique.

For Gerald, the absence of an inner being has its source in the history of his family, and particularly his father. Thomas Crich had sought to overcome his self-alienation and to resolve his guilt over social inequality through philanthropy and Christian charity. The idea of social equality which motivates Thomas Crich, however, was not only inadequate for the miners who wanted real equality, but also for his immediate family who had to exist within his claustrophobic, imaginary, and idealized world. Gerald responds by escaping from England to search for fulfillment in a series of unsatisfying adventures. When asked by his father to help in the firm, Gerald returns in the hope of discovering in the coal mines that which had formerly eluded him: a meaning in life. Leavis argues, however, that Gerald's solutions are not ultimately different from his father's. Lawrence's study of the individual psyche, Leavis writes, "has led him to a diagnosis of a civilization in which the idealism he condemns (it amounts, he points out, to the same thing as materialism) has become the deadly enemy of life."<sup>55</sup> Gerald merely accentuates his alienated subjectivity by becoming "a pure and exalted activity." Further, his "triumphant activity" conceals in its very purity a violence inseparable from the history of the Criches and from the logic of will itself. Gerald's cruelty towards the mare and the rabbit reveals the extent to which violence underlies the imposition of will. The discourse of pure rationality, therefore, conceals the coercive use of power. And more: the ultimate consequence of this discourse is that the dominant become victims of their own power. As Leavis puts it: "Where

Gerald's 'go' goes ultimately is self-destruction: the novel shows us the process, in all its aspects, with inexorable consequences."<sup>56</sup>

In Leavis's account of Gerald, one can hardly fail to notice his reluctance to politicize his cultural critique. The actual socio-political power of Gerald remains, at best, implicit in Leavis's reading of Women in Love. Rather, Gerald's value for Leavis is structural: Gerald is a psychological-moral type through whom the essence of modern civilization becomes visible. To be sure, the analysis of Gerald's psyche obliges Leavis to recognize the importance of history and social and political ideas. He notes, for example, "how the personal question about marrying with which the novel opens is related to the examination of social and political ideas and to the industrial revolution effected by Gerald."<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, Leavis's moral aesthetic allows him to separate Gerald's psyche from his position of power within society. Leavis can therefore conclude that Gerald's suicide is the inevitable result of his moral failure. Gerald's plight is thus a personal dilemma. And just as moral values are abstracted from socio-political contexts, so they are also abstracted from sexual relationships. To put it differently, Leavis remains uninterested in how sexual relationships become manifestations of social relations of power. Consider, for example, how Leavis analyzes the sexual relationship between Gerald and Gudrun. The fundamental content of Gerald's psyche, that which guides his actions in the world and determines his relationship with Gudrun, is equality and its derivative terms,

will and idea. Gerald enters a sexual relationship with Gudrun as a reaction to his father's death, but without becoming conscious of the intrinsic negativity of equality. When equality becomes the basis of personal relationships, its hidden meaning is revealed: the relationship becomes an arena for a battle of wills, reducing individuals to objects or worse, abstractions of an instrumentalized consciousness. For Leavis, the result is inevitable: the logical consequence of equality is self-destruction.

By contrast, Leavis argues that in Birkin's married relations with Ursula Lawrence locates "the positive, the conceivable and due--if only with difficulty attainable--solution to the problem; the norm, in which Gerald's disaster gets its full meaning."<sup>58</sup> The alternative to equality, however, is not sensual consciousness but "disquality." In his discussion of the West African statuette, Leavis interprets sensualism as the corollary of instrumentalism:

The West African statuette ... represents something that we are to see as a default, a failure, antithetical--and so significantly related to the human disaster enacted by Gerald Crich.... If Lawrence's art exposes so cogently the malady of civilization in which will and 'idea,' controlling from above, have usurped the direction, and the smooth running of an almost inconceivably intricate interlocking of mechanisms has become the supreme end, that is not by way of recommending a flight from intelligence and responsibility.

In fact, we are made to see the cult of the primitive as a symptom of the malady.<sup>59</sup>

"Civilization" is thus threatened not only by the imposition of will--the rationalized control of culture--"from above" but also from below, from a sensuality disconnected from "intelligence

and responsibility." Leavis's moral tradition reveals here its moralism and, more generally, how the liberal aesthetic sought to redeem Lawrence not by accepting his eroticism but by marginalizing it and by identifying it with those cultural norms which lead to moral nihilism. When the erotic is explicit in the novel, therefore, Leavis shows his sympathy with the moralistic criticism of the culture industry. For example, when he reads that Ursula "had a full mystic knowledge of [Birkin's] suave loins of darkness," Leavis claims that "in these places Lawrence betrays by an insistent and over-emphatic explicitness running at times to something one can only call jargon."<sup>60</sup> Further, in the chapter called "Classroom" where Hermione and Birkin argue about instinctual spontaneity versus consciousness, Leavis characterizes Hermione as a parody of Lawrence or "what the world has been content to take for the pure Laurentian doctrine."<sup>61</sup> Rather, Leavis insists that Lawrence is arguing for "mental consciousness" against a de-cultured instinctual spontaneity. It is this consciousness, claims Leavis, that plays "a vital function ... in the attainment of 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being.' But mental consciousness brings with it the inevitable danger, and only a constant delicate concern for wholeness can ensure the perversion that means a usurping domination from above."<sup>62</sup>

In order for Leavis to argue that Women in Love proposes the positive cultural norms of "disquality" and "spontaneous-creative fulness of being," he must accord Birkin a privileged status in the novel. For it is Birkin's idea that "spiritually, there is pure difference and neither equality nor inequality



counts."<sup>63</sup> And it is this notion of spiritual "disquality" which Birkin wants as the basis of his relationship with Ursula. "What I want is a strange conjunction with you," he says to her, "not meeting and mingling ... but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings;--as the stars balance each other" (p. 210). Leavis is thus required to defend Birkin's ideal of marriage as the norm of marriage proposed by the novel. To be sure, Leavis is sensitive to the difficulties of identifying Birkin with Lawrence, of identifying the tale with the teller. It was because of this presumed identity that Murry rejected the novel as a psychological case study. Leavis attempts to solve this critical dilemma by distinguishing Birkin's personality from his theory. As a personality, as a fictional character, Birkin is subject to criticism. Leavis, for example, accepts Ursula's criticism of Birkin's egotism, his "Salvator Mundi touch." Equally, "one of the most striking proofs of creative power, with its transcendent impersonalizing intelligence, in Women in Love, is the way in which the author's direct presence is given dramatic status among the other characters."<sup>64</sup> In this sense, Birkin is but one character among others, all of whom constitute and are necessary to the dramatic integrity of the novel. Nonetheless, although the tale is critical of Birkin's personality, it does vindicate his theory of marriage. Of this Leavis is quite certain:

Actually, it seems to me, the position for which Birkin contends in his wooing of Ursula does emerge from the tale vindicated, in the sense that the norm he proposes for the relation of man and woman in marriage has been made, by the varied resources of Lawrence's art, sufficiently clear, and, in its intelligibility,

sufficiently cogent to compel us to serious pondering.<sup>65</sup>

Leavis, however, supports this claim with somewhat dubious textual evidence: he cites Birkin's own thoughts on "the way of freedom." Birkin's ethic of the "lovely state of free-proud singleness," however, renders the very possibility of a love relationship problematical since, in principle, the purely autonomous individual has no need for others. Birkin's conception of the individual is a rationalist abstraction which eliminates any interpersonal basis for solidarity. Significantly, Birkin characterizes love negatively: as duty ("obligation") and as enslavement ("the yoke and leash of love"). Birkin's egotism is, therefore, intricately connected to his theory. What the tale shows, however, is that Birkin is erotically, sensually attracted to Ursula. The conflict within Birkin between his idea of marriage and his erotic feelings results both in his theoretical confusion and his frequent denial of those feelings. Birkin's relationship with Ursula cannot, therefore, be reduced to his theory; its very form is the struggle between two opposed worldviews--difference versus identity--which are mediated by a reciprocal erotic connection.

In his reading of Women in Love, Leavis establishes a symmetry not only between will and sensualism but also between the political and the erotic: both are threats to civilization. For Leavis, civilization as both a mode of being and as works of art is fundamentally the practice of an impersonal intelligence, a practice which opposes modern society's tendency to rationally

dominate culture. In contrast to the reductive concept of culture as social equality and identity, this intelligence is oriented to a wholeness which embraces difference. Conversely, intelligence must defend civilization from modern society's insensitivity to the necessity for a morally adequate civilization. And yet, this culture of intelligence cannot be simply identified with the defense of art. Such a defense would amount to aestheticism. Rather, the defense of art has its referent and rationale in the norm of "spontaneous-creative fulness of being." Art only becomes aesthetically valuable when motivated by this norm and only artistically successful when informed by a creative intelligence. Yet for Leavis, and the liberal tradition in general, positive cultural norms must be grounded in the private individual who seeks an autonomous identity in the world and in relation with others. That is why Birkin is accorded a privileged position within the novel and why his ideas have an intrinsic value which transcend his narrative status as a character.

This assumption of individual autonomy equally informs Mark Spilka's reading of Women in Love. Spilka finds Birkin's ideal "splendid" because it

preserves the sanctity of the individual soul, gives love a direction, and thus keeps marriage from becoming a romantic stew-pot, from which all the flavour and body boils away. Splendid, again, because the source of life lies beyond love, and therefore the individual soul, with its roots in that source, takes precedence over love.<sup>66</sup>

Not only does Spilka contend that Ursula must accept this ideal as a fundamental truth, but he also extends it to include Birkin's

friendship with Gerald. Spilka recognizes that male friendship is a problem which modern society seeks to deny. "Apparently," he writes, "we see a kind of no man's land between the casual and homosexual liasion ...."<sup>67</sup> Lawrence thus seeks to explore a problem for which there is no solution, because while "marriage is always central to [a man's] fulfillment ... friendships are always peripheral and expendible, though paradoxically vital."<sup>68</sup> What is important to Spilka is the reciprocity between marriage and friendship: both are constituents of freedom or "absolute mystic marriage." Spilka, for example, concludes that "marriage would have been a hoax for Gerald, until he had achieved some pure relationship with another being."<sup>69</sup>

What becomes increasingly evident in both these analyses is the need to defend Birkin as a moral-psychological type: the privatized individual as the bearer of a cultural tradition, "civilization." Specifically, it is Birkin's moral-psychological theory of disquality, transformed into art through Lawrence's "creative intelligence," which provides Women in Love with its aesthetic significance. Herein lies the essence of the liberal aesthetic. It is the concept of civilization as a corpus of cultural norms based on the individual's need for "spontaneous-creative fulness of being" which mediates the relation between artistic and social values. Art establishes its autonomy as the expression of an impersonal intelligence which can register the negativity and nihilism of modern society, through its revelation of the typical fates of socialized individuals, while simultaneously giving dramatic expression to positive cultural norms

through the experiences and moral values of autonomous individuals. But this intelligence would remain purely abstract unless informed by the values of civilization. There is, therefore, an organic relationship between art and civilization. For just as artistic values only become aesthetically significant when informed by positive moral values, so civilization requires art to give expression to those values. Indeed, for the liberal tradition, in the modern epoch art is virtually the only expression of civilization. Finally, art as civilization "returns" to society, its point of departure, not only as its criticism but also as a cure for its malady. This cure, however, should not be confused with socio-political transformation ; it is emphatically restricted to the moral domain of culture.

#### IV

Leavis's defense of Lawrence is inseparable not only from the redemption and revitalization of the liberal tradition but also from the critique of an emergent formalism which privileged order and structure over moral sensibility. That is, the defense of Lawrence is inseparable from the critique of T.S. Eliot and the vindication of Matthew Arnold. In a general sense, modern liberalism can be understood as a cultural discourse which, while negating the rationality of modern society because it assimilates all forms of being into itself, preserves a private sphere of "authentic" subjectivity as the realm of true, essential being. By preserving the autonomy of culture, liberalism hoped to reconcile it with society. This ambivalent cultural ideal not only implies the de-politicization of culture but also

its restriction to the reception of art and literature. Although the essential content and meaning of culture could be discovered within the work of art, however, the task of the liberal intellectual was not to defend art for its own sake but to extend its truths to society as a whole. The criticism of art was thus a "criticism of life." Moreover, the purpose and function of a literary tradition was to establish a historical continuity for society. Arnold, for example, found in Milton "the great style," a mode of being which could not be rationalized because of its depth of feeling. Because this depth of feeling is, for Arnold, a vital necessity for an enduring culture but lacking in modern society, Milton retains his aesthetic value. At the same time, Arnold is not a propagandist for capitalism but an advocate for a humanist sensibility in a society increasingly committed to the rationalization of cultural life. From Arnold's perspective, for example, aestheticism amounts to resignation. Madame Bovary is thus a work of "petrified feeling ... [because] over it hangs an atmosphere of bitterness, irony, impotence; not a personage in the book to console us; the springs of freshness and feelings are not there to create such personages."<sup>70</sup>

For Arnold, the image of a true culture, "the instinct for the self-preservation in humanity," was poetry: the most enduring cultural form in a society which not only fragmented the human subject but required cultural traditions and beliefs to exhaust themselves in the affirmation of the present. Only poetry, therefore, could recover the historical consciousness repressed by bourgeois society. Even religion had sacrificed its

universality to the empirical fact and only survives because of its "unconscious poetry." As a consequence, only poetry has the power "to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us."<sup>71</sup> In spite of Arnold's appeal to the "laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth," poetry means much more than poems; it is itself a conception of culture. When Arnold defines the "grand power" of poetry, his categories--substance, matter, manner, style, "truth and seriousness"--are all deliberately vague:

But if we are asked to define the mark and accent in the abstract, our answer must be: No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing it. The mark and accent are given by the substance and matter of that poetry, by the style and the manner of that poetry, and of all other poetry which is akin to it in quality.<sup>72</sup>

Arnold believed that this "mark and accent" was self-evident in the classics, notably Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton; they are the "touchstones" for judging all other poetry. And yet this ability to recognize a "touchstone" necessarily depends on a previously acquired aesthetic literacy. Arnold's contradictory faith in the "grand power" of poetry to speak directly to readers and in the capacity of education to produce literate readers expresses all too clearly the uneasy relationship of the liberal intellectual to the modern public. When, for example, Arnold wants to educate his readers to become aesthetically literate--to be able to judge not only literature but culture in a general sense--he appeals to a naturally given sensibility. Thus although Chaucer and Burns are great writers who apply their ideas to life, Arnold argues that they are not classics because

"the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty" are absent from their work. But what are these laws? For a public which had increasingly come to perceive poetry as an object of leisure rather than as the embodiment of a creative human instinct, Arnold's judgements could only be interpreted as equivocal. In Lukács's sense, Arnold's poetic is ironic: it refers equally to the poem and to the human subject. Poetry embodies the relationship between the human impulse for sensuous experience and for self-knowledge; it becomes a consolation for life but only as a criticism of life. As Arnold puts it: "... poetry is interpretative both by having natural magic in it, and by having moral profundity. In both ways it illuminates man; it gives him a satisfying sense of reality; it reconciles him with himself and the universe."<sup>73</sup> Moreover, since the classics never lose their power, poetry constituted an enduring tradition, and since its sensuous and moral character is given from the beginnings of Western culture, poetry could claim a universality which religion could not. In short, poetry's truth and beauty remind and console readers what is essentially human in "an age of prose and reason," an age which achieved freedom at the expense of the "religious life of the soul."

By the early twentieth century liberalism seemed in its death throes and, in particular, had become the bete noire of an emerging conservatism which identified liberalism with modernity and rejected both in the name of an idealized past. It was in this context that T.S. Eliot launched his influential attack on the metaphysical and cultural assumptions of liberalism,



redefining poetry in direct opposition to Arnold. For Eliot, modern society was a wasteland because it had sacrificed religion, a transcendent source of value, to the immediacy of individual experience. Whereas in the "pre-modern" past tradition had referred to a transcendent ideal external to lived experience, for modernity there can be no tradition in this sense because cultural values are immanent within lived experience. More specifically, the individual becomes both the subject and object of modern culture. Eliot is unequivocal about this judgement. With the rise of modern society in the late seventeenth century, the authority of tradition began to erode. This erosion was further accelerated by Romanticism and received its finishing touch with Arnold. In reaction to modernity, Eliot sought to restore a concept of tradition which was prior to the personal, to restore stability in a world of instability. And for Eliot any concept of tradition based on the creative and moral potential of the human subject was inherently unstable. Accordingly, Eliot's concept of tradition is impersonal; it is the restoration of a Christian--actually Catholic--cosmology. This cosmology, to which Eliot became increasingly committed throughout his life, was an idealized image of an unchangeable and authoritarian order. Eliot's view of tradition is as much a negation of the present as it is an affirmation of the past. Since Eliot considered human beings to be naturally impetuous and anarchic, an authoritarian tradition was necessary. T.E. Hulme, Eliot's immediate predecessor, put the issue more bluntly:

Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him.<sup>74</sup>

That this tradition collapsed with Milton is, on socio-historical grounds, somewhat questionable. Eliot, for example, can make no sense of Hamlet because he cannot accept that there is any justification for neurotic behaviour in an ordered society.

Given Eliot's theological formalism and his desire to establish art as a sphere of pure subjectivity radically enclosed from everyday life, it is hardly surprising to find him regarding Arnold's poetics as "frigid to anyone who has felt the full surprise and elevation of a new experience of poetry."<sup>75</sup> Unlike Arnold, Eliot does not want poetry to assume the function of religion but rather to reproduce a religious sensibility, the sensibility of impersonality: "Poetry is not the turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of Eliot's insistence that poetry was neither religion nor morality, he is unable to transcend the problematic established by Arnold. For although "a poem has its own life," the value of poetry is determined by reference to a universal tradition and by a critique of modern culture. Notwithstanding the substantial differences between Arnold and Eliot, especially their divergent attitudes to Milton, Romanticism and the individual, both saw poetry as the bearer of a desperately needed tradition. The inheritor of this project was Leavis who sought to resolve the differences between Arnold and Eliot by redefining the conditions

for an enduring tradition.

From the beginning, Leavis's interpretation of Eliot's literary theory was problematical. He regarded Eliot as "the most important literary critic of our age" and relied on Eliot's poetics to support his own, often fiercely polemical, literary judgments. On the other hand, Leavis's own use of Eliot's critical categories conceals a fundamental misrecognition, an unwillingness to recognize his substantial differences from Eliot. Nowhere is this more evident than in Leavis's assimilation of Eliot's notion of an impersonal tradition. Whereas for Eliot the impersonality of tradition signified a neo-aristocratic sensibility, for Leavis it signified the moral seriousness of Puritanism. Similarly, whereas for Eliot the historical referent of tradition was a hierarchical society, for Leavis it was an organic rural community. To be sure, both socio-cultural models collapsed with the emergence of modern capitalist society, but what collapsed was radically different. For Eliot it was hierarchy and religious authority but for Leavis it was the sensuous immediacy of social and cultural relationships. Paradoxically, therefore, Leavis's middle class Puritanism found Eliot's royalist impersonality congenial. And it was this Puritan tradition, characterized by "a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity" which Leavis sought to revitalize.<sup>77</sup> What is distinctive about this tradition is not the particular content of its moral values but rather the willingness to engage itself in moral dilemmas. Thus for Leavis, the greatness of modern literature--typified in

the novel by Jane Austen, George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Henry James and Lawrence--lay in its capacity to perceive the moral dilemmas of modernity and to affirm a transcendent moral consciousness. For Eliot, on the other hand, there can be no dilemma over moral values as such because they owe their stability to the authority of religious doxa.

Leavis's increasing turn to Lawrence was inseparable from his rejection of Eliot. As early as 1931 Eliot had maliciously identified Leavis with Lawrence. In a review of Murry's Son of Woman Eliot wrote: "Had [Lawrence] become a don at Cambridge his ignorance might have had frightful consequences for himself and the world 'rotten and rotting others'."<sup>78</sup> When Leavis reviewed After Strange Gods in 1934 he retaliated by attacking Eliot's criticism as "painfully bad--disturbingly inadequate, often irrelevant, and sometimes disingenuous."<sup>79</sup> By comparison, Lawrence's "moral struggle" was of a higher order than the "significant failures of touch and tone" of Eliot's orthodoxy. The schism between them had clearly surfaced and Leavis concluded his review with a barbed defense of Lawrence: "He stands at any rate for something without which the preoccupation (necessary as it is) with order, forms and deliberate construction cannot produce health."<sup>80</sup>

These literary polemics, themselves a manifestation of a difference that had always existed, mark a turning point in Leavis's intellectual development. As he increasingly turned towards Lawrence and away from Eliot, Leavis began to recognize that the cultural assumptions of his "great tradition" had their

roots in liberalism. Leavis's rapprochement with liberalism is clearly visible in his 1938 essay on Arnold. Given Eliot's influential judgement, this essay is much more than a re-evaluation of a historical figure; it is a defense of an intellectual tradition directly relevant to Leavis's own cultural values. To be sure, Leavis's defense of Arnold is qualified. He assents with Eliot's criticism that Arnold is wrong to identify poetry with religion and to defend Milton and the Romantics. Significantly, however, Leavis finds in Arnold "a vigorously independent intelligence." Far from being a casual term, "intelligence" is Leavis's radical revision of Eliot's notion of tradition as an impersonal and transcendent ideal: it signifies the creative understanding which imaginatively transforms and transcends personal experience. The necessary condition for intelligence, however, is not an a priori ideal order but a creative process or mode of being which discovers and makes manifest the impersonal and transcendent moral potentiality of personal experience. Although this intelligence is most fully expressed in Lawrence, it is significant that Leavis describes Arnold's intelligence as "informed by a mature and delicate sense of the humane values and can manifest itself directly as a fine sensibility."<sup>81</sup> And when Leavis defends Arnold's literary criticism, "even when it is not literary criticism," he is essentially defending his own. Thus he writes of Arnold: "... the moral judgement that concerns us as critics must be at the same time a delicately relevant response of sensibility."<sup>82</sup> As if to underline the significance of this essay, Leavis takes issue with Eliot's criticism that

Arnold "had little gift for consistency or for definition."

Such a criticism, he argues, fails to realize that Arnold's intention is to communicate a sensibility characterized by

certain positive virtues: tact and delicacy, a habit of keeping in sensitive touch with the concrete, and an accompanying gift for implicit definition--virtues that prove adequate to the sure and easy management of a sustained argument and are, as we see them in Arnold, essentially those of a literary critic.<sup>83</sup>

Even if at this point Leavis still considered Eliot's "critical writing [had] a higher critical intensity than any of Arnold's," his more fundamental commitment had clearly emerged. Leavis's re-assessment of Arnold thus becomes a crucial mediation in his movement away from Eliot and towards Lawrence. Subsequently, Leavis would not only claim that Women in Love was "one of the most striking works of creative originality that fiction has to show;" he would also claim in his final book on Lawrence, Words and Creativity (1976), that he was "a far greater genius than Eliot." Leavis's redemption of Lawrence is thus not just an explicit critique of Eliot but an implicit critique of Anglo-American formalism and its preoccupation with "order, forms, and deliberate construction."

#### V

The formalist reception of Women in Love can best be introduced by briefly considering Mark Schorer's perceptive essay, "Women in Love and Death," first published in 1953. The date is itself significant since the essay is contemporary with the liberal revival of Lawrence. Moreover, Schorer had earlier

published his "Technique as Discovery," a seminal New Critical attempt to theorize the modern novel. In this essay Schorer had criticized Lawrence's "mistaken notion of technique" which, in Sons and Lovers, failed to objectify emotions and life experiences as literary form. Schorer's attitude to Women in Love is substantially different. Not only is Schorer sympathetic to the novel; he also claims that Women in Love challenges our very conceptions of the novel form. What interests him, in particular, is Lawrence's concept of choosing fate and its implications for a theory of the modern novel. According to Schorer, Lawrence conceives of the novel as "psychic drama" through which he represents the "idea that we can and do constantly choose our fate, not only our social or psychological fate, but our final fate, our destiny to choose life or death...."<sup>84</sup> Prior to Lawrence--Schorer uses James and Conrad as examples--choice and fate were mutually exclusive: characters either choose freedom (James) or submit to fate (Conrad). In Women in Love, however, fate and freedom become equivalent and this conception amounts to a radical transformation of the novel form, requiring a different approach to character, structure, theme and subject, and style.

Schorer argues that Lawrence's method of characterization is determined by his interest in the relationship between a character's "psychic engagements" and his or her social personality. To illustrate this claim, Schorer establishes a typology of Lawrence's characters as "free" and "bound." The main characters are all free because they "actively seek out their fate

through the plot movement" while the rest are bound because their fate is sealed from the outset: they exist at the level of social personality alone. While the bound characters owe their method of characterization to the conventional realist novel, the free characters reflect Lawrence's new and unfamiliar method:

They have their social existence and they have their psychic existence; the first is inevitably an expression of the second, but in the second lies their whole motivation. As two take the way of death, their social role becomes more and more important.... And as the two others take the way of life, their social role becomes less important, ceases, in fact, to exist.<sup>85</sup>

Equally, as a "drama of primal compulsion," the structure of Women in Love is different from the traditional novel. Because of its rhythmic and episodic quality, Schorer likens the structure of Women in Love to dance:

As in dance, it develops through the shifting allegiances between the members, and the configurations of characters, their thematic signifying, is perhaps the strictest of all English novels.<sup>86</sup>

The traditional sense of plot as temporal structure is, consequently, no longer appropriate for Lawrence's new subject matter. Finally, Schorer defends Lawrence's style--the directness and sensuousness of his language and imagery--as artistically necessary to represent the psychic forces inhering in life, forces which must be felt and not merely understood.

The very attention to structure, style, and method clearly demonstrates Schorer's allegiances to formalism. What is



significant about this analysis is that Schorer links Women in Love to a theoretical understanding of the modern novel. To be sure, Schorer claims that Women in Love is problematical because of the possible disparity between its subject matter and form. Even if he remains sceptical about Lawrence's success in overcoming this disparity, however, Schorer does not conclude that the attempt should not be made. The critical issue is whether the novel is the most appropriate form for this attempt. Thus Schorer ends his essay by inviting criticism to take up the theoretical question of not whether Lawrence is right, but what a novel is. In spite of the importance of this widely anthologized essay, however, subsequent formalist criticism did not attempt to seriously engage the critical issue suggested by Schorer. Rather, formalist critics were content to ask a different and far less demanding question: in what sense can Women in Love be considered a literary work of art? This question presupposes not only certain aesthetic norms against which Women in Love can be measured, but also that these norms are not specific to the novel. The history of the formalist reception can thus be understood as the evaluation of Women in Love in relation to a developing concept of art which not only defines art as a sphere autonomous from socio-historical determinations; but also, the concept of art itself transcends the particularity of genre and period. In spite of the differences among formalist interpretations, therefore, what remains constant is the suppression of a theory of fiction, the denial of art's socio-historical meaning, and the central importance accorded to the

symbolic. Not only does the complexity of the symbolic become evidence of the aesthetic worth of Women in Love; the symbolic --and especially in "Moony"--becomes the site within which different interpretations of the meaning of both Lawrence's novel and art in general are articulated.

A work of art, it can be claimed, survives because of its capacity to provoke new generations of readers to create meanings irreducible to the conscious intentions of the artist. The reason for this claim is two-fold. On the one hand, once an art work becomes part of society and history, its meanings have themselves become social and historical: the field of intentionality and meaning necessarily transcends the field of consciousness. On the other hand, since the act of interpretation is undertaken by socio-historical beings, the work of art only remains part of history to the extent that readers or critics can articulate new meanings. What is significant about the formalist reception of Women in Love, however, is the extent to which it was determined by the debate between Leavis and Eliot over the significance of Lawrence. That is, in trying to wrest Women in Love away from Leavis's influence, formalism would paradoxically appeal, albeit largely implicitly, to Eliot's aesthetic.

For the sake of clarity, this debate can be characterized as essentially concerned with whether aesthetic values refer to cultural experience or religious sensibility. Leavis considered the value of art to reside in its cultural significance, in its capacity to illuminate socio-cultural experience. For Eliot, on the other hand, the value of art resided in its capacity to

reproduce a religious sensibility, a sensibility of order and stability which found expression in and through artistic form. On these two bases Lawrence was judged positively by Leavis and negatively by Eliot. In spite of Eliot's contemporary objections to Lawrence, however, formalism would seek to re-evaluate Women in Love in terms of a religious sensibility. Frank Kermode even went so far as to claim that Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility" is only a "more cautious and more literary version of a doctrine to which Lawrence gave a cosmic sweep."<sup>87</sup> Before considering in more detail how Women in Love could express a religious sensibility and, indeed, have its source in a religious vision, the significance of the formalist critique of Leavis must be understood.

Primarily, the motive for attacking Leavis was to clarify art's relationship to the socio-historical. Angelo Bertocci, for example, assumed that Leavis deliberately underplayed Lawrence's religious vision in order to counter the criticism of Murry and Eliot. Leavis's attempt to show how the novel could illuminate "our personal and social existence, or what in Lawrence's vision could be verified in the objectivities of our common life" could thus only be motivated by the desire to save him "from the connotations, for some people, of the word 'prophet'."<sup>88</sup> For Bertocci, by contrast, the important aesthetic issue is how Lawrence's religious propositions are woven into the novel's fabric with symbolism, "and from this Dr. Leavis shies away." In spite of his polite respect for Leavis, therefore, Bertocci cannot take seriously the fundamental assumptions

of a liberal cultural aesthetic. For Eliseo Vivas, whose D.H. Lawrence: The Failure and Triumph of Art (1960) can be considered the first substantial formalist study of Lawrence's oeuvre, Leavis's apologetics verge on the propagandistic. "Mr. Leavis writes about Lawrence," he claims, "as Stalinists used to write about the Monstrous Butcher before his death."<sup>89</sup> At issue here is not simply the content of Leavis's criticism but also his method which does not respect the epistemological limits of the aesthetic.

The focus of Vivas's critique of Leavis is the claim that Birkin's married relations with Ursula represent a positive norm. Vivas argues not only that Birkin is dissatisfied in his relationship with Ursula but also that there is little textual evidence to support the view that Birkin has abandoned the "African way" of sensualism. Moreover, contrary to Leavis's conclusion that Lawrence's best works express a coherent moral intelligence, Vivas finds in them "a profound emotional disorder, an obdurate major disharmony," and, therefore, maintains that to "go to these books for the wisdom that our civilization needs, without rigorous discrimination, is folly."<sup>90</sup> Leavis's conclusions, however, cannot be reduced to propaganda; they have their source in his critical assumption that art's value must be external to itself. For Vivas, on the other hand, if art's value resides in its capacity to illuminate the socio-cultural world of the critic, then the specificity of art as such disappears. Accordingly, he argues that Leavis can only arrive at the conclusion that Women in Love presents a norm by

failing to understand the limits of the aesthetic. "All we can assert," insists Vivas, "is that the novel shows that the religion of love failed to satisfy Birkin. Any attempt to go beyond this statement turns a novel into sociology."<sup>91</sup> Further, because Birkin and Ursula left England and quit their jobs, "to take [their] relationship seriously as a practical solution of our problems is simply silly."<sup>92</sup> Quite apart from Vivas's misrepresentations, his remarks clearly illustrate his opposition to the very notion of literature as a "criticism of life." This notion denies what art is: a closed form which allows readers to "understand aesthetically, to grasp in the mode of immediate apprehension aspects of our contemporary world that ... left uninformed, would have remained for us mere threatening, oppressive chaos."<sup>93</sup>

There is an evident inconsistency in Vivas's attempt to distinguish the aesthetic from the sociological. For although an art work only becomes aesthetically valid as "a creative organization of experience in dramatic and narrative terms," Vivas cannot avoid introducing ideological values into his literary judgements. His criticism of Leavis's sociologism, in short, is a criticism of his socio-cultural values. By implication, then, art is only aesthetically valid as an affirmative representation of an immanently meaningful socio-political reality but not as its criticism. Thus, if "Gerald is destroyed, it is Gerald and not all industrial magnates who suffer destruction."<sup>94</sup> To maintain this interpretation, however, Vivas makes determination about certain passages in the novel

on the basis of their presumed aesthetic value. As an industrial magnate, as a character who is central to Lawrence's critique of modern society and its imaginaire of instrumental rationality, for example, Gerald becomes "something of a dramatized idea." Similarly, the two chapters clearly devoted to this critique, "Coal Dust" and "The Industrial Magnate," are "more conceptual than dramatic." On the other hand, when Gerald is depicted in a more existential aspect, and hence abstracted from his socio-historical typicality, "the result is a person grasped directly, not in terms of [Lawrence's] concepts, a moving, responding human being, whose industrial success, whose inward disorganization and failure in love are not the product of a philosophy on the part of the creator, but a genuinely creative conception."<sup>95</sup>

At issue here is not merely the critic's attempt to reconstruct the novel in terms of his ideological interests but also, and more crucially, to determine what art is, its ontological status. The very dogmatism of Vivas's interpretation of Gerald only serves to underline the extent to which an aesthetic object has a socio-historical being, an object produced by the critic and embodying, however latently, his or her ideological values. For the New Critics neither the critique of modern society nor the critical exploration of the conditions for a humanly adequate life are, in themselves, appropriate themes for art. At best they have a representative value; at worst they are the lies of the author. Using Lawrence against himself, Vivas writes: "But while the novelist remains ... a dribbling liar, the novel does

not suffer from lies: for the truth of the novel is not in disruptive conflict with the lies of the novelist; it is to be found below them."<sup>96</sup> This assertion, however, is logically problematical. Criticism must deny its ideological interests, its subjective expectations, by arguing that the truth of its claims of what is not-art is revealed in those moments of the text which it considers aesthetically inadequate. For example, Bertocci complains that in passages like "Mino," Lawrence's didacticism becomes "excessive and perhaps humourless." This interpretation is neither self-evident nor can it be objectively verified by the text but depends on an aesthetic assumption posited prior to the reading of the novel. Only when a text affirms this assumption does it become valid as a work of art. This assumption can be put schematically as follows: art must establish for itself universal themes which not only transcend the subjective intentions of the author but are also objectively inscribed in the history of art. Through this assumption, the ideological referent of the critic--the necessity of art to universalize historically contingent human values--becomes displaced to art itself or, more exactly, to a constructed history of art. Specifically, what Bertocci and Vivas discover beneath Lawrence's socio-political critique and his analysis of erotic life--and this discovery is essentially reconfirmed and developed by such diverse critics as George Ford, Stephen Miko and Frank Kermode--is a religious vision. To be sure, this vision is interpreted differently by these critics. For Vivas, Lawrence "poses the problem of human destiny in view of the fact that his characters

cannot believe in God, so that religion, by its failure, defines the central theme of the novel."<sup>97</sup> Lawrence thus becomes linked to atheistic existentialism. For Ford and Kermode, on the other hand, Lawrence is an apocalyptic writer, and the progress of Women in Love "enacts those desperate plunges into the unknown Lawrence so much wanted."<sup>98</sup> Most significantly, this transcendent religious vision is endowed with the authority of tradition and can thus lay claim to universality. When Lawrence, as an artist, is faithful to this vision he is capable of producing a dramatically convincing symbolic art. However, when Lawrence deviates from this vision either as a social critic or as a metaphysician, he fails as an artist. And no technical ingenuity can save Lawrence from this failure.

For formalist criticism, Lawrence's religious quest constitutes the inner structure of Women in Love, to which all other themes are subordinate. To be sure, within formalism there is no consensus about the content of this quest. Nonetheless, from a general perspective it matters little whether this quest is defined in terms of God or the self, or whether erotic love is interpreted as a theology. What matters is that for the formalist critic the religious signifies the desire to create a world which transcends not just specifically socio-historical forms of existence but the socio-historical itself. With unusual candour, Bertocci argues that "it seems to be a fact that any drastic vision of social death and renewal is a religious vision, as Rousseau's was a religious vision."<sup>99</sup> Any drastic vision or critique is thus necessarily religious because



it posits a faith in a transcendent principle of being. For Bertocci, moreover, this conception even holds for a writer like Marx, in spite of his secular intentions. Conversely, any drastic critique of the present, even when theorized in terms of a possible future, a historical possibility, depends on a religious worldview. Aside from the untenability of this assumption as a principle of intellectual history, it enables the formalist critic to marginalize the explicit social criticism of Women in Love. In the case of a cold warrior like Vivas, for example, what becomes an aesthetic strength--the tragic failure of the religious quest--allows him to underline the superficiality of Lawrence's social criticism. However, because he gives no credibility to Lawrence's negativity, Vivas can make no sense of the desperation which motivates the major characters. For example, of Birkin he writes: "The fact that we remain in the dark as to the reason for Birkin's hatred of his fellow men constitutes one of the defects of the novel."<sup>100</sup>

From a rather different perspective, George Ford is equally confused by the apparent irrationality of Lawrence's social hatred. For Ford, however, this hatred is understandable as a civilian's response to war: the irrational fear of total, cataclysmic destruction. That is why Lawrence chooses destructive symbols:

Flood, fire, ice, or bomb--not one mode of a sudden destruction ... but various modes combine to convey a civilian's response to war: 'it is the end--our world is gone, and we are like dust in the air.'<sup>101</sup>

Moreover, Ford insists that Lawrence "had the good fortune not to be a pacifist" because of his capacity for hatred. Nonetheless, just because Lawrence's consciousness was informed by the experience of the war, Ford does not conclude that the novel is about the institutionalized violence of modern society. Rather, the subject of Women in Love is "how civilizations die, or might die," a subject informed by Lawrence's extended use of history, pre-history and myth. From this perspective, for example, Bel-dover becomes "the land of Sodom." Women in Love is not even a critique of modern logocentric culture in its death throes but a study of "the slow process of degeneration of past societies." And this study is "independent of how coal and iron are worked, and the differences between what [Lawrence] calls the African process and the Arctic process are not crucial."<sup>102</sup> Hardly surprisingly, Ford considers "The Industrial Magnate" chapter "somewhat labored."

To justify the claim that the socio-historical is insignificant to the meaning of Women in Love, the formalist critics appeal simultaneously to Lawrence's theories of civilization and history, especially as they are developed in "The Crown" and "The Reality of Peace" and through Birkin's statements. To be sure, read from a certain perspective, the novel provides ample support for a religious interpretation. Both Gudrun and Birkin perceive the world, other people, and themselves in religio-mythical terms. For Gudrun, the mines are a mythical, fantastical underworld peopled by "ghouls" while Gerald's "totem" is the wolf. Similarly, Birkin is constantly drawn to the cosmological

and the apocalyptic. Further, there is no doubt that Lawrence himself can be identified with Birkin in this respect. Kermode has correctly pointed out not only the continuity of the apocalyptic in Lawrence's thought, but also the extent to which the apocalyptic dominated contemporary intellectual culture. The widely held perception of crisis and the need for change thus found expression in a "blend of theosophy, socialism, sexual reformism, evolutionism, [and] religious primitivism," counting among its adherents such diverse figures as Bernard Shaw, Edward Carpenter, Ramsay Macdonald, and Houston Chamberlain who would become an important source for Nazism.<sup>103</sup> The mere presence of Lawrence's metaphysical theories in the novel through Birkin, however, does not in itself justify reading the novel as, what Miko calls, a "struggle for consciousness [which] emerges with something like a cosmology."<sup>104</sup> Lawrence's conscious intentions aside, the novel is a created world, autonomous from these intentions and yet referring to a determinate socio-historical reality. All the characters share this world to which they respond as "fictionalized" socio-historical beings. Some characters, notably Gerald, Hermione, Gudrun and Loerke, have a determinate function and being in this world and how they think and behave --how they are instituted and institute this world--has a definite socio-historical meaning. To be sure, Hermione is a distinctive and particularized character, but she is also "Breadalby" in which her being as a Kulturträger is signified in terms of wealth, power, and cultural domination. To argue, as Miko does, that she has merely put her mind to bad use, and that why

"she was trapped into doing so is not explained," is to abstract her from Breadalby. On the other hand, although Birkin and Ursula do not have determinate functions within society as capitalists, artists, or intellectuals, their very déracinement and desperation bind them to and make them representative of this world. Birkin's theories, therefore, do not transcend his being as a character, let alone the novel. Rather, it is an indication of the desperation of modern society that Birkin becomes committed to an egocentric philosophy which posits the necessity for the abstract ego to transform itself into a transcendental one. In its own terms, Birkin's ideal can hardly be considered a serious critique of modern culture. As Lukács argued in his critique of Kant, the categorical division between thought and being upon which a character like Birkin's life philosophy is built only transposes and reifies the antinomic forms of modern society in thought.<sup>105</sup> As a consequence, Birkin's affirmation of the abstract ego, his "lovely state of free-proud singleness," binds him all the more closely to the self-destructive rationality of Hermione, Gerald, and Gudrun.

Once the socio-historical is viewed from the perspective of the most déraciné character, Birkin, then it is a short step to identify his attitudes to sexuality and sexual relationships as those of the novel. To take but one instance. In a discussion on the function of talk, Miko argues that the arguments between Birkin and Ursula allow them to develop their intellectual differences; at the same time, "beneath the verbal battles" more fundamental oppositions become revealed. It is the function of

intellectual discourse to resolve opposing emotional states. In this way, Birkin's intellectual search for a conscious self is validated by the development of the novel. Through talk, Birkin not only becomes conscious of, and releases, "certain inhibiting tension," but in the process also converts Ursula. By placing the relationship between Birkin and Ursula within the context of Lawrence's struggle for consciousness, however, Miko ultimately denies the force of the erotic and the very necessity for a relationship which in principle cannot be reduced to one character's theory. Indeed, the formalist interpretation of sexuality can hardly be separated from Birkin's own. Like Birkin, Bertocci and Ford manage to avoid interrogating the meaning of explicit sexuality, often appealing to a religious theory of love. And for Kermode, Lawrence's ideas conform to an apocalyptic type in which the prophet selects his elect group and sets out for the city of God, "urging new modes of sexual conduct on his flock."<sup>107</sup> The significant exception here is Vivas who claims that Birkin's sensualism and latent homosexuality "give the lie to [his] religion of love and Lawrence's intention."<sup>108</sup> Regardless of his motives, Vivas is justified in questioning Birkin's claim to truth.

It is important to distinguish Birkin's theories from the form of his relationship with Ursula. Prior to this relationship, Birkin had identified sexuality with a corrupt sensuality, the "African way." Within the individual, however, this sensuality had to be complemented with a consciousness of self, the "disquality" of the ego. In this respect, Birkin's

relationship with Hermione can be understood as an unsuccessful attempt to combine the two. What Birkin wants is a balance between these two modes of being without realizing that this very dualism binds him to a culpable "rationality." Significantly, this dualism also characterizes Gudrun's relationship with both Gerald and Loerke. Consequently, in order to distinguish the relationship between Birkin and Ursula from the other sexual relationships in the novel, one cannot appeal to Birkin's theories. Even his distinction between "freedom," the "African way," and the "Arctic way" remains problematical, since Birkin's ideal is not qualified or mediated by the erotic which radically transforms his relationship with Ursula. Within the context of the novel, the erotic remains a potentiality in this relationship until "Excuse," a chapter which occurs after Birkin's reflections on "the way of freedom." In other words, it is not only that Ursula challenges the egotistical assumptions of Birkin's philosophy; the very form of the relationship is a criticism of normative sexual relationships as constituted through the dualism of sensualism and rationalism. Specifically, the erotic relationship between Birkin and Ursula transforms their respective beings at a profound and vital level but without obliterating their differences. It is significant, however, that formalist criticism has been less than sympathetic with Lawrence's description of erotic transformation. Miko, for example, considers "Excuse" an aesthetic failure:

... Lawrence seems to have overestimated the flooding force of his prose. Transcendental forces cannot be

convincingly located at the back and base of the loins. Even the slightest attempt to visualize this place brings bathos, and the scene unfortunately demands that it be visualized; Ursula is kneeling before Birkin, caressing the 'full, rounded body of his loins.' The flesh, especially this flesh, is recalcitrant when called upon to embody mystical forces.<sup>109</sup>

The difficulty with this scene for Miko is what he calls "over-articulation." He does not want Lawrence to name the unknown because "when nothing known applies, a description that takes the trouble to place an ontological force or state is a form of false conceptualization."<sup>110</sup> Because the meaning of the novel is related to the struggle for consciousness, to explicitly describe the erotic amounts to an aesthetic failure. As Miko puts it: "If the nature of religious experience is by definition beyond definition, other, less explicit means must be found for conveying it."<sup>111</sup>

Miko's remarks highlight a central motif of the formalist reception of Women in Love: the relationship between aesthetic value and religious experience. From the perspective of Birkin's metaphysical ideal, erotic experience cannot be convincingly symbolized through the loins. Lawrence's attempt to do so represents an aesthetic failure because he has sacrificed the religious for the erotic, consciousness for being. Moreover, Miko justifies this interpretation by appealing to universal, formal aesthetic values: the "rhythm of prose" cannot overcome the insistent intrusion of the narrator. Aesthetic values are here presumed to transcend a particular work of art because they are deduced from what Friedrich Schlegel called a "progressive

Universalpoesie." As a consequence, the formalist critic can evaluate the particular art work in terms of a general concept of art, itself an abstraction deduced from a history of art constructed in terms of the autonomous development of aesthetic values. At the same time, because formalism relies on the authority of tradition, aesthetic values are not only self-evident but immanent within the text. On the basis of this assumption, formalism avoids the necessity for appealing to referentials external to the text, while limiting the function of criticism to demonstrating how particular works of art express universal aesthetic values and, conversely, in what ways they fail. Yet the positing of the universality of aesthetic values, both deriving from and transcending particular art works, becomes problematical with a fixed and reified general concept of art closed to the creative novelty of individual art works. Radnoti has perceptively argued that a tension between concept and art work is necessary to modern aesthetic culture; otherwise the art work sacrifices its claim as a sphere of emancipatory values. He writes:

In terms of cultural history, the universal concept of art can only exist in the plural. Over the last 200 years, fixed legitimacy has been replaced by the incessant re-emergence of legitimation in a dynamic process that is more accurately described as a mode of existence than a crisis. Individual art works claim their freedom not only against the old non-autonomous status of the arts, but also against all universal concepts of art deduced from philosophy of history or metaphysics as well as against all concepts of art constituted through traditions, movements, or any other art work. This declaration of independence, however, is bound to generate a new concept of art, or else lapse into arbitrariness and relativism. This dispute



between a concept of art and an art work is not a contradiction between theory and practice, as is often misunderstood, nor a methodological debate between deductive and inductive interpretations, nor a struggle between consciousness and spontaneity, but rather a tension between two fundamental constituents of an aesthetics in the process of emancipation, and hence inherent in each work of art and in each interpretation.<sup>112</sup>

Formalism subverts the tendency towards multiplicity and freedom in modern aesthetic culture, however, by fixing the form and meaning of aesthetic values. In its interpretation of Women in Love, accordingly, formalism argues that the novel's aesthetic values simultaneously transcend Lawrence's intended significations of religious experience and embody religious experience.

Formalism considers Lawrence's religious vision to be the creative source of Women in Love, not its aesthetic value as such. Conversely, the meaning of Women in Love is Lawrence's religious quest as expressed through the fates of the various characters. Meaning and value, however, are not equivalent. The aesthetic value of an art work resides in its form through which meaning is expressed. What is distinctive about the formalist reception is not only its interpretation of the novel's meaning but its conception of literary form. For formalism, form signifies both technique and structure. The pattern of linguistic devices, the differentia specifica of literary art, both reveals the thematic structure of a literary work and gives it form in the double sense of appearance and signification. At the same time, form as structure and technique not only evaluates content; it transforms the "raw material" of art--the artist's

conscious intentions and life experiences--into aesthetic values. Finally, literary form transcends and becomes autonomous from its determinations by becoming affective, thereby denying all referents except art itself. For the formalists, the defining feature of Lawrence's literary form is the symbol which, consequently, constitutes the aesthetic value of Women in Love. Vivas speaks for all formalists when he declares that

Women in Love is a triumph of symbolic art: of art that works, in Mr. Leavis's phrase, from profounder levels and in more complex ways in order to convey more and deeper significance than naturalistic or realistic art is able to do.<sup>113</sup>

As Vivas makes clear, the aesthetic significance of Women in Love lies in the affective power of the symbolic to give form to subjectively intense experience. In Women in Love, however, this experience has an explicitly religious content. The function of the symbolic, therefore, is to mediate the aesthetic qua affective form with the religious, the substantive content or meaning of the novel. Thus, while the religious transcends and subsumes the socio-historical and the erotic, the symbolic transforms the religious into aesthetic value.

Central to the formalist concept of the symbol is the distinction between idea and experience. Due to their abstract and conceptual quality, ideas can only inform experience; their "logic" can only result in a treatise. A work of art, on the other hand, requires an adequate conception of experience. When an artist attempts to symbolize the idea, therefore, the result is an aesthetic failure: the aesthetically successful symbol

must have its source in a vision informed and transformed by experience.<sup>114</sup> This distinction, however, is neither informed by the generic and cultural specificity of the novel nor by the social and historical form of modern experience; it is a universal principle of art. The universality of this principle is expressed, first of all, negatively in the contingency of the idea. To be sure, in relation to experience the idea has a necessary and positive function; it orients the creative subject towards certain conceptions of experience. However, in relation to art, the idea has a negative value when it is not subsumed by experience. In Women in Love, for example, the socio-historical and the erotic are concretizations of the idea; they have a merely conceptual status. Whereas they have a legitimate relationship to religious experience (Vivas et al.) or, more exactly, to the development of Lawrence's religious vision, they have no autonomous value and thus represent a limitation of Lawrence's creative consciousness. As a consequence, when Lawrence seeks to endow these ideas with autonomous aesthetic value, as in "Coal Dust," "The Industrial Magnate," and "Mino," the result is predictably an aesthetic failure. These episodes appear as either didactic or arbitrary, and are thus inessential to the dramatic development of the novel. Vivas calls such symbolic episodes "semiotic" because they possess no aesthetic value. Referring to the Mino episode, Vivas writes: "... it does not tell us in as well as through, but only through itself."<sup>115</sup> This type of judgement, as I have argued, is problematical because it cannot be simply deduced from the text but must rather

appeal covertly to the critic's ideological values. There is no rational basis for relegating the socio-historical and the erotic to the idea rather than to experience. Conversely, Lawrence's religious vision can easily be read as a metaphysic, a "structural skeleton," which thereby results in a substantially different interpretation of the novel's meaning. And since the meaning of a literary text is indeterminate, both interpretations are, in principle, aesthetically defensible insofar as both establish a relationship between literary experience and life values.

By signifying ideas in Women in Love as negative or aesthetic disvalues, formalism underlines the extent to which aesthetic judgement cannot be separated from the general process of socio-cultural valuation. For formalism, the idea can be described as a negative "rationalization," in the psychoanalytic sense of a wish-fulfilling fantasy: it signifies what art is not. At the same time, as an ideological signification the idea postulates, by implication, the normative relationship between art and society, consciousness and being. That is, art establishes its legitimacy as an autonomous sphere of values, not by excluding the socio-historical (as commonly thought) but by allowing its implicit presence within the work of art to function as a representation of positive, affirmative values. It is only when the socio-historical draws attention to itself as negative criticism that it sacrifices its aesthetic legitimacy.

Lawrence's religious vision, by contrast, transcends the realm of ideas; it is an imaginative structure of experience. It is on the basis of this structure of experience that Lawrence

can both produce a symbolic art and subject his ideas to criticism. "One of the achievements of the novel," claims Kermode, "is to criticize the metaphysic, both by attacking Birkin and by obscuring doctrine with narrative symbolisms capable in their nature of a more general and doubtful interpretation."<sup>116</sup> Here Kermode draws attention to the affective power of the symbolic, merely suggesting its religious content. In his assessment of "Moony," however, he is more explicit: "The whole thing has a deliberate afflatus, an incantory haziness, as of apocalyptic preaching."<sup>117</sup> Because the aesthetic value of symbolic episodes like "Rabbit" and "Moony" has its source in religious experience, the critic feels no need to provide a detailed analysis of their ideational content; their very affectivity, their "incantory haziness," is their meaning. Bertocci goes so far as to suggest that Lawrence's "straining for expression" is a direct consequence of the religious quality of his vision; it is "an attempt to make a gesture towards some newly sensed relation between the seen and the unseen...."<sup>118</sup> Moreover, this authorial intention is reproduced in the reader's experience of the symbol, "the experience of an ever-expanding globe of apprehension where the whole that, in one sense, is to be paradoxically integrates into itself the part that is."<sup>119</sup> The aesthetic and the religious thus merge through the symbol. In contrast to the "semiotic," Vivas calls the aesthetically successful symbols "constitutive" because they are integrated with the deeper meaning of the novel. "The critic, in the last analysis," he writes, "is impotent before such a symbol; all he can do is suggest some of the

obvious discursive meanings that the scene evokes."<sup>120</sup> And just as the affect of these symbolic episodes becomes linked to the religious, so they give shape to the novel's formal structure. As Kermode puts it: "Though every major section in the novel is a new leap, Lawrence established certain recurrences of language and image which ensure continuous narrative and doctrinal pressure...."<sup>121</sup> The value and meaning of the symbolic thus become clear "in the sense in which an ordered presentation can be grasped as aesthetically clear," in Vivas's words, "when we manage to comprehend synoptically the whole poem."<sup>122</sup>

For formalism, the symbol signifies the aesthetic unity of meaning and value. As the form of meaning, i.e. of religious experience, the symbol stands opposed to the contingency of the social and historical. In contrast to the fluctuations of the socio-historical, the symbol posits an aesthetic norm of a transcendent universality which is fixed and stable. In his "Foreword" to Women in Love, however, Lawrence had argued that the act of creating form cannot be separated from the fluctuations of modern life; indeed, it expresses them. He writes:

Any man of real individuality tries to know and understand what is happening, even in himself, as he goes along. This struggle for verbal consciousness should not be left out of art. It is a very great part of life. It is not a superimposition of a theory. It is a passionate struggle into conscious being.<sup>123</sup>

Formalism, however, can only read this passage as Lawrence's affirmation of the priority of consciousness over being rather than the problems of creating form. Thus Miko concludes that Women in

Love is "a struggle for consciousness, a search for definition," from which emerges "an inclusive pattern into which [Lawrence] can fit most of the loose ends of his previous book and relate them to the ever-present concern for human need."<sup>124</sup>

## VI

By assuming that art's ontos resides in its capacity to transcend the socio-historical by creating a fixed and stable world, formalism denies the tension between art and society, a tension expressed in the very form of modern art, particularly the novel. Art can only claim such stability when it is purely mimetic, when it represents a world of transcendent values whose authority is given by tradition. According to Max Weber, the progressive "rationalization" of modern society secularizes and "disenchants" traditional cultural beliefs and institutions. In such a world, the individual feels "scattered," to use Fichte's word, because he or she cannot ground the meaning of life on stable values. When society becomes increasingly dominated by "purposive-rational action," consequently, the religious can only be posited in its transcendental universality as an abstract ideal or ethical "ought." Modern art participates in the historicity and rationality of modern society by rendering the process of value formation dynamic or, even better, problematical. Lukács accordingly considered the novel to be the epic of the modern world because, unlike other genres whose existence resides in the completed form, it is always in a process of becoming. "As form," he writes, "the novel establishes a fluctuating yet

firm balance between becoming and being; as the idea of becoming, it becomes a fixed state. Thus the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, surmounts itself."<sup>125</sup> By fixing the meaning of the symbolic in Women in Love as religious experience, formalism not only denies the dynamic flux of modern experience but also the historical signification of literary form. By interpreting Women in Love as if it were a poem, formalism abstracts and reifies the symbolic; it becomes a signification of a transcendent and disembodied consciousness, no longer connected to the "passionate struggle into conscious being." The specificity of the novel as literary form through which this struggle can find expression thus becomes sacrificed to the exigency of a universal concept of art. Women in Love, in short, becomes a symbolist poem.

The formalist refusal to theorize Women in Love as a novel has its source in the opposition between art and the socio-historical. Yet this opposition does not signify a hostility to modern society as such. In fact, only when explicitly critical of society does art become invalid. Rather, the formalist project to establish art's universality, in an epoch when tradition or traditions establish their authority by becoming rationalized, is an attempt to formally establish the conditions of art's autonomy within society. Only as a specialized sphere of meanings, formalism argues, can art claim legitimacy for itself within society. By appealing to the transcendent but unique quality of aesthetic experience in an age of reason and history--in an age when no values or meanings are absolute--formalism seeks to



differentiate art from other spheres of social practice. At the same time, as a rationalized sphere of social practice aesthetic experience becomes commensurable with other spheres of social practice and therein lies its socio-historical meaning. In this sense, the symbolic signifies a structure of meaningful but autonomous experience. The dual determination of this structure of experience, moreover, enables formalism to establish a relationship between art and society which avoids the dichotomy between aestheticism and a deterministic reflection theory of art. Yet, in differentiating art as an autonomous sphere on the basis of one kind of experience, formalism radically restricts the form of aesthetic meaning.

In modern society, however, art's continued efficacy requires that aesthetic meaning remain fluid and open-ended. In their perceptive analyses of Women in Love Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Colin Clarke underline the necessity to interpret Lawrence's theory of art as process, thereby preserving his modernness. In "The Crown" Lawrence had argued that modern culture had disintegrated to the point of being incapable of growth or development; it had become static. The cultural crisis of modernity could thus be seen in two related forms: the tendency to universalize particular personal, cultural, or social forms of being; and the reification of the "flux of corruption" as the only form of being. Thus, either death or the very mutability of forms is denied or life is denied. Lawrence, therefore, considered the war to be a consequence of this static and desperate culture. As Kinkead-Weekes puts it:

Human relationship becomes a friction of ego upon ego, in which no union is possible, but pleasure is taken in mutual reduction. The climax of this is the death-wish, when the only sensation left to explored, the only avenue for final disintegration, is the sensation-al brush with death, and eventually, willed death and destruction.<sup>126</sup>

Against this cultural imaginaire of stasis informed by egotistical will, Lawrence opposes a dialectical conception of process. This conception is quite different from a rationalist conception of progress. As Clarke observes, all of Lawrence's metaphysical categories--corruption, disruption, reduction, dissolution, etc.--are antinomic. As a consequence, Lawrence rejects the traditional moral dualisms of good and evil, right and wrong. In *Beldover*, for example, the mines not only reduce the miners to machines; they also provide the men with opportunity for sensual contact with each other. "It is a habit of Lawrence," writes Clarke, "to convey an impression of impoverished or merely nervous vitality through images of vibrancy."<sup>127</sup> In *Women in Love*, therefore, modernity is ambivalent: its positive and negative aspects are closely interwoven. Through the dialectical interplay between good and bad, light and dark, "primitive" and "civilized," Lawrence preserves modernity as a historical world which is dynamic and accessible to transformation. In this world, therefore, meaning and value cannot reside in an abstract consciousness which, through the act of will, seeks to abolish the corrupting forces of modernity or project them backwards in time. As Clarke puts it, "... there is virtue in the mud." As socio-historical subjects, then, individuals must come to

acknowledge their participation in a culpable culture. At the same time, by recovering the repressed but positive content of modern culture, they can discover new sources of life. For Clarke, this understanding is symbolically represented through the primitive statue:

... actual sensual being is one thing, the attempt to recover the sensuality through the will, having it all in the consciousness--sophisticating the savage--is quite another. We cannot go back; on the other hand, we have to find our own equivalent of the savage mindlessness. We need to recover the capacity for knowledge in the blood, the dark unknowingness.<sup>128</sup>

In and through the process of cultural disintegration, then, new values and life possibilities become visible. Accordingly, the central issue is whether the modern individual can remain open to these possibilities.

Clarke argues that in Women in Love Lawrence establishes a relationship between cultural stasis and the isolated ego on the one hand, and between individuality and cultural vitality on the other. The goal of the isolated ego is to be free from contact and connection while the goal of individuality is to belong to a community. Yet since the isolated ego is constitutive of modern culture, true individuality, Clarke maintains, "can only come to pass with the acknowledgement of community and with the disintegration of the hard and isolate ego.... [T]he coming into being of the true and 'original individuality of the blood' entails a dissolving, or disintegrating, of the 'dreary individuality of the ego'."<sup>129</sup> For Clarke, dissolution and disintegration are antinomic categories signifying cultural malaise and cultural

vitality. When disintegration and dissolution become reified as achieved states, the individual is no longer capable of growth or sustaining human relationships. The description of Gerald at the beginning of "Diver" as "alone now, alone and immune in the middle of the waters" symbolically represents the dissolving of the bonds that ought to link an individual to human community and nature, prefiguring Gerald's eventual suicide. At the same time, the process of dissolution is necessary; it is "a sign that there is a human spirit in contact with the rhythms of living and dying. The incapacity to dissolve or be transmuted, by contrast, is conceived as the mark of the isolated and mechanical state."<sup>130</sup> It is from this perspective that Clarke and Kinhead-Weekes analyze "Moony," which is for them the heart of the novel.

Within the context of the formalist reception of the novel, the analysis of the symbolic provided by Kinhead-Weekes and Clarke is of critical importance. Against "the tendency to give too static account of Lawrence's 'symbols'," these two critics argue that the rock-throwing incident symbolically expresses the process through which salvation becomes possible. Rejecting interpretations that Birkin is attacking female arrogance or that the episode evanesces into mystical experience, Clarke insists that it is about the need to shatter the illusions of the isolated ego, thereby making possible a true human relationship: the hard, bright image of the moon grows into a radiant rose, into a proper tension between light and dark, between self-sufficiency and belonging. Finally, Clarke maintains that this dynamic image expresses Lawrence's assimilation of the Romantic

traditions of Europe, particularly Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, and England:

So the fragments of the moon, 'falling back as in panic, but working their way home persistently', image a process at once reductive and integrative, violent and peace-loving, demonic and paradisaical. In effect, two traditions of Romanticism--two concepts of belonging, or ideals of self-sufficiency--are compelled to confront each other here, and indeed in the novel at large; and in the confrontation neither is affirmed at the expense of the other.<sup>131</sup>

Kinkead-Weekes elaborates further on this notion of human relationships by drawing attention to the connection between sexuality and growth. For Lawrence, he argues, sex is essentially a religious mystery, a tangible means by which human beings can contact the unknown. Sexual marriage, then, signifies a relationship in which lovers make visible to each other an invisible. And even though struggle is inseparable from growth, the aim is to "come through." Reflecting on "Excuse," Kinkead-Weekes claims that the particular nature of the sexual act is of less importance than the ability of Birkin and Ursula to contact a beyond "deeper than the phallic source." The oddness of the scene springs, he argues, from Lawrence's need "to create an adequate physical expression for a mystical relationship."<sup>132</sup> Finally, when Lawrence describes Birkin in his car as an Egyptian Pharaoh he is trying to suggest that "the new relationship can include the whole mechanical civilization into which Gerald plunged reductively, but can direct it to the destination of richer human Being."<sup>133</sup>

In their analyses of Women in Love Kinkead-Weekes and Clarke

emphasize Lawrence's commitment to process, flux, and openness, thereby underlining his modernism. Thus Kinkead-Weekes concludes that Lawrence's strength as an artist lies in "an imaginative vision inclusive enough to allow all opposites play."<sup>134</sup> Although these two critics convincingly demonstrate that Lawrence's intentions cannot be reduced to the ideal of a fixed and stable meaning, , they do not transcend the parameters of formalism. To be sure, their conception of relationship as process represents a substantial revision of previous criticism. Yet both Kinkead-Weekes and Clarke tend to fetishize process and ambivalence, abstracting the characters' relationships from a historical and political context within which they have their meaning. Thus modern culture becomes merely static or disintegrative, and no longer connected to the logic of violence and domination which not only characterizes the history of modern society but would also result in a world war of hitherto unimagined proportions. While not objecting to the socio-historical per se, both critics marginalize it to such an extent that the crisis of modern culture becomes psychologized; it becomes a question of consciousness. In spite of the optimism and idealism (in the more philosophical sense) which Kinkead-Weekes and Clarke find in the novel, albeit qualified, they tend to belittle the desperation and urgency which pervades Women in Love. The failure, for example, of Gudrun and Gerald to achieve a vitality, both individually and in their relationship, "prefigures" and explains the war. To use a Hegelian distinction, at a certain point a barrier ultimately becomes a limit: the war marks the

end of a certain process of cultural disintegration.

This sense of formalism, which privileges process as form over context, moreover, cannot be separated from the importance which Kinkead-Weekes and Clarke accord to the symbolic. To be sure, for them the symbolic is not merely affective but has a dynamic and substantive meaning. Nonetheless, it remains the basis of the novel's aesthetic value. Whereas for the other formalist critics the symbolic only gives affective form to a religious vision, for Kinkead-Weekes and Clarke it is the means through which Lawrence gives expressive form to his theories of process and human relationships. One can hardly understate the crucial aesthetic function that the symbolic performs for formalism. As technique, the symbolic signifies the values of technical rationality, the primary values of modern society. That is, since art's legitimacy as an autonomous sphere cannot appeal to traditional cultural values, formalism seeks to ground values within the very process of rationalization. The rationalization of society not only results in greater autonomy for the increasingly diverse and complex aspects of modern social life; such autonomy also remains subject to the systemic constraints of modern society. In short, the form of socially legitimate autonomy must be in-formed by what Castoriadis calls "la signification imaginaire de l'expansion illimitée de la maîtrise rationnelle." What becomes ultimately significant in the formalist reception of Women in Love, therefore, is not the substantive meaning but the form of its value: the symbolic. As a structuring principle, the symbolic gives meaning form and thus becomes an interpretive

guide, predisposing the critic to consider certain aspects of the novel as more important than others. As technique, on the other hand, the symbolic invests form with value whose referent is not art as such but societal rationalization. Through the symbolic, as a consequence, Women in Love becomes embodied with the technico-rational values of modern society and therein assumes its aesthetic value.

The formalist interpretation of Women in Love, which accords a pre-eminent status to the symbolic, is closely related to its unwillingness to theorize the novel as a cultural and historical form. By suppressing the socio-historical through the symbolic, formalism must necessarily suppress the novel's cultural and political critique, a critique expressed through the struggles of the characters to emancipate themselves from the fatalism of modern society and its attendant forms of being. Moreover, by failing to appreciate the generic and historical specificity of the novel form, formalism becomes insensitive to Lawrence's struggle to create an autonomous world of positive values. Because of the absence of meaningful values within the modern world, the novelist must not only create positive values but the very act of creation places the novelist, and his work, in a conflictual relationship to modern society. A novel's autonomy, therefore, must be achieved not only by creating values but also through a critique of existing conventions. By restricting autonomy to the formal values of the symbolic, however, formalism neutralizes the conflict between Women in Love as a created world and the conventional values of modernity. For Lawrence, the novel can



only be creative, and hence claim to be an art form, by also becoming critique. Before considering Women in Love in more detail, therefore, it is important to elucidate Lawrence's theory of the novel.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Unsigned review of *Women in Love*, *Times Literary Supplement* (9 June 1921), p. 371.

<sup>2</sup>Pilley, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup>J.M. Murry, "The Nostalgia of Mr. Lawrence," *Nation and Athenaeum* (13 August 1921) in Draper, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup>Murry, p. 168.

<sup>5</sup>Unsigned review of *Women in Love*, *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (2 July 1921) in Draper, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup>Phoenix, p. 234.

<sup>7</sup>Times Literary Supplement, p. 371.

<sup>8</sup>Times Literary Supplement, p. 371.

<sup>9</sup>Phoenix, p. 181.

<sup>10</sup>Pilley, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup>Times Literary Supplement, p. 371.

<sup>12</sup>Phoenix II, p. 276.

<sup>13</sup>Times Literary Supplement, p. 371.

<sup>14</sup>Saturday Westminster Gazette, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup>Saturday Westminster Gazette, p. 166.

<sup>16</sup>Saturday Westminster Gazette, p. 167.

<sup>17</sup>Murry, p. 169.

<sup>18</sup>Murry, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup>Murry, p. 172.

<sup>20</sup>J.M. Murry, "The Fundamental Equivocation of *Women in Love*" in D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow and Women in Love*, ed. Colin Clarke (London, 1969), p. 84.

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of Lawrence's theory of character, see Chapter III.

<sup>22</sup>Phoenix II, p. 276.

<sup>23</sup>For a thorough history of the book trade, see Marjorie Plant, The English Book Trade (London, 1939).

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in Lowenthal, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup>Karl Marx, Capital, Volume I, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1976), p. 1044.

<sup>26</sup>Phoenix, p. 180.

<sup>27</sup>The following account is indebted to Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and The Reading Public (London, 1932), pp. 19-74.

<sup>28</sup>For a historical account of the subscription libraries, see R.D. Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900 (Chicago, 1957), pp. 295-317.

<sup>29</sup>George A. Birmingham, The Book Guild Bulletin (July 1930), quoted in Q.D. Leavis, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup>Manchester Evening News (22 February 1926), quoted in Q.D. Leavis, pp. 22-3.

<sup>31</sup>New Age (1909), quoted in Q.D. Leavis, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Q.D. Leavis, p. 59.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Q.D. Leavis, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in Q.D. Leavis, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup>Shorter, p. 96.

<sup>36</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in Prisms, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 20.

<sup>37</sup>Hauser, p. 485.

<sup>38</sup>For a historical account of the English literary periodical from its origins in the eighteenth century, see John Gross, The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters (London, 1969).

<sup>39</sup>Rebecca West, review of Women in Love, New Statesman (9 July 1921), p. 388.

<sup>40</sup>West, p. 390.

<sup>41</sup>Edward Shanks, "Mr. D.H. Lawrence: Some Characteristics," London Mercury (May 1923) in Draper, p. 201.

<sup>42</sup>Shanks, p. 206.

<sup>43</sup>Shanks, p. 207.

<sup>44</sup>Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (London, 1964), p. 222.

<sup>45</sup>D.H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, ed. M. Kalnins (London, 1981), p. 53.

<sup>46</sup>Mark Spilka, "Introduction" to D.H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. M. Spilka (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), p.6. Ironically, Spilka uses this opportunity to attack New Critics like Eliseo Vivas and Angelo Bertocci because they "treat Lawrence's symbols as implicative networks in the symboliste tradition, and so freeze the novels into intellectual patterns or 'symbolic poems'" (p. 4). This aesthetic has little in common with liberalism but it is certainly New Critical. One can only assume that Spilka's attack is motivated by his need to give his liberalism a legitimacy by proclaiming its New Critical credentials. Vivas, for example, had already challenged Spilka's credibility as a literary critic because of his failure to "realize that to find an 'ethic' in a poet is to turn the poet into a moralist and to deny his role as a poet." (Eliseo Vivas, D.H. Lawrence: The Failure and Triumph of Art [Evanston, Ill., 1960], p. 293.)

<sup>47</sup>F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London, 1948), p. 23.

<sup>48</sup>DHL, p. 180.

<sup>49</sup>DHL, p. 180.

<sup>50</sup>DHL, p. 189.

<sup>51</sup>DHL, p. 219.

<sup>52</sup>DHL, p. 199.

<sup>53</sup>DHL, pp. 199, 194.

<sup>54</sup>DHL, p. 206.

<sup>55</sup>DHL, p. 197.

<sup>56</sup>DHL, p. 188.

<sup>57</sup>DHL, p. 195.

<sup>58</sup>DHL, pp. 212-13.

<sup>59</sup>DHL, pp. 203-4.

<sup>60</sup>DHL, p. 179. This hostility to the erotic is even more pronounced in Graham Hough's reading of Women in Love. Hough

rarely fails to register his disapproval of Lawrence's erotic values claiming, like Leavis, that they interfere with his artistic achievements. He notes, for example, that the "frail and invalidish Birkin is not only to be spiritually dominant over the superb Gerald, he must also be a sexual success, while in the end Gerald is a sexual failure.... The element of compensation for his own failures and deficiencies is present in most of Lawrence's novels" (The Dark Sun, A Study of D.H. Lawrence [New York, 1956], p. 75). And of an explicitly erotic scene in the novel, Hough writes: "He will persist in trying to be explicit about sensuous-emotional ecstasies that had been better left alone.... This is the kind of thing one wishes Lawrence would not do" (pp. 81-2).

<sup>61</sup>DHL, p. 217.

<sup>62</sup>DHL, p. 217.

<sup>63</sup>D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love, ed. Charles L. Ross (London, 1982), p. 166. Subsequent references will be cited internally.

<sup>64</sup>DHL, p. 213.

<sup>65</sup>DHL, p. 215.

<sup>66</sup>Mark Spilka, The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence (Bloomington, Indiana, 1955), pp. 126-7.

<sup>67</sup>Spilka, p. 150.

<sup>68</sup>Spilka, p. 168.

<sup>69</sup>Spilka, p. 163.

<sup>70</sup>Matthew Arnold, "Count Leo Tolstoy" in Selected Criticism of Matthew Arnold, ed. C. Ricks (New York, 1972), p. 463.

<sup>71</sup>"The Study of Poetry" in Selected Criticism, p. 171.

<sup>72</sup>"The Study of Poetry," p. 179.

<sup>73</sup>"The Highest Powers of Poetry" in Selected Criticism, p. 65.

<sup>74</sup>T.E. Hulme, Speculations, ed. Herbert Read (London, 1924), p. 116.

<sup>75</sup>T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London, 1920), p. ix.

<sup>76</sup>Eliot, p. 58.

<sup>77</sup>The Great Tradition, p. 17.

<sup>78</sup>T.S. Eliot, "The victim and the sacrificial knife," Criterion (July 1931).

<sup>79</sup>Review of After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy by T.S. Eliot, Scrutiny III, 2 (1934) reprinted in The Importance of Scrutiny, ed. Eric Bentley (New York, 1964), p. 278.

<sup>80</sup>Rev. of After Strange Gods, pp. 282-3.

<sup>81</sup>"Matthew Arnold" in The Importance of Scrutiny, p. 91.

<sup>82</sup>"Matthew Arnold," p. 94.

<sup>83</sup>"Matthew Arnold," p. 96.

<sup>84</sup>Mark Schorer, "Women in Love and Death" in D.H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup>Schorer, p. 53.

<sup>86</sup>Schorer, p. 54.

<sup>87</sup>Frank Kermode, Lawrence (London, 1973), p. 57.

<sup>88</sup>Angelo Bertocci, "Symbolism in Women in Love" in A D.H. Lawrence Miscellany, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, Ill., 1959), p. 85.

<sup>89</sup>Vivas, p. 269.

<sup>90</sup>Vivas, p. 270.

<sup>91</sup>Vivas, p. 268.

<sup>92</sup>Vivas, p. 270.

<sup>93</sup>Vivas, pp. 271-2.

<sup>94</sup>Vivas, p. 271.

<sup>95</sup>Vivas, p. 241.

<sup>96</sup>Vivas, p. 239.

<sup>97</sup>Vivas, p. 237.

<sup>98</sup>Kermode, p. 64.

<sup>99</sup>Bertocci, p. 85.

<sup>100</sup>Vivas, p. 228.

<sup>101</sup>Ford, p. 175.

- 102 Ford, p. 200.
- 103 Kermode, pp. 60-61.
- 104 Stephen Miko, Toward 'Women in Love' and the Emergence of a Lawrentian Aesthetic (New Haven, Conn., 1971), p. 216.
- 105 Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 83-148.
- 106 Miko, p. 261.
- 107 Kermode, p. 56.
- 108 Vivas, p. 267.
- 109 Miko, p. 273.
- 110 Miko, p. 274.
- 111 Miko, p. 274.
- 112 Radnoti, 28-9.
- 113 Vivas, p. 254.
- 114 For a discussion of Lawrence's treatment of this distinction, see Chapter III.
- 115 Vivas, p. 257.
- 116 Kermode, p. 64.
- 117 Kermode, p. 68.
- 118 Bertocci, p. 101.
- 119 Bertocci, p. 98.
- 120 Vivas, p. 247.
- 121 Kermode, p. 65.
- 122 Vivas, p. 252.
- 123 Phoenix II, p. 276.
- 124 Miko, p. 216.
- 125 The Theory of the Novel, p. 73.

126 Kinkead-Weekes, p. 398.

127 Colin Clarke, River of Dissolution: D.H. Lawrence and English Romanticism (London, 1969), p. 73.

128 Clarke, p. 82.

129 Clarke, p. 89.

130 Clarke, p. 90.

131 Clarke, p. 109.

132 Kinkead-Weekes, p. 405.

133 Kinkead-Weekes, p. 406.

134 Kinkead-Weekes, p. 411.



CHAPTER III  
THE ONE BRIGHT BOOK OF LIFE:  
LAWRENCE'S THEORY OF THE NOVEL

I

There is scarcely a single major intellectual figure of the early twentieth century who did not experience what Georg Simmel called the "tragedy of culture"--the alienation of the cultivating subject from the objectivations of culture. The ideal harmony of "subjective" and "objective" culture, the animus of modern enlightened society, appeared to have collapsed in the face of modern rationalization. Western culture thus descended from hope to despair: culturally produced objects appeared to an introverted and privatized subject as things-in-themselves, expressing a rationality which, like nature, "is determinable only as the embodiment of recognized but senseless necessities and therefore it is incomprehensible, unknowable in its real substance."<sup>1</sup> No longer mediated by creative cultural activity, modern society appeared imprisoned within its own structures of alienation. To live in such a world seemed an impossibility but to attempt to live outside of it would only intensify those divisions between the self and the world which impoverish human experience. To be sure, this perception of modernity was expressed throughout the nineteenth century by such figures as Fichte, Hegel, and Marx. But for these writers the negativity of modernity was mediated by a belief in the capacity of the

subject as a rational, sensuous and historical being to transcend and transform the existent. With the increasingly evident decline of culturally sustaining referentials, clearly visible by the early twentieth century, the optimistic faith of Romantic thought, including its capacity for tragedy, would give way to a profound cynicism, pessimism, and desperation. "We have no future;" Lawrence would write, "neither for our hopes nor our aims nor our art."<sup>2</sup>

Lawrence's critique of modernity, and more generally his theory of the novel, is profoundly informed by the seeming impossibility of a future. Undoubtedly, the experience of the war precipitated Lawrence's belief in the imminent collapse of modern European culture. Indeed, he regarded the war as the outward expression of an inner disintegration; it was the culmination of a destructive process implicit in the very form of modern civilization. Lawrence puts it this way:

And in the horror of nullity--for the human being comes to have his own nullity in horror, he is terrified by his own incapacity to feel anything at all, he has a mad fear, at last, of his own self-consciousness--the modern man sets up the reverse process of katabolism, destructive sensation. He can no longer have any living productive feelings.... It is, naturally, a process of suicide. And it is just the same as ever: the self-conscious ego, the spirit, attacking the pristine body, the old Adam. But now the attack is direct. All the wildest Bohemians and profligates are only doing directly what their puritanical grandfathers did indirectly: killing the body of the old Adam. But now the lust is direct self-murder. It only needs a few more strides, and it is promiscuous murder, like the war.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the inner void of the modern psyche is the product of the

very form of "rational" culture: it "leaves us feeling lonesome inside." Refusing to abandon its premises, modern culture becomes suicidal, and thereby foregoes the very necessity for a future.

Lawrence believed that the origins of modern civilization lay in the development of self-consciousness. When the subject becomes conscious of itself, it develops an ego and seeks to separate itself from and dominate the "old Adam," the true, integrated individual who feels at home in the universe and knows no division between mind and body, thought and feeling. Through this original act of alienation, the first form of which was the separation of man from God, modern consciousness becomes constituted as the absolute division between Self and Other. Lawrence argues that the very positing of an ego is a response to the subject's consciousness of social isolation. Once the subject no longer has a "living relation with the circumambient universe," then the ego becomes divided between a pure subjective consciousness, for which no objects exist other than the subject, and a consciousness of objects and objectives which have no organic or spontaneous relationship to the subject. "The moment you split into subjective and objective consciousness," Lawrence argues, "then the whole becomes analyzable, and, in the last issue, dead."<sup>4</sup> However, as long as there was a conflict between the creative "old Adam" and the destructive self-conscious ego, then cultural creation was possible. By the early twentieth century this creative-destructive dialectic was no longer capable of growth, resulting in a profound cultural crisis. "We are the

sad results of a four-thousand-year effort to break the old Adam," Lawrence writes, "to domesticate him utterly. He is to a large extent broken and domesticated."<sup>5</sup> What specifically accounts for the crisis of modern culture, therefore, is the collapse of the creative imagination--the failure to breathe new life into formerly dynamic traditions. As a consequence, the critical and vital traditions of the nineteenth century become reduced to static and therefore meaningless conventions. A convention, Lawrence insists, only requires "the monotonous persistency of a parasite, the endless endurance of the craven." A tradition, on the other hand, requires a cultural subject who is alive and who has not become a mere producer and consumer of convention. Hence for Lawrence, the crisis of modern culture is the crisis of the individual.

At his or her essential core the true individual, Lawrence maintains, is innocent and naive, feels "at one with the great universe-continuum of space-time-life;" and this essential core cannot be subsumed by the categories of objective social reality. This psychology of the "free human individual" characterizes Hamlet as much as Voltaire, Oedipus as much as Darwin. For no matter how much the individual must struggle against the world, he retains this vital integrity; he is "at one with the living continuum of the universe." The modern "social being," on the other hand, because he has no vital relationship to objective reality and is socially isolated, falls into a state of fear and loses his "mysterious naive assurance." Obsessed with the idea of objectives and with self-consciousness, the individual's

core of identity splits into a subjective-objective reality but with no "vital clue." The free individual, by contrast, is capable of genuine feeling because he only recognizes difference within the living continuum. And because he is capable of establishing a living relation with the world, the free individual can deal successfully with it. For example, the free individual can develop a relationship with money without absorbing it into his very being; he can be "analytical and critical upon necessity." Knowledge, therefore, only becomes an aspect of being. The social being, on the other hand,

can only be analytical, critical, constructive but not creative, sensational but not passionate, emotional but without true feeling. It can know, but it cannot be. It is always made up of a duality, to which there is no clue. And the one half of the duality neutralizes, in the long run, the other half.<sup>6</sup>

This absence of the ability to feel, and hence to develop relationships with the world and others is, for Lawrence, the condition of modern consciousness. Knowledge separated from, and opposed to, being becomes nothingness: "Ex nihilo nihil fit!"

The premise of Lawrence's critique of modern, alienated society is the "old Adam." In spite of the considerable ambiguity of this term, the "old Adam" is not primarily a historical construct but an ontological one, albeit deduced from "creative civilizations." To be sure, Lawrence claims that pagan Egypt and Greece were the "last living terms," creating a science which "proceeds in terms of life and is established on data of living experience and sure intuition."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, although

Lawrence does not believe in evolutionary progress, he does not want to "revive dead kings, or dead sages." Rather, he turns to these early civilizations to find a new basis for life: "The spark is from dead wisdom, but the fire is life."<sup>8</sup> The spark he finds there is the instinctual and intuitive character of cultural creation. Lawrence claims that this vitality is transmitted through the myths and symbols of these early civilizations. As modern civilization loses its vitality and potency to arouse instinctual feelings, the power of these myths and symbols seems to intensify. Conversely, their affective power highlights the extent to which the destruction of instinctual and intuitive life lies at the core of the contemporary cultural crisis. "We have no language for feelings," he writes, "because our feelings do not exist for us."<sup>9</sup> Lawrence thus finds in myth a language for feelings, a language which has not been compromised by the modern discourse of rationality--the alienating discourse of the Other.

In general, the "old Adam" does not signify a past civilization--an ideal norm as in Eliot's use of the past--but a vital, if repressed, consciousness within the individual. Lawrence maintains that modern civilization is destructive because it has only cultivated the mind but without producing any real knowledge of the "dark continent" of feelings. To be sure, modern civilization has "domesticated" emotions, such as love and hate, but only because they can be seen and used. These emotions, however, can never be the source of human life precisely because they are domesticated, and hence fixed in their meaning. Rather, human

life is unfathomable: "we ourselves only exist because of the life that bounds and leaps into our limbs and our consciousness, from out of the original dark forest within us."<sup>10</sup> Lawrence argues that modern civilization has sought to tame the instinctual feelings, without realizing it has set in motion a destructive process which it cannot control:

Tameness, like alcohol, destroys its own creator. Tameness is an effect of control. But the tamed thing loses the power of control, in itself. It must be controlled from without. Man has pretty well tamed himself, and he calls this tameness civilization.... Tameness means the loss of the peculiar power of command. The tame are always commanded by the untame. Man has tamed himself, and so lost the power for command, the power to give himself direction. He has no choice in himself.<sup>11</sup>

There are two possible consequences of this process: either modern civilization will go insane because it has made a prison for itself or it will become destructive by degenerating into a "strange orgy of feelings." Lawrence, however, proposes an alternative: to cultivate feelings. He distinguishes this positive cultivation from modern sensualism which idealizes "a whole rank tangle of liberated, degenerate feelings" and from the psychoanalytic view that instinctual feelings represent a threat to civilization as such. For Lawrence, these two visions are simply different sides of the same coin. Both assume that feelings are perverted: whereas one idealizes perversion, the other sees the "old Adam" as a "monster of perversity, a bunch of engendering adders, horribly clotted." Both are visions of the "degenerate tame."

Lawrence's basis for cultural growth, or renewal, is the "old Adam" who is "for ever untamed" and from whom God has not separated. Although the "old Adam" predates the emergence of a transcendental God, and hence the duality of the modern psyche, Lawrence argues that it continues to live in "the dark paths of the veins of our body." The "old Adam" thus signifies a vital but autonomous consciousness; it expresses a living relation between the individual and the "circumambient universe," not the modern dualism of man and god, self and others, mind and body. As Lawrence puts it:

In the very darkest continent of the body there is God. And from Him issue the first dark rays of our feeling, wordless and utterly previous to words: the innermost rays, the first messengers, the primeval, honourable beasts of our being, whose voice echoes wordless and for ever wordless down the darkest avenues of the soul, but full of potent speech. Our own inner meaning.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the construct of the "old Adam" is bivalent: it refers simultaneously to a "pre-modern" civilization and to the instinctual life. At the same time, since the "old Adam" can never be tamed, it provides history with a continuity, specifying the inner meaning of creative vitality. In short, contained within the construct of the "old Adam" is Lawrence's theory of cultural creation, as expressed in art and life.

The terminus ad quo of Lawrence's theory of cultural creation is the capacity to feel with the body. Lawrence notes how the Egyptians "fumbled in the dark, and didn't quite know where they were. Like men in a dark room, they only felt their own existence surging in the darkness of other creatures."<sup>13</sup> To feel with



the body, and not to fear darkness is the mark of older civilizations; it is their "spark" of wisdom. Knowledge, art and human relationships are only possible on the basis of instincts and intuitions because "by intuition alone can man live and know either woman or world, and by intuition alone can he bring forth again images of magic awareness which we call art."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, to rely on instincts and intuitions is to become open to an experiential form of knowledge that cannot be rationalized because it can never be fully "seen." By contrast, modern civilization fears the body, requires light in order to see, and thus can only admit experience and art as mental representation, as visuality and verballity. Given its assumptions, therefore, modern civilization can only produce social beings incapable of creation and experience.

Lawrence argues that there is a necessary relationship between the capacity to feel and the capacity to create an enduring knowledge and civilization. The illusion of modern civilization is its belief that knowledge, and more generally consciousness, emerges only from the mind. When the mind becomes the referent of being and experience, the human being must necessarily lose the capacity to feel, and hence the capacity for cultural creation and experience. Lawrence puts it this way:

In modern civilization, we are all self-conscious. All our emotions are mental, self-conscious. Our passions are self-conscious. We are an intensely elaborate and intricate clockwork of nerves and brain. Nerves and brain, but still a clockwork. A mechanism, and hence incapable of experience.<sup>15</sup>

Although Lawrence's metaphorical language would seem to suggest a socio-historical explanation for the form of modern consciousness, he locates its origins in the "discovery" of knowledge. The tragedy of modern civilization is its confusion of mental or "cerebral" consciousness with consciousness in general. Lawrence terms this latter consciousness "spontaneous or sympathetic" and argues that mental consciousness is its derivative: the mind, "nerves and brain," is only an "apparatus by which we signal and register consciousness," not its source. Consciousness as such has its source in all parts of the body and, as long as they "give off a stream of consciousness," the human being is capable of spontaneous life, and hence of creating vital knowledge:

While the flow streams through us, from the blood to the heart, the bowls [sic], the viscera, then along the sympathetic system of nerves into our spontaneous minds, making us breathe, and see, and move, and be aware, and do things spontaneously, while this flow streams ceaselessly, we are lit up, we glow, we live.<sup>16</sup>

While in creative civilizations the mind is controlled and informed by this spontaneous, vital consciousness, in modern civilization the mind and the body are in conflict. To understand modern civilization, therefore, it is necessary to account for the process by which a derivative consciousness, capable of only producing ideas, comes to dominate an originary consciousness, the sphere of being. But since creative civilizations must necessarily produce knowledge, Lawrence must first elucidate the normative relationship between ideas and consciousness, a relationship constitutive not only of these civilizations but also

of the vital objectivations of modern civilization.

Using an electrical analogy, Lawrence argues that the brain can be understood as a "strange switchboard of consciousness." Its function is to transfer the spontaneous energy which passes through the body into "voluntary" energy; that is, the brain transfers one form of consciousness into another. Cognition, on the other hand, is the process whereby vital energy is trans-  
formed into ideas which Lawrence calls "units of transmuted consciousness." Memory, then, is the process by which "so much energy of consciousness is stored." But the converse is also true: when the vitality of ideas is not renewed, when their connection with the body is severed, then ideas become empty shells. Lawrence argues, for example, that most of the great ideas of modern civilization--love, self-sacrifice, conquest, success--  
"are practically all dead batteries, played out. They can't provoke any emotion or feeling or reaction in the spontaneous body, the old Adam."<sup>17</sup> The mind is thus made up of ideas, some alive and some dead or dying, but when it has accumulated a sufficient number of ideas, a new stage of life begins: an idea forms in the mind rather than being simply transmuted from the body. It is at this crucial stage that the self-conscious ego is born. Lawrence describes it this way:

The moment an idea forms in the mind, at that moment does the old integrity of the consciousness break. In the old myths, at that moment we lose our 'innocence,' we partake of the tree of knowledge, and we become 'aware of our nakedness': in short, self-conscious. The self becomes aware of itself, and then the fun begins, and then the trouble starts.<sup>18</sup>

At this point two alternatives are possible: either the self-conscious ego can seek to re-establish its natural harmony with the body or it can assert itself against the body. Lawrence argues that prior to the conception of the transcendental spirit, there had been no permanent internal or external conflict. For the last four thousand years, by contrast, we have been using ideas against our instinctual beings and this internal conflict is manifested externally in the conflicts between nations, social classes, and individuals. To understand modern civilization, therefore, one must account for the origins of the conflict between the self-conscious ego and the "old Adam."

When the spiritual self becomes aware of itself, it realizes that it is not primary but derived from the spontaneous consciousness, over which the spiritual self has no "originative power." The spiritual self knows that it can only frustrate or divert the spontaneous consciousness since it is only a reflection, just as "the moon is a luminary because the sun shines." Because the spiritual self is aware of its derivative status, however, it must egotistically assert itself by fracturing the wholeness of being. Lawrence thus writes: "The spirit is always egotistic. The greatest spiritual commands are all forms of egoism, usually inverted egoism, for deliberate humility, we are all aware, is a rabid form of egoism."<sup>19</sup> Since it has no originative power, furthermore, the spiritual self must rely on the secondary power of the idea, itself always more or less moralistic, in its conquest of spontaneous being. On the other hand, since dynamic ideas are necessarily vital because they derive from instinctual

consciousness, they have the "mysterious" power to arouse the vital emotions of shame, fear, anger, and sometimes joy. Shame is the first great idea of modern civilization, and hence its foundation; it is the means by which the body, itself necessarily vulnerable, can be conquered. And once the body is perceived as a limit to civilization, to spiritual development, the conditions for the split between mind and body have been established. The body then becomes a purely physical object which must be sustained, but it is no longer the source of being. This crucial fracturing of the subject's integrity, in turn, creates the basis for the introduction of the idea of work, understood here as the physical labour necessary to satisfy basic needs--the production and reproduction of the physical body. And just as survival becomes the object of human existence, so economic production becomes the basis of modern society. The ideas of shame and work have thus not only a moral content but an ideological and teleological content as well: the conquest of instinctual spontaneity can only be fulfilled in modern, capitalist society.

The critical transition between "Western" and modern capitalist civilization occurs, however, when the hatred of the body is complemented by the fear of sexuality. Although the hatred of the body is a consequence of the ego's need to assert itself, during this phase of its development the body is not yet feared. Sexuality as such is not problematical. Lawrence notes, for example, that in Greek drama "there is no recoil in horror from sex itself: Greek drama never shows us that. The horror, when

it is present in Greek tragedy, is against destiny, man caught in the toils of destiny."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Chaucer is "lovely and fearless." It is rather with the English Renaissance that the "grand rupture" starts in human consciousness when the horror of the body becomes sexual. In a rather unusual argument, Lawrence maintains that the morbidity of the English Renaissance can be explained by the spread of syphilis which "after it had entered the blood, it entered the consciousness, and hit the vital imagination."<sup>21</sup> The emergence of bourgeois morality, as represented by Puritanism, is a reaction not only to aristocratic morality in general, but also to the prevalence of sexual disease throughout the ruling classes, including the royal families. "If America sent us syphilis," Lawrence comments, "she got back the full recoil of the horror of it, in her puritanism."<sup>22</sup> The English political and social revolution, and hence the instituting of modern society, thus has its roots in a de-sexualized, crippled consciousness. For Lawrence, therefore, individualism does not primarily derive from capitalism but from the fear of sexual, instinctual being. He writes:

The terror-horror element struck a blow at our feeling of physical communion. In fact, it almost killed it. We have become ideal beings, creatures that exist in idea, to one another, rather than flesh-and-blood kin. And with the collapse of the feeling of physical, flesh-and-blood kinship, and the substitution of our ideal, social or political oneness, came the failing of our intuitive awareness, and the great unease, the nervousness of mankind. We are afraid of the intuition within us. We are afraid of the instincts, and we cut off our intuitional awareness from one another and the world.<sup>23</sup>

This deep-rooted alienation of modern individuals from their instincts and from others must, according to Lawrence, take on a moral form in order to link instinctual repression to the economic structure of modern society. Echoing Weber's "Protestant ethic" and de Mandeville's pragmatic cynicism, Lawrence maintains that bourgeois morality not only claims that sexual activity is evil but also promises a reward for its suppression. The sound working morality of the modern world thus becomes: "Be good and you'll have money. Be wicked, and you'll be penniless at last, and the good ones will have to offer you a little charity."<sup>24</sup> The effect of this "baited morality," moreover, is to surreptitiously enslave individuals to modern society by reducing their bodies to social objects, to mere physical entities or what Marx calls "labour power." It does this in two ways. First, because a social hierarchy becomes absolutized as a moral one--the good get all the goods--those groups or social classes at the lower end of the hierarchy interpret their inferior status as a moral failure. Ashamed of this failure, a feeling reinforced by the nonconformist sects, the lower classes could only atone by adopting a work ethic. Moreover, since this ethic could only take the form of "alienated labour" and cannot alter the relationship of the working class to society, it strengthens the very system which requires their inferiority. Further, since the morality is itself grounded in the fear and hatred of the instinctual body, the consciousness of shame can only reproduce this fear and hatred, thereby suppressing the possibility for developing new feelings and human relationships. Reflecting on his personal

experiences, Lawrence considered the working class "narrow, but still fairly deep and passionate, whereas the middle class is broad and shallow and passionless."<sup>25</sup> The more the working class was drawn into the orbit of middle class culture, however, the more this passion eroded. The depressing result for Lawrence is that the "masses are rapidly going insane."

The second effect of the "reward business" is more general. By fetishizing money not simply as a sign of moral virtue but also as the inner meaning of religion, modern society secularizes spiritual salvation as materialistic success. Lawrence writes: "Money, material salvation is the only salvation. What is salvation is God. Hence money is God."<sup>26</sup> Whereas in the first case money is the reward for work and a signifier of virtue, here money becomes a means for insuring oneself against the fear and horror of the body and intimate relationships. To pursue material aims thus becomes not only the means for creating the appearance of virtue; it also becomes an end in itself--a spiritual goal--and hence must inevitably destroy the critical and instinctual consciousness by which society is judged, life is given a direction, and "physical communion" is possible. Either way, the individual becomes reduced to a product of modern society, a "social being." In the first case, by internalizing the ethic of alienated work, the individual becomes reduced to a mechanical instrument; in the second case, by identifying the acquisition of money as a spiritual goal, the individual becomes reduced to a consumer, an empty vessel to be constantly filled with material goods. The reciprocity between the rationalization



of human activity as work and as consumption is, for Lawrence, "the great clue to bourgeois psychology": it explains how the body becomes reified, and hence only capable of sensations and emotions, but not instinctual feelings. Conversely, the objectifications of the mind--the products of "civilization"--can only achieve their autonomy and legitimacy when they are purely transcendental, radically separated from the body.

Lawrence understands the inner form of modern civilization as the dialectic of estrangement and domination of consciousness over being. With the formation of the self-conscious ego, the mind becomes separated or estranged from the body and objectifies itself in a transcendental realm as pure spirit. This original act of estrangement results in the creation of a transcendental God, i.e. of modern religion. Lawrence puts it this way: "In the oldest of the old Adam, was God: behind the dark wall of his breast, under the seal of the navel. Then man had a revulsion against himself, and God was separated off, lodged in outermost space."<sup>27</sup> Since God was originally inseparable from the human being, what is estranged is an essential part of the human being. Like Feuerbach, Lawrence inverts the Judaeo-Christian myth of creation: God is not a transcendental Being who exists prior to the human but an objectification of what is essentially human, now distinguished from mere nature--the physical, instinctual body. As a consequence, the human subject locates his true being in a pure, ideal consciousness outside of himself. Being thus becomes consciousness. In this original act of estrangement, however, consciousness is not yet rationalized; it embraces but

does not distinguish between the various aspects of mental consciousness. Beginning with Plato and Aristotle, however, a process was initiated, and completed by "that beastly Kant," whereby consciousness would be rationalized into the autonomous spheres of soul (religion), mind (philosophy), spirit (poetry), and brain (science). Each sphere, moreover, would claim to exclusively reveal the truth of the human being: "The philosopher ... because he can think, decides that nothing but thoughts matter.... To the scientist, I am dead. He puts under the microscope a bit of dead me, and calls it me. He takes me to pieces, and says first one piece, and then another piece is me."<sup>28</sup> However, since the motivation for modern civilization is not the glorification of knowledge per se but "the crucifixion of the procreative body," consciousness only becomes estranged from being in order to return as a power over it. And by virtue of its exclusive and moralistic character, modern civilization, in its drive towards rational domination, inevitably becomes absolutist. Lawrence writes:

Philosophy, religion, science, they are all of them busy nailing things down to get a stable equilibrium. Religion, with its nailed down One God, who says Thou shalt, Thou shan't, and hammers home every time; philosophy with its fixed ideas, and science with its 'laws': all of them, all the time, want to nail us on some tree or other.<sup>29</sup>

Modern civilization, therefore, is not only abstract and idealized; it is also a discourse of power which seeks to dominate the body through the absolute. Lawrence thus calls for an end to this "ugly imperialism of any absolute," the ultimate

consequence of which is physical as well as cultural suicide.

When the individual, however, is constituted through the body, itself grounded in feelings, he becomes a "man alive" and can achieve a true integrity. Because for the "man alive" there is no separation between thought and being, mind and body, but a "living continuum" within himself and between himself and the universe, his knowledge and experience have a totality which is greater than the sum of its parts. What is distinctive about this totality is its dynamism. "The whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another."<sup>30</sup> For Lawrence, life is dynamic because it is both movement and relation. Movement is the very modus vivendi of the universe because "each living thing, living or unliving, streams in its own odd, intertwining flux, and nothing, not even man nor the God of man, or anything that man has thought or felt or known, is fixed and abiding. All moves."<sup>31</sup> To be alive one must participate in this movement and, conversely, to be able to perceive and express movement requires an instinctual consciousness. Lawrence claims, for example, that from a purely visual perspective, African fetish statues appear to have no movement. "Yet one motionless wooden figure stirs more than all the Parthenon frieze. It sits in the place where no Kodak can snap it."<sup>32</sup> In a very general sense, however, modern civilization is not static. The very logic of capital and the doctrine of progress clearly indicate the extent to which modern civilization institutionalizes movement. Lawrence argues, however, that modern civilization absolutizes movement, directs it towards a particular telos

and a "particular direction ends in a cul-de-sac." When directed by the moral imperatives of the mind, rather than grounded on an ever changing instinctual centre, movement paradoxically becomes stasis.

What prevents life from becoming static is the instinctual consciousness which creates a need in the vital subject to achieve a living relation with others and the world. If the universe is always changing and the subject remains vital only by changing, then to be alive means to "maintain a true relationship to things we move with and amongst and against ... [and] nothing is true, or good, or right, except in its own living relatedness to its own circumambient universe, to the things that are in stream with it."<sup>33</sup> Lawrence argues that life is the achievement of this relatedness between subject and object, Self and Other. Or, to put it differently, human fulfillment consists in achieving a living relationship with a person, a society, a culture, nature, or even an activity. Morality is thus not an absolute imperative but "that delicate, for ever trembling and changing balance between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness."<sup>34</sup> To achieve this balance, which is constantly changing, can only be painful because each new relationship must compete with and displace old relationships. In modern civilization, however, the self-conscious ego seeks to deny or eliminate living relationships. It does this in two ways. The first way is to destroy the Other. This is "the old way of greed and selfishness" where the ego seeks to completely absorb the Other within itself. This

"positive tyranny" not only defines what Lawrence calls "passion" but is also characteristic of the social imaginaire of classical bourgeois capitalism. That is, the bourgeois perceives the universe, in all its various aspects, as private property to be used or appropriated for personal gain or self-esteem. To the bourgeois, therefore, the universe can only exist and have value as his property. Hence, the bourgeois's egotistical relationship to nature or to the working class is reproduced in his personal and sexual relationships: marriage is just as much a property relationship as the mine owner's relationship to the mines and the miners. The second way modern civilization denies relationships is a reaction to the first. Lawrence calls this way "negative tyranny." Here the Self yields to the Other, thereby denying itself. Lawrence maintains, however, that self-sacrifice or humility is only a thinly disguised assertion of the ego's vanity. Far from being noble, self-sacrifice is just as culpable as "positive tyranny" because it is only a reaction to, and does not therefore challenge, the fundamental assumptions of modern civilization. In his discussion of John Galsworthy's novels, for example, Lawrence notes that the social rebels are just as preoccupied with wealth and power as the positive materialists:

They are merely social beings behaving in an anti-social manner. They worship their own class, but they pretend to go one better and sneer at it. They are the Forsyte antis, feeling snobbish about snobbery. Nevertheless, they want to attract attention and make money. That is why they are anti.... If there is one thing more repulsive than the social being positive, it is the social being negative, the mere anti.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, self-sacrifice is essentially nihilistic: it signifies the abandonment of human potentiality for growth and change. To deny one's capacity for life, therefore, is to become resigned to modern civilization and thus share its fate.

Given the domination of the self-conscious ego in modern civilization, the very possibility of true relationship is precluded. Either the Self denies the Other or denies itself; both result in stasis or death. Lawrence's alternative to these forms is a "true relatedness" between Self and Other based on "courage" and "discipline": "Courage to accept the life-thrust from within oneself, and from the other person. Discipline, not to exceed oneself any more than one can help. Courage, when one has exceeded oneself, to accept the fact and not to whine about it."<sup>36</sup> Through the category of courage Lawrence seeks to preserve the positive aspects of the ego, its capacity for self-assertion, while simultaneously using the ego against itself, by requiring it to accept the "life-thrust" from the body and thus not to fear the Other. Hence courage is not only a redemption of the "old Adam" but also modernity--the unwillingness to accept fixed limits. On the other hand, courage must be subject to discipline in order to preserve a relationship with an Other, to control the ego's tendency towards appropriation.

Undoubtedly, Lawrence wants to establish a correspondence,, if not a causality, between the relationship between mind and body which is internal to the individual, and the external relationships between the individual and the universe. Nonetheless, it is clear that Lawrence regards the relationship between man

and woman as the central relationship for humanity. This relationship not only renders all others subsidiary but also embodies their truths and limitations. As he puts it:

And the relationship between man and woman will change for ever, and will be for ever the central clue to human life. It is the relation itself which is the quick and central clue to life, not the man, nor the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship, as a contingency.

It is no use thinking you can put a stamp on the relationship between man and woman, to try to keep it in the status quo. You can't. You might as well try to put a stamp on the rainbow or the rain.<sup>37</sup>

As "true relatedness," then, the heterosexual relationship is the very basis of life, and hence for a new civilization. At the same time, the heterosexual relationship is the achievement of modernity: it is a historical category. When Lawrence discusses pre-modern civilization, for example, the universe is defined as nature, God, and community. It is only when he is referring to modern society as such--which he begins with the Renaissance--does the heterosexual relationship become "the central clue to human life." Significantly, Lawrence's claim that the novel is "the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered" ultimately rests on the privileged position it accords to the heterosexual relationship. Thus it is through Lawrence's theory of the novel that not only his critique of, but also his ambivalence towards, modern culture becomes most visible. That is why the novel matters: it becomes the representative art form of modernity, as Lukacs emphasizes, because its "structural categories ... coincide with world as it is today."<sup>38</sup>

## II

Lawrence's theory of the novel is inseparable from his theory of modern culture. All the categories of "life"--instinctual consciousness, the living relation between "man and his circumambient universe," and the absolute, static, and dualistic nature of the self-conscious ego--are equally categories of the novel. At the same time, because the novel is "the highest form of expression so far attained," it objectifies life as form. To theorize the novel, moreover, is to theorize not only the conditions of cultural creation--what is required of the creative subject in order to write novels or "make" culture--but also the more general conditions of a creative culture. Lawrence's theory of the novel must thus be considered a theory of aesthetic literacy: it establishes the norms for imaginatively reading novels, and hence for responding vitally to new cultural forms. Just as the novel is the achievement of a living relation between the author and the universe, which necessarily transcends both terms, so the novel can only become a vital art form when readers are prepared to develop new and living relations with it. And, as with any other new relation, reading true novels will be painful since, by their very nature, they must "arouse a certain resistance, and, compel, at length, a certain acquiescence."<sup>39</sup> The novel, however, cannot be life itself; it can only give life an artistic form. As a consequence, the form and significance of the novel is not only determined by its relation to general cultural categories; its specificity as an art form is also



determined by its relation to aesthetic categories. Thus Lawrence requires a theory of art as a mediation between his theory of culture and his theory of the novel. To put it differently, the novel can only become the "one bright book of life" by first becoming art.

Lawrence was clearly intrigued with difference between painting and writing. "All my life I have from time to time gone back to paint," he writes, "because it gave me a form of delight that words can never give. Perhaps the joy in words goes deeper and is for that reason more unconscious. The conscious delight is certainly stronger in paint."<sup>40</sup> The very incapacity of the modern public to respond to art, however, serves to highlight the extent to which modern civilization has effectively eroded the sensual imagination, "conscious delight," central to artistic creation and aesthetic response. As Lawrence puts it:

The reality of substantial bodies can only be perceived by the imagination, and the imagination is a kindled state of consciousness in which intuitive awareness predominates. The plastic arts are all imagery, and the imagery is the body of our imaginative life, and our imaginative life is a great joy and fulfilment to us, for the imagination is a more powerful and more comprehensive flow of consciousness than our ordinary flow. In the flow of true imagination we know in full, mentally and physically at once, in a greater, enkindled awareness.<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, this imaginative consciousness is true of art in general. Lawrence notes, for example, how in poetry the "very adherence to rhyme and regular rhythm is a concession ... to the body, to the being and requirements of the body."<sup>42</sup> The prosaic character of the novel, by contrast, tends to disguise the

imagination's sensuality but only because it operates at a deeper level there and is, consequently, more pervasive, more "unconscious."<sup>43</sup> It is this imaginative sensuality which links art to life and which the novel must embody if it is to become art.

In spite of his regular appeals to ancient or "primitive" art, Lawrence's theory of art is distinctively modern. Art, according to Lawrence, is the creation of a living relation between the creative subject and objective reality, and cannot be reduced to one or the other. Art is a third thing, existing "in between everything, in the fourth dimension." As a living relation, art is autonomous and dynamic. "The business of art," he writes, "is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment."<sup>44</sup> Like the universe, art is constantly in motion--albeit a motion that must be felt and not merely seen--and like life, "art, which reveals or attains to another perfect relationship, will be for ever new." As a created totality, moreover, art can never be completed because this totality must be revealed "at the living moment." When art confines itself to reproducing old relationships, by contrast, it becomes cliché. Lawrence criticizes Raphael, for example, because he "does nothing more than dress up in gorgeous new dresses relationships which have already been experienced."<sup>45</sup> At the same time, because art is fundamentally a revelation of life itself--a "pure relation"--it expresses the essentiality of life; it gives us "the feeling of being beyond life or death." As life, finally, art necessarily becomes a challenge to society, to historically determined existential forms. As

Lawrence puts it: "As mankind is always struggling in the toils of old relationships, art is always ahead of the 'times,' which themselves are always far in the rear of the living moment."<sup>46</sup>

To illustrate his theory of art, Lawrence analyzes van Gogh's painting of sunflowers. This painting, he insists, is not a representation of "real objective reality." Only when the sunflowers are abstracted from the painting, and hence from their relation to van Gogh, do they become real and objective and, as such, better visualized by a camera. On the other hand, nor is the sunflower on the canvas merely means for representing van Gogh's subjectivity. Such an interpretation must inevitably deny not only the specificity of the sunflower but also the achieved relation between subject and object which constitutes the painting. Rather, the "vision on the canvas" is essentially and necessarily unknowable and intangible; its right to existence will always be "incommensurable" with the technical or material conditions of art (paint, canvas), with the artist (van Gogh), or with objective reality (the sunflower). The "vision on the canvas" only becomes art by transcending its determinations. Moreover, one cannot ascribe a determinate meaning or value to this vision: as an artistic vision, the signifiés of the sunflower will always remain indeterminate. Van Gogh's painting can thus be characterized as

a revelation of the perfected relation, at a certain moment, between a man and a sunflower. It is neither man-in-the-mirror nor flower-in-the-mirror, neither is it above or below or across anything. It is between everything, in the fourth dimension.<sup>47</sup>

This analysis can serve as an introduction to the modernity of Lawrence's aesthetics, and especially to his critique of representational aesthetics. What is absent from this analysis, however, is the conflict between the vital imagination and the self-conscious ego, the conflict between art and society. Because truly living relations must involve conflict and resistance, true art cannot aspire to a harmonious whole, a "stable equilibrium." Rather, art can only be true to itself by giving form to this conflict. For this reason, Cézanne is "the most interesting figure in modern art ... not so much because of his achievement as because of his struggle."<sup>48</sup>

Cézanne's significance is that he brought back "objective substance" into art, allowing it a separate and conceptually unmediated existence. To be sure, he was never able to successfully paint the human body but his apples were the "first real sign that man has made for several thousand years that he is willing to admit that matter actually exists."<sup>49</sup> By this very achievement Cézanne challenges the fundamental assumption of modern civilization that "matter is only a form of spirit." And it is this assumption that underlies the history of Western art since Greece "first broke the spell of 'darkness'." With the fragmentation of the "old Adam," art became progressively less interested in, and less aware of, the unknown and more preoccupied with the representation of known experience until it finally became an abstraction, "limited by no unknown." Lawrence claims that the increasing domination of the rational ego over the instinctual body took artistic form as the domination of light

over darkness. This domination culminated in photography on the one hand, and Impressionism on the other.

In its struggle against the body, the self-conscious ego seeks objective knowledge which it imposes on the body, finally closing the circle by rationally verifying that knowledge. Thus even before the invention of the camera, the self-conscious ego had already identified vision, which Lawrence calls "visuality," with the true image impregnated with light. And the more light that can be thrown on the object, the more objective the knowledge, and the more extensively the rational subject can dominate the object. At the same time, since self-consciousness itself presupposes the separation between subject and object, whereby isolation becomes an ontological condition humaine, the subject as self-conscious ego must be bathed in light, against which the objective universe can only function as background. The snapshot, then, becomes the modern icon. Lawrence puts it this way:

As vision developed towards the Kodak, man's idea of himself developed towards the snapshot. Primitive man simply didn't know what he was: he was always half in the dark. But we have learned to see, and each of us has a complete Kodak idea of himself.... And we are what is seen: each man to himself an identity, an isolated absolute, corresponding to a universe of isolated absolutes. A picture! A Kodak snap, in a universal film of snaps.<sup>50</sup>

The snapshot produces a double illusion. Because the subject is placed in the middle of the picture, the snapshot presents a false image of harmony between the subject and the objective universe, thereby disguising the essential instrumentalization of the universe as background. On the other hand, because the

camera claims for itself "universal vision," the snapshot is perceived as an objective representation of the subject. Yet this is only true because the subject has become, through the course of modern civilization, a reflection of the image--an abstraction. To the modern public, therefore, Cézanne's apples become immoral because they are not realistic: to recognize them depends on an instinctual vision, not on a mental visuality. "If you can see in the apple a bellyache and a knock on the head, and paint these in the image, among the prettiness," Lawrence writes, "then it is the death of the Kodak and the movies, and must be immoral."<sup>51</sup>

Cézanne's painting not only calls into question conventional perceptions of reality but, perhaps more significantly, the fundamental aesthetic values of modern civilization. Lawrence argues that the crucial turning point in the history of Western art occurs in the Renaissance with the collapse of religious into secular art. He considers Botticelli the last purely religious artist while Correggio and Raphael, in spite of the religious subject matter of their paintings, are distinctively secular artists. From this time on, art "passes from the naive, intuitive stage to the state of knowledge."<sup>52</sup> Correggio, for example, paints realistic figures based on his own knowledge and experience while Raphael "produces the geometric conception of the fundamental truth, departs from religion, from any God idea, and becomes philosophic."<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the deliberate denial of intuitive awareness and the de-eroticization of the imagination, did art

become fully secularized and vision "more optical, less intuitive." To be sure, French Rococo still bears witness to "some real imaginative glow;" it has not yet become obsessed with light and the need to escape from physical, sexual life. In England, however, the situation is quite different. In the portraits of Hogarth, Reynolds and Gainsborough, the body has been reduced to a mannequin on which to display expensive and beautiful clothes. Furthermore, the function of these clothes is not only to express the wealth and property of their owners but also, and more importantly, to cover and deny the body. To Lawrence, these paintings are the first tangible expression of a purely optical vision; they are the products of a rationalized imagination. He writes: "The imagination is quite dead. The optical vision, a sort of flashy coloured photography of the eye, is rampant."<sup>54</sup> And the same is true of the works of Etty, Sargent, Watts and the Leightons whose images remain merely optical, never managing to "seize us intuitively." Only Blake paints with "real intuitive awareness and solid instinctive feeling." English painters thus turn to landscape because it is "a form of escape for them, from the actual human body they so hate and fear, and it is an outlet for their perishing aesthetic desires."<sup>55</sup> What is significant about this genre, therefore, is its negativity; it is constituted by the ever present absence of a human subject and the denial of the sensual imagination.

Lawrence argues that all great art emerges from a "religious" impulse which must be felt in "the blood and bones," not merely thought or visually experienced. "A picture," he writes,

"lives with the life you put into it."<sup>56</sup> With the notable exception of Blake, however, the English artists could only think of religion in strictly intellectual terms, sharply demarcated from the instinctual body. That is why they painted "the social appearance of human beings, and hoped to give them wonderful eyes." And that is also why they "could think landscape religious, since it had no sensual reality."<sup>57</sup> At the same time, it was in landscape painting that the English were able to overcome their parochialism and discovered the significance of light. Turner is the major figure here because

he achieves pure light, pure and singing.... Such a picture as Norham Castle, Sunrise, where only the faintest shadow of life stains the light, is the last word that can be uttered, before the blazing and timeless silence.<sup>58</sup>

Whereas in Constable, for example, the objective universe becomes stylized as private property, albeit requiring domestication, in Turner it becomes infused with light and no longer offers any resistance to the rational ego. Or, to put it differently, landscape painting represents the rationalization of nature just as, in socio-historical terms, capitalism represents the socialization of reason.

Representation is not an innocent term in Lawrence's aesthetics; it is the opposite of creation. Genuine art can only be created with the whole consciousness, "working together in unison and oneness: instinct, intuition, mind, intellect all fused into one complete consciousness, and grasping ... a complete truth, or a complete vision, or a complete revelation in sound."<sup>59</sup> At



the same time, in the artistic imagination intuitive and instinctual awareness must predominate, albeit without negating the necessary function of the mind. Only on the basis of the vital imagination can the artist create a living relation between himself or herself and the objective universe. And because an artistic truth must be felt and never fully known, it is also a religious truth. For this reason art will always be "ahead of the 'times'" and can live both in and beyond space and time. Conversely, an art work that can be known, such that its meaning can be fixed and determined, no longer lives. A great painting, then, is one "into which you can look deeper and deeper and get a more profound experience every time."<sup>60</sup> At the same time, this whole imaginative consciousness, "not merely the mind alone, or merely the body," is also required of the receptive subject in order to genuinely appreciate the work of art. Representational art, by contrast, emerges from the limited consciousness of the ego which always establishes itself as the fixed referent of the work of art. The self-conscious ego, Lawrence argues, must always mediate its relation to the Other through the concept or idea. Hence the modern artist can neither capture the Other's otherness nor achieve a living relation with that Other. Rather, because modern artists are dominated by their mental consciousness, they can only represent the concept. Artistic virtuosity, in this respect, is nothing less than the ability to make "the intuitions and instincts subserve some mental concept;" it is the ability to use the mind to "force" the reaction of the body. Since the mind can only represent itself, therefore, its typical

artistic products are the cliché, the "worn-out memory that has no more emotional or intuitive root," or the novelty, a "new compound of clichés." Similarly, the modern receptive subject seeks by mind alone to grasp the work of art and "in a masturbating fashion [to provoke] the body into an ecstasized response."<sup>61</sup> This produced ecstasy, however, is a momentary thrill and will die out "into ash and more ash." As a consequence, the aesthetic appetite of the modern public can only be satisfied with greater quantities of novelty which the modern artist is more than willing to produce. Lawrence thus concludes his indictment of modern art: "The masturbating consciousness produces all kinds of novelties, which thrill for the moment, then go very dead. It cannot produce a single genuinely new utterance."<sup>62</sup>

Lawrence criticizes the paintings of Gainsborough or Constable because their meanings are fixed: they are representations either of a known reality or of the ego's desire to deny the body. Similarly, Turner's very preoccupation with light is a representation of a pure spirituality, stained by "only the faintest shadow of life." Regardless of their technical excellence, therefore, Turner's paintings never achieve a living relation; they are always dominated by the need to spiritualize nature. Lawrence observes a similar tendency in French Realism. Here the body as such is not denied--Courbet, Daumier, Dégas, and Renoir did, after all, paint the human body. And yet the fear and hatred of the body remains. Now, however, the body is represented as a thing to be satirized (Daumier), used for work (Courbet), or as merely a wonderful instrument (Dégas). In

short, all these artists reify the body and hence deny its vitality. "They prefer," Lawrence writes, "as it were, to industrialize it. They deny it the best imaginative existence."<sup>63</sup> And once the body has been reified as an industrial commodity, it is a short, but highly significant, step for Impressionism to finally dissolve the body with its discovery of "pure light, pure colour, pure bodilessness." Lawrence argues that Impressionism is the triumph of representational art because the discovery of light and colour finally emancipate the spirit "from the tyranny of solidity and the menace of mass-form ... from the dark procreative body."<sup>64</sup> Yet this triumph is short-lived: having perfected optical vision, Impressionism "fell at once into cliché."

Led by Cézanne, Post-Impressionism sought to re-embodiment art by returning to "form and substance and thereness, instead of delicious nowhere-ness." Cézanne wanted to escape from the "sky-blue prison" of the optical cliché, and to express the living substantiality of the body, but he couldn't. He couldn't escape the domination of his own ego and was tortured all his life by his inability to paint the human body, especially the female body. "Try as he might," Lawrence writes, "women remained a known cliché to him, and he couldn't break through the concept obsession to get at the intuitive awareness of her."<sup>65</sup> Nor was this "concept obsession" restricted to the human body: all of Cézanne's paintings express his lifelong fight with the cliché--even his landscapes, painted at the end of his life, are satires of the landscape cliché. Cézanne was a bourgeois, impressed with grandeur and the Baroque, but he was also Provencal and could

never fully abandon his instinctual vitality, his imagination. As a bourgeois, Cézanne felt alienated from his intuitive body but as an artist he wanted to "know the world through his instincts and intuitions." Initially, Cézanne sought to achieve this instinctual and intuitive knowledge through an act of will. His early paintings, modelled on Veronese and Tintoretto, were failures not because of Cézanne's technical inability, but "because he was trying with his mental consciousness to do something which his living Provencal body didn't want to do, or couldn't do."<sup>66</sup> Lawrence insists that Cézanne was quite capable of drawing and, therefore, his conflict was not, as criticism assumes, with his medium. Rather, his conflict was between his mind and his intuition and instinct. These early paintings failed, Lawrence claims, because they "represented a smashed, mauled cliché, terribly knocked about." While his mind was ready to accept the cliché, Cézanne's imagination wanted a "new realization." These paintings, moreover, are witness to an internal struggle which would dominate most of his subsequent painting. Lawrence argues that only in his still-life pictures did Cézanne learn that cliché could be avoided by "just leaving gaps through which it fell into nothingness." These still-life pictures--a "few apples and kitchen pots"--do more, however, than avoid the cliché; they give us a "triumphant and rich intuitive vision." Cézanne was not against representation per se; he only wanted it "more true to life," not in the direction of accuracy but towards a new sense of vision, towards "a mode of consciousness that was predominantly intuitive, the awareness of

touch." With his apples he achieved this consciousness; with them Cézanne was able to express not only what can be seen but also what cannot be seen. This achievement, Lawrence argues, is Cézanne's revolution:

For the intuitive apperception of the apple is so tan-  
gibly aware of the apple that it is aware of it all  
round, not just of the front. The eye sees only  
fronts, and the mind, on the whole, is satisfied with  
fronts. But the intuition needs all-aroundness, and  
the instinct needs insidiness. The true imagination is  
for ever curving round to the other side, to the back  
of presented appearance.<sup>67</sup>

Art can only become "true" representation, therefore, when it achieves "all-aroundness" and "insidiness," and this totality can only be successfully achieved by challenging and displacing "our present mode of mental-visual consciousness." Herein lies the very essence of Lawrence's aesthetics: art's achievement of life requires both a new vision and a critique of modern cliché, of modern consciousness. As a new vision, moreover, art can never be imitated: "Every man must create it new and different out of himself: new and different."<sup>68</sup> And it is on this dual basis of vision and critique that Lawrence constructs a theory of the novel.

### III

Lawrence leaves no doubt that he considers the novel the most demanding and most developed art form to have emerged from modern civilization. In the first place, it must carry the burden of modern civilization--the author's egotism or didacticism and the increasingly alienated character of modern existence.

Lawrence argues, for example, that any novel of importance has a "purpose" or "metaphysic" which orients the author towards the world in particular ways. An artistically successful novel is one in which the novelist has been able to reconcile a necessarily abstract theory of life with a "living sense of being." And this reconciliation is only possible if the novelist can discover and re-cover both within himself or herself and within the alienated forms of modern existence an imaginative vitality. The novel is the artistic form of this achieved vitality. In the second place, due to the very invisibility of the novel's vision--a vision that hides behind words--and the necessity to balance instinctual intensivity and intuitive extensivity, the formal requirements of the novel, compared to other art forms, are more complex and more problematical. Unlike other art forms, Lawrence writes, "the novel most of all demands the trembling and oscillating of the balance."<sup>69</sup> In other literary genres, by contrast, a certain degree of one-sidedness is permissible without calling the genre itself into question. In drama, for example, Hamlet can be a hero, but in a novel he would be "a suspicious character, like Dostoevsky's Idiot." Through his concept of ethical "justice," Lukács has also emphasized how the novel must maintain a "fluctuating but firm balance." The novel, he claims, is threatened by a two-fold danger: if the novel only strives for an extensive totality, then it sacrifices life as immanent meaning, but if it seeks to give form only to an intensive totality, to the pure desires of the isolated subject, then the world collapses into insubstantiality and life becomes

abstract. Lukács writes:

The fragility of the world may be superficially disguised but it cannot be abolished; consequently this fragility will appear in the novel as unprocessed raw material, whose weak cohesion will have been destroyed. In either case the structure remains abstract: the abstract basis of the novel assumes form as a result of the abstraction seeing through itself; the immanence of meaning required by the form is attained precisely when the author goes all the way, ruthlessly, towards exposing its absence.<sup>70</sup>

The novel, then, requires an integrity between its different parts but this integrity can only be achieved when the author recognizes the fragmented nature of the world. As a consequence, a true integrity, a created totality, can never result from the mere representation of the empirical world or of the isolated subject; indeed, such a representation would threaten the very efficacy of the novel.

Lawrence believed that the challenge of the novel was to provide modern society with new feelings appropriate for a new epoch, the form of which could only be glimpsed from the present. Uncharacteristically, he finds in the Greek philosophers a clue to the possible form of "what-next books":

Plato's Dialogues are queer little novels. It seems to me it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split. They used to be one, right from the days of myth. Then they went and parted, like a nagging married couple, with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and that beastly Kant. So the novel went sloppy, and philosophy went abstract-dry. The two should come together again--in the novel.<sup>71</sup>

It is on this basis that the novel has a future: by presenting new feelings and new conceptions but without relying on

abstractions. For the novel to break out of the "emotional rut" of the present, however, it must anticipate the resistance of a public accustomed to the suffocating atmosphere of modernity. Although Lawrence believed that the conflict between the novel and the public was necessary, he was confident that the public would eventually respond to the new feelings of the novel, gradually coming to recognize that the reified structures of modernity were not life itself. Regardless of whether this optimistic faith is justified, it is based on Lawrence's belief that the need for new feelings can only be acknowledged when the public recognizes its entrapment within the structures of modernity. For Lawrence, this entrapment is most visible in the "modern" novel. Its critique, therefore, is the precondition for the novel to become the "one bright book of life."

Due to its constitutive fragility, the novel is particularly vulnerable to the rationalizing dynamic of modernity. Lawrence claims that the history of the novel bears witness to its flexibility and vitality. From Balzac to Hardy, the novel has succeeded in accommodating and transcending the didacticism of the self-conscious ego. At the same time, this success was only possible because in the true novel there is no conflict between "passional inspiration" and "purpose." By comparison, the modern novel has fared less well. Far from being the "one bright book of life," the modern novel has fallen victim to the ego's need for self-representation. Thus the very efficacy of the novel as an aesthetico-cultural form is threatened. This judgement applies equally to the "serious" and to the "popular" novel; they



are like Siamese twins:

On the one hand, the pale-faced, high-browed, earnest novel, which you have to take seriously; on the other, that smirking, rather plausible hussy, the popular novel.<sup>72</sup>

Regardless of their different styles and sensibilities, both genres of the modern novel abandon creation for production, imagination for representation, and a living relation for a limited and static consciousness. While the serious novel represents a self-consciousness in "such fine bits that the bits are most of them invisible, and you have to go by the smell," the popular novel represents a conventional moralism which increasingly degenerates into pornography. At the same time, the novel's reduction to mere representationality is complemented by the affirmative character of modern aesthetic literacy. The typical readers of both genres do not seek a living relation with the novel but rather perceive it as a mirror of themselves. The circuit of the modern novel is thus completed: cultural creation becomes commodity production while creative culture becomes the passive activity of consumption.

What is distinctive about the popular novel is its moral ambiguity. Because it is "always ostensibly on the side of the angels," the popular novel gives itself the license to exaggerate the moral qualities of its characters to the extent that they become ideal types, and hence invulnerable to criticism. Although in the popular novel virtue must triumph over evil, its very moral idealism permits the presentation of various forms of

sadomasochism--a sheik with a whip up his sleeve and a heroine with welts on her back. Significantly, in the popular novel virtue does not have to fully triumph over evil: the whip is just hidden while the welts remain "still faintly visible." The unquestioned moral credentials of the popular novel can thus permit the inversion of its moral categories, thereby revealing the extent to which conventional morality has an essentially pornographic content and sensibility. And since the popular novel never explicitly questions its own assumptions, it can justify "the most corrupt feelings, so long as they are conventionally pure."<sup>73</sup> Nor is this moral ambiguity restricted to fantasy; it is equally present in more "social" novels like Babbitt. Here material success can be simultaneously a sign of moral virtue and a cause for guilt and self-pity.

The moral ambiguity of the popular novel is not arbitrary. Rather, its ideological function is to indulge and perpetuate the public's need for sensation without ever questioning, let alone transforming, that need. Lawrence thus characterizes the popular novel as follows:

Always the same sort of baking-powder gas to make you rise: the soda counteracting the cream of tartar, and the tartar counteracted by the soda. Sheik heroines, duly whipped, wildly adored. Babbitts with solid fortunes, weeping from self-pity.... Adolescence which can't grow up. Got into the self-conscious rut and going crazy, quite crazy in it.<sup>74</sup>

Lawrence likens the popular novel to gossip not only because it excites morally questionable feelings, but also because it is essentially humiliating. "The public," he writes, "responds

now only to an appeal to its vices."<sup>75</sup> As in his critique of photography, Lawrence argues that the reader perceives the popular novel as a true representation, albeit of a subjective reality, and thus identifies with the characters. This identification is made possible because the modern reader has become a fictionalized being, a product of mass culture. Thus, just as the popular novel is an exaggerated representation of the ambiguous moral absolutes of the modern ego, so the reader, lacking an integrated and imaginative consciousness, assumes the qualities of that representation. Accordingly, Lawrence feels that popular novelists have done "unspeakable damage to ordinary people;" they have used the powerfully affective forms of moral ideas and fiction against an increasingly vulnerable public. In this sense, as well as in its legitimation of sexual and social violence, the popular novel is immoral: it presents a fictionalized world in which moral values not only predominate but achieve a "false" harmony. Furthermore, through its commercial appeal to the established and reified aesthetic tastes of the reading public, the popular novel prevents, in principle, any possible relation between the reader and itself. For this reason, Lawrence claims, the "'sweet' novel is more falsified, and more immoral, than the blood-and-thunder novel."<sup>76</sup> Finally, because it lacks any sense of living relations other than, at best, a "réchauffée of old relationships," the popular novel must constantly disappear into nothingness, "the dead burying the dead with surprising speed."

If the true novel is the art form of "virile maturity," as

Lukács maintains, and the popular novel is the art form of self-indulgent adolescence, then the modern serious novel is the art form of "senile precocity ... [which] has never quite grown to years of discretion."<sup>77</sup> Lawrence argues that the modern novelist's preoccupation with self-consciousness is nihilistic; it is a resignation to the very impossibility of human life. That is, since human life is inseparable from human relationships, to render the individual as a purely abstract and psychological entity amounts to the death of the individual, and hence the novel. Lawrence notes that to reveal "true and vivid relationships" has never been an easy task for novelists because of their limited and abstract conception of the human being. In Crime and Punishment, for example, Dostoevsky presents an "actual" relationship between the murderer and the old woman, but it is "never quite real." There is no balance between the two characters; they are merely two isolated individuals who come into contact with each other. Contrary to Lukács, therefore, Lawrence rejects the notion that the isolated individual can be the hero of the novel. He writes:

In every great novel, who is the hero of the novel? Not any of the characters, but some unnamed and nameless flame behind them all.... 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. If you are too personal, too human, the flicker fades out, leaving you with something awfully lifelike, and as lifeless as most people are.<sup>78</sup>

The individual can only be presented in the novel, in other words, in terms of a broader conception of life which will always

transcend the particularity of a character. This understanding of a character's contingency has always been problematical for the novelist. Lawrence criticizes Tolstoy in War and Peace, for example, because not only does he make Pierre too limited and too human, but he also makes him an ideal norm for all individuals. Anna Karenina, by contrast, "gives Vronsky a kick in the behind and knocks old Leo's teeth out, and leaves us to learn."<sup>79</sup> With Conrad, Joyce, and Proust, however, the tendency to make the isolated individual the exclusive subject of the novel is no longer challenged by the novels themselves. "The modern novelist is possessed, hag-ridden, by such a stale old 'purpose,' or idea-of-himself," Lawrence writes, "that his inspiration succumbs."<sup>80</sup> In the modern novel, consequently, the individual is presented as completely alone, deprived of any objects other than his or her self-consciousness.

Lawrence insists that for the modern novelist there can be "no real object, there is only subject.... The author never escapes from himself, he pads along within the vicious circle of himself."<sup>81</sup> The novel is reduced to a representation, therefore, of a limited consciousness, no longer informed by a vital "passional inspiration." For Lawrence, contemporary culture is no longer characterized merely by the conflict between mind and body. Rather, contemporary culture effects a double alienation: the mind, having become alienated from being, turns on itself, and becomes self-analytical. Moreover, since the subject has no object other than itself, the modern novelist becomes fascinated with all the minute details of the alienated subject's existence:

all the sensations, thoughts, and quotidian details registered by the mind become further subjected to analysis, thereby intensifying an already introverted consciousness. For Lawrence, this is not a true representation of life; it is the representation of the author's purpose or abstract conception of life, or of mere social existence. By faithfully representing "life as it is," human failure becomes a foregone conclusion. The hero of the modern novel, therefore, becomes a representation not of a self-consciousness as such, but of a failed self-consciousness. Accordingly, Lawrence characterizes modern novelists as "pathetic or sympathetic or antipathetic little Jesuses accomplis or manqués" because they have resigned themselves to their inevitable "crucifixion." Once this fatalism becomes accepted as the condition humaine, and modern existence becomes identified with life in general, then the novelist becomes a mere commentator or observer on the death agony of the individual. As a result, the novel can no longer claim any universality or autonomy: it becomes complicit in the very destructiveness of modern civilization. From this perspective, the very concern of Joyce and Proust with self-consciousness and with the minute details of everyday life is nothing less than a fascination with, and resignation to, the death of modern culture, and of the novel. Lawrence writes:

You can hear the death-rattle in their throats. They can hear it themselves. They are listening to it with acute interest, trying to discover whether the intervals are minor thirds or major fourths.... So there you have the 'serious' novel, dying in a very long-drawn-out fourteen volume death-agony and, absorbedly, childishly interested in the phenomenon.<sup>82</sup>

As with popular culture, the public sees itself in these novels; it becomes "frenziedly absorbed in the application of the author's discoveries to their own reaction" to life. And this is more than self-indulgent consumption; it is "almost post-mortem behaviour."

Lawrence's critique of the modern novel highlights two central aspects of modern culture. First, beneath its sentimentalism and intellectualism lies a deep-rooted desperation, the forms of which are self-indulgent violence and resigned fatalism. In spite of the modern public's enthusiasm for the modern novel, this faintly concealed desperation can only further fracture an already fractured psyche. As a consequence, the modern individual is less capable of forming viable human relationships; it thus turns to the novel for consolation and affirmation. Second, in reaction to this desperation, the ego asserts itself even more powerfully against those instinctual feelings which provide the basis for a true, imaginative life. This heightened desperation of modern culture, in turn, generates a defensive and authoritarian reaction which takes artistic form in the novel as didacticism: both the popular and serious novels become representations of their authors' absolute conceptions of life. And, as Lawrence insists, "when the novelist has his thumb in the pan, the novel becomes an unparalleled perverter of men and women."<sup>83</sup>

Against the modern propensity for rational absolutes, Lawrence proposes a notion of truth as historical and contextual. "Everything is true in its own time, place and circumstance," he claims, "and untrue outside of its own time, place and

circumstance," he claims, "and untrue outside of its own time, place and circumstance."<sup>84</sup> This is the universal truth of the novel and the basis of its claim to art. Unlike other literary genres, philosophy, religion and science, truth in the novel is relative to context, and cannot be abstracted from context without becoming untrue. Conversely, new forms of knowledge can never be true abstractly, but only in relation to context. To present a true relatedness, therefore, the novelist cannot allow one aspect to dominate over others. Love, for example, is a "great emotion" but when presented as the only important emotion, then it becomes an absolute with the result that the novel becomes a treatise. Since to be alive means to be capable of all emotions, a character in a novel cannot be restricted to one emotion and continue to live. As Lawrence puts it:

In the novel, the characters can do nothing but live. If they keep on being good, according to pattern, or bad, according to pattern, or even volatile, according to pattern, they cease to live, and the novel falls dead. A character in a novel has got to live, or it is nothing.<sup>85</sup>

A character, however, should not be considered merely a vessel for diverse but arbitrary thoughts and emotions. An artistically successful character must retain a certain integrity not only in his or her relationships with others, but also in the inter-relationships between his or her emotions and actions. Just as "life is so made that opposites sway about a trembling centre of balance," so the novelist must seek to achieve not a stable equilibrium, or static harmony, but "the trembling and



oscillating of the balance." A relation, in other words, can only be true and vital if it changes. Hence, the novelist can only achieve a true relation by giving form to the dynamic changes within relations; that is, the novelist must allow for new and unpredictable developments while simultaneously creating a structure for them. "We must balance as we go," Lawrence stresses. At the same time, this balance cannot be achieved abstractly; it must be grounded in the novelist's instinctual and intuitive sense of life. The knowledge that the novel makes possible, then, is that thoughts and ideas are only true instinctually and intuitively, in relation to the body. Thus Lawrence writes:

... if you pick up a novel, you realize immediately that infinity is just a handle to this self-same jug of a body of mine: while as for knowing if I find my finger in the fire, I know that fire burns with a knowledge so empathetic and vital, it leaves Nirvana merely a conjecture.<sup>86</sup>

In the novel this knowledge finds expression through what Lawrence calls the "quickness" of the characters, through the "God-flame" which flickers behind their actions, words, and gestures. It is this quickness that informs a character's being and relations to the world of the novel. Finally, it is this quickness that prevents an extensive totality--the presentation of an extensive range of emotions and relations--from becoming abstract. Quickness, therefore, holds a relation together, keeps it alive, and thus prevents the domination of the absolute. "And the honour, which the novel demands of you," writes Lawrence, "is only

that you shall be true to the flame that leaps in you."<sup>87</sup> The significance of the novel is thus its wholeness: its achievement of an autonomy, whereby truth becomes contextual, and of an intensive and extensive totality. It is only because the novel can make the "whole man alive tremble," therefore, that it can claim to be "the one bright book of life." On the basis of this axiom, the "supreme old novels" are the Bible, especially the Old Testament, Homer, and Shakespeare: they "affect the whole man alive, they do not just stimulate growth in one direction."<sup>88</sup> By their very wholeness and vitality, these works are precursors to the novel; they are the expression of an imagination which is greater and more embracing than a philosophy or purpose.

What gives the novel its specificity and modernity, however, is not just its concept of truth as context, as history, and hence its opposition to rational or transcendent absolutes; even more importantly, the novel specifies human relationships, and especially the sexual relationship between man and woman, as its essential subject matter, or what Lukács would call its "inner form." Since it is in the heterosexual relationship that the "quick and central clue to life" is given, then the novel can only become life by revealing the "changing rainbow" of that relationship. Although Lawrence is opposed to establishing norms for the heterosexual relationship, he is unequivocal about its centrality. "For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything," he writes, "the wholeness of man, the wholeness of woman, man alive, and live woman."<sup>89</sup> Since life, however, is defined not as the man or the woman, but the

relation itself, Lawrence's conception of the novel requires an appropriate conception of character. In his analysis of the books of the Old Testament, which Lawrence considered novels, he claims that their true hero or "pivotal interest" is not a particular character but God. In the modern novel, however, God becomes secularized as the imaginative consciousness of the creative artist. Moreover, this is essentially how Lawrence defines his attitude to his own characters. In his now famous, but often misunderstood, letter to Edward Garnett, Lawrence claims that traditionally character has been conceived "in a certain moral scheme" which, because it depends on the "old stable ego," cannot be separated from the alienating structure of modern civilization. Understood this way, therefore, character will always be a representation of the author's purpose. Lawrence's conception of character is quite different:

There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element.<sup>90</sup>

To be sure, Lawrence is here explaining his own artistic purpose, especially as it applies to The Rainbow and Women in Love. Subsequently, however, he would take this concept of character to be a general principle of the novel. It would be the basis by which he could not only construct a history of the novel, claiming its origins lay with the Bible, Homer, and Shakespeare; it would also be the basis of his critique of the contemporary novel. Indeed, Lawrence's conception of character is the very core of

his theory of the novel. On the one hand, this other ego links the novel form to the author's "passional inspiration." As such, the ego transcends and underlies the particularity of a character or a relation. On the other hand, this ego can only find tangible expression through the sexual relationships between a man and a woman; it, therefore, expresses life itself. Only because this ego has its source in "the passional secret places of life" --in the instinctual and intuitive imagination of the novelist and in that transindividual consciousness which makes a true human relationship possible--can the novel "inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and ... lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead."<sup>91</sup> By identifying the heterosexual relationship as the "new central clue to life," and by according it a privileged position in the novel, Lawrence clarifies what distinguishes the novel from its precursors--the "supreme old novels." At the same time, the heterosexual relationship links the novel to modernity. Since the heterosexual relationship, more than any other relationship, must change in order to remain vital and, since the truth of the novel as a living relation is revealed in its capacity to give artistic form to life, then the novel is immanently historical: it shows that life qua sexual relationships can only be by becoming.

Implicit in Lawrence's argument is a distinction between modernity, understood as "life" in which truth is defined historically and contextually, and modern civilization which is logocentric, and which defines truth in terms of absolutes. What is

significant about the novel is that it will not permit absolutes, exposing them as limitations of the author or character. "If you try to nail anything down, in the novel," Lawrence argues, "either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail."<sup>92</sup> In this sense, the novel is not just creation; it is also critique. Put more generally, Lawrence theorizes the novel in terms of the antinomies of history and reason. Since the Enlightenment, reason has been double-edged. Prior to modernity, reason was identified with the rule, itself essentially based on the authority of tradition. The Enlightenment sought to restrict the power and arbitrary use of authority by replacing rule with law--an abstract and universal norm. Through the concept of law, reason performed an essentially protective and defensive function in relation to both the sphere of politics and philosophical discourse. On the other hand, however, in modern society reason also became an end in itself, finding its most significant expression as the capitalist imaginaire: the unlimited expansion of rational mastery. Reason is thus no longer merely defensive; it becomes not only teleological, insofar as it establishes finite goals of socio-cultural development, but also ideological--as a principle of domination. Alongside reason, however, modern society seeks to institute itself as a historical society, a society which cannot accept limits fixed by either tradition or reason.<sup>93</sup> Modernity, therefore, is antinomic: it is torn between its historicity, whereby truth and value are open-ended and contextually relative, and its rationality, whereby human knowledge and experience have fixed a priori limits.

In his theory of the novel, Lawrence identifies reason with purpose, the form of the self-conscious ego, and history with imagination, the form of the "old Adam." However necessary purpose is for artistic creation, Lawrence leaves no doubt that the novel ultimately takes the side of history because it depends on "passional inspiration" for its vitality and being. Moreover, as a condition of its vitality, the novel must subject reason to criticism, exposing its limited nature. The greatness of the novel resides not only in its capacity for achieving a living relation, but also for critique: "It won't let you tell didactic lies, and put them over."<sup>94</sup> To illustrate this claim, Lawrence draws a comparison between the novel and Plato's Dialogues, the New Testament, and Dante's Divine Comedy. All these latter works tend to absolutize an ideal, and therefore limited, aspect of life. For Plato it is the mind itself; for the New Testament it is the self-sacrificing humility of Christ; and for Dante it is the spiritualization of woman. What concerns Lawrence here is not the ideal itself but that these works, by their very absoluteness, must keep "some vital fact dark." Were the same works made into novels, then the ideal would have to be subject to criticism: Plato would have to be reminded of his physical body; Christ would have to accept worldly goods; and Dante would have to acknowledge his sexuality. By its very form, therefore, the novel is a critique: by bringing the ideal into a relation with the real, it becomes a critique of the ideal. From this perspective, Anna Karenina is a great novel not because of Tolstoy's purpose, but because the novel subjects that purpose to criticism.

Lawrence argues, for example, that Tolstoy's purpose is to make Vronsky a tragic figure, torn between his moral values and his sexual desires. The novel, however, reveals that Vronsky and Anna do not fear themselves, but society: "The monster was social, not phallic at all. They couldn't live in the pride of their sincere passion, and spit in Mother Grundy's eye."<sup>95</sup> Thus, while Tolstoy sets out to defend a system of moral values, the novel reveals its inadequacy.

Confronted with the increasing fatalism and desperation of modern society, which was intensified by the experience of the war, Lawrence felt that he had discovered in the novel a form which would endure beyond this present. To be sure, Lawrence found these negative qualities in the contemporary novel, but only because it was not a true novel. In the true novel, by contrast, there is no possibility of fatalism because, by its very nature, it is the "one bright book of life." The novel, however, is not life itself; at best, it can only help the reader develop "an instinct for life." Life is rather a human potentiality, largely suppressed through the course of modern civilization, which has its source in the instinctual and intuitive body, and can only be manifested in living relationships. The meaning of life, therefore, is revealed not in the isolated individual but in the sexual relationships between men and women. It is through heterosexual relationships that the fate of modern society is most clearly revealed; and it is through heterosexual relationships that the basis of a future society can be glimpsed.

Lawrence believed that the novel was the only art form

through which the relationships between men and women could be most fully explored, both in their destructiveness and in their potentiality. To paraphrase Lukács, because the function of the heterosexual relationship in the novel is to provide a clue to life, it becomes a mere instrument, and its central position in the work means only that it is particularly well suited to reveal a certain problematic of modern life. In Women in Love, more than in any other novel, Lawrence uses a variety of different relationships to reveal both the destructive, fatalistic forms of modernity and the basis for "new, really new feelings, a whole line of new emotion ... [to] get us out of the emotional rut."<sup>96</sup>



Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 62.
- <sup>2</sup>*Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, p. 57.
- <sup>3</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 771.
- <sup>4</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 762.
- <sup>5</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 770.
- <sup>6</sup>*Phoenix*, pp. 543-4.
- <sup>7</sup>*Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, p. 54.
- <sup>8</sup>*Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, p. 54.
- <sup>9</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 757.
- <sup>10</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 757.
- <sup>11</sup>*Phoenix*, pp. 757-8.
- <sup>12</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 759.
- <sup>13</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 523.
- <sup>14</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 556.
- <sup>15</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 767.
- <sup>16</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 767.
- <sup>17</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 770.
- <sup>18</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 768.
- <sup>19</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 768.
- <sup>20</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 551.
- <sup>21</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 553.
- <sup>22</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 556.
- <sup>23</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 556.
- <sup>24</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 559.
- <sup>25</sup>*Phoenix II*, p. 595.
- <sup>26</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 542.

<sup>27</sup>Phoenix, p. 759.

<sup>28</sup>Phoenix, p. 535.

<sup>29</sup>Phoenix, p. 528.

<sup>30</sup>Phoenix, p. 536.

<sup>31</sup>Phoenix, p. 525.

<sup>32</sup>Phoenix, p. 526.

<sup>33</sup>Phoenix, p. 525.

<sup>34</sup>Phoenix, p. 527.

<sup>35</sup>Phoenix, pp. 547-8.

<sup>36</sup>Phoenix, p. 531.

<sup>37</sup>Phoenix, p. 531.

<sup>38</sup>The Theory of the Novel, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup>Phoenix, p. 531.

<sup>40</sup>Phoenix II, pp. 605-6.

<sup>41</sup>Phoenix, p. 559.

<sup>42</sup>Phoenix, p. 478.

<sup>43</sup>This view of prose is essentially shared by Lukács, even if he draws different conclusions. He writes: "Only prose can ... encompass the sufferings and the laurels, the struggle and the crown, with equal power; only its unfettered plasticity and its non-rhythmic rigour can, with equal power, embrace the fetters and the freedom, the given heaviness and the conquered lightness of a world henceforth immanently radiant with found meaning" (The Theory of the Novel, pp. 58-9).

<sup>44</sup>Phoenix, p. 527.

<sup>45</sup>Phoenix, p. 530.

<sup>46</sup>Phoenix, p. 527.

<sup>47</sup>Phoenix, p. 527.

<sup>48</sup>Phoenix, p. 571.

<sup>49</sup>Phoenix, pp. 567-8.

- 50 Phoenix, pp. 522-3.
- 51 Phoenix, p. 524.
- 52 Phoenix, p. 455.
- 53 Phoenix, p. 458.
- 54 Phoenix, p. 560.
- 55 Phoenix, p. 561.
- 56 Phoenix II, p. 604.
- 57 Phoenix, p. 562.
- 58 Phoenix, pp. 475, 474.
- 59 Phoenix, p. 574.
- 60 Apocalypse, p. 2.
- 61 Phoenix, p. 574.
- 62 Phoenix, p. 575.
- 63 Phoenix, p. 563.
- 64 Phoenix, p. 563.
- 65 Phoenix, p. 579.
- 66 Phoenix, p. 572.
- 67 Phoenix, p. 579.
- 68 Phoenix, p. 580.
- 69 Phoenix, p. 529.
- 70 The Theory of the Novel, p. 72.
- 71 Phoenix, p. 520.
- 72 Phoenix, p. 517.
- 73 Lady Chatterley's Lover (London, 1961), p. 105.
- 74 Phoenix, p. 519.
- 75 Lady Chatterley's Lover, p. 105.
- 76 Phoenix, p. 529.

- 77 Phoenix, p. 518.
- 78 Phoenix II, p. 419.
- 79 Phoenix II, p. 418.
- 80 Phoenix II, p. 418.
- 81 Phoenix, p. 180.
- 82 Phoenix, p. 517.
- 83 Phoenix, p. 532.
- 84 Phoenix, p. 528.
- 85 Phoenix, p. 537.
- 86 Phoenix, p. 534.
- 87 Phoenix II, p. 425.
- 88 Phoenix, p. 536.
- 89 Phoenix, p. 538.
- 90 "To Edward Garnett," 5 June 1914, Collected Letters, I, p. 282.
- 91 Lady Chatterley's Lover, p. 104.
- 92 Phoenix, p. 528.
- 93 For a discussion of modern society as a historical society, see Cornelius Castoriadis, Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe (Paris, 1978), pp. 249-316; and Claude Lefort, Les formes de l'histoire (Paris, 1978), pp. 30-48, 195-329.
- 94 Phoenix II, p. 417.
- 95 Phoenix II, p. 417.
- 96 Phoenix, p. 520.

## CHAPTER IV

### LOVE AND MODERNITY:

#### AN ELUCIDATION OF WOMEN IN LOVE

##### I

With Women in Love Lawrence created his relation to modernity, to "the circumambient universe, at the living moment." Women in Love is not a representation, at least not primarily, of a historically fixed and determined world; nor is it a representation of Lawrence's metaphysical purpose. Women in Love becomes a work of art because Lawrence was able to create a relation to modernity through the mediation of human sexual relationships as possibilities within modernity. At an early stage of "The Sisters" he wrote: "I can only write what I feel strongly about: and that, at present, is the relation between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women.--In a month The Sisters will be finished."<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence wanted to create his relation to modernity by re-creating his relation to Frieda. He believed that this relation provided the clue to modern life: this particular relation possessed socio-historical significance. But a novel is not autobiography; it can only become art by creating a relation to the socio-historical.<sup>2</sup> A relation between two people is always unique and meaningful only for themselves, even if all human

relationships are necessarily informed by socio-historical values and experiences. But the representative character of a given human relationship does not mean that it can, or should, transcend its particularity. A relationship remains significant for the two lovers because of its particularity: what is important for them is their world in terms of which the socio-historical is an abstraction. Only when a relationship develops an explicit relation to the socio-historical can it transcend its particularity, and attain universality. But in life no human relationship can attain universality without ceasing to be a particular relationship. Only in art can a human relationship attain universality because only there can the contingent particularity of a relationship be preserved in relation to the socio-historical. And only by creating a relation to the socio-historical can art transcend its particular determinations and make possible new and unpredictable relations.

By creating a relation to the socio-historical, art itself becomes socio-historical. Two months later Lawrence began to realize the complexity of his project: "All along I knew what ailed the book. But it did me good to theorize myself out, and to depict Frieda's God Almighty in all its glory. This was the first crude fermenting of the book. I'll make it into art now."<sup>3</sup> Naively, Lawrence thought he could make autobiography into art by shifting the narrative perspective into the third person. But to make "The Sisters" into a novel required more than technical revision; it required a more encompassing conception. Lawrence had to recreate his relation to Frieda in

relation to the socio-historical. Through The Rainbow and Women in Love, this particular relationship yields to a new relation within which the original was only dimly visible. Each novel creates a "relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment;" each novel creates a relation to the socio-historical and succeeds in becoming socio-historical. Yet whereas The Rainbow ends with an optimistic faith in the regenerative potential of modern society, Women in Love ends only with a problematic possibility.

In Women in Love Lawrence creates a relation to modernity by creating a critical relation to its historical possibilities. Either modern society will submit to its fate as a dying society, or it will seek to regenerate itself, bringing forth a new world.<sup>4</sup> Only by theorizing the socio-historical as a dialectic of fate and freedom, therefore, can Lawrence overcome the antinomies of a fatalistic determinism and an abstract utopianism. Thus to preserve its historical potentialities, in Women in Love Lawrence theorizes the socio-historical unity of modernity as the tension between a dying society and a new society in the process of being born, between a completed history and a history in the making. As a consequence, the future of modern society cannot be considered a determined fate: what this future turns out to be will depend on how individuals respond to the present.

To achieve this kind of relation to the socio-historical, Lawrence required an appropriate conception of character. In Women in Love, the meaning of a character's response to modernity is revealed both through his or her conscious, critical

understanding of modern society, and through his or her instinctual and intuitive capacity to form enduring and fulfilling human relationships. The relationship between Gerald and Gudrun, for example, is profoundly informed by their different responses to work. Gudrun relates to art much the same as Gerald relates to the coal industry: both objectify themselves in their work and, as a result, become essentially isolated and spiritually empty. Neither Gerald nor Gudrun, however, understand their isolation socio-historically; it is a condition humaine, a fate. At the same time, because they have become objectified by their work as isolated individuals, they are incapable of responding to each other instinctually and intuitively. To take but one instance. After making love to Gerald for the first time, Gudrun is intensely aware of their separateness from each other: "He was beautiful, far off, and perfected. They would never be together. Ah, this awful, inhuman distance which would always be interposed between her and the other human being" (p. 432). Because neither can overcome this mutual isolation, the fate of their relationship is sealed. By trying to preserve their social identities, which bind them to a nihilistic and destructive world, they must inevitably share the fate of that world. While Gerald commits suicide, Gudrun embraces the purely destructive world of Loerke, the world of "the inner, individual darkness, sensation within the ego, the obscene religious mystery of ultimate reduction, the mystic frictional activities of diabolic reducing down, disintegrating the vital organic body of life" (p. 550). The relationship between Ursula and Birkin is quite



different. Their struggle for an erotic relationship is inseparable from their struggle against modernity. To achieve a form for their relationship, Ursula and Birkin must struggle between themselves; but it is a struggle in which their different ego identities are mediated by an erotic connection. And yet the very potentiality of this relationship presupposes that both characters are prepared to struggle against the destructive and fatalistic tendencies of modernity within themselves.

Ursula, for example, comes to understand that her personal feelings of isolation and fatalism are inseparable from modern life in general, and the mechanized routine of her work in particular. Following her sexual encounter with Birkin at the water party, she felt "obliterated in a darkness that was the border of death," deciding it was better "to die than live mechanically a life that is a repetition of repetitions.... There is complete ignominy in an unreplenished, mechanized life" (p. 262). And for Ursula, the most obvious manifestation of this life is work: "Another shameful, barren school-week, mere routine and mechanical activity. Was not the adventure of death infinitely preferable? Was not death infinitely more lovely and noble than such a life? A life of barren routine, without inner meaning, without any real significance" (p. 262). The relative success of Ursula's struggle against modernity, moreover, largely is due to her "sympathetic" consciousness, enabling her to achieve a critical relation to her "mechanized life." In spite of her fatalism, therefore, she retains a "vital integrity" which allows her both to struggle against a lifeless culture and to

form a viable, if problematical, relationship with Birkin.

The artistic problem for Lawrence is to find a form through which to express the essential indeterminacy of modernity. Specifically, in order to create a relation with modernity in terms of the potentialities of human relationships, he required a form whereby art could become both immanent socio-historical critique, and a revelation of socio-historical truth. As critique, art must be capable of grasping the fundamental negativity of modernity, including the illusory denial of this negativity in the culturally dominant forms of consciousness. For it is this negativity which provides a given human relationship with a context and a limitation. As truth, on the other hand, art transcends its own socio-historical determinations and the consciousness of the characters. Art becomes truth by revealing the socio-historical potentiality of human thought and action which cannot be exhausted in a particular socio-historical experience. As truth, therefore, art not only posits a socio-historical subject, but also a future yet to be realized. As Lukács puts it: "Art always says 'And yet!' to life. The creation of forms is the most profound confirmation of the existence of dissonance."<sup>5</sup> To put it differently, if the novel is to be "the one bright book of life," it must embody through its form the vital conditions necessary for viable, enduring human relationships.

Significantly, the unity of artistic form as critique and truth is explicitly addressed within Women in Love. As Birkin and Ursula are wandering through the local market, wondering

what kind of relation they want to have with the modern world and, in particular, how they want to construct their own "world," Birkin states the following general principle:

You have to be like Rodin, Michael Angelo, and leave a piece of raw rock unfinished in your figure. You must leave your surroundings sketchy, unfinished, so that you are never contained, never confined, never dominated from the outside (p. 455).

Through this statement, Birkin not only relates art to life-- indeed, artistic values are here life values--but also to a critique of modernity. This conception of art profoundly informs Women in Love. Not only is the relationship between Birkin and Ursula defined in opposition to modernity, but is itself unfinished. Moreover, its very efficacy seems to require the two lovers to leave England, to leave a rationalized and destructive world for a sensual landscape appropriate for their relationship. Ursula is quite explicit that such a radical break is objectively necessary. In a parting conversation with Gudrun she states this position unequivocally: "One has no more connections here. One has a sort of other self, that belongs to a new planet, not to this.--You've got to hop off" (p. 534). To Ursula, this other self can only be fulfilled in a relationship which defines itself outside of, and in opposition to, the existing world. "I believe in something inhuman," she goes on to say, "of which love is only a little part. I believe that what we must fulfil comes out of the unknown to us, and it is something infinitely more than love. It isn't so merely human" (p. 534). Because all that is "human" has become linked to

existing socio-historical reality, Ursula feels that she must make an irrevocable break from that reality, and from all those who choose to share its fate. Understandably, Gudrun responds sarcastically, and never again will the two sisters exchange intimacies. In a general sense, this view of art links critique to the programmatic, whereby the work posits particular ethical norms, and simultaneously refuses the programmatic: neither the relationship between Ursula and Birkin, nor the novel, can be finished. The very indeterminacy of both their relationship and the novel, therefore, becomes a critique of the destructive determinism of modern culture.

By itself, however, the conception of art as socio-historical critique represents a limitation since it provides no basis for self-critique. The very concept of art as critique cannot avoid positing for itself a determinate referent--a conception of human nature, a determinate future, a teleology--which is the mere negation of the existent; critique is the negative image of the existent. Women in Love could only become art, however, by transcending its determinations, and becoming indeterminate; it requires a complementary conception whereby the critique, as embodied in a particular relationship, becomes itself subject to critique. The relationship between Birkin and Ursula must thus be understood as only one possibility and judged in relation to the novel as a whole. Ursula, in fact, raises this problematic of art in her argument with Loerke and Gudrun when she insists that the "world of art is only the truth about the real world." Like Birkin, Ursula links art to life, but unlike him she wants

art to be grounded in the real world--in a critical relation to it. Art is not, as Loerke and Gudrun would have it, an "absolute world" with no relation to lived experience. Rather, its very claim to truth consists precisely in its critical relation to the world. Ursula's conception of art both embraces critique as the "truth of the real world" and, at the same time, contextualizes this truth in relation to the world. Whereas in the former conception of art, articulated by Birkin, art becomes co-extensive with life, here art can make no such claim. At the same time, however, Ursula's view of art allows for the revelation of the truth of modernity as both a finished and unfinished world, whose meaning can both be known and yet never fully known. This conception of art complements the first by demystifying the latter's programmatic claims, while preserving its concept of critique. To use the relationship between Birkin and Ursula as an interpretive guide to the novel, as criticism frequently does, is to fail to recognize that their very response to modernity--in terms of both their fatalistic perception of it and of their belief that they can construct a purely private world--is by no means incompatible with modern society. Far from being a viable alternative to modernity, the desperate belief in the necessity for a private, enclosed relationship can only intensify the negativity of the existent. By defining itself in pure opposition to the world, the private relationship widens the division between "is" and "ought." Significantly, it is the novel itself that provides a critique of the ideal, private relationship: it ends with an argument between Birkin

and Ursula over the meaning of marriage. Birkin and Ursula do not, therefore, have the choice of completely excommunicating themselves from their own history.

In Women in Love the problematic of artistic form cannot be separated from Lawrence's understanding of modern history. And yet, although written throughout the war, Women in Love makes no explicit references to the war. Nonetheless, the potentially of the war pervades the novel. Very early in the novel, Birkin identifies Gerald as a modern Cain because, as a child, he had accidentally killed his brother. Birkin, however, "did not believe that there was such a thing as accident. It all hung together in the deepest sense" (p. 74). In life, genuine accidents occur all the time, but their significance is usually limited to those immediately affected. In a novel, by contrast, no accident can ever be really arbitrary: it will always have a deeper significance. In Women in Love violence breaks out all the time. The seemingly innocent act of painting a rabbit requires a "violent tussle" through which Gerald and Gudrun become "implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries." At a Bohemian café in London, a girlish woman stabs a young man in the hand to prove that she is "not afraid of blood" and to intimidate her lover. To satisfy her frustration and need for "voluptuous ecstasy," Hermione uses "a blue, beautiful ball of lapis lazuli" to try to kill Birkin, whose only protection is Thucydides's History of the Peloponnesian War.<sup>6</sup>

No act of violence in Women in Love is an accident; it all hangs together "in the deepest sense." No act of violence in

Women in Love is an accident because modern society generates violence and creates institutional forms for its expression. Gerald subjects an Arab mare to torture with "his face shining with fixed amusement" because "that is the natural order." Hermione can justify her attempted homicide because Birkin had tortured her: "She knew that, spiritually, she was right. In her own infallible purity, she had done what must be done. She was right, she was pure" (p. 164). In a society for which war is a potentiality, if not an inevitability, no act of violence is an accident; it all hangs together "in the deepest sense." And in Women in Love no human relationship is immune from the violence and fatalism of modern society; it all hangs together "in the deepest sense."

In Women in Love Lawrence created his relation to modernity through the possibilities of human relationships. Through the relationships between Hermione and Birkin, Gerald and Gudrun, Birkin and Ursula, and Gerald and Birkin, Lawrence interrogates the socio-historical possibilities of modernity. Through these relationships Lawrence seeks to uncover the source of its destructiveness and a source for its regeneration. Through Women in Love Lawrence sought to create a relation to a world in the midst of war, but without succumbing to its fatalism and destructiveness. But as a work of art, Women in Love transcends its determinations and makes possible new and unpredictable relations. And yet these relations are only possibilities; they can only be realized when readers are prepared to

imaginatively engage the novel: to discover new meanings and relate them to a developing consciousness and a changing life world. Only when readers can relate their own immediate experience of the novel to their socio-historical world, can the novel retain its socio-historical significance. In Lawrence's terms, Women in Love succeeds or fails as art to the extent that it helps readers to develop "an instinct for life." In this sense, to be aesthetically literate is to develop a living relation with art, a relation which transcends the specificity of the art work and the determinate life world of the reader.

This notion of aesthetic literacy is quite different from that which has generally informed the reception of Women in Love, with the possible exception of Leavis. That is, the notion of reading or, more generally, interpretation as relation is neither concerned with fixing or determining the "objective" meaning of a text, nor does it seek in the text an affirmation of determinate perceptions and values. Rather, to achieve a living relation with art is to develop a new but critical relation both to the art work itself and to the life world of the reader. Since this relation is only viable because it is indeterminate, moreover, the reader cannot appeal to a referent which can guarantee the truth or legitimacy of a reading. All a reader can do is to try to be as lucid as possible in rendering the relation between the specificity of the work and his or her values and assumptions. This approach to interpretation is perhaps best characterized by what Castoriadis calls élucidation: "the work by which men try to think what they are doing and to know what



they are thinking."<sup>7</sup> In short, to elucidate Women in Love is to seek to establish a living relation with it, and thereby to clarify its present socio-historical significance.

## II

In Women in Love Lawrence creates a relation to modernity by uncovering the socio-historical roots of its negativity. Unlike its European counterparts, modern English society began to clearly emerge in the early seventeenth century on the basis of agrarian capitalism. Its bourgeois revolution, ideologically represented as a "civil war," was fought not just for religious and political freedom, but also to give the aristocratic landed interests greater economic freedom. And after Cromwell's Commonwealth, the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 would politically entrench these interests in an oligarchical, but nominally democratic, State which endowed economic freedom with the status of legal right. On this economic and political basis, the English "Industrial Revolution" would take root towards the end of the eighteenth century. This revolution, however, was essentially initiated by the emerging middle class whose Puritanism had provided the animus of the civil war, but who were ultimately denied a political voice in 1688. It is precisely the dual origins of modern English society--that is, a society brought into being by an embourgeoisée aristocracy and a pragmatic, moralistic middle class--that has given rise to the concept of the "two cultures," so characteristic of English cultural criticism.<sup>8</sup> This constitutive dualism was perhaps first clearly formulated

by Matthew Arnold in Culture and Anarchy as "Hellenism," aristocratic universalism, and "Hebraism," bourgeois pragmatism. In order to stave off the threat of cultural and political anarchy, Arnold proposed a "marriage" between these two cultural paradigms which would preserve their strengths but overcome their limitations. For Lawrence, however, what is distinctive about these cultural paradigms is not their limitation, but their destructiveness. Any proposal for a new form of culture would, therefore, require a radically different source than that provided by a culpable and destructive history. It is the culpability of this history that Lawrence seeks to reveal in Women in Love.

Lawrence uses Breadalby, the aristocratic estate of Hermione Roddice, as the historical point of departure for his critique of modern culture. Although in his essays Lawrence tends to identify "modern civilization" with the emergence of rational thought and transcendental religion, in Women in Love he locates the roots of modern culture in the eighteenth century. The home of Hermione, a "Kulturtrager, a medium for the culture of ideas," is significantly described as "a Georgian house with Corinthian pillars." Through Hermione, "high" culture is linked to a very specific past, in spite of the pretensions of this culture to deny its historical roots by surrounding itself with an aura of Hellenic thought and idyllic nature. Modern civilization wants the illusion of "disinterestedness;" it wants to feel above history and beyond the "reach of the world's judgment." This is the illusion that Breadalby itself creates:

"There seemed a magic circle drawn about the place, shutting out the present, enclosing the delightful, precious past, trees and deer and silence, like a dream" (p. 139). The pastoral beauty of Breadalby disguises a past, however, that was far from delightful for the eighteenth century "labouring poor" and for those who suffered from the growth of agrarian capitalism. Indeed, in spite of the appearance of stability, eighteenth century England was regularly punctuated by popular expressions of protest, such as poaching and the destruction of machines and property.<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, social relations in rural England had been based on single, large scale units of production where the landowner exercised a paternalist control over the labourer. Moreover, because the labourer worked for perquisites as well as wages, there was always a personal aspect to these relations. The emergence of agrarian capitalism, however, required a "free," mobile labour force and the disappearance of traditional rights. When wages alone determined the relation between landowner and labourer, then the formerly social and cultural relation assumed a purely economic dimension. The ruling class responded to the disappearance of the traditional basis of its authority by developing what Edward Thompson calls "an elaborate hegemonic style"--the ritual of the hunt, the pomp of the assizes, the segregated pews, etc.<sup>10</sup> Thus the cultivated style of the aristocracy is inseparable from social domination: cultural traditions symbolically express relations of power.

The Roddice family are the inheritors of this past to which they have more than an aesthetic relation. Their very sense of

tradition is inseparable from their former economic and political power, Moreover, some vestiges of this power remain. Hermione's brother, Alexander, is a member of Parliament, albeit a Liberal, and still exercises his traditional cultural authority by regularly reading the lessons in the local church. When asked if he is a Christian, he replies: "No.... I'm not. But I believe in keeping up the old institutions" (p. 157). For this aristocracy, the eighteenth century represents an age in which there is no tension between civilization and society. It is an age in which the authority of civilization is directly manifested in the dominant political and economic institutions of society. Only with the decline of the real economic power of this class does the unity of civilization give way to a tension between two different cultural ideals. Gerald and Hermione, the narrator informs us, "were always strangely but politely and evenly inimical" (p. 76). The source of this tension, however, is not personal but socio-historical; it is to be found in the rise to power of an industrial bourgeoisie which sought to institute a new cultural paradigm, a social imaginaire based on productive work. To Hermione, Gerald always seems materialistic, espousing pragmatic values which are antagonistic to her sense of civilization. But to Gerald, Hermione seems idealistic because she is unwilling to consider that basic human needs must be satisfied. "You must make provision," he insists. "And to make provision you have got to strive against other families, other nations" (p. 77).

Lawrence locates the historical beginnings of this new

social imaginaire in the early nineteenth century. It was Gerald's grandfather who first opened the mines: "The initial idea had been, to obtain as much money from the earth as would make the owners comfortably rich, would allow the workmen sufficient wages and good conditions, and would increase the wealth of the country altogether" (p. 297). At this initial stage of industrial capitalism, the sole motive for the capitalist was greed--crude self-interest. Moreover, the early industrial capitalist was not faced with major problems in creating the conditions for capital accumulation. Agrarian capitalism had already created a seemingly unlimited supply of "free" and pliant labour. As well, extracting the coal from the ground presented no technological difficulties. Faced with the reality of rural poverty, the "labouring poor" had no choice but to go to work in the mines and factories:

All was plenty, because the mines were good and easy to work. And the miners, in those days, finding themselves richer than they might have expected, felt glad and triumphant. They thought themselves well off, they congratulated themselves on their good fortune, they remembered how their fathers had starved and suffered, and they felt better times had come. They were grateful to those others, the pioneers, the new owners, who had opened out the pits, and let forth the streams of plenty (p. 297).

To this generation of capitalists, wages and the promise of a relatively secure job obviated the necessity for a justifying ideology. Having recently experienced the harsh and desperate conditions of rural life, to the workers the new conditions of industrial production were considerably preferable.

With the generation of Thomas Crich, Gerald's father, industrial capitalism required an ideology which could justify the inequalities and insensitivities inherent with the very socio-economic structure. This is the age of social reform in which crude self-interest had to be informed by social conscience. Thomas Crich wanted an enlightened Christian capitalism; he wanted to believe that his mines were "primarily great fields of plenty for all the hundreds of human beings gathered about them" (p. 297). Thomas Crich wanted to deny his real power over the workers through a belief that he was a "father of loving kindness and sacrificial benevolence." At the same time, he was dominated by a profound sense of guilt, not because of his wealth as such but because of the disparity between his moral, religious values and the dehumanized reality of the socio-economic system which he controlled and from which he reaped material rewards:

He had always the unacknowledged belief, that it was his workmen, the miners, who held in their hands the means of salvation. To move nearer to God, he must move towards his miners, his life must gravitate towards theirs. They were, unconsciously, his idol, his God made manifest (p. 287).

Thomas Crich's solution to the contradiction between the exigencies of his social and economic position and his sense of moral inadequacy is charity. Through charity, he hoped to get closer to God and to the workers, but without sacrificing his power and wealth.

Charity is the fundamental form of bourgeois ideology throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century: it

reinforces the ethic of work as alienated labour but allows the capitalist, and the bourgeois class in general, an expression for those Christian, moral values which have no place in industrial production. As ideology, however, charity is far more than a pragmatic means of social control; it also signifies the bourgeoisie's capacity for self-deception. And for Thomas Crich, this capacity for self-deception informs his very being, and particularly his relationship with his wife. As with his real social relations to the workers, his marriage is a "relation of utter interdestruction." And as with his social relations, Thomas Crich wants to deny the destructive reality of his marriage. Although in this marriage Christiana Crich becomes like "a hawk in a cage," Thomas never abandons his belief, right to his death, that "he had loved her with a pure and consuming love ever since he had known her" (p. 290). To his workers, however, Thomas Crich's ideology of charity is inconsistent. They turned his Christian values against him by arguing that if all men were spiritually equal, and if bourgeois society was based on Christian values, why then "this obvious disquality?" Although Thomas Crich accepted the logic of this argument, he did not want to give up his material goods. Riots broke out and the army was summoned. Thomas Crich was morally shattered for, although he continued to believe in his ideological illusions, his world of enlightened paternalism, founded on Christian values, had collapsed:

There was a new situation created, a new idea reigned. Even in the machine, there should be equality. No part should be subordinate to any other part; all

should be equal. The instinct for chaos had entered. Mystic equality lies in being, not in having or doing, which are processes. In function and process, one man, one part, must of necessity be subordinate to another. It is a condition of being (p. 299).

In this new situation Thomas Crich had to re-interpret his values: to keep his goods and authority had to become "a divine necessity," but he couldn't abandon his ideal of an industry "run on love."

Gerald understood that he had not inherited "an established order and a living idea. The whole unifying idea of mankind seemed to be dying with his father, the centralizing force that had held the whole together seemed to collapse with his father, the parts were ready to go asunder in a terrible disintegration" (p. 293). Thomas Crich conceived the organization of his industry not in purely economic terms, but as an expression of his Weltanschauung: the idea that social relations should be mediated by moral values. It is this idea that gives nineteenth century English culture a unity, however fragile. And throughout the greater part of Women in Love Lawrence attempts to show the death agony of this idea, this imaginaire. When we are first introduced to Thomas Crich, he is described as "a tall, thin, care-worn man," and through the course of the novel he becomes progressively weaker but, with a "rigid" will, refuses to die. Before his death, however, two of his children will have died, both by "accidents." And soon after Thomas Crich himself dies, Gerald will commit suicide. Gerald realizes that this inner disintegration is inevitable. "There's one thing about our family, you know," he says to Birkin. "Once anything goes wrong,



it can never be put right again--not with us. I've noticed it all my life--you can't put a thing right, once it has gone wrong" (pp. 251-52).

Far more than the Crich family is dying. Throughout the novel, Lawrence shows the collapse of those cultural traditions and institutions which had formerly mediated social relations, especially the family and intellectual and artistic culture. The Brangwen family, which in The Rainbow had been a source of value, is now dominated by destructiveness and violence. Ursula accuses her father of using love only as a means for "bullying and denial," while Gudrun feels that the Brangwen house never had any "personality." To both sisters, the very thought of a stable family seems like death or madness. A similar fate has befallen civilized culture. While at Breadalby, Birkin becomes increasingly aware of the near total collapse of traditional values: "... what a snare and a delusion, this beauty of static things--what a horrible, dead prison Breadalby really was, what an intolerable confinement, the peace" (p. 154). Like a chess game whose figures and moves do not change, "its going on is like a madness, it is so exhausted" (p. 156). Given the collapse of vital traditions, modern civilization can only react through intellectualism or by embracing "primitivism." At Breadalby itself, conversation was like "a rattle of small artillery." Although superficially stimulating, "this ruthless mental pressure, this powerful, consuming mentality" was ultimately exhausting and meaningless. Nor is the situation very different among the London Bohemians: they only react to the collapse of

cultural traditions by intellectualizing the primitive.<sup>11</sup> As Hermione herself recognizes, traditional civilized values have become devoid of meaning: "The old great truths had been true. And she was a leaf of the old great tree of knowledge that was withering now. To the old and last truth then she must be faithful, even though cynicism and mockery took place at the bottom of her soul" (p. 373). And when culture can no longer be creative, it either turns in upon itself and glorifies in its own nullity, or it abandons its disinterestedness and finds its meaning in the preservation of the status quo.

Confronted with the evident collapse of the old order, Gerald sought to institute a new civilization based on "the pure instrumentality of mankind." This new civilization had little interest in those traditional moral values associated with the suffering, feeling individual. "What mattered was the pure instrumentality of the individual" (pp. 295-96). The goal of this new civilization was to create a functional order as the realization of human will. Unlike his father, Gerald had little commitment to material wealth or social position; they were simply functionally necessary: "It was like being part of a machine. He himself happened to be a controlling, central part, the masses of men were the parts variously controlled. This was merely as it happened" (p. 300). Gerald believed that the solution to the "whole democratic-equality problem" lay in the creation of the "great social productive machine;" it alone could rationally and efficiently produce a sufficiency of everything. And if the social machine worked perfectly, then it

could translate the traditional cultural ideal of harmony into a practical, social order. Only through the mediation of the machine could a unity between man and nature be achieved:

He, the man, could interpose a perfect, changeless, godlike medium between himself and the Matter he had to subjugate. There were two opposites, his will and the resistant Matter of the earth. And between these he could establish the very expression of his will, the incarnation of his power, a great and perfect machine, a system, an activity of pure order, pure mechanical repetition, repetition ad infinitum, hence eternal and infinite (p. 301).

To institute this new order Gerald, like his father, had to begin with the coal mines. It was there that the new order could exist in its purest form. Significantly, when Gerald looked at the present state of the mines, he could only see them as "the clumsy efforts of impure minds." The problem with the old order, in other words, was that it was founded on an inadequate conception; its economic inefficiency, therefore, is only a manifestation of that conception.

The immediate task was to profitably get the coal out of the ground, but for Gerald the deeper motivation was to achieve a victory for the human will in the conflict between man and nature:

There it lay, inert matter, as it had always lain, since the beginning of time, subject to the will of man. The will of man was the determining factor. Man was the arch-god of earth. His mind was obedient to serve his will. Man's will was the absolute, the only absolute.... What he wanted was the pure fulfilment of his own will in the struggle with the natural conditions. His will was now, to take the coal out of the earth, profitably. The profit was merely the condition of victory, but the victory itself lay in the feat achieved (p. 296).

To achieve this victory of the human will, Gerald had first to dismantle the old order: he had to remove all vestiges of "sentimental humanitarianism," all indications that human, moral values informed the social relations in the mines. Thus Gerald pensioned off the older employees and hired more efficient ones and abolished all perquisites, such as "widows' coals." Second, Gerald had to modernize, or "rationalize," the coal industry. Not only did Gerald introduce new technology and hire trained technicians, but he also introduced new methods for controlling the labour process:

The working of the pits was thoroughly changed, all the control was taken out of the hands of the miners, the butty system was abolished. Everything was run on the most accurate and delicate scientific method, the miners were reduced to mere mechanical instruments. They had to work hard, much harder than before, the work was terrible and heartbreaking in its mindlessness (p. 304).

To fully dismantle and transform the old order, Gerald required the co-operation of the workers. They had to abandon their traditional egalitarian values; they had to abandon their view that social relations were human relations; and they had to abandon the view that work was humanly meaningful activity. In order for Gerald's new order to be instituted, the workers had to understand that the only relations of importance were functional, instrumental ones. In short, the workers had to adopt an ethic appropriate to the new order:

There was a new world, a new order, strict, terrible, inhuman, but satisfying in its very destructiveness. The men were satisfied to belong to the great and

wonderful machine, even whilst it destroyed them. It was what they wanted. It was the highest that man has produced, the most wonderful and superhuman. They were exalted by belonging to this great and superhuman system which was beyond feeling or reason, and something really godlike. Their hearts died within them, but their souls were satisfied.... This was a sort of freedom, the sort they really wanted. It was the first great step in undoing, the first great phase of chaos, the substitution of the mechanical principle for the organic, the organic unity, and the subordination of every organic unit to the great mechanical purpose. It was pure organic disintegration and pure mechanical organization (pp. 304-05).

The magma of Gerald's socio-historical imaginaire is dehumanized, mechanical work. It is through work that the individual becomes functionally related to the machine, itself an expression of a pure will, "beyond feeling or reason." However, because the "great and perfect machine" is itself the most essential and pure form of a new civilization, a "pure mechanical organization," then work signifies far more than manual labour. Rather, the particular character of work in Gerald's mines signifies the very process by which individuals become functional instruments of the new order. Through work, not only do individuals become socially objectified as functional instruments; but also, as functional instruments, individuals form their social relations in general.

In the older "organic" world of Gerald's father and grandfather, economic relations were culturally mediated. There was always a tension between explicitly human values and economic ones. To be sure, within the workplace social relations appeared as relations between things, as Marx pointed out in his analysis of "commodity fetishism." At the same time, throughout

the nineteenth century this "natural" tendency of capitalist production was resisted by working class movements which not only wanted to "humanize" work but also to institute a more egalitarian society. Implicit in this project, however, was the relative autonomy of cultural traditions and institutions from the economic sphere. And because workers were not fully objectified through their work, they were able to set limits to capitalist socio-economic development. In other words, the very efficacy of cultural values prevented those values generated through capitalist production from ever attaining socio-cultural generality. In this respect, one need only think of the importance of the family, local traditions, popular cultural institutions, etc. for the formation of an oppositional culture.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike his father, however, Gerald felt it was necessary to eliminate cultural values from the "social productive machine," and to restrict them to a purely private domain. However, the very nature of work itself, understood as the form of social relations, militated against restricting the autonomy of private, cultural values; indeed, it threatened to erode them altogether.

Significantly, it is through Loerke's discussions of art that the larger meaning of work is most clearly illuminated. In Cologne, Loerke had been making a frieze, the purpose of which was to interpret industry. The frieze represents a country fair as a "frenzy of chaotic motion" which, for Loerke, is the very essence of work. Man at the fair, he claims, "is fulfilling the counterpart of labour--the machine works him, instead of he the machine. He enjoys the mechanical motion, in his own body"

(p. 519). For Loerke, work is not a destructive process; rather, "the machinery and the acts of labour are extremely, maddeningly beautiful" (p. 518). But to transform living beings into machines--instrumental functions--is necessarily an act of violence. For the Arab mare to be useful to Gerald, for example, she must be physically tortured. And under Gerald's new regime, work is "much harder than before." The physically violent aspect of work is further emphasized when Loerke discusses his statuette of a "tender, young" girl on a "magnificent stallion, rigid with pent-up power," a statuette he insists is "not mechanical." In order to transform the girl into a function of his art, Loerke had to slap her "harder than I ever beat anything in my life." This episode is, moreover, parallel to Gerald's violent struggle with the rabbit. In both cases, violence was necessary to transform a living being into a subject appropriate for art. These episodes, moreover, take on a larger significance when art is understood not only as an interpretation of industry, but also as a social product. The truth that this art reveals is that to assert one's will over nature and other living beings, whether in productive activity or in personal relationships, requires physical violence. It is, for example, to "gain control with her will" that Hermione feels that she must obliterate Birkin.

Although physical violence is the means of social transformation, the goal of the new world is to create a new human being as a pure social instrument, as a social machine. In the world of "mechanical organization," because it recognizes no

distinction between the social and the cultural, work is more profoundly alienating than in the "organic" world of the nineteenth century. In Gerald's world people become objectified in their very being, in their private as well as their social lives. Throughout the novel, social relations are represented as relations between machines. And it is as machines that characters become perversely eroticized in their private lives. The eroticism of the miners is abstract and sensual. Gudrun, for example, is seduced by the sound of their voices:

In their voices she could hear the voluptuous resonance of darkness, the strong, dangerous underworld, mindless, inhuman. They sounded also like strange machines, heavy-oiled. The voluptuousness was like that of machinery, cold and iron.... They belonged to another world, they had a strange glamour, their voices were full of an intolerable deep resonance, like a machine's blurring, a music more maddening than the siren's long ago (pp. 174, 175).

These feelings are not restricted to Gudrun. Palmer, one of the trained technicians hired by Gerald, is also sensually attracted to the miners: they "fascinated him, as machinery fascinated him. They were a sort of machinery to him--but incalculable, incalculable" (pp. 176-77). Both Gudrun and Palmer are attracted to the miners, however, because they are themselves eroticized machines. And the same is true of Gerald and Hermione. When mechanized sexuality is informed by social and economic power, however, the result is sadomasochism. Gerald, for example, is frequently described as electrical, expressing both his economic power and sadistic sexuality. At the Café Pompadour he was "acutely and delightfully conscious of himself, of his own



attractiveness. He felt full of strength, able to give off a sort of electric power" (p. 117). Gudrun is sexually drawn to this power in Gerald. While doing some sketches at Willey Water, she notices Gerald in a boat. Immediately she realizes the difference between her attraction to him and to the miners:

And instantly she perished in the keen frisson of anticipation, an electric vibration in her veins, intense, more intense than that which was humming low in the atmosphere of Beldover.... Gerald was her escape from the heavy slough of the pale, underworld automatic colliers.... He was master.... His glistening, whitish hair seemed like the electricity of the sky (pp. 178-79).

Sexual and economic power are here inseparable. Moreover, Gudrun's attraction to Gerald vacillates between masochism and sadism. In the incident with the Arab mare, for example, Gudrun projects her feelings on to the mare. Later on in the novel, however, she thinks of Gerald as an instrument which she can use for her own power: "He was sheerly beautiful, he was a perfect instrument. To her mind, he was a pure, inhuman, almost superhuman instrument. His instrumentality appealed so strongly to her, she wished she were God, to use him as a tool" (p. 511). Finally, Hermione's sexuality is also sadomasochistic. She tells Ursula that to marry Birkin is "to be prepared to suffer--dreadfully. I can't tell you how much suffering it would take to make him happy" (p. 376). At the same time, Hermione's sexuality is also sadistic. When she decides that she must kill Birkin, her violence is both sexual ("voluptuous ecstasy") and electric: "Terrible shocks ran over body, like shocks of electricity, as if many volts of electricity struck her down" (p. 162).

In Women in Love, to become socially objectified as a machine is also to become estranged from one's vital integrity, and therefore to become estranged from the capacity to form living relations with others. Paradoxically, in spite of an individual's socialization as machine--a social identity shared by others--the socialized individual is profoundly isolated within himself or herself. More specifically, the modern individual is internally divided between a social being capable of performing instrumentalized functions in the world and a privatized, isolated self--an ego--doomed to a purely separate, subjectivized existence. The ego is only capable of an abstract knowledge which it imposes on the world and others through the act of will. But the egotistical individual is not capable of forming living relations to the world and others. As a result, those characters in the novel who are dominated by an egotistical consciousness are always separate and isolated. Gerald is perhaps the most developed character whose identity is divided between pure socialization, "a pure and exalted activity," and an equally pure isolation. In "Diver," for example, Gerald felt "immune and perfect.... He exulted in his isolation in the new element, unquestioned and unconditioned" (p. 97). He cannot accept Birkin's proposal of love because he "would not make any pure relationship with any other soul. He could not. Marriage was not the committing of himself into a relationship with Gudrun. It was a committing of himself in acceptance of the established world ..." (p. 440). Similarly, Gudrun feels separate and isolated: "Always this desolating, agonised feeling, that she

was outside of life, an onlooker" (p. 231).

The source of this isolation, however, is the character's objectification in and through work which, through its very form, produces the dualistic identity of mechanical instrumentality and egotistic will. Even more than Gerald, who still retains a lingering attachment to the moral values of "goodness" and "righteousness," Loerke is the purest example of the isolated, productive machine:

In the last issue he cared about nothing, he was troubled about nothing, he made not the slightest attempt to be at one with anything. He existed a pure, unconnected will, stoical and momentaneous. There was only his work (p. 521).

What prevents the socialized characters from recognizing the true meaning of their lives and modern society, however, is the very ideology which posits the separation between the private and the social: the idea that work qua mechanical organization does not objectify the whole being. Once again, it is in Loerke's discussion of art that this ideology is most clearly articulated. When Ursula asks him why his horse is so stiff, he responds vehemently:

It is a work of art, it is a picture of nothing, of absolutely nothing. It has nothing to do with anything but itself, it has no relation with the everyday world of this and other, there is no connection between them, absolutely none, they are two different planes of existence, and to translate one into the other is worse than foolish, it is a darkening of all counsel, a making confusion everywhere. Do you see, you must not confuse the relative work of action, with the absolute work of art (pp. 525-26).

Gudrun echoes this view: "I and my art, they have nothing to do

with each other. My art stands in another world, I am in this world" (p. 526). Ursula, however, not only insists that there is a relation, but also explains the basis of their aesthetics of denial: "... you have to separate the two, because you can't bear to know what you are." In this particular case, the truth of Ursula's assertion is affirmed: the horse is a representation of Loerke's "stock, stupid brutality" and the girl is someone he had "loved and tortured and then ignored." At the same time, Ursula's understanding of the dominant form of ideological deception is borne out by the novel. The private love relationship, far from being separate from social relations, becomes the arena within which the inherent negativity of modernity is most fully manifested.

### III

In her illuminating essay on Lukács and Irma Seidler, Agnes Heller asks: "Can privately inhabited institutions be created? Is there a private language? Are private customs possible? Can two people make a world?"<sup>13</sup> These questions lie at the centre of Women in Love. Ursula and Birkin (albeit to a lesser extent) believe in an affirmative answer to these hypothetical questions. Throughout the novel, however, there is a consistent tension between the private and the social. In a conversation at Breadalby, for example, Gerald disputes Joshua Malleeson's claim that the "great social idea" is "social equality" by insisting on the dualism between social obligation and individual, private freedom. He puts it this way:

The unifying principle was the work in hand. Only work, the business of production, held men together. It was mechanical, but then society was a mechanism. Apart from work, they were isolated, free to do as they liked (p. 160).

For Gerald, this division between the private and the social is not problematical; it is just empirically true. Although Birkin does not share Gerald's pragmatic conservatism, he too agrees that personal, sexual relationships are private, "non-social." Only Ursula raises the difficulty of arranging the "two halves." In a fundamental sense, Women in Love can be understood as an exploration of precisely this difficulty.

Throughout Women in Love no private relationship is ever separate from the social. Rather, every private relationship is defined in relation to the social. Even more than through their "work," all the characters establish a relation to modernity, to the social, through their private relationships. The form of a given relationship, moreover, is inseparable from the characters' ideological relation to modern society. If the lovers seek to establish a complementary, affirmative relation to the social, then the negativity of modern society is both preserved and intensified within the private relationship. On the other hand, if the lovers want to establish a critical relation to the social, then they must seek to develop a new form of private relationship which is both a critique of the social, as given, and a prefiguration of a new and different sense of the social, of what it could be. Thus, although a given private relationship is necessarily a personal response

and solution to the negativity of the characters' lives, the novel creates a relation to the socio-historical by signifying the forms of private relationships as more general cultural responses and solutions to the deepening crisis of modernity: the inability of human beings to form adequate relationships with each other, and hence to create viable, vital cultural forms.

Throughout Women in Love Lawrence seeks to establish a delicate but fluctuating balance between the particular, private relationship and the more general socio-historical problematic of modernity. The difficulty of maintaining this balance, however, is not simply a technical one. Rather, its source lies in the very nature of modern society which subordinates "every organic unit to the great mechanical purpose." As a consequence of the disintegration of autonomous cultural traditions and institutions, there is no "organic" basis for private cultural forms. Within the novel marriage necessarily becomes problematic because, while it is a private relationship, it is also a social institution whose form and meaning have been determined by a culpable society. Hence all the major characters, at one point or another, pose the question of what marriage means to them in terms of both their personal identities and their relation to modern society. From the point of view of the novel, therefore, there is no "organic" basis to marriage: its given forms already determine its content. Either one accepts these forms, as given, or one must try to create new ones. Because, for example, Gerald and Gudrun cannot imagine a different form

of society, marriage seems an empty form, bound by convention. To Gudrun, modern society is perpetual, meaningless motion--mere repetition. With "the perfect cynicism of cruel youth," she cannot imagine a different world, except as a version of the present one. And to marry Gerald is to bind herself to that world. Gerald's attitude is not essentially any different. To marry Gudrun simply means that he accepts the conventions of the established world, "in which he did not livingly believe, and then he would retreat to the underworld of his life." It is only because Birkin and Ursula believe in the possibility of a qualitatively different world, that they are able to conceptualize marriage as other than its conventional form. And yet, it is only because they can develop a critical relation to society and find a new source of life within themselves that their relationship itself suggests the possibility of a future.

The very fact that in the novel marriage is understood as a problematical institution means that to theoretically explore its forms is also to interrogate the social. Consequently, it is within the particular relationships that the characters experience most intensely the deeper meanings of both modern society and their individual relations to it. At the same time, however, Lawrence creates a socio-historical relation to modernity by signifying the forms and outcomes of particular relationships as socio-historical projects which transcend those relationships. Thus Birkin's relationship with Hermione must be understood as the project to restore and revitalize past cultural traditions. Similarly, the relationship between

Gerald and Gudrun poses the question of whether viable cultural forms are possible within the limits prescribed by modern, contemporary society. From this perspective, the relationship between Birkin and Ursula takes on a larger meaning. Since Birkin only manages to come to terms with his ambivalent relation to "modern civilization" in "Excuse," and since Ursula only gradually manages overcome her isolation and fatalism, especially as it relates to her work and family, their relationship can be understood as a historical project to create a future based on a critical relation to both past and present.

The relationship between Birkin and Hermione is perhaps the most deceptive in the novel. Not only does this relationship not end with the lapis lazuli incident; its very basis seems somewhat enigmatic.<sup>14</sup> Although we can understand the basis of Hermione's commitment to Birkin, he seems merely passive, apparently deriving no satisfaction from the relationship. This confusion is further intensified by the initial descriptions of these two characters. Although self-conscious, "clever and separate," Birkin possesses an undeniable vitality and energy. Hermione, by contrast, seems grotesque:

She drifted forward as if scarcely conscious, her long blenched face lifted up, not to see the world.... She was impressive, in her lovely pale-yellow and brownish-rose, yet macabre, something repulsive. People were silent when she passed, impressed, roused, wanting to jeer, yet for some reason silenced. Her long, pale face, that she carried lifted up, somewhat in the Rossetti fashion, seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within her, and she was never allowed to escape (p. 62).



As the novel opens, the relationship has already begun to disintegrate and, a few chapters later, when Hermione tries to kill Birkin, it will seemingly end. Nonetheless, Birkin's ties to Hermione remain until his final rapprochement with Ursula in "Excuse." Significantly, the argument which immediately precedes this rapprochement is almost entirely concerned with Birkin's relationship with Hermione. And it is as a result of this argument that we gain not only a greater understanding of this relationship, but also of Birkin's development as a character and the source of his egotistical ideas of self and marriage. Moreover, insofar as Hermione can hardly be separated from "Breadalby," these ideas and the relationship in general are given a socio-historical referent. Indeed, Ursula is very conscious that the bond between Birkin and Hermione "seemed to belong to an old past which they had inhabited together.... [They] were part of the same old tradition, the same withered deadening culture" (p. 381).

Initially, Birkin wanted to believe that Ursula's anger is simply motivated by jealousy: "For you can only revolt in pure reaction from [Hermione]--and to be her opposite is to be her counterpart" (p. 387). While admitting that he "was wrong to go on all those years with Hermione," Birkin does not immediately recognize the deeper significance of that relationship, and how bound he had become to its form, long after its apparent collapse. But to Ursula, Birkin is still committed to "that old, deathly way of living," which she specifies as a "sham spirituality" based on materialism and power. Birkin wanted

Hermione to be a "spiritual bride," capable of sensuality. But in spite of the disastrous consequences of this ideal, Birkin has neither abandoned it nor recognized how it is based on egotistical power and nihilism. Indeed, the value of the relationship for Birkin was its very nihilism, from which he derived a perverse pleasure. The apparent intellectualism of the relationship thus disguises Birkin's need for masochistic pleasure: "He knew that his spirituality was concomitant of a process of depravity, a sort of pleasure in self-destruction. There really was a certain stimulant in self-destruction, for him--especially when it was translated spiritually" (p. 391). Within his relationship with Hermione, therefore, Birkin can indulge his intellectualism and nihilism, both intricately connected with dying cultural traditions.

While Birkin understands this relationship as a "deathly process" because of the destructive nature of those spiritual values on which it is based, for Hermione the actual substance of these values is less important than their ideological function. What matters to Hermione is power and social position; her spirituality is the means for achieving that goal:

In the life of thought, of the spirit, she was one of the elect. And she wanted to be universal. But there was a devastating cynicism at the bottom of her. She did not believe in her own universals--they were sham. She did not believe in the inner life--it was a trick, not a reality. She did not believe in the spiritual world--it was an affectation. In the last resort, she believed in Mammon, the flesh, and the devil--these at least were not sham. She was a priestess without belief, without conviction, suckled in a creed outworn, and condemned to the reiteration of mysteries that were not divine to her. Yet there was no escape. She was a leaf upon a dying tree (p. 373).

It is because Hermione's intellectual and spiritual values are outworn and meaningless, and merely a means for asserting her power in the world, that her intellectual positions are so inconsistent. At one moment, she defends "the beauty of knowledge in itself; at another, she claims that knowledge destroys natural spontaneity; at one moment, she attacks competition and power; at another, she insists on the necessity to kill in order to defend her power. Hermione only knows the gesture of knowledge--the cliché--because she wants, as Ursula understands, "petty, immediate power, she wants the illusion that she is a great woman" (p. 388). Conversely, Hermione requires the illusion of her universality in order to protect herself from her inner emptiness.

Although in the eyes of the world Hermione feels "perfect and complete," and beyond its judgement, she

always feels vulnerable, vulnerable, there was always a secret chink in her armour. She did not know herself what it was. It was a lack of robust self, she had no natural sufficiency, there was a terrible void, a lack of sufficiency of being within her.... And all the while the pensive, tortured woman piled up her own defenses of aesthetic knowledge, and world-visions, and disinterestedness. Yet she could never stop the terrible gap of insufficiency (pp. 63-64).

Hermione, however, is unable to see the connection between her "deficiency of being" and her social objectification as a Kulturträger; she does not see that her very defenses only intensify her inner void. And lacking this understanding, she thinks that she needs someone to "close up this deficiency." Birkin thus becomes the means for her to "be safe during this fretful

voyage of life. He could make her sound and triumphant over the very angels of heaven" (p. 64). Although she knows that Birkin is trying to leave her, she does not understand why. She does not understand that her belief in "her own higher knowledge" and her self-image as "the central touchstone of truth" not only lies at the source of her "deficiency of being," but also prevents any possibility of a lasting relationship with Birkin. For to instrumentalize Birkin as a mere means is not only to seek to dominate him, but also to preserve the very social identity which creates her deficiency. Hermione does not understand that, since Birkin becomes instrumentalized as another defense, their relationship can only become a struggle for power, thereby further intensifying her deficiency.

The crucial moment in their relationship occurs when Birkin is copying a Chinese painting of geese. To Birkin, the painting provides an intuitive knowledge of the Chinese, a knowledge of "what centres they live from--what they perceive and feel." For Hermione, on the other hand, the painting is a material possession whose value derives from the fact that it was a gift from the Chinese ambassador. Since her relationship to Birkin is based on domination, she is always driven to possess his knowledge: "She was at once roused, to extract his secrets from him. She must know. It was a dreadful tyranny, an obsession in her, to know all he knew" (p. 145). However, since her knowledge is based only on will and her "lust for power," she cannot appropriate Birkin's knowledge. Faced with the recognition of the limits of her knowledge and power, Hermione "suffered the

ghastliness of dissolution, broken and gone in a horrible corruption" (p. 145). Later that evening, Hermione tries to regain her power by controlling the form of the dance with the three other women. Far from protecting Hermione from her insufficiency, however, the dance has the very opposite effect: her very will to control provokes Birkin to "irresponsible gaiety." The very recognition of Birkin's "power to escape, to exist, other than she did" drives her even further into "a despair that shattered her and broke her down so that she suffered sheer dissolution like a corpse, and was unconscious of everything save the horrible sickness of dissolution that was taking place within her, body and soul" (p. 149). The following day, in the midst of one of the habitual conversations at Breadalby, Hermione insists that "in the spirit we are all one, all equal in spirit." Given the preceding context, this statement can only be interpreted as an attempt by Hermione to re-assert the basis of her relationship with Birkin. Thus, when Birkin claims that in "the spirit, I am as separate as one star is from another, as different in quality and quantity," he is effectively announcing the end of their relationship. It is later on that evening that Hermione yields to the desire for her "consummation of voluptuous ecstasy," and tries to kill Birkin. Even though this incident marks the collapse of their relationship, Hermione is never any closer to understanding why it failed. After the lapis lazuli incident, she "became rapt, abstracted in her conviction of exclusive righteousness. She lived in and by her own self-esteem, conviction of her own rightness of spirit" (p. 167).

Finally, as a result of a conversation with Ursula, she concludes that Birkin was ultimately inadequate for her needs: he "was without unity, without mind, in the ultimate stages of living; not quite man enough to make a destiny for a woman" (p. 378).

Through the relationship between Hermione and Birkin, Lawrence reveals the inadequacy of attempting to restore and revitalize traditional culture as a solution to the contemporary cultural crisis. On the surface, as Birkin remarks of Breadalby, the past "was better than the sordid scrambling of the present." To uphold this past as an ideal model, however, is not only a desperate reaction; the very idealization of the past must inevitably deny its culpability within the present, as well as its morbidity. Put somewhat differently, the static assumptions of traditional cultural models cannot be separated from the inherent necessity to dominate and control. Within the context of the novel, it is Birkin's very changeableness that makes Hermione think of him as not a man, "not one of us." And lacking the power to control Birkin, Hermione suffers "the ghastliness of dissolution" and falls back on physical violence as a means of achieving her goal. More generally, when traditional culture loses its power to determine the historical form of society, it appeals to authoritarian institutions.

If the solution to the present cultural crisis cannot be resolved by appealing to idealized traditions, nor can it be found within the given forms of modern society. Rather, in spite of the apparent rationality of these forms, they conceal a deep-rooted but powerful tendency for violence and destruction.

It is through the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun that Lawrence most fully explores the potentiality within modern society for violence and destruction. This particular relationship, however, could hardly be described as a typical modern relationship. Rather, "a sort of diabolic freemasonry subsisted between" Gerald and Gudrun. The specificity of this relationship can best be grasped as a dialectic between the "social" and the "historical." As a social relationship, it is based on symbiotic need. Each character seeks in the other a means for satisfying a personal need, an emptiness. But this need is itself a consequence of the structure of modern society. Both Gudrun and Gerald hope that the Other can fill the gap between their isolated subjectivity and their functional social identity. Because each constructs the other as an instrument, however, the relationship becomes a power struggle and is, therefore, doomed to failure: it can only intensify the distance between the two lovers and reproduce the very need which brought them together in the first place. However, as a social relationship, it only reproduces the forms of modern society within itself. As a social relationship, the capacity for violence within Gudrun and Gerald remains latent, unconscious. As a historical relationship, on the other hand, the potentiality for violence gradually becomes more manifest. It is through the development of this relationship that Lawrence explores the deep-rooted desperation and violence which pervades modern society, but of which it is largely unconscious. Hence Gerald's suicide or murder--the distinction is not easily made--derives

its significance from modern society's potentiality for destruction and self-destruction. And yet this is only a potentiality. It is also possible that modern society's capacity for self-destruction has not reached its limits, even in the case of the war. Gudrun's decision to abandon Gerald for Loerke must be understood in the latter respect. Through the relationship between Gudrun and Gerald, Lawrence creates a relation to modernity by revealing the destructive potentialities of modern society. And yet because these potentialities are generally unacknowledged, he must show how they emerge from the socially given forms. Within their relationship Gerald and Gudrun do not fundamentally change; their potentiality for violence is given at the outset. Rather, the relationship develops by each character discarding their illusions, by acting out their unconscious desires.

Both Gudrun and Gerald are successful in the world, albeit in different ways. But within the novel, to be socially successful is to become both dehumanized and isolated from others. Gudrun describes herself as "one of life's outcasts, one of the drifting lives that has no root" (p. 466). Similarly, Gerald is "immune and perfect." Both characters are conscious of an inner absence and a need for an Other. The miners, for example, arouse in Gudrun "a strange, nostalgic ache of desire, something almost demoniacal, never to be fulfilled" (p. 176). This inability to be fulfilled was also characteristic of Gudrun's life in London. As she put it: "Nothing materializes! Everything withers in the bud" (p. 55). Gudrun longs for an Other, but the longing



can never be satisfied: "Why wasn't there somebody who would take her in their arms, and hold her to their breast, and give her rest, pure, deep, healing rest" (p. 565). Gerald, too, has these needs for an Other. He admits to Birkin that his "life doesn't centre at all. It is artificially held together by the social mechanism" (p. 109). But Gerald cannot believe in a lasting love relationship which would give his life a centre because, as he puts it, "I live to work, to produce something, in so far as I am a purposive being" (p. 107). And yet the pressures of his work require Gerald to find a means for releasing the tension within him. Typically, Gerald finds this release in women: "After a debauch with some desperate woman, he went on quite easy and forgetful" (p. 307).

To Gerald and Gudrun, marriage can only be a "social arrangement," unrelated to love. When Gudrun first returns to Beldover, she tells Ursula that marriage now seems "the inevitable next step." But marriage is not a love relationship; it is a social institution. After Birkin and Ursula have decided to get married, Gerald says to his friend: "One comes to the point where one must take a step in one direction or another. And marriage is one direction" (p. 438). But marriage is not a commitment to an Other; it is a commitment to the established order.

Gerald and Gudrun believe in the conventional forms of private relationships, but they do not believe they are capable of love. When Gudrun first sees Gerald at Laura Crich's wedding, she sees past his conventional appearance:

There was something northern about him that magnetized her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glisten like cold sunshine refracted through crystals of ice. He looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing.... His gleaming beauty, maleness, like a young, good-humoured, smiling wolf, did not blind to the significant, sinister stillness in his bearing, the lurking danger of his subdued temper (p. 61).

What Gudrun saw immediately in Gerald was his capacity for violence and power. But Gudrun could only see this essential capacity, stripped of convention, because it also existed within herself. Just as she fears this power, she also longs for it. Initially, Gudrun derives masochistic pleasure from her fear. She observes Gerald's brutality against the mare, for example, "with black-dilated, spellbound eyes." And when they kiss under the bridge, she is again conscious of Gerald's destructive power: "How perfect and foreign he was--ah how dangerous! Her soul thrilled with complete knowledge. This was the glistening, forbidden apple, this face of a man.... He was such an unutterable enemy, yet glistening with uncanny fire" (p. 416).

But Gudrun is attracted to Gerald because through him she herself gains power. To Gudrun, Gerald "was sheerly beautiful, he was a perfect instrument. To her mind, he was a pure, inhuman, almost superhuman instrument. His instrumentality appealed so strongly to her, she wished she were God, to use him as a tool" (p. 511). To gain power over Gerald, however, Gudrun must first overcome her own fear of his male, sexual power. By erotically dancing in front of Gerald's cattle, Gudrun discovers she is capable of overcoming her fear, and of becoming

sadistic. Thus when Gerald interrupts her dance, she strikes him. "And she felt in her soul an unconquerable lust for deep brutality against him. She shut off the fear and dismay that filled her conscious mind. She wanted to do as she did, she was not going to be afraid" (p. 236).

Just as Gudrun had seen in Gerald his capacity for violence, so Gerald also sees this capacity in Gudrun:

There was a body of cold power in her. He watched her with an insight that amounted to clairvoyance. He saw her a dangerous, hostile spirit that could stand undiminished and unabated. It was so finished, and of such a perfect gesture, moreover (p. 181).

Gerald's power over others had always been inseparable from his self-control, his power over himself. And yet Gerald becomes increasingly powerless against Gudrun because she affects him at a level below his consciousness, beyond the control of his mind. Even before Gerald was aware of his feelings towards Gudrun, at Breadalby, "she signified the real world to him. He wanted to come up to her standards, fulfil her expectations.... And Gerald could not help it, he was bound to come up to her criterion, fulfil her idea of a man and a human being" (pp. 159-60). It is only when Gudrun "strikes the first blow," following Gerald's interruption of her erotic challenge to his cattle, that Gerald becomes conscious of her power over him: "His mind was gone, he grasped for sufficient mechanical control, to save himself. She laughed a silvery little mockery, yet intolerably caressive" (pp. 237-38). And yet against her power, his mind was of little use; he had to gain control over physically: "he

grasped her arm in his one hand, as if his hand were made of iron" (p. 238). Separated from his will, Gerald's power is superficial. And since Gerald's attraction to Gudrun occurs below his consciousness, beyond the control of his will, he enters into a relationship in which he has no real power. At the same time, since Gerald has always tried to dominate his feelings, they have become perverted. Through their mutual struggle with the rabbit, Gerald and Gudrun become conscious of their mutual perversion: "There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries" (p. 397).

Until the death of Gerald's father, he and Gudrun had sought to limit their relationship to the conventional. Both feared the destructive forces within themselves which a sexual relationship would unleash. On the surface, both characters rationalize this fear as their ambivalence to marriage qua social institution because they want to preserve their conventional social identities. But as Gerald becomes increasingly dominated by his internal struggle to wrestle "for death in his soul," he loses control of his conventional social identity. He believes that Gudrun is his only salvation: "He must recover some sort of balance. And here was the hope and perfect recovery" (p. 412). And Gudrun accepts Gerald's need as a condition of the relationship: she "felt as if she were caught at last by fate, imprisoned in some horrible and fatal trap" (p. 412). This fate, however, is also a challenge to her: Gerald was "the exquisite adventure, the desirable unknown to her" (p. 415). To gain Gerald's knowledge means, for Gudrun, not only to achieve dominance, but also self-knowledge. Gerald's

knowledge, however, is limited, as both Gudrun and Loerke recognize, to the immediate form of modern society, "to his necessity, in the last issue, for goodness, for righteousness, for oneness with the ultimate purpose" (p. 551). But with the death of his father, Gerald loses both his guiding purpose and his will. Although he believed that Gudrun had vindicated him--restored him as a man--the night he had gone to her, he had already become a child, "so soothed and restored and full of gratitude." Although he returned to Shortlands "in grateful self-sufficiency," he had submitted to a fate against which his will was powerless.

The consequences of this form of relationship, whereby perverted feelings become unleashed without any means of control, are realized when Gerald and Gudrun go to the Tyrol. Initially, the mountains seem liberating: they were "separate, like opposite poles of one fierce energy. But they felt powerful enough to leap over the confines of life into forbidden places, and back again" (p. 490). As Gudrun gradually overcomes her fear of Gerald and becomes more self-sufficient, this separateness becomes more destructive, and Gerald becomes more dependent. As a consequence, their relationship now becomes an overt struggle for dominance. While Gudrun seeks dominance by denying Gerald, he responds by asserting his mechanical, sexual power: "His heart went up like a flame of ice, he closed over her like steel. He would destroy her rather than be denied" (p. 493). But because Gerald can no longer direct his power, he becomes objectified by his destructive feelings. The result is inevitable. Having been outwitted by Gudrun and Loerke, and having lost the capacity to direct his

life, Gerald submits to his fate as pure, self-destructive motion: "he wandered unconsciously, till he slipped and fell down, and as he fell, something broke in his soul, and immediately he went to sleep" (p. 575). Gudrun, on the other hand, having exhausted Gerald's knowledge, decides that her fate can only be found in the purely destructive world of Loerke, a world no longer bound by feelings and values.

The relationship between Birkin and Ursula assumes its significance within the context of the other relationships. Not only are the latter symbiotic in their specific dynamic, resulting in violence and death; they are also attempts to preserve the social forms of modernity. And yet precisely because they are symbiotic and bound to the given social forms, their violence is inevitable. Significantly, each lover sees the other as a mirror of himself or herself: each is attracted to the other's perversity. By contrast, the relationship between Birkin and Ursula is founded not on identity, but on difference. Although at the very beginning of the novel Ursula feels that she and Birkin had a "natural, tacit understanding, a using of the same language," there is no attempt to deny difference, even in its extreme forms. Shortly after the water party, for example, Ursula reflects on how much she hates Birkin: "Her relation was ultimate and utterly beyond words, the hate was so pure and gem-like. It was as if he were a beam of essential enmity, a beam of light that did not only destroy her, but denied her altogether, revoked her whole world" (p. 268). Unlike the other relationships, Ursula and Birkin explicitly argue over their differences, especially as they pertain to the form of

relationship. While for Birkin, a viable relationship must be based on the recognition of individual uniqueness; for Ursula, a relationship must be based on intimacy which transcends the individual. After the rock-throwing incident in "Moony," Ursula tries to come to terms with these differences: "He did not believe in final self-abandonment. He said it openly. It was his challenge. She was prepared to fight him for it. For she believed in an absolute surrender to love. She believed that love far surpassed the individual" (p. 343).

For both Birkin and Ursula, their differences emerge from their respective critiques of modern society. Birkin believes that the fundamental dynamic of modern society is to eradicate individual difference, to render all individuals identical. Against this rationalization and homogenization, Birkin wants to assert the pure value of the unique individual. And for Birkin, the ideology of identity is most clearly manifested in love relationships as the power of female sexuality: "Always a man must be considered the broken-off fragment of a woman, and the sex was the still aching scar of the laceration" (p. 271). Because Birkin "hated sex," he wanted it "to revert to the level of the other appetites, to be regarded as a functional process, not as a fulfilment" (p. 269). Thus Birkin's intellectual defense of individual difference and his theory of marriage are inseparable from his critique of modern society. Indeed, his very aloofness and inconsistency are his psychological defenses against objectification and social determination. For Ursula, on the other hand, modern society is destructive because it erodes the emotional

intensity of individual lives: it forces individuals to become objectified as social objects, devoid of feeling. To be sure, Ursula is not insensitive to the modern eradication of individuality. Nonetheless, she is far more conscious of the destruction of an inner meaning. And the preservation and development of this inner meaning is ultimately more important to her than the defense of individual difference. Parallel to Birkin's changeableness is Ursula's preservation of her "vital integrity." In spite of periodic moods of fatalism, Ursula never fully gives in to them: "Her spirit was active, her life like a shoot that is growing steadily, but which has not come above ground" (p. 103). Thus the difference between Ursula and Birkin is the difference between two different critiques of modernity. Conversely, their relationship assumes socio-historical significance by bringing these two different critiques into relation with each other.

The dynamic of the relationship between Birkin and Ursula differs from the other relationships not only by acknowledging differences, but also by subjecting these differences to critique through the mediation of the erotic. With Birkin and Ursula, their instinctual connection to each other--a connection that exists below and beyond "language," rational discourse--makes possible a dialectical relation, a possibility for development. At the same time, this erotic substratum not only carries them through their arguments, but also highlights the limits of their respective critiques. Specifically, the price that both lovers pay for their critical relation to modernity is isolation. Birkin's ideal of "star equilibrium," while functional in



preserving his identity against societal rationalization, cannot provide a basis for a relationship with an Other: there is no "organic" link between the I and the Other. When Birkin theorizes his concept of relationship, he has to abstractly introduce mediations: his "lovely state of free-proud singleness" must accept the "permanent connection with others" as an "obligation" and submit "to the yoke and leash of love." It is only in "Excuse" that the relationship becomes "organic" such that individuality, community, and intimacy form a dialectical unity. Now Birkin "knew what it was to be awake and potent in that other basic mind, the deepest physical mind" (p. 401). To be sure, Birkin does not abandon his spiritual ideal, but now it has a context. Similarly, Ursula's belief in a transindividual love is problematical because it requires individuals in order to be realized. And just as Birkin must acknowledge that the deeper connection between them must be felt and experienced before the assertion of individuality can take on meaning, so Ursula must acknowledge the other being: "She had established a rich new circuit, a new current of passional electric energy, between the two of them, released from the darkest poles of the body, and established in perfect circuit. It was a dark fire of electricity that rushed from him into her, and flooded them both with rich peace, satisfaction" (p. 396).

Through the relationship between Birkin and Ursula, Lawrence establishes a critical socio-historical relation to modernity. Against the static and destructive forces of modernity, the relationship between Birkin and Ursula is dynamic and vital. What

gives their relationship these qualities is not just difference, itself achieved in critical relation to modernity, but also a form through which difference can be mediated, thereby allowing a dialectical development. In this particular relationship, the form is the erotic which is "deeper, further in mystery than the phallic source." But in more general socio-historical terms, Lawrence posits the need for new forms of socio-cultural relations which are instinctual and intuitive, and not determined by the fixed systemic needs of modern society. That Gerald could not accept this type of relationship with Birkin, even as a condition of his relationship with Gudrun, thus becomes an indictment of the nihilism of modern culture.

Birkin and Ursula, through the form of their relationship, posit a future which transcends their relationship. But this future becomes a problematical "ought" when modern society is unwilling to acknowledge its radical limitations. When asked by Ursula where they are going to find the social basis for a future, Birkin responds: "It isn't really a locality.... It's a perfected relation between you and me, and others--the perfect relation--so that we are free together" (p. 398). But private relationships cannot be separated from social relations: a "perfect relation" must realize itself in a "locality." This "locality," however continues to remain elusive, long after Lawrence wrote Women in Love.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>"To Edward Garnett," 18 April 1913, Collected Letters, I, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout this chapter I use the "socio-historical" to designate the relation between the "social"--a "functional" or "spatial" structure through which the various aspects or spheres of social life achieve coherence and unity--and the "historical"--a temporal structure which contextualizes the "social" within the relation between genesis and future possibility.

<sup>3</sup>"To Edward Garnett," early June 1913, Collected Letters, I, p. 208.

<sup>4</sup>It is precisely Lawrence's ambivalence towards history which has provoked criticism to deny the relation between Women in Love and the socio-historical. In its reading of the novel, therefore, criticism appeals to a particular concept of art (Vivas), to Lawrence's use of myth (Ford), while denying its historical meaning, or to process (Clarke) which is only tangentially related to the historical.

<sup>5</sup>Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>The significance of this episode is evidently related to Lawrence's attempt to explain the causes of the war. Consider, for example, the following comments in a letter written in 1916: "I read Thucydides too, when I have the courage to face the fact of these wars of a collapsing era, of a dying idea. He is very good, and very present to one's soul" ("To Barbara Low," 30 May 1916, Collected Letters, I, p. 454).

<sup>7</sup>Castoriadis, L'Institution Imaginaire De La Société, p.8.

<sup>8</sup>In spite of a tendency to "continentalize" English history, Hauser has conveniently condensed its essential dynamic as follows: "In the seventeenth century artistic culture was limited to the court aristocracy above all because of the puritanical outlook of the middle class. Circles outside the court themselves gave up the function they had fulfilled in Elizabethan culture; they had first to regain their place in cultural life, that is, to traverse a road which could follow on from their fresh economic and social rise only after a certain interval. The prosperity of the middle class had to spread and become firmly established before it could again become the basis of intellectual leadership. Finally, the aristocracy itself had to adopt certain aspects of the bourgeois outlook on life, in order to form a homogeneous cultural stratum with the middle class, and in order to strengthen the reading public, and this could not happen until after it had begun to participate in the business life of the bourgeoisie" (The Social History of Art, Vol. III, trans. Stanley Godman [London, 1962], pp. 39-40).

<sup>9</sup>For illuminating analyses of popular protest in the eighteenth century, see George Rudé, Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest (London, 1969) and Douglas Hay et al., Albion's Fatal Tree (London, 1975).

<sup>10</sup>Edward P. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," Journal of Social History 7, 5 (Summer 1974), 389.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Langbaum argues that the disassociation of mind from sensation "produces the sadomasochistic sexuality expressed by the carved African woman and by Pussum [Minette], who is masochistic with Gerald and sadistic with Halliday. The modern taste for so-called primitive art is connected throughout Women in Love with sadomasochistic sexuality" (The Mysteries of Identity: A Theme in Modern Literature [New York, 1977], p. 343).

<sup>12</sup>The seminal work on English working class culture is Edward P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London, 1968); for a more general treatment of the evolution of modern English culture, see Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (London, 1958) and The Long Revolution (London, 1961).

<sup>13</sup>Agnes Heller, "Georg Lukács and Irma Seidler," New German Critique 18 (Fall 1979), 85.

<sup>14</sup>In Lawrence's rejected "Prologue" the basis of their relationship is more explicit. Consider the following passage:  
 "She was a rather beautiful woman of twenty-five, fair, tall, slender, graceful, and of some learning." She had known Rupert Birkin in Oxford. He was a year her senior. He was a fellow of Magdalen College, and had been, at twenty-one, one of the young lights of the place, a coming somebody. His essays on Education were brilliant, and he became an inspector of schools.  
 Hermione Roddice loved him. When she had listened to his passionate declamations, in his rooms in the Blackhorse Road, and when she had heard the respect with which he was spoken of, five years ago, she being a girl of twenty, reading political economy, and he a youth of twenty-one, holding forth against Nietzsche, then she devoted herself to his name and flame. She added herself to his mental and spiritual flame" (Phoenix II, p. 94).

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