Part One
Ethics and Language—Toward an Ethics of Fiction or a Fictional Ethics?

Out of a pattern of lies art weaves the truth.
--- D. H. Lawrence

Never trust the artist, trust the tale.
--- D. H. Lawrence

Every work of art adheres to some system of morality.
But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres.
--- D. H. Lawrence

Violence appears with articulation.
---Jacque Derrida

Let us suppose that literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question.
--- Maurice Blanchot

We have art — lest we perish of the truth.
--- Fredrick Nietzsche

A textual practice is ethical when it is ambivalent.
--- Julia Kristeva
Chapter One  Otherness in Language: Ethics and Fiction

The debate on the relationship between ethics and fiction (in broad sense, literature) yields viewpoints that cut in various, sometimes conflictual, ways. While ethics, often bracketed with morality, is popularly understood as having to do with problems in the real lives of human, fiction is “made up,” sustained by the more or less arbitrary function of a system of signs. In the gap between the messy complexities of empirical reality and fictionalized worlds hovers the unthematizable, Levinasian Other which both invites and resists interpretation.

I. Literature and Philosophy

For Plato, the virtues of honesty and truth to the self which are essential to the ethical are always threatened by the dishonest and dissimulatory powers of literary and poetic language. Skipping a thousand years or so, Nietzsche inverted the Platonic hierarchy of ethical truth and the powers of language—for him, language not only represents the world, it orders, makes and remakes it. Nietzsche considers modernity as “the will to truth” becoming conscious of itself as a problem. He challenges the features that have been valued most highly—consciousness, language, reason, and intellect. Nietzsche argues that there exists no necessary correspondence between language and the world. In one of his earliest writings, “On Truth and Lies in a Normal Sense,” Nietzsche outlines the complete contingency and constructedness of the human world of signs:

What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been
poetically rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (49)

The concept of a sign is thus fully separated from the concept of truth and involved in an ongoing process of interpretation.

In The Order of Things, Foucault gives a similar argument concerning the emergence of modernity:

The threshold between Classicism and modernity (though the terms themselves have no importance—let us say between our pre-history and what is still contemporary) has been definitely crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, they discovered their ancient enigmatic clarity . . . . To the Nietzschean question: ‘Who is speaking?’ Mallarme replies—and constantly reverts to that reply—by saying that what is speaking is, in its solitude, in its fragile vibration, in its nothingness, the word itself—not the meaning of the word but its enigmatic and precarious being. (304)

If, in the original Eden, language was ordered by the world, by the process of naming, for the modernist writer, according to Foucault, the world could only be ordered now by language, by the process of imagining. In other words, language constitutes the aesthetic instrument by means of which we create the world. The word, as such, took on both a new power (no longer subordinated to the thing that it named) and a new fragility (nothing now beyond the word to guarantee its authority). Modern
artists thus face a problem in the relationship between language, cognition, and seeing.

The shift to the category of language is mainly associated with literary theory’s concern about the violence of language. In referring to the assimilative treatment of others in Adam’s naming the animals, Derrida claims that “predication is the first violence,” and that “violence appears with articulation” (VM 147-8). That is, in the case of Adam naming the animals, by overlooking the difference between a name and the thing named, Adam may overlook what is unique about the named. Adam understands them in his own terms and his “taxonomical generality” must neglect singularity of the thing he names. Blanchot also sees the linguistic “naming” of things as being a sacrifice of reality: “Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain; it exists in words as the only way they can have meaning” (1981: 43). Blanchot claims that all of being must be given over to death for speech to be possible. Language itself brings this death, and we speak only from it. Blanchot’s words are worth following closely here:

Of course, my language does not kill anyone. And yet: when I say ‘this woman’, real death is announced and already present in my language; my language means that this person, who is there right now, can be detached from herself, removed from her existence and her presence and plunged suddenly into a nothingness of existence and presence. My language essentially signifies the possibility of this destruction; it is, at every moment, a resolute allusion to such an event. My language does not kill anyone. But, if this woman were not really capable of dying, if she were not threatened by death at every moment of her life, bound and united to it by an essential bond, I would not be able to accomplish that ideal negation, that deferred assassination that is my language. (1981: 43)
The way Blanchot understands language and truth has much to do with his approach to literature— for him, the key question is not whether literary texts have a particular value or not, whether they are good or bad, but how they bring to the fore the question of the “possibility of literature.” We normally understand the literary text as communicating a truth to us.¹ For Blanchot, on the contrary, the importance of literature is to call this truth into question. Much of Blanchot’s complex theory-performance is geared toward the distinction between “literary language” and “common language.” This distinction is redoubled within the domain of literature:

If one looks at it in a certain way, literature has two slopes. One side of literature is turned toward the movement of negation by which things are separated from themselves and destroyed in order to be known, subjugated, communicated.

But there is another side to literature. Literature is a concern for the reality of things, for their unknown, free and silent existence . . . . In this way, it sympathizes with darkness, with aimless passion, with lawless violence, with everything in the world that seems to perpetuate the refusal to come into the world. (Blanchot 1982: 48-9)

Put another way, on the one side, there is the realist content, which one can interpret as belonging to the social world; on the other, there is the purity of the language of literature itself, which folds back upon itself, so as to turn away from the everyday use of words. Blanchot obviously sees the chief function of literature as residing on this second slope, in the fact that its language is also an obstacle to communication.

While Plato excludes poets from his utopia because of the duplicity of their medium, Blanchot designates the power of literary language rightly in this duplicity—i.e., literary parole can function both as purveyors of truth and as harbingers of ambiguity. Blanchot’s motto for literature is that—“Let us suppose that literature begins at the
moment when literature becomes a question” (Blanchot 1981: 21). Put differently, if literature is to revive its essentially ethical and political nature, it has to remember that it is essentially a power of contestation—“contestation of the established power, contestation of what is, contestation of language and of the forms of literary language, finally contestation of itself as power” (Blanchot 1997: 67).

In Revolution in Poetic Language, Kristeva, with the similar concern about the violence of language, also explicates two functions of language, “two modalities of what is, for us, the same signifying process. We shall call the first ‘the semiotic’ and the second ‘the symbolic’” (1984: 23-4). The symbolic function is necessary “to express meaning in a communicable sentence between speakers” (1984: 24).

Kristeva sees a “revolution in poetic language” starting to take place in the late 19th century. This revolution, according to Kristeva, radically unbinds the “semiotic” energy of language. This energy is largely tapped from the chora, the “nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stages in a motility that is full of movement as it is regulated” (1984: 25). As Kristeva sees it, Western societies tend not to recognize the semiotic level of human existence woven of drive energy, let alone the need to harness such energy aesthetically to avoid its becoming manifest in violence. For Kristeva, literature, especially in its open and experimental forms, seems to be a privileged medium for training negotiations across boundaries that demarcate semiotic otherness. This is perhaps literature’s most crucial advantage over the occidental philosophical tradition which Levinas sees as haunted by the fear of otherness as well as the fear that the other remains other.

While thus reflecting the irreducible heteronomy of the Other, literature conceived as such involves a dangerous denial of any link between texts and reality, which is also one of the decisive questions raised by the above thinkers. It is in terms of Nietzsche that one can best highlight both the possibilities and the risks of a
critical strategy that assumes the perspective of art to counter the limitations of systematic thought. For Nietzsche, art (including literature) is the countermovement to religion, morality, and philosophy, and has a privileged affirmative and disruptive force. Yet Nietzsche’s famous phrase—“We have art – lest we perish of the truth” (1968: 435)—risks the danger of making art another version of the (philosophical) truth. Indeed, art and literature lose their critical force if their place is taken for granted, if they are posited as alternatives to the truth. Therefore, if art is to function critically, it must also move beyond art and function outside of all forms of aestheticism. Put another way, if literature is an act of transgression, it is only to the extent that transgression is understood not as a breach of the law in the anarchic name of lawlessness, which results only in a reinforcement of the law, but rather as an act of contestation of the repressive authority. In that sense, if literature proves to be transgression of philosophical discourse, it is not because it confronts the law of representation from a position of greater authority, but because it, in Blanchot’s words, “carries the law away with it” (1992: 139).

Addressing the issue of the relationship between fiction and truth, text and reality, Derrida seeks to deconstruct the binary oppositions of Western thinking that underlies much of his critique of the various types of traditional literary criticism:

Criticism of content alone (thematic criticism, be it philosophical, sociological or psychoanalytic, which takes the theme—manifest or latent, full or empty—for the substance of the text, for its object or for the truth it is illustrating) can no more cope with certain texts . . . than can a purely formalist criticism, which is only interested in the code, in the pure play of the signifier, in the technical construction of a text-object, and which neglects the genetic effects or the (‘historical’, if you like) inscription of the text being read and of the new text that the criticism itself is writing.
These two inadequacies are rigorously complementary. (1981b: 63-4)

In other words, traditional literary criticism, in their various ways, sets up a false opposition between form and content, and concentrates on the one at the expense of the other. In Derrida’s opinion, a literary text is not a closed totality as the formalists would have it, nor a reflection of a more real external world. The real world is both the source of art and bears an “other” relation to art.

Therefore, while following Nietzsche with his revaluation of truth, Derrida nevertheless insists that his own deconstructive enquiry is not simply to reduce philosophy to literature or to assimilate thought to metaphor, but to propose a new way of understanding the relationship between concept and metaphor, truth and fiction. For Derrida, literature is not merely the other of communicative action, or, as Habermas would want to see it, a simply “non-serious use of language” (1987: 205) in which validity claims are entirely suspended. Literature is for Derrida no less serious an attempt to consider the nature of right actions than any ethical or political discourse. Surely the possibility that reference is indirect seems to mean that we have no reliable access to experience or to history and no basis for political action or ethical decision. Deconstruction has thus often been identified with the claim that reference is a fiction. Derrida has many times tried to correct the misreading of his work: “I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the ‘other’ and the ‘other of language’” (1984: 123). For Derrida, to treat the literary text as a self-referential game is to reinforce the philosophy/literature, or serious/nonserious, opposition by which philosophy constitutes itself. The effect of a deconstructive reading of literature is not to eliminate the referential power of texts, but rather to produce a relationship in which the hierarchy of truth and rhetoric is not
inverted but subject to a ceaseless contortion of exchange.

Generally, in the current debate over literature and ethics, literature is seen either as raw material for ethical analysis and is valued for what it contributes to moral insight, or literature is seen as utterly autonomous from ethics and thus impervious to direct ethical evaluation. On the one hand, those who use and judge literature for its edifying value risk ignoring its distinctive value and autonomy as literature. If the philosopher turns to literature to harvest philosophical insights or truths, then literature serves, at best, only as the handmaiden of philosophy in its quest for aperspectival truth. On the other hand, those who defend obsessively the autonomy of literature may overlook the values and ends implicit in its creation and in the reality it depicts. Moreover, to abandon the philosophical search for truth and general understanding on the grounds that there is no truth as traditionally conceived, but only perspectives, is problematic. If the philosophical text becomes a literary text, a text that offers a particular philosopher’s perspective on the world, philosophy could be laid to rest. While the places of literature and philosophy should not be fixed up and taken for granted, the tension between them is clear and not resolvable. They act continually as a reminder to each other of the need to question themselves.

We may discern such a dialectic relation between literature and philosophy in Lawrence’s texts. Lawrence was certainly a novelist with a purpose. He insisted over and over again that the purpose of his writing was, in the last analysis, didactic. Philosophy had come to interest him, and inevitably affected his presentation of life. Some critics may doubt the possibility for the artist and prophet to coexist in the same work, yet Lawrence himself leaves no doubt that his own goal is to bring forth the interaction of fiction and philosophy in the novel:

Plato’s Dialogues . . . are queer little novels . . . . 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. (STH 154-5)

Hence in his fiction, ideas are often expressed poetically and metaphorical language is used to express ideas. In Lawrence, if we separate the prophecy and the artistry then we have not really responded to either of them. Many of his writings explore the complicated way the novel allows theory and tests it on the pulse of poetic language.

As it is, Lawrence’s fiction is made of words but is not just an ordinary use of them; that is, it is made of language but not merely of what we use language to produce — meanings, concepts, propositions, and so on. It is as much a response to language as a use of it. Lawrence’s use of language reminds us of Levinas’s explication of the formal structure of language. Levinas argues that language is not only “a system of signs in the service of a pre-existing thought” (1990: 9), it also involves a dimension of invocation and address. Put differently, though comprehension of the Other is part of our aim, every comprehension of the Other is simultaneously address to the Other. This divergence between the Other as my theme and the Other as interlocutor is posited as the “formal structure” of language (TI 195). Situating himself in the formal structure of language, Lawrence speaks to as well as speaks with that language. In that sense, he is more than a moral novelist who seeks to preach a stable set of moral rules through his writing. The “thick” moral thinking in Lawrence’s literary text is a process of questioning, pondering, and doubting, which does not issue in prescriptive assertions but remains unexhausted and subject to reassessment.
II. Lawrence as a Moral Novelist

As has been mentioned above, while once the Leavisite critics defended Lawrence as a moral and wholly reconstructive novelist, critics now seemed able to move away from such a restrictive view and to explore new arguments about the certainty of Lawrence’s moral vision. In fact, in many of his expository writings, Lawrence himself points to the great moral value of the novel in destabilizing the fixed sorts of insights that tend to be inscribed in discursive modes such as philosophy, religion, and science. Though he values art because it is essentially moral in its function, its morality is nevertheless dependent on its being art in the first place. Without abolishing one in favor of the other, Lawrence illustrates both the necessity of a philosophical outlook for the novelist and the dangers of art becoming only a handmaiden to philosophy instead of a kind of antagonist or critic against it. As he puts it:

Because a novel is a microcosm, and because man in viewing the universe must view it in the light of a theory, therefore every novel must have the background of the structural skeleton of some theory of being: some metaphysic. But the metaphysic must always subserve the artistic purpose beyond the artist’s conscious aim. Otherwise the novel becomes a treatise. (STH 91)

Put another way, art as language must inevitably be intertextual, interacting infinitely with other languages, but its distinctiveness lies in the fact that it cannot be exhausted by these other discourses. Any novel must have some metaphysic, but this theory can never become abstract or absolute because the novel will immediately defy the theory imposed upon it:

If you try to nail anything down in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail. Morality in the novel is the
trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in
the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is
immorality. (STH 172)

In a word, the future of the novel is inextricably bound up with the fact that it is “so
incapable of the absolute” (STH 179). Whatever static binary oppositions the author
may start out with, one test of the true classic is the degree to which the work either
clings to them or entertains doubts, uncertainties, dialogic criticisms, which allow
these oppositions to become unstable and fluid by interacting with one another.

Like Nietzsche, Lawrence is keenly sensitive to aesthetic values. Nietzsche
condemns modern philosophers for substituting ethical questions for aesthetic
questions. The aesthetic, for Nietzsche, is defined by its transgression of the
boundaries between good and evil. Likewise, whether in his fiction or philosophical
works, Lawrence continues to re-examine the central idea of the location of moral
viewpoints within the framework of aesthetic experience and response. He
establishes a place for truth in art: “Out of a pattern of lies art weaves the truth”
(SCAL 8). Yet the truth in art is not imposed by the artist but a natural part of the
work:

An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the
truth of his day. And that is all that matters. Away with eternal truth.

Truth lives from day to day, and the marvelous Plato of yesterday is chiefly
bosh today . . . . Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper
function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.

(SCAL 8)

Even so, Lawrence’s fiction shows him to be against the Aesthetic and the Decadent
movement in art. Lawrence’s position concerning the connection between life and
art is akin to what Levinas suggests in his essay “Reality and Its Shadow.” In
Levinas’s words, “discussion over the primacy of art or of nature—does art imitate nature or does natural beauty imitate art?—fails to recognize the simultaneity of truth and image” (1989: 136). Lawrence’s novels dramatize this simultaneity, and from it arises important ethical questions. It is not that reality comes first and casts a shadow that is art; they are two contemporary possibilities of being.

Consequently, Lawrence seems to respond not so much to the “thing” as to the movement of life in the thing. Paul’s remarks on his painting in Sons and Lovers, concerning the question of representation, is often quoted as indicating an important quality of Lawrence’s writing: “Only this shimmeriness is the real living. The shape is a dead crust. The shimmer is inside really” (SL 152). In “The Spirit of Places,” Lawrence outlines his conception of literary language: “Art-speech is also a language of pure symbols. But whereas the authorized symbol stands always for a thought or an ideal . . . the art-symbol or art-term stands for a pure experience, emotional and passional, spiritual and perceptual, all at one” (SM 18-9). Lawrence’s conception of art-symbols constitutes an effort to imagine a kind of literary discourse that is inexhaustible and dynamic, invulnerable either to petrifaction or decay. The meaning of art-symbol is beyond the limitation of any systematic thought and thus can never be explained away. On that ground, the textuality is seen in effect as an endless process of deconstruction and reconstruction, a concrete embodiment of the process of difference. There is always something still lurking behind the expression.

The “Moony” chapter in Women in Love proposes rightly a text that is troped as texture. The words used in the scene are figured as webbings and weavings, composing poetry of the transitive and the transitional. Through a rhetorical ploy, this scene highlights the manner in which differential effects are contained and overcome. The moon was first presented as an image of reflexive self-presence, “perfect in its stillness” (WL 277). Then Birkin’s stone-throwing acts out the rupture
inscribed as a Derridean “slipping between,” the displacement of the truth/falsehood dichotomy within which Birkin feels trapped: “There wouldn’t have to be any truth, if there weren’t lies. Then one needn’t assert anything” (WL 277-8). Yet the explosive fragmentation which creates multiple centers and brings a total destruction is precisely staged in terms of the reconstitution of a center, as “the fragments caught together reunited,” and the “heart” of the moon is restored (WL 278-9). In other words, however disruptive the differential “between” might be, the return to the “norm” is ensured by a reflexive movement. For all that, this scene, through a kind of performative rhetoric, emblematizes the differential effect attuned to reverberations of difference which the logocentric structures can neither completely comprehend nor control.

It is in this sense that Lawrence anticipates Kristeva’s view that art is less an object and more a process, or a practice. According to Kristeva, “poetic language fulfils the ethical function of art by being a signifying practice” (1984: 195-7). Poetic language pluralizes and musicalizes all static socio-symbolic features. The disruptive semiotic function “shows the constraints of a civilization dominated by transcendental rationality” (1980: 140), and thus destroys the “naturalness” of its limitations, showing them to be “subject” to flexibility and change. The ethical function of art, therefore, is not the same as its ideological, or communicative, function. As Kristeva sees it, the artist who dissolves identities and shatters the communicative and representative aspect of language often finds it difficult to gain recognition, that is, to be accepted as different. That is, to a society not open to difference, to the other, and to “love”, this type of artist who wanders “at the borders of the speakable and the visible” is usually regarded as a “threat” (Kristeva 1987: 339). Therefore, Kristeva suggests that new symbolic means are needed to recognize and cultivate this difference, for this is not a difference which in the end is simply another
version of the same, but a semiotic difference which transcends Hegelian negation.

That the ethical function of art lies in its signifying practice implies that ethics conceived as such is not so much a stable set of principles, values, or prescriptions, as a matrix from which various discourses, disciplines, or practices fan out and in which they meet. In “Morality and the Novel,” Lawrence writes justly about the texture of a morality based on relatedness: “And morality is that delicate, for ever trembling and changing balance between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness” (STH 72). By extension, Lawrence believes that good art reveals “the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment” (STH 173). In *Women in Love*, Birkin’s broadly tolerant remarks on the African statuette in Halliday’s flat epitomize Lawrence’s belief. Dismissing the statuette as “rather obscene,” Gerald asks Birkin: “Why is it art?” Birkin replies: “It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it” (WL 133). To Gerald’s accusation that such a statue cannot be considered “high art,” Birkin replies: “High! There are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in a straight line, behind that carving; it is an awful pitch of culture, of a definite sort” (WL 133). To Birkin, good art is moral art, though not moralistic art or even art expressive of values he approved. In Bell’s words, the African statuette reveals for Birkin “the limitation of his own habitual culture, even if it cannot of itself provide a positive alternative” (1991: 129). Throughout the novel, both primitive art and Modern art are presented as great art, though the author or the hero may personally dislike most of it and prefer other values and other forms. Art that expresses questionable values can still be good if those values are truly those of the artist, his society, or both.

And this is why any simplified moral polarization is inadequate for reading Lawrence’s fiction. Viewpoints of moral values are, as has been indicated above, usually re-examined within the framework of aesthetic experience. Take another
example from the scene in which Gerald maltreats his Arab mare at the level crossing. Examining the language Lawrence employs to describe Gudrun’s physical sensations at the sight of Gerald’s cruel and bloody act shows that it is difficult to arrive at a consistent moral evaluation when opposite points-of-view are dramatized with almost equal clarity and vividness. Gerald’s behavior is severely repudiated by Ursula as brutal and domineering. However, in some kinds of writing, such experiences of intense physical sensation, in which the mind is temporarily suspended in torrent of extreme emotion, are presented as desirable rather than condemned: “It made Gudrun faint with poignant dizziness, which seemed to penetrate her heart . . . . The world reeled and passed into nothingness for Gudrun, she could not know any more” (WL 169-70). Lawrence’s presentation of Gudrun’s experience calls to our mind the way Birkin describes the African statuette mentioned above. When Birkin is defining for Gerald the quality of the African statuette, he seems to be describing as desirable a state very much like that of Gudrun’s at the level-crossing: “the extreme of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness” (WL 127), “so sensual as to be final, supreme” (WL 133). Just like the statue is valued aesthetically beyond good and evil, so it seems that the significance of the scene at the level-crossing as an isolated moment, an aesthetic phenomenon, has little to do with moral judgment: “And through the man in the closed wagon, Gudrun could see the whole scene spectacularly, isolated and momentary, like a vision isolated in eternity” (WL 170).

In such a way, Lawrence in his fiction brings into existence what he notices or feels, which is not always what makes a “good story” or satisfying moral but what attracts him. The social or ideological justification for the attraction may or may not be clear, but for Lawrence, to ignore it is to let the work of art die. Nonetheless, as I have claimed earlier, Lawrence is by no means an aesthete, a position represented by Loerke, a professional artist in Women in Love. In defense of a drawing of his green
bronze of a girl on a stallion, which Ursula regards as the expression of male domination, Loerke grandly and extravagantly insists on the radical separation of art and life:

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 and distinct planes of existence, and to translate one into the other is worse than foolish, it is a darkening of all counsel, a making of confusion everywhere. Do you see, you must not confuse the relative work of action with the absolute world of art. That you must not do. (WL 525)

Taking the aesthetic as his most serious category, Loerke uses the notion of form to remove art from reality, ignoring one of Lawrence’s main points about Modern art—i.e., an art which detaches form from reality reveals a serious disorder in the artist’s relationship to the cosmos.

On the other hand, Ursula’s insistence on simple realism is too much a reaction and too naïve. She first accuses Loerke of having abused the girl-model for the statue and then, “white and trembling,” maintains that “the world of art is only the truth about the real world, that’s all—but you are too far gone to see it” (WL 526). Ursula ignores an obvious prerogative of the artist: the right to use objects and creatures symbolically, a right often exercised through the distortion of photographic realism. In contrast to Loerke, she too narrowly and moralistically defines the boundaries of art and life. Lawrence appears to be on both sides and simultaneously on neither side. Never so naïve as to believe that an artist could proceed without form or design, Lawrence nonetheless believes that when design becomes a final end in itself, inflexible and absolute, it undermines the ultimate purpose of art and casts a
III. Ethics of Reading Lawrence’s Fiction

Generally, there are two tendencies related to the discussion over how otherness is related to the study of ethics and literature. The first is perhaps most associated with philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre or Martha Nussbaum, who have turned to literary examples in their considerations of ethics. This mode of reading is based on what Blanchot calls “the informational model of language” (1982: 41). In this mode, which we might call “reading for ethics” (Morrissey 329-30), literature serves an almost demonstrative role, showing readers how to lead a better life and how to treat others ethically. For literature to work as part of moral inquiry as the moral philosophers see it, they have unproblematically to assume that a text is not a linguistic artifact but a surface beneath which there are real situations and real events. This approach means that although the events of a novel can be interpreted, the representation of the events cannot. The medium, the words which make up the novel, becomes invisible. However, as we have learned from the thinkers mentioned above, without words literature is nothing; what is more, in literature it is not only the meaning of words that matters, but their texture. Paul de Man has made this point clear by arguing that the act of reading itself implies that “literature is not a transparent message in which it can be taken for granted that the distinction between the message and the means of communication is clearly established” (1986: 15).
While the first model posits similarity between narrative and real situations of ethical decision, the other model, which we might call “ethics of reading” (Morrissey 330), usually focuses on the irreducible difference between the text and the ethical situation it is purported to represent. In other words, this model pays primary attention to the text as a linguistic artifact. To employ the “window” analogy, the motto that “the glass must be read as a text” (Derrida 1981a: 233) has become an ethical imperative in this model. Thus De Man discusses ethics as “a form of rhetoric” (1979: 206), arguing that ethics occurs only in language and not in some transcendental realm. J. Hillis Miller also claims that there is a necessary moment in that act of reading as such, that it is reading itself which raises the ethical questions as much as the narratives read (1987: 1). Miller’s claim is that, in reading, we respond to a linguistic necessity— the necessity to read and thus to misread. For both Miller and de Man, the ethical law in narrative is both limited to language and springs from language. This approach prioritizes whatever in the text resists assimilation to the same. On that ground, some features, such as interpretive ambivalence, verbal ambiguity, linguistic complexity, poetic compression, and ironic reversal are emphasized in this understanding of reading ethically.

Miller’s New Criticism version of the ethics of deconstruction is desirable in its intent. But as Simon Critchley points out, Miller’s ethics seems to be limited to the reading of books in the context of a North American university (1992: 47). Geoffrey Galt Harpham also argues that Miller’s understanding of ethics is too thin and too weak. By focusing on the act of reading, Miller has taken the literary text away from a discussion of its ethical concerns. An ethical reading, as we have seen for Miller, “cannot . . . be accounted for by . . . social and historical forces” and the result of each reading can bring us nowhere than to the conclusion that “it hides its matter as much as it reveals it” (Miller 1987: 8, 121). But the world has “thickness,” an
extra-linguistic basis, with which we must engage. Tobin Siebers therefore claims that Miller’s approach represents “an isolated linguistic morality which robs ethical theory of its social content” (39). It seems that what Miller proclaims is not the importance of “the ethics of reading” but rather the significance of “the reading of ethics.” This understanding of the power of textuality over referentiality prevents Miller from unproblematically introducing a satisfying theory of ethics.

While Nussbaum does not find textuality of the text problematic, Miller follows textual anomalies too tightly as to come to disparate conclusions all the time. In other words, while Nussbaum reads literature as moral philosophy, Miller reads moral philosophy as literature. As has been quoted above, Blanchot, employing the Levinasian ethics, proposes three ways of reading in discussing how ethics appears in a literary text. The third way of reading provided by Blanchot—“that ‘inspiring’ insomnia when, all having been said, ‘Saying’ is heard” (1986b: 101)—may serve as supplement to the above two modes of reading. As Blanchot sees it, the problem of reading is not only a struggle with meaning, but the encounter with an imperative to listen, the demand for an act of listening that is nonetheless not simply an act of comprehending.8 It is this demand that Levinas describes as the encounter with the other which interrupts the play of the Same and thereby opens a dimension of response to what can not be appropriated. A Levinasian ethics, according to Gibson, would then be to treat a text “as mobile and subtle complex relations, as always caught up in a play of composition and fission, of repetition and difference” (91). The ethical mode of the text is not one in which particularities are mere illustrations of a stable, pre-existing system, but one in which “eternal unfinishedness” (Bakhtin 1981: 93) is of cardinal importance. Yet horizons insistently return, or recompose themselves, as we have seen suggested by the “Moony” chapter in Women in Love mentioned above. In reference to this, Adam Newton, in his study of narrative ethics,
describes the responsibility of a story’s reader or listener as twofold:

In part it means learning the paradoxical lesson that ‘getting’ someone else’s story is also a way of losing the person as ‘real’ as ‘what he is’; it is a way of appropriating or allegorizing that endangers both intimacy and ethical duty. At the same time, however, one’s responsibility consists of responding to just this paradox. (19)

As an other, the text can never and should never be conquered nor exhausted by the reader. And yet, on the other hand, there is no meaning that does not culminate in a transformation of the Other into the Same; that is, no reading can be completed except in the form of understanding or knowledge. In Levinasian terms, the ethical Saying as an interruption can come to appear only as the (justified) Said as an interpretation. Put more precisely, much as the reader’s responsibility to understand the dangers of appropriating and allegorizing and to avoid careless treatment even of fictional people, it is also his/her responsibility to run these risks and embrace these paradoxes for the sake of ethical meaning-making.

As we have seen in the above, and will see more in the following, the reading of Lawrence’s fiction demands just the similar process of interpretation and interruption. While some moral message or insight can always be discerned through his fiction, moment of alterity from time to time opens up within the text which allows it to deliver itself up to an “other” reading. His art-speech is continually reaching through words toward a vital meaning or experience that cannot be fixed. Conventional words and phrases are destabilized, subjected to ironic reconsideration. Accordingly, in the language- and discourse-oriented paradigm shift, we should read more attentively, closely, and sensitively to learn how to complicate our first reading, especially the reading of texts that are continually engaged in an act of “commentary.” In effect, Lawrence himself advocates a similar notion of ethics of reading.
Apocalypse, Lawrence reiterates his belief in art and articulates his own aesthetic position with reference to it:

Once a book is fathomed, once it is known and its meaning is fixed or established, it is dead. A book only lives while it has power to move us, and move us differently; so long as we find it different every time we read it . . . . The real joy of a book lies in reading it over and over again, and always finding it different, coming upon another meaning, another level of meaning. (A 4-5)

On account of this, to read Lawrence from a fixed agenda-driven perspective is to fall into the danger of operating from exactly the same mental consciousness that he abhorred and fought against all his life. To read is to be vulnerable. A responsible reader is the one who follows the imperative: “Be unprepared” (Docherty 1990: 32)! In short, the reader should not contemplate literature as example but to acknowledge it as “a foray, a many-sided experiential ‘hypothesis’, an ‘adventure,’ and a ‘suppose’” (Adamson 103).

Given the linguistic complexity in Lawrence’s fiction, I contend that an ethics of reading his texts calls for deliberate attention to the characteristic style of his work—i.e., that of self-criticism and slightly-modified repetition. As I have pointed out in the above, there are certain presuppositions so crucial to the conduct of orthodox Lawrentian studies that critics have neglected the self-interrogative forces in his writing. In fact, the essential self-criticism pervades explicitly or implicitly both Lawrence’s fiction and non-fiction writing. In “Study of Thomas Hardy,” Lawrence specifically envisions art, and particularly the art of the novel, as a special kind of reflection that can in fact criticize its own systems and theories: “Every work of art adheres to some system of morality. But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres” (STH 89). Emphasis
Added.). What he called “art-speech” remains open to experience by virtue of its unique capacity for self-critique and self-correction. Its most distinctive quality, as Michael Ragussis suggests in his reading of Lawrence’s fiction, is to be “capable of a subtle overhearing of itself” (5), even when it is most minutely occupied with its own systems and procedures. Most unsympathetic readings of Lawrence’s work tend to slight the complexity of both the evolving drama and the ideas themselves. Once they are taken into account it is difficult to maintain that Lawrence is using his novel as a pulpit, that he is forcing Lawrentian dogma on the reader. This often requires from the reader not only constant attention to underlying emotional currents but a determined analysis of what is said. Some unexpected meanings emerge only after the arguments are carefully weighed, not only against the known biases of the speakers, but against each other. Much of the power and originality of Lawrence’s novels lies in the ways it invites readers into “the thick of the scrimmage” among the multiplicity of voices, attitudes, feelings, thoughts, disagreements, and quarrels which it dramatizes. Opposing voices have thus become one of the most central metaphors. As Wayne Booth notes, “it is a mistake to talk of Lawrence’s deliberately blurred handling of point of view as simply a technical innovation: it is a powerful ethical invention” (450). Booth recognizes that Lawrence was experimenting radically with what it means for a novelist to lose his own distinct voice in the voices of his characters, especially in their inner voices:

Again and again Lawrence surrenders the telling of the story to another mind, a mind neither clearly approved nor clearly repudiated yet presented in a tone that seems to demand judgment. I don’t know of any novelist, not even Dostoevsky, who takes free indirect style further in the direction of sustained surrender to a passionate mimesis giving us not two clear voices, the (silent) author’s and the independent character’s, but a chorus
of voices, each speaking with its own authority. (446-7)

Through a language of de-authorization, Lawrence develops, revises, or even discards ideas in his fiction.9 The search is thus not for a fixed set of beliefs or principles in Lawrence’s work, but for a series of “testing” whereby the philosophies and concepts are thrown open to exploration. Art must in some sense deconstruct itself: “The degree to which the system of morality . . . of any work of art is submitted to criticism within the work of art makes the lasting value and satisfaction of that work” (STH 89). As such, Lawrence constantly uses terms in contradictory clusters so that their normal meaning is challenged, modified or even reversed. Or else he uses the word singly but with an odd inflection that leads us to construct its significance anew in context. Words interrogate themselves most obviously in a novel like Women in Love. Birkin’s words are no more sacred than any other’s, and the word he uses positively is found in debased form in the mouths of other characters. For example, some key terms like “inhuman,” “pure,” “perfect,” and “mystic” are used to present both Gerald’s worship of the machine and a moment of transcendent sexual experience shared by Birkin and Ursula. One cannot help but feel perplexed that while Gerald founds his industry on an “inhuman principle” (WL 228), Birkin wants a relationship with Ursula that is also based on something “inhuman” (WL 46). And we see that Birkin’s insistence on a state in which the individual is “responsible for nothing” (WL 138) begins to give a hint of ironic childishness when seen in Winifred, who, “like a soulless bird flirts on its own will, without attachment or responsibility, beyond the moment” (WL 212). It seems that Lawrence does not expect so much to find a pattern in words that will mirror a pattern in the world as to use language to strike at language. That is why we should pay careful attention to his language—not only to his way with words but to word’s way with him. Here J. Hillis Miller’s remark highlights the language use in Lawrence’s fiction: “Though a
given word . . . may seem to choose univocally one of these possibilities of meaning, the other meanings are always there as a shimmering in the word which makes it refuse to stay still in the sentence” (1979: 219).

Certainly the self-interrogating force inherent in and between words cannot be detected independent from textual repetition. It should be noted that repetition is not an incidental awkwardness but an essential feature of language use in Lawrence’s fiction. In fact, people who do not like Lawrence’s prose often say that his great fault is repetitiousness, which often results in confusion and contradiction.

Lawrence himself comments on the charge in the Foreword to Women in Love:

In point of style, fault is often found with the continual, slightly modified repetition. The only answer is that it is natural to the author: and that every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing, frictional to-and-fro, which works up to culmination. (WL 486)

Lawrence thus holds that the prose is less a technique of statement than a mode of presenting feelings. With a style of “slightly modified repetition,” Lawrence’s writing strains beyond the parameters of objective reality, seeking to describe some elusive, probably non-existent supra-reality. Lawrence at his strongest is an astonishing writer adept at saying what cannot be said, showing what cannot be shown. By pushing language to its repetitive extremes, Lawrence attempts to present something he believes to be there, but which proves to be unreal on the evidence of language.

The following passage from The Rainbow manifests well the style of “pulsing, frictional to-and-fro” rhythm:

They worked together, coming and going, in a rhythm, which carried their feet and their bodies in tune. She stooped, she lifted the burden of
sheaves, she turned her face to the dimness where he was, and went with
her burden over the stubble. She hesitated, set down her sheaves, there
was a swish and hiss of mingling oats, he was drawing near, and she must
turn again . . .

He worked steadily, engrossed, threading backwards and forwards like
a shuttle across the strip of cleared stubble, weaving the lone line of
ridding shocks, nearer and nearer to the shadowy trees, threading his
sheaves with hers.

And always, she was gone before he came. As he came, she drew
away, as he drew away, she came. Were they never to meet? (R 112)

Recognizing the necessary indirection of “meaning” in the emotional domain,
Lawrence relies on rhythmic effect, verbal repetition, and the elaboration of language
to achieve various poetic effects, which enable him to communicate language’s
emotional meanings. At the rhythmic level created by the syntax and word-order, it
is the violent emotional currents which are more strongly suggested. In such a way
the repetitions express the developing impulses as they arise in the lives of these
characters at these moments. Lawrence’s way of respecting what cannot be said is
also his way of getting it said.

With a careful act of listening, we might find the insistent repetition with
variation which is the hallmark of Lawrence’s style. And it follows that the novels
are collectively read more like a palimpsest than a series of discrete statements.

Here Lawrence anticipates the way Gilles Deleuze places difference in the context of
repetition. Working against the philosophy of representation, Deleuze seeks to
demonstrate the productive aspect of difference. On that account, repetition is not
defined as the return of the same, nor as the reiteration of the identical; repetition is,
quite the contrary, the production of difference. In like manner, within and through
repetition, moment of alterity opens up within the Lawrentian text, which is engaged in a rehearsal of its internal exigencies through an act of “commentary.” In other words, Lawrence repeatedly asserts his most important ideas and yet the repetitions are never quite identical—the gradual changes constitute gradual redefinition. It is in this sense that both Deleuze and Guattari praise Lawrence as one of those writers “who leave us troubled and filled with admiration because they were able to tie their writing to real and unheard-of becoming” (1988: 244).

The modified repetition in Lawrence is inseparable from an endless semantic modification; we are never allowed to feel assured that a final “signified” has been reached. Lawrence insists that “art-symbols” must not be allowed to diminish into “labels” and we “can never explain them away” (A 142, 48). Artists whose material is the written language are limited to a comparatively fixed body of signifiers. Lawrence’s strategy is to use the same signifiers to express constantly shifting signifieds, so that the meaning is always unstable and on the move. Therefore, we might say Lawrence’s narrative contributes to ethics not because it establishes a fixed moral order but because it implies the “interactive” and “relational” nature of that order. In the words of Adam Newton, who defines narrative ethics not in terms of normative statements but in terms of relation, Lawrence’s narrative might be regarded “as relationship and human connectivity, as Saying over and above Said, or as Said called to account in Saying; narrative as claim, as risk, as responsibility, as gift, as price” (7). By examining the linguistic complexities and textual differences in Lawrence’s fiction, I aim, in what follows, to provide a discussion about Lawrence’s treatment of the ethics of vision and the relation between language and the ethical self.
Chapter Two  Ethics of Vision: Blindness and Insight

Lawrence’s exploration of the paradoxical relations between the eye and the field of vision, the mind and the field of knowledge, anticipates Continental thinkers’ suspicion of the visual implication in modern thought. Through a style of self-interrogation and the slightly-modified repetition, Lawrence’s deliberation of the problem of seeing and knowing is in many ways something that we are articulating in our concerns with the ethics of alterity.

I. The Denigration of Ocularcentrism

Since Plato’s allegory of the cave, light and the role of sight have been accorded a unique position in the Western tradition. They have stood as a metaphor for truth and objectivity and the very axis of modern rationalism. More recently, however, this status has come under significant criticism from Continental thought. Martin Jay describes convincingly a “denigration of vision” in the twentieth-century French thought:

The modern era . . . has been dominated by the sense of sight in a way that sets it apart from its pre-modern predecessors and possibly its postmodern successor. Beginning with the Renaissance and the scientific revolution, modernity has been normally considered resolutely ocularcentric . . . . Whether we focus on ‘the mirror of nature’ metaphor in philosophy with Richard Rorty or emphasize the prevalence of surveillance with Michel Foucault or bemoan the society of the spectacle with Guy Debord, we confront again and again the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the
According to Jay, “Cartesian perspectivism” is often assumed to be “equivalent to the modern scopic regime per se” (1993b: 115). Descartes’ radical division of mind and body leads to a logic of expression, according to which the intelligible activities of a knowing subject is entirely separated from the passive mechanisms of a physical body. In objectivity, the world is severed from the observer; in knowability, communion is re-established through the mediation of light. Jay summarizes major features of ocularcentrism as follows—linear perspective was taken to be a faithful representation for everything that could be visually represented; in addition to linear elements, it emphasized measurability, predictability, detachment and control; it implied a fixed, monocular viewing position, reducing the importance of narrative or discursive content in favour of formal and logical structure (1993b: 118).

Indeed, many of the twentieth-century French intellectuals were extraordinarily suspicious of the visual implication in modern thought while no less sensitive to the importance of vision itself. With a shared distrust toward ocularcentrism, both Levinas and Blanchot abandon the traditional philosophical preoccupation with ontology based on “the eternally present order of vision” (Levinas 1989:157). Blanchot is urgent to explore the antinomic relations between night and day, blindness and insight, obfuscation and enlightenment. Denouncing the alleged French passion for clarity, Blanchot suggests, in works like La folie du jour (The Madness of the Day), that noontime, the hour of greatest visibility, was also the hour of greatest danger, the time when looking at the sun brought blindness. Nor was the night any more conducive to lucid vision. What he proposes is the “other night,” the murmur of un-negatable being, which withdraws from the dialectical opposition of day and night. Blanchot subverted the contemplative appreciation of the starry heavens that has been a fundamental premise of Western metaphysics, demanding instead “the writing of the
disaster”—thus literally “dis-aster”—which means relinquishing any fixed star in the visible firmament as the ground of meaning (1986b: 5)\textsuperscript{12}.

Blanchot’s concern with “the duplicity of vision” parallels Levinas’s claim that ethics is thwarted by a visually based ontology. Levinas is an idiosyncratic philosopher in the history of Western philosophy, not only because of his reversal of the traditional subordination of the ethical to the ontological, but also because, in a tradition which privileges the specular, his theory of ethical subjectivity is theorized within the metaphor of touch. For Levinas, vision is emblematic of habitual economy and its tendency to grasp and possess. Vision is a violence and a form of adequation. Denouncing the fundamental narcissism of vision, Levinas regards the phenomenologically given world as a self-defined totality, which Derrida describes as such—“everything given to me within light appears as given to myself by myself” (VM 92). In other words, any emanation of light belies the desire to take hold of something or appropriate something for oneself. For Levinas, light is the medium which sustains and bridges the difference between a subject of perception and perceivable things: “Light makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us” (EE 48). That is, in a world of light, everything other than the self belongs, through intentionality, to the self. The egoism of intentionality is based on the establishment of a sense of being at the center of a panoramic objective world:

Light makes possible . . . this enveloping of the exterior by the inward, which is the very structure of the cogito and of sense. Thought is always clarity or the dawning of a light. The miracle of light is the essence of thought: due to the light an object, while coming from without, is already ours in the horizon which precedes it; it comes from an exterior already apprehended and comes into being as though it came from us, as though commanded by our freedom. (EE 48)
Therefore, the lucidity of things and ideas is primarily the result of egoism which seeks to find oneself in the light. Levinas thus indicates (not without tones of melancholy) the limited freedom of the ego as a self-defined totality: “The ‘I’ always has one foot caught in its own existence” (EE 84).

Levinas’s disclosure of the appropriating and subsuming nature of light and ego calls to our mind Lawrence’s exposition of the crisis brought out by the modern form of consciousness, which might be recapitulated in Heidegger’s word: “The impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion. It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself” (1977: 27). The mind/body split, which leads to what Lawrence called “the masturbating consciousness,” is often connected by Lawrence to the Cartesian self-consciousness whereby each individual finds the hub of reality in him/herself, in his/her own ego. His poem “New Heaven and Earth” charts the violation of the distinctions between self and other, lover and beloved, even creator and created, as a result of the appropriation of each of the second term by the first one:

When everything was me, I knew it all already, I anticipated it

All in my soul;

Because I was the author and the result,

I was the God and the creation at once;

Creator, I looked at my creation;

Created, I looked at myself, the creator:

It was a maniacal horror in the end.

I was a lover, I kissed the woman I loved,

and God of horror, I was kissing also myself.
I was a father and a begetter of children,
And oh, oh horror, I was begetting and conceiving in my own body.

(CP 257)

Lawrence here presents the perverse energy enclosed in self-knowledge, self-love and self-creation. The articulation of solipsism reaches a horrified completion and climax in images of fertility—i.e., auto-eroticism leads to auto-conception.

In his critique of modern consciousness, Lawrence considered its split to be the result of an overemphasis on the logical, visual, and verbal processes associated with the head. In his opinion, both vision and language—or conceptual thought—segment the fluctuating world. What is more, the privileging of these mental functions serves to entrench what is constructed by eye and intellect.

This is the habit we have formed: of visualizing everything. Each man to himself is a picture. That is, he is a complete little objective reality, complete in himself, existing by himself, absolutely, in the middle of the picture. All the rest just setting, background . . . . This has been the development of the conscious ego in man . . . since Greece first broke the spell of ‘darkness’ . . . . Previously, even in Egypt, men had not learned to see straight . . . . Like men in a dark room they only felt their own existence surging in the darkness of other creatures. (P 523)

Lawrence understood the alienated ego as the product of verbal-conceptual thought; the highly intellectual and visual culture has further reified the split within the self. Like the horrified “I” in the above poem, “Man is given up to his dual business, of being . . . the living stuff of life itself, unrevealed; and of knowing . . . the manner of that which has been, which is revealed” (STH 40-1). As a conscious ego, man is thus burdened with the antinomic nature of his own existence—i.e., as both the knowing subject and the object to be known.
For Lawrence, the possession of eyes suggests the facility to categorize, calibrate and fragment what is seen into sections and sectors. Metaphorically also, the “inner eye” suggests the way the brain can superimpose images of its own making upon what the physical eye looks at. In “Fantasia and Unconscious,” Lawrence uses the analogy of the tree, which “had no face and no answer” (FU 45), to open his discussion of the tyranny of sight:

This marvelous vast individual without a face, without lips or eyes or heart. This towering creature that never had a face . . . he turns two ways: he thrusts himself tremendously down to the middle earth, where dead men sink in darkness, in the damp, dense undersoil; and he turns himself about in high air; whereas we have eyes on one side of our head only, and only grow upwards. (FU 43-4. Emphasis added.)

A tree, Lawrence thus claims, cannot be looked at and known; to relish its existence, one has to “sit among the roots and nestle against its strong trunk, and not bother” (FU 43). Since the tree has no eyes, it has no sectored vision either. Lawrence reflects how the Greeks and Romans sought in their philosophy to put a face on nature and natural objects, segmenting them into features and facial characteristics: “Everything had a face, and a human voice. Men speak, and their fountains piped an answer” (FU 45). On the contrary, the tree, as Lawrence describes it, grows according to a blind intuition which is immensely preferable to the limited linear eyesight of “seeing” creatures. Thus, trees emanate a sense of “profound indifference,” because they possess a vastness of life that eludes human categorization and definition.

Lawrence’s critique of the imperialist implication of vision has been given in many of his novels. For instance, it is manifest in Kate’s reaction to Ramon and Cipriano in *The Plumed Serpent*:

‘Ah!’ she said to herself. ‘Let me close my eyes to him, and open only
my soul. Let me close my pry, seeing eyes, and sit in dark stillness along with these two men . . . . The itching, prurient, knowing, imagining eye. I am cursed with it, I am hampered up in it. It is my curse of curses, the curse of Eve. The curse of Eve is upon me, my eyes are like hooks, my knowledge is like a fish-hook through my gills, pulling me in spasmodic desire. (PS 184. Lawrence’s italics. ).

This passage relates thematically to Lawrence’s general view that sight is the most physically distanced of the senses and therefore closest to the abstraction of intellect, which has caused the alienating nature of modern consciousness. The regime of vision constitutes an appropriation of otherness, a refusal to allow the other to be other.

Doubtlessly, Lawrence criticizes the tyranny of sight mainly because it is related to the light of reason which, in shedding its rays, appropriates and thereby abolishes things. Since the eyes are, in purely physical terms, the most elevated of our senses, they are conventionally linked with rational understanding, as suggested by the conventional metaphor “understanding is seeing.” Visuality is thus linked to rationality. Denying the pleasure of gazing into the Dionysian abysses, the Socratic eye is engaged in the production of knowledge, wherein the getting of wisdom is based on the doctrine of recollection. That is, the knower seeks to understand and to integrate their external world in terms familiar to the self. Denouncing the Socratic model of knowing, Lawrence declares: “Know thyself! Which means, really, know thine own unknown self. It’s not good knowing something you know already” (P 719). Being extraordinarily sensitive to the otherness lying beyond boundaries of man’s conscious mind, Lawrence is suspicious of the Socratic model of ethics which is based on epistemology—i.e., the more you understand, the more virtuous you are. For Lawrence, quite the contrary, any system of values or code of ethics that we
construct must acknowledge “the vast, incomprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than ever the human mind can grasp” (STH 29).

In a more determinate tone, Levinas also advises the similar caution that concepts discovered within the self would not alter the self or the world because they would mediate one’s relation to external being by dissolving its alterity. Taking a step farther than Lawrence, Levinas specifically formulates a difference or an otherness that exceeds the totality of the visual, and in doing so challenges the privileging of the subject of light. His proposition of an otherness that transcends egological existence is thematized in the face. Taken from the vocabulary of vision and light, the face manifests that which transcends the light. Therefore, the Levinasian face must be divorced from the Hegelian specularity of intersubjective recognition. Instead, Levinas considers the face as an irreducible other, which eludes the speculation of the gaze:

The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face. This mode does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum—the adequate idea. (TI 50-1)

Thus, for Levinas, there is no encounter of presence in the face. It is, beyond the egoism of existence, a visitation unpresupposable within the visible world.

However, in attempting to philosophisize without light, Levinas is confronted at the outset with a certain dilemma indicated by Derrida: “It is difficult to maintain a philosophical discourse against light” (VM 85-6). In order to attack the use of the metaphor of the sun in Western thought, which associates illumination with intelligibility, possession and apprehension, Levinas attempts to propose a sense of
infinity which is beyond the metaphysics of presence. The difficulty confronting Levinas is expressed by Derrida as a problem of light:

Who will ever dominate it, who will ever pronounce its meaning without being pronounced by it? What language will ever escape it? How, for example, will the metaphysics of the face as the epiphany of the other free itself of light? Light perhaps has no opposite, if it does, it is certainly not night. (VM 92)

For Derrida, Levinas’s attempt to do away with the violence of a universality of light for the sake of an ethics of alterity would be to abandon what to philosophy appears to be the natural means for counteracting the blindness of mysticism. Put differently, it would be to base ethics on the martyrdom of Reason. As Derrida sees it, Levinas poses the question of ethics as simultaneously the inauguration of responsibility and the impossibility of its representation.

In some sense that is also the dilemma Lawrence is compelled to face in his portrayal and critique of modern civilization—that is, though feeling that the great disease of the age is that we are all far too conscious, he had no other way of conveying this except through our consciousness. However, unlike Levinas’s treatment of light in his early work, Lawrence’s attack on the highly visual and intellectual culture is not, despite his intermittent lapse into extremity or hyperbole, basically meant to scrap rational light as such in favor of pristine darkness. “Any creative act occupies the whole consciousness of a man, comprising instinct, intuition, mind and intellect” (P 573). His concern about mental consciousness is dialectical rather than simply avoiding it; he intends to use its very power in order to surpass it. As Burack puts it, Lawrence “uses the analytic tools of the modern mind against itself” (493). In other words, what Lawrence really repudiates is not consciousness or self-consciousness, but its presumptuous claim that it can grasp, by its usual tool of
concept, the present movement of a living being in its wholeness. That being the case, Lawrence does not present mere pre-conscious, pre-linguistic naivete as an alternative to the violence of mental knowledge. Instead, he suggests that “we must know, if only in order to learn not to know” (FU 76). Learning, which always involves consciousness, inevitably leads to self-knowledge, but the accumulation of knowledge that so complicates our experience can never simply be suppressed, reversed, or eliminated.

Influenced by Nietzsche’s idea of the artist as destroyer-creator and as transvaluer, Lawrence sees the “double rhythm of creating and destroying” as precisely “the dual rhythm of initiation” (SCAL 70). In Apocalypse, Lawrence sees the poetic imagination as cyclic rather than linear: “The power of suggestion is most mysterious. It may not work at all: or it may carry the unconscious mind back in great cyclic swoops through eras of time: or it may go only part way” (A 115). Put another way, it may involve a “curve of return” to past cultures and creative models, followed by resurgence and development. It is the dialectical encounter with otherness that generates new thinking. In his novels, Lawrence devised a particular dialectics: words such as “light/darkness,” “visible/invisible,” “knowing/unknown” hint at elusive qualities that can be caught only in endless repetitions and movement. This very elusiveness made it hard either for the author to give his conception an adequate expression or for the reader to grasp a clear understanding of it. However, as has been noted, Lawrence is not conducting an argument wherein the restatement is merely unnecessary repetition. On the contrary, new contexts make the same word or phrase express a further development. As characters toss key words about, Lawrence reveals these words’ dialectical possibilities while avoiding superimposition of a theory.

In what follows, I intend to explore the way Lawrence’s fiction marks a
significant transgression of the dualistic thinking, from the basic image patterns of light and darkness to the celebrated antithesis of the African and Nordic “ways” of knowing.  

Lawrence does not merely reverse the conventional assignment of values but rather rejects the conventional taxonomies. For him, both poles of any conventional duality are clearly interrelated, dependent upon each other by definition. In a kind of linguistic labor, Lawrence chips away at any given signified of each of the poles, changing its shape little by little, but never letting it conveniently settle into a final form. To register the mutinous and discordant power in his fiction is not to concede that the novels are flawed or undermined by contradiction. Quite the opposite, as Kristeva puts it, “A textual practice is ethical when it is ambivalent” (1984: 234). “Ambivalence” allows for ethics in that it opens to heterogeneity, making room for both sameness and difference. It is in this sense that by pluralizing as well as positing meaning does Lawrence’s text fulfill its ethical function.

II. The Dialectic of Seeing

In spite of his verbal and imagistic extravagance, Lawrence in fact shows in most of his work his hostility toward the dominating influence of language and vision on Western consciousness. By exaggerating the verbal and visual features of modern consciousness—dualism, verbosity, visuality, reflexivity, conceptualization, etc.—Lawrence calls attention to the split of modern subjectivity and to the undeserved priority given to the activities associated with one part of the body—i.e. the head. As Lawrence sees it, this partial but dominant form of consciousness belittles or blocks the modes of knowing and being associated with the rest of the body. Echoing Levinas’s attack on light of reason, which tends to appropriate and thereby abolish things by means of conceptualization, Lawrence reasserts the primacy
of touch in a culture privileging specularity. Regarding the artist as the one who introduces innovative ways of seeing, Lawrence praises Cezanne for avoiding the “optical cliché” in his portraits: “He wished to displace our present mode of mental-visual consciousness, the consciousness of mental consciousness, and substitute a mode of consciousness that was predominantly intuitive, the awareness of touch” (P 579).

Therefore, while vision is usually the privileged faculty of perception in realist fiction, in most of Lawrence’s work, the primacy of dark unconsciousness is from time to time reasserted over the rational and reflective mind. Lawrence’s attack on the blinding function of rational light is manifest in The Rainbow. For instance, after Ursula has had ample opportunity to be disillusioned by those “priests of knowledge” at the university, she laments how modern men have been blinded by light— the light of consciousness, which says “there is no darkness” (R 436). We all live as prisoners of the light, Ursula decides, and are frightened by those “shadow-shapes of wild-beasts” (R 436) whose menacing fangs we see illuminated by the arc-lamp of consciousness. Having been blinded by the light, we miss the “dark shadow-shapes of the angels” and the fertile darkness of the deepest recesses of our being (R 437). In other words, we have not seen that “the angels in the darkness were lordly and terrible and not to be denied, like the flash of fangs” (R 438). For Ursula, what lies beneath the falsity of the university is the denial of eternal mysteries of unexplained powers and irrational forces. She feels deep contempt for the “stupid light” of civilization. In her dark sensual arrogance, she said to herself, “The stupid, artificial, exaggerated town, fuming its lights. It does not exist really. It rests upon the unlimited darkness” (R 443).

Ursula thus begins to yearn for something beyond “the lighted areas, lit up by man’s complete consciousness” (R 445). Newly returned from Africa, Skrebensky is
thus allied with darkness and becomes her means of exploring the “darkness” within herself. Ursula seems to identify Skrebensky with the “angel of darkness”: when she meets him she is frightened by his “self-effacing diffidence” (R 446). Their consummation makes her soul “sure and indifferent of the opinion of the world of artificial light”:

She was caught up, entangled in the powerful vibration of the night. The man, what was he? – a dark, powerful vibration that encompassed her. She passed away as on a dark wind, far, far away, into the pristine darkness of paradise, into the original immortality. She entered the dark fields of immortality. (R 451)

It seems that “they were both absolute and happy and calm” (R 452). But then all Skrebensky’s negative aspects must be dealt with, aspects which have only disappeared as sensual darkness has taken over the relationship and which soon come back. Skrebensky is for Ursula a signifier of her own potential. Their terrible consummation in Lincolnshire (R 479), which ends their relationship, restores to Ursula the recognition of the emptiness of the signifier and the final failure of transformation through a relation based on dark sensual absolute.

As we might see, the opposition of one metaphoric network (sight/ will/ knowledge/bondage) to another (darkness/lapsing/the unknown/freedom) appears frequently in Lawrence’s work. Fundamental to Lawrence’s thinking is the concept of polarity: female and male, body and spirit, impulse and ideal, blood-consciousness and mental consciousness, organic and mechanical principles, and so on. Yet the word “polarity” itself has an internal dichotomy—i.e., it can mean the possession or juxtaposition of two contrasted principles as well as the direction of thought or feeling towards a single point. This ambiguity is implied in Lawrence’s conception. He believed that no human being can develop except through the polarized connection
with other beings. This “circuit of polarized unison” precedes all mind and all
knowing, and was embodied in the science of the pagan world, of Egypt and Greece, a
“science in terms of life” (FU 8). Clinging to the idea of opposition or reaction itself,
Lawrence becomes a kind of dialectician. But he is a dialectician without
reconciliation—i.e., he does not always use his oppositions to seek the synthesis of
the opposites, which is the usual goal of dialectic.

As it is, irresoluble contradictions in Lawrence’s fiction make it impossible to
impose a fixed pattern or “to nail anything down in the novel” (STH 172). For
example, given Lawrence’s critique of mental consciousness, it seems natural that the
great potential of unconscious darkness is explicitly given primacy in most of his
fiction. However, a complex exploration of his novels demonstrates that the basic
pattern in which light is undermined and darkness is glorified never becomes fixed.
George and Annabel in The White Peacock are examples to show that neither dark
blood nor conscious mind is to be denied in modern men’s and women’s struggle to
achieve a relationship with themselves, with each other, and with the circumambient
universe. At the beginning of the novel George is living naturally, happily and freely
in the healthy body which he is glad to be, and which he is proud of. At the end of
the book this body is corrupted as a tree is corrupted by fungus. The cause is the fall
into consciousness precipitated by friendship with Cyril and love for Lettie. The
essential point about George is that the change, while horrifying, is natural and
inevitable. Somehow the sensual man must emerge from unconsciousness—“the
dark waters in which the gray fish glide” (WP 58)—and must connect himself with
the “light” of consciousness and of spiritual development. Likewise, the gamekeeper
Annabel, whose motto is “Be a good animal, true to your animal instinct” (WP 112),
is not presented in the novel as a final success, but as a wasted potential. As Annabel
himself admitted, “I am life with a good house, built and finished, and left to tumble
down again with nobody to live in it” (WP 175).

The difficulty with George’s and Annabel’s “dark freedom” is shared by Will in *The Rainbow*. In this novel, Will is usually associated with images of darkness and is appreciated for his intuitive mode of knowing and being. Anna’s first impression of Will is of “some mysterious animal that lived in the darkness under the leaves and never came out, but which lived vividly, swift and intense” (R 98). Will’s soul is like “some strange, underground thing, abstract” (R 148). There is “something subterranean about him, as if he had an underworld refuge” (R 149). It is this dark power which attracts Anna. On the other hand, like the male characters mentioned above, Will lacks the means by which his deepest sensibilities can be related to the daylight world. He is described repeatedly as “unformed,” “uncreated,” and not brought forth. His real being lays in his dark emotional experience of the Infinity and the Absolute. While Will’s soul may have a range which Anna justly envies, Anna has a consistency of self-regard which makes her more confident and self-assured. Put differently, while Anna is so egoistic as to look at all things as radiating from herself, Will “puts aside the egotist” so much that he cannot “conceive the whole.”\(^14\) If Anna’s sense of self is too overbearing, Will’s is too regressive and thus he lives too blindly and too invisibly. A passage from “The Crown” offers a helpful gloss over the problem with “eternal darkness” as well as “eternal light”:

> The barren womb can never be satisfied, if the quick of darkness be sterile within it. But neither can the unfertile loins be satisfied, if the seed of light, of the spirit, be dead within them. They will return again and again to the womb of darkness, asking, asking, and never satisfied.

Then the unconsummated soul, unsatisfied, uncreated in part, will seek to make itself whole by bringing the whole world under its own order, will seek to make itself absolute and timeless by devouring its opposite.
Adhering to the one eternity of darkness, it will seek to devour the eternity of light. Realizing the one infinite of the Source, it will endeavor to absorb into its oneness the opposite infinite Goal. This is the infinite with its tail in its mouth. (RD 28-9)

In other words, Will’s infinite, which contains for him both beginning and end, is indeed the most complete satisfaction of which he is capable, but it represents an ontological regression. Anna makes a needed and natural correction when she insists that the sky, not the cathedral roof, is the ultimate confine. It almost seems as if Anna has indeed converted Will to an attitude which will allow more “light,” at a cost of making Will losing his absolute (R 203).

As the title of this novel implies, this text has set into motion the binary of conflicting desires with all of that binary’s restless impulse to move toward ending yet resist ending. In other words, this text is embedded in a tension between narrative closure and textual openness. The rainbow as the spectrumizing of light, wherein light can be seen, deconstructs and problematizes the binary of light and darkness, visibility and invisibility, with each of the polar opposites dependent on the other while holding the potential to annihilate the other. Thus the binary opposites are not combined to resolve their conflicts but to demonstrate their interdependence and intercontamination. Moreover, as the metaphor of the rainbow suggests, the existence of the visible rainbow is made possible and complete with its invisible counterpart lying underground, beyond the worldly reality. Put differently, if the arch/rainbow is a circle whose other half is hidden but existent beyond the knowable world, then the arch is the acceptance of the objective world combined with the realization that it will never be enough by itself. Lawrence sees that in this cosmic war between light and darkness, there is no absolute winner. If darkness triumphs over light, or light over darkness, annihilation occurs.
While in *The Rainbow*, the dialectic interplay of image pattern related to light/darkness is manifest, in *Women in Love*, Lawrence’s denigration of vision is more direct and severe. Lawrence radicalizes the disavowal of ocular recognition through Birkin who demands from Ursula, not a high physical profile, but an essential invisibility—in effect, a negation of the claims of identificatory vision: “It’s not a question of visual appreciation in the least . . . . I don’t want to see you. I’ve seen plenty of women, I’m sick and weary of seeing them. I want a woman I don’t see” (WL 147). Unlike Birkin, Ursula does not so consciously and urgently demand the discarding of the eye, but her gaze is presented as being drawn, not to that which is (most) visible, but to that which is (most) invisible. And so her knowledge of Birkin comes from something beyond visualization and conceptualization: “She was watching him . . . not really aware of what she was seeing” (WL 44). It is her gaze that lets the invisible shine in its uncanny beauty. A number of words and phrases suggest that Ursula is seeing something “hidden”—“another voice,” “another knowledge,” “invisible”; “she could not say what it was” (WL 94). An episode from the “Moony” chapter reveals the way Ursula looks at things without imposing images familiar to the (human) self. At the end of this chapter, the Brangwen sisters are walking along a lane and see “a robin sitting on the top twig of a bush, singing shrilly” (WL 262). Gudrun reacts first by deciding that the bird looks as if “he feels important” (WL 262). Infected by Gudrun’s observation, Ursula “saw the persistent, obtrusive birds as stout, short politicians lifting up their voices from the platform, little men who must make themselves heard at any cost” (WL 263). But days afterward her attitude changes:

Some yellow-ammers suddenly shot along the road in front of her. And they looked to her so uncanny and inhuman, like flaring yellow barbs shooting through the air on some weird, living errand, that she said to
herself: “After all, it is impudence to call them little Lloyd Georges. They are really unknown to us, they are the unknown forces. It is impudence to look at them as if they were the same as human beings. They are of another world. How stupid anthropomorphism is!” (WL 264)

What Ursula learns is the way to see things as they are. Detaching itself in a critical way from worldly temptations, Ursula’s gaze hence attempts to see things without stereotyping, fixation, or reifying.

In this novel, Lawrence critically challenges the traditional notion that the “highest” forms of thought are the most disembodied, and he suggests the suppressed tactile dimensions be restored. Refusing to reduce the other or translate experience by visual conceptualization, Birkin and Ursula communicate through the language of touch: “Darkness and silence must fall perfectly on her, then she could know mystically, in unrevealed touch” (WL 319). The “mysterious night” that enfolds the lovers is a state of being “never to be seen with the eye, or known with the mind, only known as a palpable revelation of living otherness” (WL 320). This unspeakable knowledge is mediated by a tactile language, and there is no translation of this “dark, subtle reality” into any mental images or concepts. Birkin and Ursula see and know each other in ways that are paradoxically “never to be revealed” and that confirm the “death of knowledge” (WL 319). The organ of exploration is no longer the eye but the hand since tactility thwarts precisely the possessive interiorization and mentalization of the “living otherness” inherent in the other. In addition to that of the embodied eye, the sovereignty of the mind’s eye is also subverted by the spontaneous motion of the hand. In so doing, the lovers achieve a mutual “revelation of mystic otherness” that cannot be either seen or known.

Like her Brangwen ancestors, Ursula inherits the “mystic body of reality”
through touch. While inheriting the same tradition, Gudrun is, on the contrary, featured by her X-ray vision and mental stranglehold. Lawrence’s attack on the predatory vision is especially manifested through Gudrun’s characteristic mode of seeing. Watching the guests at Laura Crich’s wedding “with objective curiosity,” she “saw each one as a complete figure, like a character in a book, or a subject in a picture, or a marionette in a theatre, a finished creation” (WL14). As a painter, Gudrun tends to see things by enclosing the seen object within a frame, and this is also the link between her self-contained being and her nearly perfect art miniatures. Beyond that, Gudrun’s sensuous vision reveals a sadomasochistic desire to know, to possess, to usurp, to manipulate, and even to destroy. In her first encounter with Gerald, her gaze is presented as an aggressive, almost predatory, assault upon him. Looking at Gerald, she said silently to herself: “I shall know more of that man” (WL 15). On this account, Gudrun’s seeing is at least a double phenomenon: gazing at/familiarizing herself with Gerald will also be her way of knowing him. In this way, she will “know” Gerald in an essentially Western mode of knowing. For Gudrun, the essence of looking seems an act of appropriation, a gesture toward possession, rather than a vulnerable encounter as well as a pleasurable binding of one’s being with the other.

In fact, Gudrun represents the fusion of psychological contraries: on the one hand, her sense of identity is so weak that she must always feel at the center of attention; but on the other hand, to protect herself from the risks of such exposure, she must simultaneously remain the detached witness. The attempt to satisfy these two opposing needs creates a vicious circle. In order not to be negated by a hostile witness, Gudrun turns herself into one, but in so doing she risks the no-less annoying result of not being seen at all. “Always this desolating, agonized feeling, that she was outside of life, an onlooker, whilst Ursula was a partaker, caused Gudrun to suffer from a sense of her own negation, and made her feel that she must always demand the
other to be aware of her, to be in connection with her” (WL 165). In other words, while defying the aggressive gaze of others on her, Gudrun is at the same time yearning restlessly for their gaze and their word of confirmation about her existential significance. Unable to face the double demand of human existence—i.e., to look and to be looked at—Gudrun makes herself tortured by an utter sense of isolation and alienation. When she looks out on the mountain peaks of the Tyrol, “she could see it, she knew it, but she was not of it. She was divorced, debarred, a soul shut out” (WL 403). Putting herself in the position of the mocking witness gives Gudrun her (critical) power and (enclosed) security, but also exacerbates her bitterness: “She never really lived, she only watched” (WL 465).

Truly, Gudrun’s anxiety is in different degrees shared by all the other characters. Her insights into people are not always wrong but are at times too penetrating. In other words, what is most problematic in her mode of seeing is the exhaustive way in which she reduces people. The “Moony” chapter reveals this “reductive practice” of any reflexive being as well as the fear of being reduced by such practice, which are shown to be a kind of dilemma and difficulty confronting not only Gudrun but also Birkin and Ursula. The stoning episode enacts Birkins’ attempt to elude self-reflexivity and to demand a different kind of accounting from the purely specular one of emblematic representation. Through projecting its full image, the moon receives back its own ideal reflection. On the unruffled surface of the water, all that can be seen is the whiteness, which is strictly a play of light. Only when there is a disturbance of the element that sustains the surface does its illusory and uncertain status become momentarily visible. In shattering this brilliant specular image, Birkin strives to undermine the possibility of a perfect return by rupturing its symmetries and superficiality (WL 276-8). In fact, before she is aware of Birkin’s presence, Ursula herself senses the moon as a “sinister face” from which she cannot
escape: “It was like a great presence, watching her . . . . And there was no avoiding it . . . she suffered being exposed to it” (WL 275). For Ursula, the moon was an anthropomorphized watcher and hence oppressive agency. In a sense, Birkin’s stoning of the moon’s reflection satisfied Ursula’s aversion to this staring and appropriating light. Yet undeniably, the reflection can neither be removed nor would that be desirable as an end. When its reflection begins to form again on the water after Birkin’s futile attempt, we are forced to acknowledge that its fragments, which can never stay as such except momentarily, would be coming together “blindly, enviously” (WL 279).

On that account, this episode also calls into question the possibility and desirability of the “pure night” described in the “Excurse” chapter mentioned above, wherein Birkin and Ursula journey together into a world outside the realm of looking. While seeking to consummate their relationship in the kingdom of touch where only darkness and silence reign, the two lovers can never avoid relating themselves to a visible world, where their own “living otherness” can be made to appear. While in most of his work, the “beauty of touch” is shown to be far deeper than the “beauty of vision” (LCL 114), Lawrence never ceases to re-view critically the notion of “democracy of touch.” In his expository writing, Lawrence does often definitely dichotomize physical touch and mental thinking, as he says in Apocalypse: “Real consciousness is touch. Thought is getting out of touch” (A 1990). Yet as his poem “Thought” shows us, thinking may bring one more fully in touch with oneself and with the surrounding cosmos: “Thought is the welling up of unknown life into consciousness,/ . . . /. Thought is gazing on to the face of life, and reading what can be read./ Thought is pondering over experience, and coming to a conclusion” (CP 273). In other words, while Lawrence is the prophet of “an unspeakable communication in touch . . . that can never be transmuted into mind content” (WL
320), he nevertheless characterizes creativity, a way of representing what cannot be represented, as the transmutation of bodily awareness into an integrated mental consciousness that seeks expression in language and style. Similarly, as I have claimed, though skeptical of the “Nordic” way of intellectuality, Lawrence does not show his one-sided preference for the “African” way of pure sensuality, which would be like the dark water without the light of consciousness. It seems more plausible that, as the “Moony” chapter in Women in Love has suggested, living in a realm of looking and being looked is inevitable. Far from abolishing the gift of nature we call “sight”, Lawrence is instead proposing a way of re-envisioning vision, by relating “seeing” to the experience of touching and being touched. In short, spontaneous-creative fullness of being includes vision and touch as interdependent and inter-fertilizing elements rather than as mutually-exclusive opposites or alternatives.

III. The Dialectic of Knowing

As shown by the above discussion, Lawrence holds a severe attack on the predatory vision, though a further exploration reveals that mind’s eye and sense’s touch converge in his style. Likewise, Lawrence rejects the possessive mode of knowing. In his opinion, “to try to know any living being is to try to suck the life out of that being . . . . You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily. For this reason, the desirous consciousness, the SPIRIT, is a vampire” (SCAL 72). Vampire entails significantly a lust for knowledge of another being, an unpardonable sin in Lawrence’s universe. In “Apocalypse,” true knowledge is equated with our awareness of “the other thing”:

Man has two supreme forms of consciousness, the consciousness that I
AM, and that I am full of power; then the other way of consciousness, the awareness that IT IS, and that IT, which is the objective universe or the other person, has a separate existence from mine, even preponderant over mine. This latter is the way of knowledge: the loss of the sense of I AM, and the gaining of knowledge, or awareness, of the other thing, the other creature. (A 168)

So for Lawrence, to know is to bring something under a concept, to relate it back to me, to make it familiar, to objectify it, and to incorporate it into my own identity. What Lawrence disclaims from the knowing subject—“the loss of the sense of I AM”—recalls what Levinas proposes as “the dethronization of egoism.” The cognitive and representational imperialism of the ego is severely rejected by Levinas in the encounter with the Other. For Levinas, to know is also to reduce something to the same. “In knowing, which is of itself symbolic, is realized the passing from the image, a limitation and a particularity, to the totality” (OB 64). Levinas is suspicious of the totalization that he believes to be inherent in any attempt to think, to conceptualize, to systematize, to theorize and hence to know. In knowledge, Levinas says, one is in “a relation with what one equals and includes, with that whose alterity one suspends, with what becomes immanent, because it is to my measure and to my scale” (1989: 60). The mediation of one’s relations to the singularity or alterity of others through the generality of concepts discovered in oneself is where “every power begins” (Levinas 1987: 50). But in the exercise of power, there is nothing disturbing. Hence there is no teaching, no production of new ideas.

In contrast to the Platonic theory of knowledge as anamnesis (recollection), which asserts that I already know what I seek to know, and that all knowledge is already contained within myself, for Levinas, the other introduces something new, approaches as radically other, and resists absorption into the I’s habitual reduction of
the alterity of things to itself, through consumption, labor, work, and knowing. Levinas thus envisages an ethical sensibility that is irreducible to knowledge, when subject and consciousness itself in passivity are shaken by the alterity of the other person. The stark contrast between the ability of not knowing entailed by ethical alterity’s secret encounter and the foundational precept of western knowledge theory—that subjects can know some objects in the world—shatters the self-returning journey of the knowing subject. Accordingly, ethics in the Levinasian sense does not focus on how moral consciousness discovers the moral imperative within the constraints of human reason. Rather it seeks the sense of ethics in how human consciousness when encountering the infinite meets the limits of reason, the limits of its representational imperialism.

But a question has been posed by Derrida—how can moral value be conceived in the first place, if it is not cognitive, i.e. if it is not represented in reflective consciousness? Put differently, how can the encounter with the other become an ethics if this otherness is incomprehensible? How to speak to the other without comprehension? Would this not occasion the grossest misunderstanding? In short, how can one speak about the invocation of the other without neutralizing the relation, and hence transforming it into a form of knowledge? In this sense, Lawrence not only anticipates Levinas’s critique of the imperialist nature of knowledge but provides a critical review of his relentless denunciation of the power of self-knowledge. Lawrence was certainly, like Levinas, critical of the possessive mode of knowing, and surely he’ll be in accordance with Levinas’s assertion that “the light that permits encountering something other than the self makes it encountered as if this thing came from the ego . . . . And in this sense knowledge never encounters anything truly other in the world” (TO 68). On the other hand, Lawrence also makes clear on so many occasions that the knowing subject must not and cannot be abandoned in the
pursuit of what he called “true knowledge.” Every departure of the self toward the world inevitably involves a return of the self to itself. And Lawrence never fully gives up the Platonic hope of finding the permanent truth of things behind the appearance of everyday existence. Accordingly, characters in his novels are often shown to be torn between a knowing impulse and something which is more powerful but which is not yet known, not realized. If it were realized it would come as words and knowledge, and inevitably as the product of the consciousness, which was somehow a betrayal of life. In short, there is an endless oscillation in Lawrence’s major work between, on the one hand, his assertion of the ability of “not knowing” as a challenge to the possessive internalization of “knowing”, and, on the other hand, his ultimate recognition that the knowing subject’s yearning for a unity and total presence in meaning can never be denied and that no knowledge is possible without being mediated through a reflective consciousness.

Lawrence’s concern with the pursuit of “true knowledge” is manifest in the idea of foreigner and foreignness, which plays a decisive role in The Rainbow. In the Hardy study, Lawrence explains what he means by “life”: “What is the aim of self-preservation, but to carry us right out to the firing line, where what is is in contact with what is not” (STH 19). That is, in the dynamic interaction between “what is” and “what is not,” the actuality of “what is” is no longer taken for granted, for “what is not” has always already constituted the horizon of reality. Life at the moment of such an encounter appears constitutively unfinished and open-ended. It is in this sense that, in The Rainbow, the drive to know the unknown beyond is inextricably linked with the idea of the foreign. Characters are often depicted in doorways, on thresholds, at windows, “on the brink of the unrevealed” (R 186), reaching toward “the shore of the unknown” or “the porch of the great Unknown” (R 189, 191). One character who is the most successful in realizing the vast whole in life is Tom
Brangwen. If Tom has a secret of success, it lies in his receptivity and humble attitude—i.e., his ability to achieve a state of “the loss of the sense of I AM.” This in turn stems from his conviction that he is incomplete, that all things do not in fact radiate from him: “He must admit that he was only fragmentary, something incomplete and subject. There were the stars in the dark heaven traveling, the whole host passing by on some eternal voyage. So he sat small and submissive to the greater ordering” (R 35). Tom has learned to humble himself and because of this humility he is able to respond to what is alien, to a strange foreign woman and to an unknown cosmic order. What the narrator says of Tom concerning his relation with Lydia extends a complex recognition about the nature of knowledge in a human relationship—that “he did not know her any better, any more precisely, now that he knew her altogether” (R 91).

On the contrary, from the beginning, Will and Anna know much more about each other than Tom and Lydia, and they talk a great deal more. But their knowledge and words have no power to soften their wills or bring them closer. It is not their distinctiveness that ultimately separates them but their inability to love one another enough to recognize the unsubsumable foreignness inherent in the other being.

Will’s pleasure in finding symbolic meaning in ordinary things enrages Anna. Refusing to treat ordinary objects as symbols, Anna insists on the physical reality of objects and separates them from all symbolic meanings. Laughing at the Lamb as the symbol of Christ, she said derisively, “Whatever it means, it’s a lamb. And I like lambs too much to treat them as if they had to mean something” (R 150). Will counters her mockery with insults: “It’s because you don’t know anything . . . . Laugh at what you know, not at what you don’t know” (R 150). Instead of endorsing either Anna’s or Will’s view of the lamb, the narrator comments, “They were very well matched. They would fight it out” (R 152). Dramatizing the deficiencies of
symbolic and realistic ways of knowing in the couple’s quarrel, the novel works
toward an unstable trembling dialectics of the two. The reader is not invited to side
with either Anna or Will. In certain moods, Lawrence would say with Anna that a
lamb is only a lamb; yet in others he knows, with Will, that potent associations carry
the creature and the world beyond themselves. They are incommensurable yet each
is to be known only through the other.

In such a way, Lawrence’s writing generates meaning from a multiplicity of
interacting “voices” while subjecting knowing and being to constant testing. In
Women in Love, through a kind of rhetorical performance, Lawrence further makes the
tension between “knowing” and “not knowing” central to his transgressive art. As
has been mentioned above, Lawrence often uses repetition plus variation to alter the
meaning of basic concepts that he has compressed into and unfolded from the code
words. Words like knowledge and knowing become dialogized in this novel by
recurring in various contexts and in the speech of conflicting characters. Knowledge
is thus not an entity but a process. For instance, Gudrun’s “knowing” the wedding
guests as “a finished creation” and Gerald as instrumentality is juxtaposed with
Birkin’s knowledge of potency in “the deepest physical mind” and the lovers’
initiation into mysteries of darkness. Indeed, “not knowing” as a mode of knowing
is one of the most recurrent themes in Women in Love. As Birkin tells Ursula,
learning not-to-know is the secret of learning to know: “You’ve got to lapse out
before you can know what sensual reality is, lapse into unknowingness, and give up
your volition” (WL 44). What Birkin proposes is a kind of knowledge that seems, for
Ursula, to contradict any previous concept of knowledge. Ursula thereby points to
the novelty in Birkin’s definition when she asks, “How can you have knowledge not
in your head?” (WL 45). Coining the term “dark knowledge,” Birkin eschews all
traditional associations, from Plato on, of light with knowledge and truth.

86
In contrast to this vulnerable mode of (un)knowing, Gudrun always pre-mediates and contrives her manual/mental knowing. As has been quoted above, on first encountering Gerald, her unspoken thought is an analytical mentalization of her feeling as she says “assuredly” to herself: “I shall know more of that man” (WL 15). Gudrun knows Gerald in the kingdom of touch, yet her touch, unlike that of Ursual which “can never be transmuted into mind content,” reduces the unknown to a material essence that can be known and possessed by the will:

She knew. And this knowledge was a death from which she must recover.

How much more of him was there to know? Ah much, much, many days harvesting for her large, yet perfectly subtle and intelligent hands, upon the field of his living, radio-active body. Ah, her hands were eager, greedy for knowledge. (WL 332)

Just as she sees things in “too penetrating” light, so does she in no case go halfway in knowing and mastering an object; she is not satisfied until her knowledge becomes exhaustive. Through her love relationship with Gerald, Gudrun reaps the fruits of forbidden knowledge of a man and then throws him away: “After all, what was the lover but fuel for the transport of this subtle knowledge, for a female art, the art of pure, perfect knowledge in sensuous understanding” (WL 449). Gudrun’s knowledge eventually finishes Gerald, so that there is nothing “unknown, unresolved” (WL 14) left for her to discover.

Indeed, Gudrun is occasionally depicted as being capable of falling into a state of “not knowing,” wherein the mind is temporarily suspended and the volition abandoned. However, Gudrun’s ability of “not knowing” is relativized and undermined by other modes of “not knowing” manifest in other characters. For instance, the experience of “not knowing” gone through by Gudrun brings a strikingly different result from that of the encounter between Birkin and Ursula. At the mare
scene, while Ursula responds with violent antagonism, calling Gerald a fool and urging him to let the mare retreat from the train, Gudrun looks at him “with black-dilated, spellbound eyes” (WL 169). And as Gerald persists she approaches a state of mindlessness: “It made Gudrun faint with poignant dizziness, which seemed to penetrate her heart” (WL 169). At the most intensive moment, “The world reeled and passed into nothingness for Gudrun, she could not know any more” (WL 170). What Lawrence presents here is another version of the ecstatic loss of self, but also a demonic one. Like, say, the ecstatic moments gone through by Tom Brangwen, Gudrun’s state of “not knowing” follows a pattern of unendurable intensity and mindless release. But unlike Tom’s experience, which follows the subsequent (if temporary) achievement of peace and harmony, Gudrun is much more diffident and detached when returning to normal consciousness—“hard and cold and indifferent” (WL 171). While briefly losing herself in a moment of intensity, Gudrun eventually refuses to admit the experience fully to her conscious mind after it passes, and returns to a cold state of control: “She won’t give herself away—she’s always on the defensive” (WL 172). In other words, although she experiences a suspension of her self similar to that felt by Ursula with Birkin, Gudrun resents and resists its existence and its impact upon her.

In addition to Gudrun, Lawrence’s critique on the vampire lust for knowledge is most evident in his presentation of Hermione’s characteristic mode of knowing. Hermione depends heavily upon one or two elements of being—will, spirit, and intellect are fused within her into a single passion for final abstract knowledge. For Hermione, to know is the greatest thing in life. Driven by a will to know which eats up everything including herself, Hermione is “pallid and preyed-upon like a ghost, like one attacked by the tomb-influences which dog us. And she was gone like a corpse, that has no presence, no connection” (WL 89). The desire to know thus
consigns one to an experience in which the distinction between predator and prey becomes blurred. On the one hand too-sure, on the other entirely lacking, Hermione, paralleling Gudrun in this sense, is a figure suspended between identities, utterly dependent yet also overpoweringly dominant. The root of the vampiric knowledge as it is manifest in Hermione is the desire to be too close, to close the gap, to drink in and to absorb. Lacking boundaries, Hermione subsumes otherness with (her)self, or (her)self with otherness.

Yet to say that Hermione uses her mind to deny herself life is not equivalent to saying that her deficiencies are simply the result of the mind. The point is that she has put the mind to bad use. As everything is clarified through facts and the application of intellect alone, and all knowledge is neatly packaged “in a nutshell,” an individual’s instinct towards experiencing the unknown and the mysterious becomes gradually eroded. Instead of being capable of independently arriving at a conclusion, Hermione looks to external sources for answers, and becomes reduced to parroting the ideal concepts. If people live according to taught, idealized, mental concepts of what they should desire and how they should be passionate about it, then they are living aesthetically sterile and barren lives. Refuting Hermione’s indictment that “it is the mind . . . that is death,” Birkin asserts that people lead a death-in-life “not because they have too much mind, but too little” (WL 45). The object of Birkin’s attack here is not thought but thoughtlessness—not mind, but mindlessness—for to “stick to an idea is to become stupid” (STH 197), which is the result of being thoughtless and mindless. The problem with the individual in the modern world is not that he has an idea of himself, but that he insists on “persisting in some fixed idea of himself” (K 263). Such persistence is part of what Lawrence criticizes as our habitual insistence on the known, on that which lies static and established.

Another example of leading a life with “too little mind” is Gerald. Unlike
Gudrun and Hermione, who bear curiosity for everything and hold an exhaustive mode of knowing, Gerald feels meaningless and defaced. But like Gudrun, he sees the meaning of knowledge only in its instrumentality; and like Hermione, he reduces the dangerous unknown with intellect. Due to a submission to the mechanical order, Gerald found humanity very much alike everywhere. With an attitude of diffidence, carelessness, and arrogance, he considered that he himself can “know” better than the others:

He felt that he, himself, Gerald, had harder and more durable truths than any the other man knew. He felt himself older, more knowing. It was the quick-changing warmth and versatility and brilliant warm utterance he loved in his friend. It was the rich play of words and quick interchange of feelings he enjoyed. The real content of the words he never really considered: he himself knew better. (WL 59)

The assumption that the real content of the words does not matter leads Gerald conversely to have easy recourse to conceptual stereotypes, not only in expressing his views, but also in understanding other’s words. In the chapter called “The Industrial Magnate,” the narrator says, “Without bothering to think to a conclusion, Gerald jumped to a conclusion” (WL 227), and this statement defines his thinking on the whole. For instance, either unable or unwilling to think carefully about the difference in content of words like “harmony” and “organization” uttered by Birkin, Gerald “proceeded to put his philosophy into practice by forcing order into the established world, translating the mystic word harmony into the practical word organization” (WL 227). As it turns out, Gerald’s careless linguistic command creates not an organic or harmonious, but rather a mechanically organized, world. Like that of the machines, Gerald’s one-dimensional will-driven quality leads to his confusion over “harmony” and “organization,” which is the result, not of too much
mind, but of too little mind.

In “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover” Lawrence differentiates two ways of knowing: “The two ways of knowing, for man, are knowing in terms of apartness, which is mental, rational, scientific, and knowing in terms of togetherness, which is religious and poetic” (PII 512). Lawrence in this essay privileges the latter mode of knowledge, which yields “togetherness with the universe, the togetherness of the body, the sex, the emotions, the passions, with the earth and sun and stars” (PII 512).

Nevertheless, the mutinous textual play in his fiction demonstrates that any attempt to value one pole of an opposition over the other is inadequate. Therefore, the ability of “not knowing” is not a will not to know, as in the condition of ignorance, but an ability to engage with what escapes propositions and representation. What Lawrence is calling for is a new commitment by which the ability of not knowing reconstitutes the will to know. By dramatizing and relativizing our habitual mode of seeing and knowing, Lawrence seeks to make us learn to see a word like “knowledge” in a new “light” with a new meaning, though actually through the light of “dark.” Put another way, while Lawrence conducts his fight against monolithic absolute knowledge, he does not conduct it in the manner of reintroducing the absolute by absolutizing relativity, but rather guarding against it: “Once and for all and forever, let us have done with the imperialism of any absolute . . . . All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute” (STH 196). In short, far from giving up the possibility of knowledge, Lawrence seeks a knowledge constituted by its own limitations and transgressions.
Chapter Three  Language and the Ethical Self

If critique of the subject is necessary for an ethics of alterity, it doesn’t mean that subjectivity is or can be abandoned altogether. Any excess of finitude cannot do without identity even its very essence lies in imperiling an identity. As language beings, we are subject to, and subjects of, language’s structuring principles and effects. One of the great dramas inherent in Lawrence’s fiction is the paradoxical relation between language and self, wherein the ethical subject discovers its intimate models of activity and passivity within language.

I. Language and Subjectivity

As has been pointed out above, Levinas, in his early work up to Totality and Infinity, thinks the radical alterity spatially in the term “exteriority.” In Otherwise than Being and in his more recent work, in an attempt to avoid the problem of phenomenality which adheres to the face as a visible presence, he employs the distinction between “the Said” and “the Saying,” a reflection of his turn to language for the expression of radical difference. In Levinas’s thinking, language arises from difference and hence institutes ethics—i.e., language breaks down the interiority of the subject. Discourse in so doing engages the human subject in the ethical situation of violence and the first ethical command to resist such violence. In other words, what Levinas later perceives is the paradox that only in discourse is one’s subjectivity engaged, yet one must always be open first to “the call of the other.” For Levinas, the ethical subject of discourse is thus the subject that articulates and expresses this dilemma in response to the highest ethical demand. Put differently, while being always already caught and defined by frameworks that are not of one’s own conscious
choice or making, the ethical subject nevertheless is demanded to undertake as one’s ethical responsibility to make more choice and decision-making than one could ever possibly accomplish.

Echoing the Levinasian paradox, though in far less strident tones, Kristeva defines ethics as a practice that is based on the acceptance of the symbolic law together with the transgression of the law for the purpose of renovating it. Thus, Kristeva does not so much give us a treatise on ethics as a performance of it: “the ethical cannot be stated, instead it is practiced to the point of loss, and the text is one of the most accomplished examples of such a practice” (1984: 234). Stated differently, ethics is a “practice of scription” for which the text cannot be envisaged within the myth of representation: it is a performance, a production, actively involving writer and reader alike. Kristeva insists that language was not only a system but a process as well, and that the system of language, although laced with boundaries, incorporated the potential for upheaval, dissolution and transformation. If language is ethical, it is precisely because language itself resists all moral clarities. The salient feature of language is its otherness to whatever can be said, intended, placed, observed—its simultaneous ubiquity and unlocatability. However, it is pointless to try to imagine a world that is newly altered by language, since the world is always already saturated with language. Kristeva says in her preface to Desire in Language that writing as scription “assumes the necessity of adopting a stance involving otherness, distance, even limitation” as “the only guarantee of ethics” in a world of technological rationality (1980a: ix). Language as such is double, both rhythm and structure, both struggle and law; and therefore the writing subject is never either monological reason or asymbolic rhythm, but an unending dialogical, ethical process-production between the two.

In such wise, language provides a powerful model of the dialectic of freedom
and obligation that defines ethics: i.e., to be ethical is to rule and to be ruled. The ethical subject is free and accountable, but submits to the law as to necessity. In just this way, the linguistic subject names the word, but uses the sounds and marks tradition has bequeathed to it. To put this another way, the linguistic subject expresses itself, but manipulates the codes and conventions of expression available in its linguistic culture. As a result, while it speaks, it is at the same time spoken of. Within language, the subject discovers its most intimate and immediate models of activity and passivity, its most compelling forms of resistance. One effect of the power-of-language is to limit the autonomy of the agent, who is humbled before a certain form of words as before the law. Although language enables us to say things, it also constrains us to say them in certain ways. This is to think of language as a structure or system that precedes us such that there can be no understanding of ourselves outside of language. Yet this conception of ourselves as located at a moving intersection has some advantages. By means of it we can avoid the too-simple either/or choice. We can acknowledge that we live in a world and that, at the same time, we can take shape for us and become a world—though only through the mediation of language and texts.

One of the great dramas of Lawrence’s fiction is precisely this kind of paradoxical relation between language and the self. For Lawrence, on the one hand, language is spontaneous emanation which can liberate the self from “the unconscious” into conscious being; on the other hand, the external linguistic system is a system of rules and signs to which human beings are imprisoned. The thematised struggle with language continues to provide the significant focus for his representation of being in the world. Many of the tensions, conflicts, or ambivalences that occur with regard to language recur with regard to the issues of selfhood. Characters in Lawrence’s novels move between the longing to connect with the world through language, and the
recognition that language disconnected us from the world. The role of language, in the process of identifying oneself, is also found to be fundamentally unreliable. Part of what makes Lawrence’s novels so tense and nervous is that they pursue their formal disruptions of character’s identity in language even as they so often sustain nostalgic longing for a whole self.

In effect, Lawrence’s age is an age of narcissism as well as the century in which ego suffered unprecedented attacks upon its great pretension to be self-transparent and self-authorized. The art of high modernism has often been conceived as pressing to the limits the various social, political, historical, psychological, and philosophical frameworks in terms of which human action can be described, and consequently as precipitating the “destruction” of ethical subjectivity itself. While Lawrence disconnects himself from high modernism, or specifically, from the Bloomsbury aesthetics, which asserts the autonomy of artistic work, his work reveals the emergence of an ethos where existing ethical frameworks embodying the self encounter their internal limits. His awareness of the shortcomings of our relation to our language opens up the possibility of exploiting those very limitations. Lawrence argues that “in man’s adventure of self-consciousness he must come to the limits of himself and become aware of something beyond him. A man must be self-conscious enough to know his own limits, and to be aware of that which surpasses him” (P 185). Without attempting to abolish altogether the language self as an integral ego, Lawrence’s awareness of the way in which language screens us from the reality it discloses anticipates Derrida’s warning that we, as language beings, should try (even impossibly) to get rid of the entanglement of language:

We must . . . try to free ourselves from . . . language. Not actually attempt to free ourselves from it, for that is impossible without denying our own historic situation. But rather, to imagine doing so. Not actually
free ourselves from it, for that would make no sense and would deprive us of the light that meaning can provide. But rather, resist it as far as possible.\(^\text{18}\)

In what follows, by examining the recurrent themes of verbal consciousness, characterization, and authorial intention in Lawrence’s fiction in accordance with his (conscious or unconscious) problematization of language, I aim to explore the multiple ways in which the relationship between language and the ethical self has to do with the development of a relationship between the writer and his writing, between the user of language and the structure and texture of the language used.

### II. Struggle for Verbal Consciousness

In articulating that there is no reason to support that language corresponds to the world, Nietzsche advocates an account of consciousness as a historical phenomenon. He proposes that the development of consciousness was driven by our need to communicate with one another:

> As the most endangered animal he 【Man】 needed help and protection; he needed his fellows, he was obliged to express his distress, he had to know how to make himself understood—and for all this he needed ‘consciousness’ first of all: he had to ‘know’ himself what he lacked, to ‘know’ how he felt, and to ‘know’ what he thought . . . . In brief, the development of language and the development of consciousness—go hand in hand . . . . It was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness. (1974: 202. Emphasis added)

Because of their social origins, both consciousness and language are generalizing and simplifying functions which, according to Nietzsche, do not belong to man’s
individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature.

Like Nietzsche, Lawrence has never been a naïve literalist about language. The gap between word and thing, between language and being, is the condition of creativity in language. His literary and art criticism is implicitly based on the belief that language and the external/material world are disjunctive, and that the one should not be allowed to appropriate the other. For Lawrence, language is part of the social world, an “outside fate” that must not be allowed to dictate to the individual. In his fiction, the novelist continues to show his awareness of the fact that language, as a medium of communication, is also an obstacle. Characters in many of his novels are often presented to be contemptuous of, or hostile to, language. For example, Anna in The Rainbow dislikes words. Like her father Tom, who is inarticulate, Anna has trouble with words. But unlike Tom, words for Anna are not so much obstacles as corruptions. So words do not baffle her as they do him; they simply seem false:

Many ways she tried of escape. She became an assiduous church-goer. But the language meant nothing to her: it seemed false. She hated to hear things expressed, put into words. Whilst the religious feelings were inside her, they were passionately moving. In the mouth of the clergyman, they were false, indecent. She tried to read. But again the tedium and the sense of the falsity of the spoken word put her off. (R 99. Lawrence’s italics)

Anna even avoids thinking because the words which go with the rosary are “not the same as the pale rosary meant” (R 101). Her daughter Ursula was also made to acknowledge the incompetence of verbal language to explicate any inner and individual experience. When Ursula has to write to Skrebensky, she feels this task is burdensome and meaningless because the objective representation of her inner self
seems false and ultimately foreign to the thing itself: “It bored her to write a letter even to him. After all, writing words on paper had nothing to do with him and her” (R 353). For both Anna and Ursula, verbal formulation elicits merely a painful sense of absence, of the disparity between words and their referents. In fact, the characters in the novel simply do not talk very much. Those scenes that have commanded the deepest sympathy of readers—such as Tom’s proposal to Lydia, his vigil with Anna in the barn, Anna and Will’s stacking of the sheaves, their visit to Lincoln Cathedral, Anna’s solitary dance in front of her bedroom fire, Ursula and Skrebensky’s intercourse beneath the moon—all give the effect of being conducted in silence.

While the men and women in The Rainbow are “incapable of saying much” (Sanders 72), those of Women in Love spend much of their time in “conversation, argument, debate and reflection” (Alldritt 210). What is more, though Women in Love is filled with talk, it is even more skeptical about linguistic communication. In comparison with those in The Rainbow (especially with the earlier Brangwen generations which are characterized by their subliminal, unself-conscious nature), the characters in this novel are much more aware of their own difficulties of expression. Language in this novel becomes a medium through which one must pass in order to intuit a truth or reality that has been obscured by speech. While all the main characters share Gerald’s “passion for debate” (WL 22), it seems that language for them does not communicate as much as it expresses their “will to power.” All the characters, and especially Birkin, the wordsmith of the novel, talk to themselves. Trapped in dead metaphors and false concepts, they are unable to act on their words and prone to self-pity. It is obviously ironic that Birkin, the exorcist of will and knowledge, the champion of “dark involuntary being,” is a brilliant talker. In contrast to Will Brangwen, who was himself unaware of what his forename
epitomized, Birkin talks about the issue of “will” in a programmatically self-conscious way. He is, so to speak, willing himself not to will. He accuses himself of having unpacked his heart with words rather than deeds: “How was it he was always talking about sensual fulfillment” (WL 330)? And he also admits that all the talking about love and rebirth is a function of the failure to live: “What was the good of talking any way? It must happen beyond the sound of words” (WL 327). When we are told of this, we seemingly recognize a language nausea in the author himself whereby even his own articulateness could come to seem a burden and a cheat.

In the more self-conscious mode of *Women in Love*, the conceptual limitations of language are more significant and disturbing. In effect, the whole medium of the book is posited between two competing and complementary recognitions which are attributed to the conscious awareness of the characters themselves. In other words, it seems that language is compelling in its power to falsify and confuse while at the same time being regarded as indispensable and limited means of understanding. For instance, Ursula’s distrust of language is explicitly revealed in her conversation with Gudrun: “She listened, making out what she said. She knew, as well as he knew, that words themselves do not convey meaning, that they are but a gesture we make, a dumb show like any other” (WL 186). Yet Ursula is at the same time sensitive to a general problem in being “always frightened of words, because she knew mere word-force could always make her believe what she did not believe” (WL 437). For all his distrust of language, Lawrence reminds his readers in the “Foreword” to *Women in Love* that the “struggle for verbal consciousness should not be left out in art”:

Man struggles with his unborn needs and fulfillment. New unfoldings struggle up in torment in him, as buds struggle forth from the midst of a
plant. Any man of real individuality tries to know and to understand what is happening, even in himself, as he goes along. This struggle for verbal consciousness should not be left out in art. It is a very great part of life. It is not superimposition of a theory. It is the passionate struggle into conscious being. (WL 486)

Lawrence’s identification of the “struggle for verbal consciousness” with the individual’s efforts “to know” and “to understand” implies that conscious being is inevitably determined by language. Despite inherent confusion and travesty, language is the necessary way to being.

Lawrence’s battle to bend the form of the novel to suit his visionary goal serves as the frame for Birkin’s struggle to find the language which can accommodate his doctrine. In other words, Lawrence’s authorial reflections correlate, at some points, with Birkin’s thoughts: “There was always confusion in speech. Yet it must be spoken” (WL 186). The following passage shows how Lawrence, while recognizing the epistemological fall out in all language use, nevertheless believes in the struggle to express, or deliver, new ideas. For Birkin, at one time, there is ultimately no real speech except silence:

He stood on the hearth-rug looking at her, at her face that was upturned exactly like a flower, a fresh, luminous flower, glinting faintly golden with the dew of the first light. And he was smiling faintly as if there were no speech in the world, save the silent delight of flowers in each other. Smilingly they delighted in each other’s presence, pure presence, not to be thought of, even known. But his eyes had a faintly ironical contraction.

(WL 357. Emphasis added. )

The full power of the passage lies in the hypothetical slant—“as if there were no speech in the world.” This scene is in fact the linguistic analogue of Birkin’s
favorite fantasy, the lovely clean humanless world—a world swept bare of words. But the irony in Birkin’s eyes suggests the double perspectives of speechless and speech—for humanity alone, there is no reaching the perfect silence without language.

This difficulty introduces the expressive problem which we are compelled to confront: Birkin wants to utter the revolutionary word, but he has only dead letters with which to spell it. Precisely in becoming a conscious struggle for new meanings, the language of the book is put under a new strain. Birkin seeks a clean rupture with the values of his kind, but to describe the new values he must use the language of the kind. It is therefore not surprising that he comes to a bitter skepticism towards the efficacy of language. However, needless to say, his suspicion of language does not make himself fall silent. Birkin is a great talker as well as a natural thinker. In his mind the experience of the world is ceaselessly transformed into a conscious knowledge, which gives him the inevitable urge to say. Yet, by making Birkin’s verbosity and assertiveness a conscious theme, Lawrence successfully avoids reducing the novel to a sermon book. In his dialogue with Ursula on multifarious concerns, Birkin reveals himself over and again to be still not free from the modern malaise of the split of verbal and intuitive consciousness, which Ursula finds objectionable—i.e., whenever Birkin gets serious he suffers from the internal split between the speaking subject and the subject that enjoys the speech. Birkin carries his words and ideas as if they were for sale. His amusement in criticizing humanity arises rightly from this reified relation of him to his own words.

Birkin’s dilemma—i.e., human beings are usually trapped by their conscious existence, which is essentially the value and result of articulation—is further dramatized by other characters, especially by Hermione. In “Class-Room” chapter, Hermione preaches a crude version of Lawrence’s doctrine of spontaneity, instinct, and relaxation of will. Lawrence brilliantly theatricalizes the dissonance between
Hermione’s self-consciousness and her doctrine of spontaneity. Her convulsed behaviour of body and voice as she preaches animality dramatizes her difficulty of renouncing herself. The following long passage is worth quoting:

Then, piling herself together with a convulsed movement, Hermione resumed, in a sing-song, casual voice.

‘But leaving me apart, Rupert; do you think the children are better, richer, happier, for all this knowledge; do you really think they are? Or is it better to leave them untouched, spontaneous. Hadn’t they better be animals, simple animals, crude, violent, anything, rather than this self-consciousness, this incapacity to be spontaneous.’

They thought she had finished. But with a queer rumbling in her throat she resumed, ‘Hadn’t they better be anything than grow up crippled, crippled in their souls, crippled in their feelings—so thrown back—so turned back on themselves—incapable—’ Hermione clenched her fist like one in a trance—‘of any spontaneous action, always deliberate, always burdened with choice, never carried away.’

Again they thought she had finished. But just as he was going to reply, she resumed her queer rhapsody—‘never carried away, out of themselves, always conscious, always self-conscious, always aware of themselves. Isn’t anything better than this? Better be animals, mere animals with no mind at all, than this, this nothingness—’

‘But do you think it is knowledge that makes us unloving and self-conscious?’ he asked irritably.

She opened her eyes and looked at him slowly.

‘Yes,’ she said. She paused, watching him all the while, her eyes vague. Then she wiped her fingers across her brow, with a vague
weariness. It irritated him bitterly. ‘It is the mind,’ she said, ‘and that is
death.’ She raised her eyes slowly to him: ‘Isn’t the mind – she said, with
the convulsed movement of her body, ‘isn’t it our death? Doesn’t it
destroy all our spontaneity, all our instincts? Are not the young people
growing up to-day, really dead before they have a chance to live?’

‘Not because they have too much mind, but too little,’ he said
brutally.

‘Are you sure?’ she cried. ‘It seems to me the reverse. They are
over-conscious, burdened to death with consciousness.’

‘Imprisoned with a limited, false set of concepts,’ he cried.

But she took no notice of this, only went on with her own rhapsodic
interrogation. (WL 44-5)

As the above passage shows, the way in which Hermione’s arguments are proffered
tells us much more about her than the ideas themselves. Those narratorial details
surely establish a contradiction between the gospel of spontaneity Hermione is
articulating, and the actual psychological conditions she speaks from. Words are
slippery, and Hermione is able to turn truth into lies by preaching what she does not
practice.

Indeed, at first sight, what Hermione utters is what the world has been content
to take for the Laurentian doctrine. Yet Birkin’s response to Hermione makes things
more complicated: “To know, that is your all, that is your life—you have only this,
this knowledge. There is only one tree, there is only one fruit, in your mouth” (WL
46). Birkin’s exasperation is pointed at Hermione’s self-gratifying will to utter the
idea—i.e., the will to intellectual masturbation, whose very existence gainsays the
truth of what urges her to say. Her self-conscious parroting of Birkin’s ideology
drives him to criticize severely her insincerity. Yet if Hermione is tormented by the
self-consciousness she verbally denounces, so is Birkin. In other words, what Birkin excoriates so brutally in Hermione is what he knows as a dangerous potentiality in himself. The paradoxical nature of Birkin’s endeavor is that it is an intellectual search for a mindless self, a conscious condemnation of consciousness itself. As such, his articulation functions as both doctrinal revelation and the disclosure of its inadequacy. We might say that he is the man, shouting about the value of silence, suddenly embarrassed by the sound of his own voice.

In a nutshell, the whole paradox—“the articulate quest for the ineffable”—lies at the heart of the Lawrentian dialectics, in which “unknowingness” converges with vital “knowing.” Therefore Birkin’s urging of Ursula—“You’ve got to learn not-to-be before you can come into being” (WL 48)—sounds ironic. While Birkin’s statement conveys a complete truth in terms of Lawrence’s theme, it reflects ironically on Birkin, who is lecturing in strident tones about a condition he cannot achieve through his will. Lawrence’s presentation of Birkin’s dilemma—i.e. the conscious ego in the world is always burdened by its own existing—calls to our mind Levinas’s declaration of the existence of the ego as a solitary “enchainment” with being (TO 56). Even the famous freedom of thought exercised in knowing the world is incapable of breaking this enchainment: “this freedom does not save me from the definitive character of my very existence, from the fact that I am forever stuck with myself” (EE 84). Yet Lawrence, as a novelist, foregrounds the dilemma by dramatic situation, methods of characterization, and narrative technique. Both the characters and their statements are located into a dramatic context which qualifies, relativizes, and criticizes any didactic intention. The “Lawrentian” arguments are presented as dramas, and what people say are played off against what they are.

While the increasing self-consciousness of the characters and of the narrator about their speech in Women in Love attests to Lawrence’s deepening awareness of the
inevitability of “struggle for verbal consciousness” and complexity of the process in which the prison-house of language blocks consciousness from an experience of life, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence seeks to find a new language to make a vital conjunction between art and experience, language and being. The consciousness of the separation between language and life is, as in his previous novels, one of the dominant themes. From the first chapter, Lawrence makes it clear that *talking* has been one of the most important things for the men and women of the modern world. Yet what is most ironic is that, as Connie laments, “all the great words . . . were cancelled for her generation” (LCL 63). Words like *glory* and *honor* had been stripped of their meaning by the insanity of trench warfare during World War I, and the word *love* had lost its mysterious and regenerative meaning by being embalmed through countless repetitions. In the first seven chapters of the novel, the talk at Wragby Hall between Clifford and his friends centers around these “cancelled” words and ideas. It is for this reason that Connie at Wragby “hated words, always coming between her and life” (LCL 34).

In sharp contrast to the opening chapters, wherein the dominant verbs of consciousness involve thinking, talking, or seeing, the love scenes in the latter part of this novel are permeated by the “unfathomable silence” between Connie and Mellors. “And of this, they would never speak” (LCL 188). It is so individual that neither of them can talk about it, and yet it remains regenerative. In his attack on ocularcentrism and logocentrism, Lawrence makes it clear that “critical reflection is thus most useful when it gives rise to silence, thereby paving the way for ineffable numinous experience” (Burack 493). Yet to create a “silent” text is surely a difficult or even impossible task. Mellor’s and Connie’s actual silence can be enacted and described for the reader only through the narrator’s verbal abilities and the literary discourse that describes it. To put this another, it requires that Lawrence use
language to move the reader beyond language. And so it means that the state beyond language is, paradoxically, wedded to language. Finally, there is no return to a wordless, undifferentiated state in the Edenic womb. Mellor’s long letter at the end of the novel to Connie demonstrates that the verbal medium of “chatter,” whether it is positively or negatively seen, inevitably surrounds the lovers.22

Therefore, this novel similarly testifies to Lawrence’s profound ambivalence toward verbal consciousness. Yet what is truly striking about this last novel is, as Bell indicates, “the extent of Lawrence’s reconciliation with a conscious articulacy as a possible medium of feeling” (199: 217). In other words, “struggle for verbal consciousness” is more thoroughly and positively accepted both as a genuine predicament and as the only possible condition. Language, which finitizes and separates us, also serves as a system of empowerment. In view of this, Lawrence’s verbal leitmotivs are the necessary instruments by which the known can help to reveal the as yet unknown. Along these lines, Lawrence takes words or expressions from common parlance and creates a metaphoric meaning out of the different layers of implication within the same word. By exposing the tangled strands of implication in verbal usage, which are a reflection of open potentiality as well as ensnarement in language, this novel manifests a struggle by reappropriating old myths to subvert the conventions of language and society. In other words, while itself belonging to the tradition of moral-aesthetic realism, this novel stands in parodic relation to that tradition. It is on this account that Lawrence touchingly dwells on words like “fuck,” “cunt” and “phallus,” conscious of how they will disturb his audience. Lawrence is anxious to liberate, through that disturbance, the vitality that lies buried under conventional words and conventional social ordering. As the poet who “makes a slit in the umbrella,” (P 255), Lawrence struggles to find a new vocabulary within the known world. What he is concerned is that, if petrifaction and decay are
the end of all utterance, it must perpetually renew itself. Language and thought are alive—active and creative—only insofar as they provoke “new living utterance” (FU 56). Yet what is essential in his deconstruction of our conventional systems is that the terms he adopts are made to define themselves only through context, through their associations with other words, and through the encounter between the original and the conventional.

III. The Lawrence Character

The notion of character as locus of the revelation of an essential human nature leads to the result that the novel’s characters enact certain practices as socially normative. The novel is thus sometimes accused as a primary locus of bourgeois values and of the regularization, legitimization, even normativization of certain bourgeois codes. Lawrence’s novels defy this accusation. His characters are not always consistently and finely drawn. Sometimes in certain scenes they cease to be recognizable as clearly defined characters and become symbols of elemental states of joy, or fulfillment, or anger, or despair. Indeed, Virginia Woolf declared: “Human character changed in 1910” (320), suggesting that ways of perceiving had irrevocably changed. Fundamental to the change in modes of perceiving was the recognition of, or even confrontation with, the unknown and unknowable. As a result, novelists begin to create characters which cannot be wholly understood; each character becomes an “unknown mode of being” to the other characters. In view of this, the question recently raised is, in Docherty’s words,

whether moral criticism should be simply a question of ‘evaluation’ of characters, based upon some pre-judicial set of moral preferences, or whether criticism might more seriously take ethics into account with the
consequence that subjectivity—the subject position from which evaluations are made—is itself called into question. (1996: 37)

Put another way, the difference inherent in these two ethical stances toward characters is between a humanist neo-Leavisite moral criticism, and a criticism informed by the thought of critics like Levinas or Derrida.

In this sense, Lawrence’s characterization stands in “other” relation to both approaches. On the one hand, Lawrence’s narrative calls into question the supposed certainties of the individuated essences of characters. He is concerned with the “characterization” progressing as process, resisting (imperialist) appropriation and containment. There is the production of an excess, a surplus of narrative, and it is this surplus which disturbs the neat equalities of the economy of identity and which calls into question the function of representation in his narrative. Representation is thus conceived more as “excessive” than as a simple “duplication” or substitutive mimetic doubling. The presence or center of personal identity is regarded as an effect or product of differentiating relations with the other. In other words, the self is knowable only indirectly and inferentially through knowledge of that which it is not. Consequently, the Lawrence character is more often “about-to-be” than actually “is.” It is this disappearance of a transcendental self which is one of the most valuable effects of Lawrence’s characterization, wherein a consciousness can properly engage with its Other. Lawrence’s treatment of characters recalls Kristeva’s assertion of “subject-in-process” in the term of “exile”: “How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one’s own country, language, sex and identity “ (1986: 299)?

On the other hand, the striking difference between Lawrence’s characterization and the ethical criticism based on the notion of character as “dis-position” (Docherty 1996: 56) lies in the fact that Lawrence simultaneously sticks to some intrinsic and
hence unchanging element in the self. As I have mentioned earlier, modernism represents a paradoxical state (or maybe a double crisis) in the historical construction of personal identity. The rise of the individual as a value went along with its increasing disintegration as a category. The fundamentally unstable and ungrounded nature of individuality became more and more evident with an understanding of the social process of which it was a part. For Lawrence, one of the most important aspects of this is his puritan insistence that the dissolution of the category only makes the responsibility of the individual even more vital. However, it should be noted that this is not moral responsibility in a narrower sense as responsibility for one’s own being—i.e., one should be responsible for some unchanging element in the self, which is seen by Lawrence to challenge the superficial (and hence changing) social self. In other words, Lawrence perceives his characters in terms of the honesty and integrity of perceptions rather than in terms of the moral consequences of their behaviour. On that account, what they are is more important than what they do. The integrity and purity of their souls are standards by which they are primarily judged. In a word, the most distinctive feature of Lawrence’s treatment of his characters is the innovations in narratives attacking enduring traits in literary characters, which is paradoxically brought about by Lawrence’s insistence on some constant element in the self.

In his early fiction *Sons and Lovers*, which is usually regarded as a more traditional work in comparison with his later work, we can still trace the mutinous interplay of textual differences which has deliberately contested the representation of characters. Throughout the novel, there are moments when the authority of representation is undermined by contending viewpoints that remind us that the original representation was only a *representation* of reality rather than the thing itself. For instance, the narrator’s emphatic condemnation of Walter Morel is contradicted by those scenes which serve to demonstrate his spontaneous vitality and warmth. Morel
is at first accused by the narrator as an “outsider” in the family: “Conversation was impossible between the father and any other member of the family. He was an outsider. He had denied the God in him” (SL 63). Yet the next scene redefines Morel’s intellectual weakness as sensual strengths: “The only times when he entered again into the life of his own people was when he worked, and was happy at work . . . . They united with him in the work, in the actual doing of something, when he was his real again” (SL 63). The old collier is at one time a dirty brute, but at another he profoundly has our sympathy. In this novel, Paul’s view of his father is not permitted to stand unqualified. Paul’s judgment of Morel as a brutal, careless, inarticulate drunkard is counterbalanced and placed in an ironic perspective by the dramatization of scenes in which Morel’s warmth, humour, tenderness, and delight in creative activity are appreciated. When Paul sells a painting, in the middle of the family celebration we find, with a sense of tender shock, Morel weeping secretly for his dead son, William (SL 139). Moreover, we are made aware that in his own way Morel really cares for his wife, bringing her tea in bed (only to be scolded in case it has no sugar), and this tenderness emerges again at her death, though he is also frightened and awkward, feeling pushed to one side by his son (SL 399). Lawrence’s treatment of Morel is a good deal more sympathetic than those critics who accord priority to Paul’s point of view have noted.

In fact, the narrative suggests that all the characters, in addition to Morel, are perhaps best seen as a series of conflictual or transgressive selves, each defined and undermined by some differential relations. Hence Mrs. Morel is at one time a creature of superb and lovable heroism; and yet there is no doubt that she is from time to time downright disagreeable. Any attempt to portray the character in a seamless structure of words is exceeded and undermined by the domain of operative difference and ineffable otherness. It is in this sense that Lawrence’s characters should not be
judged by strict moral categories but by multiple perspectives presented in the text.

Take Miriam for example. In her room is a mirror: “In the little looking glass nailed against the white-washed wall, she could only see a fragment of herself at a time” (SL 207). In this novel Miriam is shown to the reader glance by glance and she herself serves as a mirror for other characters, particular for Paul, whose labels thus “do not in the end either adhere to Miriam or totally obscure her” (Gavin 29). And it is surely right for Gavin to suggest that Miriam “deserves to be defended against labeling or reductions” (41). Miriam’s mirror thus serves as a clue to Lawrence’s advice—“never trust the artist, trust the tale.”

Shortly after completing a draft of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnet, announcing a break with traditional conceptions of character (and hence of the self). In this letter, Lawrence describes what he is attempting to do in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*:

I don’t care about physiology of matter—but somehow—that which is physic—non-human, in-humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element—which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent. The certain moral scheme is what I object to . . . . There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states . . . to discover . . . the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say, “diamond what! This is carbon.” And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) (LII 182-3)

Lawrence’s ambivalence towards the dissolution of ethical subjectivity makes him obsessed with what he calls “carbon,” some constant element located deeper than
mere personality, which is for him no more than the changing “allotropic states” of this chemical element, made manifest as coal or diamond, as heroes and villains, in the social order. Lawrence thus relegates the social dimension of the character to a second order of things, asserting that the really interesting component is this “radically unchanged” element of life. As has been argued above, Lawrence’s habitual punning on sight/blindness or known/unknown has a revolutionary intent which attempts to shatter the “kodak” image of the self, and so the new conception of characters dwelling upon the dialectic between changing and unchanged requires in readers a deeper sense than the eye of traditional realism. The social self with its predictable and mechanical forms is made more indefinite, flexible and alive by sticking to one’s deepest being. In other words, the character is judged not by social or established moral criteria but by the degree to which he is true to the “carbon” of his nature.

Hence Ursula, in The Rainbow, refuses the chances offered by the Suffragette Movement, for she does not want, she says, simply a mechanical freedom, a freedom within the existing nation-state. She is suspicious of any system, which will reduce the individual to a “norm,” and yet “a norm is merely an abstraction, not a reality” (FU 47). She believes that the commitment of her friends to the nation-state reveals their spiritual sickness, their submission to an external system. So for her, Skrebensky has no resources within himself to question contemporary social ideology, though he is a good citizen, carrying out his colonial functions in Africa and India. In other words, Skrebensky’s social vision accords no intrinsic value to the individual, only a functional contribution to the social “ideal.”26 Ursula is finally released from her old ego to a sense of true individuality by abandoning social and historical identity:

I have no father nor mother nor lover, I have no allocated place in the
world of things, I do not belong to Beldover nor to Nottingham nor to England nor to this world, they none of them exist, I am trameled and entangled in them, but they are all unreal. I must break out of it, like a nut from its shell which is an unreality. (R 464).

At the end of the novel, the vision of the rainbow reappears—the vision of fulfillment in the rounded arch created by the union of water and sunlight, flesh and spirit, origin and end, the unconscious and the conscious. After being violently frightened by the horses, Ursula knows now that she can never yield to the ugly mechanical way of life. And yet, as I have mentioned earlier, an inherent opposition exists between the circle as a complete, perfect entity, and the rainbow in its incompleteness as an arc. The constant tension in the novel between the definite self, and its amorphous, instinctual need to belong to a larger whole which makes the self fragmentary, remains unresolved at the end. The intensity with which the self is trying to become exclusive and unique is always undermined by its desire to belong, to share, and to obliterate itself. This “trembling instability of the balance” cannot be destroyed as long as the self remains in the physical world. Lawrence’s vision of fulfillment of the self is undermined by the symbol of fulfillment itself.

While Sons and Lovers and The Rainbow trace the chronological development of characters’ growing awareness of themselves, the spatial and contrapuntal structure of Women in Love complicates and confounds readers’ attempt to define or even understand the characters. In his new conception of the character, Lawrence rejects not only “the certain moral scheme” but also the demand for characters possessing the recognizable individuality that we associate with social realism. In other words, Lawrence repudiates the traditional view of a character as a collection of traits that somehow reveal a center of personal identity or an essence. In the letter quoted above, Lawrence warned, “don’t look for the development of the novel to follow the
lines of certain characters: the characters fall into . . . some other rhythmic form” (LII 184). Instead of being fitted neatly into some sort of moral scheme, whereby we can tell clearly the “good” from the “bad,” the “right” form the “wrong,” the characters in Women in Love are best seen as indiscernible variations on some of the major themes. In the opening chapter, the five major characters are introduced by dialogue and action, external description and internal monologue, which are also used to show how the five self-contained existences are somehow mutually dependent, and how they exist within others’ mind and emotions. None of the characters is allowed to be known simply in isolation; on the contrary, the access we are afforded to each character is through the filter of a major relationship.

For instance, it is peculiarly striking that almost all the other characters in the novel replicate Birkin’s ideas in one way or another. Nonetheless, while they illustrate and enact what Birkin says, they are at the same time meant to be different or even negative embodiments of his ideas and his life. More broadly, the “tangled strands of implication” within the same term are employed to make separate beings (and the ideas they manifest) constantly rubbed against one another in unharmonious friction. There are numerous examples of this dis-identical and frictional repetition. For instance, it’s certainly not an easy task for the reader to distinguish Birkin’s singleness from Loerke’s autonomy. In his insistence on the “pure balance of two single beings—as the stars balance each other” (WL 163), “singleness” is surely a positive term in Birkin. But the word is also used repeatedly to describe Loerke, whom Birkin regards as a symptom of nihilism. Gudrun finds in Loerke “an uncanny singleness, a quality of being by himself, not in contact with anybody else, that marked out an artist to her” (WL 480). Moreover, Birkin’s “indifference” towards the world is also manifest in Loerke who “made not the slightest attempt to be at one with anything (WL 462). Lawrence plays cunningly and dangerously with
these similarities, and the readers are always being asked to make subtle distinctions.

The imperceptible difference between Gudrun and Ursula is also equivocal and seems essentially rhetorical. Ursula’s changeableness indicates her vitality: “she was so quick, so lambent, like discernible fire, and so rich in her dangerous flamy sensitiveness” (WL 142). On the contrary, Gudrun’s mobility is usually associated with images of disintegration instead of life, decomposition instead of animation—she is “a water-lily undulating in the swamp” and “a seagull above the flood of chaos” (WL 159, 225). On the other hand, Ursula’s changeableness does no harm to the self-centrality in her, which is contrapuntally presented as fatal intactness in Gudrun. Ursula doesn’t need others to ratify her existence: “She was in some self-satisfied world of her own” (WL 241). Being associated with the image of the moon, Ursula manifests the quality of static plenitude: “She had her queer, radiant, breathless manner, as if confused by the actual world, unreal to it, having a complete bright world of her self alone” (WL 252). Quite the opposite, any such self-sufficiency and self-centeredness in Gudrun are presented not as plenitude, but as murderous rigidity and inviolability. It seems that Gudrun’s character development follows the process of, in terms of allotropic images, progressive hardening, until she reaches a jewel-like intactness and a frozen integrity.

Likewise, it is surely hard to figure out exactly what differences Lawrence means to establish between the debased sensuality of the mind represented by Hermione, the corruptive dark sensuality inherent in the African statue, and the loveable sensuality of what Birkin calls “the deepest physical mind” (WL 341). Birkin’s attack on Hermione is most probably Lawrence’s articulation of his endorsed doctrine of the primacy of instinctive consciousness over mental consciousness. Yet as I’ve made it clear in the above, what torments Hermione also makes not only Birkin but all the other characters anxious or entangled in one way or another.
Consequently, Hermione is considerably more than a vehicle for Lawrentian dogma—her very defects are actually in some sense shared by everyone else in the novel. As a modern and intellectual woman, Hermione in different degrees anticipates and reflects the difficulties of other characters. Given that the major characters are potentialities of each other, it seems inadequate to see the novel dichotomously as the love story of the ideal Lawrentian couple contrasted with the destructive couple.

The new conception of character enunciated above by Lawrence poses many difficulties and practical problems for the novelist as well as for the reader. Lawrence himself is at times willing to admit that he is floundering among his own concepts. And as we have seen in the above, the reader can make sense of the distinctions of the characters only by something very abstract about them. On that ground, Moynahan asserts that most of the readers would be more interested in diamond and coal than in undifferentiated carbon: “If one cares to differentiate characters from one another . . . it must be done in terms of what they do, think and feel humanly and socially, and these terms must mediate what they ‘inhumanly’ are . . . . You cannot write a novel about carbon and nothing but carbon” (42).

Indeed, it’s impossible to have characters of “pure carbon.” Any attempt to create a character without using any of the traditionally recognizable attributes of stable egos is subject to a kind of evaporation. Lawrence has adopted the carbon as a metaphor to demonstrate what a new view of self meant for human identity—i.e., the inhuman form of being, but as Bonds suggests, in choosing carbon as a metaphor for the self-identity of character, Lawrence chooses a metaphor that at the same time troubles the very notion of self-identity. To invoke the “Moony” chapter again, Birkin’s stoning of the moon completes a series of scenes in which the clash between the “old ego” and the new is suggested. The fixed image of the moon must be shattered and
destroyed in order to make the new ego emerge, and yet the moon inevitably and simultaneously re-gathers itself, becoming a whole. By the same token, being obsessed with the intention to understand the human in “inhuman” terms, Lawrence treats his characters through an oscillation between stability and fluctuation, selfsameness and difference.

IV. Return of the Dead Author

In 1968, Roland Barthes declared the death of the Author and the birth of the Reader. The (post)structuralist's onslaught on agency has thrown into question the humanistic certainties of biography and literary authority. Intellectual developments in psychoanalysis and literary theory have meanwhile signaled the collapse of the unified subject and the need to challenge authority by stressing the slipperiness of language and meaning. “Writing,” or écriteur, is seen as slippery and evasive of any one stable meaning which could be attributed to any one author(ity). The notion of authority itself, with its investment in Being and Presence, is subjected to the most relentless scrutiny. Studies of the role of the reader have multiplied. Nonetheless, the author has never gone away. The new ethical criticism, as Lawrence Buell has pointed out, tends to argue for the importance of “authoredness,”— i.e., “to favor recuperation of authorial agency in the production of texts, without ceasing to acknowledge that texts are also in some sense socially constructed” (12).

Lawrence’s work is particularly resistant to any reading that dismisses the importance of authorial intention, given that his intensions have been a recurrent topic of legal discourse since the banning of The Rainbow in 1915. The metaphors governing Lawrence’s criticism had always been author-centric. In fact, Lawrence himself had set this trend. He did not go along with the impersonality theories
present in the modernist period. The techniques developed by such writers as Joseph Conrad and James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, were ones designed far more to disguise or conceal the personality of the author than to reveal it. When Stephen Deadalus speaks of the role of the artist in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, it is in terms of the removal of the creator from what he has created: “The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (221). Indeed, for Lawrence, the value of fiction cannot rest only in its expression of the author’s self-indulgent fantasies. But on the other hand, Lawrence did put so much of himself in his novels that there was a strong sense of authorial presence in much of his writing. Critics have found it oddly difficult or inappropriate to try to separate “the man who suffers and the mind which creates” since Lawrence himself never fully accepted the theories of aesthetic autonomy promoted in his lifetime by some modernist writers. Undeniably, if the personal is sometimes artistically damaging to Lawrence, it is also a vital source of his greatest strength.

These things said, authorial presence is by no means easy to pin down in Lawrence’s fiction. While opposing the theory of aesthetic autonomy, Lawrence nevertheless moves beyond the Romantics and locates himself in the modern (or even postmodern) world. Lawrence himself claimed in several of his essays and letters the ability of a text to speak with its own voice despite the intentions so often ascribed to the author: “The artist usually sets out—or used to—to point a moral and adorn a tale. The tale, however, points the other way, as a rule” (SCAL 2). By proposing the two “blankly opposing morals, the artist’s and the tale’s” (SCAL 2), Lawrence implies that however deliberately a writer orders his or her words in accordance with a moral or intellectual purpose, the activity of “writing” will be at odds with that purpose. Following Nietzsche’s analysis of “the basic presuppositions of the
metaphysics of language,” Lawrence calls into question the presuppositions in language of “unity, permanence, substance, cause, thinghood, being” (P II 482). The “I” as a “speaking subject” is a convention: “If I say that I am, this is false and evil. I am not” (P II 384). Therefore, there is no self-presence as a guarantor of meaning. Lawrence’s motto—“Never trust the artist. Trust the tale”—suggests that language is powerfully wayward, ultimately eluding the control of any “master.” In spite of (or because of) that, language can provide wealth greater than any writer can consciously exploit or any critic can exhaust. For Lawrence, the author who recognizes that a tale may tell a truth the teller does not know or cannot tell is the author who would strive to tell truths his/her tale could not contain. With this recognition, Lawrence makes himself vulnerable as an author in his writing in a way that cannot be separated from his most serious creative purposes and achievements.

The narrative of Women in Love is precisely this kind of “de-authorizing” enunciation. In a sense, the fact that Birkin doesn’t succeed in convincing or persuading the other characters in the novel might be seen as a reflection on or a relativization of Lawrence’s power as a prophet and teacher. Birkin’s ideas are usually articulated with reservations and qualifications into a context in which their meanings and receptions may be modified. Ursula effectively reduces Birkin to absurdity by instantly spotting the insecurity underlying his insistence. She focuses on Birkin’s inability to practice what he preaches: “You don’t trust yourself. You don’t fully believe yourself what you are saying” (WL144). Gerald is similarly not persuaded by Birkin’s arguments—while revealing himself to be curious and interested in Birkin’s ideas, Gerald remains aloof, detached, and finally unconvinced. Like Ursual, he seems able to detect where Birkin’s utterances are assertive rather than authoritative: “But to Gerald it sounds as if he were insistent rather than confident” (WL 235). In a word, the effectiveness of Birkin’s ideas is played off
against the reactions he provokes in his interlocutors.

Yet, the problem presented by Birkin is that, if we are not persuaded by his
dogmatic pronouncement, what else is there to persuade us? Given the importance
he attributes to authorial energy, it is less likely that Lawrence is really so humble
about his talents or his role as an author that he hopes his critics will save the truth of
his own art from the lie of his metaphysics. He is after all the acolyte of intuition
and mystical lapsing from consciousness in a period when that mystical being once
known as “the author” has sickened, failed and faded. Indeed, Women in Love “is
pervaded by an expressive frustration and a sense of its own vulnerability” (Bell 1992:
100), yet it should not be ignored that Lawrence still “authorizes” Birkin’s
vulnerability in articulation by offering him responsive interlocutors, among whom
Ursula is the most effective one. Accordingly, in effect, Lawrence’s interest in the
ruptures, contradictions, absences, and meaninglessness which betray consciousness,
is paradoxically countered by a strong urge to control. Put another way, it is as
though Lawrence’s anti-authoritarian aesthetics emerges out of a need to counter his
own authoritarian tendencies. Lawrence sees the ego’s mastery to be a horrifying
mental tyranny, and yet it is a tyranny he himself is guilty of.

This is inextricably related to how Lawrence posits a relation between the
author and his work. Like Eliot and Joyce, Lawrence also believed that the work of
art must be considered separately from the personality and prejudices of the artist.
And yet, while admiring Cezanne’s attempt to withhold “personal emotion” from the
objects of his art, Lawrence did not equate this attitude with a relinquishing of contact.
Lawrence did follow some of the ideas of the artists in Women in Love to reflect on
the nature and construction of their and his own art. Both Loerke and Gudrun reject
the Romantic expressive theory of art which holds that art is the spontaneous
manifestation of the artist’s essential being. Yet they together push this to the
extreme by denying any connection between themselves and their art. For Loerke, as has been indicated above, the gap between word and thing, language and being, is a radical alienation. It is a position implicitly criticized by Birkin’s way of freedom, which maintains “proud individual singleness” but accepts at the same time “the obligation of the permanent connection with others” (WL 254). More akin to Birkin’s position than to that of Leoke’s, Lawrence holds a tentative and dynamic relation with his art work. The author’s world and the novel’s world are neither identical nor separable, but in a relation of creative dialectic.

On the above account, what Birkin’s “authorized vulnerability” has taught us is that human subject as language being is both constituted and constitutive. As a prophetic writer, Lawrence surely sees himself as someone who has a message and who would wish his works in some sense to change real lives. Nonetheless, for that reason, he has been often dismissed as a preacher whose art too often collapses under the weight of its teaching mission. In effect, as I hope I have made clear earlier on, Lawrence continually interrogates and contradicts himself in his narrative. He allows what he perceived as an external voice to intrude into his work to challenge the voice he identified with himself. Recent literary theory privileging the text is able to show that the message of his text cannot be divorced from the medium itself. On the other hand, it is inadequate to reverse a traditional master-slave relation between the subject and its language at the expense of authorial intention. While recognizing that conscious being is to certain extent constituted and determined by language, Lawrence holds a position that is by no means that of passively lamenting man’s unhappy insertion into a language game. As a writer with a strong sense of mission, Lawrence saw that the way for him to change people was through writing (Ingram 17). For him, though the authors, like all human subjects, are caught in the closet of articulation, they can initiate authorial beginnings (though never absolute) by
imaginatively doing things with words.29 To employ the terms of Edward Said, Lawrence is the novelist who has construed “authority and molestation together as beginning conditions” (Said 83). The twin impulses behind the creation of the novel are tightly intertwined and not readily separated.

Therefore, the notion of author as an original creator with a unique voice cannot be simply discarded. What Roland Barthes’s essay is in fact presenting us with is the very author function it seemly seeks to eradicate. As a matter of fact, the coinage of “the death of the author,” far from denying the authorial agency, refers (or should be regarded as referring) to the critique of the concepts of authorial originality and intentionality that have long been central to the humanist model which tends to ignore the signifying force of language and cultural discourses. It is in this sense that the thought of the thinkers mentioned above can inspire us—we are reminded that the question of ethical subjectivity does not arise outside of the self, but just from within it. It functions as a caution to evaluative processes, suggesting limits to the processes. When Nietzsche finds, for example, that his work of transvaluing values is constituted by the values that he attacks, he can find no haven in neutrality or authority that will establish the value of his claims beyond question. A recoiling movement undercuts the questioning text as well as the questioned one. But subversiveness is neither a goal nor an ideal for the question of ethical subjectivity. The point is to show that it is important to learn to ask questions in given settings—i.e., to name things anew, to become alert to exclusions, to rethink what is ordinarily taken for granted, and to overhear what is usually drowned out by the predominant values. While recognizing that the subject is false and the terms used are flawed, Lawrence continues to write by relying upon a vocabulary and way of thinking which he nevertheless challenges and renews through an authorial manipulation of his text. For Lawrence the writer, the goal of “questioning” ethical
subjectivity is to re-think, re-work, and re-write. What is questioned is not abandoned. What is questioned demands a “disturbed” return, one fraught with a sense of danger, worry, anxiety, and in Levina’s terms, “responsibility”.
The humanist critics share a deep paradigmatic conviction that literature reveals humanity and that this is ethically good. Literary texts clarify the meaning of persons since they are centered on the human as traditionally understood: by stressing the moral goods of autonomy and responsibility, great books tell us how to live. They argue for “the demonstrable capability of fictional literature to communicate truth” (Freadman & Miller 231).

Heidegger argues that Nietzsche’s treatment of art is the “reversal of Platonism” (1979: 162). According to Heidegger, the choice of art over truth in Nietzsche’s work constitutes a “reversal of metaphysics” which signifies that art’s worth is to provide a better form of truth than the truth of philosophy and religion. Paul de Man challenges the Heideggerian reading of Nietzsche by emphasizing the fundamental role played by rhetoric in Nietzsche’s attack on philosophy. De Man insists that “the figurative structure is not one linguistic mode among others but characterizes language as such” (1979: 105), and thus the seemingly eccentric, far-fetched, marginal or aberrant form of language have here become the essential characteristics of language. While Heidegger’s reductive reading of Nietzsche is too simplistic, De Man’s argument also raises some suspicion—if we don’t know the essence of truth, how can we know that a particular linguistic paradigm is what characterizes language as such?

For Habermas, the literary is a second-order form of discourse, language which cannot have a legitimate role either in intellectual critique or in the generation of forms of social life and value. In his latter work, Habermas has been more prepared to allow some limited value for the literary—he goes so far to admit that modernist literature and art, insofar as they are critical and innovatory, can disclose to us the experience of this world in new and defamiliarized ways (Habermas 1984: 236). However, he remains unconvinced by the claims that metaphor or narrative can or should have any serious part to play in the legitimate determination of social action or the acquisition of knowledge. The literary, according to Habermas, is finally to serve the rational discourse, rather than to question its self-identity.

Though in this study, I’ll from time to time quote passages from Lawrence’s expository writing, I don’t mean to assume a consequential relationship between his metaphysical ideas and imaginative writing; i.e., I don’t think that Lawrence’s ideas pre-existed their imaginative expression. In fact, Lawrence himself claimed that his “pseudo-philosophy,” as he ironically called it, was “deduced” from his imaginative writings, which “come unwatched out of one’s pen” (FU 10). Certainly, for Lawrence, his fiction remained the primary vehicle for the expression of his artistic vision, and he often undercuts or relativizes in his fiction what he proposes in his expository writings. Thus Daleski offers the caution that “it is wise to regard the expository writings not as laboratory reports on experiments successfully concluded but as signposts to a road which is finally traveled only in art. In those writings Lawrence clearly did not use the precise instruments of a philosopher, and it was only embodying his ideas in the ‘pure passionate experience’ of his art that he could hope to establish their validity” (1965:19). Therefore, my use of Lawrence’s expository writing should be read dynamically and critically with his fictional writing.

Harpham also argues a new account of ethics not as a kind of philosophy or as a guide to action, but as a variable factor of “imperativity” immanent in language, analysis, narrative, and creation—i.e., as a conceptual base: “Thus ethical problems
constitute a theoretically endless chain, a chain of command in which command is always countermanded by alternatives whose recurrence resists the commands it calls forth. This resistance is inherited from the basic terms of ethical discourse, whose paradigm is the compromised binary. From is/ought, through freedom/obligation, I/one, subjective/objective, integration/permeability, universalism/communitarianism, and other relations yet to be explored, ethics is a garden of forking paths, a discourse of mitosis that urges all who will listen to become such gardens themselves, to assume the form of ethics” (1992: 48-9).

6 Miller also adopts the “window” analogy in the following argument: “The world appears green. This may be because we are wearing green glasses. But the world may really be green. There is no way to tell, since there is no way to take off the glasses” (1990: 98).

7 Harpham suggests that Miller “makes no provision for the possibility that the competition among evaluative systems for the right to describe is eventually won. He tries . . . to rule out morality, with its choices and particularities. Ethics may suspend choice, may resist settled determinations . . . But non-philosophers may not have this luxury. They must be moral as well as ethical, must interpret as well as understand” (1987: 145).

8 Lawrence Buell makes much the same kind of argument in indicating that “the newer ethical criticism envisages reinvention not as free play or an assertion of power but as arising out of conscienceful listening” (12).

9 Here I don’t mean that Lawrence’s use of language remains unchanged in all his work. In fact, during the course of his approximately twenty-year writing career, Lawrence changes not once but many times in his writing style as well as in his ideas. Therefore, while discussing the textual play in his text, I’ll identify which work I am considering by paying careful attention to chronology to avoid the danger of generalization about this writer and his work.

10 Gilles Deleuze, in his 1967 study, Difference et repetition, adroitly places difference in the post-Kantian context of repetition in order to avoid what he views as the pitfalls of Hegel’s and Heidegger’s philosophy of difference. Beginning at least with Plato, Deleuze argues, repetition is viewed as a secondary phenomenon, a simulacrum to be viewed with suspicion and mistrust. In the philosophy of representation, the key moment is one of recognition that invokes the adequation of thought to certain hypotheses taken as a starting point (Deleuze 1994: 253-4). Relying primarily on Nietzsche and the “eternal return” as a model that breaks with the philosophy of representation, Deleuze proposes that “the movement does not go from the hypothetical to the apodictic, but from the problematic to the question” (255).

11 In another book, Martin Jay offers an exhaustive array of examples: Bataille’s celebration of the blinding sun and the acephalic body; Breton’s ultimate disenchantment with the savage eye; Sartre’s depiction of the sadomasochism of the “look”; Merleau-Ponty’s diminished faith in a new ontology of vision; Lacan’s disparagement of the ego produced by the mirror stage; Foucault’s strictures against the medical gaze and panoptic surveillance; Derrida’s double reading of the specular tradition of philosophy and the white mythology; Irigaray’s outrage at the privileging of the visual in patriarchy; and Lyotard’s identification of postmodernism with the sublime foreclosure of the visual (1993a: 588).

12 Blanchot is especially concerned with the double character of vision—that it always wants at once to see and not to see, whereby the visible becomes a screen revealing and concealing a non-visible alterity. As he elaborates it in The Writing
of the Disaster, the light, that which reveals, once it becomes itself an object, turns into a gaze which is blinding. If the gaze is to make objects visible to the eye, the almost-blinding of the eye by the gaze suggests a second role of the gaze as concealment. Blanchot proposes that aesthetic experience, what he calls the writing process of the disaster, makes us sensitive to the internal reserve of the invisible inhabiting the visible.

It is important to note that Lawrence’s attack on logocentrism and ocularcentrism, and hence all basic dualism, is implicitly anti-masculinist. In Part Three, I’ll elaborate my contention that Lawrence shares feminists’ belief that the dualistic thinking inherent in patriarchal language is responsible for the construction of “woman” as “the Other”—not a Levinasian Other, but an Other that is assimilable to the (masculine) Same. Lawrence’s hyperbolic use of dualistic modes of consciousness to dismantle those very modes is analogous to feminist appropriations of traditionally masculine rhetorical devices in order to subvert male power.

A passage from Lawrence’s letter written before the completion of The Rainbow shows that neither Will’s nor Anna’s way of looking at things is entirely sufficient. “I think there is the dual way of looking at things: our way, which is to say ‘I am all. All other things are but radiation out from me.’ The other way is to try to conceive the whole, to build up a whole by means of symbolism, because symbolism avoids the I and puts aside the egotist; and, in the whole, to take our decent place. That was how man built the cathedrals. He didn’t say ‘out of my breasts springs this cathedral!’ But ‘in this vast whole I am a small part, I move and live and have my being’” (CL 302). While Will is more akin to the second mode of seeing which Lawrence appreciates, he is too weak and blind to see anything.

Critics dispute about whether “the rainbow” serves as symbol of unity or of openness. Daleski is among the critics who associate the symbol of the rainbow not so much with the incompleteness of the arch, but with the completeness of the circle. He argues that “the rainbow is one of many symbols that Lawrence employs to convey his sense of unity in a dualistic universe” (1965: 88). Daniel Dervin, on the other hand, shows that “the rainbow is an open form; it unites opposites by being a broken circle” (520).

Some critics consider Birkin’s demand as that for a discarnate feminine essence—a repudiation of the sensuous in favour of some sublime spiritual principle. Yet judging from the context, wherein Birkin insistently criticizes the disembodied form of thought, I contend that Birkin’s demand is for the discarding of the eye which has traditionally served as the organ of possessive internalizations.

In fact, fear of exposing oneself is, though in different degrees, characteristic of all the other characters in this novel. We might see this kind of fear in Lawrence’s other novels. For instance, the narrator thus describes Aaron in Aaron’s Rod: “He had dreaded exposure: and behold, we cannot be exposed, for we are invisible. We cannot be exposed to the looks of others, for our very being is night-lustrous and unseeable. Like the Invisible Man, we are only revealed through our clothes and our masks” (AR 160).

Quoted in Culler, Structuralist Poetics, 252.

And so, Kemp’s assertion that Lawrence wants “to make the word an end, to make the words stand for the world” (15) seems partial and misleading. According to Kemp, “one could open almost any page of Lawrence at random for an example of this metaphysics of presence, for the attempt to close the gap between the word and
the thing, between subject and referent” (8). One of the examples Kemp offers is the conversation between Will and Anna (R 161-2) wherein Will sticks to the presence of meaning for the Lamb in the Church. Kemp’s error is to confuse Will the character with Lawrence the author. Lawrence himself makes it quite clear that his hero is still speaking only within a novel even if a Lawrentian hero at times sounds like our understanding of Lawrence the man: “So, if a character in a novel wants two wives—or three—or thirty: well, that is true of that man, at that time, in that circumstance. It may be true of other men, elsewhere and elsewhen. But to infer that all men at all times want two, three, or thirty wives, or that the novelist himself is advocating furious polygamy, is just imbecility” (STH 114).

In his non-fiction prose, Lawrence also recurrently shows his distrust of language. For instance, in Fantasia, he even goes so far as to deny the possibility of an intelligible language: “There is no straight path between you and me, dear reader, so don’t blame me if my words fly like dust into your eyes and grit between your teeth, instead of like music into your ears . . . . ” As for the profanation of your sacred ears, just apply a little theory of relativity, and realized that what I say is not what you hear, but something uttered in the midst of my isolation, and arriving strangely changed and travel-down the long curve of your own individual circumambient atmosphere. “May say Boh, but heaven alone knows what the goose hears” (FU 68).

Lawrence here is concerned with the difficulty in the posture of a consciousness which tries to watch itself. Nietzsche has offered a relevant comment: “Never observe in order to observe! It creates a false vision, a squat; something forced and exaggerated. Experience as the wish to experience is no use. Don’t look at yourself when you are experiencing something” (1978b: 42).

In the second version of the novel Lawrence played upon the word “chatter”: “The noise of London, and the endless chatter, chatter, chatter of the people seemed like a death’s head chattering its teeth in a sort of cold frenzy” (JTLJ 277). Bell suggests that the title of this novel “signals the theme of chatter” (1991: 208).

See, for example, W. J. Harvey (1965); Patrick Swinden (1973); Lennard J. Davis (1987).

Woolf’s assertion is prompted by the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London which took place that year, but surely the precision of Woolf’s dating in her claim is joky and provocative.

The word “ethics” derives from the Greek ethos, which means, in singular, “character” and in the plural, “manners” or “customs”. For Derrida and Levinas, the ethos is an unjust and limiting reification of value, which systematically prevents the thinking of value beyond the mastery of the ego. Tobin Siebers indicates that such an “ethics without ethos” is impossible. See Siebers 1988: 98-123.

Lawrence claims that society’s collective ideals serve to control individuals from the “outside” when individuals should be living “from within outwards”: “The moment man became aware of himself he made a picture of himself, and began to live from the picture. All our education is but an elaborating of the picture. ’A good little girl’; ’a brave boy’; ’a noble woman’; ’a strong man’; ’a productive society’; ’a progressive humanity’; it is all the picture. It is all living from the outside to the inside. It is all the death of spontaneity. It is all strictly automatic” (P 380).

Related to the broad process of individuation, “singleness” is one of the major thematic issues in Lawrence’s novels. I’ll take up this issue as it is related to
sense of otherness at more length in Part Two.

28 Bonds hints that elemental carbon is not really a “pure single element” since “carbon is never purely or simply itself, for it always differs from itself, is always already something else also—diamond, graphite, amorphous carbon . . . . Rather the notion of carbon as a ‘pure single element’ derives from or is an effect of the differential relations among various items listed on the periodic table of the elements used by chemists and physicists” (Bonds 23).

29 Lawrence asserts that no “pure beginning” is possible: “When we postulate a beginning, we only do so to fix a starting-point for our thought. There never was a beginning, and there never will be an end to the universe. The creative mystery, which is life itself, always was and always will be” (SM 176).