Part Two  Love as Ethical Relation to Alterity

There we are, together and apart at the same time, and free of each other, and eternally inseparable.

--- D. H. Lawrence

For what is the beloved? She is that which I myself am not. Knowing the breach between us, the unclosable gulf, I in the same breath realize her features.

--- D. H. Lawrence

It is in eros that transcendence can be conceived as something radical, which brings to the ego caught up in being, ineluctably returning to itself, something else than this return.

--- Emmanuel Levinas

The self is non-indifference to the others.

--- Emmanuel Levinas

The other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I.

--- Jacques Derrida

In one’s friend one should have one’s best enemy.

--- Frederic Nietzsche

Superior to love of neighbor is love of those far away, those in the future.

--- Frederic Nietzsche
Chapter One  Ethics of Eros

Levinas regards eros as radical transcendence. By the same token, erotic love in Lawrence’s fiction serves as a way of encountering the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of human consciousness. Yet unlike Levinas, Lawrence does not exclude sexuality from the domain of ethics; he elaborates an ethics of eros in his concern with embodied love and language of feeling. Besides, the evasiveness and double-edgedness inherent in Lawrence’s erotic discourse have prevented sexuality from being trapped by the language meant to free it.

I. Eros as Absolute Alterity

In his early work, Levinas views eros as occurring in the space between self and other, wherein eros disrupts the familiarity of enjoyment and possession, breaking the circle one established among the things one enjoys in relation to oneself. In reading Proust’s novel, Levinas claims that Marcel’s insatiable curiosity about Albertine is love because it is nurtured by a recognition of the other as separate:

Ontologically pure, this Eros is not a relation built on a third term, such as tastes, common interests, or the conaturality of souls, but has a direct relation to something that both gives and refuses to give itself, namely to the Other as Other, the mystery. (1989: 164)

In the erotic relation, as Levinas describes it, the other has the capacity to remain other in the face of the same: “It is in eros that transcendence can be so conceived as something radical, which brings to the ego caught up in being, ineluctably returning to itself, something else than this return” (EE 96). As such, transcendence will be accomplished in the erotic relation to the other because it is a flight toward the other that does not involve a return to the self. In eros, the relation to the other is a relation
with what “slips away from the light” (TO 86), with what escapes comprehension and understanding. Here one encounters an alterity that cannot be reduced to an object of consciousness—i.e., that does not seem to come from the self. As Levinas memorably puts it, the caress in erotic relation “knows not what it seeks” (TO 89). The seeking of the caress does not degenerate into contact that would represent the ego’s hold upon the other. In effect, the caress is a relationship to the other in which the relationship does not diminish the distance between the terms and the distance does not prevent the possibility of a relation. In a nutshell, there is no ultimate teleological principle in the erotic relation.

However, are the lovers not also beings? Doesn’t the caress also involve the possibility that the other does come from the I, and is a construction of the ego’s fantasy? There is a sense in Levinas’s early works that one can find in the erotic relation an “exception” to being. While this sense of transcendence as an escape or a “way outside of being” persists to some extent in Totality and Infinity, it is qualified there by a deeper recognition of the problematic status of any “outside.”

Fundamental to Levinas’s project in Totality and Infinity is the claim that there is a significant distinction between need and desire: “In need I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other; in Desire there is no sinking one’s teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me” (TI 117). In other words, when the subject experiences need, the relation between the I and what it needs can be described in terms of a lack. In order for a need, such as hunger, to be satisfied, that which confronts me as other—the food from which I live, the air I breathe—undergoes a transformation of which I am master. On the contrary, desire is a rupture of solipsistic existence and exposure to infinity through the acknowledgment of an other whose alterity cannot be overcome. Therefore, as Levinas puts it, “Desire does not coincide with an unsatisfied need; it is situated beyond satisfaction and nonsatisfaction” (TI 79).
Put another way, in Levinas’s philosophical work, one finds an increasing insistence on the maintenance of the distinction between eros and ethics. On the one hand, eros instigates a movement of transcendence toward the Other, but at the same time it “throws us back this side of immanence itself” (TI 254). The love peculiar to eros is a relation with the Other—a relation of what Levinas calls the “metaphysical desire”—but it is also a relation which is fatally infected with the tendency to turn back into need because metaphysical desire in erotic love turns all too easily into sensual concupiscence. Said differently, the “ambiguity of love” is due to its being a relation with the other that “turns into need” even as it “presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the other” (TI 254). On account of this, Levinas defines love as an “enjoyment of the transcendent,” that is, as the appropriation of that which transcends every grasp:

An enjoyment of the transcendent almost contradictory in its terms . . . the possibility of the Other appearing as an object of a need while retaining his alterity . . . . This simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and transcendence . . . constitutes the originality of the erotic which, in this sense, is the equivocal par excellence. (TI 255)

To define love as an enjoyment of the transcendent is to define it by essential equivocation. Hence love both transcends and does not transcend; it is both like and unlike ethics. The problematic announced in the ambiguity of love is one that increasingly occupies Levinas’s thought. In Totality and Infinity, Levinas solves the problematic by proposing the fecund resolution of eros in paternity that overcomes the threat of need, voluptuosity and immanence: “The profanation that violates a secret . . . discovers the child” (TI 267). Transcendence, or metaphysical desire, would be a ceaseless movement towards exteriority, towards the Other, while eros, for Levinas, completes a circular movement back to the self in its seemingly inevitable transformation into the satisfaction of a need. This eros, affective eros, must be
overcome in the name of both transcendence and ethics. As it is, the ultimate
meaning of eros for Levinas lies in fecundity, in the production of the child.

Levinas’s refusal to contemplate the divinity of physical love is the core of
Irigaray’s critique on him.³ Obviously the importance of Levinas for Irigaray is his
refusal to submit otherness to the demands of logic. Her adoption of Levinas’s
theory of alterity in her own elaboration of sexual ethics follows from this insistence
that erotic intimacy is necessarily an unmediated encounter with an entirely different
other. She sees that for Levinas “the touch of the caress” leaves the other intact even
while seeking its alterity. The Levinasian caress respects the other as other. On the
other hand, Irigaray challenges Levinas for the way he sublimates erotic love. This
(masculine) sublimation of eroticism prevents Levinas from seeing an expression of
divinity in the act of love itself. In Irigaray’s opinion, Levinas’s discussion of
passion is trapped in the deadly circle of sublimation and debasement, the disjunction
between the spiritual creation and degraded eroticism of the flesh. “It is surely a
question of the dissociation of body and soul, of sexuality and spirituality” (ESD 15).

To exit the vicious circle and disjunction, Irigaray redefines ethical passion as
“erotic wonder” (ESD 13) which ensures the everlasting sense of novelty between the
lovers without subordinating the passionate erotic body to spiritual love.⁴ As it is,
wonder is the place of lovers’ second birth—“a birth into a transcendence, that of the
other, still in the world of the senses, still physical and carnal, and already spiritual”
(ESD 82). In other words, “wonder would be the passion of the encounter between
the most material and the most metaphysical, of their possible conception and
fecundation one by the other” (ESD 82). For Irigaray, the redefinition of ethical
passion as erotic wonder escapes the pitfalls of both moral masochism and
disembodied sublimation. “Wonder goes beyond that which is or is not suitable for
us . . . . That which precedes suitability has no opposites” (ESD 74). Her point is
that wonder, the astonishment provoked by the totally other as the first passion,
precedes the very opposition of pleasure and unpleasure, and, by extension, precedes Levinas’s distinction between narcissistic enjoyment and ethical anguish. In contrast to Levinas’s proposition of overcoming sensual enjoyment by bringing the birth of “the child,” Irigaray suggests that the erotic creation consists in the rebirth of the lovers brought forth by their “bestowing life on each other”:

Prior to any procreation, the lovers bestow on each other—life. Love fecundates both of them in turn, through the genesis of their immortality. They are reborn, each for the other, in the assumption and absolution of a definitive conception . . . . They love each other as the bodies they are.

(ESD 190)

Accordingly, wonder, no longer reserved only for God, may also be an experience of carnal wonder and lovers can finally get rid of (patriarchy’s) obsession with procreation.

Both Levinas and Irigaray, by taking corporeality into consideration, look for a down-to-earth supplement to traditional philosophy which is concerned only with conceptual logics. By contesting the purification of ethical imperatives from all “pathological passions,” Levinas departs from the Kantian legacy in his emphasis on the ethical significance of passion and embodiment. The originality of Levinas’s contribution to contemporary work on the body lies in the fact that it enables the elaboration of the ethical significance of flesh and, by extension, opens a possibility of an ethics of eros. Yet this possibility is never fully realized in Levinas’s own work since his own conception of eros remains entangled in metaphysical traditions. The radical potential of Levinas’s work is undercut at the moment it confronts sexuality. In other words, while admitting passions into the realm of ethics, Levinas dissociates those passions from any relation with sex, and in this sense, he himself repeats the classical Kantian gesture of purification. In order to maintain the separation of ethics from sexuality, Levinas even reduces the ethical significance of passion to
“pain.”⁵ Like Levinas and Irigaray, Lawrence considered erotic love as a way of encountering the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of human consciousness. Nonetheless, in stark contrast to Levinas’s rejection of sensual enjoyment, the depiction of erotic love in Lawrence’s fiction restores to sexual pleasure its status of creation. Hence eros in Lawrence prevents the degradation of sexuality, which is evident in Levinas work—“the complacent pleasure of dual egoism” (TI 266). Without excluding sexuality from the domain of ethics, Lawrence elaborates an ethics of eros in his concern with the creation of a new language of feeling and love.

II. Embodied Love and Language of Feeling

Previous discussion in this study concerning Lawrence’s treatment of seeing, knowing and the self reveals that his special, and characteristic, gift was an extraordinary sensitiveness to the “unknown modes of being.” Lawrence could never forget the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of man’s conscious mind. He always talks about the need to let go. One is reborn not by taking thought, but by letting go—by a fall into the future, or a movement to the edge of consciousness. For Lawrence, erotic love is one of the means of bringing forth a leap into the unknown world of the other. The significance of the erotic experience was just that, in it, the immediate knowledge of divine otherness is brought to a focus. Erotic intensity spells the destruction of the mastering subject, the annihilation of consciousness, the loss of sovereignty and individuality. Norman Mailer asserts that, for Lawrence, the ideal impulse of love lies in the intrinsic power of lovers to get beyond their ego, will, and self: “Sexual transcendence, some ecstasy where he could lose his ego for a moment, and his sense of self and his will, was life to him—he could not live without sexual transcendence” (112).
The overwhelming role of erotic wonder in The Rainbow precisely indicates how erotic ecstasy is the direct means for such transcendence in Tom and Lydia:

A daze had come over his mind, he had another center of consciousness. In his breast, somewhere in his body, there had started another activity. It was as if a strong light were burning there and he was blind within it, unable to know anything, except that this transfiguration burned between him and her, connecting them, like a secret power. (R 33)

Being pregnant with ecstasy, the activity produces a sense of drifting, which in turn entails loss of will and loss of identity. Halfway between sense and nonsense, between clarity and obscurity, eros evinces not so much a duality as a thoroughgoing ambiguity. “Their new life came to pass, it was beyond all conceiving good, it was so good, that it was almost like a passing away, a trespass” (R 41). In The Rainbow, the whole sense of otherness was most significantly focused in the erotic relation. Both Tom and Lydia take a great risk because neither can possess or know the other. The effect of eros, then, is to recast a subject, who has learned to control its work and achieved mastery of itself, back into a state of flux where the borders of self and other, of the I and the world, are no longer so clear, where the gap between the I and the other is not so well-defined, nor so easily grasped.

As such, in eros, the truths and certainties of the world, the will to mastery and control, are suspended. This kind of suspension of conscious mind in erotic love is especially true in Women in Love where a tactile erotics insisting on the alterity of the flesh of the other replaces a visual erotics that subsumes the flesh into a numinous image or sign. As has been indicated in Part One, the identificatory gaze loses its primacy in Lawrence’s fiction; blind touch-awareness is instead the primary mode of erotic encounter. In this new dispensation, the hand (as opposed to the eye) is the chosen organ of operation. Dissociated from the desire to identify, eros is troped as an invisible but all-pervasive force that regulates the attraction between love-objects
without their active assertion or interference. Birkin’s “soft, blind kisses . . . perfect in their stillness” (WL 187) announce the presence of a new, non-visual, tactile and desire-free erotics. Birkin prefers the secret invisibility of the anus to the high-profile visibility of phallic erections. His esoteric love-making with Ursula in Sherwood Forest represents a remarkable attempt to give cosmic resonance to an anal-erotics. The erotic engagement between Birkin and Ursula is “never to be seen with the eye, or known with the mind, only known as a palpable revelation of living otherness” (WL 320). Attuned to the cosmic vibrations, the lovers receive “the maximums of unspeakable communication in touch” (WL 320).

In Lady Chatterley’s Lover, the blocking of ocularcentric consciousness is especially apparent in the representation of Mellor’s and Connie’s erotic encounters. In this novel, Lawrence severely renounces modern love which he defines as “the self-seeking, automatic civilized man trying to extend his ego over a woman”; and it is the woman, “putting her will over him, and thereby getting a sense of power and enlargement in herself” (JTLJ 105). The sexual love experienced by Connie, before she meets Clifford, offers a practical example of what Lawrence hates about the “modern love.” Her lovemaking at that time is characterized by an urgent need to articulate spurious concepts of will even amid the sweat of sex. Indeed, on these terms, the bed becomes her willful kingdom, where she can rule easily with new transactions of mastery over an unvarying inferiority in her lover. “Rather she could use this sex thing to have power over him” (LCL 40). Such an illustration of Connie’s dominant mode of loving tends to confirm Michaelis’s later complaint about her sexual gamesmanship. Yet he approves this modern erotics of will and ambition because the adulterated sex shields him from the Lawrentian “l lapsing out” that he fears and Connie cannot as yet imagine.

On the contrary, in describing Connie and Mellor’s lovemaking, Lawrence asserts that erotic love not only gives rise to, but also should be based on, the
abandonment of acquisitive ego. In fact, the first two scenes of their sexual act are still largely dominated by Connie’s resisting ocularcentric consciousness. But in the scenes that follow, the concept of character shifts from a self constituted by a personality, persona, or ego to a self founded on bodily, impersonal forces and responses. The characters are not so much the persons named Connie and Mellors as their impassioned bodies. Mellors is throughout the novel linked to a variety of organic phenomena in order to establish a connection between human and nonhuman vitality. The woods where he lives is a place where “primroses are broad, and full of pale abandon,” where “columbines were unfolding their ink-purple riches,” where everywhere there were “bud-knots and the leap of life” (LCL 177)! In the love scenes in the woods, the acquisitive ego in both Connie and Mellors is put to rest and the language Mellors uses to describe Connie’s body is as regenerative as the nature that surrounds the couple. The “points of brilliance” in Connie are neither her eyes’ single point of view, nor the sun’s brilliant light, but her vital body’s multiple, dynamic points of feeling and inner brilliance (LCL 183). The hand’s blindness enables it to operate without ocular interference.

Lawrence’s depiction of erotic love in his fiction gives a hint to Levinas’s designation of eros as transcendence toward the other, but it also marks where they depart from each other. While both Levinas and Lawrence lay stress on erotic passions, they are divided on the locus and nature of these passions. As has been indicated above, the erotic experience of alterity is sought out by Levinas as the indefinable excess that escapes the subject, and which could not be located, fixed, and given form. The anarchy of eroticism is not only a power of disorder or loss, but rather, a simultaneously needful/desirable disruption of any ontological project at all. And yet, unable to imagine an ethics of sexuality, Levinas fails to consider an ethical encounter in “embodied love”; instead, he makes the lovers eventually turn toward the transcendent God by conceiving a child. For Levinas, love must desire immortality,
and procreation is the nearest thing to perpetuity and immortality that a mortal being can attain. The physical or the sexual, given that it leads inevitably to nourishment and enjoyment, which are “the transmutation of the other into the Same” (TI 111), should not be disavowed but must be properly channeled. Hence Levinas’s distinction between erotic and non-erotic love (or between eros and love) is at the same time sublimation of the sensuous or the physical in a philosophical-spiritual realm, or the overcoming of the ontological ambiguity of love.

On the contrary, procreation is for Lawrence the accidental tribute to erotic love, and he never regards sexual desire and pleasure as the worm at the core of love. Instead, he stresses the inviolable primacy of physical love and sexual pleasure, apart from procreation: “But the act, called the sexual act, is not for the depositing of the seed. It is for leaping off into the unknown” (P 441). While for Levinas concupiscence is bad since it inevitably involves a return to self, for Lawrence, the erotic creation consists in the rebirth of both lovers generated by the transformation of the flesh itself, as we may see in the “transfiguration” burned between Tom and Lydia. In The Rainbow, the trope of death and rebirth occurs particularly in reference to coitus. A sexual encounter like the first one between Tom and Lydia involves first his “obliteration,” “sleep,” “oblivion” and then his return, “gradually, but newly created, as after a gestation, a new birth, in the womb of darkness” (R 33). While Levinas remains within a reproductive paradigm, for Lawrence, as it is for Irigaray, the erotic caress speaks of a regeneration in the body that is other than the maternal body of sexual reproduction. Lettie in The White Peacock is accused of failing to accept that the physical body does count for more than mere procreation. Clifford is especially one of Lawrence’s targets in his critique of modern men’s subordination of sexual love to procreation. Clifford insists that sex should be subordinated to preserving the long life. He wants an heir to his property and name and he doesn’t care about sexual love: “‘So why not,’ he asks Connie, ‘arrange this sex thing, as we
arrange going to the dentist”” (LCL 191)?

More specifically, Lawrence’s quarrel with traditional conceptions of love consists mainly in his critique of romantic idealization, which tends to spiritualize passion so as to play down physical bodies. In his earlier novels, Lawrence describes a lot about what he calls “the dreaming woman” who “is so ready to disclaim the body of a man’s love” (WP132). Thus for Helena in *The Trespasser*, a kiss is the supreme experience: “She belonged to that class of ‘Dreaming Women’ with whom passion exhausts itself at the mouth. Her desire was accomplished in a real kiss” (T 64). For Lawrence love is pure and whole only when it develops naturally and simultaneously on the sensual plane and yet Helena experiences her sexuality as “sex in the head”: “The secret thud, thud of his heart, the very self of that animal in him she feared and hated, repulsed her. She struggled to escape” (T 125). Helena hence tends to yield her passion to her lover as a kindness, a sacrifice. Siegmund is quite aware of his own sexual desire and is not tempted to idealize it. Yet this desire, largely through continual thwarting, has become distorted and ambivalent: “Sometimes he would feel a peculiar jerking in his pulse, very much like electricity, when he held her hand. Occasionally it was almost painful, and felt as if a little virtue were passing out of his blood. But that he dismissed as nonsense” (T 155). Certainly Lawrence himself would not dismiss it as nonsense. He knows that the virtue is in the blood and idealization of love is the evil. His frank erotic manifestoes emphasized blood consciousness, instinct and passion.

By exalting embodied love, Lawrence puts himself passionately against what he called the cerebralization of feeling. In his attack on modern love, Lawrence laments that even passion and desire become mental ideals in us. We end up by getting “our sex into our head” and the most basic, natural sensual attraction becomes a mental experiment. In other words, the natural, spontaneous attraction between lovers becomes reduced to a “functioning of the head.” In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the
narrator emphasizes Connie and her sister’s logocentric preference for intellectual discourse over sex. Words are so important to Connie and Hilda that they require verbal engagement before they can be sexually aroused, for neither is “even in love with a young man unless he and she were verbally very near: that is, unless they were profoundly interested in TALKING to one another” (LCL 4). The sisters’ lives are so shaped by verbal intercourse that their sexual encounters can be seen as textualized: “And if after the roused intimacy of these vivid and soul-enlightened discussions the sex thing became more or less inevitable, then let it. It marked the end of a chapter” (LCL 4). For the sisters, there is no spontaneity, no unpredictability, and the whole erotic process is prescribed, set under way by language. Sex-after-talk is as inevitable as effect-after-cause in a scientific experiment. After marrying to Clifford, who joins with his intellectual friends in derogating the importance of unharnessed passion in lovemaking, Connie wastes away listening to tired, bruised, and pretentious men denigrate sex with their self-serving and escapist discussions.

And it follows that, passion and desire, as preconceived ideals about love, are superimposed mechanically and individuals then attempt to squeeze themselves into those predetermined molds. The inevitable and unenviable consequence will be distortion and conflict and disharmony instead of creative and fulfilling love. Lawrence was often criticized for his extreme and abnormal attitudes toward sex, but his own definition of abnormality is worth mentioning:

Abnormal sex comes from the fulfilling of violent or extreme desire, against the will. It is not the desires which are wrong, nor the fulfillment . . . but the fixed will in ourselves, which asserts that these things should not be, that only a holy love should be . . . . It is the labouring under the burden of self-repudiation and shame which makes abnormality. And repudiation and shame come from the false doctrines we hold. (LIII 140-1)
Lawrence’s critique is that we have built our world so scrupulously that there is scarcely anything in it unfamiliar to our mental consciousness:

Convenience! Convenience! There are convenient emotions, and inconvenient ones. The inconvenient ones we chain up, or put a ring through their nose. The convenient ones are our pets. Love is our pet favorite. And that’s as far as our education goes, in the direction of feelings. We have no language for the feelings, because our feelings do not even exist for us. (STH 202-3)

The “convenience” with which we keep our emotions does not mean the facility with which we can consciously manipulate them; on the contrary, it implies our subjection to the moral system which turns out to be the real agent of our emotions, and which deceives us into believing they are genuinely ours. “Love” becomes a convenient emotion for us and hence the word “love” had lost its subversive meaning by being sterilized through non-regenerative repetitions. In his essay “The Novel and the Feelings,” Lawrence claims that our modern society ignores the health of our feelings and Lawrence tried to tell us why reading novels is so important—it helps “cultivate our feelings” (P 758).

On account of this, Lawrence’s approach to love in his fiction is inseparable from his increasing impatience with the deadening effect of cliché. Over the years Lawrence’s moralizing about the need for a revolution in the language of love seems itself to have become clichéd, but in its time it was original and bold. In Women in Love, Birkin urges on Ursula the author’s own philosophy: “‘The point about love,’ he said . . . ‘is that we hate the word because we have vulgarized it. It ought to be . . . tabooed from utterance, for many years, till we get a new, better idea’” (WL 122). Ursula begs him, “Say you love me, say ‘my love’ to me” (WL 151). Birkin fights the cliché: “I love you right enough . . . but I want it to be something else . . . We can go one better” (WL 151). She insists that there is nothing better and again
pleads. He concedes grudgingly: “Yes—my love, yes, my love. Let love be enough then. I love you then—I love you. I’m bored by the rest” (WL 152).

Lawrence’s problem as a writer was to put into words these feelings and perceptions which he believed to be independent of the conscious intellect. He often uses words strongly reminiscent of Birkin’s to convey his concept of the aesthetic as a “lapsing out” of the conscious self.

In his attempt to describe such kind of experience of “lapsing out,” Lawrence appeals to erotic desire, which for him is “what is not said”—i.e., what is excluded by established values and what exceeds the category of the knowable and the sayable. By daring to write about the unspeakable, Lawrence is also representing the unrepresentable, hence calling into question the clichés and complacencies of common sense, the taxonomies of Enlightenment culture. The chapter called “Excuse” in Women in Love is the section where Lawrence is obviously taking a great novelistic risk. He must put into the “agitations” of speech, into the “movements” of thought, a state about which there may be nothing to say except that it is inaccessible to whatever might be said or thought:

There were faint sounds from the wood, but no disturbance . . . the world was under a strange ban, a new mystery had supervened. They threw off their clothes, and he gathered her to him, and found her, found the pure lambent reality of her forever invisible flesh. Quenched, inhuman, his fingers upon her unrevealed nudity were the fingers of silence upon silence, the body of mysterious night upon the body of mysterious night. (WL 403)

In such a way Lawrence makes an attempt to put something of this state into words, although he has to rely on such apparently self-canceling expressions as “physical mind” and “mystical nodality of physical being” (WL 403) to suggest the literally unspeakable nature of erotic love.

Hence Lawrence exhausts the language of sexuality to return that language to the
area where he had always argued it belonged—to the darkness, to silence, to oblivion. Darkness and silence—the appropriate leitmotif for books which challenge the Enlightenment confidence in reason and language—refer not only to that in human experience which is irrational but to that which is unsayable. Even after her happiness over simultaneous orgasm with Mellors in an erotic scene, Connie is still a victim of the conditioned need to find the verbal counterpart for her sexual excitement. She looks for praise and explanation through the Word. And yet she is warned by Mellors to let the instincts, not the words, confirm the experience. Later she finally has absorbed the value of the special silence that is the result of instinctual satisfaction: “And he was still with her, in an unfathomable silence along with her. And of this they would never speak” (CLC 178). In contrast to Clifford who transforms everything into words, Mellors is the potent man who leads Connie to learn to speak about love in silence.

And yet, while Mellors attempts to be silent, by withdrawing from the world of men, but without touch he was drawn back into the world, into language. The great attempt of Lady Chatterley’s Lover is to re-create in words the act of love itself, but finally Lawrence recognizes that such re-creation is inadequate, for if Connie and Mellors are together, the ink could stay in the bottle. And so Mellors writes in his final letter to Connie: “So many words, because I can’t touch you. If I could sleep with my arms round you, the ink could stay in the bottle” (LCL 312). The description of Connie and her sister’s textualization of sex mentioned above implicitly calls readers’ attention to be aware of how sex is also textualized in the novel. Another paradox is manifest in Women in Love. Despite his own severe remarks on “sex in the head”, Birkin’s “struggle into conscious being” commits him to a new articulacy in the emotional realm. The paradox is that his increasing insistence on the sub-conscious realm accompanies a heightened need for conscious articulacy. Lawrence attacks on the substitution of sex talk for actual sex. But no matter how
deep his suspicion of words, they are essential even to his sacred blood knowledge. Put differently, erotics in Lawrence’s fiction reveals the tension between the need to rescue sexuality from secrecy, to bring it into discourse, and the simultaneous recognition that the re-creation of sexuality in language must always, at the same time, resist language.⁶

Writing at a time when sexual discourse was vigorously censored, Lawrence benefited from the symbolic indeterminacy inherent in “extremity” which pushes readers beyond the empirical referent. On the other hand, when the extreme becomes the norm, this proliferation of non-empirical meanings stops. Therefore, in his attempt to release what is repressed, Lawrence also confronts the danger of what Foucault’s analysis of “repressive hypothesis” has predicted.⁷ While the discourse of and on eros points to its subversive role in ethics, when so widespread, this discourse tames, appropriates, disseminates, and eventually deprives eros of its subversive powers. Explicit discourses on erotic desire might replace it with logos (or with language). In other words, when a taboo is widely talked about, it disappears, stops being a taboo, and becomes one of many discourses. Nonetheless, as we might see in the following discussion, Lawrence’s erotic discourse proves to be double-edged and self-critical, hence preventing itself from being domesticated. In her reading of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Blanchard claims that readers have tended to ignore Lawrence’s concern with the limits of language, perhaps from fear that it will somehow lessen the significance of Lawrence’s role as priest of love: “But to see that Lawrence is both creating a language of the feelings and simultaneously calling into question the adequacy of that language is to see the very brilliance of the novel” (1992: 133). In other words, Lawrence has not only created a language of love, a lover’s discourse, but has also shown the limits of such a discourse, even at its most eloquent. To understand such kind of text is to recognize the self-critical dimension to his erotic discourse.
III. Evasiveness in Erotic Discourse

Due to the sexual explicitness in his fiction, Lawrence is often accused of “privileging the body over the mind” (Belsey 33), and hence sustaining dualism for reversing the Cartesian hierarchy. Indeed, in some of his work, “blood consciousness” seems to be not only its own authorization but the center of consciousness. For instance, in *The Rainbow*, the sight of Lydia grips Tom “in his bowels” (R 33). His adopted daughter Anna and her husband Will are as estranged as her parents, so sexual love becomes their sole and terrifying connection. Will taps into Anna’s sensuousness to fill the void, systematically exploring “the many little rapturous places” (R 221), each of which drives him mad with delight and stimulates his desire to know more. “He would say during the daytime: ‘To-night I shall know the little hollow under her ankle, where the blue vein crosses’” (R 228). With that knowledge comes further anticipation of all “the undiscovered beauties and ecstatic places of delight in her body,” even “the instep of her foot, and the place from which the toes radiated out, the little, miraculous dimpling hollows between the toes” (R 231). Their sensuality ranges from innocent toes as seen and touched to the “pure darkness” of “all the shameful things of the body” (R 233-5). In like manner, Ursula, Anna and Will’s daughter, responds to Skrebensky’s kiss from the depths of her body. It “flowed over the last fiber of her, so that they were one stream. . . and she clung at the core of him, with her lips holding open the very bottom-most source of him” (R 447).

In referring to Lawrence’s fiction, Terry Eagleton, stressing the need to prevent the body becoming “another privileged anteriority” (Eagleton 197), claims that Lawrence constantly risks reifying the body into what is merely another transcendental category. Yet I contend that it is not always fair to see Lawrence’s insistence on the body as simple inverted idealism, especially not when embodied
love is represented in his fiction. Possibly his re-drawing of the body in a positive light was to compensate for a weak constitution. Therefore, he argues that breasts, belly, hands, arms, elbows, wrists, thighs, knees, feet, face and buttocks are all centers of positive feeling and communication. Yet, erotic desire, as Lawrence describes it, deconstructs the Cartesian binary opposition between mind and body. Deleuze and Guattari describe Lawrence’s textuality as a desiring machine. According to them, Lawrence’s text “de-territorializes” modern sexuality:

Lawrence shows in a profound way that sexuality, including chastity, is a matter of flows, an infinity of different and even contrary flows. Everything depends on the way in which these flows—whatever their object, source, and air—are coded and broken according to uniform figures, or on the contrary taken up in chains of decoding that resect them according to mobile and nonfigurative points. (1983: 350)

Sex in this sense is polyvalent and polymorphic. It is like a cipher in Lawrence’s fiction and is never simply sex. As a symbol, sex has empirical and non-empirical meanings. Thus in The Rainbow sex symbolizes a holy “transfiguration” of Lydia and Tom (R 91), but also a “sensuality violent and extreme as death” for Anna and Will (R 237), a bond of “dark corruption” between Winifred Inger and Tom (R 322), and “a developing germ of death” for Ursula and Skrebensky (R 429). And so it follows that sex symbolizes joy and gladness as well as “a passion of death” (R 237). At one time, sex brings forth relaxation of consciousness, at another it is motivated by willful power over the other. Sometimes sex expresses intimacy, but at other times it expresses antagonism and self-assertion. If stories are usually considered as promising a kind of redemption (because they offer coherence, resolution, closure), Lawrence’s erotic narrative is at best, due to its discursive heterogeneity, ambivalent about its readiness to inscribe redemption.

In place of redemption, Lawrence’s love stories pose a question about the
strange impersonality of desire. Much of the time Lawrence’s characters are creatures driven by irresistible desires and compelled to act as they do—they are amoral, beyond good and evil. For instance, in his erotic relationship with Anna in the latter half of their marriage, Will is even presented as partially liberated and enabled to turn to purposive work in the world of light after his plunge into sensation which satisfies his craving for a sensual absolute. It seems that erotic experience is treated more as aesthetic experience than as moral knowledge. Barron rightly points out that Lawrence’s “aesthetic achievements are always far more subtle than his polemic” (20). In place of the moral disjunct of good/evil and right/wrong, we find in his text a cluster of aesthetic interpretive language for moral language: rich/impoverished, spontaneous/mechanical, releasing/repressed, creative/routine. In other words, it is not a question of good sex or bad sex but that they illustrate the variable meanings of sex and its unharnessed power.

The intensity and extremity of Lawrence’s descriptions of erotic desire increase along with the increasing varieties of sexual experimentation. In Women in Love, Ursula puts her arms around Birkin’s loins, her face against his thigh, with her finger-tips tracing down his flanks, establishing “a rich new circuit... released from the darkest poles of the body... at the back and base of the loins” (WL 306). Ursula here traces desire to its genital-anal center with a frankness unthinkable for her predecessors:

She had thought there was no source deeper than the phallic source. And now, behold, from the smitten rock of the man’s body, from the strange marvelous flanks and thighs, deeper, further in mystery than the phallic source, came the floods of ineffable darkness and ineffable riches. (WL 306)

In Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Mellors even went the final step and sodomized Connie. The act had historical significance, because it involved “burning out the shames, the
deepest, oldest shames, in the most secret places” (LCL 230). This forbidden
love-making cauterized the world of shame that Lawrence believed was killing sexual
fulfillment in his time: “She felt, now, she had come to the real bed-rock of her nature,
and was essentially shameless” (LCL 231-2). Attempting to end the “excursion into
bodilessness,” Lawrence used sexual love to conquer shame by having his lovers
engage in what Victorians had viewed as an unspeakable perversion. As has been
indicated above, for Lawrence, love is possible only when the dark secret of body is
accepted. It is not that Lawrence intends these sexual practices to become routine,
but they needed to be explored at least once to dispel the fear of any part of the body
so intimately associated with sexual arousal. As we read his erotic discourse, we
are invited to pay attention to how his novel begins to “sow wild seeds” in us (P 759),
so that we find ourselves stepping into the dark of unknown feelings and really new
ideas. Lawrence wants to wake us up with his language, but not shock us into
conforming to the ideal of “good sex” or humanism. In other words, Lawrence
avoided the moral model and instead relied on an aesthetic model, which treated new
sexual combinations as the subject matter of art.

Nevertheless, the duality of sexual discourse as a transgression of cultural
 taboos and as a description of physical acts conveys the immanence of non-empirical
experience in ordinary life. Therefore, while Lawrence will oppose Levinas for his
sublimation of physical love, he will not disagree with Levinas in the opinion that sex
is the actual crisis of love. As Levinas puts it, the aspect of immanence is attributed
to the fact that in love, “voluptuosity aims not at the Other but at his voluptuosity: it is
voluptuosity of voluptuosity, love of the love of the other . . . . If to love is to love
the love of the Beloved bears me, to love is also to love oneself in love, and thus to
return to oneself” (TI 254). For Lawrence, as it is for Levinas in this respect,
egoistic sex-excitement means the reacting of the sexes against one another in a
purely reducing activity. In sex the two blood-systems come into contact, and the
lovers’ violent pursuit of gratification leads to a passion to death. When *The Rainbow* was suppressed, Lawrence complained that sex seemed at times existentially repugnant to him: “And I, who loathe sexuality so deeply, am considered a lurid sexuality specialist” (CL 954). In fact, Lawrence never sees all the solutions to man’s problem in sex. On the contrary, for Lawrence, the attempt to protest against societal repression by making sexual love the be-all and end-all of human life will bring forth a catastrophic result: “Assert sex as the predominant fulfillment, and you get the collapse of living purpose in man. You get anarchy” (FU 145). If sex “is the starting point and the goal as well, then sex becomes like the bottomless pit, insatiable” (FU 220). Consequently, for Lawrence, “sex as an end in itself is a disaster: a vice” (FU 214). In other words, while Lawrence wanted us to find the dark centers of sexual potentiality, he also had a deep schizoid fear of merging with or appropriation of the other, which results “ecstasies and agonies of love, and final passion of death” (FU 220). It is death because the “central law of all organic life is that each organicism is intrinsically isolate and single in itself. The moment its isolation breaks down, and there comes an actual mixing or confusion, death sets in” (SCAL 68). By extension, the positive vitality inherent in any sensuous experience is itself a bondage. The ambivalence is made explicit in the modulating account of peasant existence in *Twilight in Italy*:

> It is this, this endless heat and rousedness of physical sensation which keeps the body full of and potent, and flushes the mind with a blood heat, a blood sleep. And this sleep, this heat of physical experience, becomes at length a bondage, at last a crucifixion. It is the life and the fulfillment of the peasant, this flow of sensuous experience. But at last it drives him almost mad, because he cannot escape. (TW 5)

Hence in Lawrence’s fiction, erotic love is described both as an ecstatic experience and a delusion, a way of salvation and a distraction. As such, the
transcendence brought forth by sexual ecstasy is presented to be momentary. Despite its releasing power, Lawrence is very tentative about its final possibility. In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul abruptly turns toward sexuality, exaggerating its power of redemption. However, the notion of sexual passion as all-redeeming contradicts the realized action of *Sons and Lovers*, and Paul claims therapeutic properties for sexuality that much of the novel belies. Though some fibre of the bond between Gertrude and Walter Morel is never severed, basically their story demonstrates that even a full sexual connection cannot compensate for a lack of “finer intimacy.” Paul denies this when he discusses Gertrude with Miriam:

My mother, I believe, got real joy and satisfaction out of my father at first. I believe she had got real joy and satisfaction out of my father at first. I believe she had a passion for him; that’s why she stayed with him . . . That’s what one must have, I think . . . the real, real flame of feeling through another person—once, only once, if it only lasts three months. See, my mother looks as if she’s had everything that was necessary for her living and developing. There’s not a tiny bit of feeling of sterility about her . . . Once it has happened to you, you can go on with anything and ripen. (SL 331)

Despite Paul’s insistent comments, most of this novel testifies that Gertrude did not “ripen.” As we shall see in Part Three of this study, Mrs. Morel’s married life was grounded in the absence of fulfillment—it has been a life of bitterness and frustration. And it is more likely that she stays with Morel not because of “the real, real flame of feeling” but because of economic and social factors that constrain her.

Lawrence’s suspicion of the redeeming power of sensual love is especially manifest in his attack on the objectification of sexuality—i.e., the frenzied pursuit of sexual variety and explosive orgasms. If Lawrence sees the positive experience of sex in terms of individual and social salvation, his vision is quite ambiguous. On the
one hand, Lawrence attacks severely the Victorian repression of sexuality—he characterizes the Victorians as grey elders, who hate and despise the body. By considering sex as a “dirty” and “yellow disease,” society turns sex into a secret. In Lawrence’s view, as his definition of “abnormality” quoted above has shown us, the more energy society invests in keeping sexuality a secret, the more sexuality will manifest itself as pornography. On the other hand, Lawrence does not see the emancipation of sexuality as entirely liberating. The modernists’ liberation of sex or the experience of “free love” turns sex into an entirely physical activity like eating and drinking—a recreational practice of sex. With two bodies banging together, the so-called liberated view of sex is for Lawrence merely the scientific enactment of sex. While making-love is the crucial big scenes in his fiction, Lawrence at the same time satirizes the “human fucking machines,” and their scientifically measurable orgasms. What the sexual freedom valorized by the advocates of “free love” leads to is not an act of fuller humanity, but an act of de-humanization.

Therefore, Lawrence’s complex and double message makes his work complicated. He represents modern sexuality in light of the sensual vibrancy while simultaneously describing its death throes. In The Rainbow, when Anna and Will are first married, their lovemaking brings them transcendental experience: “As they lay close together, complete and beyond the touch of time or change” (R 135). In contrast, after Will’s adventure with Hennie, the girl he meets in a music hall, sex expresses hostility between Anna and Will:

He was the sensual male seeking his pleasure, she was the female ready to take hers: but in her own way. A man could turn into a free lance: so then could a woman. She adhered as little as he to the moral world . . . .

They abandoned in one motion the moral position, each was seeking gratification pure and simple. (R 218)

Anna grappled in the dark with her equally estranged husband Will, who replaces his
search for inexpressible mystery in the Gothic with the contentment of sensuality in
the body of woman. “It was a duel: no love, no words, no kisses even, only the
maddening perception of beauty consummate, absolute through touch” (R 219).
Anna and Will, frustrated by their failure to “meet” each other, begin to live in a
renewed “passion of sensual discovery” (R 236). The narrator explains what their
lovemaking symbolizes now: “This was what their love had become, a sensuality
violent and extreme as death. They had no conscious intimacy, no tenderness of love.
It was all the lust and the infinite, maddening intoxication of the senses” (R 237).
Unlike the encounter between Tom and Lydia, which is presented as the fulfillment of
the creative soul and the realization of the inner core, Will’s and Anna’s sexuality is
neither in touch with the beyond, nor based on an achieved balance between the
partners. Rather, their sex is an adventure in the uninhibited exploration of the
resources of lust. Desire, hitherto repressed and subterranean, lying deep beneath the
social encounters of most Victorian fiction, re-surfaces here as an exhilarating triumph
of “a passion to death” (R 237).

Their daughter Ursula, disappointed by education and religion, also attempts to
expand her consciousness through sex. Through her sexual relation with Skrebensky,
Ursula indeed discovers herself realized in bodily sensation. Yet the narrative from
time to time discredits the idea that sex could be a salvation or a new religion. For
instance, her behavior is commented by the narrator: “It was a betrayal, a transference
of meaning, from the visionary world, to the matter-of-fact world” (R 266). As the
relationship develops we find that both Ursula and Skrebensky are really after the
thrill of egoistic gratification, for which they devise the usual sort of strategies:
provocation in a fast motor-car, stolen kisses in an empty church, and all the tricks of
mutual challenge. Ursula herself will not understand, not at least till very late, that
her erotic fantasy or even wantonness with Skrebensky is no generous gift of love but
only a confession of mutual weakness, an increasingly unsatisfactory escape into sex
from the unprecedented problems of the modern consciousness. She finally learns that it is futile to seek the infinite in a finite sexual act with Skrebensky: “Poignant, almost passionate appreciation she felt from him, but none of the dreadful wonder, none of the rich fear, the connection with the unknown, or the reverence of love” (R 439). She acknowledges that sexual passion can at best be a symbol of the infinite, but it is neither a means to the infinite nor a substitute for the infinite.

As it is, the self-interrogation in Lawrence’s language implicitly reveals his ambivalence towards sensual love and unrestrained eroticism. Take another (notorious) example from Women in Love. Following their arrival at the hostel, in the chapter called “Continental,” Ursula and Birkin engage in what appears to be an “unnatural” act of physical intimacy. The resulted feelings are recounted mainly from Ursula’s point of view:

And he was so unabashed and unrestrained. Wasn’t it rather horrible, a man who could be so soulful and spiritual, now to be so—she balked at her own thoughts and memories: then she added—so bestial? So bestial, they two!—so degrading! She winced. —But after all, why not? She exulted as well. She was bestial. (WL 413)

The language of the passage aligns it ambivalently with the act of Birkin’s earlier meditation, in the chapter “Moony,” on the African way of dissolution. While appreciating the supreme, immoral, and absolute sensuality in the African way of sensual disintegration, Birkin nevertheless has presumably rejected it along with its antithesis, the Nordic way of icy intellect. Put another way, although Birkin amply avails himself of the vocabulary of degeneration and decadence, he more than anyone else is shocked by Loerke’s degeneration. As has been indicated above, Lawrence’ novel is an uneasy conglomeration of conflicting voices, which make the baroque extravagance of the novel’s argument also that argument’s implausibility. Indeed, his novel might be seen to perform its own critique of the aspiration to escape through
any idealizations of transcendental category—as Birkin puts it: “Was it a way out?—It was only a way in again” (WL 512). On the similar account, while Ursula can take pleasure in Birkin’s licentiousness which is repulsively attractive, the novel appears to be irresolutely troubled by the very pleasures it advocates. The tone of uncertainty pervaded in the novel makes it impossible to maintain indisputably that unselfconscious and unrestrained sex is indeed as life-enhancing as it is sometimes suggested to be. The readers are accordingly not released from the imperative of judging whether Ursula’s “degradation” is finally positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy, emancipated or repressed, life-furthering or life-denying.

Lawrence’s ambivalence towards intensely sexual experience is especially manifest in the representation of the sexual power of Gerald and Gudrun. In his rejection to sublime physical love, Lawrence insists on the alterity of flesh and carnal intimacy. Yet, worrying that physical love might lead to annihilation of self and other, Lawrence turns the logic of the erotic discourses on its head. In fact, for Lawrence, voluptuosity is dangerous insofar as it results in ultimate merging with or appropriation of the other. The sexual merging of Gerald and Gudrun is precisely this kind of uncompromising attempt to colonize the psychic space of the other. Gerald’s exclusive identification of Gudrun with a nurturing or nourishing agent projects himself as an infant, and her as a mother in a role she refuses to play. Through its exposure of the mechanisms of identification that regulates the Gerald/Gudrun encounters, Lawrence’s novel mounts a devastating critique of the death-wish that fuels the desire to incorporate the other into the self.

Therefore, in spite of their dispute over the primacy of carnal intimacy, Lawrence and Levinas correspond to each other in their notion that love desires not a nostalgic return to plenitude and stasis but reaches out instead towards the other and ultimately towards a future. For them both, the impossibility or failure of fusion is the very positivity of love. The man and woman in love act as if they were trying to
join together with their beloved, as if they sought union. However, union is unrealizable, or at best, momentary. And yet that does not stop us searching for an end to our loneliness in love—the impossibility of union is at once the guarantee of desire and the source of erotic pleasure. Therefore, though Levinas has been widely attacked for sublimating erotic love, he in effect opposes Platonic love in this respect, which for him is a misunderstanding of the self/other relation because it cannot conceive the (beloved) other as absolutely other. In other words, for both Levinas and Lawrence, who conceive love as an encounter with the unique, Plato fails to see the positivity of the separation from the Other in the erotic relation, characterizing it only as a “lack.” Lawrentian love, featured by “unison in separateness,” is especially manifest in Lawrence’s designation of “star-equilibrium” as the love image in his fiction.
Chapter Two  Star-Equilibrium as Lawrentian Love (?)

Both Lawrence’s idea of “star-equilibrium” and Levinas’s notion of “non-indifference” articulate the ethical relation to alterity. Opposing the fusional concept of love, they both advocate love based on responsiveness to difference and singularity. However, as linguistic artifact, Lawrence’s text treats the articulation of “star-equilibrium” more as a problem than as a solution. While the hermaphrodite theory fails to denote the separateness of two beings, the star-equilibrium neglects the happy movements of intimacy. What is required in a genuine love relationship is for each of the lovers to be attentive to both their similarities and differences.

I. Love and the Self/Other Relation

In the first few decades of the 20th century, major works in philosophy, literature, art, and psychoanalysis viewed human relatedness in new ways. Phenomenologists of encounter began with modes of being with others and viewed the concept of the individual as derivative and secondary. That development in the history of philosophy established the primacy of being with others over being an isolated self. For instance, in contrast to philosophies that started with the individual and then sought to bridge the gap between the individual and the other, Martin Buber, Levinas’s spiritual predecessor, began with the bridge itself: “In the beginning is the relation” (53). Buber emphasizes the between because the I-Thou relation is prelinguistic, undifferentiated, and unmediated, while the I-It relations lack the spontaneity, intimacy, and genuineness of I-Thou relations. Love in this sense is a reciprocal encounter between responsible equals in a direct relation.

Levinas admired Buber for having conceived the relationship with the Other as
one of pure otherness and transcendence. Yet a relationship based on reciprocity between the I and the Thou is problematic for Levinas who prefers a relationship that is based on an asymmetrical responsibility for the other. Levinas observes that “the other is what I myself is not” and that “only what is other can elicit an act of responsibility” (1989: 67). Accordingly he reproaches the I-Thou relationship for being reciprocal and symmetrical, thus committing violence against height, and especially against separateness and secretiveness. By deliberately deemphasizing the “as yourself” in the Judaeo-Christian love command, Levinas tries to turn us away from ourselves toward the other. In his opinion, any ethical system that understands the other as simply “like the self” will be unable to respond adequately to the other’s uniqueness and singularity. For Levinas, such a reduction of self/other relation amounts to a kind of subjective colonialism, where all the other’s desires are reduced to the desires of the “home country,” the self. Moreover, the equality implied by the “as yourself” promotes the kind of “bookkeeping” arrangement that Levinas equates with “reciprocity.”

Certainly, Levinas’s ethics of other-centeredness has been criticized for failing to offer a conception of moral agency adequate to ground its imperative and for encouraging self-hatred. For instance, Paul Ricoeur suggests that Levinas’s ethics implies the “substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem” (168). For Ricoeur, both a You and an I are needed in the love relationship. Fulfillment of the commandment to love the other requires genuine love of self. However, Levinas’s attempt to respect the alterity of the other involves an absolute separation and a dissymmetry that render impossible an ethical self. Ricoeur attributes this failure to the way in which Levinas’s “entire philosophy rests on the initiative of the other in the intersubjective relation” (188). Moreover, the effort to focus only on the self’s responsibility can, despite its good intentions, return the spotlight to the self. That is, the effort to prevent our obsession with assessing the other’s obligation carries with it the threat of
taking our attention away from the other altogether, by enshrining another kind of self-centeredness in making the self supreme in its agency loving.  

Indeed, it is well known that Levinas asserts an “asymmetry” in the self’s relation to the other that is “the very basis of ethics” (1984: 67). “The ethical rapport with the face is asymmetrical in that it subordinates my existence to the other” (1984: 60). Levinas’s repeated appeal to metaphor of “height” and “master,” affirming that the other is higher than me, indicates that the self and other are not equal when one is talking about the immediate claim of responsibility or love. The question that remains is whether Levinas’s emphasis on asymmetry precludes the possibility that in some sense I am equal to the other. In effect, Levinas’s attack is directed at what he sees as an excessive emphasis on the autonomy and independence of the self. His emphasis on the initiative of the other thus might be seen as a rhetorically necessary strategy to counter this. Nevertheless, no matter how strong the initiative of the other is, I remain the self who responds to the other, with a freedom that is “different from the freedom of an initiative” (OB 115)—but a responsible freedom nonetheless. Moreover, the “receiving role” of the self is implied in Levinas’s much-neglected claim that “my ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness” (1984: 60). Levinas here reveals a dimension of the self’s “need” of the other that exposes an important sense in which the other is not simply an intruder or commander and the self is not simply the one who gives without receiving. Put differently, Levinas recognizes that we must somehow “be there” enough to “hear the injunction coming from the other,” but not “there” in the sense of a self fully constituted (OB 115).

In fact, in Otherwise than Being, Levinas explicitly designates talk of equality to the realm of justice, a realm in which the original asymmetry is suspended: “Whatever the ways that lead to the superstructure of society, in justice the
dissymmetry that holds me at odds with regard to the other will find again law, autonomy, equality” (OB 127). Justice, according to Levinas, is the domain in which comparison and calculation become not only relevant but necessary; the realm of justice is where we have to try to do what we cannot do—namely, “to compare incomparables” (OB 160). If there were only one other person in the world, the prohibition against murder would be absolute, but as soon as a third enters on the scene it becomes a matter of calculation. That the third looks at me in the eyes of the Other is what secures in Levinas’s thinking the passage from the Other to the Others, the passage from ethics to justice, from inequality in favour of the Other to equality between self and other. Accordingly, despite the limitlessness of my responsibility, I can claim justice for myself because for others I am the Other:

But justice can be established only if I, always evaded from the concept of the ego, always divested of being, always in non-reciprocatable relationship with the Other, always for the Other, can become an other like the others . . . . My fate is important. (OB 160-1)

So the asymmetry of my responsibility for the Other no longer means that I cannot expect respect and fair treatment. The question of justice arises whenever there is more than just you and me. The third party makes it possible to escape the moral chaos that Levinas’s ethics might entail. Levinas acknowledged that “in reality” no relationship can be so utterly isolated and abstracted from context as to exclude the relevance or influence of the third. The third always influences both me and the other. So the claim of justice for oneself is an integral part of complex context in which all moral responses are made. However, infinite responsibility does mean that there will always be another who needs me or another need to which I can minister, so the self’s ethical responsibility toward the other can never be accomplished or finished.

It is in this context that Levinas inverts the usual definition of philosophy from
“the love of wisdom” to “the wisdom of love”: “Philosophy is this measure brought to
the infinity of the being-for-the-other of proximity; it is the wisdom of love” (OB161).
“Love” is here employed as a synonym for the ethical, and “wisdom” is the
discursive-theoretical articulation of the ethical in a discourse that aspires to justice.
The love of wisdom by itself, even with the best of intentions, would court the danger
of abstraction. The love of love, on the other hand, would be the exclusivity of
romantic or erotic love, ultimately not only privileging the beloved above all others,
but also privileging the self, self-indulgent. When Levinas describes philosophy as
“the wisdom of love in the service of love” (OB 162), he thus describes the Said said
in the service of Saying, in which love has learnt from wisdom and wisdom from love.
In such a way, Levinas shows the necessity for the passage from the Saying to the
Said, not the pure Said of war and injustice that precedes the reduction, but what
Critchely calls “justified Said,” the Said that is justified through being derived from a
prior Saying. In this sense, Levinasian ethics would not simply be a one-way street
from the Same (Self) to the Other, but would also, in a second move, consist in a
return to the Same, but a Same that had been altered in itself.

Fundamental to Levinas’s elaboration of the “wisdom of love” in Otherwise
than Being is the conception of “proximity.” In the modern conception of
otherness, the other is always there to serve the self which is “seeking in every
intercourse merely a chance to nourish his identity” (Bauman 83). In Levinas’s
opinion, by contrast, the self is there to serve the other, and it is “difference” that
initiates the ethical treatment of the other: “The self is non-indifference to the others”
(OB 171). What Levinas calls “proximity” is precisely this “not indifferent”
response to the difference in the other. Morrissey rightly elaborates Levinas’s notion
of “proximity”—the double negative implicit in the phrase “non-indifference” means
that, for Levinas, “difference and awareness are related, causally, to each other”
(Morrissey 329). For one thing, this ethical relation to the others based on
“non-indifference” means the necessity for heeding the others, responding to them, being affected by them, and most importantly having a concern for them—i.e., “not being indifferent” to them. At the same time, and no less important, “non-indifference” also implies difference itself, suggesting that love for the other should be founded on the recognition than the appropriation of other’s uniqueness. On the above account, it should be noted that “proximity” does not refer to a sense of Cartesian distance, but rather to the immediacy of the responsibility demanded by the face. As Zygmunt Bauman points out, “there is nothing really spatial about proximity” (86). Nearness in this context is not so much the spatial contiguity of two beings as the ethically charged approach to another person—i.e., while I do not merge with the other person, I come closer and open myself to the other, offering myself by moving infinitely nearer. Hence Levinas describes proximity as “the supreme passivity of exposure to another” (OB 46). And so, proximity is neither a distance bridged, nor a distance demanding to be bridged. Proximity is satisfied with being what it is. The self and other are said there to be separated absolutely by the inexpressible secret of their intimacy. “Relation” now has a double meaning as both “absolute distance” and “immediacy.” Therefore, the closeness of proximity does not refer to the shortening of distance, or the merger of identities. It refers to waiting, an attention: “Attention is waiting: not an effort, tension, nor mobilization of knowledge around a certain thing with which one is preoccupied. Attention waits. It waits without haste” (Blanchot 1993: 74). As has been indicated above, Levinasian ethics is an ethics of caress. The caressing hand remains open and attentive, never tightening into a grip, never “getting hold of.” In such a way, Levinas rejects the romantic conception of love, according to which love would accomplish the fusion of two persons or two souls into one.

Levinas’s notion of “non-indifference” and “proximity” bears striking similarity to the idea of “star-equilibrium” that Lawrence employed in describing Birkin’s ideal
loving relationship with Ursula in *Women in Love*. Rendering difference a positive meaning, both Lawrence and Levinas oppose the fusional concept of love—they insist on the possibility of both distance and relation. Their conception of love is the one which avoids the fusion of the Other with the Same. In *Women in Love*, Birkin attacks the old way of love:

Fusion, fusion, this horrible fusion of two beings, which every woman and most men insisted on, was it not nauseous and horrible anyhow, whether it was a fusion of the spirit or of the emotion body? . . . Why could they not remain individuals, limited by their own limits? (WL 353)

Lawrence’s famous image of two stars in tremblingly-balanced conjunction most sharply gives focus to the problem of love: it is a dynamic interrelationship of two equidistant stars whose very “relation” is based on their “distance.”17 This ideal loving relationship is a way of being together which constantly resists mere merger, and which insists upon the lover’s individual integrity while demanding the full attention of the other. The image of star-equilibrium connotes the tension that draws the two lovers together at the same time as it holds them apart. An interplay of force and counter-force, attraction and repulsion prevents the two beings from merging together and collapsing into each other. In this new dispensation, tension and not release, awareness and not aggressive possession form the basis for the love relationship. Lilly’s characterization of his marriage to Tanny in *Aaron’s Rod* defines this kind of relationship: “There we are, together and apart at the same time, and free of each other, and eternally inseparable” (AR 104).

Accordingly, both Lawrence and Levinas challenge the notion of Platonic love. Although Levinas has been accused of sublimating erotic love to a Platonic realm of spiritual love in *Totality and Infinity*, he explicitly subverts the Platonic conception of love in his earlier work. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas suggests that the pathos of love acknowledges the duality of being as more than a temporary failure; it
accepts the duality as insurmountable:

The pathos of love consists in the insurmountable duality of beings. Love is a relationship with that which is forever concealed. This relationship does not neutralize the alterity, but conserves it. The pathos of desire rests in the fact of being two. The other as other is not an object bound to become mine or become me; it retreats on the contrary into its mystery. (TO 86)

By the same token, in contrast to the myth of Platonic love, wherein the two lovers recognize in each other a lost half, and their union brings back a complete single being, Lawrence appeals for total separateness and true individuality between people. He specifically defines the reality of love as the relating of the incommensurate:

But in the frail, subtle desirousness of the true male, towards everything female, and the equally frail, indescribable desirability of every female for every male, lies the real clue to the equating, or the relating, of things which otherwise are incommensurate. And this, this desire, is the reality which is inside love. (PII 452)

Instead of mimetically assimilating the other through acts of identification (A usurps B), the star-image rhetoric insists on the other’s otherness as the source of the magnetic attraction (the difference between A and B holds them together). A tension keeps the two love-objects apart in the process of drawing them together. They exist, less as separate entities, than as the sum of relations that simultaneously detach and attract them.

In spite of their common appeal to radical otherness in the love relationship, as I have indicated above, Lawrence is mainly concerned with the problem of how to connect with the other without annihilating the self, while Levinas is anxious of how to maintain the alterity of the other without subordinating it to the Same. Put another way, while Lawrence is interested in how the self is unlimitedly creative in its
encountering with the (beloved) other, Levinas (especially in his later works) is occupied with the self’s infinite responsibility toward the other. In fact, Levinas repeatedly distances himself from the term “love,” preferring for the term “responsibility.” For him, the word “love” fails to announce strongly enough that “I am ordered toward the face of the other,” who “commands” me (OB 11). Consequently, though both celebrate an excess of being (or otherwise than being), Lawrence invites an overflow of self-affirmation, and yet Levinas calls for an affirmation of the other. In other words, while Levinas proclaims dying for the other as the very meaning of love, for Lawrence, each lover should be responsible first and foremost to his/her own feeling, and accordingly, for him, self-sacrifice is the most irresponsible mode of love relationship. In a nutshell, if Lawrentian love aims at self-blossoming through the general economy of energy and discharge brought by love, the ultimate manifestation of Levinasian love is a kind of radical altruism, selfless generosity.

Even so, in their assertion of the possibility of both absolute distance and intimate relation, both Lawrence and Levinas face the problem proposed by Derrida: if everyone experiences Levinas’s radical alterity then it is a similarity, not a difference. For Derrida, “the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I” (VM 127). On that account, what Levinas considered radical alterity is, for Derrida, a radical similarity, even if that similarity is otherness, or difference (VM 128). Beyond that, Lawrence encounters the same problem as Levinas does— i.e., if all people are irrevocably separate from each other, can there be any achievable harmony in the universe? To put this another, if love were considered just the recognition of “insurmountable duality of beings,” how would it differ from sheer callousness and indifference (either to the other or to the self)? While Levinas attempts to counterbalance infinite responsibility towards the other by introducing the idea of the third party, Lawrence treats the articulation of
“star equilibrium” in his fiction as a problem and issue rather than as a solution. Bell thus describes Lawrence’s employment of this image: “Far from being naturalized as the given structure of their relationship, the image is introduced as a speculative and highly problematic possibility” (1991: 98). As I hope to show in the following discussion, while the “star-equilibrium” image is introduced by Birkin, the narrative’s emphasis is at the same time on Ursula’s rejection of it. Through oppositions, reversals, inconsistency, self-contradiction, and quarrelling, Birkin’s idea of “star-equilibrium” as an ideal notion of love is relativized and enriched. Besides, though the term “star-equilibrium” has not been proffered until Women in Love, the idea of “unison through singleness” has been implied in earlier fiction in Lawrence’s exploration of the relationship between lovers. Therefore, in what follows, I aim to examine some of the promising potentials as well as problems inherent in Lawrence’s registering the dynamics of this new dimension of love as they are manifested in his three major novels.

II. Sons and Lovers—Personal and Impersonal Love

Ever since the dawn of consciousness, when man first became aware of the distinction between the self and the not-self, he has been subject to the concomitant desires for individuation and for union—i.e., the desire to preserve and develop his individual identity, and the desire to merge himself with something greater than and outside himself. The theme of Lawrence’s men and women is the eternal will to belong, and the fear of being submerged. Lawrence formulates the contradictory desires in his description of the dual nature of love:

There is a tremendous great joy in exploring and discovering the beloved.

For what is the beloved? She is that which I myself am not. Knowing
the breach between us, the *uncloseable gulf*, I in the same breath realize her features. In the first mode of the upper consciousness there is a perfect surpassing of all sense of division between the self and the beloved. In the second mode the very discovery of the features of the beloved contains the full realization of the irreparable, or *unsurpassable gulf*. (PU 38)

Thus, for Lawrence, falling in love is the chief temptation to self-diffusion and also the hope for self-definition. It is love that makes us intuit the unlimited potentialities; it is also love that makes us aware of our own limits by making us conscious of the strangeness, the otherness of all that lies outside ourselves. Naturally, it is fatal to identify oneself totally with the other or the universe; it is equally fatal to try to exist as a wholly separate, discrete creature. Hence proper love will preserve in delicate tension the isolate self and the oceanic self.

In fact, despite Lawrence’s widely-known attack on fusional love, notion of interfusion can be found in his earlier fiction. For instance, in *The Trespasser*, Siegmund speaks of his beloved Helena as a perceptual nerve connecting him to the cosmos and he did find utter fulfillment and commitment in single moments of fusion: “Suddenly she strained madly to him, and drawing back her head, placed her lips on his, close, till at the mouth they seemed to melt and fuse together. It was the long, supreme kiss, in which man and woman have one being” (T 64). A conviction that lovers can and ought to merge their beings in each other forms part of the romanticism of this novel: “Gradually, with a fine, keen thrilling, she melted down on him, like metal sinking on a mould. He was sea and sunlight mixed, heaving, warm, deliciously strong” (T 84). Yet, that happy moment had itself been shadowed by the immediate association with the bat’s wing, red against the sun. Now it is becoming purely hopeless, and is succeeded some pages later by this: “The rosiness died out of the sunset as embers fade into thick ash” (T 92). The momentary abandonment is
conveyed in terms which we learn to read as danger signs. The will to “melt down” and “to fuse” is, for Lawrence, a dangerous will. It is a moment in which the passion conceals the lovers’ incompatibility. In “Love Was Once a Little Boy,” Lawrence described eloquently the essence of loving:

Love, as a desire, is balanced against the opposite desire to maintain the integrity of the individual self. Hate is not the opposite of love. The real opposite of love is individuality. We live in the age of individuality, we call ourselves servants of love. That is to say, we enact a perpetual paradox. (RD 167)

Lawrence here describes how the desire of relating things which otherwise are incommensurable is the reality inside love. His adoption of the vampire metaphor reveals his conception of love as diabolism and destruction. The vampire threatens individual’s autonomy by its physical and spiritual aggressions. Total identification symbolically annihilates the love-object as other in the process of its incorporation.

The desire to “devour” brings forth the outcome of a continually threatened autonomy, which is especially manifest in Walter Morel in Sons and Lovers. The relationship between the Morels manifests how injurious the fanatical imposition of an ideal can be to living human relationships: “She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have him the much that he ought to be. So in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him” (SL 25). Lawrence shows that Gertrude’s desire is to mold Walter according to her pre-conceived ideal of manhood and “good husband” that she has modeled upon her own father:

She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfill his obligations. But he was too different from her. His name was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it—it drove him out of his mind. (SL 23. Emphasis added.)
Mrs. Morel remains insensitive not only to the injury she causes to Walter, but also to the damage she does herself in deliberately suffocating his spontaneous warmth and her own under her Puritanical preconceptions. “She injured and hurt and scarred herself, but she lost none of her worth. She also had the children” (SL 26). And thus, while she turns all her attention to her sons, leaving her husband alone, the result is not a respect of otherness but the deadly “indifference”:

Now, with the birth of this third baby, her self no longer set towards him, helplessly, but was like a tide that scarcely rose, standing off from him. After this she scarcely desired him. And, standing more aloof from him, not feeling him so much part of her self, but merely part of her circumstances, she did not mind so much what he did, could leave him alone. (SL 62)

She then upholds her own motherhood as another ideal to be imposed upon her children. Already she is casting her son’s future image in the ideal of manhood that her husband has failed, or refused, to live up to. Undeniably, as I’ll discuss in Part Three, Mrs. Morel has been constrained by some social and economic factors, but her mode of loving has indeed caused some damage to both her husband and her sons.

The idea of “crippling effect of love” is worked strongly into all parts of the novel, within a context of conflicting voices. For instance, Paul is dissatisfied with his relationship with Miriam because in it he can never relax and leave himself to “the greater hunger and impersonality of passion . . . the dark, impersonal fire of desire” (SL 347). For Paul, what is missing from his relationship with Miriam is the “real, real flame of feeling” (SL 243) which he believed existing between his parents. Lawrence expands upon the general significance of Miriam’s failure in love in his later writing:

Oh, what a catastrophe, what a maiming of love when it was made a personal, merely personal feeling, taken away from the rising and the
setting of the sun, and cut off from the magic connection of the solstice and the equinox! This is what is the matter with us. We are bleeding at the roots, because (like Miriam) we are cut off from the earth and sun and stars, and love is a grinning mockery, because, poor blossom, we plucked it from its stem on the tree of Life, and expected it to keep on blooming in our civilized vase on the table. (SLC 109)

In other words, Paul is not comfortable with the communion Miriam wants because she attempts to thwart his deep male instinct to be loved, impersonally, as a man, rather than as a mind or soul or personality. Mrs. Morel provides an explanation for Paul’s uneasiness:

She could feel Paul being drawn away by this girl. And she did not care for Miriam. “She is one of those who will want to suck a man’s soul out till he has none of his own left,” she said to herself; “and he is just such a baby as to let himself be absorbed. She will never let him become a man; she never will.” (SL 160)

The question which immediately arises is whether this is an expression of Mrs. Morel’s possessiveness, of an inadequacy in Miriam, or of an inadequacy in Paul. Lawrence structured the novel mostly from Paul’s point of view, which some critics regard as constituting a conspiracy between the author’s unconscious motivation and his artistic arrangement of his material. Accordingly, the reader should be especially attentive to the way in which the novel seemingly tells us one thing, but shows us another. The discrepancies between the narrator’s interpretations and ours create a tension that becomes an intrinsic part of the novel’s form. Paul adopts his mother’s point of view of Miriam’s instinct for possession, which springs from a fundamental weakness: “You don’t want to love—your eternal and abnormal craving is to be loved. You aren’t positive, you’re negative. You absorb, absorb, as if you must fill yourself up with love, because you’ve got a shortage somewhere” (SL 274).
Miriam’s approach to nature is here presented as the key to the dissembling of their love: she loves Paul as she loves flowers, she worships him as she worships them, and Paul feels suffocated by such adoration (SL 280). However, the flowers are seen to have a very different function once the scene is read in conjunction with the narrative point of view and the symbolism of the daffodils. While Paul stands condemned for his inability to be drawn into the wonder of the flowers, Miriam’s response to the daffodils is to caress with her warm hand the cheeks of the flowers which are described as “greenish with cold” (SL 281). Miriam’s intoxication is not with possession, but with the magnificent otherness of the flowers, which she defines otherwise than her own humanity.

Therefore, as has been pointed out previously, the reader should not adhere unproblematically Paul’s labels to Miriam. Take another example. While Paul accuses Miriam of being romantic, spiritual, and over-sensitive, he himself is also presented as introspective, as mystical as Miriam, always pondering and fretting. Miriam is labeled by Paul as a “nun”—“she had no body, only a voice and a dim face” (SL 293, 328). But earlier the reader is shown how Paul is disturbed to see his unacknowledged desires mirrored in Miriam. Paul has never been able to tolerate her physicality, even such slight examples as her clutching her young brother (SL 257). While Miriam longs to touch him, it’s Paul who will not let her: “if she put her arm in his, it caused him almost torture” (SL 210). Whenever she gets “near” and “roused him,” he quickly becomes enraged at her without understanding why. Paul’s contribution to the failure of their love affair is partly through Miriam’s insensitivity during their love-making. He is hurt that she has not been with him during their union. And yet the reader is made aware that neither has Paul given himself away: “He had always, almost willfully, to put her out of count, and act from the brute strength of his own feelings. And he could not do it often, and there remained afterwards always the sense of failure and of death” (SL 352). In other words, even
when Paul does accuse Miriam justly, his accusations against her often apply equally well to himself. In such a way, Lawrence continually reminds us of Paul’s capacity for self-deception. It seems that, contrary to Paul’s accusation of Miriam for “making” him spiritual, it is Paul who needs Miriam to remain virginal. While anxious of giving himself away in his union with Miriam, Paul is occupied by the equally terrible fear of doing so, and by the will to hold himself back.

If for Paul his relationship with Miriam is all about personality and premeditated ideas, his contact with Clara is all sensual passion, with very little intellectual rationalizing entering into it. The passional transcendence of self experienced by Paul, and possibly by Clara, is fundamental to the later novel, as is the image of the “stranger” focusing the otherness to which the relationship gives access.

He lifted his head and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him; and he put his face down on her throat, afraid. What was she? A strong, strange, wild life that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars. (SL 353)

Paul and Clara have merged with the universe but not with one another. They gain themselves through their sexual communion only because they do not deny the impersonality of the experience. For Paul, Miriam as a lover is trapped in the desire to bring the distant world into the sphere of personal dominion. While Miriam calls Paul back to the littleness and the personal relationship, Clara helps him attain in their physical love the impersonality of true aesthetic experience, “something strong and blind and ruthless in its primitiveness” (SL 430).

The word “impersonal” occurs centrally in the subsequent account of Paul’s
reaction to this moment: “After that the fire slowly went down. He felt more and more that his experience had been impersonal, and not Clara” (SL 354). Lawrence is at pains to show how this impersonality is not reductive to either of them. Rather, he suggests that it is the opposite; instead of being limited to the mortal and terrestrial dimensions of “Paul” and “Clara,” they feel elevated to a primeval, cosmic realization of themselves. In other words, Paul regards it as the true aesthetic experience which goes beyond the boundaries of external personality: “It was not Clara. It was something that had happened because of her, but it was not her. They were scarcely any nearer each other. It was as if they had been blind agents of a great force” (SL 431). Clara eschews all attempts to analyze their feelings, or rationalize the effort of loving each other. Here too is the first sign of the vision of love which Lawrence would later develop. “Effortless” is what Paul demands his love to be. The scene anticipates what in Women in Love Birkin tells Ursula about the new mode of togetherness: “I want us to be together as if it were a phenomenon, not a thing we have to maintain by our own effort” (WL 250). While “maintain” evokes the specter of fragile identificatory structures, in constant need of repair and renewal, “phenomenon” conjures up a natural force, already in place, into which the lovers can tap without self-assertion or stress. As lovers, Clara and Paul come together as strangers, yet meeting. They respect the distance between their separate selves, and do not try to absorb one another.

But Paul and Clara do not for very long sustain the balance between their personal needs and impersonal desire. The lack of personal emotion begins to ruin even their sex. “Gradually some mechanical effort spoils their loving” (SL 391). Clara tries to replicate the awe and mystery of the initial experience through artificial stimulation and eventually forces or fakes her response. As a result, Clara is soon dissatisfied with such kind of impersonal love, wherein Paul expects her “to be something she could not be” (SL 431), and she is for Paul no more than an
anonymous presence of Woman, rather than a clearly defined and delineated personality. While her love relationship with Paul offers them a “higher” experience than the mere union of two people, Clara gradually finds that she desires not the universe but a man. In other words, Clara is not content with apprehensions of the “tremendous heaven that lifted every grass blade” (SL 433); she wants what Miriam wanted—i.e., the human connection. Paul never offers Clara his “real” self: “Even when he came to her he seemed unaware of her; always he was somewhere else” (SL 437). She prefers Baxter in the end, because he “is there” at least; however flawed, he is someone to encounter concretely. Although Paul has found a new self or a new center of consciousness through his love with Clara, his new self is fragile in the mundane world. Clara finally chooses the domestic world and decides to be back to her husband. Clara’s final choice undercuts the self-serving distortion inherent in Paul’s conception of love.

Besides, Clara’s point of view is employed by the author as a further corrective to our sympathy for the novel’s hero, as he is judged and found wanting by an independent and mature woman who loves him. Paul’s point of view is by no means the only one in the novel and hence his version of the truth of his story is endlessly qualified by other competing perspectives. Instead of regarding Miriam’s love as suffocating and suffused with religious worship, Clara discerns in Miriam a normal, healthily possessive love, the kind that she herself comes to feel that Paul is unable to give. Clara tells Paul in very plain terms that Miriam “doesn’t want any of your soul communion” (SL 338). In a later scene, Paul analyzes his own relationship to both Miriam and Clara: “He saw none of the anomaly of his position. Miriam was his old friend, lover, and she belonged to Bestwood and home and his youth. Clara was a newer friend, and she belonged to Nottingham, to life, to the world. It seemed to him quite plain” (SL 340). Clara’s judgment of Paul’s dangerously naïve self-absorption is corroborated by the presentation of Paul’s inner thought, which is
placed in a severely ironic perspective.

Though widely regarded as realist fiction, this novel is not so much a chronicle of a young man’s progress as an exploration of the various values which have shaped his life. These values are explored by making the characters living through them in all their contradictions, which is manifest in the struggle between the desire of cosmically impersonal love and the impulse towards worldly personal possessorship. This novel ends on a note of uncertainty but also with the reassurance of a continuing exploration of the future for answers as yet unknown. Having seriously considered suicide as a means of retrieving his lost bearings by renewing his soul-commitment to his dead mother, Paul ultimately falls back upon the inner strength that his transcendental experience with Clara has made him aware. It is Lawrence’s early enunciation of the aesthetic ethic of “learning not-to-be in order to come into being” that he will continually develop in his later works, especially in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

### III. *The Rainbow*—The Adventure into the Unknown

Echoing Levinas’s argument that one must think *care*-fully beyond the appropriative grasp of knowledge even in our most intimate relations, Lawrence asserts that the unknowable is the partner in the love relationship, and that love conceived as knowledge is restrictive: “When I have a finished mental concept of a beloved, or a friend, then the love and the friendship is dead. It falls to the level of an acquaintance” (FU 72). In other words, for Lawrence, any knowledge that imposes finality is by implication a leading to death, especially in a love relationship. This theme is explored most thoroughly in *The Rainbow*, which can be seen as a family history wherein Lawrence provides three primary texts on marriage and love
that overlap, resemble, and differ from one another in subtle ways. In the first text, both Tom and Lydia feel the awareness of the mystery of the other as a condition of their mutual attraction. Tom’s wooing of Lydia exhibits a curious mixture of passivity and self-possession. In their various casual encounters—in the churchyard after a service, in the kitchen of his ancestral farm-house, in a horse-trap on the Ilkeson road—he submits “to that which was happening to him, letting go his will, suffering the loss of himself, dormant always on the brink of ecstasy, like a creature’s evolving to a new birth” (R 38). And when he comes to a decision at last, it seems more a ritual of obedience than a deliberate choice. Tom’s passivity at his proposal to Lydia is a condition of his self-assurance: it implies a refusal to allow the mental will to dictate to the deeper demands of his nature. This turns out to be a difficult and painful experience because it requires from both of them something much closer to inability than ability to actively exert oneself. Even at his wedding night, Tom was still overwhelmed by Lydia’s unknownness: “Behind her, there was so much unknown to him. When he approached her, he came to such a terrible painful unknown” (R 58).

Put another way, Tom is responding to the unique and intense experience of the coincidence of “intimacy” and “foreignness,” of a union made pleasing to the point of pain by a knowledge of the difference that makes it possible:

They were such strangers, they must forever be such strangers . . . . Such intimacy of embrace, and such utter foreignness of contact! It was unbearable. He could not bear to be near her, and know the utter foreignness between them, know how entirely they were strangers to each other. (R 61)

In effect, Tom at first resents their differences as he realizes that he cannot bring her, the unknown, into a personal relationship with himself: “When they went to bed, he knew that he had nothing to do with her. She was back in her childhood, he was a
peasant, a serf, a servant . . . . And gradually he grew into a raging fury against her” (R 62). The decisive change comes with his sudden acceptance of her “otherness,” with his recognition that the unknown cannot be conquered by being subdued to the known: “She was beyond him, the unattainable. But he let go his hold on himself, he relinquished himself . . . . He began to approach her, to draw near” (R 94).

Curiously, the moment he lets go of a self that is accustomed to seeking its own expansion through her and is denied satisfaction, Tom overcomes his fear and sense of lack and consequently “finds himself in her” (R 94).

The symbol of the arch, which pervades the novel in natural and artificial forms, suggests the balance between union and detachment that Lawrence sees as necessary in a true marriage and love. The marriage of Tom and Lydia reaches Lawrence’s ideal— they discover and affirm each other’s independent being, then each goes their own way again, separately, yet firmly bound together. In their marriage, they have moved to a Levinasian understanding of otherness—like Adam and Eve, they hand in hand, took their solitary way. In its combination of the “solitary” and the “hand in hand,” their relationship indicates the new-found recognition of singularity. Their differences are part of what binds them. In Derrida’s terms, they have learned to “respect . . . the other as what it is” (VM 138). Like the relationship between Paul and Clara, they are both lovers and strangers. Yet unlike theirs, wherein the inhumaness takes its toll, both Tom and Lydia are transfigured creatively in their relationship: “She was the doorway to him, he to her. At last they had thrown open the doors, each to the other, and had stood in the doorways facing each other, whilst the light flooded out from behind on to each of their faces, it was the transfiguration, the glorification, the admission” (R 91). Therefore, in spite of her being a “stranger,” of her belonging “to somewhere else,” Lydia transforms the unreality of Tom’s life into “something real and natural” (R 32). By the same token, Lydia, with Tome’s help, begins to find herself: “She was very glad she had come to her own self.

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She was grateful to Brangwen” (R 258). And the search is never ending because they are aware that to know someone else fully is impossible and that the obliteration of otherness would be undesirable and destructive. The reader is told that remaining foreigners to each other (as well as to themselves) is what makes it possible for Tom and Lydia to experience the “wonder of the transfiguration” not just occasionally but “perpetually”:

Their coming together now, after two years of married life, was much more wonderful to them than it had been before. It was the entry into another circle of existence, it was the baptism to another life, it was the complete confirmation. Their feet trod strange ground of knowledge, their footsteps were lit-up with discovery. Wherever they walked, it was well, the world re-echoed round them in discovery. They went gladly and forgetful. Everything was lost, and everything was found. (R 90)

Unlike the effortless impersonal love that Paul desires, the love between Tom and Lydia contains “bonds and constraints and labours, and still was complete liberty” (R 91). It is the “wonder” inherent in their love relationship that maintains the “autonomy” of each of the two lovers and keeps “a space of freedom and attraction between them, a possibility of separation and alliance” (ESD 13).

If the distance between Tom and Lydia makes possible a fertile space arched over by trust and love, that between Will and Anna also remains unbridged, and yet what it results in is sterility, aridity, and even destructiveness. Lawrence describes the beginning of Will and Anna’s relationship in aesthetic terms, in a similar way he deals with that of Walter and Gertrude or Tom and Lydia. It is Will, the man, who appears as a “stranger” in Anna’s world. Will introduces “a dark enriching influence she had not known before” into Anna’s life (R 110). As a factor in Anna’s life, Will represents a pagan force which has drawn her to him at their initial encounter: “In him the bounds of her experience were transgressed: he was the hole in the wall, beyond
which the sunshine blazed on an outside world” (R 114). Yet as Will continually leads her into experiences which put her in danger of losing her self-control, Anna turns to regard the pagan force as threatening her religion of self-containment. She then endeavors to resist the movement towards the other—her greater individuality, wary intelligence, and more developed self-consciousness all make it harder for her to give or risk herself as Tom had done. In a summary of the ethical imperative that he believes underlie Lawrence’s fictional representations of love and sex, Norman Mailer writes: “Lawrence’s point is that people can win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it of ego, position, or identity . . . . They have to deliver themselves over to the unknown” (185). Contrary to this, Anna is content and happy with her limited horizons: “She was a door and a threshold, she herself” (R 195). Avoidance becomes so much a part of Anna’s nature that her inner response eventually contracts and she becomes hardened in her being, like the kernel of a nut. Moreover, in order to defend herself, Anna tries hard to diminish Will’s power. Her weapon is mockery. She reduces the power of the cathedral by elaborating on its most “realistic” elements, and forces Will to admit the human dimension of his “Absolute,” leaving him with only love for a “symbol.” In such a way, Anna attacks Will by making him ashamed of “the ecstasy into which he could throw himself with these symbols” (R 151).

As I have mentioned earlier, while Anna is too assertive in self-confirmation, Will is too fragile to preserve himself. Will’s exclusive preoccupation with Anna makes her mad: “He seemed a dark, almost evil thing, pursuing her, hanging on to her, burdening her. She would give anything to have him removed” (R 152). What Anna resents is the smothering totality of his unmanly dependence on her, and she fights for the right to be left alone when she wishes, to have an existence apart from him. Yet Will is insatiably compelled to her, and when he is not with her he is annulled—he feels “uncreated” (R 152). Like Tom and Lydia, they always “walked
on, hand in hand, along opposite horizons . . . hand in hand across the intervening space, two separate people” (R 178). Yet Will is “afraid” to be alone in his separateness, for he is “ridden by the awful sense of his own limitation” (R 179). On the other hand, Will persistently ties to destroy Anna’s self-sufficiency, which has made worse his sense of insecurity and frailty. As a result, he endeavors to impose his will on Anna and Anna becomes aware that he seems “to expect her to be part of himself, the extension of his will” (R 170). In a kind of vicious circle, Anna is moved, in a blind effort to save herself, to an exaggerated assertion of defiance. By asserting her right to singleness, Anna is also defying Will’s “kingship.” Though it was Will that she originally turned in the hope of enlarging her experience, years later she has to admit that he stands for nothing beyond her, and now she knows “if she were taken away, he would collapse as a house from which the central pillar is removed” (R 186). In this Eden after the Fall, love is sustained by profound hostility and endless conflict. The mode of their love relationship is anticipated in the scene of sheaves-gathering quoted earlier, wherein they were “never to meet” (R 122), except in sensuality.

The marriage of Anna and Will is thus a deadlock since neither wife nor husband has the generosity and wisdom to acknowledge and accept the unbreakable difference and uniqueness of the other. In fact, their conflict is anticipated in two blunt assertions in the early days of their marriage: “He wanted to impose himself on her” and “She wanted to preserve herself” (R 135). Both are absorbed in the struggle of proving the impossibility of partner’s aspiration to mastery. They are like the lion and unicorn for whom the eternal opposition and strife is absolute: “The crown is upon the perfect balance of the fight, it is not the fruit of either victory. The crown is not the prize of either combatant. It is the raison d’être of both. It is absolute within the fight” (P 373). The eternally suspended position of the lion and the unicorn gives a hint to Levnias’s suggestion that what “is absolutely other . . . not
only resists possession, it contests it” (TI 38). Indeed, nothing original can be created when the lion and unicorn no longer fight, being subsumed by one another; for Lawrence it is only from the constant fight between the two parties that harmony and peace arise. Yet consider the relation between Tom and Lydia—what they have in common is just as significant as what distinguishes them, and what the sense of “foreignness” leads to is not an utter separation but a creative transfiguration of both parties. An intimate relationship built on “eternal fight without any chance of uniting together” is certainly not a desirable or fertile one.

In the third generation, Ursula, like her mother Anna who turned to Will in the hope of enlarging her experience, is attracted to the young Skrebensky by the sense he gives her of “the vast world, a sense of distances” (R 293). She is attracted to the confident role he plays in the larger world. In love, Ursula seeks one of the “sons of God,” a man who, as proud as herself, will not submit to a humiliating compromise with society. Nonetheless, Skrebensky finally proves to be all too knowable and finished.23 If, unlike Will, he does not deny the outside world, he nonetheless accepts his place in it with unadventurous complacency. When being asked what he will do as a soldier once there is no fighting, his answer—“I would do what everybody else does”—makes Ursula feels he is “nothing” to her (R 311). His outer clarity—as a soldier, colonialist, and servant of the state—obscures the fact that there is in him fundamental emptiness. For Ursual, passion must “come from the Infinite” (R 385). She awaits the other who is totally other, who will emerge out of the charged metaphors of God, the Infinite, Eternity. On that ground, Skrebensky is not for her adequate “as a lover” since his more constricted self can produce no reciprocal enlargement. She realizes sadly that he arouses no fruitful fecundity in her: “He seemed added up, finished. She knew him all round, not on any side did he lead into the unknown” (R 473). Ursula is looking for an expansive direction, and she finds that only “something impersonal” can take her somewhere: “Love-love-love—what
does it mean—what does it amount to?  So much personal gratification.  It doesn’t lead anywhere” (R 527).

On the other hand, Ursula’s enormous desire for the enlargement of her experience and caused the nullity of Skrebensky.  In a scene about Fred Brangwen’s wedding, Ursula and Skrebensky are dancing on the grass.  The narrator thus describes Ursula’s aspiration for her own “maximum self”:

She wanted the moon to fill in to her, she wanted more, more communion with the moon, consummation.  But Skrebensky put his arm round her and led her away . . . .  She was not there.  Patiently she sat, under the cloak, with Skrebensky holding her hand.  But her naked self was away there beating upon the moonlight.  (R 318-9)

Recognizing that Skrebensky is inadequate as an unknown lover, Ursula looks to the moon for “consummation.”  In so doing, Ursula expresses a self-love that encloses her and makes her sense interference from the man who accompanies her. Consequently, as Skrebensky keeps trying persistently to pull her down into the darkness, Ursula is angered into paroxysms of destruction: “So she held him there, the victim, consumed, annihilated.  She had triumphed: he was not any more” (R 322).

It is at least clear that this experience, like the hawk-like marital battles of Ursula’s parents and also like Anna’s naked dancing, brings neither peace nor wholeness in the sense that Tom’s moments of transcendence did.  Instead it is powerfully self-assertive and destructive of a lesser lover.  In her willful pursuit for an unknown lover, Ursula becomes neurotically self-absorbed.  The implication would then be that Ursula, like the civilization she learns mainly to reject, seems to have made the most egoistical assertion of “being”.

The relationship between Ursula and Skrebensky turns out to be a failed one.  The union of lovers or husband and wife should not be a sign of the triumph of the individual will, nor a finished life or a conclusive plot.  Rather, it is a reminder of
limitation and insufficiency of the self, of the uncertainty of the future, based on the awareness of the parties’ own vulnerability and interdependence. It is like a great blank page to be written on. After her encounter with the horses, Ursula endures, but her arrogance and egoism are destroyed. She is then in intimate contact with the unknown realm: “It was the unknown, the unexplored, the undiscovered upon whose shore she had landed, alone, after crossing the void, the darkness” (R 494). At the end of the novel, she awaits a man who shares her connection to the beyond: “The man should come from the Infinite and she should hail him” (R 494). The man Ursula hails turns out to be Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love*.

**IV. Women in Love—Unison in Separateness**

As a man who comes “from the Infinite,” Birkin persistently seeks to revalue old values of love. To Ursula’s anti-historical claim that love “always means that same thing,” Birkin counters that its meaning has changed, and he urges that they “let the old meanings go” (WL 123). When Ursula asks what the new meaning of love is, Birkin replies tentatively, “I don’t know—freedom together” (WL 124). Frustrated by the abstraction of his own language, Birkin offers a vivid image of the love he wants—“an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings—as the stars balance each other” (WL 139). In his insistence on impersonal conjunction, Birkin advocates a mandatory pledge which is nonetheless based on the separateness of beings: “One must commit oneself to a conjunction with the other—for ever. But it is not selfless—it is a maintaining of the self in mystic balance and integrity—like a star balanced with another star” (WL 139-144). Birkin thus asserts that love returns us to an encounter with “a real impersonal me”:

There is a real impersonal me, that is beyond love, beyond any emotional
relationship. So it is with you. But we wan to delude ourselves that love is the root. It isn’t. It is only the branches. The root is beyond love, a naked kind of isolation, an isolated me, that does not meet and mingle, and never can. (WL 145)

Put differently, lovers must grasp the point that identities come about only in their isolation, and only as a result of difference: one Being is what it is only because it recognizes its separateness from another Being. Through awareness of the loved one as an inviolable other—a separate self whose autonomy can never be absorbed—each becomes aware of himself (or herself) as pure other to the loved one: “For she was to him what he was to her, the immemorial magnificence of mystic, palpable, real otherness” (WL 320). Each enjoyed the “perfectly suspended equilibrium” (WL 319) in a love relationship only through respecting the intrinsic otherness of the other.

However, as has been indicated above, Lawrence makes Ursula a critical partner who can both criticize Birkin’s excesses and enhance his admirable qualities, thereby creating a “duality of feeling” in the reader’s response. The vital side of Birkin is relativized by his priggishness and earnestness, which has made Ursula uncomfortable. When he asks for an “irrevocable” pledge, he asks with a “clang of mistrust and anger in his voice” and begins to preach at Ursula on the theme of “the real impersonal me,” repeatedly referring to “the stars” to illustrate the impersonal balance he seeks. Actually, what he is preaching is not silly in itself, once we separate the doctrine from the overblown manner in which he pushes it on Ursula. His request for a pledge is a legitimate demand for ethical commitment, but his insistence upon utter separateness makes him obstinate and inflexible. Even after their lovemaking, Birkin relapses into willful intellectualism: “And he wanted to be with Ursula as free as with himself, single and clear and cool, yet balanced, polarized with her. The merging, the clutching, the mingling of love has become madly abhorrent to him” (WL 270). To this and all the self-regarding talk of stars balanced
in conjunction, Ursula delivers a scathing rebuttal: “You, and love! You may well say, you don’t want love. No, you want yourself, and dirt, and death” (WL 389). For Ursula, Birkin’s mere words provide him with an easy excuse not to act, and hence she interprets all this as a form of selfishness, as a plea for masculine supremacy. Therefore, while Birkin uses the word “orbit,” Ursula alters the word to “satellite” (WL 139). Moreover, Ursula argues that Birkin’s passionate insistence springs from a sense of insecurity, which derives from the discrepancy between his words and deeds:

‘I don’t trust you when you drag in the stars,’ she said. ‘If you were quite true, it wouldn’t be necessary to be so far-fetched.’

‘Don’t trust me then,’ he said angrily. ‘It is enough that I trust myself.’

‘And that is where you make another mistake,’ she replied. ‘You don’t trust yourself. You don’t really want this conjunction, otherwise you wouldn’t talk so much about it, you’d get it.’

He was suspended for a moment, arrested.

‘How?’ he said.

‘By just loving,’ she retorted in defiance. (WL 216) Ursula’s remarks are really pointed. Indeed, Birkin attempts to liberate himself and Ursula from the inertia and falsity that linguistic and social codes attach to the word “love” and its interpretation. But the return to language is parodic, demonstrating the tendency of language to turn natural facts into artificial concepts:

Birkin first achieves a simple awareness of the inconsistencies in his preaching. He thought he had been wrong, perhaps. Perhaps he had been wrong, to go to her with an idea of what he wanted. Was it really only an idea, or was it the interpretation of a profound yearning? If the latter, how was it he was always talking about sensual fulfillment? The
two did not agree very well.  (WL 245)

In fact, all his descriptions and definitions of the relationship he wants are measured against, and therefore haunted by, the word “love.” And eventually he has to use the word, even though it is now supposed to carry with it the accumulated meanings of all his talks with Ursula. Ursula’s attack makes Birkin accept, though tentatively and partially, the old-fashioned sort of love as a correlative to the “impersonal beyond.”

Up to this point Birkin has been preaching from a standpoint of rejection of the more mundane aspects of love, and now Birkin was made to see the necessity of relating his yearnings to the real world.

Moreover, in one sense, Birkin’s new conception of love as “mutual unison in separateness” is a fantasy of self-sufficiency. It is a means of self-preservation, where the two egos support and define, but do not invade and destroy, each other. In other words, “star-equilibrium” is an ideal state of safety and stasis where there is neither conflict nor threat to being. However, as Lawrence sees it, the tension between self and other is what defines the ego; conflict is thus an existential necessity both in individual being and in any relationship. Therefore, when the “unison” represents an ideal state of non-violence, its denial of intersubjective violence also leads to a denial of any possible relationship. In fact, Lawrence himself reflects on the contradiction between stasis and process in his two definitions of love in the essay “Love.” On the one hand,

We are like a rose, which is a miracle of pure centrality, pure absolved equilibrium. Balanced in perfection in the midst of time and space, the rose is perfect . . . in the realm of perfection . . . neither temporal nor spatial but absolved by the equality of perfection, pure immanence of absolution.  (P 153)

In this sense, Birkin’s formulation of “star-equilibrium” matches the state of “balanced in perfection” described above. On the other hand,
Love is the hastening gravitation of spirit towards spirit, body towards body, in the joy of creation. But if all be united in one bond of love, then there is no more love. And therefore, for those who are in love with love, to travel is better than to arrive. For in arriving one passes beyond love, or rather, one encompasses love in a new transcendence . . . . Love is not a goal; it is only a traveling. (P 151)

On account of this, Birkin’s ideal love— the “final love which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility” (WL 137)— is not only a denial of human characteristics in the lovers, it is also a state of perfect inertia tantamount to nonexistence.

Therefore, “star-equilibrium” as a formulation of love should be weighed not only against Ursula’s critical response to Birkin but against Lawrence’s own assertions in his expository writings. Moreover, Birkin’s conception of an ideal loving relationship is also challenged by his own inconsistencies throughout the novel. In effect, while insistent on the separateness of each lover, Birkin sometimes does appear to desire the fusional love. When Birkin tells Gerald that he aspires to a “perfect union with a woman” (WL 51), he seems to be repeating the longing for fusion that had resounded over the centuries. The following gush from Birkin would also align him with the older romantic ideal of fusion between lovers: “In the new superfine bliss . . . there was no I and you, there was only the third, unrealized wonder, the wonder of existing not as oneself but in a consummation of my being and of her being in a new one, a new, paradisal unit regained from the duality” (WL 361). At the same time Birkin obviously affirms the ideal of fusion with a crucial reservation—love is a willingness to lose oneself in order to regain a deeper sense of oneself as autonomous. In other words, a crucial aspect of autonomy can only be realized, paradoxically, when one is willing to throw oneself into love without holding back, as Birkin tells Ursula: “in coming to you, I am without reserves or defenses” (WL 138). The tension between fusion and autonomy has been central to the issues
concerning love that preoccupied Lawrence.

In such a deliberate and complicated way, the meaning of love is relativized in different contexts and is especially manifested through Birkin and Ursula’s relationship which develops through a testing of ideas. Whenever Birkin indulges himself in giving a sermon, Ursula interrupts with a derisory remark—“So cocksure!” or “Why drag in the stars” (WL 210, 218)? Whenever Ursula relapses into stale ideas, Birkin snaps back: “Sentimental cant” (WL 321). As I’ve argued in Part One, Birkin’s speeches are expressions of character rather than authoritatively sanctioned truth. Although there is more of Lawrence in Birkin than in any other characters, Birkin is never Lawrence’s spokesperson. If his ideas on historical decline and the need for new relationships between men and women seem more eloquent than those of others, they are nonetheless contested right to the end. In fact, Birkin and Ursula expose the fallacy of each other. Through the lovers’ debate comes the complicated interplay of self and other beyond the state of solipsism. They are made prepared to respond to the other as different, and surprising. As Lawrence describes their relationship, “Ursula was strictly hostile to him. But she was held to him by some bond, some deep principle. This at once irritated her and saved her” (WL 159). In their being well pleased with as well as resistant to what the other says, they seem to adopt the position of careful attendance that Levinas associates with “proximity” or “the supreme passivity of exposure to another” (OB 47). In other words, they both have learned how to enjoy what other people say, even if what they say does not give the answer that was expected. At the end of the novel, they are still arguing, but arguing creatively. Because of their energy and pertinacity as well as their common capability of withdrawing their will from time to time, Birkin and Ursula succeed in forging a relationship that can survive among the ruins of the modern world.

While the fights between Birkin and Ursula are productive, those between Gerald and Gudrun are not. If there were a common target of attack in Birkin’s and
Ursula’s notions of love, it’ll be the sterile and dominant type of possession. Birkin explicitly rejects the kind of love that is built on the impulse of total merging, or of molding others after the image of oneself. While Ursula retains vestiges of a healthy possessiveness in her affection for Birkin, it is hardly ever aggrandizing or tyrannous. Instead of incorporating the other, their love lets the other be in a recognition of the attraction of mutual difference. In contrast to this notion of love as both “freedom and attraction,” both “separation and alliance” (ESD 13), the Gerald/Gudrun relationship is predominated by baleful contest where the aim of each lover is to conquer the other: “But always it was this eternal see-saw, one destroyed that the other might exist” (WL 241). Both Gerald and Gudrun desire to incorporate the other in a cycle of spiraling violence, as each struggles to usurp the space occupied by the other. It seems that the outcome can only be the victory of the one and the defeat of the other. While they are originally attracted by the other’s unique difference, as it is in the case of the Morels and that of Will and Anna, each finally desires to master the other by annihilating the difference that incites their desire in the first place.

Beyond that, Gerald and Gudrun have a “relation of utter interdestruction” (WL 248). The course of their affair confirms Birkin’s theory of murderers and murderees who are ruled by the “profound if hidden lust of destructive impulses” (WL 36). A series of vivid animal-scenes communicate Gudrun and Gerald’s “mutual hellish recognition” (WL 267), a vicious need to disrupt the organic dignity of living things. The scene of Gerald’s bullying his red Arab mare mentioned above draws Gudrun to the point of swooning. In addition, a scene where Gudrun teases a herd of bullocks reverses Gerald’s brutalization of his mare. The beasts frighten Ursula, but Gudrun dances insinuatingly close to the animals, expressing her fearless independence before them. Gerald’s initial response in this battle of wills is to resist her with a “faint domineering smile” (WL 193), but when Gudrun strikes him on the face the character of their relationship is set. The blow gives vent to her
“unconquerable lust for deep brutality against him” (WL 194), while in him it releases a new form of aggressiveness. Both characters are in such a way overwhelmed by the dark, demonic feelings they inspire in each other.

Another scene suggestive of the two lovers’ demonic powers is the blood-rite involving the Crich family’s great, white rabbit. Gerald’s mauling of the rabbit, and the bloody scratches it scores on the arms of both Gerald and Gudrun, create a swearing of eternal viciousness and violence between these lovers. Both characters are aroused by the rabbit’s extremity of terror. While Gerald swoons before a mystical essence of evil, Gudrun responds with a sado-masochistic ecstasy to Gerald’s subduing of the rabbit. “Slowly her face relaxed into a smile of obscene recognition” (WL 273). Their love relationship involves the excitements of violence because both are moved by the emotions of cruelty evoked by the other. Such a bondage of “obscene recognition” makes the two lovers turn their love into a “deadly contest.” Naturally, rapture and desperation, or communion and isolation, are the contraries connected with love throughout the novel. Birkin and Ursual have their own way of transcending or making use of this dialectic. They can make themselves exposed to the transforming power of love: “It was a fight to the death between them—or to new life: though in what the conflict lay, no one could say” (WL 144). Yet the love between Gerald and Gudrun is fatally and hopelessly controlled by this destructive dialectic. Love for them turns out to be nothing more than the impulse to defend the self or to manipulate the other, since what love offers them is fear of being absorbed, or anger at being rejected, by the other. Both are too threatened by their own inner emptiness to expose themselves defenselessly and passively to the transforming power of love.

In the respect of Gerald, having exhausted his interest in the mines, he has no place for his go to go, as Gudrun earlier joked. By the same token, he tends to see marriage with Gudrun as an end, a terminus towards which they have been traveling.
so far. It means certainty, fixedness in one woman and establishment for himself in social and family life. While Birkin regards his forthcoming marriage with Ursula more as a beginning of another phase in his life than an end to the tentativeness of courtship, for Gerald, “Marriage was not the committing of himself into a relationship with Gudrun. It was a committing of himself in acceptance of the established world” (WL 398). On that account, Gerald is using up, rather than replenishing, love. He appears to Gudrun as both lover and child, subjugating and worshiping her, pouring into her his “pent-up darkness and corrosive death” and drinking in her “living effluence” (WL 430-31). Their passion, unlike that of Birkin and Ursula, is a bondage in which one is fulfilled at the expense of the other. What revives him seems to her a death. Losing his father, Gerald turns to Gudrun, with all the pathos of Will’s fumbling need for Anna, and he imbibes her as a means of restoring his enfeebled being. His night with Gudrun in the chapter called “Death and Love” gave him a “grateful self-sufficiency” that she resented (WL 378). By making love an instrument of “nourishing” himself, Gerald is eventually forced to admit that he cannot do without Gudrun as evidently she can do without him.

Despite their “mutual hellish recognition,” their relationship is a hell in which Gudrun survives Gerald, due to her final indifference. While Geralds’ pressing needs make him destructively fragile, Gudrun’s indifference protects her, giving her a frigid intactness. Through mockery and apathy, Grudrun transfers to her lover the sense of rejection and exclusion that exposure to love can bring. Gerald is for her a scapegoat forced to take the place of her own insecure self-image, so that she can then vent all her scorn on it, yet remain completely immune to shame. Gudrun’s final responses to the snowy wastes can be seen as a logical extension of her qualities of coldness, unresponsiveness, and especially aestheticism. Her cold integrity and cruel survival-capacity nullify and destroy Gerald. At the same time, Gudrun pays dearly for her immunity as witness. By making herself a detached witness, Gudrun also
reduces her entire experience of the world to the single element of cynicism and irony. Consequently, she is incapable of freely accepting the risks and uncertainties inherent in her surrendering herself to a true love-experience with Gerald: “She could give herself up to his activity. But she could not be herself, she dared not come forth quite nakedly to his nakedness, abandoning all adjustment, lapsing in pure faith with him” (WL 490). Moreover, life becomes for her a permanent state of not caring about anything, being forever detached from everything, without roots or moorings. Rejecting Gerald reinforces her persistent failure to achieve a passionate immediacy of life: “Everything turned to irony with her; she recognized too well . . . the mockery of her own impulses” (WL 476). As a result, she is forced to lead a life haunted by perpetual insomnia with no respite from the inexorable monotony of time: “She could never escape. There she was, placed before the clock-face of life” (WL 471). In fact, dread of monotony is one emotion binding Gudrun to Gerald. But as soon as Gudrun realizes that the man supposed to calm her horror of time can only make it worse, she turns him into the victim of their common weakness.

It is Loerke who encourages Gudrund in developing such kind of cynical and ironic attitude toward the world, especially toward everything which might encroach upon her. With a perfect stoicism, Loerke has dispelled from his life “all illusion” and all capacity for human emotion:

To Gudrun, there was in Loerke the rock bottom of all life . . . . In the last issue he cared about nothing, he was troubled about nothing, he made not the slightest attempt to be at one with anything. He existed a pure, unconnected will, stoical and momentaneous. There was only his work.

(WL 480)

In fact, to certain extent, almost all the characters in this novel share the traits of “utter singleness without connection”, among whom Birkin is especially apparent. Birkin is capable of slipping through the net of identity like a “chameleon” or “changer,”
which is the reason why Hermione, the character most entrenched in a social identity, tries to kill him. One reason Birkin can change identity is that, like Loerke, he is an orphan. Their distanciation from society links them together as critics of the prevailing ideology. Attacking the ideal illusion of love, they both treat love as a relativistic phenomenon of no special account that one may or may not feel “according to circumstance” (WL 127). Birkin talks of love as an emotion too often idealized and absolutized; in like manner, Loerke maintains that love is the same old instinct masquerading under a multiplicity of guises.

But there the resemblance ends: Loerke’s reductive cynicism is a caricature of Birkin’s serious criticism of love. Ursula differentiates the “utter singleness” between Birkin and Loerke. While repudiating Loerke for his cold detachment from the world, Ursula nevertheless considers Birkin’s orphanhood a godsend, the fulfillment of her wish for a son of God who, having lived before Adam and Eve, is not encumbered by parents and antecedents. So Birkin comes to symbolize for Ursula the ideal of a utopian future made possible by “bath of pure oblivion, a new birth, without any recollection or blemish of a past life” (WL 261). The chapter called “The Chair” manifests their repudiation of any sense of connection or possession. After deciding to get married, Birkin and Ursula prepare to have a house and furniture of their own. Yet after buying a chair, Birkin tells Ursula that he does not want to possess anything at all; the thought of a house and furniture is hateful to him. Ursula replies that it is hateful to her too, and so they decide to give the chair they just bought to the young couple whom they had seen looking at the mattress. In denying “an old base world, a detestable society of man,” which is “all possessions, possessions, bullying you and turning you into a generalization” (WL 402), they also turn away from the threat of entrapment in the “horrible tyranny of a fixed milieu” (WL 402).

Therefore, at the end of the novel, the two lovers are going away, but to
nowhere in particular. “‘It isn’t really a locality,’ Birkin says. ‘It’s a perfected relation’” (WL 534). It seems that, by the very end, Birkin and Ursula have achieved the ideal state of “unison in separateness.” Nonetheless, instead of transcending or overcoming contradictions, this novel presents contradictions alongside possible resolutions. Lawrence belongs after all to that school of writers whose work is often more explorative and interrogative, than affirmative. His function is to ask new questions, to confront us with new values and inescapable contradictions. Therefore, even with all Lawrence’s successful couplings, there is no such thing as complacency in success or any infallible pattern of fulfillment. At the beginning of the novel, Birkin said that he wanted “the finality of love” (WL 19), yet Lawrence does not suggest that this is possible, nor does the narrative imply it can be, given the fact that Birkin is such “a changer.” The end of the novel, which comes in the middle of a conversation in disagreement, reinforces the sense of uncertainty. Lawrence deliberately ends the novel with Birkin’s reluctance to be content in his love relationship with Ursula, which he thinks is too egoistic and selfish. In other words, Birkin is not satisfied with the isolated world of two lovers. In this respect, Lawrence parallels Levinas in his opinion that the relationship of erotic love is too closed and impenetrable. Undeniably, in comparison with love concerning social community, Lawrence has been more concerned with eros, and especially with the loss and regain of self through encounter between the lovers. Even so, in what follows, I aim to explore some of the issues related to Lawrence’s relatively scarce treatment of other kinds of love—friendship and love of the neighbor—especially as they are involved with Lawrence’s attitude towards the Christian vision of love.
Chapter Three  Love without Eros

Anticipating Levinas and Derrida, Lawrence advocates the kind of friendship based on distance rather than closeness, separation rather than intimacy, defamiliarization rather than sympathetic identification. Yet, unlike Levinas, who is dedicated to the "affirmation of the Other" through radical altruism, Lawrence is more akin to Nietzsche in his insistence on the enhancing of the self through friendship. In his highly valuation of self-flourishing, Lawrence is critical of the Christian mode of love, which he considers repressive and degrading.

I. Friendship as “Another Kind of Love”

Unlike his characterization of the face-to-face relation, Levinas presents the erotic relationship as lacking an explicitly social dimension. In contrast to the reference which the ethical face-to-face relation has outside itself, the relationship of eros remains closed and impenetrable. If anyone interrupts the society established by lovers, the intimacy of the moment would disappear. Eros depends on the secrecy of the lovers, which is all too easily violated by the intrusion of others. The absolute exclusivity and unsociability of the erotic relation marks one of the differences between the need in erotic relation and the metaphysical desire with which Levinas characterizes ethics in the face-to-face relation. In eros, any intrusion of others will not lead to anything beyond the destruction of intimacy. In ethics, on the contrary, the presence of the other in the eyes of the one that challenges me from on high is the condition of morality.

In Women in Love, wherein comes Lawrence’s earlier detailed vision for society, Lawrence also repudiates the erotic couples for their seeking to insulate themselves in
“the horrible privacy of domestic and connubial satisfaction” (WL 223), which for him leads ultimately to aesthetic complacency and boredom and eventual revulsion. He calls the present society a “kaleidoscope of couples, disjoined, separatist, meaningless entities of married couples” (WL 223). For Lawrence, closing out the possibilities of other relationships by entering into the socially idealized sanctum of marriage is restrictive and false. In the story Birkin prepares Ursula for a unique love for which there is “no obligation, because there is no standard for action” (WL 301). He insists that, in order not to be “dominated from the outside” (WL 302), they must break the intrusive presence of others in their love relationship. Nonetheless, at the end of the novel, Birkin is shown to have tried persistently to break the exclusivity of the isolated pair in order to situate their love as “a little freedom with people” (WL 540). As they agree to marry, Ursula plans to get away from everyone, but Birkin sees their friends as necessary to their own love. Their dialogue is a reflective exploration of a way to love among others:

“I know,” he said. “But we want other people with us, don’t we?”

“Why should we?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he said uneasily. “One has a hankering after a sort of further fellowship.”

“But why?” she insisted. “Why should you hanker after other people? Why should you need them?”

This hit him right on the quick. His brows knitted.

“Does it end with just our two selves?” he asked, tense.

“Yes—what more do you want? If anybody likes to come along, let them. But why must you run after them?”

His face was tense and unsatisfied.

“You see,” he said, “I always imagined our being really happy with some few other people—a little freedom with people.” (WL 540)
Ursula concurs tentatively but urges him not to run after others. The novel ends in a reprise of this exchange. Ursula asks, “Aren’t I enough for you?” and Birkin replies that “to make it complete, really happy, I wanted eternal union with a man too: another kind of love” (WL 541). Their final words leave the issue open:

“You can’t have two kinds of love. Why should you!”

“It seems as if I can’t,” he said. “Yet I wanted it.”

“You can’t have it, because it’s false, impossible,” she said.

“I don’t believe that,” he answered. (WL 541)

Certainly there are evidence and possibility that Lawrence coveted a homoerotic bond in addition to a heterosexual one. Yet this “another kind of love” aspired by Birkin might be adequately considered as the ideal of friendship, if we follow Lawrence’s definition of (male) friendship as “a stark, stripped human relationship of two men, deeper than the deeps of sex” (SCAL 63). In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Lawrence precisely favours friendship as the new consciousness that is forming underneath the old dying consciousness of erotic love, which for him is “the mysterious vital attraction which draws things together, closer, closer together” (SCAL 74). In this sense, Birkin’s argument at the end of this novel highlights the need to break the self-sufficient world by encountering something other than the grasping exclusivity of the erotic love. In “Education of the People,” Lawrence also expresses the ideal of friendship as an additional relationship that might complement the heterosexual marriage. If marriage is “the center of human life,” friendship is “the leap ahead” (P 655).

Lawrence’s valuation of friendship is based on his demand that true friends avoid the close intimacy that tends to a loss of individual identity, to a confusing of “I” and “You.” The so-called “brotherly love” refers to the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the dangers of which, for Lawrence, lie in the fact that egalitarian fraternity coalesces all too easily with the Christian injunction to love one’s neighbor.
Both lead to a dissipation of the inalienable difference between the self and the other. For Lawrence, the desire to overcome strangeness of a friend is incompatible with reverence for the mystery that is wholly other. Lawrence’s insistence on the “intrinsic otherness” between friends aligns him with Levinas, for whom the virtues of friendship, such as fidelity, constancy, endurance and perennity, are often assimilated too quickly and readily into the Greek concept of *philía*. *Philía* is defined by Levinas as reciprocity, as the economic exchange that takes place within what Levinas would refer to as “the economy of the Same,” where the same and the other form a totality. In Levinas’s terminology, the intersubjective relation of *philía* is ontological and must be demarcated from the ethical relation to *Autrui*. This is why Blanchot, alluding to Levinas, describes friendship as “the interruption of being” (1997: 112). And thus, in Levinas, we appear to have a distinction between *philía* and the relation to the other, between reciprocity and responsibility, between mediation and immediacy. More specifically, Levinas’s philosophy radicalizes the role and interpretation of agape. For Levinas, our unchosen origin in an openness to the vulnerability of the Other, to the invocation of their Face, can usefully be understood as a condition of protoagape.

We can compare Levinas’ protoagapeic original relation to others with Derrida’s account of the “minimal friendship” that must precede any mutual understanding, a protofriendship that is there before any contingent agreement, contract, or initiative between the parties: “a friendship prior to friendships, an ineffaceable, fundamental, and bottomless friendship” (1988b: 636). For Derrida, following Levinas and Blanchot, the friend comes from on high, in the unfamiliar proportions of infinite and measureless dissymmetry. The friend is what is to come: “Friendship is never a present given, it belongs to the experience of expectation, promise, or engagement. Its discourse is that of prayer, it inaugurates, but reports nothing, it is not satisfied with what is, it moves out to this place where a responsibility opens up a future”
Derrida’s words give a hint to Levinas’s assertion of “asymmetrical” intersubjectivity which involves a distance or “respectful separation” that distinguishes this relation from love in any merely affective sense. For them both, all reciprocity reduces to a *philia* in which others are constructed in our self-image, thereby leveling off the radical alterity that calls us to answer.

For all their valuation of distance and difference in their formulation of friendship, Lawrence and Levinas are strikingly different in their interpretation of the significance of difference. For Lawrence, difference means distance, being full of the feeling of distance, without feeling bad about one’s superior distance, one’s superiority. Difference is thus the pathos of distance, feeling apart, and it is threatened by the opposite pathos, the Christian-moral-socialist pathos, feeling the same, and feeling-with. Though Levinas similarly holds a critique of the Christian way of sympathy, for him, the self is always on the receiving end of a command from the Other on the highest. His notion of “pathos of distance” is just on the opposite side of Lawrence’s. In this sense, Lawrence’s notion of friendship is more akin to Nietzsche’s “*areteic ethics*” than to Levinas’s or Derrida’s concern with the dispossessed among us.²⁸ In other words, while Derrida and Levinas are mainly speaking of the least among us (“the widow, the orphan, the stranger”), and call an affirmation of the other, Lawrence, following the canonical Nietzsche’s love of the future, considers the friend as representing an excess, an overflow of self-affirmation. For both Nietzsche and Lawrence, we should help our friends achieve excellence, rather than pitying them. Far from requiring an abdication of the self, friendship should demand a strengthening and enhancing of the self.

Therefore, Lawrence’s concern with (male) friendship, which is mostly treated in his leadership novels, is deeply related to his differentiation between the “love” mode and the “power” mode. What occupies Lawrence in the leadership novels is the way that society at large has been affected by the love-mode. Lawrence observes
that those who stress sexual and familial love destroy the public world. The heroes of these novels seek vital connections with others outside the limiting scope of erotic or marital relationships. Thus, in Aaron’s Rod, Lilly, from whom Aaron seeks a vital male friendship, condemns all forms of selflessness. In his urgency to preach the preservation of the self, Lilly tells Aaron to give up his “love urge,” which will “destroy the self” (AR 343). The alternative Lilly chooses is “power,” a mode of relationship where the self is not in danger of invasion.

We must either love or rule. And once the love-mode changes, as change it must, for we are worn out and becoming evil in its persistence, then the other mode will take place in us. And there will be profound obedience in place of this love-crying, obedience to the incalculable power-urge. And men must submit to the greater soul in a man, for guidance: and women must submit to the positive power-soul in man, for their being . . . .

I mean a real committal of the life-issue of inferior beings to the responsibility of a superior being. (AR 345)

With these words, Lawrence has been severely accused as a sexist and protofascist. Yet it should be noted that, while Lilly argues authoritatively like a fascist, the text, pervaded with his self-contradictory assertions, has done little to support his doctrine of “submission of the inferior to the superior.” A few pages later, Lilly adopts a palatable vagueness about the integrity of individuals: “I think every man is a sacred and holy individual, never to be violated. I think there is only one thing I hate to the verge of madness, and that is bullying. To see any living creature bullied, in any way, almost makes a murderer of me” (AR 351). On account of this, it appears difficult to reconcile the choice Lilly offers Aaron with what he has later said about the need to preserve one’s self in isolation. As an ideal of detachment, Lilly at the same time embodies self-aggrandizement, to the extent of promoting a domineering self. In addition to Lilly’s own contradictory articulation, Aaron’s ambivalent
response to Lilly’s solitariness undercuts the validity of this doctrine.

Lilly was alone—and out of his isolation came his words, indifferent as to whether they came or not. And he left his friends utterly to their own choice . . . . He left each to himself, and he himself remained just himself: neither more nor less. And there was a finality about it, which was at once maddening and fascinating. . . . And yet at the same time Aaron knew that he could depend on the other man for help, may almost for life itself—so long as it entailed no breaking of the intrinsic isolation of Lilly’s soul. But this conviction was also hateful. And there was also a great fascination in it. (AR 364)

Without offering Aaron full knowledge, Lilly allows Aaron access up to a point in preaching his doctrine of maintaining an inviolable and totally self-responsible individuality. In reply to Aaron’s question—“And whom shall I submit to?”—Lilly’s answer is: “Your soul will tell you” (AR 347). In such a way, Aaron is left to rely on his own soul instead of plagiarizing Lilly’s or relying overmuch on Lilly’s ability to articulate solutions to his own confusion.29

Likewise, the friendship between Don Ramon and Cipriano in *The Plumed Serpent* can not be conceived in ordinary sense of fraternity and fidelity. Like that between Aaron and Lilly, it is a relationship which is founded on Ramon’s enormous power of self-assertion which compels Cipriano to submission. Cipriano’s interpretation of their relationship makes it hard to define it in terms of any conventional definition of friendship:

“But you don’t believe in Ramon,” Kate says to Cipriano.

“How not believe? I not believe in Ramon?—Well, perhaps not, in that way of kneeling before him and spreading out my arms and shedding tears on his feet. But I—I believe in him, too. Not in your way, but in mine.

I tell you why. Because he has the power to compel me. (PS 217)
Kate’s reservations in regard to the friendship between Ramon and Cipriano serve further to undermine its substantiability and loyalty. When Cipriano tells her that he is “Ramon’s man”, Kate mistrusts him: “In the long run he was nobody’s man” (PS 327). Kate’s intuition is matched by Ramon’s feeling that “Cipriano would betray him” (PS 205). In face of “the problem of eternal conjunction between two men,” Ramon and Cipriano, despite and also because of their mutual infidelity and disloyalty, “embrace in the recognition of each other’s eternal and abiding loneliness” (PS 237).

Lawrence’s treatment of friendship reminds us of Zarathustra’s assertion—“in one’s friend, one should still honor the enemy”; or in fact, “in one’s friend one should have one’s best enemy” (1978a: 124). Nietzsche’s ranking of friendship as higher than romantic love or Christian agape lies in his interpretation of this relation as agonistic. For him, as it is for Lawrence, it is far better to be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo. In friendship-as-contest, the worth of the contestants depends upon their cultivating that which makes them different. Characteristic of Nietzsche’s “slaves” is the inability to maintain distance and difference. Correspondingly, we may perceive how friendship forms a unity animated by the dialectic of their pulling in opposite directions in Lawrence’s fiction. For instance, while Birkin proposes deathless brotherhood to Gerald, he at the same time lets his friend to be a sort of “beautiful enemy” to himself. Birkin is both attracted and repelled by Gerald: “There was a pause of strange enmity between the two men, that was very near to love. It was always the same between them; always their talk brought them into a deadly nearness of contact, a strange, perilous intimacy which was either love or hate or both” (WL 225). Gerald as the man of action, the doer, is the other, the essential criticism of Birkin, all that Birkin the talker is not, which ironically must be why Birkin continually hopes for and seeks a committed friendship with him throughout the novel and why Birkin is so devastated by Gerald’s death at its close.
In *Kangaroo*, Somers and Cooley also show themselves to be worthy antagonists throughout the novel. Cooley the Australian at first sees himself as a disciple of Somers the English writer and initially echoes his most cherished opinions. But Somers remains aloof, and it gradually becomes clear that the two men are loyal to completely different first principles. Thus Cooley wonders eventually aloud: “you have your own idea of power, haven’t you” (K 122)? While Cooley bursts out with passionate professions of love, Somers proclaims a doctrine that is closely allied to Lilly’s power urge. Somers specifically rejects the old ideal of brotherly affection:

The whole trend of this affection, this mingling, this intimacy, this truly beautiful love, he found his soul just set against it . . . . Yet he wanted some living fellowship with other men . . . but not affection, not love, not comradeship. Not mates and equality and mingling. Not blood-brotherhood. None of that. (K 120)

Yet Somers is at the same time reminded that his middle name of Lovat means that “Love is in your name, notwithstanding” (K 151). What it implies is the recognition of the fact that all social life is inevitably governed by the “merging” compulsions of the psychic life. Put another way, if a man is to fulfill himself through communal activity, he must move into a realm that is defined by love. Somers himself admits that in all his life he “had secretly grieved over his friendlessness” and that he “had had this craving for an absolute friend” (K 153). Up to the end of the novel, the conflicting viewpoints are not reconciled.

Therefore, though detesting what he calls “merging,” Lawrence nevertheless acknowledges that all living things are part of a “continuum, as if all were connected by a living membrane” (P 761). Lawrence suggests that individuality must remain intact. Nevertheless, if our individuality, our isolation, becomes the explicit focus of our attention, it will cease to form the secure underpinning which makes our creative lives possible. On the other hand, convinced that egoism or selfishness is an
inescapable feature of all interpersonal relationship, Lawrence gives a positive
interpretation to the necessity of “self-preservation” and “self-enhancing.” But for
Lawrence, this “perfected singleness of the individual being” means neither “what is
nowadays called individualism” nor the “cheap egotism,” both of which refer to
“every self-conscious ego assuming unbounded rights to display his
self-consciousness” (P 637). Instead, what Lawrence said about the “perfect solitary
integrity” achieved through genuine love and friendship is “the recognition of the
exquisite arresting manifoldness of being, multiplicity, plurality, as the stars are plural
in their starry singularity” (P 638).

Put more precisely, what Lawrence advocates is, in Nietzsche’s terms, the
“noble egoists,” who will bring to love and friendship not coarse selfishness but their
ego’s strength, grandeur, and demands for excellence. Both Nietzsche and Lawrence
make “contempt” a catalyst for a higher love or friendship, because, according to
them, humans are weak and inadequate, and the person who really loves them
despises them as they are and tries to lift them to a higher plane. As Zarathustra puts
it, addressing his own soul, “I taught you contempt . . . the great, the loving contempt
that loves most where it despises most” (1978a: 114). Only by such constructive
despising both of the person loved and of oneself can everyone concerned be made to
rise above, and to surpass, the mundane self. However, as Susan Tridgell indicates,
one of the dangers of Lawrence’s moral stance is that it may lead to judging others
“contemptuously,” to becoming a “mere despiser” (120). Moreover, in his highly
valuation of self-flourishing, Lawrence might regard “the unconditional affirmation of
the incoming of the other” proposed by Levinas as what Nietzsche would call the
“ascetic” ideal and slave morals. It might be in this respect that Lawrence departs
from Levinas and Derrida the farthest, in spite of their common insistence on
friendship as the cultivation of “inalienable difference.” Put more specifically,
Derrida and Levinas have rewritten all the lines of the aristocratic Zarathustra who
thought that responding to the other would reduce the forces to slavish, reactive powers and would be beneath the dignity of the active forces. The Zarathustra whom Derrida and Levinas befriend is the one who will treat the stranger and the wayfarer as a friend, to take the powerless other in our home. In other words, Derrida and Levinas are disquieted by the tendency of the community of friends to draw themselves into a circle and forcibly exclude the other. On the contrary, Lawrence is often accused for his indifference to his neighbors and community. My contention is that, far from advocating “solitude as a virtue” as did Nietzsche, Lawrence’s indifference results from his critique on Christian love manifest as charity and altruism.

II. **Lawrence and the Christian Love**

Levinas’s analysis of the face-to-face relation constitutes a radical agape ethics of responsibility for others. His formulation parallels the oldest definition of agape as disinterested love, unselfish generosity, as opposed to investment for a return. He even refers to the responsibility that requires substitution of oneself for the other as “a devotedness as strong as death” (Levinas 1988: 175). Levinas’s notion of self’s infinite responsibility toward the other is often too readily confused with the Christian ethics of “self-sacrifice” criticized by both Nietzsche and Lawrence. In fact, Levinas and Lawrence hold a common critique on the Christian way of love. Unlike the Christian belief that I should love my neighbor as myself, or the Kantian dictum according to which I should treat others with the respect that I would like to command myself, Levinas’s conception of ethics starts not from an analogy between myself and the other, but precisely from our difference. Likewise, for Lawrence, “the hardest thing for any man to do is for him to recognize and to know that the natural law of his
neighbor is other than, and maybe even hostile to, his own natural law, and yet is true . . . It is the hardest lesson of love” (STH 124).

But here the similarity ends. While Levinas dedicates his work to the victims of the Holocaust, in Lawrence’s work one is struck repeatedly by the relatively apparent absence of concern for community. Most of the characters in his fiction express an indifference that is almost aristocratic toward their neighbors. Both Anna and Will Brangwen of The Rainbow are oblivious to the world outside their household; they are in a “private retreat” that has no nationality and no war in South Africa. Their daughter, Ursula, is proudly contemptuous of her classmates, knowing herself as set apart from and superior to them. In Women in Love, Gudrun shows no compassion for the degraded miners. In this novel, community is explicitly rejected because it is in the old sense based on property and possessions. While the working classes are stunted aborigines who stare after the Brangwen sisters in the street, the upper classes are sterile and worthless. Birkin thus insists that a nation should be built on “the intrinsic otherness of individuals” (WL 104). Ursula echoes Birkin in her conviction that “one has a sort of other self, that belongs to a new planet, not to this” (WL 253). It appears that what we perceive in Birkin (and also in Ursula, though less obviously) is a human spirit engrossed in the high enterprise of perfecting itself. That being the case, the mandate of responsibility for one’s neighbor no longer dominated even theoretically.

Lawrence’s attitude toward “love of the neighbor,” though echoing Levinas’s in its respect for the intrinsic otherness between oneself and the neighbor, is again, like his notion of friendship, more akin to Nietzsche’s doctrine of “flight from neighbor,” recommended by Zarathustra to his disciples. Nietzsche claims that “superior to love of neighbor is love of those far away, those in the future” (1978a: 116). The target of Nietzsche’s attack is the Christian ethics of pity. The Christian ideal of love is agape, in the act of which the noble stoops to the vulgar, the healthy to the sick, the
rich to the poor. Yet Nietzsche speaks of pity as the agent that makes suffering contagious and thus an ethics of pity is bound to encourage weakness and mediocrity, creating a climate harmful to the cultivation of self-respect, nobility of character, and heroic virtue. Through pity and compassion, the weak succeed in imposing themselves and their values upon the strong. Therefore, Nietzsche redefines charity: “Help yourself: then everybody will help you” (1978b: 9). For Nietzsche, the weak can become self-helping only if pity is withheld from them. Moreover, as Nietzsche sees it, pity not only asserts, in veiled fashion, the pitier’s ego but also disguises the lust for power of the weak and parasitic. Accordingly, “stooping to” the weak by the self-confident strong is in the end the birth-act of domination and hierarchy: the re-forging of difference into inferiority.

Lawrence presents these essential traits of the Christian love most evidently in Mr. Crich, Gerald’s father, the watchwords of whose life—pity, duty, and charity—are the very ideas Nietzsche singles out for his strongest attack. Mr. Crich remains constant to his love for his neighbor:

He had been so constant to his lights, so constant to charity, and to his love for his neighbor . . . . To move nearer to God, he must move towards his miners, his life must gravitated towards theirs. They were, unconsciously, his idol, his God made manifest. In them he worshipped the highest, the great, sympathetic, mindless Godhead of humanity. (WL207)

Throughout the Christian era, the emphasis had been on altruism and self-restraint rather than self-assertion: “Perhaps he loved his neighbor even better than himself” (WL 245). Under the armor of his pity, however, lies a horror of death and an obscene fascination with misery. Mr. Crich is like a vampire who exerts his will over and feeds upon others:

Sometimes, it seemed to Mrs. Crich as if her husband were some subtle funeral bird, feeding on the miseries of the people. It seemed to her he
was never satisfied unless there was some sordid tale being poured out to him, which he drank in with a sort of mournful, sympathetic satisfaction.

He would have no *raison d'être* if there were no lugubrious miseries in the world, as an undertaker would have no meaning if there were no funerals.

(WL 217)

By preserving the weak and sympathizing with their weaknesses, pity becomes an instrument of the life-denying, nihilistic tendencies. In other words, pity is anti-life because it debilitates and weakens the natural impulse, and the result of this denial Nietzsche describes as “decay, chronic degeneration, and sickness” (1978b: 534).

Consequently, for Lawrence, as it is for Nietzsche, Christian era has been precipitously declining into death, as is represented by Thomas Crich: “He became more and more hollow in his vitality, the vitality was bled from within him” (WL 217).

Moreover, in the characterization of Mr. Crich and Gerald, Lawrence shows how the ideals of Christian love is effective in repressing and intensifying the hatred and violence that are latent in each individual, especially in those who mask their hostility in pity. In fact, Nietzsche speaks of pity as sublimated revenge or cruelty. To Nietzsche, agape was but an oppression born and bred by *ressentiment*—rancor and spite aroused by the sight of resolute and self-confident difference. By the same token, Mr. Crich hated his wife and her fierce aristocratic independence. Yet he has caged his wife in his unrelenting kindness and pity, which for him are masks for hatred and contempt: “He had substituted pity for all his hostility; pity had been his shield and his safeguard, and his infallible weapon. And still, in his consciousness, he was sorry for her, her nature was so violent and so impatient” (WL 223). Mr. Crich is accordingly eaten away by a cancerous disease that is associated with the hostility he had suppressed in the name of compassion.

The hatred that Gerald embodies might be conceived as a reaction against the
charity that has governed his father’s life. In Gerald, compassion and charity no longer prevail; all that remains is the aggressive drive to subjugate nature: “He had conceived the pure instrumentality of mankind. There had been so much humanitarianism, so much talk of sufferings and feelings. It was ridiculous. The sufferings and feelings of individuals did not matter in the least” (WL 215). Yet Gerald is after all his father’s son, and he is inevitably infected with the same decay. While seeming more rebellious, Gerald too is imprisoned by the old conception:

For Gerald was in reaction against Charity, yet he was dominated by it; it assumed supremacy in the inner life, and he could not confute it. So he was partly subject to that which his father stood for, but he was in reaction against it. Now he could not save himself. A certain pity and grief and tenderness for his father overcame him, in spite of the deeper, more sullen hostility. (WL 218-9).

Being unable to “confute” the idea of Christianity, or to “think his way out” (WL 220), Gerald is condemned to a state of chaos, with feelings of “contempt” confused with feelings of “unadmitted enmity” (WL 220). In his resort to arrogance and brutality, Gerald finally makes the machine itself the real God. For the “whole Christian attitude of love and self-sacrifice” of his father, he substitutes devotion to the “great social productive machine” (WL 258-9).

Lawrence’s critique of Christian love also lies in his repudiation of the way this universal love is bullied against the loved one and the way the Christian injunction to love one’s neighbor leads to a dissipation of the substantial, passional, independent self. For instance, Kangaroo, as an embodiment of Christian love, wants to make Australia “a kind of Church.” He loves as the Christian God loves, in defiance of human attempts to prevent him. His love thus becomes what masks willfulness: “I love them,” he shouted, in a voice suddenly become loud and passionate. ‘I love them. I love you, and I defy you to prevent me” (K 120). Like God, he loves people in
spite of themselves. In the light of his benevolent ideas, he can appear as beautiful as a god; yet he is ugly in person—when withstood, he is a superman monster, a “horror.” Moreover, as a kangaroo he is a fraud, being capable of loving intimacy in the mode of Christian Europe but lacking a vigorous sense of his own identity, both as an individual and as the inhabitant of a new continent. The Christian altruism causes selflessness achieved by utterly subordinating the self to an object which has been apprehended through empathy. Excessive striving in this direction leads to disintegrating personalities. Kangaroo’s repulsiveness is rooted in Lawrence’s opposition to Christian idealism which made him present Thomas Crich in an ambience of distasteful moribundity. In becoming more than either man or woman, Kangaroo has become more (and less) than human. He is for Somers like “Abraham’s bosom” (K 117), because he will overwhelm with “love” anyone who opposes him, and engulf their being.

As it is, Kangaroo’s love is oppressive because it is Love in the abstract, which denies individuality. With Somers and Harriet working through the conflicts in their marriage, the all-embracing love of Kangaroo soon begins to appear like an impossible idealism which cannot be applied to ordinary human life. Kangaroo tells Somers, “Either you are with me, and I feel you are with me: or you cease to exist for me” (K 213). Somers complains to Kangaroo: “You are so awfully general, and your love is so awfully general: as if one were a cherry in the syrup. Don’t love me. Don’t want me to love you. Let’s be hard, separate men” (K 213). Ultimately, Somers comes to view Kangaroo’s universal love as positively destructive to individual integrity for both men and women. The God Kangaroo believes is not the one that made a man realize “his own sacred aloneness” (K 224). The narrator laments after the death of Kangaroo: “If Kangaroo could have realized that too, then Richard felt he would have loved him, in a dark, separate, other way of love. But never this all-in-all thing” (K 282).
What is more, the disintegration of personality caused by the Christian mode of love results (at least partially, for Lawrence) in the chaotic aggression that characterizes the life of the mob. In other words, mobs are made up of agglomerations of self-disintegrated individuals who huddle together in fear, seeking to discharge the pent-up violence resulted from the dissolution of the integral forms of selfhood. This theme is explored most thoroughly in the scene where open violence breaks out between the Diggers, an active and parafascist organization, and their socialist antagonists, who, like Kangaroo, preach love as the source of social salvation.

It was at that time that Somers had realized that the ideals of “Love, Self-sacrifice, Humanity united in love” were dead. For Lawrence, modern man has become dependent on a vast, amorphous, impersonal entity which is identified in his consciousness as the peer group. However, the peer group is really no more than a vague constellation of ideas that are projected by society. These lonely individuals seek the security of the crowd, but the group gives them neither security nor strength.

As such, it is Lawrence’s view that modern society has an unprecedented potentiality for brute violence because it sends aggression underground, providing no socially sanctioned forms for its expression. The Christian moral tradition compels a surface appearance of universal love, sympathy and fellow-feeling; it nevertheless at the same time finds expression in radically altered form, reappearing as a subtle and subterranean but corrosive force. In The Plumed Serpent, through the characterization of Dona Carlota, Don Ramon’s wife, Lawrence shows how conformity, submissiveness, dependency, and social altruism all stem from the repression of hate. Carlota is a tormented, vindictive, guilt-ridden woman, whose life is devoted to good works within the Church, and who is full of impotent rage at Ramon’s political and religious aspirations. In this novel, she is presented as a kind of vampire who would wish to suck away the life of her husband. In her commitment to the Christian mode of love, Carlota is incapable of loving a vigorous
man like her husband. Lawrence seems to suggest that the Christian ideal of charity, sacrifice, and identification with the suffering Christ is perverse because it is merely an inverted expression of cruel impulses.

Thus far, we might see, though both Levinas and Lawrence hold a critique on Christian altruism, their critiques are not founded on the same accounts. While Lawrence repudiates it for its bringing forth the dissipation of individuality, Levinas differentiates his own position from Christian altruism by asserting that the notion of altruism remains self-centered insofar as it finds its grounding in the individual’s own “disciplined attempt” to overcome one’s self-centeredness and selfish desires. Put differently, while Levinas claims that the assertion of and focus on self-identity of the subject is an act of irresponsibility, Lawrence’s notion of love (either as eros, philia, or agape), though complicated and relativized in textual differences as illustrated above, remains to a large degree a self-centered preoccupation insofar as the ultimate focus of one’s encounter with the Other is the self itself. Although Levinas attends more explicitly to the role and function of the Other within the encounter, the call to responsibility does not adequately account for the existential freedom of the self. On the other hand, if Levinas’s serious solemnities without joyfulness and release make us uneasy, Lawrence’s gaiety with relative absence of obligation and commitment toward the other is no less disturbing. In other words, if Levinasian ethics tends to be self-effacing, Lawrence’s obsession with “enhancing the self” risks the danger of solipsism. In his insistence on self-flourishing, it seems that for Lawrence, especially in his critique on Christian love, any response to other forces is slavish and reactive, and hence the only responsibility for the self is to become what it is.

Nevertheless, in an age wherein the weak are dominated by the strong, the poor are exploited by the rich, it seems that the problem lies more in the indifference with which responsibility toward the other is treated than in the slavish result of helping the needed. Lending a hand to others is a way of inducing dependence and of reducing
them to subservience. That is something we cannot help. We inevitably produce new evils in trying to solve existing ones. But that is not excuse not to act, not to do whatever we can. In our epoch, the widow who gives everything she needs for herself appears to be more dignified than the “noble egoist” who gives out of his overflow and abundance and who is responsible only to his self. In Levinas’s thought, there is no nihilism about re sponsiveness, no fear of looking like a reactive slave, a lower type. Here the love of difference is the love of the other and being held hostage by the other is not considered demeaning, degrading, or ignoble but rather challenging and uplifting.

For all that, Levinas has indeed burdened us too much with infinite weights and unlimited obligation toward the other, in spite of his attempt to put limits on the self-sacrifice expected of us by his claim of justice.33 If for Lawrence, freedom is to get away from inhibition and blockage, i.e., from everything that prevents it from dancing, for Levians, freedom is suspect, suspended, held in question. As a result, if Lawrentian way of love is inseparable from gaiety and happiness, Levinasian ethics of love is grave, serious, and even painful. Abraham’s “me voice” (“here I am”) makes him extremely passive. He does not try to assume the position of the author, the addressor. He just takes the command, in the accusative, receives it, accepts it, and stands under it. From Nietzsche’s or Lawrence’s point of view, Abraham entirely lacks the spirit of Greek beauty and autonomy because he is slavishly dependent upon instruction from the Other. For many philosophers who stand up for freedom of the self, Levinas’s idea of responsibility is extravagant and leads all too quickly to a pathological feeling of guilt. In effect, Levinas himself acknowledges that primary ethical relation to alterity is “breathless,” like an “insomniac vigilance.” Consequently, it may still be necessary to continue to call for “good air” and to find a place for the value of self-preservation, if one wants to breathe and to sleep. Moreover, if one is to invite others into one’s home, one must be and remain in some
sense the home’s owner, the self. Put differently, a down-to-earth ethics would include an idea of a certain self-love and self-regard, which goes along with a sense of responsibility toward the other. It is in this sense that Lawrence and Levinas complement one another, enabling us to conceive a more adequate ethical relation to alterity—one that is based on the kind of self-love entailing, and compatible with, the love of the other.
NOTES

1 As part of the literary-critical vocabulary, eros is often employed in correlation with the notion of representation. In the 1980s, a new vocabulary is used when talking about texts by reviewing literature as the site of erotic desire. The target of this “language of desire” is the discourse of binary oppositions in formalist approaches to literature, which neglected the processes of signification. For instance, Susan Sontag calls for the need to theorize literature in erotic terms: “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art” (14). The question of reading has also been articulated in terms of erotic seduction: “All novels are erotic...; they seek to lure, tantalize, seduce the reader into a world other than his own” (Hutcheon 86). Roland Barthes’s well-known differentiation between texte de désir and texte de jouissance is especially put forward in highly eroticized language: “The fundamental difference between a texte de désir and a texte de jouissance is in the locus and nature of the pleasure they promote in a reader. Whereas the former might be compared to a form of sex without fore-pleasure, the latter in spite of its defining term dissipates the end-pleasure of genital orgasm by diffusing intensities through a text. A texte de jouissance promotes the polymorphous perversity of the written word” (1975: 45). In this section, while retaining its force of disruption and essence of ambiguity, I’m employing “eros” as it is related to Levinas’s concern with self/other relation and to Lawrence’s treatment of embodied love and language of feeling.

2 In his conception of eros as absolute alterity, Levinas specifically identifies alterity first and foremost with the feminine. The problematic gender implication in Levinas’s notion of the feminine as alterity will be discussed at more length in Part Three of this study.

3 Irigaray designates “divinity” as “what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign” (1993b: 62).

4 It may surprise the reader that Irigaray, while making Cartesianism one of her chief targets, should base her redefinition of ethical passion as erotic wonder on her reading of Descartes’s The Passions of the Soul. However, it should be noted that Irigaray here is not dealing with Descartes’ dualism, but is concerned with his definition of “wonder” as the “first passion without an opposite” (ESD 15). Irigaray appreciates Descartes for making “wonder” the momentum between the subject and object, the motivating force behind mobility in all its dimensions. At the same time she compensates Descartes’ argument by including sexual difference which is entirely neglected in Descartes’ thinking.

5 In Otherwise than Being, Levias refers many times to the composition of the human as “flesh and blood”: “Only a subject that eats can be for-the-other, or can signify. Signification, the one-for-the-other, has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood” (OB 74). Yet the susceptibility and vulnerability implied here is described as “trauma” (OB 10, 37, 65). As such, while in Totality and Infinity, the emphasis falls on the ambivalence of pleasure, in Otherwise than Being, the more dominant themes are pain and suffering.

6 Roland Barthes also indicates the dangers of bringing sexuality into language: “To try to write love is to confront the muck of languages: that region of hysteria where languages is both too much and too little, excessive... and impoverished” (1978: 99).

7 In his analysis of “repressive hypothesis,” Foucault indicates that the relationship between sex and power has been conventionally defined in terms of repression. Psychological and social repression of sexual discourse gives it transgressive force: “If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence,
then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression” (1978: 6). Yet, according to Foucault, control in modern societies is achieved not through direct repression but through more invisible strategies of normalization. In other words, all the talk about sex is a form of social control. Foucault thereby argues that by bringing sexuality into the clear light of language, we have succeeded only in controlling and thus repressing it and thus our sexuality is trapped by the language meant to free it.

In this sense, Lawrence anticipates Kristeva’s reformulation of ethics in the free play of erotic desire. According to Kristeva, when sexuality is reconceived as grounded in pleasure and violence, rather than the repression of jouissance, then the ethical imperative is reconceived as the necessity to articulate that jouissance: “Ethics used to be a coercive, customary manner of ensuring the cohesiveness of a particular group through the repetition of a code—a more or less accepted apologue. Now, however, the issue of ethics crops up wherever a code (mores, social contract) must be shattered in order to give way to the free play of negativity, needs, desire, pleasure, and jouissance, before being put together again, although temporarily and with full ‘knowledge’ of what is involved” (1980a: 23).

In the modern age, the ideological climate of which was clogged with dead ideals, Lawrence attempts to find a new vital utterance by appealing to the extreme. Yet he himself asserts that the extreme must not become another fixed idea or another idealism: “One should go to the extremity of any experience. But that one should stay there, and make a habit of the extreme, is another matter” (P 647).

Cohen asserts that Ricoeur’s critique of Levinas is wrongheaded because selfhood in Levinas is “not a finitude but an infinition” (Cohen 208). This way of being cannot be reduced to a form of self-esteem “because it is in no way a self-satisfaction” (208). See Cohen’s differentiation between Levinas’s position and Ricoeur’s insistence on “self-esteem” (283-325).

It should be noted that “height”, as it is here employed by Levinas, is not socially constructed by power. Rather, Levinas insists that height is encountered as the other person’s poverty, destitution, and, most important, humility. Paradoxically, the social image of height Levinas prefers is that of a teacher. The encounter with another person is one in which I am taught.

Kant had precisely argued that freedom and heteronomy contradict each other. He maintained that a free subject established his independence from both nature and religious traditions by following the autonomous laws of self-sufficient reason. On the contrary, the Levinasian ethics requires that we must abandon the language of autonomous freedom for a language of heteronomous responsibility—i.e., it requires a language wherein agency is seen as a particular kind of surrender, and where to say “I” is to say “Here I am.”

Critchley suggests that “the Said to which it is necessary to return is not one uninformed or uninterrupted by the trace of the Saying, not an unjustified but a justified Said” (1992: 229).

As has been indicated previously, in Totality and Infinity, we can see Levinas’s generally positive interpretation of separation, which he identifies as “height,” in order to indicate the lack of reciprocity between self and Other. But in Otherwise than Being, Levinas changes the emphasis from height to nearness (or proximity), acknowledging some of the difficulty with height.

Just as Levinas’s use of “freedom” varies from standard use, so his use of “passivity” is beyond our traditional contrasts. Thus when he writes that “the subjectivity of a subject is vulnerability, exposure to affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity” (OB 50), he admits that he is not
using the term “passivity” in its ordinary meaning. For Levins, passivity means man’s ability to be moved by what happens to the other, to be called by the other. To claim that the self is “passive” is to claim that the self’s response is executed in “passion”—the “infinite passion of responsibility” (OB 128). Therefore, our standard contrast between active and passive is not relevant in this case, for “In the case of responsibility, activity and passivity coincide” (OB 115).

Writing of the “community of lovers”, Blanchot, alluding to Levinas, also posits an ethical alternative that denied the importance of mutual recognition: “An ethics is possible only when—with ontology taking the backseat—an anterior relation can affirm itself, a relation such that the self is not content with recognizing the Other, with recognizing itself in it, but feels that the Other always puts it into question to the point of being able to respond to it only through a responsibility that cannot limit itself and that exceeds itself without exhausting itself” (1988: 52).

Another formulation of Birkin’s “unison in separateness” is the two-eagle image specified in Aaron’s Rod: “Two eagles in mid-air, grappling, whirling, coming to their intensification of love-onenness there in mid-air. In mid-air the love consummation. But all the time each lifted on its own wings: each bearing itself on its own wings at every moment of the mid-air love consummation. That is the splendid love-way” (AR 201-2). Daleski asserts that this simile is more apposite than Birkin’s stars because it “suggests a relationship which is alive” (1965: 195). Another similar formulation is the earth-sun image in Kangaroo: “The earth and the sun, on their plane, have discovered a perfect equilibrium. But man has not yet begun . . . . Man has loved the beloved for the sake of love, so far, but rarely, rarely has he consciously known that he could only love her for her own separate, strange self: forever strange and a joyful mystery to him” (K 133).

Despite his harsh view of love as responsibility for the other, Levinas does, time and again, use the word “love.” In one of his later interviews, he is particularly eloquent about love: he claims that the “idea of the face is the idea of gratuitous love” and suggests that faith is “believing that love without reward is valuable” (1988: 176, 177). He goes so far as to say that “that which I call responsibility is a love, because love is the only attitude where there is encounter with the unique” (1988: 174). Since for Levinas responsibility is accomplished through “giving,” his reversion to the term “love” may be due to his sense that “giving” calls to mind love rather than mere (judicial) responsibility.

In Bell’s argument, Women in Love, as a genuine work of art, presents a “world” which encompasses various individual circles of life that reflect as well as conflict one another: “Women in Love is pervaded by an expressive frustration and a sense of its own vulnerability quite distinct from the stylistic confidence of The Rainbow” (1991: 100). Yet I don’t agree with Bell’s definite argument that The Rainbow is pervaded by authorial and omnipresent voice and that the image of the rainbow is introduced in the novel as an image of plenitude. As we have seen and might see, The Rainbow is a novel full of disruption and the rainbow image is far from an image of finishedness and completeness.

Louis Martz discusses the intrusion of the narrator in the second part of this novel. He argues that In Part I the characters have been allowed to act out their parts before us, with only brief guiding touches by the objective narrator. But in Part II the narrator seems to be dropping his manner of impartiality. He is determined to set our minds in a certain direction. While in Part I the whole initial sketch of Miriam is suffused with her “beautiful warm colouring”, the style of writing in Part II seems designed to reflect the “mistiness” of Miriam.

This scene anticipates another one in Aaron’s Rod, where Aaron is presented as a
“self-unyielding male”. Aaron’s fear of being possessed has, from his wife’s point view, manifested itself in a destructive withholding of himself: “He never gave himself. He never came to her, really. He withheld himself. Yes, in those supreme and sacred times which for her were the whole culmination of life and being, the ecstasy of unspeakable passion conjunct, he was not really hers” (AR 194).

22 In Kangaroo, Richard and Harriet, by leaving the other unknown, rehearse the caution against conceiving love as knowledge: “Where their two personalities met and joined, they were one, and pledged to permanent fidelity. But that part in each of them which did not belong to the other was free from all inquiry or even from knowledge. Each silently consented to leave the other in large part unknown, unknown in word and deed and very being. They didn’t want to know—too much knowledge would be like shackles” (K 40).

23 Lawrence once comments on the insignificance of the finished and unchanged lover who remains an old stable ego: “If the one I love remains unchanged and unchanging, I shall cease to love her. It is only because she changes and startles me into change and defies my inertia, and is herself staggered in her inertia by my changing, that I can continue to love her. If she stayed put, I might as well love the pepper pot” (STH 196-7).

24 Critics have differed considerably in their reactions to the argument between Birkin and Ursula concerning their notion of love. Leavis, for example, seems to feel that the position Birkin is arguing for is clearly and unexceptionally correct: “Ursula, when she asks for love, means the love that could, and should, be ‘perfect’ and remain that till death. But not only does Birkin recoil from the implicit self-commitment to utter intimacy, and the other falsities and impossibilities; he knows that he must get Ursula to recognize for what it is the inherent matriarchal drive that, obstinately, innocent, takes cover in the feminine devotion to ‘perfect love’” (1976: 86). In his implicit sympathy with Birkin’s ideas, Leavis seems to have neglected the whole spectrum of suggestions offered by the narrative. In striking contrast to Leavis, Stephen Miko is more impressed with Ursula’s insight and with Birkin’s insecurity: “In his awareness of the comedy inherent in Birkin’s overseriousness, Lawrence goes far in meeting the objections that he is forcing his doctrine down the reader’s throat” (242).

25 Here I don’t mean that Ursula holds a totally conventional notion of love. Ursula’s position on love is far from clear and is more complex than what Birkin or some critics regard it to be. On the one hand, she seems to encourage the human qualities of love and understanding, in contrast to Birkin’s apocalyptic vision. On the other hand, we can scarcely discern any difference of her notion of love from that of Birkin’s in the following definition of love she provides for Gudrun: “Love is too human and too little. I believe in something inhuman, of which love is only a little part. I believe that we must fulfill what comes out of the unknown to us, and it is something infinitely more than love. It isn’t so merely human’(WL 534).

26 Lawrence finds the beginnings of the new consciousness in the friendship of Fenimore Cooper’s Chingachook and Natty Bumppo: “What did Cooper dream beyond democracy? Why, in his immortal friendship of Chingachook and Natty Bumppo he dreamed the nucleus of a new society. That is, he dreamed a new relationship. . . deeper than property, deeper than fatherhood, deeper than marriage, deeper than love. So deep that it is loveless” (SCAL 63).

27 Blanchot makes a distinction between comradeship and friendship—while the former stems from military vocabulary and tends towards a transparent collectivity that is profoundly exclusivist, the latter is for Blanchot bound up with “difference”.

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“If comradeship is an experience of the present, of the present of the sublimity of the Now of revolution for the exclusive elite of comrades, then friendship opens an experience of the future. The temporality of the future in friendship is an experience of slow protraction, the future tense as distension, as stretching out (1997: 31). Thus Blanchot designates friendship as a relation of “common strangeness,” or of “infinite discretion,” as if friendship could only occur in parentheses.

The term “areteic ethics” derives from the Greek arête, which is often translated too readily as “virtue,” but which also means “excellence,” “perfection,” and “valor.” An areteic ethic thus implies commitment to the pursuit of excellence, to a perfectionist human ideal. It thus helps characterize the moral standpoint of Lawrence who preferred a Greek-inspired ethic aimed at enhancing character to a Christian morality he considered repressive and degrading.

In his letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Lawrence mentions the principle of “Don’t Follow Me” akin to that of Zarathustra’s for his disciples: “Let us have no personal influence, if possible—nor personal magnetism, as they used to call it, nor persuasion—no “Follow me”—but only “Behold”” (LII 221).

With the similar concern, Blanchot advocates the notion of “weak community” (1988:62), which does not prevent the formation of a “community,” but sees to it that the capacity of the community to “normalize,” to reduce its members to certain common denominators, is kept at a minimum. In his view, as it is for Derrida and Levinas, strong communities are dangerous—to everyone outside the community, to everyone who chooses to dissent from community standards, and even to everyone who belongs contingently to that community.

Nietzsche praises solitude in Beyond Good and Evil: “For solitude is a virtue for us, as a sublime bent and urge for cleanliness which guesses how all contact between man and man—in society—involves inevitable uncleanness. All community makes men—somehow, somewhere, sometime ‘common’” (1966: 226). The solution, according to Nietzsche, is to take to the mountain, where the air is pure and clean, and all that is “common” is left far behind and way below. Of course, Lawrence from time to time appears to adorn solitude, but he as often undercuts isolation as an option. For instance, in Women in Love, whenever Birkin embraces separateness and isolation, he is forced to take to his bed for an extended period.

Cohen asserts that Levinas argues not for altruism, which would be the view of ethics based on a dichotomy between self and other, but for an ethics of infinite responsibility that makes truly independent selves possible. Cohen explicates Levinas’s notion by indicating that a self who is infinitely responsible for the other “must not be mistaken for an ascetic self” (201). While altruism or self-denial is for the sake of the self, in Levinas’s ethics, “it is the other who comes first” (201).

Levinas’s insistence on the awesome responsibility of the self for the other is best conveyed through his frequent quotation from Dostoyevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov: “We are all responsible for everyone else—but I am more responsible than all the others” (OB 146).