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**Lawrence's Vision of Evil:
The Power-Spirit in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love***

Throughout his works D.H. Lawrence has been concerned with universal questions about the meaning of human existence and the forces which control it. Because he saw man's perpetual search for cosmic harmony as an essentially religious quest and because he worked out to his own satisfaction a coherent system for fulfilling that quest, Lawrence himself has been referred to as both "prophet" and "priest". In order to understand fully his doctrine, one must understand also Lawrence's concept of evil and the attendant concept of the power-spirit; it is, after all, that force of evil, generated by man's lust for power, which interferes with the achievement of cosmic harmony. The Laurentian concept of evil perhaps can be best illuminated by an examination of its ethical context and by an analysis of the power-spirit as it is revealed in some significant passages in Lawrence's fiction.

In seeking to determine the meaning of life, Lawrence attempted to discover what heights man is capable of reaching and what he must overcome in order to reach those heights. Thus Lawrence's goal is not very different from that of other religious men. In traditional Christianity, fulfillment comes from communion with God, a state that entails an acknowledgement of one's humble dependence on God's grace and a belief in God's ultimate wisdom and love. For Lawrence, too, fulfillment equals a kind of divine communion, but it is to be reached only through the union of two persons, the blending of loving, spiritual-physical beings. The fact that Lawrence sees this conjoining in religious terms is evident throughout his works, for despite his disagreement with modernized Christianity, he relies heavily upon Christian imagery to describe the degree to which a person achieves or fails to achieve the ideal state. Tom Brangwen in *The Rainbow*

expresses both Lawrence's concept and his technique especially well. He says, "An Angel's got to be more than a human being. An Angel is the soul of man and woman in one: they rise united at the Judgment Day, as one Angel —."¹

In both religious views, the conventional one and Lawrence's unconventional one, the concepts of evil are similar in at least one important aspect: both regard evil as that which hinders the attainment of the good life. Here, especially, a comparison between Lawrence's view and the more traditional religious view is meaningful. The traditional view distinguishes between *moral evil*, that which arises from man's voluntary violation of a moral law, and *non-moral evil*, that which does not proceed directly from man's transgression, e.g., earthquake, famine, and disease. Lawrence is not concerned with the latter kind of evil; in fact, one would presume that he puts such catastrophe and suffering in another category altogether. In the context of Lawrence's own theology, all evil is essentially moral evil (sin) because man permits it to grow in himself and to emanate from him; in that sense it is therefore voluntary.

Aquinas makes a still finer distinction; he holds that evil is wholly negative, a privation of good. Because God makes all things, and because God is holy, evil cannot exist as a separate entity; it is merely the absence of goodness or the presence of goodness to insufficient degree which causes the human organism to fail to achieve its purpose.² To Lawrence, however, evil is more than a negation of good; it is rather a potential danger in the self, an active force waiting to be kindled in man's soul. Indeed, Lawrence surely would agree with Conrad's assertion in *Under Western Eyes* (1910) that "the belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness."

Yet though the source of evil be constant, the quality of evil is not. At one end of Lawrence's spectrum is simple hate, at the other, murder, and between, varying degrees of cruelty. But the concept most significant to Lawrence's vision of evil is what he regards as the cause of all evil — the lust for power, or what he often calls the power-spirit. It is the lust for power, the desire to impose one's will upon another creature, that gives rise to inhuman actions, that thwarts the attaining of the good life, and that ultimately destroys.

Lawrence does not deny that power itself is both natural and important. In *Apocalypse* he expounds his ideas about the natural order and specifies what is essential to maintaining the order and what will destroy it. He speaks of the two kinds of human nature, that which causes man to feel strong, and that which causes man to feel weak, and he declares that it is right that some should have "natural" power. He says, "Power is there, and always will be. As soon as two or three men come together, especially to do something, then power comes into being, and one man is a leader, a master. It is inevitable. Accept it, recognize the natural power in the man." And in another context he says, "In function and process, one man, one part, must of necessity be subordinate to another."³

The problem of evil results, then, not from the existence of natural power, but from a man's trying to move from his static position to assume more power than he naturally has. This unnatural effort fosters a conflict of wills, which in turn creates the force of evil. The process of destruction then begins. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* Lawrence notes the bliss of a relationship in which there is no conflict of wills; he says, "The best thing I have known is the stillness of accomplished marriage, when one possesses one's own soul in silence, side by side with the amiable spouse, and has left off craving and raving and being only half of one's self."⁴ But he describes "the worst thing" in a letter of February 1, 1915, to Lady Ottoline Morrell:

The great serpent to destroy, is the will to power: the desire for one man to have some dominion over his fellow-men. Let us have no personal influence, if possible — not personal magnetism, as they used to call it, not persuasion — no 'Follow me' — but only 'Behold.' And a man shall not come to save his own soul. Let his soul go to hell. He shall come because he knows that his own soul is not the be-all and the end-all, but that all souls of all things do but compose the body of God, and that God indeed shall *Be*.

The same power-lust that destroys the unity of two persons and that defiles man's soul becomes even more horrifying when it burgeons in society. Lawrence therefore sees danger in the inherent evil of popular religion, which he calls "a religion of self-glorification and power, forever!" He specifically sees evil in the Christian religion, and in a letter to S.S. Koteliansky, April 8, 1915, he writes, "It has become, I think now, a supreme wickedness to set up a Christ worship as Dostoevsky did: it is the outcome of an evil will, disguising itself in terms of love." Lawrence sees two kinds of Christianity, however; one

kind focuses on "Jesus and the command: Love one another!" and the other focuses on the Apocalypse, an "expression of frustrated power lust".⁵

But he sees also the social manifestation of evil in industrial society. He describes in *The Rainbow*, for example, the mines of his childhood. Ursula considers the colliery and says, "How terrible it was. . . human bodies and lives subjected in slavery to that symmetrical monster of the colliery."

Lawrence knew that the evil so deplorable to him was not always easily recognized. Indeed, it was particularly distasteful to him when it was disguised. He once wrote, "I am so sick of people: they preserve an evil, bad, separating spirit under the warm cloak of good works."⁶ And even laws are forms of evil in disguise, as he says in his essay "Study of Thomas Hardy":

Law is a very, very clumsy and mechanical instrument, and we people are very, very delicate and subtle beings. Therefore I only ask that the law shall leave me alone for as much as possible. I insist that no law shall have immediate power over me, either for my good or my will. And I would wish that many laws be unmade, and no more laws made. Let there be a parliament of men and women for the careful and gradual unmaking of laws.⁷

Perhaps to Lawrence the ultimate social expression of evil is to be found in war. And World War I not only strengthened his view of evil, it further defined it. He wrote, "Prussia is now evil through and through. Her mood is now evil. But we reap what we have sowed. It is, as with a child. If with a sullen, evil soul one provokes an evil mood in the child, there is destruction."⁸ Lawrence considers the immediate causes of such social manifestations of evil the result of an unnatural order. As the weak begin to feel "inordinately conceited", they begin to express their rampant hate of the obvious strong ones, the men in worldly power. Thus "the weak and the pseudo-humble are going to wipe all worldly power, glory, and riches off the face of the earth, and then they, the truly weak, are going to reign" (*Apocalypse*, p.17).

For Lawrence the forces of evil which are multiplied by men in the mass are also those forces which break the contact of man with human brotherhood. Evil is rampant in cities, in industry, and in Christianity, and all power which is not associated with the brotherhood is evil. Lawrence's view of evil is, of course, related to his view of goodness. As Whitman sings of the body electric, the open road, and the love of

comrades, Lawrence asks for an embracing of personal, sensual love, for freedom of the soul, but, finally, for a denial of the power-spirit, which creates all evil.

Lawrence's characters who embody evil are power-obsessed persons whose instincts have been denied gratification. They are not unlike Victor Hugo's abbé in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, who has denied the usual passions of life to become an eminent church scholar; his ascetic existence is threatened when he is trapped between his rekindled sexual wishes and his religious standards. It is significant that his first effort to resolve the conflict is to develop a hateful attitude. In this case, the power impulse is apparently directed toward the achievement of an ego-ideal which the abbé has set up for himself. Freud has said that the neurosis which evokes cruelty often results from the unconscious effort of man to satisfy an ideal picture of himself, "which is in its very nature, impossible of satisfaction".⁹ Lawrence, too, holds that the source of human misery is man's picture making and his attempt to live according to the picture.¹⁰ The image a man creates for himself usually is based on what he thinks he must become in order to achieve cosmic knowledge. Like the abbé, the Prussian officer, in Lawrence's story by the same name, releases a force of evil in the form of sadism, a substitution for the gratification of latent homosexuality.

Lawrence's belief that the source of evil is the power-lust, which is initiated in the unconscious, is clearly seen in "St. Mawr" as Lou Witt perceives evil: "There was no relief. The whole world was enveloped in one great flood. All the nations, the white, the brown, the black, the yellow, all were immersed in the strange tide of evil that was subtly, irresistibly rising. *No one, perhaps, deliberately wished it.* Nearly every individual wanted peace and a good time all round; everybody to have a good time" [Italics mine].¹¹ Lawrence seems to be saying that evil is not consciously motivated, or as Wundt has expressed it, that "morality has roots deep in the underground, and what man may call his will is often but a shallow covering of unconscious motivation greater and more powerful than choice."¹²

Thus Lawrence's view is as close to the principles of depth psychology as it is to the older ethical and theological tenets. St. Augustine explains that man fell, not because of an inherently evil nature, but because of an evil choice in his will, a choice which the bad angels had made earlier. Lawrence, however, more like Freud, removes

the problem of evil from the exclusive realm of theology and attempts to explain it also in clinical terms. The psychologist Hadfield, who was particularly concerned with the agreement between psychology and theology, says that the problem of evil in the world cannot be solved until man understands the impulses from which evil springs. And psychologists generally suggest that bringing the repressed desires to the surface will resolve the conflict and will restore peace to the disturbed personality, thus, in Lawrence's view, conquering "evil". Lawrence will say further that evil will be eradicated when the power-lust abates and when man accepts both the otherness of each man and his own natural function.

Lawrence's view of evil is consistent throughout his works; however, the most concentrated expression of this view is found in the major fiction produced during his so-called dark period, in the novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Here again, the expression of evil must be studied in its relation to Lawrence's whole religious concept. A balanced male-female union is the means by which one achieves a mystic communion, and it is the status one seeks in his natural function. In both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* Lawrence delineates this doctrine through various pairs of people; whether each pair achieves a mystic communion depends upon their willingness to accept their own natural functions and to forsake the power-impulse.

The saga of the Brangwen family begins with Tom and Lydia, who after a series of failures, finally reach the sought-for state. Lawrence describes the process:

And always the light of the transfiguration burned on in their hearts. He went his way, as before, she went her way, to the rest of the world there seemed no change. But to the two of them there was the perpetual wonder of the transfiguration.

.....
 But he knew her, he knew her meaning, without understanding. What she said, what she spoke, this was a blind gesture on her part. In herself she walked strong and clear, he knew her, he saluted her, was with her.

.....
 What did it matter that Anna Lensky was born to Lydia and Paul? God was her father and her mother. He had passed through the married pair without fully making Himself known to them.

Now He was declared to Brangwen and to Lydia Brangwen, as they stood together. When at last they had joined hands, the house was finished, and the Lord took up His abode. And they were glad.¹³

Tom Brangwen's relationship with Anna, Lydia's child by a former marriage, also is plagued with conflicts before a natural state is reached. In the beginning the jealous little Anna resents Tom Brangwen and his relationship with her mother. A particularly moving scene is that in which the child, who will not accept her natural function as child, sobs for her mother who is isolated in another part of the house in childbirth. Her stepfather becomes angry when she will not let the housekeeper prepare her for bed, and he himself, "blind, intent, irritated", undresses her while she, "stiff, overpowered, violated", sobs chokingly for her mother. Tom "wanted her to stop, he wanted it all to stop, to become natural." It is significant that as Tom and Lydia come into harmony, Anna becomes peaceful. "Her father and her mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between."

When Anna marries Will Brangwen, the first horror of evil in the novel is revealed. Although at first it seems as though they, too, will reach the mystic state, they do not succeed. After a while Anna realizes the truth: "Her life, her freedom, was sinking under the silent grip of his physical will. He wanted her in his power. He wanted to devour her at leisure, to have her. At length she realised that her sleep was a long ache and a weariness and exhaustion, because of his will fastened upon her, as he lay there beside her during the night" (p.182).

Because of the conflict in Will's soul between his strong sexuality and his passion for spiritual transcendence, he nurtures his power-spirit and treats cruelly at one time or another everyone to whom he is emotionally attached. He is described as "blind as a subterranean thing", ignoring the human mind, running after "his own dark-souled desires", and "following his own tunneling rose". As soon as Anna has a second child to fuss over, he tries to take control of Ursula, the first-born. The evil generated by his lust for power is especially apparent when Will takes his little daughter to the fair and frightens her so badly in one of the thrill-rides that she is physically ill. At that time his face is "evil and beautiful" to her, and "for the first time in her life a disillusion came over her, something cold and isolating."

Although Will learns to control his evil impulses toward Ursula, as he has learned to do toward Anna, his conflicts always will exist in some degree. Even later, when Ursula is a mature woman, they have several bitter scenes. In *Women in Love* a much older Will struggles with his

perverted desire to dominate others. Lawrence tells us that after one of those unaccountable conflicts with Ursula "it was as if he were possessed with all the devils." He literally hates her, "as if his only reality were in hating her to the last degree. He had all hell in his heart."

Ursula's Lesbian relationship in *The Rainbow* with Winifred Inger also bears evil because it, too, is unnatural. Winifred's power-spirit is obvious. "Proud and free as a man", ardent in supporting women's rights, Winifred, an athletically superior person, emphasizes her unwillingness to play a natural, submissive role: "As if I were any man's idea! As if I exist because a man has an idea of me! As if I will be betrayed by him, lend him my body as an instrument for his idea, to be a mere apparatus of his dead theory....They are like serpents trying to swallow themselves because they are hungry." Winifred's desire for power succeeds when Ursula is most vulnerable, immediately after Anton Skrebensky, Ursula's first love, has gone to Africa. Ursula responds to the friendship of her school-mistress, who delights in "having Ursula in her charge, in giving things to the girl, in filling and enriching her life". But Ursula's will is strong, too, and she does not succumb entirely to the powerful will of Winifred. Significantly, Ursula ponders the roles of lambs and lions, symbolic respectively of the naturally passive and the naturally forceful, and she concludes that hers "will still be a lion's heart when it rose from death, a fiercer lion she would be, a surer, knowing herself different from and separate from the great, conflicting universe that was not herself." Eventually, then, as "a heavy, clogged sense of deadness began to gather upon her, from the other woman's contact," Ursula rejects Winifred. She wants "some fine intensity, instead of this heavy cleaving of moist clay, that cleaves because it has no life of its own."

Unfortunately, Ursula and Anton are incapable of achieving the perfect state also. Anton would impose his world of Africa on Ursula, a world she cannot accept, and the conflict of wills fosters Ursula's cruelty and results in their separation. As they part, he looks at her, "at the closed face" which he thinks "so cruel".

The conflicts become more violent in *Women in Love*, however, and there evil reaches a point of astounding proportion. Again, it is always seen arising from the unnatural conflict of wills, from the rebellion of one person against another who tries to sustain dominion. Ursula

expresses this rebelliousness when she says, "Oh it makes me so cross, this assumption of male superiority! And it is such a lie! One wouldn't mind if there were any justification for it. It is...a lust for bullying — a real *Wille zur Macht* — so base, so petty." A later conversation between Ursula and Birkin reveals again the fear of domination:

"Oh, yes, Adam kept Eve in the indestructible paradise, when he kept her single with himself, like a star in its orbit."

"Yes — yes —" cried Ursula, pointing her finger at him. "There you are — a star in its orbit! A satellite — a satellite of Mars — that's what she is to be! There — there — you've given yourself away! You want a satellite, Mars and his satellite! You've said it — you've said it — you've dished yourself!"¹⁴

But Birkin knows what he really wants. "What I want is a strange conjunction with you...not meeting and mingling; — you are quite right: — but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings; — as the stars balance each other." Lawrence considers Birkin's desire the natural one, and his goal realistic. Ursula and Birkin succeed because neither is a neurotic who finds sublimation in the unnatural urge for power.

The opposite has been true of Birkin's relationship with Hermione, who is depicted as evil and willful. Birkin says to her, "But your passion is a lie. It isn't passion at all, it is your will. You want to clutch things and have them in your power. You want to have things in your power. And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, *to know*." The evil that is created by Hermione's power-spirit is evident as she contemplates her antagonist Birkin:

"He is not a man, he is treacherous, not one of us," said itself over in Hermione's consciousness. And her soul writhed in the black subjugation to him, because of his power to escape, to exist other than she did, she was not consistent, not a man, less than a man. She hated him in a despair that shattered her and broke her down, so that she suffered sheer dissolution like a corpse, and was unconscious of everything save the horrible sickness of dissolution that was taking place within her, body and soul (p.104).

Hermione's psychic conflict doubtless has arisen from her inability to reconcile two desires: marriage to Birkin and the achievement of her ego-ideal, one who has complete knowledge. But in order to become her ideal self, she must completely dedicate herself to intellect; hence

she cannot reconcile the sensuality and submission of marriage with the spirituality of her ego-ideal. Both impulses are partially sublimated in the desire for power, which precipitates evil. Gerald Crich perceptively observes Hermione, who "in her large, stiff, sinister grace, leaned near him frightening, as if she were not responsible for what she might do. He knew a certain danger in her, a convulsive madness."

But Gerald himself is obsessed with the power-spirit, perhaps more so than is Hermione. Gerald and Gudrun are never to achieve the unity which Ursula and Birkin achieve, because both are inflexibly strong-willed, and neither will learn the lesson from Birkin and Ursula. Indeed, Gerald always has been motivated by the power-spirit. When he takes over his father's coal firm, "the convulsion of death ran through the old system. He had all his life been tortured by a furious and destructive demon, which possessed him sometimes like an insanity. This temper now entered like a virus into the firm, and there were cruel eruptions." Gerald tries to kill Gudrun and fails, and the irresolvable conflict leads to his own destruction. Gudrun knows that Gerald's death is the alternative to a conflict he is incapable of resolving. Gerald, then, as industrial magnate, lover, and would-be murderer, represents a fusion of both social and spiritual evil, each of which arises from a psychotic urge for power.

Gudrun is like Gerald in that she fears subjugation. At one point, when she fears that she is in Gerald's power, she hates him "with a force that she wondered did not kill him". Consequently, Gudrun turns toward a person more perverted than either she or Gerald; it is Herr Loerke, whom Birkin describes to Gerald as "a good many stages further than either you or I can go..., stages further in social hatred. He lives like a rat, in the river of corruption, just where it falls over into the bottomless pit. He's further on than we are. He hates the ideal more acutely. He hates the ideal utterly, yet it still dominates him." Lawrence meticulously portrays Loerke as "the rock-bottom of all life". He is neither merely cruel nor even vindictively murderous; he only "uses" people, dispassionately, aesthetically. He has completely disengaged himself from any emotional associations with humanity. Like Hermione, but to a greater degree than she, he embodies the corruption and deterioration that result from an excess of intellect. Thus in choosing Loerke, Gudrun relinquishes all hope for redemption.

Loerke is described as a subterranean creature, but other, less vile, creatures also figure prominently in Lawrence's presentation of evil. Animals are often seen as victims of humans with unnatural power impulses. In fact, one of the first intimations of Gerald's evil nature is given as he treats his stallion with extreme cruelty. Also when Gudrun and Winifred Crich sketch the little girl's pet dog, Looloo, he sits "all the time with the fretfulness of ages on his dark velvety face". Winifred and Gudrun have violated the dog's right to be a separate creature; indeed, Gudrun has said, "Let us draw Looloo, and see if we can get his Looliness, shall we?" Winifred seems to sense the wickedness, for she rushes to embrace the dog "in penitence, as if she were doing him some subtle injury". Still again, Gudrun's evil lust for power is revealed as she tries to entice Winifred's pet rabbit, Bismark, from his hutch:

Gudrun stood for a moment astounded by the thunderstorm that had sprung into being in her grip. Then her colour came up, a heavy rage came over her like a cloud. She stood shaken as a house in a storm, and utterly overcome. Her heart was arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity of this struggle, her wrists were badly scored by the claws of the beast, a heavy cruelty welled up in her (pp.242-243).

Ursula, on the other hand, reveals an understanding of the natural function of subordinate creatures. She says:

It is impudence to look at them as if they were the same as human beings. They are of another world. How stupid anthropomorphism is! Gudrun is really impudent, insolent, making herself the measure of everything, making everything come down to human standards. Rupert is quite right, human beings are boring, painting the universe with their own image. The universe is non-human, thank God. It seemed to her irreverence, destructive of all true life, to make little Lloyd Georges of the birds. It was such a lie towards the robins and such a defamation (p.269).

Because Ursula has no apparent psychic conflict and consequently no exaggerated lust for power, she is able to view the cosmos in the proper perspective. And with Birkin she is able to reach the state of mystic communion, which is the natural destiny of man, or, as Lawrence himself says, "the end-all and the be-all".

The unfortunate characters in Lawrence's fiction who fall short of perfection do so for virtually the same reason: they all are unable to overcome evil, the barrier that inevitably arises between man and goodness. Evil is not external, but rather is created in the soul. Viewed in the context of Lawrence's total doctrine, evil, the life-negator, is finally a manifestation of that human impulse toward power.

Footnotes

- 1 *The Rainbow* (1915; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1961), pp.134-135; all subsequent quotations from *The Rainbow* refer to this edition.
- 2 See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Philosophical Texts*, trans. Thomas Gilby (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp.163-180.
- 3 *Apocalypse* (1931; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1966), pp.24, 86.
- 4 *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) in *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p.69.
- 5 *Apocalypse*, p.16.
- 6 Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, August 16, 1915. All quotations from Lawrence's letters are taken from *The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: The Viking Press, 1962).
- 7 *Phoenix*, ed. Edward McDonald (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), p.405.
- 8 Letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, February 1, 1915.
- 9 See Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-1966) XVII, 86-92.
- 10 See Lawrence's review of *The Social Consciousness of Trigant Burrow* in *Phoenix*, p.380.
- 11 *The Tales of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Martin Secker, 1934), p.612.
- 12 Wilhelm Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology*, trans. Edward L. Schaub (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916), p.206.
- 13 *The Rainbow*, pp.91-12. An example of Lawrence's allusions to the Bible as a means of emphasizing the religious quality of his doctrine can be found in the words "Now He was declared," a reference to the Abraham story.
- 14 *Women in Love* (1920; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.266; all subsequent quotations from *Women in Love* refer to this edition.