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D.H. Lawrence

Diane Hostetler
Denison University

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Emerging from under the bed, Editor Diane Hostetler puts prophet and artist on the coffee table in her discussion of . . .

D. H. LAWRENCE

BY DIANE HOSTETLER

In the 20's, critics and readers alike tried furtively to keep D. H. Lawrence under the bed. A new generation is now flaunting him upon the coffee table. His plea for a renaissance of the body, which appeals to the lurid mind of the modern sophisticate, is still being misinterpreted. His come-back strongly suggests commercial enterprise, rather than a penetrating re-evaluation of his challenging philosophy.

He deserves a better fate. The prophet in Lawrence must be divorced from the artist.

First let us consider his unsystematic, paradoxical philosophy. Since Lawrence anticipated the current problems of a mechanistic age, he has been most misunderstood in his role as prophet. The philosophy he formulated as a solution to these problems was derived from his prophetic insights. His criticism of the denial of physical instincts has particularly challenged traditional thinking in a world geared to science. Lawrence felt that society had substituted an artificial being for the real, unified man. The artificial man has been made to deny his instincts; whereas the real man acknowledges and uses them. By tending to neglect the body and concentrating on the mind, science has destroyed the fundamental unity of man and has made us conscious of only our mental motives. This incomplete knowledge has induced paralysis and sterility. To restore the real man, man's physical instincts must be taken out of the mind and returned to where they belong—the body.

Did this mean Lawrence was anti-intellectual? He has been considered so by many critics. A complete dependence upon science—he felt—perverted the uses of the intellect. We did not know enough, nor did we know it in the right way. A life based upon

reason produced a distorted view of mankind. Lawrence was striving for a balance in a rational world that had neglected the physical element in man. Frequently, he was forced to go to the extreme in order to be heard.

Lawrence was hailed as the great literary exponent of psychoanalysis when *Sons and Lovers* appeared in 1913. His sensitive treatment of the Oedipus complex impressed psychologists all over Europe. While both he and Freud became interested in introspection, their interest was stimulated independently of each other. Lawrence was fascinated with introspection's mystery; Freud, with its psychological usefulness. Frederick J. Hoffman, a critic of Freud's influence upon contemporary literature, says in his essay, *Lawrence's Quarrel with Freud*:

Lawrence disapproved of Freud because he thought the latter had brought into consciousness what had best remain unconscious. . . . Understanding anything is the undeliberate functioning of ourselves as organic and individual beings . . . The mother-child relationship is vital so long as it remains on the plane of unconsciousness. . . . Lawrence always credited psychoanalysis with value as a descriptive science. Similarly, he distrusted the analytic situation; it placed too much emphasis upon complete submission on the part of the patient. Lawrence was unwilling to have any one person submit entirely to another; such a condition would destroy the organic individuality which gives life to so many of Lawrence's fictional heroes.

To Lawrence, then, Freud's psychoanalysis was too deterministic. While appreciating its worth as a descriptive science, he grew wary when it was applied. Psychoanalysis became merely the substitute of one kind of mechanistic illusion for another. Because their probing of the unconscious entailed an examination of sex instincts, both Lawrence and Freud have been read on that basis. The careful reader discovers, however, that they did not view sex in the same way: the novelist saw the unity of sex in its natural functions; the psychologist saw its component parts whose functions should be analyzed.

Lawrence and Freud agreed, however, that the normal sex life of man had been repressed and neglected. Lawrence traced this to the fall of Adam and Eve, to the apple incident which forced an awareness of their sex. Down through the ages, Christianity has reinforced this repression by emphasizing the spiritual Jesus. In *The Man Who Died*, Lawrence had the resurrected Jesus find the physical fulfillment for his body that he had neglected during his earthly life.

At this point the reader may ask—what did the prophet offer as a solution to this mind-ridden world? Lawrence formulated a creed which called for the reinstatement of the body and of the heart:

My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. . . . All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without the fribbling intervention of the mind, or moral, or whatnot. I conceive a man's body as a kind of flame, like a candle flame, forever upright and yet flowing; and the intellect is just the light that is shed on to the things around. And I am not so much concerned with the things around—which is really mind—but with the mystery of the flame forever flowing.

The primitive in man, then, must be reclaimed so that the dark and mysterious sex instincts can be acknowledged .

Lawrence realized we could not return to West African primitivism, so he advanced the idea of blood brotherhood. *Women in Love* and *The Plumed Serpent* illustrated this relationship between men. It definitely was neither sexual nor homosexual. It was a mystical-physical love—the only kind of love that could revitalize us. But he was not entirely satisfied with this; and as he neared death, he realized he had not yet perfected his creed of returning to the unconscious.

In the unabridged *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, published in 1928, Lawrence made his most complete statement about love. In it, he developed his doctrine of "phallic consciousness." He selected the sex act because it was the only form in the modern world that had maintained a polarity. Upon the claim that men and women were forever different, Lawrence began building an unusual, contradictory "system of philosophy."

To restore man's vitality, woman had to intercede, for she was the creature closest to the primitive forces in the world. She had to understand that the mystical and spiritual powers in the sex act of love could restore man's confidence. What he proposed was no obscene mass rape. It was true fulfillment through love, and most important of all, through tenderness. It was the old heart and blood hammer-hammer, but now it existed between a man and a woman. In it, Lawrence contended he had found the true, unconscious life for which he had so long been searching.

Lawrence, therefore, was trying to restore man as a unified being by emphasizing his physical aspects, but he was called a sex-

fiend and censored without discrimination. The biographical vultures who hung around his grave in the 1930's contributed to this misunderstanding. As Anthony West so nicely put it: "As soon as Lawrence was dead, there was a rush of wounded and abandoned people who were concerned to present to the world the picture of that golden period in which Lawrence found the center of his being in them." Lawrence never totally accepted the necessary isolation of a creator. Like a child starved for affection, he reached out to all who responded to him. He had the kind of personality that attracted people, but also the kind that rejected them when they showed signs of human failings. Nevertheless, Lawrence remained a great personality, sufficiently so to intensely dislike the "personality cult" that was, and still is, running rampant in modern society.

Perhaps the main philosophic difficulty in Lawrence was that he was a converted Puritan in theory; and he had all the convert's zeal of having "found the way." Tuberculosis accentuated his extreme sensitivity to the world around him. Because he was so much more aware than others, he was forced to draw away from society and focus his observation upon himself. His relationship with the universe became personal—a violent I-thou relationship that screamed of egotism. A reading of this introspective world of D. H. Lawrence captivates or antagonizes, for his world implies a dismissal of accepted societal codes. His philosophy is a dangerous one if put into the wrong hands. Unless the reader is willing to enter a new dimension of thinking, he cannot appreciate the value of Lawrence's insights.

But what about the artist in Lawrence? Up until now, the twentieth century has been more intrigued with his prophetic philosophy than appreciative of his literary ability. His use of the introspective method was a definite contribution to writing techniques, for it encouraged subsequent novelists to break with the conventional forms. Let us examine his writing to see how he so skillfully adapted his style to his philosophy.

Hardy and James had perfected the novel of character development, so Lawrence tried to evolve a new form—a form that could accommodate his introspective method. He introduced the novel of exploration. Generally, the novelist as an explorer sets out to express graphically those undercurrents that are present in his time, but which have not yet been made conscious. If the novelist is honest and lucky, he will open these submerged channels of thought. But because of this sense of mission, the novelist often becomes the

object of hatred, for he may take his readers where they do not want to go. Lawrence once explained what he was attempting to do:

It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead.

Thus, his novels tend to lead our sympathies right into his personal world. His motto was "Art for my sake," so it is not strange that we, as spectators, often rebel at our Virgilian guide.

No matter where his imagination may lead us, however, we can never forget the beauty of his poetic prose. He appeals to our unconscious. We are lulled into acquiescence by the rhythmic beat of the flowing words. Lawrence has always been recognized as a gifted writer, but because people have not distinguished between his prophetic philosophy and his artistic ability, he has suffered.

Provoking startling ideas, too strikingly and too soon, Lawrence has indeed been what one critic described as "a man so far ahead on the road that he seemed small." Because he was always revising, expanding, or completely changing his ideas, he has been severely criticized. The present publicity he is being subjected to could be of further detriment to his already delicate literary reputation. If he is going to be placed boldly and daringly upon the coffee table, he will receive as much misunderstanding as he did from those who tried to hide him under the bed. When people exclaim with an obscene glint in their eyes, "So *you're* reading *D. H. Lawrence!*" it is obvious where their interest lies. But when they start asking with honest intellectual curiosity, "What do you think *D. H. Lawrence really* means?" this unusual novelist will begin to receive the respect that has been so long overdue.
