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Untouchable Fullness: Male Friendship in the novels of Willa Cather and D.H. Lawrence

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Untouchable Fullness:
Male Friendship in the novels of Willa Cather and D.H. Lawrence

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by
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for Pops,
for loving me well.

Introduction

“Men who have been poured from the battlefield into the hospital are like molten metal, and like molten metal they cool quickly and take strange shapes.”(p. 191) Enid Bagnold, a writer and former nurse, penned these words while living next to a convalescent home after the end of the Great War. While there, she observed the return of the men sent out to fight four years prior, many of whom, mangled as they were by the physical and psychological wounds they sustained on the front lines, had taken on the ‘strange shapes’ of which she speaks. Sara Cole, in her 2003 book *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* speaks at length about the incongruity of the returning soldier, and the effect that the image of this man, broken by war, had upon society at large.

“The image of the former soldier in a civilian context permeated post-war culture, a figure of pathos, simultaneously alone and associated with (lost) male community...the idea of brokenness crossed into a wider conception of intellectual and spiritual debilitation, with a particular resonance for modernism, which famously emphasizes breaks, fragments, disconnection, the shattering of stable constructs.” (pgs. 191-192)

Examples of this phenomenon of brokenness permeating the greater cultural milieu abound, with characters like Septimus in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* blurring the distinction between the memories of war and the reality of everyday life, the marked absence of the titular character in *Jacob’s Room*, or Eliot’s *Hollow Men*, still living but only as walking shells of what they once were.

Cole, in her particular study of the First World War and its aftershocks, investigates various literary characterizations of male friendship from that time period in order to gain a better sense of how the broader cultural understanding of homosocial camaraderie changed with the advent of post-war dissolution. Speaking to this change in perception, she writes,

“...although comradeship was consistently hailed as the saving grace of a world in crisis, the precariousness of personal friendship in the face of the war’s annihilating power in fact made it the most vulnerable and dislocating of all relations...Male intimacy ultimately becomes the vehicle not for communal strength, but for individual isolation and bereavement, and the embittered voice that rises from the trenches is specifically rendered as the voice of the permanently scarred friend.” (pg. 18)

Cole characterizes the male friend as a fundamentally tragic figure, failing not only on the broader cultural stage to assuage a ‘world in crisis’ but also on the personal front, with the individuals engaged in the formation of those bonds ultimately being left destitute. As much as this image of the isolated friend is traceable as a phenomenon in a wide variety of fiction from that time period, I was curious about the ways in which this particular characterization of male friendship, as a thing ultimately found lacking, is upended rather than enforced within the post-war era of modernist literature.

This line of questioning brought me to two authors in particular, D.H. Lawrence and Willa Cather, both of whom center the bond shared between men in their various works. Stylistically, the two could not be more distinct from one another, which is one of the primary reasons for my pairing them together for this project. Where Cather’s voice as a writer is gentle and almost

dream-like in its lilting exploration of tangible space and shared intimacy, Lawrence writes with a sharp edge, diamond-hard in its often brutal exposure of life's harshest realities.

Their writing on the subject of friendship is no less distinct. Willa Cather's novel *The Professor's House* finds its narrative center in the friendship between Tom Outland and Professor Godfrey St. Peter. It is unique in that the entirety of the book is told by way of tryptic retrospective, with Tom Outland having died in the war and the professor subsequently formalizing, in written word, the exciting stories the young man told of his time as a ranch hand. The two men are presented as kindred spirits, separated only by age and educational background but managing nonetheless to form a lively bond that deftly wends its way through the spheres of the academic, the social, the professional, and the personal. The bond that they form, however elastic it may be in its application, does not fall directly within any of the aforementioned spheres of existence. Rather, their friendship exists slightly above the stuff of life, marking it as distinct, even as it interacts with these different modes of being.

Women In Love, published by D.H. Lawrence in 1920, tells a very different kind of story, with two couples stand at the heart of the narrative. The men of the relationship, Birkin and Gerald respectively, form a bond as they each pursue one of the Brangwen sisters. The majority of the text, however, is spent plumbing the depths of each individual's mental interiority. The narration is exhaustive, chronicling every winding passage of their interior complexities. Birkin and Gerald, unlike the men of the previous novel, do not come together easily despite there being a shared sense of magnetism beneath their interactions. Throughout the course of the novel, the two men begin to see more of each other in the midst of their individual psychological explorations, coming together in an especially unique way at the novel's midpoint.

Chapter 1

In 1922, Willa Cather published a short selection of her writings comprised of both essays and personal stories entitled 'Not Under Forty.' The preface, not to mention the title itself in its bold declaration of who is and who is not meant to read the text, draws a distinct line in the sand. In the preface, Cather writes that "The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts..."(pg. 1), likely referencing the nearly simultaneous publishing of three texts that later became associated with the post-WWI modernist literary movement. These three texts, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, and Eliot's *The Wasteland* are emblematic of the Modernist tradition in their break with classically cohesive forms of storytelling especially in relation to post-war ennui, social unrest, and personal loss. The historic rupture, evinced in both the devastation of war and the revelation of new literary stylings, is echoed throughout the six pieces presented in the work in their varied focuses ranging from intimate histories to more wide-ranging thoughts on literary trends. The first story, 'A Chance Meeting,' details the mingling of two generations, with the history of the elder enriching the imagination and inspiring the awe of a much younger Cather. The older woman in the story, it is soon discovered, is the niece of Gustave Flaubert and is thus, by extension, connected intimately to the life and work of Flaubert's contemporaries. Preeminent among these literary connections is Honoré de Balzac, that shining emblem of 19th century realism. There is a generational divide standing between the two women, separating an older mode of storytelling from that which, in 1922, was just beginning to emerge. Though the world, according to Cather, may have broken in two, delineating sharply between pre-war literary

traditions and those that followed in the war's wake, this newly-forged friendship exists with one foot in both worlds. From this vantage point, there is a sacrality to Cather's understanding of the past that necessitates its preservation that is echoed in both her personal stories, like the one mentioned above, and her work as a novelist.

Sacred though it may be, the literary history preceding Cather's work is not immune to critique, as evidenced by the essay that follows closely on the heels of the first story. 'The Novel *Déméuble*' finds its primary target in the realist style, with Balzac serving as the archetype of the author single-minded in his cataloguing of the material. While her words are sharp, at one point stating that "The city he built on paper is already crumbling,"(p. 47) Cather's proposal is to substitute one method of seeing with another, rather than to abandon all thought of the realists. For Balzac, every inch of the world he inhabits is described in excruciating detail, falling under the glaring eye of an all-encompassing literary microscope. Cather's resistance to this quantitative impulse can be understood in her reference to a quote from Alexandre Dumas at the end of her essay which reads, "...to make a drama, a man needed one passion, and four walls."(pg. 51). The issue is not so much whether certain images or figures within a specific piece of literature should be elevated above others but is instead a question of selectivity when it comes to that act of elevation. In an appeal for fiction characterized by imagination rather than primarily by physical object, Cather writes, "The novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished."(pg. 43) In Balzac's exhaustive detailing of the material world, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe value to any one object or experience, as all are given the same level of attention. What Balzac manages to achieve in his writing then, from a Catherian vantage point, can be understood as a kind of arbitrary leveling of all things. This achievement

on the part of Balzac leaves little room for this or that to be understood as especially important or worthy of the reader's attention. Cather's literary focus is more specific in its simplicity, not only allowing room for there to be traceable motifs throughout her novels, but also ensuring that the relationships standing at the center of her work are not diminished by the presence of what could be characterized as a linguistically, and distinctly Balzacian, cluttered room. Cather's impulse toward emphasis via simplification¹ is echoed in the lectures of Godfrey St. Peter in her 1925 novel *The Professor's House*,

“Every act had some imaginative end...The Christian theologians went over the books of the Law, like great artists, getting splendid effects by excision. They reset the stage with more space and mystery, throwing all the light upon a few sins of great dramatic value...”(pg. 56)

A brief glance over the books of the Bible detailing Old Testament law, whether they outline rituals for bodily purification, animal sacrifice, or specific measurements for the temple, highlights their inherently granular nature. The 'splendid effects' that St. Peter references are dependent on there being 'more space and mystery' on this particular stage, without the clutter of peripheral detail. By limiting their focus to a select number of principles, these theologians are demonstrating a tendency for narrative and moral structure stripped of extraneous elements. Cather's insistence on an excisive literary approach however, understood in her echoing of Dumas' 'to make a drama, a man needed one passion, and four walls,' is not purely an aesthetic choice. Rather, it is also done in order to achieve a central literary goal, namely to direct the reader's attention toward the relationships that stand at the center of so much of her work. Cather's excision, in her favoring certain relationships over others in their particularity, allows

for what St. Peter refers to as ‘more space and mystery’ to be explored within those specific relationships. With less to clutter the narrative stage, Cather is able to paint the friendship between Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland, which stands at the center of *The Professor’s House*, in an increasingly complex and multifaceted light.

Scott Herring, in an article published in 2006 entitled ‘Catherian Friendship: How Not To Do the History of Homosexuality’ discusses Cather’s characterization of this particular male friendship to surprising effect. Prior to Herring’s article, there had been much speculation as to the nature of the male bonds found at the centre of a number of Cather’s novels. Predictably, much of this conjecture had asserted that the bonds presented in the novels were little more than closeted homosexual yearnings, operating under the more culturally palatable patina of friendship. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her 1989 essay ‘Willa Cather and Others,’ holds to one such explanation, focusing in on the connection between St. Peter and Outland, “What becomes visible in this double refraction are in the first place, of course, the shadows of the brutal suppressions by which a lesbian love did not in Willa Cather’s time and culture freely become visible as itself.”(pg. 175) Responding to this statement specifically, Scott Herring writes, “But might we pause on the apparently historical inevitability of Sedgwick’s ‘of course?’” (pg. 68) This pregnant pause necessitates a divergence from Sedgwick’s pre-supposed line of thought, and thus veers off the track of an assumed hetero/homo binary distinction as the central tension in Cather’s novel. Where Sedgwick’s theories are nuanced in their own right, Herring takes us in a new direction, carving out a figurative space that allows friendship to exist as itself rather than simply as a stifled homosexual cry for visibility.

“Cather, I believe, provokes us to think about something other than closeted cross-identification, and something more than the literary championing of urban sexual identity. In lieu of either expression or repression, her friendly male-male relations instead challenge readers to imagine spaces that surpass the artifices of a visible subculture (homosexuality) and dominant culture itself (heterosexuality).”
(pg. 69)

Herring, by identifying the spaces inhabited by the Professor and his companion Tom as something other than the closet, cuts across the historically over-determined ‘of course’ found in Sedgwick’s analysis. In so doing Herring manages to avoid categorization as classically ‘queer’ in his sensibilities, offering us a reading that manages to subvert what has become an assumptive homosexual subtext. At the same time, however, Herring also avoids interpreting the narrative in question under a strictly heteronormative rubric, opting for a third, albeit much less well-traveled, interpretation that allows Tom and the professor to exist in a sort of liminal space between the two extremes.

“...under the auspices of intense study, the two hole themselves up in the attic, take supreme delight in their new alliance, and cultivate an intellectual world of ‘alternative domesticities’ well beyond the protocols of national manhood or a marriage plot...we are instead presented with a productively antisocial male space admittedly devoid of women, but also indifferent to the social impurities of heterosexual production.” (pgs. 75-77)

The liminal space that Herring spotlights is given flesh in the Professor’s preferred, and sparsely furnished, upstairs study. Where St. Peter’s downstairs office is characterized as being

'for show' and contains 'a proper desk at which he wrote letters' it is in the low light of the third floor study that the professor's passions, both academic and personal, are housed. As much as this odd room on the third floor encompasses what the professor holds most dear, this alternative study also operates as a sort of protective barrier against the common or the everyday. This protective barrier, according to Herring, is primarily structural, as he focuses on what separates the two men spatially from the different worlds that they move in, subsequently subverting a host of pre-determined narratives. What is left essentially untouched by Herring, however, is how the male bond at the center of Cather's novel inhabits a kind of temporal framework that is also distinct in its relation to the world outside the attic. This unique temporality, while going hand-in-hand with Herring's 'alternative domesticities,' is multi-faceted in its own right, operating on a number of levels that serve to mark the relationship between Outland and St. Peter as something that exists above the sphere of the ordinary. Herring's divergence from Sedgwick's line of inquiry creates an alternative space which in turn repurposes the idea of time as it relates to the central friendship detailed in *The Professor's House*.

I hold that this renegotiation of time and its subsequent effects are highlighted not only in how the professor and Outland experience the temporal within Herring's alternative space, but also how the two men encounter, and reimagine, their own personal histories. The alternative temporality I propose here is multi-faceted in its effects, with the friendships that take center stage acting as catalysts for revelations that are not only personal, but also communal in nature. These revelations, though they occur for both the professor and for Tom in a space that is physically isolated, are in fact inherently social as they necessitate an interaction with an 'other' on an esoteric and ancestral level- a phenomenon I will call 'filial sociability.' This term, drawn

partially from the text, encompasses a number of important concepts connecting elements of the social to a larger sense of lineage and inheritance, all of which play crucial roles in my critical understanding of Catherian friendship. Using the term 'filial' to qualify the type of sociability I am discussing is fundamental to my exploration of the male friend in *The Professor's House*. While typically associated with one's biological ancestry, I will expand the use of the term to include the lineage of friendship as it is recounted in Cather's work. Though not related by blood, the friendships that form the living core of the novel are involved in their own specific kind of ancestral tradition, passing on a shared kinship that results in alternative familial structures being formed.

Going hand-in-hand with the discussion of inherited kinship are the questions of history for the professor and ancestry for Tom. The histories of both men, whether they are professional or personal, fill the spaces created by the sequestered third-floor attic and Herring's theoretical 'alternative domesticities.' These histories, though they do by necessity interact with the sphere of the first floor, exist largely outside of the classically domestic storyline recognizable in Mrs. St. Peter's social calendar. This distinction between the experience of the everyday as it contrasts with the interior world of St. Peter and is alluded to early on, in the description of the window looking out of the professor's third-floor study,

“From the window he could see, far away, just on the horizon, a long, blue, hazy smear- Lake Michigan, the inland sea of his childhood...When he remembered his childhood, he remembered blue water...the great fact in life, the always possible escape from dullness, was the lake. The sun rose out of it, the day began there; it

was like an open door that nobody could shut. The land and all its dreariness could never close in on you.” (pg. 20)

Rather than the lake itself being in full view from the attic window, it is the vague impression of it that the professor is able to behold. The descriptive language used in this first sentence is important as it describes the body of water both spatially and temporally. In terms of the former, the fact that it is seen ‘far away’ rather than say, sharply contrasted with the surrounding flora of the region, is notable in that it exists primarily as a sort of shimmering mirage, a gateway if you will, to another time in St. Peter’s life. The lake being ‘on the horizon’ underscores this understanding, placing it between the materially tangible substance of the earth, and the lofty sky, existing in both spheres but being placed explicitly in neither. Temporally, the lake is identified as something associated with St. Peter’s childhood, his own personal ‘inland sea.’ The specificity of the adjective ‘inland,’ as opposed to a body of water that is not inherently land-locked, is unique in that it implies a somewhat static existence, its lack of movement in reality mirrored in its eternal association with the closed chapter of St. Peter’s early years. The association is strong; the blueness of the water intrinsically linked to, and even blurring with, this personal history. Space and time start to become indistinguishable, distinctive only in that they are no longer endemic to his everyday reality. Though the lake is a short train’s ride away for the professor, the relationship to it is overwhelmingly nostalgic, a constant attempt at recapturing that sense of ‘escape from dullness.’

The final two sentences offer another understanding of the professor’s association with the body of water, namely a sense of vastness and, with the mention of the sun’s rising out of it, a perpetual newness. Though ensconced within the private memories of the professor, the lake’s

generative qualities are anything but sedentary, leading instead to an insistent rebirth for both the child St. Peter and, as the reader finds out toward the end of the novel, for the child's adult successor. This is crucial to understand in our exploration of the relational history central to Cather's novel, as the friendship fostered between the professor and Tom, though it is a thing enshrined in memory once Tom dies in combat, continues to be revelatory for the professor as he clutches it tightly to himself despite Outland's physical absence.

There are several threads found in the final sentences of the excerpt worth putting under the microscope. First and foremost, the idea of the lake as intrinsically open complicates an understanding of history as a thing which is inherently 'closed' and thus able to be fully understood. More broadly, the characterization of openness connects the professor's experience of the lake to Tom's vividly isolated summer atop the Blue Mesa in the midsection of the novel.¹

First comes the professor's childhood use of the lake as a place in which to evade a generalized 'dullness.' While it is used as an 'escape,' the lake is not reducible to a place of hiding, but rather operates as a sort of gate continually opening outward. It is a constant, the 'always possible' alternative to the otherwise monotonous bearing down and predictability of everyday life. In one sense, the lake's existence makes the other facets of life bearable for the young St. Peter. For the professor, both as a young man and as a scholar, the lake stands as enduring symbol of newness that has yet to be corrupted, rather than simply a benignly nostalgic memory from his childhood. This is in large part what makes the histories found within *The Professor's House* unique. Rather than operating as a history that is related as a chronological sequence of facts with an easily-defined beginning, middle and end, the association St. Peter has

¹ [Is this an oddly placed paragraph? Does Tom's experience need to be mentioned here?]

with the lake and that Tom, in his later account, has with the Mesa, is defined by the possibility of new experience. The idea of an open-ended history, a history that is constituted by a series of beginnings containing only possibilities and no conceivable ending, is antithetical to the realm of the domestic, embodied in the social lives of Lillian St. Peter and the two young girls. Though in close contact with the world of the third floor, the cares that mark the ground level of the St. Peter home are fundamentally different in both focus and outcome, from those that occupy the upstairs study. This ground-level domesticity is inherently predictable, playing out in the lives of those surrounding the professor, leaving little to the imagination when it comes to either beginning or end. The worlds of both the lake and the Mesa are, on the other hand, fundamentally fertile when it comes to the imagination. Where both the lake of St. Peter's childhood and Tom's Blue Mesa inspire a continual looking outward, the two spaces also involve an element of the historical. For St. Peter, this historical element comes in the form of him remembering an important time in his childhood, while for Tom the historic is tied to a newly discovered ancestral line.

““But I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell- nor yours...They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from...I'm not so poor that I have to sell the pots and pans that belonged to my poor grandmothers a thousand years ago...There never was any question of money with me, where this mesa and its people were concerned. They were something that had been preserved through the ages by a miracle, and handed on to you and me, two poor cow-punchers, rough and ignorant, but I thought we were men enough to keep a trust.””(pgs. 219-221)

Roddy's selling off of the Cliff City artifacts in Tom's absence is seen by the latter as a betrayal that is both vast in scope and deeply personal. The connection Tom had forged between himself and his predecessors on the Mesa is sacrosanct, and Roddy's actions, in selling the artifacts, has broken what in Tom's mind had been an inviolable bond. This bond, unlike the professor's relationship to the lake, is not purely personal. In the excerpt above, Tom's understanding of himself in relation to who he claims as his own in terms of ancestry, dates back thousands of years. The particular ancestry that Tom lays claim to is unique in its own right, encompassing much more than a singular family tree.

The reference to his 'poor grandmothers' plural supports this assertion, expanding what had previously been a non-existent family lineage for Tom outward to unimaginable lengths. Where Lake Michigan had allowed the professor to extend out and forward, there is an echoed limitlessness to Tom's backward reach for the familial. From this vantage point, Herring's characterization of the friendship between St. Peter and Outland as inherently 'anti social' is undermined, with Tom's integration of the mesa's history into that of his own being an action with explicitly social ramifications. Herring's reading of the text as 'anti social' relegates the definition of sociability to the sphere of the heterosexually productive, subsequently overlooking any element of the social that can be observed outside of that context. The strength of these central male bonds comes in their active reshaping of what constitutes sociability, with Tom writing himself into the history of Cliff City and, later on, with the professor interaction with his younger self. Neither of these social elements would have been possible, however, if it were not for the friendships that led both men to those specific points. Consequently time itself, and the

histories that mark its passage, is actively reshaped as it interacts with the phenomenon of the male friend, making room for a new type of familial bond.

In the excerpt above, Tom's language initially centers his interest on the objects he and Blake had unearthed. However, as he goes on, the 'they' Tom first references eventually comes to include not just the objects that had been sold, but also the people who had left them behind. The two are intrinsically linked, with the possession of one implying the possession of the other. The linkage of ancestry to object comes up several times, most importantly in Tom's first interaction with the St. Peter family and, later on, in his bequeathing of Blake's blanket to the professor. The first time Outland meets the professor and his family, he departs leaving what Lillian St. Peter refers to as 'princely gifts.' His gifting, of a Cliff City earthenware pot for her, alongside jade stones for the two girls, links them to the ancestry that he had adopted, and Blake had had an important hand in, during his time on the Mesa. Though the gift-giving is less overt than the trip that he and the professor later take to the Mesa, it is significant in that it brings together two very different spheres of existence into conversation with one another. Where the office in the attic serves as a symbol of virtually untraversable separation, Tom's presence and interaction with the family, in some ways, bridges that same divide. While Lillian sees it as a kind, if not odd, gesture of good faith, the objects conjoin the inherent domesticity of the St. Peter family to the tradition of adoption seen in both Tom's understanding of the Mesa and its people as well as his relationship with Blake. This connection, then, paves the way for the professor himself to eventually take up the gauntlet of friendship that Blake laid down when he left Tom on the Mesa, and the lineage of friendship is continued.

“It was on that trip that they went to Tom’s Blue Mesa, climbed the ladder of spliced pine-trees to the Cliff City, and up to the Eagle’s Nest. There they took Tom’s diary from the stone cupboard where he had sealed it up years ago, before he set out for Washington on his fruitless errand.”(pg. 235)

In traveling with the professor to the Mesa itself, Tom brings his companion that much closer to the family line that he had written himself into. The unearthing of the diary, in addition to their ascension of the Mesa itself, though they are briefly described here, mirror Tom’s experience first discovering the hidden place in conjunction with Blake. Although this passage evokes a sense of invitation and welcome, there is still an element of inaccessibility that is vital to the reader’s understanding of its significance, especially as it pertains to one’s understanding of this particular male bond. The spatial element here sets Tom and St. Peter physically apart from the world of the domestic. Situated atop the Mesa in the Eagle’s Nest, its highest point, they are in a third-floor attic of sorts, separated not only from the family and professional life of St. Peter but also from the valley below in which Tom and Blake had worked to stockpile what they needed in order to ascend the Blue Mesa initially. On the Mesa, they exist above the spheres of the everyday, interacting with a secret history that Tom ultimately passes on to the Professor. The spatial separation here underscores the alternative temporality that the two men come into contact with, while the friendship that is forged within that alternative temporality is made manifest in Tom’s gifting of the diary to the Professor.

The excerpt ends with an acknowledgement of Tom’s attempt to formalize his discoveries, as seen in his trip to Washington D.C.. The errand is ultimately fruitless, with Tom having given away most of the artifacts he traveled with, and there being no abiding interest in

his discoveries. This ‘fruitless errand’ for Tom is important to understand as it is another instance of interaction between two fundamentally different modes of being. Going to Washington, Tom hopes to memorialize his discoveries with the backing of the political powers that be. His desire to preserve and to venerate, however, is rebuffed as it is made clear to him, during the course of several painful meetings, that these artifacts are neither marketable nor of interest. There are different methodologies of value at play here that are antithetical to one another. The value system that Tom associates with the artifacts finds its expression in the heated conversation, excerpted above, that he has with Blake upon his return. Where the worth of the Cliff City artifacts, for Tom, is tied to a sense of the communal self, the politicians of DC are interested only insofar as the items in question can be exploited for profit. Though antithetical to one another, both systems lay claim to the idea the productive, but to different effects. This brings us back to Herring’s initial characterization of the alternative space friendship occupies in the novel as something that is inherently opposed to the realm of ‘heterosexual productivity.’ While this theory holds true, it does not address the ways in which, if at all, the concept of the ‘productive’ is re-constituted in this alternative friendly space. I hold that, subsequent to Tom’s explicit encounter with the world of the heterosexually productive in DC, he returns to the mesa and, upon Blake’s departure, reshapes the concept of the productive, redefining it in conjunction with a newly open-ended understanding of his own personal history.

“I remember these things, because in a sense, that was the first night I was ever really on the mesa at all - the first night that all of me was there. This was the first time I ever saw it as a whole. It all came together in my understanding, as a series of experiments do when you begin to see where they are leading.” (pg. 226)

Though the novel as a whole is divided by section into different explorations of the male bond, it is directly on the heels of a friendship disintegrating that Tom is able to comprehend the mesa in its fullness. Upon Blake's departure, Tom is quick to see that the ways in which he had previously understood and experienced the mesa up to this point have been only fragmentary. There are a number of avenues by which to understand his comment 'all of me was there,' but regardless of what analytical road one goes down, the foundation remains the same; he was not 'whole' before, but now is. This admission renders the task of pointing out the essential nature of friendship difficult, as it is only when his bond with Blake is severed that he comes to the threshold of these new revelations. That being said, I believe there is something vital going on here beneath the surface. In the next sentence, Tom indicates that this new sense of cohesion is not purely personal, but can also be applied to his understanding of the mesa on a broader scale. It is now the mesa itself, in addition to the person of Tom, that has been recognized in its totality, its wholeness. With one observation following on top of the other, there is a connection that can be drawn between Tom's understanding of the self and his understanding of the mesa, with the latter including, rather than being adjacent to, the former. This reading of the text dovetails with the previous excerpt detailing the final conversation between Blake and Tom. Within that interaction, Tom, by identifying himself with the ancestral lineage unearthed on the mesa, is stooping to pick up the threads of the totalizing wholeness he comes to understand more clearly once Blake has descended the ladder of spliced piñon trees. In this way the self that Tom discovers, while physically isolated, is only accessible in the context of a much grander, and inherently social, narrative which is itself wide enough in scope to contain both the ancestors of Cliff City and the severed friendship with Blake. The friendship, though it is now a thing of the

past, was essential in the process leading to Tom's latest discovery and thus has a critical role to play in Tom's trajectory. That discovery is as much internal for Tom as it is externally about the mesa, with the space and time he occupies no longer reducible to a simple archaeological expedition, but is rather elevated and revered as a 'religious emotion.'

“For me the mesa was no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion. I had read of filial piety in the Latin poets, and I knew that was what I felt for this place. It had formerly been mixed up with other motives; but now that they were gone, I had my happiness unalloyed.” (pgs. 226-227)

The progression from adventure to a more esoteric emotional state implies a fundamental shift in perception. The 'adventure' narrative is both grounded in action and somewhat linear in nature, with one thing leading to the next, and is thus somewhat simple to explain or grasp. There is a set trajectory with an easily distinguished beginning, middle, and end that eventually leads the adventurers to accomplishing a specific goal. The idea of a 'religious emotion,' on the other hand, is far less easy to comprehend. There is an expansion that takes place as Tom's perception of the mesa moves from 'adventure' to 'religious emotion,' underscoring the new lineage that he has come into as a result of his ascension. 'Adventure' implies a specific understanding of the temporal that is easily traced, while 'religious emotion' involves a more expansive sense of what is being experienced. Tom's contact with the mesa is no longer relegated to the realm of achievable goals, but is now evinced by a broader sense of fullness that allows for one's active participation in realities that would otherwise have been temporally distant, namely the ancestral lineage that Tom encounters in Cliff City. Tom's response, rather than remaining sedentary after having had this expansive realization, is to develop a voracious appetite for knowledge, plunging

headlong into classical texts, latin translation, and academic papers. It is one such paper by Professor St. Peter that propels Tom, once his summer on the mesa has ended, to make his way to Michigan, ultimately finding himself walking through the St. Peter's garden gate on a windy Saturday morning in early spring.

After Tom's narration of his time on the mesa, the third and final section of the novel centers itself around the professor once again. It is in this final section that the professor experiences his own ancestral discovery in the midst of a summer spent alone.

"When the first of August came round, the Professor realized that he had pleasantly trifled away nearly two months at a task which should have taken little more than a week. But he had been doing a good deal besides-something he had never before been able to do...he enjoyed this half-awake loafing with his brain as if it were a new sense, arriving late, like wisdom teeth...He was cultivating a novel mental dissipation - and enjoying a new friendship. Tom Outland had not come back again through the garden door (as he had so often done in dreams!), but another boy had: the boy the Professor had long ago left behind him in Kansas...the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter." (pgs. 238-239)

The excerpt begins with a task, in this instance the annotation of Tom's diary, left unfinished. This detail, paired with the professor's physical distance from his family, situates St. Peter well outside the context of familial obligation and professional responsibility that the reader has seen him in most of the novel. In other words, with his family gone, his involvement with the sphere of the heterosexually productive has all but ceased. Where Tom's summer on the mesa begins with an epiphany and results in an ecstatic cultivation of academic knowledge, the professor's stint alone produces a converse effect with St. Peter stepping away, perhaps

unconsciously, from the academic work at hand. Perhaps this halting of academic productivity is partially due to his already having explored so much of that world, whereas Tom had only just been introduced to the idea of pedagogical rigor. Regardless of what is accomplished, however, there is a type of newness experienced on both fronts. Though his academic work has been stalled, however, the professor is noted as having 'been doing a good deal besides....' What is the nature of his work in that isolated context and, if it is not tied to the expansion of either the domestic or academic spheres, what, precisely, does it accomplish?

The answer to these questions is strange and somewhat unquantifiable, as it is presented in the form of a person. The revelation on the part of the professor comes in the surprising form of a figure with whom he is already somewhat acquainted: his younger self. Where Tom pursues the acquisition of academic knowledge after his experience with the 'religious emotion' atop the mesa, the professor, in his time of isolation, embarks on a path that strips away that which he has acquired over the years, eventually finding himself face-to-face with this 'unmodified' version of himself. In that stripping away there is a kind of inverted symmetry that is present between Tom and the professor, with the former using his epiphanal experience as a springboard for his intellectual curiosity, and the latter finding it necessary to do away with just such knowledge in order to be reacquainted with his unallowed younger self.

The observations made about this younger, unallowed self continue, eventually drawing an even clearer line between the experiences of Tom and the professor,

"...the Professor felt that life with this Kansas boy, little as there had been of it, was the realest of his lives, and that all the years between had been accidental and ordered from the outside...The Kansas boy that had come back to St. Peter this

summer was not a scholar. He was a primitive. He was only interested in earth and woods and water. Wherever sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed, where life sprouted and decayed, places were alike to him. He was not so nearly cultivated as Tom's old cliff-dwellers must have been-and yet he was terribly wise. He seemed to be at the root of the matter; Desire under all desires, Truth under all truths." (pgs. 240-241)

There is a central irony to this passage in that the things which have filled the professor's life - family, career, academia, parenthood - are characterized as having been primarily accidental, rather than intentional, in nature. This reintroduction facilitates a reevaluation on the professor's part, exposing these different modes of being which have filled his social calendar and marked his days as being ultimately secondary to the truths known by his younger self.

The line that is drawn between the young St. Peter and Tom's cliff-dwellers is vital, creating a parallel between the two experiences. Both men, physically isolated in their different contexts as they may be, are nevertheless linked to a fuller sense of self, with Tom writing himself into the history of the mesa and the professor rediscovering an original mode of being. It is this experience that marks Catherian friendship as especially unique. The relationships that these men enjoy exist in a sphere that is distinct from, even while remaining adjacent to, the realm of the socially normative. Though adjacent to, and often interacting with, the sphere of 'heterosexual productivity,' the male friend takes on the systems of value that exist in the life of the domestic, reshaping both space and time in a way that confounds pre-existing notions of production. Centering the narrative around the individual epiphanal experiences of both St. Peter

and Tom leads, in turn, to new bonds of friendship being established, and a more expansive sense of self.

Chapter 2

“This grand isolation, this reducing of ourselves to our very elemental selves, is the greatest fraud of all...Reduce any of us to the mere individual that we are, and what do we become?...It is in the living touch between us and other people, other lives, other phenomena that we move and have our being. Strip us of our human contacts and of our contact with the living earth and the sun, and we are almost bladders of emptiness.”(pgs. 189-190)

Lawrence's posthumous collection of essays and papers, entitled *Pheonix*, was first published in 1936 by his widow, Freida Lawrence. While the work itself is expansive, encompassing literary criticism, poetry, and even sociology, there are multiple points of contact with the idea of the self throughout the text, especially in his more esoteric meanderings on life, morality, and man's relationship to man. The exploration of the self, which undergirds many of the essays and papers found within *Pheonix*, can also be traced in Lawrence's work as a novelist. His characterization of what he saw as a cultural shift toward the 'grand isolation' mentioned above plays a pivotal role in his collection of essays, and is also placed center stage in his 1920 novel, *Women In Love*. Lawrence, in his analytical work, criticizes the post-enlightenment tendency to cast the individual as the locus of all things. It is in part because of this post-enlightenment frame of reference, with the individual reigning supreme as a self-contained totality of meaning without

the need for outside influence, that Lawrence wrote so explicitly about the need we have for one another.

There is both an elevation and a reduction that takes place simultaneously, with the individual, on the one hand, being raised above, and thus cut off from direct contact with, those that surround you. Subsequently, with access to a broader external reality no longer immediately available, the self is reduced to the four walls of its own existence and is thus permanently wounded, reduced to nearly nothing but what Lawrence characterizes as ‘bladders of emptiness.’ This particular phrase, this characterization of the overly-individuated self as an empty vessel, exposes an issue inherent to the sort of reduction that Lawrence is writing against. Hoping to achieve a more radical sense of self-knowledge by turning increasingly inward and away from each other, the relational severing that is necessitated by ‘the reducing of ourselves to our very elemental selves,’ ultimately results in a loss, rather than a discovery, of the self that was so sought after initially.

The language that Lawrence uses toward the end of the excerpt to describe the nature of our interaction with one another and with the world is theologically tinged. In the Book of Acts, when Paul addresses the philosophers of the Areopagus, he conceives God as the reality in which “we live and move and have our being.” The greater context for the phrase used by Lawrence is prescient to our discussion of the self, as it locates the individual in relation to a force that exists both internally and externally, complicating the distinction between the self and that which lies outside of it.

“...they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live

and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.'" (Acts 17:27-29.)

The first sentence presents the reader with an external presence they are asked to 'grope' for in order to find. This language implies a sense of uncertainty or even blindness, indicating that what is sought after, while tangible in some ways, is not immediately recognizable. Soon after, Paul uses the metaphor of child birth to represent the relationship he is trying to describe. This description, which builds on the previous statement used by Lawrence that places the subject within the divine, rather than simply blurring the line between the self and that which is external to it, collapses those distinctions altogether, making way for a mode of being that is fundamentally symbiotic. Where symbiosis typically implies an interaction that is limited to two organisms, however, the usage of 'we' in Paul's letter expands that understanding outward in multiplicity of directions that includes both the interaction of the divine with the individual as well as the divine with the communal. Incalculability, then, is a foundational element in the ideas that Paul is trying to impart. The 'Divine Nature' that Paul references, despite being linked to his previous conception of the self via child birth, is understood as something that operates from a position that is fundamentally outside the realm of what can be codified, managed, or divined. Though existing inside and adjacent to man, the 'Divine Nature' is not something that one can reason oneself into as it exists at the confluence of the external world's influence on the interior self, and vice versa. This dovetails with Lawrence's call for 'the living touch between us and

other people,' as the concept outlined by Paul cannot exist in an individuated vacuum of the self but only as the self gives and is given in return.

Charles Taylor, in his 2007 publication *A Secular Age*, discusses the exchange between the self and the world at large at great length. Using the terms 'porous' and 'buffered,' Taylor traces the cultural trajectory of the self, helping us to identify its boundaries within the framework of secularization. Specifically, Taylor focuses on how these new-found boundaries are often at odds with a pre-modern, or mythic, understanding of the individual as it either interacts or doesn't interact with the world. The verbiage Taylor settles on to describe this changing conception of the self serves our discussion well, as it is reminiscent of the ideas set forth by Lawrence either explicitly in his essays, or more organically in his fiction.

"A crucial condition for this was a new sense of the self and its place in the cosmos: not open and porous and vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers, but what I want to call 'buffered.' But it took more than disenchantment to produce the buffered self; it was also necessary to have confidence in our own powers of moral ordering." (p. 27)

Taylor's 'buffered self' and 'porous self' exist at the confluence of several different cultural trends. The differentiation that he draws between these two versions of the self are concurrent with the rise of a post-enlightenment understanding of humanity's capacity for reason. With this rise came the incremental 'disenchantment' that Taylor references here, with the outside world, previously somewhat mysterious, gradually becoming more easily explainable thanks in large part to new advances in scientific codification and subsequent 'moral ordering.' In the push for large-scale systematizing of the world, that same tabulating lens was eventually

turned inward on the self. Lawrence speaks to this trend in another excerpt from *Pheonix*, pointing out the central danger of an exhaustive quest for self-knowledge taking precedent above all else.

“We lack peace because we are not whole, And we are not whole because we have known only a tithe of the vital relationships we might have had. We live in an age which believes in stripping away the relationships. Strip them away, like an onion, till you come to pure, or blank nothingness. Emptiness. That is where most men have come now: to a knowledge of their own complete emptiness. They wanted so badly to be ‘themselves’ that they became nothing at all: or next to nothing.” (p. 193)

The ‘stripping away’ begins, first and foremost, with a jettisoning of the relationships that surround us. The turn inward, then, according to Lawrence, begins at a point of profound alienation; with friends having gone and the individual being left to itself. Follow that road to its logical conclusion and what emerges is an individual so wrapped up in itself that the world, and the relationships that populate it, have all but ceased to exist. This brings us back to the original Lawrence excerpt and its fervent plea for tangibility rather than isolation. Lawrence characterizes the ultimate fruit of the push for exclusive individuation as ‘emptiness,’ identifying that achievement as something to be mourned rather than celebrated. Similar strains can be heard in Paul’s passage from Acts, with the divine being associated with an insistent mingling rather than a push away from the relational. In exposing the ‘blank nothingness’ at the core of an individual stripped of relationships and its connection to the outside world, a spotlight is shone directly on the intrinsic need we have for one another.

At the same time, however, Lawrence still makes space for the identifiability of the individual within the greater context of his focus on interpersonal relationships. He identifies a vitality that is intrinsic to the solitary self which is strengthened only when it exists concurrently with the communal or external. Lawrence writes on this in his essay 'Love,' also found in *Phoenix*, "...there can be no coming together without an equivalent going asunder...the motion of love, like a tide, is fulfilled in this instance; there must be an ebb." (pg. 151) With this observation, and others similar to it, Lawrence makes room for both the individual and the communal rather than favoring one over the other. By linking the self intrinsically to the communal and vice versa, Lawrence complicates any binary that would set the self in opposition to its neighbor. Complicating things further, Lawrence goes on to identify three central types of love, and their accompanying limitations, that are exhibited within that framework.

"The love between man and woman is the greatest and most complete passion the world will ever see, it is dual, because it is of two opposing kinds. The love between man and woman is the perfect heart-beat of life, systole, diastole." (pg. 153)

'Systole' and 'diastole' highlight a process found in the natural world, the seeding of plants or the flow of the tides, to understand how relationships, in Lawrence's view, ought to work best. Opposites must interact in harmony in order for this 'most complete passion' to materialize. That being said, however, simply being opposite is not enough to guarantee relational wholeness. Lawrence goes on to highlight two other types of love which he labels the 'profane' and the 'sacred' respectively.

“But not all love between man and women is whole... There may be no separateness discovered, no singleness won, no unique otherness admitted. This is a half love, what is called sacred love. And this is love which knows the purest happiness. On the other hand, the love may be all a lovely battlefield of sensual gratification, the beautiful but deadly counterposing of male against female... This is the profane love, that ends in a flamboyant and lacerating tragedy when the two are so singled out are torn finally apart by death. But if profane love ends in piercing tragedy, none the less the sacred love ends in a poignant yearning... The Christian love, the brotherly love, this is always sacred.” (pgs. 154-155)

Failure to individuate the self in its particularity results, at best, in a love that, though it is labeled as ‘sacred,’ is still only partial and thus incomplete. In direct contrast to this is the phenomenon of profane love, which occurs when there is no sharing of the self but only this singular hyper-individuation. Though the effect of sacred love is less externally destructive, both paths end in tragic loss and unfulfilled longing. While these forms of love are easily distinguishable within the confines of his essays, Lawrence’s fiction finds the profane, the sacred, and whole overlapping with one another in a variety of anomalous ways.

It is at this difficult, and often incongruous, confluence of self-knowledge and interpersonal relationships that we find the four characters that take center stage in Lawrence’s *Women In Love*. Michael Bell, in his 1992 book *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being*, dedicates a chapter to the articulation of the conscious self as it is revealed in this particular Lawrence novel. Central to that conversation is how the characters at the center of the work understand themselves, on both the self-conscious and interpersonal levels.

“...different forms of sensibility can persist within the same individual. But in *Women In Love* the conceptual and self-conscious way in which the characters ‘know’ things has become the norm and constitutes the intimate texture of the narrative presentation. This now overlays and blocks out the inarticulate, sensory knowledge attributed to the early Brangwens just as the white light of consciousness in Moony obscures the dark body beneath it.”(pg. 126)

Despite Lawrence’s appeal to a mode of being that is more conscious of, and receptive to, the relationships that shape us, the characters found in *Women In Love* spend the greater part of the novel in their own deeply individualized worlds. As noted by Bell above, the predominant method of knowing chronicled within the text is self-referential in nature. The turn exclusively inward, so abhorrent to the critic Lawrence, is the most traceable through line found in the novel with a number of notable, if not solitary, exceptions. Overshadowed, or ‘blocked out’ in the words of Bell, as these exceptions may be, they contribute a vital element to Lawrence’s work as they complicate further what is already a multi-faceted exploration of modern selfhood.

Where Bell focuses primarily on how the language of the novel itself shapes the realities of the four friends, I will be treading an adjacent critical path that, while including certain linguistic elements of the text, focuses more on the ways in which the body is experienced as its own form of knowledge. The embodied knowledge which I am describing often exists at the confluence of Lawrence’s three definitions of love, running contrary to the stark distinctions that Lawrence draws between the profane, the sacred, and the whole in *Phoenix*. Embodied knowing, Bell’s ‘inarticulate, sensory knowledge,’ though it occupies a comparatively small section of the text, often subverts the conceptual self-knowledge achieved or sought after by the central characters.

While I will be dealing with scenes involving all four characters at different points throughout the text, special attention will be given to the interaction between Birkin and Gerald in the chapter entitled ‘Gladiatorial,’ as the physical manifestation of their bond stands alone in its proximity to the Lawrencian vision of embodied wholeness as well as Taylor’s ‘porous self.’ In this instance it is the male friend, rather than either of the heterosexual unions established or the individual mental interiorities of the four friends, that comes closest to the relational ideal outlined by Lawrence in *Phoenix*. What the two men manage to achieve, as they wrestle together in the ‘Gladiatorial’ sequence, contains an echo of the Scripture referenced by Lawrence in *Phoenix*. This echo can be understood as the phenomenon of the shared self in concert with the individual, and it is one of the only instances within this particular novel that a complete ‘wholeness’ is noted as having been achieved. This achievement is notable in that it exists at the confluence of a number of Lawrencian ideals, while at the same time subverting heteronormative tropes that assume a relational wholeness that is predicated on a gendered duality. The male friend's subversion of that narrative creates something new, carving out a space for the homosocial bond that manages to fulfill a relational ideal without capitulating to a preconceived social understanding of constitutive wholeness.

In order to better understand the concept of wholeness, we will begin by taking a look at the other central figures in the novel and their relationship to this central idea.

“She loved best of all animals, that were single and unsocial as she herself was. She loved the horses and cows in the field. Each was single and to itself, magical. It was not referred away to some detestable social principle. It was incapable of soulfulness or tragedy, which she detested so profoundly. She could be very

pleasant and flattering, almost subservient, to people she met. But no one was taken in. Instinctively each felt her contemptuous mockery of the human being in himself, or herself. She had a profound grudge against the human being. That which the word 'human' stood for was despicable and repugnant to her. Mostly her heart was closed in this hidden, unconscious strain of contemptuous ridicule. She thought she loved, she thought she was full of love. This was her idea of herself. But the strange brightness of her presence, a marvelous radiance of intrinsic vitality, was a luminousness of supreme repudiation, repudiation, nothing but repudiation. Yet, at moments, she yielded and softened, she wanted pure love, only pure love. This other, this state of constant unfailing repudiation, was a strain, a suffering also. A terrible desire for pure love overcame her again.”(pgs. 252-253)

There are two primary levels of narration present in this passage, one existing within Ursula's head and the other operating from what at first glance could be understood as an omniscient perspective. The excerpt begins with Ursula's love for animals, which is predicated on their individuality, each distinct from the other, distant and content. This distance is not merely physical in nature, but also esoteric in its separation from any collective identification or, as the narrator describes, any 'social principle.' The particular usage of the phrase 'referred away' is important in that it identifies the individual as the owner of something which one can choose to either share or hold onto. In that retention of individual identity, Ursula avoids, even detests, the ramifications of what sharing it with others would necessitate, those ramifications including the

possibility of both soulfulness and tragedy, each of which require a shared communality to be achieved.

From this vantage point, the narrator steps out of Ursula's head and observes her from the perspective of those with whom she interacts. The caricatured earnestness on the part of Ursula when it comes to the act of socializing is clear, warning those around her of the callous contempt beneath the smiles. Repugnant though humanity may be to her, however, the final sentence of the excerpt finds her at a strange intersection, craving the very thing which the narrator has just described as fundamentally foul to her. It is at this contradictory intersection that echoes of Lawrence's *Phoenix* can faintly be heard.

On a large scale, the dissonance experienced here dovetails with the excerpt used to introduce this chapter. "It is in the living touch between us and other people, other lives, other phenomena that we move and have our being. Strip us of our human contacts and of our contact with the living earth and the sun, and we are almost bladders of emptiness." This desire for pure love, unwelcome as it may be for Ursula, underscores Lawrence's push for the individual to be known, seen, and touched within a greater community of other individuals. Although an inclination towards wholeness is exposed, however, it is not Ursula's primary mode of being. Her 'terrible desire for pure love' is the exception to an otherwise consistent rule of relational repudiation. Central to Lawrence's definition of 'profane love' is the idea of conflict. Where 'wholeness' necessitates a conjoining of the male and the female, the profane sets the two in opposition to one another. This opposition is given voice for Ursula in the repetition of 'repudiation, repudiation, repudiation,' a constant need to re-buffer the self, pushing the exterior world back, in order to protect from that which would threaten her detached singularity.

Ursula's existence, then, is primarily predicated on the act of negation. She is defined by what she is opposed to, rather than what she is in favor of. This is an untenable stance, as it exists only insofar as the world around it persists. Remove that which is pushed back against, and one is left with nothing but a 'bladder of emptiness.' As a result of this fundamental negation, both modes of being, the strictly individuated and the relational, are understood primarily as things to be suffered through.

Ursula's sister Gudrun approaches this same crossroads from a different direction, and to different effect. Rather than keeping herself from interpersonal contact, she welcomes its presence in the form of her suitor, Gerald, visiting her late one evening. This excerpt chronicles the immediate effects of their physical union, highlighting the disparity in experience between the Gudrun and her partner and shedding light on the chasm which grows between them as a result.

“But Gudrun lay wide awake, destroyed into perfect consciousness...she lay with dark, wide eyes looking into darkness. She could see so far, as far as eternity - yet she saw nothing. She was suspended in perfect consciousness - and of what was she conscious?...here she was, left with all the anguish of consciousness, whilst he was sunk deep into the other element of mindless, remote, living shadow-gleam. He was beautiful, far-off, and perfected. They would never be together...It was as if she drew a glittering rope of knowledge out of the sea of darkness, drew and drew and drew it out of the fathomless depths of the past, and it still did not come to an end, there was no end to it, she must haul and haul at the ropes of glittering consciousness, pull it out phosphorescent from the endless depths of the

unconsciousness till she was weary, aching, exhausted, and fit to break, and yet she had not done.” (pgs. 360-361)

Where Ursula experiences the coinciding of conflicting desires in the privacy of her own mind, Gudrun experiences a similar phenomenon in the aftermath of shared physical intimacy. The reader’s first glimpse into Gudrun’s experience is difficult to miss in that it is described using the terms ‘destruction’ and ‘darkness.’ With that as a beginning point, every element of her current reality begins to take on a sort of veiled unknowability. Her eyes, wide and dark, behold the encroaching darkness, taking on the character of that eternity, that nothingness, which she initially beholds. Her relationship to the darkness she encounters gradually changes, becoming more involved as the excerpt continues. At first, she is still somewhat adjacent to it, merely looking in from an external vantage point that, while close, still separates her from this dark eternity. The next sentence, however, places her in the midst of it, ‘suspended’ within the darkness and untethered to the immediacy of her physical reality.

The path from being a spectator to being subsumed is underscored when she thinks of Gerald as he sleeps. His state of being, while beautiful, is far removed from her; unreachable in its shadowy perfection and becoming more so as each hour passes. Lawrencean wholeness is dependent on a variety of factors in order to be realized, chief among them being a movement towards a fusion that exists concurrently with a fully clarified individuality. With Gudrun and Gerald, we have the second without the first, hence Gudrun’s quick descent into individuated nothingness.

At the final stage of her journey, we have Gudrun no longer outside the darkness as a spectator, nor even suspended immobile within it. Rather, we witness her ultimately interacting

with this nothingness in a vain attempt at reaching an end which, by all accounts, will never be reached. It is here that what Lawrence describes as the 'lacerating tragedy' of profane love comes most clearly into focus, with Gudrun ultimately being caught up in the pursuit of individual consciousness, leaving behind any sense of the communal.

Early on in the essay entitled 'Love' in Lawrence's *Phoenix*, he characterizes the titular phenomenon primarily as a sort of traveling, rather than linking it to any sort of arrival.

"Love is the hastening gravitation of spirit towards spirit, and 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." (pg. 151)

Lawrence's understanding of love is tied to the idea of constant movement with the 'joy of creation' being at the center of that tidal ebb and flow. When it comes to Gudrun, laying with 'wide, dark eyes' next to the sleeping form of Gerald, there is a sense in which the exact opposite is taking place. The traveling that occurs for Gudrun is a movement away from, rather than toward, the body. Gerald is described in a variety of ways, all of which separate him from her. One such descriptor characterizes him as a 'living shadow-gleam,' a figure who, though alive, is only partially visible to Gudrun and who, one can assume, will only become less visible as this hyper-consciousness persists.

Gudrun's only movement involves an incessant pulling at the 'ropes of glittering consciousness' until she is 'fit to break.' What makes this radical turn inward tragic, aside from the esoteric divide it creates between her and Gerald, is the wide-eyed acknowledgement, on the part of Gudrun, of the unending exhaustion that this pursuit would entail. She has achieved a

radical sense of individuation, but at what cost? Untethered to the external world and so singled out that there is no room for anything beyond the self, she has arrived at a great nothingness; aware of its blankness and yet unable to free herself from the sisyphian task of pulling, always pulling, at that unending rope of knowledge. Perhaps this is one ideation of Lawrence's 'lacerating tragedy,' a mode of being that is at once fathomless and isolated, at once never able to be understood and never able to be shared. Speaking to this reality, Lawrence, in his *Pheonix* essay fittingly entitled 'Why We Need One Another,' has this to say, "In absolute isolation, I doubt if any individual amounts to much; or if any soul is worth saving, or even having." (pg.190, Pheonix)

Contrasting sharply with the isolated exhaustion of Gudrun, Birkin and Gerald's interaction four chapters earlier highlights a fundamentally different type of individuation, found within the context of embodied action, rather than separate from it. After suffering rejection at the hands of Ursula, Birkin goes immediately to Gerald and suggests a wrestling match. Locking the door and clearing away the furniture, the two men strip down,

"So the two men began to struggle together. They were very dissimilar. Birkin was tall and narrow, his bones were very thin and fine. Gerald was much heavier and more plastic. His bones were strong and round, his limbs were rounded, all his contours were beautifully and fully moulded. He seemed to stand with a proper, rich weight on the face of the earth, whilst Birkin seemed to have the centre of gravitation in his own middle. And Gerald had a rich, frictional kind of strength, rather mechanical, but sudden and invincible, whereas Birkin was abstract as to be almost intangible. He impinged invisibly upon the other man,

scarcely seeming to touch him, like a garment, and then suddenly piercing in a tense fine grip that seemed to penetrate into the very quick of Gerald's being. They stopped...they became more accustomed to each other, to each other's rhythm, they got a kind of mutual physical understanding...They seemed to drive their white flesh deeper and deeper against each other, as if they would break into a oneness...So the two men entwined and wrestled with each other, working nearer and nearer. Both were white and clear, but Gerald flushed smart and red where he was touched, and Birkin remained white and tense...So they wrestled swiftly, rapturously; intent and mindless at last, two essential white figures ever working into a tighter, closer oneness of struggle...a tense white knot of flesh..."

(pgs. 279-280)

The passage begins with an acknowledgement of the physical differences between the two men. Gerald is described in increasingly materialistic terms, with the narrator's usage of 'rounded' and 'molded' giving a sense of his having been formed by some sort of external force. He is tethered to the physically tangible, anchored to the earth, and primarily sensual in his relationship to the world around him. Birkin on the other hand is understood in very different terms, existing liminally somewhere between man and idea. Though not possessed of the same physical stature as Gerald, he wields a power that is capable of cutting through the embodied physicality of Gerald's rounded limbs. In their coming together, there is a mingling of two modes of being that is reminiscent of Lawrence's language in *Pheonix*.

"There must be two in one, always two in one - the sweet love of communion and the fierce, proud love of sensual fulfilment, both together in one love. And then

we are like a rose. We surpass love, love is encompassed and surpassed. We are two who have a pure connexion. We are two, isolated like gems in our unthinkable otherness. But the rose contains and transcends us, we are one rose, beyond." (pgs. 154-155)

Opposite as Gerald and Birkin are described as being, there is a fundamental element to Lawrence's ideal 'two in one' that is missing from the wrestling sequence. For Lawrence, this 'sweet love of communion' is only available to heterosexual couples, with sensual fulfilment being understood as the sexual bond between the two. Rather than falling short of the standard outlined by Lawrence in *Phoenix*, however, I propose that the friendship between Gerald and Birkin, embodied in their struggle together towards this swift oneness, *expands* upon Lawrence's idealized communion, making room for intimacies that are neither inherently heterosexual nor inherently erotic. Central to this proposed expansion is the concept of the inarticulate. Michael Bell addresses this idea at length in his book *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being*, calling attention to the dissonance of trying to articulate a particularly evasive phenomenon,

"Their articulate personal consciousness may actually preempt their capacity for an impersonal trust in the unknown; whether in themselves or in each other. Many critics have noted a potentially stultifying paradox in their articulate quest for the ineffable; their personal search for an impersonal emotional value." (p. 118)

The duality noted by Bell in the final sentence, the attempted bridging of the gap between the impersonal and the personal, the articulate and the ineffable, is an essentially impossible task. Impossible as it may be, it is attempted throughout *Women In Love* by the four central friends as they try, winding themselves into confused and complex mental shapes, to sound the incalculable

depths of the self. Bell's chapter is focused on the whirling tension that this attempt at articulation generates, ending in the same similarly confused place that the central characters of *Women In Love* ultimately find themselves. Contrasting sharply with an attempted formal articulation, the wrestling sequence with Gerald and Birkin, while including moments of clear verbal communication, is largely in the realm of that which is left unsaid. Though interspersed with language, the wrestling scene can only be described by the narrator rather than articulated by the participants. What is achieved within that 'white knot of flesh,' then, is something that is ultimately left linguistically uncoded and thus exists outside the bounds of Bell's 'articulate quest.'

By primarily existing outside the bounds of language, the wrestling sequence acts as a fleeting alternative to the four friends' various attempts at individuation, cutting across the distinctions Lawrence creates between the different types of love, and achieving an unintended sense of wholeness as a result. This experience of the self as something that is at once individual and shared resists language. While incapable of being fully codified linguistically, the expansive nature of the inarticulate self is instead experienced within the context of Gerald and Birkin's friendship, distinguishing that relationship as especially vital despite its eventual loss.

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