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## Lawrence's Indian Journey to Tenderness

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### *Entrées d'index*

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### *Texte intégral*

- 1 Why Lawrence never visited India is a mystery. Because of his poor health and his love of the sun, it is really surprising that Lawrence, who was so much influenced by Indian thoughts and Hindu philosophies, did not visit India when he was so close to it (at Ceylon) in 1922. Sheila Lahiri Choudhury imagines that Lawrence "would have lived longer and certainly have had a more generous view of the sun gods than the ones he describes in his Mexican novel" if he had ever visited India" (271). She also claims that "[o]ne would like to believe that he might have found his warm sunshine in India! Had Lawrence not turned away while visiting the Brewsters in Ceylon in 1922 and sailed for Australia, there might have been a novel on India!" (272). She guesses that Lawrence's "disillusionment with Buddhism's 'denial of the soul,'" as he understood it from Henry Brewster and his wife, Achsah Barlow Brewster, might have been a reason he avoided going on to India, as he had initially intended (272). However this seems unlikely, because in his writings Lawrence consistently uses the word "Hindu" as a synonym for "Indian."<sup>1</sup> Lawrence was greatly influenced by Hindu philosophies, as we shall discuss in detail in this essay. Barwatha Regina Papa claims that "If Lawrence purposefully avoided visiting India, it was due to his fear of being overpowered," and Lawrence travelled not to be overpowered but to be renewed. But whatever reason Lawrence had not to physically visit India, he visited it imaginatively many times, and those mental and emotive visits helped lead to Lawrence's famous turn toward tenderness in his final works. In this essay, we shall discuss the influence Lawrence's frequently noticed interest in Hindu philosophies had on his vision

of human existence, changing his take on gender roles and the related relationship of humans with the cosmos. As we shall show, the ultimate result of this influence was a strong turn toward heterosexual tenderness in his work, including an increased respect for women and the feminine. Not only *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Women in Love*, where he explicitly shows his knowledge of Indian religious thought, but most of Lawrence's fiction and non-fiction was directly or indirectly affected by his reading and knowledge of Hinduism and its diverse branches, and one who is familiar with those ancient beliefs is sure to understand Lawrence better.

- 2 As T. R Sharma details in his essay, "Sun in D. H. Lawrence: A Hindu Archetype," Lawrence developed an abiding interest in Hindu philosophy. William York Tindall in *D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow* provides a comprehensive list of the many books on Hindu thought and philosophy read by Lawrence (245). This should not be a surprise, since Lord Siva, probably the most popular god in the Hindu "trinity," is worshipped throughout India as *lingam*, a symbol of the phallus. Sharma notes that Lawrence showed his awareness of this in a letter (247):

I stick to what I told you, and put a phallus, a *lingam* you call it, in each one of my pictures somewhere. And I paint no picture that won't shock people's castrated social spirituality. I do this out of positive belief, that the phallus is a great sacred image: it represents a deep, deep life which has been denied in us, and still is denied. [...] But one can still believe. And with the *lingam*, and belief in the mystery behind it, goes beauty. (*Collected Letters* 967)

- 3 Lawrence's repeated references to the sun, the moon, the snake, and other animals all have some similarities to Hindu myths and archetypes. His references to the sun are the most obvious of these connections to Indian thought.

- 4 As Sharma writes, "[a]mong the Hindus even today the sun is worshipped not only as the source of all light but also of all fertility and procreation" (247). Ancient Hindu sages believed that the sun not only plays a vital role in the development of physical life, but is also an integral part of spiritual life. Hindus worship the sun in many forms and in many rituals. Sharma explains that Madame Blavatsky was a major influence on Lawrence's understanding of Indian religious philosophy (248), pointing out that, in the *Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky says "[t]he Sun is the heart of the Solar world (system) and its brain is hidden behind the (visible) Sun. From thence, sensation is radiated into every nerve centre of the great body, and the wave of the life-essence flows into each artery and vein" (541). This psychosomatic aspect of human life is expressed beautifully in Hindu scriptures, for example, in *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, and *Vedas* which connect the physical sun with the spiritual sun for the overall development of our bodies and minds. In various *Vedas*, the sun is given different names depending on the various purposes it serves for humans and the cosmos. Some of them are "Pavaka," "Pavamana," "Suchi," "Saviata," and "Kesi." The *Gayatri Mnatra*, which is still chanted by millions of Hindus every morning and every evening, is also called *Savitri Mantra* and dedicated to the sun deity. The sun is worshiped by Hindus sometimes as a god, and sometimes as a goddess, depending on the purpose it is serving for mankind. Since gender was always in flux with Hindu gods, ancient Hindus had a concept of gender fluidity, believing that gender should be determined by the role one plays at any particular time. The androgynous form of the Sun God, as well as Lord Shiva, suggests the best destructive as well as creative power can be achieved through the perfect combination of male and female energies. These attitudes are echoed in the increasing insistence on male and female interdependence throughout Lawrence's work.

- 5 One can also see a reflection of the ancient Hindu endorsement of the sort of marriage Lawrence often advocated in his writings, in which partners fulfil their needs without being constrained by the dictates of conventional Christianity. Krishna, an avatar of the god Vishnu, and another popular god of the Hindu "trinity" is depicted as polyamorous. Draupadi, the most important female character in *Mahabharata*, who is worshiped as one of the five most chaste women ("*pancha Kanya*") ever born in India, is married to five

husbands simultaneously, having sex with them one by one every night in rotation. All her five husbands have other wives, too. So just like Lawrence, Hindu religion and mythologies never treat sex as a taboo, but believe in the sexual freedom of both men and women and at the same time give importance to loving sexual commitment and mutual pleasure.

Sharma writes that "Hindus believe in an inter-relationship between the sun, the moon, the Planets, the Stars and Man," and he points out that Lawrence expresses the same belief (Sharma, 252), quoting *Apocalypse*.

6 We and the cosmos are one. The Cosmos is a vast living body, of which we are still parts. The sun is a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins. The moon is a great gleaming nerve-centre from which we quiver forever. Who knows the power that Saturn has over us, or Venus? But it is a vital power, rippling exquisitely through us *all the time*. (29)

7 As Sharma argues Lawrence saw the spiritual separation of man from the cosmos as the root cause of human unhappiness (253). According to Lawrence, "We have lost the cosmos. The sun strengthens us no more, neither does the moon. [...] We can't get the sun in us by lying naked like pigs on a beach. [...] We can only get the sun by a sort of worship: and the same with the moon. By going forth to worship the sun, worship that is felt in the blood" (30). Paul Fussell compares Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* (1929) to his short story "Sun." He shows that in "Sun," "the rising sun is an erection" and in *The Man Who Died*, "the erection experienced by Jesus in the presence of the Priestess of Isis is the rising sun" (142).

8 Lawrence also explains his view of the sun in his poems, "Sun-Men" and "Sun-Women." In the latter poem, we can see Lawrence's idiosyncratic feminism:

How strange it would be if some women came forward and said:  
We are sun-women!  
We belong neither to men or our children nor even ourselves  
But to the sun. (*Complete Poems*, 525)

9 In his last travel book, *Etruscan Places and Other Essays*, Lawrence gives utmost importance to the sun and comes even closer to Hindu beliefs. In the essay "Flowery Tuscany," Lawrence professes this idea:

The universe contains no tragedy, the man is only tragical because he is afraid of death. For my part, if the sun always shines, and always will shine, in spite of millions of clouds of words, then death, somehow, does not have many terrors. In the sunshine, even death is sunny. And there is no end of the sunshine. (238)

10 In the first version of the essay, "The Painted Tombs of Tarquinia," Lawrence equates semi-nudity with the East. He writes, "And the women dancers especially, in this tomb, either almost nude, or wearing the swinging, dark-lined mantle over a transparent robe, suggest the east" (265). Lawrence perhaps means the direction where the sun rises by the word "east." Now how can women suggest the East? They were dancers dancing almost nude. The mystic Etruscan painters tried to portray the soul through such glorification of the body. And in this way the semi-exposure of women's bodies denotes the East, the sun rising, the breaking of a new life after death. In the concluding part of "Flowery Tuscany," Lawrence relates the sun and the absence of sunlight to consciousness, just as in the earlier part of the essay he connects the sun with death and rebirth (237). Lawrence writes, "the sun is anti-thought. Thought is of the shade. In bright sunshine no man thinks. So the Wandervögel turn instinctively to the sun which melts thoughts away and sets the blood running with another, non-mental consciousness" (242).<sup>2</sup> Lawrence reverses colonialist tropes by depicting the nations exposed to the sun as very progressive. Other nations are backward in his view. Sometimes those from the cold, backward nations, out of disgust shake off all choked up concepts and they bare their bodies to the sun to get fresh light,

fresh energy, and finally fresh new concepts. In his other travel writings too, for example in *Mornings in Mexico, Sea and Sardina*, and novels such as *St. Mawr* and *The Plumed Serpent*, there are many such references to the sun.

11 Sharma concludes his essay by saying that, "[e]ach one of us has a sun in the microcosmic form and there is sun at the macrocosmic level. The hiatus between the two is disastrous for man" (258). This basic belief of Hinduism is ontologically Lawrencian. Where Hinduism differs from most other religious philosophies is that other philosophies treat the human mind and soul as opposed to the body and its urges which are denigrated and must be wilfully repressed or controlled. But Hinduism, instead of a mind-soul/body split, posits our true self as that "consciousness" which is always in equilibrium. Hinduism, as well as Indian culture, maintains a tradition of acceptance of everything, as theologically it believes that "God fulfils himself in many ways," and we must go through all the three states of our existence to achieve *Turiya*, the fourth and ultimate state. Sharma suggests that this may be the reason Lawrence wrote Mabel Dodge Luhan, "I feel it my destiny to go east before coming west. [...] I feel America is so unreligious: it is a bad world: and that is on the brink of change, but the change is not quite ready yet, so I daren't come. My blood turns to gall; I want to go and have it sweetened a bit: away from them all, in the old, old East" (*Collected Letters* 686; quoted in Sharma 247). And he wrote Catherine Carswell, "I want to go east before I go west: go west via the east [...] I am tired of the world, and want the peace like a river" (*Collected Letters* 690; quoted in Sharma 246).

12 Choudhury, too, in her essay, "'Cosmic Carnal' Connections: Lawrence's Sun and the Indian Sun Gods," shows the correspondence between Lawrence's short story "Sun" and the Hindu concept and worship of the sun, as manifested at the Sun Temple of Konarak, India. She describes the temple in which "[e]very wheel spoke, axel, and the walls [of the temple] are covered with the erotic figures in every posture and movement. The entire temple appears to be a phallic symbol representing sexuality in its most erotic yet divine form" (277). But the statue of the Sun God seems to transcend all of this sexual exuberance. She writes, "[d]espite all the cosmic carnal references and the explicit sexual descriptions the sun stands aloof, above the entire universe embracing all mankind. Thus Lawrence is able to communicate through his narrative the same repose represented by the Konarak sun god" (278). For Lawrence, as he shows in *The Man Who Died*, sexual fulfilment is a necessary condition for self-fulfilment. Lawrence's vision of sex is analogous to the ancient Hindu vision of sex as expressed by Vatsyayana and the temple sculptures (Khajuraho, Konarak and others). Lawrence, the self-declared "Priest of Love," preaches that sexual consummation leads to the achievement of a higher consciousness.

13 H. B. Kulkarni, in "Snake Imagery and the Concept of Self in the Selected Works of D. H. Lawrence," claims that Lawrence's depiction of Ursula's journey in *The Rainbow* as the search for her "self" or soul reveals how Lawrence's concept of self resembles the Hindu concept of knowing the "Atman," the purpose of life, which according to Upanishads is self-realization. Kulkarni explains that self-realization, or finding the divine self within us, is a major theme in Lawrence's novels (29). And as in Lawrence's work, according to yoga, (which means "connection"), a man or woman alone cannot experience this divine soul within. To achieve connection between the human self and the divine self, perfect connection between the man and the woman is required. We find an example of this, Kulkarni points out in *The Plumed Serpent*, where Kate, after touching the fingers of a stranger, goes "into the greater self, her womanhood consummated in the greater womanhood" (131; quoted in Kulkarni 34). Mellors says, towards the end of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, "It's a question of awareness, as Buddha said. But even he fought shy of the bodily awareness, and that natural physical tenderness, which is the best [...] Ay! it's tenderness, really; it's cunt-awareness. Sex is really only touch, the closest of all touch. And it's touch we're afraid of" (277). As Kulkarni concludes his essay: "Man and woman cannot be complete in themselves, in their isolated separate selves. In their coming

together in love is the coming into being of Self, the true flowering of the divine spirit. But this union goes far beyond man and woman, it encompasses the whole universe" (35).

14 Gerald Doherty in his essay, "The Darkest Source: D. H. Lawrence, Tantric Yoga, and *Women in Love*," describes how Lawrence was influenced by "yoga theory [. . .] based on body consciousness and on the existence of secret somatic zones or centers which could suddenly spark into life and effect a radical transformation of awareness," and explains that his "letters and essays, written between 1917-21, record Lawrence's growing preoccupation with these centers, with their physical topography as well as their power to transform, a preoccupation which found expression in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1921), his own idiosyncratic interpretation of their psychological functioning and of their crucial role in the initiation of the sexual experience" (212). He shows in detail "the way in which Lawrence uses yoga theory as a model of sexual initiation in *Women in Love*, especially in the celebrated chapter, 'Excuse' where Birkin and Ursula, through mysterious strokings and touchings, penetrate to the secret somatic basis of consciousness and effect a new consecration of love" (212). Doherty rightly observes that Tantric yoga is particularly important here because it "incorporates sex into its rites and liturgies as a basis of transcendence" (213). He connects this practice to Birkin and Ursula's spontaneous exploration of each other's body, through which they "discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself" (217).

15 Probably for that reason, Sri Aurobindo claims that Lawrence was a "Yogi who had missed his way and come into a European body to work out his difficulties" (315). Most of the writers who advance theories about the relation between Lawrence and Indian philosophy approvingly quote Aurobindo's remark. In his book *The Yogi Who Missed His Way: Sex and Spirituality in D. H. Lawrence* (2017) D. B. Taylor traces the influence of Eastern philosophy, including the concept of the kundalini, the *chakras* and the yoga practices, on Lawrence's *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* and on three of his novels, *Women in Love*, *The Plumed Serpent* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, making claims similar to Aurobindo's. However, this view is not entirely accurate, as is illustrated by Doherty's argument that Tantra was appealing to Lawrence because it designates sexual intercourse as "the path of enjoyment" (213). This is a popular misconception about Tantra in the West, where it was marketed as a spiritual discipline solely aimed at increasing sexual pleasure by prolonging sexual intercourse, as David Gordon White explains in *Kiss of the Yogini: Tantric Sex in its South Asian Context* (xiv). The central figure responsible for this misrepresentation of Tantra was Pierre Bernard (1875-1955), who founded the Tantric Order of America in 1905 and opened Tantric clinics in many cities in America. But the connection of sex for pleasure alone with the mysterious religious practices of the East continues to be interesting to some Lawrence critics, perhaps because Lawrence himself was more likely to be familiar with the Westernized Tantric practice than with the pure form known in India.

16 However, Doherty's claim that Tantra differs from other forms of yoga as it includes the enjoyment of sex as its method of practice is an error. On the contrary, Tantrics strive to use sexual energy to go beyond bodily pleasure. Whereas Tantra seeks to conserve the sex-energy by prohibiting ejaculation and to use that energy to develop a higher consciousness, in Lawrence's work it is complete sexual fulfilment that leads to self-realization. Lawrence's concept of self-fulfilment does nonetheless resemble the concept of Tantra, as both emphasize the need for a partner from the opposite sex. This emphasis is not homophobic, as Lawrence often writes of men's need for physical closeness to each other. Instead, it derives from a sense of the cosmic complementarity of male and female energies. And both Lawrence and yoga reject the vulgarization of sex as entertainment for pleasure alone.

17 Lawrence may also have been drawn to Hinduism because, unlike Buddhism, Hinduism professes pantheism, i.e. the God is everywhere, in varied forms, and it is basically consciousness that illumines the living body as well as the universe. So detachment from life and attachment to it are both celebrations of God, because without God, there is

nothing, therefore we must know both. Hindus believe that without desire, we have no future, no enthusiasm for any endeavour. Because Lawrence's journey was from attachment to fulfilment, a higher state of being and consciousness, he was not wrong to turn to the wisdom of the yogis, even though he only partially understood it. Lawrence's writings urge the pursuit of a positive transcendence based in physicality in order to attain a higher consciousness of our true existence in the cosmos, and not beyond it. Yoga and Tantra want to transform the human into the divine, while Lawrence wants to transform the divine into the human, as is shown in *The Man Who Died*. There is no divinity for Lawrence in the conventional way. Lawrence's aim is to achieve the highest form of self, individualism, fulfilment, and creativity. To achieve that salvation, sensual interaction with the opposite sex and the circumambient universe is required. His mysticism is sensual and synonymous with fulfilled consciousness.

- 18 Lawrence was also profoundly influenced by the yogic concept of the kundalini as the life force that resides at the base of the spine and that can be awakened by erotic practices, an idea that appears in *Women in Love*. In "Birkin's Electro-Mystical Body of Reality: D. H. Lawrence's Use of Kundalini," Thomas H. Miles argues that in the chapter "Excuse," Lawrence comes very close to Tantra through depicting the awakening of the bottom of the spine (where enormous energy is believed to be coiled like a serpent), converting this latent sexual energy into potent spiritual energy. Miles writes, "[k]neeling as if to a god, Ursula begins to caress Birkin's back and loins and thereby releases, for the first time, Birkin's latent serpent force.[...] The kundalini comes from a source deeper than the phallic source and leaves Ursula free, a complete self" (199). And Miles argues that just as the Tantrics avoid ejaculation Birkin and Ursula do not have intercourse during their love making in Sherwood Forest. Instead they "discover a non-phallic mystery and hide it from the rational, civilized light of their previously phallic-centered sexual life" (201). The sexual interaction between Birkin and Ursula in this chapter is achieved "Unconsciously, with her sensitive finger tips, she was tracing the back of his thighs, following some mysterious life flow there. She had discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself. [...]. It was a strange reality of his being, the very stuff of being, there in the straight downflow of the thighs" (313). That Birkin and Ursula discover something "magnificent" by exploring their bodies and that this feeling is unusual to them is clear at the end of the chapter when Birkin and Ursula:

looked at each other and laughed, and then looked away, filled with darkness and secrecy. Then they kissed and remembered the magnificence of the night. It was so magnificent, such an inheritance of a universe of dark reality, that they were afraid to seem to remember. They hid away the remembrance and the knowledge. (320)

- 19 Miles argues that Lawrence is imitating the methods of Tantra he has learned from James Morgan Pryse's *The Apocalypse Unsealed* (1910):

There are intimations of kundalini and related mythologies in the passage. The literal external images suggest metaphorical, internal states of being. [. . .] and the serpent is associated with a sheltered nook, an emblem possibly for the interior body. Birkin and Ursula literally crawl into one another, suggesting the Hindu and Egyptian mythology of the serpent devouring his own tail - an emblem of cosmic harmony and union proceeding from aroused kundalini in a state of perfect equilibrium (201-02).

- 20 Mark Kinkead-Weekes observes that *The Apocalypse Unsealed* inspired Lawrence's development of a theory through which he could depict, in *Women in Love*, "the creative energy finally revealed and liberated in the relation of Ursula and Birkin, which turns their conflict towards new life" (157). This theory, as articulated by Pryse, concerns "ancient Indian neurology" which maintained that "a cosmic energy, flowing from humans, but coming from beyond them, can be generated in the ganglion or web of nerves whose center is the base of the spine; and how in its full circuit up through the other ganglia or chakras and the brain (a nervous system both sensual and spiritual) the whole being can be flooded with illumination" (157).

21 Doherty's work on the influence of Lawrence's understanding of the chakras in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* suggests how the knowledge gained through his travels, of cultural visions of sexuality and gender that differed from those he knew in Britain, were filtered through Indian philosophy. They structured the ways in which Lawrence's insights about what sexuality could be and could do increasingly informed his writing. Doherty convincingly argues that "the psychology of the chakras, both in its traditional yogic version as well as in Lawrence's idiosyncratic interpretation," as elaborated in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, is key to the sexual/spiritual journey of Mellors and Connie (80). Unlike the yogis, Lawrence believed that the energies must be directed downwards, to the genitals, in order to restore the balance disrupted by the over-valuation of the mind (81) in western cultures. However, he is in agreement with the yogis in striving for balance and for connection to the cosmos, "retracing ancient modes of connection, traversing the archaic path of the chakras back to "the great Source" (91-2).

22 Miles perceptively guesses that Lawrence's once dominant mother obsession, so prominent in *Sons and Lovers*, finds expression in the *Excuse* chapter of *Women in Love* (202). In Tantra, the spiritual mother or the Guru has sex with her "son," which is the accepted position of her disciple. And since the man is having sex with his "mother," he is religiously forbidden to derive pleasure out of it and is expected to control himself and not ejaculate. Thus Tantra uses the mother-son incest taboo to give sex a spiritual purpose. Miles says that in this chapter Lawrence explores pleasurable possibilities for a man's ceding power to the mother through the "non-phallic aspect of kundalini [which] is indeed woman-centered" (203, 207). But Miles emphasizes that what is most notable about the influence of Indian religious philosophy on *Women in Love* is Lawrence's fascination with the power of the hidden energies described by yogis and the specific methods Tantra uses to awaken that power. The focus on the non-phallic mother-son relationship is a temporary deviation from Lawrence's normal attitude towards sexual encounters between men and women.

23 Lawrence concentrated more on phallic awareness after this book, depicting instinctive sexual intercourse as revitalizing a man and a woman, although *The Virgin and the Gypsy* stands out as retaining a high valuation of unconsummated sexual desire. Lawrence wrote to Witter Bynner on 13 March 1928, "I still feel one has to fight for the phallic reality, as against the non-phallic cerebration unrealities. I suppose the phallic consciousness is part of the whole consciousness which is your aim. To me it's a vital part (*Collected Letters* 1046; quoted in Miles, 212). In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Connie says, "I believe the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind" (234). For Lawrence cerebral ecstasy is less real than physical or phallic ecstasy and Lawrence sticks to that for the rest of his life. Bibhu Padhi praises Lawrence's references to "the mystic Om" in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, and comments that his knowledge of Indian philosophy not only "inspired him to live his life fully" (6), but also allowed for movement beyond the cerebral, with its focus on oppositions, a move that can bring one to a state of harmonic peace. As Jack Stewart argues, "in each of his late works, he conceived of selves integrated into the life of the cosmos yet open to the presencing of Being" (44). Indian philosophy provided Lawrence with an alternative to the Western gender system as a foundational idea. Also worth noting is the fact that while still relishing the conflict between men and women that enlivens the early novels such as *The White Peacock*, *Sons and Lovers*, and *The Rainbow*, as he experienced more of the world, he began to value peace and calm more.

24 Lawrence cannot be considered a true yogi, as Sri Aurobindo claims, because he does not believe in spiritual mysticism and divinity. But in *Women in Love*, he does to a certain extent experiment in this area through Ursula and Birkin, before retreating, as Miles argues, from the idea of woman as the maternal leader of man in the journey to a new consciousness (209). Chakras are central to the philosophy of the Tantric yogis. And the woman is the guru, the guide in the endeavour to transform sexual energy into a higher awareness. If one never experiences sex in this way, one cannot be transformed from a mere sex partner into a true lover, and the lover cannot unite with the eternal *Chaitanya*

(consciousness) as professed in *Kena Upanishad* as the reason of our being. According to that theology, one can feel that power of God in oneself, not through the renunciation of body but through its celebration. The yogis try to overcome the limitations of our earthly existence, not by rejecting the body or sexuality but through indulgence in sex, because repression leads to depression and destruction. The woman plays a pivotal role here, because the body of the woman is understood to combine three crucial powers. One power is the God, the consciousness, the eternal spirit, the reason of everything, the ultimate destination and the eternal joy. This chakra (*Sushumna*) stays in the middle of a woman's body, near the spinal cord. The second one is in the left side of the body (*Ida*), that leads us higher and uplifts our soul, and the third one, on the right side of the body (*Pingala*), leads us lower, to destruction. The woman's vagina (*Yoni*) is the meeting point of these three powers, that yogis call three rivers. And the menstrual cycle is the result of high and low tide in the rivers. During sexual intercourse, the yogis try to push down their energy through the right side of the body and pull it up through the left side. By practicing this again and again, they try to channel the whole energy along the middle path and achieve god. This, in brief, is their method. All the male Tantric yogis want to become women in their next birth. White explains their methods in detail and shows that the female vagina (*Yoni*) is seen as an emblem of *Sakti* (74-75). Sadhguru explains that yogis see all bodies as containing masculine and feminine energies which need to be brought into balance for one to be "effective in the world." But a higher consciousness is attained when our energies enter into *Sushumna*, "which has no quality of its own. It is like empty space. If there is empty space, you can create anything you want." Only when you move beyond the masculine and the feminine can you "dare to explore all dimensions of life."<sup>3</sup> One might stop to consider how different this is from the Victorian sexual ideology that held sway from Lawrence's childhood to his early adulthood, and which maintained that adherence to rigid gender roles not only constituted appropriate behaviour but was indicative of mental health, and that women were either dangerous whores, with whom contact would destroy a man's body and soul, or desexualized domestic angels whose spirituality would help men escape the dangers of lust.

25 Ultimately, the endorsement of female dominance in the sexual encounter was too close to the Victorian way of romantic love, including the notorious placement of woman on a pedestal that Lawrence fought against throughout his work. (And many feminist theorists have expressed the same negative views of romantic love as Lawrence<sup>4</sup>). Nonetheless, Lawrence's move away from a purely Tantric focus on the woman as maternal figure, with whom actual intercourse need not take place (as in "Excuse"), and toward active phallicism should not be seen as a move toward misogyny. Instead, Lawrence's travels helped him reimagine male-female relations in a way that was consistent with his interest in Indian philosophy, especially the chakras. And that way of seeing does align in some respects with a major goal of feminism, namely to free sexuality from patriarchal role playing and the subordination of women through body shaming and instead to allow women -- and men -- to free themselves into higher spiritual consciousness through uninhibited bodily presence. In this way, Indian religious philosophy offered Lawrence the renewal he sought throughout his travels.

26 Lawrence was obviously very interested in Indian thought, even to the point of arguing about philosophy with his Indian friend Anand, as is discussed on the website "Making Britain: Discover How South Asians Shaped the Nation, 1870-1950." He first met an Indian, Shahid Suhrawardy, in Lady Ottoline Morrell's circle at Garsington Manor in November of 1915. And he writes of him: "There was an Indian there [...] Of course we talked violently in between-whiles, politics and India and so on." Of Suhrawardy's Ottoline Morrell's circle at Garsington Manor in November of 1915. And he writes of him: "It is pleasant to see with all kinds of eyes, like Argus. Suhrawardy was my pair of Indo-persian eyes" (Letters of D. H. Lawrence vol. II, 466). Lawrence did not care, however, for the fashion among London progressives, which we see represented in Forster's *A Passage to India*, of venerating Tagore, India's most famous poet. In May 24, 1916 he wrote to Lady



Ottoline Morrell, "these Hindus are horribly decadent and reverting to all forms of barbarism in all sorts of ugly ways. We feel surer on our feet, then. But this fraud of looking up to them - this wretched worship-of-Tagore attitude - is disgusting" (The Collected Letters 451). In the late 1920s, during a visit to London, he met a philosophy student, Mulk Raj Anand, who wrote of their meeting in his 1981 book, *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, that Lawrence urged him to ignore the writings of Tagore, whose nationalism he disliked, and instead to trust his senses (24). While his dismissal of Tagore annoyed Anand, they began a friendship that was sustained through correspondence. And Anand visited Lawrence in Bandol, shortly before Lawrence's death in 1930. To put his criticism of Indians (and particularly of Hindus) into perspective, one has only to think of how Lawrence's mind worked. As numerous critics have noted, he often initially expressed revulsion towards new peoples and ideas, such as the American Indian/Native ways which he first disparaged, before subsequently coming to understand them better and praise them. One reason for this was probably that he came to understand the meaning of foreign ideas better as he travelled and was continually exposed to new ways of seeing. His desire to see with "all kinds of eyes" no doubt helped. And this increased understanding brought massive changes in Lawrence's views on gender.

27 From his earliest writings Lawrence questioned the ideology of domesticity, that still held sway with the majority in England when he was young. "That she bear children is not a woman's significance," writes Lawrence in *Study of Thomas Hardy*, "but that she bear herself, that is her supreme and risky fate: that she drive on to the edge of unknown, and beyond" (52). And in *Twilight in Italy*, his first travel novel, he writes, "The woman in her maternity is the ultimate law-giver, the supreme authority" (136). Maybe for this reason, Lawrence saw the relationship between man and woman as a "sex-war" (135). This view is very conspicuous when he describes gender relations in *Twilight in Italy*. He writes, "In marriage, husband and wife wage the subtle, satisfying war of sex upon each other. It gives profound satisfaction, a profound intimacy" and "there is no synthetic love between men and women, there is only passion" (135). He observes that, among the Italians, male friends and alcohol offer men escape, "as from a bondage" to their wives (135). But this temporary relief from the imposing female dominance makes this "wine-drunken, liberated" man more pitiable. Even when such a man beats his wife, the husband's arrogance makes his weakness more palpable, his defeat more confirmed: "His drunken terrorising is only pitiable, she is so obviously the more constant power" and "So the women triumph" (136, 135).

28 Some critics have seen this assumption that women will always win over men as indicative of an intrinsic fear of women. In the essay, "On Lawrence's Hostility to Willful Women," Mark Spilka argues that Lawrence "saw the opposite sex as essentially threatening to personal integrity" (152). But, interestingly, Lawrence criticized the migration of Italian men to America because he understood it to be instigated by the desire of men to free themselves from the domination of women. He writes, "And this is why the men must go to America. [...]. It is a profound desire to get away from women all together, the terrible subjugation to sex, the phallic worship" (*Twilight in Italy* 136). In America, he believed, men become like machines and their manhood is mingled with mechanistic impulses in a peculiar combination that is set against woman and female energy. This escape is ultimately to the detriment of the men. By denying the fleshly connection provided by intimacy with a woman, a man, he opined, will feel an insistent desire to violently "dominate all life" instead of achieving cosmic balance. "Which is why," he concludes, "the Italian men have the enthusiasm for war unashamed" (*Twilight in Italy* 138). Looking at an Italian couple, Maria and Paolo, reunited after Paolo's return from working in America, Lawrence observes, "The husband and wife lived together in a relationship of complete negation. In his soul he was sad for her, and in her soul she felt annulled" (164), because the "stability is gone. Paolo is a ghost, Maria is the living body" (165).

29 In contrast, Lawrence's ideal was what he saw in the dances of the Italian peasants, which he describes as bearing them away in spirit, "lifted like a boat on a supreme wave, into the zenith and the nave of the heavens, consummate" (170). The dance is comparable to the dances in *The Rainbow* (295-97) and "The White Stocking" (152-153), providing experiences of transcendent connection between men and women. The peasants refuse the artificial and so feel all of their senses enhanced by the touch of true "intimate and compelling, wonderful" enjoyment (170). Lawrence insists that this absolute enjoyment does not come from encroachment of the man's soul on the independent soul of the woman. The separate entity of the woman is properly maintained throughout the dance: "he has not touched" it (170). And so when the dance is over, she can completely get back her own self, undistorted. This is where she wins, and this is where the perfection of the dance lies.

30 At this time Lawrence also expressed his view of marriage's power to unify souls, something glimpsed in Birkin and Ursula's consoling embrace during their passage by boat in "Continental." He writes:

It is in the spirit that marriage takes place. In the flesh there is connection, but only in the spirit is there a new thing created out of two different antithetic things. In the body I am conjoined with the woman. But in the spirit my conjunction with her creates a third thing, an absolute, a Word, which is neither me nor her, nor of me nor of her, but which is absolute. (*Twilight in Italy* 177)

31 That Lawrence does not endorse the idea that spiritual union and physical union are incompatible is obvious in his comment on the explanation given by Il Duro for remaining unmarried: "In him sensation itself was absolute - not spiritual consummation, but physical sensation. So he could not marry, it was not for him. He belonged to the god Pan, to the absolute of the senses" (*Twilight in Italy*, 177-8). Lawrence sees such men as incomplete, not fully aligned with the cosmos.

32 While, as always with Lawrence, his views oscillated rather than following a clear path, we can see changes in his ideas about gender over time in his travel writing. *Sea and Sardinia* reflects greater comfort with the physical allure of women and also his developing philosophy about its relation to their inner lives. He praises the Sardinian peasant women in "Cagliari," for being "so brisk and defiant. They have straight backs, like little walls, and decided, well-drawn brows" (*Sea and Sardinia* 66). Now we might deem it sexist to form an opinion of their characteristic qualities just by looking at their physical features, but to Lawrence physique and psyche are interrelated and expressive of each other. The physicality of the women represents their self-assurance and strength of character. Lawrence also expresses admiration of the Sardinian men, saying, "Here men don't idealise women" (67). Lawrence, who waged a war against idealism in many of his writings, naturally loves those Sardinian men who are full of virility: "Man is going to be male Lord if he can. And woman isn't going to give him too much of his own way, either. So there you have it, the fine old martial split between the sexes. It is tonic and splendid, really, after so much sticky intermingling and backboneless Madonna-worship" (67).

33 In his view, Sardinian men and women have a gender consciousness that teaches them how to defend their own group and at the same time connect with the other gender fully, dangerous though that may be. Lawrence detests the timid, tepid, modest way of love which has been promoted by modern civilization. This makes him sick, as it is full of affectations, pretensions and is cerebral rather than physical. He wants the celebration of true instinct in the relations between the sexes. Instinct is unpredictable. So exploring the heart of an instinctive man and instinctive woman who are pulsating with blood-energy is just like exploring an unknown and wild territory. The fear of the unknown gives it a further positive dimension. This is why Lawrence writes: "Give me the old, salty way of love. How I am nauseated with sentiment and nobility, the macaroni slithery-slobbery mess of modern adorations" (*Sea and Sardinia* 67).

34 He declares that the blossoming of true womanhood very much depends on its interaction with genuine virility, and vice versa. That Sardinian women are not sentimental and boring, and that they possess those brisk feminine qualities has become possible because their men "can be quietly kind and simple to a woman, without wanting to show off or to make an impression" (126-27). He identifies these attributes as maturity and sees it as a quality which is profoundly connected to knowledge about human life's place in the cosmos. The ultimate singleness of the human soul and strong individuality forbids them to be affected: "They did not show off in any way at all, not even a show of simplicity. They knew that in the beginning and in the end a man stands alone, his soul is alone in itself, and all attributes are nothing – and this curious final knowledge preserved them in simplicity" (127). Here he increasingly emphasizes the idea that gives its title to one of his essays, "We Need One Another."

35 In the chapter "Pan in America" in *Mornings in Mexico*, Lawrence gives a different view of Pan than in *Twilight in Italy*, now seeing the nature god not as solitary but as a model of the primal ability to find comfort as well as pleasure in relations with women, whom he now understands as revitalising men. The hunter, who symbolizes the natural man, says to his woman at night, "Let me come into the deep, soft places, the dark soft places deep as between the stars. Oh, let me lose there the weariness of the day: let me come in the power of the night" (163). In the early version of "Pan in America," Lawrence writes, "Then in the morning he says: That woman gave me a great deal of power. The depth of that woman is so deep, it goes behind the sun" (205). This echoes his words in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, "Men, being themselves made new after the act of coition, wish to make the world new" (136).

36 The chapter "Indians and Entertainment," which focuses on the rituals practiced by American Indians, celebrates woman's sexuality. "The slow gyration of the two dark-fringed maidens who shake their gourd rattles in a delicate quick three-pulse rhythm" represents "the triumph of the magical wistfulness of woman, the wonderful power of her seeking, her yearning, which can draw forth even the bear from his den" (*Mornings in Mexico* 65-66). The "bear," representing the deepest natural desires which have always been lulled to sleep by civilization in a chamber within men, awakens and celebrates. This is the magic of the dance, this is the magic of the Indian consciousness. While his vision here is of American Indians, not those of India, his later work makes a rather surprising connection.

37 Despite the trend in Lawrence criticism to see his work as moving toward greater and greater authoritarianism and thus becoming increasingly misogynistic,<sup>5</sup> the travel writings invite alternative readings, ones that are in accord with the yogic aim of achieving balance through a form of equality of the sexes. In *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*, Lawrence praises the Etruscans for allowing women as well as men to recline at dinner, a departure from the practices of the rest of the classical world (Greek and Roman), which "thought it indecent for an honest woman to recline as the man did, even at the family table. If the woman appeared at all, she must sit up straight, in a chair" (51). Simonetta de Filippis provides context for his view:

In early Roman times women were not only barred from participating in banquets, but as Pliny says "it was not lawful for women to drink wine"; in Greece only "courtesans" would lie on a couch with men at a banquet, and the only respectable public career for Greek and Roman women was as priestess; whereas in Etruria women appear to have been highly regarded and enjoyed social equality. (Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays, "Explanatory notes," 305)

38 Lawrence also praises the Etruscan men for knowing how to touch a woman in a delicate and sensitive way. He focuses on a painting that depicts a "bearded man softly touching the woman with him under the chin" (53). It is not mere "contact" or "juxtaposition of objects" but a "soft flow of touch" (54). This bond is not physical but an

obvious abstract mental image projected by the painting that conveys the tenderness at the center of Lawrence's mature philosophy of gender.

- 39 Lawrence writes, in "The Real Thing," "Man and woman are not two separate and complete entities," and they "are not even two separate persons: not even two separate consciousness, or minds. In spite of vehement cries to the contrary, it is so. Man is connected with woman for ever, in connexions visible and invisible, in a complicated life-flow" (Phoenix 197-98). And in "We Need One Another," he argues:

We may as well admit it: men and women need one another. We may as well, after all our kicking against the pricks, our revolting and our sulking, give in and be graceful about it. We are all individualists: we are all egoists: we all believe intensely in freedom, our own at all events. We all want to be absolute, sufficient unto ourselves. And it is a great blow to our self-esteem that we simply need another human being [. . .] . [It] is terribly humiliating to our isolated conceit. (Phoenix 188) Bottom of Form

- 40 Finally we can conclude that Lawrence believed that a healthy man-woman relationship would be dynamic, effervescent, and endlessly renewable. He was well aware of the hostilities existing between men and women, but was unwilling to endorse the triumph of men through domination of women. Instead, like the Etruscans, as he imagined them, and the yogis, as he understood them, he depicted the struggle between the sexes as an eternal reaching toward an ideal of balance. In feeling this way and expressing it in his writings, Lawrence came close to the spirit of India as it appears in sacred writings venerated by Hindus.

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## Notes

- 1 See the "Explanatory Notes" to the Cambridge edition of *Women in Love* for discussion of Lawrence's use of the word "Hindu" to refer to Indian Muslims as well as Hindus (538).
- 2 Wandervögel means a "bird of passage" or a migratory bird in German. It was the name of a popular German youth organisation which was established at the end of the nineteenth century for the promotion of outdoor activities and folk culture.
- 3 See <http://isha.sadhguru.org/blog/yoga-meditation/demystifying-yoga/the-three-fundamental-nadis/>.
- 4 See Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and, more recently, Laura Kipnis's *Against Love* for influential discussions of the ways romantic love disempowers women.
- 5 See Cornelia Nixon's widely influential study, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn against Women* (University of California Press, 1986), for the definitive articulation of this argument.

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## Pour citer cet article

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Carol Siegel is the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters on the representation of sexuality in literature, film, television, and popular music. Her book publications include *Sex Radical Cinema*, *Goth's Dark Empire*, *New Millennial Sexstyles*, *Male Masochism: Modern Revisions of the Story of Love*, *Lawrence among the Women: Wavering Boundaries in Women's Literary Traditions*, and the co-edited collections *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts*; *The Gay '90s: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Formations in Queer Studies*; *Sex Positives?: The Cultural Politics of Dissident Sexualities*, *Forming and Reforming Identity*; and *Eroticism and Containment: News from the Flood Plain*. She also co-edited with Ellen E. Berry the online journal *Rhizomes* from 1999-2018 and coedited *Genders* with Ann Kibbey from 1994-2009. Her current projects are a book-length study of the representation of Jewish sexualities in cinema and television and a book co-authored with Abhik Mukherjee on D. H. Lawrence and Satyajit Ray.

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