Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Lawrence Agonistes

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The Early Phase

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Again, to my wife Wendy

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

LAWRENCE'S QUARREL WITH SHAKESPEARE

By the time he finished writing *Sons and Lovers* in November 1912, D. H. Lawrence already considered himself to be among the very greatest of writers. Writing to his friend and literary adviser Edward Garnett, Lawrence states of his *Sons and Lovers* that

> It [*Sons and Lovers*] is a great tragedy… I've written a great book… Read my novel—it's a great novel. (19 Nov. 1912)

Seeing his *Sons and Lovers* as "great," Lawrence first and foremost defines his novel's greatness in terms of tragedy ("It is a great tragedy") and only later in terms of fiction ("it's a great novel"). Thus it certainly seems that the young Lawrence (he was twenty-seven years old at the time) set far greater store by "tragedy" than by the novel; he most likely desired—at this point in his creative life at least—to fancy himself to be a tragedian.

Of all tragedians, indeed, it is not surprising to find that William Shakespeare was most on young Lawrence's mind during this time in which he privileged "tragedy." What may be surprising to many is the fact that the young Lawrence's complex response to Shakespeare is characterized, not by admiration or reverence, but by hostility and animadversion.

Young Lawrence's complex, hostile response to Shakespeare takes place in "The Theatre" chapter of *Twilight in Italy* (written in 1915). Lawrence starts out by humorously describing an Italian performance of *Hamlet* that he witnessed in 1913, but he soon launches an attack on Hamlet the character and Shakespeare his creator:

> I had always felt an aversion from Hamlet: a creeping, unclean thing he seems. … His nasty poking and sniffing at his mother, his setting traps for the King, his conceited perversion with Ophelia make him always intolerable. The character is repulsive in its conception, based on *self-dislike* and a *spirit of disintegration.* (143–44; my italics)

Revealing that "I had always felt an aversion from Hamlet," Lawrence immediately indicates that he is not constrained by any feelings of reverence for Shakespeare or his character Hamlet: Hamlet, according to Lawrence, is "creeping" and "unclean," full of a "nasty poking" quality; indeed, Hamlet (says Lawrence) is full of "conceited perversion" that is "intolerable" to Lawrence, who ultimately finds Hamlet "repulsive"—"repulsive," it would seem, because Hamlet, "creeping," "unclean," "nasty," "poking and sniffing," "conceited" and full of "perversion," is indeed the cerebral, self-conscious, pretentious antithesis of young Lawrence's "great religion":

> My great religion is a belief in the blood, *the flesh*, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle.… All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind, or moral, or what-not. (Letter to Ernest Collings, 17 Jan. 1913; italics mine)

According to Lawrence's "great religion," "the flesh" and "blood" has greater wisdom than the mind, "the intellect," which "is only a bit and a bridle"—the "bit and a bridle" being indeed (it seems to me) a reference to the restraints put upon the bad black horse of Plato's *Phaedrus*—Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which Plato

> divided each soul into three—two horses and a charioteer; and one of the horses was good and the other bad… He [the horse] that is on the more honourable side is upright and clean-limbed, carrying his neck high, with something of a hooked nose: in colour he is white, with black eyes: he is a lover of honour and modesty and temperance, and the follower of true glory; he needs no touch of the whip, but is guided by word and admonition only. The other [horse] is crooked of frame, a massive jumble of a creature, with thick short neck, snub nose, black skin, and grey eyes and blood-red complexion; hot-blooded, consorting with wantonness and vainglory; shaggy of ear, deaf, and hard to control with whip and goad.
>
> Now when the charioteer beholds the person of the beloved, and causes a sensation of warmth to suffuse the whole soul, he begins to experience a tricking or pricking of desire; and the obedient steed, constrained now as always by modesty, refrains from leaping upon the beloved; but his fellow, heedless of the pricks and of the blows of the whip, leaps and dashes on, sorely troubling his companion and his driver, whom he forces to approach the beloved and to remember the joys of love. They at first indignantly oppose him and will not be urged on to do terrible and unlawful deeds; but at last, when he persists in plaguing them, they yield and agree to do as he bids them. And so he draws them on, and now they are quite close and behold the spectacle of the beloved flashing upon

> them. At that sight the charioteer's memory is carried to the true beauty, whom he beholds in company with Modesty like an image placed upon a holy pedestal. He sees her, but he is afraid and falls backward in adoration, and by his fall is compelled to pull back the reins with such violence as to bring both the steeds on their haunches, the one willing and unresisting, the unruly one very unwilling. Now that they are a little way off, the good horse in shame and horror drenches the whole soul with sweat, while the other, contriving to recover his wind after the pain of the bridle and his fall, bursts into angry abuse, railing at the charioteer and his yoke-fellow as cowardly treacherous deserters. Once again he tries to force them to advance, and when they beg him to delay awhile he grudgingly consents. But when the appointed hour comes, and they feign to have forgotten, he reminds them of it, struggling and neighing and pulling until he compels them a second time to approach the beloved and renew their offer; and when they have come close, with head down and tail stretched out he takes the bit between his teeth and shamelessly plunges on. But the charioteer, with resentment even stronger than before, like a racer recoiling from the starting-rope, jerks back the bit in the mouth of the wanton horse with an even stronger pull, bespatters his railing tongue and his jaws with blood, and forcing him down on legs and haunches delivers him over to anguish. (253C–254E)

Plato's *Phaedrus*, with its discrimination against the "evil" black horse—the horse that is "hot-blooded" and "hard to control," full of "desire"—gave the young Lawrence a memorable image of the passionate, beleaguered, heterosexual "flesh," with "the joys of love" that are put under restraint (according to young Lawrence here) by "The intellect" of twentieth-century Western man just as surely as the wild, "evil" black horse of the *Phaedrus* is cruelly and violently restrained by "the pain of the bridle" and the "jerk[ing] back [of] the bit in the mouth of the wanton horse …, bespatter[ing] his … tongue and his jaws with blood," and causing him great "anguish." The young Lawrence indeed takes the side of Plato's bleeding wild "wanton" black horse—"the blood, The flesh"—against the Platonic restraints placed upon it by "the intellect," "our minds," which can indeed be "wrong," while the intuitive, instinctual, passionate Lawrentian "blood" is "always true." In "answering to [his] blood, direct, without … intervention of mind, or moral, or whatnot," young Lawrence surely contravenes the "rational" Platonic injunctions.

Lawrence scholar Keith Sagar is surely right when he surmises that Lawrence's "great religion" letter was influenced by Plato's *Phaedrus*:

> It is not known when he [Lawrence] had first read the *Phaedrus*, but certainly not later than the beginning of 1913. His famous ["great religion"] letter to Ernest Collings, 17 Jan. 1913, reads like a violent

> reaction to [Plato's *Phaedrus*]… (Sagar 247)

Indeed, the young Lawrence's reaction to Plato in 1913 is, purely and simply, that of opposition; as discussed by Scherr in *D.H. Lawrence's Response to Plato*, his response to Plato would become much more complex as Lawrence soon reached the maturity of his *Rainbow*-*Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* periods.

But, in addition to the Lawrentian reaction to Plato contained in Lawrence's "great religion" letter, there is an equally significant response/allusion to Shakespeare contained there:

> We have got so ridiculously mindful, that we never know that we ourselves are anything … we ought to look at ourselves, and say, "My God, I am myself!"… We know too much. No, we only *think* we know such a lot … we have forgotten ourselves. We are [Shakespeare's] Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. We cannot *be*. "To be or not to be"—it is the question with us now, by Jove. And nearly every Englishman says "Not to be." (Letter to Collings, 17 Jan. 1913)

Here in his "great religion" letter Lawrence transitions from an attack on the constraining morality of Plato's *Phaedrus* to an attack on the ontological inadequacy of Western man ("we") today—an ontological inadequacy that has its basis (according to Lawrence) in the "ridiculously" excessive "mindful[ness]" of Western civilization, a "mindful[ness]" (cerebrality) that can only lead "us" to a failure to perceive/appreciate our own *being* ("we never know that we ourselves are anything"), as "we" engross ourselves (in Lawrence's view) exclusively in the mental life, the life of "knowing too much" in the *mental* way, the way of the mind that makes us forget that "ourselves" are far more than merely mind ("we have forgotten ourselves"); living an excessively mental life, says Lawrence, we are extremely incomplete, "We are [Shakespeare's] Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark." As a result of the excessively mental life lived by Western man today (particularly in England, says Lawrence), "We cannot *be*"—that is to say, "We" are not capable of fulfilling our vital human potentiality, "our spontaneous-creative fullness of being," as Lawrence would later call it in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (48).

At this point in his "great religion" letter, evidently focusing his attention on *Hamlet* and Shakespeare, Lawrence goes on to cite what may be Shakespeare's most famous line: "To be, or not to be, that is the question"—and to proceed to indict his fellow Englishmen (his and Shakespeare's) with "say[ing] 'Not to be'" in answer to this Shakespearean—and now Lawrentian—question.

Shakespeare may have posed the question "To be or not to be," but it is the young Lawrence, in his "great religion" letter, who provides an intense, spirited answer to the question of *how to be*, i.e., "The real way of living":

> The real way of living is to answer to one's wants. Not "I want to light up with my intelligence as many things as possible"—but "For the living of my full flame—I want that liberty, I want that woman, I want that pound of peaches, I want to go to sleep, I want to go to the pub and have a good time, I want to look a beastly swell today, I want to kiss that girl, I want to insult that man."—Instead of that, all these wants, which are there whether-or-not, are utterly ignored, and we talk about some sort of ideas. (Letter to Collings, 17 Jan. 1913)

For young Lawrence, "the living of my full flame" is tantamount to "spontaneous-creative fullness of being" and the ontological strength that goes with it; this ontological strength is attained by "answer[ing] to one's wants," "wants" such as "that liberty," "that woman," eating peaches, and kissing girls; furthermore, "all these wants" run counter to "the intellect," "[the] mind." And it was not long before Lawrence found the personification of "intellect" and "mind" that opposed the Lawrentian "real way of living" to be none other than the great cultural figure William Shakespeare and his great character Hamlet.

A strong case can indeed be made that Lawrence's "great religion" letter was in large part prompted by his viewing of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; on the same day that he wrote his "great religion" letter (17 Jan. 1913), Lawrence wrote another letter in which he informed a friend that he had seen an Italian production of *Hamlet* the very night before:

> We've got a theatre here, and last night I went to see *Amletto*…. (Letter to Arthur McLeod, 17 Jan. 1913)

Thus Lawrence wrote his "great religion" letter almost immediately after seeing Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; and, furthermore, he seems to have written it in direct opposition to what he conceived to be Shakespeare-Hamlet's excessively cerebral stance, a stance that Lawrence believed gave a negative answer to the Shakespearean question "To be or not to be."

Lawrence presents his elaborate (mis)conception of Shakespeare's "anti-being" stance in "The Theatre" chapter of *Twilight in Italy*, which deals with the Italian performance of *Hamlet*. In "The Theatre" Lawrence expands upon his "aversion from Hamlet"—and from Shakespeare, whom Lawrence evidently considers to be not only the creator of Hamlet but also Hamlet himself,—the original, the prototype of Hamlet, with Hamlet

possessing Shakespeare's very character traits (according to Lawrence): insalubrious character traits (says Lawrence) such as "self-dislike" and "[psychic] disintegration." Lawrence in an authoritative tone forthrightly states that

> There is … this strain of cold dislike, or self-dislike, … through all the later Shakespeare. In Shakespeare it is a kind of corruption in the flesh and a conscious revolt from this. A sense of corruption in the flesh makes Hamlet frenzied, for he will never admit that it is his own physical self-loathing, loathing of his own flesh. Hamlet is … a mental creature, anti-physical, anti-sensual. The whole drama [*Hamlet*] is the tragedy of the convulsed reaction of the mind from the flesh, of the spirit from the self…. (*Twilight* 144)

Thus Lawrence reduces the greatest Shakespeare—"the later Shakespeare"—to an oeuvre that is rooted in the author's (i.e., Shakespeare's) "self-dislike." According to Lawrence, Shakespeare's "self-dislike" is based on Shakespeare's "conscious revolt" from "a kind of corruption in the flesh"—that is to say, Lawrence's Shakespeare manifestly hates "the flesh,"—the very same "flesh" that young Lawrence celebrates and reveres in his "great religion" letter; for Shakespeare (according to Lawrence), "the flesh" can only be perceived as the site of "corruption," and thus "the flesh" can only be viewed by Shakespeare as abhorrent: it (the flesh) is particularly abhorrent to Shakespeare's mind, his (mental) consciousness, for Shakespeare (says Lawrence) manifests "a *conscious* revolt" from "the flesh." Accordingly, Shakespeare's creation Hamlet (the character) feels Shakespeare's own "sense of corruption in the flesh"—and (says Lawrence) this awareness of "corruption in the flesh" makes Hamlet go insane ("frenzied") because Hamlet will never accept the physical fact that the basic realities of "the flesh" are applicable to him ("he will never admit that it is his own flesh"). Thus, says Lawrence,

> Hamlet … [is] isolated, self-nauseated, labouring in a sense of physical corruption. But he will not admit it is in himself. He creeps about in self-conceit, transforming his own self-loathing. With what satisfaction did he reveal corruption, corruption in his neighbours he gloated in, letting his mother know he had discovered her incest, her uncleanness, gloated in torturing the incestuous King. Of all the unclean ones, Hamlet was the uncleanest. But he accused only the others. (*Twilight* 144)

With Hamlet being a projection of Shakespeare's hatred of "the flesh" (in Lawrence's view), Hamlet can only go about denying his own "physical corruption" ("he will not admit it is in himself") while at the same time vaingloriously attacking the "corruption" and "uncleanness" of his mother,

his stepfather, his "neighbours"—even as (according to Lawrence at least) "Hamlet was the uncleanest" of them all.

"Hamlet was the uncleanest," for Lawrence, because in his pretentious obsession with revealing the "physical corruption" of others he experiences much unwholesome "mental" "satisfaction"—"satisfaction" that is part and parcel of his "physical self-loathing, loathing of his own flesh"—"loathing" that is experienced by Shakespeare-Hamlet in the "great" speeches:

> in the "great" speeches … Hamlet suffered the extremity of physical self-loathing, loathing of his own flesh.… Hamlet is … a mental creature, anti-physical, anti-sensual. The whole drama [*Hamlet*] is the tragedy of the convulsed reaction of the mind from the flesh, of the spirit from the self…. (*Twilight* 144)

In his "loathing of his own flesh," Hamlet-Shakespeare is antithetical to the Lawrentian valorization of "the flesh," the Lawrentian "belief [that] … the flesh … [is] wise[st]." Portraying Hamlet as "a mental creature, anti-physical, anti-sensual," Lawrence here seems to be describing Hamlet as a veritable "mental lifer" crony of the physically paralyzed, sexually impotent Clifford Chatterley in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; as Clifford's "intellectual" crony Tommy Dukes explains it in *Lady Chatterley*:

> We [intellectuals] bust apart, and say spiteful things about one another, like all the other damned intellectuals in the world…. It's a curious thing that the mental life seems to flourish with its roots in spite, ineffable and fathomless spite. Always has been so! Look at Socrates, in Plato, and his bunch round him! The sheer spite of it all, just sheer joy in pulling somebody else to bits…. No, there's something wrong with the mental life, radically. It's rooted in spite and envy, envy and spite…. (36; ch. 4)

Like Lawrence's Hamlet, with *his* "sheer spite" and "sheer joy" in condemning the "uncleanness" of others, Tommy Dukes and the other "intellectual" comrades of Clifford Chatterley in "the mental life" find pleasure in "pulling somebody else to bits" by means of "say[ing] spiteful things" about him; according to Tommy Dukes (who is Lawrence's spokesman here), "there's something wrong with the mental life, radically" because it is "rooted in spite and envy, envy and spite"—the same kind of "envy and spite" that Lawrence attributes to Plato-Socrates and, further, to Shakespeare-Hamlet.

In contradistinction to "the mental life" of Socrates and Plato—and Hamlet and Shakespeare—Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* posits "Real knowledge"—as Tommy Dukes (Lawrence's spokesman once again

in this instance) defines it:

> Real knowledge comes out of the whole corpus of the consciousness; out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain and mind. The mind can only analyze and rationalize. Set the mind and the reason to cock it over the rest, and all they can do is criticize, and make a deadness. I say *all* they can do. It is vastly important. My God, the world needs criticizing to death. Therefore let's live the mental life, and glory in our spite, and strip the rotten old show. But, mind you, it's like this: while you *live* your life, you are in some way an organic whole with all life. But once you start the mental life you pluck the apple. You've severed the connection between the apple and the tree: the organic connection. And if you've got nothing in your life *but* the mental life, then you yourself are a plucked apple … you've fallen off the tree. And then it's a logical necessity to be spiteful, just as it's a natural necessity for a plucked apple to go bad. (37)

Lawrentian "Real knowledge" is supremely comprehensive, all-inclusive, rooted in "the whole … consciousness," the "fleshly" consciousness of "[the] belly and [the] penis" as well as the "mental" consciousness of "[the] brain and mind." The mind has real but limited value in its capacity to "analyze and rationalize"; but, unalloyed with the Lawrentian "flesh," all the mental consciousness can do is "criticize, and make a deadness"; while it is "vastly important" for the mind to "criticize … the world," the incompleteness, the insufficiency of the strictly "mental" consciousness and vision alone ultimately makes it the harbinger of the corruption of vital organic life ("if you've got nothing in your life *but* the mental life, then you … go bad")—the corruption of the "mental-lifer," as Tommy Dukes describes himself:

> I'm not really intelligent, I'm only a mental-lifer. It would be wonderful to be intelligent: then one would be alive in all the parts mentioned and unmentionable. (39)

"[O]nly a mental-lifer," Tommy Dukes finally is not vital, but only can speak of Lawrentian life vitality without manifesting/exemplifying it; but at least he is able to speak out against "the mental life" even as he practices it; Hamlet, on the other hand (according to Lawrence), is unmitigatedly "a mental creature" who hates "the flesh"—he is "anti-physical, anti-sensual," without any inkling (as Lawrence's Tommy Dukes has) of the importance of the "fleshly" consciousness, "belly and … penis" in addition to "brain and mind." Thus Lawrence's Hamlet has a severely limited consciousness, characterized by "the convulsed reaction of the mind from the flesh"—"the flesh" which was so sacred to D. H. Lawrence if not to Hamlet and his creator William Shakespeare.

But was Lawrence right in ascribing to Hamlet a severely limited consciousness, "anti-physical" and "anti-sensual"? Harold Bloom, the best-selling major Shakespeare critic and scholar (among many other attainments), certainly disagrees with Lawrence. For Harold Bloom, Hamlet is the supreme exemplar of, not limited, but rather "capacious consciousness":

> Hamlet … [is] the most intelligent character in all of literature…. [He possesses] supreme intellect and capacious consciousness….
>
> … Hamlet [has] comprehensiveness of consciousness….
>
> … Consciousness is his [Hamlet's] salient characteristic; he is the most aware and knowing figure ever conceived. We have the illusion that nothing is lost upon [him]…. Hamlet is a Henry James who is also a swordsman, a philosopher in line to become a king, a prophet of a sensibility still out ahead of us, in an era to come. (*Shakespeare* 388; 394; 404)

Thus, according to Harold Bloom, Hamlet in his "capacious consciousness" is "most aware and knowing"—with an "aware[ness] and know[ledge]" that in its supreme variety must indeed (it would seem, in Bloom's view) include Lawrentian "[blood-]knowing," the "blood-consciousness" of "the flesh" that Lawrence claims is so despised by Hamlet. Indeed, Bloom seems to aver that Hamlet possesses the very "Real knowledge" celebrated by Lawrentian spokesman Tommy Dukes in *Lady Chatterley*, the "Real knowledge [that] comes out of the whole corpus of the consciousness," "belly" and "penis" ("flesh") as well as "brain" and "mind" ("intellect").

So why then would Lawrence make such vehement statements concerning Hamlet's "anti-physical, anti-sensual" nature? For the answer we may once again turn to Harold Bloom, this time in his role as major literary theorist, the author of *The Anxiety of Influence*, in which Bloom makes the now classic statement that

> Poetic history … is … indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves. (5)

If, as Bloom maintains, "poetic history" is made by "strong poets … misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves," then young Lawrence, it seems to me, is indeed superbly and brilliantly practicing "misreading" on Shakespeare's Hamlet (the character)—and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (the play)—"so as to clear imaginative space for [himself]." For young Lawrence, in declaring his first supremely great work, *Sons and Lovers*, to be "a great tragedy," is placing himself in very

dangerous company—the company of William Shakespeare, master of "tragedy," and indeed considered by many to be the greatest writer of all in the English language—"The greatest poet in our language," as Bloom calls him (*Anxiety* 11). But young Lawrence, determined to be a supremely strong poet, is more than ready, willing and able to "wrestle" with Shakespeare—as Bloom explains:

> My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death. (*Anxiety* 5)

By the time of his writing of *Sons and Lovers*, young Lawrence was surely convinced that he was a "major figure" who was "great"; indeed, Lawrence's first declaration of his greatness takes place in a letter written just hours after he received word that his novel *Paul Morel*, an early version of *Sons and Lovers* had been rejected; declaring his indignation at the English who had rejected his novel, young Lawrence went on to declare his own greatness in the midst of rejection:

> Why, why and why was I born an Englishman!—my cursed, rotten-boned, pappy hearted countrymen, *why* was I sent to *them*…. God, how I hate them….
>
> They deserve it that every great man should drown himself. But not I (I am a bit great). (Letter to Edward Garnett, 3 July 1912)

Thus young Lawrence—even at the age of twenty-six!—saw himself as being at least "a bit great," even though he had not even completed *Sons and Lovers* yet (this he would do in November 1912).

Indeed, young Lawrence had not always been so ungracious to Shakespeare; perhaps seeing himself as only "a *bit* great" (my italics), young Lawrence was not quite ready to take on Shakespeare in 1912–1913; but he was ready to take on a considerably less formidable Titan, Thomas Mann—and so he did in a 1913 book review of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Here Lawrence launched his classic attack on Thomas Mann, in which he concludes that

> Thomas Mann seems to me the last sick sufferer from the complaint of Flaubert. The latter stood away from life as from a leprosy. And Thomas Mann, like Flaubert, feels vaguely that he has in him something finer than ever *physical* life revealed. Physical life is a disordered corruption, against which he can fight with only one weapon, his fine aesthetic sense, his feeling for beauty, for perfection, for a certain fitness which soothes him, and gives him an inner pleasure, however corrupt the stuff of life may be. There he is, … full of disgusts and *loathing* of himself…. And so, with real suicidal intention,… he sits,… reducing himself grain by grain to the

> statement of his own [self-]disgust, patiently, self-destructively…. ("Thomas Mann" 312; italics mine)

Thus young Lawrence at once took himself to be superior to his contemporary Thomas Mann, whom Lawrence found to be "sick" and anti-life ("[he] stood away from life as from a leprosy"), full of hatred for "physical life," "physical life" which Mann (in Lawrence's view) saw as "a disordered corruption" to be fought against by his (Mann's) sterile "aesthetic sense" which gives Mann "an inner pleasure" despite his horror at the "corrupt stuff of life"—"life," which Mann finds "disgust[ing]"; furthermore, Lawrence's Mann is full of "loathing of himself," full of [self-]disgust," which is (according to Lawrence) the main motivation for Mann's writing, the "self-destructive" "statement" of Mann's "[self-]disgust." But, significantly enough, Lawrence's "Shakespeare" at this time (July 1913, when the book review was published) is presented by Lawrence as the vital antithesis to Thomas Mann: while the anti-life Thomas Mann as an artist exemplifies

> the will of the writer to be greater than and undisputed lord over the stuff he writes,… (308),

William Shakespeare (according to Lawrence at this point) is "more human"; in contrast to Thomas Mann,

> there are the other artists, the more human, like Shakespeare …, who must give themselves to life as well as to art. And if [Shakespeare] were afraid, or despised life, then … [he] would … become rotten. Which is what ails Thomas Mann…. (309)

In contrast to the "rotten" Thomas Mann, Lawrence's Shakespeare (of 1913) is life-affirming, vital, all-comprehensive, "giv[ing] [himself] to life as well as to art"; Shakespeare here is not "afraid … [of] life," and has not "despised life"; like Lawrence, Shakespeare (according to Lawrence here) has been a servant of "life." If, as F. R. Leavis says, "Lawrence stood for life" (284), then so, according to Lawrence, did William Shakespeare.

Young Lawrence's kindness towards Shakespeare continues—at least for a while—in his great work of philosophy and literary criticism, "Study of Thomas Hardy." This extraordinary work, remarkable in so many ways, is indeed extremely important in looking at Lawrence's quarrel with Shakespeare; for, while Lawrence starts out in "Hardy" by being extremely favorable to Shakespeare, by the end of this masterwork Lawrence's attitude toward Shakespeare has evidently changed. Thus it seems to me that "Study of Thomas Hardy" may indeed be seen as a major

turning point in Lawrence's response to Shakespeare.

In "Hardy" Lawrence pays homage to Shakespeare as one of "the great writers" that are capable of presenting a supremely complex moral system and vision—more complex indeed than that of Thomas Hardy:

> This is the wonder of Hardy's novels, and gives them their beauty. The vast, unexplored morality of life itself, what we call the immorality of nature, surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility, and in its midst goes on the little human morality play, with its queer frame of morality and its mechanised movement; seriously, portentously, till some one of the protagonists chance to … look into the wilderness raging round. Then he is lost, his little drama falls to pieces, … but the stupendous theatre outside goes on enacting its own incomprehensible drama, untouched. There is this quality in almost all Hardy's work….
>
> And this is the quality Hardy shares with the great writers, [such as] Shakespeare …, this setting behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature, setting a smaller system of morality, the one grasped and formulated by the human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself, urpassing human consciousness. The difference is, that whereas in Shakespeare … the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate, is actively transgressed and gives active punishment, in Hardy … the lesser, human morality, the mechanical system is actively transgressed, and holds, and punishes the protagonist, whilst the greater morality is only passively, negatively transgressed, it is represented merely as being present in background, in scenery, not taking any active part, having no direct connexion with the protagonist…. [Shakespeare's protagonists] Hamlet [and] Macbeth set themselves up against, or find themselves set up against the unfathomed moral forces of nature, and out of this unfathomed force comes their death. Whereas … [Hardy's protagonists] Tess, Sue and Jude find themselves up against the established system of human government and morality, they [i.e., Hardy's protagonists] cannot detach themselves, and are brought down. Their real *tragedy* [my italics] is that they are unfaithful to the greater unwritten morality….
>
> Had … Hamlet [and] Macbeth been weaker, less full of real, potent life, they would have made no tragedy: they would have compromised and contrived some arrangement of their affairs, sheltering in the human morality from the great stress and attack of the unknown morality. But being, as they are, men to the fullest capacity, when they find themselves daggers drawn with the very forces of life itself, they can only fight till they themselves are killed, since the morality of life, the greater morality, is eternally unalterable and invincible. It can be dodged for some time, but not opposed. On the other hand, … [as to Hardy's protagonists]—what was there in their position that was necessarily tragic? Necessarily painful it was, but they were not at war with God, only with Society. Yet they were all cowed by the mere judgement of man upon them, and all the

> while by their own souls they were right. And the judgement of man killed them, not the judgement of their own souls, or the judgement of Eternal God.
>
> Which is the weakness of modern tragedy, where transgression against the social code is made to bring destruction, as though the social code worked our irrevocable fate. (*Study* 29–30)

Lawrence praises Hardy for Hardy's ability to appreciate "The vast, unexplored morality of life itself" and its superiority to "the little human morality play, with its queer frame of morality and its mechanised movement"; here Lawrence finds Hardy to have something in common with Shakespeare, who in his tragedies succeeds in "setting behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature"—"unfathomed nature" which, Lawrence explains, is infinitely superior to the "smaller system of morality … [that is] grasped and formulated by the human consciousness." Shakespeare, says Lawrence, succeeds in presenting the confrontation of the two moral systems—the "smaller system of morality" of "the human consciousness" versus "the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself, surpassing human consciousness"—in a supremely powerful Shakespearean way that depicts a moral universe in which "the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate, is actively transgressed and gives active punishment." Lawrence himself of course privileges "the vast, uncomprehended, and incomprehensible morality of nature, or of life itself, … the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate" over the "little," "queer," "mechanised," "smaller system of [human] morality," "human consciousness." Lawrence characterizes that morality which he valorizes as "vast," "unexplored," "incomprehensible," "unfathomed," "greater"; he furthermore terms this morality "the … morality of nature or of life itself" or "fate"—that is to say, this morality, whether it be "nature" or "fate," is beyond the human: it is transcendent, cosmic, sublime. Surely Lawrence is in touch with "The vast, unexplored morality of life itself," "the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate"—what Lawrence would later call "God, the creative mystery":

> Whatever the mystery which has brought forth man and the universe, it is a non-human mystery, it has its own great ends, man is not the criterion. Best leave it all to the vast, creative, non-human mystery. Best strive with oneself only, not with the universe.
>
> "God cannot do without man." It was a saying of some great French religious teacher.—But surely this is false. God can do without man. God could do without the ichthyosauri and the mastodon. These monsters failed creatively to develop, so God, the creative mystery, dispensed with them. In the same way the mystery could dispense with man, should he too fail

> creatively to change and develop. The eternal mystery could dispose of man, and replace him with a finer created being….
>
> … If humanity ran into a cul de sac, and expended itself, the timeless creative mystery would bring forth some other being, finer, more wonderful, some new, more lovely race, to carry on the embodiment of creation. The game was never up. The mystery of creation was fathomless, infallible, inexhaustible forever. Races came and went, species passed away, but ever new species arose, more lovely, or equally lovely, always surpassing wonder. The fountain-head was incorruptible and unsearchable. It had no limits. It could bring forth miracles, create utter new races and new species, in its own hour, new forms of consciousness, new forms of body, new units of being. *To be man was as nothing compared to the possibilities of the creative mystery*. (*Women in Love* 478–79; ch. 32; my italics)

Valorizing God, the "non-human mystery," Lawrence at the same time explicitly denigrates man: "man is not the criterion…. God can do without man." Indeed, Lawrence makes it plain that man has no reason whatsoever to be complacent, for "God, the creative mystery, … could dispense with man, should he … fail creatively to change and develop. The eternal mystery could dispose of man, and replace him with a finer created being…. To be man was as nothing compared to the possibilities of the creative mystery." Supremely in tune with "God, the creative mystery," Lawrence keenly understood that, "compared to … [God] the creative mystery," "man was … nothing"—and, if man displeased "God, the creative mystery" by "fail[ing] creatively to develop," "God, the creative mystery" could easily punish man by "dispens[ing] with man, should he … fail creatively to change and develop," subsequently replacing man with "a finer created being …, more wonderful, … to carry on the embodiment of creation." Like Lawrence, Lawrence's "Shakespeare" also greatly appreciates the supreme power of "the creative mystery" and its ability to punish sinning, transgressing man: "in Shakespeare," according to Lawrence, when man ("his [Shakespeare's] protagonists") "transgress[es]" against "the greater, uncomprehended morality"—the morality of "the vast, creative, non-human mystery"—man accordingly is "give[n] active punishment" by the "fathomless creative mystery"; thus, Lawrence tells us, Shakespeare's heroes Hamlet and Macbeth are "set up against the unfathomed ["non-human"] moral forces …, and out of this unfathomed force comes their death"—the death of Lawrentian-Shakespearean heroes, "men to the fullest capacity" who fight "the [non-human] morality of life, the greater morality, [which] is eternally unalterable and invincible [,] … the judgement of Eternal God." Praising "invincible" "Eternal God" and His "judgement," Lawrence at the same time valorizes Shakespeare's

tragic heroes who "fight ['the unknown morality'] till they [the tragic heroes] themselves are killed, since the morality of life, the greater morality [of God], is eternally unalterable and invincible"; a supremely strong poet himself full of ontological strength, Lawrence inevitably admires the Shakespearean tragic heroes who are "full of real, potent life" as they "war with God, … Eternal God"—it is a "war" that Lawrence is glad to have God win, but that nonetheless fills Lawrence with sympathy and respect for Shakespeare's tragic losers. But the same cannot be said of Lawrence's attitude here towards Hardy's characters—and towards Hardy as well; for here Lawrence in "Hardy" finds that, while Hardy like Shakespeare is capable of presenting "The vast, unexplored morality of life itself … [that] surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility" in juxtaposition with "the little human morality play, with its queer frame of morality and its mechanized movement," Hardy ultimately fails insofar as Hardy actually gives short shrift to "the greater morality" and instead lays emphasis upon "the lesser, human morality," "queer" and "mechanical" though that morality may be. Indeed, in Hardy's work (according to Lawrence), "the lesser, human morality, the mechanical system, … the established system of human government and morality, … Society" takes the place of "Eternal God"—and this replacement of "Eternal God" by "Society" in Hardy's work indeed makes Hardy's work surely inferior to that of Shakespeare, declares Lawrence, for its "weakness" is that, even in Hardy's greatest work, "transgression against the [mere] social code is made to bring destruction, as though the social code worked our irrevocable fate." For those atheistic "power"-obsessed Foucaultians in academia (and they are myriad), "Society," "the social code," "social energies," "social forces," are indeed tantamount to "God"; but for the supremely God-revering, supremely Society-defying D. H. Lawrence, Hardy's presentation of "Society" and "the social code" as "irrevocable" and omnipotent strikes Lawrence as a contemptible conventional cop-out, an evasion of ontological-metaphysical responsibility. Thus, according to Lawrence, even Hardy's greatest protagonists (Tess, Sue, Jude), when compared to those of (say) Shakespeare and Lawrence, are indeed ontological-metaphysical mediocrities, for "they were not at war with God, only with Society. Yet they were all cowed by the mere judgement of man upon them…. And the judgement of man killed them, not the judgement of their own souls, or the judgement of Eternal God."

The fact that Hardy's characters are "at war … only with Society," and are "cowed by the mere judgement of man upon them," and are "killed" by "the judgement of man," also surely demonstrates (in Lawrence's view) that Hardy is metaphysically inferior to Shakespeare—and, of course,

Lawrence—insofar as Hardy (unlike Lawrence and Shakespeare) is evidently incapable of portraying "the greater morality" in any kind of meaningful detail: "in Hardy … the greater morality … is represented merely as being present in background, in scenery, not taking any active part, having no direct connexion with the protagonist." Thus in Hardy's work, says Lawrence, there is a lack of "connexion" between "the greater morality, … Eternal God" and Hardy's "protagonists," who are ingloriously "brought down," not by "the greater morality," but by the mundane "lesser, human morality, the mechanical system, … the established system of human government and morality"; Hardy's protagonists (according to Lawrence) evidently lack the psychic-ontological strength to "detach themselves" from "the mechanical system … of human government and morality" which, when "transgressed" by them, "holds, and punishes" them, just as the far/infinitely greater Power of "Eternal God" "gives active punishment" to the greater protagonists of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's protagonists, says Lawrence, have more "real, potent life" than those of Hardy; this enables them to experience the greatest "tragedy," at the hands of "the greater morality"; with their great ontological strength, Hamlet and Macbeth (for instance) resist any temptation to create a situation in which "they would have compromised and contrived some [mundane] arrangement of their affairs" which would have spared them from tragedy as they would instead have gone about "sheltering in the human morality from the great stress and attack of the unknown morality"—"the unknown morality, … the greater morality, … Eternal God," with Whom they have the great "direct connexion" that leads to spectacular, magnificent, sublime tragedy as opposed to "the weakness of modern tragedy" in Hardy, whose protagonists' only "*real* tragedy" (my italics) is, says Lawrence, that their psychic-ontological weakness led to a state in which "they are *unfaithful* to the greater … morality" (italics mine)—and this unfaithfulness is part and parcel of their (and Hardy's) failure to attain the supreme heights of great Shakespearean tragedy—and beyond Shakespearean tragedy, as we shall see, the unique heights of Lawrentian "supreme art" (*Study* 128).

For Lawrence in "Hardy" has for his aim not only to compare Hardy unfavorably with Shakespeare, but also to compare Shakespeare unfavorably with … D. H. Lawrence himself! This Lawrence does in the concluding paragraphs of "Hardy," in which he launches a subtle but powerful attack on Shakespeare's poetico-cultural authority, finding Shakespeare's metaphysical "conclusions" to be lacking in "completeness" for "the soul" of his "unsatisfied, unbelieving" reader(s):

> humanity does not continue for long to accept the conclusions of … [great] writers, … [such as] Shakespeare…. These great tragic writers [such as Shakespeare] endure by reason of the truth of the [metaphysical] conflict they describe, because of its completeness.… But with regard to their conclusions they leave the soul finally unsatisfied, unbelieving. (126)

According to Lawrence, Shakespeare in his tragedies was supreme in the "completeness" of "the truth of the conflict [he] describes"; this guarantees his "poetic immortality" (to use Harold Bloom's phrase), for Shakespeare "endure[s] by reason of the truth of the conflict [he] describe[s] … [in] its completeness"; but Shakespeare ultimately fails, says Lawrence, when it comes to "[his] conclusions," "conclusions" which (says Lawrence) are unsatisfactory, unconvincing and invalid for Shakespeare's "unsatisfied, unbelieving" readers—for Shakespeare's metaphysical "knowledge," "utterance," and "conclusions" are incomplete, and indeed even "foolish":

> [even great writers] have not completed one perfect [metaphysical] utterance, not one. Small as is the circle of our knowledge, we are not able to cast it complete…. In Shakespeare's "Hamlet," the conclusion is all foolish…. (*Study* 126)

Thus Lawrence in "Hardy" contends that not one great writer—not even Shakespeare—has "completed one perfect utterance" of a vital philosophical nature; indeed, Shakespeare's "conclusion" about life can even be "foolish"—as is the case, according to Lawrence here in "Hardy" (and elsewhere), in the conclusion to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (of which Lawrence speaks a good deal in *Twilight in Italy*, of which more later). This artistic-philosophical failure, says Lawrence, has been with us "always," for no artist has been able to find "the true balance" between the two ontological streams, "the dual stream of woman and man," "the two waves … of his [and her] being," "the dual wave" of male and female that leads to "utterance" when "the two streams have flowed and [clashed] together, … where the male clashes into the female, and the two heave out in utterance" (*Study* 53); this failure in "balance," says Lawrence, leads to a failure in "utterance" insofar as even the greatest writers (according to Lawrence) have not succeeded in presenting a conception of male and female that depicts and establishes "the true balance" (127) between male and female forces of being. These great writers evidently have failed (in Lawrence's view) to fully appreciate the importance and potency of "the female stream"—an importance and potency that Lawrence in "Hardy" definitively values:

> The clear, full inevitable need in me is that I, the male, meet the female stream which shall carry mine so that the two run to the fullest flood, to furthest motion…. It is the arriving at my highest mark of activity, of being; it is her arrival at her intensest self. (54)

Proudly and definitively asserting his main ontological identity as "the male," Lawrence at the same time poignantly expresses his "full inevitable need" for "the female stream" of being to meet his male stream of being, with salubrious results for both "male" and "female" in their "streams of being," as male and female selves attain their "highest … being," their "intensest self[s]."

Here in "Hardy" Lawrence goes on to wax metaphysical-philosophical:

> Why do we consider the male stream, and the female stream, as being only in the flesh: it is something other than physical. The physical, … the sex, is only a definite indication of the great male and female duality and unity….
>
> There is female apart from Woman, … and male apart from Man. There is male and female …, … the great twin river, eternally each branch resistant to the other, eternally running each to meet the other.
>
> It may be said that male and female are terms relative only to physical sex. But this is the consistent indication of the greater meaning….
>
> … Until eternity, there shall be this separateness, this interaction of man upon woman, male upon female, this suffering, this delight….
>
> … everything of life is male or female, distinct…. Every impulse that stirs in life, every single impulse, is either male or female, distinct….
>
> … that which is … Life, that is our field. (54–55)

Philosophically-metaphysically extrapolating from male-female "flesh" and the "physical" to "the great male and female duality and unity," Lawrence here avers universal application of "male and female" terms to "the [cosmic-metaphysical] greater meaning" concerning which Lawrence here evidently claims to have supreme wisdom and vision, wisdom and vision that includes intense knowledge of "this separateness, this interaction of man upon woman, male upon female, this suffering, this delight,"—knowledge that Lawrence would later name "life-knowledge" (*Fantasia* 74); indeed, Lawrence in "Hardy" forthrightly declares that "Life … is our field"—the "field" of D. H. Lawrence, the great creative writer who indeed sees himself as possessing more "life and the wisdom of life" (*Phoenix* 536) than the great William Shakespeare himself.

Lawrence sees himself as having more "life and the wisdom of life" than Shakespeare, particularly as it pertains to the quest for "the true balance" between "male and female," "Man and Woman":

> And so it has always been, always: either a wrong conclusion, or one forced by the artist, as if he put his thumb in the scale to equalise a balance which he could not make level. Now it remains for us [i.e., D. H. Lawrence] to seek the true balance, to give each party … his [and/or her] due….
>
> Man and Woman … are the two complementary parts [or parties]. In the body they are most alike, in genitals they are almost one. Starting from the connection, almost unification, of the genitals, and travelling towards the feelings and the mind, there becomes ever a greater difference and a finer distinction between the two, male and female, till at last, at the other closing in the circle, in pure utterance, the two are really one again, so that any pure utterance is a perfect unity, the two as one….
>
> We start from one side or the other, from the female side or the male, but what we want is always the perfect union of the two. That is … the law of Consummate Marriage…. Every man starts with his deepest desire, a desire for consummation of marriage between himself and the female, a desire for completeness, that completeness of being which will give completeness of satisfaction and completeness of utterance. No man can as yet find perfect consummation of marriage …, but he can approximate to it, and every generation can get a little nearer.
>
> But it needs that a man shall first know in reverence and submit to the Natural Law of his own individual being: that he shall also know that he is but contained within the great Natural Law, that he is but a Child of God, and not God himself….
>
> It needs that a man shall know the natural law of his own being, then that he shall seek out the law of the female, with which to join himself as complement. He must know that he is half, and the woman is the other half: that they are two, but that they are two-in-one.
>
> He must with reverence submit to the law of himself: and he must with suffering and joy know and submit to the law of the woman: and he must know that they two together are one within the Great Law, reconciled within the Great Peace. Out of this *final knowledge* shall come his supreme art. (*Study* 126–28; italics mine)

According to Lawrence, before Lawrence all artists—even the greatest—had failed to "equalise the balance" between male and female; they were incapable of attaining "the true balance," for they did not have the capacity to "give each party … his [and/or her] due"—that is to say, they lacked the unique imagination to appreciate both male and female (and the male and female metaphysical principles of being) equally. But Lawrence finds himself ("us") to be uniquely capable of attaining "the true balance," as he goes on authoritatively/vatically to expound upon "Man and Woman," their alikeness and their difference, conceiving himself to be the artist who can indeed achieve the "pure utterance" of the philosopher-poet-visionary who ultimately envisages/makes "Man and Woman…, male and female,

… really one again, … the two as one," in his imagination and his art—but only after he has also supremely elucidated "Man and Woman," "male and female," in their "difference and … distinction" as well. The artist/writer who is able to perceive the value of both "the female side [and] the male," and to express that value, as Lawrence sees himself as being able to do, may also be able to attain "the perfect union of the two," of the male and female; this "perfect union," says Lawrence, is incarnated/embodied in "the law of Consummate Marriage," "Consummate Marriage" being that marriage which results in "that completeness of being which will give *completeness of satisfaction and completeness of utterance*" (my italics), with "completeness of utterance" going hand in hand with "completeness of satisfaction," and both ensuing from "that completeness of being" which only "Consummate Marriage" can guarantee.

Thus, "completeness of satisfaction and completeness of utterance" are dependent upon, and issue from, "completeness of being," which "completeness of being" is in turn ultimately dependent upon "Consummate Marriage," "the perfect union of the two," "[the] man … and the female." But who has attained "Consummate Marriage"? "Consummate Marriage," more a spatial-metaphysical state than a temporal-mundane one, has evidently not yet been attained by anyone ("No man can as yet find perfect consummation of marriage"), but Lawrence here in "Hardy" surely sees himself as coming closer to it ("he can approximate to it") than anybody else.

But why did Lawrence feel so confident of success in attaining "Consummate Marriage"? Lawrence in fact married Frieda (13 July 1914) only a few weeks before he started writing "Study of Thomas Hardy" (5 Sept. 1914); thus the fact that he was *A Married Man* (Maddox) must have been much on his mind at the time—but the way in which he made the fact of his marriage a source of his superiority to other men/artists is indeed uniquely audacious, uniquely Lawrentian.

Young Lawrence, not long after beginning his love affair with the married Frieda (March 1912), enthusiastically and earnestly spoke of their relationship in terms of marriage:

> My next coming to you is solemn, intrinsically—I am solemn over it—not sad, oh no—but it is *my marriage*, after all, and *a great thing*…. (Letter to Frieda Weekley, 14 May 1912; my italics)

"[*M*]*y* marriage, … a great thing": here young Lawrence seems already to see things and events from the perspective of the supremely strong poet, with the supremely strong poet's "triumphant solipsism" (Bloom, *Map* 9)—it is "*my* marriage," the marriage of D. H. Lawrence *alone*, not the

marriage of D. H. Lawrence and his woman Frieda, that young Lawrence in his mind's eye is contemplating at this point in time (May 1912), a point in time at which he has not yet even completed *Sons and Lovers*; but young Lawrence nonetheless is already exceedingly sure of himself and his inevitable "Greatness," and the corresponding/concomitant "Greatness" of all that was intimately connected with him: thus, "my marriage … [is] a *great* thing"—and young Lawrence, in his "solemn" obsession with "my marriage," is indeed on the way to making his very artistic identity—his "poet's stance, his Word, his imaginative identity, his whole being" (Bloom, *Anxiety* 71)—his "life"—dependent upon his forthcoming marriage:

> Do you know, like the old knights, I seem to want a certain time to prepare myself—a sort of vigil with myself. Because it is *a great thing* [my italics] for me to marry you, not a quick, passionate coming together. I know in my heart "here's my marriage." It feels *rather terrible* [my italics]—because it is a great thing in my life—it is *my life* [italics Lawrence's]—I am a bit awe-inspired…. It's the very strength and inevitability of the oncoming thing that makes me wait, to get in harmony with it. Dear God, I am marrying you, now, don't you see. It's a far greater thing than ever I knew….
>
> … It's a funny thing, to feel one's passion—sex desire—no longer a sort of wandering thing, but steady, and calm. I think, when one loves, one's very sex passion becomes calm, a steady sort of force, instead of a storm. (Letter to Frieda Weekley, 15 May 1912)

Declaring his approaching marriage to be "a great thing," young Lawrence clearly sees it as a uniquely transcendent experience for him; rather than viewing "my marriage" primarily in terms of erotic sensation and excitement ("not a quick, passionate coming together"), Lawrence deems "my marriage" to be a supremely serious trial for which he needs "a certain time to prepare myself"—"like the old knights," or perhaps like a Christ figure approaching his supreme religious experience and sacrifice. For young Lawrence here, his supremely heartfelt ("in my heart") reaction to "my marriage" puts him in touch with the "rather terrible," "awesome" realm of experience, what theological scholar Rudolf Otto calls "the non-rational numinous experience," with "numinous elements, such as the sense of awe and reverence before infinite mystery and infinite majesty" (xiii); this "numinous experience" includes "a terror fraught with an inward shuddering such as not even the most menacing and overpowering created thing can instill," together with "Religious dread" or "awe" (14): as Lawrence says, "I am a bit awe-inspired"—for he feels overwhelmed, overpowered by "the very strength and inevitability of the oncoming thing," "strength and inevitability … that makes me … [want] to get in

harmony with it." Lawrence's desire "to get in harmony with" "the oncoming thing" of his marriage in its "strength and inevitability" is rooted in

> A characteristic common to all types of Mysticism, … the *Identification*, in different degrees of completeness, of the personal self with the Transcendent Reality…. [I]t must be Identification with the Something that is at once absolutely supreme in power and reality and wholly non-rational. (Otto 22)

Thus for Lawrence—in Lawrence's creative mind, imagination and desire—his marriage becomes for him a kind of "numen," "numen" being indeed a "divine or presiding power or spirit" (*Oxford English Dictionary*)—and, for Lawrence, this "numen," this overwhelming "power or spirit," is the impending fact of his marriage, which is "a far greater thing than ever I knew"—the greatest feeling/experience of his life, with which he is eager "to get in harmony," the "harmony" that includes "*Identification* … of the personal self [of Lawrence] with the Transcendent Reality [of Lawrence's marriage]." At the same time, indeed, that he "get[s] in harmony" with his marriage, Lawrence "gets in harmony with," "identifies" with God ("Dear God, I am marrying you"), achieving the mystical-religious-poetic "Identification with the Something that is at once absolutely supreme in power and reality and wholly non-rational." Identifying with "absolutely supreme in power" God, Lawrence finds his very "passion-sex desire," his "very sex passion" to be transmuted into a "steady," "calm" strength ("a steady sort of force")—the strength of the supremely strong poet that Lawrence was indeed on his way to becoming. Thus, finally, Lawrence sees "my marriage" as the numinous source of his poetic-ontological strength and way to God.

Seeing himself as "a Child of God," as he says in "Study of Thomas Hardy," Lawrence avers that he is "a man [who] know[s] in reverence and submit[s] to the Natural Law of his own individual being" (127); in touch with God, Natural Law and "his own individual being," Lawrence in his great self-knowledge and self-esteem finds himself to be supremely capable, not only of "know[ing] the natural law of his own being," but also of "seek[ing] out the law of the female, with which to join himself as complement" (127–28)—this "knowing" and "seeking out" Lawrence by 1914 (the time of "Hardy") believes he has achieved thanks to his "marriage" with Frieda and the insight/wisdom he has gained from his "wonderful naked intimacy" with "the woman":

> Frieda and I have struggled through some bad times into a wonderful naked intimacy, all kindled with warmth, that I know at last is love…. Let