

**Saturated Phenomena and Blood Consciousness:
Nature in the structuring of Human Experience in
D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and *Women in Love***

Sushree Routray
Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee
(India)

Abstract:

D.H. Lawrence's belief in the "Blood consciousness" asserts the impracticability of attaining a comprehensive understanding of the world through a Cartesian perspective. This belief system posits the inextricable connection between the corporeal and the mental, foregrounding the primordial awareness of the embodied self and its entanglement with the natural world. This paper will examine how nature, as a manifestation of instinctive life, resists the detrimental and dehumanizing effects of industrialization and capitalism on humans. Being in the world is not solely a rational experience, and the body as embodied consciousness can serve as a foundation for knowledge. Jean-Luc Marion's concept of saturated phenomena further supports this idea. These phenomena are events that offer an intuition that surpasses our intention towards them. They are crucial to our experience of the world and can be seen as "gifts" due to their overwhelming abundance and plenitude that surpasses our ability to fully grasp them. In his oeuvre, Lawrence employs a framework in which nature is understood as a 'gift', resulting in a highly saturated representation of sensory phenomena. This serves as a paradigm of the excess inherent in his conception of Blood consciousness.

Keywords: Blood Consciousness, Anthropocene, Lawrence, Saturated Phenomena

Introduction

D.H. Lawrence employs the imagery of animality to accentuate the wisdom and sensations of the human body. There is a recurrent emphasis on the beauty and mystery of the human form, as exemplified through references to fluids, the sap of trees, sex, and the womb. These allusions suggest that human bodies are leaky and vulnerable, rather than closed and isolated spaces. Lawrence suggests in his essay "Insouciance" that "What is actual living? It is a question mostly of direct contact" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 97), emphasizing the importance of embodiment as a relational rather than an individualistic experience. Furthermore, Astrida Neimanis postulates that Phallogocentrism supports the forgetting of the bodies that "gestated our own and facilitated their becoming" (Neimanis, 2017, p. 3). For Lawrence, the womb, the nature and human relationships represent a site of revival for humanity. Lawrence (2004) theorises the belief that the "vast bulk of consciousness is non-cerebral," critiquing the notion of disembodied and pure thoughts, separate from the actual phenomenological experiences of the world, and rejects the hegemony of the mind over the body (p. 19). The anthropogenic destruction of natural landscapes, as evidenced by the proliferation of mines and cities, represents a fundamental tension between the spontaneous, instinctive nature of humanity and the constraints imposed by modernity. The Bottoms, for instance, exemplify this tension through their outwardly aesthetic appearance, which belies the unsanitary and detrimental impact of industrialization on the health and well-being of its inhabitants. In contrast, the idyllic and pristine Willey Farm serves as a poignant counterpoint, illuminating the sacrifices made in the pursuit of economic gain and the detrimental effects on the natural world. This dialectic illustrates the paramount importance of striking a balance between the demands of progress and the preservation of beauty and sensual pleasure in the natural landscape. Lawrence views human relationships with nature as saturated phenomena that exceed our capacity for comprehension. Through a close reading of the novels and an analysis of the concept of saturated phenomena, as theorized by scholars such as Cassandra Falke and Jean-Luc Marion, this paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role of nature in shaping the human experience in both novels.

**“Shimmering Protoplasm” and “Latent Mysticism”:
Nature as a Saturated Phenomenon in *Sons and Lovers***

Nature as a transcendental force facilitates a deep connection between the human psyche and the world around them, including the spiritual and sexual mysteries of the universe. The protagonist, Paul, experiences a transformation in his relationship with nature as his relationships with Gertrude Morel, Miriam, and Clara, evolve. Lawrence argues that “the business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment” (Lawrence, 1985, p. 171). Nature is a “shimmering protoplasm” that illuminates the dynamic connection between humanity and the natural world in the present moment (Lawrence, 2005, p. 197). It serves as a means of escapism from the mundane aspects of daily life, with natural elements such as cherry trees, daffodils, sunsets, and wild roses symbolizing the complex range of emotions experienced by the characters throughout the narrative.

The sexual intimacy between Clara and Paul in the chapter “Baxter Dawes” represents a moment of transcendence, in which the cosmic and the human intersect, resulting in a deep spiritual satisfaction for Paul. This moment can be seen as a “baptism of fire in passion,” according to Lawrence (p. 456). After their lovemaking, Paul realises the immensity of his passion and their nothingness before the tremendous living flood that lifted them. He says “They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars” (p. 455). While Clara may not immediately apprehend the full significance of this moment, she eventually comes to herself as a self-assured and autonomous individual. Lawrence emphasises sex as it blurs the subject-object distinction that Sartre argues against. The novel shows how “the body lived by the subject” rather than “the body-object” (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 27). It becomes impossible to ignore the essential humanity of another person when skins touch each other. The permeability and vulnerability lead to the understanding that “my gaze cannot adequately capture the fulness of the things” (p. 59). The novel focuses on the effect of the body on the lived embodiment of characters who interrogate their pure rational thoughts, which they enforce in their consciousness. Lawrence's treatment of Nature as a transcendental force is aligned with his broader philosophical stance on the nature of pure, ephemeral relationships, as elaborated upon in the chapter “Morality and

the Novel" which refers to the intersection of physical and spiritual realms. He says:

Man, and the sunflower both pass away from the moment, in the process of forming a new relationship. The relation between all things changes from day to day, in a subtle stealth of change... which exists in the non-dimensional space of pure relationship, is deathless, lifeless and eternal. That is, it gives us the feeling of being beyond life or death (Lawrence, 1985, p. 171).

Lawrence views human relationships as saturated phenomena. The concept of saturated phenomena, as theorized by scholars such as Cassandra Falke and Jean-Luc Marion, pertains to the idea of events or occurrences that surpass our cognitive faculties of understanding and intuition. These phenomena are described as being "saturated" in the sense that they overwhelm and exceed our capacity for comprehension, thereby challenging the epistemic limits of human reason. In his philosophical discourse, Marion asserts that engaging with saturated phenomena requires a relinquishment of our egoistic mode of intentionality, and instead adopting a receptive stance towards the "gift" of the phenomenon (Marion, 2002, p. 24). This approach, he argues, allows for a different horizon of appearance, one that resists the subsumption of the phenomenon under the conceptual apparatus of the subject. On the other hand, Falke emphasises the importance of intersubjective relation in the encounter with saturated phenomena. She suggests that the reader must be willing to "come out of themselves" and enter into a space of uncertainty, where their being is in relation to the other (Falke, 2017, p. 10). This, she argues, fosters a sense of human bond and acceptance of the other as an end in themselves. Miriam's connection with nature suggests that she is deeply romantic, and finds solace and fulfilment in her interactions with the natural world. Her love for flowers, in particular, is a powerful force that allows her to pour out her unconditional love. This connection with nature is intense and emotional and is often more meaningful to her than her relationships with other people, even her lover Paul. She believes that "her friend, her companion, her lover, was nature" (p. 213). It is through her interactions with nature that Miriam is able to establish a true sense of communion and understanding. She is a true romantic, and nature serves as both her friend and her lover, providing a source of solace and inspiration.

Nature serves as a conduit through which the characters can express their complex and sometimes conflicting emotions. At the beginning of the novel, Paul's relationship with nature reflects his relationship with Miriam. Later, in the final pages of the book, Paul finds life to be meaningless and is overwhelmed by the cacophony of noise that surrounds him. Another instance of this phenomenon is the ash tree near Morel's house, which evokes diametrically opposite reactions from Walter and the children. While Walter finds solace in the melodies of the west wind, the children are distressed by the wind's demonic howls. In the chapter titled "The Test of Miriam," the tactile sensation of cherry fruit coming into contact with Paul's ears and neck is described as producing a "flash down his blood," which can be interpreted as a symbol of his burgeoning sexuality (p. 365). Despite the challenges he has faced in his tumultuous upbringing, Paul endeavours to remain true to his authentic self. Even when he feels completely defeated, he refuses to allow Miriam to extinguish his inner spirit. In the chapter titled "Baxter Dawes," Paul asserts that "Love should give a sense of freedom, not of imprisonment" (p. 463), rejecting the role of martyr in the sacrifices demanded by Miriam. In the aftermath of his mother's death, Paul briefly contemplates rejecting life itself. However, he ultimately finds himself unable to do so. By the end of the narrative, both Paul and Miriam come to embrace and embody their true selves, with Paul refusing to allow Miriam to stifle his authentic identity. Miriam, in turn, comes to accept that she cannot possess Paul on her terms and must cultivate a selfhood independent of him.

Paul's indomitable spirit, fuelled by his intrinsic connection to the natural world and his inner being, resists the temptation to succumb to the finality of death. Rather, it drives him towards a quest for self-actualization in the artificial, luminous milieu of the city. This decision is emblematic of his determination to confront and overcome the challenges that obstruct his path towards personal fulfilment. As Lawrence asserts in the chapter "The Incest Motive and Idealism" that "we did not explain the unconscious, any more than we need to explain sun" (p. 17). We can only achieve self-realization by fully immersing ourselves in the raw, embodied experience of life. Lawrence suggests that it is only through direct experience that we can comprehend the profound mysteries of the universe, as knowledge is always the result of a holistic encounter. Paul seeks to cultivate a harmonious connection with the cosmos through a deep understanding of his being.

**"Her being suffused into his veins like magnetic darkness":
Saturated Phenomena and Blood Consciousness in *Women in Love***

Industrialization, according to Lawrence, is predicated on the objectification of the other, thereby undermining the inherently spontaneous nature of the relationship between humanity and the natural world. He suggests that nature is suggestive of an instinctual mode of existence and that the growing avarice of desire and capital has led to a sense of enslavement and disconnection from our deep-seated sensual and aesthetic needs. *Women in Love* provides a panoramic view of life in which it is impossible to fully know or understand the other, and vehemently opposes the reductionist analysis of knowledge through solely the mind. Lawrence critiques the individualistic nature that refuses to acknowledge the other's being, as Rupert Birkin says, "We're too full of ourselves" (p. 58). The novel also challenges patriarchal notions of possession and control, focusing instead on the idea of "impossible possession" (Beauvoir, 1948, p. 63) that arises from industrialization. These doubts and critiques are not presented as the dilemmas of a single character, but rather as collective experiences shared by the various characters in the novel.

In his understanding of love as an abstract phenomenon, Rupert Birkin seeks to create diversions through his lovers. He desires to find the meaning of life through these relationships and views his partners as mere objects. He sees them as extensions of his fantasies. As Falke theorizes, the act of love requires one to "yield their intention" (Falke, 2017, p. 3). However, Birkin's willingness to be overwhelmed by love is lacking, and he sees the event of love as simply a respite from boredom, rather than a singular occurrence. Marion contends that "to conceive of love as a need would render the beloved a mere means to personal self-fulfilment" (p. 47). Birkin's prior notions of love impede his ability to truly discover it. Birkin shouts at Hermione to understand everything with "deliberate voluntary consciousness" (p. 55). Birkin and Gerald struggle against the subjugation of their minds by societal norms. Ursula ultimately guides Rupert out of his preconceived notions about relationships with women and the reluctance to accept the excess of connection with others. The novel delves into the realm of desire, intuition, and passion in the embodiment of gender and the universal desires for love and affection. It presents both differences and universals without essentializing any dominant perspective, ultimately emphasi-

zing the knowledge derived from the givenness of the world. In the chapter "Mino," Ursula Brangwen refuses to be reduced to an object, lacking agency and ready to be a self-sacrificing paradigm of virtue. She mocks Rupert's "voice of pure abstraction" (p. 210), and instead emphasizes the importance of living through actual experiences rather than pure idealistic reflection, as both sisters continuously advocate for.

Literature offers saturated phenomena that can overwhelm readers' intentionality if they pay attention to its contents. Jean Luc Marion describes saturated phenomena as an "absolutely unique, irreproducible, and largely unpredictable event" (Marion, 2003, p. 89). He further emphasised that these encounters with these phenomena cannot be "predicted, captured or fully remembered" (Marion, 2002, p. 33). According to Marion, the ego evolves through these saturated phenomena, which surpass human intentionality. He theorizes that one should approach phenomena as a gift, without expectation or imposition of human will. Works of art and literature can offer such saturated phenomena.

The emphasis on visceral experiences in Lawrence's novels exceeds the limitations of pure cartesian rationality, as the author highlights the importance of extreme physical sensations in understanding the human body and its place in the world. Through the concept of "blood consciousness," Lawrence postulates that acknowledging the embodiment of human existence is crucial for understanding the hierarchal institutions of power and morality. Furthermore, the utilization of literature as a means of examining the experiences of others as autonomous entities, rather than mere reflections of the self, is a notable aspect of Lawrence's work. The liminal phases marked in his novels, such as intuition and blood consciousness, particularly in regarding women, serve to enhance this understanding. Additionally, Lawrence emphasises the importance of visceral experiences in understanding the human condition. Lawrence believes:

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... We know too much. No, we think we know such a lot (Lawrence, 2004, p. 21).

Through the portrayal of characters such as Gerald, who seeks to engage in a pure and visceral connection with his body and nature through the act of removing his garments and immersing himself in the scent of primroses, the novel emphasizes the importance of embracing the holistic and unquantifiable nature of existence. Rupert Birkin also believes that "vegetation travels into one's blood" (p. 152). In the chapter "Carpeting," Ursula and Hermione engage in a discourse that critiques the imposition of critical and rational analysis upon the examination of life experiences. Ursula speculates that such an approach is akin to "tearing open a bud to see what the flower will be like" (p. 203), as it inherently disrupts the holistic understanding of the subject in question. This is further exacerbated by the attempt to categorize and appropriate these experiences into predetermined containers, thereby obliterating the unique and singular nature of each experience. Lawrence argues that "Morality is a delicate act of adjustment on the soul's part, not a rule or a prescription" (Lawrence, 1991, p. 94). He asserts that the pursuit of an idealized existence is ultimately futile, as it disregards the intrinsic fallibility of the human condition. Instead of imposing rigid moral frameworks on the complex and ever-changing reality of life, Lawrence proposes that we should embrace the transience and beauty of existence, as exemplified by the symbolic significance of flowers.

Conclusion

Lawrence's understanding of the body as a form of knowledge allows us to tackle the extreme emphasis on rationalism. Through his representation of nature and human relationships as saturated phenomena, Lawrence challenges the epistemic limits of human reason and calls for the relinquishment of our egoistic mode of intentionality, instead adopting a receptive stance towards the "gift" of the phenomenon. Through the concept of "blood consciousness," Lawrence suggests that acknowledging the embodiment of human existence is crucial for understanding power and morality. The novels offer a saturated phenomenon of nature that exceeds the limitations of pure rationality and invites readers to approach it as a gift without expectation or imposition of human will.

References:

- Beauvoir, S. D. (1948). *The ethics of ambiguity* (B. Frechtman, Trans.). Citadel Press.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1956). *The second sex* (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). Jonathan Cape.
- Falke, C. (2017). *The phenomenology of love and reading*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1985). *Study of Thomas Hardy: And other essays* (B. Steele, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1991). *Fantasia of the unconscious and psychoanalysis and the unconscious* (B. Steele, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1995). *Women in love*. Planet Ebook.
- Lawrence, D. H. (2005). *Sons and lovers*. Webster's Thesaurus Edition.
- Marion, J. (2002). *In excess: Studies of saturated phenomena*. Fordham University Press.
- Marion, J. (2005). The event, the phenomenon, and the revealed. *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy*, 40(1), 57-78.
https://doi.org/10.1163/24689300_0400105
- Neimanis, A. (2019). *Bodies of water: Posthuman feminist phenomenology*. Bloomsbury Publishing.