



***The Contingency of Agnosticism on Uncertainty: an Alternative Reading
of Faith and (Un)faith in “Women in Love”***

Soumia Bakezzi^{1,*}, Hachemi Aboubou²

¹L’arbi Ben M’hidi University(Algeria), Soumia.bakezzi@univ-ueb.dz

²Batna 2 University(Algeria), h.aboubou@univ-batna2.dz

Received: 15 / 01 / 2022

Accepted: 04 / 06 / 2022

Published: 14 / 06 / 2022

Abstract:

If “*Women in Love*” is the epitome of modernist literature chronicling a religious thematic fissure between the conventional and the non-conventional, i.e. between faith and unfaith, then it is also a novel that draws significantly from these two sources of meaning, departing from certainty to reach uncertainty as the final destination. The aim of this paper is threefold. First, to show how the novel pulls the brakes on the quintessential theme of religion and expands on it from a rather epistemic standpoint, relying heavily on uncertainty as the guiding principle of the work of Lawrence. Second, to illuminate the persistence of an ongoing struggle of the being into the becoming reified in the characters, and lastly, to demonstrate Lawrence’s affiliation with the rather non-reputable religious stance, that is agnosticism.

Keywords: *agnosticism; D.H. Lawrence; faith; uncertainty; unfaith,*

***Corresponding Author**

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1914, D. H. Lawrence wrote, “primarily I am a passionately religious man, and my novels must be written from the depths of my religious experience.” (Ferrier, 2013, p. 2). This is a starting line from which everything must proceed, and an interesting point of departure for his artful career. However, in an oppositional statement he considered the fixity of a certain theme in the writing of the novel to be ungrounded and elusive. His response, if we are to call it as such, came as resistance to his previous statement, where he contends, “If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.” (qtd. In Parker and Gardner, 1994, p. 61). This generalizable statement, though provides a backdrop against which the dialectic and the dialogic of the “now and then” manifests itself, does not only speak about his literary production but speaks about the art of narration as a whole. Our concern, in this paper, is with the intersection between agnosticism as both a fixed and oscillating conceptual framework and the psychological profile of Lawrence, particularly as it is articulated in “*Women in Love*” while taking into consideration that Lawrence never avowedly called himself ‘agnostic’². We will do so by considering the theme of theism or the absence thereof and progress in our analysis along the lines of the thesis (i.e. faith), the antithesis (i.e. unfaith), and their convergence into a synthesis (i.e. uncertainty), which we argue to be the genesis of both faith and unfaith. Overall, this paper provides an implicit comparison between the commitment of the author to a non-religious stance and an analysis of a protean identity in the making³.

1. Lawrence and The Knowledge of The Self

In theological discussions, the self and the knowledge of the self exceed the cogito. The knowledge of the self goes beyond the romantic notion of transcendence to a knowledge of God. Through the prism of the twenty-first century’s inflated diagnosis of social and cultural realities, religion is assumed to take the backseat, and so man’s knowledge of himself has since been fragmented and the corollary to that is that the knowledge of God took an unconceivable detour. The notorious conception of the death of God remarkably prophesied by Schopenhauer points to the obsolescence and the indispensability of religion⁴. In modernism, the spaciousness of literary construction became a contested area where the exploration of the self sat uncomfortably with the idea of God. This is where the knowledge of the self and of God part ways.

Indeed, knowledge of the self in the literary profession is the distinctiveness in individual experiences; it is an act of individuation, a religion of the self which is at the heart of the narrative where the teller is to be found. Knowledge of the self is an extension of the self into the novel. It follows that the knowledge of the self may be missed when the concentration of the intellect is on the reconciliation of the nature of the divine with that of the human.

To situate the ostentatious death of God in modernist writing, and particularly in Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, we ought to gather an intimate knowledge of Lawrence from his works and his bibliographies as a guiding thread into an exploration of his stance regarding faith or unfaith⁵. In Lawrence’s writing, this is where he apprenticed himself to the non-conventionalism which mirrors the evolution in contemporary thought of modernism, and this is where we find Lawrence in what was reported about his upbringing and his youthful years. Later on, it is his writings that take the lead and acts as a compass in guiding us through his

²however, along the spectrum of faith and unfaith, he was controversially categorized as an atheist

³this latter is likely to reveal the inner self embedded within the narrative one. On this, John McCarthy in his influential book “*Dennett and Ricoeur on The Narrative Self*” spoke of how both Ricoeur and Dennett explored the narrative unity of the self at length. Both have demonstrated how authors interweave between the personal and the fictional to make human life intelligible and how the narrative method allows us to understand the way in which the self is constructed and constituted

⁴mankind is growing out of religion as out of its childhood clothes” Schopenhauer (2009) ”

⁵Additionally, an endemic knowledge about literary works reveals its teleology; the extrinsic purpose that is revealed due to the very practice of narration. This teleological view allows “metaphoric renderings of experience [...] and to understand the ways human beings construct their worlds” (Bruner, 1986, p.44)

unceasing revised profile and illuminate us with an insider's details that are lost in the interpretation we ascribe to it. Apropos of this, author of *The Life of D. H. Lawrence, Harrison* (2016) writes, "if writing could work to shape one's surrounding, it also served as a tangible means of fashioning an identity" (p.12)

On 15 October 1907, Lawrence explained to Revered Robert Red how the reading he was engrossed in seriously modified his religious beliefs (ibid. p. 58), and this disillusionment "showed no signs of abating"(ibid., p. 232). Indeed, "his new intellectual pursuits naturally created rifts" (p. 46). On the waning of Lawrence's religious sentiment, Harrison (2016) contends that "at the age of 21, Lawrence faced a personal crisis of religious faith by himself,"(p. 54). A crisis that did not recede as time progressed. Similarly, at around the age of twenty-two, D. H. Lawrence "had broken with the institutional religion" (Ibid., 41)

And on the significance of the novel under study, Michael Bell (1992) writes, "Of all his novels, this is the one with the most significant and sustained tension between the absoluteness of its emotional imperatives and the relativity of their forms. The book is founded on an absolute imperative of rejecting the old and discovering something new."(p. 105). He adds that *women in love* "dramatises the inward process of an alienated individuation." (ibid., 109) a form of rebelliousness against the absoluteness of the old established order. However, in Lawrence's case, the thematic preoccupation with the self found its way to the surface of his writing along with the symbolism that the knowledge of God encapsulates. Lawrence gives prominence to his individuality while relativizing the expressiveness that the emotions take once removed from the mind, a simulacra in its rudimentary conception.

2. When The Real Meets The Fictional: Lawrence as Birkin

One of the most striking features of "*women in Love*" is its proximity to the life of Lawrence. Indeed, there seems to be a personal involvement of Lawrence in the narration. On this account, we cannot overlook the resemblance between our "main" character Birkin and Lawrence. This circular self-referentiality reflects the congruence between the real and the fictional, which harkens us back to what Ronald. P. Draper (1976) considered as a major weakness of this novel, not least Lawrence's "overeagerness to tie the fictional to the real world" (p.77). One of the strong points of this tendency is that it suppresses any objection to the arbitrariness of the fictional world which may, in fact, put a limit to our inquiry.

Along these lines, we have some characters who are flat, so to speak, but also give a momentous to the events and help make it identifiable and distinguishable as such; others which I consider to be the main characters are round and there is some character development invested in the built-up of their personalities. Not least Birkin and Ursula, Gudrun and Gerald, who went through insurmountable mountains of challenges, and whose deficits are clearly delineated, be they physical or spiritual.

Surely, the roles of other characters are not to be dispensed with completely but can be hibernated at least partially to understand the inner workings of the novel. In an excerpt from *Lawrence, D. H.*, David Bradshaw (2008) writes, "One of the principal achievements of *Women in Love* is that it embraces the fervid ideology of its author while at the same time giving space to attacks on it. This testimonial allows two readings. The first, which is blatantly overt, is that it attests to the author's inclusivity which transcends the boundaries of the multiplicity of the tendentious characters to a tolerance of competing ideologies, and the second is covert and it entails enslavement, and this is where he finds his telos, in conscripting them to make ends meet⁶. To elaborate, Lawrence Did not foist his views nor did he opt for a unidimensional exposition approach to exploring what he believes in. The large margin he devised for the free flow of movement of his characters is expedient and it amplifies the value of the thesis and the antithesis alike. It allows him to traverse into unfamiliar waters through the familiar territory.

The intensity of Birkin's experiences and the rotation around his persona cannot but leave us questioning if he is Lawrence per se. Rupert Birkin emerges as a by-product of the undivided attention Lawrence gave to him, and it is a kind of preference bestowed upon him. And while his participation in the novel and the turn-taking allocated to him are measurable and can be measured, we trust our visceral understanding of its endemic meaning. Birkin is depicted

⁶ Lawrence, earlier on, provided the blueprint for his characters and set them up for a journey of discovery. This, I argue, is exploring the self by proxy.

as very vulnerable because, while he appears to be adamant on certain issues, the focal point upon which he stands is movable and tectonic. Indeed, it is safe to say that the nerve of the novel is a young man, not much is said about his past life but his profession and his controversial involvement in relationships which encompassed not only the opposite gender but also the same gender. Its timeline started with an ostensible pious and traditional young lady called Hermione Roddice and shifted towards Ursula Bragwen, whose appearance was simultaneous with that of Gerald Crich.

The intricacies in such unparalleled relationships are the ideas that are compressed into these characters, namely that of faith and unfaith as personification in characterization and that is our guiding thread in this analysis.

Inheriting their maxims' legacy, Lawrence decided to put himself at the exposure of different streams to authenticate his true feelings, to come to terms with his "self" which he disposed of in favor of a fixed end that promised to answer the vexing question of meaning by evaporating certainties and elevating the senses to come out of the circle of self-referentiality which account for too little when it comes to spiritual experiences. The embodiment, thus, gives him the vantage point of the beholder and the observer, and the chasm is both bridged and disconnected for the effect his unconscious is aiming to exert.

Characters are abstractions deliberately used in a sermonizing way to make a point, albeit they are seen not as an impediment but a catalyst, subservient to the idea. From a psychological lens, Lawrence is seen as conditioning his characters to be both independent and codependent to the moves of his quill in the episodic representation of events, which translates in real life into the internal strife Lawrence goes through. The independence of the characters is best observed when they are behaving predictably, effortfully attempting to keep danger at bay. Codependence grants him dominion over his characters and the character nurture from his wells of probabilities. It signals reorientation, the voice of the author, his magic ward that fends off expectancy, boredom, and familiarity. It is a precursor to a state of conviction and also is in parallel with his proclivities. Therefore, in this endemic transmutation and internal transformation, the reader should be on his guard for this shift in perspective and the kind of exit we are led into.

The split in identity does not necessarily mean semantic limitations, but contextual and thematic richness. Furthermore, the longevity of the traits of each character denotes one thing and one thing only, that if the exploration of the self is to follow this strategic pursuit, it is to exhaust every potential outcome that would reveal itself in due time, or that the author himself did not feel it to be in alignment with the demands of his soul. That is the rationale and the guiding principle of this novel and it is what we follow in our analysis.

One of the aspects of the novel that merits being pointed out is the author's unrestrained control over his compulsive narration which does not escape the religious trope. This latter is articulated in a dialogic way, which evinces conversing with the self. A sustained effort to keep himself in check of new intruding ideas. The authenticity, which is an existentialist trademark, in which he is best disguised, signals a pivoting aspect in the novel, the confluence of the subjective with the intersubjective. The confluence of four worlds, to be precise, across inner and outer lines as points of reference, in crossing over may erase one for alignment, similarity, or destination. The world of the author as a relatively isolated from himself, the fictional world in which he created and invested his intellectual and imagination into the making of it, and lastly, his subjective experience which is espoused with that of the fictional world. Indeed, the representation of the two inner worlds with convincing accuracy to one another. A layer within a bigger layer, the originator of fictionality. With some filtering out, one can see areas of resemblance.

With regards to his vocal involvement in his characters, Birkin himself acknowledged not only the peculiarity of the names, which gives the novel a particularly English flavor but also the roles assigned to them and the destiny that awaits them with a particular reference to the curse of Cain. "Rupert Birkin. Gudrun Brangwen. Gerald Crich. Tibby and Laura Lupton. Ursula Brangwen. Rupert Birkin. What peculiar names we all have. Do you think we've been singled out, chosen for some extraordinary moment in life, or are we all cursed with the mark of Cain?" What could this Biblical allusion possibly mean? A harbinger of a deterministic fate? or the mayhem that follows the fugitives in their own shelters and disrupts the pacific course of

their mundane life? Whatever the intentions of the author, the symbolic language has a predetermined religious dimension to it.

3. Religion, Irreligion, and Uncertainty

It may seem at first glance that the spiritual journey which Birkin embarked on does not fulfill the requirements of a truly transcendental experience with a resolute end. Starting from a process of purgation and purification which surpasses the Christian sense of the word to a non-spiritual one. The path that the author has taken was through the dissolution of his identity and his propensity to give away one of his attributions, a piece of his dissoluble self, and project it onto a character who has embodied and lived up to the role assigned to him/her. Split identity reveals the complexity of the whole and it invites the reader to not mitigate the conglomeration of it in the author, and thus, not to misread or be misled by authorial confessions, because no entity is entirely fixed. There is an unexplored set of linkages between religion and uncertainty in “Women in Love”, which is not precisely demarcated but it logically gives rise to it. This is the key to our argument in favor of agnosticism because the element of uncertainty is the deciding factor in either faith or unfaith, and the “proximal cause”⁷ with regards to agnosticism. Uncertainty has its bedrock in unjustified claims, claims without proof that does not amount to being established theories or facts, and this is the perfect description of religions. Religions appear to surpass uncertainty and even squeeze it into oblivion. Atheism or irreligion on the other hand recognizes only what is established as objective certainty⁸. It follows that what we take as a common denominator from both strands of thought is that they both in and out themselves deliberately eschew to drown themselves in uncertainty.

Though it would be objectionable to consider uncertainty the fulcrum point of this novel with regards to the theme of faith and unfaith, the subtlety and the refinement of it in “*Women in Love*” renders it central to all we seek to understand concerning faith or unfaith. Of course, this is tied to the general zeitgeist of the era, and taking historical considerations of WWI, the period in which the novel was written, we cannot overlook the predominance of uncertainty which swept away every conceivable aspect of human life, and was, in turn, projected in literary production. Indeed, much like all interwar writers who wrestled with uncertainty, Lawrence was no exception. Uncertainty about life and death, the loss of control of one’s destiny, and uncertainty as it pertains to loyalties. Indeed, much like all interwar writers who wrestled with uncertainty, Lawrence was no exception.

Faith was present in being a subject of philosophizing and also as an active framer of the philosophical perspective applied to the subject of faith and unfaith, it is a workable philosophy and instrumental rationality. On that account, the knots of religious derangement are weaved into Birkin, who seems to run afloat throughout the novel. The heavyweight that befell him and injured him seems to be a very important instance in the novel. It may indeed seem like Lawrence set himself on a long period of religious stasis.

With the seizure of one option, subsumed more or less in faith embodied by characters such as Gerald’s father, a Christ figure; Hermione, who is the epitome of conventions and tradition, an equalizer with faith, and the culmination of Western civilization and the residue of the Victorian era, of Lawrence’s religious backdrop, there will be another alternative: unfaith, depicted in Gerald whose confidence in his atheistic belief trails all of his other thoughts. He said it with an utter outburst that he is an atheist, and the reader would feel its self-imposition and off tangentiality in its very immediate context. The stereotypical depictions associated with it include capitalistic tendencies, and the visibility of the pursuit of mundane outcomes. Such a concept illustrates the presence of a second factor in the equation of religion.

The religious crisis in “Women in Love” is understood as weakening the ability of Birkin instead of empowering him, and it leads us to consider that the prognosis is

⁷See Jordan Peterson’s “Maps of Meaning”

⁸Atheism and irreligion merit to be expounded on properly. While it appears that both signify the same thing, what perhaps helps to distinguish between them are two important facets. Both converge toward belief, albeit with major considerations. While atheism in and out of itself offers a categorical objection to any supernatural entity, it holds a firm belief concerning this objection; irreligion on the other hand does not abide by any strict religious teachings or rules. The second is the framework. Undoubtedly, atheism’s framework is entirely scientific; irreligion does not have an outlined framework it posits itself on and is thus debased.

unpredictable. But then we keep seeing the element of uncertainty, the beacon that illuminates our way through the obscure entanglement of early twentieth-century dominant concerns.

Of course, many instances factor into this reading. Birkin's scandalous relationship with Gerald, already unfathomable especially when considered with the standards of his time. Gerald is the atheist and the *Übermensch* in the Nietzschean sense.

Throughout the novel, we are constantly introduced to the characters' core beliefs, be it religious or irreligious. The religiosity, wherever is founded and made clearly manifest, is eclipsed by the dawn of unfaith or uncertainty in a dialectical manner. The most satisfactory conclusion we reach is that, contrary to what Lawrence said which is quoted in the introduction, faith does not live to blossom, and this is a recurring theme that will be expounded upon later. In this regard, the constant dawning of the element of unfaith is quite traceable especially in the redundant move which sought the author's tightening fist around the Crich family, the sister and father alike

Additionally, Birkin's ailing body which we are exposed to early in the novel reminds us of Lawrence in the years of war, not deemed fit for conscription, which must add a layer of transparency to our act of accordance; of according the real with the imaginary.; however, beyond anything else, the traces we find hovering around this aspect of the novel are those of uncertainty. And uncertainty is intimately tied to the notion of the suspension of judgment and hence, agnosticism. But is that what we are led to believe? or does it speak volumes about the religious sentiments of D.H. Lawrence?

The delicacy in *Women in Love* is the balance that is at stake, with the imbalance ratio which tilts more towards certainty, and thus faith and unfaith. But even with that, on the aggregate, we notice how Lawrence reversed the gears, especially with the centrality of Birkin, who personifies. The factor of uncertainty. His refusal to surrender to the conquering forces bequeathed to him by the cultural and social canons is strikingly unprecedented and is always accompanied by the fall of the veil of sacredness, or with scornful indifference to anything and everything. In the opening lines of the chapter "Man to Man", Lawrence narrates: "He lay sick and unmoved, in pure opposition to everything. He knew how near breaking was the vessel that held his life. He also knew how strong and durable it was. And he did not care", Birkin is envisioned to suffer tremendously, sufferance from the war that he waged on everything revolving around his existential orbit, but isn't showing any signs of trading his deepest convictions with his emotional safety, even if that is to spare him from an impending fallout. He goes on to add in striking affirmation "Better a thousand times one's chance with death than accept a life one did not want". He chose to remain standstill in that pitiful position, taking the arrows from a world that throws at him in retaliation. In a way, this deep state of him which we were introduced to as the story progressed is generalizable and applies to the center as well as the circumference of the novel, and the final outcome is an inverse fallout of the constant around him and the triumph of his persona and everything it represents. In the previous chapter, he also conjured up disdain at a life of repetition "but better die than live mechanically a life that is a repetition of repetitions"; "He wanted so much to be free".

But freedom comes at a cost, it comes with evading the past and setting up a new shelter, with positing a firewall against the attacks from within and without. What we infer from this is that Lawrence was adamant on preparing the ground carefully for the degeneration of faith, though it is worth mentioning that the process is not synonymous with blasphemy, as we take notice of the replete use of religious symbolism and the extent to which they manifest themselves suppresses any protest against claims of ridicule or parody, which in a particularly pragmatic reading, one can interpret this evocation as a Machiavellian move par excellence. Another kind of revelation that attests to the author's telos anchored in a continual deferred state in the face of a deterministic aim

4. The Symbolic Language in *Women in Love*

It would not be hyperbolic to say that the novel is inflated with symbolism, which perhaps in the repertoire of D. H. Lawrence may serve as a transparent indicator of his over-reliance on the agreed-upon as a vehicle for not only revealing to us his 'being' but also of his 'becoming'.

To start with, the "Water party" chapter depicts our characters jumping in the water of the lake, some of them naked, which fundamentally recalls the Catholic experience of Baptism, a rite of rebirth, indispensable for a new start. Though we would be mistaken to draw a direct

line between that and the coming back into faith, akin to repentance. Far from that, Water symbolizes a concomitant duality in our context: rejuvenation and/or destruction. And in this regard, any interpretation will dramatically alter the reality of the fiction and the real. In another instance, Lawrence draws a perfect picture of the struggle between the certain and the uncertain, motioning with his quill the wrestling scene between Gerald and Birkin, illuminating a recurring theme, nakedness. Nakedness is synonymous with vulnerability, with surrendering the will to the test of time, it is about starting afresh.

Nowhere does Lawrence pursue this more tenaciously than in the themes of life and death. "Love and death compete for the reader's attention" Bradshaw (2008) maintains. This duality when viewed through the lens of literary production can best be summarized in The Burke Theorem⁹, a deliberate focus that excludes from its field of vision the diachronic that does not synchronize with the self as it is revealed through the penetration of the language to the conscious. the irretrievable dismal of faith and with it unfaith evidenced in "Gerald's imminent and fatal slip" that prefigures the end to extinguish the flames of atheism on the part of Lawrence.

Death in the water, on the other hand, is a harbinger of the fate of faith, exacerbated by more death tolls. Birkin's experience is a case in point. stripping him bare of his armor, disposing of the old, in this case, faith, which signals that he is available to the calls of his revelation. It also signals that the pool is enlarged, and so are his choices. The details that we might have taken no notice of fit in the pattern and reinforce such a reading.

Moreover, the dialectic of the arrival and departure may in fact start from an initial stage, it suffices to pick up on the subtleties and to follow the thread of the narrative.

Again, what is of particular interest to us is Birkin. He is driven by the force of quest, of finding a thread he could hold on to. The point being here is that he is never satisfied with the answers that would presumably answer his angst. Surely, at the end of the novel, he survives when Gerald is ensnared and lured into his untimely death and survives when Christian symbolism is buried under piles of uncertainties, and is redirected towards the point of departure, which is agnostic in nature. Disconnecting from the familiar and tapping into the incognito terrain where one reconstructs, or remains still, in an ignorance-based approach, which is agnotological in essence.

We cannot but notice that in the broad narrative, Lawrence blew a new spirit to the dying body of Birkin, and we cannot but see that he is a causal agent in creating this feeling, and in this sense, agnosticism appears to be constructive knowledge rather than a prepackaged concept. It appears constructive because it subjects the very philosophical idea of the existence of God to rigorous scrutiny, to a process of deconstruction, not only the idea of God's presence but also of God's absence. Hence the agency of both these two threads is mandatory. We find similar topography in "*Women in Love*" symbolized in theistic and atheistic symbols strewn together. We are to infer from that uncertainty as to the leitmotiv that will drag us to the very end without fully satisfying our curiosity.

Bradshaw contends,

This is the only novel Lawrence wrote with a title which is not transparent, yet this is entirely in keeping with a work of fiction in which the author's exploratory imagination continually outpaces the language he uses to set down his vision. The reader must reach out for its meanings just as Ursula must reach out to the 'great creative process' of love.

What we should take from this are both the process and the end result. With the concept of the trinity that is demolished, and the constant resurgence of the themes of Christianity which are then thrown into oblivion after a fair struggle, the fate of atheism is no different as we pointed out earlier. The only danger in that is that such an argument is susceptible to objection on the basis of neutrality. However, neutrality melts if we are to consider a Gestalt-reading. Such instances (as viewed from a Gestalt-reading) are multiplied in the story and can, in fact, be multiplied ad infinitum, but the event with which the story closes signals that Lawrence gauged the extent to which he considers to be of paramount importance: uncertainty.

⁹The Burke Theorem states that "A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing. A focus upon object A involves a neglect of object B"

The dialogism that impregnates the novel at hand and the verbal urgency to resolve his fixation, to use the psychoanalytical jargon, is obviously manifested in the open-end closure. back to where everything started, the psychological and linguistic fixation. The fixation is tantamount to a major preoccupation, that the foreclosure of the story would not be done otherwise. Even at the closure of the novel, we are provided with two options, that the agnostic self of the author will continue to have its ripple effects in his subsequent use, or that the struggle will continue, which is the less probable choice, given that all attempts have been exhausted in a relatively voluminous novel as *"Women in Love"*.

5. The Thesis, The Antithesis, and The Synthesis in *Women in Love*

To highlight some overlooked points, Christianity arguably and categorically did not escape the shrines of the novel and it appeared to incentivize the narrative moves with every pursuit of action. Though the lines between faith and unfaith are clearly delineated with respect to the presence of God and the absence thereof, Lawrence has made it irrefutably clear that there exist major serendipitous commonalities in intensity as well as in extensity. Needled to say, the reigning threads of each are weaved with geniality and are fully given their due, paving the way to a more tolerant and encompassing notion of both faith and unfaith.

Agnosticism is defined as the fact that the existence or non-existence of God is unknowable (Le Poidevin, 2010). Therefore, the things that scheme our perception (faith and unfaith) operate along with the oxymoronic essence of the word agnostic which envelope both extremes. Here, a workable definition of agnosticism as the root of theism and atheism is not only provisional but also an indispensable one. Both theism and atheism are accessible by appealing to such unobjectionable definitions that escort theism and atheism. However, suffice it to say that Agnosticism appears to gradually lose its definition when it is viewed through the lens of this radical polarity.

Though Lawrence made many transgressions, the Christian trope remained intact. Also, the novel would lead us nowhere if it was completely shrouded in the depths of agnosticism. As such, the question of epistemology is highly crucial; it echoes the fact that religion cannot completely disappear, and the progressive silencing of religion and atheism does not empty this work from religious and atheistic tenor.

As such, this indeterminacy foregrounds the novel's central religious thesis and it does the same with the antithesis. The search for an alternative model is deemed the next step in the descending towards a resolute end. Time, in the Bergsonian sense, appears to be dilated and contracted to fit the narration of the experience as it is experienced, it extends and shrinks to remove elements deemed essential or unnecessary. Once again, choosing the manner of death is but a consolidation of his worldview. This was a decisive factor in shaping his standpoint. Surely, we are led to read that he grows less certain of the two, and here comes the element of uncertainty that will guide us through the holes in the narrative and the subjective experience.

In his pursuit to strategize over how to resolve problems, Lawrence depicts Birkin as exhausting all his options to approximate and portray him as proceeding in cautionary steps. This is most evident in the spirit of the novel where he did not destroy his shelter without securing a new one. Though one would make a case for existentialism, and a strong one, especially with the spirit of uncertainty that governs the novel, the ceaseless questions that spring to mind with regards to a finite and absurd world, a hermeneutic reading of the novel delivers variant responses. It would read him as pinning his "self" down in a process of individuation but doesn't allude to the cessation of existence.

At this point, an objection might be raised that it is strictly an existential pursuit. Lines of similarity could be drawn especially as it concerns the derivation of meaning through an appeal to his senses and to his proper existence and experience. Authenticity is in fact, a humanistic trait which is widely observed since the first few lines. Characters showing signs of insurgency against the established, as is the case with the concept of marriage in the opening chapter.

6. On Agnosticism and The Agnostic Mind

It appears that there is little to say about agnosticism. After all, it occupies the middle ground between theism and atheism. A relational knowledge comes from juxtaposing it with faith and unfaith and the offshoot is that it tilts the more towards unfaith. There is nothing original about

this claim. However, what seems highly contentious in our reading of “Women in Love” is that agnosticism is but a state of mind, a transitory phase from the certain to the uncertain, after all attempts to reconcile with earlier beliefs have been exhausted. When the journey is itself the destination, the edifice of certainty becomes truncated, and is therefore removed from the way; and what is left is only its symbolic significance which in turn, may be eroded in time. However, saying that it is ephemeral because the state of mind in an ever progressive motion, which is not necessarily equal to elevated states of mind in the religious sense, would make of it a highly controversial claim, but it would certainly account for the initial stage, the blank slate with regards to the belief God or the supernatural without evidential justification before one could side with a one belief system(theism or atheism).

The author allowed Birkin to be as such, a free soul wandering through in uncharted territories with no strings attached, though there were instances when he is depicted as revisiting the dogma of the past (Christianity) or having an unorthodox relationship with Gerald, the novel’s atheist archetype. Understandably so, when one rejects something, it becomes an integral part of his identity. Coexistence activates modes of being dominated or dominant, and one must outmaneuver the other. This description is akin to what we find in the novel with regards to faith and unfaith, an insurmountable impasse that does not prove to satisfy the narrative. Therefore, acceptance or rejection yield the same effect on the conscious, and they, thus, reside in the unconscious. And this is what perhaps Lawrence was grappling with.

The problem I find in agnosticism in “Women in Love” is the conceptual ambiguity, which may seem to be uninformed and that’s why it does not offer itself ready to undergo such an analysis. Fundamentally, what this points out is the exceptional epistemological journey, and rightly so. “*Women in Love*” is jargon-free and is heavily based on allusions. We may fall into authorial fallacy, and this is true if we are to consider that what animates his fiction is self-exploration of the being in the becoming, a process of constant self-revision done in a piecemeal fashion to sustain a single thread of narration.

Lawrence’s formulation of the concept of agnosticism is done in a way that necessitates inclusion, because, in a sense, the agnostic mind is the default mind, without empirical evidence or the radiating effects of faith, the elaboration of it springs from the equation of faith and unfaith. Setting himself up for the journey of the restoration of the default self warrants the stripping away of preconceptions either in favor of theology or against it.

Furthermore, the plurality of choices is the cornerstone for his agnosticism, which is perhaps unbeknownst to him. But what do we make of such elaborations? Our reading of this cannot be divorced from the reigning religious sensibilities of that time, nor can it be inattentive to the rise of atheism as a reaction to scientific knowledge and a counter-reaction to baseless theology.

Also, what do we make of the notion of sacrifice along contextual lines? Surely, the sacrifice could be an articulation of the social and political changes that overtook the continent of Europe, but in “*Women in Love*” it appears to be firmly tied to a basic theological and philosophical question: does God exist? Human suffering has always been the default condition to the summoning of a transcendental entity, so to speak, a non-perishable concept that vexed the arena of philosophy for millennia, that is God. That knowing God is simply unattainable no matter the path one embarks on is certainly what the thesis of faith or unfaith would willingly and unwillingly support. Professing agnosticism, not through any conventional empirical scientific endeavor, and this is the artfulness and the aesthetic of Lawrence’s work but through extended moments of self-projections in alignment with the dissection of his persona, i.e. characters, along with the characters’ existential web of concerns.

7. Agnosticism in “*Women in Love*”

By and large, the epistemological and theological frameworks underpinning the conceptual upheaval which we analyze in “*Women in Love*” are unparalleled given that the story does not abide by the traditional normative view of agnosticism¹⁰, or privileges one viewpoint over the other. It is dialogic and dialectic. Consequently, agnosticism manifests itself differently, largely

¹⁰The normative view of Agnosticism holds it as an epistemic stance, that anything regarding metaphysics or the belief in God is unknown and humanly unjustified. see also Sami Pihlström (2020) “*Meaning Agnosticism and Pragmatism*”.

through associations, and the fact that its knowledge necessitates context-specific reality is something we held onto within our interpretation.

Based on the foregoing considerations, the presence of theistic and atheistic elements allows greater visibility into the subject of religion as a subjective experience. However, despite the conspicuous Biblical aspects which are conceivable in every thematic part composing the novel, and the antithesis, which is atheism, there is one complication in this narrative, the synthesis. Though both the former and the latter remain a catalyst whose acceptance is categorical, the synthesis marks another point of rupture and Lawrence problematizes the religious crisis through the lens of each. While bringing them into dialogue with one another, he nullifies atheism despite the genealogical proximity it has with agnosticism. He revisits and defines his view of what constitutes the agnostic mind, which exists at a distance from faith and unfaith.

The convergence of opposing certainty elements tilt towards annihilation instead of divergence towards resolution, but the reverse happened. With respect to the futuristic events, the way he chose his characters to die became accordingly how he wants to live. Indeed, reasons to live give reasons to die, and something must live at the expense of a perishable idea. This remark paves the way to two fundamental issues already explored: the lived and the dead experience which continues to assert its monopolizing power. An opposition between two affirmations mediated by concepts to provide the baseline knowledge needed to pin down the conceptual upheaval which stems from an elusive concept: agnosticism.

In so far as our understanding of agnosticism within "*Women in Love*" permits, agnosticism is both a patchwork of genesis and rhizomatic approach, i.e. it is not overtly depicted as deeply rooted in anything but remains essentially accessible through many entrance and exit points. Therefore, following a one-way path to revealing it would be futile, nor is it solely immersed in a fixed genealogical line of emanation.

Lawrence did not negate any measures to repair the inadequacies of his past, but resumed with opening a new chapter, thus complying with the working of his mind, and with the input from the outside world. There is no reason for us to bury the fact that the question of the end is without an end just because we want to stress a certain aspect. Agnosticism as evidenced in Birkin is as such. Knowing God for the human mind is the end itself, to know the first cause and to put an end to the ridiculous logic of infinite regression is certainly the means and the end. Needless to say, the tipping point that is concomitant with the denouement demonstrates, with utter recognition, that it is the closure Lawrence reached during a critical period in his life, and this is what we understand of his rumination, uncertainty, and the absence of a closure that satisfies the rider of the waves of "*Women in Love*". Therefore, exploring the thorny terrain of it in a highly contentious novel seems to be quite an endeavor and it is not one that will easily lead us to a calm offshore.

In this regard, Agnosticism is both teleological and non-teleological. It is an interpenetration segregated halfway, and it yields unsatisfactory results. At the intersection of the autonomy of the text and the production of the author which will inevitably leave ineffaceable prints of himself and his identity, agnosticism extends from the realm of the fictional to the real. Lawrence narrates a story that is framed within a socio-cultural perspective. However, the novel also has its own socio-cultural reality, altruistic in the sense that it voluntarily offers its own version of reality, and it maps out important facets of the conscious and unconscious mind of the author. This is vital if we are to establish any links between the real and the fictional, which is also figurative as we saw, which adds up another layer of interpretation.

II. Conclusion:

Like most 20th century towering figures, D.H. Lawrence continues to have something quintessential to say to us about his life, his time, and the world which he tries to understand. The links we infer from his fiction and non-fiction are indeed replete with such glistening peeks into that arena that inspired philosophers and scientists alike to wrestle with the subjective at the crossroads with the objective. In "*Women in Love*", we traverse from the known to the unknown, and we wonder with outstanding nativity why he chose to narrate it as he did because it is not for nothing that he did that within the contextual prefiguration, but it underscores a

rudimentary preview of agnosticism, discoverable only by intuition, as the epiphenomenon of theism and atheism. Hence the contingency of agnosticism on uncertainty.

- **Referrals and references:**

- Bell, Michael (1992), *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being*. Cambridge University Press;
David Bradshaw. (2008), *Women in Love*. Oxford University Press;
Draper, Ronald P. (1997), *D. H. Lawrence*. Routledge;
Ferrier, Luke (2013), *The Glyph and The Gramophone: D. H. Lawrence's Religion*. Bloomsbury;
Harrison, Andrew (2016), *The Life of D. H. Lawrence: A Critical Biography*. Wiley Blackwell;
McCarthy, Joan (2007), *Dennett and Ricoeur on the Narrative Self*. Humanity Books;
Parker, D.& Sebastian, G. (1994), *Ethics, Theory, and The Novel*. Cambridge University Press;
Peterson, Jordan B. (1998), *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief*. Routledge;
Pihlström, Sami (2020), "Meaning Agnosticism and Pragmatism." *Religions*, vol. 11, no. 6;
Poidevin, Robin Le (2010), *Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press;
Schopenhauer, Arthur (2009), *The Horrors and Absurdities of Religion*. Penguin Classics;