

"Touch" in D.H. Lawrence

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Lawrence thinks that touching is to live in the deepest of life as part of the universe; for us to live really or wholly as humans is to enjoy what we are given intrinsically. There are many ways of touching in human life. Lawrence, however, attaches great importance to physical touch between man and man as well as man and woman as seen in the characters of such as *Women in Love*, *The Blind Man*, *You Touched Me*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *Lady Chatterleys Lovers*, *The Man Who Died*. Quite interesting is it that touch functions as a chance for them to transform themselves into other figures. All the protagonists become aware of "the greater way of life" through the warmth of bodily touch and acquire the greater self instead of the little self. The reason why he adheres to the bodily touch lies in that too much emphasis on intelligence or knowledge keeps people away one another. Lawrence regards this touch as a clue to get over the secluded individualism and reach a richer way of life.

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I

E. Minkowski says something about human senses to the effect that for life, humans are gifted with all senses not only to perceive and direct, but also develop into the depth and to touch the deepest layer of our existence; we are expected to live in the world, not just to recognize and consider things. Touching is to transcend the distinction between one and the other. In other words, it bridges the difference between activity and passivity. Touching is to break through the shell of ordinary little life, enter into the greater self, and be united with life of the universe. It is, in a way, to trespass the realm of each other, and at the same time to create a flow of new life between both of them. It is to acquire the relativity, meet and join the other life. It is an élan vital, vitality of life. For Lawrence, to touch is to live in the deepest of life as part of the universe. To live really as human is to "enjoy everything" we are given as

Birkin in *Women in Love*, says after the fight with Gerald that "One ought to wrestle and strive and be physically close. It makes one sane." (WL 272) He speaks for the author who thinks that intelligence or knowledge keeps people away one another.

The purpose here is to clarify how touch is described and functions between the characters in *The Blind Man*, *Women in Love*, *The Plumed Serpent*, and *The Man Who Died*.

II

In *The Blind Man*, "touch" happens between Maurice, who is seriously damaged in the eyes in the war and has lost eyesight, and Bertie, who is a literary man from Scotland when Bertie comes to the stable to look for Maurice for Isabel who is worried about her husband.

Bertie is a lawyer, a so-called intellectual. He is quick of understanding, ironical, and sentimental; while Maurice is quite an opposite. He is a farmer of a big old farmhouse, very passionate, too sensitive to things and has a big constitution with sturdy limbs. He is very conscious of his slow understanding, and very sensitive, acute in sentiment. They are very contrastive in anything. With Bertie, intelligence has an advantage over affection. However, he is never acute in sentiment. In contrast, Maurice lives in the different world from Bertie's:

So long as he kept this sheer immediacy of blood-contact with the substantial world he was happy, he wanted no intervention of visual consciousness. In this state there was a certain rich positivity, bordering sometimes on rapture. Life seemed to move in him like a tide lapping, lapping, and advancing, enveloping all things darkly. It was a pleasure to stretch forth the hand and meet the unseen object, clasp it, and possess it in pure contact. He did not try to remember, to visualize. He did not want to. *The new way of consciousness substituted itself in him.* (BM 54) (italics mine)

Maurice and Bertie are totally different types of people, but Bertie has been a good friend of Maurice's wife Isabel. After several years of absence, he comes to see how Isabel is doing. Maurice hopes to establish a friendship with Bertie at heart. He tries to touch Bertie to know him better; Bertie is "almost annihilated," and so cannot help feeling revulsion to Maurice. He puts his "strong, naked hands" (BM 62) on Bertie's head, and holds it in a "soft, firm grasp." (BM 62) Bertie feels "a fine, close pressure" on the head. He cannot know how to respond to the blind man as if he is hypnotized; he has lost his words, totally terrified. He has a fear of complete annihilation with quite a sense of powerlessness. In contrast, Maurice is filled with

"hot, poignant love" and "the passion of friendship." (BM 62) To Maurice this touch is "the new delicate fulfillment of mortal friendship," and at the same time is "a revelation and surprise." (BM 62) However, Bertie lives in a different world from Maurice. He, forgetting his usual self-conscious self, falls into a swoon and suffers an illusion that he cannot even move as if captured by something. He is scared of losing himself when he leaves himself to this touch. The reason why he desires to escape from this touch is that his acceptance of this intimacy and friendship means his giving up his established himself and accepting a new strange self unknown to himself.

Maurice and Isabel have established intimate relationship they never had before since he returned from the war. They had been almost entirely alone together since he was wounded. Isabel sometimes is almost overcome by "a sense burden, a weariness, a terrible ennui," but she is happy in a wonderful and unspeakable intimacy with her husband. She is, in a way, attracted by his new way of presence. Isabel feels nearness to him and how he is invisible — "How near he was, and how invisible." (BM 52) He looks as if he is engulfed in the vortex of dark passion of some other life. To her, he seems to be tightly connected with the dark earth:

She could feel the clever, careful, strong contact of his feet with the earth, ... he was a tower of darkness to her, as if he rose out of the earth. (BM 53)

She even receives the impression that his feet know the earth. When he touches Isabel on the face with his fingers, the touch works a hypnotizing effect on her. Maurice behaves as if he already knows that things exist there before he touches them. He, in a "blood-prescience," lives comfortably in the substantial world as if carried away in the flood. He is satisfied only if he can keep himself in an intimate blood-contact with the real world. He does not want visual consciousness to invade into himself. He has some "rich positivity." (BM 54) He is delighted to possess things invisible in his hands with direct contact with them. He never wants to and attempts to visualize by remembering. He has found "the new way of consciousness." (BM 54) He is quite close in recognition to Halliday, in *Women in Love*, who says "I'm sure life is all wrong because it has become much too visual — we can neither hear nor feel nor understand, we can only see." (WL78) This is undoubtedly a negation of the intellectual and indirect way of life.

And Maurice is also quite similar to Birkin, the author's spokesman, who says "In the blood" in response to Ursula's question — "How can you have knowledge not in your head?" (WL 43) Here in this story Maurice puts Birkin's idea into practice in the daily life. Surely

enough, Birkin himself experiences the blood-contact following the discarding of visual consciousness by the conduct of making his naked body touch the vegetation in the woods after the violence from Hermione. In that sense, Maurice can be said to be awakened to the new way of consciousness. The same idea is also seen in the physical fight between Birkin and Gerald. Birkin pays a visit to Gerald who is fatigued from the emotional struggle with Gudrun. At first Birkin shows him how to do Japanese wrestling, and then Gerald gradually comes to get absorbed in it. Finally they get half naked, taking their clothes off. After the long strenuous fight, they lie exhausted on the floor. Birkin suddenly puts his hand on Gerald's without knowing it:

It touched the hand of Gerald, that was lying out on the floor. And Gerald's hand closed warm and sudden over Birkin's, they remained exhausted and breathless, the one hand clasped closely over the other. It was Birkin whose hand, in swift response, had closed in a strong, warm clasp over the hand of the other. Gerald's clasp had been sudden and momentaneous. (WL 272)

But he hesitates to accept it, attracted, and pulls his hand away from Birkin's. He admits that this touch has liberated him from the stress of consciousness, but he does not lay so much trust on this touch. He even has uneasiness and discredit on the world beyond his knowledge. Gerald can only live in the world he is accustomed to. Birkin criticized Hermione, saying "You can only have knowledge, strictly," ..., "of things concluded, in the past." (WL 86) However, this is true of Gerald as well who could only live a "bottled" life. He has limitations here. In that sense, Maurice in *The Blind Man* is quite similar to Gerald. Maurice, unlike Bertie who has quick understanding, can recognize only by touching. Maurice asks Bertie if he might touch him in an attempt to know each other better — "Do you mind if I touch You?" (BM 61) And then flinching from his request, he responds to Maurice, following what is called "the voice of education" — "Not at all." (BM 61) He was so shocked that he, "almost annihilated," (BM 62) cannot but stand without any words. What is worse, when he is requested to touch him in return by Maurice, he is even overcome with revulsion. However, as if he is hypnotized, he has little resistance to Maurice's unseen magical power. Bertie lays his hands on the horrible wounds of Maurice's eye-sockets as he is told to. Maurice requires Bertie to know him following his way. Maurice forcefully pushes his hands on Bertie's fingers just lightly placed. It is like he forces understanding on him, wanting him to directly understand the ugliest part of himself. While Bertie feels to be "in a swoon, unconscious, imprisoned," (BM

62) Maurice is "trembling in every fibre, and rocking slightly, slowly, from side to side." (BM 62) The difference here in attitude between them reflects the difference of their way of thinking of knowing. Bertie hopes for visual knowledge keeping distance; Maurice desires direct understanding by the blood-touch. Confident in the mutual recognition, he proposes, "We shall know each other now, shan't we? We shall know each other now." (BM 62) Bertie is naturally "terror-struck," pre-cautious "lest the other man should suddenly destroy him." (BM 62) Bertie has lived in an indirect contact with others keeping distance, while Maurice has a firm belief in "this very passion of friendship" (BM 62) or "this intimacy." (BM 63) It is quite natural that Bertie should desire to escape from this "intimacy" in contrast to Maurice who is greatly delighted, crying to Isabel, "We've become friends." There is no difference in feelings between Bertie who wishes to escape from Maurice's intimacy and Gerald who flinches from Birkin's offer. Maurice's blood-consciousness makes a remarkable contrast with Bertie's mind-consciousness. Bertie's world is self-conscious, and on the other hand Maurice's unconscious. Bertie never aims to go out of the accomplished self to the richer self, but tries to strenuously stick to his present himself without attempting to be united with the other self. He never ventures to find a new self in the fuller relationship with the partner. It is a world of a trivial secluded self where one cannot share sympathy with others. In contrast, Birkin and Maurice have a preference for a generous limitless self breathing in the expanded space with no interest in a diminutive narrowly-limited self. That is the very self that Birkin sought after when he held out his hand to Gerald after the wrestling and when he felt relieved and recovered through the communion of the naked contact with the vegetation in the woods. That is true of Maurice. So he happily blurts out "We've become friends" (BM 63) when he had Bertie touch his head and face, especially his seriously damaged eye-sockets. Birkin in *Women in Love* and Bertie in *The Blind Man* both find a possibility for their self or life to expand. A new self represents itself in the touch, between the two. This particularity about the "intermediate aspect" of Lawrence is described in the more interesting way in *The Plumed Serpent*, which is discussed later.

The man in *The Man Who Died* is another example of a figure who is enlightened to "the new way of consciousness." He looks back on his past life, thinking that the reason why they enforced him to die is that he forced them to love each other. That is to say, he regrets that he could not establish an opened, flexible relationship. Any compulsion should not enter in the relationship. There should not be any compulsion of self-assertion in the relationships. The compulsion is brought from the lack of sympathy. The following intimates his repentance that he could not find the *elan vital* in the relationships with others:

I asked them all to serve me with the corpse of their love. And in the end I offered them only the corpse of my love. This is my body—take and eat— my corpse—

... 'After all,' he thought, 'I wanted them to love with dead bodies. If I had kissed Judas with live love, perhaps he would never have kissed me with death. (MWD 166)

This shows that he recognizes that there was a lack of sympathy between them. He could not establish sympathy which is a clue to "the greater life." (MWD 162) In that sense, he could not have a living body. However, he is given a chance to enjoy a new life leaving the little life of compulsion out of the old bond by the resurrection. The man who regained the opened flexible soul encounters a priestess of Isis who is awakened to the same state of expanded self and induced into the relationships which he once determined not to have. He was firmly determined not to have such relationship as to infringe upon his solitude. Yet he allows himself to go back to the detestable bond. The reason why he did not flinch from the contact with her is that she has awareness of new consciousness different from any other woman he had known. That is because she experienced the compulsion of the two men's ferocious will of Caesar and Antonio. As she is advised by an old philosopher, the priestess of Isis is waiting for a man who left the past life behind. She is positive in accepting the man having "the other kind of beauty" (MWD 154) and "the sheer stillness of the deeper life." (MWD 154) On the contrary, she has no hesitation in expressing her pleasure of the unexpected appearance of the dead man as if Osiris returned to life again. Far from keeping away from the stranger, she even tries to keep him from leaving. That is because she finds "the sheer stillness of the deeper life" in him who enjoys a delicate life." Another kind of consciousness responded another kind of beauty in him. He leaves himself to her as told to do by her. As she embraces his injured body, his seared body, which is still covered with death, gradually recovers warmth. He is influenced by "a tender flame of healing," (MWD 158) and is assured all over that "I am risen," feeling "the blaze of manhood" coming up. (MWD 168) This is equivalent to the touch with the sun. He loosens the strain and liberates himself into "this tender touch of life." (MWD 158) At last he secures the greater body awakened to the consciousness of greater life. The same is true of the priestess. The other kind of consciousness founded in herself is embodied in this touch. The real touch opens the door to the liberation of secluded self. He says to himself, "This is the great atonement." (MWD 170) It is his regret for the past mean self having forced people spiritual touch lacking sympathy. He knows very well that "the mania of cities and societies and hosts lays a compulsion upon a man, upon all men" (MWD 146) The man does not look at an individual as just personal, but in relation with the society.

The following words of Deleuze are just to the point:

Nous sommes toujours epingle sur le mur des significations dominants, nous sommes toujours enfoncees dans le trou de notre subjectivite, le trou noir de notre moi qui nous est cher plus que tout. Mur ou s'inscrivent toutes les determinations objectives qui nous fixent, nous quadrillent, nous identifient et nous font reconnaitre ; ... Meme si le visage est un produit de ce systeme, c'est une production sociale : large visage aux joues blanches, avec le trou noir des yeux. Nos societes ont besoin de produire du visage. (D 57)

It is the paltry will of the world that he wants to avoid. He never inquires her name, which is the shell of the world fixing and confining us in the limitation:

'I will ask her nothing, not even her name, for a name would set her apart.' (MWD 170)

One has an individual self and a worldly self. The man was forced only to live as a savior, a social person. That life of his was denied by the people who live a social life. The death awakened him to the new consciousness of life. He has no intention to return to the previous life. The man says to himself, looking at the daily life of the priestess, the mother, their slaves. His words reflect all the thoughts of the man who noticed that there is another way of life unknown to us:

It was the life of the little day, the life of little people. And the man who had died said to himself: 'Unless we encompass it in the greater day, and set the little life in the circle of the greater life, all is disaster.' (MWD 162)

The man completed resurrection by abandoning the old self; the priestess is trying to solve the mystery of her existence in the mysterious life of the goddess Isis in search of the pieces of her husband's body scattered all over the world. She is conscious of a different way of life of which other women had no knowledge. Thus, both of them are aroused to the presence of another kind of life in the world. The living touch is realized between them, which adds newness to their life. There is no problem whether one is apart or not from the other if there is trust on this touch between them. After having acquired the greater life, he leaves the

priestess as if the season comes and goes.

III

The Plumed Serpent, set in Mexico, has characters who are aware of "the new way of consciousness." One of them is a forty-year old woman, the protagonist Kate, from Ireland who experiences such a "touch" as she never had before. There is a scene where she happens to see Mexican Indians singing and dancing to a drum played by one of the Indians who is promoting the restoration movement of the old god Quetzalcoatl. The song like "a strong, deep wind rushing from the caverns of the breast, from the everlasting soul" (PL 127) sounds strange without any recognizable rhythm or emotion, has something fascinating in itself and reaches the depth of her soul. It seems to her as if to go into his soul, into his inner mystery, into "the other dimension of man's existence." (PL 126) Kate is attracted by the song which sounds like going straight to the most ancient and everlasting soul of all men, where only the human can enjoy "immediate contact." (PL 126) The half-naked men begin to dance in a circle as if "treading themselves deep into the earth," (PL 128) and in a while, Kate is invited to the dance by one of them. His hand which holds her fingers is "warm and dark and savagely suave, loosely, almost with indifference, and yet with the soft barbaric nearness." (PL130) His soft way of touching leads her to loosen the strain of her indomitable self and regain her virginity — "she felt a virgin again, a young virgin." (PL 130) To her the men around her seem not to be separate individuals, but to be absorbed in something like the greater manhood, and the women into the so-called greater womanhood. As she learns how to take steps in the dance, she comes to relax her tension and pour her life into "the dark body of the earth" (PL 132) just like the Indians do:

It was sex, but the greater, not the lesser sex. ... She felt her sex and her womanhood caught up and identified in the slowly revolving ocean of nascent life, the dark sky of the men lowering and wheeling above. She was not herself, she was gone, and her own desires were gone in the ocean of the great desire As the man whose fingers touched hers was gone in the ocean that is male, stooping over the face of the waters. (PL 131)

The soft and loose quality of his touch enables her to discard the personal eyes. She feels that her personal conscious eyes are gone blind. The loss of her personal eyes is realized because the touch is not one-sided, but reciprocal, which is to totally different from the one that one

touches the other without any consideration. This is not the conduct that one's will neglects the other's. There is no thrust of a personal will against the other there. He touches her softly, gently. Here is nothing which suppresses or alienates her from him. So one life breaks its hard shell, and gushes toward, and is received by the other life. Thus, the reciprocating touch is accomplished by the two life-flows meeting each other.

Kate is awakened to the existence of the new different herself from the old personal herself by the mysterious contact. She had never had any doubt about her British and Irish self formed in the long living in Europe totally different from Mexico. She had her personal self, personal will. She believed in her own life without doubting the "completed myself." Yet she gradually begins to be doubtful of the individuality of human existence, and to have the thought that human life should not be fixed or confined in the realm (boundary) of an individual, but be more opened, liberated, flowing. The new recognition Kate acquires is also seen in the touch between Cipriano and herself. The claim that "*The blood is one blood. We are one blood*" (PL 417) is more abominable than death for Kate who was brought up as a member of a proud old family under the British and German idea that hereditary aristocrats are essentially superior to ordinary people. Her soul is tremendously moved by the primitive assertion. Indians' dark will which "swept away all individualism" (PL 417) denies an individual self, personal soul. The "blood-oneness" (PL 417) means the denial and the death of individual presence. Kate sometimes hates and revels this unbearable insistence, but begins to open her mind to this primeval claim of self negation. This change of Kate has much to do with the touch between Cipriano and herself. Although Kate is pleaded to marry Cipriano and help their movement by Ramón, she is hesitant about the marriage with a different race, though she is attracted by him. The following shows the scene where Ramón advises her to marry him. This is a very significant dialogue for us to know the meanings suggested in the "touching each other." And it is of great interest in that it is deeply connected with the symbol of Quetzalcoatl and the metaphor of the Morning Star:

"I feel he just wants something of me: and perhaps I just want something of him. But he would never meet me. He would never come forward in himself, to meet me. He would come to take something from me, and I should have to let him. And I don't want merely that. *I want a man who will come half way, just half way, to meet me.*" Don Ramón pondered, and shook his head. "You are right," he said. "Yet in these matters, one never knows what is half way, nor where it is. A woman who just wants to be taken, and then to cling on, is a parasite. And a man who wants just to take without

giving, is a creature of prey. ... Because when the innermost belief coincides in them both, if it's physical, there, and then, and nowhere else, they can meet. And it's no good unless there is a meeting. It's no good a man ravishing a woman, and it's absolutely no good a woman ravishing a man. (PL 271-2) (italics mine)

Kate begins to believe in the possibilities of another way of life that there might be another self of which she has no knowledge. Her speech "I want a man who will come half way, just half way, to meet me" is not only turned to the partner. When she requires him to come out of himself to meet her at the "abiding place," half way, she obliges herself to do it at the same time. She admits that she also should discard her own self, and come out of herself to meet him. This is evidently her alteration. Her soul gets closer to the Indians' blood-consciousness and the understanding of their religious movement. The story has another scene where her change is indicated. She is led to a feeling quite new to herself by his enthusiasm when he attempts to persuade her to join their movement by becoming a goddess at the temple of Quetzalcoatl:

His desire seemed curiously impersonal, physical, and yet not personal at all. She felt as if, for him, she had some other name, she moved within another species. As if her name were, for example, Itzpapalotl, and she had been born in unknown places, and was a woman unknown to herself. (PL 236)

This is not the same immediate touch as she experienced in the dance with the Indian man for the first time in her life. However, just as the beat of the drum and the Indian song affected the depth of her soul, Cipriano's strange desire in his speech moves her at the bottom of her soul. Yet this is not an one-sided touch, but the communion, or the interactive meeting of the two life-flows produced between Cipriano and Kate. The strain of her hardened self is loosened by the impersonality or physicality in his desire to seek her. She feels as if she is not a woman with the name of "Kate" representing Europeanism, but "a woman unknown to herself." Here evidently she is away from the complete personality she had firm confidence in. Or rather, "the total loss of her old self" would be the more appropriate expression. Although Birkin said that he wanted "a woman invisible" in *Women in Love*, Kate is the very invisible woman. While she hesitates whether she should get married or not, she keeps changing who attained invisibility:

... it was not her spirit alone which was changing, it was her body, and the constitution of her very blood. She could feel it, the terrible catabolism and metabolism in her blood, changing her even as a creature, changing her to another creature. (PL 421)

Thus Kate, who has a firm belief that she is possessed with the established personality, gradually notices the existence of life based on the physical-blood consciousness, not on the spiritual and conscious life, and learns to leave her to "the new, soft, heavy, hot flow," (PL 422) and what Kate knew through their physical touch is something like being "beyond her knowing," (PL 422) "so deep and hot flowing" (PL 422) Cipriano refuses her conscious satisfaction she enjoyed with Joakim and Kate finds the unknown woman in herself, throwing away the daily self-conscious self:

He was a stranger to her, she to him. He accepted the fact absolutely, as if nothing else were possible. She, sometimes, felt it strange. She had so craved for intimacy, insisted on intimacy. Now she found herself accepting him finally and forever as the stranger in whose presence she lived. It was his impersonal presence which enveloped her. She lived in his aura, and he, she knew, lived in hers, with nothing said, and no personal or spiritual intimacy whatever. A mindless communion of the blood. (PL 423)

Kate and Cipriano are freed from the hardened shell of self which segregates one from the other. Since he gets close to her impersonally, she accepts him impersonally. They face each other as just strangers, freed from the worldly self, finding each other in the each other's aura. What is established between them is the communion of the blood beyond the human consciousness, not the exchange of mind. Both of them are enlightened to a greater life beyond the fragment of life.

Thus, the touch is described as its having a function liberating and directing the self into the origin of life, a stream of flowing life if it is a mutual touch. The purpose of the restoration movement is to return the self-conscious life to the blood-conscious life. The real physical touching is realized by abandoning individualism. At last, Kate says to herself, "Was the individual an illusion?" (PL 389):

The individual, like the perfect being, does not and cannot exist, in the vivid world. We are all fragments. And at the best, halves. The only whole thing is the morning

Star. Which can only rise between two: or between many. (PL 390)

The "between two" or the "between many" referred here is identical to the "half way" and is symbolized in the metaphor of the Morning Star. Quetzalcoatl (Ramón) says, "I am Now." And then he proceeds to say, "And nothing is perfect, save the dream pass out into the sleep, I Am. ..." (PL 190) These "between" and "half way" are the places where individuals leave their life to the stream of a greater life and the third ground where they cast off their clothes of consciousness. Quetzalcoatl rules the "between," not the people, and so he says, "We will be masters *among* men, and lords *among* men." (PL 178) (italics mine) He emphasizes their being "masters *among* men, lords *among* men," never "lords of men." These "among," "between," "half way" are related with each other, and explain the quality of the touch. This is a chance where one realizes the greater life beyond his fragmental life.

IV

Several kinds of touch are described in Lawrence's novels or short stories, such as sexual touch, friendly touch, direct touch with vegetation, or soul-to-soul touch. *The Blind Man* has a character who has lost eyesight and has nothing reliable but the senses of the limbs. *Women in Love* has a protagonist who is awakened to the blood-consciousness beyond the intellectual consciousness. *The Plumed Serpent* depicts how a modern woman with a strong self-will transcends the little self and finds the genuine self through the communion with the men who have reached the ground beyond the narrowly-limited self. And in *The Man Who Died*, a man, who is determined to leave the old posture, encounters a woman who cannot be satisfied with women's traditional way of life and is aware of "the new way of consciousness." The man becomes aware of "the greater way of life" by the warmth of bodily touch and acquires the greater self instead of the little self.

Lawrence regards this touch as a clue to go over the secluded individualism and reach the richer way of life.

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