The "culture of sacrifice" of the title of this essay spans a wide range of literal and symbolic meanings, at least two of which have profound resonances for a reading of Sons and Lovers. While the practice of individual self-sacrifice is pervasive throughout the novel, it assumes significantly different forms in Parts 1 and 2. Although the literal sacrificial disciplines (mainly economic and verbal) Mrs. Morel imposes (Part 1) allows her sons to escape the coalmining destiny their father endures, it slowly reduces and alienates him, recasting him as a virtual outcast within his own family. By contrast, a symbolic investment in sacrifice (Part 2), especially in relation to sexuality, dominates the Paul/Miriam relationship, undermining its erotic potential, exposing the abyss of misrecognition that ends the affair. Paul's relationship with Clara in turn opens up a radical new possibility—that of sacrificing sacrifice itself, putting an end to the traumatic investment in suffering as a mode of transcending the body in favor of those erotic desire-flows the text calls a "belief in life" (398). Sacrifice is thus not simply a moral concept, but an interiorized disposition—the lynchpin that secures both the choices and the contracts the protagonists make, whether with themselves or the larger community, or the God they believe in.

Of course, the notion that sacrifice structures subjectivity and, as such, is basic to personal, social, and religious self-definition is not new. Psychoanalytical theory, for example, posits sacrifice as foundational to man's status as a creature of language—the mark of his/her distinction from animals who do not possess the same signifying powers. Whether it is termed the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction (Freud), or of the "presymbolic life substance of enjoyment" (Lacan/ Zizec), or of the "semiotic chora" (Kristeva), it marks man down as a being who is subject to sacrifice at an age before free choice is available. (1) Through his/her entry into language, the subject renounces short-term enjoyment for longer-term gain. In the wider perspective, this economic understanding of sacrifice exchanges terrestrial suffering for the kind of celestial reward that at once justifies and vindicates it. Because sacrifice is assumed to give more than it takes, it always pays off in the end. The difference between Parts 1 and 2 is now easily defined: while Part 1 cultivates an earthly system of economic payoffs that isolate the father as the guilt-figure who obstructs the family's social advancement, Part 2 looks to the transcendental as the site of rewards for the sexual self-sacrifice Miriam practices to bring her closer to God. In the end, Paul rejects both dimensions: his quest for a greater "enjoyment" (with Clara) discloses a primordial "impersonal" state, the "wild source" (398) of life where the laws of self-sacrifice no longer apply.

Through a rigorous parsimony that ensures their higher social status within the mining community, the Morel family engages in a literal economy of sacrifice, enforced by the mother to secure her sons' release from a narrowly class-bound society. (2) The price
paid is a high one—the expulsion of the father from the family circle, his "casting off," as the text puts it (61)—a frigid exclusion in which both the mother and children collaborate. This surface structure of sacrifice, however, conceals a deep structure, hidden from the narrator and protagonists alike. Rene Girard's theory of the sacrificial "scapegoat" is of special relevance here; the animal victim that a disordered community (read family) expels from its midst serves to assuage its own guilt and restore a lost order. Designed to protect the whole community from its own potential violence, this sacrifice (almost always of an animal) "reinforce[s] the social fabric," repressing its "rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels" (Girard 8). (3)

Because Morel bears the brunt of the guilt the family projects onto him, he is sacrificed as the surrogate animal to secure their greater cohesion. A rhetoric of incessant abasement, "mercilessly" exploited by Mrs. Morel (25) reduces her husband to the figure of a "filthy" intruder, a "cowardly beast" whom she desires to "smite ... down" (33) in order to impose the family unity she feels it most lacks. As the family combine to expel him, Morel is at once the generator and the victim of the violence directed against him. In this particular economy of sacrifice, familial success and uplift are the reward: while her sons ambitiously climb into middle-class culture, Mrs. Morel secures her position as cultural icon, writing essays at home that she reads at the Women's Cooperative.

The conception of sacrifice that dominates Part 2 is of a different order from the purely social one I have just outlined, although both share a base in the economic exchange—the investment in hardship in expectation of a greater gain. At once more openly named in the narrative, it is also more interiorized as a subjective disposition, especially towards sexual love and the sex act itself. Aligned to its transcendental intention, a new agent (God) enters as the celestial witness and mediator in the sacrificial interactions between the human and the divine. The human investment in suffering (for Miriam, as we shall see, suffering and sex are virtually synonymous terms) has its recompense in a new intimacy with a heavenly creditor whose original immolation on Calvary paid off the debts to himself that "sinful" humans accrued. (4)

This particular (Christian) concept of sacrifice—one that has "worked its way into the very heart ... late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century theories of sacrifice," according to Dennis King Keenan (10)—also underwrites the dynamics of the Paul/Miriam affair. As the magnet that attracts a complex nexus of sexual attitudes, it centers on the immolation of the "brute beast" in man—of those darkly turbulent instincts that cloud what would be the light-space of communication between man and his God. Thus the chronic sexual angst Miriam endures separates her not only from God, but also from Paul, whose overcoming of sacrifice is reserved for his erotic engagement with Clara.

The option of "overcoming" itself has its roots in Nietzsche's critique of sacrifice, expounded especially in Beyond Good and Evil and The Genealogy of Morals, which Lawrence read in 1908-10 just before writing Sons and Lovers. (5) Nietzsche's fiercest polemic is reserved for sexual asceticism: the idea of sacrificing "to one's god the
strongest instincts one possessed" is fueled by a "hatred of the human, and even more
the animal" (Beyond 62; Genealogy 136). In its starkly nihilistic intent, the act of sacrifice
negates "this life in favor of celestial rewards for terrestrial tribulations endured"
(Keenan 60), this concept of sacrifice is essentially anthropocentric, excluding by
definition the nonhuman domain. Because animals have no stake in the symbolic
mandate that undergirds it, they reap no benefits from it, except the dubious one of
being its privileged victims. (6)

Incarnated in his relationship with Clara, Paul's break with his religious inheritance
replaces an anthropocentric theater of sacrifice with a non-sacrificial life force that
incorporates the nonhuman, and that, for convenience's sake, I shall call biocentric.
Indeed throughout this essay, I shall employ "anthropocentric" and "biocentric" as
framing concepts to highlight the crucial distinction between the Paul/Miriam and the
Paul/Clara affairs. (7) Before the encounters with Clara, however, Paul has already
distanced himself from a culture of sacrifice through his "agnostic" interrogations of the
"orthodox creed," which has belief in a divine act of sacrifice as its foundational precept
(230-267). Displacing man from the center, Paul puts in his place the "great instinct" the
cosmos embodies (408)--what Cary Wolfe calls the "other-than-human [that] resides at
the very core of the human" (17). His dramatic re-vision of sexuality entails the shift from
the anthropocentric disjunction that represses the animal body to a biocentric continuum
that incorporates it.

Dethroning homo sapiens from his niche at the top of the species hierarchy, the
biocentric affects three major dislocations that undergird the radical erotic reorientations
Paul undergoes. Dispensing with the traditional God-figure (first), it removes the lynch-
pin of the sacrificial exchange, without which sexual sacrifice, as practiced by Miriam,
loses its vital meaning and motive: a redemptive ethos of love has no place in the new
dispensation. Second, it posits a network of interdependencies that puts man into
organic relation to the nonhuman other. A cosmic inclusivity locates Paul and Clara as
miniscule elements in a vaster creation from which they draw their libidinal energies,
and along with which they naturally flow without check or reserve. Third, the repetitively
ritualized roles a grammar of sacrifice imposes on Paul and Miriam give way to the
more high-risk and unpredictable rhythms of a cosmos within which the erotically
charged human and nonhuman interact with each other. This precisely the dimension of
the Lawrentian "unknown" Paul embraces, and from which Clara withdraws, as the
sacrificial ethos reasserts its authority, and as Part 2 of Sons and Lovers moves
towards its end.

1

After this general introduction, we now continue in close-up, first with that stringently
non-transcendental economy of sacrifice--the "scapegoat" syndrome that dominates
Part 1 of the novel.

In one of the densest and most traumatic modernistic depictions of a family at war with
itself, the main protagonist (Walter Morel) attracts class, gender, and species
discourses that brand him as the abjected animal-body the family spurns and repudiates. At once a "disgustingly" ill-mannered human whom the children "loathe" (142) (class), and a dysfunctional father (gender), he is also a sub-human specimen—the "beastly" creature that Mrs. Morel's aggressive species rhetoric relentlessly picks on. Although, as John Worthen notes, she appears "as partly responsible for the quarrels," the final version of the novel further degrades Morel, making him "meaner, more violent, more drunken and more unpleasant" (437-38). To deflect her own guilt at the vicious verbal abuse she meets out, she reduces Morel to the figure of the scapegoat, in Girard's terms "killed by [the] words" (98) (8) she uses as weapons to put an end to the violence she herself often provokes.

In this context, the European tradition's exclusive use of animals as sacrificial victims reflects the text's compulsive need to demote Morel down the species hierarchy, while promoting Mrs. Morel to the status of a cultural icon who attracts the children's "deepest respect" (69). Put differently, a species misrecognition (Morel is a beast) masks itself as the moral flagellation to which she subjects the surrogate victim. Caught up in Girard's violent "interchange[s] of differences," the scapegoat (Morel) takes on himself the vengeful guilt Mrs. Morel represses. In an "unrecognized reciprocity," he becomes his wife's "monstrous double" (Girard164; Keenan 25), playing the Mr. Hyde role to her Dr. Jeky11. Traditionally, the near-exclusive critical focus on the class and gender dimensions of the family violence has deflected attention away from the latent speciesism that underwrites it. Morel's reduction to the "brute" legitimates his wife's wielding the verbal "lash unmercifully" (25) to keep this unruly, incontinent animal in its proper place.

In the broadest sense, Morel is largely untouched by the culture of sacrifice that all other family members embrace with such fervor. Unlike them, for example, he never goes to chapel (22), remaining largely ignorant both of the disciplined renunciations the family practice and of those biblical stories that legitimize scapegoating where the animal takes on those "iniquities" of which the community is guilty and is banished into the "wilderness" (Leviticus 16) Although Morel's sense of victimhood is acute--"He does his best for [his family], and then gets treated like a dog" (146)--he is blind to their perception of him as the beast to be sacrificed to ensure their superior status as humans. His pathology, as it were, turns on his failure to subject himself to a sacrificial ethos that interprets his pub-crawling, apart from his family, as brutal and degrading. In sum, the traditional Judeo-Christian ideology the family upholds that privileges spirit over flesh, light over darkness, man over animal identifies Morel consistently with the underprivileged term: he configures the slightly-deformed, soot-begrimed animal-body, masquerading as human.

Even the early celebration of Morel's natural vitality has strong primitive undertones, defining him precisely by the lack of those qualities Mrs. Morel possesses. While his "sensuous flame of life"--not "gripped into incandescence by though and spirit"--subtly locates him a notch down the species hierarchy, her "intellectual" qualities--her love of "ideas"--raises her up a spiritual notch (17-18). Already Morel's body-language marks him down as a benighted, underground creature, who smells out and darkly pursues his
own satisfactions: "He trust his face forward in the blind, snout-like way of a mole, seeming to sniff and peer for direction" (19). A kind of species confusion ensures that to the highest dispenser of religious culture in Bestwood (Mr. Heaton, the parson), he appears as a "strange beast"--an impression that provokes Morel's own scapegoating fantasy of being banished from the house by this holy man he despises: "Am I to have my dinner in the yard, like a dog?" (47-48). An insistently "beastly" rhetoric downgrades him to the level of a squalid creature who eats his food "brutally" (87) and "swill[s] his belly" like a pig, and whom Mrs. Morel already treats as an "outsider" (32, 24).

Exploiting a fierce biblical rhetoric of chastisement and condemnation, which he cannot match, Mrs. Morel secures her species sovereignty over the "beast" she scapegoats to atone for her guilt over ever marrying him.

It is significant that Mrs. Morel's celebrated moment of transcendence occurs in her immediate response to Morel's being especially "beastly" toward her. In the moonlit "white lily" scene (after Morel "thrust her forth" into the garden), she is bathed in a "great, white light" in which she and "the hills and lilies, all swam together in a kind of swoon." In this much explored vignette, one small detail must serve as index of the ever-widening gap that, in splitting Mrs. Morel off from her own animality, also splits her off from Morel's. (9) What Freud calls the depreciation of man's sense of smell in favor of sight as the mark of his ascent into civilization and his break with his animal past ("Civilization" 296) also underwrites those delicate discriminations the vignette cultivates. While Morel lives habitually in an aura of pit-clothes smells--Mrs. Morel claims he never washes below the waist (110)--she, as she leans on the garden gate, dissolves into ariel fragrances--"her self melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air." Here "scent" is the vital clue-word (repeated four times) that distinguishes a culture-enhancing perfume from the rancid animal odors that emanate from Morel's body. Indeed her looking at the flowers before she proceeds to smell them keeps the civilized aesthetic priorities (visual over olfactory) strictly in place, shifting the language of appreciation into a more refined register: the "raw strong" smell of the phlox transmutes into the exquisite "scent" that "invigorates her" (33-35).

Aesthetic refinement, as it were, further widens the gap that authorizes Mrs. Morel to sacrifice Morel without qualms as the beast who, cut off from transcendence, chooses darkness before light as his natural element. Thus it comes as no surprise that the climactic vignettes in which Morel becomes the "crouch[ing]" and "snarl[ing]" animal whom Mrs. Morel orders "out of the house" when he attempts to beat up his son is located in closest narrative proximity to Mrs. Morel's becoming Bestwood's Kulturertrager as she sets a "new standard" for women in the local Guild (68-69).

How profoundly Mrs. Morel has absorbed the culture of sacrifice becomes clear at the moment of her baptismal "naming " of Paul--a biblical offering of her son in a ritual usually reserved for the priestly caste. Dubbing him her (Paschal) "lamb," Paul is her "guilt sacrifice" (Nietzsche Antichrist 154)--her atonement for her sexual "sin" of conceiving him when she "no longer loved her husband" nor "wanted this child." In place of the traditional God--the habitual recipient of burnt offerings--she unexpectedly offers him up to a more primordial deity, to the "throbbing" sun god, "lying red on the rim of the
hills.” In this version of the “penal substitution” theory (itself a subsidiary of a more comprehensive economic theory of sacrifice), Paul is the innocent substitute sacrificed to appease God's anger at the "sin" of his guilty parents. (10)

As one sacrificial act begets another, Mrs. Morel dedicates her present suffering (because of Paul's birth) to the future cause of improving his lot ("she would make up to it") for having "brought it into the world unloved" (50-51). Indeed the name "Paul" itself signals his initiation into the culture of sacrifice, where the Pauline "Law" requires the sacrifice of present "sins and iniquities" for the sake of a future reward (Hebrews 10). In a kind of forced choice, Paul becomes the inheritor of a culture of guilt and renunciation, which he spend the last third of Sons and Lovers, at least partly in vain, struggling to shrug off.

The "penal substitution" theory, however, has its dark underside, vividly exposed in the young Paul's savage immolation of his sister's doll Arabella, who takes on the role of the innocent substitute sacrificed to appease not God's, but Paul's own wrath against this "stupid big" manikin. Displaying all the sadistic expertise of an initiate, he builds an altar, disembowels the doll, and sets it alight, watching the wax-flesh melt on its forehead. The naked cruelty involved in sacrifice itself is highlighted in his "wicked satisfaction" and his "rejoicing in silence" as he contemplates the doll's slow disintegration. While "destructive feelings" toward the mother may index his unconscious motive, as psychoanalytical critics claim (Schapiro 107), his highly conscious response is made clear in the sadistic delight in destruction he displays.

Described once by Leo Bersani as Lawrence's successor (Culture 113), Georges Bataille may be our best guide to the nature of Paul's jubilation. While idealized representations exalt the transcendental aspects of the sacrificial exchange--its redemptive and transfiguring powers--Bataille dialectically lifts the repression involved to reveal its dark other side--the "sanguinary horror" that the "idealization of death" conceals, according to Elizabeth Arnould (87). As Bataille puts it, "satisfaction and dismemberment" may harmonize with enjoyment, and the "sacred horror" of sacrifice is in no way "contrary to the ultimate uses of pleasure" ("Hegel" 23). Indeed Paul's climactic delight in Arabella's dismemberment (he "smashes[s] her arms and legs under stones") prefigures a need he will later fulfill as he symbolically sacrifices his "doll" Miriam, "cruelly smashing her beliefs" until "she almost lost consciousness" (82-83; 230).

After this, the narrative itself, as it were, "internalizes" sacrifice, indulging in a near-orgy of renunciation and suffering--those painful disease-and-death episodes that punctuate its progress--at once intensifying Morel's scapegoating (his role is reduced to walk-on parts) and uniting Paul with his mother in their need to kill off all competitors for their love. Put differently, the immunization from the "beastly" other (Morel) that Mrs. Morel's exclusionary tactics aim to achieve--"I know you're niver right till I'm out of your sight" (52)--works against the family itself, undermining its peace from within. Her excess of defense--her relentless moral sanitizations--entails the ultimate sacrifice of its well being, secretly destroying it and precipitating its final break-up. (11)
In this sense, her radical scapegoating of Morel does not work: it fails to protect the family from those repressed elements within its own structures, subjecting it to distressing contingencies without apparent reason or cause. Thus Morel himself almost dies in a coal-mining accident—a near fulfillment of Paul's secret wish that he be "killed at pit" (85) (12); William dies in London in a "dreadful paroxysm" without recognizing his mother (166); Paul almost dies from pneumonia, saved only by his mother's self-sacrificial exchange of her own strength for his abject lack of it (171); and (in Part 2), Mrs. Morel herself is overtaken by that symbol for all silently invasive diseases (cancer) that destroy from within and that no scapegoating or immunizing can cure. Thus Paul's overdosing of his mother with morphia pills is the ultimate sacrificial act—one that privileges death over life as a means of ending her pain and the crippling bond of love that unites them.

With the major shift from literal to symbolic sacrifice that dominates the Paul/Miriam affair, we now turn to Part 2 of the novel. Drawing the anthropocentric, the symbolic, and the animal-body together into an intricate web of interdependencies, Part 2 inaugurates the regime of the sexual, integrating the sacrificial disposition itself into the sphere of a burgeoning erotic love. Ensuring the symbolic immolation of the unruly "beast" that lies at the core of the human, sacrifice fulfils its intention by uniting itself to a transcendental source. Interiorized as a set of renunciatory attitudes towards the sexual exchange, it also ensures the presence of a divine witness who signals his acceptance of the gift of nay-saying to sex, offered to propitiate and appease him. From the start, the culture of sacrifice casts a long shadow over the Paul/Miriam affair, at once as a rigorous inhibitor (even the erotic kiss is initially out of bounds), and as the seductive bond that unites them, driving the relationship on to its catastrophic conclusion.

The lead-in to the sexual is already adumbrated in Miriam's esoteric response to the natural world, where a sacrificial idealism underwrites her spontaneous perceptions. Her "anthropocentrism," as the text calls it, involves her appropriation of material object—flowers or rosebushes—as spurs to a transcendence that sacrifices their real presence for the sake of the inner illumination they induce; she needs "things kindling in her soul" (179). As such, nature itself appears as a vast symbolic structure that radiates a divine light for which the material rosebush is the catalyst.

Indeed from this point on, a thematics of sacrifice lies at the core of those gender discriminations through which a duplicitous narrative subjects her to constant pain and humiliation. (13) Miriam is the unwitting victim of a sacrificial ideology from which Paul endeavours to free himself, but which he exploits as a weapon to criticize and mortify her. Based on a narcissistic renunciation of otherness, it pervades the metaphorical matrices that define her—those absorbings, suckings, clutchings, and spiritualizings that dissolve the material reality of things for the sake of more ethereal satisfactions for which she is prepared to sacrifice life itself.
A sacrificial grammar, however, now only underwrites Miriam's perceptions of the natural world, but, more implacably, of the world of the animal, where a sexuality common to human and nonhuman threatens the precarious fault-line set up to divide them. Precisely for this reason, animality evokes a more harshly motivated conception of what sacrifice means. Interiorized as that opaque, adiaphanous, impenetrable substance that blocks transcendence, it symbolizes the carnal leftover, the dark untamed "beast" within that must be ruthlessly immolated before the light can shine through. The theological economy of sacrifice Miriam cultivates, according to Wolfe, "cordons off the sexual as such within the sacrificial of the 'animalistic'" (138). In radically dissociating herself from the "business of birth and of begetting" that goes on on the farm, she secures her species sovereignty as a spiritual, immaterial girl. Just as the family reacts with "disgust" at Morel's "beastly" presence, so Miriam reacts with "disgust" at "the faintest suggestion of ... [animal] intercourse" (198). An anthropocentric caesura that includes God and humans excludes other animals.

By contrast with Part 1, whose scapegoating economy of sacrifice was latent, in Part 2 Miriam's theological economy is openly analyzed and confronted. In line with the Christian economy that dominated early twentieth-century theories, Miriam interprets sex, in the words of Keenan, as a "necessary passage through suffering ... on the way to a supreme moment of transcendent truth" (10). At once anthropocentric (the sacrificial drama centers on humans) and Christocentric (Jesus sacrificed himself solely for mankind), sacrifice, as her private prayer sessions reveal, is her only means of release from the "coil of torture" that her sexual desire for Paul progressively tightens. Transmuting the painful violation of sex, as she anticipates it, into the "rapture of self-sacrifice," whose reward is her union with God, she attains to a "bliss" far exceeding anything the orgasmic animal-body can offer. In this struggle for hegemony between the divine and the animal, the sacrificial sex act enacts the triumph of a transcendental intent that transforms suffering itself into a refined form of pleasure.

The sacrificial dimension of the sex act further exacerbates the basic misrecognition that divides the two lovers. While for Paul, the meaning of sacrifice narrows ominously to the fulfillment of a personal contract--he feels the "satisfaction of self-sacrifice" because he is "faithful" to his mother (262)--for Miriam, by contrast, it expands to embrace the new concept of tragic renunciation, where the passage through suffering uplifts the victim above the mundane world: "And in sacrifice she was proud, in renunciation she was strong; for she did not trust herself to support everyday life" (255).

From this perspective, the incipient sex act with Paul appears less an abject defeat than as a submission to sacrificial Laws, higher than those governing sex and for which the suffering Savior provides the original model. Yet as the moment approaches, an abyssal gap opens up between her sacrificial conviction that "there was something divine " in the sexual act and the "sacred horror" (Bataille's term, "Hegel"23) of a sexual oblation before which her senses recoil: "Her whole body clenched itself involuntarily, hard, as if against something." (14) If "life force[s] her through this gate of suffering," as the text resonantly puts it, (15) she "would submit," assured that the reward in store was the greatest a sacrificial economy could offer for such an investment in exquisite torture
Foreshadowing the sex act shortly to follow, Paul's "smashing" of Miriam's beliefs is a symbolic replay of his literal "smashing" of the doll Arabella. Now directed against the culture of sacrifice, his pedagogical violence pinpoints Miriam as the victim who is made to pay the full price her renunciations exact. Paul's own sacrificial sadism has paradoxically the sacrificial ideology itself as its object-Miriam's belief-barrier that blocks her expression of sexual desire. Resonating with a cruel sacrificial intent, his intellectual dismemberment of her religious convictions induces the same perverse excitement in him as did his literal dismemberment of the doll Arabella. Geared to "kill[ing] her soul," the sacrificial knife of his intellect causes her "exquisite pain" as "he bled her beliefs till she almost lost consciousness" (230). As the mute animal body, she is immolated on the altar of convictions that stand in the way of Paul's sexual satisfaction.

One of Bataille's acutest insights turns on the necessity of spectacle in ritual sacrifice: it forefronts the negativity of death, made visible through identification with the victim who dies. Spectacle in effect is the source of that erotic arousal induced in the spectator who watches in imagination being "struck down dead" ("Hegel" 19-20). This Lawrentian vignette of the sex act is a complex interaction of all these attitudes. Initially the spectacle of Miriam lying "naked on the bed" fulfils all Paul's erotic expectations: aroused, "smiling with wonder," he moves forward to take her.

Unlike Bataille, however, where the sacrificial and the erotic co-energize one another, for Lawrence they act as deadly antagonists. At the moment the erotic becomes charged with the sacrificial, Paul's desire dies. Confirming her preconception of the role she is predestined to play, Miriam's body language speaks eloquently of the animal victim doomed to die in the act: lifting her "hands in a little pleading movement," she lies passively "still and resigned," as if "she had given herself up to sacrifice ... like a creature awaiting immolation." "Shut[ting] his eyes, Paul cuts off the spectacle of desire in its death throes that confirms his own "sense of failure and of death" (333-34).

In its rigorous exclusion of Miriam's responses, the narrative "puts her out of account" just as effectively as Paul does, confirming her role as the dumb animal who lacks a language of protest against the cruel fate that overtakes her (333-34). In the end, the spectacle shows Nietzsche's final "truth" about sacrifice. Shorn of its otherworldly trappings, sacrifice sacrifices God for a "nothingness"--for an "aversion to life" that at once cuts off earthly pleasures, yet brings no transcendental bliss in its wake (Beyond 53; Genealogy 136). As Nietzsche predicts, this "ultimate act of cruelty [is] reserved for the generation which is even now arising" (Beyond 63)--precisely the generation to which Paul and Miriam belong.

As a prelude to his liberation from sacrificial constraints, Paul shifts the religious terrain from a Judeo-Christian orthodoxy that locates sacrifice at its privileged center to a
heterodox biocentrism that installs "life" at the center: "Now life interested him more" (298). In place of a closed hierarchy of reciprocal forces geared to transcending the animal body, a natural continuum draws the human and nonhuman together in an "ecstasy of living" (408), which includes the whole of creation. Such "ecstasy," in effect, negates the economy of sacrifice that posits renunciation as the sole mode of access to celestial bliss. In Lacanian terms, it ensures, as Bruce Fink puts it, that there is "no conservation of jouissance, no proportionate relationship between the jouissance sacrificed and the jouissance gained" (122) (16)--in my terms, between the loss of a closed self and the unreserved happiness such loss generates. As part of the life process, both suffering and bliss reveal themselves in their immanence, and not in dreams of transcendence. At the highest "point of bliss" that Paul and Clara attain (408), sacrifice sacrifices itself without nostalgia or guilty reminder.

The celebrated Trent River encounter occurs precisely at the intersection of a partly disabled culture of sacrifice and a fresh biocentric dynamic that has yet to establish itself, although the signposts are already in place. Unlike the Paul/Miriam encounter that was circumscribed by a closed domestic space where a stuffed owl was the only spectator, the river encounter opens onto a landscape where "distant cattle" look on. As the liquid embodiment of those libidinal flows urgently awaiting release, the Trent River, "like some subtle complex creature," guides the two lovers.

Yet the shadow of the sacrificial clouds the sex act itself, the lovers failing to interiorize those fluid, turbulent energies that the river prefigured. Two slightly sinister sanguinary details signal bloodletting as the sacrificial hinge about which the vignette revolves. In the first, Paul's vampirish kiss (he sinks "his moth on her throat, where he felt the heavy pulse beat under her lips") engorges Clara's blood to enhance his own life. Her "little death" in the act is the price she must pay for his "coming." In the second, the red carnation petals, "like splashed drops of blood ... down her dress to her feet," signify the shift to a sacrificial regime: from the purely decorative to the blood-spattered, from the body beautiful to the body torn apart and dismembered.

Indeed throughout Sons and Lovers, sacrifice is closely identified with the rough violence inflicted on vulnerable females for which Paul's "smashing" of the doll Arabella is the prototype. Just as earlier he "smashed" Miriam's beliefs, now he "smashes" the scarlet flowers he himself purchased to enhance Clara's beauty. As a purely secular victim who sacrifices herself not for a transcendental reward, but for the "nothingness" of the sex act itself, Clara's subsequent "alones" and "sad[ness]" are ironic payoffs for the sacrificial gift of herself that she offered to Paul (355-56).

Symptomatically, Clara's return to "joy" occurs only when the proper post-coital rite of sacrificial purification gets under way. (17) As a sign of their cathartic release from sexual guilt, Paul industriously cleans the polluting mud from her boots. Yet in the fretful discussion that follows, guilt reasserts its presence, if only by way of their urgent need to deny it. Because Clara's offence is not against a judgmental deity, but against a society that condemns her transgression, she is neither a "criminal," or a "wrongdoer," nor even a "sinner" (357-58). Desacralized, secularized, sacrificial sex is deflected away
from the gaze of the big Other who oversees all to the look of the small other, where deception is part of the social game all lovers play.

The shadow of the sacrificial also hangs over the second love encounter, although its points of intersection with the biocentric are different. Two powerful cultural mandates--the first aesthetic (Sarah Bernhardt performs La Dame aux Camélias at the Théâtre Royal in Nottingham), the second oedipal (Clara's mother's monitory presence in the family home)--compel Paul's sacrifice of erotic desire for the sake of public and familial decorum. A tortured (and torturing) sexual frustration is their common denominator. In a mise-en-abyme effect, Marguerite Gautier's painful sacrifice on stage (18) (she renounces her passion for her lover Armand) mirrors Paul's forced renunciation of his passion for Clara's voluptuous body as she sits in the theater beside him (both Marguerite and Paul renounce sex for the sake of public propriety). The "great white-hot waves" that "kill his consciousness" are the secret agents of a culture of sacrifice that blocks his libidinal flow to secure attention to a drama that reinforces those same cultural laws (375-76).

On their return home, Clara's mother, initially "large and hostile," embodies the symbolic law of the father--the repressive mediator whose nay-saying prohibits sex relations between unmarried couples (she frustrates the lovers' desire by supervising the game of cribbage they dream up to send her to bed). At this point, a strange fetishistic perversion sacrifices long-term enjoyment to the urge for immediate pleasure. Alone in his small bedroom, Paul puts on a pair of Clara's stockings, penetrating her fantasized flesh as a substitute for her sexual presence. Functioning at once as a displacement and as an incitement to action, the fetish violently provokes his desire ("he knew he would have to have her"), a desire further inflamed by the spectacle of Clara's naked body crouched on the hearthrug in the kitchen (her mother has just gone to bed) (377-82).

The shadow of the sacrificial continues to haunt Paul's impassioned adoration of Clara's body that immediately follows, ambiguously his rapturous response, locating him in a highly anomalous position for a male Lawrentian lover--the humble celebrant of a statuesque female beauty. Simultaneously inciting and blocking desire, his "service of worship" induces all those inhibitory symptoms a ritualized, sacrificial lovemaking imposes. In a sequence of courtly love gestures, he venerates Clara's beauty, weeps "tears of pain," in "great humility " kisses her knees "passionately," while she stands still "letting him adore her" (383).

Although such an infatuated devotion to a natural object recalls Miriam's "worship" of the rosebush, the distinction between them is crucial. While her "worship," as we noted, was geared to a sacrificial transcendence (the infinite secreted within the finite), Paul's is exclusively focused on Clara's material body: what he worships in effect is the wonder of embodiment without divinization or deification, his own urgent desire incarnated in her palpable flesh. Indeed his most fervent responses are to particular body parts, especially to Clara's breasts (they materialize as two "big fruits" that he kisses "fearfully"). The end result of Paul's "service of worship" is, not surprisingly, profoundly
anthropocentric, the enhancement of a specifically human identity, of an increased self-esteem and autonomy: "proud again in her nakedness," Clara radiates a new "joy and pride" after she had been previously "cheapened" (383).

In the end, however, what seems like the celebration of embodied love is shadowed by a peculiar lack or deficiency, which the final verdict on the lovemaking insinuates. An abrupt focal shift from extreme close-up to detached distance freezes the two impassioned bodies into graven stone images—the configured absence of that biocentric dimension that the third encounter alone brings to fulfillment: "still the two stood clasped rigid together, mouth to mouth, like a statue in one block" (383).

4

It is to the nature of that fulfillment for which the first two encounters were trial runs that we now turn our attention. (19) The third encounter discloses those biocentric perspectives for which the narrator's earlier evocation of the "impersonality of passion" and of "the dark, impersonal force of desire" (328) constitutes the lead-in. Displacing man from the center, a new cross-species dynamic incorporates the nonhuman other, not as a "thing" to be savagely immolated, but as a necessary coordinate for the full flowering of sexual love. In this new dispensation, the sacrificial cycles of guilt and redemption, renunciation and celestial remuneration no longer hold sway. In place of the verbal infatuation that fuelled the Paul/Miriam affair, a nonverbal continuum opens up those ontological vistas where the human and nonhuman fructify one another. The "baptism of life," as the text calls it (405), shatters the foundations of the anthropocentric identity that previously grounded the lovers.

In the celebrated love vignette by the dark canal, a closely guarded personal space gives way to an atavistic elan vital--"something strong and blind and ruthless in its primitiveness" that engulfs the two lovers. At the moment that Paul looks into Clara's eyes, biocentric awareness comes into being: "They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life." (20) Embracing the multiplicities of the other-than-human that constitutes the space of the animate world, a vast cosmic continuum takes in "the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars." In their dissolution of safe sacrificial economies, nonsacrificial energies shrink human existence itself to a transitory phase in the evolutionary dynamism the text now names "Life": "They knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass-blade . . and every tree and living thing" (397-98).

What the hubris of the anthropocentric excludes, the biocentric includes as that primordial life force of which humans are not providential possessors, but ephemeral bearers. Indeed the sole biblical reference in the description reverses the traditional implications of the term "fall": now reconceived as a happy event, Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise marked their retreat from the stasis of a theocentric transcendence, where they sacrificed their knowledge of death to preserve their contented condition, to the contingency of a high-risk situation, where their excited self-discovery is the prototype for the one Paul and Clara just achieved
Unlike the Paul/Miriam vignette, where, as we saw, spectacle was the essence, here no visual description contours the bodies engaged in the sexual act. Disrupting the closure of figural containment, open-ended cosmic vistas amplify the sexual play to include the whole of the cosmos. Focused exclusively on Paul's responses, the subsequent extended meditation finesses the biocentric dynamic of the lovemaking. Deleuze's designation of these Lawrentian transformations--those "unheard-of becomings" that "uproot one from humanity" (265)--best evokes those violent ruptures of human identity through which Paul unites himself with the "great instinct" he shares with the nonhuman world. (21)

In a dramatic breakdown of species barriers, precisely those attributes that traditionally demarcate human from animal--reason, thought, soul--are shown up as limitations that cut man off from the deepest source of erotic enjoyment. Because Paul is no longer "a man with a mind,"--a sharply individuated autonomous self--his consciousness is diffused throughout his entire body in the same manner nonhuman animals generate their sexual power: "His hands were life creatures, living; his limbs, his body were all life and consciousness, subject to no will of his, but living in themselves." Organ autonomy is thus not the effect of a transcendence of animality that secures human identity, but of a creaturely immanence, an immersion in those same sources of energy that fuel all animal bodies: the same "pulse of fire" that drives the two lovers "onwards and upwards" drives all other life-forms from vegetable matter to stellar constellations (409).

In the midst of this celebration of bio-plentitudes, however, a none-too-subtle downgrading places Clara's name last on the list of participants: "he and the stars and the dark herbage and Clara were licked up in an immense tongue of flame." While Paul is fully absorbed, Clara, as it were, is only along for the ride. With Clara's failure to reach the same heights of "passion" as when the peewits called, the "marvelous glamour" of the biocentric gives way to a "mechanical repetition," the inevitable automatism that attends all ritual acts.

As in sacrifice, the revelatory power of the original event is no longer recaptured in its subsequent re-enactments, which at best possess a memorial value. (22) As the sign of an absence or lack, the "novelties" the lovers introduce reactivate those sacrificial cycles of shame and guilt, which at once recenter their personal selves and alienate them from each other: "These things caused a distance between the two of them" (408). In the end Paul begins to "despise" Clara a little, just as earlier, he imagined Miriam "despised" him for his failure in love.

While Paul actively renounces commitment to his community's sacred and secular values, Clara, by contrast, makes no such renunciation. Although she had "known" the great liberating event, she had not "realised fully" in the way Paul had accomplished (398). Sceptical of those very forces that once overwhelmed her, she reconstitutes herself through those same anthropocentric attributes--autonomy, stability, self-sacrifice--that the "event" itself had shattered: "She had gained herself, and stood now distinct and complete" (405).
An irreconcilable clash of perspectives undermines her relations with Paul. As she perceives him, he is an ontologically unstable, insecure, and risky young man--"he was not safe to her" (398)--who lacks even the "sure ground" and "manly dignity" she thinks her husband possesses (45). He, by contrast, perceives her as one who simply missed out on the "glamour" of the biocentric through her failure to realize its liberaitional powers. Precisely for this reason, she (like Miriam) would "imprison" him (403) once again within those sacrificial constraints he already renounced, a view the narrative later confirms in the orgy of self-abnegation that compels Clara's return to her husband. Because she needs to be "self-sacrificial," she kneels down before Dawes, doing "penance" for her "fail[ure] to make [him] love her" (427). Paradoxically, it is Clara who most succinctly exposes the essential difference between the anthropocentric and the biocentric in terms to which their love making gave meaning: "Is it me you want, or is it It?" (407).

5

As a general rule in Sons and Lovers, the culture of sacrifice is gender-specific: while Mrs. Morel, Miriam, and Clara embrace it with varying degrees of intensity, Morel, as we saw, remains largely ignorant of its mandates, and Paul seeks to escape it completely. As the ultimate scene of its renewal or final abandonment, Paul's last encounter with Miriam raises the sacrificial stakes to crisis level. Incessantly shifting viewpoints, the drama switches from the spectacle or Miriam as plaintive victim, to Paul, who as near-silent spectator sadistically analyses each move she makes: "Her hands fluttering], "her eyes shuddering," she "crouches" before him, pleading with him with "the anguished sweetness of self-sacrifice." The narrative downplaying of Paul's role as responsive agent highlight the pathos of her desire to "sacrifice herself to him ... every day, gladly."

A radical clash of perspectives pinpoints sacrifice as the hub around which the conflict revolves. While Miriam shrewdly recognizes that Paul's "rejection" of her sacrifice has its roots in his "lack of religion," he in turn interprets her sacrifice through those biocentric intensities his love making with Clara precipitated: it would entail "denying his whole life." The absence of a deity, which, as Nietzsche insists, reveals the essential "nothingness" of sacrifice (Beyond 63), also legitimates Paul's cruel revenge on Miriam for her nihilistic aversion to sexual life. The self-sacrifice she offers to prevent Paul from "destroy[ing] himself" compels his repudiation to ensure his own freedom.

The celebrated ending in which Paul confronts the "void in which he found himself" (after Miriam, "the last hold had gone") poses a fascinating link between Lacan's concept of "subjective destitution" and the renunciation of the culture of sacrifice. In Zizek's interpretation, such destitution is "an act of abandonment which sacrifices the very sacrifice" (59) in exactly the manner Paul has just accomplished with Miriam. Without the support of a human or a divine lover, the freedom he gains is the reverse of the liberation from angst that he anticipated.

The striking foregrounding of spatial over temporal structures in the description that follows ("There was no Time, only Space") may best be read in terms of the radical
dislocation--Zizek calls it "psychotic" (67)--that the abandonment of sacrifice induces. Essentially a spatial, not a temporal concept--one that delimits the "void"--sacrifice encloses the circuit of communication between the divine and the human, ritualizing the formal transactions between them.

Its abandonment, by contrast, opens onto a cosmic confusion of elements, now deprived of the sacrificial lynchpin that held them together. An hallucinatory realm without limits or bounds, space loses its hold on the sacrificial narrative that secured its beginning (the original contract), its middle (the passage through suffering), and its end (the transcendental reward). The "vastness and terror of the immense night" in which the "[s]tars and sun, a few bright grains, went spinning round" mirrors the chaos of Paul's own perceptions--the "core of nothingness" in himself that appears to reflect back the chaos. (23) A spectral wraith amid the hustle of blind elements, Paul seeks to embrace his dead mother, as the remains of a sacrificial regime now finally buried ("she was gone abroad into the night, and he was with her still"). Yet, inevitably, such a catastrophic collapse compels the return to a world, which takes on visible meaning only from the symbols and structures he just reneged on (463-64).

Thus the final paragraph ("But no, he would not give in") stages a brief restoration, a retrenchment, not (at least not overtly) of sacrificial values themselves, but of the conditions under which they may flourish once more. As a substitute for the relinquished big Other, the "city's gold phosphorescence" lights up the prospect of the new small-other relations where sacrificial contracts are respected and bring their rewards. In the same manner, the "closed fist" and "shut mouth" reinstall a newly determined self as the agent that guarantees that such contracts are honored. In short, sacrifice rebuilds those shattered foundations that undergird its exchanges and that enable it to function again (464).

Of course, Sons and Lovers is not Lawrence's last word on the culture of sacrifice, which remains an unsettled (and unsettling) topos, incessantly shifting ground throughout his writing career. As a dominant trope, it re-emerges in The Rainbow, where, with each successive generation of the Brangwen family, the efficacy of sacrifice suffers a catastrophic decline. The first generation (Tom and Lydia) conforms to a traditional Christian economy of sacrifice where the symbolic "burning away" of the dark animal other (especially in Tom) issues in a personal "transfiguration," the revelation of the "beyond " that radiates both the lovers (9091). Although the Old Testament God is still Anna's witness (second generation), the motive behind her exultant pregnancy dance is unrelentingly negative: to celebrate her triumphant ascendancy, she symbolically sacrifices the "dark beast" in her husband, ritually dancing her desire for his nullification (170-72). Likewise with Ursula (third generation), who, with the pagan moon-goddess as witness, sacrifices the impotent Skrebensky, pushing "the knife ... into his already dead body," leaving him "buried in goodly darkness" (444-45).
Women in Love, in its turn, juxtaposes the harsh disintegrative violence of animal sacrifice (the "Rabbit" episode, for example) exploited by Gerald and Gudrun as an erotic turn-on to the holistic biocentrism that sacrifices sacrifice itself (Birkin and Ursula). With something of the same expansive intensity as Paul and Clara's love making on the night the peewits called, their cosmic love making at night in Sherwood Forest incorporates those nonhuman energies--their inheritance of a universe of dark reality"--they are later afraid to recall (320). As Birkin's precursor, Paul anticipates without quite sustaining the erotic potential Birkin and Ursula bring to fulfillment. (24)

Lawrence's later turn, especially in The Plumed Serpent and in "The Woman Who Rode Away," to a more savage economy of sacrifice, where the dark gods of the blood demand human sacrifice to restore a fractured life-continuum to its former vitality is beyond the bounds of the culture of sacrifice the present essay has explored.

Works Cited


Notes

(1.) Freud defines sacrifice in terms of the renunciation of "instinctual satisfaction that marks man's ascent into civilization (39). In Zizec's formulation, "the entire psychoanalytic theory of 'socialization' [is] the description of a sacrificial situation which, far from being exceptional, is the story of everyone and as such [is] constitutive" (74). For Kristeva, 'sacrifice designates, precisely, the watershed on the basis of which the social and the symbolic are instituted" (75).

(2.) In the biographical context, as John Worthen puts it, "Lydia Lawrence saw to it that [the family] made the sacrifice" involved in sending Lawrence to university, "just as she had always sacrificed herself (39). The collection and distribution of money was a highly ritualized activity, as Paul's visit to the local pay offices indicates (93-96).

(3.) The original story of "scapegoating" occurs in Leviticus 16, where Aaron confesses "all the iniquities of the children of Israel" over a goat and then sends it "into the wilderness." Among the Morel family, only the father is unlikely to know the story.

(4.) The idea of "God sacrificing himself for the guilt of man ... the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor" is, as Nietzsche puts it, Christianity's "stroke of genius" (Genealogy 72).

(5.) For Lawrence's reading of Nietzsche's works, see Worthen 210.

(6.) As "humanized animals," domestic pets alone are "exempt from the sacrificial regime" (Wolfe 101).

(7.) The biocentric tradition, as Margo Norris defines it, is marked by "its valuation of the body and the body's effusion of powers, its instinctual epistemology, its celebration of unmediated experience." In Norris's reckoning, its chief practitioners are Darwin, Nietzsche, Ernst, Kafka, and Lawrence (3, 1) Gary Steiner juxtaposes the anthropocentric--"the view that human beings are primary and central in the order of things" (1)--to the biocentric, where a "cosmic holism" locates human beings as "part of a shared community of life with other living beings" (250).

(8.) In relation to Dinka animal sacrifices, Girard speaks of those "ritual curses" pronounced before the immolation that are "in themselves able to destroy the victim" (98). Earl Ingersoll notes that "the mother confirms her mastery through the control of language" (41), which includes an impressive repertoire of biblical condemnations against which Morel has no comeback.
(9.) "Animality" is a highly unsatisfactory term, since it assumes an essential quality in animals from which rational humans are thought to be free. See David Clark (182).

(10.) "Penal substitution" underwrites the theory of sacrifice in Isaiah and St. Paul. In the Pauline version, Jesus is the innocent victim who suffered the fullness of God's wrath for the sins humans committed.

(11.) As Roberto Exposito puts it, "That immunity, which is necessary to protect our life, when brought beyond a certain threshold, winds up negating it.... Immunization at high doses entails the sacrifice of the living" (51).

(12.) As the focus of violent domestic quarrels, Morel virtually disappears halfway through the text, his "last fight" with Paul marking the end of his aggressive interventions in family affairs (252-53). After this he has inconspicuous walk-on parts, culminating in his silent creeping round the house to avoid looking at his wife's corpse (442-44).

(13.) Among the many essays that explore the narrative "shiftiness" in Part 2, which locates Miriam as victim, Diana Bond's is particularly incisive and insightful.

(14.) The intimate connection Bataille perceives between the "sacred horror" of sacrifice and "the ultimate uses of pleasure" ("Hegel" 23) is the reverse of Miriam's assumption that suffering alone vindicates sacrifice.

(15.) The resonances, of course, are with lines 43-44 of Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress": "And tear our Pleasures with rough strife/Thorugh the Iron gates of Life." The young lady's sacrificial postponement for the sake of future reward is undermined by a short-term meditation on death. The reward for renouncing sex is not heavenly bliss, but an earthly defloration of which "Worms" are the agent.

(16.) Bruce Fink's reference is to Lacan's economy of jouissance, which is an "open, untotalizable economy" (122) resembling that of the biocentric. In my terms, it sacrifices sacrifice itself for the sake of an "ecstasy of living" that knows no limits or bounds.

(17.) In Girard's terms, the "sacrificial catharsis" is designed to restore peace and to prevent "the unlimited propagation of violence" (30).

(18.) La Dame exemplifies the gendered dimension of the culture of sacrifice, where the female (Marguerite) sacrifices not only her happiness, but also her life to the law of the father, embodied in Armand's father who demands that she renounce her love for his son. See Roland Barthes (103-05).

(19.) In the biographical context, Worthen notes that in their first weeks together, "Lawrence and Frieda were both gaining the courage to abandon self-sacrifice, and to assert their needs and demands" (412).
(20.) In Studies in Classic American Literature, Lawrence juxtaposes two metaphors for the "soul of man": it is either a "neat back garden" (anthropocentric) or "a dark forest, with wild life in it" (biocentric) (16-17).

(21.) As Deleuze and Guattari explain it, "becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal.... The becoming animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not" (262).

(22.) Different theological traditions distinguish between Jesus' sacrifice as memorial (Protestant) and as repetition (Catholic). In Paul and Clara's love making, however, repetition signifies their failure to recapture its original force, which turns it into a memorial act: they had their "splendid moments" separately, or Paul ran on "alone" (408).

(23.) Nietzsche's rhetorical question--"Did one not have to sacrifice God himself and out of cruelty against oneself worship ... nothingness?" (Beyond 63)--concentrates the essence of Paul's "subjective destitution." In preparation for the final paragraph's act of retrenchment, however, this "core of nothingness" is subtly qualified: "and yet not nothing" (464).

(24.) For a detailed exploration of the sadism involved in ritual sacrifice in Women in Love, see Doherty, in Ingersoll and Hyde, ed., Windows to the Sun.

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