D. H. Lawrence’s Vision of the Novel and

*Sons and Lovers*

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“The world is a wonderful place,’” she [Mrs. Morel] said, “and wonderfully beautiful.” (*Sons and Lovers*, 154)

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Despite D. H. Lawrence’s declining literary position and influence these days, especially in the academia, he has continued to be claimed as one of the most original and prophetic writers who have ever existed in world literature. To take a few examples, D. H. Lawrence is, as well known, a major writer in the Leavisean “Great Tradition” along with such novelists as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. In the midst of all those attacks done on Lawrence in the name of conventional morality, F. R. Leavis contends that Lawrence has greatly contributed to shaping the beautiful tradition of English mentality and sensibility through his unique, literary vision that could have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by immature, unliterary minds. E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* also includes D. H. Lawrence as a major writer on his “list of prophetic singers,” along with such writers as Dostoevsky, Melville and Emily Brontë. As for Lawrence’s creative process of prophetic songs, Forster thus explains:

D. H. Lawrence can describe a field of grass and flower or entrance into Freemantle. Little things in the foreground seem to be all that the prophet

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1. The words in each bracket in this paper are all mine supplemented for better understanding. And hereafter, all the quotations of the text will be based on *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence (Penguin Books, 1948).

2. Harold Bloom, one of the most important critics on Lawrence, notes him as “an absurdly neglected writer, because of a feminist crusade that has largely exiled him from the academies of the English-speaking world” (*Novelists and Novels*, 18).
cares about at moments—he sits down with them so quiet and busy, like a child between two romps. (124)

Moreover, for Forster, Lawrence is even “the only prophetic novelist writing today,” “all the rest” being at best “fantasists or preachers.” As “the only living novelist,” Lawrence creates the song that predominates with its “rapt bardic quality.” According to Forster’s vision of “the prophet,” she or he is someone who is “irradiating nature from within, so that every colour has a glow and every form a distinctness which could not otherwise be obtained” (130-31). Aldous Huxley is also an important critic in D. H. Lawrence’s canon, who sharply discriminates Lawrence’s unique talent from other ordinary writers.’ Huxley, an original intelligence himself, praises Lawrence as, among other things, “someone with a gift for sensing the mystery of otherness” (10). In other words, Lawrence’s gift is “an extraordinary sensitiveness to what Wordsworth called ‘unknown modes of being’” (7). In a quite recent book published in 2005, Novelists and Novels, Harold Bloom also pays great attention to what D. H. Lawrence achieved in literature. According to the master-critic, there are “only three criteria for greatness in imaginative literature” and they are “aesthetic splendor, cognitive power and wisdom” (13). Lawrence is, for Bloom, a rare novelist satisfying all these criteria for imaginative genius. Bloom also contends that Lawrence’s epiphanies revealing all these three merits are unique and original, above all, in that they are “times when elemental forces break through the surfaces of existence” (298).

Thus, apart from personal preference or distaste for Lawrence, it would be hard to deny that he still needs our attention, in his original literary mode and emphasis on the possibility of living, despite his occasional, stylistic slips or narcissistic, male-centered philosophy. Among other things, Lawrence strikes one with his special emphasis on the importance of the novel. As to his being primarily a novelist, he once wrote: “I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and the poet . . .” (Phoenix 535). He also said that “the novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained” (Phoenix II 416). According to Lawrence, the novel is, of all the art forms, the most perfect medium through which man and life can be understood and, therefore, can be given direction for life.\(^3\) Lawrence maintains that writers necessarily

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\(^3\) One of the major American philosophers, Richard Rorty also, in his book, \textit{Contingency, Irony and Solidarity}, argues that literature, especially, the novel