

FINDING THE PRIMITIVE

IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S

*THE SISTERS*

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my wife, Catherine, whose constant attention and strength allowed me to focus and complete it. Her love for me and for our little ones distracted me just enough. I love you, Catherine.

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## INTRODUCTION

David Herbert Lawrence was born in the colliery town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire in 1885 and died in 1930 at the age of forty-four in southern France. During his forty-four years, Lawrence wrote over thirteen novels, nine plays, hundreds of poems, and hundreds of letters, in addition to his many non-fiction works. Lawrence dabbled in painting, as well, though his work in this art form was as well received as his most controversial novels. F. R. Leavis not only describes him as one of the preeminent Modernists, including James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, but calls him “the great writer of our own phase of civilization” (v). In his preface to Lawrence’s 1922 edition of *Sons and Lovers*, John Macy describes the novel as “a masterpiece in which every sentence counts, a book crammed with significant thought and beautiful, arresting phrases, the work of a singular genius whose gifts are more richly various than those of any other young English novelist” (v). Though many critics may not agree with E. M. Forster’s statement that “he was the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation,” most will agree that his work greatly influenced our literary development.<sup>1</sup>

D. H. Lawrence's writing often stretched the sensibilities of his early twentieth century audience. While *Sons and Lovers* was widely praised, the public response to *The Rainbow* was somewhat different. Lawrence finished *The Rainbow* in 1914, the year World War I began, but after an investigation into its alleged obscenity in 1915, the novel was suppressed in both the United States and in England. Lawrence encountered similar difficulty in publishing *Women in Love*; after two years of attempts, he was able to publish only for private subscription and even that publishing was subject to a lawsuit.

Why were his books considered so countercultural? Mark Kinkead-Weekes explains that what most disturbed the "civilized" public was Lawrence's description of human beings out of their own control (xiii-xiv). While this theory was by no means new – Freud had already begun his exploration into the human psyche and had published *Studies on Hysteria* twenty-five years before the publication of *Women in Love* – no well known authors had yet shown characters in the throes of such unconscious activity.

Jack Stewart explains that Lawrence's approach to and understanding of the unconscious were greatly influenced by his comprehension of the principles of primitivism. Stewart, pointing to Michael Bell's definition of primitivism, which is treated in a later chapter, explores how Lawrence reworked Romantic primitivism to describe his modern outlook on the world. Though the exact nature of Lawrence's primitivism is debatable, it has been established that he

relied on primitivism in both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* to carry the greater part of novels.<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine of primitivism, obviously complex, arose from several sources,<sup>3</sup> but most critics agree that the third Earl of Shaftesbury was influential in its ascension.<sup>4</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, the Earl of Shaftesbury attempted to show that God revealed himself fully in nature, promoting the theory that the closer one existed to Nature, the closer one was to God. As such, artists and philosophers such as Lord Monboddo, James Macpherson, and Jean Jacques Rousseau began to advance the study of primitive societies, assuming that these societies must be closer to God and thus more moral.<sup>5</sup> Lawrence, among other artists, such as Pablo Picasso, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot, embraced primitivism and explored it in his art.

How and why D. H. Lawrence moved from the primitive animism of *The Rainbow* to the more explicit uses of and comments upon primitivism in *Women in Love* will be explored in later chapters, but that he *did* make the move is important to note. Lawrence read widely and variously. In addition to his unfortunate experiences in both Germany and Cornwall during the War, his new marriage to Frieda, and the popular rejection of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence's reading strongly influenced his writing. In exploring Lawrence's letters and his requests for books from friends and acquaintances, we can see that Lawrence's reading was not confined, but moved from book to book, from culture to culture without pause or, it sometimes seems, much reason.

While he was writing *Women in Love*, Lawrence was reading Jung's studies on the unconscious and Sir James Frazer's anthropological books *The Golden Bough* and *Totemism and Exogamy*, as well as studying African history.<sup>6</sup> Erwin Steinberg presents Lawrence's various relationships with several Modern anthropologists and mythographers, especially Sir James Frazer. Lawrence was very dependent on the past to find "unconscious truth" and looked, in part, to Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy*, Jane Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual*, and a myriad of mythologies for his sources (Steinberg 91-94). This diverse reading clearly affected how Lawrence approached primitivism.

But Lawrence was also greatly influenced by the science of his day. In addition to Einstein's explorations in particle physics and advancement in mechanical warfare and anthropology, Freudian psychoanalysis was developing in the early twentieth century. By the time Lawrence completed *Women in Love*, he had read translations of several of Freud's works and related some of his thoughts concerning psychoanalysis in his 1921 work, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*. He describes Freud's theories as "Nothing but a huge slimy serpent of sex, and heaps of excrement, and a myriad repulsive little horrors spawned between sex and excrement" (5). Clearly, Lawrence was disappointed with the results of current psychoanalytic theory. In *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*, Lawrence began to set down in much more concise language than previously his own theories concerning the unconscious, describing the unconscious as *the* "creative element," the only true source of individual thought (16). He tells the

reader that “What we are suffering from now is the restriction of the unconscious within certain ideal limits” and that we must “leave the unconscious to itself to prompt new movement and new being” (16).

Lawrence responded to what he considered poor science and bad logic through his literature.<sup>7</sup> Lawrence begins to experiment with the unconscious, leaving it to itself, around 1913, when he begins writing the first version of *The Rainbow*. In a series of letters that he wrote to Ladies Cynthia Asquith and Ottoline Morrell in 1915, Lawrence explicitly mentions the problems he treats in *The Rainbow*, problems such as greed, the War, the mechanization of man, and his mourning of the past. While in *The Rainbow* he explores the nature of the problems, in *Women in Love*, he offers solutions.

It can be clearly seen that *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* emerged from a single source, what Lawrence called *The Sisters*. Originally conceived as one novel, *The Sisters* grew into the two novels as the problems Lawrence witnessed became so complex and so pressing that he wrote the first novel to identify the problems clearly and the second to treat them effectively. While these problems were clarified by modern psychoanalysis, anthropology, and philosophy, they were greatly exacerbated with the outbreak of the Great War. When Lawrence and some male friends came down from the hills late August of 1914, they discovered that England had gone to war. Lawrence had already completed a final manuscript of *The Rainbow*, but had yet to begin *Women in Love*. Many critics consider *Women in Love* a War novel, but the Great War was not the only thing to

which Lawrence is responding. Other than his personal experiences with militarism, Lawrence saw a world becoming more “automized” and industrial. He did not see the Great War as a final result of the disconnection from our unconscious, but merely a byproduct of what he called “a process of derangement, just as the fixing of the will upon any other primary process is a derangement” (*Psychoanalysis* 48). But Lawrence saw that the War did greatly affect people on a personal and unconscious level, as indicated in a letter to Lady Ottoline: “After the War, the soul of the people will be so maimed and so injured that it is horrible to think of” (573).

D. H. Lawrence, like many Modern writers, reflects the fragmentation of his day in his literature; however, unlike most British Modernists, Lawrence strives to find a solution in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Lawrence searches for these lost connections between the individual and society and the individual and his soul in the lost connection between the past and the present. Lawrence was familiar with primitivism, but as Colin Clarke indicates in *Rivers of Dissolution*, he felt that the Romantic ideals – particularly primitivism – had failed miserably. Judging from his response to Freud’s advances in psychoanalysis, Lawrence was also disappointed with current psychoanalytic techniques and their ability to deal with the problems he saw.

Lawrence had a complex relationship with the past. He depended greatly on myth and anthropology, but still felt obliged to do something different from what had been done before. Herbert Asquith argues that Lawrence felt “that his

free flame could not be artificially confined in an ancient form, but must weave its own patterns, moving without restraint as its own will" (203). Lawrence loved the past and mourned its death. He wrote to Lady Asquith, "really I can't bear it: the past, the past, the falling, perishing, crumbling past, so great, so magnificent" (576). Like Birkin in the chapter "The Chair," he says, "So beautiful, so pure!" (355). At the same time, he agrees with Ursula. "I hate your past—I'm sick of it" (356).

Lawrence recognizes the importance of the past, but also acknowledges its lack of contemporary relevance. Ultimately, it is Ursula's statement that describes just what Lawrence feels: "I hate the present—but I don't want the past to take its place" (356). It is a complex relationship with the past that Lawrence struggles to explain and to understand in his two novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

Lawrence's complicated attitude toward the past is tied to his attitude to his country. In yet another letter to Lady Asquith, Lawrence said, "I am sad, for my country, for this great wave of civilization, 2000 years, which is now collapsing, that it is hard to live" (577). He sees beauty in the vast history of his nation, but he also sees "the past, the great past, crumbling down, breaking down" giving way to entropic winter, "where all vision is lost and all memory dies out" (577).

D. H. Lawrence's difficult relationship with the past and the present is influential in the writing of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. That Lawrence

makes abundant use of primitivism in the two novels is clear; however, as Michael Bell observes, his “romantic faith” of grand and somewhat naïve Biblical symbols in *The Rainbow* “give[s] way to the bitterness of *Women in Love*” (60). Lawrence’s reflection of this bitterness changes as his use of primitivism changes. Bell emphasizes Lawrence’s overt use of anthropology, indicating the “complex interplay of unconscious ritual [. . .] and conscious reflection” (109). However, the change is more than one of explicit use of primitivism. Lawrence reveals a new philosophy through the relationships among his characters in *Women in Love*. He questions the role of the past as well as the role of the present. While on a train ride to London with Gerald Crich, Rupert Birkin offers a hint at the solution: “It seems to me that there is only this perfect union with a woman – sort of ultimate marriage – and there is nothing else” (*WIL* 58).

As previously mentioned, Lawrence seeks a connection between the past and the present. He seeks a balance between the idealized “primitive” past and a realized “civilized” present. He acknowledges the advancement of civilization in his writings, though he often holds it in contempt. In *The Sisters*, Lawrence explores the role of primitivism in the midst of that civilization and finds both wanting. It is in the balance of the two that he finds a cure for a dissolving society with “maimed souls.” We shall look at Lawrence’s relationship with his world and the relationships in the novels that constitute *The Sisters* to discover just how he sought to achieve this “perfect union.”

## CHAPTER 1

### “A PROPERLY PRIMITIVIST ATTITUDE”:

#### D. H. LAWRENCE’S PRIMITIVE

#### APPROACH

##### I. D. H. LAWRENCE, PRIMITIVE CONSCIENCE, AND MODERN ANTHROPOLOGY

D. H. Lawrence’s understanding of and approach to primitivism was unique among Modernists. Lawrence did not “romanticize the primitives or share the progressive theory that saw them as simply an earlier phase of cultural development” (Stewart, “Primitivism” 110). In fact, Lawrence refused to believe the theory of evolution because “he did not feel it in his solar plexus – a properly primitivist attitude” (110). That Stewart calls his attitude “properly primitivist” is important to note. Lawrence, like Birkin, is “no simple primitivist,” nor did he see himself as a “civilized” man. He sees the “entropic extremes of primitivism and civilization, raised to a high level of ‘abstraction,’ as dialectical counterparts” (111). The primitive “casts its magnetic spell” on Lawrence, and it emerges in his literature.

What, then, do we mean when we refer to *primitivism*? Michael Bell acknowledges the difficulty in defining *primitivism*, saying “It must be recognized at the outset, then, that the term *primitivism* properly refers to a

dauntingly ancient and universal human characteristic with a correspondingly wide range of manifestations" (1). Bell attempts, at the very least, to loosely define the term. He notes that perhaps the most important aspect of primitive man is his "mythic sensibility" and that that sensibility "refers to a *way* of feeling and thought, not to specific ideas or mental objects" (7). In short, primitivism is a *way* of responding to the world and to nature. Clearly, any understanding of primitivism is influenced by a culture's scientific, philosophic, religious, and historical context. It is only by looking at its development that one can begin to comprehend not only what the term *primitivism* indicates, but also how it operates.

As Bell indicates, the term *primitivism* is not precise, and its origins are as wide ranging as its manifestations. Primitivism began to grow in popularity in the early eighteenth century, some years after Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, first argued against Thomas Hobbes' egoist philosophy, declaring an essentially good human soul. He, with the Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson, claimed that just as there existed an aesthetic sense, so there was a sense with which to apprehend morals: a Moral Sense. As a rationalist philosopher, Shaftesbury followed this claim with a number of derivative principles. Perhaps the most instrumental in the development of primitivism is that "the distinction between right and wrong is part of the constitution of human nature" (Jones 261). While this principle is not directly associated with primitivism, the idea that man, as a wholly natural creature, is motivated to

determine what is right and wrong without outside “civilized” influence is directly associated with primitivism.

This association grew out of the Romantic Movement, which, in its rebellion against the Enlightenment, attacked Reason as a foundation of the evils of the Enlightenment. According to W. T. Jones, Romantics called Reason “a false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions” (890). These distinctions were regarded as artificial and destructive. As we multiply distinctions, they destroy the whole of reality, dividing it, parsing it, and ultimately killing the “living reality” (890).

Rather than choosing the enlightened dependence on Reason, the Romantics chose to divest themselves of the accoutrements of learning and civilization and instead turned to nature. The movement embraced the concept of Moral Sense, a sense independent of civilization, a sense imbued by God and/or nature. This reliance on nature directly led to studies of and emphasis on primitive cultures. The logic is clear. If it is “civilization” that leads to separation from our moral selves, then those societies furthest from “civilization” must be closer to their moral selves.

The Romantic embrace of primitivism was expressed in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most peculiar was a popular search for the “inspired peasant,” a poet uncorrupted by civilization. Henry Jones, a bricklayer, enjoyed a brief popularity as a poet, as did Stephen Duck, a thresher. Scotland experienced the discovery of Robert Burns, whose poetry served as perfect evidence of the

goodness of a natural education. Also in Scotland, James Macpherson surreptitiously wrote *The Poems of Ossian*, a compendium of supposedly pre-Christian writings concerning the Scottish hero.

Even the more formal poets explored primitivism, as Michael Bell says, noting Wordsworth's primitivist explorations in his "formal mythological poems" and "his recreation of mythic feeling and thought" (58). Bell explains that these works recognize the "residual continuance of primitivist conventions of the more formal literary kind while at the same time indicating the more profound and inward mode of primitivist expression" (58).

At least two approaches to primitivism were present during the Romantic period. Cultural and chronological primitivism differ as their names indicate. Cultural primitivism "prefers the natural to the artificial, the uninhibited to the controlled, the simple and primitive to that onto which people have worked, nature to art" (*Handbook*). It is this approach to which most Romantics held. Chronological primitivism, on the other hand, which "looks backward to a "Golden Age" and views the present state as a sad product of culture and of society, was popular among the Modernists.

Bell introduces another approach to primitivism, conscious primitivism, which he describes as "The conscious reference to primitive motifs in which the main point or effect is not the inward recreation of ancient modes of feeling but the moral or symbolic use to which such references can be put" (32). While this approach was present during the Romantic Movement, Bell explains that it is

during the Modern Age that writers truly began to explore the inward recreation of the “primitivist urge” by methods that would disturb “established literary conventions” (5).

“Conscious primitivism,” Bell says, “represents, sympathetically or otherwise, the failure of the romantic aspiration” (61). Bell emphasizes the difference in the modern approach to the “primitivist urge,” noting the explicit use of conscious primitivism as opposed to cultural primitivism. While the works of Modernists often contain elements of all approaches, the most common approach, and most clear, is to recreate the “ancient modes of feeling,” an approach that does not reject the current world, but only changes the perspective. Bell explains that while the primitive man thinks in mythic terms, “the fully civilized man can turn to mythic forms with a sophisticated awareness of their peculiar ontological status” (43). Modern man is able to look at the mythic forms consciously and use them wittingly. In fact, modern man, through his art, is able to recreate the “mythic mentality.” Gavriel Ben-Ephraim suggests that literature, more than just recreating the mythic mentality, acts as “a mythic cartography of human experience” (75).

The Modernist movement’s origins are not quite as wide-ranging as those of primitivism, but are still not terribly precise. The term *modern* does not so much refer to a historical period as to a loosely defined accumulation of characteristics. The development of psychology, anthropology, and physics greatly affected the approach to reality. According to *The Handbook to Literature*,

“*Modern* implies a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, loss, and despair.” In a broader sense *modern* implies a break with tradition.

The past was no longer considered to be the “Golden Age,” the mythic time when all was right with the world. Modern artists began to look at the past in a new light. Artists looked at primitive cultures as a source of inspiration, but no longer as a goal. Tribal art, perhaps, is the most visible expression of this attitude. Paul Wingert, the art historian, in his discussion of the “primitive” expression in art, considers the term apt for certain cultures,

not because they represent the fumbling early beginnings of civilization [ . . . ] [but] because [they] show developments more closely allied to the fundamental, basic, and essential drive of life that have not been buried under a multitude of parasitical, non-essential desires. (Stewart, “Primitive” 111)

It is from this characteristic of primitive expression that Modern artists such as Henri Matisse, Wyndam Lewis, and Constantin Brancusi developed their “darkly sensual” and visceral artistic expression (Appel 16).

Romantic desires to remain primitive gave way to a new approach to primitivism. *Primitivism* had become a *way* of expressing and thinking. Lawrence acts as a sort of bridge between the two worlds. Bell indicates that

Lawrence’s career [ . . . ] gives one line of derivation for modern primitivism; it is the assertion in his case of a

beleaguered romanticism. [. . .] The Romantic movement provided the precedent for the literary recreation of psychological states whose qualities, putatively at least, were commonly lacking in the civilized personality. (61)

He continues, saying that primitivism “is the heir to this tradition, except that where the romantics generally sought a unification of sensibility primitivist works have tended to dramatize the disintegration” (61).

Lawrence, like many of his contemporaries, followed the Modern mantra “Make it new!” John Vickery supposes that Lawrence was attracted to orthodoxy, but Erwin Steinberg explains that Lawrence’s method was not to accept anyone else’s methods, “but rather to take from anywhere and everywhere factual details from the real world, bits and pieces of theories, superstitions, aspects of the personalities of people whom he knew, to support his own theories,” which often changed from month to month (91).

As his theories changed, so did his attitude in his novels. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim indicates that even between the writing of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* Lawrence’s attitude changed drastically. “The covenant between man and God, whose traditional sign shines so hopefully at the end of *The Rainbow*, is shattered in *Women in Love*” (179). From his letters, we find that Lawrence was a prolific reader and borrowed an ever-wider variety of books from his friends.<sup>8</sup> These readings clearly informed his writing, and by looking at Lawrence’s

attempt to explain his beliefs in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, a reader will note the influence.

One year after the publication of *Women in Love* in 1920, Lawrence published *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and subsequently *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, a sort of commentary on contemporary psychoanalysis and understanding of the unconscious. Jack Stewart clarifies the role of the unconscious in Lawrence's novels, noting that Lawrence explores primitivism in *Women in Love* through a "complex interplay of unconscious ritual (the language of symbolism) and conscious reflection (the language of prophecy)" ("Primitivism" 109). Lawrence's fascination with the unconscious is influenced by his readings of Freud, James Frazer, and Jane Harrison, among others. In *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, Lawrence tries to undermine Freud's work while developing his own informed understanding of the unconscious.

Freud began his explorations into the unconscious years before Lawrence was even aware of the idea of the unconscious,<sup>9</sup> and in acknowledging this, Lawrence declares that Freud "is on the brink of a Weltanschauung—or at least a Menschenschauung" (Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis* 4).<sup>10</sup> Lawrence finds this brink dangerous, claiming "Psychoanalysis is out, under a therapeutic disguise, to do away entirely with the moral faculty in man" (4).

There is no question that Lawrence held contemporary psychoanalysis in contempt. His sardonic introduction to Freud emphasizes his disdain for what he considered faulty thought. "With dilated hearts we watched Freud disappearing

into the cavern of darkness, which is sleep and unconsciousness to us, darkness which issues in the foam of all our day's consciousness [. . .] he came back with dreams to sell" (*Psychoanalysis* 5). Lawrence felt that Freud was destroying the Moral Sense by taking away the power of the unconscious. Freud declared, and Lawrence agreed with this, that what we consider to be free will is, in fact, a delusion. In his 1899 publication, *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) Freud claimed that dreams were "the royal road to the unconscious." Through his dream interpretations Freud explained that our conscious actions are determined by a system of unconsciously repressed memories.<sup>11</sup> Freud's explanation of repressed memories offended Lawrence because of its "mechanistic" tendencies.

Lawrence proceeds to break psychoanalysis down into its mechanical processes and determines that it is the inhibition of incest craving that ultimately destroys the psychoanalyst's argument. He refers to Trigant Burrow's argument that "Freud's *unconscious* does but represent our conception of conscious sexual life as this latter exists in a state of repression" (*Psychoanalysis* 8). Thus, Lawrence concludes, it is the knowledge of sex, not the craving for sex, that became sin. He clarifies this statement by pointing to the myth of Adam and Eve:

Adam and Eve fell, not because they had sex,  
or even because they committed the sexual act, but  
because they had become aware of their sex and the  
possibility of the act. When sex became to them a

mental object – that is, when they discovered that they could deliberately enter upon and enjoy and even provoke sexual activity in themselves, then they were cursed and cast out of Eden. Then man became self-responsible; he entered on his own career. (8)

Lawrence argues this point for one reason. When Adam and Eve became aware of sex as a mental object, “they became aware of what was pristine in themselves,” their unconscious, an idea radically different from Freud’s (8). What is the nature of that pristine unconscious? This, Lawrence claims, is what Freud and psychoanalysis have been unable to determine. Phillip Rieff explains that while Lawrence had made efforts to demonstrate this in his creative work, Lawrence uses *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* to explicitly define what Freud could not: the nature of the “pristine unconscious” (*Psychoanalysis* vii).

While the impetus of his argument concerning the unconscious may have been psychoanalysis, Lawrence’s explanation is also heavily informed by his readings in anthropology and primitive magic. John Vickery comments on Lawrence’s clear preference for Edward B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*,<sup>12</sup> but a reader will note influences from both James Frazer and Jane Ellen Harrison. Vickery also notes Lawrence’s interest in Greek culture and religion, emphasizing his admiration for Gilbert Murray’s *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (285).

However, despite his preference for *Primitive Culture* over Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Lawrence's explanations of the unconscious were very much informed by Frazer's anthropology. Lawrence seeks the origin of the unconscious, and it is by looking at the primitive cultures explored in *The Golden Bough*, *Primitive Culture*, and even Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual*, that he builds an explanation. That explanation took the form of two books, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, published in 1920, and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, published in 1921. The books were ignored by most, laughed at by several critics, and avoided by most of Lawrence's friends. Phillip Rieff claims that the work "exposed the incompetence" of Lawrence as a prophet (*Psychoanalysis* viii). In his search for the seat of the unconscious, Lawrence looked not only to anthropology, but also to those societies that the anthropologists studied and to their beliefs.

In his exploration of the seat of the unconscious Lawrence claims that, "since there must be a centre of consciousness in the tiny foetus, it must have been there from the very beginning" (*Psychoanalysis* 19). By his logic, since the consciousness exists from the beginning, it exists within the very first cell at the center of the body, the "solar plexus." The "solar plexus," according to Lawrence, is also the origin of what he calls "blood knowledge." The solar plexus, or the navel, "draw[s] the whole stream of the creative blood upon itself, and spinning within the parental blood-stream, slowly creating or bodying forth its own incarnate amplification" (19).

In a letter to Ernest Collings in 1913, Lawrence declares, "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. . . . What our blood feels and believes and says is always true" (563). This belief in blood is reiterated nearly three years later in a letter to Bertrand Russell: "I am convinced now of what I believed when I was about twenty – that there is another seat of consciousness than the brain and the nerve system: there is a blood-consciousness which exists in us independently of the ordinary mental consciousness, which depends on the eye as its source or connector" (470).

Steinberg emphasizes the fact that Lawrence wrote this in connection with his readings of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and *Totemism and Exogamy*. In the same letter to Russell, Lawrence describes the "blood consciousness" which he will later mention in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*. "Similarly in the transmission from the blood of the mother to the embryo in the womb, there goes the whole blood consciousness. And when they say a mental image is sometimes transmitted from the mother to the embryo, this is not the *mental* image, but the *blood-image*" (470). The concept of transference of mental images is likely related to Frazer's account of Captain W. and his wife, in which a lizard fell on the pregnant Mrs. W. between her breasts. She foretold to her husband that their child would be marked in the same place the lizard had fallen on her (*Totemism* 64).

Tied to Lawrence's understanding of blood-knowledge is the *totem*. Edward Tylor defines *totem* as "the doctrine of spirits embodied in, or attached

to, or conveying influence through, certain material objects" (144). The *totem* was popular among artists in the early twentieth century. Alfred Appel explores the role of primitive art in Modern art, including painting, literature, sculpture and music. In his discussion of Cézanne and Gauguin, Appel mentions that "their most radical source of inspiration was the tribal art of Africa and Oceania" (18). Within his book Appel displays African art alongside modern art, indicating not only the similarities in appearance, but in meaning. He describes how tribal art was wrenched from its original context, "where it was central to the community as a body of religious and magical objects that covered every aspect of life" (27).

This statement is reminiscent of Edward Tylor's description of the fetish in *Primitive Culture*, which Lawrence enjoyed immensely. Tylor explains that the fetish is a type of totem to which people have attached magical powers or spiritual influence (144). Lawrence latched on to the idea of the totem and, more specifically, the fetish. He wrote in response to reading Harrison's description of the totem, "It just fascinates me to see art coming out of religious yearning – one's presentation of what one wants to feel again deeply" (Huxley 151).

Harrison, in her discussion of the *totem*, describes a type of "blood knowledge" different from Frazer, but a version to which Lawrence clearly adheres. She describes a tribe from Australia who claim kinship with kangaroos. "In the Kangaroo tribe there were real leaping kangaroos as well as men-kangaroos. The men-kangaroos when they danced and leapt did it, not to *imitate* kangaroos – you cannot imitate yourself – but just for natural joy of heart

because they *were* kangaroos; they belonged to the Kangaroo tribe, they bore the tribal marks and delighted to assert their tribal unity" (46).<sup>13</sup>

In the letter to Russell, Lawrence mentions both Frazer's account and Harrison's, though without crediting either one. While Frazer describes the origin of the *totem* as the identification of a human with an animal or object, Lawrence adopts the primitive mind-set that Harrison describes. "And this is the origin of the totem: and for this reason, some tribes no doubt really *were* kangaroos: they contained the blood-knowledge of the kangaroo" (46). Where Frazer saw mythic metaphor and hoped that science will eventually show how the "mysterious transmission is made from one to the other," Lawrence declares that the mysterious transmission occurs "probably without the intervention either of nerve or of brain consciousness" (Moore 470). In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence responded to Frazer's statement, "It must have appeared to the ancient Aryan that the sun was periodically recruited from the fire which resided in the sacred oak." Lawrence felt that "It must have appeared to the ancient Aryan that the sun was periodically recruited from life. Which is what the early Greek philosophers were always saying. And which still seems to me the real truth, the clue to the cosmos" (56). Where Frazer sees metaphor, Lawrence sees *Truth*.

One can see clearly that Lawrence's understanding and practice of *primitivism* was greatly influenced and informed by his reading. Jack Stewart says that Lawrence had a properly "primitivist attitude." It is this attitude that

allows Lawrence to explore an informed *way* of thinking and acting in *The Sisters*. In his exploration of a new *way* of thinking, Lawrence sought the “pristine unconscious” as the seat of creativity and original thought. It is in his exploration of the relationship between the “pristine unconscious” and the conscious mind that Lawrence found *idealism*. Lawrence felt that a rift was growing between the spontaneous unconscious and the logical mind, and that human beings were allowing the logical mind to overcome the unconscious. This “mistake” he called *idealism*.

## II. IDEALISM, MECHANIZATION, AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MODERN AGE

Lawrence rather confusingly defines *idealism* as “the motivizing of the great affective sources by means of ideas mentally derived” (*Psychoanalysis* 11). As an example, he offers the incest motive, “which first and foremost is a logical deduction made by the human reason, even if unconsciously made, and secondly is introduced into the affective, passionate sphere, where it now proceeds to serve as a principle for action” (11). It is the movement from the “ideal” to the “passional sphere” that Lawrence calls the “final peril of human consciousness.”

His explanation is confusing unless prefaced by his understanding of the hierarchy of the mind. Lawrence, as a proper primitivist, held to a structure of the mind different from those espoused by Freud and Jung. Eric Levy, in his ontological study of *Women in Love*, describes Lawrence’s attempt to reconcile Cartesian dualism. According to Levy, reality, in Cartesian ontology, is comprised of “two primary substances: mind

and body” (157). Descartes suggested that the mind and the body are each self-consistent and operate without knowledge or need of the other. Unlike the Occasionalists of the early eighteenth century, who attempted to “eliminate the irrationality” of this philosophy, Lawrence insisted on the irrationality. Levy explains, “the interaction between the two modes of human being [. . .] cannot be *known*; it can only be *experienced*” (158).

Levy argues that Lawrence adopted Cartesian dualism and changed it to fit his own ontological system: “the Cartesian dualism of mind and body becomes the Lawrencian dualism of physical mind and mental mind or consciousness” (158). Lawrence’s conception of this duality is adopted from a hierarchy explained by Jane Harrison. “A more fruitful way of looking at our human constitution,” she says, “is to see it not as a bundle of separate faculties, but as a sort of continuous cycle of activities” (38). In his essay, “Making Pictures,” Lawrence describes the relationship between the physical and the mental mind, explaining that the blood consciousness (the mental mind) informs and directs the mind (the physical mind): “Real thought is an experience. It begins as a change in the blood [. . .] and ends in a new piece of awareness, a new reality in mental consciousness” (“Making Pictures” 616). The “cycle of activities” begins with the “blood-consciousness” and moves into the “mental consciousness.”

The problem that Lawrence claims in idealism arises when this cycle reverses. To Lawrence it is a problem of the will, more specifically the will to power. Lawrence views the will as a product of consciousness, indicating that individuality stems from the ability of the fetus to willfully assert its own isolation. This isolation is not complete until the infant is separated from the

womb, but its beginnings are found in the creative flow of blood into and from the navel. Remember, the navel *actively* draws on “blood knowledge” from the mother. This will grows in the child until it screams “the scream of asserted isolation. The scream of revolt from connection, the revolt from union” (*Psychoanalysis* 23). Individuality is the assertion of self and the ability to create and act independently.

However, when this will asserts the intellect over the passional sphere, idealism arises.<sup>14</sup> Lawrence describes the outcome of the idealist mind: “It is the death of all spontaneous, creative life, and the substituting of the mechanical principle” (*Psychoanalysis* 11). He illustrates this in a series of letters to Bertrand Russell, where he accuses Russell of being “simply *full* of repressed desires,” blaming his “false and cruel” will (Moore 60). Near the end of their friendship, he wrote to Russell, “Stop working and being an ego, and have the courage to be a creature” (71). While the anger at Russell stemmed from contrasting political philosophies, Lawrence’s statements demonstrate his mindset. When one “wills” one’s philosophy in the “passional sphere,” one becomes an idealist.

Lawrence goes on in *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* to explain that idealism leads directly to the mechanization of the human condition. When Lawrence says *mechanization*, he refers to the lack of creativity resulting from an oppression of the unconscious. Psychoanalysis, according to Lawrence, left the unconscious powerless. The practitioners required their patients to analyze their motivations, desires, and emotions, effectively inhibiting “the true passional

impulses and so produce a derangement in the psyche" (*Psychoanalysis* 10). The patients' logical deductions of their emotions and passions "idealized" their urges, thus removing them from the "passional sphere" to the "mental sphere."

The mechanization of the human was illustrated to Lawrence in a variety of ways. A reader may note in some of Lawrence's letters that he felt particularly calm and at home in places far removed from industrialism. He describes his experience in Italy to his friend A. D. McLeod:

The Italians sing. They are very poor, they buy two-penn'orth of butter and a penn'orth of cheese. But they are healthy and they lounge about in the little square where the boats come up and nets are mended, like kings. And they go by the window proudly, and they don't hurry or fret. And the women walk straight and look calm. And the men adore the children – they are glad of their children even if they're poor. I think they haven't many ideas, but they have strong blood. (558)

Lawrence's description is almost Edenic in its tranquility. This is contrasted to his reflection on England: "I hate England and its hopelessness. [. . .] I want to wash again quickly, wash off England, the oldness and grubbiness and despair" (McLeod 557). He reiterates this meditation through Birkin while Birkin and Gerald Crich are on the train to London: "I always feel doomed when the train is

running into London. I feel such a despair, so hopeless, as if it were the end of the world" (*Women* 61).<sup>15</sup>

From his responses, one can tell that Lawrence saw a strong contrast between the Italian countryside and urban England. His description of Italy is pastoral, while England is "grubby" and "shabby," a result of its mechanization.

Several critics point to *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* and the novels' explicit description of the industrial development of Beldover to show Lawrence's attitude towards industrialism.<sup>16</sup> In the beginning of *The Rainbow*, the Brangwen family lives an instinctual life along a "sluggish river" and on "rich ground" (7). By the time Ursula and Gudrun are young women, the town has grown immensely due to the efforts of the Crich family. Gerald, in fact, is beginning to mechanize the colliery, enacting his will through "pure mechanical repetition, repetition ad infinitum, hence eternal and infinite" (*WIL* 228). When Ursula asks Gudrun how she likes being home, Gudrun responds, "I find myself completely out of it" (11). This disconnection from her town is directly opposed to her family's past connection to the land. What has changed in her town? It has become mechanized.

To Lawrence, "that the ideal becomes a mechanical principle" is obvious (*Psychoanalysis* 12). Reliance on the "physical mind" that is mechanical takes away the ability to create anew. Harrison, in an explanation of the history of ritual, says, "We mimic not only others but ourselves mechanically, even after all emotion proper to the act is dead; and then because mimicry has a certain

ingenious charm, it becomes an end in itself for ritual, even for art" (27).

Lawrence is of the same mind as Harrison, and goes further, declaring that when we give up emotion, we become nothing but mimicry (10).

Idealization results in an acceptance of the mechanization of the human mind. The mechanization, in turn, results in dissolution. "Hence instead of blood consciousness eventually enriching or expanding mind consciousness, the two compartments of awareness are opposed, with the result that the only way to admit the awareness of the physical mind is to obliterate the awareness of the mental one" (Levy 158). From this obliteration, Lawrence concludes that we are suffering from the "restriction of the unconscious within certain ideal limits" (*Psychoanalysis* 16).

Lawrence understands that mechanization is leading to an entropic world, a world where we have fallen into one of two extremes. Despite his love for the primitive, Lawrence recognizes that it is possible to fall into the primitive extreme, a world of pure sensuality, but also recognizes that the world has fallen into the other extreme: one of pure rationality. Psychoanalysis has allowed man to objectify the "passionate sphere," to create mental objects from what was previously part of the creative mystery of the unconscious.

Lawrence, through Birkin, contemplates the result of falling into either the purely mechanized mind or the purely sensual mind, both of which lead ultimately to dissolution of the race. "The white races, having the arctic north behind them, the vast abstraction of ice and snow, would fulfil a mystery of ice-

destructive knowledge, snow-abstract annihilation" (*WIL* 254). The African races, on the other hand, experienced "mindless progressive knowledge though the senses, knowledge arrested and ending in the senses, mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution" (253). Either extreme results in dissolution.

However, one will note, in both cases, Lawrence connects dissolution / annihilation to knowledge. To Lawrence, there are two types of knowledge: "blood-knowledge" which he considers "direct knowledge," or a knowledge that can only be experienced, and deductive knowledge, or knowledge that comes from the objectification of the outer world. Falling into either extreme will lead to dissolution, but the dissolution itself acts as a sort of "new birth," from which the individual can grow and develop or die and be annihilated. It is important to note that the individual can grow *or* die from dissolution. Colin Clarke observes that Lawrence's use of dissolution is both negative and positive, what Clarke calls "positive-negative" ("*Living*" 219). Each type of knowledge is intimately linked with the type of dissolution, positive or negative. "Blood-knowledge," to Lawrence, is linked to a new birth, or positive dissolution. Deductive knowledge is related to ultimate annihilation, or negative dissolution.

Lawrence's understanding of "blood-knowledge" may have been influenced by the 1903 publication of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*,<sup>17</sup> a work discussing the difference between the feminine and the masculine aspects of the psyche. Weininger argues that the psyche is separated into two distinct aspects and approaches: the feminine and the masculine. The feminine,

according to Weininger, “designated the pole of unconscious objective passivity, sexual determinism, amorality, and material de-individualized immanence” (Toews 32). The masculine, on the other hand, is “the pole of conscious subjective agency, rational control, ethical individuality, freedom and spiritual transcendence” (32).

Lawrence, like Robert Musil, explores the result of psychosexual repression. In Musil’s novel, *Confusions of the Young Törless*, published in 1906, Törless is described as “having lost this sense of a centered self, of subjective agency shaping perceptions and action in a characteristically individual fashion” (Toews 54). This loss of self is due to an imbalance between the feminine and masculine aspects of his psyche.<sup>18</sup> This imbalance is repeated in Lawrence’s novels, where he uses it almost to force his characters into self-reflection.

Tom Brangwen’s psychosexual imbalance derives from a combination of his childhood and his first sexual encounter. The imbalance itself, however, is not the actual dissolution, but allows Tom to be receptive to Lydia’s obliterative primitive presence. It is in this relationship that Tom’s psychic dissolution becomes clear:

Since she had come to the house he went about  
in a daze, scarcely seeing even the things he handled,  
drifting, quiescent, in a state of metamorphosis. He  
submitted to that which was happening to him,  
letting go his will, suffering the loss of himself,

dormant always on the brink of ecstasy, like a  
creature evolving to a new birth. (*Rainbow* 39)

In his imbalance, Tom recognizes that he is incomplete. His confusion had him asserting his will and his intellect, while Lydia's presence allows him to submit and let go of his will.

Lawrence describes the outcome of psychosexual confusion explicitly in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, explaining that America's class system is near anarchy because

Americans must make a choice. It is a choice  
between belief in man's creative, spontaneous soul,  
and man's automatic power of production and  
reproduction. It is a choice between serving *man*, or  
woman. It is a choice between yielding the soul to a  
leader, leaders, or yielding only to the woman, wife,  
mistress, or mother. (145)

Lawrence further explains that sexual confusion tends to "disintegrate society" (145). The psychosexual dissolution is due to the mechanization of the mind. The feminine and masculine poles are separated and one is repressed in favor of the other. Yet again, the dissolution that results from sexual confusion – which is linked to "blood-knowledge" – is necessary for a rebirth.

Lawrence looks at more than the sexual confusion of society. The imbalance he describes is not only sexual, but also political and spiritual. Bell

indicates that Lawrence continued in the tradition of the Romantics, as he still responded to the problem of balance of power. The problem of national domination and submission that Percy Shelley approached in "Queen Mab" was still present and unresolved. R. W. Harris suggests that Shelley supported a moral revolution, requiring the transformation not only of one individual, but of many, which would lead to the "release" of social justice (288). Wryly, Harris explains how this will work: "In a new era of universal love such problems would solve themselves" (288). As this revolution refused to occur, the domination games played by the nations in power led to greater and greater dissection of the world.

Lawrence did not support either the War, or the division of Europe afterward, saying, "O, ideal humanity, how detestable and despicable you are! And how you deserve your own poisonous-gases! How you deserve to perish in your own stink!" (*Fantasia* 183). In an earlier letter to Lady Ottoline he declares, "The great serpent to destroy is the will to Power: the desire for one man to have some dominion over his fellow-men" (574). The War was not dissolution itself, but evidence of mechanistic "will to Power," resulting in a dissolution of the spirit.

But again, that dissolution is necessary. In destroying the "great serpent," Lawrence wishes to begin a new world in which "[w]e should all rise again from the grave" (Asquith 571). He declares a new hope, a new struggle for "individual freedom" and "a common effort towards good" (Ottoline 573). While

this new hope sounds rather naively similar to Shelley's hope for a moral revolution, Lawrence does not depend on the problems to solve themselves. Lawrence is waiting for complete annihilation of the state from War.

The disintegration of society is connected in Lawrence's mind to the spiritual dissolution of its individuals. Lawrence borrows his understanding of spiritual/creative dissolution from Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy*. Frazer describes the more primitive cultures as "remnants of the once civilized world-people, who had their splendour and their being for countless centuries in the way of sensual knowledge" (110). Lawrence's understanding of the Northern mind, however, differs from Frazer, who says that the Northerners are "starting new centers of life in ourselves" (110). Lawrence describes the Northern mind as "ice-destructive," which is evidenced to Lawrence by the War and our destruction of each other (WIL 254).

But Lawrence indicates a rebirth from dissolution. Clarke explains that Lawrence is "endlessly concerned with what Keats has called 'self-destroying' – the process of dying into being, the lapsing of consciousness which is yet the discovery of a deeper consciousness, the dissolution of the hard, intact ready-defined ego" (3). Donald Gutierrez, who discusses Lawrence's explorations of death, says that "Dying into new life is of course a basic religious conception, the loss or discarding of the old self and the birth of a new one patently a concept and feeling universally experienced" ("Lapsing Out" 169). *Women in Love* is filled with instances of "self-destroying" and new births. When Hermione beats

Birkin in the head with the lapis lazuli paperweight, he is “barely conscious” and “moving in a sort of darkness” (*WIL* 106). In his wanderings through nature, Birkin discovers himself and his place: “He knew now where he belonged. He knew where to plant his seed” (107). As he climbs out of the valley – a traditional place of new birth<sup>19</sup> – he finds himself free of the “old sanity of the world” (108).

In his description of Lawrence’s ontology, Eric Levy explains how the two minds – the physical and the blood – must obliterate each other.<sup>20</sup> “You’ve got to lapse out before you can know what sensual reality is. [. . .] You’ve got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being” (*WIL* 44). Tom Brangwen, whose psychosexual imbalance allowed him to “learn not-to-be,” was able to “lapse out.” He found his balance and new birth in Lydia. Birkin succeeds in many lapses and re-births. It is those, Gutierrez says, “who can ‘lapse out’ that will survive” (“Lapsing Out” 172). Those who are unable to submit their will and mind – those connected still to deductive knowledge – do not. Hermione, Gerald, and Will, who cannot “lapse out,” are not only destroyed but destroy others in their passing.

Bell distinguishes between Lawrence and Joseph Conrad, emphasizing that while Conrad, like most other modernists, sees primitivism as “the necessary isolation,” Lawrence sees primitivism as “expanding and enriching” the individual’s soul. Jack Stewart compares Lawrence to Norman Brown’s Dionysian artist: “Instead of negating, he affirms the dialectical unity of the great

instinctual opposites: Dionysus reunites male and female. Self and Other, life and death" ("Primitive" 112). While Lawrence witnessed a psychic disintegration in both primitive thought and in modern thought, he used the primitive modes in a way that he felt would cure that disintegration. Lawrence felt that the primitive mythic world-view represented a "deep emotional fullness, in which such disintegrative complexity is dissolved" (Bell 45). In his 1919 forward to *Women in Love* Lawrence writes, "Every man who is acutely alive is acutely wrestling with his own soul." In *The Sisters*, Lawrence explores this battle through mythic language and form and marries modern thought to primitive thought, bridging dissolution and birth.

## CHAPTER 2

“AND THE RAINBOW STOOD ON THE EARTH”:

THE DECLINE OF THE MODERN AGE

AND A NEW HOPE

Gavriel Ben-Ephraim notes Lawrence’s change in both tone and technique between *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* (1929). That his tone and approach did change is clear. How and why Lawrence changed his approach is somewhat less clear. *The Rainbow*’s expression of the primitive conscience can be best described as mythic, though Lawrence changes his approach throughout the novel. The second novel expresses the primitive conscience much more explicitly, the characters often becoming didactic. Lawrence moved from expressing through primitive thought in *The Rainbow*, identifying the problems he witnessed, to explicitly commenting upon primitive thought in *Women in Love* in an attempt to treat those problems.

Lawrence’s change in expression is intimately tied to his changing attitude towards his Modern world. It has already been mentioned that Lawrence’s attitude towards the Modern age – described by Seymour Lainoff as an age “of decline; a degrading of man’s response to nature, a weakened relationship

between men and women, a paralyzing of action" – is ambiguous (61). While Lawrence did not support much of what he saw and, far from accepting it, rebelled against the changes he witnessed, he admitted that what was happening was necessary. He explores the developments in his world, reflecting difficulties and what he thinks are the "cures" in *The Sisters*. Lawrence attempts in *The Rainbow* to reflect racial and cultural degeneration he believes stems from an ancestral break from our primitive origins.<sup>21</sup> The romantic relationships in *The Rainbow* reflect that degeneration, as does the narrative structure.

Lawrence, in *Apocalypse*, defines what he believes is the ancient mode of thought: "It was a great depth of knowledge arrived at direct, by instinct and intuition, as we say, not by reason. It was a knowledge based not on words but on images. [. . .] And the connection was not logical but emotional" (76).

Therefore, in the beginning of the novel, the Brangwens do not speak, "do not possess, or are not concerned with, the articulation or discrimination needed for dialogue" (Lainoff 61). The family exists in a primitive consciousness, one in which the Tower of Babel had not been built, one in which the soul and the mind were in concert. It is a mythic world where the Brangwens live instinctually with a spiritual proximity to nature. "They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men" (8).

Bell notes that that the most distinctive aspect of this primitive sensibility is the lack of a "firm and rational distinction between the inner world of feeling

and the external order of existence" (8). In a world without language and external distinction, the external world and the inner world of feeling are one and the same to the characters. Donald Gutierrez describes Lawrence's perspective as *hylozoistic*, referring to the "archaic pre-Socratic conception that all matter is alive, or that life and matter are indivisible" (178). The Brangwen men in particular "knew the intercourse between heaven and earth," felt "the pulse and body of the soil," and "felt the rush of the sap in the spring" (8). Their relationship with nature was reciprocal. The soil itself responded to the men's ploughs, opening "to their furrow for the grain" (8). Nature is not anthropomorphized, but exists with a life of its own with reciprocity of influence between itself and man.

Gutierrez explains that Lawrence uses hylozoism to "intensify and symbolize the plight, inadequacies, and deeper feeling-states of the characters" (183). While Lawrence's hylozoistic concept is evident throughout the novel, it is by far most evident at the beginning. Just as the dialogue changes through the novel,<sup>22</sup> the Brangwens' relationship with nature degrades and changes over time. To Lawrence the hylozoistic mentality represents a repressed and forgotten mode of being, and his characters' reflection of that mentality changes accordingly.

Even from the beginning, "the women were different" (8). Although they too possess "blood intimacy" with the land, the women looked beyond the "blind intercourse of farm life, to the spoken world beyond" (8). That the women

look to a “spoken world” is important to note. The primitive conscious/unconscious has no need for words; it operates non-linearly, in images and emotion. The woman of the house wants “to know” and to be like the vicar, whose dark and dry visage is somehow attractive by its sheer mysteriousness. The woman is tempted to take from the Tree of Knowledge and sends her sons to school to do exactly that.

Tom’s mother sends both her favorite son and her youngest son to school, but neither one is particularly successful. Her favorite son, Alfred, “could not get past the rudiments of anything,” and eventually left the farm to become a draughtsman in a lace-factory. Tom’s difficulties are more explicit. His mind becomes confused as the mental mind is forced to take primacy, but is unable to do so. He is passionate about literature, but is unable to apply an analytical mind to it. “He sat betrayed with emotion when the teacher of literature read,” but when he attempted to read, “the very fact of the print caused a prickly sensation of repulsion to go over his skin” (16). According to Lawrence, when the psyche is healthy, the “passionate sphere” – or the “dark self” or “blood consciousness” – is the “true center of response to the outside world” and has primacy over the mental consciousness. The purpose of the mental consciousness is solely to transmute the “creative flux” of the active unconscious into principles and ideas (Jacobson 84). When Tom begins his education, his mental mind begins to assert itself over the “passionate sphere,” resulting in a contradiction of emotions in

him. He loves the way literature makes him *feel* but despises how it makes him *think*.

Lawrence detested modern life for several reasons, but mainly because he believed modern life was driven “by the impulse to assert the self-sufficiency of man, his independence from the natural order” (Jacobson 82). As the mother sends her children to school, they are taught to assert their own minds over their relationship with nature. In the end, the eldest son runs off to sea, Alfred leaves the farm, becoming a rich snob, and Frank becomes a drunkard. The common vision and union of mind among the Brangwens is broken in this generation and “[t]he community ceases to exist” (Jacobson 82). Instead of remaining receptive to nature and aware of the “otherness” of nature, the Brangwens become closed off, what Jacobson calls creatures “of [their] own fixed will, self-enclosed, self-referring” (85). In short, they have lost their connection to nature and have set in motion the mechanization of their souls. This is the danger that comes from the infringement of the “spoken world beyond” into the farm.

While Tom does not escape unscathed from his experience at school, he becomes the master of the farm and is not completely removed from the first generation. He remembers and longs for the relationship with nature that his father had experienced. He was caught in his mental confusion, but “he wanted something to get hold of, to pull himself out” (26). He is separated, but not fully.

Lawrence introduces Lydia, a foreigner whose quiet and dark demeanor attracts Tom. Far from stimulating his rational self, Lydia’s presence stops Tom

from thinking. He no longer needs words or signs, experiencing her directly. "He could not bear to think or to speak, nor make any sound or sign, nor change his fixed motion. He could scarcely bear to think of her face. He moved within the knowledge of her, in the world that was beyond reality" (29). She goes directly into his "passionate sphere," bypassing his rational educated mind.

When Tom gives the woman and her child a ride to Ilkeston, he notes, "There was a vagueness, like a soft mist over all of them, and a silence as if their wills were suspended" (39). Lydia does not lack a will, but does not assert the will she possesses. While she had been "automated" by her first husband's will and patriotism, when she is removed to Yorkshire, the "open country and the moors" "roused some potency of childhood in her" (52). While her lapses into unconsciousness were mere self-preservation, her experiences with death and her own "death into life" experience with the vicar allow her to maintain a primitive receptivity: "[S]he would wake in the morning one day and feel her blood running, feel herself lying open like a flower unsheathed in the sun, insistent and potent with demand" (55). Lydia maintains the receptive soul that is closed off in Tom and his brothers.

Lawrence uses hylozoism to intensify Lydia's "deeper feeling-state" in her response to Yorkshire while she cares for the aged rector. There was a light that came from the sea that came "constantly, constantly, without refusal, till it seemed to bear her away, and the noise of the sea created a drowsiness in her, a relaxation like sleep. Her automatic consciousness gave way a little. [. . .] Her

soul roused to attention" (52). In this passage, Lawrence emphasizes the strange "otherness" of nature, revealing it in the bluebells "glowing like a presence, among the trees" (53). Bell declares that this "presence" is of "an unspecified being or power immanent in the woodland surroundings" (13). Bell also emphasizes that Lawrence conveys this "presence" without explicit personification. Lawrence is recreating an "ancient mode of feeling" merely through his language.

Bell says of Lawrence, "He leans on words forcing them to extend their area of meaning yet without obvious wrenching from their 'normal' sense" (15). He explains that it is in Lawrence's "ancient mode" of writing that his "mythic and animistic sensibility finds expression" (Bell 15). A reader will see in Lawrence's description of Lydia's experience in Yorkshire his play on ambiguity of verbal tense. The passage is of experience outside human time. Lydia moves to Yorkshire and summer comes, followed by winter. The passage of time for Lydia, as it is for Lawrence, is in seasons, a natural cycle. The year, the day, and the minute have no relevance to the primitive mind.

Lydia's primitive and mysterious nature draws Tom back to his primitive origins, though he is irrevocably changed by his time in "the spoken world." Tom's primitive conscience is evoked by her presence, subsuming his material consciousness. He finds his other "center of consciousness" in his "bowels, somewhere in his body[,] "like a secret power" (39). At the moment of proposal, Lydia's presence not only subsumes his educated mind, but actually destroys

him. During their embrace, Tom is “obliterated,” and “he went utterly to sleep, asleep and sealed in the darkest sleep, utter, extreme oblivion,” afterward awaking newborn (46). “He returned gradually, but newly created, as after a gestation, a new birth, in the womb of darkness” (46). Lawrence uses the death-and-rebirth pattern in his novels as a link to the primitive systems of belief, and that pattern is embodied in Tom’s oblivious sleep (Lainoff 64).

Lawrence’s understanding of the primitive death-and-rebirth pattern was linked to his understanding of ritual. While he feels modern ritual to be meaningless and empty, primitive ritual, to Lawrence, was the primitive unconscious’ response to and communication with the “otherness” of nature. While Tom prepares to propose to Lydia, still “weighing up the merits of his decision,” he performs something to which “[p]rimitive ritual seems the nearest analogy” (Bell 18). While discussing primitive ritual, Harrison describes a fertility dance of the Omaha Indians.

In the case of the girl dancing in the hoop and leaping out of it there is no doubt. The words she says, “Flax, grow,” prove the point. She *does* what she *wants done*.

Her intense desire finds utterance in an act. (33)

Tom’s preparations follow the same mode. He does not think about what he is doing; he does it. Meanwhile, Tilly takes on the role of an acolyte, fetching his white shirt while he ritualistically washes and combs his hair. Nowhere else prior to this episode does Lawrence go into such detail regarding the actions of a

character. Clearly, his actions are more important than themselves. They point to the greater something, to the immanent Proposal.

A recurring problem of communication is present throughout the novel, growing more and more significant through the generations. In the truly primitive mind there is no need for language and no need for words. However, even as Tom moves “within the knowledge” of Lydia, that communication is not perfect. Ben-Ephraim calls Tom “inadequate” to meet and take Lydia on the “carbon-level,” or the unconscious level (138). He is “unable to abandon himself and join her in the unknown element” (138). Lydia is frustrated throughout the relationship, as is Tom, by his lack of ability. It is true that he is unable to abandon himself, but it is his lack of primitive receptivity that keeps him from taking her on the “carbon-level.” Lydia’s presence evokes the primitive consciousness in Tom, but he is irrevocably changed by his education and is forever separated from Eden.

The relationship between Tom and Lydia indicates a movement from the first generations of Brangwens, those who were part of the natural order and felt the pulse of the land in their own blood. While the education of the other sons begins to isolate them from the rest of the family community, Tom still holds to that deeper consciousness within, so that when the primitive Lydia comes into his life he is able to reconnect, if only partially, with his passionate sphere. The relationships in the second generation, specifically that between Anna and Will, indicate a further separation from their Edenic ancestry. Looking at the

relationship and then each person separately, one notes the slow separation from nature and the primitive mind.

The relationship between Anna and Will begins almost as unconsciously as that between Tom and Lydia. At their first introduction Anna felt Will “waiting there for her to notice him. He was hovering on the edge of her consciousness, ready to come in” (109). Already, like her adopted father, Anna feels a vague “strangeness in her being” begin to foment. However, as a woman, Anna is not a product of that mis-education that her father experienced. While Tom becomes melancholy and self-reflective, Anna grows “curiously elated” and helplessly laughs. Those laughs are treated as more than only girlish giggles as they “seized her and shook her till the tears were in her eyes” (111).

Though she enjoyed the laughter, her unconscious is at work here. Her location at the time of the explosive laughter is noteworthy. She, her little brother, and Will are at church when she is unable to control her laughter. What Anna’s unconscious is responding to is debatable, but her later disdain for Will’s Christian faith may be indicative. Anna is intrigued by the “little things” in his actions, but the “matter-of-fact things he said” she counts as absurd (113). One may remember the woman of the Brangwen house who responded to the vicar. The vicar was “dark and dry and small beside her husband” but “had a quickness and a range of being that made Brangwen, in his large geniality, seem dull and local” (9). Will’s comments, absurd as they were, make Anna feel that the things her father said were “meaningless and neutral” (113). Lawrence

repeats the original break, but in this case the “spoken world” is now within the family.

The break from the Brangwen ancestors is made greater through Will and his Christian faith and his interest in church symbolism. Will’s interest in church symbolism is important for two reasons. Symbols, in Lawrence’s mind, are remnants of the “pristine knowledge of nature” (*Fantasia* 55). In his interest in architecture, Will indicates his remove from the original reciprocal relationship with nature, delving into remnants of his ancestors’ intimate relationship with nature.

Second, his interest lies in the church, an institutionalization of “blood-intimacy.” Lawrence does not dislike religion, but from Anna’s reaction to Church symbols, one may deduce his opinion. While Anna and Will attend church one day mid-winter, Anna contemplates the “little red and yellow window” that she had always liked. In the window is a figure of the Pascal Lamb holding a flag in one uplifted forepaw. “Yet she had always been uneasy about it. She was never sure that this Lamb with a flag did not want to be more than it appeared. So she half mistrusted it, there was a mixture of dislike in her attitude to it” (160). Her disdain is made more poignant while she joins Will looking at old illuminations.

It was when she came to the pictures of Pietà  
that she burst out.

‘I do think they’re loathsome,’ she cried.

‘What?’ he said, surprised, abstracted.

‘Those bodies with the slits in them, posing to  
be worshipped.’

‘You see, it means the Sacraments, the Bread,’  
he said slowly.

‘Does it!’ she cried. ‘Then it’s worse. *I don’t*  
want to see your chest slit, nor to eat your dead body,  
even if you offer it me. Can’t you see it’s horrible?’

(161)

She further indicates the absurdity of the symbol when she asks Will what it means. “Whatever it may pretend to mean, what it *is* is a silly absurd toy-lamb with a Christmas-tree flag ledged on its paw – and if it wants to mean anything else, it must look different from that” (162).

In his introduction to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence treats religion, specifically orthodox religion, with humor, calling both “idealists with the religious impulse rampant in [their] breasts” and the scientists that attempt to practice eugenics or disarmament absurd (61). While Will is “absorbed in looking” over the orthodox symbols of the Church, the symbols have no relevance to the more primitive Anna. They, too, are silly, absurd, and horrible to her.

As much as Anna disdains symbols, she still partakes in her own rituals among the sheaves of corn with Will and before the birth of her first child. The

first ritual, as Will and Anna harvest corn together, is redolent of primitive fertility ceremonies. They dance among the sheaves of corn, she weaving unconsciously, he hunting her:

As he came, she drew away, as he drew away,  
she came. Were they never to meet? Gradually, a low,  
deep-sounding will in him vibrated to her, tried to set  
her in accord, tried to bring her gradually to him, to a  
meeting till they should be together, till they should  
meet as the sheaves that swished together. (*Rainbow*  
169)

Eventually they do meet, though not on his terms. He tries to will himself on her, but the resultant kiss does not turn out as he expects. In his desire to overcome her individuality, it is his own that is obliterated. He is annihilated and not reborn because of his assertion.

Before the birth of her child, Anna recalls a potent ritual as she dances before the great "Unknown" (183). There is a distinct difference between Anna's ritualistic dance and the ritual practiced by Tom. Tom's ritualistic activity is largely unconscious. He does without thinking, his urges are made into action directly without thought. Anna *knew* and *realized*, recalling specifically the story of David who danced before the Lord. She institutionalizes, or at the very least recalls an institutionalized version of the "blood-intimacy" practiced by her ancestors. Anna is mimicking a ritual she has read about, consciously acting out

a story. Harrison describes this mimicry as that which has made us “think of ritual as a dull and formal thing” (27). Anna reveals her inability to create, as unable as her husband, in her mimicry.

Harrison further describes ritual: “We mimic not only others but ourselves mechanically, even after all emotion proper to the act is dead; and then because mimicry has a certain ingenious charm, it becomes an end in itself for ritual, even for art” (27). Where Tom’s actions led directly to the imminent Proposal, Anna’s actions do not lead anywhere.

But even in her uncreated ritual there is a primitive level. Will responds to her dancing much as Gerald will later respond to the Fetish. “[Will] turned aside, he could not look, it hurt his eyes” (184). Lawrence describes Anna as if she were the Fetish itself: “Her fine limbs lifted and lifted, her hair was sticking out all fierce, and her belly, big, strange, terrifying, uplifted to the Lord” (184). Rituals to Lawrence *are* remnants, even if they lack the original creativity. There is still a primitive element to which our unconscious responds. Recalling the experience among the sheaves, Lawrence describes Anna “like a full ear of corn, pale in the dusky afternoon” (184). She is recalling – if only impartially – a primitive fertility dance. In this case, Will responds poorly, shutting his mind from his wife.

Again, the problem of communication arises, due particularly to a lack of receptivity in the man. After their marriage, Anna begins to see a lack of sensitivity in Will: “It was his insensitiveness to her that she could not bear, something clayey and ugly. His intelligence was self-absorbed. How unnatural it

was to sit with a self-absorbed creature" (154). Lawrence expresses this lack of sensitivity through the dialogue that he has developed over the previous chapters. Lainoff concurs, saying "[T]he exchanges of dialogue between Anna and Will, growing in number, rarely reveal an understanding between them; rather, they signify a failure to arrive at common terms" (64). Where the previous generations had no need for words, this generation relies too much on words, which are often "mere distractions [. . .] false signals inadequate to the silent communication that takes place beneath verbalizations" (Ben-Ephraim 131).

But it is more than a problem of language that leads to the breakdown in communication. Lawrence introduces through this relationship the "will to Power." The ironically named Will shuts his mind to his wife particularly because he feels he deserves to be fulfilled (173). He ignores her feelings and asserts his will. "He did foolish things. He asserted himself on his rights, he arrogated the old position of master of the house" (173). Unlike his uncle Tom when he realizes his own incompleteness, Will dominates, allowing his will to control his "passionate sphere." Whereas Tom submitted his will to Lydia and was obliterated and reborn, Will hardens and forces and wills until he lapses. His lapse, however, is like drowning. He is alone in his "vagueness." His rebirth is not a happy rebirth. He is divided into "an absolute self" and a "relative self," and both are "very dumb, weak, helpless" (190).

Through Anna and Will's tumultuous marriage a new generation of Brangwen women is born, the first since Tom's sisters. By the time Ursula, the

eldest daughter, is eight years old, the marriage has settled down to one of sensual creativity. "All the shameful natural and unnatural acts of sensual voluptuousness which he and the woman partook of together, created together, they had their beauty and their delight" (238). Even as Will submits to the "sensual violence" within himself, there is no resolution between them. He is broken by his own will, and in the end, he wants to "give everything to her, all his blood, his life, to the last dregs, pour everything away to her" (155). Will allows his own identity to be subsumed by Anna when he is unable to overcome her with his will.

Even as their marriage heals, the couple looks to and takes part in the "spoken world beyond" as Will teaches woodwork at the school in Cossethay. Ursula is raised in an atmosphere in which the vicar is no longer a far away vision, mysterious and removed. Will and the vicar walk together, "talking and planning and working" (239). Ursula is raised in new world, separated from the farm and the relationships of the past.

When Ursula is eight years old, a flood comes to the Marsh. The flood is a complicated symbol. In one sense the flood marks the final separation of the Brangwens from the farm at the Marsh. Anna and Will at the Yew Cottage were already "separate, distinct[,]'" and the flood acts to wash away what little connection remains (*Rainbow* 240). In another sense, the flood washes away the old world, the world of primitive patriarchy and the old relationships. Tom, the

patriarch of the family and the last link to its primitive origins, is drowned, and the peace of the farm is gone (252).

Lawrence recalls a potent symbol in the flood, invoking a primitive myth not only to call attention to the break in the family, but also to call attention to a break in society. In his introduction to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence discusses what he calls the Glacial Period, during which “[m]en wandered back and forth from Atlantis to the Polynesian Continent as men now sail from Europe to America” (55). He describes a worldwide society as “cosmopolitan as it is today” (55). Lawrence places the earlier generations of Brangwens in this mythic time. His hylozoistic descriptions indicate the complete “interchange” between Man and nature that Lawrence felt was present during the Glacial period. According to Lawrence, this period of “pristine knowledge” ended when the glaciers melted, flooding the surrounding lowlands. While many refugees fled into the high places, most “degenerated naturally into cave men, Neolithic and Paleolithic creatures” (55). While the characters in *The Rainbow* clearly do not portray cave men, they do rely on the “half-forgotten, symbolic terms” remembered in “ritual, gesture, and myth-story” (*Fantasia* 55).

Ursula is already born into the family before the flood, and its symbolic power is relevant to understanding her nature. She is different from the previous Brangwen women in several ways, and Lawrence changes his method of writing about her accordingly. As the narrative style changed with the earlier relationships, so the reader finds the style changing as Lawrence focuses on

Ursula. The style has progressively grown more focused, moving from a broad mythic view over the earlier generations, into Tom and Lydia's unconscious and conscious, into Anna and Will's words and minds, and ultimately into Ursula's precise intellectualism. While the narrator avoids dialogue and emphasizes unconscious communication with the earlier generations, the successive generations progressively rely on words and dialogue to communicate, gradually losing the ability to communicate effectively. Ursula, as the final generation, speaks the most and experiences the most uncommunicative relationship.

Ursula experiences three relationships, each changing her nature and her awareness of primitive conscience. It is important to note that Lawrence's characters are not completely ontologically regular and the author spends the most time developing Ursula's ontology.<sup>23</sup> She is a dynamic character as each relationship she experiences allows her to develop a new perspective. Her first relationship with Skrebensky allows her initial development.

Ursula meets Skrebensky when she is nearly sixteen, still in love with learning. Education is for her at this time as beautiful and mysterious as the church is for her father. She still "trembled like a postulant when she wrote the Greek alphabet for the first time" (269). Yet her first conversation with Skrebensky indicates how unimportant she finds the intellect. She says to him, "I don't think brains matter" (290). To her, courage is what matters. Early on, Ursula defines herself by her will and her independence. She is "very proud in

her family” and asserts her independence to all those around her (264). She has an “instinct” to avoid and hate “petty people.” (264). She is bored with people who do not have the will to stand up and be direct. Ursula is attracted to Skrebensky specifically because of his “directness” and “independent motion” (291).

Ursula’s initial response to Skrebensky is very different from her mother’s and grandmother’s responses to their mates. Both Lydia and Anna respond unconsciously. Ursula, however, responds very consciously. The narrator breaks Skrebensky’s conversation with her down into every detail. Ursula intellectualizes his actions, trying to understand *why* she is responding to him.

It is in this relationship that Ursula begins to discover her sensuality. As previously mentioned, Ursula is the most ontologically developed character in the novel, and as such she changes several times. While in her childhood, Ursula embraces her mind and intellectualism; her time with Skrebensky allows her to see “a fine little reflection of herself in his eyes” (293). But her sensuality goes beyond mere awareness of her body and beauty. In their first intimate moment, Lawrence uses, for the first time in the novel, the word *swoon*. Neither her mother nor her grandmother *swooned* when men kissed them. Anna’s eyes flow with fire and Lydia responds by allowing herself to be held. Ursula, the most independent of the Brangwen women, *swoons* and abandons herself to the sensual kiss. It may seem odd that the most independent of the women is the

most yielding, but Ursula recognizes that it is her apparent vulnerability that gives her power over Skrebensky.

Ben-Ephraim says that Ursula defines herself, in part, by her sexuality (156). She grows aware, in this relationship, of her distinction of femininity. When she and Anton, as she calls him, kiss, she is aware that he asserts “his will over her,” but she equally asserts “her deliberate enjoyment of him” (302).

It was a magnificent self-assertion on the part of both of them, he asserted himself before her, he felt himself infinitely male and infinitely irresistible, she asserted herself before him, she knew herself infinitely desirable, and hence infinitely strong. And after all, what could either of them get from such a passion but a sense of his or her own maximum self, in contradistinction to all the rest of life. (302)

Where in previous generations less physical intimacy allowed lovers to grow more spiritually and psychically closer, Ursula and Skrebensky grow more separate and contradistinct from each other and the world. They further separate themselves not only from nature, but from the rest of humanity.

The narrator spends more time representing Ursula’s point of view than Skrebensky’s. As the relationships have progressed through the novel, the narrator has spent less and less time in the men’s minds and more time in the women’s. The movement indicates, as does Ursula’s active distinction of her own

femininity, further separation from the original primitive patriarchal system of the previous generations. However, it also indicates a further development of the psychosexual confusion Weininger describes. The “objective passivity” and “de-individualized immanence” of the feminine is nowhere found in Ursula’s actions. Instead, the reader finds Skrebensky to be the passive one.

When Ursula first meets Skrebensky, she finds him to be direct and assertive. However, the narrator indicates that Skrebensky is passive. Skrebensky waits on Ursula, and all his attention is on her (290). She confuses his quietness and reserve with self-confidence. She believes him to be “self-contained, self-supporting” (292). However, when they kiss, it is she who actively draws him nearer (299). It is she who instigates the kissing game in the shed (302). Later, as they kiss outside the church, it is Ursula who comes away “filled with his kiss, filled as if she had drunk strong, glowing sunshine” (304). He is bitter and unsatisfied. Later, he responds as Will did, wanting to empty himself to her. “He wanted to kill himself, and throw his detested carcass at her feet” (305). Twitchell indicates that Lawrence’s women in *The Sisters* are predatory and seek to draw the life from their men (83). In this relationship the reader finds that Ursula is a vampire, seducing Skrebensky to fulfill her own sensual desires.

This sensual desire is only the first step in Ursula’s development. As her first relationship with Skrebensky ends, she finds a new intimacy with her class-mistress. This relationship begins with the sensual desire that develops in Ursula’s relationship with Skrebensky. Miss Inger feels a “hot delight” when

working with Ursula, and Ursula “trembled and was dazed with passion” when she thought of Miss Inger in her bathing dress (337). As they swim, Ursula’s focus is drawn to her teacher’s white limbs. But as the relationship develops, Miss Inger draws Ursula into discussions about religion. Ursula grows to intellectualize what her ancestors intuited and then institutionalized. Instead of directly experiencing the numinous and the mysterious in her “blood-consciousness,” Ursula “talked of religion” and broke down even those remnants of the primitive past, religious symbols and rituals (342).

Ursula’s attraction to her class-mistress and the world she introduces to Ursula leads to a further separation from her heritage. The first Brangwens lived in concert with the land, living a hylozoistic life, close to nature and in touch with nature. Ursula is now completely separated from the farm at the Marsh. When Miss Inger leaves for London, Ursula is left alone in Cossethay with “no connexion with other people” (343). She is not only emotionally separated, but physically separated from her origins. Lainoff describes Cossethay as “a specimen of modern industrial society, possessing its facelessness, its insentience, its brutality” (62). It is at this point that Ursula rejects Miss Inger. She feels toward the teacher as Anna felt toward Will, that she was “ugly, clayey” (344). She again wants to assert her independence. “I don’t want to go to London, I want to be by myself” (344).

When this relationship ends as Winifred Inger and Ursula’s Uncle Tom come together, Lawrence introduces the reader to the colliery life in Yorkshire.

Tom, like Gerald in the later novel, believes in the mechanical nature of men at the colliery. He says of a man who had died recently of consumption, "We reckoned him as a loader, he reckoned himself as a loader, and so she knew he represented his job. Marriage and home is a little side-show. [. . .]One man or another, it doesn't matter all the world. The pit matters" (349). The men are no longer men; they are their jobs, part of the machine of the colliery. Ursula, just beginning to feel the disconnection of the modern world she has entered into, responds with bitterness and "sat black-souled" as she listened to her uncle talk (349). Yet she is drawn to the colliery, horribly fascinated by it. "There was a swooning, perverse satisfaction in it" (350).

Again Lawrence uses the word *swoon*. Before, he applied it to Ursula's response Skrebensky's seduction. Here, she is responding to the dark seduction of modern mechanization. Lawrence says that when idealism leads to the mechanical process, it becomes "the death of all spontaneous, creative life" (*Psychoanalysis* 11). Yet he acknowledges the perverse attractiveness of idealism and the resultant mechanization. Ursula herself has witnessed the power that asserting her intellect and her ego can give her. At the colliery she witnesses the final result of allowing the intellect to assert itself over the passional sphere. Men have lost their creativity and are nothing but "meaningless lump[s]" and "standing machine[s]" (349).

After Miss Inger and Tom marry, Ursula stays with her parents until she feels too stifled and looks for a position as an uncertified teacher. Her experience

at the school becomes another relationship, as the school and the education system take on the role of an oppressive and overbearing mother. From her first day at the school, Ursula is aware of its machine-like quality. The schoolyard is asphalt and the building itself is "grimy, and horrible" (369). Ursula compares it to a prison and the teachers to machines. The thin man she meets on her first day mechanically makes copies for his class, barely acknowledging her. She is frightened by his "mechanical ignoring of her [. . .] as if she did not count, as if she were addressing a machine" (370). She begins to learn that her ideal of education is actually this prison-like school, a machine made for one reason: to turn out little machines, ready to take on their places in the bigger machine of society.

Ursula's previous relationships had allowed her to develop an awareness of the world that the generations before her had not been able to experience in the same way. While Lydia and Anna had maintained sensual relationships and had been, or at least felt, fulfilled by them, Ursula experiences sensuality and at first believes it irrelevant in her modern life. While Anna had disdained Christian symbols, Ursula learned from Winifred Inger the reasons behind their falsity. However, she learned yet another lesson from her experience at school. As much as the sensuality was not fulfilling, her intellectual dreams of teaching have been proven as false as the ancient religions' symbols. She finds that the machine of society, represented by the school, grinds the passion out of her intellect, until

she, too, joins the machine, choosing to “never more [. . .] give herself as an individual to her class” (395).

“What characterizes the modern most,” says Lainoff of *The Rainbow*, “is the vacancy of spirit and barrenness of instinct” (65). While this barrenness is not as evident in the beginning of the novel, by the time Ursula decides to thrash Williams in front of her class, the “vacancy of spirit” that Lainoff describes is very present. While her grandfather and grandmother had lapsed out and were reborn, she lapses into anger and “something had broken in her” (401). Ursula learns the cost of giving up pure sensuality and embracing the mechanistic, idealistic intellect.<sup>24</sup>

As she finishes her last year at the school, Ursula finds herself empty of meaning, part of the machine. When she enters the university, she pushes this feeling of meaninglessness to the back of her mind as she embraces what she remembers had been mysterious: learning. She quickly finds, however, that even Latin class is nothing but “a sort of second-hand curio shop” (434). Her professors are not the priests she expects, but “middle-men” peddling their wares. She finds that even the college is a machine, and she is no longer able to define herself. Her will had always been enough to define her, existing as herself by sheer force of identity (304). By now the machine had taken away what identity she had left after teaching and “[s]he did not know what she was” (437).

Near the end of her time at college, Ursula again meets with Skrebensky who is back from Africa before going on to India. While she recalls their love and

connection, when she meets him for the first time in six years, she notes that he has changed. He is no longer determined and self-assertive but “wavering, vague” (443). While she does not realize it at first, Ursula finds that Skrebensky cannot define himself outside the army. He, too, is nothing but part of a machine, having no identity except with her or with the nation. Without her, “[h]e had no fullness, he was just a flat shape” (458).

Ursula’s ongoing relationship with Skrebensky is tumultuous, more so than even the marriage between her mother and father, yet instead of resigning herself, as Anna did in her marriage, Ursula realizes the emptiness of the contradistinction in marriage. She does not desire a marriage, defining herself as Baroness Skrebensky instead of “school-mistress, spinster Ursula Brangwen” (479). While she is unable to find herself, she acknowledges that she cannot remain part of the machine of society and breaks off her engagement to the young man.

Ursula’s experience with the horses at the end of the novel is by far the most potent and written about scene in the novel. It is the culmination of the developments in the novel, as the world for Ursula comes full circle. The novel begins in a primitive world with wordless, hylozoistic communication with nature. The world in the novel has moved from this Edenic world of pure unconsciousness through the post-Glacial period of rituals and symbols, and finally into an empty mechanistic world. Ursula has experienced the former mechanistic world, one in which communication is nearly non-existent and

humans have no identities except in the machine. Now she experiences the raw power of the "life mystery" she longs for but is unable to intellectually conquer it.

Ursula's response to the horses by Willey Water is unconscious and hylozoistic. She does not actively communicate with them, but *knows* by the "heaviness in her heart" that they are near and coming to her (488). Ben-Ephraim notes that the horses hold a dual symbolic significance for Ursula. They embody both the "potency of the male principle" and the pure power of "inhuman nature" (171). Ursula has not found a male in her life that she could not dominate by pure force of will, as every man she has been intimate with has needed her for completion. Nature is the only element in her life that has been complete *and* mysterious. The horses force her to truly encounter her own will. While her will had seemed monstrous and predatory next to Skrebensky, when confronted with the horses, her will frees her. She is now able to lapse out without annihilation.

In her previous relationships, Ursula has never truly lapsed out and experienced the healing dissolution of the primitive consciousness. After she escapes from the stampede, she "lay as if unconscious" and the "flux of change passed away from her" (490). She has finally dissolved and moves in "vague reality" (491). When she finally awakens from her dissolution, it is "as if a new day had come on the earth" (493).

In her new awareness, Ursula still sees the emptiness and darkness in the lives around her, but now sees a hope in herself, grasping and groping to find

the "creation of the living God" (495). As she looks at the dirty village around her, she looks to the heavens and sees a rainbow coalescing. As earlier indicated, Lawrence feels that dissolution is necessary for rebirth. In some cases that dissolution must be forced upon an unwilling participant. In the rainbow, Lawrence calls to mind the new covenant between God and man after the flood. Here, Ursula sees the new covenant and knows that while the dirty, corrupt machine of the world has separated humans from their souls and from each other, the "blood-consciousness" still exists in them and will "quiver to life in their spirit" (496).

In *The Rainbow* Lawrence explores the mystery of idealism, mechanization, and the resultant dissolution. While Lawrence does not offer solutions to the problems that the novel delineates, he does explore the possibility of a new creation in individual souls. He notes that at this point in history, mechanism is inevitable, but the constituents are able to learn. The rainbow at the end of the novel represents not only a hope for the individual, but for society. Ursula sees a "new growth" in the arch and the end of the novel looks to a new beginning.

### CHAPTER 3

“SOME MEN *MUST* BE TOO SPIRITUAL, AND SOME *MUST* BE TOO  
SENSUAL”: FINDING BALANCE  
IN THE MODERN MIND

*Women in Love* begins some years after *The Rainbow* ends. Gudrun has come back from art school in London, where she has been living a “studio life,” and Ursula has been teaching at Willey Green Grammar School (9). The “new day” Ursula witnessed at the end of *The Rainbow* has not quite arrived, and the people of England still wander about like little machines. Gudrun describes the village as “ghoulish” and “sordid” (11). Lawrence has explored the problems he witnessed in the Modern Age through *The Rainbow*, but now in *Women in Love*, in a world unchanged by Ursula’s miraculous vision, he attempts to explore a solution. He branches out from the Brangwens and introduces a new family, the Criches, as well as Rupert Birkin, to identify more precisely and to treat the problems introduced in *The Rainbow*.

*Women in Love* explores the interchanging relationships between several characters: Gerald Crich, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, Rupert Birkin, and Hermione Roddice. Through these relationships, Lawrence shows the Modern

use of sensuality and its inefficacy, the Modern reliance on intellect and its inefficacy, and the final balance he believes is the only path to true interpersonal connection. In a world that is disconnected from its "blood-consciousness," the protagonists must either remain part of the mechanized society and live an ignominious and empty life, or separate themselves from it to forge new balanced and fulfilling relationships.

The novel opens with a traditional marriage at which all the protagonists are present. Lawrence uses the marriage scene in at least two ways: to introduce the character of each protagonist and to show the reader an institutionalized version of love. The reader is first introduced to the Brangwen sisters as they discuss marriage, Gudrun asking her sister if she "*really want[s]* to get married?" (7). Ursula's response indicates the ultimate question of the novel: "It depends how you mean." Gudrun reveals what Lawrence believes Modern marriage to be, calling it an "experience" (7). Marriage is no longer the profound connection between two individuals, such as that between Tom and Lydia in *The Rainbow*, but an experience to be had.

Marriage was, in the Edenic days before the mechanization of society, a true spiritual connection between man and woman, as embodied in Tom and Lydia's marriage. As men and women have isolated themselves from each other and their own "blood-consciousness," they can no longer establish a complete union. The Crich marriage scene emphasizes the emptiness of tradition and Harrison's comment that we come to think of ritual "as a dull and formal thing"

(27). The wedding sets up the emptiness of the Modern age, especially connection between individuals.

Though the wedding has a prominent place in the novel, the ceremony itself is not the central focus. During the wedding, Lawrence draws the reader's attention to Hermione's desperate need for Birkin and Birkin's pity for her. Lawrence emphasizes here a Modern misunderstanding of love, describing a relationship in which the woman seeks to be completed by a relationship with a man. Hermione suffers from "a lack of robust self," and she craves Birkin, for "[w]hen he was there, she felt complete, she was sufficient, whole" (17). However, Lawrence calls love a "coming together" (*Phoenix* 151). Marriage is not one person completing another, but two self-fulfilling and self-sufficient individuals coming together.<sup>25</sup>

In order to understand fully the balance Lawrence attempts to strike at the end of the novel, one must begin with how Lawrence treats separation from the "blood-consciousness." His treatment here differs from that in the first novel in that his protagonists speak explicitly to each other and to themselves of matters of "blood knowledge," the mechanization of society, and pure sensuality, whereas in *The Rainbow* the protagonists' lives illustrate Lawrence's concerns. However, one may also see in *Women in Love* that the actions of Lawrence's characters reveal their respective connections to or disconnections from the "blood-consciousness."

The question of connection – or disconnection, in this case – is present throughout the novel, revealed by the actions of each character. Lawrence begins his conversation concerning the disconnection from “blood consciousness” with the relationship between Birkin and Hermione. While the reader is introduced to the imbalanced relationship during the wedding, it is when Hermione meets Birkin and Ursula at Ursula’s grammar school that Hermione’s disconnection from the “blood consciousness” is revealed. Birkin accuses, “But knowing is everything to you, it is all your life” (40). Hermione admits that it is knowledge “that makes us unloving and self-conscious,” but she is unwilling to admit her own fault. Birkin clarifies her problem: a reliance on words.

“You are merely making words,” he said;  
 “knowledge means everything to you. Even your  
 animalism, you want it in your head. You don’t want  
 to *be* an animal, you want to observe your own animal  
 functions, to get a mental thrill out of them.” (41)

Hermione recognizes that too much knowledge leads to a lack of spontaneity and creativity, but is unwilling to admit her own inability to move beyond her own mind. She is self-conscious and caught up in her own intellect. She desires the “passions and instincts” but in her head, separated from her soul (41).

Hermione’s self-consciousness is made evident early in the novel, while she waits for Birkin at the wedding. Ursula watches her pass and notes that her “long, pale face [. . .] seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts

coiled in the darkness within her, and she is never allowed to escape" (15). Hermione is caught in her own mind, not "allowed" to escape from her own thoughts, unaware of her surroundings, "full of intellectuality, and heavy, nerve-worn with consciousness" (16). Dan Jacobson describes what happens to the human psyche if the mental consciousness usurps the "blood consciousness," noting, "Instead of being open and receptive before the world, aware always of the 'otherness' of the world to himself, the man becomes a creature of his own fixed will, self-enclosed, self-referring, insentient" (85). Hermione's intellect has done exactly that, turned in on itself, unable to perceive except through *knowing* and possessing.

Birkin, long accepted as the Lawrence-figure in *Women in Love*, exhibits a different level of connection to the "blood consciousness." That he questions Hermione's desire for knowledge points to that connection, but their conversation at Breadalby indicates more clearly Birkin's understanding of "blood consciousness."

When Hermione approaches him in his room, Birkin is copying a Chinese drawing of geese.

"But why do you copy it?" she asked, casual  
and sing-song. "Why not do something original?"

"I want to know it," he replied. "One gets more  
of China, copying this picture, than reading all the  
books."

[. . .]

“I know what centres [the geese] live from –  
 what they perceive and feel – the hot, stinging  
 centrality of a goose’s blood, entering their own blood  
 like an inoculation of corruptive fire – fire of the cold-  
 burning mud – the lotus mystery.” (89)

Clarke, in his discussion of dissolution in *Women in Love*, describes this scene as vividly suggesting the replenishing power of the “mystic source of corruption” (98). Although Clarke does not mention it, the “cold-burning mud” implies both a source of corruption and a hylozoistic connection to the earth.<sup>26</sup> Birkin, if not in a reciprocal relationship of influence with nature, at least comprehends the essence of hylozoistic existence.

His comprehension of a hylozoistic existence is put to the test in this episode, when Hermione hits him in the head with a lapis lazuli paper-weight. While Clarke indicates Lawrence’s endless concern with self-destruction – part of the process of “dying into being” – in this case, Birkin is sent into dissolution by another person (3). Hermione’s violent action shatters Birkin’s heart, but he is unafraid of the impending dissolution, saying, “It isn’t I who will die” (106). Clarke emphasizes the necessity of acceptance during dissolution, claiming that without the acceptance, one is “subdued to the dissolution he refuses to accept” (99).

Hermione herself is unable to accept the dissolution that Birkin's drawing and explanation offer. She who "lived in and by her own self-esteem" suffers the "ghastliness of dissolution" and is no longer whole. Hermione's death is not a physical death, but Lawrence claims "she was gone like a corpse, that has no presence, no connection" (89). Hermione willfully does not apprehend the "stinging centrality of a goose's blood" and is thus destroyed by the resultant dissolution.

One will recall that Lawrence connects dissolution to knowledge, indicating a positive dissolution results from "blood knowledge" while annihilation occurs when deductive knowledge asserts itself over the passionate sphere. Here, the reader is witness to both a spiritual annihilation and a spiritual dissolution. While Hermione is annihilated and counted as a corpse, Birkin wanders out "barely conscious and yet direct in his motion" (106). He is unconsciously drawn to the wilderness, drawn back to the hylozoistic relationship with nature experienced by the Brangwen ancestors. There is a major difference, however, in the two worlds. While the Brangwen ancestors existed in a world that had not yet suffered the infringement of the "spoken world," Birkin exists *in* that "spoken world" and must go back. But, again, dissolution for Lawrence often leads to a rebirth. While Birkin must enter back into the world of men, he does so reborn, knowing his place and "where to plant himself, his seed" (107).

Gudrun also evinces a disconnection from the passionate sphere, though her character is somewhat more complicated than Hermione's. In several instances the reader witnesses Gudrun's desire to *know* and to possess. In "Sketchbook" Gudrun sits by the water sketching the water plants that grow there. She is "seated like a Buddhist" and apprehends the water plants "as in a sensuous vision" (119). Throughout the novel, Gudrun is affiliated with primitive thought, or at least primitive art. Hermione describes her little sculptures as being "like a flash of instinct" and "full of primitive passion" (39). Ursula correctly identifies Gudrun's art as looking the wrong way at the world, as Gudrun "always likes little things[,] things "that one can put between one's hands" (39). While she sits, Buddha-like, by the shore, viewing the water plants in a "sensuous vision," Gudrun *knows*. Unlike Ursula's unconscious following of the butterflies, Gudrun does not unconsciously experience the water plants. "[S]he *knew* how they thrust out from themselves, how they stood stiff and succulent against the air" (119). Where Birkin draws the Chinese geese to gain access to the "centrality of the goose's blood," Gudrun draws to *know*.

A product of her time and education, Gudrun has spent time in London, studying Modern art, and as a result has adopted the Modern penchant for tribal art. Her art recalls the totems of Frazer's *Totem and Taboo*, yet her purpose behind the sculptures is drastically different. The primitive peoples who first made the little statues that Gudrun, Halliday, and Birkin's artistic friends so admire, did so because they not only felt an affinity for the subject animals: they felt they *were*

the animals. Gudrun's animism, like Hermione's, is in her head. She does not want to *be* the animal, but to *possess* the animal.

Gudrun, also like Hermione, has difficulty maintaining her identity. Unlike Ursula, Gudrun often feels isolated, removed, and frighteningly separated. Where Ursula has the strength of ego to maintain her own identity, Gudrun defines herself through her will. James Twitchell notes that Lawrence had already created the "man-devouring female" in *The Rainbow*, in the relationship between Ursula and Skrebensky;<sup>27</sup> this *femme fatale*, Twitchell claims, is fully realized in Gudrun and her vampiric need to dominate, or to "know" her lover (84-85). Twitchell points to Gudrun's relationship with Gerald, claiming that their alternate domination and submission indicates each character's need, both to dominate and to submit. While Gerald believes Gudrun to be self-sufficient, she, like Gerald, needs something or someone to dominate. The root of Gudrun's desire to sculpt little things is revealed in her sister's comment about it: she likes to sculpt things that "one can put between one's hands" (32). She must control.

Gudrun's response to Bismarck, Winifred's "beastly" and "lusty" rabbit, demonstrates Gudrun's need to control. While her sculptures are always things that can be put "between one's hands," Bismarck is not a sculpture and does not remain "between one's hands." Gudrun is unable to control him and "a heavy rage came over her like a cloud. [. . .] Her heart was arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity of this struggle [. . .]" (240). Her reaction

to a real animal belies her totemic sculptures. She has no connection to the natural world; her only compulsion is to grow cruel.

In this episode Gerald reveals the proactive nature of the Weiningerian man. Where Gudrun grows cruel, Gerald acts on that cruelty when “a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit” (241). The couple experiences here a “mutual hellish recognition,” and the “league between them” was “abhorrent to them” (242). In fact, Gerald loses his confidence in recognition of Gudrun’s cruel dominance.

In order to more fully understand Gudrun’s dominance over Gerald, one must understand how Gerald identifies himself. He is unable to acknowledge his own existence without the assertion of his will. He follows Weininger’s description of the masculine almost perfectly.<sup>28</sup> He is powerfully individual, as witnessed in “Diver,” as he separates himself from the rest of the world, “unquestioned and unconditioned. [. . .] without bond or connection anywhere, just himself in the watery world” (47). Without a connection to individuals, Gerald defines himself in his dominant will.

In “Fetish,” Birkin and Gerald encounter several pieces of African sculpture. One in particular stands out to Gerald: “One was of a woman sitting naked in a strange posture, and looking tortured, her abdomen stuck out [. . .] it was also rather wonderful, conveying the suggestion of the extreme of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness” (74). Gerald’s reaction at

first is only to call them "obscene," but after an evening of dominance over the Pussum, he approaches the piece again, this time "with his spirit" and he notes, "It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath. He saw the Pussum in it" (79). Stewart explains that, for Gerald, "This willed sensation reduces being to the nothingness that he so much dreads, and is 'go' to the mechanical energy of the death process. He is attracted to the totem, and wants to wrest its secrets from it, because he senses in it the counterpart of his own monomania" (112). Gerald recognizes the pure sensation of it, but because he knows his escapist dominance is vitiated by such direct experience, he is repelled and resents it.

His reaction is not surprising. Gerald is an extension of the Crich family, which is itself an extension of the "shackles" from which Percy Bysshe Shelley feels man ought to liberate himself (III 171). Gerald feels he must always dominate and exert his will on the world. This is vividly realized in the chapter "The Industrial Magnate": "[I]t was his will to subjugate Matter to his own ends. The subjugation itself was the point. [. . .] What he wanted was the pure fulfillment of his own will" (223). Just as Gudrun is a product of her Modern art education, Gerald is a product of his lineage. Lawrence goes to great length to describe how Gerald's father had dominated his mother. Gerald's father, like Gerald, feared strong women, especially his wife, who "like a bird of prey [. . .] had beat against the bars of his philanthropy" (215). Gerald's father had confused his paternalistic domination with love and kept his wife caged. He

held to his idealism – an evil, to Lawrence – that his ability to subdue his passionate wife indicated in her an “infinite chastity” and “a virginity which he could never break” (218).

Gerald is unable to remove himself from his paternal lineage. While he believes he is changing his father’s legacy by mechanizing the colliery, Gerald is instead extending his paternalistic dominance into society. His desire to dominate extends to personal relationships, he finds, despite his desire to separate his working self and his sexual self. His relationship with the Pussum indicates his need to dominate sexually. “Also he felt, she must relinquish herself into his hands, and be subject to him. She was so profane, slave-like, watching him, absorbed by him” (67). His dominance is necessary to him; Gerald is an incomplete creature without someone to absorb and control. He holds the Pussum “in the hollow of his will” (72). Gerald’s desire to dominate and control his immediate world is evidence of a deeper disconnection from his environment. His reaction to the primitive art is not surprising because he is disconnected from the purely sensual and experiential past that Birkin describes. Gerald does not experience; he dominates.

Gudrun and Gerald’s relationship is marked out at the beginning of the book when Gudrun asks, “Am I *really* singled out for him in some way, is there really some pale gold, arctic light that envelopes only us two?” (15). We learn later that this “arctic light” that envelops the two represents their forthcoming psychic disintegration. Gerald also finds himself attracted to Gudrun, excited by

her “desperate cleaving to Naomi” as she and Ursula danced (92). Gavriel Ben-Ephraim tells us that Gudrun’s “cold integrity of self and cruel survival-capacity” make her a much stronger character than Gerald, whose “pressing needs make him vulnerable” (180). We have noted Gerald’s dominating will in both his sexual self and his working self, yet we have also noted his *need* for something to dominate. He held the Pussum “in the *hollow* of his will.” He eventually seeks to fill this void with Gudrun.

Gudrun is drawn to Gerald’s dominance and watches him with “black-dilated, spell-bound eyes” as he viciously controls his horse in “Coal Dust” (111).

Gudrun was as if numbed in her mind by the sense of indomitable soft weight of the man, bearing down into the living body of the horse: the strong, indomitable thighs of the blond man clenching the palpitating body of the mare into pure control; a sort of soft white magnetic domination from the loins and thighs and calves, enclosing and encompassing the mare heavily into unutterable subordination, soft blood-subordination, terrible. (113)

The relationship between Gudrun and Gerald is defined by domination and submission, though not necessarily in the way Gerald anticipated. He finds that instead of dominating Gudrun, “he was only this, this being that should come to her, and be given to her” (239). This desire for self-destruction is redolent of both

Anton Skrebensky and Will Brangwen's reaction to their women. Lawrence sees this game of dominance as destructive. Gerald submits entirely to Gudrun, and it eventually destroys them both. Gerald feels that his only means to liberty is to completely annihilate her: "If only I could kill her – I should be free" (442). After coitus, a time when she felt "her life being killed within her," Gerald submits to Gudrun, following her like "a shadow." Lawrence describes their relationship as a "see-saw, one destroyed that the other might exist, one ratified because the other was nulled" (445). Jack Stewart explains it well, saying, "This tendency of one pole to draw energy away from its opposite, instead of exchanging energy with it, is ultimately self-negating" (117).

Gerald and Gudrun's relationship is contrary to the relationship between Ursula and Birkin, due in part to the difference in character of each of the protagonists. Unlike Gudrun, Ursula is able to maintain an identity without another's dominance or submission. She has established her self-affirming identity in *The Rainbow*, and confirms that identity in her ability to dissolve without fear and without outside instigation. Even Birkin was led to dissolution through Hermione's violence, but Ursula was led merely by her love for Birkin.

Ursula is very different from the other women in the novel. Not only is she able to remain self-sufficient, but she responds to sensuality and the mind in ways conducive to reconnection, unlike Hermione. This difference is made clear in "Class-room" when Birkin shows Hermione and Ursula the sexual organs of the catkins. When Hermione enters, she is already separated from her

surroundings, "tall and strange, [. . .] as if she had just come out of a new, bizarre picture" (37). Ursula, however, not only belongs; she is absorbed in her work which "went on as a peaceful tide that is at flood" (35). The difference is also clear in each woman's need for Birkin. Hermione seeks Birkin out, but it is Birkin who seeks Ursula out.

The difference, however, is made most vivid in the discussion with Birkin over sensuality and consciousness. When Hermione mentions the futility of knowledge, Birkin accuses her of "merely making words" and of confusing her "bullying will" with a desire for knowledge (41). She, like Gudrun, only wants to know in order to possess. "You want to have things in your power. And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life" (42). Hermione suffers from "death-annihilation" from Birkin's tirade; she is rigid and impervious to his explanations. Ursula, however, is receptive and asks for clarification: "How can you have knowledge not in your head?" (43). He responds, "In the blood [. . .] when the mind and the known world is drowned in darkness" (43). Hermione responds to this statement with ridicule, "jeering at him, jeering him into nothingness" (43). Ursula, however, weeps, for she is truly touched by Birkin's statements concerning true sensuality and blood-knowledge. Whereas Hermione reacts violently, resisting dissolution, Ursula allows that dissolution to occur.

Ah yes – it was a sleep. She had had enough.  
So long she had held out and resisted. Now was the  
time to relinquish, not to resist any more.

In a kind of spiritual trance, she yielded, she  
gave way, and all was dark. She could feel, within the  
darkness, the terrible assertion of her body, the  
unutterable anguish of dissolution [. . .] (192)

Through her dissolution Ursula recognizes the need to separate herself from the mechanized society that was “cut off within the motion of the will” (192). She lapses into an unconscious state, and it is during this quiet meditation that Birkin enters to ask for her hand in marriage. He notes in her change that “she remained apart, in a kind of brightness” (194).

To understand Birkin’s comprehension of dissolution, one must look at his response, especially poignant after his and Ursula’s sensual encounter, to the Fetish. He knows he desires more sensual experience with Ursula, and he recognizes its efficacy while thinking about one of the statuettes from West Africa. While Gerald denies its relevance, Birkin contemplates the sensual history of the fetish. To Birkin, the fetish represents the “fall from the connection with life and hope” and the “long African process of purely sensual understanding, knowledge in the mystery of dissolution” (253). Birkin is seeking an escape from the shackles of corrupt civilization and is seduced by the “dark African Sahara-annihilation” of self, but ultimately responds with a question: “Was this then all

that remained? Was there left now nothing but to break off from the happy creative being, was the time up?" (254). A life of purely sensual experience, he sees, is as destructive as the life of pure intellect he identifies in Hermione.

Clarke discusses dissolution and its relevance to Lawrence's Romantic tendencies. In addition to his conversation on the Romantic influences, Clarke emphasizes that Lawrence believes dissolution to go two different directions. His most relevant argument is that Lawrence sees that dissolution is mostly conceived of as "life-destructive" (88). This is important to note. Throughout the novel, the reader finds instances of dissolution, both positive and negative, but always in the context of a denial of one's own existence, almost always as a part of the social paradigm. In particular, Clarke looks to the chapter "Moony," explaining the relevance of Ursula and Birkin stoning the moon's reflection.

While Clarke acknowledges that many critics believe differently, he explains that the moon's connection to the isolate feminine will is secondary to Lawrence's discussion on the role of the individual and self-assertive ego.<sup>29</sup> In *The Rainbow*, Ursula has defined herself by her will and the strength of her ego. Throughout *Women in Love*, Birkin forces Ursula to question the validity of that definition. While she has already experienced both sensuality and intellectualism and found both wanting, she has not yet found a fulfilling relationship. In her relationship with Birkin, Ursula is faced with one who demands that she look even beyond herself and her ego for self-definition.

On the train to England Birkin suggests to Gerald an alternative to traditional marriage: "It seems to me that there is only this perfect union with a woman—sort of ultimate marriage—and there is nothing else" (58). Birkin specifically avoids the word "love" when suggesting this perfect union. Lawrence recognizes the inefficacy of the past tradition of "love" as a solution. Mark Spilka explains, "Such forms of love involve the loss of selfhood" (80). Birkin seeks something more, a higher and more perfect union than one based on submission and dominance.

Stewart suggests that as Birkin explores the primitive conscious he recognizes that to follow the unconscious primitive sensibility, he must give up his creative conscience that leads to the death of his soul (115). Birkin discovers that his only choice, to avoid the dissolution of pure sensuality, is that perfect union that he seeks with Ursula. He identifies the relationship that Mino, the cat, wants with the female cat, as "the desire to bring this female cat into a pure stable equilibrium, a transcendent and abiding *rapproch* with the single male" (150). She rightly identifies what he thinks is equal as a masochistic relationship. He still wants Ursula to be his "satellite," though through her refusal to submit he is growing to understand his deep desire for the higher union. Spilka clarifies that union, explaining that "[. . .] Birkin insists that men and women have been singled out from an original mixture into pure individuality; accordingly, they must polarize rather than merge into love—hence star-equilibrium: 'a pure balance of two single beings: as the stars balance each other'" (80). In "Moony"

they achieve a better understanding of a union beyond sensuality and intellectualism, a union of spirit and passion, though Birkin still will not release his spirit. It is only after meditating on the inefficacy of purely sensual life that he is willing to submit to Ursula.

However, again, in "Excuse," Birkin must encounter an extreme that will not work in a perfect union. He seeks the spiritual union without the sensual. Ursula acts as his conscience and again rightly accuses him: "You're not satisfied, aren't you? [sic] Your spiritual brides can't give you what you want, they aren't common and fleshly enough for you, aren't they?" (306). He finally admits to himself that "his spirituality was concomitant of a process of depravity, a sort of pleasure in self destruction" (309). Finally, after they both submit, but without submitting, their relationship achieves what Lawrence would consider one without fear of dissolution. "Yes, she acquiesced – but it was accomplished without her acquiescence" (311). Shelley's solution – that "The man / Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys" – is realized without the inefficacy of either pure sensual love or pure spiritual love (III 170). A balance is struck and the union is forged.

In a discussion of the love between a man and his lover, Lawrence describes the particularly paradoxical nature of love relationships. He compares love to the tide, insisting that in order for fulfilling love to exist, "there must be an ebb" (*Phoenix* 151). He clarifies this comparison further:

The lover serves his beloved and seeks perfect communion of oneness with her. But whole love between man and woman is sacred and profane together. Profane love seeks its own. I seek my own in the beloved, I wrestle with her to wrest it from her. [. . .] I am in the beloved and she is in me. Which should not be, for this is confusion and chaos. Therefore I will gather myself complete and free from the beloved, she shall single herself out in utter contradistinction to me. (*Phoenix* 153)

The relationship between Ursula and Birkin is not final, is not “the goal.” Ursula describes it as “still” and “frail,” and by its nature, the relationship requires constant submission without domination. It is a difficult proposition with which Birkin has trouble feeling confident. In fact, he seeks more connection in a relationship with Gerald. While this relationship is beyond the scope of this paper, it does touch upon a relevant point. Levy says of the relationships in *Women in Love*,

At bottom, the disconnection between wanting the perfect intimacy of ‘star-equilibrium’ with Ursula and wanting an equally intimate, ‘almost extra-human relationship’ with a select group of others signifies, not incoherence, but the striving ‘[t]o have one’s pulse

beating direct from the [creative] mystery' whose life  
or activity is an endless transcendence of fixed forms.

(160)

Both Ben-Ephraim and Levy claim that the men in *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow* are largely emotionally and spiritually incomplete creatures, and admittedly, Birkin does need somebody for completion.<sup>30</sup> However, while Ben-Ephraim and Levy see this need as something to be corrected, the novel points to that need and its implicit *lack* of connection as the *source* of a transcendent relationship. In the train with Gerald, Birkin recognizes the powerlessness of the Modern marriage (58). By the end of the novel Birkin believes he has found the "ultimate marriage," one without pure submission or domination.

Birkin, recognizing the inefficacy of the past primitive consciousness, also realizes that a new connection to the "blood-consciousness" requires a new concept. Birkin's answer to Ursula's question concerning "knowledge not in your head" reveals the necessity of sensuality in the modern mind. He claims that having knowledge "[i]n the blood" is necessary for the death-into-life experience, which is itself necessary to separate one from society. But the primitive past has been relegated to a purely sensual experience, and the new intellectualism has been translated to a combat between wills. His new connection is a balance between will, acquiescence without acquiescence, and sensuality. He sees a place for sensuality and for will, but knows that dependence on one denies the other. Lawrence claims that both are necessary, "There must be two in one, always two

in one – the sweet love of communion and the fierce, proud love of sensual fulfillment, both together in one love” (*Phoenix* 155). A hylozoistic relationship with nature is now impossible, but such a reciprocal relationship is available between other people. He desires such a relationship with many others, but through Ursula, Lawrence admits its difficulty:

“You can’t have two kinds of love. Why should  
you!”

“It seems as if I can’t,” he said. “Yet I wanted  
it.”

“You can’t have it because it’s false,  
impossible,” she said.

“I don’t believe that,” he answered. (481)

While the relationship Birkin holds with Ursula is complete for her, Birkin still seeks the illusive “creative mystery.” Pure spiritual experience leads to a death of the creative soul. Being complete and finished also is a kind of death of creativity. Birkin seeks a constant striving and constant transcendent connection with people.

*Women in Love* is a novel concerned with ultimate connection, but in order to demonstrate – and, in fact, in order to achieve – this ultimate connection, Lawrence shows that dissolution is necessary. He has set up two relationships, between Ursula and Birkin and between Gudrun and Gerald, and reveals throughout the novel the necessary dissolution. The latter relationship comes to a

head in the final chapters of the novel, in which the couple experience an ultimate dissolution. After their night of intimacy, Gerald is unable to leave Gudrun's side and realizes his inability to exist without her. "But for the first time there was a flaw in his will" (445). He knows that to exist by his own will, "he must be perfectly free of Gudrun, leave her if she wanted to be left, demand nothing of her, have no claim upon her" (445). His recognition of his own inability to break from her begins his dissolution; but Gerald is arctic in nature, frozen and hard. Instead of dissolving, he is "rent" and "torn apart" (445). In the end Gerald is unable to stand his inability either to control the vampiric Gudrun or to submit fully to her. He chooses instead to sleep and wanders with "joints [ . . . ] turned to water. [ . . . ] unconscious and weak, not thinking of anything" (472)., Dissolution is forced upon him, as with Hermione, but instead of wandering like a corpse, Gerald falls unconscious. He, like Birkin, unconsciously descends into his valley and finds his place. He is an arctic creature, associated with ice and snow. Finally, "He had come to the hollow basin of snow, surrounded by sheer slopes and precipices" where he falls asleep (474).

The novel does not end at Gerald's death, and for good reason. Lawrence shows two types of love to the reader and clearly has indicated which he prefers. However, Gudrun still lives and has not suffered the "arctic annihilation" experienced by Gerald in the snow. Instead, she isolates herself, responds coldly to any questions, and essentially does not feel. She suffers another type of death than Gerald's physical death. Gudrun has died spiritually and is completely

removed from her “passionate sphere.” She is as dead as Gerald, “cold and impassive” as Gerald is “so coldly dead” (476-477).

To Lawrence love is “strictly a traveling” and a “unifying force” (*Phoenix* 151). Through *Women in Love* he has shown that the Modern conception of love is unable to maintain a “unifying force” because the Modern mind is disconnected from its “passionate sphere,” and is unable to connect truly with others because of this lack. The mechanistic nature of society has separated man from his own soul. But Lawrence also recognizes that we can no longer look to the past for that connection. “[R]eally I can’t bear it: the past, the past, the falling, perishing, crumbling past, so great, so magnificent” (Asquith, Cynthia 577). The sensuality of the primitive past is no longer enough to maintain a connection to the “primitive unconscious,” but instead “[s]ome men *must* be too spiritual, and some *must* be too sensual” (*Fantasia* 85).

Like Gerald’s mother, the protagonists are “[b]y force of circumstance, because all the world combined to make the cage unbreakable,” unable to break free from the idealistic and mechanized systems set around them (215). In the end, there are only two choices: to die or to fight. Gerald, caught in a false vision of a perfect mechanical system with himself as “the God of the Machine,” dies, unable to see the alternative. Gudrun fails even to see that she is living a false and empty life and becomes as corpse-like as Gerald, frozen and “coldly dead.” Only Birkin and Ursula leave, not unscathed, but able to struggle to remain connected in their “star-equilibrium” relationship. For Lawrence, their only

hope, and ours, is to “beat against the bars” of Modern society. The struggle is our hope and our freedom.

## CONCLUSION

Lawrence witnessed great changes in the world from his childhood in Eastwood to his death in France at the early age of forty-four; but the greatest changes he witnessed stemmed from the Great War. Lawrence was highly critical of the greed and industrialization he witnessed in London and the surrounding towns, calling England “shabby” and “grubby” (McLeod 558). But Lawrence did not see this as a result of the War; instead the War was a symptom of the same forces that led to the shabby condition of England and her people.

England, according to Lawrence, had fallen under the spell of idealism, a state in which the “mental mind” had asserted its will over the “physical mind,” or the blood consciousness. Man had allowed his intellect to control his passions, which is contrary to the primitive hylozoistic mind to which Lawrence adheres. In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence explored the result of this insurrection of the “mental mind,” demonstrating through three generations of relationships the effects of this will to power by the intellect. The Brangwen family, which had been connected to the earth and in a reciprocal relationship with the earth, grew apart from the earth, eventually moving from the farm and becoming part of the mechanical system of society. The protagonists’ ability to communicate, as they

grew less unconscious and more reliant on their own cognizance, also declined. In the end, Lawrence reveals a world filled with corpses and a "corruption so pure that it is hard and brittle" (*Rainbow* 495).

But Lawrence offers hope at the end of the novel. Ursula receives a sign, a rainbow, an arch made of two halves coming together at "the top of heaven" (495). Ursula holds a hope for a "new architecture" in the world, one in which the corruption that Lawrence describes in the novel is "swept away" (496).

Something happened, though, between Lawrence's publishing of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. England joined the War in August of 1914, about the time when Lawrence began the latter novel. While *The Rainbow* had faced severe criticism, Lawrence struggled to approach the problems he introduced in the previous novel. He did so, however, and, with great bitterness, spoke through his characters.

The second novel differs from the first, particularly in how it treats the issues Lawrence introduced in *The Rainbow*. He had already established that humans had separated themselves, or allowed themselves to be separated from, their "passional spheres" by their willful "mental minds." In *Women in Love*, he not only demonstrates the separation through the relationships in the novel, but also offers a solution.

Lawrence indicated that idealism and mechanization eventually lead to dissolution, which he counted necessary for the dying-into-being experience suggested by Keats. In *Women in Love*, Lawrence demonstrates the relevance and

the effects of that dissolution, not on society, but on the individuals that make up society.

To Lawrence, Modern society was no longer whole, but had been broken down into thousands of individuals, "each one of us so completely a separate entity, that the whole will be an amorphous heap, like sand, sterile, hopeless, useless, like a dead tree" (Moore 375). In *Women in Love*, Lawrence attempts to use dissolution as the bond to bring individuals together. In Birkin and Ursula's relationship, each is able to dissolve and acquiesce without submitting his/her identity to another. But the relationship would not survive without the dissolution that, in providing for rebirth, separates the couple from the broken society, a society that, in the semblance of marriage, would keep the individuals separate from each other.

But a solution to the social fragmentation is not solely based on a balanced relationship between man and woman. Birkin suffers a crisis of belief in "Moony," in which he questions the validity of a purely sensual existence. He acknowledges the power of the primitive past that allows connection to the blood, but also admits that the pure sensual life eventually leads to death of the creative soul, and thus a life as empty as the purely intellectual life of Modern civilization.

It is balance that allows Birkin and Ursula to remain alive at the end of the novel while Gerald, Hermione, and Gudrun have all become, in different ways, frozen corpses. Lawrence discovered while writing *The Sisters* that the hylozoistic

relationship described by the Modern anthropologists and experienced by the earlier characters in *The Rainbow* is no longer possible. The idealism and mechanization of his world has separated man from his primitive blood-knowledge. Man can no longer reconnect to that primitive conscience because man has changed society too much. Instead, Lawrence suggests a balance between the mental and physical minds, a “star-equilibrium” of the mind.

This suggestion comes in the form of the only healthy relationship in the novel. Ursula is a thinker, an educator, and an intellectual. However, in *The Rainbow*, she witnessed and understood the futility and falsity of education. She does not seek knowledge to possess it, but to *experience* it. Birkin is an aesthete in the realm of nature and one who feels and acts passionately. Together they complete each other without dominating each other. Each has acquiesced to the other without submission or domination. They exist in a balanced equilibrium.

Over a period of six years, Lawrence wrote two great novels, and struggled not only to recreate the world of primitive feeling, but to create characters who responded to the primitivist urge within them. While he acknowledged the questionable relevance of primitivism in the Modern mind, Lawrence indicates through his novels the necessity for a primitive way of thinking in a world that he believed had separated itself from its own conscience and true consciousness. In a world torn apart by dominance games between nations and individuals, Lawrence sought to find a way to remain connected to others and to his own soul; in the progression of *The Sisters*, he reflected his

seeking and what he found. His thoughts progressed and changed through the writing of the novels, starting by reflecting the transgression of the mental mind over the physical mind, and ending in a balance between the powers of the body and intellect.

His thoughts continued to move forward, as he sought better methods of expressing his desire for true, ultimate connection. In 1921, Lawrence wrote of Walt Whitman:

Each vivid soul is unique, and though one soul  
embrace another, and include it, still it cannot *become*  
that other soul, or livingly dispossess that other soul.  
In extending himself, Whitman still remains himself;  
he does not become the other man, or the other  
woman, or the tree, or the universe[.] (“Whitman”  
156)

Lawrence finds in the American poet what he had been expressing in the relationship between Birkin and Ursula: a soul who will include others, but not *possess* those others. In *Aaron's Rod*, Lawrence attempts to relate this new theory, at one point mentioning Whitman's poem “The Dalliance of the Eagles.” Aaron summarizes the poem thus:

Two eagles in mid-air, grappling, whirling, coming to  
their intensification of love-oneness there in mid-air.  
In mid-air the love consummation. But all the time

each lifted on its own wings: each bearing itself up on  
its own wings at every moment of the mid-air  
consummation. That is the splendid love-way. (167)

Lawrence demonstrates a relationship in which the individuals, in their acquiescence to each other, are able to maintain their own individual flights. He admits that his solution is not easy and requires constant struggle; but the connection between the "passionate sphere" and the intellect is only possible in a relationship. The idealism and mechanization of the Modern Age has separated man from his "passionate sphere," and the only way to achieve, and even to maintain that connection is through a "star-equilibrium" relationship. Lawrence acknowledges that his solution will not extricate those who strive from their broken society; but he offers them a hope to struggle and regain "paradise."

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster wrote a letter to the *Nation and Athenaeum* on 29 March 1930 in response to D. H. Lawrence's death.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas coauthored *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*. Stewart describes the importance of their historical work that distinguishes between "chronological" and "cultural," and "hard" and "soft" primitivism.

<sup>3</sup> See the entry for "primitivism" in *A Handbook for Literature*. Eighth Edition. Ed. William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Born Anthony Ashley Cooper, and a student of John Locke, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury was instrumental in the development of the concept of the Moral Sense and the innate goodness of Mankind.

<sup>5</sup> Lord Mondobbo wrote *The Origin and Progress of Language* and James Macpherson wrote the controversial *Poems of Ossian*, poems supposedly from a pre-Christian—to Macpherson, a pre-civilized—Scotland.

<sup>6</sup> See Rose Marie Burwell's catalogue of D. H. Lawrence's reading in *The D. H. Lawrence Review*, 3.3 (1970).

<sup>7</sup> He explains the failure of the process in his discussion on incest in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*.

<sup>8</sup> Rose Marie Burwell compiled an extensive chronological bibliography of Lawrence's reading in *The D. H. Lawrence Review* 3.3 (1970).

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud first published *Studien über Hysterie (Studies on Hysteria)* in 1885, the same year Lawrence was born.

<sup>10</sup> Weltanschauung and Menschenshauung are points of view held by the people of a certain place. Weltanschauung is a world-view while Menschenshauung is Lawrence's wry response: that at least some people think Freud's psychoanalytic theory should be a worldview.

<sup>11</sup> For more precise explanations refer to *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Trans. Alan Tyson. New York: Norton, 1966. Or refer to *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books (1955).

<sup>12</sup> John B. Vickery discusses Lawrence's preference for Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* over Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, saying "The length of Frazer's work, its almost endless multiplication of examples, its reticence about providing a theoretic framework or analytic categories, and its looser organization probably all contributed to Lawrence's attitude, which more often than we are accustomed to recognizing aligned itself with one form or another of orthodoxy" (*The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough*, 284).

<sup>13</sup> Jane Ellen Harrison herself did not agree with this primitive mindset that they truly were kangaroos. She explains after this statement that primitive man later realizes that he is *not* kangaroo and it is from this realization that the *totem* arises.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence's terms for the mind changed often. Depending on his reading, Lawrence would call the intellect "the physical mind," "the mental mind," and "the intellect." He called the unconscious "the passionate sphere," "the mental mind," "the concrete," "the primitive unconscious," among other terms. Needless to say, some of the terms overlapped.

<sup>15</sup> Hereafter abbreviated *WIL*.

<sup>16</sup> Gavriel Ben-Ephraim and Colin Clarke, among others, contrast Lawrence's use of mythic imagery to his use of industrial and mechanical imagery.

<sup>17</sup> I make this claim based on John E. Toews paper, "Refashioning the Masculine Subject in Early Modernism: Narratives of Self-Dissolution and Self-Construction in Psychoanalysis and Literature," published in *Modernism/Modernity* 4.1 (1997): 31-67.

<sup>18</sup> For explanation, see Toew's article, *ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> The valley, in more than shape, is traditionally the place of spiritual rebirth. Joseph Campbell explores the origins of this mythic symbol in *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*. New York: Viking Press, 1988.

<sup>20</sup> Recall Lawrence's penchant for changing terms. In this case *physical* refers to the intellect and *blood* refers to the primitive unconscious.

<sup>21</sup> In his introduction to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence goes to great length to describe the effect of the Deluge—the melting of the glaciers—on cultural myths and rituals, which he calls "remnants of once great societies."

<sup>22</sup> Seymour Lanoff describes the relevance of Lawrence's narrative technique to his conception of "the modern outlook" in "*The Rainbow: The Shaping of Modern Man.*"

<sup>23</sup> Both Eric Levy and Gabriel Ben-Ephraim argue that though it was a woman who first instigated the fall from Eden, the women in *The Sisters* remain whole and complete, even Ursula and Gudrun who are educated. It is only the men who reflect an ontological incoherence. While this is beyond the scope of this study, it must be noted that this argument is contrary to my argument that Ursula's ontology changes throughout the novel. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim discusses it in "Balance Through Imbalance: *The Rainbow*" and Eric Levy in "Ontological Incoherence in *Women in Love.*" Both are listed in the Works Cited.

<sup>24</sup> Ursula also experiences a brief relationship with a young man named Anthony Schofield, in which she feels his pure sensuality to be empty, saying of his inability to notice the beauty of the world: "All this so beautiful, all this so lovely! He did not see it. He was one with it. But she saw it, and was one with it. Her seeing separated them infinitely" (416). She knows she is unable to be part of the machine and remain completely her own, but her experience with Anthony demonstrates to her that a purely natural existence is equally as void.

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence discusses the nature of love relationships in two chapters of *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, "The Birth of Sex" and "Education and Sex in Man, Woman, and Child." His work, "Love," which has been collected in *Phoenix*, also discusses the nature of love relationships (151-6).

<sup>26</sup> Though this goes beyond the scope of this study, Clarke emphasizes the necessity of *corruption* in rebirth. He compares *The Ancient Mariner* and *Women in Love*, discussing the symbolism of both the moon and sea snakes (in *The Ancient Mariner*) and how each represents the corruption in man (97).

<sup>27</sup> Twitchell avoids discussing Ursula's relational maturation in *Women in Love*, choosing to focus particularly on the predatory nature of Lawrence's women.

<sup>28</sup> Almost, because the masculine, according to Weininger, is the pole of spiritual transcendence, which Gerald is unable to achieve (Toews 32).

<sup>29</sup> In particular, Clarke describes how Middleton Murry believes that "Birkin is destroying Aphrodite," or the pure female desire to be sensually fulfilled (Clarke 103). He also includes F. R. Leavis and Graham Hough, arguing that while Lawrence did, in fact, attack the "image of the Great Mother," the theme is secondary in this scene.

<sup>30</sup> For more a more in depth analysis see "Balance Through Imbalance: *The Rainbow*" and "The Teller Reasserted: Exercising of the Will in *Women in Love*," by Gavriel Ben-Ephraim in *The Moon's Dominion*. Eric Levy's article "Ontological Incoherence in *Women in Love*" also discusses this imbalance particularly. Both are listed in Works Cited.

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## VITA

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