

# THE FEMININE AND THE SACRED

## **The Mythicization of Women in D.H.Lawrence's Fiction.**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I am attempting a reading of D.H. Lawrence which concentrates on the representation of women in his fiction, something that is revealing, not only of his attitude towards women, but men too. This is because Lawrence always maintained close connections between his fiction and his theories about the relationship of the two sexes and how their union can lead to real consummation and ultimately to spiritual rebirth. He believed ardently that men and women need to rediscover their true original instincts which have been distorted and debilitated by the evils of modern mechanistic civilization.

In this quest for the original “other” self, the woman plays the most important role. Endowed, according to Lawrence, with natural intuition and strong instincts, but burdened with arbitrary, suffocating, social rules, she must find the way to her authentic female self and to do so she must follow a path which usually involves an experience of nature and leads to a meeting with the man who will help her reclaim her womanhood and waken Aphrodite, the erotic goddess dormant inside her. This is a long, arduous process, a descent into the dark depths of the human psyche, what the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung called an “individuation” process, which takes the human being to the very core of existence and provides crucial glimpses into the real meaning of life. This other self is often identified by both Jung and Lawrence as the innocent, primitive and long forgotten self, which instinctively knew how to appreciate life in its original demonstrations, the self which was still in an infant state, spontaneous and authentic, and thus healthy and pure, uncontaminated by the corrupt materialistic outlook of modern society.

Woman, by her very nature, is much closer than the man to this “unconscious” self, the place where instincts, urges and drives reside. This can be seen as a dark underworld, the Hades in the depths of the human mind, where the woman will descend after passing through various phases of mythicization: She is Persephone seeking Pluto, or in the eyes of her perplexed and often alarmed male companion, a frightening Maenad, the mysterious feminine force, a redoubtable goddess of another world. In her closeness to nature, the typical Lawrence heroine shows an Artemis-like independence and self-reliance, and in her communion with man she turns, by invoking Eros, into a passionate Aphrodite, ready and keen to abandon herself in the sacred union with the male other. In his descriptions of this mythicization process undergone by his female characters, Lawrence often employs what Hélène Cixous has defined as a feminine language, a language springing from the fertile emotional other of the female nature, the “semiotic” language of the feminine body. I use Julia Kristeva’s term “semiotic” to signify this other “land” of the unconscious, which, in D.H. Lawrence’s fiction, is often connoted by the real land where the action takes place, a land representative of these valuable human instincts.

Although Lawrence’s approach to woman may be thought of as essentialist, there can be no doubt that such a view of the female is one of the outstanding characteristics of D.H. Lawrence’s work. After all, there is something totally fascinating about the way his female characters refuse to succumb to stereotypes, social and literary, but think, feel and act with maturity, intelligence and resoluteness that distinguishes them from the males. It shows them to be not only individual and free within their fictional context, but also independent from the very man who made them.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### A. The Letters of D.H. Lawrence

- L i.* Ed. James T. Boulton. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- L ii.* Eds. George T. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- L iii.* Eds. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume III. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- L iv.* Eds. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume IV. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- L v.* Eds. James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume V. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- L vi.* Eds. James T. Boulton, Margaret H. Boulton and Gerald M. Lacy. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Volume VI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

### B. Works of D.H. Lawrence

- AWR* *Apocalypse and the Writings of Revelation*. Ed. Mara Kalnins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- CSN* *Complete Short Novels*. Eds. Keith Sagar and Melissa Partridge. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1984.



- CSS*            *Collected Short Stories*. London: Heinemann Ltd, 1978.
- FCDL*           *The Fox; The Captain's Doll; The Ladybird*. Ed. Dieter Mehl.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- FLC*            *The First Lady Chatterley*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973.
- Foreword*      “Foreword to Sons and Lovers” in *Sons and Lovers*. Eds. Helen  
Barron and Carl Barron. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,  
1992.
- FSLC*           *The First and Second Lady Chatterley Novels*. Eds. Dieter Mehl and  
Christa Jansohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- FU*             *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*.  
Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971.
- JTLD*           *John Thomas and Lady Jane*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd,  
1973.
- LCL*            *Lady's Chatterley's Lover and A Propos of Lady's Chatterley's Lover*.  
Ed. Michael Squires. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- LE*             *Late Essays and Articles*. Ed. James T. Boulton. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- MIM*            *Mornings in Mexico*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Phoenix I*      *The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*. Ed. Edward D. McDonald.  
New York: Viking Press, 1936.
- Phoenix II*     *Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Prose Works by D.H. Lawrence*.  
Ed. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore. London: Heinemann, 1968.

- Prologue*      *Women in Love and Prologue in Women in Love*. Eds. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- PS*              *The Plumed Serpent*. Ed. L.D.Clark. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- RDP*             *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*. Ed. Michael Herbert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- SCAL*            *Studies in Classic American Literature*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.
- SEP*             *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*. Ed. Simonetta de Filippis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- SL*               *Sons and Lovers*. Eds. Helen Barron and Carl Barron. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- SM*               *St. Mawr and Other Stories*. Ed. Brian Finney. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Study*           *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*. Ed. Bruce Steele. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- TI*               *Twilight In Italy and Other Essays*. Ed. Paul Eggert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- TLG*             *The Lost Girl*. Ed. John Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- TR*               *The Rainbow*. Eds. Helen Barron and Carl Barron. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

WL *Women in Love and Prologue in Women in Love.* Eds. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

WWRA *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories.* Eds. Dieter Mehl and Christa Jansohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

### C. Other Works

ANR Nietzsche, Friedrich. *A Nietzsche Reader.* Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

CL Moore T., Harry ed. *The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence.* Vols. I and II. London: Heinemann, 1962.

CW Jung, Carl. *Collected Works.* Eds. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerald Adler. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1904.

Clarke Clarke, Colin, ed. *D.H. Lawrence. The Rainbow and Women In Love.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1969.

*Erotism* Bataille, Georges. *Erotism.* Trans. Mary Dalwood. London: Marion Boyars, 1987.

FS Clément Catherine and Kristeva, Julia. *The Feminine and the Sacred.* Trans. Jane Marie Todd. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Jung Jung, Carl. *Psychology of the Unconscious.* New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2002.

*LIA* Sagar, Keith. *D.H. Lawrence: Life into Art*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985

*MMSS* Jung, Carl. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1961.

*NAEL* *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Vol.II. Ed. M.H.Abrams. U.S.A.: WW Norton & Company, Inc. 1979.

*NFF* De Courtivron, Isabelle and Elaine Marks. *New French Feminisms*. Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.

*RoD* Clarke, Colin. *River of Dissolution: D.H. Lawrence and English Romanticism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul PLC, 1969.

*SMAL* Jung, Carl. *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*. London: Routledge, 2003.

*Sagar* Sagar, Keith. *The Art of D.H. Lawrence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971

*The Symbolic Quest*. Whitmont, Edward. *The Symbolic Quest*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978

*TL* Wright, T.R. *Theology and Literature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1999.

Whitmont      Whitmont, Edward. *The Return of the Goddess*. London: Alkana, 1987.

Wright         Wright, T.R. *D.H.Lawrence and the Bible*. Cambridge; Cambridge  
University Press: 2002

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# Introduction

Most of D.H. Lawrence's literary work manifests a determined and painstaking effort to answer the questions posed by the series of crises that simmered throughout the Victorian era and erupted with the First World War. Deeply hurt and angered by what he saw as the degeneration and waste of human life caught in the nets of sterile conventions, imposed by an aged, failing civilization and fading religious dogmas, he bravely undertook the necessary task to find and reclaim the fundamental values of life through a persistent if sometimes contradictory exploration of human identity and the self.

His three important works, *A Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914-1915), "Education of the People" (1918) and *Fantasia of the Unconsciousness* (1918), show how relentlessly Lawrence was considering the possibility of establishing a harmonious world by modifying modern attitudes and taking account of gender, religion and psychology. These concerns were widespread at the time and his thinking contains a multiplicity of political and cultural influences, derived from theosophy, socialism, sexual reformism, evolutionism and religious primitivism. The intertextual references in his work, not only reflect the conflicts of an intellectual at times of protracted and serious crisis – a part of the inevitable rhetoric of anxiety in an era of torment – but also provide a key for a better understanding of his work, a text that more than most seems open to interpretation.

## **The "effeminization" of Literature and the Lawrencian Heroine**

A trend had already appeared in Victorian literature towards a return to the male-oriented, adventure novel, in which primitivism was a persistent theme. H. Rider Haggard, G.A. Henty,

Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling were some of the exponents of those purely male plots. This was certainly a shrewd move to exploit a (male) market that was not adequately catered for, but it was also a reaction to the perceived massive invasion of women writers and the consequent “effeminization” of literature which, some thought, reflected and contributed to the effeminization of modern society in general.

Effeminization and a return to the primitive state of mind were fashionable ideas at the turn of the century and spawned, not only a fair number of very popular and reasonably interesting novels, but also a fair amount of theoretical writing. Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, George Addington and their German counterparts Karl Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfeld speculated on feminism and gender differentiation, homosexuality and the hidden depths of the human character as dark continents that had to be explored, conquered and pacified. Decadence, homosexuality and feminism were freely associated, or even taken, if not as roughly synonymous, at least as symptoms of the same malaise. Theorists such as Max Nordau (*Degeneration*, 1893) and Anthony M. Ludovici (*Woman, A Vindication*, 1923) worried about the corrosion of traditional masculine values, employed a tone and a vocabulary designed to lend the greatest urgency to their eschatological scenarios, as they alternatively warned, scared and reassured:

Decadentism is an exotic growth unsuited to British soil, and it may be hoped that it will never take permanent root here.

Still, the popularity of debased and morbid literature, especially among women, is not an agreeable or healthy feature.

(Pykett 160)



Lawrence's engagement with this "exotic decadentism," often perceived as a modern sort of "primitivism," as well as with the "woman question," was significantly different in its assumptions and purposes, let alone intelligence and profundity, but the idea of the primitive as an alternative other was clearly very much part of the intellectual air of his time.

Lawrence's connection with the primitive, which we shall explore in more details in the course of this thesis, constitutes a distinctive element of his theory about the human condition, namely the commitment to the privileging of the body and his ardent belief that the regeneration of the human being can only come through the celebration of the flesh. The woman plays a vital role in all this for "Woman is the Flesh" (*Foreword* 470). She is "the swivel and centre on which he [man] turns closely, producing his movement" (*Study* 52). It is the existence of the female which "gives a man his vision, his God" (53). This belief in the importance of the female, I will argue, underpins the Lawrencian fiction.

Lawrence was perfectly aware of the basic distinction between the truth of art and the truth of doctrine, and thus careful to test his metaphysical theories in the laboratory conditions provided by fiction. In what follows, I will first outline his metaphysics with reference to his non-fiction, before considering his fictional treatment of women as a potential source of religious inspiration.

### **The Loss of the Modern Man and the Search for the Self**

Lawrence would distinguish between the mind and the body, "the known me," "the conscious ego" and "the self that lives in my body [which] I can never finally know," as he said in his essay "On Being a Man," written in 1924 (*RDP* 213). But when he had developed his theories about the duality of the human being, he still mocked "the thought adventure," that is, what

he saw as man's attachment to a false spirituality through which "he risks his body and mind," ignoring the eternal truth: "I am the son of the old red-earth Adam, with a black touchstone at the centre of me" (217). It is this black touchstone which from a modern psychoanalytical point of view constitutes the contents of the unconscious self, "the blood consciousness" or "the phallic consciousness," which Lawrence also associates with the savage, primitive instinct of ancient civilizations such as the Egyptian, the Etruscan and the Indian. In this approach, Lawrence, echoes Jung's belief that "every step towards a fuller consciousness of the present removes him [the modern man] further from his original '*participation mystique*' with the mass of men – from submersion in a common unconsciousness" (MMSS 227). Jung believes in the existence of a collective unconsciousness and Lawrence too refers to the common urges which define human unconsciousness in general.

For both Lawrence and Jung, the need to return and embrace this "other" consciousness, the dark self, is necessary if human beings are to achieve rebirth and recover wholeness. Like many others, Jung was deeply disillusioned by the catastrophic First World War: "I realize only too well that I am losing my faith in the possibility of a rational organization of the world, that old dream of millennium" (235). He talks about the gradual loss of "all the metaphysical certainties" and their replacement by rationalist and materialist ideals, which in their turn were to be shaken to their roots by the destructive spirit of the twentieth century: "The very picture terrorizes the imagination. What are we to imagine when cities today perfect measures of defence against poison-gas attacks and practice them in 'dress rehearsals?'" (236). Lawrence expresses similar agonies about the fate of humanity and the deliberate dependence of man on the machine: "We shout and blame the machine. But who on earth makes the machine, if we don't? And any alterations in the system are only

modifications in the machine. – The system is *in us*, it is not something external to us” (*RDP* 90). Lawrence calls for a return “to the Unknown God whom we ignore”:

We have to struggle for a new glimpse of God and Life.

We have to struggle down to the heart of things, where the everlasting flame is, and kindle ourselves another beam of light.

In short, we have to make another bitter adventure in pulsating thought, far, far to the one central polar of energy. We have to germinate inside us, between our undaunted mind and our reckless, genuine passions, a new germ. The germ of a new idea. A new germ of God- knowledge, or Life-knowledge. But a new germ. (209)

Jung, too, urges modern man to have a good look at his “psychic depths,” for “no light or beauty” – which amounts, more or less, to the idea of a new, reborn self – “will ever come from the man who can not bear this sight” (*MMSS* 248). In both Jung and Lawrence, this idea of the revelation of a new consciousness, hitherto deeply buried in the psyche of the tormented modern human being, must entail the dangerous “descent” into the unknown, unconscious part of the self.

Individuation is another word that Jung used to define this effort of the man to find his self, a process during which “the individual confronts the monsters that lurk in his own unconscious” (Snowden 70). This Jungian concept is of great value in the understanding of Lawrence’s characters, especially his women. Jung uses the term to denote the process by which a person becomes a separate, indivisible unity, a “whole” individual. He understood individuation to be something that begins in middle age, when individuals reach what is

supposed to be the most active and creative part of their lives and suddenly find themselves facing an unknown vista or some unforeseen upheaval. This is a turning point: the point when the unconscious, the central organizing archetype in the human psyche, which had apparently hidden the greatest measure of its influence while the ego was building a life for itself, suddenly returns full force to claim a central place in the individual's life. What was fragmented strives for unity; what was broken yearns for wholeness; and what was suppressed seeks expression. This is a major crisis which the individual can only face by making once more a descent into the realm of these disrupting forces and listening to their demands. Lawrence used the term "individualist" or "aristocrat" to connote the man "of distinct being, who must act in his own particular way to fulfil his own individual nature" (*Study* 45). This process, which Lawrence calls "second birth," is irrelevant to "knowledge," to the "Spoken Word" (40) and is mostly connected with the idea of the man being the creator of himself (42), "distinct" and "detached," "single as may be from the public" (43). The woman plays the most important role in this "full achievement" of the self (8) as it is through the union with the female that man is "fertilized" and made "big with increase" (53). Woman, on the other hand, experiences real rebirth in her union with the male.

This descent process that many Lawrencian heroines undergo, as well as the revealing union with the male, are important subjects for literary research. All major female characters in Lawrence's fiction will, sooner or later, face the sterility of their conventional life, as defined by the dominant social conditions. Most of them, like Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the Woman in *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories*, Daphne in *The Ladybird* and Lou in *St. Mawr*, feel the need to escape from a conjugal environment they find suffocating, and venture into the Unknown, both literally, by going to a distant, unknown land, and metaphorically, through the descent into their inner world in search for their

womanhood. Some of them are ready and able to undergo this test: Ursula in *The Rainbow* engages in this arduous journey towards self-knowledge, the Woman allows herself to become the object of a literal human sacrifice, which allegorically stands for the complete abandonment of the self to the other, and Lou in *St. Mawr* experiences this sacred urge in the presence of a horse and, led by her instinct, leaves her family to serve the god of mystery. However, most of these women need a male initiator to help them find their sexuality, the passion and the desire for the male other with whom they unite in a *hieros gamos*, the sacred bringing together of the two opposites, a union which, as we'll see in the following sub-chapter, Lawrence considers sacred, as it constitutes the necessary step both sexes must take towards rebirth.

However, there are also those who cannot accept this necessity and complete this metamorphosis: In *Women in Love*, Gudrun's process towards the unknown is perilous and ultimately catastrophic, for what she discovers is her destructive unconscious side; her descent is a descent into the Hades of the psyche where the dark feminine spirits hide. Hermione, in the same novel, is a tragic figure, unable to join and appreciate the true maleness in a man. Similarly, in "Tickets Please," the women become punishers of the man's vanity, ready to tear apart the male enemy, and in "Witch à La Mode," Winifred is a modern woman, whose egoism does not let her embrace the male otherness. This dark side of the descent constitutes as we shall see, an essential element in the mythicization of women, which Lawrence is not prepared to conceal. It is connected with the modern woman's egoism and her negative otherness, fabricated by the mechanized industrial world she has been living in.

## The Concept of “Opposites”

Lawrence believed in what he called the union of “pure mutual opposites,” the ultimate union of the opposite elements like fire and water, on which the law of creation is based (*Phoenix II* 231). Man and woman and their union play a vital part in his theory: “In procreation, the two germs of the male and the female epitomise the two cosmic principles, as these are held within the life-spell” (230). This is a concept which, as Jung often points out, is to be found in most philosophical systems of antiquity as well as Christianity. In Hermetic philosophy, it is expressed by the term *coniunctio* of male and female, and in Gnosticism, it is known as the *mysterium iniquitatis*. Jung refers to the primordial concept of *hieros gamos* in Christian mysticism, which however was “sublimated on a lofty plane.” For the Swiss psychoanalyst, “the physical performance of *hieros gamos* as a sacred rite not only became a mystery – it faded to a mere conjecture.” He believed that Gnosticism and subsequently the Church, turned the natural philosophy of this union “into an abstract *theoria*,” severing it from its physicality (Segal 140-1).

For Lawrence, this union with the other sex would help the human being to find his/her authentic, real self, the self who is mostly connected with the body and the senses and as such is closer to the primitive rather than the civilized idea concerning the image of the self. This union has both physical and metaphysical dimensions. Inspired by his reading of ancient mystical and pagan philosophies, he called this union “a consummation,” which “may be also physical, between the male body and the female body. But it may be only spiritual, between the male and female spirit” (*Study* 68). But physical or spiritual consummation alone is inadequate: “the marriage in the spirit is a lie, and the marriage in the body is a lie, each is a lie without the other” (83). The ultimate union must be both in body and spirit, it must be “the

Holy Ghost” union. The employment of the word “holy” shows how much Lawrence values this experience. This union becomes one of the main subjects of his work. But there are also cases, when he praises the union of the bodies more than the spiritual union, and seems to believe that the body by itself can lead the human being to spiritual rebirth. Women, who are more closely attuned to and comfortable with their bodies and senses, are more receptive to this mystical experience and become the most accurate examples of this metamorphosis. Alvina and Cicio in *The Lost Girl* do not appear to have any spiritual bond to speak of, but this does not stop Alvina from discovering in Cicio’s exotic otherness a new world, completely unknown to her hitherto, which offers her the possibility of a new life closer to the body and the instinct.

### **The Unconscious and Feminine Otherness**

I have used the term “unconscious” throughout this thesis, because my aim is to focus on the terms through which Lawrence perceives woman and which he uses in the delineation of his female characters. These help to explore and explain, as far as it is possible, the irrational urges and impulses, active in the depths of the human psyche. Here Carl Gustav Jung’s conception of the unconscious, personal and collective, has been very useful. According to Jung, in the unconscious of the male, the collective unconscious finds expression as a *feminine* inner personality: the anima, the total of all unconscious feminine psychological qualities a male possesses, which is one of the sources of creative ability. As I attempt to show in this thesis, Lawrence and his heroes often project their anima and the archetypes which exist in this anima on the feminine characters. This is seen as a cathartic process, as in the case of *Sons and Lovers*, or as an effort on the part of the male characters to discover and finally define themselves. But the term unconscious is more often used, in my analysis, in

relation with Lawrence's female characters. Taking again the Jungian theory as a background theory for this thesis, it is worth noting that for the psychoanalyst, the unconscious is a feminine realm: "Psychologically the self is a union of conscious (masculine) and unconscious (feminine). It stands for the psychic totality. So formulated, it is a psychological concept" (Wehr 116). Erich Newman, in *The Origin and History of Consciousness* (1954), asserts that "man experiences the 'masculine' structure of his consciousness as peculiarly his own, and the 'feminine' unconscious as something alien to him, whereas woman feels at home in her unconscious and out of her element in conscious" (Wehr 117). Julia Kristeva, to whom I will refer in detail later, calls the "unconscious" phase in a child's development, when the infant is still attached to the mother's body, "semiotic," and the subsequent phase, the masculine order, when the child becomes aware of individuality and enters human society, "symbolic" (103).

As it becomes apparent, women are frequently connected with the "other," not only in Jungian theory and male authors, but also by iconic feminists. In my thesis, I use the term "other" and "otherness," not only in connection with the woman's uniqueness and subjectivity, but even more as a term to connote Lawrencian otherness, the unique male or female essence which each sex seeks to discover and unite with. Interestingly, Lawrence would not portray woman as the other in the sense of the excluded creature with privileged access to the unconscious who belongs to another world essentially different from the male one in which she must live. His heroine's process towards rebirth reminds one immediately of the Jungian individuation process, even though Jung seems to be concerned with men only, as women are often seen, in Jungian analysis, as having an atrophied ego (Wehr 100-3). The Lawrencian woman however is better equipped for this mission than the men. And in this, Lawrence seems to agree with Jung that the woman



[...] with her dissimilar psychology, is and always has been a source of information about things for which a man has no eyes. She can be his inspiration; her intuitive capacity, often superior to man's, can give him timely warning, and her feeling, always directed towards the personal, can show him ways which his own less personally accented feeling would never have discovered.

(Wehr 105)

For Lawrence, "the female exists in much more than his [the man's] woman. And the finding of it for himself gives a man his vision, his God" (*Study* 53). For Lawrence, woman is something more than a representative of the female species: She is "the door for our in-going and our out-coming" (*Foreword* 471), the one who leads man to self-discovery, a "God" that must be embraced. Woman, for Lawrence, is thus more than "inspiration": She is a sacred, respectable figure.

### **The Idea of the Sacred: Otto, Bataille and the French Feminist Theoreticians**

The German religious thinker Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), in his *Idea of the Holy* (1917), resurrected the ancient association of the "holy" with the extra-cosmic and the irrational. Otto needed a word for the "holy," the "sacred," that had none of the traditional ethical and moral connotations, and focused on the "overplus of meaning" that signifies the irrational spiritual aspect. So, taking as root the Latin word *numen*, which literally means "nod," but was commonly used metaphorically to signalize "the divine will" and thus "the divine," he came up with the word *numinös*, transferred into English as *numinous*. Otto acknowledges in the

religious feeling “this hidden and esoteric element” that is almost impossible to conceptualize or understand, the sacred intuition in the depths of the human psyche, unfamiliar but intense and ever-present, ready to manifest itself in the form of the “awe” or “ecstasy” or “religious dread” that the human being experiences in front of the divine power (Otto 5-11). This is the “other,” the obscure and disowned force which exists in gifted individuals and which Christianity has tended to diminish by the imposition of moral codes. Lawrence blames Christianity for attempting to subjugate the living force and energy of the human being to the intellect and to dogma: “And I am very sorry of myself, held in the grip of some stronger force” (*Study* 13) something that seems to echo Otto’s belief that the standardization of myth and arid pedantry is destroying man’s capacity to “feel” the mysterious “other.” Such an approach by Otto and Lawrence does justice to the irrational, mystical nature of the sacred and brings it much closer to the human nature in all its precious variety, as it seeks to re-establish the value and uniqueness of these primordial instincts and urges.

The French theorist Georges Bataille (1897-1962), though far more extreme in his views, belongs to this line of thought too. Lawrence, of course, was never acquainted with Bataille’s ideas, however, in my thesis, I am trying to show how the English writer anticipates the modern French philosopher particularly in issues concerning eros, the sexual act and the body.

In *Erotism* (1957) and *Theory of Religion* (1973) Bataille opposed the Christian notion of transgression as fall, discerning in transgression the impure aspect of the sacred. Like Lawrence, he attacks the subjugation of the body to the spirit, and moreover, he connects the sacred with the carnal, the “bodily exhalations (blood, sweat, tears, shit); extreme emotions (laughter, anger, drunkenness, ecstasy); socially useless activity (poetry,

games, crime, eroticism), all of which take the form of a heterology that “homogenous society would like to definitely expel” (Richardson 36). For Bataille, the sexual act involves “the dissolution of the person” (*Eroticism* 17), it is a violent as well as excessive act (42), which calls “inner life into play” (29). Like Bataille, who takes this unconscious, erotic self to be the source of the sacred, Lawrence finds access to this “other” self through the senses: through “the gates of the eyes and nose and mouth and ears, through the delicate ports of the fingers, through the great window of the yearning breast, we pass into our oneness with the universe, our great extension of being, towards infinitude.” In the lower part of the body, which is the centre of sexual activity, Lawrence locates the centre of the blood-consciousness: “There the great whirlpool of the dark blood revolves and assimilates all unto itself” (*Phoenix II* 235). For Lawrence and for Bataille, the body is the tool to reach the sacred, and particularly for Lawrence, it is the means to achieve eternal union with the cosmic essence, the universe where the female “other” is to be found: “the body it is which attaches us directly to the female” (*Study* 66) and in the body there is the “mystic dualism of otherness” (*Phoenix II* 237). Thus, for Lawrence, the union with the other as a means to reach the sacred is a process intimately connected with the woman.

This brings us close to the view of the female as “the other,” and it is at this point that I shall attempt an association between the theories already referred to and the work of the French feminist theorists of the sixties and the seventies. I shall try to trace the relations between these new notions of the sacred, and those regarding the unconscious and the female as expounded by the French feminist theorists Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. My aim is to show how Lawrence’s writing is an example of the way these theories can be brought together creatively, and what light this association may shed in his use of language and his depiction of the female characters.

Thinkers like Otto, Lawrence and Bataille confidently see the “sacred” in things that the legislators of human society would like to expel as dangerous and incompatible with social order. Moreover, they discern holiness in the natural manifestations of the mystic self which has very little to do with notions of the righteous as expressed by conventional morality. The sacred occupies a place outside the “rational” of which the greatest manifestation is the language. In language-dominated societies, according to Cixous and Kristeva, women learn to take their place in the patriarchal, social order of meaning with feminine identity being constructed in male language. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst on whose theories Cixous and Kristeva based much of their analyses, underlines the centrality of language in the construction of gender, together with the totally illusionary nature of any sense of self as stable and coherent. Julia Kristeva focuses on the pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and child, what she called the “maternal era.” Following Melanie Klein’s study of the early mother-child relationship, Kristeva shifts the emphasis from the Freudian-Lacanian concern with the Oedipal father to the importance of the Mother bond, before the child enters into the language-dominated symbolic order, that is, the patriarchal social reality, and starts acquiring a sense of individual identity. This maternal era is characterized chiefly by physical sensations, as the child touches, tastes and smells the body of the mother, the body of blood and milk and the holy dirtiness, the body of life. Kristeva calls this phase in the child’s development, which precedes the entrance into the symbolic, the “semiotic” stage (Lacan called it “the imaginary”). It is from the semiotic, the maternal era, that a woman must derive a feminine, libidinal kind of expression, in opposition to the forced, considered and dominant male one. It involves the crossing of what Kristeva calls the “threshold” between the conscious and the unconscious, where the social and the psychic interact and poetic language is concretized. Poetry, Kristeva believes, brings about a revolution in the norms and habitual

forms of language use. It is the articulation of the inner self, a return to the era of the unconscious, the ever present semiotic, which, even though it must retain the ordering presence of the symbolic so as not to become a “psychotic utterance,” slips through consciousness and makes itself apparent in every effort of the human being to cross the boundaries, spiralling out of the controlling force of the symbolic. The maternal, pre-Oedipal phase, when men and women have equal access, is a sacred era. *The Lost Girl* is a text that shows very clearly how close Lawrence comes to these ideas. Alvina goes back to reclaim the vital ingredients that have been denied to her: she abandons England, that is, the symbolic order, for Italy, the semiotic, and in doing so she chooses to follow her instincts and reject the sullen safety of conformity. In this decision, it is love, the strongest of emotions, the one supremely indifferent to reason, and crucially the traditional domain of female deities, that gives her the necessary impetus.

Hélène Cixous also identifies the need to construct a feminine identity by abolishing the “phallogocentric” language and replacing it with a new feminine language, the language of metaphor and sound, the language of the inner self: “Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end” (*NFF* 248). “Glances,” “smiles,” “laughs,” “blood” all belong to the world beyond “social propriety” which encourages the extension of the known self to endlessness, what Bataille calls the loss of the self in the erotic experience (*Erotism* 31). In this “writing by women,” the so-called “écriture féminine,” there would be no structure or control by traditional grammatical and syntactical logic – a logic based on the systematic, imposed use of the word which reflects the male-dominated structure of society. It is the language of the body, the language of abundance, the language of voice and sound, of music and rhythm: “In women’s speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating [...] that

element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman” (NFF 251).

It would be an exaggeration to say that Lawrence abandons traditional grammatical and syntactical logic. But it would also be wilful blindness not to be struck time and again by how close, otherwise, he is to “écriture feminine.” Lawrence, the male author, invests the erotic with a female aura. The Lawrencian woman abandons herself in an erotic dissolution, not only in the presence of her lover, but crucially, far more often, when she undergoes the apocalyptic experience of the other, mythic self, which is hidden in the depths of the psyche, and is reflected in the eternal natural cycle of Life and Death. Such apocalyptic moments are articulated in an apocalyptic language, poetic for Bataille and Kristeva, female for Cixous and other feminist critics like Luce Irigaray, but in all cases “sacred.”

If such a language has no proper place in a stable patriarchal system of expression, for Kristeva, this language is, not only symptomatic of the fragmented nature of the writing subject, but also of the constant interplay between the stability of the form and its subversion, since language is defined by the interaction between these two modalities, the semiotic and the symbolic. Through this double function of language, the positive female images are never clear-cut identities with a complete, stable ego. They always resist the restriction of a final definition. Shadows of their concrete existence, the Lawrencian women become the creation of the author’s mind – that is, the male, social man, and also, his soul – his female, unconscious, semiotic. This constant transgression of the boundaries, in an attempt to reach otherness, what Rudolph Otto called the *mysterium tremendum* (Otto 12), the fearsome and wonderful object outside the self, is an act of holiness connected with the human desire of “becoming one with God, consummated into eternity” (RDP 265). This demands a dissolution

of the self, a dissolution in which Bataille sees an erotic dimension, and which Lawrence sees as the “consummation” of the ego: “I melt out and am gone into the eternal darkness, the primal creative darkness reigns and I am not and at last *I am*” (266). This consummation is erotic because it ultimately leads to woman: “It is thus, seeking consummation in the utter darkness, that I come to the woman in desire. She is the doorway, she is the gate to the dark eternity of power, the creator’s power” (265).

### **The Lawrencian Heroine and Her Mythicization**

Lawrence’s perception of women often leads him to divinize them, endowing them with qualities resistant to any sort of patriarchal control. These women often turn into sacred, simultaneously earthy and unearthly creatures, richly endowed with revolutionary symbols, but also, at the same time, complete realistic personalities, who deserve our approval and admiration. I have used the term “mythicization” because in my analysis I attempt to suggest another “reading” of the Lawrencian heroine based on the similarities that I have noted between the various facets of the female characters in D.H. Lawrence’s fiction and ancient Greek goddesses such as Athena, Artemis, Hera, Persephone and Aphrodite as well as other, more threatening and subversive mythological figures, such as Medusa, the Maenads and the Erinyes.

It is a matter of record that Lawrence was well acquainted with Greek tragedy, philosophy and religion since the ancients were standard part of his education. In 1909, when he began teaching at the Davidson Road School in Croydon, he read Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, *Electra* and *Medea* and Aristophanes’ *The Frogs*. In subsequent years, his reading included Jane

Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual*, John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* and Gilbert Murray's *The Four Stages of Greek Religion*. In 1911, the year he started writing *Sons and Lovers*, he read Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In 1916, he re-read Herodotus and became acquainted with the poetry of Hesiod. After 1928, he read Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Plutarch (Burwell 161). All these provide possible sources of his knowledge of Greek mythology.

The Lawrencian woman, I suggest, is often endowed with the charm and the power of Greek goddesses, a power immediately perceived by the males she meets. Yet, however poetic these women may be, they are often placed in the position of outsiders. They are alienated creatures, whose creativity enables them to bestow beauty and grace on the commonplace. They are Aphrodites<sup>1</sup>, lost among strange people, yet in search for their sexuality and womanhood, Heras<sup>2</sup> bound in conventional and unsuccessful marriages, independent-minded Artemises<sup>3</sup> who seek to escape and pursue the impulses of their wild nature. In his depiction of women, Lawrence seems to offer the portrait of a mature existential being in search of an identity, which Lawrence labels feminine: "that she bear herself" giving birth to her own identity, he claimed, that is the woman's "supreme and risky fate" (*Study* 48). It is Aphrodite, the erotic self contained in every woman, the hidden subterranean "other," which, once discovered, leads the woman to her eternal union with the "other half," the male, and offers "the complete consciousness," which for Lawrence is "two in one, fused. These are infinite and eternal" (51).

The path these women choose to follow leads them deeper and deeper towards self-knowledge. The transient moments, when the Lawrencian woman abandons herself to her innate instinctual self, come through the mystic of inspiration in nature. Women are alert to

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<sup>1</sup> In the Greek pantheon, Aphrodite was the goddess of beauty and love.

<sup>2</sup> Hera, Zeus' wife, was the patron goddess of the family and married women.

<sup>3</sup> Artemis was the goddess of forests and hunting



their basic nature, “the other,” “the oceanic,” the “IT,” and they are not afraid to obey its call. Here, I must make a reference to the source of these terms as they are all used constantly in my thesis, signalling the irrational, unconscious, unfathomable aspects of the human self. Johannes Fabian, in *Time and Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983), identifies the “other” with the primitive, non-Western, irrational and mystical, signalled by Eastern religion and philosophy, by the savage and the primitive (Torgovnick 223). Jeffrey Masson in *The Oceanic Feeling: The Origins of Religious Sentiment in Ancient India* (1980), states that the source of the term “oceanic” is Romain Rolland’s book *The Life of Ramakrishna* (1927), in which the Catholic theologian and novelist repeats Ramakrishna’s description of himself as “salt, dissolved in the great ocean of universe.” Rolland saw in this statement “the interpretation of the self with the cosmos,” a universal, spiritual experience. It is worth remembering here that, as Marianne Torgovnick points out, “the implications of this book staggered Sigmund Freud and shook his belief in the rightness of civilization” (11), and that Freud himself called the first stages in a child’s development “pre-Oedipal” or “oceanic” (15). Lawrence, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), used the term “IT” to signify “the deepest *whole* self of man, the self in its wholeness” (13), “the unknown inside us or outside us” (26), which is “in touch with the source” (13) to which the human being has to obey, as this “IT” constitutes the “inward voice of religious belief” (12). Thus, for Lawrence, the comprehension of the “IT” by the woman is essentially a religious practice: the knowledge of the psyche, precisely what psychology in its truest, most profound sense aspires to: hearing the soul talk, registering its inner rhythm. For Lawrence, this is the real religious practice that leads to salvation in *this* life and the woman is the priestess, the blessed guide who will lead to salvation both herself and her man.

## The Feminist Approach

Of course, there is an obvious counter argument to the view of femininity as something essentially mysterious and radically different from masculinity. Many feminist thinkers believe that notions such as the “eternal feminine,” “female instinct” and generally the confinement of the female within the “nature of things” support and sustain a crude essentialist approach to gender, which justifies and perpetuates the social injustice and isolation of which woman has historically been a victim. In the *New French Feminisms*, we see the writings of many feminists, contemporary to Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, who have their objections concerning the image of woman as something “other”:

There is no woman, no femininity, no eternal feminine. There is a social group burdened with lowly tasks, despised because it must do these tasks, and so little “specialized” that the language which refers to us and gives us a form simultaneously describes us as the sex, but also as the sex which has no sex, as the Mother-Goddess and the whore, as the muse and the bluestocking. We know that women illustrate a power relation implying a double work load, professional unfitness, the lowest possible salary, the exclusive social responsibility for the care of the elderly, handicapped, and children. Some say: woman. We say: women.  
(*NFF* 230)

Lawrence prefers to concentrate on the idea of “the woman” and “the sex”:

For sex, to me, means the whole of the relationship between

the man and woman. Now this relationship is far greater than we know. We only know a few crude forms—mistress, wife, mother, sweetheart. The woman is like an idol, or a marionette, always forced to play one role or another: sweetheart, mistress, wife, mother. If only we could break up this fixity, and realize the unseizable quality of real woman that a woman is a flow, a river of life, quite different from a man's river of life: and that each river must flow in its own way, though without breaking its bounds: and that the relation of man to woman is the flowing of two rivers side by side, sometimes even mingling, then separating again and travelling on. The relationship is a life-long change and a life-long travelling. And that is sex. (*LE* 302)

The excerpt above is taken from the essay "We Need One Another" (1928), written in the last years of Lawrence's life, and I believe that beyond his complex and controversial relation with gender issues, Lawrence here summarizes what he was trying to dramatize in most of his fiction. However, his ambivalent relationship with women and feminism in general and the way this ambivalence is portrayed in his writing has provoked the reaction of many women writers. His view of woman as "the flow," which runs parallel to that of the male one, together of course with a number of other different symbolic concepts which constantly depict the two sexes as two complementary forces – of which the most controversial one is the woman seen as "the Will to Inertia" with man seen as "the Will to Motion" (*Study* 55) – inform Lawrence's literature, which has often been accused of allocating to women roles inferior and secondary to those of men.

Although the possibility of stereotyping cannot be ruled out, in this thesis I aim to show that the motives behind his depiction of his female characters are, if not necessarily incompatible with stereotyping, in the main, multiple and in many cases irrelevant to it. Keeping in mind that Lawrence was interested in dramatizing his metaphysics, the reader can distinguish the flexibility which underpins these portraits, a flexibility which, one might argue, enables them to surpass any authorial intention and acquire a life of their own.

Lawrence is not interested in merely constructing feminine characters, creative or destructive, healthy or pathological. By providing a number of stories in which realistic human characters are set to interact and thus reveal something of the forces that shape human behaviour and life, the author aspires to give each individual the strength to escape the limitations of a life shaped by modern culture, which has deprived human beings of the instincts with which nature originally endowed them. In this effort, women are his most vital instruments. It is mainly through them that Lawrence will organize his own experiences, fears, internal conflicts and ideas into a single narrative. The task is hard, ambitious and risky, revealing of another important aspect of the painstaking procedure of character construction: in telling the author's story the feminine characters also tell their own and vice-versa, in many cases weaving what is called in this thesis, a sub-plot which runs parallel to the main one.

### **The Men's Reaction: The Male Fear of the Female**

Lawrence believes in the union of the two opposites, the male and the female, as an essential condition for the return to a natural and more innocent state of being, which signals the rebirth of the human being as a substitute for Christian salvation. Thus, this union cannot but

be sacred: “The clear, full inevitable need in me is that, I, the male, meet the female stream which shall carry mine so that the two run to fullest flood, to furthest motion” (*Study* 50). But he is fully aware that the male too will hesitate before abandoning himself to the female other, and through the male eyes, women are often seen as mysterious, demons or deities from another world, who must either be obeyed or brought to subjection. Edward Whitmont, here quoted by Wehr, describes this secret fear of men towards the women whom they cannot explain and understand: “Fear and attraction, in fact, always go together in the confrontation of the world of the absolutely other, the other sex [...] Even in the case of a good relationship between mother and son, the pattern of expectation in regard to women has its element of secret fear” (*The Symbolic Quest* 192). Wehr, commenting on these thoughts, points out that Whitmont’s words “absolutely other” are often used to describe God. Wehr goes on to suggest that “the anima projection renders men incapable of perceiving the humanness of woman” (Wehr 110). This is the theoretical background on which I shall base my approach to *Sons and Lovers*, the subject of the first chapter: Paul Morel projects his anima, to use the Jungian terminology, on the female characters of the story, his mother and his two lovers, Miriam and Clara. All of these women become projections of his fears and defects, mythicized figures and finally the object of his contempt.

*The Rainbow*, the subject of my second chapter, is one of Lawrence’s novels in which he dramatizes once more this male fear of the female Unknown. The Brangwen men approach their female partners with “awe and fear.” In most of the novels, in fact, men can be seen to mythicize women in their effort to “explain” and “know” them. This fear of the female is to be found in most of the novels: There is a striking scene in *Women in Love*, the focus of chapter three, when the exasperated Birkin stones the moon, Cybele, the female goddess, as he struggles to cope with the urge to “submit” to Ursula. Similar scenes can be found in some

of the short stories. In *The Captain's Doll*, on which chapter six is focused, the Captain tries to break female resistance and thwart his lover's ability to see through him. In "Witch à la Mode," the subject of chapter five, when Winifred is perceived by Bernard as a threat, he, unable to understand what is happening, views her as an unreasoning, ruthless witch. In "Tickets Please," discussed in the same chapter, John Thomas' life is threatened by a group of enraged women. All these scenes exemplify the fear of women to be found in so many male characters in Lawrence's fiction.

### **The "Primitive" and the Lawrencian Heroine**

It is important to note that although the Lawrencian heroine is portrayed through a language which rarely, if ever, bears any resemblance to that usually employed by white male writers speaking about the savage or – indeed – the female, yet, she does not stand as a late defender of the lost innocent awareness of the primitive, which Lawrence certainly values, considering its loss, not just regrettable, but positively crippling. She is there to embody the savage holiness, this fundamentally different, instinctual awareness of life, which becomes ever more plain as it is accompanied by her aloofness, simultaneously fed by and feeding her alienation from her surroundings, a situation that enhances her mystery and suggests a feminine individuality which often raises her to the privileged and solitary status of a "goddess."

This yearning for a return to a primitive, healthier response to the cosmos, which is explored in *The Plumed Serpent*, the subject of chapter seven, is often indirectly yet forcefully demonstrated by Lawrence through long, lyrical descriptions of nature in whose nearness his characters often let themselves be carried away and dissolve into the great

vastness of the Universe. This desire to join the core of existence translates into a desire for the primitive sensibility inscribed with the utopian passions of a human being enchanted not by the doubtful romanticism of the primitive life *per se*, but the aura of an unattained sacredness. It is impossible not to associate such an attitude with the affection for the supernatural, characteristic of early Romanticism, which also saw nature as the realm of the mysterious and the magical and a portal to a heightened, truer mode of being. Lawrence, the poet-prophet, prepares his heroines for an inner journey, whose end cannot be anything but the discovery of the authentic self. He puts himself forward as a watchman who must speak of the darkness that is Western civilization at a time of profound crisis – what Wordsworth called in *The Prelude* “this time / of dereliction and dismay” and “this melancholy waste of hopes o’erthrown” (*NAEL* 7).

This inner journey is not a radical metaphor for an escape, a sequence of dreams, however imaginative, comforting or poetic. The journey is real and results in definite, important changes: the heroine, as we have seen, undergoes a clear transformation; she gains access to the mysterious unknown area of the self, breathes bravely the fresh air of the numinous, experiences both anxiety and ecstasy. Each one embarks on this journey into the deep dark interior without feeling either a strong attraction for the metaphysics of a return to the primitive, or even entirely comfortable with their sudden decision. The main motive seems to be the desire to escape from a domestic and social slavery, to get away from an environment which can offer neither nourishment nor hope – that has been reduced to a waste land that contains nothing worth salvaging. But it is also a deeper need for self-definition that compels these women to seek freedom for both body and soul. It is a need felt rather than articulated or even precisely understood, which compels them to traverse the underworld of the psyche to recover their inner sight, as for Lawrence, this is the only way to reclaim life. Kate’s

objections in *The Plumed Serpent* cannot obscure her strength of character, the determination of this alienated woman to venture into different worlds with the courage and self-assurance of an ancient goddess. Even when she is the object of a sacrifice, as in “The Woman Who Rode Away,” the subject of chapter eight, the Lawrencian heroine seems to act according to her impulses alone, to do what *she* feels she must do. Instead of being overtaken by fear of the unknown, her soul goes out fearlessly to merge with it, and finds pleasure as well as profit in this merging. Lou in *St. Mawr*, the subject of chapter nine, seeks alienation in order to find real happiness through the exploration of the self and Daphne in *The Ladybird*, (found in chapter six together with “The Borderline” and *The Captain’s Doll*) obeys her Dionysian instinct and becomes the bride in the dark for Count Dionys.

The next important question is whether Lawrence identifies this place, the feminine psyche, as an otherness and deliberately adopts a specifically female voice when in need to journey into the unknown. There can be no doubt that Lawrence does not view this retreat into the primitive female territory as a deliberate deviation from an established male way of writing. He slips smoothly, naturally and probably unconsciously into this feminine other, and this change of voice constitutes one of the most extraordinary and attractive elements in his work. It is a rare, astonishing trait that Lawrence adopts a feminine way of expression, l’écriture feminine, when he comes to describe intense erotic scenes with emphasis on the female orgasm as in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the focus of chapter eleven, or moments of ecstasies in nature, when the heroine transgresses herself and abandons to the other, as in the case of Alvina in *The Lost Girl*, the subject of chapter four. Those fictional characteristics of Lawrence are present (among others) throughout his creative life and worthy of the most thorough examination.



## Chapter One

### *Sons and Lovers: Paul Morel's Process to Self-Discovery*

“And oh women, beware the mother's boy!” (RDP 216)

*Sons and Lovers* (1913) is generally considered Lawrence's autobiographical, indeed, *Oedipal* novel, in which he describes his youth, dwelling long on his relationship to his mother and the problematic bond she cultivated between herself and her son, a bond which is presented in the novel as a source of great confusion and pain to the hero of the story, young Paul Morel, especially with regard to his sexuality.

The writing of *Sons and Lovers* involved enough false starts, interruptions and sweeping revisions to suggest there were some serious difficulties and it is only reasonable to assume that these were not merely technical. Lawrence started work on it in September or early October 1910, during the final period of his mother's illness, and then abandoned it. In March 1911, with the trauma of his mother's death still fresh, he began a new draft which was also abandoned. Another attempt was made in November of 1911, and it was almost a year later, in late autumn 1912, when, strengthened by Frieda's important input and support, and after extensive revisions suggested by Edward Garnett, his editor at Duckworth, he finally finished the novel and changed the title from *Paul Morel* to the far more significant *Sons and Lovers*. By then he was well aware that he had written a quasi-autobiographical novel which would have deep and disturbing personal significance for a great many people. “It's the tragedy of thousands of young men in England” (L i. 476), he wrote to Edward Garnett.

## Lawrence and his Anima: The Feminine Element

I would like to begin by pointing to a comment made by H.M. Daleski in *The Forked Flame* (1965). Referring to Lawrence's later misgivings about the portrayal of his parents in *Sons and Lovers*, especially that of his father, to whom Lawrence thought he had not done justice, Daleski states that Lawrence, the artist, "penetrated to the truth which the son subsequently thought he had not seen, for the impression which Mr and Mrs Morel in fact make is not notably different from that which Lawrence had of his father and mother in later life"

(Daleski 43). One's first impression from *Sons and Lovers* is that the father is a coarse, rather violent man, who bullies his wife and has more time for drinking than he has for his children, while the sensitive, high-minded and long-suffering mother keeps the family together, resorts to her children for emotional sustenance and raises her sons to be the kind of husbands she would like. Problematic as this seems in retrospect, there is no doubt that what Paul Morel and Lawrence are, is far closer to her ideal than the model provided by the father. As John Worthen points out, "He [Lawrence] also found himself, in this final version of the novel, maintaining the status of a narrator who frequently shares the attitude of moral superiority in Mrs Morel" (Worthen 438). Yet, at the end, when Paul's deep-seated problems have become evident, some of the reader's sympathy has shifted towards the father and away from the mother, who the author, looking back in perhaps not altogether conscious anger, shows to be ruthlessly domineering and subtly manipulative. Lawrence's sympathy with his father is never explicit, but emerges by default as the son moves away from his mother, and reaches the reader like a silent, almost subconscious communication that stretches across the novel like a magnetic field invisibly influencing perceptions and reactions. This element – which does not seem deliberate enough, perhaps even conscious enough, to be confidently called a technique – is an important and typically Lawrencian trait, which allows the reader a glimpse

of a deeper stratum of emotions, all the more intense for not being explicitly articulated. It is an unruly counterpoint of a distinct, dissenting voice, offering different points of view that enrich the novel but cannot provide the characters, possibly even the author, with any relief. Lawrence's own later misgivings alone would make this clear.

My contention is that this sustained and fundamental duality is not confined to Lawrence's attitude towards the parents, but extends to all major characters in *Sons and Lovers*. It is a process that satisfies both the author's wish to move beyond the narrowly personal and develop in his fiction his dualistic metaphysics (centred upon the conflict between the mind and the body, the Apollonian and the Dionysian), as well as Paul Morel's need to dramatize his internal conflicts. Both Paul and Lawrence try to "repeat" and "present" their emotions in order "to be master of them" (*L* ii. 90). Though the writing of fiction is a long, deliberate, and highly conscious process, subconscious forces play a major part too, especially in a novel as painfully personal as this one.

I do not mean to suggest that a full-scale (and inevitably retrospective) psychoanalytical approach towards Lawrence is either desirable in this context or indeed possible, but I would venture to say that, in my opinion, C.G. Jung has provided insights and concepts that can be very useful for the reader of *Sons and Lovers*. The first I would like to invoke is the well-known concept of the artist as a person "driven to develop all sorts of defects – ruthlessness, selfishness ('autoeroticism'), vanity, and other infantile traits [...] inferiorities [that] are the only means by which it [the artist's creative impulse] can maintain its vitality" (*SMAL* 120). This – obviously – cannot be blindly applied to all artists, but it rings true when applied to both Paul Morel and Lawrence, at least in the context of this quasi-autobiographical novel. Another concept is that of the unconscious mind and its Jungian division into two parts: the

personal unconscious and the collective unconscious, of which the personal is a reservoir of material that was once conscious but has been forgotten or suppressed, and the collective is the deepest level of the psyche containing the accumulation of inherited psychic structures and archetypal experiences. Lawrence was well aware of these forces. There is a striking (and oft-quoted) passage in a letter he wrote to his friend, the barrister Gordon Campell, in which he describes how he experiences his role as a writer:

It really means something – I *wish* I could express myself – this feeling that one is not only a little individual living a little individual life, but that one is in oneself the whole of mankind, and ones fate is the fate of the whole of mankind. Not me – the little, vain, personal D.H. Lawrence – but that unnameable me which is not vain nor personal, but strong, and glad, and ultimately sure, but so blind, so groping, so tongue-tied, so staggering. (*L* ii. 302)

This “unnameable me” can be seen as the unconscious, personal and collective, this deeper domain within the human soul, the realm of emotions and urges, which also transcends the personal psyche, and which every artist must tap in the art of creation. According to Jung, the collective unconscious in the unconscious of the male finds expression as a *feminine* inner personality: the anima, the total of all unconscious feminine psychological qualities a male possesses, and which is one of the sources of creative ability.

As a character, Paul Morel has his own flaws and tends to see many of these personal defects (vanity, selfishness etc.) in the others, especially the people closest to him – and these are often things he “detests” about them. This is the psychological phenomenon C.G. Jung

has called a “projection”: “a process where an unconscious characteristic [...] is seen as belonging to another person or object” (Snowden 57-8). For Jung, this projection constitutes also “a process of dissimilation, by which a subjective content becomes alienated from the subject and is, so to speak, embodied in the object. The subject gets rid of painful, incompatible contents by projecting them” (Segal 242). The practice tends to exacerbate rather than lighten Paul’s troubles, but this is neither surprising nor irrelevant. Paul did what (the author decided that) he could. Given that Lawrence is only a slightly older (albeit considerably more mature and self-aware) Paul, it is hardly surprising that he as the author and narrator, does something quite similar with his characters, especially the female ones. But what is not effective for Paul is extremely effective for the novel and the novelist.

It is my contention, that Lawrence’s handling of the important female characters in the novel is intimately connected with the feminine unconscious, and the phenomenon of projection, which, relatively crude in Paul Morel, in Lawrence takes the shape of an intricate and consistent mythicization of the female. It is truly remarkable that the projection of a male personality (albeit through his feminine anima) onto the female characters endows them with special characteristics characteristic of, if not unique, to their sex: acute intuition, strong, infallible instincts and close affinity with nature. These women, however flawed, are by their nature the guardians of real life: life in the body; life in emotion and feeling. They are the preservers of the deep mysterious human resources that can lead to regeneration.

## Mrs Morel's Mythicization and Paul's Self-Becoming

Mrs. Morel is central to *Sons and Lovers* and it is fascinating to observe how Lawrence mingles and presents the different facets of her personality over time from the bright young delicate woman captured by the vibrant animal magnetism of her dark earthy husband, to the unhappy wife, the woman trapped in an environment hostile to her impulses and wishes, to the caring mother who also makes huge emotional demands on her sons, the constant sufferer and the relentless tormentor. The woman, trapped in a marriage that fails to be what it should, the sacred union in the flesh, will be a familiar Lawrencian theme, but this trapped woman will never break free, will not even try to except indirectly through her children, and so will remain deeply unhappy and consequently make her nearest and dearest unhappy – despite her best intentions.

A first reading of the novel may suggest that Lawrence's feelings for his mother, though intense, are not really unconventional. He has pity for her troubles, admires her courage, feels it is his duty to protect her. She is the innocent victim of her husband's uncomprehending coarseness, who needs her son's love and tenderness, and whom young Paul cannot bear to disappoint by falling below her high expectations. But beneath these commendable feelings, there lie other darker ones: Mrs Morel's depiction anticipates (and lies beneath) that of the monstrous mother described almost a decade later in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), who "makes man discover that cradles should not be rocked, in order that her hands may be left free – she is now a queen of the earth, and inwardly a fearsome tyrant [...]. Ultimately she tears him [the man] to bits" (*FU* 99). Beneath the positive features, Lawrence weaves the

frightening portrait of the mother-Medusa,<sup>1</sup> who feeds on her sons' vitality by forcing them to replace their father in her affections. But in Paul's adolescent mind, Mrs Morel is still the supreme Goddess, the good Mother, "the door for our in-going and our out-coming" (*Foreword* 471), and though he does realize the power she has over him, he prefers to see in it the mysterious force of the numinous. Unsurprisingly, Mrs Morel is the embodiment of a mystery far more complex and perilous than all the other women in the novel.

The stark realism of the novel is relieved and complemented by poetic passages that emphasize this mysterious element, and portray the female in mystical connection with the other. Mrs. Morel's first direct association with this is in a significant encounter with nature, when after a bad quarrel, her husband locks her out of the house and she finds herself alone in the peaceful darkness of the garden. There she loses all sense of consciousness and experiences something akin to dissolution of the self: "[...] her self melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time, the child too melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon" (*SL* 34). Mrs Morel never articulates her feelings; she just enjoys the great rejuvenating emotion of the moment which appeases her troubled soul and brings her peace that lasts well after the moment is gone. Before going to sleep that night, "she smiled faintly to see her face all smeared with the yellow dust of lilies. She brushed it off and at last lay down. For some time her mind continued snapping and jetting sparks" (36). Obviously, Mrs Morel is still under the spell of her mystical communion with nature in the garden. Lawrence wants her to have undergone a beneficial transfiguration which finally enables her to put up with the bad feeling at home and her husband's hostility. But what could be seen in isolation as a trait of one

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1. According to the Greek Mythology, Medusa was one of the three mermaids who would turn into stone any mortal who would dare to look at her face. She was killed by King Perseus with the help of goddess Athena.

female character is in fact something attributed to many Lawrencian women. This scene anticipates many similar scenes in later novels suggestive of the mystical ties between the female and the nature. This is not to suggest that Mrs Morel is a potential prophetess like Ursula in *The Rainbow* (1915), who could articulate the feelings derived from such moments of ecstasy in terms of the mystical otherness of nature, or that she is to undergo an initiation into her “other” self that will fundamentally change her outlook to life, like Lady Daphne in *The Ladybird* (1923) or Kate in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). But she does seem to be their not-too-distant ancestor.

In the following chapter, there is another moment of such a union with nature, when Mrs Morel experiences similar ecstatic feelings. This time the whole scene is imbued with a distinctly religious symbolism, with Mrs Morel shown as the Virgin Mary holding baby Paul in her arms: “She held it close to her face and breast.” She goes so far as to imagine her boy as a little Joseph before whom nature would offer respects. Soon after this, in a moment of adoration, she offers him to the sun: “She thrust the infant forward to the crimson, throbbing sun, almost with relief. She saw him lift his little fist. Then she put him to her bosom again, ashamed almost of her impulse to give him back again whence he came” (51). Here Mrs Morel conducts what can easily be seen as a short mystical ritual. Lawrence invests her with the role of an ancient priestess offering her own son to the Sun god in a moment of ecstasy. The moment is an apocalyptic one as she realizes that she has no love for her husband anymore and the strong bond that binds her to her infant son has not been cut. Here, she is the Mother who has absolute power over her child, a pagan goddess who can give and take life. In these two scenes, Mrs Morel is shown to possess a metaphysical sensitivity, an instinctual ability to perceive and submit to the sacredness of the moment.



In the description of the visit to the Lincoln Cathedral, Lawrence depicts his mother (through young Paul's eyes) with great, poetic sensibility. While still in the train, Paul already feels that his mother "was slipping away from him," and then in the cathedral, she seems to undergo a mystical transformation: "Her blue eyes were watching the cathedral quietly. She seemed again to be beyond him. Something in the eternal repose of the uplifted cathedral, blue and noble against the sky was reflected in her, something of the fatality" (280). Here, once more, she is shown as something otherworldly, a being akin to divinity, remote from this world, strange and wonderful as an angel. It is impossible to avoid the thought that Paul's own fear of losing her is being reflected in this striking mythicization of her.

The process of mythicization of the mother follows a dual route: on the one hand, Lawrence depicts her as a paragon of maternal love, devotion and self-sacrifice, and by interpolating incidents in which she is shown to be endowed with mysterious, otherworldly qualities, suggests that she is something greater and nobler than a mere human. The narrator does not endorse this view unequivocally – sometimes these qualities are attributed to young Paul's perceptions but are powerful intimations of her mythical status. On the other hand, the son, tacitly, not wholly consciously, yet unmistakably, revolts against her, repelled by the enormous, suffocating emotional burden she has placed upon him. Consequently, he considers her responsible for what he correctly perceives as his emotional castration and his inability to understand and satisfy his essential inner needs.

On the evidence of *Sons and Lovers*, neither Lawrence as the author nor Paul as a character appears to master his deepest feelings towards the mother. Paul never utters a single word against her gentle but unyielding rule, trying to contain his violently conflicting

emotions, wildly alternating from admiration and compassion to anger and despair. At the end he simply kills her – not metaphorically, which is clearly an impossibility, as his whole existence has been defined by her and will never be entirely free of her influence, but literally, albeit with the compassionate aim of putting her out of her misery (the pains of terminal cancer). This act of killing, promptly justified by Paul as euthanasia and never acknowledged by him as a release for him too, is the breaking point, the moment when this second, dissenting voice that runs like counterpoint through the narrative takes over the action. Here Paul's unspoken source of frustration is finally brought forth; her conversion from angel to menace, although dramatic, has been practically unconscious. Both personae constructed for the mother, the idealized Madonna and the paralyzing Medusa, are suggestive of the need shared by Paul and Lawrence: at once to do her justice but also to see his own pain and suffering mirrored in her. His mother's story, which for Lawrence becomes a story of suffering and self-denial, is also the narrative of his own emotional lack of fulfillment, a desperate projection which reveals and partly explains Paul's tension and frustration at his inability to find a satisfactory solution to these troubles. Though the confusion of his feelings regarding his mother will not end, her death – in sharp contrast to the conventional pieties – brings him an immediate and profound sense of release which is apparent in the famously positive ending.

### **Miriam and Clara: The Spirit and the Flesh**

Miriam, Paul's first love and muse, though abandoned, is to some extent both a spiritual kin and a mysterious benevolent force in his life. Miriam's real kingdom is nature, where she reigns, a lonely Artemis, the genuine, independent goddess of forests and hunting, with a genuine intimacy with all natural things, away from and largely indifferent to the brutal

realities of the human world: “To her flowers appealed with such strength she felt she must make them part of herself. When she bent and breathed a flower, it was as if she and the flower were loving each other. Paul hated her for this” (*SL* 210). Miriam magically sustains the beauty and the fertility of spring. She likes withdrawing into nature, but this solitude is actually a wordless way to express what is hidden in her soul. She wants Paul to accompany her and complete her natural kingdom: “Almost passionately she wanted to be with him when he stood before the flowers. They were going to have a communion together, something that thrilled her, something holy” (195). Lawrence may not explicitly ascribe these identities as Greek goddesses to his characters, but he clearly recognizes the religious dimension of their association with the natural world.

But Paul, although a lover of nature himself, soon feels uncomfortable. At the beginning, his need to be romantic and also admired and adored results to an attraction by the “Botticelli angel” (215) he sees in Miriam. But as this cannot sustain him for long, he starts seeing her in a very different light: a girl “cut off from ordinary life by her religious intensity which made the world for her either a nunnery garden, or a Paradise, where sin and knowledge were not, or else an ugly, cruel thing” (179). He is repelled by her love of flowers and he wants to escape when he smells the “white, virgin scent” of the ivory roses. Nature has a feminine chastity which Paul finds exciting but ultimately unsettling: “a delicious delirium in his veins” (196), an experience the young man can recognize as important but cannot explain. Miriam belongs to the “enormous orange moon” which makes his blood “burst into flames”; she is a mysterious figure “deeply moved and religious,” (215-6) watching him from the darkness, a figure to which Paul is attracted but which he still somehow fears. He cannot stand her chastity; he is irritated by the very archetypes he himself assigns to her; he is “disgusted” by her “purity,” a purity he finds forbidding. It is surely not without significance

that later, in the *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914), Lawrence would write about Botticelli's religious paintings the following: "It is as if the female, instead of being the great, unknown Positive, towards which all must flow, became the great Negative, the centre which denied all motion" (65). It is this negativity that Lawrence discerns and denies in Miriam's chaste sacredness; for him, she is the negative female who denies her femininity and therefore her mystery can inspire only fear. Paul is afraid of this eternally adolescent fairy maiden, of her female power and energy – interestingly enough, in much the same way that he will later come to fear the very different Clara.

Still, it is acknowledged that "in contact with Miriam he gained insight"; she "urged" the "warmth" he derived from his mother "into intensity like a white light" (SL 190). Miriam's spirituality is not without a positive dimension. Indeed, it is a life-giving gift. She can intuitively direct Paul and offers him crucial insights into his artistic work, pointing out with words that are both warm and true, what he had wordlessly, unconsciously produced. Miriam provides support that is important for his development as an artist, in his quest to acquire the knowledge and the discipline to turn every-day experiences and emotions into works of art. She successfully responds to one of Paul's needs, that for a spiritual woman – and Paul values her for this.

Paul, of course, grows tired of Miriam. Her spirituality and benign influence on his progress as an artist are not enough. She cannot satisfy his need to be erotically consumed as a male. Miriam is too "sane" and controlled, too "hypersensitive" (198) to find joy in the harsher realities of the blood, to offer Paul what he desperately (believes he) needs at this point in his life. Lawrence agrees: his verdict is that Miriam has committed the most serious crime a woman can commit: she has neglected her womanhood. In his later fiction, Lawrence

would create heroines filled with a yearning to discover and celebrate this lost womanhood, women who suffer from the loss of the instinct, the loss that has deprived them of their true femaleness, women who feel that their life is meaningless until they can restore their injured sexuality with the help of a man-initiator. But Miriam is not as privileged as these later Lawrencian heroines. Paul functions as her ruthless critic rather than the initiator who will help her discover her true female core. Thus she is finally left behind, as Paul heeds the call of the blood and seeks real passion.

Clara appears just in time to fill this need. Lawrence's description of her as the very opposite of Miriam is immediately suggestive of her significance: "a rather striking woman, blonde, with a sullen expression, and a defiant carriage" (*SL* 222). Full of sensuous female energy, Clara, with her large breasts, heavy, dun-coloured hair and imposing stature, has the magnificence of an ancient pagan goddess since

wherever she was, seemed to make things look paltry and insignificant. When she was in the room, the kitchen seemed too small and mean altogether [...]. All the Leivers were eclipsed like candles. Yet she was perfectly amiable, but indifferent, and rather hard. (269)

Although the split between the Flesh and the Spirit is a relatively new notion for Lawrence at this stage, Clara here is the Flesh, the passionate woman of the unconscious, in opposition to Miriam who seems to represent the Spirit. Both Lawrence and Paul see in her the forgotten knowledge of the Flesh, the knowledge in the blood, the opposite of the Mind and the Word, not the mortal knowledge, but the knowledge that gives life. Clara is strikingly similar to the

capitalized figure of the Woman in the *Foreword*. In his reworking of the Christian Trinity, the Father (who, for Lawrence, should be more properly called the Mother) is the creator, the eternal agent of creation, the feminine element with the power to give birth (*Foreword* 470). Paul needs her “warmth and nourishment”; he “must consume his own flesh” and “destroy himself” (*SL* 472), but this is a challenge he is not ready to take up yet.

Clara combines a number of significant characteristics: she is intensely attractive, though not always aware of her power; she is fiercely independent, considering herself as a woman apart from her class, and a woman of passion. Yet, she is also “a sleeping beauty,” a “dormant woman,” the “*femme incomprise*” (*SL* 361), who never had the real thing which would fertilize her soul and help her accomplish the sacred mission to serve the instinct. She has become another victim of mechanization and has forgotten about her intuitive power. Paul sees her through mystified eyes, as another lost goddess who needs to awaken to her sacred female self and experience “the real, real flame of feeling through another person” (361-2). Clara is a portrait of the modern early twentieth-century woman, who, though possessing all female intuition and wisdom, has her womanhood destroyed by the rage of mechanization: she needs to be awakened to the “dark” but real self of hers. She feels horror for this darkness, this unknown and unfamiliar feminine part of hers. She is reluctant to accept her real nature which Paul thinks he sees so clearly. Her wild instinct, her female consciousness, is bound by civilization: “She seemed denied and deprived of so much. And her arm moved mechanically, that should never have been subdued to a mechanism, and her head was bowed to the lace, that never should have been bowed” (304). Unlike Miriam, who is remote from the modern world and its evils, Clara’s wild, female psyche is held and tortured by industrialization and the new norms it has imposed on human life. But her femininity is a mysterious, incalculable force that prevails: “she yielded herself to her fate

because it was too strong for her [...] she was in the grip of something bigger than herself [...].” At the theatre, Paul feels her beauty intensely: “Her beauty was a torture to him,” and he hates Clara for “submitting him to this torture of nearness” (375). He cannot wholly explain his attraction to her and though he “perceives” her through the instinct and not through the mind, he still seeks to “understand” her.

At this initial stage in the formation of his dualism Lawrence, like Paul, feels that his mind and consciousness are in danger, and will soon be defeated by the Flesh, the unconscious, the emotion, the unknown area of the human soul which is the dominion of passion and the sensual forces of the instinct. Paul fears what Lawrence would subsequently call in his *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914) “the leap into the unknown, as from a cliff’s edge” (48). It is the leap into the “other,” the leap into the opposite bank required from the man in order to meet the female. For Lawrence this union between man and woman, the two “opposites,” is indispensable for the process of the human beings towards self-discovery. This is especially difficult for the man; it takes great courage to break age-old convention and abandon himself to the female, and at one point, Paul feels truly awed before the tremendous presence of the woman, the irresistible, powerful, mysterious female source of life: “He was Clara’s white heavy arms, her throat, her moving bosom. That seemed to be himself. Then away somewhere the play went on, and he was identified with that also. There was no himself” (*SL* 375).

But Paul cannot yet allow this dissolution of his self into the other. He cannot let go of his identity, not least because he is still searching for it. He feels attracted by her femaleness – what Lawrence acknowledges in his *Study* as a cosmic, universal concept in polar opposition and balance with maleness – but he is not yet ready to surrender himself to the

Woman; he is not ready to cross the boundary which separates them in order to reach and unite with the other. Thus, he is not able to articulate to himself the awe and the fear which Clara raises in his soul.

In his relationships with his mother, Miriam and Clara, Paul is forced to explore the nature of the construction of an identity. This is intimately related to the realization of his manhood, a goal that has him oscillate between the demands of intellect and the challenge of the liberating surrender to the life of the body and the emotions. The mythicization of the women close to him serves as a device to help make things manageable, but also as a metaphor for his own complicated efforts to find a satisfactory means of self-expression, to make his voice heard – first and primarily by his own self. His split between the Word and the Flesh, the intellect and the unconscious, attraction and repulsion, is a split which not only underlines the nature of his own internal conflict, but also determines the dualism of Lawrence's metaphysics. Miriam's spirituality and Clara's sensuality illustrate young Paul's dilemma, torn as he is between the two different modes of living. Living in the mind is his first condition, impressed on him by his mother, but this, he feels, brings about pain, the withering of the Flesh, and consequently of the feminine, which Paul tries to understand and embrace with no success. His ardent need and desire is to save his anima, the Woman inside him, and the only one who can help him achieve this, is the real woman. Thus, Miriam has to be discarded, but even Clara, who represents the Flesh, has to be left behind. Paul eventually dismisses her and denies any bond with her. But he retains her female warmth, which he worships as a dark inexplicable substance. Clara belongs to the dark – as the Flesh and the body is the dark, passionate other of human existence – and her dark side is actually an important part of the attraction Paul feels for her. Through her, Paul is baptized in the Flesh and encounters the elemental feminine nature. Clara represents an inert form of deep



instinctual life; she is endowed with an untamed female power; she is great and mysterious; she is dazzlingly numinous:

He lifted his head and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him. And he put his face down on her throat, afraid. What was she. (398)

Clara stands as an incarnation of the eternal Woman, and to consider her conventionally would be to diminish her symbolic status. Had Lawrence narrowed this significance of hers, and turned her into an ordinary woman who would finally live with Paul within the conventions of the community, the meaning of the novel would have been restricted. Paul needs to leave Clara to pursue his own emotional progress into maturity and self knowledge. He surrenders himself temporarily to this unknowable female force, but he does not need to retain control of it, nor will he allow it any permanent control over himself.

### **Lawrence's "Essentialism" (?)**

This complex and original delineation of the female has attracted the accusations of critics that he is "showing a perverse kind of sexual feeling [...] One which rejoices in failure, unhappiness and physical suffering in woman; all states that allow the male to dominate" (Pullin 65). However, it seems fairly clear that the depiction of his female characters is hardly stereotypically misogynistic. On the contrary, as Carol Siegel has claimed, it stands in direct opposition to the Aristotelian tenet that "only man has an essence." Lawrence seeks to discover the particular feminine essence, the female core in human existence. This might be

seen as an essentialist view, but if it is, it “resembles Irigaray’s in its affirmation of a female essence accessible to women as individuals.” Lawrence believes in femaleness as a universal principle and insists that it lies within the woman’s instinctive wisdom to discover and preserve it as the most valuable gift of nature. This essentialism (unfashionable though it now is) has a wholly positive meaning, as it “informs his female characters’ parodies of the male characters’ ideological statements” (Siegel 14). The woman stands on her own with an awareness of people and things different from that of the dominant male, with a unique attitude towards life and the world. It is woman’s “hensureness,” “the real bliss for every female” (*Phoenix II* 554), her “terrible logic of emotion,” which eventually “will work out the smashing of the pattern” men try to impose upon her (*Phoenix II* 537).

Both Miriam and Clara make very perceptive and creative parodies of Paul’s ideological grossness, smashing all the stereotypical models he attempts to impose upon them. Their commentary on his behaviour and his meticulously constructed self-image is accurate and sharp. The dialogues he has with both of them at the time when they are drifting apart are telling. Paul is constantly the one surprised. Their success in resisting the male efforts to impose identities on them, highlights Lawrence’s capacity to weave this subtle counterpoint of voices dissenting to the dominant perception of the protagonist. In this case, the women’s rejection comprises not only the conventional models and patterns of behaviour but also Paul’s ingenious constructions as he tries to find through them his path to self-discovery.

Although in this novel Lawrence does not explore the theme of a powerful woman who manages to reclaim her true womanhood – neither Miriam nor Clara are made to scale such heights – he allows the reader to see clearly that both these women have refused to succumb to bald stereotyping and trite categorization – either Paul’s or the narrator’s. Clara has her

self-image which she will not renounce even in the face of Paul's virulent criticism. She reacts energetically to his sarcastic comments about her involvement in feminist activities and rebukes him with intelligence and even sophistication when he tries to correct her.

Miriam is shown to have known all the time about Paul's effort to fight her off – in fact before he was fully aware of it. When Paul portrays her as a frustrated and bitter woman, ready to manipulate the man she desires in order to keep him, her retort is almost magisterial: “Very well, he would have to go. But he would come back, when he had tired of his new sensation” (*SL* 342-3). It is possible that Lawrence's analysis of Miriam's thoughts and feelings may reflect his tendency to develop characters “according to his own fictional logic – not according to the patterns of real life” (Worthen 449). However, there is nothing to disallow a reading which recognizes Miriam's ability to interpret Paul's outbursts against her accurately, discern his tendency to underestimate and bully her, and understand all his unuttered innermost feelings about her. At the end she has managed to see “his littleness” and “his meanness”; “she had summed him up” (*SL* 342). Something similar occurs at the end of his relationship with Clara. “Clara thought she had never seen him look so small and mean. He was as if trying to get himself into the smallest possible compass [...] there seemed something false about him, and out of tune” (450). These are surprising and unpleasant discoveries for Paul, whose continuing assumptions about their feelings towards him founder on the women's independent judgement and perceptiveness, which allow them to see through his surface consciousness, decipher correctly the hidden language of the unconscious and react with the true wisdom of the emotion.

There are several occasions in the novel when the male understanding of the female character, encumbered by his own troubles and limitations, amounts to a mythicization that

falls short of an accurate and coherent female identity and therefore provides him with a less than thoroughly realistic perspective. Yet, in almost every case, all doubt is shattered as a woman emerges, guided by pure emotion and infallible instinct, to sweep away false impressions about her. This time, mythicization, as an expression of human archetype, acts as a clarifying, restorative agent.

## Chapter Two

### *The Rainbow: The Bible of the Sexes*

Immediately after the publication of *Sons and Lovers* in 1913, Lawrence finished his *Study of Thomas Hardy* (November 1914) and started rereading the draft of an older novel, “The Sisters” which he had began in March of 1913. While revising and rewriting “The Sisters” (of which Lawrence made three drafts), he also changed the title into the “The Wedding Ring.” The full draft of the story, completed in 1915, was split in two separate novels which were to be among his most famous works: *The Rainbow*, published in September of 1915, and *Women in Love*, published in 1920. Lawrence was “working *frightfully* hard” (*L* ii. 239) to complete this “metaphysical” novel where he would retell the biblical story in Christian theological language but “as reflected in human experience.” Basing the novel on notions, symbols and imagery he had already introduced in the *Study of Thomas Hardy*, Lawrence develops a view of character very different from the “stable ego” of conventional fiction. Like “the sons of God and the daughters of men” in Genesis, they become “allotropic” (*L* ii.183) characters, stirred by deep and unpredictable forces open to the sacred in the Batailleian sense (see Introduction).

That the complexities of love and marriage are sacred is one of the main themes of the book. In a letter to Sally Hopkins on Christmas day, 1912, Lawrence called himself “the priest of love” (*L* i. 493), acknowledging in this perpetual, romantic feeling the essential bond that unites man and woman, the interdependency between the two sexes which had little to do with the Christian idea of love. In another letter to Henry Savage in November 1913,

Lawrence would declare sex as “the fountain head where life bubbles up into the person from the unknown –” (*L* ii.102). The novel places David’s sacred yearning for God on the same level as the attraction a man feels for “the great woman he adores” (101). This image of David reaching for the woman who he has hailed as “God” is also found in his *Study*: “And he [David] hails her Father, Almighty, God, Beloved, Strength, hails her in his own image. And with hand outstretched, fearful and passionate, he reaches to her” (*Study* 57). Love has a religious intensity for Lawrence; it is a vital, essential relationship which binds one human being to another and both of them to the Universe. He distinguishes between two kinds of love: the first is one which “make[s] the man feel proud, splendid. It is a powerful stimulant to him, the female administered to him” (99). There’s a danger, however, in this sort of love, that woman can feel used and become “hard and external, and inwardly jaded, tired out” (99-100). This kind of love for Lawrence (which he also associates with the institution of marriage) “devitalizes a race, and makes it barren” (100). What Lawrence calls real love is when man sees the woman as “the unknown, the undiscovered, into which I [the man] plunge to discovery, losing myself” (99). The man must give himself to the woman “like a man who gives himself to the sea”(100) This union must be a real *hieros gamos* (the “sacred marriage” in Greek), an experience of rebirth which has nothing to do with the custom of Christian love and marriage.

This sacred union however is not without difficulties. Lawrence engages with the difficult task of exploring the struggle and resulting anguish of man and woman in their efforts to free themselves of false manners and ideologies and realize their true, sublime selfhood. Lawrence believed that “Christianity should teach us now, that after our Crucifixion, and the darkness of the tomb, we shall rise again in the flesh, you, I, as we are today, resurrected in the bodies, and acknowledging the Father, and glorifying in his power,

like Job” (*L* ii 249). Real love for Lawrence is a sort of resurrection and the body is the sacred place where this resurrection will take place, a belief which Lawrence elaborated further in his later novels and stories and particularly in “The Man Who Died” (1927) and in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928). However it is in *The Rainbow* that Lawrence starts to explore the way to sexual regeneration, by making women the main protagonists.

The women in the novel seem to have a sacred mission. They are the first to understand that life is something holy and they try to communicate this truth to the men of the story. They become the mediators between the man and the “Whole” (*L* ii 248) and carry the message of the resurrection in the body and flesh which opposes the great Christian message of taming the body and its needs in order to gain spiritual salvation. All of them are mysterious and fascinating: Lydia comes from another world and she fascinates Tom with her Persephonic, mysterious nature. Anna is the untamed female, self-assured in her own femaleness, distant and alluring who puzzles Will, and Ursula is the uncompromising female who resists meaningless commitments with all her heart. Each one is sacred in her own individuality and each of them seeks to understand and “articulate” the cosmos around her in her own unique way.

However, along with this exploration of the female psyche, Lawrence takes good care to record men’s encounter with women’s otherness. Seeking this otherness and submitting to it must be, according to Lawrence, as we have seen, man’s first preoccupation. However all the men in the story face this encounter as a threatening experience which opposes their need for self-preservation. Tom and Will get confused and try to resist without success, whereas Skrebensky chooses to altogether recoil from it. As we shall see, women are mythicized-divinized in the men’s imagination because of their incapability to understand them. In the

male consciousness they take the form of mythical creatures from another world, beings of a mysterious origin who give the promise of happiness, but who constitute also a threat for the male integrity. Lawrence depicts skillfully the psychological tensions of these men and their effort to “venture within the Unknown of the female” (100).

### **Women’s Curiosity**

Right at the beginning, Lawrence gives a striking description of the Marsh-farm women’s air, their naturally held *Weltanschauung*: “The women were different [...] They were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance and they strained to listen.” This is a feminine attitude that stands in sharp contrast to that of the men: “It was enough for the men that the earth heaved and opened its furrow to them, that the wind blew to dry the wet wheat” (*TR* 10). In this “biblical” place, men’s cosmic consciousness is not fully awakened; their concern is the satisfaction of the bare human needs. They seem to belong to this “archetypal” (Kinhead-Weekes 167) place, a place with which Lawrence was very familiar, located on the Notts-Derby borderland, but out of which he creates “a fusion of local history with biblical myth” (173).

Although the novel is usually considered to represent “a shift in Lawrence’s attention to the feminine point of view” (Hough 55), it is also the locus where Lawrence introduces what he later called in the *Study of Thomas Hardy*, “the most lamentable and pathetic fact” (11), that is the women’s effort to share what they assume men possess, and thus seek to become part of a false individuality. Both women and men for Lawrence are trapped in a false reassurance that the “Word” gives:



And yet we believe that only the Uttered word can come into us and give us the impetus to our second birth. Give us a religion, give us something to believe in, cries the unsatisfied soul embedded in the womb of our times. Speak the quickening word, it cries, that will deliver us into our own being. So it searches out the Spoken Word, and finds it, or finds it not. (40)

The women looked out “to the spoken world beyond” (*TR* 10), the symbolic in Kristeva’s sense. In this tendency of women, Lawrence probably recognizes a will to find knowledge for, what he calls, their “second birth,” in the Word, in the Utterance which for Lawrence stand for the consciousness and the mind both of them being completely useless in the man’s effort to find rebirth: “The further he [the man] goes, the more extended his consciousness, the more he realizes the things that are not himself” (*Study* 38). The woman seeks to interpret the world and understand it, she “wanted to know” whereas the men are “turned to the heat of the blood” which Lawrence connects with real life. Lawrence connects this wish for knowledge of a material world with a false sensationalism and acknowledges in it “the violent change in human instinct, especially in women” (*LE* 281). Paradoxically, however, this tendency of women springs from their wish to imitate men: “she strained her eyes to see what man had done in fighting outwards to knowledge” (11). Lawrence is bothered by the women’s insistence on discovering “that which makes a man strong even if he be little and frail in body” (*TR* 11) as this curiosity signifies a tacit approval of the mechanistic world Lawrence despises, believing it actively prevents human beings from achieving “true individuality and a sufficient completeness in [them]selves” (*Study* 11). This feminine insistence however is not wholly a negative thing. It endows women with their surety and makes them “different” from men, each woman aspiring to “another form of life than this”

(TR 11). Although in the *Study of Thomas Hardy* he, at times, adopts and develops this negative stance (when this impulse leads woman to resemble man and his activities) it is still possible to acknowledge a positive aspect of such an attitude and form a favourable opinion about this feminine curiosity: Women can go beyond the male “word,” opening up to a deeper, sacred wisdom.

### **Lydia Lensky: The Dark Female**

The first woman encountered in the novel is Lydia Lensky, described as “a black, small and slight figure of a woman” who “walked hastily, as if unseeing” (TR 29). Lawrence creates the portrait of a foreign woman, married before, with children, probably modeled on his wife Frieda, emphasizing simultaneously her intangible, ethereal aura. This almost unearthly woman “arrested” Tom Brangwen, who, afraid even to think of her in earthy terms, could still “live in her.” Caught by “the fine flame” emerging from her, Tom feels as if “his veins had caught fire on the surface” (32). Later, in their meeting in the church, Brangwen sees her again as a creature from another world: “she was strange, from far away, a presence so much to his soul [...] She belonged to somewhere else [...] But her face was lifted to another world of life. Not to heaven or death, but to some place where she still lived, in spite of her body’s absence” (32-33). Seen through the eyes of a male consciousness, Lydia Lensky appears remote and aloof until she meets Tom at her home. In this scene, we gain some access to Lydia’s thoughts, and we feel gradually drawn into the female consciousness. “Who was this strange man who was at once so near to her? What was happening to her? Something in his young, warm-twinkling eyes seems to assume a right to her, to speak to her, to extend her his protection” (37). Lydia feels threatened by the male presence in her kingdom. She feels that her independence is suddenly in danger. Aware of her attraction to Tom, Lydia is also aware

that she must fight this fatal feeling: “She wanted it, this new life from him, with him, yet she must defend herself against it, for it was a destruction” (39). The woman, in other words, is as cautious about this new experience as Tom is. She doesn’t let herself surrender to the man, whom she sees as an intruder who tries to violate her privacy and enter into her dark kingdom.

In their second meeting, when Tom is ready to propose to her, he observes Lydia and her daughter through the window: “Mother and child sat motionless, silent, the child staring with vacant dark eyes into the fire, the mother looking into space” (42). From this point on, Lawrence refers to Lydia as “the mother” and to her daughter as “the child.” This is suggestive of the religious element in Tom’s feelings towards the woman. The strange, distant goddess is now the Mother-figure in all her sacredness, the Mother and Sister to whom Tom’s youth is “rooted,” “the restraining hand of God,” “the symbol for that further life which comprised religion and love and morality” (20). Lydia’s saint-like, calm expression changes only the moment she unexpectedly sees Tom Brangwen at her door: “A change went quickly over her face; she was unprepared” (43). Although Lydia feels invaded by the strange male presence, immediately after her acceptance of his proposal, she becomes a mysterious seductress: “with a strange movement that it was agony to him, she reached slowly forward her dark face and her breast to him, with a slow insinuation of a kiss that made something break in his brain.” Unable to escape the “infinite embrace” of the woman, Tom is carried into a “womb of darkness” (45) where he is soon to be reborn. The supreme effort for man, as Lawrence explains in his *Study of Thomas Hardy*, is “that the woman of his body shall be the begetter of his whole life, that she, in her female spirit, shall beget in him his idea, his motion, himself” (*Study* 52). The mysterious female force is here a benevolent

one. The woman here is the sacred other and Tom must find the courage to give himself to her (a daring step towards unison which Paul Morel, for example, never took).

Even after this episode of intimacy between the two, Lydia “sat utterly still” with a “tiredness that expressed a certain negation of him” (*TR* 45). This renewed remoteness puzzles Tom, but he derives a perverse kind of pleasure from being ignored by her. Utterly in thrall to her feminine powers, Tom leaves the house, confused and terrified. The sky imagery here reflects his feeling of simultaneously being captured and confused: “And all the sky was teeming and tearing along, a vast disorder of flying shapes and darkneses [...] then the terror of the moon running liquid-brilliant into the open for a moment, hurting the eyes before she plunged under cover of cloud again” (48). Nature is in tune with the feminine impulse: the sky is threatening; the moon is alluring. But nature also reflects Tom’s confused state of mind, his fear and wonder in the face of this new revelation. He feels Lydia’s unearthiness and he knows that he has to prepare himself not just to accept it, but to be one with it. It is a process towards self-authentication through this loss into the other, an unconditional surrender to the dark side of existence, which cannot but stir fear in the male soul.

Lydia, having lost the capacity to sympathize with the world, has put herself on the side of the dark forces. “Her long blanks and darkneses of abstraction” represent and belong to a strange land, where her dead husband and children lie buried. Her move to England, a land “potent, cold, slightly hostile,” suits her tormented soul. It is the Hades where the lost woman “was like one walking in the underworld, where the shades throng intelligibly but have no connection with one” (50). Lawrence uses this dark, mournful background to invest her with exotic and mystical qualities, a strange otherworldly aura. Lydia moves in the gloom of England, haunted by the phantoms of the past, a passionless and lifeless Persephone who

refuses to leave her Hades for the joy of life. What occasionally awakens her from this lethargy back to life and hope, are her long encounters with the richness of nature: “And there was a strange insistence of light from the sea, to which she must attend” (52). Still these encounters pain Lydia. They remind her what she once lived for and threaten her with the possibility of rebirth:

And she shrank away again, back into her darkness, and for a long while remained blotted safely away from living. But autumn came with the faint red glimmer of robins singing, winter darkened the moors, and almost savagely she turned again to life.

The favourite abode of the Lawrencian heroine, the world of nature, becomes for Lydia the place where mysterious, unrecognized forces operate so strongly that she loses contact with the real world. But Lydia also loses contact with her old ruined self, and feels “the intense, almost savage need to demand her life back again” (52). The animistic natural forces revive her; she fights to save herself for ever from the dread and horror of the subterranean darkness; to stay alive and share earth’s vital energy. Lydia will finally find rebirth in her union with the male other, which is as Lawrence wills: “She was as new as a flower that unsheathes itself and stands always ready, waiting, receptive” (54). This change though, is mostly an internal one, an inner confession, a promise that Lydia gives to her own self.

## Tom and the Fear of the Female

Before his marriage with Lydia, Tom's mind "remained in a state of chaos," unable to comprehend the thoughts and feelings of his future wife. This failure provokes in him a "fear of the unknown," which is the unknown feminine nature, and this fear "changed the nature of his desire into a sort of worship." The feminine is to be worshipped, not understood. On the other hand, Lydia, in her divinity, is ignorant of her lover's agony: "she did not know this, she did not understand." She proceeds to her marriage with Tom quietly, "with a strange still smile," (55) deriving power and confidence from a new sense of stability which the natural union with the male has offered her. Restored to a new world of life and hope, Lydia, proud head, grey eyes clear and dilated, looks like a feminine deity not only to her worshipful husband but to all guests to the wedding ceremony: "The men could not look at her and the women were elated by her, they served her."(56)

Lydia is aware of her metamorphosis. She has already suffered the destruction of the soul and desires her rebirth. Her union with the male is not a new experience for her –she was married once before– whereas Tom has still to go through the moment of "his trial and his admittance, his Gethsemane and his Triumphal Entry into one" (56). Lawrence employs here a rich, biblical language to signify Tom's trial in his quest to enter the hostile but desirable territory of the feminine. The feminine realm is likened to Gethsemane, with the promise of redemption and rebirth, as well as the threat of suffering and destruction. But this for Lawrence is a benevolent process: "this is the bottom of every man's desire, for the embrace, for the advancing into the unknown, for the landing on the shore of the undiscovered half of the world, where the wealth of the female lies before us" (*Study* 100). Tom must undergo the

painful transformative experience which will enable him to attain the full complexity and richness of his own emotional being.

Even after her marriage, which symbolically at least offers her the possibility of recovering again her passion to live, Lydia often retreats into herself: “She lapsed into a sort of sombre exclusion, a curious communion with mysterious powers, a sort of mystic dark state which drove him and the child nearly mad” (*TR* 60). After the birth of their first child, Lydia becomes even more distant: “shadowy,” with a “lower vitality,” “as if she were transplanted” (78). In the quiet confines of their home, Lydia grows taciturn, rarely talking to her husband. Yet, when she does, she astonishes him by her ability to read “his own heart so callously” and understand his deepest thoughts and feelings, such as his carefully hidden jealousy of his brother Alfred and his lover Mrs. Foster. Lydia is strikingly Christ-like when she foretells her husband’s future betrayal: “Why do you want to deny me?” (88). Superficially weak, for Tom Lydia remains “a dominant thing” (89).

Soon after the complaints and this display of her prophetic ability, Lydia is transfigured again, becoming sexually provocative. Her erotic call causes Tom another wave of panic. Confronted with yet another metamorphosis of his wife, his first impulse is to escape, but he cannot resist his desire. Lydia takes over now to initiate him into the divine experience of merging with the female and Tom, once more, feels alienated and helpless as he realizes that it is impossible to understand his wife through the application of (his) reason. Thus he confines himself to the mystical satisfaction a worshipper derives in the nearness to God: “She was the awful unknown. He bent down to her, suffering, unable to let go, unable to let himself go, yet drawn, driven. She was now transfigured, she was wonderful, beyond him. He wanted to go. But he could not as yet kiss her. He was himself, apart. Easiest he could kiss

her feet” (89-90). It is almost as if she represents a new religion Tom ardently wishes to join but fails to understand. Lydia still stands beyond him, terrible and unattainable, as Tom, in fear and panic, seeks a way through this irrational experience. In Jungian terms, Tom, as many men in Lawrence’s literature, is afraid to fall in the “pit,” the “vacuous nonentity” of the feminine unconscious:

Finally it should be remarked that *emptiness* is a great feminine secret. It is something absolutely alien to man; the chasm, the unplumbed depths, the *yin*. The pitifulness of this vacuous nonentity goes to his heart (I speak here as a man), and one is tempted to say that this constitutes the whole “mystery” of women. Such a female is fate itself. A man may say what he likes about it; be for it or against it, or both at once, in the end he falls, absurdly happy, into this pit, or, if he doesn’t, he has missed and bungled his only chance of making a man of himself. (CW 7, 186)

Tom is afraid of what Jung calls “the abysmal side of the bodily man” (9, 13), meaning the man’s “anima” the feminine aspect of the male soul which is projected upon women. As we saw Jung depicts this anima as a pit into which man has to fall, and this is what Lawrence probably means by “the unknown” in the female to which the man must abandon himself.

However for Jung, this return to the woman, which is similar to a return to the mother, contains a mixture of fear and attraction, a “numinous” element which leads to idealization. Referring to the symbolic significance that the mother has for the man, Jung explains her idealization by him: “Idealization is a hidden apotropaism; one idealizes whenever there is a



secret fear to be exorcized” (7, 106). This can be a negative process (the woman portrayed as a threat, the terrible Medusa, as we saw, or the outrageous Baccha). Although Jung acknowledges this male fear towards the feminine and his need to idealize her, he goes on and calls woman a “danger”: “Because she is his greatest danger she demands from a man his greatest, and if he has it in him, she will receive it” (9, 13). As we saw in the Introduction, Edward Whitmont sees this fear as characteristic of men’s confrontation of women: “Fear and attraction, in fact, always go together in the confrontation of the world of the absolutely other, the other sex” (*The Symbolic Quest* 192). Demaris S. Wehr, in her book *Jung and Feminism*, comments on this quotation of Whitmont, and notices the religious connotation of the words referring to woman: “The “Absolutely Other is a term sometimes applied to God” (110). Marianne Torgovnick, in her *Primitive Passions*, devotes the first chapter of her book to denote the hesitation of some intellectual men “of the turn of the century” (early twentieth century) like Andre Gide, Carl Jung and D.H. Lawrence to abandon themselves to the feminine (symbolized by the vast African or other exotic landscapes which they visited) from fear of losing their European male identity.

For Lawrence, however, the idea of the male embracing the female is essential for man’s personal completeness and rebirth. In fact the man must seek “for the female to possess his soul.” Possession of the man’s soul by the woman is a notion which would frighten many Lawrence’s contemporaries, but Lawrence acknowledges in this possession the fertilization of man’s soul because of the woman’s capacity to “make him [big] with increase” (*Study* 53). Lawrence believes that this must be the vital desire of every man and woman, to be consumed by the opposite other (sex). The only thing a man should be afraid of is the failure to be consumed: “So always the fear of a man is that he shall find no axle for his motion, that no woman can centralize his activity” (54). Lawrence wants his heroes to be

consummated, to “succumb” to the woman’s otherness. In their desire to finally merge with them, men are allowed to idealize-mythicize them as this mythicization upgrade women to the status Lawrence wants or imagines them to have.

Tom Brangwen – and later Will Brangwen – tries to resist this disturbing feeling of total surrender to the female. Yet, his conversion is irreversible. The initiation process reveals to him for the first time the need to “be destroyed”: “If really he could be destroyed, burnt away till he lit with her in one consummation, that were supreme, supreme” (*TR* 90). Again, Lawrence describes this in religious terms: Tom’s baptism in his new life is an apocalyptic moment for both initiate and initiator. It is the “transfiguration, the glorification, the admission” (91). As Lydia reveals to her awed worshipper the divine mystery, opening for him the door to heaven, she herself becomes the eternal woman with whom Lawrence wants him to unite, despite his ignorance of what this union really means. Here, as in *Lady’s Chatterley’s Lover*, love-making is seen as a holy mystery in which God is present. The ecstatic moments of love can be “the doorway into the further space” (90) as long as the man is free enough to flow towards the woman, the agent of this transformation. Tom finds this experience desirable but also dangerous. He feels his wife’s inapproachability as a mysterious sacredness which tortures him. Because of this fear, which for Lawrence is a sin, Tom never fully achieves this consummation.

## **Anna Brangwen: The Victorious Female**

From the beginning of the chapter called “Girlhood of Anna Brangwen,” Lawrence depicts her as a resolute person, “an independent, proud creature,” who “did not take people very seriously,” “shadowy as a tiger, and as aloof.” Anna inherits her mother’s aloofness, though not her obscurity. Generally indifferent to other people, even her two brothers whom “she did not consider as a real separate thing” (*TR* 92), the only person to attract her interest is Baron Skrebensky, a fiery aristocrat who avoids contact with his fellow parishioners, and is as proud and distinct as Anna is.

Concerning religion, Anna, even as a child, is clearly of two minds: she likes the hymns and the mystical, sensual aspects of the Christian rituals, but she is uncertain and uneasy about the “Logos,” the dogmatic doctrines of the church. Too young to have an idea of what God and his mystery is, she recognizes nevertheless the falsity of the spoken word in church: Her “mystic superstitions” never “found expression in the English language, never mounted to thought in English” (97-98). The dry, dogmatic language bores and oppresses her, creating in her an urgent need to escape all rules and institutions.

Going to church with Will Brangwen and her brothers, Anna feels amazement as she hears her cousin singing, responding to the mystical feeling music arouses in her, only to burst out laughing a moment later when she recognizes in this fervent singing a manifestation of her cousin’s religious ardour. This reaction is identical to that she shows towards Will and his passion for churches. She cannot understand his passionate response to cathedrals, the pleasure and comfort he derives from the semiotics of the Church. He is fascinated by the architecture, the paintings and the statues, even the lamb in the stained glass window, about

which Anna mocks him mercilessly. He seems to her indifferent to the deeper meaning of religious sermons which he accepts uncritically since they make his soul “live” and “run free like some strange underground thing, abstract” (148). Anna knew “there was something else she wanted to hear, it was something else she asked for, from the church” (147).

In his *Study*, Lawrence refers to the meaning of Cathedral as the emblem of one male God, representing “a blind, collective impulse” which “rose into concrete form [...] propounding in its sum, The One Being of All.” This was a religious attitude which, according to Lawrence, springs from the female mind and which prevailed throughout the Medieval period. However, within the Cathedral, there was already the denial of this “One Being of all” in the “little figures, the gargoyles, the imps, the human faces” which “from their obscurity, jeered their mockery of the Absolute” and represent the spirit of change and multiplicity, the male religious attitude which, according to Lawrence, was celebrated with the coming of Christ. Obviously but also paradoxically, Anna defends this new “male” spirit of change and “polygeny” (*Study* 62), a spirit which promises a new epoch. She attacks the sterile religious mentality, as this is depicted in the Cathedral’s semiology, and aligns with the ironic, joyful mood of the gargoyles in order to undermine Will’s Monist attitude towards god. This juxtaposition of roles (Anna, the woman, attacks the female idea of the One Absolute God whereas Will, the man, defends it, as his admiration for the Cathedral – which stands for this dogmatic idea – shows) turns Anna into Lawrence’s spokesperson and reveals Lawrence’s renewed trust to the female mind which is used here to attack an idea of female (according to Lawrence) origin. At this stage of the novel, however, Anna seeks rational answers to her metaphysical anxieties, and gets upset by her husband’s fascination with a world she cannot explain and consequently cannot approve: “What was he doing, sitting there gleaming, carried away, soulful?” Anna feels the same rage her father felt when confronted

with her mother's lapses into her own impenetrable mystery. Moreover, she hates such powerful, mystic experiences when they seize her: "She was transported to another world. And she hated it, resisted it" (*TR* 149). But Anna also "shone and gleamed to the Mystery, Whom she knew through all her senses" (97). As a natural woman, she is sensitive to the cosmic otherness, to the numinous which rests undefined, and perceives her experiences in the church as a kind of "epiphany":

She was curiously elated. She sat in a glowing world of unreality, very delightful. A brooding life, like laughter, was in her eyes. She was aware of a strange influence entering into her, which she enjoyed. It was a dark enriching influence she had not known before. (103)

Anna perceives the church as a place where a mystery unfolds and not as a place of adoration of the Absolute God. The Lincoln Cathedral episode is the symbolic epitome of this split from the traditional religion of rule and dogma. The church, symbol of "an outmoded Absolute" (Schneider 84), stands for Anna as the ultimate confine in which she would feel "roofed in" (*TR* 189) and deprived of her freedom. Yet, Anna, claiming "another right" (188), responds to the mystical aspects of the cathedral like a new goddess among old gods. Her impulse to reject her husband's almost sexual need for the womb-like warmth of the church is completely logical: she believes he is unfair to her; *she* is the female her husband must adore and embrace. She feels betrayed by his attachment to the church, and consequently adopts an antagonistic attitude towards the place.

In his *D.H. Lawrence and the Bible* (2000), T.R. Wright refers to Lawrence's characterization of Anna in the manuscript as "a risen Christ not sure what to do," (103) but yearning to be united with the "Mystery." Anna wishes to move into another realm where the essential being may truly thrive. For her "the altar is barren, its lights gone out [...] It was dead matter lying there." She wants "to rise [...] rise up above the fixed, surcharged motion, a separate speck that hangs suspended" having chosen "the direction in which it shall be carried forward." Anna seeks a place at the heart of the mystery of the existence. She yearns to transcend the limitations of the common religious conscience as she feels that this only darkens the soul. She knows that the ecstasy she experienced sprang from within, her own inner power, not from a given religious semiology, and it is this knowledge that makes her determined to destroy Will's passionate intercourse with the cathedral. When she discerns a woman's face in one of the church's stony carvings, she cannot fail to mockingly point it out : " 'He knew her, the man who curved her'" [...] 'I'm sure she was his wife'" (TR 189). Will disagrees and Anna immediately accuses him of abhorring the presence of a female element in the church: "you hate to think he put his wife in the cathedral, don't you?" After this, she senses her triumph over the cathedral and its influence on her husband: "she had got free from the cathedral, she had even destroyed the passion he had. She was glad. He was bitterly angry." Anna here defends the "multiplicity" of god. She comments on the gargoyles – which, as we have seen, according to Lawrence oppose the heavy semiology of the imposing cathedral, emblem of the One Absolute – and she deconstructs the religious philosophy which the cathedral represents. Will felt Anna had actually succeeded in destroying something important for him, one of his "beloved realities," "a blind passion," "one belief in which to rest" (190). But this brings about a new awareness of the world, one closer to nature, closer to the female sensibility:

He listened to the thrushes in the garden, and heard a note  
which the cathedral did not include [...] He crossed a field  
that was all yellow with dandelions, on his way to work, and  
the bath of yellow glowing was something at once so sumptuous  
and so fresh that he was glad he was away from his shadowy  
cathedral. (191)

Will here discovers the beauty of nature – the female realm for Lawrence – and he senses the natural life of the environment which for him is a small apocalypse, similar to the one that Lawrence usually reserves for woman. It's time for Will to feel reborn and relieved from the heavy presence of the cathedral and its implications.

### **Anna and Motherhood**

Anna will experience another ecstatic emotion, when she is pregnant and dances naked in the bedroom for the “unseen Creator who had chosen her, to Whom she belonged.” Here she is transformed into a priestess, though she cannot define to which God she is appealing. Acknowledging the full range of sensations and emotions within her, Anna has an oceanic experience and surrenders to the rhythm of dance, performing a primitive ritual revived to express a numinous, religious impulse springing from the sensual realm of the body. Anna is talking to the Lord, but the Lord here is the Lord of “exultation,” the Lord of the ecstatic experience that springs from “the pride of her bigness” (*TR* 170-71). Anna, in the pride of her female anatomy, becomes the source of life, another goddess of fertility and light. In contrast to her mother's Persephonic nature, she enjoys the gift of life and exults in her divine ability to become a creatress herself. Her sensual dance celebrates the body and its powers and

brings to mind the pagan dance of Mellor and Connie under the rain in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. For Lawrence, here Anna brings forth the new spirit, the message of the resurrection in the body. She becomes the revolutionary female who dares to mock the old religion and bring forth a revival of a mystical belief in life and senses, in the impulse and the instinct signified by the experience of motherhood.

In Anna's limited religious world, this purifying experience of motherhood is illustrated by basic biblical imagery. She dances before the Lord like David, and her husband is like Saul "proclaiming his own kingship" (170). These biblical analogies constitute a plausible means for Lawrence to describe Anna's mystic urge towards the divine in resonant symbolic terms and to present this moment of total surrender to an unknown, but intensely religious feeling. Anna can feel the presence of god without the help of religious symbols whereas Will can sense the numinous through religious art, which helps him transcend the pedestrian present and leads him to assert the triumph of the spirit over the body. On the contrary, Anna derives pleasure from the body. Her pregnant body here serves not just as a substitute religious symbol, it becomes one itself:

Oh, she stood on proud legs with a lovely reckless balance of her full belly, and the adorable little roundnesses, and the breasts becoming important [...] she felt so powerfully alive and in the hands of such a masterly force of life [...] she knew she was winning, winning, she was always winning, with each onset of pain she was nearer to victory. (177-78)



Motherhood is [here] seen by Lawrence not as a necessary burden, but as a vital, positive element in the full realization of a female identity. In his *Study of Thomas Hardy*, Lawrence accuses some of Hardy's heroines of being incapable of having children because of their atrophied vital female essence. Unlike Sue in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, who is unsuited to motherhood as she "wanted to live partially, in the consciousness, in the mind only" (104), Anna is a woman who lives in harmony with her senses. She can feel and experience motherhood in the appropriate way as a unique experience which connects the female being rather with the mystery of existence with which woman has a closer relation, than with the man she has chosen to love. As we saw in the chapter on *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence, in his "Forward" identifies (or replaces) the Omnipotent Father Creator with the Mother, acknowledging in the creative force a power bestowed to woman only: "So there is the Father –which should be called Mother– then the Son, who is the Utterer, and then the World" (470). He continues: "And God the Father, the Inscrutable, the Unknowable, we know in the flesh, in woman. She is the door for our in-going and our out-coming" (471). Maternity reassures Anna of her passionate union with life and her fervid desire to bear children springs from the natural lifeflow inside her.

Anna's ritual dance is interrupted by Will's entrance. He is startled:

And she lifted her hands and danced again, to annul him,  
the light glanced on her knees as she made her slow, fine  
movements down the far side of the room, across the fire  
light. (TR 170)

Anna feels contempt for her husband's inability to understand and share her ecstatic passion: "Go away," she said. "Let me dance alone." Will can tell that his presence interrupts a mystical performance, and despite his inability to comprehend and participate in this, he can feel "the strangeness, the power of her in her dancing," a power which "consumed him, he was burned, he could not grasp, he could not understand, he waited obliterated." Like Tom Brangwen earlier, Will is terrified by his wife's metamorphosis. Anna with her "big, strange, terrifying belly, lifted limbs and hair sticking out all fierce" dances for her Lord and "knew no man" (171). Female awareness must separate from the numbing influence of the male presence in order to remain alive. The male must be excluded from this moment of mystical sacredness; and yet, like Peter in the Sea of Galilee, he must show utter, blind faith: "She was as the rock on which he stood, with deep, heaving water all around, and he unable to swim" (173). Abandoned, Will will sink in a "horrible" "flood" of "unreality," (174) "a bottomless pit," "an endless space" (175). But his wife also becomes a threat for him. He sees her transformed into an evil, horrible phantom: "She became like a fury to him, without any sense of him. Her eyes were bright with a cold, unmoving hatred [...] she might push him off into the deeps" (174). The feminine force is mortally dangerous, like any divine force. Man is under constant threat. Hell here is the immense existential nothingness to which woman condemns man, where senses and soul fail. It is an agony for Will to live in constant uncertainty of his wife who behaves like a goddess towards him, as if his salvation lays in her hands: "Each night, in spite of all the same, he had waited with agony for bed-time, to see if she would shut him out" (175). Will suffers the agony of the sinner waiting judgement, and his sin is his inability to understand the mystery of the feminine soul. Anna, like Lydia, is seen through the eyes of the dependent, ignorant male. Lawrence is acutely aware of the male effort to impose a totalizing identity on woman in order to "explain" her.

This inability of the male to comprehend the female results in an intense conflict between them, but since the woman is better connected with the vital life powers and knows that “the body of man is of her issue” (*Study* 59), this conflict cannot but end in female triumph. Yet, this triumph does not signify the defeat of the male. The only defeat lies in man’s failure to give himself wholeheartedly to the woman, his anxiety to master her, his refusal to let his soul be saturated by the female. In the novel, Anna certainly becomes Will’s mediator; the prophetess who finally converts him to the new religion of the body and teaches him to trust life itself rather than its symbols.

Anna attains a vital, more-than-human stature, as she gradually alters Will’s destiny and leads him to a fuller awareness of life: “That which had been his absolute, containing all heaven and earth, was to become to him as to her, a shapely heap of dead matter – but dead, dead” (*TR* 190). Gradually, the converted Will starts adopting Anna’s attitude towards the cosmos: “A temple was never perfectly a temple, till it was ruined and mixed up with the winds and the sky and the herbs.” This statement reveals Will’s conversion to a theory of life, which, without abandoning the symbolism and imagery of Christianity, is clearly more liberal and more in tune with Nature. Will “still loved the church. As a symbol he loved it” (191). The language Lawrence uses to depict the struggle for balance between the couple is striking in its intensity. Will has succumbed to female force, but still has “a black struggle with himself, to come back to her. For at last he learned that he would be in hell until he came back to her.” And Anna, sometimes, “was afraid of the ugly strain in his eyes” when Will was trying to “submit” to her (194). Although his conversion is never complete – “in spirit, he was uncreated” (191) – at some point Will does give up the struggle for spiritual superiority and control. Like Tom, his father-in-law, he “submitted in the little matriarchy [...] He was indifferent to his manhood, his dignity and importance.” Anna is both satisfied and impressed

“that he could serve her so simply and completely” (193). Yet, though she has triumphed now, Will still preserves this “darkness” within himself, unknown regions of his soul, frightening even to him, which he can neither control nor extinguish. Anna discerns the “suffering among the brightness” (195) as she guides her husband to achieve his full potential, but Lawrence, just as he did with Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, chooses to leave this conflict unresolved.

### **Ursula Brangwen: The Bold Female**

What differentiates Ursula (the maiden Ella in the “Sisters”) from her mother and grandmother is her strong attachment to her father Will, the male of the family. He is “the dawn wherein her consciousness woke up” (*TR* 205). She feels “transported” when she first accompanies him to church (202), “excited, and unused” (206) when she helps him in the garden. Clinging on his back as he leaps from the canal bridge, Ursula can be seen as symbolically making her first leap into female (un)consciousness: “He leapt, and down they went. The wash of the water as they went under stuck through the child’s small body, with a sort of unconsciousness.” In Jungian terms, water here can be seen as signifying a feminine underworld, and crucially it is the father who introduces Ursula to it. In this symbolic leap, Ursula measures her courage against that of her father’s as they both risk drowning. This is a moment which might separate them forever, but in fact brings them closer, nourishing this “curious, taunting intimacy they have” (209). One interpretation of the scene is that it demonstrates Will’s “sadistic, destructive, deathly instincts” (Smith 37) and has been connected with his wish to derive through Ursula a sense “of self verification” (35). However, Will’s urge to indulge in such dangerous actions with his daughter might also suggest symbolically his wish to sink into the dangerous, threatening waters of the female

unconscious, something he never quite managed to fulfill through his wife. It is such a fulfillment he seeks in the immature femininity of his young daughter, a search as potentially fatal as any oceanic experience. As Marianne Torgovnick has pointed out in *Primitive Passions* (1998), “Lawrence had strong affinities for oceanic nature, conceived as the sight of eternity, the site of the oblivion of the autonomous self” (57). Will here disregards the grave danger to which he exposes Ursula and himself in his desire for a passage to the unconscious feminine which demands the abandonment of the “autonomous self,” the dissolution into “otherness.” Will is willing to undergo all this in order to gain entrance into this mysterious, female world. The water, symbol of female sexuality, becomes threatening for him just as a return to the womb threatens the formation of the symbolic identity. But Will, eager to lose himself in the female, is invigorated by the cold water in much the same way he derives pleasure in the quiet womb of the Cathedral. Moreover, he bonds with his little daughter by making her a partner in dangerous experiences: “He saved her, and sat on the bank, quivering. But his eyes were full of the blackness of death, it was as if death had cut between their two lives, and separated them. Still they were not separate” (TR 209). Alienated from his wife, Will travels from isolation to near death carrying Ursula on his back. However young Ursula is fearless. Will has “a craving to frighten her, to see what she would do with him” (208), but he feels under the child’s grip the “deliberate will,” “set upon his” (209). In his daughter Will sees the undaunted female his wife was: “She was always relapsing on her own to the other end where Anna was and where Will never managed to be” (208). Will is animated by this urge to escape from this unapproachable other, and at the same time find a way to unite himself with it. Ursula is a means for him to enter into this prohibited area and all his extreme adventures with the girl seem to aim at this purpose.

Very much like her male ancestors, who often felt at a loss to cope with the women's inherent mystery, Ursula feels "a spell over her" and her mind "darkened" in her father's presence (222). But unlike her male ancestors, she never feels puzzled or threatened by the male other that her father represents in this early phase in her life. She does not wish to stay with him, on the contrary, like the other women in her community, she feels this need to break the boundaries of the Cossethay Society to see what happens "beyond." In Grammar School, she aspires to a higher life among her equals, a life free from the sterile confines of Cossethay. This proud demonstration of individuality differs from her mother's selfish arrogance: for instance, Ursula's way to avoid the attacks of the "average self" is to make "herself smaller" (252). Her introspection is both deep and revealing. Her strong character and her relentless will to engage in endless soul-searching for a time turns her into an isolated, distant figure, alienated and unapproachable. Ursula's two years at St. Philips school represent her apprenticeship in a man's world. Her fascination with it, however, turns into disillusionment as she finds herself "a foreigner in a new life, of work and mechanical consideration." In her striving for knowledge and control, Ursula remains alienated, divided into a more secular self and the other: "She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote" (377). For Lawrence, this knowledge, which is sacred, is identified with the human being's effort to produce its being and it has nothing to do with the knowledge that modern man has of the modern world around him, the automatic world of the system, the Law, and the vote: "Shall I then be able, with all the knowledge in the world, to produce my being, if the knowledge be not extant? I shall not" (*Study* 40). Lawrence had declared to Sally Hopkins that he would do "the work for women, better than the suffrage" and that he would do this in "a novel about Love Triumphant one day" (*L* i. 490). If *The Rainbow* is this novel, then Ursula seems to be the idealistic feminine character in it, who, urged by her instinct to

find real meaning in a disappointing world defies its rules and its codes and follows her own path to find her true self. Thus it is not surprising that, later, when Antony, her friend Maggie's brother, proposes to her, Ursula refuses: she does not want the cage of marriage and conventional propriety the man offers.

After her experience in college, her new life and acquaintances in Beldover also enhance Ursula's feeling of remoteness. She immediately realizes the shallowness of it all, and her abhorrence for the mundane world around her grows. Gradually, she outgrows the old, established identities and turns to new directions beyond her conscious control. She uses her body and senses; she abandons herself to daydreaming, and seeks the nearness of nature, in which she finds a kind of communion and some of the satisfaction her soul yearns for. Like Alvina in *The Lost Girl*, the novel which Lawrence began almost at the same time as "The Sisters," Ursula has access to a power which, for Lawrence, comes to people gifted enough to contain it. It is a silent power, the voice of unconsciousness, which here transforms Ursula into a deity of instinct and supernatural charisma. She possesses the real knowledge of the dark world which surrounds the world of light in which the vain modern human being thinks s/he lives, safe in his/her ignorance: "This world in which she lived was like a circle lighted by a lamp. This lighted area, lit up by man's completest consciousness, she thought was all the world." But Ursula's soul "had acknowledged in a great heave of terror, only the outer darkness." Her feeling of not belonging to this world and her ability to sense another invisible dark world – a signifier also of the deep unknown human self which Lawrence later acknowledged as the savage, primitive self of the man – turns her into a figure who possesses mythical powers: "She could see the glimmer of dark movement just outside of range, she saw the eyes of the wild beast gleaming from the darkness" (TR 405). This unconscious vision of Ursula signals "a new degree of conscious awareness appropriate to the third

generation,” which makes Ursula overcome “all the contradictions of her grandparents and parents” (Kinkead-Weekes 200). She perceives the mystery of another world which surrounds the known one, and can see the falsity and the vanity of human actions. She combines the dark instinct of her grandmother and the supernatural awareness of her mother to become a priestess with her own beliefs and ideas, although her choices might take her to the brink of self-destruction.

Ursula’s readiness to explore new areas of consciousness is aroused when she meets Miss Inger, the schoolmistress of the school where she works. It is only the second time, after her father, that Ursula feels admiration for anyone. Miss Inger is a clergyman’s daughter with a “clear, decided, yet graceful appearance” and “a look of nobility” in her face. For Ursula, the “fine, clear spirit” of her teacher, her “ringing voice” and “blue, clear proud eyes” made her “a groomed person and of an unyielding mind” (*TR* 312). Ursula feels a pang of alarm at Miss Inger’s androgynous appearance, her masculine power, her mental strength and independence. Ursula, though sensitive to her feminine instincts, combines such “male” characteristics in her personality: “She stretched her own limbs like a lion or a wild horse, her heart was relentless in its desires.” Her contempt for the innocent lamb and her admiration for the fierce lion manifest her masculine boldness. But Ursula searches for the essence behind the vigour and strength of the male, behind the solidity of thought and independence of spirit. Just as she had immediately perceived earlier the dryness of soul that characterized Skrebensky, so she quickly diagnoses the problem with Miss Inger as she realizes that “she had no connection with other people. Her lot was isolated and deadly” (318). Miss Inger is deprived of feminine warmth. She belongs to a line of Lawrencian heroines, like Hermione in *Women in Love* (1915), or Dollie in “The Princess” (1925), with an atrophied female instinct (usually used by Lawrence in order to contrast them with the main heroines). Like Hermione



and Dollie, Mrs Inger is sterile and reserved indifferent to the other human souls around her. Ursula therefore rejects her and risks remaining all alone.

These encounters, however, are opportunities to develop her newly acquired wisdom. As Kinkead-Weekes has argued, it is her “new ‘allotropic’ sense of character shaped by opposite ‘forces’ which make Ursula dynamically ‘react’ to the superficial attractions of her youth” (Kinkead-Weekes 202). Winifred Inger has been proved a half-hearted Diana<sup>1</sup>: her free spirit and her independence are illusory. She eventually compromises with a system that Ursula despises and this is a shameful compromise which turns Miss Inger into some sort of “prehistoric lizard” with a “clayey, inert, unquickened flesh” (*TR* 325). Ursula sees her as part of the machine world the same world to which Tom, her uncle and Miss Inger’s fiancée, belongs. Lawrence does not set up any ethical or protective structures to save his heroine from pitfalls as she gradually learns about the world and the people. Her life-journey becomes an initiation process, a pilgrimage that is ultimately a religious one.

### **Religious Awakening**

Though she shares her father’s mystical passion for churches, and in spite of her attachment to him, Ursula, like her mother, is immediately aware of the negative impact of conventional religious authorities and their rules: “The figure of the Most High bored her, and roused her temperament” (*TR* 259). At the same time, she thinks of Christ as her guide: “what would Jesus do, if He were in my shoes?” (256) analyzing at length his saying that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into heaven” (258). Even though she was not “fit as yet to criticize” (259), it is clear she is already sharpening

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<sup>1</sup> The Roman goddess of hunting.

both her religious conscience and her critical faculties. She also proceeds from asceticism towards an appreciation of the flesh: “Who shall be shadowed by Death and the Cross, being risen, and who shall fear the mystic, perfect flesh that belongs to heaven?” The scorn she had expressed for Pan and Bacchus, the pagan Gods of the flesh, is now replaced by the acknowledgement of the joy and sense of fulfillment which the flesh offers, the desire “to walk this Earth in gladness,” “to love, live and have children” in the flesh. Ursula has realized that “The Resurrection is to life, not to Death” (262) anticipating the Man in “The Man Who Died” (1927). Ursula, as Keith Sagar suggests, will not hesitate to move into the “unknown territory with no better guide than the principle of trial and error, a deep sense of responsibility for her own life, and an indestructible faith, at the very centre of her, surviving all disillusion” (Sagar 57).

Ursula has been regarded as “the last of the Brangwen patriarchs.” T.R.Wright quotes the blurb of the cover of the first edition of the novel which describes her as the “leading-shoot of the restless, fearless family, waiting at the advance-post of our time to blaze a path into the future” (Wright 104). Frank Glover Smith points out that Ursula displays “the inner, impersonal, great desires that are fulfilled in long periods of time” (39). In mythical terms, Ursula combines the braveness and self negation of Antigone, the dynamic and courageous sister of the dead sons of Oedipus, who, defying the king Creon’s orders and faithful to the divine and moral law, conducted her brother’s funeral rites and finally hanged herself in the prison where she had been locked up. Like Antigone’s, Ursula’s skepticism leads her “to the other extreme” that is to discover and despise the “humble side of Christianity” and adopt for herself a heroic, almost masculine, ideal: “And sometimes, she dashed into flames to rescue a forgotten child; or she dived into the canal locks, and supported a boy who was seized with cramp; or she swept up a toddling infant from the feet of a runaway horse” (*TR* 265). But

Ursula also becomes the Lamb, so bitterly mocked by her mother: “She leapt with sensuous yearning, to respond to Christ. If she could go to him really, and lay her head on his breast, to have comfort, to be made much of, caressed like a child” (267). Ursula, like Lawrence, has mixed feelings towards the figure of Christ. She feels a yearning for his warmth and tenderness but this “sentimentality” surrounding him at times “maddened her.” There is no possibility of her remaining a Christian.

### **Ursula: Lawrence’s Individual (Wo) Man**

The next phase of Ursula’s process of self-discovery comes through her relationship with Anton Skrebensky. She is immediately attracted by his masculine characteristics: “He was so finally constituted, and so distinct, self-contained, self supporting [...] He had a nature like fate, the nature of an aristocrat” (*TR* 271). Lawrence, through Ursula, embraces the Nietzschean ethic of the “aristocracy of the soul” expounded in *Study of Thomas Hardy*. The influence of German expressionists like Nietzsche whom Lawrence read as early as 1908 (Chambers 120) becomes most apparent in his ideas about individuality, his notion that each one of us is born “detached from the flesh and blood of our parents, and is issued separately as a distinct creature” (*Study* 40). What Lawrence means by individualist is “not a selfish or greedy person anxious to satisfy appetites, but a man of distinct being, who must act in his own particular way to fulfill his own individual nature” (45). In the individuation process, consciousness plays an important role. For Nietzsche, man needs to reach a stage of infinite knowing and loving, that “final and highest becoming – human after which the whole of nature strives” (Montgomery 89). For Lawrence “any man of real individuality tries to know and to understand what is happening” (*Foreword* 486). This conscious knowledge of the world which individuation presupposes, however, does not of itself lead to the “second birth”

of the human being, which is the attainment of an authentic self. The effort of the individual to find his/her real self is a painful process often connected with their lost sexuality.

This is particularly the case for Lawrence's female characters. As we saw in the beginning of the chapter, women wonder about the cosmos, attempting to discover what human logic cannot grasp. Their will to return to the "Spoken Word," the world of every day reality, is not the correct path to rebirth and Ursula knows this more than all the other women in the story. She senses the other, the darkness of human nature and it is through a return to this darkness (see also Introduction about the Jungian process of individuation) which civilization despises, that the human being will finally be reborn. Thus Ursula is the true Lawrencian individual: she is not afraid to face the darkness of the human existence and feels that real knowledge lies somewhere further off than the stiff word of the "week-day life" (*TR* 264).

In sharp contrast to other contemporary modernists, who considered the degeneration of the period as a symptom of effeminization, D.H. Lawrence daringly makes the most individualistic of his characters a woman. In her individuality, Ursula becomes an androgynous figure, a god(d)-ess who reconciles her spiritual, masculine strength with her female appeal to the mystical other. Without compromising either materialism or spirituality or even simple instinct, Ursula, knowing that she has a mission in life, tries to achieve selfhood and find a meaning in her life, a meaning which is to be discovered in the sacredness of the sexual union.

## The Lapses into the Other and the Threatening Female: Ursula's Encounter with Men

Ursula's adventures with Skrebensky, however, end in disappointment. For a time, Ursula believes that she has become a blasphemous figure, a Prometheus set against the divine power, or, in more modern terms, an *immoraliste*. It is true that she feels attracted to the "splendid recklessness" of life (*TR* 277): "She lives in the conditions outlined by the underground man, unsure, with the collapse of sanctions and prohibition" (Smith 47). She envies the passion of Skrebensky's friend, a man desperately seeking a woman (*TR* 277), but then she faints in Skrebensky's hands after their first kiss (278) like a fragile, romantic heroine, the sleeping beauty of the fairy tale. Ursula's anarchic attitude is even more manifest in her views of nations and war which she states to Skrebensky:

- 'But we aren't the nation. There are heaps of other people who are the nation.'
- 'They might say they weren't, either.'
- 'Well, if everybody said it, there wouldn't be a nation. But I should still be myself,' she asserted, brilliantly. (288)

This anti-war, anti-nationalist spirit and her antipathy towards soldiers, ("I hate soldiers, they are stiff and wooden" (289), is perfectly in tune with her equally shocking ideas about religion and Christianity (in the manuscript Jesus is likened to a male lover). She comes to see Skrebensky as a "mass-man who disguises as patriotism or service his lack of individuality" (Kinkead-Weekes 201). Thus she appears as a revolutionary woman, fearless and acutely critical of the world and the people around her. Her own actions are divided between her male and female qualities: she responds to people and events in a collected,

rational manner, but she is also able to accommodate in her daily experience the moments of oceanic, mystical consciousness.

One such oceanic, transcendent moment occurs during a wedding-feast, which Lawrence depicts with a ceremonial, mysterious background: “Bright stars were shining [...] And under the stars burned two great, red, flameless fires, and round these, lights and lanterns hung, the marquee stood open before a fire, with its lights inside” (294). It is a scene springing directly from the unconscious world where Ursula’s feminine soul swells with numinous, cosmic vitality and passion: “Waves of delirious darkness run through her soul [...] she wanted to reach and be amongst the flashing stars [...] she was mad to be gone.” Once more, Lawrence uses water imagery to suggest the intensity of the female presence and the fluidity of the scene. Tom Brangwen here, is “quick” and “fluid” and as inaccessible as the creatures living in the water. The music is coming ‘in waves’; the couples are “washed” and “absorbed” into the “deep underwater of the dance.” Everything is “a vision of the depths of the underworld, under the great flood” (295). In the dark, turbulent flux of music and dance, Ursula loses her sense of self and slips into the frenzy of the ecstatic and the subconscious, turning into a moon- deity: “And her breast opened to it [the moon], she was cleaved like a transparent jewel to its light. She stood filled with the full moon, offering herself.” Skrebensky interrupts this mystical union by putting “his arm round her” and leading her “away” (296). Caught in the moonshine, like a Bacchean maenad, Ursula is transformed in the frightened eyes of the man into a perilous demonic deity with “hands and wrists” like “blades” (298), who, like Agave, the tragic heroine in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, can in her ecstasy kill any intruder who dares to disrupt this sacred moment. When Ursula comes back to her senses, the “day-time consciousness,” she feels an emptiness of the soul, a slow horror overpowering her, caused by the presence of the man on her side, “the

nothingness”(299) of his existence. Skrebensky is not the man with whom she can find real happiness: he cannot offer her what her female soul yearns for. The intuitive Lawrencean woman that Ursula is, senses that her vital forces are under threat from Skrebensky’s intellectual and psychological rigidity and she is not willing to waste her life energy uselessly on him.

The scene where Ursula is with Maggie’s brother becomes a similarly transcendent one, with Ursula again identifying with the moon: “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” (386). Every identification of the man with the moon takes place through Ursula’s eyes: she alone notices the moon, and its numinous presence. Once more, the mystical quality of nature comes to disrupt her relation with the material world. The moon, frequently appearing in Lawrence’s fiction as the symbol of the feminine principle, the archetypal symbol of fertility and the life cycle, is here an autonomous presence which directly influences human decisions on matters of life and death. Ursula, like the Greek Selene or the Roman Luna in sharing the divinity of the lesser light, realizes her eternal, uninterrupted connection with another world beyond the common human understanding: “Something was looking at her. Some powerful, glowing sight was looking right into her, not upon her, but right at her” (296). Later, in a prolonged meditation on a passage from the book of Genesis, Ursula wishes “she had been a nymph” (302) peeping into Noah’s Ark from the window and laughing. Again, the biblical imagery here is combined with allusions to ancient deities, a symbolic conjunction of the pagan and the Christian emphasizing Ursula’s rich imagination, but also her religious dilemmas: She comes to defy the Christian dogmatic rules, she questions the order that the Christian dogma represents with her anarchic attitude.

Ursula's questions and speculations about life and religion grow more and more complicated. The contrast to Skrebensky whose "life lay in the established order of things" (304) could not be greater. Ursula wonders: "Why could not he himself desire a woman so? Why did he never really want a woman, not with the whole of him: never loved, never worshipped, only just physically wanted her?" (294). Along with a line of "unsuitable" female heroines, Lawrence creates a parallel line of incapable heroes who cannot appreciate the real value of a woman by embracing her womanhood. Skrebensky belongs to this line of male Lawrencian heroes who, with their male urge atrophied, cannot discover a woman in her body and flesh and love her "physically." Like Sir Clifford, Connie's husband in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or Basil, Lady Daphne's husband in *The Ladybird*, Skrebensky resorts to a sterile adoration of the woman. He resists the urge to join the female, has only fear for the unknown woman in front of him and determinedly fights her. Skrebensky's attention to duty and propriety condemns him to emotional and mental sterility, a nullity which terrifies Ursula. Keith Sagar sees Ursula as a powerful Aphrodite who uses Skrebensky as the "medium" for "her self-contained, uncreative, corrosive lust" (Sagar 59). But Ursula seems to recognize, at least for a time, in Skrebensky the male other with whom she wants to unite. Her appeal to him "'Don't leave me – come back to me'" is a woman's appeal to the male "scotched by the knowledge that she was not under his spell nor his influence" (TR 306). Skrebensky proves himself once more as an inadequate lover, never carried away in awe and fear by the female mystery like Tom and Will. He only fears his own dependency on the woman: "he had to be free of her spirit." Ursula threatens Skrebensky's masculinity. Since he is unable to let "a female possess his soul," Ursula becomes for him a negative, alien figure. In his eyes her metamorphosis is an evil one: she becomes the "angel before Balaam" who drives him "back with a sword from the way he was going, into a wilderness" (307).



For Kinkead-Weekes, his impotence is not sexual, but springs from “a fear – common to writers and actors – that the eagerness to sink the self in others betrays an insufficiency of self.” For the critic, Skrebensky lacks the necessary individuality that each sexual lover must possess in order to transform the sexual act to an act of resurrection of the self: “Skrebensky has no sense of himself other than as part of some collective: a nation, a regiment, a couple.” He cannot satisfy Ursula’s longing for a “beyond” (Kinkead-Weekes 206). Ursula shows little interest in deciphering Skrebensky’s confused feelings towards her, but sees his ineffectiveness, his inability to reach out and touch her: “out there in the strong, urgent night she could not find him” (*TR* 306). She realizes he exists “in her own desire only” (309) and leaves him.

Later, when Skrebensky returns from South Africa, he immediately senses in Ursula “some of the abstraction and gleam of the unknown upon her, and he started, excited” (409). Remote and inaccessible, Ursula attains the stature of a strange goddess, in whose presence “his dark, subterranean male soul” kneels and exposes himself “darkly” (410). Skrebensky has changed too, acquiring from Africa a mysterious aura which compels Ursula to cross the boundary and enter “the fecund darkness that possessed his own blood” (413). He becomes a creature coming from the darkness, a symbolic region already familiar to Ursula, and “seduces” her with his newly acquired “manliness.” Skrebensky has come back from an unknown mysterious land “rather browner” and “physically stronger” with “a horseman’s sureness” and some “of the horseman’s animal darkness.” But he still possessed a “vague” soul, his “quick of a man” remains “inaccessible” (410). Ursula is puzzled. However, she feels attracted by his new aura: “yet she loved him, the body of him” (411). It is through their physical contact that Ursula “became ever more and more herself.” The description of their kiss in this passage, as in the wedding scene, is full of water imagery, the language

characterized by a fluidity which reproduces the intensity of the woman's feelings, the dive into the subterranean world of senses and emotions, the loss of self in communion with the male:

Darkness cleaving to darkness, she hung close to him, pressed herself into soft flow of his kiss, pressed herself down, down to the source and core of his kiss, herself covered and enveloped in the warm, fecund flow of his kiss, that travelled over her, flowed over her, covered her, flowed over the last fibre of her, so they were one stream, one dark fecundity, and she clung at the core of him, with her lips holding open the very bottommost source of him. (414)

This scene, which anticipates so much the lyrical "feminine" language used to describe the love-making scenes of Connie and Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, depicts the power of sexual contact. Ursula remains in this state of trance for days. The experience is a moment of epiphany: her contact with the male has completed her transformation, and her perception of the world has totally altered: "what are you, you pale citizens? her face seemed to say gleaming. 'You subdued beast in sheep's clothing, you primeval darkness falsified to a social mechanism [...] She dressed herself and made herself fine [...] But all in a mood of superficial, mocking facility'" (415). Ursula has become the prophetess she was expected to be and has discovered another world beyond the everyday. She is now fully aware of a new consciousness and has decided to allot to her new self its proper place and value. It is a new strong sense of identity which was being gradually built in her through all her encounters with the outside world.

Ursula's love-making is represented as a mystic experience: "She entered the black fields of immortality" and "She belonged to the eternal, changeless place into which they had leapt together." Like the healers and mystics of the past, Ursula preserves her solitude, which is not indicative of an absence of energy and action, but a way of listening to the inner, dark self and soliciting advice and guidance inaudible in the din of daily life: "Her everyday self was just the same. She merely had another, stronger self that knew the darkness" (418). It is a curious, separate strength, the spiritual strength of religious leaders, that makes Ursula preserve a sacred place within her, a place apart that nobody can invade, a place for communion with the other invisible world.

### **The Final Choice and the Promise of Rebirth**

From now on Ursula lives entirely in this other world of her own: her own kingdom, the sacred place to which no one can have access, the Greek *ἄβυσσος*. She finds it difficult to console Skrebensky about her refusal to marry him: "She knew he was waking up. She must modify her soul; depart from her further world, for him" (*TR* 437). Skrebensky feels this gradual alienation of hers as well as his inevitable submission to her: "He was a screen of her fears. He served her" (430). Ursula, like Anna and Lydia, consumes her faithful servant while consummating with him. After the beneficial contact with the male body, there is no need for Ursula to stay with him: "he roused no fruitful fecundity in her. He seemed added up, finished. She knew him all around, not on any side did he lead into the unknown" (438-39). Like an ogress, she uses her powerful female allure to capture him, but she would feel "none of the rich fear, the connection with the unknown" while her man was laying there "unaware," "happy" but "finished" (439). Skrebensky loses his magical aura (which was only superficial), and becomes one with the rest of the mundane world. Ursula delivers the final

stroke during their last night on the Lincolnshire beach. This is the culmination of her “devouring” power over the male: “she fastened her arms round him and tightened him in her grip, whilst her mouth sought his in a hard, rending, ever-increasing kiss, till his body was powerless in her grip [...] she seemed to be pressing in her beaked mouth till she had the heart of him” (444). At this point, Ursula’s metamorphosis is complete. She is the unsatisfied Maenad who, instead of losing herself in the ecstatic union with the male, lies there in the moonlight with her “cold rigid face like metal,” a terrifying goddess that makes Skrebensky flee “from the horrible figure that lay stretched in the moonlight” (445). In this trancelike loss of self, Ursula is wholly repulsive to Skrebensky who cannot sense and share her capacity to enter into other realms of psychic consciousness. But this capacity also means that from now on Ursula must truly live alone on the borders of the civilized world, alienated from others and uncertain of herself. This uncertainty inevitably becomes the source of torture and internal conflict for Ursula who oscillates between the private world of instinct and impulse and the public, material world, struggling to understand all her perplexing experiences and find a path that will safely lead her to happiness and peace.

In the final chapter of the book Ursula faces the need to choose a life. Her pregnancy initially makes her decide to join the conventional world with all its conformities, a world she truly despises and for a moment she realizes she has been blasphemous in separating her own demands from those of other people: “Who was she to have a man according to her own desire? It was not for her to create, but to recognize a man created by God” (457).

This psychological and mental pressure, under which Ursula lives, is vividly shown by Lawrence in the scene where Ursula, alone in the landscape, feels horrified and threatened by the appearance of some wild horses. For critics, like Gavriel Ben-Ephraim and Mark Spilka, the horses that threaten Ursula represent “powerful male sensuality” and “prevent the

social devitalized marriage with Skrebensky” (Schneider 86). Their presence has also been interpreted as symbolic of Ursula’s agony at her decision to betray her spontaneous self and accept the conventional marriage with Skrebensky (Smith 56). Keith Sagar claims that the scene underlines Ursula’s incapacity to “evade the extinction to which the horses subject her,” (Sagar 65) while Schneider believes that the horses stand for “the threat to her creative freedom” (Schneider 87). Kinkead-Weekes explains the scene as a reproduction of the “elemental world” of powerful forces, the forces of “opposites” which her grandfather managed to master but which is completely incomprehensible to the modern sophisticated woman of the twentieth century that Ursula is (Kinkead-Weekes 206).

The horses, in my view, are a reflection of Ursula’s turbulent mind, a metaphor of her anxiety and fear as she senses that she has committed “hubris,” offended the power of Eternity “to which she herself belonged” (*TR* 457). For Lawrence, Sagar argues, the human fear of horses covers a feeling of admiration for “their beautiful, physical bodies,” a sensuality which is also to be found “in the great sensual male activity” (Sagar 64). The horseman is a symbol of the mastery over animal strength, strength to be harnessed by reason. But horses are also associated with pride, nobility and independence. Ursula “stretches her limbs like a lion or wild horse”; she feels the urge “to rebel, to rage, to fight” (304). She is a female adventurer, running free in the vastness of the world. The horse was once her favourite animal, the symbol of her wild soul, but it is now endowed with negative connotations. It is the threatening, destructive force that oppresses her soul. Carl Jung in *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1947) points out the significance of horses in myths as symbols of the unconscious, related to wild phallic power and fertility and the elements: wind, fire and light. It might also turn into a maternal symbol, representing the libido repressed through the incest prohibition (312-316). Lawrence sees in the horse a symbol that

“roams the dark underworld meadows of the soul” (Smith 55), what Jung called a “psycho-pompos,” (Jung 315) to conduct soul to the other world. In this context, as Ursula has started losing her animal vitality and will, the horse becomes a life-taking, chthonic force. It stands as a symbol of the danger of abandoning the rational self entirely. Guided by intuition alone, one may get lost in the unknown, deep side of human consciousness, and Ursula feels it may have been a mistake to allow herself to be carried away by her own fantasies and reject the people near her. This is an internal conflict, a dilemma Ursula has never previously confessed to herself. In this context, the horses, which used to stand for her wild independence of spirit, have now become abhorrent creatures which threaten her life – very much in the same way her decision to accept Skrebensky’s marriage proposal threatens her emotional vitality and freedom of spirit.

The scene with the horses can also be seen as a dramatization of Ursula’s “dual will,” a phrase used by Birkin, one of the main male characters in Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (140) to show the horse’s conflict between the urge to break free and the urge to submit to his master. Bethan Jones points out that “the phrase ‘dual will’ might be more useful in describing human impulses than that of horses” (Jones 164). She refers to the attempts by almost all of the characters in *Women in Love* (the sequel of *The Rainbow*) to escape, to “bolt” against someone or something: “Bolting is clearly an important human impulse, and it is balanced by the will to be controlled – by a fellow human, a social or moral code or some kind of mechanical system imposing restraint” (165). Ursula’s instinct for freedom from conventionalities similarly “bolts” her mind. She can sense that deep inside she will never change, that she shall always belong to herself, to her deep intuitive nature: “It was the unknown, the unexplored, the undiscovered upon whose shore she had landed, alone, after crossing the void, the darkness which washed the New World and the Old” (TR 457). The

decision to submit awakens the voice of her instinct, warning her about the coming loss, the loss of the profound inner knowledge, the death of the vital life force that lies deep within human beings. Discovering this inner power has been Ursula's life purpose. Skrebensky's refusal to take her back therefore comes to her as a relief. She belongs wholly to eternity now, the vast power of life. Having endured all the initiation tasks, she finally feels part of the great, invisible power of creation.

At the end of the book, I suggest, Ursula becomes a goddess of hope and rebirth. She has created her own spirited self, she has finally learned to follow her knowing without feeling guilty about her choice. Dealing with life from her own unique perspective, Ursula refuses to allow anyone to repress her vital energies. In the symbol of the rainbow Ursula recognizes both her own reborn self and a hope for a world which would be "built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven" (*TR* 459). Her vision is a religious one, as her rebirth was achieved through an intense, religious inner conflict. She is now the holder of the secret of rebirth, possessing at least some of the secrets of man's salvation. But this time the Truth is to be found in the numinous, which exists inside human beings, in the sacredness of existence of which Ursula, the sacred female, is the prophetess.

In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence explores the tensions of sexual relationships by mythicizing women's ability to perceive the world in their own unique way. This constitutes a source of uneasiness and frustration for men who try to rationalize their behaviour in their effort to achieve their "consummation" with the female. The focus on Ursula in the last part of the book shows that *The Rainbow* is a novel about the deep questions of existence seen from a female perspective. Ursula's existential dilemmas and her final decisions symbolize

Lawrence's belief that if life is to triumph, the "shell" which imprisons the old form of life must be broken, so that new forms of the sacred can come into being (*L* ii. 285).



## Chapter Three

### *Women in Love*: Lawrence's "Apocalyptic Novel"

*Women in Love* is the second of the two intimately related but independent novels that came out of the work Lawrence started in the spring of 1913 under the title *The Sisters*. The first one, *The Rainbow*, as we have seen, was published in 1915; *Women in Love*, after considerable revision, was finally published in 1920. Lawrence himself called this novel "apocalyptic," for it reflects his first attempts to explore "the subconscious, the four fifths of the iceberg hidden below the ego and the surface of the knowing" (Kinhead-Weekes, Introduction xiv). Although in retrospect "psychoanalytic" may sound a far more appropriate description of such a task than "apocalyptic," Lawrence seems to employ the term mainly in its original, pre-Christian Greek sense of *apocalypses*: "unveiling," "unmasking" of things hidden, unseen behind the misleading facade of "normality." Such an unveiling of the workings of the modern world can only lead to the revelation of the true extent of its corruption, as well as the emerging characteristics of the new one that must replace it if humankind is not to perish. Although Lawrence diagnoses the complete disintegration of the new chaotic world resulting from the irrational violence of the war, he still believes in a possible transformation of the self and the cosmos and he explores this possibility by putting his characters under realistic circumstances. Thus his belief in a resurrection, which he explored so vividly in *The Rainbow*, has not completely faded away in *Women in Love* where Lawrence seems to be equally interested in love and in violence as two obvious parameters of the human consciousness.

In *Women in Love*, Lawrence has chosen for the role of his spokesperson-within-the-novel, not a number of women, but one male character, Rupert Birkin, a school-inspector, and clearly very much a Lawrence self-portrait. But as the title indicates, vital though men are in this novel – and by no means just as love-interests – it is again the women who play the most important roles. The alternative perspectives they offer, run counter to the male discourses, even the one developed by Birkin, and their reasoning and arguments often prevail, at times becoming absolutely dominant. Dominance, however, is not what interests Lawrence most in this novel: “What looks at first like a struggle to dominate, becomes through the loss of self a moment of oblivion and renewal, issuing in new tenderness and truth” (Kinkead-Weekes 336). Lawrence wants the emphasis to fall on love and the changes this feeling can bring to the characters, with women being the initiators of these changes. But this is only one of the many reasons which demand a focus on the feminine presence in the novel. What is unmistakable, and should most emphatically be noted, is that the moulding of the female characters is once more based on a specifically Lawrencian conception of the world. Western civilization, as he saw it, was on the brink of destruction after World War I. In *Women in Love*, women live and act as seers of the coming end, privileged prophetesses, who may be oracles of doom, like Gudrun or Hermione, or apostles of renewal, like Ursula.

### **Destruction and Rebirth: The Descent into the Inner Self**

The two sisters, Gudrun and Ursula Brangwen, can be seen as representing conflicting aspects of the Lawrencian myth. Gudrun revolts with the passionate heart and sharp intellect of the restless, ever-inquiring woman who seeks answers and refuses to accept a truth unexamined. Ursula, on the other hand, represents the eternal mystical woman but also a new hope. Having established a true communion with her hidden self, as we saw in *The Rainbow*,

she seeks the utmost consummation in the other sex. The two young women can look back on two equally powerful female ancestors, namely, their mother Anna and their grandmother Lydia. But of course they must go on to live their own lives, use their own judgement and come to terms with their contemporary, immediate world.

Naturally, it is not only the two main female characters in the novel that are in search for fulfillment. Rupert Birkin has his counterpart in his friend Gerald Crich, the other important male character in the novel, the son of the local colliery owner, the man of industry and power and embodiment of many qualities of the modern, mechanistic, mechanical life Lawrence despises. Gerald, often cynical and negative about people and society, yet not without hope for individuals and their relationships, is continually contrasted with Birkin, who seems to have a more negative, at times nihilist, attitude towards all humankind, but is still open to change and can finally abandon all his previous negativity for the fuller, earthier, joyful life, which Ursula represents and offers to him.

Thus, Lawrence creates two pairs of characters who “are not only ‘in love’ – whether in tender or aggressive ways – they are also poised at crossroads between modes of deathliness and possibilities of new life” (Kinkead-Weekes, Introduction xix). It is through the employment of such antithetical forces that the novel reflects the age’s feeling of disillusion and anxiety, which Lawrence views hopefully as the necessary stage that always precedes transformation and renewal. After all, the succession of destruction and rebirth is the natural pattern of the life-cycle; and the idea of light being born from darkness is one Lawrence has already dealt with in “The Crown,” the series of six essays that Lawrence wrote in 1914-15 at the same time that he was busy with *The Sisters*. In “The Crown” Lawrence notes:

Cry after cry as the light develops within the darkness,  
and mind is born, and the consciousness of that which is  
outside my own flesh and limbs, and the desire for everlasting  
life grows more insistent. (*RDP* 257)

It's in these essays that Lawrence elaborates more emphatically his theory about the marriage of opposites which had first stated in *Study*: "For it is as if life were a double cycle, of men and women, facing opposite ways, travelling opposite ways, revolving upon each other" (*Study* 57). The continuous, repetitive cycle of life and death, the two great opposites of life itself, may also be observed in the constant moving in and out of the conscious self that the Lawrencian heroine experiences, an experience which is like a "descent" to the inner sanctum of the psyche, "a process of learning to trust the neglected or rejected parts of oneself" (Anderson 53) and which presupposes the destruction of the ordinary, conventional self-identity.

Up to now, Ursula constitutes the best example of this process with her encounters with the "darkness," the world beyond, and her efforts to stay with the world of "light," the known world of consciousness. For Lawrence, these encounters with the "other" dark self present the knowledge "in the blood," "the unknown bodily self." Lawrence encourages man and woman to search for this "dark self in the mysterious labyrinth of the body" who is entrapped in "self-conscious panoply": "To be a man! To risk your body and your blood first, and then to risk your mind" (*RDP* 217). In Jungian terms, our journey through life is a continuing process of self-examination and growth which finally leads to *individuation* through a thorough exploration of the dark sides of the unconscious (Snowden 70-71). In his *Modern Man In Search of a Soul* (1933) Jung, referring to the problem of the modern man "who has lost all

the metaphysical certainties of his medieval brother, and set up in their place the ideals of material security, general welfare and humaneness,” suggests a return to the psychic life (see also Introduction): “At first we cannot see beyond the path that leads downward to dark and hateful things – but no light or beauty will ever come from the man who cannot bear this sight.” Going deep into one’s self, Jung recognizes, cannot but be a painful but also cathartic and profoundly rewarding experience, a kind of expiation, which must precede rebirth: “Light is always born of darkness, and the sun never yet stood still in heaven to satisfy man’s longing or to still his fears” (*MMSS* 235).

This symbolic descent to the hidden aspect of the self is found in the various ancient mythologies: Persephone’s abduction by Pluto, Orpheus’ (ultimately unsuccessful) journey to Hades to win back Eurydice, the Homeric *Nekyia*, or, to move further east, the descent of Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of sexual love, fertility and warfare, to the netherworld, and Ishtar’s (her equivalent Babylonian deity) famously reckless journey to the land of No-Return. The notion of descent in D.H. Lawrence’s fiction concerns both male and female characters, but it is his women who are the privileged, naturally gifted ones, able to acquire something akin to the mystical status and powers of the ancient goddesses, and become the guides leading their men through this mortally dangerous, but necessary experience of the destruction and rebirth of the self, to a new enriched and meaningful life. Ursula and Gudrun become the guiding spirits in the lives of Birkin and Gerald, and come to define their differing fates. But even secondary female characters, such as Hermione Roddice, the eccentric literary hostess who has a mutually unsatisfying affair with Birkin before he takes up with Ursula, are employed to demonstrate different aspects of the feminine consciousness and their varying influence on the male psyche. Lawrence waxes poetic in his descriptions of the women’s encounters with the mysterious aspects of their own selves, often in the

proximity of nature, in breathtaking, “apocalyptic” scenes that contain vivid and rich imagery as well as lyrical language.

### **Gudrun’s Encounter with “The Dark”**

Right from the first pages, Lawrence declares in no uncertain terms that the two sisters are free spirits: they are introduced as “the sisters of Artemis rather than of Hebe” (*WL* 8). Nothing could be clearer: Artemis, the maiden huntress, chaste goddess of forests and hills, and twin sister of Apollo, as opposed to Hebe, the Gods’ placid cup-bearer and the celestial wife given to Hercules. The independent-minded Gudrun, a young artist, recently returned from sophisticated Chelsea to her home town in the Midlands coalfields, gives the same impression of remoteness and alienation typical of most Lawrencian heroines who find themselves in a new, strange environment and/or awkward situations: “It was strange that she could have chosen to come back and test the full effect of this shapeless, barren ugliness upon herself.” Gudrun cannot explain the motives that compelled her to return back to her home town. She wanted to “submit” herself to this inexplicable urge to obey to this inner drive. She sees in her home town not reality, but “a ghoulish replica of the real world” (11), feels suffocated by the dark buildings with their grim inhabitants, and lives among them “half-dazed,” as if “she were treading in the air, quite unstable” and “she was afraid.” Striking in her “grass-green stockings, her large, grass-green velour hat, her full, soft coat, of a strong blue colour” (12), Gudrun feels she must find a man, and is quite practical and direct in her requirements: she is looking for “an attractive individual with sufficient means” (8). Still, despite this evidence of calculating coolness, her emotions, once awoken, are powerful.

When she first meets Gerald, she experiences “a keen paroxysm, a transport, as if she had made some incredible discovery, known to nobody else on earth” (15). When she sees him again at a wedding, she is so overwhelmed that she “rose sharply and went away” as “she could not bear it. She wanted to be alone, to know this strange, sharp inoculation that had changed the whole temper of her blood” (22). Gudrun seems afraid of this new, exciting and also erotic other. “She is not trusting to her own dark self,” as Sheila MacLeod put it, and this suggests a lack of trust in her own femininity, an inability, or at least unwillingness, to surrender to the deeper, uncontrollable part of her self, the very place where, according to Lawrence, “the deep way of understanding” takes place (MacLeod 105). Gudrun feels uncomfortable when she has to come face to face with her deeper feminine self, and this, no doubt, is feeding both the attraction and the antagonistic urge she feels for Gerald, the strong, independent man of action. There are streaks of both envy and bitterness when she tells him: “You are a man, you want to do a thing, you do it. You haven’t the *thousand* obstacles a woman has in front of her.” Here Gudrun directly questions the inhibitions and taboos, imposed upon women from within as well as without: “But isn’t it *ridiculous*, doesn’t it simply prevent our living!” (WL 48).

Gudrun’s free spirit, more in tune with independence and logic, is constantly in conflict with this deeper layer of the feminine psyche, which she also possesses and which creeps in, often in moments of ecstasy, in the presence of the masculine: Gerald on his horse, at first a “picturesque” sight that can only elicit from her an ironic smile, turns almost immediately to something that makes her stare at him with “spell-bound eyes” and feel a “poignant dizziness” (111), when he brutally forces the horse to submit to his will. Julian Moynahan claims that Gudrun identifies with the mare and derives a masochistic pleasure from this exhibition of male power (Moynahan 86). Keith Sagar says that Gerald’s treatment of the

mare reveals “his domineering will and almost sadistic sexual pride” (Sagar 80), while Mark Kinkead-Weekes sees in this battle between the man and the animal an allegory of “the human ‘war’ ” “the battle between the sexes” (Kinkead-Weekes, Introduction xx).

Undoubtly the scene awakens Gudrun’s dark instincts. Her mute fascination with Gerald’s show of cruelty and her distaste at Ursula’s angry call to him to stop – “It was unendurable that Ursula’s voice was so powerful and naked” (WL 111) – reveal to her something new about both human nature in general and her own self in particular, that disconcerts her. Her admiration for the “indomitable thighs of the blond man clenching the palpitating body of the mare into pure control” ( 113) remains a secret hidden in her subconscious, her apparent reaction being an aggressive, wordless sound: “Gudrun cried, in a strange, high voice, like a gull, or like a witch screaming out from the side of the road” (112). But Gudrun is not moved by pity for the animal, or even simple common sense like her sister who, beside herself with anger, screams to Gerald: “No – ! No – ! Let her go! Let her go, you fool, you *fool* – !” (111). Ursula’s reaction to Gerald’s brutal behaviour resembles that of Kate in the scene of the bull fight in *The Plumed Serpent*. In both cases, it is the pure feminine instinct that compels the heroines to react vigorously to the wanton violence exercised by men. However Gudrun – who does not lack feminine instinct or sensuality – feels during this battle a higher sensation, falling into a swoon, then a numbness inflicted by “the sense of indomitable soft weight of the man” (113). This incident signifies Gudrun’s entrance into the dark subterranean world of instinct and the flesh, a world, which up to that moment she could only ignore as her intellectual background and sophisticated character left no room for the feelings springing directly from the body and the senses. Now she feels that the dark, dusted colliery district has a “thick, hot attraction in it,” that “there was in the whole atmosphere, a resonance of physical men, a glamorous thickness of labour and maleness, surcharged in the air” (115). Suddenly, she wants to satisfy this sense of “nostalgia,” which comes over her, and be among



these people. Lawrence calls her a “new Daphne” (the nymph of Apollo) who, according to the Greek myth, was turned into a laurel tree in order to escape him. This modern nymph of Lawrence, however, has turned into “a machine” (116) and found her “boy” among the worker of her town “like any other common lass.” Gudrun sees some divinity in the decay around her, but these hopes and illusions do not last long. Soon she comes to see Palmer, her new companion, as nothing more than an “elegant piece of machinery” (117), a cold, destructive egoist who detests and despises other people. Once more, Gudrun feels estranged, and she feels the need to retreat from close intimacy with these people and her surroundings: “She felt she was sinking into one mass with the rest.” Sometimes she is filled with anger and contempt, and feels “prepared for flight,” but then, before she sinks into despair, the “spell” begins working again in “the darkish, glamorous country” (118).

This awakening of a deeper level of reaction to her surroundings continues in the following chapter entitled “Sketch-Book.” The opening scene has Gudrun sitting like a “Buddhist” almost in a state of nirvana, staring at the water plants of “dark, lurid colours,” rising “cool and fleshy,” “stiff and succulent” from the “soft, oozy, watery mud.” She experiences a connection with the natural secrets, she “could feel their turgid fleshy structure as in a sensuous vision, she knew how they rose out of the mud, she knew how they thrust out from themselves, how they stood stiff and succulent against the air” (119). Endowed with this new vision, Gudrun feels the sacred calling of a life beyond, but it is a calling coming from the strange, subterranean world. The imagery here points explicitly at Gudrun’s connection with these unknown, natural or supernatural forces: Lawrence likens her to a Buddhist who can hear the growing of the plants out of the mud, a connection which sets her apart from the other two women of the story, the earthy, natural Ursula and Hermione, the tortured, rejected priestess. Soon she will realize that this is a calling she cannot resist. It is her destiny to

embrace this dark world, whatever the consequences for her own self and those who will follow her.

Gudrun has a deeply rooted need for union and creation as well as destruction; a need which is fundamentally a metaphysical one, a mystical urge not to be adequately translated and explained in social or psychological terms. She desires dominion and is prepared to take any necessary risk in order to have it. In the scene with the bullocks, Gudrun finds a chance to demonstrate her weird, unearthly power:

Then in a sudden motion, she lifted her arms and rushed sheer upon the long-horned bullocks, in shuddering irregular runs, pausing for a second and looking at them, then lifting her hands and running forward with a flash, till they ceased pawing the ground, and gave away, snorting with terror. (*WL* 169-70)

This is the wild instinctual side of Gudrun prevailing over her vital, female nature. Although well aware of the causes of her alienation, and tormented by “this desolating, agonized feeling, that she was outside of life” ( 165), she cannot help obeying this wild voice from her unconscious, where mind and deep, primitive passions mingle unchecked and create tremors that come to the surface and shake from its foundations the superstructure of her life. Thus, Gudrun abandons herself to a wild dancing in front of the bullocks. Like another Cybele, the nature goddess also known as the “Lady of the Beasts,” Gudrun has a mysterious intimacy with the animals:

Nevertheless Gudrun, with her arms outspread and her face

uplifted, went in a strange, palpitating dance towards the  
cattle, lifting her body towards them as if in a spell [...]  
an uncanny white figure carried away in its own rapt trance,  
ebbing in strange fluctuations upon the cattle, that waited,  
and ducked their heads a little in sudden contraction  
from her, watching all the time as if hypnotized. (167-8)

This mystical dance is reminiscent of pagan rituals performed in pre-agricultural communities, for which hunting of wild animals was the major means of acquiring food. There, “the hunter must learn to enter a primal dance of death with his prey, accepting that he may as easily be killed as kill” (Woolger 99). Of course, Gudrun is not thinking she is in any grave danger here, let alone a mortal one; she is “confident of some secret power in herself, and had to put it to the test” (*WL* 167). Indeed, she is confident enough of the divine power she possesses, to have no hesitation in coming close to the bullocks and nearly touching them, compelled by “a terrible shiver of fear and pleasure.” Gudrun here is undergoing her first metamorphosis reminiscent of her mother’s metamorphosis when dancing pregnant in front of the mirror (*TR* 170-171), or Ursula’s frightening transformation when found alone at the Lincolnshire beach with Skrebensky (*TR* 444). Like Ursula, she is possessed by a form of divine madness, akin to ecstasy, a modern counterpart of the ancient Bacchae, the women-followers of Dionysus – the Greek god who is often depicted as a bull.

Gerald stops this strange sacred ritual by turning the animals away, much in the same way that Will Brangwen, Gudrun’s father, had interrupted through his presence her mother’s ecstatic dancing in front of the bedroom mirror, during her pregnancy. Women seem to remain isolated in their sacredness while men have great difficulty in accommodating the

sacred states of their chosen ones, let alone joining them in their journeys to the shadowy realm of the other. In the case of women, we could apply what Michael Bell has observed about characters in *Women in Love* in general, that they “typically find their own impulsive acts to be the objects of alienated surprise.” The men who happen to be the spectators of women’s “strange” behaviour lack the “reality context” in which to place and understand their needs and motivations, and consequently view these actions at best as mysterious, perhaps absurd, at worst as provocative and perverse (Bell 103). But viewed as distant, weird creatures, women acquire a sacred dimension. As we saw in *Sons and Lovers* and in *The Rainbow*, men who are attracted as well as repelled by their strangeness invest them with mysterious metaphysical qualities, a mysterious self to which they feel they must surrender. Although Gudrun possesses the stiff intellectuality of a modern woman, in the course of the novel and particularly in relation to Gerald, Lawrence endows her with the powerful but shadowy personality of Hecate, the Greek chthonic fertility goddess associated with witchcraft and the dark side of the moon. She seems to cast a spell on Gerald, confuse and almost madden him with her contradicting nature.

### **Gerald: The Dark Goddess’ Companion**

Gudrun is attracted to (and attracts) Gerald, a man who, very much like her, is also endowed with perverse destructive tendencies: “they were of the same kind, he and she, a sort of diabolic freemasonry subsisted between them.” In a way, Gerald is condemned from the start: Gudrun “knew, she had her power over him. Wherever they met, they would be secretly associated. And he would be helpless in the association with her. Her soul exulted” (122). Throughout the novel, their relationship is more like a battle than a partnership, with antagonism taking place not only on the surface but also, more importantly, on the

subterranean field where their dark selves must fight for supremacy and survival. Their relation is a “diabolic” one as it springs from the dark energies of this unconscious self which are untamed and unexplored and which come unexpectedly into the surface of the “logical” “conscious” self.

Gudrun also possesses the poisonous charm of a Byronic hero. She is a woman fatal to herself and to those close to her. Her victim, Gerald, is “magnetically” (120) drawn towards her, and though immediately acknowledging her as “a dangerous, hostile spirit” (122), he is helplessly charmed, completely disregarding the mortal danger she poses, almost as if he is deliberately seeking his own destruction. As Gudrun leads Gerald to the predictable, irresistible end, it is impossible not to think of her as a classic *femme fatale* or one in the long line of victorious villains like Lovelace in Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747), who are simply unable to resist their evil nature and will seduce, drain psychologically and finally kill their victims. Gudrun has to satisfy her angry, hungry femininity in much the same way in which Lovelace feels he “must possess Clarissa” in order to “reunite himself with the lost phallus,” as Terry Eagleton has put it (Eagleton 58). She is the aggressive female who seeks a male able and willing to explore and bring out the implicit but hidden aspects of her soul, and when it turns out he is not equal to the task, she lashes out at him and derives genuine pleasure from delivering her terrible punishment to the defeated male.

Gerald confesses his love to Gudrun after being struck – literally – by her, and in spite of her declaration that she will strike – metaphorically – the last blow too. Later, when they are alone in the canoe, the man “gave himself [to Gudrun] in a strange, electric submission” (WL 176). He “was almost transfused, lapsed out for the first time in his life, into the things around him. [...] Now he had let go, imperceptibly he was melting into oneness with the

whole” (178). This voluntary submission to Gudrun’s female power marks an important point of departure for Gerald’s consciousness: what he yearns for is not merely abandonment to the feminine other, but abandonment to the possibility of utter, final destruction. The eerie satisfaction he derives from closing in on death and decay, two active elements which Gerald feels always present in Gudrun’s difficult, destructive personality, exercise a huge attraction to him: “It was as if he belonged naturally to dread and catastrophe, as if he were himself again” (179). Julian Moynahan sees Gerald as a much more destructive personality than Gudrun, someone who actively spreads “his deadliness to Gudrun and to his workmen before he is finally disintegrated” (Moynahan 77).

Gerald and Gudrun are like a couple of dark deities, personifying the death instinct. Their presence in the novel stands for decay and dissolution, perpetuating the feeling of degradation expressed in and imposed by the Great War, “a frenzy of blind things dashing themselves and each other to pieces,” as Lawrence so vividly described in “The Crown” (*RDP* 259). Standing for “the triumph of death, of decomposition” (*WL* 388) in Lawrence’s metaphysics, Gerald and Gudrun are doomed:

As they tread a more and more dangerous path towards tragedy,  
their way of being in love steadily intensifies the sex war in which  
one always dominates or uses the other; a war of will and power,  
and finally of survival as love turns to hate or the frisson of defiance.

(Kinkead-Weekes 337)

Both Gudrun and Gerald are caught in a senseless antagonism, a fight between the sexes which has not winners at the end, only losers. Their connection is not the sacred, essential

connection which a man and woman must have, but a much more complicated bond which tends to be sadomasochistic: In the “Rabbit” chapter, Gudrun finds herself “arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity” of the animal, and at the same time feeling a “heavy cruelty” (WL 240) welling up in her. This is strikingly similar to the “white-edged wrath” Gerald feels coming up in him in his effort to capture the animal. Gudrun and Gerald share an “underworld knowledge” (241), and they both acknowledge in each other a “mutual hellish recognition” (242). Both derive a sadistic pleasure from the terrified screams and the frenzied struggle of the rabbit, a deep sensation of being alive together: “he saw her eyes black as night [...] The scream of the rabbit [...] seemed to have torn the veil of her consciousness. He looked at her, and the whitish, electric gleam in his face intensified” (241). This tearing of “the veil of her consciousness” represents the literal apocalypse of dark hidden depths which is at the heart of this novel.

In revising *The Sisters III* the last draft of *The Sisters* in 1917, the year when the novel got its final name *Women in Love*, Lawrence intensified the dark emotions of the couple aroused by the suffering of the animal, using a more “esoteric language” which almost “explores sado-masochism,” pointing out a secret and dangerous “obscenity” (Kinkead-Weekes 396). It was probably in Cornwall that Lawrence, interested in psychical research, had immersed himself in reading works such as S.T.Klein’s *Language and the Infinite*, the *History of Magic* by Eliphas Levi, J.M.Pryse’s *The Apocalypse Unsealed* and Madame Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*. He discussed some of his new influences in a letter to David Eder: “Have you read Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*? In many ways a bore, and not quite real. Yet one can glean a marvelous lot from it, enlarge the understanding immensely” (L iii. 150). One example of what Lawrence seems to have gleaned from Blavatsky occurs when Gerald responds to the sight of the red gushing blood the rabbit has caused in Gudrun’s

arm, feeling his mind flooded with the “red ether of the beyond.” As Kinkead-Weekes points out, Lawrence must have “borrowed” the terms from Madame Blavatsky:

In Blavatsky “ether” is a potency within us out of which future forms of being will evolve (hence a “beyond”), which has been present in creation from the beginning; and a medium (as Eliphas Levi wrote) through which “all the nervous centres” secretly communicate with one another. (Kinkead-Weekes 396)

Here, Gudrun and Gerald are the protagonists of an “obscene beyond” transported from ordinary reality by the sight of the wound:

The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the for ever unconscious, unthinkable red ether of the beyond, the obscene beyond. (*WL* 242)

This is the “erotic” territory, charted by Bataille, where “the delirium of the senses” brings the human being “to the level of the beasts” (*Erotism* 151). The startling “demonic” power of the animal is reflected in “the sharp blindness” of Gerald’s eyes, and its surprising strength is echoed in Gudrun’s “strange and vindictive” cry (*WL* 241).

This feeling of pleasure derived from inflicting or feeling pain is dramatically presented here. It is a feeling normally lurking deep in the “unconscious,” in the “unthinkable red ether of the beyond,” the forbidden city of the human psyche, where Jungian analysts like E.C.



Whitmont locate the primitive urges of aggression and destruction which have been expelled from “civilized” human beings as both unnatural and unsocial, the mortal enemies of rational human co-existence:

The transformative Ereshkigal-Medusa dynamic is an expression of the deepest mystery of the life force, in which creation, destruction, change, and re-creation are but variations of a unitary process of form and play of form. The central life-play of the transformative dynamism carries a sense of inexorability. In the midst of the pain it inflicts, it instills its own peculiar ecstatic satisfaction.

It gives birth to the forces of the dark twin of Dionysus, aggression and destruction, that were to be contained in the ancient sacrificial rites. (Whitmont 138)

It is interesting to notice here that Whitmont locates this urge of destruction “in the transformative dimension of the Feminine which has been repressed in the awareness of both sexes” (139). Johann Bachofen, the German-Swiss theologian, whom Whitmont cites, and whose work Lawrence was familiar with (Green 83-84), was among the first to contend that the “Bacchic mania which Euripides portrays [...] is rooted in the depths of woman’s emotional life” and discerns an “indissoluble bond” between the two mighty forces of “religious emotion and sensual desire” (Whitmont 139). Gudrun, I want to suggest, becomes a manifestation of this relation between the sacred religious feeling and the destructive drive of woman. She feels the call of the other self of hers, her feminine instinct which draws her to Gerald and which for Lawrence is religious and sacred. On the other hand, she cannot resist

her dark nature, her negative Bacchic destructive force which Gerald acknowledges and to which he is attracted.

In the chapter entitled “The Threshold,” Gerald and Gudrun share a powerful need, “the subterranean desire,” to “let go, to fling away everything, and lapse into a sheer unrestraint, brutal and licentious”:

Ah, if that which was unknown and suppressed in her were once let loose, what an orgiastic and satisfying event it would be. And she wanted it, she trembled slightly from the proximity of the man, who stood just behind her, suggestive of the same black licentiousness that rose in herself.” (*WL* 287)

Gerald discovers in Gudrun his Jungian anima, the opposite sex aspect of himself, but in his case the “female otherness” does not represent contact with an earthy, rejuvenating female psyche, but the archetypal Bacchic maenad, calling to Eros and Thanatos. In contrast to Will Brangwen and Skrebensky, who could not or would not risk the contact even with the positive feminine other, interpreting it as altogether evil, Gerald is not afraid of this dark side of the feminine “otherness,” as he discovers there vital, hitherto hidden elements of his own psyche. In Innsbruck, in winter, the couple “felt powerful enough to leap over the confines of life into the forbidden places, and back again.” In pointed contrast to Ursula and Birkin, who find in each other comfort from the threatening vastness of the icy landscape, Gudrun and Gerald thrive in the hostile environment: amid the snow they become the “opposite poles of one fierce energy” (399).

Although in Gerald, Gudrun has found an equally powerful partner and although she admires his ability to dominate seeing in him the strong man, able to “re-organize the industrial system” (417), she views his forceful masculine presence as a threat to her own independence, a power that could overwhelm and diminish her: “She was aware of his frightening, impending figure standing close behind her [...] And she felt she could not bear it anymore [...] she would fall down at his feet, groveling at his feet, and letting him destroy her” (415). Gudrun rejects Gerald not because he is incapable of understanding her otherness, but out of fear that he may deprive her of her unique status. As Sheila MacLeod puts it, Gudrun “holds back in fear from the surrender of the self as subject” and consequently must “postpone consummation” (MacLeod 111). Gudrun seeks to find consummation, but not in the arms of a man:

She felt that there, over the strange, blind, terrible wall  
of rocky snow, there in the navel of the mystic world, among  
the final cluster of peaks, there, in the unfolded navel of it all,  
was her consummation.

This is the culminating point of her union, not with the male, but with “the eternal, infinite silence, the sleeping, timeless, frozen centre of All.” By insisting on the ideal of perfect self-sufficiency, Gudrun hardens into a figure unyielding and cruel who wishes to remain a woman, whose female qualities ultimately turn her into a fierce destructive force. Gudrun’s Hades is a frozen Hades, but also a poetic one. Her “strange desire” to “plunge on and on, till she came to the end of the valley of snow” (*WL* 410) is a death call to which she wants to respond alone. She faces her inner darkness and accepts her annihilating emotions bravely.

### **Gerald: The Devouring Male**

However, Lawrence never quite allows the reader to forget that Gudrun, as a woman, has access to the fertile, positive feminine instinct, which holds her back from complete abandonment to the forces of death and destruction. On the continent, she feels “divorced” and “debarred” from the icy beauty of the snow-covered landscape (*WL* 403), and envies the simplicity shown by Ursula and Birkin. Although constantly associated with negative images, Gudrun also shares with Ursula an appeal to the creative forces of life, and this effectively preserves her value as a symbol of the feminine – and not just in Gerald’s eyes. She is by no means a sterile figure, insensitive to other people or the positives around her. She feels repelled by the “death” in old Mr. Crich’s eyes: “she admired the self-possession and the control of the dying man exceedingly. But she loathed the death itself” (286). She acknowledges (and yearns for) Ursula’s serenity and self-sufficiency: “Gudrun listened, as she sat beneath the trees, and the yearning came into her heart. Ursula seemed so peaceful and sufficient unto herself, sitting there unconsciously crooning her song, strong and unquestioned at the centre of her own universe” (165). Gudrun is aware of the dangers breeding in her proud, introverted and egotistical nature. She can well understand Ursula’s earthiness and her ability to enjoy life, and feels all the more urgently the need to break through beyond the limits of her personality. Thus, it is Gerald who becomes more of a death-symbol, the character on whom Lawrence repeatedly projects the death and corruption inherent in the brutal mechanistic world he represents.

Gerald personifies Gudrun’s dark aspects without her healthy, creative ones. When he runs to her after his father’s death, it is her positive female power that he seeks, a power he needs at that moment in order to be revived after being near the shadow of death. Without

consciously acknowledging this power, he instinctively yearns for a union with it, and is immediately conscious of its immense healing qualities: “He felt himself dissolving and sinking to rest in the bath of her living strength. [...] He was a man again, strong and rounded [...] And she, she was the great bath of life, he worshipped her. Mother and substance of all life she was” (344). Gudrun has already found a path to those inner remedies, those forgotten, yet enormous powers within. After the kiss with Gerald under the bridge, when she first experienced a loss into the powerful erotic “other,” Gudrun has started discovering the tender, sensual, Aphrodisiac part of her feminine nature with which she had long lost contact. Gerald becomes “the exquisite adventure, the desirable unknown to her” (331), the male against whom she would assert her femininity. It’s remarkable that it is always Gerald who seeks in Gudrun “the mystery of his own destruction and annihilation” (446), who feels that life sometimes could turn out to be “a curse” (208) and ultimately lacks the inner resources to withstand the natural consequences of this conclusion. Here, Lawrence displays what Mark Schorer considers “a new development in the writer,” that is the “theme of the victim who invites the victimizer, the murderee who invites the murderer” (Spilka 51). Instead of wishing to rule and dominate, Gerald’s will here shows the desire to be dominated, even, finally, to be annihilated. He repudiates the life force, which Freud calls Eros and which signifies the power which connects the human being with life. On the contrary he has an inclination towards death, the Freudian Thanatos. This inclination for Freud constitutes the man’s “death wish,” his desire to return to “the inorganic condition from which it arose” (Torgovnick 15) and which Freud connects with the “oceanic,” that is with the return to the “feminine” stage of existence, the place of the mother’s body. This wish for death reveals the perverted will of the modern, mechanistic man corrupting the vital life instinct that naturally resides within every individual human being. Gerald seeks his destruction and chooses Gudrun as his death-agent. Her omnipotence is concretized only in Gerald’s consciousness:

she becomes the destructive female he was always yearning for, owing to his own incapacity to love and acknowledge the fundamental, life-asserting female qualities. What ought to be a liberating new start, turns literally into a dead end. “Gudrun seems like the end, to me” (*WL* 439), he says to Birkin, before, like a latter day romantic hero, he walks out into the wilderness, to meet his own death. Gudrun for her part is acutely aware of the burden Gerald imposed on her: “His passion was awful to her, tense and ghastly and impersonal, like a destruction, ultimate” (444). Gerald looks very much the part of “the devouring male”: “You break me – you only waste me” (443) Gudrun claims. He aspires to a completion of the self that can only be achieved with her help:

Though she treated him with contempt, repeated rebuffs  
and denials, still he would never be gone, since, in being  
near her, even, he felt the quickening, the going forth in him,  
the release, the knowledge of his own limitation and the magic  
of the promise, as well as the mystery of his own destruction  
and annihilation. (446)

Gerald feels the waste, the weariness caused by the lack of a meaningful, creative life, and wants Gudrun to cure him. But he fails to address Gudrun’s positive, creative aspects, and thus nurtures their opposites. Instead of helping to bring out her rejuvenating qualities for their mutual benefit, he raises in her the violent, destructive Death deity that eventually kills him.

## The Destructive, Feminine Other

The ever-presence of the destructive instinct and its association with the mystical feminine is most clearly presented in the chapter titled “Water-Party.” In the beginning, Lawrence gives a calm, idyllic description of the environment:

He [Gerald] was listening to the faint near sounds, the dropping of water-drops from the oar-blades, the slight drumming of the lanterns behind him, as they rubbed against one another, the occasional rustling of Gudrun’s full skirt, an alien land noise. His mind was almost submerged, he was almost transfused, lapsed out for the first time in his life, into the things about him. (*WL* 178)

Gerald seems hypnotized by the soothing, serene effect of these little sounds (water, oars, Gudrun’s skirt). However, the water, element of life, permanent symbol of the eternal feminine, is soon to become a strange, disquieting force, independent from and indifferent, even hostile to human life. There is a very clear parallel to the incident in *The Rainbow* in which Will Brangwen recklessly dives with little Ursula clinging on his shoulders, taking her “down in the canal’s deep water” (*TR* 208). But whereas Will and Ursula emerged safe, here, two young people, Gerald’s sister Diana and Dr Brindell are drowned. After diving into the dark waters in a vain attempt to locate the bodies, Gerald – for the first time – loses himself in the watery vastness and becomes suddenly aware of its all-devouring menace. His description of it sounds calm and precise, but there is no mistaking the dread beneath his words: “ ‘But it’s curious how much room there seems, a whole universe under there; and as cold as hell,

you're as helpless as if your head was cut off' ” (WL 184). For Will Brangwen, the leap into the water, dangerous as it is, contains the positive element of bonding with his little daughter and the consequent feeling of warmth and peace, but in “Water-party” there are no positives: the water is a cold, lethal element that traps and drowns people. Ursula, fearless as a child in *The Rainbow*, is terrified here by “the loud splashing of water from out of the dark,” its “great steady booming” as everything is “drawn and lost” in it (185). Ursula does not belong to this scene of death.

The water, which engulfs the dead bodies, has the chthonic power of Thanatos. It is an unrelenting, uncontrollable force which scares her and forces her to turn her eyes to that other eternal female deity, “the high, bland moon”(185) to recover her courage. The moon, ancient goddess of fertility and cold destruction, observes the entire scene “with faint luminosity” (182), shining on Gerald’s white limbs, sending her “impertinent brightness” on “the small, dark boats clustered on the water” (184). As in many of Lawrence’s novels, the moon once more stands as a mysterious body replete with pagan significance, enriching the more mystical scenes, a constant companion to the heroines’ explorations of the hidden mysteries of the self. Lawrence seems always to link the moon with women and femininity, a connection commonly found in the beliefs and legends of primitive tribes and ancient civilizations, not only in Europe and the Near East, but also in North and South America, Africa and the East as far as Australia and Polynesia (Harding 96).

In contrast to the wedding scene in *The Rainbow* where Ursula is found in the grip of the mystical, transformative power of moon and water (295), here, these two elements become hostile for the woman. Ursula senses the presence of death, and longs to escape, “to struggle for her life” (WL 185) as any human being would. She acquires here an earthier dimension



which brings her closer to an ordinary woman. Throughout this novel, Ursula is a less mythicized figure than she had been in *The Rainbow*. It seems that now, after her numerous encounters with her deeper self, Ursula has found wisdom and self-knowledge. She appears much more settled than Birkin and, not accidentally, Lawrence also uses her as his porte-parole, the person who articulates the counter argument to that of Birkin's. Gudrun, on the other hand, though "shocked and frightened" by the accident, is quite able to "put that away" and concentrate on how she could "act her part" in order to "deport herself with Gerald" (190).

Throughout this dread-inspiring, apocalyptic scene, the feminine is persistently associated with the divine, the mysterious and the deadly. After the lake is emptied and the two corpses appear, the young woman "had her arms tight round the neck of her male companion, choking him: "'She killed him,' said Gerald" (189). The dark, feminine power, though, is also preparing the rebirth to come. The womb, which "is full of darkness," is also "flooded with the strange white light of eternity" (*RDP* 255). The scene demonstrates the widespread combination of destructive and beneficial forces which are also found personified in many ancient goddesses: Isis, the Egyptian Moon Goddess of fertility and rebirth, Ishtar, her Babylonian equivalent and Persephone and Demeter in Greece. All these powerful deities were believed to bring about both death and rebirth. This concept of the life-death cycle is never far from the surface in this novel and it is explicitly stated by Birkin:

*I do* want to die from this life – and yet it is more than life itself. One is delivered over like a naked infant from the womb, all the old defenses, and the old body gone, and new air around one, that has never been breathed

before (*WL* 186).

For Lawrence, the end signals a new beginning and vice-versa: “Into the womb of the primary darkness enters the ray of ultimate light, and time is begotten, conceived, there is the beginning of the end. And there, within the womb, we ripen upon the beginning, till we become aware of the end” (*RDP* 256). This womb, for Lawrence, is: “the womb of our era” -- probably the catastrophic era of the war generation – which imprisons the human being in its vast walls and from which the man waits to be delivered (255).

“Water-Party” ends with the symbolic coming together of life and death: The water is drained from the pond while the moon “sank at last.” “As the birds were whistling for the first morning, and the hills at the back of the desolate lake stood radiant with new mists, there was a straggling procession up to Shortlands, men bearing the bodies on a stretcher” (*WL* 189). This scene is followed by another one in which Ursula, the messenger of life, is waiting for Birkin. After the devastating loss, this woman in love brings the promise of Eros, the sensuality of the physical being. Ursula has felt rejected and abandoned before, she has known the dreadful bitterness of death, but she has the inner resources to preserve hope and give herself wholeheartedly to the new day: “Every minute, she glanced automatically at the window. He [Birkin] would be there” (190).

## Hermione: The Hopeless Priestess

In contrast to both Ursula and Gudrun, and their encounters with their other emotional self of instinct and desire, Hermione Rodice's position is established from the beginning and never really changes throughout the novel. Hermione is Birkin's mistress and like Gudrun, she is an impressive, attractive but distant figure: "People were silent when she passed, impressed, roused, wanting to jeer, yet for some reason silenced" (WL 15). Initially, she seems to have exactly the same commanding presence Gudrun has, but soon enough this facade of easy assurance and self-confidence crumbles and we see Hermione "tortured," feeling "herself exposed to wounds and to mockery and to despite." For all her qualities, she is not whole; there is something hollow behind her shiny armour which has "a secret chink" (16). This secret chink is her love for Birkin, a love which has turned into a devastating passion that weakens her self-possession and undermines her soul. Lawrence depicts her as a "violated prophetess," a prophetess who keeps "his [Birkin's] records and his oracles" (*Prologue* 492). Modelled on Lawrence's women acquaintances (mainly Ottoline Morrel but also Jessie Chambers and Helen Corke), her presence in the novel seems necessary as Lawrence shows through her depiction the extreme of mental consciousness, intense spirituality and obstinate will. She is "the apotheosis of civilization," the "withered priestess" of the novel (Kinkead-Weekes 333). She lives her passion for Birkin ecstatically, but it is not a healthy, creative passion, springing from mutual love. It is a blind, sterile feeling, alien to the natural life of the soul, and thus a fatal, destructive force that can be truly quenched only by death. Like Carlota, Don Ramon's first wife in *The Plumed Serpent*, who is crushed under her violent blind desire to "rescue" her husband from the "evil" forces to which he has surrendered, Hermione never doubts her own beliefs or her judgement: "She lived in and by her own self-esteem, conviction of her own rightness of spirit" (WL 109). She wants to save Birkin from

real adversities, but also, crucially, from himself, from what she sees as his irrational, childish refusal to face facts. She speaks patronisingly about him to Ursula:

And you see, Rupert isn't this [a sensitive man], he isn't. He is frail in health and body, he needs great, great care. Then he is so changeable and unsure of himself – it requires the greatest patience and understanding to help him. (295)

It is as if she is speaking about a difficult child rather than the man she loves.

Hermione's affair with Birkin is a degrading one for both of them. Birkin derives a perverse pleasure from Hermione's quasi-religious devotion, which he finds both servile and valueless: "And he jeered at her, at the spiritual woman who waited at the tomb, in her sandals and her mourning robes. He jeered at her horribly, knowing her secrets" (492). Like Miriam in *Sons and Lovers* whom Paul rejects due to her "angelic" nature, Birkin rejects Hermione because of her inability to concretize her femaleness and accept him as a male. She in turn is tortured and maddened by Birkin's disparaging behaviour – as Miriam is with Paul – and finally, in a fit of despair, attempts to kill him. Jennifer and Roger Woolger characterize her as a caricature of goddess Athena (with her false armor and obstinate will), a desperate woman, whose "pain of exposure" is so great that she "retaliates with all the deathly violence of the Medusa" (Woolger 87). T.R. Wright shows how Lawrence alludes to demonic, biblical figures in his depiction of her:

Hermione too suffers from a "bottomless pit of insufficiency,"  
like that from which Satan emerges and back into which he

is cast in the Book of Revelation, her identity being “established on the sand” like “the foolish man” in the apocalyptic parable, whose house fell when “the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon” it. She is frequently likened to the fallen angels, with a look “which seemed spiritual, like the angels, but which came from torture,” and “the face of an almost demoniacal ecstatic.” (Wright 133)

Hermione thus appears as a pitiful figure, a woman deprived of her true sacredness, a fallen angel who has no identity. Her striking Birkin on the head with a stone of lapis lazuli is very much a symbolic, not serious attempt to kill him. It does not deliver Hermione from her suffering, nor does it shatter her illusions. Her claim is that “spiritually, she was right” (WL 106). Hermione’s private casuistry cannot of course diminish the significance of her action. As Nigel Kelsey perceptively notes, this is an act of despair, a gesture of rebellion that signifies a desperate effort on the woman’s part to express her emotions, the exasperation of her thwarted love and the sudden end of her persevering. Hermione “articulates the language of her escape and ultimate freedom, physically and without verbal utterance” (Kelsey 151). Like Gudrun’s dancing in front of the bullocks, which puzzled Gerald, this semiotic language that women repeatedly employ, which is a dramatic support of “the voice of the conscious,” becomes in the novel what Roland Barthes called a “sociolect,” which “reassures all the subjects *inside*, rejects and offends those *outside*” (Barthes 122). This language becomes for women a language of reassurance and in many cases a link with the sacred otherness. It springs from the body, undermining all rules, and is empowering enough to signify a “re-entering” (Kelsey 150) into the social realm on terms that differ radically from those of the dominant male logos. This body-language can also be aggressive as in Hermione’s case.

Like the mythical Medea, who killed her children to revenge her husband's betrayal, Hermione's passion is expressed symbolically through this desperate gesture, which reveals her frustration towards a man who rebukes her love. Her tragedy is even more intense as this effort to punish him for his cruelty is without result. Birkin's behaviour does not change and Hermione is left alone with her unsatisfied wishes.

Hermione is shown to be incapable of understanding either the true motives of her actions, or their deeper significance. She disassociates herself "from the language of the lapis lazuli (her other), from the struggles of the Brangwen sisters and finally from Birkin himself" (Kelsey 151). She is a lost soul, clinging to the futile consolation of conventional values and her own reason. She prefers to preserve her contrived self-image, even though this keeps her alienated from her real, spontaneous self and is at the root of many of her sufferings. As with Mrs Ingram in *The Rainbow*, Lawrence portrays her as a woman who lacks the deeper, sacred force which would help her to find fulfillment.

In the chapter "Woman to Woman," Ursula confronts Hermione in a clash that Lawrence describes as a battle between "the world of the extant consciousness" and the "purely emotional" (WL 292) other. Hermione has lost all contact with her inner self and has effectively become "a priestess without religion," a mere "leaf upon a dying tree" (293). She thinks that the best way to win Birkin's love is by serving him faithfully with the devotion of a true priestess. This is the "sort of *submission* he [Birkin] insists on" (294) she says, but it is precisely what Ursula dreads in marriage, and instinctively recoils from. Hermione is not blind to the suffering this necessarily entails, but she is masochistically determined to accept it: "And one must be willing to suffer – willing to suffer for him hourly, daily" (296). This may or may not be love, but even if it is, it is of a kind that is nourishing neither of them: it is

patronizing, suffocating and ultimately useless. The surrender Hermione offers, even yearns for, is the very opposite of “the sure stability of the unyielding female” for which man looks, as Lawrence insists in the *Study of Thomas Hardy* (54). The real female that Hermione (correctly) acknowledges in Ursula is what Lawrence hails as the true feminine woman who will “possess” and “fertilize” man’s soul (*Study* 53). Hermione has “betrayed herself as a woman” (*WL* 295), remaining egoistic and sterile until the end, suffocated by her vain intellectualism.

Ursula, after a long, painful journey towards self-knowledge, is now in a position to recognize the wounded nature of a woman unable to discover and reconcile herself with her Aphrodisiac nature, her erotic other self which can be given to a man unconditionally. Her (unspoken) verdict about the failure of Hermione’s relationship with Birkin is revealing of both women’s character: “You don’t give him a woman’s love, you give him an ideal love, and that is why he reacts away from you.” The apparently heroic submission of Hermione is the result of her rejection of instinct and impulse, the separation from which has rendered her an “untrue spectre of a woman” (297). Unlike Gudrun, the other intellectual female character in the novel, Hermione is completely unaware of this alienation. She never doubts the correctness of her choices, thoughts and actions. Even though Gudrun acknowledges that “she [Hermione] is not a fool” and prefers her company to that of a woman “who keeps to her own set” (51), Hermione can never be her equal. She lacks Gudrun’s perceptiveness, the richness of her experience, her determination to try to know and live with and through a man. Like Gudrun, Hermione envies Ursula’s “unconscious positivity,” (293) while despising her as “purely emotional” (292). Hermione’s envy of Ursula, however, does not change her; it does not enable her to review her relationship to the world or to achieve peace of mind and openness of soul.

## **Ursula: The Daughter of Aphrodite**

Lawrence maintains a carefully calibrated balance between the doomed, destructive characters of Hermione, Gudrun and Gerald, and those of Ursula and Birkin, by depicting the latter couple – especially Ursula – as a beacon of hope and rebirth. Ursula is a fictional daughter of Aphrodite who moves away from both Gudrun and Hermione, who become dark figures with a worn out female impulse, the dark daughters of Persephone. Lawrence believed that “any novel of importance has a purpose” since “every novelist who amounts to anything has a philosophy” (*Study* 155) and Ursula is there precisely to present a vital part of his metaphysics: she is the character who intervenes and “corrects” Birkin-Lawrence’s uncertainties and pessimism. Birkin’s pessimistic views are illuminated, undermined and at times reinforced through Ursula’s wise and timely interventions.

During her first encounter with Birkin, Ursula, challenged and overwhelmed, tries to solve “her own problems in the light of his words” (*WL* 43). But she is already familiar with her “sensual” role, the suspension of her “volition” and the “lapse into unknowingness” which Birkin advocates. Tellingly, it is not his ideas that move her but his “great physical attractiveness”; “a curious hidden richness, that came through his thinness and his pallor like another voice, conveying another knowledge of him. It was in the curves of his brows and his chin, rich, fine, exquisite curves, the powerful beauty of life itself” (44). She is drawn to him in the sensual, inexplicable, mysterious way of sexual attraction, living in reality what Birkin can only approach through words. Even when it comes to words, Ursula is not at a loss. She always finds prompt and apposite answers to Birkin’s pessimistic pronouncements on humanity and its future: “‘And if you don’t believe in love, what *do* you believe in?’ she asked, mocking. ‘Simply in the end of the world and grass?’” Her spontaneous, pointed, often



satirical retorts do not provoke any antagonism, even as she stands firm, refusing to be browbeaten by Birkin's frequent jeremiads. It's not the young woman but the over-serious man who is made to feel silly: he "was beginning to feel a fool" and this happens soon after his first verbal encounters with Ursula. (129).

Birkin is not offended though by Ursula's criticism. He is impressed. "He saw her face strangely enkindled [...] His soul was arrested in wonder. She was enkindled in her own living fire." In Birkin's eyes, Ursula gets a divine status: "She sat like a strange queen, almost supernatural in her glowing smiling richness." Birkin responds to Ursula's positive feminine other, in contrast to Gerald, who is attracted by Gudrun's negative otherness. Birkin is there to be captured by Ursula's earthy, female warmth without resisting. He senses his coming "defeat" by her feminine wisdom: "A strange, wicked yellow light shone at him in her eyes. He hesitated, baffled, withdrawing" (130). Soon after, Birkin is ready to surrender. In this final version of the novel (revised in 1917, but published in 1920) Lawrence – aided by works which further clarified his metaphysics (*Look! We Have Come Through!*, "At the Gates") – "made cogent use of Ursula to pin down Birkin's defects" (Kinkead-Weekes 391). Her criticism is sharper than it had been in *The Sisters III* bringing out in Birkin "a life potential despite his nihilism." Lawrence further evaluates the concept of the "way of the stars" as it was conceived in *Look! We Have Come Through!* "focusing now on the ideas of two stars in 'permanent orbit and equilibrium'- symbolizing how individual independence could be reconciled, in lovers, with absolute commitment and bonding—" (392). Birkin and Ursula seem to incarnate this ultimate union of two independent minds which find one another in perfect balance, the "equilibrium" which allows the healthiest union between the two sexes.

In the chapter titled "Sunday Evening," Ursula, uncharacteristically, in an echo of Birkin's dark, pessimistic moods, sinks into meditation on the joy of death. Initially it is startling that Lawrence chooses Ursula, of all people, to express such thoughts about man, humanity and death. It seems that this is an unexpected return to Ursula's dark Persephonic impulses inherited by her grandmother Lydia in *The Rainbow*. In this passage from *Women in Love*, Ursula feels the need to surrender to the unknown, and sees death as the kingdom beyond, where "humanity is put to scorn" (WL 193), a secure refuge from the evils of a joyless, sterile life among the people. For her to die is "a joy," a submission "to that which is greater than the known," and thus it signifies "the pure unknown." Death is preferable to living "mechanized" and "cut off from within the motion of the will." Her argument carries far more conviction than the ones regularly offered by Birkin, whose contempt for humanity and her pessimistic tendencies seem to stem primarily, if not exclusively, from his own unresolved uncertainties and problems. Ursula can transcend reality and sink into the underworld of her unconscious: "her thoughts drifted into unconsciousness, she sat as if asleep beside the fire." She soon experiences an "awful nausea of dissolution set in within the body" (192). This is a process that signifies the return of the privileged female to the rich, reliable realm of her instincts and the vital union with her other, hitherto oppressed, silent self. The first significant result of this process is a profound alienation from the world outside, and a need to stay in the solitary, frightening but revealing and rewarding realm of the inner underworld.

When Birkin arrives, he can sense a sort of "change" in the woman, a change which however had endowed her with a magical glow: "But she was separate from him. She remained apart, in a kind of brightness" (194). Ursula has a divine aura in the eyes of the man after her descent into her dark self. Even more, Birkin's arrival interrupts this plunge into the

unknown, and this not unexpected, yet sudden intervention provokes in the woman a brief spurt of hatred for the intruder: "When he was gone Ursula felt a poignant hatred of him that all her brain seemed turned into a sharp crystal of fine hatred" (197). Ursula's perception of the world constantly changes. Her flexible, accepting female mind is alert (and responsive) to all aspects of life, positive and negative, to creative as well as destructive powers. Her character is the concretization of one of the main preoccupations of the novel, what Emile Delavenay defined as "the affirmation of the mysteries of life [which] goes hand in hand with a perverse delight in the idea of death" (Delavenay 393-4). However, Ursula's death wish is not destructive; it is by no means a wish for annihilation. She does not wish to nullify her life, she just wants a better one. Her occasional pessimism is amply counter-balanced by her life-affirming, life-giving qualities; her deep longing for partnership and passion never abandons her. In *Women in Love* Ursula is more of an Aphrodite: The questioning prophetess of *The Rainbow* gives place to a sensual woman full of life energy. Birkin's obstinate, pessimistic, dogmatic response to the world annoys her, and she is not always willing to put up with his wearying sermons of doom. Yet, he can also teach her. In the "Mino" chapter, Ursula interprets the male cat's attack on the female as a straightforward manifestation of "bossy" male attitudes (WL 150). And whereas in the original episode Birkin supported the "male privacy," in the 1917 version Lawrence has Birkin tell Ursula more about the natural roles of the sexes and the pure, holy "stable equilibrium" on which life is based. On the other hand, Birkin abandons the gender hierarchy and "grasps his idea of love in a way that will free it from chauvinism" (Kinkead-Weekes 392). But Ursula is never a passive recipient of his instruction. The chapter ends with her caustic comments on his "star-theory": "You don't fully believe yourself what you are saying. You don't really want this conjunction, otherwise you wouldn't talk so much about it, you'd get it" (WL 153). If Birkin's gift to Ursula is to

make her realize and experience a different kind of love, Ursula's arguably greater one is to make Birkin understand the vanity of his sterile pessimism.

### **Syria-Dea**

Ursula is never entirely convinced by Birkin's arguments about love, and her personality, though greatly enhanced through her relationship with him, remains fundamentally unchanged. On the contrary, by the end of the novel, Birkin is totally transformed, a new man and fully aware of his change: "How could he say 'I', when he was something new and unknown, not himself at all? This 'I', this old formula of the ego, was a dead letter" (WL 369). This transformation is not a painless one; Birkin has to fight hard against the tough, obstinate, old self of his. His angst is vividly dramatized in the "Moony" chapter, in which Ursula, in another pessimistic fit, repudiates humanity acknowledging only its destructive impulses: "the tide of nothingness rising higher and higher" (244). Feeling a "terrible desire for pure love" (245), she takes a walk to the woods of Willey Green where, by the full pond and under the full moon, she sees Birkin cursing and throwing stones at the reflection of the moon, ancient symbol of Cybele, the "accursed *Syria Dea*" as he angrily calls her (246). The legend was that in the temple of Cybele in Phrygia, this goddess of violent sexuality was served by eunuch priests, men who had sacrificed their virility to her, and Birkin feels that in order to establish a genuine connection with the feminine he has to surrender something of himself, he must sacrifice, like Cybele's priests, part of his masculinity, and is both unwilling and afraid to submit to this mental and psychological emasculation.

Birkin displays here something of the fear that the male Brangwens in *The Rainbow* felt for their female partners. He is repelled by the power of the moon-Cybele and Ursula is metamorphosed in his fantasy to a ruthless goddess. She stands as a representative of the eternal feminine power to which Birkin is reluctant to yield, but hesitates. Birkin's mad stoning of the moonlight is an overwhelming sight for Ursula: "her mind was all gone. She felt she had fallen to the ground and was spilled out, like water on the earth" but she gradually recovers as the image of the moon reforms on the subsiding surface of the pond:

they were coming once more into being. Gradually the fragments caught together, re-united, heaving, rocking, dancing, falling back as in panic, but working their way home again persistently [...] until a ragged rose, a distorted, rayed moon was shaking upon the waters again, reasserted, renewed.

Birkin is incapable of destroying the magic, feminine power which the moon represents. In this mystical scene, the feminine power takes gigantic dimensions emerging as a universal, undaunted threat strong enough to overcome the male resistance. However, when asked by Ursula "Why should you hate the moon?" he declines that he does: "'Was it hate?' he said" (248). What Ursula mistakenly, though not unreasonably, interprets as hate is actually pure frustration, originating from the realization how much he needs her and how much of himself he must give up to her: "There is a golden light in you," says Birkin "which I wish you would give me" (249).

It is interesting to note here that in the first version of this scene, Birkin, persisting in his obstinate attitude, asks Ursula to accept him as “a leader” (Kinkead-Weekes 393). In 1917, Lawrence replaces this demand of Birkin with the desire that both lovers surpass their egos and be together in true companionship (392). Still Ursula cannot understand the true necessity behind Birkin’s words, and views this as another of his attempts to make her submit: “You don’t want to serve *me* and yet you want me to serve you. It is so one-sided” (WL 249). But Birkin’s conception of “service,” in this particular case at least, is not as simple or egotistical as that:

‘It is different,’ he said. ‘The two kinds of service are so different. I serve you in another way – not through *yourself* – somewhere else. But I want us to be together without bothering ourselves – to be really together because we *are* together, as if it were a phenomenon, not a thing we have to maintain by our own effort.’ (249-50)

Birkin now becomes the ideal Lawrencian man who “when [he] seeks a woman in love, or in positive desire, he seeks a union, he seeks a consummation of himself with that which is not himself, light with dark, dark with light” (RDP 283). In such a mystical marriage, Birkin seeks complete union with the opposing but complementary “other,” the effective fusion of the masculine and the feminine. His decision to marry Ursula comes with the overwhelming urgency and force of a sudden realization: “He must ask her to marry him. They must marry at once, and so make a definite pledge, enter into a definite communion. [...] There was no moment to spare” (WL 254). It is another *hieros gamos*, a sacred union of the masculine and feminine principles (Harding 134) recast in Lawrencian terms. Ursula, however, continues to

demand from Birkin a conventional avowal of his love, and in the end, for all his deft, amused manoeuvres, she extracts it from him: “‘Do you really love me?’ [...] ‘Yes, I do. I love you, and I know it’s final.’” (251). Lawrence rewrote this scene in 1917 largely from Ursula’s point of view. Whereas in the original scene Ursula burst into tears at Birkin’s insistence on choosing a life with her, now she fully senses Birkin’s *otherness* trying simultaneously to discover the meaning behind Birkin’s words about the impersonality of the relationships (Kinkead-Weekes 392). In the end, reassured by this confession of his love, Ursula becomes again the vivacious, sensual Aphrodite: “She clung nearer to him. He held her close, and kissed her softly, gently [...] To be content in bliss, without desire or insistence anywhere, this was heaven” (WL 252). Ursula triumphs. She is clearly portrayed as the ideal young woman who dares to identify with her real female self, and unite with her man, not on any false terms imposed on her, but on the eternal female principles as Lawrence understood them: “Man must render himself up to her. [...] Let him be *her man* utterly, and she in return would be his humble slave – whether he wanted it or not” (265).

### **Ursula and “The Phallic Consciousness”**

The chapter “Excuse” is most revealing of Lawrence’s beliefs regarding the mysteries of the mystical union between man and woman. Here, a profound mutual understanding between Birkin and Ursula, an understanding beyond words, finally comes to full bloom. J.M.Pryse’s *The Apocalypse Unsealed* seems to have provided Lawrence with a new language to expand his metaphysics focusing now on a non-Western reading:

Do you know the physical – physiological – interpretations of the esoteric doctrine?- the *chakras* and dualism in experience? The

devils won't tell one anything, fully. Perhaps they don't understand themselves – the occultists – what they are talking about, or what their esotericism really means. But, probably, in the physiological interpretation, they do – and won't tell. Yet one gather enough.

Did you get Pryse's *Apocalypse Unsealed?* (L iii. 150)

The secrets of ancient Indian neurology and the idea of the cosmic energy that Pryse explains in his book give Lawrence the idea of energy that flows between the lovers and “produces that passing away into oblivion and reawakening into ‘essential new being,’ that is the essence of ‘true and creative sexual relationship’ more satisfying than any ‘genital experience can be’ ” (Kinkead-Weekes 395).

Lawrence gives the relationship between Birkin and Ursula a religious dimension. Ursula, fair daughter of man, recognizes in Birkin one of the sons of God and is carried away by the strange mystery of his life motion, swept by the great “dark flood of electric passion” flowing down his thighs. “It was a dark fire of electricity that rushed from him to her, and flooded them both with rich peace, satisfaction” (WL 313-14). Ursula accedes to the “phallic” power of Birkin's body, and he becomes her perfect “phallic” companion. In his essay “On Being a Man,” (1924) Lawrence attempts to explain this “phallic” self:

It is the self which darkly inhabits our blood and bone, and for which the ithyphallus is but a symbol. This self which lives darkly in my blood and bone is my *alter ego*, *hmy* other self, the homunculus, the second one of the Kabiri, the second of the Twins, the Gemini. And the sacred black stone at Mecca stands for this: the



dark self that dwells in the blood of a man and of a woman. Phallic  
if you like. (*RDP* 216)

In this quotation Lawrence brings together much of the vocabulary gleaned in his reading on ancient religions and their symbolism. Here, he refers to the Kabiri, also mentioned in Blavatsky's book *The Secret Doctrine* (and later in Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious*), as well as to the sacred stone of Mecca which was worshipped long before the time of Mohammed (*RDP* 411-12). In *Women in Love*, Ursula and Birkin are clearly in search of this phallic self. Ursula caresses the loins and thighs from which the male vital energy springs, and is convinced that "there was no source deeper than the phallic source" (*WL* 314), "the dark self" of a man and a woman which is to be discovered through the senses and the body.

Lawrence has often been criticized by feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett for identifying the sexual with the phallic. Kate Millett has attacked Lawrence for using "the penis alone" as "responsible for generating all the vital forces in the world" (Millett 398). However, we need to see how the writer's reference to the phallic power here might not constitute an attempt to privilege masculinity. As Hilary Simpson points out in *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism*, Lawrence often uses the word "phallic" as "the symbolic nexus of a multitude of possible relationships" (Simpson 133). In *The Plumed Serpent*, the phallus is used as "a religious symbol," (*PS* 135) while in *Lady's Chatterley's Lover*, it is described as "the connecting link between the two rivers [of the male and the female]" (*LCL* 325), and a symbol of "a new blood-contact, a new touch, and a new marriage [...] the true phallic marriage" (328). In *Women in Love*, Ursula acknowledges in the strange fountains of the "phallic" the deep source of life, a mystic power to which she freely abandons herself. Julia Kristeva talks about the power of the symbol of the Phallus in a similar way: "Indeed,

what is called a Phallus is precisely that co-presence of sexuality and thought that defines our human condition – we are neither pure biological or animal body nor pure mind, but the conjunction of drives and meaning, their mutual tension: sacré tension!” (FS 59). For Kristeva, the phallic power is a power not exclusively connected with the male but with the life potential. It represents the symbolic order, the order of thought and of society. Women, it is true, feel less comfortably in this order than the men. They experience a sort of *detachment* which for Julia Kristeva is “the very mark of femininity [and] stems from our [the women’s] immersion in Being and sensible femaleness.” However, women “accede to it [the phallic] only to better learn their way around its omnipotence” (60).

Ursula’s acceptance of Birkin’s mystic, phallic energy, I suggest, can be linked with the notion of the “asocial sociability” that Kristeva acknowledges in the distance the woman can adopt from the symbolic order of society and which brings her closer to a “prelanguage” state (59), the maternal state: the woman places the “Phallus-Word” in doubt via “the Minoan-Mycenanean<sup>1</sup> intimacy of the sensible,” and this constitutes a “true path to atheism,” atheism defined by Kristeva as “the resorption of the sacred into the tenderness of the connection to the other. And that sober and modest atheism relies on the maternal.” This may help to explain why Ursula dissociates herself from “the order” she is obliged to belong to. She does not recognize any sort of “powers” defined by the male social rule, and she responds to the realities of life with her heart, senses and instincts, which define “the maternal.” This detachment from the phallic rule allows her to appreciate the mysticism and strangeness of the other, the real divine phallic. Ursula is the living example of the “feminine faith [which identifies] with the crucible of mysticism than with a dogma” (FS 60) as her familiarity with this inner mystical world and her unproblematic acceptance of it does not cause her fear or

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<sup>1</sup> Freud used the term to denote the matriarchal stage during the early times of the ancient Greek civilization.

doubt, for she has entered this forbidden realm a thousand times before in her encounters with herself, nature and men.

Of course, Birkin in this case stops short of being the prejudiced, dogmatic, quasi-religious male voice of the kind exemplified by Don Ramon or Cipriano in *The Plumed Serpent*. On the contrary, he becomes part of the sacred energy of life, as he gradually discovers it through his passionate encounter with Ursula, the representative of the ultimate truth of life. Ursula never betrays her Aphrodite, and submits to Birkin's phallic, male energy from which "came the floods of ineffable darkness and ineffable riches" (WL 314). She approaches the male emblem of mystic power and strength symbolically as the source of life energy.

In total contrast to Ursula, her sister Gudrun understands the "phallic" in its symbolic meaning as related to male social dominance, the symbol of mindless male arrogance and a conservative, sterile social order: " – These men, with their eternal jobs – and their eternal mills of God that keep on grinding at nothing!" (463-64). Gudrun cannot understand the cosmic, numinous nature with which Lawrence invests the "phallic," seeing it as the life energy that brings the two sexes together:

Suddenly the deep centres of the sexual consciousness  
rouse to their spontaneous activity. Suddenly there's a deep  
circuit established between me and the woman. Suddenly the  
sea of blood which is me heaves and rushes towards the sea of  
blood which is her. There is a moment of pure frictional crisis  
and contact of blood.

This excerpt from *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), written immediately after the publication of *Women In Love*, presents a useful glimpse of the theory Lawrence had already successfully dramatized in this chapter of the novel; namely, that the numinous nature of the sexual contact is experienced by both man and woman as a metaphysical experience, as “the strange flash of electric transmutation [which] passes through the blood of the man and the blood of the woman” (*FU* 174). According to Lawrence, this is the only true knowledge which is in firm opposition to the scientific, mechanistic knowledge that is based on measurable, quantifiable phenomena. It is also a belief which will be dramatized in his novels to come where he describes powerful scenes of bodily contact between the two sexes. It is a contact which is revealing not just for men, but particularly for women, who discover their hidden, forgotten femaleness through the feeling of eros.

In Birkin’s body Ursula discovers a truth “only known as a palpable revelation of living otherness.” Ursula palpitates with real life, she feels the mystery of existence through the body, in “the reality of that which can never be known, vital, sensual reality that can never be transmuted into mind content” (*WL* 320). Charles Burack examines the allusions to Greek and Egyptian forms of consciousness Lawrence makes at this point of his description of Birkin:

His arms and breasts and his head were rounded and living like those of the Greek, he had not the unawakened straight arms of the Egyptian, nor the sealed, slumbering head. A lambent intelligence played secondarily above his pure Egyptian concentration in darkness. (318)

Charles Burack believes that Lawrence develops a simplified version of the “chakras,” (exemplified as well in Pryse’s *The Apocalypse Unsealed*), the body’s centres of energy and consciousness in the Hindu system of yoga. “The Egyptian consciousness corresponds to the first three chakras (sacrum, genitals, navel), the Greek consciousness to the last four (heart, throat, forehead, crown).” He points out how Lawrence, using a “yogic discourse,” depicts “a free flow of energy” between Birkin and Ursula, “the chosen” couple, something that he never even suggests in the sexual encounters between Gerald and his female partners (Burack 121). This yogic theory, according to Burack, constitutes the “quasi-scientific” framework which is used to explain human consciousness and action in the novel (92). It also anticipates later theories concerning the sacredness of the body and the senses and their connection to the religious consciousness.

Ursula is always willing to follow the numinous, miraculous road of the unconscious, a road which finally leads to Lawrence/Birkin’s desired “star equilibrium.” It is her comprehensiveness and ability to perceive a different, extra-sensory reality that makes her Lawrence’s spokesperson of the vital truths: without self-important sermonizing, without pretense, instinctively yet methodically, she shows Birkin the way to reconcile himself with his long-forgotten natural self and achieve a richer life. Through Ursula’s receptive awareness of this other world, generally suppressed by modern social conventions and habits, Lawrence dramatizes the end of an old epoch and the coming of a new, as in the original apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, elaborating simultaneously his metaphysics, which is here adapted to human experience, manifesting once more that “the novelist shows us what ‘really’ is the case more effectively than the theologian” (*TL* 120).

## Chapter Four

### *The Lost Girl and the Journey to the Semiotic Other*

In the years after 1912 until his death in 1930, Lawrence led a nomadic life, travelling first to Germany and Italy, then farther east to Ceylon and Australia, America and Mexico and back to Europe, paying only two short visits to England. One reason was his health problems, more real than he himself was ready to admit. He had, however, other, no less serious motives for this incessant travelling, such as his dissatisfaction with England, his wish to escape from what he saw as a sick, repressive, overly rationalistic and materialistic Northern European civilization and his desire to experience other cultures and climates, where, he believed, a better way of life was to be found, based on healthy instinct rather than failing intellect.

It was in Lago di Cardia in Italy that Lawrence started writing *The Lost Girl* in November 1912, the same period he was working on *The Sisters*, the long novel which eventually was to split in two and become *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. *The Lost Girl* was abandoned, taken up again and finally completed after the Great War. The initial title of the novel had been *Elsa Culverwell*; Lawrence had used the setting of a Cullens family he knew at Eastwood, whose conditions resembled the conditions of Alvina's family in *The Lost Girl*. Later, in February of 1913, Lawrence changed the title *Elsa Culverwell* to *The Insurrection of Mrs Houghton* moving towards a deeper exploration of the heroine's relationship to her lover and trying as well to experiment with new forms: "an historical novel, a first- person narrative by the central character, a dialect play" (Kinkead-Weekes 66). Lawrence sounded enthusiastic with this new work of his. However, he decided to get on with *The Sisters* and

left “Mrs Houghton” aside until 1920, when he returned to it under the new title *The Lost Girl*. A different Lawrence now after the war experience, with changed, more radical views on sex and marriage (“how we hang on to the marriage clue! Doubt if it’s really a way out”), he created the portrait of a “terrifying” Alvina, “the questing soul” who “moves toward reunion with the dark half of humanity” (*L* iii.521). Alvina, the young heroine of the novel, is eager to be transformed and liberated and this happens through the sexual relationship which Lawrence explores here as a return to the deep human darkness of the psyche, a symbolic journey to the “semiotic” other side. Her willingness to undergo this experience turns Alvina into another sacred feminine figure: she becomes a woman who is not afraid to face and merge with the mysterious aspects of her feminine psyche. It is a confrontation that all Lawrencian heroines face until they discover their true womanhood.

### **From the “Symbolic” England to the “Semiotic” Italy**

More than half the action of *The Lost Girl* takes place in an industrial English setting, the drab environment of Woodhouse and Manchester House, a grimly realistic world. This first part of the novel depicts the failure of the modern industrial world to deliver the happiness it promises: its hypocrisy and false pretenses can only lead to frustration, alienation and ultimately despair.

As stated in more detail in the Introduction, what Julia Kristeva calls the “semiotic,” is the disorganized, prelinguistic flux of movements, gestures, sounds and rhythms felt by the child during the earliest, pre-Oedipal stage, a flow of impulses that centres on the mother. In the “symbolic” stage that follows this semiotic, material becomes regulated and logical, following a more “masculine order” of things. The term “symbolic” applies to the world

described in the first part of the novel which reproduces the oppressive, numbing discourse of rationalism as represented by industrialism and mechanization. The term “semiotic” applies to the second part of the novel where the plot moves to Italy, the land of the subconscious, the land of feelings and emotions where Alvina finds her other self which was long repressed by the masculine, “symbolic” order and reason. This escape from England to South Europe and later other, increasingly exotic places was for Lawrence a real quest, a long journey in search of the land of the unconscious where feeling and intuition prevail over the rationalism that had so obviously failed Europe. Using these Kristevan terms, it could be said that what Lawrence sought and occasionally discovered in some of those places, was the semiotic condition of the human mind, the state in which images, senses and impulses dominate rather than reason and intellect, which comprise the symbolic order. In her journey to the south, Alvina undergoes a “maternal phase” again: her consciousness collapses and the boundaries between the real and the imaginary dissolve. Like a newly-born infant, she perceives the world through her senses: the smells of nature, the touching of flowers, the echoes of old, heroic civilizations which arouse her heart and memory. Carried there by his own passion and the strength of Frieda’s love, Lawrence found in the south enough evidence to strengthen his theories and sustain his search for this other that could truly deliver on the promise of fulfilment and wholeness.

Alvina Houghton, like Lawrence, leaves the interminable sickness of England and is carried away to Italy, the land of light and the unconscious, the feminine place of *la bella figura*, where she discovers her true womanhood, new perspectives on life and a new maturity beyond anything she had been taught. Again, the myth of the ancient Greek goddess Persephone, the pretty daughter of Demeter, who was captured by Pluto, the king of Hades, and carried to the underworld to be his queen, is relevant here. Alvina is captured by Ciccio, a



modern Italian outsider, and taken to his distant, mysterious land. In the novel, this journey functions as a metaphor for Alvina's descent into the unknown depths of her psyche, which is the necessary condition for rebirth. She finds a new identity, or perhaps more precisely, she rediscovers her true one – her repressed self, which for all the signs of its presence had hitherto been unable to emerge in its positive fullness. It requires a severance, the known descent to the underworld of the psyche, which symbolically stands for the death of her old self, in order to achieve her rebirth to a new awareness and a new life.

Lawrence's travelogue *Twilight in Italy* (1916), written at about the same time, is a work closely related to *The Lost Girl*: the latter seems to illustrate and dramatize what is described and stated in the former. There are arguably two main themes in the novel: how Lawrence's fascination with ancient people and their mysteries informs his account of Alvina's metaphorical journey into the unconscious, and even more crucially, how the narrative, especially in the second part of the novel, known as the Italian section, seems to be essentially feminine in both tone and style. Here, Lawrence develops a rich, fluid language, far more so than ever before, which brings immediately to mind the later term "écriture feminine," and the semiotic language of the body. Moreover, he makes extensive use of archetypes, symbols and mythological material in a Jungian way, in a bold and generally successful attempt to reconcile conscious and unconscious material. The combined result is a striking display of the heroine's transformation and the organic relation of the female to the sacred and mysterious world of the other.

Lawrence turns to both myth and history, blending in his own ideas on religion, particularly Christianity, and advocates with passionate eloquence the life of instincts and the flesh, as lived by people of other, more primitive (Lawrence refers a lot to the Etruscans and

Egyptians) yet far wiser and healthier civilizations, a life now generally forsaken by the modern industrialist culture which has arrogantly overthrown natural life and distorted human sensibility. Industrialism and its consequences for society is constantly deprecated in both *Twilight in Italy* and *The Lost Girl*: “It is the hideous rawness of the world of men, the horrible, desolating harshness of the advance of the industrial world upon the world of nature that is so painful” (TI 214). In *The Lost Girl*, Lawrence criticizes a number of specific modern inventions and institutions, among them the cinema for the way it promotes emotional sterility and thus accentuates the dehumanization of society: “The film is only pictures [...] And pictures don’t have any feelings apart from their own feelings: I mean the feelings of the people who watch them. [...] And that’s why they like them” (TLG 116). Lawrence considers the industrial man as the slave of modern times, living divided from the real human self of feeling and intuition. His only power is the surrogate power of the machine.

### **Man and Woman: The Meeting of the Opposites**

As in most of his novels, and more emphatically in *Lady’s Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence celebrates once more the holy union of man and woman which, for him, is the answer to the human existential anxiety. *Twilight in Italy* where Lawrence gives his first impressions of Italy, scarcely has a plot to speak of. But the loose narrative provides Lawrence with an excellent opportunity to expound his philosophy and delve deeper into the themes of the relationship between man and woman, the natural and the artificial, the industrial and the organic, the Finite and the Infinite. It is the union of these antithetical pairs that the soul requires, as Lawrence stated in “The Crown,” the ultimate union being that of the male and

the female which brings about the desirable “consummation,” the final completeness of the human being (*RDP* 265-6).

What Lawrence baldly states in *Twilight in Italy*, is deftly dramatized in *The Lost Girl*. Without being the story of a metaphysical search for the self, the narrative of *The Lost Girl* faithfully reflects Lawrence’s dualistic philosophy, and examines closely his concept of the male-female opposition: “The masculine, active, conscious principle opposed to the feminine, passive, unconscious principle” (Hough 225). The two central characters in the novel, Ciccio and Alvina are two very different beings, from radically different cultural backgrounds and individual life experiences, brought together under unlikely circumstances beyond either’s design or conscious control. The first impression readers are given of Ciccio is not really flattering. Superficially at least, he looks a rather low character. But beneath the unconvincing surface, he is a true fictional Lawrencian man. Like most of the exotic male characters in Lawrence, he is dark, dominant and blood-conscious. He represents the uncultivated, untamed, primitive and instinctual way of life. Alvina responds intuitively to this dark outsider – a positive sign, as Lawrence always puts his trust on the female intuition: the woman for him is “that other limitless country,” as Hélène Cixous put it, “where the repressed manage to survive: women, or as Hoffmann would say, fairies” (*NFF* 250). Lawrence might have never realized the woman’s relation to her environment or to her sexuality the way modern French theorists have done, but the result remains the same: Alvina emerges as a strong, resilient personality, in which somehow “the repressed [feelings] have managed to survive.” She holds her place as an independent-minded woman in the oppressive environment of her home, hostile to anything unconventional where crude, cruel rules are ruthlessly enforced and each person has one, rigidly defined role to perform, with all rights reserved for “sense” and “reason.” Alvina breaks out of the silence imposed on her, dares to

speak of her dreams and wishes, and acts out without hesitation or guilt her desire to live and feel pleasure. Through her, Lawrence explores the conflict between the self and the others, and the two different lands she lives in, England and Italy, which reflect the conflict between two fundamentally opposite visions of life.

Lawrence has many names for the metaphysical unity of the sexes as we have seen: the Holy Ghost, the Crown, the Rose or the Rainbow. He sees the sexual experience as a central one in human life and a necessary condition not just for healthy individual lives, but for healthy societies. And it is mostly based on the attraction between opposites, for difference between the two sexes is essential, since their roles are fundamentally complementary. But Alvina's relation with Ciccio also reflects this opposition in more literal terms. There is little rational reason to expect that this relationship will succeed. It is a relationship that depends on their also being social opposites (beyond their universal opposition as male and female) and grows on this antitheses. Socially speaking, romantic love, based on socially constructed personality and fineness of feeling, is predictably regarded with suspicion. This is the point "where the new fiction parted company with the old" (Kinkead-Weekes 575) namely *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, where the complexities of love between the two sexes is the central theme. Ciccio and Alvina meet in the cold English climate, and their relationship, though intense is also often antagonistic. Even the warm sensuality of the Mediterranean does not turn them into anything like typical romantic lovers. Ciccio and Alvina never live a romantic idyll – they do not want to. The sexual instinct that brings them together is raw and powerful, neither refined nor calculated. It is the primal, primitive nature of their attraction which makes the experience apocalyptic, disregarding all social differences and comes to mark Alvina's entire life.

## Alvina and the “Symbolic” England

Lawrence’s description of the local society in which young Alvina lives is succinct, precise, and ironic:

Here we are then: a vast substratum of colliers; a thick sprinkling of trades people intermingled with small employers of labour and diversified by elementary school masters and non-conformist clergy; a high layer of bank-managers, rich millers and well-to-do ironmasters, episcopal clergy and the managers of collieries: then the rich and sticky cherry of the local coal-owner glistening over all. (*TLG* 1)

This middle class stratum which Lawrence presents here constitutes the core of bourgeois society, a society generally characterized by hypocrisy and denial, and all too ready to judge by the narrow and rigid standards of a false respectability. Mr Houghton and his failing finances, Alvina Houghton and her shocking, uncompromising lifestyle are equally interesting subjects for gleeful and rather malicious gossip. This is something Alvina can immediately sense and deeply resents: “she herself felt, in the same way, something of an outcast because of the man at her side. An outcast! And glad to be an outcast [...] The bridge between her and them was established forever.” Alvina makes plain her view of the little commercial city of Woodhouse. She is disgusted by the pettiness and overall silliness of the people and their pathetic attempts at individuality and social prestige: “She knew them all. She knew Lizzie Bates’ fox furs, and Fanny Clough’s lilac costume, and Mrs Smitham’s winged hat. She knew them all” (215). Alvina, like Lawrence, is trapped in this world of

intellectual vacuity and emotional sterility, qualities that Lawrence considers typical of the whole English middle class that centres its life around money and the machine, the high priests of Mammon. Here Lawrence sides with “the repressed of culture” (*NFF* 248), as Cixous called the late twentieth century woman, by showing the oppressor in this first, “symbolic” part of the novel, adopting a more traditionally “male” style of writing, neat and linear, that keeps close to conventional syntax, without significant deviations from the established orthodoxy of the realist narrative. It is a writing style which, as we shall see, comes in sharp contrast with the style of the second “Italian” part of the novel.

Lawrence begins the novel with a description of Manchester House, the place that lies at the centre of this sterile world where Alvina was brought up. The name carries clear echoes of Victorian ambition and commercial prosperity, the latter long gone, the former still lingering beyond reason. Its imposing presence serves as a symbol of the failed hopes and the deadening dreariness that casts its shadow upon the whole community. It was a building actually meant to be quite “a monument,” with built furniture of solid mahogany (*TLG* 3), a grandiose mausoleum for many lost souls. The proprietor is James Houghton, Alvina’s father, a man with “a taste for elegant conversation and elegant literature and elegant Christianity” (2). His wildly optimistic and utterly impractical nature inevitably leads him to a series of disasters, as he experiments with a variety of enterprises: he speculates with a mine, a hotel and a music hall, all businesses that end in failure and at the end he dies bankrupt. But in his life, throughout his ambitious entrepreneurial career, Mr Houghton remains a patriarchal figure – very much like the Criches in *Women in Love* – whose dreams and aspirations, strengths and weaknesses are those of the industrial society. He is also tainted with a fault all too common in his type: aspirations to aristocratic grace and elegance combined with the selfishness, obstinacy and downright heartlessness of the oppressor: “He was a tyrant to his

shop girls. No French marquis in a Dickens novel could have been more elegant and raffiné and heartless.” And “they submitted to him” (4). His selfish and obstinate character causes the degradation of his wife, who is a virtual prisoner in her husband’s palace of fear: “But the poor, secluded little woman, must have climbed up with a heavy heart, to lie and face the gloomy Bastille of mahogany, the great cupboard opposite, or to turn wearily sideways to the great cheval mirror.” After Alvina’s birth “his wife was left alone with her baby and the built-in furniture. She developed heart disease, as a result of nervous repression” (3-4). Mrs Houghton thus provides Alvina, not only with another cause for sorrow, but also with the grim cautionary tale of a woman who languishes, wastes away and finally dies of misery and grief in the bleak environment of Manchester House. She is the victim of her husband’s corrupt, inhuman values, an alienated feminine figure, unable to help herself or others and can only add to the misery of that unhappy place and increase the loneliness of her young daughter, who finds a mother substitute in her governess, Miss Frost.

Miss Frost and Miss Pinnegar are the other important females in the Houghton household. Frost and Pinnegar: ice and vinegar are the defining elements of Manchester House, suggests Lawrence with a wry pun. Miss Pinnegar is Mr. Houghton’s trusted employee, manageress of the work girls and later his housekeeper. These two are the feminine characters around Alvina. Lawrence provides clear and thorough portraits of them, carefully delineating their personalities as well as their functions: both are strong women, bastions of social convention, and Alvina feels a special devotion to each one. Miss Pinnegar has “pale grey eyes, and a padding step, and a soft voice, and almost purplish cheeks” (12). She is a very competent woman, hard working, truthful, reliable and ever-present in Mr. Houghton’s affairs. Miss Frost is “a vigorous young woman of about thirty years of age, with grey-white hair and gold rimmed spectacles” (6). “She was steering the poor domestic ship of Manchester house,

illuminating its dark rooms with her own sure, radiant presence” (7). These two women are depicted by Lawrence as two decent and likable female characters. Miss Frost in particular is a real protectress, not only of young Alvina, but the whole Manchester House, a powerful and energetic vestal deity, an Hera, the ancient Greek protectress of family, respected even by the rough colliers who regard her as a real lady “if ever there was one” (11). But there is also another side to their benevolent steadying presence: Alastair Niven, for one, calls them the guardians of “the proper dullness” (Niven 120). This may appear harsh, but what they defend is a dead end of misery and sterility. Alvina is seen to suffocate in this house of anaemic hopes and seething fears. Although emotionally close to Miss Frost, who has stood by her like a true mother, she is also aware of the stifling limitations she imposes upon her, how her love and care ultimately serve to deny her life. She has the courage to wish her dead, symbolically speaking: “Time for Miss Frost to die. She, Alvina, who loved her as no one else would ever love her, with that love which goes to the core of the universe, knew that it was time for her darling to be folded, oh, so gently and softly, into immortality” (*TLG* 36). Miss Frost is the unquestioning guardian of a doomed world from which Alvina knows she must escape if she is ever to reclaim life. Even as the pressure to conform is maintained, the deformed moral principles of the world Miss Frost and Miss Pinnegar so bravely defend give Alvina ground to stand and the power to resist and follow her heart, free of the need to justify herself to those who attempt to force their inadequate ideals, anxieties and sentiments on all and sundry.



## **Alvina's Duality: The Devil Who Needs to Escape**

The initial description of Alvina's appearance in Chapter II raises the possibility that Lawrence aims for once at the depiction of an angelic prototype: "a slim girl, rather distinguished in appearance, with a slender face [...] She was ladylike [...] In the street her walk had a delicate, lingering motion, her face looked still." This first impression of a conventional maiden is immediately disrupted by the revelation of features which reveal hidden, less conventional aspects of her character: "But there was an odd, derisive look at the back of her eyes, a look of old knowledge and deliberate derision. She herself was unconscious of it. But it was there. And this it was, perhaps, that scared away the young men" (*TLG* 21). Then, not unnaturally, she has at least one masculine characteristic, revealing something that has to do with character rather than appearance: "And her voice had a curious bronze like resonance that acted straight on the nerves of her hearers" (23). These contradictory elements in her character reflect the complexity of her mental and psychological world which would attract people of a "different susceptibility," like the "darkie" man who was Alvina's first fiancée, and which provoke mixed emotions in the people surrounding her, even to the person closest to her. Miss Frost, who "reared and tended her lamb, her dove," is shocked to see "the lamb open a wolf's mouth, to hear the dove utter the wild cackle of a daw, or a magpie, a strange sound of derision" (21). Under the appearance of "the chaste Beatrice" there is hidden "the roaring lioness" (*Phoenix II* 537), the aggressive female who needs to and shall break free of all imposed restrictions.

This inexplicable, inarticulate but not quite secret side of Alvina is inevitably the most interesting aspect of her personality. And it is this apparently contradictory depiction of hers that reveals an authorial intention. Of course Lawrence is not interested in delineating a

hideous woman with an angelic profile – although in the first chapter the reader might be inclined to think so – but an independent woman, with great physical presence and energy, but also the inner resources to wrest control of her life and change it. Her aggressiveness, disliked and misunderstood by her surroundings, is an expression of the urge to feel and taste what life really is. Her female heart is the main means used by Lawrence to move the plot forward. There would be no story to tell, or at least it would be a very different one, if Alvina was not the kind of person who is prepared to accept the decisions of her instinct, or rather, as the narrator says, “being sufficiently a woman, she didn’t decide anything. She *was* her own fate” (34). To identify thoroughly and unreservedly with the instinctual self and follow its dictates resolutely is, according to Lawrence, a feminine talent. The woman becomes her own fate, and the obedience to this unpredictable force, both sensual and mystic, does not diminish her, but on the contrary, it is the very making of her identity, one that is free from conventional social constraints and leads to true liberation and fulfilment in life.

Alvina is full of spirit as well as heart, both of them in the right proportion to lead her to action and adventure. She may appear to act “like a man,” that is, with independence of mind, determination and little apparent regard for the consequences, but the rejection of her social environment and its values is done on purely feminine terms. She knows she is unhappy as she is and senses with unmistakable clarity the misery ahead: “I can’t stay here all my life [...] I know I can’t. I can’t bear it. I simply can’t bear it. I am buried alive – simply buried alive” (28). There is great anger in her words, but also a tremendous force, the will to live life fully, a will which for Lawrence is sacred. And this, the spontaneous force of “moving on,” is what carries her away from all that her surroundings represent. In the beginning, Alvina often appears contrary, perverse, even deliberately flirting with evil. She cannot understand her attraction to her first tutor: “She was quite sure she did not love him. But out of a certain

perversity, she wanted to go” (25). She enjoys toying with men while being very critical of them, and gets indignant with the rules that the dominant sense of social propriety imposes upon women. These impulses may well be partly due to frustration, but nothing really can explain them fully. What the omniscient narrator offers by way of explanation of her behaviour is that “some little devil sat in her breast” (29), the familiar devil spirit, as we shall see, of Daphne in *The Ladybird* or of Mrs Witt and Lou in *St.Mawr*, which fuels the female energy turning these characters into real adventurers in the search for their womanhood. Alvina’s animal vitality, her earthiness and her appeal to the other, mystic self of hers free her from the burden of conforming to the demands of a decaying civilization and reveal to her the possibility of another way, more instinctual and spontaneous, more true to real life.

The apparent duality in Alvina’s character, initially striking, quickly diminishes in significance as the story progresses, and it becomes clear that the defining characteristic of her personality is no internal struggle, but the existence of this passionate part of her which emerges and is finally established as a powerful and creative force in her development. When Alvina is venturing to test the limits of the social conventions and the tolerance in her social milieu, the reader is aware, not only of her desire to revolt and escape this circumscribed environment by any means necessary, but also of her indomitable will to realize her own individuality by following her own instinct, the demon inside her, *her* demon. For Lawrence, as we have seen, this demon is one that saves the individual and as such his presence is a blessing. It is this sacred demon who leads Alvina to the realization of the inhuman strangeness of her environment and to better knowledge of her own inner self. Alvina understands enough of the unbridgeable rift between her socially constructed personality and the impersonal forces which inhabit and essentially rule her: “She could not do as she liked. There was an inflexible fate within her, which shaped her ends” (38).

The appearance of the Natcha-Kee-Tawara troupe and Ciccio brings Alvina into immediate contact with the mysterious “out of doors” life and emphasizes the difference between the instinctual energy that characterizes the group’s life and the trivial rationality of her world. The passage to this second section of the book is marked by significant changes in the tone and style of the writing, as Alvina gradually abandons the “symbolic” English environment and moves into the “semiotic,” the world where sensation, emotion and instinct are the paramount values. The entrance of Ciccio into Alvina’s life signals the transition of the novel from the first “English” part to the second, the so-called “Italian” one. Knowing that the Italian section was written long after the first, after the war, it can be argued that this transition is abrupt, arbitrary and unconvincing, or at least that the structure is overtly schematic. However, the two-part structure represents accurately the sharp contrast between the two vastly different worlds: on one side, cold industrial England, on the other, warm rural Italy. The difference between the two parts is in fact dramatically justified, even necessary. After the anatomy of melancholy that is essentially the English section, it is there, in the Italian one, that the reader can find the positive values that Lawrence really wants to communicate. The difference in style, in other words, is not just an accidental product of the different time of writing, but an integral part of the novel’s meaning. Here, Lawrencian ideology is given fictional substance, as the writing becomes more interesting and generating, an invigorating sense of a reality beyond every-day experience.

In this transitional section, Lawrence makes increasingly clear Alvina’s attraction to a more intuitive way of life. What in a negative context appeared as willfully perverse behaviour, here becomes something altogether different as this pent up energy at last has the opportunity to result in positive action. Alvina joins the Indian group and she takes the new

Kishwe name “Allaye.” The name with the apparent sexual innuendo anticipates her sexual awakening in Ciccio’s embrace. Her first sexual experience is rather brutal, with Ciccio exulting over his accomplishment, and makes Alvina feel like one of the “old sacred prostitutes” (TLG 288). Alvina “submits” to her mystical attraction for Ciccio. By giving herself to him she becomes an *hierodouli*, a humble servant of the sacred divinity she acknowledges in Ciccio’s presence. Symbolically, Alvina embraces the other without fear abandoning her conscious will as her “questing soul mov[es] towards discovery of its darker dimension” (Kinkead-Weekes 576).

Alvina expresses admiration for the artists’ group from the beginning: artists, she thinks, are “odd, extraneous creatures,” “eccentric” with a “streak of imagination” (TLG 119). They seem to live on a separate sphere and “in an inferior stage,” but still they are “much of a type: a little frosty, a little flea-bitten as a rule, indifferent to ordinary morality, and philosophical even if irritable” (118). This is all a little too close to the romantic stereotype of the artist, but Alvina is sincere and serious in her view of them. She experiences a vivid sensation, an actual feeling of life being lived in their free, unpolished manners that differentiate them from common people who, Alvina thinks, can only feel “jealous of the things the *artistes* do, because they could never do them themselves” (115). She readily invests them with a magical aura and sees art romantically as the ultimate negation of reality and logic, the expression of gladness of life and of sensuality. The artists possess an animalistic, impulsive power – this is what attracts Alvina to Ciccio – and their apparent irresponsibility and immaturity shows them to be close to the unconscious way of life that is not subject to the stupid rules and stifling control of others, but open to the uncontrolled celebratory Dionysian element. These artists, who live in a parallel world of natural ecstasy like modern followers of Dionysus, the

inspirer of ritual madness, seduce Alvina with their dithyrambic siren song that wakes her true inner nature and calls her to the deep dark roots where the vital force of life is found.

Alvina finds the same exotic charm in the group of Navvies that she and Mr. May meet in Knarborough Road:

There was an outlawed look about them as they swung along the pavement – some of them; and there was a certain lurking set of the head which rather frightened her because it fascinated her. There was one tall young fellow with a red face and fair hair, who looked as if he had fronted the seas and the arctic sun. (117)

She sees in the faces of the Navvies a certain imaginative significance. Their experience of the wide world is printed in their physical characteristics and carried into the world of commonplace reality alters it. This is an important realization and from now on, Alvina seems determined to look for and discover in every instance of life the vital undercurrent which tempts her to seek and finally join the mystic otherness of human existence.

## The Semiotic and the Evidence of Language: Lawrence's "Écriture Feminine"

The descriptions in the second section of the novel exhibit an unrivalled lyricism. The language is fluid and expressive, warm and sensual exuding a strong sense of femininity (as defined by Cixous). It is not the only time that Lawrence employs a discourse with such characteristics. In *Twilight in Italy*, but also in his last novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, instances of *écriture féminine* are also numerous and easily identifiable in his choice of words, images and rhythms of the language as well as the things he dwells upon. These features are constantly repeated in *The Lost Girl* and their employment is no accident. It represents a release within the text from rigid constraints; the vibrant colours and sound recall the richness of life not as a human construct but as a natural phenomenon, and the flights from linearity hint unmistakably at the instinctive force that lies beneath the surface of things, far more important and true than a mere procession of meticulously ordered characters and events. For Lawrence, it is his desire to distinguish and describe the essential, rather than an interest in formal experimentation for its own sake. Take for example, this excerpt from *Twilight in Italy* which describes a dance Lawrence attended during his stay there:

From the soft bricks of the floor the red ochre rose in a thin cloud of dust, making hazy the shadowy dancers; the three musicians [...] making a music that came quicker and quicker, making a dance that grew swifter and more intense, more subtle, the men seeming to fly and to implicate other strange, inter-rhythmic dance into the women, the women drifting and palpitating as if their souls shook and resounded to a breeze that was subtly rushing upon them, through them; the men worked their feet, their thighs

swifter, more vividly, the music came to an almost intolerable climax, there was a moment when the dance passed into a possession, the men caught up the women and swung them from the earth, leapt with them for a second,[...] taking perfect, oh, exquisite delight in every inter-related movement, a rhythm within a rhythm, [...] drawing nearer to a climax, nearer till, oh, there was the surpassing lift and swing of the women; when the woman's body seemed like a boat lifted over the powerful exquisite wave of the man's body, perfect, for a moment, and then once more the slow, intense, nearer movement of the dance began, always nearer, nearer, always to a more perfect climax. (*TI* 168)

This continuously, quick-flowing paragraph – without a single full-stop in a passage of more than four hundred words – is full of repetitions, exclamations and adjectives which describes the dance, not by providing a multitude of specific details, but by giving a powerful impression of the dance's ethos and rhythms, by trying to reproduce in words its kinetic and musical excitement. At the same time, it provides a good long account of the author's own sensations, above all his palpable physical excitement: dancers, narrator and author invite the reader to join in rather than coolly contemplate the significance of ritual in rural societies. Although Lawrence never defined his firm and avowed purpose of renewing the novel (as modernist experimentation does, for example), such instances of “writing to the moment” are abundant in his work consciously challenging the traditional relationship between text and reader.

Though never a practitioner of feminine self-consciousness, Lawrence here opposes what he sees as the degeneration of modern Western societies by advocating and employing the



language of instinct and emotion, for these are what can make people rediscover not just the value, but indeed the holiness of the heart's affections and reclaim life. This is a mode of writing that owes something to the late nineteenth century New Woman's fiction. Moreover, Lawrence anticipates here, as in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, what the French feminist theorists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray would call *écriture féminine* alluding to the right (or obligation?) of the woman to write from "her body" using the pre-symbolic, "semiotic" fluid language of a pre-Oedipal stage: As Cixous put it, it is a language which sweeps syntax away and keeps going "without ever inscribing or discerning contours" (*NFF* 259), a language springing from the female body abolishing the rules of conventional, masculine writing.

I do not mean to suggest that Lawrence's engagement with feminine ways of expression, or gender issues in general, are conscious attempts to present in his writing a feminist point of view. They may be seen as symptomatic of a period when the development of a general rethinking and reworking of values was intense and widespread. It is quite remarkable though, how Lawrence, a writer who has been extensively considered guilty of misogyny, attempts a detailed exploration of the feminine soul, using as his main tools the traditionally feminine means of intuition and impulsive emotion. *The Lost Girl* provides numerous examples of a so-called feminine discourse – which also serve as examples of a feminine, if not quite feminist, approach to the world and reality. The description of the spring morning in the landscape of Pancrazio is an harmonious mingling of the natural beauty and the feminine susceptibility and sensitivity:

And then she had continual bowl-fuls of white and blue violets, she had sprays of almond blossom, silver-warm and lustrous, then sprays of peach and apricot, pink and fluttering[...] The sun was on them for the

moment, and they were opened flat, great five-pointed, seven-pointed liliac stars, with burning centers, burning with a strange lavender flame, as she had seen some metal liliac-framed in the laboratory of the hospital at Islington[...] And she felt like going down on her knees and bending her forehead to the earth in an oriental submission, they were so royal, so lovely, so supreme. ( *LG* 332)

The long, intense, slow-flowing sentences, replete with references to light, fire, smell, the repetitions of attributes and adjectives, the joyful mood, all communicate a lyricism mingled with admiration and a religious feeling to “submit” to the malevolence of nature.

The passage celebrate the beauty and the rejuvenating force of nature, but they also imply a certain pre-existing weariness, an emotional debility which the heroine carries within and makes her burst into tears a moment earlier, before this new unknown, enchanting and ultimately healing reality. This strange mood of Alvina’s, constantly enchanted, yet always on the verge of tears, yet, stranger still, not unhappy, comes in sharp contrast with another description of a positive psychological feminine mood of hers, when she gets rid of her first Australian fiancé, a description taken from the first part of the novel the *symbolic* part:

So Alvina packed up his ring and his letters and little presents, and posted them over the seas. She was relieved really: as if she had escaped some very trying ordeal. For some days she went about happily, in pure relief. She loved everybody. (26)

The feeling of relief and happiness is given here in a plain masculine language and most of Alvina’s feelings are described in this way in the whole first part of the novel. They serve as

a good contradictory example of the feminine language that Lawrence uses when accessing the fragile feminine soul of Alvina moved by the astonishing beauty of her new environment in the second part. It is a language, not only feminine, but also poetic, and as such subversive and revolutionary, very close to the language which for Kristeva allows the maximum access to the semiotic, libidinal otherness and which here, in the second part of the novel, is connected with the natural world having an almost mesmerizing effect on the feminine consciousness, numbing Alvina's body and senses: "The loveliness of April came, with hot sunshine. Astonishing the ferocity of the sun, when he really took upon himself to blaze" (334). The almost disjointed syntax, the lilting rhythm with the carefully weighed pauses and the sheer musicality of the two short sentences are truly poetic – so much so that, if divided, they have all the charm and concision of a haiku (or two):

The loveliness of April came,  
with hot sunshine.  
Astonishing the ferocity of the sun,  
when he really took upon himself  
to blaze.

The rhythm of the sentences, first light then slower yet relentless, fits exactly with the image of spring's sudden onslaught conveyed by the words. The insistent alliterating 's' sounds create an incantatory, hypnotic effect, which carries Alvina into the world of dream and the unconscious. Through this lyrical, poetic language, simultaneously delightful and deadly serious, even with an element of threat in "ferocity" and "blaze," Lawrence heightens the awareness of the commonplace experience of the sunlight. The sudden fierceness of the Mediterranean spring heat is clearly a complement to Alvina's surging emotional state,

coming as it does precisely when she is completely immersed in the feelings and sensations of the transient moment. The privileged association of the female with the poetic that is the memorable, the intuitive and the creative is a persistent feature in Lawrence's work, as systematic as it is significant. There is a genuinely feminine sensibility, free from tension and contrivance, in this unconscious absorption in the semiotic reality of the natural world. This way of writing, even if it is not exclusively a characteristic example of *écriture féminine*, finds its rhythm in the ebb and flow of the moment, because it is the expression of this particular moment, boldly seeking a new balance between syntax and sound, the symbolic and the semiotic that will constitute an affirmation of the mystery and a rich experience in itself.

Repetition is another important feature here. It does of course contribute significantly to the hypnotic rhythms of the text, but in many instances, it is also used specifically for emphasis and dramatic effect:

She sat in the darkness on the seat, with all life gone  
dark and still, death and eternity settled down on her.  
Death and eternity were settled down on her as she sat  
alone. And she seemed to hear him moaning upstairs –  
'I can't come back. I can't come back.' She heard it, she  
heard it so distinctly [...] 'I can't come back.' She heard  
it so fatally. (338)

It is repetition which renders the frightening, oppressive reality of her husband's departure to war so truly dramatic, and creates a crescendo rising to an emotional climax which bares all the feminine pain as an insistent interior monologue.

### **The Nearness of Nature and Alvina's Sacredness**

The special relationship with nature is one of Lawrence's ways of revealing the female capacity for wordless understanding and communication. Alvina senses nature in an unforced, intuitive way: not analyzing its beauty, or questioning its creations, but accepting: "Then she would find little tufts of wild narcissus among the rocks, gold-centred pale little things, many on one stem. And their scent was powerful and magical [...] She loved them" (*TLG* 331-332). The same living force of the landscape is also powerfully described in *Twilight in Italy*: "Meanwhile, on the length of mountain-ridge, the snow grew rosy-incandescent, like heaven breaking into blossom [...] In the rosy snow that shone in heaven over a darkened earth was the ecstasy of consummation" (*TI* 112). Again, as in *The Lost Girl*, the predominance of the instincts in the appreciation of nature turns the scenes into dream-like, yet clear and unforgettable experiences. Through this narrative, loaded with emotion and lyricism, Lawrence achieves a genuine expression of his heroine's psyche. He shares and articulates her excitement, amazement and conflicts, as she negotiates the new life promised by the new world she has moved in. What Alvina experiences here is a sacred fusion with nature which will lead to the revelation of her sacred entity. As Michael Squires argues, "human subject and natural object fuse [...] not to hear a message but to achieve a new identity, impregnated with a new selfhood, cleansed of corruption" (Squires & Cushman 46). The discovery and integration of this new self is usually achieved through the sensual and emotional sensitivity of the Lawrencian heroine. The world of nature becomes a sacred place

filled with religious and mythological connotations, the place where the soul is reborn. Moreover, this fluid, confident and celebratory lyrical language of the unconscious enhances the process of Alvina's mythicization. Taken together with the extended symbolism and the numerous allusions to the mythological past, they show the woman detaching herself from the brutal reality in order eventually to become what Lawrence believes a woman ought to be: "the flow which seeks to intermingle with the opposite male flow and finally create life and be consummated" (*Phoenix II* 542).

Lawrence's determination to express the deeper level of reality, the powerful undercurrent that runs through human life, instead of devoting his energies to the recording of the surface, led him to call upon an extensive range from the heritage of cultural symbolism. Symbols in his work may comprise whole scenes as well as particular animate or inanimate objects. In both *Twilight in Italy* and *The Lost Girl*, there recur the same dominant symbolic images: the moon as a feminine presence: "Only the moon, white and shining, was in the sky, like a woman glorying in her own loveliness"; the mountains as a symbol of aloofness, coldness and death: "The very mountain-tops above, bright with transcendent snow, seemed like death, eternal death" ; the city as a shabby labyrinth: "Darkness was coming on, the straggling, inconclusive street of Andermatt looked as if it were some accident: houses, hotels, barracks, lodging-places tumbled at random, as the caravan of civilization crossed his high, cold, arid bridge of the European world"; the flowing water as Time, and Time as *memento mori*: "There was the loud noise of water, as ever, something eternal and maddening in its sound, like the sound of Time itself, rustling and rushing and wavering, but never for a second ceasing" (*TI* 215).

The use of symbolism is even more frequent in *The Lost Girl* in the scenes where Alvina is alone with nature. The descriptions of the Italian landscape constitute Lawrence's most admirable equation of symbol and natural mystery within the novel. Alvina's inner conflicts and tensions are symbolically expressed through the strange beauty of her natural surroundings which leave her: "startled, half-enraptured with the terrific beauty of the place, half-horrified by its savage annihilation of her" (*TLG* 314). This is an exotic, new, extremely attractive reality for Alvina, who sees it constantly transformed through her enhanced perception. Yet, the first impression given by the narrator of Ciccio and Alvina's new home, is one of coldness, harshness and remoteness, the difficult narrow passage to the other. The mountains look "congealed"; the rush of the river is "glacial sounding" (308), the air is "crystal," the starlight "frosty" (309). Similarly, the house where Alvina and Ciccio will live offers no promise at all even of a modestly comfortable life. It is a "stone floored" house with a "dim-walled room," "fireless," with "iron-barred windows," definitely "not meant to be lived in" (310). It could be the description of a bleak prison cell, not of a home for two young people starting their life together. The absence of colour is as striking as the poverty: "the settle was dark and greasy" with "two enamel plates and one soup-plate, three penny iron forks and two old knives" (311). One wonders if Alvina will not feel like a prisoner here as she did back home. But in her eyes this poor hut in the strange land does not appear hostile; for her otherness is *apriori* a magical, warm refuge:

There was a flood of light on dazzling white snow-tops,  
glimmering and marvelous in the evanescent night. She went  
out for a moment on to the balcony. It was a wonder world:  
the moon over the snow heights, the pallid valley-bed away  
below, the river hoarse, and round about her, scrubby, blue-

dark foot-hills with twiggy trees. Magical it was all – but  
so cold. (312-13)

Symbolism is an important tool for Lawrence to explore what he believes to be the feminine soul and to fictionalize its agony to find answers and above all an identity other than the false one imposed by a corrupt civilization with twisted priorities. The symbols employed here offer further substance to the projection of her subconscious self on the environment. They link mundane reality to the transcendent through the feminine, sacred, inner world. Alvina's exulted view of the place comes as an "infinite relief" (315) in contrast to Ciccio, who, as a local, is far less susceptible to the exotic charms of the place.

Ciccio, the outsider, returns home and takes his place among his own people – and becomes once more a member of a greater community, one of many. But he cannot reconcile himself to the grimness and remoteness of the south and, inevitably perhaps, his poor house and surroundings disappoint him. He is blind to the beauty of the place, and Alvina cannot but perceive his indifference and interpret it correctly as the source of his unhappiness. Access to the mysterious appears to be a purely female privilege; it is the female only who has immediate access to the semiotic, who is aware of the subconscious undercurrents within the human psyche and is able to gain through them an understanding that can never be put in words or otherwise fully explained. Alvina's response to this ancient, still half-savage, mystic place is specifically feminine. Her perception of this harsh world denotes a transfiguration within her, a spiritual and mental as well as sexual rebirth, and nature and the symbols contained in it reflect her profound transformation. She experiences the pleasure but also the fear, often raised by intimacy with nature and its secrets, and tries to discover her deep-seated, wounded self of instinct and the senses. Alvina becomes a sacred figure among the



forests, exulted by the numinous spirit found in the Italian landscape. Her awakening is a purely natural one, not sexual, like Connie's. Ciccio was an excuse for her to discover what pre-existed in her soul, as the sacred female impulse was always there waiting to be awakened.

### **The Revival of Myths: The Jungian Artist and his Heroine.**

Lawrence largely saw in myths a context where he could evaluate his pagan beliefs about life. According to Alan Golding "He turned to these sources for a set of cultural conditions that embodied the liveliness of perceptual and emotional attention and the de-anthropocentrized view of humankind" (Squires & Cushman 203). In both *Twilight in Italy* and *The Lost Girl*, Lawrence recalls the earlier inhabitants of Italy, whose cultures have had respect for sacredness of life, and whose old abodes still carry the memory of their principled stance: "I thought of the Lake of Como what I had thought of Lugano: it must have been wonderful when the Romans came there" (TI 226). In the Etrurian, Sardinian, Mexican, Indian and Greek primitive cultures Lawrence would discover new schemes for his metaphysical anxieties as well as a new aesthetic frame for his work. It was actually a new exploration of ancient myth which enhanced his literary creativity and endowed it with new perspectives. Alvina's allusion to prehistoric people, the feeling that a part of hers belongs to them, springs from her numinous other, a divine awakening and a belief that something eternal still exists inside her, and connects her with the ancient spirits of the past. As Keith Sagar comments "Literature is full of myths which enact the journey of the soul in search of god." It is a search

also into the recesses and lowest layers of the unconscious

where that particular presence which is manhood or womanhood, the divine spark, is to be found, for it is this which puts a man in touch with all other presences. (Sagar 147)

In Italy, Alvina feels almost haunted by the sheer weight of history, the presence everywhere of “the countless generations of civilization behind him [the man] had left him an instinct of the world’s meaninglessness” (*TLG* 221). In the beginning of chapter XV, entitled “The Place called Califano,” Lawrence shows Alvina’s very first reaction to her new environment: “she was only stunned with the strangeness of it all” (314). The description of the impression these new surroundings make on her is clearly as much a depiction of her inner self as a symbolically charged view of nature:

How unspeakably lovely it was, no one could ever tell,  
the grand, pagan twilight of the valleys, savage, cold,  
with a sense of the ancient gods who knew the right for  
human sacrifice. It stole away the soul of Alvina. She felt  
transfigured in it, clairvoyant in another mystery of life.  
(315)

Alvina becomes a participant in a mystic experience: she feels connected with the mystery of the past, part of a common human soul which preceded this civilization: “The terror, the agony, the nostalgia of the heathen past was a constant torture to her mediumistic soul. She did not know what it was.”

Ciccio, the man who is the cause of this profound change in Alvina's life, becomes also closely associated with this lost past:

[...] and seeing Ciccio beyond leaning deep over the  
plough [...] her soul would go all faint, she would  
almost swoon with realization of the world that had gone  
before. And Ciccio was so silent, there seems so much  
dumb magic and anguish in him, as if he were forever afraid  
of himself and the thing he was. (315)

Alvina comes to see the old gods under a new light, long forsaken by Western eyes: "The gods who had demanded human sacrifice were quite right, immutably right. The fierce, savage gods who dipped their lips in blood, these were the true gods." Ciccio looks like one of those gods, as Maria, his sister-in-law, with "her red kerchief on her head" and the "big, gold rings of her ears," looks like an African goddess. The peasants too, "all seemed lost, like lost forlorn aborigines" (316) and like the unruly followers of Dionysus in "a lugubrious sort of saturnalia, men and women alike got rather drunk [...]. Crowds accompanied them to Osson, whence they were marched towards the railway" (337).

Alvina finds in all this a natural harmony that brings to her mind classical myths of ancient goddesses such as that of Venus "who had shed a tear for Adonis," and make her feel the presence of "strange Furies, Lemures, things that had haunted her with their tomb-frenzied vindictiveness," or of the "many-breasted Artemis" who now "had come South," a presence connected with the "milky" hyacinths, "nauseating beyond words" (333). She herself stands among the poor habitants of Califano as a strange goddess (in the same way

that Kate Leslie in the *Plumed Serpent* fascinates the native Mexicans with her mysterious origin and her imposing presence): “It seemed as if Alvina, the Englishwoman, had a certain magic glamour for them” (316).

A sense of something “pre-world”(333) conquers Alvina, who like the Jungian man, here finds access to this “common stock” (Segal 64) which every human psyche possesses and which transcends all differences in culture and even consciousness. It is the place where the archetypes are located. Jung notes the tendency of artists in particular to invoke traditional myths, a tendency which is hardly a new one:

Dante decks out his experience in all the imagery of heaven, purgatory and hell; Goethe brings in the Blocksberg and the Greek underworld; Wagner needs the whole corpus of Nordic Myth, including the Parsifal saga. (*SMAL* 114)

The revival of myths, according to Jung, is a way for artists to come closer to their unconscious and unite it with their ego. The ancient visionary material Lawrence so frequently employs in his fiction – myths and symbols – is, in Jungian terms, an expression of primordial human experience, imagery from the collective unconscious, which constitutes an important source of creativity, and, crucially, primary material the artist shares with the reader. Every writer attempts to communicate part of this material found deep in his or her own psyche, and this attempt is a process which can improve the psychological development of all involved:

What is of particular importance in the study of literature is that the manifestations of the collective unconscious are compensatory to the conscious attitude so that they have the effect of bringing a one-sided, unadapted or dangerous state of consciousness back into equilibrium. (114-5)

As we saw in the chapter on *Sons and Lovers*, Jung suggests that the artist is human “in a higher sense”, a “collective man,” a vehicle and moulder of the unconscious psychic life of mankind” (119) who is conquered by this creative process. Moreover, Jung states that the creation of a work of art becomes the artist’s fate and determines his or her personality: “It is not Goethe that creates Faust, but Faust that creates Goethe” (121). Thus, the act of writing becomes an act of conciliation between the unconscious imagery, that is inherited and fundamentally unchanging and the conscious *logos* deliberately aiming to change the world.

Lawrence and Alvina undergo what is essentially the same purifying process. Both author and fictional heroine gradually arrive at a realization of the truth and a new identity which reveals something more of the nature of people and things. Alvina’s unconscious fantasies are expressions of her inner world, her mysterious innate tendencies, realizations about herself and her life which she was not allowed to make before, for they were considered inappropriate and immoral. Modern taboos like desire or sexuality, which in the primitive mind would exist openly on the surface, manifest themselves in Alvina’s consciousness for the first time since they had been oppressed and hidden in the unconscious. Thus, Alvina becomes a symbol in the Jungian sense: she stands for the expression of desire, the will to escape, hidden in the soul of every human being trapped by the circumstances of modern life. She is a Persephone, whose release will bring spring to the barrenness in the psyche of the

enslaved by conformities woman. Lawrence becomes the poet who “foretells changes in the conscious outlook of his time” (117) and lends expression to this unconscious desire, this real need.

In *The Lost Girl* Lawrence abandons himself to the language of the unconscious, uses symbols as means to reveal and enhance the feminine consciousness and alludes freely to mythological material which reveals his intention to reconcile unconscious urges with the conscious mind. Once more, throughout this novel, Lawrence has established the feminine consciousness as his truest ally, not only as an instrument of undermining the established but deeply destructive male logic, but also as a model of the kind of human qualities necessary to bring about rejuvenation and well-founded hope for a new truer and healthier human life.

## Chapter Five

### **“The Witch à la Mode” and “Tickets Please”: Male Fear and Female Terror**

As early as 1911, Lawrence wrote a short story under the title “Intimacy,” a story which was actually an early version of ‘The Witch à la mode’ in which he drew upon elements of his own situation. That included his complicated relation to his fiancée, Louie Burrows (the Constance of the story) the “awfully good, churchy” girl as Lawrence describes her in his *Letters* (*L i* 343) and Helen Corke, the independent, strong-minded woman with whom Lawrence had a passionate love affair. In “Intimacy,” she became Margaret, changed to Winifred in the 1913 version of it under the title “The Witch à la Mode.”

The protagonist of the story, Bernard Coutts can be seen as one of Lawrence’s early autobiographical heroes like Cyril Mersham in “A Modern Lover,” Edward Severn in “The Old Adam,” John Adderley Syson in the “Shades of Spring” and the Doppelganger Hampson in *The Trespasser* (Worthen 148). Each of these figures, “without being anything so definite as a self-portrait, is clearly an experiment Lawrence is making with the role of the detached, self-controlled man and aesthete.” Bernard Coutts can hardly be seen as self-controlled. But he is clearly in a “state” of “not being able to love” the state “to which these artist figures of the early fiction are utterly condemned” (149). He falls in the category of these men which Lawrence was afraid of being: “deprived of all context,” having nothing “in which their perceptions might be rooted; they are incapable of relationship, except with inanimate nature and (above all) with words” (148). In his 1915 essay “The Crown,” Lawrence would describe

such an egoistic man as someone who “seeks his own sensational reduction, but he disintegrates the woman even more, in the name of love” (*RDP* 284).

In the story, Bernard is on his way to Yorkshire where he is to meet Constance (Connie) his “betrothed” fiancée (*CSS* 52). However, he decides to stop for a night at East Croydon, risking and hoping to meet Winifred Varley, an old flame of his and the fatal woman of the story. Through his meeting with the woman, the image that he constructs of her, her mythicization and the reflection of his fears and anxieties on her, Lawrence unfolds aspects of male behaviour and way of thinking as well as their impact on the feminine psyche. Even in this story, the heroine is seen as sacred, simultaneously exciting and terrible, and likened to classical goddesses such as Aphrodite and Venus.

In the opening scene, the reader is informed about Bernard’s conflicted feelings of exultation and shame regarding this meeting with Winifred, the woman he desires, but whom he will not admit to loving: “Each of these concessions to his desires he made against his conscience. But beneath his sense of shame his spirit exulted.” The natural setting, the dreamlike landscape with the evening star “a bright thing [...] greeting him across the sky” and “the blade of the new moon hung sharp and keen” strengthens his instincts even as it makes something “recoil” (51) in him: for no apparent reason, the thin slice of the new moon brings to his mind “a knife to be used at a sacrifice” (52). Bernard is acutely sensitive to the mystical qualities of the evening and seems to have an unconscious premonition of things to come. He feels the approach of an indefinable, yet awesome force, that is threatening and female. Bernard knows perfectly well that his going to Purley, risking a meeting with Winifred, was not really the “easiest” way to make the journey, but a “concession” to his desire: a choice, the exercise of “free will” that yet may well bring no good. The question



raised by old Mr. Cleveland (“Ay – why do we do things?” (53) applies all too clearly to Bernard: *why* does he want to be with Connie? Has he consciously reasoned and chosen to get married and settle down? Does he just wish to follow his “instinct” as he declares, and if so what exactly does “instinct” mean for him in this case? Bernard is full of contradictions that do not look as if they will be resolved.

Bernard himself, who is hardly able to understand his own nature and motives, is at least vaguely aware of the possibly serious consequences. Yet, he feels neither guilt nor remorse: “It hurt him to give pain to his fiancée, and yet he did it willfully” (54). He is furiously trying to reconcile reason with what he calls his instinct, to make it all fit together somehow. This conflict between the instinctual and the rational, usually dramatized in Lawrence as a conflict between the male and the female, is this time enacted within a single male character and thus it appears an even thornier quandary: is Bernard’s coming to Connie just another poor choice on his part, nothing more than an attempt to escape from an uncomfortable relationship, or is this a step towards the true solution which will allow him to lose his fears, satisfy his cravings and find a true physical, psychological and spiritual refuge in the female? Has Bernard the sense and the courage to respond to his need for union with this other inexplicable force which ineluctably draws him to Winifred, or is he being tossed about, helpless and desperate, by emotions he can neither harness nor understand and obey?

### **Winifred and the Male Rage: The Solid Aphrodite and the Threatening Maenad**

“She was of medium height, sturdy in build,” “blonde” with blue eyes and arms “heavy and white and beautiful” (55). Winifred is described in some detail and likened – quite strikingly – to a “solid,” “isolated,” “white” Aphrodite. Bernard is attracted to her “like a moth to the

candle” even though she clearly makes him tense and uneasy: “his blood beat with hate of her, drawn to her, repelled by her” (57). Ambivalent, he cannot commit himself to this frightening female. She appears “cold and self-possessed,” but also “with eyes heavy with unacknowledged passion” (55). When Bernard sees the statuette of Venus standing on the fireplace, he immediately makes the connection between Winifred and the ancient goddess:

The Venus leaned slightly forward, as if anticipating someone’s coming. Her attitude of suspense made the young man stiffen. He could see the clean suavity of her shoulders and waist reflected white on the deep mirror. She shone, catching, as she leaned forward, the glow of the lamp on her lustrous marble loins. (55)

The young man is obsessed by the similarity between the living woman and the glowing Venus statuette. The “solid whiteness” of Winifred parallels the “lustrous marble loins” (55) of the statue, the cold and independent woman, so “isolated” (56) and in many respects, so very like the lifeless Venus. Winifred, “of resolute independent build” (55-6) is undoubtedly powerful, almost aggressive. However, it remains a question where this resoluteness springs from: her description clearly suggests an untamed female spirit, but the statuette on which Bernard “reads” her image, depicts a woman in “suspense”: she is not moving in action; she seems to wait for a man. Similarly, the frozen beauty of both the real woman and the statuette suggests a well-set of concealed emotional anxiety, even agony. Behind her apparent resoluteness, Winifred is “petrified.” She is a woman, whose feelings of passion and love have been thwarted and deadened, possibly because of an abiding inner grief for a man: “he perceived in her laughter a little keen despair” (58). Bernard senses that Winifred is tormented by his decision to marry another woman. She finds his decision “monstrous” (62),

especially after his depressingly weak answers concerning his reasons for getting married. She can see clearly that this is not a firm decision based on “instinct” as Bernard claims, and she hastens to remind him that there are other “instincts” to be followed. Although she does not quite fulfill the conditions which would make her a true life partner for Bernard, Winifred can see clearly that the choice he has made is based very much on mere calculation and obstinacy: it is as egoistical as it is superficial.

Winifred’s anger and frustration seem quite justified, for Bernard’s decision is truly an affront to real emotion, to real life. But he cannot see this and consequently he cannot understand the woman’s fierce reaction. Surprised and dismayed, his imagination turns her into an irrational threatening figure, a frightening Maenad:

She raised her arms, stretched them above her head, in a weary gesture. They were fine, strong arms. They reminded Coultts of Euripides’ ‘Bacchae’: white, round arms, long arms. The lifting of her arms lifted her breasts. She dropped suddenly as if inert, lolling her arms against the cushions. (63)

In male eyes, the woman becomes subject to overt, inaccurate stereotyping. His confusion, guilt and ambivalence about feminine nature, which Bernard cannot decide whether he can actually understand and embrace, transforms her image into one that is simultaneously erotic and threatening: a seductive Eve and a fearsome witch; one he hates “for putting him there,” a position he finds acutely uncomfortable, while forgetting that it was “he who had come” (57). He sees her as an irrational female presence, full of “symbols” which confuse him when he tries to decipher them. But Bernard is actually an offender against the instincts by which

he claims to act. He does not have any clear and true wishes; he just feels coerced, “nailed to a cross” (58), the cross of his chosen routine, which includes Connie, his fiancée.

Nevertheless, he insists on regarding her with some satisfaction, as “the beautiful maiden with a touch of God in her brow,” a woman who makes him feel her “manly superior” (61).

Though drawn to Winifred, Bernard fears to stay with her. He believes that this is a fear caused by her lack of frankness, but this is an excuse which conveniently allows him not to acknowledge what his soul really craves for and run the danger of pursuing it. Even worse, he explains his tame settling down with Connie as obedience to the very instinct, whose dictates he willfully fails to perceive, completely oblivious to its true nature and its multiple demands. Though Winifred makes this discovery for him (63), he cannot grasp her suggestion to follow his own male nature; that is, the instinct which attracts him to the female in her, rather than the conventional need to find a woman who will provide what he hopes will be a stable point in his life.

Bernard seems completely incapable of understanding Winifred’s inner emotions or even suspect their depth. He only sees in her “that intense reedy quality which always set the man on edge” (56). He cannot comprehend her anger, although he does discern in her laughter this “little keen despair” (58). Her reaction to his intended marriage is also badly misunderstood. He thinks Winifred perceives it simply as a challenge and strives for mastery, but this is a poor, shallow explanation and an inadequate insight into the motives of the woman as well as the complexities of the situation. Bernard thinks he is consciously and consistently exercising his free will, although he does acknowledge that his coming to Winifred – the result of a series of “concessions” made “against his conscience” (51) – was not a fully conscious decision. He defends his decision to marry Connie by pointing out the vital importance of

having a home, a place to provide focus and stability to one's life, but Winifred can sense the emptiness behind his words and Bernard is irritated by her for her doubts threaten to destroy his fragile illusions.

Winifred tries to make the whole situation as clear as she can, in order to "resolve the discord," but her straight talk and reasoned arguments succeed only in injuring Bernard's smug narcissism. Consequently, he responds by punishing her in his imagination, arbitrarily turning her into a monstrous creature, laying on her all the blame for the failures of their love-affair. He blames her for having used him as her looking-glass "to see things in: to hold up to the light." He accuses her of "abnormality," of imposing on him an identity which deprives him of his manliness, his physical dimension, his very "blood" and "bone." However, beneath his self-justifying reasons, lies concealed a deeper undercurrent of anger against the woman. He shows little interest in discovering her real emotions and is all too ready to characterize her as a shallow, frivolous person blissfully unaware that such accusations apply far better to himself. His refusal to approve of Winifred's independent life, is also part of a desperate defence mechanism: he seems to have an unconscious fear of her strong, intense personality and tendency to be judgmental, precisely, because she can see and reveal truths about him which he had rather not face.

Bernard, therefore, projects upon Winifred the inner division he experiences, his desire to reap the benefits of the social conventions and still satisfy his pride by appearing to reject them. So, it is actually she who functions as *his* looking-glass, the distorting mirror that soothes his anxiety and rewards his clumsy efforts to construct a personally and socially acceptable self-image. He has made a move towards her, but when his narcissism is wounded, when his cherished self-image is threatened, he lashes out to hurt and drive her

away, to smash the mirror which reflects his powerlessness and moral cowardice. As he can only do this by demeaning her, he casts her as a poor stereotype. His fear of the power revealed in her, turns her in his eyes into a malicious goddess. He even fails to appreciate her sexual response, considering it excessive and inauthentic: an “unnatural ebb of passion” (65). Thus, he turns the sexual experience into a negative one, as he cannot allow it to rescue him from the deadness of his life, the deadness he has chosen himself, partly as a means to punish Winifred, but mainly because of his fundamentally flawed attitude to life. Passion and sex, the sacred coming together of the male and the female, is here deprived of its divinity as neither Winifred nor Bernard meet each other’s true needs. The man sees her as a cruel predatory goddess, ever ready to devour even those who serve her (64), and Lawrence likens her insistently to a witch, the title’s “Witch à la Mode,” an unacceptable modern woman, bare-armed and quick-witted, who still “looked up at him [Bernard] witch-like, from under bent brows” (62). It is especially in Bernard’s (or Lawrence’s) eyes, of course, that she appears “witch-like,” her potential sacredness a threat to his male ego.

### **The Ineffective Union**

Bernard, however, is not the only one incapable of a mature relationship with the other sex. Winifred is guilty as well. Drawing on his own situation with Helen Corke, whose self-possession and egoism had excited and stimulated him, Lawrence portrays Winifred as one of those women who “they want the flowers of the spirit they can gather from us [men]. Therefore they destroy the natural man in us – that is, us altogether” (Worthen 259). She is the modern witch, portrayed as the product of modern society, solid and resolute with “no corsets”; sharing the dead whiteness of the marble Aphrodite, but not the erotic passion of the love goddess. Winifred has isolated herself from real feelings. She is “cold” and “self-

possessed” (CSS 55). She appears distant and enigmatic, not only to Bernard, the focalizer for most of the novel, but also to the reader, since she never really expresses her emotions apart from her outburst about Bernard’s marriage. In her portrayal, Lawrence retains her mystery, the secret of an alienated woman who fails to understand her heart and respond to it.

The story is in many respects one of the lost opportunity. Bernard undoubtedly feels Winifred’s numinous presence filling the world and becoming “atmosphere and all.” The carnal contact is so intense that it almost hurts his body, he slips into another world, the world of desire in the blood, where “he did not know what he was doing.” Unfortunately for him, he feels that Winifred “wanted no more of him than that kiss” (65). Thus, the woman is turned from a human presence into a “heavy form,” which “hung upon him,” giving him “anguish and a cutting short like death.” He feels her as “a swollen vein, with heavy intensity, while his heart grew dead with misery and despair” (66). Here Lawrence attacks the empty sensationalism which often deceives both man and woman, and distorts the real meaning of the sexual act, its sacredness. This is Winifred’s punishment, the price she is paying for not being able to appreciate Bernard as her real companion in flesh and blood. Yet, these limitations in the delineation of her personality are precisely those that allow other exciting hermeneutic possibilities to emerge.

### **Winifred’s duplicity: The “Real” (?) Winifred**

Winifred is simultaneously oppressed by Bernard’s behaviour and oppressive towards him. This distance between what she seems to be (cold, independent, inscrutable) and what she might really be (sensitive, suffering and vulnerable) creates two distinct perspectives which interrogate and challenge each other’s premises and make Winifred a character of

considerable complexity. It is through the semiology of her body, her stature and movements, that Lawrence builds such a distant, unapproachable character. There are scenes involving her which move with an almost lightning speed, as they freeze action, bring the focus on her and open the possibility of diverse views and multiple explanations of her emotional world. At the same time they remain elusive in the following examples of qualities which Bernard appears to see in her: “she bowed *richly* to the piano” (CSS 62), “She lay perfectly *still* and *warm* in the fire-glow” (64) “He turned, saw her *full, fine* face tilted up to him. It showed *pale, distinct,* and *firm,* very near to him” (58) [my emphases]. Overtly, Winifred does not oppose Bernard’s accusations. She is content to aim merely at wish fulfillment in order to get her object of desire and, in this sense, she can be considered egoistical. On the other hand, Bernard is no less guilty as he takes advantage of his power over her and torments her. Thus, one way to perceive Winifred’s tragedy would be to explain it as a result of her egoism, her fear of emotional commitment, her inability to open up and offer her real self to a man, her tendency to oppress and her need for constant show of sympathy and affection. She presents a problematic sexuality, a symptom of the century’s deep decay which has distorted her womanhood as it has all fundamental human qualities. Bernard perceives this problematic sexuality but interprets it as mere egoism and arrogance. Ignorant of his own distorted character, he seeks to maintain control over her in order to keep his own confused feelings and ideas undisturbed in their precarious order. In mythicizing her, comparing her to a Maenad or to a heathen blood-thirsty goddess, Bernard articulates his unease about his own situation. Winifred, as we have seen, becomes a looking glass for his uncertainties and fears, the victim of his melodramatic tendencies and distorted perceptions. She herself seems to have a different experience of their relationship, an experience which she never communicates, as she is invariably shown as an inscrutable, enigmatic figure.



Winifred, however, can convincingly illuminate what she sees as a conventional, even puritanical, reaction on Bernard's part. She sounds perfectly accurate when she reminds him that there are "many instincts" a man can choose to obey. Moreover, her agony becomes manifest when she wonders "why that," why does Bernard sacrifice their passionate relationship for a conventional marriage, a desperate question to which he can only give an answer that is as cruel as it is unreasoned: "Because I want to!" (63). Bernard here sounds unpardonably naïve about human nature. When emphasizing his own right to free will, he shows exactly how much he lacks self-knowledge. Winifred, like Hannele in *The Captain's Doll* as we shall see, has a much clearer insight into the man's psychological state, and this is another way to perceive her personality. She can grasp aspects of his mind that he himself does not realize. In a desperate (and unsuccessful) effort to receive some logical answers from him that will help resolve the situation even without lessening her pain, she perceptively touches upon his fear of his own freedom. Her suffering is surely unnecessary and probably avoidable if Bernard could only recognize the real motives behind his semi-conscious decision to seek her again. Instead, he prefers to present their relationship in terms of sexual rivalry in which the woman is always the traitor, the sole party responsible for its failure.

Since it is the man who is the focalizer in this story, the woman is tacitly pushed to the margin, an enigmatic distant figure only partly understood. Yet, Winifred still comes across vividly alive, as a woman who seeks to understand the situation she finds herself in, and tries to establish and maintain a channel of communication between herself and her partner. Moreover, she is a woman who refuses to be punished for her independent personality and unconventional mores. Defying her limited portrayal within the story, she displays the "autonomy" which "male authors' heroines often display," as Sandra Gilbert and Suzan

Gubar have pointed out. Winifred refuses to be “fixed” or “killed by an author/owner” here present in Bernard’s voice too, who seeks to destroy the woman’s strength of character by destroying her balance. She goes on “to reach the other side of the mirror/text,” leaving hints of her real self: that of a sensitive woman with human needs, not the predatory deity Bernard imagines her to be. Even though Lawrence presents her as a typical case of the egoistical modern woman, it is hardly surprising that many elements in her depiction enable the reader to get a clearer and far more positive view of her nature, her strong feminine anxiety to be accepted as she really is, an individual human being looking for love and passion and respect. This is a clear example of what Sandra Gilbert and Suzan Gubar meant by saying that “women themselves have the power to create themselves as characters” (Gilbert& Gubar 16) even against the grain of their male author’s intentions.

At the end of the story, Bernard symbolically sets fire to everything that binds them. Fire, the passion which was the main ingredient of their relationship, becomes also its destroyer. What unites them is a passion springing from inadequate emotions and false premises, and it is spent leaving only a burn in the man’s hands and a bitter sense of failure in his soul. Winifred is left alone, her emotions unuttered, as silent at the end as she was at the beginning. And yet, “*The Witch à la Mode*” is a story that does not distance itself from the woman’s anxiety. Though told from an exclusively male perspective, it allows us to watch the woman’s agitation, her pain, her desire to be accepted for what she is, and ultimately succeeds by emphasizing how ambiguous and false the male image of woman can be.

## “Tickets Please”

The story was completed in December of 1918, together with “The Fox” and four essays at the “Education of the People,” when Lawrence was at Mountain Cottage in Eastwood, and first appeared under the original title “John Thomas,” in the *Strand* magazine in April of 1919 (Kinkead-Weekes 483). In this aggressive tale, we see for the first time a woman invested with the role of avenger. Annie, who is a tram-conductor, is the betrayed woman, who, together with her female colleagues at work, decides to give a lesson to the appropriately named John Thomas, a cocksure ticket-inspector on the Ripley to Nottingham tramway, a man who does not hesitate to play around with every female soul he meets. The girls conspire against him, literally attack him and force him to commit himself to marry one of them. His real punishment however is to meet these women as “nature red in tooth and claw” (Woolger 120); he comes face to face with the destructive feminine side, a female aggressiveness which threatens him even with death.

The women in this Lawrencian story resemble the members of an ancient Greek chorus only instead of supporting the tragic hero and commenting on his actions, they take essential decisions, they judge and punish, they become terrible monsters, fearful Maenads, the terrifying figures, who, in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, devour King Perseus, punishing him for his reluctance to accept the new god Dionysus, the god of passion and of instinctive drives, the god who metaphorically can be seen as reigning in the realm of the unconscious. They become the protectresses of this dissipated god, the protectresses of the inexplicable, obscure aspect of the human soul. This is the dark side of the sacred feminine, the threatening aspect of goddesses which religious myths in almost every culture have depicted: the aggressive femaleness as a destructive force which makes no distinctions. Agave, in Euripides’ tragedy

mentioned above, destroys her son with her own hands. Inanna, the Sumerian goddess, is also a lion goddess of the war and a dragon slayer (Whitmont 134). In the Greek mythology, we find Gorgon, the Medusa whose sight turns the beholder into stone (134) and the Erinyes, daughters of Gaia who emerged from Uranus' (their father's) blood after his castration by his son. They are the terrible furies who pursue anyone guilty of a sin against the will of gods.

In "Tickets Please," Lawrence dramatizes the domineering nature of women, the nature he is mostly afraid of, the nature which in the form of maternal or matrimonial love, seeks to suffocate man and his free spirit. In a letter to Katherine Mansfield of 5 December 1918, Lawrence writes about the "devouring" power of the Mother-Woman which can absorb and destroy man's maleness, a power from which he "struggles all [his] might to get out" (L iii. 301-2). During that period, Lawrence had been reading Barbara Low's copy of Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious*, which contains a critique of Freud's view on incest (Kinkead-Weekes 487). His reading of Jung made him realize the importance of writing fiction which crossed "the threshold of the psyche" (488) and enhanced his views on maleness and femaleness, motherhood and the human soul, views which were to be analyzed in his *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1920), as well as dramatized in his later fiction to come.

In this story Anna, John Thomas' last lover, takes the form of the Medusa, an image which for Erich Neumann constitutes the archetype of the Terrible Mother existing in the iconography of all matriarchal cultures. This myth of the Medusa killed by the brave Perseus, in both a Freudian and Jungian analysis is interpreted "as a young man's struggle with the devouring and possessive image of the feminine" (Woolger 83), a struggle which for Lawrence lasted almost his whole life, given his problematic relation with his mother and later with Frieda, and which had a strong impact on the formation of his attitude towards

women. He was clearly afraid of the dark, feminine power, a power he dramatizes here. It is a force to be avoided, being connected with the malaise of industrialization since these women are all products of the dehumanized world of the machine:

The girls are fearless young hussies. In their ugly blue uniform, skirts up to their knees, shapeless old peaked caps on their heads, they have all the sang-froid of an old non-commissioned officer. With a tram packed with howling colliers, roaring hymns downstairs and a sort of antiphony of obscenities upstairs, the lasses are perfect at their ease. They pounce on the youths who try to evade the ticket machine. They push off the men at the end of their distance. They are not going to be done in the eyes- not they. They fear nobody – and everybody fears them. (CSS 315)

It is the power of the machine which has deprived these women of their womanhood and turned them into fearful creatures. The destructive aspect of the female psyche for Lawrence, is not to be seen as something inherited from nature, but as a distortion of this nature. These women, caught in the sharp teeth of mechanization, are lost, alienated and miserable in the same way men are. They have lost contact with the “softly flowing stream of attraction and desire and beauty” and

they see themselves as isolated things, independent females, instruments, instruments for love, instruments for work, instruments for politics, instruments for pleasure, this, that

and the other.

Life for Lawrence “is not a question of points, but a question of flow.” And the woman used to be the flow, she used to hold the secret of life, she used to live “in a long subtle motion that has no full-stops and no points” in opposition to man, who likes putting points “in life and love” (*Phoenix II* 541-542).

Unfortunately the women of the story are searching for a “point.” What is missing in them is the courage to return back and discover their female nature. They have become so immersed in the man’s world that they have completely forgotten what real life is. Their consciousness has adapted so well to prevailing male structures that they risk turning into men themselves: “It is a pity of pities women have learned to think like men.[...]. Our education goes on and on, on and on, making the sexes alike, destroying this the original individuality of the blood, to substitute for it this dreary individuality of the ego, the Number One”(RDP 341). The feminine self of these women remains undeveloped. The insecurity they feel inside, despite all their “masculine” achievements, is the source of their aggressiveness and the fiercer they become the more they hide their vulnerable self. This insupportable split between the fragile, intuitive woman and the strong, outer fighter is the price the modern woman has to pay in order to succeed. Even if they don’t want to get involved in male activities, Lawrence accuses women of falling into the trap that society has set up for them. They want to have love -- no matter how meaningless and absurd such a feeling might be. They need to settle down and get married and have children and a family, but, having lost the true essence of life which is not to bear children but to “bear themselves”(Study 48), they find no satisfaction in achieving their goals. Lawrence here

seems to mourn the death of the natural woman who is different from man and has her own logic, not of the masculine sort.

Despite his fear of this unexpected and dangerous development in women's nature, it seems that portraying them as destructive figures is not Lawrence's intention. Annie, for example, is a sensitive woman before "the possessive female was roused in her" (TP 319). She feels warmth and security on John's presence:

She felt so rich and warm in herself when he was near. And John Thomas really likes Annie, more than usual. The soft, melting way in which she could flow into a fellow, as if she melted into his very bones, was something rare and good. He fully appreciated this.

Annie seems to be capable of really touching a male heart, while John acknowledges the soft, feminine touch, the flow of life that Anna represents. Both of them could have been the Man and Woman, who, according to Lawrence, could have achieved the sacred union between the male and the female, if modern life had not wounded their intuition and pure nature irreversibly. As it is, John can only "appreciate" Anna's sensuous, female presence, and Anna "wanted to take an intelligent interest in him" (318). Both of them have committed a sin against life by treating the union of a man and woman, not as a divine gift, but as a commodity to be exploited.

Lawrence dramatizes what *he* finds threatening in feminine nature, as it has been infected by civilization, using the same mystical language and semiology of ritualistic scenes alluding

to ancient pagan times, that he employs in other works in order to divinize his heroines. This time, it is not the omnipotent power of the moon (which transforms Ursula in *The Rainbow*), or the living cosmic power in a tree-trunk (which awakens Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Katherine in "The Border Line"), but the extra-cosmic sense of destruction which unites the women of the story and turns them into alien, menacing creatures:

Annie knelt on him, the other girls knelt and hung on to him.

Their faces were flushed, their hair wild, their eyes were all glittering strangely. He lay at last quite still, with face averted, as an animal lies when it is defeated and at the mercy of the captor.

Sometimes his eye glanced back at the wild faces of the girls.

The girls are filled with "supernatural power," "a terrifying lust" (323) in their voices, they often burst into "shrill, hysteric" (325) laughter. Lawrence portrays them as frenzied furies emphasizing the depth of their wounded feelings and their lust for justice. They want to "correct" John Thomas obliging him to choose one of them for marriage. Thus marriage becomes a vengeful act showing the resentment of these girls for being rejected.

The real problem for Lawrence lies in the incapability of modern men and women to open their hearts and accept one another in their souls. Lawrence here seems to attack, not only the woman perverted by industrialism, but also "male chauvinism" (Kinkead-Weekes 488), suggesting that true maleness has nothing to do with the fake confidence that meaningless sexual affairs build in a man's psyche. Lawrence's comment on modern Don Juans is caustic: "Don Juan was only Don Juan because he *had* no real desire. He had broken his own integrity and, was a mess to start with. No stream of desire, with a course of its own, flowed from him



[...]. That's Don Juan: the man who *couldn't* desire a woman" (RDP 342). John Thomas' desire is similarly false condemning him to remain without passion and respect for women.

At the end, not only Anna, but also the rest of the girls turn John Thomas down. His offer to marry Anna is rejected by her and none of the other women seem willing to finally take him as their husband. He leaves with torn clothes and bleeding face, daunted and alone. Anna now seems to realize that what she wanted was real male contact, real happiness with a man who would discover her femaleness and would not be afraid to embrace it. Anna is saved at the end, as Medea in Euripides' tragedy is forgiven for the killing of her children (murdered in order to take revenge for her husband's betrayal). Both women are tragic since their initial sadness and misfortune is transformed into rage for revenge. Both women are tragic, each in her dimensions, as their initial sadness and misfortune has been transformed into mere revenge and their rage has become their power. Lawrence, like Euripides in the past, appears to have a sense of natural justice and he does not hesitate to save these women as they give up being the willful possessive females and they listen to their inner needs by acknowledging in the man the falsity of his feelings and by rejecting him: Medea is saved by the god Helios, the Persian god of the sun, while Anna with her Maenads are saved by the unexpected prevailing of the feminine instinct hidden in the unconscious, the realm of the god Dionysus. It is a metaphorical salvation as women here are presented from a powerful point of view, dispensing justice and punishing the one who dared to play with their emotions and abuse their need for real caring and tenderness. Although Lawrence is very cautious towards the feeling of love (and women's obstinacy to get it) as a reliable feeling which can keep a man and a woman together, here, the reader is left with the impression that the feminine demand to be loved might be justified as its lack arouses so strong, frustrating and revenging feelings, in the female soul.

The tortured man at the end of the novel becomes the symbol of a collapsed sentimentalism, a term used by Lawrence in his "The Crown" (*RDP* 285) to denote the degradation both of flesh and spirit which comes as a result of the accumulation of useless experiences. John Thomas epitomizes the reluctance of the male to listen to the female voice and accept a woman as a true lifelong partner for the man in the body and soul. Lawrence, by vividly depicting through a ritualistic motif the distortion and discouragement of modern man and woman and their deviation from what is supposed to be their real nature, dares to challenge equally both sexes. and make them face their responsibility to really approach and listen to one another.

## Chapter Six

### *The Ladybird, The Captain's Doll* and "The Borderline"

#### *The Ladybird* and the Calling of the Dark Male

"The Ladybird has more the quick of a new thing in than the two other stories," wrote Lawrence in a letter to John Middleton Murry on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1923 (*L iv.* 447). The two other stories were *The Fox* and *The Captain's Doll*. All three were written between November and December 1921 and published together in 1923. *The Ladybird* is based on Lawrence's earlier story, "The Thimble," written in 1915 and published in the *Seven Arts* magazine in March 1917. This earlier version of Lawrence was about resurrection: "The fact of resurrection is everything, now: whether we dead can rise from the dead, and love, and live, in a new life, here" (*L ii.* 420). About the same period, Lawrence was finishing *The Rainbow* which was strongly engaged with the idea of love as a spirit which kindles creation, a spirit in which we need to be strong in order to fight death (*L ii.* 424). Lawrence added the central character of Count Johan Dionys Psanek and gave the story the new title *The Ladybird* in 1921.

In *The Ladybird*, Lawrence uses symbolism "less to explore 'character' than to articulate his radical antagonism, now, to the England and Europe he is about to leave." Feeling a strong antipathy for their superficial, democratic values, Lawrence concentrates more on the possibility "to crack open the sterile real world of 1918 Europe, and allow a strange subversive vitality to come through" (Kinkead-Weekes 693). *The Ladybird* examines the compelling attraction between a war-wounded German aristocrat and Lady Daphne, the beautiful wife of a war-wounded English officer. Daphne, "a tall beautifully-built girl"

(*FCDL* 160), is a woman accustomed to live by her will rather than her instincts until she finally acknowledges her unconscious desires and finds fulfillment through the dark presence of Count Dionys. The characters engage with the difficult task of the soul's recovery and resurrection, and this is achieved through the abandonment of the self to its dark instinct symbolized by the Count. It is Dionys who compels the heroine of the story to undertake the adventure of the descent into the mystery of the psyche where she discovers the erotic core of her womanhood. Once more, Lawrence paints the portraiture of a woman who abides by the conventions dictated by her social class and upbringing, but whose temper obstinately demands a different life: "Yes, her will was fixed in the determination that life should be gentle and good and benevolent. Whereas her blood was reckless, the blood of daredevils" (161). Like other *dare-devils* in Lawrence's fiction, Lady Daphne answers the sacred call of her blood for redefinition of the self.

Lady Daphne is married to "an adorable, tall, well-bred Englishman" (182), "a commoner, son of one of the most famous politicians in England, but a man with no money" (160). The loss the Great War brings – two beloved brothers dead, her husband first missing in action, then returned scarred for life, makes conventional happiness impossible. Her opportune meeting with the Count reveals, all the more clearly, the utter vanity of a "safe" conservative life in disregard of the body. Her psyche is in danger of asphyxiation within the confines of a sick, dying civilization, but her personality emerges in power and significance once she has the opportunity to find her vital, inner self.

## Daphne's Inner Conflict: The Apollonian and the Dionysian

Lawrence, like Nietzsche, sees in the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy the two polar opposites which must be reconciled in order for “life to be produced” (Montgomery 76). Law, the Apollonian, and Love, the Dionysian, must come together as they are the two principles “operative in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms” (77). In *The Ladybird*, the Dionysian is represented by the short, dark figure of Count Dionys who may also be seen as the personification of Daphne's own inner dark impulse. Daphne is a character silently torn between the opposite poles of this universal duality as it is reflected both in the world and her own psyche. She is always compelled by “her own wild energy” (161). However she is a woman who feels she must obey her Apollonian side, which Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) associates with light and reason. She is Apollo's nymph as her name connotes. But she cannot be content unless she satisfies her Dionysian instinct, the dark, intuitive part of her, this inner force that is “the eternal core of things, the thing-in-itself” (Montgomery 75).

Like Kate Leslie in *The Plumed Serpent*, Daphne feels the need for a new life and a new world. But whereas Kate takes the guidance of two already “awakened” men, to transcend the existing boundaries of her selfish nature, Daphne is made to suffer by her own blood. Her awakening becomes an urgent matter of life and death as “her own blood turned against her, beat on her own nerves, and destroyed her” (FCDL 161). It is the rule in all Lawrence's work that the woman “feels” the necessity for inner change without diagnosing and articulating it logically – indeed, she is usually supremely indifferent to analysis. Daphne's intensity of feeling draws her to Count Dionys, but, in spite of the expectations raised by his name, the man serves as a catalyst rather than her initiator. What he does is to put into words what

Daphne already subconsciously knows; he reveals to her the possibility of living this other life her soul yearns for. He is Pluto, only he does not need to abduct this Persephone: she is already well acquainted with the dark underworld Hades.

This may be just as well, for Count Dionys' theorizing, like Birkin's, never appears altogether convincing. Graham Hough remarks that the philosophy Count Dionys expounds suffers from "misplaced explanatory fervour" (Hough 176) and even F.R. Leavis, one of the most fervent early advocates of Lawrence, attributes "the poetic audacities of his speech" to "his state of extreme weakness" (Leavis 71). Kinkead-Weekes argues that his "rhetorical and symbolic language enables Lawrence to dramatize and explore his own rejection of Europe without having to take direct authorial responsibility for his character's ideas" (Kinkead-Weekes 694). For Daphne, the Count's rhetoric is of great importance for even if she clearly hears the calling of another mystic life, she needs to hear and believe it all, and her rapt reception seems natural enough and dramatically justified.

Daphne responds most fully to the mystical attraction she feels for the Count "after she had heard him singing":

she had suddenly collapsed away from her old self, into  
this darkness, this peace, this quiescence that was like a  
full dark river flowing eternally in her soul. She had gone to  
sleep from the *nuit blanche* of her days. (FCDL 219)

Daphne is very near the point of the dissolution of the self, the point where, into a state of transcendence, will finally set herself free and will manage to escape from the dull, joyless,

sterile life that must follow. She must now abandon the bright god of light, Apollo, and follow her Dionys[us], her dark instinct.

### **Death and Destruction and the Need for Rebirth**

Count Dionys is Daphne's seducer in the manner of the god Dionysus who used to seduce innocent, young girls and convince them to follow him. He is the man who opens the door for her imprisoned soul to see the light, as he arouses in her the desire to unite with the ecstatic mystery he represents. He comes from a world thrown into confusion, the world of the Great War, whose anarchy and absence of logic turn it into a world of Dionysian chaos. The Count resembles the maimed soldier described in "The Crown" who had "a newly – wakened child in his face" (*RDP* 291), provoking the admiration and the desire of the women around who wanted "his consummation, his perfect completeness in horror and death." For Lawrence, the destruction of the war constitutes also a road to rebirth: "The spirit of destruction is divine, when it breaks the ego and opens the soul to the white heavens. Aphrodite is, on one side, the great goddess of destruction in sex, Dionysus in the spirit" (292). The Aphrodisiac Eros, the sacred feeling, which, according to Bataille, "violates" the body, is for Lawrence the purifying feeling which brings woman closer to her womanhood.

The destruction and death brought by the war can also bring about resurrection, as the narrator of *The Ladybird* observes: "We may give ourselves utterly to destruction. Then our conscious forms are destroyed along with us, and something new must arise." Inside Count Dionys the obstinate death instinct he so readily displays, co-exists with an unquenchable life force, two polar opposites which somehow do not tear him apart. Having come under the shadow of death and survived, he still envisages death and destruction, he still wishes – albeit

a little too vocally – a thousand times to be dead, to be buried alive, “very deep, and dark, and the earth heavy above” (*FCDL* 167). Yet, soon after, he tells Daphne: “I wish the sun would shine on my face” (170). His wishes appear so natural, so uncontrived, that they do not appear contradictory. Lawrence considers the dark forces which the Count stands for in the story as a crucial part of the life force: darkness and sunlight are both vital for life to flourish.

When the Count is first seen, seriously wounded, he is almost dead: “he lay there a bit loose, palpitating humanity, shot away from the body of humanity” (167). But he also comes from the ancient dark forests of Central Europe.” Although “not an Aryan, surely” (159), “he must belong to one of those curious little aboriginal races of Central Europe” (164). Like a true son of the mysterious past, who has been put through the madness of the present, he readily associates himself with “the blessed God of destruction [...] The God of anger, who throws down the steeples and the factory chimneys [...] the God who pulls things down: especially the things that men have put up” (186). Here, as before, Count Dionys wishes for the end of the human civilization. He wants to beat down “the world of man” (187). The Count here clearly expresses the Nietzschean *Will zur Macht*, the idea that the noble man who aspires to a revitalizing world of the instinct might also “encompass[es] joy in destruction” (*ANR* 147). Count Dionys expresses his instinctive will to destroy the corrupted work of man in order that this world be renewed. This, as mentioned earlier, was also Lawrence’s idea of death and resurrection: the phoenix was the symbol of this regeneration taken from Jenner’s *Christian Symbolism* (Schneider 91), connected with the belief in the individual. It was in the hands of the powerful individual (the higher man for Nietzsche) to distinguish himself from the mob and bring about humanity’s rebirth. Although the Count refers openly and repeatedly to the cleansing, creative aspect of destruction and decomposition, and his own wish for



death, it is contentious whether the theme of destruction or self-destruction is the main theme of the story.

There can be no doubt that *The Ladybird* stops well short from being a story of destruction like *Women in Love*. Still, a grim sense of dissolution and disillusion is immediate and persistent. The story depicts England as a deeply traumatized country where the old spirit of nobility and faith in human progress has died forever and all four characters, the scarred survivors of the Great War, must suffer the consequences with little hope of complete healing. Daphne's own life is devastated as "death seemed to be mowing with wide swaths through her family" (*FCDL* 157). Apart from her husband who is lost in the war, Daphne has the misfortune to have her first child born dead, and she herself, in all her great beauty, seems frail and threatened with phthisis. Thus, Daphne, like the Count, also wishes "for the end of the world [...] the world of man" (187). Faced with Count Dionys' utter negativity and repeated expressions of the death wish, however, she becomes positive in spite of it all, and encourages him to restore his hope in life again: "The war will end. And the sun *does* shine, even in the winter in England" (170). Behind the appearance of sadness and fragile beauty, there is hidden Daphne's real nature, the devil inside, the devil that makes people alive, the good devil that pulls the strings of life: "Daphne had married an adorable husband: truly an adorable husband. Whereas she needed a daredevil" (161). So Daphne's instinctual urge is directed towards passion and life, it is the feminine urge to find her lost vitality and energy. Daphne's life-urge meets the Count's death-wish in the Dionysian under-world, the place where their holy merging will take place.

## The Mythical Allusions of the Hero and the Heroine

Daphne comprises both light and dark forces. She is first depicted as an Apollonian deity of light and life, imposing as Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, as she leans over the small dark figure of the Count during their first meeting at the hospital, extracting from him a half-admiring, half-protesting inanity “you are so tall as you stand” (*FCDL* 166). Lawrence deepens her appearance even more, by depicting her as independent as an Artemis or Atalanta, the lith, free-minded huntresses and intrepid tomboys of the Greek pantheon. She is also explicitly associated with the night, the moon and the water: “You know, it [her hair] is the Hermetic gold – but so much of water in it, of the moon” (171). The moon and the water, the Jungian archetypes of the feminine, intermingle here with the power of “Hermes Trismegistus” that is the ancient Egyptian god Thoth, the founder of the art of the alchemy (261, note: 171:12). Daphne’s hair, it is suggested, has the healing power of precious metals and in fact Daphne is there to “heal” the Count, by revealing to him the possibility of a new life in the light. But Daphne is also sensitive and fragile: “Her wide, green-blue eyes seemed like the heart of some curious, full-open flower, some Christmas rose with its petals of snow and flush.[...] She stood there passive and indomitable” (171). There can be no doubt that the heroine will accept and embrace this primal aspect of herself when it comes to the surface – and it will, sooner rather than later.

The semiology of the Count’s description is also remarkable. Lawrence selects every detail with an eye for its symbolic significance: the uncertain origin, ancient and mysterious, of some curious little aboriginal race (164), “his small, animal ears,” (165), his smallness, his swarthy, vaguely simian features, his very name, all contain unmistakable, primitive, chthonic associations and allude directly to the eastern pagan deities of ecstasy, the ancient

antitheses to the Olympians. Dionysus, of course, comes immediately to mind, as does Pan, the god of vegetation and a merry prankster of Greek mythology. In “Pan in America,” Lawrence conceives of Pan as the symbol of a prehistoric spirit which man had to rediscover: “In the days before man got too much separated off from the universe, he *was* Pan, along with all the rest” (*Phoenix* 24). As in *St. Mawr*, Pan becomes the symbol of the human being’s wild nature, an archetype of the universal instinct of the wild spirit and soul which modern man has lost. Count Dionys represents the old awareness, what Lawrence called “the blood consciousness,” the connection of the man to the universe, his relation to every living thing that exists on earth (see also Introduction). Daphne’s internal need is to be restored to this old knowledge.

Basil, Daphne’s commoner husband, is the second man in the story. There are no primitive associations about him, but he too comes “back from the east, from war and death” (*FCDL* 189) and bears its marks upon both body and soul:

His face was gaunt, and there was a curious deathly  
sub-pallor, though his cheeks were not white. The scar  
ran livid from the side of his mouth. It was not so very big.  
But it seemed like a scar in him himself, in his brain as it  
were. (192)

As Kinkead-Weekes claims, the germ of Lawrence’s earlier version “The Thimble” probably lays in Lawrence’s “imagining what it must have been like for [his friend] Lady Cynthia when Beb [her husband] came home from the front, wounded in the mouth” (Kinkead-Weekes 692). Basil, the wounded husband, has come back alive, but brings the shadow of the

“white death” the mark of death “still upon him.” Daphne cannot fail to notice the differences from the man she knew: the “incomprehensible coldness in his very fire,” “the strange coldness in his voice,” “his white, awful face” (*FCDL* 192). Like a man surprised by life after coming so near death, “Basileus, the King of the daytime” (Kinkead-Weekes 695) resorts to an adoring, quasi-religious emotion in the nearness of his wife: “But you look like the beauty of all life – as if you were moon-mother of the world – Aphrodite. –” (191); “I knew you were divine,” he tells her; “you were the one – Cybele – Isis. I knew I was your slave. I knew” (193). Basil endows his wife with a mythical dimension. She combines qualities of goddesses from different pantheons: First, she is the Aphrodite whom Lawrence labelled “the mother and bitter goddess” in the *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (184). In the eyes of her enchanted husband she also combines the divinity of an earth-goddess, Cybele, with the fertility power of the Egyptian goddess Isis. This mingling of Egyptian and Greek mythology is in accordance with Lawrence’s belief that “the great myths all relate to one another” (*FCDL* 266, note 193:10), a belief which probably springs from his reading of Frazer who in *The Golden Bough* also claims that the myths of Aphrodite, Dionysus, Persephone, Cybele and Isis are identical (265, note 190:36).

Basil continues to kiss his wife’s hands, then kneels and kisses her feet, an act symbolic of religious respect or even supplication, understandable from a man who has suddenly been restored to life. Daphne, for her part, feels a surge of new, extraordinary strength at this desperate manifestation of devotion: “She really felt she could glow white and feel the universe like the moon, like Astarte, like Isis, like Venus. The grandeur of her own pale power” (193). Basil offers himself to her as “a sacrifice” (195), willing to let his blood flow on her altar. After the brutal reminder of his mortality, his wife has become an immortal divinity for him: “White! White! And immortal!” (195). But Basil’s adoration of his wife is

portrayed as empty and superficial, completely different from the Count's who can read her deeper feminine soul and respond to its calling. Basil, in contrast to the Count, has learned nothing from the destruction of the war, a destruction which never functioned as a regenerating force for him as it did with the Count. Count Dionys, like the mimed soldier described in "The Crown," undergoes a process of rebirth through destruction. Their old conscious was utterly destroyed to be replaced by a new one:

To destroy life for the preserving of a static, rigid form,  
a shell, a glassy envelope, this is the lugubrious activity of  
the men who fight to save democracy and to end all fighting.  
The fight itself is divine, the relation betrayed in the fight is  
absolute. But the glassy envelope of the established concept is  
only a foul nullity. (*RDP* 294)

Basil has never abandoned this "glassy envelope" of civilization. Like Philip Farquar, the pathetic husband of Katherine in "The Border Line" whom Lawrence juxtaposes with Allan the brave soldier of the war, Basil cannot understand or satisfy Daphne's need for consummation with a real male. Fortunately Daphne, like Katherine, possesses a strong instinct which leads her to the "correct" man.

## **The Thimble**

Daphne knows that this is not the legitimate devotion a woman should receive from a man. She offers her husband her left hand, but unconsciously she still holds in her right the gift of the Count, the thimble that bears the image of ladybird, the heraldic animal of Count Dionys' family crest, symbol of the real connection of the woman and man, as he tells her:

In our family the shirt should be made and washed by a woman of our own blood: but when we marry, by the wife. So when I married I had sixty shirts, and many other things – sewn by my mother and my aunt, all with my initial, and the ladybird, which is our crest.” (174)

The emblem of the ladybird symbolizes the connection of the Count with the women in her family. In the story of 1915, the thimble, which bears this image, is thrown out of the window by the heroine: a symbolic gesture of defiance of the past, a past which is completely meaningless in the present (Kinkead-Weekes 692). But the thimble which Daphne holds in the final version of the story, serves more as the symbol of her consciousness in the blood, her other self which remains unmoved by her husband's blind, desperate, misplaced worship: “Alas, she was not the goddess, the superb person he named her” (196). Her husband's ecstatic “adoration-lust” (195), sounds vacant, vain, even absurd, in comparison to the Count's passionate, challenging, overwhelming confession:

But I, even I, I know you have a root. You, and your

leaning white body, you are dying like a lily in a  
drawing-room, in a crystal jar. But shall I tell you of your  
root, away below and invisible? My hammer strikes fire,  
and your root opens its lily-scales and cries for the sparks  
of my fire, for my fire, for my fire, for your aching lily-root  
— Ah *you*, don't I know you? And am I not a prisoner.  
Prisoner of war. Ah God, prisoner of peace. Do I not know  
you, Lady Daphne? Do I not? Do I not? (188).

This striking metaphor of a dying flower cut off from its root, which remains under the surface, waiting to sprout and bloom again through the forceful fecund influence of the sparks of fire, illustrates Lawrence's concept of the real union in the blood, the most dynamic relationship between the two sexes, which is based on passion and desire. The metaphor of the flower and the fire brings feminine fragility together with the male power in a dynamic expression of the eternal union of the male and female.

The Thimble thus provides proof that the Count can meet Daphne's needs and wishes. It is the symbol of the dark underworld, of Daphne's journey to the world of instinct and emotion. It combines emblems from the Christian, the ancient Greek and the Egyptian religion: The ladybird ("MarianKafer" in German), is the Christian emblem of the Virgin Mary, the snake often stands as a symbol of Dionysus, and the Egyptian scarab is the symbol of the sun-god ((262, note 173:24). Lawrence had found a discussion of the symbol of "scarabaeus" in Blavatsky's book, *The Secret Doctrine* (Kinkead-Weekes 388), where it is described as the symbol of man's metempsychosis. In *Women in Love*, Birkin likens the face of an African statuette of a woman to a scarab, a symbol of "the mystic knowledge of disintegration and

dissolution, knowledge such as the beetles have” (*WL* 253). This is also Count Dionys’ knowledge, the mystic life of another world, the world of destruction and corruption which precedes rebirth.

### **The Merging with the Other**

Daphne, as we have seen, responds to the mysterious calling of the Count when she hears him in the silence of the night singing, or rather “crooning” to himself the “old songs of his childhood” (*FCDL* 212). Their meeting in the dark is a scene redolent of mystical communion:

Then suddenly, without knowing, he went across in the dark, feeling for the end of the couch. And he sat beside her on the couch. But he did not touch her. Neither did she move. The darkness flowed about them thick like blood, and time seemed dissolved in it. They sat with the small, invisible distance between them, motionless, speechless, thoughtless. (215)

Both man and woman have been swept off their feet in a flood of dissolution. The darkness has released them from the bondage of consciousness which kept them imprisoned during the daylight. They are impelled to seek union in the dark, but despite the thick erotic tension they stop short of actual sexual consummation. When Daphne touches the Count with her fingertips “a flame went over him that left him no more a man. He was something seated in flame, in flame unconscious, seated erect like an Egyptian king-god in the statues” (216). In



the silent, motionless statues of the Pharaohs, Lawrence recognizes the “spark between man and the living universe” (*RDP* 316). Daphne’s meeting with the Count is a similar “blending of ‘magic’ and ‘mystic’ to Birkin’s encounter with Ursula in the “Excuse” episode of *Women in Love*. Ursula’s touching of Birkin “shifts consciousness from mystical-magical to purely mystical” (Burack 122), a knowledge in the dark like the one Daphne and the Count acquires in their mystical meeting when words cease and touch takes over:

Her finger-tips slid down him, and she herself slid down  
in a strange silent rush, and he felt her face against his  
closed feet and ankles, her hands pressing his ankles.  
He felt her brow and hair against his ankles, her face against  
his feet, and there she clung in the dark, as if in space below  
him. He still sat erect and motionless. (*LCDF* 216)

Count Dionys becomes the fire which can unite him with Daphne’s root and rejuvenate her. Further mythological associations are produced by the way Daphne feels for and identifies with the female swan of the Count’s song, the bird who fell in love with a hunter:

So she became a woman and married him and had three  
children. Then in the night one night the king of the swans  
called her to come back, or else he would die. So slowly  
she turned into a swan again, and slowly she opened her wide,  
wide wings, and left her husband and her children. (215)

It is a story rich in symbolism which alludes to the myth of the Greek god Zeus' metamorphoses to a swan in order to seduce Leda. Madam Blavatsky had also referred to the swan's mythical association with Apollo, the god of light (271, note 215:7). Lawrence refers to the swan as the bird of corruption (*RDP* 293), which might suggest that Daphne is "seduced" and "corrupted" by the Count. She abandons light and sun, she abandons the Apollonian side of life to join the mystic darkness. The bitter-sweet romantic tale triggers her epiphany, the recognition and acknowledgement of her true rightful master, and like Mary Magdalene, she kneels in front of him – as her husband had done in front of her – and wets his feet with her tears. But she is not asked to change her life and finally join with him. The real change she has undergone is an internal, esoteric one and can never be reversed: her soul has been released from the constraints of her conventional life; she has had the satisfaction to see and touch in flesh and blood what her inner self most yearns for. The final salvation is a secret, mystical one which takes place not in the world of everyday reality apparent to all, but in the ever more real world inside her. Daphne appears to make no outward change to her life; she remains for all the world the devoted wife of Basil, she has become "the night-wife of the ladybird" (*FCDL* 217), for she has now discovered the mystic passion in blood, which, Lawrence insists, is the very source and origin of the human being.

Daphne possesses a cultivated female instinct which brings her home in the end. She dares to embrace her "dark other" and her descent into the underworld of Count Dionys is essentially a successful one. Her self-awakening cannot be seen as anything, but a significant achievement, all the more remarkable since she has to brush aside, not just external social restrictions, but also the far more binding self-imposed rules. Although the conditions of her life do not change, from that moment of revelation on Daphne is a different person: "She was so still inside her. She could sit so still, and feel the day slowly, richly changing to night. And

she wanted nothing, she was short of nothing” (220). This inner resolution is tinged with a quasi-religious intensity which serves to make her one of the most remarkable of Lawrence’s “sacred” female characters.

### ***The Captain’s Doll: the Feminine Creativity and the Threat for the Male***

*The Captain’s Doll* is the less discussed of the three stories, written between October and December 1921 (*The Fox* and *The Ladybird* are the other two). It seems to have been based on “The Mortal Coil,” first written in 1913, and revised by Lawrence in Cornwall in 1917, when it took the title *The Captain’s Doll*. Lawrence called it “a very funny” story (L iv.109), but soon afterwards he expressed his worry to Mountsier about its future success: “good, but I don’t know if it will sell” (L iv.112).

The story can be seen to dramatize a number of ideas concerning woman’s power over man and her insistence on controlling him, ideas which would be presented and discussed more extensively in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921), *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) and *Studies in Classical American Literature* (1923). In these works, the woman is often seen as a predator who seeks to capture the male and take away his power and masculinity; in other words castrate him. The woman’s love is used as a weapon to destroy the male by depriving him of his independence and his capacity for rational thought, action and ultimately creation. The woman of this story, however, displays, through her artistic capacity and imagination, her power to see through appearances. The creation of the doll by the woman, a creation which parodies her lover, is the dramatic but also artistic utterance of her passionate feelings towards the actual man. The woman creates a symbolic image of her inner dialogue between her undefined desire for him and her contempt for his

pathetic personality. In multiple ways, she constructs a new dramatic persona of the man, revealing to him aspects of himself which he didn't know or didn't want to admit. Although not related directly to mysticism, this woman's gesture bears the sacredness of an omnipotent goddess: She is the "eye" which sees directly into the male soul.

### **The Illusion of Love**

The heroine of the novella is Hannele, the German mistress of Captain Alexander Hepburn who serves in the British army in Germany. She is a countess and an artist: she makes dolls in her private studio which she shares with her friend Mitchka, another German aristocrat. Hannele has fallen in love with the Captain whom she endows with mystery. She is irresistibly attracted by what she sees as a supernatural, almost demonic dimension in him: "Her heart always melted in her when he looked straight at her with his black eyes, and that curious, bright unseeing look that was more like second sight than direct human vision. She never knew what he saw when he looked at her" (*FCDL* 80). Though enchanted, Hannele feels conflicted and uncertain before she finally surrenders to the magical power of her lover – if she ever really does. Her character and conduct have been a frequent subject of debate among Lawrence scholars. F.R. Leavis considers that "the inner shifts in her have been rendered with convincing subtlety" (Leavis 268) while Graham Hough thinks that Hannele displays "a spirited indignation" (Hough 179) at what she sees as the Captain's unreasonable words and actions. Hannele, although receptive to the illusion she herself creates about the Captain, is also temperamentally opposed to it, fighting against it even as she is succumbing:

Only he hadn't any *magic*. Magic? The very word made  
her writhe. Magic? Swindle. Swindle, that was all it amounted

to. Magic! And yet – let us not be too hasty [...] Yes. Yes, she was bound to admit it. There had been magic [...] But the distaste was in her mouth again.

She is then struck by the thought that “perhaps this disillusion was a greater illusion than the illusion itself.” Hannele is not the kind of woman to be mystified by a man. She is the one who endows him with mystery. Only in this case, the female mystifier chooses to be enchanted by her object of mystification: “Nay, nay, if she could keep the illusion of his charm, she would give all disillusion to the devil. Nay, only let her be under the spell of his charm [...] It was all she yearned for” (*FCDL* 107). This is the deliberate self-deception of a woman who needs to fall in love and is determined to remain so although she can see clearly that the Captain is a “limited, inferior, slightly pretentious individual,” a man “vulgar and horrible” (106). Hannele chooses not to destroy the extraordinary image she first created of him: “the queer figure that sat alone on the roof watching the stars! The wonderful red flower of the cactus” (107-108). In this game of deconstruction, the woman deflates both oppositional terms, by making them essentially equal and thus interchangeable: if disillusion is as great an illusion as illusion itself, Hannele is quite right (and happy) to prefer illusion to disillusion.

Lawrence seems to suggest that it is the woman’s choice to live her dream in spite of its object, and this makes the man a prey of the woman even as it appears that she is irresistibly attracted to his “magic” – in opposition to her will and reason. Through Hannele, we perceive both the man’s basic significance, albeit as an illusion, and his essential insignificance, his vulgarity and triviality. Lawrence makes his point apparent here: the man’s demystification

happens as soon as he becomes a tool in the hands of a woman, something immediately signified by Hannele's making of the puppet that is his "perfect portrait" (76).

### **The Male Strategy**

The Captain's inability to satisfy female needs is also apparent in his marriage for there too his fundamental failings are apparent. His description of his wife reveals his own tendency to mythicization: "she was exactly like that fairy in the Scotch song, who is in love with a mortal, and sits by the high road in terror waiting for him to come." In thus mythicizing his wife the Captain has made his own illusory reality. He describes her as a bird in a cage, and this cage is almost redeemed as another reality, that of his wife's: "But she loved the cage. She loved her clothes and her jewels. She must have loved her house and her furniture and all that with a perfect frenzy" (*FCDL* 112). The Captain becomes the kind, generous supplier of his wife's illusions, while at the same time he himself acquires another illusory world to take refuge in, namely astronomy and his garden, and finds satisfaction in what he sees: "It's been wonderful. Instead of looking inside the cage, as I did at my bird, or at her [his wife] — I look right out—into freedom—into freedom—" (113). The moon he sees, distant, mysterious, female, offers the promise of a new life, and exactly the kind of life to which his wife could have absolutely no access: "She used to say she couldn't really look at the moon, it made her feel as if she would fall down a dreadful height" (110). The Captain obviously feels comfortable with his wife's imposed limits, for he never tries either to bring her to the real world or take her with him in his imaginary, magical journeys to the moon. Speaking of her, he sounds as if he is unwittingly telling the story of a woman forced to conform to a pre-fabricated image, one of his rather than her making. Thus, it is no surprise to find out that he welcomes the news of her sudden death: "He was deeply, profoundly thankful that his wife

was dead. It was an end of pity now; because, poor thing, she had escaped and gone her own way into the void, like a flown bird” (115). It is his own release, however, that is primary in his mind. It is perfectly clear that the existence of this “domineering but genteel little woman, very much like Mrs Morel in *Sons and Lovers*” (Balbert & Marcus 152), weighs heavily on the Captain. Fortunately for him, he does not have to kill her since fate spares him both the trouble and the guilt.

The physical presence of the Captain’s wife, however, as Keith Sagar points out, is not only a hurdle in the natural progress of the story, whose subject is the relationship between the Captain and Hannele, but also an obstacle in the Captain’s progress towards mental and emotional maturity, much in the same way that Mrs Morel was an obstacle in Paul’s process to adulthood (Sagar 116). This negative mythicization of women – a process I have referred to in the chapter on *Sons and Lovers* as a sort of Jungian projection of the male writer on his feminine characters – has a beneficial effect on the psychology of the male hero, as it often provides a solid excuse for his actions and feelings and helps him present a better, even romantic image of himself. The death of the “mythicized” woman, which naturally brings deliverance from a number of anxieties and dilemmas, has important consequences for the hero’s personality and psychology. Soon after the death of his wife, for example, the Captain admits openly that his marriage was “a ghastly affair” (*FCDL* 150) precisely because it was based on love, and comes to the conclusion that “love is a mistake.” Although he still wants marriage, he is adamant he does *not* “want marriage on a basis of love” (149), echoing here Lawrence’s ideas about the conventional kind of love which leads to conventional marriages based on the Nietzschean “Wille zur Macht” (*Study* 99) the male wish to dominate or the female wish to “receive administration of the male” (99-100). This kind of marriage based on this kind of love, fails to respond to the real spontaneous connection between a man and a

woman which is the natural connection when the man “ventures within the unknown of the female” (*Study* 100) and the woman turns “towards the sunrise and the brilliant, bewildering, active embrace of a husband” (101). As we have seen, this the absolute union between the male and the female for Lawrence, a union based on the mutual, natural urge to join the other and not on a false social bond which condemns both sexes to a boring, meaningless and lifelong relationship.

### **The Doll and its Symbolism**

Hannele herself ignores the unconscious implications of her making of the doll. But, as the Captain says towards the end of the story, if this is not a direct attempt to manipulate him, it certainly indicates such an intention: “if a woman loves you, she’ll make a doll out of you. She’ll never be satisfied till she’s made your doll. And when she’s got your doll, that’s all she wants” (*FCDL* 151). Sandra Gilbert acknowledges in the two archetypal female figures of the story, the wife and the mistress, the domineering presence of two “sinister ‘mothers’” who “battle for the doll to which they have reduced him” (Balbert & Marcus 152). Lawrence rejects the idea of “romantic love” because “it makes a doll of a man” (Kinhead-Weekes 688).

Hannele certainly has no difficulty in seeing through the Captain’s pretence of sorrow at his wife’s loss, and she never hesitates to probe his finely drawn distinctions between authentic and fictive worlds: “‘But,’ said Hannele, with a touch of mockery. ‘How do you know you haven’t made it all up — just to console yourself?’” (*FCDL* 111). Hannele *dares* to construct a doll of him, which though “flattering” rather than “malicious” (151) as the Captain himself concedes, is still *too* real (85): a somewhat frightening handiwork which



reveals her deep understanding of the Captain's character and psychology and thus her mastery over him. "It is *him!*— exactly him" (75), says her friend Mitchka, astonished and delighted. Being the wise woman she is, Hannele understands, not only her lover, but her own situation. She knows all too well that "she was heavy and spell-bound, and she loved the spell that bound her. But also she didn't love it" (84). Because she knows how much under his spell she is, she is able to portray all her contradictory feelings in the doll, including even a little ridicule when she dresses him in rarely worn "close-fitting tartan trousers" (76). This early piece of light-hearted satire anticipates her later scorn when he turns out to be inferior to her estimation, and no more than the puppet of a little woman (his wife) who can pull the strings of his existence and direct him. But even while the Captain remains an enchanting mystery, Hannele can sense an "irrelevancy," a "meaninglessness" in him, which "fascinated her and left her powerless" (84). It is this eerie quality which endows him with a kind of unearthiness, an "unreality," which in Hannele's creation becomes *too real*, too permanent, still there to see when the fascination for the person has lost its potency.

Hannele undoubtedly perceives his falseness and nullity. She is able to see him as an "absolute nothing" and then the puppet becomes for her something "barren" (90), a lifeless symbol of his insignificance. But, as her handiwork, as a work of her art, the doll is also the emblem of her passion for him. Its making stands for her effort to give reality to her dream, to materialize the image she has of him, to linger upon and preserve forever his every feature. Hannele is a woman in love, but she is also an artist, a female creator who has full, absolute power over her creation. Still, her creation contains and preserves her own conflicting feelings of admiration and contempt, love and hostility; it displays all her ambivalence towards the model. Consequently, there are times when Hannele turns to it with tenderness, and other times she views it with fear, anxiety, even hatred.

The Jungian definition of the artist comes to mind as Hannele seems to be “prevalled upon by the unconscious,” “the mysterious god” within her (*SMAL* 119) and projects onto the doll what is hidden in the unexplored depths of her own soul. Her self-division, her repressed anger and anxiety is hidden beneath the surface of her creation. This creation is actually an act of liberation, a reaction to the pressure of her lover. The heroine narrates her truth through pure female aesthetics, choosing not language, but the semiology of the unconscious, the semiotic language of art to narrate her story of repression. Hannele is not exactly a sacred feminine figure in the way other heroines of Lawrence are, but she appears as an energetic and dynamic feminine personality with a power to reveal both to herself and to the object of her art, her power not only to create appearances (her illusion of love and her lover’s idealization) but also to see beyond them.

### **Male Domination**

The Captain also feels the ambivalence in their relationship. He is threatened by the woman’s perceptiveness and ability: “You’ve got me” (*FCDL* 79), he tells her when he first sees the doll, and towards the end of the story he seeks to get hold of it, symbolically to regain control of himself and thwart her female power. He also aims for some control over the moon, the female deity, through the ancient means of knowledge and the consolidation of it in the form of a book about her – because *scripta manent* that is, what is written lasts in contrast of what is just spoken. (On their visit to the dangerous glacier, his determined effort to climb it might be seen, as Sandra Gilbert points out, as another symbol of the dangerous, inaccessible feminine soul he wishes to conquer (Balbert & Marcus 152). Frederick P.W. MacDowell claims that the Captain “must try to secure for himself the largeness of the vital woman’s

soul, associated with the moon, but he must also dominate her before he can achieve wholeness of being as a man” (Squires & Cushman 151). Hannele resists and simultaneously attacks him. She warns him about the danger the glacier presents, mocks his plan to write a book about the moon, and asks him to burn the painting of the doll he had bought. It is a sort of female rationality which takes the form of rejection of all *he* considers important; she constantly undermines his efforts to triumph in the feminine world. Provoked by his absolute rejection of love, she becomes quite caustic, but it is unclear what, if anything, is resolved. After the direct and apparently fruitless challenge of his ideas about love being a mistake, she attempts an indirect challenge too, insisting on her idea of love even as she appears to be pleading: “But won’t you have me even if I love you?” (*FCDL* 153). Even as she offers to marry him and go with him to Africa, she never agrees to what he demands as a condition for marrying. The Captain refuses the plea of love and asks that she promise to “honour and obey” him, but he never extracts such a promise. At the end, Hannele seems to get what she always wanted: the Captain, under any conditions which might as well be hers as his. The end of the tale is left open: Hannele is furious at his dismissal of love yet accepts his proposal to marry him and go with him to Africa. Whether their union will actually be based on the sort of feminine obedience on which the Captain insists is left unresolved – an unanswered question hanging over them.

### **The Surrender to the Female**

Throughout the novella, sometimes more and sometimes less obviously, the doll is a symbol of power and an often painful object of contention. Hannele made it; the Captain says, “it just sticks to me like a thorn: like a thorn” (*FCDL* 151); his wife thinks she should have it (103).

It signifies Hannele's artistic prowess, which enables her to give life, and also her deep knowledge of the man she is in love with, but it is primarily a symbol of the power held over its original. When the Captain sees it again in the window of a little shop in Munich he immediately acknowledges its power, even in the absence of she who wields it:

Yes, there he stood, with one hand in his pocket. And the figure had one hand in its pocket. There, he stood with his cap pulled rather low over his brow. And the figure had its cap pulled low over its brow [...] It was such a real little *man*, that it fairly staggered him. The oftener he saw it, the more it staggered him. And the more he hated it. Yet it fascinated him, and he came again to look. (116)

The Captain feels caught by Hannele's perspicacity as he realizes that she has intuitively managed to pick up and include in the doll the subtle but sure signs of his own weakness. The doll is as lifeless as he is, as abandoned, unloved and alone as he feels. All the negatives of his situation, which he has managed to deny, suddenly surface at the sight of this doll, and this abrupt revelation becomes insufferable. Hannele, quite unconsciously, has set herself up as a kind of psychic mother, and the doll is her divine child which represents her permanent knowledge of him.

Hannele's understanding of the male soul could be seen as a mystical process and the creation of the doll as a sacred ritual. Her injured feelings endow her with the magic power of art, the capacity and the need to portray her emotions in her creations. This need is a powerful one and in the Captain's eyes the woman becomes a predator of his psyche, like a fearful

deity dangerous and destructive as she can reveal the hidden secrets of his soul, aspects of his nature that he ignores. The Captain realizes that he cannot escape from her; she is his “hard destiny” (115) and he must once more yield to her. It seems that his dynamic masculine self has no option but to deal with his inner, shadowy needs which he has hitherto failed to confront.

Once more, the context Lawrence has created to develop and state his ideas seem to favour the woman, who provides a vigorous response to the male contentions and at the end appears more successful. The wife of the story, as the one in possession, shows the ruthless streak expected of a woman fighting to keep what she considers her own, but the mistress, Hannele, though not less possessive or, indeed, tough, does not appear to act towards her lover as a devouring female. Once more, a female Lawrencian character displays her own autonomous voice within the story against all opposition – even against perceived authorial intentions. Hannele’s disappointment does not come from her failure to impose her will upon the Captain, but because in the process, she discovers the real defects and limitations of his character. The brave, mysterious, independent male with whom she fell in love, turns out after all to be a construct of her own imagination, an illusion she herself made in order to satisfy her need for passion. But the idea of the female instinct and its expression is valued positively. Hannele’s unusual power over the man cannot be understood or explained by him: it is mysterious and unearthly and thus sacred provoking if not awe and fear at least admiration for female wisdom and farsightedness.

## **“The Borderline”: Katherine, the Modern Persephone**

As soon as Lawrence and Frieda returned to London from their first visit to America, they decided to visit Paris (January of 1923), and then, via Nancy and Strasbourg, the couple arrived in Baden-Baden where Frieda paid a visit to her mother before they left again for America. It was around this time that Lawrence started writing “The Border Line” in which the heroine Katherine Farquar takes exactly the same route from Paris to the Rhine, “the miserable journey” as Lawrence describes their trip to Germany (Ellis 160). In the story, Lawrence seems to dramatize his fear of being betrayed by Frieda and John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield’s second husband and Lawrence’s friend since 1912. Lawrence was always suspicious of an undercurrent of attraction between the two, an attraction which finally brought the two together soon after Lawrence’s death. Murry is recognizable as Philip Farquar, the pathetic little man who replaces Alan, Katherine’s first husband and who at the end is vanquished by the overwhelming presence of Alan’s ghost.

Lawrence wrote three versions of the story, the second of which was published in September 1924 in both the American magazine *Smart Set*, and in the English periodical *Hutchinson’s*. The third and more complete version of the story appeared in the collection *The Woman Who Rode Away* in January 1928. In it Lawrence had to rewrite the ending because, when the proofs of *The Woman Who Rode Away* were sent to him, the last four pages of “The Border Line” were missing. Both versions of the ending, however, involve Philip’s death and Alan’s triumph, a triumph which unfolds in a gothic atmosphere of a ghost—*cum* – horror story, the genre of which Edgar Allan Poe was the most known practitioner, and whose stories Lawrence had analyzed in *Studies in Classical American Literature* (Ellis 163). Here Lawrence too concocts a story with supernatural elements.

The heroine of the story, Katherine Farquhar, dissatisfied with her surroundings and disappointed by her life, manages to cross the borderline into a different order of being, where she meets her first husband and decides to stay with him in this extra cosmic dimension. It is worth noting right away that her appearance suggests that she is a typically earthy and sensual woman, not at all otherworldly: “A handsome woman of forty, no longer slim, but attractive in her soft, full feminine way” (*WWRA* 77). She has been married twice. Her first husband was Alan Anstruther, a Scottish soldier killed in the war and described as an archetypal warrior hero: “a born Lord,” a “red-haired fighting Celt” (78). This makes a striking contrast with her present husband, Philip, Alan’s friend, who is totally different: a small man and a “dark” “insidious person” (79). The story opens with Katherine’s departure from Paris to Baden-Baden where she is to meet her sister. On her way to Germany, she stops at Strasbourg, where during the night, under the imposing presence of the town’s cathedral, the ghost of her first husband appears to her – an event which changes her and her life forever.

From the very beginning, Lawrence highlights Katherine’s feminine obstinacy as well as her sense of unfulfilled potential: “Secretly somewhere inside herself she felt that with her queen-bee love, and queen-bee will, she *could* divert the whole flow of history – nay, even reverse it.” Lawrence, drawing probably on Frieda, (for whom “queen-bee” was one of his favourite nicknames, Ellis 161), insists on emphasizing the woman’s egoism which is soon to be abandoned after the revealing meeting with her husband’s ghost and the acknowledgement that this man was her real husband whom she should have appreciated when he was still alive.

The three characters in this story could be seen as a variant on the mythological erotic triangle of Aphrodite, Ares and Hephaestus. Katherine, of course, is the beautiful, voluptuous Aphrodite; Alan is Ares, the proud, fearless god of war and Philip, the little man, Hephaestus, the lame, unglamorous smith of the Olympian gods, lawful husband of the love goddess and the archetype of the weak cuckold who has to suffer his wife's amorous adventures. In this case, Ares or Alan (and Lawrence himself) wins out at the end: Katherine returns to him; her body and soul belong to him alone and Philip dies, defeated by the dead man's spirit.

Katherine's going to Germany is analogous to a journey to another world. Lawrence's quasi-gothic descriptions of the German landscape prepare the reader for her transcendental experience and her gradual abandonment of her living husband and the real world and her entry to a different order of reality:

The flat, grey, wintry landscape, ploughed fields of grayish earth that looked as if they were compounded of the clay of dead men. Pallid, stark, thin trees stood like wire beside straight, abstract roads [...] With sudden horror she realized that she must be in the Marne country, the ghastly Marne country; century after century digging the corpses of frustrated men into its soil. [...] Perhaps even the corpse of her own man among that grey clay. (82-3)

Katherine feels the abhorrence of the place which is described as a living Hade. On the train to Germany, she "deluded [herself] into feeling" (82), an "oceanic" condition during which she crosses the boundaries of the self and joins the cosmos:



And as she slept, life, as she had known it, seemed all to turn artificial to her, the sunshine of the world an artificial light, with smoke above, like the lights of torches, and things artificially growing, in a night that was lit up with such intensity that it gave the illusion of day. It had been an illusion, her life-day, as a ballroom evening is an illusion. Her love and her emotions, her very panic of love, had been an illusion. (83)

Katherine withdraws from this supposedly real world, which has now become an illusion, and becomes part of another reality: that hidden in the unconscious perception of things. She plunges into an enlightening meditation which leads her to a profound encounter with her psyche, her unknown inner world which she can now see reflected in the world around her: “The audible overtone of our civilization seemed to be wearing thin, the old, low, pine forest hum and roar of the ancient north seemed to be sounding through. At least, in Katherine’s inner ear” (89). This may seem very much like a death in life, the decisive crossing of the border line that marks the designated limits of the old consciousness, and the descent into the underworld of the self. But this descent is shown to be more real than conventional reality, an initiation into the realm of death, the realm where she is to meet her first husband again and be reunited with him for life.

Katherine is far from being afraid of this ordeal. She looks forward to it excited and free from doubt: “Philip had never existed, only Alan had ever been her husband. He was her husband still. And she was going to meet him” (82). She values her mystical experience and vows to protect it: “Now, in the afterwards she realized *how* careful she must be, not to break

the mystery that enveloped her” (86). She knows that a small mistake on her part, any indulgence towards the female selfishness that used to possess her while her husband was alive, would spoil it:

She must not even try to think about him definitely, not to realize him or to understand. Only in her own woman’s soul could she silently ponder him, darkly, and know him present in her, without even staring at him or trying to find him out.

The overwhelming force of her husband’s presence has swept away her old egotistical self; his unexpected resurrection has brought about the resurrection of her own soul and turned her into a new, heightened version of herself, distant from the trivialities of the everyday world in which she can no longer feel any affection. She realizes that she has no choice; she must truly live at the very border of the known; she has moved beyond the conventional world into a penumbral, quasi-mystical state of fusion with the other. Ordinary life no longer appeals:

The people looked pale, chilled through, and doomed in some way. Very far from her they were. She felt a sort of pity for them, but knew she could do nothing [...]. And they looked at her, and looked quickly away again, as if they were uneasy in themselves. (87)

She has become alien, strange, altogether different. Inexorably drawn into this other world of the unconscious, she can no longer adapt to the “real” world. On the contrary, her new mystic life by the side of her dead husband is an attractive and promising one:

Now she knew it, and she submitted. Now that she was walking with a man who came from the halls of death, to her, for her relief. [...] She went at his side, still and released, like one newly unbound, walking in the dimness of her own contentment. (86)

Katherine becomes a Persephone who chooses to live in Hades of her own free will. Pluto is her chosen one, the one she truly desires, and she views her life in the darkness of the underworld as a blessing rather than a curse.

This sudden enlightenment is not accidental. Like Lady Daphne in *The Ladybird*, Katherine possesses, as a natural gift given to women alone, the feeling for the numinous other, the tendency to embrace it and become one with it. The gothic environment in which Lawrence places the story might be “suggestive” of “powerful but subterranean psychological conflicts” (Ellis 163) which in this case might be Lawrence’s own but still it is apparent that Lawrence believes that this feminine openness to the mystical other constitutes a sacred capacity of the woman to cross real and imagined boundaries.

The cathedral, under whose shade the couple meets again, stands as a symbol of a power which must bring destruction before it can also bring resurrection:

And dimly she realized that behind all the ashy pallor and sulphur of our civilization, lurks the great-blood creature waiting, implacable and eternal, ready at last to crush our

white brittleness and let the shadowy blood move erect once more, in a new implacable pride and strength. (*WWRA* 85)

In the light of what is to come, the message suggested by this gothic description of the Cathedral, seems quite clear: we have to admit the darkness hidden deep in the human psyche so that “a new implacable pride and strength” can emerge. As in *The Ladybird*, disaster and destruction must necessarily precede rebirth.

Even after her arrival in Germany, Katherine can still hear the “hum and roar of the ancient north” (89). She feels that she participates in an ancient mystery; she can feel the “earth, strong and barbaric.” The soil of occupied Germany is haunted by a spirit “watching, watching over the vast, empty, straight-furrowed fields and the water-meadows” (88). Thus, Katherine’s adventure becomes a return to the past; it is surrounded by a pagan aura, the “old barbaric undertone of the white-skinned north” (89) and her transformation becomes a ritual which unfolds in the background of a land devastated by the recent war where the spirit of ancient times still lurks.

Katherine, like all typical Lawrencian heroines, finds refuge in the forests. There, she feels once more the supernatural presence of her first husband. The forest is the place where she comes into bodily contact with him: “He led her through the woods, past the red rocks” (98). In the periodical version of the story, before Lawrence changed the ending, the scene is even more supernatural and “more bizarre”:

And again, as he pressed her fast, and pressed his cold face against her, it was as if the wood of the tree itself

were growing around her, the hard live wood compressing and almost devouring her, the sharp needles brushing her face, the limbs of the living tree enveloping her, crushing her in the last, final ecstasy of submission, squeezing from her the last drop of her passion, like the cold white berries of the mistletoe on the tree of life. (Ellis 163)

Here the description of Katherine's love-making with her husband's ghost is almost as overwhelming as Connie's and Mellors' love-making scene in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Both women meet their lovers in the woods and are reborn through the sexual act. The sexual act, as ever in Lawrence, is central to the mystical transformation of the heroine.

The second husband, Philip, is the little man, "the little one" (WWRA 90) of the story metaphorically as well as literally. In contrast to Alan's masculine personality and brave spirit, he is small in stature and deficient in spirit, being simultaneously cunning, ruthless and spineless: "Philip was cleverer than she was. He set her up. The queen-bee, the Mother, The Woman, the female Judgment, and he served her with subtle, cunning homage" (81). But Philip's flattery of his wife satisfies only her feminine vanity, but not her real need to be and feel as a woman ought to feel when she is together with "the man of her spirit" (*Study* 53), the man she loves.

Philip's existence is necessary for Katherine's awakening. The polar opposite to Alan, he serves to awaken her to the reality of her life, both past and present. Through her second marriage, Katherine comes to realize what a misery it is to live with such a dull little creature, and by comparing him to Alan, she finally recognizes her first husband's immense all-round

superiority. Superficially, Philip seems to be the betrayed man of the story. But the really betrayed one is Alan, “the lion,” whose wife becomes Philip’s spoil as soon as he falls in the battlefield. Alan comes back for revenge and gets it. He is the frustrated Ares, the god of war, who refuses to abandon Aphrodite to the hands of the cowardly Hephaestus, even if the latter has become her lawful husband.

Philip does not sense his wife’s change. However, in the second version of the story, he becomes hysterical, resorting to empty threats that only serve to illustrate his weakness: “I assure you I shall die while you are out!” (CSS 562). In these last moments of his life, he is portrayed as a pathetic, grotesque creature clinging to his wife in a desperate futile attempt to keep her. But Alan is there to take back what belongs to him, and will not be thwarted. He ruthlessly puts a stop to the dying man’s last attempt to claim Katherine, loosening “the sick man’s hands from his wife’s neck.”

In this variant of the archetypal erotic triangle, Lawrence dramatizes (and annuls) what he so anxiously felt to be the weak man’s triumph over the powerful one. In doing so, he draws on the most controversial theme of sex relations, emphasizing the essential, undying bond between male and female. Through the character and the story of Katherine, he elaborates once more the recurrent theme in his work of the woman’s alienation and her urgent need to join the male, a union which Lawrence ardently believes to be of cosmic significance.

## Chapter Seven

### *St. Mawr: The Call of the Wild*

Lawrence wrote *St. Mawr* in the summer of 1924, while living at Kiowa ranch, high on the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in New Mexico, at a time he had already started writing *The Plumed Serpent*. The story was published together with “The Princess” by Martin Secker in 1925, although Lawrence’s idea was for a volume containing the two stories together with “The Woman Who Rode Away” (*L* v.136, 141,147). At that time, Lawrence had read Forster’s *A Passage to India* which he characterized as “very good” (*L* v.77). Forster’s criticism of the English in India must have interested him because in his new novel he was also working on a satire of English customs and ideas targeted at “a well-heeled, cosmopolitan group of devotees to the 1920s cult of enjoyment, and on the other the snobberies of English village life” (Ellis 190-191). However the story is much more than a simple satire of the English countryside and its conventionalities. It is another example of the female quest for the sacred.

*St. Mawr* has generated some hugely varying critical responses over the years. F.R. Leavis calls it approvingly “a full and self-sufficient creation” (Leavis 271), while Frank Kermode ventures that it is “one of the most achieved of his [Lawrence’s] works” (Kermode 111). On the other hand, Eliseo Vivas thinks of it as a work “very close to the worst” (Vivas 151-2,161-2), while R.E. Pritchard regards it “a work of great power but of uncertain meaning and doubtful success” (Pritchard 157). Graham Hough concedes that it is “one of Lawrence’s most brilliant performances,” but does not consider it altogether “an authentic

piece of work,” because in his opinion “there is a falsity in the motive and the conception that fatally affects the whole” (Hough 180).

The heroine of this story is Lou, a young American woman married to Rico Carrington, an Anglo-Australian hollow man. She is a woman of fine instincts, caught in a vacuous, sterile environment, weary of her frictional, peaceless conjugal life and dreaming of escaping into a wondrous other world, one she cannot yet clearly identify, but which she immediately recognizes in the dark fiery eyes, not of a mysterious exotic man, but of St. Mawr, a wild stallion that has not been completely tamed. The proud animal suggests to the two women of the story, Lou and her mother Mrs Witt, an alternative destiny and a different mode of existence far from the vanity and foolishness of the modern world. Lawrence unravels the mysteries of these two different feminine figures, constructing different senses of the feminine sacred which counteract and complete one another.

### **The Animal Unconscious and the Feminine Impulse**

The “mystic new man,” the known figure of the exotic initiator, will never come to [Lou]” (*SM* 139), but the call of a “wild spirit” (155) and the mystical possibility of a new life it promises, is introduced with the appearance in the story of St. Mawr. The wild stallion awakens her own overpowering desire for a real, uncompromising life, unlike the one she has hitherto experienced. The horse symbolism, which Lawrence often uses, is rich and unmistakable. The wild stallion represents a dangerous, untamed, otherworldly force: “But in his dark eye, that looked, with its cloudy brown pupil, a cloud within a dark fire, like a world beyond our world, there was a dark vitality glowing, and within the fire, another sort of wisdom” (41). There is more than a mere suggestion of supernatural qualities here; St. Mawr



is a demonic / chthonic being, but he is also a vitally alive creature of flesh and bones whose extraordinary qualities can be seen both in his immediate understanding of the world he is brought to inhabit, and in his powerful emotions. Lou is immediately aware of the stallion's special qualities:

Something told her that the horse was not quite happy: that somewhere deep in his animal consciousness lived a dangerous, half-revealed resentment, a diffused sense of hostility. She realised that he was sensitive, in spite of his flaming, healthy strength, and nervous with a touchy uneasiness that might make him vindictive. (28)

Later in the novel, she observes his reactions to some nearby mares:

He pretended to hear something, the mares two fields away, and he lifted his head and neighed [...] And he looked so noble again, with his head tilted up, listening, and his male eyes looking proudly over the distance, eagerly.

But it was all a bluff.

He knew, and became silent again. (83)

The all too human feelings Lou assigns to him are a neat projection of her own, the result of the intense intimacy she feels with the horse and also the frustration she shares at the limits social conventions impose on her. Lou feels imprisoned but untamed; she is a sensitive woman who has come to regret bitterly the choices that led to her present life. She is uneasy

and nervous, feeling she is living an unreal, “bodiless” (42) life, and wishing to “escape this battle of wills” (41) which she used to find exciting, but now considers senseless and vain. Like the horse, she becomes vindictive at the end, and after her husband’s accident, she leaves him in order to pursue her dream and start a new life away in America.

As we saw in the chapter on *The Rainbow*, the horse for Lawrence has a range of symbolic meanings. Carl Jung, in *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912), a book Lawrence read in 1918 (Burwell 93), points out that “the horse acquires the significance of the animal unconscious, which appears domesticated and subjected to the will of man” (Jung 308), adding that “legends ascribe properties to the horse, which psychologically belong to the unconscious of man” (309). Throughout his work, Lawrence uses the horse as a recurring symbol of sense, passion and power. In one of his letters, for example, he asks:

What does the Centaur stand for, Chiron or any other  
of that quondam four-footed gentry? Sense! Horse-sense!  
Sound, powerful, four-footed *sense*, that’s what the Horse  
stands for. [...] And then, a laugh, a loud, sensible Horse  
Laugh. After that, these same passions, glossy and dangerous  
in the flanks. And after these again, hoofs, irresistible,  
splintering hoofs, that can kick the walls of the world down.  
(*CL* 2, 769)

Perhaps the most famous celebration of the horse, however, comes in *Apocalypse*:

Far back, far back in our dark soul the horse prances. He is a  
dominant symbol: he gives us lordship: he links us, the first

palpable and throbbing link with the ruddy-glowing Almighty  
of potence: he is the beginning even of our godhead in the flesh.  
And as a symbol he roams the dark underworld meadows of the  
soul. He stamps and threshes in the dark field of your soul and of  
mine. (*AWR* 101)

The semiology of the masculine horse's body encodes a number of aspects of the  
unconscious: sense and passion, the urge to destroy combined with the urge to be free and the  
urge to live meaningfully.

In the novel, Lou fights for these impulsive forces hidden in the human  
unconsciousness, as she is certain that these are precisely the forces of life: "A pure animal  
man would be as lovely as a deer or a leopard, burning like a flame fed straight from  
underneath" (*SM* 62). The relationship that develops between Lou and the horse leads her to a  
psychological reassessment of her position as a woman, and the realization that she is trapped  
in a life she never wished for and does not like. Once more, the main conflict is one between  
mind and instinct, between conventional rationality and the mysterious, unpredictable world  
of senses and instinct. Having given reason a try, Lou feels its ill success authorized her to  
seek the alternative mode: "It seems to me there's something else besides mind and  
cleverness, or niceness or cleanness. Perhaps it is the animal. Just think of St.Mawr! [...] He  
seems a far greater mystery to me than a clever man" (59-60).

Right from the beginning, Lou seems to know the answer to her problem. St. Mawr  
awakens what was already present to her, that is her frustration at the barren world she lives  
in, and confirms her belief that there is some other world beyond, a strange but rewarding

world of darkness and mystery and beauty, which she yearns to come to know and live in. Lawrence endows Lou with a sound female instinct and thus she is guided in this difficult sacred quest for the other by an unfailing inner source of wisdom, which comes from the deep wellspring of her femininity. Not that Lou wishes for a regression to wild animal existence. It is the impulse towards a new self, and the discovery of a new meaning, which find their sacred symbol in the shape of the wild stallion, whose fierceness and vitality reflect those of Lou's female soul and appear as the necessary antidote to humankind's self-inflicted malaise.

### **Lou and the Calling of the Other**

Lou has watched the people around her and knows she doesn't want to end up like any of them. She refuses to compromise and adopt a mask for the world, because she understands there are potentialities she has not explored yet. She faces the "demons" she sees in the "chaos" of the horse's "horrid eyes" and though not unaware of the threat they pose, she realizes that "he was some splendid demon, and she must worship him" (*SM* 31). Lawrence has his heroine wholeheartedly embrace the darkness of nature and the mystical life she sees in the horse, both animal and symbol, avoiding this time the employment of a human male initiator which involves the exploration of the heroine's sexuality. In this case, Lawrence provides his heroine with an instinctual awareness of the mysteries of the wild other, sufficient to enable her to undertake this great adventure on her own, and sets her on the mystic path which leads to her almost ritual transformation: "I am not a marrying woman," she said to herself. 'I am not a lover, nor a mistress, nor a wife. It is no good. [...] I am one of the eternal Virgins, serving the eternal fire'" (139). The religious language and the imagery employed here underline the seriousness and the inviolability of her mission to discover

herself. She dismisses all men from her personal life, even “exotic” men, who may be presumably considered untainted by the sickness of the modern world, like her Indian servant Phoenix, whose non-Western origin suggests that he may be ruled by the uncanny forces of the unconscious: “He seemed to be holding something back, all the time, unconsciously, as if in his very being there was a secret” (46). But Lou’s penetrating gaze can see through the exterior to the depths of his soul, and she can perceive the artificiality behind his apparent otherness: “[...] she knew more or less all that he felt. More or less she divined as a woman does. Even from a certain rather assured stupidity of his shoulders, and a certain rather stupid assertiveness of his knees, she knew him.”

Despite appearances, Phoenix is very much part of the western world she has got so weary of; he is in essence little different and no better than all the white men of her acquaintance, including her husband: “He was so different from Rico. Yet, after all, *was* he? In his rootlessness, his drifting, his real meaninglessness, was he different from Rico? [...] Anyhow, was it really any better?” (136) Lou demystifies, not only Phoenix, but finally St. Mawr as well: “Even the illusion of the beautiful St. Mawr was gone” (137). Without abandoning her quest for the sacred, she fast abandons the symbols and has no need of initiators either, for she has already crossed the threshold and is beginning to allow her deeper, true feelings to emerge.

Lawrence creates such an emotionally and spiritually independent female character as Lou, roughly at the same time he is writing *The Plumed Serpent*, arguably his most authoritarian work, in which Kate Leslie, superficially a not dissimilar heroine with regard to her starting point, needs not one, but two “wise” men, Don Cipriano and Don Ramòn, to transform her into a sacred goddess fit to stand by the side of the resurrected ancient Mexican

god. The main difference seems to be that in *The Plumed Serpent*, the act of transformation is based on sexual contact and the awakening of the female sexual instinct. Unlike Kate, or Daphne in *The Ladybird*, Lou does not need the energy of sexual awakening because she is born with an instinctual understanding that she must give herself to something superior which would elevate her soul and spirit. After the realization made through the contact with the living mystery of St. Mawr, she proceeds alone, a virgin waiting for the man who would touch her “very spirit, the very quick of [her]” (138). The feelings, even the words that Lou uses for this man, are similar to those used by the priestess of Isis in *The Escaped Cock* (1929) when she first saw the Man: “For the first time, she was touched on the quick at the sight of a man, as if the tip of a fine flame of living had touched her. It was the first time” (CSN 582). Lou has not yet found the chosen man, but her initiation has put her at the start of an evolutionary process. The priestess of Isis, in *The Escaped Cock*, could be seen as being a stage ahead of Lou in this process. An encounter with a mysterious man would be the final blessing for Lou, but she is patient and determined enough to wait for this sacred moment: “I will never prostitute myself again. Unless something touches my very spirit, the very quick of me, I will stay alone, just alone” (SM 138).

It is tempting to read this story autobiographically. Lawrence certainly seems to have a lot in common with his heroine: the isolated ranch resembles his own, while Lou’s decision to abandon sexual relationships might reflect Lawrence’s problematic relation with Frieda, something which becomes more overt in Lewis’ (Mrs Witt’s Welsh groom) preaching to Mrs Witt concerning the respect he claims from his companion (Ellis 193-194). However, in contrast with Lawrence, Lou chooses the deliberate isolation of the monastic life, a choice common in the religious traditions of male hermits and mystics, Eastern as well as Western: Siddhartha in the Buddhist tradition and Jesus in the Christian one, to take two famous

examples, abandon the security of a settled home and the company of people to spend time in isolation in a desert, a great forest, a mountain, any place that would guarantee the absence of human beings; for to come nearer to God, one has to abandon social obligations and emotional connections, all the duties and pleasures of everyday life. As Buddha says in the Sammanaphala Suttana, “full of hindrances is household life, a path for the dust of passion” (Burt 104). Both Eastern and Western religious traditions embrace monasticism as a necessary spiritual exercise that helps man discern and approach the sacred. It is worth noting though, that this particular path to God has traditionally been a predominantly male prerogative. But what about female spirituality? D.H. Lawrence believes that the shedding of the consciousness – once felt to be inviolable – and the “achievement of a true individuality” and “a sufficient completeness in ourselves” (*Study* 110) is a woman’s obligation: “That she bear children is not a woman’s significance. But that she bear herself, that is her supreme and risky fate” (48). In this effort, woman has a great privilege, that is her capacity to open herself to the unexplored otherness of the human soul.

Lou’s search presupposes the known descent into the darkest depths of the self, here viewed as a wild, dangerous, but also vast and splendid landscape, a “blessed” and “sacred” place (*SM* 140). Lou, if not a conventional missionary, is certainly a woman with a mission in this land, one as serious as her life:

There’s something else even that loves me and wants me.

[...] It’s a spirit. And it’s here [...] It’s something more real

to me than men are, and it soothes me, it holds me up. [...]

it’s something big, bigger than men, bigger than people,

bigger than religion. It’s something to do with wild America.

And it's something to do with me. It's a mission, if you like.

[...] it's my mission to keep myself for the spirit that is wild,  
and has waited so long here: even waited for such as me. (155)

Lou feels the urgent call of a divine spirit, the call of the wild, and by heeding it she acquires the higher status of a prophet ready to undergo the uncanny cosmic experience of losing one's self and being reborn in the spirit. Yet, throughout this transformative experience, she remains first and foremost a woman.

Virginity, as a signifier of spiritual purity, retaining the possibility of opening the feminine body and soul only to the male who deserves them, is a central concept in this story. Purity – and Lawrence makes no distinction between the physical and the spiritual – is a necessary condition for the approach to the sacred. His heroines reclaim their virginity either as reborn females – as Kate does – or as perceptive, far-sighted women who have the inner resources to keep themselves to themselves, and pursue their quest for the purely spiritual. M. Esther Harding, in *Women's Mysteries* (1971), points out that the term “virginity,” as applied to ancient female goddesses such as Isis or the various moon deities, “must refer to a *quality*, to a subjective state, a psychological attitude, not to a physiological or external fact” (Harding 102). She adds that in primitive societies “a girl belongs to herself while she is a virgin [...] she is ‘one-in-herself’” (103). She quotes from J.G. Frazer's, *The Golden Bough* (a pertinent quotation for Lawrence appears to have known of Frazer's anthropological work) : “The Greek word *parthenos*, applied to Artemis, which we commonly translate Virgin, means no more than an unmarried woman, and in early day the two things were by no means the same” (Harding 101). Harding also quotes from Robert Briffault who in his book *The Mothers* states that “the word virgin is, of course, used in those titles in its primitive sense as denoting



‘unwed’ and connoting the very reverse of what the term has come to imply. The virgin Ishtar, in ancient Mesopotamian religions, is also frequently addressed as “The Prostitute” [...]. The hierodules, or sacred prostitutes of her temples, were also called ‘the holy virgins’” (102). Moreover, regarding the virgin girls of a tribe, Harding points out their “liberty of action,” which allowed them the right to “refuse intimacies as well as to accept them” (103).

Whatever her sources of knowledge, Lou believes “she understood now the meaning of the Vestal virgins” and thinks “they were symbolic of herself” (*SM* 138). After a long, esoteric journey to self-knowledge, she consciously chooses to serve the eternal power, obeying the voice from the unconscious which invites her to a mystic adventure, her life-adventure, a voice unattached to a specific figure and something “bigger than religion” (155). She succumbs to this sacred calling and finds herself in the mental state Rudolf Otto calls “*sui generis*” and “irreducible to any other,” the state of the numinous which is also indefinable, a mental state which accepts the numinous as “an original feeling-response,” irrelevant to any ethical notion of “being good” (Otto 6-7). Like the Woman, in “The Woman Who Rode Away,” she knows her mystical mission, but in contrast to her, she does not surrender to the “wild spirit,” she does not literally sacrifice herself to it even though she feels this sacred power “craves” for her. What Lawrence dramatizes here is a mutual cosmic relationship between the female and the universal power of creation. Lou feels that “to it [the wild spirit], my sex is deep and sacred, deeper than I am, with a deep nature aware deep down of my sex” (*SM* 155). She considers the possibility of joining this cosmic force, which appeals to the female in her, for Lawrence acknowledges the female essence as existing independently of any biological female being in the universe (*Study* 50). In her choice, Lou remains a free spirit ready to join whatever she feels to be sacred.

### **Mrs Witt: The Independent Hera**

It is hardly surprising that this open and daring attitude to life is also shared by Lou's mother. Mrs Witt is described as something of "the savage aristocrat," an intelligent, strong-willed woman who knows about this world and is never deceived by appearances, functioning as Lawrence's "withering *spectator ab extra*" (Ellis 191). Although she moves in the *beau monde*, she is always wary of its inhabitants, having been endowed with Lawrence's own antipathy to the "clever, well-known English people [...] with their finickiness and their fine-drawn discriminations." She is described as "a woman of energy," "handsome, with [...] vigorous grey hair" who "would appear in her New York gowns and few good jewels" (*SM* 24), an imposing combination of the magisterial hostess, and an Amazon "riding a grey gelding as smart as she was, and looking down her conceited, inquisitive, scornful, aristocratic-democratic Louisiana nose at the people in Piccadilly" (25). Lawrence creates here a powerful, visual image of a woman on her horse, a vigorous, autonomous figure placed in hierarchical relation with the people around her. She is destined to reign as the power residing in her inspires fear and respect.

It is surely not without significance that Mrs Witt is also the mother in the story, albeit an unconventional one. She seems to possess a huge amount of knowledge regarding the cosmos, and to have strong views on how this world should be run. She is a cosmopolitan, an outgoing woman who nevertheless feels trapped in the narrow confines of her habitat, impatient with the artificialities of life, frustrated with human hypocrisy and corruption. Thus, when the moment comes, she sees isolation as a welcome change.

Mrs Witt is a woman in full possession of her feminine power and dignity, qualities that enable her to understand only too well the shortcomings of the English men of her social circle, men too weak in their own masculinity to satisfy the needs of a true woman and bring to her life the necessary complements that would effect an overall balance. She is drawn closer to the Hera archetype, the elegant, assertive woman, determined to control her own life, and if she feels she must, her family's (here her daughter's) life too. Yet, Mrs Witt also possesses the independent spirit of an Artemis and the erotic, sensual instincts of an Aphrodite. Feeling confidently self-sufficient, she is determined to encounter a man on her own terms only. But such an attitude, Lawrence says, is essentially unnatural and ultimately destructive. Mrs Witt is intrigued and attracted by the mystery represented by Lewis and Phoenix, the two grooms, and is tempted to try to unravel it and if possible reduce it to words. She wishes to experience the unknown, to resurrect the "old Pan" in modern men, to discover "the hidden mystery—the hidden cause," to open "the third eye," which "sees only the things that can't be seen" (*SM* 65). She here longs for male mystic power, the real manliness that has been lost leaving behind false appearances. She alludes to mythical figures and symbols like the lost Pan about whom Lawrence wrote his essay "Pan in America" at the same time as *St. Mawr* (May-June 1924). In this essay, he regrets the loss of the spirit of Pan in the modern world which has been corrupted by ideas and laws (*Phoenix* 29,) but also by speech: "Speech is the death of Pan" (27). The ancient Greek god of the forests and sexuality represents for Lawrence the pantheistic natural spirit of the ancient times. Mrs Witt searches for the restored Pan in a man, and she also refers to the power of the "third eye," "the focus of occult power" (*SM* 235) to which Lawrence also refers in his *Apocalypse* (*AWR* 107). This is the eye of the soul, the eye which can see the invisible, what is hidden behind superficial appearances which Mrs Witt so much despises.

But although Mrs Witt is wise and far-sighted, Lawrence leaves no doubt that her implacable obstinacy and her inability to open herself fully to the other, in spite or because of her fifty years of experience in the corrupt modern world, are the great, insurmountable obstacles which effectively separate her from real happiness. Her firm belief in the Mind and her absolute trust of Reason does not let her abandon herself wholly to her female instinct which seeks the true bond to the male. "Man is wonderful because he is able to *think*" (60), she tells her daughter. This blind reliance on (her) reason blocks any true communion with men. Later, she comes to realize that "her own peculiar dynamic force was stronger than the force of Mind" (101), but by then it is too late. Her marriage proposal to Lewis, the Celt groom, is bluntly rejected, and the reason given is tellingly that he "couldn't give [his] body to any woman who didn't respect it" (111). For she is precisely such a woman. Lewis (echoing probably Lawrence's preaching to Frieda (Ellis 193-4), considers his body as something valuable, even sacred, which must not be touched by a woman unable to comprehend its significance. Mrs Witt's ironic comments about his obsession with his body are met with stony silence and cold contempt: "He looked her in the eyes, steadily, and coldly, putting her away from him, and himself far away from her" (*SM* 112). The body once more becomes here the emblem of life in the instinct, the very mystical life for which Mrs Witt longs but cannot embrace. Lewis sounds weird and incomprehensible to her when he speaks about the sanctity of his body and his refusal to be erotically touched by a woman who would think of him or address him with the lack of respect Mrs Witt habitually shows. Lewis, echoing Lawrence, sees marriage as the union of masculine and feminine bodies in their maturity and fullness, and knows perfectly well that Mrs Witt will never be able to contribute her part in the growth of the full connection a man must have with a woman. Lewis' refusal is Mrs Witt's punishment for her incapacity to accept and appreciate his maleness. Mrs Witt is condemned to wander and wonder and never find the real peace of mind and body for which

she yearns, and at the end “she seems to have crystallised into neutrality” (152). She watches impassively as her daughter settles down in the ranch, a decision she herself can never make, still endlessly and fruitlessly oscillating between her “civilized” consciousness and her frustrated wish to escape.

However, Mrs Witt possesses just as much courage and spiritual strength as her daughter. Her inner wisdom, the wisdom acquired through experience of the world, and her relentless energy are largely misspent in activities she never finds fulfilling or meaningful. Now, she feels the exhaustion and weariness a human being can only feel when already worn out and consumed by a long life in an emotional void. Hers is not a sacred calling, as is her daughter’s, but frustration and pain tormenting her and pushing her inexorably towards resignation and self-abandonment. Mrs Witt cannot settle down and find a final solution to her life-long struggle for self-completeness. It is just as difficult to find the independent-minded, sensible and sensitive male able to value her personality and, at the same time, love the wildness in her. So she remains alone and unsatisfied, succumbing to the conventionalities of the world, and yet, deep inside, still undaunted with her inner strength not exhausted and her free spirit ever lively and alert. Her powerful presence and caustic comments throughout the novel lend her doubts regarding her daughter’s decision for spiritual and physical isolation, an extra weight that makes them appear, not just reasonable, but natural: the reader is far more likely to sympathize with her ultimately negative point of view rather than Lou’s impassioned speech about her need for a retreat into solitude. At the end, her final comment to Lou about the price paid for ranch “then I call it cheap, considering all there is to it: even the name!” (*SM* 155), though not quite dismissive, does not really suggest she is convinced about the rightness of her daughter’s decision.

## Death as a Life Experience and Silence as Choice

Like many unhappy people in their middle age, Mrs Witt develops a rhetoric on life and death. Observing a funeral, she comments that “hardly anybody in the world really lives, and so hardly anybody really dies.” Death is meaningful only when “it stings,” but “Death can’t sting those who have never really lived” (*SM* 92). She wants death “to be real” to her, and declares that “only if it hurts me enough, I shall know I was alive” (93). This sounds like a peculiar kind of bitterness, if not an indirect boast, but it is also a defence of the life lived through the body. Mrs Witt asserts the preeminence of experience over both the spirit and the rational mind. Deep emotions, pain and passion, life and death, are possible only through flesh and blood. The idea of death as the natural end of life is necessary, but the notion that it should be a painful experience is intended to be provocative rather than true. It is an aggressive gesture of defiance. For someone who loves life with a passion as Mrs Witt does, death does not signify merely the frightening fragility and mortality of the flesh. On the contrary, the life force within the body becomes a death force: birth, marriage and finally death become events within life which constitute the vital mutual relationship which at the end turns death into a life experience. Mrs Witt seems to think that destruction must be harmonious, even spiritual, a mystical experience which underlines life, and she wants to be ready for this transcendent moment when it comes. Death, like all life experiences, is a beginning as well as an end. Destruction is part of life, and the human creature must be open to accept it. In front of the death experience, Mrs Witt is described as having the “pure wistfulness of a young virgin girl [...] who has never taken armour,” her fighting Amazon spirit spent; she is helpless yet ready to accept this unique experience. Lou calls her “philosophic,” but “mystical” seems much a more appropriate word to describe her willingness to explore the dark that is death and its secrets. The Persephonic aspect, one that

associates her with the underground world of Hades, emerges unexpectedly, terrifying her daughter and awakening in her “the terror of *too late!*” (93).

Mrs Witt acknowledges, like Daphne in *The Ladybird*, the devil inside her, the calling of life (and death). Unable to exorcise him, accepts that she must endure his presence and his influence. In her middle life, she gradually moves away from her wider social circle, the tedious, dispiriting reality she despises. She needs to shed her well-made, socially successful mask, and pursue the strange, intense life of the other, the life she really yearns for, yet rarely talks about to anybody. She does not *choose* physical isolation as her daughter does, but nevertheless she ends up alone. She realizes that real freedom is impossible, and indulges in her own visions and forms of meditation. Still, in the end, the only refuge left for her is silence. She rarely expresses her feelings and ideas or even opinions. Throughout the entire journey to America, she never utters a single word. She understands her grief will never end, and decides to live her deep, inner woundedness, to come to terms with suffering and the prospect of death in a world that holds no hope. It is an attitude which, without involving a rejection of the sacred, reveals another aspect of it, the retiring to the inner self when language ceases and unutterable feelings and urges take over. Many would consider that this is arguably a saner attitude than the one adopted by her daughter.

The novel ends, as we have seen, with the short, one-line statement about the value of the ranch: “then I call it cheap, considering all there is to it: even the name!” (155). It’s this statement which leaves the end open as it sounds also ironic. It is important that it comes from an older, wiser feminine mind, and makes the daughter’s decision appear frivolous, even childish. Mrs Witt refuses to adopt her daughter’s view of isolation; she might consider it useless and ineffective and probably harmful. Having no illusions to lose herself, she might

see no mystical value in Lou's spiritual quest. However, she too, like her daughter, follows her instinct, but her rational mentality and her attachment to modern civilization does not let her go all the way. Incapable of creating a new illusion, which, at the end, might just have saved her, she is left with no alternative but silence. Her silence is the existentialist silence of a human being who sees no hope in the available solutions. In sharp contrast to her daughter, she refuses to tell any story at all, just as she refuses to accept the conventional moral dicta which might superficially at least soothe her pains. Instead, she has to suffer her destiny alone in obstinate, heroic silence.

In *St. Mawr*, Lawrence creates two women who feel burdened by knowledge, by the carefully cultivated social superstructure imposed upon their real selves, but who have managed to retain their essential female nature, their female wisdom and discernment as Lawrence understood it. Having come to realize that they cannot achieve emotional and mental peace, they take the hardest choice of all, the physical and mental withdrawal, a decision also taken by earlier (male) protagonists of Lawrence in "The Man Who Loved Islands" or in the "Man Who Was Through with the World." This is another form of the descent into the dark night of the soul, the withdrawal into the inner self, a chilling equivalent and complement to physical isolation. This choice, hard and unrewarding though it is, turns them into real tragic heroines, aware of spiritual depths which they try to attain.



## Chapter Eight

### *The Plumed Serpent: Authority and the Female*

Lawrence started writing his Mexican novel in May 1923, just two months after his arrival in Mexico City, giving it the name “Quetzalcoatl,” which was the name of an ancient Aztec god. In it, Lawrence incorporated many details from his immediate environment (his house with a family of servants as well as the physical surroundings of Chapala) which actually anchor the novel in a “day-to-day reality” providing “a useful contrast to the occasional extravagance of its more obviously invented parts” (Ellis 107). Lawrence revised this first draft later in 1925, adding new material and engaging into a more “detailed, evocative writing.” It was then that he conformed with his agent’s advice to change the “unpronounceable” title to *The Plumed Serpent* (213). The novel in its last form was published in London by Martin Secker in 1926. It is of all his novels one of the most obviously concerned with a female protagonist rediscovering the sacred.

*The Plumed Serpent* is set in Mexico in the 1920s, a time of political turmoil and centers on a radical attempt to revive the religion of the ancient Aztecs. The exotic terrain, the violent action, the pagan rituals and, not least, the exciting interplay of ideas make it one of Lawrence's most striking novels. Lawrence’s fascination with the new, mysterious land of Mexico is evident throughout his story. He had already studied Aztec and earlier religions intensively and *The Plumed Serpent* provides a lively blueprint for a quasi-religious political system that marks the height of his interest in authoritarian politics: “I don’t believe either in liberty or democracy. I believe in actual, sacred, inspired authority: divine right of natural

kings: I believe in the divine right of natural aristocracy, the right, the sacred duty to wield undisputed authority” (*L* iv. 225-26). The work progressed fast and the contemporary evidence is that he was not just satisfied but enthusiastic. The comment that this is his “most important novel, so far” appears repeatedly in his letters (*L* v. 267, 271, 332), even after its almost cool reception and “whole-sale condemnation” as “propaganda” (Sagar 159). He had known “it [would not] be easily popular” (*L* v.267) but he had not expected such universal hostility.

Yet, within a year of its publication, Lawrence seems to have had a change of heart and wrote letters that appear to repudiate his leadership vision, one of the pivotal ideas in it. Writing to Trigant Burrow on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1927, he refers to the “hero illusion” (*L* vi. 99) and in a letter to Witter Bynner, dated 13<sup>th</sup> March 1928, he flatly asserts that “The hero is obsolete, and the leader of men is a back number. After all, at the back of the hero is the militant ideal: and the militant ideal, or the ideal militant, seems to me also a cold egg. [. . .] I agree with you, the leader-cum-follower relationship is a bore” (321).

The novel has been characterized as “single-mindedly intent on imagining, as a piece of contemporary history, a revival of the ancient Mexican religion.” It is thus less flexible in mode and mood than the preceding novels of Lawrence (Leavis 78). Many critics such as Jascha Kessler, John B. Vickery and L.D.Clarke have praised it as a coherent work of art “stressing Kate’s mythic quest for a source of renewal” (Sagar 159) placing emphasis on the way Lawrence reconciles his metaphysics with an attempt to write convincing fiction, focusing on his woman protagonist’s internal conflicts and dilemmas in her effort to redefine her life and self.

## Lawrence and the “Primitive”

It is easy to see why Lawrence’s response to the primitive wildness of Mexico and its ancient civilization was immediate and enthusiastic: this, crucially, was a culturally advanced civilization developed in complete isolation from the Western paradigm and its great precedents. It could provide a useful model for some of his most fundamental ideas.

Lawrence envisaged a revival of the old Indian ethos through the resurrection of the pagan gods; the regeneration of the ancient for the sake of the present and the future: something that could provide appropriate solutions to the crises chronically tormenting the place. But this plunge into the past was not a naive utopian attempt to bring about an accurate recreation of the old religious system. In his essay “Indians and an Englishman” (1922) Lawrence writes:

But I don’t want to go back to them, oh never. [...] But there is no going back. Always onward, still further. The great devious onward flowing stream of conscious human blood. From them to me, and from me on. [...] I don’t want to live again the tribal mysteries my blood has lived long since. (*Phoenix* 99)

Lawrence, consistently, views the primitive as an inexhaustible source of religious, mythical and symbolic material, still useful because it allows the re-examination of solutions from the past for the needs of the present, an unprejudiced search for a new, less precarious balance between the eternal poles of the individual and the collective, the male and the female, a search that has better be conducted without the impedimenta of Western thought. His view is not that of the anthropologist but that of the moralist: his interpretations of forgotten ancient

religions are not meant to be “authentic,” but personal, idiosyncratic and focused on the current problems facing humankind. Lawrence seeks not the expression of an alternative religious feeling, but the eternal life force, which animates human beings in its purer state, without the obfuscating presence of religious dogmas. Primitivism is a force *de facto* opposed to all dominant religions, a spiritual deposit left behind, distant yet still potent, which must be recalled and reconsidered in order to reanimate the aging, failing Western thought and provide human beings with a true chance of regeneration and rebirth.

The thrust of Lawrence’s research into the spiritual primitive is to create a model that can adequately answer human metaphysical needs as Lawrence sees them: “The animistic religion, as we call it, is not the religion of the Spirit. A religion of spirits, yes. But not of Spirit. There is no One Spirit. There is no One God. There is no Creator. There is strictly no God at all: because all is alive!” (*MIM* 72). Fascinated by ancient animistic cults, Lawrence was convinced that this everlasting living force found in everything around us joins “the great devious onward-flowing stream of conscious human blood” (*Phoenix* 99) and can offer the possibility of salvation through the union of the human inward energy with the cosmic one. This sounds very far from the basic Christian model of salvation, but it does represent something Lawrence considered a fundamental truth about existence. By reconstructing a set of pagan rituals and hymns, Lawrence gives expression to a personal religious instinct, which aspires not to the revival of a primitive religion – an impossible task – but the awakening of a new spirit informed with primitive vitality and innocence. This animistic spirit is combined with a worldly idea of the sacred, since the sacred as he writes in his essay “New Mexico” (1925) is “this effort [to come] into sheer naked contact” with the elemental life of the cosmos. It is a palpable, sensuous sacredness that is found “in the very life of the air, which is the life of the clouds, and so of the rain” (*Phoenix* 147). This immediate, intuitive awareness

of the cosmos is essentially sensuous, physical, and is the fundamental means of experiencing and coming to terms with the world: “My beliefs I test on my body, on my intuitional consciousness, and when I get a response there, then I accept” (*LE* 208).

Lawrence can see religion only as something invariably connected with human beings, living as well in a non-material world that is the world of instincts, desires, unconscious urges, dreams and fantasies and, of course, the natural world, that is humanity's only habitat. This is a tangible world: an otherness that can be touched and felt, smelt and tasted. Lawrence needs the innocence, the natural simplicity of the primitive; it is a necessary stage in the course of individual's development. It helps the Lawrencian hero, and even more so the heroine, to take the decisive step out of convention and embark on the journey into the unknown: the dark, dangerous, but vitally alive realms of the soul. This great unknown, says Lawrence, is deeply rooted in the human psyche, oppressed by the sterile, intellectual abstractions that have come to define Western civilization, but still indomitable. The human being must not be afraid of this hidden part of his soul. This conviction of his, brings him closer to the Jungian belief that modern man needs to recognise his “psychic depths” as “no light or beauty,” no rebirth, “will ever come from the man who cannot bear this sight” (*MMSS* 248). These inner instincts, the soul, the immaterial “other” that each human being hides, Lawrence identifies with the living principle of the universe. But he cannot believe that conciliation with this cosmic force is possible in the domain of Western culture. Western responses to Native Indian religion, for example, tend to oscillate between the patronizing and the dismissive: “It is almost impossible for the white people to approach the Indian without either sentimentality or dislike. [...] Why? [...] The Indian is not in line with us. He's not coming our way. His whole being is going a different way from ours” (*MIM* 52). In most of his works, it is made abundantly clear that the primitive, which is connected with the

human body and the senses, play the decisive role in the effort to recover the lost, authentic, natural self, silenced by the mind and modern civilization, but still existing deep in the human unconscious.

This unique power, associated with the instinctual, impulsive life in the body, spurned in the West, is celebrated in the less learned yet wiser primitive societies, which can appreciate and profitably employ the impersonal archetypal features of the collective psyche, features which modern man views with distrust if not revulsion – when he thinks about them at all. Thus the return to the primitive constitutes for Lawrence a necessary act of rebellion, different in its essence from the frequent political rebellions which are quite happy to maintain and often enhance the caging of the individual in the soulless mechanistic world.

### **The Role of the Narrator and the Female Focalizer**

Kate's rediscovery of the sacred, both within herself and within the cosmos, begins in the very first pages of the novel, when she "felt that sudden dark feeling" (*PS* 7) inexplicably seizing her just before her attendance at the bull fight. Kate feels strange and alienated amidst the mass of Mexican people, whom she views with a mixture of fear and distaste as a "mob" (9), "common people" who she "really hate[s]" (10). Burack suggests this is clearly a demonstration of a typical Western tourist superiority complex, a thoughtless misjudgment of the indigenous people. He goes on to claim that Kate keeps on making superficial observations about Mexico and its inhabitants (Burack 140). But one must not forget that Kate *is* a Western tourist with no special knowledge of the place and its history and consequently Lawrence is completely justified in having her react like this. Moreover, her reactions, crude as they are, open many interesting possibilities: symbolically, her calling the

crowd of natives a “mob” signifies her resistance to the strangeness, the otherness of the foreign people, an otherness, to which at the end she will succumb. Then, it is certainly noteworthy that Kate is not merely disturbed by the strange crowd; she is equally repelled by the “cowardice and beastliness” (*PS* 16) she discerns in the “brave” sport of bull-fighting and, not least, by the coldness and indifference of her American friends. Her negativity extends to the “foolish cloaks” of the toreadors, and even their skill and daring looks “silly” in her eyes. Not that she is not even-handed: she also wonders at the stupidity of the bull, the “Mithraic beast” with its massive maleness. Her impatient call to “run at the men, not at his cloak” (17) is perhaps the apex of her frustration which the brutality of this all-male spectacle provokes in her.

Lawrence here does more than provide a momentary glimpse into the feelings of a female character; and he does more than simply elevate common feminine sensibility. The adoption of an openly hostile ironic attitude towards men and their actions from a feminine position is an example of Lawrence’s tendency to “create female characters ‘from the inside.’” This tendency, according to Carol Siegel, “seem[s] to have caused him to endow them [women] with many of his own traits” (Siegel 76). Surprisingly (or not), “the choices made by Lawrence’s heroines go against the male supremacist doctrines of his fiction” (18). In order to present accurately the nature of the female sexual experience, Lawrence uses a female focalizer and activates the female parts of his own psyche, adopting a characteristically female attitude (and at times, language) in his fiction. It is both surprising and exciting to watch the point of view of the omniscient narrator, commonly though not always correctly identified with the author, interrupted and often critically undermined by the female voice. Paradoxically, it never appears that the author is in the least hesitant or ambivalent about this use of a female expressive mode. This unusual and consistent privileging of the feminine

voice is taken as perfectly normal in Lawrence's writing and it is one of his standard tools of expression.

This adoption of a female perspective is a consistent feature of the narrative mode of *The Plumed Serpent*. To take one example, Kate's sharp commentary on the male ceremonial violence of the bull-fight, enthusiastically called "*Life!*" (PS 16) by one European spectator, is more than likely to be welcomed by the majority of readers, especially the female ones, who are likely to share her abhorrence of blood sports and to side with her assessment rather than that of the male narrator. Kate becomes the focalizer, the person through whose eyes the events are seen. There is an almost palpable tension, constantly developing between the attitude of the main female character and that of the narrator, which occasionally turns into open conflict – something that stretches the most fundamental convention of the realist novel to the utmost. But this is an altogether creative tension and the result enriches the reading experience as the authority of the male narrator becomes entwined in an elaborate counterpoint with the clear female voice of the main character. The male rhetoric is subject to criticism and mockery from the female voice, which effectively works as a second, dissenting narrator within the novel. This alternative female narrator seems unconcerned and uninvolved in the heroine's predicament: she never really interferes here in her usual dynamic way. It is hardly a paradox that in the end a lot of what has been said or implied by this second narrator stays with the reader, when the main narrator's words have faded away. The traditional authorities within the novel never seem entirely secure.



## Kate and her Mythicization

In *The Plumed Serpent*, Kate is transformed into Malintzi, the ancient Aztec goddess of vegetation. Many reviewers have considered this transformation unconvincing. Charles Burack goes on and points out that Lawrence engineers this transition in just eight pages. The consequent lack of dramatic and psychological detail in the account of how Kate's profound scepticism is eventually removed, makes her conversion highly implausible (Burack 135). It is true that her scepticism is eliminated quite abruptly. But it must also be borne in mind that some allowance must be made for Lawrence's intention to express his metaphysics artistically. This is a necessity more weighty in the greater scheme of the novel, not always possible to accommodate within strict realist conventions. "The artistic effort," says Lawrence, "is the portraying of a moment of union between the two wills, according to knowledge" (*Study* 55). These two wills, for Lawrence, is the male Will-to-Motion and the female Will-to-Inertia. This process is related to the inner world of the soul and the senses of man and woman. It is more a matter of faith and feeling than of persuasion through pure reason. Lawrence tends to focus on *a priori* ideas and uses his fiction as a testing ground of his notion of femaleness as inhabited by the mystical power of a numinous force that can offer guidance through life, not only to the woman, but also through her to a man:

So that the attributes of God will reveal that which man lacked and yearned for in his living. And these attributes are always, in their essence, Eternality, Infinity, Immutability. And these are the qualities man feels in woman, as a principle. (54)

For Lawrence, this female access to the divine is beyond doubt or questioning and it is a quality that can thrive under the most difficult circumstances as long as the woman is willing to return to a deeper knowledge of her own womanhood and delve through her own memory back to her powerful female instinct. This hitherto untapped, inert, yet living resource becomes available to Kate when towards the end of the novel she symbolically “admits” the primitive and participates in a series of rituals through which she is transformed into Malintzi:

She felt her sex and her womanhood caught up and  
identified in the slowly revolving ocean of nascent life,  
the dark sky of the men lowering and wheeling above.  
She was not herself, she was gone, and her own  
desires were gone in the ocean of the great desire. (*PS* 131)

Aided by the ecstasy-inducing qualities of music and dance, Kate opens herself up to the world of the strange ancient Mexican gods. This process according to the Jungian analyst Edward C. Whitmont is characteristic of such a:

world of embodied raw nature, of desire and  
of passion [...] To the sense of order and meaning, Dionysus  
opposes the rapture of losing one’s self in irrationality, in pure  
emotion, in the drunkenness of passion, the abandonment of  
the ego sense. (Whitmont 59)

It is certainly not without significance that Dionysus, the mysterious god of the unconscious and the ecstatic, is followed by the Maenads, “the frenzied ones,” women in trance, free from the shackles of the rational mind, abandoned to the amoral, sensual pleasures of the body. Here Kate experiences a freedom from the rational reality. However, it is a mythicization process, the abandonment to the ritualistic ecstasy, which takes place in the real world. We have, once more, an opening up of the self of the Lawrencian heroine to the ecstatic world which leads women to wild, inspired action, astonishing, frightening and yet representative of the very source of life. It is a divine inspiration which compels women towards such rapture through the powerful energy of the body, the reclamation of their vital womanhood and Kate has literally undergone this cathartic process.

### **Kate: The Alienated Goddess**

More than any other Lawrencian heroine in a strange land, Kate seems perfectly conscious of her position among the native Mexicans. She has strong opinions and voices them without compunction, and this inevitably causes reactions. Nothing will effectively silence her, even when she finds herself in uncomfortable or downright dangerous situations, such as the bull-fighting and the shooting and killing in Don Ramón’s hacienda. Although revered and honored as a goddess by her Mexican servants, Kate feels uneasy and alienated in her exotic surroundings and tends to withdraw into herself, to her own unspoken thoughts and speculations. It is in her intense inner life that she faces the sudden revelations of her soul-thirst for another reality. Her Western background prevents her from conforming fully with the strange norms of her new life, to the native way of thinking and living. But her queenly mien is not lost on the natives who immediately see in her a supreme representative of a world beyond. Kate also has the unconscious sacred remoteness which inspires in the male a

mixture of fear and respect, even in Don Cipriano: “He watched her continually, with a kind of fascination: the same spell that the absurd little figures of the doll Madonnas had cast over him as a boy. She was the mystery and he the adorer, under the semi-ecstatic spell of the mystery” (*PS* 81-2). Don Cipriano finds himself in the grip of the great power of the female psyche which he does not attempt to resist. In contrast to what would be the natural reaction of a Western man (Tom and Will Brangwen’s reactions in *The Rainbow* or Gerald’s in *Women in Love* are characteristic), he is not interested in untangling her mystery or gaining any concrete knowledge from her otherness as this would be a distortion of the “natural” relationship with the female other as well as of his manly nature. The intrusion of the mind would inevitably lead to the destruction of the communion with life which brings about the true union of the two sexes.

Kate herself struggles with problems of identity, a continuous battle with false personae, the masks civilization has forced upon her. She suffers from this loss, and her suffering springs from the split between her selfish, socially constructed self and her ceaseless yearning for an intense, rich other life. She knows that though this yearning threatens to destroy whatever equilibrium she has achieved, it would be fatal to give up. In a letter to Edward Garnett, long before the writing of the novel (June 1914), Lawrence repudiates the idea that the reader should look in his novels for “the old stable ego of the character.” Lawrence continues: “I don’t so much care about what the woman *feels* – in the ordinary usage of that word. That presumes an *ego* to feel with. I only care about what the woman *is*” (*L* ii. 182-3). Kate, like most of Lawrence’s heroines until then, searches for what she actually *is*, and to do so successfully she must be ruthless: she must jettison her old ego, developed under imposed conditions she can no longer accept – her past conventional life – and go boldly ahead into

this new land to explore the hidden possibilities of the self beyond what she has hitherto experienced.

Kate's unclear origin also reflects the unknown destination she has pledged herself to seek, and her painful soul-searching, which results in her final deification, symbolically stands for her complete abandonment of the old self. Less predictably, perhaps even impressively, Kate remains somewhat alienated to the very end. Her final request to Cipriano not to let her go, leaves a gap with regard to the complete truth and effectiveness of this initiation. It is suggested in the novel that Kate never quite manages to abandon herself wholly to the new reality. Her old self-doubts and defences are not entirely overcome, and she is never utterly convinced of her new-found divinity: "And even amid the tears, Kate was thinking to herself: *What a fraud I am! I know all the time it is I who don't altogether want them. I want myself to myself. But I can fool them so that they shan't find out*" (PS 443). For all the recognition of her new status offered by the others, one is never convinced that she has lost her feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

In the first draft of the book, titled *Quetzalcoatl*, Kate's abhorrence for the "revival" of the old gods is even more apparent: "[she] watches with a mixture of fascination, revulsion and sympathy as this religious movement takes place" (Wright 193). Kate seems only superficially related to the ancient Mexican gods in whose Pantheon she now belongs. She never feels at home there; deep down she cannot give up the belief that she belongs to herself alone. Clinging to her independence, her human individuality, is simply not compatible with the transformation, the loss of the self to the ancient deity. However, she confesses: "I ought to *want* to be limited" (PS 439) acknowledging her inner need and the obligation to herself to seek for something deeper and meaningful to fill her life. It is for this reason that she goes on

to choose the mystery of the wild new world over the genteel ennui of her London life. Her attitude brings to mind Julia Kristeva's contention that "a woman is more apt to agree 'humbly' to play a 'minimal role' in the vast universe: that a woman finally is less narcissistic than people say. And hence more [...] irreligious in the Freudian sense" (*FS* 26). Julia Kristeva quotes from Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* where the psychoanalyst calls "irreligious in the truest sense of the word" anyone "who confesses the feeling of the insignificance of man and of human powerlessness in the face of the universe" (in contrast to other theorists and philosophers who see this demonstration of humility as a deep religious feeling). Although Kate does not express any ideas of "humility" or "modesty" in front of the vast universe and its secrets, she engages in provocatively "irreligious" behaviour; she is rather indifferent and irreverent towards the Quetzalcoatl pantheon and her commitment to them falls far short of the devotion of the truly faithful: "'Oh—Quetzalcoatl and all that!' she said 'one can have too much of it'" (*PS* 430). She reluctantly agrees to play a "role" in her new universe, dictated by her new desirous self, "which belonged to Cipriano and to Ramón" (*PS* 429). But through this new erotic self, Kate restores her feminine identity in its rightful place. She finds in Cipriano what, in Georges Bataille's words, "answers the *innerness* of the desire" (*Erotism* 29), the erotic object *outside* herself who encourages Kate's deliberate loss of the self, through a mystic ritual, a process meant to waken roots deep in the soul and feelings, the sensual, feminine erotic self.

Kate responds to the new ritual through sensuality and instinct, and finds herself open to unconscious forces, subterranean urges and hidden wishes:

She was afraid, mystically, of the man crouching there  
in the bows with his smooth thighs and supple loins like a

snake, and his black eyes watching. A half-being, with a will to disintegration and death. And the tall man behind her at the tiller [...] with that peculiar half-smile [...] And yet, Kate told herself, both these men were manly fellows. They would not molest her, unless she communicated the thought to them [...]

(PS 106)

So, in her soul, she cried aloud to the greater mystery, the higher power that hovered in the interstices of the hot air, rich and potent. Kate feels that she could share “the gift of grace” (107) with these two modern descendents of the Aztecs, an act of sacred communion which signals her entrance into another level of consciousness. The sight of the natives makes her aware of this latent eroticism, something that will flare up again, more forcefully, later at the “Plaza,” when she feels a sudden powerful attraction for the half-naked male dancers:

the beautiful ruddy skin, gleaming with a dark fineness;  
the strong breasts, so male and so deep, yet without the muscular hardening that belongs to white men; and the dark, closed faces, closed upon a darkened consciousness, the black moustaches and delicate beards framing the closed silence of the mouth: all this was strangely impressive, moving strange, frightening emotions in the soul.

Kate seems, in the beginning at least, completely surprised by this silent, mysterious eroticism oozing from the Mexicans – “their very naked torsos were clothed with a subtle

shadow, a certain secret obscurity;" they are very different from "the strong-muscled" white men "with an openness in their very physique, a certain ostensible presence" (121).

For most Lawrencian heroines, this sudden discovery of erotic difference comes as a powerful epiphany: eroticism is often the feminine way towards the sacred: "always on the borderline between nature and culture, the animalistic and the verbal, the sensible and the nameable" (*FS* 27). Eros is to be found in this "borderline" and Julia Kristeva says that women stand better on that "roof," for they eventually deny any restricted and restricting identities and are open to the mystery of the facts of life which by their very nature contain the possibility of change. Thus, for woman, the oscillation between "real" and "unreal" is not problematic. The life-mystery does not seek for an explanation. Woman is "here" and "there," present and absent, ready to feel, but also to talk, to be and to act. She is there moving equally towards society and towards god. Though the details of the expression differ, this is very much what Lawrence, too, seems to believe when seeing women as the individuals who must come in "real contact" with men, but also as "the living fountain whose spray falls delicately around her, on all that come near" (*LE* 299).

Following this secret path and deciding to go through with the Quetzalcoatl initiation process, Kate enters into a bargain with the Mexican men and the soon-to-be-resurrected ancient gods that would ensure her both sexual fulfillment and spiritual contentment. Less prone to suggestions, Kate knows nevertheless that she is under the influence of these two men, albeit not completely in thrall: "She was spellbound but not utterly acquiescent. In one corner of her soul was revulsion and a touch of nausea." The violence of the Malintzi rituals instead of silencing her has the opposite effect. Put under pressure, Kate confronts Cipriano, refusing point blank to believe either that he is "the Living Huitzilopochtli" or that she is



Malintzi, “the bride of Huitzilopochtli.” “I am only a woman [...] I am sick of these men putting names over me. I was born Kate Forrester, and I shall die Kate Forrester” (*PL* 371). Being swallowed up, in order to become a goddess is not what she really aspires to. Nor is she tempted by the honour the male gods promise her. If religion is to be identified with power, Kate is to remain tenaciously irreligious.

### **Kate and Female Resistance**

“Society rules by the pure masculine principle, whereas the sacred resists by the pure feminine principle. ‘Resist’ would be the world befitting the sacred” (*FS* 53). And resist is what Kate does throughout the novel. She repeatedly refuses to accept the unnatural and immoral male order that seeks to constrict and dominate, and abhors their actions. When she rescues a bird from the Mexicans’ hands in the chapter “Home to Sayula,” she acts as a defender of the weak, a guardian of a higher principle. It is no accident that she is transformed into a vegetation goddess, a protectress of life and the continuous cycles of death and rebirth. “It was as if she could lift her hands and clutch the silent, stormless potency that roved everywhere, waiting. “ ‘Come then!’ she said, drawing a long slow breath, and addressing the silent life-breath which hung unrevealed in the atmosphere, waiting” (*PS* 106). She has a strong affinity for the impalpable mystery around her, which is nothing else than the life energy. She feels imbued by an inexplicable awe and wonder, a sense which she cannot rationalize, an intense experience of the divine. She gradually cultivates inalienable bonds with the natural world, a world in which she feels far more at ease than with that of people. The incident when she rescues the little bird and desperately tries to keep it in life is characteristic: “She staggered on and on, in agony, holding up her skirts in one hand, holding the warm, wet, motionless bird in the other” (216). And so is the anger that flares up against

the man and the boy who wantonly captures and almost kills the little bird: “Black, apprehensive male defiance of the great, white weird female. Kate glared back from under her tree. ‘If looks would kill you, brat, I’d kill you,’ she said” (218). Kate, “the great white, weird female,” becomes the all-seeing eye of nature – or at least, one of its agents who may set things right and punish the evildoers. Here, yet again, the female represents the natural mystic force opposing the destructive male instinct. Kate is the alienated mystic feminine whose very difference and solitude acquire a sacred quality and act as the catalyst that ultimately provide her with the possibility of entering into a new, fecund relationship to life. This is of course an archetypal situation and as such invites widespread speculation. Harry T. Moore claims, quite reasonably, that “Kate fits neatly into the Sleeping Beauty pattern” (Spilka 68): the female lying in deep sleep, isolated, until the time comes for her to be awakened and brought back to life by the right man or two in her case. Moore acknowledges that Kate distrusts all the story about the resurrection of the ancient Aztec gods and the acquisition of divinity. Not that Kate is above having her own fantasies – she does view herself as something of an Amazon figure, but she sees her relationship to the males perceptively in terms of exclusion/inclusion. She feels emotionally excluded, and the strange, brutal religious practices, the product, not just of a different culture, but also fundamentally different sensibilities, tend to alienate her further. But a personal rebirth through a system, religious or secular, can only come through inclusion – differences must be reconciled. Caught in this awkward quandary, Kate attempts a complex compromise: superficially accepting the old time religion and participating in the male-designed activities aiming at the rebirth of the ancient gods, while silently damning them as absurd, evil and largely irrelevant to her acquirement of a new self-awareness. Despite these reservations, however, she finds herself fascinated by it all: “And deep in her soul came a revulsion against this manifestation of pure will. It was fascinating also [...] The black, relentless power, even passion of the will

in men!” (PS 387). But this is a fascination not quite convincing: Kate resists the imposition of another ready-made masculine religious and moral code, which, for all the many differences from those she had encountered before, like them, seeks not to liberate but to swallow her. In spite of her fascination, she is well aware of the danger of being diverted away from her true goal, claiming her feminine identity has been the primary issue for her, and the safest guiding principle.

The positive image of a woman in search of a new self, her radical, promising but problematic involvement with the natives, her nearness to nature and the steady building up of a new consciousness based on her intuitive affinities, constitute a quite convincing element within the novel. Kate wishes to escape from the ennui of a meaningless life as much as from the useless strain of male power games. Her desire to recover the natural balance of body and soul through the life of the senses and instincts sets in motion her inner female energy which, for Lawrence, constitutes a sacred mystical energy. She becomes a female warrior determined to find her own path, fearlessly cutting through male prejudice. This leads her to forge a mystical connection with nature and develop a genuine intimacy with the native people, but also, delving inside, to discover a new world of instincts and feelings she may have known about, but never really tapped before. Instinctively, she turns to this new reality which arises from the depths of the self and brings along new doubts and fears, but also the palpable possibility of a true profound communication with all forms of life. Kate becomes aware of the need to discover her real nature, not in order to acquire control over herself and others, but to gain wisdom and spiritual contentment – a difficult task for women as well as men. She proceeds to marry Cipriano, not because she longs for “the Living Huitzilopochtli” (PS 319), but because he is the man with the spirit and the endurance necessary for the long quest towards the discovery and revival of the self.

This compromise on Kate's part constitutes the most subversive act within a novel containing many. The whole movement to revive the religion of the ancient Aztecs seems far less convincing than Kate's own quest to achieve lifelong renewal. Kate / Malintzi, the vegetation goddess, is ready to reclaim her divine power, and the two men, Ramón and Cipriano are her initiators and consorts in the descent into the unknown. The woman who symbolically oversees the natural cycles of death and renewal, must first accomplish her own regeneration. This, carried out with unswerving dedication, cannot but disrupt and probably undermine the strategy and the purposes of the two men. What is more, Kate's argument, examining the male plans through the prism of a feminine awareness, suggests a very different ideological basis, which can give the reader genuine and unexpected reasons for unease. As we saw earlier (see the section on "the Female Focalizer"), the argument between the authorized male narrative voice and the dissenting female one sustains a dramatic tension between the linear sequence of events and their significance. This is a vital characteristic of Lawrence's narrative style which is revelatory of the complexity of his philosophical outlook on the cosmos, religion and gender.

### **Kate's Sacred Transgression through Eros**

Kate feels envy for Teresa, Ramón's future wife, acknowledging in her "This hidden, secretive power of the dark female!" In sharp contrast with Don Ramón's first wife, Carlota, who was unable to share his husband's passion for the revival of the old gods and understand the meaning behind this revival, Teresa represents the awakened female spirit, the live female sexuality which can only love and embrace male otherness. Kate sees in her "the ancient mystery of the female power, which consists in glorifying the blood-male." Even if Kate

seems to despise Teresa's servitude to Ramon, it is through her presence that she realizes "that the clue to all living and to all-moving on into new living lay in the vivid blood – relation between man and woman" (*PL* 399). Kate gradually leaves her cautious conservative self behind and follows the dictates of her long-suppressed erotic one. Erotic attraction, the act of love, is the fundamental experience of the flesh and, as Georges Bataille says, "the born enemy of people haunted by Christian taboos" (*Erotism* 92). For Bataille, Eros becomes the enemy of the prejudiced, the enemy of the pre-constructed norms and ideas, the enemy of order. The act of love resembles that of ritual sacrifice, as both involve a violation of the body order. Eroticism and violation, violence and death, are the inalienable and anarchic parts of life, fiercely independent from both reason and will, and as such they belong to the sacred rather than the profane world.

Lawrence, too, sees in eroticism the profound union of the two sexes, "an infinite range of subtle communication which we know nothing about" (*LE* 301). The union of man and woman, compelled by an inner urge, is a purely unconscious but irresistible rite, a great mystical adventure in which two others, the other outside human consciousness and the other within the self come together: "The other [outside the human consciousness] is primary and sovereign. It may arise when the other [within the self] is out of gear; it is obscure, or else blindingly clear: either way it evades the grasp of our aware intelligence" (*Erotism* 193). The merging of the two others, the inner self and the external, inaugurates the construction of a new erotic awareness, which promises a transcendent pleasure and is finally found in the union with the object of erotic desire, the man or woman who will function as the gate to erotic transgression. This mystical process leading up to the unknown self is a liberating purgatorial process, which necessitates the destruction of the profane superficial self, the death of the old consciousness. Thus, the erotic self, anarchic, irrational and irrepressible,

always has a dangerous, destructive side. Catherine Clément makes a subtle and accurate distinction: “absolute love is sacred, not divine. Narcissistic, bulimic, exhibitionist, mortal. Indecent and conspicuous [...] I love – the other no longer exists” (*FS* 124). The other, the object of the desire, must lose its independence, must be united with the desiring other. “Absolute love is sacred not divine.” If sexual love belongs to the senses, the sensual self, then it is closer to the feminine awareness, because, as Hélène Cixous put it, a woman fights with the body: “A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can’t possibly be a good fighter” (*NFF* 250). It is “her flesh [that] speaks true” (251). Thus love as the strongest, bodily passion belongs to the feminine; it is the strongest experience, taking over the rational being like an alien invader, a sovereign, coercive, incomprehensible force. If love signifies abandon, a complete surrender to the flesh, it also signifies a kind of heroism. It is also an act of self-negation for it crosses the limits of the self – the daring act of transgression that demands freedom from rule and order, the natural children of the religious divine.

The reader of *The Plumed Serpent* witnesses the woman’s revolt against this masculine order, the jouissance the new self derives from the act of lovemaking experienced as a new sensual reality:

Her strange, seething feminine will and desire subsided in  
her and swept away, leaving her soft and powerfully potent,  
like the hot springs of water that gushed up so noiseless, so  
soft, yet so powerful, with a sort of secret potency. (*PS* 422)

Kate rediscovers her sexuality, the sacred *modus* of her erotic self; she is re

born through a thorough and painful transformation of the old, conventional ego, and she is acutely aware of the minutest details of the whole unsettling, exhilarating process:

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

It is an awakening from within the depths of the spirit, the body, the soul, a pleasure derived exclusively from the male body. Kate is transformed, not by an external force, but through the sheer strength of her instinct. She is empowered by a new determination not to lose her hold “on the hidden greater thing” (109). She is surprised as she discovers her long dormant womanhood and becomes aware of the “the strange, *nuclear* power of the men [...] like a darkly glowing, vivid nucleus of new life [...] like the centre of the everlasting fire [...] a new kindling of mankind” (122). At last, the reconnection with the deep knowledge of the instinctual, erotic nature is established and life finally acquires its natural balance: “the years reeled away from her in fleeing circles, and she sat as every real woman can sit, no matter at what age, a girl again, and for him, a virgin” (394). This return to a pure state signifies the reclamation of unprejudiced, child-like awareness, a return to the “directed thinking” of childhood, which, as Carl Jung says, “lies in our individual past, and in the past of mankind” and is free from the self-interest that characterizes and ultimately disfigures the “adapted thinking” of the adult (Jung 36).

Kate needs this catharsis to get away from a degrading self image, and thus, simultaneously, from the idea of the self as a fixed construct, forever a slave to the cultural parameters that initially shaped it. This purgatorial process becomes possible and effective as Kate comes to employ the psychic tools that are the privilege of the feminine soul. This creates an eerie impression of another world to which only women have immediate access, a sacred other place to which they truly belong. Lawrence considers this feminine secret domain as a given, and invites his heroines to accept this reality, open up to it and merge with their “soft quiet rivers of energy and peace” (*Phoenix II* 541). The passage to this other world is generally possible through the awareness of the male other, and this is what makes the union of the two sexes. The woman’s sacredness can only be attained by her admission of her inner erotic self.

Kate is a very different person at the end of the novel far more flexible and resolute, and therefore far more free to feel and act. Although quite sceptical about Cipriano’s and Ramón’s ambitions to resurrect the ancient Mexican gods, she has completely internalized the need not to lose her newly found femaleness. She is fully conscious of the consequences such a loss would entail: “if one tries to be unlimited, one becomes horrible. Without Cipriano to touch me and limit me and submerge my will, I shall become a horrible, elderly female” (*PS* 439). Kate begins to understand something previously closed to her, and gradually starts to untangle the mysterious threads that constitute being: “After being, doing and being done, but first, being.” Catherine Clément quotes the above statement by D.W. Winnicott and asserts the identification of being with the feminine principle: “The feminine principle stems from being in the pure state, while the masculine principle takes charge of doing – and the acceptance that comes with it” (*FS* 52). Lawrence is in perfect accord with this idea: “The male exists in doing, the female in being. The male lives in the satisfaction of



some purposed achieved, the female in the satisfaction of some purpose contained” (*Study* 94).

In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous emphasizes the incontrovertible forces of women, depicting the female as a being vitally alive, endowed with the abundance, generosity and extravagance of nature: “Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end” (Cixous 248). Luce Irigaray acknowledges in the vastness of female being “a sort of expanding universe to which no limits could be fixed and which would not be incoherence nonetheless [...] Woman always remains several, but she is kept from dispersion because the other is already within her and is autoerotically familiar to her” (Irigaray 31). This integrated otherness in Lawrence’s fiction sustains and enhances the whole feminine existence. It is the *locus* of female power, which is real and eternal, yet, simultaneously, unarticulated and indefinable. It is a power that man can sense and woman must seek to restore through a rigorous exploration of the female inner underworld. Unlike man, the woman is not confined by action. Female being, as opposed to male acting, may suggest that the woman is somehow inert and passive and perhaps not far from being pathetic – an etymological relation that is no accident – as inertia is easily identified with immobility and thus with stagnation, decay and death. But inertia is also inalienably associated with stability, a vital condition for life: women are less active than men, but they give birth, they become the creatresses of life. The female being for Lawrence, is an expanding universe, stable, yet never at rest, an inexhaustible creative power that perpetuates life.

Kate enters into the condition of the sacred being once she has utilized her true creative potential and succeeded in interpreting correctly the clear, urgent, irrational calling of the unconscious:

So swiftly one's mood changed! In the boat, she had glimpsed  
the superb rich stillness of the morning star, the poignant  
intermediate flashing its quiet between the energies of the cosmos.  
She had seen it in the black eyes of the natives, in the sunrise of  
the man's rich, still body, Indian-warm. (*PS* 96)

Kate can feel intuitively the “strange darkly-iridescent beam of wonder, of magic” after reading the Quetzalcoatl story in a newspaper. She could sense there “a different light than the common light” (58), a light that suddenly, improbably, awakens her passionate, mystic self. It is her being that responds to the external calling, and she does not have to act or even think in order to answer it. This is not another task to be accomplished in the manner males set themselves tasks to challenge, confirm and gratify themselves. Hers is a unique internal experience, the joyous cry of being inside her that delivers liberation and rebirth.

Kate feels a numbing loneliness, a total, life-threatening alienation and it makes her realize how much she needs another world to belong to. After this knowledge, she can finally heed the sacred calling to a life that she once ignored but now yearns for. Her erotic other, long shackled and silenced, is shown re-emerging and recovering, as her longing for love and sexual healing is finally satisfied. In a society that treats her as an alien, Kate finds refuge in her capacity for feeling and empathy, and regains her spontaneous flesh-and-blood self: “We must go back to pick up old threads. We must take up the old, broken impulse that will

connect us with the mystery of the cosmos again, now we are at the end of our tether” (138). Kate, the strong female voice of resistance, starts to explore the forgotten realm of the senses, creating a sacred site where she may enter and live. This is what she has in mind when she lets herself be seduced by Cipriano, the dark-eyed messenger of Eros, and perseveres with him. Although sorely tempted to run away from it all, back to the safe quiet waters of her old life, she persists in following the dictates of her mind, and remains steadfast, though not always tolerant and patient, to reap the fruit of the new experience. She is the authentic Lawrencian heroine who dares to respond to her inner calling of intuition.

## Chapter Nine

### “The Woman Who Rode Away”: The Road to the Sacred

Written in New Mexico during summer 1924, in the interval between the first and the second draft of *The Plumed Serpent*, and published one year later in *Dial* magazine, “The Woman Who Rode Away,” a short story also involving initiation to Indian rituals, is sometimes seen as the junior partner to the novel. Neither of them was ever much loved, but “The Woman Who Rode Away” has provoked the most violent reactions. In fairness, it is hardly surprising: the (never named) white woman, who is the main character, abandons her American husband and rides out to seek the Indians. She finds them and despite their indifference and strangeness, the Woman is willing to follow them in a symbolic journey to the other, which enables her to abandon her Western identity. The Indians take her, dress her in blue, the colour of the dead, and ritually kill her. This story could be said to express Lawrence’s Bataillean belief in reaching the sacred through sacrifice quite literally.

Mabel Luhan, the hostess of the Lawrences in Taos, who was married to a pueblo Indian, was the first to be offended (Ellis 73, 188-189) as she immediately recognized herself in the portrait of the Woman. But many readers and critics were offended, especially, though by no means exclusively, feminists, who saw in this strange story of Lawrence, an attempt at “revenge” on the image of the white, Western woman. Perhaps the most outspoken critic of this story has been Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1970) who dismissed it outright as “demented fantasy,” a piece of “sadistic pornography” in which Lawrence equates sexuality with violence and death: “They [the priests] await the moment when the sun, phallic itself,

strikes the phallic icicle, and signals the phallic priest to plunge the phallic knife – penetrating the female victim and cutting out her heart – the death fuck” (Millett 410). Julian Moynahan summarizes it as a story in which a woman throws herself “into an abyss of senseless blood sacrifice” and concludes that it is “a heartless tale *au fond*” (Moynahan 178). Judith Ruderman characterizes it as “a vendetta against willful females, whose representative awaits a knife in the heart as the story ends” (135). Elizabeth Wallace is in a distinct minority in seeing it as “one of Lawrence’s most perfect creations” (Squires & Cushman 114).

The complexity of the story raises particular questions concerning authorial intention, the Woman’s presence and the final sacrifice. In my analysis, I consider the Woman as Lawrence’s manifestation of the human being whose primary mission is to discover and offer him/herself to the ultimate origin of all creation. The Woman undergoes a voluntary process of dissolution of the self in the other, following unquestioningly the calling of the human instinct, what Lawrence called, among other names, the “IT.” In his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Lawrence refers to America’s Pilgrim Fathers who left their country and come to the new world: “They came largely to get *away* [...] In the long run, away from themselves. Away from everything [...] To get away from everything they are and have been” (SCAL 9). But Lawrence argues that freedom is not the absolute it is commonly taken to be: “Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within [...] If one wants to be free, one has to give up the illusion of doing what one likes, and seek what IT wishes done” (12-13). “IT, the American whole soul” hidden underneath “the democratic and idealistic clothes [of] American utterance,” the “dusky body,” must be discovered and obeyed. “Henceforth be masterless,” he commands, only to add an immediate countermand: “Henceforth be mastered” (14). The human being, for Lawrence, must be mastered by the numinous “IT,” this numinous other, the “blood

consciousness,” which cannot be articulated, only felt, but will lead the human being safely towards its authentic self which lies dormant deep in the soul and is of the same substance with the universe.

There’s always a reluctance to abandon the known “ego” to this “oceanic” experience that is under the complete control of this dark side of the self and this, as Marianne Torgovnick points out, reveals Lawrence’s abiding commitment to Western individualism and his inability to let himself dissolve in this state of awe and wonder. Torgovnick suggests that although Lawrence feels attraction for the oceanic experience of dissolution of the self, he finally “returns to his commitment to Western individualism” (Torgovnick 57). But of course Lawrence never denied his Western sense of individual identity, although he recognized many of his desires and ideals in the old religions and rituals and believed that their necessarily eclectic revival could awaken the dark unconscious human side and rejuvenate humanity. Lawrence was always well aware that a white individual is not in a position to come close to the point of pure assimilation with the cosmos. However his heroine in this short story seems to do exactly this: she accepts the “oceanic” nature of hers, which she also finds in the mysterious and mystic Indian rituals, and voluntarily abandons herself to this experience. This is, nonetheless, Lawrence’s most ambitious ideal, that an individual derive this energy and power from the universe and return it to it. It is a hope for individual and social renewal that has very little, if anything, to do with a literal return to a savage way of life.

## The Mystical, Genderless Identity of the Woman

“The Woman Who Rode Away” can also be viewed, as an illustration of some parts of Lawrencian doctrine: his conviction that the woman’s natural function is “being” rather than “acting”: “the vital desire of every woman is that she shall be clasped as axle to the hub of the man, that this motion shall portray her motionlessness, convey her static being into movement [...] This is complete movement: man upon woman, woman within man” (*Study* 52). Lawrence found it expedient here to make the “victim” a woman, possibly because it is the woman who, as Simon de Beauvoir put it, “unreservedly accepts being defined as Other” (De Beauvoir 209), the “Other,” that is, to male rationality. Whatever view of the story one may choose to favour, charitable to Lawrence or otherwise, realistic, cautionary tale or “naked doctrine” (Kermode 111), it seems beyond dispute that it is no aberration but in perfect accord with his philosophy, what he considered important not just about women but all humanity, namely the need of the individual to find herself and in the case of the Woman, to accept the sacred calling of a world beyond which is here symbolized as an Indian god.

In the story, Lawrence portrays an attempt at such a rebirth through the abandonment of the cultural given and a return to the primitive. At the beginning there is alienation; the woman finds herself in circumstances that practically force her to abandon her family and friends and start anew to confront her fate. Seen through this prism, the woman is a tragic heroine. Lawrence had stated his idea of the tragic hero or heroine in his early work on Thomas Hardy: “In these plays [the ancient tragedies] conventional morality is transcended. The action is between the great, single, individual forces in the nature of Man, not between the dictates of the community and the original passion” (*Study* 46). The Woman’s story in the “The Woman Who Rode Away” focuses not on her estrangement from her immediate

environment, but on her desperate determination to obey the dictates of her instinct. Too long pent up, her unconscious finally violently wrests control of her. What determine her course are not hopes and fears fuelled by naiveté or ignorance, but the dark, unintelligible, reckless forces of her intuition: “she felt it was her destiny to wander into the secrets of these timeless, mysterious, marvelous Indians of the mountains” (*WWRA* 42). It takes great strength of character and deep soulfulness for someone to listen so blindly to the “IT,” to the instinct that calls from within. For the Woman, to follow her destiny is not to act on a fantasy, but to undertake an audacious and necessary venture. As Lawrence states in his essay “Aristocracy”: “The true aristocrat is the man who has passed all the relationships and has met the sun, and the sun is with him as a diadem” (*RDP* 375). The man— or in this case the woman – overcomes all obstacles in order to meet the “IT” which in the above quotation becomes the sun, the emblem of rebirth, the symbol of life. This process to the sun, (the Woman is sacrificed to the god of sun,) the symbolic quest for another land within the human soul, is literally dramatized in the story of the Woman.

In this sense the Woman can also be seen as a genderless character, deliberately denied the clear and strong individual identity that is typical of Lawrencian heroines. As Hough explains, Lawrence “does not fall into the mistake of making the woman a self-conscious, competent cosmopolitan [...] and we do not become so aware of her as a social being that her later adventures become incredible” (Hough 141). This is a defence that ought to acquit Lawrence from the charge of creating such a pathetic creature, a “silly” woman stupidly acquiescing to become a “victim” (Millett 405). The creation of the Woman has been seen as an example of Lawrence’s misogynistic streak, an enticing position which “appealed to him as a refuge from powerful women,” and, in broader terms, allowed him to express his new belief, not only in the power of male bonding and the concomitant homoerotic feelings, but



also his scorn of the anonymous mass of humanity (Nixon 9-10). But here some moderation seems necessary. We must not ignore the fact that during this same period Lawrence is working on the character of Kate Leslie, the powerful female heroine in the other Mexican story, *The Plumed Serpent*, a work he himself considered at the time his most important novel (*L v.* 267, 271, 332). Although this was the novel in which Lawrence illustrated more fully his turn towards the “phallic” mystery of the male which must be respected and then embraced by the woman (a major theme to which he would devote a lot of attention in his final years), he still made of his heroine a clever, energetic woman who can also criticize and even mock her two “initiators.” Moreover, in *Mornings in Mexico* (1925) (Lawrence’s travelogue about Mexico and Indians, written the same period) he still felt enchanted by the “the triumph of the magical wistfulness of woman, the wonderful power of her seeking, her yearning, which can draw forth even the bear from his den” (*MIM* 58-59). He discerns in her “a delicate, marvelous sensitiveness, which draws forth the wonder to herself, and draws the man to the wonder in her, as it drew even the wild animals from the lair of winter” (61). It is obvious that Lawrence, even during his “leadership period,” had not lost his belief in the mystical power of the female soul and its unique ability to save man by bringing him in contact with the eternal mysteries of the cosmos. This promise of salvation through the female, a fundamental tenet in the Lawrencian creed, appears with special intensity in the works of this period, which proves that he had not ceased dramatizing what he always believed about the female principle as the source of life.

The Woman in the story is a mystical being already initiated into the Great Mystery. She identifies with the awe inside her and the closer she approaches to her goal, the more she becomes “vague and disheartened,” untouched by anything earthly or human. Approaching the final union with the otherness of the sacred and the numinous, the Woman is beyond the

point at which she could still retain her sense of identity; she has “no will of her own,” and moves like an automaton to meet her destiny.

In her first encounter with the three Indians, the Woman instinctively recognizes her killers: “she noted this long black hair with certain distaste. These must be the wild Indians she had come to see.” For the Indians, the Woman comes effectively from nowhere, since she gives only vague and evasive answers to their questions: where is she going? “On ahead” (*WWRA* 45); where does she come from? “I come from far away,” where is her husband? “Who knows?” (46). The one thing she states clearly – a chilling clarity in this context – is her purpose: “I want to visit the Chilchui Indians – to see their houses and to know their gods” (47); “I came to look for the God of the Chilchui” (51). Initially, the woman retains some part of her “white” Western values: she is horrified by the Indians’ brutal treatment of her horse. But what she feels is not something akin to the revitalizing sexual impulse Gudrun Brangwen, for example, feels in the sight of Gerald’s brutal abuse of his mare. It is a strange brew of emotions accompanied by the numbing knowledge of impending death: “The woman was powerless. And along with her supreme anger there came a slight thrill of exultation. She knew she was dead” (48). Her process to the Indian temple of death becomes an increasingly mystical journey, almost a pilgrimage:

She lay wrapped in her blanket looking at the stars,  
listening to her horse shivering, and feeling like a woman  
who has died and passed beyond. She was not sure that  
she had not heard, during that night, a great crash at the center  
of herself, which was the crash of her own death. (44)

The woman here follows the “IT” unquestioningly; in terms of the language employed in *Mornings in Mexico*, she is like a human being who “with his consciousness and his will must both submit to the great origin-powers of life, and conquer them.” She stands for the genderless, non-sexual, almost inhuman force which is purely instinctual and spontaneous and which will lead the individual to merge with the source and “conquer” “its strange malevolence” (*MIM* 85).

During their first encounter with the Woman, the three Indians discern in her eyes the “curious look of trance,” “the assurance of her own womanhood, and the spell of the madness that was on her” (*WWRA* 46). But the feminine psychic realm is not a source of mystery for the Indians, who intuitively feel her otherness, seeing her not as a white woman but as a sacred object. She is “a mystic object [...] some vehicle of passions too remote for her to grasp.” “They never saw her as a personal woman” (67). Stripped of her femininity and her sexual identity, she does not endeavour to achieve some kind of fulfillment, emotional, sexual or any other, as Kate or Ursula, for instance, did through their encounters with men, their social surroundings and nature. She does not give any specific reasons for her decision to leave home; she never complains, criticizes, mocks or attacks. She does not possess the sharp mind and tongue of the typical Lawrence heroine. Instead of these attributes, Lawrence has invested her with the extraordinary power of a human being who has completed her metamorphosis and is now ready and able to transcend this world and leap into some other cosmic dimension. The woman is consumed by the tremendous creative energies of the cosmos. She feels she is being used for a divine purpose she does not understand and though, on one level, unwilling to die, she is unable to resist this sacrifice of her body and life: “She felt she was drifting on some consummation, which she had no will to avoid, yet which seemed heavy and terrible to her” (63).

## Ritual Death, Violence and Final Rebirth

Such an acknowledgement of the religious ritual sacrifice as the ultimate mystical experience can also be found in Bataille's comparison of eroticism and death:

In sacrifice, the victim is divested not only of clothes but of life [...] The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals [...] This sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature's discontinuity. (*Erotism* 22)

Bataille calls our mode of existence "defined" and that of separate individuals a "discontinuous" one (18). This "discontinuity" of being might be understood as a term analogous to Lawrence's "amorphousness": "Each one becomes a single, separate entity, a single separate nullity" (*RDP* 273). For Lawrence this creates a false sense of self-sufficiency which leads the individual to the substitution of the real "IT," the real meaning of life, with a self-conscious ego. As Bataille says, the dissolution of being through death or through the erotic activity restores the "continuity": to love, to die is a "refusal to limit our selves within our individual personalities" (*Erotism* 24). Similarly, Lawrence believes that death seems to bring about the desirable "continuity," the "consummation of union" (*RDP* 283), which frees the ego from the nullity of sensational existence. Thus, the ritual death of the Woman can be seen symbolically as a passage to "continuity," to the dissolution of the self within the other: "He who would save his life must lose it [...] Certainly let him cast upon the waters. But if he dare not plunge in, if he dare not take off his clothes and give himself naked to the flood, then

let him prowl in rotten safety” (*Study* 15). This is a kind of death which Lawrence presents not as annihilation, but as a mystical experience, the logical culmination of the refusal to accept the false normality of mechanical being.

In “The Woman Who Rode Away,” Lawrence, in a paradoxical inversion of metaphors, disguises the mystical death of the Woman as a literal one. For the real subject of the novel is this mystical death that the Woman is willing to undergo, the Death which devours Life in order to destroy the static nullity of the form – as says Lawrence in “The Crown” written as early as 1915 (*RDP* 298). In the ritual death of the Woman, Lawrence acknowledges the perfection of “the absolute form, the revelation of the consummation of the flux, a perfect jet of foam that has fallen and is vanishing away” (301). Thus, the Woman’s dance with death is a dance into life born again. Having almost no feelings at all when she reaches the final stage of her sacrifice: “She felt little sensation, though she knew all that was happening” (*WWRA* 70), the Woman becomes a timeless being, one who has surpassed the “achieved ego, the egoistic Christian, the democratic, the unselfish” (*RDP* 297). Having completed the first stage of her transformation, she can obey her soul-voice and give herself freely to consummation. To quote from “The Crown” once more: “I am not immortal till I have achieved immortality. And immortality is not a question of time, of everlasting life. It is a question of consummate being [...] It means undaunted suffering and undaunted enjoyment, both” (301). The Woman has already been consumed by “undaunted suffering” long before the moment “when she actually *saw* what he [her husband] had accomplished.” The “lifeless isolation” she lives in, “the great, sundried dead church, the dead portales, the hopeless covered market-place, where, the first time she went, she saw a dead dog lying between the meat stalls [...] Deadness within deadness” (*WWRA* 39). This is the actual moment of death of the human being, the sudden sharp pang of pain when everything crumbles before the realization of the

utter falsity of life, the empty vagueness of existence when the soul is deprived of the divine grace that is its livelihood. The Woman is capable of rebirth, because she has not abandoned herself to the real death, that is the death of the instinct, but despite it all she keeps alive the vital relationship with her deeper self. It is this everlasting capacity of the woman to be in contact with the inner voice of her soul, a capacity which, even in this strange short story, clearly reveals the female consciousness as the main instrument for the attainment of true, life-affirming knowledge.

In the following quotation from *Mornings in Mexico*, Lawrence refers to the violence exercised by the Indians on their victims: “The Apache warrior in his war-paint, shrieking the war-cry and cutting the throats of old women, still he is a part of the mystery of creation” (59-60). This weird, subterranean sensibility, which accepts and justifies violence as a natural human urge, though intensely felt by Lawrence, is not yet something he has unconditionally embraced or interiorized. Violence, according to Bataille, even as it brings about suffering and death, “deprives the creature of its limited particularity and bestows on it the limitless, infinite nature of sacred things” (*Erotism* 90). Cornelia Nixon shows how Lawrence, in the unpublished chapters of “The Crown,” despises the sensationalism which violent activities entail and calls it “a self-destructive gratification,” but also acknowledges in this perverse human tendency a road towards the infinite:

A man may be sufficiently released by a fall on the rope  
and a dangling for a few seconds of agony in the mid-space.  
That may finally reduce his soul to his elements [...]  
Then he can begin to develop, to build up, to unify,  
to create [...] So that the near touch of death may be

a conversion to life, a liberation to the principle of the creative absolute. (Nixon 40)

Nixon, taking into account things like Lawrence's description of his feelings at the sight of a maimed soldier at the seaside, points out that the idea he attempts to communicate here "is to go 'beyond the furthest edge of known feeling,' into sadism or into masochism – plunging the bayonet joyfully into the enemy or getting one's leg shot off. The result may be release and rebirth" (40).

The Woman in this tale wishes to be annihilated: "She knew she was a victim [...] But she did not mind. She wanted it" (*WWRA* 67). Violence is welcome as long as it functions as a liberating force whose cathartic value can be fully appreciated only if one is prepared to look beyond the limitations and prejudices of the conventional human existence. In violence, true nature is revealed: hard, strong and cruel. And the being who understands the rightness of this force is in contact with this essential nature. As Lawrence writes in *Mornings in Mexico*: "And the mystery of creation makes us sharpen the knives and point the arrows in utmost determination against him [the savage warrior]. It must be so. It is part of the wonder" (*MIM* 60). Nixon, writing about "The Prussian Officer," remarks: "Killing the officer is presented as a healthy reaction of the orderly's instinctual being" as "the orderly who kills his officer, in a burst of repressed instinct, is swept out of ordinary life into the unknown" (Nixon 42-3). Violence as a self-destructive impulse can also be a healthy reaction of the instinctual being, a way to be released into the beyond. Self-destruction is self-negation, and self-negation paradoxically brings about the consummation of the self, the state of not being, the Batailleian "continuity," which is timeless.

For the Woman in this tale, life had been a state of negation, and death became the real consummation of her existence, her passing into the flux of creation. Individuality, consciousness and the ego are all transcended, and the fundamental nature of the human being is revealed in its entirety:

The sharpness and the quivering nervous consciousness of the highly-bred white woman was to be destroyed again, womanhood was to be cast once more into the great stream of impersonal sex and impersonal passion. (*WWRA* 60).

It is not the female sex that is being obliterated here but its “whiteness [which] took away all her womanhood” (49). The woman dies, but what is condemned is her surrender to “the personal and individual” (60), her submission to the mechanical consciousness. Lawrence kills here “the great white monkey [who] has got hold of the keys of the world” (33), who has enslaved the real man(woman)hood which is properly defined and governed by the living instinctual impulses of sex and passion and supports the continuity of the great polar opposites of life, which are the earth and heaven, male and female, life and death.

According to Lawrence, only by ridding herself of this old identity, can the Woman (and any human being), become an example and a symbol of the liberated self, a woman or a man who stays attuned to her/his natural impulses, which are always the most reliable guide not to happiness, but to the real life in the instinct. This may have largely been forsaken in modern Western societies but needs to be regained for the sake of all humankind. For woman, Lawrence believes, that this rebirth can only happen through the cosmic female power possessed by them. Paradoxically, it is this belief that turns the Woman into something much



more than a fictional example of a self-destructive character. She emerges as a person in the mould of saints, who is prepared to embrace death as superior to a false life. She has taken a decision and is ready to nullify her life in order to follow the process her instinct has dictated to her.

## Chapter Ten

### “The Man Who Died”: Christ and the Etruscans

Lawrence wrote the first part of “The Man Who Died” in April 1927, immediately after his return from his tour of various Etruscan sites in the company of his American friend Earl Brewster, painter and practicing Buddhist, who also shared his interest in older civilizations. In a letter to him in May of the same year, Lawrence summarized the plot of the newly-written story:

I wrote a story of the Resurrection, where Jesus gets up  
And feels very sick about everything, and can't stand the old  
crowd any more – so cuts out – and as he heals up, he begins  
to find what an astonishing place the phenomenal world is, far  
more marvelous than any salvation or heaven – and thanks his  
stars he needn't have a mission any more. (*L vi. 50*)

A direct product of his Etruscan experience, the Man's rebirth is in short “the story of how Jesus becomes an Etruscan” (*CSN 42*), as Keith Sagar put it.

Lawrence had always found the image of the suffering Jesus potent as well as provocative. In a 1926 letter he wrote: “Jesus becomes more unsympatich to me, the longer I live: crosses and nails and tears and all that stuff! I think he showed us into a nice cul de sac” (*L v. 322*). However, there are several early occasions when he was not as negative as that. In 1915 he

could identify with the newly resurrected Christ in a way that immediately brings to mind “The Man Who Died.” Writing to the Lady Cynthia Asquith, he remarked: “And now, I feel very sick and corpse-cold, too newly risen to share yet with [...] anybody, having the smell of the grave in my nostrils, and a feel of grave clothes about me” (*L ii.* 267-8). Even his appearance of the time started to resemble the image of a tormented Jesus. In 1921, Achsah Brewster described him as both Christ and Pan, with an “unmodelled” mouth “assigned to Pan and the satyrs” and “a gentle expression” with a beard, high cheek-bones and “the fall of his hair over the forehead,” and used his features to make a Christ figure “on a curved crucifix” (Brewster 241). In 1926, Dorothy Brett painted a crucified Christ and a playful Pan using for both Lawrence’s face, and a year later, Lawrence, in his *Resurrection*, depicted himself as the risen Christ.

Both man and god in Christian theology, Christ emerged in Lawrence’s work as a symbol of the eternal conflict between the spirit and the flesh, increasingly charged with meanings as Lawrence came to despise Christianity with its emphasis on the Crucifixion, its insistence that in this world suffering is a necessary condition if man is to attain the spiritual heaven, and its explicit as well as implied belittling of life on earth and almost total neglect of the necessity of living in harmony with the flesh, its needs and its pleasures (*L ii.* 248). This was strengthened by his reading of Frazer in 1915, which “made available to him an older tradition of resurrection symbolism which had none of Christianity’s bitterness against the earth and fear of the flesh” (*LIA* 302).

The image of Lucifer and Pan and other pagan gods of older civilizations, who inhabited and represented the exiled dark otherness of the human nature, found a place in Lawrence’s metaphysics as symbols of the flesh and life lived in the instinct, a life that could bring man

closer to the divine, which is no other than the magnificent natural life of the body. In his essay "Resurrection" (1925), Lawrence talks about the possibility that man may "rise as the Lord," stop being "the man of Sorrows" and face life with "the eyes full open" (*RDP* 233). Through his visits to the Etruscan tombs with Earl Brewster, Lawrence discovered a people who fascinated him describing Etruscans as "a living, fresh, jolly people, [who] lived their lives without wanting to dominate the lives of others"<sup>1</sup> (*L* vi. 32). Lawrence had recognized in this ancient people's desire to preserve the life as nature does as "natural and as easy as breathing. Even the tombs. And that is the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness, and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or the soul in any direction" (*SEP* 19). Christ, in "The Man Who Died," begins after the Resurrection to live the life in the flesh and discovers the divine in the real "phenomenal" world around him in much the same way the Etruscans, for Lawrence, appear to have been able to feel the gods naturally and intuitively.

The original (and very much symbolic) title Lawrence had initially chosen for the story was "The Escaped Cock," (the text used here from the *Complete Short Novels* is to be found under this original title), inspired by a toy Lawrence and Brewster had seen in Volterra, where a white rooster escapes from a man, according to Lawrence, or from an egg, according to Brewster (*LIA* 304). The first part of the story was published in *Forum* in February 1928 under the title "Resurrection," which strangely appeared on the cover but not in the table of contents (Wright 215), and the second part was added soon afterwards, in July. The story was subsequently published under the same title by the Black Sun Press in September 1929. In February 1930, the London bookseller Charles Lahr, with whom Lawrence was negotiating the publication of the first unlimited edition, suggested the title "The Man Who Died," and it

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<sup>1</sup> The letter is translated in Nehls, 137.

was under this new title that the first English edition was eventually published by Martin Secker in March 1931.

The story has its place in this thesis as, in a reversal of roles, the main character is a man and the plot unfolds around his process towards regeneration and the discovery of his human identity in the flesh, guided by a woman initiator, the priestess of Isis who opens for him the doors not of heaven, but of the earthy kingdom where physical, sensual pleasure leads to mental and spiritual completeness. Thus the woman becomes the man's guide in body and spirit, showing to him the road to real happiness.

### **The Man Who Died Meets the Escaped Cock**

As Mary Freeman has noted, "The Man Who Died" treats "the transfiguration into the flesh" as a means for human rebirth (Freeman 208), reversing the Christian ideal of "the transfiguration out of flesh," the spiritual return to the creator and the refusal of the vain and sinful life of this world. The way of the Man risen from death crosses with the way of the escaped young rooster. The cock's crowing has awoken the Man and restored him to full consciousness: "Advancing in a kind of half-consciousness under the dry stone wall of the olive orchard, he was roused by the shrill, wild crowing of a cock just near him, a sound which made him shiver as if electricity had touched him" (CSN 558). But the call of life is not only awakening, but demanding too. The Man cannot embrace this new life energy in its entirety yet: "At the edges of rocks, he saw the silky, silvery-haired buds of the scarlet anemone bending downwards. And they too, were in another world. In his own world he was alone, utterly alone" (559). It is only later, while watching "the rocking vibration of the bent bird," that he perceives "the swaying ocean of life" and finally realizes that "the doom of

death was a shadow compared to the raging destiny of life, the determined surge of life” (563). T.R. Wright has pointed out the central part that the cock plays in the story “partly as a Nietzschean symbol of vitality and partly as the animal associated with that pagan type of Christ, Asclepius, the God of healing” (Wright 215). The cock belongs to the natural world. It is a pagan intrusion into the story and another instance in Lawrence’s work – exactly like St. Mawr – when an animal is endowed with anthropomorphic qualities and depicted as something divine: “The peasant and the peasant’s wife laughed heartily, and the young cock heard them.” The cock, symbol of a knowledge which goes far back to the unconscious, inarticulated state of the human soul, acquires a conscious knowledge of his state of bodily and spiritual imprisonment: “Body soul and spirit were tied by that string” (CSN 555). Lawrence sees the “spirit” of the animal as the intuitive knowledge which compels each and every living creature to “bear the fruit of its nature” (*Study* 8). The Man hears the call of nature, the call of his flesh, in the cock’s crowing, which is here akin to the blare of the trumpets of the Apocalypse, only this Apocalypse is not a universal but a personal one, and signifies not an end, but a new beginning. In his essay “Aristocracy” (1925), Lawrence described the cock as a symbol of “the Holy Ghost, The Mediator”: “And every time I hear him, a fountain of vitality gushes up in my body. It is life” (RDP 373).

The Man rises in the flesh and discovers his human and sexual dimension. His maleness is roused when he hears the cock’s call to life, and this new experience of life is the new “phallic consciousness” which is “the source of all real beauty, and all real gentleness” (*L vi.* 328). As in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and in *Women in Love*, Lawrence here sees once more the power of the phallus as a symbol of vitality. The man’s erection signifies the triumph of the body rather than that of the male, the return to “the honest stage before the apple” as Lawrence wrote to Dr Trigant Burrow on 3 August 1927: “the naïve or physical or sexual

mode of consciousness” which brings together man and woman, “the pre-cognitive flow” which is mindless. (*L* vi.114). The religious element Lawrence ascribes to this return to a pre-cognitive state of existence is apparent in his choice of the word “resurrection”: an apt word but with a heavy load of Christian connotations. The association of the phallus with this most sacred and triumphant moment in Christian theology brings the pagan and the Christian tradition together. It is an outstanding example of Lawrence’s practice “of imposing one set of religious associations upon another” (Ford 109). The phallus, whose mindless vitality and strength Lawrence chose to represent through the symbol of the cock, becomes “a great sacred image,” the image of the resurrection (*L* v. 648), shifting the emphasis away from the cross, the symbol of the crucifixion, and reducing it from its established status as the supreme religious event.

In his essay “The Risen Lord” (July 1929), which followed the novella and is seen by many critics as the unofficial third part of it (Sagar 222), Lawrence dwelled long on the idea of what constitutes the true resurrection for the human being, his/her restoration back to life:

I love the movement of life, and the beauty of life, O Mammon,  
since I am risen, I love the beauty of life intensely; columbine  
flowers, for example, the way they dangle, or the delicate way  
a young girl sits and wonders, or the rage with which a man  
turns and kicks a full dog that suddenly attacks him – beautiful  
that, the swift fierce turn and lunge of a kick, then the quivering  
pause for the next attack; or even the slightly silly glow that comes  
over some men as they are getting tipsy-it still is a glow, beautiful;  
or the swift look a woman fetches me, when she would really like

me to go off with her, but she is troubled; or the real compassion  
I saw a woman express for a man who slipped and wrenched his  
foot: life, the beauty, the beauty of life! (*LE* 272-3)

Lawrence celebrates life as a divine gift which must be appreciated, and in its slightest demonstrations, he discovers the beauty of existence, which he thinks people have not understood and embraced as they should.

T.R. Wright has suggested Nietzsche as the most important thinker behind “The Man Who Died”:

In *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, as we saw, Nietzsche has his Prophet explain that Jesus, had he lived longer, ‘would have learned to live and learned to love the earth – and laughter as well.’ *Twilight of the Idols* presents the Sermon on the Mount as part of a ‘war of passion’, an impulse towards the castration of all desire, and a general hostility to life characteristic of Christianity, *The Anti-Christ* blames not Jesus but his followers for the ‘*anti-natural* castration of a God into a God of the merely good’ while *The Will to Power* places the responsibility for ‘the loss of an organ’ and for the whole ‘*emasculat*ion of a man’s character’, the ‘extirpation’ of the passions involved in the belief that ‘only the castrated man is a good man,’ upon Christianity. (Wright 216)



Obviously, what Lawrence claims in the story is how the turn away from the past with its exhausted spirituality and the re-orientation towards a future which would celebrate a return to the long-lost physical vitality constitutes the real “resurrection” of the human being. He certainly seems to succeed in building his own resurrection narrative by offering a profound insight into human otherness and the deeper needs of the human self. The death of the Man that was Jesus is not seen as the culmination of a sacrifice of the self for the sake of mankind, but a rewarding experience, one that precedes rebirth, here synonymous with life in the flesh, the real life that the man is born to live. In relation with the myth of Osiris, the cock becomes also the symbol of the restoration of castrated sexuality, the Man’s unsatisfied wish to experience the beauty of the living world in the union with the other sex. However, the real resurrection is the coming together of man and woman, the ultimate consummation which is an altogether transformative experience: Working during the same period on *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence insists more or less on the same motif. In the first version of this novel, he depicts Connie’s efforts to find a mode to live intuitively and naturally, obeying her inherent female urge to embrace life and its pleasures. She finally achieves this through her transcendent ecstasy in the nearness of nature and through her union with Mellors. The Man, in “The Man Who Died,” learns similarly to appreciate life and its joys through the embrace of a sacred woman, the priestess of Isis.

### **The Holy Marriage**

Although the Man is soon to be risen in the flesh through a woman, following his desire for a new life, he shows no desire to be touched by any of the women he meets on his way, the peasant’s wife and Madeleine. In his eyes, their wish to touch him reveals them as “greedy,” eager only “to take more from him” (CSN 568). Even Madeleine’s wish for “excessive

giving” is taken to reveal a desire “to be saved from the old, willful Eve.” Judith Ruderman discerns here in the story “an antagonism” towards women. The Man refuses Madeleine’s offer for shelter, insisting on his staying alone until he returns to his father rather than his mother. She notes that he shows “a great deal of hostility” towards the mother of the priestess and that the narrator takes pains to make it clear that the priestess herself serves “not Isis, Mother of Horus” but “Isis in search” (Ruderman 164-65) who, according to the myth, is looking for the missing genitals of Osiris. Of course the parallelism here is clear: the priestess is to restore the Man to his own manhood by discovering symbolically his missing phallus. The Man’s supposed abhorrence for women, however, is less obvious; there is enough evidence that the Man also feels the same abhorrence, not only for women, but for the peasant and the servants in the temple of Isis as well. The peasant, his wife, the servants, the priestess’ mother, all, male and female, stand for a humanity that is ignorant and therefore repulsive. Incapable of rebirth and blind to the great mysteries of life, the peasant and his wife are “limited, meagre in their life” (CSN 560), people “who could never die, save to return to earth.” For they have killed the “cock,” that is, the powerful life energy inside them, and consequently refused the miracle of being alive. In these people, the Man sees “the little life of jealousy and property”: “In the name of property, the widow and her slaves would seek to be revenged on him for the bread he had eaten, and the living touch he had established, the woman he had delighted in” (599). Even worse, this “excessive need for salvation” (565), which he discerns in Madeleine, is one more burden for him: the Man feels that this time he must decline the role of the Messiah and listen to his human instinct, “the greater life” of the body (568).

However, the body here becomes also the signifier of a life which is deprived of its greatness. For in the body, the Man also acknowledges “the little, personal life” as he sees it

in the female body of the peasant's wife, one body which the Man feels unwilling to touch, precisely because he himself has already been a victim of this "little life" which he distinguishes in her body: he had already been a man "of his mission, of his chastity and his fear, of his little life, his giving without taking" (569). The Man does not wish to be touched, claiming that he has not ascended to his Father yet. But this seems to be no more than an excuse, later mockingly referred to by the Man himself (pretending ignorance) when he meets the two men who were talking of Jesus' rising and his divine ascent.

- The Man: And will he take flesh up into the sky?

-The two men: The Father in Heaven will take him up."(573)

But the true ascension for the risen Christ is in fact a descent, the well-known descent of the soul into the otherness of the human being, the dark area which Christianity and Western religious thought in general condemn as the dangerous area connected to the sinful flesh. Soon after, answering the question whether he is a believer, the Man declares his belief in the life and virtue of the animal he carries, the cock he bought from the peasants before they set off together on their journey towards freedom.

Both Keith Sagar in *Life into Art*, and T.R. Wright, as we have seen, refer to the association of the Man with Aesculapius, the Saviour-Healer of the Greeks, Apollo's son, whose sacred bird was the cock, symbol of fertility and rebirth (*LIA* 305-6, Wright 215). According to the myth, Aesculapius eventually acquired the skill to bring the dead back to life, and Zeus, disturbed by this threat to the natural order, cast a thunderbolt and killed him. The risen Man identifies with this pagan god of the ancient Greeks, in particular with his ability to restore to life those who have lost their earthy strength and vitality. Coming back

from the dark Hades, the Man denies his plutonic side and chooses to return to the land of living. He takes his position among the gods of earth, those who heal and protect the mortals.

The Man, dressed as an ordinary man, is ready “to inherit the earth” (573) instead of heaven. However, his forthcoming union will not be with a simple, earthy woman, but with a sacred one, a priestess of Isis, who also is in search of the greater life in the body of a sacred man. When the young priestess asks a philosopher if all women are born to be given to men, she receives the following answer:

Rare women wait for the re-born man. For the lotus, as you know,  
will not answer to all the bright heat of the sun. But she curves  
her dark, hidden head in the depths, and stirs not. Till, in the night,  
one of these rare invisible suns that have been killed and shine  
no more, rises among the stars in unseen purple, and like the  
violet, sends its rare, purple rays out in the night. To these the  
lotus stirs as to a caress, and rises upwards through the flood,  
and lifts up her bent head, and opens with an expansion such  
as no other flower knows, and spreads her sharp rays of bliss,  
and offers her soft, gold depths such as no other flower  
possesses, to the penetration of the flooding, violet-dark sun  
that has died and risen and makes no show. But for the golden  
brief day-suns of show, such as Anthony, and for the hard winter  
suns of power, such as Caesar, the lotus stirs not, nor will  
ever stir. Those will only tear open the bud. Ah, I tell you,  
wait for the re-born and wait for the bud to stir. (579)

The priestess, in other (less poetic) words, is the perfect equivalent of the Man who was Jesus. Both of them are invested with holiness and both of them yield to experience the rising through the body. Both of them are virgins, untouched and independent in the body and the spirit, saving themselves for the holy marriage, the sacred union with the other. The woman, much like Lou in *St. Mawr*, waits for “the mystic new man” who will touch her “lotus-bud” (577), significantly, the Egyptian symbol of fertility, but who will also allow her her solitariness, since she belongs forever to her goddess, Isis.

The priestess must remain literally untouched until the advent of the chosen man. What we have here is neither the traditional concept of virginity as a condition of male control over the female, nor its opposite, a declaration of female self-determination and independence as in the case of Lou. Lawrence employs a strong religious symbolism in the depiction of the holy moment when the girl will feel that the time has come to give herself to the holy man. She is “the lotus” who “will answer to the bright heat of the sun,” only this is a sun that rises in the middle of the night, a sun that “has died” and “makes no show.” It is not a politically powerful man who will capture the innocence of the young priestess, but one who possesses the sacred knowledge, the knowledge that comes from the world beyond, which is the knowledge of true life. One has to die in order to attain the gift of this knowledge, and the holy woman waits patiently for the man who has it and will transmit it to her. Lawrence’s reworking within a pagan scenery of traditional Christian motifs such as that of the virgin, allows him the use of a complex semiology and a rich language able to express his metaphysics: life is sacred, and here this sacredness is literally portrayed in the two holy figures, one male and one female, who are united through the holy communion of the flesh. Like other Lawrencian couples, Ursula and Birkin, Kate and Cipriano, Daphne and Count

Dionys, Mellors and Connie, who discover life's holy mystery as an instinctual act in the form of a natural calling, the couple in this story are also driven by an inner urge, which is not simply sexual, but combined with religious consciousness and long, deep forethought. Their meeting is also the meeting of two essentially creative spirits, and the sexual act becomes the means to achieve a spiritual goal which, paradoxically for the Man, is the rediscovery of life in the flesh. It is worth noting that the Man's vision is more apocalyptic than the woman's. For the god he served is the god of the spirit, the god who curses the flesh and prohibits its pleasures. Thus, the Man's struggle becomes an existential one as he has to rethink and redefine his mission in life, abandon the consuming religious role he had previously adopted, and undergo a conversion into a new faith, the faith in the creative, regenerative power of instinctual life. From now on he must learn to be fully alive.

### **Salvation through the Holy Woman**

Although Lawrence creates a narrative which concerns the rebirth of both sexes, he certainly concentrates on the male experience of salvation, and particularly on the Man's rebirth through the female body. At first, the Man is afraid of the woman's touch which he finds "farther than death" (*CSN* 585): "I am almost more afraid of this touch than I was of death" (591). He accepts the female power which Isis represents, but the thought of embracing this female power still terrifies him. However, he realizes that the greater life he is searching for is to be found only there, in the female embrace, and with this knowledge the Man – now a believer – prays to his new female deity: " 'Ah Goddess,' he said to the idol, in the vernacular. 'I would be so glad to live, if you would give me my clue again'" (593). This prayer, paralleled to Jesus' last exclamation to his father ("Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?"), gives a totally different meaning to the concept of salvation, which is now closely associated

with this life rather than life after death. The Man wishes to return to life and addresses his prayer, not to a “Father,” but to a “Mother.” Lawrence connects the energy of existence, the continuum of life and death, with the archetypal female force, implying thus that the abandonment of the feminine disturbs the human being’s relation with the living universe and destroys the natural, instinctive way to perceive the cosmos and live in harmony with it.

The name Isis means “ancient,” Esther Harding explains, but “she was also called Maat, which means knowledge or wisdom. Isis is Maat, the *ancient wisdom*” (Harding 184). According to the myth, Isis managed to find the scattered pieces of Osiris after his mutilation by his brother Set, and put them together. Ra, the sun-god, pitied her and had Osiris rise from the dead (CSN 61, note 7). So, the knowledge of Isis is a healing one. The Man needs to heal his wounds, both visible and invisible, and he is surprised to find that it is “the absolute stillness and fullness” (597) of the woman’s touch that will heal him and bring him back to life.

The Man’s sexual intercourse with the priestess takes the form of a mystical ritual enacted before the statue of the goddess. Edward Whitmont writes about the element of sexuality in ancient pagan rites:

Sexual expression and sexual play, moreover, include varied patterns: of aggressor and victim, violence and surrender, caring, nourishing and need-fulfilling, as well as fear and loneliness. All these facets are constellated in the dimension of self-transcendent sexual ecstasy. Through ecstatic sexuality, pagan ritual acknowledged the presence of suprapersonal power as well as its capacity to influence

human behavior in mutual assertion and surrender. In turn, by depriving sexuality of its place in consciously experienced religious ritual, the religions of the Book deprived themselves of one of the most vital vehicles of transformative power and mutual influencing.

(Whitmont 252)

The ritual elements in the love-making scene provide Lawrence with a symbolic language capable of communicating the truth of the flesh. The love-making is transformative, a revelatory experience, just as it is in the case of Connie and Mellors. The difference is that the man and the woman in “The Man Who Died” take part in a real ritual, for here Lawrence acknowledges in their sexual intercourse a “suprapersonal power,” that is the power of the goddess who oversees and protects them, the symbolic power of the female which gives new life to the male, just as Isis had managed to bring Osiris back to life. The Man is raised to a spiritual life, the “greater” life that he and the priestess represent in contrast to the “little life of jealousy and property” (*CSN* 599) of the other people around them. Unlike Mellors, who has an attractive animal masculinity which Connie finds so irresistible, here Lawrence portrays the “earthy” people as ignorant, silly and unattractive, suggesting that the revelation through love can only come to those who have earned it, those whose consciousness has been awakened and their souls prepared to accept this divine gift.

The priestess of Isis is the female initiator. It is clear that Lawrence opposes to the patriarchal basis of Christianity a matriarchal pagan religious alternative. Christian patriarchy seems useless to him, a deeply authoritarian religious system, which forces human beings to deny and neglect their natural needs and obey sterile sets of rules, whose aim is to annihilate the life of the body and bring it under the rule of the mind. It is certainly significant that



women in Lawrence generally seem able to avoid this trap which patriarchy represents. Sooner or later, they realize that they have neglected the self-preserving natural instincts and return to them. The priestess of Isis, as we have seen, does not respond to the “splendour” of “golden Anthony’s” limbs and “glowing manhood” (578), but follows her sacred instinct which leads her to the sacred man, the man who died, the man she needs and deserves. In his turn, the Man reacts to the “sacred feminine” as a typical Lawrencean man: He is afraid to abandon himself to the unknown, vaguely threatening, holiness of the female, but his holy origin helps him understand that this sacred feminine otherness which attracts him is the right choice and needs no reasoned explanation. He cannot explain. He can only recognize her as a female mystery: “The deep-folded, penetrable rock of the living woman! The woman, hiding her face” (596). “And he said: I will ask her nothing, not even her name, for a name would set her apart” (597). Like the Woman in “The Woman Who Rode Away,” the priestess remains nameless. For naming implies social consciousness, the attribution of identities and roles, the imposition of rule and order. It reflects the patriarchal system of organization with its fixed identities, whereas the meeting between the Man and the holy priestess takes place in a fluid timeless now. The eternal truth can find articulation only in the mystical semiotic language of religious symbolism.

The feminine has no limits and the deliberate self-abandonment of the Man to this oceanic otherness can only come after the rejection of the limited, ultimately sterile, patriarchal Christianity. The Crucifixion can no longer be seen as a means of purification from evil and the tyranny of the flesh, but as a useless sacrifice to which the Man can only look back in shame: “ ‘I asked them all to serve me with the corpse of their love. And in the end I offered them only the corpse of my love. This is my body – take and eat – my corpse.’ A vivid shame

went through him” (594). He has fulfilled his duty by denying the gift of life, the spontaneous spark of life which has the power to heal and here is found in the divine female body:

In silence, she softly rhythmically chafed the scar with oil,  
absorbed now in her priestess’ task, softly, softly gathering power,  
while the vitals of the man howled in panic. But as she gradually  
gathered power, and passed in a girdle round him to the opposite  
scar, gradually warmth began to take the place of the cold terror,  
and he felt: I am going to be flushed warm again, I am going to  
be whole! I shall be warm like the morning. I shall be a man.  
It doesn’t need understanding. It needs newness. She brings me  
Newness. (595)

The Man accepts this miraculous power of the woman without questioning. He himself has acquired an instinct with feminine qualities and follows it blindly, sensing rather than knowing that his salvation lies outside the strict law of his male god. In his resurrection, the Man, instead of ascending to the “Father,” joins the “Mother.” He becomes a fallen Christ who denies the divine male authority in favour of rebirth through the body of woman. This is a daring transgression which Lawrence boldly invites every man to undertake as the only way to salvation.

### **The Priestess**

The priestess has all the seriousness and the steadiness expected of her station. She is a woman who, in contrast to the Man, has perfect knowledge of and an unflinching zeal for her

mission in life. In the Man's eyes she appears as "a soft, musing cloud, somehow remote" (CSN 586), but she also has the majestic stature of the goddess she serves: "He watched her go, with her absorbed, strange motion of the self-dedicate. Her dun head was a little bent, the white linen swung about her ivory ankles" (587). Being a priestess, a carer, she easily perceives in the Man's wounds and scars "the other kind of beauty," "the sheer stillness of the deeper life." She feels real sexual attraction for the Man, as he does for her: "For the first time, she was touched on the quick at the sight of a man, as if the tip of a fine flame of living had touched her" (582). It is the same "forked flame" which brings Connie and Mellors together, the flame of living passion. The priestess is a holy woman, but in her approach to the Man she is also earthy and direct. She asks him to take off his clothes and chafes his body with oil. The woman "does not realize the death" in the Man, but this is not a burden for their union as "she has another consciousness" and goes to the Man "from the opposite end of the night" (595). It is interesting to see that this other consciousness, here conjoined with mysticism, is parallel, albeit quite different, to the equivalent consciousness of the Man. It is not only the woman who is invested with instinct and farsightedness here. The Man is equally endowed with this intuitive power to distinguish and join with the mystic otherness. Since Lawrence recognizes both femaleness and maleness as universal elements which can be easily perceived and desired by man and woman equally, the priestess possesses the same sort of "earthy" femaleness that all Lawrencian heroines do. However, this union usually provokes some fear in their male companions until they come to know, accept and embrace it. The holy woman acknowledges the Man's sacred maleness and without any further preparation is ready to give herself to it whereas the Man hesitates; he feels a surge of panic before this new eventuality: "And he trembled with fear and with joy, saying to himself: I am almost more afraid of this touch than I was of death. For I am more nakedly exposed to it" (591). The Man feels that his impending union with the woman will have further implications

he can neither foresee nor control. The acceptance of the “other consciousness” of the woman and the merging with it will bring about the *de facto* abolition of the male order he represents. The ecstasy of sexual contact, the acceptance and the satisfaction of natural urges are ascribed to an evil *other* which Christianity has demonized, rejected and repressed. All those impulses that pagan religions had considered divine have been condemned by the new Christian order. Lawrence selects the most important Christian figure, that of Christ, and employs him as the divine agent who will revive the old gods of the flesh and ecstasy, Pan, Osiris and Dionysus. These are the gods of the dark consciousness, the consciousness that the Man-Christ had once rejected but is now ready to embrace in the female presence. This admission of the “Dionysian night side of existence – ecstasy, passion, death and rebirth” (Whitmont 61) deconstructs the patriarchal consciousness and redefines the identity of the Man, who now goes over to the opposite side. Lawrence’s point again seems to be that if a man is to achieve wholeness, he needs integration with a woman.

### **The Man and his Anima**

In a Jungian psychoanalytical approach, the Man might be seen as obeying his “unconscious feminine aspect,” what Jung defines as “anima” (Snowden 60). The priestess can thus be seen as the personification of the feminine element in the Man’s soul, which seeks to find expression in real life. For Jung, the anima is personified as female, a “seductress, harlot or divine female spirit guide.” She may distort a man’s reason, since Jung identifies the anima with everything that is “unconscious, dark, equivocal and purposeless in a woman” and thus has the power to “utterly destroy a man” (61). The priestess of Isis can be seen to represent a positive, beneficial anima, the “divine female spirit” which acts as a guide for the Man. Although in the beginning, the Man is afraid of the dangerous, destructive qualities of this

divine feminine element, he impulsively senses this beneficial change he is soon to experience when he unites with it. He feels insecure about his own psychic strength, since he is now abandoning cold reason, the domain of the Christian *logos*, in order to discover and join with the warmth of the female other. Lawrence sees the effort of the man to join his anima as an essentially religious endeavour: “The religious effort is to conceive, to symbolize that which the human soul, or the soul of the race, lacks that which it is not, and which it requires, yearns for” (*Study 55*). For any man, the task of obeying and embracing his anima is not an easy one. It is hard to accept what seems completely unknown and other, and Lawrence is clear that this effort requires intuitive knowledge and faith in order to succeed: intuitive knowledge that is a kind of wordless faith in the other, the female consciousness whose full force can be felt through the feminine powers of passion, insight and instinctual affinity with nature.

The Man seems to possess the same intuitive knowledge which Lawrencian heroines rather than heroes are usually seen to possess. He is willing to undergo the descent process in order to discover his earthy human self, but he is still afraid of it – unlike the fearless priestess who immediately, without any hesitation, abandons herself to the holy man whom she instinctively recognizes as the one she was waiting for. If the Man represents the priestess’ animus, then the woman is much more prepared to acknowledge and embrace it than the Man is to embrace his own “anima.” However, the woman’s acceptance of male otherness does not entail the acceptance of the symbolic values the Man’s original mission represented: if he is the embodiment of the Christian Light and Spirit, she serves the dark wisdom of the flesh. The Man is to be initiated into this dark realm of the senses, which stands in opposition to the rational mind, but this is not a mutual rapprochement. The priestess is not accepting the *logos* – significantly, she is nameless and at times faceless. She accepts the man because she

recognizes his holy aura, but she never pretends to accept the values of the religion he represents, which she seems to ignore. Thus, she is clearly an initiator, an independent spiritual entity, a real *virgin*.

By bringing the holy man and woman together, Lawrence seeks to justify his metaphysics about the mutual relationship the two sexes need to have, but it is perfectly clear whose role it is to be the initiator here. Moreover, her choice of the Man is much more natural and uninhibited than his choice of her is. She is led to him by her instinct and does not need to develop an argument in order to justify her choice. On the other hand, the Man is in constant need of mothering, understanding and spiritual support, as he is in the process of changing his entire spiritual identity, a fundamental change which must start with the discovery and acceptance of his female ego, his anima.

The conflict between the Man and his anima is fierce; but Lawrence cuts the knot of this dilemma right at the beginning: the Man has come back from the dead, and he has taken his decision to live a new life in the flesh. He embodies the Persephonic spirit of rebirth, which brings a symbolic spring in his soul. The return to nature is representative of the Man's acceptance of his feminine side, the return to the Mother, since the priestess has set herself up as a kind of psychic mother to him as well as being the real mother to their divine offspring, the embodiment of the principle of life perpetually renewing itself. The Man is to be captured by this woman who can sense and satisfy the true needs of his soul. In the fusion of these two psyches, Lawrence enacts the mystical union of the two sexes which is one in the flesh, not an idealized eternal one, since this, eventually, would bring about disappointment, distress and finally estrangement for both of them.

The Man leaves at the end of the story, but the woman who is left behind does not feel mistreated. Their relationship is natural and undemanding as for Lawrence, all true relationships between man and woman must be, allowing the two partners individuality and independence. The woman needs her solitude no less than the Man does in order to accomplish her own spiritual mission. Emotionally self-contained and introverted, the woman belongs more to the spirit, in spite of her devotion to the goddess of the mother-earth. She needs a partner who is a spiritual seeker like herself, in order to complete this mission. The materialistic men of action, the apparent achievers, are not attractive to her. The Man does not physically resemble these men and it seems highly unlikely that he will ever evolve to become one of them. His transformation is for his own sake, the discovery of his true human dimension, not the remodeling of his spiritual role. This is a personal rebirth which in a narrow sense concerns only the self, and yet it is not at all egotistical: the path towards a life that is in tune with nature, that is focused on creation and regeneration instead of sterile antagonism and destruction, must necessarily start from the rebirth of the individual.

## Chapter Eleven

### *Lady Chatterley's Lover: the Celebration of the Flesh*

*Lady's Chatterley's Lover* is the last major novel Lawrence wrote. He started work on it in October 1926, after he and Frieda settled in Italy, at the Villa Mirinda, near Florence, and completed three different versions before he was satisfied. *The First Lady Chatterley* was finished around December 1926. In it, Lawrence abandons his beliefs in aristocracy which he had so eloquently developed in his "leadership novels" of the 1920s: *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*. Duncan Forbes, his spokesman in this first draft of the novel, declares: "I've hated democracy since the war but I now see I'm wrong calling for an aristocracy. What we want is a flow of life from one to another" (*FLC* 243).

After the completion of the first version, Lawrence began its successor known as *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, almost immediately, completing it in February of 1927. This focuses more emphatically on the theme of the sexual union between a man and a woman, a union which seems to emerge as the only solution to the problems of the modern world. Politics, which had been a serious issue in the first version (with Parker, Mellors' first fictitious name, becoming a communist), is not referred to at all. The theme of class-conflict is eliminated as "both the haves and the have-nots constitute a vast proletariat of the cold-blooded, from the clutches of which those few remaining individuals whose blood is warm need to escape" (*JTLJ* 365-6, 294-5). A third and final version of the novel was ready in January of 1928. Much different from the two first versions, this final version represents his most mature thinking on individual regeneration and the relationship between man and woman. However,



the detailed descriptions of the sexual act and the uncompromising use of four-letter words meant that publishing would prove difficult. The finished novel was first printed in Florence privately in July 1928. An expurgated version was published in London four years later, but the full text of the final version of the novel appeared in England only in 1960, followed by the famous obscenity trial in which bishops appeared alongside literary critics to testify not only to the novel's literary value but to its celebration of sex as something sacred.

The controversy which surrounded the novel from the very beginning led Lawrence to make a public defence of the work and the ideas expressed through it. In the essay "A propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," written in 1929, he explained the novel's profoundly moral objective, which is the examination of what he considered the most vital and pressing of all themes: the existing schism between body and mind, or "the phallic consciousness versus the spiritual consciousness," as Lawrence himself put it in a letter to Earl Brewster, before adding: "and of course you know which side I take. The *versus* is not my fault, there should be no *versus*. The two things must be reconciled in us. But now they're daggers drawn" (*L* vi. 340). Lawrence is fervent in his conviction that Western civilization has been guilty of imposing and maintaining this unnatural dichotomy between mind and body, subordinating the sensual and the instinctual to a false, shallow and sterile intellectualism. For Lawrence, "Life is only bearable when the mind and the body are in harmony, and there is a natural balance between the two, and each has a natural respect for the other" (*LCL* 310). He yearns and calls for a spiritual as well as sexual regeneration to restore the belief in "the great rhythm of emotion" (323) that is to be found in the natural cycle of life and remains embedded, albeit repressed and untapped, in the human soul.

The heroine of the novel, Lady Constance, is another of Lawrence's female characters who suffers the sterility of her husband's environment with stoicism, but who still hopes to escape. She believes in the resurrection of the body and as soon as she finds the way to this resurrection, through her abandonment in nature and through her union with her chosen male, she embraces it wholeheartedly. However, her true sacredness lies in her trust of her womanhood and her infallible female instinct. As an authentic heroine, she goes through a cathartic process, encountering all sorts of difficulties before managing to release her repressed other, the part of the self that modern man and woman is used to ignoring. Constance Chatterley becomes a religious figure, a sacred woman, who succeeds in defying the conventionalities of a superficial, dehumanized, machine world.

### **Connie and her Natural Rising in the Flesh**

It is worth noting, especially in the light of what is to come, that Constance and her sister Hilda Reid, like Ursula and Gudrun in *Women in Love*, are both portrayed as vivacious and independent-minded girls, who enjoy "what might be called an aesthetically unconventional upbringing" among "artists and cultured socialists." Without really exceeding the limits of their class, the sisters certainly feel free and by no means inferior to the men of their society: "they were just as good as men themselves: only better because they were women" (*LCL* 6). Both are powered by an indomitable female spirit, which enables them to achieve "a perfect, a pure and royal freedom" (7) among the men, whom they tolerate as socially necessary, part of: "The paradisaal promise: Thou shalt have men to talk to!" (8). "The only unfortunate thing" about the men, as far as the sisters are concerned, is that "They insisted on the sex thing like dogs." The sisters' tendency to devalue "the sex business" is part of their desire for independence, believing as they do that "a woman could yield to a man without yielding her

inner, free self. That the poets and talkers about sex did not seem to have taken sufficiently into account. A woman could take a man, without really giving herself away” (7).

Empowered by her upbringing, Constance carries “the peculiar soft assurance” that in the eyes of Sir Clifford seems to protect her from the “chaos” (10) of the big outside world. He is fascinated by Connie’s effortless feminine assurance, even to the point that he needs her there “to assure him that he existed at all” (16). They get married, and the result is that Connie finds herself in the position of one more contemporary Persephone who is literary confined in a countryside Hades as the wife of an English Pluto. Wragby Hall, situated near the Tevershall colliery which Sir Clifford inherited from his father and elder brother, is described in terms alluding not just to the dark, joyless underworld of the Greek mythology, but directly to the Christian Hell:

she heard the rattle-rattle of the screens at the pit, the puff  
of the winding engine, the clink-clink of shunting trucks  
and the hoarse little whistle of the colliery locomotives.

Tevershall pit-bank was burning [...] And when the wind was  
that way, which was often, the house was full of the stench  
of this sulphurous combustion of the earth’s excrements. But  
even on windless days, the air always smelled of something  
under-earth: sulphur, coal, iron, or acid.

The place is clearly meant as a grim signifier of the dehumanized, industrialized England Sir Clifford stands for. This is the world the young woman is to inhabit and she has to learn to put up with it; it is a world she cannot “kick away” (13). At the same time, it does exert a

peculiar attraction: it “fascinated Connie with a sort of horror: she felt she was living underground” (14). A creature of the earth herself, she is immediately aware of the lack of “warmth of feeling” which makes Wragby Hall empty and “dreary as a disused street” (17), with its master, Sir Clifford Chatterley, the personification of “the negation of human contact” (16). Connie feels “beautifully out of contact” in this new world; she is acutely conscious of her alienation, her terrible solitude in this sterile environment of “mechanical cleanliness and [...] mechanical order” (17).

Connie, for a while, plays her part as the “womanly” hostess to her husband’s intellectual friends, mostly men who consider her “too feminine to be quite smart” (19). But she is alert and smart enough to see through this silly masquerade even as it engulfs her: “Talk, talk, talk! What hell it was, the continual rattle of it!” (76). Instinctively, Connie opposes the false language of the mind that enslaves the body and its natural rhythms. When Tommy Dukes speaks of “the resurrection of the body” and the “democracy of touch” (75-6), she is genuinely touched and in complete agreement, even though she understands such ideas through an unlearned, intuitive wisdom rather than logical reasoning: “she didn’t at all know what the latter meant, but it comforted her, as meaningless things may do” (76). Like Lazarus and like Jesus himself, she longs to return to life. But the metaphorical resurrection for which she yearns, is identified with the body’s natural awakening, the awakening of the senses, something quite different from orthodox religious rebirth.

Connie initially finds refuge in the woods. Like many other Lawrencian heroines, she finds in nature, not just relief from the everyday world, but an altar, a hospitable temple where she will come in communion with the cosmos. The wood is often a melancholic place, a place of “grey hopeless inertia, silence, nothingness” (65), yet it is also filled with life and the

possibility of rebirth, as she rediscovers when she suddenly comes across a newly-born chick playing with its mother: “Connie crouched to watch in a sort of ecstasy. Life! Life! Pure, sparky, fearless new life! New life!” (114). It’s this natural, unconfined force of life which brings her close to the gamekeeper. Holding the tiny fledgeling in her hand, Connie cries as she beholds the miracle of creation and Mellors can sense the intensity of her feelings, her instinctual tender reaction to Life. His masculinity is aroused by Connie’s tenderness towards birth which is the most vivid demonstration of life.

Connie feels her soul growing and deepening as she moves in the rhythms of life she discovers in the forest. Her relationship with the natural world is completely different to that of Mellors. For him, the wood is just a refuge, a place where he can find some peace away from the hostile world of the machine. Although Mellors, as a gamekeeper, spends most of his time in nature, his connection with it has nothing of the mystery and profundity that Connie’s has:

Constance sat down with her back to a young pine-tree,  
that swayed against her with curious life, elastic and  
powerful rising up. The erect alive thing, with its top  
in the sun! And she watched the daffodils go sunny in  
a burst of sun, that was warm on her hands and lap. Even  
she caught the faint tarry scent of the flowers. And then,  
being so still and alone, she seemed to get into the  
current of her proper destiny. (86)

Connie's mystical connection with nature and the body is alluded to in a language that provides a spontaneous, natural release and frees her from the bonds of the self, the stark limitations of a meaningless existence. It endows her with the strength to endure and the space to breathe in, while she examines her inner needs in order finally to be able to take the next step in her personal development to achieve and establish a healthy relationship with life.

### **The Body and its Feminine Language**

Connie, as a Lawrencian woman, has accepted the fact that she cannot know or articulate the mystery even as she participates in it. Words cannot sufficiently express the deep truths of the unconscious, and the reckless utterer of such words becomes, not a sage, but a grotesque figure like Sir Clifford: "clapping and gurgling" (*LCL* 138). Over his books, Connie becomes an enemy of language within the novel; she deconstructs the word and replaces it with the semiotic language of the body. Lawrence is her great ally in this task, as he consistently undermines the male order of narration through the employment of a purely feminine language, a fluid, oceanic language which sweeps syntax away and keeps going "without ever inscribing or discerning contours" (*NFF* 259). A fine example of this language is found in the love-making scene. Connie's erotic ecstasis is given in a purely semiotic, bodily language, which captures her feeling of the dissolution of the self, which Lawrence here describes uniquely from the woman's point of view.

And it seemed she was like the sea, nothing but dark waves  
rising and heaving, heaving with a great swell, so that slowly  
her whole darkness was in motion, and she was ocean rolling

its dark, dumb mass. Oh, and far down inside her the deeps parted and rolled asunder, in long, far-travelling billows, and ever, at the quick of her, the depths parted and rolled asunder, from the centre of soft plunging, as the plunger went deeper and deeper, touching lower, and she was deeper and deeper and deeper disclosed, and heavier the billows of her rolled away to some shore, uncovering her, and closer and closer plunged the palpable unknown, and further and further rolled the waves of herself away from herself, leaving her, till suddenly, in a soft, shuddering convulsion, the quick of all her plasm was touched, she knew herself touched, the consummation was upon her, and she was gone. She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman. (*LCL* 174)

Lawrence, once more, employs a language full of repetitions and exclamations, a “fluid” feminine language very close to the lyrical language he employed in *The Lost Girl*. This sort of language, as we have seen, is what Hélène Cixous, almost five decades later, in her famous essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975), would consider a language able to “give [the woman] back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (*NFF* 250). It is not accident, surely, that Cixous should entitle one of her books, *The Newly Born Woman*, for the above description of Connie’s vaginal orgasm is a great example of the kind of text which, for Hélène Cixous:

will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising,  
insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous,

perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying  
colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we  
[women] feed. (*NFF* 260)

In Lawrence's writing, female sexuality finds utterance in an almost subversive language which reflects the openness and plurality of female sexuality.

### **Connie: The Body Protectress**

Connie is now on the threshold of discovering her long repressed womanhood. She is led to her rebirth, her reward for listening to the sacred language of the body and the senses, for obeying its natural drives. For the Lawrencian heroine, this journey into subterranean world of the self is a mystical experience which will ultimately lead to salvation: "Ye must be born again! – I believe in the resurrection of the body!" (*LCL* 85). Connie becomes a priestess in the holy land of the senses and instincts, a champion of "warm blood-sex that establishes the living and revitalizing connection between man and woman" (327), a participant in the holy mystery of life, the life opposed to death, the death delivered by the machine which has distorted the natural habitat of the human beings and their very consciousness: "The utter negation of natural beauty, the utter negation of the gladness of life, the utter absence of the instinct" (152).

As the novel develops, Connie learns to appreciate the sacredness which Lawrence attributes to the sexual act. Although there are times when she feels "cold and derisive," repelled by her lover's body, viewing it as "a foolish, impudent, imperfect thing, a little disgusting in its unfinished clumsiness" (172), these moments of scepticism are short-lived;



shortly after this she “[clings] to him in terror” (173), begging him not to leave her. Connie is split between the consciousness of the mind and that of the blood, and she cannot be whole until she finally acknowledges in her soul the sacred (phallic for Lawrence) consciousness which brings her into holy communion with the profound mystery of the cosmos. T.H. Adamowski draws an interesting parallel between Lawrence’s idea of the conscious ego, which is synonymous with self-awareness and opposes the true self of the bodily otherness, and Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of the “reflective consciousness,” the state where the false human ego operates, and is the opposite of the “prereflective consciousness,” the consciousness which precedes it and brings us into living relationship with objects (Squires & Jackson 41). Adamowski points out that Sartre, like Lawrence, “believed that we fear this monstrous spontaneity [the prereflective consciousness] because it leaves us perpetually open to that ‘unknown’ that lies before us in the future.” Lawrence too finds *life* on “this level” where the “deeper spontaneous self” lies (42). *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, in particular, presents the existential situation in which modern men and women generally find themselves, caught in the constant conflict of reflective consciousness, “ ‘the consciousness which says *I think*’ ” with the deeper self of “flesh and bone” (43).

Once Connie comes into communion with her “prereflective consciousness,” which brings her into living relation with the reality around her and the objects of this reality, she becomes the body-protectress. She discovers the body as distinct from the self, the body as otherness, and explores it as something long lost and newly found. The body arouses in her conflicting feelings of curiosity, desire and revulsion. She checks it before the mirror as it were a thing alien to her, she explores avidly the body of her lover, attracted, desirous and yet at times visited by sudden thoughts of its sheer strangeness: “surely that thrusting of the man’s buttocks was supremely ridiculous” (*LCL* 126). But it is through the body, hers and Mellors’,

that she will be reborn. The body in nature becomes the central symbol, importing into the novel the deepest significance of the pagan myth and ritual. The two lovers decorate their bodies with flowers and dance in the rain like Adam and Eve. Connie becomes part of the rhythm of nature, “gone in her own soft rapture, like a forest sighing with the dim, glad moan of spring, moving into bud” (138). She carries the forest in her soul and the forest carries her into an ecstatic, metaphorical world, more real, more free than she had hitherto experienced, a world where she may feel at home. Through the body, Connie joins the sacred as the body here, once more, becomes a religious symbol.

As we saw, it is in the wood, through nature that Connie’s body reestablishes the connection with the sacred, religious properties of the cosmos and sexual-spiritual regeneration is achieved. As John B. Humma suggests, “the metaphors in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* – linking bird, beast and flower (and air, water, earth) with one another and with hero and heroine – organically emblemize both the sexual-spiritual union of Connie and Mellors and a similar union [...] between them and the sacred wood, which is in effect the ‘cosmos,’ to use Lawrence’s term” (86-7). This connection between nature and the (human) body, brings to the surface a primordial consciousness, which in the Lawrencian lexicon is identified with the “oldest religion, a cosmic religion the same for all peoples, not broken up into specific gods or saviours or systems” (*Phoenix* 147). This is the tender, phallic consciousness described in the chapter on *Women in Love*, the knowledge in the flesh, which can only be found through the sacred union of the male and the female.

## The Phallic Consciousness and Connie's "Submission"

Connie does not have to undergo a long process of initiation and trial in order to realize that she is shackled by the unnatural, deadening environment she lives in. She immediately recognizes the necessity to escape, and boldly throws herself into the liberating experience that is the dynamic, revitalizing force of the sexual act. In a moment of epiphany, Connie discovers the mysterious power hidden in the male sexual organ: "Now all her body clung with tender love to the unknown man, and blindly to the wilting penis, as it is so tenderly, frailly, unknowingly withdrew, after the fierce thrust of its potency" (*LCL* 174). As mentioned in the chapter on *Women in Love*, Lawrence has often been accused by feminist theorists of phallogocentrism, an insistence on a male interpretation of sexuality. On the other hand, as many other eminent critics have remarked, it is extraordinary how closely Lawrence associates the phallus with feminine qualities: Hilary Simpson points out that Lawrence has interpreted the phallus according to the needs of his worldview, often identifying it with the sexual, but at times acknowledging in it something larger than the sexual, a numinous symbol of the cosmic forces of creation. She even draws a parallelism between Lawrence's conception of the phallus and the Lacanian one, which sees it as "the symbolic nexus of a multitude of possible relationships." (Simpson 133) (See also chapter on *Women in Love* for more on the concept of "phallic consciousness"). In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in particular, Simpson claims, the phallus "becomes linked with rhythmic cycles and with a rootedness in natural processes more usually assigned to female sexuality than to the sporadic and unpredictable manifestations of male desire" (134). H.M. Daleski too, in *The Forked Flame*, distinguishes between a "glorification of the 'phallus,' of male power, that is, and an adherence to the 'phallic consciousness' [...] an adherence to a sensitive if earthy physical awareness, to the senses, to a vital spontaneity, to tenderness – in a word, to the female

principle” (Daleski 260). Lawrence clearly considers phallic consciousness to be synonymous with passion, and passion is the source of the enduring strength shown by all major Lawrencian heroines. Daniel J. Schneider also draws attention to the feminine element found in Lawrence’s philosophy of the phallus: “Lawrence’s phallic consciousness, so closely related to his emphasis on warmth and tenderness, is also a kind of feminine consciousness, of the sort traditionally associated with the loving and caring mother” (Schneider 183). James Cowan notices the way Lawrence applies phallic symbolism to nature: the tree under which Connie sits is ““rising up in elasticity,”” it is an ““erect”” and ““alive”” thing. He notes that this ““suggests the mythic powers that Lawrence evokes in ‘Pan in America’ in the figure of the pine tree in Kiowa Ranch,”” which gathered ““earth power from the dark bowels of the earth.”” Connie senses the same power in the daffodils which ““are modelled in the Earth,”” something that in Cowan’s view affirms ““the female generative function of incarnation”” (Squires & Jackson 110). The phallic power which springs from the earth is here equated with the feminine omnipotence of nature: the constantly creative, regenerative force that brings forth and maintains life. This assimilation between phallic power and female tenderness is not accidental. By his last years, when *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was written, Lawrence had abandoned the earlier dogmatic ideas about leadership and power as he had expounded them in “The Crown.” In a letter to Rolf Gardiner in 1928, Lawrence drops the notion of “an obsolete form of leadership” in favour of the more humane and realistic concept of a ““reciprocity of tenderness”” (*L vi*. 307), which is mutual love, the true communion between people, a “democracy of touch,” as Tommy Dukes puts it (*LCL* 75). It is indeed an exciting and comforting concept which opposes the authoritarian attitudes that Lawrence had exposed in *The Plumed Serpent*.

In the second version of the novel, the one published under the title *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, Lawrence makes an important distinction between the penis and the phallus: “For this is the difference between the two: the penis is a mere member of the physiological body. But the phallus, in the old sense, has roots, the deepest roots of all, in the soul and the greater consciousness of man, and it is through the phallic roots that inspiration enters the soul” (*FSLC* 440). Connie is blessed with this inspiration. She admires Mellors genital organs, as Ursula admires Birkin’s body, as symbols of life and fertility, and allows herself to be initiated to the phallic mystery, here synonymous with the mystery of the life source which is female: the Father who should, more properly, be called Mother (*Foreword* 470). Like Ursula, Connie refuses the patriarchal “order,” the “symbolic” to use the Kristevan term, of the phallus as the emblem of male domination. What she celebrates in the inner, silent, creative, “feminine” power of the phallus:

It had been so perfect! And she loved it so!

And only now she became aware of the small, bud-like reticence and tenderness of the penis, and a little cry of wonder and poignancy escaped her again, her woman’s heart crying out over the tender frailty of that which had been the power. (*LCL* 174)

It is Mellors, of course, who is the carrier of the male organ, the indispensable instrument for her metamorphosis, but that does not mean that Connie has to submit to him as a man. On the contrary, the man, the keeper of the phallus, becomes her servant, the instrument that opens the door to real life in desire, to real womanhood. Lawrence also makes clear the difference between the gamekeeper’s authentic male passion and the empty masculinity of Michaelis, a

wholly new character in the second version of the novel, one of her husband's crowd with whom she also has a brief sexual affair. He is an emotionally impotent man and thus an unsatisfactory lover who fails to accept and embrace Connie's sexuality. She remains indifferent to the promises Michaelis gives her immediately after their love-making, promises of a life of luxury, which she knows he is in a position to fulfill. Michaelis cannot offer her real life in the body, as Parkin does; he can only promise to satisfy a social ambition. He is incapable of loving a woman, of joining his body to hers and becoming a real partner in life physically and spiritually.

### **The Male Love and its Transformative Power**

Connie is worshipped, albeit very differently, by Sir Clifford and Mellors, her two men. Clifford's love is tainted with the century's malaise. It is a distorted worship "based on enormous fear, and even hate, of the powers of the idol, the dread idol. All he wanted was for Connie to swear, to swear not to leave him, not to give him away" (*LCL* 111). It is sterile and suffocating, and like Daphne in *The Ladybird*, Connie is repelled by her husband's declaration that she is for him "the great I-am." She sees this as an effort to impose on her "this ghastly burden of all-life responsibility" while keeping her "in the void" (112) trapped in Wragby forever bound in his service. Clifford's worship, no matter how sincere or deeply felt, is the wrong kind of love to be offered to a real woman. It seeks to force devotion and exploit it; it appeals to the sentiment and possibly the intellect, but takes no account at all of the vital spontaneous, numinous senses of the body.

Mellors, on the other hand, worships her in the body and with his own body. She is his saviour because she has "connected him up again" (118); she has broken his isolation and re-

established the sacred communion with his manhood and his phallic energy. Similarly, Mellors has seen the woman behind the persona of Lady Chatterley, this false ego of a self corrupted by modern habits and imposed ideas, and has managed to penetrate to the true core of her existence, her femaleness. Thus he has truly succeeded in liberating her, whereas (other) “men were kind to the *person* she was, but rather cruel to the female, despising her or ignoring her altogether” (121). Clifford is unable to see the real female in his wife; he is not only physically impotent, he has also sacrificed intuition to intellect and thus lost the ability to enter the psychic, feminine realm where true womanhood is to be found. His wife remains a stranger to him to the end: he can only trust a spirit-to-spirit connection with her, a connection which is not sufficient for a rich and profound man-to-woman relationship. It is the husband, not the adulteress, who is the real sinner of the story, for he has committed the sacrilege of ignoring the female passion he should have discovered and embraced in his wife. He receives a cruel punishment for this failure when towards the end of the story he makes an attempt to restore some kind of contact with the female body in the person of his nurse, Mrs Bolton, but it is as vain as it is pathetic: “And then he would put his hand into her bosom and feel her breasts, and kiss them in exaltation, the exaltation of perversity, of being a child when he was a man” (291). The nurse becomes the substitute female, a woman who takes in his consciousness the form of a Magna Mater, a Great Mother, a quasi-maternal, quasi-erotic presence deprived of her natural earthy dimension, deprived of her real female substance, the sacredness the body endows her with.

This almost infantile state of mind into which he lapses, causes the emergence of a “certain remarkable inhuman force,” which makes him a more successful but rather inhuman businessman. It is a negative metamorphosis, the reverse of Connie’s own, based on the unnatural dependence on Mrs Bolton’s perverse maternal presence, which inevitably results

in “the utter abasement of his manly self.” It is worth noting that Mrs Bolton is both “thrilled and ashamed” (*LCL* 291) by his absolute reliance on her. As an employee, she may well feel a thrill at her employer’s submission. But as a woman who has loved her first husband with the same earthy, bodily love with which Connie loves Mellors, she feels repelled if only “in some corner of her weird female soul” “the remotest corner of her ancient healthy womanhood” (292). Mrs Bolton is not really as negative a female character in the story as she may seem. Lawrence trusts that her female instinct understands perfectly well that this is only a deceptive, illusory relationship with a man who can neither understand nor claim a woman’s otherness.

Mellors, on the other hand, serves this otherness in a way that is as natural as it is efficient. He knows that a woman needs to be loved in the womb, and he is both willing and able to satisfy this need. He sees Connie as the female other, the union with whom will establish the sacredness of their relationship and light the “little, forked flame” between the two, their personal “Pentecost,” the fiery sign of the benediction of their relationship, and give both of them the strength to live together in a world apart from the chaos around them, a base from which they can resist the monstrosity of the inhuman reality dominated by “Cliffords and Berthas, colliery companies and governments and the money-mass of people” (300-1).



## Lawrence and the “Four-Letter” Words

In this final version of the novel Lawrence depicts a much more sophisticated Mellors capable now of articulating his creator’s ideas about the state of the world and human relationships. Leaving behind the image of the working man, Mellors has now gained a commission after his heroic performance in the war. His reading of books renders him an eloquent defender of his ideas and values and this becomes more evident in his letter to Connie which concludes the book. There, Mellors sees the union with the female as a kind of religious ceremony, a natural physical expression of respect to the eternal, infinite universe: “We fucked a flame into being. Even the flowers are fucked into being, between sun and earth. But it’s a delicate thing, and takes patience” (*LCN* 301). Here Lawrence makes a valiant effort to put his metaphysics into words, combining a poetic, transcendental language, rich in biblical allusions, with a colloquial, provocative language of the body, knowing that many would find it vulgar and obscene. Lawrence has no doubt that we must dare to use these allegedly obscene words, for he sees them as “a natural part of the mind’s consciousness of the body” (309). In Mellors’ letter to Connie, Lawrence puts four-letter words in the context of a biblical, spiritual language thus schematically combining two large and important fields of signifiers and signifieds: this bold combination of the sacred and the profane serves as a signifier of his dualistic metaphysics of life in the mind and life in the blood. Lawrence sees them as two indissoluble concepts, which must coexist and serve one another. A human being cannot live in harmony with his/her real self without liberating the mind from its terror of the body (*LCL* 309). Mellors here is “able to *think* sex, fully, completely, honestly and cleanly” (308). There is chastity about sex, which strips a word like “fuck” from its vulgarity and turns it into a signifier of the sacredness of sex, seen as a ritual that follows the natural rhythms of life, “the rhythms of the sun in his relation to earth,” and

man and woman suffer when cut off from these natural rhythms, “bleeding at the roots [...] cut off from the earth and sun and stars” (323).

Connie is acutely aware of this loss of contact with the authentic self and its dire consequences, and this is what truly makes her the central character in the novel. Her fight for life is the main theme, and her quest towards self-realization provides the main plot. At the end, what brings Connie to the final purification of mind and soul is not her sexual liberation, which alone would be regarded by Lawrence as a peculiar, probably dangerous, sort of selfishness, but the regeneration of the senses and the body through the acceptance of their physicality. Mellors is the initiator of her rebirth, combining sexuality, tenderness and phallic power, and becomes a creator too as he offers Connie life both in the metaphorical sense (the resurrection of her body) and the literal (the conception of the baby).

### **Connie, Motherhood and the Taming of Female Anger**

Although unborn, the child provides one of the major symbols in the story: it epitomizes the real union of the male and the female; it is the bond between the human and the source of life that lies beyond; it is the fruit of the harmony established between the mind and the body, which results in the birth of new life. Connie yearns for motherhood, not out of a “benevolent spiritual will” (*FU* 50), which Lawrence considers the most common motive that drives women to childbearing, but out of a true woman’s unspoken mystical urge “to have a child to a man whom one adored in one’s bowels and one’s womb.” Even so, she still had to fight “the devil of self-will in her breast” (*LCL* 135), the wild bacchanalian passion that would see the man as her “temple-servant,” “dwindled to a contemptible object, the mere phallos-bearer, to be torn to pieces when his service was performed” (136). Once more, Lawrence

warns against the female will, the obstinate desire of the woman to keep herself intact, uncontaminated by male intrusion. Connie often finds her will threatening to wrench control and break forth like a fiery force. At times, she finds this call of the wild self quite irresistible:

Ah yes, to be passionate like a bacchante, like a  
bacchanal, fleeing wild through the woods. To call  
on Iacchos, the bright phallos that had no independent  
personality behind him, but was pure god-servant to the  
woman!

The dark side of female power is here, once more, identified with the obstinate will, a result of and reaction to social roles and restrictions imposed on women. Lawrence considers it a curse, for it tends to smother the real need of the woman to find peace and pleasure in her “real” womanhood. This feminine need for satisfaction can only be fulfilled through the abandonment of the female to the male she wants: when Connie was thinking of “beating down the male” she could at the same time feel her heart heavy. “She did not want it.” She had realized the need to “sink in the new bath of life, in the depths of her womb and her bowels that sang the voiceless song of adoration” (136). She sees the baby as the symbol of new life between her and the male, and it made her sink “deep to the centre of all womanhood, and the sleep of creation” (135). Connie starts wishing for a baby soon after her first sexual intercourse with Mellors. It’s the act of love-making which awakens the maternal instinct in her, not vice-versa. Sex is apocalyptic; it opens the way to discover life and its secrets, it leads to salvation of the human instinct and feelings. Motherhood here is not just about having children; more than that, it is a natural instinctive way to embrace creation, to

appreciate and adore the miracle of life in an intuitive, psychic way. In this sense, Connie will never become a conventionally ideal mother, the tender Madonna figure with the baby in her arms. As a mother, she is likely to possess something of the fierce independent spirit of Artemis who will seek for freedom in the embrace of nature, the female warrior aggression of an Amazon who will never compromise, even the narcissism and sensuality of Aphrodite, which will keep her in the arms of the man with whom she joined. Motherhood is seen as a universal principle, but also as a gift that is the privilege for woman, a concrete proof of her connection with the other. It is not ego fulfillment or even spiritual satisfaction, but a mysterious ritual that celebrates every aspect of the life force and brings the woman in touch with physical reality, the reality of the body.

The character of Connie Chatterley allows Lawrence to explore different aspects of the issues which lie at the heart of his worldview. Sex, motherhood, womanhood and their interrelations acquire here their most complete expression in the Lawrencian canon, and combine to give utterance to the most profound expression of his cosmic philosophy. Once more, the artist locates his struggle with these ideas in the locus of the feminine psyche. It is Connie's intuitive awareness of the loss of the self and her desire to restore her feminine authenticity that is the generative theme of the plot. And it is finally her willingness to "submit" to the male otherness Mellors represents, which, thanks to her sound female instinct, she is able to acknowledge and appreciate, that provides the resolution, the final triumph of the body and the sensual world of feelings and emotions for which Lawrence yearned.

## CONCLUSION

It is a well documented fact that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century many artists of different persuasions were all seeking replacements for the old social and cultural norms that were looking increasingly inadequate, false and after the First World War downright destructive. Lawrence sought a path away from the stifling confines of western rationalism, and his powerful and original fiction, not only questions the tenets of modern life, but suggests that the only way out of the sorry mess mankind has created for herself is the rediscovery and acceptance of archetypal human emotions. By extolling the special virtues of feminine nature, in particular feminine closeness to the instincts and affinity with Nature, Lawrence allots to women a determining role in the quest for the salvation of humanity. Like modern feminists, his main purpose, apart of course from the creation of his art, was to construct a new feminine identity, and he did so artistically by refusing to follow the logic of the patriarchal order, consciously or not. This new feminine identity is nothing more and nothing less than the discovery of the authentic female self, a self closely connected with a return to the natural values of life of which the most important are desire for and love of the other sex, values which Lawrence believes to be far from the merely sensual.

This insistence upon the redefinition of the roles of men and women along lines that looked as much backwards in time as they did forwards into the future, earned Lawrence a reputation for misogyny which though not really deserved, is not difficult to understand. To attain a new equilibrium for a civilization that has lost its bearings, it is necessarily to make radical changes, and in his search for a sustainable way of life in accord with what he saw as true human nature, Lawrence sought to formulate new roles for both sexes. His proposed solutions ran contrary to the dominant patriarchal trends, but also contrary to much feminist

thought, especially that which did not go any further than the demand for equal rights. But all the evidence one needs about his attitude to women is there in the many positive female characters in his fiction. Although reformers tend to be dogmatic, and Lawrence is often susceptible to the lures of dogma, yet, in spite of his relentless pursuit of a theory that could form the basis for a better life on earth, his basic intent is remarkably open. Heroines (and it is almost always heroines rather than heroes) frequently break free of stereotyping and dogma to the extent that one is tempted to speak of them as defying authorial intention. There is something totally fascinating about the way Lawrence's female characters refuse to succumb to stereotypes, social and literary, but think, feel and act with maturity, intelligence and resoluteness that distinguish them from the males. Although their choices at the end are predetermined, as they are purely creations of the artist's mind, they expose a clear argumentation and free spirit which exceeds authorial intention and in most cases earn the reader's approval who immediately perceives this independent reasoning articulated by them. The tale shows them to be, not only individual and free within their fictional context, but also inspirational examples of an alternative paradigm. Lawrence, being a man who could still believe in the possibility of better, healthier, more balanced human societies, uses them as healthy examples of human being in constant search of true meaning.

This bold determination to hope is in itself something unusual that distinguishes Lawrence from other canonical authors. Though, like many of them, he was strongly attracted to the eclectic adoption of elements found in various social cultures and religions, ancient and contemporary, he systematically constructed within the laboratory of fiction characters, situations and conditions that examine the possibility of regeneration and renewal here and now. His view of myth is not anthropological; he sees myth as a living, flexible metaphor for intelligent use in varying conditions rather than as a naive primitive substitute for scientific

knowledge. Thus, his frequent mythicization of women, although not conscious and deliberate, must be seen in this light as constructive re-examination of human social norms, not wilful, arbitrary plundering of traditions past for the construction of exotic stereotypes. It is a sort of mythicization which is in accord with his belief in woman's nature, an essentialist attitude perhaps, but one which is always moderated by the realistic descriptions of these "goddesses" as women who feel and suffer, who refuse to be confined to the sterile life ordained for them by modern civilization, and have the courage to revolt against the conditions that suffocate them, even against their creator.

This tendency consistently shown by Lawrence not to be satisfied with the fall of the declining old order, but actively to seek the emergence of a healthier, more stable one can also be seen most clearly in his use of language which in itself presents a model of the new as he saw it. There is a very striking difference between his male voice with its complete command and accuracy – the very embodiment of the symbolic order – and the rich, sensual female voice he adopts almost always in direct connection with a female character, when, for instance, a heroine experiences a kind of dissolution of the self through the closeness of nature. This is exactly the kind of language Hélène Cixous has defined as feminine, a language springing from the fertile emotional other of the female nature, the "semiotic" language of the feminine body.

In a similar way, Lawrence himself uses language that can be impressionistic as well as highly ordered and formulates theories that leave ample room for the forces that cannot be controlled by reason alone. Indeed, his most urgent recommendations are the descent into the unconscious – which is female – and the reclamation of human instincts – which are wiser than the intellect – and the abandonment of the self to the other, which is sacred.

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