

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

ALL DOWN IN BLACK AND WHITE:

Parallel Symbolic Patterns in
The Rainbow and Women in Love

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

February, 1972



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INTRODUCTION:

Landscape With Figures

In the forty years since his death, critical appreciation of the work of D. H. Lawrence has been constant. It is obvious, however, that just as Lawrence was a controversial figure in his lifetime, the essentially spectacular nature of the content of his work has been a primary factor in his posthumous fame: Lawrence is the poet-novelist of liberated morality, to the popular view at least. Certainly his contribution through art to an inner understanding of the self in such areas has been great. However, rather less attention, until recently, has been paid to the art itself, to the extent that it is separable from content--that is, Lawrence as working poet-novelist. His form and imagery, while conditioned by what he had to say, have, simply enough, been scanted in critical treatments of the content itself.

However, we have apparently grown up or at least grown blase enough to accept what once were outrageous ideas with a

complacent smile, and so more recent critical studies of Lawrence have ignored his soap box and concentrated upon his craft. In truth, of course, the two are not really separable if one seeks a more or less definitive understanding. From the beginning, the critic who ignored Lawrence's way of setting about his work, the colours on his palette, the form that his metaphors took, has had only a superficial understanding of the actual complexity of his ideas.

Lawrence's works tend to fall into separable units for the most part; Sons and Lovers, for instance, is as distinct from The White Peacock as the bulk of the poetry is from the short stories. However, one series of novels was deliberately sequential, and so offers us an opportunity to view his art in a more leisurely way with respect to certain devices and characteristic techniques. The family chronicle that begins with The Rainbow and, through the two Brangwen daughters, Ursula and Gudrun, expands outward into the action of Women In Love, represents an unusually full view, at the sustained narrative level, within the work of Lawrence, a body made up, largely, of short stories and individual, sometimes fairly brief, novels.¹

In this study I have traced a narrow but pervasive and important line of imagery from its first appearance about midway through The Rainbow through its extended and controlling function in Women In Love. The images to which I refer, most of which occur in a multiple symbolic way, are those of colour, particularly black

and white contrasts, as they are manifest in scenes of a somewhat painterly nature; while the visual eye of Lawrence has frequently been remarked, the deliberateness of structure, the carefully loaded elements of scenery, have not been fully recognized. More often than not, he has been thought of as exaggerated in his phrasing, rhetorically self-indulgent, excessive to the point of repetition and obscurantism. The vigour of his views has been taken to indicate an indiscriminant rant in stylistic terms. It is not my intent to try to argue away all charges of weakness, and certainly Lawrence can be repetitious, certainly he can fail at what he is attempting to do. That he was, however, frequently attempting something very deliberate and relatively sophisticated can be appreciated more fully in tracing out the characteristic pattern of imagery with which I am here concerned.

All stimuli and response come through the senses; this is an elementary condition of art. We hear it, see it, feel it, taste it, even, either with the body or, at one remove, with the mind. Indeed, it is upon colour that modern psychology bases much of its scaling of response; colour preferences, colour reactions, in all of what is viewed as normalcy and variation from the norm. Just as shades of blue or green are thought of as cool, depending on their tone, evocative of rest, freshness, or objectivity; browns and reds are warm colours, again, depending on their tone, suggestive of anything from passion and violence to elemental fertility. In brief, there is a generic validity to colour response, with

which every artist works. A landscape in chiaroscuro need only be tinted with the golden green of spring to turn defeat into promise. And it is very much through set landscapes, figures fixed and regarded for the moment from without, that Lawrence provides guidance and commentary upon the characters in his novels. It is instructive to pause and consider just how much of the time Lawrence, regarded as virtually the high priest of the inner self, the prophet of modern psychology in art, does, in fact, look at his characters as objects, creating an inner definition from their outer trappings.

Indeed, Lawrence employs, to great advantage in his best work, at least, what is perhaps best defined as a guidebook style, describing his characters minutely as they occur in a given moment, their appearance, their reactions to other characters, to objects, to themselves. Perhaps for this reason, The Rainbow and particularly Women In Love are, on the literal level, apt to be rather unsatisfactory novels. It is only after reasonably long acquaintance with the works that it becomes clear that the endless wrangling, the eternal self-examination, the wearisome emotional changes, are charged with symbolic significance: every action, every colour, every object, amounts to much more than itself, has a very real existence beyond its literal utility. And thus it is that a satisfactory pattern begins to emerge, a sort of intaglio upon which the action takes place, each character modified by the others, by his surroundings, by his very clothing. As Julian Moynihan observes,

"This prose does its work on the reader's nerves, compelling imaginative assent from below the threshold of consciousness."²

In a sense, this defines the relationship that exists between the two novels as well: the earlier portions of The Rainbow, for example, which are not dealt with to any great extent in this study, are nonetheless as essential to the latter part as a qualifying phrase is to a sentence. In precisely the same way, the entire Rainbow is a modifier to Women In Love, necessary to an understanding of the later novel both imagistically and symbolically, just as, conversely, The Rainbow is only really completed when Ursula's discovery of self is made manifest in Women In Love. Thus, it is not surprising that the novels share a common symbolic pattern, a "particular clothing to their aspirations," as Ursula says in The Rainbow, fields of daisies and marshes full of lilies, black rivers and white moonlight, mud and snow. It is primarily this pattern of black and white, then, with all its associations and auxiliary colours, that I see as the organizing principle underlying both The Rainbow and Women In Love, the wrought iron framework, perhaps, upon which all those brilliantly coloured hats and coats are hung. A poetic framework certainly, less logical than lyrical, but one that supports these mountains of prose as firmly, and rather more beautifully, than the most rigid scheme of rising and falling actions, climaxes and resolutions.

NOTES

1. Of course, the two novels were originally conceived of by Lawrence as only one, but like the sluggish Erewash, the idea overflowed its original banks to become the two longest fictional works in the canon.
2. Julian Moynihan, The Deed of Life (Princeton, 1963) p. 52.

II. The Bridge Over The Marsh:

The Reductive Duality of Symbolism in The Rainbow

It all begins in The Marsh, beside the sluggish Erewash, the dark absorbing blood-intimacy, the white yearning after abstract knowledge, the duality that, for Lawrence, is the principal eternal in the human mystery. It all begins in The Marsh, the centre of a pool where a stone drops, surrounded by ever-widening ripples of energy, circles of experience, the centre of the creative process both within the context of the novel and in terms of its structure. And there is, of course, another aspect of this marsh, where Ursula Brangwen quite literally has her roots, an aspect underlining from The Rainbow's very genesis the novel's concern with corruption, and reduction, indeed, the inevitability of the narrative "breakdown" so often criticized:

For the swan is one of the symbols of divine corruption with its reptile feet buried in the ooze and mud, its voluptuous form yielding and embracing the ooze of water, its beauty white and cold and terrifying, like the dead beauty of the moon, like the water-lily, the sacred lotus, its neck and head like the snake, it is for us a flame of the cold white fire of flux,

the phosphorescence of corruption,
the salt, cold burning of the sea
which corrodes all it touches....
This is the beauty of the swan, the
lotus, the snake, this cold white,
salty fire of infinite reduction.¹

There it is, all of it, a summation, so to speak, of the imagery of darkness and light which germinates in The Rainbow and will come to fruition in Women In Love, the unresolvable paradoxes which, in Lawrence, are not contradictions but cosmic oxymorons. The flux, the flow, the dark subterranean gurgling, is always present beneath the progress of this family chronicle, and it is, of course, a very special sort of chronicle, a three-generational search for a particular kind of internal balance, for, in Lawrence's terms, the "twofold Infinite":

They are eternally separate.... Man knows the great consummation in the flesh, the sensual ecstasy, and that is eternal. Also the spiritual ecstasy of unanimity, that is eternal. But the two are separate and never to be confused. To neutralize the one with the other is unthinkable, an abomination....²

The only way, then, out of the bog, is to light the dark corrupt African night with the cold lantern of the Northern spirit. But it isn't that simple; the one can easily absorb the other, and it is this that The Rainbow is all about. It is fairly clear at the outset, and becomes clearer as the novel progresses, that the main images, symbols and patterns which dominate Women In Love are already present in isolation; they are not yet fully coherent, systematized, so to speak, but strongly potential and expanding,

like an uncompleted web holding the novel together. For Lawrence's connective tissue, perhaps more in The Rainbow than in most of the other major novels, is apprehended rather than comprehended, associative rather than explicit, echoing rather than parallel. When the commentators fail, for instance, to see the relatedness of the marsh plant images attached to Winifred Inger and the liquefaction of Skrebensky's tropical disintegration, they are failing to make the intuitive leap necessary to fullest appreciation of Lawrence's art.

It is possible that this theme of corruption is "haunted by a sense of half-realized significance.... faint.... accidental," as Colin Clarke has asserted.³ But its force is undeniably present, gathering coherence as the novel, allegedly, loses coherence. For, of course, the novel does not break down in a literary sense; to insist that it does is to demand logic where there is primarily poetry. Rather, it breaks down organically, as even Roger Sale inadvertently admits:

The simplest declarative sentence is one of the main aids the novelist has in building up a stable ego, an identity If we turn to a passage in The Rainbow, we can show how Lawrence tries to break down this natural building-up process.⁴

It breaks down, in fact, as Ursula's relationship with Skrebensky breaks down, as Ursula herself breaks down, as, in fact, the Brangwen line, which has been a sort of spinal column for the narrative, breaks down. But like the swamp, still at this point

offering a genuine, if corrupt and perverse, vitality, it breaks down and dissolves to issue forth in the end with a source of life, to build a rainbow bridge across the river of disintegration.

Since the symbolic pattern which is fully developed in Women In Love is not completely realized until Ursula becomes the focus of The Rainbow--and there is no doubt that that novel alters significantly after she does--the main emphasis here will be on the latter portion of the novel. Certainly before Chapter IX, "The Marsh and The Flood," the symbols of darkness, absorption, and the moon-associated female will are present, most notably in the relationship of Will and Anna. The nature imagery is somehow charged with heightened significance, dark clouds scudding across the moon have a resonance of suggestion, daffodils seem somehow more than daffodils. Of course, Will's Gothic cathedral arches and Anna's early vision of the rainbow are main supports to the novel's very framework. But they belong irrevocably to another study. For it is in Chapter IX that Lawrence first makes explicit one of the dominant symbols of both this novel and its sequel: the association of water with darkness and death, absorption, loss of consciousness on all levels.

He went to meet the running flood, sinking deeper and deeper. His soul was full of great astonishment. He had to go and look where it came from, though the ground was going from under his feet.... The water was carrying his feet away, he was dizzy. The water was whirling, whirling, the whole black night was

swooping in rings.... In his soul, he knew he would fall.

As he staggered something in the water struck his legs and he fell. Instantly he was in the turmoil of suffocation. He fought in the black horror of suffocation... always borne down, inevitably down.... Something struck his head, a great wonder of anguish went over him, then the blackness covered him entirely.

In the utter darkness, the unconscious, drowning body was rolled along, the waters pouring, washing, filling in the place (p. 244).

Thus Tom, who has always been "afraid of the unknown in life," succumbs to it. But he had made steps toward the unknown before this, through his darkly sensual relationship with Lydia, each of them entering the other, but equally respecting the other's selfhood, forming, with their relationship, the first rainbow over the flood that ends their explorations.

Will and Anna do not fare so well, in Lawrentian terms. Will Brangwen is--literally--all will. He is seen in terms of some of the same animal imagery later applied to Gerald--the poised hawk, the tiger, the predator always dependent on his prey. Again, it is only through the breaking down of Will's desire for absorptive sensuality, of his smothering will like the smothering flood, which marks a hollow centre, that he can emerge somewhat whole from his disintegration, having discovered physical beauty in his sexual exploration, an exploration violent, beyond love. In fact, his rebirth is incompletely realized; in him the reductive and creative continue to coexist, with Lawrence more or less declaring that it is from his lust for destruction that his creative purpose springs.

But the point is surely to be found in Will's "black and awful" passion, his disintegrative sensuality. He and Anna cannot form a rainbow, anymore than his soul can rise along the Gothic arch of his cathedral. Anna herself rejects her own vision of the rainbow, "a faint, gleaming horizon, a long way off, and a rainbow like an archway.... With satisfaction she relinquished the adventure to the unknown and lapsed into vague content" (p. 192). She has, in fact, lapsed into another version of the over-heated, fecund, but still deadly marsh, the dark insensate side of her being.

And so, after the flood, the focus must shift to Ursula, seen early on, and, in fact, throughout the novel, in images of flowers, at first flowers with no marsh associations, like Birkin's "warm roses of happiness," romantic blossoms open to the sun. It will be her separation from nature, rather than her decay into its corrupt aspect, that will be charted. She becomes, by definition, pagan, a "clean, unchristian" blossom rejecting the absorptive aspect of religion, "this humble side of Christianity, unclean and degrading" (p. 283). Her sensuality and her spirituality at this point are confused, she craves the Son of Man, so to speak, with a religious ecstasy. And into her life comes Anton Skrebensky, a son of man offering ecstasy:

His face was irregular, almost ugly,
flattish, with a rather thick nose.
But his eyes were pellucid, strangely
clear, his brown hair was soft and
thick as silk, he had a slight moustache.

His skin was fine, his figure slight,
beautiful. There was a sense of
fatality about him that fascinated
her (p. 289).

Now the disintegration begins in earnest, the reductive process
is set fully in motion, a wheel rolling smoothly downward, always
downward, toward the end of the novel.

Something as small as the manner in which he takes her
hand in "First Love", Chapter XI, establishes ineffably, suggestively,
Skrebensky's kinship with Loerke of the later novel.

...the close-working, instinctive
subtlety of his fingers.... His
hand was so wonderful, intent as
as a living creature skilfully
pushing and manipulating in the
dark underworld.... (p. 295).

His words are "heat and darkness," his associations, even as early
in the novel as this, are liquid, "drenching, surging", "soft...
like the powerful surge of water" (p. 297). As he kisses Ursula
he is becoming the flood, but the destructiveness inherent in him,
in their relationship, is not made manifest yet, it is only whispered
in word choices, in Ursula's understanding of passion as the "female
triumphant for one moment in exquisite assertion against the male"
(p. 301), Skrebensky's desire in response "to kill himself and throw
his detested carcass at her feet.... to turn round on himself and
rend himself" (p. 303). But they part for the moment on a note of
optimism, in a burst of

dim blue and gold of a hot sweet
autumn.... the world had opened its
softest purest flower, its chicory

flower, its meadow saffron. The sky was blue and sweet, the yellow leaves down the lane seemed like free, wandering flowers (p. 304).

Into this sea of blue and gold, like some malicious Pan, comes Ursula's Uncle Tom, "always like the cynical Bacchus in the picture" (p. 306). Tom has already appeared once, frozen for a moment outside his elegantly fashionable demeanour, as "bestial, almost corrupt... [grimacing] with torment, the teeth all showing, the nose wrinkled up, the eyes unseeing, fixed" (p. 249), altogether very much like one of Halliday's primitive statues in Women In Love. And so he appears again, this time emphasizing that it is, in fact, he, rather than Skrebensky, who bears the strongest resemblance to Loerke:

Tom Brangwen was handsome, with his womanish colouring and dark eyes and black close cut moustache. But there was also something subtly coarse and suggestive about him for all his beauty; his strange, bestial nostrils opened so hard and wide, and his well-shaped head almost disquieting in its nakedness, rather bald from the front and all its soft fulness betrayed (p. 306).

Compare, for example, this description of Loerke:

His eyes were arresting, brown, full....
His fine black hair somehow reminded her of a bat, thin as it was on his full, sensitive-looking head, and worn away at the temples.⁵

In any case, Tom as a Loerke-type presence is developed more fully in succeeding chapters, particularly in his relationship with Winifred Inger and his participation in the mechanical, dehumanizing

system of the collieries (relating him, of course, to Gerald Crich as well, just as Skrebensky is subsequently related somewhat to Gerald).

In this chapter, too, at the wedding of Fred Brangwen to a girl from Salisbury Training College who "knew folk-songs and morris-dances," Lawrence takes his first real look at Ursula, her colouring and clothing, aspects of his characters that he will deal with more and more frequently, especially in Women In Love:

Ursula had a new white dress of soft crepe, and a white hat. She liked to wear white. With her black hair and clear golden skin, she looked southern, or rather tropical, like a Creole. She wore no colour whatsoever (p. 306).

All very virginal. But not only that. "She liked to wear white" as well she might, since she is on the threshold of her first apotheosis of whiteness, the blinding, glittering whiteness of the moon, of frozen fire.

There is a brief interlude along the way, the incident of the barge family to whose child Ursula gives her name and the necklace her uncle had given her, "made of pieces of amethyst and topaz and pearl and crystal, strung at intervals on a little golden chain" (p. 313). As the child reaches for the jewel, it falls

in a little heap on the coal-dusty bottom of the barge. The man groped for it with a kind of careful reverence. Ursula noticed the coarsened, blunted fingers groping at the little jewelled heap.... He took up the necklace carefully and blew the coal dust from it, as it lay in the hollow of his hand....

He held out his hand with the necklace
shining small in its hard black hollow.

'Take it back', he said (p. 313).

But just as she accepts the muddied rings that imagistically echo this moment in Women In Love, Ursula refuses. She clings to this little moment of gem-like beauty as a shield against the disapproving Skrebensky, who, "somehow, had created a deadness round her, a sterility, as if the world were ashes" (p. 314). And the interlude is over, only its echoes remaining to subtly change the tone of the novel's progress. For Skrebensky realizes, out of it, some measure of his emptiness:

Why could he not himself desire a
woman so [as the bargeman had desired
Ursula, cognizant of her perfect
inaccessibility]? Why did he never
really want a woman, not with the whole
of him: never loved, never worshipped,
only just physically wanted her? (p. 315).

As if in time to his thoughts, "a kind of flame of physical desire was gradually beating up in the Marsh, kindled by Tom Brangwen" in the aftermath of the wedding feast (p. 315). When the young people flock out "into the mysterious night," Ursula feels herself "a new being":

The darkness seemed to breathe like
the sides of some great beast....
Waves of delirious darkness ran through
her soul.... The darkness was passionate
and breathing with immense, unperceived
heaving (p. 315-316).

These images of darkness will recur again and again, as will the aura of her dance with Skrebensky:

It would be endless, this movement, it would continue forever. It was his will and her will locked in a trance of motion, yet never fusing, never yielding one to the other. It was a glaucous, intertwining, delicious flux and contest of flux.... a deep, fluid underwater energy (p. 316).

Lawrence abruptly dramatizes this contest of wills by raising the moon, which Ursula perceives as a "powerful, glowing sight looking right into her," with which she desires consummation:

She stood filled with the full moon, offering herself. Her two breasts opened to make way for it, her body opened wide like a quivering anemone, a soft dilated invitation touched by the moon (p. 317).

It is, of course, her element, her emblem, the personification of that destructive female will the novelist devotes so much time to exorcising in Women In Love. This is made explicit in Twilight in Italy, when Aphrodite, goddess of the senses, born of the phosphorescence of the sea foam, is rendered as

the gleaming darkness,... the luminous night... the goddess of destruction, her white, cold fire consumes and does not create.⁶

And so Ursula becomes, almost literally, destructive, cold fire, dehumanized, as Clarke points out, in

an inverse vitality running counter to growth and to warm organic blood desire. Nowhere in the novel is human personality reduced more obviously and more drastically to the human and inorganic, and yet nowhere are we more aware of power and energy....⁷

The recurrent images--steel, corrosive salt, burning moonlight,
the sea--virtually speak for themselves, dominating the scene,
driving out any remnant of the possibility of an ordinary passion:

She was as cold and unmoved as a
pillar of salt.... But he must weave
himself round her, enclose her,
enclose her in a net of Shadow, of
darkness, so she would be like a
bright creature gleaming in a net of
shadows, caught.... She was bright as
a piece of moonlight, as bright as a
steel blade, he seemed to be clasping
a blade that hurt him.... All was in-
tangible, a burning of cold, glimmering,
whitish steely fires.... Looking at him
... a sudden lust seized her to... tear
him and make him into nothing... to
dissipate, destroy... annihilate. She
tempted him.... his hands went over her
... the salt, compact brilliance of her
body.... always she was burning and
brilliant and hard as salt, deadly...
corroding... consuming scathing poison
(pp. 319-320).

And she has him, her first love, she will annihilate him, crush his
will:

hard and fierce she had fastened upon
him, cold as the moon and burning as a
fierce salt.... she was there fierce,
corrosive, seething with his destruction,
seething like some cruel corrosive salt
around the last substance of his being,
destroying him.... her soul crystallized
with triumph, and his soul dissolved with
agony and annihilation (p. 320).

She has, in one way, destroyed him as effectively as the glittering
Alpine snows will destroy Gerald; she has struck the first blow,
so to speak, to the "intrinsic heart of the overweening male" (p. 321).
But it is far from over--his "disintegrative" African pole has yet

to be firmly established in the ooze, and Ursula can still wake, unlike Gudrun after Gerald's death, to "the yellows and deep vibrating reds of autumn," the colours of life, warmth, and creation.

So Skrebensky again goes away, out of sight and, for a while, out of mind, dressed for his departure in a rather self-conscious tailored suit which, Ursula notes, makes him look "very much clothed" (p. 323). She might have said "armored," for in fact this appears to be the first stirring of the clothing symbolism, with its associations of retreat from contact, which will be so important in Women In Love. (Ursula herself has spent the night "covering herself with herself, crouching in bed" [p. 322], so it is only appropriate that the soul-damaged Skrebensky should cover himself in black broadcloth.)

Then follows "Shame", Chapter XII, a chapter largely devoted to another water-associated interlude, the curious affair of Winifred Inger. Like Tom Brangwen, whose perfect physical health is always underlined, despite his intangible aura of unwholesomeness, Miss Inger is first seen as a

rather beautiful woman of twenty-eight, a fearless-seeming, clean type of modern girl.... Everything about her was so well-ordered, betraying a fine, clear spirit... (p. 335).

Perhaps. But Miss Inger of the "straight fine back" and "strong... loins" has hips of clay.

The relationship that Spilka dismisses as "a lesbian affair"⁸ really finds its origins, as it should, in the swimming

bath where Miss Inger, in "rust-red tunic like a Greek girl's," "firm-bodied as Diana," is to give the lesson (p. 336). The pool, in fact, is itself somehow like Miss Inger,

glimmering pale emerald green, a lovely, glimmering mass of colour within the whitish marble-like confines. Overhead the light fell softly and the great green body of pure water moved under it... (p. 336).

Winifred is at home in the water, and is associated with that element throughout her stay in Ursula's life, from the swimming pool to the swamp. The climactic event, so to speak, in the love they tacitly admit, occurs on a dark, thundery night when Winifred takes Ursula for a nude swim:

The electric suspense continued, the darkness sank, they were eclipsed.

'I think I shall go and bathe,' said Miss Inger, out of the cloud-black darkness.

'At night?' said Ursula.

'It is best at night' (p. 338).

And now it is Ursula's turn to experience the annihilation of a perverse passion, destruction by a dark violation of the self. When Ursula cannot find the path to the lake in the heavily symbolic darkness, Winifred is only too ready to lead her to the shore:

And she lifted her in her arms, close, saying softly:

'I shall carry you into the water.'

After awhile the rain came down on their flushed, hot limbs, startling, delicious. A sudden ice-cold shower burst in a great weight upon them... Ursula received the stream of it upon her breasts and her limbs. It made her cold, and a deep, bottomless silence welled up in her, as if

bottomless darkness were returning upon her.... She ran indoors, a chill, non-existent thing.... within her was the void reality of dark space (p. 339).

Lesbian, yes; but a great deal more as well. Many critics have dismissed this affair as a simple manifestation of Lawrence's anti-feminism: Winifred is independent, a budding suffragette, ergo, a lesbian. This might stand up were it not for the relationship he draws between Winifred and Tom Brangwen, and the symbolic and imagistic means he uses to draw it.

As the involvement between Winifred and Ursula begins to decompose--which it does, fairly rapidly--a whole series of new words becomes associated with it. Ursula, for example, feels "poisonous... isolated and deadly.... There was nothing for her anywhere but this black disintegration" (p. 342). Still, she "adhered" to Winifred.

But a heavy, clogged sense of deadness began to gather upon her from the other woman's contact. And sometimes she thought Winifred was ugly, clayey. Her female hips seemed big and earthy, her ankles and her arms were too thick (p. 342).

A little further on, Lawrence sculpts Tom Brangwen in much the same material:

His health [was] as perfect as ever.... The fine beauty of his skin and his complexion, some almost waxen quality, hid the strange repellent grossness of him, the slight sense of putrescence, the commonness which revealed itself in his rather fat thighs and loins (p. 346).

Like Loerke, again, his bald head is "not shiny, rather like something naked that one is accustomed to see covered, and his dark eyes liquid and formless" (p. 346). And as Loerke and Gudrun will in Women In Love, he and Winifred recognize their kinship of dark corruption. Ursula recognizes it, too, has known of it instinctively, in fact, before she and Winifred ever enter Wiggiston, the red-brick town "rapidly spreading, like a skin disease," the "gruesome dream, some ugly, dead, amorphous mood become concrete" where Tom owns his colliery and his mechanized miners (pp. 344-45). As the chapter draws to its inevitable conclusion, as Tom and Winifred are drawn inexorably to one another, they become increasingly dehumanized in Ursula's eyes, as dehumanized as the colliery system around them and the insect-like colliers in their "hard, horny shells" (p. 345):

She [Ursula] saw gross, ugly movements
in her mistress, she saw a clayey,
inert, unquickened flesh, that reminded
her of the great prehistoric lizards.

[Tom] too had something marshy about him--
the succulent moistness and turgidity,
and the same brackish, nauseating effect
of a marsh, where life and decaying are
one (p. 350).

The relationship of the marsh to the breaking down of the human balance, the swinging of the scale downward to the purely unilluminatedly sensual, is of course not as explicit here as it will become in Women In Love. There is only the association of decay with perversity and dehumanization which will be translated into iciness

as well in the later novel; here it is still, like Tom, "warm clay lifted through the recurrent action of day after day by the great machine from which it derived its motion" (p. 351). But the seeds of the later marsh flowers are already present. As Spilka has noted, of a slightly divergent but related theme,

this is typical of Lawrence's social insight--this lumping together of inverted lovers with an industrial system which dehumanizes its adherents: hence in Women In Love, the perverted artist, Loerke, reduces even art to the interpretation of industry, in terms of pure motion and service to the machine, with the human element left out.⁹

So Winifred is left, "a good mate" for Tom and Wiggiston, while Ursula continues to move outward in "Widening Circles", through the dehumanized world of Brinsley Street with its neat rows of nullified students, objects going somehow bad inside, past Anthony Schofield with his satyr's eyes and his offer of the pastoral life, through fields of snow drops and across the falsely Gothic quadrangle of the somehow compromised college. It is this portion of the novel that most strongly supports Edward Engleberg's contention that The Rainbow is, in fact, a modern Bildungsroman, concerned with Ursula's education and experiences.¹⁰ This is easier to accept if a somewhat specialized definition of education is employed, since it seems clear that Lawrence is primarily concerned--always--with Ursula's development as an internal creature, with grasping what she is--"inhumanly, physiologically, materially.... as a phenomenon."¹¹ And in the last two chapters of the novel,

"The Bitterness of Ecstasy" and "The Rainbow," Lawrence gets right down to the essential carbon.

In fact, these chapters, after Skrebensky's return from the emblematically dark continent, are saturated in palpable blackness, shot through with that dead cold, white fire which has come to represent Ursula as a creature. And it is in these chapters that the cumulative significance of the apparently almost random use of "reductive" symbols throughout the novel begins to become clear, to build to the coherent symbolic form of Women In Love.

Skrebensky returns, literally, from Africa, bringing quite a lot of it with him figuratively, hard on the heels of some realizations of Ursula's on the nature of civilized consciousness, the circle of light in the midst of an unrevealed darkness both monstrous and angelic. And from the first, Skrebensky is an embodiment of darkness, of

the horseman's animal darkness.... the dark, heavy fixity of his animal desire. In his dark, subterranean male soul, he was kneeling before her, darkly exposing himself.... the dark flame ran over her (p. 443).

Skrebensky's is a "splendid-sinister potency, corrupt, fecund, destructive," overlain, but not balanced, by the skin of the minor governing class, a disintegrative force as strong and fluid as the black river beside which they walk, flowing, dissolving, through profound, massive darkness. His absorptive, African sensuality is established in a long evocative ramble, worth quoting at some length for the numerous points it makes, both about Skrebensky,

and, more importantly, about the nature of the force he represents, that pole of equatorial sun destructiveness which Birkin realizes in the later novel:

"...in Africa [the darkness] seems massive and fluid with terror.... One breathes it, like the smell of blood. The blacks know it. They worship it really, the darkness. One almost likes it--the fear--something sensual."

He talked...about Africa, conveying something strange and sensual to her: the negro, with his loose, soft passion that could envelop one like a bath. Gradually he transferred to her the hot fecund darkness that possessed his own blood. He was strangely secret. The whole world must be abolished.... A turgid, teeming night, heavy with fecundity in which every molecule of matter grew big with increase, secretly urgent with fecund desire, seemed to come to pass.... The deep vibration of the darkness could only be felt.... He seemed like the living darkness upon her, she was in the embrace of the strong darkness.... soft, unutterably soft, and with the... relentless softness of fecundity....

He kissed her, and she quivered as if she were being destroyed, shattered. The lighted vessel vibrated, and broke in her soul, the light fell, struggled, and went dark. She was all dark, will-less....

(p. 447).

But not, of course, will-less for very long. In any case, this is the absorptive, annihilating "love" that equally destroys its object and its celebrant; it contains an element of mutual use, a creation of total dependence on another that is itself destructive. Skrebensky, for example, when he is away from Ursula's physical presence, feels "grey... corpse-like," non-existent (p. 450).

And in Rouen, where Ursula turns away from him after some intangible thing "she had forgotten and wanted", he begins to feel the "death towards which they [are] wandering," with its accompanying yearning, "heavy hopeless warning almost like a deep uneasy sinking into apathy, hopelessness" (p. 456). Skrebensky, after they do part at the end of the holiday, becomes "mad" with alienation, mechanized, "as if turned to clay" (p. 457). He becomes, as Birkin will not, "...sterile,...a spectre, divorced from life. He had no fullness, he was just a flat shape," a flat shape like Women In Love's emblematic sun-annihilated Egyptians (p. 457). He is, almost literally, "walking dead," as Ursula realizes when they next meet, telling him, as she will tell Birkin in Women In Love,

"It's all such nothingness, what you feel and what you don't feel.... I'm against you, and all your old, dead things" (p. 461).

But Skrebensky, unlike Birkin, is not a separate creature able to save himself; he has fused himself with Ursula and thus feels "cut off at the knees.... a crippled trunk, dependent, worthless," a figure which does not exist "vitality." And in all their contact after this there is "a developing germ of death" (p. 462).

Skrebensky's fate is inevitable. His dissociated (from the spirit, from the creative intelligence) sensuality ends in itself. He cannot explore with it, plumb the depths, lead Ursula into the unknown. Yet he remains ambiguous, unsatisfying as a complete symbolic character, not to say a literary one. Perhaps the best gloss on the problem is to be found in Twilight in Italy, in

an essay revolving around the self-consciousness of the flesh in the Northern races and in the Italians, the pursuit of maximum sensation:

In the sunshine [the Italian] basks asleep, gathering up a vintage into his veins which in the night-time he will distill into ecstatic sensual delight, the intense, white cold ecstasy of darkness and moonlight, the raucous, cat-like, destructive enjoyment....

We envy him, we feel pale and insignificant beside him. Yet at the same time we feel superior to him.... Wherein are we superior? Only because we went beyond the phallus in search of the creative origin. And we found the physical forces and the secrets of science.

But we have exhausted ourselves in the process.... We have said, "...let us enjoy our own flesh, like the Italian." But our habit of life, our very constitution prevents [us]. The phallus will never serve us as a Godhead, because we do not believe in it: no Northern race does. Therefore... we turn perverse and destructive, give ourselves joy in the destruction of the flesh.¹²

This, perhaps, is Skrebensky, out of Africa without really being part of it, off to India to subjugate another dark race,

a butt, like the Northerner, because he seeks the destruction of the flesh, or pure gratification through the senses; yet just the capacity to live through the flesh, reductively, like the Italian, is his strength. It is only with Women In Love that Lawrence finds for this teasing paradox an appropriate dramatic correlative.¹³

He is incomplete, thus, in a sense, perverse, and deathly, to sum him up in Lawrentian terms. And, already rejected by Ursula, having broken down completely at hearing her refusal ever to marry him,

he is ready for her final destruction of him.

Where Skrebensky's passion has been dark, secret, furtive, liquid, Ursula's has been bright, exposed, and burning-corrosive: she takes him in the full, blazing moonlight, stripping off her clothes, seeking a "burning consummation with the infinite," a consummation which, as Spilka points out, "asserts the principle of the [moon-associated] triumphant female." And triumphant she is, after a fashion, breaking his soul "in her fierce desire to reach the blazing unknown [reminiscent of Gudrun in Women In Love]: moon and woman together test, expose, penetrate and destroy his inadequate manhood."¹⁴ The scene is the white seashore, the moon "incandescent as a round furnace door... a dazzling, terrifying glare of white light" (p. 479). He feels himself "fusing down to nothingness," she is "like metal," like a knife blade, as she has been before, like a harpy, and he is finally annihilated in this glare of whiteness, a world without relief, a world of the hard white will, just as Gerald in the later novel is destroyed in the endless eternal snow. But she, with her "fierce beaked harpy's kiss" and her destructive strength has killed something within herself as well; he may have emerged from the experience afraid of the darkness, afraid to be alone, but Ursula is "cold, inert dead," all her energy frozen, her vitality blasted by her dehumanization in the moonlight. For it is beyond death, in a sense, not "a part of mortality, but... an utter negation of life, as though [she] had become dehumanized."¹⁵ Only a real dissolution and a cataclysmic

rebirth are open to her, to burst out of her insect-like shell.

And so, the famous dance of the horses. The interpretations of this episode are, like Lawrence's lion and lamb who will never lie down together, so opposed as to be irreconcilable, and so numerous as to defy synthesis. Suffice it to say that in the dissolving world of the rainstorm, with its "great veils of rain swinging with slow, floating waves across the landscape," Ursula experiences a sexual-mystic epiphany, a reunion, of sorts, with animal vitality, with that masculine sexuality in every human that Gerald Crich denies, subjugates, in his relationship with his mare in the later novel. The horse as a symbol is important to Lawrence, as he makes clear in the Fantasia of the Unconscious and in the Apocalypse:

Far back, far back in our dark soul
the horse prances. He is a dominant
symbol: he... links us... with the
ruddy-glowing almighty of potence...
And as a symbol he roams the dark
underworld meadows of the soul. He
stamps and threshes in the dark fields
of your soul and mine.¹⁶

And the actual rhythm of the horses, their turbulent circling, regrouping, "pressing, pressing," functions as a projection of Ursula's own inner turbulence, her mental-emotional struggle back to the life of instinct, away from the realm of will. As Moynihan rather reluctantly phrases it,

Ursula is harried by her own interior
horses, grotesque as that may sound,
but we must assume that the image of
the trampling herd is a valid symbol
for the deep instinctive life of all
of us.¹⁷

So, like an acorn, Ursula falls from the oak tree, from the "old barren form of bygone living," and presently bursts forth like an acorn from its shell, "a naked, clear kernel" (p. 489, 492). Just as Skrebensky's will was destroyed, so has hers, in a sense, been purged: she must be very near to equilibrium within herself between the opposing forces of blackness and whiteness to see the spectrum of colours arching between them, the rainbow. True, a rainbow is a transitory thing on the literal level, giving way to different weather, fading, losing its balance of colour. But so is it a suitable symbol for just that reason; as Engelberg points out, Ursula is herself transitory at the novel's end, "suspended between an end and a beginning", ready to form another kind of arch.¹⁸ She is waiting, open, ready for her completion in Women In Love. She has crossed the bridge over the marsh.

NOTES

1. D.H. Lawrence, The Crown, quoted by Colin Clarke, River of Dissolution (London: 1969), pp. 55-56.
2. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy (New York: 1958), pp. 64-65.
3. Clarke, River of Dissolution, p. 66.
4. Roger Sale, "The Narrative Technique of The Rainbow," (Modern Fiction Studies, V, 1959), p. 30.
5. Lawrence, Women In Love (New York: 1960), p. 413.
6. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy, p: 43.
7. Clarke, p. 54.
8. Mark Spilka, The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence (Bloomington, Indiana, and London, 1966), p. 108.
9. Ibid., p. 109.
10. Edward Engelberg, "Escape From the Circles of Experience" (PMLA LXVIII, 1963), pp. 103-113.
11. Keith Sagar, The Art of D.H. Lawrence (Cambridge, 1966), p. 44.
12. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy, pp. 43, 56-57.
13. Clarke, p. 65.
14. Spilka, pp. 112-114.
15. E.T.'s Memoirs, quoted by Colin Clarke, p. 56.
16. Lawrence, Apocalypse, quoted by Sagar, p. 65.
17. Julian Moynihan, The Deed of Life (Princeton, 1963), p. 67.
18. Engelberg, p. 113.

III. BUTTERFLIES ON SNOW:

Clothing, Colour, and Character
in Women In Love

At the end of *The Rainbow*, for D. H. Lawrence at least, there was nothing so simple as a pot of gold. There was lambent hope, there was "the living fabric of truth," there was

the arc bended and strengthened...
till it arched indomitable, making
great architecture of light and
colour and the space of beauty, its
pedestals luminous in the corruption
of new houses on the low hill, its
arch the top of heaven.¹

And for both Lawrence and Ursula Brangwen, the perceiver of his mystical rainbow, there was Women In Love.

Where The Rainbow was constructed in great vaulting arches of pillared gloom and hovering colour, Women In Love might almost be said to draw its form from an elemental colour wheel, seeking its balance somewhere between the destruction of a blinding white that reflects all colours in its perfect hardness and the dissolution of an equally blinding black that absorbs them all into its infinite self. Thus, the principal governing metaphor of the novel is established, the metaphor of destruction by extremes, the image

of disintegration by heat and annihilation by cold, the war, in a sense, between the Nibelung Gerald Crich and the creature Loerke, between the "bluish corruptible ice" and the black beetles of dissolution (p. 471). The possible interpretations of these symbolic poles are almost too numerous to shake a totem at, but the characters themselves suggest the principal tension, that is, the need to achieve an equilibrium, a "star equilibrium" to quote Birkin, between the rapacious Lawrentian will-cum-intellect and the utter mindlessness of devouring sexuality without a soul. And it is in terms of the characters that the entire spectrum makes its appearance, glittering from the pages like the brilliant costumes at a masked ball.

Costumes, indeed. The most obvious--initially even perhaps obtrusive--display of Lawrentian colour is in his characters' sartorial identity, that physical dressing up of the psyche that Middleton Murry chose to see as "sedulous catalogues of unnecessary clothing."² It is, of course, anything but unnecessary; through her clothing, for instance, Gudrun is literally introduced:

Gudrun was very beautiful, passive, soft-skinned, softened. She wore a dress of dark-blue silky stuff, with ruches of blue and green linen lace in the neck and sleeves; and she had emerald-green stockings.... The provincial people, intimidated by Gudrun's perfect sang-froid and exclusive bareness of manner, said of her, "She is a smart woman" (p. 2).

Simultaneously, she is placed in context against the background of primary black and white:

The sisters were crossing a black path through a dark, soiled field. On the left was a large landscape... all blackened with distance, as if seen through a veil of crape. White and black smoke rose up in steady columns, magic within the dark air (p. 6).

It is a "dark, uncreated, hostile world", peopled by coarse beings who stare after the sisters "with that long, unwearying stare of aborigines" (p. 6). It is a world in which Gudrun is thrown into relief as a "created" individual, one in which she becomes painfully self-conscious,

aware of her grass-green stockings, her large grass-green velour hat, her full soft coat, of a strong blue colour. And she felt as if she were treading in the air, quite unstable, her heart was contracted, as if at any minute she might be precipitated to the ground (p. 6).

In contrast, significantly, no description of Ursula's dress is given at all at this point; in fact, all Lawrence reveals about her is that she has a look of "sensitive expectancy" (p. 2). She seems at once open, receptive, potential, her surface less smooth and polished and complete than her sister's. It is obvious, in fact, that Lawrence has another form of sisterhood in mind for Gudrun, as he begins to make clear in his account of the wedding of Laura Crich. Hermione Roddice appears,

a tall, slow, reluctant woman with a weight of fair hair and a pale, long face.... balancing an enormous flat hat of pale yellow velvet, on which were streaks of ostrich feathers, natural and grey.... She wore a dress of silky, frail velvet, of pale yellow colour, and

she carried a lot of small rose-coloured cyclamens. Her shoes and stockings were of brownish-grey, like the feathers of her hat.... She was impressive, in her lovely pale-yellow and brownish-rose, yet macabre, something repulsive.... Her long pale face seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within her.... (p. 9).

Yellow and brown, blue and green, the elaborately artificially costumed figures of Gudrun and Hermione begin to move into proximity, to align themselves, to initiate the train of association that will freeze them both, inexorably into the ice of overweening intellect. And they will not be alone. Mrs. Crich arrives at the church, pale, yellowish, unseeing and predatory, her hair colourless, her coat and hat of blue silk, shiny and dark. She is followed by her son Gerald, and Lawrence's extended description of him forms the focus of the scene:

Her son was of a fair, sun-tanned type, rather above middle height, well-made, and almost exaggeratedly well-dressed. But about him also was the strange, guarded look, the unconscious glisten, as if he did not belong to the same creation as the people about him. Gudrun lighted on him at once. There was something northern about him that magnetized her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glisten like sunshine refracted through crystals of ice. And he looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing (p. 9).

Gudrun responds powerfully to this element of Gerald's appearance, feeling " a knowledge of him in her essence:"

'Am I really singled out for him in some way, is there really some pale gold, arctic light that envelopes only us two? (p. 9).

It seems, then, that Gudrun instinctively apprehends her place in the scheme of things, her alliance with the Nordic, the glistening, the elaborately clad, just as Ursula feels herself drawn to Birkin, who, like herself, could be naked for all the description accorded him. Their identity clearly lies in another direction.

And so, in this one fairly brief scene, the battle lines, so to speak, are drawn. Lawrence introduces his bodiless intellectuals, exaggeratedly dressed, their sexuality, as it develops, all in their minds. The distinctions between the "forces" are further developed in the chapter "Class-Room," in which Lawrence also brings in a corollary colour pattern, the theme of yellow and red, through a discussion of "the structure and the meaning of catkins" (p. 28). Additionally, Birkin's role in the almost choreographed rhythm of contrast is more fully defined; if Gerald is ice, Birkin is fire, the sun:

She saw, in the shaft of ruddy, copper-coloured light near her, the face of a man. It was gleaming like fire, watching her, waiting for her to be aware (p. 29).

It is to Birkin, in fact, that "the meaning of the catkins," as well as their structure, is apparent. He is struck by the basic importance of their colours:

'Give them some crayons, won't you? he said, 'so that they can make the gynaecious flowers red, and the androgynous yellow. I'd chalk them in plain, chalk in nothing else, merely the red and the yellow.... There is just the one fact to emphasize.... red little spiky stigmas of the female flower, dangling yellow male catkin, yellow pollen flying from one to the other' (p. 30).

Thus, yellow, which, with reference to Hermione and in relation to brown, has been associated with decomposition, becomes, with reference to Birkin, a symbol of a form of maleness. These male associations of "yellow-ness" become even more pronounced in conjunction with Gerald and Gudrun, and thus are reinforced in their icy connotation. But the "pale gold arctic light" which glows about the latter couple is a different yellow from the "warm gold" that later suffuses Ursula's eyes, flying like the yellow pollen, one to the other. While yellow retains its ambivalence throughout the novel (gaining, in fact, yet another tint of meaning in association with Minette), red the "female" colour, is able to retain its meaning more or less consistently, at least partly because it is generally associated with Ursula, as Lawrence emphasizes at a number of critical moments.

The simplicity of Birkin's initial interpretation of these colours is broken in upon, however, by Hermione, as usual elaborately costumed and artificial, a figure infinitely remote from the nature expressed by the catkin images:

She was a strange figure in the classroom, wearing a large, old cloak of greenish cloth, on which was a raised pattern of dull gold. The high collar, and the inside of the cloak, was lined with dark fur, and her hat was close-fitting, made of fur and of the dull, green-and-gold figured stuff. She was tall and strange, she looked as if she had come out of some new, bizarre picture (p. 31).

Her complete lack of contact with the natural, her bodilessness,

made graphic in this description, even becomes clear to Birkin, who, in defining her, defines the "arctic pole" of the novel as well:

'Knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head.... your passion is a lie. It isn't passion at all, it is your will.... You want to have things in your power. And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to know' (p. 35).

Thus far Lawrence has only introduced this glittering half of his cast of thousands; it is not until chapter VI, "Creme de Menthe", that he brings the black element to the fore, when Gerald takes his first plunge into the dark river of London Bohemianism. Minette, Gerald's first contact in this other underworld, is an interesting creation, not least because of the various suggestions offered by her name (among them, a Victorian vulgarism for fellatio). Moreover, as a graphic description of the corruptibility of ice, a sort of decaying ice flower, she serves to provide a bridge between the glistening world of Gerald and the seething world of undifferentiated sensuousness of Halliday's primitive carvings which she strongly resembles (and to which Gudrun, through her art, is curiously linked). Minette is mindless and infinitely corrupt, but she is also frozen:

She was small and delicately made, with fair colouring and large innocent blue eyes. There was a delicacy, almost a floweriness in all her form, and at the same time a certain attractive grossness of spirit.... (p. 55).

As Robert Chamberlain has pointed out in his article on Minette's role in Lawrence's symbolic system, Minette has undergone a transformation, changing from an unrelievedly dark, Egyptian-looking creature named Pussum, dressed in iridescent black in the first edition of the novel, to the unwholesome golden blossom of the later one, a yellow clad figure who, quite naturally, evokes a response in Gerald:³

And he was aware of her blue, exposed-looking eyes upon him. She had beautiful eyes, flower-like, fully opened, naked in their looking at him. And on them there seemed to float a curious iridescence, a sort of film of disintegration and sullenness, like oil on water.... her loose, simple jumper was... made of rich yellow crepe-de-chine, that hung heavily and softly from her young throat and her slender wrists. Her appearance was simple and complete... because of her regularity and form, her shiny yellow hair falling curved and level.... She was very still, almost null in her manner.... (p. 57).

Thus, her associations are Nordic in colour, but in essence she is disintegrating, splashing languidly in what Birkin later describes to Ursula as the "dark river of dissolution". By placing her between the white and the black, but giving her the destructive qualities of each, Lawrence has done a good deal more than avoid a lawsuit.⁴ The suggestion of the decaying flower with which he has infused his descriptions of Minette serves also to introduce another of the novel's principal motifs, that of fleurs-du-mal, a sinister mode that gains in strength as the novel progresses until it culminates in the great annihilation scene that finally returns

Gerald to the bosom of his emblematic element, ice. Like the twin modes of dissolution by heat and darkness and destruction by cold and brilliance, the image of flowers of evil is also dual, involving the sickening decay of white funereal "snow" blossoms and the dark, fleshy turgidity of marsh flowers.

But back in the Cafe Pompadour, Halliday, Minette's opposite number, so to speak, has entered, "a swarthy, slender young man with rather long, solid black hair hanging down from under his black hat, moving cumbrously down the room" (p. 58). (It is interesting to note that he is described as slender, like Hermione, and shares her curious awkwardness of movement.) Thus, white and black seem to coalesce at their corner table, the two extremes united, as it were, in their absolute opposition:

Maxim, the prim young Russian with the smooth, warm-coloured face and black, oiled hair was the only one who seemed to be perfectly calm and sober. Birkin was white and abstract, unnatural, Gerald was smiling with a constant bright, amused, cold light in his eyes, leaning a little protectively towards Minette, who was very handsome, and soft, unfolded like some fair ice-flower in dreadful flowering nakedness.... (p. 62).

And Minette, it develops, is "not afraid of anything except black beetles.... If I see one, it gives me the creeps all over. If one were to crawl on me, I'm sure I should die" (p. 63). So, Lawrence seems to suggest, she probably would.

As Minette in a sense defines her position by this revelation--as well as introducing yet another recurring image, that of

the scarab--so Gerald reveals himself in the early morning scene at Halliday's flat which follows the night of dubious revelry. Halliday's oriental servant is perhaps significantly "dressed in another man's clothes" when they arrive at the flat, "anything but what he seems to be" (p. 66). Gerald has characteristically--and erroneously--identified him according to his appearance, his clothing. It is thus appropriate that, wrapped in a robe of a beautiful bluish colour, with an amethyst hem" Gerald should respond negatively to the nudity of Maxim:

Gerald looked at him (Maxim) and with a slight revulsion saw the human animal, golden-skinned and bare, somehow humiliating (p. 70).

Gerald glanced at him, and saw him, his suave, golden-coloured body with the black hair growing fine and freely, like tendrils, and his limbs like smooth plant stems (p. 71).

Gerald looked at the group of men, the Russian golden and like a water plant (p. 71).

In these brief observations, Lawrence has linked Maxim, "the human animal", both with his images of decay ("golden," in that narrowed sense) and fleurs-du-mal ("water plant"), and with Minette, who, later in the scene, is linked to the Pacific-African image of dissolution as it is symbolized in Halliday's statue:

Strangely elated, Gerald lifted his eyes to the face of the wooden figure. And his heart contracted. He saw vividly with his spirit the grey, forward-stretching face of the savage woman, dark and tense, abstracted in utter physical stress.

It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaningless by the weight of sensation beneath. He saw Minette in it. As in a dream, he knew her (p. 71).

Thus Minette's nullity of manner also becomes part of the pattern; she is identified with greyness, with the mingling of the black and white extremes rather than their balance.

Halliday is a different matter, neither, symbolically speaking, fish nor fowl. And he seems to be suffering under the strain of embodying both the darkness and the warm yellow, for receiving the warmth of fire glow which Lawrence has already identified with the sun, the life force:

He had a rather heavy, slack, broken beauty, dark and firm. He was like a Christ in a Pietà. The animal was not there at all, only the heavy, broken beauty... Halliday's eyes were beautiful, too, so hazel-yellow and warm and confused, broken also in their expression. The fire glow fell on his heavy, rather bowed shoulders,... his face was uplifted, weak, perhaps slightly disintegrate, and yet with a moving beauty of its own (p. 70).

Lawrence, in fact, equivocates somewhat over Halliday: he is guilty of wanting his sensation in the head, but he has not yet driven the life out of what remains of his dark, sensual body.

Birkin, throughout, remains "very white and indefinite (also, incidentally, clad in pyjamas), not to be assigned."

It is actually not until near the end of "Breadalby" that Birkin begins to fully assume his role, to assign himself.

"Breadalby", like the country house from which it takes its title,

is a chapter greatly concerned with talk, intellectualizing, analysis. Hermione sets the tone as she greets the Brangwen sisters in the drive:

Gudrun was the more beautiful and attractive, she had decided again, Ursula was more physical, more womanly. She admired Gudrun's dress more (p. 75).

An extended description of Gudrun's costume then follows, during which Ursula's clothing is scarcely mentioned. Hermione's own prune-coloured dress is revealed as "both shabby and soiled, even rather dirty," a seemingly gratuitous comment by the author, which gains symbolic significance in the chapter's climax when it becomes clear that the tenuous control she maintains over her strange mass of dark thoughts is quite worn out. Her mind becomes chaotic, "darkness breaking in upon it, and herself struggling to gain control with her will, as a swimmer struggles with the swirling water" (p. 97). The only resolution, for her, of this cataclysmic conflict between the hard white will and the rushing black tide is physical violence, directed against Birkin, in a scene that is almost a parody of ecstatic sexual abandonment:

Her hand closed upon a blue, beautiful ball of lapis lazuli that stood on her desk for a paper weight.... Then swiftly, in a flame that drenched down her body like fluid lightning and gave her a perfect, unutterable consummation... she brought down the jewel stone with all her force, crash on his head.... She must smash it, it must be smashed before her ecstasy was consummated.... (p. 98).

Thus, the will can only destroy. All the associative images in

the scene suggest Hermione's connection with the Arctic, the hard, the cold, the forces of icy annihilation. Even her passion is completely cerebral, perfectly cold and white. (And when she awakes from her post-coital sleep, she is aware that "spiritually, she was right.")

Birkin is aware of the significance of this. "'It is no good,' he said, when he had gone past her. 'It isn't I who will die'" (p. 99). As if to prove his declaration, he at once leaves the house and retreats to an ecstatic state of his own, stripping off his clothes in the midst of green nature (grass, fir-trees), rolling around among primroses and hyacinths in a Marvellesque scene of renunciation and regeneration. Revitalized, he dresses and returns to town--hatless and alone. His rejection of the realm of the will, the circles of the bodiless, is almost complete.

The pattern of colour is played upon the novel almost constantly, fragmentarily, like a lighted kaleidoscope, but it is not until the beginning of Chapter X, "Sketch-book," that the images of colour again coalesce with the images of nature in relation to principal characters. On this occasion it is the Brangwen sisters who are partially defined in their symbolic-cum-natural placement:

What she (Gudrun) could see was mud, soft, oozy, watery mud, and from its festering chill, water plants rose up, thick and cool and fleshy, very straight and turgid, thrusting out their leaves at right angles, and having dark lurid colours, dark green and blotches of black-purple and bronze. But 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 (p. 111).

The obvious phallic connotations aside, this is still a revealing passage. Through Gudrun's knowledge, her "sensuous vision", of the water plants, the world of Maxim and the world of Hermione are coupled, and by "the festering chill" (of the will), and the "blotches of black-purple and bronze" their deadliness is emphasized. And this is the "natural" Gudrun, "absorbed in a stupor of apprehension of water plants.... her feet bare, her hat on the bank opposite" (p. 111).

The scene in which Lawrence simultaneously places Ursula is startling in its contrast:

Ursula was watching the butterflies, little blue ones suddenly snapping out of nothingness into a jewel-life, a large black-and-red one standing upon a flower and breathing with his soft wings, intoxicatingly, breathing pure, ethereal sunshine; two white ones wrestling in the low air; there was a halo round them.... Ursula rose and drifted away, unconscious like the butterflies (p. 111).

It is, of course, infinitely tempting to assign character-symbols to these butterflies--it seems so obvious who the white ones, wrestling in the halo, are intended to be. Suffice it to say that the overriding quality of the passage is life and healthy light, brightness, made particularly striking by its proximity to the death-like, reeking water plants. And, at least for the moment, Ursula does not insist upon knowing the butterflies as Gudrun knows the water plants; she is content to "drift, unconscious," a

part of the living nature around her.

Marsh and water are again important images in setting the scene for "Water-Party." Again, in the early pages of this chapter, the two Brangwens are distinguished by the extent of their costumery:

The sisters both wore dresses of white crepe, and hats of soft grass. But Gudrun had a sash of brilliant black and pink and yellow colour wound broadly round her waist, and she had pink silk stockings and black and pink and yellow decorations on the brim of her hat, weighing it down a little. She carried also a yellow silk coat over her arm, so that she looked remarkable, like a painting from the Salon (p. 147).

The description is strongly reminiscent of many of Lawrence's passages on Hermione, with its over-ornamented weightiness, its suggestions of a "remarkable" artificiality. And, of course, it contains pointed references to brilliance, to black, and, primarily, to yellow. In contrast, Ursula is dealt with much more simply:

Ursula was all snowy white, save that her hat was pink, and entirely without trimming, and her shoes were dark red, and she carried an orange-coloured coat (p. 147).

Her snowy-whiteness would be more difficult to rationalize in terms of the over-all symbolic pattern were it not for the mitigating warmth of the orange coat, the lack of any quality of glitter, and the red shoes which might, if it is not stretching a point too far, be taken as a suggestion that she will travel in the right direction. On the whole, she is presented as more natural, less fully armored, perhaps, than Gudrun.

In any case, all dressed up in their symbols, so to speak, the girls proceed to the fateful water-party, a party for which Gerald is responsible, a party which ends in death. Perhaps its main schematic interest lies in the dual confrontations which occur after Gudrun's scene with the Highland cattle (virtually a mocking parody of Ursula's revelatory encounter with the horses in The Rainbow), and in Birkin's elucidation of his vision of ultimate will. This speech draws together many of the main emblems of the novel, arranging them in response to the "alarming" odour of the seething marsh:

We always consider the silver river of life, rolling on and quickening all the world to a brightness, on and on to heaven, flowing into a bright eternal sea.... But the other is our real reality... that dark river of dissolution. You see it rolls in us just as the other rolls-- the dark river of corruption. And our flowers are of this--our sea-born Aphrodite, all our white phosphorescent flowers of sensuous perfection, all our reality, nowadays.... She [Aphrodite] is the flowering mystery of the death-process.... When the stream of synthetic creation lapses, we find ourselves part of the inverse process, the blood of destructive creation. Aphrodite is born in the first spasm of universal dissolution--then the snakes and swans and lotus--marsh-flowers--and Gudrun and Gerald--born in the process of destructive creation (p. 164).

It is a speech of apocalyptic quality, of the end of the world, as Lawrence has complained of the whole novel elsewhere. As Sagar has pointed out, this process of destruction, of "movement toward universal nothing", is paralleled by the plot action between Gudrun

and Gerald, those paradoxically "pure flowers of dark corruption--lilies," as they square off the deadly combat which will end in "the last peaks of snow like the heart petals of an open rose":

'You have struck the first blow,' he said at last. 'And I shall strike the last,' she retorted involuntarily, with confident assurance."⁶

A few pages later, during the lighting of the lanterns, Gudrun and Gerald are "married" in the pale gold, arctic ceremony promised so early in the novel:

Gerald leaned near to her, into her zone of light, as if to see.... And she turned her face to his, that was faintly bright in the light of the lantern, and they stood together in one luminous union, close together and ringed round with light, all the rest excluded (p. 166).

Thus they are joined until death-literally-do them part, Gerald's pure mechanism with Gudrun's destructive will, his glistening iciness with her dark fleshiness, his snow demon with her Aphrodite.

Their union is made even more explicit in "Rabbit," which opens with Gudrun's realization that if she goes to Shortlands as tutor to Gerald's sister Winifred she is, in effect, accepting Gerald as her lover. She is reluctant, but knows she will go "if only to see what it is like. For she had an insatiable curiosity to see and to know everything" (p. 226). Gerald, at approximately the same moment in novelistic time, has recognized something similar in himself, a need for sensation in the head:

After a debauch with some desperate woman, he went on quite easy and

forgetful. The devil of it was, it was so hard to keep up his interest in women nowadays.... No, women, in that sense, were useless to him anymore. He felt that his mind needed acute stimulation, before he could be physically roused (p. 225).

So Gudrun comes to Shortlands,

dressed in blue, with woollen yellow stockings.... Her stockings always disconcerted him, the pale-yellow stockings and the heavy, heavy black shoes (p. 229).

In fact, Gerald sees her as a macaw, his sense of propriety strangely outraged as he compares her startlingly coloured dress to the correct black of the French governess:

At the same time he was finely and acutely aware of Mademoiselle's neat, brittle finality of form. She was like some elegant beetle with thin ankles, perched on her high heels, her glossy black dress perfectly correct, her dark hair done high and admirably (p. 231).

Yet, just as Minette responded to the idea of beetles, so he loathes her, "the little French beetle," he finds her repulsive. Gudrun, on the other hand, pleases him, he feels "the challenge in her very attire." She is dressed, as usual, fit to kill.

But the symbolic center of this chapter is neither Gudrun nor Gerald. It is Bismarck, the great black and white rabbit, Bismarck the mystery, and the confrontation of Gudrun and Gerald with Bismarck's mystery, a quality they can never penetrate:

Gudrun thrust in her arm and seized the great, lusty rabbit as it crouched still in another instant it was in mid-air,

lunging wildly, its body flying like a spring coiled and released... The rabbit was magically strong, and it was all she could do to keep her grasp.... Her heart was arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity of this struggle.... (p. 232).

But Gudrun, although she feels a "heavy cruelty" well up in her as she struggles with the "powerful and explosive" animal, cannot subdue the beast; Gerald can:

A sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came the unearthly abhorrent scream of a rabbit in the fear of death.... He looked at her, and the whitish, electric gleam in his face intensified (p. 233).

Either as white wolf, or as snowy bird of prey, Gerald is the enemy of the rabbit and the force of life that it represents; when Gudrun inquires as to whether it is dead, he replies that it ought to be. For the rabbit, black and white and unknowable, represents the balance of opposing forces as it occurs in nature, incomprehensible to Gudrun who can only view it as "a sickening fool, most decidedly mad." It has suddenly burst into life, dashing round the court where it is imprisoned as though "obeying some unknown incantation," and just as abruptly subsiding into "a soft bunch with a black, open eye, which perhaps was looking at them, perhaps not" (p. 235). The similes in this extended description, "as if it were a flower," "like a furry meteorite," "like a storm," place Bismarck in a universe to which he fully belongs, to whose "unknown

incantations" he responds. "His singleness of being is without reference to them or the only 'life' they understand. They are baffled by him."⁶ The normal black and white self-containment of the rabbit, its natural sanity, remain mysterious to them, although Gerald can observe it ("That's what it is to be a rabbit") (p. 235). It is perhaps significant that the strange child Winifred, who at least realizes the mystery of incarnation embodied in the rabbit--"Let its mother stroke its fur then, darling, because it is so mysterious"--is identified with it early in the chapter through colour, as well as through her own self-containment and preference for animals over most human companionship: "The child wore a dress of black-and-white stripes" (p. 229).

If Gerald and Gudrun are cut off from the mystery of life which the parti-coloured Bismarck symbolizes, there are other mysteries into which this scene does initiate them in flashes of "magical, hideous white fire" and "unthinkable red ether" (p. 235). As they stand together, matching wounds, Lawrence begins to identify the particular red of their blood with, first, the kind of blood intimacy he rejected in The Rainbow, the mutual absorption which is the exact opposite of Birkin's star-equilibrium, and, by close association, with the river of corruption already identified as flowing in Gudrun:

[Gerald] had had knowledge of her in the long red rent of her forearm.... The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the

forever unconscious, unthinkable red
ether of the beyond, the obscene be-
yond (p. 235).

In other words, dissolution. Thus Gerald, who has found himself
unable to accept what might have been a life-giving gift from
Birkin in the form of his blood, "the bright silver river", enters
into a perverted Blütbrüderschaft with Gudrun, an obscene pact of
unspeakable suggestiveness:

... She revealed again the mocking white-
cruel recognition. There was a league be-
tween them, abhorrent to them both. They
were implicated with each other in abhor-
rent mysteries.

"God be praised we aren't rabbits," she said
in a high, shrill voice.

"Not rabbits?" he asked....

Slowly her face relaxed into a smile of
obscene recognition.

"Ah, Gerald," she said, in a strong, slow,
almost man-like way. "--All that, and
more." Her eyes looked up at him with
shocking nonchalance (p. 234-235).

Indeed, they are not rabbits; she is absorbing him into inevitable
dissolution, her nonchalance a social gauge of his more intimate
loss of self. They are not rabbits, because the mystery of life
is dead to them, the balanced black and white mystery, and the
pact they have made is with death. Their mutual committment to
the dissolution of the other.

Just as Bismarck the rabbit is himself inviolate, so another
rabbit, the rabbit associated with Birkin, exists in splendid isola-
tion, free from destructive humanity in his apocalyptic vision--"a
world empty of people, just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting

up" (p. 119). Birkin himself begins the next chapter, "Moony", in isolation, recovering from his Hermione-associated illness, preparing himself, or so it seems, to reject the sort of tie Gerald and Gudrun have accepted. It is a love based on Aphrodite, that goddess Birkin has seen as born out of destructive creation, embodying corruption, and it is this goddess, associated with ice and coldness, with the dead light of the moon with its "white and deathly smile", that Birkin seeks to annihilate in his stone-throwing scene. The imagery is all in black and white, the "fire of the chill night breaking constantly on to the pure darkness" (p. 238).

In an appropriately inverted offering, Birkin throws dead flower-husks to the moon, while cursing it and that aspect of the devouring, the destructive it represents: "Cybele--curse her! The accursed Syria Dea!" In other words, at least in part, the deathliness of the will, most particularly the female will.

This fire of the moon, this egoistic knowledge of sterile sensuality, sums up for Birkin the essence of Aphrodite as the goddess of destruction, whose cold white fire consumes and does not create.

In this light,

The flesh, the senses, are now self-conscious. They know their aim. Their aim is in supreme sensation. They seek the reduction of the flesh, the flesh reacting upon itself, to a crisis, an ecstasy, a phosphorescent transfiguration in ecstasy.⁷

And the moon resists the destructive force of Birkin's barrage of stones as he strives to drive out the "flakes of white and dangerous

fire", becomes a writhing ecstatic monster, shooting out

arms of fire like a cuttlefish, like a
luminous polyp, palpitating strongly....

...like white birds, the fires all
broken rose across the pond... battling
with the flock of dark waves that were
forcing their way in.

The white fragments pulsed up and down...
apart and brilliant on the water like
the petals of a rose that a wind has
blown far and wide (p. 239).

Here, in one brief scene, Lawrence has drawn the novel's dominant images together in, it would seem, Birkin's understanding, his intuitive desire to shatter the center of that rose of frigid whiteness, that gleaming water-blooming blossom, to see if he "could make it be quite gone off the pond," off the pulsing surface of an unself-conscious darkness (p. 240). And Ursula, watching, is afraid, for it is, of course, the remnants of her destructive will which she sees broken and "dancing secretly in a round:"

Ursula was dazed, her mind was all gone.
She felt she had fallen to the ground
and spilled out, like water on the earth.
Motionless and spent she remained in the
gloom (p. 240).

The agony of the moon is, in a startlingly real way, her agony. Yet, even as the moon begins to coalesce, to regain its glistening form, so Ursula begins to return to herself, to become once more, like the reflection in the dark surface of the pond, composed, at peace. Her golden light, that light which Birkin perceives and reaches toward ("There is a golden light in you, which I wish you would give me") is

still not ascendant; her white will, like the frayed image of the moon, is still somewhat intact.

The love scene that follows is consequently seen by Birkin as a battle of sorts, and he isolates her will in her insistence on his assurances of love:

Your insistence--Your war-cry--'Do you
love me? Yield, knave, or die' (p. 244).

The war-like Brangwen still cannot accept, cannot enter Birkin's new-found peace, his freedom from will and desire; her "destructive fires," though banked perhaps, still burn. So she rejects, in effect, his gentle, passionless communion, puts on her hat both actually and symbolically, and goes home.

If Ursula is still unable to move into "star-equilibrium" with Birkin by the end of this scene, Birkin, upon reflection, begins to fully grasp his own position in the constellation. Here in what Keith Sagar has referred to as the very heart of the book, images begin to move into schematic alignment in Birkin's consciousness, he begins to equate the icy white fire of annihilation with the "putrescent mystery of sun-rays,... the burning death-abstraction of the Sahara" (p. 246). He begins by recalling one of Halliday's African fetishes,

a tall, slim elegant figure from West
Africa, in dark wood, glossy and suave...
a woman, with hair dressed high, like
a melon-shaped dome... her body was long
and elegant, her face was crushed tiny,
like a beetle's... (p. 245).

So the scarab reappears, this time in conjunction with that dome-

shaped head, packed with a peculiarly hideous knowledge. The "long, elegant" body, the body of perhaps, the Hermione of the wedding scene, surmounted by its tiny face and "rows of round heavy collars" about the neck, sits astonishingly on

short, ugly legs, with such protruberant buttocks, so weighty and unexpected below her long slim loins (p. 245).

It is here, in this stunningly emblematic figure, as much the Syria Dea in its smooth darkness as the moon in its white fire, apparently dropped so casually into Birkin's memory, that all that sensuality, all that insidious knowing that Birkin has denied in rejecting "further sensual experience--something deeper, darker, than ordinary life could give", resides. "She knew what he himself did not know. She had thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge behind her" (p. 245). And this is the crux of the matter: the relation of the senses and the mind, that internal balance so crucial to survival, has collapsed, "leaving the experience all in one sort, mystically sensual". He sees those forces striving within himself transcendent within this figure:

the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness must have lapsed, leaving the single impulse for knowledge in one sort, mindless progressive knowledge through the senses, knowledge arrested and ending in the senses, mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution, knowledge such as the beetles have which live purely within the world of corruption and cold dissolution. This was why her face looked like a beetle's: this was why the Egyptians worshipped the ball-rolling scarab: because of the principle of knowledge in dissolution and corruption (pp. 245-6).

It is this completeness that renders the process horrific: the soul has broken away from its organic hold like a leaf falling from a twig, and with it, says Lawrence, "we fall from the connection with life and hope, we lapse from pure integral living, from creation and liberty... into knowledge in the mystery of dissolution" (p. 246). The mysteries are deep, mindless, and somehow dreadful, far beyond human understanding, in fact, for, as Birkin realizes, they are subtle sensual realities, "far beyond the scope of phallic investigation," unsealed only to the fractured sensual understanding devoid of what, for want of a perhaps better word, he sees as "soul."

But what about the opposite pole, the whiteness so extreme that it becomes, in Birkin's reflection, the same as the sunburnt blackness of equatorial corruption? This, of course, embodies the answer, for the "white races" are simply embarked upon a different route to the same destination:

The white races, having the Artic north behind them, the vast abstraction of ice and snow, would fulfil a mystery of ice-destructive knowledge, snow-abstract annihilation.

Birkin thought of Gerald. He was one of these strange white wonderful demons from the north, fulfilled in the destructive frost mystery. And was he fated to pass away in this knowledge, this one process of frost-knowledge, death by perfect cold? (p. 247).

And of course he is: the corruptible rose of ice is at least as susceptible to canker as the purple-black marsh plant.

Gerald gives his own answer to Birkin's question in

"Gladiatorial." During their nude wrestling match, the two men, in becoming accustomed to one another, each to the other's rhythm, achieve a sort of physical understanding, bordering upon what Lawrence calls "a oneness" (p. 262). Birkin plays upon Gerald like a wind upon a tree, using his integrated physical intelligence, which, like his "dun-coloured" hair (p. 263) is neither black nor white, to defeat Gerald even against Gerald's greater strength. And just as it is Birkin who says that wrestling and striving and physical closeness make one sane, it is Gerald who withdraws his hand with his returning consciousness from the "strong, warm clasp" of the other (p. 264). Significantly too, it is Gerald who first reappears clad in his protective armor of costume, "a gown of broad-barred, thick black-and-green silk, brilliant and striking," and the glittering colours of corruption (p. 266). It leads Birkin to reflect on Gerald's scrupulosity of dress, his

silk socks, and studs of fine workmanship, and silk underclothing, and silk braces. Curious! This was another of the differences between them. Birkin was careless and unimaginative about his own appearance (p. 266).

And so, Lawrence seems to suggest, he can afford to be, since he is anything but careless and unimaginative with regard to his being. Appearance is the recourse of the bodiless, the refuge of those dominated by the devouring will.

In a significant contrast, the following chapter, "Threshold," which returns the focus to the Gudrun-Gerald axis, opens with a

rather pastoral letter from Gerald's sister Winifred to Gudrun, away in London at a show of her work. In it Winifred dwells at length on natural images--ferrets, holly wood--and on artistic freedom. She also delineates the characters of Birkin and Gerald by their response to some Dresden statuary given her by her father: Gerald prefers the shiny grey and white figure of a German peasant, ploughing with an ox; Birkin, a girl under a hawthorn blossom "with a lamb, and with daffodils painted on her skirts" (p. 269). Winifred herself prefers the "two mice climbing up a stalk." Presumably the tropical parrot, in view of Gudrun's earlier macaw associations, would be her choice, were she present to make it. When Gudrun does return to Shortlands, Winifred, clad in silvery velvet, makes a ceremony of her homecoming, presenting her with a "rare poppy-show....of [strangely fragrant] hot house flowers, the bunch... like a little fire to her..." (p. 271). Gudrun herself appears for the first--in fact, the only--time in the novel

like a flower just opened in the rain,
the heart of the blossom just visible,
seeming to emit a warmth of retained
sunshine... wearing a soft blue dress,
and stockings of dark red (p. 272).

What sort of flower, however, to cause Gerald to "shrink in spirit, as if it would be more than he could bear, as her hot, exposed eyes rested upon him" (p. 272)? Certainly not one of Birkin's "roses of happiness" or Winifred's "virginal cyclamens," but rather one of the pulsing scarlet blossoms that Gerald saw in Gudrun's bleeding forearm in "Rabbit."

The imagery of colour/nature in a significant sense does not again assert itself until "Excuse", Chapter XXIII. It opens with Birkin's questioning himself--as usual--about why he feels the need to "strive for a coherent, satisfied life." But this time he is to have an answer. Lawrence has said elsewhere that wholeness of being is a conflict, in the sense of an almost astral tension, since all the images that come readily to mind are planetary; logically, as Moynihan has pointed out, if the conflict is removed, "there is a collapse into chaos."⁸ The balance, in short, is lost. In a way, then, it seems clear that the conflict between Birkin and Ursula, the conflict that underlies Birkin's psychic fretfulness as "Excuse" begins, represents something like this sort of inner conflict in human terms. Just as Birkin is able to keep his grip on life through his "odd mobility" and changeableness, so is the Birkin-Ursula relationship able to survive through its conflict, "a conflict which changes both parties, which moves toward a resolution", a resolution in, so to speak, living colour.⁹

First there are the three emblematic rings, the red, the blue, and the yellow, which Birkin presents to the hostile Ursula, still smarting from what she views as her defeat at Hermione's hands in "Woman to Woman." Significantly, it is the "round opal, red and fiery, set in a circle of tiny rubies" that Ursula really prefers, and it is the only one of the three that actually fits her rather large hand. Forgetting, it would seem, the lesson she should have learned from the catkins episode, she superstitiously asks if

the warm, "flamy opal" is not unlucky--knowing that in accepting the rings she is accepting a pledge, accepting, perhaps, the implications of Birkin's apparent views of her identity as he expressed them in "Moony." But the fiery ring has another imagistic function, as it prepares the ground for the contrasts of fire and dirt, the physical and the spiritual, the living and the deathly, which form the essence of the emotional battle fought in the following pages.

As she berates Birkin with his need to return to Hermione

like a dog to his vomit. It is what
Hermione stands for that I hate. I hate
it. It is lies, it is false, it is death....
You belong to that old, deathly way of
living.... But don't come to me, for I've
nothing to do with it (p. 298).

She proves in a symbolic sense her contention that she has nothing to do with that deathly dirt by "picking unconsciously some flesh-pink spindle berries, some of which were burst, showing their orange seeds" (p. 298). Indeed, throughout this scene, Ursula is drawn in warm colours, in images of flame, contrasting strongly with those legions of "spiritual brides," processions of bodiless Hermiones wallowing in mental sensuality and sordid passion, sham spirituality thinly coating the foulness beneath (p. 299). She shines as clearly against this spiritual dirt as the rings do "lying in the pale mud of the road" (p. 299). As Ursula walks away, growing smaller in space and in Birkin's mental vision, too, he begins to accept that she is right, that he is a whited sepulchre, lying to himself:

He felt tired and weak. Yet also he was relieved. He gave up his old position. He went and sat on the bank. No doubt Ursula was right.... He knew that his spirituality was concomitant of a process of depravity, a sort of pleasure in self-destruction. There really was a certain stimulant in self-destruction, for him--especially when it was translated spiritually.... And was not Ursula's way of emotional intimacy, emotional and physical, was it not just as dangerous as Hermione's abstract spiritual intimacy? Fusion, fusion, this horrible fusion of two beings.... (p. 299).

Of course, Birkin cannot work this out logically. To do so is to deny the answer he must find intuitively, the answer he finds in a gesture when he plucks the rings out of the dirt, when, in essence, he plucks his life out of that murky stream of dissolution:

He could not bear to see the rings lying in the pale mud of the road. He picked them up and wiped them unconsciously on his hands. They were the little tokens of the reality of beauty, the reality of happiness in warm creation.

There was a darkness over his mind. The terrible knot of consciousness that had persisted there like an obsession was broken, gone, his life was dissolved in darkness over his limbs and his body. But there was a point of anxiety in his heart now. He wanted her to come back (p. 299).

And so she is coming back, slowly, into his field of vision, for he has made his choice, chosen her wonderful yellow light of warm creation, her "luminous wonder and fear" (p. 300) over the glittering whiteness, over the pale mud. The moment of actual communion, as Sagar points out quite rightly, "has (as so often in Lawrence) a flower as its token:"¹⁰

'See what a flower I found you,' she said, wistfully holding a piece of purple-red bell-heather under his face. He saw the clump of coloured bells, and the tree-like, tiny branch: also her hands, with their over-fine, over-sensitive skin.

'Pretty!' he said, looking up at her with a smile, taking the flower. Everything had become simple again, quite simple, the complexity gone into nowhere. But he badly wanted to cry: except that he was weary and bored by emotion.

Then a hot passion of tenderness for her filled his heart.... It was peace, just simple peace, as he stood folding her quietly there on the open lane (p. 300).

This is not, needless to say, the peace of resolution into a system, that resolution which spells death for Gerald Crich; it is resolution into a creative relationship, into productive happiness, as Lawrence makes clear in his continuing use of the flower image:

He stood on the hearth-rug looking at her, at her face that was upturned exactly like a flower, a fresh luminous flower, glinting faintly golden with the dew of the first light.

She was beautiful as a new marvellous flower opened at his knees, a paradisaical flower she was, beyond womanhood, such a flower of luminousness (p. 304-5).

In fact, she is one of the "warm roses of happiness." They spend a few moments awash in tides of passion, floods and fountains of the dark life-force, before they turn to the more ordinary sustenance of normal healthy bodies: "a venison pasty... a large broad-faced cut ham, eggs and cresses and red beetroot, and medlars and apple tart and tea" (p. 306). (The symbols here are no doubt rife, but must remain undiscovered, lurking beneath the plates and napkins.) And it is addressed by, in a sense, a new Ursula,

an unself-conscious Ursula, one who has learned "at last to be still and perfect" (p. 307).

Birkin is not quite so still. He must still reconcile his darkness and his light, find his "freedom together" in wandering "away from the world's somewheres into our own nowhere" (p. 307). They must break off their old connections and begin travelling together toward the distance, a journey that begins that night with their drive through that richly symbolic Lawrentian darkness.

Their reconciliation is underway:

He sat still like an Egyptian Pharaoh,
driving the car,.... in pure living
silence, subtle, full of unthinkable
knowledge and unthinkable force....
(p. 311).

And yet, not just Egyptian, not in the sense of the scarab-worshipping, sun-destroyed African pole of unconscious consciousness, for

he had the free intelligence to direct
his own ends. His arms and his breast
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 lam-
bent intelligence played secondarily
above his pure Egyptian concentration
in the darkness (p. 310).

Balance. Their darkness is illuminated, their destination, both symbolically and actually fresh green, among the trees, the grass, and the night, "a palpable revelation of otherness" (p. 312). And they become to each other "the immemorial magnificence of mystic, palpable, real otherness" (p. 312). They know each other

darkly, with the fullness of dark knowledge.... night-free, like an Egyptian, steadfast in perfectly suspended equilibrium, pure mystic nodality of physical being. They would give each other this star-equilibrium which alone is freedom (p. 311).

As Chamberlain has pointed out, this lambent intelligence of Birkin's, which allows him to begin to function at both the extremes at once, "to remain in vital suspension between the two," is not really very different from the light that so often glitters in Gerald's face.¹¹ But much that glitters in this novel is in fact ice, and where Birkin's intelligence illuminates his dark consciousness much as his car's headlights illuminate the dark road, Gerald has no inner core to be revealed, no dark cohesive unconsciousness. Thus, his dazzling surface masks his deathliness (or, more properly, indicates it), and it is appropriate that the chapter following the "excursion" of Birkin and Ursula from death, a chapter concerned with Gerald and Gudrun, should be called "Death and Love."

In this chapter, as well as in "Excuse," mud and flowers and darkness have a role to play, but a very different role from the transcendent rebirth of Ursula's "paradisal flower" and Birkin's darkly potent Egyptian phallic stem. The backdrop is the death of Gerald's father, a slow terrible death, the almost incomprehensible stretching of the man's unbroken will on the rack of his ruined body:

Every morning Gerald went into the room, hoping to find his father passed away at last. Yet always he saw the same transparent face, the same dread dark hair on the waxen forehead, and the awful, inchoate dark eyes, which seemed to be decomposing into formless darkness.... (p. 313).

Into this presence, daily, comes Gerald, "erect and taut with life, gleaming in his blondness," confronting his father, each, as Lawrence says quietly, "on the brink of departure" (p. 313). On one level, of course, Gerald is only fleeing the sickroom, but on another the meetings have an almost undefined significance which Gerald himself begins to feel, fearing some horrible collapse within himself, yet enjoying his vicarious ordeal, experiencing

the whole process of slow death without wincing or flinching. He even triumphed in it. He somehow wanted this death, even forced it (p. 314).

Birkin has already observed that Gerald is a good candidate for murder, through his desire to be killed, and in a sense he is committing long suicide by default, letting go as his father is letting go, losing his hold on reality, on the outer world, feeling that the hollow shell of himself is in imminent danger of exploding into the enormous void circling "at the centre of his soul" (p. 314). He, too, must find an equilibrium, but an equilibrium of fusion:

Something must come with him into the hollow void of death in his soul, fill it up, and so equalize the pressure within to the pressure without (p. 314).
(Italics added.)

There is no idea here of a tension between the extremes; there is only a kind of stasis, a resolution in absorption. And what better companion for the void than Gudrun?

He wanted to put his arm around her. If he could put his arm round her... he would equilibrate himself. For now he felt like a pair of scales, the half of which tips down and down into an indefinite void. He must recover some sort of balance.... She died a little death.... (p. 321).

And just as he celebrated the communion of Birkin and Ursula with flowers, so Lawrence provides flowers for Gerald and Gudrun--the funeral flowers of Thomas Crich:

Even in this darkness he could see the heaped white pallor of old white flowers at his feet. This then was the grave.... The flowers were cold and clammy. There was a raw scent of chrysanthemums and tuberoses, deadened. He felt the clay beneath, and shrank, it was so horribly cold and sticky.... He felt as if some of the clay were sticking cold and unclean on his heart (p. 331).

The symbolic echoes of this scene are nearly infinite, and for Gerald, it seems, cataclysmic. He must, after this revelation of annihilation, this discovery of "one centre... in the complete darkness beside the unseen, raw grave," go to Gudrun, his last refuge, or, as he thinks of it, "He could get at her--he would get at her." Gudrun has become his all, but in terms of her power over him as demonstrated in several earlier scenes, and he can only think of exercising his power over her in terms of exploitation, violation, "getting at" her. So, his feet heavy with cemetery clay, wet and

cold, rooted in the grave, he strikes out across the fields, invisible in the dead blackness, homing on Gudrun and vindication.

Gudrun herself is a white flower, bridal and funereal, when he finds her, and he is plastered in clay, having left, at least symbolically, a trail all the way from graveside to bedside, rather horribly like a walking corpse. Their coming together is antithetical to the love-scenes of "Excuse," a mutual violation, a destructive scene of destruction and absorption:

Into her he poured all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death, and he was whole again.... And she, subject, received him as a vessel filled with his bitter potion of death. She had no power.... The terrible frictional violence of death filled her, and she received it in an ecstasy of subjection, in throes of violent, acute sensation.... he worshipped her.... if only she would grant him the flow of this living effluence, he would be restored.... He was glad and grateful like a delirium.... he felt the full, unutterable sleep coming over him, the sleep of complete exhaustion and restoration. But Gudrun lay wide awake, destroyed into perfect consciousness (pp. 337-338).

In the morning Gerald is a new man, "full, complete, and perfected", and nearly completely dressed, while she aches with nausea of him, having, to paraphrase Yeats, put on his sickness with his power, subjugated and dissatisfied. But both, like Ursula and Birkin, though for very different reasons, are ready for flight.

Lawrence takes one last look at that elegant sinkhole in his slimy river, the Pompadour Cafe, and its dissolute denizens, in

Chapter XXVIII, "Gudrun at the Pompadour," in which Gudrun and Gerald have begun their journey to the denouement, stopping off in London on the way. Gudrun in this scene is, as Birkin has been in the past, ineffably drawn to the cafe, although on a conscious level she loathes it: "It was as if she had to return to this small, slow central whirlpool of disintegration and dissolution: just give it a look" (p. 372). Gudrun's looks, in this case, are black and sullen, as perhaps they should be in the darkness-dominated Pompadour, her blood "beating black and thick in her veins." And many of these black looks are reserved for Minette, who makes her last appearance "wearing a curious dress of dark silk with long pale rays, a curious rayed effect. She was thinner, her eyes were perhaps wider, more disintegrated" (p. 372). Besides the suggestion that she radiates her corruption, this rotten ice-flower in its sinister silk vase, she is in this scene more definitely linked with Hermione than previously, through her "ugly, mocking persistence," a trait emphasized frequently in Hermione, and through her walk, "her curious walk, stiff and jerking at the loins," very like Hermione's in the early wedding scene (p. 373).

Gerald throughout the encounter has been explicitly colourless, twinkling steadily like a faceted glacier, set off, perhaps, by Gudrun's blackness. The climax of the scene revolves, of course, around the mocking reading of Birkin's letter to Halliday on the "Flux of Corruption", and involves the explicit verbal introduction of much symbolic material for the first time into this deepest spring

of its origin:

'Isn't that the letter about uniting the dark and the light...?'

"And if, Julius, you want this ecstasy of reduction with Minette, you must go on till it is fulfilled. But surely there is in you also, somewhere, the living desire for positive creation, relationships in ultimate faith, when all this process of active corruption, with all its flowers of mud is transcended, and more or less finished--"Minette, you are a flower of mud.... I'm another, surely... We're all flowers of mud--Fleurs-hic! du mal!' (pp. 374-375)

In the context of the novel, this is already well travelled ground, but it smacks entirely too much of pearls-before-swine for Gudrun, who rescues the letter and carries it away with her. Ironically, she appears, in her final exit from this particular murky whirlpool, as the ultimate marsh plant, the ultimate beetle, the complete fleur-du-mal, at least in terms of colouration, glittering more darkly than Minette ever could:

She was fashionably dressed in blackish-green and silver, her hat was brilliant green, like the sheen on an insect, but the brim was soft dark green, a falling edge with fine silver, her coat was dark green, lustrous, with a high collar of grey fur, and great fur cuffs, the edge of her dress showed silver and black velvet, her stockings and shoes were silver grey (p. 376).

Whatever is to be made of the possible distinctions between silver and grey in the above description, one thing is clear: Lawrence is drawing together his symbolic threads. As Gudrun "moved with a slow fashionable indifference to the door," Birkin's letter crumpled

in her hand, the characters are being lifted out of their old contexts, cut free of their old associations, prepared for those final frozen days in that great cradle of snow, that knot, that navel of glamorous whiteness.

The characters are breaking loose, flying off like colours refracted into space, Ursula and Birkin travelling through "black, unpierced, ... fathomless space," through "grey, dreary nowhere," into the glowing, dazzling whiteness of the Alps (pp. 378-380). And through it all Ursula carries her new glow, her "wonderful light, golden like honey of darkness, sweet like the warmth of day" (p. 379), golden and warm in her "big soft coat with a collar of deep, soft, blond fur and a soft blond cap of fur" (p. 383). Here the golden colour has lost the cold brilliance of its Gudrun-Gerald association almost completely, no longer an arctic glow but a soft, honey-coloured radiance.

Gudrun, however, does not share this new quality. She is still "brilliantly beautifully," strikingly artificial

in a daring gown of vivid green silk and tissue of gold, with green velvet bodice and a strange black-and-white band round her hair (p. 385).

That band, of course, is not so very strange. The snowbound contest for Gudrun, her shiny green, as in the previous chapter, reminiscent of insects, is about to begin, and it is almost as though she is wearing the colours of both her champions on her head. For Gudrun is gradually becoming more and more dehumanized, mechanical, cynical, the nature of her relationship with the white gleaming Gerald,

that relationship built upon, among other shakey foundations, mutual use, becoming gradually clearer:

He was wonderful like a piece of radium to her. She felt she could consume herself and know all, by means of this fatal, living metal.... And what would she do with herself when she had destroyed herself? For if spirit, if integral being is destructible, matter is indestructible (p. 387).

She will fall into that white radiant glow, consumed and consuming.¹²

The next day, "at the end of the tiny valley railway," they find whiteness, snow, everywhere, the consummation of the white flower imagery, "a little high table-land of snow, where stood the last peaks of snow like the heart petals of an open rose" (p. 389). Images of dazzling silent whiteness fly as thick and fast as snowflakes, piling up into a density of impression as palpable and muffling as the snow itself that buries the Tyrolean houses to the window-sashes. And through it, through the ringing silence, runs Gudrun "with such heavy fleetness,"

Her blue, bright dress fluttering in the wind, her thick scarlet stockings... brilliant above the whiteness. Gerald watched her: she seemed to be rushing towards her fate, and leaving him behind (p. 388).

So he pursues, following that cold bright blueness toward his fate, "overtaking her, but not gaining any power over her" (p. 388), climbing "through the cold shadow-radiance of the afternoon, silenced... by the luminous, dazing sides of snow that rose above them and fell away beneath", up to the perfect isolation of that lost

deserted valley (p. 389).

The room in which Gudrun and Gerald find themselves squared off is a small one, "all of golden-coloured wood, floor, walls, ceiling, door.... like being inside a nut," (p. 390) in Gudrun's words, faintly echoing the acorn of The Rainbow, the acorn shell from which Ursula has freed herself.¹³ And this is a room with a very significant view:

In front was a valley shut in under the sky, the last huge slopes of snow and black rock, and at the end, like the navel of the earth, a white folded wall the cradle of snow ran on to the eternal closing-in, where the walls of snow and rock rose impenetrable.... This was the centre, the knot, the navel of the world, where the earth belonged to the skies, pure, unapproachable, impassable (pp. 390-391).

It does not take a very long leap of the imagination to see the ice flower and marsh plant images closing together here as some sort of frozen carnivorous blossom ready to snap shut, reclaiming its own.

Gudrun, it seems, has already been reclaimed, staring at this frozen omphalos "with a strange rapture":

At last she had arrived, she had reached her place. Here at last she folded her venture and settled down like a crystal in the navel of snow and was gone (p. 391).

But if Gudrun has recognized her place as victor, her essential oneness with the glamorous, soul-destroying whiteness and become as a crystal, Gerald has recognized his own situation and begun

to struggle for conquest over her icy rapture, to try to melt her with his metallic passion:

He saw the blind valley, the great cul-de-sac of snow and mountain peaks under the heaven. And there was no way out....

The passion came up in him... like the ringing of a bronze bell... He felt strong as winter, his hands were living metal, invincible.... (p. 391).

His heart went up like a flame of ice, he closed over like steel. He would destroy her rather than be denied (p. 392).

Gerald's victory, of course, will be only temporary. He may have overcome Gudrun's destructive will with his own, but while "the peaks of snow were rosy, glistening like transcendant, radiant spikes of blossom... so lovely and beyond," she has regained her will "with a click" (p. 392). And she sees this landscape of snow flowers and fire in the same way that she has seen most of the flowers, light and warmth of the novel: from the outside, from within her own closed shell of brilliant, artificial colour.

Gudrun saw all their loveliness, she knew how immortally beautiful they were, great pistils of rose-coloured, snow-fed fire in the blue twilight of the heaven. She could see it, she knew it, but she was not of it. She was divorced, debarred, a soul shut out (pp. 392-393).

For, of course, the snow that Gudrun is a part of is that dead, "terrible waste of whiteness," the blinding apotheosis of the blue-eyed will, the obscene necessity to know. And it is to this crushing, bruising coldness that Gerald belongs as well, and will belong in a more literal sense: he cannot escape at this point,

his knowledge of that fact confirming, in a sense, Birkin's belief that Gerald, at root, desires death, seeks out his murderer even as he may destroy others along his route.

In fact, these final chapters belong to Gudrun and Gerald, and Gudrun's alter-insect Loerke, that ally who guarantees that Gerald can never be, as he has felt himself, invincible. The glimpses of Birkin and Ursula are fleeting, contrasting, warm pools of light in the vast glittering field between the poles, Ursula "dilated... like a flower in the morning sun,... her veins all golden" (p. 397), Birkin dark and vital, the two becoming free together, released from shame, released from their brittle wills. Even their vision is different, associated with warmth, the living:

They saw the golden lights of the hotel glowing... like a cluster of yellow berries. It seemed like a bunch of sun-sparks, tiny and orange in the midst of the snow darkness.

They saw a man come from the dark building, with a lighted lantern which swung golden, and made that his dark feet walked in a halo of snow.... A smell of cows, hot, animal,... came out on the heavily cold air (p. 399).

Their vision is somehow mutual, and Ursula, at least, rises "free on the wings of her new condition" (p. 400), her union with Birkin. Gudrun provides a sharp contrast, her walk in the snow not a wonderful intoxication danced to "the celestial, musical motion of the stars" (p. 398), but a quest, a desire of the will, it seems, to merge with its symbolic element:

Gudrun was driven by a strange desire. She wanted to plunge on and on, till she came to the end of the valley of snow. Then she wanted to climb the wall of white finality, climb over, into the peaks that sprang up like sharp petals in the heart of the frozen, mysterious navel of the world. She felt that there, over the strange blind, terrible wall of rocky snow, there in the navel of the mystic world, among the cluster of peaks, there, in the infolded navel of it all, was her consummation. If she could but come there, alone, and pass into the infolded navel of eternal snow and of uprising, immortal peaks of snow and rock, she would be a oneness with all, she would be herself the eternal, infinite silence, the sleeping, timeless, frozen centre of the All (p. 400).

Of course, this is where she will find her consummation, where she will strike the final blow in that destructive relationship that can promise only annihilation, but it will be Gerald who will go alone into the "unfolded navel" to become the "sleeping timelessness frozen centre" of Gudrun's all, death. But not yet.

First, Ursula must realize her own desire to climb over the peaks of snow in search of a very different destination, to flee, even as her mother fled The Rainbow's gloom hung cathedral, to the land of orange trees and olives, where she can "see the dark earth,... smell its earthy fecundity,... see the patient wintry vegetation,... feel the sunshine touch a response in the buds," experience the awakening of all those senses blasted by the "terrible, static" eternal snow (p. 425). If Lawrence were writing straightforward allegory, he could not have presented a plainer choice between posi-

tive creation and will-inflicted doom: "I hate the snow, and the unnaturalness of it, the unnatural light it throws on everybody, the ghastly glamour...." (p. 425).

So the choice is made. But there is one last curious ceremony Ursula must undergo, Gudrun's gift of "the coloured stockings for which she was notorious," Parisian stockings, "vermillion, cornflower blue, and grey" (p. 427). It is difficult to determine a precise symbolic significance in this gift, and yet the whole scene is strangely evocative. Gudrun seems to be trying to give a little of herself, a little of her vivid shell, to her sister along with "the jewels," for Ursula, as she realizes, is really "going-away-forever, never-to-return.... Spiritually, so to speak... going away from us all" (p. 428). But the gap is too great to bridge, the gift remains as isolated as Gudrun herself, exulting in her will and its symbolic manifestations, for it seems that when Ursula says "'One gets the greatest joy of all out of really lovely stockings'" she means something quite different from Gudrun's reply, "'One does; the greatest joy of all'" (p. 428).

Birkin has grown equally remote from the man he sought as brother, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Gerald, icy, "intense, gripped into white light, agonistes," had drawn away from Birkin, become blank, blasted and sightless, snowburned (p. 427).

And they want

to go apart, all of them. Birkin took his place, and the sledge drove away leaving Gudrun and Gerald standing on the snow,

waving. Something froze Birkin's heart, seeing them standing there in the isolation of the snow, growing smaller and more isolated (p. 431).

There is no question now, if there has ever been, that for Gerald it will be death by snow, that the icy vapour Gerald feels forming around his heart will be fatal. That snow is death, on that one-to-one basis so loved by the diagrammatic critics, is in fact confirmed by Lawrence himself, speaking for himself, on another occasion:

The valley beds were like deep graves, the sides of the mountains like the collapsing walls of a grave. The very mountain-tops above, bright with transcendent snow, seemed like death, eternal death.

There, it seemed, in the glamorous snow, was the source of death, which fell down in great waves of shadow and rock, rushing to the level earth. And all the people of the mountains, on the slopes, in the valleys, seemed to live upon this great, rushing wave of death, of breaking-down, of destruction.

The very pure source of breaking-down, decomposition, the very quick of cold death, is the snowy mountain-peak above. There, eternally, goes on the white foregathering of the crystals, out of the deathly cold of the heavens; this is the static nucleus where death meets life in its elementality. And thence, from their white, radiant nucleus of death in life, flows the great flux downwards, towards life and warmth. And we below, we cannot think of the flux upwards, that flows from the needle-point of snow of the unutterable cold and death.¹⁴

Here is the coalition of the two forces, the ineffable equation of crystals and beetles, lilies and mud flowers, arctic torrents and sewers, the apotheosis of festering cold. And for Gudrun it will

be annihilation by blackness, absorption into Loerke as "the rock bottom of all life" (p. 417). Loerke is seen only in animal terms, in browns and blacks:

he wore a Westphalian cap, a close brown velvet head with big brown velvet flaps down over his ears.... His eyes were arresting--brown, full... like the eyes of a lost being having a strange, dumb, depraved look of knowledge....

His fine, black hair somehow reminded her of a bat.... He sat hunched up, as if his spirit were bat-like (p. 413).

Gerald, then, flirts with death on his tobaggan and skis, "moving in an intensity of speed and white light that surpassed life itself,... carried the soul of human beings beyond into an inhuman abstraction of velocity and weight and eternal, frozen snow" (p. 411); Gudrun flirts with death in the form of Loerke's insect comprehension, his obscene knowledge:

"He lives like a rat in the river of corruption, just where it falls over into the bottomless pit." [She wants] to explore the sewers, and he's the wizard rat that swims ahead... he ebbs with the stream; the sewer stream" (pp. 418-419).

Between the two a curtain of ice descends, Gerald pressing Gudrun "like frost, deadening her", Gudrun "diabolically cold." The first few pages of "Snowed Up", Chapter XXX, fairly ring with the hard cold quality of their exchanges, flint ringing on ice. They work their wills upon one another still, but they are moving apart, Gerald upward, towards those deathly peaks, ever more abstracted, Gudrun downward, towards that dark subterranean stream, ever more

living in the suggestive, the subtly lustful. Revolting intimacies are growing between Gudrun and her "creature" Loerke, all suggestive, and, as Moynihan sees it, "the suggestion is that we are looking at a couple of robotic insects with exposed ganglia of fine wire consciously parodying human communication:"¹⁵

he liked the West African wooden figures.... Their whole correspondence was in a strange, barely comprehensible suggestivity, they kindled themselves at the subtle lust of the Egyptians or the Mexicans. The whole game was one of subtle inter-suggestivity, and they wanted to keep it on the plane of suggestion. From their verbal and physical nuances they got the highest satisfaction in the nerves, from a queer interchange of half-suggested ideas, looks, expressions (p. 439).

Halliday's art collection and the Pompadour are somehow never very far in the background; their art is their life, so to speak, and in terms of Loerke's "Lady Godiva" their life needs little other definition.

Colour is slowly bleeding from the novel, even as Gerald's vitality is being bled, as he becomes whiter, the snowdemon, a part of Loerke's highly appropriate "dream of fear" in which

the world went cold, and snow fell everywhere, and only white creatures, Polar bears, white foxes, and men like awful white snowbirds, persisted in ice cruelty (p. 444).

Gleaming Gerald, the wolf, stands with a Gudrun singing curiously like Hermione in what is virtually the last splash of colour in Women In Love, high in this world of snow to watch the sunset, to

watch the life go down:

[they] watched the yellow sun sink in crimson and disappear... the peaks and ridges glowed with living rose, incandescent like immortal flowers against a purple-brown sky... whilst down below the world was a bluish shadow, and above, like an annunciation, hovered a rosy transport in mid-air (p. 437-438).

Gerald responds by wishing, again, his own death, wishing "the peaks were grey and unbeautiful, so that she should not get her support from them," while he stands isolate, losing his only prop, "with the ice-wind blowing through his heart, like death" (p. 438). And he sees, as he has seen before, Gudrun's own essential deathliness, the falsity of her rapture over the colours of the sky ("I shall destroy you, as you stand looking at the sunset; because you are such a liar" (p. 438).

He gets his wish, and Loerke's dream comes true. After this point the novel becomes a world without relief, a white dead end where Gudrun degenerates into something like a deranged clock with no hands, "a chronometer watch, a beetle," entering further and further into reductive ecstasy:

...there were only creatures, little ultimate creatures like Loerke. The world was finished now, for her. There was only the inner, individual darkness, sensation with the ego, the obscene religious mystery of ultimate reduction, the mystic frictional activities of diabolic reducing down, disintegrating the vital organic body of life (p. 443).

Gerald's approaching apotheosis as bluish, corruptible ice seems almost preferable to this rendering down to a heap of offal. As

Moynihan and others have pointed out, Lawrence is shifting his emphasis slightly, in terms of character, at least, if not in symbol, engaging sympathy for Gerald as he readies himself, subconsciously, for his merging into the glamorous whiteness, the great crystalline wave of death:¹⁶

He revolted at the thought of finding himself in the world again. He must stay up there in the snow forever.... But he felt something icy gathering at his heart.

So he came down reluctantly, snow-burned, snow-estranged, to the house in the hollow, between the knuckles of the mountaintops. He saw its lights shining yellow, and he held back, wishing he need not go in to confront those people.... He was isolated as if there were a vacuum round his heart, or a sheath of pure ice (p. 452).

Gudrun confirms his isolation, denying him with her female will, that Syria Dea destructiveness, "Her wide, dark-filled eyes... fixed on him like two moons of darkness" (p. 453). And as his own death approaches, death itself becomes voluptuously desirable to him, he wishes "to strangle every spark of life out of her, till she lay completely inert, soft, utterly dead" (p. 452). This has been their love, their knowledge, their search for fusion, and it can only end in death.

As Gudrun is about to pack up her stockings and leave him, then, spending her last day sporting about with Loerke, Gerald materializes "like a ghost," "a vague white figure... like a judgment in the whitish air of twilight" (p. 462). In their last encounter, Gerald at least will have "the apple of his desire,"

that dead sea fruit, her death. She has struck her final blow ("She raised her clenched hand high and brought it down, with a great downward stroke on to the face and on to the breast of Gerald" [p. 463] and he will consummate their relationship at last, the consummation promised, in a sense, in "Death and Love", and by the snow:

The struggling was her reciprocal lustful passion in this embrace, the more violent it became, the greater the frenzy of delight, till the Zenith was reached, the crisis, the struggle was overborne, her movements became softer, appeased (p. 463).

But he cannot finish her. His will seems to break, "a weakness ran over his body, a terrible relaxing, a thaw, a decay of strength... his joints were turned to water" (p. 464). He has become as death in the Lawrentian peaks, and drifts away to seek his merger with his element:

Gerald stumbled on up the slope of snow, in the bluish darkness, always climbing... On his left was a steep slope with black rocks... and veins of snow slashing in and about the blackness of rock.... Yet there was no sound, all this made no noise (p. 464).

In the context of the novel, this ultimate destructive love scene could only be painted in moonlight, cold, glittering white, and indeed

a small bright moon shone brilliantly just ahead, on the right, a painful brilliant thing that was always there, from which there was no escape (p. 464).

He seeks the end, that final cul-de-sac, the thread of his being stretched as thin as his father's had been when he refused to die. The white world has become "illuminated darkness," "cold as sleep," and he is almost overpowered with "sleep-heavy iciness" (p. 465). He slides at last down a slope, and sees the fatal "half-buried crucifix," the little Alpine Christ who becomes his psychic murderer there in the terror of the snow, "the rocking, pale shadowy slopes of the upper world.... This was the moment when the death was uplifted, and there was no escape" (p. 465).¹⁷

This is the Christ of his own making, the Christ who presides over the whole world of Northern ice-destructiveness, and who symbolizes, like the bright transfixing moonlight, that form of mental-spiritual consciousness which exploits and corrupts the source of life.¹⁸

So there, in the sharp frozen heart petals of the ice flower, his will snaps, his last prop is gone:

he wandered unconsciously till he slipped and fell down, and as he fell something broke in his soul, and immediately he went to sleep (p. 466).

This is the way the world ends, then, not with a bang, not with a whimper, but in dead silence.

And all, in a sense, that is left, is "Exeunt" omnes, Chapter XXXI. Gudrun is left as cold as Gerald's frozen corpse, barren in tragedy, possessed by a "cold devil of irony that froze her soul" (p. 467). Gerald in death, as Birkin sees him, is a palpable summary of the complex of white-snow-ice-death imagery that

has surrounded his gleaming blondness since the beginning of the novel: even his "life breath [is] frozen into a block of ice beneath the silent nostrils" (p. 468).

It was the frozen carcass of a dead male. Birkin remembered a rabbit which he had once found frozen like a board on the snow.... And now this was Gerald, stiff as a board, curled up as if for sleep, yet with the horrible hardness somehow evident.

He reached and touched the dead face. And the sharp, heavy bruise of ice bruised his living bowels.

Again he touched the sharp, almost glittering fair hair of the frozen body. It was icy-cold, hair icy-cold, almost venomous.... Now he looked at the shapely, strange-coloured face, with the small, fine, pinched nose and the manly cheeks, saw it frozen like an ice pebble.... His brain was beginning to freeze, his blood was turning to ice-water (p. 469).

Even the scene of the death is frozen, dead, "a grey day, the third day of greyness and stillness" surrounds the "white, icy, pallid" peaks scored with black rocks: "It was like a shallow pot lying among the stone and snow of the upper world" (p. 469).

Lawrence drums away on the note of cold death, of corruptibility, of the finality of death in those that do not love, those that are not in "star-equilibrium" and thus dehumanized, those that are at one pole or the other:

But now he was dead, like clay, like bluish, corruptible ice. Birkin looked at the pale fingers, the inert mass. He remembered a dead stallion he had seen: a dead mass of maleness, repugnant.... he watched the cold, mute, material face (p. 471).

Birkin feels, too, that in some way he has jeopardized his star-equilibrium, his suspension between the pit and the peak. He tries to at least finish his relationship with Gerald appropriately by leaving him "in the Alps, near the snow" where he belongs, but he is unsuccessful (p. 472). He still seeks that other relationship, in addition to his union with Ursula "to make it complete." Ursula cannot understand, and sees his desire as false and impossible, this aspect of balance as impracticable, perverse. So, in the end Birkin is left symbolically unresolved, as he was sartorially undefined in the beginning, in transit, so to speak, realizing there is no escape, that "the snow of abstraction lies everywhere in the civilized world":¹⁹

He was falling through a gulf of infinite darkness, like a meteorite plunging across the chasm between the worlds. The world was torn in two, and he was plunging like an unlit star through the ineffable rift. What was beyond was not yet for him. He was overcome by the trajectory (p. 379).

NOTES

All page references in the text are from D.H. Lawrence, Women In Love, Compass Edition (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

1. D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (New York, 1961), p. 494.
2. John Middleton Murry, Reminiscences of D.H. Lawrence (London, 1933), p. 223.
3. Robert L. Chamberlain, "Pussum, Minette, and the Africo-Nordic Symbol in Lawrence's Women In Love" PMLA (LXXVIII), 1963, pp. 407-416.
4. As Chamberlain, among others, reports, in 1921 Lawrence was threatened with a lawsuit by blond Philip Heseltine (composer "Peter Warlock") who claimed (and did, no doubt) he recognized himself and his black-haired mistress the "Puma" in Halliday and Pussum as they appeared in the first English edition of Women In Love.
5. Keith Sagar, The Art of D.H. Lawrence (Cambridge, 1966), p. 85.
6. Ibid., p. 88.
7. D.H. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy (New York, 1958), p. 43.
8. Julian Moynihan, The Deed of Life (Princeton, 1963), p. 79.
9. Sagar, p. 91.
10. Ibid., p. 92.
11. Chamberlain, p. 414.
12. It seems likely that Lawrence, in choosing radium as a symbol for Gerald at this particular point, had in mind not only its qualities as a white, lustrous metal, but also its rapid decomposition.
13. Lawrence, The Rainbow, pp. 492-493.
14. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy, pp. 193-194.
15. Moynihan, p. 87.
16. Ibid., p. 86.

17. It is probably worth noting that Lawrence's fascination with these Christs extended to at least two essays, "Christs in the Tyrol" and "The Crucifix Across the Mountains."
18. Mark Spilka, The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence, (Bloomington, Indiana and London, 1966), p. 142.

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