



Q33396 – Single Author Study (Lawrence Strand)

Lawrence claimed that the central theme of *The Rainbow* was ‘woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative’ (The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Vol. II, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], page 165). How is this theme explored in two or more texts on the module?

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Both Clara Dawes from *Sons and Lovers* and Ursula Brangwen from *The Rainbow* conform to the theme of ‘woman becom[ing] individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative’.¹ This is evident in how both women initiate and utilise sex to subvert gender stereotypes and in doing so achieve individuality from men and societal norms whilst achieving their own sexual fulfilment. Additionally, both women prove their individuality from either parents or spouse and their ability to be self-responsible through their associations with the Suffrage movement, getting an education and employing both to earn their own living. However, I disagree with Lawrence that such a theme is *central* to either texts as neither Clara nor Ursula’s achievements can be fully understood without first recognising what they are fighting against. I argue that it is important to first examine *Sons and Lovers*’ Mrs Morel and *The Rainbow*’s Lydia Brangwen, who represent the oppressive and trapped lives women could traditionally expect, in order to completely understand the significance of Clara and Ursula’s independence.

Lawrence uses the depiction of Mrs Morel to foreground the physical and psychological entrapment women endured from their traditional yet limiting roles as mothers and wives. Indeed, Stephens explains that Nineteenth, early Twentieth-century ideology ‘relegated women and men to separate spheres’, where women were ‘suited [to the] domestic sphere’ of the home.² This is evident in the opening chapter of the novel where Mrs Morel is presented as being physically trapped in a marriage and life she does not want: ‘Mrs Morel was alone, but she was used to it. Her son and her little girl slept upstairs, so, it seemed, her home was there behind her, fixed and stable’.³ The geographical positioning of the house as being ‘behind her, fixed and stable’ (p. 13) and the explanation that ‘she was used to it’ (p. 13) firmly locates Mrs Morel not only within the domestic sphere of the home but within ‘the long history of women’s oppression’ where women simply ‘accepted [and] embraced their lot’.⁴ Her physical entrapment in the domestic sphere is not only evident in that she must remain as a mother but through the image of the house being ‘fixed and stable’ (p. 13). Whilst this could

¹ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), page 165.

² Judith L. Stephens, ‘Gender Ideology and Dramatic Convention in Progressive Era Plays, 1890-1920’, *Theatre Journal*, 41:1 (1989), 45-55 (p. 46).

³ D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, ed. by Helen Baron and Carol Baron (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 13. [All future quotes are from this edition and in the form of page numbers embedded in brackets in the text].

⁴ Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1988), Ebook, ProQuest, pp. 2-3.

Lawrence claimed that the central theme of *The Rainbow* was 'woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative' (*The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], page 165). How is this theme explored in two or more texts on the module?

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be read positively, the definition of 'fixed' (p. 13) as being unchangeable or rigid,⁵ whilst 'stable' (p. 13) is defined as being 'not easily shaken or dislodged',⁶ suggests that Mrs Morel's living environment is overbearing, imposing and trapping. This is furthered by the controlled punctuation that pauses on 'alone' (p. 13), 'used to it' (p. 13), 'upstairs' (p. 13) and 'behind her' (p. 13). This establishes Mrs Morel's identity as only existing within the geographical limitations of the house which is furthered by the fact that she dies within the same space. Lawrence in this description of Mrs Morel foregrounds not only the physical but the psychological and emotional entrapment women endured. The choice to include the adjective 'alone' (p. 13), in conjunction with later references to her feeling 'wretched' (p. 13) and that to her the 'world seemed a dreary place, where nothing else would happen [...] nothing but this dreary endurance' (p. 13) of domestic chores such as straightening the kitchen, lighting the lamp and mending the fire (p. 14) evokes a melancholic image of an isolated or solitary individual cut off from the wider world. Indeed, the repetition of 'nothing' (p. 13) and 'dreary' (p. 13) and the nuances of 'wretched' (p. 13) being misery or distress presents an enormity of melancholic emotion and in doing suggest that Mrs Morel's living conditions are unbearable. Thus, both Mrs Morel's house and marriage become a metaphor for the ideological 'institution that both contains and fuels [female] oppression'.⁷ Subsequently, Mrs Morel's trapped position as property of her husband and society's ideology foregrounds the lack of agency and individuality that both Clara and Ursula fight against.

Unlike in *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence does not highlight Lydia Brangwen's geographical and emotional oppression through paying particular attention to her. Instead, Lawrence uses her husband, Tom Brangwen, and his agency to move between domestic and public spheres to foreground Lydia's lack of agency and by extension her lack of individuality, self-responsibility and initiative that both Clara and Ursula are praised for. Throughout the novel she is constantly positioned within the walls of the Brangwen's house whilst her husband transcends the domestic sphere to go out 'to the "Red Lion"'.⁸ Significantly, his agency to move around and his ability to return home 'at dinner-time' (p. 57) foregrounds how Lydia lacks the opportunity for social mobility and how her identity is established only in relation to her male counterpart. This is evident in her position within the kitchen 'setting the plates on the white-scrubbed table' (p. 57) whilst her husband 'appeared in the doorway, hanging back a moment from entering' (p. 57). Since she is the active agent in this scene it must be acknowledged that she is given some semblance of authority, especially since her husband does not enter her feminine space. However, her authority is undermined by the ownership language employed by Lawrence to highlight Tom's conviction that 'she was his woman' (p. 58) and 'was his to possess' (p. 58). Indeed, his view here and in conjunction with the fact that once she is married she is, similar to Mrs Morel, only referred to as 'Mrs Brangwen' positions her as an object belonging to her husband. Furthermore, Lydia's psychological imprisonment is highlighted through how she is persistently repressed by Tom's authoritative masculinity that according to Subrayan reinforces the early Twentieth-century's 'socially constructed ideal of hegemonic masculinity [that] supports dominance as [his] natural right over [women]'.⁹ This is evident in the early years of their marriage when Lydia is pregnant and Tom becomes bitter and resentful at her

⁵ John Simpson (ed.), 'fix, v.', *OED Online* (December 2018) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/70815?rskey=0YjDdp&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [Accessed 11 January 2019]

⁶ Simpson (ed.), 'stable, adj.', *OED Online* (December 2018) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/188545?rskey=kbeq67&result=3&isAdvanced=false>> [Accessed 11 January 2019]

⁷ Nigel Kelsey, *D. H. Lawrence: Sexual Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 91.

⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. by Mark Kinkead-Weekes (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), p. 61. [All future quotes are from this edition and in the form of page numbers embedded in brackets in the text].

⁹ Angelina Subrayan, 'Representation of Hegemonic Masculinity' in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 3:12 (2015). 18-21 (p.20).

lack of interest in him: 'He seethed with fury at the small, ugly-mouthed woman who had nothing to do with him. Sometimes his anger broke on her' (p. 61). The employment of the verb 'seethed' (p. 61) evokes imagery suggestive of someone boiling up in outward rage. This is significant in understanding Lydia's oppressive circumstances as it emphasises how she is the victim of her husband's physical and emotional dominance over her. By focusing on Tom Brangwen and his ability to move between spheres and his perception of his wife as his to 'possess' (p. 58), Lawrence highlights how women were dominated and owned by their husbands. Subsequently, Lawrence foregrounds the little opportunity some women had other than to undertake the reductive roles of mothers and wives within the domestic sphere which, as this analysis has demonstrated, is eventually undermined by masculine authority.

By first examining Mrs Morel and Lydia Brangwen as representations of what women could traditionally expect, it becomes unmistakable that both Clara Dawes and Ursula Brangwen do not belong to such an oppressive and diminishing category. Indeed, the significance of Clara and Ursula utilising sex to dominate men is magnified by both Mrs Morel and Lydia's submission to their traditional roles, and by extension to their husband's physical and psychological authority over them. It is precisely this idea of women being inferior that Lawrence, through Clara Dawes, is challenging. This is evident in Clara's actions of splitting from her husband Baxter Dawes, a man who 'sort of degraded' (p. 318) and bullied her, making her feel like she 'wanted to run, as if [she] was fasted and bound up' (p. 318). Here, Clara's demonstration of self-responsibility in making a better life for herself is more impressive through the understanding that this is a form of escapism Mrs Morel could not achieve. Additionally, Clara has not only escaped extreme misery that Mrs Morel and Lydia Brangwen endure but in taking her own initiative to leave Dawes she finds sexual fulfilment in her affair with Paul Morel. This is most obvious in Chapter 12 when Paul and Clara go to the theatre as Clara's individual and physical existence away from her husband is so powerful: 'she balanced her head and stared straight in front of her, pouting, wistful [...] She could not help herself – she was in the grip of something bigger than herself' (p. 375). The inclusion of 'pouting' (p. 375) defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as being an action of thrusting out or protruding the lips,¹⁰ demonstrates how active Clara is in using her body to control Paul. This is because she is physically taking on the responsibility to gain her own sexual and physical liberation from her previous feelings of being 'fasted and bound up' (p. 318). Clara's authority here subverts what Tosh explains to be 'the dominant belief [...] that women were [...] inferior to men' meaning that men were 'credited with the prime role in [...] intercourse'.¹¹ Instead, Clara reduces Paul to the traditionally feminine role of passive receiver when he 'dropped his programme, and crouched down [...] so that he could kiss her hand and wrist' (p. 375) becoming 'Clara's white, heavy arms, her throat, her moving bosom [...] There was no himself' (p. 375). Instead all he felt was 'himself small and helpless, her towering in her force above him' (p. 376). Whilst some might argue that it is Paul who is the active and by extension dominant figure in this scene, as he is the one to drop the programme in order to make advances on Clara, I argue that he is actually the passive participant as his movements are simply reactionary responses to Clara's initiating actions. Paul's lack of authority is furthered by the notion that he loses his own identity, much like Mrs Morel and Lydia, and instead metamorphosis into Clara's physical existence. Significantly, his transformation into Clara is during the climax of this encounter, suggesting that, instead of Paul's, it is Clara's sexual pleasure and fulfilment that the reader is confronting. By going against Tosh's argument that men had the primary role in sexual activities Lawrence is highlighting Clara's initiative, of using her body, to gain sexual fulfilment otherwise prohibited to her. Indeed, this demonstrates Clara's individual identity away from societal perceptions of women and from her husband.

¹⁰Simpson (ed.), 'pout, v.1', *OED Online* (December 2018) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/149106?rskey=DIgiO9&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [Accessed 8 January 2019]

¹¹ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 43.

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Similarly, Lawrence in *The Rainbow* pays particular attention to Ursula, a young and unmarried woman through her relationship with Anton Skrebensky. In doing so Lawrence foregrounds how, only through eradicating gender stereotypes and its limitations on women, can Ursula find individual liberation and realise the power of her femininity. Indeed, according to Hilary Simpson, Lawrence, despite writing against the backdrop of the emerging suffrage movement, rejected their militant campaign as being 'only measures to patch up a social system [...] already rotten at the core'.¹² Instead, she explains that for Lawrence 'the revolution must start with the individual',¹³ who must find something 'at once wider and more personal than mere political enfranchisement or reform'.¹⁴ Indeed, as a means towards selfhood and liberation Ursula explores a love affair with Skrebensky in order to erase the 'abhorrent' (p. 246) gender stereotype her mother conforms to of the 'superficial authority' (p. 202) of motherhood. As a result of this socially unaccepted affair Ursula blossoms 'like a flower in the sun' (p. 274) within their unorthodox world 'of passion and lawlessness' (p. 277). By subverting gender norms, as opposed to seeking political liberation encouraged by the suffrage movement, Ursula is successful in finding her selfhood. Indeed, once Ursula has discovered such a world and its possibilities Lawrence presents her as sexually dominating Skrebensky in order to continue finding the power of her own female identity: 'She took him in the kiss, hard her kiss seized upon him, hard and fierce and burning corrosive as the moonlight. She seemed to be destroying him' (p. 299). Lawrence's choice of diction here to include both 'took' (p. 299) and 'seized' (p. 299) which belong to the same semantic category of gaining something, in conjunction with the destructive imagery of 'burning' (p. 299) and 'corrosive' (p. 299) suggests that Ursula has exploited the situation to find the power of her own femaleness. Such exploitation foregrounds how she is dominating and by extension controlling Skrebensky's desire for her. Furthermore, in this scene and later love-making scenes Kate Millett argues that Lawrence uses the moon as a symbol of femininity.¹⁵ Thus, in using sex to control Skrebensky Ursula has found sexual liberation and quite possibly spiritual liberation, implied by the imagery of the moon as a higher power, that has allowed her to find 'her own maximum self [...] female, oh female, triumphant' (p. 281). Furthermore, not only has she found her own individual identity as a woman but in comparing her destructive powers with the 'moonlight' (p. 299) Lawrence suggests she is using the power of all women to create a new identity that does not need the support of men. Consequently, this unconventional self-creation of Ursula's, with both sexual and spiritual liberation, demonstrates that by utilising femininity against men like Skrebensky, as opposed to conforming like Mrs Morel and Lydia to both oppressive and submissive feminine roles, Ursula is self-responsible for her own freedom and daily fulfilment.

Finally, both Clara and Ursula transcend the domestic sphere to get an education, to join the suffragettes and employ both to become economically self-sufficient. Unlike Mrs Morel and Lydia Brangwen who are like most women, as Perkin argues, 'economically the weaker sex',¹⁶ Clara is not dependent upon her husband for financial security. Indeed, in leaving her marriage to find a more meaningful and fulfilling life she clearly demonstrates what Lawrence claimed to be a woman becoming self-responsible. This is evident in the way she utilises the teaching from her feminist movements to gain confidence in her independence from her husband: she had 'taken up women's rights' (p. 223) and has been a part of the Suffrage movement for 10 years, attending meetings and acquiring 'a fair amount of education' (p. 306) which provided an opportunity to teach 'herself French' (p. 306). Not only does this teaching cause her to become individual from the domestic sphere and its oppressive ideology but it most certainly distinguishes her from her husband, proving that she is capable of being self-responsible. This is strengthened through her initial lack of patience with Paul when he offers to march alongside

¹² Hilary Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism* (Kent: Croom Helm Ltd, 1982), pp.19-24.

¹³ Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism*, p. 24.

¹⁴ Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism*, p. 42.

¹⁵ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 262.

¹⁶ Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*, p. 1.

and carry her banner for her in a W.S.P.U. demonstration. Her curt and defensive tone points to her position of authority in the conversation whilst bringing her confidence in her ability to fight, without the aid of men, for herself and women like her to the surface; 'I have no doubt [...] that you would rather fight for your woman than let her fight for herself' (p. 274). Furthermore, the self-responsibility undertaken by Clara foregrounds her persistence to work independently from society's rigid gender norms even if that work is degrading. When Paul asks 'Do you like jennying' (p. 303) and 'Is it sweated?' (p. 303), Clara's response of 'What can a woman do!' (p. 303) and 'Isn't *all* women's work?' (p. 303) speaks volumes to the type of woman she is. Her initiative to break from her husband and to persevere in a 'sweated' (p. 303) job, defined as undertaking hard or excessive work at very low wages,¹⁷ foregrounds her strength to willingly position herself in an environment that places economic restrictions on women. Whilst I acknowledge that some might consider Clara's position as equating to Mrs Morel's, I argue that by voluntarily 'jennying' (p. 303) she has left the marriage institution that is infinitely more oppressive and limiting and instead has found an environment where she 'can be free and independent' (p. 273). Consequently, by presenting Clara as a Suffragette, from which she gained an education, Lawrence foregrounds a woman who is associated with modernity, growth and change; all of which highlight her as a woman of individuality, self-responsibility and initiative.

Unlike Clara, Ursula does not consider the feminist movement as a reality for change, instead she goes out to work in order to, according to Fox, elevate her individual self above the domestic lives of her grandmother and mother.¹⁸ Indeed, as 'the cloud of self-responsibility gathered upon her' (p. 263) Ursula's belief that 'she was a separate entity in the midst of an unseparated obscurity' (p. 263), not only guides her throughout the rest of the novel but points to the crux of Lawrence's argument that she is becoming individual and self-responsible. According to Miller, during the period Lawrence was writing 'opportunities [and] employment were rapidly expanding', which led to 'more women [...] leading independent lives'.¹⁹ This is evident with Ursula, foregrounded by her initiative in her seeking out and taking a teaching position which is a torture to her. Instead of giving up and residing peacefully with her parents Ursula perseveres, much like Clara does in her degrading work of 'jennying' (p. 303), refusing to allow her struggles against the public sphere to beat her as it is a matter of self-responsibility as well as pride to prove that she can pay 'her scot' (p. 362). In earning the 'four pounds two shillings and one penny' (p. 362), Ursula unlike her grandmother or Mrs Morel, has started the process of self-creation and liberation, beyond the capabilities of any political reform, that allows her to become individual as she is now 'something else besides the mere daughter of William and Anna Brangwen. She was independent. She earned her own living. She was an important member of the working community' (p. 362). Indeed, these sentence constructions, beginning and ending with longer lengths whilst encircling shorter and more resolute ones aligns with notion that Ursula has, through her own initiative, become a self-responsible individual. By breaching the domestic sphere she has bravely entered, evident by the title of the chapter, into '*The Man's World*' (p. 328). Furthermore, this sentence construction pauses on and by extension places emphasis on the words 'independent' (p. 362), 'own living' (p. 362) and 'community' (p. 362), all of which evoke an image of a self-sufficient, modern woman, suggesting perhaps she actually belongs within '*The Man's World*' (p. 328). Indeed, through Ursula's determination to seek employment and make her own way in life Lawrence is

¹⁷ Simpson (ed.), 'sweat, v.', *OED Online* (December 2018) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/195614?rskey=aurI9Q&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [Accessed 10 January 2019]

¹⁸ Elizabeth M. Fox, 'Edwardian Feminism and Suffragism', in *D. H. Lawrence in Context*, ed. by Andrew Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 192-202 (p.192).

¹⁹ Jane Eldridge Miller, "'The penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance': Modern Women, the Edwardian Novel, and 'Sons and Lovers'", *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, 39:2 (2014), 77-96 (p. 80).

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foregrounding how Ursula, through her own initiative and self-determination, has formed an authoritative and individual identity separate from her parents.

In conclusion, Lawrence presents the physical limitations and psychological hardships that Mrs Morel and Lydia Brangwen endure in order to magnify the significance of Clara and Ursula’s achievements of individuality, initiative and self-responsibility throughout the novels. This is foregrounded when both women use sex to dominate men; Clara exerts her initiative to reverse gender roles whilst Ursula does this to establish her own individuality separate from Skrebensky and society. Finally, both women transcend the domestic sphere in order to make their own living; Clara through joining the Suffrage movement and Ursula through teaching. Thus highlighting how both women use their initiative and self-responsibility to improve their lives from traditional gender norms.

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