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'You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character' (D. H. Lawrence in a letter to Edward Garnett of 5 June 1914, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], p. 183).: Discussing D. H. Lawrence's experimental treatment of character.

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In *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and 'New Eve and Old Adam', Lawrence's experimental treatment of character is revealed through his construction of identity. Rather than creating characters with a stable ego, he presents identity as layered, unconscious and self-contradictory.

In much of Lawrence's writing, there is a clear separation between the representation and the enactment of identity. In *Women and Love*, this is particularly pronounced, and is signalled overtly by assertions such as: 'words themselves do not convey meaning' and 'what was the good of talking, any way? It must happen beyond the sound of words'.[1] For a novel dominated by dialogue, these are especially bold assertions which imply the need to re-evaluate initial readings of characters in the text. Hermione Roddice is particularly deserving of such a re-evaluation. Throughout the novel, she is represented both by herself and others as overly self-conscious and shallow. In actuality, she is neither. This misconception is engendered by her apparent lack of fixed ideas. Not only does she rarely express opinions, but when she does, they are sometimes disingenuous self-conscious imitation. One example of this is when she attempts to imitate Birkin by criticising education for making children 'over-conscious, burdened to death with consciousness', only to later argue the opposite: that 'there *can* be no reason, no *excuse* for education, except the joy and beauty of knowledge in itself'.[2] Besides reinforcing the meaninglessness of language in the novel, these contradictory remarks also imply an absence of opinion and a consequent lack of selfhood which is particularly obvious because it is often placed against Birkin's fixed and somewhat dogmatic views. Furthermore, it is impossible not to notice the suggestion of inconsistency, because it is explicitly challenged by Birkin, who argues that 'knowing is everything to you [Hermione], it is all your life'.[3] In this way, both she and Birkin highlight her apparent shallow self-consciousness. Furthermore, since Hermione is self-contradictory, the consistent position of Birkin on her identity appears to be the more reliable. However, as is shown by her assault on Birkin, her enacted self is the opposite:

> Her whole mind was a chaos, darkness breaking in upon it, and herself struggling to gain control with her will, as a swimmer struggles with the swirling water. But in spite of her efforts she was borne down, darkness seemed to break over her, she felt as if her heart was bursting. […] Then swiftly, in a flame that drenched down her body like fluid lightning, and gave her a perfect, unutterable consummation, unutterable satisfaction, she brought the ball of jewel stone with all her force, crash on his head.[4]

[1] D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 186, p. 250.
[2] *Women in Love*, p. 41, p. 85.
[3] *Women in Love*, p. 40.
[4] *Women in Love*, pp. 104-5.

This passage makes it clear that Hermione's will is subservient to the 'darkness' of her unconscious desire, which 'in spite of her efforts', she is controlled by. This supremacy of unconscious desire is reinforced by modifiers such as 'seemed' and 'as if', as well as the repetition of 'unutterable', which all combine to show uncertainty, and the inability of consciousness and language to convey what is being experienced. Since water is a common symbol of female sexuality in Lawrence's writing, it is also notable that Hermione's desire for violence is compared to 'swirling water' and 'fluid lightning' – a sexual undertone which is reinforced by erotic language such as 'consummation' and 'satisfaction'. These unconscious impulses make it clear that Hermione is not as self-conscious a character as she initially appears. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest credible reasons for this apparently random act of violence. Baruch Hochman argues that Hermione is one of the characters 'whose lives are organized with the unconscious aim of circumventing the great, dark void within themselves'.[5] In this light, Hermione's assault on Birkin can be rationalised as an attempt by her to remove the danger he poses to her conception of self through his constant opposition to her ideas, which threatens to force her into conscious engagement with her basic nature. Later in the novel, Birkin comes to understand this. Although in speech, he does not acknowledge her complexity, it is said that 'he would never, never dare to break her will, and let loose the maelström of her subconsciousness, and see her in her ultimate madness.'[6] Here, Hermione's self-consciousness is explicitly presented as an outer layer which can be broken to reveal subconscious madness. It is therefore clear that Hermione's socially-acceptable exterior conceals violent, chaotic tendencies which are always just below the surface, ready to erupt. This further reinforces the fact that Hermione is not the superficial and overly self-conscious character she initially appears to be. Instead, she is a character whose identity is layered – at its base ruled by violent and sexual unconscious desires, but held together by an outer veneer of self-conscious respectability. This experimental construction of character allows Lawrence to achieve his expressed aim that 'the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters' of *Women in Love*, even though they are outwardly the representation of dignified, prosperous English society.[7]

One of the most innovative features of Lawrence's treatment of character is the establishment of a different mode of consciousness situated in the blood. As Fiona Becket argues, Lawrence 'locates the birth of consciousness not in thought or language but in the blood'.[8] This blood-consciousness is, in the mental sense, unconscious. However, it represents the core desires of characters which, though not understood by them, are fundamental to their identity. This mode of unconscious existence is explored in the hotel room scene of 'New Eve and Old Adam':

> As soon as he had turned out the light, and there was nothing left for his mental consciousness to flourish amongst, it dropped, and it was dark inside him as without. It was his blood, and the elemental male in it, that now rose from him: unknown instincts and unperceived movements out of the depths of his physical being rose and heaved blindly. The darkness almost suffocated him, and he could not bear it

[5] Baruch Hochman, *Another Ego: The Changing View of Self and Society in the Work of D. H. Lawrence* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), p. 114.

[6] *Women in Love*, p. 140.

[7] D. H. Lawrence, *D. H. Lawrence's Unpublished Foreword to "Women in Love", 1919* (San Francisco: Gelber, Lilienthal, 1936), pages are unnumbered.

[8] Fiona Becket, 'Lawrence and Psychoanalysis', in *The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Anne Fernihough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 226.

> […] that dark, unknown being, which lived below all his consciousness in the eternal gloom of his blood, heaved and raged blindly against him.[9]

One of the most striking things about this passage is the antagonism between Peter Moest's physical and mental selves. His blood-consciousness is conceived as a 'dark, unknown being' which is striving *against* him. This impression of competing entities is reinforced by the repeated use of spatial metaphors such as 'it dropped', 'now rose' and 'lived below'. As with Hermione in *Women in Love*, this creates a layering of identity between conscious and unconscious being, however, it also increases the visceral nature of this conflict by placing it within a physical context. Peter's rejection of blood-consciousness is therefore shown to create a violent internal conflict which compartmentalises his identity and sets these different parts against each-other. This is the antithesis of Lawrence's ideal of a unified self as it is expressed both in this short story and his essays: 'I absolutely flatly deny that I am […] these bits of me. The whole is greater than the part'.[10] Peter's unwillingness to confront the unconscious parts of his being and use his encounter with them in the hotel room to develop a new, complete sense of self, is therefore shown to be responsible for his unhealthy psychological state. Without this integration of the unconscious aspects of his being, Lawrence shows that he cannot develop; he is stuck in his role as the stunted man, the 'Old Adam'. Hochman's argument that 'the Lawrencean individual must seek a dissolution of the commonplace self and its values' in order to develop, aligns with this view and shows how impossible it is for a character such as Peter to be psychologically healthy.[11] This stagnancy is found in both Peter and Paula, since neither is willing to engage with their unconscious selves. As a consequence, both come into contact with opportunities for change which they do not take. For instance, Paula spins her wedding ring '*as if* she would spurn it' (my emphasis), but does not, whereas Peter's opportunity to unite with his unconscious self in the hotel room is wasted, since he can only see it as an antagonistic force.[12] In this respect, the protagonists of 'New Eve and Old Adam' are distinct from characters such as Hermione, since they are more aware of their unconscious identities, although they are either unwilling or unable to unify with them.

Besides rejecting the unconscious aspects of their own identities, the characters of Peter and Paula Moest are also notable for their complete obliviousness to each-other's identities. This is continually signalled, as in the recurring phrase 'he could not understand', which at one point in repeated four times within a single paragraph.[13] Throughout the short story, their entire relationship is founded upon 'that battle between them which so many married people fight, without knowing why'.[14] This lack of understanding is the direct consequence of their rejection of blood-consciousness, since this prevents true self-knowledge and selfhood, thereby making it impossible for them to connect with each-other. In F. R. Leavis' seminal monograph on Lawrence, he argued that successful relationships in Lawrence's writing involve 'a mutual acceptance of […] separateness and otherness', which transcends individuality.[15] By contrast, Peter and Paula reject all forms of otherness both in themselves and each-other. It is this unwillingness to engage with the alterity of their unconscious selves which is the central cause of their suffering. This reality is made clear in the following exchange:

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[9] D. H. Lawrence, 'New Eve and Old Adam', in *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Stories*, ed. by John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 172.

[10] D. H. Lawrence, 'Why the Novel Matters', in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* ed. by Bruce Steele (London: Grafton, 1986), p. 169.

[11] *Another Ego*, p. 23.

[12] 'New Eve and Old Adam', p. 162.

[13] 'New Eve and Old Adam', p. 170.

[14] 'New Eve and Old Adam', p. 161.

[15] F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955), p. 111.

> "Did you spend a night of virtuous indignation," Paula laughed to her husband, "imagining my perfidy?"
>
> "I did not," said her husband. "Were you at Madge's?"
>
> "No," she said. Then, turning to her guest: "Who is Richard, Mr Moest?"[16]

The facetious sententiousness of Paula's language ('virtuous indignation', 'perfidy') is met with the blunt functionalism of 'I did not'. These markedly different forms of expression display a refusal on Peter's part to engage with Paula on her terms, which is symptomatic of their refusal to engage with each-other more broadly. This refusal then leads to a similarly monosyllabic response from Paula, which shuts down any possibility of communication. The failure of either of them to guess the activities of the other further shows the complete alienation between them. The presence of 'another Moest', the stranger who coincidentally has the same name as the couple, is symbolic of this.[17] By having a Moest who is a stranger in their home, Lawrence highlights the fact that the other Moests are also effectively strangers to each-other. The extent of this psychological separation is evident throughout the short story and is largely due to Lawrence's experimental construction of character, which places blood-consciousness in a central role. As a consequence of creating this layered and fundamentally unconscious presentation of character, Lawrence enables the possibility of characters who are entirely ignorant of themselves, and whose different parts may be in constant conflict as a result of their internal fragmentation and self-contradiction.

Ursula Brangwen, one of the central characters of both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, is the most self-contradictory in either. In *The Rainbow*, she conceives of herself in terms of this self-contradiction, which is based on the belief that what 'one cannot experience in daily life is not true for oneself'.[18] Although this could be interpreted as belief only in knowledge derived from personal experience, Ursula instead uses it to divide herself into what she experiences on week-days and what she experiences on Sundays: 'the week-day world' and 'the Sunday world'.[19] These two spheres of existence are understood in terms of the practical and the mystical, with Ursula valuing both, yet unable to reconcile them. As such, her identity becomes internally-divided and she is unable to constitute a coherent sense of herself:

> Whither to go, how to become oneself? One was not oneself, one was merely a half-stated question. How to become oneself, how to know the question and answer of oneself, when one was merely an unfixed something-nothing, blowing about like the winds of heaven, undefined, unstated.[20]

This short passage of free indirect discourse reveals the confusion of Ursula's mind, which is filled with contradictions such as 'one was not oneself' and 'something-nothing', which are reflective of the degree to which she has divided her identity into incompatible parts. The vagueness of these contradictions ensures that her identity is defined by internal conflict,

[16] 'New Eve and Old Adam', p. 175.
[17] 'New Eve and Old Adam', p. 174.
[18] D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 263.
[19] *The Rainbow*, p. 263.
[20] *The Rainbow*, p. 264.

since the only certainty of her identity is that the parts of her are in polar opposition. Michael Bell argues similarly that identity in Lawrence's writing is 'a dynamic and evolutionary matrix of competing forces', rather than a unified whole.[21] In relation to Ursula's mental division of the week, this is true. However, it is generally the case with Ursula that her internal division is figured more simply in the opposition of core and social selves. The ending of *The Rainbow* is the most explicit in this when it describes the opposition of 'kernel' and 'husk', with the prior representing both core identity and a hopeful future, the latter being social identity and a decaying past.[22] However, this theme is explored more profoundly through the motif of the moon.

Throughout *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, the moon is used as a symbol of core feminine identity and sexuality. Ursula's response to the moon in the 'First Love' chapter of *The Rainbow* is an example of this. There is a ritualistic and sexualised dimension to this passage in which Ursula is 'offering' and opening herself to be 'filled with the full moon'.[23] However, it is the presentation of Ursula as 'cleaved like a transparent jewel to its light' which reveals something crucial about the construction of her identity.[24] Whereas Ursula's earlier week-day and Sunday selves created only confusion, the light of the moon is apparently capable of making her 'transparent': clear and without mystery or conflict. However, this does not resolve the contradictions in Ursula's identity; it is a momentary connection which resonates with something fundamental in her, but it is not pursued any further: 'she could not go [to it], in actuality […] the people stood round her like stones, like magnetic stones, and she could not go, in actuality'.[25] Ursula is restrained by her social setting and by the people around her. As Diane S. Bonds accurately asserts, Lawrence's characters have a social self 'constituted of proliferating masks or roles', which is 'in opposition to some permanent or absolute self'.[26] However, this social self is not entirely created by external pressure, since the description of these people as 'magnetic stones' implies that she is drawn towards them and bound by them in a mutual, magnetic relationship. As such, Ursula is once again shown to be internally-divided – her core self is drawn towards the liberating influence of the moon but her social self compels her to conform to normative behaviour. In some respects, this is similar to the week-day/Sunday world division, since both set mystical against practical, yet the moon example is distinct because it lacks the earlier confusion and because the stronger force at the time is clear in the result: Ursula accepts the predominance of her social self by rejecting the allure of the moon and remaining with Anton at the wedding party.

Women in Love also contains a scene which highlights Ursula's relationship to the moon. Within the appropriately-titled 'Moony' chapter, she looks on voyeuristically as Birkin attempts to destroy the moon's reflection in a pond. This destruction is described in terms reminiscent of warfare: 'there was a burst of sound, and a burst of brilliant light, the moon had exploded on the water, and was flying asunder in flakes of white and dangerous fire'.[27] The effect of the stone on the moon is like a bomb: resulting in an explosion, followed by 'white and dangerous fire'. Likewise, the repeated plosive 'b' of 'burst', 'burst' and 'brilliant' recalls the destructive impact of landing artillery. This is then emphasised by other repeated sounds as in 'water', 'was' and 'white', as well as 'flying', 'flakes' and 'fire'. The result of this is a bombardment of sounds which embodies the violence of warfare that is the unspoken context against which *Women in Love* is set. Susan Reid also identifies this use of sound to show the violence of the First World War, and further argues that 'Lawrence's deeper

[21] Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 5.
[22] *The Rainbow*, pp. 456-9.
[23] *The Rainbow,* p. 296.
[24] *The Rainbow,* p. 296.
[25] *The Rainbow,* p. 296.
[26] Diane S. Bonds, *Language and the Self in D. H. Lawrence* (London: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 64.
[27] *Women in Love*, p. 247.

engagement with rhythm [in *Women in Love*] accompanies a turn away from harmony'.[28] However, this is only partially true. As Mark Kinkead-Weekes argues, this scene is an example of how violence and discord in *Women in Love* can lead to 'wholeness, harmony, and peace'.[29] No matter what Birkin does, the moon comes together again, and although at first: 'Ursula was dazed, [and] her mind was all gone', she soon recovers and goes over to Birkin.[30] Furthermore, since Ursula identifies with the moon, this process of discord resolving into coherence also has implications for her identity. It is therefore important to observe that Birkin's attempts to destroy the moon result in it 'getting stronger', becoming 'larger and brighter'.[31] Thus Birkin, by breaking Ursula down through her proxy, the moon, allows her to come together again as a more coherent, unified whole. This process mirrors their relationship overall, since it is defined by an attempt to reject existing, socially-constructed identity and find a new way of being through communion with each-other. As such, Lawrence presents this painful restructuring of identity as a potential route to salvation for internally-divided characters such as Ursula. This route remains only partially-realised because Ursula and Birkin's future is left on an equivocal note at the end of *Women in Love*. However, even this degree of identity unification is much more developed than what Ursula achieves in *The Rainbow*. This is one of the many ways in which the Ursula of *The Rainbow* is meaningfully distinct from the character in *Women in Love*. This distinction is itself a form of self-contradiction, which is particularly experimental because it exists between texts.

The core of Lawrence's experimental character construction in all of these texts is the rejection of unified selfhood. Rather than considering characters as singular entities, Lawrence represents them as a complex array of competing impulses. The consequence of this is the creation of characters with layers of conscious and unconscious identity, which are often set in opposition to each-other. For characters who display this opposition, such as Hermione in *Women in Love*, and Peter and Paula Moest in 'New Eve and Old Adam', the consequences include unhappiness and an inability to connect emotionally with others. For those such as Ursula, who are able to partially overcome this division and reach a unified sense of self, the result is far more hopeful. It is by resolving this internal fragmentation that the characters of *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, and 'New Eve and Old Adam' are given the opportunity to attain fulfilment. However, this wholeness can only be achieved through a deliberate engagement with the unconscious and a painful breaking-down of old identities in order to establish new ways of existence.

[28] Susan Reid, *D. H. Lawrence, Music and Modernism* (Cham: Macmillan, 2019), p. 13.

[29] Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 'Violence in *Women in Love*', in *D. H. Lawrence's* 'Women in Love'*: A Casebook*, ed. by David Ellis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 233.

[30] *Women in Love*, p. 248.

[31] *Women in Love*, p. 247, p. 248.

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