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The Rainbow

D. H. Lawrence

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Introduction

I

D. H. Lawrence, known for his restless wanderings in later years, spent the first half of his life in Eastwood, a coal-mining village in the Erewash Valley, eight miles northwest of Nottingham in the English Midlands. The lovely countryside and traditional agricultural life still survived in this region amidst the depredations of Victorian industrialism. "In this queer jumble of the old England and the new," Lawrence wrote in "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside," "I came into consciousness." The landscape that Lawrence called "the country of my heart" provided the setting for most of his novels from *The White Peacock* (1911), through *Women in Love* and *The Lost Girl* (both 1920), to his last major fiction, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).

A sickly and sensitive working-class lad, quite different from the rough boys destined for a life in the mines, Lawrence left school when he was fifteen, worked briefly in a surgical-appliances factory, and was invalided out of the commercial world after a serious bout of pneumonia. He spent four years as an apprentice teacher in the Eastwood schools and, when he had saved sufficient money, entered the teacher-training program at Nottingham University and graduated in 1908. These rather depressing and disillusioning years were the basis of Ursula's experiences as teacher and university student in chapters XIII-XV of *The Rainbow*.

Lawrence made astonishing technical and thematic progress in his fiction between *The White Peacock* and *The Rainbow*, published in 1915 when he was just thirty years old. *Sons*

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and Lovers (1913), his first masterpiece, is a realistic autobiographical portrayal of a young man torn between an overwhelming attachment to his mother and a desire to establish love relations with two other women. It developed the themes of sexual conflict and of destructive "spiritual" women who deny the flesh which he had described in *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser*. But *The Rainbow*, Lawrence's first symbolic work, surpassed the considerable achievement of *Sons and Lovers*.

Between March 1913 and March 1915 Lawrence wrote four versions of the novel. He first called it *The Sisters*, then *The Wedding Ring*, and finally *The Rainbow*. In 1915 he split it into two works, and the sequel (which continues the lives of Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen) became his greatest novel, *Women in Love*.

The Rainbow introduced sexual life into the family-chronicle novel. It portrays a visionary quest for love by three generations of English men and women—Tom and Lydia, Will and Anna, Ursula and Anton—and reveals how each generation becomes successively weaker in character and spirit after the Industrial Revolution has destroyed their traditional life and their communal sense. The main characters of the first generation, Tom and Lydia Brangwen, have a strong family bond, a close relation to the eternal round of the seasons, and a connection to the vital and vivid landscape. This landscape seems—as in Thomas Hardy's novels—to exist as an independent force and is almost as significant as the people who move upon it.

The biblical, rhythmical, incantatory language of the magnificent opening of the novel suggests the continuity and "blood-intimacy" of rural life as well as the instinctive, almost sexual connection of the men to the body and pulse of the animals and the earth. This language also suggests, through "the intercourse between heaven and earth," the promise of the rainbow, which shines forth after the destructive flood and represents the redemptive and "everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Genesis 9:16). To Lawrence, the rainbow that appears in the last visionary pages of the novel symbolizes human potential, expresses hope for the future, and encompasses all the positive elements in the book: soil, cattle, harvests, naked dancing, wild horses, and sexual love. For Lawrence, the sacramental rain-

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bow stands for "the glory shining between every two people which can exist only between them. Each human relationship should be a glorious rainbow."

The opening section of *The Rainbow* reveals that the Brangwen women are traditionally distinguished from the men by their spiritual longing for something above and beyond themselves, symbolized by the ever-visible church tower at Ilkeston. While the men face inward, the women want "to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom" and to achieve a higher mode of being. Tom Brangwen's experience establishes a recurrent pattern of consummation in love, alternating with emotional isolation, that is inherited by the next two generations.

Tom and Lydia's love affair and subsequent marriage set a standard of sexual passion and instinctual integrity which the two later couples fail to meet. The very first time Tom sees Lydia Lensky (the widow of a Polish revolutionary) walking past him on the country road, he instinctively knows "that's her." As their eyes meet, he looks quickly away to relish his inner conviction and to enjoy the ambivalent, anticipatory pain of joy running through him. Soon afterward he proceeds with his ritualistic courtship, wearing a clean linen shirt, trimming his beard, and carrying a bunch of yellow daffodils. When he suddenly appears as her prospective lover, her door opens to an unknown world. Though startled by his nocturnal invasion and at his mercy (as well as at the mercy of her own intense emotions), she responds to his instinctive feelings: "she did not know him, only she knew he was a man come for her."

On the morning after their wedding night Tom, with exquisite sensitivity, deals with the hostility and jealousy of Lydia's young daughter Anna, who feels he has usurped her mother's love. Gently acceding to her demands, he subdues her antagonism by inviting her into their bedroom and into their bed. When Anna wants to eject and replace Tom, Lydia tells the glowering child: "You can't send your father from his own bed, my little bird," and he also encourages her by saying: "There's room for you as well." Later on, Tom comforts the panic-stricken Anna while Lydia is in labor ("Oh, don't cry, don't cry, love, she doesn't want you to cry, precious little heart, no, she doesn't") and shows they have progressed to sympathetic intimacy. And later still, when Tom sees Anna

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declare her love as Will embraces her in the barn, amidst roosting fowl, *he* must now suppress the bitterness of rejection and the feeling of betrayal: "Who knew her—he or that blind-headed youth? To whom did she belong, if not to himself?" All these acutely perceived and richly rendered scenes portray the sound reliance on instinctive feeling and the continuity of essential human experience: love, marriage, birth, growth.

As the Brangwens become more ambitious and seek a widening circle of experience, they find it more difficult to achieve consummation and fulfillment. Lydia finds satisfaction in her husband, Anna in her children, and Ursula seeks it in her teaching career; Tom in the land, Will in art, and Anton Skrebensky (Ursula's lover) in war. Although the second and third generations suffer a decline from the heroic standards of Tom and Lydia, they are not so easily satisfied and do succeed in extending their range and their freedom.

Anna and Will come together and express the harmony (rather than separation) between man and nature when they gather in the harvest in the moonlight. This scene is directly inspired by part three, chapter four of *Anna Karenina*, which Lawrence called "the greatest novel in the world," when Levin helps his Russian peasants gather the hay. Anna and Will's ritual courtship and mating dance—"the whole rhythm of him beat into his kisses, and still he pursued her, in his kisses, and still she was not quite overcome. . . . All the night in his arms, darkness and shine, he possessed of it all!"—suggests simultaneous sexual satisfaction.

Anna and Will, however, do not maintain the sexual and emotional intimacy of Tom and Lydia. When Anna becomes pregnant with Ursula, she repudiates her intimacy with Will and dances nakedly and exultingly before the fire in her bedroom—as King David had danced naked before the Lord in II Samuel 6:16. She excludes Will from participating in the growth and birth of their child by becoming mystically self-absorbed during the late stage of her pregnancy. She temporarily abandons their sexual relationship and focuses entirely on her reproductive role.

Later, during their visit to Lincoln Cathedral (northeast of Nottingham), which John Ruskin had called "the most precious piece of architecture in the British Islands," Anna rejects her husband in an intellectual way. She secularizes the cathe-

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dral that Will idealizes as a spiritual artifact. Concentrating on the sly, malicious little faces carved in stone that wink and leer at the temporal world, she mocks the notion that the church is absolute, destroys his cherished illusions, and spoils his passionate intercourse with the cathedral.

Ursula's childhood is contrasted to Anna's. While Tom Brangwen had protected his stepdaughter, Will, compensating for his alienation from the adult Anna, attempts to bind his daughter Ursula to him by inspiring her fearful dependence. He foolishly dares her to hold on to his back while he jumps from the canal bridge into the water below because he loves to feel the naked, terrified child clinging to his body. Shocked by this exploit, the badly frightened Ursula "laughed almost with a sob" after Will has exercised his power at her expense, damaging her trust and her love.

The third generation of Brangwens focuses on Ursula, whose relationship with Anton Skrebensky expresses the disruption of sexual and spiritual harmony that Lawrence saw in the modern world. Though Anton is associated with her grandmother's aristocratic Polish background, Ursula—the quintessential modern woman—cannot establish a successful love relation with the imperialist soldier. The difference in their characters is portrayed in the barge scene, when she instinctively gives her valuable necklace to a baby she has never seen before. Anton—snobbish, materialistic, and jealous—disapproves of her generous gesture: "Skrebensky, somehow, had created a deadness round her, a sterility, as if the world were ashes."

Ursula's judgment of Anton is ultimately, and justly, negative, for he lacks the natural vitality she recognizes in the bargeman. She must experience a sequence of failures before she can become illuminated by the hopeful light and color of the rainbow. These bitter but enriching failures—her narrow-minded school, her materialistically oriented university, her lesbian love with Winifred Inger, her unhappy affair with the mechanical and dominating Anton, even her miscarriage of Anton's baby (a strong contrast to Anna's swarm of children)—strengthen her and prepare her for the idea of an independent life, free from ties to her father, to institutions, to Winifred, and to Anton. The wild horses she encounters at the end

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of the novel symbolize her potential freedom just as the luminous rainbow promises a new beginning.

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Early in the novel, Lawrence uses the invasive collieries and the Midland Railway as a menacing opposition to the promise of the rainbow. They encroach on the town, uproot the farmers, and destroy the sense of community. When the colliery cut bursts and the embankment breaks down in chapter IX, Tom Brangwen is knocked off his feet and drowned in the black horror of the suffocating flood: "in the utter darkness, the unconscious, drowning body was rolled along, the waters pouring, washing, filling in the place."

In the course of the novel the collieries spread in rapid confusion like a skin disease, blighting and mechanizing the organic life and the human feelings that are essential for vital love. When the lesbian teacher, Winifred Inger, marries Ursula's uncle Tom, the manager of the colliery at Wiggiston, she unites sexual with industrial corruption and dwells amidst the living dead: "The place had the strange desolation of a ruin. Colliers hanging about in gangs and groups, or passing along the asphalt pavements heavily to work, seemed not like living people, but like spectres. The rigidity of the blank streets, the homogeneous amorphous sterility of the whole suggested death rather than life."

Against this background of mechanization and sterility, concepts inextricably linked in his mind, Lawrence introduces the biblical symbol of the rainbow. He uses the iconography of Fra Angelico's *The Last Judgment* (c. 1435) to represent the opposition of salvation and damnation, heaven and hell. Lawrence portrays these polarities in *The Rainbow* by contrasting illumination and darkness, inclusion and exclusion, consummation and annihilation. He uses religious imagery to describe the great moments of love and exaltation, and when he first introduces Fra Angelico's painting in chapter VI, all these recurrent metaphors are gathered into a single powerful image and achieve a simultaneity of verbal and visual meaning. The entire novel leads to Ursula's hope for the future that is expressed in the heavenly vision of the New Jerusalem, what Lawrence calls "the entry of the blessed into paradise," so that *The Last Judgment*

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ment is present in *The Rainbow* both as a symbolic center of the narrative and in the biblical imagery—light, gateways, angels, circles, gardens, and ecstasy—that expresses the themes of the book.

Part of the greatness of *The Rainbow* lies in Lawrence's ability to connect and yet differentiate the Brangwens; and Anna, Will, and Ursula are distinguished by the ways they respond to the aspirations that are portrayed in the picture. Fra Angelico's painting helps to structure and unify an enormously complex and innovative novel, and to focus the disparate images and values of three generations into a pictorial synthesis and harmony. *The Last Judgment* provides an artistic, visual, and religious representation that encompasses the experience of mankind at the apocalyptic moment of religious history and is juxtaposed against the characters' vital quest for the connection between the material and spiritual worlds.

The architectural metaphor of the rainbow connects the first judgment of Noah in Genesis with the Last Judgment of Christ in Revelation. The rainbow is not a logical conclusion to the rather pessimistic events in the novel, but a regenerative symbol that opposes Ursula's negative experiences and promises the sexual fulfillment and emotional salvation she eventually achieves with Rupert Birkin in the sequel, *Women in Love*.

III

In *The Rainbow* Lawrence analyzes the instinctual and irrational psychological forces that surge beneath the surface of human character. His conception of character in the novel was radically new. Not content with describing his characters' complex motivations, he sought to reveal their deepest sexual drives (which had been suggested but not described by previous writers). By doing so, Lawrence transformed the moral scheme of modern fiction.

The Rainbow—suggesting that man's only hope, when faced with industrialization, is to realize human potential through sexual love—opposed, as Lawrence realized, the literary and social conventions of the time. "Nobody will ever dare to publish it," he wrote in 1913. "I feel I could knock my head against the wall. Yet I love and adore this new book. It's all crude as yet . . . but I think it's great—so new, so really a

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stratum deeper than I think anybody has ever gone, in a novel. But there, you see, it's my latest. It's all analytical—quite unlike *Sons and Lovers*, not a bit visualized." Though Methuen was sufficiently confident to publish *The Rainbow* in an edition of 2,500 copies on September 30, 1915, it was attacked by moralistic critics who had no conception of Lawrence's astonishing achievement.

Since sexual explicitness had previously been confined to overtly erotic or pornographic works, Lawrence's sexual passages were assumed to be shocking and obscene. The *Sphere* condemned the book absolutely, stating: "There is no form of viciousness, of suggestiveness, that is not reflected in these pages" and menacingly warned: "unless [the publishers] hold the view that Lesbianism is a fit subject for family fiction I imagine they will regret this venture." The *Star*, equating morality with patriotism, savaged Lawrence's "eloquent lubricity," his "unnameable and unthinkable ugliness," and claimed his subtlety "is used to express the unspeakable and to hint at the unutterable." Despite its striking originality and its symbolic meanings, critics and police believed it was a "dirty book," and in the weeks following publication Lawrence was betrayed by his publisher, who allowed his stock of the novel to be destroyed.

The authorities specifically mentioned two objectionable passages, hitherto deleted from the American editions of the novel. The first passage describes Ursula's bathing with Winifred Inger, when she "lay still in her mistress's arms, her forehead against the beloved, maddening breast . . . [and] twined her body about her." It was ironic that the reviewers, the police, and the law courts all ignored the fact that Lawrence condemned this lesbianism and called the chapter "Shame."

The second passage, from the "Bitterness of Ecstasy" chapter (also about destructive sexual love), describes Ursula's lovemaking with Anton near the water and then on land. In this scene Ursula initiates the sexual encounter, expresses powerful sexual feelings, and forces Anton into the passive role that is usually ascribed to the woman: "He came direct to her, without preliminaries. She held him pinned down at the chest, awful. The fight, the struggle for consummation was terrible. It lasted till he succumbed, till he gave way as if dead." Because the novel was published during the Great War, when many men

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were fighting and being killed, hostile critics and the authorities responsible for censorship found this depiction of a sexually independent woman particularly threatening. Ursula's sexual initiative, and her criticism of Anton's soldiering, gave greater offense than Lawrence's sexual explicitness.

The authorities, though on the lookout for salacious passages, did *not* object to a scene that strongly hints of sodomy between Will and Anna—either because they failed to notice it or because the suggestion was too awful to contemplate: "All the *shameful*, natural and *unnatural* acts of sensual voluptuousness which he and the woman partook of together, created together, they had their heavy beauty and their delight. . . . The secret, shameful things are most terribly beautiful. They accepted shame, and were one with it in their most unlicensed pleasures. . . . It was a bud that blossomed into beauty and heavy, *fundamental gratification*" (my italics).

In 1915, twenty years after the homosexuality trial of Oscar Wilde, the prevailing attitudes about sexual morality and sexual expression were essentially those of the Victorian period. And these attitudes were compounded with a patriotic self-righteousness that attempted to justify the war, which Lawrence had publicly and vehemently opposed. Unlike most authors of the time, Lawrence refused to be oblique in his discussion of sex. Despite his fears that the novel would be misunderstood, he insisted on frankness about lesbianism and the sexual desires of women when even an acknowledgment of these subjects was considered offensive. He adopted a prophetic stance, propounded a new morality based on feeling, and brought sexual emotions to the forefront of the novel. He defied contemporary attitudes toward both sex and war, and was made to suffer for expressing his views.

Provoked by the reviews and by the complaints of the National Purity League, the courts proceeded against the novel under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. Though Methuen had surrendered all its copies of *The Rainbow* on November 3—ten days before the trial—Lawrence was never notified and knew nothing about the seizure of his books until after the proceedings were concluded. The elderly judge, Sir John Dickinson, whose son had recently been killed in the war, agreed with the prosecutor that "he had never read anything more disgusting than this book. . . . It was utter filth; nothing else

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would describe it." Algernon Methuen made no attempt to defend the novel or to protect the interest of the author, and expressed regret that he had published it. The judge ordered the 1,011 remaining copies to be destroyed and the defendants to pay costs of ten guineas.

After writing one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century, Lawrence lost all chance of earning anything for two years of work on *The Rainbow*. He was publicly stigmatized as obscene and had great difficulty in placing his work for the next three years. He became desperately poor, remained trapped in England when his application for a passport was refused, and was persecuted by the authorities during the rest of the war. Though he completed *Women in Love* in 1916, he was unable to publish it until November 1920—and then only privately and in New York. His reputation remained dubious until the revival of critical interest in the mid-1950s (twenty-five years after his death) when he was finally recognized as one of the major—and most influential—modern novelists.

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How Tom Brangwen Married a Polish Lady

I

The Brangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh Farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance.

There was a look in the eyes of the Brangwens as if they were expecting something unknown, about which they were eager. They had that air of readiness for what would come to them, a kind of surety, an expectancy, the look of an inheritor.

They were fresh, blond, slow-speaking people, revealing themselves plainly, but slowly, so that one could watch the change in their eyes from laughter to anger, blue, lit-up laughter, to a hard blue-staring anger; through all the irresolute stages of the sky when the weather is changing.

Living on rich land, on their own land, near to a growing town, they had forgotten what it was to be in straitened circumstances. They had never become rich, because there were al-

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ways children, and the patrimony was divided every time. But always, at the Marsh, there was ample.

So the Brangwens came and went without fear of necessity, working hard because of the life that was in them, not for want of the money. Neither were they thriftless. They were aware of the last halfpenny, and instinct made them not waste the peeling of their apple, for it would help feed the cattle. But heaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? They felt the rush of the sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and, falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and interrelations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away. The young corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men. They mounted their horses, and held life between the grip of their knees, they harnessed their horses at the wagon, and, with hand on the bridle-rings, drew the heaving of the horses after their will.

In autumn the partridges whirled up, birds in flocks blew like spray across the fallow, rooks appeared on the grey, watery heavens, and flew cawing into the winter. Then the men sat by the fire in the house where the women moved about with surety, and the limbs and the body of the men were impregnated with the day, cattle and earth and vegetation and the sky, the men sat by the fire and their brains were inert, as their blood flowed heavy with the accumulation from the living day.

The women were different. On them too was the drowse of blood-intimacy, calves sucking and hens running together in droves, and young geese palpitating in the hand while the food was pushed down their throttle. But the women looked out from the heated, blind intercourse of farm-life, to the spoken

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world beyond. They were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance, and they strained to listen.

It was enough for the men, that the earth heaved and opened its furrows to them, that the wind blew to dry the wet wheat, and set the young ears of corn wheeling freshly round about; it was enough that they helped the cow in labour, or ferreted the rats from under the barn, or broke the back of a rabbit with a sharp knock of the hand. So much warmth and generating and pain and death did they know in their blood, earth and sky and beast and green plants, so much exchange and interchange they had with these, that they lived full and surcharged, their senses full fed, their faces always turned to the heat of the blood, staring into the sun, dazed with looking towards the source of generation, unable to turn round.

But the woman wanted another form of life than this, something that was not blood-intimacy. Her house faced out from the farm-buildings and fields; looked out to the road and the village with church and Hall and the world beyond. She stood to see the far-off world of cities and governments and the active scope of man, the magic land to her, where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled. She faced outwards to where men moved dominant and creative, having turned their back on the pulsing heat of creation, and with this behind them, were set out to discover what was beyond, to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom; whereas the Brangwen men faced inwards to the teeming life of creation, which poured unresolved into their veins.

Looking out, as she must, from the front of her house towards the activity of man in the world at large, whilst her husband looked out to the back at sky and harvest and beast and land, she strained her eyes to see what man had done in fighting outwards to knowledge, she strained to hear how he uttered himself in his conquest, her deepest desire hung on the battle that she heard, far off, being waged on the edge of the unknown. She also wanted to know, and to be of the fighting host.

At home, even so near as Cossethay, was the vicar who spoke the other, magic language, and had the other, finer bearing, both of which she could perceive, but could never attain to. The vicar moved in worlds beyond where her own menfolk