DARK IMAGERY IN WOMEN IN LOVE

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DARK IMAGERY IN WOMEN IN LOVE

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CHAPTER I

WOMEN IN LOVE

In his foreword to Women in Love, D. H. Lawrence makes a clear distinction between those people of his era who strive for realization of the "new unfoldings" which "struggle up in torment" in them and those who resist understanding of such unfoldings by clinging to concepts that no longer apply to the centers which are vital to man's creative existence. He wrote in 1919 that

> we are now in a period of crisis. Every man who is acutely alive is acutely wrestling with his own soul. The people that can bring forth the new passion, the new idea, this people will endure. Those others, that fix themselves in the old idea, will perish with the new life strangled unborn within them. Men must speak to one another.[1]

The characters in Women in Love correspond basically to one or the other of the two types of people whom Lawrence cites, either to those who accept change or those who do not. Rupert Birkin and Ursula Brangwen are representative of the former type, Gerald Crich and Gudrun Brangwen the latter type. Ursula and Birkin, like all characters in the novel, are intricately involved with "the old idea," that is,

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[1]D. H. Lawrence, Women in Love (New York, 1960), p. viii.

with the society based upon man's rationalizations rather than upon his inner urgings, the promptings of "the creative, spontaneous soul."[2] But they reject the old idea in the end and therefore are eligible for a new life. They heed "the promptings of desire and aspiration" which their souls send forth and realize that "these promptings are our true fate, which is our business to fulfil. A fate dictated from outside, from theory or from circumstance, is a false fate."[3]

Almost every character in Women in Love other than Birkin and Ursula clings to the old idea as a directional guide to further action, and in doing so, contributes to the disintegration of himself as an adherent of a disintegrating civilization. These are the people who do not heed their inner promptings but attempt to maintain control of their destinies through rational theory or rationalization of circumstance; their fates are therefore "false," because artificial. Gerald Crich and Gudrun Brangwen, Ursula's sister, are the chief representives of a dying society. But the four main characters are not traditional allegorical types. Freeman says that Women in Love is "remarkable for its successful portrayal, through the feelings of

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

individuals, of this death of a whole culture . . . ."[4] The process of dissolution which society at large is undergoing in Women in Love is not presented in the novel as only an abstracted idea portrayed allegorically; it is evident "in the sphere of personal relations, in the hearts and souls of individual characters."[5]

There is also a process in the novel which is in direct opposition to the general trend of dissolution: the process of escaping the dissolution in order to regain a synthetic, creative individual and social existence. This process, like that of dissolution, takes place in the development of individual character, namely in Birkin and Ursula. Ultimately, the two couples move in opposite directions, both of which lead to a kind of death. Gudrun and Gerald, in their association with a dead and decaying western culture, follow the course of that culture to extinction, or, in Gudrun's case, to a kind of living death which is worse than extinction. Birkin and Ursula reject the course of the disintegrating culture, and disavow any connection with the old ideas. Such drastic action is itself a sort of death, because in rejecting the old ideas they reject their social

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[4]Mary Freeman, D. H. Lawrence: A Basic Study of His Ideas (New York, n. d.), p. 60.

[5]Julian Moynahan, The Deed of Life (Princeton, 1963), p. 72.

selves and take on a new center of being. Their rejection of their old centers of being is in effect the symbolic speeding up of the process of disintegration into death which western culture is going through. They are allowed to live because they do not follow their culture to its ultimate disintegration as Gerald and Gudrun do, but voluntarily turn to a more creative center of existence. Birkin says that the process of dissolution "ends in universal nothing . . . . It means a new cycle of creation after--but not for us."[6] Thus by following the process to its end, Gerald and Gudrun, and society, die and become extinct, and a new creative order takes over. By rejecting the old ideas, Birkin and Ursula die and are resurrected into the new creative order.

The two different "centers" of existence which the characters in Women in Love adhere to are antithetical. In simple terms, these centers may be described as the "mind" and the "body." The novel is basically oriented toward dispelling modern society's trend toward separating the two centers. Lawrence opposes T. E. Hulme's theory that inanimate matter, the organic world, and the sphere of ethical and religious values are each to be considered in a separate context, the first and third areas being absolutes and the second being

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[6]Lawrence, Women in Love, pp. 164-165.

"somehow different, . . . a muddy zone between two absolutes," the knowledge of which zone "remains loose and relative."[7] Lawrence followed the trend of the romanticists, who, under the influence of Nietzsche and others, had by 1900 contracted Hulme's threefold division of knowledge into "a simple dualism between dead matter and vital processes, with all values, including the strictly religious ones, subsumed under the category of the organic."[8] Generally, Lawrence decided that western civilization had followed Hulme in assuming that "life is a welter upon which value must be imposed from above and beyond," while Lawrence himself felt that "values are discovered or created outright in the act of living."[9] In Lawrence's view, man's search for values which originate from outside his vital organic self had led him to rely upon a particular kind of intellect with which he has created "a shadow world" for himself. He creates a theory of civilization and then, a priori, regards

> . . . the flesh and blood, natural scenery, and stone buildings around them as ideas or symbols illustrating the conclusions they have come to. Long before cities are ruined, we have made metal [sic] ruins of them and ghosts of ourselves.[10]

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[7]Moynahan, p. xix.

[8]Ibid., pp. xix-xx. [9]Ibid., p. xx.

[10]Stephen Spender, The Creative Element: A Study of Vision, Despair, and Orthodoxy Among Some Modern Writers (London, 1953), p. 93.

Lawrence felt that man's intellect, and therefore his rational world, should be directed from within the man, that his "blood consciousness" rather than his mental consciousness should be his guide in his search for reality. He felt that "western society had overemphasized the centers of mental activity and had disturbed the balance of the human being by cutting short pure blood activity or by subjecting it to a sparse, mean, and petty intellectualism."[11] Such imbalance between the two vital centers in man prevents his being a whole and integrated being, and finally he is unable to expand and create in rhythm with the creative universe, of which he is a part. In order to survive he must continue to grow: in order to grow he must submit to the great inhuman life force which is impersonal and unknown to the mental consciousness.

> Either he will have to start budding, or he will be forsaken of the holy ghost; abandoned as a failure in creation, as the ichthyossaurus was abandoned. Being abandoned means losing his vitality. The sun and the earth-dark will cease rushing together in him. Already it is ceasing. To men, the sun is becoming stale, and the earth sterile. But the sun itself will never become stale, nor the earth barren. It is only that the

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[11]Frederick J. Hoffman, "Lawrence's Quarrel with Freud," The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Harry T. Moore (Norman, 1953), p. 126.

> clue is missing inside men. They are like flowerless, seedless, fat cabbages, nothing inside.[12]

Man had turned into an egotist whose motivation springs from rationally conceived ideals, and since the "clue" to vital living is missing in these ideals, Lawrence felt that he must turn from man's limited moral schemes, which were "too inflexible and narrow to integrate in a creative way even the major experiences of each individual."[13] In his novels Lawrence looks "beneath our conventional ways of seeing to the more basic material of consciousness for the essentials of motivation."[14]

The material which is most basic to our consciousness Lawrence conceived of as being basic to all creative action, on both the individual and the cosmic levels. But the mind of western man had come to so predominate his motivations that even his most intimate associations with his fellow men were motivated by his desire to absorb his creative urges into some preconceived ideal. This absorption resulted in a division between mind and feeling, a result which is Lawrence's idea of immorality. He exhorts man to accept the fact that

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[12]D. H. Lawrence, "Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine," The Later D. H. Lawrence, edited by William York Tindall (New York, 1959), pp. 184-185.

[13]Freeman, p. 55. [14]Ibid.

"the sensual passions and mysteries are equally sacred with the spiritual mysteries and passions . . . ."[15] Since the great clue to essential life is to be found in personal relations, chiefly between man and woman, he "conducted his search in terms of common life."[16] Lawrence concluded that the greatest individual expression of life is to be found in sensual perceptions, which, if taken as sacred, can lead to ultimate perception of and union with the greatest of life mysteries. He felt that "the only thing unbearable is the degradation, the prostitution of the living mysteries within us."[17] Such degradation is the chief sin which his characters commit. Until Birkin, for example, had come to function at both the conscious pole and the unconscious pole at once, he had,

> as a product of his culture, been suffering a gradual divorce of reason and passion, mind and feeling. The excessive cerebration that made him sound like a school teacher and those sexual excesses that made him seem unwholesome have been growing painfully inimical. But that imminent complete divorce has been avoided, the full break will not occur, the cleft in his character is mending.[18]

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[15]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. vii.

[16]Moynahan, p. xxi.

[17]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. vii.

[18]Robert L. Chamberlain, "Pussum, Minette, and the Africo-Nordic Symbol in Lawrence's Women in Love," PMLA, LXXVII (September, 1963), 414.

In Gerald and Gudrun, who represent society at large, the cleft does become complete.

In Hermione Lawrence personifies the duality between mind and feeling. She is, like Gerald and Gudrun, the greatest kind of sinner because her feelings, the sacred mysteries of her being, are to her a mere stimulation of the mind. Because knowledge means everything to her, she doesn't "want to be an animal," Birkin tells her. "You only want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them."[19] His description of her attitude and development as a person is a synopsis of the dramatized development of Gudrun and Gerald. Birkin tells Hermione that she has her "own tight conscious world, and there is nothing beyond it."[20] In her frantic quest for intellectual understanding of even the deepest mysteries of life, she has now "come to all your conclusions, you want to go back and be like a savage, without knowledge. You want a life of pure sensation and 'passion'."[21] This is exactly what happens to Gerald and Gudrun. Hermione's problem, Birkin tells her, is that "you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will

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[19]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 35.

[20]Ibid. [21]Ibid.

and conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to know."[22] The "dark sensual body of life," the unknown, is pitted against the "will and conceit of consciousness," the known. Goodheart says that "Lawrence's criticism of mind consciousness can be understood as a criticism of the soul-body dualism on which so much of the Western cultural tradition is based."[23]

Lawrence's ideas are so unconventional that they require an unconventional method of dramatic expression. Other than through straight narrative expression, perhaps his most essential means of advancing character and idea is through imagery. Stanford even thinks that both The Rainbow and Women "depend upon a thread of dramatic images rather than conventional narratives."[24] Van Ghent states that Lawrence expresses his ideas "not only through narrative logic but also through poetic logic--imagery."[25] In her view the image

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[22]Ibid.

[23]Eugene Goodheart, The Utopian Vision of D. H. Lawrence (Chicago, 1963), p. 103.

[24]Raney Stanford, "Thomas Hardy and Lawrence's 'The White Peacock,'" PMLA, V (Spring, 1959), p. 23.

[25]Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel, Form and Function (New York, 1953), p. 248.

in his works predominates over other literary devices and is so important that it "even becomes a medium replacing episode and discursive analysis and takes over their expressive function."[26] The chief function of his imagery, she says, is to "make us aware--sensitively aware, not merely conceptually aware--of the profound life force whose rhythms the natural creature obeys . . . . He seeks the objective equivalent of feeling in the image."[27]

In view of the apparent importance of Lawrence's imagery, the task of analyzing it as expression of character and idea seems worthwhile. The problems involved in such a task hinge on the more general problem that Lawrence's "effort to circumvent conventional expressions" in order to relate the deeper ego beneath convention "sometimes made his statements as vague and general as the clichés that he mistrusted."[28] Since he is largely concerned with conveying such great intangibles as the feelings of his characters as those feelings relate to "the profound life force," the vagueness of his imagery seems unavoidable. As Freeman says, his purpose causes his selection of words "to be determined more by the aura

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Freeman, p. 56.

they had for him than by their conventional meaning."[29] But a continual reference to the relationship between character and theme, or to character as representative of idea, will provide a practical means of determining what his imagery is meant to relate.

Some of Lawrence's most important images employ varying degrees of darkness. Darkness was a natural and traditional choice for Lawrence to make to convey the idea of the unknown and the unknowable. It is a logical antithesis to light, which is the traditional image for the known, and Lawrence employs the contrast to express on several levels the basic idea of the split between intellect and instinct. Widmer says that "the tropes of death-darkness-sex have various permutations . . . in Lawrence's work. Lawrence is quite self-conscious about the principle behind the dark-light imagery."[30] In Twilight in Italy, Lawrence wrote that "the mind, that is the Light; the senses, they are the Darkness."[31] Aldous Huxley sums up with imagery of his own Lawrence's general conception of darkness. Modern man lives his life in a

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Kingsley Widmer, The Art of Perversity: D. H. Lawrence's Shorter Fictions (Seattle, 1962), p. 230.

[31] D. H. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy, p. 59, cited in Kingsley Widmer, The Art of Perversity: D. H. Lawrence's Shorter Fictions (Seattle, 1962), p. 230.

> home-made universe within the greater alien world of external matter and his own irrationality. Out of the illimitable blackness of that world the light of his customary thinking . . . scoops a little illuminated cave--a tunnel of brightness, in which, he lives, moves and has his being. For most of us this bright tunnel is the whole world. We ignore the outer darkness; or if we cannot ignore it, if it presses too insistently upon us, we disapprove, being afraid. Not so Lawrence.[32]

Huxley sums up the problem basic to Women in Love: western man's reliance upon his own limited mental perceptions for all knowledge. The darkness is essentially that of the unconscious, or of instinct, wherein lies the clue to "our true fates." It is the "dark sensual body" that Hermione lacks. Harry T. Moore believes that Lawrence expressed his central philosophy in a letter in 1913, in which he wrote,

> My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood believes and feels and says, is always true.[33]

But dark imagery in Lawrence's works must not be viewed as simply being a contrast to the light imagery of the intellect. Furthermore, to see his dark imagery solely as a plea for and the triumph of licentious eroticism is to miss the true implications of his imagery. A. W. Harrison, for

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[32]Aldous Huxley, editor, The Letters of D. H. Lawrence (New York, 1932), pp. xi-xiv.

[33]Harry Thornton Moore, The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence, first edition (New York, 1951), p. 109.

example, feels that Lawrence did not seem to know that "he was toying with nonsense" in returning always to his dark gods and thereby taking evil as his standard of good.[34] And Colin Welch thinks that Lady Chatterly's Lover calls for mankind to reduce itself "almost to an animal level." Lawrence's work, says Welch, is "calculated to deprave and corrupt."[35] In Lawrence's view, however, his works attack depravity and corruption. In his view, animal functions are not in themselves corrupt or depraved, since they are an expression of the basic life force. It is the absorption of wholesome and sacred instincts into singular mentality which depraves, producing the type of animalism which results from the duality between mind and body. Birkin says that there is a great difference between "the actual sensual being" and "the vicious mental-deliberate profligacy" which modern man resorts to.

> In our night time, there's always the electricity switched on, we watch ourselves, we get it all in the head, really. You've got to lapse out before you can know what sensual reality is, lapse into unknowingness, and give up your volition. . . . You've got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being.[36]

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[34]A. W. Harrison, "The Philosophy of D. H. Lawrence," The Hibbert Journal, XXXII (July, 1934), 554.

[35]Colin Welch, "Black Magic, White Lies," Encounter, XVI (February, 1961), p. 79.

[36]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 37.

He tells Ursula that the conceit of people centers mostly around their sensual powers, "that's why they aren't sensual--only sensuous--which is another matter."[37] They must always be aware of themselves, which results in isolation from the true centers of their being which lie outside of conceit.

The distinction which Birkin makes between sensual and sensuous is clear in the narrative explanation, but not always as clear in Lawrence's dark imagery. Because he applies the image of darkness to all of his characters, sensual and sensuous alike, and because some characters may at times fluctuate between the two states, the darkness of sensuality and the darkness of sensousness are often confusing. But by keeping his overall purpose in mind, one may discover that his dark imagery is consistent in each case.

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[37] Ibid., p. 38.

CHAPTER II

BIRKIN AND URSULA

Julian Moynahan says that Women in Love "completes an entire cycle in the development of Lawrence's thinking and feeling as a novelist."[1] The novel is the culmination of seven years of writing through which Lawrence had

> learned how to construct a dazzlingly original narrative form through which 'profound intuitions of life' could be brought to confront the systems of custom and convention.[2]

But the confrontation only revealed to Lawrence that "there was no longer any common ground where life and history could meet, mingle, and enhance each other."[3] In none of his later novels is there a character like Paul Morel of Sons and Lovers or the young Ursula of The Rainbow who is optimistic enough to think that his society can "provide the conditions of vital freedom" which he seeks.[4] Certainly Birkin is one of the great pessimists in all literature in regard to western man's chances for survival on a vital level.

Nevertheless, Rupert Birkin and Ursula Brangwen represent Lawrence's expression of hope for man on an individual level

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[1]Moynahan, p. 89.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

if not on a social level, for it seems clear in the novel that civilization as man has conceived it must die. Birkin and Ursula "bring forth the new passion, the new idea," however, and therefore will endure. Their final position is one of total integration of mind and body toward greater perception of reality at the expense of conventional values. As Mary Freeman says,

> Lawrence soon concluded that abundant life was not to be found in the main currents of our culture, neither in dedication to material progress nor in support of impotent clichés. He found inadequate also current versions of social reform and revolution.[5]

But Lawrence never lost sight of the fact that man is a social creature, and he set out to discover whether man could actually gain social ease through the sacrifice of individuality, as modern, industrialized man seemed to think, and "if society were too complicated to foster individual 'viability,' then Lawrence felt that an apocalypse must come about."[6]

Birkin concludes that an apocalypse must come about and that only a return to personal and social values which are of an organic rather than a mental derivation can effect it. In fact, all values, whether governing an individual or a nation, must gain their impetus from our natural rather than

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[5]Freeman, p. 2.

[6]Ibid.

our realized reality. Not that Lawrence was against utilizing the mind--he certainly made use of his own--but that he was against western man's tendency to rely entirely upon what he is able to know consciously, to abstract even his aspects which give him claim to being individual and vital into some unreal, fixed ideal. Lawrence wrote that "the deep psychic disease of modern man is the diseased, atrophied condition of the intuitive faculties," and that the disease is caused chiefly by obsessive preoccupation with "nice money-making schemes."[7] Man thus rationalizes a life for himself which is contrary to the very act of living.

And it is to the deepest core of the life experience that Lawrence turns for an answer to the dilemma of man's turning away from life. In Women in Love Lawrence's chief means of resolving the consciousness-unconsciousness antithesis is the portrayal of the most profound interactions between men and women as they develop according to their conceptions of where reality is to be found. The dilemma must also be worked out on an individual level. Stanford says that Lawrence's literary method in Women in Love is often to base his narrative upon a symbolic scene in which meaning is juxtaposed with

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[7]D. H. Lawrence, "Sex Versus Loveliness," Assorted Articles (London, 1930), pp. 23-24.

> scenes before or after, . . . in order . . . to contrast the destructive sado-masochistic love of Gerald and Gudrun with the creative constructive kind of Birkin and Ursula . . . .[8]

In the contrast between the two kinds of love may be seen the two alternatives offered to individuals, and therefore to mankind. Stewart writes that the structure of Women in Love is simple: "Ursula and Birkin represent a life-theme over against which is set a death-theme in Gudrun and Gerald."[9] These two themes apparently determine the significance of the novel for Lawrence, and whatever he has to say in the novel must ultimately be evaluated in respect to them. It seems reasonable, therefore, that the dark imagery be interpreted according to which of the opposing themes any given image forwards.

Although some images in the novel which utilize darkness seem to have a fixed and consistent meaning, others of the same sort seem to be inconsistent. The problem of seeming inconsistency becomes less acute, however, if the meaning of all the dark imagery proves to contribute to one or the other of the two main themes. Essentially, the consistency of the dark imagery must be determined according to two considerations: (1) is the given image "fixed," consistently

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[8]Stanford, p. 23.

[9]J. I. M. Stewart, Eight Modern Writers, 1st ed. (Oxford, 1964), p. 514.

suggesting only one meaning throughout the work, or (2) is the given image "unfixed," apparently suggesting one meaning in one instance and another meaning in another instance? Stewart raises the problem of the seemingly "unfixed" imagery when he states that "Birkin's own effort at clarifying his thought is made within a field of imagery which is to be used also in the subsequent analysis of Gerald."[10] On the surface, this seems inconsistent, since the two men represent antithetical themes, but it must be remembered that the four main characters in Women in Love have much in common. Shorer says that their characterization is traditional in that they are "free" characters, and that all other characters in the novel are traditional "bound" characters. The former "actively seek out their fate through the plot movement," and the latter "are fixed in their social roles."[11]

The life-theme and the death-theme are depicted as two opposing sides of a conflict which must be resolved by the "free" characters on both an individual and an interrelational level, and the characters fluctuate between the two themes, especially Birkin, until they resolve their respective dilemmas. Shorer believes that the four main characters are

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[10] Ibid., p. 520.

[11] Mark Shorer, "Women in Love," The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Harry T. Moore (Norman, 1953), p. 168.

> compounded of a double drive, and it is here that the method of characterization is new and familiar. They have their social existence and they have their psychic existence; the first is inevitably an expression of the second, but in the second lies their whole motivation. As two take the way of death, their social role becomes more and more important . . . . And as the two others take the way of life, their social role becomes less important, ceases, in fact, to exist.[12]

That is to say, all four characters are bound in the beginning to a dying society--in fact, they perpetuate its dying, and their psychic existence, which Lawrence portrays largely through dark imagery, leads them to ultimate death or to ultimate life; their ultimate fate depends upon whether they break free from their mind absorption, which is their tie to society, or remain bound to it. In the meantime, "new unfoldings struggle up in torment" in them,[13] and in working out the conflict between the old and the new within themselves (they are in the largest philosophical sense deciding the fate of the world), they may be at some points of their development representative of a theme opposite to the one they ultimately represent. Thus the imagery can remain consistent to the main themes, while the characters themselves change. This explains one reason that Birkin and Gerald can be analyzed within the same field of imagery. For example, an image

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Lawrence, Women in Love, p. viii.

which at one point indicates creative sensuality in Birkin may at another point indicate the same thing in Gerald, although the two characters represent, ultimately, antithetical themes. Conversely, Birkin and Ursula are often representative of the death-theme.

Another complication in the dark imagery arises from the fact that Lawrence was interested primarily in picturing the emotions and feelings of his characters,[14] and all of his characters are to him incarnate, no matter what their predilections. Therefore the physical and emotional feelings are much the same in one character as in another (on the human level, not the transcendent level, in which Lawrence's dark imagery also plays a large part). The difference between the same feelings in different characters depends upon whether any one of the characters degrades or prostitutes "the living mysteries in us," or "approaches his own self with a deep respect, even reverence for all that the creative soul, the God-mystery within us, puts forth."[15] Thus the dark imagery which depicts passion in Birkin when his mind consciousness dominates him is still passion, even though it is "vicious mental-deliberate profligacy,"[16] and it is much the same

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[14]Van Ghent, p. 248.

[15]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. vii. [16]Ibid., p. 37.

passion as that which the dark imagery depicts when Birkin gives way to his "true fate," dark sensuality. The difference in the meaning of the imagery relies heavily upon what Birkin's attitude is at the moment in respect to the two main themes. Any actual difference in the imagery depicting the two different instances of passion is often subtle or even unrecognizable. But all of the dark imagery can be shown to be consistent in relation to what it ultimately forwards: either the death-theme or the life-theme.

Since Birkin and Ursula readily fluctuate between the two opposing themes until they resolve their dilemma, it seems efficacious to treat them in a chapter separate from the treatment of Gerald and Gudrun, who also fluctuate, but whose line of development is perhaps less erratic than that of the other couple.

Birkin is a strange, and to those around him, eccentric man. As the novel opens his affair with Hermione is coming to a close, and he is soon to break relations with the Bohemian crowd in London headed by the decadent Halliday and Minette. These characters, along with Gudrun and Gerald, represent Birkin's connections with a corrupt society. His bitterness toward mankind in general is early apparent, and the first ten chapters are given to establishing his ideas

on the evils of mankind and his theory of "dark sensuality" for saving it. All of the principal characters except Loerke are introduced in these chapters, and both their established and tentative relationships with each other are treated, as well as their general alignment with one of the two major themes or the other. The first significant meeting between Birkin and Ursula takes place in the third chapter, "School-Room."

In the class room scene, Lawrence establishes a pattern of darkness contrasted with artificial light which is one of his favorite "unfixed" images for denoting the split between the mind and the senses. In this scene, the image probably indicates Birkin and Ursula's excessive involvement in the destructive mental consciousness which is in the scene personified by Hermione and symbolized by electric lights. This is true despite Birkin's theorizing against "mental-deliberate profligacy"[17] and the use of the "fixed" image of darkness and fire which suggests creative sensuality.

Birkin, an inspector of schools, comes late in the evening, a favorite time in this novel, along with the night time, to inspect Ursula's class. Unaware of his entrance, she looks up and is startled to see his face in the gathering

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[17] Ibid.

darkness, "gleaming like fire."[18] Commenting on the darkness of the room, Birkin turns on the electric lights, and "the class-room was distinct and hard, a strange place after the soft dim magic that filled it before he came."[19] Ursula, hitherto unaware of the magical atmosphere of the room--she has been "absorbed in the passion of instruction," a pursuit of the mentality--appears to Birkin like "one suddenly awakened."[20] But the sight of Birkin's gleaming face in the dark watching her, waiting for her to "be aware," startles her from her daytime preoccupation and draws forth all of her "subconscious fear"[21] of "another knowledge" of him which his face evokes in her,[22] an indication that she will not readily submit to this new kind of sensual awareness.

The flooding of the "soft dim magic" of the darkened class room with electric lights suggests the absorption of feeling by the intellect. The fact that Birkin feels compelled to turn on the lights indicates that both he and Ursula are at this point in their development still inclined toward too much mental consciousness, although Birkin condemns it in theory and Ursula is vaguely aware there is some deeper, more basic knowledge than what she has known. In their later

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[18] Ibid., p. 29. [19] Ibid. [20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid. [22] Ibid., p. 38.

intimate scenes they shun artificial lights altogether, whereas Gerald and Gudrun often identify with them. The meaning of the darkness-artificial light image (artificial light rather than merely electric light, because the image employs candles and lamps in other places in his works) is verified verbally by Birkin when he denounces Hermione's mental "sensuousness" as being quite different from instinctive "sensuality," which is "the great dark knowledge you can't have in your head--the dark involuntary being." He complains that "in our night-time, there's always the electricity switched on."[23]

The school room scene in Women in Love is reminiscent in several respects of the first major meeting between Tom and Lydia early in The Rainbow. Their relationship develops much more quickly than that between Birkin and Ursula, since Tom and Lydia actually experience the state "when the mind and the known world is [sic] drowned in darkness" which Birkin theorizes.[24] For this reason this particular darkness-artificial light image in The Rainbow can be seen as representing what is basically creative experience; out of the "darkest sleep, utter, extreme oblivion" into which they both fall, Tom, and presumably Lydia, returns gradually, "but newly

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[23] Ibid., p. 37.

[24] Ibid., p. 38.

created, as after a gestation, a new birth, in the womb of darkness."[25] This great physio-mystical experience is what Birkin means when he says that dark knowledge is "death of one's self--but it is the coming into being of another."[26] Even though Tom and Lydia are in an electrically lighted kitchen, neither of them has within the scene switched the lights on, as Birkin does in the school room scene. On the contrary, they turn them out, not literally, but mystically.

Ursula literally turns out the lights at the end of "School-Room," after Birkin and Hermione have gone. But having done so, her experience is psychological, not mystical. She sits down, "absorbed and lost," and she weeps bitterly, but "whether for misery or joy, she never knew."[27] She and Birkin have far to go before they can pass through the darkness to the "aerial and light" state of existence which Tom and Lydia experience, in which "like a dawn the newness and the bliss filled in."[28] The state is only hinted at in Ursula's beauty, which is "like a tender light of dawn shining from her face."[29]

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[25]D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (New York, 1922), p. 38.

[26]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 36. [27]Ibid., p. 38.

[28]Lawrence, The Rainbow, p. 38.

[29]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 29.

Lawrence makes frequent use of the darkness-artificial light image. According to Vivas, in Lawrence's works "the lighted area, the ostensible world, was the world of science, of efficiency."[30] Lawrence's conception of man's rational world as "a little illuminated cave" scooped out of the darkness of the unknown[31] is an indication of the limited boundaries which he felt mental reality to have and of his belief in the vast potential of intuitive powers, so long as they were not profaned. Later, as Birkin and Ursula develop the life-theme, the darkness-artificial light image suggests that they are no longer, at least at the moment, bound up in the decadent world of mind absorption, but are now in their creative roles.

In "Excurse," the chapter in which "the struggle between Ursula and Birkin is finally resolved,"[32] they achieve the kind of relationship which Birkin had desired, "pure mystic modality of being . . . . this star equilibrium which alone is freedom."[33] Accordingly the darkness-artificial light imagery in this chapter does not mean the same thing as it did in the school room. As they come into the village where

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[30]Eliseo Vivas, D. H. Lawrence: The Failure and the Triumph of Art (Evanston, 1960), p. 222.

[31]Huxley, p. xii.

[32]Mark Spilka, The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence (Bloomington, 1955), p. 131.

[33]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 311.

their consumation is to take place, "in the gloom of the coming night," of course, the lights in the shop windows "glowed like slabs of revelation,"[34] bringing to mind Birkin's earlier description of knowledge in its strict sense as liberty in "compressed tabloids," affording only knowledge of "things concluded, in the past."[35] The old church and the inn with its smell of "straw and stables and petrol"[36] are only to remind the reader that a newer revelation is to take place than that which has run its course into mental abstraction and mechanization. They drive later into the night and stop in Sherwood Forest to spend the night. It is significant that at this time Birkin turns the lights out rather than turns them on as he had done in the school room: when he stops the car, he "extinguished the lamps at once, and it was pure night."[37]

But their development to the point of fulfilling the life-theme has not been easy for them. After their initial intimate contact in the school room, their struggle continues in the chapter "An Island." In this chapter Lawrence first presents the image of "the dark lustre of very deep water"[38]

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[34] Ibid., p. 304.

[35] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[36] Ibid., p. 304.

[37] Ibid., p. 312.

[38] Ibid., p. 116.

which is to play a prominent part later in "Water Party" and "Moony." The dark water, or water and darkness, is an image consistent with Lawrence's use of water in general as being an eternal element and therefore symbolic of the impersonal and eternal life force in the cosmos which is also within man. To Gerald, who cannot master this impersonal force through his rational powers, the force is the great unknown, which to him is a terrifying and final death. But to Birkin it is a more reconcilable kind of death, actually the only way to life. As in The Rainbow, water and darkness in Women in Love combine in a relentless and destructive partnership, but must be seen in their larger function as the natural rhythm of removing the old so that the new may come into being.

In the scene in which Ursula and Birkin watch the daisy float on the "dark clear water" like a "little democracy," and then like "the golden mob of the proletariat, surrounded by a showy white fence of the idle rich,"[39] the dark Willey Water takes on the characteristics of "that dark river of dissolution which Birkin says is the reality of modern man, flowing in everybody."[40] He feels at this point that even he and Ursula are not altogether free of it. But even now he

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[39] Ibid., p. 123.

[40] Ibid., p. 164.

has an idea of death which Gerald, and Ursula, cannot understand.

> Dissolution rolls on, just as production does . . . . It is a progressive process--and it ends in universal nothing--the end of the world, if you like. But why isn't the end of the world as good as the beginning?[41]

Dissolution is an inevitable process in a dehumanized society, and

> early in Women in Love Birkin tells Gerald that people must either break up the present system or shrivel within it. By the end he realizes that the only breaking possible is to break and run for his life.[42]

Thus to Birkin the dissolution which the dark water represents is relentless, and because it is a natural process, man must experience it to its final end. He says that "it means a new cycle of creation after, but not for us,"[43] that is, not as they now exist in their corrupt selves. Gerald and Ursula agree that Birkin only wants them to know death, but he insists that he only wants them to know what they are.[44] Only by relinquishing their old selves, by giving way to the natural life force--which is death of the corrupt self--can they live.

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[41] Ibid. [42] Moynahan, p. 89.

[43] Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 165.

[44] Ibid.

In "Water Party," the dark water, along with the darkness of the night, takes on an ultimately destructive or an ultimately creative meaning according to the viewpoint of the characters. For Birkin the dark waters which have swallowed up Gerald's sister and the young doctor represent the dark forces of impersonal creation which cannot be denied. He tells Gerald that there is no use diving any more for the bodies, and rows him to shore, "evenly and unswervingly, with an inhuman inevitability," despite Gerald's unconcealed hatred of him for doing so.[45] Later that night Birkin lets the water out of the lake so that the bodies may be recovered, and the imagery of the water roaring in the darkness recalls the drowning of Tom Brangwen. Intoxicated, Tom rides his gig home through the rain and darkness. He tells himself that "you can't wear water out . . . . It falls on the just and the unjust," and he slips under the flood water of the "wet, black night," amid "a curious roar in the night which seemed to come out of the darkness of his own intoxication."[46] The great unknown, which Tom has feared all of his life, which he had finally come to ignore, takes him, and he at last becomes part of that which he feared.

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[45]Ibid., p. 175.

[46]Lawrence, The Rainbow, p. 230.

The roar of the rushing water which Birkin lets through the flood gates shocks Ursula.

> The loud splashing of the water from out of the dark, tree-filled hollow beyond the road . . . . occupied the whole of the night . . . . everything was drowned within it . . . Ursula seemed to have to struggle for her life.[47]

And when Birkin later returns, the water is "still booming in the night, the moon was fair, the hills beyond were elusive."[48] It is probably significant that the dark water which had earlier carried the daisies "into the light"[49] and then drew Gerald below its surface in search of its victims now becomes a roaring deluge of the type that drowns Tom Brangwen in the dark. The bringing together of these aspects of the darkness-water image points up the essential difference between Birkin's view and Gerald's view of death. Gerald views it as a terrifying void which must be mastered, as he masters the mines; Birkin views it as a great relentless force to which one must reconcile himself in order to live. It is part of his view that the old must give way in order for man to survive, "partaking of all that from which he emerges, not through knowing, but through being."[50] As he tells Ursula,

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[47]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 177.

[48]Ibid., p. 180.

[49]Ibid., p. 123.

[50]Freeman, p. 83.

"there is life which belongs to death, and there is life which isn't death."[51]

Yet Birkin is even now theorizing the life-theme more than he is actually living it. Nor is Ursula completely won over the side of life as yet, and the death-theme in "Water Party" becomes centered on them as Birkin walks her home from the fatal party. After trying unsuccessfully to explain to Ursula the kind of death that he would like to experience, Birkin reluctantly gives way to her simple, but intense passion. Doing so causes him to become ill and Ursula to become deeply remorseful and to bear an intense hatred of him.[52] Stewart finds their reactions inconsistent in that Birkin sees sensuality as "sanative, or an evolutionary instrument driving through and beyond sex" [53] to the "pure duality of polarization,"[54] and yet the occasion of his submitting to Ursula's passion makes him ill and causes her to meditate on death. Stewart is correct in surmising that they have "all but moved down some lethal path" as evidenced by their extreme reactions.[55] The problem is that

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[51]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 178. [52]Ibid., pp.179-190.

[53]Stewart, p. 520.

[54]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 193.

[55]Stewart, p. 519.

Stewart is mistaking "pure duality of polarization" for pure sensation, and Birkin assures all who will listen to him for any length of time that there is a definite and crucial difference between the two experiences. He probably explains it as thoroughly as possible in Chapter Three, when he denounces Hermione's, and modern man's, deliberate mentality.[56] The "old fire of burning passion" [57] which Birkin lapses into is not the same as the "living fire"[58] that Ursula senses in him in the consumation scene in "Excurse," but is rather the "ultimate and triumphant experience of physical passion," which evolves through to nothing except perhaps a temporary rejuvenation. Birkin still feels "a small lament in the darkness."[59]

Goodheart says of The Rainbow that it is Lawrence's most ambitious attempt to render the "night-time world"

> of passionate embrace between man and woman. If the night-time world is merely the source of passional life, not the goal, Lawrence nevertheless conceives of it as a transcendent experience.[60]

This is apparently Lawrence's ambition in Women in Love as well, but there is in this novel, at least, a night-time world

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[56]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 37.

[57]Ibid., p. 180.

[58]Ibid., p. 305.

[59]Ibid., p. 180.

[60]Goodheart, p. 115.

of passionate embrace which does not lead to a transcendent experience, and both couples live within it at one time or the other--Gerald and Gudrun almost all of the time. This is passion for the sake of sensation, feeling absorbed by the mind, which in Lawrence's scheme is not only immoral but also temporary in benefit--and deathly in the ultimate sense. Such passion, which can only be temporary, leaves only emptiness inside when it invariably ebbs away. This explains Ursula and Birkin's extreme adverse reactions to it, as well as Gerald's pathetic addiction to it, when he no longer has any industry to perfect.

Birkin and Ursula's reactions against their mind-absorbed passion are in complete accord with the death-theme which this kind of passion forwards. After their physical experience, Ursula is "deeply and passionately in love with Birkin," and she awaits him eagerly the next day. But even before the day is over, "her passion seemed to bleed to death, and there was nothing. She sat suspended in a state of complete nullity, harder to bear than death."[61] Shorer says that she "yearns toward real death as an escape from a living death in society,

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[61]Lawrence, Women in Love, pp. 182-183.

and being at death's door, not life's, she now hates Birkin."[62] But in Lawrence's paradoxical view, she is both at death's door and life's. She seeks escape from the "complete nullity" which is the malady of the false concepts which she lives by, the malady which is the only "real death." Her decision to end her life is "not a question of taking one's life--she would never kill herself, that was repulsive and violent. It was a question of knowing the next step,"[63] of submitting oneself to "that which is greater than the known; namely, the pure unknown. That is a pure joy. But to live as an entity absolved from the unknown, that is shameful and ignominious."[64] And in a sort of spiritual trance, she yields, and "all was dark."[65]

One would think that such great understanding would solve her problem, but perhaps the conclusions which she comes to are more Lawrence's than Ursula's, because she still resists changing. She hates Birkin because he is the reason for her changing, not into a state of "real" death as Shorer seems to think, but into ultimate life. Yet, to her, ultimate

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[62]Shorer, p. 170.

[63]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 184.

[64]Ibid. [65]Ibid.

life still lies within the framework of the existing mental values of her society. Birkin reflects on his sick bed that she is like Hermione in that she has "such a lust for possession, a greed of self-importance in love. She wanted to have, to own, to control."[66] She has not been able thus far to respond to Birkin's "soft, blind kisses settling on her from the darkness of her soul."[67] Her passion is that which can be understood only by the mind.

Their conflict continues into its last phases in "Moony." Despite her resistance, Ursula increasingly takes on more of Birkin's ideas and attitudes toward life of the body as opposed to death in the mind. She has of course been seeking a better world since her days on Marsh Farm in The Rainbow, and her experiences have led her to a point where she must change. Obviously the final change must come about through her association with Birkin. Birkin has told her that

> there is a beyond, in you, in me, which is further than love, beyond the scope, as stars are beyond the scope of vision, some of them . . . . The world is held together by the mystic conjunction, the ultimate unison between people--a bond. And the immediate bond is between man and woman.[68]

This ultimate union, which has universal connotations, is not

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[66] Ibid., p. 192.

[67] Ibid., p. 179.

[68] Ibid., p. 143.

yet to take place on the immediate level between Birkin and Ursula, however.

There has been much critical speculation upon Birkin's reason for stoning the reflection of the moon on the dark water. Middleton Murray agrees with Moore, who says that the moon which Birkin is trying to shatter is a female image.[69] According to Murray, Birkin is destroying Aphrodite, "the divinity under whose cold light Ursula annihilated the core of intrinsic male in Lawrence's last incarnation as Anton Skrebensky."[70] The moon is supposedly representative of Lawrence's weak masculinity, his inability to match his powers with seemingly insatiable womanhood.[71] Moynahan, who is understandably more objective than Murray on the subject of Lawrence, feels that the moon represents the triple goddess of womanhood, the Magna Mater who must possess man in gestation, life, and death,[72] and with whom Lawrence identifies Ursula and Hermione. Some critics simply say vaguely that the "Moony" scene has to do with Lawrence's need for "love" and his inability to give or to accept it.[73] Most of

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[69]Harry T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart: The Story of D. H. Lawrence (New York, 1954), p. 221.

[70]John Middleton Murray, Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence (New York, 1931), p. 101.

[71]Ibid., pp. 101-102. [72]Moynahan, p. 192. [73]Vivas, p. 261.

these interpretations, which deal almost exclusively with the moon part of the image and not the darkness, indicate that the darkness-moon image supports the life-theme, since Birkin is rejecting conventional love by smashing the moon.

On the other hand, Mary Freeman attaches a transcendent rather than a conventional significance to Ursula and the darkness-moon image. The scenes in The Rainbow in which the image appears show Ursula's desire for "heightened life that overreaches and encompasses sex, and like Paul, she must find some way of placing it in daily life."[74] Freeman equates the moon with the other perpetual elements which Lawrence accents but rarely verbalizes, but which, although often ignored, hold "the germ of new and more profound experience."[75] If the image in The Rainbow does indicate a creative rather than a destructive theme, then Birkin's smashing the moon should be seen as supporting the death-theme rather than the life-theme. It is an image which indicates Birkin's frustration at being unable to find a better existence than the decadent world which he lives in affords and his consequent urge to deny that such a better world is possible, as evidenced by his smashing of the bright core of vital existence, hoping to obliterate it by the absolute darkness which is a limited and temporary passional experience.

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[74]Freeman, p. 45. [75]Ibid.

Ursula approaches the mill pond at night and, seeing Birkin by the water, observes him in secret. In this scene absolute darkness is played off against darkness-fire and darkness-moon combinations. Both Birkin and Ursula want pure darkness at this point, which is an image devoid of the bright light of revelation which usually accompanies a consumation scene. In The Rainbow, if Freeman is right, the brilliant moon on a dark night accompanies Ursula's communion with a more profound experience than the merely sensuous Skrebensky can aspire to. In the "Moony" scene, the moon is also "transcendent" over the pure darkness which Ursula now feels so comfortable. The scene recalls the wedding party in The Rainbow, in which she transcends the purely sensual relationship which she has with Skrebensky, and he, soldier, man of the world, "is confused by her indifference to his simple need and humiliated by her inordinate demands that he never understands."[76] In The Rainbow it is Skrebensky, the socially bound character, who is repelled by the bright moon, and is like a shadowy, unreal, wavering presence who must obstinately draw Ursula out of the moonlight "to the shadow."[77] But in "Moony" it is Ursula who "suffered from being exposed to the

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Lawrence, The Rainbow, p. 302.

moon," and rather than being drawn to the moon, she is now "glad to pass into the shade" out of it.[78] The reactions of the mind conscious Skrebensky have been ascribed to Ursula in Women in Love.

Reminiscent of Anton too is Birkin, moving by the water like "a shadow," and the combination of fire and darkness recalls the school room scene in which Ursula is moved by Birkin's face in the darkness, gleaming like fire. But now, "a fish leaped secretly, revealing the light in the pond. This fire of the chill night breaking constantly on the pure darkness, repelled her. She wished it were perfectly dark . . . . "[79] She is rejecting the imagery which in Lawrence often represents vitalism leading to transcendence.

The imagery in "Moony" might suggest that Birkin and Ursula are clinging to the old idea of passion for passion's sake, a socially attainable ideal. Apparently Birkin, like Ursula, wishes for complete darkness. He throws a stone at the water and the moon

> exploded on the water . . . . the furtherest waves of light, fleeing out, seemed to be clamoring against the shore for escape, the waves of darkness came in heavily, running towards the center. But at the center, the heart of all, was still a vivid, incandescent quivering of white moon not quite destroyed, a white body of fire writhing and striving and not even now broken open, not

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[78]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 238. [79]Ibid.

> yet violated. The light pulled itself back in triumphant assumption.[80]

The moon, "the center, the heart of all," will not remain obliterated by the dark, despite all of Birkin's efforts; instead, it reasserts itself, renewed, trying to recover from its convulsion, to get over the disfigurement and the agitation, to be whole and composed, at peace,"[81] which of course is the goal of Birkin's struggle to find permanence. He is perhaps attempting to destroy his own frustrated desire for profound experience by destroying, obliterating, any evidence of its possibility. When Ursula, who breaks in on his stone throwing, asks him why he hates the moon, he replies, "Was it hate?"[82] Perhaps instead it is only frustration.

The brilliant moon shining in the darkness is the correlative of the golden light which Birkin sees in Ursula, her impersonal self which rises above the sullying of the clutching mind and cannot be reached through mind motivated relationships. But she is still bent on a relationship of conventional love which nurtures her passion and kindles "the old destructive fires." Birkin resists, however, for he wants "only gentle communion, no passion now. So soon she

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[80] Ibid., pp. 238-239. [81] Ibid., p. 240.

[82] Ibid., p. 241. [83] Ibid., p. 245.

drew away, put on her hat, and went home."[83] Her continued opposition causes him to ponder the soundness of his motives.

Birkin is confused at this time about what he really wants in his relationship with Ursula, a state of mind which could have brought him to stone the moon's reflection in frustration. He determines, however, that he does not want to sink further into purely sensual, unspiritual knowledge, as the African races have done. He thinks of the African fetish which he had once seen at Halliday's flat and makes the connection between the Nordic and the African processes of dissolution into mindless sensation. Yet was what he wanted with Ursula "really only an idea, or was it the interpretation of a profound yearning? If the latter, how was it he was always talking about sensual fulfilment? The two did not agree very well."[84] Apparently he has forgotten for the moment the distinction which he made earlier between sensual and sensuous. Nevertheless, he assures himself that what he wants is profound, a relationship which is at once sensual and transcendent, unlike the African process of dissolution, which Gerald and society are fated to fulfill in their own way. But Ursula is not ready to accept his proposal of marriage on his terms. She has not relinquished

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[83] Ibid., p. 245. [84] Ibid.

her egotistical desire to know him completely, to possess him utterly, to enjoy him in her mind as a love object; such an attitude is fatal, and its results become all too evident in Gerald and Gudrun.

In "Excurse," Ursula finally makes the long awaited change, and she and Birkin are now hopeful of a brighter future, since they are now in a position to throw off the fetters of a sinking civilization. There is evidently yet some limitation to the freedom which they have attained, however; apparently they have reached the immediate bond of the mystic conjunction between people which holds the world together, but for Birkin there still remains the "ultimate unison between people"[85] which is necessary to saving the world. This he fails to achieve, as is apparent in his remorse at not saving Gerald through Blutbruderschaft, his name for a mystic conjunction between men.

The dark African process appears again in the imagery in "Excurse," and in doing so seems ambiguious, since Birkin has earlier rejected it as destructive. But Lawrence seems to make it plain through his imagery that Birkin and Ursula have not sunk into the mindless sensationalism suggested by the fetish. Moynahan explains the function of the fetish as

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[85] Ibid., p. 143.

showing that western civilization is arrested at the same point as African civilization. He says that

> the same relationship between mind and feeling is broken; desire for feeling has lapsed, leaving the single impulse to production, disembodied progressive industrial knowhow, knowledge arrested in the system of making. It is equally a knowledge in disintegration and issolution.[86]

In this respect, the darkness of the African fetish applies to Gerald and Gudrun, in whom feeling becomes mere stimulation, leading nowhere but to degradation. But the image does not appear to be as ambiguous as Stewart seems to think if it represents knowledge of one sort, "arrested and ending in the senses."[87] For it is through the senses that Birkin and Ursula gain knowledge, but knowledge higher than the senses, not arrested there. Thus the darkness associated with the African fetish changes as Birkin and Ursula change. Instead of the mindless sensation of the African, their feelings evoke a mystic kind of intelligence.

> They ran on in silence. But with a sort of second consciousness he steered the car towards a destination. 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 Greeks, he had not the unawakened straight arms of the Egyptian, nor the sealed, slumbering head. A lambent intelligence played secondarily above his pure Egyptian concentration in darkness.[88]

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[86]Moynahan, p. 180.

[87]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 245. [88]Ibid., p. 310.

The African process becomes clearer when it is treated in relation to Gerald and Gudrun. Its meaning is central to an understanding of the dark imagery denoting dissolution and destruction.

After Birkin and Ursula fulfill the life-theme by finding a degree of the kind of relationship for which Birkin consciously, and Ursula more or less unconsciously, had been searching, the remainder of the action of the novel Lawrence devotes primarily to the relationship between Gudrun and Gerald, as they fulfill the death-theme which had begun earlier.

CHAPTER III

GERALD AND GUDRUN

Gerald and Gudrun do not fluctuate between the life-theme and the death-theme as erratically as do Birkin and Ursula. Although in the chapter "Water Party" there seems to be a brief moment of hope for them when Gerald is "almost transfused, lapsed out for the first time in his life, into the things about him,"[1] they develop the death-theme in an almost singular, unswerving fashion. The brief spell of life which Gerald experiences is broken by the drowning of his sister. "It was as if he belonged naturally to dread and catastrophe, as if he were himself again."[2] And because of their reliance upon a single mode of viewing their existence, he and Gudrun do belong to dread and catastrophe. They are representative of western culture, which demands mental awareness of even the deepest mystery of life. Because they have severed the connection between their mentality and their intuition, through which the deepest creative mystery manifests itself, they are unable to be creative beyond the limits of their minds.

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[1] Ibid., p. 170. [2] Ibid., p. 171.

In their fear of that which is unknowable, modern men have built up rational defenses against the unknown. Since they must know the unknown in order to feel secure against it, they construct an artificial framework of existence for themselves which is contrived for the purpose of taking into account all of the mysterious forces which seem otherwise to operate beyond their control. The contrived structure in its largest aspect becomes the cultural framework, supported by cultural values which consist of idealized abstractions and cliches. The great catastrophe comes about when the culture reaches the boundary of its limited creative power, which it must inevitably do, and has nowhere to go but down, nothing to do but dissolve completely in order to make way for a more creative culture. Having nothing further to create, no more artificial versions of real existence to perfect, modern men lose their purpose for living. Looking to their perfected, mechanized social structure for support, they find that it is dead, disassociated from real life, and it tumbles in upon them, leaving them groping in the unknown darkness which they have denied in fear.

In Women in Love, Lawrence offers western man two choices relative to his dying culture: he may either abandon it by relinquishing his reliance upon its dead standards, which means a complete change of existence mystically, a death of

the old self and a rebirth of a new, more creative self in tune with the creative mystery rather than in opposition to it; or he may continue on the path of rational mind consciousness, which has brought him to the brink of cultural dissolution, into ultimate death, for "once a man or society loses touch with its own deepest sources of being, there is no way back."[3] This is the path which Gudrun and Gerald choose.

The dark imagery which is associated with the dissolution of Gerald and Gudrun can appear to be ambiguous because dissolution takes place in most of the characters at some time or another, especially early in their development when they fluctuate between the life-theme and the death-theme. But Gerald and Gudrun almost always identify with destruction, and therefore almost all of the dark imagery which applies to them shows their alignment with the death-theme, whether or not similar dark imagery shows the alignment of other characters with the life-theme. It appears therefore that a study of Gerald and Gudrun as they reveal the death-theme, exclusive of a study of their brief fluctuations into the life-theme, would be profitable, especially in clarifying Lawrence's use of dark imagery to convey two contrasting modes of cultural dissolution, the African process and the Nordic process.

3.

The greatest contrast between the dark and the white imagery in Women in Love is in the contrast between the dark African process of dissolution and the snow-abstract Nordic process of dissolution. The former process comes about through complete absorption of the mind by the senses, and the latter through complete absorption of the senses by the mind. Paradoxically, it seems, Lawrence applies both dark imagery and white to both processes. As with the contrasting life and death-themes, the dark imagery which is applied to the contrasting processes of dissolution depends not so much upon a change of imagery for each process, as upon the ultimate theme which the given process forwards. Analysis has shown that the African variant of Egyptian darkness in Birkin finally comes to express the life-theme. But in all of the other characters in the novel to which they are applied, both the African process and the Nordic process express destruction and dissolution, the death-theme. And the similarity between the dark images expressing the opposing processes can be justified on the grounds that both processes contribute ultimately to the same theme, death.

According to Chamberlain, "the crucial and controlling metaphor in D. H. Lawrence's Women in Love is a metaphor of destruction, that two-faced disintegration by heat and

annihilation by cold,"[4] the African and Nordic processes of dissolution. The African process starts with the breaking of "the relationship between the senses and the outspoken mind," a break which results in a singular sort of experience, mystical sensuality.[5] Gerald and Gudrun come to represent a contrasting mode of singular experience, complete mind consciousness, which nevertheless also involves the breaking of the relationship between the senses and the outspoken mind. The Nordic process is much like the African, in that they both constitute a split between instinct and intellect and both forward the death-theme. In their largest meanings, the two great processes of dissolution represent the "two halves of a great cultural contrast,"[6] two different ways of cultural destruction. On the individual level, they represent the two conflicting extremes of mind and instinct. Chamberlain says that the cultural contrasts are

> more than complementary at the level of the individual, each [contrast] by implication encompassing the other. What matters is the break, the rift--not whether the break first manifests itself in a mind sense-enslaved or in a sensuality mind-enslaved. When this break occurs, both mind and senses become victimized by their alienation from each other, enslaved by impulses toward its antipodes, and then the helpless shuttling begins.[7]

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[4]Chamberlain, p. 407. [5]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 245.

[6]Chamberlain, p. 416. [7]Ibid.

The only escape is death, or "the way of freedom"[8] which Birkin and Ursula achieve together by striking a balance between the two dissolute cultures.

Chamberlain is convincing when he says that the darkness and the light in the images of the two contrasting metaphors of dissolution are applicable to both. He bases his contention upon the fact that Lawrence changed the coloring of Minette from dark in the first edition of Women in Love to light in the second edition without changing her identification with the dark African process of blood dissolution. In a like manner, he changed Halliday's coloring from light to dark without altering Halliday's primitive degeneration. Minette's closer resemblance to Gudrun in the second edition, says Chamberlain, shows the precariously thin line between the primitive Bohemians of the Pompadour Cafe and their mentally profligate opposites. Furthermore, says Chamberlain, the coloring change in Minette (Pussum in the first edition) makes clear why Birkin can be both "mindless" and intellectual, why African dissolution can be described as cold, why the Nordic process is identified with mud and marsh flowers, why Loerke, who is the character most reduced into dissolution through mind consciousness, admires primitives but advocates

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[8]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 247.

technology, and why he can be "dark skinned and so sensitively exotic" and at the same time be "clearly the quasi-mythological totem of Nordic doom."[9] Once again the ultimate theme determines the meaning of the imagery. Loerke is a further development of the mental absorption that Hermione and Gerald, before Gerald's death, stand for and is at the same time the counterpart of the African statue in Halliday's flat. The Negro woman represents "pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness,"[10] while Loerke also represents pure culture in sensation, "sensation within the ego."[11]

Since the African process involves primitive sensuality, it is probably inherently less destructive than the Nordic process, which does away with naturalism altogether. It is through a sort of enlightened African process that Birkin and Ursula get their new start, and in Lawrence, sensuality appears to contain inherent powers of rejuvenation. It seems to take its destructive quality from the parties involved rather than from any inherent evil, and becomes bad only when utilized without reverence for its higher potential. Lawrence makes this point elsewhere. In The Blind Man, for example, he

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[9]Chamberlain, pp. 411-415.

[10]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 72.

[11]Ibid., p. 443.

> demonstrates that the devouring intimacy of an all-absorbing "blood" marriage is an unsatisfactory situation; and that the potential healing power of touch is foredoomed by the unworthy nature of the recipient.[12]

Thus Gerald and Minette fail to benefit from the dark forces that flow between them.

The bringing together of Gerald and Minette in Halliday's flat marks the first in a series of incidents linking the two processes of dissolution together. The dark imagery depicting the relationship between Gerald and Minette is much like that used in the constructive relationship between Birkin and Ursula later in "Excurse," but of course Gerald and Minette are advancing the death-theme. Gerald feels as if Minette were passing into him in "a dark electric flow" which is "like a comprehension in the darkness."[13] This is exactly the same "dark fire of electricity" which flows from Birkin to Ursula in the "Excurse" communion scene.[14] The difference in meaning lies in the fact that Gerald is interested only in sensation, mostly the mental sensation of mastering Minette's primitive helplessness, much as he later brutally forces the "pure blood" mare to stand in terror before the onrushing locomotive. Minette too is a sensationalist, of course.

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[12]Nancy Obolin, "Lawrence's The Blind Man: The Reality of Touch," A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany, edited by Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, 1959), p. 215.

[13]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 65 [14]Ibid., p. 306.

She is the modern embodiment of the African statue in the pangs of mindless childbirth;[15] Minette herself is carrying Halliday's child. Her helpless obscenity is a source of perverse lust in Gerald, brought on by the mental thrill of his power over her primitive self. He must retreat, however, before the look in her eyes which makes him "feel drowned in some potent darkness that almost frightened him."[16] This again is the same potent darkness in which Birkin and Ursula lose themselves, but do not retreat before; instead they receive "rich peace, satisfaction,"[17] because of their reverence for the vital magnetism between them.

Gerald's tryst with Minette is paradoxical in that it at once poses a contrast and a parallel to his relationship with Gudrun, a contrast because between Minette and Gudrun he vacillates from an attraction to extreme sensuality to extreme mentality, a parallel because in both extremes he is choosing death. Birkin, who also vacillates (he never seems to lose his attraction for both extremes entirely), recognizes Gerald's dilemma and tells him that "part of you wants Minette, and nothing but Minette, part of you wants the business, and nothing but the business," and that he is therefore

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[15]Freeman, p. 63.

[16]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 69. [17]Ibid., p. 306.

"all in bits."[18] Gerald cannot reject both extremes for a third existence as Birkin does, and following his predilection, chooses the business, the mental reality.

> The blood-consciousness overwhelms, obliterates, and annuls mind consciousness.
>
> Mind consciousness extinguishes blood consciousness, and consumes the blood.
>
> We are all of us conscious in both ways. And the two ways are antagonistic in us . . . .[19]

Submission to either extreme results in destruction.

Gudrun first sees in Gerald a deliverance from the sordid, dehumanized life of the mining district, which at once attracts and repells her. The darkness of the grimy villages denotes a sub-human world in which men become like the moving parts of a machine, and yet have a quality of primitiveness which connects them with the African process. The Beldover district

> seemed to envelop Gudrun in a labourer's caress. There was in the whole atmosphere a resonance of physical men, a glamourous thickness of labour and maleness . . . . In their voices she could hear the voluptuous resonance of darkness, the strong, dangerous underworld, mindless, inhuman. They sounded like strange machines, heavy, oiled. The voluptuousness was that of machinery, cold and iron.[20]

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[18] Ibid., p. 90.

[19] D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York, 1930), p. 125.

[20] Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 108.

This is the sub-human world which Gudrun feels is "marvelous." She identifies reluctantly but completely with the cold voluptuousness of the colliers, and later she will identify completely with the harbinger of modern man's arrival in "the river of corruption, just where it falls over into the bottomless pit," Loerke.[21] In the meantime she still must know all she can of the established order. She seeks this knowledge in Gerald.

Her relationship with the young electrician who works at the mines foreshadows Gudrun's relationship with Gerald. Palmer is a scientist, and has no real feeling for Gudrun, nor she for him. He despises the colliers individually but finds them fascinating as a mass, "as machinery fascinated him."[22] Palmer's attributes are much like Gerald's. But there is some doubt whether Gerald's pure strong will can stand up against the wills which Gudrun, Palmer, and all of the colliers posses, although--perhaps because--Gerald is master of them all. They have "a secret sense of power, and of inexpressible destructiveness, and of fatal half-heartedness, a sort of rotteness of the will."[23] Gerald too is willful, but Gudrun wins the battle between their wills

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[21] Ibid., p. 418.

[22] Ibid., p. 110.

[23] Ibid.

because she is more dehumanized than Gerald as her identification with the sub-human colliers indicates. It is ironic that Gudrun, whom Gerald has in a sense created, should be the instrument of his destruction, and more ironic still that Gerald and his kind, the mind-conscious idealists, have set Gudrun's death process in motion by dehumanizing her. They finally destroy one another.

The mechanization of men in Women in Love is the cultural manifestation of absorption of feeling by the intellect. The mechanical function of producing goods and materials without thought of the significance of the act is correlative to the statue of the African Negress mindlessly producing a child. And despite Gregory's conviction that the savage in labor is the symbol of "the normal essence of Ursula and Gudrun combined," the perfect representative of life who sets the example which the "imperfect human beings surrounding her" should follow,[24] the evidence within the text reveals that the mines and the jungles are both dissolute. The darkness of the mines plays a significant part in depicting the destructive relationship between Gerald and Gudrun.

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[24]Horace Gregory, Pilgrim of the Apocalypse: A Critical Study of D. H. Lawrence (New York, 1933), p. 43.

The impending death of Gerald's father creates in Gerald and Gudrun a feeling of the finality of death and the hopelessness of trying to master it.

> If Gerald cannot incorporate death in his dreams of economic power, neither can Gudrun find a place for it in her mastery of life in wood and clay. If force is the thing in life, it is bitter to find oneself at last forced.[25]

When they realize that Mr. Crich will soon die, despite his dogged efforts to stay alive through sheer force of will, their consequent frustration at feeling the inevitability of their own destruction evokes in them a feeling of licentiousness and perverse pleasure in each other. "And they both felt a subterranean desire to let go . . . and lapse into sheer unrestraint, brutal and licentious." Gudrun feels a "black passion" surge up in her, a "black licentiousness" which is also apparent in Gerald.[26] Their "subterranean desire" echoes the pruience of the underworld collier in a previous chapter who lusts after Gudrun from a distance.[27] They are moving steadily toward the dissolution of pure mind sensation.

At his father's death, Gerald feels the rational structure of his orderly and carefully controlled existence

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[25]Freeman, p. 64.

[26]Lawrence, Women in Love, pp. 279-280.

[27]Ibid., p. 107.

crashing in on the void inside him. In a daze he wanders in the night, and here he takes on the characteristics of his colliers' mindless automation: "His mind became dark, he went on automatically."[28] But he cannot tolerate his aimlessness and lack of purpose and decides that he must take a direction. The image of darkness and artificial light reaffirms his commitment to mind consciousness and finally death. Out of the "unknown darkness," he sees what Lawrence ironically terms "a small saving light," toward which he immediately goes. Appropriately, a collier holds the lantern and, also appropriately, gives Gerald directions which lead him directly to his father's freshly dug grave. Recoiling from the grave, Gerald knows that it is the "one center" of the darkness of the unknown surrounding him.[29]

The night of Mr. Crich's funeral forecasts Gerald's funeral,[30] and, what is more, forecasts the mode of his death. Again appropriately, a collier directs Gerald to Gudrun's home. With the wet clay from his father's grave sticking to his boots, he goes straight to Gudrun "as if to his fate."[31] He must go to her, because he is "a victim of his own system:

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[28]Ibid., p. 330.

[29]Ibid., pp. 330-331.

[30]Spilka, p. 137.

[31]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 332.

like Skebrensky before him, he has been aroused to life through love, yet he remains unable to support himself outside a woman's orbit."[32] Whether for love or not, probably not love but mutual desperation, he chooses a woman who is coldly mechanized, cold to his child-like clinging to her, for he has trained her well to be "his tormentor and slayer."[33]

But Gerald is still human enough, despite his mechanization, to receive temporary rejuvenation from his contact with Gudrun. His passion brings him a sense of restoration. He finds a sort of unconscious peace for his "seared, ruined" brain. In contact with Gudrun, who, unfortunately for his ultimate fate, is for him the "great bath of life,"[34] Gerald finds a child-like security. In her he finds refuge from the unknown darkness of death. But his passion is the goal of his existence. Gerald never realizes, as Birkin does, that a dependence upon "the ultimate and triumphant experience of physical passion"[35] holds only temporary regenerative powers and can in itself provide no basis for vital existence. Gerald finds satisfaction in mere temporary relief.

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[32]Spilka, p. 137.

[33]Moynahan, p. 86.

[34]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 337.

[35]Ibid., p. 338.

Gudrun, however, is "destroyed into perfect consciousness"[35] by her experience with Gerald. In contrast to his "perfect sleep," she lies awake the entire night, with her "dark, wide eyes staring into the darkness,"[36] seeing nothing. She is past the point of receiving any of the regenerative benefits which even mental profligacy can give. She experiences only the deathliness of pure mind sensation. She is unable to resist Gerald's "pent-up darkness and corrosive death," but "received it in ecstasy of subjection, in throes of acute violent sensation."[37] She is not only conscious throughout the night, but lies in the dark in an "exhausting superconsciousness," yearning to make a light, yet not wanting to wake Gerald.[38] She knows that her quest for complete mental knowledge will never end.

> It was as if she drew a glittering rope of knowledge out of the sea of darkness, . . . and still it did not come to an end, there was no end to it, she must haul and haul at the rope of glittering consciousness, pull it out phosphorescent from the endless depths of the unconscious . . . .[39]

The image suggests that she must know the depths of the unconscious mystery without entering the depths. She must pull at the rope of knowledge until it ends in death.

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[35] Ibid., p. 338. [36] Ibid. [37] Ibid., p. 337.

[38] Ibid., p. 338. [39] Ibid., p. 339.

She waits in the darkness, waiting for the hours to pass into daylight so that she can send Gerald home. Despite his reluctance, she finally "broke away, rose and lit a candle. That then was the end."[40] Her mentality had at last come to predominate. The chapter in which Gerald goes to Gudrun's bedroom is fittingly called "Love and Death" and is in direct contrast to "Excurse," which could easily be entitled "Love and Life." The dark imagery is similar in the two chapters, but the difference in meaning which the imagery conveys is this: "Ursula and Birkin surrendered to the mystery of otherness to achieve peace. Gudrun and Gerald strain for knowledge of each other, and, hence power over each other."[41] Birkin and Ursula find life, Gerald and Gudrun find death. Despite the temporary rejuvenation which Gerald finds in Gudrun,

> the equilibrium which Gerald seeks is the opposite of the star-polarity of the Birkin-Ursula love. It is a desperate need, a dependence. Gerald has nothing to set against death. He is in danger of caving in unless he can "use" Gudrun as a support.[42]

The darkness of the mines provides much of the imagery of the Gerald-Gudrun affair. And it is this darkness which

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[40] Ibid., p. 340.

[41] Keith Sagar, The Art of D. H. Lawrence (Cambridge, 1966), p. 93.

[42] Ibid.

provides one of the constant parallels between the African process of dissolution and the Nordic. Aldington says that Lawrence "never freed himself from the dark mystery and fascination of the mine. For him it remained a symbol of the unconscious, . . . and in his own somewhat baffling symbolism how large a part is played by 'darkness,' and all that is hidden underground as it were mysteriously working out of sight."[43]

There can be no doubt but that the darkness of the mines, closely associated with the darkness of the Pompadour, supports the death-theme. If Walter Morel of Sons and Lovers was vitally alive as a young man, at least, before he is dehumanized by his wife and industrialization, the young collier to whom Birkin and Ursula give the chair is a young Walter devolutionized into the sub-human, modern collier, only a step above the disintegrate Loerke.

The young collier has "some of the fineness and stillness of a dark-eyed, silent rat." He is hardly a man at all; his eye lashes are "dark and long and fine over his eyes, that had no mind in them, only a dreadful kind of subject, inward consciousness, glazed, dark."[44] This, and the

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[43]Richard Aldington, Portrait of a Genius, But . . . . (London, 1930), p. 27.

[44]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 350.

fact that the collier is also "subtle," describes Loerke, who is "the very stuff of the underworld life," who "lives like a rat in the river of corruption."[45] Also like Loerke, the collier has "a queer subterranean beauty, repulsive too."[46] Thus Gudrun and Gerald's relationship moves steadily toward complete dehumanization, represented by dark, rat-like creatures who have gone deeply, deeper than Gerald can go, into the dissolution of organic creativeness. From the Pompadour to the Alps, dissolution reigns.

Much like the depths of a busy mine is the interior of the Pompadour Café, where Gerald first meets Minette. Daleski says that the dark cafe, a "vague, dim world of shadowy drinkers, humming with an atmosphere of blue tobacco smoke,"[47] is "not so far removed as it might be thought from Beldover."[48] He says that what the two worlds have in common is a "failure of meaningful life, the failure to live in bright, vivid distinction of being."[49] They fail, that is to say, because their worlds are committed to equally destructive, albeit

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[45] Ibid., p. 418.

[46] Ibid., p. 353.

[47] Ibid., p. 54.

[48] H. M. Daleski, The Forked Flame: A Study of D. H. Lawrence (Evanston, 1965), p. 129.

[49] Ibid.

different, ways of knowing. It is this ultimate destructiveness which governs the meaning of the imagery in both processes.

The similarity between the world of the Pompadour Café and the mines of Beldover brings out some consistency in Lawrence's use of the black-beetle imagery as applied to Minette and the African statue, to Gudrun and the colliers, and finally to Loerke. The only thing that Minette professes to fear is the black-beetle. Daleski contends, however, that her fear of the beetle does not disassociate her from the dissolution which the beetle represents. Birkin says that the African culture is one which has "mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution, knowledge such as the beetles have, which live purely within the world of corruption and cold dissolution."[50] Daleski states that Minette fears this dissolution in herself; she fears "her own inherent tendency to lapse, her own desire to break the complex unity of sense and mind into a disintegration into 'mystic' sensualism."[51] Similarly, Gerald and Gudrun also have an inherent tendency toward breaking that complex unity, but into mystic (in Gudrun) intellect rather than sensualism. As Chamberlain

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[50]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 248.

[51]Daleski, p. 132.

has suggested, both processes end in death and destruction. It is therefore not surprising to see the black-beetle image applied to the mines and the Nordics.

As Gudrun and Ursula walk through Beldover, Gudrun finds the blackened area repulsive. She feels compelled to go forward, however, "through the whole sorid gamut of pettiness, the long amorphous gritty street," even though to do so makes her feel "like a beetle toiling through the dust."[52] Gudrun, and the world which she personifies, are drawn like Minette, to "knowledge of one sort,"[53] and this is why the beetle image is applicable to characters aligned with both destructive processes. The Egyptians worshiped "the ball-rolling scarab beetle ; because of the principle of knowledge in dissolution or corruption."[54] The principle is the same, whether the knowledge is of the mind or of the senses. The trail of destruction and dissolution finally leads to the Alps and the insect-like, sometimes rat-like, Loerke.

On an Alpine holiday, Birkin and Ursula, who have already achieved their goal of freedom, go with Gerald and Gudrun to a mountain resort where the holiday ends in Gerald and Gudrun's fulfilling their death wish, as well as society's. By the

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[52]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 5.

[53]Ibid., p. 245. [54]Ibid., p. 246.

time they arrive there, the once socially and personally powerful Gerald has lost almost all of the masterful control which he had earlier exhibited. His dependence upon Gudrun has been steadily increasing, and their relationship has become a taut struggle of the will, which Gudrun is winning. "It was a strange battle between her ordinary consciousness and his uncanny, black art consciousness."[55] It is a monumental battle, for in Lawrence's works, "the struggle of will against will is the great sterilizing and enervating force of the modern world. The role of the battle of the wills is the sole music of our idealistic universe."[56] Gudrun overcomes Gerald's will, and in a perversion of the heightened star-equilibrium which Birkin and Ursula achieve, Loerke and Gudrun achieve "the subtle thrills of extreme sensation in reduction. It was an unbroken will reacting against her unbroken will . . . ."[57]

On their way to the Alps, Gerald and Gudrun stop off in London and go to the Pompadour Café. "It was as if she had to return to this small, slow central whirlpool of

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[55] Ibid., p. 405.

[56] Diana Trilling, editor, The Portable D. H. Lawrence (New York, 1954), p. 25.

[57] Lawrence, Women in Love, pp. 442-443.

disintegration and dissolution."[58] She and Gerald establish the final relationship between their kind of death and that of the primitives. When Gudrun takes Birkin's letter warning Halliday of his and Minette's fatal path, Gudrun is in effect recognizing her own fate in what Birkin writes to the Bohemians. From this time forward, only the Nordic process of dissolution is treated in the novel, but it now becomes perfectly clear why the dark imagery of destruction applies to the opposite modes of dissolution.

Hearing Halliday read Birkin's letter aloud evokes a violent reaction in Gudrun, making "the blood mount in her head as if she were mad."[59] Obviously the content of the letter concerns her mind absorption as well as the Bohemian's blood absorption. The letter says, in essence, that every race reaches a phase in which it desires destruction over all other desires; in the individual, the desire is ultimately a desire for self-destruction.

> Surely there will come an end in us to this desire--for the constant going apart--this passion for putting asunder--reacting in intimacy only for destruction--using sex as a great reducing agent, reducing the old ideas, going back to the savages for our sensations--always seeking to lose ourselves in some ultimate sensation, mindless and infinite--burning only with destructive

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[58] Ibid., p. 372.

[59] Ibid., p. 376.

> fires, ranging on with the hope of being burnt out utterly--.[60]

Gudrun sees the truth of herself in Birkin's letter, and in a rage she takes the letter from Halliday and leaves with it, mortified that she should be exposed publicly. Tindall says that the Bohemians, in reading Birkin's letter aloud and mockingly, "criticize him for wanting to go back to the savages."[61] Bertocci probably comes closer to the true meaning of the letter, however, when he says that Birkin's message, that "modern society society is dominated by the desire for destruction," is completely abstracted into theory when Halliday reads the letter aloud in the Pompadour.[62] The letter merely attempts to make the Pompadour crowd aware of their savagery, imploring them to give up the split between the mind and the senses. The message escapes the dull, blood conscious sensualists, but Gudrun's "superconsciousness" allows her to see her implication in it.

In the Alps Gerald must at last face the darkness of the unknown which seems to be steadily closing in upon him. He

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[60] Ibid.

[61] William York Tindall, D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow (New York, 1939), p. 102.

[62] Angelo P. Bertocci, "Symbolism in Women in Love," A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany, edited by Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, 1959), p. 83.

and Gudrun battle for psychical control over each other. After Birkin and Ursula leave them at the resort, Gerald and Gudrun are "now completely isolated, cut off from life, enclosed in the cold mechanical world of knowledge and sensation."[63] Gerald has not the faculty for the continued subtle reduction into dissolution; he is too worldly, too gross for the intricacies of pure sensation in the mind. Consequently, Gudrun begins to reject him, and he fights desperately against her growing isolation from him.

> "Are you alone in the dark?" he said.
> And she could tell by his tone he resensed it, he resented this isolation she had drawn round herself . . . .
> "Would you like to light the candle?" she asked.[64]

But Gerald, proud and obstinate, will not answer. Gudrun no longer needs the artificial light to stave off the darkness, for she knows all there is to know about the world which that image presents. She is ready to pass beyond the dissolution of ordinary "mental profligacy," such as Gerald and Hermione, and sometimes Birkin and Ursula, have experienced. She finds her defense against the outer darkness by withdrawing to an inner darkness, the darkness of the mines.

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[63]Sagar, p. 91.

[64]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 432.

Gudrun knows Gerald completely, he is the embodiment of the world as it exists for her. Now she seeks new worlds, but "there were no new worlds, there were no more men, there were only . . . little ultimate creatures like Loerke."[65] She turns away from Gerald to Loerke, who represents the final lapse of western culture into the sub-human phase of dissolution--"there was no going beyond him."[66] He forecasts the northern version of the long African process into knowledge of only one sort. In him, Gudrun finds her fate, and for her, as for the African races, the world as Gerald represents it is finished.

> There was only the inner, individual darkness, sensation within the ego, the obscene religious mystery of ultimate reduction, the diabolic reducing down, disintegrating the vital organic body of life.[67]

Gudrun's death is sealed; it is the ultimate death of society already apparent in the dark sub-human colliers in their subterranean world.

There remains only the death of Gerald to be fulfilled. He represents society in a lesser stage of dissolution than Gudrun's phase, a society to which Birkin apparently offers some hope in universal brotherhood. But rejecting that,

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[65] Ibid., p. 443.

[66] Ibid., p. 418.

[67] Ibid., p. 443.

Gerald's phase must inevitably break into Gudrun's phase, from which there is no retreat. Consequently, Gerald is finally destroyed by Gudrun, who is the "established world to whom he has committed himself."[68] "Gudrun, by going one step further in rejection of all they have previously lived by, in having uttered one cry beyond his comprehension, becomes a menace like death to his will to power."[69] Gudrun, in breaking with the established order and taking the path of ultimate mind sensation, instead of Birkin's "star-equilibrium," kills herself symbolically, for she is the established order to Gerald, and in killing herself, she also kills Gerald, for his world is gone.

Thus the death-theme in Women in Love is complete. "There is life which belongs to death, and there is life which isn't death," Birkin has said.[70] Both the life-theme and the death-theme have been fulfilled in similar fashion, by a break with the established order. But the break for life demands the relinquishing of willful desire for knowledge in one mode, a symbolic death leading to life. The break for death is merely a continuation of the old dissolution into a more degenerate phase, a symbolic death leading to ultimate

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[68]Ibid., p. 345. [69]Freeman, pp. 67-68.

[70]Lawrence, Women in Love, p. 178.

death. The dark imagery forwarding the death-theme in Women in Love is consistent in that the two kinds of dissolution which it depicts lead to the same ultimate end, death.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The two predominant themes in Women in Love, the life-theme and the death-theme, determine the structure of the novel. The death-theme evolves through western man's reliance upon his mentality for his deepest life values. By creating a culture which has its basis in ideal rather than real fact, man has become a victim of his own abstraction. The greatest manifestation of the idealization of western culture is its perfection of industry to the point that mechanization is extended to man himself. In cutting himself off from the deepest sources of his creative being and absorbing his feelings into his intellect, western man has himself become mechanized, less than human. Unable to create further, since he has reached the bounds of what the limited intellect without inspiration from man's natural creative urges can provide, he must seek inspiration in what he has created in the past. But in turning back, he finds only ideals and clichés which no longer have meaning in a vital and creative universe. In fact, a culture which is no longer creative must, like all units of existence, die when it can

no longer follow the natural flow of growth. If man is unwilling to abandon his corruption through excessive mind consciousness, then he must follow his corrupt culture to its extinction through dissolution.

The life-theme in Women in Love is enigmatic because it evolves out of the death-theme; in fact, death is prerequisite to life in the novel, a sort of symbolic death which is the destruction of the old self as a product of a decadent culture and the taking on of a new self which centers on the deepest life sources of creative being. Mary Freeman describes the four main characters in Women in Love in writing that

> Lawrence's characters struggle to divest themselves of past relationships crystallized in tradition and to come abreast of currently factual relationships, to switch on a full life-current by divesting themselves of idealogical trammels.[1]

Both couples, Gerald-Gudrun and Birkin-Ursula, struggle to find a meaningful existence in a corrupt world. Gerald and Gudrun's struggle results in final death, because in their break with society they do not break with the excessive mind consciousness that has perpetuated that society. Therefore their death is individual and, since their lives are representative of the cultural process of dissolution, their deaths are also social. Birkin and Ursula's struggle

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[1]Freeman, p. 149.

ultimately results in a new life, because in rejecting their old selves and taking on new values, they become free to grow in mental and spiritual stature.

The life-death antithesis in Women in Love is reflected, then, in the characters themselves. The couples have both individual and social significance. Through their individual and interrelational conflicts, based upon their working out on a personal level the large antithetical themes, they reveal the cultural problem and finally resolve it into two alternatives for the western man at large, life or death.

These antithetical themes provide a broad but consistent basis for reconciling seeming inconsistencies in much of the dark imagery in Women in Love, and, furthermore, provide a basis for analysis of the dark imagery in general. The dark imagery which is most perplexing is that which appears to reveal character as being aligned with the theme of creativeness in one instance and with the theme of dissolution in another. This problem can be solved in most cases by referring to Lawrence's particular aim in his characterizations. Although the novel has broad social themes and the characters embody the ideas behind them, Lawrence is primarily concerned with characterization not so much on the level of personality as on the level of the deepest impersonal ego, the creative

forces which give man his impetus. "In every great novel, who is the hero all the time?" asks Lawrence.

> Not any of the characters, but some unnamed and nameless flame behind them all . . . . In the great novel, the felt but unknown flame stands behind all the characters, and in their words and gestures there is a flicker of the presence. If you are too personal, too human, the flicker fades out, leaving you with something awfully lifelike, and as lifeless as most people are.[2]

Darkness in Women in Love often combines with this unknown flame in different variations.

The image is enigmatic in that what it depicts is "unknown" except to the sensual perceptions. It is merely "felt." Furthermore, it "stands behind all characters," not just a certain type. Through narrative support the unknown can be determined as some mysterious life force emanating from the deepest physical body of man. But the two main themes of the novel, which Birkin abstracts into theory in his letter to Halliday, set the conditions under which this force is channeled toward creativeness or toward destructiveness. Therefore when the characters to which the image is applied are aligned with the death-theme, the theme of dissolution, the image is one of a perverted instinctual life force, "dark sensuality" become "sensuousness,"[3] in the Nordic

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[2]D. H. Lawrence, "The Novel," Assorted Articles (London, 1930), p. 193.

[3]Lawrence, Women in Love, pp. 35-38.

process of dissolution, or "knowledge arrested and ended in the senses"[4] in the African process, which is the counterpart of the Nordic process that some of the characters feel drawn to at times.

None of the four main characters are "bound" to an unswerving alignment with either of the two main themes until late in their development, when they definitely commit themselves either to mend consciousness or to "star-equilibrium." Meanwhile they are in a state of flux between the two themes, alternating in various degrees between the process of dissolution (with its two divisions of African and Nordic processes) and the transcendent sensual perception advocated by Birkin as "the new way." This is especially true of Birkin, and reflects Lawrence's conviction that "in the novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all."[5] The characters are ultimately representative of society, but on the individual level are quite involved with living.

> For the relatedness and the interrelatedness of all things flows and changes and trembles like a stream, and like a fish in the stream the characters in the novel swim and drift and float and turn belly-up when they're dead.[6]

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[4] Ibid., p. 245.

[5] Lawrence, "The Novel," p. 189.

[6] Ibid., p. 196.

Because the conflict between the themes takes place within and between individual characters, any one of them in a given scene could be aligned with one of the themes other than the one which he ultimately represents. For this reason the dark imagery which is employed in that scene, "the dark flow of electricity," for example, may take its meaning from the theme with which the character tends toward at that moment. Image, characterization, and theme are so interwoven that one could very well determine the meaning of the other, but the themes seem to be the most stable point of reference.

Gerald and Gudrun's struggle is, in a sense, quite removed from that of Birkin and Ursula. Gerald is the very embodiment of industry at large, while Gudrun is the representative of the industrialized mass. The Nordic process of dissolution, the absorption of instinct by the mind with all its different external manifestations (the mines, the automated miners, mental pruience, death) finds its vehicle in them, and they carry the theme to its horrible conclusion. The process of dissolution which they portray is complicated by Lawrence's bringing into the novel another process of dissolution which the cultures of the hot countries are going through, the African process. This process, symbolized by primitive sculpture and personified by the London Bohemians,

serves several interrelated purposes in the novel. Its darkness of the mindless blood knowledge is contrasted to the whiteness of mind knowledge. It serves to illustrate one of the two ways a culture can decline and die, and on the character level, contrasts its extreme of sensuality as a human trait with the extreme of mind as an opposing trait.

Because of the complexity, the "relatedness and the interrelatedness," of the two processes, and the complexity of the interchange of dark imagery involved in them, they are central to a study of the dark imagery of the Gerald-Gudrun relationship, since it is almost entirely concerned with dissolution.

A study of the dark imagery in Women in Love can but touch upon the rich literary substance which that novel affords. The image of darkness is central to Lawrence's philosophy as well as to his artistic expression and serves as a focal point for understanding the man and his work.

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