



## A study of *The Rainbow* as a statement in feminism

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### Abstract

Woman has always been at the centre of major studies. And, author after author has felt a nagging gap between what a woman is, and what she can be. Lawrence, in *The Rainbow* affirms feminine quest as a quest for fuller self. "Why must they remain obscured and stifled all their lives?" the women ask themselves. From the beginning, women exhibit a greater capacity than man-or at least a more urgent desire- for a higher being. *The Rainbow* represents Lawrence's sympathy for women, who are closer to the vital instincts of life.

**Keywords:** woman, *the rainbow*, feminism

### Introduction

The Brangwen women excel men in their courage to fulfill their desires. Even if it means breaking the routine of domestic existence to embrace the unfamiliar and perhaps dangerous "wonder of the beyond." This difference between men and women is evident from the initial pages of the novel. But the women wanted another form of life than this, something that was not blood-intimacy.

Tom Brangwen is attracted towards Lydia Lensky widow of Paul Lensky, who is a Polish emigrant whom he ultimately marries in utter disregard of his seniority in age and her superiority in every other field of life. It is a parallel to Lawrence's life, since he himself had married Frieda, a German, senior to him in age. Evidently he made Lydia share a few significant things with Frieda. Apart from this, he gave her his own mother's name (The name of Lawrence's mother was Mrs. Lydia Lawrence). When Tom meets her for the first time, he intuitively realizes that she is the woman for him, and this fact is vaguely recognized by her as well.

The daughter of a Polish landowner, Lydia married Paul Lensky. She is over taken by a sort of mystic dread of death, still she does not lose heart and wages a heroic struggle against her miseries. When she takes up her present job at Cosselhay, she is at first overwhelmed by a sense of 'nothing, just grey nothing', but gradually, she is once again aroused to a desire for life. Now when she is introduced to us, she is feeling "as if crushed between the past and the future, like a flower that comes above ground to find a great stone lying above it."

Tom Brangwen's entry into her life signals a remarkable change in it. In the very first meeting, she recognizes him to be a man for her, and she finds that the voice of her body rises strong and insistent and she realizes that she wants him as the man who has come 'nearer to her for awakening'. As she gets to know him better, her instinct is fixed on him. She is also enhanced by the blue, steady livingness of his eyes. Her courtship with Tom is rather unsteady. At times she feels

herself opening out to him like a flower but at other times she lapses again to stupor and indifference.

A sort of love-hate rhythm comes to characterize her marital life with Tom. She feels Tom's unbounded passion for her and is gratified: but she is also aware of a 'solid' power of antagonism underneath, and it irritates her. They live suspended in a kind of tension. Often Tom gets furious with this 'small', 'ugly mounted' woman. And she too does not take it lying down; she turns on him like a tigress and there is a fierce quarrel. But they are sure that they would be received back again. And they do not stray far from each other, with each quarrel ending in a sweeter reconciliation.

Lydia's pregnancy brings upon her a spell of silence, in which Tom is almost cast out. Lydia leaves him more and more alone, and in the last months of pregnancy, she turns absolutely incommunicative, forgetting him, altogether.

Lawrence imparts a rare insight to Lydia Tom relationship. Lydia's indifference is not taken in the right spirit by Tom. During this period, she expects more attention from Tom, but Tom, who finds sexually unfulfilled, finds solace in the arms of a mistress. When this secret dawns on Lydia, it leaves her all the more hurt. One day, she opens out to Tom and tells him that he does nothing to make her love him, whereas he goes on complaining about her indifference. Her first husband Paul used to treat her like a woman, but Tom has made her feel if 'she is nothing'. She also makes it clear to him that she is waiting for him to meet her, not to bow before her and serve him. She wants his active participation in her being and not his submission to her. This moment of 'lit' is a sort of enlightenment which follows the moments of consummation. Now she enters with him into another circle of existence where there is real fulfillment.

Anna Lenskey, the chief figure in the second generation of Brangwen women, is the daughter of Lydia Lenskey by her Polish husband Paul Lenskey. We are told that she is a 'child with face like a bud of apple blossom, glistening fair hair, and very dark eyes'. She jealously guards her mother during her

meeting with Tom Brangwen. She does not appear to be very happy, but she is 'quick sharp. Absorbed, full of imagination and changeability, and be a' bewitched child'.

Gradually she becomes friendlier with Tom. In her childish, desolate moments, when she feels the need of something big and warm, she draws near her stepfather and clings to him. Often she accompanies him to the ton and feels good sitting beside him in the gig, with his big body swaying against her. Lawrence invests Anna's emotional dependence on Tom, though with a streak of the Oedipal in it, with a rare charm. Tom dissatisfied with Lydia particularly during the last months of her pregnancy, diverts his attention to Anna. She too responds to him with great openness. The two of them make a little life together. He teaches her to count or to say her letters. He also remembers little nursery rhymes and fairy tales to tell her at night.

As a child, Anna was as proud and shadowy as a tiger, and as aloof; she could confer favors, but save from her mother and father, she would receive none. She hated people who came too near as she mistrusted intimacy. Gradually she grows into a tall, awkward girl with very dark and quick eyes. She is sent to a young ladies school in Nottingham. In spite of being intelligent, she feels no interest in learning. She only seems to be obsessed with her ideal of being a splendid lady, free from petty ties, existing beyond petty considerations. She wants to be royal like Alexandra, Princess of Wales. She even dresses and behaves like her which delights her father. She is very sensitive to the shortcomings of her family, and feels humiliated, and often infuriated by the fact that her father often gets drunk.

Lawrence describes her as 'moody, quick and flush and always uneasy uncertain'. Lawrence comments: Often she stood at the window, looking out as if she wanted to go. Sometimes she went, she mixed with people. But always she came back in anger, as if she were diminished, almost degraded.

As soon as William Brangwen enters her life, she is attracted by his height, face, curious self-possession, his ringing voice. Since they are frequently thrown together, she quickly falls in love with him. The liberating expanding influence she so badly sought, she finds in him; in him, she sought an escape, in him the bounds of her experience were transgressed. It was a new reserve, a new independence that she found in him.

Anna is married to Will but fails to achieve the expansion she had expected. Since, Will, who is himself is incomplete, what sort of completion could he offer her? She feels stifled by the religious values espoused by Will. He experiences a kind of consummation in the Lincoln cathedral but to Anna, its altar is barren, "it was dead matter lying there". She claimed the right to freedom "above her, higher than the roof." So she scoffs at his ideals and exposes their hollowness. In a way, she rejects Will and seeks consolation in something outside him. She is now with child and no longer cares for Will. She even insists on sleeping alone. Will feels hurt but helpless.

Will has no identity for her, beyond a symbol of sexual fulfillment. So, she seeks fulfillment in motherhood, in bearing child after child. Ursula is still very young when she is again pregnant. In fact she continues in her 'violent trance of motherhood, always busy, often harassed but always contained in her trance of motherhood. She seems to exist in

her own 'violent fruitfulness.' And it is as if sun shone tropically upon her,' She has look of richness.

Ursula Brangwen is the most important figures in the novel. Of all the Brangwens, it is in her that the desire for an individual fullness of being is shown at its most intense. She is the eldest daughter of Will and Anna is the chief figure of the third generation of the Brangwens. The vision of the rainbow, the central symbol of the novel from which it derives its title also appears to her. About half the novel is devoted to the depiction of her girlhood and adolescent years. As a child, Ursula is tawny skinned. She has wisps of brown hair and yellow wavering eyes. That is why, she is named Ursula.

Ursula's relationship with her father Will, who turns to her after his disillusionment with Anna, has been crafted with great plan. Will whose authority has been challenged by Anna, who has deviated from his religious beliefs and made him feel ashamed, finds in Ursula, a release of his pent up emotions of inadequacy. The chief note of his relationship with his daughter is that of possession." He waited for the child to become his..... It was his own..... So that the father had the elder baby.....She as s piece of light that really belonged to him.'

Ursula gets an escape from the little jealous of home in The Grammar School at Nottingham where she goes at the age of twelve. From the Grammar School, she goes to the High School, where, like her mother earlier, she cherishes the aim of becoming a lady. But she is terribly shy and she also bites her nails. The makes her suffer great anguish. She is quick, intelligent, instinctive, but not 'thorough'. If a thing does not come to her instinctively, she cannot learn it. Then she loathes her lessons and feels contemptuous of her teachers and school mistress.

However, Ursula as a woman finds a great disparity between the reality and the ideals preached by religion. On Sundays, she learns the religious ideal of poverty and humility but finds it difficult to practice these ideals on weekdays. She even feels something unclean and degrading about them. Religion loses its charm for her when she comes to realize that the material world and the world of religion are two different entities and cannot be blended. It becomes a tale a myth an illusion, which however much one might assert it to be true as historical fact, one knows is not true.

Ursula is sensitive in the extreme and this sensitiveness is exhibited in her demeanour. She is "deeply reticent, yet lapsing into unreserved expansiveness now and then". She thinks she loves everybody and believes in everybody. But because she cannot love herself nor believe in herself, she mistrusts everybody. Her starts of revulsion and hatred are more inevitable than her impulses to love. The first impulse of love visits her when she is complimented by Anton on her dress with fine blue and white strips that looks exquisite on her golden, warm complexion. Thereafter, it becomes a passion with her to dress well and look really elegant. Ursula makes a gradual entry into the world of passion when Anton introduces her to a new world of sexual awaking. Sitting close together in the church, driving homewards when Anton takes her bare hand in his own and gently caresses it, listening to the strange adventures of his friends in the army and their girls, all these actions arouse passion in her to know her own maximum self, limited and so defined against him. 'She could limit and

define against him, the male, she could be her maximum self, female, oh female, triumphant for one moment in exquisite assertion against the male, in supreme contradistinction to the male'. And her soul crystallized with triumph. So she held him there, the victim, consumed, annihilated. She had triumphed.

It is not difficult to understand why Anton feels so annihilated. She records all her impulsive thoughts in a diary and calls to him from her heart wherever she goes. As bad news from South Africa keeps pouring constantly, she feels as if the entire world is hostile to her. Her sexual life also flames into a kind of disease within her. She is usually confused and perplexed and shrinks from all touch. Even studies appear to her dreary and burdensome. She continues with them only because she aims at complete social independence and complete independence from any personal authority.

Ursula develops a Lesbian attachment with her mistress Winifred Inger. The athletic woman of twenty eight, so white, strong, and proud and firm bodied Diana, casts a magical spell on Ursula. When Ursula is kissed by her underwater, she is simply dazed. Winifred has had a scientific education and she knows many clever people. Her company helps Ursula develop quite rapidly. She gets rid of many dogmas and even religion.

Ursula soon realizes that she can no longer be the same with Skirbensky. "She knew, vaguely in the first minute, that they were enemies come together in a trice. Every movement and word of his was alien to her being." She loves his beautiful body and the fine texture of his face but feels dissatisfied when she talks to him. Ultimately she tells him that she does not want to get married to him. Frustrated, he marries his colonel's daughter and leaves for India without any intimation to Ursula. The sudden realization that she is with Anton's child, makes her regret her rejection of Anton and she writes to him promising to be a good wife to him. It is during these days that she has an encounter with the horses.

The end of the novel is marked by Ursula having a beautiful vision of a rainbow in the sky. The rainbow is the prophetic symbol of the transformation of human life on earth. Ursula can look into the future hopefully because she has not given up her search for an individual fullness of being.

Alfred Brangwen had married a woman from Heanor, daughter of the "Black Horse." She was slim, pretty, dark woman, quaint in her speech, whimsical. She was oddly a thing to herself, rather garrulous in her manner, but intrinsically separate and indifferent. Her long lamentable complaints, when she raised her voice against her husband in particular and against every-body else after him, only made those who heard her wonder at her, they were irritated and impatient with her. She railed long and loud about her husband, but always with balanced, easy flying voice and a quaint manner of speech. Consequently Brangwen laughed at her railing. They were two very separate beings, vitally connected, knowing nothing of each other, yet living in their separate ways from one root.

Ursula had a queer fascination and awareness for Miss. Winifred Inger. Miss. Inger was a beautiful woman of twenty-eight, a fearless-seeming clean type of modern girl whose very independence betrayed her sorrow. She was clever, and expert in what she did, accurate, quick, commanding. Her appearance

was pretty graceful. Ursula longed to have a physical contact with her. And she got an opportunity when Miss Inger was to teach her swimming. Ursula was fascinated to see Miss Inger appear in a rust-red tunic tied round her waist and a red silk handkerchief round her head. Her knees were so white and strong and proud, and she was firm-bodied as Diana. Ursula went mad to see the beauty of the firm, white cool flesh. She felt highly gratified when Miss Inger caught her round the waist while still in water, and grabbed her for a moment against herself. She also kissed Ursula, Ursula was really dazed.

"The two women became intimate. Their lives seemed suddenly fused into, one inseparable. Ursula went to Winifred lodging; she spent their only living hours. Winifred was very fond of water, of swimming of rowing. She belonged to various athletic clubs. Many delicious afternoons the two girls spent in a light boat on the river. Winifred always rowing. Indeed, Winifred seemed to delight in having Ursula in her charge, in giving things to the girl, in filling and enriching her life."

### Conclusion

Lawrence's women characters throw up a wide spectrum of human nature. Like a rainbow, they show up all colours of life. Ursula's identification with the title of the novel tries to put faith in the way she develops her awareness and becomes the central character of novelist's vision.

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