

## INTRODUCTION TO 'The Rainbow'

### I. The Publication of *The Rainbow*.

With the publication of his first major novel, *Sons and Lovers* in 1912, the first phase of Lawrence's career ended. It was in 1913 that Lawrence started writing a novel under the title of *The Sisters* which he later split into two, calling the first *The Wedding Ring* which finally became *The Rainbow* while the other portion went into the making of *Women in Love*. *The Rainbow* was published in 1915 but *Women in love* though completed in 1916 could not be published until 1920. In fact, Lawrence himself regarded *Women in love* as a sequel to *The Rainbow*. However, *The Rainbow* is a complete and self-contained work of art, and it has no organic connection with *Women in Love*.

After being published in September 1915, the book was banned by a police court on the charges of being an indecent book. According to *The Daily Express* it was 'an obscene novel to be destroyed worse than Zola'. It had many objectionable scenes which boldly dealt with sex but the particular scene which outraged the orthodox sensibility was the scene in which the pregnant Anna Brangwen dances naked in her room. She does this to celebrate her victory as a mother and the "nullification" of her husband. Lawrence was shocked by the withdrawal of the novel and therein developed a feeling in him that he no longer had a sympathetic public. (His aim was never to pander to the tastes of the vulgar, or to indulge in sexuality, but rather to reveal the sacred nature of sex.)

Lawrence intended *The Rainbow* to be a new novel which he makes clear in the letter which he wrote to Garnett where he says : " I have no longer the joy in creating vivid scenes that I had in *Sons and Lovers*. All the time underneath there is some thing deep evolving itself out of me. You musn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the Character.....I think it's great—so new, so

really a stratum deeper than I think anybody has ever gone, in a novel". Though, *The Rainbow* was initially banned but the real worth and originality of the novel has been steadily recognised with the passing times". According to David Daiches, it is a rare achievement, some thing new in the history of English novel which, "leaves us with that mixture of enthusiasm and exasperation which is the characteristic effect of this disturbing genius".

## II. The Theme of *The Rainbow*

The theme of the *The Rainbow* is not easy to define as it is a complex work of art. The problem of love and marriage which has a universal significance has been treated here in relation to lovers of three generations of a single English family against a time span of over sixty years. The novel mainly deals with 'the living relationship of men and women', the crucial relationship being "between a man and a woman in marital and sexual experience".

The novel is also an important social document because it spans roughly the last sixty years of the nineteenth century, it mirrors a few of the momentous changes which took place during that period, though the encroachment of industrial life upon the country is integral. Lawrence's concern is not with history in its wider sense, with its political economic and social impact upon the world at large, but with a microcosm, or a little world, centered on the Brangwen's Farm in the Erewash Valley on the border between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. He traces the growth in awareness of the Brangwen family from the undeveloped sensitivity of young Tom in the 1860s to the intense, vital hopes of Ursula at the turn of the century. The great liberating movements of the nineteenth century throughout Europe and America are compressed into the yearnings and aspirations of the Brangwen family to move out of its own little world into freedom of the spirit, symbolised for Tom by Lydia Lensky; for William by Anna, and finally for Ursula, not by a union with Skrebensky but by her rejection of him, by her new found individuality and independence which was able to reject the romance of his forgiveness and embrace the reality of her own future. Marvin Mudrick describes *The Rainbow* as "a great elgiac novel" because it studies the dissolution and disintegration of a rural community under the impact of mechanisation. It is a brilliant record of the English manners and morals over three generations, and of the forces that threatened the conventional and accepted way of life.

## III. Varied Experiences

We are offered a wide range of experience and interest in *The Rainbow* though Lawrence makes it very clear in the very first sentence of *The Rainbow* that he is concerned with chronicling the history of a family: The Brangwens. Yet, later we see that the Brangwens are drawn out of their self-contained life at Marsh Farm and into the community in time for the first major encroachment of industrial life upon the surrounding countryside. In spite of his earlier intentions, Lawrence takes up the industrial revolutions, the colliers, the sprawling growth

of villages into towns and towns into cities. An added awareness of one's own self comes with the increase in knowledge. There comes a steady decline in religious values. Though the Church which figures largely in the novel influences the lives of the various Brangwens whose stories are told in *The Rainbow*. A corresponding growth of scientific materialism creeps into the story as it reaches Ursula. It is not the prosperity or the great scape of freedom that comes with industrial revolution, that Lawrence condemns but he is afraid of the people losing the sense of their own individuality. Education which was one of the major concerns of the nineteenth century is a prominent theme in the book. Lawrence throws a critical light on it when it comes to Ursula who like other girls of her social class, is expected by her parents to stay at home and help with the growing family. Lawrence makes this an emotional issue, focussing on the sense of isolation, of frustrations and of caged spiritual energy in Ursula. In desperation she accepts a job as an uncertificated teacher in a school in a poor quarter in Ilkeston. Lawrence's account of Ursula's experiences in this school is very subjective and the whole episode is distressing and unsatisfying. The description of the new school that Ursula joins is a highly critical one; the segmentation, the disciplinarian methods, the brutal canings are offset by no positive aspect of education.

#### IV. The Description of Characters.

Lawrence views his characters not in relation to politics or religion or society but in relation to each other. The love-hate relationship, the alternate love-hate rhythm, between the different Brangwen couples seem to vivify their characters. Lawrence, however is not concerned with rendering the externals, but his chief pre-occupation is the rendering of the soul or 'Psyche' of his characters. Each of his characters are handled emotionally where he finds them lacking. To seek their emotional fulfilment all his characters are involved in a desperate struggle. Thus, about the characters of Lawrence it has been rightly said that : "A character is sketched not by 'extension' but by probing the depths." Lawrence probes deep into the sub-conscious or even unconscious mind of his characters where he shows them at war with themselves. Thus, his characters are made outside time and space. About his characters, Baker says, "His characters are not humorous treasure troves of the Dickens' school, or the refined imaginative creations of the humanist. His men and women are simply human nature, with elemental endowment of instincts and passional impulses in more than the normal measure, people chosen as exponents of his view of life, because they live with something like the same intensity as himself. In his novels, he lets them live to the full, and thus secures the virtue of immediacy to a degree probably unique in fiction.

#### V. The Structure of *The Rainbow*.

Critics like Galsworthy and Arnold Bennet have condemned the novel to be formless. In the novel we are told about the story of three successive generations

of one particular family. The problem starts with the narration of Lydia's past which is elaborated out of proportion. Then again, too much space is devoted to Anna's childhood and girlhood and her love, courtship and marriage. Then, Lawrence indulges elaborately in describing the conflict and combat of Will and Anna. In the third generation again, the description of Ursula's childhood is unnecessarily detailed to enormous lengths. Arnold Bennett condemned Lawrence's work on being formless because of over elaboration of insignificant incidents, sudden, unexpected and illogical changes in the behaviours of characters and the absence of the definite end of the plot. Lawrence in reply to this criticism said : "Tell Arnold Bennett that all rules of construction hold good only for novels that are copies of other novels. A book which is not a copy of other books has its own construction, and what he calls faults, he being an old imitator, I call characteristics".

Thus, according to him, *The Rainbow* is a new kind of novel, with a new technique, which is not bound by the old rules of orthodox fiction.

#### VI. Symbolism in *The Rainbow*.

As in his other novels, Lawrence has made an extensive use of symbols in *The Rainbow*. The symbols in the novel are complex and difficult to understand. Julian Moyanahan describes the symbols in *The Rainbow* into three different kinds. First, we have the expanding symbols like Arches, Cathedrals, Rainbows etc. Secondly, we have symbolic characters, like Anna symbolising the Mother, Ursula the modern educated, emancipated woman struggling to achieve independence is a man's world etc. Thirdly, we have the symbolic ritual-scenes like the one in which Ursula dances naked in her room, the Moon-scene and Ursula and her horses. A lot of concentration is required on the part of the reader to understand these symbols.

#### VII. Conclusion

In order to understand the full significance of the events and their influence upon the inner lives of the protagonists requires careful, considered and repeated readings of the text. Critics have often called it "a flawed work of art". The novel undoubtedly has its faults as Arnold Kettle points out :

"There are, I think, two ways in which Lawrence's unsatisfactory philosophy seriously limits the success and value of *The Rainbow* as a work of art. In the first place, there is the excessive intensity, the lack of relaxation, which gives the book as a whole an obsessive quality, all rather high pitched and overwrought. In the second place—not quite separable from the first quality—is the unresolved element of mysticism. In the final pages of the book Lawrence seems to be making a desperate effort to slough off this mysticism, to purge from his vision its excessive individualism, to see his people not in terms of mysterious allotropic states of being, but as men and women born and living in twentieth century England, nowhere else."

Lawrence himself described *The Rainbow* as 'supreme fiction', that is, fiction which is inspired by a serious purpose, philosophy or metaphysic but which treats the animating purpose artistically, never permitting it to intrude upon the attention of the readers. To conclude in the words of Marvin Mudrick :

"The revolutionary nature of *The Rainbow* is, then, two fold: it is the first English novel to record the normality and significance of physical passion; and it is the only English novel to record, with a prophetic awareness of consequences, the social revolution whereby western man lost his sense of community and men—more especially, women—learned, if they could, that there is no help any longer except in the individual and his capacity for a passional life".

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# AN OUTLINE STORY OF 'The Rainbow'

## I. The Marsh Farm

The Marsh farm is situated at a distance from the town of *Ilkeston* and very close to the tiny village of *Cossethay*. It has been the home of the Brangwens for generations; the men have tilled the soil and established their own roots deep into the heart of the country, whilst the women have dreamed dreams and yearned for something outside themselves and beyond their own comprehension. Changes are taking place, and the colliers in the neighbourhood are being mechanised, but as yet their disturbing impact on the agrarian way of life is not felt, life continues in its traditional form.

## II. The First Generation

When the novel opens in the mid-nineteenth century, Tom Brangwen, who has taken over the farm on his father's death, finds himself heir not only to the earthly solidity of the Brangwen men, but also to the outward yearning of the Brangwen women. He marries Lydia Lensky, a Polish widow. She brings her small daughter Anna with her. Lydia has a mysterious fascination for Tom. Their marriage is not an easy one as Lydia often lives in her old memories and Tom is frustrated feeling himself unable to communicate with her. Their being of different nationalities, cultures and even languages keeps the couple from ever becoming intellectually intimate with one another. Soon after marriage Lydia becomes pregnant and Tom feeling that she has removed herself from him, turns to Anna. Though Lydia gives birth to two sons by him but Tom's relationship with Anna remains the most constant relationship in his life.

## III. The Second Generation

Anna as a girl is quite haughty by nature who spends many hours imagining herself a great lady or even a queen. She grows up to be young and beautiful and

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the Vicar physically a weaker man than their husbands, was yet able to dominate them, because of his superior education and experience. It was their education, this higher form of being, that Mrs. Brangwen wished to give her children so that they could live the supreme life on earth.

There was also Mrs. Hardy, the wife of the Squire who lived at Shelly Hall at Ilkeston. She sometimes came to the Church at Cossethay with her little children. She was fair and delicate. The other women at Cossethay talked eagerly about her husband, her children, her guests, her dress, even of her servants and her house keeping. Mrs. Hardy was the living dream of their lives. Though they were more fond of Tom Brangwen, and more at ease with him; yet it was the Vicar and Mrs. Hardy who were their ideals.

**The Change with the Industrial Revolution.** During the 1840's the Industrial Revolution began to impinge upon the life of the Brangwens. A canal was constructed across the meadows of the Marsh Farm, connecting the newly opened colliers of the Erewash Valley. The railway ran across the valley bringing the possibility of easier communication between industrial and rural life. The Brangwens were given due compensation because by the building up of the canal, the Marsh Farm was cut off from Ilkeston. Thus, it was in this way, industrialisation encroached upon the rural solitude and privacy. The town grew rapidly, and the Brangwens were kept busy producing supplies, and so they grew richer and richer. Although the Marsh Farm remained remote and original and somewhat retained its old character, the effect of industrialisation was also perceptible in the form of ugly houses that were raising their heads everywhere.

**Alfred Brangwen and Mrs. Brangwen.** Alfred Brangwen had wedded a woman from heanor : a slim, pretty dark woman, quaint in her speech and quarrulous in her manner. They were two very separate beings, vitally connected, knowing nothing of each other, yet living in their separate ways from one root. The Brangwens had four sons and two daughters. The eldest boy ran away to sea and never came back; the second son, Alfred was sent to school where he made some progress. But he could acquire no proficiency in any other subject except drawing. So he became a draughtsman in a lace-factory in Nottingham and settled there. He married the daughter of a Chemist and became somewhat of a snob. He had three children. But when he was a middle-aged man, he ran after strange women, became a follower of forbidden pleasures, and deserted his wife and children without a qualm. The third son Frank, refused from the first to have anything to do with learning. He had always been drawn with the trickle of blood over the butchery business of the family. At eighteen he married a little factory girl, a pale, plump, quiet thing who bore him a child every year and made a fool of him. Of the daughters, the elder one, Alice, married a collier and settled at Yorkshire with her young family. Effie, the younger remained at home.

romantic love affair with the young Skrebensky, the son of her grandmother's friend. Anton Skrebensky is a lieutenant in the British Army. However, her relationship with Skrebensky fails because it is too physical. Anton can love her too physically, and not adore her with his whole soul, and Ursula is too demanding and aggressive. When Anton Skrebensky leaves to go to the Boer War, Ursula is distraught. She continues her studies in a mechanical fashion until she is caught up in a brief lesbian affair with one of her teachers, Winifred Inger. She leaves school, still in a whirl of emotional instability, she decides to cast off Miss Inger and thus introduces her to uncle Tom, a manager of a Yorkshire Colliery who decides to marry her.

Free of the entanglements, Ursula now returns home but to her dismay finds her mother pregnant again. The disorder of the house and the wildness of the children cause tension between Ursula and Anna and she determines to leave home and earn her living as a teacher. She has now become independent of parental influence. She is thus rootless. After the Boer War ends, Ursula receives a letter from Skrebensky in which he says that he wishes to see her again while he is on leave in England. With his arrival, their love returns with a greater intensity. During Easter they go away for a weekend at a hotel, passing as husband and wife. Shrebensky is due to go to India and proposes marriage but she at first refuses, not wishing the finality of linking her fate with his. She finishes her course at the University and fails her degree examination, but the affair with Anton drags on and she drifts into a marriage agreement. Once the wedding arrangements are made, however, Ursula knows she cannot go on and breaks away from Anton; he determines to take a wife to India with him, immediately proposes to his colonel's daughter and is accepted.

Meanwhile, Ursula returns home to discover that she is expecting Skrebensky's child. Having made her own decision, she awaits his answer. Feeling cut off from her family she wanders about the countryside alone until a terrifying experience with a group of horses during a drenching rain storm contributes to a break down. In the period of fever and delirium that follows, she loses the child. Now the cable from Skrebensky which announces his marriage only serves to distress and anger her. She goes through a period of spiritual misery, fearing that she may never awaken from it until the vision of a rainbow, promise of hope to the world, brings her a mystic understanding and a new belief in the future.