

## Sexual Politics Revised: A Feminist Re-Reading of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*

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### Abstract

In his work, D. H. Lawrence has paid particular attention to the question of (in)visible alliances between the sexes, where the position of power and dominance often is not fixed but is negotiable and constantly in the process of (re)vision. My paper examines Lawrence's experimentation with definitions and boundaries of public and private gender roles. Both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are a good starting point for this inquiry, since the relationship between the male and female characters are problematized in a conscientious and distinctive fashion. Therefore, it is interesting to study the relationship between the characters and see how femininity and masculinity influence each individual's gender identity, and as a result their gender performance. Additionally, Lawrence consolidates a feminine significance remarkably similar to the disruption, excess, and pleasure celebrated by poststructuralist French feminists as *écriture féminine*. These novels represent the disruptive power of feminine signification, both on personal and sociopolitical levels, and end with that power still in play. They get to the heart of the conceptual difficulties of gender differences, gender identity and gender performance. They also take on this feminist imperative to define the intensity and changes necessary in personal and cultural life of the modern age, manifesting and maintaining new and different possibilities for subjectivity. I use Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler's discussions on the concepts of femininity and the feminine subject. I also refer to their gender theories as foundational models to study the conflict and shift between the gender roles in the two-gendered system of cultural norms and ideals in the world of these two novels.

Keywords: D. H. Lawrence; *The Rainbow*; *Women in Love*; feminism; subjectivity; *écriture féminine*; feminine consciousness

In her essay, 'Sexual Difference' (1992), Luce Irigaray writes, 'sexual difference is one of the important questions of our age, if not in fact the burning issue' (165) and the link uniting or reuniting masculine and feminine 'must forge an alliance between the divine and the mortal, in which a sexual encounter would be a celebration, and not a disguised or polemic form of the master-slave relationship' (174). Similarly, D. H. Lawrence, in his fictional and non-fictional work has paid particular attention to the question of (in)visible alliances between the sexes.

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In Lawrence's work, the position of power and dominance is often not fixed but is negotiable and constantly in the process of (re)vision. My paper examines Lawrence's experimentation with definitions and boundaries of public and private gender roles. What is equally interesting is to study masculinity in Lawrence's work, which is always in conflict with itself; it advocates its supremacy, while, at the same time, teases and ridicules itself. It is also at once threatened and attracted by female independence. In his texts, the men's role is problematized. Their will to enforce and perform their masculinity in order to dominate never really materializes and is at once met and challenged by female characters. On the other hand, the female characters in his novels often experience an inner transcendence which is traditionally masculine in nature.

Whether or not the male characters in Lawrence's novels succeed in asserting their dominance over women is not perhaps as interesting as if we study the relationship between the characters and see how femininity and masculinity influence each individual's gender identity, and as a result their gender performance. Another important question to consider in light of gender performance is Butler's concept of performative identity. It is interesting to examine the ways in which the characters' gender identity is embodied and enacted in each individual, and to study why these performances are necessary in their understanding of the world around them, their perception of themselves and how they are perceived by others.

Lawrence's view of women and their position in the 'man's world,'<sup>1</sup> continues to draw the reader's attention. Often in his novels, he depicts women as convincingly strong and sexually liberated characters. It is not surprising that many critics through the years have appreciated and remarked positively about these women's inner thoughts and actions. For example, Sandra Gilbert in *Rereading Women: Thirty Years of Exploring Our Literary Traditions* discusses Lawrence's transcendent depiction of his female characters and the fusion of sexuality and spirituality in them. She points out that in Lawrence's texts, the merging of the erotic and the sacred, and his remarkable intuition and his comprehension of the female psyche, differentiate him from his male contemporaries. These are some of the essential points of argument, which are also highlighted by recent feminists, which point to Lawrence being a precursor of poststructuralist

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Man's World' is the title of one of the chapters in *The Rainbow*.

feminist critics like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Gilbert for example writes:

Didn't D. H. Lawrence—in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and elsewhere—begin to outline something oddly comparable to Cixous' creed of woman before she did? Describing the cosmic mystery of Connie's *jouissance*, this often misogynistic English novelist defines an 'orgasm' whose implications, paradoxically enough, appear to anticipate the fusion of the erotic, the mystical, and the political that sometimes seems to characterize Cixous' thought on this subject, for Connie's coming to sexuality is also a coming to selfhood and coming away from the historically hegemonic Western 'nerve brain' consciousness that would subordinate body to mind, blood to brain, passion to reason. (2011: 85)

Lawrence's view of women and their position in the 'man's world' has continued to engage readers' interest ever since and has been a challenging ground for feminist discussions. However, with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953), and a few years later, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), both of whom accusing Lawrence of phallogocentrism,<sup>2</sup> his reputation as a writer was damaged for a few decades.

Their conclusions about Lawrence reflect the devaluation of traditional femininity they inherit from patriarchal culture. They consider masculinity and femininity as two opposite and binary sets of characteristics and social behavior; where masculinity is characterized by intellectual and spiritual transcendence, phallogocentric ideas and individual ego which they consider superior to feminine characteristics that are by their nature immanent, emotional, earthy and intimate. Thus, they restrict the effectiveness of feminist politics. To construct a feminine subject, as Beauvoir and Millett do, is to repeat the practices of patriarchal signification, which devalue traditional femininity.

Nevertheless, in her critique of Lawrence, Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics* (1970), comments that Lawrence 'is the most subtle [...] for it is through a feminine consciousness that his masculine message is conveyed' (71). It reveals that even though Millett was considering Lawrence as a sexual politician, she could not deny his sensitivity and

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<sup>2</sup> Phallogocentrism is a concept that was developed by Jacques Derrida. It is a systematic thinking centered on the logic of presence, which is characteristic of patriarchal systems, where the phallus is emphasized as the ultimate signifier. In these systems, therefore, men would be considered as central and normal, and women as marginal.

understanding of feminine consciousness and sexual values in his female characters, characteristics which have been explained by the French third wave feminists<sup>3</sup> as *écriture féminine*. Lawrence died many decades before the recent changes in feminist perspective, and that makes it impossible for him to have any interaction with recent feminist discussions regarding *écriture féminine* or feminine consciousness. However, there are considerable similarities between him and feminist critics such as Irigaray and Cixous (whose theories are under discussion here) regarding gender issues, the relationship between men and women and even in his understanding of feminine consciousness.

In recent years, however, especially with the development of third wave French Feminist theories, one notices a shift in readers' perspective when reading Lawrence's texts. And although some of the recent critics are more receptive to Lawrence's portrayal of women than others, nevertheless the majority of critics analyze Lawrence's texts in the tradition of Beauvoir and Millett.<sup>4</sup>

There were of course quite a number of critics who defended Lawrence's work in general, and his portrayal of female characters in particular. In this regard, one should mention F. R. Leavis, who, in *D. H. Lawrence/Novelist* (1976), is of the conviction that 'Lawrence is

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Lorber, in *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics* (1998), distinguishes between three general kinds of feminist discourses. The first wave, or gender reform feminists, which refers to the movements to obtain the right to vote. The second wave, or gender resistant feminism, which started in the United States, with an aim to increase equality and promote women's rights. The third wave, or gender revolution feminism, which is considered the continuation and reaction to second wave feminism.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1971) and Carolyn Heilbrun's *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973) as some of the early feminists who had negative views of Lawrence texts, and Hillary Simpson, Anne Smith, Shiela MacLeod, Cornelia Nixon, Terry Eagleton, Judith Rydman, Lydia Blanchard and Carol Dix as more recent critics who are more receptive to Lawrence's views. In *D. H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination* (1989), Peter Balbert attempts to defend Lawrence's artistic achievement against what he regards as "two decades of unequivocal distortion" (6) by some feminist critics who in promoting their own political agendas, have wilfully reduced to engaging with Lawrence's sexual metaphysics to a literal program of female submission to male potency.

incomparably the greatest creative writer in English of our time' (18). He regarded Ursula, in *The Rainbow*, as the first modern woman in English literature. He also praised Lawrence as one of the finest writers of the century. His 'genius' he said, 'is distinctively that of a novelist, and as such he is as remarkable a technical innovator as there has been. It is *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* that most demand attention' (Leavis 1976: 18).

Peter Balbert, in *D. H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination: Essays on Sexual Identity and Feminist Misreading* (1989), defends Lawrence's texts against the negative readings of the feminists like Millett and Beauvoir. In this book, he argues that Lawrence's artistic achievement have been misrepresented by these feminist critics who have intentionally, during 'two decades of unequivocal distortion' (6), used Lawrence's texts to promote their own feminist agendas instead of engaging with his metaphysical ideas and his celebration of feminine consciousness. Thus, they have reduced Lawrence's sexual metaphysic to a literal program of female submission to male potency. He says:

Lawrence has suffered shamefully in recent years from the mistaken assumption that a novel is the sum of its ideas. The more so as those ideas are not of a sort it is fashionable for us to like. Once it could be shown by feminists, for example, that Lawrence was a sexist, or by democrats that Lawrence was no democrat, there seemed no longer any reason why we should read him. Scandalous — that we should think of literature as having to believe what we believe, as though we read merely to have our ideologies and prejudices confirmed. In so far as Lawrence's personal beliefs are the issue, the matter is quickly dealt with: they are none of our affair. 'Never trust the teller, trust the tale,' Lawrence himself was forever saying.

(Balbert 1989: 97)

Hillary Simpson is a Lawrence scholar who has identified his feminist inclination. In *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism* (1982), she writes that before the war, Lawrence showed some tendencies towards feminist issues (16). However, she remarks, the war changed his attitude greatly. He was disappointed since he was hoping for a 'féminisation of experience, the necessity for men to take women, and the feminine side of their own natures, seriously' (Simpson 1982: 66). Nevertheless, after the war, Lawrence believed that women had not retained their feminine values, instead they became 'a perverted femininity of will and idealism' (Simpson 1982: 17). This change of attitude in Lawrence, according to

Simpson, is an indication that Lawrence had lost his feminist touch and was advocating a feminine subject.

The feminine subject which Simpson is discussing here is in line with the feminism that the third wave feminists define and promote. It is interesting to also discuss Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir's criticism of Lawrence's texts and his ideas. Like Simpson, they understand Lawrence's ideas about women as characteristic of a phallogocentric thought process which celebrates traditional femininity, since they base their criticism on a patriarchal notion of power, which would also be the starting point for their arguments. These critics, along with many others, devalue and undermine Lawrence's sexual values, criticizing his tendency to define 'woman' as the 'Other,' a categorization which has provided third wave feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous with one of the main points for their discussions on feminine signification, or *écriture féminine*. As mentioned before, Lawrence never lived to interact with the third wave feminists, yet his major concerns regarding sexual values and feminine consciousness and his radical feminist ideas come very close to that of these feminists.

Lawrence's female characters often suffer, because they are independent and unique individuals, and they behave differently from the female characters in the work of his contemporaries. Their autonomy at once threatens and challenges the established gender norms of their time and that causes them to be pushed into the margins of their societies. Lawrence defies the established order of the early twentieth century by portraying his female characters as free-thinking individuals, different from the traditional gender norms, and thus rendering them as 'The Other.' For example, Ursula in *The Rainbow*, experiences transcendence, not by being in 'the man's world,' and gaining masculine characteristics as Millett, Beauvoir, or even Simpson would have expected and would have called feminist initiative, but by superseding her efforts to become what she is not, and instead coming to terms with her feminine metaphysics or feminine consciousness.

To construct a feminine subject, as Beauvoir and Millett do, is to repeat the practices of patriarchal objectives which diminish the significance of traditional femininity and restrict the effectiveness of feminist politics. Recent third wave French feminist theories, on the other hand, challenge this presupposition. They consider the difference

between masculinity and femininity as a difference in the process of such disruption and affirmation that constitutes different possibilities of subjectivity. Their defense of female experience, therefore, is to affirm feminine characteristics, or establish credibility for the knowledge and historical impact of the feminine perspective.

This grants us the opportunity to reassess Lawrence's texts accordingly, allowing a new insight into his characters' notions of metaphysics and sexual politics by challenging the feminist discussions of Beauvoir and Millett and their valuation of masculinity and femininity when approaching Lawrence's fiction. Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, for example, seek to empower women by affirming feminine signification. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1980), Cixous characterizes the project of constructing a subject as the practice of power which determines traditional patriarchal theories and philosophies. As a result, constructing a subject is the fundamental feature of patriarchal discourse and practice. Therefore, to construct a feminine subject is not to admit to femininity since this would repeat the practices of patriarchal signification. Rather, it is to affirm feminine signification, or *écriture féminine*, which 'will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system: it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination' (Cixous 1980: 253). She explains that woman must write herself because 'when the moment of her liberation has come, it will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history, first at two levels that cannot be separated' (Cixous 1980: 250). The first is by writing herself individually, and the second is by speaking herself, 'hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*' (Cixous 1980: 251, emphasis original).

In his novels, Lawrence depicts a sexual politics whose impact and meaning extends itself to the politics of resistance that takes place in the relationship between Lawrence's male and female characters. He thematizes a feminine position similar to characteristics celebrated by French feminists as *écriture féminine*. His female characters, especially Ursula and Gudrun in both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, demonstrate their active resistance to men's dominance, which in turn shows a feminine desire for liberation from their assigned place in the patriarchal and metaphysical world order.

Additionally, in my discussions, I will use Luce Irigaray's gender theories as foundational models to study the conflict and shift between the gender roles in the two-gendered system of cultural norms and ideals in the world of Lawrence's fiction. My main focus will be on Irigaray's discussions of masculinity, sensible transcendental or the feminine subject (which is the overcoming of the binary oppositions or bringing together what traditionally has been split, material/ideal, body/spirit, immanence/transcendental, etc.), and intersubjectivity.

When in 'Sexual Difference,' Luce Irigaray states, 'woman has to discover herself' (1992: 169), it is because she believes that in today's society and in its two gendered categories, it is only man who is considered as the universal referent and woman becomes secondary to man in significance. In her texts, she advocates the creation of a feminine subject equal to the masculine one in worth and dignity by challenging phallogocentrism, which privileges the masculine in the construction of meaning, and as a result, excludes the representation of women altogether. This is because man has a fear of woman having a 'life of her own, which would entail his sometimes being her locus and her thing, in a dynamic inter-subjective process, man remains within a master—slave dialectic. He is ultimately the slave of a God on whom he bestows the qualities of an absolute master. He is secretly a slave to the power of the mother woman, which he subdues or destroys' (Irigaray 1992: 169).

Additionally, in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), Luce Irigaray criticizes the patriarchal tradition of metaphysics which is extended from Plato to Freud. She explains that this system which is established and is dependent on the subordination of women, is a system whose constitution is based on the binary opposition of Self, and woman as the 'Other.' Irigaray further argues that 'on the feminine side it is possible to exceed and disturb this logic' (1985a: 75). Disturbing this logic or this disruption and excess, for both Cixous and Irigaray, maintains *jouissance*, or a pleasure in the freedom and uncertainty of the signifying process.

In his novels, Lawrence portrays a feminine position similar to characteristics defined by French feminists as *écriture féminine*. For example, in *The Rainbow* (1915), one of his most celebrated novels, which is a story of the three generations of the Brangwen family, the already complicated interchanges between men and women for individual fulfillment in their union with their sexual partners is

intensified by complex questions of self-definition and redefinition. In the final part of the novel, the focus is on Ursula Brangwen, a young woman from the third generation. Her story, along with her sister Gudrun's, later continues chronologically into Lawrence's next novel, *Women in Love* (1920).

The subject matter in these novels is individual consciousness and the friction caused when it is in conflict with the social political norms of society. Therefore, both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* would be a good starting point for this inquiry, since the relationship between the male and female characters are problematized in a conscientious and distinctive fashion.

In *The Rainbow*, Ursula, as a young woman and in the process of self-discovery, poses some extraordinary questions to herself: 'How to act, that was the question? Whither to go, how to become oneself? One was not oneself, one was merely a half-stated question. How to become oneself, how to know the question and the answer of oneself, when one was merely an unfixd something—nothing, blowing about like the winds of heaven, undefined, unstated' (Lawrence 1960: 329). These questions are later reshaped and developed into another set of inquiries, and even though, in the beginning, these concerns are not comprehensible or clear to her, or even seem related or relevant to her queries, eventually they become more coherent in her mind. It starts with examining and analyzing her Sunday self in relation to her everyday self, and her transcendental self in regard to her immanent self. She wonders whether the amalgamation of spirituality and sensuality would result in the inner fulfillment which she is searching for. In her, 'Jesus—the vision world—the everyday world—all mixed inextricably in a confusion of pain and bliss. It was almost agony, the confusion, the inextricability. [...] This was a shame to her. The confusing of the spirit world with the material world, in her own soul, degraded her. She answered the call of the spirit in terms of immediate, everyday desire' (Lawrence 1960: 332).

After meeting Skrebensky and starting a relationship with him, Ursula ponders over the possibility of experiencing the fusion of the spiritual world with the material world or the amalgamation of the finite and the infinite. When making love to him, the experience to her was 'a magnificent self-assertion on the part of both of them. [...] And after all, what could either of them get from such a passion but a sense of his or of her own maximum self, in contradistinction to all the rest of life?

Wherein was something finite and sad, for the human soul at its maximum wants a sense of the infinite' (Lawrence 1960: 348). Nevertheless, she realizes that there is something important missing in their relationship which she is not able to define for herself, not yet. Even though it had begun for her, experiencing her maximum self, 'limited and so defined against him. She could limit and define herself 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' (Lawrence 1960: 349).

There is an inadequacy in Skrebensky's awareness or intuition to meet Ursula on equal grounds, regarding her sense of the infinite and 'her transfiguration' (Lawrence 1960: 352), which requires him to challenge his assigned place in the patriarchal society they live in. 'Ah, if only she and Skrebensky could get out, dismount into this enchanted land where nobody had ever been before!' (351). Skrebensky could not understand or acknowledge Ursula's need for inner fulfillment. On the contrary, he 'somehow, had created a deadness round her, a sterility, as if the world were ashes. [...] Why could not he himself desire a woman so? Why did he never want a woman, not with the whole of him: never loved, never worshipped, only just physically wanted her' (362-363). He was incapable of experiencing his maximum self, since it required of him to become receptive to this new experience. He was set in his world of masculinity within the patriarchal system, which advocated and acknowledged a phallogocentric dualistic system that prioritized men over women, and not the fusion between the world of the sensual and spiritual, or as Irigaray explains it, the forging of 'an alliance between the divine and mortal.' In this way, Irigaray continues, one's sexual experiences 'would be a celebration, and not a disguised or polemic form of the master-slave relationship' (1992: 169). As mentioned before, according to Irigaray who challenges phallogocentrism, the society's two gender categories, man and woman, are in fact one, man, since he is considered as the universal referent, which excludes the representation of women altogether but privileges the masculine in construction of meaning. It results in overpowering or crushing women in 'time' and 'place.' After all, man has a fear of losing his position in the master—slave dialectic (1992: 169).

On this issue of each person's confinement in his/her related gender territories, Judith Butler, another prominent poststructuralist feminist, in

her essay, 'Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*' (1986), remarks: 'The anguish and terror of leaving a prescribed gender or of trespassing upon another gender territory testifies to the social constraints upon gender interpretation as well as to the necessity that there be an interpretation, i.e. to the essential freedom at the origin of gender' (42). Butler further explains that it seems as though, to Beauvoir, the normative idea for a woman would be to accept a gender-free model of freedom, since for a woman 'becoming one's gender implies the sacrifice of autonomy and the capacity for transcendence' (1986: 43).

When Ursula decides to refuse Skrebensky's proposal for marriage, although she likes him, it is because 'she was a traveller, she was a traveller on the face of the earth, and he was an isolated creature living in the fulfillment of his own senses. She could not help it, that she was a traveller. She knew Anthony, that he was not one. But oh, ultimately and finally, she must go on and on, seeking the goal that she knew she did draw nearer to' (Lawrence 1960: 467). In her search for self-discovery and independence, she decides to enter the 'man's world,' by applying for a teaching position in spite of her father's strong objections (407). On the way to her first day to work, while on the train, 'she sat in suspense. It had begun, her new existence. [...] She was being carried forward, into her new existence' (417). At first glance, it seems like Ursula's desires and efforts to enter the 'man's world' are in line with what Beauvoir and Millett consider as a feminist politics, to retain a patriarchal notion of power, and consequently enter the metaphysics of masculinity. However, she soon finds out that even though she has more freedom and has become economically independent, she still does not feel content: 'In coming out and earning her own living she had made a strong, cruel move towards freeing herself. But having more freedom she only became more profoundly aware of the big want [...] she could put no name to' (Lawrence 1960: 456-7).

It is of course politically important to assert women's equal rights in public spaces, but that does not solve the problem of gender differences. It seems to me that when Ursula seeks employment with the school authorities, it is because she wants to become economically independent, and she is also bored at home and does not want to mend stockings, like her mother does. In other words, she does not want to become domesticated and do the jobs traditionally assigned to women. She wants to have a man's job in the 'man's world.' She downgrades the excluded

character traits and responsibilities traditionally associated with femininity, understanding that in order to be taken seriously and have increased autonomy over some aspects of life, she needs to adopt activities that are commonly linked with maleness. This corresponds with Simone de Beauvoir and Millett's theories regarding woman's emancipation.

Eventually, Ursula realizes that her rights to access public spaces and her economic independence are not sufficient to address the conceptual difficulties that the gender differences create. Perhaps it would be appropriate here to mention Genevieve Lloyd's discussion on sexual politics which could be easily related to Ursula's disappointing experiences when working as a teacher at Brinsley Street school. It also explains the criticism of both Beauvoir and Millett as groundless, since they accused Lawrence of having phallogocentric inclinations when creating his female characters. In *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (1984), Lloyd rightly articulates what is now a widely held position regarding Beauvoir's criticism of characteristics commonly affiliated with femininity. She writes:

To affirm women's equal possession of rational traits, and their right of access to public spaces within which they are cultivated and manifested, is politically important. But it does not get to the heart of the conceptual difficulties of gender difference. And in repudiating one kind of exclusion, Beauvoir's mode of response can help reinforce another. For it seems implicitly to accept the downgrading of the excluded character traits traditionally associated with femininity, and to endorse the assumption that the only human excellences and virtues which deserve to be taken seriously are those exemplified in the range of activities and concerns that have been associated with maleness. (104)

Similarly, Ursula's rejection of Skrebensky's hand in order to find her true self and inner fulfillment, or the 'Big want' in transcendence, I believe, corresponds to Lloyd's discussion here. It is in accordance to what Irigaray explains as sensible transcendence, which is an alternate reality based on sexual difference, a term that fuses mind with body, where in their relationship men and women are both equals and recognize each other's subjectivity. Thus, the dialectic of sexual difference is not based on subject/object, but still maintains identity and limits. Similarly, Ursula's struggle in the 'man's world,' her crisis of identity, and her efforts for self-discovery and finally her transcendence from her fixed position in a patriarchal society all correspond to

Irigaray's challenge to phallogocentrism, which is, of course, masculine in nature. In this stage of her development, Ursula is promoting a model of freedom regulating a masculine behavior, since transcendence appears to be particularly a masculine project, embodied by the masculine gender. To accept and act according to the character traits traditionally associated with femininity, to her, in her struggle for independence, is a source of frustration. It would mean submitting to her father's bullying, or negotiating her desire for inner fulfillment in order to please Anton Skrebensky, her suitor.

Sensible transcendence, or becoming divine in the body, is a phase that emphasizes the primacy of the body and recognizes the importance of a beyond. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993), Irigaray asks: 'Why do we assume that God must always remain an inaccessible transcendence rather than a realization—here and now—through the body?' (148). Similarly, at the end of *The Rainbow*, Ursula asks herself: 'Who was she to have a man according to her own desire? It was not for her to create, but to recognize a man created by God. [...] She was glad that this lay within the scope of that vaster power in which she rested at last. The man would come out of Eternity to which she herself belonged' (Lawrence 1960: 547).

I find that Ursula's search for inner development and her experiences in the 'man's world,' and her expectations of a fulfilling relationship correspond to Luce Irigaray's discussions of the three phases of her work or development of ideas. In an interview conducted in 1995 by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary Olson, she explains that in the first phase, she was a critique of the masculine subject as in *Speculum, This Sex Which is Not One*, and to some extent *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. 'It was the phase in which I showed how a single subject, traditionally the masculine subject, had constructed the world according to a single perspective' (Hirsh and Olson 1995: 97). The second phase, which she calls the creation of a feminine subject, is defined as 'those mediations that could permit the existence of a feminine subjectivity—that is to say, another subject' (95). And the third stage, the exploration of intersubjectivity, she sees as 'trying to define a new model of possible relations between man and woman, without submission of either one to the other' (96).

Thus, in the end Ursula turns her back on conventional marriage and chooses her right to self-discovery. However, the process of discovering her need for self-fulfillment involves complex questions of self-

definition and redefinition, which ultimately leads to exciting new possibilities, of what Irigaray calls sensible transcendence: to appreciate and recognize the fusion of spirit and flesh through her subjective identity, or to encompass both physical sensation and the recognition of a beyond. It would be the celebration of her femininity by exceeding and disturbing the logic of binary opposition, that takes shape in *Women in Love*, Lawrence's next novel.

In *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, the male characters are not usually able to easily relieve and generate their masculine subjectivity in order to dominate women, which is inherent in their upbringing and is relevant to the society they live in. They are at once confronted and challenged by the female characters. For example, in *The Rainbow*, as discussed above, Skrebensky brings deadness to Ursula. Therefore, at the end of the novel, she leaves him, because he could not in any way recognize her search for inner fulfilment or participate in a genuine exploration of a metaphysical conception of identity, which supersedes the dichotomies of masculinity and femininity. Both Ursula and Gudrun's resistance to their role as objects in a masculine metaphysic bring uncertainty to that masculine metaphysic and its potential worldly significance. Lawrence is asking us to pay attention to the importance of the sexual politics based on women's experience and incorporating traditionally feminine values in the privileged positions customarily inhibited by masculine power, and its ambitions to dominate.

In *Women in Love*, the socially privileged Hermione and her hollow intellectuality, her shadowing Birkin's every speculation, is criticized and mocked by Lawrence. Contrary to Ursula who has a mind of her own and is an independent soul, Hermione wishes to subjugate herself completely to Birkin. This way, she wants to show her love for him. For her part, Ursula not only challenges Birkin's metaphysical ideas and arguments, but also surpasses him, thus she reveals her desire for liberation from her assigned place in the hierarchical gender system. By her laughter she exposes his narrow mindedness; she also demonstrates her resistance to submit to his bullying, or to her subjection. She ridicules and exposes his real intention, his desire to control and dominate through his metaphysical ideas, being fully aware of his privileges as a man. Ursula, secure in her position as a woman, mocks and criticizes Birkin's philosophical ideas of subjectivity. She also does not attempt to theorize or philosophize the definition of the subject. Neither does she offer any

feminine metaphysics as an alternative, thereby, she escapes the realm of the dichotomy of object/subject and masculinity/femininity, which are themselves founded on a metaphysical conception of identity. Her resistance is in line with what Cixous and Irigaray ascribe to *écriture féminine*, or discourse of disruption, excess, and pleasure, in which their political affirmation leads to exciting new possibilities.

Birkin's metaphysical ideas and arguments which are confronted by Ursula's refusal to accept them, however, do not indicate Birkin's sexual wisdom or his profound wish to dominate. Rather, it reveals a conflict between the power of ideas to create freedom and pleasure, or *jouissance*, which in the course of the novel discloses feminine disruption and resistance. This conflict in turn becomes a vision of sexual equality, the sensible transcendental as a model of subjectivity, and an alternate reality based on sexual difference. Likewise, Gudrun's refusal to accept Gerald's constant devaluation of her feminine characteristics demonstrates her exercise of some power within this politics. Their conflicts allow new insight into Lawrence's critique of traditional masculine positions of power and privilege, and of traditional sexual politics. He affirms femininity as a contesting form of signification. Thereby, he depicts a sexual politics whose impact and meaning are similar to that of poststructuralist feminists, which extends itself to the very foundations of social order.

The conflict between Birkin's masculine metaphysic and Ursula's feminine resistance and disruption on many occasions in the novel remain a stalemate and therefore, a vision of sexual equality. He is teased by Ursula whenever he tries to reveal his self-importance or his logocentric ideas. His proposal of marriage and his challenging conventional masculine or phallogocentric set of thinking and behavior is inherent in the fabric of their society. It reflects Lawrence's vision of an ideal relationship, of both feminine and masculine subjectivity, or 'the exploration of intersubjectivity,' which Irigaray explains as horizontal or sensible transcendence. In 'Sexual Difference,' she explains it as a foundation for 'our salvation on an intellectual level' (1992: 163), which would lead us to comprehend and appreciate the concept of sexual difference. It would be the model of being two independent individuals, who, in their sexual difference, could form the basis of two sexually differentiated subjects living in intersubjectivity.

Birkin's proposal to Ursula invokes parts of Lawrence's doctrine, since, as many critics have noticed, in this novel, he is a mouthpiece for Lawrence's ideas and philosophy. It is also interesting here to notice that these ideas are also so similar to Irigaray's arguments above. Birkin tells Ursula:

'What I want is a strange conjunction with you,' he said quietly, '—not meeting and mingling—you are quite right—but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings—as the stars balance each other. There is only the pure duality of polarization, each one free from any contamination of the other. In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate, but perfectly polarized. Each has a single, separate being, with its own laws. The man has his pure freedom, the woman hers. Each acknowledges the perfection of the polarised sex-circuit. Each admits the different nature in the other.' (1989: 201)

However, his victory when proposing marriage to Ursula is incomplete, and his metaphysic is subjected to her mocking or her intellectual pleasure and delight, or in the words of French feminists, *jouissance*. Nevertheless, Birkin's love and respect for Ursula's views, permits them to philosophically challenge each other's boundaries, which are resonances of Lawrence's inclinations towards feminine subjectivity and feminine signification, and his sexual politics and flexibility of gender roles. In 'Sex and Gender,' Butler explains: 'In an important sense gender is not traceable to a definable origin precisely because it is itself an originating activity incessantly taking place' (1986: 43). It is no longer 'understood as a product of cultural and psychic relations long past, gender is a contemporary way of organising past and future cultural norms, a way of situating oneself with respect to those norms, an active style of living one's body in the world' (1986: 43).

At times, Birkin and Ursula grow impatient with one another. Occasionally, Birkin is arrogant and domineering in his maleness and in his views, but he is soon belittled by Ursula's amusement which is the disruptive power of *écriture féminine*, inherent in her feminine consciousness. In Birkin's discourses and Ursula's playful responses, Lawrence explores the philosophical effects and consequences of subjectivity, confirming feminine signification. Often, in a playful manner, Ursula mocks him and points out his self-absorbed silliness. He is at once absolutely serious, and made ridiculous by Ursula's teasing. The following friendly argument is a good example when Ursula makes

fun of his abstract philosophical dialogue, and resists his masculine persistence:

‘But don’t you think me good-looking?’ she persisted in a mocking voice. He looked at her, to see if he felt she was good-looking. ‘I don’t feel that you are good-looking,’ he said. ‘Not even attractive?’ she mocked, bitingly. He knitted his brows in sudden exasperation. ‘Don’t you see that it is not a sense of visual appreciation in the least,’ he cried. ‘I don’t want to see you. I’ve seen plenty of women. I want a woman I don’t see.’ ‘I’m sorry I can’t oblige you by being invisible,’ she laughed.

(1989: 163-164)

Lawrence saw the necessity of creating a new metaphysic able to renew private and public gender roles. Additionally, the exploration of intersubjectivity inherent in contemporary third wave feminism represents Lawrence’s vision of an ideal feminine and masculine subjectivity which corresponds with Ursula and Birkin’s relationship, encapsulating what seem to invoke some of Lawrence’s doctrine regarding the relationship between men and women, masculine and feminine. It also reminds us of Irigaray’s definition of sensible transcendence, when each person recognizes the other one’s individual subjectivity. Therefore, their marriage is their ‘resurrection’, which was beyond love, ‘such a gladness, surpassing their egocentric desires, transcending their “old existence”’ (Lawrence 1989: 369). When in the Alps, she feels like a new born, ‘she was herself, pure and silvery, she belonged only to the oneness with Birkin, a oneness that struck deeper notes, sounding into the heart of the universe, the heart of reality, where she had never existed’ (Lawrence 1989: 460).

Gudrun, on the other hand, very soon after her initial meeting with Gerald, realizes his will to control and subjugate, when by chance she and Ursula meet him riding on a red mare waiting for the locomotive to pass. The demonstration of his will to overpower the horse in order to keep it steady, pocking him bloody on its sides, is the demonstration of his masculine determination to dominate, which aggravates and vexes both Ursula and Gudrun. After the train passes and they are all on the other side of the railroad rails, Gudrun screams out at him from the side of the road: ‘I should think you’re proud’ (Lawrence 1989: 125). It possibly here that Gudrun understands the length he can go in order to control people around him, and his tendency to tyrannize. She realizes that in regards to her relationship with him, she should be on her guard,

that if he is given a chance, he would crush her self-confidence in order to dominate.

This is not the only incident in the novel where the reader becomes aware of Gerald's need to gain mastery over everything and everyone around him. For example, when Gerald takes over the mines from his father, his only thought is to control the miners through the power of his will. He thinks that the 'will of man was the determining factor. Man was the arch-god of earth. His mind was obedient to serve his will. Man's will was the absolute, the only absolute' (Lawrence 1989: 251). This indicates that through his masculine determination he needs to take control and subjugate. 'What he wanted was the pure fulfilment of his own will in the struggle with the natural conditions' (251-252).

When together in the Alps, in the bedroom of the hotel they are staying in, Gudrun looks at his reflection in the mirror without Gerald noticing it. How lovely he is, she thinks, and how vulnerable she feels in loving him and wanting him. But she is so careful in case he sees her so defenseless against him. Gudrun 'could not turn round and face him. For her life, *she could not*. And the knowledge made her almost sink to the ground in a faint, helpless, spent' (Lawrence 1989: 467, emphasis original). She fears him since she does not trust him with her secret fragility. 'She was aware of his frightening, impending figure standing close behind her, she was aware of his hard, strong, unyielding chest, close upon her back. And she felt she could not bear it any more, in a few minutes she would fall down at his feet, grovelling at his feet, and letting him destroy her' (467).

Their relationship is destructive because from the beginning Gudrun is in a defensive position. She guards her individuality and subjectivity against Gerald who, as a traditional man in a hierarchical society, does not admit and recognize the presence of both the feminine and masculine characteristics within himself, and the significance of the interplay between them: 'The deep resolve formed in her, to combat him. One of them must triumph over the other. Which should it be? Her soul steeled itself with strength' (1989: 465). As mentioned before, both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* present awareness of a sexual politics similar to the theories of the third wave feminists by representing different forms of signification that constitutes subjectivity. Gerald, set in his masculine determination, is somehow unaware of these social and gender evaluations and therefore he is outside this play of significance.

That is the reason why he fails to build a harmonious relationship with Gudrun who is an independent soul, although he loves her in his own way. In 'Sex and Gender,' Butler explains that '[t]he self-asserting "man" whose self-definition requires a hierarchical contrast with an "Other" does not provide a model of true autonomy, [...] the "Other" is, in every case, his own alienated self' (1986: 44).

Unlike Birkin, Gerald cannot see the necessity of change in both his personal and public life of the modern age, which is apparent in both Ursula and Gudrun's struggle for liberation and individual independence. So determined is he to uphold his position as dominating subject, that he does not explore the possibility of intersubjectivity, and consequently cannot recognize, conceptualize, or assess the politics of Gudrun's feminine resistance that takes place in a totally different register. In 'Sex and Gender,' Butler explains the motivation behind this kind of behavior and way of thinking: 'The social constraints upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told that they are not really manly or womanly, that they have failed to execute their manhood or womanhood properly. Indeed, insofar as social existence requires an unambiguous gender affinity, it is not possible to exist in a socially meaningful sense outside of established gender norms' (1986: 42).

Gerald's tragic death in the snow, in complete isolation, reflects his egocentric inner self, which was not able to 'love,' as Birkin laments: 'Those who die, and dying still can love, still believe, do not die. They live still in the beloved' (Lawrence 1989: 540). His relationship with Gudrun was a destructive struggle which was doomed from the beginning to destroy one of them, or even both. In contrast, Ursula and Birkin's relationship, which was based on mutual respect for each other's individual signification, 'was something beyond love, such a gladness of having surpassed oneself, of having transcended the old existence. How could he say "I" when he was something new and unknown, not himself at all? This I, this old formula of the age, was a dead letter' (417).

In short, in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, Lawrence consolidates a feminine significance remarkably similar to the disruption, excess, and pleasure celebrated by poststructuralist French feminists as *écriture féminine*. Both Ursula and Gudrun affirm women's independence, equal right of access to public spaces, and emancipation. However, it is Ursula's search for inner fulfillment and Birkin's illumination of

feminine disruption and resistance that raise many interesting questions; such as gender differences, gender identity and gender performance. It also takes on this feminist imperative to define the intensity and changes necessary in personal and cultural life of the modern age, manifesting and maintaining new and different possibilities for subjectivity. Additionally, both these novels represent the disruptive power of feminine signification, both on personal and sociopolitical levels, and end with that power still in play. They get to the heart of the conceptual difficulties of gender differences, some of which I have tried to address in this paper by referring to, among others, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler's discussions on the concepts of femininity and the feminine subject.

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