

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Mechanistic and Yogic Discourses in Women in Love*

#### I. War and Science

It has been observed that the world Ursula Brangwen inhabits at the beginning of *Women in Love* seems to be very different from the one she dwells in at the end of *The Rainbow*. Some critics have argued that the discrepancy indicates that the two novels do not form the “organic whole” that Lawrence had intended in “The Sisters” project.<sup>1</sup> Others see the gloomier setting of the second novel as an extrapolation of the destructive tendencies present in the modern world of the first.<sup>2</sup> My analysis of the language of the destructive and vivifying phases in *Women in Love* suggests that the novel is both an extension of and break with *The Rainbow*. The catastrophe of World War I, which Lawrence was experiencing as he wrote *Women in Love*, once titled *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath), revealed to him that any hope he might have had for the rejuvenation of European civilization was idle.<sup>3</sup> The war also incited in him a terrible misanthropy.<sup>4</sup> The destructive social forces had triumphed, and the only solution now conceivable to him was a small-scale one: the self-renewal of a coterie of “natural aristocrats,” of a clan of couples willing to detach themselves from the decadent body politic and to “save” themselves by forming new types of relationships. As readers begin *Women in Love*, they discover that Ursula’s hopes have been turned topsy turvy: her vision of the rainbow has been inverted, darkened, and gone underground; it is now a vision of the pit, a hellish mine where “[m]an was the arch-god of earth” (223). The advent of the war has split Ursula and her generation in half: they had one form of existence before the war, and another afterward.

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It is important to appreciate that Lawrence's "war book" is less against war than against the Great War, and less against the latter than against the conditions, the destructive mindset, that produced it. Indeed, the only mention of the war is in the author's foreword:

[I]t is a novel which took its final shape in the midst of the period of war, though it does not concern the war itself. I should wish the time to remain unfixed, so that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters. (485)

Like Nietzsche, Lawrence valued struggle as an intrinsic characteristic of human life and as a test of heroic virtue but opposed wars that fail to further the creative evolution of life.<sup>5</sup> The distinction between war in the service of life and that aiding death is always a slippery and dangerous one, but Lawrence clearly believed that World War I was largely aligned with the forces of death. For him, the scientific mindset is mainly responsible for producing the modern hells of mechanistic science and military-industrial enterprise. Colin Clarke has stressed that in *Women in Love* Lawrence distinguishes between destructive forces that further life and those that oppose it, but we have seen in our analysis of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that the passion for disintegration is not easily contained and effectively employed.<sup>6</sup> In the later novel, the satiric narrator often crosses the line and annihilates the characters rather than displaying a "discriminative sympathy" for them. In *Women in Love*, Lawrence's annihilating impulse is at a high, and it is probably fair to say that the novel's assaultive effects are more potent than its sacralizing impact. On July 27, 1917, Lawrence wrote Waldo Frank that *Women in Love* is "purely destructive, not like *The Rainbow*, destructive-consummating."<sup>7</sup> Thus, while the novel has an initiatory structure, its vivifying impact is certainly less than that of *The Rainbow*.

Because of Lawrence's pessimism and misanthropy while writing *Women in Love*, we can assume that he expected to touch only a small group of readers.<sup>8</sup> Because these readers inhabited what he considered to be a dying world, he thought it essential to first expose and kill off the mental habits that had given rise to this cataclysmic state of affairs. Hence, we find a transformational structure in which the mortification phase appears first, followed by the gradual introduction of the vitalization phase. This phasal order—first destroy, then create—would be employed in the rest of his major novels. In *Dies Irae*, decimation dominates; the vivifying sex scenes are few, and some critics have found them unconvincing.<sup>9</sup>

In *The Rainbow*, we saw that Lawrence used the shift from mystical to magical language to signify the devolution of European culture from the religiously vital and integrated Middle Ages to the splintered, depleted modern period that commenced with the late Renaissance. In *Women in Love*, the intensifying process of decay associated with contemporary times is suggested by the persistence of magical language and its conflation with scientific discourse. Lawrence considered the motivating force behind both magic and science to be the will to knowledge and power. Mechanistic science is for Lawrence the quintessential modern expression of this double impulse. Thinkers from Frazer to Freud had emphasized a tripartite view of cultural change—from magic to religion to science—but it was the technology-assisted War that disclosed to Lawrence the extreme costs of scientific “advancement.” Lawrence was able to conflate black magic and mechanistic science because their discourses are overlapping: both employ a system of oppositional forces governed by the dynamics of attraction and repulsion. In fact, several nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scientists and philosophers who influenced Lawrence were using many of the same terms that Kabbalists employ.<sup>10</sup> For example, Herbert Spencer, in *First Principles* (1862), uses the terms “force,” “balance,” and “equilibrium” to describe fundamental physical and biological processes.<sup>11</sup> And Spencer, like Lawrence, believes that human freedom “must result from the complete equilibration between man’s desires and the conduct necessitated by surrounding conditions” (506–7).<sup>12</sup> In *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1900), the German biologist and natural philosopher Ernst Haeckel, probably influenced by Goethe’s vitalistic biology, uses the metaphor of lovers to describe the forces of attraction in the universe.<sup>13</sup> Like Lawrence and the Kabbalists, he sees human love as a manifestation of cosmic affinitive forces.<sup>14</sup> Haeckel believes that pantheism is necessarily “the world-system of the modern scientist”; for him, God is “an intramundane being . . . everywhere identical with nature itself, and . . . operative within the world as ‘force’ or energy” (288–9). This view, which he derives from Spinoza, parallels the Kabbalistic idea of the immanent God, figured as the sephirothic Tree of Life, but the Kabbalists, and Lawrence, also insist on a transcendent Godhead, an Infinite One that produces and encompasses the manifest deity.<sup>15</sup>

In *Women in Love*, Lawrence is not trying to trash science summarily by lumping it with black magic; rather he is attempting to transvalue scientific discourse by associating destructivity with a mechanistic outlook. He does not want to stop science but to expand its aims, methods, and objects. He wants science to make simultaneous and integrative use of all

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the human powers of knowing—what he calls sensation, emotion, intuition, reasoning, instinct—and to understand things intimately in their interrelationships with other things, rather than to perceive things in part, in isolation and at a distance. And he insists that science serve vitalistic, creative values, not death.

Given Lawrence's interest in the status of the scientific enterprise, it should not be surprising that in the years immediately following the publication of *Women in Love*, he wrote his two quasi-scientific books on the unconscious, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922). In these half-serious, half-playful books, he tries to sketch out an experiential, life-centered "science" of the future.<sup>16</sup> By using the term "science" to describe his intuitive, imaginative system, he wants to retrieve the original meaning of the word as "knowledge"—a knowledge derived from all the human powers of knowing, not just the knowledge gained from the experimental method developed in the modern period.<sup>17</sup> In the Foreword to *Fantasia*, he writes:

Only let me say that to my mind there is a great field of science which is as yet quite closed to us. I refer to the science which proceeds in terms of life and is established on data of living experience and of sure intuition. Call it subjective science if you like. Our objective science of modern knowledge concerns itself only with phenomena, and with phenomena as regarded in their cause-and-effect relationship. I have nothing to say against our science. It is perfect as far as it goes. But to regard it as exhausting the whole scope of human possibility in knowledge seems to me just puerile. Our science is a science of the dead world. Even biology never considers life, but only mechanistic function and apparatus of life.<sup>18</sup>

Mechanistic science is associated with functionality, instrumentality and, above all, with death. It is even more deadly than black magic because it denies animism and posits nonliving matter and energy as the universal substrates. Though black magic has destructive aims, its central premise is that the magical forces that govern the universe are living forces that can create or destroy. A mechanistic view proposes that life is secondary, adventitious, while Lawrence believed that life is primary, originary. In the "Cosmological" section of *Fantasia*, he insists that "[t]here never was any universe, any cosmos, of which the first reality was anything but living, incorporate individuals" and that death is "the negative reality of life . . . what we call Matter and Force, among other things" (181). Matter and physical energy are derived, he asserts, from the decomposed

dead bodies of once-living individuals.<sup>19</sup> In *Apocalypse*, Lawrence sees “science and machinery” as the “death products” of a collective human consciousness that is undergoing a “long, slow death” brought about by the post-Renaissance substitution of “the non-vital universe of forces and mechanistic order” for the living cosmos (79).

My analysis of the destructive phase focuses on the compositional strategies used in the sex scenes involving Gerald and Gudrun. I also treat the episodes involving Gerald’s domination of three other female figures—Minette, the mare and mother earth—because these interactions prefigure his sadomasochistic relation with Gudrun, provide most of the language to describe their sexual activity, and indicate the pervasive subjugation of the feminine principle of the feeling body.

One of the strategies that Lawrence deploys to ensure that these scenes have a disintegrative impact on the reader is the linking of willful, egoistic or self-conscious sex to violence, domination, cruelty, decomposition, annihilation, and death. These destructive qualities are in turn tied to disequilibrium, often indicated by lack of mutuality—a pattern we saw in *The Rainbow*.

A second strategy is to connect destructive sex to a mechanistic perspective, which involves using terms associated with machines (mechanical, mechanistic, metal, friction, repetitive motion, instrument) and with a whole range of physical forces (radioactivity, electricity, magnetism, phosphorescence). This mechanistic discourse will be deployed to characterize the whole range of Gudrun and Gerald’s relationship: not only how they treat human beings, but also how they relate to other living beings. This dispersion of mechanistic terms highlights the all-encompassing effects of mechanistic thinking. While a mechanistic view is equated with destruction in *The Rainbow*, machine language is not deployed when describing the sexual acts themselves. It is as if the prewar third generation (Ursula and Anton) is spared the full effects of the dehumanizing power of science and technology. In *Women in Love*, in contrast, the infiltration of mechanistic discourse into the erotic episodes implies that the advent of the War or a war mentality, though not directly acknowledged in the text, has caused that generation to experience the full annihilating force of modern science, technology and industry. “[P]ure mechanical organization” is now explicitly linked to “pure organic disintegration” and is understood as “the first and finest state of chaos” (231).

The combined effect of Lawrence’s two compositional strategies is to suggest that the modern consciousness that produced a Newtonian macrocosmic vision of a cold, mechanistic, indifferent, unliving world,

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and that reproduces this world microcosmically in the form of destructive machines, is the very same consciousness that produces sexual violence. The modern conception of the universe as fundamentally dead is a worldview that engenders killing machines and sadistic sexuality. Even though World War I itself is elided, it is implicitly understood as a natural outcome of this worldview. The suppression of the War shifts the reader's attention away from the particular sociopolitical conditions that gave rise to it and toward the pervasive but only partially visible Western Weltanschauung that produced these conditions.

A third disintegrative device associates modern sex with head-centered modes of consciousness: vision, rationality, intellectualism, reflexivity, verbosity. This tactic was also employed in *The Rainbow*, but not as pervasively. The widespread use of this approach indicates the efflorescence of a logocentric and ocularcentric mentality.

A fourth destructive technique is to expose the pseudomysticism and the head-centeredness of sexual acts that mime mystical merger but in fact involve the destructive subjugation of one partner by another. This technique often involves, as it did in *The Rainbow*, the mixing of mystical and magical discourses. In *Women in Love*, however, magical discourse is not as consistently negative in tone, suggesting that Lawrence may have been trying to present two forms of magic: one negative, and one more positive. Though he probably did not affirm the view held by Christian Kabbalists like Eliphas Levi that white magic is good, and black magic is bad, Lawrence seemed to arrive at the understanding that a mystical encounter could contain some positive magical qualities.

## II. Mechanistic Discourses in the Disintegration Phase

The narrator stresses the triple linkage of egoism, violence, and mechanism when depicting Gerald's relationship with Minette in "Creme de Menthe." This relationship gives the reader a foretaste of the sado-masochistic dynamics that will unfold in his relationship with Gudrun. The depiction of their first encounter conflates the power discourses of science and conquest; Gerald's electric bodily energy is a subjugating, destructive, cruel force:

She appealed to Gerald strongly. He felt an awful, enjoyable power over her, an instinctive cherishing very near to cruelty. For she was a victim. He felt that she was in his power, and he was generous. The electricity was turgid and voluptuously rich, in his limbs. He would

be able to destroy her utterly in the strength of his discharge. But she was waiting in her separation, given. (65)

“Voluptuous” and “turgid” are coded adjectives; they are consistently linked to destructive activity. “Voluptuous” is here associated with Gerald’s disintegrative erotic energy, and “discharge” suggests the lightninglike explosiveness of the male orgasm. “Voluptuous” is later used to characterize Hermione’s ecstatic experience of smashing Birkin on the head; although her experience is not manifestly sexual, it represents an outburst of her frustrated, aggressive, sexual energy: “she was going to know her voluptuous consummation. . . . She was going to have her consummation of voluptuous ecstasy at last” (105). “Turgid” is also linked to Gerald’s phallic destructiveness and is later used to describe the lotus plants that are the object of Gudrun’s “sensuous vision”: “she could feel their turgid fleshy structure” (119). She responds with both attraction and fear to the abusive masculine power that the lotus signifies. To Birkin, the lotus is a symbol of disintegration: “lotus—marsh—flowers” are “white phosphorescent flowers of sensuous perfection” signifying “universal dissolution” (172). “Phosphorescent” and “sensuous” are also coded adjectives associated with disintegration. In “Gudrun in the Pompadour,” the “ecstasy of reduction” is described as “the phosphorescent ecstasy of acute sensation” (383). In “Class-Room,” Birkin distinguishes “sensuous” from “sensual” by saying that the former involves persistent self-consciousness: “That’s why they aren’t sensual—only sensuous—which is another matter. They’re *always* aware of themselves—and they’re so conceited, that rather than release themselves, and live in another world, from another centre, they’d—” (45). This sensuous reflexivity is a form of self-voyeurism: Birkin says that “In our night-time, there’s always the electricity switched on, we watch ourselves, we get it all in the head, really” (44).

The self-conscious quality in Gerald’s sense of power, and the visual-cognitive dimension of Minette’s fascination with him, are highlighted in a subsequent description of their interaction:

She wanted to know. And her eyes seemed to be looking through into his naked organism. He felt, she was compelled to him, she was fated to come into contact with him, must have the seeing him and knowing him. . . . Also he felt, she must relinquish herself into his hands, and be subject to him. She was so profane, slave-like, watching him, absorbed by him. It was not that she was interested in what he said; she was absorbed by his self-revelation, by *him*, she wanted the secret of him, the experience of his male being. (67)

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Gerald's hands are not servants of his body that give erotic pleasure, as they are for Tom Brangwen and Oliver Mellors; rather, they are instruments of subjection that make a slave of Minette. In this passage, the mystic language of absorption is conflated with the head-centered language of sight and self-consciousness. In "Fetish" (called "Totem" in most published editions) Halliday will explicitly criticize ocularcentrism: "Oh—one would *feel* things instead of merely looking at them. . . . I'm sure life is all wrong because it has become much too visual—we can neither hear nor feel nor understand, we can only see. I'm sure that is entirely wrong" (78). In "Class-room," Birkin attacks Hermione for being hypervisual and reflexive: "what you want is pornography—looking at yourself in mirrors, watching your naked animal actions in mirrors, so that you can have it all in your consciousness, make it all mental" (42).

In another scene, in which Gerald and Minette actually make physical contact sitting next to each other in the car, the language of absorption is again deployed, but this time their encounter occurs in a logocentric, rather than an ocularcentric, context. During a diffuse conversation, in which her voice rings like a bell, she consciously, subtly fuses herself into him:

The Pussum [Minette] sat near to Gerald, and she seemed to become soft, subtly to infuse herself into his bones, as if she were passing into him in a black, electric flow. Her being suffused into his veins like a magnetic darkness, and concentrated at the base of his spine like a fearful source of power. Meanwhile her voice sounded out reedy and nonchalant, as she talked indifferently with Birkin and with Maxim. Between her and Gerald was this silence and this black, electric comprehension in the darkness. . . . Still her voice rang on like a bell, tinged with a tone of mockery. And as she swung her head, her fine mane of hair just swept his face, and all his nerves were on fire, as with a subtle friction of electricity. But the great centre of his force held steady, a magnificent pride to him, at the base of the spine. (72–3)

Metaphors of physical force—attraction, friction, magnetism, and electricity—shape this passage. Both Minette and Gerald are subtly manipulating a "naturally" magnetic situation; they are playing with electromagnetic fire. The bell simile also calls attention to the metallic quality of Minette's voice and links her to mechanism. Her absorption is as much self-pushed as drawn by Gerald's magnetism and is only partial since her consciousness is split between attending to Gerald and to Birkin and Maxim. Even her conversational attention is doubly split: in

its focus it is divided between the two men, and in its form it has the dual perspective of mockery. Friction is associated with electricity and the nerves, which are linked to mind.<sup>20</sup> The contact thus sets up a conflict within Gerald between nervous excitation and spinal steadiness. The great center of force at the base of Gerald's spine is, as Thomas Miles and Gerald Doherty have argued, the sacral chakra.<sup>21</sup>

We saw that in *The Rainbow* the body's centers of energy and consciousness are usually described in Kabbalistic terms. In depicting the more modern and cosmopolitan world of *Women in Love*, Lawrence uses Hindu terms to portray the body's centers.<sup>22</sup> The Hindu science and art of actualizing human potential is called "yoga"; the word has the same root as "yoke" and means both "to unite together" and "to place under disciplined training." Yoga is a training method designed to lead the aspirants to sacred union and integration through proper stimulation and alignment of the body's chakras. Tantric yoga is the art of sacred sexuality that extends yoga practice into the erotic sphere. Lawrence had a precedent for treating the Yoga and Kabbalistic systems as relative equivalents: the Theosophists had emphasized the parallels.<sup>23</sup> Both yoga and Kabbalah identify seven levels or zones of energy-awareness in roughly the same areas of the body.<sup>24</sup> One of the main differences is that the Hindu system assigns more value to the lowest (seventh) chakra, located in the sacrum. This chakra is understood as the reservoir of the kundalini energy—the "serpent power" or life force—that flows through all seven chakras. Thus, Lawrence's shift from a Kabbalistic to a Hindu model of bodily energies and consciousness does not indicate a change in his conception of psychosomatic dynamics; rather, because the Hindu system is a more fully articulated model of psychosomatic dynamics than is the Kabbalist system, it enabled Lawrence to demonstrate more clearly how forms of energy and awareness flow through the body. He explicitly refers to the usefulness of the chakras in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*:

Having begun to explore the unconscious, we find we must go from centre to centre, chakra to chakra, to use an old esoteric word. We must patiently determine the psychic manifestation at each centre, and moreover, as we go, we must discover the psychic results of the interaction, the polarized interaction between the dynamic centres both within and without the individual. (35)

And whereas the Kabbalist system symbolically associates certain moral and spiritual properties (like lovingkindness, strength, beauty) with particular regions of the body, the Hindu system asserts that each bodily region

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actually has particular energetic and responsive qualities. That is, the chakras are not meant to be symbolic but to represent the body's actual powers of knowing and acting. In *Women in Love*, the yogic theory of the chakras serves as an experiential, quasi-scientific framework for understanding human consciousness and action. Yogic theory is at the heart of Lawrence's "subjective science."

In the mortification episodes involving sexual exchanges between Gerald and his female partners, the characters' lower chakras (located in the sacrum, genitals, and navel) are dominated by their the upper chakras (located in the crown, brow, and throat). In other words, the energy and consciousness of the head region controls the energy and consciousness of the lower body. When these head-centered chakras dominate, the language of mechanism proliferates and the yogic discourse partially recedes. This eclipse of the yogic discourse by the mechanistic discourse indicates that the characters' bodies are functioning like mind-driven machines instead of spontaneous organic systems. In contrast, the sacralizing scenes involving Birkin and Ursula depict a free flow of energy within and between their lower chakras; the head-centered chakras remain inert rather than regnant during their exchanges. In these scenes, the proper functioning of the characters' bodies is indicated by the pervasive use of yogic discourse.

The reader is not presented with an account of Gerald and Minette's coital acts, and the omission suggests that their encounters are too violent and perverse to represent.<sup>25</sup> However, the nature of the interactions, especially of their impact on Minette, is indirectly indicated by the analogy between Minette and the African statuette of a "negro woman in labor" (78). On the morning after Gerald and Minette sleep together, he "saw the Pussum [Minette] in it [the statuette]. As in a dream, he knew her" (79). What Gerald sees is: "the grey, forward-stretching face of the negro woman, African and tense, abstracted in utter physical stress. It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath" (79). The extreme sensation that the pregnant African woman experiences is pain, and it can be surmised that Gerald has sadistically produced a similar sensation in Minette. A confirmation of this connection occurs when the reader subsequently discovers that Gerald's movement toward Minette evokes in her an "inchoate look of a violated slave, whose fulfilment lies in her further and further violation" (80). Minette's masochistic desire for further violation demonstrates how intertwined are her desires for pleasure and pain. Her victimization in turn intensifies his sadistic impulse: her inchoate look "made his nerves quiver with acutely desirable sensation. After all, his was the only will, she

was the passive substance of his will. He tingled with the subtle, biting sensation" (80).

The sadomasochistic experience is a profane facsimile of mystical encounter: instead of two persons surrendering their selves to one another and thus participating together in a unified experience, a weak person sacrifices her will to her stronger partner, whose one will now governs them both. The absorption of one will by another is really a form of narcissism, not of mutual exchange.

The perverse parodying of genuine mystical encounters is one of the novel's main disintegrative strategies. Mechanical sexual interactions are frequently portrayed as quasi-religious experiences. The dissimulation is not always obvious; sometimes it is indicated by the subtle mixing of mystical, magical, and mechanical discourses; other times, it is more explicitly suggested by words like "obscene" or "abhorrent" whose general meanings are clearly negative; at times, code words like "phosphorescent" and "voluptuous" are associated with negative events in one passage and then used in other more ambiguous passages to suggest an overall negative valence; and in one instance, the narrator explicitly warns the reader of a character's (Gudrun's) "fictitious transport" (418).

Lawrence considered mechanistic science to be a twisted translation of mysticism. Gerald expresses this perversity when he undertakes "translating the mystic word harmony into the practical word organisation" (227). In effect, Gerald reduces the organic to the mechanical, rather than seeing the mechanical as the death phase of an all-encompassing life process.

For Lawrence, the final test of the authenticity of a sacred experience is always the impact on the participants. When the effect of the encounter is not mutually revitalizing, then the experience is deemed pseudo-sacred or at best partially numinous. In "The Crown" (1915), Lawrence emphasizes that creation and destruction are "divine" only when they are "pure" processes, untainted by egoistic will and intellect (*Reflections on the Death* 292–3).

The comparison between the statuette and Minette suggests that the African civilization that produced the woodcarving is related to the European civilization that engendered Minette—and the reader. According to Birkin, the African civilization represents, "Pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really *ultimate* physical consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual. It is so sensual as to be final, supreme" (79). African culture is seen as a mirror of modern culture: while the primitive African culture is said to limit the mental development of both men and women, modern European culture restricts the development of women like Minette and in effect engenders mindless, suffering savages; and by

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overemphasizing the intellectual development of men and a few elite women, European culture stymies their sensual development. Symbolically, African culture is decapitated, while modern culture is all head (and all capital-ism). Though the caricatures are crude and offensive, they suggest that the different cultures use their psychosomatic energies differently: the Africans concentrate and develop the energies associated with the chakras of the lower body while the Europeans work with their upper chakras, to the neglect of the lower. Lawrence is attempting to map culture onto the body, showing how cultural ideas and practices precipitate, channel, and impede the flow of psychosomatic forces.

The common denominator between the primitive African and the modern European civilizations is partiality: both allow one part of the human organism to dominate the others; they fetishize the part rather than affirm the whole. Lawrence suggests that violence and degradation occur when any psycho-physical sector has tyrannical control, whether it be the head at the expense of the rest of the body or the sensual body without intellect. In "The Crown," Lawrence associates "partial being" with knowing in "one direction only" and with being "always relative" and "unconsummate" (*Reflections on the Death* 267).

The symbolism of African culture is further clarified and elaborated in "Moony" during Birkin's reverie about another fetish that he had seen at Halliday's. The passage links partial consciousness with corruption and death, symbolized by beetles, particularly the Egyptian scarab:

There came back to him . . . a statuette . . . a tall, slim, elegant figure from West Africa. . . . It was a woman, with hair dressed high, like a melon-shaped dome. He remembered her vividly: she was one of his soul's intimates. Her body was long and elegant, her face was crushed tiny like a beetle's, she had rows of round heavy collars, like a column of quoits, on her neck. He remembered her: her astonishing cultured elegance, her diminished, beetle face, the astounding long elegant body, on short, ugly legs, with such protuberant buttocks, so weighty and unexpected below her slim long loins. She knew what he himself did not know. She had thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge behind her . . . knowledge arrested and ending in the senses, mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution, knowledge such as the beetles have, which live purely within the world of corruption and cold dissolution. This was why her face looked like a beetle's: this was why the Egyptians worshiped the ball-rolling scarab: because of the principle of knowledge in dissolution and corruption. (253)

Though the experience is called “mystically sensual,” the race had “died, mystically,” which indicates that the experience is a perverse imitation of creative, mystical encounter (253).<sup>26</sup> For the West African, “goodness,” “holiness,” and the “desire for creation and productive happiness must have lapsed” (253). The rest of Birkin’s reverie emphasizes that this mindless mode of consciousness is deathly because the “connection with life and hope” has been broken and “pure integral being” has been splintered (253). As in *The Rainbow*, this breaking and splintering is deemed a “fall” (253). Moreover, Birkin compares the “burning death-abstraction” and “sun-destruction” of the “awful African process” to the “mystery of ice-destructive knowledge, snow-abstract annihilation” of “[t]he white races” (254). The two types of destruction/abstraction are related but distinct processes: the African process “abstracts”—extracts, separates out, thins out—the body’s upper energies by overemphasizing the lower chakras; the Caucasian process abstracts the lower energies by overstressing the upper chakras.

The scene in “Coal-Dust” in which Gerald subdues the mare as the train approaches establishes ties among willfulness, domination, destruction, domestication, and mechanism. It also suggests that the female (whether horse or human), or the feminine principle of the feeling body, is often the object of the modern male’s aggression. Gerald is identified with the train, since it is an instrument of his colliery organization, and it is by and between machine and machine-user that the mare is caught, subdued, and symbolically raped. In the two-page scene, the narrator assaults the reader’s mind by repeating words signifying power: “force” appears four times; “press” three times; “hold,” “will,” and “bring [down/back]” twice; and “pull,” “thrust,” “grasp,” and “throw” once. Ultimately, these bombarding repetitions are meant to pave the way to a breakthrough in the reader’s awareness. The train’s invasive power is initially manifested in its ability to shatter silence: “The sharp blasts of the chuffing engine” and “[t]he repeated sharp blows of unknown, terrifying noise” terrify the mare (110). The train’s noise and unimpeded forward movement, coupled with Gerald’s unrelenting and overpowering will, reduce the mare to a soulless machine operated by spring coils: the wincing, terrified mare “recoiled like a spring let go,” yet Gerald “brought her back again, inevitably” for the “pressure of his compulsion” just outweighs “the repulsion of her utter terror” (110–11). The very inevitability of Gerald’s fixed will and domineering force suggests the repetitive certainty of mechanistic action: he “held on . . . with an almost mechanical relentlessness” (111). In “The Industrial Magnate,” the narrator describes prolonged, unvarying repetition as characteristic of “a great and perfect

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machine, a system, an activity of pure order, pure mechanical repetition, repetition ad infinitum" (228).<sup>27</sup> We saw in *Lady Chatterley* that Lawrence clearly distinguishes between mechanical and rhythmic repetition and that he often uses the former to mortify the reader and the latter to revitalize the reader.

The locomotive itself is portrayed as a kind of terrifying sexual machine that sadistically rapes the mare. Although the train is once referred to as a "her," trains are commonly phallic symbols because of their shape and power. Moreover, this locomotive has a "clanking steel connecting-rod," and as it appears on the high-road, it causes the mare to "rebound[ed] like a drop of water from hot iron" (110). That is, the mare acts as if it is terrified of the train's hot, steely, invasive phallic force. The mare is in effect caught between two masculine forces: the male human will and its inhuman symbolically masculine product:

But he sat glistening and obstinate, forcing the wheeling mare, which spun and swerved like a wind, and yet could not get out of the grasp of his will, nor escape from the mad clamour of terror that resounded through her, as the trucks thumped slowly, heavily, horrifying. (111)

The thumping action of the trucks suggests sexual pulsations, and the wheel metaphor ("wheeling mare") adds to the sense of the mare's reduction to machine. As the train passes, the symbolic double rape becomes even more sadistic: "The connecting chains were grinding and squeaking as the tension varied, the mare pawed and struck away mechanically now, her terror fulfilled in her, for now the man encompassed her" (111–12). The grinding of the connecting chains will later be echoed in Gerald's "frictional" sex with Gudrun: "The terrible frictional violence of death filled her" (344). In "Coal-Dust," Gerald is "like a keen edge biting home" into the mare and is "keen as a sword pressing into her" (111). The image of Gerald sinking into the mare "magnetically" recalls the language of sinking and magnetism in the earlier scenes involving Minette.

The linkage between this scene and subsequent episodes portraying the acts of intercourse between Gerald and Gudrun is strengthened by Gudrun's emotional identification with the violated mare. But while the mare is encompassed by terror and suffering, Gudrun's experience is not wholly painful; there is an admixture of masochistic pleasure: "she [the mare] spun round and round on two legs, as if she were in the centre of some whirlwind. It made Gudrun faint with poignant dizziness, which

seemed to penetrate to her heart” (111). The image of the whirlwind is a twisted copy of the sacred vortex; we saw a positive version of the vortex in a scene characterizing Connie’s orgasmic experience in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Gudrun’s “poignant dizziness” soon escalates into a pleasurable–painful swooning, the effect of having vicariously experienced a sadistic encounter. While Ursula cries out with horror that the mare is bleeding, Gudrun “looked and saw the trickles of blood on the sides of the mare, and she turned white. . . . The world reeled and passed into nothingness for Gudrun, she could not know any more” (112). The sadistic Gerald draws blood, and the vicarious experience of cruel penetration is a kind of visual and cognitive fulfillment for Gudrun. When she recovers, she becomes “hard and cold and indifferent,” much as she does after sex with Gerald (and much as Ursula did when coupling with Skrebensky). Then, she replays the experience visually and at one remove, through the eyes of the train guard: “through the man in the closed wagon Gudrun could see the whole scene spectacularly, isolated and momentary, like a vision isolated in eternity” (112). Here we see the theatre metaphor that is so prevalent in the destructive phase of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

The scenes in “The Industrial Magnate” depicting Gerald’s relation to another female figure, mother earth, also provide terms, images, and metaphors that will be used to describe his sexual relation with Gudrun.<sup>28</sup> As one of the captains of the coal industry, Gerald pits his will against the forces of the earth. In the machine age, his dehumanized will is the instrument for raping mother earth and hoarding her organic matter:

The coal lay there in its seams, even though the seams were thin. There it lay, inert matter, as it had always lain, since the beginning of time, subject to the will of man. 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 as the absolute, the only absolute.

And it was his will to subjugate Matter to his own ends. The subjugation itself was the point, the fight was the be-all, the fruits of victory were mere results. . . . What he [Gerald] wanted was the pure fulfilment of his own will in the struggle with the natural conditions. (223–4)

The eroticized aspect of Gerald’s subjugation of coal/matter is emphasized by the repetition of “lay” and “will”: he has his will with the inert, prostrate earth lying before and beneath him. The sexual language appears in the context of a battle metaphor, much as we saw in mortifying scenes in

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*The Rainbow*; but here the battle is no contest as General Gerald—he is likened to “a general”—musters his prodigious technological forces against the passive earth. In a subsequent passage, Gerald’s industrial organization is parodically conceived as a collective human effort expressing the mechanistic impulse of “the Godhead of the great productive machine” (225). Human mind and will serve inhuman, mechanistic aims as they despoil the earth:

He had a fight to fight with Matter, with the earth and the coal it enclosed. This was the sole idea, to turn upon the inanimate matter of the underground, and reduce it to his will. And for this fight with matter, one must have perfect instruments in perfect organisation, a mechanism so subtle and harmonious in its workings that its represents the single mind of man, and by its relentless repetition of given movement, will accomplish a purpose irresistibly, inhumanly. It was this inhuman principle in the mechanism he wanted to construct that inspired Gerald with an almost religious exaltation. He, the man, could interpose a perfect, changeless, godlike medium between himself and the Matter he had to subjugate. (227–8)

In this scheme, a mechanistic relation to the earth is, point by point, parodically given religious significance: the collective, productive human will is the transcendental God (“the productive will of men was the Godhead”); human production is the manifestation of that will and hence the manifest, dynamic deity (“the God-motion, this productive repetition ad infinitum”); and the human leader of the productive effort is an incarnate God (“Gerald was the God of the machine. Deus ex Machina”).<sup>29</sup> Mechanical production replaces human generation and is repetitive without variation; it spins infinitely. The industrial effort even has its own parodic version of ego-annihilation as human beings give up their lives to serve the system, the mechanical whole:

The men were satisfied to belong to the great wonderful machine, even whilst it destroyed them. . . . They were exalted by belonging to this great and superhuman system which was beyond feeling or reason, something really godlike. Their hearts died within them, but their souls were satisfied. It was what they wanted. (231)

Gerald’s “marvellous adjustment” of human and nonhuman “instruments,” and his “marvellous casting of myriad tiny wholes into one great perfect entirety,” are malicious acts of domination. Beneath Gerald’s “plausible

ethics of productivity,” Birkin sees “perfect good-humoured callousness, even strange, glistening malice” (56).<sup>30</sup> Gerald’s subjugation of his own sensual and compassionate impulses is reflected in his effort to dominate the earth and his own workers. The macrocosm of the industrial system is a projection, an imposition, of the microcosm of the abused self.

In “Rabbit,” Gerald and Gudrun’s will to dominate life is associated with their satiric attitude toward the rabbit that Gerald has subdued. Similarly, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, we saw that satire is a dominant technique in the novel’s mortification phase. As Gudrun dismisses the rabbit as “a sickening fool,” the “vindictive mockery” in her voice makes Gerald’s “brain quiver” (242).<sup>31</sup> Gudrun and Gerald’s “mocking, white-cruel recognition” is registered in their eyes and reveals that “There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries” (242). As desecrators of life, they are thus initiates in the perverse forms of life’s mysteries, much as Gerald’s industrial activities are perversely religious. The couple’s league constitutes a kind of twisted blood fellowship, for while Gerald is unable to commit to be Birkin’s blood brother, he does become Gudrun’s blood partner by seeing, not touching, her blood: the “deep red score” that he sees—which perhaps has vaginal resonances for him—tears “the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the forever unconscious, unthinkable red ether of the beyond, the obscene beyond” (242).<sup>32</sup> The slitting of the surface of Gerald’s consciousness to reveal “the obscene beyond” is a twisted version of the dissolving of mental consciousness that leads to positive numinous experience. In his Introduction to Harry Crosby’s *Chariot of the Sun*, probably written in 1929, Lawrence imagines the surface of human consciousness to be covered over by a “vast parasol of our conception of the universe” that keeps us from “breath[ing] in life from the living and unending chaos.” “The Absolute Umbrella” can be “either religious or moral or rational or scientific or practical.” This “contrivance and invention of our mind” is a “bubble reality” and must be “roll[ed] up” or “burst” if we are to gain “a breath of the live chaos . . . the fathomless chaos of things passing and coming” (*Phoenix* 258–9). In *Women in Love*, the narrator will burst the bubble that encloses Gerald and Gudrun and so reveal the obscene beyond at the base of their relationship. Subsequent sexual encounters between Gerald and Gudrun will be depicted as further forays into this obscene beyond. In “Snowed Up,” Gudrun’s contempt for life will become explicit; for her and for Loerke, “Art and Life were . . . the Reality and the Unreality” (448). As the two artists play their “curious game . . . of infinite suggestivity, strange and leering,” they enact the obscene beyond on the verbal plane (448).

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Birkin's letter to Halliday in "Gudrun in the Pompadour" describes the reductive process that takes place when sexual activity is not spontaneous, mutually affirming, and unselfconscious. The letter acts as a discursive gloss of the reader's experience of Gerald and Gudrun's relationship. A similar description of the reductive process can be found in "The Crown" and "Love" (1918) and so indicates that Birkin's position is Lawrence's.<sup>33</sup> Though the letter explicitly addresses Halliday's relationship with Minette, it aptly applies to Gerald's relationship with Gudrun. Birkin writes that "in the great retrogression, the reducing back of the created body of life, we get knowledge, and beyond knowledge, the phosphorescent ecstasy of acute sensation," and he advises Halliday to either "go on till it is fulfilled" or transcend this desire for disintegrative pleasure and knowledge and follow "the living desire for positive creation, relationships in ultimate faith, when all this process of active corruption, with all its flowers of mud, is transcended, and more or less finished" (383). This desire for reduction aims to tear apart the "complex unity" of male and female:

this desire—for the constant going apart—this passion for putting asunder—everything—ourselves, reducing ourselves part from part—reacting in intimacy only for destruction—using sex as a great reducing agent, by friction between the two great elements of male and female obtaining a frenzy of sensual satisfaction—reducing the old ideas, going back to the savages for our sensations—always seeking to *lose* ourselves in some ultimate black sensation, mindless and infinite—burning only with destructive fires, raging on with the hope of being burnt out utterly. (384)

The phrase "ultimate black sensation, mindless and infinite" links this passage to that portraying the African process of reduction. The desire to tear apart "the complex unity" of male and female resembles the Kabbalistic idea that evil emerges from the sundering, and subsequent disharmony, of masculine and feminine forces. A similar understanding of evil is found in Blake's later prophetic poems.

Shortly before Gudrun and Gerald's first sexual act is narrated, the reader learns that the two are possessed by a brutal passion for each other: "both felt the subterranean desire to let go, to fling away everything, and lapse into a sheer unrestraint, brutal and licentious" (287). This language of license and unrestraint is reminiscent of Will and Anna's honeymoon, one of the only times when they had a balanced relationship; however, with Gerald and Gudrun, brutality is also mentioned, indicating an

overbalance of negatively destructive forces. When Anna and Will enter their malicious phase, they are characterized as “opposites, not complements”; similarly, Gudrun and Gerald are said to be “separate, like opposite poles of one fierce energy” (399). Negative destructivity is stressed in the succeeding description of Gudrun and shows that sadism is the other side of her earlier masochistic behavior:

A strange black passion surged up pure in Gudrun. She felt strong. She felt her hands so strong, as if she could tear the world asunder with them. She remembered the abandonments of Roman licence, and her heart grew hot. She knew she wanted this herself also—or something, something equivalent. Ah, if that which was unknown and suppressed in her were once let loose, what an orgiastic and satisfying event it would be . . . black licentiousness. . . . She wanted it with him, this unacknowledged frenzy. (287)

In *The Rainbow*, Tom Brangwen had felt strong with the power to both destroy and create the world, whereas Gudrun feels strong with annihilating power alone, much as Connie Chatterley feels during her brief Bacchae phase in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The reference to Roman licence also anticipates the “night of sensual passion” in which Connie and Mellors engage in anal sex and explore the mysteries of sex as Abelard and Heloise once did.<sup>34</sup> But in *Lady Chatterley* the anal sex scene occurs after the mutual tenderness of the lovers has been established, so that its cutting edge is dulled. The release of Gudrun's suppressed aggression recalls Gerald's conversation with Birkin in which Gerald says that letting people do what they want will result in mass killing: sensing Gerald's suppressed hostility, Birkin says, “That means *you* would like to be cutting everybody's throat” (33). Gerald and Gudrun share the passion for slitting throats.

The first two erotic scenes involving Gudrun and Gerald occur in “Death and Love,” one before and one after Thomas Crich dies. Their lovemaking is thus associated with Thomas's death struggle and with his deadly relationship with his wife, Christiana. She suffers from his “subjugation,” but he persists in ignoring her hawklike (aristocratic) nature and maddened condition and instead “thought of her as pure, chaste . . . a wonderful white snow-flower” (218). Again, the feminine principle of the feeling body is suppressed. The kind of relationship that Mr. and Mrs. Crich have is also what Gerald and Gudrun possess: “a relation of utter interdestruction” (217). In a July 16, 1916 letter to Catherine Carswell, Lawrence writes that an “act of love, which is pure thrill, is a kind of friction between opposites, interdestructive, an act of death.”<sup>35</sup>

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The first erotic episode is narrated largely from Gudrun's perspective and emphasizes her analytic self-consciousness. It occurs under "the square arch where the road passed under the colliery railway" (330). The arch has perverse sexual connotations since "arch" or "vault" (*fornix*) is the root of "fornication" and is associated with prostitution.<sup>36</sup> The sexual connection between Gerald and Gudrun is thus associated with the train bridge, which is mechanistic in two senses: it is associated with the train that had menaced the mare; and it is square, rectilinear, reflecting the linear thought of mechanistic science. In *The Rainbow*, rounded arches have organic meanings, while pointed arches have more Christian spiritual connotations. Gudrun's consciousness is understood as a split, reflexive, judging, calculating, and possessive mode in which she is constantly comparing herself to other women and ranking Gerald in relation to other men: she wants "to stand under the bridge with *her* sweetheart" because "she knew that under this dark and lonely bridge the young colliers stood in the darkness with their sweethearts"; she desires Gerald's embrace because "how much more powerful and terrible was his embrace than theirs [the other colliers'], how much more concentrated and supreme his love was, than theirs in the same sort!"; and she realizes that "the colliers' sweethearts would, like herself, hang their heads back limp" (330–1). As she relates to Gerald, her eye and mind are on other persons; she does not relate directly, exclusively, to him. After the embrace, her attention becomes focussed on Gerald's head, particularly his face, indicating that her head-centered consciousness desires a cognitive relationship with his. His face is even associated with Eve's apple, which Lawrence uses to symbolize self-reflexive, dualistic knowledge:

She looked up, and in the darkness saw his face above her, his shapely, male face. There seemed a faint, white light emitted from him, a white aura, as if he were a visitor from the unseen. She reached up, like Eve reaching to the apples on the tree of knowledge, and she kissed him. (331)

Even her hands seem in service of her head, for she "wanted to touch him . . . till she had him all in her hands, till she had strained him into her knowledge" (332). These are the manipulative hands that carve animals tiny enough to be gripped: "always . . . small things, that one can put between one's hands" (39). Her mental power to "strain" has the double sense of abstraction and tension/stress; in both senses, she distorts and diminishes who he is. The visual details of Gerald's face—she touches his "eyes . . . nostrils . . . brows . . . ears . . . neck"—resemble those of Michaelis, the ocularcentric playwright in *Lady Chatterley*.

The narrator subsequently reveals that Gudrun's hands are the instruments of her controlling, calculating, greedy mind. They have Gerald "under their power" and are "eager, greedy for knowledge" but are "intelligent" and only take in as much as they can effectively receive (332). Her absorption of his erotic energy must be measured—that is, consciously monitored and modulated—because that energy has a destructive quality: "her soul was destroyed with the exquisite shock of his invisible fluid lightning. . . . And this knowledge was a death from which she must recover" (332). His lightninglike orgasmic energy has the power to electrocute her, much as his "discharge" of "electricity" earlier had the power to "destroy . . . utterly" Minette (65). Thus, Gudrun balances greed for energy and knowledge against fear of self-annihilation. The gaining of knowledge about his body is figured as the harvesting of energy from a radioactive field: "Ah much, much, many days harvesting for her large, yet perfectly subtle and intelligent hands upon the field of his living, radio-active body" (332). The metaphor of radioactive energy reduces his bioenergy to physico-mechanical force; and the harvest metaphor perversely applies an organic process to an inorganic one and implies an act of plundering. The harvesting metaphor also links to the earlier metaphor of Gudrun straining Gerald into her knowledge. Eventually, the harvest metaphor gives way to a bird metaphor: "There were all the after days when her hands, like birds, could feed upon the fields of his mystical plastic form" (332). The simile suggests ravenous predatory birds, perhaps vultures, which in "The Reality of Peace" (1917) symbolize living beings that have "locked . . . [their] unalterable will[s] for ever against life and death" (*Reflections on the Death* 43). In contrast, we saw how in *Lady Chatterley* Lawrence uses the bird figure to symbolize a numinous moment of perfected relationship—the balance of polarities represented by the bird's body connecting and equilibrating the two wings.

The second erotic scene involving Gerald and Gudrun describes a pseudomystical act of coitus. Gerald's father has just died, and Gerald desperately seeks out Gudrun and awakens her from sleep. The narrator offers Gudrun's perspective, which focuses on Gerald's face:

Save for the extreme beauty and mystic attractiveness of this distinct face, she would have sent him away. But his face was too wonderful and undiscovered to her. It fascinated her with the facination of pure beauty, cast a spell on her, like nostalgia, an ache. (343)

The mixing of mystical and magical language suggests that the "mystic attractiveness" is deceptive; it is a temporary, illusive glamor produced by

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a spell. The clue to this fake mystical encounter is not only the head-centered focus and the intrusion of magical discourse but also the comparison to nostalgia—a longing for home and the past.<sup>37</sup> An authentic mystical exchange is, for Lawrence, always in the present. The use of the qualifying language of analytic logic (“Save for,” “But”) also works against creating the sense of a mystical encounter. Moreover, Gudrun consents to the act of intercourse not because she positively desires connection, but because his powerful, rigid will impels her acquiescence: “he seemed fixed in an odd supernatural steadfastness. . . . She was lost now. She had no choice” (343). Their sexual act is not a reciprocal exchange; rather, it is represented as Gerald pouring out his own deathly orgasmic energy into her:

He found in her an infinite relief. Into her he poured all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death, and he was whole again. It was wonderful, marvellous, it was a miracle. This was the ever-recurrent miracle of his life, at the knowledge of which he was lost in an ecstasy of relief and wonder. And she, subject, received him as a vessel filled with his bitter potion of death. She had no power at this crisis to resist. The terrible frictional violence of death filled her, and she received it in an ecstasy of subjection, in throes of acute, violent sensation. (344)

Gudrun is subjected to Gerald, just as Minette, the mare and the earth were. And Gudrun is the receptacle for Gerald's own self-destructive energy. In effect, he extroverts his own introverted aggression. The language suggests sadomasochism, as it did with Minette; the frictional violence evokes the mechanical, abrasive action of steel against steel or against some softer substance. Mixed in with this language of subjection and violence is the numinous discourse of miracle, marvel, wonder, and wholeness. Again, the blending of sacred and profane discourses indicates that the encounter is falsely mystical. Yet it is still temporarily restorative for Gerald: it offers him immediate relief. Some of his relief comes from his sense of control over Gudrun as well as his transitory escape from the pressing anxieties of being out of control in the rest of his life (he cannot save his sister or father, create satisfying work, or love his friends fully). But the very fact that this and previous “miracles” have not transformed his sadistic relation to sex is itself proof of the fraudulence of the miracle. He becomes “whole” only in the sense that he becomes temporarily energetically balanced, having released an overabundance of negativity; but he is not whole in the sense of being integrated and connected.

Moreover, his ecstatic response is driven as much by reflexive knowledge as by experience: the “knowledge” of the “miracle,” as much as the encounter itself, gives him “ecstasy of relief and wonder.” In a fully sacred encounter, he would experience peace, not just relief. In “The Reality of Peace,” Lawrence describes peace as “that perfect consummation when duality and polarity is transcended into absolution”; he distinguishes peace from “quiescence and resignation,” which are its “hopeless equivalent” (*Reflections on the Death* 51, 32).

There is not only an outflow of Gerald’s deathly energy; there is also an influx of Gudrun’s life energy. Gerald experiences this influx as a restorative bath of life. The bathing metaphor compares Gudrun’s regenerative power to the healing effects of sunlight and water:

He felt himself dissolving and sinking to rest in the bath of her living strength. It seemed as if her heart in her breast were a second unconquerable sun, into the glow and creative strength of which he plunged further and further. All his veins, that were murdered and lacerated, healed softly as life came pulsing in, stealing invisibly into him as if it were the all-powerful effluence of the sun. . . . He felt his limbs growing fuller and flexible with life, his body gained an unknown strength. He was a man again, strong and rounded. And he was a child, so soothed and restored and full of gratitude. (344)

The encounter does restore Gerald’s physical vigor, and the child metaphor suggests that he might even be spiritually reborn, as Connie is after her bath of life in *Lady Chatterley*. But the next passage indicates that his becoming a child is not a spiritual rebirth but a psychological regression; it is another simulation of a religious event.<sup>38</sup> He responds to Gudrun as if she were his mother, much as the infant in Michaelis appeals to the mother in Connie: “And she, she was the great bath of life, he worshipped her. Mother and substance of all life she was. And he, child and man, received of her and was made whole” (344). The mother–child metaphor indicates a power imbalance. While the healing of his body is mentioned, special attention is given to the restoration of his “damaged brain,” indicating how much of his negative energy is associated with his mind. It is as if the destructive and creative elements of the life force collect and build in the brain, and since they have no real outlet in positive, integrated action, they slowly destroy mind and body. Because of Gudrun’s powers of regeneration, Gerald is “infinitely grateful, as to God, or as an infant is at its mother’s breast” (345). His body seems restored, but a truly reciprocal exchange would have produced a superabundance

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of energy that would have transformed them both. Instead, Gerald has, like a parasite, fed off Gudrun's energy, while she remains emotionally cut off. Gudrun's reverie in "Snowed Up" confirms that the mother-child metaphor is not to be positively valued:

Perhaps he got some repose from her. Perhaps he did. Perhaps this was what he was always dogging her for, like a child that is famished crying for the breast. Perhaps this was the secret of his passion, his forever unquenched desire for her—that he needed her to put him to sleep, to give him repose.

What then! Was she his mother? Had she asked for a child, whom she must nurse through the nights, for her lover. She despised him. (466)

The soothing effects of sex are thus rejected as an inadequate justification for having intercourse. In contrast, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the seeking of comfort is deemed a sufficient reason for sexual coupling when the exchange occurs in the context of a relatively balanced, sacred relationship.

When the narrator finally offers Gudrun's point of view, she is shown to be wide awake, unable to lose herself in sensual contact, hyperconscious of time, far-sighted yet seeing nothing. Her consciousness simulates an authentic numinous consciousness: she is seemingly "conscious of everything" (345). The activation of her reflexive and farsighted consciousness makes her aware of the gap between herself and Gerald; she realizes that her conscious state and his unconscious state put them worlds apart: "Ah, this awful, inhuman distance which would always be interposed between her and the other being!" (346). This is the "knowing in terms of apartness" that Lawrence associate with the analytic—especially the scientific—mindset. Gerald's ejection of his own pent-up violence into Gudrun's subjected body has produced in her a "state of violent active superconsciousness" (346). It is as if the destructive energy associated with his willful mind is funneled through his body into her body, where it finally lodges in her mind. The energy is not transformed or transvalued; it remains basically mental and negative. This transformational failure is due to the coercive nature of the encounter, the intensity and extent of Gerald's negativity, and Gudrun's general inability to surrender her mental awareness. While she temporarily gives in to his demand for sex, she stays in control by remaining vigilant. Even though she may want to lose herself, her lifelong practice has been to remain hyperwatchful. As she becomes weary from watching and analyzing

Gerald, her mind reverts to a consciousness of the past, to a knowledge created by memory, instead of by present feeling and sensation:

She was conscious of everything—her childhood, her girlhood, all the forgotten incidents, all the unrealised influences and all the happenings she had not understood. . . . It was as if she drew a glittering rope of knowledge out of the sea of darkness, drew and drew and drew it out of the fathomless depths of the past, 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 conscious[ness], pull it out phosphorescent from the endless depths of the unconsciousness, till she was weary, aching, exhausted, and fit to break, and yet she had not done. (346)

The passage illustrates the meaning of knowledge as grasping or apprehending something and stresses the willful nature of this process. The drawing, hauling, and pulling of elements from the unconscious recalls Gerald's pulling back and reigning in of the mare: Gudrun pulls on the rope of consciousness to satisfy her craving to dominate men mentally; Gerald pulls on the reins of the mare to satisfy his will to dominate female creatures.

The third sexual encounter occurs in "Snow" (in "Continental" in other editions) as soon as Gerald and Gudrun arrive in their Tyrolese hotel room. The scene echoes the episode in which Gerald subdues the mare and immediately follows Gudrun's "strange rapture" as she gazes out of the window at the valley and mountains (401). This rapture produces a gulf between her and Gerald, and the act of intercourse is his attempt to force a connection; it is a near rape. Had not Gudrun still been dazed by her vision, she might have put up a great struggle, like the mare, but instead she weakly resists and is easily overcome by his metallic strength:

He lifted her close and folded her against him. Her softness, her inert, relaxed weight lay against his own surcharged, bronze-like limbs in a heaviness of desirability that would destroy him, if he were not fulfilled. She moved convulsively, recoiling away from him. His heart went up like a flame of ice, he closed over her like steel. He would destroy her rather than be denied. But the overweening power of his body was too much for her. She relaxed again, and lay loose and soft, panting in a little delirium. And to him, she was so sweet, she was such bliss of release, that he would have suffered a whole eternity of torture rather than forgo one second of this pang of unsurpassable bliss. (402)

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When Gudrun recoils as the mare had, Gerald's bronze-like limbs become steely; that is, her resistance intensifies and hardens his aggression, piques his sadism. Not only is he willing to torture her, he is also prepared to endure being tortured in order to have his bliss; he is sado-masochistic, and she is an instrument of his pleasure. The choppiness of the passage—successive sentences or pairs of sentences switch joltingly back and forth between his perspective and hers—demonstrates that the encounter is not harmonious; it also has the effect of disorienting the reader. In contrast, in *Lady Chatterley*, the numinous scenes interweave the somatic focalizations of Connie and Mellors in a smoother, more seamless way, often in the same sentence.

Again, Gerald is apparently positively affected by his cruel sexuality, for the numinous language of transfiguration is used to describe his face: " 'My God,' he said to her, his face drawn and strange, transfigured, 'what next?' " (402). His invocation of the deity is really an invocation of the demonic.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, as we discussed in chapter 3, sacred energies become demonic when they become extremely out of balance. Gudrun's response indicates that whatever the nature of his transfiguration is—and it seems to be the gleam of Gerald having discovered new depths to his own pleasure and cruelty—she has been reduced to a stunned girl: "She lay perfectly still, with a still, child-like face and dark eyes, looking at him. She was lost, fallen right away" (402). Moreover, she does not hear him when he says, "I shall always love you" (402). This portrait of Gudrun resembles Loerke's statuette of the overpowered "naked girl, small finely made, sitting on a great naked horse"; but the abused girl experiences more "shame and grief" than does the sado-masochistic Gudrun (429). The powerful sculpted stallion resembles Gerald, for it is "rigid with pent up power" and its "neck was arched and terrible, like a sickle" and its "flanks were pressed back, rigid with power" (429). Gudrun looks at Gerald vacantly, "as at something she could never understand, never: as a child looks at a grown-up person, without hope of understanding, only submitting"; later, she responds to Loerke's stallion by going "pale" and experiencing "a certain supplication, almost slave-like" (402, 429). Her bafflement is not the incomprehension that one experiences in having had a genuinely numinous encounter (with the radically new, the radically unknown); rather, it is the confusion experienced when one has had an encounter with someone or something that is already known to others but not to oneself. Thus, to a child, even the conventional action of "a grown-up person" would be bewildering, even though there is nothing numinous about that action. In their previous encounters, Gerald had been characterized as the needy, grateful child; now Gudrun is the

stunned, abused, submissive child. This reversal is part of the oscillating process of dominance and submission: "But always it was this eternal see-saw, one destroyed that the other might exist, one ratified because the other was nulled" (445). Both enact the weak qualities of children, not the joyful, spontaneous, creative attributes that Lawrence values. Halliday, the arch degenerate, is called "a perfect baby" by Minette, who is herself childlike.

It is significant that the next day, during a brief reverie in which Gudrun considers marrying Gerald, she thinks of him as "sheerly beautiful . . . a perfect instrument": "To her mind, he was a pure, inhuman, almost superhuman instrument. His instrumentality appealed so strongly to her, she wished she were God, to use him as a tool" (418). The image of her as God making use of the perfect instrument recalls the image of Gerald as *Deus ex machina* using the perfect instrument of the mining organization (colliers and machines): "for this fight with matter, one must have perfect instruments. . . . He, the man could interpose a perfect, changeless, godlike medium between himself and the Matter he had to subjugate" (227–8). Both Gudrun and Gerald dream of being masters of the machine. And each considers the other an implement of pleasure. They treat one another as means, not ends. They have, using Martin Buber's language, an "I-it" relationship, not an "I-thou" relationship.

The penultimate sex scene occurs after Gudrun admits that she does not love Gerald and after she forces him to say he does not love her. It intensifies the link between sex and violence. Gerald is enraged and in despair, and his "heart was whispering. . . 'If only I could kill her—I should be free'" (442). The destructive impulse in Gerald reaches its final pitch, and the act of coitus is portrayed as an awful killing process:

He turned and gathered her in his arms. And feeling her soft against him, so perfectly and wondrously soft and recipient, his arms tightened on her, she was as if crushed, powerless in him. His brain seemed hard and invincible now like a jewel, there was no resisting him.

His passion was awful to her, tense and ghastly and impersonal, like a destruction, ultimate. She felt it would kill her, she was being killed.

"My God, my God," she cried, in anguish, in his embrace, feeling her life being killed within her. And when he was kissing her, soothing her, her breath came slowly, as if she were really spent, dying.

"Shall I die, shall I die?" she repeated to herself. (444)

Again, there are the quick, jolting switchbacks between points of view. And there is the invocation of the deity in the midst of a sadistic,

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pseudo-sacred encounter. The word "crushed" recalls the statuette of the pregnant African woman whose face was crushed in agony. This is also a sinister literalization of the cliché of sex as the little death, for this sadistic act is so violent as to be almost killing. Again, the brain is emphasized; this time its hardness and invincibility are stressed.

The real culmination of Gudrun and Gerald's sex life occurs as they physically attack each other at the end of "Snowed Up." This scene literalizes the connection between sex and death. It is easy to forget that Gerald's attempt to strangle Gudrun is partially in response to her hitting him (she also struck him in "Water-Party"). After Gerald knocks down Loerke, Gudrun "raised her clenched hand high, and brought it down, with a great downward stroke, over the face and on to the breast of Gerald" (471). Her blow recalls that of Hermione, who had "brought down the ball of jewel stone with all her force, crash on his [Birkin's] head" (105).<sup>40</sup> The blow to Gerald produces a kind of ghastly spiritual conversion in which he experiences "great astonishment" and "wonder" as "his soul opened" "wide, wide . . . feeling the pain" (471). Instead of the blow leading to a sense of renewed connection with nature, as it does with Birkin, it piques a desire to murder Gudrun: his soul "laughed, turning, with strong hands outstretched, at last to take the apple of his desire. At last he could finish his desire" (471). Earlier, his face had been an apple of knowledge for her; now, she is the apple of his murderous desire.

The portrayal of their interaction combines different terms and metaphors from previous sex scenes—beauty, crushing power, sadistic satisfaction, and violent, lustful frenzy:

He took the throat of Gudrun between his hands, that were hard and indomitably powerful. And her throat was beautifully, so beautifully soft. Save that, within, he could feel the slippery chords of her life. And this he crushed, this he could crush. What bliss! Oh what bliss, at last, what satisfaction, at last! The pure zest of satisfaction filled his soul. He was watching the unconsciousness come into her swollen face, watching the eyes roll back. How ugly she was! What a fulfilment, what a satisfaction! How good this was, oh how good it was, what a god-given gratification, at last! He was unconscious of her fighting and struggling. The struggling was her reciprocal lustful passion in this embrace, the more violent it became, the greater the frenzy of delight, till the zenith was reached, the crisis, the struggle was overborne, her movement became softer, appeased. (471–2)

In Genesis, God pronounces "and it was good" after each day of creation, whereas here the divine pronouncement is parodically associated with

the “God-given gratification” of human destructiveness. The passage suggests that Gudrun gains lustful satisfaction from her near-death throes; moreover, the softening of her movement diabolically imitates the postorgasmic softening of the body. It is only the sudden accession of “contempt and disgust” and “nausea” that causes Gerald to refrain, for he realizes that he had not “cared about her enough to kill her, to have her life on his hands” (472). “I didn’t want it, really” is “the last confession of disgust in his soul, as he drifted up the slope” (472). Now, “sunk under a sense of nausea,” he only wants to “go to sleep” (472). Earlier the release of pent-up aggression had induced sleep; now the partial release of aggression produces the urge for the sleep of death.<sup>41</sup>

### III. Yogic Discourses in the Revitalization Phase

As in *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the novel’s sacralizing phase oscillates with the mortifying phase because Lawrence wants the reader to undergo a gradual process of transformation, comparable to a snake slowly shedding its old skin as it puts forth new tissue. While destructive devices are deployed in scenes depicting Gerald’s sexual encounters with Minette and Gudrun, revitalization techniques are used in the episodes portraying Birkin and Ursula’s erotic interplay. The vivification phase is shorter, less elaborate, and arguably less persuasive than the disintegration phase, for Lawrence was more filled with wrath toward war-racked Western civilization than with hope that he could rejuvenate his readers—or himself. He was also pessimistic about the possibilities of such revitalization even when aimed at a coterie of sensitive and intelligent readers. During 1915–16, he had been unsuccessful in recruiting Bertrand Russell, John Middleton Murry, and other English friends to participate in his utopian community called Rananim.<sup>42</sup>

As individuals, Birkin and Ursula differ little from Gerald and Gudrun. As Birkin himself acknowledges in “Water-Party,” he and Ursula are also “flowers of dissolution”; but they differ from Gerald and Gudrun in not being “altogether . . . pure flowers of dark corruption—lilies” (173). It is their greater openness to growth, as well as their opposition to sado-masochism, that enables them to choose the way of life. A high level of aggression is present in their relationship, but it is mainly manifested verbally, whereas with Gerald and Gudrun the primary outlet is their sexual encounters.<sup>43</sup> It is important to stress that while Ursula and Birkin’s sex life includes the “shameful” and “degrading,” it does not include sado-masochism (413). This form of sexual violence is excluded from the “whole round of experience” because it is only appropriate as a final

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antife act of moribund couples like Gerald and Gudrun, and Halliday and Minette (413). In "Gudrun in the Pompadour," Birkin's letter urges Halliday to "go on till" this "ecstasy of reduction with Minette" is "fulfilled," but only if they can find in themselves no "living desire for positive creation" (383). Sadomasochism is for the doomed, not the living, and so is exclusively associated with the novel's mortification phase. Minette herself can find no joy in her pregnancy; she seems to Gerald "so far in spirit from any childbearing" and says to him that she does not want the baby (68). While Birkin and Ursula's arguments about love are part of the novel's destructive phase—for they struggle to free themselves from "[i]mprison[ment] within a limited, false set of concepts"—their sensual exchanges are at the center of Lawrence's revitalization effort (41).

Several compositional strategies used in the sacralization phase have an inverse relation to those deployed in the destruction phase. Thus, while one mortification tactic is to link willful, self-conscious sex with head-centered forms of consciousness and communication, a key sacralization tactic is to link spontaneous, unselfconscious, mutually satisfying sex with the lower body's modes of awareness. And while the destruction phase employs terms associated with mechanical and physical forces and phenomena, these terms are almost absent from the vivifying episodes—a fact overlooked by many critics. The one exception is the continued use of the language of electrical force, probably because of its widespread symbolic association with lightning and divine energy. In *Apocalypse*, Lawrence discusses the sacred symbolism of thunder and lightning and asserts that each has a creative and a destructive aspect:

The grand Logos of the beginning was a thunderclap laughing throughout chaos, and causing the cosmos. But the Thunder, which is also the Almighty, and the Lightning, which is the Fiery Almighty, putting forth the first jet of life-flame—the fiery Logos—have both also their angry or sundering aspect. Thunder claps creative through space, Lightning darts in fecund fire: or the reverse, destructive. (98)

The annihilating power of lightning had been emphasized in the portrayal of Gerald's orgasmic force; its creative power is highlighted in the depictions of Birkin's vital force.

A third strategy is to associate this sacred-electrical discourse with both Eastern and Western mystical discourses. Lawrence may have been influenced by Richard Pryse, who in *Apocalypse Unsealed* uses the

electricity metaphor to characterize kundalini energy as “living, conscious electricity, of incredible voltage” (11).<sup>44</sup> Lawrence also associates electrical discourse with the Biblical expression “son of God,” which we saw had Kabbalistic mystical resonances in *The Rainbow*.

A fourth strategy is to arrange the erotic exchanges to coincide roughly with the sequence of ritualistic actions that precede and makeup Tantric sex.<sup>45</sup> Because the full powers of the body are portrayed in the revitalization phase, the yogic discourse is highlighted.

Despite the novel’s overall championing of the organic over the mechanical, it is important to observe that an organic discourse is not deployed in the sex scenes involving Birkin and Ursula. This crucial point has been overlooked. The settings in which the erotic interplays take place are natural—mostly in the woods—but the language used to portray the exchanges does not refer to organic life. I believe that the absence of organic terms indicates that Lawrence was trying to show that the universal substance—what physicists might call the quantum field or matter–energy matrix—is fundamentally unified, intelligent, and alive and gives rise to both organic and inorganic phenomena. Thus, in “Mino” Birkin equates the cosmic forces that bind the universe to those which bind people in order to suggest that all these forces are fundamentally vital: “I do think . . . that the world is only held together by the mystic conjunction, the ultimate unison between people—a bond” (152). Ursula’s reverie in “Sunday Evening” also reflects this view of the ultimate unity and aliveness of matter and energy, or body and spirit: “And she knew, with the clarity of ultimate knowledge, that the body is only one of the manifestations of the spirit, the transmutation of integral spirit is the transmutation of the physical body as well” (192). This formula is simultaneously Blakean, Kabbalistic, Hindu, pre-Socratic. Like the pre-Socratics, Lawrence images the matter–energy matrix as a kind of cosmic soup from which particular creatures are created and into which their vital components return after death. Creation is thus a process of giving form to the flexible, fluid, undifferentiated matter–energy substrate, and death is the disintegration of that created form.

While a mechanical perspective denies life to the inorganic, Lawrence’s organic perspective asserts that both the organic and the inorganic are part of a cycle of cosmic life, the inorganic merely representing the decomposition/death phase of life. His organicism is simultaneously a cosmology, for it posits that the universe itself is an immense living organism made up of smaller living organisms. For him, the term “organic” indicates that a being or system of beings is living, singular, organized, developing, intelligent, purposive, sensitive, responsive, creative, self-equilibrating, and

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self-repairing. In an organic system, each part has a unique character and a unique role in its contribution to the functioning of the whole. The parts are organized in subsystems and systems, each with distinct yet interrelated cycles or rhythms. The interrelations between these subsystems are dynamic: changes in one subsystem effecting changes in others.

The novel's central metaphor for sacred connection is the star equilibrium. Birkin tells Ursula: "What I want is a strange conjunction with you—not meeting and mingling;—. . . but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings:—as the stars balance each other" (148). The image represents a dynamic balance of the forces of attraction and repulsion. It suggests that a healthy relationship involves a balance of communion and independence.<sup>46</sup> The use of an astrological metaphor reinforces the idea that numinous human relationships are manifestations of larger cosmic relationships.<sup>47</sup>

The description of Birkin and Ursula's first erotic encounter is somewhat didactic, portraying what the interaction both is and is not. It involves Nirvanalike peace, freedom, stillness, and bliss and does not involve thought, desire, and will.<sup>48</sup> Its main function is to introduce some of the sacred diction, to present a mildly sensual connection that is balanced but not fully eroticized, and to produce a mild trancelike state in the reader by combining the key terms in various ways:

She clung nearer to him. He held her close, and kissed her softly, gently. It was such peace and heavenly freedom, just to fold her and kiss her gently, and not to have any thoughts or any desires or any will, just to be still with her, to be perfectly still and together, in a peace that was not sleep, but content in bliss. To be content in bliss, without desire or insistence anywhere, this was heaven: to be together in happy stillness. (252)

This encounter is not highly erotically charged, but the quiescent, satisfying embrace soon escalates to a dynamic sexual response. As they hold one another, Birkin's "warm breath on her ears disturbed her again, kindled the old destructive fires. She cleaved to him, and he could feel his blood changing like quicksilver" (252). These are the old destructive fires of Dionysian ecstasy; they do not further the growth of the participants or their relationship. Earlier, Birkin had said that "the Dionysic ecstatic way" is "like going round in a squirrel cage" (251). The "Dionysic" way is problematic because it emphasizes the life of the body cut off from the mind. Like Nietzsche, Lawrence advocated a holistic approach that includes yet transcends—that is, integrates and overcomes—the dualism of

Dionysian and Apollonian. Birkin curtails the kindling of his sexual desire, saying "But we'll be still, shall we?" (252). The use of the subjunctive and the interrogative suggests that he is trying not to impose his will on her.

"Excuse" is the chapter in which most of the sacred sexual encounters between Birkin and Ursula take place and in which Lawrence most vigorously tries to revitalize the reader's consciousness. Perhaps too vigorously, for didactic descriptions often dominate passages in which subtler transformative devices would have been more effective. The chapter title suggests not only "out of the course" of conventional life but also "out of the curse" of Adam and Eve. It is a movement toward "paradise regained." These scenes establish the novel's positive erotic standard for numinous excursions—for sexual interplay conceived as a life-enhancing adventure.

The first erotic scene involving Birkin and Ursula is another instance of a peaceful encounter that is not fully sexual. After their fight over the rings, "a hot passion of tenderness" for Ursula "filled his heart," and as they embrace, he feels peace: "It was peace, just simple peace, as he stood folding her quietly there on the open lane. It was peace at last. The old, detestable world of tension had passed away at last, his soul was strong and at ease" (310). The tenderness in this scene resembles that in *Lady Chatterley* when Mellors, feeling compassion in his bowels, first soothes Connie. The reader learns that the hot passion of tenderness is not sexual passion, for Ursula "wished he were passionate, because in passion she was at home" (311). Tenderness is associated with a sense of spaciousness, of shared peaceful space, while sexual passion is linked to force: "this was so still and frail, as space is more frightening than force" (311).

The tenderness that dispels the tension has a renovative effect. When the couple drive on, Birkin experiences a change in consciousness from head-centered to full-bodied:

He drove on in a strange new wakefulness, the tension of his consciousness broken. He seemed to be conscious all over, all his body awake with a simple, glimmering awareness, as if he had just come awake, like a thing that is born, like a bird when it comes out of an egg, into a new universe. (311–12)

A similar hatching egg metaphor appears in the prelude to the first sexual coupling in *Lady Chatterley*. Ursula's consciousness is also transfigured: "new eyes were opened in her soul" (312). Having gone through a rebirth process, she experiences the world as "unreal," herself as "a strange, transcendent reality," and Birkin as "a strange creature from another world" (312). It is a kind of "paradise regained" experience

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where the renewed Eden seems like "another world." Unlike Gudrun's mental superconsciousness, Birkin's awakened consciousness is mainly body-based. It is important to notice that he can bring this somatic awareness to even a very modern activity like driving a car.

Echoes of Genesis are sustained as the language of magic is introduced to express Ursula's experience of Birkin as a Biblical son of God and of herself as a fortunate daughter of men:

It was as if she were enchanted, and everything were metamorphosed. She recalled again the old magic of the Book of Genesis, where the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair. And he was one of these, one of these strange creatures from the beyond, looking down at her, and seeing she was fair. (312)

The positive connotation of magic in this passage indicates that Lawrence has transvalued magic, at least white magic. In this context, it is no longer associated with domination but with spontaneous sensuality and metanoia. Lawrence in effect suggests that old magic can be transformed into new mysticism.<sup>49</sup> He may also be indicating that in the ancient world there was less of a distinction between what we would call magic and mysticism. Ancient magic was less subject to self-conscious and intellectual manipulation and was more spontaneous and body-centered. And yet, the very fact that the passage contains a literary allusion and a reference to memory ("She recalled again") indicates that an intellectual, past-centered consciousness is operating alongside or in oscillation with a more affective, present-centered awareness. The allusive structure of the passage resembles the anal sex scene in *Lady Chatterley* when Connie compares herself and Mellors to Heloise and Abelard, but Ursula is perhaps less insistent than Connie. In short, Ursula's consciousness is not totally anchored in her body. Moreover, it is ironic that Ursula, who has insisted on either male subservience or on absolute sexual equality, seems to revel in the implied superiority of Birkin, the godlike man who looks down on her. Her face is transfigured and is "upturned exactly like a flower, a fresh, luminous flower, glinting faintly golden with the dew of the first light" (313). This golden light, like the star metaphor, has been associated with her spirit, as when Birkin says "I want you to give me—to give your spirit to me—that golden light which is you—which you don't know" (249).<sup>50</sup>

Once Birkin and Ursula have been transfigured, they enact the new mode of being, and the reader is offered a description of the "mysterious life-flow" that Ursula stimulates at the back of Birkin's thighs (305). The reader may well link this "life-motion" to the passionate, dark electricity

experienced by Gerald, but Ursula's realization indicates that the life flow/motion is neither one of passion, nor of love, but a numinous energy associated with apotheosized humanity—what Yoga practitioners call “kundalini energy”:

Unconsciously, with her sensitive finger-tips, she was tracing the backs of his thighs, following some mysterious life-flow there. She had discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself. It was the strange mystery of his life-motion, there, at the back of the thighs, down the flanks. It was a strange reality of his being, the very stuff of being, there in the straight downflow of the thighs. It was here she discovered him one of the sons of God such as were in the beginning of the world, not a man, something other, something more.

This was release at last. She had had lovers, she had known passion. But this was neither love nor passion. It was the daughters of men coming back to the sons of God, the strange inhuman sons of God who are in the beginning.

Her face was now one dazzle of released, golden light. (313)

We have here the language of discovery and wonder that is so prevalent in the mystical passages in *The Rainbow*, yet here there is a greater degree of explanation and analysis. The detailing of the flow and direction of the life energy recalls *Lady Chatterley*. This specification of flow and direction suggests a kind of fluid organics—not mechanics—of the body. Doherty explains in “The Darkest Source” that in Tantric yoga—the Hindu and Buddhist art of sacred eroticism—there is “an elaborate rite of body stroking” that is practiced as a prelude to “rousing the ‘sleeping serpent’ ” (217). Ursula's tracing of the back of Birkin's thighs also recalls the Chinese drawing that traces the goose's life flow; just as Ursula has a tactile knowledge of Birkin's body, the Chinese have a kind of blood knowledge of the goose's body—their somatic centers of consciousness and energy know the goose's centers (89). Similarly, as Ursula traces Birkin's thighs and loins, “a living fire ran through her, from him, darkly. It was a dark flood of electric passion she released from him, drew into herself” (313–14). The tracing has stimulated the flow of kundalini energy, which is stored at the base of the spine, in the seventh chakra. Perhaps because Lawrence was just beginning to experiment with a sacred discourse totally unfamiliar to the reader—that of Tantric yoga—he got caught up in having to explain more than show. The narrator presents Ursula's intuitive realizations and literary allusions rather than

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her felt awareness: she discovers his “life-motion,” which she conceives as “the very stuff of being” and again thinks of him as a “son of God.” In short, the narrator offers the verbal knowledge that issues from the felt experience. A more effective sacralizing strategy might have been to present the feelings that occurred either during or after the encounter. Lawrence valued the shock power of an alien sacred discourse and yet felt a need to educate the reader about its significance. Here, his sacralizing and didactic impulses are at odds. It is important to observe that in their encounter Ursula releases Birkin’s energy and simply draws it into herself while Gudrun had willfully and hyperconsciously drawn in Gerald’s energy to form her rope of knowledge.

What most distinguishes Ursula’s sexual exchange with Birkin from Gerald’s involvements with Gudrun and Minette is its balance. This sense of balance is indicated by the introduction of the terms “circuit” and “poles,” which recall Birkin’s description of vital sexual encounter as a “polarization” and “sex-circuit” (201), and by the peaceful, mutually enriching effect that is produced:

She had established a rich new circuit, a new current of passional electric energy, between the two of them, released from the darkest poles of the body and established in perfect circuit. It was a dark fire of electricity that rushed from him to her, and flooded them both with rich peace, satisfaction. (314)

The explanatory nature of this passage is similar to that containing Birkin’s mythic account of the origins of sex: “The process of singling into individuality resulted into the great polarisation of sex. . . . There is only the pure duality of polarisation. . . . Each acknowledges the perfection of the polarised sex-circuit” (201). But while an explanatory mode is appropriate for Birkin’s account, it is less effective when used to convey an actual sexual encounter. It seems that Lawrence was concerned that the reader make the connection between Birkin’s theory and the couple’s actions. It is one thing to carry over individual terms from one passage to the other; it is another to carry over explanatory and analytic structures.

The rest of the passage describes the mutual flooding that renews both participants by jettisoning them into a new level of energy and awareness. Two key words—“flood” and “foundation”—appear in combination with various terms associated with sacred erotic experiences: ineffable, dark, deep, mysterious, potent, strange, marvellous, perfect, quick, still, glimmer, free. The language then becomes rather didactic when the narrator explains that the energy comes from a source

deeper than the phallus:

She closed her hands over the full, rounded body of his loins, as he stooped over her, she seemed to touch the quick of the mystery of darkness that was bodily him. . . . It was a perfect passing away for both of them, and at the same time the most intolerable accession into being, the marvellous fullness of immediate gratification, overwhelming, outflooding from the Source of the deepest life-force, the darkest, deepest, strangest life-source of the human body, at the back and base of the loins. . . .

There were strange fountains of his body more mysterious and potent than any she had imagined or known, more satisfying, ah, finally, mystically-physically satisfying. She had thought there was no source deeper than the phallic source. And now, behold, from the smitten rock of the man's body, from the strange marvellous flanks and thighs, deeper, further in mystery than the phallic source, came the floods of ineffable darkness and ineffable riches. (315)

Whereas Connie Chatterley's erotic body is a churning sea, Birkin's body is a flooding fountain. The didacticism in this passage again recalls the overly explanatory language in the unconvincing anal sex scene in *Lady Chatterley*, and here Ursula is almost as insistent as Connie. Ursula is not just feeling; she is also defining ("It was a perfect passing away . . . and . . . the most intolerable accession into being"), abstracting ("the quick of the mystery of darkness. . . . Source of the deepest life-force . . . strangest life-source"), comparing ("fountains of his body more mysterious and potent than any she had imagined or known"), and reconsidering ("She had thought there was no source deeper"). Although the earlier passage had linked the sons of God to "the old magic of the Book of Genesis," the language in this passage is mystical, not magical: there is no talk of spells and glamor. This change might suggest that the old magic has been metamorphosed into modern mysticism, but the didacticism undermines the revitalizing effect that Lawrence is aiming at here.<sup>51</sup>

Another "son of God" experience soon follows, and the narrator offers a brief description of the exchange. The passage contains the mystical language of flooding, swooning, lapsing out, mystery, mystic surety, awe, and riches; moreover, the portrayal of their movements is concrete and vivid:

Her arms closed round him again, her hands spread upon his shoulders, moving slowly there, moving slowly on his body, down his back slowly, with a strange recurrent, rhythmic motion, yet

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moving slowly down, pressing mysteriously over his loins, over his flanks. The sense of the awfulness of riches that could never be impaired flooded her mind like a swoon, a death in most marvellous possession, mystic-sure. She possessed him so utterly and intolerably, that she herself lapsed out. (316)

In this passage, the word “possession” is transvalued: as Ursula possesses Birkin, she is possessed by the moment and so dispossesses (surrenders) herself. The unifying effect of the encounter is stressed by the repeated use of the plural pronoun: “they woke again from the pure swoon”; “they decided . . . to write their resignations from the world of work” (316). Although the decision is joint, Birkin, the wordsmith, controls the actual writing of the resignations. In resolving to leave their jobs, they shift their affiliation from the institutional-societal “they/them” to the intimate, sacred “we/us.” As they reenter their car and drive on, Ursula realizes that they belong to a divine realm, symbolized by darkness and fate, which simultaneously encompasses them and ensures their continuing relationship. This fate is “beautiful” and fully “accept[ed]” because it springs from human desire, which seeks out all forms of beauty (318). The narrator insists that their “mystic knowledge” is “full,” not partial, because its source is the entire body, but the didacticism of the previous erotic passages has probably undermined the reader’s belief in this assertion (318).

In the episode that follows, the language of mysticism gives way to a blend of magic and mysticism. This blending indicates that the purely mystical mode of consciousness achieved through touch cannot be totally maintained when contact is ended. As Birkin drives, he is figured as having two modes of consciousness operating simultaneously. The primary mode is Egyptian, the secondary mode Greek; the latter taps the energy and awareness of the lower body, the former that of the body above the waist:

He sat still like an Egyptian Pharaoh, driving the car. He felt as if he were seated in immemorial potency, like the great carven statues of real Egypt, as real and as fulfilled with subtle strength, as these are, with a vague inscrutable smile on the lips. He knew what it was to have the strange and magical current of force in his back and loins, and down his legs, force so perfect that it stayed him immobile, and left his face subtly, mindlessly smiling. He knew what it was to be awake and potent in that other basic mind, the deepest physical mind. And from this source he had a pure and magic control, magical, mystical, a force in darkness, like electricity. . . .

Nothing more was said. 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 Greek, 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. (318)

The blatant and precise mapping of the historical references and explanations onto Birkin's body undercuts the intended vivifying impact of the passage. By the time he wrote *Lady Chatterley*, Lawrence had evidently concluded that organic figures are generally more effective—because less logocentric and distracting—as revitalizing devices than are historical and literary analogies; in the later novel, the analogies have dropped out of nearly all the erotic encounters (with the notable exception of the anal sex scene). The Egyptian consciousness corresponds to the first three chakras (sacrum, genitals, navel), the Greek consciousness to the last four (heart, throat, forehead, crown).<sup>52</sup> In Lawrence's simplified version of the chakras in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, the Egyptian mode refers to the lower or "first plane of the unconscious," and the Greek to the upper or "second plane of the unconscious." These planes are also called "fields of consciousness." Even when Birkin stops the car and walks into a "lighted, published place," he "remained dark and magic, the living silence seemed the body of reality in him, subtle, potent, indiscoverable" (319). Ursula experiences him as "the being never to be revealed, awful in its potency, mystic and real" (319). It is the blending of the Greek and Egyptian forms of consciousness that explains the blending of "magic" and "mystic." Birkin's uninterpretable and ineffable state of being enables her to remain similarly singular, mysterious, "liberated" and "fulfilled" (319).

But Ursula's subsequent reverie indicates that the altered state of consciousness that she is experiencing is not the ultimate state, for that is only achieved in actual darkness and through touch:

She would have to touch him. To speak, to see, was nothing. It was a travesty to look and to comprehend the man there. Darkness and silence must fall perfectly on her, then she could know mystically, in unrevealed touch. She must lightly, mindlessly connect with him, have the knowledge which is death of knowledge, the reality of surety in not-knowing. (319)

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For Ursula to look at Birkin is a “travesty” because the ultimate knowledge is a tactile nonknowledge that offers nonverbal and nonvisual surety, not subject to the distortions of language and appearance. It is purely mystical knowledge (beyond knowledge) without the tincture of magical awareness, that is, of awareness shaped by will or intellect. But the very abstractness of this passage—“It was a travesty. . . . She must lightly, mindlessly connect, have the knowledge which is death of knowledge”—demonstrates that Ursula does not presently possess the knowledge she values. Then, as she sits next to Birkin in the car, she too acquires a mode of consciousness resembling Birkin’s Egyptian mode; and when they simultaneously possess this sensual awareness, they embody the star metaphor: “She sat in a fullness and a pure potency that was like apathy, mindless and immobile. She was next to him, and hung in a pure rest, as a star is hung, balanced unthinkably” (319). Since it is the potency that precedes passionate action, it is apathetic; and since it is the potentiality of desire, it contains expectancy, which will eventually produce action. This expectancy or anticipation, which was the quality possessed by the medieval Brangwens in *The Rainbow* (9), is indicated by the use of the subjunctive and the infinitive in the following passage:

Still there remained a dark lambency of anticipation. She would touch him. With perfect fine finger-tips of reality she would touch the reality in him, the suave, pure, untranslatable reality of his loins of darkness. To touch, mindlessly in darkness to come in pure touching upon the living reality of him, his suave perfect loins and thighs of darkness, this was her sustaining anticipation.

And he too waited in the magical steadfastness of suspense, for her to take this knowledge of him as he had taken it of her. He knew her darkly, with the fulness of dark knowledge. Now she would know him and he too would be liberated. He would be night-free, like an Egyptian, steadfast in perfectly suspended equilibrium, pure mystic nodality of physical being. They would give each other this star-equilibrium which alone is freedom. (319)

It is touch that shifts consciousness from mystical–magical to purely mystical, from “the magical steadfastness of suspense” associated with expectancy to the “pure mystic nodality of physical being” and the “star-equilibrium” associated with contact. Thus, the Egyptian mode is associated with both the purely mystical and the mixed magical–mystical modes. And yet the supposed shift to a mystical mode is again undermined by the passage’s exceeding abstractness.

The couple's relationship is consummated in Sherwood Forest in "pure night, with shadows of trees like realities of other, nightly being" (320).<sup>53</sup> The numinous presence of the trees recalls several erotic episodes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Ursula and Birkin become totally unselfconscious and experience each other through their feeling bodies:

Quenched, inhuman, his fingers upon her unrevealed nudity were the fingers of silence upon silence, the body of mysterious night upon the body of mysterious night, the night masculine and feminine, never to be seen with the eye, or known with the mind, only known as a palpable revelation of living otherness.

She had her desire of him, she touched, she received the maximum of unspeakable communication in touch, dark, subtle, positively silent, a magnificent gift and give again, a perfect acceptance and yielding, a mystery, the reality of that which can never be known, vital, sensual reality that can never be transmuted into mind content, but remains outside, living body of darkness and silence and subtlety, the mystic body of reality. She had her desire fulfilled. He had his desire fulfilled. For she was to him what he was to her, the immemorial magnificence of the mystic, palpable, real otherness. (320)

An oscillation of giving and accepting is stressed. And revelation is now neither ocularcentric, nor logocentric; it is purely felt, purely mystical. Each has been absorbed by the night but not by each other—they meet through touch. But only when the couple are huddled together on the Noahlike ship from Dover to Ostend does Birkin experience "utter and absolute peace" and Ursula's heart glow with "the effulgence of a paradise unknown and unrealised" (388).

The final sex scene involving Birkin and Ursula suggests that even degrading eroticism has its value. Degradation is linked to shamelessness, bestiality, unrestraint. It is an affirmation of the animal side of human nature and is degrading in the sense that it taps a pre-social form of consciousness and energy—a grade below a socialized human consciousness. The scene's language recalls the honeymoon episode between Will and Anna in *The Rainbow* and the anal sex episode in *Lady Chatterley*. The passage presents Ursula's reflections on one or more degrading sexual encounters that they have already experienced or that they might experience in the future:

They might do as they liked—this she realized as she went to sleep. How could anything that gave one satisfaction be excluded? What

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was degrading?—Who cared? Degrading things were real, with a different reality. And he was so unabashed and unrestrained. Wasn't it rather horrible, a man who could be so soulful and spiritual, now to be so—she balked at her own thoughts and memories: then she added—so bestial? So bestial, they two!—so degraded! She winced.—But after all, why not? She exulted as well. Why not be bestial, and go the whole round of experience? She exulted in it. She was bestial. How good it was to be really shameful! There would be no shameful things she had not experienced.—Yet she was unabashed, she was herself. Why not?—She was free, when she knew everything, and no dark shameful things were denied her. (413)

It is significant that the passage emphasizes the bestial, not the destructive, as satisfying. “[T]he whole round of experience” and the “dark shameful things” do not include the annihilating sexuality that culminates in death, although this sadomasochism clearly gave Gerald and Gudrun some satisfaction. Given the absence of any terms referring to the mechanical or the destructive, the bestial here is aligned with the creative side of the life force. This creative side may, however, include some destructive elements, since the logic of the novel has been to distinguish two types of destruction: one which negates life, and one which ultimately serves creative, positive living. But the passage is more rhetorical than evocative: it focuses on Ursula's judgments, questions, and assertions, rather than on her feelings.

We have seen that much of the dramatic ineffectiveness of the sex scenes in the sacralizing phase is due to the sustained use of abstract, definitional, analytical, explanatory, and rhetorical language. Rather than narrating Ursula and Birkin's feelings, the narrator presents the thoughts engendered by those feelings. In the vivifying passages in *Lady Chatterley* and in *The Rainbow* we saw that abstract terms are used sparingly and are often dispersed among a variety of concrete descriptors and figures. In *Women in Love*, in contrast, concreteness and specificity are at a minimum, and while these qualities are linked conceptually to revitalization, they are actually more frequent in the mortification passages. It is as if the very strength and abundance of Lawrence's fury could not but pour itself out into concrete, specific descriptions that belied any conceptual linkage to abstraction. The very vividness of the destructive scenes may even be counterproductive since the reader may find them luridly alive and attractive. On the other hand, despite the theoretical basis for associating revitalization with concreteness, Lawrence's weakened faith in the positive transformation of the reader could not engender the kind or quality

of energy necessary for producing concrete, specific passages with vivifying effects. Instead, he had to resort to forcing the descriptions and using didactic language to compensate for the lack of positive, creative energy. He was also grappling with how to use obscure sacred discourses, knowing that their very obscurity could both aid and hinder his vitalizing aim. In *The Rainbow*, a better balance of obscurity and familiarity was reached because while Kabbalah draws on familiar Biblical expressions, it uses them in startlingly strange ways. In writing *Women in Love*, Lawrence seemed to realize that the yogic discourse he had selected ran the risk of being merely intellectually baffling, rather than emotionally engaging, and so he chose to explain his terms. This explanatory act, while increasing the comprehensibility and potential impact of the terms, also produced the countereffect of overloading the text with logocentric structures.