

MATERNITY, ABJECTION, LOVE, AND REVOLUTIONARY LANGUAGE: A
KRISTEVAN READING OF D. H. LAWRENCE'S NOVELS

by

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(Under the Direction of Adam Parkes)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores Kristeva's theoretical work on individuation, relationships, encounters with horror, and art and artisanship, as they are anticipated and dramatized in the novels of D. H. Lawrence. In contrast to the modernist and feminist scholars in the last few decades who have criticized both Lawrence and Kristeva for an apparent tendency towards essentialism, in this project I counter that both novelist and psychoanalyst attempt to destroy such binary oppositions as man / woman, body / mind, and emotion / reason, even as both make statements that at first may appear to be self-contradictory. By examining the novels of Lawrence alongside Kristeva's theories, I show points where Lawrence's work can benefit from a psychoanalytic approach that relies on more neo-Freudian and neo-Lacanian modes of understanding. The arrangement of the dissertation's chapters will follow a developmental model, beginning with Lawrence's characters in their childhood encounters with the mother, moving through their efforts to forge separate identity while encountering the universal horror of the abject, exploring their desires to merge with another in romantic union, and finally discussing their perspectives on motherhood and their roles as artists, both conventional and revolutionary.

INDEX WORDS: D. H. Lawrence, Julia Kristeva, modernism, psychoanalysis, French feminism, abject, subject-in-process, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family: my mother, who is brave and genuine; my father, whose integrity I am always trying to emulate; my brother Jeff, who meets people where they are; and my sister Rhea, whose sharp tongue and tender heart I will always miss. Finally, I dedicate my dissertation to Damon: my co-conspirator, my conscience, my childhood friend, my sounding board, my inspiration, my love, and my complement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of one of the oddest and most beautiful love scenes in all of modernist literature, the “Water-Party” chapter from D. H. Lawrence’s novel *Women in Love* (1920), Rupert Birkin and Ursula Brangwen have their first passionate sexual encounter, a union that the novel declares is “as inevitable as death, beyond question” (180). That this romantic interlude happens immediately after the drowning of Diana Crich and her would-be rescuer Doctor Brindell seems to be no accident, given the close proximity of love and death that characterizes the entire novel, and in fact almost all of Lawrence’s fictional oeuvre. Birkin’s response to their tryst illustrates how powerfully these seemingly opposite forces roil within Lawrence’s characters: “Then, satisfied and shattered, fulfilled and destroyed, he went home away from her, drifting vaguely through the darkness, lapsed into the old fire of burning passion” (180).

For these characters, love entails both fascination and disgust, attraction and repulsion, with one emotion often following immediately on the heels of the other. Appropriately, in the same chapter, Ursula leaves Birkin and returns to the now-drained lake, with its “horrible raw banks of clay, that smelled of raw rottenish water” (181); there the two drowned bodies have been found intertwined in a manner that eerily mimics a lovers’ embrace. For Ursula too, then, love, passion, and sexual desire are bound together closely with death, decay, and disgust. Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich’s relationship is no less troubled: tellingly, their sexual affair commences just after his father’s funeral, when Gerald comes to her bedroom with the foul-smelling clay of the grave still clinging to his skin and clothes. In almost all of Lawrence’s

canon – which in effect dramatizes the French phrase for orgasm, *le petit mort* (“the little death”) – love is likewise very much like a death, whether that death means a literal, physical dying, as in the case of Gerald, or a more metaphorical obliteration, as in the “death” of the individual selves of Ursula and Birkin, when the two become one.

Lawrence’s depiction of the close relationship between these two apparently dissimilar forces – union and obliteration – recalls Freud’s account of the sex and death drives, which he views as so closely related as to be sometimes indistinguishable. These contradictory but also corresponding impulses are central to Freud’s theory, especially when he claims in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) that the human species is characterized by a “struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction” (119). Such a juxtaposition existed during several important moments in Lawrence’s own life – particularly his engagement to Louie Burrows, which commenced a mere few days before his mother’s death. He wrote after her funeral to his fiancée: “It certainly feels like one of the kingdoms of death, where I am. It is true, I have died, a bit of me – but there’s plenty left for you” (*CL* 1 199). Julia Kristeva finds the relationship between these two drives to be more complex than Freud does, asserting in her work *Tales of Love* (1987) that: “if Eros opposes Thanatos they are not evenly matched in their struggle. For Thanatos is pure while Eros has, since the beginning, been permeated with Thanatos, the most deep-seated drive being the death drive” (31).

Lawrence’s own ambivalent relationship with psychoanalytic theory – particularly Freud – is well documented. In *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921), Lawrence presents his most sustained critique of Freud’s work, acknowledging his initial hope (and simultaneous anxiety) that psychoanalysis might finally explain or uncover the unconscious, that “stream of hell which undermined [his] adolescence” (203). However, after Freud’s journey “into the cavern

of darkness, which is sleep and unconsciousness,” Lawrence laments that instead of illumination, we have been left with only “a huge slimy serpent of sex, and heaps of excrement, and a myriad repulsive little horrors spawned between sex and excrement” (203). Eschewing the idea that psychoanalysis is the “talking cure” that will erase our psychic ills, Lawrence calls it the “white garb of [...] therapeutic cant” (202). Nevertheless, in a letter written after the publication of *Sons and Lovers* (1913), he betrays some belief in the cathartic potential of writing, one version of what might be called this “talking cure”: “One sheds ones [*sic*] sicknesses in books – repeats and presents again ones emotions, to be master of them” (CL 2 90). Whether or not such mastery is really possible, again and again Lawrence’s writing seems to demonstrate a practical faith in the beneficial act of uttering language, as the highly autobiographical *Sons and Lovers* illustrates.

Indeed, he spent much of his career attempting, through literary means, to represent the distortion and repression of sexuality he had experienced at the hands of religion, rationalism, and his own upbringing – particularly his intimate, yet troubled relationship with his mother, which had an extreme effect on his romantic attachments to other women.¹ Lawrence had not been introduced to Freud’s theory before writing *Sons and Lovers*, yet he had for years before “been in lucid possession of the idea that his mother’s love for him had damaged him” (Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years* 443).² We can reasonably speculate along with Worthen that it likely provided “some comfort and reassurance to find that he had been thinking along the same lines as a revolutionary European intellectual” (443). All the same, as so many of Lawrence’s sentiments indicate, he was explicitly skeptical about Freudian psychoanalysis, protesting its

¹ We can see this clearly in his relationship with Jessie Chambers, which was fraught with conflict because of his mother’s disapproval and his own sense that he could not at the same time love a woman spiritually and physically. Lawrence’s portrayal of the love triangle among Paul Morel, Miriam Leivers, and Clara Dawes in *Sons and Lovers* dramatizes this apparent need to separate sexual love from spiritual love – largely because he associated his mother with the latter. For his part, Lawrence wrote of her simply: “She is my first, great love. She was a wonderful, rare woman – you do not know” (CL 1 195).

² He writes in an October 5, 1913, letter to Mitchell Kennerly, “I never did read Freud, but I have heard about him since I was in Germany” (CL 2 80).

overemphasis on sexual dysfunction and on the intellect as opposed to the deeply physical, “passional” self (*FTU* 111-12).

In his ambivalence, Lawrence anticipated the generations of scholars since who have found Freud’s theories both compelling and frustrating. Of these, Julia Kristeva’s reconsideration of Freudianism seems to remedy some of what Lawrence found objectionable. Kristeva does credit Freud with “raising the veil of mystery the nineteenth century had held over sexuality,” thus revealing “sexuality as the nexus between language and society, drives and the socio-symbolic order” (*RPL* 84). She asserts that Freud’s discovery of the unconscious in particular paved the way for a new kind of literature, one divorced from the old, “fetishized” poetic conventions, that “could not only be made radical, but could also have the objective and social impact it was aiming for” (*RPL* 84): a revolution in signification. In her own work – particularly such texts as *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), *Powers of Horror* (1982), and *Tales of Love* (1987) – Kristeva expands the discipline to include what she believes was missing in its first incarnation: a dynamic model of subjectivity, a study of language’s crucial role in identity formation and in relationships, and a reexamination of the pre-Oedipal drives. She resembles Lawrence not only in her revisionist project vis-à-vis psychoanalysis but also in the very language she uses to pursue it: revolution, flux, separation, merging. Kristeva also identifies an important missing piece in Freud’s theory, commenting that though the mother is an important figure in traditional psychoanalysis, she is often the object rather than the subject of study, and thus, “among the patients analyzed by Freud, one searches in vain for mothers and *their* problems” (*Tales of Love* 254, emphasis added).

The mother’s perspective represents a gap that Kristeva attempts to address in works like *Tales of Love*, which speaks explicitly of her own experience of pregnancy and childbirth, and

Black Sun (1989), which discusses melancholia as it affected several of her female patients who were also mothers. More importantly, Kristeva suggests that Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic paradigms are misguided in setting up the paternal function as the hostile presence which drives the infant out of the safety of the womb and into signification. Rather, she suggests, the maternal function prefigures these paternal threats because the logic of signification is already operating within the infant's experience of the mother's body and its materiality, even before he or she becomes a speaking subject, because the mother gives but can also withhold nourishment, love, and her very presence. Watching his mother's slow death, Lawrence confirmed the lingering power of her physical body when he wrote to Louie Burrows: "My heart winces to the echo of my mothers [*sic*] pulse" (*CL* 1 195). He continued to acknowledge the importance of the mother's experience through his many literary depictions of women who carry that title, including Gertrude Morel, Kate Leslie, and Anna Brangwen.

In addition to a shared criticism of Freud and a common concern with motherhood, points of juncture between Lawrentian novels and Kristevan psychoanalysis abound. A side-by-side examination of their works reveals a dialogue between their ideas that is even more rewarding than traditional Freudian readings – which tend to focus rather narrowly on male characters' "mother troubles" – because of the intriguing combination of congruities and incongruities that emerges. This study will endeavor such an exploration, by considering Kristeva's theories in light of the fictional and theoretical works of Lawrence and vice versa, in order to discover their points of correlation and contention. By doing so, I hope to show that Lawrence's fiction dramatizes Kristeva's theories as often as it complicates and problematizes those ideas. It is telling but not surprising that, like Lawrence's imperative to "shed one's sicknesses" through

writing, Kristeva's almost identical language declares: "Literature has always been the most explicit realization of the speaking subject's condition" (*RPL* 82).

Lawrence's novels often comprise extended family and individual narratives, and because Kristeva's theory works from a similar model of progressive self-development, this study will be organized accordingly, in terms of the life stages described by psychoanalysis. I first will discuss the mother's early role in the child's formation of identity, followed by his or her first encounter with what is other and thus threatens the borders of the self. Next, I will show how facing this abjection is a necessary precondition of entering into a love relationship with another. Because many of these unions lead to marriage and children, the chapter that follows will accordingly explore Lawrentian mothers' experience of bearing and rearing children. The final chapter will investigate the creative (as opposed to procreative) efforts of Lawrence's characters and show how these artistic aspirations function both as political statements and as attempts to articulate the unspeakable.

Lawrence and Kristeva

Building on the ideas of both Freud and Lacan, Kristeva emphasizes the intimate relationship between language and selfhood, addressing not only the child's perspective of individuation but also the mother's experience of birth and separation from the child. In *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, Lawrence argues that identity, and therefore personality, comes from the conscious self. On the other hand, he posits that the infant inhabits another kind of subjectivity that is not "personal." Instead, Lawrence describes the stage of infancy as a time when "life bubbles up in us, prior to any mentality" (212). Because it is preconscious, it is an experience that cannot be verbalized. His account of infancy resembles Kristeva's description of

the semiotic, a pre-Oedipal state that precedes the infant's entrance into signification and reappears later in those aspects of language that exceed denotative meaning, like prosody and puns. Lawrence likewise insists on a life force that resists direct expression, and he uses the same metaphor Kristeva habitually does, in order to suggest that this vitality "bubbles up" in various ways as the individual matures, disrupting the smooth surface of self-consciousness and rationality.

For Lawrence, language figures centrally in the process of coming to selfhood, as he argues in his foreword to *Women in Love*:

Man struggles with his unborn needs and fulfillment. New unfoldings struggle up in torment in him, as buds struggle forth from the midst of a plant. Any man of real individuality tries to know and to understand what is happening, even in himself, as he goes along. This struggle for verbal consciousness should not be left out in art. It is a very great part of life. It is not superimposition of a theory. It is the passionate struggle into conscious being. (*WL* viii)

This struggle to individuate finds its way into this novel in the form of Ursula's and Birkin's corresponding attempts to establish distinct selves but also achieve an amatory connection with one another. Yet, more widely, it is also a feature of almost all of Lawrence's other fiction. We might think of Paul Morel's wrangling with Miriam – a relationship, he reassures Clara, in which "it's only words that go between us" (*SL* 403).

Daniel Albright contends that Lawrence's "characters are engaged in a perpetual struggle of self-definition; their main business is the determination of exactly where they stop" (22). These individuals must also protect the self from the simultaneously irresistible and annihilating potential of a close relationship with another. This simultaneous preoccupation with self-

definition and the yearning to lose oneself means that maturation is no simple task for Lawrentian characters. As they make their way towards effective separation from their parents (especially the mother), successful amorous relationships with others, and productive life pursuits (both creative and procreative), they encounter entities and persons who inspire a complex admixture of disgust and fascination. They must engage with and overcome this sense of abjection in order to become mature individuals capable of experiencing love, bearing children, and articulating themselves through words and art.

Perhaps the most important belief that both Kristeva and Lawrence have in common arises out of their radical rethinking of art. In similar ways, they both champion a dynamic model of identity that is, like revolutionary writing, provisional, fluid, and constantly in the process of becoming something else. In his short essay “Why the Novel Matters” (1925), Lawrence asserts, “All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute” (2272). He goes on to say specifically of individual identity: “In all this change, I maintain a certain integrity. But woe betide me if I try to put my finger on it. If I say of myself, I am this, I am that!—then, if I stick to it, I turn into a stupid fixed thing like a lamp-post. I shall never know wherein lies my integrity, my me. I *can* never know it” (2272). Lawrence’s model of flux finds its counterpart in Kristeva’s corresponding theory of the *sujet en procès*, a phrase that contains a French pun on the word *procès*: the individual is constantly “in the process [of becoming]” as well as “in crisis” and “on trial.” Kristeva makes use of both senses of the word, showing how the subject never gains a fixed, permanent sense of selfhood but rather is always evolving into something else. For Kristeva, this evolution happens through a kind of recurrent internal trial in which the subject is always questioning, testing, and discarding old identities, beliefs, and modes of expression and then adopting new ones. Each stance or identity is then negated in favor of further provisional

identities, and then negated again, and replaced with new models – and the process continues infinitely.

Through his life and art, Lawrence undoubtedly epitomized this model of the destabilized self, and it seems an apt characterization of a figure who endured social, personal, and even legal trials³ – yet through constant rebellion, contentiousness, and self-questioning never stagnated in terms of his thinking and writing. Though his career included some arguably problematic phases in which he did experiment with what seem to be misogynistic, fascist, and even violent philosophies (a novel like *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) or a short story like “The Woman Who Rode Away” (1925), whose ending Millett famously called “the death fuck” (410), immediately come to mind as specific examples of his more troubling fiction). Thus, readers have struggled to ascertain his ultimate set of values, yet his relentless self-revision and contradiction have made such a determination famously difficult.

Both Kristeva and Lawrence argue that art is the principle instrument of *revolt* or *flux*, though neither offers a comforting vision of art. The repeated negation of old identities, which Kristeva and Lawrence endorse, does create uneasiness, and both figures acknowledge this discomfort as a necessary condition of existence. Lawrence embraces dissonance, exclaiming: “Life cannot pass without these ruptures, severances, cataclysms; pain is a living reality, not merely a deathly. Why haven’t we the courage of life-pains?” (*PTU* 221). Similarly, Kristeva argues that a destabilized identity does create an anxiety that one must become accustomed to, though she is careful to distinguish her use of the word “anxiety” from its more negative association with neurosis. She theorizes that being able to keep oneself in the midst of restless

³ In yet another connection between Kristevan theory and D. H. Lawrence, *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship*, Adam Parkes alludes to the actual obscenity trial precipitated by the publication of *The Rainbow*, using the same language as Kristeva does in delineating the subject-in-process/on trial when he describes “Lawrence’s understanding of his relationship with the British public as theatrical and antagonistic, as an ongoing *trial*” (39, emphasis added).

self-questioning – a state of conflict that nevertheless can impart a certain amount of pleasure or jouissance – protects the individual from becoming either a paralyzed, pathological depressive or a robotic, complacent consumer. This is where art – poetic speech, in Kristeva’s parlance – becomes a dynamic force in shaping the subject (RSS 105). In her description of the fluid identity of the subject-in-process, Kristeva identifies the artist’s role, asserting: “Midway between these two solutions” – deathly melancholia or mindless consumerism – “lie intellectual works and art. These are the actual sites of this anxiety and revolt. The artist’s goal is to find the representation of this state of anxiety. It’s not a question of claiming that this does not exist or to accept living in marginality, but to represent this revolt in order to survive” (RSS 105).

Kristeva’s phrasing, in describing this transformative capacity of writing, is almost identical to Lawrence’s wording. Like him, Kristeva contends that:

In his work, the artist performs the “right” kind of violence: by appropriating what lies outside him, he achieves a balance between the self and the world. This very delicate alchemy, whose value we often underestimate, is an act of creation that takes place precisely at this interstice between the individual and the world—a privileged space where metaphor, metonymy, and other rhetorical figures come into play. The artist’s role is not to make a faithful copy of reality but to shape our attitude towards reality. This balance, this harmony, this genuine act of revolt is not about domination or concealment, but about the interstice, about appropriating and being possessed, about the resonance between the self and the world. (RSS 122)⁴

⁴ The violence Kristeva alludes to here seems to resemble that which Freud describes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: “I take up the standpoint that the tendency to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition in man, and I come back now to the statement that it constitutes the most powerful obstacle to culture. [...] The natural instinct of aggressiveness in man, the hostility of each one against all and of all against each one,

To be sure, if we return to Lawrence's original quotation about his "sicknesses," we can see how his very choice of words has larger implications for an productive talking cure. As Jeremy Tambling puts it in *Confession: sexuality, sin, the subject*: "Lawrence 'repeats' his emotions confessionally. The word, fitting Freud's repetition compulsion in *Beyond the pleasure principle*[,] suggests that the aim of mastery is bound to be flawed; that the 'sicknesses' remain" (158). Because these conflicts are recurrently operating within the individual, whether "confessed" or not, any salutary effects of the talking cure tend to be ephemeral. This is why the idea of being "in process" is so crucial to both Kristeva's and Lawrence's ideas: identity cannot be fixed because it is in a continual state of evolution. Kristeva indicates this mutable quality of identity in her appropriation of the word *revolt*, drawing upon the word's etymology, which encompasses the complex meanings of "revolve," "overthrow," and "overturn." Kristeva's aesthetics requires the literary artist, as Lawrence puts it, to "shed [old] sicknesses" and adopt new identities through the revolutionary use of words.

Finally, Kristeva and Lawrence view sexuality in intriguingly consonant ways, if only because both seem to concur on the importance of language in erotic experience. For her part, Kristeva does not aim to "rehabilitate" sexuality, but rather to shift the way it is verbally expressed: "to improve the patient's ability to articulate his pattern of response, to enable him to control and process (*métabolise*) his sexual feelings" (*IBWL* 48). This characterization of sexuality seems to apply particularly well to a writer whose frank depiction of physical love aroused such public outrage. Kristeva insists that:

psychoanalysis is neither a manifesto for sexual liberation nor a method of enforcing some sort of "normal" sexuality. [...] [Sexuality] is a central part of the

opposes this program of civilization" (49). For Kristeva, such violence is appropriately transmuted through art, and specifically literary art, into a form that articulates these instincts and drives productively.

human being viewed as an open system, and when it goes wrong, suffering is the result, suffering to which psychoanalysis responds. In doing so psychoanalysis reveals the intrinsic perversity of human sexuality. “Perverse” is no doubt too pejorative a word to apply with a clear conscience to the commoner forms of sexuality. Yet it is accurate: we are narcissistic, incestuous, masochistic, sadistic, patricidal, and naturally attracted to or repelled by physical and moral types different from our own, hence aggressive toward others. But we can “make do” with human nature as it is. In any event we have no other choice. (*IBWL* 48)

Lawrence’s unwillingness to either sugarcoat or debase sexuality indicates his similar predisposition; while at points he admittedly condemned masturbation and hardcore pornography, he nonetheless also wrote that there was “nothing wrong with sexual feelings in themselves, so long as they are straightforward and not sneaking or sly” (*PO* 240). He indicts both modern vulgarity and Victorian morality as our most sinister “trick[s] of doing dirt on sex” (241).

Readers of Lawrence’s novels have long noted his novels’ preoccupation with both normal and “aberrant” sexualities, gender roles, and family relationships. Whether he was conscious of it or not, his literary concerns would appear to have originated to some extent from his own struggles in those areas. The task of critics, then, has been to try to divine how his literal biography relates to his literary representations of maturation, relationship, and artistic expression. Kristeva’s revisionary psychoanalytic texts can help in our understanding because they investigate the psyche as it negotiates the processes of individuation, abjection, sexual merging with another, motherhood, and aesthetic creation. In doing so, these theories provide a narrative to account for some of the more problematic or ambiguous issues in Lawrence’s longer

fiction. These include the novels' alternating homoeroticism and homophobia, their occasional brutal violence, their complex family relationships, their depictions of characters' struggles to achieve stable selfhood, their frequent moments of horror and revulsion, and their ambivalent romantic relationships.

Psychoanalytic and Feminist Criticism of Lawrence

Despite Lawrence's censure of psychoanalysis, scholars of his work have not been reluctant to use its approach in looking at his fiction. Many have pointed out how early-childhood dynamics, particularly those that exist between the child and the parents, seem to determine much of what happens in the Lawrentian individual's later adult relationships. Thus, psychoanalytic theory has occupied a prominent place in scholarly treatments of his work, and has warred with biographical and historical criticism as the preferred approach to what some see as the classic Oedipal novel. From the beginning, with explicitly psychological studies like John Middleton Murry's 1931 work *Son of Woman*, numerous publications have explored Lawrence's novels in light of his relationship with his mother, his attitudes toward women, and his unconventional union with a wife and mother of three who left her family to marry him. Because of scholars' tendency to focus on these issues, feminist critics of Lawrence in particular have been careful about how they positioned themselves in relation to his work. One of the first such readings of Lawrence, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), discusses the novels in terms of their depiction of the myth of woman as other. In the equally famous work *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millett presents an even more strident indictment of Lawrence's alleged misogyny and fascism – a reading which has profoundly influenced the academy's less-than-laudatory perception of him for the last four decades.

As these studies indicate, the thorny psychological issues that continually surface in the novels offer a wealth of raw material for analysis, particularly for feminist critics. In *D. H. Lawrence and the Devouring Mother*, for instance, Judith Ruderman examines the ways in which Lawrence's psychological issues informed his leadership politics in the later years of his literary career, couching her study in the psychoanalytic terms of his coexistent "longing for merger and [...] fear of merger" (148). Cornelia Nixon takes a more historical approach to his work in *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn Against Women*, identifying what she sees as a fear of female power that emerged early in his career. In *Mothering Modernity: Feminism, Modernism, and the Maternal Muse*, Marylu Hill examines the importance of mothers in *The Rainbow* (a departure from the usual choice of text, *Sons and Lovers*). Barbara Mensch adds to the debate by suggesting that accusations of fascism against Lawrence must be considered in light of the difficulty in defining this term, the history of its use (which was initially not necessarily pejorative), and the distinctions that must be made among fascism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism. In all of these critical treatments of Lawrence, the authors have rightly identified the sense his works (and his life itself) give of being motivated by complex psychological dynamics. These works likewise represent attempts to reconcile the art and life of a writer who ultimately resists pigeonholing.

Critics continue to theorize about a constellation of troublesome questions in Lawrence's work. For instance, how should we understand his attitude toward women – are they the bearers of a new, life-affirming consciousness (as in *The Rainbow*), the practitioners of a smothering love that spells death (as in *Sons and Lovers*), or symbolic figures who should stand aside as men reclaim their power through a politics of military leadership (as in *The Plumed Serpent*)? How do we account for Lawrence's periodically violent revulsion toward homosexuality, bearing in mind

that he also produced such lyrical and even tender scenes of homoeroticism as the ones that exist in *The White Peacock* and *Women in Love*? What do we make of his frequent reversals and re-reversals of earlier literary, psychological, sexual, and political positions he has espoused? Should we consider him an experimental modernist, a misplaced Victorian novelist, or a misogynistic polemicist? It is no wonder that many studies of modernism that deal with Lawrence at any length include a disclaimer that justifies their choice to write about him.

The critical stakes for the feminist psychoanalytic critic are even more perilous. In the introduction to her study, *D. H. Lawrence and the Paradoxes of Psychic Life*, Barbara Ann Schapiro provides a kind of apologia of the relationship between “Lawrence and This (Female Psychoanalytic) Reader.” She confesses her chagrin at one particular point in his unfinished novel *Mr. Noon* (1921), at which the narrator suddenly expostulates: “Therefore you sniffing mongrel bitch of a reader, you can’t sniff out any specific why or any specific wherefore, with your carrion-smelling psycho-analysing nose, because there is no why and wherefore” (MN 260). Schapiro goes on: “But Mr. Lawrence, I want to protest, you yourself are supremely interested in the whys and wherefores, in all the intricate play of conflicting passions and multiple, competing motivations beneath the conscious surface of our lives” (Schapiro 1). While she makes an important point about his self-contradictory method, Schapiro’s psychoanalytic study – and, I would argue, Millett’s even more well-known one – is not Lacanian but relational, and it thus lacks the emphasis on language that I believe is crucial to any reading of Lawrence’s work.

As Robert Burden rightly observes (in a chapter appropriately named “*Sons and Lovers and the Possibility of a Psychoanalytic Criticism*”), in D. H. Lawrence, psychoanalytic criticism must contend with a writer whose life and work existed in complex relationship to one another. Critics have always been anxious to discover how closely or loosely the novels reflect the

biography. Lawrence paradoxically provides a species of answer to that question in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), insisting, “An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day” (8). He goes on to utter the oft-quoted lines:

The artist usually sets out – or used to – to point a moral and adorn a tale. The tale, however, points the other way, as a rule. Two blankly opposing morals, the artist’s and the tale’s. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it. (8)

To be clear, this study is intended to be neither a diagnosis of the author nor an attempt to “save” the novels from him. Rather, I hope to explore the ways in which Lawrence’s work – not merely its content, but also, in many ways, its formal innovations – practices the kind of art and subjectivity that Kristeva describes as revolutionary, even while it also points up some perils and potentially troubling implications of these models of selfhood and aesthetics. Lawrence’s unconventional use of poetic and metaphorical language demands that we not only pay attention to the psychology and relationships of characters but also, and equally fully, that we attend to *how* these dynamics are depicted by the author’s language: his repetitions, contradictions, puns, and prosody.

The critical conversation about Lawrence’s writing has long suffered under a reductionist tendency to search for the “one meaning” of his work.⁵ Even shortly after his death, in 1932, Catherine Carswell noted critics’ almost unanimous adoption of Murry’s reading of Lawrence, citing one reason for their endorsement of the heavily Freudian study: “It is one of the marks of those who dislike [Lawrence] that they evince a lust for simple and final pronouncements”

⁵ Here I quote James Thurber, whose facetious essay on “meeting” Lawrence is reprinted in *The Overwrought Urn*: “I cannot truthfully say that any part of that relationship was satisfactory, and therefore I am trying to forget D. H. Lawrence, which makes me about the only writer in the world who is” (168).

(xxxviii). Feminist and psychoanalytic studies, in particular, have tended to focus on content while ignoring particularities of the text – paradoxes, inconsistencies, and irregularities – that may interrogate or even deconstruct the apparent meaning of the author’s words.⁶

To date, no full-length Kristevan examinations of Lawrence’s work have been published, though her theories have been usefully applied to other modernist writers, both by Kristeva herself and by other critics.⁷ Her approach works particularly well with modernist literature, because so many texts from the period attempt to convey experience through radical linguistic innovation. Another benefit to her approach is that, unlike Lacan, whose theories concentrate more specifically on the subject’s entrance of language at and after the Mirror Stage, Kristeva brings attention to the instinctual stages *before* signification, identifying these pre-linguistic processes as a site of revolt. Modernists likewise were often engaged in writing that accesses illogical, irrational, and non-linear psychological states. We can look to Kristeva’s post-

⁶ One recent reading of *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) might serve as an example of this discrepancy between Lawrence’s professed intent and his method of expressing himself. In a study exploring bioscience in literary modernism, Craig A. Gordon argues that intent and expression in Lawrence are distinctly at odds with one another, citing the author’s own very literal suffering from tuberculosis as perhaps one reason he returns again and again to a physical explanation of consciousness, even as he outwardly rejects such an account as too mechanistic. Lawrence’s main beef with Freudian psychoanalysis is what he perceives as its pretensions of science – whereas he paints his own theory as a more organic model of the unconscious. Gordon argues: “it seems that Lawrence’s biological psyche—purportedly an ineffable source of spontaneity and site of resistance to the determining effects of medical scientific discourse—is all too consonant with the mechanistic model of embodiment he identifies as belonging to medical science itself” (95). In other words, Lawrence begins with a critique of medical or materialist conceptions of the unconscious but then employs a system of describing the unconscious that itself refers almost exclusively to the ways in which structures (or “plexuses”) in the body relate to one another in predetermined ways in order to create the drives. He thus wrangles as strenuously as Kristeva and other feminists do with the Cartesian dualism of mind/body.

⁷ Two examples of such treatments include Makiko Minow-Pinkney’s book on *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (1987), as well as Miglena Nikolchina’s more recent study entitled *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (2004). Kristeva herself writes at some length about Woolf (“Oscillation Between Power and Denial,” 1974), Beckett (“The Father, Love, and Banishment,” from *Desire and Language*, 1980), and Joyce (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1974), yet never addresses Lawrence’s work in any depth, perhaps because of his anomalous status in modernism. Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson employs some Kristevan theory to analyze the novels in her book *Writing Against the Family: Gender in Lawrence and Joyce* (1994). She argues that Lawrence uses language techniques that might be considered revolutionary by Kristeva’s definition because they are attempts to express the unconscious, pre-linguistic aspects of the pre-Oedipal stage. However, Lewiecki-Wilson contends that ultimately Lawrence does not seem to believe (if he is even aware) “that consciousness is a function of, or delimited by, language” (115), as Lacan and Kristeva would argue that it is. These examples, I believe, illustrate of the brevity and dearth of Kristevan analysis of Lawrence.

structuralist versions of psychoanalysis and feminism to find fruitful new ways of looking at Lawrence's work, the goal being neither to vilify nor to defend him, but rather to reopen the dialogue about his work and its place in modernism.⁸

Kristevan Psychoanalysis: A Brief Overview

In her introduction to *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi asserts that Kristeva's "relationship to feminism has always been that of a somewhat critical fellow-traveller" (9). Kristeva resists the modern feminist tendency to apply the "personal is political" credo to every aspect of human life. As a contemporary of the second-wave feminists of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kristeva was disillusioned by what she saw as the inclination of some feminists to behave like their professed oppressors, in setting up their own power structures within their groups. Instead of joining them, Kristeva reports: "I carried on thinking about the feminine condition [...] either on my own, or within the context of my academic or clinical work, but I don't consider myself a theorist of feminism. What little I wrote on women is empirical, dispersed, work in progress. . ." (RSS 29). She finds it paradoxical that in feminist thought the "speaking subject" is always "in a position which is at once subversive of and dependent on the law" (Moi 13), and that one can never escape these confines of language. Further, as Moi argues, Kristeva is always engaged in "a difficult balancing act between a position which would deconstruct subjectivity and identity altogether, and one that would try to capture these entities in an essentialist or humanist mould" (13). Finally, Kristeva realizes the dangers of a feminism that would re-inscribe women in this

⁸ Lacanian readings of Lawrence do exist – Fiona Becket notes that many of these "link the unconscious with language in ways which enable productive re-readings of Lawrence" – yet in her *Complete Critical Guide to D. H. Lawrence*, Becket mentions these studies generally and thus rather off-handedly, saying that they "have produced, and continue to produce, interesting responses to his work (Becket, *Complete Critical Guide* 138). She mentions only one such study by name. Needless to say, if even Lacanian analysis is dismissed so summarily, there is no mention here – nor in any other compendium of Lawrence scholarship to date – of Kristevan readings of the novels.

even more intractable identity, and she opts instead for a model based on temporary or provisional subjectivity.

With regard to the future of psychoanalytic study, Kristeva herself reports in one interview that she often “hears people say that psychoanalysis is dead”; her response is to qualify her attitude towards its methods and allegiances:

in some ways they are not completely wrong. Many psychoanalysts and analytical societies are in the process of self-destructing, both in the guise of a too-dogmatic obedience to the letter of Freud’s text and of sectarian splinterings around the remains of Lacan. In spite of that, however, there exists a living, fruitful psychoanalytic discourse, and such a discourse is aware of unavoidably competing and conflicting with two contemporary trends. (*Julia Kristeva: Interviews* 173)

Her modified psychoanalytic discourse attempts to remedy the current tendency to dismiss the approach as too reductionist – an inclination that stems from vulgar applications of both Freud and Lacan. Conversely, while Kristeva’s vocabulary is similar to Freud’s and Lacan’s at some points, she ultimately makes some critical divergences from both figures into new linguistic and analytical territory.

For Kristeva, as for Lacan, individuation is a complex process that begins when the individual enters into language. Kristeva makes use of Freud’s notion of the Oedipal crisis and identifies this moment in Lacanian terms as the point at which the individual enters into signification. She hypothesizes that in order for the infant (which is not yet an “I”) to become a speaking subject in the realm of language (what she calls the symbolic) there must be a separation from the mother. This maternal presence represents Kristeva’s semiotic, yet, because

the infant had no language for the utopia of this pre-Oedipal state, it is always a lost country that can never be regained or verbalized – a concept that corresponds to Lacan’s theory of the Real.⁹ According to Kristeva, the symbolic is an apparently rigid system that prioritizes meaning, signification, and the rational. However, the powerful drives of the semiotic always threaten to rupture symbolic utterances through what Kristeva calls the “poetic” qualities of language: prosody, puns, sounds, and other evidence of the materiality of the text, which recall us to the materiality of the mother’s body in our pre-linguistic state. These subvert the logic of signification by undercutting the assumption that words can directly and denotatively convey meaning.

According to Kristeva, the maternal presence also reappears, albeit in a different form, in the horror and disgust we feel when we confront the *abject*: anything that recalls the physicality of the mother’s body and thus threatens our sense of autonomous selfhood. This would include decay, rot, feces, and, most notably, the corpse. Kristeva clarifies the distinction between the *abject* and the *object*, describing the object as a less threatening other, in opposition to which the self can form a momentarily stable sense of identity. By contrast, the *abject* is:

A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing

⁹ Lacan defines the Real at one point as “that which the subject is condemned to miss, but even this miss is revelatory” (39). More expansively, he connects his notion of the real to Freud’s theory of the unconscious:

[...] the Freudian unconscious is situated at that point, where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong. [...] For what the unconscious does is to show us the gap through which neurosis recreates a harmony with a real—a real that may well not be determined.

In this gap, something happens. Once this gap has been filled, is the neurosis cured? After all, the question remains open. But the neurosis becomes something else, sometimes a mere illness, a scar, as Freud said—the scar, not of the neurosis, but of the unconscious. (22)

significant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and
hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. (*PH* 2)+

These abject entities and substances stand in for what is not “*propre*” – a French word that, as Kristeva’s translator Leon Roudiez points out, evocatively signifies both “one’s own” and “clean” (*PH* viii). Complicating matters further, Kristeva suggests that our response to abjection is not simply horror; rather we are initially “drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned” (*PH* 1). Our repulsion is compounded by a fascination that renders the abject even more dangerous. Yet, at the same time, Kristeva theorizes that abjection forms the very foundation of our culture – the taboos against which “civilization” is defined.

These encounters with the abject likewise jeopardize the boundaries of the self because it can only exist insofar as it can maintain a distinction between the *I* and the *not-I* (or object). In Kristeva’s theory, the *I* is constantly imperiled by these external threats to its internal integrity, which is one reason why she posits the *sujet en procès*, portraying identity as fluid, provisional, and characterized by the subject’s constant self-interrogation. Many modernist scholars have identified a similar tendency in Lawrence, even as early as the 1950s, when Spilka wrote of the author in terms that prefigure Kristeva’s subject-in-process, showing how even his characters seem to discard “old selves [...] like so many wrinkled skins,” in favor of new identities and ideas (*The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence* 148).

Fashioning selfhood as a dynamic and temporary construct that is always “in crisis” and “on trial,” Kristeva’s corresponding form of revolutionary art uses poetic speech to articulate the pre-Oedipal drives that underlie language. Such radical literary texts pit language against itself to reveal ruptures in logic and meaning. This quality of artistic or poetic speech is another characteristic that Lawrence’s readers have attributed to the novels. Specifically, Levenson

argues that Lawrence “uses language to strike at language [...] Lawrence hurls words on the page, as though he were hoping that they might finally shatter and let the world itself emerge.” (*Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* 151).

Kristeva describes the symbiotic relationship between semiotic and symbolic in similar terms, acknowledging that the former is not an ideal space, a safe haven that amounts to a return to the comfort of the mother’s body. Instead, the drives of the semiotic must be released through the linguistic means of the symbolic:

Caught up within this dynamic, the body is also a process. It is not a unity but a plural totality with separate members that have no identity but constitute the place where drives are applied. This dismembered body cannot fit together again, set itself in motion, or function biologically and physiologically, unless it is included within a practice that encompasses the signifying process.

Without such a practice, the body in process/on trial is disarticulated; its drives tear it up into stymied, motionless sectors and it constitutes a weighty mass. Outside the process, its only identity is inorganic, paralyzed, dead. Within the process, on the other hand, by confronting it, displacing its boundaries and laws, the subject in process/on trial discovers those boundaries and laws and makes them manifest in his practice of them. (*RPL* 101)

This model of signification clearly applies to a writer like Lawrence, who engaged seriously with ideas about identity, relationship, and language, yet also was constantly modifying his own position in regard to these issues.

Through his struggles with signification, Lawrence’s writing dramatizes and literalizes Kristeva’s theories about language, selfhood, and art – as well as providing a more illuminating

vocabulary for the dynamic vigor that critics like Spilka and Levenson have attributed to his work and to account for his apparent contradictions. The novels occasionally throw Kristeva's ideas into question in intriguing ways – for instance, in terms of the ethics of revolution and the literary representation of women. More frequently, however, Lawrence's fiction – through its ambiguities, its apparent contradictions, and the rhythm of its prose – enacts her model of an “explicit confrontation between jouissance and thethetic, that is, a permanent struggle to show the facilitation of drives within the linguistic order itself” (*RPL* 81).

Because such drives and instincts originate in the pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal stage, the infant's first experiences with the mother form the backdrop for his or her entrance into signification. When the individual becomes an “I,” there must be an inevitable alienation from the mother's body. Such a moment becomes the first in a lifelong struggle to differentiate between the self and other, and this crisis recurs in various contexts, even into adulthood. Hence, in the chapter that follows, I will discuss the individual's infant and adult experience of the split mother, as well as the psychic implications of such a division.

CHAPTER 2

LOVER AND MOTHER OF MAN

She touches me as if I were herself, her own.
 She has not realized yet, that fearful thing, that
 I am the other,
 she thinks we are all of one piece.
 It is painfully untrue.

(D. H. Lawrence, "Manifesto" 206-12)

Mothers represent the origin of some of the most troubling issues in Lawrence's novels, as well as a subject of frequent speculation in most studies of the author. Beginning with John Middleton Murry's account of Lawrence in *Son of Woman*, readers of the novels have long noted the complicated relationships between Lawrentian mothers and their children – particularly their sons. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argues that:

Lawrence is far from execrating maternity: quite the contrary. He is glad to be flesh, he willingly accepts his birth, he is fond of his mother; mothers appear in his works as splendid examples of true femininity; they are pure renunciation, absolute generosity, all their living warmth is devoted to their children: they gladly accept their becoming men, they are proud of it. (206)

Kate Millett argues with much less civility, "The idea of 'womb envy' might strike one as pure invention [...] But in Lawrence, we seem to have hit upon an authentic case of this disorder" (362).

More recently, in *Mothering Modernity: Feminism, Modernism, and the Maternal Muse*, Marylu Hill proposes a similarly pessimistic view of mothers in Lawrence's novels, suggesting

“a distinct progression in his attitude toward women throughout his literary career” (108).¹⁰ Hill goes on to argue that the early novels exhibit “an obsessive and destructive mother/son relationship, played out most notably in *Sons and Lovers*. After 1915, and starting with *Women in Love*, Lawrence seemed intent on reversing that early mother-worship by avenging himself on all females as representatives of that possessive and powerful love” (108). Lawrence himself admits the power of the mother and her simultaneous threat to the infant, acknowledging that the first moment the child realizes its selfhood, it utters the “first scream of the ego. The scream of asserted isolation. The scream of revolt from connection, the revolt from union. There is a violent anti-maternal motion, anti-everything” (*PTU* 222).

Yet, in order to engage in a heterosexual adult relationship, the male in particular eventually returns to the mother later, if only as the original model of feminine love he experienced, the example against which he forms an amorous attachment to another woman. As Lawrence explained to his fiancée Louie Burrows three days before his mother’s death: “So if I do not seem happy with the thought of you – you will understand. I must feel my mother’s hand slip out of mine before I can really take yours” (*CL* 1 195). Later, he wrote again to Louie to reassure her of his mother’s admittedly begrudging approval of their union:

[...] my mother has been passionately fond of me, and fiercely jealous. She hated J[essie] – and would have risen from the grave to prevent my marrying her. So I said, carefully, about a month or six weeks ago ‘Mother, do you think it would be all right for me to marry Louie – later?’

Immediately she said ‘No – I don’t’ – and then, after half a minute ‘Well – if you think you’d be happy with her – yes.’ (*CL* 1 197)

¹⁰ It occurs to me that there may be an intentional pun in Hill’s title: “modernity” sounds eerily similar to “maternity,” and both are inextricably linked concepts in twentieth-century literature.

In a similar way, the conflict between lover and mother which is dramatized in Paul Morel's vacillating attractions to both Miriam Leivers and Clara Dawes in *Sons and Lovers* becomes the template for the tension that nearly all Lawrence's characters will feel as they attempt to form romantic relationships later.

Lawrence scholars have been at pains to explain the psychic forces at work in these early family relationships, for while his fiction perhaps depicts a certain amount of "normal" parent-child interactions – in which, early on, a child's identity becomes distinct from that of its mother, even while the child retains an appropriately distant, familial affection for her – the novels nevertheless also contain dynamics that are not easily explained by the usual theoretical models, even psychoanalytic ones. For all the characters, there is a need to separate from the mother, and this desire has often been seen in a Freudian light as the normal push-pull dynamic that all children exhibit, both toward and away from the mother. Still, one main criticism that has always been leveled at Freud's work is its general failure to take history and culture into consideration – if only in the early works outlining his main concepts on maturation. Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, not only keeps the importance of this central childhood crisis in her theory, but takes it much further, theorizing in *Tales of Love* that the focus on mothers seems to have arisen historically out of our Western mythology of the maternal, which is centered precisely on the Virgin and her growing importance to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In this way, Kristeva locates what Freud takes for granted as a more "universal" phenomenon in specific historical tradition and mythmaking, taking it out of the "transcendent" white, middle-class male subject and identifying where and how culture has precipitated these dynamics. Moreover, taking as her starting point Lacan's linguistic contributions to psychoanalysis, she links the process of individuation with the process of signification and, by extension, with artistic production.

In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva describes how all children struggle with desires both to return to the perfect oneness of the maternal body (the womb) but also to push away into their own separate identity. Either response represents a danger, however: to return to the womb would mean complete union with no distinct identity for the individual (i.e. the death of the self), while a push off into total separateness would signify total alienation and isolation. We can see many versions of this conflict dramatized in D.H. Lawrence's couples: Birkin/Ursula, Gudrun/Gerald, Harriett/Richard, Gilbert/Johanna, and Paul Morel with both Miriam and Clara. Kristeva proposes a model in which the individual brings this conflict with the maternal container into adulthood, reenacting it in relationships with others, and particularly in romantic unions. These unresolved issues, she asserts, explain the attraction-and-repulsion dynamic present in so many relationships: the desire to merge, followed by fear, and then the pushing-away response – followed by a desire once again for union.

Eventually, Kristeva theorizes, the individual must realize that there will never be any return to the perfect satisfaction of the maternal container, a pre-linguistic state. Instead, à la Lacan, Kristeva proposes that when individuals enter into the world of the symbolic (or the world of language), they are forever alienated from the maternal body. However, one benefit of the repression required to enter the symbolic emerges in the periodic bubbling-up of what Kristeva calls the semiotic: the body of the mother, or the desire for the complete oneness and union we experienced in the womb. In practical terms, this often happens whenever an individual encounters laughter, water, tears, music, or unintelligible sound – all emblems of the pre-linguistic state of the semiotic, experienced in the body of the mother.

In this way, Kristeva argues for our lingering associations with the womb, even while we exist in the language-based world of the Father. Complicating matters is the fact that, as the

push-pull dynamic suggests, the process of individuation is at best a struggle between opposing forces. Individuals will at various points confront what, in *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva calls the abject: disgusting or frightening entities or substances that bring one to the very borders of existence. The classic example of this is the corpse, which is both human and non-human because it was once alive but is no longer. Abject substances can also include mud, blood, feces, or any other bodily excretion that elicits disgust or revulsion. Seeing the corpse, for instance, causes us to question where (and what) we would be if we weren't, an unanswerable paradox that we must grapple with if we are to have a stable identity.

Gertrude and Paul Morel, the mother-son duo in *Sons and Lovers*, spring immediately to mind when we think of this complex task of both individuation and identification, but so also does a significant group of other pairings, which instead occur between mothers and their daughters: Anna Brangwen and her daughter Ursula in *The Rainbow* (1915), Johanna von Hebenitz and her children in *Mr. Noon*, Mrs. Lettice Beardsall and her daughter of the same first name in *The White Peacock* (1911), the mother of the woman of Isis and the woman herself in *The Man Who Died, or The Escaped Cock* (1929). More specifically, Maria DiBattista argues of *The Rainbow* that as the novel opens, it is with a description of a group of people who do not yet have distinct identities – inchoate individuals:

a generic clan (the Brangwens) of primordial men and women who establish, in their elementariness, the fateful structure of human relationships as Lawrence beheld it. [...] Within this natural economy [of the Marsh farm], no personage—that is, no named self who takes part in the social and civic order of life—exists. The work ordained for consciousness in *demarcating the 'me' from the 'not me,'* the central preoccupation of Laurentian psychology, is yet to be performed. The

first stammering attempts to distinguish the inside from the outside are represented as a function of the sexual division of labor. Only after this primary differentiation is made can the boundary between self and other be drawn. (120-21, emphasis added)

Ursula will have every bit as much trouble establishing her individual identity as Paul Morel does, as we learn in the last few chapters of *The Rainbow*: “Already it was a history. In every phase she was so different. Yet she was always Ursula Brangwen. But what did it mean, Ursula Brangwen? She did not know what she was. Only she was full of rejection, of refusal. . . She could only stiffen in rejection, in rejection” (R 437). Much of this revolt happens against her parents but more specifically it occurs against her mother, whose life she is ultimately rejecting.

The Abject Mother

As many critics have noted, the mother is a repressed but undoubted presence throughout the novels. For the epigram to her book *D. H. Lawrence and the Devouring Mother*, Ruderman quotes the seventh and penultimate section of Lawrence’s poem “Manifesto.”¹¹ In this poem,

¹¹ I reprint the section here, as its ambiguous reference to “the woman” might as easily be the mother as the lover:

She touches me as if I were herself, her own.
She has not realized yet, that fearful thing, that
I am the other,
she thinks we are all of one piece.
It is painfully untrue.

I want her to touch me at last, ah, on the root and
quick of my darkness
and perish on me, as I have perished on her.

Then, we shall be two and distinct, we shall have
each our separate being.
And that will be pure existence, real liberty.
Till then, we are confused, a mixture, unresolved,
unextricated one from the other.
It is in pure, unutterable resolvedness, distinction
of being, that one is free,
not in mixing, merging, not in similarity.

Lawrence reveals his understanding of the intimate difficulty posed by the mother: “To be or not to be, is still the question. / The ache for being is the ultimate hunger” (“Manifesto” *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* 206-12). Ruderman herself traces Lawrence’s leadership period back to his troubled relationship with his mother, suggesting that “before the point of desiring the mother incestuously, and fearing castration as a result of this desire, the male child shares with the female child a desire to merge with the caretaker mother and a fear that his dependency on her will destroy him” (9).

Kristeva suggests more literally that the complicated response to the mother brings us to the abject border of our existence because we are forced to recall the materiality of the mother’s body. She calls the maternal body “a filter [...] a thoroughfare, a threshold,” and finally concludes that it “is the place of a splitting, which, even though hypostatized by Christianity, nonetheless remains a constant factor of social reality” (*DL* 238). Though it menaces us, at the same time, the abjection represented by this body also helps to define the borders of identity – effectively distinguishing the self from the mother initially, and from others at length. The first

When she has put her hand on my secret, darkest
sources, the darkest outgoings,
when it has struck home to her, like a death, "this is _him!_"
she has no part in it, no part whatever,
it is the terrible _other_,
when she knows the fearful _other flesh_, ah, dark-
ness unfathomable and fearful, contiguous and concrete,
when she is slain against me, and lies in a heap
like one outside the house,
when she passes away as I have passed away
being pressed up against the _other_,
then I shall be glad, I shall not be confused with her,
I shall be cleared, distinct, single as if burnished in silver,
having no adherence, no adhesion anywhere,
one clear, burnished, isolated being, unique,
and she also, pure, isolated, complete,
two of us, unutterably distinguished, and in unutterable conjunction.

Then we shall be free, freer than angels, ah, perfect.

(“Manifesto” *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* 206-12)

splitting that the individual experiences is a physical one – the literal severing of the umbilical cord – a separation that will become emblematic of the more profound psychological rift occurring between the self and the mother. Lawrence himself claims in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*:

[...] all the time there is the jolt, the rupture of individualism, the individual asserting himself beyond all ties or claims. The highest goal for every man is the goal of pure individual being. But it is a goal you cannot reach by the mere rupture of all ties. A child isn't born by being torn from the womb. When it is born by natural process, that is rupture enough. But even the ties are not broken. They are only subtilized [*sic*]. (FTU 32)

These more “subtle” bonds cause all of Lawrence’s characters to stumble periodically, both in their efforts to forge individual identity and then to become one with a lover.

For the sons and especially for the daughters – if not for the mothers – the vulgar Freudian formula of the mother as devouring monster does not entirely explain what must happen in order for the child to mature and then survive as an individual, nor does it take into account the powerful and intermittent attraction the individual feels toward the mother. In his introduction to the 1962 Modern Library edition of *Sons and Lovers*, Alfred Kazin emphasizes Lawrence’s “recognition, as a delicate boy who had already seen his older brother Ernest (the “William” of *Sons and Lovers*) sicken and die of the struggle to attach himself to another woman, that his survival was somehow bound up with fidelity to his mother” (Kazin x). Moreover, Kazin argues, the “struggle in *Sons and Lovers* is not the struggle between love of the mother and love of a young woman; it is the hero’s struggle to *keep* the mother as his special strength, never to lose her, not to offend or even to vex her by showing too much partiality to

other women” (Kazin xi). Like Shakespeare’s Hamlet with *his* mother Gertrude (who, not coincidentally, shares with Mrs. Morel this first name), Paul’s mother is his ultimate love-object, but she is also one with whom he is forbidden to consummate any hidden desires. Thus, he must split her into two halves, the spiritual and the carnal, which are represented by the two lovers he chooses, Miriam and Clara. Yet he cannot find in either the whole woman whom he truly desires.

The splitting of the mother, then, represents a deadly problem in terms of the possibilities for romantic love. Such an effort affects not only the male protagonist, but also the mother, and it is a dynamic we can see more clearly in later novels like *Mr. Noon*, with Johanna’s complex and intertwined experiences of motherhood and sexual love. As Rosie Jackson points out, Lawrence himself participated in such a splitting in his very choice of mate, with all of its benefits and liabilities:

Although Lawrence was doubtless attracted by her strength – when they met, Frieda was in her prime, strong, beautiful, well fed and cared for, with none of the physical or psychological weakness of Lawrence’s mother – her health and exuberance came to count against her. At the side of Lawrence’s increasing illness from tuberculosis (usually read, like Keats’, as a sign of unusual sensibility), Frieda’s health has been construed as brutally triumphant, an index of lesser sensibility. (Jackson 11)

Frieda felt the strain of this schism as well, for she writes explicitly in *Not I, But the Wind* that “Lawrence was pulling me on one side, my children on the other” (Jackson 106). In other words, Lawrence found himself initially drawn to Frieda because of her *lack* of resemblance to his mother, yet it was precisely this discrepancy that came to count against her in the end, for the bond with his mother was strong enough to prevail even after her death.

In Lawrence's life, we find examples from the two opposite ends of the maternal/erotic spectrum of woman. On the one hand, Frieda deserted her husband (Lawrence's former teacher) and children to embark upon a trans-European journey with the author – a trip which was prompted by their initial love, but which was undoubtedly complicated by her former familial ties.¹² On the other, his mother, after whom Gertrude Morel was modeled, maintained a relationship with her son that was apparently much closer than that which she experienced with her own husband. To further complicate matters, Frieda herself, like Jessie Chambers, helped Lawrence in his earnest attempts to represent the female point of view by advising him on passages in *Sons and Lovers* – particularly those that depicted Mrs. Morel. She was, in fact, the one who first described Freud's theories to Lawrence, theories which prompted his well-known summary to *Sons and Lovers*. Frieda's contribution to the problematic mother issues in the novel points to her own liminal position on the border between lover (Lawrence's) and mother (of three). He complained of her maternal attachments in one letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell: "Frieda only cares about her children now. It is as if women – or she – persisted in being unfortunate and hopelessly unsatisfied: if a man wants much, she becomes violently a mother and a man-hater, if her children want much, she becomes a violent disciple of 'love' as against domesticity or maternity. What a miserable creature!" (CL 2 345).

¹² To make matters even worse, Frieda's indecision about finally ending her marriage was answered by Lawrence's growing insistence that she make a final break. In *D. H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider*, John Worthen notes that Lawrence would appear to have forced Frieda's hand:

A letter had come from the distraught Weekley, insisting that Frieda tell him whether she was still having affairs. [...] An ambiguous reply must be sent, the next step carefully negotiated.

Lawrence hated this. Frieda recalled how 'he would hammer away at her, trying to make her commit herself finally'; he drafted his ultimatum in the form of a letter to Weekley which stated: 'I love your wife and she loves me.' But he did not post it. He sent it to Frieda, telling her that she must send it, or must write herself. She promised to do so, but felt utterly confused [...] (115)

The complex situation between Lawrence and Frieda sheds even more interesting light on Lawrence's more famous letter to Edward Garnett on November 12, 1912, in which he explains the mother/lover dynamics in the novel:

It follows this idea: a woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class, and has no satisfaction in her own life. She has had a passion for her husband, so her children are born of passion, and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up she selects them as lovers — first the eldest, then the second. These sons are *urged* into life by their reciprocal love of their mother — urged on and on. But when they come to manhood, they can't love, because their mother is the strongest power in their lives, and holds them. It's rather like Goethe and his mother and Frau von Stein and Christiana — As soon as the young men come into contact with women, there's a split. William gives his sex to a fribble, and his mother holds his soul. But the split kills him, because he doesn't know where he is. The next son gets a woman who fights for his soul — fights his mother. The son loves his mother — all the sons hate and are jealous of the father. The battle goes on between the mother and the girl, with the son as object. The mother gradually proves stronger, because of the ties of blood. The son decides to leave his soul in his mother's hands, and, like his elder brother go for passion. He gets passion. Then the split begins to tell again. But, almost unconsciously, the mother realises what is the matter, and begins to die. The son casts off his mistress, attends to his mother dying. He is left in the end naked of everything, with the drift towards death. (CL 1 476-77)

Lawrence's description of the "split" in Paul Morel represents the same schism that Kristeva describes in her recent work *Intimate Revolt*, where she argues (similarly to Lawrence himself) that there is usually no "cure" for the person in analysis. Rather, the "analyzed person discovers his irreconcilable conflictuality, the dramatic splitting that constitutes him and that detaches him from any will for control, power, or even unity. This freedom distances psychoanalysis from any moralistic or blissful humanism" (*IR* 237). Indeed, though Paul Morel finally finds freedom at the end of *Sons and Lovers*, there is nothing especially "blissful" or happy about the prospect of the city lights towards which he turns. Instead, the freedom is a freedom of nothingness, of a lack of connection to anyone else – a lonely freedom, in other words.

Similarly, Lawrence's description of the "split" in his letter to Garnett echoes a perennial issue in his novels: how does the male character negotiate the desire to keep the mother close, and also his desire to experience adult love, both sexual and spiritual, with another woman? In *The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence*, Mark Spilka mentions Father Tiverton, an early critic who argued that Lawrence "had to die as a son before he became a great artist. That death is chronicled, [Tiverton] believes, at the end of *Sons and Lovers*, as Paul refuses to follow his mother to the grave [...] Paul's death as a son implies his birth here as a man, and the potential birth of Lawrence himself as man and artist" (Spilka 39). Such a transformation is clearly fraught with difficulty for Paul, as he struggles throughout the novel with the power of his ties to his mother, which grow more complicated as he matures into an adult.

These ties show up not just with his mother herself, but also with Miriam, the literary representation of Lawrence's first love, Jessie Chambers. In her "personal recollection" of Lawrence, she recalls that early in their friendship he told her explicitly, "Every great man – every man who achieves anything, I mean – is founded in some woman. Why shouldn't *you* be

the woman I am founded in?” (59). Lawrence’s realization of his debt to women and the simultaneous necessity to escape them closely connects his mother and “the girl who had been the chief friend of [his] youth” (Chambers 9). The implications of even his metaphor and even his use of prepositions are clear: that he dismissively refers to the question of which woman he will be “founded *in*” suggests not only an abstract notion of the roots of one’s thought, but also the womb itself.

In “D. H. Lawrence on Mother-Love,” R. P. Draper points out that there is a fundamental discrepancy between what the theorist/polemicist in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* “describes [as] the disastrous effect of excessive mother-love” and “his novelist’s presentment of it in *Sons and Lovers*” (285). Draper argues that such an inconsistency is not, as Murry attributes it, due to “the added insight and detachment that comes of maturity” (Murry qtd. in Draper 285). Instead, perhaps “mother-wife-submissiveness is far from being ‘the quiescent, flowering love of a mature woman,’ but [is instead] a deadly form of domination” practiced by Gertrude Morel (285). As for her support of Paul’s role as artist, Draper calls this into question, as well: “Without being seriously interested in his intellectual pursuits (‘It was not his art Mrs. Morel cared about; it was himself and his achievement’), she gives them emotional support because they are a means by which she can achieve her end of making her son a successful figure, an image of herself that she can project on to the society around her” (287). This perhaps explains Mrs. Morel’s “opposition to Miriam [...] while she scarcely feels Clara as a competitor” (Draper 287). In Draper’s opinion, because of his ability to portray artistically “the wrong relationship between mother and son,” the philosophizing that Lawrence does in *Fantasia* is vastly inferior to the “superiority of moral accuracy and vision” he exhibits in *Sons and Lovers* (289).

Kristeva's work on the maternal speaks directly to this dilemma of the split mother. Whether she is talking about the literal mother or merely the maternal presence, as it exists for the infant and later the adult, Kristeva asserts the lasting importance of the maternal for every individual. Since the mother is the first entity the child encounters, she serves as the other against which the child must forge its own distinct identity. This process is different for everyone: some successfully differentiate themselves from the mother without debilitating effects, while others succumb to the process, struggling perennially with the abject, an issue which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. In *Tales of Love* (1987), Kristeva begins her section "Stabat Mater" by identifying the special problem that the mother poses, over and above the question of womanhood or femininity:

If it is not possible to say of a *woman* what she *is* (without running the risk of abolishing her difference), would it perhaps be different concerning the *mother*, since that is the only function of the "other sex" to which we can definitely attribute existence? And yet, there too, we are caught in a paradox. First, we live in a civilization where the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood. If, however, one looks at it more closely, this motherhood is the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory; what is more, it involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the *relationship* that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized—
idealization of a primary narcissism. (TL 234)

If the mother, then, is not as important in herself as the pure yet inaccessible relationship that she represents, then her own humanity, sexuality, purity – and, by contrast, fallibility – would

present difficulties to her child, who is anxious to keep her in her prescribed role. The sexual jealousy that the male child feels towards his father must go somewhere, and in the case of Lawrence's novels, it is usually displaced onto the adult love object.

Still, even here, there are perils. As Paul Morel discovers when he tries to enter into a relationship with Miriam, he becomes the center of a battle between her and his mother, as Lawrence puts it, "for his soul." Because he associates her hold on him so closely with the one his mother has, he finds it difficult to progress to a sexual relationship: "He was afraid of [Miriam]. The fact that he might want her as a man wants a woman had in him been suppressed into a shame" (*SL* 178). This shame seems misplaced in a normal, adult sexual relationship; clearly, the problem stems from his association of Miriam with his mother. Like his mother, Miriam represents the spiritual woman who wants his soul; however, the mother ultimately wins out "because of the ties of blood," according to Lawrence. David Holbrook describes this dynamic in different terms, citing the presence of a "hostile and malignant ghost of the dead mother" which is in fact a mother-imago who "appears often as Lawrence (in the form of the protagonist) is about to give himself to another woman" (45). Enter Clara Dawes, who resembles Frieda in terms of her sexual liberation – yet significantly *has no children*. Because Clara is in this way unlike the mother with whom he has had an intimate lifelong relationship, Paul deems it acceptable to have the sexual relationship. In the end, though, he has split the woman into separate halves, mother and lover, and still "feels the split." Thus, neither solution – platonic, spiritual love or purely sexual love – satisfies him. He cannot have both halves in one woman. Biographically, a similar situation exists: whenever Lawrence found himself occupied with multiple women, "he kept them strictly separate, so that some were for civilised contacts,

while some were simply for sensual encounters” (Holbrook 45). As Holbrook puts it, “He seems to have been seriously split in himself and his relational capabilities” (45).

Again, the language of severance here echoes not only Lawrence’s words in his unofficial foreword to *Sons and Lovers* (the 1912 letter to Garnett), but also Kristeva’s ideas about the complicated relationship between sons and mothers. As she points out in “Stabat Mater,” the mythology of the Virgin Mary is a powerful undercurrent in Western psychology, particularly with regard to the way mothers are viewed.¹³ Perhaps counter-intuitively, around the thirteenth century, the Virgin Mary began to resemble the courtly Lady: “they are the focal point of men’s desires and aspirations [...] they were unique and thus excluded all other women” (*TL* 245). Ultimately, “the Marian and courtly streams came together”:

[...] the Virgin explicitly became the focus of courtly love, thus gathering the attributes of the desired woman and of the holy mother in a totality that was as accomplished as it was inaccessible. Enough to make any woman suffer, any man dream. One finds indeed in a *Miracle de Notre Dame* the story of a young man who abandons his fiancée for the Virgin: the latter came to him in a dream and reproached him for having left her for an “earthly woman.” (*TL* 245)

¹³ One need look no further than the first *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* to see an example of the Virgin’s enduring power. Clifford’s response to Connie’s pregnancy is markedly different from the way it reads in the final version of the novel. Granted that he does not yet know who the father of the child is, Clifford tells her, “How beautiful you are! [...] You are a virgin mother—a Madonna like a rose, instead of like a lily. By God, I hope the child will be worthy of you.—I’ll get my paints out, and try to paint you: the modern Madonna!—and I the Joseph! I shall fall into Mariolatry—Mary-worship!” (*FLCL* 214). His ignorance of the child’s paternity pleases him immensely, for it allows him the fantasy of thinking of Connie as the Virgin Mother, much as Freud argues all little boys want to do with their mothers. In this version, curiously, Lawrence chooses not to invoke the literal *nom/non du père* that would shatter this illusion. In the final version, by contrast, in a redux of the Lacanian scene of original primal trauma, Connie identifies the father as Mellors, not Duncan. The text explicitly delineates Clifford’s hatred and anger at hearing the “name of the father.” Despite its being, this time, the *nom du père* of his child and not of himself, his own repressed hatred for his “intensely ridiculous” father rushes to the surface (*LCL* 10), in an obvious complement to his unnatural and “perverse” attachment to Mrs. Bolton.

This narrative bears uncanny resemblance to Gertrude Morel's influence over Paul: because of his veiled awareness of his mother's desire to have him for herself, he struggles against the ties of his lovers Clara and, even more noticeably, Miriam. The novel clarifies explicitly that Mrs. Morel "could feel Paul being drawn away by this girl. And she did not care for Miriam" (*SL* 160).

Ultimately, Mrs. Morel succeeds in winning Paul as her own, which is made obvious by his ultimate renunciation of Miriam as his lover: "And he came back to [his mother]. And in his soul was a feeling of the satisfaction of self-sacrifice because he was faithful to her. She loved him first; he loved her first" (*SL* 222). Yet the novel is quick to add: "And yet it was not enough. His new young life, so strong and imperious, was urged towards something else" (*SL* 222) – that "something" clearly being the sexual love that his mother is forbidden to offer him. Paul's mother is set against the younger woman because Miriam is too similar to herself. Conversely, Clara does not resemble Mrs. Morel so closely, and thus the younger woman can do what she cannot: participate in a sexual relationship with Paul. Compared to Clara the carnal lover, Miriam is not entirely what Kristeva calls the "earthly" woman. In fact, at points in the novel she is directly linked with the "spiritual woman" for whom Lawrence shows so much scorn in his discussion of *Jude the Obscure*'s Sue Bridehead in *Study of Thomas Hardy*. Clara becomes important because she is the other half of the split mother – the courtly or erotic lover – unlike Miriam, who is, as Draper puts it, simply one of the two Magna Maters he finds himself caught between: "two mother-tyrants, each of whom perceives the disastrous influence of the other whilst remaining blind to her own possessiveness" (Draper 288).

Paradoxically enough, perhaps the problem is not only that the mother becomes severed from her maternal identity, but also that, often, she embodies multiple, contradictory roles

simultaneously. In the midst of a discussion of the emerging cult of the Virgin Mary, Kristeva mentions that in the Eastern Church, “according to a number of iconographic representations, Mary can be seen changed into a little girl in the arms of her son who henceforth becomes her father; she thus reverses her role as Mother into a Daughter’s role for the greater pleasure of those who enjoy Freud’s ‘Theme of the Three Caskets’” (*TL* 169). She continues, “Indeed, *mother* of her son and his *daughter* as well, Mary is also, and besides, his *wife*: she therefore actualizes the threefold metamorphosis of a woman in the tightest parenthood structure” (*TL* 169). Such a characterization could easily apply to the relationship between Paul and his mother in *Sons and Lovers*, in which Gertrude Morel is cast as mother, daughter, and lover at various points in the novel.

More specifically, we see this dynamic at work between Gertrude Morel and her sons and daughter during her last days. After a final visit to Annie’s house, she is too weak to go home by herself, and thus Arthur must take her back “as if she were a child” (*SL* 378). Granted, this reversal of the parent/child relationship is not uncommon; children often do become caretakers as their parents age. Still, it is clear that for the children, and for Paul especially, the literal fact of their mother’s aging has in it something unusually fearful and disturbing, perhaps because of her historically ambiguous role in their lives. Paul’s fears are particularly visible, as they distill into moments of concentration on seemingly inconsequential details which force him to come to terms with his mother’s age and imminent death:

He sat in the kitchen, smoking. Then he tried to brush some grey ash off his coat. He looked again. It was one of his mother’s grey hairs. It was so long! He held it up, and it drifted into the chimney. He let go. The long grey hair floated and was gone into the blackness of the chimney. (*SL* 376)

The strand of hair itself epitomizes the mother's duality for Paul: it is both grey, indicating her advanced age and reminding him of her maternal role, and it is long, which calls to mind her more romantic or sexual role as a woman, with which he has long flirted but cannot come to terms.¹⁴ The fact that it floats up and is "gone into the blackness of the chimney," and that he must "let go," hints at the events of the next chapter, "The Release," in which he administers the fatal dose of morphine to his mother.

Perhaps all this proposed resonance with Kristeva's chapter would be tenuous at best – particularly with regards to her arguments about Jesus and Mary – if it were not for hints that Paul and Gertrude's relationship has in some ways been superimposed on the story of the Son of God and the Mother of Man. As an artist, Paul gains his mother's support early on, as she expresses her fervent belief in the importance of his gift and his contribution to the world, and yet she also realizes she must relinquish him to his vocation, much as Mary had to acknowledge Christ's role. Further evidence of a Christ-figure subtext lies in the final scene between the two, as Paul gives her the dosed milk, at which time author and character become oddly conflated. Suddenly, the narrator's use of free indirect discourse seems to rupture the novel's heretofore impartial, disinterested narration, telling us that Paul "put the feeding-cup between her lips that *he would have died to save from any hurt*" (SL 394, emphasis added).

This rupture between narrator/author points to Lawrence's own experience of his mother's death, which bears a telling resemblance to the scene in *Sons and Lovers*. In fact, the

¹⁴ Yet this discussion of her whitening hair has actually commenced at an earlier point in the novel. On one occasion when they have planned to visit the Leivers' new farm, Mrs. Morel asks Paul for his opinion of her new blouse, saying deprecatingly, "Too young for me, though, I'm afraid" (SL 122). Paul retorts with more than the usual vigor: "Too young for you! [...] Why don't you buy some false white hair and stick it on your head" (SL 122). Here his mother is, unlike him, facing the real prospect of her mortality, for she warns him, "I s'll soon have no need [...] I'm going white fast enough" – to which he responds without ever really acknowledging her point: "Well, you've no business to [...] What do I want with a white-haired mother?" (SL 122). His unease with the eventual reality of her death speaks to both his reluctance to see her as a mother (as opposed to a sweetheart) and his inability to break away into his own selfhood, because it is so dependent upon how his mother sees him.

anguish of the passage could point to the author's own guilt and horror. According to John Worthen in his biography *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years (1885-1912)*: "In December 1913, Lawrence told an acquaintance in Italy, Lina Waterfield, that – just as described in *Sons and Lovers* – he and his sister Ada finally gave Lydia Lawrence an overdose of sleeping draught. [...] Lydia Lawrence died the following day" (273).¹⁵

Within this event (Paul giving his mother the dosed milk), we actually find a juncture where Lawrence's lightly fictionalized rendering of his own biography complicates Kristeva's theories about the relationship between daughters and their mothers, as opposed to sons and their mothers. Kristeva uses the case history of Marie-Ange, a woman whom she characterizes as a "terrorist" in her "depressive hysteria" (*BS* 85), citing the woman's fantasies of the death of her husband's mistress, specifically by poisoning. Kristeva points out that:

[t]he terrorism of such depressive hysteria is often expressed by aiming for the mouth. Many stories involving harems and other feminine jealousies have established the image of the prisoner as a privileged image of feminine Satanism.

¹⁵ In the opposite way, one scene in *The White Peacock* becomes a fantasy reversal in which the father dies instead of the mother. When Cyril confronts his father's corpse, this unconscious patricidal desire and return to the mother is dramatized explicitly for the reader:

By the glimmering light of the two tapers we could see the outlined form under the counterpane. She turned back the hem, and began to make painful wailing sounds. My heart was beating heavily, and I felt choked. I did not want to look—but I must. It was the man I had seen in the woods . . . I felt the great wild pity, and a sense of terror, and a sense of horror, and a sense of awful littleness and loneliness among a great empty space. I felt beyond myself, as if I were a mere fleck drifting unconsciously through the dark. Then I felt my mother's arm round my shoulders, and she cried pitifully, "Oh, my son, my son!" (37).

From this passage, two possible perspectives on the scene emerge. First, Cyril sees the killed father and then feels the caress of the mother, who is now focused entirely on him. The fantasy of being the sole possessor of mother-love has come true.

This is a false sense of wish fulfillment, however, as the father's landlady Mrs. May's actions suggest. When she sees him, her response alludes to the darker implications of the scene: "Eh!—Eh!—Dear Lord—Dear Heart—Dear Heart!" wailed the old woman. As she returned, the light glowed on her old, wrinkled face" (*WP* 37). In this moment, Cyril has a double consciousness, seeing himself as an adored son, idolized by his mother, yet simultaneously perceiving the grief of the older woman at the death of his father, in an echo of Marian grief at Christ's death. It is thus that the scene does not permit the realization of the primal fantasy; instead it brings Cyril up short, forcing him to face the prospect of his own mortality by suggesting that the fate of his father will someday be Cyril's own.

Poisoning food or drink nevertheless reveals, beyond the raging sorceress, a little girl deprived of the breast. And if it is true that little boys are also deprived, everyone knows that man recovers his lost paradise in the heterosexual relationship, but also and mainly through various roundabout means that lavish oral satisfactions on him or do so by means of orality. (*BS* 85)

Paul indeed gains a certain amount of satisfaction through dispensing with his mother through a “merciful” act – one he furthermore perceives as sacrificial.

Kristeva’s account of the repressed motives of Marie-Ange adds to our understanding of Paul’s role in his mother’s assisted suicide in other ways, as well. Marie-Ange reported that after her birth, her mother bore several more children, and her mother’s obligation to breastfeed and care for these sons made the young girl feel as though she had been deserted by her maternal figure. As an adult, this feeling of abandonment took the form of an obsession with her rival for her husband’s affection:

Marie-Ange had muffled within herself the distress and devalorization where the real or imaginary maternal neglect had left her. The idea of her being ugly, useless, and insignificant did not leave her, but it was more of an ambience than an idea [...] On the other hand, the desire for death, for her own death (for want of avenging herself on the mother) filtered into her phobias: fear of falling out the window, from the elevator, off a rock, or off the slope of a mountain. Fear of finding herself in a void, of dying of the void. A permanent vertigo. Marie-Ange protected herself from it for the time being by displacing it onto her rival, who was supposed to be drowned in poison or vanish in a car going at breakneck speed. Her life was unharmed at the price of the other’s sacrificed life. (*BS* 85)

Unlike Marie-Ange, Paul without question faces the void squarely at the conclusion of *Sons and Lovers*: “himself, infinitesimal, at the core a nothingness, and yet *not nothing*” (SL 420, emphasis added), and does manage to separate from the mother, but it is at the cost of her life. Unlike the case of a daughter who is jealous of her mother’s and then her husband’s other “loves,” Paul’s lovers are his mother’s rivals, instead of the other way around. Thus, Lawrence’s situation enriches Kristeva’s theories by suggesting that, even if it is not easier, the process of splitting from the mother is at least very different for the son from what it represents for the daughter.

With their language of sacrifice and salvation, such lines undoubtedly point to the Christian mythology inherent in this relationship – yet they also reveal the place at which such a parallel breaks down. Paul “*would have* died to save” his mother, yet ultimately he *does not* make such a sacrifice, at least not literally. Perhaps the final scene of the novel, in which he decides he will not “take that direction, to the darkness to follow her” (SL 420), suggests something similar: that he has finally rejected his role as savior, if he has rejected Miriam and Clara, as well.

Even more intriguing here is the reversal of roles that occurs between mother and son, in terms of the milk itself. In “Stabat Mater,” Kristeva suggests, “Milk and tears became the privileged signs of the *Mater Dolorosa*” whose influence grew dramatically from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries (TL 249). She goes on to assert “what milk and tears have in common: they are the metaphors of nonspeech, of a ‘semiotics’ that linguistic communication does not account for” (TL 249). If the mother’s milk is this sign of the non-verbal, Paul’s administration of milk to his mother – in direct opposition to the usual feeding of milk by the mother to the infant – suggests that he himself is in some ways co-opting her role. Perhaps

because of the split in Gertrude's roles – in which she has taken on the appearance of lover and daughter – he is left to serve in the maternal capacity.

Indeed, Paul's views of the mother and lover roles also reverse themselves during these final three chapters of the novel, as he wrestles with the power of the Magna Mater: on one particular morning as he leaves her, he kisses his mother goodbye "as if she were a lover" and then, later in the day, breaks down into tears of grief with his lover Clara, who takes him into her arms and "soothe[s] him like a child" (*SL* 376, 377). What Lawrence describes here reflects much of his own ambivalent commentary about psychoanalysis and psychology in general, in terms of the relationship with the mother and the incestuous drives. In one letter to Katharine Mansfield written December 5, 1918, while he was staying in Middleton, he characterizes his attitude thus:

[...] I send you the Jung book, borrowed from Kot. in the midst of his reading it. Ask Jack not to keep it long, will you, as I feel I ought to send it back. – Beware of it – this Mother-incest idea can become an obsession. But it seems to me there is this much truth in it: that at certain periods the man has a desire and a tendency to return unto the woman, make her his goal and end, find his justification in her. In this way he casts himself as it were into her womb, and she, the Magna Mater, receives him with gratification. This is a kind of incest. It seems to me it is what Jack does to you, and what repels and fascinates you. I have done it, and now struggle with all my might to get out. In a way, Frieda is the devouring mother. – It is awfully hard, once the sex relation has gone this way, to recover. If we don't recover, we die. (*CL* 2 301-02)

In a sense, this quotation seems reminiscent of the clichéd joke about a man “spending nine months trying to get out of the womb, and the rest of his life trying to get right back in.”

Lawrence’s warning resonates with those – like this critic, admittedly – who do see a quality of methinks-the-lady-doth-protest-too-much in the vitriol with which he mentions psychoanalysis, and want to follow the trail of his inconsistent words and deeds (writing).

Lawrence’s response does not take into account the mother’s experience of this splitting, particularly not in *Sons and Lovers*. On the subject, Kristeva explains in “Stabat Mater” that the “Virgin especially agrees with the repudiation of the other woman” because it renders her “alone among women, alone among mothers, alone among humans since she is without sin” (TL 258). Such a reward inevitably has its consequences, however, for the Virgin and, more specifically in this case, for Gertrude Morel:

the acknowledgement of a longing for uniqueness is immediately checked by the postulate according to which uniqueness is attained only through an exacerbated masochism: a concrete woman, worthy of the feminine ideal embodied by the Virgin as an inaccessible goal, could only be a nun, a martyr, or, if she is married, one who leads a life that would remove her from that “earthly” condition and dedicate her to the highest sublimation alien to her body. (TL 258)

In this case, Paul’s mother is just that: the mother of the “chosen” one, she relinquishes her status as lover to her husband – a disappointment as a man – but she cannot take on the same relationship with her son. She must release him to the “other woman,” and she only unwillingly does so to Clara, who forms the other half of the split between mother and lover. Her reward is her continued responsibility for his soul, as well as her own role in his success as an artist and

man. Ultimately, however, the Christ/Mary parallel breaks down, for *she* sacrifices herself for him, instead of the other way around.

Indeed, not just for Paul Morel, but for the rest of Lawrence's male characters, the question of the mother recurs continually, in ways that echo Kristeva's observations about the maternal. These men must negotiate their conflicting desires to both keep the mother and to give her up for the sake of romantic love. Interestingly, this issue figures prominently in Lawrence's biography, as well, in what David Holbrook calls "his problems of bringing together in woman the ideal and the libidinal" – which he claims were eased by "Frieda's 'free' approach to sexuality" (Holbrook 44). Granted that, as so many critics of Lawrence have been wont to do, it is very easy but ultimately inadvisable to draw too many simplistic connections between Lawrence's biography and his literary works. Still, in *Mr. Noon*, in particular, there are parallels to his life that seem more than coincidental, and the fact that the novel ends on an abrupt note without really concluding – its last words are a list of the contents of a hat box sent to Johanna by her sister Lotte – may betray its author's reluctance to write any further and thus perhaps its literal closeness to home (Holbrook 44).

A Girl's Mother

At this point, we might turn to Johanna von Hebenitz herself – particularly as she seems to closely resemble Frieda – to see that the split in the mother's role has other, more complex consequences, as well. For the female characters in Lawrence's novels, it is perhaps more perplexing because it often occurs on both sides of maternal feminine experience: mother and daughter. Kristeva writes that for a woman:

The body of her mother is always the same Master-Mother of instinctual drive, a ruler over psychosis, a subject of biology, but also, one toward which women aspire all the more passionately simply because it lacks a penis: that body cannot penetrate her as can a man when possessing his wife. By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating herself. (*DL* 239)

For a woman, the difficulty of becoming a mother is that it creates an uncomfortable – but in some ways attractive – connection with her own mother’s body, a body that she had to separate from at some early stage, immediately forming an identification with the paternal, symbolic function in order to have her own distinct identity.

Johanna experiences this split in identity, understanding herself as a complex amalgamation of woman, wife, mother, and lover, and consequently, she must also dichotomize her lovers’ roles.¹⁶ In telling Gilbert about her amorous past, Johanna begins: “Mothers are awful things nowadays, don’t you think? [...] Don’t you think they all want to swallow their children again, like the Greek myth? [...] Ha—mother love. It is the most awful self-swallowing thing” (*MN* 157). The idea that a mother’s love would require her to swallow not just her child but *herself* suggests that no stable identity is possible in the first place for the mother, and then, further, that there are certainly no possibilities for romantic love. Johanna goes on, “There isn’t a man worth having nowadays, who can get away from his mother. Their mothers are all in love with them, and they’re all in love with their mothers, and what are we poor women to do?” (*MN* 157). Her final question is not a rhetorical one – especially in view of her immediately

¹⁶ There are indeed many ways in which a woman can experience the splitting of her identity, not the least of which is in terms of language. Like Frieda/Johanna, Julia Kristeva herself writes of the rift caused by the conflict between Bulgarian, her “mother” tongue, and French, the language of her professional life. Yet, she emphasizes, “I have not forgotten my maternal language [...] I am almost prepared to believe in the myth of resurrection when I examine the divided state of my mind and body” (*IR* 242, 243).

subsequent reference to Shakespeare, opining that men are “all Hamlets, obsessed by their mothers, and we’re supposed to be all Ophelias, and go and drown ourselves” (*MN* 157).

Of course, Johanna’s case is complicated further (as Frieda’s was) by her own role as a mother, which coexists alongside her extramarital affair with Gilbert. Her frustration seems to stem from the fact that she comprehends her husband Everard’s attempts to divorce her from both her sexual and her maternal body: “He wants to set me on a throne and kiss my feet. You don’t know how uncomfortable I feel” (*MN* 157). The practical implications of such a complex mother-son-lover dynamic are likewise echoed in Gilbert’s relationships, as Johanna conceives them: “You [Englishmen] all want a white snowflower in your buttonhole. [...] Oh, the English and the Americans, with their snowflowers and their saintly mothers and their unmentionable incidents in the background! It’s all such a lie” (*MN* 159).

Again, this splitting dynamic does not only have consequences for Everard and for Gilbert, the men, but also for Johanna herself, in her initially unsuccessful attempts to find fulfillment in the person of one man. Curiously, the names of her ex-lover Eberhard and her husband Everard are nearly interchangeable, and accordingly, in these two figures she finds the two halves of what she needs in a love relationship – in much the same way that Paul Morel finds the two halves of the ideal woman in Miriam and Clara. Recalling her affair with the psychiatrist Eberhard, Johanna declares, “It was he who freed me, really,” yet then admits, “He was wonderful, but he was awful.—He would have sent me mad” (*MN* 160). In the same conversation, she describes her possessive, jealous, and conventional husband Everard as:

[...] *quite* happy there in Boston, with his work, and his love for me as a snowflower. [...] But why won’t he let me tell him about Eberhard? He *knows*, at the bottom. He *knows*. In his unconscious, he knows I’m not faithful to him. But

he would kill me rather than let me tell him. And that is what is so awful to me. I feel it is awful—I live in a lie, and it sends me mad. (*MN* 162)

Because her role as mother to Everard's children has been disconnected from her role as his wife, a sexual being, she is then forced to split a man's role in her life into two parts – husband and lover – and total fulfillment is therefore possible with neither. This could serve as one reason for her infidelity to Gilbert during their travels in the Tyrol. This part of the novel likewise directly resembles the biographical reality of Lawrence discovering Frieda had been unfaithful to him during their travels in the Alps. As John Worthen puts it, at one point: "Lawrence and [David] Garnett went scrambling off up the mountain sides looking for flowers to go into the botanist Garnett's collection; while they were gone, Lawrence later learned, Frieda and [Garnett's friend] Harold Hobson made love in a hay-hut. It had not been the first time that Frieda had exerted in practice her belief in free sex" (*D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years* 428). Like Johanna, Frieda lived according to these beliefs, no matter whether they "torment[ed] Lawrence" or not (Worthen 428).¹⁷

Thus, Johanna becomes another example of what Anne Fernald calls Lawrence's "commitment to conversation, to interaction" and to the "intellectually substantive" activity of

¹⁷ The problem of the "split" woman appears again in Connie Chatterley. In the first *Lady Chatterley*, Lawrence included a more explicit description of the tone of the Chatterleys' marriage: "[Clifford] could never be a husband to her. She lived with him like a married nun, a sister of Christ" (*FSLCL* 9). In the second *Lady Chatterley*, the passage has been revised to denote more generally, "[s]he lived with him a married nun, become virgin again by disuse" (*FSLCL* 229). In a fittingly oedipal attitude, Clifford clings first to Connie and later to Mrs. Bolton as surrogate mothers, all the while believing that "[f]athers were ridiculous: his own obstinate one, supremely so. [...] Sir Geoffrey, [his] father, was intensely ridiculous" (*LCL* 10). To be sure, there is also the sense that Clifford is not the only one who views the relationship between lovers (or man and wife) as an unequal one. During a visit from Connie's father at the beginning of the second *Lady Chatterley*, Connie watches him contemplating a voluptuous Renoir nude in her private sitting room, noting that his "eyelids had a funny wistful tilt, a little plaintive and childish, very celtic [...]" His plaintive childishness came from his own sensuous desire [...]. He seemed to her so often like a spoilt child" (*FLCL* 232). Moreover, in the final *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, through the narrator's free indirect discourse, we learn that Connie herself, as a young woman just having experienced sexual consummation for the first time with her young man, came to feel that all men's perennial unhappiness with women is "for no reason at all, except that they are discontented children, and can't be satisfied whatever they get, let a woman do what she may" (*LCL* 9). Thus, once again, the man's casting of the lover into the role of mother becomes a feature of the narrative.

argument between worthy opponents (184). Fernald does not mention *Mr. Noon* specifically in her article, but the aforementioned conversation between Johanna and Gilbert is strongly reminiscent of the heated dialogue between Ursula and Birkin in *Women in Love*. Moreover, in *Mr. Noon*'s case, as in the earlier novel, the female perspective almost seems to gain more credence than the male. Note, for example, Gilbert's reaction to Johanna's overtly Freudian arguments, summed up in her question, "there is no strong feeling aroused in anybody that doesn't have an element of sex in it—don't you think?" (*MN* 161). He admits that these psychoanalytic "theories were not new to [him]," yet at the same time: "Now, with the gleaming, distraught woman opposite him, he was troubled by the ideas. He was troubled, and depressed. It all saddened him, and he did not agree, but did not know what to say" (*MN* 161). His speechlessness and anxiety seem to confirm Johanna's more accurate characterization of things, casting doubt on Gilbert's ability to know his motivations, since he cannot mount a convincing defense against her assertions. There seems to be an explicit connection to Freud himself here, for, as Madelon Sprengnether observes: "In the process of formulating the Oedipus complex Freud set the parameters for his subsequent treatment of the mother by establishing her position as object rather than subject—the passive recipient of the son's libidinal urges" (2). Certainly, Johanna represents a troubling challenge to Freud's "ideal[ization of] the mother's devotion to her child, at the same time that he conceives of her as castrated and hence inferior or worthy of masculine contempt" (Sprengnether 3).

Given this quality of Freudian psychoanalysis, which "maintains that civilization itself depends on the male subject's detachment from and transcendence of the mother [and] [...] nearly effaces her from the drama of human development" (Sprengnether 3), it is easy to see the reason for Johanna's agitated frustration with her husband's view of her. Sprengnether goes on to

identify how the question of motherhood complicates Kristeva's theories of feminine identity (Sprengnether 216). Unlike her husband, whose idealization of mother love provides the basis for his transcendence and his entry into the masculine world of history and civilization, Johanna feels caught in the impossible decision she must make: either "she accepts a paternal identification, ruthlessly excising from her consciousness those aspects of her experience which are irreducibly female, or she accedes to her position as 'fallen,' identified with her flesh, and thus mute, removed from the signifying process" (217). Sprengnether goes further to note that Kristeva offers a third option in her "reference to the condition of being divided, and the complexity of the 'catastrophic-fold-of-'being.'"" (217). Johanna's ambivalence towards her roles as mother and wife suggests that, like Kristeva's maternal model, she realizes "she will never be able to accede to the complexity of being divided, of heterogeneity" (Kristeva, *TL* 248).

This treacherous reconciliation of the mother and lover's roles, often embodied in the same woman, reappears throughout Lawrence's novels. Judith Ruderman gives one critical account of this attempt to differentiate self from other, referring specifically to Lawrence's women and arguing that they:

tend to appear in pairs in many of [Lawrence's] works: one thinks of Miriam and Clara in *Sons and Lovers*, Ursula and Gudrun in *Women in Love*, Louisa and Mary in "The Daughters of the Vicar," March and Banford in *The Fox*, Carlota and Teresa in *The Plumed Serpent*. Because these pairs often split neatly between the sexual and spiritual aspects, one may ascribe their presence to Lawrence's puritanical upbringing, which caused him to see a woman either one way or the other. [...] This emphasis cuts across the sexual-spiritual axis and often results in

characters being treated as positive or negative aspects of the Magna Mater.

(Ruderman 12)

For her most obvious example of this dynamic, Ruderman cites Gudrun, who in her relationship with Gerald metaphorically “incorporates aspects of the ‘bad mother,’ she who encourages her child’s dependence on her and then, feeling that dependence a drag on her freedom, wishes to commit infanticide” (Ruderman 17).

Other versions of this problematic mother/lover duality abound in Lawrence’s novels. In *The Rainbow*, this tension appears almost immediately in the form of the widow Lydia Lensky, who remains unnamed for a number of pages after Tom Brangwen first spies her, and whose descriptors alternate between “the strange woman” and “the mother” of young Anna Lensky, with the latter name usually winning out. In the first weeks of their marriage, Brangwen seems mystified by her air of self-possession, the feeling he has that she is “curiously self-sufficient” (*R* 60), a separate being, and that their physical intimacy does not connote a corresponding spiritual connection. In fact, far from being a comforting presence, she is instead “foreign and unknown to him” (*R* 59). During her pregnancy, she becomes a terrifying figure, “like the upper millstone lying on him, crushing him” with the weight of her separation from him and his foreknowledge of her imminent suffering (*R* 64). When she finally goes into labor, Brangwen is paralyzed by his inability to either identify with her or move beyond this sympathy with her into his own separate man’s world. Again, Lawrence describes a split in the man, only this time it is the husband with the wife, instead of the son with the mother. Still, it coincides with the pivotal moment of childbirth, a nexus of the roles of lover and mother that Lydia embodies: “Brangwen, sitting downstairs, was divided” (*R* 74). Literally, his knowledge that “the child was being brought forth out of their one flesh” and that his wife “must be torn asunder for life to come forth” is the

source of his impotent anguish (*R* 74), which places him curiously in line with young Anna and her terror during her mother's labor.

In these first few chapters of *The Rainbow*, we can see the seeds of Ursula's future struggles with motherhood in the child Anna Lensky. Here, however, we see the female child's experience of the mother, which is in some respects remarkably similar to that of the male child: Anna Lensky is so jealous of her mother's affection towards her new husband as to become almost a romantic rival to him. Indeed, the morning after their marriage, she appears at their bedroom door in her nightgown, and confronts Tom Brangwen, who answers the door: "'I want my mother,' she said, jealously accenting the 'my'" (*R* 66). She doesn't seem to love her mother so much as to feel what the narrator calls "some anxious connexion" marked by jealousy, criticism, passion, and worry (*R* 71).

After his wife's pregnancy drives a wedge between the couple, "he turn[s] to the little girl for her sympathy and her love [...] So soon they were like lovers, father and child" (*R* 64). However, even this intimacy is not unmarked by troublesome moments. While her mother is in labor with her first Brangwen child, Anna has a hysterical episode of sobbing for her mother, which both Brangwen and Tilly the housekeeper answer by saying that her mother is "poorly tonight" and that little Anna needs to go to sleep (*TR* 75). Brangwen's attempts to soothe her go unheeded, until he finally loses patience and begins to ready her for bed in what, disconcertingly, resembles a rape scene:

And he reached his hand and grasped her. [...] She would have shrunk from him, but could not. So her small body remained in his grasp, while he fumbled at the little buttons and tapes, unthinking, intent, unaware of anything but

the irritation of her. [...] She kept stiff, overpowered, violated, he went on with his task. (*R* 76)

Brangwen and his daughter's relationship is complicated even further by his association of Anna not only with the role of a lover but also the mother. When Brangwen carries Anna with him to the barn to do the farm's chores, in order to calm her hysterical tears during her mother's labor, she gradually ceases to cry, distracted by watching him feed the cattle. Amid the comforting sounds of the beasts' eating and the soft reflections of lantern light on the wall, Brangwen gazes "down at the silky folds of the paisley shawl. It reminded him of his mother. She used to wear it to church. He was back again in the old irresponsibility and security, a boy at home" (*R* 79). Much as the Mary of Kristeva's "Stabat Mater" embodies mother, child, and wife simultaneously, so does the young Anna to Brangwen. After the birth of his son, Brangwen turns to Anna, in whom he "formed another centre of love [...] Gradually a part of his stream of life was diverted to the child, relieving the main flood to his wife" (*R* 83).

Meanwhile, his relationship with his wife is for a period not quite the same, perhaps because she has become the mother instead of the intriguing Polish woman whom he married. He is pleased with the son she bears him, but afterwards, "she seemed to lose connexion with her former self. She became now really English, really Mrs. Brangwen. Her vitality, however, seemed lowered" (*R* 82). Her newfound "English-ness" and the decrease in her life-force seem proportional to her loss of mystery for her husband; he now finds comfort in his stepchild Anna, whom he loves as "he never loved his own son" (*R* 82). For Brangwen, at least, the novel offers hope, in that ultimately his wife Lydia comes again to represent "the awful unknown" that Brangwen finds so compelling and erotic (*R* 94).

Still, for Lydia Brangwen, the process of childhood might be said to resemble Kristeva's own autobiographical account of motherhood, which appears in the fluid, non-linear text in the left margin of "Stabat Mater":

Then there is this other abyss that opens up between the body and what had been its inside: there is the abyss between the mother and the child. What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and this internal graft and fold, which, once the umbilical cord has been severed, is an inaccessible other? My body and ... him. No connection. Nothing to do with it. and this, as early as the first gestures, cries, steps, long before its personality has become my opponent. The child, whether he or she, is irremediably an other. To say that there are no sexual relationships constitutes a skimpy assertion when confronting the flash that bedazzles me when I confront the abyss between what was mine and is henceforth but irreparably alien. Trying to think through that abyss: staggering vertigo. No identity holds up. [...] a woman protects herself from the borderline that severs her body and expatriates it from her child. Lucidity, on the contrary, would restore her as cut in half, alien to its other—and a ground favorable to delirium. But also and for that very reason, motherhood destines us to a demented jouissance that is answered, by chance, by the nursling's laughter in the sunny waters of the ocean. (*TL* 255).

Part of the Lydia's difficult period of adjustment after Fred's birth may inhere in her attempts to come to terms with the complex concepts described by Kristeva above. Although she has already experienced motherhood before, her second marriage to Tom Brangwen seems to represent the "real" or "mature" one, unlike her first marriage to Lensky as a younger woman. Lawrence

denotes this explicitly through the shift in addressing her, from “Mrs. Lensky” to “his [Brangwen’s] wife” – a change that reflects her transformation into a woman of the Brangwen clan, a foremother of their children. This could also suggest that she does gain an identity after the trauma of childbirth, which consisted of being separated from what was once the “insides” of her own body.

The split of Tom Brangwen and the subsequent division of Lydia Lensky (now Brangwen) into lover/mother anticipates some of the difficulties that Anna will have with her husband Will – some emerging even as early as the morning after their wedding. Lying in post-connubial bliss, Anna and Will are like the fetus itself, “as remote from the world as if the two of them were buried like a seed in darkness” (*R* 145). As the passage progresses, its language becomes even more redolent of the womb:

[...] they lay close together, complete and beyond the touch of time or change, [and] it was as if they were at the very centre of all the slow wheeling of space and the rapid agitation of life, deep, deep inside them all, at the centre where there is utter radiance, and eternal being, and the silence absorbed in praise: the steady core of all movements, the unawakened sleep of all wakefulness. (*R* 145)

However, such a state of perfect union – just as in the case of the unborn infant – is only temporary, and both Will and Anna are eventually borne like infants “down the circles of praise and joy and gladness, farther and farther out, towards the noise and the friction” of the everyday world (*R* 145).

Significantly, it is not long before Anna begins to think of maternity for herself. When she considers the possibility of a pregnancy, Anna thinks to herself “not that she loved babies so

much [...] But she wanted to bear children. And a certain hunger in her heart wanted to unite her husband with herself, in a child” (*R* 175). Her desire for motherhood, then, itself reflects the split in the woman between mother and lover, and at the same time, perhaps paradoxically, reveals how easily these roles can become enmeshed. In a neat framing gesture, Will’s manner of comforting Anna after their first marital conflict closely resembles her stepfather’s words on the night when he took her to the barn while her mother was giving birth: “Don’t cry – don’t cry [...] Don’t cry, my love” (*R* 156). His gesture almost makes Will seem the maternal partner in the relationship. Interestingly, after their embrace shifts from comforting to passionate and they have sexually reconciled, they both again become like the infant: “When they came to themselves, the night was very dark. [...] They lay still and warm and weak, like the new-born, together. And there was a silence almost of the unborn” (*R* 156). In this scene, Will transforms from the mother into the infant in the space of a mere few paragraphs. Moreover, shortly after their first night, he thinks to himself that “it was true what they said, that a man wasn’t born until he was married” (*R* 150).

After years of marriage and four children, however, the two of them settle into an “old, accustomed intimacy” (*R* 234), and Will sees her no longer as a lover but rather as an all but sexless woman who has “been absorbed in wifedom and motherhood” (*R* 227). Like her own mother, her former maternal role is conflated with her new role of wife, the latter of which Will no longer views in erotic or romantic terms. Will himself, in addition to splitting the mother/wife from the lover, feels a divergence in himself: when he considers a sexual dalliance with another woman, “another self seemed to assert its being within him” (*R* 227). He is no longer the all-but-eunuch husband, but rather a prospective lover to a young woman whom he has just met.

As for their daughter Ursula, for the length of both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, she remains childless; only the pregnancy scare at the conclusion of the first novel alludes to any future maternity. Yet her troubled perspective on motherhood reveals itself before she has even considered that she might be pregnant. Early in her courtship with Anton Skrebensky, she attends a church service with him the morning after a particularly passionate evening of stolen kisses. Struggling with her feelings of annoyance at the sermon on Noah, Ursula “mock[s] at this multiplication” represented by the imperative to procreate and comes to a turning point in her views of reproduction, the body, and God (*R* 325).

Even more than her explicit sneering at Christianity, however, her subsequent literary allusion to Hamlet’s “kissing carrion” speech speaks volumes about her attitude: “What was God, after all? If maggots in a dead dog be but God kissing carrion, what then is not God? She was surfeited of this God. She was weary of the Ursula Brangwen who felt troubled about God. Whatever God was, He was, and there was no need for her to trouble about Him. She felt she had now all licence” (*R* 326).¹⁸ Ursula’s reference to this passage inadvertently reveals her (and perhaps the author’s) anxious view of motherhood as intimately related to decay, rot, and corpses. In Hamlet’s “kissing carrion” speech, he is literally suggesting that the sun creates maggots in the carcass of a dead dog by “kissing” it with its warmth – all this according to the theory of spontaneous generation that held currency in Shakespeare’s day. If we look at this metaphor more closely, however, we can see what it implies about women and childbirth: the

¹⁸ Here Lawrence is quoting from Warburton’s edition of Shakespeare’s play, in which he substituted the more logical “god” for the word “good,” to the approbation of Samuel Johnson. For an explanation of the implications of this change, see, for example, Hiram Corson’s explication in “On a Disputed Passage in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*,” published in *Notes and Queries*, September 13, 1873. After Warburton’s emendation, the passage reads thus:

HAMLET. For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god kissing carrion—Have you a daughter?

POLONIUS. I have, my lord.

HAMLET. Let her not walk in the sun. Conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive.

(II.ii)

“kiss” of the sun (the male) “impregnates” the dead dog (the female), causing it to bear maggots (the child). This reading is lent further credence by Hamlet’s immediately subsequent question and pointed warning about Ophelia’s “conceiving” – a pun on the word’s multiple meanings of mental apprehension and physical fertility. He declares, in fact, that conception (in the physical sense) will not be a blessing, whether for her or others. More revealingly, Hamlet’s comparison of the mother’s body to a dog’s carcass suggests a powerful sense of abjection – which apparently springs from his anger at his mother’s betrayal of his father. Yet this disgust is also directed at himself, as he characterizes the children of woman – both Ophelia’s hypothetical progeny and, by extension, himself as his mother’s son – as “maggots.” For Ursula’s part, this is an important reference, although the implications for her are markedly different from Hamlet’s situation. Ursula is without doubt struggling with religion, particularly Christianity’s sublimation of the natural passions of the body into the less satisfying form of words, sermons, and prohibitions. Yet, it is not only a theological issue for her. That she refers to the “kissing carrion” speech in the context of her newly fledged affair with Anton – in which she is also having her first experiences of erotic love (kissing, petting) – seems like an uneasy realization of the possible consequences of sexual union.

During the thick of her courtship with Anton, there are still more hints as to her future as a “split” woman like her mother and her grandmother. At the dance after her brother Fred’s wedding to a local girl, she turns suddenly, feeling “some influence looking in upon her” (*R* 318), and sees a large moon rising outside. Her response is a kind of reverence and desire for communion, yet that is only possible as she splits herself to receive it: “her breast opened to it, she was cleaved like a transparent jewel [...] Her two breasts opened to make way for it, her body opened wide like a quivering anemone” (*R* 319). She thinks to herself that she wants to “get

away to the clean, free moonlight” and that such a move will spell her liberty from “the dross” of humankind (*R* 319). Paradoxically, her own desire is to split others, as well, and specifically Skrebensky: “A strange rage filled her, a rage to tear things asunder” (*R* 319). Thus, her own desires match those of the moon, itself a symbol of vitality, albeit of the darker ilk. Lawrence talks explicitly about the moon’s significance in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, insisting, “It certainly isn’t a snowy cold world, like a world of our own gone cold. Nonsense. It is a globe of dynamic substance like radium or phosphorous, coagulated upon a certain vivid pole of energy, which pole of energy is directly polarized with our earth, in opposition with our sun” (*FTU* 55). His beliefs about the moon underscore the importance of Ursula’s desire to become one with it by letting it inside her body. Interestingly, this unity is phrased in terms of birth – a cleaving of the body – yet it is almost as if the birth process is reversed. Instead of splitting to become hollow and lacking, the body cleaves to *receive* oneness and merging – a fantasy version of the mother’s desire to keep the infant inside of her and to retain the temporary sense of wholeness it confers.

Later, in *Women in Love*, Ursula will contemplate the moon again; by contrast, in this second, more ambivalent lunar scene, it seems to her “mysterious, with its white and deathly smile [...] the sinister face, triumphant and radiant” (*WL* 237). Afraid, and glad for the trees that shield its white surface from her, Ursula goes to Willey Water and meets Birkin, who is likewise disturbed by the cold, bright unity of the moon’s face. The description here might likewise apply to the mother herself: “a white body of fire writhing and striving and not even now broken open [...] It seemed to be drawing itself together with strange, violent pangs, in blind effort. It was getting stronger. It was reasserting itself, the inviolable moon” (*WL* 239). Here the fear seems to be centered on a mother who will not be split, a “moon regathering itself

insidiously [...] the heart of the rose intertwining vigorously and blindly, calling back the scattered fragments, winning home the fragments” (*WL* 240). Here he fears the image the moon presents: a picture eerily similar to the seemingly unified, potentially smothering body of the mother, which calls back its “pieces,” including the child, incorporating them and making them indistinguishable from herself. Of course, in this section Birkin might also be hurling stones at the unity of the *I* or Ego, but the origins even of this dilemma lie in the mother’s “inviolable” body. In fact, later in the scene, frustrated with the futility of language, he turns to that same semiotic or maternal body. As Kristeva puts it, the “possibilities of communication having been swept away, only the subtle gamut of sound, touch, and visual traces, older than language and newly worked out, are preserved as an ultimate shield against death” (“*Stabat Mater*” 253). Accordingly, what Birkin wants, he knows “must happen beyond the sound of words” (*WL* 242). He harnesses the power of the Semiotic or maternal in order to “make up for the vertigo of language weakness” (*TL* 253). In this way he resembles Gerald, who as the owner of a mine attempts to master the matter (or “*Mater*”) of the earth.

This masculine re-appropriation of the mother’s power could be said to prefigure later novels like *The Plumed Serpent*, where maternal influence admittedly turns considerably more ominous. Judith Ruderman asserts that most critics view this novel as “concerned in the main with the male-female relationship,” yet she argues that the book is also an exploration of the “role of the Magna Mater” as Lawrence conceived of it and an attempt “to correct the modern-day ascendancy of the Magna Mater” delineated in earlier novels like *The Lost Girl* (Ruderman 144). Again, in terms remarkably similar to Kristeva’s language in her description of the cult of the Virgin, Ruderman identifies Lawrence’s problem thus: “it is not simply woman who has assumed the power role but woman as Mary or Queen of the World: she is the real target of

Lawrence's spleen" (144). Ruderman observes likewise that, significantly, during the marriage ceremony between Kate Leslie and Cipriano, the "postures that the men and women must take [...] require the woman to stoop and kneel, and the man to stand erect" (144). Kate herself has served as a kind of Madonna figure in the past, "worshiped as a queen by her previous husbands, both of them blue-eyed, ineffectual men [...] [but] now the black-eyed men [...] are ready to assume their proper leadership role after pulling woman down from her pedestal" (Ruderman 144). It is interesting that Ruderman waves away Kate's own more empowering traits in favor of her "Maryhood," which she identifies as "one reason for Cipriano's attraction to her" (145). It is this aspect of Kate – her resemblance to the Madonna – that is so threatening to the novel's paradigm of masculine power.

Upon first glance, Lawrence's account of Kate's fall from Marian heights might seem to fall surprisingly into line with Kristeva's attempts to find answers to "a motherhood that today remains, after the Virgin, without a discourse" (*TL* 262). Kristeva, like Lawrence, seeks a way of pulling the contradictorily powerless, yet unquestionably influential Madonna figure "down from her pedestal" and into a more realistic and positive role. Lawrence's visualization of such a move, however, would appear to be rather distant from what Kristeva envisions instead in "Stabat Mater": "So let us again listen to the *Stabat Mater* [of Pergolesi], and the music, all the music...it swallows up all the goddesses and removes their necessity" (*TL* 263). Kristeva's path lies through the semiotic or maternal aspects of music, tears, milk, and the meandering reflections in the left-hand column of text in "Stabat Mater," as it contrasts with the more linear and logical one on the right side of the page. She advocates "not avoiding the embarrassing and inevitable problematics of the law but giving it flesh, language, and jouissance—in that case its

reformulation demands the contribution of women” (*TL* 262). Women’s role in such a reconstitution of language, then, is central.

Lawrence’s proposed remedy near the end of his career points him instead in the general direction of the masculine realm of leadership politics. A man’s task with regard to his female mate in such a world is to behave according to Lawrence’s dictate in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*: “Combat her in her cock-sure belief that she ‘knows’ and that she is ‘right.’ Take it all out of her. Make her yield once more to the male leadership” (*FTU* 191). The woman, asserts Lawrence, must not be as the wives of “these miserable men, for ever looking back to their women for guidance” (*FTU* 192). Clearly, then, the Marian ideal, which tells the young man to forsake his fiancée for the Virgin’s sake, has evaporated. The ideal Lawrentian woman, once divided into tyrannical mother or devouring mistress, will finally be transformed into a “true” wife:

[...] once a woman *does* believe in her man, in the pioneer which he is, the pioneer who goes on ahead beyond her, into the darkness in front, and who may be lost to her for ever in this darkness; when once she knows the pain and beauty of this belief, knows that the loneliness of waiting and following is inevitable, that it must be so; ah, then how wonderful it is! How wonderful it is to come back to her, at evening, as she sits half in fear and waits! (*FTU* 193)

This is the only place for such a split woman, for to consider her in all her complexity would be to awaken all the repressed matter of childhood regarding the troubling erotic/maternal duality of the mother.

Still, Lawrence is inexorably drawn back to the mother, both in the lovers he chooses for himself and fictionalizes, as well as in his tendency to identify so closely with the maternal. In

the self-titled chapter of *Kangaroo*, Richard Somers looks out at the fierce sea, the original symbolic maternal body, yet it is body uncontaminated by the smothering sympathy of the sentimental mother:

To surge with that cold exultance and passion of a sea thing! Now he understood the yearning in the seal-woman's croon, as she went back to the sea, leaving her husband and her children of warm flesh. No more cloying warmth. No more of this horrible stuffy heat of human beings. To be an isolated swift fish in the big seas, that are bigger than the earth; fierce with cold, cold life, in the watery twilight before sympathy was created to clog us. (*K* 125)

Somers's ability to identify with the "seal-woman" and her otherwise censure-worthy desire to abandon mate and progeny corresponds to an apparent attempt to identify and come to terms with the impulse that led Frieda to leave her husband and children.

Though Lawrence insisted upon this course of action – an account we find reprised again in Gilbert and Johanna's quick courtship in *Mr. Noon* and his literal demand that Frieda come away with him to the Tyrol – his request had the reflexive effect of only augmenting the implications of the split woman. Rather than merely being a psychological divide between Frieda the mother and Frieda the lover, the rift expands to an actual, geographical schism that divides Frieda between England and the Alps. Thus, Richard Somers's notion of the "isolated" fish within the quiet enclosure of water represents the ultimate fantasy, one which echoes a desire to return to the union of mother and child in the womb and which appears later in adult life – for instance, in Rupert Birkin's ostensibly paradoxical desire for singleness within union:

[...] the paradisal entry into pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union, stronger than any pangs of emotion, a

lovely state of free proud singleness, which accepted the obligation of the permanent connection with others, and with the other, submits to the yoke and leash of love, but never forfeits its own proud individual singleness, even while it loves and yields. (*WL* 247)

Perhaps such a fusion is not possible, but it at least represents the author's hope that the split mother may be re-imagined in order to permit a merging that does not threaten identity. Such cohesion poses its own threats, however, as the individual finds in his or her inevitable and repeated encounters with the abject maternal body, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

“THE PASSIONATE EVIL THAT IS IN US”

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated.

It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.

(Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 1)

The mind’s terror of the body has driven more men mad than ever could be counted. The insanity of a great mind like Swift’s is at least partly traceable to this cause. In a poem to his mistress Celia, which has the maddened refrain “But—Celia, Celia, Celia s***s,” (the word rhymes with spits), we see what can happen to a great mind when it falls into panic. A great wit like Swift could not see how ridiculous he made himself. Of course Celia s***s! Who doesn’t? And how much worse if she didn’t. [...] And then think of poor Celia, made to feel iniquitous about her proper natural function, by her “lover.” It is monstrous.

(D.H. Lawrence, *A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover* 13-14)

A curious agony, and a relief, when I touch that
which is not me in any sense,
it wounds me to death with my own not-being;
definite, inviolable limitation,
and something beyond, quite beyond, if you
understand what that means.
It is the major part of being, this having surpassed oneself,
this having touched the edge of the beyond, and
perished, yet not perished.

(D. H. Lawrence, “Manifesto” 206-12)

In a letter to Lady Ottoline on April 8, 1915, Lawrence wrote: “This is the very worst wickedness, that we refuse to acknowledge the passionate evil that is in us. This makes us secret and rotten” (*CL* 2 315). This “passionate evil – with its attendant horror, disgust, revolt, and yet

paradoxical fascination – is a feature of almost all of Lawrence’s writing, and this ambivalence has long puzzled Lawrentian scholars. His characters are frequently faced with entities or substances that they find terrifying and repulsive, yet simultaneously magnetic and attractive. Maria DiBattista attributes this tendency to revulsion to modernist writers in general, claiming that:

The body stiffening in rejection is the characteristic posture of the modern, its standard attitude of revolt: Mrs. Dalloway stiffening at the top of the stairs; Stephen Dedalus’s spiritual contractions in revulsions against Dear, Dirty Dublin; the crampings that afflict the Beckettian body. But Lawrence also recounted how this atavistic gesture, like the infant’s moro reflex, could indicate the last insistent twitchings of life-in-embryo resisting the soul’s couvade. (DiBattista 115)

In this way, DiBattista connects these characters’ tendency toward fear or revulsion with the infant’s experience of the mother.¹⁹ Lawrence also specifically references the moro reflex when he describes the alienation and rejection associated with individuation’s mandated separation from the other: “The scream of revolt from connection, the revolt from union. There is a violent anti-maternal motion, anti-everything” (*PU* 22). This feeling of revolt is elicited later, as well,

¹⁹ Indeed, DiBattista’s juxtaposition of a reflex of stiffening with one of couvade – in which the expectant father experiences a “phantom pregnancy” along with his mate’s real one – suggests that to identify with the mother’s body produces feelings of both sympathy and disgust or fear. Though she does not phrase it in those specific terms, DiBattista’s very language reveals the dichotomy of revulsion/attraction and the inevitable connection to the abject mother.

To pursue DiBattista’s metaphor of couvade further, we might look at studies of its social importance in various cultures. In his anthropological work *Anxious Pleasures* (1987), Thomas Gregor discusses the use of couvade in cultures in which, as he puts it, it “is an expression of fundamental ambivalence in [...] male sexual identity” (196). Certainly, it may represent a male curiosity about or even envy of the feminine experience, but beyond that, as Gregor points out, in many societies couvade “appears where the father is absent from the household [...] In each of these instances, the father may be perceived as an interloper in the mother-infant relationship. The son’s initial identification is with the mother rather than the absent or shadowy father” (196). This initial mother-infant closeness facilitated by the father’s couvade resembles the most common version of the modern Western household, where the paternal figure is often less visible to the infant than the mother. The father’s advent into the child’s life then explains the “stiffening,” as DiBattista puts it in her discussion of the modern character, toward the smothering love represented by the mother and her now abject body.

when we confront what disgusts us, in a re-rehearsal of the original scene of repulsion, and we can even extend this further to describe the kind of recoil Lawrence performs against homosexuality, smothering love, and other larger abstractions – a recoil that Kristeva’s *Intimate Revolt* will connect back to the original sense of pushing away the mother, or other.

Nevertheless, literal disgust and a preoccupation with decay is a motif that other critics have noted in Lawrence’s work, as well. In his critical study *The World of Lawrence*, Henry Miller identifies in the author himself a capacity to bring creation out of decay and disease, a “neurotic” who was also “productive” and a “genius,” a writer who was “monstrous” yet had a “fecundating [...] spirit,” and someone who “worshipped corruption. Because it is out of corruption that we shall discover life more abundant” (Miller 47).²⁰

A representative early review of *The Rainbow* by James Douglas in *Star* in October 1915 provides an accurate summary of the prevailing opinion on Lawrence: Douglas calls his admitted genius “morbidly perverted” and accuses him of using “this divine insight to tear open cells of horror and to gloat over unfathomable corruption” (Draper, *The Critical Heritage* 94). At the subsequent obscenity trial of *The Rainbow*, the *New Statesman* reports, “the magistrate described [the novel] as ‘utter filth’ and said that he had ‘never read anything more disgusting than this book’” (Draper, *The Critical Heritage* 105). As his often nauseated critics attest, there is no

²⁰ Miller goes on to praise Lawrence’s “genius” by pointing to his realization of contraries:

How can there be any question of genius without this question of conflict? How can there be any civilization without this element of disease? Those who are not tainted are worthless, worse than worthless—they are dead. Disease is the germ of life in its most virulent form. Disease springs out of the quick of corruption, and corruption is simply the decay of a living organism. If there is no life there can be no corruption, no decay, no death; disease is the spiritual algebra that equates life with death, that furnishes the continuity between life and death. It is disease we ought to worship. It is only through disease that we know health, that fine balance of the warring forces in us of life and death. [...] Corrupt? Of course he was corrupt. He worshipped corruption. Because it is out of corruption that we shall discover life more abundant. (Miller 47)

doubt that as an author Lawrence was not afraid to depict sexuality and the unmentionable parts of the human body, as well as the body's literal state of corruption as a corpse.

Indeed, the connection between abjection – that combination of horror and fascination – and the novels of Lawrence becomes clear almost as soon as we look at Kristeva's theories alongside his work, particularly in *Powers of Horror* (1982). Death is an obvious occasion when Lawrence's characters must face the abject, yet we can also see the effects of abjection in the proliferation of abject sexualities in the novels – bodies and desires that seem to threaten the bounds of identity. In *Women in Love*, in particular, Lawrence extends his revulsion toward humanity to what, in *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, Michael Levenson calls a desire for “the annihilation of our species” (150). Levenson goes on to observe: “Scarcely able to bear the thought of human presence in the world, [Lawrence] imagines an individuality so radical that it no longer falls within the boundaries of humanity” (150). Further, this characteristic breaching of borders on the level of individual psychology extends even to the generic qualities of Lawrence's work, as well, for his longer works of fiction often permeate or erase the boundaries between the novel and the genres of poetry, nonfiction, and drama.

A clear connection emerges here between the revolutionary ideas contained in Lawrence's novels and Kristeva's belief that “abjection, like other forms of psychological suffering, may ultimately be stimulating and creative” (Bové 116), although not all abjection ends positively. Many of Lawrence's characters – the two men in “The Prussian Officer,” for example – never successfully confront their horror and revulsion to emerge, on the other side of it, more vital and creative individuals. Even Kristeva avows that she “understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones” (PH 9).

In this chapter, I propose to examine several cases of abjection in Lawrence's fiction, which might be bracketed under the figurative and literal forms of the corpse. The appearance of corpses, decay, and corpse-like sexuality become especially evident in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Women in Love*, *The Rainbow*, *Sons and Lovers*, and in the shorter works "Odor of Chrysanthemums" and "The Prussian Officer." By reading these Lawrentian works through the lens of *Powers of Horror* in particular, we can begin to see the ways in which Kristeva's theories help to account for the horror and concomitant attraction that erupts whenever Lawrence's characters confront the abject. Lawrence's works themselves help to elucidate Kristeva's ideas by dramatizing them, in addition to providing occasional challenges to her assertions. This is the case throughout the novels, especially in terms of their portrayals of both amorous and familial relationships.

In his introduction to the 1954 edition of his critical work *Son of Woman*, John Middleton Murry tries to account for his contention about the historically controversial *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which has been deemed "pornographic" for its rather frank descriptions of sexual acts, including anal intercourse. Murry asserts, "ambiguous is the very delineation of physical love between Mellors and Connie, which culminates in the description of an experience 'of piercing, consuming, rather awful sensuality'" (xvi). He goes on to call the novel "curiously sad and depressing," "devitalized," and possessed of "a false and treacherous reconciliation of sensuousness and sensuality [with] little creative depth or human warmth" (xvi-xvii). Such a view flies directly in the face of other modern scholarship on the novel – for instance, Mark Spilka's argument in *The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence*, where he asserts that the novelist calls for a return to the mysticism of the physical body itself: "this sense of religious communion pervades *all* the sexual passages; so that to call them 'naturalistic descriptions of the sex-act,'

with Harry Moore, or to speak, as Diana Trilling does, of the revelations of biology, is to miss the whole tenor and purpose of the reading experience” (191). Spilka’s very language in this section is, albeit unintentionally, suggestive of the body: in describing the sense of mysticism contained in “the sexual *passages*” of the novel, he might be referring equally plausibly to textual passages *and* the physical orifices, or “passages,” to which Lawrence alludes in these sections of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Spilka’s accidental pun is fortuitous, for it further underscores the connection between textuality and physicality that is literally embodied by Lawrence’s novels.

Such divergent readings of the “pornographic” language and content of the novel point to the very questions *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* raises about the forbidden, the “awful” – what Kristeva calls the abject – and also to the paradoxical attraction such abjection simultaneously represents. When Leavis refers to the novel as “notorious [...] for its hygienic undertaking in relation to the obscene vocabulary and the corresponding physical facts” (*D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* 369), his language alludes to the terrifying yet fascinating quality of these passages, which seem to disgust and repulse as many readers as they fascinate and enthrall. The latter type of readers, like Spilka, seem to see in these transgressive passages the possibility for a new kind of creativity and reverence for what Garry Watson calls “the sometimes smelly but unrepugnant body” (13). Connie Chatterley herself, we learn, initially approaches this new kind of lovemaking as an “awful” proposition. However, as the base of this word – “awe” – would suggest, she soon begins to view her intimate life with Mellors as an encounter with a being who is a “bit terrifying! But lovely really!” (*LCL* 226). But before she can achieve this ecstatic moment of epiphany, she must confront the abject: a presence that haunts all of Lawrence’s work in its depiction of his characters’ revulsion of and attraction to sexuality.

In *Women in Love*, we can see how alarmingly horror and sexual desire mingle in the characters. Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich's sexual affair commences just after his father's funeral. Likewise, Rupert Birkin and Ursula Brangwen consummate their union at the same time that a group is searching Willey Water for the drowned bodies of two other characters. As these relationships illustrate, the sexual encounters in Lawrence's fiction often occur in tandem with deathly scenes. More literally, however, the proliferation of corpses in this novel (including those of Winifred, Doctor Brindell, Mr. Crich, and finally Gerald), as well as those that appear in "Odour of Chrysanthemums," "The Prussian Officer," and *The Plumed Serpent*, attests to the odd mixture of revulsion and fascination that these fictional characters experience when they confront what is neither *I* nor other. The formation of the self alone necessitates a meeting with horror, for as Kristeva argues: "These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. [...] It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (*PH* 3-4).

A Threat from Within

Lawrence returns again and again to the notion of the horrific, abysmal, and terrifyingly unknowable in both his fictional and nonfictional work. In a fragmentary writing entitled "On Taking the Next Step" (1923), he says ominously of modern life, "We just mark time on the brink" (387). In a strategy remarkably akin to Kristeva's discussion of the non-rational properties of the emiotic, which disrupts the logic and meaning of language, the sentences that follow in Lawrence's essay use the word "brink" so frequently as to render it nonsensical in the mind of the reader:

Brink of what? We are on a brink, we all seem agreed about it. But we none of us decide what brink it is.

What is it we don't know? What is it we should have realised, or begun to realise, in the war, and didn't. What is it we funk?

What about the next step? Whither? Towards what? And what will it land us in.

Brink! That means the edge of something. A river, a gulf, a chasm, a precipice, a barranca, a sea, an ocean. What is it then that lies over the brink? What is this mysterious beyond? [...]

A brink is the end of an old journey, the edge of a jump of some sort. This brink then is the end of a journey.

End of what?

Why, the end of democracy, the end of the ideal of liberty and freedom, the end of the brotherhood of man, the end of the idea of the perfectibility of man, the end of the belief in the reign of love, the end of the belief that man desires peace, harmony, tranquility, love, and lovingkindness all the while. The end of Christianity, the end of the Church of Jesus. The end of idealism, the end of the idealistic ethic. The end of Plato and Kant, as well as of Jesus. The end of science, as an absolute knowledge. The end of the absolute power of the Word. The end, the end, the end.

We're at the end of all these things.

And at the beginning of what?

A gulf. A gulf, a gulf! What's a gulf?

Nay, you can't look into the gulf till you've run to the real edge of it. And you very rarely come to the brink of one sheer precipice. No, you come to a steep place, and look down to another level: not very far. You scramble down to this level: your old paths will get you down so far. And you look over. And still you can't see into the gulf. You look down to another ledge, rather narrower. ("On Taking the Next Step" 387)

From the beginning of her work *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva employs the same language of the gulf or abyss to explain her conception of the abject, asserting that it represents a threat that cannot be reconciled with individual identity. In order to preserve a notion of selfhood, the individual must consider the abject thus: "Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing." (*PH* 2). It is not an "object" in the sense that it supplies one "with someone or something else as support" (*PH* 1); in fact, its opposition to *I* is its only "objective" quality. Like Lawrence's "gulf," it continues to withdraw, the more we attempt to identify what it actually *is*: we "think, *there is the verge!* But it isn't. Not quite" (Lawrence, "On Taking the Next Step" 388).

At the same time, for Kristeva the abject carries a certain attraction along with its repulsion; it "draws [one] toward the place where meaning collapses" (*PH* 2). The abject is that which is "jettisoned" from the *I*, yet, she asserts, "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (*PH* 2). Perhaps this explains the characteristic push-and-pull, or attraction-and-repulsion dynamic, that occurs between the subject-in-process and the abject: it is a combination of "horror, fascination, estrangement" that brings us "to the border of [our] condition as a living being" (*PH* 3). The simple, basic relationship formula of other/*I* is disturbed by this non-object, which we must cast away in order to preserve the laws and

boundaries of civilized society, yet which is always there, at the very border of existence, threatening to eradicate us. Indeed, the abject is perilous precisely because, instead of strengthening the borders of the symbolic realm of language and reason, it actually “points to the fragility of these borders” (Oliver 56). Thus, any meeting with abjection threatens to obliterate the self – yet we *must* face it.

For Kristeva, the corpse becomes the crucial emblem of this crisis, for as we contemplate the lifeless body, we also consider the inevitability of our own identical fate. By default, such a realization carries with it the problem of identity: we ask, “When I myself become the corpse, what or where then will *I* be?” The impossibility of this question – a contemplation of non-being, which is inassimilable – forces us to turn away from the corpse in repulsion and horror. We can see this dynamic clearly in Birkin, when he views the dead body of his beloved Gerald in *Women in Love*:

Birkin went again to Gerald. He had loved him. And yet he felt chiefly disgust at the inert body lying there. It was so inert, so coldly dead, a carcase [*sic*], Birkin’s bowels seemed to turn to ice. He had to stand and look at the frozen dead body that had been Gerald. [...] And now this was Gerald, stiff as a board, curled up as if for sleep, yet with the horrible hardness somehow evident. It filled him with horror. (*WL* 469)

His inability to reconcile Gerald’s known identity with the lifelessness of the corpse throws Birkin into his own psychic trauma because he cannot understand how Gerald, his intimate, could become the frozen mass of decaying flesh that Birkin is suddenly faced with: “He had loved Gerald. Now he looked at the shapely, strange-coloured face, with the small, fine, pinched nose and the manly cheeks, saw it frozen like an ice pebble—yet he had loved it. What was one

to think or feel?” (*WL* 469). In the end, he imagines that his own body and blood are freezing, “turning to ice-water,” and he feels “a heavier cold congealing within him, in his heart and in his bowels” (*WL* 469).

It is significant that Birkin’s physical response to Gerald’s corpse lies not only in his heart but also, as is mentioned twice in the passage, in his entrails. Kristeva identifies other substances, including mud, blood, feces, and rot, that inspire moments of abjection that are similar to our revulsion against the corpse. The matter that comes out of our bodies is problematic because it has “traversed the boundary of the body” (*PH* 69). Excrement and menstrual blood, in particular, are pollutants because the former represents “danger to identity that comes from without” and the latter, that which comes from within (*PH* 71). Both substances are gendered as feminine: menstrual blood for obvious reasons, and excrement because “maternal authority is experienced [...] as sphincter training” (*PH* 71). Tears and semen, on the other hand, do not fall into the same category as these “pollutants.” In any case, through these examples, Kristeva points out that “corporeal waste [...] [represents] [...] the objective frailty of symbolic order” (*PH* 71).²¹

²¹ This explains one reason why purification rites have such a central place in many cultures: the “purification rite [...] [prohibits] the filthy object, extracts it from the secular order and lines it at once with a sacred facet [...] Defilement is what is jettisoned from the ‘symbolic system’” (65). Because of this, Kristeva argues: “Defilement, by means of the rituals that consecrate it, is perhaps, for a social aggregate, only one of the possible foundings of abjection bordering the frail identity of the speaking being” (67). Indeed, Kristeva also points out that “[i]t is not [...] surprising to see pollution rituals proliferating in societies where patrilineal power is poorly secured” (77). Given Kristeva’s characterization of the abject as what threatens cleanliness and order, it is curious that Lawrence often describes Christianity as abject. In *The Rainbow*, Ursula turns the other cheek after her sister Theresa has slapped it, only to have her other cheek slapped, as well: “There was something unclean and degrading about this humble side of Christianity. Ursula suddenly revolted to the other extreme” (*R* 285). Her response is a visibly Nietzschean repudiation of Judeo-Christian forgiveness: later she picks a fight with Theresa in retribution, and then goes “away, unchristian but clean” (*R* 285).

At the same time, Kristeva clarifies that abjection does not necessarily have to occur as “lack of cleanliness or health” but, more symbolically, can exist in that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (*PH* 4). Thus, even concepts and individuals can come to represent the abject. As she puts it: “Abjection is above all ambiguity” (*PH* 9). It is what is irreconcilable, amoral, flouts convention, denies boundaries and categories. We can see here how the novel as a genre could be seen, by Kristeva’s definition, to resemble the abject because of its annexation of other literary forms and consequent refusal of generic boundaries – a subject I will address more fully in the sixth chapter’s discussion of revolutionary art.

In order to explain the individual’s experience of abjection, Kristeva uses a more concrete example of fireworks versus fire at night, saying that if the fireworks “went on for more than five seconds, the soul could not endure it and must perish” (*PH* 19), unlike fire, which the individual can witness for long periods of time without adverse effect. This, then, is the crux of the abject: a sudden fascination but also a simultaneous repulsion. Indeed, even in the fire example, we might see possibilities for abjection: the subject is afraid and horrified by the fire, but at the same time is glad and wants to burn things. Lawrence’s works abound with characters who exemplify this desire to approach the border of identity through an encounter with a fearful or horrifying individual, substance, or situation. We might think here of Elizabeth Bates’s contemplation of her husband’s dead body in “Odour of Chrysanthemums,” the subordinate’s desire to kill his superior in “The Prussian Officer,” or even Kate Leslie’s witnessing of the ritual sacrifice of the traitors in *The Plumed Serpent*: all three scenes illustrate this paradoxical, unwilling attraction to the abject.

According to Kristeva in her later volume *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* (1987), the objective of the analyst is to give “meaning to the ‘emptiness’ of the ‘borderline’ [represented by the abject] while teaching the patient to cope with the emptiness within self-understanding that is the original source of our anguish and moral pain” (*IBWL* 34-5). This trauma plagues Lawrence’s characters, as well; the distinction in each character lies in whether he or she is able to successfully move beyond this initial trauma to the kind of play with masks and incessantly shifting identities that Kristeva describes as the ideal: “the real end of analysis, if indeed the process ever ends, is more likely that which comes after the period of disillusionment [when the analysand realizes s/he is alone], when a certain playfulness of spirit returns: ‘I am someone else, I cannot say who. There are things that cannot be said, and I am entitled to play around with them so that I can understand them better’” (*IBWL* 51). Kristeva makes clear in the first chapter of *Powers of Horror* that her study of the abject will be “phenomenological” (*PH* 31), an approach that works well with Lawrence’s characters, in terms of their complex and idiosyncratic experiences of horror’s paradoxical attraction. To complicate further our experience of reading the novels, some characters change dramatically during the course of the story, and Kristeva’s language of “masks” and “play” seems to help in some measure to account for these characters’ radical alterations in outlook, belief, and behavior.

In Rupert Birkin’s case, a debate with Gerald over murder also becomes a chance to encounter the abject possibility of a corpse and move beyond it into a space of play where subjectivity is a fluid thing. The inconsistency represented by his position – he is a well-respected schoolmaster who is making the shocking suggestion that a murdered person more or less “asks” to be murdered, or at least willingly plays the role – makes him appear abject in the eyes of Gerald, who protests the ethics of such a position. Birkin here approaches the amorality

expressed in Kristeva's belief that the abject "thus corresponds to fundamental hypocrisy in morality and politics" (Lechte 160). Indeed, Birkin could well be described as Kristeva's abject "amoral oscillator: [...] he who, slyly and unpredictably, at one time conforms to existing moral principles, and at another secretly flouts them" (Lechte 160). In this way, surprisingly, he resembles Loerke, another character who exhibits amoral traits and behavior.

Despite their initial troubles, the central characters in his novels almost always manage to overcome their initial "recoil" and "dread" by the end. In *Women in Love*, for instance, there are numerous examples of the horror of the abject body: Birkin's sickened appearance to Ursula after his head trauma, the corpse of Gerald Crich's father, Winifred's drowned body, and the portrayal of Hermione, who essentially becomes a living corpse.²² However, these encounters with the abjection of bodily parts and processes undoubtedly sometimes make possible an interrogation of outdated taboos, as well, as Lawrence indicates when he decries Swift's squeamishness in his poem about Celia's excretory functions. His exasperation at the modern avoidance of abject body parts is underlined by the double mention of this quotation from Swift quotation – both in *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1929) and in the introduction to his poems from *Pansies* (1929), where he appropriately deems Swift's "over-squeamish" thoughts to be "some terrible constipation" (420, 419).

Perhaps this is partly why Lawrence's novels resonate with readers: he is unafraid of the prospect of exposing the sometimes-unhygienic body that has not been sanitized by the "spiritual" discourses of psychology and religion. This desire to confront what is forbidden and "obscene" is markedly in evidence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, even in the more emotional

²² Garry Watson notes that "it has always seemed obvious to me that with one striking exception—Gerald Crich torturing his Arab mare in the railway-crossing scene in *Women in Love*—the images of the body Lawrence had to offer us were best understood as providing a radical alternative to the images and analyses we find in Kristeva's book [*Powers of Horror*]" (2).

language used to describe the main two characters' sympathy and passion for one another. Just before their first sexual encounter, as Connie cries holding the young chick, Oliver feels "compassion [flame] in his bowels for her" (*LCL* 122). And a short while later, after they come together a second time and discuss their mutual satisfaction, Connie feels "her passion for him [move] in her bowels" (*LCL* 143). In both cases, the physical locus of their passionate feelings lies in the sector of the body most closely associated with abjection: the intestines, which house the waste and excrement of the body. This way of locating their attraction associates it with excrement, yet perhaps also with the nourishing properties of manure.

Simultaneously and perhaps paradoxically, these descriptions seem to lend themselves to a more positive interpretation: Lawrence clearly portrays Connie and Mellors's relationship as a vital, loving one, in dramatic contrast to both characters' marriages with their respective spouses. Moreover, the emphasis on the lower as opposed to the upper regions of the body is reinforced by Lawrence's assertion, in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, that the upper area of the body is distinguished by the energy of the solar plexus, which ultimately "is the keep and central stronghold of [our] triumphantly conscious self" (*FTU* 28). By contrast, the abdominal region is associated with, and in fact adjacent to, the "two lower gates of the passionate body" (*FTU* 28), both of which figure prominently in the sexual relationship between Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors. Indeed, later in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence addresses this directly, explaining: "the true polarity of consciousness in woman is downwards. Her deepest consciousness is in her loins and belly" (*FTU* 188).²³ In this way, Lawrence's visceral descriptions of the locus of her feelings set up Connie's bowel-deep love for Mellors as the ideal,

²³ It is worth noting that later in the novel, when she meets her father in London, the first details she notices about him involve these lower regions of the body: his "stout thighs" are "strong and well-knit, the thighs of a healthy man who had taken his pleasure in life," and Connie decides to herself that the thighs are "more important to her than faces, which are no longer very real. How few people had live, alert legs!" (275).

implying that she loves him on a physical level that puts the inferior “spiritual” love of the mind in its proper perspective. At the same time, the novel implies that Connie must be wary of this passionate response to Oliver, for this encounter with the not-entirely-unpleasant abject does embody unseen dangers: “She resisted it as far as she could, for it was the loss of herself to herself” (143).²⁴

To be sure, the idea of merging with the other is attractive because it promises fulfillment and completion, but it is significant that the passionate feelings it arouses are associated with the abject, because her encounter also brings an individual to the brink of his or her identity, and poses the threat of merging as the obliteration of individual selfhood. As Kelly Oliver puts it in *Reading Kristeva*, the “abject is something repulsive that both attracts and repels. It holds you there in spite of your disgust. It fascinates” (55). What is most compelling and yet frightening about the abject is that, in Kristeva’s own words, it is:

is an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us *from inside*. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so. (“Interview with Kristeva” 135-6, emphasis added).

Oliver asserts that, in addition to this sense of menace-from-without-*and*-from-within, the “abject is what is on the border, what doesn’t respect borders,” and adds: “Even jettisoned, the

²⁴ The second version of *Lady Chatterley* makes the ambivalent qualities of abjection even more explicit, simultaneously linking them to the maternal body. In the scene when Connie tells Oliver of her pregnancy, the text essentially doubles the bodily metaphor of the “bellyful,” as Oliver expresses his hatred of Clifford and the others as a feeling of having “swallowed poison, and had a bellyful of it” (*FSLCL* 527). The presence of a living embryo in Connie’s belly takes on an ambiguous significance when set alongside the corresponding “contents” of Oliver’s stomach.

object can still threaten the social, the symbolic order of language, reason, and logic. The symbolic can maintain itself only by maintaining its borders; and the object points to the fragility of those borders” (56). In more practical terms, at “the level of personal archaeology, abjection shows up as the struggle to separate from the maternal body” (Oliver 56). This maternal presence correlates closely with abjection because, in Western cultures, toilet training is usually directly supervised by the mother and is ultimately required by the defilement prohibitions embodied by the father’s position as the symbolic. Beyond this literal connection, Kristeva’s explanation of the object threat of excrement could also be a description of the peril represented by the mother’s body: “dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be” (*PH* 3). Like excrement, the mother’s body “permits [the *I*] to be,” yet is not ultimately the *I* – thus, it represents a decided danger to the individual.

A decided ambivalence about this very object realm of excrement – what Freud calls “anality” – exists in Lawrence’s novels, in which the perennial issue of sodomy pulls the Lawrentian hero back to the threat of permeable identity boundaries he experienced from the mother. David Holbrook argues that Lawrence’s recurring obsession with this sexual act might point to a belief that the “shadow of the internalized inhibiting mother lurks within woman’s body—lurks in the vagina. It is against that that we must struggle” (48). In fact, Holbrook’s paradigm complicates Kristeva’s ideas of the location of the object. In *Powers of Horror*, the anus is a primary site of abjection because it is associated with the waste and excretions of the body – yet in this version, it can also be construed positively. Kristeva discusses “the anal drive—anal rejection, anality—in which Freud sees the sadistic component of the sexual instinct and which he identifies with the death drive” (*RPL* 149). Despite this apparently negative characterization, our association of anality with expulsion, the traversing of the body’s borders,

renders it a site of subversion because it “precedes the establishment of the symbolic and is both its precondition and its repressed element” (149).²⁵

Yet the vagina, aside from its role in the excretion of menstrual blood, is likewise acceptable for Kristeva, as it is also the means through which the individual was born. In fact, the womb itself becomes a metaphor for the chora, the kind of pre-linguistic ideal she espouses in the space of the maternal container – although she is careful to add that this is not a literal, physical equation of womb with chora. Conversely, in multiple novels, including *Kangaroo*, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and *Mr. Noon*, Lawrence repeatedly speaks of anal intercourse as representing “the joys of pursuing ‘the secret places of shame’, not out of tolerance—a belief that there should be no shame—but *because* they are shameful” (Holbrook 47). This presents an intriguing problem. If, as Holbrook explicitly puts it, the ideal new world to which Lawrence aspires in poems like “New Heaven and Earth” “is not the woman’s separate being—but her anus” (48), then the move is away from the vagina: the old specter of the “cradling mother, which threatens ‘horrible merging’” (49), and towards the site of most abjection in the body. Thus, argues Holbrook, Lawrence sets up sodomy as the solution to “the fears of the mother lurking in the vagina, and of the womb as a grave” (49). We can see this clearly in two parallel scenes from the novels: in “the closing pages of *Mr. Noon*, [in which] the Alps themselves look like a woman’s body that threatens to trap Gilbert in the grave” (Holbrook 49), and, more tragically, in the scene of Gerald’s death in *Women in Love*, in which he walks into the rounded valleys of the Alps to his demise, returning, essentially, to the deathly womb of Mother Earth.

²⁵ Nixon reads *Women in Love*’s Sherwood Forest love scene between Birkin and Ursula not as a description of literal sexual intercourse. Rather, she argues that the “darkness” to which the passages habitually allude refers to what she calls “the anal caress” – as opposed to mere sodomy. She argues that the “reason Birkin apparently wants [Ursula] to accept and laugh over his excretory function is that it will finally get them off ‘the emotional personal level’ on which Ursula still wants to dwell” (125). What is surprising here is that Nixon specifically references “civilized humanity’s alienation from excrement” without mentioning Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*, in which the psychoanalyst writes at length about purification rites and the abjection of excretory function.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Gertrude Morel provides a clear embodiment of the smothering maternal. In all of Paul's searching for a woman to take the place of his mother, he never finds satisfaction, and perhaps the reason lies in the paradoxical seduction of the abject. Paul is devoted to his mother, and by extension to her smothering love. Her transformation into a corpse merely underlines what is already abject about her and about the mother/son relationship. As Kristeva puts it, "devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what flows from the other's 'innermost being,' for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" (*PH* 54). Miriam represents the most significant danger to Mrs. Morel's position of dominance over Paul, and her threat stems directly from the fact that she desires to envelop Paul as in an emotional "womb," as even Paul himself realizes, telling her, "You don't want to love—your eternal and abnormal craving is to be loved. You aren't positive, you're negative. You absorb, absorb, as if you must fill yourself up with love [...]" (*SL* 218). Miriam actually *becomes* the void to Paul. Later, after they physically consummate their love affair, Paul becomes almost immediately disenchanted with Miriam, hating her because "She took all and gave nothing [...]. At least, she gave no living warmth. She was never alive, and giving off life" (*SL* 293). In this way, Miriam also comes to represent the abjection of the corpse to him.²⁶

The threat of the abject persists in the final half of *Sons and Lovers* – even before the agonizing protraction of Gertrude Morel's death. In fact, we can see this encounter with the abject/object enacted in Paul's fight with Clara's husband in the chapter "Baxter Dawes." As the

²⁶ Yet Paul also represents abjection to Clara, much as Miriam does to him. Paul and Miriam are more alike than different, and this may partially account for his sudden bouts of hatred towards her. At one point, when the three of them are strolling together, Clara declares of Paul's bouquet of daffodils, "I don't want the corpses of flowers about me." Paul answers: "you only call a thing a corpse because it looks corpse-like [...]. A dead flower isn't a corpse of a flower" (*SL* 238). Thus, Paul himself seems to have much more tolerance for the abject, in some ways, than the other characters in the novel, who shrink from even the "deadness" of picked flowers.

two men struggle violently together, they become a tangled mass of bleeding faces and flailing limbs. It seems significant that the descriptions of Paul's experience of the fight resemble Kristeva's account of the experience of meeting the abject other, and that as he hears "the horrid sound of the other's gasping," he becomes unconscious and only later "gradually [comes] to himself" (*SL* 366). Returning home, Paul starts at the sight of his image in the mirror, for his "face was discoloured and smeared with blood, almost like a dead man's face" (*SL* 367). He is only fully reassured of his identity the next morning, when he sees "his mother looking at him. Her blue eyes—they were all he wanted to see" (*SL* 367). In this re-casting of Lacan's Mirror Stage moment – in which the infant, seeing itself in a mirror, gains a sense of itself as a coherent body, rather than a collection of parts – Mrs. Morel's gaze provides a much clearer reflection than does any physical mirror projecting Paul's image back to him.

Gertrude Morel herself explicitly comes to represent abjection in her death scene, which occupies much of the final section of the novel. All of the descriptions of Paul's (and even his sister Annie's) horror in the face of their mother's horrific death point to their realization of the abject presence of the maternal. Fighting for air after her fatal overdose of morphine, Mrs. Morel begins to breathe loudly and unevenly, a "sound, so irregular, at such wide intervals [that] sounded through the house" (*SL* 396). Her mouth resembles the abyss of the abject, "dreadful, with the bottom jaw fallen back" (*SL* 396). Likewise, after each agonized breath, "There was a space—a long space" (*SL* 396); thus, the terrifying blankness of her silences begins to conjure abjection.

Again, this is only a temporary stay against abjection and identity crisis, for as his mother is dying, Paul encounters the abject in perhaps its most terrifying form. His administration of the fatal dose of morphine amounts to an attempt to stave off a more horrible death by making her

passing peaceful, yet the result is exactly the opposite. In her “great, ghastly snores” (SL 398), she becomes even more obviously the picture of abjection, so that Paul’s very identity becomes subsumed by her death – to the extent that, when he goes to Clara for sexual and emotional solace, she “grew to dread him [...] and it made her feel as if death itself had her in its grip. She lay in horror. [...] She almost hated him” (SL 387). From this perspective, the novel’s concluding page might be read in a less pessimistic way, for when Paul surveys the stars in their darkness overhead, he muses, “So much, and himself, infinitesimal, at the core a nothingness, and yet *not nothing*” (SL 420, emphasis added). The progression of thought represented by such a sentence prefigures the penultimate sentence of *Sons and Lovers*, in which Paul decides he will “not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow [his mother]” (SL 420). Despite the apparently bleak loneliness of such an ending, it also admits possibilities for Paul’s coming to terms with his mother’s death and his own identity.

At the same time, we might view these concluding statements of the novel from the opposite perspective. Lawrence’s description of the “nothingness” at Paul’s core directly parallels Kristeva’s language, particularly when she discusses the threat of the abject, using Lawrence’s exact words, “not nothing”: “Not that. But not nothing, either. [...] A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (PH 2). Viewed in this light, Paul himself becomes the abject. Nevertheless, in the concluding line that plots Paul’s course in an opposite direction from his mother and her death, there is a sense in which he essentially decides to jettison this abject maternal presence by making himself the abject, turning away from the maternal to pursue instead the life of men represented by the “city’s gold phosphorescence” (SL 420). This echoes the tendency of other male characters in the

novels – Richard Somers Lovatt in *Kangaroo*, for example – to reject, not necessarily the mother, but certainly the feminine world of the home (and its associations with the smothering maternal presence) in favor of the masculine sphere of politics and leadership.

The Corpse and Abject Sexuality

Abjection's role in identity formation is not only at issue in the relationship with the mother, and not even necessarily a crisis solely for male characters. In Lawrence's short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums," Elizabeth Bates confronts the other in her dead husband, at the same time she realizes that his body has become the abject: "He was so heavy and inert. A terrible dread gripped her all the while: that he could be so heavy and utterly inert, unresponsive, apart. The horror of the distance between them was almost too much for her—it was so infinite a gap she must look across" (302). Here, in almost identical words, we can see what Kristeva describes in *Powers of Horror* as "a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject" (*PH* 6). Kristeva speaks explicitly of the horror of the corpse, which indeed becomes the emblem of the abject in *Powers of Horror*, asserting:

In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (*PH* 4)

Indeed, Elizabeth's conclusions at the end of this story bear marked resemblance to Paul Morel's aforementioned resolutions in the final sentences of *Sons and Lovers*: "She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame" ("Odour of Chrysanthemums" 302). This is particularly significant when it is set alongside Kristeva's identical language in her initial gloss of the abject as something "banish[ed]" which "does not cease challenging its master" (*PH* 2). Such a comparison between Lawrence's novel and short story complicates the optimism of the aforementioned reading by suggesting that both characters' resolution to head towards "life" obscures their fearful avoidance of the abject corpses of mother and husband, respectively.

In contrast, from its beginning chapter, the characters in Lawrence's late novel *The Plumed Serpent* experience the complex relationship between abjection and the visceral (often dead) bodies associated with "Life." When Kate Leslie attends the bullfight in the opening chapter of *The Plumed Serpent*, she experiences perhaps the most abject passage in all of Lawrence's writing, yet her companion Owen, at least outwardly, seems to embrace such horror and gore as the epitome of his guiding principle of "Life" (4). Kate's revulsion, on the other hand, begins even before the bullfight: watching Owen being frisked by the ticket man at the gate, Kate feels "the shock of horror, fearing the fellow might paw her" as well (4). In the crowded stands, she and the Americans, Owen and Villiers, find themselves in the hot, odorous crush of humanity, being pelted by the refuse of discarded banana skins.

Surprisingly, when the smartly dressed toreadors emerge into the ring, Kate's reaction continues to be "a chill of disgust" (11). It is a chill of premonition, as well, because the description of the actual event that follows is so graphically gory as to be difficult to read. Much is made of the scene in which the first small bull fatally gores the horse of one of the picadors.

Kate herself, having expected the bullfight to be a “gallant show,” instead finds herself “taken [...] completely by surprise”:

[...] before she knew where she was, she was watching a bull whose shoulders trickled blood goring his horns up and down inside the belly of a prostrate and feebly plunging old horse.

The shock almost overpowered her. She had come for a gallant show. This she had paid to see. Human cowardice and beastliness, a smell of blood, a nauseous whiff of bursten bowels!

She turned her face away. (13)

Finally, “getting beside herself” and convinced that if she stays to see any more of the debacle, she will “go into hysterics” (16), Kate decides to leave, but not before she witnesses the further graphic horror of another horse’s goring. Her disgust seems to be due to the scene’s symbolic rendering of sadistic sexuality, which emerges here in the jarring conflation of penetration and violence embodied by the bull’s working horns.

This is the beginning of Kate’s introduction to the “death lust” of Mexico, yet her initial reaction is to turn away and show her scorn for her companions, who have been hypnotized by the show’s entrails and blood: ““They might just as well sit and enjoy somebody else’s diarrhoea,’ [*sic*] was the thought that passed through Kate’s distracted but still Irish mind” (17). The proliferation of excrement in this chapter – extending to Kate’s aforementioned analogy of the two Americans’ behavior – reveals the abjection that menaces Kate throughout the novel.

At this early stage of the novel, Kate’s exodus through the arena’s tunnel carries a distinct echo of the birth canal, as well. Having left the womblike enclosure of the arena and its surrounding stands, she finds herself “in the great concrete archway under the stadium [...]

Facing outwards, she saw [...] the great wooden gates that opened to the free street. Oh, to be out, to be out of this, to be free!” (17). Such an exclamation might also express the wish of the infant to be born, to be free of the mother’s body. And indeed, later Kate is effectively born (or reborn) through the coliseum’s tunnel into the downpour outside, cleansed of the abjection contained in the stadium’s enclosure. In this passage, the connection between abjection and the mother’s body becomes obvious. The inner arena, which echoes the womb, becomes associated with the blood and excrement of the bullfight.

Lawrence’s treatment of lesbianism uses much of the same language as his descriptions of the corpse and the deathly maternal body, particularly because of the difficulty of articulating the fear and fascination attendant in such an encounter. As Marianna Torgovnick puts it, Lawrence’s work “broaches views of sexuality rarely discussed in fiction before its time: sado-masochism, wild fluctuations in emotions within the love and sex relation, and the awareness and torment of bisexual longings which cannot speak their name” (37). Yet, for all of Lawrence’s later vitriol against lesbianism (Oliver Mellors’s rant in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, for instance), the commencement of the affair between Ursula Brangwen and Winifred Inger in *The Rainbow* lacks the oppressive sense of abjection found in the ambiguous male relationships depicted in many of his novels – though the female version does bear a resemblance to “The Prussian Officer” in terms of both works’ depictions of an unequal power relationship (student/teacher and subordinate/superior officer). Significantly, Ursula becomes more aware of Winifred Inger just after her initial interactions with Anton Skrebensky, mentioned in the preceding chapter, “First Love.” She begins to feel disillusioned with other people, even in her most romantic interludes with Skrebensky: “She felt like bright metal weighed down by dark, impure magnetism. He was the dross, people were the dross. If she could but get away to the clean, free

moonlight” (*R* 319). The sense of impurity and uncleanness in the language of the metaphor here suggests that Ursula views the encroachment of others’ identities as abject and longs to create her own sense of “clean, free” identity.

Her disenchantment continues into the next chapter, which puts her back at school, having experienced sexual attraction yet still fearful that “she [*has*] no self” (*R* 335). In the midst of this crisis, “after Skrebensky had gone [...] there sprang up between the mistress [Winifred Inger] and the girl that strange awareness” (*R* 336). The title of this chapter – “Shame” – does suggest that either Lawrence’s, Ursula’s, or her society’s attitude towards the women’s union conceives of it as abject and taboo; nevertheless, the descriptions of their interactions contain much more poetry and beauty than do the bloody and violent scenes between many of Lawrence’s men. When Ursula visits Miss Inger at her bungalow and the two go for a night swim, their bodies are “twined,” and the “soft air of night” surrounds them (*R* 340). Their intimacy in the following weeks seems to Ursula a revelation, particularly since it leads to the exposure of the falsehoods of religious dogma and traditional gender roles. Through her discussions with Winifred and the older woman’s intellectual circle, Ursula begins to conceive of a love that is closer to the Lawrentian ideal: not the passive, fearful love of “lambs nor doves,” but that of “a lion or a wild horse,” full of fierceness, risk, and ultimate triumph (*R* 342).

Still, abjection lurks close by: during the sudden shower that erupts during their swim, Ursula feels “a deep bottomless silence [...] as if dark bottomless darkness were returning upon her [...]. She ran indoors, a chill, non-existent thing” (*R* 340). Having returned home after their weekend together, Ursula is relieved: “For a time Miss Inger, her mistress, was gone; she was only a dark void” – yet, the following morning, her attraction to this abject union returns, “burning, burning” (*R* 341). Significantly, at a certain point, “a heavy, clogged sense of

deadness began to gather upon her, from the other woman's contact. And sometimes she thought Winifred was ugly, clayey" (R 344). The very presence of the word "clay" connotes deadness, corruption, and abjection – and prefigures the scene in *Women in Love* in which Gerald comes to Gudrun in the night, with the clay from his father's newly dug grave still clinging to his boots. Ursula goes on to relate the clay explicitly to the corpse, suggesting of Winifred the "heavy cleaving of moist clay, that cleaves because it has no life of its own" (R 344).

Thus, despite this on the whole more aesthetically pleasing account of the female experience of homosexuality, the result remains the same, because homosexuality in general cannot be allowed in the Lawrentian paradigm of strictly demarcated gender roles.²⁷ At the end of their affair, Ursula coolly engineers Winifred's marriage to her uncle, Tom Brangwen, opting for convention over the "shameful." Such a move is necessary because of the "marshy, bitter-sweet corruption [that] came sick and unwholesome in her nostrils" when she considers both Winifred and her uncle (R 351). To bring them both together and abject them helps her in her task: "Anything, to get out of the foetid air. She would leave them both for ever, leave for ever their strange, soft, half-corrupt element. Anything to get away" (R 351). Thus, like Lawrence's authorial "murder" of Gerald and thus of Birkin's attendant problematic attraction to him, Winifred is abruptly dispatched by her marriage to Tom Brangwen, and because she has taken her rightful place as "a good companion [...] his mate" (352), she no longer embodies a danger to Ursula's momentarily shaky sense of sexual identity. She has also capitulated to Lawrence's paradigm of men's and women's respective roles. Tom and Winifred will continue to represent

²⁷ Barbara Ann Schapiro reads Lawrentian homosexuality in a related way, suggesting: "The homosexual strains in Lawrence's fiction, whether between two men or two women, spring from the same motivational source—the desire to merge with an other who is an idealized version of the self. Lawrence intuitively understood the narcissistic nature of this dynamic in which the other is only an idealized projection, and it is, I believe, what finally repulsed him about the homosexual bond" (96-7). Though her analysis is intriguing, I believe we must make a distinction between the homosexual relationships represented by, for instance, Ursula and Winifred versus the disturbingly violent male characters in "The Prussian Officer," which I will be discussing in the next section of this chapter.

abjection because their business as colliers embraces the mindless mechanization of modern life that Lawrence repudiates.²⁸ Ursula's perennial encounters with abjection do not end here, as we learn in *Women in Love* and its elaboration of abjection in relationship. As Kristeva notes, "devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what flows from the other's 'innermost being,' for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" (*PH* 54).

The conclusion of Ursula and Winifred's affair and the latter's subsequent marriage provides an effective model for accounting for the homoeroticism and homosexuality that appears again and again in Lawrence's fiction. This seemingly conventional rendition of the marriage plot, which ties up the loose ends, provides a neat solution to one form of the abject – for Lawrence, homosexuality and the abjection it represents to him is a thorny problem that cannot be resolved merely by "accepting" or "facing" it. The abject must be *abjected* – e.g., rejected or cast away – so that the character can regain a solid, coherent sense of self, gender, and sexuality. This represents the keenest struggle for Lawrence's characters, as they all contend at some point with threats to identity that originate from within *and* from without, sometimes simultaneously. The physical corpse evokes the literal death of the self, while, for Lawrence and his characters, homosexuality seems to imperil the self by erasing the strictly demarcated lines of gender that he has set up as an ideal. For him, homoeroticism is abject because it is the "other thing," the thing he cannot name, which he associates with his disgust at "nasty [...] black-beetles" (*CL* 2 320-21), and which menaces from within just as surely as from without.

²⁸ Lawrence makes this connection between abjection and colliery clear at the conclusion of *The Rainbow*. During the final hours of Ursula's affair with Anton Skrebensky, she cries at the natural beauty of Sussex, where they are vacationing, complaining of the train she sees in the distance that it "had tunneled all the earth, blindly, and uglily" (464). Likewise, Anton realizes this connection of mechanization and industrialization with the abject when he calls it "a blind, sordid, strenuous activity, all for nothing, fuming with dirty smoke and running trains and groping in the bowels of the earth, all for nothing" (466).

We might complicate even this interpretive strategy, however, by placing it alongside DiBattista's reading of Winifred Inger. While she admits that Lawrence's anti-lesbian rhetoric in this chapter is problematic, she nevertheless counters this common critique: "Lawrence's tale casts Winifred in a more complex and interesting social drama" than what this simple objection to homophobia might suggest (136). Instead of objecting literally to her attraction to women, "he denounces her as an *educative* disaster—a legitimate objection in a bildungsroman. She teaches Ursula that scientism, rationalism, and materialism are the gateway into the modern, the 'man's world.' [...] Her marriage to Tom Brangwen, the industrialist, merely confirms her kinship with the man's world of sterile mechanism" (136, emphasis added). Viewed from this perspective of psychological gender identification, Winifred becomes an undeniably masculine character, as Lawrence associates her with what Kristeva would call the realm of the Symbolic, the law of the father. Thus, that the novel places her with Tom Brangwen at the end suggests that it is this *masculine*-identified "homoerotic" relationship – between Winifred and Tom – that is most repulsive, not the relationship between Winifred and Ursula.²⁹ Granted that the literal feminine power embodied by this female relationship seems to be undeniably threatening to Lawrence, the chapter nevertheless suggests that it is male homosexuality that is most "abject" to him. Indeed, this masculine realm is not exempt from the threat of the abject – in fact, in many ways it is far more vulnerable because of its strictly demarcated limits.

²⁹ This reading throws a different light onto Kate Millett's reading of Lawrence's women. Using his portrayal of Kate Leslie in *The Plumed Serpent* in particular, Millett contends that what is most disturbing about Kate's character is Lawrence's insistence that she must forfeit her sexual independence to her new husband (and symbolically, must submit to his political partner's ambitions for a new Mexico). She goes on, however, to assert that Kate is after all no real woman but rather a "female impersonator" (Millett 284-86). Here we might add, along with Fiona Becket, that what Millett says about Kate Leslie "could be said of many of Lawrence's heroines," as well as less prominent characters like Winifred Inger (*Complete Critical Guide* 145).

Policing the Boundary of Masculinity

In contrast to his treatment of lesbianism in works like *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence's perspective on male homosexuality represents a more profound struggle in his fiction. Many of his novels express a complex blend of both male homoeroticism and homophobia, which is often couched in the language of decay and corpses, and is sometimes concurrent with the presence of *actual* corpses. His characters continually wrestle (and Birkin and Gerald literally do so) with homosexual desire. This seems to be an inexorable part of the novels, yet it is only part of Lawrence's perspective on the issue. As Nixon points out, after Lawrence's early encounter with John Maynard Keynes and Duncan Grant at Keynes's Cambridge rooms, he "reacted violently to their homosexuality, and went home in a severe depression that was to last for months" (Nixon 11). Part of the reason lies in Lawrence's own words to David Garnett, "whose friend Frankie Birrell was also homosexual" (Nixon 11):

And as [Keynes] stood there gradually a knowledge passed into me, which has been like a little madness to me ever since. And it was carried along with the most dreadful sense of repulsiveness—something like carrion—a vulture gives me the same feeling. I begin to feel mad as I think of it—insane.

Never bring B[irrell] to see me any more. There is something nasty about him, like black-beetles. He is horrible and unclean. I feel as if I should go mad, if I think of your set, D[uncan] G[rant] and K[eynes] and B[irrell]. It makes me dream of beetles. In Cambridge I had a similar dream. Somehow, I can't bear it. It is wrong beyond all bounds of wrongness. I had felt it slightly before, in the Stracheys. But it came full upon me in K., and in D.G. ...

I could sit and howl in a corner like a child, I feel so bad about it
all. (*CL* 2 320-21 qtd. in Nixon 11).

Here Lawrence's language reveals the abject threat which homosexuality represents, in words like "dreadful," "repulsiveness," "carrion [...] vulture," "mad," "insane," "nasty," "*beyond all bounds of wrongness*" (*CL* 2 320-21, emphasis added).

Readers of Lawrence cannot help but notice, however, that the novels contain a plethora of general instances in which men are attracted to one another in an unusual way. The terminology used to describe these meetings tends to be similar: the main male character feels a kind of awareness of the other that transcends mere friendly kinship. Like Siegmund with the stranger Hampson in *The Trespasser*, the protagonist senses, when the other man speaks, that the stranger "express[es] something in his own soul" (110). That Siegmund subsequently feels both "a strong fear and a fascination opposing each other in his heart" reveals the abject potential of such a meeting (*T* 111). A wealth of other examples exist: Richard Lovatt Somers's relationship with Jaz in *Kangaroo*, in which he describes the other man as "restless, desirous, craving something—heaven knows what" (*K* 61); the "look of recognition" that habitually passes between Aaron Sisson and Rawdon Lilly in *Aaron's Rod* (*AR* 61). In *The White Peacock*, the narrator Cyril Beardshall describes in glowing terms the aftermath of a swim in the pond with his friend George Saxton: "We stood and looked at each other as we rubbed ourselves dry [...] he put his arm round me and pressed me against him, and the sweetness of the touch of our naked bodies one against the other was superb. It satisfied in some measure the vague, indecipherable yearning of my soul; and it was the same with him" (*WP* 222). Such scenes as these show the undeniable fascination of the homosocial (and at points homoerotic) connection that occurs between Lawrentian men who have a deep understanding of one another – a reading that Millett

perhaps oversimplifies in her apparently neutral pronouncement that “male homosexuality and friendship are one of the great interests of Lawrence’s life” (374). Indeed, while Lawrence declared at one point, “I believe the nearest I’ve come to perfect love was with a young coal-miner when I was about 16” (Mackenzie 134), he enjoyed an enduring (though contentious) marriage to a woman..

Indeed, for Lawrence, the explicitly homosexual body is ultimately an abject body because it threatens the rigidly prescribed borders of gender roles that he clearly delineates in works like *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* – and the kinds of roles that appear repeatedly in his later novels. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *The Plumed Serpent*, most notably, Lawrence shows both the sexual and the political/domestic versions of this relationship, in which women must submit and men conquer. In the cases of both novels, the male characters follow Lawrence’s professed ideal as he outlines it in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*: each morning, the man must forget the woman with whom he has been during the night, and “get back to the great purpose of manhood, a passionate unison in actively making the world” (FTU 110). Lawrence contends that, in their individual passions for women, men can no longer see the sacred “purity of [their] surrender” to the greater purpose of men – instead, if “sex [is] the one accepted prime motive, the world drifts into despair and anarchy” (FTU 110). Certainly, the threat of the woman is strong; however, Lawrence can speak explicitly of their peril to men, which suggests that they do not epitomize abjection as another man might.

It is significant that he does not mention this potential situation of passion between men as another, even more dangerous possibility – though he continually flirts with this potentiality. In the strong responses of men to each other lies the threat of unbalancing this crucial, “basic” relationship between man and woman that forms the bedrock of many of Lawrence’s theories – a

shift that would thwart the ultimate purpose of mankind, which is less individual and relational, and more global, political, and often military. These homosocial (and occasionally also homoerotic) relationships occur more often than not in the novels, where male characters yearn for close connections with other men: the “other thing” to which Birkin alludes in *Women in Love*.³⁰

Because the danger lies precisely in its unconsciousness, even here – and, perhaps, *especially* here – in the masculine world of politics and the military, abjection appears everywhere. In fact, *Powers of Horror* suggests, the abject is not merely a psychological problem but a societal one, as well. The notion of abjection is a safeguard against chaos and completely permeable borders; to *abject* the abject is also to put away that which threatens the boundaries of rationality, normalcy, and humanity. Highly-regimented systems, like religions and political systems, must have a notion of that which is aberrant, outside, or marginalized, in order to function effectively. Thus, it makes sense that the military would be one of the places where abjection would abound. Kristeva’s language, as she describes food loathing and its cause (a threat to the inside/outside border of the body), could also be used to explain the more extensive implications of abjection in the military: “Food becomes abject [...] if it is a border between two distinct countries or territories” (75). Much as food always has the potential to defile, as an outside substance being introduced to the “clean and proper body” (75), entities may threaten the “clean and proper body” of a nation and its military, as well.

³⁰ Kristeva argues that Freud displays much of the same avoidance of homosexuality, though he does address it in *Totem and Taboo*. In *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, she defends him at least partially, asserting that though the “absence of women is glaring” in one particular scene of patricide, “we must try to appreciate [Freud’s] theoretical contribution, to take his totemic fable seriously” and “to recognize that the founder of psychoanalysis had the honesty to express the homosexual substratum of the sacred understanding, the split of this social destiny into homosexual destiny” (44, 45). Still, her tone is somewhat critical as she observes that “he does not, however, investigate [it] further” (44, 45).

Lawrence's story "The Prussian Officer" dramatizes this dynamic and its potential for disruption. In the story, the (admittedly sadomasochistic) attraction between the two men threatens the order and hierarchy of the military, and also, more generally, the strictly prescribed gender roles espoused by Lawrence in his later critical essays on psychoanalysis – particularly because the abjection in the story appears from the perspectives of both main characters: the superior and the subordinate.

Ironically, the younger man's job title runs directly contrary to the captain's estimation of him: instead of being an "orderly" person, he is disorderly and undisciplined. To his superior officer, the orderly represents abjection's distinct *lack* of order and meaning: the younger man's eyes are as "expressionless" and "unmeaning" as Kristeva's abyss (38, 41), and he performs his duties with a "free movement [...] which no military discipline [can] make stiff" (41). Moreover, in a description that anticipates Gerald's disgust at Gudrun's wound from the rabbit's claws in *Women in Love*, the captain is fixated on the "scar on [the orderly's] left thumb, a deep seam going across the knuckle [...] ugly and brutal on the young, brown hand," which causes the older man to "[suffer] from it and [want] to do something to it" (41). The scar itself, because it is deep enough to be visible, suggests abjection because it implies a past breach of corporeal borders, as well as the blood and pus that inevitably follow. Further, the very absence of clear language in the description of the scar suggests abjection, as well: the captain wants to do "*something*" to it, must "use all his will-power to *avoid seeing* the scarred thumb," and thinks to himself that he "want[s] to get hold of it *and—*" (41, emphasis added). These multiple gaps, ambiguities, and omissions represent the central problem that Julia Kristeva identifies in *Powers of Horror*: the Word must speak the abject, but ultimately it cannot, since abjection threatens the very boundaries of the symbolic. Accordingly, in order to continue to "[keep] himself hard to the idea

of the Service” (40), the captain must avoid even looking at the orderly, whom he is simultaneously attracted to and repelled by.

In fact, the captain’s strong and ambivalent feelings towards the orderly express another form of abjection. At the beginning of the orderly’s service, a normal, hierarchical military relationship exists between the two men, yet soon enough the captain notices a change that leaves him constantly “irritated” (39). Significantly, this word appears no fewer than three times over the course of two pages. The presence of the orderly – and, more specifically, the “undiscovered feeling [...] held between the two men” – threatens his very identity, and “[s]ome of his natural completeness in himself [is] gone, [and] a little uneasiness [takes] its place” (39). It seems clear this section of the story that the most significant threat represented by the orderly lies in the palpable, turbulent homoerotic attraction between the captain and the younger man.

In his biography of Lawrence, Mark Kinkead-Weekes contends that “to treat the story as essentially about repressed homosexuality and sadism [...] is to oversimplify” (77). Though Kinkead-Weekes frames the orderly’s threat to the captain in terms of his role in society and military, his account reads very much as Kristeva’s does in *Powers of Horror*: “the opposite kind of life calls his kind radically in question, so that the very attraction seems to lessen and imperil the self” (77). Thus, the captain’s initially jarring desire to inflict violence also seems less inexplicable when we consider the individual’s desperate need to abject whatever threatens identity: it must be destroyed, pushed firmly away from the subject in order to preserve the fragile and frighteningly permeable boundaries of the self (*PH* 3). Again, the vague wording of the captain’s feelings points to his inability to speak the abject, to put it into the terms of the symbolic, and thus to render it manageable. Instead, “keeping quite justified and conventional in his consciousness, he let *the other thing* run on” (“Prussian Officer” 43, emphasis added) – yet

he cannot even name what this “other thing” is. And thus, for example, when he flings the end of a belt at the young orderly’s face, drawing blood, what he feels is the abject and ambivalent mixture of “a thrill of deep pleasure and of shame” (*PH* 43).

Likewise, the orderly does everything he can to avoid the captain and the abjection he represents. Deliberately avoiding eye contact, he “rarely saw his master’s face. He did not look at it” (“Prussian Officer” 37). Sensing the change in their relationship and the older man’s sudden and violent obsession, the orderly fears that “now if he were going to be forced into a personal interchange with his master he would be like a wild thing caught, he must get away” (“Prussian Officer” 40). Again, as Kinkead-Weekes puts it, “The orderly too learns [...] to look past the other, not eye-to-eye. It is not the attraction, but the repression of response, that is ‘perverted’” (78). The escalating violence in their encounters only points to the more and more urgent task of casting away the abject, an objective that drives both men to the brink of murder, with the orderly finally succeeding. The military context of their relationship prevents them from airing these feelings plainly, as Birkin and Gerald essentially do in *Women in Love*. However, this context also intensifies (and even perhaps arouses) these feelings precisely because it is a place in society where they must remain unspoken.

Throughout the story we can see evidence of this other side of the abject: its paradoxical *attraction*. If the abject aroused only a negative reaction, it would not represent such a struggle; the individual could merely choose to avoid it, as the captain and orderly do for much of the story, by not looking at or thinking about it. Instead, in the scene in which he is beaten by the captain, the orderly finds himself, paradoxically, “look[ing] at the officer, as if fascinated” – much as the captain has responded to the sight of the orderly’s abject, bloody body with “a pang, as of pleasure” (“Prussian Officer” 45). This scene might serve as a rehearsal of the wrestling

match between Gerald and Birkin in *Women in Love* – albeit a version with a much less friendly ending. The only solution in this case is for one man to abject the other forcefully, by murdering him. Since the abjection represented by the captain's abject passion is more perverse and somehow more unacceptable in its single-minded obsession, he must be the one to die. Intriguingly, this also forecasts the murderer and "murderer" conversation between Gerald and Birkin, in which the latter man insists that a murder requires two participants, each of whom willingly agrees to play his role.

The orderly's murder of the captain is filled with inexorable fascination, yet when he contemplates the corpse of his former master, the repulsion associated with abjection immediately sets in:

... Slowly, he got up. The body twitched and sprawled there, inert. He stood and looked at it in silence. It was a pity it was broken. It represented more than the thing which had kicked and bullied him. He was afraid to look at the eyes. They were hideous now, only the whites showing, and the blood running to them. The face of the orderly was drawn with horror at the sight. Well, it was so. In his heart he was satisfied. He had hated the face of the Captain. It was extinguished now. There was a heavy relief in the orderly's soul. That was as it should be. But he could not bear to see the long, military body lying broken over the tree-base, the fine fingers crisped. He wanted to hide away. (56)

The vagueness of the orderly's language here – calling the captain's body "more than *the thing* which had kicked and bullied him" ("Prussian Officer" 56, emphasis added) – suggests his inability to articulate the fear and repulsion that this corpse represents. In his desperation to get

away, we can see the final stage of abjection, which is the putting-away of the abject/object in order to shore up identity. In Kristeva's terms, "refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (*PH* 3). The captain's corpse is merely the literal embodiment of the actual abjection Lawrence uneasily faces: the unacknowledged, passionate connection between the two men. The orderly's fascination with the captain has been much weaker and more circumstantially motivated than the captain's attraction to him, yet the superior officer still becomes a threat in the sense that he represents an avenue of human intimacy that the orderly (and, by extension, Lawrence) cannot ultimately endorse. That the orderly succumbs to death once he has no other to make him a self indicates the doomed relationship between many of Lawrence's male characters and what they view as the "abject" notion of homosexuality.

A parallel, yet less brutal, scene occurs in *Sons and Lovers*, both in the fight between Paul Morel and Baxter Dawes and in the later resolution of their quarrel. Despite the proliferation of blood and bodily rupture in the descriptions of the fight, as well as Paul's decided physical pain, his overwhelming feeling for Dawes is one of a perverse attraction. After the first blow from the other man, Paul wants desperately to retaliate against Dawes's violence, yet the actual articulation of this wish sounds much more like thwarted romantic yearning than a desire to wound: "It was the other man's mouth he was dying to get at, and the desire was anguish in its strength" (365). Such a sentence reads ambivalently, as it indicates literally Paul's need to reciprocate Dawes's punches, yet it might just as effectively describe a longing to kiss him.

When he does manage to land a blow, Paul unexpectedly "shiver[s] with pleasure" (365), much as the captain does in "The Prussian Officer," after his assault of the orderly. Likewise, the last moments of the struggle between the two men, Paul and Baxter Dawes, reads uncannily

like the final violence between the orderly and the captain. Paul wins the fight by choking the older man with his knuckles and the man's scarf – while the orderly, similarly, uses his knees to do the strangling. In the midst of their strangling of the other, both men experience a sense of alienation from their bodies: Paul feels his grow “[t]ighter and tighter [...] like a screw that is gradually increasing in pressure, till something breaks” (*Sons and Lovers* 366), and the orderly “fe[els] as if his head [goes] to vapour” (“The Prussian Officer” 56). This inexplicable dissociation could be due to what we could reasonably call the Kristevan crisis inherent in such a scene, in which the goal becomes defending the boundaries of the self by abjecting the threat to identity – in both cases, a very literal and corporeal threat.

Significantly, the two scenes diverge in their outcomes: the orderly, despite the captain's abjectly “frightening and horrifying” convulsions, continues to press down on his throat because “it please[s] him, too, to repress them” (“The Prussian Officer” 56). He is experiencing here the paradoxical attraction of the abject. Paul, however, ceases his pressure on the other's neck when “suddenly he relaxe[s], full of wonder and misgiving [about] what he [is] doing” (“The Prussian Officer” 366). Perhaps this is the most important aspect of these two similar fights between older and younger men: their opposite conclusions. Where the orderly feels on the whole satisfied with his act of violence and his dispatch of the captain and his abjection, Paul is left feeling “full of wonder” and “all bewildered” by his physical interaction with Baxter Dawes (“The Prussian Officer” 366). Such paradoxical magnetism in the face of violence illustrates the powerful and inexplicable current of homoeroticism that exists between the two men despite their apparent enmity.

In the end, the divergent conclusions of *Sons and Lovers* and “The Prussian Officer” seem to reflect Lawrence's continually changing ideas about how to reconcile his own

ambivalence about homosexuality. The two stories' common scenes of violent interaction suggest Lawrence's preoccupation with how to express appropriately this desire for physical contact between men. In "The Prussian Officer," the only resolution that seems possible is the murder of the abject entity: the captain. Given the military's emphasis on hierarchy, the sole alternative to this ending would be the captain's sublimating his sexual desire for the orderly in increasingly violent acts against the younger man. On the other hand, in *Sons and Lovers*, the solution is much less traumatic: Paul simply sends Clara back to Dawes, her husband.

It is important to note that this is not an *entirely* satisfactory resolution, particularly because at their last meeting before Clara's return, there is another ambiguous moment of attraction. The violence of their fight has created a certain intimacy between the two men, which has led to their subsequent meetings at Dawes's convalescent home to smoke, talk, and drink whiskey, sharing a bedroom while they are there. Simultaneously, there exists between them "a big reserve" (*SL* 402), likely owing to their mysterious relationship – so much so that the "instinct to murder each other [...] returned. They almost avoided each other" (*SL* 404). Yet they do talk again when they are going to bed, and after Dawes complains of being past his prime and Paul responds with an affirmation of the "plenty of life" he still exudes, the "eyes of the two men met. They exchanged one look. Having recognized the stress of passion each in the other, they both drank their whiskey" (*SL* 403). The moment renders Dawes "breathless," and his words respond "suggestively" and "caressingly" to Paul in this scene (403). To be sure, the talk of being still within one's prime also suggests an attendant concern with sexual prowess.

Much as their avoidance keeps them from murdering one another in earnest this time, keeping away from the problematic other seems to be crucial here to sidestepping the abject threat to stable male identity that homosexuality represents. We see this again when, in response

to Dawes's command that Paul inspect the edema in his legs, "Paul reluctantly got out of bed and went to look at the rather handsome legs of the other man that were covered with glistening, dark gold hair" (*SL* 404). Paul's preoccupation with the secondary sexual characteristics of the other man likewise implies homoerotic desire. Such a situation is clearly fearful for Paul, who must remove the source of abjection in order to shore up his sense of conventional identity (at least, in terms of gender and sexuality). In the end, as indicated by the opening line of the chapter "Derelict," "Clara went with her husband to Sheffield, and Paul scarcely saw her again" (*SL* 409) – and, presumably, he does not see Baxter Dawes either, thus proving the success of his plan to cast away the abject.³¹

In *Women in Love*, the similarly problematic relationship between Birkin and Gerald bears a striking resemblance to that between Paul and Baxter Dawes, even if its resolution appears somewhat different. In perhaps the most famous homoerotic scene in Lawrence's work, the chapter "Gladiatorial," Birkin and Gerald engage in an impromptu wrestling match because, as Gerald puts it, "It is perhaps true that I want something to hit" (*WL* 260). In this later novel, the outcome is simultaneously more tender and athletic, and it is much less obviously violent than what occurs between the captain and the orderly. This could be explained in the narrator's comment, "There were long spaces of silence between their words. The wrestling had some deep meaning to them—an unfinished meaning" (*WL* 265). Their strikingly confidential talk afterwards – spanning subjects from their respective physical beauty in one another's eyes to Birkin's desire to marry Ursula – attests to the unaccustomed mood of intimacy between the two

³¹ Charles Ferrall suggests a different reading of this connection between the two men, arguing that the novel exhibits a "drift of sympathy away from the mother towards the father" (116). Ferrall contends that the relationship between Clara and Baxter Dawes is a symbolic rendering of his own parents' marriage, and he goes on to assert: "Because of their respective relationships with Paul, Clara acquires a body and Baxter a mind [...] Paul has reconciled his own parents by, as it were, fathering them but this is only achieved by empowering the father at the expense of the mother" (117).

men. James Cowan has recently suggested another reading of the scene in which the wrestling is precipitated by Birkin's intermittently fragile sense of self, which has less chance of being absorbed by a man than by a woman. Birkin sets up Gerald as an idealized male, some of whose characteristics he wishes to master and in fact annex in a scene "in which his dominance of the other man is conceptualized metaphorically as penetration" (47). Cowan reads this in the way Birkin's slender body surprisingly overwhelms the much larger man and wins the unofficial "match" in the end (48).

Such an ambiguous situation is ultimately still unacceptable to Lawrence, however, for even this masculine beauty turns quickly to abjection. In *The First "Women in Love,"* Lawrence's account of Birkin's viewing of Gerald's corpse is markedly different from its depiction in the final version of the novel. In the final version, the sight of Gerald's dead body recalls two images to Birkin's mind: first, "a dead stallion he had seen: a dead mass of maleness, repugnant," but immediately subsequently, "also the beautiful face of one whom he had loved, and who had died still having the faith to yield to the mystery" (*WL* 471). It is significant that the gender of this latter "one" is never revealed, nor the story behind this tragic loss that occurred at some point in Birkin's history; that he is not here referring to Gerald himself is obvious, for a moment later he calls Gerald "The denier!" (*WL* 471). Gerald has been transformed so that he is in the same paragraph both "the warm, handsome, virile body" *and* "this ignominious cold corpse of a dead male [...] a heap of matter, transient, pitiful, *abject*, like a dead animal" (*FWL* 442, emphasis added). Without a doubt, these two dramatically different images are impossible for Birkin to reconcile, as we can see from his hysterical tears, which are so disturbing that they drive even Ursula, "aghast," from the room (*FWL* 442). Adding to Birkin's pervasive sense of disgust is Gerald's final associations with the abject mother's body – yet a body that nevertheless

still carries a perverse attraction: “Gerald’s father had looked wistful, to break the heart [after his death]: but not this last terrible look of cold, mute Matter. Birkin watched and watched” (*WL* 472).

As a result, perhaps, the conclusion to Gerald and Birkin’s relationship is recast into the marginally more acceptable “solution” that Birkin puts to Ursula on the final page of the novel: “You are enough for me, as far as a woman is concerned. You are all women to me. But I wanted a man friend, as eternal as you and I are eternal” (*WL* 472). Ursula’s response to Birkin might represent the “other voice” in the argument Lawrence could have been having within his own mind: “It’s an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity” (*WL* 472). And indeed, after Ursula’s emphatic, “You can’t have it, because it’s false, impossible,” the novel concludes with Birkin answering stubbornly, “I don’t believe that” (*WL* 473). Despite his baldly put rebuttal, his use of the word “believe” does somehow make the ending seem more tentative. Birkin could have said, “Yes, I can have it,” or “Yes, I will,” yet he chooses to answer by negating Ursula’s prohibition – “I *don’t* believe that” – which might, in a sense, belie an unconscious concession to her point.

In some measure, perhaps, Gerald’s death seems to save Birkin from becoming fully cognizant of what he really desires. Now that Gerald is a corpse, and has become definitively abject – not just the homoerotic body but the *dead* body – the burden of choice has been taken out of Birkin’s hands. There will be no relationship of the kind he covets, because the one man with whom he could have had “another kind of love” is now dead. Gerald has been abjected, as have the ambivalent feelings laid bare in the earlier wrestling scene between the two men. It is a convenient way of removing the whole question, certainly, to kill off that which brings Birkin to the very brink of his identity as a man. By removing the temptation of Gerald, Lawrence renders Birkin and Ursula’s hypothetical interchange in these final lines much less threatening to

heterosexual identity than if they were discussing the actual possibility of his loving another man as intimately as he loves her.

Gerald's ultimate transformation into a corpse underscores the undeniable connections between abjection, homosexuality, and the corpse, which we must register after reading Lawrence in any depth. Since gender and identity exist as such central struggles for his characters, the possibility of losing oneself – either to death or to a relationship with another who cannot properly be pigeonholed as a real “other” because of his or her similar sex – presents itself again and again in the novels. It has an especially close relationship to the death, decay, and “black beetle” imagery that Lawrence chooses in order to express his repugnance. His own troubled experience of sexuality compounds the implications of homosexuality as that “jettisoned” abject that, “from its place of banishment, [...] does not cease challenging its master” (*PH* 2).

To be sure, heterosexual romantic unions – the subject of discussion in the next chapter – present similar problems for Lawrence's characters. The abject repeatedly surfaces here, as well, suggesting that the idea of merging with another individual – of *either* sex – holds both an attraction, but also simultaneously a fear of obliterating identity. As Levenson notes, though, homoerotic desire in *Women in Love* in particular provides the precondition for the most apparently healthy heterosexual relationship in the novel: “Birkin's failure with Gerald is thus a condition of his success with Ursula, first because it keeps the lovers together and second because it keeps them apart. Gerald is what lies beyond them and what lies between them” (163). The abject, far from being a threat to identity that must be decisively disposed of, stays at the periphery of the characters' vision, and even while it menaces, it also provides the nourishing

soil from which Lawrentian characters' more socially sanctioned heterosexual relationships will spring.

CHAPTER 4

MEN AND WOMEN IN LOVE

Love is a coming together. But there can be no coming together without an equivalent going asunder. In love, all things unite in a oneness of joy and praise. But they could not unite unless they were previously apart. And having united in a whole circle of unity, they can go no further in love. The motion of love, like a tide, is fulfilled in this instance; there must be an ebb. [...] So that the coming together depends on the going apart, the systole depends on the diastole; the flow depends on the ebb. There can never be love universal and unbroken.

(D. H. Lawrence, "Love" 7)

A couple that lasts [...] is necessarily a federation of at least four partners: the masculine and the feminine sides in the man, the masculine and feminine sides in the woman.

(Julia Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said* 64)

In *Women in Love* the paradoxical way to have a perfect relationship is *nearly* to have it: any closer and all is lost.

(Michael Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* 161)

Sex is the balance of male and female in the universe, the attraction, the repulsion, the transit of neutrality, the new attraction, the new repulsion, always different, always new. [...] Marriage is the clue to human life, but there is no marriage apart from the wheeling sun and the nodding earth, from the straying of the planets and magnificence of the fixed stars. Is not a man different, utterly different, at dawn from what he is at sunset? and a woman too? And does not the changing harmony and discord of their variation make the secret music of life?

(D. H. Lawrence, *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover* 40-41)

John Worthen points out in *D. H. Lawrence and the Idea of the Novel* that, "like in *The Rainbow*, *Sons and Lovers* ends before the main character finds 'a mate'" (40). Indeed, the psychological problem of finding another with whom to share one's intimate life occupies considerable space in Lawrence's novels. Most of Lawrence's characters at the very least consider the possibility of love, union, and perhaps marriage, though some, like Paul Morel,

never achieve this goal. Still, regardless of whether or not a character ever finds a beloved, the search for and maintenance of a love relationship challenges both men and women, as Worthen indicates in his choice of these two novels as examples: like Paul Morel and Ursula Brangwen, almost all of Lawrence's characters encounter the possibility of romantic union at some point, to differing degrees of success.

Yet the problem of union has far-reaching consequences for the self, even beyond the idea of "starting a family" or "bonding with another." Levenson argues in *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* that the Lawrentian pair is not merely the merger of two individual beings. In fact, the merging "aims to constitute the self which until it enters the dyadic bond is only a congeries of incoherent emotions" (156). Thus, union defines the self instead of the other way around: the "romantic couple confirms, even constructs, the singular self" (156). As Lawrence points out, though, such fusion can be deadly, as we see in Gerald and Gudrun's "fatal consonance" as opposed to Birkin and Ursula's "living strife" (162).³² Indeed, as Maria DiBattista suggests in her examination of the modern English novel's depictions of love in *First Love: The Affections of Modern Fiction*, our initial romantic attachment to another "give[s] form to this inchoate sense of the divinity of the Beloved, to this mysterious intuition of the Other as the totality of marvels and, as Nabokov warns, evil" (238). That both good and evil are embodied by the beloved indicates one reason why the love relationship can be so treacherous.

³² Yet it must be said that critics do not agree on the implications of this, one of Lawrence's most famous couples. In *D. H. Lawrence and Women*, Carol Dix puts some critics' negative reading of the relationship perhaps most succinctly: "So Birkin and Ursula make it? One doubts it" (59). It depends entirely upon the way one reads the continual conflict between them. Likewise, Kate Millett dismisses the relationship with a pointed assertion that it is not at all a meeting of equals: "And of course a star in Birkin's orbit is exactly what Ursula's position is to be; Birkin will play at the Son of God, Ursula revolving quietly at his side" (371).

The problem of amorous relationships can be traced throughout Lawrence's fictional oeuvre, from *Sons and Lovers*, through the pair of "Sisters" novels and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, into the later, so-called male leadership novels, like *Kangaroo*, *Aaron's Rod*, and *The Plumed Serpent*, and finally even in Lawrence's unfinished, highly autobiographical *Mr. Noon*. In *The Rainbow*, Ursula Brangwen's foremothers all seem to encounter a perilous moment in their courtships and marriages when the prospect of merging with another becomes at once a frightening and fascinating possibility. Later, in *Women in Love*, the sisters, Gudrun and Ursula, both exemplify an oscillation between a desire for individuation and a desire for both emotional and physical union with the Other, in the sense that both experience feelings of both attraction and repulsion (often closely on each other's heels) to the men that they love. Likewise, Connie Chatterley and Kate Leslie both find themselves drawn to, yet also repelled by, the overt sexuality and corporeality of their prospective lovers. For the male characters, this experience falls along similar lines: Paul Morel clearly encounters tremendous struggles when he considers sexual and spiritual relationships with both Clara Dawes and Miriam Leivers. Even Gilbert Noon, the character who perhaps most autobiographically corresponds to Lawrence in his relationship with Frieda, wrestles with his simultaneous desire *and* distaste for Johanna von Hebenitz.

In order to understand why some relationships succeed and others fail – sometimes fatally, as in Gerald Crich's case in *Women in Love* – many contemporary scholars interested in questions of gender have cited the respective Lawrentian partners' willingness, or unwillingness, to adhere to the author's prescriptive rules for men and women's roles. Famously, in *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett discusses at length the problems represented even by a text like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – which is the Lawrence novel for which she has the least antipathy. She

asserts that the novel masquerades as a “celebration of sexual passion” but is actually “largely a celebration of the penis of Oliver Mellors, gamekeeper and social prophet” (238). Likewise, in her famous critique of Lawrence in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir’s quarrel with his work does not center on his female characters – she concedes that these women appear to be strong, intelligent, and passionate – but rather on their obligation to forget their own concerns, their own identities, their own lives, their need for “personal love” and its trappings (De Beauvoir 250), and their own sexual fulfillment, in favor of actively supporting their men’s “passionate purpose” in life (*Fantasia of the Unconscious* 110 qtd. in de Beauvoir 247). While these more political and historical accounts of gender politics and heterosexual union do represent a compelling narrative for how Lawrentian relationships work, they do not, ultimately, account satisfactorily for the question of psychological motivation. Among more typological scholars, Mark Spilka contends in *The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence* that in order to understand the love relationships in the novel, one must understand the connection among men, women, and nature, as well as the more organic notion of “Life” that Lawrence advocates. Other critics, like John Middleton Murry, have attempted to address these male/female unions in more specifically psychoanalytic terms, arguing of a text like *Sons and Lovers*, for example, that the abnormally close relationship between the “divided man” Paul Morel and his mother prevents him from successfully bonding with either Miriam Leivers or Clara Dawes (*Son of Woman* 34). Ultimately, however, most psychoanalytic Lawrentian scholars stop short of Kristeva, preferring to discuss the novels using a more Freudian paradigm. Perhaps this is because it is fairly simple to bracket Lawrence’s relationship troubles (both fictional and biographical) under the general, vulgar Freudian heading of “unresolved mother issues.”

Yet it is here that investigating the question from the standpoint of Julia Kristeva's theoretical work seems to be a productive, new step. In addition to engaging with the mother-son (or mother-daughter, or father-daughter) dynamics implied by most characters' difficulty forming romantic relationships, Kristeva's work, particularly the Lacanian component of it, helps to explain how the meeting with the Other is necessarily also an issue of individuation and formation of the Self, and is also an experience that is linguistically constructed. That many of Lawrence's characters exhibit such an ambivalence towards love and union – indeed, even many of the “successful” examples, like Birkin and Ursula, or Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors – also speaks to the continued, lurking presence of Kristeva's abject, and the fear of its breaching the borders of the Self.

Rupert Birkin characterizes successful romantic union thus:

There was another way, the way of freedom. There was the paradisal entry into pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union, stronger than any pangs of emotion, a lovely state of free proud singleness, which accepted the obligation of the permanent connection with others, and with the other, submits to the yoke and leash of love, but never forfeits its own proud individual singleness, even while it loves and yields. (*WL* 247)

This notion of both “free proud singleness” and “the obligation of the permanent connection with others” conjures Kristeva's almost identical language in both *Tales of Love* and *Powers of Horror*, where she discusses the process of individuation and the way childhood desires for a return to the perfect union of mother and child in the womb manifest themselves in adult love relationships. Tellingly she emphasizes literary representations and their role in love, arguing

that they “invite us to carve out our own territory within love, establish ourselves as *particular*, outdo ourselves in a sublime Other” (*TL* 7). Her view coincides with Lawrence’s in her declaration that “I am, in love, at the zenith of subjectivity” – yet she warns of the fragility of this state, pointing out that “in the rapture of love, the limits of one’s own identity vanish” (*TL* 5, 2).

Indeed, almost all of Lawrence’s characters encounter a similar moment when the possibility of merging sexually and emotionally with another person represents both an attractive and frightening prospect because it is psychologically linked with earlier, sometimes pre-linguistic childhood memories. Granted, the desire for two to become one seems natural enough — the familiar Platonic myth paints us all as incomplete halves, searching for our complementary part — yet many obstacles exist, even for Lawrentian lovers who seem as well-matched as Rupert and Ursula Birkin, or Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors. With this desire comes a fear of total fusion – of the kind we experienced in the womb before we became “selves” – for, in romantic or sexual terms, such a state would mean the obliteration of identity, as the two lovers would become indistinguishable from one another. An excessive form of this “horror, fascination, estrangement” is strongly in evidence, for instance, in the interactions between Gerald and Gudrun, particularly near the conclusion of *Women in Love*, where for each individual “the object appears as an elusive other just beyond the subject’s comprehension” (Smith 79). Here, even in romantic unions between men and women, we re-encounter Kristeva’s abject, what John Lechte describes as “the psychoanalytical elaboration of universal horror” (158), which is always present and always poses a threat to identity and even to existence.

In addition to the abjection Lawrence appeared to find in homosexuality and homoeroticism, his straight characters likewise seem to end up, over and over again, in a position

to face the abjection conjured by a love object. Even in these more socially sanctioned relationships between men and women, there exists the possibility of deathly merging. In the cases of Ursula and Birkin, and Connie and Mellors, their encounter results in a successful relationship in which both partners are separate yet unified – yet for Gerald and Gudrun, whose respective problems with individuation prevent them from fully dealing with this traumatic realization, there is no happy conclusion. In each case, the relative success or failure of the encounter with abjection results from several variables, including the individual psychology and personality of the character, the combination of the two lovers in relationship with one another, and the role of art (or the symbolic) in articulating the trauma.

A Resurgence of the Abject

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva's discussion of the abject casts a more ominous shadow on the process of establishing the self and its relationship to romantic love. She suggests that we carry into adulthood a desire for the perfect fulfillment represented by the maternal body, and that that desire manifests itself in our attempts to become one with a beloved. Kristeva further complicates this dynamic by postulating that we also encounter the abject during the process of individuation. In *Powers of Horror*, she defines this concept as "a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (*POH* 2). We face abjection whenever we confront objects, individuals, or situations that bring us to "the border of [our] condition as a living being" (*POH* 4). In order to hold onto our tenuous sense of identity, we must push the abject as far away from ourselves as possible. To push it away shores up our own sense of self; thus, it can aid in the forging of identity. At the same time, the abject is dangerous precisely because, instead of strengthening the borders of the symbolic, it actually "points to the fragility of those borders" (Oliver 56). Any

meeting with the abject, then, also threatens to obliterate the self — yet we *must* face it.

In nearly all of Lawrence's novels, each of the main characters experiences, in his or her own way, this Kristevan struggle to individuate, in which an encounter with the abject brings the character to the brink of existence and identity. Moreover, this crisis most often appears in the context of his or her pursuit of a love interest, suggesting that the imminent merging with the beloved is yet another rite in the characters' progression towards selfhood.³³ Kristeva explains these mixed feelings in *Tales of Love*, paraphrasing one section of Freud's work which also profoundly influenced *Powers of Horror*: "In the object relation, the relation with an other, hatred [...] is more ancient than love. As soon as an *other* appears different from myself, it becomes alien, repelled, repugnant, abject—hated" (*TL* 222). In each case, the love object is nearly irresistible, but in that attraction also lies his or her threat to the individual selfhood of the character. As Kristeva theorizes, the fear of the maternal body and its association with merging is not, as Freud imagined it, one of castration, but rather a terror of losing one's *entire* self (*PH* 55).

In *Women in Love*, for example, the Brangwen sisters become foils for one another in terms of their individual responses to the abjection that occurs in tandem with the possibility of

³³ It is no accident that here and elsewhere Kristeva uses the same term Anne Wright does in *Literature of Crisis, 1910-1922*, where the latter describes the Great War as the literal "crisis" that informed all of Lawrence's writing. The word indeed appears frequently in the novels, especially in *Women in Love*, where, for instance, we discover that "There was a crisis when Gerald was a boy, when the Masters' Federation closed down the mines because the men would not accept a resolution" (*WL* 217). Wright emphasizes Lawrence's usual metaphorical wording of the moment of orgasm as "coming to the crisis," a phrasing that points to the close relationship between war and love, sex and death. In *Black Sun*, likewise, Kristeva acknowledges the link between amatory and melancholy states, showing both their larger political implications and their specific manifestations in individuals. She alludes directly to love when she calls melancholia the "*Somber Lining of Amatory Passion*" in her section heading, moving on to explain: "Conscious of our being doomed to lose our loves, we grieve perhaps even more when we glimpse in our lover the shadow of a long lost former loved one" (*BS* 5). Likewise, in terms of politics, she argues:

The periods that witness the downfall of religious and political idols, periods of crisis, are particularly favorable to black moods. While it is true that an unemployed worker is less suicidal than a deserted lover, melancholia does assert itself in times of crisis; it is spoken of, establishes its archaeology, generates its representations and its knowledge. (*BS* 8)

The relationship of crisis to deathly states, then, is explicitly rendered in Lawrence's work, particularly in *Women in Love*, where the narrative account of Ursula's thoughts as she contemplates her passionate new love for Birkin — that "Death is a great consummation" (*WL* 183) — implies that for her, likewise, the moment of orgasm is a "little death," or *le petit mort*.

romantic union. After first seeing Gerald, Gudrun senses the threat in the “strange stealth glistening through his amiable, almost happy appearance” (*WL* 17). Similarly, when Birkin returns from his two-week recovery from Hermione’s violent blow to his head, Ursula initially feels joy at seeing him, but then finds herself “rather repulsed” by his “ghastly” appearance, asking, “You have been ill, haven’t you?” (*WL* 116). Thus, both women have an encounter with this feeling of horror, but only Ursula seems able to move beyond the abject into a successful relationship. There is a desire to keep the self separate, but also to become one with the beloved, and each sister negotiates these conflicting impulses in her own idiosyncratic way. On the night of Diana’s drowning, Gudrun finds in “the great, level surface of the water, so heavy and deadly” (*WL* 174), an echo of her own fear of immersing herself, of merging with Gerald completely in relationship. Likewise, only a few feet away, in her canoe with Birkin, Ursula is “uneasy yet for some word, for some assurance,” fearful of Birkin’s possible desire for “silence, pure and whole,” the silence of complete fusion with another (*WL* 170). Abjection is inextricably linked with the idea of merging with the other, since such a fusion would blur the borders of the self and thus represent a challenge to individual identity.

Gudrun, in particular, encounters this version of abjection in situations like the horse-riding scene, in which she reacts with involuntary disgust and repulsion to the sight of “the trickles of blood on the sides of [Gerald’s] mare” (*WL* 104). In fact, for her the Abject appears even early in the first chapter, as she walks with her sister through the colliers’ town, with its descriptions of rotting food and dirty people — again, though, the Abject creates a sense of both repulsion *and* attraction, as Gudrun’s subsequent, otherwise-inexplicable frequent visits to the town attest. Gudrun’s relationship to the Abject is a unique one in the novel, however, since she does seem to find its fascination, yet never seems fully to engage with it, unlike the other

characters, who either are able to fully overcome it (as Birkin and Ursula do) or succumb to it completely (as in Gerald's case).

Mary Burgan characterizes both *Ulysses* and *Women in Love*, on a historical level, as "revolutionary novels, celebrating...the liberation of women from the Victorian ideal of angelic passivity and conscientious repression of instinct" (178). Nevertheless, she adds, "submerged in the imagery of such liberation is the implication that, in her maternal as distinct from her erotic aspect, women is a potential threat whom man must either master or serve as the eternal infant" (178). With regard to Gudrun, this parallel seems to hold true. Gerald's inability to fully engage with and abject the smothering Maternal presence, represented by Gudrun, leads directly to his death, a death whose topographical landscape and language also symbolically point to a return to the body of the mother. As she later points out, "Gudrun Brangwen is as ruthless as Mrs. Crich in her assertion of temporal maternal power over the male," and it is in her sexual encounter with Gerald after his father's death that her "devouring maternity" becomes most visible (186).³⁴

Part of what makes this relationship so tragic is that its destructive scope comes from the inability of each lover to transcend the abject. What Burgan calls Gudrun's being "tied to the untranscended, domestic relationships of personal history" (187), we might rename as her continual encounters with abjection. Initially, in their first amorous interchange under the bridge, Gudrun seems to exercise a modicum of restraint with Gerald: "for the present it was enough, enough, as much as her soul could bear. Too much and she would shatter herself" (*WL* 325).

³⁴ Levenson phrases the reason for their failure somewhat differently. Citing the conflict and continual, paradoxical reversals and questions as the reason why Birkin and Ursula successfully construct selves through their union, he points out that, by contrast, Gerald and Gudrun

[...] affirm one another's statements and echo one another's words. Their conversation abounds with phrases such as "that's just it," "so do I," "certainly," "exactly," and this compulsive verbal agreement becomes a way of inciting one another to passionate attraction. [...] After an initial period of hostility Gerald and Gudrun place themselves in this erotic *congruity* which seals their mutual fate. (*Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* 158)

In the end, Levenson argues, for Gudrun and Gerald, "mutual assent will turn violently into its opposite while the continual bickering between [Birkin and Ursula] serves to protect them from the catastrophe of 'fusion'" (159).

Even so, there is a subtle certainty that time will bring a merging that has no restraint, that threatens even the boundaries of identity, reflected in Gerald's characterization of "the fathomless, fathomless desire [that her fingers] could evoke in him [as] deeper than death, where he had no choice" (*WL* 324). For Gudrun, the relationship is a constant tightrope-walk, in which she struggles to maintain her balance between abjection and subjectivity. She is ultimately successful in this, if at Gerald's expense. She is "afraid, but confident. She [knows] her life tremble[s] on the edge of an abyss. But she [is] curiously sure of her footing. She [knows] her cunning [will] outwit him" (*WL* 454). And ultimately, her certainty is not unfounded; she survives, while Gerald succumbs to both a psychological and a literal death.

In the end, of all the characters, Gerald seems to be the one who struggles most profoundly, and unsuccessfully, with the Abject. Early in the novel, during his initial interactions with Minette, he says, when Birkin queries him about his feelings for her, "I liked her all right, for a couple of days [...] But a week of her would have turned me over. There's a certain smell about the skin of those women, that in the end is sickening beyond words—even if you like it at first" (*WL* 88). Later, he reacts with disgust to Gudrun's bleeding arm, after she attempts to remove Winnifred's rabbit from its cage, for "[t]he long, shallow red rip seem[s] torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the *forever unconscious, unthinkable* red ether of the *beyond*, the *obscene beyond*" (*WL* 235, emphasis added). Thus, he initially refuses to touch her, and finally only does so with great reluctance and repulsion. More importantly, perhaps, for the middle of the novel, Gerald's experience of his father's illness and death exemplifies another protracted encounter with the Abject. Witnessing the "horrible choking rattle from his father's throat, the fearful, frenzied eye, rolling awfully in its wild, fruitless search for help [...] the dark blood and mess pumping over the face of the

agonised being [...] Gerald [stands] transfixed, his soul echoing in horror” (*WL* 326). Initially, he finds comfort in the symbolic rituals of funeral and propriety in general; however, once alone, he finds that he cannot endure his solitude, as his confrontation with the *Object* has threatened his very identity. Certainly, he is threatened by his solitude — but it is precisely because he has no *Other*, in opposition to whom he might forge a unified sense of self. In response to this aversion to being alone, he strikes out into the unknown and ends up at the grave of his father, where the “horribly cold and sticky” matter of the clay (*WL* 331) — clinging, significantly, to his feet — only exacerbates his trauma.

His subsequent sexual encounter with Gudrun on the same night temporarily heals him by giving him the peace of knowing that he is a unified *Self*. Perhaps he summarizes this resolution best when, in response to her query as to why he has come to her, Gerald replies, “Because—it has to be so. If there weren’t you in the world, then *I* shouldn’t be in the world, either” (*WL* 336). In other words, he seems to indicate here that Gudrun provides an *Other*, in opposition to which he can establish a sense of identity. Lawrence himself admittedly remained rather resistant to the “heavy reliance on the complex of the Oedipus complex” in Freudian psychoanalysis (Simpson 92), with its insistence on the role of the mother. Here we might recall Lawrence’s sentiments about the *Magna Mater*, expressed in a 1918 letter to Katherine Mansfield about the tendency of the man to “return to the woman” and cast “himself as it were into her womb” (Moore 565). Accordingly, Gerald does seem to view Gudrun as a kind of surrogate mother who is able to comfort him. However, rather than shoring up his momentarily fragile sense of identity, their sexual encounter instead underlines the attendant breaching of corporeal and emotional boundaries. Ultimately, his inability to recover from the abjection created by their union directly contributes to his eventual demise.

At the same time, “Gerald is unable to metaphorize death,” to reiterate Gerald Doherty’s assertion (63). His inextricable ties to death haunt him throughout his life, and certainly for the course of the novel, in whose second chapter Birkin identifies him as Cain: a man who killed his brother, if, in his case, accidentally (*WL* 20). Gerald cannot escape the Abject, and he also cannot abject the abject, so as to become a whole Self. Near the time of his father’s death, he observes of Gudrun, “You seem to be clutching at the void — and at the same time *you are void* yourself” (*WL* 317, emphasis added). He subsequently describes himself as “a pair of scales, the half of which tips down and down into an indefinite void” (*WL* 321). Perhaps it is significant here that removing two letters of the modifier attached to “void” leaves us with an abyss that is both “indefinite” and “infinite.” For Gerald, death is unknowable and everlasting, but ultimately inevitable — perhaps more inevitable, as it were, than it is even for the other characters in the novel.

His terrible premonition about his own demise uncannily prefigures Kristeva’s *Tales of Love*, where she examines the death and hatred that are buried under the “love story” of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. She suggests that, if death were not the inevitable end to the young lovers’ union, and if there were no hatred from family and society to keep them apart, the future prospects for such a relationship would be limited to two similarly pessimistic and unromantic scenarios. Either Romeo and Juliet would end up married and living “the banal, humdrum, lackluster lassitude of a tired and cynical collusion,” or they would go on being “a passionate couple, but covering the entire gamut of sadomasochism that the two partners already heralded in the yet relatively quiet version of the Shakespearean text” (217). Thus, in Kristeva’s view, these two characters already hint from the beginning of the play that their relationship is

deathly and doomed. In Lawrence's novels, we can see plenty of characters who embody this sense of hatred – even his heroine Ursula, who as a young woman in *The Rainbow* has “starts of revulsion and hatred [that] were more inevitable than her impulses to love,” but the novel gives us to know that this is largely because she is as yet “uncreated, unformed” (R 288). Likewise, after their birth of their children and Will's aborted affair, Ursula's parents Will and Anna become sexually involved again, yet their passion resembles the second of the hypothetical futures Kristeva imagines for Romeo and Juliet: “a sensuality violent and extreme as death. [...] It was all lust and the infinite, maddening intoxication of the senses, a passion of death” (R 237).

The death drives and sadomasochistic tenor of this, the emblem of the Western idea of the “ill-fated lovers,” even more consistently mirrors the connection between Gudrun and Gerald, particularly from the latter's perspective. At one moment in the novel, during their train ride to London, Gerald asks Birkin, “Have you ever really loved anybody?”— to which Birkin replies portentously, after initially vacillating, “*Finally—finally—no*” (WL 50, emphasis added). What is ironic about this scene is the fact that Birkin's explicitly-stated wish to love in such a way is never fulfilled, while Gerald, who is more fearful of the idea, does eventually experience such a “final” love for Gudrun, a love which results in his death. Moreover, Gerald realizes the excessive, identity-obliterating quality of his passion for her, even while he simultaneously comprehends Gudrun's ability to be “sufficient unto herself, closed round and completed, like a thing in a case” (WL 436). Conversely, Gerald “realized [...] it only needed one last effort on his own part, to win for himself the same completeness [...] This knowledge threw him into a terrible chaos. Because, however much he might mentally *will* to be immune and self-complete, the desire for this state was lacking, and he could not create it” (WL 436). When he does decide to open himself to her, the language Lawrence uses to describe their feelings towards one another

is decidedly abject. Granted, both lovers liken their newly-vulnerable souls to the romantic image of flowers' opening buds — but that image is superimposed immediately upon a vision of the bloody, “torn open” wound of the heart itself (*WL* 439).

The literal landscape surrounding Gerald's death presents a similarly threatening picture, emerging as a strong symbolic echo of the topography of the mother's body, as well as conflating this scene with romantic merging. Indeed, this interpretation of the scene might also extend to the psychological and metaphorical realm, as well, as a literal return to the scene of a primal trauma. Gerald stumbles along, until he reaches “the hollow basin of snow, surrounded by sheer slopes and precipices” (*WL* 466) — a part of the landscape that seems to indicate a figurative return to the womb or Maternal Container. In fact, Birkin in particular has associated Gerald with the blank, deathly whiteness of snow from the beginning of the novel, when he describes Gerald as “one of these strange white wonderful demons from the north, fulfilled in the destructive frost mystery” (*WL* 247). With regard to Gerald's death, the eerily white scene is invested with even more psychoanalytical weight, since Gerald's earlier, unvoiced exclamation — “How frail the thread of his being was stretched!” (*WL* 465) — finds conclusion in the final sentence of the chapter: “He wandered unconsciously, till he slipped and fell down, and as he fell *something broke in his soul*, and immediately he went to sleep” (*WL* 466, emphasis added). In essence, the return to the womb does not signify a regaining of the peace and completeness there, but rather spells death, since it necessarily means the obliteration of identity. The snapping of the “something” in Gerald's soul seems to be his final relinquishing of identity for the oblivion of death, for which he seems to have been destined since the beginning of the novel. In the end, then, the novel points to the inefficacy of this couple's means of individuation in the context of the love relationship. In *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*, even F. R. Leavis provides a quasi-

psychoanalytic treatment of the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun, discussing it in markedly Kristevan terms of abjection: “we are made to realize the *horror* of the process [of his father’s death] for Gerald [...] We see him turning, more and more compulsively, to Gudrun to save him from the *void*” (200, emphasis added). Ultimately, of course, she is unable and unwilling to do so.

In her we find a woman confronting the abject via sexuality, much as, meeting Gerald in town, she “looked and saw the trickles of blood on the sides of the mare [on which Gerald is riding], and she turned white” (104). A decidedly erotic description precedes the aforementioned sentence, where the narrator notes that Gerald is “pleased with the delicate quivering of the creature between his knees” (102). The fact that Gudrun herself is an artist, like Mansfield, and that she creates diminutive sculptures of small animals – perhaps akin to what Lawrence might view as Mansfield’s tidy and tame stories – further strengthens the connection between them. Indeed, as Gudrun’s and Gerald’s fates attest, the cut-off, repressed sexuality of such a modern, “spiritual” woman makes her capable of destroying a man, both psychically and literally.

At the same time, Lawrence seems to assign Gerald ultimate responsibility for his fate, and the novel hints at this authorial position early on, in a conversation between Gerald and Birkin that takes place even before Gudrun’s advent into his life. To Birkin’s anti-Arnoldian assertion that “people should do just as they like [...] which makes them act in singleness” (27), Gerald responds with the disdainful retort, “I [...] shouldn’t like to be in a world of people who acted individually and spontaneously, as you call it. We should have everybody cutting everybody else’s throat in five minutes” (27). In fact, the individual responsibility part of Birkin’s equation is precisely what makes Gerald so uncomfortable, the idea that another’s choice – or his own – might lead him uncontrollably to his demise. If we accept Birkin’s

proposition that that “means *you* [Gerald] would like to be cutting everybody’s throat” (27), then we must also accept that his psychic death at the hands of Gudrun’s abjection remains his own choice. Provocatively, Birkin goes on: “This is a complete truth. It takes two people to make a murder: a murderer and a murderee. And a murderee is a man who is murderable. And a man who is murderable is a man who in a profound if hidden lust desires to be murdered” (27). Ironically, Birkin implies here that Gerald must have some murderous “hidden lust” of his own – a desire that certainly becomes evident in the scene with the mare – yet, in fact, Gudrun ultimately acts as the “murderer” to Gerald’s “murderee.”³⁵ Indeed, Lawrence-via-Birkin’s thoughts on the matter assert his own certainty that Gerald is “afraid of [him]self” (27), an idea that the novel reiterates later, on the night when Gerald goes to Gudrun after his father’s death. When she asks him, “But why did you come to me?” he answers tellingly, “Because—it has to be so. If there weren’t you in the world, then I shouldn’t be in the world, either” (337). His pause, indicating his practical difficulty in formulating a reason for his presence in her bedroom, also reveals a certain reluctance to think too deeply on what it is about Gudrun that so compels him. Her deathly appeal to him, and his inability to resist it, suggest that some are perhaps destined not to survive an encounter with the abject – particularly not if they have no artistic outlet, as is the case with Gerald.

A similar situation has existed in the case of Gudrun’s own parents, particularly during their courtship. On Anna Lensky and Will Brangwen’s journeys to church together, their union is likewise fraught with both the abjection of religious and of romantic union: contemplating the figures of the Pietà, she pronounces them “loathsome.” When he explains, “You see, it means the

³⁵ DiBattista makes a compelling case here that the text is arguing that “[i]t takes two people to make a murder, just as it takes two people to make a marriage. Murder, like love, designates the presence of a profound if hidden lust for relationship; hence the demonstrative import of Birkin’s later encounter with Hermione, when he simply *refuses* to let himself be killed” (DiBattista 147).

Sacraments, the Bread,” she responds, “Does it! [...] Then it’s worse. *I don’t want to see your chest slit, nor to eat your dead body, even if you offer it me. Can’t you see it’s horrible?*” (161). For her, this is what religious – and by extension, sexual – union means: the ripping of the body and consumption of the corpse. Though their love eventually settles into the more peaceful rhythm of married life, this is still an indication of at least one Lawrentian character who is uneasy at the prospect of merging.

“We’ve nearly got it” ³⁶

Lawrence’s attitude towards the possibility of equitable and satisfying relationships, particularly in marriage, is not unrelentingly negative, as he illustrates through the romantic relationships featured in *Women in Love*, *Kangaroo*, and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, in particular. Though these partnerships are characterized by almost incessant lovers’ quarrels, they produce a vigorous tension that seems to become the animating force of love. In his nonfiction, one need look no further than his polemics in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* to see how specifically he prescribes and delineates these relationships:

Husbands, don’t love your wives anymore. [...] Learn to walk in the sweetness of the possession of your own soul. [...] But if your wife should accomplish for herself the sweetness of her own soul’s possession, then gently, delicately let the new mode assert itself, the new mode of relation between you, with something of spontaneous paradise in it, the apple of knowledge at last digested. But, my word, what bellyaches meanwhile. That apple is harder to digest than a lead gun-carriage. (*FTU* 146-7)

He asserts, “The best thing I have known is the stillness of accomplished marriage, when one

³⁶ (*WL* 355)

possesses one's soul in silence, side by side with the amiable spouse, and has left off craving and raving and being only half one's self" (*FTU* 138). Here Lawrence disputes the ability of love to complete the self, arguing instead that an "obstinate and determined love-will [...] is quite another matter than love" (*FTU* 147) and that we should strive instead to be as complete as possible in ourselves. The dream of love is only an illusion that masks our inability to be alone with ourselves; even after sexual union, he contends, "even in its profoundest, and most elemental movements, the soul is still individual" (*FTU* 174). Yet, tellingly, Lawrence admits openly and with humility, "I must say, I know a great deal more about the craving and raving and sore ribs than about the accomplishment" (*FU* 138). Even the author himself is not immune to the desire to merge, the romantic fantasy of love.

In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva's language in the chapter entitled "A Holy Madness: She and He" speaks both to these perils and also to the compelling aspects of romantic merging, which she compares to a desire to merge with God. Using the biblical Song of Songs, she discusses the ways in which the divine love metaphorized by this apparently erotic biblical text provides a revealing model for "the dominant theme of absence, [and] the yearning to merge" embodied by human love (*TL* 94). In the Song of Songs, the lover, like God, has "run away"; thus, he is fundamentally absent, even from his beloved, who becomes a threat to him by her very presence. Kristeva points out that "he flees, defying not only the maternal hearth where the power of the mother goddess or of the wife is huddled, but the very sexual merging itself: 'On my bed at night, I sought him / whom my heart loves. / I sought but did not find him' [Chapter 3, Verse 1]" (*TL* 96). In the end, argues Kristeva, "the intensity of love comes precisely from that combination of received jouissance [pleasure, bliss, or ecstasy accompanied by the shattering of the normative, coherent self] and taboo, from a basic separation that nevertheless unites—that is

what love issued from the Bible signifies for us, most particularly in its later form as celebrated in the Song of Songs” (*TL* 90).

In *Women in Love*, Birkin and Ursula literalize this more positive ideal of romantic union, in the “free proud singleness” and yet “permanent connection” of their model for individuation and love (*WL* 247). Perhaps Lawrence holds them up as the model because of his own admitted identification with Birkin’s views, which are strengthened through the uneasy synthesis he reaches with the dialectical complement of Ursula’s challenges. Here I cite Daniel Albright’s argument in *Personality and Impersonality in D. H. Lawrence*, in which he suggests that *all* of Lawrence’s major characters, both male and female, can be seen as mouthpieces for the author’s thoughts. Thus, instead of debates between a clear authorial voice and other voices he encountered, the arguments between Ursula and Birkin in *Women in Love* represent interior conversations within the mind of the author, in which *both* voices are his, or belong to different “selves.” Moving beyond an author’s identification with characters, however, a Kristevan reading of the text emphasizes that these two characters realize the importance both of negotiating the semiotic, and of approaching abjection, through the symbolic world of language.

Similarly, DiBattista argues that in English literature – and in Lawrence’s work especially – “First Love is that form of experiencing that links two life-initiating events: the divine visitation of Love and the birth of the artistic vocation” (xvi). In other words, she asserts, we experience love in order to write or talk about it afterwards.³⁷ In fact, as speaking subjects, we are all, to some extent, constituted through speaking of love – first for the mother, and later for the beloved. Kristeva phrases it in much the same way: “Under [love’s] sway, one does not

³⁷ Worthen identifies this same tendency in Lawrence’s own biography. Quoting a passage from one of Lawrence’s rhapsodic written accounts of his early relationship with Jessie Chambers, Worthen adds: “Such writing so easily slips, too, into being a literary exercise: not so much a description of passion as an experiment in how passion might be written about” (*DHL: The Life of an Outsider* 75).

speak *of*. One simply has the impression of speaking at last, for the first time, for real” (TL 3). The amount of verbiage in Lawrentian love scenes attests to the vital importance of language, both in terms of forging individual selfhood and in terms of merging with another.

Identity is implicated in the prospect of love, especially as union simultaneously presents both the hope of fulfillment and the often-frightening possibility of the self’s being swallowed up in such merging. The role of language in such conflict also becomes a central concern, as the individual is constituted by signification and not the other way around. Birkin becomes frustrated with Ursula’s periodic attempts to make him verbalize his amorous feelings, yet he resists such clichéd phrases of love:

Even when he said, whispering with truth, “I love you, I love you,” it was not the real truth. It was something beyond love, such a gladness of having surpassed oneself, of having transcended the old existence. How could he say “I” when he was something new and unknown, not himself at all? This I, this old formula of the age, was a dead letter. (*WL* 361)

Thus, even with his expostulations about the ideal union of the disembodied love relationship, Birkin does, at some level, realize that a complete merging, in the manner of a fusion with the maternal presence, is impossible. He announces that the “root [of the “paradisaal” relationship] is beyond love, a naked kind of isolation, an isolated me, that does *not* meet and mingle, and never can” (*WL* 137). To be sure, Ursula does represent a certain amount of danger to Birkin’s individual psyche, for Lawrence casts her in the early stages of their courtship as the embodiment of “the female will to absorb the ‘Other’ in the all-comprehending womb” (DiBattista 158). This fear of total fusion is the state to which Birkin alludes with disgust when he inveighs against love and its tendency to obliterate separate identity.

Viewing their relationship from a similar perspective, Levenson says of the couple's intermittent disharmony:

[...] we can also recognize it as a way to forestall the threat of fusion, to avert a dangerous synchrony of desires, and thus to preserve a saving distance. Birkin assures Ursula that they are approaching "a perfect and complete relationship": "We've nearly got it – we really have" [...] In *Women in Love* the paradoxical way to have a perfect relationship is *nearly* to have it: any closer and all is lost. (161)

This idea of constant motion *toward* what is perfect is what makes the conflict between Birkin and Ursula so frustrating, yet ultimately so compelling.

A Kristevan reading can be mapped onto Lawrence's theory of flux, in the sense that the characters illustrate this continuous oscillation between a desire for separate identity and, conversely, a desire for the fusion of the two into one. For Birkin especially, there is the ultimate longing for these two contradictory states to exist simultaneously: he tells Ursula, "What I want is a strange conjunction with you— [...] not meeting and mingling;—you are quite right:—but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings:—as the stars balance each other" (*WL* 139). Yet, as DiBattista points out, for Birkin, the "ceaseless promptings of desire must find their way into language where they can be materialized into living forms, or else they will languish in the mind" (151). Thus, the perfect complement of Lawrence's two characters emerges in Ursula's corresponding position that Birkin's brand of disembodied, idealized love cannot exist without the symbolic: he must approach this semiotic realm, which is beyond language, *through* language — for example, by declaring his love for her, and by entering with her into the

symbolic, *lawful* institution of marriage, in order to then transcend this language-based construct by creating their own version of it.³⁸ This productive conflict between semiotic and symbolic mirrors the romantic tension between Birkin and Ursula, suggesting, in the former case, that we cannot have one without the other, and in the latter case, that their perpetual push-and-pull between individuation and union is the only guarantor of a lasting amorous relationship.³⁹

To return to Birkin's words, his endorsement of separateness echoes, in slightly different words, what Lawrence also explains in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*: that in the love relationship, there is joy in recognizing the lover as unique (238), but simultaneous pathos at the realization that that very individual uniqueness produces an un-crossable gulf between the two (239). Lawrence also proposes a solution for what ideally happens, based not on psychoanalysis alone, but rather on his notion of "morality" — the "essence" of which, he contends, "is the basic desire to preserve the perfect correspondence between the self and the object, to have no trespass and no breach of integrity, nor yet any refaulture in the vitalistic interchange" (227). Lawrence thereby expresses the perfect balance of the simultaneous human desires for union/merging and separateness/identity/individuation, which Ursula and Birkin are attempting to establish for themselves in their relationship.

In order to further understand the distinctive quality that exists in their union, it might be useful to look at the contrary example of Birkin's initial attachment to Hermione. Early in the

³⁸ The perils of entering into language do not disappear, however, as we can see at the end of *The Virgin and the Gypsy*. Yvette has long believed herself in love with the gypsy, yet when she receives his letter in the final lines, the novel seems ultimately to dismiss that feeling, as nothing else follows the line: "And only then she realized that he had a name." That this had never occurred to Yvette suggests that with this entrance into the symbolic (a moment interestingly reminiscent of Lacan's *non/nom du père*) the connection between them evaporates. Joe Boswell is no longer the mysterious gypsy but an ordinary man with an ordinary name. For Yvette, the gypsy's attraction wanes as soon as he leaves the pre-linguistic world of the instinctual drives and occupies the realm of signification (*VG* 270).

³⁹ While the relationship may endure, any idea of "success" is dubious in such a union, as Kristeva acknowledges in her quotation of Freud's essay "The Tendency to Debasement in Love." In it, Freud theorizes, "We must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual drive itself is unfavorable to the realization of complete satisfaction" (qtd. in *TL* 385:2).

novel, during the wedding scene, Hermione's ruminations amount to an unvoiced admission that she experiences "a lack of robust self, she [has] no natural sufficiency, there [is] a terrible *void*, a *lack*, a *deficiency of being* within her" (*WL* 11, emphasis added). In that case, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that, if Birkin had not ended the relationship with Hermione, the result might have been a similar end to Gerald's, since both would have found themselves involved with a "strange and sepulchral" woman who represented the abject, the abyss, the smothering maternal presence that threatens to obliterate identity in its all-encompassing greed (*WL* 82). The destructive, "perfect ecstasy" Hermione feels when she attempts to crush Birkin's head with the ball of jeweled stone also attests to her synonymous relationship to death. At the conclusion of the novel the two relationships diverge finally in the culmination of this destructive desire: unlike Birkin, who survives his encounter with Hermione, Gerald wanders into the Alps and finally obviates Gudrun's role by destroying himself.

For Birkin and Ursula, the semiotic world of fusion does not take on the same ominous cast as it does for Hermione, or for Gerald and Gudrun. Indeed, as Ursula prepares for their trip abroad, Lawrence writes: "She was not herself—she was not anything. She was something that is going to be—soon—very soon" (*WL* 377). It is as though Ursula has yet to be born; the terms in which Lawrence's narrator describes her are suggestive of gestation, pointing to her eventual emergence from a "womb" — at least, in figurative or emotional terms. At length, when she finds herself sharing the blanket with Birkin on the ship, en route to the continent, Ursula discovers perfect peace in their merging: "Here they sat down, folded together, folded around with the same rug, creeping in nearer and ever nearer to one another, till it seemed they had crept right into each other, and become one substance [...] the darkness was palpable" (*WL* 378). The language here suggests that the two lovers almost become twins in the womblike darkness of

amorphous sea and sky, or perhaps that Birkin himself functions surprisingly as a kind of maternal container, “enfolding Ursula round about” (*WL* 379). However, the scene is not one of abjection or threat, as it might be for Gudrun and Gerald, and the primary explanation for this lies in the conclusion of the passage. As the two emerge from the warmth and security of the all-encompassing blanket, they find themselves “stiff and cramped” (*WL* 379), yet they are, once again, two single beings. Simultaneously, with “the paradisaal glow on her heart, and the unutterable peace of darkness in his, this [is] the all-in-all” (*WL* 379): an idea closely akin to Kristeva’s notion of the ideal balance of fusion and separate identity.

In the end, through their sexual union and their marriage, Birkin and Ursula to some extent exemplify the productive tension that can exist between Kristeva’s notions of the symbolic and the semiotic. In their case, there is a possibility for union without the loss of the self. Likewise, the confrontation with the Abject happens in the context of the symbolic, which is the only viable method for dealing with it. We might make the connection here between Birkin himself as verbal “artist” and Kristeva’s notion of the revolution in poetic language: he harnesses the attraction and the unspeakable power of the semiotic through language, with the aid of Ursula as the other half of their dialectic. The presence of individual identity in the “all-in-all” of the previously mentioned scene echoes Kristeva’s discussion of “The Song of Songs” in *Tales of Love*, in which “we see that [...] the lyricism of each part of the lover’s message contains the whole of which it is a part” (Lechte 117). Expressing that infinite whole through the symbolic language of words is one of the goals of such revolutionary poetic language, yet before one can reach that goal, it becomes necessary to confront the abject. The distinction between Birkin and Gerald’s views of the void is clear in their differing views on the African statue. Viewing its “terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness,” Gerald asks with horror

and disbelief, “Why is it art?” Accordingly, Birkin responds, “It conveys a complete truth [...] It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it” (71). His ability to conceive of organic identity is part of the reason why he is so successfully mated with Ursula.

To be sure, as a woman, Ursula has a more complex response to their union, largely because of the prevailing double-standard of the sexual mores that apply to her and not to Birkin – a subject that allies Lawrence closely with Hardy’s project in *Jude the Obscure*. In the chapter entitled “The Dreaming Woman,” Hilary Simpson discusses the influence that *Jude* had on Lawrence as a novelist, especially in terms of female sexuality. Specifically, she points out that Sue Bridehead was what Lawrence might have called “the spiritual woman.” Embodied historically by his mother and Jessie Chambers, the spiritual woman, with her offer of spiritual, emotional love and her demands for it, sought to devour a man alive. She shows up as Miriam Leivers in *Sons and Lovers*, and then again more terrifyingly as Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love*. What is dangerous about Sue, however, is very different from what is so threatening about Hermione. As Simpson points out, Sue’s “chastity [springs] not from ignorance or innocence, which a legal husband might rightfully hope to dispel, but from a conscious sense of her own sexual autonomy” (48). She is the direct opposite of Arabella, whose problem lies in her very fecund sexuality. And though Sue is in some ways an improvement over the prudery of the Victorian maiden, her refusal of sexual satisfaction to Jude nevertheless reinstates the same madonna-whore division that has plagued literary portrayals of women for centuries. It is as though most writers have been unable to write female characters who embody mature, practical sexuality in ways that still allow them a sense of morality or spirituality.

In some ways, we might see Ursula Brangwen as an answer to this dilemma. She wrangles continually with Birkin during the first half of the novel, asking him repeatedly for

conventional, verbal declarations of love, which he largely refuses. However, by the end of the novel, and especially in their conversation which concludes the work, Ursula is beginning to show signs that she has come closer to middle ground with Birkin, and vice versa. He has relented at several points – such as in the chapter “Mino,” at the conclusion of which he concedes, “Yes—my love, yes—my love. Let love be enough then. I love you then—I love you. I’m bored by the rest” (146). As for Ursula, that she gives herself to him sexually both before and after their marriage itself puts her into a different category from Sue Bridehead. While Ursula seems bothered by no such possibility, Sue is, conversely, afraid that marriage with Jude would give him a right to claim her sexuality in more concrete legal terms. In fact, sexual union, with its threat to Sue’s “sense of her own sexual autonomy” (Simpson 48), might likewise represent a challenge to her sense of selfhood in general. Robert B. Heilman notes:

Deliberately or instinctively Hardy is using certain Romantic values as a critical instrument against those of his own day, a free spirit against an oppressive society, the ethereal against commonplace and material. But a very odd thing happens: in conceiving of Sue as ‘spirit,’ and then letting her develop logically in such terms, he finds her coming up with a strong aversion to sex – in other words, with a strong infusion of the very Victorianism that many of her feelings and intellectual attitudes run counter to. (308)

And Simpson continues, “This analysis applies equally to Lawrence’s ‘dreaming women.’ In other aspects of their lives, ‘spirituality’ is potentially radical and liberating; but with sexuality it coincides, in effect if not in cause, with the prevailing social conventions” (49).

In the end, the “spiritual woman” wants verbal expressions of love because they seem

safer, and they do not really threaten identity. In fact, they are proof that the man recognizes her individuality, if only as the love object. Sex, on the other hand, is an act that involves a breach of the body's borders. Its ambiguity, particularly in a time when women's social and gender roles are also a bit ambiguous, is the source of fear for many of the aforementioned female characters. In sexual union, there is a moment of merging that is frightening because it threatens that newly-fledged sense of identity that these "modern women" are still protecting. Hence, it makes sense that sex would be a frightening prospect. As Carol Siegel puts it in *Lawrence Among the Women*, "In *Women in Love* [...] union with the dominant male causes a drift toward death" (76). In this way, historical context and archetypal psychology appear to intersect here – certainly, these "modern" females experience much the same psychodrama that women have always gone through, but because it occurs in the context of a historical shift in women's roles, it is doubly perilous for them.

We can see this anxiety about female sexuality in Katherine Mansfield's angry response to Lawrence's novel *The Lost Girl*. Siegel explains that in Mansfield's eyes, "Lawrence's sin against art seems to be that he creates a female character who experiences life physically despite her emotional sensitivity [...]. His vision is of triumphant female sexuality, an intelligent woman's life built around sexual fulfillment. Mansfield's response is, 'I feel a horror of it—a shrinking'" (100).

Yet facing this kind of "horror" or abjection squarely and moving beyond it into an enduring love relationship does seem possible, particularly in one of Lawrence's later novels. For one of his most famous (or infamous) couples, Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors, sites of abjection abound in their relationship and initial meetings, yet these moments simultaneously and paradoxically bond the lovers in an undeniable attraction to one another. After they have

physically consummated their affair, Mellors compliments her buttocks, declaring:

An' if tha shits and pisses, I'm glad. I don't want a woman as couldna shit
nor piss [...]

Tha'rt real, tha art! Tha'rt real[...]. Here tha shits and here tha pisses: an' I
lay my hand on 'em both an' like thee for it. I like thee for it. Tha's got a proper,
woman's arse, proud of itself. It's none ashamed of itself, this isna. (*LCL* 241)

His willingness to address the taboo issue of excretion and the body parts associated with it reveals part of Lawrence's mission in this novel.

John Worthen points out that in this section of *Lady Chatterley*, more than in the two earlier versions of the novel, "language is being pushed to the very limits of its usefulness; the four-letter words have lost their roots in the language of a class, and are being aimed instead at the wondering heads of their readers" (*D. H. Lawrence and the Idea of the Novel* 176). Likewise, Worthen cites a letter from Lawrence to Ottoline Morrell in which he "offered her the same doctrine," asking her whether, if a man she had loved when she was younger had uttered Mellors's aforementioned words to her, she would not have considered it "a liberation" (qtd. in *D. H. Lawrence and the Idea of the Novel* 176, 177). This, in Worthen's view, provides the "didactic" aspect of the novel, which is meant to teach us not to quake at the sexual and physical taboos it depicts, but rather "to embrace the deepest and closest experience of which human beings are capable, and not simply to 'lead the mental life'" (176, 180).

In *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence actually attempts to turn the idea of abjection on its head, maintaining that abjection does not emerge through unconventional sexual acts and obscene language, but rather in what he calls the "normal" – but, to him, "monstrous" – relationship of "conjugal happiness" (*APLCL* 13). He goes on more explicitly to argue that

participants in vital sexual relations are marked by an ability “to use the so-called obscene words, because these are a natural part of the mind’s consciousness of the body. Obscenity only comes in when the mind despises and fears the body, and the body hates and resists the mind” (*APLCL* 12). Lawrence’s words closely resemble Kristeva’s later account of eroticism, particularly when she argues that the “first and most ‘popular’ effect of psychoanalysis was to challenge the perverse ways in which sexuality had been misused, whether religious, rationalistic, moralistic, or associated with the superego” (*IBWL* 46).

Lawrence likewise did not seek merely to *say* the obscene words, thus misusing them further, but rather aimed to transform their use, thus rehabilitating their power. In “The State of Funk,” a late article written in response to public outcry against the “indecentcy” of his work, he openly declares his intentions: “Now I am one of the least lurid of mortals [...] If there is one thing I don’t like it is cheap and promiscuous sex. If there is one thing I insist on it is that sex is a delicate, vulnerable, vital thing, that you mustn’t fool with. [...] Sex must be a real flow, a real flow of sympathy, generous and warm” (223). Sex thus becomes linked with a more profound, linguistically constructed spiritual experience, much as it does for Kristeva, for whom sexuality is “a complex pattern of responses and meanings in the relations between one open system and another, one articulate subject and another. Hence it is more than what is called ‘erotic’ in pulp novels and pornographic magazines” (*IBWL* 47). She discusses obscene language more specifically in *Tales of Love*, pondering the next step now that, thanks to Freud, “a modicum of censorship has been lifted where desire, pleasure, and love are concerned” (366). In the end, she concludes: “the major rhetorical question still remains: what language is to be ascribed to this lifting of censorship? Naming the sexual act as such, in its organic reality, says nothing of the amatory relationship as a questioning, unsettling process for its subjects” (*TL* 366). Lawrence

seems to achieve this kind of “realistic” depiction of eroticism in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, for he does succeed in avoiding both the language of sexual repression *and* clinically explicit descriptions of bodies.

Accordingly, in the text of *Lady Chatterley* itself, the infamous yet ambiguous episode of anal intercourse is immediately followed by Connie’s troubled epiphany: “In the short summer night she had learnt so much. She would have thought a woman would have died of shame. Instead of which, the shame died. [...] There was nothing left to disguise or be ashamed of. She shared her ultimate nakedness with a man, another being” (*LCL* 268). In this moment, she is not only confronting the abjection alone, but through the romantic union she has shared with Oliver Mellors. Sexual merging thus becomes catharsis, “purifying” the body and mind of taboos and leaving it “naked and unashamed” (268) – significantly, the same terms used to describe Adam and Eve in paradisaal Eden, after they tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and became like gods. Interestingly, here we might also observe, that the indirect language used in these sexually taboo scenes simultaneously has a metaphorical, veiled quality that itself becomes the syntax of displacement.

Again, however, despite the glowing portrayal of Connie and Mellors’s relationship, the Kristevan idea of the absent lover returns in this novel, as well. The story concludes with the separation of the lovers, as Connie goes to Venice with her sister Hilda for some weeks. And like the lover in “Song of Songs”, he writes to her, lamenting their time apart from one another but calling it, in much more carnal terms than the biblical Song, “the pause of peace of our fucking” (*LCL* 328). However, he returns to the sacred, concluding with an allusion to the Pentecostal flame: “Never mind, never mind, we won’t get worked up. We really trust in the little flame, and in the unnamed god that shields it from being blown out. There’s so much of you here with me,

really [...]” (*LCL* 328). Like the Biblical lover, he must content himself with writing to and of the beloved: “Well, so many words because I can’t touch you. If I could sleep with my arms around you, the ink could stay in the bottle” (*LCL* 328). In this case, however, we could plausibly say that this is the success of their union: it demonstrates the absence that Kristeva deems so appropriate to the romantic relationship, the human version of divine love. Further, her absence in fact seems to necessitate, elicit, or provoke his writing; thus, it makes literary art possible, or enables a merger of artist (Lawrence) with character (Mellors), both of whom write the same words here. Considering other Lawrentian unions – Gilbert and Johanna’s more problematic one, perhaps – that progress into a shared future that Mellors’s letter only hints at, perhaps Connie and Mellors’s relationship *is* the ideal one: it epitomizes the constant flux to which Lawrence repeatedly refers, “the changing harmony and discord of [women’s and men’s] variation [which] make the secret music of life” (*APLCL* 41).⁴⁰

The previously mentioned maritime scene with Birkin and Ursula prefigures the metaphor that Lawrence uses in *Kangaroo* to describe a crisis in Richard and Harriett Lovatt’s marriage that occurs halfway through the novel. In the explicatory chapter “Harriett and Lovatt at Sea in Marriage,” the narrator, who speaks more generally and didactically than he has heretofore, compares marriage itself to a “bark” which traverses the “wildly stormy strait” of “perfect love,” usually on its way either to “the vast Pacific waters of lord-and-masterdom [or] the democratic Atlantic of perfect companionship” (*K* 169, 170). In his language of the stormy waters of “perfect love,” he references the “two fierce and opposing currents meet[ing] in the

⁴⁰ Kate Millett refers to the novel dismissively, calling it “as close as Lawrence could get to a love story.” She goes on: “It is also something of a cry of defeat, perhaps even of remorse, in a man who had aspired rather higher, but had to settle for what he could get” (344). She refers to a letter he wrote to Witter Bynner on 13 March 1928, in which he admitted that his former endorsement of male leadership was a “bore,” which he wished to exchange in favor of a new philosophy of “tenderness, sensitive, between men and men and men and women, and not the one up, one down, lead on I follow, *ich dien* sort of business” (qtd. in Millett 344 fn).

narrows,” by which he means the union represented by perfect love, a union of equals. The ship is tossed back and forth, between the woman’s desire for perfect companionship after the inevitable death of perfect love, and the man’s push towards a “lord-and-masterdom” that will nevertheless be “bliss” for the woman who “belong[s] to [him]” (K 170). Lawrence himself seems to come down on the side of the “lord and master” model. We can see this clearly in the last lines of the chapter, in which Lovatt, at a final, insoluble stalemate with Harriett, resolves that he must “submit to the dark mastery” of his own “fearful god,” take up his rightful place as a leader of men, and then “the rest would happen” – “the rest” meaning, presumably, her willingness to fall into line as the “nest” to house his “phoenix” (K 176, 173).

Nevertheless, an old motif – the rainbow – recurs in this chapter, perhaps alluding to another way, the way of constant flux, or a connection of two opposites, which Lawrence had embraced as an ideal in his earlier novels. In the description of the ship, the *Harriett and Lovatt*, the prose, while exhausting and fraught with strife, nevertheless suggests that the ship’s perils have rendered her still beautiful, despite her long journey in the “stormy” waters of perfect love:

Fair weather and foul alternated. Sometimes the brig *Harriett and Lovatt* skimmed along the path of the moon like a phantom: sometimes she lay becalmed, while sharks flicked her bottom: then she drove into the most awful hurricanes, and spun round in a typhoon: and yet behold her sailing out through the glowing arch of a rainbow into halcyon waters again. And so for years, till she began to look rather worn, but always attractive. Her paint had gone, so her timbers now were sea-silvery. Her sails were thin, but very white. (K 171).

Later in the paragraph Lawrence tries to argue that “the flag of perfect love [...] was nearly tattered away” (171), which suggests that the rainbow itself, once a symbol of optimism about

the fate of men and women in relationship, only lasts for so long before these unions must be steered, either by the male or female partner, into other, less tumultuous waters. This necessarily requires compromise from one of the partners.

Despite the realistic yet uncomfortable marital strife in *Kangaroo*, many readers have tended to see Ursula and Birkin as a good Lawrentian couple, yet we should examine this proposition more closely. We might see Birkin and Ursula's relationship as a successful one, but since it is arguably predicated in part on Birkin abjecting his homoerotic desire for Gerald, its foundations are not at all secure. Wright argues that the "failure to perfect a 'Man to Man' relationship between Gerald and Birkin is central to the narrative: it nullifies the entire regenerative fabric as Birkin perceives it" (138), nullifying also the positive aspects of his relationship with Ursula. Murry underscores this failure to face abjection in homosexual desire in *Reminiscences of D. H. Lawrence*, where he discloses his realization that he was indeed the "obscene bug sucking away his life" that Lawrence called him, and, in language echoing *Women in Love's* "Gladiatorial" chapter, admits, "I was unconscious of my duty towards him: to wrestle with him to the going down of the sun" (10). Further, in direct quotation of another chapter title from *Women in Love*, he asks, "Why had I never dared to fight Lawrence, man to man?" (14).

Notwithstanding these male responses to the abject, here we might return to Ursula, whose connection with regard to homoerotic desire seems to be different from Birkin's: because she has already experienced an openly lesbian relationship with Winifred Inger (and decided against continuing it), she is perhaps further along than Birkin in her sexual development, having faced that "taboo." We might conclude conversely that erotic relationships between women are not as threatening to the social order as those that occur between men, and thus that Ursula's "Shame" is less terrifying than Birkin's might have been: a shame that he fears will lead to

psychic death. To engage with abjection is indeed to face the possible annihilation of selfhood. As Levenson argues, *Women in Love* may be “perhaps the most unpleasant important novel in the language,” yet the constant conflict between the novel’s two most successful lovers seems “far less discouraging when set against the perfect stability of death” (165). For Birkin, as for all of Lawrence’s men, this is a real fear, harking back to the fearful prospect of the smothering body of the abject mother. For Ursula, by contrast, the female experience of coming to selfhood and of entering into relationship with another is compounded, as the next chapter discusses, by its enduring connection with motherhood, whether prospective or actual.

CHAPTER 5

A MOTHER'S FEAR AND FULFILLMENT

The mother, also, from the bowels knows her child – as she can never, never know it from the head. (Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* 221)

D. H. Lawrence recognized the profound magnitude of the mother's experience from the earliest moments in his career, observing to his fiancée Louie Burrows of his own dying mother: "You see mother has had a devilish married life, for nearly forty years – and this is the conclusion – no relief. What ever I wrote, it could not be so awful as to write a biography of my mother" (*CL* 1 195). The sexual act from which new life emerges is a form of creation that Lawrence continually explores in his novels. Yet for the male characters, the act signifies something that is very different from what sexual intercourse means to Lawrence's women, if for no other reason than women's awareness that a pregnancy could result from the encounter.

Most famously, his depiction of Gertrude Morel, in particular, places surprising focus on *her* thoughts about pregnancy and motherhood, before the novel's emphasis shifts to Paul's point of view – one need only look at his title, *Sons and Lovers*, whose perspective implies a narrative from the mother's standpoint rather than that of the son. Lawrence's desire to explore the woman's experience of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood recurs at various points throughout the novels, from early texts like *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers* to later works like *The Plumed Serpent* and *The Escaped Cock*.

As in his fiction, in Lawrence's correspondence he expresses wonder at the mother's perspective. In a 1913 letter to Henry Savage, he reflects:

I think if I had a child coming, I think I should be happy too. Because if one is careful—if the mother is careful—I think all the world starts again, right clean and jolly, when a child is born. One should be happy, I think, when a child is coming, because the mother's blood ought to run in the womb sweet like sunshine. Because we all must die, whereas we *mightn't* have been born. And when a child comes, something is which might never have been. (CL 2 43)

As Nixon points out, “In pregnancy the women seem to have access to the infinite apart from the man, and in giving birth they seem to do, alone, what the man only does in sex: surrender conscious control and give themselves up to the power of the divine forces within” (106). Despite this possibility of communing with the infinite, childbirth is an act that produces markedly ambivalent reactions among Lawrence's female characters if only because of the years of mothering that must inevitably follow it.

Owing both to his unusual relationship with his own mother and his ambivalence about Frieda's attempts to stay connected to her children, Lawrence's sensitivity to the mother's point of view was not unmixed with anxiety.⁴¹ The mingled fear and excitement of his fictional women – Gertrude Morel, Connie Chatterley, Kate Leslie, Alvina Houghton, Gudrun Brangwen (who has had a baby at the end of an early version of *Women in Love*), and even Ursula Brangwen (who fears she is pregnant at the end of *The Rainbow*) – suggests that it is a troubling prospect even for women who have yet to experience it. Individuation by itself is difficult for these female characters, and to add to that complex process the thorny relationship and blurred boundaries that exist between mother and child is to compound the psychological challenges these women face. However, even within this dilemma appear opportunities, albeit limited, for transcending the fear

⁴¹ This sensitivity to feminine concerns is visible even at the beginning of Lawrence's career. Catherine Carswell recalls that when his first novel *The White Peacock* was published, “To Lawrence's amusement his work was taken for a woman's in several quarters” (6).

of mother and child fusing into one, and moving on to experience both the fulfillment of a close relationship and the liberty of individual selfhood. Indeed, as Lawrence's female characters illustrate, though maternity may initially seem to be a solution to their alienation and desire for union, it represents an entirely new set of issues that these women must face.

In terms of traditional psychoanalysis, Freud's work remains rather silent on the subject of maternity from the mother's perspective, a subject that was of obvious interest to Lawrence. Kristeva notes: "The fact remains, as far as the complexities and pitfalls of maternal experience are involved, that Freud offers only a massive *nothing* [...] There thus remained for his followers an entire continent to explore, a black one indeed" (*TL* 255). Reading Freud, she argues, "One might be led to think that motherhood was a solution to neurosis" (*TL* 254). In her early work *Desire in Language* (1980), she goes further to suggest "Motherhood's impossible syllogism":

Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. "It happens, but I'm not there." "I cannot realize it, but it goes on" (*DL* 237).

It is in terms of the mother's perspective that Kristeva's work bridges in the gap left by earlier psychoanalysts, especially Freud. She herself remarks in frustration that "when Freud analyzes the advent and transformations of monotheism, he emphasizes that Christianity comes closer to pagan myths by integrating, through and against Judaic rigor, a preconious [*sic*] acknowledgment of a maternal feminine. And yet, among the patients analyzed by Freud, one seeks in vain for mothers and their problems" (*TL* 254). Kristeva, on the other hand, helps to amplify this aspect of Freudian theory, in the immediate personal sense, through her own

descriptions of the alienation she herself feels as a mother – an estrangement that allies her with many of Lawrence’s fictional mothers.

In the left-hand marginal text of “Stabat Mater,” which is far less analytical and rational than what appears in the adjacent column, Kristeva reflects on the rift of the body, of the psyche, and even of language itself: “First, there is the separation, previous to pregnancy, but which pregnancy brings to light and imposes without remedy [...] A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language—and it has always been so” (*TL* 253-4). The arrangement of the text itself might be read as an allegory of the schism between semiotic and symbolic, for while she must remain within the rational system of language (the fact that she is writing a critical text for publication, if nothing else), she is also pushing through its limits with the more fluid left column.

For the woman, and particularly for the mother, the separation between self and other is even more problematic because during pregnancy there is the apparent possibility of true union, which disappears as soon as the child is born. For Kristeva, women “live on that border, crossroads beings, crucified beings. A woman is neither nomadic nor a male body that considers itself earthly only in erotic passion” (*TL* 254). She nevertheless grounds her examination of this issue in historical and phenomenological realities, when she declares, “we still must pay close attention to what today’s women have to say about this experience. Pregnancy is a dramatic ordeal: a splitting of the body, the division and coexistence of self and other, of nature and awareness, of physiology and speech” (*NMS* 219).

A similar preoccupation with the separation of mother and child runs throughout Lawrence’s work, and it finds voice not only in the novels, but also, and at length, in his nonfictional texts. In *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, Lawrence focuses on the navel as the

emblem of this rift that is the beginning of both individuation and lifelong isolation from the mother's body:

There at the navel the first rupture has taken place, the first break in continuity. There is the scar of dehiscence, scar at once of our pain and splendour of individuality. Here is the mark of our isolation in the universe, stigma and seal of our free, perfect singleness. Hence the lotus of the navel. Hence the mystic contemplation of the navel. [...]

A mother will realize better than a philosopher. She knows the rupture which has finally separated her child into its own single, free existence. She knows the strange, sensitive rose of the navel: how it quivers conscious; all its pain, its want for the old connection; all its joy and chuckling exultation in sheer organic singleness and individual liberty. (*PTU* 219-20)

The first chapter of this study examined the struggle both towards and against the desire to merge again with the maternal body, particularly in Lawrentian men, but for the mother this experience is perhaps even more tragic and enduring. Kristeva characterizes pregnancy dramatically as “a sort of institutionalized, socialized, and natural psychosis” yet goes on to qualify this statement by saying that pregnancy is also “a slow, difficult, and delightful process of becoming attentive, tender, and self-effacing” (*NMS* 219).

The push to towards self-effacement, combined with one towards self-formation, becomes the crux of motherhood's difficulty. Indeed, as Sara Mills argues that for Kristeva, women “still have a privileged access to the semiotic” (Mills 69). Similarly, in her study of Woolf's novels, Makiko Minow-Pinkney characterizes Kristeva's theoretical account of female individuation thus:

According to Kristeva, the little girl in her psycho-sexual development within Western monotheistic societies faces a stark choice: either mother-identification or father-identification. [...] In other words, woman cannot but be androgynous. Even if she identifies herself with the mother in the position of the repressed and marginal, she must have a certain identification with the father in order to sustain a place in the symbolic order and avoid psychosis. On the other hand, if she identifies herself with the father, denying the woman in herself, she is non the less biologically female; the father-identification remains precarious, stands always in need of defence. (21, 22)

The young girl thus has a more complex experience of maturation than the male child does, yet as Minow-Pinkney puts it, it is a position “both precarious and privileged” (22) – precarious because of its problems with identification, but privileged because it contains the possibility of a new, radical kind of subjectivity. We can see this dynamic clearly in characters like Ursula Brangwen, who struggles through the course of two novels (though we are given more of her personal experience in *The Rainbow*) to establish a self, and who identifies with various figures she meets, both male and female. In her doomed pregnancy at the end of the novel is a moment of both fear and expectancy, in which she actually turns away from Skrebensky, feeling that her planned marriage to him is a rather irritating social necessity compared to the much more profound importance of the coming child.

In the end, Ursula’s independence and individual identity win out over love and motherhood at the conclusion of her relationship with Anton. Later, in *Women in Love*, even after she marries Rupert Birkin, there is no talk of motherhood, and the novel suggests that perhaps the two of them will form the whole of their family unit. Given Ursula’s troubled history

with issues of maternity, we could theorize that motherhood might require too much of her self, and she fears this merging. For many Lawrentian women, bearing a child initially seems to promise the kind of completion and union that they cannot seem to achieve with their husbands and lovers, though this often reverses itself after they actually experience childbirth. In *Mr. Noon* Johanna eschews the role of motherhood – even though she originally chose it in bearing two children as the wife of Everard – instead opting for the role of the lover, which she enjoys with Gilbert (and, in fact, with a companion of his, as well). In another version of a woman's transformation, Lawrence's shorter work *The Princess* gives the story of a child coddled by her father into believing she is royalty. The Princess is so ill-prepared for motherhood and, moreover, for adult love, that the story skips over her fertile years, and she moves directly from girlhood to being an elderly, addled woman.⁴²

On the other hand, Gudrun Brangwen represents a rather peculiar case in Lawrence's fiction because of her very different attitude toward motherhood and the way that attitude manifests itself in her relationship with Gerald. Anne Wright argues, "the narrative of *Women in Love* places a premium on children, or rather on childlessness (in the first chapter Gudrun expressed her distaste at the prospect of having a baby)" (153). Yet she points to the earlier version of the novel, observing that in it Lawrence had included an epilogue in which Gudrun writes to Ursula from Germany to say that she has had a son by Gerald after his death. Cornelia

⁴² Cornelia Nixon also points out that in Lawrence's work, families are far from the unquestioned blessing that Western society would argue they are:

Couples with children, especially the fathers, are usually extremely unhappy in Lawrence's novels: the father absconds long before the beginning of *The White Peacock*, commits adultery and kills himself in *The Trespasser*, and leaves his wife and children to become an itinerant musician in *Aaron's Rod*. In *Women in Love* the mother of the Crich family is half mad, and Ursula and Gudrun view their parents' life as "so nothing" [...] and doubt that they will have children at all [...] In the stories, a remarkable number of families have only one parent, the other having died or left. If both stay after the children come, someone will pay, usually the child ("The Rocking Horse Winner") or the father ("The Old Adam"), unless both parents are ninnies ("Daughters of the Vicar"). (Nixon 102).

Nixon goes further, noting, “Gudrun is the first of Lawrence’s heroines to be pregnant at the end of a novel. The pregnancy makes Gerald realize that he loves Gudrun, but the fragment, which must be nearly the end of the novel, concludes with Gerald worrying that she will love the child more than she does him” (Nixon 103). That Lawrence changed the plot of his novel so that Gudrun does not in fact have a child is a telling authorial choice. If she had become a mother, we might speculate that she would embody less obviously the “destructive artist” role in which Lawrence seems to wish to cast her. As it stands, her lack of a child at the end of *Women in Love* underscores that she is not the ideal artist figure that Lawrence is promoting. In fact, near the end of the novel she compares Gerald directly to an infant, thinking angrily to herself, “Had she asked for a child, whom she must nurse through the nights, for her lover . . . An infant crying in the night, this Don Juan . . . Ooh, but how she hated the infant crying in the night. She would murder it gladly” (*WL* 457-58). Her wishes ally her squarely with the stereotypically “devouring mother” which Lawrence once dubbed Frieda in a letter to Katharine Mansfield (*CL* 3 302), and which reappears intermittently throughout the novels. It is not surprising, given this common portrayal of the maternal instinct, that Gudrun’s violent wish to “murder [the infant] gladly” and the surrounding passage not only appear in the later *Women in Love* – without the final plotline of Gudrun’s having a child – but also in *The First “Women in Love,”* in which Gudrun *does* become a mother.

“Precarious and privileged”⁴³

Because of Lawrence’s professed interest in representing the woman’s perspective, it is worth looking at the women in the novels who actually do go on to face childbearing, and the indications he gives about what that experience is like for them. Gertrude Morel is the most

⁴³ (Minow-Pinkney 22)

visible example of the role of motherhood in Lawrence's novels, yet she exemplifies the eventual fate of almost all of these mothers: they are relegated to the background of the novels, so that the main characters – artists, and male artists particularly – can enjoy the full limelight. This dismissive treatment also appears to be the case with Ursula Brangwen's mother Anna, whose story occupies part of the first half of *The Rainbow*. In both cases, we are given considerable insight into the reasons why these women come to appear as they do to their children, through the novels' accounts of the early days of their marriages. For Gertrude, who is initially fascinated by her husband, but who ultimately finds no fulfillment in his lack of comprehension of the spiritual matters of life, having a child is a way of gaining another with whom to bond spiritually, if not physically (as she does with her husband). She already has the added challenge of being relegated to "Mrs. Morel," not "Gertrude," for the bulk of the novel, suggesting that she has no individual identity, but is merely an extension of her husband's name. Anna Brangwen (née Lensky) desires a child for very different reasons: "a certain hunger in her heart wanted to unite her husband with herself, in a child" (R 175). Thus, unlike Gertrude, who desires to separate herself from her husband in order to create a union with her son, Anna desires an even closer union with her husband through the experience of childbirth.

Anna finds this desire for oneness difficult to achieve, however, as her husband Will becomes afraid of her in her newly pregnant state. To him, she seems now "fulfilled and separate and sufficient in her half of the world. [...] she was complete in herself, and he was ashamed of his need, his helpless need of her" (R 179). The months of her expectancy are marked by an excess of hope and happiness. She no longer needs her husband because she has the promise of fulfillment from her coming child, and because of this she frightens Will, who happens upon her dancing naked in their bedroom during the last few weeks before she delivers. It is so striking to

him that the “vision of her tormented him all the days of his life, as she had been then, a strange, exalted thing having no relation to himself” (*R* 185). She has access to the irrational Semiotic here, which would seem to make her a positive example in Kristevan terms of the possibilities of subjectivity. We are left at the end, however, unsatisfied with her as a character – perhaps because, after the birth of Ursula, the novel largely disposes of her perspective and adopts her daughter’s point of view.

DiBattista’s account of Anna provides yet another explanation for why she is a less successful figure, in terms of self-expression, despite this moment of non-linguistic celebration: she argues that Anna’s “creative voracity seems disproportionate to her own powers as a symbolic animal,” pointing out that she likewise “has no particular knowledge of or reverence for Will as a separate figure [...] because she would abide in a world free of representation, uncluttered by *distinct* human imaginings” (130, 131).⁴⁴ Her refusal to acknowledge the separation between herself and her husband amounts to a kind of psychic fusion in which there are no distinctions between things or persons. This is the same mystical union we had in the womb, which we long for and cannot access, yet to try to get to this place outside of the linguistic world of the symbolic brings psychosis, a state that we sense even in the unrestrained joy of Anna’s dancing. This is what terrifies Will about the scene – she is completely outside

⁴⁴ Anna’s irrational behavior in this scene closely mirrors the “Water-Party” chapter of *Women in Love*, where Gudrun will dance with abandon in front of a group of Highland cattle. Though she initially asks Ursula to sing to her and so provide a rhythm for her dance, she seems immediately unconscious of even this structuring element of music. When, a few moments later, Ursula cries, “I’m frightened” (*WL* 159), it seems to be precipitated as much by her sister’s odd movements as it is by the cows. She resumes singing with anxiety, as Gudrun dances wildly, like her mother before her:

Gudrun, with her arms outstretched and her face uplifted, went in a strange palpitating dance towards the cattle, lifting her body towards them as if in a spell, her feet pulsing as if in some frenzy of unconscious sensation, her arms, her wrists, her hands stretching and falling and heaving and reaching and reaching and falling, her breasts lifted and shaken towards the cattle [...] (*WL* 159)

Gudrun’s is the dance of the mother’s body, which is beyond language and representation, and is like Anna’s dance a kind of pure semiotic psychosis of “hypnotic convulsion” (*WL* 159). In fact, here we might reasonably postulate one further reason for Ursula’s fear: an unconscious memory of her mother’s nonsensical but joyful dance, which occurred during the last weeks of her pregnancy with Ursula.

representation and thus has become the abject herself. Accordingly, her labor is likewise terrifying for Will but triumphant for her.

Here we might look to Kristeva's "Stabat Mater" to understand the way in which Anna exults in her birth pains. She points out that the "ordering of the maternal libido reached its apotheosis when centered in the theme of death" (*TL* 250). Her inability to taste death – because she does not die, but is rather taken up into heaven in the Annunciation – is itself a tragic fate, which causes her to fixate on the corpse. The "*Mater Dolorosa* knows no masculine body save that of her dead son, and her only pathos [...] is her shedding tears over a corpse" (*TL* 250).

Thus, though she knows that:

[...] resurrection there is, and, as Mother of God, she must know this, nothing justifies Mary's outburst of pain at the foot of the cross, unless it be the desire to experience within her own body the death of a human being, which her feminine fate of being the source of life spares her. Could it be that the love, as puzzling as it is ancient, of mourners for corpses relates to the same longing of a woman whom nothing fulfills—the longing to experience the wholly masculine pain of a man who expires at every moment on account of *jouissance* due to obsession with his own death? And yet, Marian pain is in no way connected with tragic outburst: joy and even a kind of triumph follow upon tears, as if the conviction that death does not exist were an irrational but unshakable maternal certainty, on which the principle of resurrection had to rest. (*TL* 250-251)

Accordingly, for Anna during the agony of birth, "[e]ven the fierce, tearing pain was exhilarating. She screamed and suffered, but was all the time curiously alive and vital" (*R* 191). At the same time, we are given to know that "to her it was never deathly" (*R* 191). Perhaps this

lies in the sex of her child, which differentiates Anna from Kristeva's portrait of Mary as the *Mater Dolorosa*. At any rate, Anna is sad for other reasons.

When her first-born Ursula comes, she feels disappointment because it is not the son she has hoped for. This may provide a clue as to the reason why Anna's experience of motherhood is so different from Gertrude's situation: despite her rich joy at breastfeeding her new child, she is already alienated from Ursula. Despite her affection for her daughter, Anna will never feel the relationship between them becoming too close. It is significant that just as Anna rejects a closer relationship with Ursula, Will is claiming her as his – the child's relationship with the parent of the opposite sex seems to be a key to this dynamic. Thus, in *Sons and Lovers* Gertrude accordingly searches for a male with whom to find the fulfillment she lacks. Initially this responsibility falls on her eldest child, William, but when he dies, Paul is the sole heir of her affection.

John Lechte states baldly in his summary of Julia Kristeva, "Love is impossible without a separation from the mother" (167). This is a sentiment embodied most explicitly by Gertrude Morel in *Sons and Lovers*. Lawrence begins his novel about Paul Morel in a contextual way, by first explaining the background of his mother and the multiple ways in which this history manifests itself in their complex relationship. Lawrence paints a character who is spiritual and religious, who is initially attracted to her husband's physical vitality but ultimately dissatisfied with his un-intellectual bent. When he disappoints her by returning to his drinking and squandering habits, she is disillusioned and turns to her eldest son William as an object for her love. In a scene near the opening of the novel, while she is pregnant with Paul, she follows William to the fair but leaves him in the afternoon to return home. As the young boy watches his mother walk away, he is "cut to the heart to let her go, and yet unable to leave the wakes" (SL 4).

We are given to know as readers that he “was miserable, though he did not know it, because he had let her go alone” (*SL* 5). This scene of walking away is book-ended by the last scene of the novel, in which, rather than the mother’s turning away from the son, Paul turns from his mother’s death towards life and the city’s lights. Still, the story stays with the perspective of Gertrude throughout the first half of the novel, particularly during the scene in which she is trapped outdoors, pregnant with Paul, during an especially nasty fight with her husband.

Cast out by a violently drunk Mr. Morel, she wanders the garden, struck by the appearance of the large petals on the lilies and their “binful[s] of yellow pollen,” which she rubs onto her fingers in fascination (*SL* 24). Her preoccupation with the reproductive apparatus of the plants betrays the feeling of the sublime generated by the unborn Paul, who “boil[s] within her” (*SL* 25).⁴⁵ In between moments of fierce anger at her husband, who has passed into unconsciousness with his head resting on the kitchen table, she is “[f]earful always for the unborn child” (*SL* 25). When finally she is let back inside by her sullen and ashamed spouse, she leaves him sleeping and regards herself in the mirror with satisfaction and “smile[s] faintly to see her face all smeared with the yellow dust of lilies” (*SL* 26). These flowers are themselves an ambiguous symbol. Strengthening the novel’s suggestion of a tie between Gertrude and Mary, the mother of Christ, the lily has for centuries been dubbed one of the flowers of the Virgin. At the same time, the flower has also since pagan times been an emblem of fertility (its association with sexuality so overt that Victorian churches often removed its stamens and pistils for fear of arousing their congregations to thoughts of impurity), yet it also simultaneously has been a

⁴⁵ In a startlingly reciprocal way, Paul will later use the metaphor of pregnancy in order to describe his feeling of desolation after his mother’s death. In a conversation with himself in the midst of a bout of self-destructive behavior, he tells himself, “You’re alive,” and then answers, “She’s not” (*SL* 411). His next response, “She is—in you” (*SL* 411), suggests that Paul conceives (both literally and figuratively) of his mother’s presence as residing inside him, much as a fetus resides inside the mother’s womb. That he goes on, “You’ve got to keep alive for her sake,” and that the entity who utters these words is in fact “his will in him” (*SL* 411), allies him with his mother in the aforementioned scene of conflict with her husband. In the same way, in the aforementioned scene Gertrude’s “will in [her]” demands that she must protect her unborn son from the elements and from her husband.

popular flower for funerals. Gertrude's pleasure, then, is not an unrelieved celebration of the joys of the maternal, for her focus on the lilies alludes to the deathly aspects of motherhood, as well: the irrevocable death of her sexual purity, as well as the unavoidable eventuality of her aging and death, which the advent of her child brings into even sharper relief.

Indeed, though the manner in which she revels in the reproductive life would seem to indicate a profound enjoyment of it, her actual experience proves otherwise. Motherhood suits her well, but the baby itself is not so much the attraction as is the man he will eventually become. The process of birth does not bring her pleasure – “She was very ill when her children were born” – but when she learns that she has borne a son, she finds “consolation” in “[t]he thought of being the mother of men” (*SL* 31). Her early moments with the baby Paul reinforce this idea, for at one point, holding the infant in her arms, she imagines that “the navel string that had connected its frail little body with hers had not been broken” (*SL* 37). Finally, as the novel tells us, Gertrude is “a woman who waited for her children to grow up” (*SL* 68). The process of pregnancy and birth is thus only a step towards the real fulfillment she seeks in subtly incestuous adult relationships with her sons.

In this way she resembles Kristeva's patient Isabel, the “virgin mother” described in *Black Sun*:

Desire for a child was revealed as narcissistic desire for lethal fusion—it was a death of desire. Thanks to her child Isabel would elude the risks of erotic ordeals, the surprises of pleasure, the uncertainties of the other's discourse. Once she had become a mother she would be able to remain a virgin. Deserting the child's father in order to live as a single woman [...] alone with her daydreams, needing

no one and threatened by no one, she entered motherhood as one enters a convent.
(*BS* 89)⁴⁶

On the other hand, the pleasure of such asceticism is never sufficient to assuage the ache of motherhood because it stems precisely from the mother's past experiences with own maternal figure. Kristeva argues that the sociologically documented prevalence of female (as opposed to male) depression shows more pessimistic prospects for women's path to psychic wholeness. She goes on, "[t]his may also reveal an aspect of feminine sexuality: its addiction to the maternal Thing and its lesser aptitude for restorative perversion" (*BS* 71). Because Gertrude has no access to such physical pressure valves, she is doomed to feminine depression of the "loss of object and meaning of speech and sadomasochistic domination over them" (*BS* 71), which Kristeva describes in the same section of "Illustrations of Feminine Depression."

The character who seems more successfully to embody this ideal combination of maternity and eroticism is the woman of Isis in *The Man Who Died*, yet, as in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the two lovers are separated at the end just as she conceives a child by the character Christ. The lady's mother, a threatening presence in the novel, casts a shadow over the lovers' happiness. Their union is "perfected and fulfilled," and the man asks, "How can it not be good?" when the woman queries him nervously as to how he feels about her pregnancy (*MWD* 82, 83). Yet "the peace of her maternity was troubled by anxiety" about her mother the widow's plotting against her child's father (*MWD* 83). In this way, she resembles Connie Chatterley, who must experience her pregnancy alone, until she can be released from her legal bond to Clifford by

⁴⁶ Lawrence would appear to have viewed Gertrude Morel in much the same way – the very title of "The Virgin Mother," his famous poem about the death of his own mother. he uses identical language. We can see her return to a virginal state through his use of metaphor, for he begins by calling her the literal "doorway" through which he entered the world, and ends by dubbing her "a seed in the night time," emphasizing the not-yet (or no longer?) fruitful quality of her life. Here we can see another place where setting his work alongside Kristeva's proves to be a fruitful study: where her description of the patient Isabel represents the "virgin mother" problem from the perspective of the mother, Lawrence concentrates on the effects this reversion to virginity has on the now-adult son.

divorce. For the woman of Isis, however, the impending separation from her lover inspires not fear but an unexpected feeling almost of relief. Though she implores him to stay with her near the temple of Isis, where she will build them a house, another part of her is satisfied with the parting: “And even she wanted the coolness of her own air around her, and the release from anxiety” (*MWD* 84). That the woman of Isis would be inclined to diverge from both child and husband into separate identity indicates her awareness of the more fearful aspects of maternity: a possibility of deathly merger.

This desire for a break from the father of her child further aligns the woman of Isis with Anna Brangwen, since, after conceiving the child who will become Ursula, she suddenly sequesters herself from her husband Will, to be alone in the “blaze of light in her heart [...] from the conception in her womb” (*R* 178). Will himself is threatened by the new self-sufficiency his wife has achieved in her pregnancy, imploring silently, “Why could he not always be one with her? [...] Why must he be set in this separateness, why could she not be with him, close, close, as one with him?” (*TL* 179). With Kristeva, we can theorize that Anna’s completeness and self-possession will be temporary, ending when the child is born. First, Kristeva argues in “*Stabat Mater*,” “The lover gone, forgetfulness comes, but the pleasure of the sexes remains, and there is nothing lacking” (*TL* 249). Nevertheless, she goes on: “First there is the separation, previous to pregnancy, but which pregnancy brings to light and imposes without remedy” (*TL* 253). The child’s exit from the mother’s body reifies her lack of completion, which she initially sought from an erotic connection with her husband or lover and then from the connection with her unborn child, sharing the same body. In birth, the child becomes “irremediably an other,” when “this other abyss [...] opens up between the body and what had been its insight: there is the abyss between the mother and the child” (*TL* 255, 254).

For these Lawrentian mothers, indeed, a “mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh” (*TL* 254). Perhaps this explains their sense of dread, which ultimately has less to do with a looming literal person who threatens to separate them from their lovers or husbands than it does with a fear of the alienation that follows pregnancy, which that pregnancy prefigures in the birth of the child. And what can such mothers expect afterwards? A lucid conception of their own, separate identity? Certainly not, as Kristeva (autobiographically) describes it:

Lucidity, on the contrary, would restore [the mother] as cut in half, alien to its other—and a ground favorable to delirium. But also and for that very reason, motherhood destines us to a demented jouissance that is answered, by chance, by the nursling’s laughter in the sunny waters of the ocean. What connection is there between it and myself? No connection, except for that overflowing laughter where one senses the collapse of some ringing, subtle, fluid identity or other, softly buoyed by the waves. (*TL* 256)

The mother, then, experiences not only a physical division of the flesh to allow for birth, but a schism of identity, after which she is forever alienated, and even more tragically so, since in pregnancy she has had a taste of the completion and union for which she has longed.

Expectancy and Terror

Ursula Brangwen is perhaps one of the best examples of the full trajectory of a Lawrentian character from girlhood to womanhood and its attendant concerns about future motherhood, if only because she appears in two novels, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. For Ursula, a relationship with her mother entails a constant switching of roles, of a similar kind to the reversals Paul Morel experiences with his mother, who appears to him alternately as a young

girl, a lover, and an old woman. Unlike Paul, however, Ursula's contemplation of her mother involves the added layer of frightening awareness that the complex dynamics are in her future, as well, should she decide to become a mother herself. Ursula rejects the maternal in many ways, not the least of which is her eventual break with Winifred Inger, whose fully developed woman's body initially attracts her but who eventually becomes as "clay-ey" and tomblike as the deathly mother's. Because *The Rainbow* stays so consistently close to her perspective, Ursula illustrates perhaps better than any other character the ways in which Lawrence's account of motherhood intersects with Kristeva's depiction of it as both a fearful and a fascinating prospect.

When Kristeva points out the "Paradox: deprivation and benefit of childbirth" (TL 243), her words form one way of accounting for Ursula's fluctuating emotions. There is a promise of the fulfillment brought by the oneness of mother and infant in the womb, yet also some sense of foreboding at the prospect of the birth, which will forever alienate mother and child. These are the ambivalent feelings that Ursula experiences when she suspects she is pregnant with Anton's child near the end of *The Rainbow*. Only a few days earlier, on a vacation with him at the coast, she has found herself drawn inexorably to the sea, that age-old symbol of the mother's body:

[...] a yearning for something unknown came over her, a passion for something she knew not what. She would walk the forshore alone after dusk, expecting, expecting something, as if she had gone to a rendezvous. The salt, bitter passion of the sea, its indifference to the earth, its swinging, definite motion, its strength, its attack, and its salt burning, seemed to provoke her to a pitch of madness, tantalizing her with vast suggestions of fulfillment. (R 478)

When, as this passage prefigures, she finally discovers a few days later that she is indeed “expecting, expecting something,”⁴⁷ her response is likewise characterized by a fearful but expectant uncertainty that is very like what Kristeva describes of her own experience of motherhood: “like a flame it took hold of her limbs and body. Was she with child? [...] In the first flaming hours of wonder, she did not know what she felt. She was as if tied to the stake. The flames were licking her and devouring her. But the flames were also good. They seemed to wear her away to rest” (R 484). The only regret she has, in these passages, is the necessity of tying herself socially to Anton in marriage, as she will be expected to do. Still, in the end, after her long illness when she discovers “[t]here would be no child: she was glad” (R 494). But the child itself might only represent her desire to find, more generally, “the creation of the living God” as an inspiration for her own creation, and her repudiation of “the old, hard barren form of bygone living” (R 495). Instead of the literal creation of a human being in her own womb, Ursula opts instead at the end of the novel for the creation of a new humanity as a whole, freed from the mechanical living death in which they have existed: the colliers as “those who are buried alive” and the “old, brittle corruption of houses and factories” (R 495-6). The “creation” she envisions is more of the psychic and spiritual sort, captured in the novel’s habitual metaphor of “germination” (R 496), and in this way she represses the fear of maternity.

Ursula’s response to her own mother reveals her own mixed feelings toward the Semiotic, a realm that has no connection to rationality or sense. At one point, regarding Mrs.

⁴⁷ Lawrence’s choice of phrasing in this line, particularly his repetition of the word “expecting,” is significant, especially when contrasted with Gudrun’s response when she hears news of the death of Gerald, whom she has previously called an “infant crying in the night.” Sitting with Loerke afterwards, like him she is “emotionless and barren” (WL 467). Yet the narrator immediately repeats the final word in a moment of free indirect discourse, taking on the voice of Gudrun: “My God! this was a barren tragedy, barren, barren” (WL 467). In these two instances of repetition, first of “expecting” in *The Rainbow* and then of “barren” in *Women in Love* – lies the very kernel of the distinction Lawrence makes between the sisters: one is capable of producing life (if not in the form of actual children, then in the form of artistic and vital expression), and the other is stunted, sterile, and the antithesis of a true artist.

Brangwen's demeanor, which is more befitting of the "shyness and trepidation of a young girl than her daughters ever felt" (*WL* 147), Ursula erupts into laughter that can only be described as inexplicable and hysterical – thus, it is much more clearly a product of the non-rational bubbling-up of the semiotic than of the reason and language of the symbolic. Here the mother, like Gertrude near her death in *Sons and Lovers*, becomes as the child. Ursula's inexplicable laughter at her mother "seize[s]" her almost involuntarily (*WL* 147), and becomes as a fit or, indeed, a seizure. She giggles "helplessly" and "uncontrollabl[y]" until she is "weak with laughter" (*WL* 147, 148). Here she has access to the Semiotic itself, a realm that has no connection to rationality or sense. Instead, the body itself takes over, and there is a return to a pre-linguistic state. Indeed, when the parents become angry at the girls' laughter, Gudrun is unable to explain the cause of their mirth, saying only, "We were laughing because we're fond of you" (*WL* 149).

Ursula experiences these conflations of feminine identity – mother, child, and lover – throughout both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. At the end of her post-adolescent relationship with Anton Skrebensky, as the two of them take a London taxi back to their respective lodgings, Ursula's sympathetic response to him occurs as "[a] pain flam[ing] in her womb, for him" (*R* 468). Surprisingly here, as in Connie Chatterley's bowel-deep response to Oliver Mellors, the physical locus of the attraction is not "genital" or necessarily sexual, but rather located deeper in the body, in the heart of the abdomen – and specifically, for Ursula, in the place where she might soon feel the presence of a child. That her desire for him is located here says everything about Ursula and Anton's relationship itself: later, ashamed of having made him cry, she wipes his face with her handkerchief, as if he is a child. For Ursula, who only a few pages later will anxiously suspect she is pregnant by Anton, the experience of love that she has with him is eerily close to the maternal experiences that she will soon anticipate.

Beyond Ursula, however, perhaps an even more troubling yet intriguing example of fear of maternity lies in the title character of Lawrence's novella *The Princess*, whose refusal to mature into full womanhood until late in the story provides a disturbing portrayal of arrested development. Coddled into perpetual girlhood by her father, in her mid-thirties she resembles a woman at least ten years her junior and has no interest in marriage until after her father's death. Even then, marriage is in her mind an abstract thing that "should" be done – she has no real conception of the physical and emotional intimacy implied by the relationship. Further, her childlike diminutiveness reminds readers of the small, rather girlish stature and mannerisms of Mrs. Morel in the eyes of her adoring son – yet, in this case, the daughter is adored as a miniature lover by her father. When she finally meets Domingo Romero, she is drawn to him but has no frame of self-reference as a fully-grown woman from which to form a healthy romantic relationship. For himself, Romero is of the Mexicans who "found their *raison d'être* in self-torture and death-worship" (*P* 179), and his deathly appeal is also centered specifically in the body. The Princess, Miss Urquart, finds him attractive precisely because of that quality in him that bespeaks "a fine demon" that is akin to hers (*P* 180).

Their brief and ill-fated relationship fails for a number of reasons, among them the conflict that Lawrence has already identified, between the intellectual or spiritual self represented by the Princess and the darkly physical, primitive self embodied by Romero. After the physical consummation of their initial attraction, she feels "a burning, tearing anguish, [and] she felt that the thread of her being would break, and she would die" (*P* 214). In the end, she feels close to death because their sexual relationship is threatening her identity as she knows it – because, as she understands it, "he had got hold of her, some unrealized part of her which she never wished to realize" (*P* 213). Certainly, there is no possibility mentioned at any point in the

story of the Princess's conceiving or even considering the conception of a child. Still, the story's elision of maternity speaks volumes about its centrality to her character.

Hannah Prescott, her mother, dies a mere two years after bearing her sole child, a daughter who is immediately co-opted by her father to be his sexless paramour. Her mother herself dubs Mary Henrietta with the juvenile title "My Dollie," suggesting her own inability to reconcile the child she has borne with her adult experience of motherhood. A mere two pages into the story, the narration relates baldly and dismissively, "Hannah Prescott had never been robust. She had no great desire to live. So when the baby was two years old she suddenly died" (*P* 168). Despite her physical absence from the story and from the Princess's life, she is a palpable presence, suggesting that the Princess's firm repression of her mother's memory, and the fears and threats it represents, has disastrous consequences for her selfhood. Her relationship with Romero ends with her own forceful denial of her attraction to him and refusal to love him despite his pleas; like Gerald and Gudrun, her inviolable self-possession proves Romero's literal death and her psychic one. After their union, she is shattered and collapses into constant tears, and essentially "[t]hey were two people who had died" (*P* 214). The trajectory Princess's own biography echoes the elision of Hannah Prescott's maternity, as well. She progresses rapidly from a lifelong girlhood, through a brief and violent sexual affair – with no mention of motherly inclinations or premonitions at all – after which, though she is, for all appearances, still "the Princess, and a virgin intact," suddenly "her bobbed hair was grey at the temples, and her eyes were a little mad. She was slightly crazy" (*P* 218). The similar absence of motherhood from this part of the story likewise points to the implications of repressing the mother. To live, like the Princess, entirely in the spiritual spheres of identity makes one ill-equipped for physical intimacy with another; conversely, to subsist entirely in the lower spheres of the body spells violence,

madness, and death, as it does for Domingo Romero. Appropriately, the Princess marries an elderly man at the end of the story, thus completing her return (though incomplete and dysfunctional) to childhood with a new, surrogate father.

The fear of maternity thus becomes the kernel of *The Princess*, this horror expressed in the story's continual repression of the mother's memory – even down to its eventual banishment of the obviously maternal, nurturing companion Miss Cummings. The language of rupture, evident in the last pages of the story, echoes the physical openness and tearing of childbirth, and it is clear, when the Princess decides firmly that she cannot bring herself to love Romero – for it “is fixed and sealed in her” (*P* 216) – that this refusal is akin to her implicit rejection of childbirth and motherhood. This means an eschewing of sexuality, as well, something that not all of Lawrence's female characters find necessary. In this, she resembles Kristeva's melancholic patient Helen, whose alternating frigidity and “orgies” of sexuality pointed back to “a mother [who] cloisters the frigid woman in an imaginary solitude that is affective as well as sensory” (*BS* 78).

Gerald's lover Minette, in *Women in Love*, provides an exemplar of the opposite kind of mother (one who closely resembles the mother of the aforementioned patient Helen, which Helen describes as “inhuman, artificial, nymphomaniac”⁴⁸), particularly in the early stages of her expectancy – yet Minette's eroticism is undoubtedly an uncomfortable experience for Gerald. It is significant that his final intimacies with Minette come at just the time when she discovers that she is pregnant, and that what horrifies him about her at the end of their association is precisely what characterizes her as a mother-to-be. His revulsion at what he perceives as “her inchoate suffering” also nearly “rouse[s] the old sharp flame in him [...] a passion almost of cruelty” (*WL* 72). The word “inchoate” appears no fewer than three times in this chapter, reemphasizing her

⁴⁸ (*BS* 78)

status as mother-to-be. As many have pointed out, the West African statue of the woman in childbirth provides yet another link to Minette, for when Gerald looks more closely at it, he is struck by its “terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath. He saw Minette in it. As in a dream, he knew her” (*WL* 71). Minette, however, is unable to divest herself of the role of victim, an identity she seems born to embody. Like the Virgin, oddly enough, she appears made to endure the pain of watching the men in her life aspire to greatness, while suffering herself, in existing only as represented by art, yet having no agency of her own.

Though there is admittedly more discussion in the chapter of Gerald’s reaction to Minette’s presence, there are hints about her own feelings as a mother-to-be. Unlike other Lawrentian mothers, like Anna Brangwen and Connie Chatterley, Minette is dismayed at her impending delivery, calling it “beastly” and responding “emphatically” to Gerald’s question as to whether she wants the child, “I don’t” (*WL* 61). Her aversion and its source in abjection is made even clearer by the subsequent discussion of fear that occurs among Gerald’s “café society” friends. Minette claims boldly that there is nothing that frightens her “except black-beetles” (*WL* 62). Given Lawrence’s 1915 letter to David Garnett about his visit to Cambridge – which characterizes his feeling about the homosexuality of a new acquaintance as akin to the revulsion he feels at seeing “black-beetles” – Minette’s disgust at black-beetles, through Lawrence’s biographical use of the same analogy, becomes linked in some way with her aversion to motherhood (*Cambridge Letters* 2 321). It is interesting, however, that she has no loathing for blood as an abject substance, and she goes so far as to violently stab the hand of the young man who dares to question her lack of fear. Afterwards, she declares boldly – yet in her juvenile, lisping voice – “They’re all afwaid of me” (*WL* 64).

Minette, then, is not defenseless. Though Gerald feels compelled to make her suffer further and to treat her cruelly, she nevertheless terrifies him on some level, perhaps because of her recent revelation of being pregnant. Though she seems to him “so small and childish and vulnerable, almost pitiful,” she has also “the dark looks of her eyes [which] made Gerald feel drowned in some potent darkness that almost frightened him” (*WL* 69). Perhaps this is why the others are likewise afraid of her: she is the abject mother herself, identified with blood and black-beetles both, and she reminds Gerald of his continuing struggle to master and subjugate Matter/Mater, which will end in his own, literal demise. The chapter title itself – “Totem” – refers to an animal or spirit that represents a group or individual, a kind of symbolic representation of what cannot be articulated. This idea of symbolic representation links back to Gerald’s viewing of the African statue, whose meaninglessness he calls “sheer barbari[sm]” (*WL* 70). We are given to know immediately afterwards that Gerald rejects the artwork because the narrator informs us that Gerald “wanted to keep certain illusions, certain ideas like clothing” (*WL* 72). Minette imperils Gerald’s desire to keep all experience within the symbolic because she embodies that which cannot be represented, and she likewise threatens the bounds of his identity by reminding him of the identity-obliterating body of the mother.

Minette’s attitude towards becoming a mother stands in stark contrast to Connie Chatterley’s eventual perspective on pregnancy, perhaps because the two have a healthier love relationship – in Kristevan terms, they alternate between both individuality and union. Realizing that she is to have Oliver Mellors’s child, she begs him: “Say you’re glad about the child! [...] Kiss it! Kiss my womb and say you’re glad it’s there!” (*LCL* 302). Connie, happy in her love with Mellors, is unashamed and open about the paternity of her unborn child and feels a sense of joy at the thought of childbearing. Mellors, on the other hand, feels dread at the thought of her

bearing a child to the two of them, worrying about the “future”; Connie counters logically, “Be tender to it, and that will be its future already” (*LCL* 302). Perhaps because of the successful push-and-pull balance of her union with Mellors, Connie can afford to be more optimistic about the possibilities for her child, despite its being born out of wedlock to a socially mismatched, adulterous couple. There is also the fact that at the beginning of the second version of *Lady Chatterley*, she has stubbornly and perversely decided to exult in her sexless marriage: “Almost in cruelty against herself, with smooth rigour she repressed herself and exulted in her barrenness” (*FSLCL* 229).

When Connie tells her father that she is pregnant, the narrator is careful to point out that it “was the first time she had uttered the words to any living soul, and it seemed to mark a cleavage in her life” (*LCL* 296). Her feelings at the thought of bearing a child are a mixture of fear and joy, and the tearing in two of her life is significant, especially since she is forced, with her father, to put into symbolic terms the unspeakable ambivalence of maternity. Connie’s own relationship with Clifford is much like the mother-child bond – so much so, in fact, that when she finally confesses to him her pregnancy and love for Mellors, he explodes at her, “And you mean to say you want to have a child to a cad like that?” all the while himself with “the queer blank look of a child” (*LCL* 322). To make matters even clearer, he childishly and stubbornly refuses to give her the divorce, though to persist in this line of reasoning is obviously irrational. In truth, he has been Connie’s child for most of the years of their marriage; his deadness below the waist and impotence merely underscore his juvenile sexlessness.

Connie transfers the care of this overgrown infant to Mrs. Bolton, who herself struggles with a combination of satisfaction and disgust, as she cares for Clifford. After Connie’s letter to him explaining her infidelity and intention to be with the man she really loves, he reverts

completely to infancy, weeping “like a child, wetting the bib of her starched white apron, and the bosom of her pale-blue cotton dress, with his tears” (*LCL* 316). For her part, in her white and pale blue dress, with its associations of virginal maternity, Mrs. Bolton has become a surrogate for the Virgin herself, “the Magna Mater” (*LCL* 317). She inspires in Clifford “an apparent wonderment, that looked almost like a religious exaltation,” yet she feels “both thrilled and ashamed” as she retires “to her own room, where she laugh[s] and crie[s] at once, with a hysteria of her own” (*LCL* 317, 316). Mrs. Bolton provides a sharp contrast to the perspective on motherhood held by Connie, for although she “triumph[s]” in her position of “exaltation [...] [a]t the same time, in some corner of her weird female soul, how she despised him and hated him! He was to her the fallen beast, the squirming monster” (*LCL* 317). This combination of shame and triumph alludes to the abjection that marks their relationship: that of the smothering mother and the monstrous child.

Connie, by contrast, has more unfettered access to the “ancient healthy womanhood” that Mrs. Bolton must repress in order to stay on as Clifford’s caretaker (*LCL* 317). Her father senses this early on, and tells Connie as a young wife, “I hope [...] you won’t let circumstances force you into being a *demi-vierge*” (*LCL* 15). With chagrin, understanding its meaning, Clifford translates the phrase – “A half-virgin!” – and bristles at Sir Malcolm’s assertion that Connie is “getting thin... angular. It’s not her style. She’s not the pilchard sort of little slip of a girl, she’s a bonny Scotch trout” (*LCL* 15). Moreover, when he finally meets Oliver Mellors, he tells the younger man with bawdy joviality, “You’ve got a baby in her all right. [...] But you warmed her up, oh, you warmed her up, I can see that! Ha-ha! My blood in her! You set fire to her haystack all right. Ha-ha-ha! I was jolly glad of it, I can tell you. She needed it” (*LCL* 307). Her father’s coarse but good-natured characterization of Connie’s formerly dormant sexuality is able to

communicate what the novel seems to be suggesting of her: that she was indeed desperately in need of the union she enjoys with Oliver. Connie is happy and more optimistic than Oliver about the possibilities for their child, perhaps because, even early in her marriage to Clifford, we are given to know that “Connie did want children [...] But early in 1918 Clifford was shipped home smashed, and there was no child” (*LCL* 9).

Earlier in the novel, Connie has tried without success to fulfill the maternal instinct that she feels on a physical level in other ways, as well, indulging in a short-lived affair with the Irishman Michaelis, who is invited by Clifford to stay at Wragby, and who seems to her an “infant in the night [...] crying out of his breast to her in a way that affected her very womb” (*LCL* 24). When Clifford remarks impersonally to Connie on one of their walks, “I mind more, not having a son, when I come here, than at any other time,” she is taken aback that the “child, her child, was just an ‘it’ to him. It...it...it!” (*LCL* 43, 44). By contrast, for Connie it represents a fulfillment that she desires but considers impossible – that is, until Clifford gives her permission to be unfaithful for the sake of conceiving an heir. Reinforcing the Lacanian-psychoanalytic component of their relationship, the one significant condition Clifford makes to their agreement is that she must never mention the literal *nom du père*: the name of the child’s biological father.⁴⁹

Kristeva suggests at the beginning of “Stabat Mater” that there must be something “in the portrayal of the Maternal in general and particularly in its Christian, virginal, one, that reduces social anguish and gratifies a male being” and something that “also satisfies a woman so that a

⁴⁹ Perhaps surprisingly, given his difference in every other respect from Clifford, Oliver is similarly unconcerned with the idea of siring a child, except for a vague consciousness of its practical implications. Writing to Connie in the final chapter of the novel from his exile at The Grange Farm, Oliver tells her, “So I believe in the little flame between us. For me now, it’s the only thing in the world. I’ve got no friends, no inward friends. Only you. And now the little flame is all I care about in my life” (*LCL* 327). He concludes the thought dismissively, “There’s the baby, but that is a side issue” (*LCL* 327). His offhand comment stands in direct contrast to Connie’s attitude toward her pregnancy, which seems to be a more profoundly hopeful but simultaneously fearful prospect. Though he has had an obvious role in the child’s conception, he can remain more detached from it because of his less involved relationship with it – in other words, he will not be sharing a body with the fetus, as Connie will.

commonality of the sexes is set up, beyond and in spite of their glaring incompatibility and permanent warfare” (*TL* 236). Only thus can a balance be struck that preserves some notion of the peace between male and female. Nevertheless, for Connie, as for Johanna von Hebenitz and several other Lawrentian women, this “reward” of subjugation is not worth the price of being flattened into either a one-dimensional “mother” or a “fallen woman.”

Life after Labor

The difficult aspect of Lawrentian femininity is these women’s frequent inability to mingle the sexual and the maternal halves of being. Like Johanna in *Mr. Noon*, some of these women seem more suited for the role of lover than of mother. After she has called mothers “awful things,” Johanna goes on to say that she is no Ophelia to sacrifice herself for the young “Hamlets, obsessed by their mothers” and refuses “to put rue and rosemary in my hair, though they’d all like to make me” (*MN* 157).⁵⁰ Johanna likewise refuses to let Gilbert make her into a mother – a legitimate concern on her part, given that Gilbert has never had a mother, at least “[n]ot to remember” (*MN* 157). Her distaste for motherhood stems from her belief that it always involves a desire on the part of mothers “to swallow their children again, like the Greek myth,” and that “mother-love” is, in fact, “the most awful self-swallowing thing” (*MN* 157). Perhaps it is this suffocating closeness – the “pain” that Kristeva describes in “Stabat Mater,” where she identifies her child with a lifelong suffering – that precipitates her offhand wish, “I should love a little Japanese baby: brown and solemn and so *different*” (*MN* 158, emphasis added). The

⁵⁰ This is a moment of meta-awareness on the part of the author, who created both Gilbert Noon and Paul Morel closely in his own image, and who either consciously or unconsciously betrays his own agenda with his significant naming of the latter’s mother Gertrude, the same name as Hamlet’s mother. Tellingly, she is only addressed by her first name a few times during the entire course of the novel.

difference she references here might be just the distance necessary to separate her from the frightening union she feels with her child.

Kristeva's words seem to echo Johanna's wish for difference, precipitated by the threat literally embodied by pregnancy; it is the fear that:

My body is no longer mine, it doubles up, suffers, bleeds, catches cold, puts its teeth in, slobbers, coughs, is covered with pimples, and it laughs. And yet, when its own joy, my child's, returns, its smile washes only my eyes. But the pain, its pain—it comes from inside, never remains apart, other, it inflames me at once, without a second's respite. As if that was what I had given birth to and, not willing to part from me, insisted on coming back, dwelled in me permanently.

One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain: the child represents it and henceforth it settles in, it is continuous. Obviously you may close your eyes, cover up your ears, teach courses, run errands, tidy up the house, think about object, subjects. But a mother is always branded by pain, she yields to it. "And a sword will pierce your own soul too..." (*TL* 241)

Given the lifelong pain implied by a mother's identification with her infant, it is easier to understand why Johanna removes herself from such a close relationship with her children and even with her husband. She desires freedom – sexual, emotional, and intellectual – and would be forced to sacrifice these liberties if she had chosen to stay with her family in Boston.

Lawrence's understanding of this dynamic prefigures Kristeva's model, given that in *Sons and Lovers* he also makes a nearly verbatim quotation of the biblical reference to which Kristeva alludes in the passage above. When, in an echo of Samson's story, her husband secretly cuts the luxurious curls of the baby William, Gertrude knows that "[t]his act of masculine

clumsiness was the spear through the side of her love for Morel” (*SL* 16). Like the Virgin before her, her faith centers on the promise embodied by her son: “He was a beautiful child, with dark gold ringlets, and dark-blue eyes which changed gradually to a clear grey. His mother loved him passionately. He came just when her own bitterness of disillusion was hardest to bear; when her faith in life was shaken, and her soul felt dreary and lonely” (*SL* 14). William, then, becomes something of a savior to his mother, who has found the marital union she has experienced with Morel to be less than fulfilling. Still, the peril inherent in such a situation lies in the danger of caring so much for a frail human being. When she first walks in on the impromptu barbering session, she is speechless, goes “very white,” and then is consumed with weeping: “she buried her face in [the child’s] shoulder and cried painfully [...] It was like ripping something out of her, her sobbing” (*SL* 15). This is the potential of fear and fulfillment in motherhood: Gertrude loves her son to distraction, more as a worshiper or a lover than as a parent, but her very love ensures her loss and pain.

Contrary to his earlier emphasis on Gertrude Morel’s maternity, Lawnreze refuses to cast Johanna as the virginal mother or disciple in *Mr. Noon*, although she is ultimately denied the role of mother altogether because she takes up with Gilbert Noon and denies her life in Boston. Her response to his apparent naïveté renders her “maternal,” when Gilbert tells her that she must renounce Everard, writing to him that she is never coming back: “she knitted her woman’s brows, and thought of things he did not think of: her children, her many years of married life in England and America, her parents: all the old scheme of things. She knew he thought of nothing: only he looked away into the distance. And she didn’t remind him. She let his far-awayness decide” (*MN* 167). Rather than deferring to his superior wisdom in their situation, her actions instead indicate a resignation to his greater willfulness. We might surmise that her thoughts echo

those actually recorded by Frieda herself in *Not I, But the Wind* (1934), where she remembers seeing her children on their way to school, one day long after she has left them:

They danced around me in complete delight. ‘Mama, you are back, when are you coming home?’

‘I can’t come back, you must come to me. We shall have to wait.’

How I suffered not being able to take them with me! So much of my spontaneous living had gone to them and now this was cut off. When I tried to meet them another morning they had evidently been told that they must not speak to me and only little white faces looked at me as if I were an evil ghost. (*Not I, But the Wind* qtd. in *Frieda Lawrence*, Rosie Jackson 133)

The transformation of Frieda into “evil ghost,” a familiar way of referring to the absent or smothering mother, makes her feel the pressure of her split identity (mother/lover) even more painfully.

Returning to the heavily autobiographical portrayal of this relationship in *Mr. Noon*, we can see how Lawrence is also exploring this duality, through his allusions to both Mary the Virgin and Mary Magdalen. While visiting her German hometown of Detsch and waiting for him to arrive to meet up with her, Johanna enjoys a brief flirtation with “her old friend Rudolf von Daumling,” who is unhappily married to a woman “who wounded his over-sensitive spirit” (*MN* 173). Through her encouragement, Johanna convinces him of his continuing appeal and virility. Rather than condemn her for what could be justly called her infidelities to both her husband and to her new lover Gilbert, Lawrence’s narrator cajoles mockingly:

But I ask you, especially you, *gentle* reader, whether it is not a noble deed to give to a poor self-mistrustful Rudolf substantial proof of his own

virility. We say substantial advisedly. Nothing ideal and in the air.

Substantial proof of his own abundantly adequate virility. Would it have been more noble, under the circumstances, to give him the baby's dummy-teat of ideal sympathy and a kind breast? (*MN* 177)

This biblical allusion to the Virgin provides a foil for the narrator's next question to the reader: "don't you agree with me that Magdalen had only *one* fall, and that was when she fell to feet-washing. What a pity, what a thousand pities! [...] But let me help you up, dear Magdalen, and let everybody wash his own feet. That's sound logic, I believe" (*MN* 178).⁵¹

As for Johanna, Rudolf does not let her go to Gilbert, who has just arrived in Detsch, without an outpouring of his own abjection-tinged disappointment. Still, he has longed, like Lawrence's loathed and apostrophized "gentle reader," for the maternal woman who would worship him as Magdalen or Mary did Christ, and he is likewise "crying for a dummy, and to have his not-particularly-beautiful feet washed with spikenard and long hair" (*MN* 178). The dejected poetry he writes is described abjectly as being like pus "flow[ing] from the wound" (*MN* 178). Here we see another way in which Lawrence and Kristeva are in dialogue. She argues that the "Mother and her attributes [...] find their outlet in the arts [...] of which the Virgin necessarily becomes both patron saint and privileged object" (*TL* 249, 250). Johanna rejects this casting as the sacred Mother, and instead "took her sex as a religion" (*MN* 175). Gilbert likewise resolves that "he [is] not going to try and idealise his love," declaring that he "want[s] a lily with her roots deep down in the muck, fast, gripped, triumphant rooted in the muck" (*MN* 221). The consequences of this refusal to accept the "white snowflower" model of womanhood (and by

⁵¹ Lawrence will continue this thread in *The Man Who Died* (also *The Escaped Cock*), where, in his retelling of the Passion, the risen Christ first visits Magdalen, hoping to appeal to her physically and even erotically, instead of spiritually. In the end, he rejects his growing connection with her (and leaves her and the rest of his followers) because of her inability to overcome her symbolic "foot-washing" role as his worshiper.

extension maternity) are the creation of a woman like Frieda or Johanna, who exercises her right to experience free love, sometimes at the expense of her husband or committed lover.

In *The Plumed Serpent*, Kate Leslie is, like her precursor in *The Princess*, a European woman who finds herself involuntarily absorbed into the darkly passionate, foreign culture of Mexico. At least initially, the female character's sexuality is conflated with motherhood, as, towards the end of the novel, Kate feels herself being persuaded to marry Cipriano to take her place as Malintzi, the goddess wife of Huitzilopochtli. The terminology uncovers the indistinct border between the mother and lover roles when Kate says revealingly, She is afraid of her role as the companion goddess to Don Ramón and Cipriano, and vacillates between revulsion and resignation. At the end of the chapter "The Living Huitzilopochtli," she has decided, at least for the moment, that to stay with these men is to be a kind of mother goddess, which disgusts her:

I would die rather than be mixed up in it any more. Horrible, really, both Ramón and Cipriano. And they want to put it over me, with their high-flown bunk, and their Malintzi. Malintzi! I am Kate Forrester, really. I am neither Kate Leslie nor Kate Tylor. I am sick of these men putting their names over me. I was born Kate Forrester, and I shall die Kate Forrester.

(PS 407)

Reclaiming her original surname as a symbolic emblem of her own individual selfhood, Kate repudiates the ability of men to take her identity through marriage and motherhood, both states which she has experienced twice. However, in the final pages of the novel, almost without having willed it, she decides to live in the ambivalent pull between her inexplicable desire for Cipriano and her pervasive feeling that "*I know all the time it is I who don't altogether want*

them [Ramón and Cipriano]. I want myself to myself. But I shall fool them so they shan't find out' (PS 486).

The conflation of motherhood with adult sexuality happens at various points in this final chapter, with Kate – “la Patrona” to her man-servant – watching his

[...] gay, shy, excited little smile. Something of the eternal child in him.

But a child that could harden in an instant into a savage man, revengeful and brutal. And a man always fully sex-alive, for the moment innocent in the fulness [*sic*] of sex, not in the absence. And Kate thought to herself, as she had thought before, that there were more ways than one of “becoming again as a little child.” (PS 485)

Kate is frightened precisely of these continually shifting roles, and by the fact that her husband and his political partner both strike her at various points as young boys in need of a mother. Her status as a woman beyond her fertile years means that she can only acquire surrogate children, not her own, biological ones. Still, her insistence on a separate self is a transgressive move, since she is expected by the two men in her life to devote herself entirely to their new religion – just as the Virgin Mary was entirely devoted to Christ’s life and work.

Yet sometimes Lawrence’s mothers find a kind of peace in the very chaos that their divided identities produce. This “demented jouissance,” far from being a fate worse than death, is in fact that quality that vivifies these characters, even in the case of a woman like Kate, who is trapped in her situation. Towards the end of the novel, as she struggles to decide whether to stay in Mexico or return to Britain, she reflects on her reproductive years and her new “sexual correspondence” in marriage with Cipriano. She begins to understand of herself for the first time that she has been in life like “the great cat, with its spasms of voluptuousness and its lifelong

lustful enjoyment of its own isolated, isolated individuality” (*PS* 480). She finds connections with men only to break them and roam about in her self-possession – yet in the end, she realizes that the result of such a dynamic is her becoming like one of “her women ‘friends,’ the powerful love-women, at the age of forty, forty-five, fifty, they lost all their charm and allure, and turned into real grimalkins, greyish, avid, and horrifying, prowling around looking for prey that became scarcer and scarcer” (*PS* 480). Such women are intrinsically pugilistic, as Don Ramón’s new wife Teresa points out, when she tells Kate earlier that “some women must be soldiers in their spirit [...] You would always fight. You would fight with yourself, if you were alone in the world” (*PS* 476). Such fighting may put her at odds with the men in her life, but it also secures Kate’s individual identity.

After having borne and raised two sons and reaching middle age, then, she is finally free to be herself, but she realizes that this independence will doom her to being alone. In the end, she elects to turn back towards connection, telling herself as regards Cipriano that she must submit to him “as far as I need, and no further” (*PS* 482). Again here, she is facing the abject, as the language in her contemplations reveals:

“I must have both [connection and independence],” she said to herself. “I must not recoil against Cipriano and Ramón, they make my blood blossom in my body. I say they are limited. But then one must be limited. Without Cipriano to touch me and limit me and submerge my will, I shall become a horrible, elderly female. I ought to want to be limited. I ought to be glad if a man will limit me with a strong will and a warm touch. Because what I call my greatness, and the vastness of the Lord behind me, lets me fall through a hollow floor of

nothingness, once there is no man's hand there, to hold me warm and limited."

(*PS* 482)

Finally, she achieves the connection that she has sought all of her life, but at the cost of much of her will. Despite her coolly logical reasoning as to why she will submit to her new husband, in the final lines of the novel she is reduced to begging him to want her as his woman, and to desire her to stay with him in Mexico. She has become a mother-figure again to him and to Don Ramón, her life as a mother never fully finished, though her own biological sons are long grown.

In *Women in Love*, Gerald's mother Mrs. Crich provides another depiction of maternity, but she provides an indication of what motherhood means for the woman in her old age. Viewing the body of her dead husband, Mrs. Crich exclaims with dismay at his appearance, "You're dead [...] beautiful as if life had never touched you—never touched you," and turning to her children, she commands them in a voice that is both "awful and wonderful": "None of you look like this when you are dead! Don't let it happen again. [...] If I thought that the children I bore would lie looking like that in death, I'd strangle them when they were infants, yes—" (*WL* 327). Her strange and interrupted response frightens her children, particularly the daughters, who can cry nothing but "Oh, mother!" (*WL* 326). Still, Mrs. Crich continues – prophetically, in Gerald's case – "Pray for yourselves to God, for there's no help for you from your parents" (*WL* 327). For him, indeed, there will be no help, particularly not from the body of the mother, embodied by Gudrun in their sexual connection later, after the funeral of his father. With her violently phrased wish to strangle her children, Gerald's mother likewise foretells his death, which will happen in the context of his returning to the icy "womb" of the Alpine valleys in which he freezes to death.

In this desperation between mother and daughter, the Criches are similar to the narrator Cyril's mother in *The White Peacock*. Looking at her engagement ring from her fiancé, Cyril's

sister Lettie turns it to hide the jewels so that only the gold shows, as in a wedding band, yet “she twist[s] it back quickly, saying, ‘I’m glad it’s not—not yet. I begin to feel a woman, little mother – I feel grown up to-day’” (*WP* 159). Her mother’s response is even more mournfully impassioned, when she “suddenly” rushes over to Lettie, “kiss[ing] her fervently”:

“Let me kiss my girl good-bye,” she said, and her voice was muffled with tears. Lettie clung to my mother, and sobbed a few quiet sobs, hidden in her bosom. Then she lifted her face, which was wet with tears, and kissed my mother, murmuring:

“No, mother – no – o –!” (*WP* 159)

Like the Crich girls, Lettie’s response to her future marital and maternal status is filtered through that of her mother. Lettie’s engagement only reinforces her mother’s sense that, with her children’s maturation and marriage, she is losing her only chance at completion and fulfillment – a state magnified by the past desertion and recent death of her husband, who had not lived with the family for many years.

Further cementing this connection between mother and daughter is the fact that we learn that the mother in this novel – whose name, Lettice, is nearly identical to her daughter’s – had a similar reaction to her wedding ring. Lettie complains that the ring “feels so heavy – it fidgets me” (*WP* 159). To comfort her daughter and reassure her that her antipathy to the band is normal, she tells Lettie, “You are like me, I never could wear rings. I hated my wedding ring for months. [...] I longed to take it off and put it away. But after a while I got used to it” (*WP* 159). Here the mother and daughter represent the two extremes of female relationships in general, and of wifehood and motherhood in particular: the desire for connection with a husband and children, yet the fear and revulsion simultaneously represented by such a prospect.

That Lettie feels ambivalence towards her future life as a mother and wife is obvious, and even the affective fallacy employed in the natural descriptions in this chapter – “Lettie Comes of Age” – indicates the abject fear that she feels. Her twenty-first birthday, a significant one because of its connotations of maturity and marriageable age, dawns frighteningly frigid and barren:

Lettie was twenty-one on the day after Christmas. She woke me in the morning with cries of dismay. There was a great fall of snow, multiplying the cold morning light, startling the slow-footed twilight. The lake was black like the open eyes of a corpse; the woods were black like the beard on the face of a corpse. A rabbit bobbed out, and floundered in much consternation; little birds settled into the depth, and rose in a dusty whirr, much terrified at the universal treachery of the earth. The snow was eighteen inches deep, and drifted in places. (*WP* 157)

This snowy and corpse-like landscape, again, closely resembles the one that ultimately dooms Gerald Crich: the cold, white, and deathly body of the mother/Mater/Matter represented by the earth itself – a body that even inspires fear in the animals that make it their home, much as Lettie fears both returning to the mother’s body and becoming the mother’s body.

Lettie’s distaste for her engagement ring-cum-wedding ring reveals a connection to another of Lawrence’s novels: the second part of “The Sisters,” which he was finishing in the spring of 1914 under the working title “The Wedding Ring,” and which was later to be called *The Rainbow*. Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett in a letter dated May 9, 1914: “Frieda wants the novel to be called *The Rainbow*. It doesn’t look it at first sight, but I think it is a good title. I like it better than the Wedding Ring” (CL 2 173). Significantly, as her first marriage was ending, and just before beginning an official union with Lawrence, Frieda thought the infinite circle of

the wedding ring less profound than the arc of the rainbow, an image that will be the crux of Ursula's sense of expectancy at the end of the novel. To pursue the spatial metaphor implied by each symbol – ring and rainbow – the first implies a return or continuity with the point of origin, while the latter merely a connection (albeit ephemeral) between two points on earth.

The difference in meaning between these two symbols may be more significant than it initially appears. If we turn to yet another telling revision from an earlier to a final version of a Lawrence novel, *Quetzalcoatl*, we can see the author's changing conception of the relationship between mother and lover, as well as the disconcerting idea of a return (that motion suggested by a ring) to the mother. The shift to masculine leadership politics that Lawrence explored in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* is taken up again in the revisions of this earlier novel, which are reflected in the novel's final form, *The Plumed Serpent*.

At the conclusion of the final version, Kate is begging Cipriano to confirm his desire for her to stay with him, and the novel's last sentence is her pleading imperative, "You won't let me go!" (*PS* 487). On the contrary, in the earlier incarnation of the novel, *Quetzalcoatl*, Kate is preparing to leave Mexico for England, and though the novel ends with her "tr[ying] to get on with her packing" rather than with an actual departure, she still tells her servant Felipa, "I must go to my children and my mother" (*Q* 326, 325). The return to the mother (and to her own motherhood) stands in marked contrast to her impassioned requests to Cipriano at the conclusion of *The Plumed Serpent*. Thus, it seems more than coincidental that a conversation with Felipa in these same final paragraphs of *Quetzalcoatl* features an apparently offhand discussion of the shape of the earth. Intrigued, Felipa says to Kate:

"But I want to see the world. – Is it true that you go like *that* –?" and she curved her hand round swiftly, to describe the motion of sailing round the globe.

“Yes,” said Kate. “But it always *seems* flat.”

“Ah, it is true!” And Felipa burst into a wild little laugh. “Look!” she said, turning to Juana and Pedra, who stood there. “When you go to the Niña’s country you go like that!” And again she swiftly delineated with her hand, the side of a ball. (*Q* 325-26)

Not only is Kate’s trip back to Europe a figurative and literal return to both mother and motherland; the globe conversation she has with Felipa underscores the multiple registers of meaning in this passage. The motion that Felipa makes with her hand to describe the roundness of the earth – a curving motion over and down (or to the side) – mimics the expectant mother’s characteristic gesture, an affectionate stroking of her full abdomen. Likewise, Kate’s admission – that to travel around the world is always ultimately to return to the place where one originated – echoes the inevitability of an individual’s periodic, usually masked desires to return to the mother’s body. As Kate points out, the journey back to the point of origin only “*seems* flat” (in other words, cannot be perceived as it is happening) because such a desire is usually latent, filtered obliquely through other relationships. What complicates this aspect of human desire so profoundly for Lawrence’s mothers is that they, like Kate, have the same inclination that the male characters do to return to the mother’s body, yet their female bodies *are* often, simultaneously, the “mother’s body” – if only to their own infants, prospective or actual.

Here the work of Kristeva and Lawrence engages in one of its most central dialogues. The mixed feelings of the psychoanalyst toward maternity and the ambivalence of the novelist’s female characters regarding this same subject speak to a similar dynamic. That Lawrence was able to dramatize in these women’s emotional selves the very psychic dilemmas that Kristeva outlines in *Tales of Love* suggests further ties between the novelist and psychoanalyst. Moreover,

that Lawrence was not content to depict only the son's perspective, but shifted his focus in the novels after *Sons and Lovers* to include the point of view of the woman – not only as object but also as subject – likewise indicates that he recognized that the first task of the self was to articulate, aestheticize, and thus deal with the initial, alienating trauma of individuation. He writes explicitly to Edward Garnett in the midst of writing what was to become *The Rainbow*, “In the Sisters was the germ of this novel [...] woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative” (*CL* II 165).

Thus, despite Lawrence's turn to leadership politics in many of his final novels, it seems reasonable to posit that on some level he was persistently interested, as he was in his earlier works, in a wider notion of “revolution.” Instead of limiting it only to a military reference point, he also expands the notion of subversion to include a reevaluation of the very notion of the true “artist.” Thus, like Kristeva in her appropriation of Lacan's famous claim that “the unconscious is structured like a language” for her own work on psychoanalysis, language, and art, Lawrence is deeply concerned with how early traumas of identification with and separation from the maternal reveal themselves in the work of revolutionary artists, the subject of the final chapter in this study.

CHAPTER 6

ARTIST AND REVOLUTIONARY

You've got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being.

(Rupert Birkin, *Women in Love* 37)

[...] it seems to me that there is only one way to go through the religion of the Word, or its counterpart, the more or less discreet cult of the Mother; it is the "artists'" way, those who make up for the vertigo of language weakness with the oversaturation of sign systems. By this token, all art is a kind of counter reformation, an accepted baroque-ness.

(Julia (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 252-3)

Art is the evidence of the conscious and of the unconscious self in the artist, and nearly all drama, nearly all tragedy, consists in the conflict between this conscious and this unconscious self. In his consciousness, the great artist is, or has been, nearly always conservative, aristocratic. In his unconsciousness he is subversive to the old order.

(D. H. Lawrence, "Dostoevsky" 379)

The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs.

(Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 38)

To enter into a new system of signification – untied from the confining strictures of the symbolic – requires a certain amount of destruction of old modes of understanding, of the kind Birkin promotes. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva asserts clearly her position on this process: "In the 'artistic' practices the semiotic—the precondition of the symbolic—is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic" (*RIPL* 50). In almost identical terms, Levenson observes of Lawrence in *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*:

Lawrence is certainly not the only modern writer to suspect that language obstructs meaning, but that judgment usually identifies specific hindrances [...]

and suggests that a strenuous effort might purify literary discourse. Lawrence entertains no such hope. He does not pursue *le mot juste*, nor does he expect to find a pattern in words that will mirror a pattern in the world. Instead he uses language to strike at language [...] Lawrence hurls words on the page, as though he were hoping that they might finally shatter and let the world itself emerge.

(151)

Lawrence is wary of culture's tendency to absorb artistic rebellion and render it cliché. In "Introduction to these Paintings," he discusses the work of Cézanne, explaining why it was initially subversive – because "the touch of anything solid hurts us [...] Cézanne's apple hurt" (203) – and why it eventually became a deadened status quo: "it was not till his followers had turned him again into an abstraction, that he was ever accepted. Then the critics stepped forth and abstracted his good apple into Significant Form, and henceforth Cézanne was saved" (203).

Lawrence's own alternative vision for art – the literary version of which he describes in "Why the Novel Matters" – is an explicit refusal of fixity, disarticulation, and stasis. Through continually evolving philosophies, practices, and identities, the novelist achieves a dynamic, revolutionary form of art: "I don't want to grow in any one direction any more. And, if I can help it, I don't want to stimulate anybody else into some particular direction. A particular direction ends in a *cul-de-sac*" ("Why the Novel Matters" 195-96). DiBattista likewise identifies in Lawrence a tendency to play with masks even in his discourse, which she describes in language that is remarkably close to Kristeva's account of the goal of analysis:

Lawrence's incantatory style, sibylline and jaunty by turns, aim at dispelling concentrations of linguistic energy that are in danger of solidifying into inert rant (Lawrence is a dynamic ranter) or petrified narrative. Even the most formidable

defender of Laurentian propriety, F. R. Leavis, admits that such prophetic ventures can degenerate into exasperated tirades, but such lapses, I would contend, merely demonstrate that Lawrence is a novelist who is too wise to forgo playing, on occasion, the fool. Whatever his personal or narrative distresses, he will not cling to his wit if it means losing his way. (DiBattista 116)

Here again, in the work of both figures, is the language of destruction, though Kristeva's version is of a different ilk than Gerald's or Don Ramón's conception of it.⁵²

Though Lawrence's characters struggle continually with the fear and loathing of the abject – that confrontation with what is neither *in* us nor *of* us, but which threatens the very boundaries of the speaking subject – it is worth noting that there are moments in the novels when they are able to progress beyond it, into something resembling healthy individuation and relationship with others, if only briefly and provisionally. Moreover, this moment of progression usually occurs in the context of the individual's attempt to acknowledge the power of the semiotic through art. For both Julia Kristeva and D. H. Lawrence, art represents a means by which the symbolic world of language (for the former) or the world of the "spiritual," deadened intellect (for the latter) can, by its destruction or rupture, open a space for the chora – that realm beyond expression and reason that contains some possibility of "being subversive to the old order," as Lawrence puts it in his essay "Dostoevsky" (379).

⁵² Albright identifies this tendency in *Mr. Noon*, where he argues that Lawrence takes satiric aim at "overrefined modern sexuality" using a relentless repetition of the slang word *spoon*: "Spoon, spoon, spoon; Lawrence repeats the word until it is pure inanition, all meaning vanished in the physical grossness of the rounded lips that pronounce it" (52). This kind of playing, Albright argues, indicates a certain inherent mistrust of language. Albright points also to the "Harriet and Lovatt at Sea in Marriage" chapter of *Kangaroo*, in which we find "a long set of variations on a single figure of speech, which is toyed with, pawed, cuffed, squeezed like an accordion, a signal exercise in misguided virtuosity" (51). Though he ends with this critical evaluation of the "exercise," it is telling that Albright himself cannot but refer to Lawrence's writing in metaphorical terms: "Whenever Lawrence does this, he is in effect surrendering to the devil, sleeping with a whore, wallowing in a fallen language. This is his satirical mode; by manipulating corrupt speech, by making it feel even queasier than it usually does, he is trying to provide a verbal image of a corrupt subject" (51).

In “Art and the Individual,” Lawrence wrestles explicitly with the question, “What is art [for]?” and finally comes to the following conclusion:

It is Art which opens to us the silences, the primordial silences which hold the secret of things, the great purposes, which are themselves silent; there are no words to speak of them in, so we struggle to touch them through art; and the eager, unsatisfied world seeks to put them all into a religious phrase [...] It seems to be human fate to strive to know to the uttermost, and men in general cannot bear to touch the Mystery nakedly, without a garment of words. [...] People complain continually, along with Tolstoi, in such terms [which contend that some art is too “vague” or “sketchy”]. They should know that they are purposely led to the edge of the great darkness, where no word-lights twinkle. (“Art and the Individual” 141)

That Lawrence frames the objective of good art in these terms – “purposely [leading readers] to the edge of the great darkness” – calls to mind Kristeva’s notion of the abyss. His lack of fear at the prospect of art’s showing us frightening mysteries that cannot be articulated allies him with Kristeva in her project for revolutionary art. Such a process is not, as either writer concedes, a pleasant one for the reader or aesthete.⁵³

⁵³ Like Lawrence himself, who similarly rejected the pervasive influence of Freud, Henry Miller accuses vulgar psychoanalysis of trying in its “theories to find a panacea for human ills, if not a remedy by the eradication of suffering at least a remedy by the *explanation* of their origins, trusting to the belief that when we know the cause of a thing and can name it we shall be cured of our suffering” (130). Yet Kristeva’s modern psychoanalysis does not seek to remove suffering nor to articulate specifically the trauma of abjection, which occasions creation, but in fact builds it into its portrait of the *sujet en procès*, which contains the pun in French of the subject both “in process” and “on trial.” Miller’s laudatory description of Lawrence as a writer who “refuses to name, refuses to explain, refuses the grace of salvation by either sublimation or abandonment of responsibility” might as easily describe Kristeva’s reluctance to name the terrifying “thing” which we fear and desire (Miller 130), and her consequent refusal “to propose a systematic theory” for precisely how genius arises from this trauma (Kristeva, “Is There a Feminine Genius?” 497).

In fact, Lawrence concludes in “The Future of the Novel” that, though the “novel has got a future [...] It’s got to have the courage to tackle new propositions without using abstractions” (“The Future of the Novel” 155). Such innovations as it is charged with making will not be easy; rather, they must “break a way through, like a hole in a wall” (155). And again, Lawrence ends by putting his discussion of this revolutionary kind of novel in the remarkably Kristevan terms of abject horror:

And the public will scream and say it is sacrilege: because, of course, when you’ve been jammed for a long time in a tight corner, you get really used to its stuffiness and tightness, till you find it absolutely strikingly cosy; and then, of course you’re horrified when you see a new glaring hole in what was your cosy wall. You’re horrified. You back away from the cold stream of fresh air as if it was killing you. (“The Future of the Novel” 155)

Lawrence’s descriptions of fear and disgust – coupled with his metaphor of the hole, which again bears striking resemblance to the abject void – further suggest that he and Kristeva are discussing a similar psychological dynamic.

In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence uses the language of sexual union to suggest another way of subverting the mind’s dominance over the body. Lawrence identifies the moment of merging as the opposite of the “sunny day-self” of the public life: the nighttime self’s “swaying consciousness of the dark, living blood,” its being “no more than a powerful wave of mounting blood, which seeks to surge and join with the answering sea in the other individual” (*FTU* 184). The prevalence of blood and union in Lawrence’s ideas suggests Kristeva’s language, inasmuch as he advocates a return to more physical, visceral modes of understanding experience – and less symbolic modes of knowing or language.

Lawrence and Kristeva both believe that artists are capable of unlocking this revolutionary potential of expression, and both believe that it must happen, to some extent, through a subversive use of language – not merely a subversive logic of expression, but the *renunciation* of logic, in some cases, altogether.⁵⁴ Indeed, though in some writings Kristeva cites the work of abstract painters in particular as revolutionary, she also extends her endorsement of art to literature, and specifically to the novel. Her discussions of the artfully disjointed and elliptical work of Céline serve as a perfect example. Like Lawrence, moreover, Kristeva is less concerned (though, it must be stressed, not *unconcerned*) with the political implications of a work. Her citation of Céline, known for his anti-Semitism, illustrates her choice to emphasize the otherness of his language itself, and not necessarily the literal signification of his utterances. As becomes obvious in his essay “Why the Novel Matters,” Lawrence takes a similar position, noting that the novel gets closest to the life-force that is his highest goal. Granted that Kristeva phrases this idea somewhat differently – praising the heterogeneity of novelistic language as a way of achieving her ideal, an equilibrium of symbolic and semiotic – the gist of their arguments is nearly identical.

⁵⁴ Kristeva articulates the relationship between language and art, as well as linking her ideas to Lawrence through Freud, by explaining the ways in which twentieth-century avant-garde writers actually predate or anticipate Freud’s theories:

One might submit that Freud’s discovery of the unconscious provided the necessary conditions of such a reading of poetic language [as the space where the subversion of logic is possible]. This would be true for the history of *thought*, but not for the history of *poetic practice*. Freud himself considered writers as his predecessors. Avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, more or less unaware of Freud’s discovery, propounded a practice, and sometimes even a knowledge of language and its subject, that kept pace with, when they did not precede, Freudian breakthroughs. Thus, it was entirely possible to remain alert to this avant-garde laboratory, to perceive its experiments in a way that could be qualified as a “love” relationship—and therefore, while bypassing Freud, to perceive the high stakes of any language as *always- already* poetic. (*DIL* 26)

Though few would call Lawrence’s work “avant-garde” because of his novels’ marked indebtedness to Victorian novelistic conventions, his use of repetition and of incantatory and poetic language is inarguably a distinctive and innovative feature of the novels. It is, moreover, telling that many of Lawrence’s experiences, insights, and plots are so closely related to Freudian theory, despite his avowed ambivalence toward his contemporary.

A Relationship with Art

Fantasia of the Unconscious foregrounds Lawrence's vocal resistance to an idea he saw as endemic to modern life: the notion that reason, intellect, and science are the privileged means of experiencing and understanding life. More and more, Lawrence began to see the deadness and mechanization of early twentieth-century British commerce and industry and the sterility of modern self-consciousness. For him, the body and the organic work of human hands came increasingly to represent a mode of getting back to the vital, physical self. Morag Shiach explains in *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood in British Literature and Culture, 1890-1930* that, during the last years of the 1920s, "Lawrence was increasingly coming to see work as a point of resistance to excessively cerebral conceptions of selfhood" (185). The work of artists – and, perhaps more aptly put, of *artisans* – becomes the remedy for "the impossibility of creative forms of selfhood within the spaces of industrial labour" (Shiach 192). This impossibility appears in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, for instance, in the "reduced and degraded" workers in Clifford Chatterley's mines (192).

Conversely, Oliver Mellors represents an ideal of creative labor. Shiach points to one of his first meetings with his future mistress:

Connie discovers Mellors in the woods: drawn by the sound of his hammering she finds him in his shirt-sleeves, kneeling and at work. He resents the intrusion, but she is apparently fascinated by the spectacle. She enters his hut and sees a carpenter's bench, tools and nails, an axe, a hatchet and 'things in sacks': the paraphernalia of artisanal labour. (192)

Her fascination with his work underscores his anomalous position in the Chatterleys' world, a creature Connie has never before encountered. Even in a novel less concerned with art per se and

more with artisanship, Lawrence shows the artist as a revolutionary figure because, though Mellors employs man-made tools and materials to create his art, he does not let a worship of them render him just another automaton in the modern world – much as the Kristevan artist does not succumb to the regimented logic and repression of the symbolic world, but instead *uses* its structures and forms to invoke the semiotic. Kristeva writes of such an activity: “*Work* as process, whatever kind of work it may be—when it is being carried out (and not when it is reified according to the exchange structures of a particular society)” — resembles this model of revolutionary signifying practice (*RPL* 104).

In other Lawrence novels, the emphasis on artists is even more pronounced. On the very first page of *Pictures and Fictions*, Nancy Kushigian notes that, although “sometimes beginning as passive observers, Lawrence’s heroes and heroines inevitably become actively expressive creators of visual art or imaginative reality” (1). We can see this facility in Rupert Birkin, who often serves as the author’s mouthpiece. In the chapter “Breadalby,” Hermione finds him copying a Chinese drawing of a goose, albeit “with much skill and vividness” (*WL* 81). Birkin remains securely within the symbolic here, making another copy of the drawing in order “to know it” (*WL* 81). Still, the germ of the revolutionary artist, the reclamer of the semiotic, lies in his expanded reply a few moments later, in which he tells Hermione precisely *what* he has come to know from the drawing: “I know what centres they live from—what they perceive and feel—the hot, stinging centrality of a goose in the flux of cold water and mud—the curious bitter stinging heat of a goose’s blood, entering their blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire—fire of the cold-burning mud—the lotus mystery” (*WL* 81-2).

Tellingly, her reaction to the mysterious, irrational, yet “insidious occult potency” of Birkin’s monologue is to feel “witless, decentralized” (*WL* 82). Hermione’s inability to respond

or even to countenance this explanation of the drawing's mystery points to her own association with the abject; she is indeed the walking corpse:

She suffered the ghastliness of dissolution, broken and gone in a horrible corruption. And he stood and looked at her unmoved. She strayed out, pallid and preyed-upon like a ghost, like one attacked by the tomb-influences which dog us.

And she was gone like a corpse, that has no presence, no connection. (*WL* 82)

Her frightened response embodies both her knowledge that “the split [between them as lovers] was coming” (*WL* 81), and also her disgust at his talk of blood and mud, the very language of the abject. Conversely, Birkin's ability to remain “unmoved,” as opposed to psychically dissolving as Hermione does, stems directly from his own ability to navigate the semiotic through the visual art that he makes.

The aesthetic conversation between Kristeva and Lawrence continues here, in terms of which artworks have revolutionary potential for expressing the semiotic. The visual art Kristeva mentions most often includes the abstract work of artists like Jackson Pollock, which defy the symbolic world of recognizable form and shape. In a fascinating way, Lawrence extends Kristeva's aesthetics further, suggesting through Birkin's copying exercise that even the most precisely drawn, literal artworks can elicit responses that transcend mere mimicry or our usual notion of rational representation. Appropriately, then, Birkin's aforementioned enigmatic description of his understanding of the drawing reads more like modernist poetry than it does like a logical answer to a direct question.

This relationship with art does not only exist among Lawrence's characters. The author likewise situates himself in the world of modern art, and we can see through his allegiances how surprisingly closely his and Kristeva's ideas are allied. Nancy Kushigian discusses these

influences in detail, moving more specifically into an explanation of German avant-garde art's impact on D. H. Lawrence's work in *Sons and Lovers*. Her synopsis of the project of artists like Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky could likewise summarize Julia Kristeva's vision for the revolution in poetic language: "following the lead of Van Gogh and Munch, [they] created an art in which line and color express dynamic forces that disturb the formalisms of the past" (Kushigian 42). Indeed, the expression of "dynamic forces" through "line and color," which she mentions here, could just as aptly be replaced with the term "semiotic." Likewise, Kushigian notes that "Lawrence later wrote of *Sons and Lovers* that it represented the experience of many young men of his own generation, unable to express themselves sexually because trained by their culture to repress sexual instincts" (38). It is here that she connects the effect of German art on Lawrence's novel, adding:

One of the novel's central issues is the fluidity of Paul's ego boundaries, his attempt to define a personal identity that yet reaches out and relates to others, and his difficulty in doing so. This fluidity of boundaries is pictorialized in images that dissolve stiffly formal outlines, replacing them with vibrating lines of force meant to represent an interior source of vitality and life, an inner vitality capable of transforming and even apocalyptically destroying exterior forms. (38)

This language of dissolving boundaries, particularly those that control genre, calls to mind Kristeva's abject and its potential threat to the borders of identity. That this mode of German art was influential in Lawrence's conception of the novel indicates that he was perhaps similarly interested in a fluid notion of both identity and artistic genre.

While the notion that the self is a tenuous thing, always at risk of being annihilated, would cause anxiety, the possibility of permeable boundaries also represents liberation from the alienation of pure selfhood, and the artistic representation of this movement beyond the solipsistic world of the self offers a freedom that, for Kristeva, is worth a fearful encounter with the abject. In the final lines of *Sons and Lovers*, Paul struggles explicitly with the abjection that oppresses him after his mother's death:

He could not bear it. On every side the immense dark silence seemed pressing him, so tiny a spark, into extinction, and yet, almost nothing, he could not be extinct. [...] Stars and sun, a few bright grains, went spinning around for terror, and holding each other in embrace, there in a darkness that outpassed them all, and left them tiny and daunted. So much, and himself, infinitesimal, at the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing.

(420)

Paul begins by fearing the overwhelming darkness of his loss of both mother and identity, but by the novel's concluding words, he has become *something* on his own. Even if it is at the cost of his happiness and his most important relationship, he has become a self – which is, in itself, a form of creative endeavor.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Like Kristeva, Miller contends that this kind of struggle is endemic to the artist. He points out Lawrence's frustration at always "*trying to do*" something, noting that:

This trying seems to be the creation itself. And it is this effort to go beyond oneself, to surpass, to say, and do the impossible, which makes certain men a subject of eternal debate. [...] And yet it seems to me that it is only these men who count, who really affect us and influence us. They strive to go beyond "art" into life again. [...] What they most deeply wish to convey to the world is rendered then in a hermeneutic language which estranges them. (Miller 262)

The “Subtle” Artist’s Failure

One Lawrentian character who obviously complicates this idea of artist as navigator of the abject is Gudrun Brangwen, who, in Frank Kermode’s words, is able to savor “the terror of the meaningless” (67), and thus might seem on the surface to refute much of what Kristeva says about the role of a revolutionary artist. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva posits the transformative quality inherent in poetic language as a means of contending with the horror of abjection. To be sure, Gudrun’s lover Gerald “is unable to metaphorize death” (Doherty 63); he cannot find a way to even partially articulate the abject in symbolic terms, which would include words or artistic work. But Gudrun, whose status as an artist should make her a positive example in Kristeva’s paradigm, is portrayed far from sympathetically in the novel. If she is attempting, along Kristevan lines, to take the inexpressible semiotic and harness its power in symbolic terms, we might wonder why she becomes such a smothering, destructive presence by the end of *Women in Love*.

One reason lies in the scope of her artwork, which Mary Burgan calls “abortive [...] subtle and imitative rather than orgasmic. It fastens on minute imitations of small creatures” (187). Maria DiBattista adds that “Gudrun is the ironic artist who has no imagination, or stomach, for the spontaneity of eternity” (145). Gudrun is merely creating “little things [...] that one can put between one’s hands,” since they “seem to be more subtle to her,” explains Ursula in the third chapter (*WL* 32). But immediately on the heels of this explanation, she declares, “I hate subtleties [...] I always think they are a sign of weakness” (*WL* 33). There is nothing revolutionary in Gudrun’s art; the diminutive scope and size of it implies an attempt at artificial unity or control on the part of the artist. It is true that she, like Birkin in his copying of the goose picture, is imitating nature. However, unlike Birkin, who uses the imitative drawing in order to

enter temporarily into the consciousness of the animal, Gudrun's ultimate goal is to reduce, subdue, and thus master nature. Because she "habitually employs language to encircle, complete, and fix the real" (DiBattista 155), she becomes a verbal and artistic version of the smothering maternal body.

This inferior method of coping with horror becomes especially clear in the penultimate chapter of *Women in Love*, when she has nearly decided to sever ties to Gerald. Instead of feeling relief, she watches the clock, aware of death's steady march: "In vain she fluttered the leaves of books, or made statuettes in clay. She knew she was not *really* reading. She was not *really* working" (*WL* 457). Likewise, in the end, her inability to achieve any sublime or transcendent effects through her art is not so different from what the novel has heretofore suggested about her; it is merely thrown into sharper relief by the traumatic conclusion of her relationship with Gerald.

In order to understand Gudrun better, we might turn to Carol Siegel's summary of Lawrence's novelistic project: his "topic is not the perversity of men, but the cruelty and dangerousness of forcing natural things" (69). Similarly, in explaining Kristeva's "revolutionary poetic text" – which we might identify more expansively as anything from poetry to the novel to visual art – Kelly Oliver points out that it "is never a unified text. It is always in process and points to the process of signification itself" (100). Such a project can only produce frighteningly expansive and experimental works, which are assuredly not Gudrun's oeuvre.

Perhaps Kristeva's characterization of melancholia and its relation to art might give still another explanation for Gudrun's negative portrayal in the novel, despite her status as an artist:

[...] we are confronted with an enigmatic paradox that will not cease questioning us: if loss, bereavement, and absence trigger the work of the imagination and

nourish it permanently as much as they threaten it and spoil it, it is also noteworthy that the work of art as fetish emerges when the activating sorrow has been repudiated. The artist consumed by melancholia is at the same time the most relentless in his struggle against the symbolic abdication that blankets him. (*BS* 9)

Because of the ways in which she attempts to force her art, by will, into something unnatural that can be controlled, then, Gudrun's art becomes "fetish." On the other hand, as Lechte puts it, "Kristeva's view of art is not one that is static and fetishized, but one that is above all dynamic: constitutive rather than constituted," and thus, "[p]otentially, at least, aesthetic *activity* is within the reach of every one," even if great artistic *works* are not ("Art, Love, and Melancholy in the Work of Julia Kristeva" 25).

Gudrun represents a negative artist because she fetishizes and attempts to *contain* the abject – a futile gesture – through her art and her self-important certainty. Hence, she seems to find herself tottering again and again on the brink of the abyss: "Ha—ha—she laughed to herself, so frightened that she was trying to laugh it off—ha—ha, how maddening it was, to be sure, to be sure!" (*WL* 456). In this way, she resembles Gerald, whose coal mine he sees as a way of controlling the insides of the earth, the matter (or Mater) he finds so frightening. Gudrun fails as an artist because she always struggles to, and in the end perhaps succeeds in, vigorously repressing the abject – but ultimately without the possibility of a fulfilling love relationship or of a profound artistic career.

Her connection with the "homosexual and sadistic" artist Loerke at the novel's conclusion suggests as much, as well as allying the two characters in their shared belief that "art becomes an end in itself" (Spilka, *The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence* 139). We are left with the sense that, "if Gerald can bring Gudrun the direct, violent plunge toward death, the process

becomes more subtle and ecstatic with Loerke” (139). Ultimately, though Gudrun has survived her relationship with Gerald, one can easily imagine the fate of a woman who cannot truly face the abjection of a romantic partner – or, in aesthetic terms, what might become of an artist who cannot engage with the sublime.

It is telling that Gudrun’s work is endorsed early in the novel by the deathly Hermione, who says of her carvings, “Perfectly beautiful—full of primitive passion—” (*WL* 32). Nevertheless, Birkin, as the novel’s male aesthete, sees through Hermione’s approval of the primitivism of Gudrun’s work, lambasting his former lover for being in truth “more decadent than the most hide-bound intellectualism”:

‘You are merely making words,’ he said; ‘knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don’t want to *be* an animal, you want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them. [...] What is it but the worst and last form of intellectualism, this love of yours for passion and the animal instincts? [...] It isn’t passion at all, it is your *will*’ (*WL* 35)

Hermione’s, and by extension Gudrun’s, insistence on the individual, willful experience of primitivism in art points to the self’s desperate attempt to shore up its own boundaries by creating an other. By making “primitive” art, Gudrun can contrast its passion and animalism to her desire for a more intellectual and contained sense of identity. Hermione’s lauding of her work reveals their shared status as characters who cannot engage artistically and productively with the object.

Birkin’s language in this passage, as he goes further into a rant that renders him “only a passionate voice speaking,” also suggests that Hermione is at an earlier, less evolved stage of

psychological development. In a remarkably Lacanian moment, he tells her, “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” (*WL* 36). Thus, besides its role as an other in opposition to which she can define her self, a second reason for her appreciation of Gudrun’s work, paradoxically, is that it functions as a mirror that will reflect back to her a unified identity – if primitive and animalistic.⁵⁶ She has not progressed beyond the toddler’s Mirror Stage. As a disembodied voice in this passage, Birkin exemplifies the not-being that he champions as a mandatory precursor to identity, when he tells her, “You’ve got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being” (*WL* 37).

Likewise, it is appropriate here to make the connection between Birkin as a successful “artist” – albeit a less visual and more verbal one – and Kristeva’s notion of the revolution in poetic language: he harnesses the attraction and the unspeakable power of the Semiotic through language, with the aid of Ursula as the other half of their dialectic. Expressing that infinite whole through the symbolic language of words is one of the goals of revolutionary poetic language, yet before one can reach that objective, it becomes necessary to confront the abject. The distinction between Birkin and Gerald’s views of the void is clear in their differing views on the African statue. Viewing its “terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness,” Gerald asks with horror and disbelief, “Why is it art?” Accordingly, Birkin responds, “It conveys a complete truth [...] It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it” (*WL* 71). Again, Birkin understands this because, as he puts it to Hermione in his explanation of why

⁵⁶ Daniel Albright’s reading of this scene reaffirms Hermione’s relationship to art, suggesting that she, like Lady Crystabel in *The White Peacock*, is closely akin to the Lady of Shalott, in that each woman “feels nothing, but her dead affections can be roused to a yearning optic covetousness for what she lacks, a body, the body’s robust delight” (35). However, in Lady Crystabel’s case – and to some extent in Hermione’s, as well – the myth ultimately has a different ending: “Lawrence, who tends to distort myths in the direction of female malevolence, the Lady of Shalott does not break her mirror [...] but instead invites her lover to live with her inside the mirror of her consciousness, tries to absorb him into effete phantasmagoria” (35).

her “primitive” aesthetics does not really escape intellectualism, “real sensuality [...] is a fulfillment—the great dark knowledge you can’t have in your head—the dark involuntary being. *It is death to one’s self—but it is the coming into being of another*” (WL 36, emphasis added).

His simple, positive assessment of the African statue – “It is art” – suggests that its “terrible face, void and [meaningless],” is yet another mask of identity, this one of suffering. Not coincidentally, it is the same “small, fine mask” that becomes the face of Minette, the statue’s model, the next morning as she and Gerald cease their affair, after she has told him that she is ten weeks pregnant (WL 73). In the Kristevan terms of the maternal chora and its relationship to art and the semiotic, it is also appropriate that the suffering depicted in the statue belongs to a woman in labor, yet that its model, though pregnant, is herself like a fetus and a small infant, “inchoate” and possessed of a speech impediment that makes her sound distinctly like a child (WL 61). Except that she remains objectified by Gerald and the other men in her life, Minette might serve as another model of Kristeva’s subject-in-process: simultaneously mother and child, like the Virgin.

Conversely, Birkin lays claim to the possibility of provisional, temporary subjectivity, a reflection of his own acceptance of continually shifting identities, or Kristeva’s notion of the subject-in-process, which ultimately concedes a lack of one, stable identity. Indeed, later in the novel he will say to Ursula – ostensibly about the decorations in their future home, but more evocatively about the self itself – “One should just live anywhere—not have a definite place. I don’t want a definite place. As soon as you get a room, and it is *complete*, you want to run from it” (WL 348).⁵⁷ Thus, he eschews permanence in favor of a continually evolving, provisional self,

⁵⁷ Birkin’s comment closely resembles Kristeva’s phrasing when she describes the study of linguistics in *Desire in Language: a Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*: “For, as soon as linguistics was established as a science (through Saussure, for all intents and purposes) its field of study was thus hemmed in [*suture*]; the problem of *truth* in linguistic discourse became dissociated from any notion of the speaking *subject*” (DL 24). The “truth” she refers

epitomized by his description of a house that is never “complete.” Birkin’s sentiments in the African statue scene and in his “house” comments to Ursula align perfectly with Kristeva’s contentions in her brief and practical text *In The Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*: the point of analysis is not to provide the analysand with a single, unified and stable persona, but rather a series of shifting identities, of whatever kind seems most useful at the moment, and through these changing “masks” to give the subject an identity whose only constant is its constant state of flux – its ability to “live anywhere,” as Birkin puts it. Likewise, it is appropriate here to make the connection between Birkin as a successful “artist” – albeit a less visual and more verbal one – and Kristeva’s notion of the revolution in poetic language: he harnesses the attraction and the unspeakable power of the semiotic through language, with the aid of Ursula as the other half of their dialectic.

Art, Religion, and Violence

The distinction between revolutionary and abject artist, which Gudrun illustrates in *Women in Love*, becomes more complicated in *The Plumed Serpent*, a novel criticized for its alleged endorsement of fascism, as well as its association with the misogyny of Lawrence’s later, leadership-politics novels.⁵⁸ Art’s connection to religion becomes more explicit here, but it is an ancient, pagan religion, rather than the Roman Catholic belief system of modern Mexico, that Lawrence suggests will offer the potential for revolutionary modes of expression and identity.

Early on, the novel suggests that primitive religion and artisanship will be linked with this radical conception of identity. When Kate Leslie visits Don Ramón and Doña Carlota at Jamiltepec, their hacienda on the lake, she sees her first real glimpse of Don Ramón’s plans for a

to here is the sense in which utterances come “sincerely” from the “real” self of the individual uttering them, rather than existing as utterances that change or reveal the changes of a dynamic, ever-shifting identity.

⁵⁸ For an elaboration of this view, see Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* and Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.

return to the ancient religion of Quetzalcoatl. She has glimpsed it earlier, at the dance in which she participated in Sayula, but in this later passage she begins to see her host's central role in the resurrection of this archaic belief system. Ramón is nearly a god among his followers, and shortly after Kate's arrival, this becomes clear when he goes to visit one of the artists in his own compound, a man who is carving a wooden sculpture of Ramón's head. Though, like Gudrun's art, "[i]t was larger than life, conventionalized [...] under the conventional lines the likeness to Ramón revealed itself" (*PS* 190). Thus, the art is to a certain extent representative and literal, but it also goes further to express the power of its subject. The sculptor's response to Ramón's presence is worth noting here: "The artist gazed with wonder, and with an appreciation touched with fear. The other man, large and intense, with big dark eyes staring with intense pride, yet prayerful, beyond the natural horizons, sent a thrill of dread and of joy through the artist" (*PS* 190).

This scene reveals that the "subtle" kind of art Gudrun produces in *Women in Love* is, at least in one respect, similar to the work of this Mexican artisan, who could also be said to create "carvings [...] full of primitive passion." Given Don Ramón's deified status in his community, the "larger-than-life" bust could indeed be called "fetish." The artisan's piece could be seen to resemble the real sensuality that Birkin sees in the African statue, according to his belief about the importance of learning "not-to-be" (*WL* 37). Don Ramón, likewise, seems to have the power to harness the semiotic through his music, for when he drums, it is with the rhythm of a heart beating: "he lifted the drum-stick, and after waiting a moment or two, to become still in soul, he sounded the rhythmic summons, rather slow, yet with a curious urge in its strong-weak, one-two rhythm. He had got the old barbaric power into the drum" (*PS* 192). Here the art (in this case, music) actually makes use of the body and blood themselves, echoing the alternation of systole

and diastole as it pumps lifeblood through the physical being – and by extension the material aspects of sound and rhythm, lost when one begins to hear meanings. Appropriately, all of Ramón’s men are almost involuntarily compelled to gather in the terrace: “They sat in silence for a time, only the monotonous, hypnotic sound of the drum pulsing, touching the inner air” (*PS* 192).

Likewise, when Kristeva describes the ambitions of Céline in the concluding chapter of *Powers of Horror*, she is pointing to his realization of music and rhythm’s power to harness the semiotic and deal productively and artistically with the abject: “The dizziness Céline gives way to and binds himself to in order to tap emotion from the inside is, as he sees it, the fundamental truth of scruption [*sic*]. Such dizziness leads him to the fulfillment of a kind of challenge to abjection; it is only thus that he can, by naming it, both have it exist and go beyond it” (*PH* 190). As she quotes Céline, “His project is to ‘*resensitize language*, to have it *throb* more than *reason*—SUCH WAS MY AIM...”” (*PH* 190). The language here – “*throb*” especially – alludes to the bodily, visceral noise of the heart, the same sounds evoked by Don Ramón’s drumming.

Similarly, Don Cipriano’s insistence on incorporating horror into life could be called a fascination with the abject, particularly when he says to Kate, “Get used to it [...] Get used to it that there must be a bit of fear, and a bit of horror in your life [...] The bit of horror is like the sesame seed in the nougat, it gives the sharp wild flavour” (*PS* 259). Lawrence himself argues something similar in the introduction to the poems in *Pansies*: “The fairest thing in nature, a flower, still has its roots in earth and manure; and in the perfume there hovers still the faint strange scent of earth, the under-earth in all its heavy humidity and darkness. Certainly it is so in pansy-scent, and in violet-scent; mingled with the blue of the morning the black of the corrosive humus. Else the scent would be just sickly sweet” (418).

Kelly Oliver explains Kristeva's ideas on abjection and horror in *Reading Kristeva* similarly, noting that:

[...] abjection is what is repressed with the symbolic element of language, and when this repressed shows itself, it undermines the authority of language itself. [...] But unlike some of her earlier writings on revolutionary poetry in *Powers of Horror*, the power that Kristeva identifies with abject language is almost purely aesthetic. She suggests that the language of abjection points to the lack of meaning and only through its own beauty does it have meaning. (101-102)

Here, Oliver also attempts to account for Kristeva's "troubling" commendation of the anti-Semitic writings of Céline, explaining that "to argue that she endorses Céline's racism is to oversimplify her position. Kristeva praises Céline's writing because it lays bare a horror that underlies all of culture" (102).⁵⁹ Don Cipriano's comment, then, dramatizes Kristeva's theory

⁵⁹ It is important to note that Kristeva has struggled perennially with this criticism throughout her work on the implications of psychoanalysis in twentieth-century culture. In 2002's *Intimate Revolt*, she explores avenues for subversion – what she currently calls a post-feminist, fledgling "culture of revolt" in which "the possibility of questioning [is still] alive" (4). Yet at this point in her career she has come to explicitly decry nihilism, which she explains as "the rejection of old values in favor of a cult of new values, interrogation of which is suspended" (*IR* 6). By Kristeva's definition in this newer work, we can see how, in *The Plumed Serpent*, Lawrence has strayed from a productive polemics that questions old values into a rigid and violent program for militarily mandating "new" ones. As she puts it, the problem is:

[...] this nihilistic suspension of questioning in favor of so-called new values, which as values, precisely, have forgotten to question themselves and have thereby fundamentally betrayed the meaning of revolt [...] The pseudorebellious nihilist is in fact a man reconciled with the stability of new values. And this stability, which is illusory, is revealed to be deadly, totalitarian. I can never sufficiently emphasize the fact that totalitarianism is the result of a certain fixation of revolt in what is precisely its betrayal, namely, the suspension of retrospective return, which amounts to a suspension of thought. (*IR* 6)

For Kristeva, "retrospective return" is the capacity of the individual for self-questioning, self-testing – and it is here that her subject-on-trial gains larger social and political implications. The refusal to question oneself fixes one in a static identity, which leads naturally to rigid political positions and a fetishization of values. Kristeva is describing the same impulse to fetishize that leads Gudrun and Loerke on their path to dissolution, instead of towards real revolutionary art – the impulse that distinguishes "pseudo"-nihilists and -artists from real practitioners of subversive art and politics. Thus, the extent to which we believe Lawrence was able or *unable* to continue questioning himself at the end of his career would determine the extent to which we could consider him either a revolutionary or a problematic artist in Kristeva's terms.

about the power of horror by suggesting that it is a necessary part of learning to aestheticize and to appreciate beauty.

This argument – that an artistic work should be under no obligation to censor its violence or horror – might as easily be applied to Lawrence’s novels, particularly the discussions of race that recur in works like *The Plumed Serpent* and *Kangaroo*, a novel whose title explicitly refers to the large nose and elongated face of the sole Jewish character in the book. Thus, a literary or artistic representation of murder – such as the violent and grisly killing in “The Prussian Officer” – is in the end much less threatening than a literal act of violence. In her view, “the artist performs the ‘right’ kind of violence: by appropriating what lies outside him, he achieves a balance between the self and the world” (RSS 122). In this way, the aesthetic component to Don Ramón’s attempt to resurrect Mexico’s ancient religion points to the power of abject art and literature: it dramatizes the unspoken horror of hatred and violence, in order to keep it from being repressed and then insidiously and subtly manifested in general society, in the form of *real*, physical violence.

On the other hand, in one conversation Kate asks Don Ramón with astonishment, “And don’t you want peace?” to which he replies, “I? I shouldn’t think of it. The meek have inherited the earth, according to prophecy. But who am I, that I should envy them their peace! No, Señora. Do I look like a gospel of peace?—or a gospel of war either? Life doesn’t split down that division, for me” (PS 206). Like Kristeva’s neo-Nietzschean position – “Abject literature laughs at horror” (Oliver 103) – Don Ramón scoffs at Kate’s repression of the abject, preferring instead to face the intrinsic violence and primitive aesthetics of the religion of Quetzalcoatl, in place of the vacuity of her “European good faith,” which always seeks peace (PS 256). Ramón finds in the aesthetic offshoots of his cult – in its hypnotic chanting and drumming, its primitive

artisanship in carvings and textiles – the key to expressing the darker side of Mexico, sublimated centuries before to the Christianity of the conquistadors. Cipriano later says to Kate much the same thing: “Why do white people always want peace? [...] Peace is only the rest after war [...] So it is not more natural than fighting. Perhaps not so natural” (*PS* 204). Both Ramón and Cipriano embrace the seething abject, just beyond the confines of the Symbolic realm of rationality, freedom, and peace. Such constructs belie, yet paradoxically at the same time reinforce, their very foundations in the irrational, violent, and unintelligible world of abject horror.

Kate’s final capitulation to marriage with Cipriano underscores the intense power of the abject reflected by both him and his master Don Ramón. In “The Attack on Jamiltepec,” Kate watches with fascination as the self-professed leader of this cult is stabbed in the back and side by a would-be assassin, and then witnesses Don Ramón’s quick execution of the man who would have murdered him:

Glancing from horror to horror, she saw Ramón, his face still as death, blood running down his arm and his back, holding down the head of the bandit by the hair and stabbing him with short stabs in the throat, one, two, while blood shot out like a red projectile; there was a strange sound like a soda-syphon, a ghastly bubbling, one final terrible convulsion from the loins of the stricken man, throwing Ramón off, and Ramón lay twisted, still clutching the man’s hair in one hand, the bloody knife in the other, and gazing into the livid, disordered face, in which ferocity seemed to have gone frozen, with a steady, intent, inhuman gaze. (*PS* 324)

These are the same hands and face of the man who is attempting to resurrect the great tradition of

folk artisanship in Mexico, the gentle yet powerful presence that initially seems to lack the roughness, ugliness, and vulgarity of the “little general” Cipriano.⁶⁰ Yet the artisanship that Ramón appears to represent is merely the veneer of a profound violence and bloodthirstiness that epitomizes abjection. Without question, here we run into a potentially troubling blind spot shared by both Lawrence and the earlier work of Kristeva: their elision of the consequences of actual militaristic revolution, as opposed to the aesthetic or linguistic revolution. While Kristeva eventually attempts to account for what she sees as a dangerous tendency in some creative artists to adopt a fixed political position (however initially subversive it was), Lawrence in particular so literalizes this idea of creative destruction that it begins to destroy more than it creates – with humanity’s destruction becoming a final goal.

Christ himself is not excluded from Lawrentian characters’ disgust at humanity. Ramón’s identification with Jesus – in an echo of the crucifixion, his hands and side are covered with blood after the attack – suggests the more sanctioned abjection of the body of Jesus. Here, too, is another connection between art and abjection: Lawrence’s figuration (via Ramón) of Christ as an abject figure, but also simultaneously as the creative artist who is “*author* of salvation,” in the words of Hebrews 2:10. His own status as religious savior is closely identified, then, with the idea of the abjection inherent in revolutionary art. Such a reading is supported by Kate’s perception of Ramón’s appearance the moment after he has so brutally murdered the bandits:

⁶⁰ We can see a confusing distinction between this text and *Women in Love*, in terms of what kind of husband each novel advocates for its heroine. By the end of *The Plumed Serpent*, Kate has, albeit unwillingly, become the kind of wife who can be with her husband in the evenings, yet must send him off to the military and political world of men in the morning. By contrast, in *Women in Love*, when the obviously abject and unsympathetic character Hermione tells Ursula that she should not marry Birkin because he is too “sensitive,” we see an early reflection of what Lawrence himself would come to conclude, both in *The Plumed Serpent* and in his nonfiction work *Fantasia of the Unconscious*: “‘Yes,’ said Hermione slowly, ‘I think you need a man—soldierly, strong-willed— [...] You should have a man like the old heroes—you need to stand behind him as he goes into battle’ (WL 287). Subsequently, she warns Ursula that she will “suffer—dreadfully” from her association with Birkin because he is so “changeable” (WL 287). It is curious that in *Women in Love* Lawrence takes this offhand utterance of a rather minor, near-villainous female character (whom we are ostensibly meant to disagree with) and makes it into the underpinnings of a later novel’s gender politics.

“His brow was like a boy’s, very pure and primitive, and the eyes underneath had a certain primitive gleaming look of virginity” (*PS* 325). In any case, his apparent innocence is in marked contrast to his recent actions, which troubles the analogy of the Christ figure.

Lawrence often juxtaposes this kind of violence with art and beauty, showing their complex, ambivalent, and yet closely intertwined relationship. In “The Prussian Officer,” the captain’s struggles against his feelings for the young orderly occur concurrently with his intense and inexplicable irritation at “the free movement of the handsome limbs, which no military discipline could make stiff” (“PO” 41), as well as the young man’s aesthetic bent. In fact, one of the captain’s worst beatings of young Schöner comes on the heels of the latter’s confession that he is carrying a pencil behind his ear because he has been writing poetry for his lover (“PO” 46). The text makes it unclear whether this poetry is his own original work or not, however: though the orderly tells the captain that he has been “writing poetry,” the narration in this passage states more ambiguously that he has been “copying a verse for his sweetheart’s birthday card” (“PO” 44). It is unclear whether he has been copying something that he or someone else originally wrote. In any case, through the violent ending that is the climax of the story, Lawrence suggests that the orderly’s murder of the captain is a far more vivid creative/destructive act than the poetics he has played at earlier in the tale.

Symbolic Creation through Destruction

A less political version of revolution appears in the earlier novels, and it is here that Lawrence seems most closely allied with Kristeva’s ideal artist. Rupert Birkin embodies this artist, in the aesthetics he vocalizes in one of his first private conversations with Ursula. Here he opines on the creative and destructive energies needed to reenergize the world. Repulsed by the

smell of the marshy earth at their feet, he insists that, rather than the “silver river of life” that most see as the primary stream in human experience and art, the “other river, the black river [...] our flowers are of this—our sea-born Aphrodite, all our white phosphorescent flowers of sensuous perfection” (*WL* 164). Thus unlike Botticelli’s graceful, bright image of the goddess of love and beauty born from a pink shell, Birkin’s Aphrodite “is the flowering mystery of the death-process [...] born in the first spasm of universal dissolution—then the snakes and swans and lotus—marsh-flowers—and Gudrun and Gerald—” (*WL* 164). Here the associations with Aphrodite – sexual liberty, beauty, art, love – are tellingly and knowingly reversed by Birkin to explain how beauty arises from decay and rot. Though Birkin in the end hesitates to call himself and Ursula similarly “pure flowers of dark corruption” or “fleurs du mal,” he acknowledges that, granted, corruption “is a progressive process—and it ends in universal nothing—the end of the world,” but wonders, “why isn’t the end of the world as good as the beginning?” (*WL* 164-5). Ursula seems more inclined to see this end to things as forecasting a new creation to come, but Birkin insists that this new beginning comes differently: “After us, not out of us” (*WL* 165). Significantly, Birkin’s earlier endorsement with the shifting masks of identity in his response to the African statue – tantamount to a dismissal of the artist and his or her stable selfhood – suggests that the subject is not the central factor upon which the artistic work relies.

The work of creation then becomes inextricably tied with dissolution, just as the novel will continually identify Gerald with the “destructive frost mystery” of the Northern peoples. The novel’s portrayal of Gerald betrays its anxiety about the possibility of annihilation – an idea closely tied to Kristeva’s conception of the abject void – even as its male protagonist Birkin seems to champion the end of humanity as the next step in the creation of something new. The “Industrial Magnate,” Gerald initially embraces destruction as an ultimate good, as he breaks

down the “Matter” of the earth that he mines for coal. Still, despite his innovations, his reduction of costs, his replacement of human miners with more efficient machinery, he lives in fear of being himself destroyed by his own mechanical improvements: “The whole system was now so perfect that Gerald was hardly necessary any more” (*WL* 224).

Further, whereas Birkin is rather comfortable with his intrinsic changeableness – irritating as it is to Hermione and, at times, even to Ursula – Gerald is afraid of “not knowing what he [is]” (*WL* 224). Significantly, Lawrence’s language later in this passage mirrors Kristeva’s use of the identical term “mask,” which she employs in *In the Beginning Was Love* to describe the purpose of analysis: to allow a space of play for the analysand to experience multiple roles and identities. Birkin is able to do this, continually destroying old identities and picking up new ones, just as the novel’s author does. Gerald, conversely, destroys but has at the same time an abject fear of the abyss that he fears is himself:

[...] he went to the mirror and looked long and closely at his own face, at his own eyes, seeking for something. He was afraid, in mortal dry fear, but he knew not what of. He looked at his own face. There it was, shapely and healthy and the same as ever, yet somehow, it was not real, it was a mask. He dared not touch it, for fear it should prove to be only a composition mask. His eyes were blue and keen as ever, and as firm in their sockets. Yet he was not sure that they were not blue false bubbles that would burst in a moment and leave clear annihilation. [...] He was afraid that one day he would break down and be a purely meaningless bubble lapping round a darkness. (*WL* 224-225)

His fears are not unfounded, moreover, because in Kristevan terms, his face *is* a mask, his identity merely a tenuous, provisional thing. He fears the destruction of his stable selfhood – a

state which is always an illusion – while his cohort Birkin is able to embrace the vicissitudes of identity with a playfulness that engages with the abject and reveals its nourishing qualities.

There is a disintegrative tendency inherent in the work of Connie Chatterley's old friend Duncan Forbes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as well, which resembles Gerald's anxious destructiveness and the art-for-art's-sake aesthetics of Gudrun Brangwen and her lover Loerke at the conclusion of *Women in Love*. After Connie and Hilda discuss with Mellors their plan to attribute Connie's infidelity to a fictional tryst with Duncan instead of the actual affair with Mellors, at the former man's request, the four meet at Forbes's studio in order to discuss the possibility with him. Duncan Forbes creates art that is "all tubes and valves and spirals and strange colours, ultra modern, yet with a certain power, even a certain purity of form and tone: only Mellors thought it cruel and repellent" (*LCL* 310). It is significant that most of Mellors's objections to and prescriptions about Duncan's art are put in the Kristevan language of abjection, though once again, the crux of successful artisanship lies in the ability of the artist to negotiate the abject without either repressing or succumbing to it.

Mellors's feelings of repulsion against the artist's work occur precisely because he believes the work "murders all the bowels of compassion in a man" and moreover murders Mellors himself, as he tells Hilda after she mocks his disgust (*LCL* 311). Still, Mellors is reluctant at first to voice his opinion because he realizes that "Duncan was almost insane on the point of his art; it was a personal cult, a personal religion with him" (*LCL* 310) – in other words, it is a fetish, just as Gudrun's art is for her. Duncan's latent fear of the terrible bodily associations conjured by his own creation – its "tubes [...] and spirals" echoing the loops and twists of the intestinal tract – manifests in the violent anger he immediately directs towards Mellors. The gamekeeper later observes privately and insightfully to Connie that, should she

pose for Duncan as he has requested, “he’ll only shit on you on canvas” (*LCL* 312). This vulgar but accurate way of framing Duncan’s treatment of Connie uncannily anticipates what Judith Butler has argued in *Gender Trouble*:

The boundary between inner and outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer, this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit.

(Butler 170)

Such a conception of identity is only temporary, however, as D. Diane Davis points out when she summarizes Butler’s argument: “this ‘process’ of expulsion and repulsion is not absolute; it cannot finally produce stable subjects because it cannot extinguish the remainder, the excess that it abjectifies” (Davis 39). Duncan will always be brought up short by the “passionate evil that is in [him],” that which “makes us secret and rotten” (*CL* 2 315). The threat is from within, not without, as he has implied through his displacement of this abjection onto his artistic subjects.

While Connie does, in the end, agree to Duncan’s demand that she sit for him, she realizes that he cannot ultimately hurt her, even by fouling her as his artistic subject: “He can make as many empty tubes and corrugations out of me as he likes. It’s his funeral” (*LCL* 312). Apparently, Duncan seeks to remake Connie into a network of intestines, the carriers of human excrement and conduits of abjection. However, her refusal of this abject role suggests that the true crisis is within the artist himself, and that projecting abjection onto another in order to repress it will likely have disastrous consequences for his art, as becomes obvious in her evocation of his funeral and thus his death. It seems clear that Duncan’s work has no capacity for being categorized in Kristevan terms as “revolutionary art.” Rather, it reduces the frightening but

also rich and transformative power of the abject to an empty pattern of geometric shapes, much as Gudrun's work reduces the powerful potential of art to a collection of diminutive animal sculptures.

In contrast, Mellors seems to grasp fully art and artisanship's faculty for expressing abjection. In the closing paragraphs of the novel, in his letter to Connie, Mellors opines on the societal ills that conspire to separate the two of them, blaming the deadness caused by an over-industrialized, materialistic, and avaricious Britain. His prescriptions for how to cure these problems actually echo the new religion of Don Ramón, albeit in a less violent incarnation: "If only [people] were educated to live instead of earn and spend, they could manage very happily on twenty-five shillings. [...] They ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances, and carve the stools they sit on, and embroider their own emblems" (*LCL* 326). Once again, the artisanship of these activities, for Mellors, puts them closer to a revolutionary kind of art that is more of the body, less intellectualized and thus more in tune with the semiotic. To be sure, Mellors's more utopian view of the role of artisanship remains at odds with Don Ramón's version, which is only a thin covering for the grisly violence that the return of the ancient religion of Quetzalcoatl brings with it.

Yet even in the practice of artisanship we can find the other extreme – the impotent artist – embodied by multiple Lawrentian characters, including Ursula Brangwen's father in *The Rainbow*, who, in his middle age, after years of empty, mindless employment as a draughtsman, turns back to the physicality of artisan work in order "to carve things that were utterances of himself" (*R* 355). He is initially hopeful that he can recapture the "knowledge of beauty in the plain labours" that he understood as a youth, restoring the woodwork of the Cossethay church organ (*R* 355). However, unable to "quite hitch on," "[w]avering," "uncertain, confused," and

“[w]ith a little ash in his mouth,” in the end, he resorts to imitative work, copying “classic stuff” and moving restlessly from medium to medium (*R* 355), beginning with wood-carving and moving on to clay modeling, watercolor painting, and metalwork and jewelry-making. Here Birkin’s later pronouncements regarding identity in *Women in Love* are foreshadowed by Brangwen’s stated wish for his art: “to carve things that were utterances of himself,” and to find “a new strength in his sense of reality” (*R* 355), which would come from the visceral experience of handling the physical materials themselves. Like Birkin, he faces the possibility of meaninglessness and of beginning “not-to-be,” yet they diverge in that Brangwen ultimately backs away from the fearful prospect. This decision to retreat is reflected in the effect of his paintings, in which “his church tower stood up, really stood and asserted its standing, but was ashamed of its own lack of meaning” (*R* 356). A suggestion of both literal and aesthetic impotence emerges here, in the symbolic evocation of the phallus as both the symbol of masculine power and virility and, in the Lacanian sense, the original signifier of desire. Brangwen’s steeple tower, then, is empty of signification and does not give him success in constituting himself as a subject.

Ursula, on the other hand, seems to find artistic potential in language. During the death of her “old self” after her affair with Winifred Inger, she seems to achieve a kind of freedom and new creation following destruction – albeit one that carries with it the cost of heartbreak and momentary confusion. Instead of staying in the moment of mourning, “remembering a dead self [...] the young loving self she mourned for” (*R* 357), she turns to the memory of her unfinished affair with Anton Skrebensky. Resurrecting his memory, she begins to believe that “through him, in him, she might return to her old self, which she was before she had loved Winifred,” even as she realizes that this former self “had scarcely existed, it was the creature of her imagination” (*R*

356, 357). The affair with Skrebensky recommences only after Ursula's extended stints as both a teacher and a college student, and in both worlds she likewise finds none of the creative impulse and organic aesthetics that she has naïvely come to expect from life and learning. Instead, she discovers in education the same kind of mechanistic, inorganic and abject industrialism that repulsed her so thoroughly in her uncle and Winifred Inger, and that drives her to throw the two together. The pregnancy scare at the end of the novel – and her relief when it turns out to be a false positive – reveals that it is not physical *procreation* that she seeks, but rather an artistic or organic sense of original *creation*, embodied by the rainbow itself, “the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven” (*R* 496). Ursula herself represents this possibility of renewal, which Lawrence suggests, at least at this point in his career, will come from the feminine consciousness.

“At the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing”⁶¹

The idea that truth is a “living fabric” is yet another connection binding together Kristeva's and Lawrence's aesthetics. For both, the ideas of flux, fluidity, and movement, and the consistency of a very *lack* of consistency become the necessary ingredients for a revolutionary form of art. In “Art and Morality,” Lawrence presents his vision of the artist's task: modeling for humankind how to “maintain [itself] in true relationship to [its] contiguous universe” (“Art and Morality” 167). The universe itself does not stay still but rather “is like Father Ocean, a stream of all things slowly moving. [...] And since we move and move forever, in no discernible direction, there is no centre to the movement, as far as we can see. To us, the centre shifts at every moment. [...] Allons! there is no road before us!” (“Art and

⁶¹ (*SL* 420)

Morality” 167).

We can see the novel as a symbolic, textual version of this dynamic flux in the individual, in the sense that it is composed of many diverse parts, all growing in different directions, like Lawrence’s metaphor of the individual as a tree in “Why the Novel Matters.” He enjoys the revolutionary qualities of the novel precisely because they shatter this notion of the closed, completed self:

Now I absolutely deny that I am a soul, or a body, or a mind, or an intelligence, or a brain, or a nervous system, or a bunch of glands, or any of the rest of these bits of me. I am a man, and alive. [...] For this reason I am a novelist. And being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog. [...] I do hope you begin to get my idea, why the novel is supremely important, as a tremulation on the ether. [...] I very much like all these bits of me to be set trembling with life and the wisdom of life. (“Why the Novel Matters” 195-96)

Still, though Lawrence periodically advocates a preservation of individual “parts,” he is asserting a certain kind of “wholeness,” though it is much more akin to Kristeva’s notion of the subject-in-process than it is to the conventional idea of a unified, stable identity:

I do ask that the whole of me shall tremble in its wholeness, some time or other. And this, of course, must happen in me, living. [...] it can only happen when a whole novel communicates itself to me. [...] Which means that in [the novel’s] wholeness [it] affect[s] the whole man alive, which is the man himself, beyond any part of him. [It] set[s] the whole tree trembling with a new access of life, [it

does] not just stimulate growth in one direction. (“Why the Novel Matters” 196)
 For Lawrence, only in this genre does it become clear that “[a]ll things flow and change, and even change is not absolute” (“Why the Novel Matters” 196).

His ultimate view of art rests in an assertion that it somehow evokes the dynamic forces at work both specifically in the individual and generally in the universe:

Each thing, living or unloving, streams in its own odd, intertwining flux, and nothing, not even man nor the God of man, nor anything that man has thought or felt or known, is fixed or abiding. All moves. And nothing is true, or good, or right, except in its own living relatedness to its own circumambient universe; to the things that are in the stream with it.

Design, in art, is a recognition of the relation between various things, various elements in the creative flux. (“Art and Morality” 167)

Or, as he more succinctly puts it in “Morality and the Novel,” the “business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment” (171). Lawrence’s novels, and the often self-contradictory characters within them, exemplify Julia Kristeva’s contention that the novel can provide a space for rupture. Alluding to the work of Bakhtin, she points out the ways in which this genre in particular can disrupt the symbolic and open a space for the semiotic to bubble up through apparently conventional utterances; in fact, she asserts that the “novel is privileged terrain for such an exploration and its communication to the greatest number” (*IR* 5). It is only thus that literature alone can do the work that both Kristeva and Lawrence desire for it to do: as Lawrence puts it, “[getting] your bodies back, men and women” (“Men Must Work and Women As Well” 637), and as Kristeva phrases its task, “revalorizing the sensory experience, the antidote to technical hair-splitting” (*IR* 5).

Certainly, many critics have felt obligated to consider the ethics of a model in which one must destroy in order to create – particularly in view of such examples as the clearly troubling politics and aesthetics of a novel like *The Plumed Serpent*. Yet again, Kristeva's recent exploration of the process of revolt in *Intimate Revolt* sheds more light on what opposition can mean for social ethics, particularly in her aforementioned exhortation about the importance of self-questioning. In terms of discourse, at least, we might see these same possibilities for continual self-revision in Lawrence's work, especially in *Women in Love*. Levenson says of the novel that:

The difficulty in situating Ursula coincides with our difficulty in following the argumentative rhythm of the book as a whole, a rhythm of reversal reversed, the act of opposition itself opposed. This pattern repeats on a broad scale what the Lawrentian paragraph so often achieves in microcosm, a play of posits and oppositions incompatible with continuous development, a sequence that affirms a belief, invokes a value, expresses a desire; then cancels the affirmation, the invocation, the expression; and then cancels the cancellation without restoring the original positive terms. (*Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* 154)

Such a description might lend itself to a more negative impression of Lawrence's project, yet in this way he falls completely into line with what Kristeva hopes will be the future of revolt: a continuous questioning that does not become fixed in its original opposition, but continues questioning and never returns to its original terms.

In almost identical language, Lawrence argues in a radical declaration:

We should ask for no absolutes, or absolute. Once and for all and for ever, let us have done with the ugly imperialism of any absolute. There is no absolute good,

there is nothing absolutely right. All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute. The whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another” (“Why the Novel Matters” 191)

It is only in this slippage that Lawrence can find the “integrity” he maintains despite (and perhaps even because of) these constant alterations. Indeed, this Lawrentian (and Kristevan) version of integrity can be seen clearly in the last few sentences of the polemical, contentious, and often self-contradictory *Fantasia of the Unconscious* itself, when Lawrence concludes disgustedly of modern society:

Better passion and death than any more of these ‘isms.’ No more of the old purpose done up in aspic. Better passion and death.

But still – we might live, mightn’t we?

For heaven’s sake answer plainly ‘No,’ if you feel like it. No good temporizing. (195)

Even here, he is asking for a worthy opponent, someone to challenge him out of his inertia and into a changed version of himself. In this vacillation, he exemplifies precisely Kristeva’s subject-in-process. Moreover, it is the same dynamic identified by many Lawrentian scholars, among them Levenson, who agrees with Nixon’s characterization of Lawrence: ironically, the “integrity of the individual [lies in the fact] that its “wholeness can only be generated through division, disunity or partition” (*Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* 156).

At the same time, there is a discernable sense of ethics even in Lawrence’s apparently chaotic model, which might have an analogy in one section of Kristeva’s biography of Melanie Klein, as she describes the analytical and theoretical moves of her subject. In her subchapter “Cultural Acts of Sublimation: Art and Literature,” she cites an example in which Klein proves

her contention that “artistic creation [is] more than a diagnostic tool. The work of art can also serve as an initial—and perhaps even an optimal—way of caring for other people” (*MK* 187). She describes a case from in which a woman named Ruth Kjär, who is an interior designer and a melancholic depressive, in the end finds healing and reparation of the “emptiness” she feels at the center of herself through creating her own “masterly” paintings, to the surprise of her family (*MK* 187). Kristeva narrates Klein’s delight in the ways in which “[f]rom this perspective the work of art provides a way to re-create the harmony of the inner world and to maintain tolerable relations with the outside, if not to experience love with other people [...] despite the enduring conflicts that stem from the upheavals of childhood” (*MK* 188). Such a description would seem to ally Kristeva with Klein in terms of her hopes for the healing power of artistic production for the melancholic.

On the contrary, Kristeva seems to reveal more of herself here than Klein, as in her skepticism she points to the “naïveté of Klein the essayist [...] juxtaposed with the perseverance of Klein the theorist” (*MK* 188). In the end, Kristeva finds Klein’s attempts at literary criticism mixed with her own psychoanalytic ideas interesting and delightful but perhaps too optimistic, as she counters more realistically that “[t]he reader of Klein is still hungry: the mechanism of reparation certainly does not exhaust the creative process,” and in fact, the “reparation process [...] is wholly dependent on the experience of loss” (*MK* 188). Kristeva ends the chapter in sympathy and admiration for Klein’s motives, however, as she concedes that, though Klein perhaps saw in her analysands only the hopeful narrative of reparation that she wished to see, she nevertheless “sought to preserve her young patients’ capacity to sublimate-symbolize” (*MK* 191). Who wouldn’t, she asks, behave the same way, when “art and literature effect a dynamic that is comparable to the ordeals of psychic survival” (*MK* 191)? She adds, “Along the way, literature

benefited from being in the spotlight, though it also jealously retained its enigmas” (MK 191). Most interestingly, Kristeva points to the ways in which Klein was herself “a creator as well, with her own projective identifications with her patients” (MK 191). Though Kristeva does endorse the attention that Klein pays to her patients’ artistic creations and allegiances, she appears to be less convinced that they represent a unilaterally hopeful prognosis, particularly for the kind of melancholic she describes in *Black Sun*.

We can see the melancholic’s rejection of signification in Lawrence’s Brangwen women, as well. Anna Brangwen, unlike her daughter Ursula, has a mistrust of verbal expression which, even in her teenage years, results in the subversion of language in favor of pure art or semiotic. In *The Rainbow* in particular, this tendency becomes clear in her attitude toward religion. In the novel the church exists as a space devoted to far more than sacred contemplation; beyond that, it becomes associated with artistic aspiration, as well as courtship ritual. When Anna’s father observes her profound antipathy towards the transformation of divine art into words, we can see this inclination against verbalization – a characteristic that will later appear in her daughter Ursula, as well:

Nevertheless Brangwen was uneasy about the girl, the whole house continued to be disturbed. She had a pathetic, baffled appeal. She was hostile to her parents, even whilst she lived entirely within them, within their spell.

Many ways she tried, of escape. She became an assiduous church-goer. But the *language* meant nothing to her: it seemed false. She hated to hear things expressed, put into words. Whilst the religious feelings were inside her they were passionately moving. In the mouth of the clergyman, they were false, indecent. She tried to read. But again the tedium and the sense of the *falsity of the spoken word* put her off. She went to stay with

girl friends. At first she thought it splendid. But then the inner boredom came on, it seemed to her all *nothingness*. (R 106, emphasis added)

In her mother's traumas are the seeds of Ursula's own struggles with art and the symbolic, and also clues as to why Gudrun fails as an artist.

The "nothingness" that Anna senses is what ultimately cannot be articulated. It is the semiotic, but in Anna Brangwen's case other life events stifle this process. Before she has the chance to learn to access the semiotic (represented by the religious mysticism and emotion she feels) through language, she decides to devote herself to her maternal role, repudiating this symbolic mode of expression. Ursula, conversely, has had a long apprenticeship in accessing the semiotic through the symbolic mode of language by the time she marries Birkin, thanks to their continual verbal wrangling. This younger couple goes beyond what Ursula's parents have accomplished in their own psychic development, and they hash out their individuation together, through a continually evolving sense of self that they forge through opposition and negation.

Specifically, Birkin dramatizes the subject-in-process, as Kristeva describes the artist in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, where she associates this rejection or negation with Freud's "death drive" or, in her own parlance, "jouissance" (204). Birkin shows this tendency towards negation most obviously in the final line of *Women in Love*, where, instead of telling Ursula that he does, despite her prohibitions, believe in the possibility of intimate relationships between himself and both a woman and a man, he answers her denial of this prospect, "I don't believe that" (WL 473). It seems significant to Freud's citation of the death drive, as well, that Birkin and Ursula have only recently had a similar conversation over the dead body of Gerald. Birkin's very understanding of the aesthetic and creative power of the universe is colored by negation, as well. After his horror at viewing Gerald's corpse, he turns away with a broken heart and resolves,

“Whatever the mystery which has brought forth man and the universe, it is a non-human mystery, it has its own great ends, man is not the criterion. Best leave it all to the vast, creative, non-human mystery” (*WL* 469). His characterization of the universal creative impulse as “non-human” is his own refusal of the unified, eternal Self, and his embracing of the subject-in-process. He says, in markedly Kristevan terms, “Best strive with oneself only, not with the universe” (*WL* 469). The self itself cannot be known, yet it is the only thing we have, and the only means by which we can know or create at all.

In this way, he resembles Paul Morel, particularly in the scene in which he and Miriam view some of his past artwork. Kristeva’s ideas speak to the dynamics in this scene, explaining that “[t]he subject of this experience-in-process is an excess: never one, always already divided by what Sollers calls a ‘double causality,’ simultaneously ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ the subject, divided in such a way that the subjective ‘unity’ in question is expended, expending, irreducible to knowledge” (*RIPL* 204). As they inspect Paul’s most recent sketches, he gains a sense of the progression of his own identity through his drawings. At first, he says dismissively of them, “There’s nothing new in it [...] and nothing very interesting,” yet when he considers them more closely, he remarks with surprise, “H’m! [...] I’d forgotten that. It’s not bad, is it?” (*SL* 415).

The novel finally justifies his rejection of Miriam through her telling response that, though the drawing in question is “[n]ot at all bad,” she “[doesn’t] quite understand it” (*SL* 415). There is no curiosity in Miriam’s admission of non-comprehension, only a turning away to other personal effects that will give her clues to how to reconnect romantically with him. In fact, her only interest in his art is as a means “to rediscover him, his position, what he [is] now” (*SL* 414). She is stuck in the romantic realm of merging and has not moved beyond, to a conception of art’s capacity to challenge the symbolic order by turning signification against itself. In this way she is

unlike Clara, who from the beginning of her affair with Paul “love[s] his artist’s paraphernalia” (SL 321), though apparently more than she loves Paul himself. Miriam has, for most of the novel, only been interested in his art insofar as it presents her with him, “an endless psychological account” (SL 415). Thus, the childhood lovers part at the end of the novel, with Paul turning “towards the faintly humming, glowing town” (SL 420).

In this scene with Miriam, as Paul considers his work with a more objective perspective, he begins to see what he has not seemed to before. In the past, he has focused almost entirely practically on making the paintings lucrative, “gradually making it possible to earn a livelihood by his art” (SL 301). At this point in his life, “the applied arts [interest] him very much” (SL 301), but he is less concerned with making his art revolutionary. Only as he finds heartbreak, in the losses of Clara, Miriam, and especially his mother at the end of the novel, does he turn to the public realm and to his art’s place in the world at large. Here at the end of the novel, he is stripped to his essence, which, though “infinitesimal,” is nevertheless “something [...] at the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing” (SL 420).

In this way, he epitomizes Kristeva’s theory about the origins of literature and art. At the beginning of *Tales of Love*, she asserts that all literature is essentially composed of love stories, but also that love can only be spoken about *after* it has occurred, and never in the midst of its passion. Reflecting nostalgically upon her own memories of love and her own ultimate inability to verbalize these recollections, she concludes, “The language of love is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be most straightforward; it is a flight of metaphors—it is literature” (TL 1). Even the emblem of love’s passion, “the love letter, that innocently perverse attempt to subdue or revive the same, is too much engulfed in the immediate fire and speaks only of ‘me’ and ‘you’ or even a ‘we’ resulting from the alchemy of

identifications, but not of what is really at stake *between*” (TL 3). This thing that exists between two lovers is the source of her question, “What is love?”

The place of the artist, then, is not only to face the abject, but also to speak of love through conjuring the semiotic, that original locus of union and mother love. As it does for Paul Morel, love for Kristeva represents “a risk of death, a chance of life” (TL 2), a threat that, simultaneously, is also the key to any sense of identity. In “the rapture of love” he experiences with both Miriam and Clara, Paul witnesses what Kristeva describes as “the limits of one’s own identity vanish[ing], at the same time that the precision of reference and meaning becomes blurred in love’s discourse” (TL 2). One reason why he must finally give up even his love with Miriam lies in his inability to pull free from love’s “[v]ertigo of identity, vertigo of words [...] that irremediable cataclysm, of which one speaks only after the fact” (TL 3), and into his own separate sense of identity. Only through refusing Miriam’s love is he able to speak, to express, and to create art that brings his passion into the symbolic realm of language.

The idea that language and love are inextricable and inexplicable is not a new one for Lawrence scholars – though none has framed this idea in specifically Kristevan terms. Michael Bell’s study, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being*, emphasizes the centrality of language to love, exploring the connection between affection and expression. He points out the excessive amounts of “talk” in Lawrence’s most infamous novel, in the amusingly named section, “Lady Luvverly’s Chatter” (209). Here Bell describes the way in which “the ‘talk’ theme [...] comes more pointedly to frame the central relationship as well as to pervade it. The opening chapters focus on talk, on talk about sex, and on talk about talk” (Bell 211-212). Bell shows how the gossip and scandal of the final chapters continues this theme, and I would argue that the letter

from Mellors at the conclusion – a disembodied “voice” – brings the theme full circle.⁶²

Kristeva is similarly concerned about the *speaking* of love afterwards, and she concedes that, “as bracing as it might be, love never dwells in us without burning us. To speak about it, even after the fact, is probably possible only on the basis of that burning” (TL 4). She goes further: “In short, love is an affliction, and by the same token it is a word or a letter” (TL 6).

Alluding to the same dynamic, Lydia Blanchard discusses *Lady Chatterley* and its obsession with language, citing Clifford’s anger, which is centered on his contention that Connie has broken her *word* to him, as well as the “John Thomas” and “Lady Jane” passages where the lovers give individual voices to their own sexual anatomy, and finally, Oliver’s letter at the end of the novel, where he laments that there are “so many words because I can’t touch you” (LCL 328).

Blanchard argues, much as Kristeva does about love and language, that:

⁶² Lydia Blanchard’s reading of Lawrence’s project to demystify “dirty” words is even more complex. Pointing out Foucault’s citation of *A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in his well-known work, *The History of Sexuality*, she goes on to argue:

For Foucault, Lawrence is an example, perhaps the paradigmatic example, of those who have misunderstood the nature of discourse, of those who have misunderstood the relationship between the language in which we talk about sex and the repression of sexuality. [...] By bringing sexuality into the clear light of language, Foucault argues, we have succeeded only in controlling and thus repressing it. [...] Repression created our modern understanding of sexuality, and without repression sexuality loses rather than gains power. (Blanchard, “The Language of Sexuality” 18)

In other words, by suggesting that Lawrence *only* set out to make dirty words less taboo, even well-intentioned critics who laud the novel’s liberating qualities are at the same time fixing sexual discourse far more effectively than if they had avoided the mention of “unpleasant” sexual or anatomical words altogether. Blanchard, in the end, contends that Lawrence had a much more sophisticated understanding of the relationships among sexuality, power, and discourse than most scholars and readers give him credit for.

In any case, the dilemma of language plagues not just Lawrence but his critics, as well, as John Worthen notes in his biography of the author, *D. H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider*. In one footnote, he describes the problem of language in the novels, particularly with regard to sexual relations, explaining his own use of terminology:

‘To have sexual intercourse’ is long-winded and legalistic; ‘to copulate’ is clinical and disapproving; ‘to make love’ in a fully sexual sense is a relatively recent euphemism (c. 1950); ‘to go to bed with’ and ‘to sleep with’ are euphemisms inappropriate for many situations, including sex outdoors, and are also fairly recent (c. 1945). ‘To fuck’ is in many ways preferable to the euphemisms, and is the word Mellors uses in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Unfortunately, it draws self-conscious attention to itself. Lawrence is cited in *OED2* as by far the earliest person – in 1929 – to use ‘to have sex’ in print (‘Sex and Trust’, *Poems* 466, perhaps as an abbreviation of Olive Shreiner’s ‘to have sex relations’ from 1911). As the phrase has at least the merit of directness, I have (rather reluctantly) used it at times. (75)

[...] Lawrence was so effectively to use image and symbol himself in his own greatest novels; re-creating in words the act of love itself, the great attempt of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; finally recognizing that such re-creation is inadequate, for if Lady Chatterley and Mellors were together, the ink could stay in the bottle [...] It is to a different system of signs, to the forked flame, to a world in which there is no need for a mediating language that Mellors and Lady Chatterley move, and it is small wonder that Lawrence's letters and discursive prose during this period also show much interest in the story of Adam and Eve, before the fall, in a time before consciousness and language. (Blanchard 31)

She concludes by asserting that "the very brilliance of the novel" lies in its "study of the tension between these two ideas, between the need to rescue sexuality from secrecy, to bring it into discourse, and the simultaneous recognition that the re-creation of sexuality in language must always, at the same time, resist language" (Blanchard 31, 33).

And Lawrence too seemed to feel this tension in *Lady Chatterley*, using these shocking words in the hope of representing sexuality with something like honesty, yet recognizing the likelihood of his being misunderstood by the reading public, as he had been with the publication of *The Rainbow*. He wrote to Juliette Huxley in 1928 of his most infamous novel that it was "being printed by a little printer, in Florence, in an old little shop where nobody understands a word of English, not even those basic foundation-words like fuck and cunt and shit" (CL 7 344). He continues flippantly, yet with odd appropriateness, "Ah, teach them to your mother, it's never too late to learn. –" (CL 7 344).

This preoccupation with language is inextricably tied to subjectivity itself. John Lechte points out Kristeva's assertion that "literature and all forms of artistic endeavour fundamentally

interpenetrate” (Lechte 53). Instead of arguing that unified selfhood is a prerequisite for the creation of an artistic work, for Kristeva, “subjectivity may be seen to be formed in and through art. Instead of choosing to produce this or that particular work as a result of what one is, ‘the work of art, the production, the practice in which [the artist] is engaged extends beyond, and reshapes subjectivity’” (Lechte 53). By way of outlining more fully and lucidly Kristeva’s precise position on the issue of artistic production and subjectivity, Lechte – and I – quote her full answer to the question:

It’s necessary to see how all great works of art – one thinks of Mallarmé, of Joyce, of Artaud, to mention only literature – are, to be brief, masterful sublimations of those crises of subjectivity which are known, in another connection, as psychotic crises. This has nothing to do with the freedom of expression of some vague kind of subjectivity which would have been there beforehand. It is, very simply, through the work and the play of signs, a crisis of subjectivity which is the basis for all creation, one which takes as its very precondition the possibility of survival. I would even say that signs produce a body [...] (Kristeva, qtd. in Lechte 53)

Here we think again of Paul’s crisis at the end of *Sons and Lovers*, as he struggles with an inchoate identity that feels like a void, but that he feels convinced is *something*: “himself, infinitesimal, at the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing” (*SL* 420).

Given that Kristeva argues that the self only emerges from art, and is not the precondition for producing the art in the first place, Paul Morel’s greatest irritation with Miriam in *Sons and Lovers* becomes an intriguing statement on his momentary lack of stable identity and his incomprehension as to how to find such a sense of self: “He felt again her interest in his work. Or

was it for himself? Why was she always most interested in him as he appeared in his work?” (*SL* 415). The simple answer to Paul’s question is that, whether consciously or not, Miriam is astute enough to realize that his very identity arises from his art, instead of his art coming from some “true” self. Perhaps here he is suggesting, however, that Miriam is attempting to get in touch with this “true” self of Paul through his sketches, instead of accepting them as the productions of a provisional, emerging, and ever-metamorphosing personality.

On the other hand, Ursula’s optimistic vision of a new, reborn mankind, symbolized by the biblical image of the rainbow, involves her own rejection of a narrowly escaped identity bound up in marriage, social convention, and the modern world of industry and commerce. Throughout the concluding pages of *The Rainbow*, and well into *Women in Love*, Ursula is repeatedly described as “coming into being” like an unseen, nearly invisible seed in the dark. As she grows into the artistic world of Birkin (and less so, of Gerald and Gudrun), she gains a provisional self and becomes a subject-in-process.

We can turn back to the unsuccessful artist, Gudrun, to see why she is not an appropriate model of the Kristevan artist. Because she, along with her companion Loerke, “fetishistically privileges the symbolic, by substituting [it] for reality” (Lechte 150), they are therefore both complicit in the repressiveness of the symbolic. Though their repeated mantra of “art for art’s sake” seems on the surface a revolutionary idea that would subvert the dominant symbolic order, they have strayed into the realm of psychosis by not considering the equilibrium that must be maintained between symbolic and semiotic. To only allow the former means unified, organized, and logical, yet restrictive order. To only emphasize the latter spells insanity, void, and meaninglessness. For the artists sanctioned by Lawrence, and for the novelist himself, the power of literature lies in its ability to speak what cannot be articulated, through gaps, silences, water,

laughter, music, and poetic, non-rational language. Not coincidentally, this is the same irrational, borderline-psychotic response elicited in the four lovers in *Women in Love*'s chapter "Continental," when, hearing Loerke perform his recitation in an unfamiliar dialect, the English guests are "forced to laugh [...] involuntarily" (*WL* 395), with no knowledge of what the man is actually saying. Birkin and Ursula recover from the experience, but it represents the beginning of the abject and sadistic relationship between Gudrun and Loerke.

Kristeva's work explains with finality why Gudrun does not succeed: she tries to access identity as *the origin* of the artwork, perceiving it as an essential quality that the artwork merely expresses or reveals. In sketching young Winifred Crich's Pekingese dog Looloo with her, Gudrun tells her, "Let us draw Looloo [...] and see if we can get his Looliness, shall we?" (*WL* 327). She is joking with the child, certainly, yet the addition of the suffix "-ness" at the end of the word "Looloo" suggests as much an essential quality about the dog that makes it "Looloo" as it does the syntactic formulation "His Highness," as it is used in royal address. Her certainty that selfhood – even the selfhood of an animal – is an accessible substance or entity exposes her own lack of understanding of the role of art in communicating and constituting the self, as well as interacting with abject fear and horror. Leavis's characterization of Gudrun is even more succinct: "For Gudrun, 'art,' we have been made to recognize in full explicitness, is a very different thing from 'art' for the creator of *Women in Love*" (210).

By contrast, characters like Birkin and Ursula seem fully to grasp this notion of real art, and show it through their constant flux, thereby illustrating the phrase Leavis uses to describe the purpose of the competing voices in *Women in Love*: "self-testing" (*DHL: Novelist* 31). Here we might return to Levenson's characterization of Lawrence's "play of posits and oppositions," which are always operating without returning to the "original positive terms" (154). David

Trotter phrases it even more colorfully: “On several occasions, Lawrence revised simply in order to say one last thing, and then another last thing, and then another, about the mysterious supplement to marriage which has become Birkin’s primary obsession” (269). We can see the implications of our failure to do so in Bell’s criticism of some studies of *Lady Chatterley*: though he commends them for their recognition of the author’s “concern with language in this last novel,” he contends also that “the accounts offered to date still largely take the work in isolation while seeing it as representing a general Lawrencean stance towards language. [...] this is by no means wrong, but a crucial aspect is missed if the question of language in this novel is not seen as part of the overall evolution of his novelistic *œuvre*” (209). For an example, we might return to *Women in Love* and look at its use of the term “inhuman.” The word is initially used in a collection of uneasy contexts and revolting prospects: Hermione’s deathly spirituality, Gerald’s mechanistic ambitions, and the horrifying, choking death of Mr. Crich. However, midway through the novel the term takes on an opposite meaning, as it is used to characterize the very positive connection between Ursula and Birkin: “It was the daughters of men coming back to the sons of God, the strange inhuman sons of God who are in the beginning” (*WL* 305). This continual reversal and re-reversal that readers observe in Lawrence’s language is the very embodiment of the “self-testing” endured by Kristeva’s *sujet en procès*, a subject who is both “in process” and “on trial.”

Understandably, such masking and playacting have real, serious consequences, particularly as they concern identity: they are, for instance, a way of dealing with the fear of one’s mortality. Kristeva describes the “writer [as] a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs” (*PH* 38). Lawrence narrates in his own parlance in “Christs in the Tirol” (1912): “And so [the artisans] try

to get used to the idea of death and suffering to rid themselves of some of the fear thereof. And all tragic art is part of the same attempt” (609). Lawrence describes the series of crucifixes he saw in his travels in the Alps, carved by the artisans living in the mountains, and representing the physical suffering of Christ, calling these pieces “human attempts at deciphering the riddle of pain” (609). Witnessing the abject horror embodied by these carvings, Lawrence observes:

There are so many Christs carved by men who have carved to get at the meaning of their own soul’s anguish. In the Zemm valley, right in the middle of the Tirol, there are some half-dozen crucifixes by the same worker, who has whittled away in torment to see himself emerge out of the piece of timber, so that he can understand his own suffering, and see it take on itself the distinctness of an eternal thing, so that he can go on further, leaving it. (“Christs in the Tirol” 608)

For these artists, the process of creating the work is, in itself, what creates identity, generating a momentarily unified picture of who the artist is, as well as articulating symbolically, in Kristevan terms, the “universal horror” of the abject in a less threatening way that more manageably metaphorizes it.

From fear and loathing to artistic work, a handful of Lawrentian artisans exemplify this attempt to negotiate abjection through symbolic and artistic means. The work of artistic production makes it possible to understand terror and desire that cannot be spoken. Lawrence’s works dramatize Kristeva’s notions of art by suggesting, not just that we trust the tale and not the teller, but that *only* through the tale will we get even a glimpse – though it will be only provisional and momentary, marked by a continual destruction of former identities – of who the artist “is.”

This difficult task produces significant dividends, both for artist and reader, if we can

maintain this sense of identity always in flux and always imperiled by abjection. In his essay “Love,” Lawrence references a force that can only be called the abject, revealing his comprehension of the way this powerful non-object defines us:

There is that which we cannot love, because it surpasses either love or hate. There is the unknown and unknowable which propounds all creation. This we cannot love, we can only accept it as a term of our own limitation and ratification. We can only know that from the unknown profound desires enter in upon us, and that the fulfilling of these desires is the fulfilling of creation. (“Love” 12)

Finally, in an essay entitled “Life” from the same volume, he ends by verbally embracing the mystery of the abject:

Do I fear the strange approach of the creative unknown to my door? I fear it only with pain and with unspeakable joy. And do I fear the invisible dark hand of death plucking me into the darkness, gathering me blossom by blossom from the stem of my life, into the unknown of my afterwards? I fear it only in reverence and with strange satisfaction. For this is my final satisfaction, to be gathered blossom by blossom, all my life long, into the finality of the unknown which is my end. (“Life” 18)

Lawrence’s work rewards the reader who is able to venture with the author into the realm of the unknowable, with its terrifying beauty. Only here, in the rich humus provided by the abject, does the artist begin to approach the revolutionary subversion that Kristeva describes in her theories and Lawrence dramatizes through his literary works.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

“You must have patience with me and understand me when my language is not clear”
(Lawrence *CL* 2 286)

It seems to be a good sign that in the last twenty years, more and more studies of Lawrence have adopted titles containing the prefix *re-*: *Rethinking Lawrence* (1990), *Renewing the Normative D.H. Lawrence* (1992), *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-Readings* (1997), and *Reclaiming D.H. Lawrence* (2002) are only a few examples. In fact, this tendency to reexamine him has been present, though not widespread, since Lawrence’s own time period. Catherine Carswell also makes extensive use of this prefix in her 1932 narrative of Lawrence, where she reflects on future critics of his work: “Lawrence as a whole remains to be read and *re-read*. He has to create the taste for his work, and this takes time. But it is a taste that grows. Not only so: it is a taste that delicately transforms the palate and *renews* it for the *re-trial* of other tastes, ancient and modern” (xxxix, emphasis added). We should not be surprised, given all of the connections this study has explored, that Carswell’s description of reading Lawrence so accurately anticipates Kristeva’s own writing on the subject-in-process – not coincidentally, also visible in Carswell’s use of the word “trial.”

Like Carswell, I too believe that Lawrence remains to be read and re-read. In modernist studies, D. H. Lawrence has tended to represent one of two incompatible extremes: either critics cast him as an odd man out or they view him as a figure whose works are quintessential artifacts of the period. This dichotomy seems to arise out of the difficulty of determining his definitive philosophy or set of literary practices, though many of his most well known critics – including

Millet, de Beauvoir, and even his defender Leavis – have apparently done just that. Yet, what is most arresting about Lawrence – as well as frustrating, maddening, and fascinating – is his refusal to be fixed in one identity or philosophy. In this respect, Kristeva’s theory contributes to the study of modernism by suggesting a new way of thinking about Lawrence, one of its most problematic figures – a theoretical approach in which we don’t attempt to determine “what it all meant” but instead we explore what he was in the process of doing or representing at different moments in his career. It is indeed a wide continuum, stretching from the early family drama in *Sons and Lovers*, to narratives of female selfhood in *The Rainbow* and *The Lost Girl*, the political concerns in *Aaron’s Rod* and *The Plumed Serpent*, the transcendent sexuality in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and the re-envisioned Christianity in *The Man Who Died*.

Lawrence’s own incessant metamorphosis – which so closely resembles Kristeva’s idea of the *sujet en procès* – makes him the literary equivalent of the abject in his own literary era. He is the embodiment of Kristeva’s description of the more symbolic, human forms of the abject, as indeed his very inconsistencies and contradictions thwart our assumption of a coherent “identity, system, [or] order” in modernism: instead, he is that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (*PH* 4).⁶³ Throughout his career, he

⁶³ Indeed, modernism itself has been notoriously difficult to define in the fifty or so years since it began to emerge as a literary era to be studied. Peter Childs gives a full yet succinct history of the term “modernism” in his book of the same name, tracing the changes in its usage over the last several centuries:

‘Modernist’ is a comparatively old word which, in the late sixteenth century [,] named a modern person and came by the eighteenth century to denote a follower of modern ways and also a supporter of modern over ancient literature. By contrast, ‘Modernism’ was first used in the early eighteenth century simply to denote trends characteristic of modern times, while in the nineteenth century its meaning encompassed a sympathy with modern opinions, styles or expressions. In the later part of the nineteenth century, ‘Modernism’ referred to progressive trends in the Catholic Church. In literature it surfaced in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), to denote what he called a general and unwelcomed creeping industrial ‘ache of Modernism’. In criticism [...] the expression emerged but failed to gain currency with Robert Graves’ and Laura Riding’s 1927 *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. It was only in the 1960s that the term became widely used as a description of a literary phase that was both identifiable and in some sense over. (14)

In his 2009 exploration *Modernism and Theory*, editor Stephen Ross acknowledges, “Any consensus about modernism in the singular has given way to numerous and disparate understandings of modernisms in the plural, as

professed no obligation to be consistent. Indeed, he relished the changeable nature of his writing and ideas: “Whatever proceeds from me lives and dies. [...] And that is very good; if it were not so, everything would turn to cast iron. There is too much of this cast iron of permanence today” (“On Human Destiny” 209).

The iconoclastic mutability of Lawrence takes many forms. First, as Hugh Stevens points out in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, before one even begins to speak of Lawrence the modernist, “one needs to acknowledge how Victorian he is. His fiction continues a project begun by George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, and continued by Thomas Hardy: an analysis of the impact of modern technologies on provincial communities” (142). We can also see how Lawrence combines, for example, the conventional family history of *The Rainbow* with modernist narrative techniques that emphasize the complexity and indeterminacy of human psychology. He is perhaps the most visible example of the modernist debt to psychoanalysis as an underpinning to its understanding of character, motivation, and psychological realism. Further, unlike figures such as Pound and Lewis, who confined their experiments to poetry or novels, Lawrence worked in a wide array of literary genres and artistic media, including literary criticism, history, psychology, drama, poetry, travel writing, painting, and, most famously, fiction (both short and long). His politics were contentious, sometimes even against his literary contemporaries; in fact, he frequently refused to participate in politics at all, and furthermore, often inveighed against humanity in general and longed for its annihilation.

the old geographical, temporal, and material limits on what qualified as modernism have been determinedly dismantled” (1). In his preface to the second (2009) edition of *Modernisms* (first published in 1995), Peter Nicholls argues similarly: “In the thirteen years that have passed since this book first appeared, the field of Modernist Studies has seen a remarkable growth and diversification. It is commonplace now to acknowledge that Modernism is not one thing but many and that its divergent forms are profoundly determined by specificities of time and place” (viii).

Yet along with this repugnance Lawrence exhibited a deep and abiding interest in dynamically representing Life, individual identity, and the connections that exist between humans – some of the central concerns of psychoanalysis. After reading Trigant Burrow's book on the subject – *The Social Basis of Consciousness* – Lawrence wrote to the author of his own feeling of alienation from the rest of humankind: "I believe as you do – one must use words like believe – that it is our being cut off that is our ailment, and out of this ailment everything bad arises. I wish I saw a little better how you get over the cut-offness. [...] Myself, I suffer so badly from being cut-off. But what is one to do? [...] At times, one is *forced* to be essentially a hermit. I don't want to be" (CL 6 113). In his actual review of the book, Lawrence endorses Burrow's ideas, arguing against what both see as the "normalizing" goal of psychoanalysis: "Individuals rebel, and these are the neurotics, who show some sign of health" ("Review of *The Social Basis of Consciousness*" 334). To be sure, he condemns humanity's unified self-image, declaring that it "has a picture of itself, and lives accordingly. The individual likewise has a private picture of himself, which fits into the big picture. In this picture he is a little absolute, and nobody could be better than he is. He must look after his own self-interest" (335).

The problem with such a model, in Kristevan terms, is its intractability: such a coherent picture of the self is by definition illusory and narcissistic. Rather, Kristeva envisions an individual engaged in a signifying practice in which the symbolic (that which attempts to generate and articulate meaning) is periodically ruptured by the semiotic chora (that which is inexpressible or beyond representation). She describes the symbiotic relationship between semiotic and symbolic, acknowledging that the former is not an ideal space, a safe haven that amounts to a return to the comfort of the mother's body. Instead, the drives of the semiotic must be released through symbolic (that is, linguistic) means:

Caught up within this dynamic, the body is also a process. It is not a unity but a plural totality with separate members that have no identity but constitute the place where drives are applied. This dismembered body cannot fit together again, set itself in motion, or function biologically and physiologically, unless it is included within a practice that encompasses the signifying process.

Without such a practice, the body in process/on trial is disarticulated; its drives tear it up into stymied, motionless sectors and it constitutes a weighty mass. Outside the process, its only identity is inorganic, paralyzed, dead. Within the process, on the other hand, by confronting it, displacing its boundaries and laws, the subject in process/on trial discovers those boundaries and laws and makes them manifest in his practice of them. (*RPL* 101)

With regard to the artistic enactment of such a process – the use of revolutionary poetic language to articulate the inexpressible – she argues, “We can read a Mallarmé or a Joyce only by starting from the signifier and moving toward the instinctual, material, and social process the text covers” (*RPL* 101).

Kristeva goes on to say that such a revolutionary signifying process has the effect of “transform[ing] the law, boundaries, and constraints it meets” (*RPL* 101). However, it is different from a dogmatic or reactionary model of revolution because this practice:

does not stop there or hypostatize [these subversive ideas]; it passes beyond, questioning and transforming them. The subject and meaning are only phases of such a practice, which does not reject narrative, metalanguage, or theory. It adopts them but pushes them aside as the mere scaffolds of the process, exposes their productive eruption within the heterogeneous field of social practice. (*RPL* 101)

These hypotheses about the relationship between signification and the drives apply quite clearly to Lawrence and his ever-transforming ideas and writings. We might well see his sometimes radical, and sometimes troubling statements about marriage, writing, politics, and various other subjects as the “scaffolds” upon which he builds provisional ideas, immediately then questioning and discarding these concepts for new ones – and this is perhaps why he so skillfully thwarts attempts to ascertain his final meaning.

As befits his ambivalent status in modernism, it should thus not be surprising that Lawrence’s work lingers so often on abject subjects and persons, on that which imperils the coherent, unified self. This may take the form of the mother’s body, as in Lawrence’s novel *The Lost Girl*, when Alvina Houghton contemplates the flowers of Italy, shortly after she has discovered that she is pregnant: “Everywhere little grape hyacinths hung their blue bells. It was a pity they reminded her of the many-breasted Artemis, a picture of whom, or of whose statue, she had seen somewhere. Artemis with her clusters of breasts was horrible to her, now she had come south: nauseating beyond words. And the milky grape hyacinths reminded her” (*LG* 333). It seems clear that the statue of Artemis represents an exaggeration of the mother’s body, yet it is one that Alvina’s own physical self will soon resemble, if only in its ripe maternity. She turns instead to the yonic image of the “magenta anemones,” thinking that “their red-purple silkiness had something pre-world about it” (*LG* 333). Yet even the erotic body is fraught with abjection; later, as she pleads with Ciccio to come back to her after the war, her husband’s silence frightens her, and she compares him to “a corpse [...] some unnatural, doomed, unbearable presence” (*LG* 339).

Kristeva theorizes that one “may call it a border; [but] abjection is above all ambiguity” (*PH* 9). In fact, Kristeva’s assertions about Joyce’s ambiguous language in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* could easily be applied to much of Lawrence’s writing, as well:

How dazzling, unending, eternal—and so weak, so insignificant, so sickly—is the rhetoric of Joycean language. Far from preserving us from the abject, Joyce causes it to break out in what he sees as prototype of literary utterance: Molly’s monologue. [...] The abject lies, beyond the themes, and for Joyce generally, in the way one speaks; it is verbal communication, it is the Word that discloses the abject. But at the same time, the Word alone purifies from the abject [...] (*PH* 22-23)

More generally, she identifies the “‘object’ of literature” as “vertiginous and hallucinatory” and notes that literary expression is

the untiring repetition of a drive, which, propelled by an initial loss, does not cease wandering, unsated, deceived, warped, until it finds its only stable object—death. Handling that repetition, staging it, cultivating it until it releases, beyond its eternal return, its sublime destiny of being a struggle with death—is it not that which characterizes writing? And yet, dealing with death in that manner, making sport of it, is that not infamy itself? The literary narrative that utters the workings of repetition must necessarily become [...] a narrative of the infamous” (*PH* 23-24).

Indubitably, Lawrence’s narratives are of that ilk, particularly as they, like Joyce’s, open up a space for representing the abject: corpses, “aberrant” sexualities, sickness, refuse, and physical decay.

It is not only that representing these objects and entities depicts physical abjection, but also, more widely, that Lawrence's work embodies what Kristeva describes as a revolution in signification itself – so that he not only describes abjection, but is himself abjection. In the foreword to *Women in Love*, Lawrence explains his own method – much as Kristeva does Joyce's style in her aforementioned argument – in terms of his habit of reiteration, duplication, and recurrence: "In point of style, fault is often found with the continual, slightly modified repetition. The only answer is that it is natural to the author; and that every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing, frictional to-and-fro which works up to culmination" (*WL* viii). Lawrence's terminology brings us back to the introduction of this Kristevan exploration of the novels, by conflating the language of orgasm – a "pulsing, frictional to-and-fro" – with that of death, the final "culmination."

It seems clear, after reading Kristeva's account of Joyce, that we must reopen the conversation about Lawrence, particularly in terms of his relationship to these modernist contemporaries. It is relatively unproblematic to imagine, for instance, Joyce's literary development as a linear progression of method and aesthetics, from his early novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to the late work *Finnegans Wake*. Conversely, Lawrence's own candid, unrepentant attitude towards his fluctuating ideas and their contradictions is what gives so much trouble to contemporary scholars of modernism as they have attempted to categorize him – and this difficulty cannot be overstated.

Accordingly, some of the most insightful studies of Lawrence in the last few decades have investigated how his career might resonate with the often-contradictory projects and spatiotemporal orientations of modernism itself: the journey into the mind's interior but also the refusal of personal psychology; an inclination to rehabilitate an ideal past yet also a push towards

a liberating future; an emphasis on urban centers as the location of modernity yet often (as we see in much of Lawrence's work) a contradictory retreat to natural, unspoiled areas away from the city. In *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, Levenson describes Lawrence's literary representation of the modernist problem of subjectivity, suggesting that the relentless oppositions in *Women in Love* – against the community, against the other, and even against the self – help to clarify the distinction between *I* and other. Daniel Albright expands this idea of identity, arguing that in Lawrence's fiction, as in that of Woolf and Mann:

the traditional apparatus of the nineteenth-century novel is wholly subverted in order that self-expression may at last be perfected: the author pays little regard to the consistency of behavior, the idiosyncrasy, the distinctness of his characters, for he conceives his characters only as versions of himself, fractured into some fable only because the mind is dynamic and can never conceive itself in its totality (1).

These writers' inability to comprehend the totality of the personality does not necessarily indicate a limitation on their part – instead, as Kristeva suggests, perhaps any notion of a whole or coherent self is always illusory. Indeed, Albright imagines Lawrence's characters not as one-sided representations of “quantifiable traits,” but rather asserts that because the novelist “conceives personality as something elusive or tricky” his characters are difficult to understand and predict (17).

Recently, in his study *Paranoid Modernism*, David Trotter has cast the debate about identity and personality in more explicitly psychiatric terms, showing how the rise in professionalization in the early twentieth century produced writers who began to conceive of themselves as somehow special or different (and thus alienated) from other, ordinary people. For

this reason, these writers were often paranoid, deliberately separating themselves from the “mess” of “entanglement” with others (6, 10). Taking a completely opposite view, Maria DiBattista discusses the importance of the amatory relationship in her study *First Loves*, suggesting that this bond forms the basis of identity for the characters in many British novels of the period. For her, first love catalyzes the individual’s inspiration to create art.

Yet, for all their insightful exploration of Lawrence’s work, these studies seem to lack a sustained attention to the ambivalence in his writing: the alternating love and hatred, desire to fuse with another and the desire to shove away, the fascination and repulsion – and an attention to the ways in which these concerns play out even in the author himself, who changed ceaselessly throughout his career, and who valued, above all, his *lack* of a stable identity: “Me, man alive, I am a very curious assembly of incongruous parts. My yea! of today is oddly different from my yea! of yesterday. My tears of tomorrow will have nothing to do with my tears of a year ago” (“Why the Novel Matters” 196-97).

In the end, Roland Barthes’s comment on Kristeva’s theoretical work could as easily be said of Lawrence, for Barthes argues that Kristeva “always destroys the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by, the one of which we could be proud” (Barthes 1). What we finally discover in Lawrence is precisely that which terrifies his experimental, quintessentially “modern” artists, Duncan Forbes and Gudrun Brangwen: we are not imperiled by that which is outside us, but by what lies *within*. It is we ourselves who are the abject because we are both uncannily familiar and unfamiliar, “strangers to ourselves.” That Lawrence’s writing and career make explicit this impossible paradox – and further, that he *embraces* it – attests to the continued need to give a “re-trial,” in the words of Carswell, to the works of a writer who so productively complicates our pursuit of modernist studies. Indeed, in the Foreword to *Pansies*,

one of his last works, Lawrence cautions his reader against attempting to find the everlasting meaning of the poems:

Anyhow I offer a bunch of pansies, not a wreath of *immortelles*. I don't want everlasting flowers, and I don't want to offer them to anybody else. A flower passes, and that perhaps is the best of it. If we can take its transience, its breath, its maybe Mephistophelian, maybe palely ophelian face, the look it gives, the gesture of its full bloom, and the way it turns upon us to depart—that was the flower, we have had it, and no *immortelle* can give us anything in comparison.

To view Lawrence thus requires a scholarship that is just as nimble, albeit mercurial, as his thought (much as Kristeva's theory demands, as well). Lawrence concludes his foreword with a warning that is just as applicable to contemporary readers as it was to the audience of his time, noting that his works should last "merely the breadth of the moment, and one eternal moment easily contradicting the next eternal moment. Only don't nail the pansy down. You won't keep it any better if you do" (424).

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APPENDIX A
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by D. H. Lawrence

<i>APLCL</i>	<i>A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> (1929)
<i>AR</i>	<i>Aaron's Rod</i> (1922)
<i>CL</i>	Cambridge Edition of <i>The Letters and Works of D. H. Lawrence</i> (1906-30)
<i>FTU</i>	<i>Fantasia of the Unconscious</i> (1922)
<i>FWL</i>	<i>The First Women in Love</i> (1920)
<i>K</i>	<i>Kangaroo</i> (1923)
<i>LCL</i>	<i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> (1928)
<i>LG</i>	<i>The Lost Girl</i> (1920)
<i>MN</i>	<i>Mr. Noon</i> (1921)
<i>MWD</i>	<i>The Man Who Died</i> (or <i>The Escaped Cock</i>) (1929)
<i>PS</i>	<i>The Plumed Serpent</i> (1926)
<i>PO</i>	<i>Pornography and Obscenity</i> (1929)
<i>P</i>	<i>The Princess</i> (1924)
<i>PTU</i>	<i>Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious</i> (1921)
<i>Q</i>	<i>Quetzalcoatl</i> (1925)
<i>R</i>	<i>The Rainbow</i> (1915)
<i>SL</i>	<i>Sons and Lovers</i> (1913)

<i>T</i>	<i>The Trespasser</i> (1912)
<i>VG</i>	<i>The Virgin and the Gypsy</i> (1930)
<i>WL</i>	<i>Women in Love</i> (1920)
<i>WP</i>	<i>The White Peacock</i> (1911)

Works by Julia Kristeva

<i>BS</i>	<i>Black Sun</i> (1989)
<i>DL</i>	<i>Desire in Language</i> (1980)
<i>IBWL</i>	<i>In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith</i> (1987)
<i>IR</i>	<i>Intimate Revolt</i> (2002)
<i>NMS</i>	<i>New Maladies of the Soul</i> (1995)
<i>PH</i>	<i>Powers of Horror</i> (1982)
<i>RPL</i>	<i>Revolution in Poetic Language</i> (1984)
<i>RSS</i>	<i>Revolt, She Said</i> (2002)
<i>SNSR</i>	<i>The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt</i> (2001)
<i>TL</i>	<i>Tales of Love</i> (1987)