

## D.H. Lawrence's Death-Eaters in *Women in Love*

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**This paper offers a Derridian reading of D.H. Lawrence's novel *Women in Love*, with excerpts from the novel's prequel *The Rainbow*. Through Derrida's ideas of difference and the imaginary origin, I explore the relationship between female reproductive potential and representation as means to a female sexual power, which Lawrence's men attempt to destroy and subvert. By attacking realms of representation, like art, the novel's male characters seek to dominate female reproductive power to assert patriarchal visions of modernity and modernism. These violent sexual dichotomies are found in the male characters' relations to modern capitalism/colonialism and the modernist artistic project to "make it new." Their masculine worldviews are perpetuated by consuming the death of representation, but they can never destroy the feminine cycle of reproductive potential and life.**

Despite the eponymic "women" in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920), this novel explores male homosociality and men's attempts to harness female reproductive power as a tool for masculine domination. The novel's prequel, *The Rainbow* (1915), introduces the power struggle between men and women, manifest in the threat of female sexuality and reproductive potential as modern masculinity begins to emerge. In *Women in Love*, the central male characters seek to usurp female reproductive capacity to solidify the increasingly uncertain role of men in modernity. However, Lawrence's men attempt to annex female reproductive power through destructive rather than generative enterprises. This destructive impulse targets not only the female body, but also aesthetic representation, the metaphorical fruits of human reproductive efforts. Lawrence's male characters perform violence upon all kinds of representation in order to combat the reproductive dominance of the female.

In the novel, representation and reproduction function as key components of Derrida's concept of *differance*: "Differance is therefore the formation of form. But it is *on the other hand* the being-imprinted of the imprint" (Derrida 63). In order to give constructs meaning, *differance* functions within a system of signs, which provide the linguistic tools to perform a Derridian deconstruction of Lawrence's novel: representation is one version of the proliferation of signs, and reproduction is the structural origin in this chain of creation and recreation. The reproductive power inherent in women reminds Lawrence's modern men of their intrinsic lack, and to cement a patriarchal modernity, they attempt to destroy the origin of female creative power by attacking the chains of representa-

tion that lead to the womb.

Lawrence's central male figures in *Women in Love*, Birkin and Gerald, represent the complications of modernism and modernity writ large. The artistic and social movement to "make it new" in opposition to tradition and obligation, as well as the developing modernity in the era of Western industrialization and "expansion economically and politically into other continents," respectively are crucial to a complete modern ideology (Friedman 500). For instance, the growth of capitalism and colonialism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain was a sterile reproductive cycle perpetuated by the consumption of death; Great Britain sought to reproduce its own image upon foreign communities and prosper economically by killing native cultures, which occurs through imperialistic growth. In this sense, reproducing the British identity abroad and the increase in consumer culture stems from the often literal but essentially metaphorical death of communities abroad. The cycle of impotency produced by capitalism's destructive consequences on foreign soil reflects the way Birkin and Gerald try to assert power over women to ultimately find themselves void of reproductive power; the death consuming chain of Great Britain's imperialism most directly links to Gerald's violent quest for power over women and his own industrial coal empire.

Both of Lawrence's central male characters believe "Man's will was the absolute, the only absolute," and they seek to define their modern reality by exercising an absolute masculine will over women (Lawrence 231). Birkin strives to birth an umbilical male order based on a return to the primitive, the "primal desire" (150); however, this fantasy, which transcends his industrial and material present, relies upon the spiri-

tual submission of a woman—Ursula. As Birkin seeks to feed off the death of Ursula’s individual essence to propel his male-centered mission, Gerald uses physical domination to attempt to kill female power—literally. Each man becomes a *death-eater* through his destruction of representation and attempts to inhibit the inherently female power that men lack: reproduction. This *lack* of reproductive potential experienced by Lawrence’s men leaves them powerless to destroy the source—the womb, the origin of this power—so they draw closer to this point of origin by eliminating links in the chain of signifiers. By destroying representation, which in Derridian terminology serves as the unifying procreative *trace*, they attack the process that connects the chain of signifiers in their modern world. Ultimately, this is a futile quest to subvert the signification of a female power they cannot access. The psychological and spiritual violence they attempt to perform upon the womb paradoxically results in their submission to the woman, revealing the impotence of the modern man and his project in modernity.

#### FUTILE DESTRUCTION: MALE IMPOTENCE, REPRODUCTION, REPRESENTATION

In both novels, Lawrence reveals how even the most childlike and seemingly weak women hold the sexual potential to invoke male impotence and exhibit man’s reliance upon a cyclical return to the womb. The ideologies behind the masculine experiment in modernism and modernity reveal both an agenda for social power and anxieties over female autonomy. Crucially, each man in these novels fails to dominate women, because they eventually act on either a conscious or an unconscious desire to submit to a life-giving cycle of reproductive power: they return to the womb. This return occurs through dependence upon women to mediate homosocial bonds between men, as well as the experience of release and submission during sexual intercourse. In *Women in Love*, while the reproductive potential remains theoretical (no children are actually born in the novel), the male process of challenging female power is physical and sexual. However, in their mission to make women ineffectual under the male gaze, they prove their own impotence and reveal the supremacy of female sexual power. For example, in Birkin’s endeavor to make Ursula relinquish every essence of her being to him, he returns to the womb by having sex with her; instead of the one sided domination he desires, they experience a mutual submission to each other’s bodies (327).

As the prequel to *Women in Love*, *The Rainbow*

serves to illuminate Lawrence’s progression of themes like masculine desire in this particular storyline. For instance, both *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow* reveal a male attraction to childlike, weak women in order for masculine domination to manifest sexually. In *The Rainbow*, Will Brangwen forces himself on a young church-goer, whose “childishness whetted him keenly” (*Rainbow* 211), and the Pussum appeals to Gerald greatly, “for she was a victim” and “he felt an awful, enjoyable power over her” (*Women* 63). The Pussum’s childlike, easily dominated female form attracts Gerald, but despite her “delicacy” and primitively “Egyptian” look, she has the reproductive power Gerald lacks—she is pregnant (61, 63). Therefore, Gerald performs an intrinsically impotent act by having sex with the Pussum; he embodies the phallus that becomes nothing but a lack within “the black looks of her eyes” mirrored in the “dreadful, potent darkness” of her womb, already filled with another man’s seed (75). He is unable to reproduce life, effectually becomes sterile, and feeds off the nothingness born from their intercourse; he consumes the death of potential reproduction.

Just as Derrida explains how meaning is endowed by everything a subject or object *is not*, Gerald’s masculinity is defined by the inherent *lack* of reproduction. Following, the modern man fears the female potential for sexual power, which will abjectly “recall men to the womb or tomb” (Kaplan 192). This return to the womb shows the male inability to master modernity, and instances of death throughout the novel reveal this failure. In other terms, the success of the modern vision involves the ability to reproduce the industrial, social, and economic aims of the British Empire upon her colonies, while replenishing the stock of competitive workers at home; men like Gerald in particular need control over such reproductive cycles to ensure their economic power within the modern era. Moments when Birkin and Gerald become subject to a cycle of impotence reveal a crucial binary of repressed desire: in their endeavor to destroy female reproductive power they create an excuse to return to the womb. Despite their attempts at autonomy through sexually subverting women, Birkin and Gerald enter into heterosexual relationships that reveal their infecundity in the modern agenda for progress and power, thus turning the novel’s focus away from homosociality and back to the connection between reproduction and representation.

Birkin’s modernist agenda is apparent in his desire to follow Ezra Pound’s artistic ideology and “make it new.” Despite his intent to transform his reality into something new, the alternative reality he theorizes is a

return to the primitive as imagined through a modern lens, and thus not truly “new.” In his critical piece “Surgery for the Novel—Or a Bomb,” Lawrence proposes harkening back to the Greek philosophers to enlighten the future novel-form, *as art or representation*, but the glance to the past does not necessarily apply to life: “You’ve got to find a new impulse for new things in mankind, and it’s really fatal to find it through abstraction” (Lawrence 117). Therefore, by envisioning an abstraction of a past reality, Birkin does not actually seek to make art new, but to destroy representation as the signifier of all that the impotent subject cannot reproduce. Life is his medium and the representation of nature is the demon he must contend with to found a new reality based on the primitive. For example, in the chapter “Moony,” Birkin throws a stone to break the reflection of the moon upon a pond: “there was a burst of sound, and a burst of brilliant light, the moon had exploded on the water, and was flying asunder in flakes of white and dangerous fire” (256)—and yet the image reforms as the water settles. *The Rainbow* sets the stage for this natural imagery attributed to the women of *Women in Love*; Lawrence directly likens women to this natural world, in which men have no influence: *The Rainbow*’s “Anna is made by the moon to ‘drift and ebb like a wave’, a wave over which Will has no control” (Verleun 120). He links nature, as the ultimate creator of representation and reproduction, directly to women and excludes men in the symbolic chain of virility. Thus, Birkin must kill representation in order to replace modern reality with one devoid of symbols and signs—to achieve a transcendental whole (Jameson). Birkin views modern reality as a false culmination of representations compiled to the point of a simulation of reality, with an original: the primitive.

Contradictorily, Birkin’s very belief “of some external reality to be imitated,” even one in the distant past, relies on the very principle he suppresses: the suggestion that mimesis or “representation is possible” (Jameson 121). However, while he feeds from the death of representation he does not realize that he seeks an imaginary original, or simulacra. Instead, his interpretation of the primitive is a result of his hyper-masculine modernity—the modernity he seeks to destroy while simultaneously creating a new world born in opposition to it (Baudrillard). In another theoretical sense, Birkin believes in “the myth of the simplicity of origin” (Derrida 92), but “[i]n this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable” (Derrida 36). Although the womb serves as the physical origin point of reproduction, even this seemingly concrete location is a representation or symbol of a

larger female sexual power and productivity. As Birkin destroys chains of representation to reach and destroy the origin of productive power, he will never pinpoint the origin for such a proliferation of power. Furthermore, a return to the primitive can only ever be a representation in the nature of its *return*. Each mimetic instance creates a new origin, born in the interpretation of the past, significantly colored by the present; origins are only known *ex post facto*, leaving an incomplete epistemology, and only the present exists. The reassembly of the moon upon the pond should warn Birkin that this death-eating is futile: “the rays were hastening in in thin lines of light, to return to the strengthened moon, that shook upon the water in triumphant re-assumption” (256). The reproductive power of nature is too strong for him to destroy and the moon’s image will always return, just as Lawrence’s likening of Anna to the moon foreshadows her overpowering reproductive powers.

#### CYCLES OF DEATH AND VIOLENCE IN PATRIARCHAL MODERNITY

Ultimately, only Gerald’s death opens Birkin’s eyes to his own futility. He cannot create a world based on death, because he seeks to form a representation while killing the act of representation. Then, his lack of womb prohibits him from birthing a new reality; to harness the reproductive power for a new reality, he must return to woman, and he cannot return to woman and destroy her, as he desires. Birkin’s desire to transform his modern reality into something new, *in his mind*, relies on a creative and productive capability. Birkin claims, “You’ve got very badly to want to get rid of the old, before anything new will appear—even in the self,” but in order to herald in the new, “We’ve got to bust” this life “completely, or shrivel inside it” (51). He at once believes that he can destroy the representations that construct his present reality without replacing them with new forms. He seeks to destroy representation until he reaches an origin: an impossible crusade of destruction thanks to the aforementioned illusory nature of origin. For Birkin, once the obligations and understandings that tie him to the present reality crumble away, man and woman will be “responsible for nothing, asked for nothing, giving nothing, only each taking according to the primal desire” (150). Gerald’s death awakens Birkin to the futility of his quest because the masculine bond between Gerald and Birkin is the primary motivation for Birkin to construct this new/primal world. His imagination recreates the primitive society that establishes masculine power and homosocial (verging on

homosexual for Birkin) bonds. Ursula is an access point for Birkin to gain the reproductive power he needs to create his male-dominated utopia: a new world for him and Gerald. Just as Birkin's attempts to instigate the death of representation fail, Gerald's death is the moment of clarity that illuminates the failure of death as a viable creative source. A new world cannot simply be born from the death of the illusive present.

In many ways, Gerald is the epitome of the modern man: he is the heir of a vast fortune from a family-run mining industry and uses his physical prowess to intimidate and dominate his subordinates. In the chapter, "The Industrial Magnate," Lawrence reveals the source of Gerald's modern identity and his violence towards others. Essentially, his subjugation of his workers and objectification of women stems from his attempt to form his image in opposition to his family, or to be reborn. Gerald's identification with modernity comes from a rejection of tradition and a Victorian lifestyle, and thus "Freud's account of the formation of society through patricide" clarifies the formation of Gerald's modern identity in opposition to his father (Kaplan 193). Gerald's father, Mr. Crich, loves Mrs. Crich "with a pure and consuming love," which causes him to "hold her in his arms sometimes, before his strength was all gone [...] Till he was bled to death and then he dreaded her more than anything" (225). Mr. Crich's theoretically masculine and ultimately physical death occurs despite Gerald's recollection of his mother's traditionally female submission to his father: "She was like a hawk that sullenly submits to everything" (225). Through her submission, she actually drains the life out of her husband, because he loves her with an all-consuming love; her submission is predatory like a hawk. Thus, woman's ability to destroy through the evocation of love in man produces a deep anxiety in Gerald over the destructive potential of women's love and sexuality. Even women's physical submission is dangerous to him on an emotional level. This is another edge on the sword of female reproduction, which the Brangwen family also characterizes in *The Rainbow*: Anna Brangwen experiences such fulfillment with every new birth, that her husband Will's love for his ever-growing family leads him to serve "his wife and the little matriarchy" (*Rainbow* 193). Both novels depict multiple generations and their experience with love and submission. The parent generation prominent in *The Rainbow* and only glimpsed in *Women in Love*, lays the groundwork for their children to enter the modern world in ideological opposition to them. However, as long as the trace of female reproduc-

tive power remains intact, the chain of signifiers reaches from one generation to the next, challenging the sons of the Empire to fight for a representational power to which they ultimately submit, as their fathers did before them. Therefore, the question of longevity for a patriarchal modernity riveted with destructive force becomes central to Lawrence's sequel.

The destructive allure of the womb comes into play during Gerald's fatal, Oedipal rivalry with his younger brother. Although Kaplan acknowledges Freud's signification between patricide and the formation of homosocial bonds, she does not engage with Gerald's murder of his brother as a key moment in which fratricide replaces patricide. His early instance of mortal violence demonstrates the son's desperate battle for agency over the mother; he first destroys fraternal bonds to gain authority in the discourse between male power and the female body (Freud). Coppelia Kahn summarizes the theme of Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow's revision of Freud: "While the boy's sense of *self* begins in union with the feminine, his sense of *masculinity* arises against it" (Kahn 10). Thus, while homosocial bonds will become imperative in Gerald's future capitalistic rule, his boyhood self recognizes the threat his brother poses to his *individual* formation against their mother, and he acts out with violence. From a young age, violence manifests itself in the pursuit for a masculine identity. Gerald feeds on the death of his brother for the sake of fulfilling his desire for the mother.

Gerald's sense of male competition and female domination recurs in the capitalistic vein of modernity as well. For instance, his father attempts to run his business on the same loving principal he exercises with his wife, but capitalism does not feed on love, but the death of love and the implementation of man's absolute will. Capitalism produces a system of commodification, including the male commodification of women, and perpetuates a new system of symbols for men to dominate. For instance, Gerald's Arabian mare is a central symbol for his desired supremacy over Eastern colonies/communities, women, and material wealth: "he sat glistening and obstinate, forcing the wheeling mare, which spun and swerved like a wind, and yet could not get out of the grasp of his will" (112). The geographic origin of the mare from the Middle East implies Gerald's modern, globalized economic influence, and the mare symbolizes and foreshadows the way he attempts to *break* Gudrun sexually through his physical prowess. Ironically, as the modern man, Gerald detaches from the Victorian era so obsessed with *breeding*, and yet

he continues to function within the economic and social cycle of good breeding—whether horse, family, or woman. Again, Lawrence refers to this female symbol of the horse through natural simile: she “swerved like a wind” (112). This unifying natural imagery ties all the female characters and symbols in the novels to connotations of mother earth, authenticity, and natal capability. Lawrence connects these women to the same earth that Gerald seeks to exploit. Instead of love and charity, Gerald turns “upon the inanimate matter of the underground, and reduce[s] it to his will” (235). He enacts this same policy in his relationship with Gudrun in order to reject his father as the symbol of tradition, but his sadomasochistic desires can only physically dominate and leave him emotionally impotent.

### MALE DESIRE AND FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE POWER

Birkin and Gerald seek to distance themselves from falling in love with women in order to smother female power for the sake of bolstering the male, but this gap between the sexes reveals the depths of their unconscious desires, particularly Birkin's. Birkin naively believes that a strong homosocial bond will give him the strength to harness female desire for his transcendental journey into a new reality. In *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick concisely describes the workings of these homosocial bonds: “in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence,” via women as the “conduit of the relationship” (Sedgwick 25, 26). Remarkably, Lawrence presents an opposing version of Sedgwick's triangle in *The Rainbow*, when Ursula matches her older, female lover from her school days with her Uncle Tom. Lawrence's triangle is intriguing, because women use a man to mediate their relationship—exemplifying the autonomy of female sexual identity (not necessarily acknowledged as fact in Lawrence's time). Furthermore, Ursula's triangle is not for the sake of subverting her own sexuality, but to realize and solidify her sexual orientation as heterosexual. In the male homosocial triangle, women balance the transference of power between men and can subvert male homosexual desires, which might disrupt the heteronormative system of patriarchal power. Birkin's bond with Gerald does not bring him the sensation of completion he desires because their friendship is a social construction Birkin forms to hide the truth of his homosexual desires. Their friendship

is a tool for sexual suppression and, despite his genuine passion for Ursula, her role in the triangle also subverts Birkin's true desires for Gerald. From the prologue that Lawrence ultimately deletes: “Although he was always drawn to women, feeling more at home with a woman than a man, yet it was for men that he felt the hot, flushing, roused attraction which a man is supposed to feel for the other sex” (Kaplan 195). Although Lawrence does not print this passage, its sentiments are spread throughout the novel in chapters like “Gladiatorial,” when Lawrence uses sexualized language (“oneness,” “entwined,” “white knot of flesh gripped,” “flesh escaping under flesh,”) when the two men wrestle naked (280). Birkin battles two opposing desires: a sterile homosexuality and a return to the womb. His fruitless desire for men manifests in his desire to superimpose the same impotence on his relationship with women.

Where Birkin is not sexually satisfied in his relationship with Gerald, he turns to a secondary relationship with Ursula, hoping for “the demon part of himself to be mated—physically—not the human being” (305). Adhering to the heteronormativity of modern society, he wants Ursula to sate his base, physical desires while submitting her will to his. He asks Ursula, “I want you to give me—to give your spirit to me—that golden light which is you—which you don't know—give it me” (259). However, Ursula sees through his over-intellectualization of love, reveals the hypocrisy in his destruction of representation, and proves his desire to submit to her love, her womb, and that sense of *home* he secretly desires. She sets him on the path to submit to her femininity by invoking a representational power they both possess: the manifestation of feeling in the form of language. Aristotle states, “Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words” (Derrida 30). Therefore, after repeatedly uttering her Brangwen battle cry of “Do you really love me?” Birkin finally answers, “Yes, I do. I love you, and I know it's final” (261). By uttering these words, he manifests that emotion of which so many of Lawrence's male characters fear the repercussions: love. Gerald would most likely argue that love weakens the male drive for patriarchal power, and for Birkin, his feelings make him indifferent to Ursula's lack of submission. Almost immediately after he finally verbalizes his feelings, she responds to him “as if submissively” (261). By expressing his love, Birkin places himself in a mutual relationship with Ursula, where his original desire for her submission becomes impossible. Birkin may use his warped sense of masculine power to

perceive her submission to his will, but his return of her affection places them on equal ground, and any submission from her forever contains the qualifying “as if” that defies the patriarchal fantasy (261).

Just as Birkin cannot fulfill his homosexual desires with Gerald, and cement his “vision of a male-centered community,” his failure to love Hermione further proves his eventual submission to the womb and female power (Kaplan 193). Ursula sees Hermione as a betrayal of womanhood: “Hermione was like a man, she believed only in men’s things” (306). Hermione is the woman who readily submits herself to Birkin; she surrenders her womanly will to become the object of Birkin’s desire. She loses her essence as woman and remains female solely on the physical level—a weak representation but not reality of feminine identity. As such, she is the logical object for transference of Birkin’s desire for Gerald and serves as a reflection for Birkin’s desire to destroy and feed off representational death. Lawrence repeatedly describes her as “unnatural” (137), “cold” (26), “poisonous” (39), “like a ghost,” and “like a corpse” (90); her womanhood and reproductive potential seem as dead as she does. She demolishes Gudrun’s artwork by dropping her sketchbook into the pond just as Birkin throws rocks at the reflection of the moon; she kills art, or representation. Ursula recognizes Hermione and Birkin’s nihilistic modernism as death and destruction without rebirth. They kill for the sake of death alone. Ursula understands that Birkin’s new reality will never come to fruition, because by loving her he will exist in the modern reality where she grounds herself. She does not seek a mimesis of the imaginary, perfectly primitive past, but functions in the present, looking to the future—just as acts of representation and reproduction jettison symbols of the present into the future, continuing the chain of signifiers indefinitely. Correspondingly, man’s ultimate submission to woman, and his unconscious desire to return to the womb, is an acquiescence to the modern world—a world whose survival relies on the reproductive powers of humankind through colonial, capitalistic, and population growth.

#### DEATH-EATING, DEAD ENDS, AND THE RETURN TO THE WOMB

Hermione is the very moon that Birkin seeks to destroy ineffectually: “In the darkness she did not exist. Like the moon, one half of her was lost to life” (303). Lawrence’s metaphor of Hermione as the moon reveals her liminal position in this female power structure. Unlike Ursula, the Magna Mater, the ultimate womb, she is

an object that casts shadows; she holds representational power (the imprint in *difference*) but not pure reproductive power (the formation of form in *difference*). Hermione does not “give him a woman’s love, you give him an ideal love, and that is why he reacts away from you. You don’t know. You only know death things” (308). There is truth in Hermione’s destructive identity, but as long as she is the moon who casts shadows—no matter how fleeting or insubstantial—she still holds more representational power than Birkin. Hermione’s desire to define life and Birkin’s new world stand in for the death of modernism; thus, Ursula rightly labels Birkin, “you scavenger dog, you eater of corpses [...] You are so *perverse*, so death-eating” (320). Ursula makes a connection between modernism’s goal to “make it new” and the way that process relies upon a reality filled with *new* life and vision, not the “old, dead things” that repel her in her first lover, Anton Skrebensky, and his colonial ambitions in India (*Rainbow* 428). However, the way Birkin thinks of his new world abides by the modernist ideals of making art and life new, even though the return to the past is not a new reality at all. He wants a change from their parent’s generation, unlike Skrebensky who simply relocates the lifeless antiquation of the homeland onto foreign soil. Ursula hopes she can fulfill Birkin without her spiritual submission, knowing this submission is ultimately useless to an impossible new reality. Lawrence describes their intercourse as “a perfect passing away for both of them” as they experience a mutually physical submission in which she emerges “her complete self” and he “in his strange, whole body” (327). Here, Lawrence negates the typical reproductive intercourse and describes sex as a mutual death—a description violently beyond *la petit mort*. Birkin reaches bliss from mutual acquiescence, but his transcendent state is a mirage, which Lawrence forms to indicate the dangerous potential for sterility in modernity. Tellingly, when young Ursula also consummates her relationship with Skrebensky in *The Rainbow*, her assertion of her “her indomitable, gorgeous female self” (*Rainbow* 282) results “in annihilating him” (*Rainbow* 300). Lawrence houses both scenes of sexual consummation within churches to christen not only the physical victory of women but also the spiritual completeness that fills Ursula afterwards. She gains a spiritual oneness in herself through physical union—a wholeness that threatens the patriarchal, homosocial realms in which Lawrence’s men function. Lawrence shows the purposelessness of a violent, masculine modern world; the modern world will never be completely masculine, which leaves men to either respect female power or have no access to it.

Only the victory of female sexual power and fertility can subvert the barren mission of Lawrence's men and bring true productivity into to the modern era.

Gerald does not seek homosocial bonds in the same way Birkin does; instead, he finds his sadomasochism in power over his workers and self-identification as a master of capitalism and modernity. Fredric Jameson writes, "capitalism destroys genuine human relationships, but also for the first time liberates humankind from village idiocy and the tyranny and intolerance of tribal life" (123). This dynamic plays out in Gerald's microcosm of modernity: his family's mining business and the workers' community. His is an animalistic, primal power established by defining his physical prowess against the weakness of others. For example, Gerald views his workers as "ugly and uncouth, but they were his instruments. He was the God of the machine" (230). His position as "Deus ex Machina" feeds his desire "to extend over the earth a great and perfect system in which the will of man ran smooth and unthwarted, timeless, a Godhead in process" (236). He destroys human relationships by objectifying his workers as well as those close to him, like Gudrun. He seems to prove this ability to dominate the natural world in chapters like "Coal-Dust," when he rides the terrified mare next to a moving train. This instance works as a symbol for his future physical domination over Gudrun, the connection between his sadomasochistic desires over women to his capitalist agenda, and his ultimate failure. Lawrence likens the subjugated horse to Gudrun:

But as strong as the pressure of his compulsion was the repulsion of her utter terror, throwing her back away from the railway, so that she spun round on two legs, as if she were in the centre of some whirlwind. It made Gudrun faint with poignant dizziness, which seemed to penetrate her heart. (112)

Gerald's command over the natural world foreshadows his violent, physical penetration into Gudrun, which "was like a doom upon her" (462). The setting of this scene is crucial, because the train that frightens the horse-Gudrun is most likely one of "So many wagons, bearing his initial, running all over the country" (230). His name decorates the train as a symbol for England's mobilization, globalization, and industrialization in the modern world. The horse is also "from Constantinople," which again places Gerald in a trans-national capitalistic discourse typical of the violent globalization of English modernity (114). Here, Gerald's participation in colonial capitalism invokes

the second half of Jameson's definition: alongside colonization comes the transference of "civilized" life into tribal life (Jameson 123). One piece is out of place in his plan for global dominance, and that is his contest for domination with Gudrun. Despite her physical reaction to his sovereignty over the horse, "She was not afraid" (114).

Birkin and Gerald's failure to erect communities with umbilical male power comes from the emergence of the "New Woman"—a new feminine identity blossoming in the wake of modernity. Middle and upper class women, like the Brangwen sisters, began taking advantage of the education becoming increasingly available to twentieth-century women, entering jobs traditionally considered masculine, and asserting intelligence and independent power outside the domestic sphere (Lavender 1). The spiritual completeness that Gerald and Birkin desire to harness through the submission of the Other is already present in woman: "Ursula was the perfect Womb, the bath of birth, to which all men must come!" (322). Therefore, every time they enter the womb, no matter how violently they project their masculine ideologies or physicality, they submit to that woman and womankind. Thus, women are the *differencial* Other to men, and while Jameson writes, "the realization of the Other which is at the same time a dawning knowledge of ourselves as well" (Jameson 118), the realization of the feminine Other is also the knowledge of what men lack. Ursula does not discover this feeling of wholeness within herself through Birkin but much earlier in the course of *The Rainbow*. When Ursula finds a sense of completion in her youth, "Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity" (*Rainbow* 409), her lover only finds lack: "The horror of not-being possessed him" (*Rainbow* 424). Thus, there is no fulfillment in this male *jouissance*, no love of the lack, and Lawrence's men continue to project their destructive search for a pleasure driven power upon women.

Gerald's sexual relationship with women solidifies his perceived right to ruthlessly conquer the objects, or women, he desires. Gerald's passion is "tense and ghastly, and impersonal to, like destruction" to Gudrun; "She felt it would kill her. She was being killed" (462). He feeds off her sensation of death inspired by his savage sexuality, but the orgasmic moment of his psychological murder of Gudrun fades into anguish when he realizes "Gudrun was sufficient unto herself" (462). This thought only makes him desperate for "the same completeness"—a completeness he believes obtainable either by killing her or "to stand by himself, in sheer nothingness" (463). The only

reason Birkin does not have a similarly violent reaction to his realization of Ursula as “the perfect Womb” is the fulfillment he experiences in submitting to her, whether he is conscious of his submission or not: “he had just come awake, like a thing that is born [...] into a new universe” (322, 324). Sex with Ursula is the only passage by which Birkin can gain the reproductive power inherent in her and produce his new reality; it allows for his own death and rebirth. However, his impotence to form his new world stems from his reliance on homosocial bonds to suppress homosexual desire; when Gerald commits suicide, Birkin loses the relationship that allows him to deny his relationship with Ursula as a submission to her.

Gerald’s suicide is the moment of clarity in the novel’s struggle for brotherhood and masculine power, not “the repository for the novel’s unresolved conflicts and contradictions” as Kaplan suggests (Kaplan 200). Earlier in the text, Lawrence warns that Gerald wants “the pure fulfillment of his own will in the struggle with the natural conditions” (231). This desire is crucial to understanding his decision to commit suicide instead of murdering Gudrun to prove his ultimate masculine will. By seeking power through sexual domination over women, he makes the same mistake his father made—the mistake he so desperately wants to crush with his own powerful phallus—and understands the woman as a submissive being. His mother’s submissive nature leads to his father’s death of masculinity, due to the self-consuming love he feels for her. Gerald forces Gudrun into sexual submission, but she never loses equal footing with him when it comes to the all-important will: “In her will she killed him as he stood; effaced him” (472). Gerald resents the fear his mother inspired in his father and returns to his mother by trying to kill her ideological power over him through sex with Gudrun, but “Was she his mother? Had she asked for a child, whom she must nurse through the nights, for her lover” (483). He cannot take his Oedipal revenge, because Gudrun is only a symbol for his mother. Similar to Birkin’s false belief that the primal original can somehow be translated to the modern present, Gerald’s projection of his mother upon Gudrun creates a new original in the *differance* between these two women: Gudrun exists in her *not being* Gerald’s mother. Her position as a false sign divulges Gerald’s tendency to fill women with the meaning he attributes to his mother, and make them into empty signifiers. Once he recognizes the “indefiniteness of reference,” the fact that a complete Gudrun cannot be a representation of his mother, he can “recognize that we are indeed dealing with a system of signs” (Derrida 49).

For Gerald, all women become intimidating and death-inducing instead of signifiers for their life-bringing reality. Thus, killing Gudrun will not end his struggle with the natural world: “As if he cared about her enough to kill her, to have her life on his hands!” (490). As a child, he unwillingly submits to the womb’s power to give him life, but as a man he refuses its power to bring him to the tomb. He cannot capture meaning, but he can remove himself from the chain of signifiers; he can achieve *telos*, the ultimate end. Thus, “he must stand by himself, in sheer nothingness” and “go to sleep” forever, by his own will (463, 490).

Gerald uses his death to prove the ultimate power of his masculine will, but just like Birkin’s destruction of representation, if the sovereignty of masculinity only births destruction, then nothing can be made anew—neither modernity nor the modernist project can succeed. Here, Lawrence reveals his anxieties over the masculine agenda so violently trying to define the modern era, and his own position as a man participating in a modernist project. From the Victorian-era Brangwens in *The Rainbow* to the modern clan in *Women in Love*, “the same oblivion, the fecund darkness” found in women terrifies and consumes men (*Rainbow* 45). This gendered and sexualized battle for reproductive power transcends generations, revealing that the most integral part of life, reproduction, cannot be made new by modern masculinity. Gerald thinks about his mother and father’s destructive love: “Only death would show the perfect completeness of the lie. Till death, she was his snow-white flower” (225). Similarly, Birkin’s image of a new world shatters with Gerald’s death. His death reveals the fragility of the new world Birkin attempts to construct and the weakness of homosocial bonds when the desire that constructs them is not of a mutual kind (sexual vs. asexual)—particularly the weakness of bonds void of reproductive potential. The novel proposes that the only self-constructed fulfillment for men exists in the death that they attempt to wield upon women. Men function in a cycle of death, where women function in a cycle of life. Thus, the novel reflects Lawrence’s own modernist impotence and anxiety. He writes with a modernist agenda—seeking to make art new and better represent the actuality of his modern society. Through Birkin, he theorizes a utopian reality, turning away from the capitalistic and colonial evils of a world where Gerald’s reign. However, he functions in the same cycle of death as his male characters. Birkin and Gerald seem to represent opposing sides of modernity; one trying to reform the modern into a new reality and the other



trying to cement his power in the modern realm. However, they are two sides of the same coin, and without the modern giant, Gerald, against which Lawrence theorizes a new world, Birkin's new world dies: he is left fragmented in comparison with the fulfilled Ursula, and the homosocial foundation of his new reality becomes "a perversity" (500).

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