

**G. Eliot, Forster and Lawrence (5)**  
**The Sisters : A Study of *Middlemarch*,  
*Howards End* and *Women in Love***  
**(Ⅲ)**

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要約

G. エリオット、フォースター、ロレンス (5)  
「姉妹」の小説  
(*Middlemarch, Howards End, Women in Love* の比較)  
III

平井 雅子

*Middlemarch, Howards End, Women in Love* における姉妹像は、それが展開する葛藤と変貌によって、各の小説のドラマの中心をなす。それは姉妹が、自らが抱える社会とのディレンマ、および自己内部のディレンマを演じきることによって、自己の殻を脱皮し、その未知の姿をあらわにするからである。姉妹は、共通の苦しみの基盤と互いの親密さの上に、通常の間人間関係には見られぬ卒直さと直観によって、相手を理解し批判する。それが本来、一個人の内部に閉じ込められている曖昧さ、葛藤を追いつめ、決断を迫り、それぞれの狂気（均衡の崩壊）をもたらす。姉や妹は、それまでの自己にはない言動に走ることで、社会の秩序に挑戦すると同時に、自己の価値観そのものを踏み外し、敗北と屈辱に直面する。しかし、それはいかなる状況の下でも生き残り、むしろ自己の敗北によって鮮明となる sexuality、性の欲望にめざめる瞬間でもある。それは、伝統的に男性に征服され、全てをゆるし、受け容れる女性、母性の神話とも微妙な類似と対立を孕み、ことに Lawrence の描く男女関係の中で女性の性と、その概念とのディレンマが追求される。

(1) 姉妹が自己の枠をはみ出す言動に及ぶ〈狂気〉までの過程。(2) 女性の性 (sexuality) のめざめ、そのディレンマ。(3) 母胎にまつわるイメージ言語 (womb language) を駆使する Lawrence の文体と、それが姉妹、それぞれの男女関係の中で見せる意味の変容、その破壊性と可能性を解明する。

### III. The Drama of the Sisters : Conflict in Female Knowledge

In these novels, people have various myths about themselves and about others, social, individual, male or female, and they have different attitudes towards themselves. They may simply accept them or acquiesce in them without question. They may glorify them. They may strive for them. They may insist on them when the myths seem out of place, out of date. They may resist or reject them. They may suffer from the conflict between different myths. They may experience the death of their own myths, and then... what happens then? At the centre of these various dramas lies the drama of the sisters, their conflicts as expressed and developed through their actions and communication between them. Dialogue or verbal exchange is typical of such communication, but there are also other forms of communication such as gestures, looks, tones of voice, presents, letters, the roads they take, the men they choose, the laws they obey.... In fact, owing to the common root and intimacy between them, the sisters watch each other with a sensitivity and understanding which surpass other people's, and they also react to each other without the usual inhibitions and pretences which exist between other people, so that the sisters' actions and behaviour become part of their communication. In that closeness of the sisters lies the secret of that dramatic force which directs their next action or sometimes even changes their characters.

#### (1) From Sanity to Madness

It is a matter of degree ; but when I say that Margaret and Helen are very close and that there is essentially no antagonism between them, I am comparing their relationship with that between Dorothea and Celia who do not ultimately understand each other and are latently antagonistic :

Since they could remember, there had been a mixture of criticism and awe in the attitude of Celia's mind towards her elder sister. (*M*, p. 7)

*Antigone* comes somewhere between. Antigone calls to Ismene at the beginning of the play :

Ismene, sister of my blood and heart,  
See'st thou how Zeus would in our lives fulfill  
The weird of Oedipus, a world of woes ! (*Antigone*, ll. 1-3)<sup>1</sup>

Sharing Oedipus's blood, which is a source not only of pride but of the shared "fortunes" of "pain, affliction, outrage, shame", they are together and singled out from the rest of the world, especially now that their parents and brothers are dead. Antigone's first words express their link which goes deeper than the sharing of opinions or temperaments. There is a deep implicit trust in the way Antigone speaks to Ismene, which rings naturally because of this link. However, as Ismene shrinks from taking action against

Creon's order (that one of their dead brothers, Polyneices, shall be left unburied because he fought against the State, and that anybody who tries to bury him shall be put to death), Antigone's disappointment is so great that she immediately reacts by renouncing any support or understanding from her sister :

ANTIGONE

I urge no more ; nay, wert thou willing still,  
I would not welcome such a fellowship.  
Go thine own way ; myself will bury him.  
How sweet to die in such employ, to rest, —  
Sister and brother linked in love's embrace—  
A sinless sinner, banned awhile on earth,  
But by the dead commended ; and with them  
I shall abide for ever. As for thee,  
Scorn, if thou wilt, the eternal laws of Heaven.

ISMENE

I scorn them not, but to defy the State  
Or break her ordinance I have no skill.

ANTIGONE

A specious pretext. I will go alone  
To lap my dearest brother in the grave.

ISMENE

My poor, fond sister, how I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE

O waste no fears on me ; look to thyself.

ISMENE

At least let no man know of thine intent,  
But keep it close and secret, as will I.

ANTIGONE

O tell it, sister ; I shall hate thee more  
If thou proclaim it not to all the town.

. . .

ISMENE

But, if the venture's hopeless, why essay?

ANTIGONE

Sister, forbear, or I shall hate thee soon,  
And the dead man will hate thee too, with cause.

(*Antigone*, ll. 69–94)

In fact, Ismene does sympathize with Antigone and feels, like her sister, that by the gods' law their brother should be properly buried. But at least for the moment her fear of the earthly order is greater than her love of the dead or fear of gods. For Antigone it is not a matter of weighing and choosing ; it is a categorical or absolute demand that she bury her dear brother, whatever he might have done, whatever their uncle and new king might

order. The moment Ismene fails to see this point, her sympathy seems less than nothing, and it only obscures Antigone's purpose. Rejecting Ismene's sympathetic but negative argument, Antigone's purpose becomes clear and insistent; it is a dramatic motive which demands an audience to witness its absolute strength.

However, drama starts in Ismene's mind as well. The moment Antigone refuses to have any connection with her sister, that refusal starts working in its own way in Ismene's solitary mind, disturbing her, and driving her against her own wits. By the time Antigone breaks the order and is tried by Creon, Ismene claims passionately that she, too, was guilty of the deed.

ISMENE

But now thy bark is stranded, I am bold  
To claim my share as partner in the loss.

ANTIGONE

Who did the deed the underworld knows well :  
A friend in word is never friend of mine.

ISMENE

O sister, scorn me not, let me but share  
Thy work of piety, and with thee die.

ANTIGONE

Claim not a work in which thou hadst no hand ;  
One death sufficeth. Wherefore should'st thou die?

ISMENE

What would life profit me bereft of thee? (*Antigone*, ll. 540–8)

Deprived of her relationship with Antigone, Ismene would find her life no longer worth living. Although she was slow to foresee this at the moment of fear, the actuality of the utter loss impressed by Antigone's words and deed has grown every minute and finally overcomes her fear. Antigone's reply sounds harsh and unrelenting, but, curiously, it shows more common sense, at least clear-headedness, than Ismene's sudden claim. There is no need for Ismene to die, and nothing would be gained by her death. It is as if they have switched sides between sense and madness. Creon's observation is very much to the point :

both maids, methinks, are crazed. One suddenly  
Has lost her wits, the other was born mad. (*Antigone*, ll. 561–2)

But the gap between the sisters cannot be mended.

ANTIGONE

No, save thyself ; I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE

Is e'en this boon denied, to share thy lot?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for thou chosed'st life, and I to die. (*Antigone*, ll. 553–5)

What mattered was the moment of choice between life and death. At that moment their lives parted, and there is no going back afterwards. Still, there is an important differ-

ence in Ismene. She has to go on living with the burden of denied relationship with her sister, suffering and, by suffering, learning the meaning of her sister's death. There is no real suffering, and consequently no learning, for Celia in Dorothea's crucial moments of Casaubon's death and her love for Ladislav.

Margaret and Helen's relationship follows a somewhat similar pattern to Ismene and Antigone's. Although the situation is not so harsh as to force them to be in the same bark in the rough sea, Margaret and Helen are very close, in the opening chapters, at the conscious level of shared views and emotional experience. The moments of crisis and divisive choices start with Helen's third letter in the first chapter, and again in Chapter 19 when Margaret announces her engagement to Henry Wilcox. At both times the sisters try to prevent a gap developing between them, using sympathy, understanding or discussion to bridge over the difference. When Margaret receives Helen's letter, her first reaction is: "I must go down and see her"; "I must be near her at this crisis of her life" (*H*, p. 6); "She must be assured that it is not a criminal offence to love at first sight" (p. 8).

I have it in Helen's writing that she and a man are in love. There is no question to ask as long as she keeps to that. All the rest isn't worth a straw. A long engagement if you like, but inquiries, questions, plans, lines of action—no, Aunt Juley, no. (*HE*, p. 7)

Against Aunt Juley who believes in effective lines of action and common sense, Margaret feels the absolute need ("must" appears repeatedly in her speech and thought) to trust and sanctify her sister's choice of love. It is upon this loving trust and belief in personal relations that their relationship depends. But Margaret's trusting gesture misfires not just because Tibby's hay fever prevents her action but because Helen *has* changed her mind before Aunt Juley starts on her carefully instructed mission on behalf of Margaret. It seems that there is no cause for the gap between them at this point.

But the effects of their choices and reactions remain long afterwards with them, with the hidden sense of incompleteness which keeps returning through unexpected events and words and actions of each other, challenging the sisters to act the parts they have intended to drop or deny. Thus when Margaret decides to marry Henry Wilcox, Helen protests with tears and an incomprehensible repetition of "Don't", and Margaret thinks:

Helen is a little selfish. I have never behaved like this when there has seemed a chance of *her* marrying. (*HE*, p. 169)

Now that they have exchanged roles, Margaret expects Helen to take her position of loving trust. Helen, on the other hand, has *seen* to her cost that all the Wilcoxes' life has "panic and emptiness" inside their shell of manly vigorousness. Therefore, she cannot accept, even in the spirit of loving trust, that her sister should pursue a line she herself has abandoned. In Margaret, Helen is forced to see, and refuses to see, her forsaken role repeating itself with a vengeance. Even after the tears of clash and sisterly affection, the best Helen can do is to quietly ignore Mr. Wilcox's existence and continue to love her sister as if nothing has happened.

On the other hand, Margaret argues:

In the first place, I disagree about the outer life. Well, we've often

argued that. The real point is that there is the widest gulf between my love-making and yours. Yours was romance; mine will be prose. I'm not running it down—a very good kind of prose, but well considered, well thought out. For instance, I know all Mr Wilcox's faults. He's afraid of emotion. He cares too much about success, too little about the past. His sympathy lacks poetry, and so isn't sympathy really. I'd even say... that, spiritually, he's not as honest as I am. (*HE*, p. 171)

"There is the widest gulf between my love-making and yours"—so it is not an exchange of roles—but is it so? The "gulf", according to Margaret, consists of two points: "the outer life", to her, is not the simple shell which surrounds "panic and emptiness" but "the island" upon which the whole of spiritual life and personal relationship stands; she claims 'sanity' ("well considered, well thought out") in not being taken in by Mr. Wilcox's manliness. He is "a real man", unlike their "intelligent. . . but dyspeptic and difficle" brother Tibby, with sound judgment on practical matters, efficient in decision and action, who can care for her and support her, but Margaret, knowing his faults, is not going to give him her whole self. It is a strategy of self-defence combined with the determination to "connect" with the man of action who complements her own nature. It is one of her *must's*. But the strategy does sound grotesque whether she loves Mr. Wilcox or not. To her argument Helen replies:

It makes me feel worse and worse. You must be mad. (*Ibid.*)

'Madness', which seized Antigone from her birth and takes Ismene suddenly, appears in *Howards End* temporarily (she 'awakes' from it overnight) with Helen, and more persistently and deliberately with Margaret, and again later when Margaret judges from Helen's businesslike correspondence that she must be mad; and also when Mr. Wilcox calls "madness" Margaret's wish to sleep with Helen one night at Howards End. There are a number of other occasions in which the sisters act as if beside themselves.

If Margaret's claim for her love in "prose" contains an element of madness, as Helen argues, it typically illustrates the curious relationship between sobriety and madness in this novel. In many cases, 'sanity' or sensible action appears as a disquieting feature of insanity. In fact, the one hides or triggers the other, weaving a chain of actions and reactions. At the very beginning, before Paul arrives and the trouble starts, Helen thinks Mr. Wilcox has "knocked to pieces" her bookish, romantic ideas about equality, women's suffrage, etc. and given her "such a setting down" as she has never had. However, this moment of 'sober' revelation, which she delightedly accepts, contains the seed of the rash and indiscriminate glorification of the Wilcox male, as was shown in the previous chapters, and her 'insensible' defencelessness leads Paul to kiss her in the dark garden:

This girl would let you kiss her. . . . (*HE*, p. 22)

The world reels round her in the passionate air of the night.

In the morning, Paul looks frightened, and Helen "realized" that behind the walls of the Wilcoxes was "panic and emptiness". However, this apparently objective phrase

hides her own shattering reaction to the experience, which continues to haunt her. Her criticism of Mr. Wilcox and of Margaret's love for him hides the growing violence and 'insanity' of this reaction.

On the other hand, Margaret, apparently the "more sensible of the two", occasionally comes dangerously close to 'insanity' despite—or possibly owing to—her efforts at sensible action. When she discovers Mr. Wilcox's past affair with Mrs. Bast, with her calculating head she writes brief "practical" notes for Helen and Leonard separately, to send the Basts away and hush up the matter, so as to prevent Helen's learning about it, if possible—an attitude unlike her normal honest responsible self. Putting off all her qualms to a later date, she centres herself on her love for Mr. Wilcox—or at least on what she thinks is the major thing in her love for Mr. Wilcox, to sustain the marriage, to save his face. But her head is racked while she is doing this, trying to suppress her own reaction, too much occupied to foresee the horrible result. Margaret's unusually dry and, therefore, stunning letters drive Helen and Leonard together for one night, beside themselves. Early the next morning Helen departs alone, 'awakening' from the dream but leaving a "tender and hysterical" note for Leonard. This element of hysteria is the main cause that shatters Leonard's romantic dream, giving him a fatal wound which eventually bleeds him to death.

Before this, however, Helen seems to take over Margaret's role of sobriety, for the sake of Leonard's baby which she is carrying. Keeping it secret and avoiding all contact even with Margaret, Helen travels to Germany and plans to have a new life, without depending on the affections which have been dear to her. Her strange secrecy and the lack of personal feeling in her letters make Margaret think Helen must be "mad". Overwrought with worries and distress, Margaret doesn't know what to do, herself losing control. In order to act 'sensibly' again, and to help Helen, she finally takes Mr. Wilcox's advice, plotting a siege of Helen at Howards End; and this is so unlike the usual Margaret that it makes her feel more and more insane. When she sees the pregnant Helen and suddenly realizes her mistake in betraying their relationship, Helen's "quietly moving forward with her plans, not bitter or excitable, neither asserting innocence nor confessing guilt, merely desiring freedom and the company of those who would not blame her" makes Margaret think that "most ghastly of all was Helen's common sense" (*HE*, p. 293).

There is assurance, however, in that their emotions grow tender under the influence of Howards End and that, moving from room to room with their old furniture and books which fit charmingly, they gradually come to themselves, discovering through the memory of a common past sanctifying the present that "the inner life had paid". And yet... yet again... even such memorable moments of regaining oneself are not described as entirely free from threats of unrecognized 'insanity'. We can spot this if we move a little out of the sisters' perspective, for instance, in the following conversation:

"Leonard is a better growth than madness," she [Margaret] said.

"I was afraid that you would react against Paul until you went over the verge."

"I did react until I found poor Leonard. I am steady now. I



shan't ever *like* your Henry... but all that blinding hate is over. ...  
I understand how you married him, and you will now be very  
happy." (*HE*, p. 311)

As it turns out, "poor Leonard" dies (though the sisters cannot foresee it here) as a final result of the momentary sexual encounter with Helen which, she says, made her "steady". Margaret calls this "a better growth than madness". The sanity sounds like a cold-blooded calculation, though not planned but calculated afterwards, earned at the cost of somebody else's life. After having Leonard, Helen realizes the wrong, the terror which it can lead to, of "raving" against the Wilcox men whom she cannot change anyway. Her 'sanity' is only the result of relinquishing her desire to have anything to do with the Wilcoxes' glamour, which she could achieve only by splitting her physical and spiritual needs and cutting down her personality drastically. Her speech is similar to Margaret's 'prose' when Helen says, "I understand how you married him ... I do at last understand." But she does not see the irony which mutely questions her 'understanding'. Margaret does not reply. She has just walked away from Henry Wilcox who has neither understood Helen's wish to stay at Howards End for the night nor tried to connect his own humiliating past with Helen's present condition and be generous to her. When she appeals to his conscience and reminds him of her forgiving him, in order to awaken his sympathy for Helen, he turns absolutely cold and calls it her "blackmail". So just when Helen "understands", Margaret has given up her relationship with Henry.

Although the sisters' 'sanity' *seems* to meet here, they do not really meet, as if reaching from two sides of a mirror. They have escaped from madness and are utterly disillusioned and sad, cherishing for one night between them at Howards End a tenderness which has no other home to grow in. There is an ambiguity, between assurance and despair :

Explanations and appeals had failed ; they had tried a common meeting-ground, and had only made each other unhappy. And all the time their salvation was lying round them—the past sanctifying the present ; the present, with wild heart-throb, declaring that there would after all be a future, with laughter and the voices of children. Helen, still smiling, came up to her sister. She said : "It is always Meg." They looked into each other's eyes. The inner life had paid.  
(*HE*, p. 296)

There seems to emerge a sanctifying salvation, but the expression itself, "the inner life had paid", suggests also the cost they have had to pay, involving the fate of other people, which they are not fully aware of. It would be even possible to find unacknowledged malice in them if they insist on 'gains', making light of losses. But Margaret's silence about her break with Mr. Wilcox tells us more about her sorrow than her words to Helen would do. Similarly, though Helen unquestioningly accepts her condition (being pregnant without a husband, even without a man she can claim as her lover), and excludes not only outside contact but outside concern, it does not mean that she has not suffered losses. Underneath the sweetness and peace of the evening, ephemeral like a may-fly,

there is unexpressed sadness between the sisters, which paradoxically just saves their "salvation" from falling into insanity. The image of health and youth, "laughter and voices of children", which has stayed with the house since before Helen first saw it and will eventually be heard as Helen's child, Miss Avery's nephew, and she herself play in the field, is not known to them yet.

## (2) Women's Sexuality

In that simile of reaching from two sides of the mirror, what constitutes the mirror itself? In other words, what separates the sisters beyond "explanations and appeals"? It is, to use Margaret's words, "the widest gulf between my love-making and yours", but the explanation she gives for it is not sufficient; rather it is misleading. When she tries to analyze her own love for Henry Wilcox, the point she fails to deliver—and perhaps is not fully conscious of—is that she loves him *in spite of* all his faults. That she *knows* all his weaknesses is surely not a guarantee of the strength of her love. Her knowledge and the way she coolly lists his faults make it sound grotesque. What she does not explain and perhaps could never explain is the strength of her desire for the "man" in Mr. Wilcox which overcomes her wavering before the difficulties and failures she can foresee. It is in order to avoid total failure and to let this desire find some fulfilment that she adopts her tactic of holding back a large part of herself out of his reach:

I don't intend him, or any man or any woman, to be all my life—  
good heavens, no! There are heaps of things in me that he doesn't,  
and shall never, understand. (*HE*, p. 171)

This method, however well thought out, is more or less destined to fail:

Yet he did alter her character—a little. There was an unforeseen  
surprise, a cessation of the winds and odours of life, a social pressure  
that would have her think conjugally. (*Ibid.*)

In order to let their conjugal life come through, she has to hold back a lot of what was spiritually important to her, as her way of dealing with his past affair with Mrs. Bast shows. When the spiritually important part she has to hold back grows too big and threatens to topple the balance, she feels herself losing her mind, and she has to come out of their relationship. This shows how ineffectual her 'method' is, but the strength of her desire itself is not demolished by it. It simply has to stand aside.

Helen at first is seized by a similar desire, but romanticizes it and makes it seem everything. Thus by blurring the conflict between her desire for the man and his spiritual failings, she never tests its real strength as her sister does. Just as she makes it seem everything, she then drops it altogether, and her affair with Leonard is an act of vengeance on her desire. Her desire itself never develops, and although she at last realizes her mistake and glimpses another possibility in Margaret's choice, she can never share Margaret's anguish of love and deep sorrow over her loss.

After all, there is a difference between the sisters even in their reconciliation. The situation does not greatly change even after Margaret nurses Helen and Henry together

at Howards End, though they do gradually learn to know each other better and begin to like each other.

"I like Henry because he does worry."

"And he likes you because you don't."

Helen sighed. She seemed humiliated, and buried her face in her hands. After a time she said: "About love"—a transition less abrupt than it appeared.

Margaret never stopped working.

"I mean a woman's love for a man. I supposed I should hang my life onto that once, and was driven up and down and about as if something was worrying through me. But everything is peaceful now; I seem cured. . . . I used to be so dreamy about a man's love as a girl, and think that for good or evil love must be the great thing. But it hasn't been; it has been itself a dream. Do you agree?"

"I do not agree. I do not." (*HE*, p. 335)

That Henry does worry shows his moral concern in the sense that he feels himself spiritually responsible for the mess he has created, in which Charles has committed manslaughter, because of his own refusal to face and track down his misdeed or to be humble and extend his sympathy. There is a parallel between Henry's collapse and Creon's, in the disaster inflicted upon their sons as a consequence of their own arrogance. But Henry achieves a warmth towards Helen probably because Margaret accepts him despite his wrong and still loves him and also because, as she says here, Helen ceases to "worry" too much. Helen has seen her own limitation and now, therefore, can admit his limitation. Although the sisters' attitudes towards Henry seem similar on the surface, the processes by which they achieve them are different, and consequently there is a gap between their sympathies. Helen's sympathy comes from giving up her "dream" of "a man's love": Margaret's sympathy comes from the greatness of her desire itself which perseveres despite her awareness of disappointments and failures.

Critics, on the whole, have objected to the way the sisters forgive and somehow 'connect' with Henry Wilcox at the end of the story. Lionel Trilling criticized:

. . . this rather contrived scene of busyness and contentment in the hayfield; the male is too thoroughly gelded, and of the two women, Helen confesses that she cannot love a man, Margaret that she cannot love a child<sup>2</sup>.

But Trilling fails to notice the significance that Margaret *can* love a man. Wilfred Stone goes further and likens the sisters' emotions to the more limited aesthetic appreciation of human emotions by Tibby:

. . . he can respond to Helen's tears only when they have an esthetic effect upon him . . . In short, he likes her the way Browning's Duke likes his Duchess, dead and hanging on a wall. Is Helen any kinder than this to Leonard, or Margaret to Henry? Because they cannot bring these men into harmony with their private symphony, they

destroy them in the loud noises of the fourth movement and quietly settle down to make their own kind of music<sup>3</sup>.

I myself have remarked that the sisters' speeches on 'love' sound grotesque and that Helen's 'sanity' is achieved only by cutting down her personality drastically. Leonard did die as a result, if unintended, of Helen's reactionary love for him, and neither she nor Margaret have the right to appreciate Helen's "growth" at the cost of a man's life. When Margaret tries to explain her love in "prose", she makes it sound strategic and cold-blooded. Whenever the sisters try to 'explain' their love, it sounds grotesque because it is only part of what is happening behind it. All the same, Margaret's love for a man survives *despite* Henry's failure to be a man. It is not a matter of "quietly settl[ing] down to make their own kind of music".

There is a similar disappointment among the critics about Dorothea's love for Will Ladislaw. Let us look again at some of the criticisms and consider what ultimately attracted Dorothea to Will and caused her to make her bold confession of love to him.

Let me first quote fully Henry James's famous disclaimer :

He [Will Ladislaw] is, we may say, the one figure which a masculine intellect of the same power as George Eliot's would not have conceived with the same complacency ; he is, in short, roughly speaking, a woman's man. It strikes us as an oddity in the author's scheme that she should have chosen just this figure of Ladislaw as the creature in whom Dorothea was to find her spiritual compensations. He is really, after all, not the ideal foil to Mr. Casaubon which her soul must have imperiously demanded, and if the author of the 'Key to all Mythologies' sinned by lack of order, Ladislaw too has not the concentrated fervor essential in the man chosen by so nobly strenuous a heroine. The impression once given that he is a *dilettante* is never properly removed. . . .<sup>4</sup>

"A woman's man", emasculated, showing his character only in being negative to Casaubon's inorganic, mazy pedantry but having no strength of his own to replace it—the analysis is right but James is wrong to assume that George Eliot was not aware of this. Barbara Hardy notes the scenes in which Will descends from the lyric love, "the delightful indulgences of image worship" to "the destructive extreme of self-contempt, hostility, and cynicism", and says :

In a novel which at least tries to deal plainly with unideal existence, this rejection of worship is an important strand in the pattern of feeling. It would be hard to argue, however, that George Eliot is thoroughly clear and full in analysing the descent of Will and Dorothea into the ordinary world.<sup>5</sup>

Gilian Beer is probably the first to interpret Ladislaw's 'weakness' as a possible strength, when united with a man's other qualities to attract a woman :

It is hard for him, after all, to *do* anything, except gently to seduce her to criticize her husband. He feels grandeur, though he does not

feel grandly. It is that quality of the aspirant that distinguishes him. . . . He is kin to women, not polarized against them. Ladislav's position, outside money inheritance, sharing the awkward financial dependency more often associated with women, does have the effect of reinforcing his feminisation. . . . He exactly focuses what is peculiar to women's predicament by sharing many of their conditions, and yet living a liberated life. This liberation depends upon his being a man, with freedom to travel, to live where he will, and to make his own friends.<sup>6</sup>

It is his sharing a common predicament with women *plus* his independence *merely based on his being a man* that attracts Dorothea's sympathy and love, according to Gilian Beer. Certainly the elements she lists here of a man's freedom have become much less difficult for a woman since Dorothea's (and George Eliot's) time, but the lure of his just being a man, the fundamental stage of sexual attraction between a man and a woman, is something just glimpsed here. Although Gilian Beer's stress is apparently upon Will's liberated life-style which is denied to women, perhaps we should emphasize even more the freedom, activeness, and simple and youthful attractiveness of his body, his sex. It is not that Will is sexually loose. On the contrary, he is prevented by his own romantic view of woman from making a definite approach to Dorothea. But his body itself, his physical maleness, is untainted by any inhibition, while women's are burdened with the traditional sense of submission, suppression and shame. 'A running brook', 'spring', and other natural images, characteristically associated with Will, which Hardy calls "lyrical" and Beer notices as images of youth and freedom, are implicitly sexual, suggesting possibilities of sexual liberation. Borrowing Barbara Hardy's phraseology, we might say, "It would be hard to argue, however, that George Eliot is thoroughly clear and full in analysing the descent of Will and Dorothea into" purely sexual attraction.

In fact, sexual desire is hardly portrayed in *Middlemarch*. Once it appears *symbolically* in the thunder which strikes the air and lights up their faces, when Dorothea and Will almost part but then declare their love. But sexual desire is described more realistically, though not directly, when Dorothea is alone or when her desire faces a failure. Frank Kermode says concerning Dorothea's failure with Casaubon right from their honeymoon at Rome:

'Images are the brood of desire', says the novelist at the opening of the fourth chapter. . . . The image of Rome is the brood of desire that fails. To balance the scene, there is the wonderful moment of Dorothea's return to Lowick and the blanched winter landscape, when the fire glows incongruously and she, seeking confirmation in the glass for her sense of deathly defeat, finds an image of health and vitality, the human and perhaps specifically female strength that comes through these crises. Lawrence—who saw so clearly that the novel must make *this* kind of sense and not fob us off with papers stuck into brandy-flasks, meticulously rendered lawsuits—

Lawrence not only learned from the good and the bad in Eliot's figures, but... remembered and reproduced this one at the climax of *Women in Love*. He meant that Crich, like Casaubon, belonged to death, to an old order.<sup>7</sup>

Kermode could have added that a woman's desire for a man, both in Gudrun and Dorothea survives "incongruously" the "death" of the man she loves. "An image of health and vitality, the human and perhaps specifically female strength" is, to put it more bluntly, female sexual desire. The object of her desire may die, it may prove to have never existed, and she may *feel* no desire at all. But the primary female desire for a man, despite this death, "comes through", and it is to this desire that we should attribute Dorothea's ultimate desire for Ladislav.

Therefore, even with Ladislav who is himself the negation of Casaubon's old deathly glamour, Dorothea has to go through utter disillusion with and aversion from him to find her ultimate desire for him. After his speech and unspoken despair at their last parting has convinced Dorothea that he loves her and is worthy of her trust, she witnesses what she thinks is a love-scene between him and Rosamond, and whips back to Lowick. Although she tries to act as if nothing has happened and visits the parsonage as she promised to do, she meets everywhere the remaining carcass of her love for the man. Mr. Farebrother's old aunt hunts for her tortoise-shell lozenge box which Ladislav has given to her, saying, "... very pretty ; but if it falls it always spins away as far as it can." And when she at last grasps it with delight, her nephew remarks :

Oh, if it is Ladislav's present ... If Henrietta Noble forms an attachment to any one. . . she is like a dog—she would take their shoes for a pillow and sleep the better. (*M*, p. 542)

It is the sexless 'affair' of an old maid, and she has no hesitation in revealing it to her company. But it is an ironic version—the sexless sex—of Dorothea's own desire for Ladislav which she subsequently finds alone at Lowick :

In that hour she repeated what the merciful eyes of solitude have looked on for ages in the spiritual struggles of man—she besought hardness and coldness and aching weariness to bring her relief from the mysterious incorporeal might of her anguish : she lay on the bare floor and let the night grow cold around her ; while her grand woman's frame was shaken by sobs as if she had been a despairing child.

There were two images—two living forms that tore her heart in two, as if it had been the heart of a mother who seems to see her child divided by the sword, and presses one bleeding half to her breast while her gaze goes forth in agony towards the half which is carried away by the lying woman that has never known the mother's pang. . . . now, with a full consciousness which had never awakened before, she stretched out her arms towards him and cried with bitter cries that their nearness was a parting vision : she

discovered her passion to herself in the unshrinking utterance of despair. (*M*, pp. 542–3)

The bleeding half of the child carried away by “the lying woman” (which might literally mean Rosamond)—is her vision of Ladislaw as “the bright creature whom she had trusted—who had come to her like the spirit of morning visiting the dim vault where she sat as the bride of a worn-out life”. Although she has lost that vision of delightful freedom as a rescue and support for her, she finds herself still clinging to the other bleeding half, which is the most explicit vision George Eliot could give of woman’s sexual passion for the man, and this Dorothea becomes conscious of for the first time at the cost of the other vision. However, one wonders why it is that “her grand woman’s frame was shaken by sobs as if she had been a despairing *child*” and not a despairing ‘woman’. The woman in Dorothea still seems immature and not fully come out.

If we compare *Middlemarch* with *Howards End* and *Antigone*, we may ask whether woman’s sexual passion is ‘revealed’ in each novel. Probably not in *Howards End*. Not in the sense I have been discussing it. There is only an indication of it; however, it is impossible to understand without it the perseverance of Margaret’s love for Henry Wilcox. Pity is only an element of it, not enough, as it is not enough to explain Dorothea’s love for Ladislaw. It is there that many critics seem to make a mistake with both novels.

All the same, the impression which Margaret’s love gives is sexless, though not in the same sense as Henrietta Noble’s. Margaret goes through an anguish of love that old Miss Noble could never dream of. It is puzzling to wonder whether Margaret (and Forster) could never be positively conscious of woman’s sexual love, or her sexual passion itself goes through a transformation into sexless sex because of her anguish and total despair over the man. The man has collapsed, like Creon, but Ladislaw does not.

Although for the moment Dorothea thinks she has lost him, her mistake is revealed during her passionate interview with Rosamond which she undertakes to give the ‘lovers’ her sympathy and support, and Ladislaw proves to be worthy of her love and trust after all. Her fractured vision of him is restored. As for Ladislaw, he is miserable and wretched over the incident and feels he cannot right himself in Dorothea’s eyes, but he never has to admit to himself his ultimate failure and responsibility. Also he despairs over their social situation which makes it “impossible” for them to get married. He is sulky, “irritated” and “bitter”, but neither his own core nature nor his adoration for Dorothea is touched to the extent that Dorothea is tested. Through Dorothea’s aroused passion and her courage to speak out, they manage to get married and put the two severed halves together.

Disillusion and isolation are related to the awakening of sexual consciousness: this seems to be the case with certain individuals who have a passion for “intensity and greatness” as a pivot of social conduct. In these works, then, do we witness a particular connection between that social or religious passion, its disillusion, and the awakening of sexual consciousness?

Although it is never explicitly stated in *Middlemarch*, some scenes and narrative

passages seem to suggest such a connection through the heavily-charged rhetoric.

Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it. (*M*, p. 2)

The first characteristic of this passage is its rhetoric consisting of a curious mixture of social, religious and sexual terms (as well as domestic, universal, historical and Biblical terms), which apparently describe the heroine's social and ethical passion alone. The sexual implication is either suppressed or sublimated—more likely to be suppressed because of the frustrations and failures (“retractions” and un-sought-for “martyrdom”) which seem inevitable. Yet the implication is there, even insistent, lurking with a strange movement which seeks to come out from behind the veil. The second characteristic of the passage is the violent fall from the expectation of the first half to the disappointment of the second. The conclusion of the second half, “incur[ring] martyrdom. . . in a quarter where she had not sought it”, applies to *Antigone*, *Howards End*, and probably *Women in Love* (where it would apply to the death of Gerald) rather than to *Middlemarch* itself, if we take “martyrdom” literally as physical death rather than as a rhetoric for ‘inconvenience’ or ‘self-renunciation’. But the process leading from disillusion to sexual consciousness, which is not described in the quotation and yet lies hidden under the veil, pervades all these works.

In actuality, neither Dorothea's actions nor their results are as grand as the style of the passage demands. Why is it then that George Eliot used such a dramatic mixture of sexual, religious and tragic references? The answer lies in the strong connection between *Middlemarch* and *Antigone*. George Eliot must have had the Greek tragedy in mind when she wrote the novel, and she developed the hidden meaning of her passages by conversing with *Antigone* through the use of composite rhetoric.

And we can observe in *Antigone* how Antigone's tragic action, “seeking martyrdom”, leads to a disillusion and, as a result, to her sexual awareness. As soon as Creon orders Antigone to be put alive into the walled-in sepulchre and left to live or die among the dead (so that he may seem not to be responsible for her death), she starts lamenting her “death in honor”, her isolation both from the crowd, the chorus, who do not understand the intensity of her action and from the dead who will surround her with their unresponsive corpses, and her “unwed” and “forlorn” state.

Fruit of incestuous sheets, a maid forlorn,  
And now I pass, accursed and unwed,  
To meet them as an alien below;  
And thee, O brother, in marriage ill-bestead,  
‘Twas thy dead hand that dealt me this death-blow. (*Antigone*, ll. 868–871)



Her father's "incestuous" marriage, her brother's "ill-bested" marriage, and her own "unwed" state are mentioned here. They are connected, and her action has somehow to compensate for the failures of her kinsmen in the eyes of heaven and earth. But the "piety" which she thought would lead her to an honourable death is rejected both by the living men and the dead who will not embrace her, and this seems to have made her alert to her own "unwed" state. The word is repeated frequently, almost with obsession :

Unwept, unwed, unfriended, hence I go, (l. 877)

O grave, O bridal bower, O prison house (l. 891)

A bride unwed, amerced of marriage-song

And marriage-bed and joys of motherhood, (ll. 919-20)

So her fate was the eventual "martyrdom" brought about by her kinsmen's passionate and rash marriage and its consequent social disgrace, and she embraces death as something greater than this disgrace. But the fact that she has to live on among the dead she chose reminds her of all her disillusionments with the dead while they lived plus the disillusion of "death" itself. It is then that her "unwed" state suddenly tells on her, and she literally pines for death after that disillusion.

This sexual consciousness is not that of the woman with a mild temperament who prefers security and common sense, who "mildly acquiesces" in the sentiments and views of a greater person but knows how to "manage" him or how to procure the satisfaction of her "small" desires. The character of Celia demonstrates George Eliot's awareness that such "small" desires do count especially in society where everybody should have a stance, economic and social, from which to share a basic understanding with her fellowmen or even to respect each other. Whereas the severe predicament forces Ismene, with her mild submission to male authority, momentarily to abandon her normal position and join her sister in their isolation, Celia's stand is never threatened. On the contrary, since her marriage to Sir James Chettam, the good-natured respectable country-gentleman, Celia has acquired independence from her sister and her own world of matronly dignity. Proclaiming that her husband is always right, she feels his steady support at her back as well as a stable sexual relationship, which allows her to mature as a confident woman and mother. That steady confidence and loyalty contrasted with the rashness and retractions—in a word, the vulnerability—of the passionate woman draws out the double difficulties such a woman has to face in the life of the Victorian England.

Celia's matronly advice to Dorothea is not to mourn Casaubon, since his death was only too welcome, but to seek secure comfort under Sir James's roof and share the joy of looking after the baby which is the centre of Celia's universe. Mrs. Cadwallader's private advice is more to the point :

You will certainly go mad in that house alone, my dear. You will see visions. We have all got to exert ourselves a little to keep sane, and call things by the same name as other people call them by. To be sure, for younger sons and women who have no money, it is a sort of provision to go mad : they are taken care of then. But you

must not run into that. (*M*, p. 371)

To her husband Mrs. Cadwallader adds the remark :

It will be well for her to marry again as soon as it is proper, if one could get her among the right people.

... How can she choose if she has no variety to choose from? A woman's choice usually means taking the only man she can get.

Mark my words, Humphrey. If her friends don't exert themselves, there will be a worse business than the Casaubon business yet. (*Ibid.*)

We can follow the trend of Mrs. Cadwallader's thought : isolated as she is, a woman of high social standing can go mad because of frustrated sexual desire if she insists on either remaining alone with her "visions" in the solitary house (a Gothic image which also reminds us of the sepulchre where Antigone was literally confined) or making her own "choice" while "she has no variety to choose from". She "see[s]" clearly a husband is the best thing to keep her in order" because, mental illness or a disastrous marriage, the results of the intense visionary pursuit of sexual passion, would be alternative forms of madness. Certainly the worldly-wise Mrs. Cadwallader cannot be absolutely sure that Dorothea has no chance of meeting an appropriate man, but the circle of men a woman of Dorothea's class gets to know is extremely limited.

Oh, I cannot bear it—my heart will *break* . . . I don't mind about poverty—I hate my wealth. (*M*, p. 560)

This confession by Dorothea when she makes her final choice of Ladislav is her way of avoiding Mrs. Cadwallader's worldly-wise prediction of madness and of narrowly finding the fantastic fulfilment of Dorothea's spiritual and sexual needs. We find here George Eliot's special kind of drama where common sense works as a critical voice which *detects* the intense sexual hunger beneath the intense spiritual hunger and which, by kindly and tactfully but impudently treading into "where angels fear to tread", stimulates the revelation of unadmitted passions.

How does this compare with *Howards End* which does not overtly 'reveal' sexual consciousness, though it is implicitly there in the logic of the plot? In *Howards End*, strictly speaking, the dichotomy between madness and common sense does not apply to the sisters. According to Mrs. Munt, the sisters were both "odd girls", and she predicted :

Sooner or later the girls would enter on the process known as throwing themselves away, and if they delayed hitherto it was only that they might throw themselves more vehemently in the future.

They saw too many people at Wickham Place—unshaven musicians, an actress even, German cousins (one knows what foreigners are), acquaintances picked up at continental hotels (one knows what they are too). It was interesting, and down at Swanage no one appreciated culture more than Mrs. Munt ; but it was dangerous, and disaster was bound to come. (*HE*, p. 12)

This is not far from Mrs. Cadwallader's thought about Dorothea, except that Mrs. Munt is worried "they saw too many people"—but people of odd kinds, not the right sort of

people, able with a mild appreciation of and complacency about English culture to fit into society. In fact, with a wider opportunity for meeting various sorts of people, especially with their emancipated views, the sisters are vulnerable to more dangers than Dorothea, who is surrounded by her guardians, worshippers, and her matronly sister and lady-friends. "Throwing themselves away" implies their accumulated or frustrated sexual desire, and to "throw themselves more vehemently" after a delay describes the process of sexual madness growing out of it.

On the other hand, delay might mean watching others, distancing themselves from sexual passion, and understanding others' mistakes and failures. This is particularly true of Margaret, rather than the more "selfish" and "irresponsible" Helen, because she has had to put herself last, after her younger sister and brother, having taken care of them since their parents died. This is first shown in her role as reader of Helen's letters; then in her having to stay with Tibby with his hay fever despite feeling that she should be with Helen at her crisis; then in listening to Helen's story and being concerned with her eccentric behaviour, and basing her own love upon her prosaic understanding (indirect and bookish) of male power and limitations. This distancing and prosaic understanding gives the impression of practical or common sense; but it is really in the same line as Helen's "mad" passion, only it starts with the intellectual understanding of its own disillusion and isolation.

For this reason, when her vague sense of disillusion turns into a direct understanding of disillusion and isolation, her awareness of sexual desire still comes through—so at least the plot implies. Margaret has to face her alienation from Henry Wilcox both when his moral unworthiness (his cheap affair with Mrs. Bast in the past) is revealed and when Henry proves unable to understand or admit Helen's (and Margaret's) wish to stay at Howards End on her last night in England. On both occasions, Margaret feels burning shame, anger, and impotence at Henry's alien thinking, and yet paradoxically it is that lacerating experience which reveals the irrational depth of her feeling for him. On the first occasion, she manages to accept the man, swallowing her aversion. On the second occasion, she decides to leave him, out of loyalty to her affection for Helen who needs her sister particularly in her pregnancy and social disgrace, and yet Margaret's unspoken sorrow tells us more about her loss than all her endearments and her defence of Henry have done before. Helen on the other hand cannot even for a moment face her disillusion with the man she loves. Her horror turns her passion into reaction. Although she discovers her limitation and learns to be humble, she learns this lesson at the expense of her sexual desire. "I am cured," she says. It is a sad resignation.

Could it be, then, that the ambiguously sexless impression which *Howards End* gives is due to the distance Margaret consciously places between herself and all physical and emotional feelings, and due also to the stoicism of the rhetoric which reflects the development of her mind—though it is this very distance that separates Margaret from Helen, and allows her to meet her own sexual dilemmas face to face?

### (3) The "Womb"-language and Female Superiority

'Distance' which an intellectual mind puts in sensual experience works in ambiguous ways, both stimulating awareness and causing alienation. It seems that with Forster it tended to promote the stoic element in his writing in spite of the sensual nature of its subject and that with Lawrence it brought out that sensual element present in germ in the rhetoric of George Eliot and Sophocles. This section studies that characteristic of Lawrence's rhetoric and also the problems involved.

When we compared the opening chapters of the novels, we found that the unique qualities that distinguish the two sisters in *Women in Love* are: (1) pride in instinct and instinctive knowledge (rather than in ideas and intellectual knowledge), and (2) the vague belief ("prescience") in something yet to come in spite of or through that limitation. Instinct, physical instinct, can almost be the equivalent of sexual instinct; however, compared with the instinct in men, it seems to go one step further back, to the physical recognition of the bond between mother and baby.

Although the relationship is that between man and woman, rather than between mother and child, the sisters frequently feel warmth, icy-coldness or nullity in the womb, or fire, friction or dissolution in the veins, and there are a number of other indications in the images and language which remind us of mother-knowledge. In fact, the main issue in the conflict between Birkin and Ursula is his resistance to female superiority in this mother-knowledge. Similarly, though their reactions are different, the conflict between Gerald and Gudrun centres around the mother-child relationship in their sex. In their case, it is Gudrun who resists the burden of the male who mindlessly pours all his bitterness into her and rests like a child in the bath of life. Despite the difference, however, we have to bear in mind that both sisters take an ambiguous distance from sex: their knowledge born of experience (they are women, not girls), their pride in the knowledge, their disillusion with and apathy to the sexual 'myth' (or common belief) of 'her man' and 'her child' (especially the mythic pleasure of bearing a child), and their readiness for and vulnerability to an unknown experience.

Mother-knowledge or female knowledge which is associated with the image of the mother is the knowledge that comes of accepting, enduring, giving birth to and still being irrevocably united with the fate (the life or death) of another being. The acceptance or germination of this fate takes place in the woman beyond her control, and in this sense her role is submissive. But, in exchange for this submissiveness, she has the greater knowledge of knowing another being through this bond.

Although both sisters seem to recognize the strength of this knowledge and use it, consciously or unconsciously, as a female weapon in their relationship with men, the ways they react to and use this knowledge form the difference between them. It is Ursula and not Gudrun who has "prescience" of something yet to come, despite or because of the limitation of physical and sexual experiences. In the opening chapter ("Sisters") Gudrun, in spite of her apparently bolder and more decisive behaviour and speech, is more reluctant to pursue a line of thought or action to its conclusion. That she

is more deliberate and suffers from the hostile eyes of the people in the mining community, whose influence, nevertheless, she feels strongly in her veins, is related to her artistic vocation to be effectual and her constant need for self-defense. Using the terms of the mother or the womb, one might say that her womb is threatened and violated by the dark physical nature of the mindless, soul-less, socially-debased people who are half cowed but bitter, grudging and lurking in hostility, which in a way thrills Gudrun and makes her determined to persist. On the other hand, she suffers painfully from the crassness and insensitivity of the people to her refined physical knowledge, so that they utterly fail to appreciate her knowledge of their corrosive sensual natures. Her shocking clothes are one of the forms of her artistic expression of such knowledge and its deliberate use—her will to master and be beyond the crassness of the people's passions—a superiority which they fail to appreciate and try to discourage with their cold stare and spiteful words. Likewise, though the workmen standing by appreciate Gudrun's body enough to relate its price to their week's wages, it never occurs to them to recognize her superior knowledge of their nature. It is so far beyond their comprehension that her theatrical pose and indignation almost look absurd. Hence, we see in her nature a strong frustrated demand for the recognition of her superiority.

Ursula, too, shows a strong demand for the recognition of her female knowledge and its superiority in her relationship with Birkin. In the chapter called "Carpeting", she also shares that demand with Hermione when they momentarily unite against Birkin who tries to resist female superiority in sensitive knowledge and its refinement.

"Isn't the evening beautiful! I get filled sometimes with such a great sense of beauty, that I feel I can hardly bear it."

Ursula, to whom she had appealed, rose with her, moved to the last impersonal depths. And Birkin seemed to her almost a monster of hateful arrogance. She went with Hermione along the bank of the pond, talking of beautiful, soothing things, picking the gentle cowslips.

"Wouldn't you like a dress," said Ursula to Hermione, "of this yellow spotted with orange—a cotton dress?"

"Yes," said Hermione, stopping and looking at the flower, letting the thought come home to her and soothe her. "Wouldn't it be pretty? I should *love* it." (WL, p. 141)

The idea of the beautiful evening which "fills" Hermione and the idea of clothing themselves in the colours of gentle cowslips are both "soothing" to the women because, in appreciating these gentle beauties of physical touch and sensation, they are appreciating their own gentle sensitivity—the tribute which men are not willing to pay. They unite their forces to confirm the value of their sensitivity and to exclude the men from their world as something inferior and menacing, "almost a monster of hateful arrogance".

There is a contrast between Ursula's suggestion of a cowslip-coloured cotton dress and Gudrun's always striking outfits such as "her grass-green stockings, her large grass-green velour hat, her full soft coat, of strong blue colour" (WL, p. 12). The difference

arises because Gudrun's clothing is more deliberate and aggressive. It is not meant to soothe herself but to shock and arrest and make ineffective the crassness of other people which threatens to trample upon her female sensitivity. Ursula is much less deliberate, and always unsure of herself because her feelings are mixed. Even while Ursula opens her heart to Hermione in their confidential talk—a manner which Gudrun never takes towards a woman with such deliberate power as Hermione's—immediately Ursula feels revulsion and hatred against Hermione for engaging her in what seems the treachery and exclusiveness against Birkin whom she has already instinctively (though tacitly) accepted as her lover. In her relationship with Birkin, too, she suffers from the split between love and hate. However, being open to different sorts of emotions and being ready to pursue them at greater risk, she has moments of forgetting or losing herself which may be both her limitation and salvation. This somehow seems connected with her "prescience", and it probably has some connection with the illogical hope at the end of *Howards End* and *Middlemarch*.

The first sharp conflict between Ursula and Gudrun occurs in "Coal-Dust" where they watch Gerald forcing the young mare to face the passing locomotive. Gudrun's reaction to the scene is not only different from Ursula's but is antagonistic to it.

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 and round, on two legs, as if she were in the centre of some whirlwind. It made Gudrun faint with poignant dizziness, which seemed to penetrate to her heart.

"No—! No—! Let her go! Let her go, you fool, you fool——!" cried Ursula at the top of her voice, completely outside herself. And Gudrun hated her bitterly for being outside herself. It was unendurable that Ursula's voice was so powerful and naked.

A sharpened look came on Gerald's face. He bit himself down on the mare like a keen edge biting home, and *forced* her round. She roared as she breathed, her nostrils were two wide, hot holes, her mouth was apart, her eyes frenzied. It was a repulsive sight. But he held on her unrelaxed, with an almost mechanical relentlessness, keen as a sword pressing in to her. Both man and horse were sweating with violence. Yet he seemed calm as a ray of cold sunshine.

Meanwhile the eternal trucks were rumbling on, very slowly, threading one after the other, one after the other, like a disgusting dream that has no end. The connecting chains were grinding and squeaking as the tension varied, the mare pawed and struck away mechanically now, her terror fulfilled in her, for now the man encompassed her, her paws were blind and pathetic as she beat the air, the man closed round her, and brought her down, almost as if she were part of his own physique.

"And she's bleeding!—She's bleeding!" cried Ursula, frantic with opposition and hatred of Gerald. She alone understood him perfectly, in pure opposition.

Gudrun looked and saw the trickles of blood on the sides of the mare, and she turned white. And then on the very wound the bright spurs came down, pressing relentlessly. The world reeled and passed into nothingness for Gudrun, she could not know any more.

When she recovered, her soul was calm and cold, without feeling. The trucks were still rumbling by, the man and the mare were still fighting. But she herself was cold and separate, she had no more feeling for them. . . . The guard's van came up, and passed slowly, the guard staring out in his transition on the spectacle in the road. And, through the man in the closed wagon Gudrun could see the whole scene spectacularly, isolated and momentary, like a vision isolated in eternity.

Lovely, grateful silence seemed to trail behind the receding train. How sweet the silence is! Ursula looked with hatred on the buffers of the diminishing wagon. The gate-keeper stood ready at the door of his hut, to proceed to open the gate. But Gudrun sprang suddenly forward, in front of the struggling horse, threw off the latch and flung the gates asunder, throwing one half to the keeper, and running with the other half, forwards. Gerald suddenly let go the horse and leaped forwards, almost on to Gudrun. She was not afraid. As he jerked aside the mare's head, Gudrun cried, in a strange, high voice, like a gull, or like a witch screaming out from the side of the road:

"I should think you're proud."

The words were distinct and formed. The man, twisting aside on his dancing horse, looked at her in some surprise, some wondering interest. (*WL*, pp. 111–2)

Here are two ways of facing and understanding the assertive violence of the male upon the mare, in conflict with each other. Ursula is "frantic" with opposition and hatred of the bullying male, but she (at least) claims that "she alone understood him perfectly, in pure opposition". She identifies herself with the frightened and bleeding mare, while her consciousness, fired into "pure opposition", allows her to direct her whole repulsion to the centre of this violence, the will of the man. In this sense, she has a oneness with and distance from the mare and can only throw herself back from the passing locomotive towards which she is pressed. But Gudrun keeps another sort of distance, larger than Ursula's, which appears first as her hatred for Ursula's "naked" reaction and then as the ability to see "through the man in the closed wagon. . . the whole scene spectacularly, isolated and momentary, like a vision isolated in eternity". It is a special artistic vision

of the moment, isolated from history and the experience of living, that she gains out of this experience. And, as if to confirm her active part in this dramatic spectacle, she dashes forward and flings open the gates by herself, crying out with words "distinct and formed". A theatrical performance.

Both understandings (and both representations of understanding) are based on the sisters' sexual and physical knowledge as woman. Obviously they both experience the "terror" and "repulsion" of the mare under the pressure of the man's "compulsion" as a violence which does "penetrate" into their own bodies, and it makes Gudrun lose consciousness. However, openly Gudrun never admits to any terror or pain. At the thought of blood, she turns white, the world reels, and she cannot know any more, but still throughout the experience she is a match for Gerald whose face gets a "sharpened" look and who "bit himself" down the mare, gripping her naked frenzy and pain between his loins, but who keeps "calm as a ray of cold sunshine". Thus, when she recovers, she finds herself "calm and cold" and "indifferent", free from fear. By enduring the experience, without giving herself away like the mare or Ursula, by mastering the experience in her female role, she comes strong and clear out of the experience with the full knowledge of Gerald's "sharp", relentless assertiveness—the sharpness so pure as to be inhuman like the keen edge of the sword or a beam of cold sunshine. She herself is inhuman, "a witch" who can use her special knowledge because she is free from human horror and bondage. At the top of her "strange" voice, like a gull, she salutes Gerald with the recognition of his "sharp" mastery of wild, frenzied nature. If he is the "proud" male, she herself is the proud female who can claim him thus. They are both masters of this horrifying spectacle, dominant and impressive. But the question remains: is she really so strong if she cannot bear her sister's "powerful and naked" voice? And is all her mastery worth it? For Ursula, too, there is a problem. Being "frantic" and losing self-control, she seems not only vulnerable but lacking in dignity—a hysterical woman who only highlights the nature of this scene and makes an irritating noise. Isn't it presumptuous and limited of her, after all, to claim that "she *alone* understood him perfectly, in pure opposition"?

The contrast between the sisters becomes clearer in the following chapters, "Sketch-book" and "An Island". The opening of the former chapter forms a parallel to the opening of "Sisters":

One morning the sisters were sketching by the side of Willey Water,  
at the remote end of the lake.

But then it proceeds to show the clear difference between their attitudes in their quiet private hours of contemplation:

Gudrun had waded out to a gravelly shoal, and was seated like a Buddhist, staring fixedly at the water-plants that rose succulent from the mud of the low shores. What she could see was mud, soft, oozy, watery mud, and from its festering chill, water-plants rose up, thick and cool and fleshy, very straight and turgid, thrusting out their leaves at right angles, and having dark lurid colours, dark



green and blotches of black-purple and bronze. But she could feel their turgid fleshy structure as in a sensuous vision, she *knew* how they rose out of the mud, she *knew* how they thrust out from themselves, how they stood stiff and succulent against the air.

Ursula was watching the butterflies, of which there were dozens near the water, little blue ones suddenly snapping out of nothingness into a jewel-life, a large black-and-red one standing upon a flower and beathing with his soft wings, intoxicatingly, breathing pure, ethereal sunshine; two white ones wrestling in the low air; there was a halo round them; ah, when they came tumbling nearer they were orange-tips, and it was the orange that had made the halo. Ursula rose and drifted away, unconscious like the butterflies. (*WL*, p. 119)

Gudrun on the one hand is "seated", immobile "like a Buddhist", "staring fixedly" at the water-plants which themselves are embedded deep in the "soft, oozy, watery mud" but "rose up, thick and cool and fleshy". Ursula on the other is watching various sizes and colours of butterflies, continually and "suddenly" being surprised by their appearance, disappearance, change of colour or shape, and undefinable flitting movements. Just as the butterflies "breathing pure, ethereal sunshine" are themselves ethereal, "breathing with ... soft wings", so Ursula, watching and softly breathing their movements and "the halo" in the air around them, "drifted away, unconscious like the butterflies." Colours figure prominently in this passage, as in the references to the sisters' clothes, but it is not just the colours but the texture, light, warmth, and tone of the colours that matter. For they reflect two kinds of 'knowledge' or understanding, and they are associated with those of the scene of the fight between Gerald and the mare. Gudrun's deliberate, conscious knowledge is here concentrated on dark things, cool things, unmoving things of water: the "dark lurid colours, dark green and blotches of black-purple and bronze" of the "thick and cool and fleshy, very straight and turgid" water-plants. This is contrasted with Ursula's vague, almost-unconscious knowledge of bright things, moving insubstantial things, which seem to "drift" in the air, *together with* the spots of "blue" (the colour of the beautiful sky, the most ephemeral colour) which easily disappear but suddenly snap "out of nothingness into a jewel-life", with the large soft wings of "black and red" which stand "upon a flower and breathe" like the warm "intoxicating" sun, and with the "two white ones wrestling in the low air" with "a halo" round them but "tumbling nearer" (the humorous picture of angels with the echo of Emily Dickinson's drunken bee) to reveal the "orange-tips" (like the tips caught from the sun) that made the halo. The soft warm blessing of nature which is so ephemeral as to appear miraculously out of the blue is, nevertheless, created around the tiny "wrestling" bodies—tiny in view of the nature which surrounds them. The two "wrestling" ones are mating helplessly in intoxicating nature. Their relationship with nature is friendly, blessed and unconscious. This knowledge, which itself is ethereal, is conveyed through the poetic language, whereas there is a strong emphasis on Gudrun's conscious, willed knowledge of the

water-plants, that "she *knew* how they rose out of the mud, she *knew* how they thrust out from themselves. . . ."

So the sisters' understanding of physical and sexual life corresponds with their understanding of nature. Gudrun's water-plants themselves are located in nature, even more so than the flitting butterflies, because they are inescapably fixed in the "festering chill" of the soft mud, both fecund and deadly, but they do not seem to abandon themselves to this helplessness. In fact, they do, Gudrun knows, "thrust out from themselves", from their own rootedness, upon their sheer will "against the air", against nature. This hostile relationship with nature seems so contravened and dangerous, even murderous. The "turgid" and "stiff" stems, like inflamed sexual organs, may snap off any moment from their own weight and inflexibility.

On the other hand, we know also that there are two sides of nature, hostile and friendly, and that the difference between the sisters is caused not simply by the difference between their characters but by the two sides of nature which a man or a woman is forced to face differently. In his essay, "The Reality of Peace", Lawrence says:

Perhaps the decay of autumn purely balances the putting forth of spring. Certainly the two are necessary each to the other; they are the systole diastole of the physical universe. . . . Is it a pride to me that in my blood the fire flickers out of the wheaten bread I have partaken of, flickers up to further and higher creation? Then how shall it be a shame that from my blood exudes the bitter sweat of corruption on the journey back to dissolution; how shall it be a shame that in my consciousness appear the heavy marsh-flowers of the flux of putrescence, which have their natural roots in the slow stream of decomposition that flows for ever down my bowels?

There is a natural marsh in my belly, and there the snake is naturally at home. . . . Then let the serpent of living corruption take his place among us honourably. Come then, brindled abhorrent one, you have your own being and your own righteousness, yes, and your own desirable beauty.<sup>8</sup>

From the snake to the marsh-flower and from the marsh to the decay of autumn, the image becomes less violent and quieter, but through them runs the same impulse for murder and decomposition. If we pursue this logic, just as spring and autumn in nature need each other, lightly-flitting butterflies and heavy marsh-flowers need each other, and the innocent man (Adam) and the snake need each other. And as there are two sorts of actions, creative and destructive, there are two sorts of knowledge, creative and destructive. The kind of knowledge which thrives on decomposition, the understanding of the snake and the marsh-flower, is the one Lawrence associates with our civilised consciousness and which he criticizes in many of his writings. And yet at the same time he regards the knowledge as an inevitable part of the process of life, to be given its due respect. Moreover, it is even "honourable" if the knower *knew* and accepted the fate of decomposition with pride. Here, as in the "Sketch-book" scene, he can admire the

courage, strength, thrills and trembling beauty of those who stand erect, whatever the consequence may be. Although the marsh-flower is associated both with Gudrun and Gerald in *Women in Love*, it is essentially Gudrun's flower, the female knowledge, of accepting and persevering, thus mastering, the fate of decomposition. It signifies the seething knowledge, rather than the violent action, of the destructive process of life.

The passage in "Sketch-book" is meant to remind the reader of the attraction Birkin felt towards the Chinese drawing of geese which he was copying at Breadalby, Hermione's Georgian house. He explains to Hermione:

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 own blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire—fire of the cold-burning mud—the lotus mystery. (WL, p. 89)

What is meant by the word "they" is ambiguous. Presumably it signifies geese, and through them the artists in China—because he claims, "One gets more of China, copying this picture, than reading all the books." But his interest is clearly more personal; he is interested in learning what does not belong to mentally-assertive Western culture but is, nevertheless, embedded in his own people—female knowledge of the essentially male, consciously analytical attitude to nature. Whether man made nature hostile or hostile nature made man hostile to it is one of those questions difficult to answer, but the aggressive attitude of man towards nature has certainly made nature even more hostile. It is, at the bottom, such a malfunction within the living body that Birkin's speech refers to. But he does not stop there. When the artists (and Gudrun in the passage quoted before) identify themselves with the goose or the lotus in the "stinging" mud, they are not simply looking at a hostile nature but observing the reflection of man's ego (or the "stinging centrality" of the goose) in nature, and thus, through their perception, are able to fix the glamour of this reflected ego in a timeless scene.

So there is both a general truth and a particular truth of the artist that Birkin's words refer to. The fact that man is facing hostile, even corrosive nature inside himself has such bitter, telling truth in the novel that it envelops not only Gudrun and Gerald but also Birkin and Ursula, Hermione, and others. The artist's role is more deliberate. It involves deliberate identification, representation, and search for an effect, though that identification or experience does not mean sitting back in a safe corner but being vulnerable and daring, and Gudrun's words and actions reflect this more than anything else in the novel.

Gudrun is always on the look-out for aggression and theatrical effect. When she later slaps Gerald on the face after chasing his highland cattle in "Water-Party", she makes sure that Gerald understands she is not afraid of him and his cattle; and when he manages to find words, and reminds her that she has struck the first blow, she retorts, "And I shall strike the last." (WL, p. 171) And so she does in the end, when Gerald dies in the snow. She is like a woman on a tightrope who must make sure that she is not afraid, and so she hates Ursula when she shows her "naked" anger or fear. This whole

game of making sure is so much like a demonic spirit residing in Gudrun that Gerald's forced but soft reminder "sounded like a dream within her" and her retort comes "involuntarily" as if she were a spiritual medium.

It is only when she is forced to confront herself and her fears that Gudrun cannot stand it, and this appears not only in her antagonism to her sister's different reaction but later more clearly in her confrontation with her own clock-face :

Oh God, the wheels within wheels of people—it makes one's head tick like a clock, with a very madness of dead mechanical monotony and meaninglessness. How I *hate* life, how I hate it. How I hate the Gerald's, that they can offer one nothing else. . . . What were his kisses, his embraces. She could hear their tick-tack, tick-tack.

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!

Then, with a fleeting self-conscious motion, she wondered if she would be very much surprised, on rising in the morning, to realise that her hair *had* turned white. She had *felt* it turning white so often, under the intolerable burden of her thoughts and her sensations. Yet there it remained, brown as ever, and there she was herself, looking a picture of health. . . . 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. She was watching the fingers twitch across the eternal, mechanical, monotonous clock-face of time. She never really lived, she only watched. Indeed, she was like a little, twelve-hour clock, vis-a-vis with the enormous clock of eternity—there she was, like Dignity and Impudence, or Impudence and Dignity.

The picture pleased her. . . . She would have got up to look, in the mirror, but the thought of the sight of her own face, that was like a twelve-hour clock-dial, filled her with such deep terror, that she hastened to think of something else. (WL, 464–5)

That "in vain she fluttered the leaves of books, or made statuettes in clay", that "she never really lived, she only watched", and so on, together with her repeated tendency to look into the mirror and with the image of her hair turning white "under the intolerable burden of her thoughts", all has a strong echo of "The Lady of Shalott". Moreover, the words such as "the wheels within wheels of people" and "the mechanical succession of day following day" remind us of "the eternal trucks . . . rumbling on, very slowly, threading one after another, one after the other, like a disgusting dream" from which the mare, having fought in frenzy, in the end "pawed and struck away mechanically", emphasizing the merely repetitious, mechanical, endless and meaningless phase of such a burden, such knowledge. Already, when she was watching the struggle between Gerald and the mare, Gudrun was removed by several partitions from the scene, looking through the eyes of the guard in his closed van passing by, at the reflection of the mare's bleeding

wound and terror upon her female sensitivity, again reflected on the mare. As the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun develops, at moments she catches a glimpse of perfect knowledge of the man he himself cannot see, but those glimpses are passing, temporary. Once they are past, there is nothing for the persistent observer to do but to see their reflections reflected upon her (or his) senses and to see those reflections reflected upon the other person's reactions—or else, as Gudrun is here beginning to do, to resist the mechanization and dilution of this superior knowledge to the every-day, meaningless level. Her pride in her knowledge, her last hold on life, will not permit her to stand her own clock-dial face reflected in the mirror, a vision of the mere mechanism her conscious knowledge itself is falling into. She “hates” Gerald, or “the Gerald”, for “offer[ing] one nothing else”, as if she is only capable of *being offered* something, not capable of grasping, making or giving something. Because she “never really lived, she only watched”. Her limitation is the limitation of her knowledge. Her female knowledge is limited by her female passivity, in spite of her daring performance. Like the Lady of Shalott, she never dares to live, and thus to die in knowledge.

The surprise, the gap, between the *expectation* (or diagnosis) of her hair turning white and the *reality* that “there it remained, brown as ever, and there she was herself, looking a picture of health” has a parallelism in *Middlemarch*, which Frank Kermode noted as a case of the kind of reality that Lawrence learned from Eliot and reproduced in his own work. It is the scene at Lowick on her return from the honeymoon to Rome, when Dorothea looks into the mirror for the confirmation of her sense of deathly defeat, only to find an image of health and vitality there. There is even a coincidence between the chill, unsympathetic winter landscape of Lowick, where everything shrinks and withers, and the maddeningly white winter landscape of Tirol where Gudrun and Gerald meet their crisis, where they have moments of perfect isolated sensations, and where Gudrun comes to fear and despise him as an oppressive “burden” stifling her.

Interestingly, Kermode not only points out that “Crich, like Casaubon, belonged to death, to an old order” but half hesitatingly calls Dorothea’s incongruously glowing vitality (just like the fire glowing incongruously in the room) “the human and perhaps *specifically female strength* that comes through these crises” (italics, mine).<sup>9</sup> In the word “female” biological and social meanings mingle. Kermode’s stress seems to fall on the biological and its implications. But the strength which Gudrun deliberately employs in her combat with Gerald depends also on the social myth of the “female” role. In other words, her strength depends not only on her natural vitality that perseveres through the insensitivity and violence of the male who tries to impose his will, but on the secrecy of her real experience where her supposedly “superior” knowledge resides. She never admits her fears or her own sense of futility to Gerald because her superiority depends on her secrecy, if on nothing else. A similar thing can be said about Gerald as a strong male. Quite different from Casaubon who is pedantic, ego-centric, and emotionally and sexually unresponsive, Gerald is socially assertive, sexually virile, and able to forget himself in his social or sexual role. (He is often described as “a pure instrument”.) Nevertheless, the dangerously provoking and daring sensations which Gudrun experiences with him,

starting off quite differently from Dorothea's nun-like enclosure in her relationship with Casaubon, turn out to have their own dead-end—in persistent dependency on her role, in her unyielding deliberate submission, in her knowledge which finally counts—the limitation which gradually but inevitably grips her like an oppressive burden that cannot relax or change. That is the kind of death which weighs on her, and why she looks into her mirror to see if her hair has turned white, only to find the same persistent vitality of youth.

The next vision she has of herself, which Kermode does not mention, shows Lawrence's *uniqueness*, which belongs neither to Tennyson nor to George Eliot. The vision of Gudrun's clock-face, which illustrates the mechanism of her socially and sexually determined role, is only the female counterpart of Gerald's male role, the male myth of the machine age that knows only how to repeat itself ever more efficiently. That Gudrun *cannot* bear to face this vision in the mirror is a clear indication of her distance from nineteenth-century heroines. The myth of the female, which was her strength, has shrunk into a meagre twelve-hour clock, no more than the meagre reproduction of the whole social mechanism, with no mystery behind it.

Or has it a mystery behind it? In the case of Ursula, it becomes ambiguous. Unlike her sister, Ursula is less conscious and deliberate, less aggressive, more flexible, and, therefore, more ready to face and admit her defeats and adjust to the change of nature both in and outside herself. In that sense, she has a richer "female" potentiality, though she is less interested in using it effectively. In fact, her sense of mistakes and failures often overcomes her, so that she never seems sure of herself, except when she is passionately attacking the "bullying" male and when she feels her "female" attraction has "conquered" the male. In her relationship with Birkin, there is a complex interplay of tender feeling and conflict, passion and pain, even periods of indifference.

Birkin, too, has both an admiration for and a resistance to her "female" power, which is best illustrated in the famous moon scene where he throws stones into the pond again and again to break the spell of the moon's reflection in the water. That the scene forms a pair with Gudrun's looking (or not daring to look) into the mirror has not been noticed to my knowledge, probably because the scenes look so different. The difference comes largely from the difference of their surroundings—the small bare bedroom where Gudrun sits up by herself in the chilling whiteness of the high Tirol mountains, and the dark but mysterious nature of the mill-pond close to the sisters' home. And it is Birkin's presence and violent action that disturbs and reveals the menacing persistence of the moon, the great female power. The moon is probably as far as one can get from the socially determined female role. If anything, it represents the physiological role of woman as part of nature, but it has its own myth. Ursula herself, wandering out by herself to be away from people in the night, suddenly notices the presence of the moon, is frightened by its big sinister smile, and somehow hates its reflection in the pond. It should be noted that *both* the man and the woman hate the moon, though they also find it mysteriously compelling.

But it seemed so mysterious, with its white and deathly smile. . . .

Night or day, one could not escape the sinister face, triumphant and radiant like this moon, with a high smile. (*WL*, p. 245)

Why does Ursula find the moon “deathly”, “sinister”, and “triumphant”? Why does she want to escape from it? To find the answer, one should first examine the chapter called “Sunday Evening”. It recounts her first sexual experience with Birkin, and his “soft, blind kisses” which surprised her with “a sort of delicate happiness”. She first draws away, pretending to see if somebody is coming. Then, “to show him she was no shallow prude”—which is deliberate and daring—she suddenly held him tight and covered his face “with hard, fierce kisses of passion”.

“Not this, not this,” he whimpered to himself, as the first perfect mood of softness and sleep-loveliness ebbed back away from the rushing of passion that came up his limbs and over his face as she drew him. . . . he only wanted her, with an extreme desire that seemed inevitable as death, beyond question.

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. (*WL*, pp. 187–8)

Apparently Ursula is uneasy because Birkin’s gentle kisses of silent happiness are quite new to her, and yet the language which describes it as “strange moths, very soft and silent, settling on her from the darkness of her soul” reminds us of the flitting movements of the butterflies which come out of nowhere and settle on the flowers, “breathing with his soft wings, intoxicatingly” as Ursula watched them during the day. She must have been familiar with it at least on the unconscious level because it is close to her soul: it comes “from the darkness of her soul”. Yet she does not expect it to come from the male. Contrasted with this is the image of “fire” that burned and “shattered” Birkin, that “fulfilled and destroyed” him, which is closely related to the image of the triumphant, deathly moon. Ursula is more at home with this “old passion”, the old role of man and woman in violent sexual passion. She is more used to this, she must have wanted it, and she knows she can conquer him with passion. That he “whimpered” is sadly a sign of his weakness and defeat, though he too is familiar with this kind of passion and does not want it on one level of consciousness. And yet he is “fulfilled” and “satisfied” at the same time. The experience is ambiguous: it is shattering and inevitable “as death”, and it is the “ultimate and triumphant experience of passion, that had blazed up anew like a new spell of life”. Especially the deceptively ambiguous use of the words such as “*like* . . . life” and “*as death*” should not escape the careful reader because it registers the implication of self-deception as well as the mysterious nature of the experience.

For Ursula, after this experience, the period of passionate delirium in which she just sits indoors and waits for him to come, capable of nothing, and the period of complete nullity and dissolution of the body succeed each other as a most painful sequence.

As the day wore on, the life-blood seemed to ebb away from Ursula, and within the emptiness a heavy despair gathered. Her *passion seemed to bleed to death*, and there was nothing. . . . She had

travelled all her life along the line of fulfilment, and it was nearly concluded. She knew all she had to know, she had experienced all she had to experience, she was fulfilled in a kind of bitter ripeness, there remained only to fall from the tree into death. . . . In a kind of spiritual trance, she yielded, she gave way, and all was dark. She could feel, within the darkness, *the terrible assertion of her body*, the unutterable anguish of dissolution, the only anguish that is too much, the far-off, awful nausea of dissolution set in within the body. . . . And she knew, with the clarity of ultimate knowledge, that the body is only one of the manifestations of the spirit, the transmutation of the integral spirit is the transmutation of the physical body as well. —Unless I set my will, unless I absolve myself from the rhythm of life, fix myself and remain static, cut off from living, absolved within my own will. But *better die than live mechanically a life that is a repetition of repetitions*. (WL, pp. 191–2)

There is fine distinction between her decision that her life is fulfilled, however bitterly, and the assertion of the body which says it is not fulfilled. Apparently the simple cause of bitterness is that Birkin does not come to meet her passion at the proper time. However, it is not that one man does not come; it is the culmination of all her previous experiences that her moments of great physical need—or what she thought was purely physical need—were never properly met to leave her finally satisfied. In *The Rainbow* we see another Ursula who also seems to get satisfaction at moments and yet hungers after something more, and turns on Skrebensky with a relentlessly demanding passion which finally defeats him. There, too, the moon acted as a great force, representing her frustrated, corrosive passion. These experiences of her past, as well as her daytime bitter experiences of teaching in school, are left out of *Women in Love* except for allusions like: “She had travelled all her life. . . .” For the particular experiences we should turn to the previous novel, but we can admit the truth of her general statement and say that both her newly-awakened passion for Birkin and its premature bleeding to death are the confirmation of what she has experienced and known. What she realizes with a new force is that physical passion with all her experience and knowledge has come back again and that it has been pursuing its course of death. Although it will continue to produce its ebb and flow, she makes the important decision to admit its consequences instead of struggling to preserve herself with her fixed will.

The paradox is that by refusing to face the growing knowledge that her physical life as well as her spiritual life (because one is the manifestation of the other) is undergoing a convulsive process of dissolution, she will be estranged from “the rhythm of life” and be a mere machine with one fixed will to stay out of life (or death, as they come to mean the same thing). The machine-life with its “repetition of repetitions” corresponds with the clock-image which frightens Gudrun. On the other hand, by relinquishing her will and quietly accepting the anguish and nausea of dissolution, Ursula can let her physical life and spiritual life be part of “the rhythm of life”. This is her real point of departure from



Gudrun's way of life.

The "Moony" scene is essentially a ritual confirming what has taken place inside Ursula in the preceding chapter. Birkin, throwing stones at the moon in the water, is undergoing the anguish of the struggle against the terrible assertion of the physical life which has him at its mercy, but he is also fighting the sinister triumphant look of the female myth which pretends to know better and to absolve itself from the process of universal dissolution.

The mirror-image is important here because it doubles the image of the moon itself and its reflection, the myth of a moon created by man one step out of its mortality. In one sense, he is fighting against the illusion of female knowledge which prevents man and woman from looking directly at their frustrated, disoriented physical life, to which Ursula responds with quivering fear and anxiety. In another, he is fighting against the rhythm of his own physical nature that inevitably comes back to seek the female, which makes his action ugly and obsessed. The two sides, merging, render his performance both pathetic and absurd, and Ursula's eyes register this, though they would not have been able to do so with her own behaviour.

"Cybele—curse her! The accursed Syria Dea!—Does one begrudge it her?—What else is there—?"

Ursula wanted to laugh loudly and hysterically, hearing his isolated voice speaking out. It was so ridiculous. (*WL*, p. 246)

Birkin keeps stoning the reflection of the moon, never being fully satisfied with the disruption he has momentarily produced but having to go on "like a madness"; and yet he does succeed in achieving an effect that convinces him and Ursula, however momentarily, that "there was nothing but a rocking hollow noise. . . no moon any more, only a few broken flakes tangled and glittering broadcast in the darkness, without aim or meaning, a darkened confusion. . . ."

Then Ursula's double vision and ambiguous attitude must be noted again, appearing this time in a positive light.

Birkin stood and listened and was satisfied.

Ursula was dazed, her mind was all gone. She felt she had fallen to the ground and spilled out, like water on the earth. . . . Though even now she was aware, unseeing, that in the darkness was a little tumult of ebbing flakes of light, a cluster dancing secretly in a round, twining and coming stealthily together. . . . until a ragged rose, a distorted, frayed moon was shaking upon the waters again, re-asserted, renewed, trying to recover from its convulsion. . . to be whole and composed, at peace.

Birkin lingered vaguely by the water. Ursula was afraid that he would stone the moon again. She slipped from her seat and went down to him, saying:

"You won't throw stones at it any more, will you?" (*WL*, p. 248)

In Ursula's vision the image of the water being "spilled out" into extinction is succeeded

by the image of the invisibly gathering “ragged rose, a distorted, frayed moon. . . shaking” and being “renewed”. Although as a physical or scientific phenomenon the re-gathering motion of the moon on the water-surface does not change its nature after its momentary disappearance, the depth of her experience and her acceptance of nullity has released her will and importantly changed her perception of the moon’s motion (or the water’s motion).

The language which describes Birkin’s stoning the moon’s image on the pond, the repeated convulsion and intertwining of the moon like a rose, and Ursula’s almost-direct physical experience of this scene—this is a sexual language which gradually changes its note from stark and insistent physical violence and blind vigorous recovery to mad confusion and nullity, and then suddenly to naive and trembling sensuality and finally to peace. The motion is no longer menacing or assertive but “shaking”, “reasserted” (passive), “renewed”, and “trying to recover” and be at peace—the quivering and natural state of renewal, which calls for soft fear and tenderness.

It is essential to interpret Ursula’s pleading to Birkin in this light. I use the word “tenderness” in its general sense, but it has a special significance for Lawrence, especially in his later works such as *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Although I do not propose further discussion of the term, it should be noted here that it comes as a result of the drastic attack on and rejection of sexual roles and the subsequently renewed acceptance of a physical life whose nature has undergone change.

Thus the ‘womb’-language is used in different ways to describe the sisters’ two kinds of female knowledge and the courses they take. When the sisters are together by themselves, they tend to share an almost sang-froid distance from their female feelings, discussing and analyzing them, but their ways part in their attitudes to men. Gudrun, never forgetting to be an artist with a superior knowledge, keeps a challenging distance and mysteriousness from Gerald, while accepting him and being equal to him in any form or degree of sexual violence. Her strength lies in her deliberate and unflinching mastery of the traditional female role and its daring dramatization against the aggressiveness of the male in his socially-expected, persistent role. Before her dramatic effect, Ursula’s tendency to lose distance and self-control, her “naked” fear and anger with the “bullying” male, looks “vulgar”, “unrefined”, “impertinent”, and sometimes even “ugly”. But she has also moments of almost unconscious attraction and tenderness towards Birkin, which she admits or hesitates to admit with trembling fear and hope. Though she is unsure and caught in dilemmas, her honest suffering and openness to conflicting emotions give her the possibility of breaking her own limitation, the limitation of her female role in its naive belief in physical knowledge. This enables her, however momentarily, to regain naturalness in the stressful relationship with Birkin, who himself is caught in the dilemma of his social and sexual roles.

But this is not the end of the ‘womb’-language. The sisters’ female knowledge has its counterpart, male knowledge and male action. Especially Ursula’s knowledge, by its very vulnerability and openness, involves a violent collision with male thinking, and if the directness is shared by both bodies, she and the man have the chance of dying in and

reorganizing their sexual roles.

#### Notes

- 1 From *Sophocles*, With an English Translation by F. Storr (Heinemann : London, 1912).
- 2 *E. M. Forster* (The Hogarth Press : London, 1967), p. 116.
- 3 *The Cave and the Mountain : A Study of E. M. Forster* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 275.
- 4 *The Galaxy*, March 1873, cited in *George Eliot and Her Readers : A Selection of Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by John Holmstrom and Laurence Lerner (The Bodley Head : London, 1966), pp. 111–2.
- 5 *Particularities : Readings in George Eliot* (Peter Owen : London, 1982), p. 100.
- 6 *George Eliot* (The Harvester Press : Brighton, 1986), p. 172.
- 7 *Continuities* (Routledge and Kegan Paul : London, 1968), pp. 145–6.
- 8 D. H. Lawrence, *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, ed. by Michael Herbert (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 36–7.
- 9 *Continuities*, p. 146.

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