

**An exploration of female and male  
homosocial bonds in D. H. Lawrence's  
'serious English novels'**

**ENGL 3318: Final Year Project**

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## Introduction

To focus exclusively on homosocial relationships, ‘the social bonds between persons of the same sex’, may seem like an odd choice when studying a writer like D. H. Lawrence.<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence himself stated that ‘The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child, will always be subsidiary.’<sup>2</sup>

His attitude towards sex, gender and the nature and importance of homosocial relationships, however, were subject to many changes throughout his career. These changes, I argue, are most visible in three closely related novels written across a seven-year span. The first is the female-focused narrative of *The Rainbow*, banned for obscenity upon publication due to its protagonist’s lesbian affair.<sup>3</sup> The second is its sequel, *Women in Love*, best-known for the ambiguous relationship between its male protagonists, but whose female relationships are also worth studying. The last novel is *Aaron’s Rod*, a text in which the titular protagonist relinquishes his ties to his family and country and explores the possibilities of bonds with other men. In a 1921 letter, written shortly before the publication of *Aaron’s Rod*, Lawrence explicitly ties this novel to the previous ones: ‘It is the last of my serious English novels – the end of *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* line. It had to be written – and had to come to such an end.’<sup>4</sup>

The present study is concerned with demonstrating how Lawrence’s shifting philosophical beliefs affected the way he treated homosocial relationships in his novels. I will engage with his theoretical tracts, tracing the evolution of his dualistic models, the ways in which he treated homosexuality, and his emphasis on the subject’s individuality. While his later views on gender were highly conservative, I argue that the characters, particularly the female characters, in his earlier novels are individualised to such a degree that making generalisations concerning gender is something we should be wary of.

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<sup>1</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> D. H. Lawrence, ‘Morality and the Novel’ in *Study of Thomas Hardy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), ed. Bruce Steele, pp. 169-175.

<sup>3</sup> See D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 11. Further references will be indicated in the body of the essay by (*R x*).

<sup>4</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), iv, ed. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield, pp. 92-93.

## I. Female Homosociality in *The Rainbow*

The term ‘homosocial’ can be a misleading one, a kind of ‘oxymoron’, as Sedgwick herself notes. Its relation to the term ‘homosexual’ is a paradoxical one: it is ‘formed by analogy’ with the term, and at the same time ‘distinguished’ from it.<sup>5</sup> Adrienne Rich’s notion of the ‘lesbian continuum’ offers a useful model for describing the concept with regards to female homosociality. Though ‘lesbian’ implies a model of sexual relationships, it is actually defined as the ‘range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience’.<sup>6</sup> While this may of course describe lesbian relationships, it also includes relationships such as those between female co-workers, female friends and even mothers and daughters. Out of all Lawrence’s texts, *The Rainbow* (1915) is the one in which female bonds play the largest role in the subject’s journey towards its ‘final aim ... the full achievement of itself.’<sup>7</sup> The subject in this case is a female character, Ursula, and the two women who exert the strongest influence on her development function within the text as opposite poles within Lawrence’s philosophical system of dualities. By engaging with, and subsequently reaching a compromise between the worlds of her mother, Anna, and her teacher, Winifred, Ursula finds individual fulfilment, a ‘new reality’, at the novel’s close (*R* 108).

Before examining the characters’ relationships in more detail, it is worth delineating the system of dualities through which Lawrence defines them. In his *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914) he identifies two opposite ‘streams’ of being, which he labels ‘male’ and ‘female’. Though his language is gendered, it is important to bear in mind that he uses these terms in a highly idiosyncratic way, and not strictly as indicators of sexual difference: ‘There is female apart from Woman,’ he writes, ‘and male apart from that.’<sup>8</sup> The ‘Male’, for Lawrence, is a kind of collective term for different elements of his philosophy. It is action, ‘doing’ and the world of the intellect, growing ‘upwards’. It is ‘discovery and light and utterance.’<sup>9</sup> The ‘Female’ contains the opposite forces: ‘being’ as opposed to ‘doing’; the sensual and physical as opposed to the intellectual. It is ‘the centre and the darkness and the origin’, a turning inwards rather than reaching outwards.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Sedgwick, pp. 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> See Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’ in Catharine R. Stimpson and Ethel Spector Person (eds.), *Women: Sex and Sexuality* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1980) pp. 62-91. For the definition of the terms *lesbian continuum* and *lesbian existence*, see pp. 79-80.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence, Hardy, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence, *Hardy*, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94 and p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* I use the capitalised terms ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ to refer to Lawrence’s concepts, distinct from ‘male’ and ‘female’, which I use with their standard meaning.

The interaction between Male and Female forces, whether between different subjects or within the same subject, is arguably one of the most important driving forces in Lawrence's work. His criticism constantly reiterates the idea that a fusion of the Male and Female leads to a superior, transcendent state of completion. In 'Hardy' this kind of perfected internal balance is an ideal state, represented by the flower.<sup>11</sup> The journey towards the flower of individual fulfilment is central to *The Rainbow*; it is what Lawrence would call its 'structural skeleton'.<sup>12</sup> Ursula achieves this balance by rejecting the extremes of the other two women, whose over-investment in the Male and Female respectively leads, in both cases, to a disastrous erosion of individuality.

As Kinkead-Weekes points out, in the passages leading up to Ursula and Winifred's affair, there is a powerful dual 'physical and intellectual' attraction as valid as Ursula's feelings for any male character in the book.<sup>13</sup> Winifred, on the surface, appears to have achieved the perfect balance between Male and Female which Ursula herself aspires to. In a deliberately repetitious passage, Lawrence first draws attention to Winifred's Male intellectualism.<sup>14</sup> Her profession as a schoolteacher places her in the 'Man's World' of ideas towards which Ursula later finds herself.<sup>15</sup> She is described as having 'clear' qualities four times within the space of a single page, and is twice noted as being 'clean' (R 383). The two words are almost homophones and synonyms, and their repeated use within such a contained space is intentional. Light and clarity for Lawrence are strongly associated with the Male force of the intellect in this novel, in 'Hardy' and even in *Women in Love*.

The second sequence featuring Winifred, the swimming lesson, is coloured by Female physicality. Ursula's attraction to Winifred's physical qualities is the focus of this episode; the words 'firm' and 'strong' are frequently used to describe Winifred's body, and Ursula's intention in this passage is 'to touch the other, to touch her, to feel her' (R 385). This moment of touch is a climactic one and prefigures similar episodes in Lawrence's later short fiction.<sup>16</sup> Here it functions as a love-confession, a way of transmitting non-empirical, non-intellectual knowledge, though the knowledge it transmits is limited: only in the consequent passage,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 203.

<sup>14</sup> See Fiona Becket, *D. H. Lawrence: The Thinker as Poet* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) p. 119 for one example of how Lawrence's repetition is part of his deliberately 'kinaesthetic language'.

<sup>15</sup> See the chapter of the same name in R pp. 401-462.

<sup>16</sup> For the most obvious examples of this see 'The Blind Man', 'You Touched Me' and 'The Horse Dealer's Daughter' in D. H. Lawrence, *England, My England and Other Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

where the women have sex, does Ursula gain a better understanding of her lover, and of her lover's lack. And this is where the relationship begins to decay, and Winifred's imbalanced nature manifests itself.

The cottage scene which follows is set in 'cloud-black darkness' (R 387). Darkness is consistently associated with love-scenes throughout *The Rainbow*: Tom Brangwen proposes to and kisses Lydia in her dark room in the evening, dressed in funereal black; Will and Anna first kiss at night too; and the significant love-scenes between Ursula and Skrebensky all take place outside, in the dark (R 76-81; 153; 344-346; 364-370; 495-498). The darkness of these other scenes, regardless of how fulfilling or frustrating they are, is usually somewhat balanced by the simultaneous presence of light, typically the moon. The darkness here is different: it is frightening, completely 'bottomless', and causes Ursula to almost immediately crave 'the light, the presence of other people, the external connection with the many' (R 387-388). The word 'eclipsed' is crucial here: what is so terrifying and revolting to Ursula is not the fact that Winifred is a woman, but that she is so eager to eclipse individual consciousness, both within herself and within Ursula (R 386). Ursula only begins to realise this after having sex with her, suggesting that it is the sensual, the Female aspect of Winifred's nature which is lacking.

The language of the chapter becomes coloured by a preoccupation with nothingness: Winifred becomes 'a dark void', a gateway to 'black disintegration' (R 388, 391). Her affinity with water points back to Tom Brangwen's death by drowning, itself an example of the self becoming 'barely distinguishable from the whole, becoming part of the continually moving flood and part of the darkness outside'; it is both a literal and symbolic example of the complete extinguishing of consciousness.<sup>17</sup> This idea reaches its apex in the dismal hamlet of Wiggiston, where lack of selfhood is the norm: villagers constantly die in the mines, and their wives swap husbands without a second thought; "One man or another, it doesn't matter all the world" (R 396). This is where Winifred belongs.

It is undeniable that 'Shame' is at least partially tinted by homophobia; Lawrence does explicitly call Winifred's lifestyle 'perverted' (R 391). It is important to note, however, that Ursula's own attraction to another woman is never in itself a source of distress: indeed, she only begins to become repulsed by Winifred's body after being repulsed by aspects of her personality. As Kinkead-Weekes points out, 'Lawrence's treatment of [the affair's] beginning

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<sup>17</sup> Becket, p. 125.

and fulfilment ... is wholly sympathetic.<sup>18</sup> Winifred's real crime is not her homosexuality but her rather more perverted eagerness to relinquish her individuality and her journey to developed consciousness. This results in her turning to a traditional and comfortable life as a heterosexual housewife which, incidentally, is not radically different from Anna's decision.

Anna comes from the other extreme, that of the inward-looking, physical, anti-intellectual aspect of being. Even her marriage to Will is inward-looking, as Joyce Wexler indicates: the couple 'are step-cousins, and their marriage is not a movement beyond the family into the world for either of them.'<sup>19</sup> Ursula fiercely rejects her mother's world, most notably just after she breaks with Winifred Inger's Male world of ideas. Anna's neglect of the outside world is something which her daughter despises, and it turns her into a 'breeding animal', with her 'physical, limited life of herded domesticity' (R 401-402). We share Ursula's judgement that Anna's pregnancies are merely the results of an entirely self-centred pursuit of sensual pleasure with Will. The lack of affection she feels for her children, who are cast off when they begin to grow conscious, is particularly shocking (R 402). Her pure physicality culminates in a loss of the self which is equivalent to Winifred's; she and Will 'were neither of them quite personal, quite defined as individuals, so much were they pervaded by the physical heat of breeding and rearing their young' (R 402).

When Ursula believes herself to be pregnant at the end of the novel, her attitude towards Anna shifts:

Suddenly she saw her mother in a just and true light. Her mother was simple and radically true. She had taken the life that was given. She had not, in her arrogant conceit, insisted on creating life to fit herself. Her mother was right, profoundly right, and she herself had been false, trashy, conceited.

(R 537)

This reconciliation does not last, however. The same train of thought which leads her to this conclusion also leads her to dismiss the importance of 'the self', an unthinkable idea for Lawrence (R 536). Lawrence, too, always rejected the idea that motherhood was the fulfilment of a woman's life: 'That she bear children is not a woman's significance. But that she bear herself, that is her supreme and risky fate'.<sup>20</sup> This 'non-normative birth of the self' is

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<sup>18</sup> Kinkead-Weekes, p. 203.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce Wexler, 'Beyond the Body in *The Rainbow* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*' in *D. H. Lawrence Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2003), pp. 25-41. No specific page references available.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence, *Hardy*, p. 52.

indeed what occurs.<sup>21</sup> As well as being a symbol for the achievement of individual fulfilment, in the context of female homosocial bonds, it is also a very clear symbolic repudiation of her bond with her mother, as well as a break with the idea of motherhood and the purely Female mode of living.

It is the case that the female homosocial bonds in *The Rainbow* are ultimately rejected. Yet so too are Ursula's unsatisfactory bonds with Anna and Winifred's male equivalents, Will and Skrebensky. At the end of the novel, as she approaches the rainbow of fulfilment towards which the whole novel has been moving, Ursula vocalises a break with all connections, male or female: "I have no father nor mother nor lover" (R 545). Becket's description of the rainbow as 'an architectural form without a history' is a useful one to apply to the novel's ending.<sup>22</sup> Ursula's architecture has come about through her bonds with other women, though these, as part of her personal history, ultimately have to be broken. Her sense of identification with the women, however brief, allows her to temporarily experience the extremes of Male and Female, and to work towards her own balanced state which lies between and beyond them.

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<sup>21</sup> Christine M. Connell, 'Inheritance from the earth and generational passages in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*' in *D. H. Lawrence Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 2011), pp. 72-91. No specific page references available.

<sup>22</sup> Becket, p. 127.

## II. Female Homosociality in *Women in Love*

*Women in Love* (1920) and *The Rainbow* began life as the same novel, which in its very early stages was titled *The Sisters*, suggesting a focus on female homosocial bonds.<sup>23</sup> Ben Knights argues that the title of the finished sequel functions as a kind of 'pretext', a way for 'the male narrator to fix his gaze on men.'<sup>24</sup> *Women in Love* does indicate a shift to male homosocial bonds, yet as Knights himself states, the Brangwen sisters are 'more than a pretext'. Their early interactions with each other open and frame the rest of the novel. Beneath these interactions is an ebb-and-flow of alternating agreement and disagreement, mingled with like and dislike. It is significant that the novel opens with a dialogue: it establishes a pattern of attraction and repulsion which will be played out until the novel's end.

The sisters are quietly angry at each other one moment, then admiring, then 'cold' and 'almost with resentment' the next.<sup>25</sup> What they dread, however, is not disagreement, but rather the end of their dialogue, the end of conflict, which is seen as a 'creative' force in *Hardy*. The suggestion of silence leads to 'a void, a terrifying chasm' (WL 10).<sup>26</sup> When the end of dialogue is an indication of agreement, rather than defeat, and they share 'a strong, bright bond of understanding', they become deeply unpleasant. Ursula begins to resemble the over-Male mistress she rejects in *The Rainbow*; she is 'bright and radiant and attractive', embodying the qualities she was initially attracted to. Yet she is also 'mistrusted by everybody, disliked on every hand ... curiously clear and repellent' (WL 262).

While Ursula and Gudrun's relationship certainly merits investigation, my interest here is primarily to do with the interactions between Ursula and Hermione Roddice, on which very little has been written. Hermione is too often dismissed as a subject of further study. The editors of the Penguin edition are correct in describing her as a 'complex response to Lady Ottoline Morrell', yet they undermine this idea of complexity when they reduce her to one of two '*fleurs du mal*', the counterpart and polar opposite to the sensual Pussum (WL 535, 531). While she does partly serve this role, she appears significantly more than the Pussum does throughout the text, suggesting that she warrants more attention.

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<sup>23</sup> John Worthen offers a brief history of the *The Sisters* in his 'Introduction' to the edition of *The Rainbow* already cited on pp. 11-13.

<sup>24</sup> Ben Knights, *Writing Masculinities: Male Narratives in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 90.

<sup>25</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin, 2007), ed. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen, pp. 7-10. Further references will be indicated in the body of the essay by (WL x).

<sup>26</sup> Fiona Becket, *The Complete Critical Guide to D. H. Lawrence* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 100.

The real complexity of Hermione's character is revealed more through her interactions with other women, especially Ursula, than with the men in the text. Though her relationship with Ursula is primarily an antagonistic one, there is at the same time a certain kind of intimacy. Millett's assertion that the women 'are prevented from forming any dangerous female alliance by what Lawrence rather hopefully assures us is the natural repugnance of women towards each other' erases the subtleties of the two characters and is one that I would question.<sup>27</sup> I argue that the ultimate break between the women stems from mutual misunderstanding of one another as individuals, and differing attitudes towards love and society, rather than gender-bound roles. Lawrence's narrative voice helps to mediate between the women in their later interactions, and complicates the idea that female homosocial alliances in the text are purely to be rejected. As it is useful to read *The Rainbow* against the *Study of Thomas Hardy*, it is first worth tracing the relationship between *Women in Love* and another important essay.

In the unpublished 1916 'Prologue' to the novel, one key word provides a link between this text and Lawrence's theoretical essay of 1915, 'The Crown':<sup>28</sup>

How to get away from this process of *reduction*, how escape this phosphorescent passage into the tomb, which was universal, though unacknowledged, this was the unconscious problem which tortured Birkin day and night.

(WL 506, my italics)

The word 'reduction', used here to refer to Birkin's affair with Hermione, would have been highly significant for Lawrence at this time. In 'The Crown' he explores a system of dualities similar to, but not the same as those which he identified in *Hardy*. Here, the lion is loosely analogous to the Female in *Hardy*, representing the dark 'Source' or 'Beginning', the womb and associated physicality.<sup>29</sup> The unicorn, related to *Hardy*'s Male, is 'the white light, the Mind,' consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

In 'The Crown', Lawrence focuses on the relationship between these opposite forces within the same subject, rather than between different people. The result is a comparatively sparser exploration of sex, and with it a casting-off of the formerly gendered terminology of 'Male' and 'Female'. Lawrence still believes in the potential of the dark/sensual and light/spiritual elements within the subject to creatively synthesise in the 'iris', or 'Holy Spirit'

<sup>27</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 266.

<sup>28</sup> The essay is published in Lawrence's collection *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), ed. Michael Herbert.

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence, *Porcupine*, p. 256.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

of ‘consummate being’<sup>31</sup> which, in a nod to the equivalent ‘flower’ in *Hardy*, is also imagined here as a ‘blossom’: real individuality and real fulfilled being. There is, however, a stronger note of wartime pessimism here which was not present in *Hardy*; the essay reads more like a diagnosis of the diseased ‘corruption’ of society than the hopeful call to fulfilment found in *Hardy*.<sup>32</sup> There is a greater danger of one element triumphing over the other, leading to a false kind of individual fulfilment, a ‘sham Crown’ of ‘sterile egoism’, which, if we were apply these theories to *The Rainbow*, seems firmly jammed over the heads of both Anna and Winifred Inger.<sup>33</sup> ‘The true crown,’ Lawrence writes, ‘is upon the consummation itself, not upon the triumph of one over another, neither in love nor in power. The ego is the false tyrant.’<sup>34</sup>

In the ‘Prologue’, Birkin identifies a division between an individual’s sensual and spiritual halves. Hermione, in this text, is all-spiritual, ‘completely without desire’ (WL 510). But while the unpublished 1916 ‘Prologue’ and ‘Wedding’ chapters are undoubtedly worth studying, we should remain wary of applying the characterisation found therein to the finished text.<sup>35</sup> If we study the relationships between the female characters in ‘Wedding’, it is clear that we are working with two very different texts. In ‘Wedding’, Ursula’s attitude towards Hermione is generally much more positive. While Ursula notes the ‘conscious’ and ‘deliberate’ touches to the other woman’s self-presentation, instead of vilifying her for it, she ‘admire[s] Hermione Roddice extremely’ and the other woman makes an ‘impression’ upon her heart. There is a deeper sense of instinctive empathy here: in Ursula’s ‘heart some deeper, troubled note was struck by the formed, yet rather pathetic, yearning beauty of Hermione’ (WL 523). While, like Birkin, Ursula sees through Hermione’s false composure, she does not censure her for it.

In ‘Sisters’, the revised and published version of this chapter, Lawrence tones down Ursula’s instinctive capacities, and thus the potential for mutual understanding between the women is frustrated. Her observation is more objective and less emotive: she watches ‘with fascination’ rather than admiration (WL 14). This shift does seem to cast the women’s relationship in an unfavourable light, and to immediately annihilate the possibility of ‘any

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>35</sup> Booth, discussing Birkin in particular, is sceptical of their relevance. See Howard J. Booth, ‘D. H. Lawrence and Male Homosexual Desire’ in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 209 (February 2002), pp.171-196, with a discussion of the ‘Prologue’ on p. 98. See also Kinkead-Weekes, p. 329 and George Donaldson, ‘“Men in Love”? D. H. Lawrence, Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich’ in Mara Kalnins (ed.), *D. H. Lawrence: Centenary Essays* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1986), pp. 41-67 for similar questioning.

dangerous female alliance'. But I would argue, rather, that it leaves more space in the following narrative for their relationship to develop, and opens out the possibilities for more nuanced characterisation of the two. The Ursula of 'Wedding' is guilty, perhaps, of the same tendency towards hasty judgement which the Ursula of 'Sisters' will come to identify in Gudrun, and 'revolt' from (*WL* 263). And by removing such judgement from the text, Lawrence makes it clear that the 'reduction' Hermione of the Prologue has been replaced by a more complicated character.

The 'Class-room' chapter of the novel serves as a kind of battleground for some of the ideas in 'The Crown', yet it also allows Ursula and Hermione to interact more directly. Here Birkin attacks Hermione for her lack of sensuality and overbearing desire to impose her will on others:

"But your passion is a lie," he went on violently. "It isn't passion at all, your *will*. It's your bullying will. You want to clutch things and have them in your power ... Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life ... You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to *know*."

(*WL* 42)

This is a judgement of Hermione which he generally maintains throughout the text. What is interesting here, in terms of female homosocial bonds, is the simultaneous mix of 'pleasant intimacy' and sense of rivalry between the women (*WL* 43-44). Yet there is a suggestion here of an affinity between Hermione and Winifred Inger, both being characters of will and the lust for mental power. There is the potential for history to repeat itself, for Ursula to be taken over once again by an overly-spiritual, "bullying" woman.

Hermione's actions in 'Breadalby' seem to prove Birkin right. Her silent 'unconscious but all-powerful will' pervades the pages of the chapter (*WL* 88-91), and in one instance is exerted on Ursula when the two are alone:

...Hermione captured Ursula and brought her into her own bedroom, to talk to her. A sort of constraint came over Ursula, in the big, strange bedroom. Hermione seemed to be bearing down on her, awful and inchoate, making some appeal. They were looking at some Indian silk shirts, gorgeous and sensual in themselves, their shape, their almost corrupt gorgeousness. And Hermione came near, and her bosom writhed, and Ursula was for a moment blank with panic. And for a moment, Hermione's haggard eyes saw the fear on the face of the other, there was again a sort of crash, a crashing down.

(*WL* 93)

This passage is, in a way, the dark reverse of the pool scene in 'Shame', where two women

exchange sensual knowledge through physical contact (*R* 384-386). Here, the understanding is non-physical, and communicates a sense of repulsion rather than attraction. 'Through Miss Inger,' Carol Dix writes, 'Ursula learns to be wary of submissiveness.'<sup>36</sup> Her ability to resist Hermione has come about through the relation with Winifred.

Yet when the women next meet, in the chapter 'Carpeting', this sense of repulsion is complicated, while not entirely dismissed. Hermione is initially 'fascinating and repelling' to Ursula, and yet on the next page they are 'united in a sudden bond of deep affection and closeness' (*WL* 140, 141). However, Lawrence once again refuses to keep the relationship simple: 'As soon as they were in accord, they began mutually to mistrust each other' (*WL* 142). This recalls the negative consequences of Ursula's accordances with Gudrun, and again emphasises the importance to the text of 'creative conflict'. At the end of the chapter, Ursula muses on the 'contact' between the women, which incidentally has involved literal, ingering physical contact (*WL* 135). This suggests a shift from what we see in 'Breadalby', where the idea of contact with Hermione is a source of 'fear'. She accepts that there is a 'league between the two women', perhaps more firmly established by such contact, but cannot shake off her instinctive dislike. Again, there is the suggestion that the potential for female alliance is hampered. Yet this is also true, in the same chapter, of Ursula's relationship with Birkin, to whom she is 'strictly hostile' but also 'held to him by some bond'; 'irritated' and 'saved' by him at the same time (*WL* 143).

'Woman to Woman', as the chapter title suggests, is a particularly rich place in which to study female homosocial relationships, and it is here that Lawrence offers the final representation of the women's relationship to one another. The title invites the reader to compare the chapter with Birkin and Gerald's 'Man to Man', and we would expect it to involve Ursula and Gudrun, the other two major characters and the men's love interests. We find Hermione in Gudrun's place, which indicates her importance to the novel's structure.

The nature of the narrative voice in this passage is peculiar, sliding between each woman's viewpoint repeatedly and often without an obvious indication that this is happening. It is difficult to distinguish here between objective facts and the characters' subjective judgements, which problematises any attempt to take a clear side in the conflict that follows. Like Birkin in 'Class-room', Ursula judges Hermione to be all mind and no body: 'Her self was all in her head ... She must always *know*' (*WL* 292). The reader accepts this, but then is forced to reconsider this judgement in the following paragraph: 'But Ursula only suffered

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<sup>36</sup> Carol Dix, *Lawrence and Women* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 38.

from Hermione's one-sidedness.' Without a specific indication that this second sentence is only Hermione's opinion, Lawrence lulls the reader into accepting this attitude. What follows is fascinating, and challenges many of our assumptions about Hermione up to this point. Lawrence indicates that Hermione is aware of her own spiritual failings, conscious of her 'sham' universals and, at bottom, a creature of 'flesh'. She has deliberately, and with great difficulty, cultivated her mind-knowledge to gain 'an unquestionable distinction' (WL 292-293). What is being suggested, I would argue, is that Hermione is aware of the importance and necessity of the sensual aspect of her nature, but that she sees mind-knowledge as dominating the society of her time. Worthen sees *Women in Love*'s characters as being defined by the choice 'to either accept their world, or try to escape it' (R 31). Hermione chooses the former, and is self-aware in doing so; Ursula and Birkin choose the latter.

Hermione's newfound self-awareness manifests itself throughout the women's conversation. Ursula notices a change in Hermione, and is surprised at her candour after having been repeatedly exposed to her self-conscious falseness. She initially respects her for it: 'There was some delightful naked irony in Hermione' (WL 293). Sadly, however, the two clash when it comes to Birkin and the question of love. Ursula is correct in identifying Hermione's fantasy for a "physically strong, bullying man" and her ultimate desire for submission, which we can again link to her submission to the corrupt world of the text. Ursula rejects both societal and sexual submission as "impossible" (WL 297, 294). Not all of Hermione's views are to be rejected though. Her prediction that, for Birkin, marriage would be "disastrous", that he would be torn in two 'between the opposite directions' foreshadows the open ending of the novel, where he expresses a desire for two different kinds of love and Ursula simply dismisses it.

As I have demonstrated, there is much to be gained from exploring Hermione and Ursula's relationship; more, perhaps, than from that between the two sisters. Hermione may have traces of Winifred Inger, as the 'Prologue' shows, yet she grows into something more complex, as does her relationship with Ursula. The pattern of antagonism between the women is not simply structured around mere gender-based rivalry but upon individual differences, the foremost being their attitude, overt or not, towards submission in love and society. Each woman's personal philosophy distorts her perception of the other, and neither manages to fairly judge the other.

### III. Male Homosociality in *Women in Love*

In *Women in Love*, as in *The Rainbow*, we are presented with a significant homosocial bond between parent and child, this time between Gerald Crich and his father Thomas. While Birkin and Gerald's is the most heavily foregrounded male homosocial bond in the text, I feel that it would first be worth studying the father-son dynamic, towards which relatively little critical attention has been paid, and to compare it with the mother-daughter interactions in *The Rainbow*, as well as the other male homosocial bonds in the text.

As with Ursula and Anna, the parent-child relationship here is initially antagonistic, characterised by 'opposition'. When Thomas falls ill and ends up relying on Gerald, the relationship alters: Gerald feels a 'poignant pity and allegiance' for his father while at the same time harbouring 'contempt and unadmitted enmity' (WL 218). This ambivalent attitude reflects the broader structural duality of the novel and also reflects on Gerald and Birkin's strange friendship. At one stage the younger men openly admit to hating one another, and yet an omniscient narrator tells us earlier that they suppress feelings of mutual love (WL 56, 34). Love and hatred are present in both relationships, yet the hatred is suppressed with Thomas, while the love is (initially) suppressed with Birkin.

Gerald's clashes with his father are grounded in ideological disagreement, and frustration at his father's inability to reconcile the opposing forces within himself. Thomas' concern for his workers' welfare is genuine, yet he struggles to balance it against his need to control them and exert his authority. He is 'trapped between two halftruths'--one of love and one of power, two terms which would become important in Lawrence's later writing.<sup>37</sup> This leaves him ultimately 'broken' (WL 226). Gerald dispenses with love altogether and chooses the 'inhuman principle' of the machine: 'He, the man, could interpose a perfect, changeless, godlike medium between himself and the Matter he had to subjugate' (WL 228). This will-to-power is not dissimilar from Hermione's, a character with whom he has a strange affinity.<sup>38</sup>

Gerald's philosophical disagreements with his father mirror, in a way, Ursula's rejection of her mother's pure physicality and closing-off from the outer mental world. One key difference, however, is that Thomas Crich aims for a sense of internal balance, which across all of Lawrence's writing is the real key to fulfilled individuality. He is hampered, however, by his lack of introspection. Anna, meanwhile, is the opposite. She is aware of a mental world beyond her purely sensual one; she sees the same metaphoric rainbow as Ursula,

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<sup>37</sup> Lawrence explores the relationship between love and power in his 1925 essay 'Blessed Are the Powerful', published in the Cambridge edition of the *Porcupine* essays.

<sup>38</sup>See F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p. 178.

the same emblem of fulfilled being. Rather than striving towards it she instead questions whether or not it is worth pursuing it: 'Must she be moving thither? ... But why must she start on the journey?' (R 237). Thomas Crich dies aiming to pursue this balance, though others in the novel, like Birkin, continue his journey.

Birkin and Thomas are introduced in the novel at the same time, as a visually similar pair of dark-featured, thin, rather ill-looking men (WL 20). Both characters preach a kind of love of comrades, of further male homosocial bonds beyond the heterosexual marriage bond, though Thomas' is broad and inclusive in scope and Birkin's seems to be restricted to an additional bond with Gerald.<sup>39</sup> And both, of course, are marked by their opposition to Gerald, which in both cases involves a simultaneous intimacy, not unlike the bond which exists between Ursula and Hermione. Birkin, however, is much closer to achieving the balance between love and power, and sensuality and spirituality, than Thomas Crich, and this opens up many more possibilities for his relationship with Gerald.

Jeffrey Meyers' early study of *Women in Love* argued for the presence of repressed homosexuality between Birkin and Gerald, relying heavily on the 'Prologue'.<sup>40</sup> He is, however, problematic in that he reduces male eroticism to 'an alternative to heterosexual love' and associates it with 'the female element *within* man', a connection which Lawrence himself never made.<sup>41</sup> This idea has more in common with the dated concept of the 'invert' than with Lawrence's unique and much more complex model of sexuality.<sup>42</sup> He is also problematic in using the word 'homosexual' as an umbrella term; the examples of 'overt homosexual scenes' that he identifies are anything but. While they all involve a degree of male closeness, and their place on the homosocial continuum is often ambiguous, nothing is ever sexually explicit. Even the idea of repressed homosexuality is unlikely: Booth notes that 'Repression for Freud is an unconscious process, and Lawrence's response to homosexual desire was increasingly considered.'<sup>43</sup> He proceeds to make a convincing case for Lawrence's deliberate awareness of and engagement with the idea of homosexuality throughout his writing. It is therefore unlikely that Lawrence would have remained unaware of the homoerotic potential in Birkin and Gerald's relationship, and I feel that for a critic to simply focus on uncovering this aspect

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<sup>39</sup> See Donaldson, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> See 'Chapter IX: D. H. Lawrence' in Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930* (London: Athlone Press, 1977), pp. 131-161.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>42</sup> See Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (New York, London: Mitchell Kennerley, 1912) and Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), ed. Joseph Crozier.

<sup>43</sup> Booth, p. 100.

of it would be misdirected.

Though I disagree with Meyers' opinion that Birkin's confession that he used to wrestle with a Japanese man is his metaphorical revelation of homosexual experience, I do think the extract that he selects provides a useful framework for thinking about how the passage frames the homosocial interactions in 'Gladiatorial'.<sup>44</sup> Birkin, in response to Gerald's assertion that Japanese men are repellent, answers:

“Repel and attract, both. They are very repulsive when they are cold, and they look grey. But when they are hot and roused, there is a definite attraction—a curious kind of full electric fluid—like eels.”

(WL 269)

This again suggests points to the pattern of repulsion and attraction which runs throughout the novel. It also, however, can be interpreted as being descriptive of Gerald, suggesting the benefits, for him, of strengthening the homosocial bond with Birkin, and the drawbacks of rejecting it.

The image of the 'cold', 'grey' male body here points to Gerald's corpse in 'Exeunt', an end state which is heavily foreshadowed throughout the text (WL 479-480). Gerald's death is largely the result of the kind of internal imbalance warned against in 'The Crown'. Gerald himself is a more subtle example of a person lacking sensuality, more evident in characters like Winifred Inger and Hermione. His sex throughout the book is 'ghastly and impersonal, like a destruction, ultimate' (WL 444). In reality, it is the mere simulacrum of true sex, and is diagnosed in 'The Crown' as 'sensationalism', which is seen as the root cause of war.<sup>45</sup> It is this sensationalism which ultimately results in Gerald's death: he finally turns his violent impulses on himself, and chooses a kind of suicide (WL 472-474).

Birkin does, however, see the potential for individual fulfilment within Gerald, a kind of electric potential which exists alongside the frozen deadness. Andrew Harrison argues that 'the new 'electrical language' of *Women in Love* almost invariably centres in the person of Gerald', but he forgets that the language of the fulfilled heterosexual sex-connection between Birkin and Ursula shares the same language:

It was a dark flood of electric passion she released from him, drew into herself. She had established a rich new circuit, a new current of passional electric energy, between the two of them, released from the darkest poles of the body and established in perfect circuit. It was a dark fire of electricity that rushed from him to her, and flooded them

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<sup>44</sup> Meyers p. 146.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence, *Porcupine*, p. 277.

both with rich peace, satisfaction.

(*WL* 313-314)

Ursula herself is the most balanced female character in the text, and has her own independent electrical circuit: her eyes, when she justifiably criticises Birkin for his spiritual dependence on Hermione, become flashing 'yellow lights' (*WL* 307).

We have then, in the figure of Gerald, a paradox. He possesses both the urge towards icy death through sensationalism, and the potential for real individual fulfilment through the electrical connection with another being. Birkin's brief musings on the male Japanese body are much more than an oblique reference to homosexual potential: he both warns Gerald of the dangerous fate that awaits him and invites him to challenge it by establishing an electrical connection with him.

Concerning the wrestling, my contention is that while it is presented as a deliberate equivalent to sex, it is certainly not merely a screen for, or repression of, sexual feeling, but an equally fulfilling alternative to it. Donaldson addresses this uncertainty:

...the logic of [Birkin's] thoughts must be that the basis in nature for the relationship between men is some basis other than sex love, but equal to sex love between men and women in strength and worth. But what the other but equal basis in nature is he doesn't say; and that Lawrence doesn't disclose more of what he means leaves the reader, like Gerald, moving uneasily, but in no particular direction.

He accepts that readers (and, I would argue, critics) are tempted to suppose 'a homosexual implication' in the place of such ambiguity, though I agree with him that 'there is no clear justification for it.'<sup>46</sup> As I have earlier stated, however, physical contact is crucial to Lawrence in the forming of interpersonal bonds, whether between women or men, so the importance of the act of wrestling, of sustained touch, should not be underestimated.

The language of the passage is structured around showcasing the differences between the two men: Birkin is 'narrow', with his own 'centre of gravitation' and 'abstract' strength. Gerald is 'heavier' and 'round', placing his weight on the earth, with a more tangible physicality (*WL* 269-270). This establishes them as opposites, despite the fact that they are both male. Birkin makes the key observation that he and Gerald are 'so different; as far, perhaps, apart as man from woman' (*WL* 274). Central too is the idea of 'interpenetration': 'It was as if Birkin's whole intelligence interpenetrated into Gerald's body' (*WL* 270). If we go beyond the crude supposition that this merely refers to penetrative sex, we find the same term

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<sup>46</sup> Donaldson, p. 54.

used in 'The Crown' to refer to internal fulfilment: 'It is only the perfect meeting, the perfect utter interpenetration into oneness, the kiss, the blow, the two-in-one, that is timeless and absolute.'<sup>47</sup> As the criteria for this 'oneness' demonstrates, the 'perfect meeting' of opposite influences does not necessarily have to involve the sexual act. Kinkead-Weekes argues that the 'experience Lawrence thought central to every creative marriage of opposites' could result from other modes of contact, such as 'a kiss' or 'a touch of fingers', and which 'now, clearly, does not depend on gender any more than on intercourse.'<sup>48</sup> The climax (so to speak) of the scene is not that of sex: it occurs when the two men simply touch each other's hands (WL 272). And while Birkin here 'displays a willingness to express his need for physical intimacy ... without risk to his sexual identity or the possibility of shame in exposing himself in a manner that could be construed as homosexual', it is the more fractured and incomplete Gerald who withdraws the contact and pulls away, sealing his fate (WL 272).<sup>49</sup>

Though I have resisted the interpretation that 'Gladiatorial' is merely a covert homosexual sex scene, or the results of the author's repressed sexuality, I think that the fact that it has remained ambiguous to many readers in this regard is significant. If we come back to Sedgwick's model of homosociality, we encounter the argument that the 'continuum between homosocial and homosexual' is, 'for men', 'radically disrupted', much more so than that between women.<sup>50</sup> Yet in the bond between Birkin and Gerald we have something of a bridge across this disruption. While the friendship is eventually shattered, one partner having succumbed to his self-destructive urges, it is one in which both partners come close to achieving a sense of Lawrentian fulfilment. It comes much closer to this, indeed, than any of the female friendships presented, and indeed outranks a number of heterosexual pairings. In *Aaron's Rod* (1922), Lawrence would become even more engrossed with the possibilities of male friendship, but would sacrifice his interest in female experience and relations between women, and even lose a degree of interest in the heterosexual marriage bond.

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<sup>47</sup> Lawrence, *Porcupine*, p. 272.

<sup>48</sup> Kinkead-Weekes, p. 336.

<sup>49</sup> Ingersoll, Earl, 'What's in a name?' naming men in Lawrence's novels' in *D. H. Lawrence Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2012), pp. 37-64. No specific page references available.

<sup>50</sup> Sedgwick, pp. 1-2.

#### IV. Male Homosociality in *Aaron's Rod*

As I mentioned at the beginning of the essay, Lawrence himself saw *Aaron's Rod* as the final part of a 'series' which began with the two Brangwen novels.<sup>51</sup> Like Birkin, the taciturn Lilly in this novel resembles Lawrence, perhaps even more so: he is a 'dark, thin, quick fellow', and a writer with a foreign, flirty, Frieda-like wife.<sup>52</sup> As is the case with Birkin, we should be wary of simply viewing Lilly as Lawrence's mouthpiece, since he too is treated with much scepticism.<sup>53</sup> The comparison is useful, however, in that it connects the two characters to each other, inviting us to view Lilly as a kind of extension of Birkin, whose idealised "another kind of love" is changed into something else here (*WL* 481).

This desire is again male-focused. Male homosociality becomes a subject of vital interest to Lawrence in his later writing, often vying for importance with the topic of heterosexual love. His critique of Whitman, across several different incarnations of the heavily-edited *Studies in Classic American Literature*, is a prime example of this.<sup>54</sup> Though he would not have been unaware of the homoerotic elements of Whitman's work, Lawrence does not tend to use the word 'homosexual' at this stage of his writing. This can be compared with the 1915 'Crown', where he uses the term quite freely. We find instead terms like the more ambiguous 'manly love, the love of comrades' and even, in a later draft, the 'passional relation between man and man'.<sup>55</sup> Though Lawrence's language is often highly metaphorical and sometimes oblique, there are many instances of writing across the various Whitman drafts which invite a sexual interpretation. In a private 1919 draft of the essay, which is salient for a number of reasons, Lawrence refers to male bonds with the language of electricity: 'the last circuit of vital polarisation goes between man and man.' This 'final polarisation' is not possible for men and women, he writes, which suggests it has a unique importance.<sup>56</sup> As I have shown, he also makes use of this electrical language in 'Gladiatorial', which is the first indication of the shift to male-centred bonding which *Aaron's Rod* largely concerns itself with. Yet here, within this draft, Lawrence comes closest to defining this kind of homosocial bond as an explicitly sexual one, something which he would resist soon afterwards.

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<sup>51</sup> Lawrence, *Letters* ii, pp. 92-93.

<sup>52</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod* (New York: Penguin, 1950), p. 91. Further references will be indicated in the body of the essay by (*AR* x).

<sup>53</sup> See Kinkead-Weekes, p. 651, for Lilly's 'objectionable' and contradictory nature.

<sup>54</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ed. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen.

<sup>55</sup> Lawrence, *Studies*, p. 153, 415.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

A particular passage here suggests that both vaginal and anal sex have a sort of equal standing. The anus, or ‘coccygeal centre’, is described as being the place where ‘the deepest and most unknowable sensual reality breathes and sparkles deeply, in unspeakable power ... our last and extremest reality.’<sup>57</sup> It would be rash to assume that anal sex is strictly associated with the homosexual couple, were it not for the fact that Lawrence immediately makes the connection himself, linking the anus specifically to the male body:

So that, in the last mystery of established polarity, the establishment is between the poles of the coccygeal centres. The last perfect balance is between two men, in whom the deepest sensual centres, and also the extreme upper centres, vibrate in one circuit, and know their electric establishment and readjustment as does the circuit between man and woman. There is the same immediate connection, the same life-balance, the same perfection in fulfilled consciousness and being.<sup>58</sup>

There are some important linguistic patterns to take note of here. There is an emphasis on the bonds between men being the ‘same’, and just as ‘perfect’ as a heterosexual relationship, but also as something to come ‘last’, a kind of end point or goal.

The threat of reduction and the loss of individuality through a sex connection between men still hovers in the air, however. Lawrence sees Whitman’s particular model of manly love, in which there is ‘no equality, no equilibrated duality’, as a kind of ‘prostitution’, linking it to ancient Greek pederasty.<sup>59</sup> The ‘pederastic model of homosexuality’ is analogous, in a way, to Winifred and Inger’s doomed affair, as Justin D. Edwards notes.<sup>60</sup> Lawrence, here, distinguishes between his own ideal of equilibrium, linked to Birkin’s model from *Women in Love*, and Whitman’s mere ‘fusion’, which is characterised by possession rather than balance.

Lawrence’s views at this time, however, were far from stable. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, published three years after this 1919 essay, he continues to rally against his old enemy, the ‘self-conscious will’.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, he tones down the connections between homosexuality and egoism in this essay, and not long after this, in a 1925 edited version of ‘The Crown’, he would similarly remove many references to homosexuality.<sup>62</sup> This is far from being a complete shift towards an acceptance of it, however. In *Fantasia*, he completely

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 365-366.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 366-367.

<sup>60</sup> Justin D. Edwards, ‘At the end of *The Rainbow*: Reading Lesbian Identities in D. H. Lawrence’s Fiction’ in *The International Fiction Review*, Vol. 27, Nos. 1 and 2 (2000). No pagination.

<sup>61</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ed. Bruce Steele, p. 118.

<sup>62</sup> Differences between the two editions are noted in the Cambridge edition of *Porcupine*.

denies the possibility of the kind of idealised star-equilibrium between men which he had briefly considered in 1919. Men are here bonded together by ‘new *collective* activity ... a new polarised connection with other beings, other men.’<sup>63</sup> While this sounds suggestive, Lawrence is for once quite clear about the fact that this is ‘not sex, and should never be confused with sex.’<sup>64</sup>

Lawrence’s new model of idealised male bonds, surprisingly, is closer to the model he had rejected in Whitman. It necessitates the ‘forfeit’ of the individual in favour of following a ‘soul-chosen leader of leaders.’<sup>65</sup> This signals a change in his own personal philosophy of the individual, which had heretofore been more important to him than anything. Lawrence’s new ideal is a lot closer to Whitman’s ‘merging’, though the man wielding power over another does not seem to lose his own individuality.<sup>66</sup>

Where, then, does all of this leave us when exploring male homosocial bonds in *Aaron’s Rod*? I agree with Booth that Lawrence was conscious, even fascinated by the possibility of homosexuality at this stage, both within himself and others, though he ultimately rejected it.<sup>67</sup> As with *Women in Love*, a search here for evidence of the author’s supposedly repressed homosexuality would be misguided. *Aaron’s Rod* is indeed a novel indeed so self-consciously full of male homosexuality that hunting for it as if it is a repressed element would be absurd. The two young men, Angus and Francis, are a clear example of this. While they are satirised, as Jeffrey Meyers indicates, it is with rather gentle mocking.<sup>68</sup> The dominant tone of Aaron’s interactions with the two is, as the text itself indicates, one of ‘comedy’ (AR 233). This is a far cry from his attitude towards making homosexual acquaintances in 1915, an experience which was described as ‘one of the crises of [his] life.’<sup>69</sup> An interesting aspect of the couple is that they display the sensual/spiritual, Female/Male dichotomy which Lawrence established in *Hardy* as part of the fundamental forces in a balanced individual, and a balanced sex-relation. More recently, as I suggested, he explored the potential of these forces existing between two men through Birkin and Gerald, though the bond there is an ultimately unsuccessful one. Francis is darker and healthy, ‘handsome and well-coloured, might be Italian’ (AR 224). Angus, however, is less bodily,

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<sup>63</sup> Lawrence, *Fantasia*, p. 135.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence, *Studies*, p. 366.

<sup>67</sup> Booth, p. 100.

<sup>68</sup> Meyers, p. 152.

<sup>69</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ii, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, p. 321.

‘with his pale thin face, a classic Englishman’ (AR 224). Like Hermione, he is more mental than sensual. While he is certainly ridiculed, he is not destroyed. Aaron is also ‘touched’ by his partner’s ‘genuine kindness’, though at the same time remaining suspicious of it (AR 256). Besides these men, Aaron enters into several friendships with several characters who were thinly-veiled representations of Lawrence’s real-life homosexual acquaintances.<sup>70</sup>

Though Lawrence becomes less hostile towards homosexual men, however, I do not believe he actively encourages sexual bonds between men in this text. The massage Lilly gives Aaron does, Ingersoll claims, ‘naively [open] itself up to being construed as a clumsy attempt to represent homosexual activity’:<sup>71</sup>

He rubbed every speck of the man’s lower body – the abdomen, the buttocks, the thighs and knees, down to the feet, rubbed it all warm and glowing with camphorated oil, every bit of it...

(AR 118)

If we refer again to Lawrence’s criticism at the time then we get a better understanding behind the mechanics of the somewhat awkward act. In *Fantasia*, he had begun to map the individual’s spiritual and sensual centres to the upper and lower body respectively. Interestingly, the lower, sensual centres of the body are now associated more strongly with men, and with the father in particular.<sup>72</sup> This is a far cry from *Hardy*, where sensuality was part of the Female influence, and this reflects, perhaps, a growing marginalisation of women on Lawrence’s part.

For the purposes of this passage, however, the association between lower self, sensuality and fatherhood paints the massage in a very different light. It indicates a lack of sex for one, since Lawrence voiced his separation from Freud early on, and would not have supported the suggestion of a kind of incest here.<sup>73</sup> The negation of any idea of sex is indicated by Lilly comparing Aaron to a sick baby being treated by its parent (AR 118). The sequence does, like all the instances of prolonged physical contact in Lawrence’s work, promote the bond between the two. This is now predicated, however, on a power imbalance, a ‘David and Jonathan’ dynamic with one friend dominant over the other: ‘the love between comrades is always and inevitably a love between a leader and a follower.’<sup>74</sup> What the bond is not is a vacillation ‘between homosexual attraction and the antagonism of suppressed sexual

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<sup>70</sup> See Kinkead-Weekes, p. 538.

<sup>71</sup> Ingersoll, no pagination.

<sup>72</sup> Lawrence, *Fantasia*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>73</sup> Lawrence, *Letters ii*, p. 218.

<sup>74</sup> Lawrence, *Studies*, p. 415.

desire', as Millett argues, nor is it the advance of Lilly as the 'homosexual propagandist' which Meyers labels him.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Millett, p. 275 and Meyers, p. 150.

## Conclusion

In a letter written before the publication of *Women in Love*, Lawrence wrote:

I do believe in friendship. I believe tremendously in friendship between man and man, a pledging of men to each other inviolably.—But I have not ever met or formed such friendship. Also I believe the same way in friendship between man and woman, and between woman and woman, sworn, pledged, eternal, as eternal as the marriage bond, and as deep.—But I have not met or formed such friendship.<sup>76</sup>

His fiction was one way of exploring the formation and nature of this kind of ‘pledging’, something which he lacked in his own life. Though his later writing certainly contained an unpleasant misogynist streak (earlier in the same letter he calls for the woman to ‘yield some sort of precedence to a man’), in his earlier work, he ‘wanted, even needed, to see things through a woman’s eyes and ... frequently rewrote their preliminary texts to achieve his own.’<sup>77</sup> *The Rainbow*, in a way, was a manifestation of this ‘need’: his early earnest desire to show ‘woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative’ is encouraging.

As it stands, female friendships in his texts are interesting, often veined with complicated patterns of attraction and repulsion, though they are never quite as fulfilling as male bonds, and after *Women in Love* they are totally discarded as a topic of interest. Male bonds, on the other hand, are glorified, and at one stage are even described as the foundations to ‘create a new era of life’.<sup>78</sup> While Lawrence’s dwindling interest in female bonds is lamentable, he is remarkable in many other ways. His perception of the everyday repulsion and attraction that structures even close relationships, his emphasis of the importance of touch, and his status as one of few writers to blur the division between homosexual and homosocial bonds make him a unique literary voice even a century on.

**Word Count: 10,455**

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<sup>76</sup> Kinkead-Weekes, p. 488.

<sup>77</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott, ‘D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)’ in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 199), p. 217.

<sup>78</sup> Lawrence, *Studies*, pp. 414-415.

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