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A CONSIDERATION OF THE SOCIAL COMMENTARY  
WITHIN D.H. LAWRENCE'S NOVEL THE RAINBOW

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To my parents

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CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

D.H. Lawrence's critical essay "Why The Novel Matters" contains the personal claim:

"Nothing is important but life . . . For this reason I am a novelist . . . The novel is the book of life." <sup>1</sup>

This claim is elaborated upon in "Morality And The Novel":

"The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe at the living moment . . . If we think about it, we find that our life consists in this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us." <sup>2</sup>

Arnold Kettle, writing in An Introduction to the English Novel suggests that The Rainbow contains within it a manifestation of these assertions. He contends:

"The search, the passionate, desperate search of the characters of The Rainbow is to achieve personal relationships which make them at one with the universe." <sup>3</sup>

He adds to this contention his conviction that this novel is firmly grounded in reality, that within The Rainbow Lawrence is concerned with "actual human social issues". <sup>4</sup> Some of these issues he then indicates:

". . . there is the whole question of the relationship between work and personality; there is an examination of the social set-up of Cossethay and Beldover, the position of the squire and the vicar and the schoolmaster; there is the problem of industrialism, the significance of the canal and the railways and the pits; there is a great deal and from many points of view about the English

educational system; there is the question of the impact of the English Midlands on the Polish émigrés; above all there is all that is implied in the phrase 'the emancipation of women'." <sup>5</sup>

In D.H. Lawrence : Novelist F.R. Leavis advances similar contentions about The Rainbow. He maintains that within it Lawrence combines his interest in the struggle of the individual for fulfilment with his interest in the social issues which confronted him and his contemporaries:

"The novel has for theme the urgency, and the difficult struggle, of the higher human possibilities to realise themselves . . . And in the significantly different histories of his three generations Lawrence is giving an essential part of the history of civilization in England. An interest like his in the deeper life of the psyche cannot be an interest in the individual abstracted from the society to which he belongs." <sup>6</sup>

The scope and method of this thesis derives from these critical contentions. I intend to illustrate that within The Rainbow Lawrence incorporates a commentary on some of the social developments which occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth century periods of English civilization, making this commentary through his depiction of the struggle for fulfilment of the different members of the successive Brangwen generations. In illustrating this it is not my intention to suggest that Lawrence is just a social historian or that The Rainbow ought to be regarded simply as a social history of English civilization. Although my thesis might give this impression as a result of its concentration upon the social

historical aspect it must be emphasised that Lawrence's interest in the effects of social developments upon the individual is just one of his many interests, and that The Rainbow can be considered from other critical angles, including with regard to its symbolic structure and content, its place in Lawrence's development as a novelist, and its intrinsic significance as fiction.

The method which I have adopted to accomplish my illustration involves considering the struggle of each of the Brangwen generations separately, in the order in which they appear within the novel. Although this method tends to incline the delineation of the thesis towards a parallel with that of The Rainbow itself, it is yet advantageous in enabling me to accentuate the different developments which occur, while still retaining the sense of transition which prevails throughout.

In the second chapter I am concerned with the generation of Tom Brangwen, although some initial attention is directed towards a consideration of his predecessors. This chapter, as with the subsequent ones, is divided into sections in order to facilitate discussion of the different developments and also to alleviate the tendency towards the sort of parallelism mentioned earlier. The various issues which I deal with in these sections are enumerated in an introductory paragraph, and this method is repeated in the later chapters. In brief, the issues considered in this second chapter are Lawrence's depiction of rural life; his description of the factors contributing to its decline; and his account of the problems confronting the individual living through this decline.



The third chapter, which is concerned with the generation of Anna and Will Brangwen, deals with Lawrence's presentation of the merging of the old rural, agrarian world with the emerging urban, industrial world. In its sections I concentrate on illustrating his impressions of the problems encountered by individuals associated with the unification of the two forms of living observed in these worlds.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the generation of Ursula Brangwen. She lives within the consolidated urban industrial world and in the sections of this chapter I concentrate on discussing Lawrence's account of her efforts to find satisfaction in this world.

In the conclusion I deal with the final chapter of The Rainbow and give consideration to the direction in which Lawrence's social commentary seems to tend in the finishing sections of the novel.

Throughout, I hope to show that Lawrence's accomplishment in respect to his social commentary is threefold, in that simultaneously he presents an impression of actual historical occurrences, he infuses this presentation with a criticism of some of the developments depicted, and he introduces into this criticism certain of his own personal ideas.

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