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The Lawrentian Woman: Monsters in the Margins of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century British Literature

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

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by

Dusty Brice

December 2015

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Dr. Daniel Westover, Chair

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Keywords: D.H. Lawrence, Graham Swift, Angela Carter, Sebastian Faulks, Monstrous-

Feminine, Abject

## ABSTRACT

The Lawrentian Woman: Monsters in the Margins of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century British Literature

by

Dusty Brice

Despite his own conservative values, D.H. Lawrence writes sexually liberated female characters. The most subversive female characters in Lawrence's oeuvre are the Brangwens of *The Rainbow*. The Brangwens are prototypical models of a form of femininity that connects women to Nature while distancing them from society; his women are cast as monsters, but are strengthened from their link with Nature. They represent what I am calling the Lawrentian-Woman.

The Lawrentian-Woman has proven influential for contemporary British authors. I examine the Lawrentian-Woman's adoption by later writers and her evolution from modernist frame to postmodern appropriation. First, I look at the Brangwens. They establish the tropes of the Lawrentian-Woman and provide the base from which to compare the model's subsequent mutations. Next, I examine modern British writers and their appropriation of the Lawrentian-Woman. The Lawrentian-Woman's attributes remain intact, but are deconstructed in ways that explore women's continued liminality in patriarchal society.

## DEDICATION

For Victoria, Molly, Lilly, Cherokee, Libertie, Montana, and Nahla. Uncle Dusty (Bubba) wants you to be whatever you want to be when you grow up. Don't let other people define you. Just be you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Let me start by saying that I wouldn't be the man that I am without my beautiful, incredible fiancé Holli Flettrich. She is patient, kind, graceful, and has been beyond wonderful as I've worked toward achieving my dreams. I'm ridiculously lucky. I must also thank my mother, Tammy Lane, and my father, Kenny Brice. They have been nothing but supportive in all of my endeavors. I aspire to be as good as they are.

This project would not have happened if it weren't for my committee chair, Dr. Daniel Westover. He encouraged me throughout this process, and has been absolutely essential in each stage of the project. I have become a better scholar under his guidance, and I'm grateful that I've had this opportunity. Also, special thanks to Dr. Phyllis Thompson and Dr. Michael Cody for their wonderful insight concerning my project. Their questions and comments have allowed me to further refine my thesis, and I am appreciative of all of their suggestions.

All of my colleagues are, frankly, amazing. I'm thankful for all of their input and insight. Specifically, I want to thank Erik, Beth, Jonathan, Jacob, Nathan, Inga, Joe, Lauren, Kelsey, Jessica, Alex, Marco, Marijana, Katie, and Zachary. If you've read any of my work, or you've listened to any of my ramblings, thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Sawyer, Dr. Lichtenwalner, Dr. Kornweibel, Professor Grover, Dr. Honeycutt, and Dr. Jones, my brother Dusty (the name so nice they had to use it twice), Gary, Charlie, Logan, Jessica, Cheryl, Josie, and my many, many nieces and nephews. If you've been involved in my life, I owe you a debt of gratitude.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Lawrentian Woman: Subversive Feminine Identity in 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature

*“Whether they are aware of it or not, the men of today are a little afraid of the women of today”*

–D. H. Lawrence, “Matriarchy”

#### Lawrence and Women

D. H. Lawrence had conflicting viewpoints concerning femininity that evolved over the span of his career and life. The rich, sensuous depictions of female consciousness present in his earlier works contrast with the conservative values he espoused during his “leadership period,” when “Lawrence believed that personal salvation was to be found in submission to a male leader, a natural hero possessed of wisdom and power. Women in particular would have to learn that submission was for their own good; in Lawrence’s new utopia, even the most inferior man would have one follower, namely his wife” (Nixon 4). Many critics focus on Lawrence’s blatant misogynistic values that became especially prevalent after the onset of World War I. This focus on his later political and social values distorts the way critics approach Lawrence; certainly, they retroactively apply his personal beliefs to his more sensitive early novels. In her seminal feminist text *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir notes, “Lawrence believes passionately in the supremacy of the male” (246). Carol Dix echoes this sentiment in *D.H. Lawrence and Women* when she states, “Much of Lawrence’s writing is given... to actual explicit invective against women: direct hatred and anger, roused by fear of their emasculating power” (111). However, many of these discussions about Lawrence’s treatment of women fail to adequately consider the impact of his work being banned by the literary establishment. Indeed, it is important to note that his “leadership phase” began only after *The Rainbow* was banned and mislabeled as pornography



in 1915. Prior to this, Lawrence's treatment of women was decidedly different, and I contend that discussions of his work are unbalanced in that too much critical emphasis is placed on his leadership phase and not enough on close examination of the period directly preceding it. After decades of biographical and feminist criticism that has overemphasized Lawrence's post-censorship, conservative, homosocial values as a means to interpret his texts, I argue that his critical reception needs to be reevaluated and his earlier portrayals of sexually liberated women highlighted as subversive modernist models of femininity.

The condemnation of *The Rainbow*, in conjunction with a protracted World War I, deeply disillusioned Lawrence. According to Judith Ruderman, "The first stirrings of his urge toward male leadership in the social and political realms should be dated at 1915, with the banning of *The Rainbow*, the dashing of his hopes for acceptance of his art, and his placement in a position of extreme dependency on those more powerful than he" (12). Upon finishing *The Rainbow*, Lawrence admits to being "*frightfully* excited over this novel now it is done" (Moore 328). Later, however, in a letter to Edward Marsh, Lawrence laments the political uproar *The Rainbow* has spurred: "As for the novel, I am not surprised. Only the most horrible feeling of hopelessness has come over me lately—I feel as if the whole thing were coming to an end—the whole of England, of the Christian era: as if ours was the age only of Decline and Fall... It isn't my novel that hurts me—it's this hopelessness of the world" (379). The fact that this call for censorship happened in the midst of the First World War only added to Lawrence's despondence. Shortly after the controversy that plagued *The Rainbow*, Lawrence "began to formulate a political scheme that would channel his apparent desire for bonding with other men and render it acceptable to himself as a force for rebuilding the world once the war had destroyed the old political order. And he began to denounce women, blaming them, and their self-conscious sexuality in particular, for the

state of the world” (Nixon 15). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar reinforce this idea when they label Lawrence as a member of a post-WWI literary community which directs its vitriol for the war toward women (*No Man’s Land* 260). The authors in this community comment on the idea that “the most crucial rule the war had overturned was the rule of patrilineal succession, the founding law of patriarchal society itself” (279-80). Lawrence’s adoption of homosocial beliefs coincides with the widespread rejection of *The Rainbow* and reflects the shifting gender paradigms that occurred after the onset of WWI as well as the reactionary societal call for a reestablishment of patriarchal values and power.

Despite his own professed conservative, masculine values, Lawrence writes compelling, strong, and sexually liberated female characters. As a result, his documented beliefs have vexed critics who appreciate his nuanced portrayals of the interior lives of women. Sandra Gilbert examines Lawrence’s transcendent depictions of women and his conflation of sexuality and spirituality. She argues that Lawrence predates and prefigures poststructuralist feminist critics such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray in his merging of the erotic and the political, and that his remarkable insight into the female psyche sets him apart from his male contemporaries:

Didn’t D.H. Lawrence—in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and elsewhere—begin to outline something oddly comparable to Cixous’ creed of woman before she did? Describing the cosmic mystery of Connie’s *jouissance*, this often misogynistic English novelist defines an ‘orgasm’ whose implications, paradoxically enough, appear to anticipate the fusion of the erotic, the mystical, and the political that sometimes seems to characterize Cixous’ thought on this subject, for Connie’s coming to sexuality is also a coming to selfhood and coming away from the

historically hegemonic Western ‘nerve brain’ consciousness that would subordinate body to mind, blood to brain, passion to reason. (*Rereading* 85)

Certainly, then, Lawrence’s women do not subscribe to moralistic tenets of femininity championed by phallogentric discourse. Instead, they frustrate patriarchal norms through their intense connection to their own bodies and to Nature. The most subversive female characters in Lawrence’s oeuvre are the Brangwen women of *The Rainbow*, a novel that portrays a community in flux and tracks changing gender paradigms. By examining three generations of Brangwen women, the novel transitions from restrictive Victorian norms to the incipient sexual liberation movement. *The Rainbow*’s frank depictions of female sexuality are tame by contemporary standards but were daring and seditious in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Moreover, the novel’s emphasis on female sexuality has been hugely influential to subsequent British writers—including but certainly not limited to Graham Swift, Sebastian Faulks, and Angela Carter—and their own portrayals of femininity. In fact, it is my contention that the Brangwen women specifically serve as character prototypes for a challenging and sensual form of femininity that recurs in characters throughout subsequent British fiction. These characters have shared attributes that make them representatives of what I am calling the Lawrentian Woman.

### The Lawrentian Woman

The Lawrentian Woman is strong, autonomous, and shares a personal, spiritual connection with the natural world. Adrienne Rich describes the powerful relationship that has existed historically between women and Nature in Western thought: “Woman’s physiology was the original source of her prepatriarchal power, both in making her the source of life itself, and in associating her more deeply than man with natural cycles and processes” (72). Lawrence is clearly sensitive to this enmeshed, natural, spiritual connection between women and the rest of

the animal and vegetable world. It gives the Lawrentian Woman self-assurance and sexual liberation. However, this very liberation is what ostracizes her from patriarchal society; she falls outside of the narrow expectations hegemonic forces impose upon women. In his 1929 essay “Give Her a Pattern,” Lawrence insightfully acknowledges “all the atrocious patterns of womanhood that men have supplied to woman: patterns all perverted from any real natural fullness of a human being” (163). The Lawrentian Woman is a subversive model that combats these “perverted patterns.” Largely excluded from patriarchal discourse, she actually draws power from her link with Nature and the animal world. Her relationship with Nature imbues her with an ungoverned sensuality and sexual power that dominant masculine forces view as threatening. According to Dorothy Dinnerstein, “Suppression of female sexual impulse has an obvious practical congruence with one-sided male possessiveness: a woman with a strong sexual will of her own may defy a man’s wish to keep her for himself. . . . Her own bodily pleasure in sex, independent of the pleasure she gives her partner, is the essential threatening fact” (59). The Lawrentian Woman’s liberation from restrictive sexual expectations engenders in her an autonomous spirit which, in turn, produces insecurity and sexual anxiety in the men in her life. In *The Rainbow*, Tom is conflicted by his sensual attraction to Lydia: “When he approached her, he came to such a terrible painful unknown. How could he embrace it and fathom it? How could he close his arms round all this darkness and hold it to his breast and give himself to it?” (Lawrence 53). Likewise, Swift obviously appropriates Lawrence’s candid approach to sexual relationships and uses this language to explore masculine sexual anxiety in *Waterland*. Tom Crick reflects on his wife’s sensual past: “Once upon a time there was a future history teacher’s wife. . . who—wearing little or nothing at all—invited the future history teacher to explore the intricacies of her incipient womanhood, to consider the mysteries of her menstrual cycle—and to offer reciprocal

invitations” (106). Lawrence and Swift both use the Lawrentian Woman to exemplify patriarchal attitudes to sexually liberated women.

Thus, the Lawrentian Woman’s independence from the norms established by dominant ideology renders her uncanny to the patriarchal gaze; that is, she is seen as both familiar and unnerving, becoming what Freud calls “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (825). She is familiar in that she is defined by predetermined cultural roles: mother, wife, lover, daughter. However, she is rendered uncanny because she refuses to fulfill her prescribed roles of nurturing and sexual submission. Her eschewal of moralistic expectations and her link with her female body frustrates patriarchal discourse. In retaliation, masculine forces cast the Lawrentian Woman as grotesque and abject, and she becomes representative of Barbara Creed’s concept of “monstrous-femininity” (1). Indeed, the defining quality of the Lawrentian Woman is her portrayal as an uncanny entity, a being more powerfully connected with both her body and the animal world than the established realm of the patriarchy, and this incompatibility ultimately leads to her being labeled as a monstrous, horrific “Other.”

### Abjection

In order to better understand patriarchal treatment of the Lawrentian Woman, it is important to first define Julia Kristeva’s concept of “abjection,” and then examine Creed’s subsequent appropriation of the term in her discussion of monstrous-femininity. The abject is what is simultaneously attractive and repulsive; it is an object or being that exists outside of the acceptable boundaries imposed by hegemonic forces, but still manages to challenge dominant ideology from its marginal position (Kristeva, *Powers* 1-2). More specifically, Kristeva contends that women’s bodies provide a major source of abjection in male-dominated societies. Certainly,

the patriarchal imagination defines women largely through their reproductive functions and their feminine bodies. Rich acknowledges the profound impact abjection has historically had on depictions of femininity: “Throughout patriarchal mythology, dream-symbolism, theology, language...the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, ‘the devil’s gateway’” (34). The key aspect of abjection is ambiguity, especially when one considers that “it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). The abject Lawrentian Woman challenges patriarchal expectations through her liminal position in society and is thus depicted as a grotesque outsider.

All of this is not to say that Lawrence himself views his female characters as abject. There is a tendency among critics to equate Lawrence’s life with his art, and many have read his female characters as representations of his Oedipal anxiety toward his mother and other women in his life. Judith Ruderman ties Lawrence’s prose to his life, and claims that his writing “shows evidence of unresolved pre-oedipal conflicts beneath the oedipal overlay” (8). Likewise, critic Judith Farr admits: “My own view is that Lawrence’s oedipal fascination persisted and that he wrote about his mother with open passion or with a malice born of it until he died” (196). She goes further, labeling Lawrence thusly: “[He was] struggling with his own sexual desire, jealous of his father, and obsessed with his mother’s nature and relation to himself” (199). However, these critics rely too heavily on the Lawrence’s biography and disregard crucial elements of his early portrayals of women in favor of linking his life to his work. They ignore the complexities contained within his writings, and are too eager to draw a direct connection between Lawrence the man and Lawrence the artist. Earl Ingersoll reflects on the overemphasis on biographical

information to interpret Lawrence's novels: "The not-so-hidden agenda of this 'Freudian analysis' is patent: analyze the characters as surrogates for the author" (29). This misguided inclination to impose elements of Lawrence's life into his prose robs the texts of their richness, and applies static interpretations to works that should be approached using varied critical methods. It is important to note that the Lawrentian Woman suffers abjection because Lawrence writes her as autonomous, as a threat to an established order of gender norms, not because Lawrence had an unusually intimate relationship with his mother. He reflects the norms of early twentieth-century Britain while simultaneously challenging established gender paradigms through his depictions of women as Others. Women in *The Rainbow* force male characters to confront abjection, which directly confronts them with their own patriarchal ideology. Susan Bowers states, "The grotesque also challenges patriarchal symbol systems through its incorporation of horror.... Because abjection momentarily enforces the dissipation of all meaning—in the face of horror, the subject confronts Nothingness itself—it enables the construction of new meaning" (Bowers 20-21). The Lawrentian Woman is not only cast as abject, but is also labeled a monster because she frustrates restrictive forms of femininity.

### Monstrous-Femininity

The concept of monstrous-femininity is closely associated with abjection. Creed argues, "All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (1). Female monsters are deemed horrific, but not for the same reasons that society declares male monsters terrifying; instead, the female monster is essentialized and defined by her anatomy and sexual nature, and is thus considered horrific because she represents, in phallogentric ideology, concepts of sexual difference and castration (2-3). The Lawrentian Woman is portrayed as monstrous through patriarchal discourse. Her

connection with her body and its natural rhythms is unacceptable according to the sexual norms set forth by society. De Beauvoir keenly acknowledges the horrific connotations surrounding the female body when she writes, “The word *female* brings up... a saraband of imagery—a vast round ovum engulfs and castrates the agile spermatozoon; the monstrous and swollen termite queen rules over the enslaved males; the praying mantis and the spider... crush and devour their partners” (3). Critic Lisa S. Starks also provides insightful commentary on monstrous-femininity and the abject female body. She contends, “Because the abject is projected onto the maternal body and by extension ‘the feminine,’ it is often envisioned in representations of the grotesque female body. Extended beyond the maternal, ‘the feminine’ itself thus ‘becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed’” (123). The Lawrentian Woman’s fecundity (or lack thereof) and the perceived grotesqueness of her feminine body are key aspects that exclude her from phallogentric discourse and render her an abject monster.

Additionally, the Lawrentian Woman is deemed horrific because of her relationship with Nature. Her enmeshment within the animal world places her on the margins of society and links her to a natural cycle of birth, deterioration, and death (Creed 47). The Lawrentian Woman skirts the boundary between human and animal (Kristeva, *Powers* 12). Thus, she is viewed as an ambiguous and mysterious Other. Rich acknowledges the fusion of femininity, Nature, and death that is archetypal in the patriarchal symbolic order: “In winter, vegetation retreats back into the earth-womb; and in death the human body, too, returns into that womb, to await rebirth... Here we see one of the many connections between the idea of the Mother and the idea of death—an association which remains powerful in patriarchal thought” (108). Initially, the Lawrentian Woman’s depiction as monstrous appears to disenfranchise her and render her weak; indeed, that is the aim of the patriarchal forces that cast her as grotesque. However, though her societal



position suffers, she is actually imbued with a kind of prepatriarchal power. She becomes simultaneously alluring and repulsive, a mysterious and an awe-inspiring representation of the natural world and of mortality. Hélène Cixous believes that hegemonic ideology has a need to equate women with death. She contends, “Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That’s because they need femininity to be associated with death; it’s the jitters that gives them a hard-on! for themselves! They need to be afraid of us” (1951). The Lawrentian Woman becomes, in the patriarchal imagination, a physical manifestation of male sexual anxieties as well as a reminder of the frailty of the established, dominant order.

### 20<sup>th</sup>-Century British Writers and the Lawrentian Woman

As a model of femininity, the Lawrentian Woman has been hugely influential for contemporary British authors. In the following chapters, I will examine ways in which the Lawrentian Woman has been adopted by twentieth-century writers and discuss her evolution from modernist prototype to postmodern appropriation. First, I begin with the exemplary Lawrentian Women: Lydia, Anna, and Ursula Brangwen of Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*. They establish the tropes that identify the Lawrentian Woman and provide the base from which to compare the model’s subsequent mutations. Next, I move on to Graham Swift’s modern classic *Waterland*, which is strikingly similar to *The Rainbow* in that it too portrays several generations of women within an insular geographic location. Swift’s text is especially interesting because it positions the female body as the major source of horror instead of the global threats that loom in the background of the novel. Much like *The Rainbow* and *Waterland*, Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong* is a work that is concerned with homosociality and the masculine disgust of female sexuality. Whereas World War I is fast approaching in *The Rainbow* and a distant specter in *Waterland*, *Birdsong* vividly depicts the violence of the Great War and juxtaposes this bloodshed

with sexuality and maternal figures. Finally, I examine Angela Carter's subversive collection *The Bloody Chamber* in order to see what happens when the Lawrentian Woman is cast as a literal monster as opposed to being rendered one by phallogentric imagination. The major attributes of the Lawrentian Woman remain intact throughout these texts, but they are deconstructed and recast in interesting ways that explore women's liminal position in patriarchal discourse throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## CHAPTER 2

### “IT WAS NOT HUMAN—AT LEAST TO A MAN”: THE GROTESQUE FEMALE OTHER IN D.H. LAWRENCE’S *THE RAINBOW*

*“And he dared not think of her face, of her eyes which shone, and of her strange, transfigured face.”*

D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* (1915) is a work that illuminates and challenges Victorian gender roles. In this rigid patriarchal structure, women, and especially mothers, are destined to be “the symbol[s] for that further life which comprised religion and love and morality” (Lawrence 13). In other words, it is women’s collective national duty to be consumed with imparting normative Christian values to their families. This moralistic view of femininity disregards female sexuality and in fact marginalizes the female population. Luce Irigaray acknowledges, “Female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters” (*This Sex* 23). Lawrence brilliantly illustrates how three generations of Brangwen women, Lydia, Anna, and Ursula, all suffer under—but simultaneously subvert and frustrate—Victorian gender expectations. This constant clash between moral femininity and sexual liberation engenders a sense of terror and instability in their mates, who view the Brangwen women as threatening, grotesque, and monstrous entities. The men cast them as “Other,” not only because of their Polish ancestry, but also due to their refusal to submit to culturally prescribed gender roles; thus, the women are doubly marginalized in the rural Marsh community.

Throughout *The Rainbow*, male sexual anxiety and uncertainty manifest themselves in the abjection that male characters experience when they confront the female body. Kristeva describes abjection as a sense of simultaneous repulsion and attraction. This impulse “turns out to be essentially fear of [woman’s] generative power. It is this power, a dreaded one, that

patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing” (*Powers* 77). The men attempt to suppress the Brangwen women’s sexuality through patriarchal construction of marriage, a construction that serves to reinforce normative gender roles. As Irigaray notes, “Woman’s social inferiority *doubles* her sexual inferiority, and/or reciprocally so in a circularity it will be hard to get past, or out of” (*Speculum* 119-120). When this institution ultimately fails to fully sexually repress the women of the Marsh, the Brangwen women are then characterized as archaic/devouring mothers, monstrous wombs, witches, and other horrific constructions. In short, all are representative of various aspects of monstrous-femininity.

The first woman to suffer abjection and be classified as a horrific Other in the Marsh is Lydia Lensky Brangwen. Initially, Lydia’s husband Tom enters into their relationship with an unhealthy Oedipal fixation and, consequently, a considerable disdain for female sexuality<sup>1</sup>. Tom grows up in a household in which his mother is the ultimate moral authority, and she especially dotes on Tom, her favorite child (Lawrence 9). She forces him to attend a grammar school, an experience he finds distasteful. However, to please his mother, he puts forth a genuine effort in his education: “If he could have been what he liked, he would have been that which his mother fondly but deludedly hoped he was. . . . It was her aspiration for him, therefore he knew it as the true aspiration for any boy” (10). He is obsequious to his mother’s demands and expectations and desperately seeks her love and affection. Therefore, it is surprising that Tom’s first sexual encounter is with a prostitute. Before, he was “a youth fresh like a plant, rooted in his mother and sister. . . . For him there was until that time only one kind of woman—his mother and sister” (13).

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<sup>1</sup> There have been a number of critical discussions centered on Lawrence and his own Oedipal fixation. In *D.H. Lawrence and the Child*, Carol Sklenicka claims, “We must attribute Lawrence’s vision of the novel as the ‘perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships’ to the anxious and perhaps perverse love of Lydia Lawrence for her son, and to the closeness she demanded from him” (53). Additionally, Lawrence’s mother and Tom’s mother share a name, which serves as an obvious temptation for critics who want to employ biographical interpretation. However, this (mis)reading is reductive. Tom’s Oedipal impulses are not indicative of Lawrence’s problematic relationship with his own mother.

After this experience, however, Tom is disgusted, and he views the female body as abject. He regards the prostitute as unclean: “There was a cold distaste for her, and a fear of her; there was a moment of paralysed horror when he felt he might have taken a disease from her” (14). Later he feels a similar pang of sexual anxiety when he approaches a “nice girl” and discovers that “he was incapable of pushing the desired development. The very presence of the girl beside him made it impossible.... She was a girl and he liked her, and dreaded violently even the thought of uncovering her” (15). After he meets Lydia, he finds in her not only a mysterious foreign lover, but also a maternal surrogate to replace his now deceased mother. Lydia is an older woman and, more importantly, a mother. Sandra Gilbert argues about the primacy of mothers in Lawrence’s fiction, noting, “We see at the same time an acknowledgement of the male subject’s dependence on female, and specifically maternal, power” (*Rereading* 282). Lawrence emphasizes Tom’s youth compared to Lydia’s experience as she longs for him: “Also he was very young and very fresh. The blue, steady livingness of his eyes she enjoyed like morning. He was very young” (Lawrence 51). Considering Tom’s attachment to his mother and his desire for the older, maternal Lydia, one can clearly see the Oedipal components of their relationship— and also how Tom, through his Oedipal anxiety, gradually comes to view Lydia as grotesque.

After Tom initially expresses an interest in Lydia, he proceeds to cast her as abject and Other. We see this in his focus on Lydia’s “ugly-beautiful mouth” shortly following their engagement (Lawrence 43). Tom’s fixation on her mouth is evocative of his fear of female genitalia. He is simultaneously repulsed by and attracted to Lydia; thus, her mouth—resembling a vaginal construction—becomes a major source of abjection. Irigaray acknowledges vagina dentata imagery and its prevalence in Western thought, that woman’s sex organs “are pictured in fantasy, what is more, as a greedy mouth” (*Speculum* 115). We first see Tom’s terror of being

consumed after he and Lydia are engaged: “What was agony to him, with one hand lightly resting on his arm, she leaned forward a little, and with a strange, primeval suggestion of embrace, held him her mouth. It was ugly-beautiful, and he could not bear it” (Lawrence 43). Lawrence’s use of “strange” and “primeval” in depicting this initial embrace calls to mind images of the “archaic mother,” or the “parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and of end” (Creed 17). Later, when Lydia longs for Tom she is seen as “darkness,” and Tom imagines “yielding himself naked out of his own hands into the unknown power!” (53). With this passage, Lydia is equated with a void and the archaic mother, a combination better known as the “fecund mother-as-abyss” (Creed 25). In other words, she is the cannibalizing maternal “black hole from which all life comes and to which all life returns” (25). Lawrence’s poignant use of “unknown power” to describe Lydia signifies her not only as a void, but also as a mystical Other. Her passion carries with it connotations of castration, consumption, and masculine annihilation. Tom’s fear of being consumed by an archaic mother figure reflects Irigaray’s notion that in Western thought, “[Woman’s] desire is often interpreted, and feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole” (*This Sex* 29). In the Marsh’s patriarchal society, Lydia’s wish for sexual fulfillment is irregular and upsets the rigid, normative tenets of femininity, creating sexual anxiety and fear in Tom.

Lydia is further rendered abject in the scene in which she gives birth. Creed states, “The womb represents the utmost in abjection for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination—blood, afterbirth, faeces” (49). Tom confronts the perceived horrors of the female body when he hears his wife in labor: “He started. There was the sound of the owls—the moaning of the woman. What an uncanny sound! It was not human—at least to a man” (Lawrence 76). Lawrence’s use of “uncanny” further

assigns this natural process an inhuman quality. Freud notes, “The uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (833). Tom has obvious issues with maternal figures, simultaneously desiring and repulsing them. Thus, it is appropriate that he views the birthing as uncanny. During the birth, attention is again drawn to Lydia’s vaginal mouth, which “was shut with suffering in a sort of grin. She was beautiful to him—but it was not human. He had a dread of her as she lay there. What had she to do with him? *She was other than himself*” (76, emphasis mine). Tom openly defines her as monstrous “other” and “it” in this passage; he regards her maternal nature as abject, and ultimately has to look away from the terrifying scene: “When her pains began afresh, tearing her, he turned aside, and could not look” (76).

Like Lydia, her daughter Anna is also characterized as a grotesque feminine Other. More than any other character, Anna is considered monstrous because of her maternal body and functions—she best embodies the “monstrous womb” (Creed 7). She is essentialized, equated with her biology and thus reduced in phallogentric imagination to a vessel defined by her reproductive functions. Creed remarks that patriarchal societies cast woman’s womb as horrific: “It houses an alien life form, it causes alterations in the body, it leads to the act of birth. The womb is horrifying *per se*, and within patriarchal discourses it has been used to represent woman’s body as marked, impure and part of the natural/animal world” (49). Ussher echoes this sentiment, stating, “The female reproductive body is positioned as abject, as other, as site of deficiency and disease” (151). The abjection Anna faces initially places her in a weakened position; however, crucially, she eventually manages to draw strength from her marginal position and extreme fecundity.

Anna and her husband Will endure a war of attrition to see who will be the more dominant mate. The two are in constant opposition; Will both desires and is repulsed by Anna, and he ultimately wants to coerce her into a state of subjugation. Anna feels that Will specifically targets her femininity in his attempts to suppress her: “He seemed to lacerate her sensitive femaleness. He seemed to hurt her womb, to take pleasure in torturing her.... She pressed her hands over her womb in anguish” (149-150). Lawrence intentionally foregrounds the image of the womb in this passage in order to equate Anna’s femininity with her maternal functions, and, in doing so, foreshadows her fecund destiny. She becomes the victor in their drawn-out struggle for superiority through the use of her maternal body.

The turning point of Anna and Will’s bitter battle for control occurs in the famous scene of ritualistic dance, where a visibly pregnant Anna dances naked in a sort of ceremonial exultation “to the Unseen, to the unseen Creator who had chosen her, to Whom she belonged” (179). The ritual carries pagan connotations, and stands in stark opposition to Will’s normative and patriarchal Christian faith. She subverts his religious beliefs through her dancing: “He was in the house, so her pride was fiercer. She would dance his nullification, she would dance to her unseen Lord. She was exalted over him, before the Lord” (180). When Will discovers her ritual, he becomes angry and demands that she cease. She disregards his command. She exerts her autonomy and expresses herself in a distinctly prepatriarchal ceremony. She owns her pleasure and dances sensually, and upsets her husband’s restrictive expectations of femininity. Much like Tom before him, Will cannot bear the sight of his wife: “He turned aside, he could not look, it hurt his eyes. Her limbs lifted and lifted, her hair was sticking out all fierce, and *her belly, big, strange, terrifying*, uplifted to the Lord” (181, emphasis mine). He is repulsed by her maternal body in part because it represents sexual difference (Creed 57). Moreover, he sees his naked,



pregnant, dancing wife as abject because “woman’s pregnant womb, whose outer sign appears to be a grotesquely swelling stomach, also awakens man’s attraction and fear of woman as sexual ‘other’ (57). Finally, Will casts Anna as abject because she refuses her husband’s restrictive norms. Her autonomy engenders sexual anxiety in Will, and he fears Anna’s strength as well as her female body.

After Anna gives birth, Will becomes submissive to her demands. Indeed, as Anna is giving birth to Ursula, she “felt so powerfully alive and in the hands of such a masterly force of life... she knew she was winning, she was always winning, with each onset of pain she was nearer to victory” (Lawrence 189). Anna revels in the mystical power inherent in her ability to create new life. Later, she acknowledges that “she loved to be the source of children” (205). Christine Connell asserts, “Her maternal powers constitute all of her being in both its sun-inspired fecundity and in its violent, forceful fruitfulness” (86). Anna’s fecundity gives her mastery over her husband and her rapidly expanding brood; Will is acquiescent to her femininity, to her maternal body which represents “feminine excess at its most extreme, the boundless bulging body standing as the epitome of unruly fecundity, fears of abjection reinforced by the act of birth” (Ussher 151). Anna uses her maternal functions as an instrument of control, and to fill the gap in her life left by Will’s patriarchal, repressive sexual norms (Irigaray *This Sex* 27). Her maternal functions enable her to feel “so complacent, so utterly fulfilled in her breeding” (Lawrence 352). Lawrence’s provocative choice of “breeding” to describe Anna’s maternity is reminiscent of the language of animal husbandry. By equating Anna with livestock Lawrence reinforces her role as Other outside of patriarchal society. This is an especially potent image because she is associated with restrained forces of Nature, with animals that are coerced into prescribed roles by society. Again, this is not to say that Lawrence himself sees women as

grotesque animals, but rather that he is illustrating phallogentric attitudes towards autonomous maternal figures like Anna. This is an important distinction because Lawrence's prose reflects—but also subverts—patriarchal ideology. Anna is cast as Other, but she actually draws strength from this designation. By falling outside of patriarchal discourse, and being rendered a monstrous being by hegemonic ideology, Anna is imbued with more strength and autonomy than she could possibly hope to attain within the narrow confines of the Marsh community.

Finally, Ursula is undoubtedly the most fiercely independent of the women of the Marsh. As a result, the Marsh's patriarchal forces characterize her as both alien and monstrous. Margaret Storch points out the power Lawrence gives to his female characters, and especially Ursula: "D.H. Lawrence's response to women reflects his awareness of the fundamental power of women over men's emotional lives and of strong female influence in his own society" (97). Certainly, her will and influence prove disruptive to Victorian gender norms considering "she was always in revolt against babies and muddled domesticity" (Lawrence 273). Storch also notes, "[Ursula] is the heroine who emerges from cyclic generations of Brangwens as a separate individual, deliberately going beyond her mother's existence, which is enmeshed in childbirth and maternity" (110). She rebels against gender expectations through her sexual expression with both Anton Skrebensky and her teacher Miss Inger. Additionally, she rejects maternity and refuses to accept marriage proposals from Anton and Maggie's brother. According to Irigaray, the institution of marriage inherently "disguise[s] a *purchase agreement for the body and sex of the wife*" (*Speculum* 121). After she rejects Anton's offer of marriage, she truly comes to be viewed as Other. Anton is horrified by her illicit passion: "She owned his body and enjoyed it with all the delight and carelessness of a possessor. But he had become gradually afraid of her

body” (Lawrence 460). He views her as Other because she is unwilling to submit to him, to take him as her husband rather than just as her lover.

Rendered abject by society, Ursula often takes solace in and seeks strength from her natural surroundings. More than any other character, Ursula has a strong, intimate bond with Nature. At one point, she gazes reverently at an ash tree and reflects: “I could never die while there was a tree” (334). She is described as standing near the ash “in worship” (334). This terminology conjures images of a connection to a maternal earth goddess; in a sense, Nature is Ursula’s place of worship. Her spiritual link reflects how women often face abjection due to their relationship with Nature. Although Creed does not directly address the Lawrentian Woman, she might be when she writes, “Her ability to give birth links her directly to the animal world and to the great cycle of birth, decay, and death. Awareness of his links to nature reminds man of his mortality and of the fragility of the symbolic order” (Creed 47).

Similarly, women so closely enmeshed with the earth have historically been associated with witches, who are able to use their feminine powers to control forces of Nature (76). Anna’s most obvious connection with Nature is her adoration of the moon. The moon is typically associated with femininity. Adrienne Rich remarks, “The moon is generally held to have been the first object of nature-worship, and the moon, to whose phases the menstrual cycle corresponds, is anciently associated with women” (Rich 107). Ursula’s reverence for the moon is remarkably similar to Anna’s euphoric reaction to her ritualistic dance—both ceremonies recall pagan rituals that oppose the accepted patriarchal Christian faith. Ursula’s first “communion” with the moon is blocked by Anton’s stifling presence: “She wanted the moon to fill her, she wanted more, more communion with the moon, consummation. But Skrebensky put his arm round her and led her away” (Lawrence 317). Later, however, after she has rejected Anton’s

marriage proposal, the moon instills her with transformative power. She absorbs sensual, sexual energy from the moon, and this terrifies Anton. He views her as a dominant “harpy” as he follows her along the beach and notes how “she prowled, ranging on the edge of the water like a possessed creature” (478). Lawrence conveys Anton’s horror of Ursula’s desire when he describes her perceived grotesqueness through language such as “prowled,” “possessed creature,” and the harpy imagery. She is seen as possessed and monstrous simply because she exerts a sense of autonomy. When Ursula finally grasps Anton in her arms, “his body was powerless in her grip, his heart melted in fear from the fierce, beaked, harpy’s kiss” (479). Anton is presented as impotent in the monstrous clutches of Ursula. They have sex on the beach under the mystic moonlight, an experience that “lasted till it was agony to his soul” (479). After they finish, Anton seizes his opportunity to flee from her: “He drew gradually away as if afraid...and he plunged away, on and on, ever farther from the horrible figure that lay stretched in the moonlight” (479-80). He escapes Ursula that night, and leaves her permanently the next day. However, he is unable to truly rid himself of her: “But at night, he dared not be alone.... He watched the window in suffering and terror. When would this horrible darkness be lifted off him?” (481). Shortly afterwards, Anton reconnects with an old lover who is willing to face subjugation under marriage, but he fearfully acknowledges, “[Ursula] was the darkness, the challenge, the horror” (482).

In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence reexamines and deconstructs the roles of female sexuality and maternity in patriarchal discourse. Ruderman astutely notes, “In a sense, Lawrence demythologizes the institution of motherhood by debunking the notion of unadulterated and wholly beneficial maternal devotion” (187). Instead of fulfilling the expected role of caretaker and moral authority of the family, the women of the Marsh subvert Victorian gender roles

through their sexuality and sensual nature. Tom, Will, and Anton all attempt to dominate and repress their respective mates' sexuality through institutional means. However, as Lawrence shows, the patriarchal construction of marriage ultimately cannot suppress these strong women. The Brangwen women's collective rejection of the tenets of moral femininity subjects them to the ire of patriarchal forces in the Marsh, and they are subsequently viewed as abject, monstrous Others. Collectively, they provide the template for the Lawrentian Woman.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORY AND HYSTERIA: THE LAWRENTIAN WOMAN IN GRAHAM SWIFT'S *WATERLAND*

*“And it was her father’s milk—but, alas, never her mother’s—that Mary Metcalf grew up on.”*

Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (1983) addresses various human crises, including numerous historical wars and an impending Cold War with its threat of nuclear holocaust. Unruly history student Price is justified in his wary assessment that “fear is here!” (Swift 288). However, these global threats and atrocities are placed in the background of the novel. Indeed, Swift places emphasis on the importance of personal narratives and how these accounts are often disregarded in the larger scope of historical events. In keeping with this theme, it makes perfect sense, then, that the major source of horror in *Waterland* stems not from the Cold War setting or the various wars that have raged throughout history, but from a more personal, intimate source. More specifically, Swift foregrounds societal abjection of the women in the Fens, particularly Martha Clay, Sarah Turnbull Atkinson, Helen Atkinson Crick, and Mary Metcalf Crick, and depicts these Lawrentian Women as horrific.

*Waterland* and *The Rainbow* share a number of attributes. Both novels follow several generations of strong women as they navigate marginalization within the confines of an isolated patriarchal community. With *Waterland*, however, Swift subtly appropriates and rewrites the Lawrentian Women of *The Rainbow* in order to better portray the women in the Fens as disenfranchised. He achieves this through his narrator, Tom Crick. Whereas *The Rainbow* is told through an omniscient perspective that penetrates the inner thoughts and lives of the Brangwen women, the Lawrentian Women of Swift’s Fens are rendered abject, mysterious, and ambiguous through Crick’s narrow, phallogentric perspective. Kristeva partially defines abjection as “a

border; abjection is above all ambiguity” (*Powers* 9). *Waterland* is a work that revels in ambiguity. Swift admits that he is “fascinated by borderline conditions, or rather by the difficulty of drawing a distinct line between some fundamental human concerns” (Vianu 343). One of the key abjections in *Waterland* is directed toward the maternal body. The patriarchal structure of the Fens defines women largely through their reproductive functions and their feminine bodies. Women’s role in reproduction is an essential aspect to the ascribed role of normative feminine identity (Ussher 3). The women of the Fens are both desired by and repulsive to the patriarchal forces that dictate the societal standards of the area; the community as a whole forces the women who do not adhere to societal norms to remain marginalized and isolated.

Throughout *Waterland*, Swift presents the female body and aspects of maternity as recurring motifs. This foregrounding can be seen in the novel’s chapter titles, which include *About Holes and Things*, *About the Change of Life*, *Histrionics*, and *In Loco Parentis*, and, more subtly, in Swift’s several references to mother’s milk. As the women are further rendered abject, patriarchal forces come to view them as horrific. Again, they are seen as grotesque because of their bodies and their reproductive functions (or lack thereof). In fact, the women are reduced to their anatomy; they are defined by the societal forces of the Fens by what their bodies can and cannot produce. Thus, by examining the aspects of abjection and monstrous-femininity that appear in *Waterland*, including both the role of “witch” that Martha and Sarah inhabit and the horrors of maternity that Helen and Mary represent— I will show that the Lawrentian Woman’s body— not bombs or war or other manmade implements— constitutes the novel’s major elements of horror.

At first glance, Martha and Sarah may appear to inhabit opposite ends of the spectrum both in terms of financial affluence and societal expectations. However, both women are branded

as witches by the Fenland society. When the reader first encounters Martha, it is clear that she has already been expelled from the Fenland society and labeled a witch; she lives on the literal and figurative margins of the community. This kind of marginalization occurs in society because, as De Beauvoir argues, “The woman who does not conform devaluates herself sexually and hence socially, since sexual values are an integral feature of society” (759). Martha’s physical description is evocative of some of the traditional characteristics of a crone or a hag: “That face! Small, moist, needly eyes. Leather purse of a mouth. Nose: bony... And those cheeks! They’re not just round and ruddy.... They’re over-ripe tomatoes. And, speaking of over-ripeness, this smell” (Swift 260). The witch is the most obvious example of a gendered monster that exists across cultural boundaries, often portrayed as a wicked elderly woman capable of engaging in horrific acts (Creed 2). Martha refuses to abide by the patriarchal norms that constrict the women living in the Fens. Additionally, she is condemned because she has no children and is past the point of procreation. Adrienne Rich acknowledges the importance of woman’s reproductive functions in determining her societal position: “The value of a woman’s life would appear to be contingent on her being pregnant or newly delivered. Women who refuse to become mothers are not merely emotionally suspect, but are dangerous” (169). The one patriarchal construction that she has reportedly entered into, marriage, is called into question by the community: “But some said that Martha Clay, who was some twenty years younger than Bill, was never Bill’s wife at all. Some said that Martha Clay was a witch” (Swift 9). Her lack of fecundity and her advanced age both contribute to her pejorative status. Indeed, according to Ussher, “The post-menopausal woman [is] represented primarily as the crone, the hag... Or she is represented as witch, and condemned, as witches always are” (118). Ussher’s assertion that post-menopausal women are



often portrayed as witches reinforces the idea that women past their reproductive prime are considered horrific in patriarchal constructions.

Alternatively, Sarah is initially embraced by Fenland society when she marries the powerful Thomas Atkinson; the community wonders, “Who [is] this frolicsome and—so it proved—fecund young bride?” (Swift 60). The first aspect of Sarah that the community notices is her ability to give Thomas Atkinson heirs. This is her primary value in the patriarchal structure of the Fens. Thomas Atkinson, a man many years her senior, eventually becomes more possessive and jealous of Sarah once he realizes that she is entering her sexual prime as he begins his own sexual decline. He sees that “he has failed to give due attention to this wonderful *creature* with whom, once, he bounced so casually through the *rituals of procreation*. In short, Sarah Atkinson is in her prime; and her husband is growing old and doting—and jealous” (65, emphasis mine). Thomas strikes Sarah shortly thereafter, rendering her mute and an invalid. His violent reaction against Sarah and her sexual primacy initially serves its intended purpose: he silences her, and suppresses her blooming, threatening sexuality. Sarah remains in her room, and later in her own specially constructed asylum, secluded and excluded from the outside world. She, like Martha, is cast out from the patriarchal society; she is expelled and made abject after her reproductive functions are permanently interrupted.

Later, however, Sarah exerts power despite her marginalized position when she comes to be feared as a mystical, magical Other, a witch like Martha. After Thomas’ death, the town tells stories about Sarah having premonitions and leading her sons, the only two men in the patriarchal structure that have not repulsed her, into successful business propositions. In regards to her sons, “The brothers were inhibited by that woman up there in that upper room. In short, the townsfolk might have diagnosed, had they been acquainted with a form of magic not then

invented, the classic symptoms of Mother Fixation, not to say the Oedipal Syndrome” (76). Swift’s subtle use of the term *magic* to describe the considerable hold Sarah has on her sons reinforces the monstrous witch imagery associated with her. The Fenland community implicates quiet, damaged Sarah as a soothsayer, circulating their belief that the “blow on the head had bestowed on Sarah that gift which is so desired and feared—the gift to see and shape the future. Thus it was she who so uncannily predicted the exact timing of the repeal of the Corn Laws... It was she who devined, and even caused to be, the boom years of the mid-century” (72). She is relegated to a role of a goddess in a tower, a spectral figure haunting the imagination of the community. Moreover, after Sarah dies, rumors spread of her supernatural influence. A massive flood sweeps through the Fens, and this is attributed to her passing. During the flooding, her ghost is reported around in town by her granddaughter. What is particularly interesting about the sighting is Sarah’s ghost appears as she was before she was struck silent by her husband: “Has she returned, too, not just from the dead but from the former life that was hers before a knock on the skull dislodged her brains and for ever jumbled up for her past, present and future?” (89). However, the most striking story that circulates about Sarah is her daring escape from an asylum. Some in the Fenland community believe that she, “being a woman of uncanny powers,” escaped her confines and “dived ‘like a very mermaid’ beneath the water never to surface again” (90). Her equation to an uncanny mermaid blurs the boundary between animal and human; she is instilled with unsettling powers by the phallogentric imagination of the Fens.

While Sarah is viewed as having mystical powers, Helen is considered horrific because of her maternal body. Creed states, “When woman is represented as monstrous it is always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions” (7). Similar to the Atkinson brothers and Tom Brangwen from *The Rainbow*, Tom has an Oedipal fixation with his mother. After Helen

dies, Tom recalls his own envious reaction to his mother paying special attention to his older brother Dick (Swift 210). Later in the novel, Tom wears his mother's apron and tries to assume her motherly duties by cooking for the family: "For if Dick can step into Dad's lock-keeper shoes, I put about me Mother's apron.... I am engaged in culinary necromancy. With the aid of that swaddling apron... I am trying to conjure, to absorb into myself, the spirit of my dead Mummy" (246-7). It is important to note Swift's conscious use of "conjure" in regards to Tom's "dead Mummy." "Conjure" is yet another reference to magic and witchcraft that haunts the novel. Additionally, in this passage, Tom wants to subsume his mother's identity into himself, and he hopes to accomplish this by wearing her "swaddling" apron, the apron being a prominent emblem for the role of caretaker that women represent in a patriarchal society. Elizabeth Gross discusses the importance of developing an identity separate from a maternal figure when she writes, "What must be expelled from the subject's corporeal functioning can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution" (87). Because of his inability to pry himself from the maternal, Tom never fully establishes an identity independent of his absent mother (Kristeva, *Intimate* 176).

Helen is also considered horrific because of her incestuous relationship with her father and the subsequent monstrous birth of her intellectually-deficient son Dick. Incest is arguably the taboo that is most consistently present in societies around the world. Kristeva points out that the prohibition of the maternal body acts as a defense against the incest taboo (*Powers* 14). The patriarchal constructions of the Fens reject both Earnest and Helen for their inappropriate relationship. Helen, like Martha and Sarah, lives both figuratively and literally on the margins of the society; she lives in a secluded house with her father who has fallen in love with her, "[and]

we're not just talking about ordinary paternal affection" (Swift 195). Earnest idealizes his daughter as a being of beauty and perfection; he uses witch imagery when he imagines "her effecting miracle cures, not by her nursely arts, but by the sheer magic of her beautiful presence" (194).

Earnest decides that his daughter will make the ideal vessel to carry his son, "the saviour of the world" (198). Again, we see the emphasis Earnest places on his daughter's reproductive function being her most useful feature. However, once Dick is born, Helen is considered horrific not only for her maternal body and her reproductive functions, but also for the child that she has produced. Dick is intellectually delayed and is presented in grotesque terms. Dick is described as "not a savior of the world. A potato-head. Not a hope for the future. A numbskull with the dull, vacant stare of a fish" (209). He is rejected as sub-human, described more like a fish than as a human being. Dick's obvious deficiencies are seen, in the phallogentric imagination, as Helen's fault. Her womb produced this perceived monstrosity, this "abortive experiment" (221). Thus, she, rather than her father who instigated the incestuous relationship and demanded a son, is to blame.

The final Lawrentian Woman of the Fens to represent monstrous-femininity in *Waterland* is Mary. Mary is the most horrific and abject of the female characters; she signifies different stages of womanhood and the functions that render each phase grotesque. Mary embodies the madonna/whore complex. Like Helen, Mary's father has an idealized image of his daughter. Harold Metcalf names his daughter Mary because he "would have turned her, if he only could, into a little madonna, who would be transformed, in due course, into a princess" (39). Mary's father has narrow, restrictive patriarchal expectations of what constitutes acceptable femininity. Indeed, as De Beauvoir notes in her discussion of the social construction of femininity, "One is

not born, but rather becomes a woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature” (301). However, Mary frustrates her father’s desire for her to abide by patriarchal norms by expressing an “itch of curiosity,” a sexual hunger (44). In her sexual exploration with Tom, he recognizes, “She was the bolder of the two of us” (43). The scene in which Tom and Mary sexually experiment carries horrific connotations in the way that Mary’s body is described: “Mary’s hole began to reveal a further power to suck, to ingest; a voracity which made [Tom] momentarily hold back” (43). Swift’s use of “power,” “suck,” “voracity,” and particularly “ingest” portrays Mary’s vagina as a monstrous *vagina dentata*, as a force that will potentially castrate and devour Tom. Creed discusses the male fear of castration that exists in phallogocentric discourse: “Man’s fear of castration has... led him to construct another monstrous phantasy—that of woman as castrator. Here woman’s monstrousness is linked more directly to questions of sexual desire than to the area of reproduction” (7). Tom’s hesitant reaction to exploring Mary sexually demonstrates his abjection to her female body; he is both repelled and attracted (14).

Mary is in touch with her budding feminine body and proud, rather than ashamed, of her body’s functions. Swift writes, “She spoke of hymens and of her monthly bleedings. She was proud of her bleedings” (44). Mary’s positive conception of her bodily functions stands in stark contrast to patriarchal society’s abjection of the female body. Rich acknowledges the awe, fear, and sexual anxiety that menstruation inspires in the patriarchal imagination: “The mere existence of a menstrual taboo signifies, for better or for worse, *powers only half-understood; the fear of woman and the mystery of her motherhood*.... This taboo itself must have added to their apparent powers, investing them with the charisma of ritual” (105). Furthermore, menstruation denotes a major change in a young woman’s monstrous status: “Menarche marks the point at which a girl becomes a woman; when childhood innocence may be swapped for the mantle of monstrosity

associated with abject fecundity.... Breasts, pubic hair... and most significantly, menstrual blood—stand as signifiers of feminine excess, of the body as out of control” (Ussher 18-19). Mary’s entrance into womanhood is marked by her open sexual experimentation with Tom, Freddie, and Dick. Eventually, Mary becomes pregnant from engaging in this socially unconventional behavior.

Mary’s pregnancy and subsequent abortion represent another facet of monstrous-femininity. Maternity is considered by the patriarchy to be “desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject” (Kristeva, *Powers* 54). In patriarchal discourse, maternity is essential to a normative feminine identity: “It is in maternity that woman fulfills her physiological destiny” (Beauvoir 540). Mary’s pregnancy flouts social conventions because of her uncertainty of who impregnated her. In order to “fix” this perceived mistake, she agrees to see Martha for an abortion. The scenes in which Martha performs the abortion on Mary are the most horrific in the novel. Tom and Mary venture to Martha’s cottage, which lies on the outskirts of the Fens. Swift writes, “It’s a long way to Martha’s cottage” (259). The most striking component of the depiction of Tom and Mary’s journey to Martha’s cottage is Swift’s emphasis on liminality. Martha’s cottage is far from the center of the Fens. She lives beyond the borders of the established order, in an ambiguous space in which Nature overtakes the domestic realm. Tom and Mary enter the marshes at twilight, a liminal boundary between day and night. Swift writes, “Christ, Mary, if we’re stuck out here in the dark. Twilight thickening. The time of owls and will o’ the wisps” (260). Swift consciously presents the young couple clearly outside of the boundaries they have always acknowledged and further reinforces the motif of magic with his evocation of “will o’ the wisps.” When Mary finally reaches Martha, she has the abortion, which is the most striking instance of body horror present in the novel. Tom walks in on the repulsive

act: “A pipe... is stuck into Mary’s hole. The other end is in Martha’s mouth. Crouching low, her head between Mary’s gory knees, her eyes closed in concentration, Martha is sucking with all her might” (266). The aborted fetus demonstrates the abject in two different manners: first, the corpse is “the quintessence of the abject” (Starks 123). Next, bodily waste, especially from the female body, is a major abjection (Kristeva, *Powers* 53). This horrific scene comes to an end when Tom sees the aborted fetus: “In the pale is what the future’s made of. I rush out again to be sick” (Swift 267). The repulsion Tom experiences is the expected, normative reaction of a patriarchal representative.

Mary isolates herself in a convent after her abortion. She takes a vow of celibacy, thereby engaging in patriarchal norms. She not only chooses to be abstinent, but she also partakes in the established order by joining the church, an institution designed to prescribe and instill norms and values. Mary’s sexual curiosity subsides. She further assimilates into patriarchal culture by marrying Tom some years after her visit to Martha. However, Mary is unable to participate in one key function the patriarchy expects: after her abortion, she is unable to procreate. She tells Tom, “You know, don’t you, that short of a miracle we can’t have a child?” (106). Mary’s inability, her lack, is the driving force behind her shift in feminine identity. She rejects her formerly liberal view on sexuality and supplants it with a more austere sexual identity.

Tom believes that his relationship with Mary is at least partly built upon the basis that both of their mothers are absent from their lives (40). In their marriage, Tom treats Mary more like a mother than a wife. Mary nurtures Tom by “seeing him off to school each morning—the inevitable ironies, the mother-son charades this prompted” (106). She is, as he describes her, his “mother wife” (114). Mary is no longer passionate, no longer a sexual being, but instead a

mother who cannot bear children of her own. Swift illustrates patriarchal attitudes toward women when he writes, “Women are equipped with a miniature model of reality: an empty but fillable vessel.... Tom Crick... was responsible for filling the then avid and receptive vessel of Mary Metcalf, later Mrs. Crick” (35-36). Swift’s use of “miniature” to describe women’s idea of reality and “vessel” to describe Mary demonstrates the marginalization of women at large in the Fens’ society. It is also worth noting in the passage that Mary is no longer called by *her* name, but instead takes on the moniker “Mrs. Crick,” thereby showing a sort of ownership Tom has over Mary. Ultimately, however, Mary is best described thusly: “In another age, in olden times, they might have called her holy (or else have burnt her as a witch)” (286). Again, witch imagery is utilized to describe a woman who deviates from accepted norms. Young Mary Metcalf is a strong and independent woman, but the patriarchal forces of the Fens view her as an abject witch.

The Lawrentian Woman is richly represented in *Waterland*. Swift presents grotesque female bodies as the major source of horror in his novel and shows how patriarchal forces are both repelled and compelled by their own constructions of femininity. The Fenland community labels autonomous women as abject monsters and coerces them into the margins of society. Women have historically been both integral to and expelled from Western societies, forced into subjugation for the benefit of patriarchal norms and standards. Creed argues, “The presence of the monstrous-feminine... speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity” (7). These Lawrentian Women’s bodies have been simultaneously appropriated and repulsed by phallogentric ideology; they have been distorted into monstrous entities.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE GENDER WAR: WORLD WAR I, MATERNITY, AND SEBASTIAN FAULKS'

#### *BIRDSONG*

*"It had been hard to think of blood as the mark of new life"*

Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* is a novel full of jarring juxtapositions. Chief among these is the disparity between the novel's opening, pre-war story and its subsequent battlefield narrative. Faulks ingeniously begins the novel as an erotic romance, set just before World War I, between married Isabelle Azaire and young, idealistic Stephen Wraysford. He then abruptly transitions to a visceral, violent war narrative set on the Western Front. Faulks acknowledges his intentions with such a provocative juxtaposition: "The question is, how far can you go? What can human beings do to one another physically, through flesh, through killing, through love, through sex? The idea of [the affair] was it would foreshadow the extremely intimate nature of killing" (Faulks Interview). This change in emphasis from sex, a life giving force, to death and trauma is indicative of a major transition in Britain as the war began. In *No Man's Land*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar question and examine how this shift in cultural paradigms negatively affected the portrayal of femininity during and after WWI: "Can this be because the war, with its deathly parody of sexuality, somehow threatened a female conquest of men? Because women were safe on the home front, is it possible that the war seemed in some peculiar sense their fault, a ritual of sacrifice to their victorious femininity?" (261). During and after the First World War, femininity was rendered abject in the social conscience, and came to be seen as threatening, ominous, and even monstrous.

Faulks believably conveys the senseless violence and trauma that marked the abbreviated lives of an entire generation of young British men; however, more potently, he uses images of

maternity to represent the futility of such a tremendous loss of life. In *Birdsong*, maternity and Nature carry negative connotations. These images are associated with death and decay rather than life and growth. In this sense, then, Faulks subverts Lawrence's odes to the natural world and his emphasis on the interconnectedness of Nature and humanity. Faulks maintains Lawrence's sensual depictions of natural surroundings and his cosmic equations between our bodies and the earth, but instead foregrounds the decay, stagnation, and destruction that are ingrained in the natural world. This negative view of maternity and Nature reflects, in many ways, the disillusionment of England with changing cultural paradigms during and after WWI. By carefully examining the maternal imagery in *Birdsong*—including images of growth and fecundity, various allusions to Christ and the rebirth motif, and the abjection of Lawrentian Women—I will explore how Faulks uses these images to illustrate the consequences of the Great War.

In the opening passages, Faulks extensively describes areas of growth and cultivation; gardens serve as an especially potent recurring motif. With this image of restrained fertility, Faulks, much like Lawrence, demonstrates the inherently wild, uncontrolled aspects of Nature. However, he differs from Lawrence in that his evocation of Nature has grim undertones. More specifically, Faulks strips away the worshipful tone of Lawrence's cosmic exaltation of Nature and grounds his own portrayals in a muddy, grimy, violent reality. Faulks' first description of a garden is indicative of his subsequent depictions: "The gardens had a wild, overgrown look and their deep lawns and bursting hedges could conceal small clearings, quiet pools, and areas unvisited even by the inhabitants" (3). While his use of "bursting" and "wild" to describe hedges initially seems innocuous, this is only the first instance of the author defamiliarizing garden imagery by incorporating a sinister, violent undertone that effectively foreshadows the chaos that

will come to mark Stephen's experiences on the Western Front. Another scene featuring a garden depicts "an owl somewhere deep in the gardens, where the cultivation gave way to wilderness" (14). Later a formal garden is explained as having "three oval patches of grass at various angles which unhinged the balanced vista that should have greeted passengers approaching from the street" (77). In these two particular instances, Faulks depicts gardens as untamed and disordered. His use of "unhinged" and the image of restrained growth becoming unkempt represent a change in perspective, a shift in balance in Britain caused by the disruption of the Great War. Perhaps the most provocative representation of a garden in the novel occurs in the scene in which Stephen, Isabelle, and others visit the water gardens. The visit begins as a lively excursion into a scenic area; however, as the afternoon progresses, the natural surroundings elicit a visceral response from Stephen, and he proceeds to have hellish premonitions of death and the onslaught of war: "He was repelled by the water gardens: their hectic abundance seemed to him close to the vegetable fertility of death. The brown waters were murky and shot through with the scurrying of rats from the banks where the earth had been dug out of trenches" (42). The rats and trenches and Faulks' use of "shot" clearly foreshadow the grisly trench warfare Stephen will eventually experience.

Stephen goes further by observing that "what was held to be a place of natural beauty was a stagnation of living tissue which could not be saved from decay" (42). Critic Richard Bradford comments on Faulks' framing of the garden scene, arguing that "the descriptions burgeon with a blend of lazy innocence and sublimated sexuality," but he also contends that Faulks "leaves the reader with enough clues. . . . that quite soon a very different form of blending of the human body with the natural world—mud, bones, tissue and blood—will occur in this same place" (87).

Faulks continues to question the intimate connections between sex and death by equating life-giving forces with death and decay, and gives prevalence to the idea that death is unavoidable.

Marilyn Yalom questions the implications of maternity and how death is naturally ingrained in a life-giving process: “As reality, possibility, or impossibility,[maternity] raises questions about the meaning of life, the value of projecting oneself into the future through one’s progeny, the eventuality of replacing one’s parents, the inevitability of death” (106). Faulks uses gardens not only to foreshadow destruction, but also to illustrate that death is intrinsically found within life. He poignantly renders gardens and areas of fecundity abject, and in doing so, he embodies the malignity attached to maternity post WWI. Faulks defamiliarizes an image traditionally associated with vitality and even, if one considers the Garden of Eden, the inception of life. The water gardens scene denotes the initial transition from gardens as Edenic signifiers to later being juxtaposed with the horrors of mud-caked trenches and graphic warfare. The shift from scenic gardens to desolate trenches mirrors the change in narrative, the change from life and sex to death and terror, and evokes the tale of Adam and Eve in Eden. Stephen, and Britain as a whole, are cast out of a more innocent world— a world in which, despite Britain’s numerous domestic issues and shortcomings, the country is still the supreme imperialistic world power— and venture into a new order marked by the violence and destruction of the Great War. The typical soldier was transformed by the global conflict, and became “no man, an inhabitant of the inhumane new era and a citizen of the unpromising new land into which this war of wars had led him” (Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s Land* 259). By portraying garden imagery thusly, Faulks embodies the negative connotations of maternity during and after WWI.

Another maternal aspect of the novel is situated in its images of rebirth and in the portrayal of Stephen and other soldiers as Christ-like. At one point in *No Man’s Land*, Gilbert

and Gubar analyze the depiction of women in British WWI propaganda posters. One of the most striking examples the critics examine is “The Greatest Mother in the World.” The poster displays a nurse cradling a tiny soldier on a stretcher in a pose that is reminiscent of breastfeeding. Gilbert and Gubar contend, “[The] nurse evokes a parodic *pietá* in which the Virgin Mother threatens simultaneously to anoint and annihilate her long-suffering son” (288). Because Faulks posits soldiers as Christ-like, he also presents British women as a collective, mourning Virgin Mary. The women were largely disconnected from the trauma soldiers experienced. Much like Mary, they watch their proverbial sons suffer, but are unable to fully understand the depth of their agony.

The first obvious equation of soldier as Christ occurs in a scene in which Isabelle visits a church. She initially reminisces on her sexual encounters with Stephen, his “blood swollen flesh in front of her face, her mouth; she could feel it probing and entering each unguarded part of her, not against her will but at her hungry and desperate insistence” (Faulks 109). Faulks’ description carries the violent connotation of “blood swollen flesh,” and in turn foreshadows the violence of WWI. Her thoughts then wander, perhaps inevitably, from sex to death. She looks up at the altar and ruminates on the figure of Christ on the cross:

She thought how prosaically physical this suffering had been: the punctured skin on forehead, feet, hands, the parting of flesh with nails and steel. When even the divine sacrifice had been expressed in such terms, it was sometimes hard to imagine in what manner precisely human life was supposed to exceed the limitations of pule, skin, and decomposition. (109-110)

Isabelle’s meditation on the crucifixion echoes the martyrdom of the typical soldier. Faulks is far from the first author or poet to express British soldiers in such a manner; certainly, he follows in

a literary tradition which notably includes Lawrence alongside WWI poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, a tradition steeped in gynophobia and homosociality (Gilbert and Gubar *No Man's Land* 260). In Isabelle's rumination, the image of flesh parted by steel evokes scenes of British soldiers pierced by blades and riddled with bullets and shrapnel. Additionally, the soldiers' experience with countless rows of barbed wire suggests Christ's crown of thorns. Faulks explores this motif further when he portrays soldiers who build and repair the trenches, and the fact that they are "supported by a wooden cross" (117). Later, in the midst of a devastated battlefield, as soldiers begin to stir and climb from their trenches, their movement is described as "a resurrection in a cemetery twelve miles long" (229). This idea of resurrection suggests a rebirth, a concept that Faulks associates with Stephen.

While Faulks equates British soldiers in general with martyrs, he places particular emphasis on Stephen as a Christ-like figure. Stephen often engages in carpentry—he is skilled with wood, which refers not only to Jesus' trade but is also evocative of the cross. Additionally, he is viewed as source of deliverance. In fact, after Jack Firebrace survives a trench collapse, he imagines Stephen as a savior: "He felt confident that Stephen would deliver him" (424). The closing sequence of the battlefield narrative not only clearly positions Stephen as a Christ figure, but is also a reenactment of the birthing process. Stephen is trapped in a collapsed trench alongside fellow soldier Jack. Jack's legs are braced because they have been severely damaged in the tunnel, and Stephen is forced to carry his injured comrade over his shoulder. This image is suggestive of Christ carrying the cross to Calvary; in this instance, Jack is Stephen's "ungainly burden" to bear (435).

The trench, a variation of a cavern, is a vaginal construction. Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge, "A cave is—as Freud pointed out—a female place, a womb-shaped enclosure, a

house of earth, secret and often sacred” (*Madwoman* 93). The trench is a narrow, claustrophobic womb construction, and Stephen is described as an infant as he waits to be “delivered” by Dr. Levi and the others in the German troop: “He began to kick and buck within the confines of where he lay. The claustrophobia he had kept at bay now gripped him. The thought of men moving freely close at hand and the fear that they might not hear or reach him let loose his panic” (Faulks 460). Faulks illustrates male anxiety of womb signifiers through Stephen’s struggle against the enclosure; he kicks within his womb construction, much like a fetus in utero, and regards the trench as horrific, as a place of termination. Faulks tellingly depicts the vaginal trench as “Stephen’s coffin” (462). Again, a feminine construction is equated with death. Stephen eventually climbs his way through the tunnel, symbolic of a birth canal: “Gurgling and spitting earth, Stephen clawed his way forward, shouting as he went. He could see light from some lantern swaying in the tunnel ahead of him. There was air. He could breathe” (462). Faulks draws on Kristeva’s illustration of the violence ingrained in maternity. She writes, “Evocation of the maternal body and childbirth induces the image of birth as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides” (*Powers*, 101). When Dr. Levi finally helps Stephen to safety, Stephen stretches his arms out in a Christ-like pose and the two men weep together. He poignantly reflects: “Of all the flesh he had seen and touched, it was this doctor’s hand that had signalled his deliverance” (465). Stephen is ultimately reborn into a new world irreparably affected by the trauma of WWI.

Finally, the Lawrentian Women in *Birdsong* most obviously reflect the negative connotations of motherhood in postwar Britain. The women in the novel all suffer abjection within Britain’s patriarchal society. A majority of the soldiers in the novel resent femininity. Gilbert and Gubar argue that post-WWI, women were used as scapegoats in phallogentric

discourse: “The unmanning terrors of combat lead not just to a generalized sexual anxiety but also to an anger directed specifically against the female, as if the Great War itself were primarily a climactic episode in a battle of the sexes that had already been raging for years” (*No Man’s Land* 260). The soldiers’ resentment stems partly from a sense of male comradeship and homosociality, but also from a shared disconnect with British society. Women were excluded from combat, and were therefore unable to imagine the tragedy and senseless brutality that an entire generation of young British men had experienced. Stephen is especially egregious in his treatment of women other than Isabelle. It is important to note that Stephen’s own mother was relatively absent throughout his life; he refers to her directly in only one passage, stating, “My mother was not a strong character either” (Faulks 99). He transfers his resentment of his mother and the war into other relationships with women. Stephen describes his friend Mathilde as “no more really than a pale version of what womanhood could achieve. Stephen viewed all women this way. He felt sorry for men who were married to *creatures who were so obviously inferior*” (155, emphasis mine).

In the most disturbing passage in the novel, Stephen experiences the simultaneous repulsion and attraction of abjection when he and Michael Weir visit a house where a mother and daughter work as prostitutes. Weir, a virgin, is immediately disgusted when the older woman touches him. The prostitute mocks Weir’s sexual shortcomings: “It is long and soft, and when I touch it, he begins to cry” (196). After failing to arouse Weir, the older woman sets out to seduce Stephen: “She put her hand into a bowl of disinfectant, then ran her fingers through the gash between her legs, through the coarse hair and the scarlet flesh that parted at her familiar touch” (196). Faulks depicts her vagina as a wound; his use of “gash” and “flesh that parted” recall the violence that Stephen has experienced, and again equate sex and death as intertwined.



Additionally, the fact that the prostitute uses disinfectant on herself is evocative of two distinct images: first, it reinforces the image of her vagina as a wound and recalls battlefield treatment of injuries. Next, it presents the prostitute as an unclean, abject Other. Stephen expresses that he is interested only in the daughter and pursues her. He initially sees her as vibrant and full of life: “She was beautiful. There was light in her dark brown eyes; there was air and life in her limbs. The flesh was unwounded... She was peace and gentleness, she was the possibility of love and future generations” (197). However, he quickly comes to view her as abject, too, equating her youthful fertility with death and decay. He abruptly regards her with disgust: “His tenderness was replaced at first by a shuddering revulsion. Then his mind emptied. There was only this physical mass.... Her daughter’s body was no more than animal matter, less dear, less valuable than the flesh of men he had seen die. He did not know whether to take the girl or kill her” (197-98). Faulks emphasizes the interconnectedness of sexuality and violence through his impactful language. Also, the prostitute’s daughter is equated with “animal matter,” and therefore falls outside of the patriarchal boundaries that Stephen acknowledges. Again, while this association often empowers the Lawrentian Woman by giving her autonomy, as it does for Isabelle earlier in the novel, it also renders her abject in the male gaze.

Like Lawrence, Faulks depicts a scene that conflates sex and death. Stephen then proceeds to threaten the girl with a blade, a phallic signifier; he resents her for not experiencing the war as he has, and places the knife between her legs before he fully comprehends what he is doing. In this scene, Stephen displaces his war trauma onto an innocent young girl; he is initially in a position of power over the girl’s body. However, by the end of the passage, the prostitute reclaims control: “The girl had regained her calm. She did not scream for help or remonstrate... She seemed to grow stronger by the second, feeding on her relief and his despair” (198-99). The

most compelling aspect of this scene comes at the very end: she is maternal and nurturing in her interactions with Stephen. She touches him gently, demonstrating a tenderness that Stephen does not expect. Thus, the young prostitute begins as an object in the male gaze—her sexuality is literally a commodity—but, like all Lawrentian Women, she subverts the restrictive norms imposed by patriarchal society and manages to draw strength from her marginalized position.

In addition to being viewed as abject, a number of the women in the novel, especially those with maternal or fecund qualities, are also considered monstrous by Stephen and his brothers in arms. Monstrous-femininity is a potent patriarchal construction; this idea is especially reflective of what many young men felt during and after the utter devastation of the Great War: “The combatant’s comradeship ‘passing the love of women’ was often energized by a disgust with the feminine as it was by a desire for the masculine” (Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s Land* 302). The character who best reflects male anxiety about the female form is the virgin Weir. Weir has avoided sexual contact from women since his adolescence, after “he had first touched female flesh when only seventeen and had recoiled from the possibility it offered” (186). He fears the mysterious, unknown power of the female body; this passage recalls Lawrence’s description of the Brangwen women, specifically Lydia, as unknown voids that threaten castration and termination. He comes to regard the female body as repulsive. Weir confronts Oedipal anxiety in one particularly interesting passage: “When his mother turned to him with a quizzical tilt of her head and laid down her sewing to ask him what he was thinking, he had to focus quickly on her parted hair, her beads and modest layers of clothes, and put from his mind the picture of inflamed organs and the interplay of flesh” (187). In this scene, Faulks not only illustrates sexuality using grotesque imagery that stresses the violence of sex, but also captures the male anxiety toward maternity that denoted the Great War.

Isabelle is the prime maternal figure in the novel, and is thus the key Lawrentian Woman in the work. Her maternal nature is important in how she is perceived by the patriarchal society in Britain; she is portrayed as motherly even as an adolescent experiencing her menarche. Faulks writes, “This blood...was supposed to be shameful, but she had never thought of it that way. She valued it because it spoke of some greater rhythm of life” (33). Adrienne Rich comments on phallogocentric imagination and the shame it associates with menstruation: “The menstrual cycle is yet another aspect of female experience which patriarchal thinking has turned inside out, rendering it sinister or disadvantageous.... A man whose unconscious is saturated with the fear of menstrual blood will make a woman feel that her period is a time of pollution, the visitation of an evil spirit, physically repulsive” (106). Her menstruation reinforces the novel’s theme of sex and violence, the idea that posits “blood as the mark of new life” (Faulks 105). Isabelle is deeply connected with the rhythms of her body and is cognizant of their role in the maternal duties she is destined to fulfill. She is even maternal in her interactions with her lover, Stephen. Before their affair, she staves off her attraction to him by imagining him “as the third child, as Lisette’s brother... To some extent she was successful in making herself look down on him, though she noticed that this only seemed to add an element of motherly tenderness to her alarm” (37).

Once she becomes pregnant with Stephen’s child, however, her role shifts. She fulfills her desire of maternity and is portrayed in a way that suggests an almost supernatural power: “She had stopped hemorrhaging herself away; her power was turned inward where it would silently create” (105). Oakley points out the societal implications of maternity: “Childbirth stands uncomfortably at the junction of the two worlds of nature and culture. A biological event, it is accomplished by social beings—women—who consequently possess a uniquely dual character. In bearing children, women both ‘accomplish a work’ and become ‘the centre of an

atrocious” (608). After Isabelle discovers she is pregnant, she leaves Stephen. This is the finale of the erotic narrative, and leads directly into the subsequent battlefield tale. The next time Stephen encounters Isabelle, she has been altered by the chaos of war. She was injured by a shell and her face is horribly disfigured. This revelation takes him by surprise: “And there was something else. The left side of her face was disfigured by a long indentation that ran from the corner of her ear, along the jaw, whose natural line seemed broken, then down her neck... He could see that the flesh had been folded outward” (Faulks 314-315). He is both repelled and attracted to Isabelle; Faulks’ use of “flesh” has sensual connotations, but Stephen is also repulsed by her exposed wounds. Thus, she perfectly represents both abjection and monstrous-femininity. Moreover, Isabelle is most representative of how maternity was affected by WWI. She carries the scars of warfare and embodies the transformation of maternity from being focused on life and vitality to death and decay.

Ultimately, Faulks illustrates postwar attitudes toward femininity and maternity and how patriarchal constructions came to further render women abject. Oakley asserts that maternity may be the key to understanding women’s marginalized position in patriarchal discourse: “Just how reproduction has been socially constructed is of prime importance to any consideration of women’s position. It may even be in motherhood that we can trace the diagnosis and prognosis of female oppression” (608). It is not only the soldiers who carry negative connotations of femininity and maternity, but indeed British society as a whole that condemns the perceived inaction of women during WWI. Faulks’ uses this societal misperception in his intentional juxtaposition of sexuality and death to frame how maternity was viewed before, during, and after the First World War.

## CHAPTER 5

### “NOTHING HUMAN LIVES HERE”: GENDERED MONSTERS AND PATRIARCHY IN ANGELA CARTER’S *THE BLOODY CHAMBER*

*“Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness”*

Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is a collection of short stories that subverts typical gender roles and expectations associated with heroines in fairy tales. The women in the collection do not, as they do in most fairy tales, rely on dashing princes to whisk them away from the perils of their narrow, insular worlds. Instead, the women eschew normative gender expectations and choose paths of self-reliance and self-actualization. More specifically, they are able to achieve a sense of liberation from restrictive patriarchal norms by discovering and enjoying their dormant sexuality. Carter consciously foregrounds horror and sexuality in her revisionary interpretations of classic fairy tales. According to Gina Wisker, “By rereading traditional sexual scripts featuring monstrous witches and golden-haired heroines of the fairy-tale genre, she exposes the conservative meanings implicit in these narratives” (116). Her emphasis on fairy tales’ inherently grotesque qualities becomes especially potent when one considers that “the horror genre is more directly responsive to questions of sexual difference, more willing to explore male and female anxieties about the ‘other’ [than other genres]” (Creed 152). Critic Merja Makinen reinforces this idea, asserting, “Carter’s strength is precisely in exploding the stereotypes of women as passive, demure ciphers” (9). Carter’s women reject the ascribed tenets of normative femininity, and actively explore their sexuality, shattering taboos in the process

Carter uses the model of the Lawrentian Woman in an especially interesting way. Paul Magrs observes, “The apocalyptic thresholds into personal interrelations that feature so strongly in D.H. Lawrence’s work have, in Carter’s writing, become invitations to deconstruction and

reinvention” (185). Instead of Carter’s women merely being *perceived* as monstrous in phallogentric imagination, they are *literally* monstrous women. They are mysterious and ambiguous; Carter’s Lawrentian Women blur the fragile boundaries between animal and human, and in doing so they upset the established patriarchal order. The women celebrate their sexuality, and they become actual monsters— tigers, werewolves, and vampires—but in a sense they have been monstrous all along. They simultaneously embody and subvert the role which society has defined for them. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state, “It is debilitating to be *any* woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (*Madwoman*, 53). Instead of rejecting the monstrous figures of fairy tales, Carter uses them to challenge the angel/monster dynamic present in phallogentric society. Wisker argues, “In her hands, horror writing becomes a powerful vehicle through which she can critique established philosophical, political and sexual norms” (Wisker 117). In fact, Carter imbues her Lawrentian Women with greater strength and independence after they cast off patriarchal restrictions and embrace their true forms. By examining “The Tiger’s Bride,” “Wolf-Alice,” and “The Lady of the House of Love,” I will show how Carter upsets the hegemonic definition of monstrous-femininity, and in doing so she presents a model of femininity that emphasizes autonomy and authority over passivity and subjugation.

“The Tiger’s Bride” begins with a patriarchal figure assigning monetary value to his young, virgin daughter. She bitterly reflects, “My father lost me to The Beast at cards” (Carter 51). This opening image of commodification proves to be a recurring motif. Certainly, the unnamed narrator is reduced to a trinket or a “pearl” (55), and her father recklessly gambles her away to a mysterious feline simply known as The Beast. She addresses the reader, stating, “You must not think my father valued me at less than a king’s ransom; but, at *no more* than a king’s

ransom” (54). Carter places emphasis on “the relationship between women’s subjective sexuality and their objective role as property” (Makinen 10). The narrator’s virginity makes her an attractive commodity in a rigid, patriarchal society. This normative sense of feminine purity is prescribed to her at a young age. She hears cautionary tales from her nursemaids about the waggoner’s daughter and her scandalous pregnancy. The narrator reflects, “Yet, to her shame, her belly swelled amid the cruel mockery of the ostlers and her son was born of a bear, they whispered. Born with a full pelt and teeth; that proved it” (Carter 56). Carter consciously uses an image of cruel ostlers in order to illustrate the enforcement of phallogentric norms. Ostlers are responsible for the maintenance of horses; they impose boundaries on forces of Nature. With this scene, we see that the patriarchal community views the waggoner’s daughter as abject, as a woman who produces a monstrous birth. Yet no mention is made of the man who impregnated her; this reaction recalls the monstrous birth between Helen Crick and her father in Swift’s *Waterland*. The community disregards the men in these taboo relationships, instead shaming the women for birthing monsters. Indeed, the burden of the horrific birth in “The Tiger’s Bride” falls entirely on “the waggoner’s lass, hare-lipped, squint-eyed, ugly as sin” (56). Barbara Creed argues that depictions of monstrous births further render women abject: “Those images which define woman as monstrous in relation to her reproductive functions work to reinforce the phallogentric notion that female sexuality is abject” (151). However, despite this grotesque example of the repercussions of female sexuality—a didactic fairy tale within a fairy tale—the narrator retains her latent sexual curiosity, an aspect of herself that she later explores.

Carter, like Lawrence, closely ties the narrator’s sexuality with images of Nature. More specifically, the narrator deeply empathizes with horses, “the noblest of creatures” (Carter 62) and other beasts of burden. The narrator’s association with horses is reminiscent of the climax of

*The Rainbow*, in which Ursula Brangwen has a sublime experience when she confronts a stampede of wild horses. There is a conflation of intense beauty and danger; Ursula confront the most awe-inspiring aspects of Nature, but also feels a deep connection to these sublime creatures. The narrator of “The Tiger’s Bride” has a similar link with Nature throughout the story. She reflects that as a young girl, “The nursemaids initiated me into the mysteries of what the bull did to the cows” (56). After her father gambles her away, she closely examines the horses in The Beast’s carriage. She longs to escape: “Horses are better than we are, and, that day, I would have been glad to depart with them to the kingdom of horses, if I’d been given the chance” (55). She sees her own situation as parallel to the horses. They are both held captive and coerced into unnatural roles by restrictive “ostlers,” and are destined to become “saddled and bridled beasts in bondage” (62). The narrator further relates not only to the horses, but also The Beast, her new owner; she questions her role in patriarchal society, pointing out that none of them would be considered to have a soul, “Since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things when the good Lord opened the gates of Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out” (63). Makinen notes the striking similarities between Carter’s uncanny depictions of the narrator and the various beasts:

Fairy-tales are often seen as dealing with the ‘uncanny,’ the distorted fictions of the unconscious revisited through homely images—and beasts can easily stand for the projected desires, the drive for pleasure of women. Particularly when such desires are discountenanced by a patriarchal culture concerned to restrict its women to being property. (9)

The narrator’s relationship with The Beast evolves over time. As a young girl, she is told ghastly tales about “the tiger-man,” and how he eats naughty girls. Her nurse warns her, “[He



will] ride through the night straight to the nursery and—Yes, my beauty! GOBBLE YOU UP!” (Carter 56). Makinen points out: “The felines signify otherness, a savage and magnificent power, outside of humanity.... A sensuality that women have been taught might devour them” (10). Much like the waggoner’s daughter, the tiger-man is a tale used to enforce normative feminine values on the narrator. However, her encounter with The Beast, the tiger-man of lore, eventually awakens her dormant sexuality. After bringing her back to his palatial confines, The Beast desires only to see the narrator’s naked, virgin body. She scoffs at his unusual request: “That he should want so little was the reason why I could not give it” (Carter 61). In this moment, she also resents her virginity, lamenting “I wished I’d rolled in the hay with every lad on my father’s farm, to disqualify myself from this humiliating bargain” (61). Carter’s provocative use of “rolled in the hay” conjures images of barnyard animals and the beasts of burden that run throughout the story; this is another way that Carter ties the narrator to the natural, animal world. Despite her initial hesitation, she does eventually succumb to The Beast’s expectation. After nervously stripping, she reflects, “I felt I was at liberty for the first time in my life” (64). Though she experiences a sense of liberation, she still feels uncomfortable with her flesh, noting, “I felt as much atrocious pain as if I was stripping off my own underpelt” (66). Yet again, the narrator is equated with the animal world that lies outside the boundaries of patriarchal discourse. In the final passage of the story her inner self is finally revealed. The Beast pounces on her, ferociously licking her until he peels layers of skin off of her, revealing “a nascent patina of shining hairs” and “beautiful fur” (67). Her animal self has always been beneath the false veneer of normative femininity that she has worn in order to fulfill her ascribed duties within phallogentric culture. With this final scene of empowerment, she finally embraces her sexuality, and this gives her

“power, strength, and a new awareness of both self and other” (Makinen 10). Hence, her rejection of restrictive patriarchal norms allows her to achieve self-actualization.

Much like “The Tiger’s Bride,” “Wolf-Alice” centers on a young Lawrentian Woman who upsets patriarchal expectations through her monstrousness. The titular character of the story is a feral woman raised by wolves; certainly, when we first encounter her, she is outside the boundaries of patriarchal society, unable to communicate properly with either humans or wolves. She has not yet been tainted by hegemonic ideology and is deeply enmeshed with Nature. Much like a werewolf, she inhabits a liminal space between animal and human. Critic April Miller notes that werewolves are metaphors for “the limits placed on female sexual subjectivity” (281). Her position as an outsider reflects her abject nature. Indeed, Kristeva describes the abject thusly: “It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the [patriarchy’s] rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (*Powers* 2). She is discovered by nuns who attempt to impose normative feminine values upon Wolf-Alice. The nuns function within organized religion, a patriarchal construction which prescribes norms and mores. Carter challenges hegemonic ideology by privileging Nature over patriarchal structures: “It seemed to her the congregation in the church was ineffectually attempting to imitate the wolves’ chorus” (Carter 125). We can further see Carter’s preference of Nature over society in Wolf-Alice’s name; Wolf-Alice is identified as a wolf first and a woman second. The nuns try to domesticate Wolf-Alice, teaching her “to recognize her own dish; then, to drink from a cup. They found that she could quite easily be taught a few, simple tricks” (120). Despite their successful attempts at “training” her, the nuns have a much harder time convincing her “to cover up her bold nakedness” (120). Wolf-Alice’s relationship with Nature, in conjunction with her disconnection from patriarchal discourse, empowers her, and thus she feels

no shame for her female body. When she reverts to patterns of animal behavior, the nuns decide that she is beyond their help and send her to the Duke, an actual bloodthirsty lycanthrope. The Duke and Wolf-Alice parallel one another in many ways. Both fall outside of the boundaries of patriarchal culture, they inhabit a liminal space between human and animal, and they are cast as abject by society. The Duke is viewed as abject because he is a “corpse-eater” (121).

Additionally, he is seen as diseased, described as “white as leprosy, with scrabbling fingernails” (121). The Duke’s fixation with cannibalism positions him as a monstrous Other

In contrast, Wolf-Alice is rendered abject because of her female body, and specifically her menstruation. Kristeva comments on the menstrual taboo in Western discourse, noting, “Menstrual blood...stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference” (*Powers*, 71). Wolf-Alice has been conditioned enough by patriarchal forces to be ashamed of her menstruation: “She had learned a little elementary hygiene in the convent, enough to know how to bury her excrement and cleanse herself of her natural juices...it was not fastidiousness but shame that made her do so” (Carter 122). Additionally, her menarche lines up with a full moon, thus syncing her body’s natural rhythms to the moon’s cycle. This again is evocative of werewolf lore; Miller asserts, “Werewolves are linked to menstruation through their parallel reliance on the cycles of the moon and bodily transformations that blur the line between animal and human, inside and outside” (289). At the moment of her menarche, she becomes cognizant—and self-conscious—of her body. She explores her body, especially her incipient breasts and the “little diadem of fresh hairs tufting between her thighs” (Carter 124). Carter evokes animal imagery in her use of “tufting” to describe the growth pattern of Wolf-Alice’s pubic hair. This thereby reinforces the

werewolf motif, as both puberty and lycanthropy “produce unprecedented hair growth, rapid bodily transformations, and uncontrollable, confusing physical urges” (Miller 288-289). As she develops, she begins to wear the dresses the Duke has collected from previous victims and models them in a mirror. However, she doesn’t initially comprehend that the mirror is a reflection of her own image. Jacques Lacan comments on this phenomenon in infants, and ties this to an infant’s realization of herself as a subject: “The objective notion of the anatomical incompleteness of the pyramidal system and likewise the presence of certain humoral residues of the maternal organism confirm the view I have formulated as the fact of a real *specific prematurity of birth* in man” (1166). In other words, the mirror stage is an integral component in an infant’s identity formation. Wolf-Alice, at this point, has not wholly assimilated into the established order, so her inability to distinguish her reflection is symbolic of how she is incapable of seeing herself the same way others do. She finally realizes that the image caught in the mirror is in fact her reflection: “A little moisture leaked from the corners of her eyes, yet her relation with the mirror was now far more intimate since she knew she saw herself within it” (Carter 124). This moment marks Wolf-Alice’s entrance into the established order as she becomes conscious of herself as a subject rather than an object. After she recognizes her reflection, the final dress she tries on is an old wedding dress, a patriarchal emblem of feminine identity. While her cognizance of her reflection and the fact that she dons a wedding dress suggest that Wolf-Alice will accept a prescribed feminine role, Carter cleverly subverts this expectation. In the final passage of the story, the townspeople assemble to enact their revenge on the Duke. He is condemned by the patriarchal society for his grotesque actions, and they wound him with a silver bullet. Wolf-Alice nurses the Duke back to health—a normative feminine script—but she does so in a very sensual way. Dressed in a wedding gown, she drags her tongue

across his wounds in a sexually suggestive manner, licking “without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead” (Carter 126). She technically embodies a role of normative femininity in that she is maternal and nurturing in her treatment of the injured Duke; however, she simultaneously subverts patriarchal gender expectations by being sexually unrestrained. She performs the role of a nurturing woman, but, much like the Brangwen women, she upsets patriarchal norms in her execution of this script. With this act, she cements her liminal position between animal and human, and is thus rendered an abject woman who falls outside of patriarchal boundaries.

Finally, “The Lady of the House of Love” shows an alternative path to sexual liberation from patriarchal constructions. Unlike the heroines of the other two stories, Nosferatu’s only living ancestor is initially open to her sexuality. According to Sarah Sceats, “Vampires represent what we both fear and desire; they evoke a marginal world of darkness, secrecy, vulnerability, excess, and horror. Whatever they are, it is positively Other” (107). The titular vampire’s sexuality has been appropriated and made horrific by her ancestors. She is described as “a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening” (Carter 103). She is marginalized by the surrounding community, and Carter emphasizes her lack of agency as a monstrous being: “The beautiful somnambulist *helplessly perpetuates her ancestral crimes*” (93, emphasis mine). Her sexuality, the lure that she uses to feed on hapless men, has been co-opted by the patriarchal influence of her ancestors. Makinen remarks, “‘Lady of the House of Love’, with its lady vampire, inverts the gender roles of Bluebeard, with the woman constructed as an aggressor with a man as the virgin victim. But with this construction of aggressor, comes the question of whether sadists are trapped within their nature” (11). However, I contend that the vampire in the

story is not merely a sadist incapable of changing her bloodthirsty constitution; indeed, she is *caught within the restrictive confines of patriarchal discourse*, and hence defined by their insular terms. Carter's use of vampirism is especially potent considering their dual role of victim/victimizer: "Their ambiguity is manifest, their essence contradictory: they confuse the roles of victim and predator. Combining dependence and rapaciousness, the vampire is an embodied oxymoron" (Sceats 107-108). Creed points out the nature of patriarchal discourse and how it is reliant upon women submitting to phallogocentric expectations: "An ideology which denigrates woman is also endorsed by woman: patriarchal ideology works in and through woman" (165). The vampire remains an abject cipher until she ultimately rebels against the patriarchal construction of her monstrous identity.

Carter uses vampiric mythology to explore gender dynamics. Sceats notes, "Angela Carter's writing carves out an oblique territory, using vampiric tropes to examine gendered behavior and heterosexual power relations" (108). She imbues the female vampire with an uncanny sense of beauty. In fact, she is too beautiful to be recognizably human. Carter writes, "She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness" (94). She is abject, and therefore both seductive and terrifying, alluring and uncanny (Creed 66). Additionally, her sexuality is conflated with her desire to feed. She simultaneously embodies the role of "death and the maiden" (Carter 93). Small mammals no longer slake her hunger for flesh: "Now she is a woman, she must have men" (96). She is rendered abject because of her lineage's appropriation of her sexuality; her lust and her bloodlust are the same, and thus she is shunned by her community. Creed's thoughts on female vampires line up perfectly with Carter's vampiric

protagonist: “The female vampire is abject because she disrupts identity and order; driven by her lust for blood, she does not respect the dictates of the law which set down the rules of proper sexual conduct” (61). It is only when the virginal “hero”—a soldier preparing to fight in WWI—arrives that the vampire is given the opportunity to liberate her sexuality from the clutches of her ancestors.

She attempts to seduce him, but her uncanny beauty and abject, vaginal mouth repulse him. He is “disturbed, almost repelled by her extraordinarily fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson, a morbid mouth. Even—but he put the thought away from him immediately—a whore’s mouth” (Carter 101). The virgin hero fears being consumed by the vampire, both literally and sexually. The vampire’s monstrous identity prevents her from fulfilling her need for intimacy, and in turn amplifies her loneliness. According to Sceats, “[She is] trapped in a vicious circle of violation and dependence, her (vampiric) connection with human beings keeps her inhuman and thus fails to yield the real connection she longs for” (112). In the final passage of the story, she attempts to devour the soldier. However, his purity protects him from the lure of her sexuality, and enables her to break free from restrictive patriarchal expectations. She becomes human and dies in the process: “In death, she looked far older, less beautiful and so, for the first time, fully human” (Carter 107). She escapes the ascribed dictates of her ancestral lineage by being active rather than a passive cipher. She rejects the grotesque tenets of femininity attributed to her.

Throughout *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter explores how women both embody and challenge the patriarchal construction of monstrous-femininity. She subverts not only fairy tales, but also the tropes that define the Lawrentian Woman and places special emphasis on the horrific aspects of the stories, which enables her to insightfully critique the gender roles and sexual

difference present in the tales. In *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, Carter writes, “There is the unarguable fact of sexual differentiation; but, separate from it and only partially derived from it, are the behavioural modes of masculine and feminine, which are culturally defined variables translated in the language of common usage to the status of universals” (6). Carter uses images of grotesque female sexuality to comment on the unequal sexual dynamics that occur in phallogentric society. In Western thought, female monsters “shock and repel, but they also enlighten. They provide us with a means of understanding the dark side of the patriarchal unconscious” (Creed 166). Despite the fact that Carter’s Lawrentian Women face abjection from their respective patriarchal societies, they also derive a power from their sensual, monstrous identities.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### D.H. Lawrence Today: The Implications of the Lawrentian Woman

Sandra Gilbert raises a provocative question in her preface to *Acts of Attention: The Poems of D.H. Lawrence* when she asks, “How can you be a feminist and a Lawrentian?” (Gilbert ix). Indeed, Lawrence’s own blatant misogynistic views color the way many feminist critics approach his canon. De Beauvoir perceives a lack of female autonomy in Lawrence’s women: “Woman is not evil, she is even good—but subordinated. It is once more the ideal of the ‘true woman’ that Lawrence has to offer us—that is, the woman who unreservedly accepts being defined as the Other” (252). However, I reject the over-reliance on Lawrence’s biography to critique and categorize his female characters. Instead, I contend that the Lawrentian Woman embraces her designation as Other because, by being classified thusly, she becomes imbued with a sense of mystery and awe that upsets patriarchal norms. She is rendered animal, abject, and monstrous in the male gaze that dominates Lawrence and his literary descendants’ prose and is subsequently pushed to the margins of phallogentric society, but she still draws strength from her connection with the natural world and her own sexuality. Furthermore, the Lawrentian Woman is largely characterized by this conflation of sexuality and Nature.

Gilbert astutely notes Lawrence’s fearful reverence for autonomous femininity and his focalization of women in his works:

Lawrence...implicitly believes in the Great Mother’s power even while he explicitly dreads and rejects it. Famously misogynistic and, in rhetoric, fiercely, almost fantastically patriarchal, he is nevertheless the author of books whose very titles—*Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love*, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*—are haunted

by female primacy, by the autonomous sexual energy of the goddess. (*Rereading* 284)

The Lawrentian Woman emerges from her marginalization as more powerful and daring than she could possibly be within the rigid confines of normative femininity. According to critic Peter Preston, “Where the male voice threatens to disturb the balance or to attempt to reduce the woman to ‘the Other,’ as with Birkin in *Women in Love*, the female voice functions in the text to undercut the hectoring or tendentious male” (43). Lawrence’s emphasis on independent female characters challenges the norms imposed by a society that demands women are meek, silent, and subservient, that women are to be seen and not heard.

Lawrence portrays women outside of patriarchal limitations, women in liminal positions. In the case of the Brangwen women, they exist between national boundaries, blur the fragile line between human and animal, and revel in their transgressive feminine identity. Lawrence himself admits, “My ‘women’ represent, in an impure and unproud, subservient, cringing, bad fashion, I admit—but represent none the less the threshold of a new world, or underworld, of knowledge and being” (Moore 532). Lawrence, then, *consciously positions* his women as unknown Others who shirk or distort culturally ascribed feminine duties through their sensual links with their female bodies. Gilbert argues that by doing so, “He was actually trying to undo just the binary oppositions—light/dark, culture/nature, mind/body, self/other—that such contemporary theorists as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray deplore” (“Preface” xix)<sup>2</sup>. His subversive model of femininity has proven hugely influential to modern British writers who further deconstruct elements of the Lawrentian Woman in order to better highlight patriarchal anxiety of female

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence upsets conventions by portraying his women’s connections with their bodies as positive. However, it is true that in his attempts to deconstruct this particular binary, Lawrence in fact essentializes women and reinforces patriarchal ideology that equates women with their bodies. Nevertheless, his unconventional portrayals of women remain challenging to patriarchal discourse.

sexual liberation. They seek to lend their own perspectives to this world of “knowledge and being” that Lawrence espouses through his women.

Contemporary, postmodern authors such as Swift, Faulks, and Carter have appropriated Lawrence’s distinct framework of women and their struggles within the patriarchal gaze. Preston contends that no other twentieth-century writer has inspired as much controversy and debate among contemporary authors as Lawrence: “The authors may wish to defend, re-vision, challenge, or dismiss their constructions of Lawrence’s ideas... The fact remains that in spite of all the accusations of bad artistry, misogyny, sexual and political fascism, Lawrence is still *there*, still ‘in’ our novels, still to be reckoned with, still our contemporary” (45). British writers inspired by Lawrence have adopted the Lawrentian Woman to deconstruct the established order and question the restrictive expectations that women still address today. The Lawrentian Woman is such an effective model of subversive feminine identity because it remains applicable; any woman who fails to conform to a normative, nurturing mode of female identity is labeled monstrous. Adrienne Rich notes, “What we did see, for centuries, was the hatred of overt strength in women, the definition of strong independent women as freaks of nature, as unsexed, frigid, castrating, perverted, dangerous; the fear of the maternal woman as ‘controlling,’ the preference for dependent, malleable, ‘feminine’ women” (Rich 70). Moreover, women are depicted in phallogentric discourse as either madonnas or whore, monsters or mothers. De Beauvoir acknowledges the dichotomous depiction of women present in Western society: “But if woman is depicted as the Praying Mantis, the Mandrake, the Demon, then it is most confusing to find in woman also the Muse, the Goddess Mother, Beatrice” (287). Contemporary British writers use the Lawrentian Woman to critique the oppressive norms imposed upon women by patriarchal society.

The writers I examine subtly rewrite Lawrentian tropes in their appropriations of the Lawrentian Woman. Swift shifts the omniscient narrative focalization of *The Rainbow* into the limited, distinctly patriarchal perspective of Tom Crick. Faulks emphasizes the malignant qualities of Nature as opposed to Lawrence's worshipful treatment of the animal world. Finally, Carter casts her Lawrentian Women as actual monsters and places masculine perspectives on the margins of the text. Despite their disparate approaches, these contemporary writers all share one thing in common: they confront Lawrence's legacy and influence by reshaping and recasting his archetypal Lawrentian Women, *The Rainbow's* Brangwen women. They present their own idiosyncratic Lawrentian Women and reinvent these already liminal beings in order to further expose the limitations placed on women.

Lawrence's controversial stance on male supremacy has obviously affected his standing in the canon, and feminist criticism centered on Lawrence's misogyny has altered the way readers approach his works. Lawrence's philosophical views and troubled history with his mother are invoked in order to interpret his oeuvre. Lawrentian criticism relies heavily on the author's life, and his problematic values have sullied many critics' perspectives. However, according to Preston, "Lawrence, in spite of the overall decline in his reputation, particularly in the academy... continues to inhabit British fiction" (42). Indeed, traces of Lawrence's sensual style can still be seen in contemporary authors. Specifically, his impact can best be examined through the continued influence of the Lawrentian Woman and her monstrous, abject role in modern British literature. She inhabits the margins of contemporary texts, upsetting patriarchal discourse through her connection to her female body and sexuality. She is both desired and repelled, a sexualized being repulsed by society for her strength and independence.

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