

THE RAINBOW



The main theme of The Rainbow is the struggle of men and women, in three different generations of the Brangwens, to achieve peace and fulfillment with each other - to obtain "the rainbow," a symbol of the complete polarized relationship. In this relationship the lovers are transfigured, separate; yet each achieves through the other a fulfillment which is beyond the recognizable borders of a seemingly satisfactory physical relationship. Success or failure of marriage is judged by how far men and women approach this religious side of love. The conflicts between the sexes, as represented in the novel, are the conflicts in their unconscious minds, which Lawrence for the first time attempts to throw light on.⁷⁸

Tom Brangwen and Lydia Lensky are the first married couple whose relationship is carefully examined. They are very different from each other: he is a rough, uncultivated English farmer whose whole life is physical and organic, while she is a half-aristocratic, rather intellectual Polish lady. Tom has been interested in a foreigner since his first meeting with a Frenchman at an inn where he went to drink - an encounter which made him wonder: "there was a life so different from what he knew it. What was there outside his knowledge, how much?...What did everything mean? Where was life, in that which he knew or all outside himself?"⁷⁹ Seeing Lydia for the first time in the road, Tom is thrilled by her

foreignness, and he knows instinctively that she is his real mate.⁸⁰ "That's her," he says involuntarily. Lydia, a widow of thirty-two, is struck by his vitality and youth; to her he is very young and fresh (Tom is twenty-eight). His "blood" suddenly tells her "to take him, to have him, and then to relinquish him."⁸¹ Thus their marriage is based chiefly on "blood-knowledge," i.e. they marry because they feel that they are bound together by "blood."⁸² However, the difficulties are inevitable, since they are two complex beings with different pasts, but committed to live together. Tom's choice of a foreigner suggests the necessity of seeing the other partner in a permanent sex relation as genuinely other; i.e. the "otherness" of the married couple must be respected in every aspect.⁸³ But at first this fact is not recognized, and the beginning of their married life is a failure. Tom always feels that there is foreignness between him and his wife, "such intimacy of embrace, and such utter foreignness of contact."⁸⁴ They have nothing to talk about and do not even have much recognition of each other. There is always a "distance" between them; each feels separated in his own self. However, the hours of remoteness usually alternate with moments of intense consummation. Life works through the complex interaction of sameness and differences between people who are deeply linked by ties of "blood." In spite of foreignness, Tom and Lydia feel that they are

inextricably bound to one another, and their relationship is described by Lawrence as "unaccountable." And in working out the relationship between the two, Lawrence shows us the tensions and potentialities of marriage.

Though the relation springs from mutual need, there is independence that cannot be permitted. Tom doesn't realize this; he wants to possess his wife, who, in return reacts furiously. He overlooks the separateness or otherness of Lydia, whose talk about Poland and "something strange and foreign and outside of his life..."⁸⁵ makes him feel cut off completely from her. It is difficult for Tom to live with his wife with the shadow of her past between them. Lydia becomes more and more unaware of Tom, especially at the time of her pregnancy during which he goes out to the pub frequently in order to "escape the madness of sitting next to her" when she does not belong to him, and when she is "as about as any woman in indifference" can be.⁸⁶

Moreover, Tom usually feels that his wife cares too much for Anna, the child with her former husband. Thinking that Tom usurps her mother's love, Anna is always hostile to her step-father. Tom resents his wife's concern for the child, who, he feels, stands for Lydia's past which he does not want her to think about. However, Tom tries every way to win Anna's friendship; and finally, after the birth of his child, Anna changes her attitude toward Tom whom once she called "bomakle." She, who has been strained and

distorted to support her mother, becomes "an independent forgetful little soul; loving from her own centre."⁸⁷ They come to like each other so much that they are like "lovers, father and child."⁸⁸

Having won Anna's love, Tom, who is conscious of his pending failure with Lydia, begins to struggle to establish a new relationship between them. The child - the mixture of their "blood" - helps to bind them together. Tom, after a long time, deliberately accepts the "otherness" of his wife, and Lydia respects his. "He went his way..., she went her way,"⁸⁹ and they remain the law to themselves until their death. They are "a small republic set in invisible bounds."⁹⁰ Sex is the very foundation of marriage, and they feel that sexual adjustment is necessary for the re-establishment of their marriage. For the first time they stop thinking of themselves and of using each other: they cooperate in their physical relationship. Neither one of them needs to lead nor to follow. They let the man-woman relationship act for itself. Thus, they feel they are fulfilled with each other. Physical fulfillment opens the door to a new world:

Their coming together now, after two years of married life, was much more wonderful to them than it had been before. It was the entry into another circle of existence, it was the baptism to another life, it was the complete confirmation. Their feet trod strong ground of knowledge, their footsteps were lit up with discovery...They had passed through the doorway into the further space...She was the doorway to him, he to her.⁹¹

For Lawrence sex relationship is an important expression of the individual self in its search for vital mysteries.⁹² It enables both men and women to go to the deepest sources and to know clearly their separate and complementary roles. It is a relationship of "discovery" i.e. man and woman discover themselves in their sexual union.⁹³ He felt that during the sexual act there was a period when the gap between the partners, instinctive pattern of responses and their rational minds closed, when they were all of one piece - at one with their environment, and unegotistically united with each other. This was the only moment in which a real relationship between man and woman was established,⁹⁴ and in this moment each partner saw the other as a "door" to an aspect of experience utterly new and different and "beyond."⁹⁵ It is a door to new realms of consciousness, an initiation into divine mysteries, the mystery of the other world that is close to us. A true marital relation is creative not only in the sense of producing children but also in its establishment of the relation with the "beyond."

Fulfillment brings an end to every problem. Tom no longer cares for his wife's foreignness: "He did not understand her foreign nature, half German, half Polish, nor her foreign speech. But he knew her, he knew her meaning, without understanding. What she said, what she spoke, this was a blind gesture on her part. In herself she walked strong and clear, he knew her, he saluted her, was with her."⁹⁶

As for Anns, "What did it matter, that Anna Lensky was born of Lydia and Paul? God was her father and her mother."⁹⁸

The achievement of a happy, fulfillment relationship between Tom and Lydia is noticed by Anna: "...her father and mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between."⁹⁹ It is the complete arch, symbolizing a situation of positive and fulfillment harmony in which all factors (not only the sexual) of a complete whole meet creatively. Even in their old age, they still remain fulfilled with each other. Whenever Tom thinks of his marriage with Lydia he feels proud and happy:

Was his life nothing? Had he nothing to share, no work? He did not count his work, anybody could have done it. What had he known, but the long, marital embrace with his wife...At any rate it was something, it was eternal. He could say so to anybody, and he was proud of it. He lay with his wife in her arms, and she was still his fulfillment, just as the same as his. And that was the be-all and end-all, and he was proud of it.¹⁰⁰

The relation between Tom and Lydia is shown as a satisfactory man-woman relationship, because it is a communion in which the lovers are transfigured, separate, yet bound together as the other's gateway to life. And Lawrence compares their successful marriage with the relation between Will and Anna of the second generation. In their relationship we see the tensions, the love-hate interactions which for Lawrence were the central part of the marriage life.¹⁰¹ Their love is a kind of attraction-repulsion.¹⁰² At the first days of their marriage "they were both very quick and

alive, lit up from the other world, so that it was quite an experience for them, that anyone else could exist.¹⁰³ But very soon even in their honeymoon there are the "black and ghastly days"; they begin to struggle against each other. It is a conflict that they do not understand, one that arises from the blind forces of their unconscious - the irrational fluxes and revulsions of feelings. They fight a battle of the unconscious will which surges and recedes, led by their supplementary personalities: "They fought with each other, the passion was there. But the passion was consumed in a battle. And the deep, fierce unknown battle went on. Everything glowed intensely about them, the world put off its clothes and was awful, with new, primal nakedness."¹⁰⁴ Someday "they glowered at each other, he with rage in his hand, she with her soul fierce with victory. They were vry well matched. They would fight it out."¹⁰⁵ "Hate," "rage," and "fury" are the words that dominate the relation between Will and Anna. But the conflict always ends with a blind rush of tenderness:

So it went on continually, the recurrence of love and conflict between them. One day it seemed as if everything was shattered, all life spoiled, ruined, desolate and looked waste. The next day it was all marvellous again, just marvellous. One day she thought she would³⁰ from his very presence, the sound of his drinking was detestable to her. The next day she loved and rejoiced in the way he crossed the floor, he was sun, moon and stars in one.¹⁰⁶

In the alternating tides of attraction and repulsion between a man and a woman of different temperament and background we see love in action, that these flares of hate

alternating with periods of sexual passion and satisfaction represent an element in every adequate marriage.

Besides, the difference in their religious beliefs makes the conflict inevitable. Tom and his wife also had this problem. Lydia, brought up as a Catholic, had turned to the Church of England for protection. The outward form was good enough for her. "Yet she had some fundamental religion. It was as if she worshipped God as a mystery, never seeking in the least to define what He was."¹⁰⁷ So she lived perpetually in the presence of this ultimate mystery, and Tom shared it with her. But with Will and Anna, it is difficult. Will, with his craftman's sensibility and his unintellectual interest in the pictorial symbol of religion, is in sharp contrast to his wife's pragmatism and her literal-mindedness; and the contrast is itself symbolic of a mystical difference between the sexes - the two complex beings. Will's religion has nothing to do with morals or mankind; it is only an emotional experience of the infinite, the Absolute, while Anna's is a religion of the ego: "the thought of her soul was intimately mixed up with the thought of her own self. Indeed her soul and her own self were one and the same in her."¹⁰⁸ She doesn't find any values in her husband's religion, which strikes her as dark, and "caring nothing for humanity."¹⁰⁹ She is filled with a mad impulse to insult the symbols Will adores. Once when she, in the village church, sees Will absorbed in contemplation of the lamb that, in the stained-glass window, holds a flag in the

Cleft of its boat, "dark, violent hatred of her husband" sweeps up in her.¹¹⁰ She reacts to it very violently because she has bound herself responding to the spell worked by the symbol on her husband, "the power of the tradition seized on her, she was transported to another world."¹¹¹ And she makes fun of his adoration to the symbols and his belief in miracles. Anna makes him feel ashamed of his religious beliefs, and he hates her.

The opposed nature of Will's and Anna's religious experience is seen clearly in their reactions to the Lincoln Cathedral, the Anglican Church. To Will, the cathedral has the same kind of significance as the natural life of the farm had to his forefathers. It embraces the whole universe; "And there was no time nor life nor death, but only this, this timeless consummation, where the thrust from the earth met the thrust from the earth and the arch was locked on the keystone of ecstasy. This was all, this was everything."¹¹² It is a satisfactory consummation of his needs. "There his soul remained, at the open of the arch, clinched in the timeless ecstasy, consummated."¹¹³ But Anna resents Will's ecstasies, though she feels for a time the mystical power of the church. For her the altar is barren, and the cathedral a confined place from which one must escape to the freedom, to the blue sky outside. "She claimed the right to freedom above her, higher than the roof."¹¹⁴ The church does not represent the whole of the universe, and she deliberately destroys his devout absorption by comparing the sculpture with

everyday realities; she brings the cathedral completely down to earth. She takes a malicious delight in pointing to him the sly little faces carved in stone, winking and leering, suggesting "the many things that had been left out of the great concept of the church."¹¹⁵ Will is forced to see that his absolute is not as absolute as he has thought. Somewhere inside him he responds "more deeply to the sly little faces that knew better, than he had done before to the perfect surge of the cathedral."¹¹⁶ Angrily, and hating her he admits to himself that there is much outside the church. "Strive as he would, he could not keep the cathedral wonderful to him,"¹¹⁷ and "the deep root of his enmity lay in the fact that she jeered at his soul."¹¹⁸

The disillusionment that Anna's mockery brings on has a decisive effect on Will. The cathedral was an absolute in a world of chaos, but now he has lost his absolute; and the loss makes him become a more superficial person. Will feels "uncreated," slightly ashamed of his religious belief, having failed to find real expression:

He listened to the thrushes in the gardens, and heard a note which the cathedral did not include, something free and careless and joyous... There was life outside the church. There was much that the church did not include. He thought of God, and the whole blue rotunda of the day... still he loved the church. As a symbol he loved it. He tended it for what it tried to represent, rather than for that which it represents.¹¹⁹

Moreover, even in their sex-relationship Will and Anna are separated as they separate themselves from each other

in their religious belief. Without her cooperation in the physical consummation Will is full of "blackness of rage and shame and frustration." He tries to force her to accept him, and Anna, in return fights fiercely against him. "What horrible hold did he want to have over her body? Why did he want to drag her down and kill her spirit."¹²⁰ She feels that he must respect and adore her, since she gives him his rebirth and supplements his life by turning him back from time to time to the fountain source of strength.¹²¹ But Will thinks that she must submit to him, for he is a man, a leader of the family. And each tries to dominate the other. Unlike Tom and Lydia, they do not realize that they are people with separate destinies, and that they have no right to lay "violent hands of claim on the other."¹²² In spite of the continual battle, Anna becomes pregnant. The pregnancy gives a feeling of bliss: "The passionate sense of fulfillment, of the future germinated in her, made her vivid and powerful. All the future was in her hands, in the hands of the woman."¹²³ And she dances the triumph of her pregnancy, naked in her room, celebrating her fertility. Her naked dance, as Frederick R. Karl and Marvin Magalamer suggested, is a ritualistic performance in which her dedication is to the gods of creativity - the powers that make growth possible.¹²⁴ Will sees his wife as the Magna Mater - the type-figure of a feminine dominance that

must defeat the growth of any prosperous long-term relations between man and woman, and he hates her more. The birth of the child makes Anna happier and self-contained. There are more children, and whenever she is pregnant she lapses into a vague content. For her "the baby was a complete bliss and fulfillment."¹²⁵ And she stops thinking of establishing a happy, fulfilled relation with Will. Anna becomes more and more absorbed in rearing her nine children, and her personal assertions and ambitions disappear. She no longer wants to make her marriage a "door" to the unknown. "She was willing now to postpone all adventure into unknown realities. She had the child, her palpable and immediate future was the child. If her soul had found no utterance, her womb has."¹²⁶

While Anna finds her fulfillment in rearing the children, Will finds what fulfillment he can have in his craft; he devotes himself to his creative work in wood and other materials. However, they are bound together by their physical love: "There was no tenderness, no love between them any more, only the maddening, sensuous lust for discovery and the insatiable, exorbitant gratification in the sensual beauties of her body."¹²⁷ and "that was what their love had become, a sensuality violent and extreme as death."¹²⁸ Will's abnormal intensity of relation with his daughter, Ursula, is an outcome of the failure between him and Anna.¹²⁹ He gives up trying "to have the spiritual superiority and

control, or even her respect for his conscious or public life.¹³⁰ Both of them live simply by their physical love: "They had no conscious intimacy, no tenderness of love. It was all the lust and the infinite, maddening intoxication of the senses, a passion of death."¹³¹ However, they achieve, if not a consummation, at least some measure of equilibrium, if only a compromise: "...she would put herself aside, and when she felt one of his fits upon him, would ignore him, successfully leave him in his world, while she remained in her own."¹³²

The relation between Will and Anna is quite unsatisfactory because it is a relationship which only "part," not the "whole," of the person is involved. Will and Anna are bound together only by physical love. They fail to make their relationship as a "gateway" to the "beyond," to the "rainbow condition" in which love is beyond the physical and sensual, and in which they become oneness with the infinite.¹³³

Ursula Brangwen and Anton Shrebensky are the third couple whose relationship is examined. Ursula's life is dominated by education - first as a student and then as a teacher. Because of her education, she becomes more complex and fastidious than her ancestors, who were confined to the farm. Ursula revolts against Anna's existence, limited by child bearing and muddled domesticity as she revolts against religion. She despises her parents' animal fulfillment,

and tries to find a mate with whom she can find something much more than physical satisfaction. She is unwilling to settle for less than a complete relationship, and feels that an average man is not suitable to be her mate. Ursula wants to be seized by a Son of God, one of those who make off with mortal women and immortalize them; only then, like the phoenix can she be resurrected into wholeness, joy and fulfillment.¹³⁴ Seeing Shrebensky who "brought her a strong sense of the outer world," she feels as if "she were set on a hill and could feel vaguely the whole world lying spread before her."¹³⁵ Besides, his nonchalance and physical distinction fascinates her: "He was so finely constituted, and so distinct, self-contained, self-supporting."¹³⁶ She feels that he will lead her to new life of greater self-realization and "plunging, boundless freedom." He is a Son of God, she tells herself, and immediately she falls in love with him. But the more she is intimate with him, the more she sees his defects. He has none of the qualities which she has imagined. Shrebensky reveals himself as a man who lacks individual soul; his life is purely on the surface, circumscribed by his duties and the established order of things. The failure of life in him expresses itself in his acceptance of social function as the ultimate meaning of life. As a soldier, he devotes himself to the good of the greatness number and is willing to sacrifice his own

"intrinsic self" for community. "I belong to the nation," he tells her, "and must do my duty by the nation."¹³⁷ But since Ursula is against any form of standards and believes in the supremacy of individuality, she answers him harshly: "It seems to me...as if you weren't anybody - as if there were not anybody there, where you are. Are you anybody, really? You seem like nothing to me."¹³⁸ His deficiencies are revealed even more in their encounter with the bargee and his family. Ursula establishes immediate contact with these people, talks to them unaffectedly, receives the bargee's unspoken admiration of her sex, and give her name to the unchristened baby, to whom she gives her necklace. Shrebensky is completely insensitive to this act; he remains aloof from it, and all he can say is that the bargee's wife once must have been a servant. Comparing Shrebensky with the bargee, Ursula recognizes that the latter gave her a pleasant warm feeling, while Shrebensky "...had created a deadness round her, a sterility as if the world were ashes."¹³⁹ On his part, Shrebensky envies the bargee's ability to communicate with Ursula, body and soul, in a way that he, Shrebensky, could never do. Ursula realizes that only the physical part of him is alive; the rest is dead and sterile.

Their first relationship is proved to be a failure, because Shrebensky is inadequate to be the lover of an intelligent and sensitive girl like Ursula. After his departure to do his "duty" in the South African War, Ursula

turns her love to one of her school teachers - Mistress Winifred Inger, who attracts Ursula by her intellectuality.¹⁴⁰ Then after six years absence Shrebensky returns to her again. Ursula, who has been bitterly disillusioned with life,¹⁴¹ still hopes to establish a new relationship with him. "He would have been the doorway to her into the boundless sky of happiness and plunging, inexhaustible freedom which was the paradise of her soul."¹⁴² But Shrebensky is still the same - a man who is not interested in the individual, only in forces and vague ideas. He belongs to the established order of things. He determines to go to India to be a servant of the imperial state - to be used as an instrument. His values are the values of the Indian Army, Sahib, and his consolation is the same - whiskey.

As it turns out, Shrebensky cannot even offer her physical fulfillment as a kind of compromise for his defects. In their sex relationship Ursula is always unsatisfied; "...you've never satisfied me since the first week in London. You never satisfy me now. What does it mean to me, you having me..."¹⁴³ This declaration illustrates how Lawrence conceives sex to be a part of "religion" - sex experience is an important expression of the individual self in its search for vital mysteries.¹⁴⁴ Sex is a means of fulfillment in which man proves his maleness and woman her femaleness. Being always frustrated, Ursula finds in Shrebensky no unknown that can be for her a real transcending of the banal.

He is unable to provide her with a valid sense of the "unknown." "She knew him all round, not on any side did he lead into the known. Poignant, almost passionate appreciation she felt for him but none of the rich fear, the connection with the unknown, or the reverence of love."¹⁴⁵

Their failure with each other is symbolically shown in their last meeting - a violent, passionate encounter on sand hills in the moonlight. Ursula makes "hard and fierce" love to him till he becomes desperately exhausted: "It lasted till it was agony to his soul, till he succumbed, till he gave way as if dead, and lay with his face buried..."¹⁴⁶ She lies still after the symbolic killing of Shrebensky by her violent and passionate love, and evidently she sees it as a proof of failure and loss: tears trickle from her eyes. And, as Graham Hough suggests, sexual failure in the individual is a part of failure of character.¹⁴⁷ The next morning they know that all is over between them, and their subsequent conversation is as follows:

'Well, what have I done?' he asked, in a rather querulous voice.

'I don't know,' she said, in the same dull, feelingless voice. 'It is finished. It has been a failure.'

.....
'Is it my fault?' he said, looking up at length, challenging the last stroke.

'You couldn't---' she began. But she broke down.¹⁴⁸

Ursula rejects Shrebensky, who marries his Colonel's daughter, a few weeks later, and sails with his new wife to India. Ursula finds herself pregnant, and her failure with

Shrebensky drives her to desperation. Determined to give up her striving for the fulfillment she has imagined and to accept with all its implications, the traditional role of child-bearer, Ursula, knowing nothing about his marriage, writes to Shrebensky with humbleness. Her decision to marry him brings a "bondaged sort of peace---"¹⁴⁹ the peace of renunciation. It's an insecure peace, threatened by the inactivity of waiting in the combining, suffocating atmosphere of her parents' house; Ursula escapes by walking out into the October rain. As she walks through the rainy countryside, she encounters the horses that circle around her; she flees them, narrowly escapes, returns home, and takes to her bed with a raging fever.¹⁵⁰ She has two weeks of illness and delirium, and through it all she feels bound to Shrebensky by nothing but the expected child. Later, Ursula is glad when she learns that she will have no child; and when Shrebensky's cablegram arrives ("I am married"),¹⁵¹ she knows that the man she must have will come out of the Infinite, "out of Eternity to which she herself belonged."¹⁵² The loss of her child means to Ursula the loss of the last bond tying her to the past, and as she recovers, she expects a new creation. "As she grew better, she sat to watch a new creation....In the still, silenced farms of the colliers she saw a sort of suspense, a waiting in pain for the new liberation."¹⁵³ She feels newborn, like a kernel "free and

naked and striving to take new root, to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the flux of time."¹⁵⁴

Ursula slips out one day to walk in the rain - naked woods, and sees over the corruption of the mining town the iridescent colors of a rainbow forming in the distance. By its arch she sees a possible future perfection for herself and for the world: "She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven."¹⁵⁵ The rainbow's message to Ursula tells her she will escape the mean little world which she identifies with Shrebensky and one day she will find her real mate, the Son of God.¹⁵⁶

On the whole The Rainbow is a novel about love between man and woman in three generations of the Brangwens.¹⁵⁷ Each struggles to achieve the complete polarized relationship, symbolized by the rainbow. Tom and Lydia of the first generation are the only couple who, after a period of estrangement, attain fulfillment beyond the physical. Less fortunate is the second generation; Will and Anna can achieve only sensual satisfaction with each other. Ursula of the third generation, who lives in the industrialized England, not in the agricultural country as her ancestors did, and whose life is influenced by her education, finds it difficult to achieve her "fantastic fulfillment" with

an ordinary man like Shrebensky. She seeks more than Shrebensky can understand or provide, something more than the ordinary concept of love, which has "so much personal gratification."¹⁵⁸ This quest for love which is beyond the physical and sensual becomes the theme of Women in Love.