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“Must Become Modern,” and “Must Break Out of It”:
Mobilizing Affects of Anticipation in Modernity and Nature in *The Rainbow*

In his essay “The Novel and the Feelings,” Lawrence proposes a renewed hearkening to the “low, calling cries” that arise from untamed feelings, as opposed to domesticated emotions. Yet for Ursula Brangwen in *The Rainbow*, the distinction between raw feeling and conventionalized emotion becomes blurry, since her central “cry” arises from a confusion between the urge to erect an independent self away from the marshes of Cossethay, and a desire for mobility instilled by industrialization and urbanization. As Michael Bell has pointed out, Lawrence uses language in a way that “undermines the reified categories, such as reason and feeling,” and indeed *The Rainbow* undoes the binary of emotion and feeling that Lawrence himself outlined in his essay (“Le coeur” 30). In this paper, I consider feeling or affect not simply a primal cry which is detached from the social realm, but as Lauren Berlant has noted, rather as “theory-in-practice of how a world works”: affect is a site that “registers the conditions of life that move across persons and worlds, play out in lived time, and energize attachments” (16). As Andrew Humphries points out in his study of the technologies of transport and female mobility, Ursula must negotiate her way through a technologically changing world, balancing the “pursuit of modernity” and her personal mobility as a modern woman (97). This paper investigates the psychic rhythm of anticipation, disappointment, and renewed anticipation, a mode of feeling through which Ursula inhabits the changing material conditions of mobility and modernity, making her a “traveller on the face of the earth” (387). Through Ursula’s final vision, *The Rainbow* stages and problematizes the desire to recuperate modernity in terms of natural fecundity. The sonorities of language especially make visible the affective labor invested in negotiating the ebbs and flows of attraction and repulsion regarding the modern world.

Modernity operates through affective structures of anticipation that draw laboring bodies toward urban and industrial centers, promising the vague yet enticing prospect of self-fulfillment. At the brink of womanhood, Ursula grapples with the thought that “she must go somewhere, she must become something” (263). Suspended between a sense of disorientation (“How take even one step?”) and restlessness (“And yet, how stand still?”), she feels a compulsion to break the circle of her family home “to make something of herself” (263). The circumference of Ursula’s world expands through vehicles of mobility such as the tram that takes her to Kingston-upon-Thames, yet the anticipation of teaching children there to “blossom like little weeds” is cut short in the tram’s suffocating space (341). The tram both delivers and encloses Ursula, catching her in a double bind of movement and stasis, anticipation and disillusionment that is repeated in the latter half of the novel. But Ursula’s impulse for mobility is renewed in her delight at the family’s removal from the marshes, as she imagines herself as a kite casting off “the old, bound shell of Cossethay” (389). Yet again the sense of “space and liberation” proves illusory, since this new location moves the Brangwens closer to the collieries and a mechanized earth of capitalist production—what Lawrence later in *Women in Love* labels “the resistant Matter of the earth” that challenges the industrial man’s will to subjugate it (227). In the “new red-brick suburbia” at the outskirts of the mines, even the church bells are “so much harsher and more insistent,” invading the house and moving the whole family to work within a mechanized division of time (391). College life also lends “the ash of disillusion,” yet still Ursula says, “No matter! Every hill-top was a little different, every valley was somehow new” (404-5). Such recurring anticipation is “cruel” in the sense that “the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which [one] risks striving” (Berlant 2). In *The Rainbow* this transformation is cast as Ursula’s dream to make something of herself through the institutions (schools) and vehicles of the modern world—to an extent, Ursula is enmeshed in endless optimism, an anticipatory affect

that Sara Ahmed defines as “an orientation[] toward the future as being [...] full” (Ahmed 173). As she continually re-invests “the next move, into the world again” (405), Ursula collides repeatedly with a world resistant to her expectations, but without falling into affective alienation or detachment, which in Ahmed’s words, would be work as a resistant orientation against the socially regulated forms of desire or happiness. Rather, Ursula plunges into the waves of anticipation and disillusionment, always coming back for more after being bumped against the disappointing barrenness of modernity.

The Rainbow seems to present the organicism of nature as an antidote to the false hopes of the modern world, which is cast as an inorganic space lacking “artery” or “organic formation” (320). The motif of germination which is central in the novel has especially been read according to Jack Stewart as registering the possibility of “[h]uman flowering,” an “act of drawing from one’s roots and fulfilling one’s potential” (Stewart 30). Yet this antithesis of modernity and nature, of the inorganic and the organic is not so clear as it seems, since Ursula’s anticipation for renewal in nature more often overlaps with similar patterns of expectancy in modernity’s push toward the future. The bodily experiences of renewal in nature, such as picking and touching blossoms, or the famous collision with the “burst[ing]” horses occur right before Ursula renews her hope to “make something of herself” (263). In one scene, small autumn buds fuel anticipation for a future full of possibility:

Odd bits of information stirred unfathomable passion in her. When she knew that in the tiny brown buds of autumn were folded, minute and complete, the finished flowers of the summer nine months hence, tiny, folded up, and left there waiting, a flash of triumph and love went over her. (311).

The word “minute” coupled with “complete” brings the sense of a brittle and intricately finished miniature flower within the bud, while the alliterated tension in the “finished” yet “folded” suspension of the “flower” is released in Ursula’s final “flash of love and triumph” (311). The bud becomes more than an empty prophecy, bearing within itself the completion of

its promise which needs only the passage of nine months to become visible. Nature in *The Rainbow* brings an anticipated future into the present. In another scene, nature presents to Ursula's eyes all the spectrums of day and night in one moment: in one of her last evenings in Cossethay, "the splash" of golden wood chips shine like "sunlight," while the "snowdrops" in the "glimmering dusk" of twilight anticipate the "first stars of night" in their glitter (389). For Ursula, there are no *false* rainbows of future promise in nature since it shows how the future is already contained in the present: in nature, time becomes non-segmented in this intertwining of present and future.

This becomes a problem for Ursula when germination works a trope for a promised fulfillment at the end of anticipation. Rather than nature introducing an opposing principle against Ursula's compulsion to move, modernity seems to co-opt the ecological sensibility engendered by autumn buds and dormant seeds—the anticipation of impending germination—and prompts Ursula to project hope towards an uncertain futurity. The repeated imagery of enclosing husks and bursting kernels pertain not only Ursula's own hope for germination, but to what she prophesies as a whole series of germinations to come from the colliers:

As she sat at her window, she saw the people go by in the street below, colliers, women, children, walking each in the husk of an old fruition, but visible through the husk, the swelling and heaving contour of the new germination. In the still, silent forms of the colliers she saw a sort of suspense, a waiting in pain for the new liberation: she saw the same in the false hard confidence of the women. [...] It would break quickly to reveal the strength and patient effort of the new germination (458).

What strikes me in this passage is the ambiguity of the phrase, "a sort of suspense," which contrasts with Ursula's earlier tone of conviction in her vision of the completed flower folded in autumn buds. The sonic qualities of the passage strain to remedy this hesitance: the vibrant intakes and outtakes of breath in "swelling and heaving" seem to recall the pangs of pregnancy, while the sounds of the passage, "swelling and heaving contour" take apart the aspirate (/h/), sibilant (/s/), and glottal (/k/) consonants in "husk" as if the language itself tries to enact

Ursula's penetrating vision. As Bell has noted, the rhythm of Lawrence's prose here becomes "an enactment of the inner processes by which a particular 'world' is sustained": it stages how Ursula inhabits the industrialized world and tries to make her place in it bearable—by viewing it as an unopened seed (*Language and Being* 66). The trope of germination fuels hope of a fulfilled future—as with the buds of nature—yet also marks (and masks) the difference between the garden and the colliery, a difference that is detectable in the language of Ursula's strained hesitance.

Yet if the rainbow at the end of the novel is again a false one, I do not suggest that Ursula's final vision is simply a naïve and ecstatic retreat into false consciousness. Rather, I see the ending as a moment of suspension which makes visible the affective labor invested in creating and also living within patterns of anticipation. The final vision of the rainbow is produced through effortful hope which "anguish[es]" the heart, and the "shadow of iris" that Ursula finds at the edge of the rainbow is something that must be "sought" out by the human eye in order to be seen (458). Ursula's anguish and the effort to look into the remote corners of her vision reveals the affective investment necessary in enduring the barrenness and illusory attractions of the modern world. *The Rainbow* thus investigates how affects of anticipation become a mode of inhabiting modernity by grappling and laboring with its resistance.

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