

The Education of Ursula: Perspectives On Teaching and Learning in *The Rainbow*

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In Lawrence's fourth novel, *The Rainbow*, the character of Ursula studies to become a teacher, a career she seeks because she wishes to be economically independent of her family. It seems clear that Ursula's outer experiences and inner reflections in *The Rainbow* represent Lawrence's own attitudes and feelings toward education.

Before she takes up her post as a teacher she dreams that she will be able to "make the little, ugly children love her. She would be so *personal*. Teachers were always so hard and impersonal. There was no vivid relationship. She would make everything so personal and vivid, she would give herself, she would give, give, give all her great stores of wealth to her children, she would make them so happy, and they would prefer her to any teacher on the face of the earth" (R; 341). This is a common dream of most teachers, the personal approach—the power of personality to overcome all obstacles in learning. She wishes to become "the gleaming sun of the school, the children would blossom like little weeds, the teachers like tall, hard plants would burst into rare flower" (ibid.).

Her first day, a Monday, arrives; it is a drizzly day in late September as she makes her way to school, to the 'new land' (ibid.). Lawrence tells us, "It had begun, her new existence" (R; 342). But like most people, she experiences the fear of the unknown and the apprehension concomitant with beginning her working life. The experience of commuting to work causes her to reflect on her new state:

Often, oh often the tram seemed to stop, and wet, cloaked people mounted and sat mute and grey, in stiff rows opposite her, their umbrellas between their knees. The windows of the tram grew more steamy, opaque. She was shut in with these unliving, spectral people. Even yet it did not occur to her that she was one of them. The conductor came down issuing tickets. Each little ring of his clipper sent a pang of dread through her.

But her ticket surely was different from the rest.

They were all going to work; she also was going to work. Her ticket was the same. She sat trying to fit in with them. But fear was at her bowels, she felt an unknown, terrible grip upon her.

(R; 342-43)

Lawrence here is tapping into a vein of human experience that is common to almost everyone who has had to go through the first day of work; he has managed to capture the emotional upset and apprehension everyone feels; his use of the ticket as a metaphor for one's course in life, or one's fate, is a masterful choice. As she nears the school she looks around her and finds she is in "a small, mean, wet street, empty of people. The school squatted low within its railed, asphalt yard, that shone black with rain. The building was grimy, and horrible, dry plants were shadowily looking through the windows" (R; 343). The building 'squats' in wait for her it seems; the black, grimy and horrible appearance is depressing, but most of all the 'dry' plants 'looking' through the windows give a sense that what goes on inside the building is anti-life. As she enters the building she feels "The whole place seemed to have a threatening expression, imitating the church's architecture for the purpose of domineering, like a gesture of vulgar authority....The place was silent, deserted, like an empty prison, waiting the return of tramping feet" (ibid.). She finds the teacher's room, which seems 'burrowed in a gloomy hole' (ibid.). She knocks at the door and a man's voice bids her enter—his voice sounding 'as from a prison cell' (ibid.). It is a dark little room that she enters, a room which never gets any sun. Everything seems unreal in this dim, narrow room. She and the other teacher comment on the weather by way of being friendly but in this room "it seemed that neither morning nor weather really existed. This place was timeless. He spoke in an occupied voice, like an echo" (R; 343-44).

Violet Harby enters the room and welcomes her; Ursula feels "the callous, crude rudeness between the two teachers" (R; 345), which is a foreshadowing of her experiences to come. As she and Miss Harby enter the 'big room,' Ursula notices that its 'rigid, long silence was official and chilling' (R; 346). The very light in the room feels 'unliving' and she feels the room close in; she feels shut in, and the narrator says, "The prison was round her now!" (ibid.). The walls of the room are pale green and chocolate: institutional colors. The geraniums at the windows are 'frowsy'; the long rows of desks fill her with dread; she feels oppressed but still excited by the newness. She climbs into the teacher's chair—her feet cannot touch the floor—but "lifted up there, off the ground, she was in office" (ibid.). She senses this new reality, "This prison of a school was reality" (R; 347) but here she "would realize her dream of being the beloved teacher bringing light and joy to her children" (R; 347). The environment however, is perhaps not the best because "the desks before her had an abstract angularity that bruised her sentiment

and made her shrink. She winced, feeling she had been a fool in her anticipations. She had brought her feelings and her generosity to where neither generosity nor emotion were wanted. And already she felt rebuffed, troubled by the new atmosphere, out of place" (ibid.). She feels she ought to 'alter her personality' to fit the environment, that she is herself less than adequate to the task ahead.

Ursula is to teach Standard Five, the members of which she observes, as they line up, "jerking their shoulders, tossing their hair, nudging, writing, staring, grinning, whispering and twisting" (R; 348). To a tune played on a piano the pupils 'march' into the big room, but Ursula's girls 'broke loosely into the room' which angers the head teacher, who shouts, "Who told the Standard Five girls to come in like that?" (R; 349). Ursula reddens with embarrassment; the head roars that the girls should go back out and reenter, at which Ursula's heart 'hardened with ignominious pain' (ibid.).

After this bad beginning, Ursula faces her class: 'some fifty five boys and girls' (ibid.). As she does so, she feels "utterly non-existent. She had no place nor being there" (ibid.). She is at a loss as to what to do; she waits painfully while "her block of children, fifty unknown faces, watched her, hostile, ready to jeer. She felt as if she were in torture over a fire of faces. And on every side she was naked to them" (ibid.). But she gathers her courage and asks the class a math question and "a grin went over the face of the class, seeing her commence" (ibid.). Though some students try to participate, the day goes by incredibly slowly, for she is confused as to what to do, and there come the inevitable "horrible gaps, when she was merely exposed to the children; and when, relying on some pert little girl for information, she had started a lesson, she did not know how to go on with it properly" (R; 350). Lawrence observes, "The children were her masters. She deferred to them" (ibid.). Perhaps she is cowed by the numbers because Lawrence/the narrator says that "before this inhuman number of children she was always at bay" (ibid.) for, "...this class of fifty collective children, (was) depending on her for command, for command it hated and resented" (ibid.). Her impression is that "it was so inhuman. They were so many, that they were not children. They were a squadron" (ibid.). To her they become a 'collective inhuman thing' (ibid.). Dealing with this collective is perhaps too much for Ursula's first day.

At dinner-time she feels 'stunned, bewildered and solitary' and "It seemed to her she had just disembarked from some strange horrible state where everything was in a hell, a condition of hard, malevolent system" (ibid.). To make matters worse, she feels she doesn't know how to teach, and never will. Other feelings of negativity center on Mr. Harby, the head, who 'thrashed and bullied, he was hated' but respected by the students because they fear him and acknowledge his power. The narrator then comments, "...in a school, it was power and power alone that mattered" (R; 351). She talks to Mr. Brunt in the teacher's room and he advises her 'to get a tighter hand' over her class because "they'll get you down if you don't tackle 'em pretty

quick” (R; 352). But Ursula doesn’t really comprehend her situation. The narrator explains:

The first great task was to reduce sixty children to one state of mind, or being. This state must be produced automatically, through the will of the teacher and the will of the whole school authority, imposed upon the will of the children.

(R; 356)

Lawrence then gives his basic view of the dilemma she faces:

Children will never naturally acquiesce to sitting in a class and submitting to knowledge. They must be compelled by a stronger, wiser will. Against which will they must always strain to revolt. So that the first great effort of every teacher of a large class must be to bring the will of the children into accordance with his own will. And this he can only do with an abnegation of the personal self, and an application of a system of laws, for the purpose of achieving a certain calculable result, the imparting of certain knowledge. Whereas Ursula thought she was going to become the first wise teacher, by making the whole business personal, and using no compulsion. She believed entirely in her own personality.

So that she was in a very deep mess. In the first place she was offering to a class a relationship which only one or two of the children were sensitive enough to appreciate, so that the mass were left outsiders, therefore against her.

(R; 356)

This deep mess that she’s in stays with her when she leaves the school grounds each day. Outside she feels that the “luminous sky with changing clouds, seemed just like a fantasy, like a piece of painted scenery. Her heart was so black and tangled in the teaching” (R; 356-57). Her depression is put in even starker terms: “How then could the sky be shining? There was no sky, there was no luminous atmosphere of out-of-doors. Only the inside of the school was real—hard, concrete, real and vicious” (R; 357). This string of adjectives (especially the last) conveys the harsh reality Ursula faces. But her will is strong and she will not ‘let school quite overcome her’ (ibid.). What saves her is her knowledge that she will some day leave; in addition, on her weekends she feels rejuvenated by her nature walks and the beautiful sunsets. Still, there are humiliating times ahead for her; for there ‘already was a deadly hostility grown up between her and the children’ so that when she goes to town to buy a ribbon, her charges follow and call her names; she is so upset that she ‘colored with shame at being held up to derision in the public

street' (R; 367). The narrator notes, "They came after her, the boys she tried to teach" (ibid.). They even throw stones at her. As might be expected, the situation she finds herself in causes her to change in unexpected ways: "...in her soul a change took place. Never more, and never more would she give herself as individual to her class" (ibid.); she would stay "as far away personally from her class as if she had never set foot in St Philips school. She would obliterate them all, and keep herself apart, take them as scholars only" (ibid.). She will become the thing that Lawrence hates most: a machine; "So her face grew more and more shut, and over her flayed, exposed soul of a young girl who had gone open and warm to give herself to the children, there set a hard, insentient thing, that worked mechanically according to a system imposed" (ibid.). Ursula's education has begun; she realizes further that "It was no good, any more, to appeal, to play upon the better feelings of her class"—all she can do is allow her will to take over, she must, with this class, 'grasp' them into 'subjection' (ibid.). She has become hard and impersonal 'since the stone-throwing'; now she is 'going to fight and subdue' (R; 368).

She therefore first identifies her 'enemies' in the class. It seems the most threatening is a boy named Williams: "He was sort of defective, not bad enough to be so classed. He could read with fluency, and had plenty of cunning intelligence. But he could not keep still. And he had a kind of sickness very repulsive to a sensitive girl, something cunning and etiolated and degenerate. Once he had thrown an inkwell at her, in one of his mad little rages" (ibid.). Because he is so cunning, he starts to hang around her to 'fawn on her' but this only makes her dislike him even more intensely because he had a 'kind of leech-like power' (ibid.). Their first confrontation unfolds this way:

One morning, at composition, she said to the boy Williams:

"Why have you made this blot?"

"Please Miss, it fell off my pen," he whined out, in the mocking voice that he was so clever at using. The boys near snorted with laughter. For Williams was an actor. He could tickle the feelings of his hearers subtly. Particularly he could tickle the children with him into ridiculing his teacher, or indeed, any authority of which he was not afraid. He had that peculiar goal instinct.

"Then you must stay in and finish another page of composition," said the teacher.

This was against her usual sense of justice and the boy resented it derisively. At twelve o'clock, she caught him slinking out.

"Williams, sit down," she said.

And there she sat, and there he sat, alone, opposite to her, on the back desk, looking up at her with his furtive eyes every minute.

"Please, Miss, I've got to go an errand," he called out insolently.

"Bring me your book," said Ursula.

The boy came out, flapping his book along the desks. He had not written a line. "Go back and do the writing you have to do," said Ursula. And she sat at her desk trying to correct books. She was trembling and upset. And for an hour the miserable boy writhed and grinned in his seat. At the end of that time he had done five lines. "As it is so late now," said Ursula, "you will finish the rest this evening." The boy kicked his way insolently down the passage.

(R; 368-69)

This is only a prelude to coming battles between Ursula and Williams; in the afternoon session she notices him ducking down under his desk repeatedly—she asks him what he's doing and he "lifted his face, the sore-rimmed eyes half smiling. There was something intrinsically indecent about him. Ursula shrank away" (R;369):

"Nothing," he replied, feeling a triumph. "If I speak to you again, you must go down to Mr Harby," she said. But this boy was a match even for Mr Harby. He was so persistent, so cringing and flexible, he howled so when he was hurt, that the master hated more the teacher who sent him than he hated the boy himself. For of the boy he was sick of the sight. Which Williams knew. He grinned visibly....there was a little ferment in the class. Williams' spirit infected them all. She heard a scuffle, and then she trembled inwardly. If they all turned on her this time, she was beaten.

(R; 369)

Williams is like the class disease, as far as Ursula is concerned. Soon another student accuses Williams of 'nipping' him, and as the victim sits rubbing his leg, Ursula commands Williams to come to the front; he refuses; and

The rat-like boy sat with his pale smile and did not move. "Come in front," she repeated, definite now. "I shan't," he cried, snarling, rat-like, grinning. Something went click in Ursula's soul. Her face and eyes set, she went through the class, straight. The boy cowered before her glowering, fixed eyes. But she advanced on him, seized him by the arm, and dragged him from his seat. He clung to the form. It

was the battle between him and her. Her instinct had suddenly become calm and quick. She jerked him from his grip, and dragged him, struggling and kicking, to the front. He kicked her several times, and clung to the forms as he passed, but she went on. The class was on its feet in excitement. She saw it, but made no move.

(R; 370)

Ursula holds onto him, snatches her cane and brings it down on him; he struggles and kicks—and she “saw his face beneath her, white, with eyes like the eyes of a fish, stony, yet full of hate and horrible fear. And she loathed him, the hideous writhing thing that was nearly too much for her” (ibid.). She brings down the cane again and again even though she has a ‘horror lest he should overcome her’ (ibid.). This because he “writhed, like a mad thing. But the pain of the strokes cut through his writning, vicious, coward’s courage, bit deep, till at last, with a long whimper that became a yell, he went limp” (ibid.). But she makes the mistake of letting him loose and he rushes at her ‘his teeth and eyes glinting’ (ibid.). She has a second of ‘agonized terror’ because he ‘was a beast thing’ (ibid.). “Then she caught him, and the cane came down on him. A few times, madly, in a frenzy, he lunged and writhed, to kick her. But again the cane broke him, he sank with a howling yell on the floor, and like a beaten beast lay there yelling” (ibid.).

She looks at Williams on the floor:

“Get up,” she said. The thing writhed away from her. She took a step forward.

....“Get up,” she said. And with a little dart, the boy was on his feet. His yelling dropped to a mad blubber. He had been in a frenzy.

“Go and stand by the radiator,” she said.

....The boy blubbered wildly by the radiator. Ursula looked at the class. There were fifty pale, still faces watching her, a hundred round eyes fixed on her in an attentive, expressionless stare.

(R; 371)

She tells the class to take out their readers, which they do silently. “They were no longer a pack, but each one separated into a silent, closed thing...they read, mechanically” (ibid.). Ursula, ‘trembling violently’ went to sit at her desk while Williams remained by the radiator ‘blubbering.’ She sits at her desk silently, watching the class. Finally, the class begins to ‘recover its ease’ and ‘the tension relaxed’ (R; 371).

Williams (still crying) is told to return to his place; Williams obeys, but “dragged his feet

across the room, wiping his face on his sleeve. As he sat down, he glanced at her furtively, his eyes still redder. Now he looked like some beaten rat" (R; 372).

The children leave. As she is getting ready to depart, the head comes in and tells her that if she takes care of the other troublemakers in the same way, 'you'll be all right' (ibid.). She leaves the school grounds and

As she went along the street, clattering on the granite pavement, she was aware of boys dodging behind her. Something struck her hand that was carrying her bag, bruising her. As it rolled away she saw it was a potato. Her hand was hurt, but she gave no sign....She was afraid, and strange. It was to her quite strange and ugly, like some dream where she was degraded....Something has broken in her, she had passed a crisis. Williams was beaten, but at a cost.

(R; 372)

She stops for tea in a small shop but "she did not taste anything. The taking of tea was just a mechanical action, to cover over her existence" (ibid.). She goes home, but she does not know why, for there is 'nothing for her there'; she could "only pretend to be normal. There was nobody she could speak to, nowhere to go for escape. But she must keep on, under this red sunset, alone, knowing the horror in humanity, that would destroy her, and with which she was at war. Yet it had to be so" (ibid.). In the morning again she had to go to school, so "she got up and went without murmuring even to herself. She was in the hands of some bigger, stronger, coarser will" (R; 372-73). This day, school is fairly quiet, but she can feel "the class watching her, ready to spring on her. Her instinct was aware of the class instinct, to catch her if she were weak. But she kept cold and as guarded" (ibid.). Williams is absent from school, but his mother has come to school and Ursula is called to meet her with the headmaster. She tells them that her son is very ill and that he has a weak heart. She says she has seen the marks where Ursula caned him and seems inclined to threaten legal action. Ursula begins to make excuses for her beating of Williams and feels angered that she has to even explain. The woman continues to complain, but Ursula "still could not answer. She looked out on the asphalt yard, where a dirty rag of paper was blowing" (R; 374). She has 'ceased to feel or to exist' (ibid.). The mother speaks only to the head at this point, asking that her son not be beaten in future and the head promises to keep this in mind. The woman leaves.

The next morning, Williams 'turned up' and he "glanced at Ursula with a half-smile; cunning, subdued, ready to do as she told him. There was something about him that made her shiver. She loathed the idea of having laid hands on him. His elder brother was standing outside the gate at playtime, a youth of about fifteen, tall and thin and pale. He raised his hat, almost

like a gentleman. But there was something subdued, insidious about him, too” (R; 375). Ursula learns from Mrs Harby that “It’s the big Williams” (ibid.). And though Ursula ‘shrank from the scandal and the brutality’ of the whole affair, it has some ‘vague, horrid fascination’ (ibid.) for her. But the overarching sense she gets from Williams and his contentious family is one of sordidness. She still feels “The Williams in her class was wrong somewhere. How nasty it was altogether” (ibid.).

Her struggle for survival at school does not end once she settles Williams; she still has ‘several more boys to subjugate before she could establish herself’ (R; 376). She “....knew now that nothing but a thrashing would settle some of the big louts who wanted to play cat and mouse with her” (ibid.). She does not rely on the headmaster to enforce discipline because he resents her and would like to see her fail to control her students. Therefore when “she was driven wild, she seized her cane, and with fixed, desperate eyes gleaming almost cold with anger, she slashed the boy who was insolent to her, over head and ears and hands. And at length they were afraid of her, she had them in order” (ibid.). But this brutality that is forced upon her comes at a critical cost:

But she paid a great price out of her own soul to do this. It seemed as if a great flame had gone through her and burnt her sensitive tissue. She, who shrank from the thought of physical suffering in any form, had been forced to fight and beat with a cane and rouse all her instincts to hurt. And after-wards she had been forced to endure the sound of their blubbing and desolation, when she had broken them to order.

(ibid.)

Her anger finally focuses on the system:

....sometimes she felt as if she would go mad. What did it matter, what did it matter if their books were dirty and they did not obey? She would rather, in reality, that they disobeyed the whole rules of the school, than that they should be beaten, broken, reduced to this crying, hopeless state. She would rather bear all their insults and insolences a thousand times than reduce herself and them to this. Bitterly she repented having got beside herself, and having tackled the boy she had beaten. Yet it had to be so. She did not want to do it. Yet she had to. Oh why, why had she leagued herself to this evil system where she must brutalise herself to live? Why had she become a school -teacher, why, why?

(R; 376-77)

But no matter how evil the system may be, the “children had forced her to the beatings. No, she did not pity them. She had come to them full of kindness and love, and they would have torn her to pieces” (ibid.). Her will does not fail her, nor does her sense of herself, because “she was not going to be made nought, no, neither by them, nor by Mr Harby, nor by all the system around her. She was not going to be put down, prevented from standing free. It was not to be said of her, she could not take her place and carry out her task. She would fight and hold her place in this state also, in the world of work and of man’s convention” (R; 377). The narrator compares her to “a young filly that has been broken in to the shafts, and has lost its freedom. And now she was suffering bitterly from the agony of the shafts. The agony, the galling, the ignominy of her breaking in. This wore into her soul. But she would never submit. To shafts like these, she would never submit for long. But she would know them, that she might destroy them” (R; 377-78).

The strength of her character seems equal to the task before her, for once “she was broken in to her teaching, Ursula began gradually to have a new life of her own again” (ibid.). She has plans to go to college within a year and a half; she dreams of making a difference in society, but for now all that matters is ‘work, work’; she must go on with the teaching ‘which was destroying her’ but she can now manage “without spilling all her life. She would submit to it for a time, since the time had a definite limit” (ibid.). In class, her teaching becomes ‘almost mechanical’ but it is still ‘a strain on her, an exhausting wearying strain, always unnatural’ (ibid.) and this is perhaps Lawrence’s main point about teaching in this type of atmosphere: that it is forced and unnatural. But however against nature some of its aspects seem, “there was a certain amount of pleasure in the sheer oblivion of teaching, so much work to do, so many children to see after, so much to be done, *that one’s self was forgotten*” (*italics mine*; ibid.). This is possibly what Lawrence sees as a consolation for many teachers—the ability to forget oneself while teaching others. The narrator says, “When the work had become like habit to her, and her individual soul was left out, had its growth elsewhere, then she could be almost happy” (ibid.). These two years of teaching cause her ‘chaotic’ soul to become ‘hard and independent’ (ibid.). She actually begins to tolerate the job—what Lawrence calls ‘making the thing go’ (ibid.). While she consciously struggles with her situation her soul is left free, it was “left to rest, it had the time of torpor in which to gather itself together in strength again” (ibid.). Still, the hours are long, the tasks heavy, and the discipline draining, so that she was ‘worn very thin and quivering’ (R; 379).

Perhaps she is most tested on beautiful mornings:

She came to school in the morning seeing hawthorn flowers wet, the little, rosy grains swimming in a bowl of dew. The larks quivered their song up into the new sunshine, and the country was so glad. It was a violation to plunge into the dust and greyness of

the town.

So that she stood before her class unwilling to give herself up to the activity of teaching, to turn her energy, that longed for the country and for joy of early summer, into the dominating of fifty children and the transferring to them some morsels of arithmetic. There was a little absentness about her. She could not force herself into forgetfulness. A jar of buttercups and fool's-parsley in the window-bottom kept her away in the meadows, where in the lush grass the moon-daisies were half-submerged, and a spray of pink ragged robin. Yet before her were faces of fifty children. They were almost like big daisies in a dimness of the grass.

(R; 379)

The children are *almost* like flowers, a common enough simile, but Lawrence does not allow it to work; by qualifying it he emphasizes the unnaturalness of the situation: of putting children in a setting such as a school, where the 'dimness' obscures their natural brightness. Ursula is so abstracted that she "could not quite see her children. She was struggling between two worlds, her own world of young summer and flowers, and this other world of work. And the glimmer of her own sunlight was between her and her class" (ibid.). But this transfer of light from her world to the world of work allows her to cope with the condition she finds herself in so that these 'days she was happy in her soul' and she 'made her children happy too, with a tingling of delight' (ibid.). On one particular afternoon, an afternoon in which she breathes the spirit of nature, "to her, the children were not a school class....they were flowers, birds, little bright animals, children, anything. They only were not Standard Five. She felt no responsibility for them. It was for once a game, this teaching" (R; 380). If they get their sums wrong, what does it matter? She gives them easy and pleasant work on this day. But the narrator notes that this particular, dreamy day "had not been school. It had been playing at school beneath red hawthorn blossom" (ibid.). She realizes she cannot go on like this. For one thing, the quarterly examinations are approaching and her class is not prepared; it irritates her that "she must drag herself away from her happy self" and use all her energy to

...force, to compel this heavy class of children to work hard at arithmetic. They did not want to work, she did not want to compel them. And yet, some second conscience gnawed at her, telling her the work was not properly done. It irritated her to madness, and she let loose all the irritation in the class. Then followed a day of battle and hate and violence, when she went home raw, feeling the golden evening taken away from her, herself incarcerated in some dark, heavy place, and chained there with a consciousness of having done badly at work....

....Why should children learn, and why should she teach them? It was all so much milling the wind. What folly was it, that made life into this, the fulfilling of some stupid, factitious duty? It was all so made up, so unnatural. The school, the sums, the grammar, the quarterly examinations, the register—it was all a barren nothing.

Why should she give her allegiance to this world, and let it so dominate her, that her own world of warm sun and growing, sap-filled life was turned into nothing? She was not going to do it. She was not going to be prisoner in the dry, tyrannical man-world. She was not going to care about it. What did it matter if her class did ever so badly in the quarterly examination. Let it—what did it matter?

(R; 380-81)

But her feelings change when the poor results of her class in the exams are returned; she feels miserable and she is shut up in 'gloom'; but she realizes that 'at this time' work was more important to her than sunshine, fields and freedom.

With the coming of winter, she feels even more an 'inhabitant' of the world of work. But her dream of college in a few months keeps her going. She counts the months she has left at school before she can be free to go to college. Ursula finally leaves school at the end of July, when the summer holiday begins:

The morning outside was bright and sunny, and the freedom got inside the school-room this last day. It was as if the walls of the school were going to melt away. Already they seemed shadowy and unreal. It was breaking-up morning. Soon, scholars and teachers would be outside, each going his own way. The irons were struck off, the sentence was expired, the prison was a momentary shadow halting about them. The children were carrying away books and inkwells, and rolling up maps. All their faces were bright with gladness and goodwill. There was a bustle of cleaning and clearing away all marks of this last term of imprisonment. They were all breaking free.

....The excited hours passed slowly in suspense. Then at last it was over. For the last time, she stood before her children whilst they said their prayers and sang a hymn. Then it was all over.

"Goodbye, children," she said. "I shall not forget you, and you must not forget me."

"No, miss," cried the children in chorus, with shining faces.

She stood smiling on them, moved, as they filed out.

(R; 392)

As she stands in the bare classroom, she feels that she has ‘triumphed over it’; that she “had fought the good fight here, and it had not been altogether unenjoyable. She owed some gratitude even to this harsh, vacant place, that stood like a memorial or a trophy. So much of her life had been fought for and won and lost here. Something of this school would always belong to her, something of her to it. She acknowledged it. And now came the leave-taking” (ibid.). In the teacher’s room there is excited discussion of summer plans; the teachers are “eager, and attached to each other, like comrades leaving a ship” (ibid.). Mr. Harby presents Ursula with two volumes of poetry as a parting gift from the other teachers; he is pleased because he can for once “extend good feeling to his teachers. As a rule, it was so difficult, each one was so strained in resentment under his rule” (R; 393).

But at last she is out. She gave one final and hasty glance at “the school buildings squatting on the asphalt yard in the hot, glistening sun, one look down the well-known road, and turned her back on it all. Something strained in her heart” (ibid.). On the way home, as she sits “on the top of the tram in the sunlight, she looked around her with tremendous delight. She had left something which had meant much to her....There was a little pang amid her exultation, of fear, not of regret” (ibid.).

She is touched by the inscription in one of the books she has been given; furthermore, all the other teachers have signed under the inscription. She feels she loves them all; for “they were her fellow workers. She carried away from the school a pride she could never lose. She had her place as comrade and sharer in the work of the school, her fellow teachers had signed to her, as one of them. And she was one of all workers, she had put in her tiny brick to the fabric man was building....” (R; 394).

ii.

When Ursula begins her college education she ‘was not at first disappointed’ (R; 398). It is a contrast to the school she has just left as a teacher; she sees before her “The big college built of stone, standing in the quiet street, with a rim of grass and lime-trees all so peaceful: she felt it remote, a magic-land. Its architecture was foolish, she knew from her father. Still, it was different from that of all other buildings. Its rather pretty, plaything, Gothic form was almost a style, in the dirty industrial town” (R; 398-99). Which is a contrast to the ‘squat’ buildings of St Philips School. Lawrence reminds us of the history and romance of education by noting “there was in it a reminiscence of the wondrous, cloistral origin of education. Her soul flew straight back to the medieval times, when the monks of God held the learning of men and imparted it within the shadow of religion. In this spirit she entered the college” (R; 399). She feels that the lobbies and cloak room are vulgar and they ‘hurt her at first’ but she could not

openly admit her criticism because she ‘was on holy ground’ (ibid.). She hopes that her fellow students will have ‘a high, pure spirit,’ that they will say only ‘real, genuine things’ and that their faces, when she sees them, will ‘be still and luminous as the nuns’ and monks’ faces’ (ibid.). To say that Ursula has romantic notions of higher education is perhaps an understatement. The reality is quite different, however, because the real girls “chattered and giggled and were nervous...the men looked mean and clownish” (ibid.). Still, she is excited to attend her first class. The windows “were large and lofty, the myriad brown students’ desks stood waiting, the great blackboard was smooth behind the rostrum” (ibid.). Whereas she had felt a prisoner as a teacher—separated from the flowers and fields she loved, now that she is in college, she looks out the classroom window to see “the lime-trees turning yellow, the traderman’s boy passing silent down the still, autumn-sunny street. There was the world, remote, remote” (ibid.). She feels the timelessness of the place, “within the great, whispering sea-shell, that whispered all the while with reminiscence of all the centuries, time faded away, and the echo of knowledge filled the timeless silence” (ibid.).

In the first lecture, she listens and “scribbled her notes with joy, almost with ecstasy, never for a moment criticising what she heard” (ibid.). Her attitude to her education is one of reverence, especially for her teachers:

At first, she preserved herself from criticism. She would not consider the professors as men, ordinary men who ate bacon and pulled on their boots before coming to college. They were the black-gowned priests of knowledge, serving forever in a remote, hushed temple. They were the initiated, and the beginning and end of the mystery was in their keeping.

(R; 400)

She therefore takes great joy in the lectures, especially those on education; there “was such freedom and pleasure in ranging over the very stuff of knowledge, and seeing how it moved and lived and had its being” (ibid.). She enjoys most of her classes but her terror is the math class, where she struggles to get control of the information. After math came the “lovely, peaceful afternoons in the Botany laboratory. There were few students. How she loved to sit on her high stool before the bench...carefully mounting her slides, carefully bringing her microscope into focus, then turning with joy to record her observation, drawing joyfully in her book, if the slide were good” (ibid.).

The first year passes “in magnificent seclusion and activity of learning. It was strenuous as a battle, yet remote as peace” (R; 401). But during this first year “the glamour began to depart from college”:

The professors were not priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge. After all, they were only middle-men handling wares they had become so accustomed to that they were oblivious of them. What was Latin? — so much dry goods of knowledge. What was the Latin class altogether but a sort of second-hand curio shop, where one bought curios and learned the market value of curios: dull curios too, on the whole. She was as bored by the Latin curiosities as she was by the Chinese and Japanese curiosities in the antique shops. “Antiques”—the very word made her soul fall flat and dead.

(R; 403)

Now that the ‘life’ has gone out of her studies, she puzzles over why this should have happened; she gradually begins to fathom it, but still “the whole thing seemed sham, spurious: spurious Gothic arches, spurious peace, spurious Latinity, spurious dignity of France, spurious naivete of Chaucer. It was a second-hand dealer’s shop, and one bought an equipment for an examination. This was only a little side-show to the factories of the town. Gradually the perception stole into her. This was no religious retreat, no seclusion of pure learning. It was a little apprentice-shop where one was further equipped for making money” (R; 403); Lawrence saves his harshest criticism for last: “The college itself was a little, slovenly laboratory for the factory” (ibid.). Ursula falls into an even gloomier depression because of these realizations: “A harsh and ugly disillusion came over her again, the same darkness and bitter gloom from which she was never safe now, the realization of the permanent substratum of ugliness under everything” (ibid.). The mood she felt at St Philips School returns, for now when she looks on the beauty of nature, it again pains her to be separated from it. One afternoon she arrives at the college and sees that “the lawns were frothed with daisies, the lime-trees hung tender and sunlit and green; and oh, the deep, white froth of the diasies was anguish to see” (ibid.). Lawrence uses repetition frequently in his work when he wishes to emphasize a point; ‘spurious’ was used earlier to describe the business of education and he returns again to this but substitutes the word ‘sham’: she must return to the “sham workshop. All the while, it was a sham store, a sham warehouse, with a single motive of material gain, and no productivity. It pretended to exist by the religious virtue of knowledge. But the religious virtue of knowledge was become a flunkey to the god of material success” (ibid.). Because of these perceptions and feelings, Ursula falls into ‘a sort of inertia’; she continues with her studies from habit but she can ‘scarcely attend to anything.’ (ibid.). Once while she is daydreaming in class, Lawrence has her fall into a reverie that is striking in its juxtaposition of the outside world with that of the college; as she looks out the classroom window, “A woman in a pink frock, with a scarlet sunshade, crossed the road, a little

white dog running like a fleck of light about her. The woman with the scarlet sunshade came over the road, a lilt in her walk, a little shadow attending her. Ursula watched spell-bound. The woman with the scarlet sunshade and the flickering terrier was gone—and whither? Whither? In what world of reality was the woman in the pink dress walking? To what warehouse of dead unreality was she herself confined” (R; 404)? Notice how Lawrence has repeated the image of the scarlet sunshade for emphasis; the little dog is like a ‘fleck of light’ dancing at her feet; the contrast of light and shadow in this scene is most effective. But her gloom continues as she reflects that:

What good was this place, this college? What good was Anglo-Saxon, when one only learned it in order to answer examination questions, in order that one should have a higher commercial value later on? She was sick of this long service at the inner commercial shrine. Yet what else was there? Was life all this, and only this? Everywhere, everything was debased to the same service. Everything went to produce vulgar things, to encumber material life.

(ibid.)

But not every subject in school causes her such depression, for Botany was “one study that lived for her. She had entered into the life of the plants. She was fascinated by the strange laws of the vegetable world. She had here a glimpse of something working entirely apart from the purpose of the human world” (ibid.). Her love of nature and her love of Botany are consonant aspects of Lawrence’s characterization of her and in fact reflect Lawrence’s own preferences. Like many of his other creations, Ursula represents values and beliefs that Lawrence himself held to be true and important. Sometimes, however, he tends to belabor his point, as he does here about the tawdriness of the education system. Ursula’s disappointment is like that of a lover who has become disillusioned in the beloved: “College was barren, cheap, a temple converted to the most vulgar, petty commerce. Had she not come to hear the echo of learning pulsing back to the source of the mystery?—The source of mystery! And really, the professors in their gowns offered commercial commodity that could be turned to good account in the examination room; ready-made stuff, too, and not really worth the money it was intended to fetch;—which they all knew” (ibid.).

So Ursula only feels the ‘mystery’ of education in her Botany studies; all else is an exercise in falsity—only the natural world is real to her—“she felt she was degrading herself in a kind of trade of sham gewgaws” (ibid.). It is inevitable that she should compare her time in college with her time as a teacher at St Philips—and college takes second place—for even “Brinsley Street and Mr Harby seemed real in comparison. Her violent hatred of the Ilkeston school was

nothing compared with the sterile degradation of college” (ibid.).

As her last year at college approaches, she ‘had the ash of disillusion gritting under her teeth’ (ibid.), she begins to detect a pattern in her experience of education, and perhaps a more generalized understanding of all experience involving new beginnings and the perhaps inevitable disappointment of expectations:

Always the shining doorway ahead: and then, upon approach, always the shining doorway was a gate into another ugly yard, dirty and active and dead. Always the crest of the hill gleaming ahead under heaven: and then, from the top of the hill, only another sordid valley full of amorphous, squalid activity. No matter! Every hill-top was a little different, every valley was somehow new.

(ibid.)

Man’s perception of himself in modern times has become an ever-shrinking circle of consciousness, limited as it is to what is safe, known and readily understood; Lawrence has said, “We have become too fixedly conscious. We have limited our consciousness, tethered it to a few great ideas, like a goat to a post” (R; 629). Man’s mind has become restrictive, he has forgotten the importance of intuitive experience, of what lies beyond the mind. Ursula’s consciousness is in the process of transcending this limited mentality. Lawrence describes it thus:

This world in which she lived was like a circle lighted by a lamp. This lighted area, lit up by man’s completest consciousness, she thought was all the world: that here all was disclosed for ever. Yet all the time, within the darkness, she had been aware of points of light, like the eyes of wild beasts, gleaming, penetrating, vanishing. And her soul had acknowledged in a great heave of terror, only the outer darkness. The inner circle of light in which she lived and moved, wherein the trains rushed and the factories ground out their machine-produce and the plants and animals worked for the light of science and knowledge, suddenly it seemed like the area under an arc lamp, wherein the moths and children played in the security of blinding light, not even knowing there was any darkness, because they stayed in the light.

But she could see the glimmer of dark movement just out of range, she saw the eyes of the wild beast gleaming from the darkness, watching the vanity of the camp fire and the sleepers; she felt the strange, foolish vanity of the camp which said “Beyond our light and our order there is nothing,” turning their faces always inward towards the sinking fire of illuminating consciousness, which comprised sun and stars, and the Creator, and the System of Righteousness, ignoring always the vast darkness that

wheeled round about, with half-revealed shapes lurking at the edge.

(R; 405-06)

Man's pride in his own consciousness blinds him to the greater realities around him—and other alternate consciousnesses. Lawrence, in the next passage, where the language and phrasing become somewhat biblical, seems to be talking about himself—his own role or mission as a prophet of what will be, as a critic of what is and as a memorialist of what has been:

Yea, and no man dared even throw a firebrand into the darkness. For if he did, he was jeered to death by the others, who cried, "Fool, anti-social knave, why would you disturb us with bogeys? There *is* no darkness. We move and live and have our being within the light, and unto us is given the eternal light of knowledge. Fool and knave, how dare you belittle us with the darkness?"

(R; 406)

The final segment of this pivotal passage becomes prophetic in cast; it might almost be mistaken for a passage from the Book of Revelation:

Nevertheless the darkness wheeled round about, with grey shadow-shapes of wild beasts, and also with dark shadow-shapes of the angels, whom the light fenced out, as it fenced out the more familiar beasts of darkness. And some, having for a moment seen the darkness, saw it bristling with the tufts of hyena and wolf; and some, having given up their vanity of the light, having died in their own conceit, saw the gleam in the eyes of the wolf and the hyena, that it was the flash of the sword of angels, flashing at the door to come in, that the angels in the darkness were lordly and terrible and not to be denied, like the flash of fangs.

(R; 406)

Those, perhaps like Lawrence, who have 'given up their vanity of the light, having died in their own conceit' see clearly and more deeply than those who restrict themselves to the light through fear or ignorance. It appears Lawrence believes that only through the process of looking outside the light, to the edges of consciousness, can man hope to transcend or overcome the fear of the unknown that is the inheritance of every human soul. The circle of light represents the world that science can explain, but Ursula senses that there is another context in which she lives—

one that comprises her emotional needs, fears and beliefs. John Worthen has said:

Lawrence is symbolizing the classic dilemma of early twentieth century materialist man, learning from his scientific education to believe in the 'eternal light of knowledge' and the 'fire of illuminating consciousness' but also finding the scientifically explained and ordered universe utterly inadequate in its understanding of man's emotional needs and beliefs, his fears and particularly his religious experience.

(CB; Vol. 1; 181-182)

A scene related to the image of the circle of light just cited is to be found in a succeeding passage where Ursula is in the Botany lab; she recalls a question Dr. Frankstone, a physics professor (who represents materialism), had put to her, "I don't see why we should attribute some special mystery to life—do you?" She thinks of this as she studies a slide under her microscope: 'she focussed the light on her field, and saw the plant-animal lying shadowy in a boundless light' (R; 408). This passage continues using Lawrence's philosophic reflections placed in the context of Ursula observing a life form under the lens of her microscope. Ursula reflects that her being must be more than the sum of its physical processes, for 'electricity has no soul, light and heat had no soul' (ibid.). Life must be more than this:

She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw it move—she saw the bright mist of its ciliary activity, she saw the gleam of its nucleus, as it slid across the plane of light. What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified?

(ibid.)

She decides that its purpose is to 'be itself':

But what self? Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the micro-scope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity.

The symbol of light, representing understanding or consciousness, has been appropriated by Lawrence and given a different meaning, but one that is limited and restrictive; he sees that mental consciousness is only one aspect of man's nature: and that in modern man the soul or spirit has been repressed or neglected while the mind has been exalted.

The nature and growth of consciousness is one of Lawrence's central concerns in most of his writings and the character of Ursula in the *Rainbow* is no exception. Of course, her mind, her soul and her unconscious develop in many other ways throughout the novel and she is transformed by many influences, but her consciousness follows a steady course of expansion as the novel progresses. Brown has commented on Lawrence's view of the mind and its relation to unconscious and the soul:

The proper function of the mind, then, is to register the more primary consciousness, to translate its promptings into acts and language as directly as possible, rather than, as with the modern world, to attempt to set itself up as the only center of knowing and the personality, to direct and control. This process of translation of the unconscious into consciousness is necessary to the progress of life, the progress of the soul toward its full incarnation.

The idea many people have that Lawrence sees the conscious mind as negative or distorting is perhaps misunderstood: the mind is a quite necessary part of the total being of man. The mind, "man's consciousness, that is, his mind, his knowledge, is his greater manifestation of individuality. With his consciousness he can perceive and know that which is not himself. The further he goes, the more extended his consciousness, the more he realizes the things that are not himself. Everything he perceives, everything he knows, everything he feels, is something extraneous to him...." (P; 431-32). Ursula evolves in this way, by extending and then transcending what she experiences in a constantly widening circle of consciousness. Her experiences at St Philip's School and at college are steps in this process, both experiences are necessary to her evolution as a believable character; it is likely that Lawrence was speaking from experience (he was after all a teacher for a time) when he described Ursula's educational experiences. His views on education, on the education then offered in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at least, may appear negative at first but in his view, this negativity is necessary to the development of any consciousness.

Ursula enters each new experience with images of how it will be, with idealistic expectations for the best; she is inevitably frustrated and disillusioned by the realities she finds, grows in consciousness and understanding through her experiences and conflict and then transcends them. This is what education should do.

As already mentioned, Lawrence was for a time a teacher. One head teacher commented on his work by saying that Lawrence showed great promise as a teacher and that he was ‘exceptionally efficient’ in his job (CB; Vol. 1; 118). But he saw teaching as a primarily negative experience. However, in a letter to a friend, near the end of his life he wrote, “I had better talk to the young and try to make a bit of a new thing with them, and not bother much about my own personal life. Perhaps now I should *submit*, and be a teacher. I have fought so against it” (Letters; vii; 616). It is a shame that he came to this realization only when time was running out for him, but he taught the world how to value life as a process of personal being and becoming.

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