



A Few Epiphanic Moments of Ursula Brangwen in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* - A Study

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ABSTRACT

*Northrop Frye is of the opinion that lyric is the outcome of the epiphanic revelation, while drama has its roots in ritualistic performance. The dramatic form of the point of epiphany emerges when there is a separation of the divine and the demonic. The epiphanic form of scriptural drama depicts the triumph of a divine redeemer over demonic resistance. Epiphany is a Greek word meaning manifestation, appearance, or showing forth. An "epiphanic moment" re-orient, re-orders or transforms the view from one way of looking at the world to another. These moments give way to the unexpected and surprising moments. They are the moments of illumination that impose unified meaning by generating integrated narratives of explanation. These explanations serve as the foundation for future decisions. Thus, epiphanies are moments of revelations and decisions. It is a unique experience of moving away from the ordinary plane of existence to an elevated state. This paper explores such visions and revelations experienced by Ursula in the novel *The Rainbow* by D.H. Lawrence.*

KEYWORDS : epiphany, revelation, unique experience, moments of illumination and vision

Northrop Frye is of the opinion that lyric is the outcome of the epiphanic revelation, while drama has its roots in ritualistic performance. The dramatic form of the point of epiphany emerges when there is a separation of the divine and the demonic. The epiphanic form of scriptural drama depicts the triumph of a divine redeemer over demonic resistance. One important aspect in poetic symbolism is the point of epiphany at which an apocalyptic world and the cyclic order of nature is presented simultaneously. Its most common settings are the mountain-tops, the island, the tower, the light house and the ladder or staircase. There are several mountain-top epiphanies in the Bible. Epiphanic moments are represented by the pinnacle of the temple and the top of the wheel of fortune. The demonic epiphany gives a glimpse of the undisplaced demonic contexts, and sometimes the point of epiphany is presented in erotic terms as a place of sexual fulfillment, where there is no apocalyptic vision but simply arriving at the summit of experience in nature. Frye also terms epiphany as a "... a discontinuous but rightly ordered series of significant moments of apprehension or vision" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 326). If we give religious connotation, the word epiphany stands for a Christian holiday on January 6th celebrating the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus.

Epiphany is a Greek word meaning manifestation, appearance, or showing forth. An "epiphanic moment" re-orient, re-orders or transforms the view from one way of looking at the world to another. These moments give way to the unexpected and surprising moments. They are the moments of illumination that impose unified meaning by generating integrated narratives of explanation. These explanations serve as the foundation for future decisions. Thus, epiphanies are moments of revelations and decisions. It is a unique experience of moving away from the ordinary plane of existence to an elevated state. This paper explores such visions and revelations in the novel *The Rainbow* by D.H. Lawrence. According to Lawrence, every individual consists of distinct selves, the self of ordinary social and familial experience involved in daily events and aiming at limited goals, and the self of essential being involved in mysterious transactions with the living universe and aiming at a goal unknown. Hence a wholesome state of being must refer to the dual fulfillment of the two selves. This dual fulfillment must take place as a single integrated experience of life. This can be achieved by a mindless union with organic creation and by the capacity for a higher form of living. The wholeness of being exists only when these two values are brought together in a single organized experience of life.

The Rainbow discusses at length how an individual can find fulfillment through marriage. It traces how such fulfillments have happened through successive generations and the impact of modern civilization on human sensibility. In the novel, the three generations of the Brangwen family struggle successively to find a balanced relationship in which their strong instinctive sense of oneness with the natural world is har-

monized with the conscious intelligence and mechanical sophistication which are the marks of industrialized society. A tentative resolution is achieved in the first generation when Tom and Lydia meet like a rainbow for their child Anna "... to play in the space beneath, between" (102). Anna and Will of second generation lead a life which is devoid of conscious intimacy, tenderness, love and mutual understanding. Anna's pursuit of experience and Will's common place expectations always keep them apart. In the succeeding generation, the struggle intensifies culminating in the complete collapse of the relationship between Ursula and Skrebensky. In the earlier generations, men have enjoyed the contentment of blood-intimacy while women have been aspiring for the higher being.

Ursula is an active passionate girl endowed with inquisitive nature. She wishes to move out of the intricately woven life and enter into the real practical world. She wants to groom into a different personality untouched by normalcy and artificialities of life. "How to act, that was the question? Whither to go, how to become oneself, one was merely a half-stated question. How to become oneself, how to know the question and the answer of oneself, when one was merely an un-fixed something-nothing, blowing about like the winds of heaven, undefined, unstated" (292). The intuition to probe into facets of life makes her ponder over the daily activities and the eternal truth. It is at this point she gets fascinated towards Anton Skrebensky, an engineer in the army. She experiences the first impulse of love and reels in a happy apocalyptic world in his nearness "as if his being were urging her to something" (304).

The physical consummation of their love takes place when Skrebensky visits Marsh Farm on Fred Brangwen's wedding. Their love culminates into a passionate union under the moon lit sky. The moonlight kindles in her a unique sensation. With her soul drenched in moonlight, she yearns to have more communions with the moon. The moon exudes an inspiring and profound influence on her being. Lawrence's picturesque description makes the readers feel the intensity of moon and Ursula's inclination towards it. Through her moon-consummation, she links herself with the Infinite.

She turned, and saw a great white moon looking at her over the hill. And her breast opened to it, she was cleaved like a transparent jewel to its light. She stood filled with the full moon, offering herself. Her two breasts opened to make way for it, her body opened wide like a quivering anemone, a soft, dilated invitation touched by the moon. She wanted the moon to fill into her, she wanted more, more communion with the moon, consummation. (327)

At the moment of mystic ecstasy, she overpowers Skrebensky by fierce love-making. The feminine power triumphs over his distinct

masculinity reducing him to a nullified soul. It is a defining moment for her but she has destroyed the core of his emotions. "And her soul crystallised with triumph, and his soul was dissolved with agony and annihilation. So she held him there, the victim, consumed, annihilated. She had triumphed: he was not any more" (330). She is frightened at her gleaming power and becomes aware of the awful potential inherent in her self. She feels the radiance of the bright moon possessing her. In a fit of intoxication she dreams to be one with the moon. "... she stretched up her arms, hard, hard, in bliss, agony, offering herself to the blond, debonair presence of the night" (331).

Ursula enjoys the bliss of contentment. She undergoes a total transformation in her outlook and spirit. The moon provides a propulsive force to handle the various tests and challenges in life by transmuting emotions and expanding Ursula's perceptions. Her favourite, the book of Genesis no longer inspires and moves her. She is bored by the concept of multiplying and replenishing. She starts to consider it merely "a vulgar and stock-raising sort of business" (332). At that time Ursula remembers the flood that drowned the entire world. She feels excited to think of the naiads in Asia minor dwelling at the mouth of the streams announcing the news of Noah's flood to their sisters. Ursula wishes to be a nymph so that she can laugh through the window of the ark and flick drops of flood at Noah and his companions who consider themselves as the only survivors. Lawrence has introduced Noah and the flood to emphasize the universal concept of procreating future generation. In this epiphany, Lawrence states the transformation of individual self to universal being. Nature influences Ursula, and she feels herself to be a universal being by the effect of nature. It kindles her yearning for "the unrisen dawn" (442). She cannot fathom the real meaning behind the existence when she examines a unicellular shadow in the Botany laboratory. An illumination fills her mind making her understand that self-assertion and self-preservation are the keys to prove one's identity. "It was a consummation, a being infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity" (450).

Even in the presence of Skrebensky, she does not feel one with him. She finds a great indifference in his approach. The old kinship has been lost and he seems to belong to a different world, an alien to her being. She starts to recognize that she is not mere Ursula Brangwen but a representative of the woman in the universe. She wants to assert her individuality. But her demeanour annoys Skrebensky and severs their relationship. When Ursula discovers that she bears a child, she understands the life's plain truth of existence. She makes up her mind to lead a simple, complete life to attain the fantastic freedom and fulfillment. At this juncture, she undergoes a transformation which makes her to approach and analyze life critically and spiritually. She feels a great heaviness oppressing her. The fluctuations and agitations in her mind make her go in search of wholeness. During her departure for Willey Green, through the woods, she encounters a pack of snarling and fuming stallion which she wishes to avoid. Her tension, mental and emotional agitations come to the fore in her meeting with the steed. It is a life turning experience for Ursula. She has to fight against all vacillations and veer her way back to stability and security. Repeatedly, the horses confront her. The horses symbolize sensuality and physicality in contrast to her blank mental state.

She went on, drawing near. She was aware of the great flash of hoods, a bluish, iridescent flash surrounding a hollow of darkness. Large, large seemed the bluish, incandescent flash of the hoof-iron, large as a halo of lightning round the knotted darkness of the flanks. Like circles of lightning came the flash of hoofs from out of the powerful flanks. (497)

The movement of the horses, their prowess and the way in which they overpower Ursula make her go in search of wholeness and entirety. The horses are beautiful and majestic creatures associated with freedom and power. They are linked with our sexual, creative and spiritual energy. The horses are of divine origin and a symbol of greatness, valor and virility. The Horse is seen as representative of endurance, a friend, independence, mobility, stamina, strength,

and travel. The head of the horse is particularly sacred and potent. Among other things, it represents knowledge (*jnana*). Ursula's experience with the horses is a significant epiphanic moment in her life and elevates her to a true meaningful life. It complies with the saying that the appearance of horses in dreams is an outcome of the secret yearning to express the spontaneous self.

Ursula's heart-throbbing encounter with the stampeding horses may be hallucination or reality. Ursula is instilled with the spirit to confront the world with nerve and confidence. The image of horses, as two sides of the coin is a reminder of the sinister destructive power of the dark forces of life as well as of their creative potentiality. In her walk in the forest she is silent within and she engages with another kind of energy, that of life itself. She moves into the life that is waiting for her. She is endowed with positive energies of inspiration, expansion and liberation. To each new experience she brings the whole of herself.

As she sat there, spent, time and the flux of change passed away from her, she lay as if unconscious upon the bed of the stream, like a stone, unconscious, unchanging, unchangeable, whilst everything rolled by in transience, leaving her there, a stone at rest on the bed of the stream, inalterable and passive, sunk to the bottom of all change. (499)

Ursula learns to ride the power exist in her which will make her nurture and shine and drives her into the life that is waiting for her.

The group of horses renders her the knowledge about the hard realities of life. She has understood the bottom of all things. She breaks herself from unreality. It makes her breathe the new air of new world. The peace she got was deep and enriching. She threw away all her past bitterness and was gradually absorbed into growth. The awareness that dawn on her makes her traverse an exciting path of progress throughout her life and avoid unproductive obstacles and gain a measure of liberation from the enslaving situation. When she turns back home she feels that there is something else waiting for her. The rainbow in the novel *The Rainbow* stands for future peace and prosperity in the midst of industrialization. Ursula's encounter with the romping horses makes her germinate into a new being which gathers her potential to march ahead with indomitable fervour to meet the challenges in the existing material world. Ursula having freed herself of her struggle with Skrebensky feels free not only of the disturbing past but also of the false ties that she has tentatively accepted in its place. Ursula expresses triumph over her experience and breaks through all hindrances and particularly, the circle of the wedding ring.

Ursula begins to perceive a different world nurturing a mystical hope and joy. She must go in search of the personal self beyond the finite self. Growth and experience turn out to be the very motive of her life. Shredding away from the bond, she is ready for her rainbow, because she is free from the perpetuity of experience which has victimized her so long. There is no taking the past away as only the full commitment to the circles of experience allows one to escape them. The new woman emerges out of her is too strong, and becomes conscious of the long-sleeping hidden powers that direct her spirit to counterforce all the encircling hindrances. Mark Spilka in one of his critical essays states:

Dostoevsky called the Russians the "god-bearing" people, those who carry the secret of life within them and preserve it for that remote apocalypse when all the world will be fit to receive it. At the conclusion of *The Rainbow* Ursula is the single god-bearing person left in the world. It is a tribute to the prodigious optimism and persuasiveness of Lawrence's vision that the secret she holds seems worth the keeping until the world is fit to receive it. (D.H.Lawrence: *A Collection of Critical Essays* 49)

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