

## *The Rainbow*, as a Female Bildungsroman

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### Abstract

It is argued in this paper that *The Rainbow*, about three generations of the Brangwen family, is a female Bildungsroman, which focuses on the growth and initiation experiences of three main female characters—Lydia, Anna and Ursula. Moreover, the initiation is completed by three generations altogether. According to Mordecai Marcus(1969), there are three categories of initiation: tentative initiation experience, represented by the first generation of Brangwen family—Lydia; uncompleted initiation experience, the same case with the second generation—Anna; decisive initiation experience, whose spokesperson is the third generation—Ursula. *The Rainbow*, a book about the family history of the Brangwens, concerns the initiation experiences of three female characters. Based on such considerations, this paper, by means of textual analysis and comparative study, will prove that *The Rainbow* is a female Bildungsroman presenting the initiation experiences of three female generations of the Brangwen family, and the initiation experience of each female character is varied but closely related, which shows the growth is a complicated and gradual process.

**Key words:** *The Rainbow*; Female bildungsroman; Ursula; Self-fulfillment

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### INTRODUCTION

The publication of *The Rainbow* is a turning point for Lawrence's writing career. Lawrence once wrote to one of his friends: "Now I am writing a totally different novel" (Wang, 2009, p.1). "I am rather proud of it now" (Edward, 1990, p.1). Since its publication, the critical responses to the novel *The Rainbow* are somewhat mixed. Some critics think the novel is nothing less than a failure, which brings Lawrence great shame and ruins his reputation. Holderness argues that the novel "is a radical novel of criticism and protest against the value of Lawrence's contemporary society" (Holderness, 1992, p.52). While others think it is, alongside with *Women in Love*, one of his greatest novels. Leavis, the most influential critic in England in the 1950s and 1960s, thinks *The Rainbow* is "a study of contemporary civilization" (Leavis, 1995, p.120). He also claims: "*The Rainbow* shows us the transmission of the spiritual heritage in an actual society, and shows it in relation to the general development of civilization" (Leavis, 1995, p.173).

Edward Engelberg (1963) defines *The Rainbow* as a modern Bildungsroman in his essay "*Escape from the Circles of Experience: D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow as a Bildungsroman*" because of Ursula's experience. He puts forward the idea that *The Rainbow* can be viewed as a modern Bildungsroman, but he just focuses on Ursula's psychological experience and did not elaborate systematically and in details, which leaves enough room for my research.

To sum up, Bildungsroman is a kind of literary genre to describe the protagonist's growth and developing experience. It is about moral and psychological growing process of a person or several persons from innocence to maturity as well as self-discovery. In the end, the protagonist finds a suitable place in the society and his or her initiation experience inspires readers to achieve their own epiphany. The protagonist's initiation experience is a gradual process.

The female Bildungsroman is about female protagonist's growth and developing experience, which emphasizes the struggles of female protagonists for their individuality and integration against fragmentation. The male Bildungsroman and its female counterpart are bound to differ in some respects. The main differences are caused by gender. It is female's status in the patriarchal society that determines that female protagonists will meet more difficulties and challenges in their initiation process from innocence to maturity.

## 1. LYDIA: A TENTATIVE INITIATION EXPERIENCE

Lydia, the first generation of the Brangwen family, is the typical example of tentative initiation experience; she has made some progress in self-discovery, but her exploration for self-recognition and self-consciousness halts on the threshold of maturity, and she hasn't eventually achieved the goal of self-discovery. However, her tentative initiation experience has provided valuable reference for the growth of following generations.

Traditionally, initiation story mainly focuses on only one or central protagonist, revealing his or her initiation experience. In *The Rainbow* by D. H. Lawrence, they are three initiation protagonists superficially, however, they can be integrated into an initiation experience. The protagonists Lydia and Anna serve as a pretext for Ursula, the central protagonist. Their pursuit is the same, Ursula has achieved the final goals of self-discovery and initiation which her forerunners fail to. In this way, the initiation experiences of the first and second generations of Brangwen family are just the variations of Ursula's initiation experience. In addition, they lay foundation for Ursula's growth.

Lydia is a daughter of a Polish landowner and she is widowed when she marries Tom Brangwen. Though she is thirty-four years old at that time, she can also be viewed as initiation protagonist, for she does not achieve the goal of maturity and self-discovery. As for the age limitation of protagonists in Bildungsroman, Professor Rui (2004) mentions "the age of initiation protagonists is mainly from thirteen to twenty or so, while there is no absolute restriction. Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is universally viewed as a Bildungsroman, in which the initiation protagonist is more than thirty years old. The initiation protagonists are defined as the youth by most experts, while the implication of word "youth" is obscure." (Rui, 2004, p.22).

Actually, the initiation experience for Lydia is a process of discovering herself and regaining her own identity. At the very beginning, when Lydia marries Lensky—a young doctor who is superior to her both intellectually and economically, she is completely conquered by Lensky and loses herself totally. "Lydia, as if drugged, followed him like a shadow, serving, echoing"

(Lawrence, 1995, p.47). She admires him so much even feels privileged to be loved by him, "became with him a patriot and an emancipee" (p.47).

In this way, Lydia devotes herself heartedly to Lensky's career and never considers what she really wants and needs. Like many traditional women at that time, Lydia regards herself trivial and inferior, and is totally unaware of her female self. Moreover, the couple indulge themselves totally into Polish revolution and neglect their own children. Due to their negligence, two children die of diphtheria. Her husband is very depressed at that time. However, "the war went on, and soon he was back at his work." (p.47) The blind and fervent patriotism makes Lensky a working machine and lack humanity.

Lensky views Lydia only a shadow, an echo, a slave, an appendix to him. His "over-protection" on Lydia is also an indication of his selfish man-chauvinism. He cares her and guards her not because he respects and loves her but he wants to boast of his chivalry. In fact, this kind of protection is another form of control and domination.

In addition, Lensky regards Lydia as a tool and enjoys his superiority fully. In this way, Lydia has no socioeconomic status and is in a subjugated as well as dependent position in the family. Moreover, the death of her two children poses a heavy blow on her.

At that time, Lydia is in a precarious position, which she totally loses support in her life. Situation is worse when they are forced to go to London. However, London is an essential place for Lydia's growth and self-discovery, where Lydia has got the awareness of being independent, and has embarked on the journey of seeking self-discovery. In London, Lensky is dying, but he is still unaware of his unjust treatment and oppression over Lydia, he boasts himself of being a great protector of his weak wife and child. He even thinks that Lydia and their child would die without his protection. After his death, accustomed to living as an appendix of her husband, Lydia feels at a loss at first. Desperate and helpless, she could not find the way out and is confused. "She could neither wake nor sleep. As if crushed between the past and the future, like a flower that comes above-ground to find a great stone lying above it, she was helpless" (p.49). However, Lydia survives and starts to be aware of her female self. It is painful for her to escape from the male-dominated society and wake for the suppressed female self. The death of Lensky is a turning point for her process of growth. It is a relief for her, "she was impassive and indifferent. Yet she was outside the enclosure of darkness" (p.49). It is impossible for a widowed woman at that time to achieve the goal of self-emancipation, self-consciousness as well as self-fulfillment totally, but it is a great attempt to start a journey of seeking her female self. Lydia's first marriage with Lensky, though tragic itself, provides her a broader scope and an opportunity to gradually seek her female self during her second marriage with Tom Brangwen.

In the patriarchal society, the majority of women have long been denied the access to education and social activities, so they are inferior to men both spiritually and economically. "Marriage is the traditional and maybe the only way for women to enhance their economic and social status. Thus a woman tends to choose, or rather have not much choice but to marry a husband who is superior to her either spiritually or economically. This inevitably leads to a discrepancy in socioeconomic status and in intelligence between the husband and wife, which usually results in the subjugated and dependent position of woman in the family. So apart from the social suppression, women are suppressed more directly by their husbands" (Zhang, 2002, p.7). This is the same case with Lydia, her fate is closely related to marriage. She firstly married Lensky, who is superior to her economically and spiritually and a typical result of patriarchal society. She is completely conquered by his confidence, gravity and authority. Therefore, during the company with him, she has no her female self and acts as an appendix even a surgical appliance for her husband. While in her second marriage she chooses Tom Brangwen, who is a farmer and seems to be inferior and less sophisticated than Lydia for she comes from a better family and once worked for patriotic revolution. In spite of Tom's inferiority, Lydia accepts his proposal and marries him at last. Meanwhile, the second marriage starts her journey of self-discovery and eventually she has achieved tentative initiation growth.

On the way to Cossethay, Tom meets Lydia for the first time. Then he falls in love with her at first sight, "that's her," he said involuntarily" (Lawrence, 1995, p.32). When Lydia comes to Tom's house to borrow butter, she shows herself as quite an untraditional woman, she enters soon after Tom opens the door, and asks straightly: "Can you give me a pound of butter?" (p.35). In this way, her straightforwardness, activeness and also unconventionality give Tom a fresh vigor and contribute to proposing to her. Aroused by his love, Lydia becomes aware of her natural desire for self-fulfillment, and begins her journey of pursuing love actively. In her relationship with Tom, she pursues the whole being, the combination of body and soul. At first, she takes initiative in sexual contacts. And more than that, she makes efforts to solve conflicts between Tom and her. After blaming Tom for paying no attention to her feelings, she quickly tries to make peace: "Come here ... my love ... my dear, and she put her arms round him as he stood before her, round his thighs, pressing him against her breast" (p.42).

In the relationship with Tom, Lydia takes her own responsibility and contributes to building up and maintaining a relatively harmonious relationship between her and Tom. It is impossible and hard to imagine for a woman in the Victorian time to pursue sexuality actively. What's more, Lydia is even aware of her right to refuse Tom's demand of sexuality. She refuses to serve as a sexual object to satisfy man's desire of sexuality. She lives for herself! Tom is just a part of her life and her self-fulfillment.

Lydia has made great progress from an appendix to relatively independent female self without being subjugated by Tom's male self. It seems that Tom and Lydia enjoy a harmonious marriage and live in equilibrium contentedly.

However, their relationship is just based on marriage, which is simple and natural. Moreover, their marriage is due to sexual passion and instinctual integrity. When Tom meets Lydia at the first time, he says involuntarily, "that's her", which shows a natural instinct in him and his attitude towards this love affair. Actually, their relationship is harmonious superficially, the eternal strangeness between them makes it impossible.

Before they get married, Tom is from a farmer family, while Lydia is from a Polish landowner family and the ex-wife of patriot revolutionary, and they enjoy very different cultural backgrounds. In addition, lacking communication and mutual understanding, they can't reach the inner heart of each other. Owing to different age, backgrounds, experiences and nationalities, they can't communicate effectively in the first two years of marriage. Lydia is not satisfied with this kind of situation, and hopes that Tom can make some progress in knowledge in order to communicate and combine together spiritually. However, Tom fails to do so. The sense of strangeness baffles them to approach the spiritual world of each other. Consequently, Lydia is lost in her loneliness and darkness while Tom is disappointed for not being able to enter Lydia's inner world. In the end, they give up to approach the inner world of each other though they love each other. In this way, Lydia is just bodily independent, while she does not get the spiritual self-fulfillment. She ceases in the threshold of spiritual growth, which can be defined as tentative initiation experience.

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## 2. ANNA: AN UNCOMPLETED INITIATION EXPERIENCE

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According to different categories of Bildungsroman by Marcus, Anna, the second generation of Brangwen family, can be viewed to achieve the uncompleted initiation, for she crosses the threshold of maturity and to some extent has made some progress in growth and self-discovery. What's more, Anna's initiation experience can be served as another stage and variation of Ursula's initiation.

Anna, the second generation of Brangwen family, is the daughter of Lensky and Lydia. Because of Lensky's fanatical involvement in patriotic revolution, they live in extreme poverty and lead an unstable life. When she is only one year old, her father dies in poverty and desperation. The absence of paternal love makes Anna more sensitive and more dependent on her mother, and meanwhile she is ready to protect her mother at any time in her own way from the childhood.

Then Lydia and Anna live in the vicarage. After Lydia marries Tom, Anna lives with her mother and step-father in the Marsh. Due to the absence of paternal love and her special identity in the Marsh, she excludes herself from getting in touch with others except her mother. Little by little, moved by Tom's sincerity as well as his love, she finds a sense of belonging in the new environment then has a happy and carefree life in the Marsh during her childhood. She shows a sense of independency and indifference which her peers don't enjoy.

When she grows into teens and goes to school in Nottingham, she forms her own judgment and does not follow others blindly. At first, she thinks all the girls at school are very ladylike; she is absorbed in being a young lady and can be in good terms with her classmates, while "she came to a speedy disillusion: they galled and maddened her, they were petty and mean" (p.80).

Then she insists to be her self and gives up going into company. "Because of the ill-at-ease feeling other people brought upon her ... She had a curious shrinking from commonplace people, and particular from the young lady of her day" (p.80).

What's more, she is not afraid of school authority and dares to show her dissatisfaction instead of accepting what she is told and following what she is asked.

Actually, it is the loose and free family environment that provides Anna with the room for self-independency and self-discovery.

When Anna is eighteen years old, she firstly meets her cousin Will Brangwen, a rather long, thin youth with a bright face and a curious self-possession. After contacting for several times, they fall in love with each other. During their love affairs, Anna does not withhold and suppress her feelings as the traditional women do, instead she pursues her love, even sexual fulfillment openly, which is more liberated than Lydia. She believes that women enjoy equal rights and privileges as men. In this way, her expressions and declarations of love are very direct and straightforward.

While Lydia thinks that it is men who kiss, and women just receive and appreciate, Anna would not just receive Will's kiss passively, she kisses Will. And unlike Lydia, who fears her desire for sex at first, Anna never hides her desire for sex. She actively engages herself in sex and enjoys it very much. (Zhang, 2002, p.15)

She is also decisive in her marriage, once determined; she marries Will quickly in spite of all the worries of her parents. Their early marital life is harmonious and they enjoy it delightfully. However, discrepancies appear soon and there are constant conflicts between them from then on. It seems that her marriage with Will Brangwen is a long-term war of control and anti-control, retaliation and anti-retaliation. They disagree on many aspects, Anna does not give in nor subordinate to the patriarchal society and follow Will's wills. Thus, during the process, she has gained some self-independence and self-discovery. On

one hand, Anna challenges man's authority in sexuality and would strip Will "naked in the daylight, and so gladly and perfectly," and "Will let her do as she liked with him, and shone with strange pleasure. She was to dispose of him as she would. He was translated with gladness to be in her hands. And down went his qualms, his maxims, his rules, his smaller beliefs, she scattered them like an expert skittle-player" (Lawrence, 1995, p.140).

One of the foundations of men's antipathy towards women and inhibition of women's sexual functions can be found in *The Genesis*, which accuses Eve of seducing Adam into committing sin. And "the feeling that women's sexual functions are impure is both world-wide and persistent. One sees evidence of it everywhere in literature, in myth, in primitive and civilized life." (Millet, 1970, p.47). As Kate pointed out, in the patriarchal society, the moral standards concerning sexuality for women are harsher and much higher than that of men's. Women's desires for sex are considered to be indecent, usually women are supposed to withhold the desires and be the sexual objects even sexual tools. Fooled into believing their inferior position in sexuality, women get used to withholding their sexual desire and totally lose their selves. However, Anna dares to strip Will and engages herself in sexuality actively. Her challenge of tradition lets her make great progress and eventually leads to sexual fulfillment. In addition to seeking fulfillment in sexuality, Anna does not follow religion blindly and confine her natural self into it. Anna is suspicious of the credibility of the religion and challenges the authority as well as sacredness of it, even bursts into laughter in the church. Such kind of laxness is unimaginable at that time, in which religion is regarded as the most sacred and plays an essential life in people's spiritual life. Anna's wild laughter in the church shows her pursuit of natural self and self-emancipation as an individual.

Moreover, she can't tolerate the hypocritical inhibition of humanity and despises the church for giving her no fulfillment of the soul. Anna not only pursues her spiritual self, but also criticizes Will's blind indulgence in religion.

In addition, Anna shows her resent for the religion directly and uncovers the hypocrisy of the gospels, which confine human being into its doctrines and reduce them into slaves of religion. Anna does not follow the religion blind-mindedly. Instead, she makes judgments by herself and does not subordinate her natural self to the doctrines of religion. Moreover, during the conflicts with Will, Anna finds out the roots of man's chauvinism in religion. It is Anna who speaks out the suspicion many women hold towards the male-supremacy theory, and exposes the hypocrisy of it. She scoffs at Will's sculpture of Adam and Eve, which Will is always proud of.

Her remarks and criticisms are like a bomb which not only uncovers men's unjust treatment on women but also shocks men into awareness of their hypocrisy. What's more, Anna also strives for her rights in the family



domination. After a short harmonious marriage, there are constant conflicts over family domination between Will and Anna. Will, ingrained in male chauvinist thoughts, thinks that man should be the center and pillar of the family, and other family members should obey his ideas even subjugate to his will. However, through constant efforts, Anna wins the domination over family affairs and becomes “a living proof of the inadequacy of the patriarchal genesis myth” (Daleski, 1987, p.103). Eventually, Will is forced to admit that Anna is everything to him; she is his life and his derivation. He depends on her. If she were taken away he would collapse as a house from which the pillar is removed.

In conclusion, Anna has achieved goals of sexual fulfillment, remaining her natural self in religion as well as family domination. To some extent, she has made some progress in self-discovery, however, as the birth of the first child, Anna indulges herself into the children-bearing, while ceases her strive for self-discovery.

In the novel *The Rainbow*, rainbow is a symbol of self-fulfillment, also a reward for protagonist’s initiation. In return, Anna just could see “a faint, gleaming horizon, a long way off, and a rainbow like an archway, a shadow-door with faintly coloured coping above it” (Lawrence, 1995, p.143), which also indicates Anna’s uncompleted initiation experience.

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### 3. URSULA: A DECISIVE INITIATION EXPERIENCE

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Ursula, the third generation of Brangwen family, is the focus of the novel *The Rainbow*. What’s more, she is the only one female protagonist who not only explores ways of self-discovery and self-fulfillment psychologically, but also takes actions to achieve the goal of growth, and to emancipate herself from almost everything that confines her natural self. In return, she has fulfilled the decisive initiation.

#### 3.1 Self-Consciousness From Childhood

Ursula, as the first child of Will Brangwen and Anna Lensky, lives a carefree life owing to the over-indulgence of Will. During this period, Will and Ursula are in good terms, even Ursula is psychologically closely attached to Will. However, soon she finds out she is too naïve and even her beloved father is undependable.

He reprimands her because the charwoman in the church “descended on him like a harpy” and he “can’t bear being spoken by that old woman” (Lawrence, 1995, p.156). Actually, Will doesn’t have the courage to turn on the charwoman when she attacks him, then he brings rage on Ursula instead. On another occasion, he reproaches Ursula for trampling on the potato field. What’s more, when Will teaches Ursula to swim, he lets Ursula ride on his back then jumps off the canal bridge down into the water and terrifies her by diving her in the deep water to meet his

curiosity and adventurous spirit. Moreover, he sends the swingboat sweeping through the air until Ursula feels sick and her face turns pale. Like many adults at that time, in the name of love and care for the child, Will pursues the privilege to dominate over Ursula. He neglects her natural self and shows little respect for Ursula’s self, which leaves her great trauma and sows rebellious spirit in her.

Gradually, she defends herself against the outside world. She cuts off her childish soul from memory, so that the pain and the insult should not be real. She asserts herself only. There is not anything in the world but her own self. So she learns to protect her soul and natural self from the malevolent outward society. Because of the experience during childhood, Ursula learns to separate her soul from memory and remain her natural self, which contributes greatly to her self-consciousness and decisive initiation experience.

When Ursula is young, she has also achieved the self-consciousness under the influence of her grandfather and grandmother. After her grandfather’s sudden death from flood when she is eight years old, she begins the exploration of self-consciousness and reflects on the life. Every day after school she comes to accompany her solitary grandmother and gets inspiration from her remarks.

Her grandmother’s experience and remarks pose a far-reaching influence on Ursula, leading her into a broader unknown world, which makes her not confine herself within the domestic affairs as most traditional women do at that time.

Facing with weird father, ignorant mother and turbulent siblings in the family, Ursula learns there is no one in this world she can depend on but herself. From grandfather’s death and grandmother’s tales and experience, she comes to believe that there is a broader unknown world waiting her to explore. Since then, she embarks on the brand-new journey of exploring self-consciousness.

#### 3.2 Self-Discovery From Religion

Though Ursula has achieved some self-consciousness, she can’t escape from the reality of the world. She has to face her weird father, ignorant and machine-like mother who indulges herself in children-bearing and domestic chores, and takes care of her turbulent siblings. Disappointed with the irritating reality, she turns to religion for help and hopes that she can achieve true meaning of life and happiness by depending on God. “To her, Jesus was beautifully remote, shining in the distance, like a white moon at sunset, a crescent moon beckoning as it follows the sun, out of ken” (p.194). When the priest speaks the “language of creation” in the church, she even dreams that she can be the wife of one of the Sons of God. However, Ursula reverts to “the non-literal application of the scriptures” (p.195) and does not follow the Gospel blindly. Every time before she accepts the doctrines, she would question their credibility and experiment in person. Once she hears the saying, “it is easier for a camel to go

through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into heaven” (p.195). She also questions its credibility and compares the situation with her family, applying the saying to her father. She even imagines that her father gives away all property to the laborers and the poor in order to become poor to get into the heaven after death. However, she feels dreadful about being poor.

Moreover, after argument with her sister Theresa, Theresa slaps her in the face. Bearing the Christian doctrine of being humble in mind, Ursula does not fight back, being silent instead. However, Theresa regards such kind of behavior as defiance and slaps her again. Suddenly, Ursula comes to realize the unreliability and absurdity of Christian doctrines and beats Theresa up heavily.

By experimenting what said in the Bible personally several times, Ursula eventually discovers the incredibility and hypocrisy of the religion, gives up the illusion for religion as well. What’s more, she develops a skeptical spirit toward conventional values and ideologies. From then on, she depends on her own experience and instinctive comprehension to judge affairs in the world as well as concludes that what she can’t experience is not true. Ursula does not have faith in the tenets of the Bible blindly, but forms her own judgments over worldly affairs instead.

### 3.3 Self-Realization From First Love

As Ursula passes girlhood towards womanhood, she feels a sense of self-responsibility and becomes aware of herself. She is eager to be her own self. She wants to be “Out of the nothingness and the undifferentiated mass, to make something of herself!” (p.198). So she tries to seek self-realization through love and dreams that one day she can marry one of the God’s sons who can bring her love, happiness as well as self-fulfillment. At the age of sixteen, Ursula meets Anton Skrebensky, a young soldier with very clear grayish eyes. At first sight, “something in his self-possessed waiting moved her” (p.202), his directness and independence also attract her strongly. From Anton, Ursula can feel a strong sense of the outer world. “So Ursula thought him wonderful, he was so finely constituted, and so distinct, self-contained, self-supporting. This, she said to herself, was a gentleman; he had a nature like fate, the nature of an aristocrat” (p.203). Ursula regards Anton as the Son of God, and falls in love with him soon. Not satisfied with confining to domestic affairs and submissive role in the society, to some extent, Ursula views Anton Skrebensky and romance with him as a gate to the external world and she is eager to enter that world through him.

At first, when together with Anton, Ursula behaves like a traditional woman. To please her lover, she puts great emphasis on her appearance.

However, she would like to be herself, deposits the hope of self-realization on love, and depends on man to realize her value as an independent woman. During the romance with Anton, she is not satisfied with confining

herself to romantic emotion; instead she gradually redefines her pursuit of spiritual fulfillment in the society and intends to develop herself into a self-responsible modern woman. Therefore, Ursula begins to discuss social affairs with Anton. Then Ursula finds out there is no natural self in Anton at all. He has neither aspiration nor judgment, only stubbornly devotes himself to the empty good of the nation, which actually represents the benefits of ruling class. His blind rationality and conformity to conventional political ideology make him a soulless instrument of society rather than a living human being. Even though Ursula is still in love with Anton, Anton fails to bring her happiness and fulfill the goal of self-realization as well as the value of being an independent woman in the society, Ursula eventually decides to part with him.

Actually, as the third generation of the Brangwen family, Ursula deposits more hopes and higher pursuit on the relationships between the two sexes than her former generations. In her mind, the ideal relationship is the harmonious unity of body and spirit. Moreover, such kind of relationship should be a gate to fulfill the value as an independent human being as well as to find one’s natural self. Therefore, in the experience of the relationship with Anton Skrebensky, on one hand, she falls in love with him and enjoys the sexual life bodily; on the other hand, she refuses to marry Anton because she can’t communicate with him spiritually. The romance with Anton fails to help Ursula achieve self-fulfillment as well as self-realization, so their relationship is over. However, in the process of pursuit for self-realization through the romance with Anton, Ursula’s social self once triumphed over her natural self for a time. She feels like behaving as the traditional women do at that time and accepting the submissive role in the male-dominated society. She would marry Anton, go to India with him, and live a simple and tranquil life as a traditional housewife. However, eventually she can’t bear the ignorance of her natural self, which makes her choking. So she obeys her natural self and insists on pursuing the harmonious unity of body and spirit in the relationship between two sexes. At last, their relationship ends up with Anton marries the daughter of Colonel, not Ursula. It seems like a tragedy superficially, however, Ursula is the winner, because she wins in the spiritual level, keeping the pursuit for self-independence and self-realization.

### 3.4 Self-Exploration in the Capitalist Society

The first generation of the Brangwen family Tom Brangwen stands for the last generation of agricultural civilization in capitalist society, the second generation Anna and Will live in a transitional period from agricultural civilization to industrial society. Until the third generation, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnesses great changes in the western world. The capitalist economy has developed rapidly since the Industrial Revolution. The development of economy

and society has greatly changed even destroyed the traditional ways of life. The gap between the poor and the rich has grown rapidly. In the industrialized society, people have become dehumanized and alienated. Consequently, their sense of morality has declined. The class contradictions have become sharper than ever before. In such circumstance, Ursula explores the truth, kindness and beauty in the capitalist society, avoiding being dehumanized and machine-like as Little Tom and Miss Inger do in the novel.

After Ursula attends her uncle Fred Brangwen's wedding ceremony, she has a walk with Anton, then reaches a wharf. There is an empty barge, painted with a red and yellow cabin hood. The environment there is too bad for people to live in.

The Ruth's who stand for the lowest classes in the society live there in poverty, with a newly-born baby girl. Though they belong to the lowest class, and the class contradictions at that time are sharp, Ursula is still very easy-going and kind, greeting them amiably and visiting their "house" without hesitation. She remains her natural self and the kindness without class superiority. Moreover, having known that the Ruth's newly-born baby girl haven't got name yet and the parents continue arguing over it and can't come to consensus, Ursula is willing to share her own name which stands for her identity with the baby girl from the lowest class. Even she is excited about it and gives her necklace which is the most valuable and she likes best to Ursula Ruth.

Comparatively speaking, her company Skrebensky seems to be too selfish even with strong class superiority. When they reach the wharf, because of the dirty and messy environment, he is lingering to come in. Again, when Ursula decides to give little Ursula her necklace, he shows his disapproval and warns: "the stones and pearl are real; it is worth three or four pounds" (p.221). However, Ursula insists on her own decision and remains to be her natural self that contains many merits such as kindness, frankness and independence. What's more, she also appreciates Mr. Ruth's frankness very much. In her eyes, to be natural self, even being impudent, is better than being pretentious, and she tells Anton directly: "I loved his (Ruth's) impudence—it was so gentle underneath" (p.222).

Unlike traditional women at that time, Ursula does not confine herself to family and domestic affairs; hence she is more likely exposed in the evils of capitalist society. With the development of economy and industry, mining industry was blooming in British society. Many rich farmland was turned into collieries meanwhile capitalists have become money-orientated and many common people have become machine-like miners. In the capitalist society, the capitalists exploit the workers severely in order to make more money. Even the relationship between the employers and employees are just like the instrument

owners and instrument. Through Ursula's Uncle Tom, she gets to know the greediness, soullessness, indifference as well as numbness of human being in the capitalist society, which she disgusts most.

When Ursula is invited to her Uncle Tom's new colliery, "the place had the strange desolation of a ruin. Colliers hanging about in gangs and groups, or passing along the asphalt pavements heavily to work, seemed not like living people, but like specters" (p.240).

Ursula is also astonished by the loss of human nature of capitalists, colliers, even the wives of colliers. Their nature has been destroyed even they are dehumanized by the industrialization.

In such alienated and dehumanized society, Ursula is on her way of self-exploration and she succeeds in disposing the greediness and hypocrisy of the capitalist, hence remains her natural self and has achieved growth.

After the industrial revolution, British economy has experienced rapid development; Britain has turned into an industrialized country as well as the workshop of the world. In order to plunder the raw material, resources and to dominate the local people, British Empire has launched a series of wars to invade other countries. Through her lover Anton Skrebensky, a young soldier and also usually acting as the tool and machine of war and politics, Ursula gets to know the viciousness and cruelty of the war, showing her contempt and hatred towards war.

When Anton goes to the war with the Boers in South Africa, Ursula's hatred for war is becoming stronger and stronger. Though Ursula witnesses many evils of capitalist society, she remains her natural self and does not be alienated and dehumanized, which is obviously evident of her growth.

### **3.5 Self-Responsibility From the Relationship With Inger**

After Anton goes to war, her class-mistress Miss Inger appears in her life. Miss Inger is a rather beautiful woman of twenty-eight, she is independent as well as modern. "She was clever, and expert in what she said, accurate, quick, commanding" (p.234). Before, Ursula and Miss Inger are good friends, then there is a strange awareness as well as unspoken intimacy between them. In Ursula's eyes, Winifred Inger is beautiful, elegant as well as independent, who is the typical representative of modern woman Ursula admires and is longing to be. Because of this, Ursula develops a lesbian relationship with Miss Inger.

They spend a period of time together happily, taking swimming class together, spending the weekend alone in a lovely little bungalow, taking a shower in the rain naked, talking about religion and belief together, discussing the Women's Movement. Ursula is also introduced by Miss Inger to various women and men, educated, "unsatisfied people." After a period of intimate intercourse, Ursula gradually discovers Miss Inger's hypocrisy as well as



soullessness, “sort of nausea was coming over her ... a heavy, clogged sense of deadness began to gather upon her, from the other woman’s contact. And sometimes she thought Winifred was ugly, clayed” (p.239).

During the summer vocation, when Miss Inger invites Ursula to go to London and spend the vocation together, Ursula rejects and tells her: “No, I don’t want to go to London, I want to be myself.” Then Ursula introduces Miss Inger to her Uncle since they belong to the same category and they can be a good match. At last, they are married.

During the together with Miss Inger, Ursula is not satisfied with being the shadow of others, instead she remains being herself. She is responsible for her inner heart and follows her own judgment, which also indicates her progress as well as growth.

### **3.6 Self-Improvement From the Experience in St. Philip’s School**

Ursula continues to pursue an ideal road for her self-fulfillment. When she is seventeen years old, she accepts a position as a teacher in a primary school in spite of her parents’ opposition. By doing so, she’d like to subvert female’s submissive role in the industrial patriarch society as well as to emancipate herself to become self-supporting. At first, before being a teacher, she is full of hopes and dreams as she expects a lover at that time. She is determined to set up a friendly teacher-student relationship, and teach students with love and devotion.

what’s more, she is ambitious about her teaching career, and believes she can be the best teacher in the school meanwhile the school will be proud of her. However, things go against one’s wishes, the reality lets her down. First, the school is old, shabby and prison-like. Second, Mr. Harby, the head of the school, is a machine-like person, he is ruthless and just wants to put the whole school under his control. Third, her workmates are machine-like, “cocksure, jolty, jerky, bossy, callous, crude and rude” (p.258), Ursula is frightened to think of getting on with them. Fourth, in the hope of building up friendly and harmonious relationship with students, Ursula tries her best to teach them by love and devotion instead of force and authority. However, they get used to Mr. Harby and other teachers’ force authority, they don’t appreciate her kind and humane instruction, and instead they become the master and make use of her weakness to despise and gang against her. Hence Ursula fails to keep the class in order, let alone teaching students knowledge. Frustrated in management and instruction, Ursula feels miserable and distressed for her natural self is suppressed in that inhumane and prison-like school.

However, she continues teaching and Mr. Harby “began to persecute her because she could not keep her class in proper condition, because her class was the weak link in the chain which made up the school” (p.267). Mr. Harby would punish students in Ursula’s class harshly if they offended against him, while if the offence was against

Ursula, he would punish lightly. In this sense, offence against Ursula is acquiescent. Then because of Mr. Harby’s intentional vicious behavior, Ursula can hardly bear the torture.

Ursula’s feminine virtues—love and gentility, which is valuable in itself, becomes a disadvantage in the man’s world. The male teachers show contempt at her incapacity of keeping order, even Miss Harby, who has assumed enough masculinity to command the class, despises Ursula for her weak femininity. Actually, Ursula is faced with two-folded discrimination as an independent working woman—gender discrimination and class discrimination. Traditionally, domestic women are ruled by their husbands meanwhile working women are also ruled by their male bosses. At that time, working women are more frustrated than men in the pursuit of self-fulfillment in the man’s world. Because of all the unfavorable conditions, Ursula fails to carry out her humane instruction in the man’s world. She nearly gives up under the great pressure. However, she insists on and continues teaching, proving that she can support herself rather than depending on parents. She has gained self-improvement, knowing how to survive in the corrupted male-dominated society where force is more effective than love and gentility. Bearing it in mind, Ursula begins to treat students with force and authority. She punishes a troublesome boy harshly, but knowing that he has got a heart condition the next day. At the price of her femininity even humanity, she succeeds in winning the students’ respects as well as the approval in the man’s world.

Though ferocious and suffering, the teaching experience has helped Ursula become stronger, more determined, more courageous, more independent as well as more confident than ever before. She has achieved self-improvement, knowing if she would succeed in the male-dominated patriarchal society, first she has to gain acquiesce and acceptance through accepting its terms, ways and system. Such kind of self-improvement is also an advance as well as growth for Ursula.

In Bildungsroman, the initiation protagonist is usually tempted by the outside world and has an experience of leaving home. For Ursula, her teaching experience in St. Philip’s School can be viewed as her leaving-home experience, which enriches her experience and helps her achieve initiation.

### **3.7 Self-Awakening in the University**

Ursula continues her pursuit of self-fulfillment after entering the university. As usual, before entering the university, she is full of hopes and dreams. She dreams that the school is a “holy place”, and

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 for ever in a remote, hushed temple. They were the initiated, and the beginning and the end of the mystery was in their keeping. (p.295)



Gradually, she is extremely disappointed, only to find “College was barren, cheap, a temple converted to the most vulgar, petty commerce” (p.298), as well as a

Second-hand dealer’s shop, and one bought an equipment for an examination. Moreover, the professors were not priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge and Latin is so much dry goods of knowledge, and the Latin class is only a sort of second-hand curio shop, where one bought curios and learned the market-value of curios; dull curios too, on the whole. (p.297)

She feels a kind of disillusion, she can’t achieve self-fulfillment in the college which is only another gate to a dirty and dead world. The external reality again comes to conflict with her natural self severely. The only thing which gives her pleasure in college is botany, so she focuses on her botany laboratory.

At this time, Ursula hears from Anton, knowing he will come back to England soon. Frustrated and suffered in the previous experience, Ursula neglects her natural self and pursues maximum sensual self, hence their love affair is renewed when Anton comes back. However, for Ursula, Anton is too strange,

He had belonged to a different world from hers. It was as if they had cried a state of truce between him and her, and in this truce they had met. She knew, vaguely, in the first minute, that they were enemies come together in a truce. Every movement and word of his was alien to her being. (p.302)

In her inner heart, she has strong longing for “the unknown”, and the pursuit for spiritual freedom, which Anton fails to satisfy her. When Anton asks her to go to India with him, there is a fierce argument between them. After the argument, Ursula dismantles so-called democracy, criticizes British unjust colony over India, disposing Anton’s hypocrisy and dumbness and striking Anton’s the weakest point without pity. However, Ursula indulges in sexual-fulfillment with Anton, the love affair between them continues.

When Ursula fails her university graduation test, she is faced with two choices, to be a teacher or be the wife of Anton. Obviously, being a teacher means more toughs and she has to explore in the man’s world. While it seems more attractive to be the wife of Anton, which means she can depend a man to have a leisure life in her rest of life. At the very moment, clearly being aware of Anton’s hypocrisy and incapability to help her fulfill her natural self, she rejects him and decides to continue her exploration and pursuit of self-fulfillment as well as self-discovery by herself.

However, “as the patriarchal ideology has been internalized, Ursula is unavoidably influenced by the collective women unconsciousness” (Zhang, 2002, p.35). When Ursula finds out she is pregnant with Anton’s baby, she regresses and turns to Anton for help, telling him she is willing to marry him.

After the struggle with horses in the rain, Ursula is in mediation. Then Ursula determines to confine neither by man nor by convention. By refusing to marry Anton, Ursula remains her natural self and becomes an independent self-responsible woman. Though suffering and painful, Ursula succeeds in freeing herself from everything confined her natural self, hence the process of her growth can be defined as decisive initiation experience. As a return and reward, she sees the rainbow which symbolizes success as well as completeness.

Steadily the color gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow. The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and color and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new house on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven. (Lawrence, 1995, p.336)

She also envisions the hope and life from the rainbow. “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” (p.336).

Moreover, her persistent pursuit for her natural self, dauntless rebellion against traditions and conventions as well as the optimistic exploration of self-fulfillment and self-discovery makes her the exemplary and vanguard for women’s growth and self-fulfillment.

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