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Freud's Death Instinct in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*

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INTRODUCTION

D.H. Lawrence was familiar with the world of psychoanalysis. First of all, he was on friendly terms with the London psychoanalyst Dr David Eder, “a colleague of Ernest Jones and the first man to lecture in England on Freud’s discoveries”. (Salgãdo 85) Ernest Jones is well-known as Sigmund Freud’s official biographer. Further, Lawrence discussed in all probability the theories of Freud with his later wife, Frieda von Richthofen. She had an affair with the singular disciple of Freud, Otto Gross, about whom she wrote in her correspondence with Lawrence. (Steele xiv) Additionally, D.H. Lawrence had connections with members of the Bloomsbury group in which psychoanalytic themes were discussed, among which Freudian ideas. As far as is known D.H. Lawrence only knew Freud’s theories “at second or third hand”, but when his novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913) appeared, it was enthusiastically received by the English psychoanalysts as a “confirmation of the Freudian theories of the Oedipus complex and the incest motive”. (ibid. xxviii, xxv) D.H. Lawrence, however, was discontent with the reviews that linked his story-line with the Oedipus complex while there was no trace of incest in it and that withal overlooked the artistic creation of the novel: “My poor book: it was, as art, a fairly complete truth: so they carve a half lie out of it, and say ‘Voilà’. Swine!” (ibid. xxviii) In response he wrote *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921), “confronting Freud’s theory of the unconscious, as he understood it, with his own ‘new psychology’.” (Steele xxx) A year later in his *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) he even “dismissed the Freudians’ work along with modern science as ‘magic and charlatanry’.” (ibid. xxxi)

D.H. Lawrence's fierce antagonism to psychoanalytic theory would on the one hand deter one to exert any Freudian analysis on his novels, but on the other hand it does not have to mean that Lawrence rejected all of Freud's ideas. As Alan W. Friedman observes: "D.H. Lawrence was a virtual textbook embodiment of Freud's theories about the pleasure principle and the death instinct." (207) While Friedman includes thereby several of Lawrence's novels and short stories, this paper will only focus on the death instinct in *Women in Love*. Although D.H. Lawrence could never have read Freud's *Jenseits Des Lustprinzips*, translated as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, before or while writing *Women in Love*, it is clear that they (despite Lawrence's claimed antagonism) shared the same ideas. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud applies the hypothesis of E. Hering to confirm his idea of the death and life instincts: "According to E. Hering's theory, two kinds of processes are constantly at work in living substance, operating in contrary directions, one constructive or assimilatory and the other destructive or dissimilatory." (Freud 59) In *Women in Love*, the pivotal character, Rupert Birkin, introduces a philosophy of which the phrasing is remarkably similar to that of Hering. Birkin makes the distinction between "the silver river of life" which progresses "on and on to heaven" and "the dark river of dissolution" which "rolls in us just as the other". (Lawrence 201) According to him, all living things are born in this process of destructive creation. (ibid. 201) In *River of Dissolution*, Colin Clarke investigates Lawrence's attitude towards this so-called process of corruption. He demonstrates that "the characters in *Women in Love* are all of them caught up in the reductive process, and that this process is a deeply ambiguous one." (Clarke 151) While Friedman maintains that D.H. Lawrence's novels exemplify Freud's theory of the death instinct without connecting it with the river of dissolution and Clarke focuses on the river of dissolution without mentioning Freud's theory of the death instinct, this paper will discuss the river of dissolution as a clear interpretation of the death drive.

The nature of the characters in *Women in Love* is predominated by that which Freud calls “the death instincts”. The principal idea of the death instinct tends to a self-destruction which is outwardly performed by melancholy or mourning. When, however, the death instincts are “turned towards the outside world”, Freud speaks of an “aggressive or destructive instinct”. (Laplanche 97) Both the latter and the former are present in the novel, but the latter takes clear form in the love relationships. First of all, Rupert Birkin’s philosophy of the river of dissolution will be compared with Freud’s theory of the death instincts. Secondly, it will be proved that Rupert Birkin functions as a prophet whose philosophy of the flux of corruption is the idea around which the whole novel is constructed and is exemplified by the other characters. From his divination emerges that sexuality is the driving force behind disintegration. Gerald and Gudrun’s relationship serves as the main example of sexual destructiveness, which is finally demonstrated by the mystical death of Gerald at the end of the novel.

1. THE RIVER OF DISSOLUTION

Rupert Birkin is the pivotal character in *Women in Love*. He functions as a prophet whose theories are the ideas around which the novel is constructed. In chapter 14, “Water-party”, he meditates on the oppositional currents of life and death that are synthesised in living beings and that parallel the outer world in which both progress and corruption are present. He calls them “the silver river of life” and “the dark river of dissolution”. (Lawrence 201) These two conflicting tendencies correspond to Freud’s division of the death and life instincts inherent in human nature. The river of dissolution is similar to the death instincts which aim to “restore an earlier state of things” (Freud 49), while the life instinct is bent on self-preservation. Freud’s definition of a

death instinct assumes that “inanimate things existed before living ones” (Freud 46) and therefore death instincts aspire to reduce “the living being back to the inorganic state” (Laplanche 97).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud explains that sexuality is the only concept in which both the life and death instincts are united. To vindicate this hypothesis he applies the myth of Aristophanes taken from Plato’s *Symposium*. According to Freud, the scientific expertise on the origin of sexuality is inadequate and therefore one has mainly to rely on hypotheses albeit based on myths. Aristophanes’ speech relates:

‘The original human nature was not like the present, but different. In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two ...’ Everything about these primeval men was double: they had four hands and four feet, two faces, two privy parts, and so on. Eventually Zeus decided to cut these men in two, ‘like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling’. After the division had been made, ‘the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one.’ (Freud 69-70)

The reason why Sigmund Freud supports the use of this myth is because it exactly renders that which he wants to prove, namely that the origin of an instinct can be found in the urge to return to its original state of being. (Freud 69) Sexuality is an ambiguous concept. On the one hand it is self- preservative because it secures the survival of a species through procreation, but on the other hand it is controlled by its desire to return to its original state, namely the reuniting of the germ cells. (Freud 71) In other words, sexuality equates with the life instinct, which is sometimes also

called the sexual instinct, but is controlled by the death instinct. Freud suggests that when one employs Aristophanes' myth scientifically, one can assume that

living substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which have ever since endeavoured to reunite through the sexual instincts [...] and that these splintered fragments of living substance in this way attained a multicellular condition and finally transferred the instinct for reuniting, in the most highly concentrated form, to the germ-cells. (Freud 70-71)

Freud adds that he is not convinced himself of his hypothesis, but that he nevertheless follows this train of thought out of a shortage of scientific evidence and out of "simple scientific curiosity". (Freud 71) It seems no coincidence that D.H. Lawrence also refers to Aristophanes' myth in the next chapter 16, "Man to Man":

It is not true. We are not broken fragments of one whole. We are the singling away into purity and clear being, of things that were mixed. The sex is that which remains in us of this mixture. In the old age, before sex was, we were mixed, each one a mixture. The process of singling into individuality resulted in the great polarization of sex. [...] There is now to come the new day... The man is pure man, the woman pure woman, they are perfectly polarized. But there is no longer any of the horrible merging, mingling self-abnegation of love. (Lawrence 233)

It is clear that Birkin starts from Aristophanes' idea that once, in primeval times, man existed out of two sexes and that since the scission one longs to reunite. But according to Birkin mankind is evolving in such a direction that the drive to fuse will disappear. This passage can be interpreted as a reaction against Freud's application of Aristophanes' myth, by rejecting that mankind is controlled only by somatic impulses. The "horrible merging" denotes the sexual act which he

sees as a disavowal of the ego. When a relationship centralizes around the physical uniting and the individuality threatens to be lost, a downward spiral of mutual destruction arises and finally the destruction of the self. By this pronouncement Birkin reveals his aversion for the physical aspect heterosexual relationships imply. The prophetic tone Rupert Birkin exerts by referring to the future, “there is now to come the new day”, sounds almost like a biblical promise. This threatening atmosphere remains present in Birkin’s speeches during the novel.

2. A PROPHECY OF DEATH

The doom scenario of the sexual relationship becomes stressed in a recapitulating letter of Birkin in chapter 28. In this letter it becomes clear that Birkin considers the sexual relationship part of the river of dissolution, strongly emphasizing the supremacy of the death instinct within sexuality. First Birkin writes:

There is a phase in every race [...] when the desire for destruction overcomes every other desire. In the individual, this desire is ultimately a desire for the destruction in the self. [...] It is a desire for the reduction-process in oneself, a reducing back to the origin, a return along the Flux of corruption, to the original rudimentary conditions of being- ! (Lawrence 435)

This excerpt obviously echoes Freud’s theory of the death instinct by referring to its desire to return back to the origin and the self-destructive facet of the instinct. Then, he continues by involving sex in “the Flux of corruption”:

And if , Julius, you want this ecstasy of reduction with Minette, you must go on till it is fulfilled. [...] But surely there is in you also, somewhere, the living desire

for positive creation, relationships in ultimate faith, when all this process of active corruption, with all its flowers of mud, is transcended, and more or less finished- Surely there will come an end in us to this desire [...] - this passion for putting asunder- everything – ourselves, [...] - reacting in intimacy only for destruction- [...] - always seeking to lose ourselves in some ultimate black sensation, mindless and infinite- burning only with destructive fires, ranging on with the hope of being burnt out utterly- (Lawrence 436)

Firstly, this letter and the above-mentioned section of chapter 16 betrays Birkin's dislike of sexuality. His proposition of a "relationship in ultimate faith" would mean an asexual bond between two souls, without the sexual intimacy and desire in which one loses one's identity to the other: "In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate, but perfectly polarised." (Lawrence 233) Indirectly one can deduce that this bond of positive creation is not meant to happen with Minette who is implicitly bound to destruction. In "Crème de menthe" she is ten weeks pregnant by Julius Halliday, but when Gerald meets her again in chapter 16 there is no report of any pregnancy, only that she looks "thinner" and "more disintegrated". (Lawrence 85, 433) The silent disappearance of the pregnancy arouses the idea of abortion. In that case, Birkin's reproach of their "intimacy only for destruction" can be read literally. Further, the letter is very specifically addressed to Julius. Birkin does not write that there is a *general* desire for positive creation, but that this desire is in *Julius*. Subsequently, he writes: "there will come an end *in us* to this desire", not *in mankind* for example. (My italics.) The personal pronoun *us* conveys the connotation of intimacy between two equals. The reader does not know the full content of the letter, because the reading is interrupted, but one can assume that Birkin is proposing the same "Blutbrüderschaft" like he did to Gerald in chapter 16 "Man to Man", as a solution oppositional to a mindless sexual destruction. In this Brüderschaft Rupert refers to the old German knights who swore eternal

faithfulness to each other. (Lawrence 239) It is Rupert's declaration of pure love for Gerald, but Gerald remains indecisive. (ibid. 240) There must be a reason why Rupert thinks that Halliday has the same desire, just like he rightly thinks the same of Gerald. In "Crème de Menthe" Halliday is presented as being rather female; he "squeals", cries in panic and almost faints when he sees some blood. (Lawrence 83) And although Gerald is portrayed as strong and manly, he feels attracted to Birkin and even to Halliday whom he thinks "piquant". (ibid. 86) The positive relationship that Rupert Birkin offers seems to be of a homosexual character. It is as Seelow states in his book *Radical Modernism and Sexuality*: "What exactly this other kind of love might be remains somehow inconclusive. Certainly, heterosexual love remains inadequate for Birkin and, consequently suggesting, as supplement, a homosexual love that never quite materializes." (93)

Secondly, this letter is not only a plea for another kind of love but is also a prophecy which predicts an apocalyptic end for those who do not convert to this religion of positive creation. The letter which is overheard by Gerald and Gudrun, surfaces during their passage on their way to Austria. It is read out loud in chapter 28, in The Pompadour Café in London, by some bohemian friends of Birkin, who are also acquainted with Gudrun and Gerald. The Pompadour is described as a "whirlpool of disintegration and dissolution" (Lawrence 432) which makes the place perfect for a sermon on deterioration in favour of "positive creation". His Cassandra predicament, however, is ignored and ridiculed. Birkin's letter, which is principally meant for Julius Halliday, is indirectly addressed to Gerald too. The relationship of Julius and Minette is analogous with that of Gerald and Gudrun. Just like the former, Rupert calls Gerald and Gudrun flowers of mud. (Lawrence 201) He names them in one breath with Aphrodite, snakes, swans and lotus -marsh-flowers-, all "born in the process of destructive creation". (Lawrence 201) The symbolic meanings of these elements are all related to sexual desire. When

Gudrun arrives at the Café, “young men nodded at her frequently, with a kind of sneering familiarity”. (Lawrence 432) She is a known customer in The Pompadour, where she came regularly at the time she lived as an artist in London. Gerald then, has the reputation of having mistresses. Minette, for example, is one of them. According to Birkin, Gudrun and Gerald are “flowers of mud” in “the Flux of corruption”, just like the Lotus is (Lawrence 201), because they blossom beautifully in the sunlight, but their roots need to be nourished by darkness and decomposition. They are “Dead Sea Fruit”, “apples of Sodom”. (ibid. 150) The letter therefore serves as a final warning for Gerald before he moves on with Gudrun. But as forecasted by Birkin, their relationship turns into a destructive struggle of wills with the death of Gerald as result. Not only the recommencement of Rupert’s idea, here in the form of a letter, but also the timing of occurrence shows its vital importance. It proves that Birkin’s version of Freud’s theory of the death instinct is exemplified by the other characters.

3. PROPHECY FULFILLED

The prophecy of destruction is most suitably directed to Gerald Crich. Nevertheless, he is the only character who seems conciliated with the mechanisation of life. He seems strong, manly, decided. He believes that “man’s will is the absolute, the only absolute” and what he craves for is “the pure fulfilment of his own will in the struggle with the natural conditions”. (Lawrence 258) He is the industrial magnate who smoothly modernizes the mines and gains profit despite the workers: he is “the God of the machine” and the miners form the components of the machinery. (ibid. 263) But in the second half of the novel it becomes clear that Gerald struggles with an inner darkness. As a child he killed his brother with a gun by accident. Not knowing that the gun was loaded, Gerald blew his brother’s head off. Birkin plays with the idea in how far an event can happen accidentally and decides that every event must have its significance. (Lawrence 40)

Ursula Brangwen too, ponders upon the accident. She suggests the possibility of Gerald's subconscious will to kill: "This playing at killing has some primitive DESIRE for killing in it, don't you think?" (Lawrence 65) Gudrun thinks it perverse to assume such a thing and it seems to her "the purest form of accident". (ibid. 65) But Birkin even goes further in assuming that every murder needs a murderer and a murderee. (ibid. 48) The murderee is the person who in fact has a hidden desire to be killed. (ibid. 48) And according to Rupert, Gerald is now one of them. (ibid. 48) Rupert keeps pointing at Gerald's unhappiness, while Gerald every time denies it or at least does not confirm it. But there are several indications which demonstrate that the death of his brother had consequences for Gerald's further life. It is the repression of his feelings that leads to the slow degeneration of his mind and finally pushes him into death.

As a main result of the incident, Gerald suffers from that which Freud calls a "fate compulsion": "The impression they give is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some 'daemonic' power; but psycho-analysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early infantile influences." (Freud 23) There is no doubt that the unintentional killing of his brother was a traumatic child experience for Gerald. Not only he has to bear the burden of loss but also that of guilt which is strengthened by the reactions of his environment. When Gudrun asks Gerald's little sister's nurse about the other Crich children she raised, the nurse answers that they were "little fiends" and "that Gerald was a demon if ever there was one, a proper demon, ay, at six months old." (Lawrence 246) Gerald became the boy who shot his brother's head off and the step to call him daemonic was never far behind. Influenced by the reaction of others, he started to believe in being cursed. This belief is enforced by the death of his sister, Diana, who drowns during the water-party given by the Criches for the village. When Gerald attempts to find his sister in the cold water, Gudrun observes him "as if he belonged naturally to dread and catastrophe, as if he were himself again."

(Lawrence 209) Gudrun's biased observation shows how outsiders look differently at him, because of his horrid background. This has the effect that Gerald has lost his belief in a positive outcome when something negative happens.

‘There's one thing about our family, you know,’ he continued. ‘Once anything goes wrong, it can never be put right again – not with us. I've noticed it all my life – you can't put a thing right, once it has gone wrong.’ (Lawrence 214)

Further, Gerald's father will always take him responsible for the death of his youngest son and because Gerald must have felt his father's aversion for him, the two of them had created a mutual dislike. (Lawrence 252) Despite their oppositional relationship, Gerald still craves for his father's forgiveness which would allay his guilty conscience. When he surfaces again after an unsuccessful search under water, he sees his father and says: “I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm afraid it's my fault.” (Lawrence 213) Although Gerald was responsible for the water party, he could not have done anything to prevent the accident. For Gerald however, the rescue of Diana could have liquidated the death of his brother. But now he feels as if he has failed his father twice.

Unable to control his demons, he seeks compensation by perfecting the mine system which shows his ability to control natural forces. It is a contest between his will and “the resistant Matter of the earth”. (Lawrence 263) The machine is the Godhead, work is worship and he, “the most mechanical mind, is purest and highest, the representative of God on earth”. (ibid. 260) Gerald's reformations are said to be led by a “furious and destructive demon, which possessed him sometimes like an insanity” and had tortured him all his life. (ibid. 264) Freud's phrasing of the fate compulsion resounds clearly in this description. Subsequently, Gerald desires to mechanise the whole system, but at the same time he mechanises himself into a soulless monster. Where his father showed humanity to the workers, Gerald destroys every sparkle of life and joy in them and they have to go on in total submissiveness: “There was a new world, a new order,

strict, terrible, inhuman, but satisfying in its very destructiveness.” (Lawrence 266) Infected by his temper, the sensation of death spreads through the factory “like a virus”. (ibid. 264) Finally, the mine system is so perfected that it functions without the genius behind it. Earlier in the novel, Ursula mentions laughing about Gerald that “he’ll have to die soon”, because “when he’s made every possible improvement, [...] there will be nothing more to improve.” (Lawrence 64) Ursula has judged rightly. Gerald is not needed anymore and confronted with himself in his loneliness, the emptiness of his soul frightens him: “[H]e went to the mirror and looked long and closely at his own face, at his own eyes, seeking for something. He was afraid, in mortal dry fear, but he knew not what of.” (Lawrence 267) He tries to find relief in women, but fulfilment is of short duration and it becomes more and more difficult to be satisfied. (ibid. 269)

That is where Gudrun appears. She presents him comfort and warmth. The physical attraction makes him feel alive again. Lawrence writes:

Something must come with him into the hollow void of death in his soul, fill it up, and so equalize the pressure within to the pressure without. [...] In this extremity his instinct led him to Gudrun. (369)

This “pressure” brings us back to Freud. The ‘pressure’ of the instinct is described by *The language of Psychoanalysis* as “the exigencies of life which exert pressure on the organism to accomplish the specific action which is alone capable of resolving the tension.” (330) Note the similarity of language use between Freud and D.H. Lawrence: the feeling of a pressure that is equalized to instinct. Further, which instinct is meant here? His life instinct that urges him to secure his self-preservation? Or is it a death instinct that leads him to Gudrun? The motives of Gerald’s drive to unite with Gudrun can be interpreted in different manners, just like sexuality itself is an ambiguous concept. Gerald uses Gudrun as a means to escape from the “hollow void of death” that stirs in his inner body. The literal warmth of Gudrun’s body becomes a figurative

life infusion for Gerald. In that case the physical attraction can be seen as a life instinct, a last resort to escape the allurements of darkness and death. On the other hand, the need to coalesce is a desire for the complete annihilation of the self. This corresponds to the view of Rupert Birkin, as described above, that physical sexuality is part of the river of corruption which can be seen as an interpretation of Freud's death drive. The instinct or the pressure Gerald feels, does not have to be a sudden urge that emerges out of nothing. More likely, Gerald's need for sexual fulfilment is merely the result of a mental construction of an object of which he believes that it can fulfil his desire for satisfaction. Gudrun becomes an object he uses for his own purpose. Lawrence extends this objectification of Gerald's desire by using the imagery of Gudrun as a liquid:

He lifted her, and seemed to pour her into himself, like wine into a cup. [...] So she relaxed, and seemed to melt, to flow into him, as if she were some infinitely warm and precious suffusion filling into his veins, like an intoxicant. (Lawrence 378)

Further in the same chapter she becomes the vessel:

Into her he poured all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death, and he was whole again. [...] And she, subject, received him as a vessel filled with his bitter potion of death. (Lawrence 393)

The reversal of the two functions indicates a Freudian idea that emphasizes the role of a fantasised identification with the other person during sex. When Gudrun is subject to Gerald, she has the passive role which Freud relates to a masochistic capacity while Gerald in his active position fulfils the sadistic role. (Laplanche 402) In the first excerpt in which Gerald is the cup, he is actually the donor and only mentally a receiver. So the darkness and death he inflicts upon Gudrun he enjoys in the form of a warm suffusion. In either way it means a destruction of the object, Gudrun, and the self. Freud explains sadism as an instinct which originally belonged to the death instincts that separates off and takes on for the purpose of reproduction, the function of

overpowering the sexual object (as a sexual instinct) to the extent necessary for carrying out the sexual act. (Freud 65)

Sadism and masochism is part of every sexual relationship according to Freud. But that which makes Gudrun and Gerald's relationship so dangerous is Gerald's dependency of Gudrun. She is the counterpart of his inner darkness and without her he gets consumed by it. His unnatural dependency is partly due to the complex relationship between Gerald and his father. His father was the opposite of Gerald, the standard against which Gerald reacted. But his father "stood for the living world to him": "The whole unifying idea of mankind seemed to be dying with his father, the centralising force that had held the whole together seemed to collapse with his father, the parts were ready to go asunder in terrible disintegration." (Lawrence 255) Lawrence compares the death of father Crich with that of the Greek mythical figure Laocoon: "The great serpent had got the father, and the son was dragged into the embrace of horrifying death along with him." (ibid. 327) It shows how strongly they are connected, maybe just because of the death of Gerald's brother. Unwillingly, father Crich had set apart Gerald, "like Cain", because he could not suppress the feeling that his eldest son was responsible for the incident. (Lawrence 201) The consequence of his father's behaviour is that Gerald is haunted by the fear to be set apart again. When he feels slipping away Gudrun, he tortures both of them by holding on to her. "[G]erald would destroy her rather than be denied." (Lawrence 454)

The penultimate chapter, "Snowed up", pictures a devastating fight of wills, that only can lead till the utter destruction of one or the other. The chapter is crammed with the oppressive succession of excruciating vocabulary in which passion is alternated with ghastly bloodlust. D.H. Lawrence felicitously succeeds in passing on the relationship's perversity to the reader. Unable to free himself of her, Gerald sees death as the only solution to become independent. " 'If only I could kill her', his heart was whispering repeatedly. 'If only I could kill her – I should be free.' "

(Lawrence 500) Gerald wants to kill his desire and his desire has crystallized in the form of Gudrun. Eventually, Gerald tries to strangle her, but then the satisfaction of being in control of her life turns into nausea and he lets her go. Tired of everything he wanders into the snow-clad mountains where he falls asleep and freezes to death. In the last moments of his death he believes that it was his fate to die like this. "It was bound to happen." (Lawrence 534) His belief in fatality strengthens the idea that Gerald suffered from fate neurosis. The person who suffers from fate neurosis "has no access to an unconscious wish, which he thus first encounters coming back at him as it were, from the outside world (whence the 'daemonic' aspect stressed by Freud)." (Laplanche 162) This brings us back to Rupert Birkin's assumption that Gerald has the unconscious wish to die, or more specific, to be murdered. (Lawrence 48) In the snow Gerald feels the threat of being murdered. And then he feels the blow and he knows he is being murdered: "It was bound to happen. To be murdered!" (Lawrence 534) If the death of his brother was an accident, there was no reason why he died. His death was mere fate and Gerald must have wondered why he had not died instead of his brother. The subconscious wish to replace his brother made him neurotic, unable to be satisfied; not by the perfection of the firm, not by sexual comfort of women, not by the relationship with Gudrun. Only death could bring him fulfilment.

Via the letter, Rupert Birkin warned Gerald and Gudrun for the destructiveness of the sexual relationship and before that, he somehow knew that Gerald was subconsciously a "murderer", someone who desires to be killed. But the most remarkable fact is that Birkin also foreshadowed the death of Gerald. In chapter 19 Rupert contemplates on the mysteries of dissolution, the dark knowledge, which can only be obtained by purely sensual sensation "after the death of the creative spirit". (Lawrence 293) He argues that the African culture has a deep insight in this destructive knowledge, because they are "controlled by the burning death-

abstraction of the Sahara". (Lawrence 293) For the white races remains the same knowledge of corruption only different because of "the Arctic snow behind them". (Lawrence 293)

[G]erald was one of these strange white wonderful demons from the north, fulfilled in the destructive frost mystery. And was he fated to pass away in this knowledge, this one process of frost-knowledge, death by perfect cold? Was he a messenger, an omen of the universal dissolution into whiteness and snow? (Lawrence 293)

Gerald fulfils Birkin's prediction by freezing to death. His death is symbol for the destructiveness of the sexual relationship in which sensuous knowledge is chosen above the spiritual.

4. THE AGGRESSIVE INSTINCT

Gerald and Gudrun's relation is the main example of the destructive effect of the sexual relationship, but there are other examples throughout the novel. All these relationships are marked by aggression, if not expressed by physical behaviour then it is certainly present in their phantasy. The aggressive instinct is "the term used by Freud to designate the death instincts in so far they are turned towards the outside world." (Laplanche 16) Important is that Freud considers the aggressive instinct "(in the same way perhaps as the tendency towards self-destruction)" inextricably bound up with sexuality. (ibid. 19) It is therefore not surprising that the aggressiveness which the characters perform is directed to their sexual partner. First of all there is the relationship of Rupert Birkin, before he falls in love with Ursula, with Hermione Rodicce. As in the relationship of Gudrun and Gerald there is a fight of wills between them. Only, their fight is not a fight alternated with passion but with dominance. The resemblance of both relationships is the desire to overpower one another. Hermione wants to know everything that Rupert knows, but when she tries to meet him with contemplations over existential matter in an attempt to be

congenial to him he annihilates her argumentation. She is very domineering, but he humiliates her again and again until she is fulfilled with a nausea, a darkness that does not yield until she tries to kill him. Rupert escapes from her attempted murder and she represses the fact that she tried to kill him. Both Gerald and Hermione get filled with ecstasy and pleasure in the knowledge that they have the ultimate power over their victim which is the power to decide between death and life. With the aggressive instinct the instinct to master coheres, as is the case in these relationships. “The instinct to master appears as a form that the death instinct is able to take on when it ‘enters the service’ of the sexual instinct.” (Laplanche 218) As discussed before, Freud indicated this form of aggressiveness as sadism in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. (65) While the aim of the death instinct is a destruction of the self, “the aim of the aggressive instinct is to destroy the object.” (Laplanche 16) But Laplanche explains that, according to Freud, aggressiveness in the form of mastery over the object will never aim to completely annihilate the object when the object is taken into account. When the object is taken into consideration, there is a “turning-round towards masochism, at which point the instinct to master can no longer be distinguished from the sexual excitation which it arouses.” (Laplanche 19) This explanation reveals the difference between Gerald and Hermione’s attempted murder. While both enjoyed to be in control over their object, only Gerald empathized with his object as a result of which he ceased the strangulation. It seems as if their love turns into hate when they feel that they are losing the other. Birkin clearly opposes to Hermione and begins to show interest for Ursula while Gudrun at the end directs her attention to Loerke. According to Freud however, “the apparent turning-round of love into hate is a mere illusion: hate is not a negative form of love, for it has its own genesis. [...] ‘The true prototypes of the relation of hate are derived not from sexual life, but from the ego’s struggle to preserve and maintain itself’.” (Laplanche 21) Here Freud contradicts himself by confirming that hate would not have its origin from the sexual life as hate is a form of

aggressiveness and the aggressive instinct is a form of the death instinct which is on its turn bound up with the sexual instinct. As sexuality contains both the self-preservative and the self-destructive instinct, “the ego’s struggle to preserve and maintain itself” in the form of hate, can be derived from sexual life. Ambivalence, “the simultaneous existence of contradictory tendencies – especially the coexistence of love and hate” (Laplanche 26-27), is typically present in jealousy which is the case with both Hermione and Gerald. Anyhow, the boundaries between love and hate are closely related and this is clearly exemplified in chapter 5 in which Birkin says to Gerald that he hates him, but he could equally well have said that he loves him. (Lawrence 73) The same is expressed by Rupert in chapter 11. When Ursula suggests that love is the greatest, Birkin responds that one “might as well say that hate is the greatest, since the opposite of everything balances.” (Lawrence 151)

Between the couples in the novel it is just that balance which lacks. Mr and Mrs Crich’s marriage is a third example of devastating relationships. Mr Crich is dying but his death is slow and painful. He has always deceived himself by believing that he loves his wife and he wants to keep this illusion intact until his death: “Only death would show the perfect completeness of the lie.” (Lawrence 252) By contrast, Mrs Crich became mad. She is described as a bird of prayer locked in a cage who completely submits to her husband, but is “consumed by the fierce tension of opposition”. (Lawrence 251) Thomas Crich is conscious of the dark mark she leaves in his heart and now that he is ill, the darkness that the pain causes, is similar to the darkness that his wife brought on him. (ibid. 248) Thomas Crich must all his married life have lived with the pain of death in him: their “relation was one of utter interdestruction”. (ibid. 251) In chapter 16, “Man to Man”, Rupert warns Gerald for Gudrun’s need for expression and her aversion for ordinary life. (ibid. 241) He continues: “You can see what mere leaving it to fate brings. You can see how much marriage is to be trusted to—look at your own mother.” (ibid. 241) Rupert blames “the common run of life”

(ibid. 241), of which the conventional marriage is part, for the mental deterioration of Gerald's mother. Mr and Mrs Criche's marriage depicts a familiar image of the Victorian age in which the wife was cut off from public life by which many of them became "mad" or labelled as hysterical.

Finally, there is the death of Diana Crich. When she was drowning, a young man, doctor Brindell, tried to save her, but in her panic she choked him by clenching her arms around his neck. "She killed him", are the concluding words of Gerald. (Lawrence 220) The two young people at the bottom of the lake, in a mortal embrace, is a powerful significative image of the destructiveness of the sexual relationship. This is also beautifully contrasted by Ken Russell in the cinema version of *Women in Love* in which first a close-up of the enlaced dead bodies of Diana Crich and, in this case, her husband is shown and immediately thereafter Birkin and Ursula in a sexual embracement in exactly the same position. When Birkin turns on his back he utters: "My God, what next?" after which Ursula breaks into tears. It also recaptures Rupert's idea that the sexual act kills the individual instead of preserving one's singleness.

5. ANOTHER KIND OF LOVE

Birkin believes however, that there is another way,

the way of freedom. There was the paradisaal entry into pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union, stronger than any pangs of motion, a lovely state of free proud singleness, which accepted the obligation of the permanent connection with others, and with the other, submits to the yoke and leash of love, but never forfeits its own proud individual singleness, even while it loves and yields. (Lawrence 293, 294)

With this conviction Birkin decides to marry Ursula. But although their relationship is tender and peaceful, Birkin will never be completely gratified. He still regrets the fact that Gerald did not

accept his love for him. Birkin believes that if Gerald had done this, Gerald would not have died. Their bond would have kept him alive, while Gerald's physical relationship with Gudrun only drove him into destruction. He also believes that the spiritual connection he has with Ursula and which he offered to Gerald, is an eternal union which maintains after death. But now, according to Birkin, Gerald is lost, because Gerald did not accept his love, even in death. (Lawrence 541)

The final conversation between Ursula and Rupert by which *Women in Love* concludes, conveys a clear expression of Rupert's intention behind his ponderous contemplations during the novel. After Gerald has died, Ursula asks Rupert if he really needed Gerald and if she is not enough for him. Birkin answers: "You are all women to me. But I wanted a man friend, as eternal as you and I are eternal." (Lawrence 542) He calls it "another kind of love" on which Ursula reacts that "it's an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity", it is impossible and a falsity. (ibid. 542) The novel ends with the reaction of Birkin: "I don't believe that." (ibid. 542) Seelow writes: "*Women in Love* ends with Gerald's merging into death and Birkin's elegy expressing that heterosexual love cannot be enough. The novel provides no resolution, only an elegiac despair." (93) The same is voiced by Trotter: "In so far as *Women in Love* is a book about relations between men and women, it is a book about the extent to which relations between men and women can never be enough, for a man." (254) Birkin's appeal for "positive creation" or "another kind of love" is rather ambiguous because he proposes a homosexual relationship in opposition to the disintegration of a sexual relationship between men and women. At the time and still, homosexuality is seen as part of the decadence and decay of the modern times. Of course, Birkin lets it sound as an asexual relationship between two men who have a spiritual affinity. Nevertheless, one cannot escape the abundant descriptions of sexual tension between the male characters in *Women in Love*. The desire for fulfilment of their physical attraction lurks on every corner.

CONCLUSION

By starting from a Freudian theory, this paper took a contemporary perspective on D.H. Lawrence's novel. The conclusion can be drawn that the ambiguity of sexuality forms both the core of Freud's theory of the death instinct and of Rupert Birkin's philosophy of the river of dissolution. The dichotomy of life and death, growth and disintegration, purity and corruption is omnipresent in *Women in Love*. This concurs with Colin Clarke who assumes that Birkin, in his search for wholeness, incorporates degradation. (ix) Friedman, conversely, presumes that Birkin's mental struggle is "an attempt to imagine a world free of the death wish". (207) The latter, however, can certainly not be denied. When Birkin fiercely repudiates Freud's use of Aristophanes' idea that "we are [...] broken fragments of one broken whole" (Lawrence 223), he actually tries to imagine an intimate relationship without the interference of the death instinct. Nevertheless, the reality within the novel proves that the time is not ripe yet for such a paradisiacal world. And Birkin is bitterly aware of this. The river of dissolution is "our real reality", all is "born in this process of destructive creation" like Aphrodite, "born in the first spasm of universal dissolution". (Lawrence 201) With this last mentioned quotation, Birkin already emphasizes the sexual connotation that he associates with the river of dissolution. He describes the river of corruption as an orgasmic gush of degradation, comparing it with Zeus' dissipated semen. D.H. Lawrence recapitulates the idea of an upset balance between creative and disintegrative tensions later again in his essay "Pornography and Obscenity": "Sex is a creative flow, the excrementary flow is towards dissolution, decreation, if we may use such a word." When "the two flows become identical", then we have "the degraded human being". (Clarke 149)

Taking this in consideration, *Women in love* pictures a dejected image of the world. In the eyes of Birkin, all the characters are “degraded human beings” and the only thing that distinguishes him of the others is his consciousness. (Lawrence 202) Still, the novel ends with hope. When Ursula, in response on Birkin’s confession of faith in another kind of love, exclaims that two kinds of love cannot exist, Birkin answers: “I don’t believe that.” (Lawrence 542) Given the demonstration that all Birkin’s predictions came true, Birkin’s concluding words can be conceived as a hopeful prophecy for the future.

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