

Lawrence's Pursuit of Invisibility: with Special Reference to Ursula

Motofumi Nakayama

Lawrence's distrust of humanity is already shown in the letter to J. M. Murry in 1917, where he thinks "One is happy in the thought only that transcend humanity." *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *The Man Who Died* are in their respective manners pursuing the way to transcend humanity. Especially *Women in Love*, *The Plumed Serpent*, and *The Man Who Died* are books which strive for how to surmount individuality. His misanthropy is in that we are all too full of ourselves.

In *Women in Love*, Birkin insists that Ursula should be invisible. Ursula is depicted differently from Gudrun or Hermione, who are both too individualistic to be invisible. Ursula comes to understand Birkin's world, but cannot live in his sphere. Kate, in *The Plumed Serpent*, is more experienced in life and nearer to Birkin, which enables her to accept Ramón's idea of intermediateness. The priestess, in *The Man Who Died*, is superior in invisibility to Ursula or Kate, because she even has no name which indicates worldliness. Individuality is attained in the priestess.

This paper discusses how the problem of overcoming individuality is pursued in the latter novels following *Women in Love*.

Key Words : humanity, individuality, misanthropy, invisibility

I

Ursula, who played a very important role in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, had already been a heroine named as Ella in *Sisters I*, *Sisters II* and *The Wedding Ring*. In *Sisters I*, besides Ella, Gerald and Gudrun are also contained, and furthermore, Ella-BenTempleman episode (Ursula-Anton Screbensky in *The Rainbow*) and Ella-Birkin (Ursula-Birkin in *Women in Love*) are already described. Almost all the characters constituting *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* had already appeared in *Sisters I*. However, Lawrence develops *Sisters I*

into *Sisters II* and *The Wedding Ring*, and then splits *The Wedding Ring* into *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. The reason for it is shown in the letter addressed to Edward Garnett in 1914:

In the scheme of the novel, however, I must have Ella get some experience before she meets her Mr. Birkin. (LDHL 263)

Apparently, particular attention is paid to the characterization of Ursula as seen in the revision of *Sisters I* to *Sisters II* and *The Wedding Ring* and also in the fact that almost the latter half of *The Rainbow* is allotted to the description of Ursula. Its purpose is without doubt to make her suitable enough to compete with Birkin. She has to be a "new" woman qualified enough to sail for a new way of life, not a simple partner.

Furthermore, Ursula's problem proceeds to be discussed in Kate in *The Plumed Serpent* and the priestess in *The Man Who Died* as well as in Ursula in *Women in Love*. This paper discusses what is expected in Ursula, examining the main episodes in the works mentioned above.

II

Gudrun, younger sister of Ursula in *Women in Love*, is always negative in anything and cannot live in a positive way. Her way of thinking in life is illustrated in her words when she talks with Ursula about their future life "*Nothing materializes! Everything withers in the bud*" (WL 8). On the other hand, Ursula has a prescience at heart that something new is coming into being:

She lived a good deal by herself, to herself, working, passing on from day today, and always thinking, trying to lay hold on life, to grasp it in her own understanding. Her active living was suspended, but underneath, in the darkness, something was coming to pass. If only she could break through the last integuments! She seemed to try to put her hands out, like an infant in the womb, and she could not, not yet. (WL 9)

Unlike Gudrun, Ursula has an unconscious intention to comprehend human life while she takes a negative attitude toward the realities. It seems that her way of thinking lacks positiveness, but her attitude in life is constructive. There exists the footing Birkin and

Ursula share in common. Birkin, just like Ursula, is also pessimistic about the present-day human life, and believes that the present situation will not be improved as long as everything is not destroyed; to such an extent, things have seriously deteriorated. His saying that '... it won't expand anymore' (WL, p.54) suggests Birkin's hopeless feeling that things have already reached the ultimate, and there is no room left to add something new. He recognizes that our present life has become as if "a blotch of labor" (WL 55), and there is no other way but to be "a crumbling nothingness" (WL 54) if we cannot establish "new values to things, new truths, a new attitude to life"(WL, p.54). Birkin struggles to acquire this "newness" in the relationship between Ursula and him. However, ironically, this "newness" is only created by destroying old things. It is not easy even for Ursula to cast away her old posture, though she is affected by his idea unknown to her. The same is true with Hermione and Gerald, so they cannot find the same footing.

Chapter "Mino" is very interesting in that Lawrence's idea of "new woman" is implied. Ursula visits him in order to discern his true mind since he never frankly admits that he is in love with her. But against her expectation, he does not approve of the "love" she believes in, because she is imbued with the old ideas of love:

"I don't it feel that you're good-looking," he said.

"Not ever attractive?" she mocked, bitingly.

.....

"Don't you see that it's a question of visual appreciation in the least," he cried. I don't want to see you. I've seen plenty of women, I'm sick and weary of seeing them. *I want a woman I don't see.*" (WL 147) (italics mine)

His last words, "*I want a woman I don't see,*" are very confusing, but we can guess that the so-called "invisible woman" suggests a woman who is not impressed by visual values and does not judge things on the basis of the traditional values. Birkin's wishing her to be an 'invisible woman' reflects his ardent desire to establish a new life, or a new sense of values. The reason for his persistent refusal is that even the idea of love is lifeless enough to suffocate people's minds. His obsession that we must "smash the old" is demonstrated in his recurrent phrases: "a real impersonal me" (WL 145), "a final you" (WL 146), "a final me" (WL 146), "an isolated me" (WL 145), "follow the impulse" (WL 146). He claims that even the feelings are bound by "the old." That is the reason he insists that we should "cast off ourselves" (WL 147) and even "cease to be" (WL 147). Birkin has the firm belief that the feeling of love is at present a hindrance to

any relationship or 'widely opened self.' He persistently persuades her to recognize his vision:

"If you are walking westward," ... "you forfeit the northern and eastward and southern direction."

.....
"Love is a direction which excludes all other directions. It's a freedom *together*, ..."
(WL 152)

But Ursula who firmly believes that "love includes everything" expresses apparent unwillingness to submit to him. It is because her admitting to him would be nothing but to lose her foundation on which she has relied. To Ursula, who has dissatisfaction with the traditional marriage or the reality of the present-day marriage, and does not hesitate to refer her own home to as "a sordid place," unbearable is his statement below:

"The world is only held together by the mystic conjunction, the ultimate unison between people - a bond. And the immediate bond in between man and woman." (WL 152)

The word "bond" irritates her, because it reminds her of the traditional bond between all married couples, including her parents. Although she opposes "the mystic conjunction" or "the ultimate unison between people" which Birkin proposes, saying that "love is freedom," her love-belief does not lie beyond "a freedom together." That becomes apparent in the scene where they argue about their future life in Chapter "Chair." There is a great difference in their thoughts between Birkin and Ursula. He dreams of living together with several favorite friends of his, while she sticks to their own life without others. She cannot understand why he needs others, such as Gudrun or Gerald. We would rather say that she represents a general perspective of women than to lack understanding of his world in which he stands. The visionary world he has recognized is unknown to her, which is far beyond her. She gets exasperated more and more by his statement:

"... One is committed. One must commit oneself to a conjunction with the other— forever." (WL 152)

However, he also is not confident in his speech, so he faces her rebuff:

"You don't fully believe yourself what you are saying. You don't really want their conjunction, otherwise you wouldn't talk so much about it, you'd get it." (WL 153)

As is pointed out by her, he does not put his ideas into practice. But it is the fact that he wishes the present love to be another different one. On the contrary to his expectation, people desire to be loved as a support of their pride. In that sense, love is egoistic. Birkin strongly refuses to say "I love you" because he does not want to associate with her on the same plane where she wants to meet him. It seems to him that people take advantage of love as a tool of their will.

Ursula attacks him, saying that it is perverse of him not to follow his love-urge in spite of being in love. Tired of the discussion with her, he submits to and accepts her. But he replies to her, saying "I believe in you" (WL 147) instead of saying "I love you." That is because what he seeks after is not sentimental. What he needs is not the satisfaction of his mind, but the trust in the existence as an individual. Ursula is not an "invisible woman," but a "visible woman" who regards love as "a process of pride."

III

The reference to visual obsession is also seen in Chapter "Fetish." It is in the scene where Birkin and Gerald are staying with Hallidy, one of Birkin's bohemian friends. To Gerald's astonishment, Hallidy and his friend are standing stark naked in front of the fireplace. Hallidy here justifies to Gerald, who is totally baffled to see the unexpected scene, the importance of living unclothed. His speech below is almost identical to what Birkin says in Chapter "Mino."

"Oh, —one would feel thing instead of merely looking at them. I should feel the air moue against me, and feel the things I touched, ... I'm sure life is all wrong because it has become much too visual— we can neither hear nor feel nor understand, we can only see. ..." (WL 78)

Although Hallidy emphasizes the meaningfulness of living without any clothes, Gerald, who leads a traditional aristocratic life following the social order, cannot accept his suggestions. His society requires them to live while paying attention to the order. They are asked to be conscious as social beings. He cannot agree with Hallidy. To him, to live naked is

to neglect publicness. He chooses to live clothed in consciousness. The problem is that we live "consciously." This conscious life makes people over-conscious, self-assertive, self-centered, this is, "visual." As Ursula's consciousness makes herself visible to Birkin, so the stubbornly self-conscious Gerald has himself visible. In Chapter "Coal-Dust," Gerald's willful consciousness is revealed in the starting pages. When the locomotive approaches the cross giving off a mechanical sound, Gerald arrives riding on a white horse. He tries to control the horse which desperately attempts to escape from the squeaking sound throwing his upper body backwards on her hind legs. Gerald who pushes his willful self to compel her to obey him is a visible man, according to the Birkin's way of speaking. Here he is a manifestation of self-assertion. There is another scene where he wields his selfish will over others in Chapter "Death and Love." That is the scene where he slyly comes into Gudrun's room at night led by the intrinsic void at the bottom of his mind and the emptiness intensified by the loss of his father. He comes to get the evidence of his being alive. Surprised at the unexpected intrusion, she cannot reject him because he looked like a helpless baby asking for mother's help. However, his behaviour is as self-centered as many others and not considerate of Gudrun, which is quite similar to his behaviour towards the horse in Chapter "Coal-Dust." In the self-centeredness, he is a visible man. In the Birkin's perspective, we cannot live free from the visual consciousness, being accustomed to it; we have our naked senses blind, bound all over by the self-consciousness. Needless to say, this is the cloth of self-consciousness.

Chapter "Breadalby" has a symbolic scene where Birkin throws his clothes away and rolls around over the vegetation in the woods. Birkin, who nearly escaped from Hermione's attack with the paperweight at the end of the struggle with her, runs into the woods and gets undressed unconsciously. He feels as if he was newly resurrected with vivid life of plants spreading all over his whole body, and is fulfilled immeasurably:

Nothing else would do, nothing else would satisfy, except this coolness and subtlety of vegetation travelling into one's blood. (WL 107)

Here he is liberated from the conscious life by the communion with the trees and plants. His extremely biased spiritual life takes back its balance. He feels refilled as if dried-up soil was given water, and recuperates "his own living self" by touching the "soft and more delicate and more beautiful than the touch of any woman" (WL 107). The act of undressing himself takes him from the closed world to the open world, and makes him realize that he had made the same wrong as the dead man did in *The Man Who Died*. Here he knows the place "where he

belonged" (WL 107) through the naked direct contact with the living vegetation. The invisibility is acquired in him since he has attained the realization of naked consciousness. When one established one's impersonal self, throwing away one's own personal self, there is no "sensuous" consciousness there; the "sensuous" self recedes, and another different dark rich, "sensual" self manifests itself. In Chapter "Fetish," Halliday emphasizes the significance of living naked; his idea is so close to Birkin's statement in "Mino."

IV

The Plumed Serpent also has an Ursula type of woman named Kate, who has a history of individualistic life for 40 years. She reaches the recognition that "the god impulse had collapsed" (PL 78), and comes to undeveloped Mexico, hoping that life obtain mystery again in her. The Kate figure overlaps Lawrence who leaves England in 1919 for undeveloped countries.

Kate is a strongly self-conscious woman who has a firm belief that "each individual has a complete self, a complete soul, an accomplished I" (PL 105). She reminds us of Ursula in *Women in Love*, but she is not of a Hermione type. She has more unshakeable confidence in herself than Ursula. We can see in Kate the Ursula figure who has had much more experience in life. She meets Ramón, who is engaged in the restoration movement of the old Deity "Quetzalcoatl" with the purpose of manifesting the possibility of new life. In that sense, Birkin and Ramón direct their eyes to the same goal. The discussion over "will" recurs here, again, which repeats between the main characters in *Women in Love*:

"Oh, isn't life horrible!" "Every human being exerting his will all the time—over other people, and over himself, and nearly always self-righteous!"

Ramón made a grimace of repulsion. "To me," he said, "that is just the weariness of life! ... My soul is nauseated, and there is nothing but death ahead, unless I find something else." (PL 73-74)

Their statements above denotes their irritation against the reality that individuals and their life both have become violent will itself. The result of one enforcing one's will on others and making them submit to one is just misanthropy. However, Ramón, unlike the disturbed Birkin, has already found out a realm. Ramón tells Kate that he has discovered "my own manhood." (PL 74) Against him retorts Kate, "I *have* my own womanhood" (PL 74). Her

sarcastic reply intimates our way of thinking about present life, which is egoism that has been the centre of life. The narrow-minded consciousness that one has one's own life causes the antipathy and will-to-will struggle between individuals. Her statement reflects her 40 years of life, and at the same time reveals the fact that she only leads her limited life. However, her egoism is not so extreme as Hermione's. She is flexible enough to listen to Ramón. He attempts to open her eyes to his attained recognition of human life:

"And then – when you find your own manhood – your womanhood," ... "then you know it is not your own, to do as you like with. You don't have it of your own will. It comes from – from the middle – from the God. ... And the God gives me my manhood, then leaves me to it. I have nothing but my manhood. The God gives it me, and leaves me to do further. (PL 74)

His words above tell very well the agony of his past life. Here is seen the naked Ramón facing some immanent God in himself and his own soul, taking off the cloth of his narrow-minded consciousness. Ramón here is totally different from Birkin who is always talking about an "impersonal" self. Unlike Ramón, the talkative Birkin always remained an exponent of his vision, which caused Ursula's distrust. In contrast, Ramón is actually living an "impersonal" life himself. There lies the reason Kate gets to know "They (i.e. Ramón and Cipriano) have got more than I, they have a richness that I haven't got." (PL 184) although she has a sturdy self-will.

The belief shown here is made possible when one turns one's eyes to the unlimitedness of a selfless mind and reaches the recognition that one shares with others the depth of the unlimitedness. Being human is to be personal, and at the same time "impersonal," and to have a common self. The clues to acquire one's commonality or generality lie in the decision to break the hard crust of the self-will and enter into a mystic relationship. It is quite natural that Kate sticks to her own individuality because she had lived in the country for 40 years where everyone has no doubt of his or her individual life.

However, as previously said, Kate senses that Ramón has reached a world unknown to her, though she still has the same strong self-will as Ursula. She acknowledges that she has 'a complete soul,' 'an accomplished I' (PL 105), but she is not as blind to the self-will as Hermione in *Women in Love*. Kate is without doubt a "visible" woman, but has a quality to be "invisible." There is the developed Ursula here. Ramón is attracted by Kate's matured self while he has an opposing feeling against her. Kate notices his keeping harmony in spirit. "The Morning Star"

that Ramón advocates metaphorically symbolizes the mystic relationship between humans:

The magnificence of the watchful morning star, that watches between the night and the day, the gleaming clue to the two opposites. (PL 93-94)

The "intermediate" aspect implied in the "Morning Star" is, so to speak, the ultimate vision of human relationship the author acquired after struggles. Kate's closed soul is gradually opened by the association with the open-minded Ramón and his follower Cipriano.

Ramón is a person who can be rooted in the world transcending his own familiar daily world, just like Birkin. He discovers from his experiences that his own human nature is essentially far beyond him. In that sense, he shares with Birkin the recognition that "One is committed." Their souls are opened to the God in that both of them are beyond their own limitation. The reason Cipriano thinks Ramón as "more than a man" (PL 387) lies there. Ramón's secret which immeasurably attracts Kate and affects Cipriano to submission to him is in his impersonalness he recognizes:

"... there must be manifestations. We *must* change back to the vision of the living cosmos; we *must*. The oldest Pan is in us, and he will not be denied. In cold blood and in hot blood both, we must make the change. That is how man is made... I accept myself entire, and proceed to make destiny." (PL 316)

To Ramón, being a man is the integration of personal and impersonal aspects in one self; one soul consists of both the elements. Ramón's recognition of human wholeness enables Kate to throw away her self-conscious self and to blurt out "Let me close my eyes to him, and open only my soul" (PL 184). Kate's cry at heart tells her internal change; she tries to give up living a "visual" life and to look at things unconsciously. Kate at last finds the meaningfulness of being an "invisible" woman.

V

The topic of an "invisible" woman is discussed in *The Man Who Died*, too. The priestess of Isis is awakened to "the greater life of the body" (MWD 140). She knows the Goddess Isis and lives seeing her life in the mysterious life of the Goddess who searches for the pieces of the husband's body. As Isis cannot find out the "last clue" to give Osiris the integration, so the

priestess herself lives seeking for the "last clue" to give her the reality.

This woman is aware of a life transcending "the little, personal life" (MWD 140). That is known from the situation under which women were placed at that time. She once said to the old philosopher, "Are all women born to be given to men?" (MWD 151). This question she holds about womanhood causes 'the very flower of her womb' (MWD 151) not to respond Antony's brilliant manliness and makes her scared of Caesar's 'eagle-like rapacity' (MWD 151). The reason she lives apart from the world is, as the philosopher says, to throw herself into the light of the "invisible sun" (MWD 151) in the resurrected man approaching her silently instead of the man requiring her to be bathed in the sun of their maleness' (MWD 151). Therefore, she opens her mind to the seemingly vagabond man who came to ask for one-night lodging. There is 'the other kind of beauty' or "the sheer stillness of the deeper life" (MWD 154) on his face. The flower of the womb starts to move for the first time; never did it respond to men before. That is because the blocks which had kept her from men were taken off. He, unlike Caesar and Antony, does not have any desire for her to open her flower to his sun-like manhood. This man has gained that "sensual" life which Birkin firmly believes. He lives in an "invisible consciousness," not in a superficial consciousness, but in a dark, sensual flesh, totally different from the arrogant, compelling existence of Gerald or Hermione in *Women in Love*. They cannot help exerting their forcible will over others. They always asks for their vindication in satisfying their desire. We cannot see the stillness of life found in the dead man in their way of showing love to their partners, and only see the self-centered, willful, glaring sun. In Birkin's way of speech, they live "a visual, sensuous" life.

On the other hand, the resurrected man finds in the priestess something different from the other women he had known before. That is "her tender desire for him" (MWD 163) when she showed in detaining him, which was like a soft, tender sun. She is, unlike Hermione, awakened to a dark, 'sensual' consciousness. She never tries to conquer others with her compelling will. The man determines to stay there, though he knows that she identified him. He touched the tenderness of the woman, who lives following 'the woman-flow' (MWD 163). But that is not enough for his death-remaining flesh to restore the reality of life. Although he is urged to life by the priestess, he is still in death. The following is a scene where she rubs his death-covered body with her ointed hands as if she was like a priestess who presides a secret ritual.

As he leaves himself to her, the man gradually feels his body gaining warmth:

Then slowly, slowly, in the perfect darkness of his inner man, he felt the stir of

something coming. A dawn, a new sun. A new sun was coming up in him, in the perfect inner darkness of himself. He waited for it breathless, quivering with a fearful hope... 'Now I am not myself. I am something new...' (MWD 168)

What he feels here is quite the same happy feelings as Birkin gets when he rolls around over the grass, naked. As Birkin felt the life of vegetation touch his own life and penetrate all the limbs of his body and revive his almost dried-up body, so the dead man is filled up with newness and strength by the gentle warm touch with the woman, just like Connie who found the delightfulness of life in the touch with Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Love*. The priestess is without doubt an "invisible" woman living in a "dark" flesh Birkin repeatedly insists in *Women in Love*.

VI

The "invisible woman" is the subject Lawrence sought after in the works *The Plumed Serpent* and *The Man Who Died* since *Women in Love*. As Birkin said that "we are all too full of ourselves" (WL 44), we are all visible, or visual and have the same aspects as the characters of the stories. Hermione and Gerald are not the only examples of visible characteristic. Gerald, Hermione, and Kate respectively represent us who have no doubt of our completed self. Among them only Kate is freed from the bond of selfish self-centeredness, and acquires her unstrained self. The following realm Kate manifested is the very new land which he discovered in his last stage of his life:

The individual, like the perfect being, does not and cannot exist, in the vivid world. We are all fragments. And at the best, halves. (PL 390)

The new state of mind that the priestess and the man attained in *The Man Who Died* is the ultimate realm which Lawrence finds after all the struggles in life.

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