Undulating Styles:  
*The Rainbow*

There still remains a God, but not a personal God: a vast shimmering impulse which wavers onwards towards some end, I don’t know what – taking no regard of the little individual, but taking regard for humanity. When we die, like rain-drops falling back again into the sea, we fall back into the big, shimmering sea of unorganised life which we call God. We are lost as individuals, yet we count in the whole.

*(Letters, I, p. 256)*

For we are all waves of the tide. But the tide contains the waves.

*(‘The Crown’)*

Evidently the wealth of critical writing on Lawrence, and in particular on his mature fiction, means that the main ideas are continually laid down and augmented, and Lawrence’s style almost always, rightly, receives critical attention. That there are right ways and wrong ways of approaching his language is something which is implicitly taken up in this study. Lawrence is, of course, recognizably a highly metaphorical writer and his work has much to communicate about the necessarily metaphorical nature of understanding. If Lawrence can be seen ‘thinking metaphorically’ in his discursive writing, to what extent is the poetic character of his thought available to us in his fiction? While I would be reluctant to say that *The Rainbow* is ‘about’ language any more than the books on the unconscious, or indeed *Women in Love*, are ‘about’ language, directly, my intention here is to examine metaphoricity in *The Rainbow* as the proper vehicle for Lawrence’s thought in the context of a significant work of fiction. This will not prove to be another mode entirely, different
utterly from that of the subsequent novel, *Women in Love*, for instance, but a specific modulation of Lawrence's 'metaphysic', broadly speaking. To make a metaphor is not the same as 'thinking metaphorically': *The Rainbow* embodies its own mode of thinking metaphorically which communicates what it is really 'about'. The discussion opens with a concentration on something which is on the face of it quite local, on the wave-imagery of the novel as representing a tangible body of metaphor within the work. This is with a view to focusing on the question of how an instance of metaphor within a narrative can also come to be seen as the language of the whole novel. Essentially it will emerge that without the 'wave' in *The Rainbow* there is no novel. So that even at this point it is possible and appropriate to talk about *The Rainbow*'s 'engulfing' medium.

There is nothing in the first paragraph of *The Rainbow* to suggest the radical view of language that will emerge in the course of the novel. It unproblematically sets the scene after a traditional model, and the debt to Hardy has often been noted, but we cannot talk benignly about influences on Lawrence who was, in his discursive writing, a perceptive theorizer of the novel genre. In his mature fiction Lawrence turned the novel form into the arena of his critique of the ideals and aesthetic orthodoxies which were habitually represented within that form. His art-speech ('Art-speech is the only truth') also constituted a critique of the excessively aestheticized, excessively self-reflexive modern novel, a form which, in his view, revealed a lack of artistic integrity. The tendency in modern fiction which it represented provoked Lawrence's criticism partly because it seemed to him to pay lip-service to Nietzsche's view in *Human, All Too Human* that 'artists of all ages have raised to heavenly transfiguration precisely those conceptions which we now recognize as false' (p. 220) but stopped short of a genuinely philosophical critique of those conceptions. In the process of re-reading, we are forced to recognize how Lawrence's radically metaphorical prose reveals his awareness of the distance between himself and the traditions of the past, a distance that he can strategically develop.

The second paragraph, and successive relatively short paragraphs leading into the distinctive 'prologue' of *The Rainbow* begin to suggest that the narrative language itself will have a specifically Lawrentian ontological bearing. The 'wave which cannot halt' (*The Rainbow*, p. 9) has been set in motion. It refers to a