



## Women in Love

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### Research Paper—English

Women in Love has been regarded as Lawrence's best novel by many critics including F.R. Leavis, Keith Alldritt and F.H. Langman. It is, indeed, the creation of a strikingly original kind genius, and has been justly praised in the highest terms by most of the scholars of Lawrence. A perusal of the very first few pages of this book convinces the reader that it is a work of a first rate novelist. No wonder Lawrence himself considered it to be "a very serious and profound piece of work ... a much finer book than Rainbow."<sup>1</sup> Women in Love was completed in 1916, but first it was published in 1920 for fear of legal proceedings against it on the ground of obscenity. It is a sequel to The Rainbow. It is a well known fact that Lawrence originally wrote a sequel work to be titled The Sisters, but later on divided it into two novels named The Rainbow and Women in Love in order to present his vision of life effectively and artistically. He wrote in one of his letters : "I am going to split the book into two volumes : It was so unwieldy. It needs to be in two volumes."<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning he was planning to bring out the book in one volume under the title The Sisters, even then he declared that the heroine, Ursula, whom he earlier called Ella, should have some experience of love and before loving and marrying the right person, Birkin : "I must have Ella get some experience before she meets her Mr. Birkin."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, later on he split the book into two novels in The Rainbow, and thought of continuing her tale in Women in Love. The novel begins with a discussion on the possibility of marriage, and ends with one on the possibility of a further relationship beyond marriage, be-

tween men. In each case the relationship is more than a private one, but has implications for society as a whole. Lawrence was acutely aware of the effect of modern civilization, industrialization, mechanization and of scientific education on human psyche and thereby on the establishment and the growth of human relations: "He soon came to feel the deadness of modern industrial civilization, with the mechanizing of personality, the corruption of the will, and the dominance of sterile intellect over the authentic inward passions of men, which he saw as the inevitable accompaniment of modern life."<sup>4</sup>

The novel deals with the theme of love and marriage as a means of achieving fulfilment in life and relationships. This theme is unfolded dramatically with all intensity at the very beginning of novel, and the reader is wholly engaged in it. On the very opening page of the book, the two sisters, Ursula and Gudrun, talk about marriage and the serious atmosphere of the novel is fully revealed. The very first sentence that a character in the novel utters is Gudrun's question to her elder sister Ursula, "...don't you really want to get married?"<sup>5</sup> The conversation between them comes to a close on a note of tension, with Gudrun angrily working on her drawing and Ursula absorbed in her stitching, and "this betraying the tension of the situation."<sup>6</sup> The Gerald – Gudrun story forms a complete action in the Aristotelian sense – that is, it has a beginning, middle and an end. Gudrun, for the first time, sees Gerald at his sister's wedding. She feels attracted towards his gleaming beauty and maleness. As Lawrence describes him: "His gleaming beauty, maleness,

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like a young, good humoured, smiling wolf, did not blind her (Gudrun) to the significant sinister stillness in his bearing, the lurking danger of his unsubdued temper.”<sup>7</sup> Though Gudrun is impulsively magnetized by his beauty and maleness, yet this fascination doesn’t blind her to the significant, sinister stillness in his bearing. She realizes that his totem is the wolf. Then she questions herself, “Am I really singled out for him in some way...?”<sup>8</sup>.

The following words of Birkin are fully applicable to her: “And woman is the same as horses : two wills act in opposition inside her. With one will, she wants to subject herself utterly. With the other she wants to bolt and pitch her rider to perdition.”<sup>9</sup> Evidently, Gudrun is also of the same sort as Gerald is – equally cruel, dominating and aggressive. Henceforward, she knew, she had her power over him. Wherever they met, they would be secretly associated. And he would be helpless in the association with her. Her soul exulted.<sup>10</sup> The violence that lies hidden in Gudrun comes to the surface when she, after dancing voluptuously in front of the wild bullocks, becomes aggressive and drives them away. Here she matches her will against that of the bullocks and tests her power. Her victory over bullocks releases her desire for violence against Gerald, and she suddenly strikes him on the face with the back of her hand. He does not feel angry with her, but tells her that he loves her. Gudrun also knows that Gerald also is a domineering sort of person.

Lawrence’s words in “Love was Once a Little Boy” predict their forthcoming predicament : “Take the love of a man and a woman, today one finds ... conflict of the two opposing egos or individualities ... it is the inevitable result of trying to snatch an intensified individuality out of the mutual flame ... each hopes it will flourish like a salamander in the flame of love and passion.”<sup>11</sup> Gerald and Gudrun too like two salamanders in the same flame, will fight to dominate each other till the flame of love between the two extinguishes. The progress of their affair vindicates their perceptions. Gerald is mechanical in all his relations as

he is in business. Gudrun also perceives that he has effectively de-personalized sexuality and the individual: Now she realized that this was the world of powerful, under world men who spent most of their time in the darkness. In their voices, she could hear the voluptuous resonance of darkness, the strong, dangerous underworld, mindless inhuman. They sounded also like strange machines, heavy, oiled.<sup>12</sup> Gerald is of the opinion that a ‘social question’ does not enter between him and any woman. They provide him with his most satisfactory relief from the frightening sense of his own nullity. His unacknowledged desire to engage in the reductive process represented by the African wood carving is the disintegrative counterpart of that mystery of ‘ice-destructive knowledge’ which he completes in the mines. It is no accident that Gudrun sees him emerging from “soft, oozy, watery mud”<sup>13</sup> like the water plants which she is sketching. Moreover, Gerald seeks to satisfy in women that passion for destruction which underlines his administration of the mines. For instance he seizes on a woman like Minette as a victim and takes pleasure in the feeling that he will be able to “destroy her utterly in the strength of his discharge.”<sup>14</sup>

Gerald and Gudrun’s view about love and marriage that are expressed during their talks with Birkin, who is friend of Gerald, also reveal more clearly the sort of relationship they want with each other. Gerald says that he has had attachments with several women but he has never felt love or true love. Gudrun, with an intention to mock at Birkin, ironically adds, “He says that you can find an eternal equilibrium in marriage, if you can find an eternal equilibrium in marriage, if you accept the unison, and still leave yourself separate, don’t try to fuse.”<sup>15</sup>

Lawrence’s direct treatment of the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun adds to this indirect or symbolic treatment. The description of the sexual intercourse in the chapter “Death and Love” considerably expands the meaning of their implication with each other. This description exposes the conflicts of desire which confound their

relationship. Firstly, there is the conflict between Gudrun's desire for victimization and dominance. In this chapter she submits in an ecstasy of 'subjection' to Gerald's need of her. It was wonderful, marvellous, it was a miracle... of his life, at the knowledge of which he was lost in an ecstasy of relief and wonder. And she, subject, received him as a vessel filled with his bitter option of death. She had no power at this crisis to resist.<sup>16</sup>

Gerald – Gudrun's sex relation is quite contrary to Lawrence's concept of sex relation. It is 'cheap', 'promiscuous', and 'heartless' in nature. It is a sort of 'bullying', 'a moment's excitement' and is never a 'real flow of sympathy, generous and warm'. As Lawrence asserts, If there is one thing I don't like it is cheap and promiscuous sex. If there is one thing I insist on it is that sex is a delicate, vulnerable, vital thing that you mustn't fool with. If there is one thing I deplore it is heartless sex. Sex must be a real flow, a real flow of sympathy, generous and warm, and not a trick thing, or a moments excitement, or a mere bit of bullying.<sup>17</sup> Both Gerald and Gudrun continue to have the sense of combat for supremacy over the other. She knows from the beginning that he is naturally promiscuous. But now she resolves to give him a fight. "One of them must triumph over the other"<sup>18</sup>. Gudrun, to add to the agony of Gerald, turns her attention towards a voluptuous German artist Loerke, who is also staying in the same hotel. Both don't remain loyal to each other. Lawrence gives much importance to the feeling of fidelity in love. To quote from his "Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover"—"The instincts of fidelity is perhaps the deepest instincts in the great complex we call sex. Where there is real sex there is the underlying passion for fidelity."<sup>19</sup> Gerald Gudrun's love is not real love, hence there is no passion for fidelity. She tells him that their relationship has been a failure and she mockingly adds "But we can try again elsewhere."<sup>20</sup> She, a little later, informs him that she has decided to leave him and to make her own arrangements most probably with Loerke. But now in Gudrun's leav-

ing Gerald, sensual gratification is denied to him. Another relationship, like Gerald and Gudrun relationship, which proves a failure is Birkin and Hermione relationship. As she says, "To me the pleasure of knowing is so great so wonderful nothing has meant so much to me in all life as certain knowledge."<sup>21</sup>

She also asserts that mind is death and that "it destroys all our spontaneity, all our instincts."<sup>22</sup> This means that she is an equivocator. What lies behind her equivocation is a perverted lust. She is guilty of intellectualizing sex. In a brutally frank conversation between her and Birkin, he tells that her only real motivation is her bullying will: As he remarks: You want to clutch things and have them in your power.... And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to know."<sup>23</sup> Hermione stands for indulgence in sensational gratification within the mind. She presents the negative side of Lawrentian philosophy. Lawrence asserts, "I am going to accept myself sexually as I accept myself mentally and spiritually, and know that I am one time one thing, one time another, but I am always myself. My sex is me as my mind is me and nobody will make me feel shame about it"<sup>24</sup>. But Hermione is not going to accept herself sexually but only mentally and spiritually. Hermione is all mind and spirit and no flesh or instincts. She represents an "extravagance of spiritual will"<sup>25</sup> an intellectual form of bullying. Lawrence defines bullying as the desire to superimpose one's will upon another and he characterizes it as "the most fatal flaw of all things."<sup>26</sup>

She wrongly believes that she can still attract Birkin by the quality of her knowledge and beauty. She persuades him to love her. But love is spontaneous and it can not be received by force. So she presents the negative side of Lawrentian philosophy of love. Her love is opposed to Lawrentian principles of blood intimacy and natural life, and spontaneity. She represents intellectual. She is after knowledge. She has an obsession "to know

all.”<sup>27</sup> When she compels Birkin to explain what knowledge he gets from copying a Chinese drawing of geese, he forces her to admit to herself an awareness of unknown modes of being and to recognize her that ‘reality of life’ is something she can have no command over and can not take into her possession. Hermione’s ‘deficiency of being’ is shown by the ‘terrible void’ within her, and it is to Birkin that she turns to fill the void, “to close up this deficiency.”<sup>28</sup> Believing that she herself is the central touchstone of truth, she thinks that she needs only Birkin and his knowledge in conjunction with her to be complete. Thus Lawrence, through Hermione Birkin relationship, throws light on the various factors which cause conflict in man- woman relationship. One is that for a satisfactory relationship man and woman must have an integrated personality. As Hermione represents only the mind, the intellect and lacks the opposite so her relationship with Birkin ends in fiasco. Second is that, in man- women relationship, they should not try to prove their superiority, rather they must respect the “otherness of the other.”<sup>29</sup> But Hermione wants to overcome Birkin rather than recognizing his individuality.

This feeling is accompanied by a deep dislike for the whole social structure of England. He shows the same passionate dislike of the bourgeoisie among whom he lives as the clever cultivated Gudrun does for the working class life in which she has grown up and from which she has broken away. Although Birkin can find no general practical cure for the social disease that disgusts him, he seeks a personal way of salvation for himself. He wants to try to live by a religion of love. This love is not to be interpreted in a romantic or Christian sense. It is to be a relationship between ‘fulfilled’ individuals, who remain individual but who achieve through the others some contact with hitherto unknown. But Lawrence also expresses the idea: Neither man nor woman should sacrifice individuality to love, nor love to individuality... you have to balance love and individuality, and actually sacrifice a portion of each... Love, as a relationship of unison, means and must mean,

to some extent, the sinking of individuality.<sup>30</sup>

Ursula has mixed feeling towards him as she feels attracted towards him but at the same time feels that he annoyed her. But there has been no time for the understanding to develop. The understanding between the two does develop but slowly, yet the urge of soul is present even here. The desire to know, to understand the person for whom one feels intuitive attraction. When Birkin sees Ursula acting in a ballad at Hermione’s residence he finds that “she was like a strange unconscious bud of powerful womanhood. He was consciously drawn to her. She was his future.”<sup>31</sup> Rupert Birkin has one aim in life-to find a woman and to remain with her all his life.

In the beginning of their relationship, Birkin recognizes that Ursula, like Hermione wants to dominate him. In his mediations he realizes the fact of Ursula’s arrogance and tyranny and in this respect he compares her to Hermione. But he finds Ursula to be a promising material and thinks that she can be moulded to his ideal of love. So he embarks upon a re-education of her mind. Ursula wants no bullying from her lover. She can’t tolerate male domination. What she wants is love, love in the normal conventional, romantic sense and she wants him to tell her that he loves her. She urges him and coaxes him to say he loves her. She feels that he has made a deep confession of love to her, though in an absurd manner. She does not understand him when he says that he wants a strange conjunction with her- not meeting and mingling but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings.

The process does not consist of adjustments at the mental level, it consists of the negation of certain mental curiosities and doubts which they have about the type of love the other partner wants to offer. Each, therefore, wants to insist on his or her ideal of love. As Rupert tells Ursula, “While ever either of us insists to the other, we are all wrong. But there we are, the accord doesn’t come.”<sup>33</sup> Finally, however, the accord does come, when they are capable enough to let things take their own shape and don’t impose each

one's ideal of love upon the other and they are happily married. So through Birkin Lawrence has presented his philosophy and through Birkin-Ursula relationship he has presented a balanced relationship. David Cavitch briefly sums up Birkin's story thus: Roused to a new love in his relationship with Ursula, he slowly manages to erase his image of her as a Magna Mater full of Woman's greed to possess and dismember her sexual victim. Birkin's progress towards a sane response to Ursula is measured chiefly by their extended discussions about love and by their mercurial quarrels that displace his fear and allow the lovers to express trust and tenderness.<sup>34</sup> In addition to man and woman relationship, the novel explores and communicates the depth of a unique relationship between two men which satiate man's quest for something beyond love, something mystical. Birkin, who is considered to be Lawrence's self portrayal, is possessed with the idea of permanent and pure relation between two men which is absolutely necessary for the full, integrated growth of a person's being. Lawrence explicitly states as well as dramatizes how Birkin finds himself confronted with this problem - "the problem of love and eternal conjunction between two men. Of course this was necessary- it has been a necessary inside himself all his life - to love a man purely and fully."<sup>35</sup> Birkin endeavours to achieve this kind of conjunction with Gerald Crich. Ursula completely fails to understand why he should need another man when he has got her. It depresses her that he wants a further fellowship and deeply

desires another man- Gerald without caring for proper response. This causes a rift between them, though not a serious one and he admits to angry Ursula that despite the fact that he has a "perfect and complete relationship"<sup>36</sup> with her, he certainly craves for a "final, almost extra human relationship with him a relationship in the ultimate of me and him."<sup>37</sup>

The effort of the two men is to experience and in some way to formalize a relationship between man and man which, it is implied, is one necessary condition of a full relationship between man and woman. Birkin also feels the need of another man as his counterpart so as to have a sense of completion in life. As he explains to Ursula; You are enough for me, as far as a woman is concerned... But I wanted a man friend as eternal as you and I are eternal... having you I can live all my life without anybody else, any other sheer intimacy. But to make it complete, really happy I wanted eternal union with a man too; another kind of love.<sup>38</sup>

Thus in *Women in Love* Lawrence has presented various kinds of human relationships. From the detailed study of the novel, it becomes clear that in the novel he has presented contradictory relationships. They succeed as they give due respect to the individuality of the other and do not try to prove their superiority. In this way, *Women In Love* successfully portrays different kinds of relationships which broaden the readers prospective about the understanding of human relationships.

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