

Love in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*: Different Levels of its Manifestation

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Abstract

This article deals with 'love' among men and women at different levels. The love of a man with a woman, a man with a man, love-hate relationship of a woman with a woman –all serve as the basis of human relationships in this novel. Hence, all these levels have been critically analysed, referring to the text, as closely as possible. The aim of this article is to find out which bond works and which do not. And if they do not, what are the reasons behind this fiasco? Thus, the psychological terrain of the main characters is the prime focus in this article. Human relationships, at times, are denied by the protagonist like Birkin. Again, love has different meanings to different characters in the novel. Sometimes, love alters if it finds an alteration. Extremes in relationships have been adroitly dealt with by the novelist. Hence, these are being closely observed, rather critically analysed in this essay.

Keywords: Protagonists, Sculptor, Love, Human Relationships, Man, Woman, Homoerotic.

“Love is not love if it alters when alteration finds” (Shakespeare W.:1961,1111), Shakespeare wrote in Sonnet no. CXVI. But time passed by, and, love developed many connotations too. Love began to be treated as a feeling, an emotion having many layers of meaning, many levels of understanding. *Women in Love*, a novel by D.H. Lawrence, is a novel par excellence, wherein Lawrence writes about love from different levels and alternative manifestations.

Women in Love starts off with bandying of words on marriage between the two sisters, Ursula Brangwen and Gudrun Brangwen. Like Austen, Lawrence emphasizes marriage as an integral part of a woman's existence, again women in Lawrence's novels not just win a man's heart, she also is courageous enough to voice her opinions, likes and dislikes. The women protagonists in Lawrence, always accept life as it is. For example, while Gerald feels envious of her new friend, Loerke, the young sculptor, Gudrun might be reticent or restrictive in her opinions on her sculptor friend. But she kept on praising him to the skies.

Ursula and Birkin, would have been made a perfect pair of lovers, if Birkin held back his frank vociferation of his love for Gerald. Ursula loved Birkin to distraction, Birkin too did. But, the frank admittance of another love, running parallel with that of Ursula, adds a different charm to the novel, which, like any other Lawrentian novel kicks off controversy in human relationships. Once again, it is proved that Lawrence makes us think out-of-the-box, makes us weigh the pros and cons of human relationships in its different layers, in its variegated connotations.

David Riesman in his *The Lonely Crowd* expressed that the humans, though move in a throng, are always left to themselves, they are ultimately alone. They are destined to keep their own company. Again, John Donne declared that “No man is an island” (6). But, Lawrence quite adroitly, posits his characters in between the two, they are neither shoved into the grooves of utter loneliness nor they are surrounded by allies or soul-mates all the time. Especially, Lawrence never portrays a character, straight and untrammelled. Rather, almost all the characters are in quest of a dream-relationship, in consonance with the present one. It appears, as though, no character is content with his/her companion. He/she craves for more alliances, more expansiveness in relationships. Though, *Women in Love* is seen as the immediate sequel of *The Rainbow*, it proves to be more daring, more challenging than the preceding one. Graham Hough thereby argues in this regard, “*Women in Love*, in fact, questions the whole institution of marriage, which *The Rainbow* takes for granted” (Hough 92).

Thus, it is clear that *The Rainbow* is the easier to understand between the two. Plot-wise, craft-wise, *Women in Love* (1920) is really unique in its approach and artistry. *The Rainbow* has a hint of destructive impulses, as Lawrence himself in a personal communication write, “This (*Women in Love*) actually does contain the results in one’s soul of the war: it is purely destructive, not like *The Rainbow*, destructive consummating” (Salgado 123). In *Women in Love*, we find a clash of opposing impulses, of diversifying aims and implausible bonds of love. In fact, unlike *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* is a more difficult book with jarring definitions of the term ‘love.’ Though, according to Salgado, the difference between the two novels lies in “emphasis, tone and direction” (122). Hough points out the difference in the “conscious seeker of fulfilment” in life—in *The Rainbow*, there is only one seeker, while in the more complex work *Women in Love*, along with Ursula, there are Gudrun and the two men, “who are not only looking for something from their womenfolk, but from each other”

(Hough 95). Thus, both individual and related aspirations are being taken into consideration, in order to comprehend the pattern of the complex and unpredictable emotion—love, in *Women in Love*. Why is then the title of the book *Women in Love*? It could better have been either “Women and Men in Love” or “Love of Men and Women.” But the women are the centre in this novel, while the male characters are pivoting round them. The emotional equation among themselves is yet to achieve a veritable pattern, hence, the novelist perhaps did not dare include ‘men’ in the superscription. Whatever the reason be, whatever the schema of relationships be, it is true that, Lawrence believed in the relationship between men and women—normal, passion-driven, biological. It becomes pivotal to scrutinizing various levels of manifestation of love in different relationships which would help us analyse the bond that works among characters and the novelist’s take on it.

At the outset, Birkin made his presence felt in Ursula’s Botany class and the stage is set for a perfect union of two hearts. Ursula dreamt of getting a man in her life and Birkin did fit into the space in her mind, held blank for Mr. Right. Hermione was her arch-rival in the regard. Fighting Hermione would not be an uphill task, as long as Birkin was keen on winning her heart. While conversing with Hermione, Birkin had made a point clear; negation of “one’s self” and merging with that of the other would definitely define his own take on sensuality. Ursula was being assailed to know, whether love and sensuality were to stand on the same pedestal. It was, however, soon discovered that Birkin was looking for it in the man-woman relationship.

Ursula tried her best to understand the nature of Rupert Birkin, even though, she could feel that Birkin was more interested in Gerald Crich than Hermione. It seemed a bit awkward to her initially. He had truly fallen sensually for Ursula, no doubt, but a parallel relationship with a man like Gerald Crich was his innate demand. Was then Birkin unclear or confused as to what he really needed in order to lead a decent existence here on earth? Birkin called it “another kind of love” (WIL 451). In today’s parlance, it would have been same-sex love, ‘homoeroticism’ or the ilk. Barring all, Ursula and Birkin had a healthy relationship between themselves, Birkin was sure, at last, of knowing Ursula in a world “where there is no speech” (Lawrence 162). And, even Ursula, we have seen, “was always frightened of words, because she knew that mere word-force could always make her believe what she did not believe” (Lawrence 492). Ursula, from within, was dying for Rupert Birkin and to her Birkin was

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like a soulmate, with whom she could commune with. It was doubly proved, when, she kept arguing with Hermione, in the most witty and acerbic terms, that would have been possible, keeping her mildness intact. As Hermione asked Ursula straight whether she loved Birkin really or not, she took just a fraction of a jiffy to rejoin firmly:

He wants me to accept him as—as an absolute—But it seems to me he doesn't want to give anything. He doesn't want real warm intimacy—he won't have it—he rejects it. He won't let me think, really, and he won't let me feel—he hates feelings' ... 'He wants me to sink myself, Ursula resumed, 'not to have any being of my own.' (Lawrence 288-9)

Which love is this then? love of a man for a woman? can it be sans passion? sans feelings? This daring demand of loving one as an absolute, transcends or rather annuls the person's individual yearning for physicality. Does the consummation of love, in this case, demand a total negation of senses? Does then love remain intact in mortifying senses, nullifying bodily desire? Or, is this just verbal jugglery to baffle her rival, Hermione? (WIL 451)

In marriage, absolute surrender to one another is necessary, not that the female will have to surrender herself to the man unconditionally. In fact, Rupert Birkin and Ursula open up to each other and their indoctrination of the emotion, love is laudably brought to the fore in "Mino (WIL 146)." This conversation between Rupert Birkin and Ursula Brangwen is worth quoting in order to get a clear comprehension of love growing in between them, which engulfs both of them, quite rationally, enthusiastically and with enough verve and vivacity as:

"It is as very little need for a woman now, has he?
disgusting, people marrying for a home."

"Still," said Ursula, "a man has very little need for a woman now, has he?" ...

"I do think," he said, "that the world is only held together by the mystic conjunction, the ultimate unison between people—a bond. And the immediate bond is between man and woman." (Lawrence 146)

The bandying of words, the exchange of ideas continues for quite some time. Birkin is keen on driving home a point, that, if pure unison is attained by the couple, it becomes irrevocable. Until it becomes irrevocable, the unidirectional way of love cannot be attained.

To Birkin, freedom is love, love freedom. If such be the case, no love affair would ever consummate in marriage. Freedom is an inherent characteristic feature of love. At the close of this chapter, Birkin, being insisted upon, by Ursula to articulate his love for her, expresses that he wants this love for her to be “something else.” And as a critic I think, Birkin is over-concerned for the well-being of Ursula. The chapter concludes with Birkin’s muffled soliloquy, though critics find in it a fruition of love, irony and submission. Being repeatedly nudged by Ursula, he blabs out, as though in a soothing trance, “Yes, my love, yes, my love. Let love be enough then. I love you then—I love you. I’m bored by the rest” (Lawrence 148). Ursula, being assured of his love for her, chimes in unison, and lets out a faint “Yes.” Thus, both Birkin and Ursula feel the bond of love getting firm around them, between them, taking them in a tight clasp. This love, between two ardent lovers, knows no tomorrow no yesterday, it has no death, no decay. Hence, interdependence between the two gradually increases and Ursula feels reassured, protected and taken care of. Perhaps, women in love need such assurance, such pledge of having a secured existence, even after wedding. Man and woman relationship builds on the base of love and mutual trust which Ursula and Birkin do share.

Gerald-Gudrun relationship is now our immediate concern. In case of Ursula and Birkin, mutual feelings develop into love. Or does it at all? Or can Gerald love just Gudrun and vice-versa? What is love to both of them? In fact, Lawrence purposefully shoves Loerke, the French sculptor into the scene and puts the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun to test. Gudrun does overcome the ordeal she is put into, once her new-found relationship with Loerke is doubted by Gerald. And, things really come to a deadly pass when Gerald succumbs to a terrible fall on the hilly terrain.

The critics are more interested in a different kind of love between men than between a man and a woman. In fact, compared to Ursula-Birkin’s marriage, the possibility of emotional bond between Gerald and Gudrun proves to be a distant possibility. Marriage, to Gerald, is a mere convention, and, Gerald subscribes to the view of Birkin in this regard,

Marriage was not the committing of himself in into a relationship with Gudrun. It was a committing of himself in acceptance of the established order, he would accept the established order in which he did not livingly believe, and then he would retreat to the underworld for his life (Lawrence 348).

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Naturally, we are in for a shock. Gudrun is dreaming of marital bliss on her union with Gerald. And Gerald is out to have another relationship outside wedlock! But reality has its own compulsion and no one can either deny this or thwart its design. Perhaps, Hardy, that is why, added so much importance to fate, to Providence. But Lawrence is rational enough to put relationships in the confines of individual proclivities and inclinations. Gerald is whimsical yet he has been able to win the heart of Gudrun—the art-teacher of a grammar school. How Gudrun used to lose herself in Gerald, yet how Gerald still used to remain a mystery, unravelled to her, can easily be understood by analysing significant lines from the narrative such as:

She wanted to touch him and touch him and touch him, till she had him all in her hands, till she had strained him. Into her knowledge. Ah, if she could have the precious knowledge of him, she would be filled, and nothing could deprive her of this. For he was so unsure, so risky in the common world of day. (Lawrence 326-7)

Gerald and Gudrun come closer to each other only to realize that love as a pure and profound emotion had several strata of manifestations and implications. In Chapter XVIII, 'Rabbit', Gudrun's personality catapults to prominence. Apart from imparting lessons in drawing and modelling to the little girl, she interacts with Gerald on an intimate level. Her "insatiable curiosity" has brought her to Short-lands, to see how the Crich family lives in that place. Gudrun releases a pet rabbit from the cage and things begin to take an interesting turn. Human cruelty or deliberate indifference to animals' shocks Gudrun. Gudrun feels subdued under the dubious or ambivalent sexual urge of Gerald.

Gerald and Gudrun come closer to each other, only to be severed from each other. Gudrun has a hunch that Gerald could not be a man of clean disposition. Though, Gerald puts up a clean, unsullied image to the world, Gudrun could make out that his life stands governed by "un-integrated sensuality." Gudrun resists the idea of marriage with him, though she condescends to be a mistress of Gerald. But the contrived sensuality between them never gets complete and eventually they are dragged into a conflict. Towards the close of the novel, Gudrun discovers that Gerald is nothing but a promiscuous man with a flick of "lady-killer" in his nature. Gudrun longed for a man who would be protective, apart from being virile and chivalrous. In fact, the child in every woman looks out for a man who would be shielding her from all vicissitudes in life. Gerald also seeks mother-like affection from Gudrun, when his father passes away.

Perhaps, a mutual emotional dependence gives a perfect shape to a human relationship. Camaraderie is the maiden step in an inchoate bond, followed by joie de vivre, which again tows a deeper and mutual understanding, in the blossoming of a relationship, be it man-man, man-woman or woman-woman. Liang ya-Liou observes in his essay titled, "The Politics of Sexual Liberation: D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*"

Lawrence also criticizes Gerald for failing to live up to Gudrun's idea of a man. Advanced as Gudrun is, she craves a man who is not just virile but chivalrous and protective so she can be a childlike, clinging woman to him. In a scene in "water-Party" where Gudrun rows away with Ursula, Gerald sees 'there was something childlike about her, trustful and deferential, like a child. (Day G. & Di Niro 191)

Gudrun being a New Woman in her sensibilities hates to play a simpering, doll-like, obedient gewgaw in Gerald's hand, though she would love to be a beautiful fool to him, just to fulfil her emotional needs. But, sadly enough, industrial tycoon, Gerald, proves to be a pure, inhuman, almost superhuman instrument, utterly irresponsible to Gudrun's yearning. Gudrun moves out of the charted territory of interdependence in love, takes a bold step forward and offers herself in psyche and physique to Loerke, a sculptor, from Germany, who had fallen for her. With a plausible promise of a bond of love and mutual exchange of feelings. Gudrun, at the back of her mind, begins to weigh the pros and cons of the promising union with Loerke, imagining him pitted against Gerald, known to her since ages. To Gudrun, at her acquaintance with Loerke, she began to re-consider, re-analyze her relationship with Gerald. At one point of time, when Loerke, the German sculptor addressed her as Mrs. Crich, she vehemently opposed. "The name, in Loerke's mouth particularly, had been an intolerable humiliation and constraint upon her, these many days" (Lawrence 443). Even "with some hauteur," she refuted, "I am not married" (WIL 444). She keeps trying to annul her ties with Gerald, as she perceived his stoicism, his indifference towards her. She felt left out and utterly humiliated. A relationship needs avid involvement of both the souls in order to make it work. If one of the two, i.e. in bipolar relationship, stays silent or cold, it is sure to snap off. Gudrun begins to subscribe to the view of Loerke, that the artist should live for his/her art.

Gerald was growing more and more nonchalant towards the budding love between Gudrun and Loerke, mostly because, he abhorred Loerke as "a noxious

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insect” (WIL 445). He began hardening himself against Gudrun, thus jeopardizing their relationship, quite precariously. This triangular relationship has been adroitly dealt with by Lawrence as:

How should Gerald hope to satisfy a woman of Gudrun’s calibre? Did he think that pride or masterful will or physical strength would help him? Loerke knew a secret beyond these things. ... And he had understanding where Gerald was a calf. He, Loerke, could penetrate into depths far out of Gerald’s knowledge. Gerald was left behind like a postulant in the ante-room of this temple of mysteries, this woman. But he, Loerke, could he not penetrate into the inner darkness, find the spirit of the woman in its inner recess, and wrestle with it there, the central serpent that is coiled at the core of life. (Lawrence 445)

Gerald, at last, gave in to the call of a finale, by succumbing to Death—the ultimate conclusion to everything: expectation, existence, relationship, life. While talking in the same breath about Gerald, Gudrun and Loerke, Lawrence posits Gerald as the “ne plus ultra” in the world of man, as it existed for her (446). Gerald wins the appellation ‘man,’ while Loerke is a just a “creature” to Lawrence. “Ultimate creatures may survive in this world of lesser mortals, while ‘man’, real man, cannot. “He [Gerald] was single and, by abstraction from the rest, absolute in himself” (446). Gerald fails to survive in a world where least regard is added to “goodness, righteousness, oneness with the ultimate purpose” (446).

Gerald is pontificated on the altar of innocence and pure love. His love being possessive, he, at one point, thought of killing Gudrun. The very thought of Gudrun, being won over by Loerke, was an oppression to Gerald. As though, to kill her would mean “voluptuous fulfillment” to him! As the thought of murder was lurking beneath his soul, Gerald even saw Death stalking him on the snow. Thus, Lawrence writes, “Yet, why afraid? It was bound to happen. To be murdered! He looked round in terror at the snow, the rocking, pale, shadowy slopes of the upper world. He was bound to be murdered; he could see it. This was the moment when the death was uplifted and there was no escape” (467).

Gerald’s demise came as a relief to both Loerke and Ursula, as both of them were afraid of losing their partners to the love-tentacles of Gerald. Though orientations are strangely different, both of them felt jeopardized in their realms of love. It was, as though, Gerald posed a potential threat to both of them. It, of

course, talks hugely of his bisexuality, which might be threatening in continuance of a healthy and straight relationship with one's life partner.

Now, in conclusion, the relationship between Birkin and Gerald is the case in point. How is it that these two men were having a stealthy homoerotic inclination towards each other? Birkin wanted to have another relationship, beyond the usual one with Ursula. It might have triggered umpteen questions, loads of doubts and misgivings and a few debates. In this regard, John Worthen in his renowned criticism of D. H. Lawrence, titled *D.H. Lawrence and the Idea of the Novel* maintains that, "Gerald is a focus for Birkin of his need for 'other people,' his desire for 'another kind of love'; it is something the novel has dramatized, not something it has reached a conclusion about or is offering as a truth" (96). This point is a bit confusing. Why can't we accept the fact without any precondition that Birkin had fallen for Gerald out of his need of "another kind of love," his craving for an "eternal union with a man" (WIL 451-2)? While Ursula demanded of him the name of the person, he had been weak on, Birkin spoke "abstractly," though the implication was loud and clear: Gerald Crich. But again, the chapter "A Chair" in this novel leaves us in utter confusion, when Ursula hits the bull's eye and demands herself to the ultimate point of his union with human souls:

'You've got me', she said. 'Why should you need others? Why must you force people to agree with you? ...

You've got me. And yet you want to force other people to love you as well... You do try to bully them to love you. —And even then, you don't want their love.'

His face was full of real perplexity.

'Don't I?' he said. 'It's the problem I can't solve. I know I want a perfect and complete relationship with you: and we've nearly got it—we really have. —But beyond that. Do I want a real, ultimate relationship with Gerald? Do I want a final, almost extra-human relationship with him—relationship in the ultimate of me and him—or don't I? (Lawrence 451-2)

With such dithers, such confusion, such misgiving, how can a man inch towards a firm bond, whatever it may be, a homoerotic or a normal one? His real perplexity cannot be explained though it leaves room for much conjectures.

His idee fixe of relationship is building a 'perfect and complete' relationship as he has with Ursula. But as his imagined bond with Gerald could not fit into any of the given parameters of relationship, he was into a disturbing bewilderment.

No matter what happens, a man has to hold the skeins of relationship dear to his heart firm. Otherwise, confusion and doubts will assail them and they will stand either futile, meaningless or redundant. Hence, it is really heartening to find Birkin firmer in his opinion, more direct in expressing his logic:

'Aren't I enough for you?' she [Ursula] asked.

'No,' he said. 'You are enough for me, as far as woman is concerned. You are all women to me. But I wanted a man friend, as eternal as you and I are eternal.'

'Why aren't I enough?' she said. 'You are enough for me. I don't want anybody else but you. Why isn't the same with you?'

'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', he said. (Lawrence 583)

At this rejoinder, Ursula is utterly hurt, she cannot take it in. She vehemently opposes this logic as "an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity" (WIL 580). But, the answer with which this novel comes to an end, drives her crazy, "I don't believe that"! (WIL 580). Birkin gathers courage enough to oppose her view, that it is "wrong, impossible" (WIL 581). Birkin, perhaps, that freedom in a relationship can defy all confinements and feeling of possessiveness. This will definitely make a person breathe freely in the space created by the boredom of eternal presence of one's life partner. This can fortify the relationship with the life-mate better. Perhaps, Birkin is subscribing to this view. The question of loyalty to one's lifelong mate does not arise, as it remains unquestioned, axiomatic. Perhaps, Birkin means it, while he puts it to Gerald, "You have got to admit the unadmitted love of man for man. It makes for a greater freedom for everybody, a greater power of understanding both in men and women" (WIL 582). But is it Birkin's own logic in support of 'perversity' as Ursula objects? George Donaldson in his seminal essay titled, "Men in Love" D.H. Lawrence, Rupert Birkin, Gerald Crich" (Donaldson 49), cannot but express his tart, acerbic, quizzical observation while opining on the conclusion of the novel as, "Is the novel's inconclusiveness a matter of two irreconcilably contrary views of Birkin's need for Gerald, both

equally true of that need as we have seen it in the novel? Or is Ursula's a superior truth to Birkin's, intended by Lawrence to be so or not?" (Donaldson 49).

If togetherness is the ultimate aim of all love alliances, Gerald and Gudrun, Birkin and Ursula all are to pass an acid test of verification. Ursula loves Birkin, Birkin looks for a man, Gerald, who is in a love-bond with Gudrun. Gudrun who loves Gerald, again responds to the emotional advances of Loerke, as their basic interest in art is shared and common. But, as marriage seems to be the *end of experience*, Birkin keeps looking for a parallel relationship with Gerald, a man, which could have erased the boredom of a routine relationship. Boredom, ennui, being the ultimate cause of toying in another relationship, would energize him to undertake his day-to-day journey on earth. Then, where does the question of human relationships stand?

To take an overall view of the main characters as the ultimate skeins in the woven pattern of relationships, it is really important to understand the basic components of their respective natures. Gerald, though conventionally successful is dissociated from his inner essence, destroying himself in the long run, while Gudrun is ever-conflicting in her own norms of accepting men like Gerald and Loerke in her life and giving in to the artist-sculptor, Loerke, who at least, corresponds with her own set of beliefs in art. Birkin and Ursula may not be the best of couples on earth, yet, their togetherness is laudable though an element of dissension creeps in when Birkin tries to reason for his love for Gerald as an another kind of love, which has no sanction of the sane society, but which is a dire necessity for Birkin. It is really cogent to conclude this essay with Peter New's words excerpted from his essay, "*Women in Love: Fiction and Fantasy*," wherein emphasis is added to individual experiences and undergoing such experiences in his/her own way as:

It is clear enough that Lawrence wishes us to regard them as healthy and the rest as diseased, but in so far as the novel draws us towards their attitudes and away from others', it does so by a rhetoric of symbolism, not really by a compulsion of sympathy, a feeling with them. We cannot really live vicariously in their relationship since we have not experienced what it is like to lead their individual lives. (New 194)

Though *Women in Love* by Lawrence is a book with a bold and daring statement, though it had been rejected by a handful of publishers, though Lawrence seemed to be confused in defining the relationships etched in this novel, it stands apart as a novel by its own right, cashing in on the maze of normal and undefined patterns of human relationships. After all, men and women are all intertwined in a web of cobwebby existence, in which skeins of emotions and passions form warps and woofs, “Lawrence sustained this scheme, possibly the grandest conception in English fiction, whilst being constantly provocative in every area of social and moral perception” (Niven 113).

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