

Women in Love

By drs. J.A.Goris

'I cannot live here anymore; and I am sure I cannot do any more work for this country', Lawrence wrote in a letter of 17 November 1915, when Frieda and he were ready to go to America - a country he saw as bad, but nearer to freedom. 'I think there is no future for England: only decline and fall. That is the dreadful and unbearable part of it: to have been born into a decadent era, a decline of life, a collapsing civilisation'¹. *Women in Love* was published in 1920, but written during World War I and completed in 1916. This was a particularly difficult time for Lawrence. He was trapped in Cornwall by the war, unable to leave because his passport had been confiscated and constantly under pressure from the authorities, who seemed to be convinced that he was a spy. His sense of persecution had a great influence on his writings, added to which was the general cultural pessimism of his days. Many of his contemporaries in England and Ireland as well as on the Continent shared this pessimism: Yeats, Mann, Proust, Joyce, Eliot were all disturbed by the passing of the old order to which they belonged. Many literary works of these years were characterized by a cynicism about the outer world and an obsessive interest in psychic states, aggravated by Freud's lifelong pessimism. Another factor in Lawrence's bitterness was the ongoing industrialism, which had not only ruined the scenery of his childhood days, but also mechanized humanity and murdered its natural impulses, an evil intensified by the war. Within this apocalyptic era *Women in Love*, the gloomiest of Lawrence's works, took its final shape.

'Relations between the sexes' is again a major theme. In *The Rainbow* Lawrence tried to be a spokesman for women, in the various relationships in *Women in Love* he seeks to distinguish between truly creative conflicts and those which, like war, leave only scars and damage. He insists on the differences between the sexes as more than obviously physical: the beings of men and women are also determined mentally and emotionally. Yet the author believes that the sexes can live ideally in balanced harmony with each other, neither claiming possession of the other: 'The man has his pure freedom, the woman hers', he writes in *Women in Love*. Each relationship in both novels explores ways in which such a balance may be established, testing the claims of each kind of partnership in an earnest search for proof that the ideal can be realized. Tom and Lydia, perhaps most positively Ursula and Birkin, but also Will and Anna show moments of perfected union, though none of these relationships survive without conflict. Lawrence knew from his own marriage that a measure of struggle and

argument between both partners was a natural part of a developing relationship, and that once these ceased the union was threatened with extinction.

The structure of *Women in Love* is quite different from *The Rainbow*; the latter presents a 'march of the generations', in which events are narrated developmentally in a sequence, like Lawrence had observed in Hardy's works. *Women in Love*, on the other hand, portrays the way of life of Ursula's generation, the generation growing up in early twentieth century England. Actions happen at the same time though in different places. In his discussion of the novel Philip Hobsbaum explains that each chapter focuses on an event which is a literal narrative, but which has also symbolic overtones¹. In chapter four, called 'Diver', a man's swimming shows he inhabits a medium quite different from those watching him; 'Coal-Dust' is an evocation of the industrial background of the novel. So it is throughout the book; a particular event not only gives each chapter its atmosphere, but also acts as a framework for the psychological notation therein. A major difference with *The Rainbow* lies in the specific presentation of new developments in society, with its London bohemians, new possibilities for women, and travels to the Continent. As Hobsbaum suggests, in *Women in Love* one can see Tolstoy combined with George Eliot in the narrative pattern: one pair of lovers converging while another pair diverges. He also mentions a Dostoevskian influence in the background, particularly in the disaffection from society which some of the characters display².

The relationship that converges is that of Ursula and Birkin, the one to diverge that of Gudrun and Gerald. In the very first stages of the novel the sisters set eyes on their future partners, and the tone of the relationships is set for the rest of the novel. This 'Leitmotiv effect' may have been borrowed from Wagner: we know Lawrence had seen his operas. Gudrun sees Gerald at the Crich wedding, and she is magnetised at first glance by 'something northern' about him. Lawrence thinks the northern races have a cold and destructive nature, and Gerald is their prototype in his icy, hard being, with a glisten like cold sunshine (p.14). There is 'a sinister stillness' in his bearing, the lurking danger of 'his unsubdued temper'. His maleness is that of a predator, the wolf, and Gudrun has a strange sense of being 'singled out' for him, in a 'pale gold, arctic light' that envelopes only the two of them (p.15). They are destined to be partners in a cold, destructive battle of power and perverted sex, in which she eventually destroys him. The theme of 'coldness' in their relationship recurs symbolically in several chapters. In chapter four, 'Diver', Gerald feels perfectly at ease in the cold, wet and remote

¹ See endnote iii, p. 61/62

² See endnote iii, p.52

world of Willey Water, a muddy lake 'all grey and visionary'. Gudrun envies him 'almost painfully', wishing vehemently she could join him in his morbid cold male world, his 'otherworld', in revolt against her role as a woman (p.47/8). The nature of their bond becomes clear in another scene by the side of Willey Water in chapter ten, 'Sketch-Book'. While Gerald is rowing a boat together with the domineering Hermione, Gudrun, grimly absorbed in sketching, drops her sketchbook into the water. Gerald notices a 'body of cold power', 'a dangerous, hostile spirit' in Gudrun as he gets her book back (p.122). She responds to his glance, 'signalled full into his spirit' and in that look, in her tone a bond is established between the two of them; Gudrun feels a perverted ecstasy of having power over him (p.122):

...they were of the same kind, he and she, a sort of diabolic freemasonry subsisted between them. 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.

Gerald has a similar way of singling people out as victims. In the London Pompadour Café his sadistic being is revealed in his mingling with the whorish, childlike Minette, who is described as 'almost null' (p.65). She appeals to Gerald strongly, he feels 'an awful, enjoyable power over her, an instinctive cherishing very near to cruelty. For she was a victim ... he would be able to destroy her utterly in the strength of his discharge'. However, Minette is also shown as manipulative herself; she plays off Gerald against her lover Halliday, and does not respond to him in the way Gudrun does. The sketchbook scene reminds Gerald of how Gudrun's face 'lifted up to him', when he was on the swerving horse. This outing in the chapter 'Coal-Dust' (p.110 ff.) is a telling example of Gerald's cruel nature, as well as of vital differences between the Brangwen sisters. Gerald relentlessly forces the Arab mare to hold her head to the gate, while the sharp blasts of the approaching train make the horse rock with terror. A 'glistening, half-smiling look' is on his face because of his sadistic pleasure in the mare's distress (p.110). In his study of Lawrence's major novels Scott Sanders, Assistant Professor at Indiana University saysⁱⁱ:

He forces his will upon the mare with 'mechanical relentlessness', and she finally surrenders by pawing and trembling 'mechanically.' For Lawrence this mechanization of a living creature is the cardinal sin against nature ... The managerial class, including Gerald himself, are a part of the machine.

Even Ursula, the most peaceable of the characters, is 'frantic with opposition and hatred of Gerald' and tries to stop him, crying 'No -! No -! Let her go! Let her go, you fool, you *fool* - -!' She feels a severe anger at his insensitive behaviour (p.113): 'Does he think it's manly, to torture a horse? It's a living thing, why should he bully and torture it?' Gudrun, however, looks at him 'with black-dilated, spell-bound eyes' and feels 'faint with poignant dizziness'. She loses all feelings of being human and can hardly endure her sister's 'powerful and naked' voice; she opts out, her world 'reeled and passed into nothingness'. When she recovers her soul is calm and cold, her voice strange and high, 'like a gull, or like a witch', screaming out from the side of the road. And when man and horse are gone and Ursula's anger abates, Gudrun feels 'as if numbed in her mind' by the sexual symbolism linked with violence in the scene (p.113):

the strong, indomitable thighs of the blond man clenching the palpitating body of the mare into pure control; a sort of soft white magnetic domination from the loins and thighs and calves, enclosing and encompassing the mare heavily into unutterable subordination, soft blood-subordination, terrible' (p. 113).

In his study 'Lawrence, Hardy, and American Literature' Richard Swigg calls Gudrun an 'unstable, vulnerable figure, but with devices and ambitions which mitigate the suffering to which she, like Hermione, is liable'³. He explains that in Gudrun's nature a division is revealed: 'With one part of her she craves an invulnerable form, clothed, socially perfect, free of others' assumptions of intimacy; with another part of her, there is the fascination for the obscene cracks in the surface tightness.' Being unable to acknowledge her own desire in explicit thought and speech, she can only have visual, mindless knowledge. Swigg explains how she wants the thrill of the split between surface and subterranean as 'sensationalized experience', and Gerald's domination of the horse unwittingly gives her a cruel taste for this thrill. At a later point in the story we see Loerke, Gudrun's next partner, go even further in his ideas about the subjection of nature: he sculpts a horse as a machine, and when Ursula protests, Gudrun defends him. Several scenes in the book demonstrate Ursula's sound human instincts and emotions whereas Gudrun's are distorted. In the 'Sketchbook' scene Ursula is fascinated by the fleeting, softly coloured butterflies, as opposed to Gudrun, who studies the dark festering mud and the plants that grow from it. Another example is presented in the sisters' comments on the event of Gerald shooting his brother, when he told the latter to look

³ See endnote viii, p.139

down the gun and blew the top of his head off. To Ursula it seems incomprehensible that she would pull the trigger of 'the emptiest gun in the world' while anyone were looking down the barrel: 'One instinctively doesn't do it - one can't' (p.49). But to Gudrun it seems 'the purest form of accidents'; she sees it as something that 'happens' to one, as if there is no will behind it, not even an unconscious will. Gudrun suffers from a desolating, agonising sense of being outside of life, 'an onlooker, whilst Ursula was a partaker' (p.165) and she aggressively seeks for compensation in other people, engaging in a battle of dominance with her partner that leaves no room for any sharing of sincere joy.

The death of his brother is not the only fatal accident with which Gerald is connected. He has what his mother calls an obsession with failure and destruction; a sense of doom and family tragedy. In the chapter 'Water-Party' his sister Diana is drowned together with the young Doctor Brindell. The portrayal of the event shows how Gerald's initial concern and empathy slide down into mechanical coldness while he is trying to find them under the 'terrible, massive, cold, boundless surface' of the water. He tells Gudrun what he sees down there (p.184): 'there's room under that water there for thousands', 'a whole universe, cold as hell, in which you're helpless as if your head was cut off'. To Gudrun, who is absorbed in her own sensationalized anxiety, he seems no longer human, but it is Birkin whose views are downright perverted. He thinks Diana Crich is better off dead: 'In life she was a fretting, negated thing ... Her living, somehow, was all wrong' (p.185/6). However, Birkin is challenged by Ursula to put his thoughts into words, whereas Gudrun, in her unbearable psychological isolation, is incapable of such communication. She remains the unresponsive 'onlooker' in Gerald's musing over the endless under-water realms for the dead, and leaves him behind in his morbid thoughts (p. 184). She lacks the sense of identity of her sister; Ursula, 'the partaker', who is capable of listening to the other person and of forming her own thoughts, at the same time strong enough not 'to yield, as if it were, her very identity' (p.186).

For Gudrun it is impossible to have such faith in 'her own identity'. She has to constantly guard it by not becoming involved and keep up her defences. Not only does she stay away in the difficult hours Gerald spends with his dying father - he might think her 'too easy of winning' (p.335) but she is also unable to truly give herself during Gerald's nightly visit afterwards. In his grief and distress he needs Gudrun's love and admits his emotional need of her: 'If there weren't you in the world, then *I* shouldn't be in the world, either' (p.343). She sees his claim as a threat, 'She sighed. She was lost now. She had no choice'. In their lovemaking he needs 'vindication'; Gudrun makes an attempt by letting him hold her in his arms, but she cannot let down her guards; she lies 'wide awake, destroyed into perfect

consciousness' (p.345). It is in this night that she fully realizes her incompatibility with him - or with any other partner: 'They would never be together. Ah, this awful, inhuman distance which would always be interposed between her and the other being!' In her soul-searching we see the influence of Freud's 'aggravated pessimism' (p.346):

She was exhausted, wearied. Yet she must continue in this state of violent active super-consciousness. She was conscious of everything - her childhood, her girlhood, all the forgotten incidents, all the unrealised influences and all the happenings she had not understood, pertaining to herself, to her family, to her friends, her lovers, her acquaintances, everybody. It was as if she drew a glittering rope of knowledge out of the sea of darkness, drew and drew and drew it out of the fathomless depths of the past, and still it did not come to an end, there was no end to it, she must haul and haul at the rope of glittering conscious, pull it out phosphorescent from the endless depths of the unconsciousness, till she was weary, aching, exhausted, and fit to break, and yet she had not done.

Gerald is mistrustful of intimacy, too. He is always conscious of putting himself at her mercy, hoping that she will restore him and 'grant him the flow of this living effluence', yet 'afraid she would deny him before it was finished' (p.345). He attributes qualities of the Magna Mater to her, she is 'Mother and substance of all life' and he himself is grateful 'as an infant is at its mother's breast'. And, like a mother, she feels tenderness for him, but with 'a dark understirring of jealous hatred'. She wants him to go, so that she can relax and be 'released' from this 'monstrous juxtaposition' of their two bodies in her bed (p.346). In his appeal to her deeper, softer emotions Gerald has made a fatal mistake: it has confronted Gudrun with her life-wrecking inability to give or take intimacy and inspires her with a terminal, all-absorbing passion to get rid of him forever.

It is in the ice-cold snow world of the Tyrolese mountains, where the two sisters and their partners are on holiday that the complete degeneration of the Gudrun-Gerald relationship is portrayed. Their lovemaking is reduced to a hard, cold fight, in which he 'would destroy her rather than be denied' (p.402). But it is Gudrun who, like a cold-blooded murderess, is going to deal the last blow, leaving Gerald the victim of heartless revenge and betrayal. In the terrifying silence that 'isolates the soul' Gudrun feels she is going to reach her ultimate mission, which fills her with a strange rapture; at last she has 'arrived'. Gerald is filled with foreboding: 'already he felt he was alone. She was gone. ... There was icy vapour round his heart. He saw the blind valley, the great cul de sac of snow and mountain peaks, under the heaven. And there was no way out' (p.401). At their arrival he already had a premonition of Gudrun's 'rushing towards her fate, and leaving him behind' (p.398) and this takes shape in the

person of Loerke, who leaves Gudrun spellbound. He is really like one of the 'little people' who have no soul, and in Gudrun he has found his mate: 'Something in Gudrun seemed to accord with him', and she sees in Loerke 'the rock-bottom of all life' (p.426/7). His view of life is cynical and corrupt; his art is not creative but deadening, interpreting industry instead of religion. 'Loerke, with his love of machinery and his deification of industry', says Scott Sanders in his study, 'could be taken as a satirical portrait of the Futurist'⁴. His 'green, bronze' statue of the young girl on the horse reveals not only his contempt for nature, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, but also his sadistic traits, appealing to Gudrun's impulse to become his slave, 'she looked up with a certain supplication, almost slave-like' (p.429). He suits her pathetic needs better than Gerald does, who, as she realizes, is not base enough for her: he is too respectable in his 'force of will and his power for comprehending the actual world.' Gerald is still capable of human feelings and having a purpose in life; he has a valuable friendship with Birkin and represents something in the world as a skilled industrial magnate in the reform of his father's mines. Gudrun is not up to such a purpose, and she knows it; she cannot possibly see herself as his sincere helpmate. At the thought of herself as his wife, able to 'hitch him on' in his ambitions to re-organise the industrial system 'something seemed to snap in her' and a terrible cynicism begins to grow in her. (p.418).

Soon Ursula, feeling doomed in the eternal snow, wants to leave and she and Birkin decide to go south, to warmer places, 'to feel the sunshine touch a response in the buds' (p.434). In the chapter 'Snowed up' Gudrun is 'free in her contest with Gerald' (p.441). In a terrible chaos of thoughts, comparable to Siegmund's 'inextricable knot' during his journey home in *The Trespasser*, it dawns upon Gerald that he, like Siegmund, has Hobson's choice. To exist at all he must be perfectly free of Gudrun, but this involves having to stand alone, in sheer nothingness; on the other hand, he may give in and fawn to her, or become indifferent, purposeless, dissipated; he even considers killing her (p.445). The chapter is a portrayal of the relentless outcome of the lovers' sick dependence on each other, which now culminates into hatred, violence and utter despair. In their final showdown Gerald sinks under a sense of nausea. He has enough of life and gives up; he loses; yet in a sense he is the moral winner in their pathetic, terminal war. He is above throttling Gudrun; 'As if he cared about her enough to kill her, to have her life on his hands!' (p.472). Having lost all sense of place in the snow, it dawns upon him he has nothing to live for and he feels the half-buried crucifix to mark his end, 'he was bound to be murdered'. Unlike Siegmund, who takes his own life, Gerald dies

⁴ See endnote xiv, p.101

against his will. Like Siegmund he falls victim to a cold, unfeeling relationship with a woman and, like Christ, to cold, unfeeling betrayal.

The culmination into nothingness of the Gerald - Gudrun relationship coincides with the fulfilment Ursula and Birkin have finally achieved. From the onset of the novel, Ursula, like the Ursula in *The Rainbow*, is looking for fulfilment in life. However, she has given up, at least for the time being, her active search for a partner; marriage, she thinks, is likely to be 'the end of experience' (p.7). Ursula has a zest for life, like her mother and grandmother before her. Where Lydia was limited by her marriage to Tom, and had only her foreign ancestry to make her stand out, Anna's cravings for 'experience' have not materialized at all. She seeks solace in motherhood and dubious compensation in an oversexed marriage. This downward line of unfulfilled females is carried one step further in Gudrun, who does have an education and possibilities to become something, but she rejects a socially acceptable purpose in life. Ursula is the first person to bring the promise of the rainbow that stands on the earth to fruition. She is an educated and independent woman, a class mistress at Willey Green Grammar School, where she teaches botany. She has made her way up into the world since her unhappy days as a Standard Five teacher at St Philip's school in *The Rainbow*. Still she does not see her career as the end-all of her existence: she is 'always thinking, trying to lay hold on life' (p.9). She keeps an open mind, and admits to Gudrun that she would 'marry like a shot' if she were tempted. However, to tempt her takes more than an 'awfully nice man' with a good salary. It is the school-inspector Birkin that attracts her attention, and whom she wants to know.

Throughout the novel, Birkin is not portrayed as the healthiest of people. He is physically weak, 'pale and ill-looking' (p.20), suffers from bouts of illness, 'he liked sometimes to be ill enough to take to his bed' (p.201) which are often caused by his unhealthy relationship with Hermione. He has a negative view of people: mankind had better be wiped out (p.25), Diana Crich is better off dead, and Ursula's father is hardly an individual: 'How curious it was that this was a human being! ... He was not a parent. A slip of living flesh had been transmitted through him' (p.255). His social intelligence does not convey 'equilibrium' or balance. He puts Ursula's back up with his marriage proposal, which he addresses to her father - in a most unfriendly way. Philip Hobsbaum says about Birkin⁵: 'For most of the book he is what many of us might become under the stress of ill health, depression and frustration. That is to say, he is not a whole man.' Hobsbaum explains that Birkin has often been taken to

⁵ See endnote iii, p. 64

be the voice of Lawrence; certain passages in Lawrence's work elsewhere resemble much of what Birkin has to say. But there are other influences at work as well; the study draws attention to a connection with Lawrence's own state of mind at the time of writing *Women in Love*, which corresponds closely with that of his despairing fictional character. Like Birkin, at this point of his life Lawrence was exasperated by the shocking inflexibility of people. It is as if he wants to arm Birkin against the outer world by making him an unfeeling misanthrope. Several critics have pointed out how Lawrence's sense of persecution during the war translates into a fear and hatred of the masses in the novel. There is no concrete sense of what the people of England are like behind the discussions in the novel; there is no canal boat family to represent them as there was in *The Rainbow*. The only decent people are the drunk miners giving Gerald the way to Gudrun's house in the chapter 'Death and Love'. Lawrence seems to expose his own frustrations with the society he had to live in by means of Birkin's letter to the Pompadour people, and portrays his fear of a meaningless future in Ursula and Gudrun's nasty rejection of their childhood home. The girls' jeering at their parents' appearance on the way to the party in 'Water-Party' reflects the rejection of the values of a past century, which Lawrence had already seen in Hardy's literature of the 1890s, and which intensified his feelings of doom and fatality.

Birkin is not happy in his personal life, either. For years he has had a connection with Hermione Roddice, a noted hostess and friend of authors and painters, particularly at Breadalby, her home. Lawrence modelled her on Lady Ottoline Morell, who used to entertain him and his contemporaries at her Oxfordshire home during World War I. The portrayal caused considerable offence. Hermione is 'a man's woman', who cultivates the mental side of her personality. She is a person who denies her emotions and presents herself as invulnerable, hiding her 'tortured, exposed soul' under an air of superiority in her world of culture and intellect: 'she moved among the foremost, at home with them' (p.16). She aimlessly drifts along in the world of art and ideas, which remotely reminds us of Lettie after her marriage in *The White Peacock*. At the same time, she is utterly desperate and craves for Rupert Birkin to close up her 'terrible void', her lack of robust self; she needs to have a strong grip on him in order to feel 'complete, sufficient, whole'. She forces her will upon other people, thus nipping all spontaneous joy in the bud. Their relationship is a destructive battle, a cat-and-mouse game in which Rupert fights her off; 'the more she strove to bring him to her, the more he battled her back' (p.17). He himself is not an amiable character either. Ursula notices the hidden, ultimate reserve in him, cold and inaccessible, hostile even. At the same time his nature is clever and separate; he does not fit at all in the conventional occasion, which both

attracts and annoys Ursula. There is 'some kinship between her and him, a natural, tacit understanding, a using of the same language' (p.20). She intuitively feels he is her compliment, as her grandfather Tom felt when he met Lydia.

A feature of Lawrence's thought is its dualism, the notion that 'everything that exists, even a stone, has two sides to its nature' ⁱⁱⁱ and this is specifically true for human beings, for men and women. A man is never completely male and a woman never completely female; each person of either sex has both male and female qualities. Lawrence presents his views on the duality of male and female in his *Study of Thomas Hardy*, in which he analyzes several of the latter's Wessex characters, such as Tess and Alec from *Tess of the d'Urberville*, and Jude and Troy from *Jude the Obscure*. In his essay 'The Tiger and the Lamb: The Duality of Lawrence' literary critic H.M. Daleski discusses what Lawrence sees as specifically male or female qualities, and presents them in a table ⁶. To mention but a few, 'light', 'movement' 'doing' and 'mental clarity' are considered male, versus 'darkness', 'stability', 'being' and 'sensation', which are female. The success of a relationship between a man and a woman, in Lawrence's scheme, does not lie in the 'melting and fusing' of two people into one, as Sigmund hoped to achieve with Helena in *The Trespasser*; there must be a double reconciliation of opposites. Each individual has to reconcile the opposing qualities within him or herself, and consequently man and woman are to meet as opposites. A meeting on equal terms of two people who have themselves achieved full individuality ideally leads to a balanced union, in which partners are a complement to each other.

This is also the essence of Birkin's 'sermons' in the novel. Far more than in his other novels, in *Women in Love* Lawrence presents his own search for truths to the reader by means of the protagonists' dialogues. Ursula dislikes Birkin's preaching; his 'priggish Sunday school stiffness' annoys her. She knows what kind of love he wants, but cannot accept his terms on which a developing relation must be based: it is all too detached for her. She wants 'unspeakable intimacies' (p.264): 'She wanted to have him, utterly, finally to have him as her own, oh, so unspeakably, in intimacy'. However, Birkin does not believe in 'final self-abandonment': he regards the 'hot narrow intimacy' between husband and wife as abhorrent (p.199). What he wants is 'a strange conjunction' with Ursula, 'an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings - as the stars balance each other', in which sex is vital, but not all-important (p.148). Lawrence writes in his essay 'Love' ^{iv}:

⁶ See endnote xv, p.107/8

Only in the conjunction of man and woman has love kept a duality of meaning. Sacred love and profane love, they are opposed, and yet they are both love. The love between man and woman is the greatest and most complete passion the world will ever see, because it is dual, because it is of two opposing kinds. The love between man and woman is the perfect heart-beat of life, systole, diastole.

Behind Birkin's 'sermons' there is his fear for female dominance, which pervades so many of Lawrence's relationships. Birkin feels that 'woman is always so horrible and clutching, has a greed of possession and self-importance in love' - and this holds good for both Hermione and Ursula, in both of whom he detects traits of the Magna Mater (p.154). It is when he is 'sick and unmoved' in his revolt that he meditates of 'separateness' in relationships: 'the old way of love seemed a dreadful bondage, a sort of conscription'. He is afraid of losing his independence in a complete intimacy, of being destroyed in a union with a woman, and sees sex as a limitation: 'It was sex that turned a man into a broken half of a couple, the woman into the other broken half' (p.199). Like William and Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers* and like so many of Lawrence's male characters he is emotionally insecure; yet in Ursula he seems to have found the partner who will restore him to faith in life.

However, Ursula is not easily won over. She has her own ideas of love, which are not Birkin's; she is not at all sure that she wants 'this mutual unison in separateness' (p.264). Whereas Birkin does not believe in 'final self-abandonment' she herself does: she believes in an absolute surrender to love, which to her is everything. She resents Birkin's self-possession, in which he tries to lay down the law for her. Birkin wants the surrender of her spirit, but he is far too theoretical to convince Ursula of his love. 'You only want your own ends. You don't want to serve me, and yet you want me to serve you. It is so one-sided!' she says to him. Their opposition is symbolized in the chapter 'Mino', where Birkin's male cat bullies the young stray cat into submission, in Ursula's words behaving 'like all males' (p.149). In the chapter 'Moony' the lovers' dance of opposites, their battle of the sexes, is decided in a fierce argument, in which they hurl insults at each other. Birkin's hatred of the moon is symbolic for his misogynist qualities; his violent attack of its image portrays his frustrated anger with the woman in his life whom he wants desperately but who refuses to give in to his ideas. He finally realizes it is no use; women are like 'paradisal birds that could not be netted' (p.250) and Birkin yields to Ursula's 'war-cry' (p.251/2): he declares his love for her. The scene leaves the reader wondering just how triumphant the female is. It is true, she is not bullied into submission, but submits voluntarily: she is willing to fight for him, to let him be 'her man

utterly, and she in return would be his humble slave - whether he wanted it or not.' In this she is sincere but rash; she gives up her position as a teacher that took her years to achieve, she leaves her relatives behind after a distressing scene and blindly takes off abroad with her husband. As she announced early in the first pages of the novel she would marry like 'a shot' if tempted, and this is certainly the impression the reader gets. Dr. Elaine Feinstein, who has lectured on D.H.Lawrence at universities in both Britain and America, says in her 'Introduction' to a study on the author's life ^v:

In recent years, feminist critics have been angered by Lawrence because he increasingly came to see liberation for women entirely in terms of a saving sexual relationship, and his writings show a mounting rage against women's desires to use their minds and express their individuality.

In her study it becomes clear how far Lawrence's fear of powerful women and his uncertain idea of masculinity have a biographical source. One wonders if these feelings are translated in the novel in Birkin's attitude towards marriage. However strongly he believes in a permanent union between man and woman, for him it is not the 'supreme and exclusive relationship' (p.353). He wants something 'clearer, more open, cooler, as it were' (p.199), but not promiscuity. Marriage in the old sense is repulsive to him, 'the most repulsive thing on earth', worse than 'egoïsme à deux' (p.352 ff.). He sees it as 'a sort of tacit hunting in couples: the world all in couples, each couple in its own little house, watching its own little interests, and stewing in its own little privacy': 'the way they shut their doors, these married people' repulses him (p.199).

In Lawrence's earlier work we have seen several instances of male-male friendships. There are Cyril and George, Paul Morel and Baxter Dawes, Siegmund and Hampson, who are all intimate to some degree. However, their relations are portrayed as incidental rather than vital. This changes in *Women in Love*. The men have a vital need for each other - throughout the novel there is the suggestion that it helps Birkin to keep the necessary emotional distance to Ursula, in his fear to be overruled by the Magna Mater in her. He frequently seeks out Gerald when in need of advice or support in his struggle with his girlfriend. Though not expressly sexual, their union has a physical as well as a mental and emotional side. In the chapter 'Gladiatorial' Gerald and Birkin's wrestling match has a sensuous connotation as the two 'seemed to drive their white flesh deeper and deeper against each other as if they would break into a oneness' (p.270); they 'seemed to penetrate' and interfuse in admiration of each

other's body. Their being physically close satisfies a need in both of them; Birkin says it 'makes one sane' and to Gerald 'it is life' (p.273). They agree that, as they are mentally and spiritually intimate, they should be more or less physically intimate, too, to make the friendship 'more whole'.

Still, the most valuable part of the friendship is portrayed in the young men's conversations, which remind us of the kind of intimate friendships women often have - without raising suspicion of homosexuality. The reader gets to see the warm and human sides of both Gerald and Rupert as they look for each other's company, mostly to talk about what occupies their minds, in which they may be crudely direct. 'You force yourself into horrors, and put a millstone of beastly memories round your neck', says Birkin, aware of Gerald's fascination with tragedy in the chapter 'Water-Party', when Diana is drowned. It may be his attempt to put his friend's morbid feelings of guilt about the accident into perspective, or to prove his own unsentimental nature - in which he goes too far by his fascist comments. But in the end Birkin's anti-human line does not really work. More than Gerald, Rupert longs to seal their union with some kind of 'pledge', as suggested in his proposal of 'Blutbruderschaft'. When the two men take leave in Austria Gerald looks back on their male affair with 'icy scepticism', while later Birkin's grief over his friend's death shows him as far more sensitive than he appears to be in the rest of the novel. Ultimately Birkin grieves over the loss of Gerald as over a beloved - and his grief is sincerer than Gudrun's.

As a couple, Gerald and Gudrun have completely 'diverted'; their development is closed completely. However, at the end of the novel Ursula and Birkin's life together has only just begun, and even though they are presented as the couple that has 'converted', at the same time they have turned their back on their country, relatives, work and society; they live in a void. D.H. Lawrence critic Dr. F.R. Leavis says in his work on the novelist that the diagnosis of norms represented by Gerald and Gudrun is convincing^{vi}. However, Leavis adds: 'Birkin and Ursula as a norm, contemplated in the situation they are left in at the close of the book, leave us wondering.' He explains that it has left Lawrence himself wondering too: 'That is, if a certain symmetry of negative and positive was aimed at in *Women in Love*, Lawrence has been defeated by the difficulty of life: he hasn't solved the problems of civilization that he analyses.' Lawrence himself writes in a letter to a literary friend⁷: 'The book frightens me: it is so end-of-the-world. But it is, it must be, the beginning of a new world too.' He believes England has a long and awful process of corruption and death to go through. In his later

⁷ See endnote xiii, p.482

works *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent* he tries in vain to find a practical solution to its defects, while in his last novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* he portrays people who try to find their own personal solutions to life as a first step to a different kind of society.

ⁱ Harry T.Moore: The Collected Letters of D.H.Lawrence /Volume One. (William Heinemann Ltd, 1962) p.383

ⁱⁱ Scott Sanders: D.H.Lawrence: The World of the Major Novels. (Vision Press Limited, London, 1973) p.94

ⁱⁱⁱ W.T. Andrews: Critics on D.H.Lawrence: Readings in Literary Criticism. (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971) p.105

^{iv} Harry T.Moore: Sex, Literature and Censorship: Essays by D.H.Lawrence. (William Heinemann Ltd, 1955) p.58

^v Elaine Feinstein: Lawrence's Women: The Intimate Life of D.H.Lawrence. (Flamingo, 1994) p.9

^{vi} F.R.Leavis: D.H. Lawrence: Novelist. (Chatto & Windus Ltd, London, 1962) p.28