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„Obscene and Perverse:  
Gender, Sexualities and Heteronormative Ideals in  
Selected Novels of D.H. Lawrence“

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## 1. Introduction

The impact of D. H. Lawrence upon the tradition of English literature is not easy to assess. For some, he belongs among the most influential and noteworthy authors in the English language. Others see him as a creator of pulp fiction, selling sex instead of literature. Others have hardly even heard of him. However, for several decades of the twentieth century Lawrence was hotly discussed and widely read. Consequently, he has been of great interest to critics, starting from the time he was writing. Gender studies in particular have played a major role in discussions of Lawrence, the peak of that tradition of criticism definitely being reached in the latter half of the twentieth century. Considering the wealth of interpretations on D.H. Lawrence, the purpose of this study will be to review scholarly work on the author by several critics interested in the treatment and different forms of gender and sexualities in his novels.

Lawrence's writing features an abundance of intersexual relationships as well as many vivid female characters. Among them, there are women living according to traditional gender roles as well as women striving for independence and dominance. How they are treated will be a major concern of this study. Equally interesting is the investigation of Lawrence's treatment of men. They feature frequently, at times with rather obvious hints at homosexuality. Male characters' interest for other men is not a straightforward matter, however, since it is often paired with an equally strong interest in women. This interest in the female can hardly be considered an alibi-action of a secret homosexual, since within this, emotions and the struggles between the sexes are depicted most vividly, employing various forms of power struggles and coming together, and consequently producing a variety of outcomes. Drawing on reviewed scholarly work, the forms that relationships between men and women might

assume according to Lawrence, will be discussed in this study. Also, Lawrence's treatment of men when they enter into a same-sex relationship, platonic or not, will constitute a part of my analysis below.

Feminist critics have long been interested in Lawrence's work. Not only interested – often appalled. This is not surprising, considering the hardly deniable misogyny in Lawrence's depiction of female characters. An important branch of gender criticism engaged with Lawrence is Second Wave Feminism, which saw his work picked up and fiercely criticised. One influential discussion regarding the author from that movement was written by Kate Millett, and will serve as a starting point for the analysis of scholarly work on Lawrence reviewed in this study. In *Sexual Politics* she argues that Lawrence was a misogynist, exploiting the female body in his writing, using it to establish and support power relations which set up the masculine as overpowering oppressor.

Interestingly, the term "gender", and the related terms of masculinity and femininity implying the cultural and psychological dimensions of sex, are only rarely used by Millett or not at all. Although she mentions and explains the terms, quoting studies by Stoller (Millett 29, 30), she does not continue to apply them to her own work. Since the term "gender" has become commonly used in later works of criticism, and implies a different category of sex-specific action and thought, this must be kept in mind when reading and analysing Millett's work.

Not every critic viewing Lawrence's work from a feminist perspective shares Millett's view. Although many find fault in the author concerning his treatment of women, Millett's polemics are not reproduced. Rather, they oppose her rather stern treatment of Lawrence, a great number of scholars express more sympathy towards Lawrence in their writing. Thus,

Millett's discussion poses a sharp contrast to other scholars engaged with his works. Still, they cannot ignore problematic aspects in Lawrence's fiction and comment on the issue as well as Millett, while at the same time being intrigued by much of his writing.

Sandra Gilbert illustrates the conflict between adoration and feminist criticism of Lawrence: "*how can you be a feminist and a Lawrentian?*" (Acts ix). Most scholars reviewed here admit that they are both. Even in Millett, who does not admit this, there must be a certain fascination with the author in order to engage with his novels to the extent necessary to write an extensive analysis on him. Gilbert mentions Lawrence to be an "outsider and rebel, not an authoritative spokesman for a hierarchical status quo" (xiv), as a factor contributing to women writers' interest in him, and consequently, feminist readers' too. His misogyny is fairly obvious at times, whether his characters compare women to horses voluntarily relinquishing their free will<sup>1</sup> or an obvious attempt to strangle Gudrun.<sup>2</sup> Still, even women readers enjoy much of his oeuvre "despite his often hectically masculinist rhetoric" (Gilbert Acts xix). His appeal lies in his profound rejection of the cultural metaphysics that would suppress (...) the body, otherness – and women" (Gilbert Acts xix).

Another intriguing aspect often acknowledged in discussions of Lawrence is his ability both to write from a woman's point of view and express desires and fears of modern women, while at the same time often reverting to misogynistic writing about them and putting his characters back into a more traditional role. Therefore, I am going to investigate several female characters' strategies in either coming to terms with their patriarchal environment, or the choice they make to employ more radical ways in their fight for freedom. Whether they

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<sup>1</sup> See Birkin on Gerald's mastering of his horse in *Women in Love*, p 89-91, and Birkin's interpretation of it on p 114.

<sup>2</sup> See Gerald in *Women in Love* p 399.

are successful in their strive for power, and how they are treated by the narrating voice according to the critics discussed, will constitute a large part of this study

Moreover, it has been suggested by some scholars that there is the possibility, even a pursuit of mutuality and peace between the sexes. Especially *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is said to offer a solution to Lawrence's previous characters' struggle with and against each other. Not all critics argue that there is a balance between the sexes in the novel written very late in Lawrence's career, even calling "the phallic 'hunting out' of Connie Chatterley (...) a comparably combative tactic, despite the novel's avowed intention to preach sexual 'tenderness'" (Gilbert Acts xviii). Not neglecting those sharing a benevolent view on the treatment of Connie, the concept of mutuality will be explored in addition to a discussion of various power struggles and strategies to achieve and maintain a powerful position in a relationship.

## **2. Gender Criticism on D. H. Lawrence**

The critical works chosen for this study offer an overview of different views and emphases in scholarly work on D. H. Lawrence. Kate Millett's criticism serves as an example of a strictly negative view on Lawrence. Thus, she represents one end of the spectrum that makes up the sum total of possible analyses. Since she uses a large part of Lawrence's oeuvre to demonstrate her theory of masculine hostility and power politics, she stands in sharp contrast to others like Carol Dix, who serves as Millett's counterpart, defending most of Lawrence's work, even if it openly shows misogynistic traits. Her almost solely positive view in *D. H. Lawrence and Women* outs her as being intrigued by Lawrence's fiction, which might soften



her expressed criticism. However, she offers a thorough reading of the author, and occupies the opposite end of the scale in Lawrence criticism.

Sheila McLeod's criticism in *Lawrence's Men and Women* offers an extensive analysis of the author's work. However, although admittedly enjoying Lawrence's novels as a private reader, she gives a more differentiated account of the treatment of the sexes than both Kate Millett and Carol Dix. McLeod accounts for various kinds of relationships in Lawrence's novels, discusses characters' power strategies as well as homosexual relations and the intersexual power struggle. Thus her criticism offers a broad range of discussions on various aspects in Lawrence's characters, and is thus a rich source for my own analysis of the author.

Since the struggle between the sexes does not take place in a vacuum, but has to be viewed in connection with surrounding factors, Nigel Kelsey's analysis of Lawrence is vital. It takes into account the class distinction and its effect on the intersexual relations of the Morel household, thus offering his opinion on a factor largely neglected by most critics. Moreover, he investigates feminine power strategies in the character of Mrs Morel. This is particularly interesting in comparison to Millett, who finds the Morel men to be stronger in every aspect of family life. The widely shared opinion that Mrs Morel is only a victim is transformed by the assumption that despite her traditional role in the household, she is not always submissive but actively employs her own tactics in the power struggle. Moreover, he discusses the Brangwen sisters' strategies of liberation from masculine dominance in discourse, and – by doing so – how they set themselves apart from their environment.

That the misogynistic portrayal of many female characters in Lawrence's novels might stem from a masculine fear of the threatening powers of the opposite sex is the concern of Mark

Spilka's analysis. He does not believe in Millett's polemic and views his work from a more benevolent perspective, discussing the possibility of feminine power even in characters like Connie Chatterley, who Millett sees as most submissive of all.

Threat is also an important theme which Margaret Storch traces. In her writings about "Images of Women in D. H. Lawrence", she uses it to account for Paul's hostile treatment of women in *Sons & Lovers*, which culminates in death. Not only the actual killing of Mrs Morel is discussed, she also identifies further instances where Paul's desire for her death surfaces, leading up to the drastic events which occur towards the end of the novel. Her explanation of the dimensions of threat offered by female characters offers an explanation for Lawrence's misogyny, while at the same time avoiding adopting an overtly polemic tone.

Since feminism was gaining influence in society in Lawrence's day, it had an obvious effect on his writing and image of women. Additionally, the author's forming years were characterised by the traumatic experience of the First World War, which also contributed to his imaginings of the opposite sex. Hilary Simpson picks up on these influences on Lawrence, especially focussing on types of feminist women whom Lawrence either rejected or found likeable. Her findings are particularly interesting when applied to the characters in his novels, and go some way in explaining Lawrence's post-war misogyny.

Several scholars' findings discuss the possibility of mutuality and Lawrence's idea of an ideal relationship. Mark Kinhead-Weekes discusses the concepts, as well as Gavriel Ben-Ephraim and Joyce Wexler. Therefore, their analyses of how mutuality and perfect union are achieved in Lawrence's novels, especially in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, will be reviewed below.

### **3. Feminine Struggle against Phallocentrism: – Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics***

#### **3.1 Theory of Sexual Politics**

Kate Millett published her influential work *Sexual Politics* in 1969. In it, she attacks patriarchal power relations in general, and condemns several authors featuring them in their work, among whom we find D. H. Lawrence. She defines misogynistic literature as a “comic genre, [its aim being] to reinforce both sexual fractions in their status” (45). Millett explains in the preface that her endeavour is to point out that the sexual revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was followed by a counterrevolution of patriarchal forces whose goal it was “[to assure] the continuation of a modified patriarchal way of life” (xi). She identifies some of D. H. Lawrence’s work as evidence for her hypothesis.

Millett begins her argument with a definition of the term politics, which she defines in a wider context, allowing it to be applied to gender relations. “The term ‘politics’ shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another” (23). In this context, she identifies “sex [as] a status category with political implications” (24), indicating that in relationships between members of opposite sex there is always a power struggle involved, where one partner assumes a dominant position. This can take many forms, and frequently features in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, where sexual

relations in particular play an important role, and the power – according to Millett – is hardly evenly distributed.

However, the male-female distinction does not form the only component of the hierarchy in sexual power relations. Millett states that “the principles of patriarchy are twofold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger” (25). This notion of hierarchical levels in patriarchal power structures is particularly of interest when analysing Lawrence in Millett’s terms, since relationships between men, also concerning homosexuality, constitute a frequently occurring aspect throughout his fiction, however explicitly it may feature. Among the novels discussed, it is best illustrated by the relationship between Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*, which is described as a male friendship, while at the same time repeatedly hinting at more intimacy.

“Suddenly [Birkin] saw himself confronted with another problem – the problem of love and eternal conjunction between two men. Of course this was necessary – it had been a necessity inside himself all his life – to love a man purely and fully. Of course he had been loving Gerald all along, and all along denying it” (WIL 171). The passage clearly illustrates Birkin’s interest in intimacy with a man. The narrator’s mention of his denying it does not quite comply with Birkin’s discussions with his later wife Ursula about the topic, where he openly admits that he needs love with a man beside their heterosexual relationship. Moreover, in the friendship that might also be love between the two men, Birkin takes the lead emotionally, suggesting the topic to Gerald. Although depicted as physically weaker than Gerald, he appears as the superior of the two, which is manifested even physically in his winning the wrestling match, thus being set up as the stronger male introducing the weaker to his ideas. Thus the two men illustrate Millett’s discussion on hierarchical levels of power in patriarchy.

Masculine power is almost subtly established and maintained, being accepted as the norm, since “[c]onditioning to an ideology” (Millett 26) leads to the fact that in patriarchy, power is supported “by consent of its members” (Millett 26). This is achieved by “the “socialization” of both sexes to basic patriarchal polities with regard to temperament, role and status” (Millett 26). She explains that each sex learns a different set of rules for behaviour deemed appropriate by society, which leads to common associations of masculine characteristics such as “aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy” with masculinity, and traits such as “passivity, ignorance, docility, “virtue,” and ineffectuality” with femininity (26). Thus, the dominion over women is supported by women themselves, since they are being conditioned from infancy on to learn the rules of conduct according to the norms of the patriarchy in which they are raised. Moreover, the socialisation into different temperaments assigned to the two sexes leads to an allotment of roles according to the same distinction. “[S]ex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. (...) [N]early all that can be described as distinctly human rather than animal activity (...) is largely reserved for the male” (Millett 26).

The three categories status, role and temperament are interlinked, so that, for example, “higher status [of one sex leads to the adoption of] roles of mastery, largely because they are first encouraged to develop temperaments of dominance” (Millett 26). The inferior status, role and temperament of the women are traditionally explained by the biological distinctions between the sexes. “[W]here culture is acknowledged as shaping behaviour, it is said to do no more than cooperate with nature” (27), a sentiment Millett objects to, since gender is learned through socialisation, and is not innate (29). In fact, quoting Stoller, she claims that is established in infancy (Millett 29). “[M]ale and female are really two different cultures, their

life experiences are utterly different” (Millett 31). To find the real differences between the sexes and those not related to culturally acquired rules of conduct, would be a task Millett, or feminism in general, is highly interested in. “[What they] may be, we are not likely to know [...] until the sexes are treated (...) alike” (29).

Millett identifies the family as “patriarchy’s chief institution” (33), since it is in charge of the socialisation of the members of society, acquainting the child from the beginning with patriarchal power structures and their position in it (33). This socialisation process is taken further in order to lead to “conformity (...) through peers, schools, media, and other learning sources, formal and informal” (Millett 35). Thus, society as a whole serves as educator in establishing the roles, temperament and status appropriate to the sexes.

Class is a factor which Millett explains to have the potential to blur the status of the female sex, since economic independence might cause women to appear to stand higher than some men (36). This aspect in Millett’s discussion is of high interest when reading *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, whose heroine transgresses class borders with the relationship with Mellors. In identifying class distinctions as being less rigid for women than for men (38), Millett claims that this cannot really be interpreted as a privilege, but rather as stemming from a disadvantage. Since women are financially dependent on men, their class status is dependent on them too (Millett 38). This is illustrated by the fact that the lower class lover/partner of an aristocratic woman – as in the case of Constance Chatterley and the gamekeeper Mellors – does not ascend to aristocracy as the logical result of their relationship.

The subordinate position of women in patriarchy, according to Millett, is further emphasised by cruelty in association with sexuality. “Patriarchy (...) typically link[s] feelings of cruelty

with sexuality, the latter often equated both with evil and power” (44), using examples such as wife-beating, pornography, rape and hostility towards women to support her claim (45). Hostility can be expressed through misogynistic literature, which “grew somewhat out of fashion” as a result of courtly and romantic love in Western society, but faced “[its] resurrection in twentieth-century attitudes and literature” (45). This might result from “a resentment over patriarchal reform” (Millett 45), and decreasing censorship, which gave way to “masculine hostility (...) in specifically *sexual* contexts” (45). In her analysis of Lawrence’s novels, Millett finds several examples to support her claim. There, not only male dominance, but hostility and misogyny are themes she traces and condemns.

Moreover, Millett identifies patriarchal society as an influential factor on women and the image they have of themselves (37). Constant emphasis on masculine superiority, the image of woman in society and the discrimination against her in many areas of daily life “cause her to believe what is said about her, and to develop a very low self esteem, which is a highly effective tool in keeping her in subordinate position, since if she does not believe in her own strength and abilities, she is not likely to revolt against the status quo. “As with other marginal groups a certain handful of women are accorded higher status that they may perform a species of cultural policing over the rest” (58).

### **3.2 Strategies for the Justification of Dominance**

What concepts does Millett find to justify masculine dominance? Among the most important she mentions are myth and religion as being significant to the standing of the sexes because patriarchal opinions and convictions are illustrated and portrayed in them (46). Thus, they support masculinity’s claim for dominance. Since in patriarchy, myth and religion are shaped

by masculine thought, “[t]he image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of “otherness” of woman” (46). Thus, patriarchal myth uses woman as an excuse, or even as a scapegoat, for sin (e.g. Eve) or for evil in the world (e.g. Pandora), but the scapegoat is not the only function she holds for men. Masculinity uses “sexual antipathy (...) to provide a means of control over a subordinate group” (47) and thus justifies masculine dominance (47). Therefore, Eve and Pandora are not only scapegoats, their myths also justify male rule, their actions almost destroy the world, therefore they illustrate the importance of masculine protection of the world.

Another factor which establishes members of the female sex as inferior is the “uneasiness and disgust” (Millett 47) the female body causes, and thereby serves to establish the female sex as inferior. Female “sexual functions,” for instance, “are [seen as] impure” (47). This is clearly illustrated in “[t]he event of menstruation” (47). Also, Millett states that “virginity and defloration” (48) appear to terrify males, who do acknowledge it as something special in most cultures, additionally identifying the woman as “undamaged good”, but at the same time develop a certain fear towards its uncanny quality. Furthermore, a notion which is much discussed is the identification of the woman by her lack of something or even “wound” (Millett 47), the fact that she does not have a penis, whose possession is indicated as being the norm. “Patriarchal circumstances and beliefs seem to have the effect of poisoning the female’s own sense of physical self until it often truly becomes the burden it is said to be” (47). This deliberate degradation of woman, the lowering of her own self esteem, as Millett refers to it, is a highly effective tool in keeping her in a subordinate position.

Another aspect strengthening the masculine position is the frequently occurring phenomenon of male bonding. Not only are women traditionally confined to the private sphere, there are



institutions explicitly intended to further male friendship and contact (Millett 48). Although today most women are not confined to the house as much as they were in earlier times, or as they still are in other patriarchies, there is significantly more emphasis on male group activities, such as sports clubs, pub culture etc., whereas this is still often the exception and less valued for female members of society. In this context, Millett mentions the anthropological concept of men's house institutions in preliterate societies as "exclusively masculine" (48), functioning to "strengthen the masculine communal experience through dances, gossip, hospitality, recreation, and religious ceremony" (48). Often, "[t]heir atmosphere is not very remote from that of military institutions in the modern world; they reek of physical exertion, violence, the aura of the kill, and the throb of homosexual sentiment" (Millett 49). This corresponds to the split hierarchy Millett identifies in Lawrence's fiction. Younger males are to be initiated into masculine society (Millett 49). They must be "hardened" (Millett 49) in order to become part of the man's world, they are not fully valid members of it yet, and therefore not at the top level of society.

Homosexuality is an aspect not to be underestimated in socialisation, a claim Millett supports by explaining men's house culture. She states that "[u]ntried youths become the erotic interest of their elders and betters" (49), something rather common in other cultures too, such as the Samurai or ancient Greek civilisation (49). "Considerable sexual activity does take place in the men's house, all of it (...) homosexual. But the taboo against homosexual behavior (at least among equals) is mostly non acceptable, so that there is often a rechanneling of the libido into violence" (Millett 50). The substitution of sex with violence links back to the common phenomenon in Western society, already mentioned above, of associating these two realms. A passage illustrating this is the famous wrestling scene

between Gerald Crich and Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love*, which will be considered in a later section of this study.

Explaining the culture of men's houses, Millett mentions the "psychoanalytic term for the (...) adolescent tone [being] "phallic state"" (49). Drawing on "[t]he Hungarian psychoanalytic anthropologist Géza Róheim (...) defining [the men's house culture's] communal and religious practices in terms of a "group of men united in the cult of an object that is a materialized penis and excluding women from their society"" (qtd in: Millett 1969: 49). "Primitive society practices its misogyny in terms of taboo and mana which evolve into explanatory myth. In historical cultures, this is transformed into ethical, then literary, and in the modern period, scientific rationalizations for the sexual politic" (Millett 51).

In contrast to the enforcement of male contact in patriarchal society, contact among females is hardly encouraged (Millett 51), and even considered negative. This is incorporated in the socialisation of women. The social processes and practices Millett explains feature in the literature of Lawrence, which she reviews. How she and other scholars find them to be incorporated into the novels, and Lawrence's agenda, will be reviewed in the following chapters.

## 4. Female Characters in Accord with Traditional Gender Roles in the Fiction of D. H. Lawrence

### 4.1 Tradition as Ideal?

Millett explains that, concerning the sexual politics in Lawrence's novels, the contrast is not really between man and woman, but against the New Woman. Traditional women "know their place" (Millett 250), and do not pose a threat to his male, whereas the modern woman is always characterised by a want, a certain deficiency: "marriage" (McLeod 100). The fate of traditional Women does not seem to be shared by all of them equally. It might be true for some, but as early as in *Sons & Lovers*, we encounter cruelty against them.

Many female characters encounter hostility, also Mrs Morel, who incorporates a traditionally feminine gender role. *Sons and Lovers*, written early in Lawrence's career, already features a certain hostility toward women. However the assortment of power is rather interesting. Even though Lawrence's mother is subject to a very violent husband, she does have strong power over the men – or rather boys – in the family. The novel is characterised by the oedipal relationship between the mother and her sons, especially Paul after the death of his elder brother. Apart from her obvious care for her children, "critics have also come to see Mrs. Morel as a devouring maternal vampire (...), smothering her son with affection" (Millett 247) and living through his experiences in the outside world. This emphasises the power she exerts over her son, but also implies a sexual component, in alliance with the oedipal aspects often mentioned in connection with the novel.

However, Gertrude Morel's power diminishes, or is turned against her in the course of the novel. Even though Paul is influenced by her in the professional as well as romantic aspects of his life, he becomes like his father, bullying her and even killing her in the end, which is disguised as euthanasia, as relieving her pain in the death struggle. This shows that power relations in the Morel family are assigned to the male, a fact also illustrated by the sexual politics in the marriage of Lydia and Walter Morel, where the major power lies with the husband (Millett 247). Nevertheless, a certain weakness of male characters in the novel becomes noticeable on several occasions, illustrated by Paul being torn between mother and mistress (both with Clara and Miriam) as well as the depiction of the father as being unable to win a verbal fight, or his bad conscience when the situations escalates, as happens regularly. In fact, some critics see Walter Morel in the inferior position, an aspect discussed with regard to Nigel Kelsey's analysis of Lawrence's work later on.

Millett claims that "the Oedipus complex [in *Sons and Lovers*] is rather less a matter of the son's passion for the mother than his passion for attaining the level of power to which adult male status is supposed to entitle him" (247). Thus, the "maternal vampire" exerting her power over her son is not really in power, but serves the larger purpose of assigning power to the male child. "The way out of [the son's] dilemma lies then in becoming, at first, like his mother rather than his father" (248). As stated above, Paul does become like his father in some respects toward the end of the novel, perhaps partly due to the chain of events triggered by the over-possessive mother and the "naturalness" of acquiring a dominant position in male intersexual relationships. Paul's way to power in particular is paved by women admiring and serving him, for one purpose or the other.

As Millett puts it: “Women are Paul Morel’s steppingstones up into the middle class” (248). His mother’s ambitions result in high aspirations, a good education and an emphasis on his artistic talent and professional life. Miriam’s admiration improves his self esteem and supports his development, and Clara makes a man out of him by introducing him to the world of sexual pleasure (247). The two lovers, Miriam and Clara, are said to take the roles of spiritual and sexual mistress (Millett 252), both being assigned a well-defined role, neither of them getting to be a whole woman for Paul, and therefore not getting the whole of Paul either. Paul on the other hand benefits from all three women, managing the almost impossible task of transgressing class boundaries as a male, moving up in society to the middle class (Millett 248). However much they might be of assistance to Paul, the women in the novel cannot be sure of his loyalty. “The novel’s center of conflict [lies] in Paul’s divided loyalty to mother and mistresses” (Millett 251). Neither his mother nor Miriam nor Clara get his undivided support. He quarrels and fights them off alternately.

Still, after his mother’s death, Paul tries to revive the relationship with Miriam. At this late point in the novel, Paul lacks orientation in his life. In his confusion, he thinks of reverting back to his old method of using women to give him direction. “In despair he thought of Miriam. Perhaps – perhaps – ?” (S&L 363) Miriam appears as a way out of his state of desperation, but thinking of her in despair is not very flattering. It is obvious that Paul is only looking for someone to fill the void his mother left: “He would leave himself to her. She was better and bigger than he. He would depend on her” (S&L 363). Explicitly using the word “depend”, Lawrence confirms Margaret Storch’s argument about the role the concept of masculine dependence plays in Lawrence’s writings, which is analysed in more detail below. Here, the concept does not seem threatening to Paul, it seems to be his wish to find someone

to depend on. However, since this dependence has to lead to a partial abandonment of his self, it carries a strong, (self-)destructive power.

Also, his wooing is not a merry act. Paul notices many flaws in Miriam, and Miriam is not at ease either. Still, he proposes to her, a thing he has not been able to bring himself to do during all the years they spent together as a couple, when it had been Miriam's wish to be asked. The scene depicts a desperate Paul, Miriam being clever enough to notice that a marriage with him would not make her happy. She leaves Paul desperate and lonely again. How much Paul might have tried to fight off his mother, as Millett writes, he is not successful. Trying to win Miriam as substitute does not help. He is alone and feels lost. The penultimate paragraph of *Sons & Lovers* reads: "'Mother!' he whispered – 'mother!' / She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this. And she was gone, intermingled herself. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her" (S&L, 369).

Paul's attempts to break free from her seem to have failed. However, emancipation from the mother's hold returns to his thoughts as the primary goal: "But no, he would not give in. [...] He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly" (S&L, 369). Thus, the ending of *Sons & Lovers* is both characterised by despair and hope, the latter prevailing eventually. But Paul has not been able to entirely cut the cord from his mother's influence. Even in death she is still a presence in Paul's life, making his dependence on her and her power over him apparent, in spite of her traditionally feminine life.

Returning to Millett's discussion of traditional women in Lawrence's novels, she states that both, Paul's and Miriam's mothers are traditional Victorian women living according to

traditional gender roles and conceptions (250). Miriam is not modern enough to serve as exception (Millett 259). Similar to the two mothers, she also “idealizes Paul” (Millett 250) and “[later sees in him] the godlike and indifferent Lawrentian male” she so admires (Millett 250). Although Millett claims Lawrence argues against the New Woman, not against traditional gender roles, it seems that the traditional women, especially in *Sons & Lovers*, are treated rather badly as well. Paul’s mother has to face the most fatal treatment, being killed by her son.

Millett also identifies aspects of “sexual sadism toward [Miriam]” (253) in the teaching situations at the farm. When Miriam does not immediately understand what he explains, Paul becomes upset rather quickly, which in turn causes tears and fear in Miriam. “Paul is roused by the mixture of tears and beauty” Millett tells us (253), “[blood] roused [being] the Lawrentian formula for sexual excitement and erection. The sight of Miriam suffering or humiliated is the very essence of her attractiveness to him” (Millett 253). In one of the situations, when Paul is unsatisfactorily trying to teach Miriam, he wants to throw the pencil in her face. Not surprisingly, since the metaphor is used by feminist critics elsewhere, too<sup>3</sup>, Millett links the pencil to the penis, as “both are instruments which here become associated with literacy and punishment” (Millett 254). On the other hand, it has to be noted that Miriam’s purity and her suffering for him, her existing and dressing up for him – despite his noticing – are not sufficient to keep Paul interested, or to rouse him enough to remain with her.

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000. Print.

Another deficiency in Miriam attacked by Lawrence is her so-called frigidity, very likely inherited from “(her) mother’s Victorian repugnance toward sexuality” (Millett 254) and her own upbringing in that tradition. When Paul finally convinces her to receive him, the experience is not fulfilling. Miriam does not pass the test, as the sexual act is named in the title of the chapter, which gives Paul reason and excuse to turn to Clara, the experienced and more sensual woman (Millett 254), who is cast off later on too. Paul justifies his leaving Miriam by accusing her of not wanting him, thus seriously lacking understanding of her situation and upbringing, her mother having referred to sexual relations as “dreadful” (S&L 255). Her reservation even after having experienced it, points to the prevailing influence of her upbringing. It might, on the other hand, also hint at her insecurity of Paul’s loyalty, the sequence of events showing she is right to doubt him. Paul breaks off with both women, the discarding of them, or women in general, after having used them, might also be read as “eliminating the threat of intellectual competition” (Millett 257) “Paul’s habit to lecture his mistresses” sets him up as a superior being. Millett writes that “the female’s lower nature (...) is incapable of activity and finds its only satisfactions in a human relationship where she may be of service to men and children” (257).

Sheila McLeod notes that Miriam lacks courage, Paul’s task being to induce her to dare to achieve something, such as education, which he is trying to give her (88). “But Miriam will not and cannot” (McLeod 88). Her strength shows in her accepting the affair with Clara and knowing that he will come back to her. However, knowing and concealing it from him corresponds to the “traditional female wisdom which [...] is geared to maintaining the status quo in relationships between men and women” (McLeod 88). It seems that her traditional female wisdom makes her an unfit a bride for Paul, since she is similar to his mother, “gaining strength from the possession of others rather than the possession of herself”



(McLeod 88). On the other hand, Miriam is a clever girl. There is more to her than meets Paul's eye, as her insight and thoughts illustrate. She often knows more than Paul about emotional concerns, and does not feel the need to brag about her insight, which is often greater than Paul's. "In many ways she is stronger and more worldly-wise than Paul. Perhaps this is what he cannot forgive her" (McLeod 89).

What Millett and McLeod seem to miss in their discussions above is the Miriam of the final chapter of *Sons & Lovers*. In my view, here we encounter a woman who has grown. She is going to become a teacher, thereby receiving an education – entirely without Paul – and financial independence. Also, she is not swept off her feet by Paul's proposal. She is not willing to give him an answer, despite her love for him. Instead of accepting Paul's proposal, she makes him admit – against his will – that marriage is not what he desires, but dependence on a woman (resembling his mother). "'Do you want it?' she asked, very gravely. 'Not much,' he replied, with pain" (S&L 367). When Paul continues the dialogue by asking whether without marrying, they "can do nothing," Miriam decidedly refuses (S&L 367), and eventually, leaves. Miriam has been a traditional girl throughout the novel. With the prospect of a job and independence, she partly assumes a more modern lifestyle. By refusing sex without marriage, which is what Paul proposes, she shows that she is still linked to traditional values. But her decision, in spite of the love she feels for Paul, shows more strength in her than before. It seems that the power relations between them have begun to break up, and that there is a shift in the division of power in the novel's ending.

## 4.2 Opinions on the Concept of Motherhood Illustrated in *Sons & Lovers* and *Women in Love*

McLeod draws on Lawrence's experience in real life, explaining his problematic but close relationship with his mother. She suggests that the problem was not only his own mother, but that the concept of motherhood in general was something deeply troubling to him. Motherhood, in Lawrence's novels, is not a notion the author seems to cherish, but to see as slavery (McLeod 153). But while he acknowledges its restricting effect on women, he laments its effect on the man more.

McLeod argues that Lawrence finds "manhood [...] more important than childhood, that women should care more about the men in their lives than they do about their children" (153). Entirely failing to grasp the concept of fatherhood and its potential rewards, "the Lawrentian hero perceives fatherhood [...] as a threat to [his manliness]. [...] And so mothers tend to become either monsters or pitiable apologies for womanhood" (153-54). Additionally, another threatening factor in motherhood McLeod mentions links back to Millett's notion of the maternal vampire. "Mothers are supposed to feed rather than to feed on their children" (155). Mrs. Morel, however, feeds on Paul's experiences in life, his achievements and emotions.

Not only motherhood, but children themselves are often depicted with a significant lack of benevolence, if they feature in a novel at all. McLeod gives the example of Mellors' daughter with his ex-wife, who weeps because he shoots a cat. No pity is shown, the girl being imagined to use tears in order to gain something (McLeod 159). "The child has become the enemy of the man, in league with women" (McLeod 159), a rather extreme judgement and

certainly not appropriate. Aside from lack of tenderness shown in the treatment of the few children there are in Lawrence's novels, McLeod mentions that they are not really necessary to Lawrence. "[T]he crown of womanhood is not motherhood but wifeness" (159). To find and submit to the right man, to Lawrence, seems a greater and more important achievement than procreation. Only Connie and Mellors, the central couple in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, are allowed the possibility of a child, since they have a perfect relationship before, which cannot be disrupted by having a baby. "Because a child is not necessary, a child can (just about) be allowed" (160). Furthermore, the child has not been born yet. Therefore, it is (for the moment) not much more than an idea, a road sign pointing which way to go in the future. It seals the fate of Connie and Mellors, signifying that they will have a future together, disregarding difficulties they might be experiencing at that moment.

McLeod explains Lawrence's neglect of the importance of children with the "paranoid male phantasy [of] the female's loss of sexual desire for the male [with womanhood]" (162). If true, it proves Lawrence's understanding to be rather limited in some emotional areas. It moreover shows a surprisingly public obsession with sex, and an equally surprisingly openly shown fear to lose the possibility of frequent sexual encounters as well as the chance to prove his virility and potency. To admit feeling threatened by a baby is both almost ludicrous and – curiously – at the same time, recklessly honest and exposing, and thus an impressive authorial achievement.

McLeod even takes a step further and compares a possible child to the penis of the man who fathers it, emphasising Connie's masculine-centred priorities (168). Even though Connie's pregnancy is not threatening the male authority of Mellors, since their relationship is strong enough to endure the strain Lawrence puts on it, it is not greeted with much enthusiasm on

Mellors' side. What seems to be more important is Connie's worship of and submission to Mellors: "good fucking makes good children" (169). Even though to Mellors the child does not play an equally important role as to Connie (169), he does take responsibility for it.

Still, the importance of becoming pregnant to Connie seems to be neglected as the novel ends, but McLeod points out that this is misleading, since the event that leads to the first sexual encounter is that Connie is moved by the sight of "the hatching of the pheasant chicks" (169). It illustrates clearly that the wish for children has been vital for Connie all along. That Lawrence gives the scene this focus is significant. It might hint at his ability to grasp the fact that fertility is an important topic to women, especially if they are denied it. However, he shows some inconsistency with the importance of motherhood in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, an aspect McLeod criticises: "It is paradoxical that Lawrence [...] is capable of understanding and sympathising with women so well when he chooses to do so, and yet at the same time so often incapable of accepting and absorbing the meaning of either his understanding or sympathy" (170). She accounts for it by pointing out the need for "women [to] remain the other [...] in order to give definition to the elusive concept of maleness" (170).

Margaret Storch claims that "D. H. Lawrence's response to women reflects his awareness of the fundamental power of women over men's emotional lives" (97). Indeed, Lawrence's writings make it clear that he must have been aware of the potential for power in the feminine. He experienced it throughout his life, beginning with the influence of his mother, up to his marriage to Frieda, an undoubtedly dominant woman, an aspect most critics find important (Storch 97). His experience in real life finds a way into his writing, and can be seen in many of his novels, "[his] rebellion against the powerful mother [being] a major element in his work" (97). Storch's analysis of Lawrence's work does not comply with the assumption

that all traditional women in his novels face a treatment less harsh than that of their modern counterparts. Instead, she detects much cruelty in Paul's treatment of his mother, even if on the surface the mother exerts a lot of influence on Paul and is described with great sympathy. Storch finds "a fundamental antagonism towards the mother" (98) on a deeper level of interpretation.

She identifies three instances in *Sons & Lovers* which work towards a destruction of the mother figure and maternal values that seem so oppressing to Paul Morel, and the masculine in general. "These key events are: the sacrifice of Annie's doll, Arabella, in Paul's childhood; the burning and symbolic entombment of the loaves of bread in the "Strife in Love" chapter; and the death of Gertrude Morel as an immediate result of an overdose of morphia administered by Paul" (Storch 98). The destruction of the doll reads like a human sacrifice, an image supported by Paul, who builds a rudimentary altar for the purpose. He first burns her, then smashes the remains, the doll being compared to the mother, against whom the "powerful anger" (99) is directed.

Where Millett claims Paul Morel first becomes like his mother, then like his father, to Storch the opposite seems to be true. She acknowledges that the son "must deny himself identification [...] with his father as a strong male" (100), since Paul's loyalty lies with the bullied mother. However, "in the treatment of Annie's doll [...] Paul is behaving towards the mother in a way that reflects the father" (100). Similar to his father, who feels guilty and defeated after hitting his wife, Paul feels strong aversion against the destroyed doll, because he has destroyed it (100). "The father's shame reflects the damaged masculine pride of father and son" (101).

Another instant Storch sees to be symbolically linked with Paul's desire to destroy his mother happens when he is supposed to take care of his mother's baking bread while she is out. Since the task has been given to Paul by his mother, and bread is seen as a maternal symbol standing for nourishment – a vital task of the mother (101) – Storch sees an obvious parallel. The loaves of bread burn in the oven and are ruined. Paul reacts by wrapping them and hiding them away in the small, closed space of the pantry. If the bread is interpreted as standing for the mother, this action is seen as her symbolic burial, bringing to the surface Paul's desire to kill his mother (101).

The third incident Storch mentions is the most violent, since it involves the actual death of Paul's mother, inflicted by himself (105). Mixing morphia with milk and giving the fatal mixture to his mother, he lies to her when she complains about its bitterness. ““It's a new sleeping draught the doctor gave me for you,” he said” (S&L 346), thus disguising his true intention. Therefore, it seems much more like murder than a mercy killing, since Mrs Morel neither knows nor has given her consent to the drastic act.

What he can only be said to have fantasised about before, becomes reality now, significantly by his very own hands. By being killed, I find Gertrude Morel to suffer the harshest fate of Lawrence's female characters, in spite of being a traditional woman. However, the stern attitude and necessity to destroy her does not stem from her values and way of life. Instead, it seems to be necessary for the son in order to be able to emancipate himself from the mother's hold. Moreover, in an interesting reversal of roles, “[it] is through an inversion of maternal power, the drinking of poisoned milk, rather than through masculine aggression” (106) that Mrs. Morel dies. This does not seem any less aggressive, and even more cruel considering the

inherent irony: that motherhood is the destructive force, where it is also the source of existence, something which Millett also does not fail to notice (249).

In all three instances featuring the symbolic and actual death of Gertrude Morel, there is at least one “female accomplice” (107) present. She is “a symbol of the sexual liberation he hopes to achieve through destruction; that ultimate act of rebellion is finally, however, ineffectual” (107). The ineffectuality shows in his inability to open up to his lovers. It neither works with Miriam, nor Clara, because he is still dependent on his mother (107). No wonder Lawrence finds women threatening, if this is the source his fear stems from. Still, it makes his hostility understandable in some circumstances, albeit in a somewhat limited way.

Like Margaret Storch, Nigel Kelsey dedicates much space in his analysis to commentary on Mrs Morel’s death as an act of killing. However, he does not stress the oedipal implications of the episode, but emphasises its “political nature” (105). He explains that Mrs Morel’s ambiguous role, comprised of her “position as *woman* and *housewife* and her adopted political role of ‘policing’ the household sphere” (105). Her power tactics will be explained later on, but Kelsey finds them to be significant and that they shape the life of the family. Paul’s act of killing his mother is identified as challenging her grip on the family (Kelsey 105). Kelsey does acknowledge, like Storch, that the killing of Mrs Morel also implies Paul’s freeing himself. Since he “[realises] the uncompromising politics of the *social* which his mother represents and from which he is becoming increasingly alienated” (106), he must find a means to escape. “The killing signifies, therefore, an interstice of rationality [in a social] crisis” (106). Thus, it is an attempt to gain sanity in the power struggle, but is at the same time threatened by the maddening act of killing his mother.

The act of killing brings to the surface the fact that there are no “real alternatives” (106), since Gertrude Morel is doomed to death. “[but] ultimately she is surely ‘sacrificed’ for household suffering everywhere” (106). Her killing is disguised as euthanasia, but the “mercy killing” is merciful more to Paul than to the dying patient (107). It is important to note that the last phase of Mrs Morel’s life involves a reversal of the “‘sexual’ roles [and] the power relations” between them (107).

#### **4.3 Masculine and Feminine Victims of the Power Struggle**

Nigel Kelsey identifies elements of horror in *Sons & Lovers*, explaining with respect to Kate Millett that “the horror of *Sons and Lovers* is [...] the ‘madness’ induced by patriarchy and male power” (Kelsey 71). However, he notes the importance of “external factors (work, class, culture) [which] at least partly constitute Paul Morel’s problematic relations with women” (71). Similar factors account for the problems of other protagonists, such as Mr and Mrs Morel. Unlike many critics, who do not grant much space to a discussion of the older Morel generation, and often offer but a brief picture of a power struggle in favour of the masculine partner, Kelsey investigates the dynamics and causes of the problems between the couple. Interestingly, he does not identify Mr. Morel simply as the rude and violent oppressor spoiling the happiness of the rest of the family. The forces at work within him and his wife will be shown on the following pages.

In contrast to Millett, Kelsey discusses at length the strategies and ideologies which Mrs. Morel uses in order to achieve a power balance in her favour, a notion strongly attached to the Morel household, forming the core of the protagonists’ life and base of their beliefs, fears and disturbed psyches. By explaining Mrs. Morel’s strategies of power, seeing her as “the



real driving force of the household” (82) and the Morel family’s code of behaviour as well as the tensions and the factors accounting for them between certain members of the family, he identifies interesting underlying beliefs in the novel’s protagonists. Reading Kelsey’s analysis, it also becomes clear that Mrs. Morel is not simply a victim to her violent husband. She quite powerfully shapes the thoughts of her children (and even herself) in order to have them on her side. Where Millett claims that “responsibility for the discord in the characters’ lives rests firmly with the discourses and actions of men” (Kelsey 71), he objects.

The Morel household is not a happy place, but what accounts for its dismal nature? Of course, poverty in the mining community is a strong factor influencing the emotions of the family (79), but not the only one. Rather, it results in an “oppressive marital conflict [that] quickly permeates the whole household [and remains] as a permanent fixture, a continuous collective household anguish” (79). The oppressive and dismal atmosphere of the Morel home is mostly blamed on the father, mainly when he is absent, out drinking, while the household is implied to be the “*place* where the husband and father *should* be” (79). The absent father is said to be “the cause of the family suffering” (79), a notion which “tends to be transmitted by Mrs Morel to the children.” Therefore, she actively employs a strategy to set up her husband as a terrifying outsider.

Walter Morel is however not only blamed for the atmosphere at home when he is absent, but also when he is present. “[The] text variously demonstrates that the absent Morel made present would serve neither to give Mrs. Morel the love she desires nor reconcile the father to his children who see him [...] as contemptible and hateful” (Kelsey 80). The hostility against Walter Morel, created to a large extent by his wife, therefore, is apparently not founded in his

acting right or wrong, but rather in his very being. “The real problem [seems to lie] in Morel’s inability to satisfy his wife’s bourgeois desires” (Kelsey 80).

Kelsey identifies the class conflict between the married couple as a central issue. They come from different worlds, Walter Morel comes from a mining family and is therefore deeply rooted in the working class, Mrs. Morel, even if impoverished, is of bourgeois origin. The gap seems to be unbridgeable, since their conflicts not only centre around disappointed expectations and differences in the two classes’ lifestyle. Rather, they speak different languages, and do not cling to shared ideologies and ideals. “The battle that inevitably develops between them, [...] is clearly a demonstration of the felt experience of class conflict at a personal level embodied in the textual opposition between body and mind” (82). Gertrude Morel sticks to her old middle-class values and projects all that is wrong with her life onto her husband (82). The hostility directed against him, and his failing attempts to live up to his wife’s expectations “[drive] him insane” (82). As a result, Walter Morel does not treat her with much respect or consideration (82).

The attitudes of both characters are intrinsically linked to each other, as Kelsey explains: “The beginnings of Morel’s neglect of his wife, therefore, cannot be divorced from Mrs Morel’s ideological and increasingly physical rejection of her husband” (82). Walter Morel is not welcome at home, and does not spend much time there. “[In his] absence, Mrs Morel [...] gradually inculcates an array of bourgeois values from which the uneducated Morel is acutely alienated. [...] Morel’s absence from the household [...], far from being a source of anxiety and far from being the source of all misery, actually creates Mrs Morel’s *coup d’etat*” (Kelsey 82). “From her the feeling was transmitted to the other children. She never suffered alone any more: The children suffered with her. (...) All the room was full of the sense of

waiting , waiting for the man who was (...) drinking himself drunk. (...) [The mother and children] shared the same anxiety” (S&L 54). The scene illustrates how the children are influenced by their mother’s feelings, how she does not spare them her own negative emotions. Thus, Mrs. Morel actually seems to use the hateful aspects she attacks in her husband to support her own power politics. In adopting the role of the victim, Mrs. Morel might in fact be said to brush that role off onto the only apparently dominant husband.

There are occasions when Walter Morel exerts physical power over his wife, and treats her quite brutally: “Paul never forgot coming home (...) one Monday evening and finding his mother with her eye swollen and discoloured, his father standing on the hearthrug, (...) and William (...) glaring at [him]” (S&L 52). Walter Morel’s “brutality is a symptomatic expression of the fact that the members of ‘his’ household just as the community of Bestwood are victims of class” (84). Regardless of a potential “motivating force [...], Mrs Morel and her children experience Morel’s brutality first and foremost as brutality, not as the debilitating effects of capitalist [mechanisms or] class conflict” (87). Therefore, their resentment is understandable to any reader. The relatedness of Morel’s behaviour as (at least partially) a consequence of a hostile environment at home, created primarily by his wife and her influencing the children, remains a possibility. It certainly does not justify his brutality, but it underlines his helplessness as a working-class man unable to fight on an intellectual basis and thus, hints at Morel’s inferior position in the power politics in his home, where he is bound to lose in any intellectual struggle.

#### 4.4 Power Strategies from an Inferior Position in *Sons & Lovers*

The class conflict between Walter and Lydia Morel certainly accounts for some of the problems between them. It is, however, unlikely to be the only force separating them, the one which especially alienates Morel from his family and home. Mrs. Morel is rather successful in being the centre of the family. Therefore, the following section contains an analysis of the strategies Kelsey finds her to apply in order to achieve this status. Paradoxically, her position of strength is in part triggered by her inferiority in many situations. At the same time, these situations often show how the “madness” of the masculine power struggle (Kelsey 71) also affects Mrs Morel: “[She] tends to laugh [...] in the moments when her oppression boldly exposes its nakedness to her” (Kelsey 91). This reaction, hysteria or “bitter irony” (91), serves to point out the dependence of Mrs Morel. She is physically and economically helpless against her husband.

Laughter is a way of coping with her oppressive situation, however close it might be to insanity. But Mrs Morel does more than just cope with her situation. She also employs certain strategies of power politics. For example, it is Mrs Morel who creates the “household anguish” by spreading the fear of the absent Mr Morel (79). She also imposes her suffering onto her children by not disguising it (80), thereby positioning her husband as the evil other. “Moreover, Mrs Morel’s over-indulgence with her children whilst serving to fill the chasm of lost love and sexual relations between husband and wife also takes the form of a weapon against her spouse” (80). Attributing Gertrude Morel’s working against her husband to the class conflict between them (82), Kelsey claims that she feels increasingly alienated “from her own class, [realising the blameable person to be] her husband” (82). This realisation hints at Millett’s argument that women’s social status is dependent on their husbands, which makes

Mrs. Morel transgress class boundaries and descend to the working class. It is important to mention that Walter Morel – whether for feeling below his fiancée or for pure maliciousness – had depicted his financial means as being rosier than they really were. However, Mrs Morel knew without a doubt that he was working class, so it seems rather limited to push all the blame simply onto her husband. By employing this strategy, she seems to blame him for her own “naivety” (Kelsey 82).

Instead of working towards a balance in power relations, or a mutual understanding, Mrs. Morel despises her husband, and considerably engages with her children instead. “[The] text amply demonstrates how [...] Mrs Morel [becomes] the real driving force of the household” (82), using her husband’s absence in her favour (although at the same time fretting about it). “[She] gradually inculcates an array of bourgeois values from which the uneducated Morel is acutely alienated” (82). By accusing Mrs. Morel of the creation of an environment, which hostile and unintelligible to her husband, Kelsey identifies her to be preparing the ground for a reversal of the power relations in her favour, setting herself up as head of the family. Calling it “coup d’etat” (82), Kelsey gives it a strong political note. By alienating Walter Morel from his home and family, he becomes “a mute apolitical subject” (Kelsey 86).

What is also interesting in the context of Mrs Morel’s creation of a bourgeois environment is that the action somehow contradicts the argument of masculine class dependence. In spite of a working class father, she educates her children, encourages them to expand their horizons, to a future outside the mining community, which she finds to be beneath her. Whether she does this to reject her husband or because she really does believe that a white collar future will be brighter for her sons than her own life, does not make a difference. She raises men to

transgress class boundaries, thereby re-enforcing the power of her influence, however limited it may be in other areas of life.

Paradoxically, while being the centre of the family and working against her husband throughout the majority of *Sons & Lovers*, Mrs Morel is also the stereotypical angel of the house. Kelsey notes that “Mrs Morel [works from an] apolitical vacuum in which the only solace is a living martyrdom” (89). The household, even if it is the mind-shaping core of the Morel family, is her prison. Kelsey even finds her to be voiceless on many occasions, “the vocalisation of her distress [being] too frequently left for others to convey” (89). At the same time, she strongly believes in the values of marriage and family, staying in her limited and limiting world, “forever to defend the nuclear family and marriage form” (Kelsey 93). Even if Mrs Morel defends her way of life, the factors accounting for her set of beliefs are probably just as problematic to feminist critics as her suffering.

Interestingly, Kelsey finds the public and the private sphere to be as if reversed in the actions and beliefs of the Morels. “[The] relentless struggle of their relationship can in part be explained by their respective ambiguous gendered identifications with [the] two relatively opposing realms” (93). Being alienated from his home, Kelsey explains that “the public house becomes [Walter Morel’s] private sphere [where he is welcome and finds] male comradeship” (Kelsey 93). It seems that he can be himself more – the jolly person Mrs. Morel first fell in love with – in a public space. To Mrs. Morel, the public with which she feels at home looks rather different. She despises the working-class atmosphere of public places such as the Wakes (Kelsey 93), a fair nearby, or the pub, both places which make her husband feel comfortable. Emphasising her middle-class background, she embraces the public when it involves “intellectual discourse and debate on religion or politics [...] or the

critical forum offered by the Women's Guild, which she joins" (Kelsey 93). The intellectual public, at times, might feel more like home to her (in resembling a middle-class parlour) than her actual working-class home.

However, the Morel home retains its significance by

[offering] a fixed reference point. It is from the private stability of the household [...] that Mrs Morel employs the tactics of a political-social exclusion of [her husband's] section of the *public*. [...] This shutting out of [his working-class] cultural life [...] develops into ritualised utterances and practises which serve tactically to hegemonically enshrine her own specific *public* identification within the *private* sphere. (Kelsey 94)

Although Mrs. Morel engages in public life by joining the Women's Guild, thereby joining the fight for "women's independence" (Kelsey 96), her "major victories [...] occur as a result of her battling hard both *for* and *within* the private sphere" (Kelsey 96). It is the place where she fights for and achieves "influence and power however limited" (Kelsey 96), a power she uses in order to assist her sons to escape from their working-class home in a mining town. Since to achieve power Mrs. Morel has had to identify with the private realm of her home, she has been "acting as an agent for the reproduction of private bourgeois familial ideologies, at the same time as being one of its prime victims" (Kelsey 96). Thus, Mrs. Morel represents a sharp contrast to modern characters in Lawrence's novels, who try to break away from the private sphere. Looking at her situation "is to recognise the rationale of the tactics in the face of other alternatives in which many women find themselves; either mediating between the

realm of the public-private, or else standing ambiguously between the two domains” (Kelsey 97).

#### **4.5 Powerful Opposition and a Clash of Generations exemplified by the Brangwen Women**

The Brangwen women, according to Carol Dix, are given great strength in *The Rainbow*, especially those of the older generations, Lydia, the grandmother, and Anna, the mother of Ursula and Gudrun. As Millett claims, they are given power because they do not pose a threat to men, since they do not question the natural order (250). They remain in woman’s traditional role, therefore, Lawrence can approve of them. Dix claims that “feminist critics have become unsure of Lawrence, because he seems to be saying that women can free themselves, but have to stick with what nature ordains” (34), an aspect best investigated by Lawrence’s concept of duality.

Dix sees Lydia Brangwen being portrayed as a very powerful female character. “[She], with Tom, first shows that awful Brangwen womanpower, that is to increase with Anna and Ursula. Lydia does not dominate Tom, but she certainly shows him the way she expects to be treated. The lead comes from her” (35). Moreover, “her man only learns of sexuality through her and becomes passive to her active. It is Tom who is being described as ‘submissive’” (Dix 86). Her daughter Anna, also assuming the traditional feminine gender role in her marriage to Will, is given a certain power, too. “She is fiery and knows her own mind” (Dix 36). In her, we see the ability Dix acknowledges in Lawrence – to describe the claustrophobia women at his time must have felt, and the will to escape the limits placed on femininity by



Victorianism. However, “Anna’s generation has not the means of escape” (36), so, after much fighting, she turns to motherhood and neglects the fight between the sexes (37).

The women belonging to the older generation in the novel “take over in all things sexual” (Dix 86), although it must be added that at least Anna’s husband is unfaithful on one occasion. Both Anna and her mother Lydia, however, are portrayed in a far more sympathetic way by Lawrence than their female successors. He seems to have significantly fewer problems “portraying women of the former generations, investing them with quite some power. “Lydia conquers [her husband] Tom [and] Anna spoils Will’s life [by having so many children,] tying him to the burden of nine children until both his hope and his talent have withered” (Millett 258). But Lawrence approves of this “blood knowledge” (Millett 258), “[idealising] the sexuality of the past (...) into a healthy freedom,” which does not apply to actual reality, but paints a rather nostalgic picture (Millett 258). Neither Lydia nor Anna “are in any way sexually inhibited” (Millett 258). Instead, the male partners participate in their wives’ physical experience, thereby celebrating the “power of the womb.” (258). This is seen in Tom’s impressions when he witnesses child birth, which impresses him deeply, “[suffering] more than [Anna] did” (TR 192).

Gender relations, sexual politics and their negotiation are important aspects in *The Rainbow*. Apart from the already mentioned portrayal of the Brangwen women of an older generation, it also features “an ideology of male sexual needs [...] early on [...] when the young Tom Brangwen seeks sexual satisfaction from a local prostitute.” (Kelsey 122) Although the image of a prostitute makes room for much critique in feminist terms on Victorian double standards, marriage as form of prostitution and more, Kelsey limits himself to stating that the episode serves male satisfaction only. Nevertheless, this satisfaction carries a connotation significant

to the sexual politics in the novel. Kelsey claims that the fear of having caught a venereal disease gives the encounter a dangerous connotation. “[The] function of the prostitute [...] in the text serves [...] to satisfy male desire, [...] thereafter to serve as an alien even dangerous sexuality, which [...] threatens to shatter the ideology of romance and wholeness of being to which the Brangwenian male conscience still needs to return” (123).

Kelsey seems right, Tom Brangwen is rather disturbed after the encounter, “The thing was something of a shock to him” (TR 19). The shock seems to be his disappointment in women, or a change in how he sees them, since the quote is immediately followed by Tom’s impression of woman as “[occupying] the supreme position, [...] symbol for that further life which comprised religion and love and morality” (TR 19). Kelsey notes that “[the] prostitute is not without power effects [...], challenging male readers of *The Rainbow* to confront their ideological complicity in their universalising of women as objects [..]” (123-4). Indeed, “post-coital” Tom sees a split in his image of Woman. “For him there was until that time only one kind of woman – his mother and sister. / But now? He did not know what to feel” (TR 19). Tom begins to think in polar opposites, his mother and sister impersonating the mystic centre of the household, opposed by the prostitute and the disappointing quick sex she offers as well as the fear of “inefficiency” (TR 19). Kelsey reads “[the] prostitute as [scorning] the masculine division between the moral/immoral woman” (124).

In spite of not contracting a venereal disease on his first sexual encounter, which he briefly fears, Tom is infected with something, or rather, his mind is. “He was tormented now with sex desire, his imagination reverted always to lustful scenes” (TR 20). The prostitute awakens him sexually, similar to Clara in *Sons & Lovers*, but the awakening is not blissful. Instead, it is torture, almost an addiction, the “lustful scenes” being detestable memories. The question

arises whether they are hateful because they involve a prostitute and not a lover/wife, or whether their lustfulness itself carries the hateful potential.

Being subject to his awakened sexuality, Tom looks for the right girl, but is continuously disappointed. His active seeking of marriage being a “sign of a compulsory heterosexuality and its related moral code [...]. In turn, the text provides us with a voluptuous heterosexual woman in the form of Lydia Lenski” (Kelsey 124). Being the counter-image of the prostitute, Kelsey finds the latter to “[surface] as a mirror image in Lydia’s perception that [...] she finds herself [in a situation of] an inegalitarian politics [in the Brangwen household]; a masculine politics of protection and intimacy in exchange for penetration without payment” (125). The mirroring of the two female figures is supported by the author in featuring them in the same chapter.

Although the concept of the New Couple will only really gain prominent status in *Women in Love*, traces of it can be detected in the marriage of Tom and Lydia, when they “begin to learn that successful sexual relationships are not the product of an all consuming desire but require careful negotiation within a dialogue of mutual trust and respect” (Kelsey 126). Not recognising their own faults, especially Tom, who is not willing to see his mistakes and misapprehensions in love, they lead a very unhappy marriage for some time. However, more importantly, they reunite (126).

Anna has inherited part of her mother’s knowledge to handle men. However, she seems more aggressive and keen to show her power as a young woman. “For the purpose of accruing personal feminist power [...] she attempts to obliterate all margins, by ridiculing [...] Will’s beliefs” (Kelsey 130). Her behaviour moves on the borderline between sanity and hysteria,

perhaps because she is fighting for “[an] independence in marriage which refuses to be at a man’s beck and call. [...] Anna’s hostility to Will [...] cannot easily be read outside of the historical forces of feminism in which women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were once again finding a voice” (Kelsey 130-31) She expresses her resistance in the act of sewing, which she only does when she pleases. However tame this may seem to feminist readers today, Kelsey claims that at her time “it is enough [...], challenging her husband’s masculine desire for household practices to conform to his ideas” (131).

Anna’s position illustrates a transitory state of woman, not quite traditional, and not yet modern and independent. However, her figure foreshadows the possibility of changes in woman’s life for when her daughter Ursula grows up. That she seems to embrace this transitory state, while her husband feels rather uncomfortable with it, can be deduced from a short statement made on their honeymoon. When they lie in bed at twilight, the time of day setting the scene for their talk stands for a time of change. “‘I don’t like the twilight,’ he said. / ‘I love it.’ she answered” (TR 148).

One chapter of *The Rainbow* is titled “Anna Victix”, implying her victorious struggle. Her power to confront her husband face to face is seen in their dialogues, where she often challenges his statements. According to Kelsey, the peak of her triumph is “when, naked and pregnant, she dances alone in her bedroom to annul her young husband [and] successfully fights off, therefore, the patriarchal fiction that would allow Will the right to possess her body only” (131). In her victorious dance, she appears like an Amazon, not needing a husband, only a man’s physical presence with which to mate. In this context, Sandra M. Gilbert’s discussion of Cixous and Clément’s concept of “The Newly Born Woman” becomes

relevant.<sup>4</sup> Anna, impersonating a change in feminine identity and behaviour, dances to liberate herself, and to celebrate her womanhood, similar to the practice of “the southern Italian ritual of the Tarantella” (Gilbert “Tarantella” xi). Dancing serves as a means of escape from “the wilderness out of which silenced women must finally find ways to cry, (...) and dance in impassioned dances of desire [thus offering an] interlude of orgasmic freedom” (Gilbert “Tarantella” xi). Anna feels strong in her pregnant dancing, her husband on the other hand uneasy. But Anna’s dancing precedes the steady period of freedom the couple achieves later. This is in accordance with the Tarantella-simile, since Gilbert explains that the liberating experience of the dancer is only temporary, so that they “[lapse] into fatigued acquiescence” (Gilbert “Tarantella” xii). Similarly, Anna’s victory in her powerful dancing habit is only temporary too.

Anna’s victory, her showing Will her strength and shattering many of his religious and patriarchal beliefs, leaves Will insecure at first (Kelsey 132) and drives him away. He spends time away from home, on one occasion making use of it to seduce a girl on a night out in Nottingham. “Should he begin with her to live the other, the unadmired life of his desire? Why not? (...) Why should he not enjoy what was in there? (...) Her childishness whetted him keenly. She would be helpless between his hands” (TR 227-8). That it is the childish girl’s helplessness which makes her attractive to him shows that Will Brangwen is insecure in the face of strong femininity as that displayed by his wife. However, the girl is not so helpless and does not give in eventually. “His failure to subjugate sexually the girl he seeks out [...] is an attempt to compensate for the loss of a traditional male power base within marriage” (Kelsey 132). However Will does not stay alienated from his marital home. Quite on the

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<sup>4</sup> For full argument see Cixous and Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*. London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd., 1996. Print.

contrary, he and Anna discover a new happiness with new sexual practices. Similar to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Kelsey perceives the couple to find the practice of anal sex a liberating experience. It seems to eliminate shame, by overcoming it in committing the shameful act, and also to extinguish the power struggle between the couple.

Anna herself is in favour of their new sex life, but the question remains as to why the power struggle stops. Is it because, by submitting to anal penetration, thus perhaps agreeing to be humiliated, as Millett would say, the struggle is made redundant? In taking it to another level, the level of sexual intercourse, and relinquishing the leading role to the partner, does Anna bring the negotiations over dominance to an end? Kelsey suggests a third reading, implying that their turn to "sodomitical activities are in some measure representative of political power" (134) or perhaps a sexual political revolution. Anna turns to motherhood for fulfilment, her sexuality does not feature prominently anymore as soon as Ursula takes action.

## **5. Transformed Femininities: Modern Female Characters in Lawrence's Novels**

### **5.1 The Influence of Feminism: The New Woman and Other Feminist Types**

Hilary Simpson analyses Lawrence's work in the context of many aspects of feminist history and looks at different types of women and feminine ideologies, investigating their relationship to the author. Interestingly, Simpson finds Lawrence to support certain feminist values, although his view changes over time to almost the opposite. Also, he was not a supporter of radical feminism, but of a rather romantic and unthreatening version of it.

Interestingly, his sympathising with the matters concerning the feminist movement can be identified to end with the First World War (16). After these dramatic years, his attitude towards women changed.

Simpson finds a great number of Lawrence's female characters engaged or at least interested in politics and women's rights. Therefore, these characters all feature in this section on modern women, since the commitment shown, the thinking about and voicing of opinions regarding the situation of their own sex (and this by rather common women), as well as their active fight for them is not a trait traditionally associated with a passive, old-fashioned definition of Woman. However, it needs to be kept in mind that the engagement with the feminist movement is not the central, defining focus of most of the female characters. It constitutes a large part of the characters of Clara, Ursula (in *The Rainbow*) and Gudrun. In Miriam, Mrs. Morel and Connie Chatterley it runs as an undercurrent, although particularly the women from *Sons & Lovers* are aware of inequality between the sexes.

The suffragettes, although not perceived as a threat by Lawrence, were not his favourite branch of politically active women, since they "ignored the question of sexual liberation which preoccupied him" (Simpson 16) His characters' engagement with the movement and their endeavour for women's emancipation in society is mostly not taken seriously, "the issues raised by feminism are reduced to personal problems to which individual answers must be sought" (Simpson 25). According to Simpson, this limiting view constitutes "[the] real blow to feminism" (37). Commitment to feminism does not seem to be offered as an answer to those problems. An example here is Clara, who is engaged in the women's movement, but her fight for equality does not solve her problems or make her happy. Apart from Clara's obvious individual problem – living alone instead of with her husband – "the novel implies

that Clara's dissatisfaction has nothing to do with women's oppression, but concerns only her sexuality and the necessity for her to come to terms with it" (Simpson 29). Clara's active engagement in the women's movement seems negligible, although it has taken up a great part of her life until the relationship with Paul. "[Feminism] has given her the support she needs [to leave her husband and work for her living, [...] [and at first intrigues] Paul, but later it comes to seem an irrelevance" (Simpson 28-9).

Through her feminist education as well as her experience and physical attributes, Clara appears strong. Although Paul seems to find her attractive from their first meeting, there is something that makes her more attractive later. "It is when Clara reveals emotion or weakness that Paul starts to feel attracted towards her and not merely interested. [...] It is one of the stock responses to an emancipated woman – a desire to experience the thrill of seeing a strong and independent person betray her vulnerability" (Simpson 33).

Vulnerability on Clara's side still does not seem to be enough for Paul to let the problematic matter of feminism go. "[He] also wants her to acknowledge that her feminism is misguided and that what she really needs is sexual fulfilment" (33), writes Simpson mentioning that Paul is successful, portrayed in Clara's interpretation of the spinster Miss Limb, who is supposed to be missing a man (33), which Simpson describes as crucial moment. "From this point onwards Clara's aggressive feminism, which had previously intrigued Paul, is less important," and features only as a sign of loose morals (33), since she agrees to become Paul's lover and have sex in rather public places.

Paul is however inferior to Clara in some respects, a fact that is clear to her, but apparently not to him, illustrated in their different conceptions of their lovemaking. Paul assumes it to be



as satisfying for her as it is for him, “[but] the text itself gives the lie to this, for the satisfaction is Paul’s” (Simpson 34). It is clear that their relationship will come to an end, in this way seeming similarly unsuccessful like the one with Miriam. It is partly brought about by opposing ideas of it, since Paul desires the “impersonal” quality of having sex, whereas Clara wants “more personal intimacy” (Simpson 35), an unbridgeable tension.

Linking back to Lawrence’s critique on the suffragette movement, which left out sexuality from its struggle for more rights, Simpson claims that one thing that cannot be held against Paul is his acceptance of a woman’s sexual past. Since this is not a common trait, virginity still considered a vital virtue as it was in Victorian times, Paul’s opinion might seem quite remarkable. At the same time, it might be seen as simply selfish, since the kind of sexual act he would like to experience – “a baptism of fire” (Simpson 35) – is only possible when the woman agrees and is free to do so too (35). “Yet this theory ignores [...] the fact that women have traditionally had a larger stake in love and marriage than men [...]” (Simpson 35). That Clara herself is aware of the dangers to her reputation becomes clear with her reaction to Paul telling her of his testimony in court about their being to the theatre together. Her husband, upon seeing them together, becomes rather violent later on, accidentally hurting the factory owner instead of Paul, and is taken to court. ““Why need *my* name have been dragged in?” she said” (S&L 307), a reaction Paul does not care for in the least.

The relationship with Clara does not remain happy for long. The reunion with her husband Baxter Dawes, as interpreted by Millett, shows her as being entirely in the hands of the two men deciding her fate. Simpson claims that, to some extent, Millett’s reading is accurate, but also mentions that there is another component in Clara’s going back to Dawes. Apart from her husband’s violent behaviour it becomes visible that in her marriage, Clara is dominant,

admired and emotionally independent (Simpson 36). Even if the relationship is not perfect, it seems desirable to assume the powerful position. Also, it is made clear that the relationship with Paul is neither sexually satisfying, nor rewarding on any other level. The assumption that the decision to leave him for Dawes might be Clara's is therefore not far-fetched. "Clara will not [...] submit to Paul, will not choose the relationship in which she would have to be the subordinate partner" (Simpson 36). Moreover, we do not know whether the reunion with Dawes puts an end to Clara's engagement with feminist matters, because it has existed before and throughout her marriage (Simpson 28).

Lawrence's engagement with and opinion on feminism may be, or become, ambivalent, but he certainly was aware of "many of the material conditions of women's oppression" (Simpson 26), and impressively illustrates his insights through his characters Mrs. Morel and Clara (Simpson 26), but also, to some extent, through Miriam. Especially in Mrs. Morel, who mostly belongs to a traditional type of woman, can it be said that he incorporates modern views in her interest in women's rights, since she joins the Women's Guild and attends their meetings. This is an interesting point, but Kelsey's argument has to be kept in mind that Mrs. Morel seeks the public only for intellectual reasons in order to escape, or fuel the fire of the fight on class-distinction with her husband. Be that as it may, Simpson argues that she "enjoys these meetings [as an] opportunity to use her intelligence and her sharp tongue in discussion" (27), which earns her children's respect.

At the same time it is made clear that the Women's Guild does not help her financially oppressive situation. "Mrs Morel is constantly at a disadvantage because of her lack of financial independence" (Simpson 27). She does not have money of her own, the household budget depending on her husband's income, which he receives from mining. The situation is

dismal, for “Morel exploits this position as breadwinner and Mrs Morel’s essential powerlessness is revealed” (Simpson 28). As a powerless, dependent creature, she stands in opposition to Clara, who is not a mother and therefore “able to leave her husband and work for her living” (Simpson 28).

Clara’s involvement in the suffragette movement itself is not directly attacked in *Sons & Lovers*. This attitude changes in *The Rainbow*. Feminism is a prominent theme there too, essential to Ursula, “[but] the type of feminism represented by the suffrage movement is specifically rejected. It features in many other novels too, but the type of feminist Lawrence describes more kindly is what Hilary Simpson calls the Dreaming Woman (46). He probably welcomes her more dearly because the sexual component is not neglected. The so-called dreaming woman “was a type of New Woman whom he referred to as the ‘dreaming’, ‘spiritual’ or ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ woman” (46), the latter term being particularly confusing, since the pre-Raphaelite movement was not a feminist one. However, Simpson explains that the terms are linked, for the looks of the pre-Raphaelite woman “represented a radical challenge both to the [traditional] innocent young lady [...] and to the stereotype of the mannish suffragette” (46).

The appearance of a pre-Raphaelite woman underlined a wild and romantic femininity, a suggested passion “with her loose romantic clothes and unbound hair [...]” (Simpson 46). Also, the wish for male company attributes to this type of woman’s eroticism. This seems to be the kind of woman in which Lawrence can imagine finding the free sexuality for the baptism of fire. He might do so because of a common misunderstanding. “The loose garments, the dropping of a false ‘innocence’, the readiness to enter into *spiritual* intimacy with men, were all too often misread as indications of sexual accessibility” (Simpson 47).

Quite the opposite is true, Simpson explains, writing that they incorporated other characteristics, such as intelligence, education and emancipation (47). Simpson describes them as “stimulating companions and [...] often crucial in the spiritual development of the men with whom they are involved, but they cannot, or will not, satisfy these men’s sexual desires” (47-8). In her looks, Miriam in *Sons & Lovers* often resembles the Dreaming Woman. This impression is supported by Paul, and Miriam herself thinks of it in order to escape her dismal limited farm life (56), this image is attractive to Paul at first, but turns sour in the course of the novel. Still, their relationship lasts for years, their frequent conversations surely help Paul on his way to grow as an artist and to progress in life. In this way, Miriam plays an important part in Paul’s spiritual development, clearly displaying a trait of the Dreaming Woman.

“The crucial issue [...] is once again the nature of the sexual failure between the hero and a [Dreaming Woman]” (Simpson 56), which underlines that this kind of woman refuses to be a sex slave. Although Paul persuades Miriam to have sex, it is not the end of the story. Perhaps it is such an unsatisfying, unsuccessful endeavour because Miriam leaves behind her convictions as a Dreaming Woman, trying to adopt Paul’s views, but failing to and then returning to her own. In the novel, the blame is definitely placed on her (Simpson 56). The end of their relationship might be induced by Paul, but Miriam does not give in when he wants her back. Her emotional reflections on his proposal towards the end of the novel underline her spirituality, her refusal and personal development without Paul’s help being “a terrible blow” (56). “Miriam has struggled to resist Paul’s domination over her, and succeeded” (Simpson 57), thus proving her strength.

The failure of relationships with Dreaming Women make clear that they turn out not to be what Lawrence is looking for in order to achieve his love ideal. Thus, he must look for alternatives. Strong ideas that became manifest were “the witch or the prophetess” (Simpson 58) a new, more mysterious version of femininity, linked with the concept of “dissolution” (Simpson 59). But the priestess will not do for Lawrence, either. Instead he moves away from spiritual women, directing his main interest “on the body and the instincts” (60). This interest is not accompanied by any interest in women’s rights or liberation. “The interest in feminism was brought to an abrupt end by the changes in the status of women occasioned by the First World War” (Simpson 60).

Lawrence is often concerned with homosexuality, mostly, and rather differing, among men, but he hardly ever depicts relationships between women. *The Rainbow* features Ursula’s lesbian affair with the teacher Winifred Inger, considerably, although not extremely older than her and also educated in feminist matters. The chapter in which the episode occurs is called “Shame”, and “is Lawrence’s only explicit treatment of female homosexuality” (Simpson 37). That she is a an experienced teacher, whereas Ursula is training to become one and is still a young girl makes their relationship resemble the stereotypical “homosexual tradition“ of sex between teacher and disciple, “and transfer them to the relationship between a young girl and her teacher” (Simpson 38). Simpson agrees with other critics claiming that the lesbian affair is part of Ursula’s growing up, but mentions that she “cuts the experience off from the rest of her life [...]” (38).

It is particularly interesting, the way how Ursula’s female lover is described changes. At the beginning of their affair, Winifred seems admirable and attractive, whereas at the end of the affair, she is described as “corrupt” (Simpson 38). Winifred assists Ursula’s growing up not

only in respect to sexuality, but she also introduces her to feminist ideas, elaborating on the concept of motherhood and considering alternative feminine lifestyles. Winifred is criticised, apart from for her lesbianism, for her radical feminist statements, according to “one of the most frequent accusations levelled at suffragists and other feminists [...] that they were man-hating lesbians, [...]” (Simpson 40). Still, feminism is a big influence on Ursula. Interestingly, similar to Clara in *Sons & Lovers*, whose life is defined by her active feminist career, the significance of feminism decreases as the novel continues (42). It seems as if Lawrence made his modern women – slowly and as inconspicuously as possible – less radical by obliterating their feminist ideas. That this happens to a number of characters makes room for the assumption that it is a general strategy to undermine a feminist – or simply feminine – agenda.

## 5.2 Characteristics of Feminine Power

Modern women face a harsh treatment in Lawrence’s novels, something many of Lawrence’s critics agree on. Opinions differ on what characters actually belong to this category, and some find strength in those who look weak and subordinate at first sight. Miriam is one of the characters Millett, and perhaps many of Lawrence’s readers, see as one of his most submissive, powerless characters. Dix contradicts this, saying that “[despite] the fact that Miriam was the girl Paul Morel treated quite cruelly, [...] nevertheless comes over as a strong female character. [...] Aside from her relationship with Paul Morel, she was also a thinking, feeling girl of her own time [...]” (30).

However Lawrence lets Paul Morel treat Miriam, he also “detect[s] her own dissatisfaction with [her Victorian] way of life. She did not like her lot, as a girl” (Dix 30). Miriam’s lack of

sexuality, as Paul would see it, is accounted for by Dix with adolescence, “a girl trying to come to terms with female sexuality” (31). Living in a time with no contraception available to her, Miriam avoids sexuality, since pregnancy would limit her life even more (Dix 31). She finds even more strength in Miriam’s character since she “sees the social injustice [between men and women], if Paul does not”, thereby positioning her as “further ahead, in her growing up, than Paul” (31).

Miriam’s sexual opponent in *Sons and Lovers*, Clara Dawes, embodies characteristics of the New Woman. Therefore, her approach toward sexuality is much more aggressive, or outgoing. “It is from Clara [that Paul] learns the excitement of sensuality in woman, and that a woman can be as definite as a man about wanting sex” (Dix 32). Moreover, apart from her sensual qualities, Clara is “the type of woman who had worked out her own place in the world, and was able to express her own sexuality” (Dix 32). However, Dix does not comment on Paul’s discarding of Clara, Millett uses the example of her reuniting with her husband, to illustrate that even the independent Clara becomes submissive and is put back in her place at her husband’s side. Instead, Dix attributes great power to her alongside the other female characters in the novel: “[*Sons and Lovers*] is the young man’s journey, his adventure in learning about life. He learns from women” (32).

McLeod identifies Clara to be a challenging character to Paul Morel (90). “Her feminism is not an object of scorn, but enhances her attraction” (McLeod 90). Still, Clara is treated rather harshly. Her feminist ideals and actions do not raise her above a miserable life, her job is experienced as “degrading” (McLeod 90), but to her, “marriage seems to be more degrading than her job” (McLeod 90). How harsh, then, is it to reunite her with her husband and make her go back to the degrading prison she has known marriage to be? This seems to serve as her

punishment, either for living as a modern woman, or for standing up to Paul Morel and letting him know about his inadequacy as a lover.

McLeod explains that she “becomes his lover because [...] she feels sorry for him” (91). Paul experiences their lovemaking as “a moment of the highest passion [and] assumes that it has been the same for Clara” (McLeod 91), which she identifies as “misapprehension” later on (McLeod 91). She confesses that it has not been satisfying to her, and “accuses [Paul] of selfishness,” claiming that he is more interested in sex than in her, a distinction Paul is not capable of understanding. He “[believes] that sex is entirely a matter of blind instinct and is spoiled by making an effort (91), a notion that recurs in Lawrence’s novels, especially in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. However, Clara is not happy about effortless sex, and Paul is angry about her confession. Instead of considering his own deficiencies, “he decides that Clara must go back to her husband” (McLeod 91). The proper place for her passionate sexuality seems to be in marriage (McLeod 92). The modern woman, Clara, is strong. “[Perhaps] Clara is too strong, either for her own good or Paul’s good.” (McLeod 91).

As mentioned earlier, D. H. Lawrence often portrays his modern female characters as feeling a desire which their modern lifestyle cannot fill. This can be seen in many of his novels, most notably in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, where the female characters quite clearly show these traits. Sheila McLeod points out that some of Lawrence’s female characters “chose at least partial economic independence in the face of parental opposition [and decide] to earn [their] own living. But such independence never quite gains authorial approval as an end in itself: marriage must still be considered sooner or later” (McLeod 86).



In spite of strong characters such as Clara Dawes, or other women with influence on the male hero, the emphasis in *Sons & Lovers* is often on the mother figure. According to Millett “*The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* mark a transition in Lawrence’s affinity from mother to mistress” (257), moreover, especially the first “contains the key to his later sexual attitudes” and serves as “explanation and root of his phallic consciousness and male supremacist ethic” (257). Here, again, the threat the modern women of his age pose to Lawrence is explicitly detectable (Millett 257). Lawrence’s solution to the problem is “to marry and smother them, [and] then go beyond them [in moving] on to homosexual attachments, forming sexual-political alliances with other males” (Millett 257). Millett’s phrasing here is rather polemic. However, the central position of marriage to Lawrence’s characters is also something McLeod detects. Marriage seems to be a way of putting the woman back in her place.

### **5.3 The Quest for Feminine Power in a Patriarchal Environment: Ursula’s Journey through *The Rainbow***

Sometimes it is difficult to put Lawrence’s female characters into a category. Ursula might appear differently in *Women in Love*, but she is a strong, modern woman in large parts of *The Rainbow*. She is certainly the dominant partner in the relationship with Skrebensky. He is her first lover, and “during the relationship she blossoms” (McLeod 95), experiencing a process of growing up, during the relationship. Similarly to Paul in *Sons & Lovers*, Ursula uses the relationship with a man to develop. “Ursula is realising the power of her own sexuality” (McLeod 95), which shows quite clearly that the sexual politics here are in female hands. “[Skrebensky] is destroyed and annihilated while Ursula triumphs, the sense of her own female power confirmed” (McLeod 96).

Still, similar to her lover, the relationship is not good for her either. “[She glimpses] the destructive potential of sexuality” (McLeod 96) in her behaviour with Skrebensky and tries to be better, but the relationship fails in spite of it. McLeod accounts for the failure and hurt that Ursula experiences with her youth, since she is only sixteen when the episode first happens (96). Still, she emerges as a stronger, more mature person and is ready to face the challenge of venturing into the masculine world of work by becoming a teacher. The venture is not very successful, and prepares Ursula for a life considered to be more appropriate for her sex by the author. Her failure at college is paralleled with her failure in the revived relationship with Skrebensky, which is at once the reason for neglecting her education, and for the failures occurring soon after it, too.

As a result of Ursula’s journey in *The Rainbow*, McLeod mentions that gaining “partial freedom [...] served to make her aware of further freedoms still beyond her reach and, most of all, [a certain lack in her life, supposedly] marriage” (100). Feeling this lack, Ursula meets Skrebensky again, returning to her womanhood (McLeod 100). Again being the stronger of the two, she rejects the idea of marriage he proposes. Skrebensky is not a Lawrentian hero like Birkin, who she meets in *Women in Love*. Therefore, he is an unfit partner for her, and it is probably her dominance which keeps Ursula from accepting him or his offer. “Because Ursula is stronger than he is, neither of them can be happy” (McLeod 101), which results in Skrebensky being “afraid of her body” (101), the physical manifestation of her power in the relationship: “She owned his body and enjoyed it with all the delight and carelessness of a possessor. But he had become gradually afraid of her body” (TR 460). The further course of their relationship shows that he is right in feeling scared, as Ursula does not care for their intimacy as much as he does. When she carelessly tells him she might not want to marry, he

breaks into tears, showing the destructive potential of her actual refusal in breaking off their engagement.

In spite of depicting her in a dominant position, “Lawrence is not altogether on Ursula’s side, on the side of Woman. In making her womanly fulfilment entirely dependent on the strength of a man, Lawrence is allotting her a secondary place in the relationship” (McLeod 101). Also, she suffers physically. Ursula becomes pregnant, living with the fear and uncertainty of the situation and possible consequences. She deals with the situation alone and eventually suffers a miscarriage before it becomes public. A lapse into weakness in asking Skrebensky to take her back, formulated in a self-deprecating letter, is rejected by her former lover, who has rushed into marriage after their break-up. Ursula is forced to be strong by herself. Her desperate long walk in the rain, which results in the illness that triggers her miscarriage is both a catharsis and a transition to self-sufficiency.

Anna Brangwen, Ursula’s mother, has her way of fighting, the process and outcome of which might be arguable. Ursula does not approve of her mother’s life, and refuses the thought of choosing it for herself. “[Her] mother’s pregnancy enraged the eldest girl. Mrs Brangwen was so complacent, so utterly fulfilled in her breeding. (...) Ursula, inflamed in soul, was suffering all the anguish of youth’s reaching for some unknown ideal, that she can’t grasp” (TR 353), which shows that Ursula dreams of a life in the outside world. However, the desire to leave the domestic sphere appears to only be a reaction to an undesirable role model. She does not really know what she wants, which might doom her to failure.

Nevertheless, she shares some of her mother’s traits as a young woman, a person of course, who Ursula does not know, as seen in her power over her lover Skrebensky. But Ursula does

not marry him. “[She] breaks all occupational and ideological ties with the Brangwen generations and shuddering at the very word fecundity, transcends even the explicitly reformist streak of her mother’s sexual struggles” (Kelsey 133). Ursula is the New Woman and ready “to explore a new space of socio-sexual and economic alternatives” (Kelsey 133). Instead of the sexual practices her parents engage in, which in spite of their embracing them leave “a sense of shame” (Kelsey 134), Ursula employs another shameful sexual activity: she has a lesbian affair.

As a matter of fact, the relationship does eventually come to an end. As Ursula briefly turns to Skrebensky again, the relationship with Winifred is still a presence Ursula has not yet processed. “[The] ambiguity and ambivalence underlying her relationship with Winifred has no place in the sexual relationship with Skrebensky” (Kelsey 138). As a result, Ursula projects all that is hateful to her onto his body, “so that he too comes to represent the very embodiment of an imprisoned, sterile sexuality” (Kelsey 138). Ursula becomes a destructive force in the relationship, the “extreme hardness and independence [...] in the sexual intercourse,” significantly coming from Ursula, showing her terrible female power, and how feminine independence might be achieved even in sexual intercourse with a man. The desire for independence is a strong driving force in Ursula. It “is the outcome of a desperate attempt to find an ideological basis of autonomy for women. [However, she, too, returns] to a compulsory heterosexuality” (Kelsey 139), but not without a fight. But, as it seems “compulsory”, the end of *The Rainbow* sees Ursula slowly accepting that she has to wait for the right man (Kelsey 140).

The compulsory heterosexuality that marks the ending of *The Rainbow* also features in *Women in Love*. Ursula’s and Gudrun’s debate on marriage clearly positions the topic as a

central motif in the text. The sisters discuss it, but do not embrace it as a desirable concept. Gudrun is set up as its most vehement adversary. ““It’s just impossible. The man makes it impossible.”” (WiL 3). Because of this attitude, which she openly shows, she experiences “relatively hostile conditions” (Kelsey 144). “[The] text hereby confirms the hypothesis that potential marriage resisters are not going to break the universal norm” (144). However, in the “absence of choice” (Kelsey 142), it cannot be dismissed entirely. Still, the sisters’ and especially Gudrun’s resentment of the topic shows that an exploration of alternatives in sexuality will play an important part throughout the novel (Kelsey 142).

In addition to compulsory heterosexuality manifested in marriage, the text lets its female characters on the search for independence explore forms of expression, the possibility of freedom and their relations with the opposite sex. However, it seems difficult even for Gudrun to find her way. After Ursula is married, we are told: “How deeply, how suddenly she envied Ursula! Life for her was so quick, and an open door (...). Ah, if she could be *just like that*, it would be perfect” (WiL 316). The struggle for independence seems to be a strain even an overtly strong character like Gudrun is hardly able to bear. The endeavour to be different is a difficult venture, the sisters’ trying to set themselves apart also showing the alienation of women such as Ursula and Gudrun, since they question the society, practices and customs around them (Kelsey 143).

It is worst for Gudrun, who, perhaps because she sees the world through the eyes of the artist, looking for beauty, “suffers” more than her sister in the face of the “ugliness” (Kelsey 143) of the mining community and patriarchy, however well-disguised by leisure activities it might often be. “[Gudrun] was filled with repulsion. (...) She clung to Ursula, who, through long usage was inured to this violation of a dark, uncreated, hostile world. (...) Ursula could feel

her suffering” (WiL 5). The two women are walking on a nice, sunny day, on the way to a wedding, yet all they notice for the moment is the dismal impression of the mining community about to rejoice over the restraining act of marriage.

#### **5.4 Strategies of Liberation: Nudity, Fashion and Talk**

*Women in Love* shows the unequal distribution of freedom concerning the body and expression. An instance depicting the different situations of women and men is the swimming scene in Willey Water at a party (Kelsey 146). Gerald [...] is free to choose to commence his swim in relatively close proximity to the public gaze.” (Kelsey 146) Gudrun and Ursula, on the other hand, are painfully aware of the necessity of privacy. “Gudrun envied him almost painfully. (...) [She] felt herself as if damned, out there on the high road. (...) “God, what it is to be a man” she cried” (WiL 35).

When the sisters want to go for a swim at the Criches’ party, they row “to a remote spot” (Kelsey 146) in order to escape the gaze of the party guests, but even then do not appear to enjoy a relaxing bath in the lake. Their swim is accompanied by a constant threat of being seen, the “desire for invisibility from the public gaze” (Kelsey 148) showing a cultural limitation of women in forbidding them the freedom to be seen, or to not care about it. Gudrun’s and Ursula’s stockings, on the other hand, indicate that they draw the attention to their physical attributes. Gudrun conquers the world with her colourful stockings, an expression of her freedom and beauty. On the other hand, the bright eye-catchers might also stand just for the quest for freedom, a freedom in expression and choosing an independent way of life that has not quite been achieved.

The choice of stockings and colour further illustrates the issue of feminine discourse and freedom of speech. Similarly to the restrictions they experience in connection to their bodies when swimming, there is freedom to be found in speech. By elaborately analysing and discussing colours and fashion, for example, the sisters enjoy their freedom of speech. The choice of their topic might be argued about, since it clearly comes from the realm associated with feminine qualities and does not have significance in the masculine world of action and politics, but – at least to Kelsey – it seems more important that they talk at all.

Enjoying freedom of speech seems to be a liberating and fulfilling experience, as they are expression of thoughts, even if these are thoughts on a “girly” subject. It is “above all a pleasure gained from an ability and a collective desire to ‘talk clothes’, not to men or even near men” (Kelsey 148), as seen in their talk on holidays in the Alps. “Gerald came in (...) “Go with Gerald and smoke,” said Ursula to Birkin. “Gudrun and I want to talk.” Then the sisters sat in Gudrun’s bedroom, and talked clothes, and experiences” (WiL 330). They deliberately send their lovers away before their talk. By choosing a topic that automatically excludes men, they set up a feminine discourse, a language of their own, “a sociolect for women” (Kelsey 149). “The principal advantage of a sociolect (outside the advantages which the possession of a language gives to any power one seeks to preserve or gain) is obviously the security it affords [...]” (Kelsey 149).

Talking fashion grants the two women a dialectic space which has the power to unify them, where man cannot intrude. It gives them a means of defining themselves against masculinity (Kelsey 149). However important and powerful a strategy this might be, it has to be kept in mind that by choosing a topic that is traditionally feminine, they create their own realm of dialectics against masculinity in a space that has been assigned to the feminine by patriarchy

long before, so the radicalness of the act remains questionable. In spite of the significance of fashion as a topic to be talked about, it also illustrates a lack of speech. Kelsey mentions that Gudrun's "coloured stockings are the manifest effects of her historical language loss" (150).

Especially in contrast to the mining community, associated with coal dust, dirt and narrow-mindedness, the bright-coloured stockings become even brighter. They are a discourse on their own, inducing the mining community to hostility and sneering, as seen in the chapter titled "Coal Dust" of *Women in Love*. They might be intended as a radical statement on behalf of woman, but they serve to attract the male gaze, therefore emphasising "the fragmentation of *woman* into a sexual object" (Kelsey 160). Similarly, Gudrun's stockings affect Gerald, making him "uneasy [because of] the political implications of the 'language' spoken by Gudrun's attire" (Kelsey 160). Fashion serves to make a political statement, and in that sense strengthens a woman's position, at least enough to make a man uneasy. Flashy fashion challenges most male characters in the novel, whether it be Gerald or road workers.

The challenge of Gudrun's colourful fashion underlines her strength, and thus the threat she poses. In the road workers, Kelsey finds it to trigger the reactions of first "silent watching [then] derisive humor and then scorn" (161), which at least in part serves to compensate for their own unhappy and powerless working-class life. Gudrun threatens them with her fashion and behaviour by questioning the "discourse of dominance and superiority" (Kelsey 161), and therefore, "Gudrun as woman must be reduced through the process of fragmentation to a position of weakness" (Kelsey 161-2). Gudrun's colourful clothing is both her weapon "to symbolically challenge the [...] forces of oppression [...] but [serves] also to protect [her]" (Kelsey 162).



### 5.5 Violence as a Strategy of Power

The female characters in *Women In Love* fight, but it is a fierce struggle that leaves them powerless on many occasions. This results in the use of physical violence on some occasions, which is most clearly illustrated by Hermione's striking Birkin with her paperweight: "Her hand closed on a blue, beautiful ball of lapis lazuli (...) Then swiftly, in a flame that drenched her body like fluid lightning and gave her a perfect, unutterable consummation, unutterable satisfaction, she brought down the ball of jewel stone with all her force, crash on his head" (WiL 85). While Hermione's attack seems like madness, Gudrun's physical violence against Gerald has a more subtle, symbolic dimension. "[She] lightly strikes Gerald on the face" (Kelsey150) when she is trying to drive cattle and he works against her.

The use of physical violence as an attempt to gain power is ambivalent in the sense that it is an action that might be considered masculine. On the other hand, in the power struggle between the sexes, it shows their lack of power on a verbal level, so that they need to revert back to an instinctive, physical reaction because of their helplessness. Hermione hitting Birkin in particular displays an act of despair. Interestingly, this links back to Millett claiming that the feminine is associated with the instinct, not being apt for aspects of life that include intelligence. Kelsey asks "whether or not the use of violence by women either as a substitute for, or in the absence of a fair discursive exchange should be officially legitimated by *radical* women as a whole, because as Gudrun recognises although resorting to violence signifies a crisis in communication, it must also be acknowledged that fair play is not the enemy's catchword" (151).

In contrast to Hermione and Gudrun, Ursula does not use physical violence against a man in *Women in Love*. Her ideas and discourse are not as fixed as that of the other two female characters, allowing her to “[adopt] a more fluid discursive position [and] a number of subject positions within discourses” (Kelsey 152). She does not seem to have an independently formed opinion. Rather, “Ursula’s discourse *reacts* to those around it, [but in spite of being able to be persuaded] it retains an autonomous critical capacity; is ultimately judgemental” (Kelsey 152-3). This critical attitude has a significant impact on her relations with women, since they “lead her away from women and particularly from the earlier ideas on love and marriage resistance generated in her discussions with Gudrun” (Kelsey 153). The alliance between the sisters is shattered, Ursula “[turning] instead [...] towards Birkin and the ‘man’s world’” (Kelsey 153).

Lawrence’s occupation with Ursula is notably different from that with the other female characters. The reason Millett offers is that “Ursula is [Lawrence’s] contemporary” (Millett 258). It might be true that “[p]atriarchal prejudices are overturned” in *The Rainbow* (Millett 259), seen for instance in Ursula finding “the concept of God the Father (...) a nauseating presumption” (Millett 259), but Ursula is still not portrayed in a similarly sympathetic way as Lydia and Anna. Although Lawrence does show some sympathy for Ursula’s suffering in her education, he simultaneously shows some resentment (Millett 260).

Millett claims that “Lawrence finds the New Woman Ursula fairly hard to bear [since she] is too close to him, [close enough for him to see her as] a rival” (259). Because of this, Lawrence’s feelings towards her are a mixture of “sympathy, threat and fear” (Millett 259). The fear stems from the Woman “entering [the masculine] world” (Millett 260). As she can live in the spheres of both sexes, “Lawrence feels little left for the man. (...) Most of [his]

sexual politics appears to spring from this version of the emancipation of women” (Millett 260). In depicting “working women [as] sad figures [who] cease to be attractive to men, who hold their sex as a point against them” (260), Millett finds Lawrence to show his resentment against the modern woman.

However, he also sheds light on the difficulty of this kind of situation, which might be interpreted as a critique on the way society handles the problem. At the same time, he is trying to convince his readers that “should Ursula succeed, she will lose her femininity,” and lets her return to her parents’ house only moderately successful (Millett 260). This might be interpreted as double punishment by Lawrence, since it is not only failure, but also staying feminine, that constitutes Ursula’s fate. Since Millett claims that Lawrence is moving away from his interest in women, working towards a closer relationship with men, this renders Ursula insignificant, bearing in mind the sequel to the *The Rainbow – Women in Love*.

Like the preceding novel, *Women in Love* is also “a campaign against the modern woman” (Millett 263), personified in the characters of Gudrun and Hermione, who are in fact described as “the enemy.” (Millett 263) Here, again, the modern woman is characterised by “a [repulsive] lack,” as explicitly stated in the presentation of Hermione (263). This becomes visible in the description of Gudrun, too, whose life as an artist is not taken seriously, and whose entire life, in erotic as well as professional terms, is not successful, due to her modern attitudes (Millett 268). Millett sees in her Lawrence’s only female artist (268), but her lack of success only serves to emphasise women’s inability to gain status in that field. In Ursula, she sees a rather different character in *Women in Love* compared to *The Rainbow*. In the later novel, she appears more traditional, and accepts happiness on Lawrence’s terms, by marrying and submitting herself to her husband Birkin.

## **5.6 Exertion of Feminine Power: Gudrun's Strategies for the Assumption of Power in Women in Love**

Ursula's sister Gudrun is a truly remarkable character. Her sense of freedom, her self-determination, and the way she voices her opinions – often in a witty, sharp and sarcastic way – make her very interesting. It is perhaps her independence and sexual activity that explain the harsh treatment she faces from the author. In *Women in Love*, she “is depicted as irredeemably destructive” (McLeod 104). Her relationship with Gerald Crich is described similarly to the unfit, temporal affair between Ursula and Skrebensky (McLeod 104). Ursula's strength reduces Gerald “to addictive worship, thence to his own destruction” (McLeod 104). Gudrun takes part in the affair very actively. She “is magnetised by Gerald [...] but not dazzled enough to be blinded to something [...] sinister in Gerald's bearing” (McLeod 105). Her physical attraction “illustrates the modern woman's instant susceptibility to sensation” (McLeod 105). These feelings are not very trustworthy, as is the tendency to [undervalue] her own femininity” (McLeod 105), which is strong enough to seal Gerald's fate in the end.

Gudrun is an artist. As such, she creates, and wants to take part in the world of action, “but action is for men” (McLeod 106). Thus, although being a beautiful woman, McLeod explains that she behaves in a rather manly way (106), the characteristic of “omnipotence [associated with the artistic act of creation] is made to seem destructive” (106). Her manly behaviour is associated with a casting off of the concept of marriage that entangles her sister, which forms “[the] cornerstone of Gudrun's repudiation of femininity” (McLeod 106). Not surprisingly, this is not an opinion to be praised. “Gudrun sounds so strong, [but] she is unsure of herself”

(McLeod 106), and experiences a lack similar to Ursula after the relationship with Winifred Inger. She envies her sister and her relationship to Birkin, which is presented as ideal and easy, at least easier than her own, destructive affair (McLeod 106-7).

The relationship between Gudrun and Gerald is bound to fail: “[It] allows of no separateness but insists on fusion-in-passion, in which each demands all of and gives all to the other. The struggle becomes the life-or-death fight for individual identity which can only be achieved by one partner reducing the other to dependence and, eventually, to destruction” (McLeod 109). The destruction McLeod mentions is Gerald’s death in the mountains. Apparently, he cannot handle Gudrun’s strength. “The relationship cannot endure because both Gerald and Gudrun are expecting at once too much [...] and too little [...] from one another” (McLeod 109). However strong Gudrun might be, her power is not constructive in the field of love. Where Ursula’s conversion to a form of femininity fit for a working relationship makes room for an “equilibrium” (McLeod 109), Gudrun’s sticking to her strength leads to loss: “the loss of the self in passion; the loss (through habituation) of passion itself; and the loss of the mystery which properly belongs to sexual relations” (McLeod 109). Equilibrium, or mutuality, is impossible in this kind of relationship.

Still, McLeod finds the depiction of Gerald’s and Gudrun’s relationship as being only capable of destruction unconvincing. She finds Lawrence to be “attacking the concept of romantic love: [...] the violent, unbearable physical attraction” that can lead people to choose to die for it (111). Acknowledging the absurdity of romantic love, she questions its destructiveness (111), thereby questioning Lawrence’s condemnation of Gudrun and her power over the man. “He cannot allow either us or his characters a plurality of vision” (McLeod 111). However, what McLeod seems to neglect compared to my own reading of the novel is the utter

difference in the coming together of the two couples. Whereas Birkin and Ursula consummate their love after they have solved their problems in a fight, bringing them closer together, Gerald almost forces himself onto Gudrun in order to solve his own problems after his father's death.

The emotional impact on Gudrun is tremendous, its consequences determining the course of the following affair with Gerald. "Into her he poured all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death, and he was whole again. (...) And she, subject, received him as a vessel filled with his bitter potion of death. (...) He felt his limbs growing fuller and flexible with life, his body gained an unknown strength. (...) But Gudrun lay wide awake, destroyed into perfect consciousness" (WiL 290-1). The quick, desperate, unasked-for encounter is purely selfish, destroying the emotional potential in Gudrun to have a lasting relationship with Gerald, as we learn earlier. When they kiss under the bridge, Gudrun, although she enjoys it, deliberately stops because "[for] the present it was enough, enough, as much as her soul could bear. Too much, and she would shatter herself, she would fill the fine vial of her soul too quickly, and it would break" (WiL 279). This is exactly what happens when Gerald visits her that night. Since the intimacy is too much for her, and the encounter does not rouse her, the relationship is determined to fail.

The destructiveness inherent in Gudrun's and Gerald's relationship stems from "paranoid thinking, full of all sorts of mistakes and contradictory assumptions. (McLeod 114) McLeod identifies the author's fear that "women cannot know better than to take advantage of [...] masculine fears. If men will not be men, then women will become men instead: strong, independent and dominant. Just like Gudrun" (114). Assuming this kind of threat to lie in the feminine is likely to be the source for the discarding of strong women in Lawrence's novels.

Because she is a threat, modern woman has to be converted to a mode of living where she does not pose a threat anymore.

This “special sort of woman (though misguided) needs a very special sort of man, like Birkin” to convert her (McLeod 117). Gerald, like Skrebensky with Ursula, is the wrong man for that task (McLeod 117). He is not apt to stand up to a strong woman and put her in her place – the place Lawrence seems to find adequate. Gerald is too weak, so his attempts to correct Gudrun are desperate. “Gerald is afraid [and] tries to strangle her” (McLeod 118), thereby trying to force his will onto Gudrun, similar to his brutal mastering of the mare earlier in the novel. Unlike with his horse, “he cannot succeed in his attempt to desecrate and destroy her.” (118) Instead, he dies, driven to death by Gudrun’s irreformable will. Strong Gudrun does not cry for him, unlike Birkin. “Frozen as she is, Gudrun will survive” (McLeod 118).

However strong Gudrun might be, her reaction to Gerald’s death is questionable. She is quite unmoved. “Lawrence does not tell us directly [...] that Gudrun is mistaken.” (118) Her static reaction underlines the threat strong, modern woman can present. Apart from her strength, “Gudrun, the modern woman, is doubly alienated” (McLeod 119), both from her feminine side that “knows its own gender-based place [...] and [...] her dark, passional self” (McLeod 119), the consequence being her “cynicism” and her “unhappiness” (McLeod 119). Since “Gudrun has chosen the unnatural state of singleness” (McLeod 119), her life has to be incomplete. Gudrun’s strength imposes on her a life characterised by struggle in the masculine world as an artist and in the realm of sexual relationships by not finding a happy alliance.

### 5.7 A Triad of Threat: Hermione, Ursula and Gudrun

The reason why Lawrence lets his strong, modern female characters experience hostility might lie in his conviction that [the] male [...] must assert his independence from female domination” (Storch 108). Since strong women like Gudrun seem to induce in their lovers some sort of dependence on them, they are dangerous. Ursula, in *The Rainbow*, “is the heroine [...] deliberately going beyond her mother’s existence, [...] a woman who will have her own history” (Storch 110), portrayed as a shimmering, impressive character. However, as Skrebensky’s lover, her awful female power becomes visible. “Their relationship ends when he feels that his will has been broken by the sexually assertive Ursula” (Storch 110).

Similarly, in *Women in Love*, female power becomes a distressing factor. It is manifested in “Birkin’s definition of and struggle to establish a love relationship that leaves the individual, free together with a study of female threats to the maintenance of male integrity through the portrayals of three women: Hermione, Ursula, and Gudrun” (Storch 111) Birkin’s conclusion in the face of the feminine threat seems to be alliance with men, and the development of the New Man, the only one able to handle the terrible power of woman: “he must preserve his sense of self by producing images of an independent male leader and pioneer from whom the woman, as other, is eternally different and separate, but dependent upon him for ideas and action” (Storch 112). The Lawrentian hero here described therefore involves a reversal of the sexual politics, where power lies on the feminine side, which reverts them back to a form where woman plays the weaker part. This strongly suggests that the Lawrentian hero is in fact not that strong, but that he depends on a dependant woman in order to appear so.



The three female characters Hermione, Ursula and Gudrun share certain qualities that are portrayed as hateful, or at least as causing unease. “Ursula shares with Hermione and most women the wish to dominate men in an overbearing and possessive way” (Storch 111). Especially Hermione incorporates traits that her lover Birkin feels the urge to eliminate. She “appears negative and threatening to the male because of her spiritual and mystical qualities, [reproducing] the idealizing capacity of the suffocating mother, and hence the most extreme form of abstraction and loss of maleness” (Storch 112) Also, she “displays the intellectualism that Birkin identifies as a social evil and traces back to the idealizing mother” (Storch 112) The threat and hatefulness Hermione presents to Birkin is manifested in her attack on him, where she hits him on the head with a stone paperweight (Storch 114) After the attack, Birkin frees himself from the relationship with Hermione through a period of sickness (Storch 114).

Ursula is not very different from Hermione at first, but her development is. She starts out as rather dominant, and “has the destructive female qualities” of her mother (Storch 110). At the same time, her sensuous personality seems to offer “a relationship grounded in the emotional and the sensuous through which the male can break away from the distorted possessiveness of the mother” (Storch 113). In spite of associating Ursula with a liberating power, “Birkin’s feelings towards her remain ambivalent and sometimes anguished” (Storch 114). Only after he has formulated his ideas on the ideal relationship, and, after with some arguing and criticising Ursula has accepted it, does his attitude change (Storch 114).

What has to be mentioned is that Ursula does not give in without a fight, and that her acceptance of Birkin’s terms is followed by a compromise on his side. During their discussion by the lake at night, when Birkin points out his wishes concerning a relationship, Ursula urges him to admit that he loves her, which he eventually does, although he claims

that it is something beyond love that he seeks. In spite of wanting “a commitment to Ursula that is founded upon a denial of maternal power” (Storch 118), he acknowledges the power of the feminine, the power of fertility and (possible) motherhood in Ursula (Storch 118). Their mutual struggle towards each other is further emphasised by their fierce fight when Birkin takes Ursula out in his car.

And in the stress of her violent emotion, [Ursula] got down from the car (...).

“Ah, you are a fool,” he cried, bitterly, with some contempt.

“Yes, I am. I *am* a fool. I’m too big a fool for your cleverness. (...)” (...) Suddenly a flame ran over her, and she stamped her foot madly on the road, and he winced, afraid that she would strike him. (...)

A wonderful tenderness burned in him, at the sight of her quivering, sensitive fingers: and at the same time he was full of rage and callousness. (...)

“*You!*” she cried. (...) “What you are is a foul, deathly thing, obscene, that’s what you are, obscene and perverse. You, and love! You may well say, you don’t want love. (...) You are *so* perverse, so death-eating. And then –“ (...)

A clearer look had come over Birkin’s face. He knew she was in the main right. (Wil 256-8)

In their fight, which spans several pages of the novel, Ursula does not spare Birkin any fault she finds in him. He has to justify his beliefs, the struggle bringing them closer together. Although Ursula lets Birkin dictate her letter of resignation shortly after, their relationship is not based on her submission only. Birkin, too does not seem as dogmatic as before.

Despite Birkin's turn in relation to Ursula, a conversion on her part is necessary. McLeod points to "a shift in the acceptance of female dominance in *Women in Love*. In the earlier novels, the woman's power seems indomitable. [...] In *Women in Love*, on the other hand, Birkin isolates and attacks the significance of [the feminine]" (Storch 117). He does so by destroying an image associated with Woman on several occasions: the moon. He "flings stones at the reflection of the moon in the water." (Storch 118) The idea of destruction is repeated on several occasions, most importantly through their sexual encounter in the chapter titled "Excuse" (Storch 119).

"Birkin and Ursula consummate their love and commitment according to Lawrence's regressive phallic ideal, whereby the female responds to the dark richness of the male loins. The encounter seals the finality of their commitment. This is the first major example in Lawrence's writing of his masculinist ethos, whereby the man has indeed, in fantasy, crushed female power and is himself dominant." (Storch 119)

The passage illustrates how the conversion of woman by the Lawrentian hero involves sexual politics in favour of the masculine. Although conversion seems necessary and to be the path to happiness, it seems that the happiness of the woman is not as much the author's central concern as the happiness of the man. On the other hand, McLeod mentions that the chapters following the passage quoted illustrate that assuming a dominant position remains a fantasy. She accounts for her conclusion by pointing towards "Ursula's continuing sensuous power" (119-20), and to Birkin's "unfulfilled" desire for a union with Gerald (120). Although Ursula displays more girlish behaviour in her relationship with Birkin than she seems to before, as when she runs to him sobbing after the fight at her parent's house the evening before her wedding, she does not lose her womanly power over him. Whereas he repeatedly refuses to

tell her he loves her, he finally does so, not grudgingly but willingly, after their fight that brings them together: “He (...) kissed her delicate, finely perfumed hair. “Do you love me?” she whispered, in wild seriousness. “Yes,” he answered, laughing” (WiL 367).

Gudrun is the third member of the triad of women sharing certain similarities. Gerald is a powerful man, who likes to demonstrate his dominance, as illustrated by the episode where he brutally masters a horse. Dominant behaviour towards animal-like, delicate creatures can in fact be observed earlier in the novel, on his trip to London and the episode with the Pussum, a young bohemian woman and acquaintance of Birkin. “He felt an awful, enjoyable power over her, an instinctive cherishing very near to cruelty. For she was a victim. He felt that she was in his power (...). He would be able to destroy her utterly in the strength of his discharge” (WiL 50). Gerald’s perception of the Pussum makes clear that he enjoys having power over inferior creatures, that he finds pleasure in acting out his dominance.

However, in the relationship with Gudrun, he becomes dependent. This shows in the scene after his father’s death, where he comes to Gudrun at night, desperately needing her (Storch 115). “His dependence upon her increases as the novel progresses” (Storch 115), so that at the time of their break up, they have assumed stereotypical roles of mother and child (Storch 115). “Gudrun becomes the ultimate terrible mother”, a realisation associated with the snow and ice of the mountains, the setting of the final stage of their relationship. The snow also emphasises the split between her and Gerald, since she is fascinated by it, whereas to Gerald it is an uncanny sight. The cold element further reflects “emotional coldness: the unyielding ice banishes the male to an eternity of [...] impotence.” (Storch 116) It is what eventually brings about the death of Gerald. The blame is placed on Gudrun, since she has denied Gerald

her affection, thereby painfully pointing to his dependence on it, and thus he has been pushed to his death. Thus, the destructive power of feminine dominance is impressively confirmed.

Gerald's death is frequently hinted at throughout the novel, also the Brangwen sisters discuss his fate very early on in *Women in Love*, when Ursula says: ““He'll have to die soon (...) He's got to go, anyhow.”/”Certainly, he's got to go,” said Gudrun. “In fact, I've never seen a man who showed signs so much” (WiL 36). Gudrun's connection with his eventual destruction is further emphasised by the stages of development of the relationship between her and Gerald. At every step towards their affair, there is death involved. It features when they first kiss at the water party, where immediately after, one of Gerald's sisters and a young man drown. Their first passionate encounter takes place when Gerald walks Gudrun home after dinner at his house, when Gerald has been informed that his father is going to die within days. The relationship develops further with their first sexual coming together in Gudrun's parents' house, where Gerald sneaks in unannounced and a disappointing night follows. This takes place shortly after the death of Gerald's father, the history of death related with their affair indicating that once again someone will have to die. This is in fact Gerald himself, who finds death in the snowy Alps after the relationship with Gudrun has officially arrived at a dead end.

Mark Spilka takes the blame off Woman to some extent, for example in the case of the death of Gerald Crich. Or rather, he can be said to argue in favour of Lawrence when he says that Gerald's death is in part his own fault. He supports this claim, finding “that Lawrence implies some fusion between destiny and intention by which characters are held responsible for their fates” (190). Mentioning “Birkin's speculations on how he might have saved himself [...], Gerald's death in the snow is his “intended” destiny” (Spilka 190). He himself is responsible

for his death, similar to other characters in *Women in Love*, apart from Birkin and Ursula, “who [...] choose their own destruction” (Spilka 191). They do so because they are wilful, “[using mind and will as terminal powers, dominating and exploiting emotional life” (Spilka 191).

Spilka, although his criticism appears rather mild in contrast to more radical views such as Millett’s, does not deny Lawrence’s hostility towards women, explaining it with the view of “the opposite sex as essentially threatening to personal integrity” (192). Thus, he recognises Woman as a potential threat to Lawrence’s characters in line with the other critics analysed in this study. Spilka sees the female characters, who stick to their will as a strong force of action, such as Hermione, as most threatening, and therefore to be punished. However, although she is discarded by Birkin, he mentions a scene after her much discussed violent attack against Birkin, which is said to represent their final break, when she is furnishing his flat. They discuss the concept of will, Birkin establishing it as dangerous, Hermione finding it most powerful (192). However, Spilka finds it a noteworthy aspect that Birkin, apart from some verbal comebacks, “[obeys] her almost meekly” (193), not conquering the strong will of his former lover. “Apparently he is not much of a will-breaker himself, more [...] a provoker of women like Hermione and Ursula whose will seems stronger, if anything, than his own” (193).

In provoking women’s will, Birkin faces a different reaction from Ursula than from Hermione. Nevertheless, she does not simply submit to his beliefs, but voices her opinion. Still, the breaking of will, especially that of a woman in a relationship with a man, is a prevalent topic they discuss at length, using the incident of Gerald’s mastering of the mare as metaphor for sexual relationships (193). ““A horse has no *one* will. Every horse, strictly, has

two wills. With one will, it wants to put itself in the human power completely – and with the other, it wants to be free, wild (...)” (WiL 114). Using the horse as metaphor for woman is convenient and leaves room for interpreting it as misogyny by the man who would like to set himself up as the overpowering oppressor, as Millett argues. Ursula takes the hint and asks: “Why should a horse want to put itself in the human power” (WiL 114), thus finding out that Birkin is convinced this is “the last, perhaps highest, love-impulse: resign your will to the higher being (...) And woman is the same as horses” (WiL 114).

The comparison of horse and woman is perhaps not flattering, but the novel supports Birkin’s claim. Ursula does not submit at first, she is “a bolter” (WiL 114), but Hermione clearly shows the will to submit, when Ursula complains about Birkin wishing her to do so. “Ah, if only he would have made this demand of her? (...) Hermione would have been his slave – there was in her a horrible desire to prostrate herself before a man (...)” (WiL 246). Apparently it is not simply the will to serve that Birkin wants, since the affair with Hermione lacks something more vital. It seems he wants the struggle towards each other which he experiences with Ursula, however much she does tend to submit in the end.

Critics like Millett and Mark Spilka have considered Birkin’s voicing his wish for submission in relation to the horse-simile. Spilka objects to Millett’s interpretation of Birkin as it seems to approve of Gerald’s treatment of the horse, finding him to have a deeper understanding of the concept of mastering/being mastered. He claims that Birkin perceives contradicting powers to be at work in the mare/woman, one seeking freedom, the other willing to give up freedom (193). This complies with Simpson’s reading of the voluntary relinquishing of personal freedom as an act of love, which can also be found in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* for example. The conviction that the will to submit lies within Woman is disputable, as well as

Birkin's opinion on the mastering of the mare. While others criticise him for agreeing with Gerald's actions, Spilka finds his attitude indecisive, not clearly in favour nor against it (194). However, a certain fascination with the domination of Woman can hardly be denied, perhaps rooted in Lawrence's belief "that women were the stronger sex, the likely dominators, in emotional relations" (195).

Still, Spilka sees balance in *Women in Love*, the characters' "assent and respect freely given and fairly won" (195), an aspect supported by the mutuality of the New Couple suggested by Birkin. However much Spilka sees Lawrence to respect and like women, and to express it in this novel, there are many instances arguing for the opposite. Beginning with the question of voluntarily relinquishing will and the brutally demeaning act of mastering, women who do not yield to masculine ideas (or the ideas of their individual masculine opposite at the time) are not treated well or made happy either. Hermione is discarded and seems lonely in her dominant attitude, Gudrun ends up alone, too, is made responsible for Gerald's death and envies her sister's luck in love with Birkin.

### **5.8 Contrasting Versions of the Powerful Female: Connie Chatterley versus the Brangwen Sisters**

Differently to Millett, Carol Dix finds much strength in Lawrence's female characters. "The women characters are so numerous, so vivid, so real, imaginative, complex and colourful, that there is no avoiding them. [...] Lawrence's women are not men in women's clothing (his men are more like women in men's clothing). [...] There are no men characters he builds, and creates, so lovingly" (24) The aspect Dix admires most is the "brilliant summing up of the claustrophobia women can feel about social limitations in their lives; [...] of the fears they



feel when they step outside those limitations; or the paradox of the fight for freedom and fear of taking it up totally” (24).

Dix sees Connie Chatterley as Lawrence’s masterpiece. “She [is] a mixture of the virtues and attributes of all her predecessors – and at the same time [...] more alive and real than any of them” (49). She is “trapped [in] a wrong marriage” (49). Feeling dead (50), she needs to “[find] something that brings her back to life” (51), which she eventually does find in Mellors. In spite of Connie’s almost fanatic admiration of Mellors, Dix finds her to be “the active one; [...] the one with the most expressed feelings” (90).

Again defending Lawrence against harsh feminist opinions like Millett’s, Dix “[sees] nothing dreadful or demeaning in the fact that Connie is allowed to worship [Mellors’] body. On the contrary, to think of a man writing about a woman and giving her the sense of passion, and energy, sufficient to adore a man’s body, is to me very beautiful. [...] It is not submission [...]; it is sheer pleasure and ultimate fulfilment” (51). Where Millett criticises Lawrence’s neglect of “the female genital organs, thus showing his negative feelings towards women” (Dix 91), Dix argues that this might only be due to his lack of knowledge about them, and that he does eventually acknowledge them through Mellors adoration of Connie’s body (91).

Connie struggles with the competing desire for love and sexual fulfilment to give meaning to her life, and the fear of giving up freedom and the status she has as lady of Wragby in order to enter a relationship (Dix 52). One of Connie’s greatest strengths is said to lie in this struggle. “She fights for [the] free spirit in herself. It takes time, more love, passion and some talk from [Mellors] to make her understand what she is fighting. Partly, she is afraid. [...] Now, the fear is of letting go to this sexual passion and seeing where it will lead her. [She

realises] that part of her had been playing with [Mellors]” (Dix 52). But Connie succeeds in the fight, and manages to fully enter into a serious relationship with the gamekeeper. Is she powerful because she dares to do so? Or does she lack power because she listens to Mellors and lets herself be influenced by him? Dix certainly argues for the first.

The power of Lawrence’s female characters is taken a step further with the modern Brangwen women, Ursula and Gudrun, who are created before Connie. “Ursula is the path, the direction” (Dix 37), Gudrun might be seen as achieving the goal of independence. “Gudrun is ahead [...] of all Lawrence’s other women” (Dix 42), but it takes Ursula to lead the way. “She is the central character in all [Lawrence’s] work” (Dix 37). Dix claims that she turns against “her mother’s way of life” (37) and dares enter the masculine world of work and action by studying to become a teacher and moving away from home (37), thereby showing strength, independence and, as a consequence, a fair amount of power. However, the limitations a young woman is likely to face are depicted in Ursula’s attempt to leave home for her teaching post and education, which her parents deny her. She is forced to remain at home, taking a post that does not permit her the same extent of freedom she has been trying for, whereas we learn in the beginning of *Women in Love* that Gudrun has lived in various places away from home, enjoying the freedom of life as an artist without parental supervision. Interestingly, she has returned home, at least for some time, a fact she herself cannot quite explain .

Both sisters have experienced relationships with men. Ursula’s sexual relationships are seen both, to support and develop her independence on the one hand, and on the other hand to diminish it at the same time. She uses the affair with Skrebensky “to define herself sexually” (Dix 38). Also, it sets her up as the dominant partner, using the young man as a stepping

stone in her personal development. Dix sees her homosexual excursion with the fellow teacher Winifred Inger as “[Lawrence’s] attempt to show her as a fully independent-minded and very passionate young woman” (38).

However, to many readers the episode offers different interpretations. “Winifred Inger has angered feminist critics because Lawrence implies that she is not a happy woman; as though he were saying no lesbian could be happy” (Dix 38). But Dix sees the possibility for an additional reading of the character and its implications. She sees Winifred as an inspiration to Ursula (38). “She represented something to the teenage girl, intent on finding her full independence. [...] What was important to Ursula was how to attain the pride and freedom of a man, with the essential beauty that still lies in being a woman. Through Miss Inger, Ursula learns to be wary of submissiveness” (Dix 38).

However, Ursula’s venture into the world of lesbian love, work in the masculine world and also into the world of the women’s movement end with “a big want”, a formulation causing much contempt in feminist critics, since it is easily interpreted as the need for a husband, a family and a feminine sex role. Dix, again, offers a different reading. “[The big want] is everything lovely in ordinary life: [not only but also] love: relationship with the opposite, with a man, which would lead her into ever yet more fascinating realms of experience. Not marriage of the traditional type, but something evolving” (39). Ursula’s trying to leave for an independent life away from her parent’s house is depicted as a failure. Whether this is a sign of Lawrence’s anti-feminist opinion that woman does not belong in the masculine world, or a skilful depiction of the problems a woman is likely to face in her struggle for independence, is difficult to judge. What is important here, as Dix writes, is that Ursula gets to choose. “She chooses to be sexually independent, not to marry [...]. Lawrence gives the young modern

woman every credence for fearing the trap he saw so many wasted by. But Ursula can still see her way out” (Dix 40). Dix’s argument is understandable, but so is the other critics’ dissatisfaction with Ursula’s lack of success. Her sister Gudrun offers more material for interpretation on this point.

Dix, like McLeod, sees Gudrun as “an independent woman” (41). “She explores the idea of a woman finding herself in a creative art, as an artist, more than Ursula ever has. [But] sometimes she indulges in the fantasy that [...] she is the clinging, submissive type again. For instance, when she meets and is attracted to Gerald” (Dix 41-42). Putting her attraction to Gerald Crich aside as “[r]omantic fantasy for [Gudrun]” (42), she explains that “Gudrun is trying to work out her own ideas. She is interested in [the then new concept of] free love”, not being interested in conformity to social structures (Dix 42). In her pursuit of freedom “Gudrun is ahead [...] of all Lawrence’s other women” (Dix 42). She pursues her freedom even if it harms her reputation, as when she cannot bear to be called “Mrs Crich” when the relationship with Gerald begins to suffocate her. “Her voice was loud and clamorous, the other people in the room were startled. / “Please don’t call me Mrs. Crich,” she cried. (...) “I am not married,” she said with some hauteur” (WiL 379). The public confession is also intended as a blow to Gerald, who is present and “went white at the cheek-bones” (WiL 379), as a further reassurance of her independence.

The depiction of Gudrun is problematic to feminist readers, as is Ursula being featured so little in *Women in Love*. Gudrun’s artistic endeavours are seen as being ridiculed, Ursula is seen as being submissive to Birkin, and both sisters as not consistent in pursuing their independence. Dix reads the sisters’ characters as Lawrence’s artistic achievement. “[He] does not make them champions for their cause [...]. He shows them as being confused, often

fearful, and tempted to backslide” (Dix 42). He thereby creates complete human characters with flaws as well as strengths. Thus, the sisters choose different paths in their pursuit of happiness. “Ursula tries her experiment in loving with Birkin, Gudrun is continuing the fight for women finding what independence really means” (Dix 43). This reading suggests Gudrun to be the most powerful of the female characters in the novel, and perhaps in most of Lawrence’s fiction. She is not led to happiness by marriage. Instead, she is envious of her sister’s life and ends up alone.

## **6. Negotiating Masculinities and Male Sexualities**

### **6.1 A Missionary’s Position – The Lawrentian Hero Converting His Woman**

“[The] independence of women is the given starting-point, not the goal.”

(Simpson 123)

Lawrence’s later novels in particular begin with women who have already found their independence. Ursula and Gudrun in *Women in Love* have already experienced life away from the parent’s protective and investigative control and formed their own ideas. Similarly, Connie has seen a portion of the world and can decide about most matters in her daily life without consent from others, although her character is significantly different from the overtly independent Brangwen sisters. But the question is not how to achieve independence. Instead, “[the] novels revolve around the question of what use woman shall make of their freedom. The implied answer, in most cases, is that they will find fulfilment by voluntarily relinquishing it, and consigning themselves to the man who will satisfy their essentially masochistic sexual needs” (Simpson 123). Female masochism as ideal? Consequently, the

Masculine assumes, or is given, immense power. But it is a tricky concept, since any pain inflicted is received “voluntarily”, as Simpson points out above, made clear by Birkin’s philosophy of the will to submit in woman. After quarrelling with Birkin in *Women in Love*, Ursula has to give up her freedom in order to be happy with Birkin, to achieve mutual happiness with him. She does so voluntarily and seems to be convinced after a series of discussions in which Birkin elaborately and eloquently could be seen as making his opinion her opinion.

Masochism and submission of women is supported by Lawrence’s construct of phallic consciousness (Simpson 122). It most vividly describes his phallogocentric view. The term itself suggests the phallus to be the source of power, masculinity the ruling force, it’s symbol the phallus as the penis inflicting pain on women (voluntarily in their masochistic submission). However, Simpson explains that in Lawrence’s concept “the phallus [can] embody the ‘feminine’ qualities of tenderness and sensitivity” (129), so that duality becomes possible in what is, in actual fact, a purely masculine image of the phallus. What is interesting about the terminology here is that “‘phallus’ is not a simple synonym for ‘penis’” (Simpson 129). In this context, Simpson mentions that “‘phallic’ was used as synonym for the word ‘sexual’ (130). In the absence of a female equivalent, it is used in connection with both male and female instances (Simpson 132). “In Lawrence’s usage,” Simpson defends the author’s choice of vocabulary, “[...] ‘phallic’ loses its association of thrusting aggressiveness and takes on feminine connotations. [...] It becomes linked with rhythmic cycles and with a rootedness in natural processes more usually assigned to female sexuality than to the sporadic and unpredictable manifestations of male desire” (Simpson 134).

Modern women in Lawrence's novels face many obstacles. The way to a life less tiresome seems to lie in a development originating in a modern, feminist endeavour to be independent. Strong-minded women do not find fulfilment unless they give up at least some of their convictions and freedom, ideally for a man. Some of Lawrence's heroines turn from independence to marriage. It seems that they eventually are made aware of their mistakes, that they are converted to a "correct", more desirable way of life.

A quasi-religious conversion back to marriage and traditional gender roles is what happens to Clara Dawes. According to Kate Millett, she is the only modern woman in *Sons & Lovers*, and serves as Paul's sexual initiator. A divorced woman interested in women's liberation, she is said to provide her body in order to please Paul's desires. In spite of her rather high self-esteem, she is also inhibited by something lacking, as Lawrence designed his modern women. What she is probably lacking is a husband, which Paul corrects. After having exploited her sexual services, he reunites the couple against Clara's will, or at least without asking her about it before (Millett 256-7). She loses her way by living without her husband, but quasi-religiously is converted back to her appropriate place and traditional life as a wife. As it is Paul who comes up with the plan of reuniting her with Dawes, Lawrence's male hero obviously plays the part of the missionary. However, Clara has visited Dawes several times before, and seems to know what Paul is up to. The reunion with her husband does not quite come out of the blue, but is a possibility she has probably considered before.

Traits of the conversion of woman are visible to a great extent in *Women in Love*. The novel obtains a special status for Millett, since it "is the first book addressed to sexual politics directly" (263). While *The Rainbow* is largely concerned with the New Woman, *Women in Love* puts the "New Man" in focus (Millett 262). His major task is to put the New Woman

back in her place, which means to make her a wife (Millett 262). As the New Man Lawrence presents the reader with Rupert Birkin, who is admired by Ursula. His body is elaborately described, similarly to Gerald Crich's physical qualities, both being "utterly desirable [men]," Birkin being desirable to Ursula, and Gerald to Birkin (Millett 262). The New Man Birkin is strong, survives, and even manages to be in a happy relationship. Gerald Crich however, who sticks to the old values of masculinity and mastery, dies. Even though this is Gudrun's fault, the consequences for not adapting to the situation are fatal.

Ursula has been cured of the impudent attempt to attain a higher status in society than that which has been assigned to her by patriarchal socialisation (Millett 268). She agrees to marry Birkin, and thereby surrenders herself to the man, re-establishing the old order. At the same time, *Women in Love* is also characterised by an attempt to "[adapt] to the new situation" (Millett 263). The New Woman and the New Man together constitute the New Couple (Millett 263), which features the ideal state of "a perfect equilibrium between polarities" (Millett 263) Even though Millett mentions this concept, she also criticises it, saying that on the one hand "Lawrence advocates it" (263), but that it is not really portrayed accordingly in the novel. There are several passages painting a rather different picture, such as the scene where Gerald brutally masters his mare. "The mare mastered is the woman mastered" (Millett 263), a statement implying Gerald's old-fashioned, male-dominant way of exerting his power over the female.

Also, the New Man does not seem to be radically different from his traditional predecessor. Although Birkin has his own ideas about life with a woman, "interested in going beyond love" (Millett 263), the New Couple does not require him to make sacrifices. Much rather, it requires an almost traditional woman, in the sense of understanding and acceptance for the



man's need for space. Thus, the ideal New Woman, to Lawrence, is converted to the right way by the New Man.

Marriage is discussed extensively in *Women in Love* (McLeod 87). When Lawrence lets his female characters go out into the masculine world of action and work in quest for identity, thereby leaving their "womanliness" behind, he does not seem to approve of it. The concept of marriage and its possible desirability is closely linked to it. The Brangwen sisters Ursula and Gudrun discuss it and the possibility of growth in it (McLeod 87). "Whether or not it is true [that personal growth is possible in marriage] cannot be resolved" (McLeod 87).

Unlike Gudrun, Ursula considers marriage a possibility. That her venture into the masculine world is not a happy one is shown by her failure and the difficulties she experiences in putting up with the rather brutal job of teaching, or the loneliness and necessity to prove herself. She does not seem successful in her struggle to free herself from the family. A break from its ties is only possible when she has Birkin to run to, as the night before her wedding a serious fight with her father separates her from her former ties. Thus, her strength relies on Birkin. Like an old-fashioned bride she moves from the rule of the father to her husband, not succeeding in the venture of leaving home alone.

Her development away from a determined young woman to a woman happy to be saved by her husband becomes obvious during *Women in Love*. In spite of appearing as a strong woman wanting to find her independence, as it seems in *The Rainbow*, Ursula is being converted throughout the sequel. It seems that she becomes tired of fighting for her freedom, and instead becomes Birkin's wife. Notably on his terms, not her own, since we witness discussions between the couple on the kind of relationship they are going to have.

Marriage, in the new form Lawrence suggests, is presented as offering a good life for Birkin and Ursula. McLeod questions whether both partners will have the opportunity for personal growth in it: “What sort of woman is both capable of and ready for marriage to the Lawrentian hero” (86)? A traditional woman perhaps is not, neither is the modern, feminist type. The Lawrentian hero seems to be in need of a woman who embodies an ideal form of traditional submissiveness, or tolerance for her partner’s needs and want for freedom and aloofness. On the other hand, she must be modern enough to understand. Thus, having made the development from modern, sometimes sexually aggressive and outgoing woman earning her own living and fighting for her ideals, to a woman who is willing to sacrifice her freedom, Ursula becomes subject to change, being converted and thereby becoming the ideal partner for the Lawrentian hero.

The fact that a good relationship involves sacrifices is surely not what critics attack here. It seems that the new relationship is based on sacrifices on the female side only, which leaves the Lawrentian hero with all the benefits. Also, it does not seem to be extremely different from traditional marriages, since submissiveness is a major feminine characteristic in it.

## **6.2 Female Characters Working towards a Conversion of Woman**

The conversion of Ursula does not begin with Birkin. It seems that the development is already introduced in *The Rainbow*. When Ursula is training to become a teacher, she turns to a woman for love. Her lesbian relationship with fellow teacher Winifred Inger is depicted rather malevolently after it comes to an end. Again, similar to her episode with Skrebensky, Ursula uses the relationship as a stepping stone: “As the intimacy develops, so Ursula too

develops” (McLeod 96). But the development is different than in her former relationship. “[Whereas] in the relationship with Skrebensky she came to some realisation of her own adult female self, in the relationship with Winifred it is the loss of this very same self which leads to disillusionment” (McLeod 97). The fact that the relationship fails, crushing Ursula, hints at the authorial intention to point out its perversity and impossibility. The author shows his resentment for Ursula’s chosen way of life, and forces her to turn in a different direction. As McLeod puts it, “Lawrence chooses to grant Ursula a homoerotic affair, only to reject it in bitterly misogynistic terms” (97).

In spite of discarding Ursula’s lesbian experience as a wrong decision, the author lets her have it. McLeod suggests that Lawrence acknowledges the affair, “saying that homoerotic relationships are a normal and necessary part of growing up for women no less than they are for men. On the other hand, he is saying quite clearly that it is the rejection of such relationships between women which constitutes real growth” (97). She comes to the conclusion that powerful female alliances might “constitute a threat” (97), since they exclude the necessity of masculine intervention. From this angle, the authorial masculine view shows much insecurity, leaving the sexual politics, which are on a level above the plot, to woman. Perhaps Lawrence’s desire to write in favour of a sexual political dominance of the man stems from these feelings of insecurity and threat.

Winifred, in spite of introducing her to feminist ideas and independent life, serves to convert Ursula back to a more suitable life. Ursula’s growing dislike of her shows that she is being educated in the right direction. Simultaneously, Ursula takes care of the conversion of Winifred. She introduces her to her uncle with the possibility of their marrying already in mind. Interestingly, Winifred knows about it and still agrees to come. She enters into a

relationship with Tom Brangwen in spite of her physical dislike, and agrees to marry him as a favour to Ursula, who she asks about it at her last visit to her bed:

One night Winifred came all burning into Ursula's bed, and put her arms around the girl, holding the girl to herself in spite of unwillingness and said: "Dear, my dear, – shall I marry Mr Brangwen – shall I?" (...) "Yes," said Ursula. (...) "But he's not (...) as good as you. There's something even objectionable in him – his thick thighs – (...) But I'll marry him, my dear – it will be best. Now say you love me." (TR 352)

Winifred's seeking out Ursula illustrates that it is not her uncle she wants, but that in order to make the girl love her, she does as the girl likes. Thus, in young Ursula's search for freedom she liberates herself from the strain of her unwanted female lover by tying her to a conventional life against her nature.

### **6.3 Reversal to the Feminine Ideal: Mellors' Conversion of Connie**

Lawrence's last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, is described to some extent as being a reconciliation with the female sex (Millett 238). However, even if Lawrence regresses from some of his most notable hostilities, much of his traditional traits of sexual politics, which he developed earlier in his life, still persist in it.

Millett calls the relationship between Constance Chatterley and the gamekeeper Oliver Mellors "devotional" (237), the novel "a celebration of the Penis of Oliver Mellors" (238), and its heroine Connie a "good example for [the counterrevolution]" (239), interpreting it as supporting masculine power strategies only. The novel revolves around the adulterous

relationship of the lady with her servant, the power might also be said to lie on Connie's side, although her character and behaviour do not always support the assumption. She often seems to be in need of a physically and psychologically challenging partner.

Connie illustrates Millett's argument about women transgressing class boundaries. She might appear to stand higher than Mellors because of her rank and financial means. Still, in spite of the different social backgrounds of the two lovers, Connie is often described in rather submissive terms. Partly so in her marriage and on the other hand, she is, or begins to be described in the course of the novel. Her husband Clifford is impotent, both as the master of his manor and grounds, since he cannot manage his property because of his paralysis, and with his wife, who is supposed to be his property as well, but chooses other men as lovers and travels alone even when he does not give his consent. Nor does he exert power over anything else that is supposed to be controlled by him; especially in the obvious sense of sexual ability, since his paralysis makes the sexual act impossible.

It seems that Clifford has been figuratively impotent even before his wounding in the war, since Lawrence lets Connie reflect on her past with Clifford, telling the reader that sex has not been the centre of their relationship from the beginning. In spite of Connie's premarital relationships, there is no intercourse with Clifford until after the wedding, and without much passion. Clifford considers it a necessity and not too important an affair. Connie's view seems to be similar, since her sexual encounters as a girl are only favours to the men courting her. What she is really after is the intellectual stimulation they offer before and after intercourse. This is not what she gets from Mellors, at least not in the upper class sense of high education and complex philosophical matters eloquently discussed. Mellors uses language rather sparsely, and if he does, mostly to discuss rather straightforward matters such

as food or intercourse. The sexual act itself might on the other hand be what is most difficult to the artificial life of the upper classes. It seems to be what none of the people Connie is in touch with is able to handle satisfyingly, neither in a physical nor psychological way.

In her analysis of the sexual politics in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Millett picks some of the explicit erotic scenes, of which Lawrence presents us with plenty in the novel. In one dialogue between Connie and Mellors – in between instances of sexual intercourse – the two lovers, or sexual partners, reflect on their physical features. Connie's vocabulary in the description of Mellors' penis rings of adoration, "the mood of [the novel] is narcissistic" (Millett 238) because of the narrator's excitement (via Connie) of the male body. The vocabulary used is significant in terms of the distribution of power in the relationship. Connie often admires the body of her lover: "Save for his hands and wrists and face and neck he was white as milk, with fine slender muscular flesh. To Connie he was suddenly piercingly beautiful" (LCL 184).

Connie's adoration, together with the depiction of sexual encounters, illustrates that the power mostly seems to lie on Mellors' side, as he takes the lead in their sexual encounters. When they have sex for the first time, "he drew her up and led her slowly to the hut, not letting go of her till she was inside. (...) She lay still, in a kind of sleep, always in a kind of sleep. The activity, the orgasm was all his, all his; she could strive for herself no more (LCL 99-100). At the beginning of their relationship, Connie is passive, their coming together only satisfying Mellors.

In contrast, Joyce Wexler, in a later chapter, argues that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a campaign for mutuality. However, it is quite comprehensible not to see mutuality throughout

much of the novel, since the abandonment of will – namely Connie’s will – seems central in it. “Lawrence believes [...] you must in some sense lose yourself to find yourself in sexual love” (Spilka 203), in other words, that self-abandonment is necessary. But how is it achieved? “[The] ways of breaking a woman’s will, or of getting her to acquiesce of her own free will, are varied in Lawrence’s postwar fiction, and [...] most of them seem to fail” (Spilka 198). Not in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, though. Lawrence’s concept of “tenderness” seems to serve as powerful enough strategy to achieve it. The concept surfaces repeatedly, often paired with compassion, and in connection with the character of Mellors, like in the situation that leads to the first instance of intercourse between Connie and Mellors and her emotional reaction to the pheasant chicks (Spilka 198): “His heart melted suddenly, (...) and his hand softly, softly, stroked the curve of her flank, in the blind and instinctive caress” (LCL 99).

Connie seems apt to give in to Mellors ways, as she is not satisfied with the way of life at her Wragby home and the artificial talk it offers (Spilka 201). “It was the last bit of passion left in [men like Michaelis and Clifford]: the passion for making a display. Sexually, they were passionless, even dead” (LCL 42). At Wragby, sex is a perverted concept, seen as either insignificant by Connie’s husband Clifford, or in an artificial context by many of his witty but shallow visitors (Wexler 201). Although Connie herself has never attributed much meaning to sex, it seems to be vital to her. Since her impotent husband is not able to give her what she seeks, she at first turns to the playwright Michaelis (Spilka 201), the relationship with whom seems to accidentally prepare her for the relinquishment of her free will. She exerts it in their sexual encounters, where she actively brings about her own orgasm by herself and is harshly criticised and humiliated for it. This humiliation might well prepare her for the relationship with Mellors, the wish never to relive it probably a strong factor attributing to passivity in

Connie's future sex life. In an encounter with Michaelis late in their relationship he voices his anger:

When at last he drew away from her, he said, in a bitter, almost sneering little voice, "You couldn't go off at the same time as a man, could you? You'd have to bring yourself off! You'd have to run the show!"

This little speech, at the moment, was one of the shocks of her life. (...) She was stunned by this unexpected piece of brutality, at the moment when she was glowing with a sort of pleasure beyond words, and a sort of love for him. (...) Her whole sexual feeling for him, or for any man, collapsed that night. (...) And she went through the days drearily. (LCL 45-46)

Michaelis speech causes great insecurity in Connie's concept of sexuality, and her active participation in it. By trying to brush his own feelings of guilt for not being a satisfying lover onto Connie, Michaelis inflicts emotional pain on his former lover. Connie is soon going to take a passive, submissive part in her affair with Mellors.

Although submission to the other is offered as necessary for a satisfying relationship, it seems that it is only submission on the woman's part, not the man's. This is illustrated by Michaelis' "resenting his submission to the woman's power" (Spilka 203). Mellors does not submit anything in sexual terms, unless perhaps his determination to live without a woman. But "his capacity for creaturely tenderness [...] is what Lawrence wants to get across" (203). With him, sex is genuine, without the artificial capacity of the Wragby society, even if the price for it is submission.



Genuinely tender, their first sexual encounter takes place in the shed by the pheasant compound. Connie cries over the pheasant chicks, which is said to be a general despair inherent in her generation, and “Mellors responds with creaturely compassion and a melting heart” (Spilka 204). Their sexual encounter is a silent and quick affair and a rather one-sided act, Mellors ordering Connie to lie down and getting down to business, which does not per se imply tenderness, but Spilka finds it touching. “The scene is doubly or perhaps triply touching in that it affects the heart, the sensual body on which heartfelt feelings depend, and our sympathetic understanding of these live things” (Spilka 204).

Spilka comments on Millett’s devaluating discussion of the episode as “indicative of the pure male mastery and female subjection which, she asserts, Lawrence really wants” (204). The nature of the first sexual encounter between Connie and Mellors makes it difficult to argue against her, but Spilka manages to, claiming that it is only a temporary condition, since their relationship will develop further to a different handling of sexuality (204), attributing the encounter some importance as a vital achievement. “Connie’s acquiescence, in this first of the series of sexual communion by which she is renewed, is all that Lawrence asked for in his mid-career hostilities toward women” (204).

However, if this is all Lawrence wanted to achieve, why didn’t he? As the author and thus creator of his novels’ characters, he could easily have done so in earlier novels. Instead he chose to portray a struggle between the sexes, perhaps not willing to easily switch to the comfortable solution of female submission in giving up their free will. I find it plausible to believe that towards the end of his career and life, Lawrence was simply tired of fighting and losing, and therefore came up with a simpler solution. To balance the view on the relationship, Spilka mentions that it has a similar effect on Mellors, opening him up to a new

emotional and sexual union, becoming vulnerable in the course of it, almost like Connie (204). Spilka finds Mellors to be equally fascinated by Connie's body (205). It takes some time and several sexual encounters, but "[they] express mutual love [...] without benefit of anything like male mastery or female subjection" (Spilka 205).

Even the greatest defender of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* cannot ignore Mellors' cruelty on certain occasions. The fact that "[he] hated mouth kisses" (LCL 110) hints at it, but it becomes more obvious one night when the couple make love in what Spilka calls "the now famous night of searing passion" (206) "Though a little frightened, she let him have his way, and the reckless, shameless sensuality shook her to her foundations, stripped her to the very last, and made a different woman of her. (...) She had to be a passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave" (LCL 218) The episode is received controversially by Lawrence's critics, Spilka finding it to depict a reversion in the mutual relationship back to a power balance in Mellors' favour (206). He attributes it to a feeling of inferiority (by Mellors) brought about "by a fierce quarrel with Connie's sister Hilda" (206), at the same time allowing for a reading more concerned with the lovers themselves than with the other people close to them. It might be caused by a feeling of inferiority caused by Connie herself, since it takes place after she decides to go to Venice and pretend to become pregnant there, thus diverting the possible blame from Mellors, presumably out of a feeling of shame since he might be considered beneath her (207).

A simple quarrel seems a poor excuse, but the feelings of inferiority triggered by the class issue account for some aggression.. However, even if this is the factor accounting for Mellors' rather violent sexual actions, it serves as but a weak excuse for his treatment of his lover. At the same time Connie herself wants something besides tenderness for that night

(LCL 218). Therefore, she is not being abused. Her required passivity, however, and her impression that “[in] the short summer night she learned so much” (LCL 219) make her a disciple, setting up Mellors as master. It is this mastery in sexuality as opposed to her watching in passive awe that forms a problematic aspect in the reception of the relationship.

#### **6.4 Changeable Boundaries between Homosexuality and Heterosexual Ideals**

According to Millett, the way Lawrence depicts the physical qualities of the male characters in his novels is very admirable, more so than those of his female characters (238). It is often described as beautiful, vital, strong, and always magically attractive to the female characters. In the several novels Lawrence published throughout his, admittedly not always very successful, career, this becomes visible on several levels. Also, Lawrence’s sexual politics change during the course of his career, as illustrated by Nixon’s devoting a whole book to the topic and featuring Lawrence’s “Turn against Woman” in the title. Whereas at first he seems to be depicting rather strong female characters and the power in their relationships as perhaps not always evenly distributed, but also not exploitative, he develops a more hostile view against women later on. Also, with this turn against women, he places a greater emphasis on homosexual relations between his characters, or at least the desire of one male to enter into erotic relationships with one or several others.

Lawrence’s turn towards homosexuality climaxes in a kind of infertility or sterility as a result of women’s total exclusion. Interestingly, in terms of fertility and creative power, this aspect reflects the development from a rather balanced view on women towards a very hostile opinion. In his earlier novels, Lawrence displays his belief in the “power of the womb” (Millett 257) , which to him has enormous creative power. However, he then moves on to

give creative power to the penis, thereby developing his “phallic religion”, where “the male alone is the life force” (Millett 258), giving immense power to the male. It is needless to stress that the more the power of masculinity and the male sex increases, the more the power and importance of the Feminine decreases. It almost entirely loses its impact in the creational act.

Particularly significant in terms of sexual politics, is what Millett has to say about the love triangle between Ursula, Birkin and Gerald, identifying the latter as “the real erotic center in the novel” (Millett 265). Nixon implies the same, claiming that “the apparently heterosexual relationship between Birkin and Ursula incorporates intrinsically homoerotic elements” (Nixon 171). Homosexuality is an important aspect in this relationship, since Birkin’s fascination for Gerald is more than simply male friendship. “[T]riangles are (...) diagrams of power in sexual politics” (Millett 265), Millett explains, recapitulating the different versions of love triangles in literary tradition. Lawrence introduces a new form of that constellation. The courtly triangle featuring a woman, her husband, and the man courting her, and the continental triangle consisting of a man, his wife and his mistress are well known. The love triangle introduced by Lawrence comprises a man who is in a relationship with a woman, but is courting another man at the same time (Millett 266). This perfectly describes the relationship between Ursula, Birkin and Gerald, also containing a “new strong double standard (...) since the wife is allowed no other distractions, [whereas] the man can enjoy homosexual [love]” without being considered unfaithful (Millett 266). This again supports Lawrence’s rule, exemplified in Ursula’s lesbian affair in *The Rainbow*, that female alliances are not approved of, whereas “[m]ales (...) are encouraged to build alliances” (266).

### 6.5 Homosexuality as a Physical Struggle between Birkin and Gerald Crich: The Famous Wrestling Scene

They seemed to drive their white flesh deeper and deeper against each other, as if they would break into a oneness. (...) The two men entwined and wrestled with each other, working nearer and nearer (...) [Birkin] seemed to penetrate into Gerald's more solid, more diffuse bulk, to interfuse his body through the body of the other, as if to bring it subtly into subjection, (...) It was as if Birkin's whole physical intelligence interpenetrated into Gerald's body, as if his fine, sublimated energy entered into the flesh of the fuller man, like some potency, casting a fine net, a prison, through the muscles into the very depths of Gerald's physical being. (...) Now and again came a sharp gasp of breath, a sound like a sigh, then the rapid thudding of movement (...) At length Gerald lay back inert on the carpet, his breast rising in great slow panting, whilst Birkin kneeled over him, almost unconscious. (WIL 136-7)

The homosexuality inherent in *Women in Love* becomes visible especially in the widely discussed wrestling scene between the naked Birkin and Gerald Crich. Millett describes the scene as being "as close as Lawrence cared to come to sodomy" (Millett 267). The fact that he does not portray homosexuality more explicitly might be due to his fear "of being branded effeminate" (Millett 267). Millett admits that Lawrence is very good at "the loving caress to the male body" (Millett 267), but does not believe it is honest. "The masculine alliance (...) is so plainly motivated by the rather sordid political purpose of clubbing together against women" (Millett 268), that a real love for men cannot be truly depicted. To Millett, homosexuality seems to be only a means to turn against women – there is no real love for men in the novel. Considering the homophobia that can be witnessed in most heterosexual

men, it seems rather unlikely that Millett's reading of homosexuality in Lawrence is entirely true. Male alliances are supported more strongly than friendship among women. However, the allegation that homosexual feelings and actions are a turn against women might seem deluded, implying some egocentric – or feminist-centric – prevalence in Millett's interpretation.

Concerning the heated debate surrounding the homosexuality factor in Lawrence's fiction, critics are uncertain whether his adoration of men, the male body and male friendship is based on his actual sexual feelings and action. Many of his friends and family are convinced that he did not actually exert a fascination for masculinity in his personal life (at least not in physical form). It does, however, feature prominently in much of his fiction. Dix claims that *Women in Love* serves this purpose: “[it] is the very beginning of Lawrence's [...] need to express, through the feminine point of view, his own adoration of men” (13), arguing that “[to] Lawrence the love between man and woman, in all its intensity, is still not enough for the individual soul – he wanted love between men too, but he was not sure how to go about it” (93). This confusion is illustrated by the relationship between Birkin and Gerald, climaxing in their naked wrestling, and Birkin's mourning for Gerald after his death.

Dix admits that “instances of Lawrence's adulatory writing about men are many, and they are seen to ring with a glow that his writing about women often lacks” (94). Not entirely attributing this to a possible homosexual component in Lawrence, but rather to his ability to capture beauty (95), she notices the sexuality of the wrestling scene (98). However, she believes that his desire for men was less physical than an expression for an ideal of male friendship (101), and that “the friendship was more an ideal in Lawrence's head, as was the perfect union with woman, than a reality” (102). Surprisingly in tune with Kate Millett, Dix

acknowledges “that behind [Lawrence’s] adulation of the male, this desire for friendship, for love, for sex [...] lay a tendency in [his] later life to hate in women what he used to admire, and to fight instead for the supremacy of the male above the female” (105).

Undeniably, many passages in *Women in Love* are homosexually charged. They always seem to be brought about by Birkin, the reader being induced “to accept Birkin’s proposal that what he needs is sexual relations with a woman *plus* [closeness to a man]” (Kelsey 155). Heterosexuality as a compulsory norm is not questioned, similar to woman’s situation in the novel. However, the male friendship Birkin seems to want is more than platonic, even if it might not explicitly include sexual intercourse. The concept is problematic for everybody but Birkin. Ursula questions it, Gerald does not seem altogether at ease with it, but to Birkin this “new order of sexual relations [offers a way to happiness and fulfilment, because it] frees the subject to explore realms of experience and knowledge previously untouched by traditional relationships” (Kelsey 155).

Birkin’s ideals might be noble, but they may also merely create acceptable space for bisexual desire. Kelsey explains that Birkin’s new ideal “order includes anal intercourse and the anal caress between men and women, as well as legitimating a particular form of love between men” (156). While this love is not labelled, it cannot exist in a vacuum. Therefore, it is problematic to the characters involved, the novel’s ending suggesting that it is not only difficult to achieve, but impossible to a constellation of characters such as those in *Women in Love*.

Kelsey questions Birkin’s ideal of love between him and a woman while at the same time reflecting on manly love for a friend (156). As an illustrating example Kelsey mentions “the

only occasion he and Ursula make love. [...] Birkin's discourse is clearly defensive – signifying that his natural desire runs not in addition to but actually against the order of heterosexual desire itself" (156-7). Kelsey considers Birkin to be a homosexual who disguises his true nature with a more acceptable bi-sexual mask.

Inevitably, in the context of sexual orientation in *Women in Love*, Kelsey discusses the wrestling scene between Birkin and Gerald. Like probably all other critics reviewed, he does not fail to notice the pressing homosexual atmosphere of the episode. "However, the text is careful to provide each segment of homoerotic contact and desire with an implicit asexual rationale allowing the scene to be read as a physical struggle, [...]" [The] only obvious anomaly is their decision to strip naked [...]" (157). Birkin's explanation that clothes would inhibit their movement sounds much like the attempt of the seducer. The sexual component is further underlined, their "unconsciousness" brought about by the physical exercise, which has sexual connotations in itself, but also by Gerald's and Birkin's feelings of "guilt" (158), resulting in a shameful dialogue when "Birkin attempts to justify their intimacy" (158). Their embarrassed silence denies Birkin success.

However, the novel comes up with a term that serves to define and vindicate the homosexual wrestling of Birkin and Gerald as well as the new sexual order suggested by Birkin to Ursula. Lawrence suggests the term "Blutbrüderschaft" (Kelsey 158), a strong connection between two men, loyal and like soul mates, to grant an everlasting ally against the threats of the world of woman (Kelsey 158). "Birkin's revulsion from sex is explained, therefore, as a revulsion from the hungry, power-seeking female" (Kelsey 158). However, it seems unconvincing that the alliance Lawrence suggests is only a protection from woman, only misogyny not including a sexual desire for men. Kelsey doubts that even the two protagonists



participating in the allegedly gay activity of naked wrestling seem to know what their union is (158-9). As Gerald evasively states: “‘We’ll leave it till I understand it better’” (WiL 172), which he never actually manages. Thus, in spite of their naked wrestling, the topic keeps hovering around incomprehensible to the characters in the novel. To the reader, however, it is difficult not to interpret it as (half-)hidden homosexuality.

Kelsey offers another reading of the scene, albeit does not seem entirely convinced by it. He acknowledges that the scene might also “[serve] to confirm overt masculinity rather than a dubious sexuality” (175). Moreover, it might serve as “an expansion of sexual relations between and within the sexes giving a new dimension to transcendence of which blood brotherhood is a part, the emergence of sexual difference and diversity in a new enlightened age” (Kelsey 175). This reading seems rather far-fetched, considering the remaining characters’ sex life. The new dimension is only allowed and embraced in the form of Birkin’s adoration of the masculine. Ursula has experienced lesbianism as not leading to happiness in *The Rainbow*, the love between women being seen as a phase that must be overcome. Also, the sexual escapades Loerke tells Gudrun about in the Alps are not portrayed in the soft light of a transcendent sexuality leading to happiness. Therefore, the acceptance of new modes of loving and being cannot be supported as the driving force in the depiction of the relationship between Gerald and Birkin.

Still, Kelsey continues, the goal of the new sexuality seems to be “liberation” (175), but there are contradictions. On the one hand, it seems the narrator wants to go beyond the dual system of “‘hetero’ and ‘homo’” (175), but by using the terms and setting up the new ideal using “a language of heterosexual values” (175), the contradicting forces seem impossible to unite. Moreover, it is difficult not to get the impression that these contradicting forces and the

sexual implications of examples such as wrestling perhaps serve “to disguise [...] the absent and feared signs of homosexual desire” (Kelsey 176).

The potentially beneficial aspect Kelsey mentions in Birkin’s proposed new sexuality is that the novel “implicitly recognises diverse sexualities” (176). However, “these connotations are filtered through a mosaic of heterosexual images and stereotypes thus denying the writing its potential efficacy in relation to sexual diversity and difference” (Kelsey 176). Thus, a sexual revolution is abolished in the end, as if Lawrence wanted to position heterosexuality as the central construct and basis for healthy relationships in his readers’ minds (Kelsey 176). However, Kelsey mentions censorship as a factor that is not to be underestimated (176). It is difficult to determine whether outside factors such as censorship influenced the ending of the novel, or whether Lawrence censored himself. The issue on sexual politics and sexual relations in the novel are, however, not resolved.

The novel explores alternatives to marriage and family, but does not go beyond the two concepts, as seen in the Brangwen sisters, who are both unable to reject the concept entirely, and in Birkin and Gerald, whose manly friendship also cannot exist alone, and is in fact only Birkin’s idea (177). However overruled the women’s opinion in the novel (especially in the case of Ursula) might be, “it is not women in the text who threaten male homoeroticity but the power of heterosexual ideology” (177), thus again emphasising “anti-feminist politics and [...] a predominantly patriarchal programme” (177).

## 6.6 Masculine Alliances as a Patriarchal Power Strategy

Among the authors investigating Lawrence's turn against woman and towards man is Hilary Simpson, who has her own theory accounting for it. What is the reason for Lawrence's ambivalent, often cruel treatment of women, and his fervent admiration of men? Is it because Lawrence was gay, or is it just pure misogyny? Hilary Simpson comes up with another option. She argues that Lawrence wrote in order to strengthen the masculine, since he felt feminine power – at his time – to be prevalent in society. “For him, at this point, female dominance *was* the *status quo*, and male superiority was the urgent revolutionary movement necessary to restore things to their rightful order” (Simpson 99). Lawrence's opinion probably originates in Woman's improved status as a result of the First World War, when many women entered work life, and therefore were increasingly considered in economic matters, at the same time enjoying a new self-respect and respect from society (Simpson 99).

Apart from the right to vote, “[the] First World War [...] brought about more fundamental and spectacular changes in women's lives” (Simpson 63); in the absence of men, women began to work – a development which presented many conflicts, since “there was considerable hostility to it” (Simpson 63). In spite of the advantages that accompanied women's entering the work force, such as more sexual freedom and financial independence (Simpson 64), not everybody was content with their newly gained status, especially after the war. This hostility is reflected in Lawrence's portrayal of women in his novels published after the war, depicting “a fresh anti-feminist reaction” (Simpson 14) His “personal paranoia about female dominance” (Simpson 99) and his turn towards men as principle objects of desire, and as an alliance against the perceived threat, become understandable.

Lawrence's paranoia, as Simpson refers to his fear of feminine dominance, might not present the author as a grand, nonchalant man in himself resting on his confidence, but it is not entirely incomprehensible. Simpson mentions social figures immediately after the war, proving that men were the minority, "with the greatest discrepancy occurring amongst the relatively young" (100). "[Demoralised] by the brutality and futility of the war, [facing] the additional problem of unemployment" (100), a dismal atmosphere becomes visible. Women's growing power, although they were far from being the ruling power, contributed to the feeling of powerlessness triggered by the experiences of the war and the impression of being overwhelmed in number by the opposite sex when they returned home.

Another factor attributed to women's perceived dominance was birth control. "It was also during this period that women first began to exercise control over their own fertility on a large scale, to tentatively acknowledge and assert their own sexuality, and to use their new political power to institute reform in matters that particularly concerned them" (100). The sexual revolution continued and the focus shifted from the mind to the body with the rise of New Feminism (101-2). The new awareness of the female body together with new feminine power was associated with threat, and this threat finds its way into Lawrence's post-First World War novels.

The threat of woman is accompanied, or even enhanced by a sense of confusion in association with the appearance of gender. "The flapper, the representative of [the fashionable] youthful sophistication [expressed by wearing] short skirts and short hair" (Simpson 103) The image of the flapper, a rather boyish kind of Woman, supported the fear "that women were losing their femininity and becoming more like men, and that the security of the traditional sexual roles was becoming blurred" (Simpson 103). As a consequence, men

feel threatened by manly women, because they seem to require “womanly men” in order to regain a sexual balance (Simpson 106), a balance disrupted by the consequences of war, it seems. “Lawrence believed that women only sought emancipation when men abdicated from their responsibilities [...]. The women’s movement is seen as a destructive force based on unconscious revenge against men for having left women [alone]” (Simpson 108). The assumption seems absurd, but the suggested solution almost too convenient. “The solution to the problem can only lie with men reasserting their masculinity” (Simpson 108).

Based on this logic, Lawrence turns towards men, and has many male characters in his novels do the same. This kind of same-sex-bonding can be observed in Birkin’s attempts to achieve a close relationship with Gerald in *Women in Love*. However, Simpson argues that the kind of “male comradeship and the male power which are talked of [are not] convincingly realised [by any character]” (109). In the case of Birkin and Gerald, the relationship, whether the sexual component is denied or acknowledged, is not successful. The desired kind of union between the two men is not achieved.

Sheila McLeod is not a fan of Millett’s characterisation of Lawrence’s treatment of men. Also, she does not find the relationship between two men to be set up as superior in comparison to that between man and woman. Instead, she identifies it as coming second after the latter, but finds it to be valued much higher than the bond between family, friends and so forth (35). Thus, it has a central position in Lawrence’s literature, and undeniably, often assumes a homoerotic component. McLeod does not account for it by a simple labelling of Lawrence’s sexuality, but suggests that firstly, to assert masculine identity is a strenuous task and requires more effort than becoming a woman (12), and secondly that Lawrence was

constantly trying to come to terms with his gender and sexual identity, in an exploration of the possibilities between masculine and feminine forces (McLeod 15).

In his endeavour to find a path to his masculine identity she considers him to explore relationships between two men, the most famous example being Gerald Crich and Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love*. It is rather different to exclusively female affairs, and does not feature sexuality as freely as the depiction of Ursula and Winifred in the novel's predecessor. But the relationship between the two men itself carries more significance and is more prominent. McLeod admits that at times in Lawrence's career "it [...] seems [...] that the relationship of man to man is threatening to take precedence over the relationship between man and woman" (35). There is no doubt that Lawrence, and through him his male characters, seeks masculine company. At the same time, these purely masculine relationships are not successful, or rather not realised, often leaving the Lawrentian hero with a bitter aftertaste and unresolved issues (McLeod 35). In the case of Birkin and Gerald, their naked wrestling is as close as they get to sexual contact, in spite of "[the] love between man and man [being] based on physical attraction" (McLeod 37).

McLeod asserts that masculine relationships take place in the same hierarchy mentioned by Millett in the context of male house cultures, and resemble the pattern of heterosexual relationships, in that they "[entail] the willing submission of the weaker to the stronger" (37). In spite of Gerald's physical superiority, Birkin is the dominant of the two, suggesting having the wrestling match and then winning it. It is also he who elaborates on the topic and nature of their relationship and what he would like it to be, but interestingly, Gerald does not quite go along with this. He doubts the concept Birkin suggests and does not seem to feel comfortable with the extreme closeness, either physically or mentally. A factor contributing

to the strange atmosphere between them is definitely Birkin's compliments about Gerald's body. The fact that homoerotic action is never actually realised between the two is part of the bitter disappointment it carries (to Birkin), showing the characteristic of failure McLeod suggests in the context of homoerotic relationships in Lawrence's novels. Also, it proves to be a destructive force, since it is Birkin's "bitterness [that] points the way to Gerald's ultimate destruction" (McLeod 43). The love between men still has to prevail for Birkin, as he is not willing to give up the idea. Unlike Ursula, he does not understand that he "can't have two kinds of love (...)" (WiL 407)

Birkin blurs the homoerotic component of his admiration for Gerald by use of the concept of blood-brotherhood. However, it does not sound as innocent as it should. The word alone sounds rather violent, moreover implying the exchange of a vital bodily fluid, thus the sexual connotation is obvious. Moreover, it subsumes a parasitic component, because in the giving of blood, and even more in the receiving or taking of it, one assumes the vampire-like position of the devouring mother, insisting on having a part of the other's life force. Thus, Birkin, although he appears to be repeatedly vindicated in the novel, also represents a rather selfish kind of love in his ideal imaginings of a relationship between men.

The emotions between Birkin and Gerald do not seem to be fully negotiated, and there is serious doubt whether they are mutual. McLeod mentions that Lawrence "[misattributes] homoerotic feelings to Gerald" (43), a problematic statement, because it results in the obvious question: how could he have? As Lawrence's creation, his characters feel what he inscribes in them. It is more likely that these feelings are wrongly assumed by Birkin, and expressed via the narrating voice.

Moreover, Birkin, who often seems to be sure about his feelings for Gerald, is not depicted as stable in his will to commit to him, or rather to his homosexual feelings. This can be seen in the abrupt change of topic after the wrestling scene, where they first perform their ambiguous wrestling, then talk about their personal relationship and discuss the concept of blood-brotherhood, only to then abruptly change the subject to women and marriage with Ursula (McLeod 44). “It would seem that the wrestling match has been a sort of homoerotic stag night for Birkin, perhaps even a sort of exorcism” (McLeod 44) The latter meaning seems unlikely. It might have been an attempt at exorcism, but it seems more plausible that it was an attempt to find out whether this is more satisfying than physical contact with women. McLeod, too, claims that this is not the end to Birkin’s homoerotic journey, which will resurface most prevalently in his reaction to Gerald’s death. The event can be seen as “Gerald’s [...] punishment for his having failed to reciprocate Birkin’s love” (McLeod 45).

At the same time, Birkin suffers from his strong feelings towards a member of the same sex, his “homosexuality [making] him feel guilty and inadequate, less of a man than he might otherwise be” (McLeod 47). This can only be the case if Birkin is a divided character, since he defends his love for Gerald vehemently to Ursula. It only seems to be a taboo when talking to Gerald, but with his future wife, he unscrupulously admits that a woman is not enough, but that there has to be love with a man too. His frankness stands against the alleged shame for his homosexual affinity. However, his insistence on union with Ursula is an argument in favour of his additional homosexual adoration for men, its intensity making it unlikely to be the alibi-relationship of a closeted homosexual.

Like Simpson, McLeod reflects on the phallus as a central concept to Lawrence’s characters. She describes it as a unifying force for the different forms of man’s neediness and flaws,



especially the fact that “the independent male cannot remain independent for long, but needs must find another man whom he can admire or a woman on whom he can depend and by whom he is nourished” (65). Against this stands the phallus, signifying not just the obvious male organ, but also “the achievement of maleness” (McLeod 66). She questions the reduced interpretation of the phallus as increasingly important to “the frail and sickly Lawrence, [for whom] penile erection was a triumphant demonstration of male strength” (66). Rather, she sees it to be intended by the author “as a sacred object [and] the mysterious source of life itself, [which] makes it worthy of worship” (McLeod 66). To attribute a maternal creational value to the phallus alone seems strange and difficult, an aspect McLeod does not fail to notice. But this literal meaning is not how the concept is said to be intended.

Returning to the argument mentioned elsewhere that partners in a relationship are reborn, or that this is a prime goal of it, the phallus becomes important because through this symbol it can be achieved (McLeod 66): “the phallus is the prime creative agent, not because its actions lead to the birth of children, but because they lead to the rebirth of both man and woman in the sexual act” (McLeod 66). Also, it protects from dissolution by absorption into the other, a fate that threatens for example Gerald and Gudrun. It represents the incorporation of dual values in “[representing] not only man’s connection with woman but his difference and eternal separateness from her” (McLeod 66). What represents all that for Woman? Nothing, it seems. Or the phallus, by signifying a man’s relationship, simultaneously defines it for women, too. However, one sex seems to be grossly neglected in the process, as there is no equivalent female agent.

## **7. Mutuality between the Sexes: Considering the Possibility of Power Balance**

Wexler suggests a reading which does not condemn Lawrence as a misogynist. Instead, she interprets parts of his endeavour as an almost feminist attempt to propagate mutuality between man and woman (122). She states that “Connie and Mellors find beauty in each other as a result of their physical and emotional intimacy” (122), a concept whose validity and development shall be examined on the following pages. Moreover, Wexler states, “[Lawrence] pays attention to [women’s] subjectivity” (116). Quoting Carol Siegel, another Lawrence advocate, Wexler notes that “[e]very Lawrence heroine, even those who fail miserably, forcefully determines the course of her life through her own choices” (quoted in: Wexler 115).

Opposing Millett’s view and criticising her choice of passages for discussion, Wexler explains that Millett “ignores evidence of the strength and independence of Lawrence’s heroines” (115). Another noteworthy aspect about his fiction is Lawrence’s endeavour to formulate parts of his narrative from a feminine perspective (Wexler 115). “Despite a shattering feminist critique, the novel retains a place in popular culture as an expression of a woman’s romantic fulfillment” (Wexler 116).

According to Wexler, “[t]here are good reasons for women to read [*Lady Chatterley’s Lover*] as an affirmation of their desire [...] as Lawrence tried to release men and women from the constraints of contemporary ideologies” (116). Among these ideologies is the merging of sexuality and beauty (Wexler 116). By this, Wexler means the assumption that only beautiful people can feel sexual desire, and trigger it in others (116). Wexler explains:

The conflation of beauty and sexuality is actually quite recent. For centuries beauty was associated with virtue, not passion. [Therefore,] a female character who expressed sexual desire was usually ugly. [...] The virtuous woman was beautiful, which meant that she was spiritual and asexual. (116)

Moreover, Wexler notes that this perception declined around the same time as Victorianism. By the beginning of the twentieth century, “[b]eauty and sexuality were conjoined for women both as objects and subjects of desire. Beauty made a woman sexually attractive, but it also implied that only a beautiful woman could feel sexual desire” (Wexler 116). “Lawrence push[es] the meaning of ‘beauty’ from external features to internal states” (Wexler 116), which is clearly illustrated in Connie’s relationship with the gamekeeper Mellors, and especially in the development of the bond between them. The fact that Connie becomes beautiful as the relationship develops supports this claim.

What Wexler holds in favour of Lawrence is that in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* – as in many of his other novels – he “attacks [the conflation of sex and beauty] in several of its manifestations” (117). Here, these manifestations are “the New Woman, the flapper, and [...] the child woman” (Wexler 117). None of them seem to offer a desirable identity for woman. In Lawrence’s opinion, neither type carries the potential to make woman happy. Considering the first type – the New Woman – Lawrence leaves his readers the conclusion that to follow this idea is not enough, a notion Wexler shares with her fellow critics. It leaves women with a want – a void the life of the New Woman cannot fill (118). “Connie remains discontent” in spite of achieving a certain professional reward through her husband’s publications and intellectual conversations with him and his friends (Wexler 118).

Concluding the argument on the types of woman Lawrence attacks in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Wexler states that he invents “an alternative ideal [...] based on mutual adoration rather than material assets” (119). “Relationships built on beauty fail, but [...] love makes people beautiful” (Wexler 119). Moreover, “Lawrence suggests that a woman’s appearance is significant for what it reveals about her capacity for sexual response. [Therefore, he] constructs the erotic body in a new way” (Wexler 120). Connie does not embody prevalent ideals of beauty, but “measures her body’s erotic readiness” (Wexler 120).

Both, Millett and Wexler, notice the importance of fertility Lawrence attributes particularly to his female characters. Where Millett criticises that children are a burden and depicted as the source of a woman’s vitality, Wexler points out that “[c]hild-bearing is not the source of a woman’s vitality but its reward, as if erotic fulfillment led to fertility” (121). This is depicted in Connie’s musing about possible pregnancy, finding the possibility of a love child received in passion desirable:

[She felt] as if her womb, that had always been shut, had opened and filled with new life, almost a burden, yet beautiful. / “If I had a child!” she thought to herself; “if I had him inside me as a child!” - and her limbs turned molten at the thought, and she realised the immense difference between having a child to oneself, and having a child to a man whom one’s bowels yearned towards. (LCL 117)

Kate Millett uses her analysis of D. H. Lawrence to support her assumptions of masculine power over women. Wexler’s point of view opposes this, since she finds that “[t]he lovers’ reciprocal development is essential to Lawrence’s aim of readjusting the relationship between

men and women. [Their] attraction [...] is based on their mutual recognition of the other's vulnerability" (121). Wexler points out that "Mellors is more vulnerable than most lovers" (121), as he is concerned to be considered only a "sperm donor for the Chatterley heir" (121). By allowing Mellors to feel this way, Lawrence makes the man the object, or at least proposes the assumption, which is radically different to Millett's argument, accusing the author of depicting women as objects. In spite of the possibility of a power-imbalance in favour of Connie, the novel further develops mutuality, Wexler proposes. Both lovers leave the Chatterley estate. However, it is Mellors who writes the letters concluding the novel, which hints at his being the active, stronger part.

Vulnerability is a problem for Connie, too. Wexler states that "[her] adoration [of Mellors] makes her vulnerable" (122). In her prior sexual relationships, Connie kept control by keeping her lovers at a certain emotional distance. Only when she meets Mellors does she feel "a deep connection between her emotional and physical feelings, between love and passion" (Wexler 122).

Millett criticises the relationship between Connie and Mellors, often mentioning the power imbalance and the lack of respect and friendliness in their handling of one another. Moreover, their sexual encounters are not seen as impressive, passionate or fulfilling (Wexler 123). Wexler accounts for their imperfect scenes of intercourse by attributing to them a narrative purpose: "[Connie and Mellors'] sexual encounters form a narrative sequence that reflects emotional changes in both characters" (123). The encounters show a gradual development to the fourth time they have sex, which is described in more detail than the others. However, they all lead to a "reciprocal transformation of lovers" (Wexler 123), who develop into beautiful beings, both looking at themselves and their partner (Wexler 123). Connie does not

find beauty in her own body until desire is aroused: her desire for Mellors, and Mellors desire for her (Wexler 123). Similarly, even though beauty is not a typical masculine attribute, Mellors begins to feel beautiful as a result of desiring Connie and being desired by her (Wexler 123).

One aspect about the mutuality between the lovers strived for by Lawrence that Wexler mentions in a critical voice is Mellors' wish for simultaneous orgasm: It pressures the female partner, and serves "to increase his own [pleasure]" (123). Mellors makes it clear that simultaneous climax is a sign for a good relationship: "'We came off together that time,' he said. (...) 'It's good when it's like that. Most folks live their lives through and they never know it'" (LCL 116). A "simultaneous orgasm requires both partners' satisfaction" (123), an aspect Wexler holds in favour of Lawrence's ideas about intercourse. There are further details she evaluates from a differentiated point of view: for instance Lawrence's rejection of the clitoral orgasm. Being an aspect which enrages Millett, it only causes a winking comment on Wexler's side. "Thanks to Masters and Johnson, we know that [this] is simply wrong and that [Lawrence's] enthusiasm for simultaneous orgasm is misplaced" (123). Instead of analysing Lawrence's ideas about ideal sexual encounters in detail, she attributes a deeper meaning to their nature. She reads them as carrying symbolic meaning (124).

Mellors might be the one deciding the ways of their sexual encounters, but Connie seems to be in need of someone to take the lead, and not to be happy without it, as her marriage and previous relationships show. Throughout the novel, Lawrence lets us know that sex has not been a thrilling experience to Connie. With Mellors, she experiences passion. Perhaps the fact that he is demanding, dominant and (brutally) against clitoral stimulation are part of his fascination to her. However careful and considerate her previous lovers might have been,

they obviously did not trigger significant feelings in Connie. Mellors does. The fact that Lawrence developed a heroine with the strong desire to be dominated in bed is of course problematic to feminist readers.

One such reader is Hilary Simpson, who does not find *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to propagate a new kind of mutual sexuality, a turn back towards sympathy with feminism and its values as Wexler and Ben-Ephraim suggest. "By a neat reversal these values are now 'masculine', leaving his women characters the choice of either identifying with the new 'feminine' values of cerebration, will, technology and so on, or of becoming disciples of the new masculinism." (Simpson 138) His featuring of the female orgasm does not help this impression, since his "exaltation of the phallus in his work is accompanied by loathing of the clitoris, its female equivalent" (Simpson 138) By denying woman the ability to receive pleasure via this essentially female organ and allowing it only via the "masculine" way of penetration, the mutuality and support of feminist values remains doubtful.

The rejection of clitoral orgasm is voiced in Connie's affair with the artist Michaelis. Here, "Connie enjoys active, clitoral orgasm – a fact which he later uses to taunt her" (Simpson 138). Her lover's verbal rejection of her feminine way of seeking pleasure "distorts for ever her concept of her own sexuality" (Simpson 138). Like Michaelis, Mellors is not in favour of clitoral stimulation. It seems as if the action itself is felt to undermine the masculine attempt to satisfy a woman, denying the phallus its (omni)potence.

In spite of all the differences between Millett's and Wexler's critical analyses, Wexler does note certain instances where the power lies on Mellors' side. Still, she defends some of them, finding them to carry the author's attempt for mutuality, and therefore a kind of equality.

While the novel calls for Connie to respond to Mellors as he wishes, at least Mellors values mutuality.(...) [H]e wants her to be satisfied too. This may seem selfish, but it is more than any other man in the novel offers. The simultaneous orgasm is a retrograde goal, but it is a physiological expression of Lawrence's emotional ideal: mutual adoration. [Moreover,] *Lady Chatterley* assumes that sexuality is essential to men and women alike but argues that it is not fulfilling in itself. [...] A confluence of sexuality and emotion is the novel's erotic ideal, and Lawrence makes it available to everyone, beautiful or not. (Wexler 124)

In this context, Lawrence's concept of duality becomes interesting, "the theory that opposites do more than attract, they are firmly held together in eternal combustion; they repel, attract and at base are firmly linked" (Dix 54). Therefore, both feminine and masculine aspects are found in both sexes (Dix 54). The concept of duality exerts much force over Lawrence's characters, and is seen to carry much potential in order to reconcile the sexes (Dix 57). "[Man] and woman not only have to meet as opposites, but also to reconcile the opposing forces within themselves" (Dix 57).

Dix states that the tension between the opposing forces is used to develop "female characters into Woman [or Man's image of them]" (58). For instance, "Ursula explores the essence of femaleness in her relationships with men" (58), as in the affair with Skrebensky, which Dix



defines “as a testing ground for her female powers” (58). Another character she mentions to specifically embody duality is Birkin (58). “[He] most actively contemplates the theme of duality, reflecting on Ursula as woman” (58) and opting for “soul union”, his ideal of a male-female relationship, and possibly exactly that reconciliation of the two opposing forces within the human being for which Dix sees Lawrence to argue.

Additionally to the suggestion of balance between the sexes, as Lawrence’s views might be interpreted, Dix finds Lawrence to be writing “from the feminine point of view” (12). She supports this statement by pointing to the female characters, who she sees as “[t]he real heroes of all his novels [...]” (12). At times, Lawrence himself speaks through his female characters (12). “Lawrence was intrinsically writing about the liberation of the self, so he could relate that to young women of his day and to himself” (Dix 13). This can be seen in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, where both, Gudrun and Ursula are depicted in their struggle toward independence (Dix 13) and their – perhaps even Lawrence’s own – “journey through life” (Dix 16).

A point in favour of Lawrence that is perhaps even more important than the power Dix finds to lie with female characters is her opinion that Lawrence is looking for balance between men and women (14), similar to her fellow critic Wexler. Lawrence’s aim “is [to come] to terms with the masculine and feminine in each of us. Liberation of the individual will eventually mean getting away from sex role stereotypes [...]” (Dix 14). Rather surprisingly, this seems to be in agreement with Millett’s point of view on sex roles. However, since Millett does not see any (real) power within Lawrence’s female characters, she is not likely to agree with the solution that Dix feels is offered by Lawrence.

“Through Birkin, in *Women in Love*, Lawrence tries to describe the modern male, in which men and women have come nearer to each other” (Dix 17). Dix does not fail to notice, however, that some novels, such as *The Plumed Serpent*, digress from that ideal, but does not attribute vital meaning to them, in comparison with – in her opinion – Lawrence’s real concern. Explicitly turning against Millett’s tradition of criticism, she states that “if we face a critic of Lawrence’s attitude towards women, such as Kate Millett, fairly with the evidence of his very real interest in feminisation, the new female mode of being, the new awareness of androgyny, the arguments disappear before our eyes” (17).

However, Dix notes that not all of Lawrence’s work seems to embrace the feminine. A large amount of Lawrence’s hate against women stems from the “fear of their emasculating power” (Dix 111). Still, Dix does not agree with others that Lawrence always fights against female emancipation. “Only through the independence of women can men also find their emancipation – freedom from family, from too much responsibility, from too much control by first mother, then wife” (Dix 113). Thus, the fight for freedom so central to Lawrence’s works seems to inevitably involve the feminist movement. By this claim, she sets up Lawrence as essentially feminist in his thinking, a paradoxical thought considering his submissive female characters, and yet understandable in the light of duality, a concept with traces of paradox itself.

In Mark Kinkead-Weekes’ article on sexual relationships in Lawrence’s novels, it becomes clear that sexuality is found more often than just in the sexual encounters of the novels’ characters, “[for] Lawrence saw in artistic creation, and in the language of fiction itself, an analogy with the sexual act” (Kinkead-Weekes 103). The creative component of both, writing and sex, does not necessarily include procreation, as this does not explain the mysticism and

power of the act. It is much more the new creation of the two characters becoming lovers. Kinkead-Weekes identifies “the vision of sexual relationship [as] essentially concerned with the necessity of salvation through a process of death and rebirth” (115).

According to Kinkead-Weekes, it seems as if mutuality is not an entirely new concept in *Women in Love*. It can be said to feature before, in *The Rainbow*, in the relationship between Lydia and Tom, the oldest Brangwen generation depicted. Kinkead-Weekes identifies “the vision of sexual relationship [as] essentially concerned with the necessity of salvation through a process of death and rebirth” (115). This process necessarily involves a mutuality, a togetherness, and a mutual compromise, both partners giving something up in order to gain rebirth in their sexuality. With Lydia’s daughter Anna and her husband Will, “[the] conflict of opposites has a new tone, a struggle to withhold the self or dominate the other, which the relationship between Tom and Lydia had not” (Kinkead-Weekes 109).

“Ursula [...] embodies all the opposites of her family at peak intensity and awareness. [In her relationship with Skrebensky] we can [...] measure the increasing difficulty of the marriage of opposites and the destruction that can result from the assertion of a partial self” (Kinkead-Weekes 109-10). Thus, the conflict of power relations might be seen to develop from generation to generation in the Brangwen family’s couples, climaxing with Ursula’s generation, her generation also being the one offering a solution to the problem, developing at the same time back (to a peaceful togetherness of compromise similar to Tom and Lydia) and forth in Birkin’s ideal of equilibrium between lovers in a relationship.

The development in *The Rainbow* from an ideal relationship exemplified by Tom and Lydia to destructive relationships with the will to dominate culminating in Ursula illustrates a

“paradoxical structure” (Kinkead-Weekes 110). The ideal relationship “is partial and primitive in comparison with the growing richness and complexity of the human beings [in later love relationships]” (Kinkead-Weekes 110). An accounting factor might be the lack of problematic aspects in a harmonious relationship, another that the couple is very remote from the author’s generation and experience, living in another time and serving as an ideal model of the past, a softened, transfigured glimpse at the past.

*Women in Love* shows an opposite development to *The Rainbow*, as here the concept of mutuality is renewed by Birkin’s ideals, which he tries to live with Ursula. It has been argued already that the New Couple suggested by Birkin is not so new, the necessary compromise being more on the feminine side (and the masculine compromise perhaps simply being to put up with a woman besides the ideal male “friendship”). However, it is set up as potential path to happiness, other than Gudrun’s and Gerald’s relationship, which keeps the power struggle at a radical level leading to the death of one lover.

The way to mutuality for the New Couple, however, is not smooth. They negotiate in the chapter titled “Moony”, Birkin showing some resentment against femininity, its symbols (the moon) and its impersonation, Ursula (Kinkead-Weekes 111). He sees it as threatening his masculinity (111), and moreover representing the realm of reason, which both lovers wish to overcome (111). By destroying the reflection of the moon in the water, Birkin tries to destroy the influence of reason on their relationship, an influence he believes to be a disadvantage (Kinkead-Weekes 111). However, it can be argued that discussing the topic at length is enough to give it a rational component, the fact that it is a concept he repeatedly contemplates and must have formulated in his head before his discussion with Ursula emphasising the observation. However, their reasoning, discussing, even quarrelling eventually has its effect.

Mutuality comes out of the couples' struggle within destructive forces and impressions, the "process of destruction [turning] mysteriously into a way of healing, beauty and peace." (112) Kinkead-Weekes identifies a development in Lawrence's depiction of relationships, working towards seeing them as "a statement of faith in the creative and saving power of sexual relationship, [offering the potential] of growth through conflict" (113). This implies that even if mutuality is achieved, there is no lasting peace or equilibrium unless the partners constantly re-negotiate it.

Mutuality is also important in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, although the busy sex life of Mellors and Connie is distracting. The novel offers space for an interpretation of the lovers' mutuality to be a simple, old-fashioned form of power relations disguised by mutual admiration. Kinkead-Weekes claims that "the vision of sexual relationship remains essentially concerned with the necessity of salvation through a process of death and rebirth. What is new, of course, is the explicit location of that process in orgasm, and the arrangement of erotic episodes in a specific sequence" (Kinkead-Weekes 115).

The focus on simultaneous orgasm, necessarily including female climax, hints at a mutuality in sexuality, since the concept preliminarily involves pleasure on both sides. It can of course be argued in Millett's sense, by taking a closer look at the sexual encounters and the lack of foreplay or stimulation, that this is no real mutuality, but only a masculine fantasy, supporting the sexual power of the male and blaming the lack of an orgasm on a deficiency on the female side. However, focussing on the female orgasm at all, already carries some significance and is more than most of Lawrence's contemporaries feature. Thus, the regard for woman's pleasure, even if its achievement in the novels depiction is doubtful, I consider a point to be held mostly in favour of the author.

What is missing in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in contrast to *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, are the "conflict and opposition" Kinkead-Weeks holds necessary for growth (116). Instead of moving between conflict and opposition, "there is no interplay of [these] forces" (116) in the novel. There is development only in one direction, illustrated by the order of sexual encounters. Identifying a certain sequence in them complies with the argument of them serving a narrative purpose and depicting the development of the characters' relationship. Each episode is said to function as awakening in a different part of the body, or the embracing of a different form of sexuality, such as "the glad acceptance of animal function [of the human body]," "[the discovery of] the mysterious life hidden in the genitalia," or the "sensuality of anal intercourse" (Kinkead-Weekes 116).

The search for pleasure in sexual contact climaxes in the ultimate goal of "[burning] out the last shame and fear" (Kinkead-Weekes 116). That the fear and shame seem to lie mostly within Connie is a blemish on the concept of mutuality between her and Mellors, as he seems to be free of shame, serving as Connie's liberator from these obstructing forces. True mutuality would divide that role equally between both partners, setting it up as a result of their reciprocal love.

In focussing on the couple's sexual encounters, their sexual awakening to a relationship different to everything they knew before, illustrated in a very physical way, disrupts the "balance that characterized the earlier fiction" (117), a factor Kinkead-Weekes holds against Lawrence, since the sexuality of the earlier novels appears more complex and less pornographic. By not being featured so explicitly, but serving a larger context, signifying something more than just sex, they carried more impact, whereas with *Lady Chatterley's*

*Lover*, “the concept of sexuality and the concept of relationship strike one as having shrunk” (Kinkead-Weekes 117).

It is of course disputable whether such explicitness in the sexual encounters is necessary, or makes the story more beautiful. On the other hand, Lawrence might see beauty in the explicitness, the simplicity, in contrast to a more complicated, implicit sexuality. His explicitness and frequent use of four letter words, however, is often attacked, Kinkead-Weekes disappointedly labelling as “a loss in love and language” (120). In its explicitness, it might be a loss in language. To call it a loss in love is harsh, since that concept should not be touchable and is probably not alterable by the register of its verbal description. The explicitness in which the relationship between Connie and Mellors is described – in my view – is not a factor that diminishes the credibility of their mutuality.

The balance between the lovers in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is also the concern of Gavriel Ben-Ephraim. He notes differences in contrast to Lawrence’s earlier works, claiming that Mellors is the first of his masculine heroes to be “narrated from the inside” (139), and is thus vivid enough and able to stand up to feminine influence. Ben-Ephraim finds that balance to become possible via a softening of “the hostility to his female protagonist” (140). Softening but not abolishing misogyny? At first sight, this seems to be a half-hearted attempt to create equilibrium between the sexes.

However, there is action against both man and woman in order to prepare them for their union “by rejecting both woman’s presumptuous ego and man’s aggressive helplessness in ego-based relationships” (Ben-Ephraim 140). The ego, or will, similar to Spilka’s view, appears to be significant to the problem. Ben-Ephraim finds this to be exemplified in the

relationships of Connie's and her sister's adolescent years in Germany, where they learn to use men as satisfying tools on their own terms, bringing about their female orgasm after their partners have climaxed, and almost alone, thus using it as a weapon to set up their independence (140). He finds that they do so, because they "view the overwhelming pleasure of mutual climax as a threat to the supremacy of the self" (140), but it is exactly this empowering of the self, instead of a readiness to give it up to find union, that makes it unsatisfying on a psychological level.

Mellors, in contrast to Connie, stands for "the experience of the body wherein the self becomes other" (Ben-Ephraim 144). With him, Connie can overcome the ego and find "vital reality" (Ben-Ephraim 145) in the physical relationship. This is reflected in Connie's attention towards her own body after seeing Mellors', which might be seen as starting the healing process of Connie's fragmented self, but Ben-Ephraim also identifies a problematic aspect in examining her "lifeless", neglected body, reflecting "her fierce inner battle" (145) of the body and the conscious mind. The latter "actively resists diminishment of its sovereignty over being" (Ben-Ephraim 145). As a result, she perceives the bodies, hers and Mellors', as utterly different realms, his being touchable, hers "wasted" (146), but gradually Ben-Ephraim sees Connie as ready for change, a process which must also take place in Mellors, who has to give up the solitude he has chosen (146).

They both "share a fear of intimacy, but this is overcome in a setting that dramatizes their cowardice" (Ben-Ephraim 146): the much discussed episode of their first lovemaking in the hut near the pheasants. What is interesting here is the significance of maternity, embodied by the pheasants, which "poses a counterforce to ego" (Ben-Ephraim 147): this is still Connie's problem, but it triggers a feeling in her, thus helping to "unify [her] divided being." (149) The



sexual encounter seems triggered by Connie's tears, which are said to "signal the drowning of the will and the cleansing of the self-consciousness. (...) [At] this tender moment, it is as though the obstruction of self falls away from her, leaving a pure living creature that arouses Mellors's withheld instincts" (Ben-Ephraim 147). In their coming together, both might be said to give something up in order to gain something.

The unifying power of maternity is taken a step further when Connie becomes pregnant, "[she] is born a woman when ready to bear a child" (Ben-Ephraim 149). In spite of the impression that Mellors does not care about their child, Ben-Ephraim attributes great meaning to his paternity, since it has the power make him "equally transcendent when both partners join the universal generation that goes beyond individual being" (149). Thus, he becomes part of the creative force in life, the life-giving force apparently tied to the union with Connie, and associated with the Freudian concept of Eros (Ben-Ephraim 150). "Freudian Eros is relevant here because it subsumes sexuality to the reproductive drive of the life principle" (Ben-Ephraim 150). The positive force in procreation has a deep impact on the two lovers. However, it should not be entirely forgotten that on a personal plain, Mellors does not attribute the same meaning to it. It seems almost like a duty, a consequence of his actions he has to incorporate into his future, not a happy event of transcending significance, which questions the achievement of mutuality in the novel.

Still, Ben-Ephraim finds balance between the two lovers, which seems to be essential on a larger scale, mentioning the philosophy "that male and female become complete only when they join together [extending it to what he insinuates to be Lawrence's view] that the union is truly accomplished when two creatures unite to create another" (150). However, he also notices that the development to this kind of procreating balance in affirmation of Eros is not

so straightforward. On the contrary, both characters stumble over their old selves, insecurities and class distinctions. Also, the pregnancy is a potential threat to the power balance between the two, as Connie might “reduce generation to an aspect of her ego instead of losing her ego in generation” (150). and thus increase her maternally-based power. Mellors reacts against it in their sexual encounter which is identified by “the ‘burning out’ of shame”, where it is implied that he corrects Connie with anal penetration (Ben-Ephraim 151). This practice is said to “[save] Mellors from drowning in an intimacy on female terms” (151).

This can hardly be said to be a depiction of a balanced relationship based on mutuality of the two lovers, therefore it can easily be doubted whether the concept is ever really achieved, or only attempted. Ben-Ephraim argues that at least it does not depict the same destruction that the characters driven by ego and will in Lawrence’s previous novels endure (151). He admits that “the struggle between self and being will not cease;” adding a brighter future for the two lovers: “for Connie and Mellors the separating instinct will be balanced by a stronger instinct still, by the merciful drive toward [creation]” (Ben-Ephraim 152). It seems much more likely that a final balance is impossible between two living human beings, even if they become one via some strategy or other.

## 8. Conclusion

When reading Lawrence's novels and the reviewed criticism thereon, it becomes clear that his treatment of women is ambivalent, indicating that his view of the opposite sex was subject to strong, contradicting emotions. On the one hand, he is able to assume a feminine position and depict a woman's emotional life as well as strenuous factors with impressively deep insight. His ability to write from a woman's point of view is most successfully achieved in the character of Ursula in *The Rainbow*. Also, the portrayal of Mrs. Morel in *Sons and Lovers* shows his insight into feminine struggles in life. On the other hand, he appears to be incapable of maintaining a benevolent attitude, as almost all of his female characters are humiliated sooner or later.

My review of criticism on D. H. Lawrence offers an overview of possible opinions on the author's works. Although the scholars chosen attempt a thorough investigation of intersexual relations in his novels, their categorisation of characters often results in the neglect of certain aspects in the respective characters. In my view, this is most obviously the case in discussions of Miriam, who is read as inferior, passive and entirely under the influence of Paul. However, as I have shown in my discussion, she develops a stronger mind towards the end of the novel, declining Paul's suggestions at marriage and an affair consecutively, and beginning an independent life. Thus, her categorisation as inferior does not comply with the process of personal growth and maturity she achieves in the end of *Sons & Lovers*.

However, all critics reviewed offer interesting insights in various perspectives on Lawrence's novels, such as Nigel Kelsey's discussion of Mrs. Morel's power tactics against her husband. Her strategies in alienating him from home and family are not discussed with equal

elaborateness in any other critic's work reviewed. It poses an important counter-argument to the prevalent idea of Mrs Morel as victim of her husband's masculine oppression. Moreover, it explains the possible view of Mr. Morel as a defeated outsider in his own home, thus very likely to account for much of the tension between the sexes throughout the novel.

Interesting with respect to feminine power is the reading offered by Nigel Kelsey concerning an exclusively feminine sociolect in the topic of fashion. In his argument, it is a sign of power that women discuss a purely feminine topic excluding men. I would like to add that this feminine space for language and thought is problematic, since its emphasis is on a sphere traditionally assigned to women throughout history, and often considered to be of minor importance. Thus, the dialectic space for Woman as created by Ursula and Gudrun in *Women in Love* not only offers a reading as a liberating power strategy by the assumption of speech, it also offers space for interpretation to an opposing view, since the choice of topic limits the female characters to a traditionally feminine role.

Among the scholarly work reviewed, Sheila McLeod's offers a most thorough analysis of Lawrence's novels. She proves, as quoted from Sandra Gilbert in the introduction, that it is possible to be both, a Lawrentian and a feminist. An aspect of particular interest to me in interpreting Lawrence's novels is her analysis of the conception of motherhood in Lawrence's male characters. It underlines and expands Storch's and Spilka's arguments of women as a threat, and offers a view no other critic's discussion does, on the marginalised concept so central to Connie, yet neglected in most novels.

I cannot agree fully with Millett's polemic view on D. H. Lawrence. However, her argument gives much space for counter-action from later critics. It is remarkable that other critics –

among whom we find many women commenting on Lawrence – do not reproduce her fierceness, but find less radical words in their analyses even when pointing towards clearly misogynist portrayals. It is even more remarkable – and here, as with Millett, I do not agree – that Carol Dix defends the author even in his misogyny, often finding excuses. This hardly seems the task of a scholar, but rather that of a fan.

Scholars discussing the concept of mutuality in some of Lawrence's couples offer more convincing explanations than Dix. However, it seems difficult to support the argument fully. Considering that Lawrence supposedly works towards a balance between the sexes as suggested by Wexler and Ben-Ephraim, the frequent practice of converting his female characters back to a way of life more submissive than they first chose almost negates the endeavour. Many of his female characters are urged to a relinquishment of the freedom for which they struggled, which leaves their prospect of further liberation and achievement of power quite dismal. Therefore, Lawrence often seems to be writing in favour of men. Although he depicts them as struggling through life too, in relation to women they often maintain a dominant position.

However, there is hardly ever complete dominance on the male part, as seen in Birkin's partial submission to Ursula's wishes, for instance, or Mellors' entering into the relationship with Connie. Moreover, Lawrence's men are depicted as struggling to come to terms with themselves and their desires, whether it be the secret wish for intimacy with another man, or their fears of intimacy with a woman. Lawrence's attempts at mutuality illustrate quite clearly that the concept is not permanent, but can only exist if it is constantly re-negotiated by the couple concerned.

Still, balance is not always achieved, and often does not seem to be the goal. Some of Lawrence's women end up as victims, whatever strategies to maintain power they might practice. Gertrude Morel faces death from her son – the one person she does not expect to turn against her, other than her husband, on whom her strategies work well. Other female characters, like Gudrun, achieve independence. However, Gudrun's achievements are not honoured with success and happiness. Instead, her character becomes cold in her reaction to Gerald's death. She is lonely, alienated from the common life in her home, and jealous of her sister, who has given up her independence in exchange for marriage with Birkin. Similarly strong-willed and independent, Hermione is left alone, being despised by nearly every major character in *Women in Love*.

The characters who manage to remain in a successful relationship have to give up their independence to do so. This is of course a source for criticism, especially from Kate Millett, who condemns any sort of dependence on men. However, it should be acknowledged that a relationship without sacrifices by both partners cannot exist, or at least will not be considered happy by both partners. Therefore, Lawrence's portrayal of the relinquishment of freedom in Connie and Ursula shows his insight into the dynamics of intersexual relationships.

At the same time, there is a problematic aspect of the two relationships that is propagated as ideal: the sacrifice is not really mutual. In my view, it requires women to give up more than their partners. Connie has to give up wealth, status and much of her social life. Ursula has to give up her teaching position, and thus her financial independence. While these sacrifices seem immense, Lawrence firmly establishes them as not to be regretted, since the rewards make up for the loss, and both women get what they want. Connie becomes pregnant, and

Ursula finally gets to leave the hateful repressive surroundings of the midlands and her unsupportive family. In this light, their decision to make sacrifices does not seem drastic.

The problematic aspect concerns the author's intention. By giving them dismal lives before they enter into more promising relationships, does he prepare the ground for their return to dependence on their men? I cannot entirely dismiss this reading, while at the same time disagreeing with Millett and her overtly critical analysis of Lawrence's oeuvre. In my view, Lawrence's works are intriguing, while at times shockingly misogynistic. It is probably the tension this schism creates that makes his novels so interesting. With his portrayals of power struggles, feminine submission, homosexuality and sexual dominance Lawrence might not be the most likeable author. In my opinion, however, the ambivalent feelings he creates in his readers are what forms his greatest achievement.





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## 10. Appendix

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## 10.2. Zusammenfassung: Summary in German

Diese Diplomarbeit vergleicht und analysiert die Ansichten diverser Kritiker über ausgewählte Romane von D.H. Lawrence: *Sons & Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* und *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Der Schwerpunkt der untersuchten kritischen Werke in Hinsicht auf diese Romane liegt in den Bereichen Feminismus und Machtverhältnisse in zwischenmenschlichen sowie sexuellen Beziehungen.

Ausgangspunkt für die Analyse feministischer Kritik an D.H. Lawrence ist Kate Millets kritisches Werk *Sexual Politics*, ein radikal-feministisches Manifest aus dem Jahr 1969. Alle weiteren untersuchten Werke stammen aus der Zeit nach Millet, deren Interpretation des Autors oft genannt und kommentiert wird. Millett beschreibt Lawrences Literatur als ausschließlich frauenfeindlich, und unterstützt diese These durch zahlreiche Textbeispiele. Obwohl kein anderer Kritiker Lawrence als Fürsprecher für die Frauenbewegung bezeichnet – mit teilweiser Ausnahme von Carol Dix, die in ihrer Interpretation von Lawrences Werken den Autor häufig gegen Angriffe anderer Kritiker verteidigt – äußert niemand eine gleichsam radikale Kritik an Lawrence.

Dennoch thematisieren alle untersuchten kritischen Werke die oft frauenfeindliche Haltung des Autors, sowie häufige homosexuelle Tendenzen in dessen Romanen. Während Kate Millett hinter diesen eine Strategie erkennt, beginnende Emanzipation des weiblichen Geschlechts zu unterwandern und diese Entwicklung umzukehren, untersuchen die übrigen Autoren die Zusammenhänge und Gründe für die Darstellung zwischenmenschlicher, sexueller Beziehungen und das Frauenbild in Lawrences literarischen Werken. Sowohl Klassenzugehörigkeit und -konflikte, als auch historische Ereignisse mit Auswirkungen auf die Position der Frau wie etwa der erste Weltkrieg und frühe Formen von Emanzipation



werden analysiert. Weiters ist eine bedrohliche Komponente im Frauenbild oft erkennbar in den untersuchten literarischen wie kritischen Werken.

In Kontrast zu den unterschiedlichen Analysen zur Ausübung von Macht in zwischenmenschlichen und sexuellen Beziehungen behandelt ein weiterer Teil der Diplomarbeit Möglichkeit von Gemeinsamkeit und Balance in den Machtverhältnissen zwischen den Partnern in verschiedenen Beziehungen der Charaktere in den behandelten Romanen. In dieser Hinsicht werden die Interpretationen von Joyce Wexler, Gavriel Ben-Ephraim und Mark Kinkead-Weakes untersucht. Sie diskutieren die Möglichkeit von ausgeglichenen zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen in Lawrences Romanen, und finden Beispiele dafür in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* und *Women in Love*. Zusätzlich ist diese Komponente bereits in *The Rainbow* wahrnehmbar.

Zusammenfassend ist zu sagen, dass in dieser Arbeit weder Lawrences Kategorisierung als extrem antifeministisch, noch manchen verteidigenden Momenten wie von Dix vollkommen zugestimmt wird. Ebenfalls erscheinen einige Verweise auf Balance im Geschlechterverhältnis als kaum glaubwürdig. Stattdessen sehe ich die polarisierende Wirkung des Autors als seine größte Errungenschaft. Seine literarischen Fähigkeiten und die Faszination, die seine Werke auf viele Leser über die Jahrzehnte auswirken, ist von seinem Frauenbild nahezu unbeeinflusst. Ob Frauenfeindlichkeit vom Leser erkannt wird oder nicht, die Werke von D.H. Lawrence erfreuen sich großer Beliebtheit. Dass sie jedoch deutliche Spuren von Frauenfeindlichkeit und Homosexualität enthalten, wird ebenfalls deutlich und überdauert – auch in Hinblick auf Erklärungsversuche seitens Lawrences Kritiker – die Rezeption seiner Werke.



### 10.3 Curriculum Vitae

#### Personal Details:

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#### Education:

1989-1993: Primary School, Klagenfurt, Carinthia

1993-2001: Grammar School, Tanzenberg, Carinthia

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September 2008 to June 2009: Erasmus Exchange Year at the University of Nottingham, UK

April 2010: Research on D.H. Lawrence at King's Meadow Campus,  
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#### Work Experience:

July 1998: Office trainee at KS&P, Carinthia

July - August 1999: Internship at the daycare centre of "Naturerlebnisdorf Rosental",  
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- July - August 2000: Internship at the PR and media relations office of „Tourismuswerkstatt Strafinger“ in Pörschach/Wörthersee, Carinthia: Media Database Marketing
- Februar 2003: Internship at “ORF Kärnten” (Public Broadcasting Network – Radio News)
- July 2003: Internship at the PR company “ZFL”, London
- July - August 2004: Internship at “ZFL”, Munich
- July - August 2006: Translator for “BMC”, Carinthia
- July - August 2007: Internship at „Soll & Haben“, Innsbruck (Media Relations, Journalism, Life Style Magazine, Photography)
- 2002 - 2009: Execution of polls at various fairs and exhibitions in Klagenfurt, Carinthia
- July – September 2010: Internship at “Bohmann Verlag”: magazines, video journalism, interviews
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