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**“A Woman Has to Live Her Life,
or Live to Repent Not Having Lived it.”**

**Female Sexuality in D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*
and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover***

**B.A. Essay
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Abstract

D.H. Lawrence wrote about women in a way that was relatively unknown in the beginning of the twentieth century. This essay explores the female characters of Lawrence's novels *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the importance of sexual experience in their development and presentation. From the publication of *The Rainbow* in 1915 and *Women in Love* in 1920 until the final version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1928, society, as well as Lawrence himself, had advanced significantly in regards to women and their sexual freedom. However, Lawrence's female characters in these novels all had one thing in common; they were unaffected by social constructions of female behaviour and sexuality. Ursula Brangwen, Gudrun Brangwen and Connie Chatterley all experienced love and sex before marriage and their sexual experiences had a great impact on their character development. Lawrence emphasised the importance of young women experiencing sex in order to find themselves and become happy. Lawrence's characters also express feelings of all kinds of love, as siblings and in friendship, as well as exploring love between two individuals of the same sex. Lawrence approached the characters in the three respective novels in different ways, which were dependent on his own personal development and advances in his writing style. Many of the characters in Lawrence's novels are believed to echo his personal beliefs, though in various different ways. His approach towards female sexuality was unique and ground breaking while also enraging and shocking to some of his readers. Lawrence's novels faced much criticism due to his way of writing about women, as well as the language he used to do so. Lawrence's language also developed, from being relatively discreet and modest in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* to having crude words and explicit sexual descriptions in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Lawrence's writing was the first of its kind and impacted the approach to female sexuality in British fiction of the later twentieth century.

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Introduction

D.H Lawrence wrote about women from a generally unspoken perspective in the British literary scene, at a time when women were not supposed to be sexual beings or to explore their personal feelings towards love and sex. Though his portrayal of this new female perspective was often inaccurate and often approached through a gendered lens, it led to a revolution in how female love and sexuality was to be written about.

Lawrence's ideas about women and female sexuality developed significantly from his early writing to his later novels. Lawrence also had an interesting approach to the topic of love and sexuality in a general sense and his writing reflects much about his own life, using concepts such as familial love, friendship and homosexuality to express his feelings towards people. From the publication of *The Rainbow* in 1915 and its sequel *Women in Love* in 1920 to the third and final version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1928, his motifs and literary technique underwent a drastic change, possibly due to his own personal development and changing thoughts and feelings.

The Rainbow tells a generational story in which the reader sees the development of several characters. The Brangwen family is the main focus of the story but the character of Ursula is most prominent. The novel tells a story of a young woman's first love and first sexual experiences as well as her struggle in combining her sexuality with other aspects of her life. In *The Rainbow* Lawrence approaches the topic of women and female sexuality from a perspective of a man whose progressive views are in line with the times. His female characters in *The Rainbow* are sexually experienced before marriage and the language of the novel points towards the marital connection being less important to women and their development than their premarital experiences. The language used is relatively discreet and minimal, and inexplicit imagery is used to describe sexual encounters. Lawrence made a bold statement by including a lesbian love scene in his novel, which was quite controversial at the time, as portrayals of lesbians had not been seen previously in English literature and this had a great impact on how lesbians would be viewed and portrayed in future fiction.

Women in Love continues the story in *The Rainbow*, where Ursula and her sister Gudrun have become independent women who long for love and a good life. The novel delves deeper into the emotional and spiritual aspects of love and contrasts the emotional and physical compatibility of two couples. When Lawrence wrote *Women in*

Love he was still under much of the same influences as when he wrote *The Rainbow* but the development of his female characters imply that he is inspired by the liberal women of his time who had started standing up for themselves and their femaleness. In *Women in Love* his approach to love and the different types of love is expanded and the topic of love between family members, sisters and even friends is opened for discussion. The topic of male friendship and homosexuality is also touched upon and makes an interesting contrast with the lesbian love affair Lawrence writes about in *The Rainbow*. Love between the sexes is also approached in a different way than Lawrence has previously approached it, as it focuses intensely on the spiritual aspects and the importance of emotional connection in love. The topic of polarity and duality is also a matter of discussion and ties in with a lot of the ideas that Lawrence himself has on the subject.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is a story of a woman living in a dysfunctional marriage where her husband suffers from a disability from a war injury. The woman, Connie, when lacking sexual and emotional attention from her husband, seeks it elsewhere. When Lawrence moved on to writing *Lady Chatterley's Lover* he had undergone significant changes in a lot of his writing. The novel differs significantly from the others, specifically in regards to language and explicit descriptions. However, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* does share several aspects with the other novels, such as how the premarital experiences and sexual affairs are a large part of the character development of the main female character and how the adult woman is formed by her actions as a young woman. The novel is largely from a female perspective, but as it is written by a man its view is quite gendered and the descriptions of women through the eyes of the male character are more descriptive than the ones from the woman herself. It is therefore interesting to view how the male characters of the novel regard the women in their lives. Some of the male characters, Tommy Dukes for example, are in line with topics that Lawrence has previously addressed, like Birkin's view of polarity, but others, such as Mellors, have a completely different view. The novel has faced a lot of criticism for many things, though most often it has to do with the language used to describe sexual acts and physical relationships.

These three novels, though quite different in most aspects, share the common thread that female characters are very important to the narratives. The women in Lawrence's novels are portrayed in a different way than how they had been previously

presented in literature and showed that women should also be viewed as sexual beings that can display passion and love on their own terms.

Lawrence ...treats female sexuality with an originality and a sense of excitement that no man had ever brought to it before. Lawrence, to my mind, was the first ever novelist to show, probably better than any female novelist ever had, the strength and power of a woman's feelings, sexual and erotic, by showing his woman characters in relationships with men they loved passionately (Dix, 81).

The Rainbow

In *The Rainbow* women are allowed significant spiritual freedom to love and experience different aspects of their romantic and sexual feelings. Lawrence's language in *The Rainbow* is relatively self-censored and mostly portrays female sexuality as a positive and discreet entity using language that insinuates its existence without any explicit descriptions.

The three generations of Brangwen women that *The Rainbow* portrays all have significant sexual experience before settling down in marriage and having families that feature in the story that unfolds in the novel. The women that the novel discusses portray Lawrence's ideas that women "can free themselves, but have to stick to what nature ordains" (Dix, 34). As the novel portrays three generations of members of the Brangwen family, we get to follow some of them from birth to adulthood. The first Brangwen woman we are introduced to is Lydia, a widowed Polish woman with a young daughter, who marries Tom Brangwen and settles down to a life in Nottinghamshire. Lydia had been previously in a marriage in which, towards the end, she was not significantly happy, but is forced to relocate to England and figure out a new life for herself and her daughter after her husband passes away. Lydia is a strong woman who had found work independently and was surviving splendidly before being courted by Tom. Lydia married Tom, not out of necessity or love, but for an opportunity to provide a better life for herself and her daughter in a better position and class. Lydia allows Tom to take the reins in their relationship while keeping much power in her own womanhood without becoming his property. As Dix expresses it: "Lydia does not dominate Tom, but she certainly shows him how she expects to be treated" (35). Lydia certainly sets the tone for the independent, strong female characters to come in the novel. Lydia's daughter, Anna, is the first woman the reader follows from early childhood into adulthood. Anna is a child when she is first introduced, but her character develops throughout the novel, creating a round, realistic presentation of a woman. Anna grows up to be a strong, adventurous and self-assured woman who has great ideas of becoming extraordinary. However, her options are limited in that regard and she settles into marriage and having children at quite a young age. In spite of this, Anna maintains her independence and fully immerses herself in the raising of her children and expresses her liberation explicitly (Dix, 37). Anna's first born daughter, Ursula, has the full attention of the reader for the remaining chapters of the novel. Ursula is quite

possibly the most central character of the novel while also being the symbol of real change for women in her time. "Ursula is the path, the direction" (Dix, 37). As Ursula is the main character of a large section of the novel, she becomes even more of a revolutionary symbol and her love affairs become proof of a change and an altered view towards female sexuality by the society of the time. Lawrence uses the experiences of premarital sex and love as a way for the female characters to find their own voice and their own way to go through life (Worthen, 49). Premarital sexual experience is therefore much more important to the development of Lawrence's characters than any of their marital relationships.

The Rainbow approaches the topic of marital love with little respect and portrays lovers' first affairs as being much more significant experiences. Two of the three main female characters in the novel have experienced important love affairs before becoming wives. Lydia had previously been married and therefore has a relatively significant experience with love before she learned to live on her own for a while. Lydia developed a lot from her first marriage and became much more independent and aware of what her abilities were. She married Tom Brangwen after discovering herself as a single woman who needs love and care and therefore had a much easier time settling down into marriage. Ursula, however, is the one whose sexual experience is most important as a young woman. Ursula is seventeen years old when her initial love affair with Skrebensky unfolds and its impact on her is significant. As Dix explains "...she is getting ready to define herself sexually" (38) and the rest of her life and her sexual experience in later relationships is defined by her first sexual encounter with Skrebensky. Lawrence makes it evident how marriage is unimportant to each of the Brangwen women before entering it. Lydia has been married before and lets Tom pursue her significantly before agreeing to marry him. Anna gets pleasure from provoking her husband and loves nothing more than her children, while often she feels nothing resembling love toward her husband. She says she physically loves him and respects him despite not understanding him, but "Above all, she loved to bear his children. She loved to be the source of children" (RB, 174). Again, Ursula has a somewhat different storyline in this regard. She only really cares about marriage when it is convenient for her. When she is proposed to by Skrebensky she has doubts, but is tempted to give in to the comforts of marriage. When considering whether or not to marry him, she admits that she loves him deeply, but that she cannot bear the thought of

marrying him and had a hard time forgiving him. "...she did not forgive him that he had not been strong enough to acknowledge her" (RB, 347). Nonetheless, she maintains her independence by eventually rejecting the idea of marrying him and expresses some disgust at the idea of becoming trapped in such a social convention. For Ursula, love was not the only thing necessary to marry someone; "She believed that love was a way, a means, not an end in itself" (RB, 347). The one thing the Brangwen women all have in common is that at some point they prove to have little care for marriage and express deep feelings of dissatisfaction with their married lives. This is made clear by the way Lawrence uses descriptions to explain their marriages and their sexual experiences.

The way sexual relationships are described in *The Rainbow* is through language that is relatively discreet and with limited imagery that only suggests, without explicitly describing, any specific acts. The novel has extensive descriptions of all variations of love and sexual encounters, but as such, the descriptions are all on the more modest side. Love is described several times from a few different characters' perspectives, and all descriptions are similar in their manner. However, when the topic of sexual acts and physical love is approached, its descriptions vary significantly. In spite of this, sex, and especially women having sex, is described in distinctly vague terms and mostly in a context of experience. The most explicit description of a sexual encounter is Ursula's night with Anton Skrebensky, and even that is described through very particular language that is vague and ambiguous. "She took him in the kiss, hard her kiss seized upon him, hard and fierce and burning corrosive as the moonlight He was reeling, summoning all his strength to keep his kiss upon her, to keep himself in the kiss" (RB, 270). Marital sex is hardly ever described, most likely due to its being more sacred and less relevant to what Lawrence thought to be the most important reason for sex. When Lawrence's characters proceed to encounter sexual activity, they are looking for ways to find their own personal path and self worth. "Sex ... is presented as an opportunity for the realisation of self, as the self now above all needs to be realised" (Worthen, 38). In this sense, Lawrence treats sex not so much as a specifically physical act, but more of a spiritual encounter where the opportunity to find oneself is, and should be, the only aspiration. Much of the descriptions related to the sexual encounters in the novel are more emotional than they are physical. An example of this is how Ursula and Skrebensky feel when it is over: "And her soul crystallized with triumph, and his soul was dissolved with agony and annihilation" (RB, 270). While the female characters of

The Rainbow do experience sex in a way similar to what is described of the male characters, and they are presented as relatively equal to their male counterparts, the female experience is even more spiritual than the male version. However, Lawrence also allows his female characters, most specifically Ursula, to experiment much more with their sexuality than had previously been thought decent, in a social sense. Ursula is able to have love affairs without them necessarily ending with marriage and experiments with other kinds of love as Lawrence attempts to present his characters' sexual activity and relationships without connecting them explicitly to their capabilities to provide or be in a good relationship, or even their sexual orientation. The sexual encounters are simply means to describe the characters' "ways of finding and being themselves" (Worthen, 49). As a result, the language used to describe sex is modest and refrains from explicit wordings and focuses more on the emotional aspects of sex.

The relevance of presenting a lesbian love affair in *The Rainbow* has been much discussed throughout the years since the novel's original publication and is a very clear example of how lesbians were viewed at the time. Ursula Brangwen's love affair with her teacher Winifred Inger is just as significant to her development as a woman as any of her sexual experiences with men as a young woman. Dix muses with the idea that this lesbian encounter is a Lawrentian attempt at portraying Ursula as a unique, passionate and independent young woman looking for inspiration. "Ursula felt her whole life begin when Miss Inger came into the room" (RB, 283). To Ursula, the love she has for Inger was the same kind of love as she had for men, only more beautiful because she is a woman. "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" (Dix, 38). Ursula is greatly inspired by Winifred and learns a lot from her about herself, society, and what it means to be a woman. However, towards the end of their relationship Ursula does begin to have doubts about their connection and their relations, most likely due to the fact that Winifred is a woman. She begins to be disgusted by her physically, "Her female hips seemed big and earthy, her ankles and her arms were too thick" (RB, 289). This does not come as a surprise to Winifred, who seems to have been expecting Ursula to give up on their relationship and conform to society's heteronormative expectations. "The fine, unquenchable flame of the younger girl would consent no more to mingle with the perverted life of the elder woman" (RB, 289). Feminist critics have criticized Lawrence's portrayal of a lesbian woman and a lesbian affair. "Winifred Inger has

angered feminist critics because Lawrence implies that she is not a happy woman; as though he was saying no lesbian could be happy” (Dix, 38). However, it is quite possible to imagine that Lawrence’s perspective of these matters was not unusual at the time the novel was written in the 1910s. His implication in the novel that, as a lesbian woman, Winifred could never be satisfied or fully content, was most likely a quite common assumption in Lawrence’s circles (Dix, 38). This view of lesbianism was to change drastically throughout the following century, but Lawrence’s inclusion of this taboo subject in his novel might have opened some of his contemporaries’ minds to the idea of lesbianism.

Though sources differ on this matter, it can be worth observing that the lesbian scene between Ursula and Winifred might have been the first of its kind in British literature and it undoubtedly had an impact on how lesbianism was portrayed in literature in later years. The topic of lesbianism, though not as taboo as male homosexuality, was not something that was frequently written about in the era before World War I. Generally considered the first truly notable novel that depicts lesbian love openly was *The Well of Loneliness* that was published in 1928, over ten years after the publication of *The Rainbow*. However, during the early twentieth century, lesbian love was something that was generally not considered to be a real convention. After the Victorian period of literature, where women being loving to each other was completely ordinary, many close female relationships would rarely be considered as anything other than a close friendship and a friendly connection between two women. If anything sexual were to occur in these friendships, that would be considered obscene and no longer an acceptable social situation for the women involved. “No longer could women be as openly loving, supportive, or tenacious as they had been in previous decades” (Edwards, para 8). What had previously not been considered an issue, had now become something unacceptable. This was undoubtedly a confusing period of time where something that had never existed in conversation before became unthinkable terrible. The chapter of “Shame” in *The Rainbow* was one of the chapters considered too obscene to be published and led to the prosecution of Lawrence and his publishers. The novel avoided being banned but the prosecutors remained adamant that the novel portrayed “immoral representation of sexuality” (Edwards, para 2), most likely in reference to the novel’s portrayal of lesbianism. This was most likely the first occasion of lesbianism being openly discussed as a moral issue and therefore it can be assumed

that the novel, perhaps unintentionally, contributed to the shift in female culture whereby the development of female sexuality began to be considered as equal to that of men (Edwards, para 3). Lawrence's feelings towards this topic were most likely toward the way of thinking that lesbianism was a less permanent love than love between men and women and was simply the same as a close friendship for the most part. Despite his personal feelings toward the topic, his writing about lesbianism was no doubt inspirational for others to do the same. This is one of the reasons why the lesbian love scenes in *The Rainbow* had an impact on how lesbians would be viewed in the coming years.

Women in Love

When Lawrence wrote the sequel to *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, his main ideas from *The Rainbow* continued flowing through its language and plot. Female sexuality becomes a more complicated matter as the women develop in both themselves and their lives. Sexuality becomes intricately connected to love and deeper emotions and is continually discussed with a delicate undertone.

In *Women in Love* Lawrence talks about women and female sexuality in a similar way to *The Rainbow* while his writing style develops. Lawrence's approach to *Women in Love* is similar to his approach to *The Rainbow* as they were originally meant to be one single book that was eventually split into two novels due to its length. In *Women in Love* the main characters are Ursula Brangwen, as in *The Rainbow*, as well as her sister Gudrun. In *Women in Love* the sisters are significantly older than in *The Rainbow* and have experienced and seen more than when we leave them at the end of *The Rainbow*. The sisters are also effectively contrasted with the female characters of the generations before them that we see in the previous novel, and they are much more modern and advanced than the women that came before them. Ursula and Gudrun are removed from the usual narrative of the Victorian woman where marriage is the end goal. The sisters are independent and as such they mock the institution of marriage in its previously known form and attempt to persuade each other that marriage should not be the end of something but rather the beginning of an experience (Gordon, 364). The first few pages of the novel describe a conversation between the sisters where they discuss their view towards marriage and how they feel about it, Gudrun appearing slightly more interested in it than Ursula who replies "I don't know.... It depends how you mean" (WIL, 3) when asked by her sister if she wants to get married. However, throughout the novel, even though much has changed, Ursula says: "'Why *does* every woman think her aim in life is to have a hubby and a little grey home in the west? Why is this the goal of life? Why should it be?'" (WIL, 328). It is therefore quite clear that the development of the female characters in *Women in Love*, while continuing on with what had been written in *The Rainbow*, still takes a big step away from the image of older stereotypical women. The sisters represent a time where it is beginning to be more acceptable for women to follow their own paths and not to be the unwilling property of someone else. Therefore they represent a new generation of women that have developed from their predecessors in *The Rainbow*.

Women in Love approaches the general topic of love in a more complex manner than Lawrence had done before, with the addition of the topics of love between two men, friendship and sisterly love. In *Women in Love* the main characters all experience different kinds and aspects of love. The sisters Gudrun and Ursula have a deep bond of love between each other as well as a familial love towards their parents and family. They also each have a love towards animals and their work, Ursula as a schoolteacher and Gudrun as an artist. However, the subject of romantic love also plays a big part in their life experiences. The sisters experience romantic love and connections in a very different way from one another. Gudrun is more openly sexual than her sister is; she has lived in London for a while and as such was more likely to have experienced things there. Ursula, as we discovered in *The Rainbow*, is quite sexually experienced by the time she meets Rupert Birkin, but her relationship with him begins to be explicitly sexual and she enjoys it significantly. The novel also explores the avenues of friendship through the course of the sisters' lives. Neither of them has many particular friends, but Gudrun has friends that she made in London and has a quite large social circle, even if it would not be considered close friendships. Ursula is a bit more isolated in *Women in Love* than she is in *The Rainbow*, where she struggled to make friends as a child, but later has a meaningful friendship with fellow teacher Maggie Schofield which she values highly. Despite having other friends throughout their lives, Ursula and Gudrun make an effort to stick together. Their sisterly bond and the relationship they have in *Women in Love* differs from the description of their sisterhood in *The Rainbow*, but as many siblings do, they grow up to be even closer than they ever were as children. In *Women in Love* the two sisters are quite attached to each other and make many friends together, as a duo. This is clear when the sisters become friends with Gerald and Rupert, they do so as a team, though they later start seeing them away from each other in order to establish a closer connection with the men. They both respect each other and the others' lives, but value their sisterhood very deeply and appreciate the bond that they share. This addition of sisterly and friendly love adds a level of depth to the manner in which Lawrence has previously approached the matter of love.

The novel's two most prominent male characters, Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich, also experience love significantly differently to their female counterparts as well as each other. "*Women in Love* marked an advance on the presentation of male-male tenderness in Lawrence's early fiction" (Worthen, 50). Birkin is extremely sceptical

towards the idea of a real love in marriage and believes that the union between a man and woman is not all it can be; he desires an additional connection between man and man. “Of course this was necessary—it had been a necessity inside himself all his life—to love a man purely and fully” (WIL, 178). Gerald is unconvinced of Birkin’s ideas but agrees to some extent that marital love is not what he personally desires; he mostly wants it simply due to the fact that he was expected to marry. Birkin and Gerald both experience a strong physical connection to one another and the language surrounding their physical encounters is very sexual in tone and appears to encourage the reader to understand the homosexual undertone in their friendship. Lawrence’s language in scenes that imply homoeroticism is quite explicit and provokes much thought about the validity of the notion that the two characters share a deeper bond than friendship. “So they wrestled swiftly, rapturously, intent and mindless at last, two essential white figures working into a tighter, closer oneness of struggle, with a strange, octopus-like knotting and flashing of limbs in the subdued light of the room; a tense white knot of flesh gripped in silence between the walls of old brown books” (WIL, 234). However, there is increased subtlety in the way the sexual undertones are portrayed in the scenes where Birkin and Gerald are physically close and they contrast significantly with the way Lawrence portrays lesbian love in *The Rainbow*. Birkin explicitly states that he would be content with no wife as long as he had Gerald as a part of his life. Whether this was only meant to be interpreted as a strong indicator of their friendship or if it was indeed intended in a homosexual context, it is hard to tell. In “Prologue to *Women in Love*”, Lawrence states that “Birkin felt a passion of desire for Gerald Crich” (48), and “Gerald Crich was the one towards whom Birkin felt most strongly that immediate, roused attention which transfigures the person of the attracter with such a glow and such a desirable beauty” (62). Therefore, Birkin and Gerald’s relationship is of a different nature than any of the other relationships in the novel, and differs from other relationships that Lawrence has described in his novels.

The contrast between the descriptions of the lesbian love scenes in *The Rainbow* and the love shared between Gerald and Rupert in *Women in Love* shows quite easily the difference between female and male love in Lawrence’s work. The two men share a distinctly different kind of connection than Ursula and Winifred shared. In *The Rainbow* Lawrence describes all the love that Ursula and Winifred share through the eyes of a young woman looking for sexual and spiritual encouragement and finding attention and

attraction in an older woman who enjoys treating Ursula as a sexual being as well. This relationship with Winifred has been described by Lawrence himself and others as perverted, in the sense that the lesbianism itself is not perverted in the traditional meaning of the word, but rather that “the way in which her capacity for relationship is in itself distorted” (Worthen, 47). Lawrence experiences the relationship between the two women as a way to alter the worldview of the young Ursula and “bring her rather cruelly into the adult world” (Worthen, 47). It is, therefore, simply a narrative device of Lawrence’s and puts the experience into a category where it has no expectations of becoming anything permanent or anything more than an experiment. However, Lawrence’s portrayal of the male-to-male love that Gerald and Birkin share is significantly different. “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” (Dix, 93). The lengthy and graphic descriptions of the chemistry and electricity that the two men share, even though they sometimes disagree with one another on a spiritual and social level, prove that the connection between the two men is valued highly, or at least higher, than the connection between the two women in *The Rainbow*. Accordingly, the portrayal of the two connections and the contrast between them is a clear result of Lawrence’s own background and feelings towards the subjects.

In *Women in Love* the subject of love and sexuality is portrayed through a more spiritual way than before, as the spiritual connections of the characters appear to be as important, if not more important, than the physical aspects. If one could say that *The Rainbow* was written about love and marriage in a traditional sense, it would also be true that *Women in Love* approaches the topic of love in a slightly different way. The essence of the novel is clear through the symbolic use of vocabulary, most evident in the portrayal of Birkin. The symbolism and use of spiritual imagery in various scenes makes up for the sexuality of other scenes throughout the novel (Pritchard, 86). The way Birkin approaches the topic of love and marriage is quite different from others in the novel. He sees love as a meaningless human emotion and “attempts to dismiss the merely human and conscious emotion of love in favour of the preconscious forces” (Pritchard, 93). This becomes a certain obsession of his in his relationship with Ursula, who does not quite understand his whole objective but dismisses it as an “indirect and pretentious avowal of love” (Pritchard, 93). Birkin’s spiritual inclinations are mostly in regard to marriage and love, but they also affect other aspects of his life. He believes

strongly in a higher being and that this plane of life is only a platform from which to achieve a higher and ultimate life of spirituality. Birkin is apprehensive and disgusted by Ursula's demands of love and the marital situation "where (male) individuality is smothered by feminine possessiveness" (Pritchard, 97). Unlike what was undoubtedly more common at the time the novel was written as well as today, Lawrence makes Birkin out to be much more interested in spiritual relationships and connections rather than the physical and sexual aspects of love and relationships which was more often considered a female concern. To Birkin, marriage and love sound mundane and uninteresting and therefore he looks for something more significant.

In his "Prologue to *Women in Love*", Lawrence states that Birkin "in his most passionate moments of spiritual enlightenment ... would pour out his soul for the world, there was in him a capacity to jeer at all his own righteousness and spirituality, justly and sincerely to make a mock of it all", but while these feelings were prominent on a spiritual level, he still desired sensuality and sexual relations in spite of himself (57). This emphasises the idea that spiritual and emotional connection is considered of more value than sexual connections in *Women in Love*.

While the character of Birkin does express a magnitude of ideas regarding love in a spiritual sense, he also expresses thoughts on polarity that contrast his own ideas and exposes his own confusion. It has often been speculated that Birkin is the purest representation of Lawrence's own thoughts and feelings on this matter and that can easily be ratified. "Lawrence based all his theories on the complicated concept of duality" (Dix, 54). Birkin muses about the way he is physically attracted to Ursula and how his future is bound to hers, while also experiencing the intensity of his spiritual ideas and feelings regarding their situation. His confusion about his feelings and the separation of the physical and the spiritual is highly influenced by the notion of duality and polarity. The essence of his feelings towards relationships is the idea that man and women are separate and individual but can come completely together in a relationship, where they can accomplish the complete unity and wholeness while not being merged or submitted to one another and still maintaining their separateness throughout. For him, it is important that both individuals are pure and whole and are perfectly polarised, without any interference from outside forces.

There is only the pure duality of polarisation, each one free from any contamination of the other. In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate,

but perfectly polarised. Each has a single, separate being, with its own laws. The man has pure freedom, the woman hers. Each acknowledges the perfection of the polarised sex-circuit. Each admits the different nature in the other. (WIL, 173)

Birkin's feelings regarding this are made very evident throughout the novel, especially in regards to his relationship with Ursula. Birkin is sure that Ursula does not understand the concepts that he believes in, but is still persistent in attempting to get her to understand and agree with his beliefs. Throughout the novel he makes several attempts, but he eventually wants to marry her despite her being unable to fully agree with him on this matter. He puts his ideas of polarity aside in order to marry Ursula. Their marriage is far from traditional, but Birkin is willing to tell Ursula that he loves her and compromises on some of his ideals in order to get her to agree to his way of marriage. However, the way Ursula's own ideas about marriage and love have changed throughout the course of the two novels, her own thoughts cannot exactly be considered traditional, and therefore it is not impossible to think that she could become a believer of the duality of polarisation. These ideas could quite possibly be an accurate portrayal of Lawrence's own ideas, though the way they are expressed by Birkin in a confused manner leads to the assumption that Lawrence himself was unsure about it all.

Lawrence uses the relationship between Ursula's sister Gudrun and Gerald Crich to contrast Ursula and Birkin's relationship to portray the latter as the superior type of relationship. As Ursula and Birkin's relationship can hardly be considered traditional, making the people closest to them experience a much more old fashioned relationship, Lawrence manages to portray Birkin and Ursula's relationship as a better, more idyllic way to love. Gerald and Gudrun share a purely physical love, it is passionate and sensational and they both enjoy that aspect of it. However, there is little spiritual connection between them, certainly nowhere near the type the spirituality between Birkin and Ursula. The lack of spirituality and focus on the physical aspects of their relationship can easily be understood to be due to Gerald being practical in nature in combination with his childhood experiences that undoubtedly conformed him into a more careful, more traditional person. Gudrun also expresses some confusion at her sister's feelings and behaviour and it is quite clear that the choices Ursula has made would never be right for Gudrun. The way Gudrun and Gerald's relationship ends, with Gerald's death, makes the superiority of the other couple's relationship even clearer. It

shows that if Gerald and Gudrun had only followed Birkin and Ursula's example, they might have been able to make it. This makes the implied inferiority of Gerald and Gudrun a clear contrast with the better, more spiritual relationship between Ursula and Birkin.

Lady Chatterley's Lover

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence approaches the topic of women and female sexuality in a significantly different way than in his previous novels. It is discussed in a much more open manner as well as the sexual experience of a young lady is normalised and expected. The novel also has much more crude descriptions of sexual activity, both the acts themselves as well as the emotions surrounding them. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a prime example of a highly controversial attempt to convey female sexuality, as a great portion of the novel is seen through female eyes, but the author's approach to female sexuality is from a male perspective. When the novel is approached from a twenty-first century feminist viewpoint it is evident that the author is clearly male and has a limited insight into the inner workings of women. The ideas that are intended to be a female character's attitude towards sexual relations would appear to be solely based on the understanding and the experiences that the male author writing it possessed. Female sexuality is vaguely and inaccurately portrayed and most of the sexual encounters described between Connie and Mellors tend to be male-oriented. In addition, women are described several times in the novel to have absolutely minimal interest in sexual matters and are portrayed to only want to take part in them in order to please a lover, which is a misconception that was extremely common at the time the novel was written. When the perspective is Connie's and descriptions of sexual encounters are from her point of view, the descriptions are very different from what a current day woman would expect a woman to be thinking. As a result, the novel has an interesting approach to the topic of female sexuality that is tinted by the male perspective of its author.

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence's society has moved on to a place where the female characters are expected to be experienced sexually and to have had love affairs before getting married. The attitude towards pre-marital sex and sexual experience in Lawrence's previous work had been that it was quite important and considered a vital part of a character experiencing happiness and finding oneself. The importance of this is made increasingly obvious in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Connie is a young woman when she is introduced in the novel, but despite her young age she is experienced in the matter of love and sex. Her experience is listed early on, but the reader is reminded throughout the novel that she is not experiencing her first love affair and the encounters of her youth are recollected several times. Her first lover was a

young German man with whom she lived many experiences; her first sexual encounter, her first time falling in love and her first heartbreak when he passed away. It is also made clear that Connie experienced significant freedom in her upbringing, which indicates that the way Lawrence envisions the society of the time as having moved on from the society that is referred to in *The Rainbow*. However, in line with Lawrence's previous writing, it is made evident that these experiences that Connie has had as a young woman had turned her into the person she is and helped her develop into an adult woman ready for marriage.

The language surrounding sexuality in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, especially that of Connie, is much cruder than Lawrence's previous work and offers more explicit descriptions than was generally known at the time. The sexual descriptions and the sexual connotations associated with Connie's affairs are quite explicit and Lawrence allows himself to use wording that he had not been quite so free with previously. These descriptions and the use of explicit language is possibly the main reason why this novel was banned for a long time after its publication and surely played a part in providing Lawrence with the notoriety that has been associated with him ever since. Descriptions such as "...his penis began to stir like a live bird" (LCL, 130) and "she felt his naked flesh against her as he came into her" (LCL, 145) were certainly not common in novels at the time and became a subject of much dispute in the years after the novel's publishing. The jump that he makes from being relatively modest in his sexual language in his previous work such as *The Rainbow* to the explicit language utilised in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* might have been a premeditated change in order to provoke people and start a controversy. Furthermore, it is unlikely that this significant change in language has any relation to the feminist movements of the time and their battle to open up the conversation about female sexuality and move the woman from the shadows to the forefront of these conversations. Alternatively the explicit language is likely to have been a way for Lawrence to attempt to portray his thoughts on the topic in a way that came natural to him and using language he felt was most proficient. It has been speculated that Lawrence had thought to make the novel look at sex from a whole perspective, where it was physical as well as spiritual and portrayed in a way that is full and honest (Gordon, 371). In that sense, the novel's approach to the topic is quite successful if the controversy surrounding the novel is placed in the correct context, for it was not a generally known and talked about topic, especially in this sense. Nonetheless,

it is apparent that the novel's explicit descriptions and increasingly vivid language is a major change in Lawrence's writing style.

Lawrence faced a significant amount of criticism and backlash for his approach to female sexuality in the novel, as the topic of female sexuality was considered taboo and not often discussed as openly as Lawrence does in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Much of the critique at the time it was originally published was focused on the fact that women and their sexuality was not to be talked about in general. In later years much of the criticism was also in regards to his approach to the topic, most notably the fact that he, a man, was attempting to write about sex from a female perspective. As Malraux says, "Female sexuality escapes him, the sexual experience not being transmissible from one sex to the other" (56).

Lady Chatterley's Lover conveys a significant contrast between the experiences of the different genders in sex and approaches the matter of sex through a gendered lens. Sex and sexuality is largely described with the interest of maintaining a certain distance between the way the different genders experience it. Descriptions of sex based on Connie's experience, or from her perspective, are indicative of the apparent distinction between her interest in sexual affairs and her male counterpart's interest, for her interest is significantly more than in the male descriptions. The men who are presented in the novel, especially Mellors, are portrayed to believe themselves entitled to sex and that a woman should follow and do everything the man wants without ever considering what the woman herself might want. Other men in the novel are less inclined towards sex, for instance Tommy Dukes, who expresses a limited interest in any kind of physical relationship with a woman. These different views of the men in the novel towards sex provides a contrast with how the attitude towards women and their sexual experiences in the novel is expressed. The feelings and attitudes of women towards sex and sexuality is not as explicitly stated or even touched upon in as distinct a way as the men's are. It is however a great topic of conversation for the men, as seen in both conversations of Mellors and Tommy Dukes. These men talk extensively about women and their sexualities and their attitude towards it, but it is rare occasion that a woman approaches the same topic with the same level of openness, or even at all, despite belonging to the gender that is the subject of discussion. It can therefore be quite interesting to note what the male characters say or how they describe the female ones.

Many male characters in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, most notably the character of Mellors, express a deep discontent toward women and especially the modern woman who stands up for herself and has her own beliefs and follows her heart. However he does exude a sense of entitlement toward women as well as righteousness in regard to his previous experiences with women and female sexuality. He gives explicit descriptions of his previous love affairs and expresses a deep bitterness toward the women that he has had relationships with. In his first two relationships, the women were portrayed as having a lack of sexual interest towards Mellors which led him to marrying his first wife, out of no more feeling than simply because she wanted him. "That was what I wanted: a woman who wanted me to fuck her" (LCL, 177). When describing the relationship he had with his first wife, it is coloured by his frustration towards her and her sexuality. His frustrations were mostly focused on the fact that she never managed to climax at the same time as he did, as well as his dissatisfaction in her taking too long to have an orgasm, while at the same time he expressed no direct desire to help her in that department, as he only thought about his own pleasure. Mellors portrays a profound resentment towards women and female sexuality. He is convinced that women either do not have any interest in sex and only put up with it for their husband's sake, or that women are too interested in it and want too much sex. He also believes that most women are lesbians and he feels that he has suffered greatly at their hand. "When I get with a Lesbian woman, whether she knows she's one or not, I see red" (LCL, 223). Mellors' opinion of women seems to be quite low and he only desires to have them in his life when they make *him* the priority of their lives and put *him* before all else. These expressions of his feelings make him seem quite selfish and above all misogynistic, but an interesting contrast to his character is the character of Tommy Dukes.

Tommy Dukes expresses feelings regarding women and female sexuality are in a way similar to those of Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love*. Tommy's feelings differ significantly from Mellors' feelings regarding this subject as well as the female characters' own thoughts on the matter. Tommy is a friend of Connie's husband Clifford and Connie has a discussion with Tommy in which he makes a clear point on his views on the relationship between gender and sexuality. In Tommy's opinion, a woman whom a man views as an intellectual cannot coexist as his lover at the same time. "A woman wants you to like her and talk to her, and at the same time love her and desire her; and it seems to me the two things are mutually exclusive" (LCL, 59). When

Connie attempts to dig a little deeper as to why Tommy feels this way, he explains that a woman with whom he enjoys a conversation or an intellectual connection or bond, cannot possibly evoke any kind of sexual feeling in him. This might be a sign of his own sexuality, asexuality even, which at the time did not exist as a concept. This is also a way in which women are portrayed as unimportant entities that should only be used for one purpose at a time, be it intellectual or sexual. Tommy's views and feelings towards women and female sexuality are also contrasted with Rupert Birkin's thoughts and ideas in *Women in Love*, specifically in regards to his views on polarity and the spiritual aspects of love affairs. For Tommy, the physical act of sex is not at all connected to the way he experiences spiritual connection and love with a woman. For him, the two are completely separate and cannot become intertwined in any case. He does not see himself giving in to a love of that kind, because to him it is impossible. This does not seem too far away from the feelings that Birkin has in *Women in Love*, where sex is a completely separate entity from romantic love, while both are an important aspect of life. Without it being explicitly stated, as it has been insinuated that Birkin's ideas reflected those of Lawrence himself, it could be assumed that Tommy's ideas also in some way also parallel Lawrence's own feelings toward the matter.

The novel offers a contrast between Connie's lovers and her husband and in doing so attempts to show how sex can influence a marriage for both parties. The marriage between Connie and Clifford is described as intimate and full of love for a while, in spite of his disability. For a time his disability did not affect Connie in a negative way and she did not feel a lack of intimacy in the relationship. Connie and Clifford were initially described as intellectually compatible and in full accord with enjoying each other's company in a non-physical way. However, after a while, Connie begins to feel isolated and seeks some physical company. Her first affair with Michaelis is strictly physical on her part, only to satisfy a sexual need that her husband was unable to. Even though Connie never considered pursuing her relationship with Michaelis in any way more than simply sexually, after her affair with him, Connie first begins to disconnect herself from Clifford by hiring a nurse to take care of him in her place. After Mellors is introduced into the story, Connie becomes even more disconnected from Clifford as she gets to share a both physical and some intellectual connection with him which, though limited, is more than enough for someone as isolated and lonely as she is. This is clear in the way the two men are described in distinct ways. "Clifford Chatterley

is not only ‘unmanned’ but reduced to a monstrous infant, while Mellors is a complete man – potent, worker, gentleman-looking, educated – as ‘devil’ as well” (Pritchard, 187). Clifford is also affected by the affair that Connie has with Mellors as he begins to feel unwelcome in his marriage and loses the emotional and intellectual connection he had previously held with his wife.

The character development of Connie is significantly tied to her approach to her sexuality and it is formed and developed by her sexual relationships and experiences. References to Connie’s premarital lovers and extra marital affairs throughout the novel serve as reminders as to how they had affected her. Connie develops into a stronger, rounder person and the dynamics of her character become fuller and clearer. “Connie’s progress towards Mellors takes the shape of a significant succession of failures in relationships, firstly as a girl in Germany, then with Clifford and finally with the playwright Michaelis” (Worthen, 112). André Malraux claims in his analysis of Lawrence’s characters that the character of Connie pursues the affair with Mellors in order to become closer to her true self, to fulfil her true desires and to go after what she truly wants for herself (57). This is consistent with Lawrence’s previous characters’ development, and how the female characters prominent in Lawrence’s novels find their true selves through sexual encounters and premarital experiences. Furthermore, Connie also remembers and actively thinks about her previous sexual experiences and is not ashamed to admit that they happened. She also believes that both parties are entitled to enjoy themselves in sex and that it should be a mutual affair. The progression of the character of Connie throughout the novel is therefore closely tied to her sexual activity and experience and forms a large portion of how the character is presented.

A large section of descriptions regarding Connie’s sexual activity and her feelings towards her affair with Mellors are tinted by a desire not for the actual sexual encounters but what these encounters might bring her that her husband cannot provide. At the time the novel was written, a woman of Connie’s age and status would be expected to be having and raising children. However, Lawrence has never been one for writing explicitly about what society expects and as such he creates this dilemma for Connie. She is a married woman of a certain age and social status but her husband is unable to give her children. Connie’s affairs can be viewed as not only driven by her desire for a physical and sexual connection with Mellors, but also, for a while, the possibility of conceiving and having his child. Some of the descriptions of her feelings,

such as the way she feels him in her womb and bowels, indicate that they are rooted in her desire to have a child, his child, or any child. She thinks: “Another self was alive in her, burning molten and soft in her womb and bowels, and with this self she adored him” (LCL, 147). This is followed by: “‘If I had a child!’ she thought to herself; ‘if I had him inside me as a child!’” (LCL, 147). This could be Lawrence’s way of rationalising the affair to his contemporaries who would possibly be more tolerant towards a woman desiring children rather than a woman who simply desires sexual freedom and taking control of her own body. The kind of affair that Connie and Mellors share would not be a common topic of discussion in Lawrence’s society where people would rather be unhappy but look happy than actually pursuing their own happiness. “And so it did, as if her womb, that had always been shut, had opened and filled with new life, almost a burden, yet lovely” (LCL, 147). Furthermore, in such a society the inability to have children was a topic that was accepted as a problem in a woman’s life. Therefore it might be a reasonable assumption to think that Lawrence was attempting to make Connie’s affair more understandable in his contemporary society while not removing any of the sexual connotations and descriptions that proved so shocking. Needless to say, this attempt did not persuade many to approve of the novel but rather helped its adversaries to label the novel as perverted. However, the way these descriptions all point to the aspects of her marriage that her husband cannot provide for her efficiently, it can easily be understood as a way for her to extract what she wants.

Conclusion

The British literary scene was unaccustomed to openly discussing women and female sexuality at the time D.H. Lawrence started his writing career. In that time, the early twentieth century, women were generally not expected to be experienced in love or sex by the time they became wives. It was not accepted in all societies that a woman would experiment and explore sex and their own sexuality as young women today might. Despite the social expectations towards women, D.H. Lawrence wrote about these aspects from a viewpoint not often seen at the time. Most of the female characters in Lawrence's novels have in common that they are not held back by the barriers of society and its notion that women should not desire or experience sex. The fact that Lawrence wrote about women and their sexuality opened up discussion on the matter and might have affected how the topic was approached in later literature. Lawrence's writing style and the way he wrote about these topics advanced throughout the years as his own life views and experiences broadened.

Through the female characters of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence manages to make it clear that the old traditional thought that a woman should not be sexually experienced at the time of her marriage was not one of his beliefs. The way Lawrence begins to embrace the importance of sexual experience for a woman to find her own path is the inception of a developing theme within his novels regarding the sexual experiences of a woman. He made several daring statements in the novel that led to much controversy, including the lesbian love scene. When Lawrence continued with the story in *Women in Love* he advanced the female characters even further by addressing the topic of love and sex in a slightly different way. The expansion of his approach to love, the inclusion of other types of love than only romantic love, as well as the spiritual aspects of love is evidently a progression from his previous work. The female characters in *Women in Love* are also much more independent and stronger characters with a more advanced narrative, indicating that Lawrence drew inspiration from his female contemporaries who were starting to fight for their rights as women. *Women in Love* interestingly contrasts with *The Rainbow* in certain matters, most specifically in regards to non-heteronormative sexual affairs and by implying the vastly different views that people had on the topic.

Lady Chatterley's Lover was one of the most controversial novels published in the early twentieth century and was labelled obscene by many. The obscenities that the

novel has are mostly based around the fact that it tells the story of a woman who enjoys sex and finds it outside of marriage when her husband is unable to satisfy her needs. One of the main differences between Lawrence's writing *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and his previous novels is the use of more explicit language and words that were frowned upon. However, in many other ways, Lawrence writes about women and female sexuality in this novel in a quite similar fashion to his other novels, for it certainly focuses on the importance of premarital experience and how it affects the development of a person.

The progression of female sexuality through experience is a significant aspect of Lawrence's portrayal of women; *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* all have very clear examples of this. The portrayal of women as passionate people that can express love in many ways, as well as enjoy its physical and sexual side, is a prominent and ground breaking feature in Lawrence's fiction.

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