



# A Queer Feminist Reading of Women in Love by D.H. Lawrence: Lesbian Desire and Psychological Turmoil

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**Abstract**— In *Women in Love*, D. H. Lawrence entwined the lives of two sisters, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, and their relationships with two men, Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich, where Lawrence explores the intricacies of love and human relationships in *Women in Love*. The story revolves around themes of desire, existential reflection, and the fight for individual individuality in romantic relationships and is set in early 20th-century England. Through a queer feminist lens, this essay examines the psychological agony and latent lesbian desire in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). It contends that an undercurrent of same-sex desire suppressed by hetero-normative patriarchy is shown in Lawrence's depiction of female relationships, especially that of Gudrun Brangwen. Gudrun's strong emotional connection to her sister Ursula and her attraction to the feminine sculptor Loerke imply an implicit rejection of conventional male-dominated relationships, even as her hostile relationship with Gerald Crich devolves into violence and emotional collapse. Based on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theories on homosocial desire and Adrienne Rich's concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality,' this study reinterprets Gudrun's psychological struggle and emotional separation as manifestations of suppressed lesbian potential rather than pathology. In the end, the book becomes a place of conflict between queer female subjectivity and male-centered narrative control.



**Keywords**— Lesbian, Queer Theory, Heterosexuality, Female Intimacy, Gender and Sexuality, Repression

## Introduction

*Women in Love* (1920) by D.H. Lawrence examines sexual and emotional interactions in a post-war modern society when social standards and gender roles are changing significantly. A thorough examination shows deep undercurrents of lesbian desire, especially in the emotional and psychological lives of the female characters, even if the work is frequently read via its heterosexual couplings. *Women in Love* exposes the diagnosing and repression of same-sex female intimacy via the prism of lesbian and queer feminist theory. It also shows how these desires result from a rejection of heteronormative expectations and patriarchal structures. This essay examines how Lawrence's depiction

of female psychological distress, especially in Gudrun Brangwen, functions as a response to the suppression of lesbian potential as well as a symptom of it. *Women in Love* (1920) by D. H. Lawrence is a sophisticated examination of contemporary sexuality, identity, and human relationships. The book, which is set in the years following World War I, depicts the mental instability of a changing society. Its main issues are the emotional upheaval that its characters go through and the unusual dynamics of desire, especially as they relate to the female leads. The existence of lesbian desire is implied in the book rather than explicitly stated, particularly in Gudrun Brangwen's character. D. H. Lawrence portrays this as an acknowledgment of profound

psychological turmoil and the breakdown of conventional relational systems rather than as a celebration of sexual emancipation. Through its characters, the book delves deeply into psychological, emotional, and sexual intricacies, especially in the relationships between women and between males. The novel's psychological agony and confusing portrayal of lesbian desire, particularly in Gudrun Brangwen's connection with Ursula Brangwen and her interactions with Loerke and other women, are among its most interesting undercurrents.

### **Female Intimacy and Repressed Desire**

The closeted type of same-sex attraction is suggested by Lawrence's portrayal of profound, almost erotic, emotional intimacy between women, particularly Gudrun and Ursula, even though he never explicitly depicts a lesbian connection. Lawrence describes the sisters' shared "terrible naked intimacy," a term that goes beyond the typical vocabulary of familial closeness to imply a strong, possibly erotic emotional connection. Their relationships with males are frequently displaced or undermined by this emotionally charged and exclusive form of intimacy. Such female bonding moments are a type of erotic triangulation, according to lesbian theory, in which men are rendered inconsequential or even invasive. It is revealed that the women, Gudrun in particular, are psychologically independent but incredibly tormented between their inner impulses and the conventional constraints of heterosexuality.

### **Gudrun as a Lesbian Figure: Subversion and Symbolism**

Perhaps the most subversive character in the book is Gudrun Brangwen. She is emotionally evasive, artistically ambitious, and fiercely autonomous. According to a lesbian or queer interpretation, Gudrun is a woman who defies patriarchal authority in both her sexual and intellectual pursuits. Her violent, hostile relationship with Gerald Crich serves as a metaphor for how heterosexual companionship falls short of offering emotional fulfillment or personal freedom. Her eventual attraction to Loerke, a man who is effeminate and may be queer, serves as a coded diversion from the heterosexual narrative. Gudrun defies the conventional paradigm of masculine dominance by selecting Loerke over Gerald and looks for a companion whose gender identity is unclear. As a lesbian surrogate, Loerke functions as a symbolic substitute for female companionship from a queer standpoint, signifying a type of non-heteronormative desire that defies binary gender norms. Furthermore, Gudrun's emotional impenetrability and psychological distance from masculine desire have frequently been construed as frigidity through Freudian or misogynistic perspectives. However, a lesbian

interpretation reinterprets this disengagement as opposition to mandatory heterosexuality, a concept later defined by Adrienne Rich. It's possible that Gudrun's incapacity to emotionally surrender to males is due to a repressive cultural context that prevents her from recognizing her genuine desires, rather than psychological instability.

### **Lawrence's Ambivalence: Lesbianism as Threat and Fascination**

Female freedom and same-sex intimacy both appealed to and troubled D.H. Lawrence. He handles lesbian desire in a contradictory way. On the one hand, he portrays it as a rejection of the "natural" relationship between men and women, a form of psychological sickness. However, compared to the heterosexual couples in the book, his depiction of female bonding is strong and frequently more emotionally genuine. In contrast to Ursula's connection with Birkin, which is continuously hampered by his philosophical abstractions, Ursula and Gudrun's relationship is significantly more emotionally complex and robust. An enigmatic sensuality that suggests repressed homoeroticism permeates Gudrun's moments with Loerke. Instead of resolving these conflicts, Lawrence leaves them open, allowing for queer interpretation. This ambivalence, according to lesbian feminists, is a reflection of larger cultural anxieties over female sexuality that is not under male control. In addition to exposing the boundaries of his imagination, Lawrence's uneasiness with lesbianism, which is evident in his propensity to associate it with psychological disorders, unintentionally creates a queer subtext that defies resolution.

### **Psychological Turmoil in the Modern Individual**

The characters in the book are always looking for relationships and internal meaning, especially Gudrun, Gerald, Ursula, and Birkin. Desperation and fragmentation are common outcomes of this existential quest. Perhaps the most complex figure in terms of psychology is Gudrun, who is an artist. Her independence and intelligence are combined with a cold, frequently harsh demeanor toward other people. Manipulation, emotional aloofness, and ultimately violence characterize her relationship with Gerald Crich as it descends into mutual destruction. Gudrun's psychological decline is depicted by Lawrence through her inner monologue and symbolic images. She exhibits a 'passionate repudiation of everything,' displaying a self-aware yet emotionally estranged personality. Intimacy is replaced by her creative energy, implying that her psychological distress results from her incapacity to establish fulfilling, long-lasting interpersonal relationships.

### **Female Intimacy and Lesbian Undertones**

The connections between women hold a stronger emotional and psychological force, even though the narrative is

centered around two heterosexual couples, Gudrun and Gerald and Ursula and Birkin. Despite being based on sisters, Gudrun and Ursula's relationship is tainted with conflict, jealousy, and emotional dependence. Lawrence describes their "naked intimacy," a term that conflates erotic attraction with familial love. More significantly, Gudrun's encounters with women, especially in the book's later sections, suggest that established male-female dynamics are being rejected. Her relationship with the effeminate sculptor Loerke implies that Gudrun looks for understanding and company away from male hostility. According to Lawrence, Loerke is a metaphorical link between male and female sexuality because he is "delicate" and "strangely sensual." Gudrun's emotional distance from men and her preference for affection over physical passion suggest a coded lesbianism, or at the very least, a psychological displacement of conventional desire, even though she is not explicitly lesbian.

### **Lawrence's Ambivalent Treatment of Lesbian Desire**

D.H. Lawrence found female sexuality, particularly when it challenged male authority, to be both fascinating and unsettling. Lesbian desire is neither completely accepted nor categorically denounced in *Women in Love*. Instead, it is presented as a component of a larger modernist issue: the limitations of heteronormative relationships, the crisis of intimacy, and the fragmentation of identity. Gudrun's potential homosexual inclinations are presented as a sign of deeper dissatisfaction rather than as freeing. Her attraction to Loerke (and implicitly to other women) and her rejection of male control are not a positive confirmation of same-sex love, but rather the result of her psychological need for autonomy. Lawrence's own effort to comprehend and portray sexuality in all its complexity without relying on simplistic moral judgments is reflected in this.

### **Psychological Turmoil in the Novel**

There is a lot of psychological and emotional conflict in *Women in Love*. Characters like Rupert Birkin and Gudrun are searching for identity and purpose in a post-World War I society where conventional norms are eroding. They experience internal struggle and alienation, which manifests as an identity crisis. Gudrun in particular shows symptoms of psychological instability; she frequently expresses malice, anger, and existential dissatisfaction, and her relationship with Gerald Crich turns extremely destructive. The conflict between intellectualism and instinct, particularly in sexual relationships, is frequently shown by Lawrence. Characters experience psychological distress and internal division as a result, leading to a battle within the mind and body.

### **Lesbian Themes and Women's Relationships**

Although a lesbian relationship in contemporary terms is never depicted overtly in *Women in Love*, there are significant homoerotic undertones, especially in the relationship between Gudrun and Ursula. The sisters enjoy a deep, emotionally intense relationship that may occasionally be contentious. Their relationship implies a profound emotional tie that occasionally excludes men, although it is not being explicitly sexual. Lawrence describes their relationships with passion, implying a fascination and possessiveness that goes beyond basic sisters. Loerke is an effeminate sculptor whose descriptions subvert conventional notions of masculinity. He is not as overtly masculine as Gerald, which is one of the reasons Gudrun is attracted to him. Her psychological battle with male authority and possibly a dormant yearning for non-heteronormative relationships is shown in her rejection of the male-dominated sexual norms exemplified by Gerald and her attraction to Loerke, who may also be queer-coded. Lawrence makes reference to Gudrun's disinterest in conventional male sexuality in her psychological profile, as well as her underlying want for a different form of emotional bond, possibly with women. Lawrence portrays lesbianism as a sign of the modern woman's revolt against a world ruled by men, even though he does not celebrate it (he frequently sees it with a sort of Freudian distrust). Gudrun and Ursula are examples of educated, self-reliant, and sexually conscious women. Internally and socially, tension is created by their defiance of traditional female norms. The book exposes the psychological costs of rebellion while criticizing the patriarchal system that suppresses women's sexual autonomy. D.H. Lawrence found female sexuality uncontrollable by men to be both fascinating and unsettling. He portrays lesbian relationships as a range of human experiences that defy social standards, but he does not entirely support them. His depiction of lesbian female characters is nuanced; they are frequently strong and self-reliant but also lonely and mentally ill.

### **CONCLUSION**

Through a lesbian or queer theoretical lens, *Women in Love* portrays a deeper struggle between the cultural standards of heterosexual patriarchy, suppressed lesbian desire, and female autonomy, in addition to the psychological depth of its characters. In addition to being a problematic modern woman, Gudrun Brangwen also becomes a symbol of resistance to the male-centered framework of desire. Her mental anguish is not only personal; it is also a political reaction to the marginalization and denial of lesbian potential in early 20th-century literature and culture. Paradoxically, Lawrence's inability to adequately describe

lesbian love creates a fertile ground for queer analysis, one that validates the existence of female same-sex desire, no matter how hidden. The emotional pain of contemporary people struggling with belonging, sexuality, and connection is dramatized by D.H. Lawrence. The novel examines the disruptive power of female desire that exists outside of male control through Gudrun Brangwen's character. The novel's lesbian undertones emphasize the psychological and emotional emptiness that plagues Lawrence's characters rather than offering a progressive perspective on sexuality. In the end, Lawrence presents lesbianism as a reflection of the psychological turmoil that permeates the post-war society, when love in all its manifestations is becoming more and more elusive, rather than as a remedy. Lawrence examines how advancement, emotional detachment, and the pursuit of meaning can lead to psychological anguish. In this context, non-heteronormative urges and lesbian overtones emerge as manifestations of self-discovery and rebellion among women such as Gudrun. Lawrence portrays lesbianism as a component of a larger issue of intimacy and identity in a fractured world rather than as a cause for celebration.

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