Women in Love Study Guide

Women in Love by D. H. Lawrence

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen are sisters who live in Beldover England. Ursula is a school teacher and Gudrun is an art teacher who has made a reputation for herself as an artist. The two women are in their twenties, and they are looking for love. When they meet Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich, respectively, they struggle with their lovers and with their own natures, to try to make the marriages that will fulfill them against the dissolution and degeneration of their industrial times.

Ursula and Gudrun are used to living their own lives after their own fashions, and marriage is an oppressive thought to both of them. They could never marry the way their parents have. They enjoy their liberty too much. Ursula meets Rupert Birkin, the school inspector for her district, and Gudrun meets Gerald Crich, the son of a mine-owner, and they each begin their respective courtships. Rupert Birkin is already in a relationship with Hermione Roddice, a wealthy aristocratic woman, but she is highly intellectual and Birkin resents how she wants to know everything in her mind, without having any physical knowledge of things, and he begins to wind the relationship down by denying and contradicting and otherwise rebelling against Hermione.

The two couples are drawn together by a number of incidents: Gerald's father is dying, and as he prepares to take over the mines, he confronts the problem of the business, and has to learn how to be more and more efficient in the extraction of coal from the earth. Lawrence describes him as a Northern type, blond and vigorous, and he is somewhat machinelike as well, in how he tunes the business to the extraction of coal. This process wears down his spirit, though, and he seeks some quality of Gudrun to rekindle his humanity. Gudrun is a second child, aloof, ironic, and highly skilled in making art—but she does not have the flexibility to accommodate the demands Gerald makes on her: she can give him the peace he wants, but it costs her a highly-uncomfortable period of self-awareness. She struggles with him, and their relationship really begins when she strikes him across the face over a trifling comment he makes: he allows her this act of superiority, and her violence even seems to prove her vigor to him, but it costs him some self-esteem as well, to let her trample him, and he remains competitive.

Ursula and Birkin are different, more flexible but also more intellectual. Birkin knows what he wants in a woman. He wants a relationship beyond personal love where two people trust each other so much and trust themselves so much that they can remain committed to each other and through their commitment to each other, allow each person to remain who they are. He wants a woman to accept him in his own personality and he wants to do this for a woman in turn. Ursula and Birkin debate these ideas to the point of frustration, and Ursula ultimately extracts the simple statement from him. He tells her that he loves her and she is satisfied. But she also knows what he means and they share this abstracted devotion to the universe through each other.

The book comes to its climax in the trip the two couples make to the Alps, where Ursula and Birkin are setting out on their world travels (they have renounced their jobs in

England, and are going to look for a place where they can foster their relationship itself) and Gerald and Gudrun are entrenching themselves in their opposition against each other. As Gerald starts to really try to make Gudrun submit, she befriends a homosexual German artist names Loerke, who is a guttersnipe, someone without any power or position, but a deep reserve of irony and sarcasm with which to comment on everyone else's illusions. When Gerald gets exasperated and strikes Loerke, he then starts to strangle Gudrun, and he is satisfied by the idea of strangling her, it feels like the absolute act that will fulfill him. However, Loerke comes to and makes an ironic statement. Gerald can see the foolishness of the act and so he releases Gudrun and walks out into the snow, where he ultimately freezes to death.

Ursula and Birkin had left Gerald and Gudrun in the mountains together, but they return, and Birkin laments the death of his close friend. He had tried to have a friendship surpassing friendship with Gerald—he wanted to be nearly married to his friend, but Ursula tries to make him believe that one marriage is enough, and that she will be what Birkin needs in the world. Gudrun follows Loerke back to Germany, and continues to practice her art, but it seems by the end of the novel that she has abandoned the hope of a final and fulfilling love like her sister has with Birkin.

Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

In Chapter 1, Gudrun Brangwen is back from her travels, visiting her sister Ursula at their parents' home in Beldover. They are talking about marriage, and neither one of them can imagine marrying. Ursula has even turned down some good proposals—but they can't imagine being bound to anyone for good.

The two women go to see a wedding of one of the younger Crich girls, and they have an aversion to the commoners who gather for the spectacle. At the church, the Criches all arrive, with Rupert Birkin, and Hermione. Gudrun is moved by the sight of Gerald, and Ursula is moved by Birkin, although it seems like a tragedy to her that he should be so stuck with Hermione. They have a perverse relationship, and are always fighting each other off.

When the bride arrives, the groom has not arrived yet, and a panic runs through the crowd, until the groom's carriage comes into view. He leaps out of the carriage and has a foot race to the altar with the bride.

Gudrun asks Ursula what she thinks of Rupert Birkin, and she says it's appalling how he gives himself to everyone. "One must discriminate," Gudrun says. (p. 68). When Gudrun sees Gerald come into view at the end, she cannot stand it—she wants to be alone with the "strange, sharp inoculation that had changed the whole temper of her blood" (p. 70).

In Chapter 2, at the wedding reception at Shortlands, Birkin makes a point of taking care of Mrs. Crich, who is put out by so many strangers being in her house. Birkin says that people don't matter. She asks him the identity of various people, and he tells her when he can.

Gerald and Hermione begin a conversation about race and nationality in Europe, and whether they are the same thing, but Birkin does not join it: the conversation is out of place here, but his resistance bothers Hermione, who wants to draw him out, and possess him. The bridegroom says that he was late on account of a missing button hook. Birkin tells Gerald that he expects him to be able to "to act spontaneously on one's impulses" (p. 82) as opposed to doing "the collective thing" (p. 82).

In Chapter 3, Birkin finds Ursula in her classroom at the end of the school day, and he gives her students instruction on drawing catkins, the strange colors and shapes of the various organs. Ursula admires his way with the students, but then Hermione comes in and noses in on the lesson. Birkin shows the catkins to Hermione, who never noticed them before, and Hermione invited Ursula and Gudrun to stay at Breadalby, her estate.

Hermione asks Birkin whether the children are better for being raised to consciousness, but Birkin says that consciousness comes to them nevertheless. Hermione says that she thinks the students would be better off without the knowledge they are getting,

which only ruins them. Birkin turns on her , and attacks her for wanting knowledge of everything, but not letting things live. He says that she only wants to see the world she recognizes from her ideas. Against knowledge, Birkin says that he wants sensuality, spontaneity, a blood knowledge that erases what the head knows. "You are the real devil who won't let life exist," he tells Hermione. (p. 93). Hermione, not to undaunted, renews her invitation to Ursula and Gudrun. When they leave, Ursula starts to cry bitterly, but she can't tell whether it's for joy or sorrow.

In Chapter 4, Ursula and Gudrun go for a walk to Willey Water, and Gerald runs out and dives into the lake. Ursula and Gudrun says that they envy him his nakedness and his pleasure in swimming—as women they could never do what he had done. Gerald sees them on shore, and is aware of his attractiveness as a male. Ursula says that she has heard that Gerald is putting in a modern electrical plant for the house, and making improvements and modernizations.

Ursula tells Gudrun that Gerald shot his brother as a child, innocently enough, when they were playing with an old gun that went off. Ursula says that they must have been courting the accident, since she could never pull the trigger even on an unloaded gun, if it was pointed at someone. The sisters object to Hermione's treatment of them, her superiority, but they say that they should admire her for using her superiority to invite people like them, who aren't in the highest classes. The sisters agree that what one wants is to strut, to be a swan among geese.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to two main things: the main characters and the authorial tone. The characters—Gerald and Gudrun, Ursula and Birkin, Hermione Roddice, the Criches, are all defined in terms of their opposition to someone else, and the things they want that they can't get. Their oppositions define them, and they run in every direction, so that each character is defined by their opposition to every other character. There are no unisons, or teams, here. There are only slightly disappointed, aggressive individuals, who want what they want.

The first chapter also introduces the reader to the author's tone. Lawrence moves freely into and out of the characters' minds, and articulates things that they themselves would probably not be aware of, if they were people. But he gives picture of the internal workings of their psychology, so that characters are not defined by their social position so much as they are defined by their relation to the power they have as a result of that position, and the things they want to use that power to get. Typically it is love, or some deep satisfaction, that they want from each other, although Ursula and Gudrun are both aloof from their own desires: they are not convinced that marriage is really a good idea. The plot seems to hinge on the question of whether these two women can benefit from close relationships.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to Birkin and his philosophical way of looking at human nature. He wants the uniqueness in a person, the act and way of being that fulfills their

unique situation. Not everyone seems to be qualified for this kind of act, but Birkin says that he expects it of Gerald, and in spite of the "strange enmity between the two men" the book seems to promise that this hope will be the source of some tension and possible fulfillment for the two of them.

In Chapter 3, Birkin's attack on Hermione, who is still, at this point, his lover, is rather brutal, but the two of them are fed up with each other, and it seems that the relationship can't last. Ursula's tears, at the end of the chapter, indicate either a misery for Hermione's sake, that she should suffer Birkin's relentless attack, or perhaps a joy for the honesty with which Birkin has undone Hermione, whom the reader already knows Ursula does not like. This ambivalence widens the resonance of almost all the action in the book, as many characters find themselves in the same position, of having contradictory feelings about their own feelings.

In Chapter 4, the dialogue between Ursula and Gudrun puts a lot of things in perspective. Hermione Roddice, for instance, is both admirable and contemptible, and Ursula and Gudrun both wonder how they are going to make places for themselves in a world filled with people like Hermione and Gerald, who are so free, and the commoners they encountered in chapter 1, who are so vulgar.

Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary

In Chapter 5, Gerald Crich and Rupert Birkin see each other on the train into London. They get to talking, and Birkin says that man wants a new gospel, to renew his industrial circumstance. He says that thing have gotten completely bad...in every way" (p. 106). Birkin has a low opinion of social convention, which puts people in place based on their profitability. He says that he would rather a spiritual purpose than a material one. Birkin asks Gerald whether love is the purpose of his life, and Birkin says that he wants to love. Gerald says that he wants a single woman, but Birkin says that he wants a unique bond with a man as well. All that remains is the marriage with a woman, he says. (p. 109).

Gerald asks Birkin where he stays in London, and Birkin tells Gerald about the artistic crowd he knows, whom he loathes and also tolerates. the narrator says that Birkin's "dislike of mankind, of the mass of mankind, amounted almost to an illness." (p. 112).

In Chapter 6, when Birkin and Gerald meet in the café later that same day, Gerald meets The Pussum, who has a childish lisp. The two of them are somewhat fascinated with each other, and Gerald tells her about his time in the military, and exploring in the Amazon. There is an electricity between Gerald and Pussum, and when Julius, Pussum's boyfriend, comes in, she uses Gerald's presence to humiliate him. She throws her drink in his face, and belittle him in conversation. When Halliday leaves, Pussum tells Gerald that Halliday wanted her to have his child and disappear. Gerald takes care of her by ordering oysters and drinks. When Gerald arrives at Birkin's flat with the others, there is a Hindu man there as butler. Halliday says that he found him on the road starving, and took him in. Gerald sees an African sculpture that reminds him of a fetus "beyond the limits of mental consciousness." (p. 127). When Birkin goes to bed, Gerald ends up in a room with Pussum.

In Chapter 7, in the morning, Pussum is still asleep when Gerald wakes up. Gerald goes out and sees the men crouching around the fireplace naked. They talk about what it might be like, to live someplace where clothes are unnecessary. Gerald asks Birkin for his thoughts about the sculpture of a woman in childbirth, and Birkin says that it is art because "it conveys a simple truth" (p. 133). When Gerald goes back to his room, he sees Pussum as having the "inchoate look of a violated slave, whose fulfillment lies in her further and further violation, made his nerves quiver with acutely desirable sensation" (p. 134). Gerald comes back to the flat for a few nights with Pussum until there is a row, and Gerald almost hits Halliday. Pussum gets his address so that she can touch him for money in the future.

Chapter 8: Ursula and Gudrun visit Breadalby, Hermione's estate. They are shown to their rooms, and they are critical of Hermione and the house, and the talk is "always slightly sententious." (p. 139). The attitude was "mental and very wearying" but the party

—Ursula and Gudrun, Gerald and Birkin, Hermione, an Italian Count, and a young Miss Bradley—keep up the conversation. Hermione's brother shows up, and talk is of Parliament and politics, and conversation turns to the value of education and knowledge again. Hermione and Birkin are opposed to each other, and Hermione seizes the high ground, calling Birkin a little boy when he won't go with the others for a walk. He feels like she is too domineering, and takes all the spontaneity out of things, and the others wish that they hadn't come either.

When Hermione and the others come back, Hermione calls for Birkin, and he shows her the drawing he has been copying, in order to learn it. "I know what centres they live from—what they perceive and feel—the hot, stinging centrality of a goose in the flux of cold water and mud—the curious bitter stinging heat of a goose's blood, entering their own blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire—fire of the cold-burning mud—the lotus mystery." (p. 145).

After dinner, the party smokes, and enjoy anarchic conversation before they play music and dance. They organize tableaux vivants, with each of them dressing up to portray a role from the Biblical story of Ruth, and Ursula and Gudrun make a striking impression on the others.

Later, Gerald asks Birkin about the Brangwens, and Birkin tells him what he knows. They both find the women compelling. Gerald tells Birkin how the affair with Pussum ended, in a near row, and says that he wants to give her money to square the account. Gerald says that some part of him wants something he can't name, and when Birkin says that he might marry, but Gerald distrusts marriage. Birkin says that he believes in it.

When the party agrees to bathe, Ursula and Gudrun have no suits, and Gerald agrees to use a large handkerchief as a loincloth. After bathing, Gerald asks Gudrun why she didn't bathe, and when she says that she didn't like the crowd, he thinks of her as symbolizing the real world, beyond the world he has control of.

The group talks about social distinctions, and the roles people are bound to, and Hermione proposes the equality of all people, but when the crowd has left, Birkin contradicts her, and tells her that people aren't equal at all. When he takes down a book and turns his back to Hermione, she raises a stone paperweight, and hits him on the head with it. She is about to hit him again to kill him, but he turns to her, and now that he is facing her, she is powerless. He leaves Breadalby, and goes into the primroses and takes off all his clothes, walking around, still dazed by the blow.

Chapters 5-8 Analysis

In Chapter 5, the train ride to London give Gerald and Birkin occasion to talk about their feelings about the modern world. Birkin wants to keep to the individual way of seeing things, and not get lost in the mechanicalization of things, whereas Gerald doesn't seem as bothered by things. Birkin seems even a little ridiculous, compared to his friend, who

is more sanguine, and self-contented. His description of the world is a grumpy one, although it is not entirely out of consideration—others have made the same complaints about modernity. Now the book seems to be setting up the question of whether or how Ursula and Gudrun and Birkin and Gerald will be able to satisfy each other.

In Chapter 6, Lawrence's dramatization of Birkin's dissipated crowd is a bit different than the reader might expect, after all the talk about mechanicalized death. These people are trying to be unique, but there is nothing to their uniqueness, they are just being a little vile, and degrading each other with their refusal to elevate their virtues. This does not undermine the electric fire that is playing between Gerald and Pussum, and it is a mark of Gerald's masculinity and his difference from Birkin that he can take Pussum as a lover, that he has that power and that indifference to her dissipation.

Chapter 7 is one of the low points of dissipation in Women in Love. Pussum describes the Bohemian set as "only half men" (p. 136). Gerald's fascination with Pussum is a low passion, and he regrets it soon enough, but he does enjoy the power he has over her, when she is used to the half men. His power is enormous compared with Birkin's but as with everything in this novel, that power is dangerous in its own way, and it seems to be lacking the sensitivity and restraint Birkin stands for.

Chapter 8 brings the opposition between Hermione and Birkin to a head, literally, with the blow Hermione brings down on him. The atmosphere of her house is just a higher version of the Halliday company, with less outright dissolution, and more spiritual fixity and intellectualism, which Birkin says and the others can see, deadens everything. Birkin wants another life than the life he has had with Hermione, and now he is injured, but he is free to try to get it.

Chapters 9-13

Chapters 9-13 Summary

In Chapter 9, Ursula and Gudrun encounter Gerald at a train crossing. His horse is terrified by the noise of the train, but he rides it down, subjugating it to his will. The women are horrified by the horse's pain, but he wants to master it. The women continue walking after the train passes, and the miners debate whether five minutes with Gudrun would be worth a week's wages. Walking with Ursula through the miners' dwellings, the women are fascinated, repulsed and soothed by the rough houses and smooth dialect of the miners.

Gudrun goes out on Friday night to join the crowd of miners and their wives in the marketplace. She ends up befriending an electrician, and they walk off into the country together.

In Chapter 10, when Ursula and Gudrun are out sketching at Willey Water, they separate, and Gudrun Gerald and Hermione row up to where she is sketching a water flower. Hermione asks to see the book, and when Gudrun shows it to her, Gerald asks for it, but Hermione drops it in the water. Gudrun refuses to take any compensation for the book, which was just full of sketches.

In Chapter 11, at roughly the same time as the previous chapter, Ursula is walking around Willey Water, and finds Birkin fixing up a small rowboat. Birkin says that he has been ill since Hermione hit him, though he doesn't describe the incident. Birkin says that he can't live his life correctly, and Ursula says that she doesn't understand his objection, since his life is already his own, so must be perfect in its way. Birkin says that the world is finished, and they debate the value of love. Ursula says that it is the only value, but Birkin says that with all the things people do in the name of love, it can hardly be meaningful. Birkin strikes Ursula as an egotist and a preacher, for failing to accept the world she finds beautiful and self-sufficient. They start to have an understanding, but when Birkin says that he wants to go say goodbye to Hermione, Ursula objects. He tells her that he doesn't have any affection for Hermione, but he should still be civil to her, but she doesn't quite agree.

In Chapter 12, Hermione is meeting Birkin at his rooms at the mill to furnish them, even though Ursula resents this retention of authority, when Birkin has already broken with Hermione. They measure the rooms, and as usual, Hermione is 'thwarted' by Birkin. He does not want to accept an expensive rug she wants to give him.

Ursula tells Gerald that she hated him on the day they saw him ride his horse down in front of the train, and this starts a conversation on the difference between humans and animals. When Hermione says that the way to stop a bad habit is to force oneself to do it, Birkin objects that "It is fatal to use the will like that. Disgusting. Such a will is an obscenity." (p. 201). He says that the horse wants to be under the human power

because it is a higher power than the horse has in itself: "the highest love impulse: resign your will to the higher being." (p. 202).

Ursula steps out with Hermione, and the two women are in momentary agreement against Gerald and Birkin with their analysis and power. But even here, the intimacy is tenuous, and Ursula cannot completely agree with Hermione.

In Chapter 13, Ursula gets a note from Birkin inviting her and Gudrun to tea, but she does not tell Gudrun, so she can go alone. She meets Birkin in his room at the Mill, and he confesses himself to her: he wants to be with her, but he does not want to call it love. She wants it to be love they feel for one another, and accuses him of egotism and also of bullying her. Birkin says that love give out in the end, it is merely personal, and he wants something bigger than that. He wants to "deliver myself over to the unknown in coming to you." (p. 209). They banter back and forth, mistaking and exasperating each other.

Meanwhile, the Mino cat encounters another cat, a stray, and bats her around in the garden. Birkin says that the stray likes it, likes being put in place.

Ursula believes that Birkin has said that he wants her to be a satellite of him, but he said that he wants her to be balanced like stars are balanced. Finally he admits that it is love he feels for her, and Ursula is soothed and contented with him.

Chapters 9-13 Analysis

In Chapter 9, one of the things Lawrence does well is describe the lives of the miners, having grown up the son of a miner. He describes their lives from the perspective of Ursula and Gudrun, who have some nostalgia for this region, and some attraction to the miners' soothing slang, but they are also repulsed by the coarse language and low intentions, which only sully them, bringing down their more elevated expectations. Nevertheless, Gudrun takes an electrician as a lover, for company, it seems.

In Chapter 10, Hermione returns to the narrative for her superiority, and for her ham-handedness in handling Gudrun's drawings. Gudrun's insistence that it doesn't matter soothes Gerald, who takes her at her word, but the reader is still aware of some loss on account of Hermione's presence.

Chapter 11 is one of the philosophical foundations for the marriage that will unite Ursula and Birkin. Their opposition over Birkin's preachy intellectual sense of things is almost comic, except that the reader already knows how earnestly both characters want some kind of union beyond ordinary love. Birkin's desire to break with the entire world seems unrealistic and excessive, even romantic, but Ursula brings his chivalry toward Hermione back down to earth by having her own preference: she doesn't want Hermione to furnish Birkin's rooms.

In Chapter 12, Ursula utters a challenge of sorts to Birkin, by telling him that she does in fact mind, that Hermione is furnishing his rooms. She essentially states her desire to

have him be his own man, or even for her to be the one who helps him and the chapter ends with her apprehension about the fact that she has issued the challenge. She does not know what it will entail, or how she can prepare for it.

Chapter 13 creates one of the crises of the book: Ursula and Birkin confess themselves to each other, and even though Birkin's language appalls Ursula for its pretentiousness and what she calls his prevarication, they are able to come to an agreement in the end. Birkin relents on his language, and Ursula relents on her resentment, and they find happiness in each other.

The image of the Mino batting around the stray would seem to root this kind of mastery in nature, as if to reaffirm the need for dominance as an inevitable part of any relationship.

Chapters 14-15

Chapters 14-15 Summary

In Chapter 14, one of the traditions Mr. Crich keeps up is a yearly party at Willey Water for the people from the mines and the whole community. the Brangwens go as a group, and Ursula and Gudrun mock their parents gently on the way. When they arrive, they are a little appalled by the crowds, but they see Hermione and Gerald and Birkin, and arrange to go out on the water in Gerald's own light canoe. They set out, and find a quiet place where they can bathe, then run themselves dry in the woods. Ursula sings while Gudrun does eurhythmic movements to her singing. A herd of cattle comes upon them, and Gudrun dances before them, then runs at them and sends them scurrying.

Gerald and Birkin have come to find them, and when Gerald asks Gudrun what she has done with the cattle, she punches him in the face, presumably for being the owner of the cattle, but also because she has the freedom and pugnaciousness to oppose his arrogance and power. Gerald says that he isn't angry with her, he's in love with her.

Gerald and Gudrun and Ursula and Birkin take two separate boats back out on the lake, and they are enjoying their new intimacies with the dark settling over the waters. But then they hear a commotion: someone has fallen in the lake. Gudrun and Birkin row their respective boats in the direction of the noise: Gerald's sister Diana has fallen in, and a doctor's son has gone in after her, but neither can be found. Gerald dives in and tries to find them, but cannot, and he is weakened by the darkness of the water. The two children have apparently died—they would have been found by now—but Gerald and the others make their efforts to find the bodies. Birkin goes to the sluice to open the gate to release water from the lake, and Ursula watches as he turns the handle to raise the sluice.

In the morning, the bodies are found with Diana's arms around the doctor's son's neck. The narrator says that the people in the district took the disaster hard, as if it had been one of their own children who died. "There was an intensity in the air, almost magical. Did all enjoy it? Did all enjoy the thrill?" (p. 258).

In Chapter 15, in the aftermath of the drowning, Ursula says that that she must die unless something happens: she cannot go on. She feels like a fruit that has finished with the tree, and must drop off, into something like death, or other life. Birkin comes to see her at her house in the evening, while her family is at church. Book has had a rough time at Gerald's house, and they talk about the Criches, and death. When Birkin says that he is ashamed for the Crich family, for their "lugubrious, false" grief (p. 267) Ursula says to herself that she hates him. She feels like Birkin is a "beam of essential enmity, a beam of light that did not only destroy her, but denied her altogether, revoked her whole world." (p. 268).

Chapters 14-15 Analysis

In Chapter 14, death rears its head for the first time in the novel and the effects are devastating. Gerald has already lost a brother and this episode indicates that there is some kind of bad fortune associated with the Crich family. The girl had been too free—dancing on the roof of the launch—when she fell in. Gerald takes responsibility for finding the bodies, even though Birkin and the others all advise him to take care of himself. But he is too much a part of the family, too much a part of the crowd, not to play his part, and he strains himself making the efforts might save his sister—or then to locate the bodies. Immediately before this disaster, though, Gerald and Gudrun and Ursula and Birkin have their first tastes of consummation, as they find each other on the far side of Willey Water. Their freedom together is delicious, although Gudrun and Gerald's consummation is marked by violence as Gudrun strikes Gerald across the face. Since they cannot meet as themselves, in openness, they meet as psychological opponents, in tension and opposition, with the intimacy of enemies, who offer each other release, and also resent each other's presence. They cannot accept the fact of the other—they each want to be in control, so they fight.

In Chapter 15, following the drowning, Ursula feels like she is at the end of her own life as well. She needs a change, she needs something to happen, she is so full of her days, and impatient for something she doesn't understand, so she calls it death. When Birkin comes, and has his opinions about the goings-on at the Crich house, she agrees with him that public grief is monstrous and false, but something about the fullness of his consciousness negates her, he takes up so much energy. She is filled with hatred for him, although the tie of hatred binds her to him nonetheless.

Chapters 16-18

Chapters 16-18 Summary

In Chapter 16, Birkin is ill at home, thinking about Ursula's resistance to him. Her desire for merging and unity makes him furious—he wants to be separate and integral to himself, and he wants her to be the same. Gerald comes to see him and Birkin asks him about his relationship with Gudrun. Gerald tells Birkin about the slap she gave him, but Gerald says that it interests him, and he'll see the relationship through.

Gerald and Birkin talk about Winifred, Gerald's younger sister, who has been upset about her father's dying. Birkin suggests getting Gudrun to tutor her in art, since she is a unique child. "every true artist is the salvation of every other," Birkin says. (p. 279). He tells Gerald that the is his equal if not his superior

In Chapter 17, Gudrun is planning to escape from Beldover to St. Petersburg, to work with another sculptor, the industrial midlands are just depressing her. Ursula and Gudrun call on a Mrs. Kirk to buy honey, and Mrs. Kirk tells them that Mr. Crich is not long for this world. Something about her peremptory tone—she repeats that she pinched Gerald Crich's bottom many a time when he was a baby—is amusing to the sisters, but also disturbing. The narrator then describes Mr. Crich's death process, and says he is trying to keep himself intact without allowing the fact of death to enter his consciousness. The narrator says that Mr. Crich never let his wife into his consciousness either, but he warred against her, and tried to take care of her, even though she remained remote and outside from him. "All his life, he had been so constant to his lights, he had never broken down. He would die even now without breaking down, without knowing what his feelings were, towards her." (p. 286). Mrs. Crich hated his easy way with people, which undermined the aristocratic history she had known.

Winifred is Mr. Crich's one special joy, and she refuses to acknowledge his death process either, so she is dear to him in his illness.

While his father is dying, Gerald finds that he is going to be in charge of the family and the business, and he feels unprepared. He takes the business in hand, and starts to make improvements, even in spite of the resistance of the miners. He reduces inefficiencies, even though it means not taking care of people who have been cared for (like widows). The narrator says that even though the men resent his efficiencies, they also like to be part of the mob, the machine he is managing, and the work goes on with its great destructiveness at a profitable and efficient pace. The narrator says that equality is a myth, but that there is an order in nature, and it respects the strongest people, the ones whose lives are closest to the laws of their existence, and the ones that have the greatest control over the material of existence.

In Chapter 18, Gudrun comes to Shortlands to work with Winifred, and after she makes a portrait of her Pekinese, Winifred decides to paint a portrait of her rabbit, Bismarck. Gerald comes to see her and Gudrun when they are going to the rabbit cage to get the rabbit, and when the rabbit claws and scratched Gudrun's arm, Gerald takes it from her, and stuns it with a sharp blow to the neck. He doesn't kill it, but he puts it back in its cage. As with the scene with Gerald and his horse by the train, this tears "the veil of her consciousness." (p. 316). She recognizes a similarity in Gerald, and the scene draws them closer.

Chapters 16-18 Analysis

Chapter 16 focuses on the differences between Gerald and Birkin. Birkin has a much stronger set of opinions that Gerald, who has more power in the world. But Gerald has a weakness, in that he is susceptible to Birkin's ideas, and does not have his own ideas to resist Birkin's vocabulary with. His force is physical, and that makes him something of a machine. Birkin's suggestion that an art teacher is Gerald's equal is a radical proposition that makes perfect sense, but Gerald still chafes against it.

In Chapter 17, by focusing on Gerald as an industrialist, this chapter moves some weight further from the emotional center where the characters want to merge and ultimately live. The process Gerald is involved in, of making the mines more efficient, and magnifying his own power and thoughts through the organization of the business, is an inhuman process, which will ultimately destroy Gerald because it is not rooted in anything organic and rejuvenative. There will always be more details to manage, and more power to keep under control, but nothing to feed the human being who will need rest from this process of management and mastery.

In Chapter 18, the blood the rabbit draws when it scratches Gudrun's arm is a badge of initiation that she shares with Gerald, and the fury of the beast, in addition to Gerald's violence, which manages it, is an experience that they know well. They relate to the animal fury, the desire to be free, and also to the powerful control Gerald exerts. It is on these terms that they will meet, as they continue to draw closer, and this violence is linked, with Gerald, with the entire industrial process. In the previous chapter, it was coal —but here it is a living creature he exercises his control over.

Chapters 19-21

Chapters 19-21 Summary

In Chapter 19, when Birkin returns to England recovered from his illness, he goes out for a walk one night and sees the moon reflected in Willey Water. When Ursula goes out for a walk, she sees him throwing stones into the pond, to destroy the complacent and powerful image of the moon reflected there. Again and again he throws the stones, but the reflection regathers itself. Ursula sees him, and steps out. He tells her that there is a light in her that he would like her to give him. They talk about what kind of relationship they might have, but Ursula suspects that Birkin wants her to serve him, and she resists him, although she is draw to him nonetheless. Finally Birkin tells Ursula that he loves her, which is what she wants to hear, and they know some peace in each other.

The next day, Birkin realizes that he has to ask Ursula to marry him, and he goes to her house, where he talks to her father. Everything comes out sideways, and the father misinterprets him, and takes offense at his casualness. When Ursula comes in, she says that she is not ready to answer, and complains that Birkin and her father are bullying her. Birkin leaves, and the issue is not resolved.

When Ursula talks it over with Gudrun, the two women agree that the men only want to bully them, and make them conform to their ideas, although when Gudrun goes into her criticisms of Birkin, Ursula recoils, some, and has more sympathy for him.

In Chapter 20, ater the fiasco at Ursula's house, Birkin goes to Shortlands to see Gerald. Both men feel bottled up and frustrated, and since sleep, drink and travel won't do ("In sleep, you dream, in drink you curse, and in travel you yell at a porter," Gerald says) (p. 345) they decide to wrestle to work off their aggressions—and also o try for the union Birkin has wanted, with Gerald. After wrestling, Birkin says that he had proposed to Ursula, and he explains what happened. The men discuss marriage and love, and Birkin says that Gerald has never loved a woman, and they agree that what they want in the end is a kind of fulfillment—even though they use different words for what they want.

In Chapter 21, Gudrun receives a letter from Winifred, describe Mr. Crich's decline, and the possibility that Gudrun could have a studio to work with her in. Gudrun scents Gerald behind this request, and this inclines her to accept it. When Gudrun returns from London, Winifred has prepared an enormous, gaudy bouquet for her. Gudrun meets Mr. Crich, and is appalled to see so much death in him, but she accepts his offer of a studio, if she works with Winifred. "Gerald, in his father's presence, stiffened with repulsion." (p. 363). Winifred is the only one who visits her father and enjoys seeing him, and she serves the purpose, for him, of representing the living world.

When Winifred asks Gudrun whether her father will die, Gudrun says she does not know, and Winifred does not seem to want to know the answer, since she refuses to know death, yet. Gerald and Birkin talk about the possible engagement of Ursula and

Birkin. When Birkin leaves, Gerald and Gudrun talk about him, and agree that he is off his head a little. They have a different idea of what union would look like, and the intimacy between them seems to develop to the point that the reader can look forward to it coming into existence.

Chapters 19-21 Analysis

In Chapter 19, nothing comes easy to any of these characters, partly because words and ideas are in the way, but partly because their personalities are too complex to simply merge into each other, the way their parents' generation, perhaps, had just made their marriages. For Birkin and Ursula, marriage would have to satisfy their ideas and this makes complications between them. They are both such individuals that marriage cannot be imposed, it has to arise out of an inner need for both of them, at the same time. They are both in a state of decay, as the reader has seen with Ursula's impatience with her surroundings, and Birkin's impatience with the state of culture and his soul. Marriage seems inevitable, and desirable, between them, but there are still the terms—and the part of the soul that takes the terms seriously, to be reconciled.

Chapter 20 is one of the apotheoses Birkin experiences, in his mindless, rapturous wrestling with Gerald. It is as close as the men will get, it is as close as the obstacles between them will allow them to get. This almost-unconscious experience smells strongly of the blood knowledge Lawrence is always talking about—something beyond intellect and mind, something that brings humans to life in the centers where their lives themselves take place—in their bodies. This intimacy is also important for taking place between men, not between man and woman, since this raises the question of homosexuality, and the boundaries of human sexual life. Whether the reader wants to see this as a sexual scene or not, the intimacy between Gerald and Birkin is physical and profound, and could not have been acted out in any other way, to reach the same degree of satisfaction and inter-knowledge.

Chapter 21 brings Mr. Crich closer to death, and it also brings Ursula and Birkin closer to marriage, at the same time that it brings Gerald and Gudrun closer to whatever kind of relationship they will have. Nothing seems possible until after Mr. Crich dies. His death is a weight on the household, and an impediment to Gerald's freedom, but the foundation is being laid, for the freedom Gerald wants for himself. It is not clear that he wants Gudrun out of freedom so that without her he could not sustain himself.

Chapters 22-24

Chapters 22-24 Summary

In Chapter 22, Ursula meets Hermione at Birkin's flat for tea, and she resents Hermione's sense of superiority, but she also pities her, since her intellect is her only possession. They discuss the love Birkin wants of a woman, and agree that he is too caught up in his ideas, but Ursula resents Hermione's limited knowledge of Birkin, since Hermione herself is incapable of understanding the type of love he requires. Hermione urges Ursula not to marry Birkin, but Ursula does not feel that Hermione has the right authority, to give her this advice. When Hermione sees the Mino, she talks to it as if it understood, as if she alone could talk to it, and Ursula resents her pushy intellectualism.

In Chapter 23, Birkin take Ursula out for a car ride, and gives her a gift of three rings, as an engagement, of sorts. She still has not answered him, but he is content to let her answer in time. He tells Ursula that he will never see Hermione again. Ursula and Birkin fight over what Hermione represents. Ursula says that Birkin wants the intellectual masturbation and pornography that arouses Hermione—and Ursula ends up throwing the rings at Birkin, so that they scatter in the grass, and she walks away from him. The narrator says that Birkin knows that Ursula is mostly right, and Ursula comes back conciliatory, with flowers for him. He gives her the rings back, and puts his arms around her, and they are reconciled. They drive to Southwell Minster, and have high tea there. IN their room, Ursula feels Birkin's thighs, and the small of his back, and senses the mysterious knowledge there, and she knows him by feeling him, and they have their mystical knowledge of each other. After tea, they agree to drop their jobs, together, and travel, to get out and see the world. They drive, and agree not to return, but to camp out, and sleep in the car. In a lane off the road, they park, and knew each other.

In Chapter 24, as Mr. Crich dies slowly, Gerald feels compelled to witness the death, but he needs Gudrun's presence to give him some counterbalance. He keeps Gudrun close at the end of the day, and she offers to be a help to him if she can be. Gudrun dies a little when he walks her to the road, and puts his arm around her, and she loses herself in the embrace. She reacts, later, against the annihilation that comes with the peace, and resents Gerald for annihilating her to get his comfort.

Mr. Crich finally dies, and Mrs. Crich tells her children not to look peaceful and young in death—she wants them to look old and used up, unlike her husband, who insisted on his youthfulness and innocence.

Gerald is appalled in his father's absence, and he goes to the Brangwen house, letting himself in and finding his way to Gudrun's bedroom at night. She lets him into her bed, and he knows an absolute peace in her arms, but she remains awake all night, apprehensive about getting him out of the house in the morning without being compromised herself. At the stroke of five, she finally wakes him, and he is slow to

rouse, but she walks him out, and is glad when he's gone, and she herself is out of danger.

Chapters 22-24 Analysis

In Chapter 22, Ursula and Hermione get to talk about Birkin and his ideas, but even as they become intimate, the antipathy develops between them. There is no satisfaction, in Lawrence's world, as the closer characters get, the more they resent each other, and resist each other's ideas, even each other's presence. This chapter really does show Hermione in a bad light, and it is almost the last the reader will see of her in her bossy intellectual self.

In Chapter 23, Ursula and Birkin finally know each other, and even though they are not married, the language the narrator uses for their consummation echoes much of the language Birkin has been using for sex and the union of two people. The union takes place in the dark, in a mystical dark such as cannot be known by the mind, and it merges them even as it leaves them both free in themselves. Ursula and Birkin have finally fought to a peace, fought through to another way of speaking to each other, and their opposition is largely forgotten as they make the leap they have both been preparing to make.

In Chapter 24, Mr. Crich's death is a relief, but it also puts a heavy weight on Gerald's psyche. Once again, peace in the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun comes for one at the expense of the other. When Gerald comes to Gudrun, she comforts him while she herself is uncomfortable, and some resentment builds up on account of the exquisite pleasure he takes in her arms.

Chapters 25-28

Chapters 25-28 Summary

In Chapter 25, Gerald and Birkin talk about whether Gerald ought to marry Gudrun at the same time that Ursula and Birkin marry. They agree that legal marriage is a sham, and Birkin says that the union between men and women is not the last word, but there should be a union between men, as well, and he asks Gerald if he will enter a blood-brotherhood with him. He cannot accept Birkin's offer, not yet.

In Chapter 26, Ursula and Birkin buy a chair for their house, but Birkin wants to travel, not to settle in one place, and they find a young couple to give the chair to, rather than keep it themselves. The young woman is a brash sort, with control over her man, but Ursula says that the man has a rat-like separateness and crafty resistance to him, and she admires him for hit. Birkin says that he wants to settle down near other people, but Ursula says that he can't make other people love them.

In Chapter 27, Ursula tells her family that she and Birkin will be married tomorrow, and her father objects that she thinks only of herself. Without really articulating his objection, he becomes angry, and ends up hitting Ursula, so that she packs her bags and leaves that night. She goes to Birkin in tears, and he takes her in. She stays with him—they are as good as married not anyway—and they are united beyond themselves. When Ursula sees Gerald, she tells him that he might be just as happy with Gudrun, and Gerald says that he will ask her to come away with him at Christmas. He invites Ursula and Birkin as well—they agree to go to the Alps together.

Ursula returns to the house her parents have just moved out of and collects her things. She breaks with the past for good, and Gudrun is upset when she finds out that Ursula and Birkin know about Gerald's invitation. She wants to exist for him alone without reference to anyone else.

In Chapter 28, in London on their way to the Tyrol, Gerald and Gudrun encounter Pussum and Halliday and that crowd. They are drunk, and full of mockery for Birkin. Halliday pulls out a letter from Birkin, in which Birkin carries on in his pompous philosophical way, and after he reads it aloud, Gudrun walks over and takes it from him, then walks out.

Chapters 25-28 Analysis

Chapter 25 gives Birkin more occasion to try to define the ultimate marriage, and he cannot marry Ursula without also wanting to marry Gerald, in a way. Gerald hears his proposition and cannot accept it, he does not know what it means, and he seems to distrust the bond Birkin imagines.

In Chapter 26, after the rather abstract chapter that precedes this one, this chapter gets particular, and returns to specifics, describing the market, and the chair Ursula and Birkin find, and the miners they talk to, and their charming/infuriating dialect. The portraits Lawrence provides, in this chapter, are sensitive and compelling, and bring the miners and their women to life in a tender way that reveals Lawrence's affection for the half-unfinished, half-unconscious people.

In Chapter 27, the young people are breaking with the old world, and when Ursula tells her parents about her plans, the fight they have is a permanent rupture, which will never be repaired. She abandons the past and the mistakes of her parents and her community—she will be accountable for herself and herself alone. She can do this without remaining completely hermetically sealed, like her sister: Gudrun wants to possess Gerald completely, and is angry when he betrays her even by telling Ursula and Birkin about his plans to invite her to the Tyrol.

In Chapter 28, Halliday and Pussum's society is what Ursula and Birkin are trying to leave behind, and after the seriousness of the unions he has portrayed so far, Lawrence gives the reader a very low scene, with no sensitivity or tenderness. This is almost comic, except that the portrait of the dissolute crowd is so oppressive to Gudrun.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

In Chapter 29, Ursula and Birkin take the ferry across the channel, and then the train south through France to Austria. The trip is surreal for Ursula, the whole world is gray and shifting, and Birkin is the only reality for her. When they arrive in Innsbruck, Gerald and Gudrun are there, and Gudrun says that Gerald had romanced all the women in Paris while they were there. All four of the Englishmen are glad to be out of England. They take a train to Hohenhausen, further into the mountains, and then a sledge from there, to another cabin further. The narrator describes the cabin as being in the navel of the earth, with the mountains all around. There is still a strong opposition between Gerald and Gudrun, and "he would destroy her rather than be denied." (p. 493).

Ursula and Birkin and Gerald and Gudrun meet the party of Germans, and introduce themselves, and partake of their entertainment. They sing and dance together, and the reader is introduced to Loerke, the German artist who works some effect on Gudrun. Gerald and Birkin both hate him, he is so weak, but he means something to Gudrun. When she goes outside, Gudrun wants to continue on and on to the end of the mountains, and so does Gerald, but Ursula and Birkin are both a little oppressed by the mountains, and the inhuman cold. They enjoy a day of sledding, but Ursula wants to return to the earth. Gudrun watches Gerald socialize with the others, and resents his easy strength, she determines to oppose him, and to triumph. He is so easy-going with her that she feels determined to make him uncomfortable, so she punishes him by opposing him, contradicting him, teasing him about making the Professor's daughter love him. Gudrun is nervous about submitting to him herself, so she opposes him. She is not impressed with his industrial accomplishments, but she wants him to submit to her. He takes her sledding, and the speed and his control make the descent the "complete moment" of her life. (p. 514).

Ursula and Gudrun describe Loerke as a street-arab, an outcast who knows the meaningless of all elevated social values, and exists in the cracks of their philosophy. He tells them about his commission to design a frieze for a factory in Cologne, and says that art should interpret industry as it once interpreted religion. Gudrun is attracted by what she sees as the "rock-bottom of all life" that had "dispensed with all illusion" (p. 521).

Loerke shows Ursula and Birkin and Gerald and Gudrun a photo of a sculpture he had made, of a naked young girl on an enormous horse, and Ursula is upset by the fixity in the horse's character. Loerke says that the artwork relates only to itself, but Ursula says that this is untrue, the artwork has to relate to life. Loerke says that a woman is no good for him after she is twenty, there is too much of a woman about her.

After Ursula asks him to leave, Birkin says that he and Ursula will go south, to Italy, and warmth. Ursula finally agrees with Birkin when she says that "Love is too human and little. I believe in something inhuman, of which love is only a little part." (p. 534).

Chapter 29 Analysis

In Chapter 29, the transition from England to the Continent is a profound one for Ursula, who leaves the world behind, and now lives in a world of Birkin alone. When they find Gerald and Gudrun in Austria, the bliss Gerald and Gudrun experience together is powerful and rare and real. They cannot get it from anyone else, but they cannot share it, either, they can only provide it for each other, at some expense. Interestingly, the novel introduces a new cast of characters, and now instead of Hermione, the character of Loerke rounds out the foursome. Ursula and Birkin are complete, though, so Loerke will work his effect more on Gerald and Gudrun. Gudrun is drawn to him, as a fellow outcast and artist—and Gerald hates him as a weakling and foundling.

When any of the characters go outside, the snow and cold is as oppressive as reality—this is literally the crystallization of the physical universe, and there is no living there.

Loerke is a human absolute. A homosexual, he knows no illusions and can live without them. He is like a ragged urchin in the street, who practically wants to be kicked by the stronger Gerald and Birkin, but Gudrun is fascinated by him, he is so absolute to himself. Chiefly, Loerke gives Gudrun assistance in opposing Gerald, for she needs some human companions if she is going to fight against his mechanical force, which attracts and repels her. The environment of the mountains is too inhuman for Ursula and Birkin, so they leave, but before they do, Ursula gives Birkin his triumph when she articulates what has been his own philosophy, all along, of a love that is not absolute, but only part of the larger, inhuman world. Even so, there is something elemental for Gerald and Gudrun to work out in the snowy landscape, so they stay, enter the last stage of opposition.

Chapter 30-31

Chapter 30-31 Summary

In Chapter 30, in Ursula and Birkin's absence, Gerald and Gudrun start to grind each other down. She tells him that he doesn't love her, and he agrees with her, but draws her to him nonetheless, even though it humiliates him, that he cannot feel love. He tells her he loves her nonetheless, submitting to her, then taking his revenge physically, in making her swoon with her own strong emotions. Gerald says that he thinks he will have to kill Gudrun in order to escape from her power. When Gerald and Gudrun climb to a high slope to watch the sun set, Gudrun says that she wants to gather all the colors to her breast and die, she is so full of emotion. She criticizes Gerald for coming between her and this beautiful experience. Returning to Loerke, Gudrun talks about art and creativity. She gives him indications that she is not Gerald's wife, which allows Loerke an advantage over Gerald. Gudrun says that the world is finished for her, but she still does not intend to be killed by Gerald, so she finds strength in Loerke.

When Gerald interrogates her, in a perfect fury, about her fascination with Loerke, she insults him, and tells him that they are independent, and can make their plans separately.

Loerke asks her where she will go, and she says that she doesn't know. She might go anywhere. She says that she does not want to answer the question, and she might not go where the ticket indicates she will go, if she must buy a ticket. Gudrun and Loerke are having this conversation in the snow, when Gerald comes upon them. Gerald responds to their subtle mockery by hitting Loerke, knocking him down, and then he starts to strangle Gudrun. Loerke sees this, and starts to say to Gerald, in French, 'when you are finished' and this fills Gerald with disgust for the whole thing, the murder and the opposition with Gudrun. He lets go of her, and starts to walk into the mountains. He stumbles down some inclines, then sees a crucifix in the snow, and believes that he will be murdered. "Lord Jesus, was it then bound to be— Lord Jesus." he says. (p. 575). He then falls, and something in him breaks, and he goes to sleep.

In Chapter 31, Ursula and Birkin return to the icy mountain world to see Gudrun now that Gerald has died. Gudrun cannot feel anything, but when Birkin goes to see Gerald's body, he is overcome with emotions. He loved Gerald, and will not be the same man without him. He says that it does not matter to the world that man disappears—the fountainhead is endless, and will continue to make life—but it matters for him to be deprived of his friend. He breaks down and cries and Ursula is upset to see him crying. He insists that it would have made a difference if Gerald had been able to love him. "Those who die, and dying still can love, still believe, do not die," he tells her. (p. 582). Ursula asks him if he needs to despair over Gerald's death, and he says that he does. Ursula is determined to be enough for him, herself, and it seems that this discussion, of whether one love can be enough, will be going on for some time in their marriage.

Chapter 30-31 Analysis

In Chapter 30, after Ursula and Birkin leave, Gerald and Gudrun are left along with each other. The more powerful Gerald becomes, the more Gudrun reaches for Loerke for strength, and the more she relies on Loerke, the more determined Gerald becomes, to break her down. They give each other these satisfactions—her by humiliating him, and submitting to his power, him by letting her humiliate her, then taking his satisfaction from her. Gudrun uses Loerke to fight Gerald off, for Loerke knows what woman really wants, from inside—as opposed to Gerald, who only knows the external needs and existence of woman. When Gudrun is fascinated by Loerke, and Gerald interrogates her about him, she refuses to be discussed: it is as if they do not have the right to consider each other's lives, even though they are completely intimate with each other. Without the sympathy and understanding Ursula and Birkin have, their intimacy is merely mechanical and ultimately appalling. Gudrun fears this mechanical clockwork inside Gerald, and sustains herself with the liveliness of Loerke, even though he is ironic and deathlike himself. Gerald finally gets the opportunity to murder Gudrun, but Loerke's sarcasm interrupts him, and spoils the mood, so he walks into the snow, and dies there. There was never any retuning to organic life for him, not if he is always bothered by the desire to go on and on, further and further into things.

In Chapter 31, Gerald's death is the end of the opposition between him and Gudrun—she and her ironic way of looking at things without really caring triumphs. Gerald has nearly strangled her when Loerke says, impassively, 'Sir, when you are finished..." and this breaks the murderous spell. This death does not move Gudrun, but Birkin is heartbroken by his friend's death. He knew that Gerald was more mechanical than him, but he had loved Gerald, and he wanted him to continue to exist. His death deprives him of something, so that he has to reach for universal ideas of creativity and divinity to explain the loss to himself. He himself knows that the person who has faith in love and in life will survive death, but Gerald could never believe it, he was always managing the machinery of life, and never believing. His death marks the way forward for Ursula and Birkin, into the vitality of life, even if that means they will continue to oppose each other.

Characters

Ursula Brangwen

Ursula Brangwen is a school teacher at the beginning of Women in Love. She is more serious and less finished than her sister Gudrun, but she is also more womanly, more vital, more sure of herself. She has a relationship with and then marries Rupert Birkin, warring with him over the definition of love, and what should be possible between them. She is a proud and independent woman who refuses to be bullied and insists on doing things because they make sense to her because she wants to do them herself.

Gudrun Brangwen

Gudrun Brangwen is Ursula's sister and she has attained renown as an artist and sculptor of miniature birds and animals. She runs with an artistic crowd, and she always wears brightly colored dresses and stockings. But like her sister, who has to feel desire inside herself for things, she can't just run along with the others. As the younger sister, Gudrun is competitive with Ursula, and envies her composure and self-sufficiency. Gudrun has an affair with Gerald Crich, and when they go away at Christmas together, he and she torment each other, so that Gerald ultimately walks out into the snow and is killed by the cold. Gudrun cannot settle down like her sister to a transcendent marriage, she just wanders the world, too intact in herslf to accept a partner.

Gerald Crich

Gerald Crich is the son of the owner of the mines near Beldover. He is an effective industrialist, who transforms the business of coal mining from a profitless to an efficient enterprise, but the work leaves him ultimately dissatisfied, and he wants some other thing to fill him up. He finds this thing in Gudrun Brangwen, and he goes to her in the middle of the night, to find a peace sleeping in her arms. But he doesn't have enough regard for society to marry her properly, so they go away together to the Alps, where their relationship blossoms, and then turns over-ripe, as they torment each other. Neither can possess the other fully, and neither can be satisfied with a less-than-all relationship. eventually Gerald walks out into the snow and is killed.

Rupert Birkin

Rupert Birkin is the intellectual heart of the novel. He is a school inspector, with very particular ideas about man in industrial society, and the death process he is engaged in. Birkin wants an ultimate marriage with a woman. It turns out to be Ursula and he wants to be beyond himself, beyond just caring for the other's comfort. He wants to be accepted in his contradictions, and he wants to accept a woman in hers - beyond the mere personalities of himself and the other.

Birkin marries Ursula, and while they struggle over the terms in which he imagines this union, they accept each other, and give up their jobs to wander the world, looking for a place where they can settle down together, with a few good people.

Birkin also wants an ultimate relationship with Gerald Crich, and the two men wrestle naked together, but Gerald is not capable of this kind of union, in the end, and walks out into the snow rather than humanize himself in a relationship with Gudrun or Birkin.

The Pussum

The Pussum is one of the characters in the Halliday crowd, whom Birkin knows in London. She is a model and a hanger-on, with an affected lisp that makes her seem childish. She has an affair with Gerald Crich, who is drawn to her soft femininity, but she is really only using Gerald to revenge hrself on her lover Halliday, to make him jealous.

Hermione Roddice

Hermione stands for the purely intellectual woman, who cannot approach a person, or life, excpet through the inttelect. She is highly bred, but she understands that she should be more democratic in her society, so she stoops to the company of the Brangwen sisters, but they are both aware of her falseness, because Hermione is not spontaneous with herself, everything goes through her mind.

From the beginning of the novel, Hermione has a relationship with Birkin, but Birkin hates her purely mental satisfactions, and ultimately torments her so much that she boffs him on the head with a stone paperweight. She nearly kills him with the first blow, but he protects himself from the second, which might have finished him off.

Mrs. Crich

Mrs. Crich is the matriarch of the Crich family, but she is strangely abstracted and out of touch with her family. She has a sense of propriety and aristocracy, which wars with her husband's democratic sense of obligation to his workers. She and he war all their lives, and never arrive at a truce, they just resist each other.The opposition keeps her apart from her own life, so that by the end of the novel, she hardly seems to know her own children.

Mr. Crich

Mr. Crich is Gerald's father, an industrialist who runs the coal mines. His sympathies are all with the men, not with the industrial undertaking as much. He dies without acknowledging the horror of death, he just plays his role as father and industrialist out to the end, refusing to let the horror of death get a hold on him, or make him admit he had made any mistakes in his life.

Loerke

Loerke is the artist whom Gudrun meets in the Alps, at the reunionsaal. She sees him as the ultimate outsider, who has a beetle's perspective on human nature. She is fascinated with him, and this enrages Gerald Crich, who cannot stand the man's weakness and outsider status. Nevertheless, Gudrun uses Loerke as a buoy, to keep her from following Gerald down into self-destruction. by giving up on society, and looking at everything ironically, she lets herself live, whereas Gerald wants meaning so much that he can only find it in death.

Winifred

Winifred is Gerald Crich's younger sister, and Gudrun Brangwen comes to work with her on her art and sculpture. This gives Gerald plenty of occasions for getting to know Gudrun.

Objects/Places

Beldover

This is the town where the first three quarters of Women in Love is set. It is a small town in the midlands of England, where there are coal mines run by the Crich family.

The mountain retreat

This is a place in the Alps near Innsbruck, where Gerald, Gudrun, Ursula and Birkin travel at the end of the novel to get away from the dampness of England. The snow and the cold symbolize something absolute like death, and Gerald succumbs to the icy appeal of non-existence. Ursula and Birkin, retreat from the place, they have each other to shelter and warm each other, even in the inhuman landscape. Gudrun is drawn to the cold as well, but some irony, some appreciation for continuing to create, even in an ironic way, keeps her from dying in it.

Sculptures

These are art objects Gudrun makes, and she teaches art to Winifred, Gerald Crich's oyounger sister. Gudrun has won some renown for her art, and at the end of the novel, her desire to make art, and live outside of life, keeps her alive, and gives her places to go, even if it is ultimately tragic that she cannot have a full and living connection with someone, as Ursula and Birkin seem to have in each other.

The Mill

This is where Rupert Birkin lives before he and Ursula marry, and begin to travel.

Shortlands

This is the Crich residence, a manor house that has been in the family. It is the site of Diana's drowning, during the water party, and Mr. Crich's death.

London

This is where Rupert Birkin visits occasionally, and spends time with a dissolute crowd of artists and hangers-on. He introduces Gerald to this crowd, and Gerald takes The Pussum briefly for a lover.

The Water Party

This is an annual event that was started years ago, under Mr. Crich's impetus. He invited the people to the manor, and entertained with music, food and boating. At the water party described in the novel, Gerald's younger sister Diana falls in the lake, and when a doctor's son dives in to save her, she clings to him and kills him, so that the lake has to be drained before their bodies are found.

Willey Water

This is the lake Ursula and Gudrun walk to, where Gerald is swimming.

Themes

Unreality as against reality

When Gudrun goes to the church to see the Crich wedding, she sees the mining district as an unreal ghost world. Ursula feels like the world is unreal as well, after she marries Birkin, and their relationship is more real than anything else. The reality of social convention, and of the economic means of production, mining and trade and social roles, all seem unreal to the throbbing, vital selves that these four characters experience as their primary reality.

There is a reality, though, to the inner life Birkin is always talking about, and which Ursula seems to be attuned to. This reality is centered on the transcendent bond two people can share with each other and also through each other, with their own internal lives. For Lawrence, this is the source of all real life, the internal life and the natural world that echoes it and the conversations with other like-minded people.

From this book, it almost seems as if conversation itself is the ultimate reality. This is where ideas get tested out and people are able to resolve their deepest inner conflicts with each other. When they are incapable of this, as Gerald and Gudrun are, the internal reality is trounced by the external unreality, and death or irony become the ways of dealing with the constant internal pressures.

The warfare of one against the other in relationships

All of Lawrence's characters infuriate each other. There is never any peace between them, except in non-verbal, semi-sexual but more-than-sexual union. Birkin is obviously drawn to Hermione, but they infuriate each other, and he can't help but be antagonistic to her intellectualism. The blow she deals him on the head is just the final external physical manifestation of the internal war they have been waging, but the physical act is necessary to end the relationship definitively. Gerald and Gudrun are opposed to each other in a sadomasochistic way, so that one or the other of them has to be in control, while the other is in thrall, submitting entirely—but the resentments always kick in, so that there is a struggle to be in top again. Gudrun deals Gerald a blow on the face for what seems like little provocation, but he seems to relish it as a mark of reality.

The final opposition is between Ursula and Birkin, but here the opposition is most productive, for the two nurture and feed each other without ever really agreeing about the terms they use. But there is some slippage, some transcendent reason for faith, that allows them to continue on in spite of their disagreements. Lawrence does not seem to proposes a relationship that is not defined by struggle.

Even Birkin and Gerald have their antagonistic relationship, as Birkin wants Gerald to have an ultimate relationship, like marriage, but Gerald cannot envision it, and it never comes to pass.

Self renewal as against self-destruction

Death is a strong presence in Women in Love, as Gerald has killed his brother in childhood, so that he is marked out with death in advance. Gerald's father's death, and his sister's, make the non-existence real in the book, for those who are affected by them, as Gerald is affected. Gerald is ground down by his father's death, for his father is not acknowledging his death as he is dying it. He tries to keep his personality alive and intact, by playing the normal social role, of father and mine-owner. Gerald can take refuge from the horror of the death in the industrial process, by managing the mines and making them more efficient, but he does not love any one thing enough to feel fulfilled and redeemed by it. He goes to Gudrun in the middle of the night, like a thief, to take her love from her, rather than knowing himself well enough to ask, or negotiate for what he needs. He is so ground down by the death he sees, and by the deadening mechanical process, that he cannot do anything but continue to wear himself down.

Birkin is likewise affected by Gerald's death, but this death for him is not an impersonal act of a mechanical universe, nor is it the denial of the organic process, for the sake of the social norms. The only way Birkin can live with Gerald's death is to understand himself as a part and parcel of the universe that will go on creating long after all human beings are gone, and by loving the process - even his own extinction. In the same way he loved Gerald, he can find his place in things, and be at home. Birkin's faith in woman, and in himself, prevents him from being destroyed by death, or by mechanicalization.

Marriage in industrial times

Birkin says that there is nothing left but the ultimate marriage with a woman, the old ideals are dead as nails, and this statement makes a high hurdle for the relationships described in the book to get over. Gerald and Birkin have both had their relationships with the people in the Halliday set, in London, and they have found how shallow and infuriating they can be, and the book does present the reader with a few other relationships, between miners, for instance, or the Brangwens'. Birkin has his relationship with Hermione Roddice, but this relationship is too intellectual, and it is coming apart even as the book begins.

The main relationships are between Gerald and Gudrun and Ursula and Birkin, and of the two, Birkin, even though he has so many preachy ideas, has the best idea of what kind of marriage is possible, and Ursula is the most flexible, and the most vital, that she can adapt to his ideas. Gerald and Gudrun are so fixed in their personalities, and so inflexible in regard to their ideals and their ability to see and satisfy another person's desires, that they only grind on each other. They are two finished perfections that cannot adapt to each other, so they tend toward death, while Ursula and Birkin adapt to each other, and foster each others' lives.

Style

Point of View

Women in Love is told by an omniscient narrator, who can tell people's feelings, and watch their internal states. This narrator does not inject himself very much, in the narrative, but there are a few places where it seems like the author himself is speaking through the characters. Birkin in particular seems like the mouthpiece for certain types of ideas that are dear to the heart of the novel, but like the characters themselves, the book has an antagonistic relationship with the ideas it puts forward, and no single idea is wholeheartedly endorsed. Even Birkin's idea about the ultimate marriage between men and women is complicated by Ursula's ideas about the self-sufficiency of woman in her love with a man. Gerald wants to have complete possession of a woman, but Gudrun is not content to be dominated. She also has to stand aloof. These points of view keep the novel in constant struggle between characters.

Setting

Women in Love is set in the industrial Midlands of England in the 1920s. The landscape is predominantly mechanized, and the mines themselves use the workers as part of an enormous machine designed to make money out of the extraction of coal. This mechanization of the landscape is hard for Ursula and Birkin, who are more alive to the sensitive human life that is trampled by the mines, so the school, and the wild places in between towns, become the centers of something like opposition to the industrial landscape.

The last part of the book takes place in the icy world of the Alps, where the crystalline perfection of the landscape is an almost-psychological alternative to the social landscape the first two thirds of the book take place in. The perfection of the cold and icy world is set against the organic soil-based life that can be renewed through marriage. Gerald personifies the death process that goes to toward the perfection of ice out of despair over ever being fulfilled by either the organic world or the mechanized world that he has come to master.

Language and Meaning

Women in Love is narrated in literary language, with sophisticated vocabulary, and a good number of high concepts. The book is not explicitly philosophical. It does not use specialized language of the philosopher, but it does center on a few philosophical concepts of the self's renewal through marriage, of the death of the organic world in the mechanized world of modern times. Birkin is the main spokesman for these ideas, but Hermione takes them up as well. The book is not completely at home in this vocabulary, though, for when The Pussum and Halliday make fun of one of Birkin's letters, the reader has to agree that there is substance to their criticisms. In this sense, the terms

keep the characters themselves and the book and the reader in constant motion, for there is no ultimate resting place, where terms are settled and defined.

Structure

Women in Love is told in linear chronology, but it is also told in psychologically realistic terms, so that narrative is interrupted by the narrator's commentary on the characters' feelings. This immersion in the characters' feelings is new to Lawrence and it realizes new theories of the conscious and unconscious minds that were coming into existence at the time Lawrence was writing. This constant torrent of internal experience makes the book an allegory for the development of the self through conflict and struggle with other people on one hand and with the self's own temperament, on the other. The opposed dualities between Birkin and Hermione, Birkin and Gerald, Gerald and Gudrun, and Ursula and Birkin, keep the book stretched tight between different poles, so that there is no resting, but a character's personality is a kind of fate that will have to be borne out, and can never be finalized or closed off in a finished product.

Quotes

"'There's the whole difference in the world,' he said, 'between the actual sensual being, and the vicious mental-deliberate profligacy our lot goes in for. In our night-time, there's always the electricity switched on, we watch ourselves, we get it all in the head, really. You've got to lapse out before you can know what sensual reality is, lapse into unknowingness, and give up your volition. You've got to do it. You've got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being" (p. 95).

"'He's got go, anyhow.' (Ursula says)
'Certainly, he's got go,' said Gudrun. 'In fact I've never seen a man that showed signs of so much. The unfortunate thing is, where does his GO go to, what becomes of it?" (p. 99).

"The old ideals are dead as nails—nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman - sort of ultimate marriage - and there isn't anything else" (p. 109).

"on them there seemed to float a film of disintegration, a sort of misery and sullenness, like oil on water" (p. 117).

"He climbed out of the valley, wondering if he were mad. But if so, he preferred his own madness, to the regular sanity. He rejoiced in his own madness, he was free. He did not want that old sanity of the world, which was become so repulsive. He rejoiced in the new-found world of his madness. It was so fresh and delicate and so satisfying" (p. 166).

"I loathe myself as a human being. Humanity is a huge aggregate lie, and a huge lie is less than a small truth. Humanity is less, far less than the individual, because the individual may sometimes be capable of truth, and humanity is a tree of lies. And they say that love is the greatest thing; they persist in SAYING this, the foul liars, and just look at what they do!" (p. 188).

"At the very last, one is alone, beyond the influence of love. There is a real impersonal me, that is beyond love, beyond any emotional relationship. So it is with you. But we want to delude ourselves that love is the root. It isn't. It is only the branches. The root is beyond love, a naked kind of isolation, an isolated me, that does NOT meet and mingle, and never can'" (p. 207).

"Love is a direction which excludes all other directions. It's a freedom together, if you like'" (p. 215).

"She knew all she had to know, she had experienced all she had to experience, she was fulfilled in a kind of bitter ripeness, there remained only to fall from the tree into death" (p. 260)

"On the whole, he hated sex, it was such a limitation. It was sex that turned a man into a broken half of a couple, the woman into the other broken half. And he wanted to be single in himself, the woman single in herself" (p. 269).

"She (Ursula) believed that love was EVERYTHING. Man must render himself up to her. He must be quaffed to the dregs by her. Let him be HER MAN utterly, and she in return would be his humble slave—whether she wanted it or not" (p. 343)

"Fusion, fusion, this horrible fusion of two beings, which every woman and most men insisted on, was it not nauseous and horrible anyhow, whether it was a fusion of the spirit or of the emotional body?" (p. 391).

"Unconsciously, with her sensitive fingertips, she was tracing the back of his thighs, following some mysterious life-flow there. She had discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself. It was the strange mystery of his life-motion, there, at the back of the thighs, down the flanks" (p. 395).

"Even when he said, whispering with truth, 'I love you, I love you,' it was not the real truth. It was something beyond love, such a gladness of having surpassed oneself, of having transcended the old existence. How could he say "I" when he was something new and unknown, not himself at all? This I, this old formula of the age, was a dead letter" (p. 459).

"Nationally all Englishmen must die, so that they can exist individually" (p. 488).

"The world was finished now, for her. There was only the inner, individual darkness, sensation within the ego, the obscene religious mystery of ultimate reduction, the mystic frictional activities of diabolic reducing down, disintegrating the vital organic body of life" (p. 550).

"Best strive with oneself only, not with the universe" (p. 580).

"To be man was as nothing compared to the possibilities of the creative mystery. To have one's pulse beating direct from the mystery, this was perfection, unutterable satisfaction. Human or inhuman mattered nothing. The perfect pulse throbbed with indescribable being, miraculous unborn species" (p. 580).

"Those who die, and dying still can love, still believe, do not die" (p. 582).

Topics for Discussion

What is the role of irony in Women in Love? How does it help characters make sense of their world and how does it become dangerous? What is irony's relationship with art? With truth? Using examples from the text, describe the uses of and consequences of irony in Women in Love.

How does D. H. Lawrence define modern machine culture, and what answers does he propose to the deadening effect he says it has? Are his solutions convincing, or are they flawed, in your experience and observation? How do the various characters in the novel work out his ideas about industrial modernity? Using examples from the text, describe the problem with industrial modernity, and the solutions D. H. Lawrence proposes.

What is the difference between the relationship with men and women and the relationship between men, in D. H. Lawrence's Women in Love? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each kind of relationship? Why does Birkin need both? How does Lawrence describe the relationship between these two kinds of relation? How do you understand the difference?

D. H. Lawrence makes a searing critique of the mechanical culture embodied in Gerald Crich. Id that critique still valid now, or have the terms of industrialism changed, since the 1920s? In what ways is Women in Love still relevant to contemporary times? In what ways is it obsolete?

Is the relationship between Ursula and Birkin the ideal relationship? In what ways does that relationship satisfy, and in what ways does it not satisfy, the definitions Birkin and the narrator lay out, for what the ultimate marriage might be?

What is the difference between Ursula and Gudrun, in Women in Love? They are sisters, raised in the same household, but they have very different personalities. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of their personalities? What makes them who they are and why do their fates differ so drastically in the end?