

09. Modernism

Modernism

Modernism generally refers to the artistic response to the profound changes of the society that took place at the turn of the century and especially in the aftermath of WWI: the horrors of the war itself, the rising social tensions in the 1920's and 30's, and the new trends in science and psychology.

Background:

- Changes in the intellectual climate around the turn of the century: growing criticism of Victorian way of life among intellectuals, new ideas: Darwin; Marx; Freud; growing disillusionment with English imperialism (the Boer War 1899-1902 seen with discontent), rising Irish nationalism and struggle for independence
- “Edwardian Era” (1901-1910) – consciously anti-Victorian, King George V ascends to the throne in 1901, and after a few peaceful years WWI breaks out, followed by the economic crisis in the 1930's, rising Nazism and Spanish Civil War, growing popularity of Communism
- Late 19th century aesthetic theory: art for art's sake and the related separation of art and artist from “common” life and common people who were increasingly literal but uneducated with regards to any kind of “higher” culture; this is the beginning of the division of “highbrow/middlebrow/lowbrow” culture
- Literary background: influence of French symbolism and new developments in visual arts (Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism), a rediscovery and new appreciation for metaphysical poetry (Donne)—desire for greater intellectual complexity in poetry;
- Modernist fiction: fragmentation of perspective, time not as a chronological series of events but a mingling of past, present and future in the consciousness—time as a constant flow (which becomes the narrative technique of “stream of consciousness”); this focus on individual consciousness also brings a questioning of the possibilities for communication and the notion of the essential loneliness of the individual
- Modernist poetry: free verse, juxtaposition of images

Modernism was an international movement in all the arts, growing from the artists' feelings that the previously reliable structures of the human life and of society have been destroyed or unmasked as false: that order, coherence and unity (that had been among the chief characteristics of a work of art) did not really reflect an underlying order of reality but rather covered up the essentially fragmented and fluid nature of reality. Modernist art typically works with the fragment. In literature, this involves using a series or juxtaposition of images without transition and explanation, the technique of the collage, shifts in perspective, in voice; there is suggestion rather than explanation. The traditional authority of literature as a medium conveying truth and culture is challenged; the reliable narrator is replaced with a collage of voice and perspectives. While 19th century fiction typically featured a detailed, chronological narrative with an authoritative narrator, modern fiction prefers suggestion and partial perspective of the first person narrative or the incomplete perspective of one of the characters, or possibly multiple perspectives of multiple narrators.

Thomas Sterns Eliot (1888-1965)

One of the characteristics of English and American literature of the first half of the 20th century is its internationalism. Many American authors came to stay for extended periods of time in Europe, most

often in Paris and in London, so that they would meet and mingle in very international groups. T. S. Eliot was an American, born in Missouri; after some university studies in America he went to Europe, just before the outbreak of WW1, to devote himself to further studies at European universities. He settled in London in 1915 where he gradually began to work as an editor of literary periodicals, and eventually became an influential poet and literary critic. He got married at that time but that marriage turned to be a disaster; his wife Vivienne had serious mental problems and Eliot suffered deeply in such an unstable relationship. He experienced a mental breakdown and then separated from his wife. She was eventually confined to a mental institution. Some years after her death, Eliot married his assistant and enjoyed a happy marriage in his old age. Eliot wished to stay in Europe; he appreciated its rich culture and long history, which he found was lacking in the USA. In 1927 he became a British citizen and joined the Church of England; as he himself famously put it, he was “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion.” In 1947 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Eliot’s Modernist poetry uses juxtaposition, in other words scenes and images are put next to each other without any transitory or explanatory comments. Secondly, Eliot relies on many sources in his poetry and intertextual allusions are very frequent in his texts: references to Christian theology and biblical imagery, to ancient cults, to Greek mythology, to Asian religions, to English authors, to French symbolists, to Dante and other classical European authors, and also to contemporary scholarship or music. He writes in free verse.

Eliot’s first collection of poems was *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) but the poem that made him famous as one of the chief representatives of Modernist literature was *The Waste Land* (1922), a long, complex poem with countless allusions to other texts and to contemporary life. After *The Waste Land* Eliot turned more and more to religious, Christian themes in his poetry, retaining still to a great deal its complex nature: *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (collected gradually and published together first in 1943). Eliot also wrote a number of theater plays and many literary theoretical essays and pieces of criticism. Among his most famous essays is, for example, his text “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921), in which he discusses English metaphysical poetry. He appreciates the ability of the metaphysical poets to have “a direct sensuous apprehension of thought”—in other words their ability to achieve a union between feeling and thought, and argues that after them, starting with Dryden and Milton, there occurred a “dissociation of sensibility,” a break of this union which poets have not been able recapture. Another important essay of Eliot’s is “Tradition and Individual Talent” (1919), in which he explores the problem of tradition and artistic innovation, and how the work of a poet is related to previous literary tradition. Eliot does not call for any break with tradition but rather argues that the poet must penetrate into the heart of tradition and only then can s/he bring something new. That does not mean, however, that a poet must conform to the conventions of the past; rather, tradition (the accumulation of past works of art) is continually influenced and shaped by new, contemporary works of art. The influence works both ways: the past influences the present, and the present shapes, retrospectively, the past. In this sense the poet must surrender himself/herself to tradition. This is Eliot’s “impersonal theory” of poetry: art is about the depersonalization of the author. The author must be fully immersed in study and knowledge of the existing corpus of culture; there is no room for subjective emotions, as the Romantics would have had it. One should not study poetry to discover “what the author wanted to say” but study poetry in the context of other literary texts. Eliot’s critical ideas become influential in the following decades in a new school of literary theory called New Criticism (starting in the 1930’s in the USA).

The Waste Land is one of the most important pieces of Modernist poetry. It is a complex image of the dry and wasted land of European culture in the interbellum period, after all the changes that occurred in the society in the previous decades and culminated in WW1. *The Waste Land* also has a psychological explanation (that the poem reflects Eliot's own mental breakdown and burnout during the critical years in his unhappy marriage—he worked on it while he was recovering from a nervous breakdown). This may very well be true, but it should not reduce the complexity of the poem to a single reading. *The Waste Land* is a multilayered text: it references texts and learning from the Greek Antiquity, the Bible, Hinduism and Buddhism, Dante, English literature, French literature, music; it gives us a mixture of images, voices, bits and pieces of stories and conversations and philosophical reflections, all these standing side by side in juxtaposition without any transitions. Eliot wrote some explanatory comments to go with the poem and scholars have traced the various intertextual allusions of the text, but even with the supporting materials *The Waste Land* is not an easy read. It is an expression of Eliot's belief that art should be complex, that it should be "highbrow," and not condescend to the low abilities of the common reader.

The poem was heavily edited by Ezra Pound, who deleted many passages to make it more compact and powerful. The text has five parts: I. Burial of the Dead, II. A Game of Chess, III. The Fire Sermon (the title is taken from a famous Buddhist sermon), IV. Death by Water, V. What the Thunder Said. "Burial of the Dead," a rite in the liturgy of the Anglican Church, opens with an image of spring which is unsettling; winter seems preferable because it does not stir desire. Then this image changes into someone's personal memory of winter and childhood, then an image of the "hyacinth girl," of a tarot card reading, and finally of London. This gliding from one image to another is characteristic of *The Waste Land*. "A Game of Chess" has two scenes, the first one is an upper class parlor where a woman is waiting and then talking to her visitor, the conversation falling apart; the second scene is a London pub and people chatting as the bartender closes down for the night: there is a man and woman talking about the woman's marriage and how worn out she looks, and how instead of buying new teeth with the money her husband gave her, she went to get an abortion pill. "The Fire Sermon" is the longest section, it opens with a natural scenery of the Thames, then the Greek prophet Tiresias describes an indifferent love affair between a man and a woman, then there is a scene set on the Thames referencing Richard Wagner and another love affair between a nameless man and a woman. "Death by Water" is the shortest piece, depicting the drowning of Phlebas (a character Eliot invented), and the last section, "What the Thunder Said," concentrates most clearly on the images of drought and the yearning for rain, which does not come, until finally the Thunder (a divine voice, perhaps) speaks (this part is inspired by the Upanishads). The Thunder speaks three words, three commandments: give, sympathize, control. The poem reflects on each of these: what have we given?—only in the act of sexual union we have given something but that act of giving is but momentary; have we sympathized?—each person is locked in his or her prison; have we surrendered to control?—the text says that the heart "would have" responded, but perhaps it never really has. Then there is an image of the mythic Fisher King (a mythical figure connected to regeneration and life force; in ancient mythical cults, fish were considered holy food and the symbol of fruitfulness) waiting on the shore considering what to do; the prospect is that of ruin or perhaps still clinging on to the remnants of what it was. Finally, the poem ends with the Hindu benediction of "Shantih," "peace which passes understanding," suggesting perhaps a transcendental hope, importantly from a non-European source.

To give an example of Eliot's later writing, here is the first part of "East Coker," the second of the four quartets, written in 1940 – the first of the quartets that Eliot wrote during WW2 ("Burnt Norton" was written in 1935, "The Dry Salvages" in 1941 and "Little Gidding" in 1942). Each of these

quartets is divided into five sections, like *The Waste Land*, and each quartet bears a place name as its title. Burnt Norton is a manor house in southwest England that Eliot visited; East Coker is the village where his Puritan ancestors had lived before they left England for the New World (it is also the place where Eliot is buried); The Dry Salvages are rocks by the coast of Massachusetts where Eliot would spend summers with his family as a child; and Little Gidding is a small village in East England in which there was an Anglican religious community in the 17th century. The poems all deal with the passing of time and man's understanding of time, put in a kind of mystical or religious framework: man's relation to the divine is ever present in the background. In each quartet, the fifth section refers to the problem of meaning in language and how words signify, so that the poems become a metatext. As in *The Waste Land* here, too, there are many intertextual references: to the Bible, to Christian mystics (Julian of Norwich), but also to Hindu sacred texts, and also references to the contemporary situation – WW2. *The Quartets* are more unified in their voice than *The Waste Land*, they do not use such a difficult juxtaposition of images, but their lyrical quality is just as striking.

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.
Houses live and die: there is a time for building
And a time for living and for generation
And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto.

In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls
Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,
Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,
And the deep lane insists on the direction
Into the village, in the electric heat
Hypnotised. In a warm haze the sultry light
Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.
The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.
Wait for the early owl.

In that open field
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,
On a summer midnight, you can hear the music
Of the weak pipe and the little drum
And see them dancing around the bonfire
The association of man and woman

In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie—
A dignified and commodious sacrament.
Two and two, necessarye coniunction,
Holding eche other by the hand or the arm
Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,
Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
Mirth of those long since under earth
Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons
The time of the seasons and the constellations
The time of milking and the time of harvest
The time of the coupling of man and woman
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

Dawn points, and another day
Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind
Wrinkles and slides. I am here
Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

faeces – excrement; wainscot – wood paneling on the wall; arras – tapestry; sultry – oppressively hot

YOUTUBE:

TS Eliot reads his Four Quarters, by vinyhilist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga8tOrG4ZSw>

10:42-14:00

James Joyce (1882-1941)

One of the most outstanding examples of Modernist authors, Joyce was an Irishman born in Dublin. He attended Catholic schools but instead of going to the seminary he studied modern languages in Dublin and gradually abandoned his Catholic faith. As an adult man he worked as language teacher in many different places, including France, Italy and Switzerland where he sought safety during WW2 and where he also died. Joyce was a polyglot and spoke around 15 languages. He had very poor eyesight. Although he became a respected author, he never made much money by his success. He was happily married to an uneducated woman from the Irish countryside. He spent by far the greatest part of his life outside Ireland, but he always wrote about Dublin, and his first collection of short stories was called *Dubliners* (1914). In these stories Joyce depicts Dublin and its residents, mostly ordinary

people in their ordinary business and concerns, and the collection of stories captures various stages of life, from childhood to adolescence and maturity.

In his next work, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Joyce invents the character of Stephen Dedalus and tells, with semi-autobiographical references, the story of Stephen's gradual liberation from the nationalistic and particularly religious (Catholic) traditions in which he has grown up. His moment of "epiphany" comes when Stephen, after strenuous effort to part with his selfish and sinful ways and to be a good Catholic, considers becoming a priest; he sees a girl walking on the sea shore, is struck by her beauty and realizes that admiration of beauty and sensual pleasure is not wrong, nothing to be ashamed of. Instead of going to the seminary, Stephen goes to study literature, articulates his own theory of art and is firmly determined to overcome all the social restraints which pressure him. Finally, he decides to leave Ireland to find true liberation. The name of the character, Stephen Dedalus, obviously refers to the hero of Greek mythology Daedalus who made wings for himself to escape from Minotaur's labyrinth; similarly Stephen Dedalus escapes the confining restrictions of his society to be free. This moment of "epiphany" is an important element in Joyce's texts; he uses the theological term that is related to the "revelation" of Christ to the three Magi, but his revelation is not a theological one, rather it is a moment of insight, often unexpected, when an experience or a sight or a situation helps the character realize some deeper meaning or deeper truth.

Joyce's Modernist masterpiece is the long and complex *Ulysses* (1922 in Paris), a novel which takes place in one single day in Dublin, 16 June 1904, and has three main protagonists: Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom (a Dublin Jew—so an outsider, of sorts, like Joyce himself, who was an Irish Catholic or ex-Catholic in London) and his wife Molly Bloom. The book is organized into 18 sections, each of which refers to an episode from Homer's *Odyssey*. Leopold Bloom is a kind of modern Odysseus/Ulysses, Molly is his unfaithful wife and Stephen Dedalus becomes his lost son Telemachus. Bloom and Dedalus go about their various errands in Dublin; they pass each other several times and they finally meet when Dedalus is drunk and goes to a brothel. Bloom takes him home to recuperate, and finds out that Molly had a visit from a lover, as he had suspected. The book ends with Molly's monologue, five enormous, sprawling sentences: her recollections of her childhood in Gibraltar, thoughts of her lover that afternoon, memories of life with Bloom and in conclusion, her memories of how they were in love, ending finally with her all-embracing, affirmative "yes"—perhaps to her marriage with Bloom, despite their long estrangement, but also "yes" to the potential and to the sensuality of life.

Written, famously, in a "stream of consciousness," the novel is a challenge to readers, as the plot develops irrespective of chronology and through a mixture of the characters' thoughts, actions, bits of conversations, and memories. It is a story of a quest for paternity: Bloom's son died as a baby, Stephen Dedalus has made an emotional break with his own father; also a story of overcoming remorse and guilt, obviously also a story about love and physicality, about the body, often with comic overtones; and a story about the limitedness of human perspective. How each of the three characters experiences and remembers reality is shown to be limited, unreliable, biased. Because of its very explicit treatment of sexuality the book was banned in the USA and in Britain for several years but T.S. Eliot, who admired Joyce's writing and who was a influential man in the publishing world, helped him to publish his next book, *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) and a selection of his writings.

YOUTUBE

**James Joyce – Ulysses: Molly Bloom's soliloquy, last 50 lines, by MichaelAskil
Movie clip, 3 min**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ii_aZ6djNkM

Nora Connolly — Molly Bloom's soliloquy, by Irish Cultural Centre Hammersmith; 5 min
Start at 1:24

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMxSBZa9hfc>

God of heaven theres nothing like nature the wild mountains then the sea and the waves rushing then the beautiful country with the fields of oats and wheat and all kinds of things and all the fine cattle going about that would do your heart good to see rivers and lakes and flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colours springing up even out of the ditches primroses and violets nature it is as for them saying theres no God I wouldnt give a snap of my two fingers for all their learning why dont they go and create something I often asked him atheists or whatever they call themselves go and wash the cobbles off themselves first then they go howling for the priest and they dying and why why because theyre afraid of hell on account of their bad conscience ah yes I know them well who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all who ah that they dont know neither do I so there you are they might as well try to stop the sun from rising tomorrow the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head in the grey tweed suit and his straw hat the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyear like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldnt answer first only looked out over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he didnt know of Mulvey and Mr Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves and the sailors playing all birds fly and I say stoop and washing up dishes they called it on the pier and the sentry in front of the governors house with the thing round his white helmet poor devil half roasted and the Spanish girls laughing in their shawls and their tall combs and the auctions in the morning the Greeks and the jews and the Arabs and the devil knows who else from all the ends of Europe and Duke street and the fowl market all clucking outside Larby Sharons and the poor donkeys slipping half asleep and the vague fellows in the cloaks asleep in the shade on the steps and the big wheels of the carts of the bulls and the old castle thousands of years old yes and those handsome Moors all in white and turbans like kings asking you to sit down in their little bit of a shop and Ronda with the old windows of the posadas 2 glancing eyes a lattice hid for her lover to kiss the iron and the wineshops half open at night and the castanets and the night we missed the boat at Algeciras the watchman going about serene with his lamp and O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the figtrees in the Alameda gardens yes and all the queer little streets and the pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

One of the key figures of the Modernist movement and indeed of the London intellectual elite of the first half of the 20th century, Virginia Woolf had all the qualifications necessary to become an elite liberal thinker and author. Her father was a scholar, literary critic and philosopher, member of the late Victorian intellectual elite. From her childhood Virginia was surrounded by leading artists and intellectuals; she became an influential writer and thinker, her sister was a successful painter. As an adult woman she lived in Bloomsbury, a part of London which later gave the name to her circle of friends and associates: the Bloomsbury group. They were intellectuals and artists (including, for example, E. M. Forster) who met regularly as friends to discuss not only art but also new trends in the society; among their important topics was women's emancipation and sexual liberation. The Bloomsbury friends had very open sexual relationships among themselves, both heterosexual and homosexual. Virginia eventually married Leonard Woolf, a journalist, and they had a happy marriage. Later Virginia had a long love affair with a female writer, Vita Sacville-West, who became an inspiration for Woolf's book *Orlando* (1928); Leonard Woolf remained tolerant and supportive even throughout this period.

Throughout her life Woolf struggled with depression and mental problems which was not publicly known, until she committed suicide in 1941, as a consequence of her increasing nervous instability: she was afraid she would become a burden to Leonard, and she was also terrified of WWII.

Woolf was the author of many essays and theoretical texts, about literature and art, but she was also a leading thinker in the area of women's rights; her concern was with the situation of professional women like herself. In a famous essay called *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she argues against the social expectations that women should be mothers and homemakers. If there is very little fiction written by women, she says, it is because women do not have the necessary conditions for writing, not because they are not intellectually capable of it. Woolf says: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" – emphasizing the necessity of economic and social independence of women.

As a fiction writer Woolf wanted to focus on something which she found missing in Victorian fiction: her interest was in the mind, in one's motives, in the workings of consciousness. She experiments in her fiction with the "stream of consciousness" method by which she can depict the fine nuances of human psychology: the mind's constantly moving back and forth between the present and the past, between thought and action, between change and memory. These are the features of her famous books: *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928).

YOUTUBE: Leonard Bloom remembers Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press

Leonard Woolf - On the Formation of the Bloomsbury Group and on Virginia Woolf; by John Hall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xVQRGhJkgo>

watch from 2:27 to 7:27

YOUTUBE: The Hours opening sequence, by Brendan; 5 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMRoqYM01j0>

The Hours, a film adaptation of Michael Cunningham's book, inspired by the life of Virginia Woolf and her book *Mrs Dalloway*

David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930)

In great contrast to the privileged upbringing of Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence's early life was that of a poor, underprivileged boy in a Nottinghamshire village. His father was an uneducated miner; his mother was a teacher who wanted her children to be more refined than their father who was often drunk and overall a crude man. Lawrence first sided with his mother's aspirations but later came to see the middle class values as lifeless and, reassessing the character and life of his father, he saw the potential for real vitality in the world of working class people. This tension is reflected in his novels: *Sons and Lovers* (1913) is largely autobiographical, depicting the life of a miner's son, his relationship to his parents, the oppressive love of his mother, and his falling in love with a young girl and with a married woman.

Through the influence of his mother, Lawrence pursued a career in education and became a schoolteacher, while he also started to write poetry and short stories. In 1912 he quit schoolteaching; he fell in love with a German aristocrat, Frieda, who was the wife of a university professor. After Frieda's divorce she and Lawrence got married but it was considered scandalous. Things became even more difficult after the outbreak of WWI; Frieda was considered suspicious by the British authorities and the couple was closely observed. Lawrence started to look for a different kind of social system than what he knew in Europe and got interested in searching for an ideal society; he and Frieda traveled to Australia and to New Mexico, trying to learn from native tribes. They returned to Europe when Lawrence contracted tuberculosis; he died in the south of France.

In 1915, when Lawrence was already respected as an established novelist, he published a novel of a different kind, one which shocked contemporary readers and critics by its explicit depiction of sexual desire: *The Rainbow*, followed later by a related second novel called *Women in Love* (1920). Both novels were quickly banned, like another of his famous novels, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (published in Italy in 1928; in England it wasn't published until 1960). These novels all focus on love relationships and are very explicitly erotic. For Lawrence, however, this had a deeper meaning: he put sexual desire into a kind of mystical framework; his sensuous language is not just about the passion itself but it always has a strong lyrical and symbolical dimension, celebrating the energy, the liberation, the sense of ecstatic union not just of two persons but of the body, the self, nature, the universe. Lawrence's novels open larger questions of man and nature, nature versus the industrial society, personal identity, the connection of the mind and the body, and also probe into the issue of social class.

The Rainbow and *Women in Love* were originally conceived as a single novel but eventually grew into two separate books which follow the lives of several generations of the same family. In *Women in Love*, set in the 1910's, we read the story of Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen whose parents and grandparents were characters in *The Rainbow*. Gudrun's marriage to the gradually more and more ruthless mine owner Gerald Crich is contrasted to the love relationship of her sister Ursula: Ursula's lover Rupert Birkin, a friend of Crich's, perhaps Lawrence's alter ego (also a schoolteacher), experiences strongly a desire to be united to the natural world, which coincides with his passionate relationship with Ursula. Birkin also has strong feelings for Gudrun's husband Gerald—in the novel they are depicted as friends, but there is a notable homoerotic undertone in their relationship; there has been debate among scholars about Lawrence's possible homosexuality/bisexuality. The marriage of Gudrun and Gerald ends tragically when Gerald, in a fit of jealousy, attacks Gudrun while they are hiking in the Alps and then wanders off to the Alps, slips off a cliff and dies. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* depicts the love relationship of Connie Chatterley, who is married to a crippled and therefore impotent aristocrat/businessman, and their gamekeeper Mellors.

Here is an excerpt from the conversation between Birkin and Crich; Birkin is sick and Crich visits him. As Birkin ponders his love-hate attitude toward sex and a female lover, he offers Crich a different kind of union: friendship, a relationship in which they would remain perfectly whole and free, in contrast to what he considers to be the inevitable desire for dominance in a heterosexual relationship.

He [Birkin] wanted so much to be free, not under the compulsion of any need for unification, or tortured by unsatisfied desire. (...) And he wanted to be with Ursula as free as with himself, single and clear and cool, yet balanced, polarised with her. The merging, the clutching, the mingling of love was become madly abhorrent to him.

But it seemed to him, woman was always so horrible and clutching, she had such a lust for possession, a greed of self-importance in love. She wanted to have, to own, to control, to be dominant. Everything must be referred back to her, the Woman, the Great Mother of everything, out of whom proceeded everything and to whom everything must finally be rendered up. (...)

“You know how the old German knights used to swear a Blutbruderschaft,” he said to Gerald (...) and swear to be true to each other, of one blood, all their lives. That is what we ought to do. No wounds, that is obsolete. But we ought to swear to love each other, you and I, implicitly, and perfectly, finally, without any possibility of going back on it. (...) You must tell me what you think, later. You know what I mean? Not sloppy emotionalism. An impersonal union that leaves one free.”

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