

## Nietzsche's Influence on Character Design in *Women in Love*: A Philosophical Exploration

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to examine philosophical infusion in D. H. Lawrence's novel Women in Love. It examines how Lawrence has been influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy in his character portrayal in his novel. It also looks at how Lawrence shapes his characters in his novel borrowing the ideas from Nietzsche. Nietzsche's key philosophical ideas are used to the creation of characters in Women in Love. This study presents a fresh analysis of the text and opens the door for further research by analyzing the novel through the spectacles of Nietzsche's philosophy. It fosters a greater knowledge of both the literary works and Nietzsche's philosophical ideas by encouraging researchers to go deeper into classic literature and study English novels from a Nietzschean perspective. It promotes a deeper understanding of both the literary works and Nietzsche's philosophical concepts. This paper explores how Lawrence skillfully incorporates Nietzsche's philosophy into his character portrayal by opening up new avenues for philosophically informed literary analysis of classic literature. It also contributes to the understanding of classic literature and the application of philosophical concepts to literary works. Readers might understand the themes and characters of Lawrence's novels in a new way by applying Nietzschean concepts to the book. This paper sheds light on the intellectual framework of the story and divulges further levels of meaning. It expands the field of literary studies by making it easier to conduct comparative studies between different authors and philosophies. This approach promotes interdisciplinary study and more cohesive academic discourse by bridging the gaps between literature and philosophy. Furthermore, it encourages interdisciplinary research, bridging the gap between literature and philosophy, and fostering a more comprehensive academic discourse. Overall, it aims to foster a better, more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between literature and philosophy.*

**Keywords:** Life force, Nietzschean philosophy, Overman, self-assertion, transformation, will to power

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## **Introduction**

The well-known German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has had a significant impact on many different areas of creativity and intellect. It is well known that Nietzsche's philosophical theories have had a significant influence on English poets and writers. Nietzschean philosophical principles are present in nearly all of D.H. Lawrence's literary works. His book *Women in Love* is a good illustration of Nietzschean influence. Four fundamental Nietzschean ideas are used by Lawrence to shape his characters and their complex relationships in his books.

These Nietzschean concepts encompass the 'Revaluation of all values', the 'Overman', the 'Will to Power' and the 'Last Man' often intertwined with the 'Blond Beast'. Lawrence has incorporated key concepts of Nietzsche's philosophy into his novels, particularly through the characters in *Women in Love*.

## **Overman's Shadow on Birkin**

Nietzsche (1989) employed the term *Übermensch* for Overman to encapsulate his concept that man is something that must be overcome. The Overman is an artist as he creates himself. He undergoes a transformative process of self-surpassing, parallel to an artist crafting his masterpiece. He creates his values that make up his character. It is his will power that shapes his character. Nietzsche (1989) says, "Life itself is *will to power* (p.21). In Nietzsche's philosophy, these elements are inherently interconnected (Bianco, 1972, p.3). He has passions that to get perfection in life. He strives to have the "self-perfection's uppermost state (p.11). He refuses to compromise with society's conventional definitions of humanity and consistently endeavors to surpass them.

Birkin epitomizes Nietzsche's vision of the Overman. Birkin is an intellectual with abundant knowledge of different fields. Obviously, as an intellectual, he is guided with the concept of 'Will to Power' in himself. "Nietzsche views our pursuit for knowledge as not impartial, but as a manifestation of our 'Will to Power' our fundamental motive of self-assertion, subjugation, and conquest, as well as our need for security" (Habib, 2011, p.183). So, Birkin seeks self-improvement and undergoes a transformation. His pursuit of self-discovery and self-surpassing creates a distance for him from societal conventions as "the Overman who seeks mastery over their passions and constantly strives for self-perfection" (Bianco, 1972, p.3). His relationship with Ursula reflects Nietzschean ideal of a partnership based on equality and mutual respect. He rejects power dynamics within his relationship with Ursula. Ursula is "sensitive and protective, and believes in true love" (Zheng, 2010, p. 126). Birkin advocates for a harmonious equilibrium in relationships with her. It reflects "Nietzsche's emphasis on partnership and shared growth" (Ahmed and Hayat, 2017, p. 434). He believes on equal partnership and emphasizes on shared growth and mutual respect in relationships.

Birkin goes on self-questioning and reflection, as he evolves and matures. His journey involves self growth and transformation so as to become a better version of himself. It lines up with Nietzsche's concept of self-surpassing and continuously improving. From good, he becomes better but he remains dissatisfied and questions himself and his surroundings. In this context, Bianco (1972) states "Birkin's persistent self-surpassing resonates strongly with Nietzsche's vision of the Overman" (p.45). Birkin's continual self-improvement embodies Nietzsche's Overman concept. The Overman disdains any

compromise with the conventional definitions of humanity and endeavors to achieve self-perfection. Birkin also does the same. His pursuit of self-improvement leads him to surpass his previous accomplishments and always strives for further betterment. Birkin parallels to Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch, often translated as the Overman or Superman who represents a self-surpassing man.

At a train station, Birkin and Gerald meet and have an important conversation. Gerald finds a newspaper article filled with meaningless words and tells Birkin about it. It leads to a discussion about the need for a special person who can bring new ideas, truths, and a different perspective towards looking at life. Gerald remarks that "there must arise a man who will give new values to thing, give us new truths, a new attitude to life or else we shall be crumbling nothingness in a few years, a country in ruin" (Lawrence,2004, p.59). A visionary person is a must to save society from becoming insignificant. Birkin and Gerald discuss on the importance of rethinking and changing the traditional and social values. They believe that without such a visionary figure to bring fresh ideas and perspectives, the society could lose its significance. Birkin asserts that "reforming society is futile without first dismantling the old value structures (p.42). He advocates for the revaluation of all values, a process that involves dismantling the old value systems rather than merely creating new ones.

Birkin expresses his disgust for a society built on lies and deception driven by pursuit of materialism. But Gerald supports the acquisition of material possessions as a means for the working class to attain a higher status. Birkin reacts him with disgust. He argues that desire for material gain makes individuals conform to others' expectations. If they live by societal anticipations, it ultimately results in false value systems. This perspective is closer to Nietzsche's admiration for individuals who uncover the hypocrisy and excessive comfort of their era. In this context, Bianco (1972) quotes Nietzsche (1989) as "men who uncover the hypocrisy and excessive comfort of their age are the most admirable types because their revaluation involves the courage to become conscious" (p.43). Men have to have courage to confront their one's own consciousness.

Birkin's viewpoint, which is frequently based on existential or philosophical discontent, conveys a deep dissatisfaction with mankind. His desire for humanity's extinction reflects a nihilistic outlook, in which he finds no hope in human activities and inventions. He thinks that human beings are incapable of creating anything genuinely worthwhile and valuable. It reflects a profound criticism of moral, artistic and societal shortcomings. This sentiment echoes Nietzsche's perspective, as it carries the notion that "the Overman is an aspirational goal rather than a realized ideal" (Bianco, p. 45). Like Nietzsche's Overman, Birkin is not bound with anything. He does not have strong bond with his society. He is high and free spirited man. He is rich in inner strength as he surpasses himself and becomes better. He constantly strives to improve himself and grow. He never loses his inner strength. He is in line with Nietzsche's Overman. His unconventional lifestyle, marked by a lack of fixed dwellings and feeble societal bonds, "aligns him with Nietzsche's Overman" (p.45). Nietzsche describes the Overman as an individual who rejects the desire for an era characterized by compassion, gentleness and justice. He thinks such hope and aspirations lead one to inner weakness.

Birkin and Ursula both reject the will as domination. It can be argued that Lawrence is against will as domination. He believes more in the sensual side of human being. Zheng (2010) remarks, "Birkin, in a

sense, is a self-portrait of Lawrence, who fights against the cramping pressures of mechanized industrialism and the domination of any kind of dead formulas. He was presented as a symbolic figure of human warmth, standing for the spontaneous Life Force" (p. 127). He believes that the new developments of the modern age will bring more destruction and death to the society rather than improvement.

Lawrence (2004) further emphasizes Birkin's unique character by depicting him as clever and distinct, bold enough to reject the conventional norms. He is introduced in the way Nietzsche introduces the Overman:

Birkin was as thin as MrCrich, pale and ill-looking. His figure was narrow but nicely made. He went with a slight trail of one foot, which came only from self-consciousness. Although he was dressed correctly for his part, yet there was an innate incongruity which caused a slight ridiculousness in his appearance. His nature was clever and separate, he did not fit at all in the conventional occasion. Yet he subordinated himself to the common idea, travestied himself. He affected to be quite ordinary, perfectly and marvelously commonplace. And he did it so well, taking the tone of his surroundings, adjusting himself quickly to his interlocutor and his circumstance. (p.29)

Lawrence emphasizes Birkin's uniqueness by portraying him as clever, sharp and distinct individual who doesn't fit into society's usual expectations. He was presented as a symbolic figure of human warmth, standing for the "spontaneous Life Force." (Zheng, 2010, p. 127). However, Birkin paradoxically conceals his distinctiveness, appearing completely ordinary and unremarkable mediocrity. He excels at adapting to his surroundings and interacting with people, pretending to be just like everyone else.

Birkin's portrayal in the novel mirrors Nietzsche's vision of the Overman- rich in spirit, unbound by societal norms, and committed to self-improvement. His strength lies in his inner strength rather than physical strength. Birkin is depicted as an entity from elsewhere. His first meeting with Ursula at school evokes his unearthly image:

She was busy, the end of the day was here, the work went on as a peaceful tide that is at flood, hushed to retire. This day had gone by like so many more, in an activity that was like a trance. At the end there was a little haste, to finish what was in hand. - - - She stood in shadow in front of the class, with catkins in her hand, and she leaned towards the children, absorbed in the passion of instruction. She heard, but did not notice the click of the door. Suddenly she started. She saw, in the shaft of ruddy, copper-coloured light near her, the face of a man. It was gleaming like fire, watching her, waiting for her to be aware. (Lawrence, 2004, p.54-55)

This description reinforces Birkin's divine nature, emphasizing his indefinite, transcendent existence. Birkin at Halliday's London house is shown as an ephemeral. Lawrence, (2004) further states, "Birkin looked ghostly and unlimited" p. 194). At another instance, when he goes to see Ursula at her house, he is described as an "indefinite entity" (Bianco, 1972, p. 49). He is also described as "the children, in a sudden angelic mood, retired without a word. Billy seemed angelic like a cherub boy, or like an acolyte, Birkin was a tall, grave angel looking down to him" (Lawrence , 2004, p. 195). These portrayals show how Lawrence has crafted Birkin in accordance with Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch. Birkin has been given the persona like that of the Overman. Birkin's multifaceted

characterizations make parallel with Nietzsche's vision of the *Übermensch*. Both carry the qualities of a free and independent spirit, resisting societal conventions.

Birkin's inclination towards solitude is highlighted in the novel. He decides to stay away from the people of his surroundings. He travels to France without notifying anyone. Later, he develops self-awareness and becomes more aware of himself. He makes some progress in self surpassing process. He avoids being around people and undergoes profound self-awareness with personal growth. Only creative men can go through this process of contemplation. This is the image of Nietzsche's *Overman*, a person that goes beyond, that surpasses himself. It echoes Nietzsche's concept of withdrawal and return. Bianco (1972) takes it as "Nietzsche's image of the self-surpassing individual" (p. 60). During his solitary sojourn, Birkin undergoes deep self-awareness and personal growth following the Nietzsche's concept of withdrawal and return. Nietzsche's *Overman* also exhibits a recurring pattern of withdrawal from society characterized by psychological or physical isolation, followed by a reestablishment of human connections. This process of withdrawal and return is typical of creative individuals, who engage in contemplation during periods of solitude and then apply their insights to effective action upon reintegration into society.

### **The Nietzsche's 'Will to Power' in the Novel**

Nietzsche (1989) contends that living entities inherently possess a desire to exert their strength, asserting that life itself embodies the 'Will to Power'. He says, "Living things wants to discharge its strength- life itself is The Will to Power- self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent consequences of this" (p.15). Even actions undertaken for self-preservation are fundamentally driven by the desire to exert power. In the story of *Women in Love*, characters are found following Nietzsche's philosophical concept of 'Will to Power'.

### **Hermione and 'Will to Power'**

Hermione is the major character in the novel *Women in Love*. She represents the Nietzschean concept of 'Will to Power'. Hermione is driven with the desire to exert her power over the people around her. According to Nietzsche, any living being wants to discharge its strength and exert power on others. Being guided with the Nietzschean philosophy of the 'Will to Power', Hermione wants to exert power to influence people around her. She "represents the power of intellect over the emotion" (Gautam, 2016, p.1028). She tries to influence the actions and choices of the people around her with her own will to power. Time and again, she attempts to extract information from others with the intention of exerting power over them. She seems to be self-centered. Her forceful behavior guided by 'Will to Power' occurs when she compels Gudrun to show her the unfinished painting which was only half done. Besides, in an argument at Ursula's school, Hermione tries to influence Birkin to bend him to her will. But Birkin defies her in her arguments and makes her feel humiliated. As she cannot exert her power over Birkin with strong logics in arguments, she makes physical attack on him to satisfy her will to power. It can be taken as "a manifestation of her thwarted Will to Power" (Ahmed and Hayat, 2017, p. 431). When intellectual coercion fails, she resorts to physical dominance to assert her control.

In the novel, both male and female characters can be seen in a continuous struggle for exerting power over each other. For instance, in the chapter, "Mino", a male cat frequently attacks a female cat. Ursula does not like it. She says, "Mino, I don't like you. You are bully like all males" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 149). She takes it as male's attack on female and tries to stop male cat from attacking on female cat. It is also symbolic of an attempt of exerting her Will to Power as female to male. Ursula's attempt to stop the male cat exerting physical power over female cat is symbolic of asserting herself against male dominance. The male cat, Mino, serves as a symbol for all males, and Ursula's resistance reflects Nietzsche's concept that "All living things possess a will to power although many do not have minds" (Ahmed and Hayat, 2017, p. 432). Mino employs physical power over female cat as Hermione makes physical attack on Birkin. Both display the will to power through physical assaults. Both try to prove their superiority over each other.

### **Gerald's Struggle for Identity**

Unlike Birkin, Gerald struggles for his identity and societal expectations. As he rises in the industrial and societal hierarchy, he experiences an identity crisis. His initial success in taking over the coal mines brings a sense of achievement and power, but it comes at the expense of his true self. In this context, Bianco (1972) states that "Becoming entwined with the industrial machinery, he loses touch with his true self"(p. 83). His identity crisis is marked by a deep sense of disconnection and alienation. Questioning his own authenticity, he experiences existential fear. It reflects Nietzsche's criticism of losing one's true self in the pursuit of societal success.

Gerald is energized and enthralled by the lively atmosphere of London. Birkin is disgusted by what he sees in London. He perceives its decadence and moral decline. Gerald and Birkin's attitudes toward the city highlight their fundamental differences. Gerald's attraction to London and its decadence highlights the conflict between his pursuit of societal success and his desire for authentic experiences. In this context, Bianco (1972) states, "Nietzsche's critique of urban decadence as a breeding ground for the "Last Man" mentality is evident in Gerald's growing attraction to the city" (p. 84). Gerald's engagement with the ballet dancer, Pusum indicates his inclination to decadence and sensuality. Gerald represents the embodiment of Nietzsche's 'Blond Beast', driven by primal instincts. In contrast, Birkin seems to be true to his character as "he maintains a more intellectual and detached perspective, distancing himself from Pusum's seductive allure" (p. 84). Birkin sees the ballet as a decadent spectacle whereas Gerald regards it as a profound artistic expression. These opposite responses to the performance indicate their fundamental disparities in worldview and values. Bianco (1972) further says, "Birkin's disdain for London reflects mirrors Nietzsche's critique of contemporary society, while Gerald's fascination aligns with the allure of urban life" (p.84). Birkin and Gerald perceive the same thing in different ways. Gerald's attraction to Pusum, the ballet dancer, represent his love for decadence and sensuality.

Gerald also tries to exert his will to power over other. He is called "the God of machine" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 223) for he owns the coal mines. He rises to a leadership position in the coal mines but he cannot be satisfied. Steven (2007) in his essay, "D.H. Lawrence: Organicism and the Modernist Novel", describes the effect of industry on nature. He states, "All of which examines the impact of what Lawrence calls the mechanical on landscape and on our way of living. In addition, the modern

has a demonic and fascinating power, which is an awful destructiveness" (p.142). Gerald experiences a disconcerting sense of alienation and detachment from his own identity. He finds himself at a distance from who he really is. In this context, Bianco(1972) remarks, "Gerald's profound disorientation underscores his internal struggle to reconcile his newfound social status with his authentic self" (p.83). This existential crisis is evident when he looks into the mirror, searching for something elusive.

On the other hand, Gerald frequently tries to exert his power to bring his beloved Gudrun under his dominance. His desire for dominance can be seen in their intimate encounters under a bridge as he exerts his physical power:

She wanted to stand under the bridge with HER sweetheart, and be kissed under the bridge in the invisible darkness. Her steps dragged as she drew near. Under the bridge, they came to a standstill, and he lifted her upon his breast. His body vibrated taut and powerful as he closed upon her and crushed her, breathless and dazed and destroyed, crushed her upon his breast. - - - And how much more powerful and terrible was his embrace, was how much more concentrated and supreme his love was. - - - He lifted her and seemed to pour her into himself, like wine into a cup. (Lawrence , 2004, p.330-31)

Gerald tries to exert his will to power over Gudrun as if she is there to fulfill his desire as wine. He has power over everyone and everything. His will even moves to a higher level of domination to reach Gudrun. In this aspect, he could be reflecting Nietzsche's notion as Balliotti (1998) states:

The fundamental drive of all living things is the Will to Power, the impulse to dominate one's environment and extend one's influence. In humans, the Will to Power sometimes manifests itself as brute force, but more frequently requires creativity, boldness, and innovation. Nietzsche claims that the typical catalog of human desires was for love, friendship, respect, procreation, and biological nourishment. (p. 82)

Will to power is fundamental drive in human being. Sometimes it is manifested in brutal force and sometimes with creative force. Gerald's relationship with Gudrun revolves around dependency. Gudrun becomes aware of Gerald's impulsion and will to power in his relationship with her.

Gerald also employs his will to power over his employees. He is called "the God of the machine" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 223). He holds the authority to hire and fire the workers of his coal industry as he wishes. Besides, his social status also stirs him to exercise his will to power over others. Gerald's rise to power within the coal industry aligns with Nietzsche's assertion that "the fundamental drive of all living entities is the Will to Power" (Ahmed and Hayat, p. 434). He profitably achieves his goals. His desire for power and control goes beyond his coal industry as he seeks control over Gudrun under the bridge and elsewhere.

### **Gudrun's Quest for Will to Power**

Like Gerald, Gudrun's activities are also found overshadowed by Nietzsche's concept of 'Will to Power'. She has desire in exerting power and control over every possible being from man to horse. Zheng (2010) states, "Gudrun is a person to control, to possess, and to exercise her own Will to Power. She has the negative destructive mental self-consciousness in the depth of her soul (p. 126). Her actions are driven by a desire to assert control and have the things confirm to her will. Her 'will to

power' probably attracts Gerald because he has also an innate quest for power over others. Her will to power makes her support the idea of discrimination as she says, "One MUST discriminate" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 29) between the people who are exceptional and little fools. Like that of Gerald, she puts on view her will to power in a rather negative and destructive manner as AL-Emad and Sawai (2019) remark, "Gerald and Gudrun are the symbol of destruction" (p. 53). Roussenova (2014) also passes a judgment on the character of Gudrun as she states, "Gudrun is not used to being reduced to a passive position. That in her apparent victimhood, she can be a dangerous enemy is hinted by the simile comparing her eyes" (p. 97). Gudrun becomes ready to sacrifice her relationship for the sake of asserting her dominance and satisfying her desires. She uses words as instruments of power over her sister Ursula. In this context, Ahmed and Hayat (2017) states, "She [Gudrun ] manipulates Ursula through verbal influence, reflecting a negative manifestation of the "Will to Power" (p. 434). Gudrun and Ursula, two female characters, are created as similar and antithetical characters. They look to be sharing same character traits at the beginning of the novel but by the end of the novel they become quite incompatible.

### **Hermione and Loerke as Nietzsche's 'The Last Man'**

Nietzsche presents 'The Last Man' as a figure antithesis of 'Superman'- a being capable of divine creativity and self-overcoming. Birkin epitomizes Nietzsche's vision of the superman/Overman whereas Hermione and Loerke reflect the image of The Last Man. Bell (2001) says that, "As Lawrence argues the theme of 'The Will to Power' and embodies them in his characters; it could be argued that he could be against Will to Power in terms of dominations" (p.179). Hermione's character seems to be symbolic of the 'Last Man' as she embodies a conventional, materialistic, and shallow persona. Ameen & Ahmed, (2016) state, "She [Hermione] is on a continual attempt of imposing her domination on her surroundings. Her behaviors and efforts of domination made her to be a symbol of The Will to Power" (p. 429). She is consumed by societal norms and strives to conform to expectations. AL-Emad & Sawai (2019) also remark that "Women in love were too possessive and they would like to completely control and monopolize their partners" (p.52). Hermione's obsession with societal appearances and her "lavish lifestyle epitomize Nietzsche's critique of the 'Last Man'.

Loerke, the sculptor, is another character who aligns with the concept of the 'Last Man'. Loerke seeks approval from others and is satisfied with a mediocre lifestyle. His character illustrates Nietzsche's warning against a society "obsessed on material wealth and lacking the drive for self-improvement" (Bianco,1972, p. 86). His primary focus is on financial success and recognition. He believes that financial success will secure his happiness. He lacks the drive for self-improvement and is content with mediocrity.

Hermione and Loerke as Nietzsche's 'Last Man' personas, are struggling with existential emptiness and a sense of purposelessness. Hermione's failed marriage and Loerke's unfulfilling artistic pursuits serve as "testaments to the shortcomings of conforming to societal expectations" (p. 86). In contrast to these 'Last Men', the characters of Birkin and Gerald represent the Nietzschean ideals of self-surpassing and the 'Blond Beast'. Their journey is marked by self-discovery and primal instincts. It stands in stark contrast to the conformist attitudes of Hermione and Loerke.



## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Lawrence's *Women in Love* is a typical novel overshadowed with the Nietzschean philosophical concepts. Through the characters of the novel, Lawrence skillfully integrates Nietzsche's ideas of the "Revaluation of all values," the "Overman," the "Will to Power," and the "Last Man" into the narrative. The concept of the "Will to Power" permeates the novel, influencing the behaviors and motivations of characters. Lawrence explores and challenges prevailing values, societal norms, and human nature. Birkin opposes the idea of using power dynamics and instead highlights the importance of mutual respect and equilibrium. This viewpoint reflects the shared philosophy of Nietzsche and Lawrence. Birkin's pursuit of self-surpassing, his rejection of societal norms, and his quest for authentic values align with Nietzsche's vision of the Overman. Gerald embodies the "Blond Beast," driven by primal instincts. Hermione and Loerke serve as cautionary examples of the "Last Man," individuals who conform to societal norms and prioritize materialistic pursuits over personal growth. Lawrence's exploration of these Nietzschean concepts invites readers to contemplate their own values and the extent to which they conform to societal expectations. Both, Nietzsche and Lawrence reject the imposition of power over others. They advocate for a peaceful and harmonious coexistence where power is not exerted as a means of domination.

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