

**LAWRENCE'S DATABLE MALES: GERALD AND BIRKIN,  
RICHARD SOMERS, AND OLIVER MELLORS AS  
ACCEPTABLE DINNER COMPANIONS**

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So much has been written about D.H. Lawrence's detestable male characters. Lawrence's vision of the ideal male appears to be a philosophical male who is highly sexual and quite dictatorial. While Lawrence critics attempt to determine the value of these male characters, the artistic worth or symbolic meaning of these characters can perhaps be determined on a simpler level: would I, as a woman, want to spend time with Gerald or Birkin or Richard Somers or even Oliver Mellors? This would be the most accurate test of each character's alleged misogyny. Ironically, I find Lawrence's most controversial character to be the most sociable, agreeable and therefore, 'datable'. Of course, there are several issues to consider: inviting Gerald and Birkin minus the other, encouraging Richard Somers and Oliver Mellors to leave their private existences and appear in public and understandably, the challenge of resurrecting these Lawrence characters.

I invite Birkin and Gerald to dinner separately, thus proposing to meet each character on a different evening and in a different restaurant. And just as I imagined, Gerald questions why Birkin was not invited. He knows of my 'friendship' with both characters and continues to watch me suspiciously throughout the evening. I ask the Industrial Magnate about the family business.

Gerald responds warmly and somewhat energetically to my question and begins to lecture about the importance of technology in today's society.

"What matter[s] is] the great social productive machine" (*WL*, 255) he tells me earnestly.

And as he continues to speak, I realize he is like most ambitious young males. I am tempted to tell him of something called a computer and of the impact it will have on the business world, but I hold back. He cuts the lamb on his plate with high class precision; the fingers hold the fork as if it were too hot to hold completely. His tea is getting cold and so he summons the waiter. Gerald is aware of my close scrutiny; Gerald is 'fair', good-looking, appears distant. With some reluctance he asks:

"I wonder what Birkin is doing tonight?"

I agree to meet Birkin the next evening. I arrive somewhat early and as I look about the room I wonder if the other customers are aware that I would be dining with a D.H. Lawrence character. But of course, why would they? I doubt the blond haired girl beside me is waiting for Shakespeare and I am reluctant to believe that the man at the bar is watching the door for the arrival of Chaucer. And yet I believe in the existence of Rupert Birkin; I believe enough to watch him walk into the restaurant demonstrating the same reluctance I noticed the night before with Gerald:

Birkin [was] thin...pale and ill-looking. His figure was narrow but nicely made. He went with a slight trail of one foot, which came 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. (WL, 21, 22)

He shakes my hand politely and sits across from me. "It's not a wedding" I tell him. "Relax". He smiles, perhaps somewhat amused or perhaps just attempting to be polite. Birkin examines me as closely as I examine him. "A Lawrence reader has never asked to meet with me before. Don't you think this is somewhat perverse?" Birkin asks. He eyes me in a freakish manner - as if I had mistakenly put my blouse on inside out. I can tell from his physical summation that he has determined that I am an academic, that I am, at times, too engrossed in my research and that I am in desperate need of male companionship.

"So, what are you writing? A journal article? A dissertation?" he asks.

The waitress arrives. Birkin orders tea - I order whisky.

The conversation begins pleasant enough, even though I am slightly annoyed with his attitude. He tells me of Ursula, of their home life and of their extravagant dinner parties. Gerald had apparently been over for supper this week. Suddenly, I am confused.

"Wait a minute", I interrupt him. "Gerald died at the end of *Women in Love*".

Birkin looks at me with disgust.

"I'm a *fictional* character. You invited me to dinner and you're looking for logic?"

By this time, his voice is elevated, his attitude contemptuous; understandably, we are attracting attention from the establishment's other patrons. As the evening proceeds, I implore him to explain his idea of star-equilibrium. He is annoyed with me and tackles the question as would an

arrogant graduate student; his attitude of superiority is maddening and I am almost tempted to take him outside and beat him senseless.

"Balance is the main idea of my philosophy. Feminists have made too much of the misogyny issue. I don't hate women. Lawrence didn't hate women. I simply wish to be acknowledged for myself as much as a woman expects to be cherished and revered - "a pure balance of two single beings; - as the stars balance each other". (WL, 164)

He talks constantly, while still managing to eat and make eye contact with several males about the room. The evening eventually ends - horribly. Birkin leaves suddenly after ranting to me for an hour about the politics of male/female relationships. He does not even bother to make an excuse for his quick dismissal; he simply tosses his dinner napkin on the table and escapes my presence. I never did like him. Perhaps he sensed it from the beginning. Perhaps his antagonism towards me is related to the paper-weight incident. Scholars tend to gloss over the incident with Hermione. An examination of Birkin is really not complete until one considers the fact that this man's ex-girlfriend smashed a paper-weight into the side of his face. Noteworthy? I think so, especially when considering the misogyny issue.

I drove home that evening a different route than usual. As I passed by a small coffee shop, I recognized someone familiar huddled beside another man, talking amicably. Birkin had left me and made arrangements to meet with Gerald. I park in front of the building and watch the two men for a moment. They laugh and jostle each other; then Gerald puts his arm on the counter. Birkin extends his own arm and the two men begin to arm wrestle.



Richard Somers was the most reluctant of all the characters to meet with me. Not only did Somers have difficulty committing to a dinner date, but at times, he had trouble committing to an actual telephone conversation. Eventually, I sent a note, via his wife, who responded promptly stating that yes, he would attend. As expected, he arrives late and is accompanied by someone who resembles Jack Calcott. Somers has to be ushered to his seat and prompted to sit. Jack informs Somers that he will return in an hour to drive Somers home.

Richard Somers is a quiet man. He appears shy or conceited; at first, I am not certain which, but I notice that he will speak with encouragement. Unlike my evening with Birkin, this time I carry the conversation and after a few minutes can feel Somers warming to the discussion. I tell him of my work and of my interest in Lawrence. He smiles from behind the menu, somewhat leery of me. He shows little interest in my writing, but is willing to discuss his own.

The issue of ordering is quite difficult for him. He rallies between the chicken and the fish, drawn to both and yet again, unable to commit. After thirty minutes of mindless pleasantries, of debating the pros and cons of poultry vs. fish, I sense he wants the chicken and yet he appears to be waiting for some sort of divine signal. I am extremely conscious of the passing time.

"Order the chicken!" I shout at him. "Tell me you want the chicken!" He is noticeably shaken by my exclamation and decides to order soup and a sandwich instead. Throughout the evening, Somers remains removed from the conversation, so much so, that this time, I excuse myself and conclude the dinner early.

Oliver Mellors is quite a tall man. He is, as they say, 'strapping', and I also notice, freshly shaven. I picture him hovering over a wash tub hours earlier scrubbing himself clean in preparation for our dinner. He immediately orders a beer and as he sits before me, watches me with a keen enthusiasm.

"Did you have trouble finding the place?" I ask him.

"Na". He tastes his beer exuberantly, relishing the flavour. As with the others, I tell Mellors of my interest in Lawrence and of my current research project. He does not seem surprised. I then wonder if he has been talking to Birkin or Gerald.

"Do you like women Mr. Mellors?"

"Aye" he answers devilishly and I begin to laugh, not only from the stupidity of my question but I notice that I am leaning towards him, balancing on my elbows, waiting earnestly for his reply. I immediately like him. He is just as intriguing as he is on paper. An hour later, he is roaring drunk. I ignore the annoyed glances of the other patrons as Mellors explains quite loudly why he has trouble finding the ideal woman.

Most of them want a man, but don't want sex ... the more old-fashioned sort just lie there like nothing and let you go ahead ... the sly sort of women ... pretend they're passionate and have thrills. But it's all cockaloopy .... Then there's the ones that love everything, every kind of feeling and cuddling and going off, every kind except the natural one .... Then there's the hard sort, that are the devil to bring off, and bring themselves off like my wife. They want to be the active party ... Then there's the sort

that's just dead inside ... Then there's the sort that puts you out before you really 'come'. (LCL, 219)

We talk of many things: class structure, men, women, lesbianism and a thing Mellors calls "cunt awareness" (LCL, 301). After several beers, Mellors slams his fist into the table pronouncing that he "stands for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings" (LCL, 302), which brings the waiter to our table, pleading for us to be quiet and respectful of the other customers. At one point in the evening, I drop my dinner napkin, and as Mellors retrieves it, he tells me that he will place it between his legs at night and think of me. Needless to say, I seem to have made a friend.

In *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence recounts one woman's observation that describes Mellors as a "sexual moron" (515) which suggests that Mellors is a stupid man. But the term moron is quite extreme for a man who is sociable and who enjoys beer and women. He is a considerate man, socially and as Lawrence has proven, sexually. Mellors is acutely conscious of his companions and this accentuates his interest in the well being of his female acquaintances. Gerald's existence tends to circle Birkin's, thus creating an equation that seems inseparable. And Richard Somers is so absorbed in his own ideas to even acknowledge the presence of another person. Ironically, I find Mellors to be Lawrence's *least* misogynistic character because of his ability to fully acknowledge his female partner. Mellors becomes an ideal dinner companion for really any woman, while Gerald, Birkin and Somers, confined in their own masculinity are "undatable" and because of this alone, guilty of the crime of misogyny.

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