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MARSLAND PRESS
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A Study Of The Novels *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: D.H. Lawrence

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Abstract: Lawrence brought out *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in a private edition in July 1928. Though it was a novel that he felt "the world would call very improper,"¹ he was certainly not just out to shock the sensibilities, to drop "a little bomb in the world's crinoline of hypocrisy."² A man of strong convictions, Lawrence knew the tremendous worth of his work not only for his day, but for the times to come: "And in spite of all antagonism, I put forth this novel as an honest, healthy book, necessary for us today."³ The "turbulent consequences"⁴ his novel as well as the paintings were soon to have are all part of critical history. A book "famously, even notoriously" about sex,⁵ *Lady Chatterley's Lover* came under attack in particular for the use of taboo words, for its cult of phallic dominance, the impractical nature of its social doctrine, and its ignoring the dynamics of class consciousness and history. While F.R. Leavis speaks of "the offences against taste entailed in the hygienic enterprise,"⁶ Keith Sagar charges the novel with obsessive sexuality: "Copulation looms out of all proportion to other activities in a fully human relationship."⁷ The language of obscenity has been seen as being put to use "deliberately and self-consciously."⁸ It is a sentiment which is voiced again by Alastair Niven: "the tone of affectionate banter between Mellors and Connie cannot overcome the sense of self-conscious daring in the choice of words."⁹ Millett reads the central thrust of the novel as the establishment of masculine dominance in the famous lines thus: "*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a quasi-religious tract recounting the salvation of one modern woman... through the offices of the author's personal cult, 'the mystery of the phallus.'"¹⁰ The practicability of Lawrence's doctrine has also been questioned: "The extending of consciousness, the getting into touch with one another, are things impossible in the created world of the book"¹¹, and: "Yet in the sphere of labour, it is far from clear how these transformations can possibly be brought about."¹² The novel has been accused of denying class consciousness and the historical truths: "Such a denial of history is the necessary precondition for the relationship between Connie and Mellors."¹³ Nevertheless, though some of the limitations are fairly obvious, it needs to be acknowledged and emphasized that the book's central concern, as always in Lawrence, is with the question how to live fully, wholly, with the greatest measure of satisfaction. The dimension of physical love has also been described in recent philosophical and psychological theories in terms of phallic consciousness.

[Kumar, N. and Akram, M. **A Study Of The Novels *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: D.H. Lawrence.** *Rep Opinion* 2020;12(2):7-16]. ISSN 1553-9873 (print); ISSN 2375-7205 (online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/report>. 2. doi:[10.7537/marsroj120220.02](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsroj120220.02).

Keywords: Lawrence, Novels, Plumed serpent.

Introduction:

Graham Holderness's *D.H. Lawrence: History, Ideology and Fiction* (1982) is the chief sceptical reading about the nature of the social vision in Lawrence's work. Holderness cogently presents the view that an Edenic pastoralism is projected by Lawrence onto the historical miseries of English rural life. Lawrence is seen as ignoring the historical crisis in that the prologue to *The Rainbow* is a pastoral ideal, not a sketch of pre-industrial England and the vision of the rainbow at the end a fiction. Lawrence is accused of resisting his own consciousness of politics of class in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In the final version of the novel, argues Holderness, class is abolished altogether. He says that the denial of history becomes a necessary

condition for the relationship between Connie and Mellors: "history presents no obstacle to its fulfilment, its symbolic reconciliation of real contradictions."

Drew Milne, who undertakes a detailed discussion of these critical perspectives, argues that Lawrence's politics have often been conflated with sexual politics. His contention is that while the novels are representations of politics, the sexual solutions are also shown to be illusory within the terms of the novels. Milne suggests that Lawrence's fiction itself contains a self-critical dimension which is not usually acknowledged: "The tensions between class struggle,

power and sexuality in Lawrence's writing need detailed analysis as processes of recognition and misrecognition rather than as schematic illustrations of a politically incorrect position."⁹⁰

Lawrence and Language

Of late, Lawrence's works have attracted semiotic readings that use methods of contemporary literary theories. As concern with theory and linguisticity became fashionable around 1970, structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction suggested new ways of reading. However, while writers like Joyce, Beckett and Faulkner absorbed the bulk of theoretical attention, there were comparatively few references to theorists such as Foucault, Lacan or Bakhtin in Lawrence criticism until recently. Acquaintance with theory did not sufficiently alert critics to Lawrence's own awareness of language. One possible reason for the lack of recognition of Lawrence's interest in language was suggested at the MLA convention held in December 1987: "Lawrence foregrounds message while Joyce foregrounds language."¹¹¹ This relative neglect could also possibly have been caused because Lawrence's texts demonstrate authorial presence in a period when the author has been declared dead.

Critics like Daleski and Kinkead-Weekes have drawn attention to the strangeness of Lawrence's language. Kinkead-Weekes draws attention to the exploratory forms of Lawrence's language when he refers to "a continual 'systole and diastole' of poetry and analytic prose, exploration and understanding" in *The Rainbow* in his essay "The Marble and The Statue."¹¹²

Michael Ragussis's *The Subterfuge of Art: Language and the Romantic Tradition* (1978) is an important study that attempts to define Lawrence's sense of language. Choosing *Women in Love* as the representative text, Ragussis pays great attention to particular words and phrases of the novel, noting how Lawrence makes individual words mean differently by deploying them in a variety of contexts. Fairly common words are first used in a special way. But what surprises the reader even more is that the word, repeated later, acquires an additional, sometimes antithetical meaning: "What is baffling about this novel's vocabulary is that it seems deliberately to defy our educative powers."¹¹³ He makes useful observations based on structuralist perceptions of Saussure and draws attention to the fact that in *Women in Love* the words attain meaning, not through the notion of similarity, but difference.¹¹⁴

Avrom Fleishman stresses the importance of the discourse theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic and shows how multiple linguistic registers are at work in *St Mawr* and demonstrates the

polyphonic quality of the prose writings of the later 1920s.¹¹⁵ Similarly, David Lodge in *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (1990) brings Bakhtin's theory and practice to bear on the fiction of D.H. Lawrence "primarily in the hope of enhancing our knowledge and understanding of the kind of literary discourse Lawrence produced."¹¹⁶ Lodge finds Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky most illuminating in connection with Lawrence. Dostoevsky's importance for Bakhtin, says Lodge, is that he loosened "the grip of the authorial discourse" and allowed "the other discourses in the text to interact in more dramatic and complicated ways than the classic nineteenth-century novel allowed."¹¹⁷ Lodge suggests that Lawrence's development from *Sons and Lovers*, through *The Rainbow*, to *Women in Love* was a steady progression towards a kind of fiction which Bakhtin had already described in his study of Dostoevsky. Lodge particularly praises *Women in Love* for its being "dialogic": "The narrator seldom speaks in a clearly distinct voice of his own, from a plane of knowledge above the characters: rather he rapidly shifts his perspective on their level..."¹¹⁸ The result is that the novel has not got a single thesis, but several which are given an even-handed treatment.

Lady Chatterley's Lover

In his quest for a coherent and fulfilled life Lawrence tries to portray complete life – mental, physical and spiritual – in his novels. However, as an advocate of a living contact between man and man and man and nature, Lawrence tends to put instinct above reason and feeling above cerebration. Lawrence's belief in blood-consciousness implies that body is wiser than the mind. In fact, the life of the mind has always been suspect in Lawrence. Lawrence deemphasized mental consciousness in his first novel (*The White Peacock*) and denounces it in his last (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*). Fixed will, industrialism, materialism and mechanization of life have been the familiar targets in Lawrence's novels from *Sons and Lovers* to *The Plumed Serpent*. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence dismisses the life of the mind as inadequate, incomplete and a dangerous distortion, highly toxic in its effect on sexual, social and spiritual harmony. Besides mental consciousness Lawrence identifies mechanized greed, mechanical will, sexual stupidity and money-mania as the enemies of freshness and spontaneity, instinct and emotion. The cold lucidity of logic, the megalomania of machine dominated lives, the imposition of will on others through the exercise of power and control are some of the startling symptoms of modern industrial societies. With an uncanny instinct for health and harmony, Lawrence makes the prophetic announcement that anything that undermines the natural instincts and

clogs the free-flow of sympathy in men and women is likely to starve the roots of life. The obsession with mental concepts, money, machines or efficient management for personal greed can initiate a process of alienation that can disturb individual and social stability. The thoughtless exaltation of the mind at the expense of the body can be particularly injurious to the dream of wholeness and harmony. So urgent is Lawrence's intention to correct the prevalent misconceptions about sex, marriage, money, work and success ethics at the personal and the social plane that his commitment to life overrides his commitment to art as he risks over-emphasis and even scandalous utterance in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the interest of his holistic vision which sees a close correlation between sex, work and morality.

A post war book that begins amid the ruins and the aftermath of war, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence's last major novel, displays an impassioned engagement with the destiny of whole mankind. Making a plea for a bit of warmth and tenderness, for touch and flow of sympathy among human beings, it attempts to restore instinct its rightful place in life. The novel looks with scepticism at the efficacy of cold, abstract mental processes in the attainment of fullness in life. It finds disembodied rationality virtually abetting and encouraging greed, mechanization and money-mania in societies. Set against the opposition of instinct and abstraction, flesh and mind, nature and culture, consideration for others and self-obsession, the story of Lady Chatterley and her lover, in spite of the pathos of their isolation, points clearly towards certain Lawrentian constants that constitute his holistic vision of life. The prodigal son, who, after all his wanderings, at last returned to the English soil in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, voices his deep sense of anguish, his worry and weariness at the directions modern culture has taken and offers to do his bit through this novel. The declamatory speeches, the insistent epigrammatic statements that some of the characters are made to give betray the fact that the quest springs from a deep authorial need and fervour. The book that, among other things, *is* about sex, takes care to distinguish minutely between different modes of love and sex that are prevalent in modern societies. If the working classes "are consistently objectified and offered as emblematic by the narrative voice,"¹⁴ and if the book does not believe in people "enough to allow them to exist except as examples of depravity,"¹⁵ it is because Lawrence is concerned with the regeneration of the whole. Most of the characters in the book lead partial, fragmented, half lives. The difference between them is that while some of them egotistically deny their incompleteness, exulting in the rigid mental control they exercise over themselves, the leading characters are acutely aware of their unfinished

existence and strive to achieve a state of completeness and entirety. It is in the discernment they show and their striving to live a more complete life that hope is contained.

The novel opens on a sombre note as Clifford Chatterley, who is wounded seriously on the battlefield, is sent back from Flanders "more or less in bits" (LCL, 5). He had had only a month's honeymoon with his young bride Constance. Gradually "the bits seem to grow together again" (LCL, 5) and back at Wragby Hall, the family seat in the smoky Midlands, the young baronet, now impotent, with the lower half of his body paralysed forever, can return to life again. There is a grim realization: "We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen" (LCL, 5). While Maurice Pervin of "The Blind Man", also wounded on the war front, loses his eye-sight and is at times acutely conscious of the disfiguring scar he carries on his forehead, Clifford, with his strong will, maintains a rigid control over life and exults in his capacity to do so. A half man, condemned to a partial existence, Clifford is quick to assert his artificial coherence and unfinished state as completeness in life.

Confined to the small village Tevershall that is the very picture of hopeless dreariness, Connie Chatterley is reduced to living an isolated existence with her crippled husband. Her very soul shudders at the "utter soulless ugliness of the coal and iron Midland" (LCL, 13). The industrial England is blotting out the agricultural one:

On the low dark ceiling of cloud at night red blotches burned and quavered, dappling and swelling and contracting like burns that give pain. It was the furnaces. At first they fascinated Connie with a sort of horror: she felt she was living underground (LCL, 13-14).

The old order is changing and the new one that replaces it is singularly ugly. The sounds and lights of the colliery railway and the new works at Stock Gate intrude upon whatever little privacy the remnant of the forest can be said to have. The neighbouring town Uthwaite is "the tangle of naked railway-lines" (LCL, 155) with coal mines and steel-works sending up smoke and glare which the pathetic seeming church-spire bravely tries to pierce. Huge lorries shake the earth and one has a feeling of being closed in. The demolishing of Squire Winter's stately house – one of the last bastions of old England – to make way for newer and more modern buildings, announces the end of an era.

The unthinking spread of industrialization has blighted the land as well as the lives of those who dwell on it. Iron and coal corrode, eat deep into the bodies and souls of the men. Trailing home from the pits, the colliers, with their underground grey faces and out of shape shoulders, look like "weird fauna of

the coal-seams” (LCL, 159). Good and kind they may be, but they are less than men, only half-alive, caught up helplessly in the dominating tendencies of the day. What can possibly become of such a people in whom “the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails,” and only “uncanny will-power remained”? (LCL, 152). Visiting England for the last time in the summer of 1926, Lawrence had found “a queer, odd sort of potentiality in the people, especially the common people”¹⁶ and he writes for them with a desire to regenerate England and the English.

If the lives of the colliers are singularly ugly, hopeless and uncreated, the ruling classes, themselves in the grip of an extreme of mental-rational life, that in the ultimate analysis breaks down to crass materialism, are incapable of giving a direction to the masses. Wragby, that is governed by a physically lame, impotent master represents the dominance of sheer will, the extreme of rational life. The supreme pleasure in the life of the mind actually means wilful suppression of the real self, instinct and the body. Mechanization puts a premium on outward form and decency, devotion to money and materialism, and sex for domination, power and occasional excitement. Inside the thick walls of Wragby, the young intellectuals of the day, the Cambridge cronies, gather around Clifford. Highly cerebral, all of them are caught up in abstractions, supremely interested in the exchange of ideas. As a young girl, Connie herself had exulted in the mental intimacy she established with the young men at Dresden and later with Clifford: “It was the talk that mattered supremely: the impassioned interchange of talk. Love was only a minor accompaniment” (LCL, 7). Of her own, she comes to grow sick of such intimacy and see it as sham, as a denial of the wholeness of a human relation.

Sir Clifford who, sitting complacently in his wheel-chair, riding upon the “achievement of the mind of man” (LCL, 179), is too obvious an instance of the dominance of mind, devotes his energies to writing and emerges as a successful author of rather spiteful stories. Absorbed in himself and obsessed with his stories, he expects Connie to take active interest in him and his work. The inspiration that drives him to engage himself in the intense mental effort of composing the stories springs from a shrewd and practical mind, for it rises out of a consideration of handsome monetary reward and social success. The dominant material mode of the day is something in which Connie, too, with the stoicism characteristic of her age, acquiesces: “Money you *have* to have. You needn’t really have anything else. So that’s that! – ” (LCL, 62).

The masses take their cue from the aristocracy that is a prisoner and a perpetrator of the materialistic, mental culture. The Mammon of mechanized greed

has got hold of every person – the master as well as the servant. With everyone wanting more and more, there is a mad rush to be successful, to shove oneself forward:

Merrie England! Shakespeare’s England! No, but the England of today, as Connie had realised since she had come to live in it. It was producing a new race of mankind, over-conscious in the money and social and political side, on the spontaneous intuitive side dead, but dead. Half-corpses, all of them: but with a terrible insistent consciousness in the other half. There was something uncanny and underground about it all (LCL, 153).

As some get more than their fair share of money, a profound grudge against the “well-groomed, well-bred existence” of the masters rises up (LCL, 158). The disparity breeds envy, discontent and jealousy. Harmonious community life of yore becomes impossible. No common fellow feeling exists any longer. The natural flow of sympathy between man and man is dead. All are living separate, isolated lives.

The insane times, devoted to the mad pursuit of material advancement, insist that the outward form and decency of order be preserved at all cost, though life may wither at the root. Michaelis, the immensely successful Irish writer of smart society plays, who is Connie’s lover in the early part of the novel and whose mask-like face with a fixed expression links him to the wooden African statues in *Women in Love*, is engaged in his underground life of perversity while maintaining a façade of upwardness and progress. Early in the novel Clifford tries to convince Connie that it is their living together from day to day, the “habit of each other” that is “more vital than any occasional excitement” (LCL, 44). Later when Connie announces her decision to leave Wragby, he is furious because the rhythm and decency of life at his house is disturbed, stubbornly refusing to see that it is the rigid, inorganic form that is inimical to life in reality.

While the detached, disembodied mental processes make Clifford cling to the outward form because the status quo favours the superior position of the master, they also propel him toward more intense practical activity of the world, for therein lies the key to satisfying his money greed. As Connie falls ill and her elder sister arranges a nurse, Ivy Bolton, to take charge of Clifford, a new phase begins in his life. Nurse Bolton who had considered herself as almost belonging to the governing class among the colliers, holds a profound grudge against the masters for their money, fastidiousness and power, and yearns to be one of the gentry. At forty seven, she looks young. Her growth had stopped with the death of her husband since as a young widow, she failed to register this hard reality. It gives her inordinate satisfaction to have the high and mighty Clifford Chatterley in her power.

These two stunted personalities quickly enter a vicious, perverted world of their own. With her brazen, nosey nature and crass practical sense Bolton gives release to the gross, calculative and materialistic man of the world Clifford actually is. Soon Clifford gives up his high-minded career as a story writer altogether and under the influence of Bolton throws himself unashamedly into the mining industry. The man that emerges, while inwardly he is going “pulpy” (LCL, 146), is yet the active, efficient businessman of the world. Bolton becomes the Magna Mater figure and the successful Clifford, paradoxically, an infant in her charge who leans on his nurse with a terror of his own inadequacy. The situation develops unhealthy ramifications as the perverse nature of the liaison comes to the fore:

And they drew into a closer physical intimacy, an intimacy of perversity, when he was a child stricken with an apparent candour and an apparent wonderment, that looked almost like a religious exaltation: the perverse and literal rendering of: “except ye become again as a little child.” – While she was the Magna Mater, full of power and potency, having the great blond child-man under her will and her stroke entirely (LCL, 291).

By the end of the novel, as Connie decides to leave him, Clifford clings to Bolton so childishly that both suffer degradation; it is “the exaltation of perversity, of being a child when he was a man” (LCL, 291). Success in matters practical does not mean success and, balance in private, personal affairs. Rather it becomes a strategy of hiding the innate deficiency, the lack.

The shrewd man of the world that he is, Clifford becomes almost superhumanly clever regarding the matters of business and puts the industry before the individual. A negation of human contact, he does not waste one heart-beat of sympathy on anyone. Later in the novel, Squire Winter, delighted at the rumour that the incapacitated baron might soon acquire a son, lauds Clifford’s business-sense: “Ah, my boy! – to keep up the level of the race, and to have work waiting for any man who cares to work!” (LCL, 150). With the ruling-classes shamelessly devoted to self-aggrandizement, no common pulse of humanity joins the master and the servant. Complete materialism, rising out of an extreme of rational-practical mode of living, governs the relationships so that life is left lopsided, warped.

The self-obsessed civilization that allows only mechanical form of relationships and considers the mental-life supreme, is doomed to look at sex as momentary excitement, as a means of gaining power, not as a way of getting into connection with the other and the circumambient universe. Connie’s experiences with the young men at Dresden with whom she liked

to enter into intellectual discussions, show how she is filled with distaste for the whole “sex business”:

And however one might sentimentalise it, this sex business was one of the most ancient sordid connections and subjections. Poets who glorified it were mostly men. Women had always known there was something better, something higher. And now they knew it more definitely than ever. The beautiful pure freedom of a woman was infinitely more wonderful than any sexual love (LCL, 7).

Connie soon learns to take sex as a thrill while remaining free inwardly and even exults in the thought that a woman can use sex to have power over man and use man as a mere contemptible object. She remains stuck to this mental framework as is revealed in her relations with Michaelis. However, the thrill is short-lived and she finds that she is no longer interested in asserting power over the other. Mick, the nervous modern lover, himself unable to give a woman any satisfaction accuses Connie of being selfish and self-seeking. The relationship comes to an end. Connie is stunned and shaken out of her stupor: “Her whole sexual feeling for him or for any man collapsed that night” (LCL, 54).

As the experience leaves her cold, making her body go dull, lifeless and slack, Connie comes to realize that sex should mean warmth, tenderness, touch and healthy sensuality between partners. The realization is by no means easily achieved and many are the occasions when she is filled with a sense of disillusionment: “As for sex, the last of the great words, it was just a cocktail term for an excitement that bucked you up for a while, then left you more raggy than ever” (LCL, 62). However, the body demands justice. It seeks physical togetherness and union because it craves to be connected and warmed by a human, affectionate partner. Looking at her own reflection in the mirror, Connie is filled with pent up fury and resentment at the men of her generation who are incapable of warmth and natural human affection towards a woman. She feels cheated, neglected and denied of her share in life. At twenty-seven her body has lost its healthy gleam and is going meaningless. The sophisticated men can be polite towards her but none dares to show a bit of natural warmth and masculinity: “The sense of deep physical injustice burned through her very soul” (LCL, 71). The body is asserting its own rights and its claims are not to be ignored. As the barrenness of mental intimacy is exposed, there is a deep longing in her for life to be more balanced and inclusive, and for sex to mean something other than her generation takes it to be.

Interestingly, it is Tommy Dukes, one of the characters stuck in the mire of pseudo-mental life, who serves to introduce the first “oracular clues”¹⁷ to Connie’s regeneration. On the famous evenings, when

the Cambridge friends gather around Clifford for an exchange of ideas while Connie remains a silent spectator of “the parade of the life of the mind” (LCL, 36), the young intellectuals of the day discuss, among other things, the sex connection. While Hammod considers sex a strictly private matter, comparing it to going to the privy in importance, Charley May sees sex as merely an exchange of sensations instead of ideas. The mental mode in which they invest their whole faith does not let them allow anything beyond functionality to sex. It is Tommy Dukes who, wary of the artificial sex compulsion, would rather remain clear. Himself leading a life of excessive mental activity, he is able to know its inadequacy and can discern that the real knowledge proceeds from “the whole corpus of the consciousness” (LCL, 37). He sees the evil of imposing ideas on life, the vice of the compulsion to succeed and speaks for spontaneity. Keenly aware of the spitefulness of the purely analytic mind, he draws attention to the need of shoving “the cerebral stone” away so that there can begin “a democracy of touch, instead of a democracy of pocket” (LCL, 75). Dukes sees that the supremacy accorded to the rational principle makes for imbalance in life. It segregates and isolates by ignoring the warm bodily centres of sympathy and disrupts the flow of natural warmth and compassion. He sees the civilization, hell bent on pursuing its aims, going down the chasm and voices his belief that “the only bridge across the chasm will be the phallus!” (LCL, 75).

Detaching statements like the above from the flow of the narrative Kate Millett reads into them the assertion of male supremacy and interprets the entire novel in that light: “The sexual mystery to which the novel is dedicated is scarcely a reciprocal or co-operative event – it is simply phallic.”¹⁸ To accept a tendentious statement like this will be to miss altogether the fine awareness and discernment the novel itself shows towards a woman’s subordinate status in a patriarchal society. While Clifford regards Connie as his property, taking her for granted, the proponent of tenderness, Mellors, can turn violent against her, abusing her for her sister Hilda’s class-snobbery. The tale shows Connie, who is accused of having a slave nature by Hilda, as having an intelligent and firm mind actually. During the intellectual gatherings at Wragby, Connie remains a quiet but sceptical, resistant listener. The novel is remarkable in its depiction of silence and unspoken gestures adopted by Connie as strategies of revolt in a man-dominated society. As Clifford tries to convince Connie with his shallow logic that the real secret of marriage was not sex but the habit the partners develop of each other in chapter V, or as Mellors goes on giving voice to his despair endlessly in Chapter XV, Connie remains free

– keeping quietly detached on the first occasion and running out into the rain and thunder on the second. She may select to remain quiet: “She was silent. Logic might be unanswerable, because it was so absolutely wrong” (LCL, 45). But when the moment comes and when she chooses, Connie can counter Clifford’s arguments with force. Ultimately, when she leaves the master for his servant, she is showing enough courage to push aside the nothingness which had so overpowered her.

In any case, Tommy Dukes’s phase of phallic regeneration does not propose to subjugate women as it includes both “intelligent wholesome men, and wholesome nice women!” (LCL, 75). It is important to see the meaning and significance Lawrence attributes to the phallus. Though Keith Sagar regrets that the “symbolism of the phallus is hardly realized in the novel,”¹⁹ he also hints at its meaning: “The phallus takes over many of the associations of the earlier rainbow symbol, particularly that of pure naked contact between people at the deepest level of their being, and, through this, a sense of relatedness to the greater purposes of creation.”²⁰ In “A Propos of ‘*Lady Chatterley’s Lover*’” Lawrence gives a clue to the meaning of phallus, saying that if England is to be regenerated “– then it will be by the arising of a new blood-contact, a new touch, and a new marriage. It will be phallic rather than a sexual regeneration. For the Phallus is only the great old symbol of godly vitality in a man, and of immediate contact.”²¹ In *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, the second of the three versions of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, explicit views on the phallus are given: “But the phallus, in the old sense, has roots, the deepest roots of all, in the soul and the greater consciousness of man, and it is through the phallic roots that inspiration enters the soul.”²²

As Ed Jewinski elaborates in his essay “The Phallus in D. H. Lawrence and Jacques Lacan,” in Lawrence “the ‘phallus’ has lost its importance as a sexual organ, for the central significance of the ‘phallus’ is its symbolic force, its power to represent the desire for human fulfillment.”²³ The aim of phallic regeneration thus is not the establishing of masculine dominance, but the flow of new vitality, inspiration and contact among human beings. If mental-life segregates and leads to partial growth, then phallic consciousness puts one in touch and encourages all-rounded development. Lawrence wanted to set the phallic reality against the mental consciousness of the day:

You know I believe in the phallic reality, and the phallic consciousness: as distinct from our irritable cerebral consciousness of today. That’s why I do the book – and it’s not just sex. Sex alas is one of the worst phenomena of today: all cerebral reaction, the whole thing worked from the mental processes and

itch, and not a bit of the real phallic insouciance and spontaneity. But in my novel there is.²⁴

On the margins of the village survives the remainder of the forest that can be seen as offering rather too schematic a contrast to what Wragby represents. Nevertheless the wood/Wragby opposition is at the centre of the novel and provides obvious clues to an understanding of its meanings. Even in its vulnerability, the wood, where Robinhood once hunted, enshrines a whole way of knowing and being that can lead to a more integrated life. The early part of the novel sees Connie, filled with disillusionment at the inadequacy of mental life, the fraud of sex, fleeing to the wood in terror many times. However, she is so out of touch, so unconnected with the elements that she is unable to be in tune with life around her. In this mental state of utter apartness, the forest refuses to provide her a sanctuary:

But it was not really a refuge, a sanctuary, because she had no connection with it. It was only a place where she could get *away* from the rest. She never really touched the spirit of the wood itself – if it had any such nonsensical thing (LCL, 20).

The gamekeeper Oliver Mellors, who resides in the wood in sheer repudiation of society, is another battered warrior of the modern wasteland. Ten years older than Connie, he belongs to the working classes but has got some education and has travelled to India and Egypt as a lieutenant in the army. Mellors has seen and rejected the reigning materialistic values of the modern world that distance man from man, kill all finer instincts and make all men join the mad rush to succeed. He has the quality, the capacity to be in touch with man and beast, something that is fast disappearing from modern societies. However, his marriage to Bertha Coutts, whom he accuses of trying to domineer him, has left a bad taste in his mouth. Now, full of bitterness, he takes refuge in the wood, recoiling away from all human contact. There seems to be hardly any sense of fellowship left in him.

Two episodes are significant in that they draw Lady Chatterley and this man from lower origins together, cause their fates to be intertwined and begin the process of renewal. As the best incidents are in Lawrence, these seemingly ordinary, day to day events cannot be reduced to a meaning but they hint clearly at the possibility of a different mode of life. These speak for the integration of instinct and physical touch with the surroundings as against a utilitarian, mental mode. In a familiar enough situation, Connie, during one of her many trips to the forest, happens to come upon Mellors as he is washing himself in the backyard of his cottage. In her state of complete unrelatedness and numb dullness, Connie receives a shock of awareness in her very body, her womb. She has been so enmeshed in the life of the mind at Wragby that she

has almost forgotten that people are also bodies:

Yet, in some curious way, it was a visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of her body.... Perfect, white solitary nudity of a creature that lives alone, and inwardly alone.... Not the stuff of beauty, not even the body of beauty, but a certain lambency, the warm white flame of a single life revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a body! (LCL, 66).

Here is a separate creature that is living for the joy of it, not for some idea or corrupt ethic. The episode can be said to be climactic in that the crude fact of bodily existence is thrust under Connie's very nose. Connie is able to realize that there are possible other ways of life than those represented by Wragby, that Wragby excludes something so very important.

It is now somewhat easier for Connie to take interest in the natural life around her. The woman who had once felt so invigorated by the mental intimacy she always needed to establish with her young men admits to herself the inadequacy of mental life to bring her any sense of fulfilment. The brilliant words of Clifford already seem to her like dead leaves "crumpling up and turning to powder, meaning really nothing" (LCL, 50). It is not any intellectual discussion but the alert brown hens, sitting on eggs outside the gamekeeper's hut in the forest that become "the only things in the world that warmed her heart" (LCL, 133). Another moment of realization comes when, with the assistance of Mellors, Connie is able to feel the pulse of life beating in another live creature, a tiny chicken prancing in front of a coop. As Mellors helps Connie hold it on her palm, she can feel "its atom of balancing life trembling through its almost weightless feet" into her hands (LCL, 115). Mellors may have fallen out with humanity, but he is in touch with the bird and the beast, the flora and fauna in the little, shrunken wood. Connie, who is able to share for a while the joy he takes in warm creation around him, also longs to be put in touch. As she starts crying in anguish at her own drab existence, Mellors responds with compassion that has no ulterior, worldly motive. Living so very isolated, he also at times feels acutely his "unfinished aloneness" (LCL, 144). The need is as much his as hers.

Henceforth Connie and Mellors are lovers and they meet and mate stealthily many times in the rustic hut or the gamekeeper's cottage in the wood. The tale does not regress into mere romance as it shows that the achievement of unison by the lovers is by no means easy. Mellors has his class hang-ups and can retreat into a characteristic attitude of insolence, mockery and ridicule. At the same time Connie's ironical detachment during the sex act, her willing herself into cold separation can be fatal to their relationship: "Surely the man was intensely ridiculous in this posture and this act!" (LCL, 126). However, of

her own, gradually, the realization dawns on her that if she holds herself willfully apart from the experience, it means being enveloped into nothingness. She is no longer interested in having power over the male, in using the man as “a contemptible object” (LCL, 136). Her will relaxes and the loosening of her will is neither acquiescence before Mellors nor a revelation of her slave-nature. By electing to come together with her mate in mutual tenderness, she has chosen to submerge herself in the “new bath of life” (LCL, 136).

The tenderness and touch between the lovers put them into connection with the rhythm of the universe. Walking in the forest when spring is full upon it, Connie can almost feel “the huge heave of the sap in the massive trees” (LCL, 121). Lawrence, whose quest is not for the after-life but for the fulfilment of man’s desires during life, sees a truly phallic marriage as a great step in the direction of life-fulfilment. At the same time, love is not to be considered as a merely personal feeling. It should rightfully connect: “the oneness of the blood-stream of man and woman in marriage completes the universe, as far as humanity is concerned, completes the streaming of the sun and the flowing of the stars.”²⁵

The lovers, however, cannot remain cut off from society and must take their place in the real world. The relationship between a lady and a gamekeeper, neither of whom is still free of his or her early marriage-ties, brings them face to face with a hostile world that is “ready to destroy whatever did not conform” (LCL, 119). Though Mellors places his confidence in the glow, in the “forked flame” between him and Connie (LCL, 301), one cannot but feel the pathos of their situation, its vulnerability. At the same time, the heart is warmed to see Mellors’s refusal to be overcome by the tendencies of the world, his courage “to live beyond money” (LCL, 300). He imbibes in himself an “inherent sense of purpose.”²⁶ Mellors and Connie at least stand firm by their convictions: “One can’t change the world in a minute. But if one has a satisfactory system of values inside oneself, and something of an aim in one’s life, it’s a great deal.”²⁷ Unlike Clifford who insentiently uses Connie as a crutch, Mellors feels that a man “must offer a woman *some* meaning in his life” (LCL, 276). Mellors who is said to be “female in sensitivity yet male in strength and attitude”²⁸ is a truly androgynous human being who combines in himself insight, tenderness and a resolution to live by his values.

While Connie and Mellors’s resolution not to be overawed by the tendencies of the world intensifies the pathos of their loneliness, it also heightens and brings to the fore what is so very wrong with the modern civilization. Its money-mania, mechanized relationships and extreme glorification of the rational principle have sapped life of all its joy and vitality, so

that it grows lopsided, warped. The whole Europe is in the grip of the tension of money. The life of the young is without any core or coherence. As Mrs Bolton says, the young of Tevershall are not serious enough to care about anything and thus there is hardly any chance of their being turned into Bolsheviks. In fact the youth all over Europe forms a homogeneous crowd that wants to forget itself in cocktails, cinema, sun-bathing or jazzing, to be “drugged”, and not to be bothered about anything (LCL, 259).

In this very post-war scenario Connie and Mellors, who make a resolution to live by their beliefs, their instincts, emerge gradually as more sane and balanced persons. Mellors, who now has Connie by his side, considers the idea of forming alliance with other people, though his wistfulness betrays something of its hopelessness: “Oh, if only there were other men to be with, to fight that sparkling-electric Thing outside there, to preserve the tenderness of life...” (LCL, 120). As Sagar observes, “He wants to use the strength and hope which he derives from Connie to apply to more broadly human purposes and endeavours.”²⁹ Mellors’s hopes are not realized within the novel. In fact what the novel requires is a tremendous change in attitude, a change within before it happens without. It sees that there is an urgent need for the masses to wake from the “industrial somnambulism,”³⁰ to begin really to live, and get in touch with one another. As Mellors looks at the colliers of Tevershall he sees that it is the tension of money and hard-work that has stolen men’s manhood and made them ugly and uninspiring to their women. The novel’s message that the world would be a better place if wants were fewer and people trained to “*live* instead of *earn and spend*” (LCL, 299) does not sound strange or impractical to the reader from the land of the *Gita* and M.K. Gandhi.

However, the viability of the vision the novel presents has been doubted and severely questioned, the shrill, insistent tone and the note of self-justification mistrusted: “Mellors’s vision is frankly Utopian. His real expectations far from sanguine.”³¹ It has been noted that the feeling of the whole novel is one of sadness and weariness: “A barren hope, reflected in the pathos of the end of the novel. In fact it is a barren world, a barren life: love is not so much an answer to it as a refuge from it like the wood.”³² The novel has been accused of escapism: “it constructs a romance cut off from England and the English.”³³ While it is to be conceded that the novel hardly encourages a strong hope that Connie and Mellors would emerge out of their isolation and act as agents of miraculous change in a bleak world, their story does compel one to pause and consider the causes of so much barrenness and incompleteness of the present day life. In the process certain Lawrentian constants

come to light.

Pitting money-mania against natural joy in living, reason and rational thought against instinct and intuition, apartness and mechanized relations against the free flow of sympathy, the book reveals some of the tragic contradictions of modern living. Instead of emphasizing the beleaguered status of the lovers or the frailty of love before the reigning corrupt modes of the times, one should be sensitively alive to the quest undertaken in the novel, the quest for making life whole and complete by integrating and assimilating the things modern living has neglected and excluded in its false, mistaken emphases. The novel presents a severe indictment of money and the unthinking spread of industrialization which it sees as resulting from the supreme status granted to dry, self-seeking rationality. The utter neglect of bodily instincts leads to the atrophy of warmth and sympathy among human-beings. The wholeness of life suffers. The warped and arrested growth of life is exemplified in the crippled body of Clifford and the shapeless physiques of the colliers. The sincere wish of the author is for people to lead integrated, whole and complete lives and for this he attempts to restore instinct, emotion and intuition, reinstate glory and glamour of the body, and revive joy and pleasure in simple things of life. The stress falling on the judgment of the propriety and naturalness of language, on the question of the realism of class-dynamics and the viability of social philosophy should not be allowed to take us away from the search for completeness embarked upon in the novel. For it is the quest for wholeness that carries the weight of the novel. It is in this that the meaning of the tale resides.

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1/27/2020