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**Literature and Theory:
Lady Chatterley and D.H. Lawrence's
Metaphysics**

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Abstract

The novel has often been a useful vehicle for many writers to express their world-views and theories through judiciously (and sometimes less so) constructed plots. D.H. Lawrence was a writer who always used fiction as a testing ground and a showroom for his theories, especially those about the relationship between the two sexes, and how their union can lead to an authentic consummation and ultimately to spiritual rebirth for both man and woman. However, in this quest for the original self, the woman seems to play the crucial role, for she is privileged with natural intuition and strong instincts and is less prone than the man to the evils of a deformed ratio. Nonetheless, she is burdened with arbitrary and suffocating social rules, which she must fight in order to gain the way back to her authentic female self. In this short presentation I focus on the way such theories are employed in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence's most successful and certainly most popular work. The heroine, Connie Chatterley, undergoes a painful process towards self knowledge, driving "on to the edge of the unknown," until she "bears herself." This quest to find her feminine self involves, as is typical with Lawrentian heroines, first, a quasi-mystical experience in the bosom of nature where the heroine comes in contact with her true hopes and needs i.e. her deeper, authentic self, then the meeting with the lover man who can help her undergo erotic and spiritual rebirth. The heroine's progress towards this rebirth is also treated as a mythicization process: her sexual and spiritual imprisonment in her husband's castle and her escape into the refuge of nature parallels closely the myth of Persephone; her easy and deep affinity with nature, her love of freedom and self-reliance are highly suggestive of Artemis; and in her keen erotic nature, her readiness to abandon herself in the sacred union with the male other she is of course Aphrodite. A short reference will also be made to Lawrence's employment of what has been called the "feminine language," the language which, according to feminist theoreticians like Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, springs from the fertile emotional other of the female nature (the "semiotic"), and also to the "dirty" i.e. the disorderly, sexually charged language used by Mellors, which Lawrence used in order to demonstrate the sacredness hidden in such "unacceptable" language.

Key words: Lawrence- theories-Lady Chatterley

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Lady Chatterley's Lover is the last major novel D.H.Lawrence wrote and one of the most popular because of the great scandal it provoked the time it was written.

The controversy which surrounded the novel led Lawrence to make a public defence of the work and the ideas expressed through it. In the essay "A propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," written in 1929, he explained the novel's profoundly moral objective, which is the examination of what he considered the most vital and pressing of all themes: the existing schism between body and mind. Lawrence is fervent in his conviction that Western civilization has been guilty of imposing and maintaining this unnatural dichotomy between mind and body, subordinating the sensual and the instinctual to a false, shallow and sterile intellectualism. For Lawrence, "Life is only bearable when the mind and the body are in harmony, and there is a natural balance between the two, and each has a natural respect for the other" (*LCL* 310).

In this quest for the original "other" bodily self, the woman plays the most important role. Endowed, according to Lawrence, with natural intuition and strong instincts, but burdened with arbitrary, social rules, she must find the way to her authentic female self and to do so she must learn to listen to her own instinct after she has discovered it. Moreover, the Lawrencian woman, I suggest, is often endowed with the charm and the power of Greek goddesses, a power immediately perceived by the males she meets. Yet, however poetic these women may be, they are often placed in the position of outsiders. They are Aphrodites¹, lost among strange people, yet in search for their sexuality and womanhood, Heras² bound in conventional and unsuccessful marriages, independent-minded Artemises³ who seek to escape and pursue the impulses of their wild nature. Accordingly, the portraiture of Lady Chatterley can be read as following a mythicization process of three phases: first she is the imprisoned Persephone, then she becomes the independent Artemis of the woods until she discovers her Aphrodite, the erotic goddess dormant inside her. But beyond this mythicization process which will lead to the triumph of the body, the 'feminine' and the 'offensive' language of the novel is also revealing regarding Lawrence's metaphysics.

Constance and her Mythicization Process

Lady Constance suffers the sterility of her husband's environment with stoicism, but she still hopes to escape. Constance Chatterley is not a promiscuous upper class lady who seeks erotic pleasure in the hands of any macho man she would happen to meet on her way. She must find the way to her authentic female self and to do so she must follow a path which usually involves an experience of nature and finally leads to a meeting with the man who will help her reclaim her womanhood.

¹ In the Greek pantheon, Aphrodite was the goddess of beauty and love.

²Hera, Zeus' wife, was the patron goddess of the family and married women.

³Artemis was the goddess of forests and hunting

In the first phase of her mythicization, Connie finds herself in the position of one more contemporary Persephone who is literary confined in a countryside Hades as the wife of an English Pluto. Wragby Hall, situated near the Tevershall colliery which Sir Clifford inherited from his father and elder brother, is described in terms alluding not just to the dark, joyless underworld of the Greek mythology, but directly to the Christian Hell: “And when the wind was that way, which was often, the house was full of the stench of this sulphurous combustion of the earth’s excrements.” The place is clearly meant as a grim signifier of the dehumanized, industrialized England Sir Clifford stands for. This is the world the young woman is to inhabit and she has to learn to put up with it; it is a world she cannot “kick away” (13). A creature of the earth herself, she is immediately aware of the lack of “warmth of feeling” which makes Wragby Hall empty and “dreary as a disused street” (17), with its master, Sir Clifford Chatterley, the personification of “the negation of human contact” (16). Connie feels “beautifully out of contact” in this new world; She, for a while, plays her part as the “womanly” hostess to her husband’s intellectual friends, mostly men who consider her “too feminine to be quite smart” (19). But she is alert and smart enough to see through this silly masquerade even as it engulfs her: “Talk, talk, talk! What hell it was, the continual rattle of it!” (76).

In her second phase of this mythicization process Connie finds refuge in the woods. Like a modern Artemis, she finds in nature, not just relief from the everyday world, but an altar, a hospitable temple where she will come in communion with the cosmos. The wood is often a melancholic place, a place of “grey hopeless inertia, silence, nothingness” (65), yet it is also filled with life and the possibility of rebirth, as she rediscovers when she suddenly comes across a newly-born chick playing with its mother: “Connie crouched to watch in a sort of ecstasy. Life! Life! ” (114). It’s this natural, unconfined force of life which brings her close to Mellors, the gamekeeper. Holding the tiny fledgeling in her hand, Connie cries as she beholds the miracle of creation and Mellors can sense the intensity of her feelings, her instinctual tender reaction to Life. The woman feels her soul growing and deepening as she moves in the rhythms of life she discovers in the forest:

And she watched the daffodils go sunny in
a burst of sun, that was warm on her hands and lap. Even
she caught the faint tarry scent of the flowers. And then,
being so still and alone, she seemed to get into the
current of her proper destiny. (86)

Connie’s mystical connection with nature and the body is alluded to in a language that provides a spontaneous, natural release and frees her from the bonds of the self, the stark limitations of a meaningless existence.

It is in the wood, through nature that Connie’s body reestablishes the connection with the sacred, religious properties of the cosmos and sexual-spiritual regeneration is achieved. As John B. Humma suggests, “the metaphors

in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – linking bird, beast and flower (and air, water, earth) with one another and with hero and heroine – organically emblemize both the sexual-spiritual union of Connie and Mellors and a similar union [...] between them and the sacred wood, which is in effect the ‘cosmos,’ to use Lawrence’s term” (86-7). This connection between nature and the (human) body, brings to the surface a primordial consciousness, which in the Lawrencian lexicon is identified with the “oldest religion, a cosmic religion the same for all peoples, not broken up into specific gods or saviours or systems” (*Phoenix* 147). Connie is now on the threshold of discovering her long repressed womanhood. She is led to her rebirth, her reward for listening to the sacred language of the body and the senses, for obeying its natural drives.

The Body and its Feminine Language

Connie becomes an enemy of language within the novel; she deconstructs the word and replaces it with the semiotic language of the body. Lawrence is her great ally in this task, as he consistently undermines the male order of narration through the employment of a purely feminine language, a fluid, oceanic language which sweeps syntax away and keeps going “without ever inscribing or discerning contours” (*NFF* 259). A fine example of this language is found in the love-making scene. Connie’s erotic ecstasis is given in a purely semiotic, bodily language, which captures her feeling of the dissolution of the self, which Lawrence here describes uniquely from the woman’s point of view.

And it seemed she was like the sea, nothing but dark waves
rising and heaving, heaving with a great swell, so that slowly
her whole darkness was in motion, and she was ocean rolling
its dark, dumb mass. [...]
She was gone, she was not, and she was born:
a woman. (*LCL* 174)

Lawrence, once more, employs a language full of repetitions and exclamations, a “fluid” feminine language. This sort of language is what Hélène Cixous, almost five decades later, in her famous essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975), would consider a language able to “give [the woman] back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (*NFF* 250). It is not accident, surely, that Cixous should entitle one of her books, *The Newly Born Woman*.

In Lawrence’s writing, female sexuality finds utterance in an almost subversive language which reflects the openness and plurality of female sexuality.

After her sexual intercourse with Mellors, Connie is reborn, she is a new woman, the lost Aphrodite who was found and she learns to appreciate the sacredness which Lawrence attributes to the sexual act. Connie is split between the consciousness of the mind and that of the body and the blood, and she

cannot be whole until she finally acknowledges in her soul the sacred consciousness (which Lawrence often called phallic) which brings her into holy communion with the profound mystery of the cosmos. T.H. Adamowski draws an interesting parallel between Lawrence's idea of the conscious ego, which is synonymous with self-awareness and opposes the true self of the bodily otherness, and Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of the "reflective consciousness," the state where the false human ego operates, and is the opposite of the "prereflective consciousness," the consciousness which precedes it and brings us into living relationship with objects (Squires & Jackson 41). Adamowski points out that Sartre, like Lawrence, "believed that we fear this monstrous spontaneity [the prereflective consciousness] because it leaves us perpetually open to that 'unknown' that lies before us in the future." Lawrence too finds *life* on "this level" where the "deeper spontaneous self" lies (42).

Once Connie comes into communion with her "prereflective consciousness," which brings her into living relation with the reality around her and the objects of this reality, she becomes the body-protectress. The body in nature becomes the central symbol, importing into the novel the deepest significance of the pagan myth and ritual. The two lovers decorate their bodies with flowers and dance in the rain like Adam and Eve.

Lawrence and the "Four-Letter" Words

In the final version of the novel Lawrence depicts a much more sophisticated Mellors capable now of articulating his creator's ideas about the state of the world and human relationships. In his letter to Connie which concludes the book, Mellors sees the union with the female as a kind of religious ceremony, a natural physical expression of respect to the eternal, infinite universe: "We fucked a flame into being. Even the flowers are fucked into being, between sun and earth. But it's a delicate thing, and takes patience" (*LCL* 301). Here Lawrence makes a valiant effort to put his metaphysics into words, combining a poetic, transcendental language, rich in biblical allusions, with a colloquial, provocative language of the body, knowing that many would find it vulgar and obscene. Lawrence has no doubt that we must dare to use these allegedly obscene words, for he sees them as "a natural part of the mind's consciousness of the body" (309). In Mellors' letter to Connie, Lawrence puts four-letter words in the context of a biblical, spiritual language thus schematically combining two large and important fields of signifiers and signifieds: this bold combination of the sacred and the profane serves as a signifier of his dualistic metaphysics of life in the mind and life in the blood. Lawrence sees them as two indissoluble concepts, which must coexist and serve one another.

Conclusion

The character of Connie Chatterley allows Lawrence to explore different aspects of the issues which lie at the heart of his worldview. Sex, motherhood, womanhood and their interrelations acquire here their most complete expression in the Lawrencian canon, and combine to give utterance to the most profound expression of his cosmic philosophy. Once more, the artist locates his struggle with these ideas in the locus of the feminine psyche. It is Connie's intuitive awareness of the loss of the self and her desire to restore her feminine authenticity that is the generative theme of the plot. And it is finally her willingness to "submit" to the male otherness Mellors represents, which, thanks to her sound female instinct, she is able to acknowledge and appreciate, that provides the resolution, the final triumph of the body and the sensual world of feelings and emotions for which Lawrence yearned.

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