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Sexuality and Misogyny in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Szexualitás és nőellenesség D. H. Lawrence *Lady Chatterley Szeretőjében*

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1. Introduction

D. H. Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – henceforth abbreviated as LCL – in 1928, a novel which is often considered a “perhaps too liberal” one, dealing openly with sexuality and the dynamics of human relationships. Although the novel seems not only to champion sexuality but the welfare of women as well, I believe it has an underlying message unsupportive of woman’s complete liberation. More specifically, LCL supports the liberation of women in the public sphere, which was more or less inevitable in the United Kingdom around the time of the novel’s publication, even though the passages concerning relevant issues, for example education, are occasionally treated with irony; while at the same time, a belief system is suggested for women regarding sexuality, that would put them in a considerably disadvantageous position.

This paper will explore the underlying misogynistic message of Lawrence’s infamous novel, along with the ambivalent attitude towards women that manifests itself on a number of levels: in the comments of the narrator, in the beliefs of all the important male characters and even in the personalities of the most important female characters, among them Constance, the female protagonist, herself.

One reason for this ambivalence might be that LCL is a modernist novel. Although its form resembles the traditional nineteenth-century novel – the plot is presented more or less in chronological order and most of the characters are fairly consistent – it still shares some of the characteristic traits of the modernist version of the genre such as “the refusal of norms of beauty, the willingness to make radical linguistic experiment, all often inspired by the resolve [...] to startle and disturb the public” (Levenson 3). The last point is the most obvious, as the novel treated sexuality more frankly than previous literary works, detailing the scenes of lovemaking more explicitly; for which it was immediately banned and was not legally published until the 1960s. In addition, its consistent refusal of early twentieth-century ideals of beauty becomes evident as the novel progresses: Connie’s curvaceous body is repeatedly emphasized (LCL 2, 14, 196) and she is declared more desirable than the fashionable women of the time (LCL 196).

Yet for this paper, the novel’s most important trait is that its themes are strikingly modernist. The most noteworthy correspondence with other modernist works regarding the subject matter is their preoccupation with women. LCL also becomes curiously ambiguous whenever modern women are evaluated regardless of the basis of evaluation. Here the distinction between assertive women and conservative, compliant women must be pointed out, as the latter are always treated with respect while it is the former who receive all of the

criticism and ambiguous presentation. As Marianne Dekoven pointed out in her essay “Modernism and Gender” in *A Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999) the rise of feminism in the early decades of the twentieth-century

produced in modernist writing an unprecedented preoccupation with gender. [...] Much of this preoccupation [...] resulted in the combination of misogyny and triumphal masculinism [...] which was] almost universally accompanied by its dialectical twin: a fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine. The result was an irresolvable ambivalence toward powerful femininity. (Dekoven 174)

These twin themes, along with the resulting ambivalence, are present in LCL throughout the entire plot line. In fact, even before opening the book the reader finds an example of the ambivalence of modernist writers: the title, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, suggests that the novel's protagonist is a man. However, rather than naming him, he is referred to as the lover of a woman, implying that he becomes significant through his relations with her, thereby emphasizing her importance as well. Furthermore, as nearly all of the events are told primarily from Lady Chatterley's point of view, the two of them as a couple become an obvious choice when naming a protagonist. However, as it will be discussed in more detail later, by the end of the novel it is revealed that Lady Chatterley's importance is relative to that of the lover, who will be presented as the positive male model and the true protagonist.

1.1. Historical Context of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

A possible motive for the preoccupation with sexuality in LCL might be inferred if the cultural context of the year 1928 and the decades leading up to it are taken into consideration. While Dekoven pointed out the importance of feminism and the New Woman, who was “oriented more toward productive life in the public sphere” (Dekoven 174), in the development of modernism, her focus was literary rather than historical therefore she did not go into details. One of feminism's contributions was, as Melanie Phillips wrote in *The Ascent of Woman* (2003), women's participation in the Great War, which was crucial in securing the success of the suffragette movement (Phillips 299). This meant a considerable change in the power structure of early twentieth-century society for both genders. For women it was the first step towards being adequately represented in the public sphere (Phillips 302), while for men it meant the possible diminishment of the established patriarchal structure. Sylvia Walby, in *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), defines patriarchy as “a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 20). Furthermore, she

argues that “patriarchy is composed of six structures” (Walby 20) of which I found two to be relevant to LCL, namely “patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions” (Walby 20). As the following chapters will demonstrate, this cultural aspect of male domination seems to be abandoned in LCL, perhaps because of the political events described above took place, while male sexual domination is reinforced instead.

2. Stylistic Tools Used to Maintain Ambiguity and to Plant Underlying Messages

Lawrence used various tools to maintain the ambiguous tone of the novel, alternating between highlighting the pro-feminist and the biased opinion of the passages. What is crucial to notice here is that only the passages on education have a predominantly supportive tone while those on sexuality are just the opposite.

One such tool in maintaining ambiguity is using phrases which may be interpreted as uncomplimentary remarks within scenes or descriptions that are otherwise in favour of women. An early example is to be found on the first few pages of LCL. The paragraph is dedicated to describing the upbringing of Lady Chatterley – henceforth referred to by her nickname, Connie – on the one hand and on the other to explaining a popular socio-cultural phenomenon that was prevalent during her youth:

Constance and her sister Hilda had had what might be called an aesthetically unconventional upbringing. They had been taken to Paris and Florence and Rome [...] to the Hague and Berlin [...] They were] not the least daunted by either art or ideal politics. It was their natural atmosphere. [...] They lived freely among the students, they argued with the men over philosophical, sociological and artistic matters, they were just as good as the men themselves: only better, since they were women. (LCL 2)

The interesting, pro-feminist element of the description is that the narrator mentions such subjects as politics and sociology casually, suggesting that by the 1910s it was hardly noteworthy if a woman received an education as effective as that of men. This corresponds to Walby’s claim that education “has undergone some of the most changes towards reducing gender differences” (Walby 107). However, one of the curious aspects of the quotation is that the two girls seem to have been educated all around Europe except in their native country. The absence of the United Kingdom in this context might be considered an attempt to point out the flaws of British higher education, which, since then, had been examined on a number of occasions.

In 1928, two decades after the years the novel alludes to, Virginia Woolf wrote A

Room of One's Own in which she clearly described the restrictions women had to face in England. She began the essay by relating a personal experience from an academic library: she was told that “ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction” (Woolf 567). To the untrained eye this might sound reasonable at first glance, seeing that there are academic libraries even today that only grant reading permissions to specific people. Yet at a closer look the above argument fails immediately as the person whom Woolf quoted clearly stated that only women were under such restrictions, implying that the same rule did not apply to men. Later on, after sketching a somewhat incomplete history of the opportunities women had if they wanted to pursue an intellectual career, Woolf concludes: “few women even now have been graded at the universities; the great trials of the professions, army and navy, trade, politics and diplomacy have hardly tested them. They remain even at this moment almost unclassified” (Woolf 615-616). In light of Virginia Woolf’s realistic account of the state of affairs it may be assumed that Connie and Hilda were educated outside of the United Kingdom because only the continent offered equal educational rights.

However, this positive interpretation might be called into question on two points: first because of the word ‘unconventional’ at the beginning of the quotation, which means “not limited or bound by convention; free and easy” (OED definition of “Unconventional”). Therefore, depending on the reader’s viewpoint, it could either be said that the passage praised Connie’s parents for their modern way of thinking or that it pointed out the fact that the girls had not been raised properly, as the thorough education they received was not in accordance with British customs at the time.

The other reason why the positive interpretation might be doubted is because the last few words in the quote “only better, since they were women” (LCL 2) make a sharp gender distinction. In this quotation the hidden message is even harder to understand because by using free indirect speech Lawrence made it difficult to separate the voice of a young Constance from that of the narrator; which is a device that is frequently used later as well. (In my discussion of free indirect speech I rely on Montgomery.) This is another tool used to convey a slighting message: the remark itself as well as the agent to whom it is assigned is concealed. Assuming that these words come from the eighteen-year-old Connie is plausible if the reader takes her inexperience and youth into consideration. One interpretation could be that she meant to say that on top of being competent at school they were also women, in which she took pride. However, if the comment is made by the narrator, then, two further interpretations are possible: it can either be perceived as serious, in which case, according to

the logic it implies, if a woman was able to debate successfully with men it was a note- and praiseworthy event; thereby attempting to reinforce the age-old, and recently crumbling myth that generally men are intellectually superior to women; or it could be understood as an ironic remark on this recently exposed myth.

In stark contrast with the depiction of Connie's and Hilda's education, where the analysis proved the positive elements to be more visible than the possible negative ones, there is the unfriendly undertone of the passages on the next page. Here the dominant theme of LCL, sexuality, is introduced based on an opposition: the young German men wanted physical intimacy along with the intellectual one while Connie and Hilda were uncertain about the physical aspects of a relationship (LCL 3). This opposition is reinforced by the declaration "the lovemaking and connection were only a sort of primitive reversion [...] one was less in love with the boy afterwards and a little inclined to hate him, as if he had trespassed on one's privacy and inner freedom" (LCL 3). In this quote the focalizer is clearly the young Constance who has not yet learnt how to find her own satisfaction during sex. (In my discussion of focalization I followed chapter 6 in Rimmon-Kenan.) This is promptly followed by a statement whose message highlights a notion biased against women: "for, of course, being a girl, one's whole dignity and meaning in life consisted in the achievement of an absolute, a perfect, a pure, a noble freedom. What else did a girl's life mean? To shake off the old and sordid connections and subjections [...] and the] sex business was one of the most ancient, sordid connections and subjections" (LCL 3).

At first glance there is nothing obviously offensive in the quotation, but upon closer analysis three interpretations are possible: first, it contains a crude generalization that tries to narrow women's prospects to a single possibility, second, it also contains a tinge of hostility against women that is demonstrated on multiple occasions as the novel progresses and third, it denies the possibility that women could have an individual meaning in life that is not related to anyone else but to the woman in question. In this passage, Lawrence uses free indirect speech again to make the separation of Connie's voice from the narrator's difficult. If it is the narrator speaking then it is a relatively simple case of prejudice but if the reader interprets the quote as coming from Connie the interpretation becomes more complicated: in this case the most important female character is used as a medium to voice this opinion, which could either serve to prove Connie's limited knowledge of social issues or it could be an ironic presentation of received opinions at the period. By placing the aforementioned positive description of education immediately before such an ambiguous passage about sexuality, Lawrence forecasts the contradictory nature of the whole novel as well as that of the time-

period in which it is set.

The third common tool that is used is essentially the opposite of the first one: a negative opinion is plainly presented while the possible lack of conviction in it is barely noticeable. The discussion of women's opinion about sexuality is closed with the somewhat problematic observation that women in general believed sex to be an undesirable chore: "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 3). The assessment itself is clear: women think that sexuality is not important. However, the assessor could either be Connie or the narrator. The reason why assigning this passage to Connie seems illogical is that she herself is a woman; therefore it would be unlikely for her to refer to women with the third person plural pronoun instead of the first person plural, unless she was distancing herself from a generalized opinion she did not believe in. However, it is obvious that if she had uttered these words she would not have distanced herself from other women at this point, because on the one hand the argument supporting this opinion was introduced with her first sexual experience (LCL 3) and on the other hand an important part of the plot-line is that Oliver Mellors, her lover, makes her change her outlook on life by the end of the novel. For this reason, it is more likely that this passage was intended to come from a male narrator with the young Connie's focus, in which case it can be viewed as an early manifestation of a misguided attitude, referring to the conviction that women and men do not share certain pleasures, a conviction that male characters will echo in relation to women.

As it was previously stated, ambiguity towards women rather than pure misogyny was characteristic of the period in which LCL was written. Therefore, the quoted observation gains more importance once the reader realizes that it contradicts the main message of the novel: the human body, and even more so, a healthy sexuality is the most important thing in the world. This idea can be assumed to have a central role because apart from education and class, their opinion on sexuality is what the antagonist and the protagonist differ on, and it will be the protagonist who supports the opinion, thereby implying that it is true.

Following the previous argument, if the male narrator's opinion of women contradicts the main point of the novel then it may mean that Lawrence was calling men's general opinion of women into question. However, the very subtlety of this questioning suggests that the novel supports the popular opinion – based on false beliefs – that women do not enjoy sexual intimacy, because, as seen in the above quotation, the argument that supports it is elaborately and plainly described while the possibility of it being false only reveals itself

through a close analysis of the text.

In later chapters, this opposition of ideas regarding sexuality and the breakdown of Connie's beliefs become the organizing forces of the novel. From her youth (LCL 3) until after she began her affair with Michaelis (LCL 20), an Irish playwright, Connie did not think much of sex. "To her it meant nothing except that she gave herself to him [Michaelis]" (LCL 20). Although not explicitly stated, this was possible because he was portrayed as a bad lover: "he roused in the woman a [...] craving physical desire [... which] he did not satisfy in her; he was always come and finished so quickly" (LCL 23). Soon, however, Connie learned that by exchanging her passive role for an active one in lovemaking she could find her own satisfaction (LCL 23). At first glance this idea is very much in favour of women but as the story progresses the reader finds that the presentation of this idea is not that simple. This early manifestation of an open-minded approach to sexuality becomes nothing more than an experiment on Connie's part, about which all the relevant male characters, whether modern or old-fashioned, form a rather defensive, male-centred and misogynistic opinion as it will be shown in later chapters.

3. Analysis of Important Male Supporting Characters

Throughout the novel, whenever a male character is introduced the reader quickly learns whether they are modern or conservative in their thinking. Yet, the common trait they all exhibit is their varying level of alienation from women either on an intellectual or a physical level or, in the case of Clifford Chatterley and Tommy Dukes, on both levels.

The four most important male characters in LCL are Clifford Chatterley, Connie's husband, Michaelis, her first lover, Tommy Dukes, a friend of Clifford and Oliver Mellors, the title character of the novel. Although they are united by some of their views regarding women, the essential difference between them is that the first three, discussed in Chapter 3, are presented as negative examples of social behaviour, while the behaviour and beliefs of Mellors, discussed separately in Chapter 4, are presented as the solution to social problems.

3.1. Clifford Chatterley

The first figure to be analysed is Clifford Chatterley, a complex character whose importance is only revealed through contradictions. As mentioned above, Clifford is biased against women on multiple levels, of which the physical one will be discussed first. He is a young intellectual of aristocratic blood who is described with all the hallmarks of the modern men of the twentieth century: in his youth he was rebellious in a fashionable way (LCL 6) and

later became a successful writer (LCL 42), but it is also revealed that even before his injury “the sex part [of a relationship] did not mean much to him” (LCL 8). Because the novel is centred around the importance of sexuality, his opinion becomes a flaw in his character. By saying that he never really cared much about sex, even before his injury, he is put in opposition with the main message of the novel more pointedly than women are: according to popular contemporary sexological theories his lack of desire was extremely uncommon among men (Forel 223) because of which Clifford is presented as the antagonist in the novel.

While his opinion corresponds with what women are described to believe, he and the female characters are not treated the same way. Curiously, the women who are depicted as sharing his opinion are not presented as fellow antagonists but are rather shown as misguided or naturally inclined to lack sexual desires. This natural inclination will be crucial in a later chapter of this paper because if Clifford also had such inclinations it would mean that in a way he experienced sexuality the way women were supposed to, which will be an important point in Oliver Mellors’ analysis. However, it is noteworthy that even though Clifford did not value sexuality too much he was only forced into impotence by circumstances, through an accident during his military service in the Great War: he was paralysed from the hips down (LCL 1).

Yet even though he is physically disabled, theoretically, his mental capacity for love should still be intact. However, he does not exhibit signs of love for Connie so he falls under the category of the ‘egoistic lover’ (Forel 125). The term comes from a contemporary Swiss sexologist, Dr. Auguste Forel, who was as much praised as blamed for his liberal-mindedness. His book, *The Sexual Question* (1905), was translated into English in 1908, so even though there is no explicit evidence, Lawrence, who was also familiar with Sigmund Freud’s theories, could have read it as Clifford’s character corresponds to it so well: “He is not wanting in fine words, but in his opinion all sentiment and respect is due to his person, while he reduces to a minimum his duties toward the object of his love. He exacts much from the other and gives little” (Forel 125). Unsurprisingly, Clifford’s egoistic behaviour partially derives from his injury: he needed Connie’s help in every little personal matter (LCL 11, 60). But it is revealed that he never repaid Connie’s acts of selfless kindness in any way. Much of their time spent together was dedicated to Clifford’s stories (LCL 11), whose creation was the only form of entertainment Connie was allowed to participate in. Whenever Clifford’s friends visited she had to sit with them to inspire them (LCL 28) but she was not supposed to enter the conversation because the men took offence at the attempt (LCL 32). Nor did she dare to respond to compliments from their guests for fear of hurting Clifford’s feelings (LCL 14),

which shows exactly how one-sided their relationship was. By the time Connie was finished with Michaelis, Clifford's indifference towards his wife was made plain and unmistakable: "he was never really warm, nor even kind, only thoughtful, considerate, in a well-bred cold sort of way! But never warm as a man can be warm to a woman [...]" (LCL 60). The description implies that rather than treating her as his wife he treated her as he would a mere acquaintance. Naturally, as described in real-life situations by Forel (Forel 114-115), this cold treatment resulted in Connie's and Clifford's complete estrangement: even before Connie developed feelings for Mellors she realized she detested Clifford. At one point her thoughts are revealed through indirect speech, stating that she "wanted to be clear of him [Clifford], and especially of [...] his obsession with himself, his endless treadmill obsession with himself" (LCL 79).

More importantly, Clifford assumes that whatever he does not desire Connie would not desire either. The first instance of this self-centred belief is when he plainly states that the sole reason Connie could not desire a man who was antipathetic to him is because she cares for Clifford (LCL 36). Obviously, this is not the case as by this time Connie is having an affair with Michaelis, whom Clifford detests. This reveals that Clifford does not think of Connie as an individual capable of forming opinions that contradict his, but rather as an extension of himself; an old-fashioned concept that was most likely conserved in his mind due to his aristocratic upbringing and further reinforced after his injury in the War.

The less evident second example can only be seen from Clifford's gradually deteriorating opinion about sexuality. Whenever conversation forces him to think or talk about the meaning or function of physical intimacy Clifford expresses an increasing amount of indifference, bordering on contempt. At the very beginning he considers intimacy a "great thing" (LCL 28), but later, as the emotional gap between him and Connie grows (LCL 36-37) his opinion deteriorates as well. He says "one can just subordinate the sex thing to the necessities of a long life [...] Just use it, since that's what we're driven to [...]" (LCL 37). Eventually, after the possibility of Connie having a child comes up, he thinks sexuality ought to be substituted altogether: "all the love-business for example, it might just as well go [i.e., disappear]. I suppose it would if we could breed babies in bottles" (LCL 62). This last statement suggests that since he is no longer able to enjoy it, for him, sexuality became a mere function or necessity, much like using the toilet. In other words, since he is not able to enjoy the sensations of intimacy, he completely turns against the notion, and given the chance would selfishly deprived women, including his wife, of the pleasure as well.

While his physical aversion is gradually built up throughout the novel, his intellectual

opposition towards women is only revealed by the end. At first Clifford discussed everything related to his art with Connie (Lawrence 11, 84) but when they had a discussion about the coal mines Clifford dismissed her opinion and said “Ah, don’t talk like a woman!” (LCL 157). Incidentally, this scene corresponds with Woolf’s previously quoted observations, in which she claimed that women were rarely taken seriously in traditionally male professions.

After this first derogatory comment, Clifford’s true opinion of women, devoid of his well-bred politeness, was revealed when Connie told him that she was in love with Mellors (LCL 262). A valid argument in Clifford’s defence would be that he just discovered that he was being cheated on which would make him say things he did not mean but his behaviour before Mellors’ name was revealed contradicts this. While he thought Connie’s lover was Duncan Forbes, presumably a man of Connie’s class, he was more or less civil and only worried about how this new development would affect his life while their relationship was never mentioned: Connie’s departure would “destroy the fabric of *his* daily existence [...and] cause [...the] derangement of *his* personality” (LCL 261, emphases mine).

However, when he found out who Connie’s real lover was, his first reaction was: “My God, you ought to be wiped off the face of the earth” (LCL 263) which is much harsher than how he reacted to Duncan. Offended and outraged that Connie wanted to choose a working-class man over him he exclaimed “My God, my God, is there any end to the beastly lowness of women!” (LCL 263). He meant this as an insult to Connie’s intellect because he expected more class-consciousness on Connie’s part; he expected Connie to follow a conscious choice rather than an unconscious instinct. But it is also important that instead of damning Connie only, he started speaking about women in general. He went as far as declaring that Connie was one of those women who were immoral and unnatural because they were not happy about how society was developing: “you’re not normal, you’re not in your right senses. You’re one of those half-insane, perverted women who must run after depravity” (LCL 263). As this scene is the last time Clifford appears directly in the novel his behaviour leaves a lasting impression: he is presented as a cruel and unfeeling man who is only courteous towards women as long as they are an asset to him or behave in a way he deems suitable.

As it has been argued Clifford is the antagonist of the novel, who, in this case, represents the negative male role model that should be avoided. Due to Clifford’s characterization it might be argued that LCL is not merely the manifestation of the early 20th-century’s ambiguous attitude towards women, but a more elaborate social criticism which severely judges anything Lawrence did not agree with. In this respect LCL stands up for women by claiming multiple times that a person like Clifford had no right to Connie: first

through Michaelis (LCL 44), although his opinion is only expressed indirectly, then through Clifford's aunt, Lady Bennerley (LCL 61) as well. However, the fact that Sir Malcolm, Connie's father, asked Connie not to leave Clifford (LCL 242) weakens this claim because it suggests that the old notion that love is not worth throwing money and position away for was still wide-spread.

Finally, it will be argued later that Connie did not free herself by leaving Clifford; she merely exchanged one type of male-domination for another, one that Lawrence found preferable. Clifford represented the type of man that was almost entirely uninterested in women sexually and was also doubtful of women's intellectual capacities, making him an example of the behaviour that should be avoided. However, instead of simply divorcing Clifford and moving away as a single woman Connie waited until she found Mellors.

One possible reason for this could have been the fact that in the 1920s women were still fighting for many rights only men enjoyed – the right to education and suffrage only being some of the high profile campaigns – therefore freedom was something they desired but once they got it they were not entirely comfortable yet in the new, unknown situation. Because of this, some women chose the safer, familiar option of immediately entering a new relationship. Based on this, it could be argued that the novel also sought to point out the issues of coping with the newly gained freedom, an attitude very much in support of women.

3.2. Michaelis

The second character to be analysed, Michaelis, is another young modern who is portrayed only slightly more positively than Clifford. He is presented as another rather self-centred lover yet he is completely different: he is perfectly healthy so he cannot explain away his shortcomings. As mentioned above it is through him that Connie learns how to find her own release yet in each of their love-making scenes he is presented as a failure. Their last intimate scene together is described as follows: "Connie found it impossible to come to her crisis before he had really finished his. And he roused a certain craving passion in her, [...] she *had* to go on after he had finished, [...] till she brought about her own crisis [...]" (LCL 45, emphasis mine). Until Connie meets Oliver Mellors this is one of the most contradictory scenes in the novel. At first the narrator seems to defend Connie and women in general by saying "because, after all, like so many modern men, he was finished almost before he had begun. And that *forced* the woman to be active" (LCL 45, emphasis mine). By using the words 'had' and 'force' it is implied that Connie's activity is Michaelis's fault but in reality this statement can only be considered a form of defence for women if one accepts the idea that

women ought to be passive during sex. Although this was a popular belief, reinforced by medical documents (Forel 92) written by renowned sexologists, this does not save the idea from being misogynistic: the implication that women by default should be passive in bed is a major restriction on women as it was clearly stated that many women, in this case Connie, could not find pleasure in the passive role. So in reality this so-called defence was another form of confinement for women, in the disguise of century-old, biological ‘facts’ that, since then, have been proven false.

The other aspect of the scene that can be attributed to blunt selfishness is Michaelis's rant that followed as soon as Connie came down from her height. “You couldn't go off at the same time as a man, could you? You'd have to bring yourself off! You'd have to run the show! [...] You keep on for hours after I've gone off... and I have to hang on with my teeth till you bring yourself off by your own exertions” (LCL 45). By saying this out loud Michaelis basically told Connie that he thinks women hold back on purpose out of selfishness which corresponds to a statement made by the male narrator at the beginning of the novel: “she [women in general] could use this sex thing to have power over him [men in general]. For she only had to hold herself back in sexual intercourse [...] and then she could prolong the connection and achieve her orgasm and her crisis while he was merely her tool” (LCL 3). This must be a bit of information disclosed by the narrator because at this point in the plotline Connie had only been eighteen and did not have enough experience to know this. But the older Connie, who was accustomed to challenging the views of men, immediately called Michaelis out by asking if he cared about her pleasure (LCL 45). His eventual response was characteristically masculine: “I'm quite willing. But I'm darned if hanging on waiting for a woman to go off is much of a game for a man...” (LCL 45). With his outburst Michaelis revealed that while he desired intimacy with Connie his interests only went as far as his own pleasure was concerned. Also he was outraged at the idea that his performance was never enough for a woman: “I never had a woman yet who went off just at the same moment as I did” (LCL 45). The reason these complaints coming from the ‘modern men’ are typically male rather than modern is that later they will be echoed by Mellors as well, who is an old-fashioned character, implying that the centrality of male activity is a universal idea, adopted by older generations as well, rather than an idea that sprung from the minds of the new generation.

3.3. Tommy Dukes

The third male character to be discussed is Tommy Dukes, whose opinion is relevant

do to his complete impersonality. He does not have, nor does he wish to have, an intimate relationship with Connie, and his comments are directed against men and women in general. At first glance, he seems to come close to truly regarding women as his equals but even his ideas about society are fraught with hidden opposition against women's growing liberation. In the very first scene where his male-centred opinion is revealed he states: "real knowledge comes out of the whole corpus of the consciousness; out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain and mind" (LCL 30). Tommy's claim strictly defines the birthplace of real knowledge as the male body: rather than use the gender-neutral word 'genitalia' Tommy specifies the penis as essential for real knowledge. In other words, he clings to the only thing in which women will invariably differ from men. One might try to attribute his specifying the male body so closely to the fact that he said this to his male friends. However, on the one hand, Connie was there as well, even though all of them tried their best to pretend that she was not listening to the conversation (LCL 32), while on the other hand he consistently goes on to prove his point whenever he speaks, regardless of the composition of his audience. In fact, he insulted Connie personally in the same scene when he stated that he wished he had "the courage to say "shit!" in front of a lady" (LCL 32) which he actually did, as Connie always had to be there during these conversations. Then he said he would rather cut his penis off than swear in front of his mother who is a real lady (LCL 32), implying that Connie was not a real lady.

Later, the opening scene of Chapter Six reveals that Tommy is not only prejudiced against women but he is also a hypocrite because when he speaks about knowledge he makes use of the difference between men and women but when he speaks about his treatment of both sexes he tries to neutralize the difference and claims that men and women should not be treated differently:

'I? What am I doing but talking perfectly sincerely to a woman at this moment?'

'Yes, talking...'

'And what more could I do if you were a man, than talk perfectly sincerely to you?'

'Nothing perhaps. But a woman...'

'A woman wants you to like her and talk to her, and at the same time love her and desire her; and it seems to me the two things are mutually exclusive.' (LCL 46)

Tommy's initial responses suggest that he thinks he must behave with women the same way

he behaves with men therefore implying that in his mind the two sexes are more or less the same. More specifically, his last quoted response suggests that he thinks women became manlier as he can have conversations with them but cannot desire them. At first glance this interpretation contradicts his theory about knowledge since he referred to the penis as an essential source of knowledge. However, an alternate reading of the situation would be that he deliberately chose to include the penis as essential because that way, according to his definition, women will always be denied access to real knowledge regardless of how capable they are of holding stimulating conversations. Thus, however liberal-minded his reasoning seems on the surface, his thoughts still carry a tint of aversion for emancipated women. As revealed, his basic belief is that one cannot be intelligent and desirable at the same time, which suggests that, in Tommy's view, women, who are supposed to be desired by heterosexual men, should not be intelligent and likable at all. Throughout the remainder of the conversation he further expounds this idea:

'I like women but I don't desire them. I like talking to them; but talking to them, though it makes me intimate in one direction, sets me poles apart from them as far as kissing is concerned.'

'Where does it [the difference between men and women] lie, as far as we're concerned? We're all intelligent human beings, and the male and female business is in abeyance.' (LCL 47)

Essentially, what Tommy believes is that desirable women cannot be intelligent, because once a woman's brightness is revealed to him his desire diminishes and she stops being interesting as a potential lover: she is immediately regarded as masculine. Although he does not state it explicitly, he gives further evidence to this opinion when he says "I tell you, if I'm really a male thing at all, I never run across the female of my species. And I don't miss her, I just *like* women" (LCL 47). Although Tommy questions it in theory, there is no doubt that biologically he is male human. Therefore by stating that he does not consider the women he meets and claims to like – the modern, educated, slim wasted women of the early twentieth-century – the female version of his species he seems to imply that modern women are not really women in his opinion. This further strengthens his opinion that women ought to be like they were said to be in previous centuries: erotically pleasing and simple-minded.

However, the bluntest declaration of his opinion comes a little after this conversation with Connie and it reveals that his so-called modern thinking hides a very conventional and typically 19th-century notion. During a conversation in mixed company he first states that "the only bridge across the chasm [between consecutive stages of society] will be the phallus"

(LCL 63)¹. Consistently with his previous statements, he disregards the notion that women might prove such a bridge as well. Soon after this declaration he effectively closed the discussion by saying “[t]here might even be real men, in the next phase. [...] Real, intelligent, wholesome men, and wholesome nice women! [...] We’re not men, and the women aren’t women” (LCL 63). Later in the novel this idea will be echoed by Mellors as well, but the significant difference between the two of them is that Tommy does not set up a cause and effect relationship between the current unmanly and unwomanly state of the two sexes in either direction. In addition, this quote corresponds with an observation made in the analysis of Clifford, that LCL aims to criticise society in general, and Tommy hardly could have put his views more straightforwardly: according to him the defining characteristic of a man should be his intelligence while the defining characteristic of a woman should be her niceness, which is a much vaguer quality.

Despite all this, the reader learns early on that “something about [Mellors] reminded Connie of Tommy Dukes” (LCL 39) which will have a great impact on the reader’s perception of both characters. On the one hand, as he is compared to the hero of the novel, Tommy’s position gains strength on a symbolic level, which implies that his opinion is not considered to be entirely false, while on the other hand Mellors’ positive status is weakened by the comparison because he will echo Tommy’s ideas on the state of men and women, a fact which will be further discussed in Mellors’ analysis. A possible reason for this link between the two characters could be Lawrence’s desire to maintain the novel’s ambiguous attitude towards women without disrupting the unity of the protagonist’s characterisation with ideas that do not fit his character.

4. Analysis of Oliver Mellors

Before an in-depth analysis of Oliver Mellors, whose character represents Lawrence’s beliefs on sexuality, an important point to make is that LCL seems to divide those critics who focused on sexuality and gender roles in the novel in an interesting pattern. In the analysis of Mellors I will primarily rely on the analysis of Kate Millett (1969) and James C. Cowan (1994) but that of László Kéry in his book *A sötét láng próféta* (1978) is also noteworthy. It is interesting to note that while Millett fiercely argues to point out the misogyny depicted in the novel, Cowan and other male critics either disregard feminist interpretations or aim to

¹Millett, in *Sexual Politics* (1969), also quotes this passage, but does not comment on it elaborately; she merely considers Tommy’s suggestion another attempt on Lawrence’s part to highlight the importance of men (242).

defend Lawrence by arguing for the falsehood of the analyses which claim that LCL is intentionally biased against women. One such example is Drew Milne, who, in his essay “Lawrence and the politics of sexual politics” published in *The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence* (2001), rejects Millett’s analysis as having too narrow a focus (Milne 207), while claiming that “Lawrence was critical of Freud” (Milne 198) without acknowledging that many of the love making scenes are based on Freud’s theories that have since been proved as ungrounded.

Unlike Cowan and Milne, László Kéry did not seem to be aware of Millett’s criticism and viewed the novel from a traditional, therefore inherently male-centred, point of view. Throughout his analysis he emphasizes how Mellors and Connie defeated the class-barrier between them as well as their success in establishing a sexually satisfying relationship (Kéry 330) – without acknowledging that it was mostly due to the transformation of Connie’s mentality rather than mutual compromise.

In my opinion neither Millett’s complete condemnation, nor Cowan’s attempt to exempt Lawrence are without flaw. On the one hand, it is true that Millett’s focus on sexuality is too narrow. While she mentions the implications sexuality has on class and society, she neglects Lawrence’s cultural support of women mentioned in Chapter 2 of this paper. On the other hand, Cowan seems to misinterpret some of the passages in LCL, repeatedly claiming that cooperation was possible for Connie (Cowan 119, 121) when, as my argument will show, that would only be true if cooperation is understood as giving in to men’s desires. Furthermore, he interprets Lawrence’s male chauvinist beliefs as “sexual fallacies” (Cowan 117) derived from “sexual theories that by today’s standards are fallacious or questionable” (Cowan 117) implying that an objective reader should not blame Lawrence for believing them. I would like to argue with the word ‘today’, as a source he quotes on the next page contradicts it. While Cowan acknowledges Lawrence’s bias and his firm belief in male sexual dominance (Cowan 117), he also quotes a certain George H. Neville, a friend of Lawrence, who observed that “It is certain that from *somewhere* he [Lawrence] developed a *personal* ideal, vision or state which had for its foundation the utter dominance of the male. If my idea be right and he did develop such an ideal at this time, it is perfectly clear proof that he was very much lacking in the practical application of his observations” (Neville 76, *emphases mine*). Neville clearly states that he, who, according to Cowan, was “more experienced sexually” (Cowan 118), thought Lawrence’s idea of dominance was not the general opinion at the time. Additionally, Cowan also disregards Lawrence’s idiosyncratic use of the infamous four-letter words. I believe that these neglected aspects are crucial in analysing Mellors’

character – and by extension, LCL's proposed model of healthy gender roles.

Oliver Mellors stands in direct opposition with everything Clifford, Michaelis and Tommy represent in terms of society: Mellors comes from a working-class family while the rest of them all come from the middle or upper classes. His position is peculiar because due to his time served in the army he came into close contact with the middle classes and learned their social rules yet he prefers a physically active life – which the representatives of the middle classes abhorred – to an intellectually active one. However, despite this opposition, their ideas about women and sexuality are strangely similar, implying that, ideally, class difference should not play a role in a person's conceptualization of sexual roles.

As mentioned in Chapter 3.3, Mellors' ideas are especially similar to that of Tommy Dukes'. Because Connie provided the link between the two men by comparing them (LCL 39) it might be argued that Mellors' statements that "if [...] the men walked with legs close bright scarlet, and buttocks showing scarlet [...] then the women 'ud begin to be women. It's because th' men *aren't* men, that th' women have to be" (LCL 193) derive from the same basic idea Tommy had about the two sexes not being real; not being what they used to be. Unlike in Tommy's version of the same idea (see Chapter 3.3) Mellors maintains a cause and effect relationship between the changes in the two sexes. In his opinion men are to blame for the current state of society. However, this cannot be viewed as a positive notion regarding women because it presupposes their inferiority. Mellors essentially said that women only change in reaction to the changes in men. Furthermore, their very change is only perceived from a male point of view: women had lost what men perceived as feminine in them – which naturally may not be in accordance with what women at any given time perceive to be feminine – while also stating that both the present change for the worse and the future change for the better – neither from a woman's point of view – requires men to change first. In other words, according to Mellors' logic, womankind cannot change for herself: women are presented as relative to men both under good and bad circumstances. And because this notion is associated with two important characters it might be argued that it is one of the major messages of the novel. However, it cannot be said that Mellors is a completely misogynist character as he exhibits the ambivalent attitude of the period towards women as well.

When Connie and Mellors first meet at the hut, which is their first real private encounter, his dislike of liberated women is revealed: "she had wakened the sleeping dogs of old voracious anger in him, anger against the self-willed female" (LCL 76). The word 'old' is especially important because on the one hand it can refer to Mellors' personal feelings, the anger he used to feel because of his first wife, while on the other hand it could also point to

the anger men had always felt because of women who fought against the prevailing gender roles. The latter point becomes especially relevant because it serves as a unifying point among the male characters: despite the contrast between the mentalities of Mellors and the modern men he shares their antipathy towards strong-willed women. However, when Connie breaks down emotionally his opposition disappears immediately (LCL 99) and as soon as he sees the soft, fragile side of Connie, the side that allows him to play the traditional, protective, male role, their romance starts.

The first lovemaking scene between them is curiously depicted: it is a mixture of Mellors' feelings and Connie's thoughts, which shows that they experienced their first physical encounter differently: Connie was not there with him, she only allowed the experience to happen to her. Yet in this scene the reader sees Connie's world-view crumbling. As discussed in a previous section, she grew up thinking that sex was not at all important, yet with Mellors she felt at peace afterwards even though she herself did not reach her peak (LCL 100). The importance of this scene is in that it establishes the underlying thesis of the novel: "Her tormented modern-woman's brain still had no rest. [...] if she gave herself to the man, it was real. But if she kept herself for herself, it was nothing" (LCL 100). That she did not have an orgasm at this point is very important because what the scene implies is that the very fact that she stopped trying to be active gave her a sort of peace, despite her lack of satisfaction. Essentially, according to LCL, when it comes to sexuality women should remain in the strict, old-fashioned gender roles established centuries earlier and thus find their peace of mind (LCL 100). The remainder of the novel seeks to prove that a healthy, sexually active, heterosexual relationship is not possible otherwise. As it will be demonstrated, what the novel does not say explicitly yet implies rather forcefully is that 'active' only applies from a male point of view.

A crucial scene after their affair begins is when they accidentally meet after Connie had been ignoring Mellors for a few days. Because Mellors insists, they make love in the middle of the forest, despite Connie's initial protests. This is the first time that they reach their climax together.² The description is definitely presented from Connie's point of view: this time the reader gets a detailed account of her feelings and almost nothing of Mellors'. However, the description of the scene is as one-sided as the previous ones: "She had to lie down [...] he began to move, [...] she could do nothing [...] she could only wait, wait and

²According to Kéry, a mutual orgasm was the sign of a perfect union for Lawrence (Kéry 322), however it is unclear why Lawrence thought that woman's more active participation in love-making would destroy this union.

moan in spirit as she felt him withdrawing [...] and she lay there crying in unconscious inarticulate cries. [...] she lay inert” (LCL 115-116). In this scene it was emphasized that, unlike with Michaelis, Connie did not strive for her own satisfaction in any way; instead, it was Mellors’ performance that brought pleasure to Connie: all of the few active words describe him while Connie is only described with passive verbs, implying that if the man is able to perform women do not need to be active.

Ingeniously, even the vocabulary of the novel strengthens this central idea. While Cowan stated that Lawrence treated sexuality frankly (Cowan 115), especially in LCL, which was “more explicit than his earlier novels in its direct description of [...] sexual intercourse” (Cowan 116) this statement is not quite true. His analysis does not mention what Millett points out in the chapter on D. H. Lawrence in *Sexual Politics* (1969): while the penis is described with a multitude of synonyms the female organs are scarcely described (Millett 239-240). However, she did not comment on the fact that even the single word that appears in LCL is not exclusively used for the female genitalia: in the first case, when Connie asks what ‘cunt’ means Mellors answers “It’s thee down theer; an’ what I get when I’m i’side thee, and what tha gets when I’m i’side thee; it’s a’ as it is, all on’t” (LCL 155). What Mellors here explains is that the same word is used to describe the female organ *as well* as intercourse itself. Furthermore, when Connie simplifies it and equates his word with one that is only used to describe the action he immediately protests: “Nay nay! Fuck’s only what you do. Animals fuck. But cunt’s a lot more than that. It’s thee, dost see [...]” (LCL 156). To put it more plainly, through the voice of the protagonist, Lawrence claimed that women cannot be considered as separate individuals when it comes to sexuality: only men are separate, as they have a penis, indicating its importance with a great variety of synonyms; while anything else, that is, anything related to the female body, is just a part of the sexual act, and therefore does not need a separate word to describe or name it.³

However, when Mellors and Hilda are arguing the word is used differently: “An’ if your sister there comes ter me for a bit o’ cunt an’ tenderness, she knows what she’s after” (LCL 217).⁴ In this case, the word does not even include Connie since she has to go to Mellors to get it. By presenting Connie as not included in the one word that is otherwise used to refer to the female body it is implied that women are completely denied an autonomous

³Additionally, the word ‘pussy’ is also used in the novel (Lawrence 49), which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) already had multiple meanings by 1922, one of them being the female genitalia, yet Lawrence only uses it to refer to a cat, reinforcing my argument.

⁴The Oxford English dictionary (1989) defined ‘cunt’ strictly as the female genitalia. Also, Lawrence’s use of the word in this quote was marked as having a transferred meaning, supporting the above argument.

sexuality. This line of argument would imply that only men are essential parts of human sexuality while women are passive, secondary participants who may or may not enjoy the physical contact – depending on the natural inclination of the woman (i.e. a passive trait) and the skills of the man (that are actively subject to change) – supporting Millet’s claim that intimacy between Mellors and Connie is not based on cooperation (Millet 239). In light of this, H. M. Daleski’s claim about the swear words, also quoted by Kéry (Kéry 313), that “Mellors uses them [...] with full respect to Connie’s person, and without impairing either his dignity or hers” (Daleski 265) seems to be erroneous.

The notion that women do not count as sexually independent beings was further reinforced when Connie told Mellors that she wanted to touch him like he touches her (LCL 148). In other words, Connie plainly told Mellors that she had a desire yet to be fulfilled. However, when they made love soon after, Mellors was the only one described with active words (LCL 150), which means that her request was not granted. It is also noteworthy that in this scene she did not reach her peak but when Mellors initiated a second encounter she let go of her resistance (LCL 151) and that time they were both able to enjoy their intimacy again (LCL 152). The message of this scene is again obvious: when the woman wants to be active as well it will not be as good as when she remains passive, even if passivity means giving up her own desires.

Cowan also discusses this scene but interprets it from Mellors’ point of view. While he does not mention Connie’s verbalized desire he claims that Mellors “accepts the situation [that they did not have a mutual orgasm] nonjudgmentally and only observes realistically that she ‘wasn’t there’” (Cowan 121). Cowan further states that “they can establish greater mutuality when they have sexual relations a second time the same night [...]” (Cowan 121). However, since Connie’s desires had been left unfulfilled the scene can hardly be understood as a manifestation of mutuality.

Connie’s thoughts on the night before she goes to Venice further reinforce the notion of female passivity: “it cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her. She *had* to be a passive, consenting thing, *like a slave*, a physical slave” (LCL 218, emphases mine). Again the word ‘had’ is used which implies that she did not really want to be passive but could not avoid it. Also in the same sentence she is compared to a slave, which serves to support the notion that she did not really want to act in the way required of her, in this case to be passive, but she did not have the free will to choose her course of action if she wanted to be in a harmonious relationship. A strange fact that might be mentioned here is that only Connie accepted these terms of compromise while Mellors, when felt forced into the compromising

situation by Bertha, rebelled against it with all his might (LCL 177-8). During one of their nights together before Connie's departure Mellors told Connie all of his previous issues with women: his first two girlfriends did not want to have sex with him (LCL 176) while the one he eventually married, Bertha, did not want it the way he wanted it. Concerning Bertha, Mellors goes into a heated rant:

she'd never have me when I wanted her: never. [...] And then when she'd put me right off, and I didn't want her, she'd come all lovey-dovey, and get me. [...] But when I had her, she'd never come off when I did. Never! She'd just wait. [...] And when I'd come and really finished, then she'd start on her own account, and I had to stop inside her till she brought herself off, [...] fair in ecstasy. [...] I told her about it, I told her how I hated it. And she'd even try. She'd try to lie still and let *me* work the business. [...] But it was no good, she got no feeling off it, from my working. (LCL 177)

This passage echoes the exact same issues Michaelis had with women and has the same accusatory tone, revealing that men supposed that women took the active role just to torment them. However, as both Michaelis and Mellors stated, the women they were complaining about started playing the active role because they wanted to get their own satisfaction, which the men were not able to give them alone. In other words, the two men were offended by the conviction that their performance was not enough for their partners.

Male performance is a key concept in LCL, which Cowan also discusses: "Lawrence seems to have bought the prevalent male myth that the man is responsible for orchestrating the entire sexual encounter, and all the woman has to do is to cooperate and admire" (Cowan 119). While acknowledging that the significance of male performance was a myth, Cowan also states that Lawrence believed in women's co-operation. But co-operation is a slightly ambiguous word and Cowan's claim only stands if it is understood as the woman accepting the passive role. However, in its more general meaning, "to work together, act in conjunction" (OED definition of co-operate), the notion that only men are responsible for both partners' pleasure and the notion of co-operation are mutually exclusive because in this case women must remain inactive. And as both Mellors and Michaelis demonstrated, the possibility that men and women could cooperate, as equal partners, to please each other, never enters the mind of either of them. In each case either the man is responsible for both his and the woman's pleasure or just his own, but the idea that women might actively contribute to the man's pleasure as well is never mentioned.

As their conversation goes on, Mellors further complains about all the different kinds

of women whom he dislikes: those who cannot enjoy it, those who pretend to enjoy it anyway, those who seek their own satisfaction actively, as well as those who prefer to be creative in bed, but, most importantly, those who do not even want him in bed: lesbians (LCL 178-179). In this scene it seems that Mellors' real problem is that women do not always live up to his expectations. He prefers women to behave in a way that allows him complete freedom, which is mutually exclusive with women's freedom, since that would force him to take a woman's desires and tastes into consideration. Apparently, he thinks that this is not due to women, which suggests that no matter how polite he is, he does not really consider women his equals.

A special point to mention is his reaction to lesbian women: "Then there's the sort that puts you out before you really "come" [...] I could kill them. When I'm with a woman who's really Lesbian, I fairly howl in my soul, wanting to kill her" (LCL 178). It is quite difficult to imagine how a man could get into an intimate situation with a lesbian and especially why a lesbian would want to get into such a situation, but his opinion of them is an alarmingly aggressive and hostile one. When Connie asks if he minds lesbian women more than homosexual men his answer is "I do! Because I've suffered more from them" (LCL 179). Although he does not specifically state it – therefore the reader cannot know for sure – it seems that what he really resents is being forced to experience sexuality as many women experience it: the other person taking an active role, not letting them satisfy their own needs and then leaving them to cool down without release.

However, despite his sexual bias, it must be said that Mellors never made a derogatory remark about intelligent women. He disapproved of passionless and stubborn women, the latter proved most vividly when he met Hilda (LCL 215-17), but he never gave evidence to finding intelligent women distasteful. However, even though he does not exhibit the contempt of modern men, as represented by the previously discussed characters, he does share some of their views. During one of their conversations Mellors tells Connie what he thinks about industrial society: "All the modern lot get their real kick out of killing the old human feeling out of man, making mincemeat of the old Adam and the old Eve. [...] The world is all alike: kill off the human reality, a quid for every foreskin, two quid for each pair of balls" (LCL 191). Again, Mellors' opinion is parallel to that of Tommy: even though he mentioned the figures of Adam and Eve, he only mentioned male body parts to describe their destruction as if implying that if the man was destroyed it did not matter if the woman was left intact.

Since he is the protagonist and as such his opinion has great weight, this adds a further dimension to the overall message of the novel: men do not mind if women are intelligent, nor do they mind women being sexually liberated to some degree. In fact, Mellors claims that he

requires women to be sexually liberated enough to enjoy his ministrations (LCL 181) but only as long as their freedom does not touch what he perceives to be the traditional roles assigned to men. If women somehow find their pleasure in a way that is not entirely the result of his own activity, through the active cooperation of both participants, for example, then he is immediately against the notion. The strike to the male ego by the possibility that cooperation would mean that the man would have to give up part of his sexual leadership, resulting in the shift in assigned sexual roles, might have been one of the reasons why conservative and modern men have united in their opposition to the sexually liberated women of the twentieth century.

5. Analysis of the Important Female Characters

5.1. Constance Chatterley

As a final point, the presentation of the central female characters, Connie and Hilda, deserves a few remarks as well. As Millett briefly pointed out, LCL is a “tract recounting the salvation of one modern woman” (Millett 238). The very fact that Lawrence does not consider her character an entirely lost cause – unlike her sister’s – is symbolically presented through an opposition between her physical description and her personality. Physically she is presented as a traditional woman “with big blue eyes, and curling, brown hair, and a soft voice, and rather strong, female loins [because of which she was] considered a little old-fashioned and ‘womanly’” (LCL 14), while in direct opposition to this her personality is presented as somewhat modern.

As Melanie Phillips wrote in *The Ascent of Woman* (2003), women contributed a great deal to the British workforce during the Great War (Phillips 296). Connie was one of these working women as in her initial description it is said that “Connie did a mild form of war-work” (LCL 5) although the words ‘mild form’ draw attention to the fact that her involvement was probably not particularly committed or long-lasting. Because physicality and sensations are far more important in LCL than anything that is related to thinking, her physical characterisation becomes more relevant than that of her personality. In other words, it is suggested on a symbolic level that her way of thinking is not unchangeable and as such will be altered at some point. This alteration happens, although gradually, most notably in her private life: after their second time together with Mellors, Connie’s thoughts are revealed through indirect speech: “it puzzled her, his queer, persistent wanting her, when there was nothing between them, when he never really spoke to her” (LCL 109). This line of thought resembles what the 18-year-old Connie thought at the beginning of the book: that a

relationship requires an intellectual involvement, which implies that she had not yet embraced Mellors' way of thinking. However, when she realizes that she is in love with Mellors she comes to the decision that "she would give up her hard bright female power; she was weary of it, stiffened with it; she would sink in the new bath of life, in the depths of her womb and her bowels that sang the voiceless song of adoration [of Mellors]" (LCL 118).

Furthermore, she is systematically alienated from other women. First, through the use of free indirect speech, Connie is revealed to think that assertiveness in women is a sign of insanity: "[Mrs. Bolton, Clifford's nurse] had that queer sort of bossiness, endless assertion of her own will, which is one of the signs of insanity in modern woman" (LCL 83). This idea of Connie's is sinister for two reasons: first, she considered the manifestation of will in women a sickness, even though she received a modern education, second, because this subtle statement announces to the alert reader that she herself will most likely forfeit her initial assertiveness as her aim in the novel is to stay sane. Eventually, by the end of the novel, she turns completely against women when she thinks "that in itself was a relief [...] to be free of the strange dominion and obsession of *other women*. How awful they were, women!" (LCL 224). This thought crosses her mind in relation to Hilda, her sister, which adds further concern: Mellors not only managed to turn Connie against women in general, but even against one of her closest family members.

5.2. Hilda

In opposition to this, Hilda is presented as a modern woman, who, even though the two sisters are physically similar, is revealed to be a lost cause in Mellors' opinion. Hilda is linked to Greek mythology on two occasions. First she is labelled an Amazon, a warrior-woman from Greek mythology, and described as "not made to fit with men" (LCL 64). Second, she is also compared to Athena, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom (LCL 210) – as well as to her Roman counterpart, Minerva, which serves to underline the importance of the comparison – which is by no means accidental. According to one version of the Greek myth, Athena popped out of Zeus' head in full armour. In other words, Athena was born without sexuality being involved at her conception and she also came into the world from her father's head which can be understood as a birth from intellectual activity. These alone would make her somewhat unnatural but, most importantly, due to her armour, she was not born defenceless. These are characteristics Hilda exhibits on a symbolic level: first, as it will be discussed in more detail below, she exhibits a type of sexual appetite that is not normal, according to Mellors' views. Second, she decided to live a single life rather than involve

herself in a new relationship (LCL 209); therefore, she is not part of the cycle of human life that is presented as healthy. And, finally, her ability and desire to stand up to Mellors (LCL 216-217) undermines Mellors' self-image as a dominant male. Also, by connecting Hilda to two two-thousand-year-old myths, the narrator claims that self-confident women are not only disliked in the twentieth century but had never been appreciated at all.

Eventually, the final judgement on her will be delivered by Mellors, who claims on the one hand that because of her stubborn will she deserves "to be left severely alone" (LCL 217) while on the other hand that "she should ha' been slapped in time" (LCL 218) implying that her self-will is a bad habit that should have been punished in her younger years.

Hilda's opinion on sexuality, which is presented as extremely misguided, is exactly the same as Mellors' with the reversal of the traditionally assigned roles:

I've never met a man yet who was capable of intimacy with a woman, giving himself up to her. That was what I wanted. I'm not keen on their self-satisfied tenderness, and their sensuality. I'm not content to be any man's little petsy-wetsy nor his *chair à plaisir* [flesh always available] either. I wanted a complete intimacy, and I didn't get it. That's enough for me. (LCL 223)

As pointed out in Chapter 4, the main issue is that men are against the idea that they should experience sexuality as women traditionally experienced it, while modern women strive to gain new experience: the experience men have enjoyed for centuries. This passage implies an interesting bias against women since the same desire – for the other person to give him or herself up – appears from both male and female points of view in the novel, yet only women are presented as abnormal for having this desire. Furthermore, this passage reveals a major issue concerning Lawrence's ideas about sexuality: the depiction of his characters suggests that he does not believe that intimacy could be experienced on equal terms by both participants. Both Mellors and Hilda claim that they could only enjoy intimacy if their respective partners "try to lie still" (LCL 177) or give themselves up (LCL 223). By providing only extreme views, Lawrence either disregards the possibility of a true compromise where both men and women are equal in sexual intimacy or it does not even occur to him as a possibility. Millett's rather harsh words on the issue are "[according to Lawrence] the world will only be put right when the male reassumes his mastery over the female in that total psychological and sensual domination which alone can offer her the "fulfillment" of her nature" (Millett 242). However, while Millett does have a point, she seems to disregard contemporary sexological trends, which could offer some insight into why Lawrence never entertained the notion of a more equal compromise. Furthermore, taking only sexuality into

consideration makes the assessment too narrow-minded to adequately portray Lawrence's ideas on gender roles.

6. Conclusion

All in all, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a modernist novel that gives a detailed description of what D. H. Lawrence thought about twentieth-century society. He used various literary and grammatical tools to covertly convey an ambiguous message about women without an obviously offensive edge, yet many of the ambiguous passages turn out to be either outright biased against women, or at best male centred, once closely analysed.

The novel essentially breaks down the question of women's liberation into two main parts: the social and the private, physical part. In relation to the social issues of women it is very much in favour of liberation, even though Lawrence systematically conveyed ambiguous ideas regarding women's education and social status, which may have been due to the ambivalent attitude of the period. However, these ideas proved to be supporting women, as the novel points out the unequal treatment of women on multiple occasions: when subtly discussing the discrepancy between the educational rights of the two sexes, and when pointing out the issues of coping with newfound freedom. In addition, Clifford, the antagonist, is portrayed to represent the purest manifestation of intellectual prejudice, underlining Lawrence's dislike of public discrimination of women, which is further reinforced by the protagonist's lack of intellectual prejudice.

However, in relation to the private side of women's liberation the novel exhibits a consistently hostile attitude. Through the modern male characters Lawrence represented the educated upper classes as the undesirable new development in men's behaviour. He argued throughout the book that modern men are cruel to women, because they do not appreciate them sexually, which seems to be a defence of women's sexual rights, only to clarify in the second part of the novel that while he claimed that both women and men should enjoy physical intimacy, women should only do so by submitting to the will of men. He reinforced this notion in a number of ways: by linguistic means, through the male protagonist's ideas as well as through the development of the central female character, whose opinion the reader would not be so quick to label misogynist since the idea of a misogynist woman is far more problematic than the idea of a misogynist man. However, Connie is slowly turned into one through her contact with Mellors.

Eventually through Connie's relationship with Mellors the true message of the novel is revealed: the most important thing in the world is sexuality and as such men must retain their

control and active role in it to maintain their dominant role in society. Intelligence is not particularly important in the novel, firstly because it is not related to the physically active part of life, secondly because women had already won the right to equal education. Therefore, intelligent female characters abound, but sexually active men do not allow any form of breach on their century-old male sexual prerogative.

In contrast, Lawrence systematically presents sexually active women as evil, cruel, even unnatural, while he praises those who are able to enjoy sexuality through male activity alone. The novel describes sexually passive women as well – although with very little detail – who are presented as unfortunate but still more preferable than active women who may threaten prevalent patriarchal power structures. Thereby the novel reveals itself to be an ingeniously crafted, subtle, yet perceptible defence of the collective male ego and dominant self-image that was wounded by the growing sexual liberation of women.

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