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WOMEN FOR AND AGAINST *LADY* *CHATTERLY'S LOVER*: AN ASSESSMENT

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During the dark and difficult years of World War I, D.H. Lawrence often thought and dreamt of founding a utopian community which he would name "Rananim"; a refuge to which he and his closest friends could escape, away from the horrors of war and widespread desolation. Although Lawrence made several attempts to start such a community, they were never successful. His relationships with his close friends were often turbulent: he fell in and out with Lady Ottoline Morrell, Bertrand Russell, Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry. Furthermore, he and Frieda Lawrence seemed fated to become restless travellers. They wandered through Europe and eventually left it in disgust, lived in Ceylon and flirted with Buddhism, then travelled on to Australia, thereafter to New Mexico and -finally to Mexico. Believing that he had at long last found the place he had been searching for, he urged his friends to join him. But Utopia was not to be. Lawrence's health had never been good, but now it was becoming a serious problem. Frieda left him and returned to Europe, unable to challenge his frequent outburst of temper. His friendship with Murry, which had once seemed firm, became seriously marred by Murry's scathing reviews of some of Lawrence's novels, by the quarrels between Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield, and ended in a final breach which occurred on Lawrence's return to Europe.

Lawrence and Frieda were soon reunited and they took up residence in Florence in 1926. During that year Aldous Huxley became a close friend. The notion of a utopian community had not

been entirely abandoned. Although it seemed no longer possible to put it into practice, Lawrence adopted the role of prophet by fictionalising his utopian thoughts in the most conversational of all his novels: *Lady Chatterly's Lover*.

Lawrence's blueprint for a true English democracy involved a profound change of social structures such as the nationalisation of land, industry and means of transport. Nevertheless, he believed that such changes would be futile if they were not preceded by a new understanding between men and women and it is this relationship which alone could constitute a firm foundation for a truly democratic society. The controversy lies in Lawrence's naïve understanding of what a utopian relationship between a man and a woman would be. In many aspects, Lawrence was a supporter of women's rights, as the following excerpts from his letters to Murry show¹:

«Every woman shall have her wage to the day of her death, whether she work or not, so long as she works when she is fit -keeps her house or rears her children».

Letter to Murry, 12 February 1915.

«There must be women governing equally with men, especially all the inner half of life.... The women's share must be equal with the men's».

Letter to Murry, 15 July 1915.

«And as the men elect and govern the industrial side of life, so the women must elect and govern the domestic side. And there must be a rising rank of women governors, as of men, culminating in a woman Dictator, of equal authority with the supreme man».

Letter to Murry, 26, July 1915.

¹. The extracts of the three letters written by D.H. Lawrence are to be found in Anne Smith (ed.), *Lawrence and Women*, Vision press, London, 1978, pp.39 and 42.

It is clear that the last extract puts Lawrence's "feminism" into question. Is he really maintaining that women's role should be restricted to the domestic circle? In a letter to Katherine Mansfield, Lawrence leaves no doubt that it is ultimately the supreme man who dictates the woman:

«I do think a woman must yield precedence to a man, and he must take this precedence. I do think men must go ahead absolutely in front of the women, without turning round to ask permission or approval from their women. Consequently the women must follow as it were unquestioningly. I can't help it. I believe thus. Frieda doesn't. Hence our fight».

Letter to K.Mansfield, 21 November 1918.

Lady Chatterly's Lover, a novel which Lawrence had later thought of calling *Tenderness*, asserted his belief that the ills of civilisation could be healed only if a new physical -and sexually liberated- relationship between men and woman could be established. In his *Return to Bestwood* he draws out a plan for *Lady Chatterly's Lover*:

«What we need is some glimmer of a vision of a world that shall be, beyond the change. Otherwise we shall be in for a great débâcle.... What we should live for is life and the beauty of aliveness, imagination, awareness, and contact.»

This "glimmer of a vision" of Lawrence's utopia is to be found in the relationship between Lady Chatterly and her lover Mellors (called Parkin in the second version). Towards the end of the first version of the novel, Duncan Forbes -speaking no doubt on behalf of Lawrence himself- insists that what the English really want is *Contact!* Some sort of passionate human contact among themselves. The English responded poorly to this call. Lawrence's novel was not only criticized as being a public menace, it was put on trial and condemned by London's Central

Criminal Court in Old Bailey, where it was declared that *Lady Chatterly's Lover* set on a pedestal promiscuous intercourse, commended sensuality almost as a virtue, and encouraged and even advocated coarseness and vulgarity of thought and language.

Three versions were written of this novel. If the title of the first version created such furore, the title of the second version in no way lessened the outrage. *John Thomas and Lady Jane* was first published in Italian and was not published in the original English until 1972. The suggestion to use these names as a title came from Maria Huxley who, after reading Lawrence's manuscript, was very cross, morally so...²

John Thomas and Lady Jane were Lawrence's current metaphors for the male and female genitals.

In this article I propose to analyse the responses of four readers of Lawrence's novel: Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Anaïs Nin and Carol Dix. The methodology used is based on Elaine Showalter's concept of *Feminist Critique* which concerns the experience and reactions of woman as reader, with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature, and the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes³. In order to evaluate these responses, they will, in turn, be applied to a table of binary oppositions set up by the French literary theorist, Hélène Cixous. Briefly, Cixous states that the tradition of philosophical and literary thought in the Western World is permeated by the following table of binary oppositions:

activity		passivity
sun		moon
culture		nature
day		night
father		mother
head		emotions

². See Introduction by Roland Grant to D.H. Lawrence, *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, Penguin Books, England, 1974.

³. Elaine Showalter, «Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness», *The New Feminist Criticism*, Pantheon, New York, 1985, pp.245.

intelligible		sensitive
logos		pathos

The terms on the left correspond to MAN whereas those on the right correspond to WOMAN. Each opposition can only exist in hierarchy to the other and, according to Cixous, the *femenine* is always equated with negativity and powerlessness; the *masculine* side, on the other hand, is equated with positivity and power. For one term to acquire meaning it is necessary for that term to destroy its other. The couple: male/female -says Cixous- cannot be left intact: *it becomes a battlefield where the struggle for signifying supremacy is forever reenacted*⁴. Because victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity, it is the male who is always the victor and the female -according to patriarchy- who is always the loser. Cixous then goes on to denounce the equation of feminity with passivity because, she says, if a woman is not passive, and does not represent all the terms on the right hand side of the table then it is as good as saying that she does not exist.

Simone de Beauvoir.

The first reader this article concerns, Simone de Beauvoir, analysed her response to Lawrence's novel in her best-selling *The Second Sex* (1949)⁵, a work based on Sartre's existentialist philosophy. According to de Beauvoir, woman has been presented as "immanence" and man as "transcendence" throughout patriarchal ideology. In other words, woman has been reduced to "object"; she has been constructed as "The Other" and has been denied the right to her own subjectivity. Any patriarchal theory of the true state of woman's nature is false, for one is not born a woman: one becomes one. Woman is not a biological construct but a cultural construct.

⁴. Hélène Cixous, «Sorties», *New French Feminisms*, Harvester, New York, 1981, pp.91-92.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Penguin Books, 1976). Hereafter abbreviated as S.B.

In her chapter on Lawrence, de Beauvoir criticises Lawrence's phallogentric concept of sexuality. Both man and woman give to each other their body and soul, and renounce their personalities. But, de Beauvoir adds, the relationship is not built on equality because it is the man who is the connecting factor, not the woman; or rather, it is the phallus, and not the womb. It is man who thus provides the couple's transcendence in a "phallic marriage" (the expression is Lawrence's). Woman, on the other hand, cannot provide transcendence because she is too wrapped up in sentiment, *«she is all inwardness; she is dedicated to immanence»* (S.B., p.249). De Beauvoir protests against the Lawrentian man who is the active partner in sex (he may be rooted in his sexuality but he manages to transcend this), whereas woman remains a prisoner of her own sexuality. As man is in possession of the phallus, he is both thought and action. Though she may indeed try to play man's role socially, it will always be man's role, never her own. De Beauvoir points out how unfair it is that such a woman (if she is a fictional creation of Lawrence's) will eventually tire of being *«clever, noble, efficient, brilliant, competent»* and will go back to sex *«which is her business at the present moment»* (S.B., p.249). At this point de Beauvoir quotes Lawrence:

«Woman is really polarized downwards towards the centre of the earth. Her deep positivity is in the downward flow, the moon-pull. And man is polarized upwards, towards the sun and the day's activity.»

D.H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. (1922)

De Beauvoir stresses that Constance Chatterly achieves both peace and joy because she has recognised the truth. She has given herself, she has given up her personal love, she has given up her pride and self-will in bowing down before Mellor's divinity. In doing this she becomes a true woman, one *«who unreservedly accepts being defined as the Other»* (S.B., p.254).

In applying de Beauvoir's response to Cixous' table, it is seen that Lady Chatterly represents Passivity / Moon / Nature / Mother / Emotions / Sensitive / Pathos.

Mellors (or Parkins) is: Activity / Sun / Nature / Head and Emotions (Lawrence rejected the antithesis SEX-BRAIN) / Sensitive.

Kate Millett.

In her very radical doctoral thesis which was published under the title *Sexual Politics* (1969)⁶, Kate Millet is clearly influenced by de Beauvoir although she barely mentions her. Like although de Beauvoir, she is of the opinion that Lawrence held nothing but contempt for the modern woman who was independent and autonomous and she maintains that he saw in Freud's theories of the feminine a way to keep woman in her place: a woman is fulfilled by being both receptive and passive. The novel, *Lady Chatterly's Lover* is, according to Millett, a «quasi-religious tract recounting the salvation of one modern woman... through the offices of the author's person cult, the mystery of the phallus» (K.M., p.238). Millett illustrates this by citing a certain passage from the novel as a scene of transfiguration in which the deity (which is the phallus) ascends before the «reverent eyes of the faithful»⁷.

Lawrence's novel is also a programme for social and sexual redemption, claims Millett, and the two cannot be separated. Tommy Dukes, a friend of Lord and Lady Chatterly, says at one point that civilization is rapidly declining and he forecasts doom. This is due to the fact that there are no real men and no real women left in the world. Dukes says:

⁶ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (London: Virago Press, 1977). Hereafter abbreviated as K.M.

⁷ See K.M., op. cit., p.237.

«It's going down the bottomless pit, down the chasm. And believe me, the only bridge across the chasm will be the phallus!»

Lady Chatterly's Lover, p.82.

Redemption can only be achieved through phallic consciousness, but, writes Millett ironically, the metaphor of bridge/phallus is an unhappy one; *«in respect of penile length, the future hardly seems promising»* (K.M., p.242).

Constance Chatterly, therefore, shows women the way to redemption through relinquishing her self, her ego, her will and her individuality. But Connie herself does not know the way, she is guided and taught by Mellors/Parkin. It is through a feminine consciousness that the masculine message is conveyed. Connie's only meaningful existence is sexual and, as Millett points out, whenever Lawrence uses the word "female" he usually precedes it with negative adjectives such as "wierd" or "queer".

Mellors/Parkin is constantly referred to as "remote", a "wild animal" with some superior "male knowledge", a phallic divinity. Unlike other Lawrentian heroes Mellors/Parkin has neither artistic prestige nor political power but - according to Millett - he makes up for this by being in possession of a magnificent John Thomas.

Millett admits that Mellors/Parkin tries his hand at being a social prophet but this is given little emphasis on the whole. Indeed, for Millett, he is as much a snob as Constance for he despises his own class. Moreover, in coming together, what Constance and Mellors/Parkin achieve is the transcendence of class *«into an aristocracy based presumably on sexual dynamism rather than on wealth or position»* (K.M., p.244).

Millett, like de Beauvoir, is a resisting reader of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. She understands that what Lawrence is offering is a mixture of Morris and Freud, for not only does Lawrence advocate a return to certain aspects of the middle ages (a less industrial England) he also advocates a return to older sexual roles. Millett writes:

«Modern man is ineffectual, modern woman a lost creature (cause and effect are interchangeable in these two tragedies), and 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» (K.M., p.242).

Millett's reading of Lawrence's novel relates Constance to Passivity / Moon / Nature / Mother / Emotions / Sensitive / Pathos. Mellors/Parkin, on the other hand, is represented by Activity / Sun / Nature / Father / Emotions / Sensitive / Pathos.

Carol Dix.

If the first two readers are "resisting readers" in that they scrutinize the text and maintain a degree of objectivity, Carol Dix's reading of Lawrence's novel - set out in her book, *D.H. Lawrence and Women* (1980)⁸ - openly rejoices its subjectivity, although at the same time she insists that she is a feminist. In the introduction to her book, Carol Dix explains that her main aim is to «dispel the misjudgment of Lawrence by of Kate Millett». Dix claims to be a feminist but, she writes, she fully supports Lawrence. She stresses that her approach to the novel is not as «a literary critic but as that of a lay person, with a degree and a career as a writer» behind her, and that it was from the pages of Lawrence's *Lady Jane* and *John Thomas* that she learned so much that was relevant to own her life.

Carol Dix confesses that she identifies and sympathises with Connie Chatterly more than with any of Lawrence's other women because Connie knows that as a modern woman, she is dead, that she wants her heart to open and wants to give herself to her lover but at the same time is deeply afraid of losing her individuality. It is only when she first catches sight of Parkin washing in the woods that she finds something that brings her

⁸ Carol Dix, *D.H. Lawrence and Women*, (London: Macmillan, 1980). Hereafter abbreviated as C.D.s

back to life. She has found aestheticism and beauty and this will give her variety in life. Dix continues by stating:

«I see nothing dreadful or demeaning in the fact that Connie is allowed to worship Parkin's body. On the contrary, to think of a man writing about a woman and giving her the sense of passion and energy, sufficient to adore a man's body, is to me very beautiful. Connie expresses for all young women, THEIR feelings about men and sex. It is not submission, or giving way to something they do not like; it is sheer pleasure and ultimate fulfillment.»

(C.D., p.51)

Unlike de Beauvoir and Millett, Dix sees Connie as «not exactly passive in sex» because she is «electric, ecstatic, writhing and foaming» (C.D., p.88). The fact that Connie is allowed to ADORE the male body makes her active and privileged, for she is the participant, the lover, the doer and the one who has the most expressed feelings. «We should give Lawrence credit - Dix insists - for emancipating Connie so she can simply wonder and enjoy "fucking"» (C.D., p.89).

Nonetheless, credit must be given to Dix when she illustrates that Parkin is not «one of the old-style men, with a hard will and an insistence on knowledge above instinct» (C.D., p.118).

When applying Dix's response to Cixous table it is found that there is one important difference to the previous responses of de Beauvoir and Millett and that is that where the former two see Constance as being subordinated completely and losing all individuality by succumbing to the "Phallic Marriage", Carol Dix sees Constance as dead at the beginning of the novel and as being brought back to life through Phallic Consciousness. Thus, the table would look like this:

Constance develops from passivity to activity / from sun to moon / from culture to nature / from head to emotions / from intellible to sensitive / from death to life.

Mellors/Parkin represents both activity and passivity / moon / nature / emotions / sensitivity.

Anaïs Nin.

The last of the four readers is Anaïs Nin, whose book, *D.H. Lawrence. An Unprofessional Study*⁹, was published in Paris in 1930 when Nin was 28. Nin, like Dix, is a fervent admirer of Lawrence's novel and she insists that Lawrence had «a complete realization of the feelings of women. In fact, very often he wrote as a woman would write... It is the first time that a man has so wholly and completely expressed woman accurately» (A.N., p.59). Moreover, *Lady Chatterly's Lover* is a perfect love story because «every moment of the relationship reveals the woman's feelings as well as the man's» (A.N., p.58).

Nin goes to great lengths to explain - and to support - Lawrence's theory of "Phallic Marriage" and stresses that Lawrence, more than anyone else, realized the tragedy of inequality in love. It is the inequality of sexual power which leads to the disintegration in sexual relationships. Each man and each woman has to find his/her own level of power and if they do not do so then the relationship will be a physical, spiritual and mental torment. Lady Chatterly and Mellors relationship was such a fulfillment because each managed to find his/her own level of power.

Anaïs Nin is by no means discouraged when Lawrence insists on disparaging the modern woman "the cocksure woman" who denies her instinctive wisdom and attempts to prove the inner strength of "the hensure woman". Far from it. Nin takes sides with Lawrence in saying that "cocksureness" does not suit woman, for above all she must retain her femininity and acknowledge the fact that as a woman she is closely bound to the earth.

Nin argues then, that Lady Chatterly does achieve fulfillment in her relationship because she has found her own level of power by acknowledging Mellors/Parkins as her saviour. She communes with God and with nature through him and because of this she can go on to motherhood and he «to the building of their world together» (A.N., p.110). This ending of the novel promises a bright and perfect future.

⁹ Anaïs Nin, *D.H. Lawrence. An Unprofessional Study*, (London: Black Spring Press, 1985). Hereafter abbreviated as A.N.s

Thus, Constance Chatterly has found happiness in denying the Head / the Intelligible / the Logos and by acknowledging her roots in the Moon / Nature / the Mother within her / and in Emotion.

Mellors/Parkins, too, has found his level of power in a balance between Sun and Moon / he is a man of Nature and Emotions. Lawrence is, according to Nin, rightly suspicious of the Intellect and in this, he is close to the feminine nature.

To sum up the four readers responses to Lawrence's novel, according to Millett and de Beauvoir, Constance and Mellors/Parkin are one more example of sexual stereotypes. Both fit into the roles patriarchy have created for them and Millett and de Beauvoir condemn this. Nin and Dix, on the other hand, choose to see the terms on the right hand side of Cixous' table as positive terms and feel that this is where woman's true identity lies. Moreover, they applaud the fact that the identity of Mellors/Parkin fluctuates over to the feminine side although he still retains his masculinity.

One other important work which deserves to be mentioned is Hilary Simpson's *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism* (1982)¹⁰. Simpson acknowledges the criticism by feminists against Lawrence but insists that *Lady Chatterly's Lover* should be evaluated against its historical context. Lawrence was not as misogynist as de Beauvoir and Millett make him out to be. It is true that he was suspicious of the militant suffragettes who laid too much stress on political liberation and too little on sexual liberation. On the other hand, what most readers of Lawrence have ignored is that his usage of the word *phallic* lacks its association of thrusting aggressiveness and takes on feminine connotations. Marion Shaw takes a similar stance to Simpson in her article *Lawrence and Feminism* (1983) when she states that «although feminists are justified in berating Lawrence, in their final assessment he should be allowed a place in their pantheon. The reasons have little to do with sexual liberation and much to do with his articulation of neediness. He took feminism seriously

¹⁰ Hilary Simpson, *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism*, (London: Croom Helm, 1982).s

by being frightened of it; he bestowed power on it, no one more vividly or vehemently. And moreover, the anxieties he expresses, or half-expresses, give women a kind of freedom, imaginatively suggest to them options for living»¹¹.

¹¹ Marion Shaw, "Lawrence and Feminism", *Critical Quarterly*, (Manchester: Volume 25, Number 3, Autumn 1983), p.27.

