

CSÓTI MAGDALÉNA

## LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

AN ATTEMPT TO ANALYSE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
FOCAULDIAN SEXUAL DISCOURSE AND  
D. H. LAWRENCE'S *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*

Michel Foucault, French philosopher quotes – at the very end of his work about the relationship between sexual discourse, knowledge and power: *The History of Sexuality – The Will to Knowledge* (1976)<sup>193</sup> – the following passage from D. H. Lawrence:

Ours is the day of realization rather than action. There has been so much action in the past, especially sexual action, a weary repetition over and over, without a corresponding thought, a corresponding realization. Now our business is to realize sex. Today the full conscious realization of sex is even more important than the act itself. After centuries of obfuscation, the mind demands to know and know fully.<sup>194</sup>

The quotation is taken from “Á Propos of Lady Chatterley” (1931), an essay – written two years after the first publishing of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1929) –, in which Lawrence gives not an explanation to, but a sketch of the background for a better understanding of the novel. Though Foucault uses the fragment to illustrate his ideas about how sexuality, thematized on the level of discourse, amounts to the perception of sex as

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<sup>193</sup> Foucault, Michel *A szexualitás története – A tudás akarása*. Budapest: Atlantisz, 1996: 164.

<sup>194</sup> Lawrence, D. H. “Á Propos of Lady Chatterley.” In *Á Propos of Lady Chatterley and Other Essays*. D. H. Lawrence, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1961: 89.

determined by dominant power relations, Lawrence's aims as to his last novel perhaps add up to more than the mere reproduction of these same relations.

In order to investigate the matter further, a better knowledge of Foucault's views with regard to the function and functioning of sexual discourse is required. First, a summary of *The Will to Knowledge* will highlight the lines along which Lawrence's intentions with the writing of the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* would be analysed. Secondly, in the light of what has been discussed, the novel will be focused upon. Thirdly, those aspects of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* will be paid attention to which seem to explain or perhaps subvert the Foucauldian views. Finally, Lawrence's essay "À Propos of Lady Chatterley" will be analysed to further emphasize the connections and results. Hopefully, the conclusion will allow the affirmation of the following assumption: though the novel is not entirely successful in its aim – at freeing sexual discourse from the negative connotations attached to it, thus rendering sexuality the power to free humanity itself –, it reflects, however, aspirations that point in the direction of "improvement in" the status of sex.<sup>195</sup>

### ***LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX***

*The History of Sexuality* was planned to be a major work of four volumes, unfortunately, however, only the first three books were completed. In the first volume, *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault lays down the basic concepts of his investigation into the history of sexual discourse. He describes the formation of the notion of sexuality in terms of historical, cultural, and social changes. Approaching the topic from a Marxist point of view, Foucault argues that "sexuality" appears at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in a sense enrooted in, or at least closely linked to, the

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<sup>195</sup> Works referred to in the paper appear with the indication of their *original* year of publication between brackets. Citations are directly followed by the indication of source between brackets, or – in case it proved appropriate – they are indicated in footnotes. The bibliography contains solely the list of works *cited*.

formation of the middle-class (Foucault, 1997: 19, 108–109, 126). Analysing medical, legal, demographical documents, conduct books, religious works and literary achievements of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he unfolds step by step the birth of sexual discourse and the mechanisms which operate it. Interestingly, this “operating” of sexuality is established in order to justify the authority of the aforementioned mechanisms (Foucault, 1997: 83–89).

Although sexuality – as Foucault explains – is perceived as a taboo, a domain to which access of language and thought is forbidden, it is paradoxically a constant topic of discussion.<sup>196</sup> Consequently, sex though a notion present on the discursive level, is considered, nonetheless, repressed, excluded and marginalised in communication – and thus, it is not to be manifest in any sort of open social interaction. This limitation of sexual activity to the level of discourse aims at rendering its observation<sup>197</sup> possible (Foucault, 1997: 19–20). Foucault compares attitudes towards sexuality before the 18<sup>th</sup> century to attitudes after the turn of century, and comes to the conclusion that the reason why from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on it is more and more difficult to refer to sex in any way, is the fact that it gradually becomes subjected to control. This control is manifested explicitly on the level of language: words and expressions are excluded from every-day discourse, thus sexuality is inscribed in a limited, guarded section of reality (in this case, this section is marriage) – so, it can be subject to surveillance (Foucault, 1997: 19). Surveillance is one of the key-notions of the Foucauldian oeuvre. In his

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<sup>196</sup> Jacques Derrida, 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, reflecting upon Condillac’s notion of “absence” points out that “every sign, as much in the ‘language of action’ as in articulated language [...] supposes a certain absence (to be determined)”. Applying the idea to the gradual limitation of sex to language, it can be argued that sex is meant to be absent from the uncontrollable domain of every-day life, and put instead on the level of discourse, in order to be subjected to efficient control. See: Derrida, Jacques “Excerpt from Signature, Event, Context. A communication to the Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française, Montreal, August 1971. From *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass, pp. 307-330.” <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/sec.html> (09 Sept. 2007).

<sup>197</sup> In this paper the term “observation” will consequentially be used as synonymous with the term “surveillance”.

most frequently cited work, *Discipline and Punish* (1975) he dedicates a whole chapter to explain what he means by the relationship of power and knowledge, and how constant observation is essential for the mechanism between the two. Through the famous example of Bentham's *Panopticon*, Foucault reveals that in order to dominate and control, incessant observation is a must: observation that assigns knowledge to the observer; knowledge rendering power over the observed.<sup>198</sup>

As opposed to the visual representation of power in *Discipline and Punish*, in *The Will to Knowledge* surveillance and observation of sexuality as a means of social control are entirely discursive, inscribed in language, in the dominant discourse(s). Historically, sexuality is first subjected to surveillance by religion, more precisely by the institution of "confession".<sup>199</sup> The term in itself refers clearly to the nature of the communicative act: confession demands that the individual told the "truth" about what they had said, thought or done. It is aimed at revealing the pure, naked self of the confessor – to rid themselves of the secret sins by a purifying speech act. Confession forces the individual to articulate the unspeakable: to name the sins in the presence of the authority that forbade them; to subject oneself to surveillance; to render the dominant power the very knowledge that makes one subjected.

Confession becomes a linguistic ritual in which the confessor becomes the subject of their own confession; it is a ritual that accomplishes itself in a power-relationship, for the confessor acquires the (at least virtual) presence of a partner; since only the partner – who is not merely a partner in the act of communication, but the representative of the forum that explicitly demands confession – has the power to force, to evaluate, to condemn and to punish, to redeem and to absolve. In the ritual of confession difficulty and resistance amount to the truth of

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<sup>198</sup> Foucault, Michel *Discipline and Punish* (extract). In *Literary Theory: an Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin, Michael Ryan, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004: 549–566.

<sup>199</sup> Foucault refers directly to the convocation of Trident (Foucault, 1997: 20).

confession. The mere uttering of the truth evokes changes in the confessor: it exempts, redeems, and purifies them.<sup>200</sup>

In this sense confession directs attention to something very important: it is a process that gets the untold secrets articulated, it casts light upon the truth about sins. Thus, confession reveals what is “repressed”. In spite of the fact that religion gradually loses ground in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, confession is kept and transferred to the scientific domain. Confession becomes for instance a solid basis of criminology, medicine and psychiatry, social sciences and literature, too (Foucault, 1997: 60–78).

Interestingly, however, in spite of the shift in focus confession remains centred around the institution of marriage (that is, marriage as the legal terrain of sexuality). Like confession, the institution of marriage is subjected to alterations, too. Changes result among others in the fact that sex is less and less spoken about. Moreover, in the Victorian era it is entirely transformed into a mechanism of (re)production on the level of discourse as well. Sexuality grows to be something “taken into account not from a moral but a rational point of view [...] [sexuality is] something to be handled, managed; it becomes integrated in the utilitarian systems in order to be regulated and operated efficiently” (Foucault, 1997: 27–29 – my translation, Cs. M.). Marriage is the norm according to which sexuality is measured and discussed – however, solely in terms of rationality. Sex gets to be subjected to institutional discourse(s) that only allow(s) utilitarian formulations of sexuality; excluding and marginalizing all other possibilities. Thus, the language of confession, that is, sexual discourse is either harshly obscene, or clinically allusive and shy.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Foucault, 1997: 65 – my translation, Cs. M.

<sup>201</sup> Richard Hoggart, in his introduction to the 1960 publication of Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* accounts for the aforementioned two-sidedness of sexual discourse by an illustrative old war-time anecdote. The story features a soldier, who coming home from abroad finds his wife in bed with another man. Seeing this, he exclaims: “I come home after three fucking years in fucking Africa, and what do I fucking-well find? – my wife in bed, engaging in illicit cohabitation with a male!” (Hoggart, Richard “Introduction.” In

Although confession remains essential to the reproduction of knowledge and power, it becomes less and less attached to large-scale social institutions, and gets integrated into a wide range of discourses and modes of communication of every-day life – as an antidote against the repression of sexuality, as Foucault states it (Foucault, 1997: 66–67). Together with this shift of emphasis in the operation of confession, the role of the prophet becomes central: it gains new meaning and importance in sexual discourse. Since sexuality is perceived as something repressed, it gets instantly listed with the goals to be reached (Foucault, 1997: 10). To talk about sexuality becomes revolutionary in the face of the powers that seemingly try to suppress it. Sexual discourse comes to equal the promise of freedom, of a new age that is to be reached by the exploration of “good” sexuality or “true” sexuality. It becomes equal to the self that has to be constantly looked after, taken care for, developed and fulfilled. Furthermore, through the mediation of the prophet sexuality grows to be “the truth”, “the future”, “the means” of (self-)redemption (Foucault, 1997: 10–13).

Taking the figure of the prophet as a point of departure, Foucault also indicates changes within the domain of literature: the author of the epic of the Middle Ages is followed by a new type of writer. This new, prophetic writer engages upon the route to an unattainable goal: they aim at grasping and revealing the unreachable truth that lies within the human soul.<sup>202</sup> Confession in literature, or “confessional literature” comes to

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*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, D. H. Lawrence, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1984: ix.)

<sup>202</sup> German sociologist, Niklas Luhmann in his work *Love as Passion – A Codification of Intimacy* (1982) describes the same changes with regard to the shift that is reflected in literature, too:

During the seventeenth century the great heroic adventures and their happy or tragic outcomes – especially with respect to love – had already started to be internalized. [...] In the following century, morality switched its techniques of disclosure over to disclosing mediocrity, and literature undertook to do the same in its narrative technique. Both began to take an interest in normal people. (From: Luhmann, Niklas *Love as Passion – A Codification of Intimacy*. California: Stanford University Press, 1998: 121.)

serve the redemption of humanity in general from the suppressive power of the dominant – whatever the truth brought to the surface may be. The point is to bring the inner from darkness to light, for that is exactly what is considered to amount to freedom (Foucault, 1997: 62–63). Nonetheless, communication plays a trick on the author at this point, since the essence of confession is, on the one hand, the (virtual) partner deciding over the value of discourse who is, on the other hand, the partner representing the suppressive power against which one “fights” by uttering the unspeakable.

According to Foucault, for over one hundred and fifty years Western-European civilization has constantly been preaching about how sexuality is repressed and distorted hypocritically – all the while forgetting that it does nothing else, but incessantly thematizes sexuality in every possible way. In addition, the fact that ordering and surveillance of sexuality is one of the basic means to maintain society is also ignored. Yet, sexual discourse is inscribed in the social system exactly in order to enable its reproduction and prevent it from falling apart.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, sexual discourse always and inevitably refers to the dual nature of sex in language: it tries to reveal something suppressed by claiming that it has to be fought for – thus confirming the control and suppression of sex. The more it is talked about, the better it can be subjected to surveillance. Foucault claims “there is the irony of the strategy – it even makes us believe that it is all about our ‘liberation’” (Foucault, 1997: 167 – my translation, Cs. M.).

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Luhmann accentuates the same points as Foucault does: both authors sense the gradual shift that points in the direction of the focusing on the internal, that is, on truth as norm to be discussed and reached.

<sup>203</sup> Foucault accentuates – again on Marxist ground – the importance of “bio-politics” in capitalism. Bio-politics is the regulation of social reproduction by means of social institutions and dominating discourses that determine production on the collective as well as on the individual level (Foucault, 1997: 28–30). Though Foucault does not refer to it, but his ideas about the workings of discourse in the power-knowledge relationship are very similar to Althusser’s notion of ideology.

**CONNIE, DAVID HERBERT AND MICHEL**

D. H. Lawrence was a man deeply concerned with the fate of modern Western-European civilisation, and believed that through his writings he might show humanity the way to a better world. Most of his works bear the traits of a tractate, and as Stephen Potter, critic of Lawrence expressed it: perhaps *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is closest to the genre of the pamphlet.<sup>204</sup> In his last novel he tries to accomplish a magnificent (though, with regard to the outcome, questionable) project to purify language regarding sexuality. He interprets talk about and attitude towards sex as a sign and indicator of deeply enrooted social and individual problems. As one of the characters in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* formulates it: sex is “the one insane taboo left: sex as a natural and vital thing”.<sup>205</sup> So, in order to render sex the place it deserves, Lawrence made an experiment to demonstrate how it is only innate hypocritical tradition, false pretence and social norms that make language distort our perception of sexuality.

Consequently, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century England, still holding firmly to Victorian morals, it was not until the sixties that D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was published in the complete and unabridged form. From its first publication in 1929 to 1960 the book was only to be purchased in pirated and/or expurgated copies (solely available on the Continent and in the United States). Foucault would argue that this immediate reaction of the state (by means of censorship based on the Common Law) is a perfect example of the “logic of repression” (Foucault, 1997: 86).<sup>206</sup> The dominant discourse(s) intervene(s) – when a manifestation of resistance is perceived – threatening with punishment unless the representative of the offence against the norms withdraws to

<sup>204</sup> Rolph, C. H. *The Trial of Lady Chatterley*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1990 [1960]: 155.

<sup>205</sup> Lawrence, D. H. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1984 [1929]: 227.

<sup>206</sup> Note also that the normalizing power intervenes not in the form of religious but of legal and moral discourse (about Foucault's views on the shift of focus see afore).



“non-existence, silence and invisibility” (Foucault, 1997: 85–89). As a result, sexual discourse remains within the reach of dominant power, and the attempt to “break free” only contributes to the “repression” of sex. Lawrence, however, did not withdraw, and kept himself firmly to the decision not to conform by mutilating his work by any means:

English publishers urge me to make an expurgated version [...] insisting that I should show the public that here is a fine novel, apart from all ‘purple’ and all ‘words’. So I begin to be tempted and start in to expurgate. But impossible! I might as well try to clip my own nose into shape with scissors. The book bleeds.<sup>207</sup>

The reason why Lawrence refused to edit an abridged version lies in the very nature of his: as E. M. Forster put it thirty years after the decease of his friend and contemporary, the author of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was a preacher comparable to Bunyan, and a passionate advocate of his social views comparable to Blake (Rolph, 113). Lawrence’s vision about the dangers of capitalism and consumer society, about the dehumanised machine of a man led him to consider his position as a writer as a means of the quest for the salvation of humanity.

Thus far, taking Foucault as a point of departure of the analysis, one might acknowledge why at the end of *The History of Sexuality – The Will to Knowledge* Lawrence is quoted as an example of ignorant reproduction of “sexual repression”. His figure parallels that of the prophet – as Forster put it –, who from the Foucauldian approach invokes the constant interference of the dominant discourse (for example through censorship) by his “confirmed” idea, namely that sex and *talk* about sex is the way to solve difficulties perceived as both individual and collective problems. Furthermore, besides representing the stereotypical prophet, D. H. Lawrence also embodies the new type of writer, emerging with the new type of “confessional literature”, who desperately believes in the

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<sup>207</sup> Lawrence, 1961: 87.

coming of a better world. Accordingly, he passionately believes that vulgar or clinically sterile talk about sex is one of the main reasons for the problems and tragedies of Western-European civilization. The opening paragraph of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, illustrative of his vision of his time, sounds as follows:

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.<sup>208</sup>

Lawrence sketches not only the dawn of a new age after the tragedy of the First World War, but he also envisions the (re)construction of the individual (and through them, that of the state) upon and among the ruins. He lays emphasis on the difficulty of the task, accentuating that it depends on the individual how they can manage to find the way to the better world that awaits them. Clearly, the first sentences of the novel seem to justify the comparison between Lawrence and Foucault's view of the prophetic writer: the (re)construction of the (better!) world is only achievable by the exploration of hope lying somewhere down in darkness, deep within the soul.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 5.

<sup>209</sup> Lawrence reintroduces the topic of the coming world several times in the novel – one of the most fascinating of these is a discussion between Sir Clifford and his friends about the idea of babies bred in bottles (see: Lawrence, 1984: 76–77). Countless solutions come up concerning what ways could lead to the better, future world, one of which states: “the phallus is the bridge to what comes next” (Lawrence, 1984: 77). Ironically, the sentence (summarizing what has already been said) is uttered by Sir Clifford, who represents views exactly opposing this idea. Perhaps, it is not by mistake that Lawrence puts these words into the mouth of the character who symbolically represents Victorian morals and attitudes that condemn sexuality and refuse to accept the body as equal to ratio. Thus, the writer, yet again, affirms his conception about the better world and the role of sexuality (that is, the inner, discursively excluded truth that leads to salvation), moreover, he justifies his views by Victorianism itself through the figure of Sir Clifford.

In his novel, Lawrence depicted post-First World War Britain as a mechanical, inhuman state, where people are disconnected (Lawrence, 1984: 284) and only live to spend (Lawrence, 1984: 314–315) in the hope of comforting joy found in false pleasures: “And that was what they all wanted, a drug: the slow water, a drug; the sun, a drug; jazz, a drug; cigarettes, cocktails, ices, vermouth. To be drugged! Enjoyment! Enjoyment!” (Lawrence, 1984: 270) Lawrence wanted to make the reader realize that the way the individual and thus society as a whole is organized in the capitalistic, industrial era tends towards a confusion of the self amounting to the disastrous vision of sheepish, machine-like existence. His reflexions about the man-machine of industrialism might be another link to *The Will to Knowledge*, though not in the exemplifying way. Concerning the issue, Foucault seems to reach the same conclusion as Lawrence did a few decades earlier. On the one hand, Foucault claims that with the expansion of industrialism, Victorian morals also appeared.<sup>210</sup> This moral “code” dictated the efficient exploitation of the available sources – thus, the human body, too. It is “perceived as a machine” (Foucault, 1997: 143) that serves solely as a means of reproduction, so sex is strictly limited to economical and rational purposes. On the other hand, Lawrence creates the figure of Sir Clifford, husband to Lady Chatterley, who symbolically represents the Victorian attitude to one’s body and sexuality. The following fragment from a conversation between him and his wife is meant to illustrate this feature of Clifford’s character:

‘Do you like your physique?’ he asked.

‘I love it! [...]’

‘But that is rather extraordinary, because there’s no denying it’s an encumbrance. But then I suppose a woman doesn’t take a supreme pleasure in the life of the mind.’

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<sup>210</sup> Indicating the strong connection between the two, he gave the title “We, ‘Other Victorians’” to the very first chapter of his work (Foucault, 1997: 7).

‘Supreme pleasure?’ she said, looking up at him. ‘Is that sort of idiocy the supreme pleasure of the life of the mind? No thank you! Give me the body. I believe the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind [...] But so many people, like your famous wind-machine, have only got minds tacked on to their physical corpses.’

He looked at her in wonder.

‘The life of the body,’ he said, ‘is just the life of the animals.’

‘And that’s better than the life of professional corpses...’<sup>211</sup>

The critique of Connie and the reactions of her husband reflect the Victorian conception of the body accurately. On the one hand, “the life of the mind” is directly opposed to “the life of the body,” moreover, as the man accentuates, the latter is clearly separated from what is essentially human by its animalistic nature. On the other hand, Connie introduces the idea of the machine-man, who is a mere corps, though a professional one. The dialogue gives a very exact description of how Sir Clifford thinks about sexuality – accordingly, the reader is invited to catch a glimpse into Victorian mentality.<sup>212</sup>

Besides the fact that traits of the conception of industrialism and its effects upon the moral climate of the age are very similar, both Foucault and Lawrence seem to approach the matter of capitalism from a Marxist point of view. It has already been mentioned that in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* the notion of sexuality is closely connected to capitalism and the emergence of the middle- and working-classes.<sup>213</sup> In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* Marxist influence appears in the vision of Bolshevism that is threatening the bourgeois classes. The following quotation is taken from one of the conversations between Sir Clifford and his friends:

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<sup>211</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 245.

<sup>212</sup> Not to mention the feminist reading of the quotation: here the reader might also encounter the stereotypical idea that links sexuality entirely to the female body.

<sup>213</sup> See Foucault, 1997: 143–149.

‘Bolshevism, it seems to me,’ said Charlie, ‘is just a superlative hatred of the thing they call the bourgeois; and what the bourgeois is, isn’t quite defined. It is Capitalism, among other things. Feelings and emotions are also so decidedly bourgeois that you have to invent a man without them.’

‘Then the individual, especially the *personal* man, is bourgeois [...] Even an organism is bourgeois: so the ideal must be mechanical. The only thing that is a unit, non-organic, composed of many different, yet essential parts, is the machine. Each man a machine-part [...] That, to me, is Bolshevism.’

‘Absolutely!’ said Tommy. ‘But also it seems to me a perfect description of the whole of the industrial ideal. [...] Just look at these Midlands, if it isn’t plainly written up ... but it’s all part of the life of the mind, it’s a logical development.’<sup>214</sup>

The fear of Bolshevism is expressed through the statement that it is enrooted in utmost hatred against the unclear notion of the bourgeois. Clearly, if these men perceive this as a threat, they inevitably range themselves among the middle-class.<sup>215</sup> Later on, however, it unfolds that capitalism and Bolshevism are practically the same: both notions are based on the ideal of the machine-like man, and both of them take “the life of the mind” as their point of departure. Thus, on the basis of this fragment it can be argued that, like Foucault, Lawrence also links the status of sexuality to capitalism which is explicitly claimed to be “the logical development” of “the life of the mind” (that represents – as it has been discussed earlier – the Victorian, rational, business-like attitude towards one’s body).

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<sup>214</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 40.

<sup>215</sup> Although from the first moment on there is no doubt about this fact in the novel, it is interesting to see how discursive strategies help to construct and affirm one’s status and cultural code in such social interactions as for example a tea-time discussion among friends.

By publishing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence tries to encourage sexual discourse exactly in order to redeem it from its taboo aspect, to give back the reader their inner, natural and healthy attitude towards their body. It seems, however, that despite the parallels, his novel does fall into the category of Foucauldian ideas about sexual discourse as a means of revolt against assumed repression. Not only is Lawrence a self-entitled pamphleteer-prophet of universal redemption by sexuality, but he is an advocate of true and good sexuality. "True" and "good" sexuality in the same sense as Foucault uses the terms when he discusses the nature and goals of the prophet. Moreover, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Lawrence also subjects to the dominant power-discourse when he links true and good sexuality to the institution of marriage. In spite of the fact that in some aspects the novel accounts the story of an adulterous relationship between married people, the love relationship between Connie and Mellors, the gamekeeper is meant to illustrate "marriage" as the holy, unbreakable tie enrooted in harmonious chastity between man and woman:

Now is time to be chaste, it is so good to be chaste, like a river of cool water in my soul. I love chastity now that it flows between us. It is like fresh water and rain. How can men want wearisomely to philander. What a misery to be like Don Juan, [...] impotent and unable to be chaste in the cool between-whiles, as by a river.<sup>216</sup>

Though the fragment from Mellors' letter to Connie does not formulate it de facto, the image of the cool and freshening river seems to reflect the basic concept of marriage. It is an institution grounded on the unity of man and woman in love and understanding, living together in peaceful monogamy – as by the continuous flow of the river of chastity. Though Lawrence was a harsh critique of Victorian attitudes towards sex, he

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<sup>216</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 317.

seems unconsciously to fall for the dominant discourse that limits sexual activity to marriage (in order to keep it under control). Thus, Lawrence remains in the field of power–knowledge relations, furthermore he affirms it by accepting marriage as the legal and morally adequate institution of sexuality.<sup>217</sup>

Besides showing what makes a good marriage (Connie and Mellors) as opposed to a bad one (Connie and Clifford), Lawrence also lays stress on the illustration of false, and thus wrong and harmful sexual aspirations (Connie’s relationship with Michaelis) as opposed to real ones (Connie’s relationship with Mellors). By accentuating these differences, Lawrence lays special emphasis on the description of sex as a physical and emotional process amounting to the spiritual renewal of the self. Indeed, he ascribes sex the power to distort, or heal and reveal one’s inner self. One of the best examples of the former, distorting effect is a scene in which Connie looks at herself naked in her huge mirror – exploring herself through the *reflected* image:

She did not know what she was looking for, or at, very definitely, yet she moved the lamp till it shone full on her. [...] She had been supposed to have rather a good figure, but now she was out of fashion: a little too female, not enough like an adolescent boy. [...] Her body was meaningless, going dull and opaque, so much insignificant substance. It made her feel immensely depressed and hopeless [...] no healthy human sensuality, that warms the blood and freshens the whole being.<sup>218</sup>

In this scene the protagonist of the book examines her body through the eyes of her lawful husband (Sir Clifford), and the ideas he represents. First, she considers herself pretty and female, however, she instantly

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<sup>217</sup> Note that according to Foucault resistance can only be present as an integral part of the very system which it aims to undermine. Thus, any sort of resistance is doomed in a sense to fail, since it cannot break the vicious circle (Foucault, 1997: 97–98).

<sup>218</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 71–73.

recalls that she does not conform the woman-ideal of her time. Then, she comes to feel worried and depressed about this, meanwhile her bitterness leads her to the realization that it is healthy sensuality that she is in desperate need of. On the one hand, it is her sexual affair with Michaelis that directs her attention to herself – herself as a reflection to be reflected upon. Therein lies the power typically attributed to sex by prophets (at least, according to Foucault): sexuality has the ability to reveal one's inner self, that is, to bring truth to light. On the other hand, probably for the first time in their relationship Connie realizes that she cannot conform the inhuman, rational way of thinking that renders body a necessary evil to cope with.<sup>219</sup> The parallel between the location of what is wrong and harmful about sex and the Foucauldian vision of Victorian sexual discourse (sex as a matter to be managed, organized and dealt with on a rational basis, “the life of the mind”) is strikingly obvious. Lawrence describes exactly the dominant power that has to be fought against: the power that suppresses sex and marginalizes its natural, healthy and emphatically bodily aspects as shameful, “animalistic” (Lawrence, 1984: 245) and merely “functional” (Lawrence, 1984: 76). He perceives this attitude as dangerous, and focuses in the major part of the novel on the demonstration of the negative effects of such thinking. As he formulated it: “I always labour at the same thing, to make the sex relation valid and precious, instead of shameful. And this novel is the furthest I've gone. To me it is beautiful and tender and frail as the naked self is” (Hoggart, xv).

Lawrence also lays great emphasis on his “prophetic mission”, and – under the pretext of the novel he – tries to show the reader, how freedom can be reached by harmony and self-awareness found in sexuality. Since he is a writer, the use(s) of language as a means to reach his aims is of central concern: he attempts to discuss sexuality as openly as possible. As Lawrence expressed it in his essay “Á Propos of Lady

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<sup>219</sup> “And sex was merely an accident, an adjunct, one of the curious obsolete, organic processes which persisted in its own clumsiness, but was not really necessary” (Lawrence, 1984: 13). Other examples are to be found in the discussions about sex between Sir Clifford and his friends: Lawrence, 1984: 33–36, 76–77 for instance.



Chatterley”, he considered taboo words as merely shocking for the eye (that is, to the norms inherent in man as a cultural product of our times), but not for the mind (that is, to man evolved and cultured far beyond the momentarily available cultural norms) (Lawrence, 1961: 87–88). He firmly believed that the constant repetition of the words will reveal their “true” nature, and rid the eye of the shock offered by taboos inscribed in the construct of culture. Although according to many the effect is dubious, most critics agree that Lawrence was in the pursuit of a noble ideal.<sup>220</sup> As Yeats put it with great awe in a letter to Mrs Shakespeare, one of his friends:

These two lovers, the gamekeeper and his employer’s wife, each separated from their class by their love and by fate are poignant in their loneliness; the coarse language of the one accepted by both becomes a forlorn poetry, uniting their solitudes, something ancient humble and terrible.<sup>221</sup>

Yeats touches upon the core of Lawrence’s mission: he interprets the effect of the attempt to reactivate the original connotation of the words as a profound achievement. However, he does not lay accent on the words themselves, but on the “coarse language of the one” that is accepted by the other. During the course of the novel the ominous “four-letter words” appear most frequently in the Nottinghamshire dialect used by Mellors.<sup>222</sup> The fact that Mellors does speak Standard English (indeed, his

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<sup>220</sup> During the course of the Penguin v. Regina trial in 1960, most of the witnesses claimed that his accomplishment is remarkable but not wholly successful (Rolph, 58).

<sup>221</sup> Shorer, Mark “Introduction to Lady Chatterley’s Lover.” In *À Propos of Lady Chatterley and Other Essays*. D. H. Lawrence, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1961: 157.

<sup>222</sup> The “politically correct” expression is borrowed from the Penguin v. Regina trial (1960). Although the expression “four-letter words” was introduced by the prosecution in order to cover such terms as for example “cunt”, “fuck”, and “shit”, it was the prosecution itself that engaged in the detailed explanation of what it aimed to avoid by lengthily discussing and repeating the words (the use of which it considered morally degrading and outrageous). See Rolph, 9–250.

vocabulary testifies that he is as familiar with the formal register of the language, as he is with the regional dialect) reveals the importance of the usage of “coarse language”. Lawrence refrains from integrating sexual discourse in its ideal, pure form into Standard English that is mainly spoken by characters representing Victorian England (which is in a sense the symbol of a capitalistic, industrial state and a spiritually weakened and degenerated society, too). Yet, words referring to sexuality also occur outside Connie and Mellors’ field of communication. In these instances, however, words are represented in their every-day context, either receiving a vulgar, or a clinically neutral, sterilizing connotation. As opposed to these interactions – exclusively in the Standard English (Lawrence, 1984: 45–47, 55–57, 76–78) –, discourse between the lovers is aimed to indicate how language can be used in a way that words lose the negative connotations attached to them. Perhaps, Lawrence positions the words in the context of a regional dialect in order to reinforce a certain atmosphere of the familiarity of one’s own language (for example, the one spoken at home, which is possibly less normalized than standard language) that is part of their identity as an integrated unity of man and woman.<sup>223</sup> Thus, by Connie accepting the language of Mellors, the two of them create their own “linguistic reality”. They cut out a segment from the linguistically available reality, and start to build up a new world of their own in which sexuality is freed from the false shame attached to it, and becomes part of human nature:<sup>224</sup>

He laughed. Her attempts at the dialect were so ludicrous, somehow.

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<sup>223</sup> As Gloria Anzaldúa states in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987): “I am my language.” (Anzaldúa, Gloria *Borderlands/La Frontera* (excerpt). In *Literary Theory: an Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin, Michael Ryan, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004: 1027.) Although the quotation is taken from a context discussing post-colonial as well as gender issues, identity theoretical aspects of the book might be worth to consider even in the case of Lawrence’s novel.

<sup>224</sup> Note that this is exactly what Lawrence refers to in the very first paragraph of the novel!

‘Coom then, tha mun goo!’ he said.

‘Mun I?’ she said.

‘Maun Ah!’ he corrected.

[...]

‘Tha’rt good cunt, though, aren’t ter? Best bit o’ cunt left on earth. When ther likes! When tha’rt willin’!’

‘What is cunt?’ she said.

‘An’ doesn’t ter know? Cunt! It’s thee down theer; an’ what I get when I’m i’side thee...’

‘...It’s like fuck then.’

‘Nay nay! [...] Animals fuck. But cunt’s a lot more than that. It’s thee, dost thee: an’ tha’rt a lot besides an animal, aren’t ter...’<sup>225</sup>

The conversation between Connie and Mellors directs attention to three important aspects. First, the woman accepts the language offered by the man, and tries to learn it by imitation. Although the process is not without difficulties, they engage in the development of something that unites them, as Yeats put it. So, they limit their sexual discourse (and in this sense their sexuality, too) to the intimacy offered by the Nottinghamshire dialect. At the same time they distance themselves from Standard English and what it symbolically represents. Secondly, the words ‘cunt’ and ‘fuck’ are used repetitiously by the author in order to reach his aim. According to Lawrence, it is important to be “able to use the so-called obscene words, because these are a natural part of the mind’s consciousness of the body. Obscenity only comes in when the mind despises and fears the body, and the body hates and resists the mind” (Lawrence, 1961: 90). The dialogue is meant to illustrate how sexuality can be treated as something natural, something in harmony with both the mind and the body. Thirdly, by accentuating the difference between animal and human sexual activity, Connie and Mellors’ discourse is

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<sup>225</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 185.

justified in the face of Victorian views that place the “life of the mind” before mere bodily functions. As Sir Clifford pointed it out in a fragment discussed earlier, these are so close to instincts that they are categorised with the “animal”: he distinguishes between human and inhuman on the basis of sexuality. Mellors, however, draws another distinction and states that the difference between the human and the instinctive is a difference in the nature of desire – thus allowing sexuality the presence in the discourse.

According to the Foucauldian view, such overt exposition of the discourse about sex tends to strengthen the ties around the field of legal sexuality – owing to the mechanism that works vaguely according to the law of “the exception that proves the rule”. So, in spite of the fact that Lawrence is revolutionary in advocating open sexual discourse, his prophetic mission is doomed to fail. Moreover, it inevitably supports the dominant power–knowledge relations referred to by Foucault. Thus, the banishment of the novel in England in 1929 seems to justify the view that sexual discourse is a built in the mechanism of the dominant, and whenever it is realized outside the given frames, it instantly allows the dominant discourse to intervene and so, to demonstrate its regulatory power. In this process discourse, in the sense of the linguistic realization of the assumptions that describe and at the same time create sex and sexuality, plays a crucial role. As we have seen, censorship backed up by the legal institution of the Common Law prevented the public confession (disguised as a novel of high literary value) in this case. However, it would be rash to draw the conclusion, that Lawrence was yet again a typical example of the “prophet” who inevitably supports the power-discourse against which he preaches, since he uses the same language as the dominant discourse he opposes (otherwise, he would not even be taken into account).

*Á PROPOS OF SEX*

D. H. Lawrence was aware of the risks involved with his experiment. Moreover, at times his ideas concerning the issue of sexuality and language seem to precede contemporary thinkers' views, like those of Michel Foucault. Apart from the fact that at several points Lawrence exemplifies the French philosopher's theory, apparently he also justifies him in matters crucial to the structure of Foucault's model. Still, it should not be surprising that a sharp-witted novelist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century England, like Lawrence observes and records in a precise and accurate manner his ideas about the mechanisms operating in industrial society and the individual who lives in accordance with Victorian norms. However, some aspects that appear in the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, later detailed at greater length in the essay "Á Propos of Lady Chatterley", evidently seem to undermine the Foucauldian hypothesis according to which the overt discussion of sexuality as such is absolutely inherent in the control mechanisms that regulate the incessant reproduction of power relations. Lawrence, though a typical prophet-figure, seems to find a way to the solution to what he considers a problem.<sup>226</sup> In this light, the Lawrence-quotation at the end of *The Will to Knowledge* becomes suspiciously out of context.

Criticism of contemporary sexual discourse abounds in the novel. As it has already been mentioned Lawrence consciously depicted the ideology that he considered unhealthy and dangerous – most of the sessions between Clifford and his friends serve this very aim. Still, not only Victorian views are discussed but also the mechanism of (social)

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<sup>226</sup> Note that Foucault assumes "sexual repression" as non-existent; he tries to reveal that the notion of sexuality was created in order to regulate and maintain society, and the fact that many people perceive it as a subject of repression can be traced back to the regulatory mechanism itself. Dominant discourse creates the framework of sexuality by limiting it, and affirms the validity of this domain by reaction to any attempt at breaking the laws that prescribe the norms (see: Foucault, 1997: 164–167). However, if we accept Lawrence as a prophet in the Foucauldian sense of the word, then we also assume that he himself struggles against sexual repression as such.

control through every-day discourse. Gossip, as a form of expression of public opinion or sentiment, also as a channel of dominant discourse (that determines and regulates the norms), is of central concern in the novel. One of the best examples is the figure of Mrs Ivy Bolton and the nature of gossip closely linked to her character:

When I hear Mrs Bolton talk, I feel myself plunging down, down, to the depths where the fish of human secrets wriggle and swim. Carnal appetite makes one size a beakful of prey: then up, up again, out of the dense into the ethereal, from the wet into the dry [...] with Mrs Bolton I only feel the downward plunge, down, horribly, among the sea-weeds and the pallid monsters of the very bottom.<sup>227</sup>

Mrs Bolton, the nurse taking care of Sir Clifford, is a sort of recipient of local events and an inexhaustible gossip. Her character gains crucial attention in the discussion of discourse as a manifestation of (social) control since she is a mediator between Tevershall, the miner-village (representing the working-class), and Wragby Hall, the estate of the Chatterleys (representing the upper-class). It is through Mrs Bolton's stories that the Hall gets informed about problems and events that determine daily life in Wragby. Necessarily, gossips relating to the private life of people abound in these accounts; sexuality as the basic motivation behind tensions and phenomena is quite frequently thematized.<sup>228</sup> The essence of these stories and the attitude of the listener towards them are clearly indicated in the quotation. As a communicative, verbal interaction gossip is paralleled with the bird plunging down in muddy water to get the prey and ease their hunger. Gossip reveals what is hidden from the eye because of its dirty and horrible nature, and in spite of the fact that it arouses a feeling of repulsion, it fascinates the

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<sup>227</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 279.

<sup>228</sup> See for example Lawrence, 1984: 104–108, 278–281.

individual and even satisfies their curiosity. However, the “beakful” amounts of “wriggling human secrets” are sized and commented upon without much consideration of the context. Gossip is humiliating as much for the gossip themselves, as for the listener since it is aimed at the deviant in the sense that it focuses on what is outside the domain of the norm: on “the pallid monsters of the very bottom”. As Connie puts it:

Connie was fascinated, listening to her. But afterwards always a little ashamed. She ought not to listen with this rabid curiosity. After all, one may hear the most private affairs of other people, but only in a spirit of respect for the struggling, battered thing which the human soul is, and in a spirit of fine, discriminative sympathy. [...] Mrs Bolton’s gossip was always on the side of the angels. ‘And he was such a *bad* fellow, and she was such a *nice* woman.’ Whereas, as Connie could see even from Mrs Bolton’s gossip, the woman had been merely a mealy-mouthed sort, and the man angrily honest. But angry honesty made a ‘bad man’ of him, and mealy-mouthedness made a ‘nice woman’ of her, in the vicious, conventional channelling of sympathy by Mrs Bolton.

For this reason, the gossip was humiliating. [...] The public responds now only to an appeal to its vices.<sup>229</sup>

Gossip distorts information in accordance with what is considered conventional. Despite the striking obviousness of the woman’s mealy-mouthedness as opposed to the man’s angry honesty in her story, Mrs Bolton’s perception excludes any other ways of interpretation that do not form part of the dominant discourse. Mrs Bolton is an ideal gossip since her sympathies conform with the norms that regulate and determine social interactions. Thus, her stories as well as her figure stand for the discourse that is entirely the opposite of that of the prophet: her accounts

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<sup>229</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 104–105.

are absolutely subjected to the dominant discourse for they are never aimed at questioning the validity of the system they generate from. Furthermore, these stories gain their power from their tendency to reveal the hidden in a distorted manner, to force confession that allows legitimacy to the dominant discourse.

Consequentially, when gossiping is centred round sexuality, it inevitably treats sex as dirty and abnormal, and uses language accordingly. Lawrence observes the phenomenon accurately when detailing the reaction of Mellor's wife realizing that her long-left husband "is keeping women" (Lawrence, 1984: 280). As Sir Clifford – constantly informed by Mrs Bolton – writes it in a letter to her wife: the gamekeeper "is accused of all unspeakable things" (Lawrence, 1984: 279) by his wife, Bertha Coutts. So, Mellors becomes subject of discussion, as a target of unutterable charges brought against him; more precisely, he becomes subject of public confession in spite of himself. Further on Sir Clifford accounts the following in the same letter:

The woman has blown off an amazing quantity of poison-gas. She has aired in detail all those incidents of her conjugal life which are usually buried down in the deepest grave of matrimonial silence, between married couples. [...] Of course, there is really nothing in it. Humanity has always had a strange avidity for unusual sexual postures [...] but I had hardly expected our game-keeper to be up to so many tricks. No doubt Bertha Coutts herself first put him up to them. In any case, it is a matter of their own personal squalor, and nothing to do with anybody else.

However, everybody listens: as I do myself. [...] She has discovered on the top of her voice that her husband has been 'keeping' women down at the cottage...<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 280.



First, Mellors' wife launches at discrediting her husband by confessing every tiny detail of their sexual life – obviously aiming at the redemptive nature of the dominant discourse. She wants her husband back by the means of black-mail: she would not cease to air their relationship unless Mellors accepts to move in with her again and stop “keeping women”. Her public confession is not necessarily aimed at “freedom”, rather at the humiliation of the other in the hope of submission from his part. She expects the condemnatory power to win over her husband, and to render him back to her. Secondly, Sir Clifford's comments, on the one hand, reveal the attitude of Tevershall and Wragby Hall towards the gossip: though it is solely Mellors and Bertha Coutts' private affaire, everybody listens with close attention, eager to get a glimpse into the details. On the other hand, Sir Clifford hints at points already discussed such as the institution of marriage as the legitimate domain of sexuality where it can be subject to discourse, but otherwise not talked about or thematized. Thirdly, his attitude towards the gossip also shows how information is filtered through the values central to Victorian mentality. Sir Clifford mentions the so-called “matrimonial silence”, already referred to, and alludes (note that he refrains from explicit formulation) to “unusual sexual postures” as opposed to usual, normal, conventional modes of sexual activity. In addition, he refers to the unaccountability of the information, too: he expresses his shock or surprise to get to know that his gamekeeper, whom he thought a decent man, could be apt to such things. From his vantage point the distinction made between decent and indecent people on the grounds of sexuality is evident. Furthermore, he gives voice to his feeling concerning the doubtful aspect of the news by stating that only women can betray men into deeds so shameful.<sup>231</sup> Sir

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<sup>231</sup> Yet another aspect of the novel for feminists to indulge in! In spite of the fact that Foucault does not engage in a detailed discussion of this very important aspect of controlled sexual discourse, sexuality as abnormal and sinful is most often linked to women, more precisely to the female body. Though Yvonne Bleyerveld investigated the “topos” of sexually powerful women from a historical point of view, if the phenomenon is looked upon from a gender perspective, then (since women studies is an interdisciplinary field, too) the digression might be allowed. The image of “evil” women who have the

Clifford evidently falls in the large group of individuals who keep themselves firmly to the inherently prescribed norms, and who help the system maintain the power relations by forming their opinion accordingly.

However, it is precisely at this point of the narration that a reference to the futility of language is made by Mellors himself when reacting to the charges already mentioned. When Sir Clifford expresses his worries about the gamekeeper's ability to attend his duties in such circumstances, Mellors replies as follows: "'Ay,' he said. 'Folks should do their own fuckin', then they wouldn't want to listen to a lot of clatfart about another man's'" (Lawrence, 1984: 281). The gamekeeper touches upon a very important aspect of the discourse about sex, namely that it is fascinating and shocking because sexuality is withdrawn from the physical realm and placed to the level of linguistic reality. People speak about the activity and exercise it in this strange and passive manner because they cannot manage it otherwise. Going back to what Foucault said about the gradual formation of the notion of sexuality from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, the connection between Lawrence and the central idea of *The Will to Knowledge* seems clear. On the one hand, the Foucauldian view holds that sex was quasi-consequentially transformed into sexual discourse precisely in order to expose it to efficient surveillance. Since prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century sex was uncontrollably integrated into private life, outside the reach of authorities, it had to be brought to light so as to subject it to control. On the other hand, Mellors' comment reveals exactly this aspect of the discourse. He is much aware of the reason why people find utmost pleasure in discussing other's love life in details; he points

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power to get respective man expose themselves to self-humiliating deeds by means of their cunning charm and beauty can be traced back to ancient Greece, but references also abound in the Bible as much as in medieval art and literature. Among the most popular examples we find Aristotle and Phyllis, Adam and Eve, Samson and Delilah, Salome and King Herod. For details consult: Bleyerveld, Yvonne "Powerful Women, Foolish Men. The Popularity of 'Powerful Women' Topos in Art." In *Women of Distinction. Margaret of York – Margaret of Austria*. [Exposition catalogue.] Ed. Dachmar Eichberger, Leuven: Davidsvonds, 2005: 167–175.

out the same relationship between language and sex as Foucault does: sexuality is banished from every-day life to the limited domain of verbal discourse, and thus it is shifted from the active field to the passive.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, by making this remark Mellors is also reflecting upon the consequences of this fact. He realizes that people have difficulties in their private life and in spite of the fact that mere talk about sex might occasionally relieve tensions it does not necessarily solve their problems on the long run. The idea reappears twice at the end of the novel, in Mellors' letter to Connie. "Anyhow, nobody knows what should be done, in spite of all the talk" (Lawrence, 1984: 314). The allusion to talk, to language indicates again that discourse might not prove to be the most efficient means to deal with the range of problems raised in the book.<sup>233</sup> Almost at the end of the letter he writes: "Well, so many words, because I can't touch you" (Lawrence, 1984: 317). Perhaps, herein is the essence of the novel to be found: words only substitute and veil the acts, and block desire attached to these acts. It is not necessarily discourse that frees one from the tensions that mentally, spiritually and physically distort them.<sup>234</sup> It is rather deeds that help one ease their secret pains.

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<sup>232</sup> Interestingly, the positioning of this shift in history is also similar to the Foucauldian view. The French philosopher dates it from the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and so does Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

If the man wore scarlet trousers [...] if they could dance and hop and skip, and sing and swagger and be handsome, they could do with very little cash. And amuse the women themselves, and be amused by the women. Hey ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass, and dance the old group dances... (From: Lawrence, 1984: 315.)

First, Mellors associates the idea of open and true sexuality to men's scarlet trousers that evidently refer to the Middle Ages. He also mentions group dances which perhaps allude to much earlier times. Still, the fact is that in Lawrence's novel as well as in Foucault's work free and active sexuality is linked to pre-modern eras.

<sup>233</sup> For instance the problem of industrial England vs traditional (agricultural) England, alienation vs self-awareness, body vs mind, good sexuality vs harmful sexuality.

<sup>234</sup> Sir Clifford's handicapped figure for example is often referred to as the symbolic crippling of modern society as such (see: Rolph, 110; Lawrence, 1961: 124). His disability to live a whole life, lacking the control over his body is also explicit in the novel: "And again the dread of the night came on him. He was a network of nerves, and

**WORD-PERFECT**

Yet, Lawrence was conscious about the fact that subtle layers of his work, like the above discussed relationship between language and true sexuality, will be exposed to serious misinterpretation. For this reason he published his essay “Á Propos of Lady Chatterley”, two years after the novel had been finished, in order to overcome the misreading by detailing the motivation that lies behind the concept of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In the essay he accentuates that the thoughts he noted down are “not intended to explain or expound anything: only to give the emotional beliefs which perhaps are necessary as a background to the book” (Lawrence, 1961: 124). If one refrains from bearing in mind the post-modern image of the orphaned text and the death of the author as unquestionable, then in this essay one might find an abundant source of references and explanations that further support what has already been said.<sup>235</sup>

In “Á Propos of Lady Chatterley” Lawrence gives a systematically structured account of what he considers a serious problem of Western-European civilization and dedicates long passages as to the possible solution to the threat. In his conception the menace lies in the misinterpretation of the notion of sexuality. He claims that all problems

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when he was not braced up to work, and so full of energy: or when he was not listening-in, and so utterly neuter: then he was haunted by anxiety and a sense of dangerous impending void. He was afraid” (Lawrence, 1984: 145). It has been already discussed that Sir Clifford represents those Victorian minded upper-class people who believe fully in “the life of the mind”. Yet, this fragment reveals how insecure and empty those might feel, who refrain entirely from taking their body into account. Not surprisingly, it is at night that Sir Clifford indulges into the dread of “impending void”. Night as the symbolic representation of the inner self, the darkness of secret desires that “cast light” upon the repressed aspirations, thoughts and emotions. Sir Clifford fears the empty hours of the night, because perhaps it is only “nothing” that he would find if taking a closer look at himself. Furthermore, the depiction of the miners bears a very similar meaning (see for example: Lawrence, 1984: 165–166).

<sup>235</sup> Moreover, an insight into the author's state of mind and his conceptions of truth and reality are worth the investigation in the light of the novel itself. With regard to the orphaned text and the death of the author see Derrida (1971).

attached to love and human relationships in general arise from the disruption of harmony between mind and body. Lawrence lays emphasis on the fact that it is rational thinking which leads to the disregard of the physique as such – and this neglect of the one has as a consequence worrying effects on the other:

‘Knowledge’ has killed the sun, making it a ball of gas, with spots; ‘knowledge’ has killed the moon, it is a dead little earth fretted with extinct craters as with small-pox; the machine has killed the earth for us, making it a surface, more or less bumpy, that you travel over [...] this dry and sterile little world the abstracted mind inhabits.<sup>236</sup>

Sir Clifford in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is the exact example of “knowledge” since he is the embodiment of the bodiless mind. He is a separate entity who defines himself in accordance with his intellectual achievements. He is a personality in this sense, but only a half accomplished one – that is the reason why his writings are considered smart but empty very early in the course of the novel (Lawrence, 1984: 18). Knowledge as described in the fragment above leads to the abstraction of the world and the self, too. By explaining and describing every moment of life, rational thinking segments reality and also the individual into separated, pre-considered units. This segmentation via abstraction leads to or goes hand-in-hand with isolation: in order to be able to explain and describe something, the subject of analysis or observation must be limited so as to allow investigation. At this point Lawrence’s thinking matches the Foucauldian view: knowledge requires control in the same sense as surveillance can only be efficient if its subject is available, isolated, limited by clear-cut boundaries.

In connection with isolation – that is, the spreading of “knowledge” as a quality indicating the value and status of the individual

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<sup>236</sup> Lawrence, 1961: 120.

– in “Á Propos of Lady Chatterley” Lawrence also criticises individualisation considered by many of his contemporaries as the ideal fulfilment of the human race.<sup>237</sup> Like Foucault, he also realizes that the abstraction of reality has as a consequence the gradual development of the individual, of the notion of personality. Both authors trace the process back to the birth of industrialisation and the strengthening difference between the upper- and lower-classes:<sup>238</sup>

...and the feeling of individualism and personality, which is existence in isolation, increases. The so-called ‘cultured’ classes are the first to develop ‘personality’ and individualism, and the first to fall into this state of unconscious menace and fear. The working-classes retain the old blood-warmth of oneness and togetherness some decades longer. Then they loose it too.<sup>239</sup>

In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* Lawrence depicts the phase where society as a whole has already lost its unity (see for instance the discussion about Bolshevism that concludes that both the ideal of capitalism and Bolshevism, both the upper- and working-classes can be traced back to the machine-image of man). Yet, references to earlier, different times and potential futures are also featured in the novel (such as Mellors’ nostalgic accounts over men in scarlet trousers, or Sir Clifford’s company’s discussion about immunized women). In the essay, Lawrence emphasizes that the loss of integrity – both on the collective and the individual level – results in a distortion regarding attitude towards the body and sex.

He sketches this distortion on the scale between two poles (Lawrence, 1961: 91–92): on the one hand, one might find the Puritan-minded individual who is silent about sexuality and would preferably deny its existence. On the other hand, there are the modern, young,

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<sup>237</sup> Bényei Tamás *Az ártatlan ország. Az angol regény 1945 után*. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2003: 249.

<sup>238</sup> See for example: Foucault, 1997: 126.

<sup>239</sup> Lawrence, 1961: 122. For the same idea see Foucault, 1997: 126.

“jazzy” people who regard their body as a toy to play with. He also mentions the “business man” type that can be situated somewhere between the two (closer to the jazzy people); this latter is the Victorian-minded individual whose goal is to keep their body fit in order to ensure proper working conditions. Though all three are present in the novel, the “jazzy” and the “business man” type are predominant: Mrs Bolton, Mellors and even Connie mention the younger generation that they associate with jazz, obsession with money, drinks and cocktails, and openly loose behaviour towards the other sex (Lawrence, 1984: 106–110, 274–277, 314–315); whereas Sir Clifford and most of his company represent the self-managing businessman.<sup>240</sup>

What Lawrence tries to draw attention to with this categorisation is the fact that sexuality and thinking about sexuality came worryingly apart. By stereotyping the self-absorbed, narcissistic individual (Lawrence, 1961: 92) he forecasts a problem that will be thoroughly dealt with in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, he states that the formation of these types, together with the birth of the individual’s narrowed concept, is closely linked to education (crucial to Foucault in the analysis of control and surveillance, as well as in the development of sexual discourse).<sup>242</sup> Lawrence believes that education “has *taught* us a certain range of emotions, what to feel and what not to feel, and how to feel the feelings we allow ourselves to feel. All the rest is just non-existent” (Lawrence, 1961: 94 – emphasize in the original text). On the one hand, this idea reflects that he was aware of the power that lies in the institution of education pre-determining norms and the notion of deviance. On the other hand, the fragment also suggests that the idea of constructivism was familiar to Lawrence (in spite of the fact that he obviously did not know the term and was ignorant about the fact that a

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<sup>240</sup> Classic grey Puritanism appears for instance when Connie travels to Venice and meets the Guthrie girls (Lawrence, 1984: 269, 276).

<sup>241</sup> For example Christopher Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978) is primarily centred round the problematic of this very phenomenon.

<sup>242</sup> Foucault, 1997: 30–33, 50.

whole range of studies will be derived from the concept).<sup>243</sup> He affirms that what one learns, what is encoded as knowledge into somebody pre-determines the range of impulses one is able to perceive. Lawrence formulates the phenomenon as follows: “The mind has a stereotyped set of ideas and ‘feelings’, and the body is made to act up, like a trained dog” (Lawrence, 1961: 92).

However, he argues, the body is stronger than the mind, and strikes back remorselessly (Lawrence, 1961: 95–98). He believes that it is especially sex that has the power to reveal superficial, counterfeit emotions and false love. This is the reason why such an increasing amount of relationships end up so abruptly and with the involvement of so much hatred towards each other (Lawrence, 1961: 113). This is the reason why Connie’s love affair with Michaelis is doomed to fail: personal sympathy is not enough to make a sexual relationship last (Lawrence, 1984: 56–57). Lawrence says that “[t]he important thing is that sex itself comes to subserve the personality and the personal ‘love’ entirely, without ever giving sexual satisfaction or fulfilment. In fact, there is probably far more sexual activity in ‘personal’ marriages than in a blood-marriage” (Lawrence, 1961: 114). It has already been discussed that for Lawrence also the ideal framework of sex is marriage. Yet, he makes a difference between ‘personal’ marriage that involves personalities whose unity is based on counterfeit emotions that derive from mental sympathy between man and woman, and ‘blood-marriage’. Sir Clifford and Connie’s marriage clearly belongs to the former category: the matrimonial tie that is based on what Lawrence calls “thrill”; the “affinity of mind and personality [which] is an excellent basis of friendship between the sexes, but a disastrous basis for marriage” (Lawrence 1961: 113). When Connie discovers that perhaps there is more

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<sup>243</sup> Several scientists from very diverse disciplines devote(d) themselves to the study of constructivism and its effects upon the perception of reality. See for instance Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Pierre Bourdieu’s *La Distinction* (1979), Heinz von Foerster’s *Observing Systems* (1993) and so on.



to love than her husband claims, she comes to despise spending evenings with Sir Clifford, writing stories together and listening to his talk that earlier fascinated her so much:

They were not the leafy words of an effective life, young with energy and belonging to the tree. They were hosts of fallen leaves of a life that is ineffectual. [...] Their marriage, their integrated life based on a habit of intimacy, that he [Sir Clifford] talked about: there were days when it all became utterly blank and nothing. It was words, just so many words. The only reality was nothingness, and over it a hypocrisy of words.<sup>244</sup>

It is striking how Connie formulates the feelings towards their marriage: she refers to it as a construct build up by words, words that veil nothingness itself.<sup>245</sup> It is opposed to this stand that Connie and Mellors' relationship gradually develops into something new, spiritual and meaningful not by means of words but mostly through deeds and emotions – they evolve into what Lawrence calls blood-marriage.

Interestingly, however, he cannot define how this blood-marriage is to be reached, apart from the fact that he gives descriptions about it as a union based on re-vitalizing blood-sex.<sup>246</sup> He is only able to tell us what is wrong and harmful (that is, the tie between individualized entities who consequentially fear and after a while despise each other since they are isolated in their abstractedness), and thus to speculate about what possibilities humanity might have. In search for a solution he lays great emphasis on the fact that man became uprooted in the sense that by individualising every available segment of reality around him, he grew detached from the cyclic rhythm of the cosmos. He compares human

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<sup>244</sup> Lawrence, 1984: 52.

<sup>245</sup> Radical constructivists, cheer up!

<sup>246</sup> “And the other, the warm blood-sex that establishes the living and re-vitalizing connexion between man and woman, how are we to get that back? I don't know. Yet, get it back we must” (Lawrence, 1961: 116).

beings to trees with roots in the air that have to be replanted into solid earth (Lawrence, 1961: 119).<sup>247</sup> With this, Lawrence suggests that humanity should get back to its source, “before Plato, before the tragic idea of life arose” (Lawrence, 1961: 119).<sup>248</sup> Throughout the essay he argues that good and true sex is the source to go back to, the remedy to all the insecurity and apartness that characterizes Western-European civilisation. Still, it is not passive talk about sex, but thoughtful deeds in the realm of active sexuality that he claims crucial:

It is no use asking for a Word to fulfil such a need. No Word, no Logos, no Utterance will ever do it. The Word is uttered, most of it: we need only pay true attention. But who will call us to the Deed [...]? It is the *Deed* of life we have to learn: we are supposed to have learnt the Word, but, alas, look at us. Word-perfect we may be, but Deed-demented.<sup>249</sup>

Lawrence claims that there is no such thing as “meaning” or “articulated truth” that would help solving the problems that absorb humanity – words and language are only abstractions of the mind, and not means to mount difficulties. He tries to point out that sexuality has been discussed for a long time without effect. Thus, instead of repeating what has already been said, people should act, not just talk. He definitely urges the placing of sexuality from the discursive back to the level of intimate every-day interactions between man and woman.

In the light of what has been said about the novel and the essay connected to it, the Lawrence-quotation cited in *The Will to Knowledge*

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<sup>247</sup> Note the tree-motif in the novel-fragment above.

<sup>248</sup> Most deconstructionist theoreticians regard language as a construct that determines our perception of reality, thus they urge the going back to the sources, to the state before language in order to develop a language of our own to describe our perception of reality. A good example for experimenting with new ways of language-usage might be Hélène Cixous, French feminist thinker who tries to use the so-called “écriture féminine” (based on Lacan’s works) as a means to overcome language as a male construct.

<sup>249</sup> Lawrence, 1961: 118.

might appear in a different light. Evidently, Lawrence cannot escape the Foucauldian prophet-label attached to him, however, one has no other means of communication than language itself (and perhaps the example he sets by his way of living).<sup>250</sup> Although he talks about sex, thus he momentarily maintains the discursive power-relations, what he uses the sexual discourse for is most subversive. He urges people to *sexual realization* which does not equal sexual action or sexual discourse, but alludes to unification by sex in the face of individualism. It means refraining from both action and talk by getting the two in harmony. To conclude, let a final quotation from the same work (that is, from “Á Propos of Lady Chatterley”) stand here as a reminder of what Foucault mistook for a perfect illustration of his theory about sexual discourse:

Years of honest thoughts in sex, and years of struggling action in sex will bring us at last where we want to get, to our real and accomplished chastity, our completeness, when our sexual act and sexual thought are in harmony, and the one does not interfere with the other.<sup>251</sup>

What Lawrence as a prophet was after is in a sense the subversion of sexual discourse by excluding language itself from the interaction and rendering instead the *realization* of sex the central concern of the matter. Although he could not fend power-discourse off, what he was up to was precisely the elimination of language itself in order to enable humanity (or at least his readers) to take the next step towards a better, harmonious world after the tragedy of the First World War.

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<sup>250</sup> Although it was not mentioned but Lawrence was in desperate search of a remedy to the wounds he attributed to the war. After WWI he set out with his wife to their “savage pilgrimage” to find a place to live in peace and harmony. See Lawrence, 1984: i.

<sup>251</sup> Lawrence, 1961: 89.

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