



Faculty of Arts & Philosophy

Ruben De Baerdemaeker

# Masculinities that Matter

## Reading Hemingway and Lawrence with Judith Butler

Promotoren:	Prof. dr. Gert Buelens Vakgroep Engels Prof. dr. Marysa Demoor Vakgroep Engels
Decaan:	Prof. dr. Freddy Mortier
Rector:	Prof. dr. Paul Van Cauwenberge

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# Introduction

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## *Why Judith Butler?*

The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

This sentence won Judith Butler the 1998 Bad Writing Award, a short-lived gimmick instituted by the broadly named journal *Philosophy and Literature*. It should quickly be pointed out that this award was hardly a serious, let alone seriously damaging indictment of a scholar's work; the 1998 runner-up was Homi K. Bhabha, while the 1997 award went to Frederic Jameson, scholars whose work, like Butler's, has continued to figure at the forefront of scholarship in the humanities. In fact, their prominence does more to highlight *Philosophy and Literature's* own silent purpose: to attack high-profile and overtly left-wing academics in order to increase its readership. (Credit where credit is due: it certainly succeeded in raising its own profile.) The debate generated publicity and numerous comments, one of the more sophisticated of which assumed the form of a *New York Times* op-ed piece by Butler herself, followed in turn by a number of reactions in that very same newspaper. The controversy was

prolonged by Martha Nussbaum's vicious piece in *The New Republic*<sup>1</sup>, entitled "The Professor of Parody" (meaning, of course, Butler herself), which was then rapidly dismissed by such prominent feminists as, among others, Gayatri Spivak, Drucilla Cornell and Joan W. Scott. The whole controversy ultimately gave rise to a collection of essays edited by Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb, *Just Being Difficult?* – in which, incidentally, Butler is given the last word.

This whole fuss surrounding Judith Butler – an academic feud staged on such public battleground as the pages of a leading newspaper – points to two aspects of her notoriety that are crucial to this dissertation: primarily, the fact that her writing has drawn so much critical, sometimes vitriolic, commentary is a clear index of her impressive popularity<sup>2</sup> at least during the nineties. Secondly, the argument that her writing is "difficult" (which she makes no effort to deny, as is shown by the title of her essay "The Value of Difficulty") indicates why her work has been read in different, sometimes radically conflicting ways – is it materialist or idealist? Is it voluntarist or determinist? Is it even philosophy and, if it isn't, then what is it? The combination of these two factors – popularity and difficulty – has generated a minefield of interpretations, citations and (somewhat ironically in this case) resignifications: a quick digital search<sup>3</sup> turns up hundreds of references to *Gender Trouble* in a wide array of fields of study – which only begins to hint at the proliferation of words like *performativity*, *performance* and *performative* in academic discourse, particularly in the last decade of the twentieth century.

The fate of "popular" terms, however, is always tragic: the new buzz-word is picked up, taken out of its original context, used in such a variety of ways that, after a relatively short

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<sup>1</sup> This article appears to be no longer available from the *New Republic* website, but copies are easily available online.

<sup>2</sup> A classic index of academic success is the publishing of a "reader" devoted to the work of a single scholar. The *Judith Butler Reader* (ed. Sara Salih) was published in 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Through a popular academic database that is entirely in corporate hands and shall not be given any avoidable advertising here.

while, it has ceased to mean anything definite, and its users have wearied of its constant use, misuse and abuse. If, for example, words like deconstruction and poststructuralism are clearly past their popularity prime, performativity is no longer an awe-inspiring weapon of choice for any author seeking to add firepower to an argument.

This is not necessarily a bad thing, however: now that the buzz is over, maybe the accumulated clutter of significations can be scraped off, historical debris can be cleared, and the notion of performativity can be retrieved – reclaimed, even.<sup>4</sup> This dissertation, then, intends to do just that. It was born out of a set of questions surrounding the notion “Butler Revisited.” More accurately, perhaps, this should read “The Early Butler Revisited” – for, if the concept of performativity may seem a bit worse for wear, it would be unforgivable to claim the same of Butler herself (a point which will be addressed below). The main ambition of this dissertation is to revisit Butler’s theory for the purposes of literary analysis, almost twenty years after the publication of *Gender Trouble*.

### *Why Literature?*

Nussbaum, in her *New Republic* piece, describes Butler as follows: “[t]rained as a philosopher, she is frequently seen (more by people in literature than by philosophers) as a major thinker about gender, power, and the body.” It is true that Butler has had – and still has – huge appeal to researchers in the humanities, and that literature departments around the world have stocked more of her books than their colleagues in philosophy, but the same could be claimed of other feminists, or of proponents of post-colonial or trauma theory. Rather than devaluing Butler’s work, this may show that there is something about her take on gender and identity that is appealing to people who deal mainly with literary texts. Jonathan Culler provides an insightful hypothesis as to what this “something” may be:

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<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Spivak seems to favour the term “the performative” – which is clearly one way of circumventing a certain vagueness that is arguably the consequence of the overcitation of Butler’s text.

[T]he first result of the performative is to bring to center stage a use of language previously considered marginal – an active, world-making use of language, which resembles literary language – and to help us conceive of literature as act. [...] Second, for Austin, in principle at least, the performative breaks the link between meaning and the intention of the speaker, for what act I perform with my words is not determined by my intention but by social and linguistic conventions. [...] Since literary utterances are also events where the intention of the author is not thought to be what determines the meaning, here is another way in which the model of the performative seems highly pertinent. The model of the performative thus seems to provide a model of language that suits the analysis of literature better than competing models. (507)

It should be added that, apart from Culler's theoretical argument, Butler's writing draws heavily from sources that have traditionally carried a great deal of importance within literary theory and the practice of literary criticism: situating herself within a tradition of feminism, she happily combines psychoanalytic theory (Freudian, Lacanian, Kleinian), Foucauldian analyses of (bio-)power<sup>5</sup> and a "generally poststructuralist" outlook on identity and subjectivity.

Yet if there is any particular element in her early work that made her such a success amongst literary critics in the early nineties, it is surely that, though she remains deeply rooted in feminism (and, in the face of accusations to the opposite effect, is unwavering in proclaiming herself primarily a feminist), her subversive take on gender and identity makes her work immediately relevant to those who are *not* primarily feminists, *nor* primarily involved in Gay/Lesbian studies. Butler's real *tour-de-force*, on a political level, may well be that, by writing herself into the budding field of Queer Theory, she managed to make feminist theory relevant beyond feminism, and to make Gay/Lesbian studies relevant beyond the Gay/Lesbian community – precisely by asking: what is this category of "woman" that

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<sup>5</sup> The difficulty and seeming incongruity of combining Lacanian and Foucauldian theory is addressed at length in *The Psychic Life of Power* – indeed, the title indicates as much.

feminism claims to appertain to? What is this category of “gay” or “lesbian”? In fact, what is this “identity” we speak of?

### *Why Hemingway and Lawrence?*

If revisiting the concept of performativity for the purposes of literary analysis is the stated aim of this dissertation, then the literature to be analysed should ideally pose a challenge to the theory. This study focuses on selected works by Ernest Hemingway and D. H. Lawrence for a number of reasons, the most obvious being their reputation as macho, masculinist, hard-boiled or phallic authors who might be expected to resist a reading inspired by feminist theory, never mind a theory that questions and blurs the distinction between the masculine and the feminine. This is a terrifically crude generalisation, of course – and one that will not be allowed to stand – but it is probably safe to say that Lawrence and Hemingway hardly spring to mind as shining examples of feminism in high modernism.

And then there are additional reasons for taking Hemingway and Lawrence as a combined object of study: although, as authors, they are very different, the overlap of their careers, and the relative temporal proximity of the works discussed, make for a body of texts emerging from a shared historical background. And, though Lawrence was older than Hemingway, this historical background shows in the topics both authors deal with in their most successful novels: both were severely affected by the World War I (physically so in Hemingway’s case), both struggled to find a basis for morality in the climate of modernism, and both men spent significant amounts of their lives away from their native countries.

Hemingway and Lawrence, by the way, did not know each other. There is only this tantalising description of a near-encounter in Hemingway’s *True at First Light*:

[Mary:] 'Did you ever know him [Lawrence]'?



'No. I saw him and his wife once in the rain outside of Sylvia Beach's book shop in the Rue de l'Odéon. They were looking in the window and talking but they didn't go in. His wife was a big woman in tweeds and he was small in a big overcoat with a beard and very bright eyes. He didn't look well and I did not like to see him getting wet. It was warm and pleasant inside Sylvia's.'

'I wonder why he didn't go in?'

'I don't know. That was before people spoke to people they did not know, and long before people asked people for autographs.'

'How did you recognize him?'

'There was a picture of him in the shop behind the stove. I admired a book of stories he wrote called *The Prussian Officer* very much and a novel called *Sons and Lovers*. He used to write beautifully about Italy too.' (86)

One page before this passage, we read the following:

'Lawrence tried to tell about it,' I said. 'But I could not follow him because there was so much cerebral mysticism. I never believed he had slept with an Indian girl. Nor even touched one. He was a sensitive journalist sightseeing in Indian country and he had hatreds and theories and prejudices. Also he could write beautifully. But it was necessary for him, after a time, to become angry to write. He had done some things perfectly and he was at the point of discovering something most people do not know about when he began to have so many theories.' (85)

Given Hemingway's penchant for manipulating his own public image, and the urge to reinvent his past (as testified to by *A Moveable Feast* – the creatively non-fictional account of his Paris years), we may well wonder whether the near-encounter in Paris ever actually took place; it may well serve a different purpose. Lawrence published a positive review of

Hemingway's first short story collection, *In Our Time*, in the *Calendar of Modern Letters* in 1927, which reads thus:

Mr. Hemingway's sketches, for this reason, are excellent: so short, like striking a match, lighting a brief sensational cigarette, and it's over. His young love-affair ends as one throws a cigarette-end away. "It isn't fun anymore." – "Everything's gone to hell inside me."

It is really honest. And it explains a great deal of sentimentality. When a thing has gone to hell inside you, your sentimentalism tries to pretend it hasn't. But Mr. Hemingway is through with the sentimentalism. 'It isn't fun anymore. I guess I'll beat it.'

And he beats it, to somewhere else. In the end he'll be a sort of tramp, endlessly moving on for the sake of moving away from where he is. This is a negative goal, and Mr. Hemingway is really good, because he's perfectly straight about it [...] If he really doesn't care, then why should he care? Anyhow he doesn't. (*Introductions and Reviews*, 311-312)

It is impossible to prove whether or not Lawrence and Hemingway ever nearly met – Hemingway may very well have done Lawrence a posthumous return favour. The only thing that can be shown is that they were aware of each other's work, without there being any personal contact.

But what really makes this duo worth studying from a Butlerian point of view is not just that they wrote some of their works in the same period, that neither wrote from a feminist perspective (or any other given coherent theoretical perspective), or that they were both men struggling with the representation of gender in their works. Not even that both were, to use a very outdated phrase, great authors - both were masterful stylists, both created intricate narratives relevant to their times, both wrote complex, round, fascinating characters reflecting

the human condition. Added to all those things, the works discussed in this dissertation pose very different challenges to Butlerian theory.

### *Hemingway*

Hemingway's reputation as an author complicates the reputation of the work he actually authored. Even today, after decades of critical interventions, it is still difficult to separate the man from the myth, and the myth from the literary work.

With some narrative of his life, or parts of it, coursing through our collective national unconscious, how can we hope to remove Hemingway from our individual interpretations? He is there whether we consciously bring him there or not. The reluctance to let go of Hemingway is even more telling. It is the reason why he has become a cultural figure, why so many biographies have been written about him, why his name is now shorthand for various representations of masculinity that have importance in our society: the man's man, the sporting expert, the sexist bully, the wise Papa. (Moddelmog 1999, 15)

Hemingway had an extraordinary gift not only for the writing of fiction, but also for manipulating the "mechanism of fame" (as coined by Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman). And his fame, as Debra Moddelmog tells us, revolves mainly around matters of masculinity. Hemingway's focus on the masculine man tinges his literary reputation with the suspicion of misogyny (for an early example, and precedent, see Katherine M. Rogers' 1966 *The Troublesome Helpmate. A History of Misogyny in Literature*.) Fortunately, in recent years, Hemingway's persona has come under more intense scrutiny, which, combined with the rise of feminist and queer theories, has led to a critical re-evaluation of his work (a phenomenon, by the way, that applies to Lawrence as well). This re-evaluation was triggered, or at least stimulated, by the 1986 publication of *The Garden of Eden*, which, for all its

serious editorial problems, plays with gender, race and identity in a way that puts many of the idiosyncracies of Hemingway's classics in a wholly different perspective.

And yet much of the serious scholarship that seeks to reconsider gender in Hemingway fails to reconsider the role of biography in interpretation. From Mark Spilka's seminal *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny* (1990) through Comley and Scholes' *Hemingway's Genders* (1994) to Carl Eby's *Hemingway's Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood* (1999), the nineties saw a proliferation of (often very insightful) writing on Hemingway's gender politics often embedded in and supported by biography. The most successful Hemingway biography (both academically and financially) brought forth by this decade was Kenneth Lynn's *Hemingway* which, unsurprisingly, offers plenty of interpretations of Hemingway's work through reference to Hemingway's life (particularly, in good Freudian tradition, by reference to the problematic relationship with his mother).

This dissertation, without rejecting the results of this scholarly criticism, does not deal in biography. Its interests are interpretative and theoretical. It is tempting, of course, to read biography into, say, Harold Krebs and his mother, as it is tempting to read Harold Krebs into Hemingway – but that is a dialectic that would complicate the dialectic between literature and theory too much to be in any way helpful. What may be helpful, however, is Hemingway's particular prose style, most famously and succinctly defined by his own ice-berg metaphor (in *Death in the Afternoon*): write only the tip of the iceberg, and leave the reader to puzzle out – or guess at – what's underneath the surface.

This way of writing provides theoretical links to Butler: writing the “outside” of a character can be understood as writing the “performance” of a character, and, if this is the case, then Butler's theory may become an analytic tool to understand how the fictional character exist within the order, the normative system, that is the fictional text. The space that is thus taken up by normativity also ties in with the Hegelian concept of ekstacy, which plays

a role in Butler's writing<sup>6</sup>, and which refers to the way the subject is outside itself when it reflects upon itself. Essentially, ekstacy is a condition for the Hemingway's "code heroes" to exist: only in aspiring to be something they are not (yet) do Hemingway's protagonists (both male and female) find a source for ethics. The challenge posed to Butlerian theory, then, is that these characters seek fulfilment by approximating a gender ideal – the idea of which Butler works hard to undermine. These ideas, represented very concisely here, will be elaborated from different angles in the first part of this dissertation.

The first chapter on Hemingway, "Performative Patterns in Hemingway's 'Soldier's Home'" discusses one of the shortest short stories in *In Our Time* to examine how performativity always occurs within a certain discursive regime or normative system, and how the clash between two such systems affects protagonist Harold Krebs. "A Rotten Catholic: The Religion of Discontent in *The Sun Also Rises*" deals with Hemingway's first successful and classic novel to show how repetition and ritual can be framed in terms of performativity to explain how spirituality and religion fail to avert the tragedy that is *The Sun Also Rises*. "The Possibility of Solitude" returns to *In Our Time*, and more precisely to "Big Two-Hearted River" to ask the theoretical question of what happens to the socially instituted subject when it is deprived entirely of society. And, finally, "A Farewell to Stable Genders" proposes a Butlerian reading of *A Farewell to Arms* based on the ground covered in the preliminary chapters, to show how Butler may inspire a more general approach to a novel that has heterosexuality at its very center.

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<sup>6</sup> Fascinatingly, the concept is used in Butler's very first book (*Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*), and, though its presence is felt in much of her writing, doesn't resurface until *Giving an Account of Oneself*, where it plays a significant role.

## Lawrence

The trajectory of Lawrence's critical reputation somewhat resembles that of Hemingway's, particularly in its struggle to recover from feminist attack. Kate Millett's seminal *Sexual Politics* (1969) not only fuelled feminist literary criticism in the seventies, it also condemned Lawrence as an author interested primarily in the repressing and objectifying of women<sup>7</sup>:

While insisting his mission is the noble and necessary task of freeing sexual behavior of perverse inhibition, purging the fiction which describes it of prurient or prudish euphemism, Lawrence is really the evangelist of quite another cause – “phallic consciousness.” 238

Sadly, the main critical strategy that allowed Millet to argue her case, was to read Lawrence's text as necessarily autobiographical, and to read protagonists in the novels and short stories as incarnations of Lawrence himself:

All the romances of his later fiction are a reworking of his parents' marriage, and of his own too, modelled on theirs [...].

Paul Morel is of course Lawrence himself, (246)

[*Women in Love's*] hero Rupert Birkin, is Lawrence himself. (262)

However, even Sandra Gilbert, early feminist advocate of Lawrence<sup>8</sup>, is compelled to admit that

There seems to be no doubt about it. At his most fanatic, specifically in the period when he produced such so-called “leadership” novels as *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*, Lawrence made countless statements of the kind that we would now label “sexist”. (x)

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<sup>7</sup> This position reverberates in the work of, for instance, Bonnie Kime Scott (*The Gender of Modernism*) and Cornelia Nixon (*Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn against Women*).

<sup>8</sup> Her book *Acts of Attention: The Poems of D.H. Lawrence* was based on her doctoral dissertation, which was finished in 1968, i.e. before *Sexual Politics*

And yet:

Even at his most overtly masculinist, I sensed that Lawrence did not quite fit into what I'd now call the "patriarchal modes" in which I had been educated. He didn't pontificate about "tradition." He didn't lecture about "law" or "form." Scrupulous artist though he was, he didn't have grandiose and authoritative authorial intentions. Instead, he *attended* – as he himself said, and as I tried to stress through the title of my book – nakedly, with a sort of mystical passivity, to the flux of experience and the fluidity of language. [...]

It was, finally, for this "life-rapidity" – this intuitive acquiescence in a transcription of powers outside the self – that I honored Lawrence. Nor was I the only female reader to do so. (xii)

Hemingway studies and Lawrence studies seem to share this characteristic that the personalities of these two authors loom so large over their own oeuvre that it is tempting to read the author into the work. Millet's study is symptomatic of this trend in Lawrence scholarship – a trend which often combines with a psychoanalytic interest.<sup>9</sup> From this point of view, it is interesting how much ink has been spilled about both Hemingway's and Lawrence's relationship to their respective mothers,<sup>10</sup> and how both became literary personages heavily associated with aggressive modes of masculinity.

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<sup>9</sup> Psychoanalysts have lapped up Lawrence's work from the word go. American psychiatrist Alfred Booth Kuttner, reviewed *Sons and Lovers* in 1915 and published a Freud-inspired article on that same novel in 1916. For a very good overview of psychoanalytic criticism of Lawrence, see James C. Cowan *D. H. Lawrence: Self and Sexuality*, chapter I. Cowan's own readings are themselves excellent examples of how biography and psychoanalysis inform textual analysis: "Lawrence's literary work emerges from the matrix of his personal psychological experience, including his psychosexual experience. That alone is reason enough to make an effort to understand him in these terms." (xiv-xv)

<sup>10</sup> If Kenneth Lynn's Hemingway biography expounds Hemingway's oedipal problems, then John Worthen's biographies of D.H. Lawrence are its counterparts. And if there is an ongoing biographical debate about whether Hemingway was more influenced by his mother or by the wounds he sustained at the Italian front, then Lawrence biographers are divided over whether either his mother or his wife were the greater influence – or burden. (In this respect, Brenda Maddox's *The Married Man* makes for a nice counterpart to Worthen's gigantic bio.)

Lawrence's mother will play no part in this dissertation, nor will his wife, nor will his personal life – the stage should remain uncluttered by biography and the spotlight point at a selection of texts. The first chapter on Lawrence deals with his two non-fictional texts about the subconscious, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*. These theoretical texts demonstrate the potential difficulties of reading Lawrence from a Butlerian point of view: their views of consciousness and subjectivity are apparently diametrically opposed – an opposition that, given Lawrence's penchant for discussing big ideas in his novels, is carried over into his fiction as well. Lawrence's "challenge" to Butler could be formulated as follows: how can you read the prediscursive body if you deny its existence?

The fictional works that will be discussed are two of Lawrence's most famous novels, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The discussion of *Women in Love* also addresses Thomas Strychacz' *Dangerous Masculinities: Conrad, Hemingway and Lawrence*, a recent study whose intentions and subject matter are very close to my own, not only in discussing gender in Hemingway and Lawrence, but also in adopting an explicitly Butlerian angle. I focus on Strychacz' discussion of *Women in Love* to outline how my reading and use of Butler is fundamentally different. The final chapter of this dissertation is a fairly detailed Butlerian reading of one of the most infamous and "sexy" novels of the twentieth century, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

### *Which Butler Did It?*

The obvious problem for any study that takes Judith Butler as its point of departure is that there is no such thing as a monolithic Butlerian theory that is there to be grasped and applied. Butler has written on various subjects from various angles and continues to change her focus and write about topics that are relevant in the world (the world of academia as well as the "real" world) today. Though her theories of gender made her famous, it is important to



stress that Butler is not solely a gender theorist. Only three of her books are entirely devoted to gender: *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter* and *Undoing Gender*. (It is hardly a coincidence that these three books are published by Routledge and come in the exact same size.) *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* form the theoretical backbone of this project, but even these two books do not necessarily present one clean theory, particularly as *BTM* was written primarily as a response to criticisms and misreadings of the earlier *Gender Trouble*. (*Undoing Gender*, then, seems like a bit of a latecomer, published more than ten years after *BTM* and dealing less with performativity but more with specific issues of trans- and intersexuality.)

Apart from these works that deal explicitly with gender, this dissertation will also lean on some of Butler's further work in the area of (for lack of a more precise denomination) "critical theory" – *The Psychic Life of Power* (which deals with the difficulties that arise from the juxtaposition of Lacan and Foucault) , *Excitable Speech* (which returns to the Austinian performative in order to investigate the mechanisms of hate speech), and, particularly, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (a typically eclectic book arguing the "primacy of the Other").

Charting Butler's work on a timeline shows up a remarkable evolution, one that she herself describes as a move "from a focus on performativity to a more general concern with precarity." ("Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics", i) This is a shift that has proved very fruitful: *Precarious Life* is one of the most intelligent post-9/11 books to date, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, essentially a conversation with Gayatri Spivak, is at the forefront of current debates on (post-)nationalism, and her latest monograph at the time of writing, *Frames of War*, tackles the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan head-on. These books, however, will not be referenced in what follows, precisely because they are thematically so far removed from *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* that the amalgamation of theories and ideas would

become too unwieldy to be a helpful tool for literary analysis.<sup>11</sup> (I have no doubt, however, that particularly *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* can shed light on fictionalised traumatic events as well as actual instances of violence – but that does not lie within the scope of this dissertation).

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<sup>11</sup> The same goes for *Antigone's Claim* and *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (a highly technical discussion with Slavoj Žižek and Ernesto Laclau). Butler's shifting focus does, however, entail a shift that may actually bring her closer to the world of *belles-lettres*: despite her fierce repudiation of those critics who accused her of writing "badly," it would seem that her style has become more lucid, less rigid, and less jargon-ridden over the years.

*Literature and Theory: A Double-Barrelled Methodology*

“Literary interpretation, like virtue, is its own reward” claims Stanley Fish – thus, it may not be necessary to justify writing about two Dead White Males. What may desire justification, however, is juxtaposing literature and theory without granting clear methodological priority to one over the other. The reasoning behind it is simple and transparent, even if the result may not be: if the theory can show something about the literature that has not been shown before or, ideally, cannot be shown without the theory, then the effort has been worthwhile. Secondly, if the literature can add interest or nuance to the theory, then that, too, is worthwhile (only, in this direction and in this case, one should obviously bear in mind that the theory was not conceived to deal with literature, so that, for instance, Butler can clearly not be blamed for failing to explain Lawrence).

There are a few problems with these assumptions. First of all, throwing a new theory at a piece of fiction will undoubtedly yield some sort of result, in the same way that hitting someone over the head with a hammer will produce a different effect from hitting that same person over the head with a cricket bat. Hammer or bat, however, the effect in both cases is predictable (not to mention painful), and the difference uninteresting. Clearly, when resorting to theory, it is the critic’s task to enable a reading that is not entirely predictable – and, hopefully, manages to be of interest. Seeing as neither predictability nor interest are quantifiable research objectives, it is clear from the outset that the outcome of this project may not be univocally positive or negative.

The second, but closely related, problem is that the mixing of theory and literature cannot be done in a sterile Petri dish or vial: the vessel employed in this instance is the necessarily tainted and contaminated researcher, smeared with the fungal spores of subjectivity, shrouded with the lab coat of convention and restricted to the rusty realms of unreliable reasoning. In an attempt to take into account the unsanitary conditions of this

experiment, however, this dissertation can rely only on the given theoretical and literary texts. Therefore, the method employed in much of what follows is close reading – old-fashioned, perhaps, subjective, certainly, but still an excellent way of (quite literally) “making sense” of a text.

Depending on the literary text under scrutiny, various aspects of Butler’s work will be turned to, and various passages from that work will be brought into play. Often, Butler will be joined by one or more other theorists or philosophers, but the main commitment of this project is to remain faithful to Butler’s original work. This introduction does not provide a comprehensive outline of Butler’s theory – nor even a limited outline – because each of the chapters should be able to stand more or less on its own, containing the theoretical background referred to.

What follows, then, is an experiment. It is not, nor was it ever intended to be, an overview or comprehensive discussion of Butlerian theory; it is not an all-encompassing study of Lawrence and Hemingway, and it is not a systematic approach to gender in modernism. As an experiment, it can go wrong, it could blow up, or nothing might happen at all – but, whatever the outcome, it should at least lead to some new insight.

Part I:

Hemingway

# Performative Patterns in Hemingway's "Soldier's Home."

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## *Patterned Pictures*

Ernest Hemingway referred to "Soldier's Home" as "the best short story I ever wrote" (Hemingway 1981, 139). In the short story collection *In Our Time*, the story does stand out if only because its protagonist, an American soldier in the aftermath of WWI, is not, as a reader might have come to expect, Nick Adams, but the oddly named Harold Krebs. It will not do to embrace Harold Krebs as just another version of the same old Nick Adams (or, indeed, as some would have it, as yet another straightforward literary incarnation of Hemingway himself). "Readers must wonder why Hemingway chose 'Krebs' instead of 'Nick,'" David Ullrich asserts in an article dedicated to teasing out the meanings conjured up by this protagonist's name. This story is different from those featuring Nick as a protagonist: this main character is not caught by the safety net of the famous Hemingway "code" – he slips through its mazes.

The text famously opens with a description of two photographs, forced into a parallelism that brings out the significant contrast between the worlds – or the potential safety nets – that they represent:

There is a picture which shows him among his fraternity brothers, all of them wearing exactly the same height and style collar. [...] There is a picture which shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal. Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. (Hemingway 2003, 111)

These snapshots introduce the double backdrop against which Harold Krebs's story will unfold, and they prefigure the antagonism that will direct its narrative. With reference to a

theoretical framework based on the work of Judith Butler, this paper will trace how Krebs becomes an outsider to what once was his life, and how his tragedy is brought about by the conflicting social norms that govern his behaviour – i.e. the norms of the respective societies represented by aforementioned photographs.

The first picture seems to signify a traditional American schooling and education fuelled by a juvenile form of (homo)sociality<sup>12</sup>: there are no women in this picture, and the *fraternity brothers* (first-rate homosocial pleonasm) wear collars of the exact same height and style, as a token of male bonding. This American ideal of youthful masculinity clashes with the uniformed male version of the second picture – a clash announced by the story’s very first sentence: “Krebs went to the war from a Methodist college in Kansas” (111). Women are suddenly present in this picture, and the hint of blossoming sexuality is highlighted through the remark that Krebs and his fellow soldier “look too big for their uniforms” (111). Though it may be far-fetched to suggest they are swollen with phallic desire, their size, their outgrowing the rigid convention of uniforms, conjures up an altered masculinity, one that is no longer strictly constrained by the limits of uniformity. That there is something out of joint in this evolution is suggested by the deadpan statement that “The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the photograph” (111).<sup>13</sup> This small narrative diptych is more than a chronological prologue to introduce the protagonist, as it already contains most topoi and tensions that will dominate the further story.

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<sup>12</sup> In the tradition initiated by Eve Sedgwick’s early work (most notably *Epistemology of the Closet*), I use the words “homosocial” and “homosociality” to refer to male bonding that is not homosexual, but rests on a disavowal of the possibility of homosexuality.

<sup>13</sup> Kennedy and Curnutt have pointed out that this sentence refers to a line in Gertrude Stein’s *Geography and Plays*: “In the photograph the Rhine hardly showed” (Kennedy and Curnutt, 1992).

## Performativity

This sense of “outgrowing” a uniform pattern is the main theme of “Soldier’s Home.” The two pictures at the beginning of this story emblemise different styles of normativity – networks or patterns of norms and regulations that shape the people they encompass. This interplay between normativity and subjectivity, is precisely the main subject of Butler’s early work though theorising the institution of the subject within social norms functioning as constitutive constraints has remained at the very core of Butler’s thought even into more recent work such as *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) (which has no explicitly gendered angle and thus seems to digress from the bulk of her earlier writing).

Reading Butler alongside Hemingway can be productive, as was shown by Thomas Strychacz in his book *Hemingway’s Theaters of Masculinity*. As the title implies, Strychacz focuses explicitly on the performative quality of Hemingway’s male protagonists, most notably Francis Macomber. He proposes a “hermeneutics of performance [that] undertakes to enter the sliding ground of signification, which renders meaning contextual and constative utterances rhetorical” (48). My own project, though similar, does not so much want to highlight the theatricality of Harold Krebs’ gender identity, but rather to investigate its underpinnings.

It is certainly not the intention of this chapter to simply apply a dab of queer theory to Hemingway’s text and give it a pink coating. This reading was triggered by the recurrent references to “patterns” that, in this story, crop up in various guises – from geometric to social. This paper therefore analyses the patterns and matrices, nets and mazes that protagonist Harold Krebs attempts to live his life.<sup>14</sup> If the individual is always instituted, again and again, by performing the norms laid down by its environment, this may account for

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<sup>14</sup> It should be acknowledged here that Robert W. Lewis also wrote an article about the idea of patterns in “Soldier’s Home,” but focused his analysis on the importance of sports as “patterned” activities. I will try to show here that “patterns” can and should be construed more broadly to bring out dimensions of identity politics that otherwise remain entirely hidden.



Krebs' difficulties in coping with the narrative of his past upon finding himself in a completely different setting.

### *Lies*

Upon returning to his home town, wanting to talk about his war experiences, "Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie" (111). Having moved from the Methodist college in Kansas to the war in Europe, Krebs does not retrieve his sense of fitting in even when back in the States (a sense of fitting in so tellingly illustrated by the story's opening snapshot). The setting of (post-)wartime Europe differs so greatly from homey Oklahoma that it becomes impossible to speak the truth about the war. Krebs moves from the "pattern" of college to the pattern of war back to the pattern of home, but he has lost his talent for uniformity along the way. Krebs's life in Okla-home is patterned, but does not fit in with the local ethos:

He was sleeping late in bed, getting up to walk down town to the library to get a book, eating lunch at home, reading on the front porch until he became bored and then walking down through the town to spend the hottest hours of the day in the cool dark of the pool room. He loved to play pool. In the evening he practised on his clarinet, strolled down town, read and went to bed. (112)

Clearly, our soldier's home is beset with fewer extremes than Belleau Wood and Soissons, and its inhabitants seem scarcely interested in the truth about the war. Even Krebs's parents show no real interest in their son's recent experiences: "[His mother] often came in when he was in bed and asked him to tell her about the war, but her mind always wandered. His father was non-committal" (112).

The “quite unimportant lies” (111)<sup>15</sup> that Krebs finds himself compelled to tell have a curious effect on him: “A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told” (111) – a distaste evolving into “the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration” (112). At this stage, Krebs is in the process of losing whatever positive memories he may have had about his time in Europe – for it becomes clear that not all was miserable there, especially after the war had finished.<sup>16</sup>

Krebs’s growing distaste for his own war memories is emblematised in the way he interacts with former fellow-soldiers:

When he occasionally met another man who had really been a soldier and they talked a few minutes in the dressing room at a dance he fell into the easy *pose* of the old soldier among other soldiers: that he had been badly, sickeningly frightened all the time. In this way he lost everything. (112, my italics)

That Krebs is obliged to *pose* even in the company of people with whom he shares bits of his past illustrates the extent to which his and others’ view of the past is always tainted by the present. Past experiences become embedded in the pattern of the present, and, concretely, the experience of war sediments into a myth, a narrative that adapts itself to present circumstances, not facts in the past. Memories, then, as soon as they are actualised and present-ed in the form of narrative, acquire a performative value. Memory needs to be re-enacted or, rather, reconfigured in language to become intelligible within the discourse of the present, and this is a transition that Harold Krebs is not capable of making.

Belleau Wood has rendered his mother’s pious language and framework of conventional belief a nonsense. The world now contingent to Krebs is one from which he is

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<sup>15</sup> J.F. Kobler argued that these “lies” indicate that Krebs was merely present “at” battles without actually taking part in them, and that Hemingway intended this story as an oblique “*mea culpa*” for overstating his own role in WWI. Steven Trout, however, rebutted Kobler’s argumentation, and the actual nature of Krebs’s part on the battlefield need not be particularly relevant here.

<sup>16</sup> As Hemingway wrote in a letter to his family, recovering from his war wound in Italy: “So you see that while war isn’t funny a lot of funny things happen in war” (Selected Letters, 16).

absolutely disconnected – whose language and values he cannot share. (Peter Messent 1992, 15)

Krebs, then, comes undone, or “lost everything” (112), because he is not in touch with home, or does not feel at home in Oklahoma, and because this present unease, paradoxically, taints his past, rather than vice versa. The paradox we encounter is that it is not his past actions that generate a particular status within a contemporary regime (a status as, say, war hero), but that the present in fact alters Krebs’ very memory of the past. In the extreme case of Harold Krebs, there is a complete dissolution between the war and his American home to the extent that his narrative about the past war cannot be accommodated in the present.

With regard to “Soldier’s Home”, John McKenna and David Raabe, inspired by “temperament theory” boldly claim: “Language is an abstraction. Talk can never substitute for the event itself” (204). But what the story really shows is that language and talk are necessary in order to preserve an event as a factor in one’s self, in one’s *narrative identity*.<sup>17</sup> The tragedy of Harold Krebs, then, lies not in *having to talk* or *having to lie*, but in being unable to *translate* experiences into the paradigm(s) expected in small-town USA. One may even suggest that it is this inability to translate the past into a past-as-present that causes Krebs’s passivity and apparent disaffectedness.

## Sex

He would have liked to have a girl but he did not want to have to spend a long time getting her. He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics. He did not want to have to do any courting. He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn’t worth it.

He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences. Besides he did not really need a girl. The

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<sup>17</sup> “Narrative identity” is a concept borrowed from the work of Paul Ricoeur. It has an interesting correlate in the recent writings of neurophysiologist Antonio Damasio, who speaks of “autobiographical self.”

army had taught him that. It was all right to pose as though you had to have a girl.

Nearly everybody did that. But it wasn't true. You did not need a girl. (112-113)

Sexuality is a crucial factor in this particular story and in the construction of our protagonist's identity. Krebs's sexual development is woven through the story's back- and foreground and is mixed up with his inability to (re-)adapt to life as he once knew it. Harold Krebs's heterosexual desires have a strong homosocial incentive. The college photograph introduces homosociality in the opening lines of the story, and the concept is naturally extended into the military. The second snapshot sporting two German women may seem to speak against this reasoning, yet, as the passage just quoted makes clear, sexual encounters were part of the army's male homosocial regime. Heterosexuality becomes an extension of homosociality, and the latter remains in the background as a safety net: there is no need for Krebs to become committed to a heterosexual relationship or to a female other, since wanting to have a girl is only a "pose" associated with the male world of the army.<sup>18</sup>

Assumedly, Krebs's first sexual experiences take place in Europe against the backdrop of the war (this seems to be implied by the story's opening paragraphs), which goes some way in explaining his unwillingness to make an effort to get in touch with an American girl. Back in Oklahoma, Krebs suddenly lacks the homosocial bonds that shaped his sexuality and finds himself facing a complex cluster of relationships he is no longer a part of: "But they [the girls] lived in such a complicated world of already defined alliances and shifting feuds that Krebs did not feel the energy or the courage to break into it" (112). Having lost the male bonds that shaped his life (and his sexual desire) thus far, Krebs is unable to substitute the

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<sup>18</sup> A relevant and more elaborate correlate to the way homosocial ties produce heterosexuality can be found in *A Farewell to Arms*, where Frederic's love for Catherine is really only a pose at first, initiated by Rinaldi's interest in Catherine. E.g.: "His breath went away. 'I won't kiss you if you don't want. I'll send your English girl. Good-by, baby. The cognac is under the bed. Get well soon'" (62). In *AFTA*, of course, this love affair develops to a far greater extent, and Frederic Henry manages to establish a more meaningful relationship than ever seems plausible for Harold Krebs.

proper American heterosexual matrix for the tightly woven homosocial fabric he is used to. In her discussion of Freud's take on melancholia, Butler writes:

In cases in which an ambivalent relationship is severed through loss, that ambivalence becomes internalized as a self-critical or self-debasing disposition in which the role of the other is now occupied and directed by the ego itself. (Butler 1999, 73-74)

The loss that Krebs suffers upon returning home – the loss of the homosocial ties he had relied on since high school – becomes part of his identity structure. The ambivalence of his sexuality (heterosexuality as produced by homosocial desire), as Butler tells us, can only result in melancholy self-debasement. Freud was, of course, particularly interested in the development of sexuality in childhood – and Butler focuses on the same issue – but this does not make the idea of melancholia as a necessary component of sexuality any less relevant to Krebs. We will see that Krebs's relationship with his parents is problematic, to say the least – which becomes most blatantly obvious when Harold flatly tells his mum he does not love her. The crux of Krebs's sexuality is a nexus of loss and melancholia that reflects the formation of identity in the Oedipal stage. Krebs, through the loss he sustains, relives an oedipal scenario in which love for the (m)other has to be disavowed in order to be deflected onto a different object. Only, in Krebs's case, he does not find his way out of the triangle.

### *He liked the pattern*

In an attempt to deal with life in Oklahoma, Krebs decides to step outside of social life: he becomes interested in patterns.

There were so many good-looking young girls. Most of them had their hair cut short. When he went away only little girls wore their hair like that or girls that were fast. They all wore sweaters and shirt waists with round Dutch collars. It was a pattern. (112)

The pattern Krebs likes to watch only becomes a pattern when it is observed from the outside. Only through remaining on the outside of society, is it possible to perceive social phenomena as a structure. “If the ‘I’ is not at one with moral norms, this means only that the subject must deliberate upon these norms, and that part of deliberation will entail a critical understanding of their social genesis and meaning” (Butler 2005, 8). If, in her early work, Butler emphasised how the subject is always constituted by the social norms that condition its emergence, her more recent writing leaves more room for a critical subject, a subject that is reflexive and takes itself and its own emergence as an object of thought. Krebs, rather than studying himself, is not “at one” with the norms he inhabits and is therefore able to study those norms as an uninvolved spectator. The patterns he finds in – or, more accurately, imposes upon – his surroundings are problematic: the longing for structure seems to reflect the melancholic desire for that lost homosocial space. It is not a coincidence, then, that he likes the girls with the boyish haircuts<sup>19</sup> and flat shoes, nor is it a coincidence that he likes them for the patterned regularity reminiscent of his own high-school picture:

He liked the look of them much better than the French girls or the German girls. But the world they were in was not the world he was in. He would like to have one of them. But it was not worth it. They were such a nice pattern. He liked the pattern. It was exciting.

(113)

The sexualised desire for regularity becomes apparent not only in observing these American young ladies, but also in Harold’s pastimes: for one thing, “He loved to play pool” (112) – an activity harmless enough in its own right, but one that heavily relies on geometrical abstractions. Billiards is exactly the kind of game that demands the construction of an abstract mathematical pattern from the actual position of balls on the table. Krebs’s liking sports

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<sup>19</sup> Hair (and especially women with short hair) is an often discussed topos throughout Hemingway’s writing, occurring from, quite literally, his very first until his very last book. For an overview of critical response to this peculiarity, see Eby, 17-19.

because of their patterned and inconsequential nature was already commented on by Robert Lewis, who focused particularly on “Hemingway’s Concept of Sport”:

Truly, pool, motoring (as pastime), and girls’ softball are mindless activities that are patterned (carefully patterned in the case of pool and softball), just as courtship and “getting ahead” are, but the restrictions or rules of sport are purely arbitrary and gratuitous and without pretense to meaning or significance outside themselves. (Lewis 1970, 25)

Apart from sports, however, there are still other patterned activities in Harold Krebs’s life: how about his playing the clarinet? Few things are more mathematically patterned than music – and clarinets, like many other musical instruments, require knowledge of fingering *patterns*. Consider also that the clarinet was originally a German instrument that became very popular in American jazz in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and it becomes apparent that the instrument even shares Harold Krebs’s ethnic background, so that one might go so far as to say that this instrument (the shape of which is perhaps too obviously phallic to be interesting) symbolises a successful transition from the old world to the new that Krebs finds himself unable to emulate.

We are told that reading plays a big part in Krebs’s life-pattern, and we later find out what it is Harold reads:

He sat there on the porch reading a book on the war. It was a history and he was reading about all the engagements he had been in. It was the most interesting reading he had ever done. He wished there were more maps. He looked forward with a good feeling to reading all the really good histories when they would come out with good detail maps. (113)

Maps are an abstraction from reality yet again, reducing geographic space to an interpretation.<sup>20</sup> Krebs is attempting to acquire an overview of his own past, and finds enjoyment in treating his present surroundings in the same way. The problem that arises, however, is that this approach to life leads only to a rational and abstract view of the trouble Krebs tries to deal with. In an extra Oedipal twist, Krebs becomes exactly like his father: non-committal.

One of the most striking (and hence often remarked-upon) characteristics of this particular short story is the way Hemingway uses repetitions and parallelisms: in the middle section of the story especially, we find an alternation of sentences beginning with “He liked” and “He did not want”, occasionally varying into “He would have liked” or “He wished.” Wendolyn Tetlow suggests that

in the second paragraph the recurrence six times of “he did not like” and “he did not want” counterpointing “he liked” in the first paragraph, creates a rhythm of “yes-no” that parallels the tension in the story between reluctance and persistence. The rhythm makes clear the conflict between Krebs’s desires and what he is able to deal with, or rather, life as it is. (73)

This interpretation seems plausible, while others, like Kennedy and Curnutt, point out that “[t]hroughout ‘Soldier’s Home,’ echoes of [Gertrude] Stein’s rhythms and repetitions infuse Hemingway’s style” (5).<sup>21</sup> There may be a specific reason for Hemingway’s use of Steinian repetitions in this particular story, however: through the repetitions, the story gains structural unity because of the recurring *pattern* generated by these repetitions. The reader is forced into a position similar to that of Krebs, as we are forced to read the pattern and impose meaning

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Stewart also notes this, and adds: “But patterns are not the same as the day-to-day reality of war, nor are patterns of love a substitute for the real thing.” (65)

<sup>21</sup> The stylistic link to Stein is certainly there (and Michael Reynolds has argued that *In Our Time* is in fact full of references and tributes to Sherwood Anderson, Joyce, Turgenev and Stein).



onto the story. In imposing meaning upon a story, the reader is arguably caught up in the same desire for abstraction that Krebs suffers from.

### *Psychic Excess*

The reader attempting to puzzle out the patterns in the story is, of course, not necessarily a social failure in the way Krebs is one, but he or she assumes a similar position of outsideness. The structure, the pattern of society (or the text) generates a position that is not encompassed by this structure – a certain “excess” that cannot be captured by the normativity that is and remains its foundation. The concept of excess is vital to think Butler and Krebs together, and it puts Krebs in a different light: he is fundamentally tied up in the “pattern” he attempts to study, as it is the structure of society that makes his own subjectivity possible. A person is always *more*, however, than the position society allots to him or her: in Butler’s account of subjectivity, social constraints always create more than they can contain – a certain “psychic excess.”

Excess, that which is not captured by norms and regulations, is already apparent in the picture that shows Krebs and the other corporal looking “too big for their uniforms.” If, previously, this phrase was interpreted as having a sexual connotation, it may well be argued that it shows Krebs’s evolution into a more mature individual, both in terms of sexuality and of intellectual development. Krebs is in a position where the uniform itself does not contain him – the structure that is meant to constitute him as a soldier produces something more than a soldier. The American structure Krebs returns to cannot encompass him either: Krebs no longer fits in, and the ways in which he has “grown” in Europe lead him into passivity. Being and remaining outside of the pattern one studies also forecloses any serious form of

commitment: one turns one's surroundings into an object of study, and no longer interacts with it, or the people in it.

*Interaction* is precisely what Krebs intends to avoid: "He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences" (113). Consequences are parts of patterns governed by causality. The pool table may be seen as a symbol of the workings of causality safely confined to a non-permeable frame (even quite literally): one ball causes another to move in a mathematically predictable direction, but its course will be stopped by the frame of the pool table and not prove of any consequence outside. In the case of human beings interacting, however, psychology and indeterminacy take over and consequences can no longer be accurately predicted. Krebs therefore resolves to stay away from intersubjectivity and chaos, and lives in a world of rational abstraction limited to predictable outcomes.

Butler suggests that "ethical deliberation is bound up with the operation of critique" (2005, 8), which implies that the subject who is "not at one with moral norms" and deliberates upon those norms shares this position with the critic. This is not to say that Krebs becomes a cultural critic, but his outlook on society allows him to obtain a view of norms and patterns that the critic would be equally eager to tease out. Krebs's delicate position on the margins of society will ultimately cause him to trespass against some of its most fundamental values. To reflect on moral norms is to assume a distance from them, and it is only from a position of awareness of those norms that one can sin against them: only after eating from the tree of knowledge, do we find out what constitutes sin – and thus we find ourselves outside the social field of paradise. Thus, in choosing to step outside the social field he enjoys observing, Krebs becomes more liable to break its rules. He thinks too much – such men are dangerous.

### *The Great Taboo*

A dimension of “Soldier’s Home” that seems to have been downplayed or underemphasised in much criticism is the relationship between Krebs and his younger sister and, especially, to what extent this relationship might be justifiably thought of as incestuous.<sup>22</sup>

“I tell them all you’re my beau. Aren’t you my beau, Hare?”

“You bet.”

“Couldn’t your brother really be your beau just because he’s your brother?”

“I don’t know”

“Sure you know. Couldn’t you be my beau, Hare, if I was old enough and if you wanted to?”

“Sure. You’re my girl now.”

“Am I really your girl?”

“Sure.”

“Do you love me?”

“Uh, huh.”

“Will you love me always?”

“Sure.” (114)

This whole dialogue may be friendly banter or innocent playacting, but it is only too clear that an incestuous relationship between Harold and one of his sisters is at least conjured up on a *discursive* level. Add into the equation that “[h]e was still a hero to his two younger sisters” (112) – the hero that he could not be to his fellow townsmen – and it seems that Harold’s

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<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Lynn toys with the idea and, not untypically, links it Hemingway’s childhood “twinning” experience and Carl Eby also takes a psychoanalytic interest in the matter, but others simply state: “This is surely not the case” (McKenna and Raabe 1997). The incest motif in “The Last Good Country” seems to be more widely acknowledged and accepted.

affects vis-à-vis his sister may not be altogether “innocent” by the simple moral standards of, for instance, his deeply religious mother.

Significantly, Krebs’s sister engages in an activity that can be called patterned<sup>23</sup>, and she trespasses against a gender boundary whilst doing so, firmly treading on the homosocial ground of Krebs’s past: she plays baseball and, according to herself, “can pitch better than lots of the boys. I tell them all you [Krebs] taught me. The other girls aren’t much good” (114). In this respect, it is definitely meaningful that she is the one who brings in the mail and hands Harold *The Kansas City Star*, which he then opens to the *sporting* page. She even seems to have picked up on the interest this situation may arouse in Krebs and, when the latter is reluctant to come and watch her play (indoor) baseball, actively twists sexuality and sports into emotional blackmail: “Aw, Hare, you don’t love me. If you loved me, you’d want to come over and watch me play indoor” (115). The conversation ends abruptly (but by no means coincidentally) when mother Krebs comes in with Harold’s breakfast (an invigorating start to a man’s day, consisting of two fried eggs, crisp bacon, and a plate of buckwheat cakes to be topped with maple syrup) and tells her daughter to “run along.” She interrupts the (mock)sexualised conversation between brother and sister, and emphatically addresses the latter using her first name. The whole conversation between Harold and his sister takes up no more than a page, much of which is Hemingwayesque, space-consuming dialogue. After Helen’s first teasing sentence, we read: “Krebs looked at her. He liked her. She was his best sister.” (114) Not until after the dialogue do we find out that her name is Helen. We never learn the other sister’s name, nor does she put in an appearance anywhere in the story.

The story concludes with the sentence: “He would go over to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball” (116) Helen is here named for only the second time in the story.

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<sup>23</sup> Sports correspond to patterns in the way that pool does so: a set of abstract rules makes for a situation that needs to be interpreted with the aid of those rules. For a more thorough discussion of the significance of sports in “Soldier’s Home,” see Robert W. Lewis (1970).

All in all, she crops up four times in the story, with surprisingly regular intervals in between – a lovely pattern indeed. The first time, she is one of “his two young sisters” (112) and the second time she is explicitly focalised through Harold as “his best sister” (114). The contrast between Harold thinking of her as “sister” before their flirtatious chat, and his decision to go and watch “Helen” play baseball, thus seems tied up with the mother’s naming the sister. Mother Krebs names Helen in order to try and pull Harold back into normal family life, but, instead, it seems that, because of the concretisation of “sister” into “Helen,” she becomes more attractive to Harold – for it is her company he decides to seek at the end of the story.

If mere naming is significant, then so is the name itself: the mythological Helen (of Troy) was blessed with legendary beauty and a talent for seduction. The sexual attraction inherent in the name Helen may well be the result of her parentage, her mother, Leda, famously having slept with Zeus, in the guise of a swan. The name “Helen” thus carries connotations of illegitimate sexuality and a disregard for the rules that constitute a normally functioning family. Apart from that, she is alliteratively associated with her brother, who is not only Harold, but also a Hero to her. (This alliteration is emphasised by the line: “You run along, Helen,” she [mother] said. “I want to talk to Harold” (115).)

Seeing that the conversation between Helen and Harold is interrupted at this crucial point, it becomes the perfect situation for Krebs in being of *no consequence*. For a man like Harold Krebs, who wants no consequences, how can any conversation be better than an eroticised chat with his sister (in whom he can have no official sexual interest, seeing that she is his sister), about an event as confined as indoor baseball (if baseball is already appealing in its own right – being a sport – it resembles pool even more when played indoors, safely framed by literal walls to contain the pattern of girls playing sports) – a conversation which has no issue (because it is fortuitously cut short by the maternal intervention).

Along these lines, I do not claim that Harold and Helen have an incestuous sexual relationship (certainly not in such strong terms), but that precisely the cultural prohibition against incest allows for a “pose” of sexuality that would strongly appeal to Krebs’s sensibilities. The conversation would plainly be flirting if it did not take place between brother and sister, so it paradoxically relies heavily on the incest taboo not to be incestuous, and to become culturally acceptable. Even so, mum does not seem to like it and quite literally takes the sister’s place in joining Harold at the breakfast table.

*“I know, Mummy.”*

The scene between Harold and his mother is the most painful in this story, perhaps in all of *In Our Time*. She immediately pulls him back into the world of consequences, the very world that Krebs thought he was successfully managing to avoid. “There can be no idle hands in His kingdom,” the mother pleads, to which her son replies: “I’m not in His kingdom” (115). The grounds on which his mother appeals to him are the same grounds Krebs has tried to leave behind: religion, sexual morality (“I know the temptations you must have been exposed to. I know how weak men are” (115).) and the standard American professional life. Krebs disavows being in God’s kingdom, and emotionally distances himself from his mother and the world she attempts to lure him back into: “Krebs looked at the bacon fat hardening in his plate” (115).<sup>24</sup> Mother Krebs tries to persuade Harold of the need to find a job, and informs him that his father wants Harold to come and see him in his office (the office which must be even less “homey” than the home this ex-soldier finds himself in).

“Is that all?” Krebs said.

“Yes. Don’t you love your mother, dear boy?”

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<sup>24</sup> This sentence has received considerable critical attention – it seems to have been influenced by similar imagery in James Joyce and Ford Maddox Ford, and, within this textual situation, it is thought that “[t]he hardening bacon fat is an objective correlative of Krebs’s feelings toward his mother” (Lamb 1995).

“No,” Krebs said. (115-116)

When his mother starts crying after this brisk denial of affection, Krebs finds that his rather vague afterthought “I don’t love anybody” is of very little consolation to her. What follows is a humiliating mother-and-son scene harking back to childhood:

Krebs felt sick and vaguely nauseated.

“I know, Mummy,” he said. “I’ll try and be a good boy for you.” (116)

It may seem odd that Krebs, an adult man who saw some of the bloodiest battles the world had ever witnessed, can be induced to promise his Mummy (with capital M) that he’ll be a good boy for her. It may seem even odder that, after stooping to such overtly childish rhetoric, he is still not found willing to pray with his mother. On the other hand, it also displays the wholly perfunctory nature of Krebs’s consoling his mother: “Still, none of it had touched him” (116).

### *Indoor Baseball*

The story’s final paragraph is dense and difficult. Krebs realises that his attempts “to keep his life from being complicated” have failed, and he resolves to “go to Kansas City and get a job and [his mother] would feel all right about it” (116). The one and final act of resistance he undertakes, however, is not to go and see his father in the office, but, instead, to go and watch his sister play indoor baseball. Lewis claims:

Once more in a moment of crisis Krebs escapes from social patterns and finds haven among the patterns of sport, and here there might seem to be some hope that it is a prelude to a more thorough and general escape, an escape to freedom outside the context of games. (Lewis 1970, 26)

While this interpretation may be valid, it works particularly in the context of Lewis's focusing on the meaning of sports in this short story. From a more gendered point of view, however, I believe this ending is in fact richer and more problematic: we have seen that Krebs steps outside of social structures in order to study them, and this is precisely the gesture he repeats forcefully. Again he trespasses against the "rules" or structure of the family by not heeding his mother's words and by refusing to turn to his father for guidance. He trespasses even further by returning to the link with his sister – a link that was, as we have seen, decisively interrupted by his mother and that we might describe as "non-non-incestuous."<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, Krebs's refusal to go and talk to his father, and his decision to go and watch his sister, is thus a double sin against the pattern of the family. Krebs again steps out of normal life (in the sense of a life lived according to the norms) and enters into a world that can only be described as a negative, as an outside. It may be too optimistic to claim, as Lewis does, that Krebs "finds haven among the patterns of sport" seeing that he remains in an uncommitted position: he decides to go and "*watch Helen play indoor baseball.*" All four italicised words fall into the patterns that have been identified in this text: Krebs *observes* a *girl* who is his sister during a *patterned* activity in an *enclosed space*. This final sentence becomes the climax of all Krebs's emotional problems.

### *A Game of Negatives*

In my reading of "Soldier's Home," I have tried to stress how identity, and particularly gendered identity, emerges within the context of a particular social setting. Harold Krebs gets into (gender) trouble because decisive moments in his life take place in two very different settings – as they are illustrated not only by the two photographs, but also by the English name Harold and the German-sounding Krebs – and the one setting (the home mentioned in

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<sup>25</sup> This "non-non" formula is indebted to the work of Giorgio Agamben, who mobilises it to great effect.



the title) will not accommodate for a genuine narrative about the other. The political criticism inherent in Hemingway's text, and the aspect that I here want to emphasise, is not just about the way war veterans are treated back home (though Steven Trout has shown that this is one of the story's themes), it is also about the impossibility to accurately represent the experience of war. Krebs's identity was shaped during his time in Europe, but the closure that Oklahoma tries to impose on his story alienates Krebs from his own life-story. He remains on the outside of society and becomes an "abject body." In a final act of defiance, he trespasses against ordinary rules of family life, and even against the very incest taboo that structures American as well as European communities. The imposition of closure on Krebs's war narrative backfires, and Krebs turns against the one who most severely tries to impose it: his mother.

Because of the way he tries to come to terms with past and future (by studying the social context as a pattern), Krebs finds that "It was all a lie both ways." It becomes clear to him that experience cannot simply be converted into a narrative. That narrative becomes a less than perfect substitute for lived experience – something is lost in translation. However, reading "Soldier's Home" through the lens of Butler allows us to see that this loss is a necessary condition for a narrative to emerge: even if Krebs unsuccessfully grapples with the sociality he finds himself in, we do *read* about this struggle in the short *story* called "Soldier's Home." Inspired by Butler, we might speak of a "constitutive lack" – a negativity at the core of identity that is negated, or covered over, in language. This is a negation of a negative that does not mathematically turn into a positive: it is first and foremost not not. It is a lie both ways.

Kennedy and Curnutt claim that the line "It was all a lie both ways" (113) was inspired by Sherwood Anderson's "The Untold Lie" (1992, 6). (The line in Anderson reads: "Whatever I told him would have been a lie" (1947, 253).) In this story, the same mechanism

is at work: *the only way to avoid lying is not to speak at all*. This not-speaking is precisely the topic of Anderson's story and thus a constitutive lack at the heart of its narrative.

In the case of "Soldier's Home," Krebs finds himself compelled to lie in order to be listened to, even to the extent that his lies taint his memories of the war because he cannot translate his European war experiences into the pattern of Oklahoma. At the same time, however, the patterns of the story do come together neatly in the final sentence, so that the formal unity of the story is tightly maintained and brilliantly balanced. Even though Krebs' identity relies on the experiences he does not (and cannot) relate, because of the incommensurability of the different settings, it is apparently possible to construct a story about his life that is formally patterned and seemingly "closed" while at the same time open-ended and uncertain.

The reading of this story is a game, in which the reader is pushed into position similar to that of Krebs: facing a beautiful and exciting pattern, but unable to quite make sense of it. The reader is pushed to the outside of the story in the same way that Krebs is pushed to the outside of a society that cannot accommodate him or his story.

# A Rotten Catholic. The Religion of Discontent in *The Sun Also Rises*

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## *Religion?*

Religion in Hemingway is a somewhat new, and to many readers a potentially awkward choice of topic. Ernest Hemingway has often been cast as a typical proto-existentialist, a nihilist, or a Waste-Lander. His protagonists (and, through an all too easy process of identification, he himself) have traditionally been read as hard-boiled, hard-drinking, hard-living he-men who craft their own norms and values against the bleak backdrop of modern, post-war reality. More recently, however, it has begun to emerge that Hemingway's spiritual sensibilities play a classically underestimated role in his fiction. In the wake of the publication of Hemingway's posthumous works, and the consequent critical reassessment of Hemingway's sexual politics, it now seems time to revisit the themes of religion and spirituality in one of literature's allegedly most macho modernists.

This chapter was partially inspired by the work of H.R. Stoneback, and particularly his new and authoritative glossary on *The Sun Also Rises* – a volume bound to become a benchmark for future writing about Hemingway's first successful novel. Stoneback has long argued that religion, and particularly Catholicism, plays a crucial thematic role in much of Hemingway's work – and he proves this point in great detail with regard to *The Sun Also Rises*. But proving that religion is often present in a novel does not amount to proving that *The Sun Also Rises* actually *is* a religious novel. Taking into account the many religious references identified by Stoneback, it is still necessary to read these references within the context of the novel without making Catholicism the *a priori* focal point of one's

interpretation – for if it has become very clear that there is a spiritual dimension to this novel, it also remains undeniable that much of its content is decidedly profane.

To illustrate this point, we need look no further than the novel's two famous epigraphs – one provided by Gertrude Stein, the other taken from Ecclesiastes. Much has traditionally been made of the opposition between Stein's "lost generation" thesis and Ecclesiastes' loftier prose, and the discussion has often revolved around the question to what extent either quotation is endorsed by the author or the text at large. To put the question this way, however, forecloses the possibility of communication, even similarity between these epigraphs. Stein's dictum reads: "You are all a lost generation." and Ecclesiastes follows up with "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever..." The idea of the lost generation is, almost literally, echoed in the first words of the second epigraph: one generation passeth away and is, thus, lost.

Crucially, the Ecclesiastes quotation goes on to assert the theme of transcendence: one generation after another is lost, but the earth abides and the sun, having set, also rises again. It is precisely in this repetition, this perpetual succession of generation and regeneration, that a transcendent dimension can be found. It is thus possible to read the combination of the epigraphs as: all generations are lost, but that is precisely the source, the very condition, for transcendence, for a possible spirituality. This reading deconstructs the assumption that Stein and Ecclesiastes are posited as incommensurable opposites. Certainly, the former asserts a bleak view of modern life and the post-war generation, but, textually, it flows into an assertion of transcendence.

This deserves further deliberation, particularly as it serves to make a rather Butlerian point: whereas Stein focuses on one generation being lost as a unique event, Ecclesiastes places the event in a perpetual succession and return of events. Thus, Stein's view implies change, whereas Ecclesiastes implies the impossibility, or the relative insignificance of

change. Stein points out variation, Ecclesiastes stresses sameness. There are multiple ways of framing this distinction – one of the more popular, in contemporary theoretical parlance is that of Being and Event – but, in light of the aims of this dissertation, the most relevant is that between discourse and citation. In this sense, we may read Stein’s sentence as an incomplete (re-)citation of Ecclesiastes, and the relevant dialectic that thus arises is between citation/event on the one hand, and discourse/transcendence on the other. In what follows, this dialectic shall be used to investigate how the event is made to spill over – or fails to spill over – into transcendence.

### *Discontent?*

*The Sun Also Rises* begins in Paris, city of light, city of romance, and, in the roaring twenties, city of decadence. The bright aspect of city life never really makes it to the foreground of the novel, though: Hemingway’s Paris may have the decadence, it has very little of the glamour. The reader is introduced to Robert Cohn, who is “sick of Paris, and [...] sick of the Quarter” (19), Jake Barnes, who claims not to be romantic, but bored (and therefore picks up a prostitute to dine with him), and Brett Ashley, whose first line in a taxi conversation with Jake is: “Oh, darling, I’ve been so miserable.” (32) The earliest stages of the novel take the reader to a cheap restaurant, a nightclub, and a bar whose quality is gauged entirely in terms of the amount of liquor it serves. As Stoneback points out in his glossary, it goes too far to read Hemingway’s Paris as a desolate Waste Land – there is nothing inherently infernal or dreary about spending time in cafés and restaurants, and the reader’s sympathy toward particular characters is directed by the extent to which these characters *like* Paris. The reading of Paris-as-Waste Land, then, is possibly a result of the lives our protagonists lead there – lives which are obviously less than perfect. The conversation between Jake and Georgette sums it up nicely:

"Don't you like Paris?"

"No."

"Why don't you go somewhere else?"

"Isn't anywhere else."

"You're happy, all right."

"Happy, hell!" (22-23)

For all the attractions this city boasts, it is not a place conducive to happiness – Paris is never depicted as the romantic place it is in popular imagination. This is made even clearer in the two opening chapters that Hemingway excised from the novel before publishing it: there is an illuminating paragraph on why Jake chooses to live in Paris:

I am a newspaper man living in Paris. I used to think Paris was the most wonderful place in the world. I have lived in it now for six years, or however long it is since 1920, and I still see its good points. Anyway, it is the only city I want to live in. They say New York is very fine, but I do not care for night life. I want to live quietly and with a certain measure of luxury, and a job that I do not want to worry about. Paris provides all these things. ("The Unpublished Opening" 10-11)

Paris is no longer perfect for Jake, but it will have to make do. In this passage, Jake denies entertaining any great objectives: he is ostensibly rational and calculating about the city he lives in and the life he lives in it. The metropolis, as the topos of modern life, figures as a place of rationality, but not satisfaction, in which the novel's protagonists (none of whom are native to Paris or even France) are haunted by their own displacement.

The urban landscape Hemingway sketches is very much structured along the lines identified by Georg Simmel, that early theorist of city life. In his *magnum opus*, *The Philosophy of Money* [Philosophie des Geldes, first published in 1900], Simmel elaborately discusses the consequences of the modern market, in a way that combines concern for culture

and the individual. He finds, roughly, that, because of the way economy relies on the quantifying effects of money, “the pure form of exchangeability” (Simmel 130), a general shift from subjectivity to objectivity occurs (“economic value as the objectification of subjective values” (65)), and this to the detriment of culture and individuality:

The lives of many people are absorbed by such evaluating, weighing, calculating and reducing of qualitative values to quantitative ones. Gauging values in terms of money has taught us to determine and specify values down to the last farthing and has thus enforced a much greater precision in the comparison of various contents of life. (144)

Indeed, we encounter a great amount of detail concerning financial transactions in this novel<sup>26</sup> and a striking example of the importance Jake attributes to his financial situation occurs when he gets home after leaving Brett in the company of the count:

There was a light in the concierge's room and I knocked on the door and she gave me my mail. I wished her good night and went up-stairs. There were two letters and some papers. I looked at them under the gas-light in the dining-room. The letters were from the States. One was a bank statement. It showed a balance of \$2432.60. I got out my check-book and deducted four checks drawn since the first of the month, and discovered I had a balance of \$1832.60. I wrote this on the back of the statement. The other letter was a wedding announcement. (37-38)

Jake’s calculating his financial situation is the first in a significant series of events that introduces the novel’s principal themes: he spots “a good catholic name” on the wedding invitation and, noticing the crest that goes with it, he is reminded of the count, Zizi and Brett, and concludes: “To hell with you, lady Ashley.” He then undresses and muses about his war wound reflected in the mirror, again pondering the Catholic Church, after which he turns to

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<sup>26</sup> For a more elaborate discussion of the moral implications of finance, see for instance Scott Donaldson, “Hemingway’s Morality of Compensation” and George Cheatham, “Sign the Wire with Love. The Morality of Surplus in *The Sun Also Rises*”

his bullfighting papers. When he eventually tries to go to sleep, he finds: “My head started to work. The old grievance.” (38) and abruptly starts crying. In this sequence of events, Catholicism, Jake’s love for Brett Ashley, and bullfighting are combined into a dense emotional cluster that somehow evolves from Jake’s financial calculations.

The resemblance between Simmel’s sketch of the modern man and the protagonist of *The Sun Also Rises* is undeniable. Jake spends a great deal of money in the book, but always does so with care and deliberation, making sure he gets his “money’s worth,” down to the last farthing. Jake buys pleasure in this way, but at the same time he keenly realises that his “fine philosophy” will not hold, nor will, implicitly, the pleasure thus obtained:

Just exchange of values. You gave up something and got something else. Or you worked for something. You paid some way for everything that was good. I paid my way into enough things that I liked, so that I had a good time. Either you paid by learning about them, or by experience, or by taking chances, or by money. Enjoying living was learning to get your money’s worth and knowing when you had it. You could get your money’s worth. The world was a good place to buy in. It seemed like a fine philosophy. In five years, I thought, it will seem just as silly as all the other fine philosophies I’ve had.  
(152)

Jake’s sentence about “Just exchange of values” echoes a previous utterance by Bill Gorton, who seems to take the same mercantile philosophy just a bit further still. Bill, rather drunk at this point (which is hardly unusual in the novel) urges Jake to buy something from a Paris taxidermist. “Simple exchange of values. You give them money. They give you a stuffed dog.” (78) In terms of “value”, the “stuffed dog” in this context seems to signify an utterly useless object and the suggested transaction stresses Bill’s status as a cynic: whereas for Jake the world is still “a good place to buy in”, Bill construes money as a means of obtaining useless commodities, and commodities as valuable only in economic terms. He corresponds to



Oscar Wilde's definition of a cynic as "a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing" or to Simmel's description of the metropolitan blasé:

The essence of the blasé attitude is an indifference toward the distinctions between things. Not in the sense that they are not perceived, as is the case of mental dullness, but rather that the meaning and the value of the distinctions between things, and therewith of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless. They appear to the blasé person in a homogeneous, flat and gray color with no one of them worthy of being preferred to another. This psychic mood is the correct subjective reflection of a complete money economy to the extent that money takes the place of all the manifoldness of things and expresses all qualitative distinctions between them in the distinction of "how much." (1971, 329-330)

In many ways, Bill is a mirror character to Jake, but his cynical wit also embodies the logical conclusion to the shallow and materialist life that Jake and his companions seem to be leading in Paris. The novel's exposition firmly places its protagonists in an unsatisfactory place and time, in which they all live unsatisfactory lives. Any sense of the sacred seems very far off at this point in the novel.

The description of Hemingway's Paris that I have here provided serves mainly as a backdrop against which Hemingway's Spain becomes more accurately legible. Stoneback has long argued that the theme of pilgrimage pervades much of Hemingway's work, and that "*The Sun Also Rises*, far from being the chronicle of an aimless 'lost generation' that it is often taken for, is Hemingway's first great meditation on the theme of pilgrimage." (2003, 52) I concur with this general idea, especially in the sense that Jake travels from Paris to Spain in quest for a spirituality that cannot thrive in the metropolis. The rationality and mercantility that Simmel identifies as key determinants of city life do not allow for a satisfactory sense of the sacred to develop, and offer no solace from the dissatisfaction experienced by Jake and his

fellow pilgrims. The remainder of this chapter will outline three different ways in which these protagonists, and especially Jake, attempt to escape this dissatisfaction: ritual killing, romantic love, and religion.

### *Ritual Killing*

Ritual killing, particularly when it assumes the form of the bullfight, brings us back to the dichotomy that was introduced by the novel's epigraphs. The bullfight, with all its symbolic and ancient connotations is in the first place a ritual, in which the high priest puts his life at stake. The spirituality of the bullfight, then, would be derived from the transcendence of the ritual: bulls may die, and bullfighters may die, but the bullfight lives on, triumphing over the death at its very centre. This is exactly the way Ecclesiastes also depicts transcendence in the first chapter that was the source for this novel's epigraph: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9) The Old Testament Preacher who provided Hemingway with the title of *The Sun Also Rises* could have been describing bullfights in this passage. The ritual killing of bulls is an ancient rite in which what has been done shall be done again, repeating the ritual of death in such a way that it is the ritual and the repetition, not the finality of death, that dominates the meaning of the bullfight. In this sense, the bullfight is the ultimate ritual, in that it survives and transcends death itself: in killing the material bull, the bullfight as a ritual is reaffirmed as a living tradition, and certainly the kind of tradition Jake Barnes would be susceptible to. As Baker analyses it: "Except for the church ritual, it was the one thing that had come down intact from the old days in Spain." (145)

Bullfighting figures as a sort of cult in this novel. For sure, no eager spectators are ever excluded from it, but only the true *aficionados* know what it is all about, and only they have

the knowledge and sensibility to enjoy the bullfight in its purity. The spirit and conscience of *afición*, or passion for bullfighting, is incorporated by the hotel-owner Montoya.<sup>27</sup>

He always smiled as though bullfighting was a very special secret between the two of us; a rather shocking but really very deep secret that we know about. He always smiled as though there were something lewd about the secret to outsiders, but that it was something that we understood. (136)

Jake introduces his friends to the ritual of bullfighting, but none of them are capable of Jake's level of enthusiasm or enjoyment of the spectacle. In the aftermath of their first bullfight, it transpires that Cohn (who had been worried he might be bored – and thus showed himself still far more *blasé* than Bill) had been rather sick, Mike has but little of significance or intelligence to say, and Brett appears to have been fascinated mainly with Pedro Romero's green trousers and handsome appearance. Jake and Montoya, however, immediately understand and identify the qualities of young Pedro Romero:

Bill and I were very excited about Pedro Romero. Montoya was sitting about ten places away. After Romero had killed his first bull Montoya caught my eye and nodded his head. This was a real one. There had not been a real one for a long time. Of the other two matadors, one was very fair and the other was passable. But there was no comparison with Romero, although neither of his bulls was much. (167-168)

Jake not only fails as a missionary of bullfighting, unable to convey the sacredness of the bullfight to his companions, he will also thwart his relationship with Montoya and, thus, with bullfighting itself. By first advising Montoya to shield Romero from the American ambassador (as Romero, young and natural as he is, could only be corrupted by “this Grand Hotel business” (176)), afterwards to introduce the bullfighter to his friends, including Brett,

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<sup>27</sup> And the cult's priests are, of course, the bullfighters. As Lawrence R. Broer put it in his influential study *Hemingway's Spanish Tragedy*: “These, Hemingway felt, were men worth emulating – men in the throes of perpetual conflict, who nevertheless were erect and proud looking, possessing a seemingly indomitable spirit and sardonic carelessness.” (vii)

with her pronounced sexual interest in Romero, and throwing a bottle of brandy into the bargain, he compromises his *afición* to the point where Montoya will drop him entirely:

Just then Montoya came into the room. He started to smile at me, then he saw Pedro Romero with a big glass of cognac in his hand, sitting laughing between me and a woman with bare shoulders, at a table full of drunks. He did not even nod. (180-181)

If, as Allen Josephs has argued, “[a]ll the characters who make the pilgrimage to the fiesta at Pamplona are measured – morally or spiritually – around the axis of the art of *toreo*”, then Jake fails to measure up to the standard he sets himself. Not only does he find the *toreo* to have become corrupted, for instance in the character of Belmonte, who, these days, appears to be in it for the money, he also actively contributes to the corruption of Pedro Romero by turning him into a sexual prey for Brett Ashley. Jake wants to belong to the spirituality of the bullfight, but fails to belong to it unconditionally.

### *Religion*

This reading of bullfighting as a religious practice that Jake admires, yet fails to accomplish a satisfying relationship with, is in tune with Jake’s problematic Catholicism. Jake is a self-proclaimed Roman Catholic with a very ambiguous attitude towards his church. The first mention of the Catholic Church significantly occurs when Jake is musing about his war wound, which illustrates how his sense of religion sprouts from the material lack he experiences:

The Catholic Church had an awfully good way of handling all that. Good advice, anyway. Not to think about it. Oh, it was swell advice. Try and take it sometime. Try and take it. (39)

It is implied here that religion and thought, rationality, belong to different worlds with different moral demands – a sense of the sacred that is other to the sense of the real, as is illustrated by Jake's subsequent encounters with religion: in the train down to Bayonne, for instance, the restaurant car is reserved by a troupe of American Catholic pilgrims so that Bill and Jake cannot have lunch until quarter past four. This is a more or less humorous episode, but it is also one that illustrates how the religious becomes tainted with the material world (and the need for food that it brings along). These pilgrims, undoubtedly very devout Christians, rather uncharitably, come between their fellow travellers and their lunches, leading Bill, at one point, to buttonhole a Catholic priest and ask "When do us Protestants get a chance to eat, Father?" (93) The theme of the religious pilgrimage is made very explicit, here, and the ambiguity that is conjured up lies in the impossibility of experiencing a spiritual voyage that is only spiritual – put simply: even a pilgrim has to eat. The pilgrims, meanwhile, are on their way from Rome to "Biarritz and Lourdes" (91) – a collation of the spiritual and the material, not to say mundane, if ever there was one. Irrelevant as the pilgrims may seem to the plot of the novel, they introduce the idea of travelling in quest of the spiritual, and the inevitable material "pull" of a world in which people get irritated when having to wait to get lunch. Hemingway sets up a strong dichotomy between the material and the spiritual, or the real and the religious, and Jake Barnes will find himself consistently wavering between the two, unable to reconcile the one with the other.

The place to look for religion in *The Sun Also Rises* is traditionally chapter twelve: the time Bill and Jake spend fishing in Burguete – the fishing trip that was originally an idea of Robert Cohn's, who backed out at the last minute. The atmosphere of chapter twelve is generally lighthearted and happy, with lots of friendly banter and little or no obvious frictions. Carlos Baker goes so far as to speak of a "brief but golden age". (85) H.R. Stoneback argues that the religious banter and mock ceremonies actually betray a more sincere religious

sensibility on Jake's part than has traditionally been assumed and even identifies a Trinitarian impulse:

We find talk of tricycles and "mystery"; Jake and Bill fish in the *third* stream they come to, and the catching of the trout is rendered in terms of threes; there are various incongruous trinities mentioned – such as Bryan and Mencken and Bill together at Holy Cross; finally, the chapter ends with a round of three-handed bridge. (1983, 34)

By and large, this chapter is brimming with religious suggestion, ranging from the fish as an ancient symbol for Christ, Bill's reference to Bryant's *A Forest Hymn*<sup>28</sup> ("Remember the woods were God's first temples." (106)) to Jake's enquiring after the salt, echoing Matthew 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth" – and all this in close proximity to Roncevaux, a major attraction for pilgrims, and the burial site of that archetypical Christian hero Roland.

Stoneback finds that Jake does not get involved in Bill's banter about religion with full gusto, especially when the latter goes on about William Jennings Bryan:

We unwrapped the little parcels of lunch.

'Chicken.'

'There's hard-boiled eggs.'

'Find any salt?'

'First the egg,' said Bill. 'Then the chicken. Even Bryan could see that.'

'He's dead. I saw it yesterday in the paper yesterday.'

'No, not really?'

'Yes, Bryan's dead.'

Bill laid down the egg he was peeling.

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<sup>28</sup> The significance of this reference was elaborated on by C. Harold Hurley in the article "But Bryant? What of Bryant in Bryan?": the Religious implications of the allusion to "A Forest Hymn" in *The Sun Also Rises*.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, and unwrapped a drumstick from a piece of newspaper. ‘I reverse the order. For Bryan’s sake. As a tribute to the Great Commoner. First the chicken, then the egg.’ (126)

Bill, always keen on humorous exchanges, goes on like this for a bit, but is careful to include H.L. Mencken in his stream of mockery – assumedly so as to redirect his verbal assaults away from Jake’s Catholic sensibilities. Stoneback claims that there is more to this scene than all-round mockery and supports this claim by pointing out that Bryan, in fact, died about a month after the timeframe of this bit of dialogue, so his death is actually inserted into the novel at the cost of temporal coherence, which would make his appearance here still more significant. But to conclude on this basis that we are dealing with a clearly Christian passage in a deeply religious novel would clearly be too hasty.

I suggest that there is no reason to read this chapter as *either* deeply Christian (or catholic) *or* as cynical mockery. To be sure, Bill’s attitude is one of cynicism and the banter is mainly his. When he mockingly proclaims “Let us rejoice and give thanks”, Jake, somewhat desultorily, replies: “Eat an egg.” – after which “Bill gestured with the drumstick in one hand and the bottle of wine in the other.” (126) This mock-communion ceremony, in which the bread has been replaced with the bit of chicken (that has at this point become the focus of the creationism/evolution debate), does precisely what the pilgrims did in the train: it highlights the material aspect of religion. As Butler formulated it in *Gender Trouble*: “there is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects.” (186-187). Bill’s parody, then, is slightly painful to Jake not because it mocks his religious beliefs, but because it illustrates the material nature of his supposedly spiritual practices: if a wafer may just as well be a chicken drumstick, this illustrates the randomness and the materiality of the wafer – which, to a transsubstantiationist Catholic, would be a particularly unwelcome idea.

In pointing out the materiality of ritual, Bill returns us to the problem of event vs. transcendence: transcendence is an effect based on the repetition of events, but that does not mean that the repetition of an event (in this case a type of communion ceremony) necessarily renders it transcendent. In fact: the singularity – and materiality – of the event precludes it from wholly collapsing with the transcendent – otherwise it would become unidentifiable *as* an event. But Bill's banter points out another problem as well: if ritual is a citation, then so is parody, and a theoretical distinction between the two is hard to maintain.

The amazing intricacy of Hemingway's text somehow manages to jokingly invoke the chicken-and-egg motif to conjure up the debate about Darwinian evolution, while at the same time making the bit of chicken the centrepiece of Bill's fake communion ceremony. Even on a purely textual level, we thus end up with a chicken drumstick as the crystallisation of a number of the novel's underlying oppositions: Jake's Catholicism versus Bill's cynical strain of Protestantism, creation versus evolution, and, ultimately, the spiritual versus the material. The way Bill's mock-ceremony destabilises that latter dichotomy and lays bare the material nature of all modes of ritual, then, can be said to destabilise the other oppositions as well: what finally unites Bill and Jake is not spirituality, but their enjoyment of ritual in all its material manifestations.

The rituals of wine-drinking and fishing form the basis for Bill and Jake's enjoyment of their time away from our other protagonists, arguably because the rituals are allowed to exist in their purest form: Bill and Jake do not get drunk in this episode, and their drinking does not have the unpleasant consequences that will mar the reunion with Cohn, Mike and Brett in Pamplona. The wine does become a running joke ("Let us utilize the product of the vine. Will you utilize a little, brother?" (126)) and Jake is practical enough to ensure that the wine is included in the price of their hotel room, but the ritual provides an apparently successful bonding mechanism. At the same time, though, the religious nature of this ritual is highlighted



and therefore arguably undercut, or at least questioned, by both Bill and Jake (both of whom indulge in the “utilizing” banter).

The other ritual, that of fishing, is equally ambiguous, and this ambiguity might in fact be traced back directly to Christian imagery: according to the New Testament, the apostles, who were themselves fishermen, were in their turn “fished” or at least gathered by Jesus, who thus becomes a fisherman of fishermen. Yet on the other hand, the fish was a major early-Christian symbol for Christ. Taking into account both these aspects, it becomes very difficult to precisely circumscribe the symbolism of the fish that Jake and Bill catch on their trips. Not unlike the chicken discussed above, the fish can be said to incorporate two different semantic impulses: that of Christ-the-fisherman and that of Christ-the-fish. Given the extra complication that Jake Barnes echoes the mythological Fisher King figure, this trope of the fish cannot be reduced to a single meaning. One thing can be asserted with precision: similar to the chicken, the fish is a material given that evokes different possible religious meanings, but this vagueness does not reduce the satisfaction Jake and Bill derive from it. The fact that Bill and Jake do not fish together in the same spot, or even where they can see each other, stresses that ritual not only functions as a bond, but equally as a starting-point for potentially very different spiritual experiences.

When Bill and Jake meet the Englishman Harris to complete their Trinity, the functions of ritual already discussed here are only made even clearer: the recognition of ritual as a material given leaves each participant in the ritual free to experience its spiritual dimension in his own way – hence Hemingway’s stress on the factual, never the spiritual. Loyal to his own iceberg metaphor, Hemingway can be said to foreground the material, the signifier, so that it gains autonomy or at least primacy vis-à-vis the signified. This happens both intratextually, where the fish as a signifier presumably has a different and incompatible meaning for

respectively Bill and Jake, and textually, in the sense that the reader cannot be sure what signifieds exactly are conjured up by the many religious tropes in this chapter.

We stayed five days at Burguete and had good fishing. The nights were cold and the days were hot, and there was always a breeze even in the heat of the day. It was hot enough so that it felt good to wade in a cold stream, and the sun dried you when you came out and sat on the bank. We found a stream with a pool deep enough to swim in. In the evenings we played three-handed bridge with an Englishman named Harris, who had walked over from Saint Jean Pied de Port and was stopping at the inn for the fishing. He was very pleasant and went with us twice to the Irati River. There was no word from Robert Cohn nor from Brett and Mike. (129-130)

Against this background, perhaps it should not come as a surprise that even the highlight of Jake's pilgrimage, the visit to Roncesvaux, is not described as an elaborate religious epiphany, but still the actual text is problematic. Here is the visit in full:

We paid for the message and walked back to the inn. Harris was there and the three of us walked up to Roncesvalles. We went through the monastery.

"It's a remarkable place," Harris said, when we came out. "But you know I'm not much on those sort of places."

"Me either," Bill said.

"It's a remarkable place, though," Harris said. "I wouldn't not have seen it. I'd been intending coming up each day."

"It isn't the same as fishing, though, is it?" Bill asked. He liked Harris.

"I say not."

We were standing in front of the old chapel of the monastery.

"Isn't that a pub across the way?" Harris asked. "Or do my eyes deceive me?"

"It has the look of a pub," Bill said.

"It looks to me like a pub," I said.

"I say," said Harris, "let's utilize it." He had taken up utilizing from Bill. (133)

Stoneback goes out of his way to argue the following:

It is not necessary to read Jake's mind here – we know what a Catholic pilgrim would feel at one of the most venerated pilgrimage sites in the world. His silence is the most appropriate response. And why would he bother to argue with Bill's comment that seeing Roncevaux "isn't the same as fishing," when Jake, the wounded Fisher King of the novel, the pilgrim quester, knows that, in the anagogical sense, *fishing is exactly the same as visiting the pilgrim's shrine.*" (226)

It is hard to agree with this argument for two reasons. The first is, very practically, that Jake, for all the echoes of Santiago in this text (Jacob, Jake, Rue St. Jacques all refer to Saint James, or Santiago), does not end up in Santiago de Compostela, which is truly *the* ultimate goal for a pilgrim, at least in Spain, so it can be argued that Jake's pilgrimage is incomplete and that he does not live up to the prophecy of his name (again an instance of Jake Barnes failing to live up to a standard). The second reason is that, in fact, we do *not* "know what a Catholic pilgrim would feel at one of the most venerated pilgrimage sites in the world." We may have an idea of what he *should* feel, but that, as we will see instantly, does not always correspond to reality in the case of Jacob Barnes. I would like to suggest, therefore, that Jake's silence functions in much the same way that fishing and wine-drinking do, but on a metafictional level: the reader is confronted with a very material immateriality (how else to describe silence in this context) and is allowed the freedom to let a spiritual level grow out of that material nothingness – an endeavour that may well be the central element in this entire novel. I do not wish to quarrel with Stoneback's reading of the visit to Roncesvaux – I much rather want to suggest that his reading is a perfect instance of crafting a spiritual dimension out of silence – which, therefore, proves my point.

There is no need to exhaustively list all instances in which religion – implicitly or explicitly – figures in this novel, even if they all do seem to relate to the suggested tension between the material and the spiritual. There is, however, a curious moment in the novel that illustrates this tension so well it would be a shame to neglect. The first thing Jake does after arriving in Pamplona and sorting out his bullfighting tickets, is to go into the cathedral and pray. This is the one moment in the novel that employs a kind of stream-of-consciousness technique, and we find Jake praying for many different things, for instance “I thought I would like to have a lot of money, so I prayed that I would make a lot of money.” At the end of his prayers, however, Jake realises that

all the time I was kneeling with my forehead on the wood in front of me, and was thinking of myself as praying, I was a little ashamed, and regretted that I was such a rotten Catholic, but realized there was nothing I could do about it, at least for a while, and maybe never, but that anyway it was a grand religion, and I only wished I felt religious and maybe I would the next time; (103)

Jake would like to “feel religious”, but all the time he is praying, he is aware of his bodily posture and his forehead on the wood. What he seeks in religion is a way of transcending his bodily being, but the harder he tries to rise above the material, the more he gets entangled in it. He prays for money, and it makes him feel ashamed and a “rotten Catholic”. He feels it is a “grand religion” but fails to actually experience the grandeur of what he supposes a religious experience should be.

As a Catholic, Jake seems to aspire to a non-embodied spirituality, but he is simultaneously aware of his inability to obtain this. Pilgrims get in the way of his lunch, even in the woods that were “God’s first temples” he is reminded of the material triviality of church ritual, and in the cathedral he ends up praying for money, fully aware of the pew he is praying on. The non-spiritual part of Jake’s life is problematic not only because of the

material conditions of the metropolis – which he has temporarily left behind – but also because of the material condition of his body. We may conclude, it seems, that singling out aspects of the material world in the form of ritual is not sufficient as a basis for the kind of religious experience Jake feels he ought to attain or strive for. In other words: Jake is, yet again, struggling to reconcile the event with the transcendent or, very clearly in the case of his prayer, the citation with the discourse.

### *Romance*

Because of the emphasis that is placed on the vague category of the “material” (which is not as solid and reliable as may seem at first sight), it is necessary to point to the most obvious material problem in this novel: Jake’s war wound, and its consequences for his love life – or lack thereof. To say that love is one of the main themes of *The Sun Also Rises* would be banal, but the theme gets an extra dimension when read as similar to Jake’s aspirations to “feel religious”: as a spiritual quest that remains unresolved in the end. The love-story, or love-tragedy, of *The Sun Also Rises* is well-known and seemingly straightforward: Jake loves Brett, Brett loves Jake, but Jake cannot make love to Brett, so Brett seeks sexual satisfaction and relationships elsewhere. Despite this deeply unsatisfactory situation, however, Jake and Brett remain very close friends, and more than that, up to the point where their relationship becomes uncertain and contestable ground, not corresponding to any socially sanctioned form of love.

What Jake seems to want to get out of this relationship is, again, a sort of transcendence, built on an ideal of romantic love that conquers all and lasts forever. In the scene in the Paris taxi mentioned earlier, we read the following:

She was looking into my eyes with that way she had of looking that made you wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes. They would look on and on after everyone else's eyes in the world would have stopped looking. She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that, and really she was afraid of so many things. (34)

Jake ascribes to Brett's eyes, or her look, an other-worldly, almost divine quality, transcending both time and space – eyes that would “look on and on” at everything on earth. “Had we but world enough, and time,” Andrew Marvell tells his “Coy Mistress”, “an hundred years should go to praise thine eyes”. For lack of so much time, however, he suggests: “Now let us sport us while we may.” Jake Barnes does the exact opposite: being unable to “sport” he is compelled to divert his attention to the transcendental qualities he finds in his beloved's eyes.

Jake is not averse to the idea of having and maintaining a more or less platonic relationship with Brett, but, for her, this is not a realistic option: “I'd just *tromper* you with everybody.” (62) Thus, once more, the material world populated with physical bodies gets in the way of Jake's occasional high-flown ideas, as Brett does not share Jake's interest in the transcendental. The tragic end of the book, then, can be said to lie in Jake's renouncing his quest for love. The novel's last sentence is bitter, almost cynical.

‘Oh, Jake,’ Brett said, ‘we could have had such a damned good time together.’

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Isn't it pretty to think so?’ (251)

The policeman raising his baton is an obvious reminder of Jake's physical problem (as has been pointed out often enough), while at the same time leading Jake to see the relativity of his

war wound: even if he had not suffered his genital injury, he would not necessarily have had a happy life with Brett. Once more, Jake is pulled back into reality by a confrontation with the material impossibility of satisfying his desire for transcendence. Jake becomes the embodiment of Nietzsche's admonition: "The lower body is the reason why man does not easily mistake himself for God."<sup>29</sup>

What Jake's final remark suggests is the relative importance of his war wound. It is indeed a "lack," and one that comes to symbolise the tension between the material and the spiritual. In order to maintain this contrast, however, it is important that Jake, presumably without a penis, is still a man. Critics have often eagerly assumed Jake to be an emasculated man, a man whose gender identity is constantly in question. Indeed, it has convincingly been shown that Jake's gender is not necessarily entirely stable, but there is no reason to assume that this is a logical consequence of his war wound. Instead, this is another instance of the material (or the event) clashing with discourse (or the symbolic):

The symbolic is understood as the normative dimension of the constitutions of the sexed subject within language. It consists in a series of demands, taboos, sanctions, injunctions, prohibitions, impossible idealizations, and threats – performative speech acts, as it were, that wield the power to produce the field of culturally viable sexual subjects. (Butler, *BTM* 106)

Jake's war wound makes his body incompatible with the "series of demands, taboos" etc. demanded by the discourse of heterosexual romantic love and his physical body cannot find its place within "the field of culturally viable sexual subjects." This translates, in the novel, as the tension between the material (the wound) and the discursive (the narrative in which Jake is

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<sup>29</sup> The "lower body" is more correct than the common mistranslation that reads "belly". The relevance of this difference will be appreciated by the reader who has Jake Barnes in mind. The original text reads: "Der Unterleib ist der Grund dafür, dass der Mensch sich nicht so leicht für einen Gott hält". (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, nr. 141)

seeking to inscribe himself into the symbolic, into the heterosexual matrix). This tension can never be resolved, seeing as Jake's war wound is itself part of a narrative, and as the narrative of romantic love needs the material theatre of the body in order to unfold (an argument akin to the one made by Butler in the preface to *BTM*, in which she demonstrates the interdependence of matter and discourse).

Jake's famous war-wound serves to show how the physical and the spiritual lock into each other in this novel: there is a "lack" in Jake's physical circumstances, and he therefore sets off on a quest to attain spiritual, transcendental satisfaction. Rather than being a necessary cause for his trouble, this war-wound, which seems to basically be an absence, a no-thing, becomes the textual intersection of the life Jake lives and the life he would want to live.

### *Conclusion: A Trinity of Tragedy*

I want to refer back to the visit to Roncesvaux at this point - Jake's silence is to the reader, as his war-wound is to Jake himself: a nothingness that challenges the reader and Jake to try to make sense of the very emptiness he is confronted with. Jake understands that rituals are material – isolated and reiterated material practices that spill over into the spiritual. But Jake does not come to terms with those aspects of the material that are not ritualised, and his wound is a discursive token of this dissatisfaction: Jake's material world is unbalanced and does not spill over into the idealised Catholicism he envisages.

In the end, we may suggest that the most significant Catholic element in this novel is the dualism that pervades it. The novel principally shows Jake's failure to reconcile the modern material world and the sacred, because what he really wants is a pure, non-embodied, discursive and transcendent sense of the sacred. His war-wound, then, is a symbol of the discontent that leads him into religion, and back. Jake does not become the Catholic he would



want to be, he turns out not to be the *aficionado* he believes he might be, and he does not get the girl he wants to get.

The struggle that has been highlighted in this reading of *The Sun Also Rises* has been traced through a number of dialectic relationships (between citation and discourse, matter and discourse, particular and transcendent). Jake tries to find transcendence in rituals – fishing, drinking, praying, bullfighting – but the individual, particular, events that constitute the story, are not in themselves transcendent experiences, so that Jake's religious quest necessarily remains tainted with traces of the material world. This material world, when manifested as Jake's war-wound, also refuses to be embedded within a straightforward romantic narrative. Jake's pilgrimage, then, has to end tragically, because what he is trying to get away from is not just modern metropolitan life (the ostensible motivation for his travels), it is in fact the particular, the material, which is a necessary condition for any sense of transcendence.

# The Possibility of Solitude

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I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature and has his senses still. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 104-105)

When Hemingway's Nick Adams departs for his camping trip in "Big Two-Hearted River," he enters into a quintessentially American tradition of retreat into the wild, away from society. This tradition may be most accurately and famously embodied by Henry David Thoreau, who chose to begin his self-inflicted isolation on Independence Day, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1845<sup>30</sup>, thereby deliberately echoing the Founding Fathers' move away from the society of the Old World, into the wilderness of the New. This essay intends to consider what it means for the individual to retreat from society: how is one's subjectivity altered when the constraints of society are abandoned, and how is the subject's reflexivity (and, thereby, agency) affected when there is no recognition, prohibition or feedback from any concrete other?

In his perceptive and well-researched essay "From Thoreau to Queer Politics," Henry Abelow offers a queer reading of *Walden* that reads as follows:

What *Walden* figures as valuable and vivid is life outside the discourses of domesticity, romantic love and marriage, and the white bourgeois family. All these discourses are at least in the aspirations of the book left behind. To transcend this is *Walden's* object, and if it fails fully to accomplish this transcending, the object remains. (37)

Abelow's claim is twofold: firstly, *Walden* paints the possibility of life outside of mainstream discourse while, secondly, it fails to "fully transcend" that very discourse. This failure, however, is inherent in the project Abelow reads in *Walden*: how could a book repudiate a

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<sup>30</sup> Though Thoreau himself insists that his moving into his cabin on Independence Day occurred merely "by accident" (*Walden*, 67), the symbolism of the date is too blatant to ignore.

certain type of discourse without bearing the traces of that very discourse? Or, as Butler puts it in *GT*: “If every refusal is, finally, a loyalty to some other bond in the present or the past, refusal is simultaneously preservation as well.” (63) In other words, as Thoreau ventures into the woods, in a gesture critical of the society he leaves behind, his criticism, his turning away from a certain type of discourse, still firmly ties him to the town of Concord and, by extension, American society. Abelow writes: “Thoreau represents himself as despising the American state quite as much as he requires the American nation.” (39)

Possibly the most telling attachment to social life that is to be found in *Walden* lies in Thoreau’s substitution of society for nature, wherein the latter is anthropomorphised (or sociomorphised) to dispel loneliness:

I have occasional visits in the long winter evenings, when the snow falls fast and the wind howls in the wood, from an old settler and original proprietor, who is reported to have dug Walden Pond, and stoned it, and fringed it with pine woods; who tells me stories of old time and of new eternity; and between us we manage to pass a cheerful evening with social mirth and pleasant views of things, even without apples or cider, - a most wise and humorous friend, whom I love much [...] and though he is thought to be dead, no one can show where he is buried. An elderly dame, too, dwells in my neighbourhood, invisible to most persons, in whose odorous herb garden I love to stroll sometimes, gathering simples and listening to her fables; for she has a genius of unequalled fertility, and her memory runs back farther than mythology, and she can tell me the original of every fable, and on what fact every one is founded, for the incidents occurred when she was young. (110)

This cryptic account of Thoreau’s “visitors” reveals how, at least in order to make sense of his solitude in retrospect, the author feels compelled to imagine characters to provide alternative types of discourse – “stories of old time and new eternity”, “the original of every fable”.

Having turned away from society and the field of intelligibility it constitutes, Thoreau manufactures a new field of intelligibility, and locates it in the natural elements surrounding him: “Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?” (110)

At several points in her work (notably *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Giving an Account of Oneself*), Butler turns to a combination of Hegel, Nietzsche and Foucault to consider how power – in whatever guise, but always as imposed by the other – brings about the subject. She remarks:

The form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* oneself. This figure operates as part of the explanation of how a subject is produced, and so there is no subject, strictly speaking, who makes this turn. (*PLP* 3)

In other words: the subject cannot exist without a certain “turning back upon oneself” (i.e. *reflexivity*, quite literally) taking place – which always happens under the influence of the other. The consequence is that, in the case of Thoreau (as in the case of Nick Adams, which we will turn to later in this essay), some sense of other is strictly necessary for reflexivity, and, hence, subjectivity, to remain possible. Thoreau’s chapter on solitude seems to corroborate this thesis:

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I *may* be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I *may not* be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself a human entity; the scene, so to

...speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. (108)

To “be beside ourselves in a sane sense” translates exactly as *ekstacy*, as used by Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, where it is an effect of the “primacy of the Other” and the investment of the self in the other – the “certain doubleness” Thoreau senses and experiences as an advantage of solitude. However, in order to maintain this doubleness which is a necessary condition for subjectivity, Thoreau casts himself as a spectator located in the other which, in his particular situation, can only be “nature” or the surroundings he invests, as we have seen, with anthropomorphic traits.

To summarize: if the subject needs constraints imposed by the other in order to turn back on itself, (in fact, the very process which brings about subjectivity), it makes sense that the individual out in the wilderness will continue to imagine an other, even if this entails the sociomorphisation of immediate surroundings. This makes sense particularly when we bear in mind Butler’s admonition that the subject is not exactly the same as the individual. Rather, it “ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation.” (PLP 10) The subject as a linguistic category thus depends on the existence, if not the presence, of language, or at least of a linguistic structure. The need for the other is a consequence of the subject’s embeddedness within language, within discourse – the question is, then, primarily what form this other can assume, and how the fundamental underpinnings of subjectivity can be sustained when cultural and linguistic structures are no longer physically present.

### *Big Two-Hearted River: Nick’s Gaze*

Nick looked at the burned-over stretch of hillside, where he had expected to find the scattered houses of the town and then walked down the railroad track to the bridge over the river. The river was there. It swirled against the log spiles of the bridge. Nick looked

down into the clear, brown water, colored from the pebbly bottom, and watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. As he watched them they changed their positions by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again.

Nick watched them a long time. (163)

This essay is by no means the first to remark upon the extraordinary insistence on the visual in the first pages of this story, but what I am interested in here is particularly the rapport that is established between Nick and his surroundings. The story begins with a scene that separates Nick from all human company: “The train went on up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burnt timber. Nick sat down on the bundle of canvas and bedding the baggage man pitched out of the door of the baggage car.” (163) The baggage man, the only other possible person in this scene, is there only as a trace, in the shape of Nick’s bags, while the character himself is in the train going out of sight. From looking at the train – the embodiment of society departing? – Nick turns to looking at the hill-side and the river that is, after all, the object of his journey. The brief description we get of the remains of the town of Seney is not explicitly focalised through Nick, who, in any case, seems to show very little interest in the ruins. Society is not only departing along the railway, social structure also lies in ruin around Nick – an excellent starting point for one who desires to leave society behind for an indefinite period of time: “He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him.” (164)

If Nick feels he has left the need for discursivity behind, he does immediately establish a visual rapport with his environment – particularly with the animal life that stands out in the dead, burnt-over environment he is in: “Nick’s heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old feeling.” (164) Thus, in the early stages of the story, Nick firmly renounces the discursive ties of society and exchanges them for a visual and affective connection to the natural phenomena he encounters.

Strychacz' reading of Nick's gaze focuses on the absence of an other and the centrality of Nick's "I/eye": "as the sole spectator, he becomes the subject of every act of looking and perception; he is free to subject any object within the visual field to his gaze." (228) Reasoning from Nick's "master gaze" which "must not be recognized by another" (ibid.), Strychacz interprets this story as an illustration of the struggle for "true manhood" to be "rescued and then revived in isolation." (ibid.) Such a reading, plausible as it may seem, is certainly incompatible with Butler (in whose work "pure manhood" can only be a discursive construction in its own right, and one that is established performatively at that), it also goes against the "connection" argued for above – the idea that Nick does, in fact, create a (non-human, non-social) other to relate his own subjectivity to. This "connection" (or projection, if you will) is highlighted by the succession of sentences that take inanimate objects as their grammatical subjects: "The road climbed steadily", "The road ran on, dipping occasionally, but always climbing", "Finally, the road [...] reached the top", "The burned country stopped off at the left with the range of hills", "On ahead islands of dark pine trees rose out of the plain." (164) Because this climbing, rising, and stopping are focalised through Nick, the text indicates the extent to which Nick, at this early point in the story, is immersed in, and guided by, the landscape he is in; for it is Nick who does the climbing, and Nick who perceives the country as "stopping off". The attribution of movement and action to his surroundings does not amount to anthropomorphisation, but does attribute to the landscape qualities that are projected from a subjective (and therefore discursive) point of view. Even in this burnt and blackened landscape, Nick, as a focaliser, finds (grammatical) subjectivity in the road, in the country, in the trees. This attribution of subjectivity, of life, culminates a few paragraphs further, when Nick reaches the end of the fire-devastated country:

Underfoot the ground was good walking. Two hundred yards down the hillside the fire line stopped. Then it was sweet fern, growing ankle high, to walk through, and clumps

of jack pines; a long, undulating country with frequent rises and descents, sandy underfoot and *the country alive again*. (165, my italics)

The burnt city of Seney, and its immediate surroundings, figure as a kind of purgatory, in which society is already absent, though its place has not yet quite been taken by the “country”<sup>31</sup> and its aliveness. It is a middle stage that Nick works through with ease (“the ground was good walking”) before entering the country he has been aiming for. “He broke off some sprigs of the heather sweet fern, and put them under his pack straps. The chafing crushed it and he smelled it as he walked.” (165)

Nick’s “guide” through this purgatory is an animal that will continue to play its part later on in the story: the grasshopper, to which Nick utters the first spoken words of the story:

“‘Go on, hopper,’ Nick said, speaking out loud for the first time. ‘Fly away somewhere.’”

He tossed the grasshopper up into the air and watched him sail away to a charcoal stump across the road. (165)

Hereupon, Nick decides to leave the road crossed by the grasshopper, and head into the “live” country. Having left the world of discourse behind – or so Nick believes – he nonetheless invokes language to address a grasshopper. This implies another instance of Nick’s (mockingly?) attributing subjectivity to the others in his unpeopled environment. This attribution is complicated when Nick makes the grasshopper respond to his exhortation: by throwing it up into the air, Nick makes sure that the grasshopper indeed “fl[ies] away somewhere.” Hardly expecting the grasshopper to respond to his command, Nick shows an awareness of the “game” he is playing: he physically forces the grasshopper to obey his spoken command, and thereby shows that the attribution of subjectivity (even of sociality) is purely imaginary.

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<sup>31</sup> It is useful to bear in mind the resonance of the word “country” in Hemingway’s work, for instance in the short story “The Last Good Country”, or in *The Sun Also Rises*, when Bill Gorton approvingly announces: “This is country.” (122)



This perspective on the story may illuminate one of the traditional hermeneutical challenges in the text: why does Nick make such an effort to head north when he could easily access the river much closer to Seney?

He was tired and very hot, walking across the uneven, shadeless pine plain. At any time he knew he could strike the river by turning off to his left. It could not be more than a mile away. But he kept on toward the north to hit the river as far upstream as he could go in one day's walking. (165)

This passage is particularly hard to make sense of if one follows Strychacz' interpretative track which insists on the self being "offstage": if there is no audience, no spectator, no gaze but Nick's own "master gaze", then why would Nick go through all this trouble? There is, after all, no "real" reason for him to carry his too heavy pack as far north as he can make it in a hot summer's day. The problem can be framed differently if we allow for a significant connection to the landscape itself, if we imagine Nick's natural surroundings as an other that does impinge on Nick's actions and guides his behaviour – that is, an other, that, for all its lack of society, is transformed into an audience of sorts.

We have already seen that Nick's leaving the road was triggered by a grasshopper. But he is guided also by larger natural elements: "He did not need to get his map out. He knew where he was by the position of the river" and, furthermore, "Nick kept his direction by the sun." (165) The arduous nature of Nick's journey, then, is stressed by the fact that, once he chooses not to use his man-made map,<sup>32</sup> he travels not only off-road, but also upstream, against the flow of the river, and north, away from the sun. This sets up a struggle against the very elements that guide his course. Nick is not one with his surroundings: he is guided by them, but not determined by them. One could say that Nick's subjectivity is maintained because he exists within an relationship to an other without being reduced to that other.

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<sup>32</sup> This is in stark contrast to Harold Krebs in "Soldier's Home". In both stories, however, maps figure as a rational abstraction from the real "country" – which appeals to Krebs, but not to Nick, under the circumstances.

Reading “Nature” as an “Other,” particularly within a Butlerian frame, may seem far-fetched, or even a bit woolly, but it is worth noting that, when discussing Levinas in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler draws attention to the sometimes “woolly” nature of the other:

[The] condition of being impinged upon is also an “address” of a certain kind. One can argue that it is the voice of no one, the voice of a God, understood as infinite and preontological, that makes itself known in the “face” of the Other. That would surely conform to many of Levinas’s own claims about the primary address. For our purposes however, we will treat the Other in Levinas as belonging to an idealized dyadic structure of social life. (90)

This dimension of the other, which can range from “no one” to “God” to “an idealized dyadic structure” allows us to see that the mechanism at work in BTHR is, essentially, religious: in need of an other, Nick attributes characteristics of his own subjectivity to his surroundings, in order to preserve the dyadic structure of social life even when social life is absent.

Recognising this non-descript religious aspect of Nick’s efforts, it becomes possible to read his endeavours as similar to Jake Barnes’ in *TSAR*: as a sort of pilgrimage. First of all, the idea of pilgrimage (at least in Hemingway) precludes taking the easiest or shortest possible way to one’s objective: the struggle augments the satisfaction. Secondly, the struggle is performed in the sight of an other, particularly God. The religious dimension of BTHR offers an explanation for Nick’s efforts to reach the river as far north as he can in one day’s walk: he proves himself worthy in the eyes of an imagined other, incorporated by the landscape he is in. This is by no means to suggest that Nick is “repentant before God” or seeking to please some deity, but much rather that the landscape itself, and Nick’s relating to it, is the reason – or the excuse – for him to exert himself in this fashion. The text’s relative and rather ambiguous religious dimension comes to the fore when Nick has finally set up camp and cooked his dinner: “‘Chrise,’ Nick said, ‘Geezus Chrise,’ he said happily.”

### *Labor of the Hands*

But labor of the hands, even when pursued to the very verge of drudgery, is perhaps never the worst form of idleness. It has a constant and imperishable moral, and to the scholar it yields as classic result. (*Walden*, 125)

In the chapter “The Bean-Field,” Thoreau gives a detailed account of his principal form of practical labour: that of “planting, and hoeing, and harvesting, and threshing, and picking over and selling” (128) beans. This chapter abounds with references to Virgil’s *Eclogues* and with high-flown metaphors, as well as practical advice for the amateur agriculturist, but it remains very unclear *why* exactly Thoreau decides to spend so much time on this particular pursuit: “But why should I raise them? Only Heaven knows.” (123)

A significant portion of Part I of *BTHR*, and nearly all of Part II is given over to the detailed description of practical actions. And, as is the case in *Walden*, it is not entirely clear why Nick is so absorbed by his manual tasks, or, indeed, why they occupy so prominent a place in the narrative. A clue is provided in the lines: “His mind was starting to work. He knew he could choke it because he was tired enough.” (169) Nick’s mind had been working already: contemplating how exactly to brew his coffee transported him back to the memory of an earlier fishing trip with two companions, Bill and Hopkins. Having thought through this memory (and having finished the coffee), Nick’s mind apparently takes him to thoughts he would rather “choke”.<sup>33</sup> In retrospect, then, we are led to conclude that Nick’s manual activity, apart from serving its practical purposes, is drawn out so Nick can keep his mind off things. From the reader’s perspective, this has a double significance: on the one hand, we can

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<sup>33</sup> What these thoughts are has been the subject of endless debate: the earlier hypothesis, defended by Malcolm Cowley, Carlos Baker and Philip Young assumes that Nick is working through a war trauma (though the war is not once mentioned in the text: this hypothesis rests on elements from other Nick Adams stories – particularly “Now I lay Me” – and biographical data. Kenneth Lynn (followed by, amongst others, Carl Eby, has disputed this hypothesis and attributes Nick’s emotional distress to psychological causes. Others, like Strychacz or Matthew Stewart have pointed out these two theses are not mutually exclusive. Because the text is deliberately silent on the issue, however, there is no need for our purposes here to try and pin down the exact nature of Nick’s troubles.

see that Nick is keeping himself busy so as not to be faced with the workings of his mind, and on the other hand, we are flooded with information, very little of which gives us any access to Nick's thoughts, feelings or motivations.

One explanation for the heavy stress on the details of manual labour is that it is a very straightforward way of establishing oneself as a subject – a way of asserting one's agency beyond or outside of the boundaries of grammar: you can plant beans and watch them grow in the knowledge that those beans would not have been there but for your interference. Similarly you can make sure your tent is set up perfectly and, once inside, rest assured that you are comfortable thanks to your own painstaking effort.

Another way of looking at this issue is through the lens of performance once again. This time, not so much performance for an other, but perhaps sooner performance to oneself: performance, in Butlerian parlance, is not only an effect of the double bind of self and other, it is also implicitly a mode of self-fashioning:

According to the understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. (*GT*, 173)

Whatever the nature of Nick's problems (see footnote 4), we can read his commitment to physical activity as a longing for this "coherence" that is "desired, wished for, idealized". This is a mode of performance that, *pace* Strychacz, does not even need an audience to do its work: if Nick desires to stave off disturbing thoughts relating to his own identity, he can turn to manual tasks not only to "take his mind off things," but particularly to affirm his identity, his agency in direct, concrete terms.

This reading also accounts for the sudden shift within part I of the story: as we have seen, Nick's trek to his camp site is determined by his relationship to the landscape, to his natural surroundings. Once he arrives, however, the story focuses almost entirely on necessary practicalities and the details of Nick's setting up camp and cooking dinner. In the reading proffered here, this shift is not merely related to action (from movement to settlement), but also from one aspect of performativity to another. In the first part, Nick relates to his environment as his other, and thereby creates a non-social (but perhaps sociomorph) backdrop against which to establish his subjectivity. In the second part, then, he focuses on manual labour and its immediate effects in order to establish himself as having a coherent, reliable identity. Only when he has nothing more to do – when camp is set up, when he has cooked and eaten his dinner, and when the only thing to look at is “the glow of the fire” (165), he finds his identity under threat again and decides to go to sleep.

### *Fishing for Symbols*

The reader who expects or desires answers from Part II of “Big Two-Hearted River” can only be disappointed: mainly, it meticulously describes Nick fishing, providing enough detail to serve as a manual for the apprentice fisherman. In fact, after reading both Thoreau and Hemingway, the reader who (like this author) has never displayed any particular interest in either agriculture or fishing may well feel better equipped hitting the streams of Michigan than planting the beans of Boston. This amount of detail further obfuscates Nick's emotional life – both to the reader and to Nick himself, presumably – while also making for a rich stream of meanings in which to fish for symbols.

Nick is awoken by the sun – his guide from the previous day – and, immediately, we find him in an altered state of mind: in part I, “His muscles ached and the day was hot, but Nick felt happy” (164), “He was tired and very hot” (165), “Nick was happy as he crawled

into the tent” and “He was very tired” (167). In the beginning of part II, we find “Nick was excited. He was excited by the early morning and the river. He was really too hurried to eat breakfast, but he knew he must” (173), “He washed his hands at the stream. He was excited to be near it.” (174 ) The transition from happy and tired to excited and hurried is accompanied by a shift from the visual to the tactile: instead of just looking at the trout, or seeing the river through the trees, Nick is eager to make physical contact with river and fish, thereby combining the two different “modes” that characterised him previously. Yesterday, Nick was content to wear himself out walking through the landscape, following the river upstream, afterwards to set up camp with great care once the sun was down. If my reading of those scenes was plausible, then it must be possible to apply the same logic to the second half of the story. In fact, we will see that the two modes of performativity as they were analysed earlier merge in this section of the text.

The focus on Nick’s practical tasks is maintained throughout this second part: we see Nick get out of his tent, collect grasshoppers as bait, fix breakfast and pack lunch, head off to the river and fish. In terms of plot, in fact, this is all that happens. And yet, despite the paucity of events, the narrative bustles with activity: Nick – as well the text – is focused entirely on the tasks at hand and appears very satisfied that way: “Nick felt awkward and professionally happy with all his equipment hanging from him.” (175) Nick’s skill and knowledge as a fisherman allow him to be in charge of his environment and to control the outcome of his actions, much as his setting up camp and cooking dinner the previous evening allowed him to gain a sense of mastery, and an opportunity to keep his mind from “working.”

Nick’s relation to his natural surroundings, however, is less straightforward than it was in part I because it is marked, as was mentioned above, by a shift from the visual to the tactile: “He stepped into the stream. It was a shock. His trousers clung tight to his legs. His shoes felt the gravel. The water was a rising cold shock.” (175) The repeated mention of “shock” as

Nick steps into the river indicates a new stage in the narrative: the river is no longer a landmark, a feature by which to guide one's steps – it is shockingly real and cold now Nick is immersed in it. The trout, too, are no longer to be looked at from a bridge: Nick's relationship to them is now established through rod, line, and hook:

There was a tug on the line. Nick pulled against the taut line. It was his first strike. Holding the now living rod across the current, he brought in the line with his left hand. The rod bent in jerks, the trout pumping against the current. Nick knew it was a small one. He lifted the rod straight up in the air. It bowed with the pull.

He saw the trout in the water jerking with his head and body against the shifting tangent of the line in the stream.

Nick took the line in his left hand and pulled the trout, thumping tiredly against the current, to the surface. His back was mottled the clear, water-over-gravel color, his side flashing in the sun. The rod under his right arm, Nick stooped, dipping his right hand into the current. He held the trout, never still, with his moist right hand, while he unhooked the barb from his mouth, then dropped him back into the stream. (175)

This fragment illustrates how two modes of performativity converge in the fishing sequence: this is primarily a sequence of actions, performed (and rendered) with an eye for detail that shows Nick in control. Secondly, it also illustrates how the fishing gear establishes a sort of communication between Nick and the fish that (from the beginning of the story onwards) figures as an important part of that non-social other that Nick relates to. The communication, though obviously non-lingual and non-social is now very physical rather than merely visual, and it is established through the medium of Nick's fishing gear – in fact, it was prefigured by Nick's baiting his hook with a grasshopper: "Nick took him by the head and held him while he threaded the slim hook under his chin, down through his thorax and into the last segments of his abdomen." (175) The creature Nick addressed with kindness the day before is now run

through to serve as bait with which to catch the trout Nick had admired from the railway bridge.

The shift in the relation between Nick and the non-social other entails an increase in interaction (appropriative as it is), and a decrease in the amount of projection that is needed to establish this other *as* other (and, consequently, the self that relates to it). Thus, the performative mechanisms that establish Nick as a subject are still twofold, but mingled: not only does he firmly establish his subjectivity by successfully manipulating his environment, he also undeniably interacts with other beings: by killing the grasshopper, by catching the trout, holding it, and throwing it back. And this interaction has its effects on Nick himself, most clearly so when he hooks the big trout that escapes when the leader on Nick's line breaks: "Nick's hand was shaky. He reeled in slowly. The thrill had been too much. He felt, vaguely, a little sick, as though it would be better to sit down." (177) Nick is emotionally engaged in the fishing, but at the same time we see that he deliberately triggers and controls his emotions: "He did not want to rush his sensations any." (177)

Nick's not wanting to "rush his sensations" is symptomatic of his struggle for mastery – over his environment, over the fish, but most crucially over himself. This fundamental insight also helps to explain why, at various points in the story, Nick does not want to make the fishing any more difficult than it has to be. In contrast to the previous day, when he deliberately hiked further than strictly necessary, Nick now, quite literally, goes with the flow: "It was no fun to fish upstream with this much current." (178) He decides not to fish in a deep hole underneath a tree because "[h]e was sure he would get hooked in the branches." (178) He also decides not to fish the swamp:

Nick did not want to go in there now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them. In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun



did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. (180)

Nick can master his emotions, but does not care to pit his mastery against “tragedy.” The sun, Nick’s natural guide, does not come through in the swamp, but it is not always helpful in the open either: “It was almost impossible to fish then, the surface of the water was blinding as a mirror in the sun.” (178) As Margot Sempere suggests:

“That the blinding, impenetrably lighted surface disables the fisherman is clear; but what also may be suggested here is the capacity of the river to reflect the fisherman, to make him conscious of himself in its mirror. Wishing to avoid both blind fishing and the possibility of self-discovery, Nick's alternative seems to be an equally troubling “wallowing”-upstream, and too deep for safety.” (27)

Nick avoids circumstances in which his control and mastery would be contested, or in which the mechanisms he employs to establish his agency could be “reflected.” And yet, by the end of the story, we find that Nick’s character has somewhat evolved, and it is indicated that this evolution is not yet at an end.

Particularly, we find that Nick’s attitude to discourse is changing again: “He wished he had brought something to read. He felt like reading.” (180) Furthermore, the very end of the story constitutes both a return and a move forward: “He was going back to camp. He looked back. The river just showed through the trees. There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp.” (180) Though Nick is not yet ready to face the “tragedy” of fishing the swamp, his taste for discourse, for narrative, is being redeemed, and, while he is going “back” to the camp, he does foresee engaging with the swamp – that is, no longer warding off all unpleasantness and engaging with an other that is not controllable or predictable, presumably as a preparation before returning to that unpredictable and unknowable other that is society.

### *Into the Wild*

If Henry Abelove claimed that, in *Walden*, what is held up as valuable is “life outside the discourses of domesticity, romantic love and marriage, and the white bourgeois family,” then, surely, the same can be said about “Big Two-Hearted River.” To view the story in this light also challenges traditional readings of the story that emphasise the therapeutic purposes of Nick’s fishing trip: the argument can be turned around to reveal the side of the coin that repudiates the “white bourgeois family” and its discourse. Though it is textually indicated that, indeed, Nick does suffer some kind of emotional distress, we can also infer that this distress exists within the paradigms laid down by the society he has left behind. The problem that remains, then, is that, in repudiating society, it is always necessarily retained.

“Big Two-Hearted River” invites a “queer” reading analogous to Abelove’s reading of *Walden*: Nick retreats into the wild to avoid society and its expectations, but cannot escape the pull of discourse and narrative. The outdoors, then, figures as an alternative “other” in which masculine identity can be reinvented, reaffirmed and, first and foremost, performed. Nick’s fireside memories of an earlier fishing trip invoke a narrative of male homosocial bonding outside the structures of the family – clearly showing up Nick’s remaining attachment to narrative: “Nick drank the coffee, the coffee according to Hopkins. The coffee was bitter. Nick laughed. It made a good ending to the story.” (169) Even the trout Nick catches are males – before he expertly de-sexes them:

Nick cleaned them, slitting them from the vent to the tip of the jaw. All the insides and the gills and tongue came out in one piece. They were both males; long gray-white strips of milt, smooth and clean. All the insides clean and compact, coming out all together. (180)

The outside, the non-social, the natural, in this context, is distinctly gendered: it is a masculine space, purportedly outside of discourse. (Specifically in American literature, however, this

space is everything but “outside discourse” – few topics, before and after Thoreau, have inspired American authors more than the wild outdoors.)

The problem of the solitary self trying to escape society brings to mind the story of Christopher McCandless, the young man who turned his back on society to perish in the Alaskan wilderness in 1992. (The circumstances that led to his death were reconstructed by Jon Krakauer in a narrative that later, somewhat ironically, was picked up by the film industry.) This diary note, written about a month and half before his death, echoes Thoreau (and possibly Nick Adams) to an extraordinary extent:

I am reborn. This is my dawn. Real life has just begun.

Deliberate Living: Conscious attention to the basics of life, and a constant attention to your immediate environment and its concerns, example → A job, a task, a book; anything requiring efficient concentration (Circumstance has no value. It is how one relates to a situation that has value. All true meaning resides in the personal relationship to a phenomenon, what it means to you). (Chris McCandless, notebook, emphasis in original, qtd. in Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 168)

McCandless’ (awkwardly real-life) insistence on deliberate living (a direct reference to Thoreau: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately” (*Walden*, 72)) and the necessity of relating to “a phenomenon” is not only astonishingly close to Nick Adams, it also shows how adherence to discursive principles – the “idealized dyadic structure of social life” – is retained and cherished after months spent in complete isolation.

### *Monarch of all I survey*

Nick Adams cannot break free from the society that made him, nor could Thoreau, nor could Chris McCandless except, tragically, by dying. But it is worth remembering that social constraints – in Butlerian theory – are also *enabling* constraints: it is possible to make the

decision to physically abandon society, embrace solitude, and find a non-social other in “nature” or, to use Hemingway’s preferred term, the “country.”

This possibility allows for a more positive reading of “Big Two-Hearted River” than is generally proposed: Nick may be fleeing from his problems – whatever they are – but his doing so performatively establishes him as a subject relating to an other that does not carry the limitations, the demands, of the social other he (presumably temporarily) chooses to ignore. This move is “queer” in that it distances itself (physically and emotionally) from the average workings of society governed by a heterosexual matrix, and particularly because it enables a mode of life that is alternative to this matrix.

The empowerment that is derived from retreating from society is only relative, but Nick’s positioning himself first as an observer, subjecting the landscape and the fish to his gaze, and then as an efficient outdoorsman, skilfully manipulating his environment, gives him a sense of mastery. And, though his mastery is not valid in any social context, it does allow him to retain his subjectivity in defiance of social constraints.

I am monarch of all I *survey*,

My right there is none to dispute. (*Walden*, 66)

# A Farewell to Stable Genders

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## *Catherine the Nurse-Whore*

Much has been made of gender relations in *A Farewell to Arms*, especially by feminist critics, some of whom have condemned Hemingway for idealising the subservient woman in the character of Catherine Barkley, whereas others (including Simone de Beauvoir, no less) lauded the author for “regard[ing] women as fellow creatures.”<sup>34</sup> (qtd in Traber, 28) Catherine’s eagerness to please is remarkable indeed (and a potential eye-sore to gender-conscious readers), but more recent criticism has attempted to complicate the idea that Catherine simply gives herself up to embody Frederic’s every desire – and what better way to complicate matters than to resort to (a version of) performativity. Comley and Scholes, for instance, suggest:

Such apparent compliance and self-erasure have seemed appalling to many readers (though some male critics have found Catherine an ideal woman), but it is possible to read this episode in a slightly different way. We might, for instance, see Catherine not as erasing herself so much as assuming a role in a game of sex and love that allows her to transfer her affections to a man other than her dead fiancé. She assumes the role of whore as a means of escaping profoundly cultural codes [...]. (37)

What is productive in this reading is not the idea that Catherine alternates between adopting the roles of nurse and whore, thus embodying a “primal male fantasy of modern culture (38)” but much rather the idea that she “performs” certain roles or uses certain cultural forms in order to get away from the trauma that is the loss of her fiancé. (It is ironic that Comley and

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<sup>34</sup> Critical responses to Catherine are not dissimilar from those to Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*, who has been variously labelled “hard boiled”, “a female who never becomes a woman”, “and exclusively destructive force” and even “a compulsive bitch”. (See Wendy Martin, “Brett Ashley as New Woman in *The Sun Also Rises*” and Kathy Willingham, “Bretty Ashley and the Code Hero Debate”.)

Scholes, in their eagerness to categorise Hemingway's *Genders* – the title of their book – assert Catherine's escape from "profoundly cultural roles" by placing her into two profoundly cultural categories, but these claims will be addressed at a later point.)

The idea of Catherine's role-play is picked up by Daniel Traber, who usefully casts it in terms of performativity (with reference to Judith Butler), to

argue for an anti-essentialist Hemingway who uses his central female character to critique gender roles and their naturalised social functions. Indeed, the constructed nature of female-feminine identity is such a central issue that it should affect how a reader makes sense of practically every creative element in the novel. *A Farewell to Arms* offers a sophisticated study of gender – both masculinity and femininity – as a self-conscious performance. (27)

Traber goes on to discuss the performative dimension of femininity in the novel, and only indicates that masculinity can be read along similar lines. However, if performativity, in Traber's text, is assumedly "self-conscious", then how is it also subversive of identity to the point of being "anti-essentialist"? I will first turn to the character of Catherine, and particularly Traber's analysis, before examining Frederic Henry through the lens of performativity.

### *Femininity, Masks, Performance*

The extent to which Catherine Barkley's performance is highlighted in the novel makes her a very eligible topic for the kind of analysis Traber provides: from the moment of her introduction, it is made very clear that she actively assumes a certain role, or performs a certain persona.

She looked at me, 'And do you love me?'

'Yes.'

‘You did say you loved me, didn’t you?’

‘Yes,’ I lied. ‘I love you.’ I had not said it before.

‘And you call me Catherine?’

‘Catherine.’ We walked on a way and were stopped under a tree.

‘Say, “I’ve come back to Catherine in the night.”’

‘I’ve come back to Catherine in the night.’

‘Oh, darling, you have come back, haven’t you?’

‘Yes.’

‘I love you so and it’s been awful. You won’t go away?’

‘No, I’ll always come back.’ (29)

Catherine not only plays the part of a woman in love, she also forces Frederic to participate in her “staging” of a romantic meeting. That she is very consciously citing a cultural norm – perhaps even rather a stereotype – is something she makes very clear herself:

‘This is a rotten game we play, isn’t it?’

‘What game?’

‘Don’t be dull.’

‘I’m not, on purpose.’

‘You’re a very nice boy,’ she said. ‘And you play it as well as you know how. But it’s a rotten game.’

‘Do you always know what people think?’

‘Not always, but I do with you. You don’t have to pretend you love me. That’s over for the evening. Is there anything you’d like to talk about?’

‘But I do love you.’

‘Please let’s not lie when we don’t have to. I had a very fine little show and I’m all right now. You see I’m not mad and I’m not gone off. It’s only a little sometimes.’ (29-30)

Catherine, having staged her “fine little show” also becomes the one completely and suddenly reverse the situation she herself created: she goes from the woman-in-love to the woman-in-charge, whereas Frederic, still playing along to the best of his abilities, finds himself shifted from the man adored to the man dominated. Traber reads the curious polarity generated in this very brief exchange (and in further scenes, which we will go on to examine) as follows:

Hemingway is problematizing gender by having Catherine appropriate the woman in love persona as a tactic to pull together the broken pieces of her life. Scholars typically treat Catherine’s “love strategy” as a well-intentioned evasive maneuver. But as a woman who consciously performs, or mimics, the expectations of femininity, Catherine is hardly unaware of her actions, nor is she simply “crazy” as she offhandedly remarks. She may be experiencing a sense of psychological turmoil, but she is perfectly sane in her chosen method for dealing with it. She opens a space for agency between the cracks of wanting the lie and *knowing* it is a lie. (30)

I agree with Traber to some extent, but I would like to suggest that this reading, while it talks about performance, does not address performativity. Yes, Catherine does “appropriate” a persona, and, yes, she does “cite” a conventional version of femininity and, indeed, she seems to do so with a high degree of awareness. But underlying the assumption that this creates a “sane” and an “insane” version of Catherine, or the Catherine that “knows” the lie and the one that “wants” the lie, is the assumption that there is such a thing as the “real” Catherine who does the knowing and who is essentially “sane”. But if the woman in love persona is “fake”, are we then to conclude that, in the “vacillation between romantic fantasy and hard-boiled cynicism” (31), the latter pole figures as “real”? This seems to be the case in Traber’s reading of Butler, especially when, with regard to *Gender Trouble*, he claims that “one can perform an identity using the mainstream codes and meanings, but a parody of the naturalised role can expose that identity as a construct.” (32) It is not just that one *can* perform an identity,



however: in *Gender Trouble* and elsewhere, Butler is adamant about identity existing only in and through performance:

My argument is not that there need not be a “doer behind the deed,” but that the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed. This is not a return to an existential theory of the self as constituted through its acts, for the existential theory maintains a prediscursive structure for both the self and its acts. It is precisely the discursively variable construction of each in and through the other that has interested me here. (181)

If the “doer” is always an “effect” of the deed and, hence, cannot be said to exist outside of performance, then this has its consequences for Traber’s reading of Catherine’s polarity, for it then becomes impossible to think of one version of Catherine as more authentic, more real, or more sincere than another version. It becomes, for instance, logically impossible to say whether the cynical Catherine is somehow *prior* or fundamental to the romantic one or vice versa. It may be true that the textual build-up invites us to read Catherine (especially in the earlier stages) as a woman who seduces Frederic as a sort of game, to put on a “little show” she somehow gets some satisfaction or solace out of, but that does not make it impossible to turn the tables on this reading by suggesting that she may just as well be a hopeless romantic who “plays” at cynicism now and again in order to make herself seem more interesting, or in order to suit the circumstances the better. I am not suggesting that this is the case, I am merely pointing out that these “discursively variable construction[s]” are not mutually exclusive.

This also entails that the concept of the “lie” becomes less workable, seeing as it returns us to a stable self that then decides to produce an untrue and temporary version of itself. But, of course, Traber is entirely right in addressing the issue of *agency* that arises from the gap between “the cracks of wanting the lie and *knowing* it is a lie.” (30) In order to keep “agency” on the playing field while excluding the morally charged and ontologically unsound presence of the “lie” I would like to return to *ekstacy* as a way of maintaining the gap that agency

requires. It is true that *ekstacy* does not appear in *Gender Trouble*<sup>35</sup> – in fact, to my knowledge it is not until *Giving an Account of Oneself* that it comes up in Butler’s work – but it may well have been its absence that has caused so many problematic interpretations of agency in Butler’s work, particularly *Gender Trouble*. For, if the doer is constructed in and through the deed, does that make the doer a victim of the deed, or does it make the deed potentially arbitrary? In other words: are we, according to *Gender Trouble*, always determined by discourse so that we are never responsible for our deeds, or are we, rather, completely free to assume any gender we can dream up and totally determine our own identity? The impasse between determinism and voluntarism, however, can be overcome by thinking of the self as the Hegelian subject that is always comported outside itself in order to reflect upon itself. This outside-ness, then, guarantees the gap required for agency and reflection. So, for the sake of avoiding moral overtones and blurred theoretical issues, it may be worthwhile thinking of Catherine as an essentially *ecstatic* subject, meaning that she is indeed, as Traber suggests, very much aware of her behaviour, even to the extent that she may modify her “performance” to manipulate Frederic, to play social games, or even to consciously get away from the constraints of her past – all of which may be more relevant and interesting than to simply accept that she is lying.

This move away from the lie as a valid analytic concept ties in with Traber’s resorting to the figure of the “mask” with regard to Catherine in labour:

But the mask of dutiful femininity slips off when the pain grows and she turns to the anaesthetic. The change is weighted with symbolism since the gas is delivered through a mask, now a substitute for the failed mask of femininity. (36-37)

*Gender Trouble* devotes a subchapter to “Lacan, Rivière and the Strategies of Masquerade,” in which Butler meanders through a discussion of Lacan’s ideas on sexuation and Rivière’s

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<sup>35</sup> It seems plausible, though, that *ekstacy*, or at least the Hegelian subject, lurks underneath the surface of the text of *Gender Trouble*.

take on femininity *as* masquerade to arrive at a conclusion that made her instantly unpopular with scholars working in a strictly Lacanian vein of theory: “The construction of the law that guarantees failure is symptomatic of a slave morality that disavows the very generative powers it uses to construct the “Law” as a permanent impossibility.” (73) The bone of contention here is Lacan’s assumption that gender roles are attributed along lines of “having” or “being” the Phallus – both of which are inherently impossible. Butler takes issue with Lacan’s “explaining that this ‘appearing as being’ the Phallus that women are compelled to do is inevitably *masquerade*.<sup>36</sup>” In what follows, she outlines two different kinds of interpretation of this masquerade:

At least two very different tasks can be discerned from the ambiguous structure of Lacan’s analysis. On the one hand, masquerade may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology, an appearing that makes itself convincing as a “being”; on the other hand, masquerade can be read as a denial of feminine desire that presupposes some prior ontological femininity regularly unrepresented by the phallic economy. (60)

The second track is the one taken by Traber, who suggests that Catherine’s mask of femininity “slips off,” presumable to reveal an underlying “prior ontological femininity” – which would go against the idea of the “performative production of a sexual ontology.” Butler’s text, though attempting to steer a middle course, lends credence to Joan Rivière when she claims:

The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the “masquerade”. My suggestion is not, however, that there

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<sup>36</sup> Butler quotes Lacan writing that “the effect that the ideal or typical manifestations of behaviour in both sexes, up to and including the act of sexual copulation, are entirely propelled into comedy.” (*GT*, 60) As an etymological point of interest: the word “mask” is derived, via Italian, from the Arabic “maskhara” (مسخرة), meaning “comedy”.

is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (qtd. in *GT*, 67)

If femininity *is* masquerade, then this brings us to an interesting twist with regard to Traber's discussion of Catherine's personas, for inasmuch as "real" is a useful concept, it would be precisely the conventionally feminine Catherine who is the more "real" within the terms of the heterosexual matrix. But it is too soon to jump to this conclusion without looking, more or less systematically, at the textual evidence we can gather in the novel.

As Traber points out, Catherine's vacillation between romanticism and cynicism is especially prominent in the early stages of the novel, when Catherine's character is set up, so we need to bear her ambiguity in mind when we reach the scenes in which she attempts to be the perfect wife. When Catherine and Frederic first meet, Catherine tells him about her fiancé who was killed at the Somme, and whose mother sent her his rattan swagger stick as a memento. Traber suggests:

The mother's act of sending the swagger stick demands that Catherine play the gendered role of the grieving sweetheart. Then a sudden shift in attitude occurs. She becomes a wordly, jaded modern woman, stating, "I didn't know about anything then."  
(31)

Apart from emphasising Catherine's bewildering persona changes, her first appearance in the novel also points out a source for her instability: a nexus of loss and sexuality. Her fiancé was "blown to bits" and all she has left is his "swagger stick." While it may seem juvenile to read this stick as phallic, this novel is abundant in fetishes great and small, and the overtones of the boy's "thin rattan stick like a toy riding-crop, bound in leather" sent to the mourning fiancée by the boy's mother at least seem significant, particularly when Catherine says: "I could have given him that anyway. But I thought it would be bad for him." (18) – presumably talking not

just about marriage, but also about sex. Carl Eby, in his ground-breaking study of fetishism in Hemingway's life and work, goes so far as to offer the following commentary:

Catherine's refusal to get married before the war represented a refusal to give up her phallic properties, and her fantasy about her fiancé wandering into a hospital with "something picturesque" like a "sabre cut" implies that she envied his phallus. Given such a "castrate or be castrated" dynamic, intercourse understandably could have been "bad" for both Catherine and her fiancé. (Eby, 84)

Whether or not we accept this very Freudian reading, it is still clear that we are dealing with an economy of exchange along sexualised lines: Catherine is in the process of exchanging her dead fiancé for Frederic, and Frederic is taking Rinaldi's place as Catherine's suitor, while Rinaldi (at least for the moment) is diverted onto Catherine's companion miss Ferguson. The stick is there as an early reminder that this kind of exchange does not always turn out to be even-handed: in exchange for a dead fiancé, you may end up with nothing but his swagger stick.

As the relationship between Frederic and Catherine develops over the next two encounters, we find that Catherine's role becomes increasingly dominant, though in a very insidious way, by "manipulat[ing] condoned expectations of feminine behaviour and desire – and Frederic's reaction suggests she has done it effectively." (Traber, 31) Their courting is twice referred to as a game: about their second encounter, Frederic tells us: "I was angry and yet certain, seeing it all ahead like the moves in a chess game." (24) And, at the occasion of their third encounter (the one discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is Catherine who says out loud: "This is a rotten game we play, isn't it?" Ironically, this second reference to the "game" undermines the first, in which Frederic asserts that he could "see it all ahead" – Catherine proves him wrong.

There is a complicated relationship between the “little show” that Catherine has Frederic take part in and her cynical denouncing it as a game: for the revelation of the game as a game does not quite annul the validity of its performance. Frederic *has* said that he loves her (even though, in his own mind, he dismisses it as a lie), and he even repeats this after Catherine has interrupted the game, when *she* dismisses it as a lie: “‘But I do love you.’ ‘Please let’s not lie when we don’t have to.’” (30) Even though this declaration of love is twice deemed false, it is nonetheless this scene that serves as the beginning and, for all we know, the basis of their further relationship. It may be early days to speak of the performativity of love, but a Jamesian notion (William, not Henry) of psychology seems to be at hand, here: if you don’t smile because you are happy but, rather, are happy because you smile, then maybe you don’t say you love someone because you do – rather, you love someone because you say so.

I find myself in interpretative disagreement with Traber, however: if Catherine’s “performance” vacillates between the (“fake”) “condoned expectations of feminine behavior and desire” and her supposedly genuine cynicism, that would imply that Catherine seduces Frederic mainly in her “feminine” mode. At this point in the novel, however, we might ask whether her “feminine” mode is really all that attractive: she coerces Frederic into a false avowal of love and a promise always to return to her. Hardly a smashing recipe for a first date. If Frederic is attracted to Catherine after this chapter, then this must be at least partially because he is attracted precisely by the vacillation in her behaviour, and the unknowability that goes with it (as well as, of course, her physical beauty). If we read femininity as a mask (or even if we read femininity in classic Lacanian fashion as not really existing within the Symbolic), then this unknowability may be read as the feminine trait *par excellence*. Such a reading also refuses the rather simple assertion of one early reviewer, Henry Seidel Canby,

that “Catherine and [...] Henry have nothing strange or novel in their personalities.” (Studies in AFTA, 15) – a statement that resounded through early criticism of the novel.

Catherine’s volatility will indeed be transformed in later stages of the novel, and will turn much more into the stylised femininity that has generated so much critical attention. Catherine and Frederic meet only once between the scene discussed above and their reunion in the hospital in Milan where Frederic lies injured, namely when Frederic goes off to the front and Catherine gives him a Saint Anthony (another fetish object?) for protection. When Catherine reappears in the novel, the first conversation she has with Frederic is lovey-dovey without reservation or cynicism, and the subsequent scenes with these two lovers consist of innocent romantic banter (“‘You’ve such a lovely temperature.’ ‘You’ve got a lovely everything.’” (93) So let us take a closer look at the scene that leads Comley and Scholes to dub Catherine Frederic’s “nurse-whore.”

‘How many [other women] have you – how do you say it? – stayed with?’

‘None.’

‘You’re lying to me.’

‘Yes.’

‘It’s all right. Keep right on lying to me. That’s what I want you to do. Were they pretty?’ (95)

Of course we could read this as an instance of what Traber called “wanting the lie and knowing it is a lie,” but we could wonder if the lie is still a lie if it does convey the information Catherine wants to obtain. In any case, the rest of the conversation cannot be taken at face value, seeing as its validity is announced to be dubious.

‘Does she [a generic prostitute] say she loves him? Tell me that. I want to know.’

‘Yes. If he wants her to.’

‘Does he say he loves her?’ Tell me please. It’s important.’

‘He does if he wants to.’

‘But you never did? Really?’

‘No.’

‘Not really. Tell me the truth.’

‘No,’ I lied. (95)

We have seen that the declaration of love means a lot to Catherine – possibly because she understands its performative potential. Frederic’s lie is problematic because it is unclear whether Catherine still knows this is a lie. Its performative dimension, however, is highlighted by Catherine’s incitation “But you never did.” In this context, to reply “yes” would be a complete rupture of the flow of the conversation. This is not to justify Frederic’s response – it is rather to point out that this conversation is, again, somewhat staged by Catherine, and Frederic tells her what she wants to hear – which is the exact opposite of what Catherine deduces about the interaction between customer and prostitute:

‘And that’s it?’ Catherine said. ‘She says just what he wants her to?’

‘Not always.’

‘But I will. I’ll say just what you wish and I’ll do what you wish and then you will never want any other girls, will you?’ She looked at me very happily. ‘I’ll do what you want and say what you want and then I’ll be a great success, won’t I?’

‘Yes.’ [...]

‘I want what you want. There isn’t any me any more. Just what you want.’

‘You sweet.’

‘I’m good. Aren’t I good? You don’t want any other girls, do you?’

‘No.’

‘You see? I’m good. I do what you want.’ (95-96)



Why this passage should anger feminist critics is pretty obvious: the man lies to the woman and she then submits to his will by becoming something like the permanent, perfect prostitute. This claim is echoed even by “redemptionist” critics like Comley and Scholes, whose take remains that: “She assumes the role of whore as a means of escaping profoundly cultural codes [...]” (37) Traber argues something similar: “Catherine claims she will copy the behavior of prostitutes – doing and saying exactly what the customer wants – to “be a great success” as Frederic’s lover.” (32) But there is a fairly obvious counter-argument to this reading, and it is the “but” Catherine prefaces her commitment with. Prostitutes do not always, that is, not by definition, say what a man wants to hear. “*But* I will.” This signifies that Catherine does *not* “copy the behaviour of prostitutes,” but rather picks up on one aspect of prostitution that (as the reader knows) is hugely important to her: the playing along in a staged setting, performing along with the script laid out in the heterosexual matrix, saying what other want you to say. The irony, of course, is that she is the one who has “staged” this particular exchange, even to the extent that it seems that this is the point she had wanted to reach. In such a reading, this is a submission that is the result of enormous agency.

Does this mean that Catherine is “fake” or “lying”? I maintain that this is not the case. In fact, the line “There isn’t any me any more. Just what you want” is not just a manifestation of a malleable cultural norm, it is in fact a formulation of the very law (or Law) of Lacan’s version of the heterosexual matrix: in attempting to embody the phallus, the woman “is” the projection of male heterosexual desire. Thus, in this scene, Catherine is no longer trapped between her two previous personas; her persona is now the very mask of femininity itself.

She seems to stick to this “new” and more stable performance during most of the novel, though there is again a vacillation in her behaviour when the subject of prostitution comes up again (this is when Frederic and Catherine check into a hotel before the former has to return to the front):

‘What’s the matter, darling?’

I never felt like a whore before,’ she said. [...]

‘You’re not a whore.’

‘I know it, darling. But it isn’t nice to feel like one.’ Her voice was dry and flat.

‘This was the best hotel we could get in,’ I said. [...] Oh, hell, I thought, do we have to argue now?

‘Come over here, please,’ Catherine said. The flatness was all gone out of her voice.

‘Come over, please. I’m a good girl again.’ (137-138)

Both Catherine and Frederic state that she is not at all a whore (a statement Traber acknowledges, though Comley and Scholes do not) – in fact, the thought that she might be perceived as one, or might act like one, makes her briefly alter the performance of her femininity. But, after this brief moment, she appears to decide that, whatever the “mask” of femininity is or does, it cannot simply be equated with prostitution.

The mask reappears when Catherine is in labour and she receives a non-specified anaesthetic gas through a rubber mask; a proceeding in which Frederic actually gets to assist. Traber provides the following analysis:

In a final attempt to conceal the negative with a facade of cheerful optimism she calls the pains “good ones.” But the mask of dutiful femininity slips off when the pain grows and she turns to the anaesthetic. The change is weighted with symbolism since the gas is delivered through a mask, now a substitute for the failed mask of femininity. Catherine’s statements continually refer to her needing the gas: “I want it now,” “I want it again,” “*Give it to me. Give it to me.*” (Hemingway’s emphasis [...]) The gas numbs the fear of death, which is simultaneously the fear of life. The naturalized “good wife” is no longer in the room; she is replaced by someone who openly demands an artificial peace. The gas is a metaphor for traditional feminine identity. (36-37)

While connecting the rubber mask to the mask of femininity is inspired, it is hard to make out, from this passage, whether it is the mask or the gas that is metaphorically related to femininity. What is easier to make out, is that, in my Butlerian reading of the novel, femininity may be a mask, but it can hardly function as a sedative. The constraints of the heterosexual matrix are, after all, *enabling* constraints rather than anaesthetic vapours.

In the end, what transpires from this reading is that, though Catherine does vacillate between various roles or various types of femininity, it would be futile to decide which of these roles is the more “genuine” and should be considered the “real” Catherine. The femininity she adopts (one might say “chooses to adopt,” but that implies more voluntarism than is useful) is indeed, to some extent, “traditional” or in compliance with the heterosexual matrix, but this traditionality is undercut at many points, for instance when she suggests cutting her hair so she and Frederic look alike, or when she speaks of them being one entity rather than two separate people. (This is another dimension of her that Traber does go into whereas Comley and Scholes do not. This aspect of their relationship will be discussed further on.) Catherine’s femininity, then, is rich, problematic, and does not allow for any simple or reductive reading – especially a reading that would cite her as proof of Hemingway’s misogyny (or, indeed, feminist leanings). To read her behaviour against a Butlerian background, however, possibly allows for the many facets of her nature to co-exist without morally or textually privileging one over the others.

### *Masculinity, Homosociality and Performance*

Taking on Traber’s suggestion that “*A Farewell to Arms* offers a sophisticated study of gender – both masculinity and femininity,” this section will attempt an analysis of the character of Frederic Henry, to investigate whether his masculinity is constructed differently from Catherine’s femininity, in performative terms. One narrative difference should be taken

into account, here, namely that it is, of course, Frederic who is the narrator of this novel, and therefore the one who “constructs” both himself and Catherine in retrospect. But let us first turn to characterisation regardless of the overarching textual level of narration – and address that later.

If, in the case of Catherine, her vacillation between versions of femininity was a striking characteristic of her womanhood, a similar, more structural vacillation characterises Frederic Henry – a vacillation between the homosociality of army life and the heterosexuality of his romance with Catherine. Homosocial banter is introduced in the novel’s very first scene, after the descriptive opening paragraphs – the setting is the officers’ mess at dinner-time, the main characters a young captain, a priest, and the other officers, all indulging in spaghetti and wine, “clear red, tannic and lovely” (6):

‘Priest to-day with girls,’ the captain said looking at the priest and at me. The priest smiled and blushed and shook his head. This captain baited him often.

‘Not true?’ asked the captain. ‘To-day I see priest with girls,’ he explained to me. He took my glass and filled it, looking at my eyes all the time, but not losing sight of the priest.

‘Priest every night five against one.’ He made a gesture and laughed loudly. The priest accepted it as a joke.’ (7)

This scene firmly establishes the army as a theatre of homosociality: the comradeship between the men is stimulated by wine and banter – about sex, of course. The masturbation joke hints at the sexuality that underpins this homosociality – masturbation, after all, is only indirectly heterosexual (and imaginably common practice at the front?) and certainly illustrates the possibility of sexual practice for “men without women.”

The character most involved in the homosocial dimension of the army is Rinaldi. Peter Cohen has even argued that Rinaldi’s role has been downplayed by most critics, who have

generally been quick to dismiss Rinaldi's attempts to kiss Frederic as "brotherly." Leaning on Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men*, Cohen, somewhat provocatively but certainly refreshingly, concludes that

in that Rinaldi's feelings for Frederic also involve sexual desire, they constitute a mixture of all the ingredients normally associated with romantic love. I am still more comfortable with describing Rinaldi's feelings for Frederic as simply desire, but his behavior towards Frederic might also suggest that we look for two love stories in *A Farewell to Arms* instead of the usual one. (51)

To reach this conclusion, Cohen firmly relies on Sedgwick's argument that the boundary between the homosocial and the homosexual is blurred and permeable. Sedgwick assumes a continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual, while stressing that social manifestations of the homosocial depend on an implicit renunciation of this very continuum: aforementioned banter about masturbation is only made possible by the shared assumption, among participants, that homosexuality is impossible or at least off-limits. In Sedgwick's poststructuralist approach, this would mean that the spectre of homosexuality is constantly renounced (and, therefore, invoked) through homosocial practices.

This poststructuralist twist conveniently allows us to leave the question of Rinaldi's (and Frederic's) latent or repressed homosexuality unanswered – because unanswerable. In fact, to bicker over whether or not Frederic and Rinaldi are either gay (Cohen) or straight (Reynolds, Donaldson) seems a bit futile. What is more interesting to me, is to see how Frederic's masculinity is built on the foundations of the anything but stable sliding ground between the homosocial and the homosexual that is explored in Cohen's essay. The novel itself leaves us with many clues and no answers. For example, Cohen refers to the "trafficking of women" as underpinning homosocial bonds and argues that this is what happens when Rinaldi "transfers" Catherine from himself to Frederic. In the context of Cohen's reasoning,

which is informed by Gayle Rubin as well as Eve Sedgwick, this makes perfect sense, but Cohen also reminds us that this “transaction” initiates Frederic’s radical commitment to a heterosexual relationship. A relationship that, moreover, will cause him to part with the homosocial world of the army and the homosexuality it implies:

Rinaldi’s fears prove all too true: Frederic abandons the homosocial world of war for Catherine and a world of heterosexual love, and Rinaldi loses not only the object of his desire, but also his place in the novel as a whole. (50)

Other instances in the novel where the ties between the homosexual, the homosocial, and the heterosexual are invoked do not provide a more stable surface on which to pin down Rinaldi’s or Frederic’s sexual identity. Take one of the most problematic scenes in this respect, set in the field hospital after Frederic has been wounded:

‘We won’t quarrel, baby. I love you too much. But don’t be a fool.’

‘No. I’ll be wise like you.’

‘Don’t be angry, baby. Laugh. Take a drink. I must go, really.’

‘You’re a good old boy.’

‘Now you see. Underneath we are the same. We are brothers. Kiss me good-by.’

‘You’re sloppy.’

‘No. I am just more affectionate.’

I felt his breath come toward me. ‘Good-by.’ I come to see you again soon.’ His breath went away. ‘I won’t kiss you if you don’t want. I’ll send your English girl. Good-by, baby. The cognac is under the bed. Get well soon.’

He was gone. (62)

This sparse hemingwayesque dialogue illustrates the quagmire into which simple characterisation and interpretation drown. Lines like “We won’t quarrel, baby. I love you too much” could have been lifted directly from a romantic dialogue between two lovers – even

between Catherine and Frederic – and yet this overtly romantic dimension is denied, or at least complicated, by the invocation of the homosocial code that structures the relationship between Rinaldi and Frederic: Rinaldi mentions Catherine, he encourages Frederic to have a drink, and, above all, insists that “We are brothers.”

The figure of brotherhood deserves some more comment especially in the light of the earlier discussion of “Soldier’s Home”: here, the prohibition against incest is invoked to reinstate the prohibition against homosexuality. The implication Rinaldi seeks is “I can say I love you without desiring you because a) we are both men and therefore cannot desire each other, and if this implication has become doubtful because of my previous behaviour, then b) I cannot desire you because we are not only ‘the same underneath’ but even brothers.” The “sameness” Rinaldi speaks of is meant to activate this two-pronged discursive game: they are the same because they are both men, and because they are as good as family – and only opposites attract. This mechanism, though complicated by its homoerotic dimension, is the same as the one invoked in the banter between Harold Krebs and his sister: the dialogue would be overtly romantic if it weren’t for the taboos it negates. But in the case of Frederic and Rinaldi, this fairly straightforward principle is complicated by the fact that, of course, they are *not* brothers and the incest taboo does not apply to them – which, in turn, suggest, that they are not necessarily “the same” and therefore may still be attracted to each other.

An extra enigma that arises specifically from Frederic’s privileged position as a narrator is: what does he do (or not do) to make Rinaldi decide *not* to kiss him? The sentence “I felt his breath come toward me. ‘Good-by.’ I come to see you again soon.’ His breath went away. ‘I won’t kiss you if you don’t want’” leaves a lot of room for speculation: does Frederic simply ignore Rinaldi, does he turn away, is his speech elided from the rendering of this dialogue? As a narrator, Frederic is entitled not to tell his reader all about him and Rinaldi, especially if

it “dare not speak its name” – but the cracks that appear in this dialogue indicate at least uncertainty, and demonstrate the incompleteness of the narrative.

Returning to the question that opened this section, whether Frederic can be analysed in a way similar to Catherine, it makes sense to ask if there is such a thing a “masculinity”, and even if it possible to interpret masculinity *as* mask. As a reminder: the notion of the mask is derived from the work of Joan Rivière and Jacques Lacan, who claim (in different ways) that the “essence” of femininity *is* masquerade. This is the case because femininity depends on appearing to “be” the phallus, whereas masculinity depends on appearing to “have” the phallus. Within this binary dynamic, one may well wonder why femininity can be cast (somewhat poetically or dramatically) *as* masquerade while masculinity (in Butler’s chapter) remains unmentioned. After all, if gendered identity is always a matter of performance, and always a matter of approaching a position vis-à-vis the phallus, then why would the mask be an attribute only of the feminine position? The only obvious reason is that in order to pretend to *be*, one needs a mask. But how, then, does one pretend to *have*? Surely we are not talking about visual appearance when we invoke this terminology and, surely, the term “masquerade” denotes an action, a performance?

When thinking about Frederic’s character, we must obviously study the male pole in this dialectic. If the female mask is said to “be” the phallus, this is the case because, according to classical feminist theory, the female embodies the male’s desire and the male’s desire is to have the phallus. Turning this claim around, however, we must say that masculinity involves “assuming” or “performing” the right kind of desire to sustain the feminine mask – a version of the commonplace that femininity is desiring to be desired while masculinity is desiring to desire. But the latter half of this equation is absent from Butler’s discussion (logically so, as she is writing about femininity). But the question, then, remains: why would only this feminine desire figure as a masquerade? Underpinning both the masculine and feminine



position is a desire to occupy a safe, recognisable spot within the Symbolic, so if this desire manifests itself as a mask on the one side, why not also on the other? Is the mask of masculinity not the mask of desire? (And is it just possible that the emphasis on the mask of femininity, even in Butler's work, is a remnant of the patriarchal discourse that casts the female as the mysterious, the poetic, the unfathomable – echoing the equally patriarchal idea that masculinity is simple and straightforward?)

If these questions are allowed onto the table, we can enquire whether the differences between Catherine and Frederic (and the differences between their developments as characters) are the consequence of a Law governing sexuation or of the symbolic order in which these characters come into being. And if we bear in the mind the possibility that masculinity is a performance, and even a masquerade, to the same extent as femininity, then there is no need to look for Frederic's identity or sexuality, but a need to examine the various manifestations of his masculinity. One of these manifestations, as touched upon above, is clearly the homosocial environment of the army, with its potential homoerotic dimension. The other, then, must be Frederic in his heterosexual relationship with Catherine.

'Come back to bed, Catherine. Please,' I said.

'I can't. Didn't we have a lovely night?'

'And can you be on night duty to-night?'

'I probably will. But you won't want me.'

'Yes, I will.'

'No, you won't. You've never been operated on. You don't know how you'll be.'

'I'll be all right.'

'You'll be sick and I won't be anything to you.'

'Come back then now.'

'No,' she said. 'I have to do the chart, darling, and fix you up.'

‘You don’t really love me or you’d come back again.’

‘You’re such a silly boy.’ She kissed me. ‘That’s all right for the chart. Your temperature’s always normal. You’ve such a lovely temperature.’ (93)

Frederic’s persona, in the hospital and, later on, in Switzerland, is that of the caring lover wanting to spend as much time with Catherine as possible. This makes him a very different character from the one sharing jokes with the other officers in the canteen, and a different character from the officer in charge of ambulance drivers. It even makes him a very different character from the Frederic we saw in earlier stages of his relationship with Catherine, which, as was pointed out earlier, suddenly shifts into a higher gear once Frederic has been wounded. It is true that he has not abandoned his sense of humour (nor, for that matter, has Catherine), but the banter between them has none of the mockery or sharpness that could be found in the officers’ mess, or even in conversations with Rinaldi.

In this reading, Frederic’s shifting attitude is no more of a ‘lie’ than is Catherine’s. It may resemble role-play, it may even seem too lovey-dovey to the more cynical segment of a cynical (post-)modern readership, but there is nothing in the novel to suggest that this mutual affection is somehow feigned or disingenuous. What’s more, in the light of the theoretical point made above: Frederic seems to make a point of embodying a constant desire, with Catherine as its steady object. We can see the “masquerade” at work in the passage quoted above when Frederic assures Catherine that will “want her” even though he cannot know how he will feel after his operation, or when he teases her with “You don’t really love me or you’d come back again.” – a statement mutually acknowledged as playful and “staged.”

This new stage in Frederic’s development signals a commitment to Catherine – and the heterosexual regime that follows from it – that will last when he returns to military service, and to Rinaldi. Book III, which narrates the events from Frederic’s return to the moment of his flight to Milan, is steeped in bleakness: though we get an elaborate description of his

encounter with Rinaldi, and a scene in the mess that harks back to the beginning of the novel, there is none of the gaiety and comic relief that brightened the novel's first chapters.

'Tell me all about everything.'

'There's nothing to tell,' I said. 'I've led a quiet life.'

'You act like a married man,' he said. 'What's the matter with you?'

'Nothing,' I said. 'What's the matter with you?' (150)

'This war is terrible,' Rinaldi said. 'Come on. We'll both get drunk and be cheerful. Then we'll go get the ashes dragged. Then we'll feel fine.'

'I've had the jaundice,' I said, 'and I can't get drunk.'

'Oh, baby, how you've come back to me. You come back serious and with a liver. I tell you this war is a bad thing.' (151)

'Are you married?' he asked from the bed. I was standing against the wall by the window.

'Not yet.'

'Are you in love?'

'Yes.'

'With that English girl?'

'Yes.'

'Poor baby. Is she good to you?'

'Of course.'

'I mean is she good to you practically speaking?'

'Shut up.'

'I will. You will see I am a man of extreme delicacy. Does she – ?'

'Rinin,' I said. 'Please shut up. If you want to be my friend, shut up.'

'I don't *want* to be your friend, baby. I *am* your friend.'

‘Then shut up.’ (152)

From Rinaldi’s perception that Frederic acts “like a married man” this dialogue hardly resembles the friendly, if pointed, earlier exchanges between them: getting drunk together is not a viable option because Frederic is still recovering from jaundice and the subject of sex is declared off-limits by the same. All is not well with Rinaldi either, who is treating himself for syphilis, and who has taken to drink more than previously: “[Apart from work] I like only two other things; one is bad for my work and the other is over in half an hour or fifteen minutes. Sometimes less.” (153) Things do not exactly pick up in the officers’ mess, where Rinaldi, slightly drunk, tries to revive the jolly atmosphere of former days:

‘He is a good priest,’ said Rinaldi. ‘But still a priest. I try to make the mess like the old days. I want to make Federico happy. To hell with you, priest! [...] To hell with the whole business.’ He looked defiantly around the table, his eyes flat, his face pale.

‘All right,’ I said. ‘To hell with the whole damn business.’

‘No, no,’ said Rinaldi. ‘You can’t do it. You can’t do it. I say you can’t do it. You’re dry and you’re empty and there’s nothing else. There’s nothing else I tell you. Not a damned thing. I know, when I stop working.’ (156)

Though Rinaldi, in this episode, is sullen, depressed, and even aggressive, his negativity is at least partially inspired by Frederic’s refusal to restore their relationship, and to re-enter into the homosocial behaviour that brightened their former days. This marks Rinaldi’s exit from the novel (“I woke when Rinaldi came in but he did not talk and I went back to sleep again. In the morning I was dressed and gone before it was light. Rinaldi did not wake when I left.” (162)) and prefigures the misfortunes Frederic will suffer at the hands of the previously so accommodating Italian army.

Frederic’s narrow escape from execution, clearly, definitively confirms his choice for Catherine (and the heterosexual matrix) over and against the homosocial world of the army.

That this choice had been in the making – or had already been made – is shown by the dialogue with Catherine that occurs in the middle of Book III, despite the fact that she is not even there:

Are you really there?

Of course I'm here. I wouldn't go away. I'm always here. This doesn't make any difference between us.

You're so lovely and sweet. You wouldn't go away in the night, would you?

Of course I wouldn't go away. I'm always here. I come whenever you want me.

'–,' Piani said. 'They've started again.' (176)

Frederic's desire for Catherine remains – the mask is not quite removed or, rather, replaced. He even talks in his sleep, allowing his lover persona to show through his soldier persona. Catherine's sentence, as dreamt up by Frederic, "I come whenever you want me" emphasises how it is the projection of desire that structures their relationship: Frederic's "want" conjures up the very presence of Catherine in his dream, in the same way that his desire is a condition for Catherine's masquerade of femininity to succeed.

To summarise: after being wounded, Frederic discovers heterosexual desire as a basis for his masculinity, which, after all, consists primarily *of* this very desire. The mask of masculinity is the mask of desire, and as long as the desire can be upheld, the sexual identity derived from it is not only socially sanctioned, it is also "safer" than the slippery slope of homosociality sliding toward homosexuality. Thus, Frederic finds both physical and sexual safety with Catherine ("[her hair] would all come down and she would drop her head and we would both be inside of it, and it was the feeling of inside a tent or behind a falls" (102)) and finds himself reluctant to return to the unstable world of the unstable Rinaldi and the unstable Italian army that, after all, nearly gets him killed in the retreat.

*Frederic and Catherine: The Matrix and its Gaps*

Above, I have argued that both Frederic and Catherine turn away from one persona in order to adopt another – one that is more clearly and more cleanly appropriate to the heterosexual matrix. This turn is clearly helped along by the physical fact of Catherine's pregnancy:

‘And you don't feel trapped?’

‘Maybe a little, but not by you.’

‘I didn't mean by me. You mustn't be stupid. I meant trapped at all.’

‘You always feel trapped biologically.’

‘Always isn't a pretty word.’ (125)

This reference to the trap of biology may seem to get in the way of a sustained Butlerian reading of the Hemingway text. The notion expressed here by Frederic can be read as culturally conservative or even explicitly homophobic in that it consolidates the link between heterosexual intercourse and reproduction, implicitly casting heterosexuality as “natural.” At the same time, however, the feeling of being “trapped” is the feeling of being caught in the heterosexual matrix – something Frederic potentially realises only now – which works, among other things, to produce families that will continue its very existence. To this end, the heterosexual matrix necessarily construes “sex” as “natural” by rendering it inevitable, material, and “biological.” In Butler's words:

[T]he regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the “materiality” of sex, and that “materiality” is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony [and] the materialization of norms requires those identificatory processes by which norms are assumed or appropriated, and these identifications precede and enable the formation of a subject, but are not, strictly speaking, performed by a subject (*BTM*, 15)

The double mechanism that Butler describes – of materialization and of identification – is exactly what is at work to bring Frederic and Catherine together: they feel “trapped” by the inevitability of biology and, from this inevitability (or materialization) deduce the inevitability of heterosexual union, preferentially in the form of marriage. In this way, Catherine’s pregnancy comes to symbolise and strengthen their bond. As we have seen, both Catherine and Frederic had been developing as strict adherence to the cultural codes of the heterosexual matrix, but it seems as though Catherine’s pregnancy, evoking the material logic of heterosexuality as it does, seals the deal or, referring to Frederic’s sentiments, closes the trap.

There is a scene at the Milan race track that prefigures this development, and illustrates the choice Catherine and Frederic make. This scene occurs during Frederic’s halcyon final weeks in the Milan hospital – when he can walk and get around independently, and before Catherine has announced she is pregnant. The racing is “very crooked. Men who had been ruled off the turf everywhere else were racing in Italy (115)” and particularly Catherine objects to this. The only way they have of winning is by taking Meyers’ tips, but, even so, they find that even backing a winner does not bring any substantial rewards. After a while in the company of Meyers, Crowell and other, they decide to watch a race by themselves:

‘We can stay out here and watch the race from the fence.’

‘That will be lovely. And, darling, let’s back a horse we’ve never heard of and that Mr Meyers won’t be backing.’

‘All right.’

We backed a horse named Light For Me that finished fourth in a field of five. We leanded on the fence and watched the horses go by, their hoofs thudding as they went past, and saw the mountains off in the distance and Milan beyond the trees and the fields.

‘I feel so much cleaner,’ Catherine said. (119)

An interesting dichotomy is set up, here – and it is one that will last into Switzerland. The backdrop is a crooked world in which the rules are bent or simply ignored. The choice is between the company of people who know their way around in this world (and, thus, must be tainted by it) or solitude. Solitude signifies adherence to the rules even in the face of loss; and one might ask whether it is the adherence or the loss that makes Catherine feel “cleaner.”

In choosing the righteousness of isolation, Catherine and Frederic signal a deeper, underlying choice: a choice not only for adherence to the rules, but also a choice for each other, over and against the “crooked” world. This combination translates into the choice for adherence to the heterosexual matrix and, particularly, against the crooked and “bent” (pun intended) world in which these rules can be transformed into, for instance, the homosociality of the army. This decision shows a certain awareness of the exclusions that are necessary to construct the legality of heterosexuality: it posits itself over against other possible subjectivities and sexualities. In a sense, we could read this scene as suggesting that heterosexuality can only “work” if it turns away from the rest of the world: two people are “trapped” and bound together by the principle that gives structure to their lives and identities at the cost of other (potential or previous) relations. The scene at the races also prefigures, painfully, that, while participation in the wicked of ways of the world leads to only minor successes, isolation results in failure.

And isolation is exactly what they seek, and find, in Switzerland. They cross the lake, and the border, into neutral territory – a scenario in itself brimming with symbolic suggestion – and together await the birth of their child. Spending the winter in a cottage above Montreux, they appear to be in each other’s company most of the time – they “did not know any one in Montreux” (259). This is the most halcyon section of the novel, spent in heterosexual, as good as marital bliss. There is, however, a set of complications that indicates the instability of this heterosexual matrix they seek to inhabit: there is the fetishism that is more and more



foregrounded in the text, there is the insistence on “sameness” or even “oneness”, and there is the fact that, for all their keeping up appearances, Frederic and Catherine are not actually married.

Fetishism, and particularly hair fetishism, is a frequently occurring phenomenon in Hemingway’s work.<sup>37</sup> Eby identifies

a perverse, pornographic kernel embedded in Hemingway’s art. [...] Although this kernel remained static over the decades – as if Hemingway were prohibited from imagining erotic encounters in any other way – it was nevertheless fundamental to his creativity. (272)

The question here is how this “kernel” functions within the parameters set up by *AFTA*. Though hair was mentioned a few times in the earlier stages of the novel (particularly Catherine’s hair), it plays a far more prominent role in Book V, e.g.: “Catherine was still in the hairdresser’s shop. The woman was waving her hair. It was exciting to watch and Catherine smiled and talked to me and my voice was a little thick from being excited.” (260) And hair-incited sexual excitement is not limited to Frederic: Catherine, after all, encourages Frederic to grow a beard and later tells him: “I love your beard [...] It’s a great success. It looks so stiff and fierce and it’s very soft and a great pleasure.” (270) The “excitement” derived from watching Catherine’s hair being waved, and the “fierceness” and “stiffness” attributed to the “great pleasure” that is Frederic’s beard highlight the sexual connotation of hair in this relationship. But whereas Eby reads this type of fetish as part of the “perverse kernel” at the heart of Hemingway’s creative output, it is hard to read this fetishism as equally central to the relationship between Catherine and Frederic.

It is more plausible to see the significance of hair as related to desire as the structuring principle of the heterosexual matrix. Catherine’s hair is clearly a focus of Frederic’s desire of

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<sup>37</sup> Carl Eby was the first to compile a comprehensive study of fetishism in Hemingway’s work, but earlier commentators, including Reynolds, Lynn and others have commented on the “hair thing” that comes up in so many Hemingway texts, perhaps most notably and noticeably in *The Garden of Eden*.

Catherine even to the extent that Catherine supposes her pregnant body less desirable, and therefore decides not to cut her hair for the time being:

‘You know, darling, I’m not going to cut my hair now until after young Catherine’s born. I look too big and matronly now. But after she’s born and I’m thin again I’m going to cut it and then I’ll be a fine new and different girl for you. We’ll go together and get it cut, or I’ll go alone and come and surprise you.’ (270)

And how would Frederic respond to this suggestion other than by saying: “I think it would be exciting.” (270) Frederic’s beard, on the other hand, suggests (the mask of) desire at least in Catherine’s description of it as being “fierce” and “stiff” while also being “soft” and “a great pleasure” – a description in which it is hard to ignore the phallic overtones. She even employs the same adjective as Frederic when she states: “Go on. Grow it. It will be *exciting*.” (166, my italics) Hair, then, is an index of how desire circulates between them and keeps their commitment to the heterosexual matrix intact in their relative isolation. As a fetish, then, it is something that appears in the margins of the matrix but does not work against it. It does not appear as accidental to or detached from the heterosexual matrix though it may indicate the inherent instability, the lack of self-sufficiency of this matrix.

The focus on hair and the insistence of its sexual function also introduces a second motif that, seemingly, undermines the fundamentals of the heterosexual love-story: the longing for one-ness and sameness. Etymologically ingrained in the notion of heterosexuality is, of course, the principle of difference. And yet, fairly early in the narrative (as discussed above), Catherine insists on their being one inseparable entity – “There isn’t any me. I’m you. Don’t make up a separate me.” (103) But this idea is reiterated and connected to the hair motif in book V:

[Catherine:] ‘Darling, why don’t you let your hair grow?’

‘How grow?’

‘Just a little longer.’

‘It’s long enough now.’

‘No, let it grow a little longer and I could cut mine and we’d be just alike only one of us blonde and one of us dark. [...] I want you so much I want to be you too.’

‘You are. We’re the same one.’

‘I know it. At night we are.’

‘The nights are grand.’

‘I want us to be all mixed up. [...] Why, darling, I don’t live at all when I’m not with you.’

‘I won’t ever go away,’ I said, ‘I’m no good when you’re not there. I haven’t any life at all anymore.’ (266)<sup>38</sup>

Sameness is not the same as oneness, but the two are taken together by Catherine, who wants them to be “just alike” while she wants “to be you too”. In my understanding of the heterosexual matrix – conceived along Hegelian lines as it is – oneness does not necessarily contradict heterosexuality, but sameness does. Seeing as the logic of the matrix is derived from one signifier – let’s agree to still call it the phallus – and the desire(s) it generates, heterosexuality is (even in Butler’s articulation of it in *Bodies that Matter*) a version of unity in discord, of two being one. Sameness, or the desire of sameness, however, risks halting the exchanges of desire in a heterosexual economy. In this light, Catherine’s sentiments, as condensed into her utterance “I’m you” can be read in two directions: the first fits the matrix to perfection – Catherine *is* Frederic to the extent that she *is* his desire. To be more precise: Catherine is Frederic’s desire, which is Catherine’s desire to be desired – and so forth, ad infinitum. But if “I’m you” is taken to mean: “I and you are the same”, this confounds the

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<sup>38</sup> The similarities between this passage and some sections of *The Garden of Eden* are obvious and all the more striking bearing in mind that the latter novel was begun no sooner than 1946 – roughly twenty years after *AFTA*. (For an account of the early writing stages of *AFTA*, see Paul Smith, “The Trying-out of *A Farewell to Arms*”, which traces its first steps back to 1919. For a detailed account of the way Hemingway’s fetishisms culminate in *The Garden of Eden*, see Eby.)

dynamic of heterosexuality, because sameness precludes the masquerade of heterosexuality that is based, in both directions, on the desire of the other – the desire of difference.<sup>39</sup>

Read in these terms, Catherine's love shows up a paradox of heterosexuality: if it is based on an economy of becoming the desire of the other (simultaneously as a subject and an object), then this desire has no final foundation – except, of course, for the phallus. But if this phallus is itself imaginary and can be projected onto a fetish (such as hair), then what is there to stop the desire of the other to spill over into a desire of the same? It is the inherent instability of desire circulating through this matrix that may in itself cause a desire of sameness – in other words: Frederic and Catherine's quest for a socially sanctioned, stable heterosexuality is undermined because a strict adherence to the rules of this matrix (and the masquerade that goes with it) reveals its inherent flaws and instabilities.

The third grain of sand in the seemingly well-oiled machine of Catherine and Frederic's relationship is the issue of marriage. Again, this is something that got mentioned in the earlier stages of the novel, but which gains prominence in book V:

'Let's get married now,' I said.

'No,' Catherine said. 'It's too embarrassing now. I show too plainly. I won't go before any one and be married in this state.' I wish we'd gotten married.'

'I suppose it would have been better. But when could we, darling?'

'I don't know.'

'I know one thing. I'm not going in to be married in this splendid matronly state.'

'You're not matronly.'

'Oh yes, I am darling. The hairdresser asked me if this was our first. I lied and said no, we had two boys and two girls.'

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<sup>39</sup> This is not to suggest even for a moment, of course, that homosexuality precludes desire – that would be absurd. It does suggest that homosexuality is hard to theorize within this framework without pathologizing it – which is precisely the point Butler makes when she preaches the “Lesbian phallus” or questions the ontological primacy of the Law.

‘When will we be married?’

‘Any time after I’m thin again. [...]’ (260-261)

And further:

‘Did you ask him [the doctor] if you ought to get married?’

‘No. I told him we’d been married four years. You see, darling, if I marry you I’ll be an American and any time we’re married under American law the child is legitimate.’

(261-262)

Catherine’s lying to the doctor and the hairdresser about her married state signals that, however much they may pretend to be married, even feel that they are, marriage is a social contract that functions only when all of its preconditions – in the form of relevant speech acts – are met. Catherine and Frederic’s not being married shows that that it is not only the internal dialectics of their heterosexuality that is problematic – so is the way in which it is insufficiently rooted in the “outside” world. In this case, the lie really is a lie, because it does not correspond to a social reality.

In a rather splendid literary gesture, it is the doctor and the hairdresser – respective representatives of the trap of biology and of the fetishism that sustains desire – who lay bare the lack of a social, symbolic dimension to the relationship that, to its protagonists, seems so flawless. Book V, then, though depicting the happiest period of the story – free from war, free from meddling others – foregrounds the germs of the tragedy that will conclude the novel. This last book invokes a subtle kind of tragic irony: while Frederic Henry, as protagonist and focaliser, seems perfectly content, the reader understands that all is not well as motifs from earlier parts of the novel are ominously brought together – by Frederic Henry the narrator.

### *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*

In 1968, Daniel J. Schneider published an essay titled “Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*: The Novel as Pure Poetry.” Its title and main thesis derive from Robert Penn Warren’s distinction between

“pure” poetry, which seeks more or less systematically to exclude so-called “unpoetic” elements from its hushed and hypnotic atmosphere, and an “impure,” a poetry of inclusion or synthesis, which welcomes into itself such supposedly recalcitrant and inhospitable stuff as wit, cacophony, jagged rhythms, and intellectual debate. (66)

Schneider then goes on to project this distinction onto the novel, and suggests that, whereas novels like “*War and Peace*, *Ulysses*, *Moby Dick* and *The Magic Mountain*” decidedly belong in the “impure” category, *A Farewell to Arms* is “one of the purest lyric novels ever written.” (67) This type of argument has an old-fashioned ring to it,<sup>40</sup> but serves here as a reminder that Catherine and Frederic, as literary characters, are moulded to fit a certain mood, or tone – as Schneider puts it: “The determination to make the novel lyrical inevitably influences all of its parts. Character becomes, in one sense, unimportant.” (69) Though I would contest Schneider’s implication that Hemingway’s characters, particularly in *A Farewell to Arms*, are “highly generalized” and without “vivid particularization” (ibid.), it is true that, on the level of the text – which is the only level that really concerns us here – the novel revolves around imagery and motifs of gloom and doom:

In *A Farewell to Arms* the dominant state of mind – the sense of death, defeat, failure, nothingness, emptiness – is conveyed chiefly by the image of the rain (with all its tonal associates, *mist*, *wet*, *damp*, *river*, *fog*), by images and epithets of desolation (chiefly

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<sup>40</sup> The kind of lyricism that is inherent in Hemingway’s style has been interpreted by many as related to a Hemingway’s version of masculinity (in a tradition initiated by Philip Young in his 1952 classic *Ernest Hemingway: a Reconsideration*, and analysed by Hugh Kenner in his influential study of American Modernism, *A Homemade World*.)

*bare, thin, small, and fallen leaves*), and by images and epithets of impurity and corruption (chiefly *dust, mud, dirt, and disease*). (Schneider, 70, italics in original)

This perspective raises a big question about the novel's tragic ending: if the novel's primary objective is to convey "the sense of death, failure, nothingness, emptiness," then Catherine's death is simply a means to obtain this objective, or even a mere side-effect of the text's tragic inclinations. Catherine dies because there is nothing else for her to do, trapped as she happens to be in a tragic (lyrical) narrative.<sup>41</sup> One – admittedly sentimental – objection to this reading is that it is profoundly unsatisfying to any reader whose literary desires are not primarily narratological, whereas another objection could be that it is in fact a banal reading – for every tragic ending in the history of literature could be read as the sacrifice of a character to literary form. But Schneider's deeper point remains valid: Frederic and Catherine are characters in a novel steeped in ominous imagery and a formidable build-up towards tragedy. But does that necessarily mean that the reading undertaken in this chapter, in which Catherine and Frederic are treated as plausible "subjects," is completely futile? Is it impossible to read the novel's ending in a way that combines an interpretation based on the characters' performativity with the structural literary impetus identified by Schneider? In other words: can our protagonists be both complex and tragic?

One way of attempting such a unified reading is by stressing Frederic's position as narrator looking back on past events,<sup>42</sup> but, in line with the focal points of this discussion, I am more interested in heterosexual performativity's potential for tragedy. Daniel Traber suggests:

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<sup>41</sup> Such a reading, by the way, would bring *A Farewell to Arms* remarkably close to a novel Schneider himself tells us is very different – *The Magic Mountain*, after all, famously concludes with the cynical casting aside of its protagonist when he has served his purpose (ironically, though, Thomas Mann's protagonist ends up fleeing from the Alps into the first World War – the exact opposite trajectory to Frederic Henry's).

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Jim Phelan: "Distance, Voice, and Temporal Perspective in Frederic Henry's Narration: Successes, Problems, and Paradox.", Trevor Dodman: "'Going All to Pieces.' *A Farewell to Arms* as Trauma Narrative."

Catherine dies because there is no other way for Hemingway to conclude this argument about biological constructs honestly. Catherine's gender experiment fails because the biology of her sex is a final trap she cannot escape. (36)

But in offering this reading, Traber falls into the exact same "trap" as Frederic does, when he speaks about being "trapped biologically". As was discussed above: the heterosexual matrix depends on precisely this type of materialisation of sex. What, then, does it mean that Hemingway (or, let's say, the implied author) fails to "conclude this argument about biological constructs honestly"? It may mean that there simply is no way out of the conundrums that appear between the mazes of the heterosexual matrix itself.

We have seen that both Catherine and Frederic move from an ambiguous sexual state to an idealised form of heterosexuality. In leaving behind the slippery grounds of melancholic mourning (Catherine) and the homosocial network of the army (Frederic), they seek security, both physical and sexual, by clinging to heterosexuality and to the performances it exacts. As we have already seen, this heterosexuality fails to provide the stability they seek because of its inherent flaws and because of its detachment from social reality – but those issues will not kill you. And yet, Catherine's dying in childbirth demands some explanation or at least comment. Traber suggests that "Catherine dies in the ultimate performance of 'what women do.' What is 'natural' to the female sex ultimately kills her." (36) But there is more at stake here than a show-down between the natural and the performative (whatever that might look like), which is why it is useful to rephrase Traber's claim: Catherine dies in the ultimate performance of femininity precisely because the "ultimate performance" is inherently impossible.

Allow me to unwrap this by returning to the notion of "psychic excess" as part of Butler's Foucauldian legacy: the norm cannot completely capture that which it produces, so the subject living within social norms is marked by "excess". This "excess," for instance, can arguably be seen in the fetishism that Catherine and Frederic develop (for, in their isolated



existence, there is but little opportunity for this “excess” to develop in other directions). Within this logic, the closer a subject clings to a norm, the smaller is its “psychic excess” and, thus, its subjectivity. In this scenario, to be completely “normal” is not to exist.<sup>43</sup>

Catherine’s death, then, is her “ultimate performance” because (on the literary level) it combines the “trap of biology” with the trap of the heterosexual matrix: her dying in childbirth combines the physical death of the body with an ominous end to the reproductive mechanism of heterosexuality. This powerful nexus does not suggest that “heterosexuality kills” (though, clearly it can do), but it suggests, on a literary level, that the mechanism behind heterosexuality, the matrix that determines the configurations of masculinity and femininity, is barren, and not as reliable and self-sufficient as it may seem.

I believe this reading is richer than Traber’s because it combines events on the level of the narrated action (Catherine’s “biological” death) with the over-arching thematic and tragic pull of the narrative. It is an attempt to offer, if not an explanation, then at least an interpretation of Catherine’s seemingly futile death in the light of problems raised by the novel, particularly with regard to sexuality and relationship.

### *A Farewell to Conclusions*

Few novels have generated so many radically conflicting interpretations as *A Farewell to Arms*, and it would be ill-advised to try and resolve the novel’s enigmas once and for all. This chapter has attempted to reconcile, or at least take into account, some of these conflicting points of view, particularly with regard to the basic question of whether Frederic and

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<sup>43</sup> This idea runs as an undercurrent through much of Slavoj Žižek’s work – for instance in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*: “What if we are ‘really alive’ only if we commit ourselves with an excessive intensity which puts us beyond ‘mere life’? What if, when we focus on mere survival, even if it is qualified as ‘having a good time’, what we ultimately lose is life itself? What if the Palestinian suicide bomber on the point of blowing him- or herself (and others) up is, in an emphatic sense, ‘more alive’ than the American soldier engaged in a war in front of a computer screen against an enemy hundreds of miles away, or a New York yuppie jogging along the Hudson river in order to keep his body in shape?” (88)

Catherine are complex, round characters, or rather stereotypes, vehicles for Hemingwayesque dialogue and, ultimately, tragedy. This exercise is a delicate one, because the focus on character in this chapter may lead to neglect of the novel as literary text, with its narrative strategies and tragic structure. However, by taking on board (older) concerns for the novel's "lyrical" qualities, justice may be done not only to the novel's creation of characters, but also to its coherence.

Reading this novel with Butler, as was shown by Daniel Traber, is both tempting and rewarding, but not straightforward. I do, however, believe some telling elements came to the fore in this discussion. First of all: it is "easier" to read Catherine from a Butlerian perspective, because her "performance" is much more obvious than Frederic's – though it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether this has to do with femininity being the more "spectacular" or with Frederic's privileged position as narrator. I have differed significantly from Traber's Butlerian analysis, which, in my view, implicitly still assumes a stable subject *before* performance. My own reading has attempted to take on board Butler's radical critique of the subject, which allows Catherine to emerge as a richer, even more complex character.

Our male protagonist, Frederic Henry, on the other hand, may cause us to think through the implications of Butler's proposed "matrix" for the masculine side of the equation. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler writes at some length about femininity as masquerade, without making clear in what way masculinity is necessarily different. In fact, if both the masculine and feminine positions are always approximations, then masculinity could be said to depend on a "mask of desire." This theoretical issue is particularly relevant to Frederic Henry, whose identity in the novel can be shown to be *as* performative as Catherine's.

An analysis dealing primarily with sexuality allows for a detailed study of how Frederic and Catherine evolve in this novel, not only individually, but particularly in their relationship with each other. This relationship is constructed along the lines of an ideal, "pure"

heterosexuality that corresponds to Butler's description of the "heterosexual matrix." This may not be a particularly important insight in its own right, but it can be made to tie in with the novel's highly problematic tragic ending, for what does it mean that this idealised, idyllic union leads to tragedy? The novel seems to suggest that a clinging to the heterosexual norm in search of safety or security ends in tragedy. This suggested conclusion may seem radical, but it is supported by the novel, inasmuch as it does not accept Catherine's death merely as a literary device, nor as a misogynist gesture that "liberates" the male protagonist.

*A Farewell to Arms* is a tragedy and a love-story that raises complex questions about what it means to commit to a (heterosexual) relationship. As we have come to expect of a great novel, it offers no concrete answers, but demonstrates the inherent instability of gender, identity and sexuality. Above all, the novel seems to offer this warning: it will not do to embrace the governing norm of heterosexuality in search of security, for the norm itself is not a safe haven; it is a consequence of endless performances and masquerades that all depend on the norm they help to sustain. Say farewell to stable genders.

## Part II

Lawrence

# “This Root of All Knowledge and Being”: D. H. Lawrence and the Bodily Unconscious

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It is easy to dismiss D.H. Lawrence's two texts on the unconscious. Both published in 1923, *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* are at best incoherent, and at worst rambling, near-psychotic writings. Lift the right passages from either, and you may use them to re-establish Lawrence's reputation as a conservative misogynist, raving anarchist, sexually obsessed pervert or – why not? – all three of those. At the same time, though, for all his unorthodox propositions, Lawrence's tone is amazingly self-confident (to the point of arrogance), and sometimes witty (to the point of being hilarious). How can any writer display such command of style and language to put forward the kind of nonsensical and nearly always unfounded theories the reader of *Psychoanalysis* and *Fantasia* is subjected to?

This paper intends to revisit these Lawrence texts, not to redeem them, but to inscribe them into a present-day dilemma constituted by different intellectual approaches to the very issues Lawrence addresses in his slightly awkward essays: the relationship between self and subjectivity, the conscious and the unconscious, the physical and the discursive. I focus on two leading thinkers in their respective fields, incommensurable as they may usually be deemed: Judith Butler and Antonio Damasio, the former revered as the queen of Queer Theory, the latter respected as one of the world's experts on neurophysiology. What connects Butler and Damasio to Lawrence is the fact that they have both published best-selling books on the role the human body plays in the production of human selves or subjects.

Butler's book *Bodies that Matter*, to some extent, was meant as an answer to those critics who had accused her of not leaving any room for the human body in her first, hugely popular book *Gender Trouble* (popular of course being a relative concept in academic publishing).

Antonio Damasio first came to public attention (public, again, being a relative term) with *Descartes' Error*, in which he expounded his "somatic marker hypothesis" and argued against the Cartesian theatre from a neurological point of view. *The Feeling of What Happens* takes his focus on the embodiment of mind and emotion further still and provides interesting parallels as well as challenging oppositions to Butler's account of the subject – and can be said to cut into the jugular of structuralist and poststructuralist accounts of the self by questioning the role language plays in the formation of our selves.

#### *A Note on Lawrence's Text*

*Fantasia of the Unconscious* is filled to the brim with such a plethora of ideas and digressions (about, for instance, Einstein's theory of relativity, cosmology and the "huge, plunging soul" of trees (41)) that I will limit this discussion to those elements immediately relevant to the topic at hand, though not without signalling that this hardly reflects the vitality of Lawrence's writing – or its more far-fetched hypotheses.

In *Psychoanalysis*, Lawrence expounds a theory of consciousness as being primarily located in the body – in the solar plexus, to be precise:<sup>44</sup>

The great magnetic or dynamic centre of first-consciousness acts powerfully at the solar plexus. Here the child knows beyond all knowledge. It does not see with the eyes, it cannot perceive, much less conceive. [...] Yet from the belly it knows, with a directness of knowledge that frightens us and may even seem abhorrent. (218)

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<sup>44</sup> Considered the locus of one of the seven chakras in Hinduism, the solar or celiac plexus is a network of nerves located in the abdomen (behind the stomach).

The solar plexus will emphatically be picked up again in *Fantasia*, where, again, it is presented as the very foundation of individuality:

Primarily we know, each man, each living creature knows, profoundly and satisfactorily and without question, that *I am I*. This root of all knowledge and being is established in the solar plexus; it is dynamic, pre-mental knowledge, such as cannot be transferred into thought. (29)

This focus on a particular nerve complex is not convincingly argued, nor is its importance proved in Lawrence's text – the solar plexus is deemed exceptional mainly because of its proximity to the navel, “the mark of our isolation in the universe, stigma and seal of our free, perfect singleness.” (217)

While the solar plexus is the foundation of consciousness according to Lawrence, it is also the cornerstone of his more elaborate mythology of body and mind: he identifies “four great spontaneous centres” (242) (one of which is, of course, the solar plexus) based on a horizontal division of the body (the diaphragm separating the solar and the cardiac plexuses) and the vertical difference between the body's front and back. The four parameters thus introduced into this mystical equation are sympathetic versus voluntary (the vertical division) and subjective versus objective (the abdomen as opposed to the breast).

Implausible as this hypothetical sketch may seem, we must grant that Lawrence elaborates this theory to a fair degree of detail without losing sight of the greater whole he is attempting to describe. *Psychoanalysis* being much the shorter of the two volumes, it can also be said to be the more coherent and focused – if not necessarily entirely convincing. It is in any case the product of a vivid and detailed imagination.

The truly incisive idea in these texts, however, is not necessarily related to Lawrence's rambling on about planes, plexuses and polarities – it lies in the role he ascribes to the mind. His regarding the body (without any mention, so far, of the brain) as the seat of spontaneous

consciousness and knowledge leads him to severely question and reduce the part the mind plays in human consciousness:

[F]rom [the] fourfold reaction within the self results that final manifestation which we know as *mind*, mental consciousness. The brain is, if we may use the word, the terminal instrument of the dynamic consciousness. (246)

Lawrence opposes the conscious mind to the vital and dynamic workings of its underpinnings, the four spontaneous centres: not only is it the “instrument of instruments” (246), it is also mistakenly self-assured. Being but the mechanical manifestation of the human will located in the body, the mind translates the physical into the ideal, where it dies. “Ideas are the dry, unloving, insentient plumage which intervenes between us and the circumbient universe.” (246) Thus, conscious thought figures as the completion of a mechanical and intensely physical process – and is not to be overestimated. This is the central idea that underlies Lawrence’s text, and the cultural critique he elaborates particularly in *Fantasia* is based upon it.<sup>45</sup> Cerebral life should be a function or a tool of the bodily “will”, and should not be turned against the body as Lawrence suggests it usually is in modern times.

### *A Book for All and None*

The introduction to *Fantasia of the Unconscious* contains a remarkable admonition to the reader. In fact, it plainly advises the reader to give up the book even before it has started: “The generality of readers had better just leave it alone. The generality of critics likewise.” (5) In a single page, Lawrence manages to announce that he will “stick to the solar plexus” and “lurch into cosmology”, to suggest that books should not necessarily be available to the public at large (“like slaves exposed naked for sale”), to have a quick stab at the “age of mistaken

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<sup>45</sup> Lawrence’s cultural critique in *Fantasia* often follows a reasoning remarkably similar to Freud’s *Civilisation and its Discontents* (written 1929, published 1930): for Lawrence, as well as for Freud, Western culture is built on the negation of drives, and the suppression of desires, which leads to a state of discontent. Freud’s essay, however, is the more coherent, and builds on his own version of psychoanalysis, which Lawrence here rejects.



democracy” and to announce that he is not a scholar “of any sort” but, rather, an “amateur of amateurs” not wanting to “convince anybody.” In brief, he seems to do everything in his authorial power to persuade the reader of the futility of the book at hand.

This strategy is not one of false modesty: it effectively undermines the authority of the text at large – not so much by deprecating its purpose, but by presenting it to the reader as an entity that is just there, take it or leave it. The reader who does go on to peruse this volume and does not approve of its contents, only has him- or herself to blame. Lawrence combines the Nietzschean textual strategy of pretending to write for the select few with a calculated Lawrentian nonchalance purporting utter disinterest in readership or sales numbers. In *Fantasia*, this strategy will be consistently kept up by alternating between the high-flown and the ridiculous, the cosmic and the comic, for example:

[I]t is tiring to go to any more tea parties with the Origin, or the Cause, or even the Lord. Let us pronounce the mystic Om, from the pit of the stomach, and proceed. There’s not a shadow of doubt about it, the First Cause is just unknowable to us, and we’d be sorry if it wasn’t. Whether it’s God or the Atom. All I say is Om. (14)

### *Conscious Bodies*

Stressing the role the body plays in the making of the human, and questioning the high status generally accorded to the rational mind, Lawrence finds an unlikely but far more scientific ally in Antonio Damasio. Though Damasio is careful to stress the possibilities and benefits of consciousness and mind, his basic argument is that “extended consciousness” (which involves all higher functions, such as language and conceptual thought) always relies on “core consciousness” – which, by his own definition, is remarkably close to Lawrence’s thoughts on the solar plexus:

We can infer that the thoughts in our minds are created in our individual perspective; that we own them; that we can act on them; that the apparent protagonist of the relationship with the object is our organism. As I see it, however, core consciousness begins before those inferences: *it is the very evidence, the unvarnished sense of our individual organism in the act of knowing.* (Damasio 2000, 125, my italics)

Whereas for Lawrence the solar plexus is the physical place where we become conscious that “I am I”, Damasio locates the source of consciousness primarily in the brain, as the site where body states are “mapped”. There is, however, a tantalising parallel when both Lawrence and Damasio distinguish between different levels of consciousness: Lawrence discusses “planes of consciousness”, related to the solar and the thoracic plexuses, Damasio speaks of “core consciousness” and “extended consciousness.” And thanks to the technology and scientific knowledge available to him, Damasio manages to be far more precise and plausible in identifying the physical structures that make core consciousness happen:

(a) they are among the phylogenetically older structures of the brain; (b) they are largely located near the midline; (c) none is located on the external surface of the cerebral cortex; and (d) all are involved in some aspect of body regulation or representation.  
(271)

What Damasio has become most famous for is his treatment of consciousness as dependent on emotion and feeling. *The Feeling of What Happens* deals with the role emotion plays in the making of consciousness, and Damasio persuasively shows that emotion – broadly defined as a change in body state – *precedes* consciousness (and “feeling”, in his text, is simply consciousness of an emotion). “All of these processes – emotion, feeling and consciousness – depend for their execution on representations of the body. Their shared essence is the body.” (284) In *Descartes’ Error*, Damasio also writes on how emotion plays a vital role in decision-making: people with brain damage to the ventromedial prefrontal lobe have a seemingly

normal consciousness and perform normally on IQ tests and similar tasks, but their ability to experience emotions is severely reduced. This impairment apparently leads them to make disastrous choices in their personal lives. The implication of the cases Damasio presents is that emotions help us make decisions that we might think are entirely rational and that lack of emotion, paradoxically, leads to wrong choices.

So Lawrence and Damasio share a certain common ground: they posit that the body is the source of mental life and that consciousness is not a monolith, as it can be analysed as existing on different levels. Conscious thought, then, is the highest or most “extended” level of consciousness, but as such it is always supported by the underlying levels – and, as Damasio illustrates with a number of clinical examples, cannot exist without them.

### *Bodies in Performance*

Bringing Butler into this discussion is a delicate matter, because it requires taking apart the celebrated concept of performativity. If the subject is always performative, then it cannot be its own foundation, but if it is not its own foundation, how can it be said to be founded upon the neurological substrates that Damasio empirically identifies? Clearly, one would have to assume that the brain has nothing to do with the subject, which would firmly establish Butler as the last of the idealists – a position her opponents have always been eager to condemn her to. But there is another way out: both Lawrence and Damasio are very much aware of the paradoxical nature of the subject in time – that which is in constant evolution, yet always regards itself as the same person. This paradox, which underlies Butler’s analysis of the discursive production of the body, offers a bridge to body-based theories of subjectivity.

Lawrence, in his characteristic, sweeping fashion puts it as follows:

When you go to sleep at night, you have to say: ‘Here dies the man I am and know myself to be.’ And when you rise in the morning you have to say: ‘Here rises an unknown quantity which is still myself.’ (180)

The dynamics between sleep and consciousness, in Lawrence’s semi-mystical account of the self, is what makes for the human condition and its connection to the natural world (the moon being “the tide-turner” (181)). In his parlance, the flow of life alternates between flowing “upwards and outwards, towards mental consciousness” and flowing “[d]ownwards towards the digestion processes, downwards further to the great sexual conjunctions, downwards to sleep.” Central to this process, and stripped of Lawrentian embellishments, is the idea that the human self needs to recreate itself anew every day, in order to become “the unit for the next society” (180) (an idea that Lawrence may well have picked up from Nietzsche; the Self wanting nothing more than to “create beyond itself” [*über sich hinaus zu schaffen*] (Zarathustra, I, 4) in order to create a new kind of humanity).

Damasio’s approach is typically more measured, though there is an artistic flourish to it:

It may be helpful to think of the behaviour of an organism as the performance of an orchestral piece *whose score is being invented as it goes along*. Just as the music you hear is the result of many groups instruments playing together in time, the behaviour of an organism is the result of several biological systems performing concurrently. The different groups of instruments produce different kinds of sound and execute different melodies. They may play continuously throughout a piece or be absent at times, sometimes for a number of measures. (87, my italics)

The “behaviour of an organism,” and the way it is “being invented as it goes along,” at least partially corresponds to the concept of *performativity* – Damasio’s metaphor of the improvised orchestral piece can even be read as undermining common-sense causality in the

same way that Butler's writing attempts exactly that: the orchestra is only an orchestra *because it performs*, in the same way that the subject is brought about by its performance.

But the parallel is not perfect, for the different groups of instruments in Damasio's text do not correspond to the subject as a nexus of discourses, but to the subject as a product of biological processes (both within and without the brain). Particularly, with regard to the subject-in-time paradox, Damasio divides the self into several selves, some of which are more fleeting than others. One of these "selves" – or groups of musical instruments, if we stick to the same metaphor – is the "autobiographical self": "a nontransient collection of unique facts and ways of being which characterize a person." (17) This autobiographical self denotes an element of the self not easily captured by Butler's theory of performativity, as the momentum of her text, both in *Gender Trouble* and in *Bodies That Matter*, lies in undermining the notion of a stable, nontransient subject.

Damasio's claim, however, is not a return to the unified subject of liberal humanism – far from it – but by including an (empirically verifiable) part of the self that is more fixed in his own version of performativity ("performance" corresponding to "behaviour" to a remarkable degree of precision), he forecloses any simple view of the subject as a fixed entity, while at the same time accommodating for a complex biographical component that is always part of the subject and its behaviour. This discrepancy between the neurological and the "queer" view of the subject points to where they will differ radically, perhaps irreconcilably.

### *Language versus Image*

The "I" is [...] a citation of the place of the "I" in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates: it is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak.  
(BTM, 226)

In this sentence, Butler articulates a poststructuralist assumption that Damasio will question. His text does not specifically address poststructuralism, let alone Butler, but poses a problem for the primary role ascribed to language and discourse in the wake of the dominant French poststructuralists. Though no serious philosopher has claimed that there is nothing outside language or discourse, it has become a common assumption that we, humans, are in the first place lingual beings whose *assujettissement* takes place in and through language. We cannot be a subject if we are not a grammatical subject, an “I” which entangles us in a grammar that is not of our creation, over which we have no control.

Both Lawrence and Damasio, probably because they share a very similar hierarchy of “selves” or “consciousnesses,” come to the conclusion that language and discourse occur only in the higher reaches of consciousness – when a “self” has already been established. Lawrence, in his prophetic mode, writes: “‘In the beginning was the Word.’ This is the presumptuous masquerading of the mind. The Word cannot be the beginning of life. It is the *end* of life, that which falls shed.” (246)

Damasio, less linguistically lavish and scientifically more convincing, goes through the standard neurological process of studying patients with language dysfunctions in order to extrapolate his findings into a general conclusion:

As I studied case after case of patients with severe language disorders caused by neurological diseases, I realized that no matter how much impairment of language there was, the patient’s thought processes remained intact in their essentials, and, more importantly, the patient’s consciousness of his or her situation seemed no different from mine. (109)

To illustrate his thesis about thought processes being conducted independent of language, he refers to one of the worst cases of aphasia ever document: that of a man, Earl, whose entire left hemisphere (the hemisphere that, in the case of most humans, including Earl, controls all

language functions) had been surgically removed (an operation now obsolete). The effect of such a procedure is, of course, drastic, as, among other things, the patient's linguistic faculties were practically reduced to nil. His "core consciousness", however, was unquestionably intact, as was his emotional life – this man was still a person, a self, even though the grammatical category of the subject was totally unavailable to him.

Instead of relying on language to explain thought processes, consciousness, and subjectivity, Damasio proposes the term "image," which does not correspond to a visual image, but refers to simultaneous neural activity, possibly in several areas of the brain. His claim that language, then, "translates" these images into words and sentences may make many a philosopher of language shudder and is certainly up for elaboration, refinement, and critique, but the "image" as a coincidence of neural patterns cannot be denied to be an observable, biological given.

A particularly unfortunate (but isolated) instance of Damasio's attempted excursions into the philosophical would be his claiming that: "If self and consciousness were born *de novo* from language, they would constitute the sole instance of words without an underlying concept." (108) Such a claim presupposes that the signified always precedes the signifier, and forecloses the possibility that signifiers may call a signified into being – which a performative utterance can be said to do, and which is what Judith Butler's entire theory of performativity revolves around. The "underlying concept" or signified can be analysed as an effect of the signifier, and there is no reason to assume, as Damasio does, that the opposite is the only possible way for language to work.

But, despite the insufficient nature of Damasio's sporadic attempts to show how language works, the neurological evidence he offers for the thesis that language cannot precede the formation of self or consciousness is very hard to quarrel with. This type of evidence may not entirely debunk poststructuralist premises, but it certainly raises questions

on theoretical and ethical levels. Theoretical because it challenges the idea that grammar is indispensable for the formation of a subject, or the idea that even the subconscious, as claimed by Lacan, is structured as a language. Ethical in a remarkable twist that entangles Judith Butler, as one might argue that people such as Earl cannot, according to her theory, become subjects, but are deemed what she herself would call “abject bodies” – at least by the standards of her own theory. Can a theory in which subjectivity is based on language recognise people without language as human?

### *Caught Up*

The obvious problem that Damasio and Lawrence, in their critique of language, encounter is that their views on language are necessarily expressed in language. Neither of them goes into this problem explicitly, but both are compelled to deal with it implicitly.

As a scientist, Damasio relies on the discourse of biology and neurology. However, because consciousness is a relatively new theme in the latter discipline, and because his text is not aimed only at fellow neurophysiologists, he does expand the vocabulary of his own scientific field, and he borrows narrative and stylistic devices (e.g. personal accounts of particular patients, and a tendency to resort to more or less elaborate similes) from similar popular writing on science. Thus, Damasio deals with the problem of having to use language in order to criticise language by resorting to the scientific method of combining empirical data with a body of previously amassed (i.e. discursive) knowledge. The discursive transformation of the field that Damasio thus effects, is embedded in the logic and tradition of classical scientific investigation, the underlying rhetorical assumption of which is that, because it is logical and empirical, it must also be true, or at least approaching truth. Damasio does not acknowledge this implicit conviction, nor does he invoke any sort of meta-reflection on his own writing. This mode of writing is not immune to critique, as it effaces the text’s discursive



alliances, purporting objectivity and absoluteness. On the other hand, it is only because Damasio's text is embedded in a discursive tradition that it can, in any way, be "true".

Whereas Damasio's take on language may be lacking in complexity, Lawrence's visionary style could be called too complex to be a straightforward and trenchant critique of received notions of linguality. Lawrence does, however, appear to be much more aware of his own entanglement in language than Damasio is. Anne Fernald, referring to Lawrence's views on consciousness, states that

all of this gets explained through language, an insurmountable irony that Lawrence works to overcome, as we have seen, through jarring shifts of diction and context, as if mixed metaphors, slang, and assault might pierce the veil of language itself. (194)

Lawrence continually reminds his reader of his essay's textuality, for instance in chapter four of *Fantasia*, in which he wanders into an elaborate train of thought about trees, only to conclude:

Excuse my digression, gentle reader. At first I left it out, thinking we might not see wood for trees. But it doesn't much matter what we see. It's nice to just look around anywhere. (41)

The striking and omnipresent shifts of register probably serve a similar purpose: Lawrence has no problem with moving from aggressive and slangy rants into a mystical and contemplative style even within one paragraph.

Lawrence's awareness of his entanglement in discourse is even reflected in the way he uses and abuses sources:

Lawrence's pattern was not to accept any one else's models, paradigms, or orthodoxies, traditional or revolutionary, but rather to take from anywhere and everywhere factual details from the real world, bits and pieces of theories, superstitions, aspects of the personalities of people whom he knew, to support his own theories, some of which he

held constant over a lifetime, other of which he developed to meet his personal needs as those needs changed, sometimes from month to month. (Steinberg 91)

Steinberg calls Lawrence a “mythographer” who puzzles with all sorts of discourses available to him in order to end up with the patchwork of theories that suits him best. The effect of this puzzling, however, is that the reader is reminded of the discursive nature of all accumulation of scientific knowledge. Lawrence treats scientific theories (Einstein’s theory of relativity seems to be a particular favourite of his) as being at an equal level with ancient myths or esoteric writings. A heterogeneous body of incommensurable texts is Lawrence’s playground, and the playfulness of his eclecticism destabilises his text while being in itself perhaps the text’s most significant process.

Lawrence undercuts his own writing and destabilises it wherever he can, so that the text’s instability and slippage become part of its meaning. Like Blake before him, Lawrence creates his own mythology by making original use of existing concepts, expressing a belief in non-transient forces that can be symbolised in language in any number of different equivalent ways.

### Poetry

Lawrence’s remarkable use of language in non-fictional prose invites a detour into his poetry, where this linguistic alienation and self-referentiality can be expected to be more radical and explicit. *Pansies* is a particularly rich hunting-ground because, regardless of its debatable aesthetical merits<sup>46</sup>, the poems in this volume frequently provide lapidary statements condensing a larger idea into the richer language of poetry. Consciousness, mental life, and cerebrality are a recurring theme in these poems, and, figure – together with money –

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<sup>46</sup> Critics have generally been quick to dismiss the two volumes of *Pansies*, whereas, more recently, others have attempted to redeem them (e.g. Simmonds 2003). The artistic merit of these poems is not necessarily relevant here, as they are used mainly to gain insight into Lawrence’s elusive ideas on the consciousness and subjectivity.

as symptoms of a sick civilisation<sup>47</sup>. A particularly relevant poem in this context is the somewhat prosaic “Thought”:

### **Thought**

Thought, I love thought.  
 But not the juggling and twisting of already existent ideas  
 I despise that self-important game.  
 Thought is the welling up of unknown life into consciousness,  
 Thought is the testing of statements on the touchstone of consciousness,  
 Thought is gazing onto the face of life, and reading what can be read,  
 Thought is pondering over experience, and coming to conclusion.  
 Thought is not a trick, or an exercise, or a set of dodges,  
 Thought is a man in his wholeness, wholly attending.

The poem creates a tension between two types of thought – one to be loved, one to be despised. Lawrence, in his revolutionary mode, condemns the “self-important game” of pondering “already existent ideas” even though, as we have seen, his own non-fictional writing is indebted to a multitude of incongruous sources in a way that might well be labelled “juggling.” It is to be assumed, then, that what is to be despised is not particularly an influence from already existent ideas, but the failure to work these ideas into something more than what there was before. “Real” thought, then, relies on a creative impulse that combines and adds to ideas that are already there.

Where does this creative impulse, according to Lawrence, spring from? Clearly from a source that is pre-conscious: “unknown life” welling up into consciousness. In the light of the discussion of Lawrence’s views on the unconscious, “unknown” can only mean “pre-discursive” and not “springing from some unknown source” – we know exactly which source Lawrence is thinking of. Because of the pre-discursive nature of “unknown life”, we may assume a temporal dimension to the following lines: if, in the next line, thought is defined as “the testing of statements”, we find that “statements,” being verbal, have necessarily already been generated by consciousness, which then continues to process its own products.

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<sup>47</sup> The recurrence of these themes again seems to prefigure Freud’s *Civilisation and its Discontents*.

The line after this is the first to invoke an outward movement by emphasising the “gazing onto the face of life,” which is then also translated into a process of verbalisation – that of reading. What is meant by the “face of life” is unclear, as it can refer both to the life of the conscious organism, or life as an abstract whole, or life as the organism’s combined perception of the internal and external world. The latter meaning seems the one most likely to be endorsed by the poem itself, which goes on to include “experience” in its kaleidoscopic description of thought. This line ends the chronological sequence of the development of thought by indicating that thought is not thought unless it comes to a conclusion.

The sequence of verbs in this little narrative neatly sums up the action: the necessary components of thought are “welling,” “testing,” “gazing,” “reading,” “pondering,” and, finally “coming to conclusion”. (There is a finality to this process that brings to mind *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*, in which consciousness is also construed as the last stage in the process of thought.)

Analysed thus, there is a tighter unity to this poem than is obvious at first sight: the first line is a simple, positive statement, which could seamlessly float into the last. The second and last-but-one lines are negative definitions, delineating what thought is not – or should not be. There is a temporal, processual coherence in lines 4-8, which makes the contempt in line 3 stand out as an impulsive (maybe – aptly – not entirely rational) rejection of other potential, more conservative, definitions of thought.

This analysis also shows up a conceptual difference between Lawrence and Damasio, and it has to do precisely with the temporality constructed in Lawrence’s poem as well as in his work on the unconscious. In Lawrence’s text, thought moves through the body in order to die a certain death once, through consciousness, it reaches language – “The mind is the dead end of life.” (246) Spinoza, for one, would not agree: “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body, or a certain mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else.”

(Ethics, Book II, Proposition 13) This statement is often collapsed into “The mind is the idea of the body,” which highlights the discrepancy: for Spinoza – and, we might add, for Damasio – the notion of the body as such having an idea is simply outrageous; an idea does not travel *through* the body, because an idea is always an idea *of* the body. The process here is not so much one of temporality as it is one of simultaneity (in Spinoza, for whom body and mind are two attributes of one and the same substance) or “nesting” in Damasio’s writing (as made explicit precisely in *Looking for Spinoza*:

The image for the ensemble of these reactions is not that of simple linear hierarchy. That is why the metaphor of a tall building with many floors only captures some of the biological reality. The image of the great chain of being is no good either. A better image is that of a tall, messy tree with progressively higher and more elaborate branches coming off the main trunks and thus maintaining a two-way communication with their roots. The history of evolution is written all over that tree. (38)

### *Butler and the Pre-Discursive*

In a lucid critique of Judith Butler, Geoff Boucher has argued that she does not take her own theory far enough in the sense that “Butler has not, in actuality, dispensed with the assumption of a pre-discursive individuality.” (Boucher 121) Within its frame of reference, Boucher’s critique is trenchant and convincing, and does indeed lay bare a deficit in Butler’s theory: perhaps performativity still does not manage to do away with the prediscursive subject to the extent that Butler claims it does.

In the light of this discussion of Lawrence and his sporadic alignment with neurology, however, we may adopt a different angle on the problem of prediscursive individuality: bodily existence, and particularly our neural configuration, though impossible to posit outside of language, may well be thought of, in Damasio’s terms, as enabling a “proto-self”. This proto-

self is not a subject: it is merely an organism responding to its own body states and to its sensory perception of an outside world. This is not a return to the self-grounding subject: the neurological evidence, as it has been read here, does not suggest that the subject is not socially and performatively constructed; it merely shows that there are structures in the brain (intriguingly the phylogenetically oldest parts of our neural equipment) that are necessary for a sense of self to develop.

I claim that this reading of Damasio is actually consistent with Butler's theory, and may answer some of Boucher's concerns. In the important introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler distances herself from the linguisticism she found herself accused of in the wake of *Gender Trouble*, while staying clear from materialism. Her answer to those critics who crave to see a firm belief in biological truths confirmed is:

Although at this moment I want to offer an absolute reassurance to my interlocutor, some anxiety prevails. To "concede" the undeniability of "sex" or its "materiality" is always to concede some version of "sex," some formation of "materiality." Is the discourse in and through which that concession occurs [...] not itself formative of the very phenomenon that it concedes? To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. [...] In philosophical terms, the constative claim is always to some degree performative. (10-11)

Butler theorises the body from the outside, from the level of discourse. In fact, she can be said not to theorise the body at all, but rather to analyse precisely the discourse by which "the body" as such becomes an analytical category. Her approach, therefore, is complementary rather than opposed to biological or neurological research, though it contains a strong caveat regarding the language those disciplines depend upon to conduct their research and formulate

their conclusions. Her deconstruction of linguisticism and materialism – and, ultimately, of discourse and materiality – leads her to challenge the modern notion of “a culture or an agency of the social which acts upon a nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface.” (4) But what is most tantalising about the writing of both Damasio and Lawrence is precisely that the body is not construed as “a passive surface” at all. It becomes the very source and theatre of emotion and consciousness, embedded in interaction and sociality.

The angles from which Butler and Damasio approach the subject are fundamentally different, the former analysing how discourse enables the speaking subject and confers materiality upon the body, the latter investigating how consciousness relies on a complex system of interaction between the body and the brain. And yet the two seem to meet at the point where subjectivity “happens.” Damasio’s groundbreaking effort to make consciousness the focus of his neurological work, and Butler’s equally groundbreaking endeavour to strip the body of its nondiscursive status combine to radically dismiss any remaining idea of a self-grounding or self-comprehending subject. This meeting-point cannot quite be identified as the barrier between discursive and non-discursive (which would be absurd, given Butler’s incisive deconstruction of this dichotomy), nor can it be described anymore in terms of body and mind. Rather, it must involve the meeting of two theoretical paradigms that interlock in a particular fashion: the one establishing that human bodies, as organisms, are organised in such a way as to respond and adapt to their surroundings, the other establishing how these surroundings enable, indeed compel, such an organism to behave in certain ways. This analysis renders Boucher’s argument at least partially irrelevant, because the pre-discursive individual is at least biologically verifiable as a living organism, even a “proto-self.” Butler’s “primary narcissism” or “auto-affectation,” while admittedly not the strongest point in her theory, roughly corresponds to any organism’s ability to adapt in order to survive – a quality found in entities ranging from unicellular amoebas to complex human bodies.

As a final remark on this matter, I would add that this two-pronged approach to the individual is capable of bridging the gap between human and nonhuman animals in a way that Butler's theory, in its own right, would find very hard to accomplish, precisely because of its reliance on language and discourse to an extent that, as we have seen, may not be biologically justified. Nonhuman subjectivity can be said to be impossible from within the framework laid down by the poststructuralist need to equate the subject with a *grammatical* subject, so that prediscursive subjectivity is a logical impossibility. Stressing that prediscursive individuality, on a biological basis, however, is not only possible, but a biological reality, thus re-establishes a firm link between the human and the nonhuman.

### *Poststructuralist Exhaustion*

"The poststructuralist paradigm is now exhausted," Toril Moi writes, and adds: Theorists, whether they are feminists or not, need to rethink their most fundamental assumptions about language and meaning, the relations between language and power, language and human community, the body and the soul (or whatever we want to call the inner life). (1735)

This paper has tried to suggest two possible ways of doing the "rethinking" that Moi deems necessary: one way is to try and read Butler's radical theory of the body alongside Antonio Damasio's neurological insights on consciousness and subjectivity. I have claimed that these approaches, though they are fundamentally different, can not only come to compatible conclusions, but even enrich and maybe complement each other. If the poststructuralist paradigm has been exhausted, one possible way of rejuvenating critical theory may be a renewed interest in other branches of science, a project that seems to appeal to a number of scholars today, but for which a new paradigm or methodology has yet to be developed.



The second attempted way to rethink assumptions about the human condition has been the return to Lawrence's prestructuralist text about the unconscious. Lawrence's ideas should not and cannot be accepted at face value, but they may prove inspiring: Lawrence's way of writing about the body and avoiding the trap of logocentrism, as Daniel Schneider has shown, is to "invent a new language" (Schneider 40). A language, it is true, that is characterised by loopholes and rhetorical chaos, but, at the same time, a language that does not seek closure or direct referentiality to the body.

### *Rip the Veil*

It was Lawrence's ambition to "[r]ip the veil of the old vision across, and walk through the rent." (10) It is unlikely that anyone actually followed in Lawrence's exact footsteps, walking through the rent, but the challenge he poses still holds sway to some extent: I have tried to demonstrate that Lawrence's text is valuable and relevant today in at least two areas.

In the first place, Lawrence reminds us that we are bodily beings, and, in suggesting that the body – not language – is the source of the self, he finds an ally in Antonio Damasio. The collation of these two theories is less than perfect, but their shared conclusion is similar, namely that language and thought are faculties only of the higher regions of consciousness, determined by bodily factors we are not usually aware of. Neither would claim that language is unimportant for the formation of the self, but they demonstrate (each in his own way) how there is an organic entity that precedes language.

Secondly, Lawrence appears to be very much aware of his own reliance on language to communicate his ideas on the bodily unconscious: arrogant and self-assured as his text may come across, it seems that his whole elaborate system of planes and plexuses is undermined precisely by his rhetorical particularities. His style draws attention to the lingual nature of his ideas and, in doing so, distances the reader. The body, then, does not exactly appear as a

referential entity within the text, but rather haunts the gaps and cracks that Lawrence provides.

# Women in Love, Men in Society

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## *Why Butler is not Brecht*

In his recent book on masculinity in Lawrence, Hemingway and Conrad, Thomas Strychacz relies heavily on Butler's theory of performativity to formulate original readings of "a handful of modernist fictions" – an aim clearly closely related to that of this dissertation. The basic theoretical set-up of Strychacz' endeavour, however, is not only quite different from my own, it is also, I will claim, based on a somewhat reductive reading of Butler's work.

It is Strychacz' stated intention to "[uncover] how masculinity 'is done': that is, how men enact, and try to stabilize, a pose of masculine authority." (3) Oddly, this intention is accompanied by a footnote referring to the page in *Gender Trouble* where Butler specifically invokes Nietzsche, echoing that "there is no doer behind the deed" and rephrasing: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender". (33) Now, if there is no gendered being before gender, then how can "men" be said to "enact, and try to stabilize, a pose of masculine authority"? Many are the pitfalls of grammar and it may be unfair to take Strychacz to task for what could just be an intelligible way of stating a complex theoretical background, but the introduction to this book, as well as some of the readings it puts forth, confirms that Strychacz is not keen to take on board the more spectacular theoretical dimensions of Butler's theory:

Because these works adopt a specifically theatrical mode of gender performance, this study parlays Butler's ideas into modernist narrative by way of Bertolt Brecht's concept of the *gest*. The *gest*, put briefly, is a dramatic strategy whose purpose is to represent and 'make strange' a particular set of social conditions, and thus to reveal an otherwise covert structure of power. (Strychacz 2007, 3)

This formulation suggests that Strychacz is interested mainly in Butler's use of "performance" in a theatrical context – a performance that is somehow staged or dramatic. To be precise, the bridge to Brecht seems to be built on Butler's discussion of drag as a parodic gesture that, indeed, lays bare covert power structures: "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.*" (GT 175, italics in original) The problem, now, is that, to Butler, drag may *mimic* the performativity of gender – it is *not* therefore itself that same mechanism. If it were, drag would equal gender, and its parodic effect would be lost.

It follows that, while drag may be comparable to Brechtian drama in that it points to structures of power and – in Butler's text – the performative process of gendering, *it is not in itself performative*. This may sound paradoxical, but it lies at the core of Butler's insights: what is performative is the gendered subject, i.e. you and I, going through everyday life. We are constituted by our acts, and our genders are continually being performed in the sense that they consist of citations of the unwritten rules of culture and discourse. The fact that we are not generally aware of this performative process proves only how well it works: performativity is not something we "do" consciously – ultimately, it is what does us prior to our knowing it. Theatricality, then, is precisely the opposite: by revealing what is ordinarily unseen, it can make us aware of the processes we are constituted by. And precisely because it reveals these processes, it cannot be a perfect copy thereof – if it were, it would become invisible. The theatrical mode that is intended to "make strange" or defamiliarise is by its nature "ecstatic": it moves away from the structures of power that regulate "normal" life in order to lay bare these structures. The reflexivity of Brechtian theatre is enabled by this constitutive ekstatic move: it distances itself from the rules of theatre and society in order to create a theatrical performance critical of society.

So there seems to be a categoric mistake underlying Strychacz' theoretical approach, and it is a mistake Butler warns against: "The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial." (*GT* 180) We can say that Brechtian theatre, or even drag performances, "express" processes of, broadly, subjectivation, without effectively "performing" those processes. The gestic or theatrical reality is deictic: it points towards the non-theatrical world, for example in order to demonstrate its contingent nature. But if we take Butler seriously, we must emphasise that subjectivity is not simply deictic – it does not simply "express" a pre-existing individuality – it is performative.

### *Double Take on "A Chair"*

To illustrate how Strychacz' theoretical introduction informs his readings, I turn to his discussion of *Women in Love*. In this chapter, "Doing a Double Take: Reading Gender Issues in *Women in Love*," Strychacz demonstrates entirely convincingly that a relevant textual feature of this novel is that it often forces the reader to do a "double take" on what may have been taken at face value until the text at least partially retracts it, e.g. by adding the sentence "So Birkin meditated whilst he was ill" to a seemingly authoritative and misogynist train of thought, thereby making the status of these thoughts wholly unclear. This is an important insight, and it can hardly be emphasised sufficiently in the face of those readers who would still equate characters' thoughts with those of the narrator or, worse, the author.

But where I differ from Strychacz' reading is when he engages with the chapter "A Chair", offering a close reading that purportedly illustrates this chapter's theatricality: "The diverse glances of 'A Chair' transform the scene into a gest: its staging reveals multiple, interlocking structures of power." (190) It is not made clear why exactly the importance of looks and glances at this point in the text automatically amounts to transforming the whole scene into a "gest", however. As we have seen, in order for something to be properly "gestic",

it should at least involve a reflexive distancing from the system it portrays – something that may be true for the chapter in itself, indeed for the novel as a whole, but at the intratextual level Strychacz is here concerned with, it is not at all clear what the “staged” quality of the marketplace is, exactly. The question is not, it seems, to what extent the narrator “stages” this scene (for this observation would be banal – how could any narrator do otherwise? – and banality is certainly not something Strychacz can be accused of), but, rather, how and to what extent Birkin, Ursula, and the other characters in this scene stage themselves in such a way as to create a performance that is gestic rather than just performative.

The narrator, in fact, lays this scene with great skill and a touch of good humour:

The old market square was not very large, a mere bare patch of granite setts, usually, with a few fruit-stalls under a wall. It was in a poor quarter of the town. Meagre houses stood down one side, there was a hosiery factory, a great blank with myriad oblong windows at the end, a street of little shops with flagstone pavement down the other side, and, for a crowning monument, the public baths, of new red brick, with a clock-tower.  
(354)

The description of this explicitly public space in a poorer part of town announces the importance of class in what follows, while the insertion of a hosiery factory already indicates the flow of goods through the class system: throughout the novel, the Brangwen sisters’ love of fine and colourful stockings is often remarked upon. Stockings are made here, in this rather drab environment portrayed as the habitat of the lower classes, before they can be flaunted by the young women of the middle class. The factory thus seems to introduce the ordinary flow of production goods (which Ursula will attempt to subvert): from the bottom upwards, produced in industrial ugliness to provide a sense of style and beauty for those who do not do the producing.

In what follows, Ursula and Birkin, who had come out browsing for furniture, decide to buy an old chair they both like exceedingly (“‘So beautiful, so pure!’ Birkin said. ‘It almost breaks my heart.’” (356)) Almost immediately afterwards, though, they decide they don’t want it after all:

“All right,’ he said, ‘then let us not have it. I’m sick of it all, too. At any rate one can’t go on living on the old bones of beauty.’”

“One can’t,” she cried. “I *don’t* want old things.”

“The truth is, we don’t want things at all,” he replied. “The thought of a house and furniture of my own is hateful to me.”

This startled her, for a moment. Then she replied:

“So it is to me. – But one must live somewhere.”

“Not somewhere – anywhere,” he said. “One should just live anywhere – not have a definite place. I don’t want a definite place. – As soon as you get a room, and it is *complete*, you want to run from it. – Now my rooms at the Mill are quite complete, I want them at the bottom of the sea. It is a horrible tyranny of a fixed milieu, where each piece of furniture is a commandment-stone.” (356)

Thus, Ursula decides to give the chair away to a young couple she had spotted shopping for household necessities, “a young woman, who was going to have a baby” and “a young man, down-at-heel and dejected”. (354) Strychacz has significant points to make about the following exchange, particularly by noting “the erotic, class charged undercurrents of the scene”. The roles played by class and sexuality are announced even before any words are exchanged: class distinction was inherent in the setting, as we have seen, and it is compounded by the introduction of a second unmarried couple, of whom the woman, moreover, is pregnant. Strychacz is also right to point out that “Ursula’s approach invokes social codes governing the public negations of class differences.” It seems odd, however, to

assume that Fred and his fiancée, the intended recipients of the chair, respond in a way that “indicates their full grasp of the way in which the system of class is constituted by, and thoroughly imbricated with, theatricality.” (190) It is not (and Fred and his fiancée do not grasp it): what is theatrical or gestic (Strychacz appears to use these terms as synonyms) does not *constitute* society – it highlights the processes that do.

So what are these processes that are at work in this chapter? Possibly inspired by Birkin’s recently stated ideas about not having a home, not occupying a place circumscribed by society, Ursula attempts to rid herself of possession, and, in doing so, transgresses against the premise that commodities move from the lower classes upwards through the processes of capitalism. She does not appear to realise that she cannot simply disavow her own status and occupy a spot “not somewhere – anywhere.” (356)

The social awkwardness here, then, does not derive from Birkin’s “staging” a scene, nor from the “young couple’s reaction draw[ing] attention to the extraordinary nature of this staging” and it is certainly not the case that “it is the first time in the novel that Ursula plays spectator” (190): the awkwardness consists in Ursula’s inability to shake off her middle class status and in her transgressing against the laws of society. Similarly, the other couple’s reaction shows how they are incapable of thinking outside of social norms: they are stuck in the system, much rather than actively “groping for the appropriate public role” (190). The key events in these passages are precisely not gestic, but performative: we find Ursula in the process of adapting to her new place in society, in which she is no longer a school teacher, nor is she a married woman (yet), though her position at this point seems to depend very much on Birkin, even to the point where, though they don’t necessarily agree, she acts out his stated desire of disrupting social structures. The instances Strychacz reads as “profoundly gestic: [...] an act of self-persuasion” (194) are not gestic – they do not even appear to be conscious or deliberate – this is performativity at work, not just performance, let alone parody.



## *Verfremdung*

In the light of the above, to what extent is it possible to claim that “[o]ne powerful consequence of this chapter’s gestic structure is to make Birkin’s ideals subject to a *Verfremdungseffekt*” (192)? I do not want to dismiss this thesis out of hand, but, at the risk of stating the obvious, I would point out that *Verfremdungseffekt* is not a novelistic term, and its translation is problematic. If the V-effekt in Brechtian theatre is brought about by means of music, set, make-up and unorthodox styles of acting and singing, then how could these elements translate into the paradigm of the novel? Added to that, the real difficulty would lie in another defining characteristic of Brechtian epic drama: its narrator. Put simply: in theatre, a narrator is not strictly necessary, even odd – and alienating. A novel, on the other hand, cannot exist without a narrator.

Severing this term’s firm ties to the world of theatre, and transplanting it into an apparatus designed to read novels should probably not be attempted without the theoretical ground-work necessary to clarify what precise new meanings it is supposed to assume. Lacking this clarification, however, Strychacz’ argument goes as follows: Birkin’s ideals become estranged or alienated because the reader can see that the narrator assumes a certain distance from them – a process very similar to his earlier insight that the narrator often implicitly questions, or turns upside-down, bold statements about society or manhood. Now, precisely because *Verfremdung* as a concept is so “alien” to novelistic practice, it is hard to disagree with this claim. It is true, indeed, that Birkin’s ideas become detached from the narrative in which they are embedded, so that, as in good Brechtian fashion, the reader/spectator is confronted with a set of ideas rather than events, arguably even vehicles rather than characters. The reader’s task then, is to recognise the incongruity of these ideas and to become involved in the text by responding to them intellectually rather than empathically. (And this is not a far cry from Butler’s reading of drag acts.)

The main problem with this reading, however, is that it can be rephrased without resorting to *Verfremdung*: what Strychacz entirely correctly points out is essentially that Birkin is *not* the concretisation of the narrator, nor are any of the other characters. Formulated this way, the claim comes across as far less sensational. It merely states the received wisdom that Lawrence's fictional worlds are often laboratories of ideas, voiced and refracted through a matrix of characters. In this particular chapter, this matrix is clear-cut and echoes the main plot of the novel in containing two heterosexual couples: Birkin and Ursula (middle class), Fred and his fiancée (working class) – a matrix that allows for sexual undercurrents along class lines. Is this, then, a “staging” of a confrontation? One could supposedly insist that the narrator is the one who does the staging (which would make the task of the narrator very different from his counterpart in epic theatre), but how exactly is that different from saying that the narrator *narrates* this scene, as is his job? Why would narration be a less interesting or less powerful term than “staging”? What does the use of “staging” effectively bring to the analysis other than confusion?

### *The Theatre of Focalisation*

Strychacz' reading of this chapter is clever, and I do not want to take issue with the interpretative elements he rustles up – I mainly want to point out that they do not really depend on a “gestic” or “theatrical” reading, but can be perfectly argued from a more conventional point of view – even if it be Butler-informed. Let us begin with what, in Strychacz' reasoning, is a defining aspect of this particular chapter: the visibility (“diverse glances” (354)) that supposedly renders it theatrical. Strychacz' analysis of looks as indicative of a class system makes perfect sense: mainly, it is Birkin and Ursula who observe the other couple (before deciding to offer them the chair). Ursula is sexually fascinated by the man, Fred, (“He would be a dreadful, but wonderful lover to a woman” (358)) and Fred's fiancée

registers this (“The full-built woman was staring offensively”) but, as Strychacz notes, she “never looks at the wholly inaccessible Birkin”. (190) This is indicative of the way in which focalisation works in this chapter: it alternates between zero focalisation and focalisation through Birkin and, most often, Ursula. The only “glances” on the part of Fred and his nameless fiancée are the one from the girl mentioned above, and two from Fred: “The man looked up at him with a grimace of a smile, furtive, unsure” (359) and “he turned uncouthly, awkwardly aside, glancing up at her with quick bright eyes, oddly awkwardly aside, glancing up at her with quick bright eyes, oddly suggestive, like a quick, live, rat.” (360) Obviously, none of these looks lead to focalisations other than Birkin’s or Ursula’s – Fred’s glances are perceived by Birkin and Ursula respectively, and the “offensiveness” is felt by Ursula. Crucially, the perspective of the other young couple is completely absent and we must bear in mind that their awkwardness, furtiveness, uncouthness and even rat-likeness are first and foremost imputations made about them by Birkin and Ursula.

What it means, then, not to read this scene as “gestic” but as performative, is to see how Birkin and (to a lesser extent, but more clearly) Ursula are caught up in the very web they want to escape from. Birkin disavows the values of society, even its core value – that of possession – but, in doing so, confirms to the reader that he and Ursula are very much caught up in their middle class existence. Birkin can only disavow the value of possessing things because he possesses more than enough capital. Ursula can pretend to give away a chair without invoking the class system, i.e. without being patronising, but it is this disavowal that brings class more strongly into play than at any other point in this novel. Thus, in a very dialectic and Butlerian moment, Birkin and Ursula confirm the norms they believe to rebel against: simply denying one’s entanglement in a normative system does not amount to freeing oneself from the system. On the contrary: much like the unconscious in Freud, the norm does not know negation.

Ultimately, what the predominant focalisations in this chapter show is how Ursula and Birkin's intentions – and, in a way, they themselves – are undone by a normative system that is not of their own making, but which is so much part of establishing their selves that they either do not notice it, or firmly deny its existence. In this sense, it is an instance where, in Butler's powerful formulation, "ideology surfaces discursively as an effort to cover over a constitutive 'lack' in the subject." (*BTM*, 194) The "lack" here is close to its Lacanian version, in that it refers to the cut – the loss – that institutes the subject as an entity within its social surroundings (the big Other, if one insists). So if we read Birkin's ideology as marking a difference from the structures it effectively depends on (as Strychacz does), this is possible not because of an effect of alienation but because, much like an analyst reading between the lines of an analysand's discourse, we see those performative processes at work which bring about Birkin's discourse.

So far, it would seem that to read the characters in this chapter as encapsulated and modelled by cultural constraints (rather than subjected to a voluntaristic theatrical impulse) is not only more faithful to Butler's theory of subject formation, it also embraces many important elements of Strychacz' reading without resorting to the theoretically dodgy resorting to theatricality, gestures, and *Verfremdungseffekt*. However, when Strychacz extrapolates his "gestic" reading to the rest of this novel (and particularly to its final chapters), it will be hard to stay on this same level of relative agreement, reading and reasoning from the Butlerian perspective argued for here.

### *Loerking in the Margins: Pursuit and Rejection of Masculinity*

The character of Herr Loerke has been the subject of a great deal of debate, and it is about to become a bone of contention in this text as well. Against the background of my comments on "A Chair", it is very hard to agree with Strychacz' position that says:

From the perspective of the gests of manhood for which Loerke is responsible, Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of him as one of Lawrence's (and male modernism's) "paradigmatic no-men" is wholly misleading. It is because Loerke *does* possess cultural, artistic, and even sexual masculine capital, and because he can employ it publicly, that Birkin tries to diminish him to a perverse "wizard rat" and plays the anti-Semitic card, and that Gerald, despite his conventionally "big and powerful" presence, has to try to reduce him to a "little brat." (206)

Gilbert and Gubar's text, invoked by Strychacz, reads as follows:

Not insignificantly, the triumph of Gudrun's New Womanly determination at the end of *Women in Love* is facilitated by the intervention of a New Man, the terrifying no-man named (after Wagner's Loge) Loerke, a dwarfish and, says Birkin, probably Jewish industrial artist whose arrogance and cynicism utterly undermine the plans of the Siegfried-like hero that Gerald ought to have been. (*No Man's Land*, 40)

So the question seems to come down to this: does Loerke "possess masculine sexual capital" or is he a "no-man"? Is he a man or a rat? One crucial error in Strychacz' argument should be laid bare straight away: it is true that Birkin and Gerald attempt to diminish Loerke's masculinity and even humanity, and it is true that they probably do this out of jealousy. But Strychacz conveniently forgets that Ursula, Gudrun, even Loerke himself, do something very similar, which already casts a shadow of doubt over the "sexually masculine capital" Loerke is supposed to possess.

Let us begin at the beginning: Loerke is introduced in the long chapter "Snow", which begins with the arrival of our four protagonists in the small village of Hohenhausen, in Tyrol. When they meet the other guests at the hotel, Loerke is described (without any apparent focalisation taking place) as "a small, dark-skinned man with full eyes, an odd creature, like a child, and like a troll, quick, detached". (405) Clearly, Loerke's manhood is, if not questioned,

then at least set apart as different, from the very first. If he is a man simultaneously like a child and like a troll, then both his status as a full adult and his status as a full human are unsettled. This strange in-between status will only be corroborated by later descriptions of Loerke, notably when focalised through Gudrun, long before Gerald and Birkin engage in their abusive conversation:

He was a sculptor, and she wanted to hear his view of his art. And his figure attracted her. There was the look of a little wastrel about him, that intrigued her, and an old man's look, that interested her, and then, beside this, an uncanny singleness, a quality of being by himself, not in contact with anybody else, that marked out an artist to her. [...] His figure interested her – the figure of a boy, almost of a street arab. He made no attempt to conceal it. He always wore a simple loden suit, with knee breeches. His legs were thin, and he made no attempt to disguise the fact: which was of itself remarkable, in a German. And he never ingratiated himself anywhere, not in the slightest, but kept to himself, for all his apparent playfulness. (422)

Loerke, to Gudrun's mind, is strangely overdetermined, reminding her of both an old man and a boy, or an Arab and a "gnome." No wonder the overall impression is that of a man who keeps to himself, does not ingratiate himself – who is, as he was described from the first, "detached" and unwilling to conceal the incongruities of his appearance.

Loerke's less than straightforward masculinity becomes obvious particularly in relation to the two protagonists we have encountered thus far: if Gerald and Birkin represent or incarnate two very different types of masculinity, the presence of Loerke invites us to read them as very similar nevertheless. Gerald is the "industrial magnate", Birkin is the man of big ideas. Both, in these respective roles, perfectly live up to the standards of conventional masculinity. In Gerald's case, this is the most obvious: he succeeds his father in running an industrial enterprise, and does so along scientific lines, rationally, without much regard or

care for his employees. Gerald embodies the triumph of mind over matter and perpetuates the class system along very clear lines. Birkin, on the other hand, may speak out against society and its structuring principles, he is nonetheless deeply entangled in his own status, and his big ideas flow from a naive disavowal of social ties, as we have seen in the discussion of “A Chair”. That Gerald and Birkin are very different while very similar is made obvious in the “Gladiatorial” chapter, famous for its homoerotic overtones:

They were very dissimilar. Birkin was tall and narrow, his bones were very thin and strong and round, his limbs were rounded, all his contours were beautifully and fully moulded. He seemed to stand with a proper, rich weight on the face of the earth, whilst Birkin seemed to have the centre of gravitation in his own middle. And Gerald had a rich, frictional kind of strength, rather mechanical, but sudden and invincible, whereas Birkin was abstract as to be almost intangible. (269)

He seemed to penetrate into Gerald’s more solid, more diffuse bulk, to interfuse his body through the body of the other, as if to bring it subtly into subjection [...] It was as if Birkin’s whole physical intelligence interpenetrated into Gerald’s body, as if his fine, sublimated energy entered into the flesh of the fuller man, like some potency, casting a fine net, a prison, through the muscles into the very depths of Gerald’s physical being. [...] Often, in the white, interlaced knot of violent living being that swayed silently, there was no head to be seen, only the swift, tight limbs, the solid white backs, the physical junction of two bodies clinched into oneness. (270)

Gerald and Birkin are complementary rather than opposite, in their physique as well as in their thoughts. Even their names are complementary: Gerald is usually referred to by his first name, Birkin by his last. Together, they are a conglomerate ideal of modern manhood: the practical philosopher, the idealist industrialist.

Loerke has no place in this stylised picture: he has no definite class, he hardly has a definite profession (what is an industrial artist, exactly?), he doesn't even have a definite sexuality. And yet, he manages to live fantasies harboured by Gerald and Birkin: for instance, he does not hesitate to confess to having slapped one of his models, "harder than I have ever beat anything in my life. – I had to, I had to. – It was the only way I got the work done." (433) – when it is Gerald who is often associated with violence (deflected onto animals at first,<sup>48</sup> perpetrated against Gudrun only at the very last stage of the novel). It is also Loerke who has lived Birkin's ideal of being free from possessions: "I have known what it was to lie in bed for three days, because I had nothing to eat." (425) He even maintains a singular independence from finance at the time of the story, through his dismissive statement: "Dunque, adesso – maintenant – I earn a thousand pounds in a year, or I earn two thousand–." Everything about Loerke gives the impression that he somehow manages to live if not outside society, then at least in its margins, to the point of hardly being intelligible, while representing, at least to Gudrun, a chunk of unmediated reality:

To Gudrun, there was in Loerke the rock-bottom of all life. Everybody else had their illusion, must have their illusion, their before and after. But he, with a perfect stoicism, did without any before and after, dispensed with all illusion. He did not deceive himself, in the last issue. In the last issue he cared about nothing, he was troubled about nothing, he made not the slightest attempt to be at one with anything. He existed a pure, unconnected will, stoical and momentaneous. There was only his work. (427)

It is tempting, through the image of the "rock-bottom of all life" to read Loerke as a sort of manifestation, reflection, or "return" of the Zizekian "rock of the Real" – particularly as Gudrun describes him as so unfettered by the Symbolic. But I believe this passage invites a reading that is more relevant in the context of this novel. The influence of Nietzsche in this

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<sup>48</sup> See: Andrew Howe: "Beastly Desire: Human/Animal Interactions in Lawrence's *Women in Love*."



work has often been commented on, and is usually linked to Rupert Birkin. Birkin's ideas and theories, indeed, often have a decidedly Nietzschean ring to them, but in this particular description of Loerke, is he not much more a Nietzschean man than Birkin ever will be? From his rejection of a morality based on social convention to his dispensation of all illusion and ultimately being nothing but "will", Loerke is presented as a Nietzschean being who almost lives the life of a Zarathustra, reminding us that much of Nietzsche's thought, even when presented through Birkin's reflections, is, in fact, deeply unsettling. Loerke's focus on his work, furthermore, is entirely in line with Nietzsche's call for man to "create beyond himself" [*über sich hinauszuschaffen*] (Zarathustra, I, 4) regardless of man-made morality. That is why, to Loerke, it is perfectly acceptable to slap a teenage model until she sits still, if that is what is needed to create his artistic vision of a girl on horseback.

To read Loerke as *Übermensch*, as superman, would be going too far, but his unconventional mode of life, his refusal to measure himself by ordinary standards, sets him apart from the other characters in this novel and makes his presence threatening to some (Gerald and Rupert) and fascinating to others (Gudrun and, initially, Ursula). Loerke's peculiar status is enhanced by the overdetermination that makes him almost illegible to the reader, and to the characters in the novel. Presumably, it is this illegibility that makes Gerald and Rupert resort to their offensive language – spoken only to each other, not to Loerke himself – in which the principle at work (to resort to Butler's use of Kristeva's term) is *abjection*: an attempt to exclude Loerke from what is intelligible, social, and, ultimately, human. This exclusion, disturbingly, begins from Birkin's assumption that Loerke is Jewish, from which it is established that he is "a gnawing little negation, gnawing at the roots of life." (428) (If Gilbert and Gubar claim Loerke was named after Wagner's Loge, or Loki in Norse mythology, surely in Rupert's formulation he is much sooner Nidhogg, the dragon (or worm) gnawing the roots of Yggdrasil, the tree of life.)

But the lowest form of life – lower even than Jews and negations, apparently – Loerke corresponds to, according to Birkin and Gerald, is that of the sewer rat: “They [Gudrun and Ursula] want to explore the sewers, and he’s the wizard rat that swims ahead [...] he ebbs with the stream, the sewer stream.” (428) The sewer may not be a pleasant place to dwell in, but it is an interesting place to dwell on – for is it not in itself the very model of abjection? The sewer is the place for accumulating and, ultimately, removing that which society does not want to see or be confronted with. Waste, the by-products of consumption, must be hidden and remain hidden through the various stages of its disposal. Thus, it is the sewer that holds the clues to modern life by containing all things unwanted in society. (As a concrete example: the general use of drugs like cocaine is most adequately measured through sewage samples.) In this sense, the sewer is a very physical part of the “constitutive outside” of society: through condemning certain substances to the sewage system, society makes clear what is physically unacceptable in its midst. By discursively relegating Loerke to this place, Birkin makes clear that, to his civilised mind, Loerke is an abject body, who, quite simply, ought not to exist.

The narrator seems to be complicit in this strategy: as we have seen, Loerke is consistently described as not-quite-human, and it is very difficult for the reader to conjure up sympathy for this character. Whereas a Heathcliffe is also dark and brutal, at least he has the redemption of romance. Loerke has no such thing – the only romance in him is devoted to his cold and utterly detached “world of art” (431). But the narrative cunning of this process is remarkable: the reader is complicit with Birkin’s abjective treatment of Loerke inasmuch as the reader also instinctively dislikes the sculptor. The effect holds the reader in an uncomfortable bind: if we find Loerke an unattractive figure (for physically maltreating his models, for instance), this is because we are trapped in a logic similar to Birkin’s – a logic that allows us to feel revolutionary and “different” while in fact being wholly complicit with the system we claim we want to revolutionise.

So how to resolve the initial question: “Is Loerke a man, or is he a no-man?” Probably, the question is too black-or-white to merit an answer, but it does allow us to see that, in some respects, Loerke undeniably functions as a man in the heterosexual matrix that structures this novel, while at the same time disavowing all interest in this and every other structuring principle. Gerald and Birkin may trespass against the matrix through the homoerotic side of their friendship, they are still firmly embedded within it. Loerke seems to exist only in the margins of this structure – he is an outsider, interested only in detaching art from the world. He is indeed a “negative”, an example of the amoral or anti-moral “bedrock of life”.

Many critics, notably Kate Millett, have argued, or simply assumed, that Rupert Birkin “is” Lawrence, or at least functions as the author’s mouthpiece. This easy identification has fortunately lost currency in recent years, but the idea that Birkin’s ideas are more or less in tune with Lawrence’s often lingers in the background – not, I would add, without reason. Therefore, I must make it quite clear that my reading of Loerke does *not* make Loerke into a version of Lawrence, or the kind of character that Lawrence, or the narrator, or the novel, prescribes as a sort of ideal. What I do claim is that, in the later stages of this novel, it apparently becomes necessary to insert a character that complicates the mirroring of Gerald and Birkin: whereas, all the way through the novel, they were on different sides of the equation of manhood, they now find themselves staring across a new divide, lumped together in opposition to Loerke. The division is no longer between the industrial man and the idealist man, but between man within and “man” without society/morality/humanity. And if this description is vague, that is because Loerke himself is vague of necessity: he resists signification at the level of the novel itself, and this resistance must be transferred into all comment on the text. To try and answer the question of Loerke’s masculinity in plain terms would be to misread him entirely, because, as a man outside of recognisable structures of manhood, he both is and is not a man, as he both is and is not a rat.

To summarise: following the lines of my reading of “A Chair”, I disagree fundamentally with Strychacz when it comes to the application of Butler’s theory of performativity: where he sees theatres and “gests”, I see structures and strictures encompassing literary characters. In the case of “A Chair”, these two different approaches can acknowledge similar insights. When it comes to the character of Loerke, however, I find that reading him in terms of intelligibility and abjection makes him not only very different, but even more interesting than in Strychacz’ reading, which practically neglects Loerke’s marginalisation, which he himself, all other characters, and even the narrator actively foster.

### *Concluding Consequences*

The issues raised in this essay have frequently been more or less theoretical ones, and the main “practical” matter in which I try to distance my reading from Strychacz’ is the interpretation of the character Loerke. If such is the harvest of nearly twenty pages of ploughing and reaping, then perhaps even the sowing was a waste of time and intellectual energy. So what, if any, are the more fundamental consequences of the Butlerian reading I propose, over and against Strychacz’, when it comes to drawing conclusions about the novel, rather than isolated passages or chapters? In *Undoing Gender*, Butler phrases very potently what lies, in my understanding, at the very core of her work:

We are, to an extent, driven by what we do not know, and cannot know, and this “drive” (*Trieb*) is precisely what is neither exclusively biological nor cultural, but always the site of their dense convergence. If I am always constituted by norms that are not of my making, then I have to understand the ways that constitution takes place. The staging and structuring of affect and desire is clearly one way in which norms work their way into what feels properly to belong to me. The fact that I am other to myself precisely at

the place where I expect to be myself follows from the fact that the sociality of norms exceeds my inception and my demise, sustaining a temporal and spatial field of operation that exceeds my self-understanding. (15)

This emphasis on the primary importance of sociality, and how it is ultimately inextricably connected to individuality can be condensed into a more positive formulation: “Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something.” (19) This little adage will be the pivoting point of my final reflection on this novel, which so poignantly deals with the theme of the individual within a social context.

First of all, what Strychacz reads as “*Verfremdung*”, I read as the novel’s showing us those dimensions of characters that are unknown to themselves – the “temporal and spatial field of operation that exceeds [their] self-understanding.” As a result, the novel invites us to see the limited agency of Birkin and Gerald: both of them, in different ways, refuse to be “undone”, and, therefore, “are missing something”. Birkin refuses to acknowledge his constitution within the norms laid down by society, and by disavowing his position in a class system, he fails to see that it is, paradoxically, this class system that put him in the powerful position from which he is able to reject it. Furthermore, it seems that, despite his relationship with Ursula, with whom he desires an idealistic “star-equilibrium”, the only one he would potentially be “undone” by is Gerald Crich – which briefly occurs during their wrestling match. Gerald, however, as a modern, rational, industrial man, is even more insistent not to be “undone”, even in his relationship with Gudrun:

“Well, you don’t *think* you love, do you?” she asked.

He was silent with cold passion of anger.

“You don’t think you *can* love me, do you?” she repeated, almost with a sneer.

“No,” he said.

“You know you never have loved me, don’t you?”

“I don’t know what you mean by the word ‘love’,” he replied.

“Yes you do. You know all right that you have never loved me. Have you, do you think?”

“No,” he said, prompted by some barren spirit of truthfulness and obstinacy. (442)

There is a performative mechanism at work in these lines; a speech act of denial that forecloses the possibility of Gerald’s risking himself in a relationship with Gudrun, and, thus a speech act which seals Gerald’s fate. He is so keen to preserve his rationality and pride that he denies all affect, even the possibility of affect. He is “missing something.” He is missing something even to the extent that his “barren spirit of truthfulness and obstinacy” will kill him in the end.

Then there is Loerke, about whom one might claim that he, too, refuses to be “undone” and therefore misses out, though, through his cynical attitude to life, he might be said to understand life and “the way [...] constitution takes place” more deeply or more clearly than any of the other characters. This same cynicism, however, makes him the perennial outsider who does not really partake in the social life he might be able to see through: “No – Paris [...] it makes me sick. Pah – l’amour. I detest it. L’amour, l’amore, die Liebe – I detest it in every language. Women and love, there is no greater tedium.” (458) Incidentally, in describing “women and love” as the greatest possible tedium, Loerke even goes so far as to position himself outside of, or at least unaffected by the novel in which he is a character, thereby confirming himself as the ultimate outsider.

The novel leaves us with Birkin as the surviving male protagonist, in a final scene that does nothing to resolve his sexual and philosophical dilemmas:

“You can’t have two kinds of love. Why should you!”

“It seems as if I can’t,” he said. “Yet I wanted it.”

“You can’t have it, because it’s false, impossible,” she said.

“I don’t believe that,” he answered. (481)

The novel ends with a negative statement from which we can only conclude that Birkin has not really changed, and has not gained any insight into his own affections and desires – which he simply, almost compulsively, repeats.

The conclusion of Strychacz’ chapter on *Women in Love* reads as follows:

My interpretation of *Women in Love* emphasized its gestic potential by focusing on the dramatic construction of the narrative and on the ever-present struggle for social power, or the struggle to maintain power, that underpins each moment of the text. To read the novel this way is to take its ideas about gender and sexuality not straightforwardly, nor as a sign of some endless free-play, but as strategies exercised by the characters for purposes that cannot in the end be separated out from their class status. (206-207)

I believe that by shifting the focus away from the voluntary streak of this claim (“strategies exercised by the characters”) to the fundamental aspects of Butler’s theory that emphasise the dimension of the self located in the other, can do more to highlight the relationship between society and the individual in this novel, as well as its tragic potential. It allows us to see how particularly the male protagonists attempt to struggle free from the society they inhabit, and, in doing so, sink even deeper into its quicksand.

Though the outcome for the characters, in this reading, is tragic, the novel does open up questions about agency that are more fundamental than the level of strategies and purposes, or gestures and theatres. To its reader, the novel conveys a complex admonition that, indeed, we are undone by each other, and the refusal to be undone, the disavowal of dependence on the other, amounts to missing something. In exploring the possibility of escape from society, then, this novel is not a naïve libertarian tract, nor is it a reactionary warning. Much rather, it teases out the binds between the individual and the society it inhabits, and shows how a radical rupture of those ties is not only impossible, but potentially lethal.

# Lady Chatterley's Body

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## *A Propos of Sex*

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a novel about sex, but that does not necessarily make it an easy target for a gendered, or specifically Butlerian, reading. Ever since the novel was disparaged by Kate Millett in her seminal *Sexual Politics* (1968), feminists and gender theorists have not been too keen on Lawrence's most notorious work, so that, paradoxically, one of the century's most controversial literary accounts of sexuality has failed to achieve in the area of gender studies the momentum it has long held in the popular imagination, witness Philip Larkin's nostalgic verses from "Annus Mirabilis":

Sexual intercourse began  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(which was rather late for me) -  
Between the end of the "Chatterley" ban  
And the Beatles' first LP.

My project here is not so ambitious as to intend to re-evaluate the critical relevance of Lawrence's text or to single-handedly alter its reputation – what is at stake in this attempted Butlerian reading of Lawrence is the interplay between the discursive and the physical (in the light of what was said earlier) and the added dimension of sex and sexuality.

If a traditional, somewhat uninspired, reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* may argue that Clifford symbolises the cerebral man, while Mellors is more in touch with the spontaneous, physical centres of consciousness, a Butlerian reading, if successful, should be able to introduce some finer details and nuances into this all-too rigid dichotomy. Because gender, sexuality and the interaction between the discursive and the physical are among the



novel's prominent themes, I turn primarily to Butler's earlier works, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*; two volumes that directly – and controversially – address these topics.

### *Phalluses Straight or Queer*

Butler's original accounts of gender and performativity draw heavily on classical psychoanalysis – Freud and Lacan – and a prominent feature (no pun intended) of both *GT* and *BTM* is the Lacanian phallus:

“Being” the Phallus and “having” the Phallus denote divergent sexual positions, or nonpositions (impossible positions, really), within language. To “be” the Phallus is to be the “signifier” of the desire of the Other and *to appear* as this signifier. [...] For women to “be” the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through “being” its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectal confirmation of its identity. (*GT*, 56)

Butler here appropriates Lacan's terminology to argue that masculinity and femininity are never biological givens but first and foremost (or always-already) structural positions enabled by a patriarchal symbolic order. Gendered identities, in this heterosexualised perspective, range from “having” the Phallus (masculine) to “being” the Phallus (feminine) – positions which can never be absolute (hence the quotation marks that must not be dropped), because by the very nature of Lacan's system, it is impossible for anyone to actually have or be the Phallus. Either (or any) gender identity, in this formulation, is thus a matter of approximating one of two extreme positions vis à vis the Phallus, the centre of discourse.

In the same chapter, Butler already goes some length in questioning the validity of Lacan's formulas and formulations, using his own terminology:

Lacanian discourse centers on the notion of “a divide,” a primary or fundamental split that renders the subject internally divided and that establishes the duality of the sexes.

But why this exclusive focus on the fall into twoness? Within Lacanian terms, it appears that division is always the *effect*, and not a preexisting condition on which the Law acts. (70)

Because of Lacan's assumption and acceptance of this dichotomy, Butler accuses him of adhering to a "slave morality" governed by a theological impulse, and this is precisely the point on which she will continue to deviate from Lacanian theory.

Butler's elaboration and reworking of this idea in successive books (notably *Bodies that Matter* and *Undoing Gender*) will become increasingly unorthodox to Lacanians. Though this subsequent rephrasing and repositioning broadens the gap between Butler's work and that of traditional psychoanalysis (see, for instance, the debate between Butler and Žižek in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*), her later work does not exactly revoke or contradict this basic premise that the positions of men in women in Western patriarchal society depend on their relation to the Phallus, the Master Signifier, or the centre of discourse.

The chapter "The Lesbian Phallus" in *BTM* is a significant step away from Lacan. Here, Butler uses Lacan's theory against itself to prove that the Phallus, even within the limits of Lacan's own text, can be read as a "transferable phantasm" which can thus also become lesbian. Her strategy in doing so lies in pointing to the masculinist impulse that seems to drive Lacanian theory to accepting precisely the phallus as the ultimate signifier:

Are we to accept the priority of the phallus without questioning the narcissistic investment by which an organ, a body part, has been elevated/erected to the structuring principle of the world? If "The Mirror Stage" reveals how, through the synecdochal function of the imaginary, parts come to stand for wholes and a decentered body is transfigured into a totality with a center, then we might be led to ask which organs perform this centering and synecdochal function. (79)

(Intriguingly, the phallus in this chapter is no longer deemed worthy of capitalisation.)

The notion of the lesbian phallus is a provocative one, but it can be said to capture the most momentous impulse of Queer Theory: the radical move away from the rigidity of structuralist logic and a willingness to embrace the paradoxes and instabilities of identity. This move may not be as spectacular as it sounds, however: social realities do not slip and slide away because of the rise of Queer Theory, nor does every Butler reader lose all sense of a stable self, to dissolve into a puddle of undetermined gender: “Clearly, the phallus operates in a privileged way in contemporary sexual cultures, but that operation is secured by a linguistic structure or position that is not independent of its perpetual reconstitution.” (89) Butler’s project, at this point, is not exactly to do away with the phallus as a theoretical concept, but to argue its transferability and challenge its automatic association with the penis and, by extension, masculinity. By severing the phallus’ “imaginary” ties (indeed by questioning the very distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary), the characteristic double bind of performativity comes into play, so that the phallus always signifies as it is signified, i.e. comes into being only when it is in some sense appealed to.

### *Setting Up Sexual Experience*

Reading *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* from a perspective based on this revision of “heterosexist structuralism” (*BTM*, 90) can potentially shed a different light on the Clifford-Connie-Mellors triangle. Clifford and Mellors, the men, try to “have” the phallus, Connie, the woman, “is” the phallus, so, according to Lacanian logic, Clifford and Mellors both want to have Connie. Two knights joust for the favour of the lady; the tenor and the bass vie for the love of the soprano – the scenario is well-known, but perhaps too archetypal and certainly too clean-cut to explain a novel that makes the sexual relationship its explicit theme.

The novel sets up the backdrop of the culturally sanctioned type of sexual relationship in the description of Connie’s first sexual experiences, mirrored by her sister Hilda’s, when

the sisters reside in Dresden, “for music and other things” (6) and enjoy the company of German students:

And they tramped off to the forests with sturdy youths bearing guitars, - twang-twang! – they sang the Wandervogel songs, and they were free. Free! That was the great word. Out in the open world, out in the forest of the morning, with lusty and splendid throated young fellows, free to do as they liked, and above all, to say what they liked. It was the talk that mattered supremely: the impassioned interchange of talk. Love was only a minor accompaniment. (6-7)

The passage is rich in erotic suggestion: the youths are described as “sturdy” and “lusty”, the repetitious “twang-twang” may be read as indicating more than innocent merriment (to twang also means “to thrust through” (OED)), and there is mention of “impassioned interchange” in the context of a phallic (?) thrusting out into nature, into the forest. To the sisters, whose brief biography we are here introduced to, it is “the talk that mattered supremely: the impassioned interchange of talk.” (7) In what follows, this privilege granted to discourse is taken to the extreme:

So they had given the gift of themselves each to the youth with whom she had the most intimate and subtle arguments. The arguments, the discussions were the great thing: the love-making and connection was only a sort of primitive reversion, and a bit of an anti-climax. (7)

Charles Burack offers a rather radical reading of this passage:

The sisters’ lives have become books divided into chapters, and they treat sex as a conversation ending a chapter. Sex is thus represented as part of and defined by a larger social script. For the sisters, there is no spontaneity, no unpredictability, and the whole erotic process is prescribed, set under way by language. (2005, 21)

The narrator certainly does make clear that sexual intercourse, at this point, is part of a discursive regime, part of the parcel of music, conversation and freedom to which love is but a “minor accompaniment.” But the element of judgment in Burack’s analysis is not helpful: Connie and Hilda have their “tentative love affairs, by the time they were eighteen” (7) in the romantic setting of Dresden<sup>49</sup> and its surrounding forests. It would have been incongruous for the narrator to insist on the “deep emotional and tactile connection” (21) Burack advocates. The text, in fact, has an answer ready even on the very same page: “But a woman could yield to a man without yielding her inner, free self. That the poets and talkers about sex did not seem to have taken sufficiently into account.” (7) Sex is just not particularly important in itself, at this point – at least to the sisters. If the generalising effect of this sentence seems unfortunate, we should bear in mind that Hilda and Connie are lumped together in these passages: there is a vague sort of focalisation at play that suggests we are reading about both Connie’s and Hilda’s attitude to sex at this moment in time, not a generalised statement about female sexuality.

What Burack argues in his study of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, is that the novel is constructed to first annihilate the reader’s received notions of sex, afterwards to renew, revitalise, even sacralise these views. The grand view behind this project is translated into two chapters entitled respectively: “The Destructive Phase” and “The Sacralization Phase.” Though Burack argues his case meticulously, one cannot help feeling that the textual evidence mainly serves the purpose of buttressing this larger project. Though Lawrence himself might well have endorsed this project, it does foreclose a reading that privileges the characters’ perspective on narrated events over the more encompassing but necessarily blunter instrument of an ambitious project attributed to the narrator.

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<sup>49</sup> Dresden functioned as safe, if imperfect, haven at the end of *Women in Love*: “At least in Dresden, one will have one’s back to it all. And there will be amusing things to do. It will be amusing to go to these eurhythmic displays, and the German opera, the German theatre. It *will* be amusing to take part in German Bohemian life. (464)

For instance: if their sexual relationships are embedded in a discursive regime, Connie and Hilda play their parts within this regime (and seem to play them to great effect), and reflect on them while doing so. Even though the narrative is very fast-paced in the first chapters of the novel, there are unmistakeable glimpses of focalisation in the Dresden episode that alert the reader to the non-authoritative nature of what is reported. For instance: “And the men were so humble and craving. Why couldn’t a girl be queenly, and give the gift of herself?” (7) If this reflection is attributed to, somewhat artificially, both Connie and Hilda, then there is no reason to assume that a sentence like “they were just as good as the men themselves: only better, because they were women” is not similarly focalised. The subtlety of the novel is such that, though we may be keen to identify a larger and overarching project – we may even like to assume that this was Lawrence’s express intention – this attempt is thwarted at every turn by the possibility that we are not reading the narrator’s (and certainly not Lawrence’s) straightforward convictions, but the rendition of events through the filter of the characters. This is a complication that will be returned to at various points in this discussion, because it disrupts facile inference and sweeping claims to replace them with a text-based appreciation of the characters’ evolution.

In the light of this discussion, it becomes necessary to qualify an earlier claim: the backdrop set up in the Dresden episode is not just one of cultural acceptability (acceptability in this particular cultural setting, that is), it is the backdrop Hilda and Connie weave for themselves, a backdrop onto which their subsequent individual experiences are yet to be embroidered. Connie’s and Hilda’s ideas about sexuality have been formed in these pages: they know sex as an aspect of talk, of conversation, of social life. There appears to be a strong narrative impulse to these experiences: not only do they talk and debate with the male German students, they also create a mental narrative in which men are “like discontented children” (9), “like dogs” (7), even “merely a tool” (8) – surely, a narrative of the very same events

focalised through one or more of the German students in question would be spectacularly different. There is a double discursive struggle for power at work, here: there is the discourse with German men which initiates the sexual experience, but, crucially, there is also the discursive struggle to arrange these events in a meaningful sequence that makes sense of this experience – a struggle on the level of narrative.

In relation to the German men, Connie and Hilda “yield” to the sexual instinct in the male, and thus perform “being” the phallus in a heterosexual relationship: they become the object of desire, that which the man wants to have. In this sense, the sentence “they argued with the men over philosophical and sociological and artistic matters, they were just as good as men themselves: only better, because they were women” takes on a new dimension: they engage in a logocentric discursive struggle as easily as men do, but they do so differently. Is this because philosophical debates are won by controlling and dominating signification – by obtaining the position of “having the phallus”, whereas Hilda and Connie, simultaneously functioning as objects of desire, also “are” the phallus, at least to the German students who desire them? Does the addition “only better because they were women” not shed some doubt on the validity of their performance? If anything can be legitimately inferred from the early stages of Connie’s and Hilda’s sexual awakening, it must be that, at the outset of the novel, sexuality seems to be embedded in a discursive struggle for power, which indicates that the sisters’ narrative smugness about their experiences is at least potentially up for revision or evolution.

### *Clifford and the Cronies: the Fest of Phallogocentrism*

Intellectual life at Wragby clearly does not provide stimuli to alter Connie’s mindset: if sex and conversation are already essentially connected in Connie’s experience, then chapter

IV provides a scene in which the viability of this combination is discussed and propagated at some length:

“It’s an amusing idea, Charlie,” said Dukes, “that sex is just another form of talk, where you act the words instead of saying them – I suppose it’s quite true. I suppose we might exchange as many sensations and emotions with women as we do ideas about the weather and so on. Sex might be a sort of normal physical conversation between a man and a woman. You don’t talk to a woman unless you’ve ideas in common: that is, you don’t talk with any interest. And the same way, unless you had some emotion or sympathy in common with a woman, you wouldn’t sleep with her. [...]” (33-34)

The statement here proffered by Tommy Dukes epitomises what is made out to be a rather typical debate between Clifford and his friends: in this instance, they intellectually explore to what extent sexual intercourse is similar to conversation and whether it should be equally casual and non-committal. Obviously, this is very much a conversation between men, full to the brim of paternalistic, even macho, overtones. Clifford’s contribution to this verbal battlefield is far from impressive, yet illuminating:

“Well!” he said. “Being myself *hors de combat*,” I don’t see I’ve anything to say on the matter.”

“Not at all!” said Dukes. “The top of you’s by no means *hors de combat*. You’ve got the life of the mind, sound and intact. So let us hear your idea.”

“Well!” stammered Clifford. “Even then, I don’t suppose I have much idea. – I suppose marry-and-have-done-with-it would pretty well stand for what I think. Though of course, between a man and a woman who care for one another, it is a great thing.”

“What sort of a great thing?” said Tommy.

“Oh – it perfects the intimacy,” said Clifford, uneasy as a woman in such talk. (34-35)



This exchange shows two things: the first is that, in this kind of debate, it is irrelevant that Clifford is paralysed from the waist down, as long as he has the “life of the mind, sound and intact.” This discussion is entirely cerebral and hypothetical: Tommy indicates that, no matter how high-flown and unconventional his ideas may be, ideas is primarily what they are, their practical application not being of interest. Secondly, Clifford appears ill at ease with the topic despite the purely intellectual mode of discussion. Possible reasons for this squeamishness are plenty: perhaps his lack of experience gets in the way, or perhaps, as the text indicates, “his ideas were not vital enough to him” – perhaps, even, he is acutely aware of the danger of Connie indulging in extramarital “conversations” (Connie is already having her affair with Michaelis at this moment) – but why is he then said to be “uneasy as a woman in such talk”? If, according to Tommy Dukes, the condition of Clifford’s manhood-below-the-belt is no condition for, or measure of, ability of partaking in this exchange of masculine debate or banter, then the failing of Clifford’s manhood-above-the-belt, his inability of performing successfully (i.e. interestingly) in this conversation must be doubly painful, for it questions his manhood even on the level of the intellect.

What may make the situation even worse for Clifford, is that the only woman actually present in this company does not seem “uneasy” about it all:

And Connie sat there and put another stitch in her sewing. – Yes, she sat there! She had to sit mum. She had to be quiet as a mouse, not to interfere with the immensely important speculations of these highly-mental gentlemen. But she had to be there. They didn’t get on so well without her. Their ideas didn’t flow so freely. [...] How many evenings had Connie sat and listened to the manifestations of these four men: these and one or two others! That they never seemed to get anywhere didn’t trouble her deeply. She liked to hear what they had to say, especially when Tommy was there. It was fun.

Instead of men kissing you and touching you with their bodies, they revealed their minds to you. It was great fun. But what cold minds!

Connie plays the part of the hostess, the female presence, perfectly. Her presence in the room is merely formal, almost nominal, but apparently still necessary. If the discourse we read about in these pages objectifies women with sentences like “If you have the proper sort of emotion or sympathy with a woman, you *ought* to sleep with her”, Connie’s demeanour is that of the perfectly objectified woman. At the same time, however, she also demonstrates the great flaw in the arguments being tossed to and fro: the men do *not* converse with her, not intellectually and certainly not physically. Her being present facilitates male discourse whilst rendering it futile at the same time. In her own mind, she also comments on the ongoing debate, and, subtly, it becomes clear that her point of view is slightly different from the large claims the men make about intercourse in the conversational and sexual senses: to her, the intellectual exchange takes place *instead* of the physical act. Substitution rather than sameness, metaphor over simile (in Tommy’s words: “sex is a sort of communication like speech” (35)).

Tommy Dukes is a central but ambivalent character in this chapter: in the passages quoted above, he voices a radical idea about the nature and value of sex, but implicitly admits the inanity of the conversation. A few pages later, we find him producing sentences that could have been taken verbatim from *Fantasia of the Unconscious*:

“Real knowledge comes out of the whole corpus of the consciousness, out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain or mind. The mind can only analyse and rationalise. – Set the mind and the reason to cock it over the rest, and all they can do is to criticise and make a deadness. I say *all* they can do. It is vastly important. My God, the world needs criticising today – criticising to death. Therefore let’s live the mental

life and glory in our spite, and strip the rotten old show. – But mind you, it's like this.

While you *live* your life, you are in some way an organic whole with all life. [...]" (37)

It is ironic that we should find such typically Lawrentian ideas in a context that is being viciously undermined, even parodied, by Connie's attitude towards it as well as the narrative tone that describes it. On the other hand, this irony illustrates how well this novel is aware of the paradox at its centre (as were the texts on the subconscious discussed earlier): how can one speak about the physical conscience if part of one's theory is that speech is but the dead end of life. This paradox is epitomised in this chapter IV, particularly in Tommy's next speech:

"But you do believe in something."

"Me! Oh, intellectually, I believe in having a good heart, a chirpy penis, a lively intelligence, and the courage to say shit! in front of a lady."

"Well, you've got them all," said Berry.

Tommy Dukes roared with laughter.

"You angel boy! If only I had! If only I had! No, my heart's as numb as a potato, my penis droops and never lifts its head up, I dare rather cut him clean off than say shit! in front of my mother or my aunt – they are *real* ladies, mind you; and I'm not really intelligent, I'm only a mental-lifer. [...]" (39)

Whereas Clifford spoke of "a man and a woman who care for another" (35) without, it seems, paying any attention to Connie sitting nearby, Tommy Dukes now twice says "shit!" in her presence while claiming he dare not do so in front of "real ladies". So whereas Clifford was "uneasy as a woman" earlier, Connie now apparently fails to qualify as a "real lady". What is particularly striking in the discussion of gender and sexuality in this chapter, is how often the penis is appealed to as the relevant signifier (even in the somewhat feeble pun about setting "the mind and reason to cock it over the rest"), though the discussion purports to be far

removed from the actual physical life. The paradoxes and ambiguities thus conjured up indicate the predicaments that will haunt the further text of the novel: a link between discourse and sexuality is explicitly suggested, but the question of dominance is nowhere settled. Is it possible to attain a position of power merely on the discursive (symbolic) level, or on a purely sexual level? These questions tie in directly with Butler's concerns about the status of the phallus as the centre of discourse and its putative relation to the penis – whether these ties remain productive in the course of this analysis, however, remains to be seen.

### *Problematic Penises: Clifford and Michaelis*

Before moving on to the main plot of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* it is necessary to complete this sketch of initial questions set up by the novel by briefly discussing Lady Chatterley's first lover, Michaelis, in contrast to Clifford, thus illustrating once more the idea of a battle for discursive and sexual authority.

Chapter II indicates how Connie is sucked into a narrative that is not of her own writing, but into which, for the time being, she settles, as she settles into Wragby, the Chatterley estate. "Well, there it was: fate, like the rest of things! It was rather awful, but why kick? You couldn't kick it away. It just went on. Oneself also went on. Life, like all the rest!" (13) This awkward sentiment underpins Connie's estrangement from her surroundings: "it was all like a dream: or rather, it was like the simulacrum of reality." (18)

The relationship between Clifford and Connie, at this point, is perfectly compatible with being/having the phallus in Lacanian terms: Clifford is aloof and "not in actual touch with anything or anybody" while at the same time "absolutely dependent on her." (16) He occupies the symbolic position of being in charge, not only of Connie, but also of Wragby, its mines, and its colliers. In order to maintain his position, however, he needs Connie to submit to this scenario, which she does.

Clifford writes Connie into his life in the same way he writes his fictional stories:

Curious, very personal stories about people he had known, clever, rather spiteful, and yet in some mysterious way, meaningless. The observation was extraordinary and peculiar. But there was no touch, no actual contact. It was as if the whole thing took place on an artificial earth. (16)

The artificiality of Clifford's stories closely parallels the artificiality attributed to Connie's own life: "she was herself a figure somebody had read about, picking primroses that were only shadows, or memories, or words." (18) It seems as though Connie almost realises she is a character in a fictional story, but cannot muster the courage to take either the narrator or Clifford to task for assigning her to a passive, subdued role. Because this chapter is focalised mainly through Connie, we get only a vague sense of Clifford's intellectual triumph over his physical misfortune – instead, it is made plain to the reader that Connie tries to reconcile herself to this artificial mode of life ("This was one of the fleeting patterns in the mirror. What was wrong with it?" (19)). If there is no particular struggle for discursive power in this particular chapter, it is because Clifford's and Connie's (gendered) positions are, for the moment, firmly established.

This safe, if unsatisfactory, marital life is disturbed for the first time when the playwright Michaelis is introduced. As a fellow author, he is in a position to challenge Clifford at his own game: literature, and the discursive dominance that, to Clifford, it entails. Even before they meet, and before Connie is mentioned as part of the triangle, both men already share an object of desire: the "bitch-goddess, as she is called, of Success" (21) which Michaelis already possesses and Clifford craves. Michaelis turns the Chatterleys' stable equation into a triangle: he is at the centre of the conversation that ensues, but makes sure Connie is not excluded from this conversation. If we bear in mind Clifford's desire for the bitch-goddess Success, it is obvious that some kind of exchange is taking place between the

two men: they both want success, and, at least after their first lengthy conversation, they both want Connie. Michaelis, to some extent, “has” success, Clifford, to some extent, “has” Connie. “He [Michaelis] knew just where he was with Clifford. They were two alien dogs which would have liked to snarl at one another, but which smiled instead, perforce.” (24) None of this goes to say that there is any kind of deliberate, let alone conscious, exchange going on, but the underlying mechanism is clearly reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss’ descriptions of patriarchal societies (in which women function as objects of exchange in order to maintain social ties).

But reading Connie as completely objectified in this exchange scenario would be a grave injustice to the novel, which consistently portrays her as a woman with a vivid inner life, quite capable of making decisions for herself. Michaelis’ attraction, to Connie, seems to lie in his difference from the men around her:

Connie felt a sudden strange leap of sympathy for him, a leap mingled with compassion and tinged with repulsion, amounting almost to love. The outsider! The outsider! And they called him a bounder! How much more bounderish and assertive Clifford looked! How much stupider! (23-24)

The first time Connie and Michaelis have sex, this doesn’t flow spontaneously from conversation: Michaelis sends out “an appeal that affected her direct in her womb” (25). This appeal, though sexual, incorporates an infantile element, that of the “infant crying in the night” (25), which corresponds to Michaelis’ craving for pity and sympathy both before and after intercourse: “‘You’re only too infinitely good to me – I can hardly bear it.’ He turned aside, and she saw that in another moment he would be sobbing.” (26) Michaelis’ behaviour in these private scenes is quite different from his dealings with Clifford, who dislikes the “inner effrontery” of his “sad dog sort of extinguished self” (28). In his social dealings, Michaelis never breaks down the way he did in Connie’s presence: “He stayed that time only

the three days, and to Clifford was exactly the same as on the first evening, to Connie also. There was no breaking down his external man.” (29)

But if Michaelis enters into a physical relationship with Connie, it is also the physical nature of their relationship that will finally disrupt their union. Michaelis being “the trembling, excited sort of lover whose crisis soon came,” (29) he ends up brutally rebuking Connie: “You couldn’t go off at the same time as a man, could you?” (53)

This speech was one of the crucial blows of Connie’s life. It killed something in her. She had not been so very keen on Michaelis. Till he started it, she did not want him. It was as if she never positively wanted him. But once he had started her, it seemed only natural for her to come to her own crisis, with him. Almost she had loved him for it – almost, that night, she loved him and wanted to marry him.

Perhaps instinctively he knew it, and that was why he had to bring down the whole show with a smash: the house of cards. Her whole sexual feeling for him or for any man collapsed that night. Her life fell apart from his as completely as if he had never existed. (54)

Though it is the physical aspect of their relationship that causes their break-up, it is Michaelis’ *speech* that is one of the crucial blows of Connie’s life. If we take focalisation into account again, and we read this passage as focalised through Connie (why else the “perhaps?”), it seems that Connie again retroactively constructs a version of her sexual experience – a narrative that is completely different from the one about her experiences in Dresden: in Germany, sexual intercourse was a logical consequence of conversation, but in Michaelis’ case it is precisely distinct from it. Michaelis can handle himself all right in conversation and in discourse – he is, after all, an author – but cannot handle himself equally well when it comes to physical intimacy, at least not the kind of intimacy that Connie has come to expect from the narrative construction of her time in Dresden, in which the man, indeed, figured as a

*tool* or an *animal* in the sex act. In structural terms, this makes Michaelis not so much a mirror image of Clifford, but rather a less extreme version of him: Clifford has the life of the mind, control over discourse as a novelist, and he is physically impotent. Michaelis has a quick mind, but shot through with flashes of passion, he is also an author, but of plays, which come to life only in the hands (and bodies) of actors over which the playwright has but limited control, and, finally, Michaelis is not impotent, but neither is he, it appears, a great lover.

Reading the text along the lines of discourse and physicality, assuming that gendered positions are primarily discursive positions vis-à-vis the phallus, brings out Connie's struggle for meaning as a literary character: she attempts to find a satisfying position in the sexual spectrum, but the narrative account of her experiences thwarts this goal. In the first five chapters, the novel seems to have run through the classical, tragic, plot construction, in which hopes are built up, the eponymous "lover" of the novel's title seems to be found, only to smash all hopes in a fit of sexual disappointment, leaving the heroine to reflect: "Nothingness! To accept the great nothingness of life seemed to be the one end of living. All the many busy and important little things that make up the grand sum-total of nothingness!" (55)

But the novel also plants the seeds of an added dimension it is set to explore: on the discursive, conversational level, nothing has really changed in the triangle of Connie, Clifford and Michaelis, except that some sort of exchange has taken place between Clifford and Michaelis, whereas on a sexual, physical, and, above all, hidden, secret level, Connie has moved from a state of expectation, through brief enjoyment, to disillusionment.

### *Introducing Mellors*

Having set up the thematic imbalance between the physical and the discursive, the novel goes on to introduce the protagonist who will take this imbalance to its conclusion, the enigmatic Oliver Mellors. Traditional readings of Mellors regard him as the typical,



Lawrentian, “classless hero”, as the phallic man, the man who defies cultural norms and thus manages to bring out the “real woman” in Connie. These readings may all, at least to some extent, hold true within the context of the novel, but the central question here is rather: what is Mellors’ position in the discourse-physicality divide, and, by extension, how does his presence destabilise Lacanian and/or Butlerian interpretations of the penis and the phallus, or the Real and the Imaginary?

Mellors first appears at a point in the novel when, crucially, Clifford and Connie are out for a walk in the woods (a situation that is reiterated and intensified in chapter XIII), talking about, again, sex. Clifford talks of tradition and the importance of having an heir, which leads him to stress that Connie taking a temporary lover to that end would not distress him, as long as Connie agrees that “the casual sex thing is nothing, compared to a long life lived together[.]” (45) As Connie more or less agrees this point, she first notices the gamekeeper’s dog, and then the man himself. If verbal communication (one is tempted to say intercourse) was somewhat strained before Mellors’ arrival, it now begins to falter altogether. Mellors answers questions tersely and unwillingly, but the characteristics attributed to him through Connie (who functions as a focaliser once more, here) amount to a heterogeneous cluster: he “seems to emerge with such a swift menace”, looks at Connie with a “perfectly fearless, impersonal look”, makes a bow “like a gentleman, but he said nothing at all.” He is “a curious, quick, separate fellow, alone but sure of himself” and looks “like a free soldier rather than a servant.” (46-47) This overdetermination of Mellors as a character culminates in Connie’s instinctual perception that “He was rather frail, really. Curiously full of vitality, but a little frail, and quenched.” (47) If the reader is left uncertain as to what to make of Mellors, this is mainly because this scene is entirely described via Connie’s own responses to him, which are clearly mixed and incongruous. This first encounter is not particularly elaborate or overtly significant in the novel, though it does occur at a significant point in time, and at a

significant thematic nexus: Clifford and Connie talk about Connie's potentially having an affair for strictly reproductive purposes, then Connie meets Mellors for the first time, a man who strikes her as, among other things, solitary and aloof, then comes the dramatic sexual disappointment and break-up with Michaelis, and the chapter concludes with Connie pondering "[a]ll the many busy and important little things that make up the grand sum-total of nothingness!" (55) The narrative arc of this chapter thus places the encounter with Mellors before the break-up with Michaelis – without ever explicitly suggesting a causal relationship between both events, but tracing Connie's state of mind throughout the chapter and thus connecting the two occurrences nonetheless.

### *Introducing Mellors' Body*

If, so far, Mellors has played his role merely on a narrative, discursive level, the way in which his presence will complicate the dominance of discursivity in the novel is announced in Connie's subsequent encounter with Mellors. When Connie volunteers to take a message from Clifford to Mellors, she finds the man washing himself in the yard behind his cottage and

in spite of herself, she had a shock. After all, merely a man washing himself! Commonplace enough, heaven knows.

Yet, in a curious way, it was a visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of her body. She saw the clumsy breeches slipping away over the pure, delicate white loins, the bones showing a little, and the sense of aloneness, of a creature purely alone, overwhelmed her. Perfect, white solitary nudity of a creature that lives alone, and inwardly alone. And beyond that, a certain beauty of a pure creature. Not the stuff of beauty, not even the body of beauty, but a certain lambency, the warm white flame of a single life revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a body! (66)

If Connie's very first focalisation of Mellors was overdetermined, it now ventures toward the overstated: the language employed here is hardly appropriate to the scene it describes. Indeed, it is one of those instances of Lawrence's style becoming so susceptible to parody or dismissal. And yet there is more to this passage than over-the-top literariness: "with her mind, she [Connie] was inclined to ridicule. [...] She was rather annoyed." (66) Connie, our focaliser, is annoyed at her own incongruous response to this man, whom she has met only twice before, washing himself in his back yard. In this way, the novel qualifies its own lyrical description of the game-keeper's body – the overstatedness can be said to be partially retracted or at least balanced by Connie's reaction to her own sentiments. At the same time, however, the reader faces a dilemma similar to Connie's: we are invited to be "inclined to ridicule", even to be "annoyed" at this stylistic flamboyance, but we are warned that the ridicule can be nothing but purely cerebral. The repetition of and insistence on the body and its solitude are hammered home so heavy-handedly in this passage that it is hard to escape its impact, ridicule as we may: the body is there and it appears insurmountably in the last sentence, boisterously leaning on an exclamation mark.

Thus, the rhetorical mechanism behind this introduction of physicality is complex and powerful: on the one hand, it pretends to cancel itself out through Connie's ambiguous attitude to it. This ambiguous attitude, then, allows the reader to identify with Connie's response, in thinking it merely preposterous, but nevertheless not being quite able to ignore the impact Mellors' body has on the text, on Connie, and on the reader. Any illusion that may remain about the novel setting up a simple dichotomy between body and mind, or discourse and matter, is exploded here, and will be in several other passages: it appears that the text embraces rhetorical strategies that reach out to the body precisely by denying straightforward discursive access to it – in this case, through overdetermination, overstatement, and the immediate partial retraction of the overstatement.

After this brief encounter, Connie decides to deliver her message after all, and what follows is a surprisingly civil and normal conversation – surprising because Mellors’ manner earlier in the chapter, when Connie encountered him and his daughter in the forest, was not entirely gentlemanlike – which contains the following tantalising lines:

“Would you care to sit down?” he asked, presuming she would not. The door stood open.

“No thanks! Sir Clifford wondered if you would – –” and she delivered her message, looking unconsciously into his eyes again. (67)

The double dash that effectively hides Connie’s message from the reader has its implications: first of all, because of Clifford’s talk about Connie taking a lover and providing an heir for Wragby, it is tempting to read something like “Sir Clifford wondered if you would... kindly become my lover and produce an illegitimate son for him.” In this narrative context, this would, of course, be absolutely impossible and preposterous, but the silence in the text invites an insertion of the type of discourse that abounds in the novel, and particularly in Clifford’s talk about sexuality and its relative insignificance. Secondly, the missing message implies that, whatever is spoken between Connie and Mellors, or between Clifford and Mellors, via Connie, is completely insignificant compared to the physical communication that Connie has just experienced. Even in the course of this very innocent conversation, the narrator stresses body language and posture rather than actual words. Thus, despite the return to “normalcy” after Connie’s visionary experience of Mellors’ body, the discrepancy between words and experiences is curiously upheld. Cracks appear in the narrative edifice that had been set up before this chapter, and the cracks will run along the lines of focalisation, or at least perception, through the remainder of the text, as Mellors reflects “She’s nice: she’s real! She’s nicer than she knows” and Connie suggests “The gamekeeper Mellors is a curious kind of

person, [...] he might almost be a gentleman” to which Clifford’s reply is: “Might he? [...] I hadn’t noticed.” (68)

### *Connie and Mellors: Successful Sex*

Plenty has been said and written about the roughly eight<sup>50</sup> sex scenes in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and all too often this has been done from a moral (or, indeed, legal) point of view. Even literary critics seem to feel the need either to redeem or condemn these scenes. It is not my ambition, in this section, to bother too much about either, mainly because this is a tired debate, and one in which the trenches seem to have been abandoned in favour of a dialogue that is both more interesting and more plausible from the perspective of literary criticism. Much of the debate revolves around the question of phallocentrism in the sex scenes: arguably, Connie’s growing fascination with Mellors’ penis is a projection of a male fantasy (or specifically Lawrence’s fantasy – who was, according to some, suffering from erectile dysfunction as he wrote this novel<sup>51</sup>). Similarly, it has been claimed (by Millett, originally), that the depictions of sexual congress are tainted by a patriarchal urge to objectify and dominate the female. Responses to these accusations have pointed out that the “paean” to Connie’s “cunt” occurs two chapters before the joint laudation of Mellors’ “John Thomas” (Spilka), so the focus on genitals is not limited to Mellors’ penis, or that the “narrator distinguishes between *penis* as ‘a mere member of the physiological body’ and *phallus*, which, ‘in the old sense, has roots, the deepest roots of all, in the soul and the greater consciousness of man.’” (Cowan 144) Other critics (Burack, Daleski), by reading these sexual passage in context, have argued that Connie’s submissiveness, as well as the anal sex scene in Mellors’ cottage, are elements of a larger narrative in which Connie grows in independence,

<sup>50</sup> 13 instances of intercourse are described in the novel, which can be loosely grouped into eight scenes, depending on one’s criteria for counting.

<sup>51</sup> There is little certainty about this point, but to some critics, including Millett, it is of great interest. For a recent biographical reading of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, see James C. Cowan: *D.H. Lawrence. Self and Sexuality*.

maturity, and, finally, womanhood. My primary interest in these sex scenes, however, is not biographical or political, let alone moral; I mean to investigate how they relate to the novel's interest in discourse and matter, and what better place to start than the "paeans" to Connie's and Mellors' genitals respectively?

The first "paeon" (for lack of a better word – "genital apostrophe" sounds rather too clinical for our purposes here) occurs in chapter XII and is embedded in post-coital banter, during which Connie half-mockingly attempts to speak Derbyshire to Mellors:

"Tha'rt good cunt, though, aren't ter? Best bit o' cunt left on earth. When ter 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 – an' what tha gets when I'm i'side thee – it's a' as it is – all on't!"

"All on't" she teased. "Cunt! It's like fuck then."

"Nay nay! Fuck's only what you do. Animals fuck. But cunt's a lot more than that. It's thee, dost see: an tha'rt a lot besides an animal, arn't ter? – even ter fuck! Cunt! Eh, that's the beauty o' thee, lass!"

If Tommy Dukes insisted that he would like the "nerve to say 'shit' in front of a lady", then Mellors decidedly ups the ante, here: not only is his vocabulary ruder, he even gets the lady in question to join him on the lowest rungs of the socio-lexical ladder. But what is most striking about his passage is the elaborate metonymical construction Mellors sets up to illustrate that his use of the word "cunt" is in no way derogatory: cunt is, indeed, "thee down theer", i.e. Connie's genitals, it is also the experience of making love, as opposed to mere, animal-like, fucking.<sup>52</sup> "Cunt" thus comes to mean much more than its dictionary meaning – possibly because of the dialectal context in which it is used here. There is nothing at all out of the

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<sup>52</sup> This comes as a bit of a surprise because of Mellors' frequent associations with animals and nature (he even makes Connie "lie down [...], under the boughs of the tree, like an animal" (133) in chapter X).

ordinary about genitals – male of female – signifying more than just the reproductive organ, of course, but what is particularly odd about this instance is that the trope is based entirely on contiguity, and is thus a metonymy much more than a metaphor: in the text, “cunt” is Connie’s vagina, it is what Mellors experiences when he penetrates Connie, it is what Connie experiences during the same, and on top of that it is everything that makes their intercourse surpass mere biology. Thus, from the basest of signifiers, a metonymical chain reaching to the highest of human emotions is forged.

The second paean, the one to Mellors’ penis, is spoken in chapter XIV, 2 chapters after the disquisition on “cunt”:

The man looked down in silence at the tense phallus, that did not change. – “Ay!” he said at last, in a little voice. “Ay ma lad! Tha’rt theer right enough. Yi, tha mun rear thy head! Theer on thy own, eh? An’ ta’es no count o’ nob’dy! Tha ma’es nowt o’ me, John Thomas. Art boss? of me? Eh well, tha’rt more cocky than me, an’ tha says less. John Thomas! Dost want *her*? Dost want my lady Jane? Tha’s dipped me in again, tha hast. Ay an’ tha comes up smilin’. – Ax ‘er then! Ax lady Jane! Say: Lift up your heads o’ ye gates, that the king of glory may come in. Ay, th’ cheek on thee! Cunt, that’s what tha’rt after. Tell lady Jane tha wants cunt. John Thomas, an’ th’ cunt o’ lady Jane. (210)

The contiguity is here somewhat less obvious than in the previous passage, especially because this is also Mellors speaking, but this time about his own penis, in the second person. Thus, whereas Connie can still be equated with “cunt” in its broad sense (“Th’art good cunt, th’art”), Mellors’ address here establishes “John Thomas” as a tertiary character – mockingly referred to even as “the tie that binds our hearts in kindred love<sup>53</sup>” – even to the point where Mellors exclaims: “That’s John Thomas’ hair, not mine!” (210).

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<sup>53</sup> Also an ironic reference to the hymn “Blessed Be the Tie that Binds” (John Fawcett), the first verse of which reads: “Blest be the tie that binds// Our hearts in Christian love; //The fellowship of kindred minds // Is like to that above.

The idea of contiguity is restored, however, when Mellors goes on to assert: “He’s got his root in my soul, has that gentleman.” (211) This statement seems to be a reversal of Tommy Dukes’ earlier theory that “Real knowledge comes out of the whole corpus of the consciousness, out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain or mind.” (377) The link between man and member is thus re-established and emphasised yet further:

The quiver was going through the man’s body, as the stream of consciousness again changed its direction, turning downwards. And he was helpless, as the penis in slow soft undulations filled and surged and rose up, and grew hard, standing there hard and overweening, in its curious towering fashion. (211)

To summarize: the female genitalia are here metonymically construed as the very essence of human sexual experience, while the male member is that which dominates both man in woman, pushes them to the actual act. In this way, both types of genitalia have a linking function: Connie perceives Mellors’ penis as belonging to her as well as to him (“He’s mine too. He’s not only yours. He’s mine!” (210)), whereas Mellors construes Connie’s “cunt” as part of what makes their sexual relationship more than merely animal.

There are two crucial points I would like to make in relation to this analysis, and the first one, somewhat obviously, is that even though the penis bears very traditional overtones of power, dominance, and sovereignty, the “cunt” (which is probably a more accurate word than vagina in this particular context) figures as that without which human intercourse remains void of meaning, and void of enjoyment for both people involved, so, despite the obvious phallocentrism in this novel, there seems to be a female (cuntcentric?) counterpart at play as well.

Secondly, because of the contiguous, metonymical structure that marks both the penis and the “cunt” in the passages discussed above, the big Lacanian divide between the Phallus and the penis simply does not work in this context. This is not at all to deny the mythical



overtones that are only too clearly attached to the phallus in the novel; this is to suggest that the text does not allow for a reading of the Phallus as completely detached from the penis. The bodily consciousness that is so important in this novel, as in Lawrence's theories about consciousness, goes against the premise that the Symbolic, governed by the Phallus, is radically cut off from the real. And, if Lawrence is not compatible with Lacan in this matter, is it then still possible to read Lawrence through Butler? How can we talk of the Lesbian Phallus, the transferable phantasm, if Lawrence's notion of the phallus is contiguously built on the penis, with its roots in a man's soul?

To address these theoretical issues, it is necessary to extend the close reading presented so far to some of the other sexual encounters between Connie and Mellors. The very first time they make love seems very unromantic, and not, in fact, particularly loving. Mark Spilka put it as follows:

She responds to Mellors' directions "with a queer obedience". She lies still throughout the act "in a kind of sleep", so that, "The activity, the orgasm, was his, all his." She can bear the burden of herself no more, and gives herself to the man without striving. No wonder that Kate Millett exploits the scene as indicative of the pure male mastery and female subjection which, she asserts, Lawrence really wants. (204)

Spilka's argument in the essay just quoted, is that Connie's obedience and passivity are only preliminary, a first stage in her sexual (re-)awakening. Much as I concur with this rebuttal of Millett, I would like to suggest that the text already introduces a greater physical tenderness and togetherness than either Mellors, Connie, or even the reader are immediately aware of. With regard to this scene, Burack notes:

The characters are not so much the persons named Connie and Mellors as their impassioned bodies. Hands and genitals are central because they are the body's principal agents of touch and connection. [...] These new focalisations seem to bridge

traditional perspectival distinctions between subjective and objective, superficial and deep, internal and external, singular and multiple. (37)

These “bodily focalisations”<sup>54</sup>, as Burack calls them, are not limited to the description of sexual intercourse, but also pave the way towards it. Leading up to the event, Connie has headed out into the forest to see the newly-hatched pheasant chicks, when Mellors

put his *hand* with quiet confidence slowly into the coop. The old hen pecked at him, but not so savagely. And slowly, softly, with sure gentle *fingers*, he felt among the old birds’s feathers and drew out a faintly-peeping chick in his closed *hand*.

“There!” he said, holding out his *hand* to her.”

She took the little drab thing between her *hands*, and there it stood, on its impossible little stalks of legs, its atom of balancing life trembling through its almost weightless feet into Connie’s *hands*. (115, my italics)

This very tender scene brimming with symbolic suggestion initiates the actual physical contact between Mellors and Connie, even if it is not even mentioned whether their hands actually touch in this instance: new life passes from Mellors’ hand into Connie’s and, no matter how fragile it is, trembles into Connie’s grasp. The motion and contiguity is here stressed by the insistence on hands, and by the textual pattern produced by them – Mellors’ single hand (but plural fingers) held out to put life into Connie’s pair of hands, when Mellors sees “a tear fall onto her wrist”.

But the bodily focalisation goes beyond hands and genitals, to encompass also the face and a bodily conscience that is referred to in various ways: “suddenly he was aware of the old flame shooting and leaping up in his loins”, “compassion flamed in his bowels for her”, “his heart melted suddenly, like a drop of fire”, “she put her hands over her face and felt that really her heart was broken, and nothing mattered any more.” (115-116) With this movement from

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<sup>54</sup> This term is useful here, but I would indicate that it is distinct from focalisation in its strictly narratological sense.

the hands to a larger physical awareness, a theme of cerebral *unawareness* is introduced, primarily through the notion of blindness: “Her face was averted and she was crying blindly” (115),

He laid his hand on her shoulder, and softly, gently it began to travel down the curve of her back, *blindly*, with a *blind* stroking motion, to the curve of her crouching loins. And there his hand softly, softly stroked the curve of her flank, in the *blind* instinctive caress. She had found her scrap of handkerchief and was *blindly* trying to dry her face. (116, my italics)

This very dense and poetic introduction of lexical themes leads into the passage Millett so fiercely objected to: the description of Connie’s passive obedience to Mellors. And yet the obedience that is so objectionable seems to be not quite limited to Connie: “His face was pale and without expression, like that of a man submitting to fate.” (116) The focus on Mellors’ hand (again curiously single) is firmly re-established to the point of personification: “the soft, groping, helplessly desirous hand touching her body, feeling for her face. The hand stroked her face softly, softly, with infinite soothing and assurance”, “his hand groping softly”, “the hand knew, too, how to unclothe her where it wanted”. (116) The text goes even further by then slipping into an impersonal focalisation that is not even physical any more: “And he had to come in to her at once, to enter the peace on earth of her soft, quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him, the entry into the body of the woman.” (116) The latter of these two sentences is arguably the only sentence focalised through Mellors, whereas the use of “had to” suggests an external compulsion or at least, and probably more precisely, an urge beyond conscious control.

Connie’s focalisation, which ends this scene, revolves around two themes: her own dream-like state, and her unknowingness about Mellors. The dreamlike state she is in is

characterised by repetitions that mark the circular nature of her thoughts and feelings as long as she and her lover lie close to each other.

He lay there with his arms round her, his body on hers, his wet body touching hers: so close. And completely unknown. Yet not unpeaceful. His very stillness was peaceful.

She knew that, when at last he roused and drew away from her. It was like an abandonment. (117)

The following exchange between Connie and Mellors is prosaic in style and mainly practical in nature – the abandonment is marked stylistically, and the tightly-woven discursive web that foretold and described their intercourse gives way to straightforward narration, and the focalisations that were crucial to the preceding passage are replaced by zero focalisation.

A close reading of this scene reveals how themes and concepts are woven into a complex pattern for which the fugue is a very apt metaphor, for different (lexical) themes are picked up by at least the three “voices” of Mellors, Connie, and the impersonal narrator. This textual closeness suggests a more fundamental connection between Connie and Mellors than either of them, at this point, realise. This connection finds expression in the compulsive “he had to come into her at once” – a sentence of which the insistence stands out. This impulse, this urgent need, can be dictated by nothing but the body, which, at this point in the novel, for the first time takes on its role as a conscious entity, with mainly the hand functioning as a synecdochal substitute for physical consciousness and knowledge (the hand which will later, as we have seen, be replaced by the penis in this function). This metonymy, as well as the fugue-like nature of this scene, corroborates the contiguous dimension of the narrative: the primary focus on the hand slides to a focus on “bowels”, “heart”, “loins” and slides further into an overwhelming (phallic) compulsion that is equated with “fate”. The phallicism that is unquestionably inherent in the text is thus contiguously related to a physical impulse that consciousness cannot quite grasp, and that leaves Connie bewildered and confused. In other

words, this scene reverses Butler's reading of Lacan: even if Connie can be said to "be" the phallus (she is submissive, and an object of heterosexual desire) and Mellors can be said to "have" the phallus (he is dominant, and the subject of desire), the point that is established in this scene is that it is the body – the penis – that is more powerful than the phallus. The Real takes over and Symbolic signification can only ask "[W]hy? Why was this necessary? Why had it lifted a great cloud from her, and given her peace? Was it real? Was it real?"

The discrepancy here turned up is reminiscent of the genealogy of the meaning of the phallus, and even points to current debate about its status. Butler's rebellious reading of Freud's "On Narcissism" asserts that

it is clear from the metonymic trajectory of Freud's own text, the ambivalence at the center of any construction of the phallus belongs to no body part, but is fundamentally transferable and is, at least within his text, the very principle of erotogenic transferability. Moreover, it is through this transfer, understood as a substitution of the psychical for the physical or the metaphorizing logic of hypochondria, that body parts become phenomenologically accessible at all. (BTM, 62)

So, whereas Freud's text still ostensibly asserts a metonymical relationship between the penis and the phallus, this relationship, in Butler's reading, becomes metaphorical, leading her to assert that "the phallus is neither the imaginary construction of the penis nor the symbolic valence for which the penis is a partial approximation." (ibid.) Notably, Lawrence's text is similar to Freud's in that "[i]n the course of restoring this phallic property to the penis, however, Freud enumerates a set of analogies and substitutions that rhetorically affirm the fundamental transferability of that property." (ibid.) An "orthodox" Butlerian reading of the sex scenes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, then, should perhaps assume that all "bodily focalisations", or any qualities attributed to body parts, are necessarily phantasmatic projections ("The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is

itself the projection of a surface” (Freud, “On Narcissism”, qtd in *BTM*, 59)), but, for the moment at least, I want to leave open the possibility that, because of the literary nature of Lawrence’s text, a richer reading may be produced if we do not foreclose the possibility of a conscious body by *a priori* accepting this stalemate of structuralism.

### *The Disappointments of Discourse*

“But there’s the rest of things.”

“What rest of things?” she said.

“Sir Clifford. Other folks! All the complications.”

“Why complications?” she said, disappointed.

“It’s always so. For you as well as for me. There’s always complications.” He walked on steadily in the dark. (117)

In his analysis of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Burack focuses on successive sex scenes to argue his thesis about the destruction of sexuality, followed by a sacralisation of the same. His analysis is often valuable and corroborates the points I have made above about focalisation and the prominence of bodily consciousness. To limit one’s analysis to the explicitly sexual passages in the novel, enlightening though it may be, unavoidably skews one’s analysis, particularly because these intense moments often occur in a narrative context of dissatisfaction. The first sex scene, which we have dwelt on above, happens when Connie practically breaks down with disappointment at what has become of her own life, and ends with discursive reality kicking in in the form of Mellors’ announcing “complications”.

A striking instance of conflict between the discursive and the physical (artificial as this dichotomy is, of course), occurs in chapter XIV, when Connie spends the night in Mellors’ cottage for the first time. They spend some time talking by the fire-side, and their topic is mainly – what else could it be? – sex. Connie asks Mellors about his sexual past, and about

his feelings towards herself. Their talking about sex, however, seems to remove them from each other, more and more so as Mellors attempts to clarify his own position and finds he cannot do so without insulting Connie in the process:

“And you talk so coldly about sex,” she said. “You talk as if you had only wanted your own pleasure and satisfaction.”

She was protesting nervously against him.

“Nay!” he said. “I wanted to have my pleasure and satisfaction of a woman, and I never got it: because I could never get my pleasure and satisfaction of *her* unless she got hers of me at the same time. And it never happened. It takes two.”

“But you never believed in your women. You don’t even believe really in me,” she said.

“I don’t know what believing in a woman means.”

“That’s it, you see!”

She was still curled on his lap. But his spirit was grey and absent, he was not there for her. And everything she said drove him further. (206)

The argument escalates to the point where Mellors first sends Connie off to bed by herself, and decides to go out when she refuses. Connie saves the situation: “Wait! What’s come between us?” What follows is a familiar pattern: “A dimness came over her, like a swoon. All her consciousness died [...]” until he “took her in her arms, pressing her against his body”. (207). “Till his hands reached blindly down and felt for her, and felt under her clothing to where she was smooth and warm.” (208) It looks as though we are witnessing a re-enactment of the very first sex-scene, Connie and Mellors finding themselves saved by the body, but there is just a bit more dialogue before actual intercourse on the hearth-rug:

“Ma lass!” he murmured. “Ma little lass! Dunna let’s fight! Dunna let’s niver fight! I love thee an’ th’ touch on thee Dunna let’s talk! Dunna argue wi’ me! Dunna! Dunna! Dunna! Let’s be together.”

She lifted her face and looked at him.

“Don’t be upset,” she said steadily. It’s no good being upset. Do you really want to be together with me?” [...]

“Ay!” he said. “Let’s be together! Let’s be together on oath.”

“But really?” she said, her eyes filling with tears.

“Ay really! Heart an’ belly an’ cock –” (208)

The transition from quarrelling to making love is established primarily through physical contact, but also through use of the vernacular – even though Mellors’ speech here draws an implicit parallel between “fight”, “argue”, and “talk”. It seems that the relative hardness of Mellors’ earlier talk – in “proper” English – is softened by the dialect. It appears easier for him to soften his tone and retract his earlier accusations. The implication is that dialect is governed by rational logic to a lesser extent than standard language is (an implication that makes sense linguistically, in so far as standard language is the result of the rationalisation and standardisation of one variety (or more) of spoken language).<sup>55</sup>

Overall, this scene corroborates the idea that, in order to “really be together”, Connie and Mellors need to isolate themselves from the outside world not only physically, but also discursively. In what follows, I would like to demonstrate that Butler’s rearticulation of Lacan’s theory of the phallus remains pertinent and useful for a reading of scenes set in this outside world of discursivity, even though it becomes problematic in the bubbles of physicality that Connie and Mellors create for themselves.

The macro-structure of the novel, after all, remains very classical: Clifford and Mellors both claim Connie’s affections, and this triangle stays in place at least until Connie goes to Venice. The struggle for power between the two men (which, of course, echoes the class

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<sup>55</sup> That dialect plays an important role in this novel is obvious, but its double connotation remains problematic: on the one hand, it can be the language of the coarseness and commonness that Mellors and Connie both detest, on the other hand, it is the vehicle of great tenderness, as in the scene where Connie, half-mockingly, imitates Mellors’ speech after making love in the cabin in the forest. (177)



struggle that is one of the novel's themes) is set up in the spectrum of rationality versus physicality. The dichotomy here, however, is not clear-cut or simple: it is *not* the case that Mellors assumes the role of the physical man while Clifford personifies reason. Both men are caught in a struggle for meaningfulness, and both men attempt to negotiate a balance between conscious thought and unconscious drives – both, initially, are very unsuccessful in this endeavour, though their strategies are diametrically opposed.

A relevant passage to this effect occurs at the end of the long chapter X – the chapter in which Connie and Mellors have sex for the first, second and third time, and also the chapter in which Connie pays a visits to Mrs. Flint and her baby at Marehay farm.

In the evening, Clifford reads Racine to Connie, who is not remotely interested, though she is grateful for not having to talk to Clifford. The latter concludes: “After all, [...] one gets all one wants out of Racine. Emotions that are ordered and given shape are more important than disorderly emotions.” (139) Clifford's obsession with the rationalisation of emotion – of everything, in fact – shines through after Connie has gone to bed:

And again the dread of the night came on him. He was a net-work of nerves, and 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. And Connie could keep the fear off him, if she would.

(139)

Clifford is not the happiest of people, and it is striking that his main reason for wanting Connie near is not so much about affection as it is about distraction, or to keep up his semblance of control – his having the phallus, personified still by Connie. His whole theory about the classical need to control emotion crumbles in front of his own anxiety: “his dread was the nights when he could not sleep. [...] Then it was ghastly, to exist without having any

life: lifeless, in the night, to exist.” (140) Clifford’s situation brings to mind the following claim by Butler:

[I]deology surfaces discursively as an effort to cover over a constitutive “lack” in the subject, a “lack” that is at times rendered equivalent to the notion of “constitutive antagonism” and, at other times, understood as a negativity more fundamental than any given social antagonism [...]. (*BTM*, 194)

Indeed, Clifford’s theorizing, his writing, his engineering, his whole rational façade seems nothing but an attempt to conceal, or to deal with, a “lack” that, as Butler points out, needn’t be entirely describable to be probable. Clifford seems to be caught up in a loop, constructing a rationalist philosophy to cover over his “lack”, while this same philosophy and his adherence to it only alienates him (and his wife) from his own emotional or phantasmatic attachments. His radical investment in the Symbolic thus can be said to increase or at least highlight the lack that is its foundation.

That Clifford’s need for Connie is registered primarily on a symbolic level, is shown by the ease with which he allows Mrs. Bolton to take her place: “But now he could ring for Mrs Bolton. And she would always come.” (140) Mrs. Bolton always “comes”, but despite the unfortunate double-entendre in that sentence, the relationship between Clifford and Mrs. Bolton is sexualised merely in her substituting for Connie, to “keep the fear off him” at night. The substitution does not end here: “In her half-sleep, thoughts of her Ted and thoughts of Lady Chatterley’s unknown lover commingled, and then she felt she shared with the other woman a great grudge against Sir Clifford and all he stood for.” (140-141) In these pages, narration shifts from Clifford to Mrs. Bolton to Mellors, that latter transition via the lines: “Connie was in bed, and fast asleep all this time. But the keeper, too, could not rest.” (141) In this way, Connie does not even have a perspective to be rendered, here: she is asleep and

clearly not to be taken into account in this passage, and yet she briefly pops up in the surface of the text to indicate that, though her presence – her existence – at this moment is merely symbolic, the narrative and its two male protagonists still revolve around her.

Mellors, too, sits brooding and restless, much like Clifford, earlier. Only, he has no ready substitute for Connie (and it is legitimate to wonder whether he would settle for one), and thus faces his thoughts and memories alone, and the reader is presented with a relatively lengthy stream of thought about Mellors' past, his place in the class system (he doesn't have one), his affair with Constance Chatterley. Instead of going to bed, he heads into the forest and "beats his bounds", when "he thought of the woman. Now he would have given all he had or ever might have to hold her warm in his arms, both of them wrapped in one blanket, and sleep." (143) The difference between Mellors and Clifford here is clear: of course, Clifford cannot go out and walk five miles through the forest by himself – let alone in the middle of the night, but apart from that, it simply never occurs to the highly cerebral Clifford that he may want to physically hold his wife: in his view, that would amount to admitting to at least some sort of lack. Mellors, on the other hand, "felt his own unfinished condition of aloneness cruelly. He wanted her, to touch her, to hold her fast against him in one moment of completeness and sleep." (143) In the end, Mellors goes over to Wragby (where Mrs. Bolton sees him and jumps to the correct conclusion) and ponders breaking into the house before he decides to go home at the break of day.

This episode shows how, overall, a Butlerian reading of the text is thoroughly plausible: the woman functioning as the phallus has these two men orbiting around her. Clifford shows he is superficially in control (having the phallus): Connie is, after all, his wife, sleeping under his roof, and, above all, substitutable by a servant, since ties of affection are, in his rationalised view of the world, only important when carefully and consciously crafted (as they are in Racine). Mellors, through his desire for Connie, whom he cannot at this moment have,

nor substitute, recognises and confronts his “lack” and his desire. His mind is not at all made up as to what kind of relationship with Connie, if any, he wants to cultivate, and he is indecisive when it comes to trying to physically get through to Connie by, equally physically, entering into Clifford’s domain.

But the novel also delights in showing up the limits of the cultivation of rationality, and Clifford’s belief in the powers of the mind, as occurs in chapter XIII, which seems to be a reprise and elaboration of chapter V, in which Mellors makes his first appearance and assists Clifford by pushing his wheelchair. In this scene, however, Clifford and Connie are out for a walk in the forest when Clifford’s motorised wheelchair breaks down altogether and Clifford has to give in to Connie’s suggestion that he might sound the horn to alert Mellors:

In the silence a wood-pigeon began to coo, roo-hoo! Roo-hoohoo! Clifford shut her up with a blast on the horn.<sup>56</sup>

The keeper appeared directly, striding enquiringly round the corner. He saluted.

“Do you know anything about motors?” asked Clifford sharply.

“I’m afraid I don’t. Has she gone wrong?”

“Apparently!” snapped Clifford.

The man crouched solicitously by the wheel, and peered at the little engine.

“I’m afraid I know nothing at all about these mechanical things, Sir Clifford,” he said calmly. “If she has enough petrol and oil-”

“Just look carefully and see if you can see anything broken,” snapped Clifford. (187)

The differences between the two men are here highlighted through a double bind: Clifford, when it comes to matters mechanical, is the one who boasts in-depth knowledge and insight and thus, by right, should be in a dominant position in this situation where technology is at stake. That this situation is not gender-neutral is shown by Clifford’s insisting on referring to

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<sup>56</sup> Clifford’s callousness to the animal kingdom was announced when, one page earlier, upon seeing a mole in the forest, he suggests: “Unpleasant little beast – we ought to kill him”. (186)

his mechanical wheelchair as female, and even as “old girl” (186) – a grammatical preference Mellors does not hesitate to adopt as well. Oddly, though Connie initially has no part in the conversation above, the triangle that drives the narrative as a whole – two men and a discursive centre thought of as female and passive – is repeated with a piece of machinery instead of a female protagonist. Clifford could be expected to be in full command of the situation, and yet it is the baronet who “snaps” at his gamekeeper, while the latter will remain calm throughout.

As Clifford’s frustration with the wheelchair increases through a number of subsequent attempts to get its engine running smoothly again, Connie realises that Clifford’s talk about the class system amounts to pretence and make-believe: the presence of Mellors highlights Clifford’s impotence in more than one respect: not only is he sexually crippled, it is obvious that even the circumstances he counts on for holding up at least his dignity – his social status, his knowledge of technology – let him down at the slightest mishap, until his self-confidence and assurance positively crumble. The narrator reports these events with a supreme sense of irony:

Clifford was pale with anger. He jabbed at his levers. The chair gave a sort of scurry, reeled on a few more yards, and came to her end amid a particularly promising patch of bluebells. (188)

Even when the motor is more or less up and running again, Clifford will not tolerate Mellors pushing the chair up-hill and, through his obstinacy, finally damages the engine beyond immediate repair, so that Mellors, with the aid of Connie, will have to push the heavy chair back to the house without the aid of the engine. Clifford at last realises that “It’s obvious I’m at everybody’s mercy” (190), thus admitting defeat in this struggle for power which Mellors thus wins precisely by not engaging in it. The result is that Connie is only drawn much closer to Mellors than she was before:

She had had fugitive dreams of a friendship between these two men: one her husband, the other the father of her child. Now she saw the screaming absurdity of her dreams. The two males were as hostile as fire and water. They mutually exterminated one another. And she realised for the first time, what a queer subtle thing hate is. For the first time, she had consciously and definitely hated Clifford, with vivid hate: as if he ought to be obliterated from the face of the earth. (192)

Apart from corroborating the opposition between the natures of Clifford and Mellors, this passage is crucial in establishing Connie as a character growing in independence. As far as discursive power goes, she sees through its purely symbolic mechanisms and recognises that Clifford derives his sense of power and control merely from his structural position – a position that is not even of his own making. Clifford comes to exemplify Byron's succinct phrase in *Don Juan*: "Men are the sport of circumstances, when // The circumstances seem the sport of men." (Canto V, st. 17) As Connie asserts herself as a character capable of seeing through the constitutive constraints of society, she seems to move towards a position that is no longer embodies "being" the phallus. This phase of the novel marks the beginning of the end of the struggle between Clifford and Mellors (though the former has no idea there is one), principally because Connie's symbolic position shifts, or rather, becomes overdetermined: the passivity that used to dominate the focalisation through Connie's consciousness is shed to reveal what, possibly, had long been lurking underneath the surface of active awareness: "she had consciously and definitely hated Clifford".

Between these events and the time of Connie's departure for Venice, her self-confidence and independence increase dramatically: she manages to spend two nights at Mellors' cottage (with only her sister, Hilda, knowing of one of these occasions), and, for the first time, she stands up to Clifford verbally and intellectually, radically rejecting Clifford's neo-platonic sympathies:

“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: when the body is really wakened to life. But so many people [...] 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 professorial corpses. – But it’s not true! The human body is only just coming to real life. With the Greeks it gave a lovely flicker, then Plato and Aristotle killed it, and Jesus finished it off. But now the body is coming really to life, is really rising from the tomb. And it will be a lovely, lovely life in the lovely universe, the life of the human body.” (235)

Crucially, though, it is not the case that Connie simply replaces Clifford with Mellors: in her relationship with the latter, she also grows more active and assertive, an evolution that is marked by her running out into the rain, naked, when she and Mellors are in the hut (an action that astounds and unsettles Mellors as well as Clifford, when he hears about it afterwards), or by her decision to go to Venice even though both Mellors and Clifford implicitly resent her going.

### *Balancing the Body*

Tempting as it is to read Connie’s speech about the “life of the human body” as a direct rendition of the narrator’s, or Lawrence’s, actual views, the novel nonetheless goes on to balance the physical and the discursive in its final stages, and it does so by means of the contrast between the last night Connie and Mellors spend together and their subsequent

separation. During this final night, the physical relationship between Connie and Mellors is taken to a new stage, marked by “sensuality sharp and searing as fire, burning the soul to tinder” (146) – anal sex, as we can read between the lines:

She had often wondered what Abélard meant, when he said that in their years of love he and Héloïse had passed through all the stages and refinements of passion. The same thing, a thousand years ago! The same on the Greek vases – everywhere! The refinements of passion, the extravagances of sensuality! And necessary, forever necessary to burn out false shames and smelt out the heaviest ore of the body into purity. With the fire of sheer sensuality. (147)

In these lines – and those that follow – sensuality figures as different from “love” or “voluptuousness”, and certainly quite different from the “tenderness” that plays such a crucial part in the novel. The awkwardness of this scene has been much remarked upon:

Mellors’ recourse to anal intercourse, or buggery, has caused no end of controversy since its detection in the early 1960’s. Lawrence’s “cowardly reticence” here, his verbal ambiguity in this otherwise explicit novel, has been remarked upon; the use of Connie as an outlet for Mellors’ homosexual urges has been suggested by at least two observers; and still others take buggery itself as the supreme heterosexual practice for Lawrence, the ultimate sexual mystery, and the great climax accordingly of Connie’s sexual initiation. (Spilka, 206)

The reason why this scene may be uncomfortable to the reader is not just because of its phallic, masculinist overtones (“at last it [shame] was roused up and routed by the phallic hunt of the man”, “fundamentally, she had needed this phallic hunting out, she had secretly wanted it” (247), it is also because the focalisation here is explicitly Connie’s: for all her growth in independence, it may seem as though she is completely reduced to passivity and phallus-worship – and worst of all, she even seems to like it.



And yet, there may be no need for the reader or critic to resolve this tension, precisely because of the way this scene is focalised through Connie, who realises:” What liars poets and everybody were! They made one think one wanted sentiment. When what one supremely wanted was this piercing, consuming, rather awful sensuality.” (247) The “one” here, is primarily Connie herself, especially as the reader is cast in the category of “poets and everybody”. This scene sets up a difference between a shameful (and implicitly normative) sensuality, and physical, personal sensuality that is based on the elimination of shame and of socially constructed and accepted views of sexuality. In this sense, the real emancipation that occurs here is an emancipation from society and its conventional belief in sentiment (and reproductive sex). In one sense, then, the sub-text in this passage places the reader in an outsider position, and announces that any shame or discomfort produced by this scene is an effect merely of social bigotry. In other words (and in a very Lawrentian gesture): if you don’t like what you’re reading here, reader, then that’s merely because you cannot see beyond the social (or theoretical) constraints you are still a slave to.

A technical side-effect of the stream-of-consciousness-like focalisation that traces the trajectory of Connie’s thoughts is that, despite the mention of the “bodily roots of us” and “smelt[ing] the heaviest ore of the body into purity”, the explicit bodily focalisations are absent in this description, which confers a more abstract and surprisingly more cerebral character onto this scene than was present in former descriptions of the sex act. Thus, this very intimate and very physical scene can be read as Connie’s re-awakening to consciousness purified of socially induced shame, and rooted in the body.

But it is also, of course, the transition to Connie’s stay in Venice, and her separation from Clifford as well as Mellors. The last fifty pages of the novel almost read like an epilogue: clearly, the main movement of the novel is concluded, and plotlines are speedily wound to a close. Crucially, Connie, the centrepiece of the phallic rivalry that drove the

narrative onwards, is removed from Wragby and, though she does provoke sexual responses in the men in Venice, she is factually taken out of the equation. It is significant, then, that Connie is connected to Wragby only through the letters she receives from Clifford and, later on, from Mrs. Bolton and Mellors. It is Clifford who, unwittingly, keeps Lady Chatterley informed about her lover and his difficulties in obtaining a divorce. The discursive triangle thus reaches its most tenuous point and practically fades out – only Clifford (as is to be expected), is still devoted to the life of the word: “He wrote very good letters: they might all have been printed in a book. And for this reason Connie found them not very interesting.” (261)

When Mellors writes to Connie, he sprinkles his communication with a coarser sense of humour than Clifford’s, which is highlighted when he relates the conversation between the two men which was also mentioned in one of Clifford’s letters:

He as good as told me I was a disreputable character who walked about with my breeches’ buttons undone, and I as good as told him he’d nothing to unbutton anyhow, so he gave me the sack, and I leave on Saturday week, and the place thereof shall know me no more. (270)

But the real difference between Mellors’ and Cliffords’ letters, apart from their stylistic and humorous qualities, lies in their respective purposes: in Mellors’ letter,

There was not a word about herself, or to her. Connie resented this. He might have said some few words of consolation or reassurance. But she knew he was leaving her free, free to go back to Wragby and to Clifford. (270)

Even though Connie resents this “false chivalry” on Mellors’ part, it is clear that Clifford expects her to come back, relying on the symbolic ties of matrimony, whereas Mellors has no such tie to claim, their connection being illegitimate and unsanctioned, and he himself still being caught up in the process of severing the marital tie that binds him.

This particular difference between Clifford and Mellors leads straight to their respective positions at the end of the novel, Clifford clearly presenting the more extreme of the two cases, when he learns of Connie's unwillingness to return to Wragby, and her asking for a divorce:

After this, Clifford became like a child with Mrs Bolton. He would hold her hand, and rest his head on her breast, and when she once lightly kissed him, he said: "Yes! Do kiss me! Do kiss me!" [...] It was sheer relaxation on his part, letting go all his manhood, and sinking back to a childish position that was really perverse. And then he would put his hand into her bosom and feel her breasts, and kiss them in exaltation, the exaltation of perversity, of being a child when he was a man. (291)

This child-like state, this "exaltation of perversity" is, frankly, astounding, and yet it is somehow a logical consequence of Clifford's failed manhood. His denial of the body leads him to intellectual, purely rational, maturity, which in turn condemns him to incomplete (even perverse) relationships and a sort of split in his personality:

The curious thing was that when this child-man which Clifford now was – and which he had been becoming for years – emerged into the world, it was much sharper and keener than the real man he used to be. This perverted child-man was now a *real* business-man; when it was a question of affairs, he was an absolute he-man, sharp as a needle, and impervious as a bit of steel. When he was out among men, seeking his own ends, and "making good" his colliery workings, he had an almost uncanny shrewdness, hardness, and a straight sharp punch." (291)

Clifford's sorry state at the end of the novel seems to beg for a Butlerian reading: his tendency to live life in the symbolic is here only confirmed to the extent that his behaviour (and implied success) as a businessman is a perfect illustration of the mechanism of *performativity*. So perfect an illustration, in fact, that it practically amounts to a *drag* performance. Clifford

wields the signifiers of masculinity in a performance that is superficially effective, though it does not fool the reader who knows of the other, fetishist and childlike, manifestation of Clifford's subjectivity. The parallel with drag, here, is not a gratuitous one: this passage finally unhinges a notion of "reliable" or "steady" masculinity based on outward signification, in the same way that drag performances, in Butler's reading, highlight the phantasmatic nature of gender itself: "the parody is *of* the very notion of an original". (*GT*, 175) Clifford's gender performance is a clear attempt to still hold on to the ideal of "having" the phallus – a position that assumes (performs) control over signification as well as some sort of dependence on the feminine side of the equation – in this case, Mrs Bolton. Also, in refusing to divorce his wife, Clifford holds on to the symbolic tie that helps keep his social position in place. And yet, though he superficially corresponds to the male position in a classical Lacanian gender system, Clifford's personality here clearly crumbles and becomes the token of disintegration of the self.

Mellors' fate, in conformity to the novel's logic, is wholly different, but is emphatically not simply a matter of his being the more physical of the two men:

"Shall I tell you?" she said, looking into his face. "Shall I tell you what you have that other men don't have, and that will make the future? Shall I tell you?"

"Tell me then," he replied.

"It's the courage of your own tenderness, that's what it is [...]"

[...]

"Ay! it's tenderness, really; it's really cunt-awareness. Sex is really only touch, the closest of all touch. And it's touch we're afraid of. We're only half-conscious, and half alive. We've got to come alive and aware. Especially the English have got to get into touch with one another, a bit delicate and a bit tender. It's our crying need- " (277)

“Tenderness”, “touch” and “cunt-awareness” are here introduced as synonyms, and as the important element in this relationship. It is interesting to find “cunt-awareness<sup>57</sup>” balancing the phallicism that was so central in previous erotic passages. This being part of the last instance of intercourse in the novel is doubly significant because the novel is at this point finding a new balance between the discursive and the physical, as was introduced by the emphasis on letter-writing, the most significant instance of which is yet to occur, viz. Mellors’ long letter which ends the novel.

This letter attains a curious balance between the forces, physical and discursive, that have driven the evolution of Lady Chatterley’s love affair throughout, culminating in praise, rather remarkably, of chastity:

So I love chastity now, because it is the peace that comes of fucking. I love being chaste now. I love it as snowdrops love the snow. I love this chastity, which is the pause and peace of our fucking, between us now like a snowdrop of forked white fire. And when the real spring comes, when the drawing together comes, then we can fuck the little flame brilliant and yellow, brilliant. But not now, not yet! Now is the time to be chaste, it is so good to be chaste, like a river of cool water in my soul. (301)

What has happened in the course of the novel is that both Connie and Mellors have experienced a sort of re-awakening to the impulses attributed to their own bodies and, having indulged in the pleasures of the body, they find a new state of equilibrium in which discourse becomes supportable, even helpful again, witness the length and scope of Mellors’ letter, which ranges from a report of his own personal circumstances to a reflection on the situation of the working class, to a mystical and poetical paean to chastity (and against, one might add, promiscuity).

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<sup>57</sup> This is particularly interesting in the light of Butler’s reading of Plato and Irigaray in Chapter I of *BTM*, where she stresses the relevance of the etymological links between matter and motherhood/femininity.

*Pre or Hyper: Whither the Body?*

From the Boy Scouts to the fashionable sodomites, and from Elizabeth Arden to D.H. Lawrence (one of the most powerful personality-smashers, incidentally: there are no “characters” in his books). Always and everywhere the body. Now the body possesses one enormous merit; it is indubitably *there*. (Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza* 101)

If we attempt to read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* against a Butlerian background, we face a fairly straightforward problem: in the novel, the body is the basis of emotion, consciousness and happiness, whereas, in Butler, the body can only be made material through the effects of discourse. There is a straightforward, and very unsatisfactory, way to break this dead-lock: Lawrence was wrong, and analysing *Lady Chatterley's Lover* against the sophisticated merits of poststructuralism and constructivism is a waste of time and energy, because its narrator advocates an outdated notion of a pre-discursive body. This novel illustrates the mechanism that Butler describes and deconstructs: the characters construct an ego-ideal that is of necessity a construction involving the body as a basis of identity. In this case, the body is romanticised as a source of vitality that needs to be reckoned with as containing some elementary truth about the self; a notion that psychoanalysis and poststructuralism have long since debunked.

If such a reading may be valid, it is not particularly inspiring, let alone interesting. Apart from those objections, it also fails to do justice to the richness – the literariness – of Lawrence's text. In fact, the problem of incompatibility may well be solved by taking this discussion to a different level altogether: precisely because we are dealing with a literary text, all reference to a pre-discursive body is of necessity futile – there are no bodies in books, there is, technically, only discourse, contained in the “body” of the “material” book. So the bodies we have been discussing are nothing more than conglomerates of literary description,

i.e. of discourse. This is an open door, but it leads to an interesting corridor: firstly, though the novel appears to go against the very principles of the theory we have used to read it, it also uses these very principles of discursive construction to do so. Secondly, it remains clear that the body still occupies a very special place in this work: it seems to be not only the basis of consciousness, but also the (often metonymical) transmitter of a spiritual (or sensual) impulse that surpasses the individual.

Thus, the novel, being so adamant in its initial opposition of discourse and physicality, and in its later reconciliation of the two (at least in the case of Mellors and Connie), uses discourse to place the body in a place that is beyond discourse: as was the case in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, the novel attributes qualities to the body that cannot be captured by discourse. There is a contiguous movement from rationality, through a physical consciousness, to a larger, implied, spirituality/sensuality, that invites the reader to see the limits and imperfections of discourse, in order to conjure up a body that is not *pre-discursive* but *hyperdiscursive*.<sup>58</sup>

This is not just a theoretical trick to achieve some sort of closure at the end of this chapter: the novel posits the body as the seat of consciousness, even though consciousness may choose to deny this fundamental connection in a gesture that pervades our Western culture and even underlies the industrial revolution and the excesses of capitalism. In doing so, however, this particular novel also makes an effort to reconcile the discursive and the material in its own plot structure, finally to culminate in a letter (a text-within-the text) which again invokes the contiguity between “cunt” and “tenderness” (a contiguity that ranges from a part of a body in a text within a text to the sentiment that seems valued most highly in the novel and, certainly by the end, may well be equated with the spiritual/sensual phallicism (balanced, or expanded, by a vaguer female counterpart) that is so pertinent to the novel).

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<sup>58</sup> I am grateful to Benjamin Biebuyck for coining this term.

Discursivity and hyper-discursivity are two necessary poles for the plot to move between, until the tension between these poles is resolved in the rather grandiose gesture that is Mellors' letter.

### *A Possible Conclusion*

The initial questions this chapter started off with, revolved around the possibility of resorting to Butler's description of "the Lesbian Phallus" to propose an innovative reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, particularly with regard to the problem of the divide between matter and discourse in the novel. I believe that the result of this attempt is twofold, depending on how one chooses to phrase the research question exactly:

Is Butler's theory helpful for an overall reading of this novel? Yes, it is: bearing in mind the phallus as a discursive centre of power and a transferable phantasm, we can outline precise differences between the characters of, in the first place, Clifford and Mellors, and we can also trace how sexuality can be discursively produced in certain places in the novel – notably the episode in Dresden, the affair with Michaelis, and the conversations about sexuality that go on in Wragby.

Is Butler's theory *always* helpful in reading this novel? No. The theory also enables us to see, however, where the theory no longer works, and where what I have chosen to call the "hyperdiscursive body" takes over, and seemingly goes against the somewhat sterile logic of "having" and "being" the phallus.

However, in the end, by resorting to Butler's theory, we can see a thematic divide in the novel that is not quite (as Richard Hoggart claimed in his famous preface to the Penguin edition of the novel) the split between body and mind: the novel is far more subtle than that. The divide between the discursive and the hyperdiscursive appears more productive, as the



interaction between them is more dynamic, and even if the novel contradicts some of Butler's claims about the constructed nature of the body, it works within a very similar dialectic.

What makes this novel so remarkable, and so relevant, is its refusal to give in to any notion that it is impossible to write the body. Lawrence's prose, especially in those passages that seem so incompatible with a Butlerian version of physicality, relies on repetition, metaphor and particularly metonymy to craft a fine web of signification that never tries to capture the body, but rather to conjure up a hyperdiscursive dimension that produces not only a body but also, as its ultimate goal and achievement, "tenderness".

# Conclusion

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## *Lies and Tragedies*

This section returns us to the research question underpinning this dissertation: does Butler's theory of performativity shed light on literary texts – and vice versa? It was suggested in the introduction that, because of the significant differences in their styles of writing, Lawrence and Hemingway would relate to Butler's theory in different ways and in different aspects – a hypothesis that demands to be confirmed or denied.

In the case of Hemingway, I believe it is fair to say that Butlerian readings work, and that a Butler-informed angle can indeed highlight aspects of the work that might otherwise remain invisible. In the chapter on "Soldier's Home," for instance, but also very clearly in the case of *A Farewell to Arms*, a focus on the social, discursive network that forms the backdrop of the stories, enables the reader to see how characters always position or, indeed, perform, themselves with reference to a complex network of social norms. Krebs needs to make sense of his war experience, but finds he cannot do so in the tranquil setting of Oklahoma. Why? Mainly, it would seem, because the events that occurred within the setting of the war cannot simply be translated into the paradigms of home. Krebs finds himself compelled to live outside the norms of society – to study those norms as patterns, as rationalized abstraction – because internalizing those same norms amounts to *lying*. In brief, the contrast between the discursive regimes that play a role in this story (the battlefield and the home) becomes a chasm of untranslatability that eventually turns life itself into a lie.

The lie of Krebs' life is compounded by profound "gender trouble" – Krebs' gender identity, built to a large extent on the homosocial world of the army, appears itself

untranslatable and causes Krebs to trespass against fundamental rules of kinship: he disavows love for his mother, but openly flirts with his sister. A similar gender problematic steers the narrative of *A Farewell to Arms*, in which protagonist Frederic Henry vacillates between male friendships in the army and his heterosexual love interest in Catherine Barkley. The length and structural unity of *A Farewell to Arms* allow this novel to be more complex and detailed than “Soldier’s Home,” yet the underlying problem in both is very similar: the protagonist experiences the difficulty of moving between paradigms, between forms of sociality and, ultimately, between the forms of masculinity dictated by the differences between settings.

From this Butler-enabled point of view, the tragic quality of these two stories also becomes more poignant and more explicable: in different ways, both texts testify to the death of the stable subject. Moving from one paradigm to another highlights the performative mechanisms that create a sense of identity, and it is precisely this highlighting that allows the reader to see performative mechanisms at work even when there is no move between paradigms. Catherine Barkley illustrates this perfectly: she, too, vacillates between gendered modes, to the point where it is factually impossible to tell which is the “real” Catherine (the romantic Catherine or her cynical alter ego), so the conclusion that remains is that the “real” Catherine (or Frederic, or Krebs) does not exist but in relationship to a set of norms and conventions that is invoked through performance. These Hemingway texts convey the notion that life within a discursive regime cannot be described in terms of authenticity or identity – it is always “a lie both ways.”

If this focus on discursive regimes is the engine powering *A Farewell to Arms* and “Soldier’s Home,” then “Big Two-Hearted River” and *The Sun Also Rises* can be read as attempts to escape those regimes. “Big Two-Hearted River” is an extreme example of turning away from society and its symbolic: there is only one (human) character in this story, camping and fishing entirely by himself. And yet, analysis of the story shows that, throughout

the text, Nick Adams does relate to a non-human other – animals, the sun, or even the landscape – and, through the detailed attention he pays to the effect of his every action, remains a subject within a sociomorph dialectic. *The Sun Also Rises* is similar in that the novel presents a quest for transcendence, an attempt to escape the material conditions highlighted by modern metropolitan life.

In both stories, the protagonists fail to achieve their objectives: Nick does remain trapped within a social scenario (he has to, in order to maintain his own subjectivity, his own self) and Jake Barnes fails to find transcendence in Catholicism, bullfighting or romance. Arguably, this double failure indicates something about the nature of Hemingway's writing: when characters are written and determined from the outside, from the perspective of a normative society, then it becomes logically impossible for these characters to become detached from this society. This, of course, corresponds perfectly to Butler's theory: the constitutive constraints imposed by the Other enable the subject to happen, and the subject does not exist without those constraints. Translated into Hemingway's writing, this view of subjectivity is not particularly uplifting: characters are trapped in a system that is not of their making and that, crucially, is fundamentally unsatisfying. Frederic Henry, Jake Barnes, Harold Krebs and Nick Adams all try to negotiate their identities by maneuvering within the parameters laid down by society, but ultimately fail to transcend, master or manipulate those parameters.

### *Writing (Around) the Body*

From this point of view, Lawrence is diametrically opposed to Hemingway: his characters also struggle with social norms and convention as do Hemingway's, but

Lawrence's writing itself arguably resists writing from the "outside." His non-fiction sheds some light on why this is the case: if subjectivity does not come from the outside, creating characters should not happen from the outside either. Lawrence's texts on the subconscious show very clearly why Hemingway is much more in line with Butler (and, by extension, with structuralist and poststructuralist accounts of subject formation): to Lawrence, consciousness is a side-effect of bodily processes – he even goes so far as to say that language and conscious thought are peripheral. In the realm of non-fiction, then, Lawrence is completely opposed to Butler's project.

If complete theoretical opposition is not in itself an interesting given, its effects on the level of fiction are of greater concern. Lawrence faces the problem of writing fiction based on the assumption that language is not central to subjectivity, and that the body is the source of identity. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* illustrates this problem by focusing heavily (and explicitly) on the bodily dimension of sexuality. A close reading of the sex scenes in the novel shows how a series of poetic effects (particularly metonymy) is employed to establish a dimension of "hyperdiscursivity" in which the body is located, figuring as the origin of impulse, feeling and tenderness.

Lawrence's writing is an act of resistance: he resists the domination and primacy of discourse by turning language back onto itself. The poetic devices he employs both in fiction and non-fiction subvert straightforward referentiality and point towards the body. There is no point in finding fault with Lawrence for not being compatible with language-based accounts of the subject; rather, it is worth stressing that Lawrence attempts the impossible and does not accept language or social convention as inescapable. In a way, he is the more adventurous thinker (though that does not make him right): it seems to be a consequence of Butler's writing (radical and left-wing as it is) that change only occurs through the resignification of given social ties – that identity is a product of the discourse by which it is regulated.

Lawrence has but little time for resignification and discourse regulating identity – to him, discourse is dead, and life is only in the body.

This is not to say that identity in Lawrence is wholly self-contained: the tragedy of *Women in Love* is precisely Gerald and Rupert's failure to be "undone" by Gudrun and Ursula. And *Lady Chatterley's Lover* ends with Mellors and Connie defying convention in order to have a life together. It is not a coincidence that this novel has the most positive outcome of any of the texts discussed in this dissertation. In fact, this kind of ending may well be impossible to Hemingway (the end of *The Sun Also Rises* is a relevant counterpart), in whose work there is no happily-ever-after.

The insistence on the body in Lawrence does pose a serious challenge to Butler's theory on two levels: first of all, as was argued in the discussion of *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious*, Lawrence may remind us that it is legitimate to inquire into the status of the prediscursive in Butler's work. One does not even need to take neurobiology into account to wonder how Butler applies to non-lingual, non-human animals, or at which point in infant development performativity actually comes into play. Secondly, and more central to this dissertation, it has to be admitted that a Butlerian reading cannot really say anything about the hyperdiscursive nature of the body in Lawrence's work, other than that it exists – or that it is wrong. By extension, it could be argued that Butler's work may not be very useful in dealing with texts that advocate a "romantic" view of the subject – a view in which identity is not the product of discourse.

To summarize, I believe that a Butlerian reading of Hemingway and Lawrence helps elucidate the differences between them. Notions of performativity, normativity and ekstacy are remarkably compatible with Hemingway's way of creating fictional characters who struggle with the social system they inhabit only to find that they are trapped within it –

indeed, depend on it. Lawrentian characters, on the other hand, seem not to be crafted by society but to have a self-founded identity that can choose to ignore convention.

### *Reading with Butler*

So how useful is Butlerian theory really when it comes to literary analysis? If the analyses provided above are plausible, then, clearly, resorting to Butler is not one's worst option when analyzing a literary text. Performativity is still a useful concept for literary theory, at least if it is not used as a synonym of "theatrical" or even "fraudulent". There are, however, a few issues with Butlerian readings of the kind attempted in this dissertation that must not be left unaddressed.

The first issue is that, because of Butler's psychoanalytic inspiration, it is difficult not to read literary characters as actual human beings rather than the textual functions they are. This is not a very novel way of reading texts and tends to ignore other elements of literary interpretation. The texts that have been discussed here do have relatively "conventional" characters in the sense that they are plausible and realistic; a Butlerian analysis of stories in which character plays only a secondary role may look very different.

Secondly, as was stated in the introduction, there is no such thing as a unified and transparent Butlerian theory, which makes it impossible for a "Butlerian reading" to take into account Butler's various formulations of a concept like performativity – the reading will always be based on a reduced version of the theoretical writing. Arguably, this is always the case, regardless of which theory is put to use. But, perhaps because of the eclectic nature of Butler's own work, perhaps because of the resignifications that sometimes seem to take place within it, it is tempting – and perhaps unavoidable – to resort to other theorists and theories

alongside Butler (e.g. Georg Simmel in the section on *The Sun Also Rises*, or Antonio Damasio when discussing Lawrence, or even Thoreau). It may well be that Butler's theories of identity and subjectivity are so all-encompassing that in themselves they do not really provide a specific angle from which to read a text.

The search for an angle leads to another issue that was also raised in the introduction: it is clearly unrealistic to believe this "experiment" is in any way or measure objective. The texts discussed cannot be chosen objectively, the same goes for the selection of Hemingway and Lawrence, and the interpretation of Butler's work and the literary texts is of necessity a highly subjective act. For all these reasons, it is impossible to measure the success of the experiment.

However, I do believe it has been shown that a Butlerian reading focusing on performativity can bring out interpretive elements that otherwise remain hidden. The radical nature of her thought forces one to look at texts assuming not that characters "do" or "are" but exist as the result of actions and discourse determined by their environment. Her focus on gender, combined with the insistence on the dialectic of Self and Other, reveals insecurities, nuances and details that can enrich textual interpretation and analysis.



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