

Lady Chatterleys Lover

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This is the classical book of Lawrence, and the one most people associate him with, and as a young man I was no exception. The reason for that is obvious, the notoriety of its reception and the consequent ban. A ban that was not lifted in Anglo-Saxon countries until the late fifties. Such a ban obviously enhanced sales and made the author far more known than he would otherwise may have been. The parallels with James Joyce are obvious. The reason for the exaggerated reactions is of course obvious, the explicitness of the sex-scenes and the accusations not only of lewdness but pornography. My parents had an edition of the book, some lurid cover I recall vividly, printed in some cheap paper-back by a publisher no doubt no longer in existence. I myself bought a Signet edition back in the fall of 1972. It must have been then, I definitely recall reading it in my dormitory room in Perkins Hall, although I recall very little of it, except the crippled Sir Clifford, his frustrated wife, and the existence of a game-keeper to give her satisfaction. Maybe I was appropriately shocked as I was also surprised to learn on my Christmas flight to the west Coast a month or so later that Lawrence had also written other novels, novels which I would later appreciate far more.

Now comparing the final version of Lady Chatterley to the first version which was posthumously published several years later what are the striking differences? The first version is somewhat shorter, far less explicit, and has almost none of that insistent preaching. Its general impression is a softer tale, not as harsh and not as well defined. In the original version the lady and her husband share at least in the beginning a pleasant life together, reading to each other, discussing Plato, showing some modicum of mutual respect not to say tenderness. Only later does he begin to get involved in the running of his estate and picking up the enervating hobby of playing with the radio. The lady Connies hatred of him only becomes apparent in the end. In the final version her dislike of him is present from the very beginning and you wonder why she ever married him in the first place. In the final version he is a writer and playing at being an intellectual, and apparently quite successful at it, making himself (as well as her by proxy) a minor celebrity. She does not care for his work, and her father dismisses it as clever but pointless. The husbands quest for intellectual vainglory is eventually replaced by a passion for the running of his estate and mines. He realizes that to cater to the pleasures is one thing, but to cater to the very bread and butter of life is quite another. In many ways the author is both repelled by this new transformation as well as admitting a grudging admiration for it. Sir Clifford may be a crippled man, but his mind is as alert as any.

However, the greatest change between the two versions is that of the character of the game-keeper. In both cases he is depicted as a person who has risen above his station due to his superior qualities. A man of education and verve, although of a humble background. A man achieving on his own merits the status of a gentleman through rising through the ranks of the military, but who later decides to give it all up and affect the broad Derby

dialect of his upbringing¹. But while he in the first version comes across as rather timid, well aware of the difference in status between the two of them, resenting becoming a kept man and instead wanting to be the 'top dog'. In short it is the lady who takes the initiative and has him as a kind of plaything, which he resents. In the final version it is the game-keeper that takes control from the beginning. The initial seduction has almost the nature of a rape, or at least of an abuse of a situation. From the very start the whole thing is done on the terms of the keeper, not as in the initial version on the terms of the lady. Thus while the episode with the trip abroad is a crucial part of both narratives, and in both cases the return of the game-keepers estranged wife and the subsequent humiliation and dismissal takes place during her absence, the consequences are very different. In the first case the keeper is afraid of letting her go, in the final he could not care less, intuiting that she needs time and space to come to terms with her eventual decision. And indeed at one point during the scandal erupting in her absence, she has a horror of the humiliation to her that would follow would Sir Clifford ever get wind of her affair with his servant. Yet in fact, before her departure, she forces her reluctant sister Hilda, who in the first version is thrilled by the affair, to meet her lover and let them have just one fling together before the trip. Hilda is scandalized by the affair, and meeting him does not make things better, he intent on insulting her. During that night the climax of the affair is reached, and, we are led to conclude, the act of impregnation takes place as well. Now in the first version the result of the dismissal is a further reduction of the game-keeper to that of a lowly worker in a mine. He lodges with some friends, and one of then most touching if not pathetic scenes in the book concerns the visit of Connie to the humble abode. Eventually he sulks and is talked sense to by an old friend of Connie in a drunken orgy in a restaurant. The general impression is one of puzzlement, he appears almost like a child, and why should her ladyship give up her social standing to humor such a character. In the final version there is no such nonsense. True the game-keeper wants to earn his own living, but if that does not work out, her independent income surely will come in handy. No staying at some humble place for him, he goes to London where they meet. Connie asks for a divorce from her husband who refuses out of spite to grant her one. (In fact there is a brutal interview in which she is forced to reveal the real lover, not the fake one, concocted for technical reasons ²). The whole thing ends on a rather up-beat note. The world may be hostile but is no match to a couple in love.

While the first version had no real message, at least none that is overly explicit, this cannot be said of the final version which is in many ways a sermon. What is he preaching against? Modern life of course. Modern life of mechanized efficiency, a life that centers around money. Without money you starve, but once you possess money, money possesses you and poisons your life. The ugliness of the industrial landscape is an obvious sore point with Lawrence. Much as he may resent the idle classes, he cannot but mourn when

¹ A dialect which incidentally was that of Lawrence as well.

² In fact the very incarnation as a hapless artist of the former childhood friend of Connie who in the first version has such a brotherly rapport with her, and talks sense to her lover in whiskey drenched confrontation in a restaurant. That scene in the restaurant is too good to be scrapped in the new version, but now it takes place with Connies father, a successful artist, who cannot but help find the keeper congenial, sharing as they do a sensual temperament.

their stately mansions are being torn down in the name of progress and profit. The sheer ugliness of the modern buildings, the sheer inanity of modern entertainment. It is all dead, dead and dead. What does he want to have instead? The love of life, the flow of blood, and the real connection with the sources of belonging. The game-keeper, who incidentally has had his name changed from the slightly demeaning Parker to Mellors, states his philosophy of love straightforwardly enough. Love is carnal, none of that sentimental stuff that with most women (and men) goes for love. It has its own language its own channels, it is based on instinct and tenderness and earthly desire. It is the kind of earthy sensuality that can say of a woman's arse that it is the most lovely in the world, and touch her orifices as if giving benediction. Yet Connie is in spite of her ruddy healthy nature inhibited, a sleeping beauty of sorts, who has to be waken up, not by a chaste kiss on her lips, but by penetration that touches her very quick, igniting her flame to burn away her shame. This gives Lawrence plenty of opportunity to be sexually explicit in his depiction, but lewd as it might be, it is not really pornographic, in a sense it is strangely un-arousing in spite of its excessive sensuality. This is the kind of love that the game-keeper has looked for in women but never met until now. The woman who enjoys being 'fucked', not the one who abhors the act (and did not the lady Chatterley do so at first, finding the ritual rather ridiculous, with the buttocks of a man going up and down, spending himself so quickly and feebly), nor the one who postpones her pleasure until the man is spent and then uses him for her own desires, her cunt hard like the beak of a bird, pecking at his pecker. To Mellors, the game-keeper, (as well as for Lawrence) the perfect sexual union is the one in which both partners climax simultaneously.

To Sir Clifford there are those who rule, and the great mass that should be ruled. Those who rule are not necessarily more gifted than those who have to obey, only they are placed by fate in their position, and are thus obligated to the very same to fulfill their mission. Take any reasonably clever boy, extract him from his humble origins early enough, bring him up as a lord, and he will be ready to act as one. It is not a question of blood, it is a question of circumstances. There might be a certain truth to it, at least it has the cynical lack of illusion that usually marks the taste of truth. There is after all a certain ambiguity towards Sir Clifford. He may be crippled, but in spite of his physical handicap, his lack of potency, he is strong of torso and mind, but that very strength is also his ultimate weakness, that which dooms him to coldness and death. He does not care about others, he only ultimately cares about himself. Without this love, this instinctual tenderness, what does his cleverness bring him, or bring anyone else for that matter.

As he is told by his wife in a letter that she is not coming back to him as she had promised before her departure, he breaks down, because he had always known that this was coming to him, but by never acknowledging it squarely like a man, he only made it worse by apprehension, the kind of expectation that instead of softening a blow makes sure it penetrates so much deeper.. In the final scenes he is shown to regress, to become a child, helpless and pathetic because of his very physical strength and mental agility. He turns his nurse into his mother, fondles her breasts and kiss them, in a desperate effort to achieve consolation. There is an element of sadism in this relentless unfolding of his tragedy, so much more bitter for lack of sympathy..

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