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Work and selfhood in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Lady Chatterley's Lover is famously, even notoriously, a book about sex. The novel is divided into three sections: the first seeks to register the nature and causes of psychic and social degradation; the second stages a series of sexual encounters between Lady Chatterley and the gamekeeper, Mellors; and the third considers the viability of their existence as a couple. Lawrence created three different versions of the novel, using a range of characters and circumstances to articulate its different forms of individual and social dysfunction, but the basic structure of degeneration, rebirth and consequent fragility remains intact throughout all of Lawrence's re-writing. What has less frequently been noted, however, is that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is also a novel about work: about the alienation of industrial labour, the desperate compensatory quality of intellectual work, the inescapability of physical toil, and the imaginative and ideological work of narrative fiction. The novel begins with the observation that: 'The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work.' It thus opens with the catastrophe and ruin which Lawrence aims to exemplify and to embody in the physical and psychic failings of his characters, but it also begins with the necessity for hard work.

The labouring self

The relations between work and subjectivity preoccupied Lawrence throughout his writing, though the ways in which he represented the social and psychic significance of labour were to develop significantly. In his 'Study of Thomas Hardy', written in 1914, Lawrence argues forcefully that work is a negation of the creative aspects of the individual self. Lawrence sees the human individual as caught between two opposing forces, one which is driven by fear and concentrates on self-preservation and another which is intense, transient, wasteful, but creative. Work, he argues, is securely placed

on the side of self-preservation, fear of risk, and deadly repetition. Lawrence resists the tendency to elevate work as a moral or spiritual imperative and sees it rather as a destructive and inhibiting necessity. A man, and it is always a man in this essay, who is working is caught in the mechanical repetitions of a physical and intellectual habit 'repeating some old process of life, unable to become ourselves, unable to produce anything new' (*Hardy*, 45). For Lawrence work is 'simply, the activity necessary for the production of a sufficient supply of food and shelter: nothing more holy than that' (33), and it is a form of non-living or negation which every individual craves to escape. Though he indicts labour because of its repetitions and its basically mechanical character, Lawrence is at this stage willing to contemplate the idea that mechanisation could liberate us from the necessity of work. He insists that we can never go back to pre-industrial forms of artisanal labour, and thus sees the progressive reduction of working time as the only way to imagine greater resources of time and energy for wasteful, excessive and creative forms of being. Work may be a displacement activity for the 'unsatisfied soul', it may be a method of bringing aspects of life into our consciousness, but it is only ever the pre-condition of creative life and may in practice be its negation.

In his essay on the 'Education of the People', written in 1918, Lawrence is still concerned about the inhibiting effects of fear: 'if you can't cure people of being frightened for their own existence, you'll educate them in vain'.¹ He believes that fear of poverty grips everyone and drives them towards desperate and destructive strategies of self-preservation, in response to a threat that may well not be very substantial: this fear mechanism will reappear in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as the bitch-goddess of success. But in 'Education of the People' Lawrence no longer sees work as a burden to be overcome, in fact he argues that it is irresponsible to educate children without considering the central role that physical and practical labour are likely to have in their adult lives. He condemns the idealism that 'sits decreeing that our children shall be educated pure from the taint of materialism and industrialism, and all the time it is fawning and cringing before industrialism and materialism' (93). He also sees the attempt to abstract a spiritualised notion of individuality from the simple material facts of labour as misguided, and even dangerous. Offering people some abstract future possibility of self-fulfilment or self-expression, beyond and apart from the world of work, is a kind of fraud: 'Away with the imbecile pretence of culture in the elementary schools. Remember the back streets, remember that the souls of the working people are only rendered neurasthenic by your false culture' (112). Against this idealism, Lawrence begins to construct his own versions of a materialism which seeks to ground the

individual in the affective and physiological structures of the body. His rhetoric is brutal as he advocates seizing babies from their mothers, or beating children, as a necessary means to overcome the deleterious cultural and individual effects of spiritualised and idealised forms of selfhood. Thinking of ourselves as ideal cerebral beings we tend to reject physical work as degrading or menial, and so Lawrence insists that we must find a version of selfhood that encompasses our physicality. He sees work, in this essay, as 'a pleasant occupation for a human creature, a natural activity' (149). Work may provide the means for personal independence, and even liberty, but it should be undertaken in a spirit of pragmatism, in a fashion that is absorbed but mindless.

This concern with the development of a physical model of individual selfhood is much more fully articulated in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), where Lawrence tries to substantiate his ideas about the interaction of physical and nervous forces within the individual. Some notion of practical creativity remains central to his conception of human individuality, and in an analysis reminiscent of Marx's comments on work and species being, Lawrence asserts that 'It is the desire of the human male to build a world: not "to build a world for you, dear"; but to build up out of his own self and his own belief and his own effort something wonderful.'² Work then becomes an integral part of Lawrence's account of the interaction of individual and species: we are from the moment of conception individuals but we are also bound by the psychic and physiological laws of our species which drive us towards creative interaction with, and transformation of, the external world through the activity of labour. Lawrence's account in *Fantasia* becomes increasingly embattled and he returns to the pernicious effects of spiritual forms of knowledge and the domination of mental over physical life: twin manifestations of the distorted and destructive will. 'Will' here is associated with the spiritual, with the 'upper self', and with destructive egoism. As Lawrence will express it in 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*': 'Men only know one another in menace. Individualism has triumphed. If I am a sheer individual, then every other being, every other man especially, is over against me as a menace to me.'³ This sense of being embattled, subject to threat and overwhelmed by the friction of other wills, will re-emerge in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In *Fantasia*, writing about dysfunction, danger and menace produces a violent supplement within the writing which again focuses on women and children. Lawrence argues that man's supreme responsibility is 'to fulfil his own profoundest impulses, with reference to none but God or his own soul, not taking woman into count at all' (124) and this task has become both more urgent and more violent by the end of the book:

But fight for your life, men. Fight your wife out of her own self-conscious pre-occupation with herself. Batter her out of it till she's stunned. Drive her back into her own true mode. Rip all her nice superimposed modern-woman and wonderful-creature garb off her. Reduce her once more to a naked Eve, and send the apple flying. (284)

This naked Eve, unlike the modern woman, is of course unlikely to work, or at least unlikely to be involved in waged labour outside the home.

By the end of the 1920s, Lawrence increasingly comes to see work as a point of resistance to excessively cerebral conceptions of selfhood: it may indeed be the residuum of the physical within social life, an activity whose materiality and temporality cannot be abstracted, despite the progressive tendency towards abstraction and alienation inherent in capitalist social and economic relations. When Lawrence recommends, in a letter written in 1927, that his wife's daughter should absorb herself in work, he does so out of despair over her capacity to engage in any other ways with the vital and dynamic processes he sees as integral to human subjectivity: 'it is better that she works. The young can neither love nor live. The best is that they work' (vi. 34).

The relations between the social degeneration and the psychic collapse Lawrence reads into contemporary idealisations of the self and the redemptive possibilities of manual labour are made even more explicit in the 1929 article, 'Men must Work and Women as Well'. Here he explicitly repudiates his earlier argument that material and mechanical progress could free us from the burden of toil, associating such inverted utopianism with 'great magnates of industry like Mr Ford'.⁴ Indeed, the aspiration to free ourselves from physical labour becomes simply another manifestation of the repudiation of material forms of subjectivity. Having craved freedom from physical work, we are now doomed to resent all physical demands on our time and energies. Lawrence certainly condemns the pernicious effects of such fastidiousness, arguing that all that it has produced is angry and resentful individuals who are nonetheless still required to undertake a series of manual tasks. Yet his language suggests that his earlier aspiration to escape from the brute demands of physical labour has not entirely disappeared: 'the labouring masses are and will be, even if all else is swept away: because they must be. They represent the gross necessity of man, which science has failed to save us from' (587). Even allowing for the ironic tone in which he represents this 'gross necessity', it is hard not to hear some lingering regret over science's failure. As he tries to exemplify residual and necessary forms of physical labour, Lawrence is driven towards the ruthlessly and remorselessly gendered categories already in place in an earlier study such as *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. Women's labour is represented by cooking, cleaning and child

care, while the epitome of male physical labour is revealed in the dark and sweaty body of the miner. Lawrence insists on the essential and originary distinction between men and women – ‘A child is born with one sex only, and remains always single in his sex’ (*Fantasia*, 140) – and he reads conflict between men and women as a symptom of the idealisation and repudiation of the physical, and specifically of physical labour.

Lady Chatterley's Lover, written in the late 1920s, engages in an imaginative mode with the ways in which work might express, repudiate or unsettle the destructive tendency towards idealism which Lawrence sees as most fully expressed through rapidly advancing industrialisation and mechanisation. Commercialism and industrialism are seen as dominating not simply economic relations between classes and between individuals, but also familial, sexual and cultural relations between all the characters in the novel. The novel is set in the industrial Midlands where Clifford Chatterley's country house is surrounded by the collieries that generate his wealth. This industrial landscape is consistently presented by the narrator as embodying broad social and ethical meanings:

With the stoicism of the young she took in the utter, soulless ugliness of the coal-and-iron Midlands at a glance . . . she heard the rattle-rattle of the screens at the pit, the puff of the winding engine, the clink-clink of shunting trucks, and the hoarse little whistle of the colliery locomotives . . . when the wind was that way, which was often, the house was full of the stench of this sulphurous combustion of the earth's excrement. But even on windless days the air always smelt of something under-earth: sulphur, iron, coal, or acid. And even on the Christmas roses the smuts settled persistently, incredible, like black manna from the skies of doom. (13)

The movement of this passage is instructive. It begins with the tentative, even unconscious, recognition by Lady Chatterley of the ugliness of the landscape that surrounds her and it then creates through the insistent repetitions of its language an almost physical unease in the reader as it moves towards its conclusion with the skies of doom. That it should be Constance Chatterley who glimpses the ugliness that surrounds her is important for the narrative development of the novel, but so too is her incapacity at this early stage really to grasp the enormity and significance of such ugliness. The narrator drives us towards conclusions Constance Chatterley is far from reaching, while also letting us know that she will be capable of such perceptions in the future.

This industrial landscape dominates the lives of those who work in it, turning them from human flesh to soulless mechanism. Working people simply strive to do better within the industrial system: to earn more money. This mechanised greed, a form of ‘prostitution to the Money-God’, is

condemned repeatedly in the novel but political alternatives to capitalism are represented as equally implicated in the logic of mechanism and system: 'You must submerge yourselves in the greater thing, the soviet-social thing. Even an organism is bourgeois: so the ideal must be mechanical . . . Each man a machine-part, and the driving power of the machine, hate: hate of the bourgeois! That, to me, is bolshevism' (*LCL*, 38). This remark brings together anxieties over mechanisation, objectification and submergence of self in what might seem like a relatively familiar sort of organicist nostalgia, but in fact the relations between mechanism and selfhood are far from stable in the novel as a whole. Representations of selfhood in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* draw on a series of minute but semantically and ideologically significant distinctions between self-consciousness, with its pathological manifestations in the will, and a pre-mental consciousness of self.

Thus, while one character can express anxiety about the ways in which communism necessitates a sacrifice of the self, other voices throughout the novel question the viability and the desirability of self-consciousness and its articulation through the will. Excessive self-consciousness, particularly a mental consciousness with no grounding in bodily experience, is ascribed to many of the characters in this novel. Michaelis, who is Lady Chatterley's lover in the early parts of the novel, is self-contained to the point of pathology: "Me give myself away! ha-ha!" he laughed hollowly, cynical at such an idea' (27). Yet he also suffers from a 'sad-dog sort of extinguished self' (28). Clifford has a precarious sense of self – 'he needed Connie to be there, to assure him he existed at all' (16) – but also has a coercive, bullying self that seeks to eradicate disturbing or unpredictable elements of its own or in others. Constance Chatterley's sister Hilda seeks to intervene in her sister's life and is condemned as wilful by Mellors in generalising terms that move from character analysis to social dogma: 'A stubborn woman an' 'er own self-will: ay, they make a fast continuity, they do' (245). But it is in the sphere of sexual relationships where the dangers of self-assertion and self-consciousness are most powerfully asserted. Connie's early sexual experiences with a young German student, with whom her primary connections are 'philosophical, sociological and artistic', involve merely 'a queer vibrating thrill inside the body, a final spasm of self-assertion' (8). 'Thrill' and 'spasm' are terms which signal superficiality of experience throughout the novel and are associated with attempts to ward off the creative and the unpredictable. Thus Connie's self-assertion is read through her fearful conformity and the result is a neurotic spasm.

Lady Chatterley's Lover becomes increasingly forceful in its articulation of the forms of authentic selfhood which are desirable and possible. Beginning with a sense that Connie's early sexual experiences might have

been transient and superficial but that she is still capable of change and development, the novel begins to see all manifestations of willed selfhood as pernicious and as irremediable. Mellors declares that 'when a woman gets absolutely possessed by her own will, her own will set against everything, then it's fearful, and she should be shot at last' (*LCL*, 280). Indeed Mellors has been given the power by the novel to distinguish between degenerate and empty forms of subjectivity, such as those associated with his ex-wife and with Clifford Chatterley, and creative forms of self-realisation. One of the first things we learn about Mellors is that he is 'sure of himself' and he is represented as intact and as separate to the point of hostility. For Connie, on the other hand, selfhood is a burden, a weight of mental consciousness that she carries from the opening pages of the novel until she 'could bear the burden of herself no more' (117). Connie's affair with Mellors leads to a loss of self which she both celebrates and fears ('she did not want to be effaced') and her will struggles against the forms of knowing associated in the novel primarily with the womb and the bowels: 'She had a devil of self-will in her breast that could have fought the full, soft, heavy adoration of her womb and bowels' (135-36).

Physical consciousness

Physical consciousness emerges, however fleetingly, as a key point of resistance to mechanisation and to the power of commerce in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. This version of selfhood is explored physiologically and historically in Lawrence's two sustained engagements with theories of human subjectivity: *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*. In these texts Lawrence argues that our conception of human subjectivity is partial, in that it interests itself only in our mental lives. For Lawrence this is a belated and contingent part of individual development. He prefers a psycho-biological model of selfhood which draws on networks of nerves to illuminate the particularities of human subjectivity. Lawrence insists that individuality is a given, though it is an attribute that may easily be lost. From the moment of conception the human infant is an individual whose development will depend on the particular balance of forces within distinct parts of the organism. Lawrence describes the forms of consciousness associated with areas such as the 'solar plexus' or the 'lumbar ganglion' and analyses the impact of these physical entities on the human individual. As in 'Education of the People', the imbrication of social policy, familial interaction and psychic life becomes increasingly troubling as Lawrence expresses his hostility not simply to the cerebral but also to the emotional. This may lie behind the brutality with which Mellors reprimands his daughter for

weeping over the death of a cat: “Ah, shut it up, tha false little bitch!” came the man’s angry voice, and the child sobbed louder’ (*LCL*, 58).

Lawrence’s interest in a psycho-biological model of subjectivity was by no means eccentric, though some of his conclusions undoubtedly were.⁵ Throughout *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* we can find traces of a range of social and medical models of psychic life and of the forms and meanings of its failures. Clifford is to some extent a victim of war, the physical wound that paralysed him being a harbinger of subsequent psychological wounding: ‘mentally he still was alert. But the paralysis, the bruise of the too-great-shock, was gradually spreading in his affective self’ (49). The image of the bruise allows for the representation of a wound that is sudden, the result of a specific trauma, but also part of a slow, cumulative process. Clifford’s loss of his affective self displays crucial attributes of ‘traumatic neurasthenia’, a medical condition widely discussed in the early years of the twentieth century.⁶

Neurasthenia was understood as a chronic condition, the result of exhaustion of nervous force, but it could also be the result of a more precise individual or social trauma. Clifford’s nerves function erratically, creating imbalances of energy throughout the novel. At times he suffers from a collapse of nervous energy, or he wastes nervous energy through self-deception or obsession, and at other moments he is in a ‘nervous frenzy’. When not braced up to work Clifford is reduced to ‘a net-work of nerves’ (139), a circulation of energy which serves simply to mask a dangerous void.

Clifford’s condition is named variously. Early in the novel he is suffering from ‘vacant depression’, while in the later stages of the novel his behaviour is diagnosed as hysterical. Throughout, however, he is associated with wasteful and compulsive spending of nervous energy to no particular end. This lack of ‘end’ is given forceful, perhaps even crude, expression in his failure to procreate. But it also has more abstract meanings which are associated with his life even before the war. As the inheritor of the legacy of industrial exploitation he is bound to a system that can only accelerate both production and acquisition in an ever more frantic spectacle of industrial growth. As a young intellectual he is similarly caught in a discursive economy that knows no bounds: the intellectual discussions in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* are notably futile and rather prolonged. This forceful indictment of wasteful nervous expenditure sits rather uncomfortably with Lawrence’s own fascination with excess and waste in his ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’, but in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* Lawrence displays a horror of non-productive, or non-procreative, expenditures of energy.

In the treatment of neurasthenia doctors recommended rest, but Clifford tries instead to overcome nervous and affective exhaustion by ever-increasing levels of work. His ‘work’ at the beginning of the novel is writing

fiction, an activity that is treated with great scepticism. Joint participation in Clifford's work appears to offer Clifford and Connie some shared and meaningful activity and we are told that 'their interests had never ceased to flow together, over his work' (18). But this shared project is not long sustained: from the outset we are told that what they had shared was a 'vague life of absorption in Clifford and his work'. The vagueness already tells us about a lack of focus, a certain drifting, the absorption is a loss of self based more on fear and negation than on creative transformation, and finally the absorption is primarily in Clifford and only secondarily in his work which suggests that such collaborative labour cannot mask a more fundamental division. The sentence contrasts strikingly with the narrator's conclusion about Connie and Mellors after they have struggled together to push Clifford's wheelchair uphill: 'It was curious, but this bit of work together had brought them much closer than they had been before' (192), closer presumably than all the sexual intimacies they have shared at this stage of the novel.

Clifford's work is a frenzy of neurotic activity whose aim is worldly success. Connie's father tells us that as literary texts, his stories are 'void', a judgement that Connie herself will come to share. Connie also comes to resent Clifford's work as a symptom of his self-obsession: 'She wanted to be clear of him, and especially of his consciousness, his words, his obsession with himself – his endless treadmill obsession with himself and his own words' (93). The narrative voice here enacts the futile repetitions of the process it is describing, assaulting us with Clifford's selfhood and his language. Clifford's writing is simply an enactment of the futility of his speech, with its proliferation of words and its increasing incapacity to name or to know the world: 'when he was alone he tap-tap-tapped on a typewriter, to infinity. But when he was not "working", and she was there, he talked, always talked' (83). The inauthenticity of this form of labour is clearly signalled by the inverted commas, as aesthetic creativity is reduced to repetitive and mechanical tapping. Connie's role in this creative work is similarly reduced: 'the thrill had gone out of it. She was bored by his manuscripts. She still dutifully typed them out for him' (99). The creative capacity of language is here savagely removed from any concerns with the mode of its material production. As one considers the numbers of women who gave up time to struggle with the typing of Lawrence's own manuscript of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* this insistent degradation of the activity of typing strikes a particularly uncomfortable note.

Degeneration and industry

Clifford's work of literary production is, then, a self-deceiving and self-obsessed exercise in futility, and is indeed an activity he is pleased to

renounce. As Connie's physical and mental health decline in the first section of the novel, Clifford acquires a nurse, Ivy Bolton, who will oversee the transference of his energies from literary to industrial production. Ivy Bolton is a strange and liminal character: she is the widow of a miner yet her education and professional training gain her an entry to the world of the Chatterleys. She has a fierce sense of class loyalty but also a fascination with the lives and mores of the upper class. As an independent working woman she is particularly susceptible to the corrosive effects of this novel's social and psychic categories which can only read her determination as pathological will. Ivy Bolton is introduced as a woman of some determination driven by a clear desire for economic independence: 'Ivy Bolton went to Sheffield, and attended classes in ambulance, special ambulance, and then the fourth year she even took a nursing course and got qualified. She was determined to be independent and keep her children. So she was assistant at Uthwaite hospital, just a little place, for a while' (*LCL*, 81). This training for independence actually leads her to economic, and later emotional, dependency on the Chatterleys. Her education separates her from the working classes, indeed leads to a sort of contempt for them whilst at the same time identifying her with the progressive movements of industrial capital, if not exactly with progressive capitalists. Mrs Bolton encourages Clifford to shift his energies towards the development of his mines, pointing out in particular the importance of local labour for young girls: 'keep the men going a bit better, and employ the girls' (106). Clifford is pleased to transfer his energies from the 'populace of pleasure to the populace of work' which he finds grim and terrible, but also more substantial: 'the meat and bones for the bitch-goddess were provided by the men who made money in industry' (107). Under Mrs Bolton's influence, Clifford becomes increasingly absorbed in business and in his mines, in the 'brute business of industrial production'.

For Clifford, identification with the processes of industrial labour creates a harmony between labour and selfhood, even if this is a harmony of degradation. Industry and commerce sustain fantasies of potency and agency for Clifford which he had found in no other cultural sphere: 'he really felt, when he had his periods of energy and worked so hard at the question of the mines, as if his sexual potency were returning' (147). For Ivy Bolton, on the other hand, an increasing identification with the process of industrial production serves to disconnect her from her class and from any sustainable notion of 'independence'. By the end of the novel, however, both are destroyed and reduced to mutual dependence and perversity: '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).

The workers in his mines are also reduced and degraded by the results of

Clifford's feverish work, by the rapidity and momentum of industrial change. Lawrence is particularly forceful in his representation of the impossibility of creative forms of selfhood within the spaces of industrial labour. In other parts of the novel Lawrence works to construct the tension of dialogue between different characters and the narrative voice. Constance Chatterley's increasing identification with the terms and convictions embodied in the narrative voice develops slowly and hesitantly throughout the novel and is mediated by her exchanges with Mellors. The working classes, however, are not permitted to enter into such imaginative or intellectual dialogue, but are consistently objectified and offered as emblematic by the narrative voice: their meanings are always already given. This objectification draws to some extent on existing forms of language: the naming of the mine and its associated industries as 'the works' serves to evacuate conceptions of individuality from the process of labour by identifying activity and place. This is a form of abstraction which might be seen as fundamental to the social relations of industrial production under a capitalist economic system, but in a novel that seeks to undo such abstraction and objectification its easy reproduction is striking. Industrial labourers are 'weird distorted, smallish beings like men' (*LCL*, 153) whose degradation renders any notion of collectivity impossible. Their physical and moral state makes the idea of common humanity ridiculous, and at the sight of them Connie's 'bowels fainted' (159).

The working classes have been reduced, by industrialisation and by education, to false consciousness and coercive will. Connie overhears working-class children singing in their new school, a building which resembles both a chapel and a prison, and responds with horror:

Anything more unlike song, spontaneous song, would be impossible to imagine: a strange, bawling yell that followed the outlines of a tune. It was not like savages: savages have subtle rhythms. It was not like animals: animals *mean* something when they yell. It was like nothing on earth, and it was called singing. Connie sat and listened with her heart in her boots, as Field was filling petrol. What could possibly become of such a people, a people in whom the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails, and only queer mechanical yells and uncanny will-power remained. (*LCL*, 152)

We can have no access to what this sort of singing exercise might mean to these children, or to whether they might elsewhere do other sorts of singing. Rather, they are condemned to represent the corrosive effects of industrialisation on human intuition and creativity. Working men are also read as expressive only of a system that contains them absolutely, 'men not men, but animas of coal and iron and clay' (169). They are identified completely with

the materials and with the mechanism of industrial production while working women are barely perceptible at all. Working people are determined by the system that produces the forms of their labour, and the details of their work are thus profoundly insignificant.

There is, apparently, no redemption from the destructive effects of industrial labour. Certainly, the elderly Squire Winter suggests that industrial work may in fact be the saving of the race when he says to Clifford: 'you may again employ every man at Tevershall. – Ah, my boy! – to keep up the level of the race, and to have work waiting for any man who cares to work! –' (150), but since this comment is made in the course of a speech in which the Squire congratulates Clifford on his future paternity its perspicacity is in some doubt. Mellors tells us, on the other hand, that working for money has turned men 'into labour-insects, and all their manhood taken away, and all their real life' (220).

Physical labour

The hopelessness of this analysis continually disturbs the narrative and imagery of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but the possible recovery of 'manhood' through labour is imagined, through the activities of the gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors. We learn very early in the novel that Mellors maintains his own domestic space through his own labour. He has handed the daily care of his daughter over to his mother, but tends to his own garden and does his own housework. His domestic work is the condition of his separateness and allows him to control his environment and the rhythms of his day. Mellors's 'little railed-in garden in the front of the house' is also a measure of his control of his own environment. Interestingly, it evokes a markedly less sensual engagement with gardening than Connie is to experience later in the novel: 'Connie especially felt a delight in putting the soft roots of young plants into a soft black puddle, and cradling them down. On this spring morning she felt a quiver in her womb, too' (162).

Connie discovers Mellors in the woods: drawn by the sound of his hammering she finds him in his shirt-sleeves, kneeling and at work. He resents the intrusion, but she is apparently fascinated by the spectacle. She enters his hut and sees a carpenter's bench, tools and nails, an axe, a hatchet and 'things in sacks': the paraphernalia of artisanal labour. She then settles down to watching 'the man at work'. This fascination carries with it its own forms of objectification, with Mellors imagined simply as 'the man', but this is surely abstraction to an essence rather than reduction to an emblem. For Connie, her earlier glimpse of Mellors washing merges with her attentive observation of his labour:

So Connie watched him fixedly. And the same solitary aloneness she had seen in him naked, she now saw in him clothed: solitary and intent, like an animal that works alone, but also brooding, like a soul that recoils away, away from all human contact . . . It was the stillness, and the timeless sort of patience, in a man impatient and passionate, that touched Connie's womb. (*LCL*, 89)

Such stillness contrasts markedly with the fevered toiling of Clifford or the mechanised repetitions of industrial labour. Mellors's labour is individual and artisanal, and his intentness is distinct from the 'vague absorption' of intellectual labour. Mellors is the son of a collier, who after receiving an education at Sheffield Grammar School becomes a clerk. He later 'chucked up my job at Butterley because I thought I was a weed clerking there' (201) and found work instead as a blacksmith on the pit-brow. As a blacksmith he is curiously placed in relation to mechanised labour since the blacksmith points both backwards to a vanishing form of agricultural production and forwards to the dependence of labourers on a functioning machine. He spends some time in the army, displaying a particular knack for working with horses and winning the support and affection of one of his officers. He gains a commission, but following the death of his friend gives up army life to return to manual labour. This narrative of Mellors's career stresses his agency, his capacity to choose particular places and forms of labour, and Connie's observation that 'he seemed so unlike a gamekeeper, so unlike a working-man anyhow' (68) captures something of this anachronistic quality.

But how are such forms of work possible within an economic and moral system that seems so destructive of productive labour? The answer may lie in some theory of uneven development, with Mellors emerging as an anachronistic figure whose very oddness might provide a resource for utopian imaginings, the kind of figure of medieval labour that Lawrence had indeed specifically disavowed in his 'Study of Thomas Hardy'. Certainly there are suggestions at a number of points that physical and manual labour were not always the alienated thing that they appear to be in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as a whole. At one point we are told that in the late Victorian period miners were 'good working men', though Mellors himself sees the decline as rather earlier: 'it's a shame, what's been done to people these last hundred years: men turned into nothing but labour-insects' (220). This uncertain periodisation is not simply a matter of carelessness, but a symptom of the particular interactions of myth and history within the novel: it is necessary for *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to imagine more integrated forms of labour, but not really to examine how or when they might have been realised.

Mellors's version of work is pre-industrial and he insists that 'I know nothing at all about all these mechanical things' (187), although as a trained blacksmith that is likely to be a question of willed ignorance. He extricates

himself imaginatively from the economic relations and industrial forms of production that dominate the world around him: 'bit by bit, let's drop the whole industrial life an' go back' (219). Since working for money can only lead to physical and moral deformity, and there is no solution to the 'wage squabble' except not to care, Mellors 'refused to *care* about money' (148).

Yet in the sphere of labour, it is far from clear how these transformations can possibly be brought about. We have already been told that the 'individual asserts himself in his disconnected insanity in these two modes: money and love' (*LCL*, 97), and without dwelling on the disconnected insanity we can indeed see that money and love are privileged modes of experience and relationship within *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The transformative possibilities of sexual relationship can be figured within the novel as a matter of unique and private forms of human relationship and as the outcome of the work of writing. It is certainly true that sexual behaviour is constantly metaphorised and pathologised in the novel and given public meanings, but, nonetheless, it is possible for two individuals, Connie and Mellors, to create forms of intimacy and passion that the novel represents as transformative and transgressive. In some sense the novel draws on the 'privacy' of sexual relations which it elsewhere denies in order to render alternative moral and sexual economies imaginable. It also builds up the symbolic and affective meanings of a series of terms, such as 'blindly', 'intuitively' and 'queer' in order to allow for the imaginative apprehension of new modes of selfhood. I do not intend to suggest that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* constructs some sort of sexual utopia: Mellors's hatred of 'mouth kisses', his murderous dislike of lesbians, and his distaste for black women who are 'a bit like mud' (204) all suggest that fear and phobia continue to circulate within his sexual fantasies and knowledges. Equally, Connie's increasing horror of other women ('to be free of the strange dominion and obsession of *other women*. How awful they were, women!' (253)) suggests that her new ways of knowing and experiencing the world are not without their rather brutal exclusions. Nonetheless, it remains the case that the novel can, through its own literary work, construct another version of sexual relationship with a freedom that is simply unavailable in the case of economic relations.

At the end of the day, and at the end of the novel, Mellors has to have a job: 'I've got to work, or I should die' (167). This need is not a matter of economic stringency, since he has an army pension, but is a question of having something to keep him occupied and 'working with the immediate quiet absorption that was characteristic of him' (198). He has to work in order to function creatively as an individual and he has to work for someone else in order to have the discipline of labour, but he refuses to participate in the 'wage-struggle'. The dilemma is simply exacerbated by his relationship with

Connie who could, after all, keep both of them financially secure, but Mellors makes it clear that his involvement in productive and waged labour is a condition of the viability of their relationship.

There is never any question that Connie might need work as a culmination of her selfhood since the narrative of her life is created out of affective and domestic relationships. It is pregnancy which delivers her from inertia, and motherhood is set to become her primary occupation. For Mellors, however, his life must have some sense of movement and purpose which is connected to his role as productive labourer: 'Living is moving and moving on . . . a man must offer a woman *some* meaning in his life, if it's going to be an isolated life, and if she's a genuine woman. – I can't be just your male concubine' (*LCL*, 276).

By the end of the novel Connie and Mellors are living apart, presumably temporarily. She is waiting to have their baby and he is learning to become a farmer:

And for six months he should work at farming, so that eventually he and Connie could have some small farm of their own, into which he could put his energy. For he would have to have some work, even hard work, to do, and he would have to make his own living, even if her own capital started him.

(*LCL*, 298)

Connie's capital sits uncomfortably beside Mellors's desire to make his own living because the acknowledgement of the need for capital allows social relations and economic structures to intrude into the unmediated exchange of work and individual selfhood that Mellors projects. Mellors ends by invoking the 'great groping white hands' (300) that will seek to crush all those who would live outside the norms of money and will, but in the face of the novel's incapacity really to imagine any such space except in the most abstract terms, these white hands become ghostly and even fantastical. The work of the novel has taken us so far from the contingencies and materiality of productive labour that even its vivid fears and passionate denunciations begin to feel less solid. The symbolic invocation of degeneration and decline cannot sustain its rootedness as we are taken from the physicality and economic contingency of labour to the ghostly abstraction of those groping white hands.

NOTES

- 1 D. H. Lawrence, 'Education of the People', in *RDP*, 85–166 (p. 91).
- 2 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk J. Struik (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 113; D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1922), p. 3.

- 3 D. H. Lawrence, 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', in *LCL*, 513.
- 4 D. H. Lawrence, 'Men Must Work and Women as Well', in *PII*, 582-91 (p. 583).
- 5 See Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), for an account of late nineteenth-century psycho-biology.
- 6 See, for example, Clifford Allbutt, 'Neurasthenia', in *A System of Medicine*, ed. Clifford Allbutt and Humphry Davy Rolleston (London: Macmillan, 1910), VII. 727-91.

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
D. H. LAWRENCE

EDITED BY
ANNE FERNIHOUGH



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521623391

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First published in print format 2001

ISBN-13 978-0-511-22156-9 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-10 0-511-22156-8 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-62339-1 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-62339-1 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-62617-0 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-62617-X paperback

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