Discontent with Civilization

in D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

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Introduction

The similarities in thoughts and subjects of the modernist writer D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), are numerous and striking. Both tried to understand their characters and patients respectively as driven by unconscious desires, and both saw the repressive function of society upon these desires as problematic. The resemblances were perhaps first made apparent in Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers*, in which many critics saw a fictionalization of Freud’s Oedipus complex (see, for example, A.B. Kuttner’s “A Freudian Appreciation” and H.M. Daleski’s “The Release: The First Period”). However, despite the similarities, as Philippa Tristram points out, Lawrence was quite critical of Freud, and even wrote his own psychoanalytic credos, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (138). While these were written in opposition to Freud, the fact that Lawrence felt the need to write within a psychoanalytic discourse to explain his views on the human psyche further underlines his bond with Freudian theory.

Another thing Lawrence and Freud share is the popular misconception that they were obsessed with sex. In Lawrence’s case this is not least due to the explicit treatment of the subject in his last great work, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928). Nevertheless, the novel is really a traditional story about a married woman who falls in love with a man below her station. However, unlike the knights of medieval romances about courtly love, the vassal, Oliver Mellors, is not content with worshipping his Lady Constance Chatterley from a distance to keep their love pure. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* love is genuine only when it is based in the body, and thus Connie’s love for her husband, Lord Clifford Chatterley, is doomed from the moment he returns from the First World War, an invalid below the waist, incapable of having a physical relationship with his wife. Connie and Mellors break most of the laws of decency in their relationship, and they do this as an act of defiance against their society, which they perceive to be corrupted by industrialization.
This essay will argue that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* both portrays and is a revolt against civilization. However, the novel is also a part of that civilization, which creates an ambivalence in the textual revolt. To do this, Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) will be used as a theoretical framework for the analysis. It should be noted that this does not mean that Freud’s text should be seen as a key to the novel; it will merely be used as a tool to understand a dimension of it. The parallels between *Civilization and Its Discontents* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* are remarkable, almost as if one was based upon the other. Surprisingly few critics observe this, and one of the first to have done so, Naomi Mitchison in 1930, curiously enough finds the two works “incompatible”, although they focus on the same issues (963). Tristram, on the other hand, speculates that *Civilization and Its Discontents* might have made Lawrence realize he had more in common with Freud than he thought, had he had time to read it before he died (139).

Before moving on to the analysis, it is necessary to define some Freudian terms that will be used in the essay. Freud’s theories can seem strange, even bizarre, so it is best to keep in mind that most of the concepts he uses should be seen as theoretical constructions or metaphors for how the human psyche works, rather than as ideas about actual phenomena. As the title *Civilization and Its Discontents* suggests, Freud there investigates how civilization affects the individual negatively. Freud’s definition of “civilization”, which will be used in this essay, is “the sum total of those achievements and institutions that distinguish our life from that of our animal ancestors and serve the dual purpose of protecting human beings against nature and regulating their mutual relations” (27). The foundation of this civilization is the love drive, Eros, which seeks to join individuals together in larger units such as families and nations (55). In order to reach this goal of larger communities, civilization has to restrict Eros in certain ways, for example through the incest taboo, which prevents families from forming too close bonds that may limit their contacts with other groups (39f).
Besides Eros, Freud argues that humans also have a death drive, which aims at destruction (55f). Its aggression is turned both inwards, towards the self, and outwards, towards other people, and it therefore poses the greatest threat towards civilization (56ff). The threat is hampered by the super-ego, a form of internal authority that uses the conscience to restrict immoral actions (60f; 73). It is first developed in children through fear of punishment and of loss of love in reaction to thoughts and actions considered improper, but it eventually becomes a completely internalized part of the ego (61ff). Thus, in reaction to the death drive’s urge to impose harm upon others, the super-ego imposes the same harm upon the ego (60f). This, according to Freud, is the reason for the individual’s discontent within civilization: through the super-ego the two strongest forces within every human, Eros and the death drive, are restricted (51). The result is not only the ability to live together in relatively peaceful communities, but also neurosis and unhappiness (79).

While Lawrence’s relationship with Freudian theory in general is indeed interesting, this is not the place to investigate it further, but the curious reader would probably find Anne Fernihough’s *D.H. Lawrence Aesthetics and Ideology*, as well as Tristram’s chapter “Eros and Death (Lawrence, Freud and Women)” in *Lawrence and Women* useful. However, because these studies do not deal much with *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, they are not used in the analysis of this essay, whereas Michael Squires’ article “Modernism and the Contours of Violence in D.H. Lawrence’s Fiction” and Peter Fjâgesund’s *The Apocalyptic World of D.H. Lawrence* have been of greater value, as they deal with themes essential to the study at hand, such as violence and industrialization.

The analysis of this essay consists of two chapters. The first will examine the society depicted in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and how it oppresses the characters, as well as how this depiction makes the satirical features of the narration problematic. The second chapter will
then study how the novel portrays Connie and Mellors’ revolt against this society, and how Lawrence’s writing of the novel, and the novel itself relates to this revolt.
“Civilised society is insane”: Civilization in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

In order to illuminate what it is that Connie and Mellors revolt against, this chapter will analyze the society that is portrayed in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, with the use of Freudian concepts such as the super-ego and the death drive. The separation of mind and body in the characters is explored, as well as the use of the First World War as a symbol of the destructiveness of industrialization. Lastly, after an investigation of how mechanized society affects the individual and nature, the aggressive energy in the narration of the novel is discussed.

According to Freud, communities have super-egos comparable to those of individuals (77f). Indeed, not only the functions, but also the principles enforced by these two super-egos are often similar, and thus the moral and social codes of a society can give us an idea of those of the individuals in that society as the former are usually more easily recognizable than the latter (Freud 78). One of the most important principles of the society depicted in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is stated in its opening sentence: “Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically” (5). Thus there is a discrepancy between reality and the characters’ attitudes towards it, a rejection of the feelings demanded by the tragic age. As Kirsty Martin explains, for Lawrence, emotion is always based in the body (21), but the society and most of the characters of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* place all emphasis on the mind, while the body is despised or ignored, which in effect distances the characters from true feelings. Hence the failure to feel the seriousness of their own age, to take it tragically, can be traced to the characters’ detachment from their own bodies.

This distance can be seen in Connie’s and her sister Hilda’s first love affairs: they feel that “[i]t was the talk that mattered supremely”, while “the love-making . . . was only a sort of primitive reversion” (7). To them, love is a thing of the mind, and its bodily expression, sex, is only an unfortunate by-product of it. Clifford, whose disability does not allow for many
purely physical experiences, claims the body is nothing but an “encumbrance” and prefers the “supreme pleasure of the life of the mind” (234). Similarly, his friends, together with whom he experiences this “supreme pleasure” through intellectual discussions, hope civilization will “help us to forget our bodies” and think “nothing but the spirit in us is worth having” (74f). Even Tommy Dukes, who predicts a future “resurrection of the body” and a “democracy of touch”, merely intellectualizes this idea, plays with it in his mind, rather than implementing it in his feelings and, in effect, his body (75).

This intellectualization portrayed in the characters can be seen as a form of sublimation, explained by Salman Akhtar as the aiming of sexual energy into non-sexual activities of social worth (273f). Freud argues that civilization, by challenging men (his exclusion of women, although a result of the society he lived in, is very unfortunate) with “increasingly difficult tasks . . . oblig[es] them to sublimate their drives” (39). In Lady Chatterley’s Lover this is particularly evident in Clifford, whose disability deprives him of all forms of sexual intercourse. Instead Lawrence turns his character’s energies towards pursuits of high social worth indeed: writing and, later, coal mining. Clifford’s stories are described as lacking “touch” and “actual contact” (16). Their artificiality, which makes them “true to modern life”, as stated by the narrator, is also a sign that they do not take seriously the tragedy of the age they so accurately portray (16). Hence Clifford’s lack of bodily awareness, and his refusal to take things tragically, is illustrated in his texts.

Furthermore, Connie is portrayed at this stage as almost as detached from her body as Clifford. While her former lovers “insisted on the sex thing” (7), her relationship with Clifford is completely of the mind: it is described how “[h]e was so very much at one with her, in his mind and hers. But bodily they were non-existent to one another . . . They were so intimate, and utterly out of touch” (18). As Gerald Doherty notes, Connie actually takes part in Clifford’s sublimation (paragraph 18). She helps him write his stories, and feels how it
engages not only her soul, but also her “body and sex” (16). Her entire being and all its energies, including that of her sex, are focused upon these stories, while none remains for bodily experiences.

Eventually, Connie’s energies are directed elsewhere, which will be discussed further below, but so are Clifford’s. His nurse, Mrs Bolton plants the idea in him that he should engage himself more in his coal mines, and when he becomes a successful businessman through mechanizing the mines, he feels he has “fulfilled his life-long secret yearning: to get out of himself” (108). However, as Fjågesund argues, the energy that Clifford puts into the mines is “an active contribution to the ultimate destruction of the modern world” (149). In “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, an essay written in response to the reactions to the novel, Lawrence describes Clifford as “a pure product of our civilization” (333). In this way, Clifford ultimately becomes a personification of the society that Connie and Mellors rebel against. Not only does he lack touch and tenderness, he also sublimates his sexual energies towards writing shallow stories in order to gain popularity and towards mechanizing his industry and, as a result, the miners who work there.

However, it is easy to forget that Clifford is very much a victim of the First World War. His incapability to take things as they are, tragically, is a result of his physical disability, which in turn is a result of the war: “he had been so much hurt, something inside him had perished, some of his feelings were gone” (6). Indeed, it is impossible to understand the novel without recognizing its post-war context. Squires notes how all the major characters, as well as the narrator, have been deeply affected and wounded, physically or mentally, by the war (96). This being said, some critics have perhaps put too much emphasis on it. In her introduction to the hardback Penguin Classics edition of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Doris Lessing argues that the First World War is the most important theme of the novel (xvif). While it is true that the war has a very prominent position, considering it to be the theme of
the novel is perhaps somewhat simplistic. Rather, the war, for Lawrence, represents other concepts central to the themes of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, such as violence, modernity, and industrialism.

To understand this it is necessary to look at an article titled “With the Guns” that Lawrence wrote less than a month after the outbreak of the First World War. In it he criticizes the impersonality of modern warfare. It is not war as such that troubles him, but the mechanization of it. He praises Italian soldiers for their bravery in battle, but also for their inability to “feel themselves parts of a machine” (“With the Guns”). New kinds of far-reaching weapons enable soldiers to fire guns without ever knowing if or whom they hit, which makes warfare impersonal and turns the individual soldier into “a fragment of a mass . . . [with] no rights, no self, no being” (“With the Guns”). This is exactly what happens to workers in an industrialized, civil society according to Lawrence. To him, the war was simply the ultimate, but far from the only, example of the destruction of men by machines.

Consequently, to Lawrence, there are two forms of violence, one evil and unnatural and one healthy and natural. The former is mechanical and impersonal. It is to fire at an unseen enemy in cold blood without ever knowing if the bullet killed, wounded, or missed. The latter demands the “old natural courage” required to charge towards a visible enemy (“With the Guns”). Petra Rau argues that in “With the Guns”, Lawrence describes “militarism as a symptom of the modern age of technology that threatened to force apart body and spirit” (137). It is not killing an enemy or war as such that is immoral, but the lack of true feeling and naturalness in war in the industrialized age. Industry, not violence, is evil.

This view of violence as something natural is, of course, also evident in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where Freud argues that it is necessary for human wellbeing. The death drive is surely present in Lawrence’s brave Italians who openly attack their enemies, but is it likewise there in the soldiers who blindly fire at invisible targets in cold blood? As Lawrence depicts
the modern soldiers in the article as nothing but “fragments of a mass” without self, their violence cannot possibly come from the death drive of that self. Instead it could be argued that as parts of the mass of a community, they act under the influence of the violence of that community’s super-ego towards those who do not live up to its moral demands and those who try to hinder the extension of the social group, for example by waging war against it. Hence the two forms of violence evident in Lawrence’s writings can be distinguished as the natural violence of the self and the civilizing violence of the super-ego.

What, then, does this have to do with Lady Chatterley’s Lover? Simply the fact that the novel is a warning about what happens when the super-ego’s violence grows too dominant. According to Freud, the super-ego becomes destructive when its demands are not adapted to the level of control over the drives that the ego is actually capable of exercising (79). Mellors predicts that the human species will make itself extinct by repressing what Freud would call the drives: he tells Connie that “if we go on in this way, with everybody, intellectuals, artists, government, industrialists and workers all frantically killing off the last human feeling, the last bit of their intuition, the last healthy instinct – if it goes on in algebraical [sic] progression, as it is going now: then ta-tah! to the human species! Good bye! darling! [sic]” (218). Just as Freud fears that “humanity . . . [has] become ‘neurotic’ under the influence of cultural strivings”, Mellors, even more pessimistically, predicts the destruction of Britain, if not humanity (80). They both blame the violence of the super-ego for this.

Throughout Lady Chatterley’s Lover, this view of violence and destruction is associated with the modern, mechanized society that the novel is set in. Fjågesund claims that industry is intimately connected to a “sense of impending doom” in the text (150). The coal dust from the pits stains everything in its surroundings, creating an apocalyptic mood, as when “even on the Christmas roses the smuts settled persistently, incredible, like black manna from skies of doom” (13). Connie is horrified at the sight of some workers, who seem to her “on the
spontaneous intuitive side dead, but dead. Half-corpse all of them” (153). In her mind she
describes the colliers working in Clifford’s pits as “only the grey half of a human being”
(159). The workers are only half-humans, without true feelings. Disillusioned, Connie asks
herself, “[w]hat 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?” (152). In psychoanalytical terms, industry, which is a part of civilization, seems to
have deprived the workers of their ability to connect with their natural drives.

Moreover, industry is also responsible for the destruction of nature, in Lady Chatterley’s
Lover represented by the wood around Clifford’s hall, Wragby. During one of her walks,
Connie realizes that not even the wood is left “unravished” by humans (94). During the war,
Sir Geoffrey cut down some of the trees “for trench timber”, which damaged the sense of “the
mystery of wild old England” (42f). Connie thinks this “let[s] in the world” and ruins “the
pure seclusion of the wood” (42). Similarly, Mellors ponders how the lack of solitude offered
by the wood comes from the mechanization of society:

The fault lay there, out there, in those evil electric lights and diabolical rattlings of
engines. There, in the world of the mechanical greedy, greedy mechanism and
mechanised greed, sparkling with lights and gushing hot metal and roaring with traffic,
there lay the vast evil thing, ready to destroy whatever did not conform. Soon it would
destroy the wood, and the bluebells would spring no more. All vulnerable things must
perish under the rolling and running of iron. (119)

This violation of the wood is particularly interesting considering, as John B. Humma
observes, that it functions as a “polar opposition to Tevershall pit and town” (78). Hence, in
the conflict between industry and nature, nature seems to be losing. In his article, in which
Humma explores the nature imagery in the novel, he argues that Lawrence associates the connection between nature and the individual with the connection between “mind consciousness and blood consciousness”, or, roughly translated into Freudian terminology, super-ego and id (78). This in effect means that nature’s defeat in the battle against industry and civilization implies the id’s defeat in its struggle against the super-ego. Violence upon nature is violence upon human drives.

Interestingly, violence is also evident in the narration of the novel. Squires even calls Lady Chatterley’s Lover the “culmination of violence as art” (101). Curiously, violence is missing from the narration of the two scenes where it is actually depicted, the one where Mellors more or less rapes Connie (132ff) and the one where they have anal sex and “[i]t cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her” (247). Squires discusses how these scenes are instead narrated so that they emphasize Connie’s heightened sensibility through her body as an effect of Mellors’ violence, which breaks down her “social shield” (98f). The violence that should have been in these scenes is instead “distributed . . . into the narrator’s animosity” towards different concepts he finds offensive in modern society (Squires 99). This almost seems to be a form of sublimation, not of sexual, but of aggressive, energy. It is not channeled into the scenes of actual violence, which are both also descriptions of a new form of intimacy. Instead, it is directed towards concepts of social significance, if not higher social worth, such as commercialism, industrialism, and shallowness (Squires 99).

However, contrary to what might be expected considering Lawrence’s views on natural and healthy aggression, the violence of the narration is not of the direct, brave kind of the Italian soldiers Lawrence praises in “With the Guns”. Rather, as Charles Michael Burack notes, it is reminiscent of what is known of Clifford’s writing (17). The narrator describes how “Clifford was really clever at that slightly humorous analysis of people and motives which leaves everything in bits at the end. But it was rather like puppies tearing the sofa-
cushions to bits, except that it was not young and playful, but curiously old, and almost obscenely conceited” (50). Just like Clifford’s stories, the narrator is “clever, rather spiteful . . . [and] curiously true to modern life” (16), for example when he tells the reader that “[t]he gentry were departing to pleasanter places, where they could spend their money without having to see how it was made” (156), or that ”the Prince [of Wales] had been a King, and the King had died, and now there was another King, whose chief function seemed to be, [sic] to open soup-kitchens” (157). Thus the violence of the narration points to an instability in the relation between the novel’s form and its content. While the uncivilized aggression of Mellors is shown in the story to be natural and healthy and have a resurrecting potential, the aggression used in the narration is actually of the civilized, distanced kind that is at the same time criticized by the narrator. It is not the violence of Freud’s death drive, but the mechanized violence of the super-ego of industrial society. The narrator is actually satirizing the tragic, rather than taking it tragically.

To recapitulate this first chapter, Lady Chatterley’s Lover is set in a form of post-apocalyptic society, where the mind and the body are separated, and the former is given prominence over the latter, which is rather looked upon as an impediment. As emotions are inevitably connected to the body for Lawrence, this separation results in an inability to feel the appropriate emotions, to take the tragic tragically. The reason for the tragic sense of the age, the First World War, while essential to the novel, is basically a symbol of the industrial form of violence caused by civilization. Violence in itself is not evil, but the modern, mechanized form of it is. Through a psychoanalytical perspective, this can be seen as the violence of the super-ego, distinguished from that of the death-drive. This civilized violence not only results in the destruction of nature, but may also, in Mellors’ view, bring about the destruction of humanity. Paradoxically, as the novel can be seen as a form of critique of the industrial society it depicts, where lack of bodily awareness and true feeling make people
unable to take the tragic tragically, the narrator has a tendency to use the civilized weapons of irony and satire that he criticizes, which indicates an ambivalence in the novel’s critique of civilization.
The Courage of Tenderness: Revolt in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

The nature of the society depicted in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* having been established, the following chapter will focus on the way the text portrays a revolt against this society, as well as the relationship between the revolt and the novel itself and its author. The relationship between Connie and Mellors will be analyzed through the perspective of how it enables their revolt to take place and how the physical nature of it can be seen as a celebration of the body and as such of true emotion and of taking things seriously. The concept of “tenderness”, central to the novel, will be closely analyzed to show how it is linked to the unconscious and human drives. Lastly it will be argued that the very writing of the novel can be seen as a revolutionary act, but also that the novelistic form can be claimed to contradict the revolt *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* portrays.

In one way, Connie and Mellors’ revolt can be seen as fairly straightforward. Their love affair is in itself a revolt against the conventions of their society. In the England of the 1920s where their story is set, an aristocratic lady simply did not run away from her husband to conceive the child of his gamekeeper. As Freud asserts, an adult was limited to “heterosexual genital love” within a marriage with the purpose of procreation (40). While it was usually generally admitted that people had sex, how and with whom it was acceptable to have it was quite restricted. There are hence several taboos broken at once in the story: infidelity, the transcendence of class boundaries, divorce, and extra-genital sex. Nevertheless, while these things would perhaps be enough to class Connie and Mellors’ relationship as a form of rebellion, the revolt is really more thorough and more complex, as the following discussion will show.

As has already been mentioned, Freud worries that the demands of the super-ego, both on the cultural and the individual level, can become too severe for the individual to cope with. He claims that if the super-ego requires the ego to exercise more control over the id than it is
actually capable of, the ego may eventually become neurotic or rebel against the super-ego (79). Connie does both these things in reaction to the stipulations of her society. Her depression is depicted as being a direct result of her lack of emotion; she has a sense that “[w]hatever happened, nothing happened, because she was so beautifully out of contact” (19f). Eventually, when she meets Mellors, her neurosis is turned into rebellion, partly through an awakening of her body, reinstating the contact she has been lacking.

If it is correct, as was argued in the previous chapter, that the foremost principle of the society portrayed in Lady Chatterley’s Lover is the refusal to feel sincerely, then a genuine revolt against that society must include an attempt to take the state of the world seriously. Mellors is despairingly pessimistic about the future; he sees how tragic the world is and takes it very tragically. The society he lives in scares him because he knows it is “a malevolent, partly-insane beast”, which makes him wish his relationship with Connie had never been initiated (120). In contrast, before she meets Mellors, Connie is depicted as so disconnected from the world and her body (and thus, by Lawrentian definition, from her feelings), that she is too distanced from them to feel anything at all genuinely. When she visits the hut to see the chicks before her relationship with Mellors has begun, she is connected to the word “forlorn” three times in two pages: as she watches the chicks, she feels “the agony of her own female forlornness”, when she cries, Mellors sees “something so mute and forlorn in her”, and the narrator describes that she is crying “in all the anguish of her generation’s forlornness” (114f).

The word “forlorn”, meaning “pitifully sad and abandoned or lonely” marks her depression as detaching her from the rest of the world, rather than connecting her tragedy to that of the world. In contrast, when she goes to the wood to meet Mellors the day following their first sexual encounter, she is portrayed as linked to nature: “she could almost feel it in her own body, the huge heave of the sap in the massive trees, upwards, up, up to the bud-tips” (121f), echoing Mellors’ merging with the wood the previous night after he has walked her home and
“folded himself into” the darkness of the wood (120). When her connection with the world is being reestablished through her relationship with Mellors, Connie is both bodily and emotionally awakened, and as a consequence able to start taking the world as it is.

However, the fact that the ability to take the tragic state of the world tragically is necessary in order to revolt against the society described in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* does not mean that it is in itself a sufficient criterion for rebellion. In fact, taking things too tragically can even stifle the revolt by allowing fear to take control over actions, as can be seen in Mellors’ attempt to isolate himself from other people, even though he feels that having a relation with a woman is “the core to [his] life” (204). Until Connie enters Mellors’ life, his tragic worldview only results in fatalism: he thought he had “done with it all”, life that is, but his relationship with Connie means he has “begun again” (118). This starting to live again is done very reluctantly; because Mellors is afraid of society, he wishes he could stay detached from it, but knows that “[t]he world allows no hermits” (119). With characteristic gloom, he has “a sense of foreboding” when he thinks of his relationship with Connie in relation to the world, and wishes “there were nobody else in the world!” (120). As Connie points out, he “seem[s] to have such a lot behind” him (216); he hopes only that humanity will soon have “wiped each other out” and does not believe in the future (218). The thought of the child Connie is carrying, representing this future, fills him with dread because “it seems to [him] a wrong and bitter thing to do, to bring a child into this world” (218). Nevertheless, just like Connie he is changed by their relationship, although more slowly and reluctantly. While she is already partly transformed and more at one with the world the day after their first love-making, Mellors is unable to feel glad that Connie is pregnant until their last encounter, when she coaxes him into admitting that if he is “tender to [the child] . . . that will be its future” and kisses her belly “to kiss down to the womb and the foetus within the womb” (278).
Hence just as Mellors gives Connie the ability to feel sincerely, she gives him the ability to hope for a better world. Together these two qualities enable them to revolt against civilization by living according to their own principles, rather than those set by society. Taking the world and the age seriously makes it impossible merely to treat it as something that can be dismissed as ridiculous, as Clifford does. Instead, they have to live their lives in it as though they affect the future.

Having established the principle behind Connie and Mellors’ revolt – taking the world seriously – and the fact that a mutual exchange of attitudes is needed between them to enable it, it is now time to investigate what is emphasized in the portrayal of their living their lives as if they mattered. If, as Martin argues, emotions are linked to the body in Lawrence’s works, then the revolt must start in a celebration of the body, an assumption that is supported by Rau who claims that “Mellors and Constance are Lawrence’s version of a future that restores the body through sex rather than through machines” (136). As has already been pointed out, Mellors is a very physical person, who “stand[s] for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings” (279). Douglas Wuchina argues that he has “an uncommonly well-developed sensual awareness” (175). To Mellors, physical sensations are so important that he can tell Connie that “if I only lived ten minutes, an’ stroked thy arse an’ got to know it, I should reckon I’d lived one life” (223). Mellors is thereby an epitome of bodily awareness.

Connie, on the other hand, has to be taught how to appreciate such things. She is unable to “understand the rapture it was” for Mellors to touch her, and during their second love-making she distances herself so much from it that she finds it “a little ridiculous”, echoing Clifford’s view of the world (126). Not until her third coupling with Mellors does she actually reach an orgasm, after which she feels as if “[a]nother self was alive in her . . . in her womb and bowels”; she has started to become aware of her bodily self (135). Eventually she becomes so dedicated to this awareness that she preaches to Clifford that “the life of the body is a greater
reality than the life of the mind” and that in the future lies “a lovely, lovely life in the lovely universe, the life of the human body” (234f). Contrary to what has been argued about the nuisance of the body by Clifford and his friends, Connie begins to appreciate the rest of the world only after she has become attentive to her body as an inherent part of her self. Thus the novel shows how bodily awareness leads not only to physical but also to mental happiness.

This celebration of the body is not only evident in the two main characters, but also in the narration. Burack argues that the sex scenes between Connie and Mellors are narrated through “bodily focalization”, meaning that rather than depicting the action from the point of view of “a self constituted by personal and social qualities”, it is shown through that of “a self founded on bodily, impersonal forces and responses” (37). The characters are portrayed as their bodies, rather than their individual selves, as in the following passage, when Mellors forces himself on Connie in the wood: “For a moment he was still, inside her, turgid there and quivering. Then as he began to move in the sudden helpless orgasm, there awoke in her new strange thrills rippling inside her, rippling, rippling, like a flapping overlapping of soft flames, soft as feathers, running to points of brilliance, exquisite, exquisite, and melting her all molten inside” (133). In passages such as this, Connie and Mellors’ names are rarely used; instead they are only pronouns, or simply “the woman” and “the man”.

This physical form of narration can be contrasted with the mechanized, civilized one used to mock modern society, as was discussed in the previous chapter. It is especially often used in relation to Clifford, as when describing how his “cool and contactless assurance that he belonged to the ruling class didn’t prevent his tongue from lolling out of his mouth as he panted after the bitch-goddess . . . After all, if you really looked closely at Clifford panting after the bitch-goddess, he was a buffoon. And a buffoon is more humiliating than a bounder” (72f). The picture of his lolling tongue is quite cruel, and the distance that the narrator upholds between himself and his subject-matter gives his sarcasm a sharp edge, especially
when compared to the complete lack of distance in the passages of bodily focalization. There is hence a clear instability in the narration of the novel. On the one hand, this can be seen as a chaotic and thus, as civilization stands for order, uncivilized feature of the novel. On the other hand, Squires points out that unstable narration is a Modernist literary attribute (98). As such it is a characteristic of the contemporary civilization that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* criticizes.

However, this celebration of the body in the novel does not imply that the mind should be completely abandoned, a point which is often overlooked by critics. For example, Kate Millet argues that it is really only Connie who lets go of her “self, ego, will, individuality”, while Mellors, like other “Lawrentian heroes”, stays an individualist (244). Had this been correct, the revolt discussed in this essay would have been only Connie’s, without Mellors taking part in it. However, contrary to what Millet seems to think, Lawrence is not propagating for a complete and constant loss of self, but rather for the ability to lose it when it is in the way of true experience. Mellors already has this ability, as can be seen when “[d]riven by desire, and by dread of the malevolent Thing outside, he made his round in the wood, slowly, softly. He loved the darkness and folded himself into it. It fitted the turgidity of his desire which, in spite of all, was like a riches [sic]: the stirring restlessness of his penis, the stirring fire in his loins!” (120). Here he is nothing but desire; his self is lost, enabling him to merge into unity with the wood.

Nevertheless, he can at other times be an intellectual, very much living in his mind, as when he lies in bed speaking to Connie about how he wants to change the world and “wipe the machines off the face of the earth”, and his penis barely reacts to her caresses (219f). Mellors is simply an example of what Lawrence writes about in “A Propos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*”: “Life is only bearable when the mind and the body are in harmony, and there is a natural balance between the two, and each has a natural respect for the other” (310). The fact that Connie needs to learn how to sometimes give her body prominence over her
mind does not mean that she should become only body and no mind. Even at the end of the novel, she can still use her mind, as when, by questioning him in an almost Socratic fashion, she helps Mellors realize that he “stand[s] for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings” (277ff).

Hence, while it is easy to understand and sympathize with Millet’s feminist critique, which is overall very well founded, she sometimes seems to be too busy sorting the characters into the categories “male” and “female” to take their individuality into account. Connie and Mellors both give the other something s/he did not have before. Connie learns to feel with her body, and Mellors learns to feel hope, although very distrustfully, for the future. There is no question about the fact that Lawrence’s views on women are problematic, to say the least, but to simply read his works in the light of these views is not sophisticated enough to give a thorough understanding of the texts.

Nevertheless, although the mind should not be expelled from human consciousness, the emphasis on bodily experience is certainly the most prominent feature of the novel. A striking aspect of the celebration of the body in Lady Chatterley’s Lover is the concept of tenderness. According to Mark Schorer, Lawrence actually intended to call the novel Tenderness (133). Furthermore, the word “tender”, or some derivation of it, is used strikingly fifty-eight times in the novel. Had it been spread out evenly this would have meant approximately every fifth page, which makes it a key word even before Connie points out to Mellors that what distinguishes him from other men is “the courage of [his] own tenderness” (277). Therefore it is necessary to investigate what meaning Lawrence seems to want to put into the word in this novel. To begin with, Mellors describes Connie as “tender” because she is different from “the celluloid women of today” after they first make love (119), and a few paragraphs later he thinks of “the tenderness of life” and “of women” as something that needs to be saved from “that sparkling electric Thing outside there” (120). Later, when they have sex in the hut,
Connie feels Mellors’ penetration of her as “the dark thrust of peace and a ponderous, primordial tenderness, such as made the world in the beginning” (174). Tenderness thus seems to be something that belongs to the pre-modern world and is threatened by industrialization and the shallowness of modern art forms such as film and photography. It is some form of ancient power that is so fundamental it “made the world”.

However, it is also interesting to note that “tenderness” is contrasted with “sensuality” in the anal sex scene, where it is described how Connie feels “piercing thrills of sensuality, different, sharper, more terrible than the thrills of tenderness” (246). Hence it is not merely physical awareness or sexuality in general, but a specific form of it. Mellors equates it with “cunt-awareness” (277), and “cunt” in turn has earlier been defined by him as “thee [Connie] down theer; an’ what I get when I’m i’side thee – an what tha gets when I’m i’side thee . . . Animals fuck. But cunt’s a lot more than that. It’s thee, dost see: an’ tha ’rt a lot besides an animal, aren’t ter? – even ter fuck! Cunt! Eh, that’s the beauty o’ thee, lass!” (178). “Cunt” hence seems to stand for a part of the self that is active during, or perhaps activated by, love-making. In Freudian terminology this could be translated into the love drive, or Eros, which strives to tie people together in groups (55). Tenderness, or cunt-awareness, can therefore be defined as an awareness of Eros.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that tenderness is always and only a matter of love, or for that matter, that it is never violent. The first thing Mellors associates it with when Connie tells him that what makes him different from other men is “the courage of [his] own tenderness”, is his relationship with the soldiers in the army during the war (277). He felt he had to be “a bit tender to them – even if [he] put ‘em through hell!” (277). Even more brutally, Mellors wishes he dared kill his wife, Bertha Coutts, and Clifford as that would be “the tenderest thing you could do for them” because “[t]hey can’t live! They only frustrate life” (280). As these examples of violent urges are in no way of the mechanized, cold-blooded kind that was shown
to be associated with civilization and the cultural super-ego in the previous chapter, it seems as if tenderness is not only linked to Eros, but also to the death drive. This is not very surprising, as Freud argues that the two drives rarely “appeared in isolation”, but instead mix and merge with each other (56).

To conclude this discussion about the concept of tenderness in the novel, it seems to stand for an inherent part of human beings that is associated with both sex and violence, or with Eros and the death drive. However, rather than being the actual drives themselves, it is an awareness of them, and thus an awareness of the unconscious part of the self, to Lawrence linked to emotion and therefore the body. The philosophy of tenderness propagated by Connie and Mellors is therefore an extension of bodily awareness, and, as true emotions are placed in the body, of taking the world seriously.

The reawakening of the natural drives can also be seen as part of a historical process. Jae-Kyung Koh, referring to the Freudian notion of “the return of the repressed”, argues that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is based “upon a cyclical view of history”, where the psychological drives that are repressed in one age will inevitably re-emerge in the next (189f). The very writing of the novel can be seen as an attempt to affect or hasten this process. Lawrence biographer John Worthen claims Lawrence’s view of himself as a writer with a mission to influence society was revived during the years when he was writing *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (355f). Just like Connie and Mellors, the novel breaks taboos set up by the society it was written in, both by portraying a relationship between the wrong people having sex in the wrong way, and by using what was thought of as crude words, such as “fuck” and “cunt” to do it. This led to the censoring of the novel in the United Kingdom until 1960, when a court trial gave Penguin Books the right to publish it in its entirety despite the obscene words used ("Lady Chatterley’s Lover"). Depicting indecent sex was in a way worse than having it because the former risked corrupting innocents, as the question posed to the jury by a prosecution counsel during the
trial implies: "Is it a book you would wish your wife or servants to read?" ("1960: Lady Chatterley’s Lover sold out").

Although Lawrence was aware of the fact that the novel was “unpublishable”, so much so that he did not see any point in having it typed in preparation for publication, he spent much valuable time writing it, and rewriting it twice (Worthen 357). Worthen argues that Lawrence did this because he “saw himself as someone who would change people for the better” (355f) and the novel as “a kind of artistic terrorism” aimed at making people admit their own sexuality (367). In this way, Lawrence took the world seriously enough to believe in his ability to shape its future and to write in the way he wished things were. Therefore the fact that Lawrence illustrated not just sex, but offensive sex in literary form was itself a form of revolt against the society he lived and wrote in. Thus the writing of Lady Chatterley’s Lover was the same kind of revolt that the novel depicts.

Nevertheless, despite these revolts, both in the plot and in the writing of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, the novel cannot necessarily be seen as a revolt in itself. One of the things that is continuously criticized throughout the novel is the characters’ attempts to capture their lives and the world in words. Connie and Clifford’s marriage is described as “words, just so many words. The only reality was nothingness, and over it, a hypocrisy of words” (50); Connie feels “[r]avished by dead words” (94), and she is “angry with [Clifford], turning everything into words. . . . How she hated words, always coming between her and life!” (93). By overusing words in this manner, people have emptied them of their meaning, so that Connie considers “[a]ll the great words . . . [to be] cancelled for her generation” (62). This excessiveness in trying to verbalize life is a part of the intellectualization that Clifford and his friends, and modern society in general, are criticized for in the text, and one of the things that Connie and Mellors revolt against. Words are in the way of true experience, of taking the tragic tragically, because they distance the speaker from the emotions s/he is trying to express by making them
something external, rather than something internal that is placed inside the body. Of course, it seems somewhat contradictory to use a novel, as opposed to, for instance, a painting or a musical composition, to criticize the overuse of words, as they are what novels are composed of. A novel is by necessity an attempt to “turn everything into words”.

However, Lawrence seems to have been aware of this inconsistency in his novel, and actually lets his narrator discuss it in connection with Mrs Bolton’s gossip about Tevershall:

It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead. Therefore the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret places of life: for it is in the *passional* secret places of life, above all, that the tide of sensitive awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and freshening. (101)

The point seems to be that it is legitimate to use words to try to describe experience if it is done so that the words lead the reader to a heightened awareness of “the *passional* secret places of life”, or, in the vocabulary used in the rest of the novel, to tenderness. Hence the ravishing effect of words upon experience is not by necessity a consequence of all verbalizations, and it does not seem far-fetched to assume that Lawrence saw his own novels as examples of “properly handled” ones.

It is hence possible to see Lawrence’s position in this matter in two ways. From a purely logical perspective he is still contradicting himself, trying to mediate experience untainted by words by using words; because it is a novel, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is inevitably a part of the civilization it condemns. However, in a more forgiving light, Lawrence should rather be praised for at least attempting what is perhaps impossible. Taylor Stoehr argues that Lawrence
is unable to “communicate to us any very helpful notion of the goal he has in mind, since it is itself pure experience, unmediated by language” (122). This is probably true, but perhaps the act of using words to express this pure experience is all the more revolutionary because it is ultimately futile. In this last of his novels, Lawrence tried to reclaim words that had been befouled with negative connotations they did not originally contain. By doing this, he was hoping to bring language and experience closer together. In “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, he explains that civilization has “separate[d] the word from the deed” although they “should be related in harmony” (307f). Curiously, he recommends chastity to most people, because what is really needed is not practicing sex, but thinking about it (“A Propos” 308). As human cognition consists at least partly of verbalizations, people need words that represent what they are thinking of, which is why it is imperative to re-conquer words such as “fuck” and “cunt”. In Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Lawrence strives to teach people how to think about sex, which he hopes will eventually result in a merging of the word and the deed.

Consequently, while Lady Chatterley’s Lover will perhaps not itself be able to convey the true experience Lawrence wanted to express, the thoughts potentially resulting from the novel may do so. Thus Lawrence refused to give in to the inevitable hopelessness of the world and chose to write for the future he was hoping for, rather than the one he dreaded, just as Connie and Mellors’ live for the future they dream of instead of the one they fear. That Lady Chatterley’s Lover is a part of the civilization it criticizes, which creates an obvious ambivalence in the text, does not mean it can be dismissed as inconsistent. Its awareness of its own inconsistency only makes its revolt all the more potent.

In summary, this chapter has shown how Connie and Mellors’ revolt is the result of a mutual giving of abilities to the other: Mellors learns how to keep a small hope for the future, and Connie how to be aware of her own body and emotions. Together these two abilities allow them to take the world seriously enough to live as though their actions shape its future.
They do this by trying to live and treat each other tenderly, that is, with an awareness of their emotions and their unconscious selves. Similarly, Lawrence’s writing of the novel despite the knowledge that it could not be published in the society he lived in, is also a revolt in that it tries to affect the future. While this revolt is somewhat contradictory due to the use of words to criticize how words get in the way of experience, what the novel really tries to do is connect word with deed, and give people a vocabulary with which to think about sexual experiences. This disarms the inconsistency and really strengthens the power of the revolt.
Conclusion

This essay set out to examine how *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* both is and portrays a revolt, as well as how the fact that it is a part of the civilization it revolts against generates an ambivalence in the text. As a theoretical support Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* was used. The first chapter examined the society depicted in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, while the second focused on the revolt of the characters, Lawrence, and the novel itself.

The industrialized civilization portrayed in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* results in the characters’ disconnection from their bodies and, as a consequence, from their emotions, leading to a refusal to take the tragic tragically. Connie and Mellors’ revolt against civilization consists in daring to take things as they are, and consequently living as if their actions affected the future. They try to create an awareness of human drives, or a tenderness, as Lawrence calls it, in this future. Their revolt is therefore similar to the one Lawrence performed in writing a novel he hoped would make people aware of their own tenderness, even though he knew this novel could not be published at the time.

Industrialization and lack of true feelings lead not only to destructive relationships but also to destructive, as opposed to natural, violence, for example in the mechanized warfare of the First World War. This unnatural violence is related to that of the super-ego, which, according to Freud, tries to impose the rules of society upon the ego through the natural violence of conscience, thus stifling Eros and the death drive. While the plot of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* criticizes this civilized and mechanized violence of the super-ego, it also uses it in the form of satire to formulate this very critique, which contributes to the ambivalence in the novel’s relationship with society. Likewise, because the novel uses words to try to describe experience, it actually commits the very act it criticizes modern civilization for: “turning everything into words”. It is thus a part of the modern society it condemns.
Hence it is clear that the ambivalence mentioned in the argument is evident both in the narration of the novel, which in some sections adapts to the distanced and ironic attitude of civilization, and in the novelistic form, which, as it consists of words, stands in the way of experience, although this is done in an attempt to make the reader aware of “the *passional* secret places of life” and thus eventually enhance experience. Hence the revolt takes place not only in the plot of the novel, in Connie and Mellors’ relationship, but also in the novel’s form, for example through the use of “dirty words”, and in the writing of the novel even though it was “unpublishable”.

Although the ambivalence created by the fact that the novel tries to convey a wordless experience by using words could seem to undermine its revolt, it rather illustrates a point, namely that word and deed in modern human consciousness are separated. By trying to regain the right to define and use words that society has deemed improper, Lawrence really attempts to bring word and deed back into unity, and enable people to think about sex rather than just have it mindlessly. Freud would perhaps have pointed out the futility of this attempt, given that he believes the censoring of the drives, and thus of the words connected to them, is what holds society together, but he would also have recognized the necessity of reacting against an overly oppressive super-ego. In doing so, Lawrence set an example, just like Connie and Mellors, by acting according to his beliefs. Perhaps this, rather than the lack of success in his endeavour, is what really matters.
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