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## BOOKS & WRITERS

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### Black Magic, White Lies

By Colin Welch

WHOEVER decided to prosecute *Lady Chatterley's Lover*\* may be proud of his handiwork. Despite his efforts the book is now in print. Apart from exposing the law to ridicule by forcing it to assess merits, literary and otherwise, which it is not qualified to assess, his achievement is solely this: to have secured for the book the maximum of publicity and a volume of clerical, academic and critical acclaim which might have astonished or embarrassed even its author, not the most modest of men nor one with any love of clergymen, dons, or critics.

The Bishop of Woolwich has told us that this, in his view, is a book which Christians "ought to read." In it, he says, Lawrence has tried to portray sexual intercourse "as in a real sense an act of holy communion." Mr. Norman St. John-Stevas has recommended the book to every Catholic priest and moralist. It is "undoubtedly a moral book," thinks he. Mr. Richard Hoggart declares that the book is "puritanical"—or rather puritanical in a sense which he defines: "the proper meaning of it to an historian is somebody who belongs to the tradition of British puritanism. And the main weight of that is an intense sense of responsibility for one's conscience." The Rector of Eastwood, Lawrence's Nottinghamshire birthplace, has suggested that the book might almost be given "to young people about to be married as a guide in love and marriage." Ho hum.

There must be others, neither prigs, fools, nor perverts, who have their doubts about all this; who, while conceding that *Lady Chatterley* is a work of great literary merit, indeed of dark, magical and terrible beauty, nevertheless believe it to be a profoundly immoral or even evil work. There must be others, in a word, who have *understood* it. If so, they have not yet spoken. They were not asked to at the trial. Since then they may not have dared to, such is the terror

inspired by Lawrence's victorious partisans. Yet a word or two must perhaps be said, lest posterity think we were all bewitched. And I hope it may be said without denying to Lawrence either the admiration due to his genius or the sympathy due to his sickness and sufferings in mind and body.

AS A GUIDE to love and marriage *Lady Chatterley* is somewhat unorthodox, to say the least, in that the central situation is doubly adulterous. The clergymen at the trial seemed somewhat shifty about this, as well they might be.

The Bishop of Woolwich, for instance, said that the book "portrays the love of a woman in an immoral relationship, *so far as adultery is an immoral relationship*," but that it does not advocate "adultery for its own sake." The Rev. Donald Tytler wriggled for some time before admitting that neither Connie nor Mellors appeared to "regard marriage as sacred and inviolable." He took refuge, however, in the highly arguable assertion that the book "is a novel, not a tract."

It seemed generally agreed that the adultery was largely incidental or irrelevant, a chance twist of the plot. It was implied, indeed, that the real meaning of the book would not have been much damaged or altered if Sir Clifford and Bertha had never existed and the two lovers had been happily married by page 120 in the Penguin edition. This, I think, is to misunderstand the main *negative* purpose of the book, which is to undermine or utterly destroy the Christian attitude to sex, love, and marriage—an operation in which Lawrence could hardly have expected or even welcomed the assistance of the clergy.

Most Christians, I believe, are taught to honour sex as an essential part of love and marriage, not as an end in itself but as a means by which love may express itself and marriage be blessed with children. If Lawrence does not

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\* *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. By D. H. LAWRENCE. Penguin Books. 3s. 6d.

regard sex as an end in itself, he certainly endows it with priority not only over marriage but over love as well. For in *Lady Chatterley* the first sexual act between Connie and Mellors quite definitely precedes any love between them and, if love in any sense comes later, it cannot finally find expression in sex, because it is from sex that it first issued.

This is quite in keeping with Lawrence's general view of human relations, which seems to be that there can be no contact between people except physical, no knowledge of others except carnal knowledge, no love or responsibility without sex, no intercourse which is not largely or fundamentally sexual. Even his men are subject to this rule: they wrestle or embrace in the nude, they "press" against each other, their love is "perfect for a moment." "If I love you, and you know I love you," Middleton Murry plaintively asked Lawrence, "isn't that enough?" No, it wasn't, Lawrence retorted: there must be a physical mingling of their blood, an inviolable pre-Christian sacrament which should bind them together in blood-brotherhood.

It is Lawrence's point in *Lady Chatterley* that, beside sex, marriage is but an empty form, a thing meaningless in itself, and that wherever the claims of sex and marriage are in conflict, those of sex must prevail. Had Connie and Mellors been free to marry at once, this point could not have been so clearly established. The adulterous nature of their union is thus an essential part of the plot, as is the disgusting nature of Mellors' marriage, and the dry vacuity of Connie's. All together, by making marriage appear ridiculous or nauseating, serve to throw pure sexuality into sharper and more admirable relief.

Marriage and love, of course, are not identical, and a book which derides the one might certainly be redeemed and ennobled by the other. Is *Lady Chatterley*, then, a book about love? One must speak here with some diffidence. One man's love may be another's lust, and it is quite possible that Lawrence wrote of what he thought was love, or of love as he knew it. If love at all, however, the love which he celebrates is certainly of a very narrow, introverted sort, in many respects remarkably akin to the masturbation which he so eloquently denounces in *Obscenity and Pornography*.

Much was made at the trial of Mellors' alleged assumption of "responsibility" for *Lady Chatterley*. I have read very carefully the passage on p. 123 cited by Mr. Richard Hoggart in support of this allegation. In it I find little suggestion that Mellors has willingly assumed any responsibility for anything. All I find there is a certain foreboding, vague premonitions of "pain and doom" ahead, regret at the loss of his own

privacy, a conviction that "they" will do her in, "no sense of wrong or sin."

Conscience, for Mellors, is "chiefly fear of society." And indeed he swiftly shifts the responsibility for all that may go ill from his own shoulders onto those of society, which he knows "by instinct to be a malevolent, partly-insane beast;" onto the shoulders of "the vast cvil thing," of "the world of the mechanical greedy, greedy mechanism and mechanised greed" which is "ready to destroy whatever does not conform." The book ends, incidentally, with Connie and Mellors still undestroyed: society seems momentarily to have lost its grip.

One difficulty about Mellors assuming much responsibility for Connie is his apparent failure to assume any responsibility for any of the women he has previously bedded, including his wife and the long list of conquests of which he boasts to Connie on pp. 211-212. Admittedly his sexual experiences with these women, though varied, are uniformly unsatisfactory. Their efforts to please him awaken in Mellors no sign of sympathy, gratitude or kindness towards them: only rage and bitterness because they failed. The Lesbians were the worst, it seems: they made him "howl in his soul, wanting to kill them."

Thus is established another point that Lawrence wished to make: that no responsibility whatever is inherent in the sexual act as such. It is inherent only in the *perfect* sexual act. If this is an argument against promiscuity, it seems a very dubious one, since, like poor Soames Forsyte, we may wish and wish and never get it; seek and seek and never find it—the beauty and the loving in the world.

THE COMMON EXPERIENCE of people in T required love is to love not merely one person but, through that one person, a whole universe. Love opens the eyes and the heart, revealing the beauty in all things. In gratitude we love the God that created the beloved one. We love the sun and all it shines upon. We love even those we hate, seeing in them also for a moment our common humanity made manifest. We are one with all. Thus through earthly love even the most mundane of us may sense that unearthly love or charity which has been expressed, for instance, in our own day in the noble and joyous *passacaglia* by which Hindemith represents St. Francis' hymn of praise and gratitude to God for all creation. It is this smiling, generous, and life-enhancing quality which may give even to illicit love an undeniable dignity and grace, and which makes even the strictest churchman—if he be not himself embittered or perverted—regard it as not the meanest of sins.

Of this quality there is in *Lady Chatterley* as little trace as in any novel which deals with man and woman at all. A misanthrope from the start ("oh, well, I don't like people"), Mellors's hatred of humanity becomes ever more violent and hysterical as his affair with Lady Chatterley proceeds and intensifies. His dislike of Sir Clifford is natural enough in the circumstances. Less natural is the form it takes: a bitter contempt for Clifford's impotence, brought about by a war injury: "no balls...tame, and nasty with it." This contempt finds its most vivid expression in an insult, addressed to Sir Clifford himself, of such brutal coarseness as to make the blood run cold: "It's not for a man i' the shape you're in, Sir Clifford, to twit me for havin' a cod atween my legs."

"Reverence for a man's balls?" "Yes, indeed," answered Mr. Hoggart at the trial. Mellors' reverence is selective. He reveres his own balls; he does not appear to revere Sir Clifford's, or even to regret their absence.

While Mellors' love for Connie is unable to generate the slightest tenderness for any other being, his hatred for Sir Clifford and for his own wife spreads and burgeons, overwhelming all barriers, engulfing finally the whole human race. It is a constant complaint of Mellors that there are too many people around. It seems to him "a wrong and bitter thing" to bring a child into this world. He brings one, nonetheless; but this is "a side-issue," he says.

In his wild and maundering monologues it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the misanthrope from the reformer. It is plain that he cannot tolerate anyone as they are: clumsy, ugly, deformed, money-grubbing, sexless; the middle-classes "the mingiest set of ladylike snipe ever invented;" the working classes "just as priggish and half-balled and narrow-gutted," etc. In certain circumstances, indeed, the latter might be spared, provided they wear "close red trousers, bright red, an' little short white jackets" and provided they do not "have many children, because the world is overcrowded." But this is a momentary weakness.

In general Mellors is "pleased that they [the human race] hurry on towards the end." Provided his "cock gives its last crow," he doesn't mind. "To contemplate the extermination of the human species and the long pause before some other species crops up" calms him "more than anything else." And even this gloomy contentment is untypical.

Sometimes Mellors wants to get away from it all: "I feel the colonies aren't far enough, because even there you could look back and see

the earth, dirty, beastly, unsavoury among all the stars: made foul by men." At other times he wishes to hasten the process of depopulation by more drastic means. He wishes he had shot his wife: "she was a doomed woman...I'd have shot her like I shoot a stoat...a raving doomed thing...If only I could have shot her...it ought to be allowed." And not his wife alone: "I could wish the Cliffords and Berthas all dead;" it would be "the tenderest\* thing you could do for them," perhaps, "to give them death...They only frustrate life...Death ought to be sweet to them. And I ought to be allowed to shoot them."

It would be wrong to accuse Mellors of a total disrespect for all forms of life. But he respects only subhuman life, life without mind or soul. He can appreciate in a certain context "the prettiness and loneliness" of the weasel, for instance, but only to show that he would have more qualms about shooting a weasel than about shooting all the Cliffords and Berthas, who "are legion."

"Legion"—that we may well believe: included among them, presumably, is every sad, maimed, or unfulfilled person, all to be shot down like stoats. For in his Starkadder ravings poor Mellors is only feebly echoing the murderous fantasies of his own creator, whose letters and conversation breathe a bloodthirsty hatred of mankind in no way unworthy of Hitler; of the Lawrence "who hated men," who would have liked to kill "a million Germans—two millions," who longed for "a deadly revolution very soon" and "cared" only for "the death struggle," who wanted every she-tigress to have 77 whelps, each to eat "70 miserable featherless human birds," who wanted to have "poison fangs and talons," who *believed* (his italics) "in wrath and gnashing of teeth and crunching of cowards' bones" and "in fear and pain and oh, such a lot of sorrow," who wanted to kill "beastly disdainful bankers, industrialists, lawyers, war-makers, and schemers of all kinds," as well as, first of all, his inoffensive hostess at Taos, Mabel Luhan; of the Lawrence to whom Jesus became ever "more *unsympatisch*" the longer he lived.

It is pity more than terror that is awakened by Lawrence's anguished flailings, by his rages and torments. And it is pity too, more than anything else, that we feel for Mellors in his loneliness and bitterness, in the eerie solitude into which, trapped himself, he lures Connie to join him, pity for a man so profoundly wretched that even love itself can bring him no more happiness or serenity than an ingrowing toe-nail.

IF *LADY CHATTERLEY* is not a book about marriage or love (or, if about love, then about a

\* Yes, the book was once going to be called *Tenderness*.

rather odd and unsatisfactory sort of love), what then is it about?

I have referred to its negative purpose: the destruction of the Christian attitude to sex, love, and marriage. What is its positive purpose? In place of the Christian attitude what does it positively suggest? At this point, strange to say, we can take a hint from the Bishop of Woolwich who does seem in a muddled sort of way to have grasped that the book is not quite as simple as it looks, that there are mysterious undercurrents and undertones in it, suggestions of the supernatural. "An act of holy communion"—yes: at this point the Bishop shows that he has both vaguely discerned and profoundly misunderstood what Lawrence was really getting at.

Hugh Kingsmill described Lawrence as "a pseudo-mystic." "The pseudo-mystic," he explained, "whether Lawrence with an audience of thousands, or Lenin and Hitler addressing millions, appeals to the will in language borrowed from the spirit."

Lawrence's essential credo is bluntly expressed by himself as follows:

My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true. The intellect is only a bit and bridle. . . . All I want is to answer my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind, or moral, or what not. . . . The real way of living is to answer to one's wants. . . . "For the living of my full flame—I want that liberty, I want that woman, I want that pound of peaches. . . ."

More commonly this credo is expressed in pseudo-mystical terms: "And God the Father, the Inscrutable, the Unknowable, we know in the Flesh, in Woman." We are so flattered and gratified at being thus assured that the appetite for women is in fact a religious appetite that we may overlook the fact that the God thus revealed to us is not our God but Lawrence's God; not the God even of the most progressive bishop, but that "protozoic God" which, according to Middleton Murry, Lawrence "would if he could put us all on the rack to make us confess."

A SIMILAR SLEIGHT of hand is attempted in *Lady Chatterley* and, to judge by the volume of clerical applause, successfully brought off.

Certainly, the book is full of religious imagery and symbolism, and in the grave simplicity and majesty of its prose it is sometimes possible to catch more than an echo of the Authorised Version. Indeed, without any obvious defiance of the author's intentions, the whole book can

be read as an elaborate and blasphemous parody of the Gospels.

The first key is supplied by Tommy Dukes, whose racy, prophetic utterances place him in the role of a sort of clubman John the Baptist. "Our old show will come flop," he cries. "Our civilisation is going to fall. It's going down the bottomless pit, down the chasm. And believe me, the only bridge across the chasm will be the phallus." On the far side, he explains, is a "next phase," in which mankind, regenerated by the phallus, should consist of "real, intelligent, wholesome men and wholesome nice women." There will be "a resurrection of the body." At this phrase "something echoes inside Connie." She, like the children of Israel, is "waiting." In the empty incompleteness of her unregenerate life she waits for completion, for fulfilment, redemption; for the promised one, the saviour, the phallus.

Nor does she wait in vain. And when the phallus comes "with the dark thrust of peace and a ponderous primordial tenderness," she is re-born just as the converted are re-born in Christ: "She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman." To the astonished Sir Clifford, she declares that the body, killed off by Jesus, is now "coming really to life, it is really rising from the tomb." "Give me the body," she cries. "The life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind." Rising at last to an exalted climax, she proudly proclaims that "whatever God there is has at last wakened up in my guts . . . and is rippling so happily there, like dawn."

In this context it is clear enough that Mellors is not indulging in any figure of speech when he addresses his own penis as "the king of glory;" he is speaking the sober truth as he sees it. Here, too, he faithfully echoes his creator, who was accustomed to view the parts of the body as endowed with separate life: endowed, in the case of Mellors's penis, not merely with a will of his own but with mastery over Mellors, "a root in his soul."

In this context, too, it is clear enough that when Mellors, "with an odd intentness" and with a look of which Connie "could not understand the meaning," wreathes his pubic hair and hers with forget-me-nots and woodruff, and winds "a bit of creeping-jenny round his penis," this is not just innocent love play or some other questionably pretty fancy. No, indeed: this is the solemn moment at which the votaries ceremonially deck their idol with all the bounty of nature in token of their gratitude, dependence, and self-abasement.

For this is what the book is really about: not love or marriage but the worship of the phallus. It is not a novel in the puritan tradition either

as that tradition actually existed or as Mr. Hoggart somewhat naïvely defines it. (For surely it is naïve to interpret puritanism as a reliance upon one's own uninstructed conscience, without reference to God's teaching as revealed in the Holy Bible? Puritanism without the Book is not merely Hamlet without the prince; it is Hamlet without Shakespeare, without its creator. Without the Book, Jomo Kenyatta is a Puritan.)

No, *Lady Chatterley* is a novel in a far older and darker tradition, in a tradition which since the coming of Christianity has been half-submerged, emerging in the West only fitfully and surreptitiously in the guise of "the Old Religion." *Its tradition is the tradition of witchcraft.* The orgiastic rites it celebrates bear precisely the same relationship to the Holy Communion as the Black Mass does to the true Mass. Tam O'Shanter was at least drunk when, carried away by the young witch's ample charms, he suddenly roared out, "Weel done, Cutty-Sark!"

Nor is *Lady Chatterley* only a novel: it is a tract also. It does not merely depict: it preaches. And what it preaches is this: that mankind can only be regenerated by freeing itself from the tyranny of the intellect and the soul, from the tyranny of Jesus Christ, and by prostrating itself before its own phallus; in other words, by reducing itself almost to an animal level (almost, but not quite: for animals are mercifully incapable of the morbid cerebrations—"sex in the head"—which alone could generate such fantasies). If this is not a doctrine calculated to deprave and corrupt, I do not know what is.

"DEPRAVE AND CORRUPT"—was the jury's verdict confirmation of what many have long suspected, that these words have pretty well lost all meaning? Along with belief in original sin we seem to have discarded any belief in the original innocence which the verbs "to deprave and to corrupt" presuppose. And certainly it is slightly ridiculous to talk of a *book* corrupting a society in which, if present tendencies are maintained, it may soon be quite usual for a schoolgirl to have an abortion before she can read.

Nor is *Lady Chatterley* likely to deprave and corrupt *many* people. It is unlikely to corrupt anyone who reads it with as little attention and understanding as that displayed by most of those who spoke up on its behalf at the trial. Nor is it likely to corrupt those millions who are now going to read it for what are laughingly called "the wrong reasons," just skimming through looking for the dirty bits. There is nothing particularly depraving in the mere description of the sexual act, nor corrupting in a mere four-letter word, and the skimmers are unlikely to find much more in the book than that.

No, the people it is most likely to corrupt are those few who are going to read it "for the right reasons," the earnest ones who will read it carefully with sympathy and respect, and who have sufficient intelligence and knowledge to grasp the point. Heaven knows, it is difficult enough to keep one's sanity under the impact of Lawrence's torrential eloquence, his proud solemnity and poetic gifts. Was ever spring more tenderly or beautifully described than in this book? It is only too easy to surrender to his warlock spells and incantations, to his hallucinatory repetitions and variations, to his dithyrambic rhapsodising. Was ever book less boring? It is about as boring as the explosion of a moral H-bomb. To compel assent Lawrence has arts enough of his own. He hardly needed the full weight of clerical and academic approval to make him well-nigh irresistible.

A book which Christians *ought* to read? A book, rather, which Christians may read, or some Christians anyway—those, perhaps, with long spoons.

## A World With Arms Without War

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ONE of the worst effects of the administrative confusion in Washington, which was the consequence of Eisenhower's dilettante leadership in his second term, has been an equal confusion in European—and indeed American—minds about the aims of American policy. With no strong hand in the White House to deter Congress and the Press from needling the Chiefs of Staff into making impossible claims for different Services and weapons, and posing improbable forms of Soviet threat to justify them, the impression has naturally gained ground that the United States is determined to push the arms race to the limit. It has even given colour to the belief, fostered by Bertrand Russell and others, that "the conscience of the West" has been transferred to the guardianship of the British Left, merely because there is more noise made on this side of the Atlantic about the problems of international security than on the other.

In fact, nothing could be a more complete distortion of the truth. It happens that there is a great deal more serious, dispassionate, and