

‘OH! – MY PEN DROPS FROM ME HERE!’ BLISS, PLEASURE AND SEXUAL  
ENCOUNTER IN THE EROTIC NOVEL

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 – BLISS, SEXUAL ENCOUNTER AND WRITING IN JOHN CLELAND’S <i>FANNY HILL OR MEMOIRS OF A WOMAN OF PLEASURE</i> .....	10
CHAPTER 3 – TENDER BLISS, BOREDOM AND THE MIND/BODY BALANCE IN D. H. LAWRENCE’S <i>LADY CHATTERLEY’S LOVER</i> .....	31
CHAPTER 4 – PLEASURE, PAIN AND DEGRADATION IN PAULINE RÉAGE’S <i>STORY OF O</i> .....	61
CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION.....	88
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	91

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores three accounts of male erotic fantasy. In my second chapter, I apply Roland Barthes' conceptions of bliss and pleasure to John Cleland's 18<sup>th</sup> century erotic novel, *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* in order to test Barthes' theory. In my third chapter, I use D. H. Lawrence's own erotic theory to analyze his depictions of boredom, tenderness and the mind/body divide in his 20<sup>th</sup> century novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In my fourth chapter, I rely on the theory of sadomasochism to explore the ways in which pleasure, pain and degradation figure in the Pauline Réage's 20<sup>th</sup> century sadomasochistic novel, *Story of O*. In all three of these novels, erotic pleasure, love and transcendence are central themes and I ultimately elucidate the ways in which Cleland, Lawrence and Réage strategically use them to influence the reader's reception of their accounts of male erotic fantasy.

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

I begin with a practical rather than a theoretical introduction. This is because I will be referring to three different theoretical positions in my exploration of the erotic narrative. In my second chapter, Roland Barthes' distinction between bliss and pleasure, as outlined in *The Pleasure of the Text*, will frame my discussion of John Cleland's 18<sup>th</sup> century erotic novel, *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. In my third chapter, I will rely on the erotic theory that D. H. Lawrence outlines in his essays, "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," "Fantasia and the Unconscious" and "A Propos to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" in order to analyze his 20<sup>th</sup> century novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Finally, in my fourth chapter, the theory of sadomasochism as imbedded in the Marquis de Sade and Sacher-Masoch's paradigmatic novels, *Justine* and *Venus in Furs*, will inform my discussion of Pauline Réage's 20<sup>th</sup> century sadomasochistic novel, *Story of O*. Sigmund Freud will also cast his long shadow over all three chapters insofar as he influences and helps interpret these theoretical positions. Instead of outlining these positions in further detail, I will now discuss some practical considerations that arise with erotic narratives, most notably reception history and within this topic, questions of censorship, authorship and gender.

Since its first publication, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* has been a topic of public scrutiny. The first volume of the novel was published in November 1748 and the second in February 1749. Within a year of its publication, the government arrested and imprisoned Cleland as well as the printer and the publisher of the novel. Shortly after their arrests the charged parties were released on a recognizance of £100,<sup>1</sup> but

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<sup>1</sup> In his introduction to the novel, Peter Wagner explains that "[t]he persons charged in connection with the publication of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* were soon released on a recognizance of £100" (14).

unfavourable reactions to the novel and Cleland himself were far from over. The Bishop of London, Thomas Sherlock, wrote to the Secretary of State begging him “to give proper orders, to stop the progress of this vile Book, which is an insult upon Religion and good manners, and a reproach to the Honour of the Government, and the Law of Country” (Wagner 14). The Bishop’s request prompted another round of arrests. Cleland and his publisher were convicted and imprisoned “on a charge of ‘corrupting the King’s subjects’” (Karolides, Bald and Sova 284). Cleland and his publisher were eventually released and, to avoid any further legal action, Cleland prepared a bowdlerized version of the novel that his publisher eagerly circulated. However, this was just one of many versions in circulation as pirated editions were also available in the 1750s. In the 1760s, publishers started releasing illustrated versions of the novel.<sup>2</sup> These explicit and often crude illustrations further discredited the novel because they reduced it to a piece of pornography and as such, it was seen as a work without literary or historical value for more than two centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Despite its classification as an erotic novel, secret editions of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* were widely and steadily circulated in Europe and the United States from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until Peter Holmes published a non-bowdlerized edition of the novel in 1821 that obscenity censorship in

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussions of the novel’s publication history see: David F. Foxon’s article, “John Cleland and the Publication of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*” and Michael Shinagel’s essay, “*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*: Pornography and the Mid-Eighteenth Century Novel.”

<sup>3</sup> Wagner points out that “[r]ather than enhancing the text, the pictorial, often badly executed, exaggerated and did much harm to *Memoirs* – a rare exception is the edition of the 1766 with engravings attributed to Gravelot. If *Fanny Hill* acquired a bad name and was relegated for more than two centuries to the realm of ‘pornography,’ then it was mainly because of the illustrations” (15).



books became an issue in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court convicted and imprisoned Holmes for printing and publishing the novel. The Judge overseeing the case, Chief Justice Isaac Parker, declared that Holmes was “a scandalous and evil disposed person” who had tried to “debauch and corrupt” the citizens of Massachusetts by “rais[ing] and creat[ing] in their minds inordinate and lustful desires” (Karolides, Bald and Sova 285). The Judge added that *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* “is so lewd, wicked and obscene, that the same would be offensive to the court here, and improper to be placed upon the records thereof” (Karolides, Bald and Sova 285). Holmes’ trial was the first of many obscenity trials that would involve the novel. After several arrests and book seizures in the 1920s<sup>5</sup> and 1930s,<sup>6</sup> a New York publishing company, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, announced their decision to publish an unexpurgated edition of the novel in 1963. This announcement prompted a flurry of trials in New York, Massachusetts and in the United States Supreme Court in order to determine if the novel was in fact obscene.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of these trials, the prosecution held that the book was obscene because it provided detailed descriptions and illustrations of the

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<sup>4</sup> According to Richard H. Kuh, “*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* appears to have been the contraband in America’s first reported obscenity prosecution of book sellers, dating back almost a century and a half; in 1821 in Massachusetts, two merchants who had offered *Fanny Hill* for sale were convicted, and one of them was jailed” (129).

<sup>5</sup> Paul S. Boyer explains that “[i]n December of 1923, two New York booksellers, Maurice Inman and Max Gottschalk, were arrested for selling *A Night in a Moorish Harem*, *Only a Boy*, and John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill* – three hoary classics of the literary underworld... In March 1924, the hapless Inman and Gottschalk were convicted in special sessions court and fined \$250 dollars each” (136).

<sup>6</sup> Karolides, Bald and Sova point out that “[i]n 1930, while the Massachusetts legislature debated a revision of censorship laws, *Fanny Hill* was among 300 books seized in a raid on a Philadelphia bookshop. The city district attorney led the raid and announced at the same time that Philadelphia officials would undertake an extensive campaign to curb sales of ‘obscene’ literature” (285).

<sup>7</sup> At the time of these trials, the United States Supreme Court stated that “material dealing with sex... that has literary or scientific or artistic value or any other form of social importance may not be branded as obscene” (Rembar 401-402). Thus, the defence’s task was to prove that *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* was valuable beyond its eroticism.

characters' sexual experiences and exchanges.<sup>8</sup> The book was defended on the grounds that it was of literary value<sup>9</sup> and social importance.<sup>10</sup> After three years of mixed verdicts and appeals in the judicial courts,<sup>11</sup> the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1966 that *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* was not obscene and thus, could be published in its entirety without fear of censorship.

Lawrence's erotic novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, also has a long history of censorship. In 1928, Lawrence privately published his novel in Italy instead of England in order to avoid the censors. Lawrence intended to mail copies of the novel to subscribers in England and the United States but this proved to be a costly and ineffective plan. Because he published privately, Lawrence could not obtain an international copyright and lost a significant amount of his profits when pirated editions of the novel appeared throughout Europe and the United States. To make matters worse, in 1929 the

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<sup>8</sup> Kuh asserts that "the contention that *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* was obscene was not based on any suggestion that it was wrong to state, simply and straightforwardly, that sexual intercourse, flagellation, voyeurism, and the like took place in Mrs. Brown's and Mrs. Cole's bawdy houses. Rather, the charge of prurience arose from Cleland's techniques in conveying this information: his sparing of no details, his moment-to-moment animated pictures of the incidents, and his word-creations of the sensual reactions of the participants. *Fanny Hill* abounds in all of the how-to-do-it factors – appearance, coloring, sensitivity, movement, feelings, size, timing, conversations, exclamations – specifics painted to heighten eroticism, and (if it exists) prurience" (133).

<sup>9</sup> Many expert witnesses defended the literary merit of the novel and among them was poet, critic and anthologist, Louis Untermeyer, who stated: "...what is interesting to me in the book is not merely the description of the sexual act, which I have read before, but the reaction of people toward it, and the variations which are played upon this central theme which, to me, sum up, come to, a work of art, of literature" (quoted in Kuh 131).

<sup>10</sup> John Hollander, a book reviewer and assistant Professor at Yale University insisted that the novel had social as well as literary value when he explained that Fanny's male benefactor and her madams were examples of "modern industrial capitalism...the entrepreneurial man, the self-made man" (quoted in Kuh 131).

<sup>11</sup> For further discussions of the obscenity trials see: Morton Cooper's article, "*Fanny Hill* vs. the Constitution" and Raymond F. Sebastian's article, "Obscenity and the Supreme Court: Nine Years of Confusion."

United States government declared the novel obscene and barred it from the mails.<sup>12</sup> From that point on, it was illegal to print, publish or purchase the novel but some brave proprietors continued to order and distribute it. One such proprietor, James A. DeLacey, was caught distributing copies of the novel by members of the Boston censorship society, The Watch and Ward.<sup>13</sup> The society took immediate legal action against DeLacey and his clerk, Joseph Sullivan, and the court convicted, fined and imprisoned both men for this infraction.<sup>14</sup> Pirated and expurgated editions of the novel continued to circulate for the next three decades but it was not until 1959 when Grove Press announced their intention to republish the novel that an unexpurgated version was legally distributed in the United States. This announcement prompted a re-banning of the mails and a short-lived obscenity trial that lifted the ban and ruled in the publisher's favour.<sup>15</sup> Although this obscenity trial was brief, it was not the novel's last.

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<sup>12</sup> Karolides, Bald and Sova explain that “[t]he United States government had declared the novel obscene in 1929 and the post office ruled the novel barred from the mails. Travelers returning from Europe with copies of the novel faced having the book confiscated by the United States Customs” (300).

<sup>13</sup> Boyer reveals that “[e]arly in October 1929 John S. Sumner in New York learned that DeLacey had ordered five copies of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and he made haste to notify the Watch and Ward Society...The Watch and Ward secretary dispatched an elderly agent, John Tait Slaymaker, to the Dunster House Bookshop to purchase a copy. At first both the clerk, Joseph Sullivan, and DeLacey himself refused Slaymaker's importunities, but when Slaymaker (who was using a false name) returned the next day, DeLacey agreed to sell him a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* at a later date. Slaymaker returned a third time two weeks later and purchased the book for fifteen dollars” (196).

<sup>14</sup> Karolides, Bald and Sova note that for this infraction “DeLacey was fined \$800 and sentenced to four months in jail, and Sullivan was fined \$200 and sentenced to two weeks in jail” (300).

<sup>15</sup> Karolides, Bald and Sova explain that “[a]s soon as the novel was published by Grove, Postmaster General Christenberry issued an order to ban the novel from the mails. The publisher went to court and [the case]...was heard in federal district court by Judge Frederick van Pelt Bryan, who agreed with the publisher and lifted the ban” (301). The Judge justified his decision by stating that “the broadening of freedom of expression and of the frankness with which sex and sex relations are dealt with at the present time require no discussion. In one best-selling novel after another frank descriptions of the sex act and ‘four-letter’ words appear with frequency. These trends appear in all media of public expression, in the kind of language used and the subjects discussed in polite society, in pictures, advertisements and dress, and in other ways familiar to all. Much of what is now accepted would have shocked the community to the core a generation ago. Today such things are generally tolerated whether we approve or not. I hold at this stage in the development of our society, this major English novel does not exceed the outer limits of tolerance which

In 1960, Penguin Books decided to publish the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* for the first time in England. This decision was followed by an announcement from the Crown that an obscenity trial would be held. During the trial, the prosecution argued that the novel was obscene because it contained explicit sexual content and derogatory language.<sup>16</sup> The defense called thirty-five expert witnesses, who testified that the novel was of moral and literary value.<sup>17</sup> After three days of testimony and three hours of deliberation, the jury returned with the verdict of “not guilty” and acquitted Penguin Books of all charges. The publicity of the trial made *Lady Chatterley's Lover* a hot commodity and Penguin Books released the unexpurgated version in both hard cover and paperback editions to cope with the demand. Even though the novel was not obscene under British law, the Indecent Publications Tribunal of New

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the community as a whole gives to writing about sex and sex relations” (quoted in Karolides, Bald and Sova 301). For further discussions of this trial see: James C. N. Paul's book, *Federal Censorship: Obscenity in the Mail* and the fourth chapter of Brenda Maddox's book, *D. H. Lawrence: The Story of a Marriage*.

<sup>16</sup> As Karolides, Bald and Sova point out, “objections to the novel arose over both the explicit sexual descriptions in the novel and the language used by the characters” (300). Despite this, expert witnesses, like Richard Hoggart, defended Lawrence's use of language by testifying that “I heard a man say ‘fuck’ three times as he passed me. He was speaking to himself and he said ‘fuck it, fuck it, fuck it’...He [was using] the word as a word of contempt, and one of the things Lawrence found most worrying was that the word for this important relationship had become a word of vile abuse... [Lawrence] wanted to re-establish the meaning of [the word], the proper use of it” (quoted in Coetzee 49-50). In his essay, “A Propos to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*” Lawrence also defended his use of taboo words by explaining that “[t]he words that shock so much at first don't shock at all after a while... We are today...evolved and cultured far beyond the taboos which are inherent to our culture...The evocative power of the so-called obscene words must have been very dangerous to the dim-minded, obscure, violent natures of the Middle Ages, and perhaps are still too strong for slow-minded, half-evoked lower natures today ...[But I hold that] being able to use the so-called obscene words [is crucial ] because these are a natural part of the mind's consciousness of the body” (309-310).

<sup>17</sup> J. M. Coetzee notes that “with the resources of Penguin Books behind it [the defence was] able to call in a stream of eminent witnesses to [defend] the merits of the book...[Some of these witnesses] included an Anglican bishop who asserted that in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Lawrence was trying to portray the sexual relationship between man and woman as ‘something essentially sacred,’ and a director of religious education who suggested that reading the book would help young people to grow up ‘mature and responsible’” (48-49). For further defences of the novel see: C. H. Rolph's book, *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited*.

Zealand examined the paperback edition in 1965 in order to determine if it was indecent. Some members of the tribunal thought, “the sale of the Penguin [paperback] edition should be restricted to persons of seventeen or over” (Karolides, Bald and Sova 302) but the majority felt that such restrictive action would be futile and declared that the edition was not indecent. By the late 1960s, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was finally free from censorship in Europe and North America.

Pauline Réage’s erotic novel, *Story of O*, also has a history of censorship but unlike those of the previous two novels, this history is overshadowed by issues of authorship. In 1954, the original version of *Story of O*, *Histoire d’O*, was first published in Paris by the famous avant-garde publisher, Jean-Jacques Pauvert. In the months following its publication, Parisian society buzzed over the novel’s sadomasochistic content but primarily focused on ascertaining the true identity of the author, who had used the pseudonym, Pauline Réage.<sup>18</sup> Prominent writers, publishers, journalists and editors, male and female alike, were among the suspects but Réage’s identity remained a mystery. In addition to this intrigue, the novel’s disturbing content soon prompted the French government’s vice squad, the Brigade Mondaine or Worldly Brigade, to launch an official investigation. The Brigade arrested and interrogated all parties involved in the novel’s publication, but then as suddenly as it had been initiated, the investigation stopped.<sup>19</sup> After this strange turn of events, Pauvert freely published the novel without

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<sup>18</sup> In her “Translator’s Note” to the novel, Sabine d’Estreé explains that “[d]uring the winter following its publication, *Story of O* became the talk of the French salons and cafés. Even in Paris, where scandal is slow to ignite, there was an element of shock in these exchanges – that such a book, such a total anachronism, could appear, full-blown, in the mid-twentieth century. But the real interest centered around the mystery: who was Pauline Réage?” (x).

<sup>19</sup> In an interview with a journalist for *The New Yorker*, John de St. Jorre, Réage sheds light on this sudden turn of events: “A friend of mine – a medical doctor, who had been my gynaecologist for years was living with a man who had just become the Minister of Justice... I went to meet with her and told her I would like

fear of censorship but this was not the case for the publisher of the English translation, Maurice Girodias. The Brigade raided his publishing company, Olympia Press, seizing *Story of O* and other erotic texts. To make matters worse, Pauvert was dissatisfied with Girodias' translation and opted for a new translation by Grove Press which was published in the United States in 1965.<sup>20</sup>

The American edition of *Story of O* was an instant success<sup>21</sup> and critics hailed its author,<sup>22</sup> even though her identity was still unknown. It was not until some thirty years later that she broke her silence in a 1994 interview with John de St. Jorre of *The New Yorker*. In this interview, Réage identified herself as Dominique Aury<sup>23</sup> but later admitted that the name was a pseudonym.<sup>24</sup> After this interview, it was widely accepted that Aury was the author of the novel but many feminist critics still refuse to believe that

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to see the Minister. Three days later, I received an invitation to lunch at Croissy, a suburb south-west of Paris...we sat down to lunch, I beside the governor of the Bank of France, with the Minister of Justice and my friend opposite...[After lunch] I got up to leave...[and] said, 'Monsieur le Ministry je vous remercie.' He said he would see me to my car. I said goodbye, and he kissed my hand. 'Madame,' he said 'I was very pleased to meet you.' That's all. The next day, he issued a decree ending all the proceedings against *Story of O*.' Under French law, when a minister does that no one can ever resume legal action. That was the end of it" (47).

<sup>20</sup> De St. Jorre points out that "*Story of O* remained a Paris phenomenon until the mid-sixties, when Barney Rosset, of Grove Press, bought the American rights from Pauvert, with the understanding that a completely new translation would be made...This version of the novel...made its debut in the United States in 1965" (48).

<sup>21</sup> As Carol Cosman notes "Grove Press ran 500, 000 copies in their first printing of the American edition in 1965 [and] sales continued to be high" (26).

<sup>22</sup> The *Times Book Review* saw Pauline Réage as "a more dangerous writer than the Marquis de Sade" since "art is more persuasive than propaganda...Aiming only to reveal, to clarify, to make real to the reader those dark and repulsive practices and emotions that his better self rejects as improbable or evil, she succeeds in drawing us irresistibly into her perverse world through the magnetism of her own selfless absorption in it" (quoted in de St. Jorre 48-49).

<sup>23</sup> De St. Jorre declares that the author of *Story of O* is "Dominique Aury" and adds that "[n]ow eighty-six years old, she has been a journalist, an editor, a translator, a member of several literary-prize committees, and a prize winner herself, and was awarded the Legion d'Honneur; in short, she is a highly skilled and much respected woman of letters" (43).

<sup>24</sup> De St. Jorre explains that Réage confessed that "the name Dominique Aury was itself a disguise" and told me her real name but "asked me not to publish it, or the details of her surviving family, and this, I agreed to" (44).

this account of male erotic fantasy was written by a woman.<sup>25</sup> Thus, issues of authorship and gender are integral to the novel's reception history and continue to influence readers and critics today. Assuming that Réage is in fact a woman, I believe that *Story of O* provides a much-needed female voice to the erotic narrative which is primarily dominated by male authors, like Cleland and Lawrence, who appropriate female experience to support their accounts of male erotic fantasy. Such appropriations have not been without feminist objections as my footnotes will copiously show. Thus, in spite of their cultural and temporal differences, censorship, authorship and gender are all key factors in the reception histories of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Story of O*.

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<sup>25</sup> Susan Brownmiller is one of many critics who is "vehemently hostile to suggestions that...popular sex fantasies attributed to women are indeed the product of a woman's mind." Brownmiller adds that while reading the "scurrilous, anonymous pornographic classic *Story of O* by 'Pauline Réage,' a pseudonym that many men delight in believing masks the name of a real woman" she "nearly retched" and was disturbed by a male colleague's suggestion that the novel was "the truest, deepest account of female sexuality" (359-360).

## CHAPTER 2 – BLISS, SEXUAL ENCOUNTER AND WRITING IN JOHN

### CLELAND'S *FANNY HILL OR MEMOIRS OF A WOMAN OF PLEASURE*

*“There occurs an encounter which is intolerable, on account of the joy within it, and sometimes man is thereby reduced to nothing; this is what I call the transport. The transport is the joy of which one cannot speak”*  
(Ruysbroeck)

In his discussion of the text and the erotic body in *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes describes the relationship between bliss<sup>26</sup> and pleasure as parallel, fluid, marginally different and oppositional. Barthes explains that his terminology is “ambiguous because French has no word that simultaneously covers pleasure (contentment) and bliss (rapture). Therefore, ‘pleasure’... sometimes extends to bliss [and is] sometimes opposed to it” (19). Barthes underlines the opposition of these terms by stating that “pleasure can be expressed in words, [and] bliss cannot” (21) to demonstrate why bliss is outside of language and the text. To qualify this exclusion, Barthes explains that “*criticism always deals with texts of pleasure, never texts of bliss*” because “criticism is always historical or prospective” so “the constatory present, the *presentation* of bliss, is forbidden [to] it” (22, Barthes’ italics). Bliss occurs within the momentary experience of the present, which makes it “the untenable text, the impossible text” because “you cannot speak ‘on’ such a text, you can only speak ‘in’ it” (Barthes 22). Bliss, unlike pleasure, escapes the reader because it is a momentary experience outside of language, criticism and the text.

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<sup>26</sup> In the original version of *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes uses the French words “jouir” and “jouissance” where “bliss” is found in the English version. “Jouir” means “to enjoy” and “jouissance” means “intense enjoyment, delight [or] climax” (Collins Roberts 370). Thus, these French words do not have an obvious English equivalent. In his “Note on the Text,” Richard Howard also acknowledges that difficulty of translation when he states “we lack the terms acknowledged and allowed in polite French utterance; we lack jouissance and jouir, as Barthes uses them here” (v). Despite this, Howard adds that “Barthes’s translator, Richard Miller, has been resourceful, of course, and he has come up with the readiest plausibility by translating jouissance...as ‘bliss’” (v).



Barthes remedies the inaccessibility of bliss by treating the erotic body as a text. Barthes states that “the text” takes “human form” in “our erotic body” (17). Bliss is not among the simple, drawn-out pleasures of sexual encounter; rather it is a momentary experience. In this way, bliss is comparable to orgasm. Like orgasm, bliss “imposes a state of loss” but “is never the text that recounts the kind of bliss afforded literally by ejaculation” (Barthes 14, 55). Barthes clarifies this distinction by stating that “emotion is the slyest of losses [because] it contradicts the general rule that would assign bliss a fixed form: strong, violent, crude: something inevitably muscular, strained, phallic” (25). Thus, emotion prevents the ‘strong,’ ‘muscular,’ ‘strained’ penis from being the site of bliss. In John Cleland’s erotic novel, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* the protagonist, Fanny Hill, supports Barthes’ claim when she describes her experiences as a prostitute with numerous men and women as being pleasurable and often orgasmic, but only blissful when she loves her one special partner. In his novel, Cleland addresses the problematic idea of blissful experience in the text and challenges the reader to reconsider the acts of reading and writing through his use of a voyeuristic lens. This lens positions the reader as a narrative intruder who eavesdrops on Fanny as she writes a letter to a Madam about her erotic past.

In both of their texts, Cleland and Barthes privilege emotional gratification in sexual encounter and in writing. In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny values her erotic experiences with her true love and husband-to-be, Charles, over all her other sexual encounters because she loves him. Soon after her separation from Charles, Fanny becomes the companion of Mr. H – who sexually satisfies her but pales in comparison to Charles:

[W]hat an immense difference did I feel between this impression of a pleasure merely animal, [with Mr. H—] and struck out of the collision of the sexes by a passive bodily effect, from that sweet fury, [with Charles] that rage of active delight which crowns the enjoyments of a mutual love-passion, where two hearts, tenderly and truly united, club to exalt the joy, and give it a spirit and soul that bids defiance to that end which mere momentary desires generally terminate in, when they die of a surfeit of satisfaction. (Cleland 101)

Fanny admits that her sexual encounters with Mr. H— and Charles are both physically gratifying but she values her encounters with Charles more because they are also emotionally gratifying. In her experiences with Mr. H— Fanny describes her pleasure as ‘merely animal’ and her orgasm as a ‘passive bodily effect’ that ‘terminates in...a surfeit of satisfaction,’ whereas with Charles, their ‘mutual love-passion’ and ‘connection of spirit and soul’ allows Fanny to have a blissful experience that ‘bids defiance to’ the temporal limitations of orgasm. The pleasurable but not blissful exchange with Mr. H— demonstrates how Cleland, through Fanny’s encounters, privileges emotional gratification over the physical pleasures of sexual experience. Similarly, Cleland privileges emotional gratification in writing when Fanny is so overcome by the memory of her reunion with Charles that she drops her pen and has what the reader must assume is a blissful experience represented as a “gap” in the text:

My pen drops from me here in the ecstasy now present to my faithful memory! Description, too, deserts me and delivers over a task, above its strength of wing, to the imagination; but it must be an imagination exalted by

such a flame as mine, that can do justice to that sweetest, noblest of all sensations...sending up, through my eyes that sparks of the love-fire that ran all over me, and blazed in every vein and every pore of me: a system incarnate of joy all over. (Cleland 220)

It is significant that Fanny stops writing when she remembers her sexual reunion with Charles because her other orgasmic encounters do not disrupt her writing. Even though Fanny achieves orgasm and thus has great sex in these other encounters, she does not have blissful experiences when she writes about them. Fanny's sexual reunion with Charles is both emotionally and physically gratifying. When Fanny writes about this memory, she is not merely remembering that she had great sex, she is reliving the emotional bliss of this moment. It is also crucial to point out that this gap in the text occurs before Fanny describes herself reaching orgasm with Charles. Thus, Fanny's blissful experience arises from the emotional intensity and significance of their reunion rather than the physical pleasure and orgasm that result from it.

Through their privileging of emotion, Cleland and Barthes position emotional gratification as a requirement of blissful experience. Emotional gratification elevates the sexual experience of Fanny's erotic body from the repetitive, simple pleasures of a sexual encounter to the novelty of a blissful experience. Similarly, the emotional gratification Fanny experiences while writing elevates her from the mundane and repetitive writing process to the novelty of a blissful experience outside of the text. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud argues that it is impossible for adults to enjoy repetitive experiences and behaviours because this type of pleasure is childish:

Children have their pleasurable experiences repeated often enough, and they are inexorable in their insistence that the repetition shall be an identical one. This character trait disappears later on. If a joke is heard for a second time, it produces almost no effect; a theatrical production never creates so great an impression the second time as the first; indeed, it is hardly possible to persuade an adult who has very much enjoyed reading a book to re-read it immediately. Novelty is always the condition of enjoyment. (Freud 42)

Freud's claim that adults cannot take pleasure in repetitive experiences because they are not novel, parallels Barthes claim that an "extravagantly repeated" erotic experience is "contrary" to an "unexpected [erotic experience that is] succulent in [its] newness" (42). Although Barthes, like Freud argues that repetition contradicts novelty, he is referring to erotic experiences that are pleasurable but not blissful. Ultimately, Cleland and Barthes challenge Freud's position through Fanny's blissful encounters with Charles, which are repetitive due to the nature of the sexual acts involved but novel because "bliss comes only with the *absolutely new*" (Barthes 40, his italics).

In the beginning of *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes argues, "there is always a vacillation...a margin of indecision" between bliss and pleasure which makes their meaning "precarious, revocable [and] reversible" and leaves "the discourse incomplete" (4). Barthes exposes the complementary yet contradictory relationship between bliss and pleasure to draw attention to what unites and simultaneously distinguishes these terms in his discussion of the erotic body and the text. Barthes defines "the text of bliss" as "the text that imposes a state of loss, discomforts (perhaps to a point of boredom), [and] unsettles the reader's historical, cultural and psychological assumptions [and] the

consistency of his tastes, values [and] memories” which ultimately “brings to a crisis his relation with language” (14). Conversely, Barthes defines “the text of pleasure” as “the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria [and] comes from culture [but] does not break with it” (14). Barthes challenges the opposition of these terms when he reveals that “what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss” (7, his italics). As pleasure pursues this site of loss (which is also the site of bliss), pleasure achieves the impossible and forges a complementary relationship with bliss.

However, this feat is not without its complications because pleasure by definition should “content, fill [and] grant euphoria” (Barthes 14) but as pleasure approaches bliss, instead of maintaining its functions, it destabilizes them. As a result, pleasure cannot have a complementary relationship with bliss unless it betrays its nature. Despite this failure, Barthes’ classification of bliss and pleasure as “texts” allows them to foster a complementary relationship through their mutual union with the text. As the text of pleasure reaches the text of bliss, bliss “imposes a state of loss” (Barthes 14) that causes it to break from language and the text. This separation forces bliss to occur in the erotic body instead of in the text. Thus, bliss cannot have a complementary relationship with pleasure because they have different mediums.

In his discussion of the erotic body and the text, Barthes outlines the nature and mediums of pleasure and bliss to solidify their complementary yet simultaneously contradictory relationship. Barthes unites pleasure with bliss through a site of loss but distinguishes pleasure from bliss when pleasure destabilizes itself. Conversely, Barthes unites bliss with pleasure through the text itself but repels bliss from pleasure when the

text fails. Barthes ultimately blames pleasure for this problematic relationship because pleasure contradicts itself. Barthes qualifies this accusation when he introduces selfhood into his discussion:

Now the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reins of pleasure and bliss is an anachronic subject, for he simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture...and in the destruction of that culture: he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse. (14)

Similar to the anachronic subject, pleasure embraces its nature when it maintains its present state of being but denies its nature when it approaches bliss, which according to Rick Rylance is “an ecstatic loss of previous being” (82). Pleasure rejects its own nature to approach bliss and in doing so creates a false complementary relationship with bliss that immediately reverts back to contradiction when bliss destroys the selfhood that pleasure needs to protect. For this reason, Barthes privileges bliss and charges pleasure as the agent of contradiction in their problematic relationship.

Barthes emphasizes the dysfunction of bliss and pleasure’s relationship to expose their mutual perversity through the ‘anachronic subject’ who is ‘split twice over, doubly perverse.’ Barthes defines perversion as the breakdown of restrictions and constraints when he states that “pleasure in pieces [,] language in pieces [and] culture in pieces” are all examples of “perverse texts” because “they are outside of any imaginable finality” (52). Although Barthes focuses on the mutual perversity of bliss and pleasure, neither term requires the other to be perverse. Pleasure is sometimes perverse but bliss is always

perverse. Barthes explains that “bliss does not constrain to pleasure” or any other force because “the text of bliss is absolutely intransitive” (52). Bliss does not need the text, language, culture or pleasure to reach meaning which is why “perversion does not suffice to define bliss; it is extreme perversion which defines it: an extreme continually shifted, an empty, mobile, unpredictable extreme. This extreme guarantees bliss” (52). The reader witnesses this extreme perversion and its aftermath in Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* when Fanny drops her pen.

This scene is an example of the complementary yet simultaneously contradictory relationship between the mutually perverse bliss and pleasure because in Fanny’s blissful experience she is “a subject split twice over, doubly perverse” (Barthes 14). In Barthesian terms, Fanny is an “anachronic subject” because she “enjoys the consistency of [her] selfhood” and “seeks its loss” (Barthes 14) as she unknowingly approaches a site of bliss. When Fanny reaches this site of loss, she drops her pen and has a blissful experience, which Cleland represents with a “gap” in the text. This gap demonstrates that the “text of bliss” “discomforts” and “unsettles” Fanny’s “historical, cultural and psychological assumptions [and] the consistency of [her] tastes, values [and] memories” which ultimately “brings to crisis [her] relation with language” (Barthes 14). The text fails Fanny in this blissful moment and as she recovers from her disorienting experience, she confesses her “faithful memory” and “description, too [have] desert[ed her]” (Cleland 220). Fanny hopes her imagination will bridge this gap but it fails to do so. This is evident when she is unable to provide a detailed description of this encounter, as she does with her other exchanges. Fanny’s imagination, memory and ability to write fail her because she cannot recover from her loss of self. Fanny’s loss of selfhood supports

Barthes' claims that in bliss "no alibi stands up" because "nothing is reconstituted [and] nothing [is] recuperated" (52). When Fanny drops her pen, she breaks from language, the text and culture and experiences a complete loss of self, which exemplifies the extreme perversion that guarantees Barthian "bliss."

Although this experience depicts the mutual perversity of bliss and pleasure, there are moments in the novel where Fanny's pleasure is perverse but does not lead to bliss. Barthes explains that without bliss, pleasure can only achieve "an average perversion" which "quickly loads up itself with a play of subordinate finalities: prestige, ostentation, rivalry, lecturing, self-serving etc" (52). In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny's pleasure exemplifies this average perversion when she initiates a contrived rivalry with Mr. H—. Soon after Fanny becomes Mr. H—'s live-in companion, she becomes acquainted with the other kept mistresses in the household. Fanny quickly learns that all of them "perfectly detest their keeper[s]" and as a result "[make] little or no scruple of any infidelity [that] they [can] safely accomplish" (Cleland 104). Unlike these women, Fanny does not want to wrong Mr. H— because he pampers her with his "constant generosity, politeness and tender attentions" so she "insure[s] him her fidelity" (Cleland 104) in return. However, after seven months as his companion, Fanny finds Mr. H— and her maid, Hannah, having sex in the room adjoining her bedroom.

Without their knowledge, Fanny watches their exchange through the open doorway and thinks to herself that if she had "loved this man" she would not have "had the patience to see the whole scene through" (Cleland 104). Even though Fanny admits that "[her] pride alone was hurt, [not her] heart" (Cleland 105) she is tempted to burst in on them to "play the jealous princess" (Cleland 105). However, she decides against it



because she fears that such an outburst would jeopardize her position. Instead, Fanny delays her vengeance in order to plan her retaliation carefully. Fanny decides to retaliate by cheating on Mr. H – and she recognizes that she has the perfect opportunity to do so when Mr. H— hires a “very handsome” and impressionable “tenant’s son” (Cleland 106). Fanny admits that normally her “pride alone would have guarded [her] from [thinking this] way” but after “Mr. H—’s condescension with her maid,” Fanny “look[s] on [the tenant’s son] as a delicious instrument” for “[her] designed retaliation” (Cleland 107). Fanny seduces the tenant’s son and takes double pleasure in their sexual exchange because it allows her to establish a contrived rivalry with Mr. H – and it is physically gratifying. Even though Fanny achieves orgasm with the tenant’s son, their sexual exchange is not blissful because her pleasure derives from a rivalry, which Barthes would describe as “a subordinate finality” of “average perversion.”

Despite Fanny’s initial intentions to use the tenant’s son as an instrument of revenge in a single sexual encounter, she decides to have an affair with him. Fanny realizes that she cannot justify this affair as “revenge” and admits she is in the secret relationship for “the sole pleasure of enjoyment” (Cleland 120). When this happens, Fanny’s perverse pleasure shifts from her contrived rivalry with Mr. H – to the self-serving pleasures of physical gratification. Fanny continues to have orgasmic encounters with the tenant’s son but they are not blissful because self-serving pleasure is another subordinate finality of average perversion. Fanny indulges in this perverse pleasure but her indulgence soon becomes excessive. Fanny increases the frequency of her exchanges with the tenant’s son and in doing so significantly increases the likelihood of their discovery. Inevitably, Mr. H – catches Fanny and the tenant’s son in a compromising

position and in a desperate attempt to ensure herself a lenient punishment for this affair, Fanny decides to “play the jealous princess” (Cleland 105) by informing Mr. H – that she saw him with Hannah. This information spares Fanny from harsh punishment because Mr. H – feels partially responsible for her indiscretion. As a result, he dismisses her as his companion but he permits her to take the valuable belongings she accumulated while she was with him.

Soon after her dismissal, Fanny meets Mrs. Cole and becomes a prostitute in her brothel. Fanny’s experiences in this brothel represent another instance in the novel where her pleasure is perverse but not blissful. To gain the respect of Mrs. Cole and the other prostitutes in the brothel, Fanny is required to have sex with a man of Mrs. Cole’s choosing in front of the entire group as part of a communal display of sexual prowess. After watching several couples engage in intercourse, it is Fanny’s turn to perform the same task for the group. Although “the whole troop of men and women” recognize that she is uncomfortable and relieve some of her anxiety with their “applause...flatter[y] and compliments” (Cleland 159) Fanny is still apprehensive that the exchange will not be pleasurable when her partner initiates their encounter. Despite this, Fanny is quickly propelled into “an ocean of boundless pleasures” that leaves her and her partner “overpowered and still...for a few blissful moments” until “the[ir] sense of pleasure [is] stagnated” and they are able to “recover from [their] trance” (Cleland 161). Once Fanny leaves her partner “the company that had stood round [them] in a profound silence...compliment[s] [her]” and assures her that she will “go through no further public trials” because she has been “consummately initiated as one of them” (Cleland 161).

With a sigh of relief, Fanny decides she has received “a double payment [through this] one juncture” (Cleland 161).

Fanny’s ‘double payment’ or ‘double pleasure’ is a combination of perverse pleasure and another type of pleasure. Fanny’s pleasure is perverse because her public exchange enables her to gain social and financial security, the approval of her peers and the ecstasy of orgasm. Even though Fanny experiences physical bliss or orgasm, she does not have a blissful experience. This is because she lacks an emotional connection with her partner. In addition to the absence of love, their exchange leads to personal prestige and self-serving pleasures, which are “subordinate finalities” of “average perversion.” In addition to these perverse pleasures, Fanny enjoys the pleasure of performance in this encounter. This is one of many instances in the novel where Fanny takes pleasure in her role as a prostitute. Margaret E. Mitchell claims that “Fanny’s function [in this profession] is to suffer and to submit... as a woman and as a commodity” (310) to her male keepers and Madams. However, Mitchell points out that, despite the potential dangers of this position, “luckily for Fanny, [her] suffering is always, accompanied with pleasure” (310). Barthes explains that a “certain pleasure is derived from a way of imaging oneself as individual, of inventing a final, rarest fiction: the fictive identity” (62). Thus, Fanny takes pleasure in all of her erotic experiences as a prostitute because she enjoys performing this fictive identity. Barthes reveals that when the subject performs “this fiction [by] stag[ing] [its] plural [in] the theatre of society” the subject’s “pleasure is individual - but not personal” (62). When Fanny performs her fictive identity, the pleasure that she experiences in her sexual encounters is not personal or emotional.

Conversely, Fanny's erotic experiences with Charles are personal and emotional because she is not performing this fictive identity when she is with him. Fanny meets Charles for the first time shortly after the sly Madam, Mrs. Brown, has lured Fanny into her brothel. As Fanny wanders through the brothel, she notices Charles sleeping on the floor and immediately falls in love with him. Fanny kneels down beside him and with a "trembling hand," she takes "hold of one of his" and "wak[es] him as gently as possible" (Cleland 72). In this way, Fanny initiates a relationship with Charles because she loves him. Fanny's forwardness in this scene is significant because in all her subsequent relationships, Madams initiate her sexual encounters with male keepers or Fanny initiates sexual encounters with men she does not love. It is also crucial to point out that even though Fanny and Charles meet in a brothel, she has not accepted her position as a prostitute and is still a virgin. Despite this, when Charles wakes up he assumes Fanny is a prostitute because of the venue so he "assures her that he will make it worth her while...if she favour[s] him with her company" (Cleland 73). Even though Fanny loves him, she tells Charles "that for reasons [she does] not [have] time to explain... [she] c[an] not stay with him, and might not even ever see him again" (Cleland 73). Charles is "struck [by her] appearance and likes her as much as he c[an] think of liking anyone in [her] supposed way of life" (Cleland 73) so he ignores her initial rejection and boldly asks Fanny to come away with him:

[He] asked me briskly at once if I would be kept by him, and that he would take a lodging for me directly, and relieve me from any engagements he presumed I might be under to the house. Rash, sudden, undigested, and even dangerous as this offer might be from a perfect stranger, and that stranger a

giddy boy, the prodigious love I was struck with for him had put a charm into his voice there was no resisting, and blinded me to every objection: I could, at that instant, have died for him; think if I could resist an invitation to live with him! Thus my heart, beating strong to the proposal, dictated my answer, after scarce a minute's pause, that I would accept his offer, and make my escape to him, in what way he pleased, and that I would be entirely at his disposal, let it be good or bad (Cleland 73)

After this conversation, Charles honours his offer and whisks Fanny away from the brothel with her debts paid. In this way, Charles saves Fanny from a life of prostitution even though he mistakes her for one. Charles does not realize that she is a young and impressionable virgin until their first sexual encounter. It is significant that Fanny lets Charles take away her virginity because it makes her completely reliant on him. Fanny admits that because Charles now “ha[s] complete triumph over [her] maidenhead” she “belong[s] to him” rendering him “the absolute disposer of [her] happiness, and in a word, [her] fate” (Cleland 79). Despite all that she risks to be with him, Charles and Fanny live happily together as husband and wife until Charles’ father finds him and sends him away before he can return to Fanny. Charles’ sudden departure propels Fanny back into a life of prostitution and with no one else to save her from this fate, she quickly learns how to stage her fictive identity. Once she has mastered it, Fanny enjoys her sexual encounters but they pale in comparison to her blissful experiences with Charles. Barthes explains that “bliss is...like a sudden obliteration of the warrior value...a suspension of the ‘heart’” (30). For the subject to undergo this ‘suspension of the heart,’ the subject’s heart must be vulnerable to suspension before it approaches a

site of bliss. If the subject's heart is vulnerable, blissful experience is possible but if the subject's heart is not open, bliss cannot occur. In this way, Barthes makes emotional vulnerability a requirement of bliss.

Fanny's body and heart are vulnerable in her sexual encounters with Charles but only her body is vulnerable in her orgasmic encounters as a prostitute. Fanny's heart is not vulnerable when she performs her fictive identity because she is emotionally detached from her partners. The orgasm that Fanny achieves with these partners is satisfying but unfulfilling because her heart is not vulnerable to suspension. In her sexual encounters as a prostitute, Fanny is ultimately constrained by the temporal limitations of orgasm and by her heart, which resists suspension and in doing so disables her from having a blissful experience. Conversely, in her sexual exchanges with Charles, Fanny is not constrained by the temporal limitations of orgasm or by her heart, because both her body and her heart are vulnerable to suspension. Thus, Fanny's emotional vulnerability enables her to experience the emotional gratification that bliss requires.

Fanny happily engages in physically gratifying sexual encounters with Charles because her love for him makes their exchanges emotionally gratifying. Freud describes the subject's desire to engage in repetitive behaviours like this as "the compulsion to repeat" (21). Fanny's compulsion to repeat makes sense with Charles because their encounters are truly blissful. However, Fanny also repeatedly engages in other sexual encounters that are not truly blissful. Freud explains that "the compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to the instinctual impulses which

have since been repressed” (21). Fanny eventually realizes that her sexual exchanges as a prostitute are not emotionally gratifying and thus not blissful but continues to engage in them. Fanny experiences an excess of physical pleasure during one of these exchanges and believes she is breaching bliss but realizes that this is not the case when her orgasm dissolves (Cleland 120). After several disappointing encounters, the novelty of her orgasm wears off. When this happens, Fanny’s pleasure fades and sex becomes boring. Barthes explains that “boredom is not far from bliss” because “it is bliss seen from the shores of pleasure” (26). It is important to point out that when Barthes reveals that bliss is related to boredom he is referring to the type of bliss that occurs when a subject is only physically vulnerable. This type of bliss bores Fanny because it disappoints her. As Fanny writes about these physically gratifying encounters, she remembers her disappointment and realizes that the erotic content of her letter will disappoint and bore the Madam who will read it. To prevent this reaction from her reader, Fanny uses unique diction and phrasing to describe her sexual encounters. However, despite her efforts, Fanny admits that her letter will eventually bore the Madam because of the repetition of the sexual acts that she repeatedly describes:

...[W]hatever variety of forms and modes the situations are susceptible of, there is no escaping a repetition of near the same images, the same figures, the same expressions, with this further inconvenience added to the disgust it creates that the words joys, ardours, transports, ecstasies, and the rest of the those pathetic terms so congenial to, so received in the practice of pleasure, flatten and lose much of their due spirit and energy by the frequency they

indispensably recur with, in a narrative of which that practice professedly composes the whole basis. (Cleland 129)

As she writes, Fanny recalls how she tried to make her sexual exchanges as a prostitute interesting by varying her sexual partners, the venues she had sex in and by experimenting with different types of sex and sexual positions. However, Fanny's attempts were unsuccessful, which made her erotic exchanges seem predictable and boring. Andrew Elfenbein points out "the great danger about sex [in Cleland's novel] is not...that it is dangerous or morally corrupting, but that it is potentially boring" (34). Even though Fanny enjoys writing about her erotic past, she finally succumbs to the boredom when she is in the middle of describing two orgasmic but impersonal exchanges:

... [B]ut as the circumstances did not admit of much variation, I shall spare you the description. At the same time, allow me to place you here an excuse I am conscious of owing you for having perhaps too much added the figurative style though, surely, it can pass where more allowable than in a subject which is so properly the province of poetry, nay! Is poetry itself, pregnant with every flower of imagination and loving metaphors, even where not the natural expressions, for respects of fashion and sounds necessarily forbid it. (Cleland 207)

Fanny admits that these exchanges are monotonous so she spares her reader further description of them and apologizes for her letter's repetitive content. Through this admission, as both the writer of her letter and as the subject of Cleland's novel, Fanny



demonstrates that physical gratification cannot sustain the writer or subject's interest. Emotional gratification is required.

Fanny proves this when she drops her pen as she remembers her sexual reunion with Charles. Prior to this blissful experience, Fanny is hesitant to describe her sexual encounters. However, once Charles re-enters her narrative, Fanny is eager to describe their sexual exchange. This is because Fanny is able to experience the emotional bliss of their encounter in a new way. Fanny is always emotionally vulnerable with Charles, but her vulnerability is never the same because her emotional state is influenced by ever-changing factors. As a result, Fanny's emotional gratification in each encounter is unique and cannot be replicated. Thus, it can be argued that Fanny is able to have a blissful experience when she remembers her blissful reunion with Charles because she is in a different emotional state. The fact that Fanny has two novel experiences from the same encounter (Cleland 220)<sup>27</sup> demonstrates that bliss can overcome the repetitive nature of sex and writing. Fanny enjoys writing about her erotic experiences regardless of their novelty. Because she takes pleasure in these memories, Fanny's text is written in pleasure. However, writing her text in pleasure does not make Fanny's text a "text of pleasure." Barthes reveals that this is because "writing in pleasure" does not "guarantee... the writer – [his/her] reader's pleasure" (4). In other words, Fanny's pleasure does not guarantee her reader's pleasure. Instead, Cleland uses the novel's voyeuristic lens to guarantee insight into the roles of writer and subject by allowing his readers to eavesdrop on Fanny as she writes her letter. In this way, Cleland cleverly permits his readers to understand Fanny without giving them the same opportunity to intrude on him as the

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<sup>27</sup> The memory of her blissful reunion with Charles causes Fanny to have another blissful experience when she drops her pen.

writer of this erotic novel. Barthes claims that “so –called erotic books” like *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* “are books of Desire, not of Pleasure” because “they *represent* not so much the erotic scene [but] the expectation of it, the preparation of it [and the] ascent [of it]” (58, Barthes’ italics). According to Barthes, the expectation of pleasure “is what makes the scene exciting” so “when the scene occurs” the reader is “disappoint[ed] [and] deflat[ed]” (58) because his/her expectation has not been fulfilled. For this reason, Barthes decides “that the whole [premise of erotic books] is very disappointing” (58). Despite this, Barthes reveals that a text of Desire can become “an object of pleasure” or a text of pleasure if the writer “force[s] the text to breach bliss” (59).

Cleland tries to make his text a text of pleasure by breaching bliss. His novel reaches a site of bliss when Fanny remembers that Charles initiated their sexual reunion by “enter[ing her with] might and main” (Cleland 220). Fanny breaches this site of bliss when she stops writing. Barthes explains that bliss “withdraws the text from the image-systems of language” and “imposes a state of loss” that brings to crisis [the subject’s] relation with language” (33, 14). This ‘state of loss’ leaves “language in pieces, culture in pieces” (Barthes 52) and Fanny in pieces which is evident when she regains her composure but is unable to return to her previous state of being. Before her blissful experience, Fanny is proud of her erotic past and never questions or considers the moral implications of her lifestyle. However, when Fanny picks up her pen, she announces her new social position as the wealthy wife of Charles in order to distance herself from erotic past:

In the bosom of virtue, I gathered the only uncorrupt sweets: where, looking back on the course of vice I had run, and comparing its infamous

blandishments with the infinitely superior joys of innocence, I could not help pitying, even in point of taste, those who, immersed in a gross sensuality, are insensible to the so delicate charms of VIRTUE, than which even PLEASURE has not a greater friend, nor than VICE a greater enemy. Thus temperance makes men lords over those pleasures that intemperance enslaves them to: the one, parent of health, vigour, fertility, cheerfulness, and every other desirable good in life; the other, of diseases, debility, barrenness, self-loathing, with only every evil incident to human nature. (Cleland 223)

After this blatant rejection of her former lifestyle in favour of her new “virtuous” life, Fanny addresses her reader, as the novel ends. Fanny acknowledges that her change of lifestyle and perspective might seem like a “tailpiece of morality” that is “out of place or out of character” (Cleland 223) but she explains that she wants to live a life of virtue instead of vice because of “how comparatively inferior [vice’s] joys are to those [of] virtue” (Cleland 223). Fanny’s drastic change after she drops her pen demonstrates that she achieved bliss because it destroyed her previous state of being. As Barthes explains, when bliss “imposes a state of loss [...] nothing [can be] reconstituted [and] nothing [can be] recuperated” (14, 52). I argue that the fact that Fanny undergoes this state of loss at the end of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* demonstrates that Cleland successfully forced his novel to a site of bliss.

However, Cleland fails to breach this site of bliss. In order to breach bliss, Fanny has to stop writing and in doing so, break from the text. Cleland is able to depict this site of bliss and the consequences of its achievement but he cannot depict bliss itself because it occurs outside of the text. Cleland can only represent bliss with a “gap” in the text.

Murat Aydemir asserts that “Barthes privileges the suspension of narrative” over “the suspense of narrative” (168) because bliss cannot occur in the text. It is evident that Cleland, like Barthes, also privileges the suspension of his narrative because he represents bliss with a “gap” in his novel. Because Cleland fails to breach bliss, Fanny cannot write from within it. Fanny’s inability to write in bliss demonstrates that the writer can reach a site of bliss but the writer has to stop writing to have a blissful experience. Similarly, the reader can reach a site of bliss through a text that is emotionally gratifying but the reader has to stop reading the text to reach bliss. Thus, the processes of reading and writing can bring the writer and reader to a site of bliss but the writer and reader can only experience bliss when these processes cease. Ultimately, through their exploration of the erotic body and the text, Cleland and Barthes demonstrate that reading and writing are not blissful experiences.

## CHAPTER 3 – TENDER BLISS, BOREDOM AND THE MIND/BODY BALANCE

### IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*

*“Tenderness emerges from the fact that two persons  
longing as all individuals do, to overcome the  
separateness and isolation to which we are all heir  
because we are individuals, can participate in a  
relationship that, for the moment, is not of two isolated  
selves but a union”  
(Rollo May)*

Throughout his career, D. H. Lawrence expressed his dissatisfaction with the state of modern society.<sup>28</sup> He believed society's preoccupation with individualism, materialism and mechanization had produced a modern consciousness that was cold, artificial and detached. Lawrence despised the modern consciousness because he believed it had damaged the sacred relationship between men and women. Lawrence recognized that modern men and women were out of touch with each other and believed they were incapable of forming a real connection because they suffered from a division within the self. Lawrence felt that Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory was responsible for the “modern” self's division and by extension, society's demise.

In Lawrence's view, Freud's “psychoanalysis had become a public danger” because it reduced the unconscious to “nothing but a huge slimy serpent of sex...that ate our souls and caused our helpless neuroses” (PU 7, 9).<sup>29</sup> Freud also restricted the parameters of “normal” sexual experience to desires, behaviours and acts that were strictly procreative. Any desires, behaviours or acts that did not fall into this category

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<sup>28</sup> “Modern” society refers to the state of European society in the 1920s and certainly from the years 1926-1928, during which time Lawrence wrote the erotic novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

<sup>29</sup> The abbreviation “PU” refers to Lawrence's essay, “Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious.”

were dismissed as perversions<sup>30</sup> that should be repressed in order to maintain psychic health and moral well-being. Lawrence rejected Freud's labeling because he believed Freud was sullyng sexual experience by making perfectly normal sexual desires, behaviours and acts the subjects of social taboos. Despite Lawrence's objections, Freud was a well-respected psychologist and his psychoanalytic theory was widely accepted in "modern" society. Consequently, society automatically attached fear, anxiety and shame to sexual experiences that Freud deemed "deviant." These negative associations were also attached to the site of sexual experience - the body. According to Lawrence, the body then, as a potential site of perversion, became a perverse object that society feared and desperately tried to ignore. Thus, in Lawrence's view, it was through society's internalization of psychoanalysis that "the mind [came to] despise and fear the body, and the body [came to] hate and resist the mind" (AP 309).<sup>31</sup> Freud tried to liberate himself from a long Christian tradition of body-fearing morality,<sup>32</sup> but Lawrence felt that Freud failed to achieve this goal. Lawrence ultimately blamed Freud for severing the connection between the mind and body preventing the modern self from being whole.

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<sup>30</sup> In his essay, "The Sexual Aberrations," Freud defines perversions as "sexual activities which either (a) *extend*, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) *linger* over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim" (62, his italics).

<sup>31</sup> The abbreviation "AP" refers to Lawrence's 1930 essay, "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*."

<sup>32</sup> James C. Cowan argues that "Freud and Lawrence were both opponents of conventional morality while espousing a more profound ethic" (262). In a letter to James J. Putnam (8 July 1915), Freud insists that his personal morality which is based on "a sense of justice and consideration of others" opposes conventional morality. Freud explains that "sexual morality as defined by society, in its most extreme form that of America, strikes me as very contemptible. I stand for an infinitely freer sexual life" (308). Similarly, in "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" Lawrence states, "I want men and women to be able to *think* sex, fully, completely, honestly, and cleanly" (308, his italics). Lawrence, like Freud, wanted to liberate the mind: "The mind has an old grovelling fear of the body and the body's potencies. It is the *mind* we have to liberate to civilize these points" (AP 309, his italics).

In an attempt to repair psychoanalysis' damage, Lawrence outlines his own theory of the mind in "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious" and "Fantasia of the Unconscious." In these two essays, Lawrence discusses several topics<sup>33</sup> but primarily focuses on providing a detailed description of the unconscious. Lawrence characterizes the unconscious as a "blood" consciousness that fuses the mind and body. This is in contrast to Freud's unconscious, which is a strictly "mental" consciousness. In "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," Lawrence describes the "blood" consciousness as a "lovely, suave, fluid, *creative* electricity that flows in a circuit between the great nerve-centers" (22, his italics). In this passage, Lawrence mixes the language of the body with the rhetoric of science in order to emphasize the importance of balance. Lawrence explains that the "blood" consciousness promotes psychic health by balancing the mind and body. Once the mind and body are in balance, the self is able to experience "real" emotion.

In "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," Lawrence distinguishes between two types of emotion: real emotion and counterfeit emotion. He explains that even though many "modern" men and women think they are living "emotionally rich lives," they are in fact incapable of experiencing real emotion<sup>34</sup> because their minds are out of touch with their bodies. According to Lawrence, real emotion resides in the body but can only

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<sup>33</sup> In addition to the unconscious, Lawrence discusses morality, incest, psychoanalysis and the relationship between child and mother; and lover and beloved in his 1921 essay, "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious." Lawrence also discusses the senses, sleep and dreams, sexuality, sexual experience and non-incestuous parental love in his 1922 essay, "Fantasia of the Unconscious."

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence insists that "today, many people live and die without having had any real feelings – though they have had a 'rich emotional life' apparently, having showed strong mental feeling. But it is all counterfeit...we are today, creatures whose active emotional self has no real existence, but is all reflected downwards from the mind...People allow themselves to feel a certain number of limited feelings... [and] this feeling only what you allow yourselves to feel at last kills all capacity for feeling, and in the higher emotional range, you feel nothing at all. This has come to pass in our present century. The higher emotions are strictly dead. They have to be faked" (AP 311).

be understood by the mind.<sup>35</sup> Thus, a connection between the mind and body is essential for the self to experience real emotion. For Lawrence, real emotions are instinctive, natural and pre-social expressions that signal the beginning of the modern self's transformation into its "true" self. To complete this transformation, the "modern" self must experience the highest of all emotions, tenderness or tender love. Once the "modern" self reaches the brink of tender love, it dies and is reborn in tenderness as its "true" self. Lawrence depicts the "true" self's coming into being in his last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which he initially entitled, *Tenderness*.<sup>36</sup>

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence charts the personal journey of Constance Chatterley, as she initiates a scandalous affair with her gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors, in a desperate attempt to escape the unbearable monotony of life with her husband, Clifford Chatterley. As Connie and Mellors' relationship grows from lust to tender love, they experience a series of sexual awakenings that bring their minds and bodies into balance allowing them to shed their "modern" selves and be reborn as their "true" selves. Both characters achieve personal fulfillment through sexual rejuvenation, but they do not experience sexual rebirth at the same time. Mellors is reborn in the couple's first sexual encounter, while Connie is not "born a woman" (*LCL* 174) until their fifth encounter. Many feminist critics object to Connie's sexual rebirth by arguing that her loss of self is a loss of personhood,<sup>37</sup> while other critics have read Connie's loss of self as a return to

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<sup>35</sup> Lawrence characterizes "the body's life [as a] life of sensations and emotions. The body feels real hunger, real thirst, real joy in the sun or the snow, real pleasure in the smell of roses or the look of a lilac bush; real anger, real sorrow, real love, real tenderness, real warmth, real passion, real hate, real grief. All the emotions belong to the body, and are only recognized by the mind" (AP 311).

<sup>36</sup> In a letter to Dorothy Brett (6 January 1928), Lawrence states: "I've been re-writing my novel, for the third time. It's done, all but the last chapter. I think I shall re-christen it *Tenderness*" (255).

<sup>37</sup> Sheila Choudhury asserts that Connie's sexual rebirth seems to "suggest that a woman needs to annihilate and negate her selfhood before she can be called a woman in Lawrence's terms" (191). Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir points out that after her transformation, Connie is an embodiment of the old sexist expectation



patriarchy. These critics reject Connie's sexual rebirth by arguing that it reinforces phallic power by returning Connie and Mellors to traditional patriarchal roles,<sup>38</sup> while still other critics fault Lawrence for his masculinist agenda.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the foregoing objections, some critics charge Lawrence with objectifying Connie in order to play out his own masculine rape fantasies.<sup>40</sup> Although many critics ultimately reject *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as a patriarchal text that confirms male rape fantasies, some critics

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that a "woman should subordinate her existence to that of a man" (250). De Beauvoir concludes that all Lawrence has to offer to his reader "is once more the ideal of the 'true woman'...– who unreservedly accepts being defined as the Other" (254). In short, Connie is Lawrence's "ideal woman" because she adheres to the traditional gender role of the slow, soft and yielding female.

<sup>38</sup> Choudhury reads Connie's sexual rebirth as a "subordinat[ion] into the traditional feminine role of a passive receiver from an active partner" (191). Kate Millett extends this reading when she claims that all of "the scenes of sexual intercourse in the novel are written according to the 'female is passive, male is active'" (240) principle. Put another way, Lawrence uses Mellors' hand to reinforce phallic power and mastery by turning Connie into a 'passive receiver.'

<sup>39</sup>According to Millett, even though Lawrence insists that the mission of his novel "is the noble and necessary task of freeing sexual behaviour of perverse inhibition, purging the fiction which describes it of prurient or prudish euphemism, Lawrence is really the evangelist of quite another cause – 'phallic consciousness'" (238). Millett defines the phallic consciousness as "the transformation of masculine ascendancy into a mystical religion, international, possibly institutionalized" (238). Millett considers the phallic consciousness "sexual politics in its most overpowering form" and for this achievement, she crowns Lawrence "the most talented and fervid of sexual politicians" and "the most subtle as well, for it is through a feminine consciousness that his message is conveyed" (238-239). In short, Lawrence is the slyest of misogynists because he uses a female character to sell patriarchy to his readers. Charles Burack attacks this account of Lawrence by pointing out that "Millett supports her critique of the novel by citing masculinist statements made by Mellors but ignores passages that undercut those messages" (16). Burack also points out that Millett "fails to attend to broader negational structures that undermine all dogmatic assertions made within the novel" (16). In other words, Millett fails to provide an accurate account of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* through purposeful omission. For other objections to Lawrence's agenda see: Simone de Beauvoir's "D.H. Lawrence or Phallic Pride;" Corneila Nixon's *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn Against Women*. For other defences of Lawrence's agenda see: Sheila Macleod's *Lawrence's Men and Women*; Peter Balbert's "Feminist Displeasure and the Loving of Lady Chatterley: Lawrence, Hemingway, Mailer, and the Dialectic of 'Sex-with-Guilt,'" David Parker's "Towards a New Evaluative Discourse;" and Mark Spilka's "On Lawrence's Hostility to Wilful Women: The Chatterley Solution."

<sup>40</sup> Sharon Stockton reads one of Connie's sexual experiences as a violent rape and believes that her rebirth gives "the impression that Mellors 'heals' Constance Chatterley, first through rape and then through his dominance in sex. In this way, [Lawrence] both energizes the mother body and brings its proliferations under masculine control" (81). For Andrea Dworkin, the novel's sex scenes exhibit the defining features of pornography where women are "presented in postures of sexual submission," and "women's body parts are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts" (29). For Catharine A. Mackinnon the danger of such depictions is that: "sooner, or later, in one way or another, the consumers want to live out the pornography further in three dimensions" (102). In other words, some critics read Connie's sexual experience as a masculine rape fantasy. For other readings of Connie's experience as a masculine rape fantasy see: Anne Smith "A New Adam and a New Eve – Lawrence and Women: A Biographical Overview."

challenge this reading by arguing that Connie and Mellors destabilize rather than confirm traditional gender roles.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the critical controversy that surrounds *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, it is not my intention to refute or to support objections to the novel. Instead, I will explore the themes of tenderness and transcendence by analyzing Connie and Mellors' individual paths to sexual rejuvenation. Mellors' sexual awakening and rebirth have been largely overlooked by critics, which is curious given the fact that one of the novel's overriding messages is that the "blood" consciousness can only awaken when lovers are joined in tender love.<sup>42</sup> In *A Lover's Discourse*, Roland Barthes defines tender love or tenderness as "bliss" (224). By equating tenderness with bliss, Barthes asserts the undeniable connection between bliss and the highest of all emotions, love. When an individual experiences tender love, he/she breaches bliss and has a blissful experience that causes a state of loss. As the individual recovers from this experience, he/she is reborn in tender bliss as his/her "true" self. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Connie and Mellors undergo a series of sexual awakenings that culminate in blissful experiences that enable each of them to achieve wholeness and personal fulfillment through tender bliss.

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<sup>41</sup> Tonya Krouse insists that "the movements of Mellors' hand do not appear to fit neatly under a heading of 'patriarchal' or 'phallic' dominance nor do they appear to signify egalitarian give-and-take" (53). Krouse admits that Mellors' hand symbolizes his mastery but points out that "it makes little sense to regard Mellors as an unproblematic agent of patriarchal power or as an unproblematic purveyor of phallic dominance" when "the narrative constantly and consciously undermines Mellors' masculine privilege" (53). In other words, even though Mellors and Connie take on traditional gender roles in some of their sexual encounters, the patriarchy that this move suggests is destabilized at various points in the novel. Krouse adds that critics who "assign the fantasy to Mellors or to Lawrence himself" are misreading "the narrative [which] clearly appears to credit this fantasy to Connie" (54). Krouse concludes that "such claims leave no room to see moments in which Connie has agency over her own sexual experience even as she submits" (55). Judith Butler also points out that "if the pornographic representation is someone else's fantasy, that of 'men' – broadly and ambiguously construed – and if 'the woman viewer' is the injured-object of that fantasy-turned-action, then women are by [Dworkin's] definition never agents of pornographic fantasy" (504). Simply put, reading Connie's sexual experience as Mellors or Lawrence's rape fantasy denies Connie the agency to have her own sexual fantasies.

<sup>42</sup> As Choudhury aptly asserts, "it is through the lover's union that the new consciousness awakens" (191).

At the beginning of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence characterizes Connie as a typical "modern" woman with nothing distinctive or unique about her. She was merely a "ruddy, country-looking girl" who "seemed just to have come from her native village" (*LCL* 6), but this was not the case. Instead of growing up in a village, Connie had had an "aesthetically unconventional upbringing" (*LCL* 6), travelling and living among artists and cultured socialists. When she turned fifteen, Connie was sent to a boarding school in Dresden, where she spent her time sexually and intellectually experimenting with other students. By the time she was eighteen, Connie had gained a considerable level of sexual experience but had never found sex satisfying, even when she was in love. Connie never let herself "love a young man unless he and she were verbally very near: that is, unless they were profoundly interested [in] *talking* to one another" (*LCL* 8, Lawrence's italics). Connie had many stimulating conversations with men at Dresden, but it was rare when she developed a strong "mental" connection with one. Thus, when Connie met a man who mentally connected with her, she loved him for it. This type of intellectual communion satisfied Connie, but it never fully satisfied her partners. They always wanted to have sex, so she slept with them. Connie did not sleep with them because she loved them. She slept with them because she wanted to maintain "the impassioned interchange of talk" (*LCL* 7). It was the talk that Connie loved, not the men. Thus, when she met a man whose love of talk matched hers, she married him.

In his essay, "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" Lawrence classifies Connie and Clifford's marriage as a "modern" marriage. According to Lawrence, this type of marriage "takes place when two people are 'thrilled' by each other's personality: when they have the same tastes in furniture or books or sports or amusement, when they love

‘talking’ to one another, when they admire one another’s ‘minds’” (AP 325). Lawrence believes this type of relationship “is an excellent basis [for a]friendship” but that it is “a disastrous basis for marriage [b]ecause marriage inevitably starts the sex activity, and the sex activity is, and always was and will be in some way hostile to the mental, *personal* relationship between man and woman” (AP 325, his italics). In other words, according to Lawrence “modern” marriages can never be successful because they are based on a “mental” connection. For Lawrence, a marriage is not truly a marriage without a blood connection. Lawrence defines “blood” as “the substance of the soul” and posits that it is only “in the blood, [that] knowing and being, [and] feeling, are one and undivided” (AP 324). Blood then, is what balances the mind and body. As the mind and body come into balance, the affective self awakens and real emotion becomes possible. Eventually, a couple breaches the highest of emotions, tender love. When this happens, they have blissful experiences that transform them into undivided individuals. Thus, it is through a blood connection that a couple can experience tender bliss and achieve personal fulfillment and wholeness. Because tender love is the basis of a blood connection, this type of connection is lasting, as is the tender sex that it produces.<sup>43</sup> In Lawrence’s view, if a couple lacks this blood connection, they should not marry because this type of marriage is counterfeit. Lawrence despises counterfeit marriage and the sex that it produces but believes that virtually every marriage in his “modern” society is counterfeit. For this reason, Lawrence concludes that “nearly all modern sex is a pure matter of nerves, cold and bloodless” (AP 326). Lawrence refers to bloodless sex as “nervous” or “personal” sex.

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<sup>43</sup> Lawrence explains that tender sex is “always different, always new” (AP 323).

Because “nervous” sex is not blissful in this conception, it causes physiological and psychological damage over time. Lawrence explains that when a couple’s “bloodstreams are brought into contact” during tender sex “the urge of blood-desire is positive” which causes “a newness in the blood” (AP 326). This ‘newness in the blood’ refreshes the couple’s energy levels, renews their mutual desire for physical contact and strengthens their blood connection, which keeps them emotionally and mentally in touch. Thus, tender “sex is the great unifier...which makes people happy together, in togetherness” (AP 332). Unfortunately, “nervous” sex does not have the same effect. Lawrence explains that when a couple’s bloodstreams come into contact during “nervous” sex, “the blood-contact becomes frictional and destructive” which causes “a resultant whitening and impoverishment of the blood” (AP 326-327). This ‘whitening and impoverishment of the blood’ drains the couple’s energy levels and weakens their mutual desire for physical contact, which ultimately strains their “mental” connection. Over time, “nervous” sex becomes so exhaustive and debilitating that it destroys a couple’s desire for physical intimacy. When this happens, the couple gradually drifts apart until their “mental” connection also collapses. Thus, instead of unifying “modern” couples, “nervous” sex divides them.

At first, “modern” couples do not notice the adverse effects of “nervous” sex because they find it pleasurable. Lawrence explains that “the katabolism of ‘nervous’ sex-activity...produce[s] for a time a sort of ecstasy and a heightening of consciousness” (AP 327). “Modern” couples experience this ‘ecstasy and a heightening of consciousness’ in their first few sexual encounters but the novelty of “nervous” sex quickly wears off and sexual encounters cease to be pleasurable for them. Once their

sexual encounters cease to be pleasurable “modern” couples are able to recognize that “nervous” sex has damaged their relationships. Lawrence explains that pleasure during “nervous” sex, “like the effect of alcohol or drugs, is the result of the decomposition of certain corpuscles in the blood, and is a process of impoverishment” (AP 327). This process of impoverishment first breaks down a couple’s desire for physical contact and then collapses their “mental” connection. Without a connection to sustain them, both partners start to physically and mentally decline.

In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the impoverishment of “nervous” sex is evident in Connie and Clifford’s relationship. After returning from a month long honeymoon, Connie and Clifford no longer desire physical intimacy. This is surprising as Clifford is a virgin when he marries Connie. Lawrence explains Clifford’s uniqueness: “he was not just keen on his [sexual] ‘satisfaction,’ as so many men seemed to be” (*LCL* 12). Because sexual satisfaction is not his priority, Clifford loses his sexual desire at an accelerated rate. Once his desire is gone, Clifford admits that “the sex part did not mean much to him...sex was merely an accident, or an adjunct: one of the curious obsolete organic processes which persisted in its own clumsiness, but was not really necessary” (*LCL* 12). It does not bother Clifford that he has lost his sexual desire because he finds “mental” stimulation more satisfying than sex. Connie feels the same way, but finds sex less satisfying than Clifford does. Sex is only minimally satisfying for Connie because she treasures her freedom and believes she will lose “her inner, free self” (*LCL* 7), if she lets herself climax with her partner. To prevent this from happening, Connie puts off her own orgasm until her partner is done with his. Connie gains pleasure from her first few encounters with each new partner, but the novelty of her partner eventually wears off and

the sex encounters become boring rather than pleasurable. Once sex becomes boring, Connie and her partner lose their sexual desire. When this happens, both Clifford and Connie are relieved. Connie and Clifford do not realize that their mutual loss of sexual desire has set in motion a chain reaction of events that will push them further and further apart until their “mental” connection eventually collapses.

Connie and Clifford’s relationship suffers further damage when Clifford leaves for war and returns six months later, paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheelchair. His paralysis is physically as well as emotionally emasculating. Clifford “was really extremely shy and self-conscious now [that] he was lamed...he was much too hurt in himself [from] the great shock of his maiming, to be easy and flippant. He was a hurt thing” (*LCL* 15). Although Clifford does not desire physical intimacy, his injury makes it an impossibility rather than a choice. Because Clifford is no longer able to give his wife sexual pleasure, he feels less of a man. He also feels emasculated because he is physically incapable of fathering children. Clifford’s inability to father children signals the end of the era for his family as well as for Wragby Hall, which has been in the family for generations. Without an heir, he knows the Chatterley line will end with him and this reality is almost as shameful as his loss of self-reliance. Clifford is in constant need of assistance and has to rely on Connie or the house servants to help him perform basic tasks. He is most reliant on Connie:

[H]e was absolutely dependent on her – he needed her every moment. Big and strong as he was, he was helpless. He could wheel himself about in a wheeled chair, and he had a sort of bath-chair with a motor attachment, in

which he could puff slowly round the park. But alone he was like a lost thing.

He needed Connie to be there, to assure him that he existed at all. (*LCL* 16)

Clifford's reliance on Connie pushes them further apart because it highlights his emasculation. Clifford's injury denies Connie sex and the possibility of children. His neediness and his complete lack of sexual desire transforms Connie's role from wife to nursemaid, and his failure to fill the traditional role of husband is socially shameful for her. Connie's father calls her a half-virgin and not so subtly encourages her to have an affair by saying, "I hope, Connie, you won't let circumstances force you into being a demi-vierge...unless you like it, of course!" (*LCL* 17). Connie rejects the idea and is outraged when Clifford also suggests that "it would almost be a good thing if you had a child by another man [because] if we brought it up at Wragby, it would belong to us and to the place" (*LCL* 43-44). Clifford's insensitivity and the selfishness of his suggestion signal a change in him.

Clifford "had been hurt so much [in the war that] something inside him had perished, some of his feelings were gone" (*LCL* 6). His affective self died leaving him incapable of experiencing real emotion. In "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" Lawrence explains that Clifford's lameness is "symbolic of the paralysis, the deeper emotional or passional paralysis, of most men of his sort and class, today" (AP 333). Lawrence believes that emotional death is endemic in "modern" society because most men and women engage in "nervous sex." Clifford's emotional death is premature but it is indicative of the fate that Lawrence believes will befall the rest of "modern" society. Lawrence explains that Clifford is "a pure product of our civilization" (AP 333) because his physical and emotional breakdown epitomizes the consequences of "nervous sex." In



the end, Clifford loses his ability to experience real emotion as well as counterfeit emotion making him “purely a personality” (AP 333):

He was not in touch. He was not in actual touch with anything or anybody; save traditionally, with Wragby, and through the close bond of family defense, with [his sister]. Beyond this, nothing really touched him. Connie felt that she herself didn't really, not really touch him. She had never finally got at him: perhaps there was nothing to get at, ultimately: just a negation of human contact. (*LCL* 16)

Connie recognizes that their “mental” connection is no longer intact because Clifford’s “mental” feelings are gone. He is a shell. As Jennifer Swift points out, all Clifford can offer Connie are “words, or conversations, or...the conversations of others” (147).

Clifford has talk and words, so he writes. Clifford writes “very personal stories about people he had known, clever, rather spiteful, and yet in some mysterious way, meaningless...there was no touch, no actual contact. It was as if the whole thing took place on an artificial earth” (*LCL* 16). Connie helps Clifford with his writing by typing and by talking. Clifford always wants to “talk everything over with her monotonously, insistently, persistently, and...this thrill[s] her and absorb[s] her” (*LCL* 16). Connie takes pleasure in their talk because she loves the “mental” life, as does Clifford. This common interest is all that holds them together. Connie continues to help Clifford, but the appeal of typing and talking quickly fades. When this happens, Connie is overcome with boredom. Typing bores her, talking bores her and Clifford bores her. The “mental” life ceases to be pleasurable and their “mental” connection collapses. Even though she does not enjoy it, Connie continues, “living this vague life of absorption in Clifford and his

needing her, and his work, especially his work” (*LCL* 18). Connie is loyal, but it is obvious that the “mental” life is wearing both of them down.

Clifford is physically and mentally declining at an accelerated rate and Connie is following suit. Clifford’s physical paralysis has spread to his affective self, gradually killing off his capacity for “real” and “mental” feelings. Morag Shiach observes that “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” (94). Shiach explains that “neurasthenia was understood as a chronic condition, [that was] the result of exhaustion of nervous force, but it could also be the result of a more precise individual or social trauma” (94). Clifford’s nerves, like his mind and body, are out of balance causing him to suffer from overwhelming bursts and collapses of nervous energy. Clifford is most prone to a fluctuation when he experiences stress or when he is not writing, talking or listening to a conversation: “Anger! And again the dread of the night came on him. He was a net-work of nerves, and when he was not braced up to work, and so full of energy: or when he was not listening – in, and so utterly neuter: then he was haunted by anxiety and a sense of dangerous, impending void. He was afraid” (*LCL* 139). Clifford finds that “Connie could keep the fear off him” (*LCL* 139) but as they drift further and further apart, his condition worsens. Without Connie, he is alone. Gavriel Ben-Ephraim argues that Clifford’s obsession with words and talk “eventually rebounds against [him], for he is ‘gradually dying’ in the mental-life” (142), sinking deeper and deeper into his obsession.

Connie also suffers in the “mental” life. Connie’s mental decline is evident when she withdraws into a dream-like state: “it was a life: in the void...Wragby was there, the

servants; but spectral, not really existing...it was all like a dream: or rather, it was like the simulacrum of reality...no substance to her or anything - no touch, no contact” (*LCL* 18). She eventually realizes that her lifestyle is causing her physical and mental decline and tries to mentally detach from her life because it is unfulfilling. However, she is unable to do so. Her life is unbearable because it causes her severe anxiety and stress:

Out of her disconnection, a restlessness was taking possession of her like a madness. It twitched her limbs when she didn't want to twitch them, it jerked her spine when she did not want to jerk upright, but preferred to rest comfortably. It thrilled inside her body, in her womb, somewhere, till she felt she must jump into water and swim to get away from it: a mad restlessness. It made her heart beat violently, for no reason. And she was getting thinner. (*LCL* 20)

Connie's physical and mental decline makes her question her lifestyle. Ultimately, Connie realizes that her unhealthy marriage is killing her: “She had married [Clifford] really because in a mental way he attracted her and excited her... [but] now the mental excitement had worn itself out and collapsed, and she was aware only of the physical aversion. It rose up in her from her depths: and she realized how it had been eating her life away” (*LCL* 97). Once she realizes this, Connie decides to change her life. Connie escapes Wragby and the “mental” life by going into the wood but this does not calm her nerves. The wood is “not really a refuge [or] a sanctuary [for Connie] because she [has] no connection with it. It [is] only a place where she [can] get *away* from the rest” (*LCL* 20, Lawrence's italics). The solitude of the wood is not enough for Connie because she feels incomplete.

Connie is desperate and finds a convenient connection when a successful playwright named Michaelis comes to stay with her and Clifford at Wragby. Michaelis is appealing to Connie because he appears to be everything that Clifford is not. She quickly learns that this is an illusion. In their first sexual encounter, Michaelis demonstrates that he, like Clifford, is detached: "He was a curious and very gentle lover, very gentle with the woman, trembling uncontrollably, and yet at the same time detached, aware, aware of every sound outside" (*LCL* 26). Connie recognizes his detachment but continues the affair in order to maintain their connection. Connie is first drawn to Michaelis because of his talk and personality. It is only after she gets to know him mentally that she physically desires him. Michaelis cannot satisfy Connie's desire because he is already physically declining in the "mental" life: "He roused in [her]...a wild, craving physical desire [but] this physical desire he did not satisfy in her: he was always come, and finished, so quickly: then shrinking down on her breast, and recovering somewhat his effrontery, while she lay dazed, disappointed, lost" (*LCL* 29). Connie salvages their connection by having Michaelis stay inside her after he climaxes so that she can use him as a tool to bring herself to climax. Connie enjoys their encounters but they are not blissful. Despite this, she continues the affair because it is pleasurable: "She still wanted the physical, sexual thrill she could get with him, by her own activity, his little orgasm being over. And he still wanted to give it her. Which was enough to keep them connected" (*LCL* 29-30). Connie and Michaelis are connected by their mutual sexual desire but eventually their desire fades and their connection is broken. When this happens, Michaelis returns to London leaving Connie unfulfilled and out of touch. As Jacqueline Gouirand points out "the meagre compensation offered by her affair with Michaelis (a mere excursion after

all) does not prevent her from being confronted with [her] void of a dismal and mechanical existence” (98). In other words, even after her affair with Michaelis, Connie is still stuck in the “mental” life with Clifford.

The “mental” life seems inescapable so Connie gives up and succumbs to it. When she does this, a feeling of nothingness spreads through her: “Clifford’s mental life and hers – gradually it began to feel like nothingness. Their marriage, their integrated life based on a habit of intimacy...there were days when it all became utterly blank and nothing...the only reality was nothingness” (*LCL* 50). Connie feels nothing in the “mental” life because her already divided mind and body are gradually moving further and further apart. Once this destructive process is complete, Connie sees nothingness in everyone and everything. She becomes a cynic, but her cynicism enables her to recognize the similarities between Clifford and Michaelis. Michaelis writes plays that mean nothing and Clifford writes stories that mean nothing. They both make “a display of nothingness [because] it [is] the last bit of passion left in [them]...Success was what they wanted. They wanted, both of them, to make a real display – *their* display – a man’s own very display, of himself, that should capture for the time the vast populace” (*LCL* 5, Lawrence’s italics). Michaelis and Clifford use their meaningless writing to garner success. Lawrence refers to this process as “prostitution to the bitch-goddess” (*LCL* 51). According to Morag Shiach, “the 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 [and] this fear mechanism appear[s] in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* as the bitch-goddess of success” (88). Michaelis and Clifford take pleasure in the bitch-goddess of success but Connie does not.

Connie goes numb with an all-consuming feeling of nothingness. This is evident when Michaelis proposes to Connie and she feels nothing:

‘Why don’t you and I make a clean thing of it? Why don’t we marry?’...He spoke it almost in a brilliance of triumph, and Connie looked at him as if dazzled, and really feeling nothing at all. Hardly even the surface of her mind was tickled... Hardly even her most outside self responded, that at any other time would have been thrilled. She just got no feeling off it all, she couldn’t ‘go off.’ She just sat and stared, and looked dazzled, and felt nothing. Only somewhere she smelt the extremely unpleasant smell of the bitch-goddess. (LCL 52-53)

This smell brings Connie to the shocking conclusion that Clifford and Michaelis are in fact the same. As Gilles Mayne observes “like Clifford, Michaelis reduces sex [and marriage] to a means: having an heir, gaining more power and more prestige” (171). Michaelis does not love Connie but wants to marry her to improve his social image. Thus, a marriage to Michaelis would be as unfulfilling as her marriage to Clifford. Connie realizes this and decides that she is done with empty men and her empty life. She “refuses to be invaded by the same torpor, to accept the nothingness of life” again and to prevent this from happening “she has to *move away* from Wragby, the world of mental life, old forms [and]...fake emotions” (Gouirand 98, her italics). Connie escapes from her numbing life by retreating into the wood.

The wood becomes a site of regeneration for Connie. She goes for daily walks because she feels lighter and freer in the wood: “Connie felt herself released, in another world...she breathed differently...she breathed freer” (LCL 84). As she spends more and

more time in the wood, her physical and mental decline gradually slows until it eventually stops. When this happens, Connie is able to heal. Her mind and body move closer together but they do not come into balance. This is because the wood can reverse the damaging effects of “nervous” sex but it cannot repair self-division. Only a blood connection can do this and Connie finds this type of connection with Mellors.

Connie first encounters Mellors when she is walking in the wood with Clifford. Mellors appears out of nowhere, startling Connie: “A man with a gun strode swiftly...their way, as if about to attack them; then stopped instead, saluted, and was turning downhill. It was only the new gamekeeper, but he had frightened Connie, he seemed to emerge with such a swift menace. That was how she had seen him, like the sudden rush of a threat out of nowhere” (*LCL* 46). In this initial sighting, Connie gets her first glimpse of the sublime. Connie feels both terror and awe when she sees Mellors because she senses a strong but unfamiliar connection between them. She does not realize it but she senses the potential for tender bliss between them. Connie intuitively knows that Mellors differs from “modern” men that she has encountered and his difference scares her because she does not understand it.

Despite her fear, Connie has an overwhelming desire to connect with Mellors. As Douglas Wuchina asserts, “Connie comes outside, and finds real desire” (182). It is evident that Connie is experiencing “real” desire rather than “counterfeit” desire<sup>44</sup> because the basis of her attraction to Mellors is intuition. Even though Connie is experiencing “real” desire, she finds it deeply disturbing that she is attracted to Mellors when she has never even spoken to him. Connie asks Mellors if he enjoys working in the wood and he answers her question politely, but his voice changes in the middle of his

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<sup>44</sup> Lawrence’s term.

response: “His voice, on the last words, had fallen into the heavy broad drag of the dialect [even though]...there had been no trace of dialect before” (*LCL* 47). Mellors’ shift from clear, upper class English into a lower class vernacular confuses Connie because she knows he is a gamekeeper but he appears to be a gentleman to her. Thus, instead of clarifying his enigmatic status, their talk obscures it. Connie’s confusion after her talk with Mellors demonstrates that they do not have a strong “mental” connection. Connie and Mellors’ intuitive connection is a blood connection, which is characterized by “real” feelings and “real” desire. Even though Connie and Mellors share this deep connection, her mind resists it. Connie needs to understand her desire but a logical explanation eludes her. Connie barely knows Mellors yet she senses that he is warm and aware even though he appears to be detached and inattentive: “she saw in his blue, impersonal eyes a look of suffering and detachment, yet a certain warmth...[he] look[ed] perfectly unheeding. Yet Connie felt he noted everything” (*LCL* 47). Connie wants to justify her attraction to Mellors because she does not trust her instincts. Connie’s mind dominates her body so she cannot listen to her body without her mind interfering. This “mental” interference makes Connie distrust her body as well as her affective self.<sup>45</sup> Connie’s affective self is inactive so Mellors’ overly expressive face shocks her: “it was a face that changed all the time, baffling” (*LCL* 67). Mellors’ capacity for real emotion overwhelms Connie because she has never experienced real emotion and is still not ready to do so. Connie’s mind and body are still out of contact. Swift points out that “being out of contact...protects [Connie] from the pain and vulnerability of regeneration” (147). Thus, even though Mellors and Connie share an emotional, physical and mental

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<sup>45</sup> According to Lawrence, the affective self resides within the body.



connection, Connie cannot embrace the full potential of their union until her mind and body are in contact.

Unlike Connie, Mellors' mind and body are in contact when they meet. For the eight past months Mellors has been working and living alone in the wood, which has enabled him to fully recover from the damaging effects of "nervous" sex. Mellors still suffers from self-division but his mind and body are closer together than most "modern" men and women because his secluded lifestyle spares him from the "mental" life. Due to the closeness of his mind and body, Mellors does not question his instincts when he meets Connie. Instead, he senses that Connie is different from most "modern" women and rejoices in her difference: "she wasn't all tough rubber - goods - and - platinum, like the modern girl...somewhere she was tender [...] she [was] nice: she [was] real! She [was] nicer than she kn[e]w" (*LCL* 119, 68). Mellors intuitively knows that Connie is capable of tenderness, but he recognizes that she is not yet ready to experience real emotion. Due to the close proximity of Mellors' mind and body, his affective self is on the verge of awakening and does so when his eyes meet Connie's: "His eyes came to hers in an instant, as if he wakened up" (*LCL* 48). Once Mellors' affective self becomes active, Mellors is able to experience real emotion for the first time but he does not welcome this change.

Mellors was deeply hurt in his relationship with his wife, Bertha, and does not want to be hurt again. Linda Ruth Williams explains that "rather than seeing the relationship as a contract, Bertha [saw] Mellors as an object, [as] the medium for pleasure" (103). Because Bertha used him as a sexual tool, Mellors fears close contact with women. After his separation, Mellors' chooses a secluded lifestyle to shield him

from all close human contact. However, Connie takes away this sense of security when she finds Mellors' hut and starts to visit daily. Mellors' resistance to his ever-strengthening desire for Connie is evident when he sees her sitting outside his hut:

[S]he sat in the doorway of the hut... [with an] utterly still, waiting look on her face. To him it was a look of waiting. And a little, thin tongue of fire suddenly flickered in his loins, at the root of his back, and he groaned in spirit. He dreaded with a repulsion almost of death, any further close human contact. He wished above all things she would go away and leave him to his own privacy. (*LCL* 89)

Mellors desperately wants Connie to leave him alone because every time he interacts with her, another part of him awakens and with each new awakening, his feelings for her deepen. Mellors' feelings for Connie are evident when he cleans and rearranges the hut to make it more comfortable for her: "He had made the hut tidy, put the little table and chair near the fire-place, left a little pile of kindling and small logs, and put the tools and traps away as far as possible, effacing himself" (*LCL* 113). In addition to these changes, Mellors builds a shelter behind the hut to house five chicken coops. To care for the chickens, he must visit the hut multiple times a day. One afternoon, when Mellors is counting the new chicks, Connie arrives breathless and brimming with excitement to see them: "'I had to come and see the chickens!' she said, panting, glancing shyly at the keeper... 'Are there anymore?' 'Thirty-six so far' he said. 'Not bad!' He too took a curious pleasure in watching the young things come out" (*LCL* 114). Connie's genuine interest in the chicks softens Mellors and prompts him to stay with her as she admires

them. Connie asks Mellors if she can hold a chick and he grabs one from the coop but as he places it in her hands, she starts to cry:

Suddenly he saw a tear fall on to her wrist. And he stood up, and stood away, moving to the other coop. For suddenly he was aware of the old flame shooting and leaping up in his loins, that he had hoped was quiescent forever. He fought against it, turning his back to her. But it leapt, and leapt downwards, circling in his knees. (*LCL* 115)

The ever-strengthening intensity of Mellors' desire for Connie both awes and terrifies him. Mellors experiences the sublime when his mind and body come into balance. Once this happens, Mellors abandons his resistance and gives into his overwhelming desire for tenderness. Mellors' acceptance of his tender desire makes him emotionally, physically and mentally vulnerable to Connie. Mark Spilka asserts that Mellors' newfound vulnerability enables him to recognize that "Connie's 'crying need,' like that of her generation, is for tender love" (66). Mellors wants to fulfill her need and his selfless desire to do so pushes him to the brink of tender love: "she was crying blindly, in all the anguish of her generation's forlornness. His heart *melted* suddenly, like a drop of fire" (*LCL* 115, my italics). Mellors reaches out to Connie with the blind instinct<sup>46</sup> of his mind, body and soul: "He laid his hand on her shoulder, and softly, gently it began to travel down the curve of her back, blindly, with a blind stroking motion, to the curve of her crouching loins. And there his hand softly, softly stroked the curve of her flank, in the blind instinctive caress" (*LCL* 116). Mellors tries to satisfy Connie's need by having tender sex with her but he fails to achieve this goal.

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<sup>46</sup> According to Lawrence, "blind instinct" is the intuitive response, feeling or sense that is associated with a blood connection.

Instead of breaching tender bliss with Connie, Mellors breaches it alone and has a blissful experience: “he had come to her at once, to enter the peace on earth of her soft, quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him... [but] the activity, the orgasm was his, all his” (*LCL* 117). After Mellors recovers from his blissful experience, he realizes that loving Connie has forever changed him: “She had connected him back up again, when he had wanted to be alone... [in] the darkness and seclusion of the wood. But [now] he knew that the seclusion of the wood was illusory... [and he] could no longer be private and withdrawn” (*LCL* 118-119). Mellors’ altered perception of the wood demonstrates that he has experienced a loss of self. When Mellors falls in love with Connie, he sheds his “modern” self and is reborn as his whole, “true” self in tender bliss. In this new state of being, Mellors no longer suffers from self-division. His mind and body are in balance and he is an undivided individual for the first time in his life. Thus, Mellors gains a new perspective and achieves personal fulfillment and wholeness through tender bliss. Despite this, Mellors is disappointed because Connie did not share his bliss.

Connie does not have a blissful experience because she is not in love with Mellors. Connie senses the potential for tender love between them, but she cannot reciprocate Mellors’ love until her affective self awakens. Connie’s mind and body are still out of contact but they are quickly moving closer together because she has a blood connection with Mellors. This movement changes Connie’s perception of sex. Prior to her encounter with Mellors, Connie believed that:

Love, sex, all that sort of stuff [was] just water-ices. Lick it up and forget it. If you don’t hang on to it in your mind, it’s nothing. Sex especially – nothing. Make up your mind to it, and you’ve solved the problem. Sex – a cocktail –

they both lasted about as long, had the same effect, and amounted to the same thing. (*LCL* 64)

Before Connie meets Mellors, sex is meaningless, but after her first sexual encounter with him, it becomes meaningful. Connie's perception of sex shifts because she witnesses Mellors' blissful experience. The emotional depth of Mellors' bliss makes Connie realize that sex can be meaningful for her if she lets herself be completely vulnerable with Mellors, as he is with her: "she knew, if she gave herself to the man, it was real. But if she kept herself for herself, it was nothing" (*LCL* 117). Connie recognizes that unlike "nervous" sex, tender sex requires emotional, physical and mental vulnerability. To reach this level of vulnerability, Connie must undergo a series of awakenings starting with the activation of her affective self. After Connie's first sexual encounter with Mellors, her mind and body are in contact and her affective self is on the verge of awakening. Connie's affective self becomes active during their second encounter: "Far down in her she felt a new stirring, a new nakedness emerging. And she was half afraid. Half she wished he would not caress so. He was encompassing her somehow" (*LCL* 125). Connie is only 'half afraid' of her newfound vulnerability because her body supports it but her mind is against it. The fact that Connie is only 'half afraid' demonstrates that her mind is losing its dominance over her body. This loss of dominance is also evident when Connie resists her "mental" temptation to use Mellors as a sexual tool: "Even, when he had finished, she did not rouse herself to get a grip on her own satisfaction, as she had done with Michaelis. She lay still, and the tears slowly filled and ran from her eyes" (*LCL* 126). Instead of listening to her mind, Connie listens to her heart.

Connie's drastic shift from "mental" temptation to blind instinct demonstrates that her mind and body are quickly coming into balance. Connie follows her blind instinct in her third encounter with Mellors prompting her to have another emotional awakening when they climax together: "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" (*LCL* 133, my italics). Connie's mutual orgasm with Mellors 'melts' or opens her up to him. It is fitting that Connie's emotional awakening is described as 'melting' given that "the trope of melting is a romantic conceit" used to "indicat[e] the dissolution of mind into body and self into being" (Ben-Ephiram 149). Thus, with each new awakening Connie comes closer to personal wholeness. For Connie to achieve this goal, she must experience tender love. Once Connie recovers from her mutual orgasm with Mellors, she experiences adoration for the first time: "She adored him... it was not the passion that was new to her. It was the yearning adoration. She knew she had always feared it. For it left her helpless. She feared it still. For if she adored him too much, then she would lose herself, become effaced" (*LCL* 135). Connie's feelings for Mellors scare her because they threaten her personal freedom.

To prevent herself from falling in love with Mellors, Connie adopts her old "mental" instinct: "the old hard passion flamed in her for a time, and the man dwindled to a contemptible object...But while she felt this, her heart was heavy" (*LCL* 136). To protect herself from a loss of self, Connie reduces Mellors to a sex object even though it pains her to do so. Connie continues to detach herself from Mellors and from the tender

sex that they share until she convinces herself that she can never love him. In their fourth sexual encounter, Connie tells Mellors this but as she tells him, her heart breaks: “‘I — I can’t love you!’ she sobbed, suddenly feeling her heart breaking...‘But I want to love you — and I *can’t*’...yet, as he was drawing away, to rise silently and leave her, she clung to him in terror” (*LCL* 172-173, Lawrence’s italics). As Connie watches Mellors get up to leave, she is overcome with terror and awe. Connie experiences the feeling of the sublime when her mind and body come into balance. Once this happens, Connie abandons her resistance and gives into her desire for tenderness. Connie’s acceptance of her tender desire makes her emotionally, physically and mentally vulnerable to Mellors but this is not enough for him. Mellors is deeply hurt by her words and is going to leave her.

Connie realizes that she is about to lose Mellors and this terrifies her. Connie’s terror pushes her to the brink of tender love and she reaches out to him with the blind instinct of her mind, body and soul: “‘Don’t! Don’t go! Don’t leave me! Don’t be cross with me! Hold me! Hold me fast!’ she whispered in blind frenzy, not even knowing what she said, and clinging to him with uncanny force” (*LCL* 173). Even though he is hurt, Mellors embraces Connie and gives into her tender desire: “He took her in his arms again and he drew her to him, and suddenly she became small in his arms, small and nestling... and she began to melt in a marvellous peace. And as she melted small and wonderful in his arms...all his blood-vessels seemed to scald with intense yet tender desire, for her, for her softness, for the penetrating beauty of her in his arms, passing into his blood” (*LCL* 173). Connie and Mellors’ mutual desire for tenderness enables them to reach the full potential of their blood connection - true intimacy. Connie and Mellors achieve this level of intimacy by passing into one another’s blood. When Connie passes into Mellors’

blood, she breaches tender bliss and has a blissful experience: “suddenly, in a soft, shuddering convulsion, the quick of all her plasm was touched, she knew herself touched, the consummation was upon her, and she was gone. She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman ...And she moaned with a sort of bliss, as a sacrifice, and a new-born thing” (*LCL* 174). Connie’s blissful experience causes her to shed her “modern” self and be reborn as her whole, “true” self. Lawrence equates this transformation with becoming a woman because he believes that prior to Connie’s loss of self, she is a “modern” woman instead of a “real” woman.<sup>47</sup> In Lawrence’s view, “modern” women are not “real” because they suffer from a division within the self. Thus, when Connie sheds her “modern” self and is reborn as an undivided individual, she becomes a “real” woman for the first time.

In addition to her new status, Connie’s blissful experience makes her a new person. Instead of doubting her relationship with Mellors, Connie rejoices in their partnership and celebrates Mellors as an individual:

And now in her heart the queer wonder of him was awakened...Beauty! what beauty! a sudden little flame of new awareness went through her. How was it possible, this beauty here, where she had previously only been repelled? ...Her whole self quivered unconscious and alive, like plasm. She could not know what it was. She could not remember what it had been. Only that it had been more lovely than anything ever could be. Only that. (*LCL* 174-175)

Even though Connie recognizes that her blissful experience has changed her, she cannot remember the experience itself. This is because, according to Barthes, bliss imposes a

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<sup>47</sup> In his essay, “A Propos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*” Lawrence explains that in “modern” society “there are, the young women say, no *real* men to love. And there are, the young men say, no *real* girls to fall in love with. So they go on falling in love with unreal ones, on either side” (AP 312-313, his italics).



state of loss from which “nothing is reconstituted [and] nothing is recuperated” (PT 52).<sup>48</sup> After Connie recovers from this state of loss, she feels fulfilled and proclaims her love for the first time: “When awareness of the outside began to come back, she clung to his breast, murmuring: ‘My love! my love!’”(LCL 175). Connie knows that her and Mellors’ love is lasting and is confident that they will eventually get married. Thus, Connie gains a new perspective and achieves personal fulfillment and wholeness through tender bliss.

In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence contrasts the two types of connections that Connie develops in her romantic relationships. Lawrence refers to these connections as “mental” and blood. Connie has a strong “mental” connection with her husband, Clifford. Connie and Clifford are attracted to each other’s minds and personalities but they do not love each other. Because of this, they engage in “nervous” sex. Connie and Clifford initially take pleasure in “nervous” sex but the novelty of sexual encounter eventually wears off and sex becomes boring. “Nervous” sex bores rather than fulfills Connie and Clifford because it lacks emotion. Without love to sustain them, Connie and Clifford lose their desire for physical intimacy, which strains and ultimately collapses their “mental” connection. When this happens, Connie and Clifford start to physically and mentally decline as their minds and bodies drift further and further apart. Connie’s relationship with Clifford leaves her bored, unfulfilled and damaged.

Connie’s relationship with Mellors does not have the same effect. Connie and Mellors’ have a blood connection. Their attraction is initially instinctual but it quickly becomes emotional. Because of this, they engage in tender sex. Connie and Mellors take pleasure in tender sex and eventually find it blissful but they do not breach tender bliss at

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<sup>48</sup> The abbreviation “PT” refers to Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text*.

the same time. Prior to their blissful experiences, Connie and Mellors undergo a series of sexual awakenings that bring their minds and bodies into balance. Once this happens, they breach bliss and have blissful experiences that cause them to shed their “modern” selves and be reborn as their whole, “true” selves in tender love. Connie and Mellors’ love is lasting, as is the novelty of the tender sex that they share. Tender sex ultimately fulfills rather than bores Connie and Mellors because it is emotional and physical. Connie and Mellors’ tender love renews their desire for physical intimacy and strengthens their blood connection. By contrasting this blood connection with Connie and Clifford’s “mental” connection, Lawrence sets “nervous” sex in opposition to tender sex. The result of “nervous” sex is boredom and the outcome of tender sex is bliss. Thus, boredom is the opposite of bliss.

## CHAPTER 4 – PLEASURE, PAIN AND DEGRADATION IN PAULINE

### RÉAGE'S *STORY OF O*

“The stroke of death is as the lover’s pinch, which hurts, and is desired.”  
(*Antony and Cleopatra*, V, 2.)

Upon the first reading, one is shocked by Pauline Réage’s erotic novel, *Story of O*, because of its disturbing sadomasochistic content. Sadomasochism is a type of transgressive sexual practice that involves sadistic and masochistic desire. Sadism is the innate need to humiliate, abuse, injure and in extreme cases murder others in order to experience sexual pleasure.<sup>49</sup> The term “sadism” derives from the Marquis de Sade’s infamous erotic narratives,<sup>50</sup> most notably his novel, *Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised*.<sup>51</sup> In *Justine*, de Sade contrasts the lifestyles of Justine and her older sister, Juliette. Juliette indulges in the pleasures of vice while Justine chooses a life of virtue. De Sade breaks from the moral tradition of his day by punishing rather than rewarding

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<sup>49</sup> The Austro-German sexologist and psychiatrist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, provides the first scientific account of “sadism” in *Psychopathia Sexualis*. In this book, Krafft-Ebing defines sadism as the “innate desire to humiliate, hurt, wound or even destroy others in order thereby to create sexual pleasure in one’s self” (87). Krafft-Ebing explains that “sadism, especially in its rudimentary manifestations, seems to be of common occurrence in the domain of sexual perversion” (87). In other words, Krafft-Ebing classifies sadism as a sexual perversion because he believes it is unnatural. Sigmund Freud challenges this view in his essay, “The Sexual Aberrations,” when he states that “the roots of active algolagnia, sadism, can be readily demonstrable in the normal individual” (569). Freud explains that this is because “the sexuality of most men shows an admixture of aggression, of a desire to subdue, the biological significance of which lies in the necessity for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by actions other than mere *courting*” (569, his italics). Freud suggests that the “concept of sadism fluctuates in everyday speech from a mere active or impetuous attitude towards the sexual object to an absolute attachment of the gratification to the subjection and maltreatment of the object” and concludes that “only the last extreme case can claim the name of perversion” (569). Simply put, Freud believes sadism is a natural sexual instinct that is only perverse in its extreme form.

<sup>50</sup> Vern Bullough explains that Krafft-Ebing, coined the term “sadism” from “the novels and personal life of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814)” (9).

<sup>51</sup> *Justine* or *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* was published in 1791. De Sade expanded this original version, commonly known as “the first Justine” into a four thousand page, ten-volume work entitled *La Nouvelle Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, suivie de l’Histoire de Juliette, sa soeur*. This massive work was published in 1797. For further discussions of *Justine*’s publication history see: Maurice Blanchot’s essay “Sade;” John Phillip’s essay, “Representations of the Feminine;” Lawrence W. Lynch’s essay, “The *Justine* Cycle” and Angela Carter’s essay, “Polemical Preface: Pornography in the Service of Women.”

Justine for her virtuousness.<sup>52</sup> This is evident when Justine is robbed by a beggar for her generosity, raped by a nobleman for her chastity and tortured by monks for her piety. Justine's misfortune continues throughout the novel as she repeatedly encounters sadistic men who brutally rape, mutilate and abuse her. Justine eventually escapes from the clutches of these monsters, but her experiences with them render her a defiled and penniless social outcast. De Sade liberates Justine from this painful and degrading existence when she is struck by lightning and dies.

The protagonist of Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch's erotic novel, *Venus in Furs*<sup>53</sup> also endures a painful and degrading life but unlike Justine, Severin von Kusiemski takes pleasure in his pain because he is a masochist.<sup>54</sup> In the beginning of the novel, Severin becomes completely infatuated with Wanda von Dunajew, a woman who resembles the Greek goddess of love, Venus. Severin wants to be Wanda's slave and begs her to mistreat him. Wanda honours his request, and in doing so fulfills his

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<sup>52</sup> Jean Paulhan posits it is "a novel which bears every resemblance to those edifying works in which vice is seen punished every time and virtue rewarded. Except that in *Justine* it's the other way around" (12).

<sup>53</sup> In his introduction to the novel, John Glassco explains that "since its appearance in 1870 *Venus im Pelz* has taken a leading place among those novels which, though regarded as serious works of literature when they first appeared, are now valued less as works of art than as human documents, and whose impact and appeal are still mainly sensational" (i). Glassco adds that the novel "has gone through more than thirty editions in its native German and been translated into most European languages, has been widely though unsuccessfully imitated, and has given its author the distinction – about which he complained bitterly at the time – of having his name attached to what is now one of the most widespread sexual aberrations in the world" (i). This sexual aberration is "masochism." Krafft-Ebing confirms this association when he states: "I feel justified in calling this sexual anomaly 'Masochism,' because the author Sacher-Masoch frequently made this perversion, which up to his time was quite unknown to the scientific world as such, the substratum of his writings" (127-128).

<sup>54</sup> Krafft-Ebing defines "masochism" as "a peculiar perversion of the psychical *vita sexualis* in which the individual affected, in sexual feeling and thought, is controlled by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by this person as by a master, humiliated and abused" (127, his italics). In his essay, "Sexual Aberrations" Freud accepts this definition and adds that "[m]asochism as a perversion seems further removed from the normal sexual goal than its opposite. It may even be doubted whether it ever is primary and whether it does not more often originate through transformation from sadism" (569). Simply put, Freud believes that masochism is unnatural. Thus, Krafft-Ebing and Freud are in agreement that masochism is a sexual perversion even in its most rudimentary forms.

masochistic fantasy.<sup>55</sup> Severin's masochism initially disturbs Wanda, but the power that she gains from it soon entices her. When this happens, Wanda embraces her sadistic desire and becomes the Cruel Woman<sup>56</sup> who takes pleasure in his pain. Severin sustains severe physical, mental and emotional damage from Wanda's repeated abuse but like Justine, he is liberated from it.<sup>57</sup> Through their depictions of Justine and Severin's painful and degrading lives, de Sade and Sacher-Masoch provide powerful and paradigmatic accounts of sadism, masochism and the combination of the two now commonly known as sadomasochism. These master accounts inform Réage's depiction of sadomasochistic erotic fantasy in *Story of O*.

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<sup>55</sup> Severin's erotic fantasy is fetishized because it combines his two obsessions: Venus and furs. Severin's fur fetish originates from a significant childhood experience. When he was nine years old, his fur-clad aunt whipped him and then forced him to kiss her hand, while kneeling at her feet. Severin had always feared his aunt but during this encounter "his fear was instantly transformed into adoration, or rather, the two became inextricably combined and geared toward an ideal, sublimated object of desire" (Stewart 76). Severin fantasizes about the Greek goddess of love, Venus wearing his aunt's furs: "ever in my mind was the image of the beautiful ideal woman who from time to time appeared to me amidst my leather bindings and fossils, as a vision, couched on a bed of roses, surrounded with cupids; sometimes in Olympian toilet, with the radiant countenance of my plaster Venus, at other times, under the very different aspect of my aunt in her *kazabaika* of red velvet trimmed with ermine" (Sacher-Masoch 57, his italics). Wanda's likeness to the Greek goddess and her willingness to wear fur enables her to make this fantasy a reality.

<sup>56</sup> Suzanne Stewart asserts that male masochism both produces and depends on the presence of the Cruel Woman: "the male masochist perceive[s] himself as subject to a dominatrix, to a topos called Cruel Woman. The masochist himself create[s] this Cruel Woman" and his "[m]asochistic ritualistic parthenogenesis depends on the participation of the [Cruel Woman] in the creation of a cruel law" (13, 39). Stewart explains that "[t]he cruel woman plays a double role: she is the object of desire, and she prohibits its genital fulfillment (it is unclear whether Severin and Wanda ever consummate their relationship); she constitutes the aim but also the limit of pleasure, that is, both its promise and its prohibition" (77). Stewart adds that Wanda's "double role takes the form of a double requirement: as the statue of Venus she must come to life, she must look back at the man's desiring gaze; and at the same time, she must prohibit limitless pleasure" (77). The Cruel Woman gives the masochist pleasure by inflicting pain but denies him sexual intercourse and with it, the pleasure that it affords. This sexual denial produces "a tragically incomplete or mutilated masculinity whose very center is his self-punishment" (Stewart 176). Thus, the Cruel Woman both creates and sustains the masochistic identity.

<sup>57</sup> Wanda liberates Severin from his self-destructive desire when she abandons him for another man. After Severin recovers from his maltreatment he is grateful for Wanda's abandonment because it forced him to suppress his masochistic desire: "the lovely woman in the fur jacket appeared before me in my mind's eye, and once more I began to smile at this woman whom I had loved so insanely, at the fur jacket which had once so charmed me, at the whip which I had felt, and I laughed finally at my sorrows and told myself: the cure was cruel but radical, and the essential thing is that it was effective" (Sacher-Masoch 160, his italics).

In *Story of O*, Réage charts the personal journey of O as she tests the limits of pleasure and pain with her lover, René. René brings O to a sadistic gentlemen's club called Roissy, where he and other club members repeatedly rape, whip and torture her. These experiences alter O's perception and she begins to associate her pain with René's pleasure. After several gruelling weeks at Roissy, O returns home and consents to further mistreatment in order to please René. This repeated abuse gradually erodes the boundary between pleasure and pain until they are indistinguishable. When this happens, O derives pleasure from pain and embraces her newfound desire to experience and inflict it. O's sadomasochistic desire enables her to occupy the roles of Cruel Woman and passive victim simultaneously. Through this characterization, Réage merges de Sade and Sacher-Masoch's portraits of sadism and masochism in order to provide a complete account of sadomasochistic erotic fantasy. Réage's account relies on O's evolving desire.

William Simon and John H. Gagnon provide a useful language to describe the movement of O's desire. In their article "Sexual Scripts," Simon and Gagnon explain that "scripts are a metaphor for conceptualizing the production of [sexual] behaviour within social life" (53). There are three distinct levels of sexual scripting: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts. According to Simon and Gagnon, cultural scenarios are abstract guidelines that indicate how an individual should act, think and feel in a particular sexual situation.<sup>58</sup> These guidelines require frequent adjustment to ensure that they reflect the values and expectations of their immediate social context. Interpersonal scripts are the mechanisms that are responsible for this

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<sup>58</sup> Simon and Gagnon define "cultural scenarios [as] instructional guides that...not only specify appropriate objects, aims, and desirable qualities of self/other relations, but also instruct in times, places, sequences of gesture and utterance, and among the most important, what the actor and coparticipants (real or imagined) are assumed to be feeling" (53-54).

adjustment. Once interpersonal scripting is complete, an individual can establish his/her sexual identity by intrapsychically scripting his/her behaviours, thoughts and feelings in accordance with the immediate social context. If the individual's social context changes, he/she will experience a crisis of self. Simon and Gagnon explain that this type of crisis "requires renegotiation of [the] aspects of the self involved in or related to [the] change...because the ecology of the self has been disturbed" (57). Thus, when there is a change in social context, an individual must abandon his/her previous state of being and undergo a reorganization of the self.

In *Story of O*, O experiences a crisis of self en route to Roissy and accepts a new sexual identity during her stay. This sexual script is degrading for O because it reflects the sadistic values and expectations of Roissy. Over the course of the novel O adopts several sexual identities and scripts, each more demeaning than the last. O's sexual identity and script are initially easy for the female reader<sup>59</sup> to relate to but as O undergoes increasingly more degrading reorganizations of the self, the reader can no longer sympathize with her experience. As the narrative proceeds, the distance between O and the reader continues to widen until the reader completely detaches from O's experience and rejects this type of erotic fantasy. Réage creates ironic distance between O's erotic experiences and the reader's reception of them in order to call attention to the effect of male erotic fantasy on the female subject. In *Story of O*, O undergoes a gradual process of

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<sup>59</sup> Arthur Efron points out that "female students studying the novel in a college course in California in the 1970s made such statements as this: 'I found the book extremely erotic and O uncomfortably easy to identify with, perhaps because the book proceeds from a premise I find real: love often includes a degree of submission and enslavement.' Another woman wrote: 'I completely identified with the heroine.' [While] another [admitted]: 'I was terrified by O's condition and her willingness to comply with slavery, yet I was swept along with her and became O'" (83). For more reactions from female readers see: Prof. Charles E. May's article, "Sex, Submission and *Story of O*: An Excerpt."

degradation that erases the boundary between pleasure and pain and ultimately leads to an annihilation of the self.

At the beginning of the novel, O is an independent and successful businesswoman who works in the fashion department of a prominent photography agency. O takes her job as a fashion photographer seriously and “dresses modestly, conservatively – perhaps even mannishly – in contrast to the exotic feminine creatures who are her photographic subjects (objects)” (Cosman 28). In addition to her high-powered career, O is in a stable relationship with her live-in boyfriend, René. Over the course of their two-year relationship, O and René develop a sexual script in which they both have free will. O recognizes and respects René’s needs, feelings and personhood as he does hers. This level of mutual recognition and respect stabilizes their sexual identities and the sexual script that they share. In their article, “Sexual Scripts,” Simon and Gagnon explain that “the stabilizing of sexual scripts, often confused with the crystallization of a sexual identity, occurs partly because it works by insuring adequate sexual performance and providing adequate sexual pleasure” (56). They add that the stabilization of sexual scripts “also represents an effective accommodation with the larger self process, in which sexual practice and sexual identity do not disturb the many components of one’s non-sexual identities” (56). Simply put, couples with stable sexual scripts have satisfactory sex lives that do not disrupt their daily lives. Like these couples, O and René are comfortable with the roles that they occupy during sexual exchanges but their sexual identities do not define them. Sex is not the focal point of O and René’s immediate social context and for this reason, their private and public lives remain separate. However, the private and public collide when René convinces O to get into a stranger’s car.



The stranger's car represents a new social context. This is evident when René encourages the stranger to tie O's hands and remove her undergarments. By permitting and endorsing this violation, René takes away O's free will and demonstrates that he does not recognize or respect her needs, feelings or personhood. Mutual recognition, respect and free will were the foundation of their sexual script and René negates them. This negation and the change in social context destabilize O's sexual identity and the sexual script that they share. René's sexual identity is unaffected by these changes because he is in control of them. These changes then, represent René's control and O's loss of it because they render her "motionless [and] silent, so stripped and exposed, so thoroughly gloved, in a black car going God knows where" (Réage 4). O is dumbstruck but once her shock wears off, she experiences a crisis of self and is plagued with fear and uncertainty. These feelings intensify when the car reaches its destination and the men escort O inside a chateau that she will later come to know as Roissy.

The men leave O in the care of two young women, whose uniforms and shackles mark them as slaves. The women were dressed in:

[T]he garb of pretty eighteenth-century chambermaids: full skirts made out of some light material, which were long enough to conceal their feet; tight bodices, laced or hooked in front, which sharply accentuated the bust line; lace frills around the neck; half-length sleeves...Both wore a close-fitting collar and had tight bracelets on their wrists [...] Both collar and bracelets were made of several layers of leather (each layer being fairly thin, so that the total was no more than the thickness of a finger). They had clasps, which functioned automatically like a padlock when it closes, and they could be

opened only by means of a small key...both collar and bracelets fit the arms and neck so snugly – although not so tight as to be the least bit painful – that it was impossible to slip any bond inside. (Réage 6,8)

As part of their enslavement, it is their duty to prepare O for the members of Roissy. This preparation demeans and demoralizes O because it confirms that she is no longer in control of her body. The women emphasize this loss by taking away her right to self-presentation. The women do not allow O to undress or bathe herself, nor do they let her do her hair or makeup. Instead, they force her to sit, naked, in front of a full-length mirror while they prepare her. The women prevent O “from either crossing her legs or bringing them together [so that]...she [can] see herself, thus open, each time her gaze stray[s] to the mirror” (Réage 7). O’s literal openness emphasizes her vulnerability to the men of Roissy and foreshadows their expectations of her. As John Phillips points out, the mirror “reflects the holes of [O’s] body in a [setting] in which the permanent availability of [her] body is constantly demanded” (95). O does not recognize this expectation but as she observes herself in the mirror, O realizes that she is in a new cultural scenario with a different set of expectations. Simon and Gagnon argue that “[s]elf-observation represents incipient self-control, and self-control becomes synonymous with the staging of the self” (56). When O looks in the mirror and recognizes that she is in a new setting the process of self-formation begins. O begins to understand her situation as the women fasten a collar around her neck and tight-fitting bracelets around her wrists that match their own. O recognizes that these shackles mark her as a slave but she resists this role even as she enters the library, bound and blindfolded.

O quickly learns that resistance is futile when four members of Roissy force her into submission. As she kneels before them, the men confirm O's enslavement by mastering her:

[T]hey made her kneel down... [t]hen one of the men, holding her with both his hands on her hips, plunged into her belly. He yielded to a second. The third wanted to force his way into the narrower passage and, driving hard, made her scream. When he let her go, sobbing and befouled by tears beneath her blindfold, she slipped to the floor, only to feel someone's knees against her face, and she realized that her mouth was not to be spared. Finally they let her go [and]...removed her blindfold...Two of the men were standing and smoking. Another was seated, a riding crop on his knees, and the one leaning over her fondling her breast was her lover. All four of them had taken her, and she had not been able to distinguish him from the others. (Réage 10-11)

As her significant other, René should love, cherish and protect O but he rejects this courtly role when he plans and participates in her rape. Despite this, René tells O he loves her and she believes him. Janis L. Pallister argues that this supposed "love" relationship is "the total debasement of the myths of courtly love [because it] permits the friends actually to participate in the sexual act(s), which... no longer represent a somewhat pure, even 'elevated' love, but rather, here and now, the destruction of the female body" (5). This destruction is evident when René and his friends whip O to complete her initiation. René enjoys O's initiation and tries to prolong it because of the extreme "pleasure [that he gains from] extracting, or having the others extract, from her this unquestionable proof of his power" (Réage 13). As David Mickelsen asserts "part of

René's attachment to O derives from the pleasure of inflicting pain [b]ut this motive leads directly to another, the desire for power – a power that manifests itself in possession" (169). Thus, René's relationship with O is ultimately predicated on power, not love.

Power also motivates the other members of Roissy because it is the primary goal of their sadistic gentlemen's club. To achieve this goal, club members enslave women. The private and unimposing chateau serves as the perfect venue for this physical and psychological abuse. The members of Roissy enforce a strict set of rules and regulations<sup>60</sup> that women must follow when in the chateau as well as when they leave it. René and the other members of Roissy explain these rules and regulations to O and inform her that they will continue to rape, whip and abuse her until her obedience is

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<sup>60</sup> "You are here to serve your masters. During the day, you will perform whatever domestic duties are assigned you, such as sweeping, putting back the books, arranging flowers or waiting on tables. Nothing more difficult than that. But at first word or sign from anyone you will drop whatever you are doing and ready yourself for what is really your one and only duty: to lend yourself. Your hands are not your own, nor are your breasts, nor, most especially, any of the bodily orifices, which we may explore or penetrate at will. You will remember at all times - or as constantly as possible – that you have lost all right to privacy and concealment, and as a reminder of this fact, in our presence you will never close your lips completely, or cross your legs, or press your knees together...This will serve as a constant reminder, to you as well as to us, that your mouth, your belly, and your backside are open to us. You will never touch your breasts in our presence: the bodice raises them toward us, that they may be ours. During the day you will therefore be dressed, and if anyone should order you to lift your skirt, you will lift it; if anyone desires to use you in any manner whatsoever, he will use you, unmasked, but with this one reservation: the whip. The whip will be used only between dawn and dusk. But besides the whipping you receive from whoever may want to whip you, you will also be flogged in the evening, as punishment for any infractions of the rules committed during the day: for having been slow to oblige, for having raised your eyes and looked at the person addressing you or taking you – you must never look any of us in the face [...] And yes, by the way: while it is perfectly all right for you to grow accustomed to being whipped – since you are going to be every day throughout your stay – this is less for our pleasure than for your enlightenment...Actually, this flogging...[is] intended less to make you suffer, scream or shed tears than to make you feel, *through* your suffering, that you are not free but fettered, and to teach you that you are totally dedicated to something outside yourself. When you leave here, you will be wearing on your third finger an iron ring, which will identify you. By then you will have learned to obey those who wear the same insignia, and when they see it they will know that beneath your skirt you are constantly naked, however comely or commonplace your clothes may be, and that this nakedness is for them. Should anyone find you in the least intractable, he will return you here." (Réage 15-17, her italics)

absolute. Once this happens, they will release her into the care of a member of Roissy, who will ensure that she continues to follow these rules and regulations in her daily life. O recognizes that she has lost her personal freedom and with it the right to make her own sexual choices. O understands her predicament and has to respond to it. Simon and Gagnon explain that “interpersonal scripting represent[s] the actor’s response to the external world [and] draws heavily upon cultural scenarios, invoking symbolic elements expressive of such scenarios” (54). Thus, an individual responds to his/her environment by constructing a behavioural script that reflects the values and expectations of the relevant cultural scenario(s). If multiple cultural scenarios are available, an individual can select the values and expectations that inform his/her behaviour but if only one is available, the individual has little or no choice. Unfortunately, the latter is the case for O. She recognizes that submission is her only option, so she submits.

Although O initially has no desire to submit to her captors, this eventually changes because of her attachment to René. O recognizes and respects René and wants to satisfy his needs. O’s need to please René eclipses all of her other needs, even that of self-preservation: “she recalled the prisoners she had seen in engravings and in history books, who also had been chained and whipped many years ago, centuries ago, and had died. She did not wish to die, but if torture was the price she had to pay to keep her lover’s love, then she only hoped he was pleased that she had endured it” (Réage 26-27). Mickelsen aptly asserts that “O desires a sense of belonging so strongly that she will accept any kind of connection, even a painful one” (170). O treasures her connection with René and continues to degrade herself in order to maintain it. Even though René never reciprocates or appreciates her consideration, O ignores her needs in order to fulfill his.

Thus, as Jennifer Benjamin points out “O is constantly recognizing her lover and he is constantly negating her” (156). Although René does not recognize or respect O’s needs, feelings or personhood, he is aware of her and notices that she treats him differently than the other members of Roissy. These men also negate O, but René expects her to recognize and respect their needs, feelings and personhood as she does his: “he told her... [that s]he must greet them and submit to them with the same respect with which she greeted him, as though they were so many reflections of him” (Réage 32). René knows that O will honour his request and admits that he always intended to prostitute her. Andrea Dworkin characterizes O’s relationship with René as “the incarnation of demonic possession” because he encourages “the annihilation of [her] will and choice” (109-110). René promotes the destruction of O’s free will because her degradation gives him power. René admits this when he tells O that he derives extreme pleasure from prostituting her:

The fact that he gave her was to him a proof, and ought to be one for her as well, that she belonged to him: one can only give what belongs to you. He gave her only to reclaim her immediately, to reclaim her enriched in his eyes, like some common object which had been used for some divine purpose and has thus been consecrated. For a long time he had wanted to prostitute her, and was delighted to feel that the pleasure he was deriving was even greater than he had hoped, and that it bound him to her all the more, as it bound her to him, all the more so because, through it, she would be more humiliated and ravaged...O listened [to him] and trembled with happiness. (Réage 32)

O’s reaction to this news signals a change in her perception of pleasure and pain. Before O came to Roissy, she associated her pleasure with René’s pleasure and her pain with his

pain. However, after her experiences at the chateau, O associates René's pleasure with her pain. Despite this change, O still derives pleasure from René's pleasure and in doing so, takes indirect pleasure in her pain. Thus, the repeated abuse that O endures at Roissy tends to unsettle the boundary between pleasure and pain. O's mistreatment also alters her perception of submission and enslavement. This is evident when O happily accepts her role as René's sex slave: "O was on the verge of saying that she was his slave and that she bore her bonds cheerfully [but h]e stopped her" (Réage 33). Thus, even though O initially has no desire to submit and resists her enslavement, she eventually develops the desire to submit and in doing so, embraces servitude.

By accepting her role as René's sex slave, O reaches the third and final level of the self-formation process, intrapsychic scripting. Simon and Gagnon explain that "the imagery of the intrapsychic yields to change far more slowly than the more externally monitored production of the interpersonal scripts" (59). Intrapsychic scripting is a longer process than interpersonal scripting because it involves an individual's internal rehearsal and acceptance of the behavioural script that he/she constructed to reflect the values and expectations of the relevant cultural scenario(s). As previously stated, O's behavioural script and sexual identity are predetermined by the rules and regulations of Roissy, which demand submission, absolute obedience and acceptance of one's enslavement. For O to establish and stabilize her new sexual identity as a sex slave she must both externally and internally accept this role, and with it the rules and regulations of Roissy. O happily submits and accepts her enslavement but her obedience is not absolute. This is because she is still undergoing a process of internal rehearsal and acceptance. O wants to please René but struggles to abide by two of the rules and regulations of Roissy: "If there was

one rule to which O had trouble submitting...it was the rule forbidding them to look the men in the face [...] As for the rule of silence, it meant so little to her that, except in the case of her lover, she did not once break it, replying by signals whenever another girl would take advantage of their guards' momentary distraction to speak to her" (Réage 37-38). O's sexual identity must stabilize before her obedience can be absolute.

For O's sexual identity to stabilize, she has to surrender herself internally to her enslavement, and in doing so lose herself. O experiences a loss of self when she reflects on the effects of her silence and chains:

The chains and the silence, which should have bound her deep within herself, which should have smothered her, strangled her, on the contrary freed her from herself. What would have become of her if she had been granted the right to speak and the freedom of her hands, if she had been free to make a choice, when her lover prostituted her before his own eyes? True, she did speak as she was being tortured, but can moans and cries be classed as words? Besides, they often stilled her by gagging. Beneath the gazes, beneath the hands, beneath the sexes that defiled her, the whips that rent her, she lost herself in a delirious absence from herself which restored her to love and, perhaps, brought her to the edge of death. (Réage 38-39)

O's loss of self appears to be a transcendental moment but this experience differs from true transcendence or Barthes' idea of bliss. According to Barthes, "bliss" requires an emotional connection between two partners who recognize, respect and love one another. René clearly does not recognize, respect or love O and she confuses his desire with love. She wants René to "love" her but he never demonstrates that he does. Despite this, O



believes that René loves her because he prostitutes and enslaves her. O equates René's desire to own and possess her with love and is "willing to risk death in order to continue to be the object of [his] desire" (Benjamin 160). Thus, O does not love René but is fixated on him because he fulfills her desire to be desired. O and René's relationship ultimately revolves around sex and power but it lacks the emotional connection that true transcendence requires. Benjamin explains that "[a]lthough true transcendence and freedom are constituted by the free giving of self in a reciprocal relationship, O finds a kind of substitute transcendence, or loss of self, in her enslavement" (161). This substitute transcendence or loss of self stabilizes O's sexual identity as René's sex slave.

After this stabilization occurs, O demonstrates absolute obedience. She follows the rules and regulations of Roissy and honours all of René's requests. For example, prior to her loss of self, René tells O to see the other members of Roissy as extensions of himself but she struggles to do this. However, after her sexual identity stabilizes, she honours this request:

He was the hand that blindfolded her, the whip wielded by the valet Pierre, he was the chain above her head, the unknown man who came down on her, and all the voices which gave her orders were his voice. Was she growing weary? No [...] those parts of her body most constantly offended, having become less sensitive, at the same time seemed to her to have become more beautiful and, as it were, ennobled: her mouth closed upon anonymous members, the tips of her breasts constantly fondled by hands, and between her quartered thighs the twin, contiguous paths wantonly ploughed. That she should have been

ennobled and gained in dignity through being prostituted was a source of surprise, and yet dignity was indeed the right term. (Réage 43-44)

The fact that O derives dignity from her absolute possession demonstrates that she has established a new sexual script with René. In this new sexual script, O recognizes, respects and obeys René as her master and he degrades her as his slave. With this new sexual script and identity, O's transformation is complete. The other members of Roissy recognize this and release her into the care of René.

O and René return to their apartment in Paris and thus to their previous social context. Despite this, O and René maintain their master/slave sexual script. René tells O how to think, feel, act and dress and she happily obeys. O is free from her shackles but feels more enslaved than ever: "She was no longer wearing either a collar or leather bracelets, and she was alone, her own sole spectator. And yet never had she felt herself more totally committed to a will which was not her own, more totally a slave, and more content to be so" (Réage 58). René does not whip or prostitute O but after two weeks of monogamy, he introduces her to his stepbrother, Sir Stephen, who is also a member of Roissy. Sir Stephen asks O to be his slave but emphasizes that René will remain her primary master: "There is between us a freedom so absolute and of such long standing that what belongs to me has always belonged to him, and what belongs to him has likewise belonged to me. Will you agree to join with us? I beg of you to, and I ask you to swear to it... [but b]efore you reply, realize for a moment that I am only, and can only be, another form of your lover: you will still have only one master" (Réage 71). O does not respond to Sir Stephen's request but René encourages her to do so: "If you give your consent,' René said, 'I'll personally explain to you Sir Stephen's preferences'" (Réage

72).<sup>61</sup> In the original version of *Story of O*, Réage uses a form of the French verbs “accepter” and “consentir” where “consent” is found in the English version. “Accepter” means “to agree” or “accept” and “consentir” means “to agree [or] consent” (*Collins Robert* 6,143). Thus, these verbs are the French equivalent of “consent.” In both the French and English connotations of consent there is an emphasis placed on specificity. To give one’s consent is to agree to specific terms or conditions,<sup>62</sup> whereas to submit is to surrender one’s self to another person’s will.<sup>63</sup> René and Sir Stephen ask O to give her consent but they want her to do so before they outline Sir Stephen’s preferences. Thus, René and Sir Stephen want submission but they use the rhetoric of consent to hide this reality. O recognizes the discrepancy between consent and submission when she considers their request:

The hardest thing, O was thinking, was not the question of giving her consent, and she realized that never for a moment did either of them dream that she might refuse; nor, for that matter, did she. The hardest thing was simply to speak...In order to speak, did she have to move? But she could not move of her own free will – an order from them would immediately have made her get up, but this time what they wanted from her was not blind obedience, acquiescence to an order, they wanted her to anticipate orders, to

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<sup>61</sup> In the French version of *Story of O*: “Si tu *acceptes*, dit René, je t’expliquerai moi-même les préférences de Sir Stephen” (Réage 90, my italics).

<sup>62</sup> “Consent, v.: voluntarily to accede or acquiesce in what another proposes or desires; to agree, comply, yield” (*OED*).

<sup>63</sup> “Submit, v.: to place oneself *under* the control of a person in authority or power; to become subject, surrender oneself or yield *to* a person or his rule, etc” (*OED*, original italics).

judge herself a slave and surrender herself as such. This, then, is what they called her consent. (Réage 72-73)<sup>64</sup>

O wants to give René and Sir Stephen her consent but her body resists her mind: “Did she consent?...This wilful assent they were suddenly asking her to express was the agreement to surrender herself, to say yes in advance to everything to which she most assuredly wanted to say yes but to which her body said no” (Réage 75).<sup>65</sup> As Susan Griffin points out, “will in the form of bodily response is carefully schooled out of [O], so that she is no longer connected to her own feelings” (189). O already ignores some of her bodily responses with René but she has to deny them all in order to surrender herself to Sir Stephen. O is hesitant to do this but does not want to disappoint René. She recognizes that giving herself to Sir Stephen will please René so O puts his happiness before her personal well-being and “mumble[s]: ‘I consent to whatever you both desire’” (Réage 76).<sup>66</sup> Once O gives her consent, Sir Stephen caresses her until she moans with pleasure. René encourages this exchange but O feels humiliated for enjoying it because she considers it a betrayal. However, when O realizes that the men admire her for her humiliation, she takes pleasure in it: “And however humiliated she was, or rather because she had been humiliated, was it not somehow *pleasant* to be esteemed only for her humiliation, for the meekness with which she surrendered, for the obedient way in which

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<sup>64</sup> “Le plus difficile, se disait O, n’était pas *d’accepter*, et elle se rendait compte que l’un et l’autre n’envisageaient pas une seconde, non plus qu’elle-même, qu’elle put refuser. Le plus difficile était simplement de parler [...] Pour parler, fallait-il bouger? Mais elle ne pouvait pas bouger de son propre gré – un ordre l’aurait fait se lever à l’instant, mais cette fois-ci ce qu’ils voulaient d’elle n’était pas qu’elle obéisse à un ordre, d’état qu’elle vint au-devant des ordres, qu’elle se jugeait elle-même esclave, et se livrait pour telle. Voilà ce qu’ils appelaient son *aveu*” (Réage 90-91, my italics).

<sup>65</sup> “*Consentait-elle?* Mais elle ne pouvait parler. Cette volonté qu’on lui demandait tout à coup d’exprimer, c’était la volonté de faire abandon d’elle-même, de dire oui d’avance à tout ce à quoi elle voulait assurément dire oui, mais à quoi son corps disait non” (Réage 94, my italics).

<sup>66</sup> “Elle balbutia: ‘Je *consens* à tout ce qu’il vous plaira’” (Réage 96, my italics).

she opened?” (Réage 78, my italics). The fact that O takes pleasure in her humiliation, signals another change in her perception of pleasure and pain. Until her degrading sexual encounter with Sir Stephen, O derived indirect pleasure from her pain. After the encounter, this association ceases to be indirect. O takes pleasure in her pain and in doing so develops masochistic desire.

O recognizes that her exchange with Sir Stephen differs from her encounters with the other members of Roissy. In those encounters, René prostituted O to derive pleasure and power from her degradation but with Sir Stephen, René selflessly offers her as a gift: “At Roissy...those who used her...were the instruments by which her love derived pleasure from her...[b]ut not here. René had turned her over to Sir Stephen, but it was clear that he wanted to share her with him, not to obtain anything further from her, nor for the pleasure of surrendering her, but in order to share with Sir Stephen what today he loved most, as no doubt in days gone by, when they were young, they had shared a trip, a boat, a horse” (Réage 81). By comparing herself to objects, O seems eerily aware of the objectification that she will endure in her relationship with Sir Stephen. Mickelsen aptly asserts that from the onset “components of this power relationship are not man-woman but man-object” (169). Sir Stephen goes to great lengths to dehumanize and objectify O and his first gesture is to rob her of René. Sir Stephen achieves this goal by becoming O’s master. René happily gives up this position to please Sir Stephen: “René admired him and wanted to emulate him, to compete with him, and this was why he was sharing everything with him, and why he had given O to him: this time it was apparent that she had been given with no strings attached” (Réage 88). Even though René continues to live with O, he forfeits his rights to her.

O is completely dependent on René because of the sexual script that they share. O derives happiness, dignity, self-worth and a sense of purpose from his desire for her: “she was a light, a nymph on clouds, a fish in water, lost in happiness. Lost because these fine strands of hair, these cables which René held, without exception, in his hand, were the only network through which the current of life any longer flowed into her. This was true to such a degree that when René relaxed his grip upon her – or when she imagined he had – ... then everything was choked and smothered within her...[and s]he felt as though she were a statue of ashes – bitter, useless, damned – like the salt statues of Gomorrah” (Réage 92). René’s mastery defines O and because of this, losing him destabilizes her sexual identity prompting a crisis of self-formation. Simon and Gagnon explain that “such moments require renegotiation of [the] aspects of the self involved in or related to the change” (57). They add that “such negotiated outcomes [are] outcomes of either compromise or dominance and repression” (57). Although O’s sexual script with René involves dominance and repression, it is ultimately an outcome of compromise because in exchange for O’s absolute obedience and submission, René entertains her love fantasy. Conversely, the sexual script that O and Sir Stephen establish is strictly an outcome of dominance and repression. This is evident when Sir Stephen squashes O’s love fantasy by telling her that: “You’ll obey me without loving me, and without my loving you” (Réage 86). Thus, O and Sir Stephen share a sexual script in which O must obey and endure with no expectation of recognition, respect or love. O eventually accepts this degrading sexual script as well as her new sexual identity and in doing so stabilizes them.

Once O accepts her role as Sir Stephen's sex slave, she starts to pursue women. O is attracted to Jacqueline, a model that she photographs at work. O befriends her and when she needs a place to stay O encourages Jacqueline to move in with her and René. Jacqueline gladly accepts this offer and moves into O and René's apartment. As O spends more time with Jacqueline, her desire to possess Jacqueline intensifies. However, she does not embrace her desire because she sees herself, in animalistic terms, as a subordinate member of a pack who stalks its prey but does not pounce until the pack leader gives the order: "She could have taken Jacqueline by the shoulders any number of times and, without saying a word, pinned her against the wall with her two hands, the way a butterfly is impaled; Jacqueline would not have moved, and probably not even done so much as smile. But O was henceforth like those wild animals which have been taken captive and either serve as decoys for the hunter or, leaping forward only at the hunter's command, head off the game for him...She was waiting for an order [and] [i]t came to her not from René, but from Sir Stephen" (Réage 100-101). O's identification with animals is a testament to the severity of her dehumanization but even this level of degradation does not prevent her from experiencing empathy. This is evident when Sir Stephen orders O to recruit Jacqueline for Roissy and she resists the idea:

'I want you to seduce [Jacqueline]... [because] you're to be the bait that lures her to Roissy.' O set down the cup of coffee she was holding in her hand, shaking so violently that she spilled the viscous dregs of coffee and sugar at the bottom of the cup. Like a soothsayer, she saw unbearable images in the spreading brown stain on the tablecloth: Jacqueline's glazed eyes confronting the valet Pierre...her downy cheeks stained with tears and her painted mouth

open and screaming, and her straight hair, in a Dutch bob along her forehead straight as new-mown hay – no, it was impossible, not her, not Jacqueline. ‘No, it’s out of the question,’ she said. ‘Of course it’s not,’ Sir Stephen retorted. ‘How do you think girls are recruited for Roissy?’ (Réage 120).

Although O initially resists the idea of recruiting Jacqueline, she soon relishes this cruel mission because she wants Jacqueline to share her plight: “how sweet it would be to see Jacqueline naked and defenceless beside her, and like her” (Réage 130). O’s desire to deliver Jacqueline into the sadistic world of Roissy stems from her need to share her secret and in doing so, stifle the loneliness of her entrapment. This is evident when she admits “she was living in Paris locked in her secret as though she had been locked in a brothel [and] the only persons who had the key to her secret, René and Sir Stephen, at the same time had the only key to her body” (Réage 137). Sir Stephen recognizes that O’s feelings, rather than her obedience to him, prompt her to resist and then ultimately obey his order to recruit Jacqueline. Sir Stephen wants O’s obedience to be uninhibited and recognizes that she must shed her personality and capacity for emotion in order for this to happen. Thus, as Phillips aptly asserts, “the *obliteration* of identity becomes the main focus of interest” (91, his italics). To ensure that this obliteration takes place, Sir Stephen brings O to Samois.

Samois is a secluded house similar to the chateau but different in that it is run by the only female member of Roissy, Anne-Marie. Anne-Marie specializes in furthering the degradation and objectification of enslaved women by mutilating their bodies. As soon as O enters this oppressive social context, she starts to undergo a reorganization of the self that relies on a restrictive interpersonal script. The nature of this interpersonal



script becomes apparent through the restrictions placed on of O's body. Anne-Marie forces O to wear a constricting whale-bone corset that "she tighten[s] a little more [every day], until her waist [is] scarcely larger than the circle formed by her ten fingers" (Réage 146). In addition to the corset that deforms her waistline, O endures a lengthy and brutal whipping at the hands of another enslaved woman. After this whipping, O reflects on the tumult of contradictory emotions that arise from her warring masochistic and bodily desires: "O had never really understood, but she had finally come to accept as an undeniable and important verity, this constant and contradictory jumble of her emotions: she liked the idea of torture, but when she was being tortured herself she would have betrayed the whole world to escape it, and yet when it was over she was happy to have gone through it, happier still if it had been especially cruel and prolonged" (Réage 152). O derives both pleasure and pain from her whipping, but this is not Anne-Marie's intention.

As part of O's restrictive interpersonal script, her torture is meant to be strictly painful and degrading. Simon and Gagnon explain that "[w]hile such scripts generally imply things about the internal feelings of the participants, only the representation of appropriate feelings need be manifested or confirmed" (55). O exhibits and genuinely experiences the appropriate feelings of pain and humiliation when she is being tortured but internally experiences the inappropriate feeling of pleasure when her torture ceases. O experiences inappropriate feelings before and after torture because she is intrapsychically scripting her identity as a masochist. Thus, O's interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts are at odds. Simon and Gagnon reveal that "[r]ather than being reciprocally reinforcing, the requirements of the interpersonal and intrapsychic scripting of the sexual frequently

represent a continuing – and for some a costly – dialectic” (59). This dialectic is costly for O because the demands of her restrictive interpersonal script cause her to intrapsychically script an even more degrading reorganization of the self. O’s new sexual identity is evident when Anne-Marie forces her to whip another woman and O relishes the experience: “For on two occasions Anne-Marie had handed O the thonged whip – both times the victim had been Yvonne – and told her to use it. The first time, for the first minute, she had hesitated, and at Yvonne’s first scream O had recoiled and cringed, but as soon as she had started in again and Yvonne’s cries had echoed anew, she had been overwhelmed with a terrible feeling of pleasure, a feeling so intense that she had caught herself laughing in spite of herself, and she had found it almost impossible to restrain herself from striking Yvonne as hard as she could” (Réage 157-158). Even though O derives pleasure from inflicting pain and in doing so embraces her sadistic desire, she retains her masochism. Thus, the degradation that O endures at Samois erases the boundary between pleasure and pain, transforming her into a sadomasochist.

Despite this transformation, O’s objectification is not complete. Before O leaves Samois, Anne-Marie pierces her labia with two interlocking iron rings and Sir Stephen brands her buttocks with his initials. After O endures this horrific experience, her objectification is complete because she takes pride in the brand and rings that mark her as Sir Stephen’s property: “From these irons and these marks, O derived a feeling of inordinate pride” (Réage 163). Once O’s brand heals, she returns to Paris with Sir Stephen. Shortly after their arrival, Sir Stephen prostitutes O to other members of Roissy and then punishes her for her interactions with them. O happily endures her prostitution and punishment even though it further dehumanizes her. O’s dehumanization sinks to

new depths when Sir Stephen introduces her to his friend, the Commander, who has an animal mask fetish. To fulfill the Commander's erotic fantasy, O selects an owl mask from his collection and shaves off her pubic hair while Sir Stephen attaches a long dog chain to her vaginal rings. Sir Stephen and the Commander then take O to a party where she is lead around by her leash wearing nothing but her owl mask. The other members of the party circle, stare at and touch O but do not speak to her "as though she were a real owl, deaf to human language, and dumb" (Réage 198). As Mickelsen points out, "O has been reduced to sub-human status" (169). Even though Sir Stephen is responsible for her condition, this level of degradation and self-effacement ceases to be attractive to him. In the final chapter of the novel, O senses that Sir Stephen is about to abandon her and asks for permission to kill herself: "seeing that Sir Stephen was about to leave her, [O] said she would prefer to die [and] Sir Stephen gave her his consent" (Réage 200). Ultimately, O reaches a level of degradation where she bases her self-worth on Sir Stephen's desire and when this desire ceases to exist so does her desire to live.

In *Story of O*, Réage charts the tragic journey of O as her experiences degrade her identity and with it, the boundary between pleasure and pain. At the beginning of the novel, this boundary is intact and pleasure is the opposite of pain. O's identity is stable as is the sexual script that she shares with René. This initial situation is easy to relate to for the female reader because O has free will, expects recognition and respect, and can distinguish between pleasure and pain. However, O's situation changes and becomes more difficult to relate to when René brings her to Roissy. In this sadistic venue, René and the other members of Roissy rape, whip and torture O and this repeated abuse eventually causes O to associate her pain with René's pleasure. When this happens, O

accepts a new sexual identity and script based on this degrading association and returns home with René where she consents to further mistreatment in order to please him. René enslaves and prostitutes O and then eventually surrenders her to Sir Stephen. Sir Stephen proves to be a far crueller master than René and the degradation that O endures as his slave erases her identity and with it, the boundary between pleasure and pain, transforming her into a sadomasochist. This reorganization of the self is destructive and dehumanizing for O, and ultimately leads to her suicide. Thus, O's experiences with René, Sir Stephen and the other members of Roissy cause her to accept several sexual identities and scripts, each more degrading than the last.

This chapter begins by suggesting that *Story of O* is shocking upon the first reading because of its sadomasochistic content but I want to end by giving a second, and more critical reading, that is likely to change the impact of the novel. Réage uses sadomasochism to position the female reader strategically in relation to the novel. As O gradually develops sadomasochistic desire, her experience becomes increasingly more difficult for the female reader to relate to. The distance between O and the reader continues to widen until the reader completely detaches from O's experience and rejects it. Réage creates ironic distance between O's experience and the reader's reception of her experience in order to expose the effect of male erotic fantasy on the female subject. Through her use of irony, Réage encourages the reader to resist, if not reject her novel because in doing so, the reader questions and rejects male erotic fantasy. Thus, this narrative as a whole is a response to the stereotypes of male erotic fantasy. In many accounts of this type of erotic fantasy, the tension that transgressive sexual practice and lifestyle creates is often resolved by concluding the narrative with a mutual love

relationship or in some cases, marriage. Réage starkly contrasts such accounts when she refuses to resolve this narrative tension and offers the total annihilation of the female subject as the only outcome of sadomasochistic sexual practice. Thus, *Story of O* is ultimately a critique of erotic narratives in which male authors, like John Cleland and D. H. Lawrence, appropriate female experience and assign pleasure to female characters in order to confirm their accounts of male erotic fantasy.

Although Réage critiques such appropriations of female experience, she appropriates male and female experience in her novel. This is because appropriation is a requirement of fiction, and as such many authors strategically use it as a narrative tool to accomplish their goals. In *Story of O*, Réage appropriates male and female experience to depict the alienating process of degradation and dehumanization that results from O's loveless relationship with René, while in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Cleland and Lawrence appropriate male and female experience in order to depict the rejuvenating and blissful process that results from a mutual love relationship. Ironically, Réage's tragic portrait illuminates rather than discredits Cleland and Lawrence's accounts of male erotic fantasy.

## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

I began this thesis by establishing that John Cleland's *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Pauline Réage's *Story of O* are transgressive texts. I will now conclude with a discussion of the central themes that unite them, erotic pleasure and love. In their narratives, Cleland, Lawrence and Réage test and ultimately transcend the boundary of erotic pleasure. Many artists have given different names to the experience that transcends pleasure. In his book, *The Pleasure of the Text* Barthes uses the term "bliss" to describe this experience. Barthes explains that bliss "imposes a state of loss" from which "nothing is reconstituted [or] recuperated" (14, 52). Because of this, when an individual breaches bliss he/she experiences a loss of self and is reborn as a whole, new self. Barthes admits that bliss is similar to orgasm in that it imposes a loss of self, but clarifies that bliss results from emotional rather than physical ecstasy. In other words it is love, not sex that prompts an individual to breach bliss. In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny transcends the boundary of erotic pleasure with her true love, Charles, and is reborn as a whole, new self. Thus, Barthes' term "bliss" accurately describes Fanny's transcendental experience.

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Connie and Mellors also transcend the boundary of erotic pleasure with their true loves and are reborn as whole, true selves. In his essay, "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," Lawrence admits that Connie and Mellors undergo this transformation because they are in love. He credits the development of this emotion to the blood connection that they share. Lawrence defines a blood connection as an innate union that links the minds, bodies and souls of the individuals who share it. Lawrence explains that once individuals fully embrace this connection they experience a loss of self

and are reborn in tenderness as whole individuals. The term “tenderness” is Lawrence’s equivalent of Barthes’ bliss. Barthes recognizes the interchangeability of these terms in *A Lover’s Discourse* when he defines tenderness as bliss (224). In my discussion of Lawrence’s novel, I combine these terms and refer to Connie and Mellors’ transcendental experiences as tender bliss.

In *Story of O*, O also transcends the boundary of erotic pleasure with her lover, René, but she is not reborn as her whole, true self. Instead O loses her independence and personhood, and is reborn with a fractured sense of self, as René’s sex slave. This happens because O’s relationship with René revolves around power and sex and lacks the emotional connection that tender bliss requires. O’s experiences as a slave further degrade her fractured identity, and with it the boundary between pleasure and pain. As O loses the ability to distinguish between pleasure and pain, she develops masochistic and sadistic desire. Once these opposing desires fuse and O becomes a sadomasochist, this overwhelming dual desire causes a total annihilation of the self. Thus, O’s transcendental experience is ultimately tragic.

Although the outcomes of Cleland, Lawrence and Réage’s narratives differ, all three authors rely on the idea and the word “love” in their accounts of male erotic fantasy. In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Cleland uses the idea of love to justify the novel’s otherwise unreasonable ending. Fanny is a prostitute for most of the novel, but her love for Charles and good fortune enable her to abandon this socially reprehensible position for a life of virtue and monogamy as his wife. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Lawrence also uses the idea of love to justify the ending of the novel and to condone Connie’s cruel, transgressive and unethical behavior. Connie has a class-transgressing affair with her

husband's gamekeeper, Mellors, and eventually leaves her crippled and helpless husband for him. Even though Connie's actions are morally reprehensible, Lawrence applauds her for them and condemns her "modern" marriage in order to promote her love relationship with Mellors as the ideal union. Unlike Cleland and Lawrence, in *Story of O*, Réage uses the idea of love and the word "love" as ironic devices. At the beginning of the novel, the reader and O believe that she is in a love relationship because of the repeated use of the word love. However, even as it becomes clear that this notion of love is pure fantasy, O continues to use the term. This continual and excessive usage adds to the ironic distance that Réage creates between O's experience and the reader's reception of this experience. Thus, in spite of the differences in their narratives and projects, Cleland, Lawrence and Réage all use love as a narrative tool to influence the reader's reception of their accounts of male erotic fantasy.



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