

# The Triumph of the Strategies of Submission: Constance in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

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## ABSTRACT

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* has long been condemned as an indecent and obscene book to read. Its author D. H. Lawrence also has been taken as a male chauvinist who has degraded women in his novels. This paper appeals that we need to start from the idea that Lawrence is firstly an insightful writer, rather than a sexist. Lawrence is, in effect, a humanist who thinks man and woman are two parts of human relationships. It is their unison that makes human life complete. This paper sets to illustrate this argument through a close reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, one of D. H. Lawrence's most representative but controversial works. The novel's heroine Constance dares to activate her life in a society full of moral and religious hindrance for women. She struggles to live a dynamic and complete life on her own, and eventually wins her success against the patriarchal society with her strategies of submission.

**Keywords:** *D. H. Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover, Constance, Strategies of Submission*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1960, the Penguin Books, risking the prosecution, published D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in London. The trial and its publicity made the novel an instant bestseller. It marked "the start of a decade of unprecedented sexual explicitness in the arts" [1]. While through years, the novel still has been condemned as an indecent and obscene book to read. Especially for the feminists, they think Lawrence is a male chauvinist who has degraded women in his novels. In the famous feminist writing *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir holds that Lawrence reduced women into men's accessories. She says in the book that "it is once more the ideal of the 'true woman' that Lawrence has to offer us, that is, the woman who unreservedly accepts being defined as the Other" [2]. Also for Kate Millet, in her *Sexual Politics*, she points out that Lawrence is a passionate believer in the myth of nature which has ordained that female personality is congenital, even her shame is not the product of conditioning, but innate [3]. Before beginning the analysis of Constance in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I appeal that we need to start from the idea that Lawrence is firstly an insightful writer, rather than a sexist.

Recently, a handwritten letter by Lawrence intended for publication in a magazine in 1924 suggests that he bridled at sexism. In the letter, he defended women against a man's prejudice that women were seeds of terrible and unmentionable evilness because they inspired lust in men. While Lawrence argued that women were the same as men. It was the men who cannot control themselves should be to blame for [4]. Lawrence is, in effect, a humanist who believes that man and woman are two parts of human relationships. It is their unison that makes humans

complete. He said in his *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover* that "men experience the great rhythm of emotion man-wise, women experience it woman-wise, and in the unison of men and women it is complete" [5]. Lawrence described that sex is the essential unifier of men and women. In its big, slower vibration it is the warmth of heart which makes people happy together [6]. Woman, the same as man, has the right to pursuit their sexual happiness and expresses it as freely as man. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Constance as the wife of an impotent husband, she cannot feel the warmth of her life, and life without sex makes her feel nothing but meaningless.

Humans are all independent individuals, and their supreme business is to save their own souls. However, the marriage of Constance with Clifford exist as a hindrance for her life [7]. Once in the novel, Constance expresses her dissatisfaction with the Churches' asceticism: "the body is only just coming to real life. With the Greeks it gave a lovely flicker, then Plato and Aristotle killed it, and Jesus finished it off. But now the body is coming really to life....." [8]. Here Constance represents Lawrence's opinion that sexlessness cannot drive human life on to a promising future. Thus behaving accordingly, Constance in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* dares to activate her life in a society full of moral and religious hindrance. She struggles to live a dynamic and complete life on her own. She is not like Mrs. Morel in *Sons and Lovers* who dies of poison by her own child, which is a mockery that Lawrence sets for her failure to be a real woman. Rather, Constance in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is not only presented as the central figure of the novel, but also wins her success against the patriarchal society with her strategies of submission.

## 2. TRUE COLOURS UNDER THE SUBMISSIVE VEIL

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Constance acts as the wife of Sir Clifford and the lover of Oliver Mellors interchangeably. When in Ragby, she is the most respective lady of the Tevershall village and the qualified wife of Sir Clifford. While in the wood, she is a beautiful woman full of attraction to her lover. She always acts under the veil of submission. As what described by Lawrence in the novel, it is true that Constance is "a woman gifted from nature with the appearance of demure, submissive maidenliness" [9]. But the fact is, as Freud pointed out, whatever the character's later capacity for resisting the influences of abandoned object cathexes may turn out to be, the effects of the first identifications made in earliest childhood will be general and lasting [10]. The true Connie, as her father puts, is a "bonny Scotch trout rather than the pilchard sort of little slip of a girl" [11]. She is a woman brought up in an atmosphere with the "cosmopolitan provincialism of art that goes with pure social ideas". She can argue with the men over philosophical, sociological and artistic matters. Constance masters the strategy that a woman could yield to a man without yielding her inner, free self during her younger years. She is even able to use sex to have power over those men [12]. Beauvoir holds that Lawrence's heroines are all beautiful and healthy, but not heady [13]. While in the novel, we can find out that the "attractive demure maiden" actually is a woman with strong self-will. Constance is as strong-willed as her father, as her sister puts. When she realizes that she had lost touch with the "substantial and vital world", she feels intolerable at her life. She tries to free herself immediately with an affair with Michaelis, the young man Clifford invites to Ragby. "In a choice of men, Michaelis really had far more use for her than Clifford" [14]. At least, he has a "complete" body, and compared with him, Clifford is obviously more boulderish and stupider [15]. But when she finds out that Michaelis cannot fulfil her sexual desire, and he is the same with the hollow man like Clifford, she quickly lets their relationship go.

Connie also dares to announce her existence to men. When Clifford's cronies have conversations in Ragby, she always there, quietly doing woman's business. But she listens to their discussions, and reflects on the things she is interested in. While these gentlemen pretend to neglect her existence, hoping she will keep silent forever, she looks up and speaks out her ideas on their discussions. "If they be not nice to me, /what care I how nice they be?" [16] Maybe it is her innermost yell to these proud and self-righteous man. When Clifford demonstrates that she cares for him more than any men in the world, Connie keeps silent, but says in her heart that it is "so absolutely wrong". Quietly, subtly, Constance deals with men in her own way. From Lawrence's description of Constance in the novel, we can clearly see that she is a woman has strong self-consciousness and always hides her true colours under her submissive veil.

## 3. THE CONTRIVING WITH THE SUBMISSIVE STRATEGIES

Constance not only passively fights for her voice, but also actively contrive these proud men. "My God, Connie, all the bloody contriving!" When Constance tells her father that she has a lover as the gamekeeper of Clifford, she conceives a child of that man, and she also plans to use Duncan Forbes to disguise as her lover, her father is greatly shocked by her daughter's doing. "Contriving, conniving; Contriving, conniving! Makes a man think he's lived too long" [17]. Even her sophisticated father was stunned by her wits of contriving for these men: Mellors, Clifford, Forbes Duncan, and now even he himself was involved into her contriving. In this respect, we see that Constance is Lawrence's one of the most outstanding heroines who is a self-begetter and who will sever family bonds for personal renewal [18]. When Constance finds her own interest is abused by her husband, by her family bond as lady Chatterley, she decides to save herself with her own strategies.

### 3.1. *The contriving of her husband*

Lady Chatterley, the perfect wife of Sir Clifford, who is always a demure woman quietly stays with her husband, who never makes her husband feel at the slightest sign of flirting on her part, is a wife makes Clifford extraordinarily proud of [19]. But Constance knows something wrong with her life, especially the nothingness of Clifford, his words and his novels, which is exactly as her farther told her. These nothingnesses make Constance despaired. She does not tend to break with her husband herself, because she is always quiet and vague for her husband's existence [20]. Therefore, she asks her sister Hilda for help to set her free. She gets her freedom by forcing Clifford to receive the practiced nurse Mrs. Bolton as his servant. Though she is still afraid that how many of her roots, perhaps mortal ones, are tangled with Clifford's, she breathes freer after Mrs. Bolton takes her place to take care of Clifford. Thereafter, she enters a new phase of her life [21]. After that, Constance gives every chance to Mrs. Bolton to control Clifford, even she knows that Clifford is losing himself to Mrs. Bolton's hand. "Connie was sometimes tempted to say to him: 'For God's sake, don't sink so horribly into the hands of that woman!' But she didn't care for him enough to say it, in the long run" [22]. In addition, she woos Mrs. Bolton in her league to help her to deceive her husband, and makes Mrs. Bolton a messenger between her and her lover. Constance controls her husband by the controlling of Mrs. Bolton. After all, she is clever enough to let Mrs. Bolton control her husband and she herself still acts as the demure wife.

### 3.2. *The contriving of the gamekeeper*

“Give me the resurrection of the body, and democracy of touch!” [23] Constance has the desperate desire of her renewal as a real woman with the right to enjoy her sexual life. After the first try with Michaelis, she knows that most modern men are impotent and even need women to be active. After her encounter with the gamekeeper, she becomes aware of this potent man with the male distinctions different from the common modern men. Besides, the gamekeeper undoubtedly is the best choice to be her lover. “He is lovely as a lover!” she tells the truth when she talks with Hilda about her love affair with the gamekeeper. From my point of view, here are three reasons why Constance chooses the gamekeeper as her lover. Firstly, Mellors is a natural man who has a healthy body which is different from the crippled Clifford and the other modern impotent men. Constance makes it clear that “at least he was sane, and wholesome” [24]. Secondly, Mellors is single and lives by himself. Mellors has no families and friends nearby and he lives a life secluding from the outside world. Therefore, there is no disturbance for Constance’s affair with him. Constance is not worried about her ladyship, but she really concerns about her complete freedom from the outside world. She feels free and warm in the wood and in the cottage with the natural man. Nature is her refuge, her sanctuary from the outside world. The third important reason is that she is the master of the gamekeeper. In other words, she can control the man in some way. As put in the novel, “he [Mellors] was powerless to preserve his privacy; he was a hired man, and these people were his masters”; “For after all he was only a hired man.” Constance can do things in her own way because she is the ladyship of the Tevershall village. When she asks the key of Mellors’ cottage, “couldn’t we get another key?” Though she asked in her tender voice, underneath of her is a woman determined to get what she wanted in her own way [25].

After the first personal meeting with the gamekeeper, she determines to conquer the man though it seems that she is not welcome. “Having failed to make herself heard, her mettle was roused, she would not be defeated” [26]. As mentioned before, Constance is a woman of strong will, she tries her best to get close to Mellors and tries to know every detail about him. When she sees how utterly the man dislikes her when she goes against him, she changes her strategy to be a tender and poor woman who needs man’s love. Step by step, the man conquered by her pretended tenderness and submissiveness. Finally, Mellors even “likes that sort of a man submitting to fate” to Constance’s tenderness [27].

### 4. CONCLUSION

In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, men are actually declining while women were rising up [28]. Beauvoir holds that in Lawrence’s novels, masculine arrogance provokes feminine resistance, while women finally would be

conquered by men’s masculine power [29]. In this regard, she will see Mellors’ conquest of Constance in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. While just as the Romans conquered Greece by force, Greek culture conquered Rome the other way round. Admittedly, Clifford controls Constance through his identity as the lord of the house, Mellors controls her by his potent sexual power, while Constance conquers them by her strategies of pretended submissive womanness. From the German boy to Michaelis, Mellors, and Clifford, Constance has contrived these men under her submissive veil. At the end of the novel, Clifford lost his original intentions to control his wife as a “soul partner”. Instead, he is fooled by Constance’s continuous love affairs with other men. Even the gamekeeper Mellors, who just wants to get rid of women and to live alone, also gets stuck by Connie’s contriving. At last, Mellors takes Constance as his only hope for life. As stated in his confessions to Constance, “what I live for now is for you and me live together”; “I’ve got no friends, not inward friends. Only you” [30]. Because of Constance, Mellors becomes a rebellious man to his master and a man cannot live completely without her. Maybe Clifford will never divorce her, but as Mellors puts it, Clifford cannot really do anything to her. And if Clifford never divorces Constance, they will manage to keep clear of him [31]. In this way, Constance eventually gets what she wants by her strategies of submission: her child and a man who loves her. Born in an age full of limits to women’s rights and a society under the moral and religious suppression, Constance undoubtedly a courageous woman worth our admiration.

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The greatness of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* lies in a paradox: it is simultaneously progressive and reactionary, modern and Victorian. It looks backwards towards a Victorian stylistic formality, and it seems to anticipate the social morality of the late 20th century in its frank engagement with explicit subject matter and profanity. One might say of the novel that it is formally and thematically conservative, but methodologically radical. The easiest of these assertions to prove is that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is "formally conservative." It is important to remember that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was written towards the end of the 1920s, a decade which had seen extensive literary experimentation.

254 quotes from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "A woman has to live her life, or live to repent not having lived it." *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence 102,580 ratings, 3.51 average rating, 5,082 reviews. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Quotes Showing 1-30 of 254. "A woman has to live her life, or live to repent not having lived it." D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. tags: life, living, philosophy, women. 4724 likes. Like. "We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen." D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. 3222 likes. Like. "Perhaps only people who are capable of real togetherness have that look of being alone in the universe. The others have a certain stickiness." *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, however, will see Constance's own sexual pleasure as central to the storyline; denied by her frustrated husband and satiated by groundsman Oliver Mellors. A circumspect passage from the novel, interpreted as describing sodomy, is omitted, with most love scenes filmed by romantic firelight. As revealed earlier this month, the language in the adaptation is also curtailed, with dozens of the most extreme obscenities in the English language represented by a single "c-ck" in the new BBC version. Mercurio, who admitted his adaptation would "almost certainly" cause debate, said he had hoped to bring the romance between Constance and Sir Clifford to the forefront of his version, as well as the class conflict he believes is central to the book. In the novel "*lady chatterley`s. Lover*" by D.h.lawrence. Vlera Ejupi, PhD. Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages, Cultures and. To speak and write about Literature is without any doubt one of the most delicate as well as refined processes in the history of mankind. The history of mankind is very rich with all the possible kinds of genres which.