



“Now you want to be an artist, so you’ve got to use the artist’s faculty of making the sub-conscious conscious” — Explore Lawrence’s attempts to make the sub-conscious conscious.

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In his short essay ‘The Novel and the Feelings’, written in 1925, D. H. Lawrence wrote, ‘we have no language for the feelings’.¹ Lawrence identifies ‘feelings’ as abstractions, inhabitants of the ‘dark continent’ that is the subconscious self, primarily overlooked or misunderstood and yet wholly central to our being, and thus to Lawrence’s exploration of the complexity of human experience. In order to foreground and explore the subconscious feelings of his characters, Lawrence seeks to re-define the parameters of language. He employs free-indirect discourse, which allows him to blur narrative boundaries and create a sense of intimacy with the characters in order to delve further into their underlying feelings. Lawrence adapts and re-invigorates an existing language through his use of rhythm, sound, metaphor and repetition to make it signify in new and unexpected ways. This essay will pay close attention to selected passages from ‘New Eve and Old Adam’ and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in order to explore the way in which Lawrence articulates the sub-conscious, tracing underlying processes of emotional experience in Peter Moest and Constance Chatterley.

The use of third-person free-indirect discourse lessens the divide between the authoritative author and the subjective experience of the character. Allan Ingram writes that it is ‘the perspective afforded by an omniscience that does not need to be justified’.² The narrative omniscience renders the thoughts and feelings it describes as a veracious account, allowing the reader to ask *why* rather than *whether* they occur. Lawrence is able to permeate the character’s perspective to offer a more complex and intimate impression of their internal response, and gesture towards the subconscious feeling that they themselves often cannot comprehend. ‘New Eve and Old Adam’ explores the unhappy Moest marriage, which is caught between traditionalism and an unfolding modernity. Peter is old-fashioned in his desire to retain male authority and in his inability to identify with his feelings: ‘he remained staring at the dark, having the horrible sensation of a roof low down over him; whilst that dark, unknown being [...] raged blindly against him’.³ This quotation exemplifies Lawrence’s ability to continually shift between the conscious and the subconscious in his descriptions, which are often overlapping or ambiguous, creating an unstable, divided feel in the narrative. Although the author’s ability to inhabit the character’s mind brings the reader closer to the subconscious, the shifting instability in itself is also indicative of the uncertain and inconstant, subconscious state. The subtle fluctuation between conscious action and thought and subconscious feeling is confusing and disorientating, replicating for the reader the lack of control that the characters themselves experience.

¹ D. H. Lawrence, ‘The Novel and the Feelings’, in *Study of Thomas Hardy and other Essays*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 203.

² Allan Ingram

³ D. H. Lawrence, ‘New Eve and Old Adam’, in *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Stories*, ed. John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.172. [All quotations from the primary text will henceforth be indicated by line numbers].

The shifting perspective from external to internal, narrator to character, reiterates the struggle between the conscious and the subconscious. Lawrence argues that ‘man has pretty well tamed himself’, through a resistance to instinctive, subconscious feeling.⁴ In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Connie volunteers to deliver a note to the gamekeeper Oliver Mellors, only to stumble upon him in the process of washing himself: ‘Connie backed away ... one might touch: a body!’ [For paragraph see appendix].⁵ The struggle manifests itself in Connie’s dualistic response to the scene; she removes herself and yet cannot suppress her own fascination with it and her physical attraction to Mellors’ body, ‘a certain beauty of a pure creature’ (ll. 12-13) Her ‘tamed’ behaviour can be identified in the phrase ‘in spite of herself’, which indicates the conscious barrier that Connie has erected in order to inhibit her own subconscious feeling. The juxtaposition of feeling and conscious control is conveyed through the combination of external movement and internal response.

Lawrence depicts the progression from conscious to subconscious through the distinction between the mind and body. In order to succumb to her instinctive feeling, Connie must overcome the barrier of her mind and identify instead with her body. Katie Gramich cites Michel Foucault in her observation of ‘a change in the focus of the discourse of power in society from the fleshly body to the body as a receptor of the mind’.⁶ Through Connie, Lawrence implies this secondary engagement with the body must be un-learned in order to engage directly through an unrestricted, unconscious response. Connie first identifies her ‘visionary experience’ through the realisation that ‘it had hit her in the middle of the body’ (ll. 8-9). Connie’s subconscious is located in her body; Lawrence depicts the feelings that engulf her as wholly physical sensations rather than thoughts refracted through the mind.

The separate bodily feelings cannot be intellectually suppressed and Connie is therefore able to yield to her instinctive self, relinquishing her conscious hold in order to indulge in her joyous, instinctive response. However, she concludes with an awareness of the feelings that now ‘lay inside her’ and upon failing to suppress them, she chooses to undermine them instead: ‘with her mind, she was inclined to ridicule’ (l. 17). The power of the mind to overcome the instinctive body is acknowledged in the way that Connie ridicules both Mellors for the ‘vulgar’ act of washing outside, and herself for allowing her feelings to take hold: a defensive conclusion that conveys embarrassment for the ‘fleshly body’.⁷ Lawrence locates fulfilment within primitive, subconscious sensation; Connie must rid herself of the intellectual bonds that merely stimulate a ‘simulacrum of reality’ to overcome the trepidation of the body that fuels her conscious contempt.

Through Connie, the subconscious is associated with a renewed sense of joy and the discovery of a tangible world of instinctive feeling. Fiona Becket identifies that ‘the potential for sex to revivify the self is manifested only where modern “mental consciousness” is shed’.⁸ This shedding of consciousness can be seen in the significant change within Connie’s person as she reflects on Mellor’s body; she turns from being dismissive to joyous through the change from a rational mode to a sensual and poetic identification: ‘not even the body of beauty, but a certain lambency, the warm white flame of a single life revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a body!’ (ll. 13-15). Connie rejoices in the physical appreciation of Mellors’ body through a slow, deliberate application of language, as though she herself is rediscovering its delights. The use of light imagery conveys connotations of hope and insight, whilst the repetition of ‘body’, ‘creature’ and ‘beauty’ reiterates a sense of

⁴ Lawrence, ‘The Novel and the Feelings’, p. 203.

⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2005), p. 55. [All quotations from the primary text will henceforth be indicated by line numbers].

⁶ Katie Gramich, ‘Stripping off the “Civilized Body”: Lawrence’s nostalgia de la boue in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*’, in *Writing the Body in D. H. Lawrence: Essays on Language, Representation and Sexuality*, ed. Paul Poplawski (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 150.

⁷ Gramich, p. 150.

⁸ Fiona Becket, *The Complete Critical Guide to D. H. Lawrence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 150.

re-birth and renewal. Pure, subconscious bodily feeling is proffered as a genuine, tangible form of engagement with the immediate environment, and for Connie it is a means of leaving behind a deadened, disconnected world where intellect has replaced any true sense of existence or identification.

Lawrence depicts Connie's curious desire to yield to physical sensation and the subsequent joy that she feels. However, in 'New Eve and Old Adam', Peter is fearful of his subconscious, of the split sense of self that it brings into being. Peter leaves Paula for the night and goes to stay in a modern hotel room where his confused array of feelings, frustration, bewilderment and vulnerability, take hold within his subconscious, producing a kind of self-division. He is trapped in his mind, whilst the body or 'physical soul' is reduced to an underlying, threatening presence: 'that dark, unknown being, which lived below all his consciousness in the eternal gloom of his blood' (ll. 45-46). The location of the 'dark, unknown' being in the blood identifies Peter's subconscious, like Connie's as located within the 'fleshly body'.⁹ John Turner reiterates the necessity of rejecting the mind in his description of 'the body as 'a communicative power anxious to heave itself into consciousness'.¹⁰ In order for a sense of progression, Peter must succumb to this bodily instinct. Yet, unlike Connie, who slowly unlearns the civilised constraints of the mind, Peter refuses to detach himself, and this failure to wholly inhabit his body, which remains a detached presence in his subconscious, is indicative of his internal division, his split sense of self.

Lawrence uses light to convey a new sense of sight within Connie through the unification with her body, whilst Peter is perpetually threatened by a subconscious that 'raged blindly against him' (l. 47). Separated from his bodily subconscious, neither Peter nor his instinctive feeling can make sense. Peter's subconscious is described through images of dark expanse that are triggered by the switching off of the light, leaving him with no concrete means of retaining a hold on his external environment. He feels endangered by the bodily presence of his subconscious; the repetition of 'against' presents it as something alien and entirely separate from him. He feels overwhelmed by its engulfing, inescapable presence: 'the darkness almost suffocated him' (l. 41). For Peter, the subconscious is therefore associated with the overbearing sense of claustrophobia and death; unlike Connie, he has no instinctive connection with his body or feeling, and instead desperately withholds himself from it.

Peter is trapped in his mind, unable to engage with his subconscious self that rages detachedly in the body. John Worthen acknowledges detachment in the story as 'a matter of being locked within oneself, unable to come out to share intimacy'.¹¹ Intimacy, it is implied, must be realised through the instinctive body, and it is Peter's inability to succumb to bodily intimacy that prevents him from obtaining marital and sexual fulfilment. Instinctive feeling lies dormant within Peter; the subconscious knowledge of Paula's desires is described as 'the dark, powerful sense of her' (ll. 51-52). The use of 'dark' aligns Paula with Peter's own bodily subconscious, both of whom yearn for liberation and a primitive intimacy. In a letter to Ernest Collings, Lawrence stated 'a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect'.¹² It is Peter's inability to relinquish his hold on intellect and be intimate, to acknowledge his own instinctive knowledge of Paula that is the threatening force that inhabits his subconscious. Detachment from the 'fleshly body' renders him incapable of submitting to neither it nor his wife, producing a split sense of self that straddles the conscious and subconscious state.

⁹ Gramich, p. 150.

¹⁰ John Turner, 'Lawrence's New Eve and Old Adam', *JDHLS* 3.2 (2013), p. 46.

¹¹ John Worthen, 'Lawrence: Short Story and Autobiography', in *Renaissance and Modern Studies Volume XXIX: D. H. Lawrence 1885-1985* (Nottingham: Printed privately at the University of Nottingham), p. 14.

¹² As quoted in John Turner, 'Lawrence's New Eve and Old Adam', *JDHLS* 3.2 (2013), p. 41.

The split sense of self that Peter harbours, aligned both with and forcibly against his wife, manifests itself in his subconscious through the presence of Paula. Turner describes how ‘a new basis for sexual relationships involved a struggle for power’; Peter’s insecurities regarding his wife’s female authority and strength can be seen in the image of Paula attempting ‘to dig him away from her’ (l. 63). His subconscious feeling of being uprooted in the sway that ‘surges backwards and forwards darkly in a chaos’ (ll. 65-66) replicates the persistent, unsolvable tension that moves back and forth between them. This struggle is also present in Lawrence’s fluctuating use of personal pronouns: ‘He thought [...] She wanted [...] She could not bear [...] He felt’. Switching from one to another conveys the uncertain struggle that sets the two against one another. It mimics the instability of the marriage, of coming and going, separating and reuniting, of repeatedly failing to distance themselves from one another.

Lawrence draws heavily on the metaphor of water to gesture towards subconscious feeling. Water signifies a real, tangible, and yet ungraspable existence; something that can be both contained, controlled and manipulated, and is simultaneously liberating and threatening. In *Lady Chatterley*, when Connie experiences the sexual thrill of orgasm with Mellors, Lawrence bases the description not of feeling tangibly, in the feel and movement of the sea:

And it seemed she was like the sea, nothing but dark waves rising and heaving, heaving with a great swell, so that slowly her whole darkness was in motion, and she was ocean rolling its dark, dumb mass. Oh, and far down inside her the deeps parted and rolled asunder, in long far-travelling billows, and ever, at the quick of her, the depths parted and rolled asunder, from the centre of soft plunging, as the plunger went deeper and deeper (p. 152).

Lawrence forces the reader to look at words in a wholly metaphorical sense, to abandon intellectual connotations and direct them into a tangible means of empathising with experience. The ebb and flow of continuous feeling is embodied by the sweeping rhythm of the short phrases that replicate the shifting motion. The phrases come together to form a long sentence that elicits a gradual build; this sense of progression is reiterated through Lawrence’s subtle modification of phrases in their repetition; ‘the deeps parted and rolled asunder’ becomes ‘the depths parted and rolled asunder’ two lines later, insinuating advancement. The frequent use of ‘and’ in close proximity slows down the pace of the description so that the subconscious feeling becomes instantaneous for the reader. Connie is embodied by her own instinctive feeling, ‘and she was ocean’, which imbues a sense of empowerment, of presence; the sexual consummation is as much Connie’s ability to assimilate herself within her subconscious feeling.

Peter’s inability to overcome the intellectual self renders the association of water that Lawrence uses to gesture towards his subconscious as an underlying, threatening presence:

Underneath it all, like the sea under a pleasure-pier, his elemental, physical soul was heaving in great waves through his blood and his tissue, the sob, the silent lift, the slightly-washing fall away again. So his blood, out of whose darkness everything rose, being moved to its depths by her revulsion, heaved and swung towards its own rest, surging blindly to its own resettling (p. 173).

The image of the dark, lapping water lurking beneath Peter, visible through the slats of the vibrant pleasure-pier conveys a stark contrast and a threatening presence being held at bay, separated from Peter. The combination of short two-word phrases followed by slightly longer phrases mimics the rise and fall of the waves, the build to an acknowledgment and the

failure to see it through. This description is centred much more within the confines of the body through references to blood and tissue; the threat lies in the confinement of the ‘great waves’, which unlike Connie’s, which unravel in ‘long-far travelling billows’, are unable to find release. Peter stands above his own subconscious as a means of resistance, suppressing the knowledge of his wife’s desire for freedom: ‘being moved to its depths by her revulsion’. His refusal to accept her rejection is realised through his resistance to his own bodily subconscious.

For Lawrence, making the subconscious conscious is about allowing oneself to see and experience in new ways, of overcoming pre-determined response through instinctive feeling. Lawrence replicates the association of the subconscious with un-determined, tangible experience by engaging with language in a new way that enables the reader to see characters differently. He reinvigorates language through texture, incorporating feeling, movement and energy into the sentence structure. In this way, language is not constrained by its intellectual association and offers the reader a more physical means of identification. Similarly, this new way of comprehending language is replicated in the characters’ sense of experience. In order for the characters’ to obtain subconscious fulfilment, they must overcome the intellectual mind and process experience through tangible, bodily feeling. Whilst Connie is able to withdraw this intellectual veil and obtain fulfilment through instinctive, sexual feeling, Peter is unable to overcome his intellectual insecurities and acknowledge his subconscious feeling.

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