

## CHAPTER TWO

*The Revitalization Phase of  
Lady Chatterley's Lover*

We saw that in the mortification phase of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the narrator uses head-centered techniques to try to dismantle and purge the reader's modern sexual consciousness. Splits in the reader's mind are intensified in order to disintegrate them. In the novel's sacralization phase, which begins with the introduction of Mellors in Chapter V and reaches its highest pitch in the seven sex scenes involving Mellors and Connie in Chapters X–XVI, the aim is to reintegrate and reenergize the reader's consciousness.

The famous sex scenes have been celebrated for their beauty, verity, and liberating power; they have also been attacked as tedious, naive, sexist, and obscene. While it has been observed that the scenes represent the erotic initiation of Constance Chatterley, what has not been realized is that they are part of a narrative structure designed to initiate the reader.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this initiation is to transform the reader. Through an analysis of the literary devices and sacred discourses deployed in the erotic episodes, I demonstrate that Lawrence's carefully orchestrated effort to revitalize readers eventually gives way to a deconstructive impulse that prevents readers from forming new erotic dogmas and encourages first-hand exploration.

The narrator of *Lady Chatterley* implies that the novel has a vivifying function when he asserts that the "properly handled" novel should "reveal the most secret places of life" by "cleansing and freshening" the "tide of sensitive awareness" (101). While the disintegration phase dominated the first half of the novel, the vitalization phase governs the second half. As one stage wanes, the other waxes.

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In the revitalization phase, Lawrence employs a new narratorial consciousness that becomes progressively integrative, sensory-affective, and poetic as the relationship unfolds. This consciousness represents either a new or transformed narrator and serves as the primary vehicle for initiating the reader. In effect, the new narrator is a kind of hierophant who conducts the transformational process. The vivification stage aims to instill ideas of sacred eroticism and evoke an experience of aliveness and connectedness—a deeply felt response rooted in the reader's body and realized in his or her mind.<sup>2</sup> What is especially remarkable about this phase is that it eventually self-deconstructs: the last four sex scenes partially undermine the reader's initiation and reflect Lawrence's desire to avoid engendering a rigid, authoritarian, or sanctimonious religion of eros.

The conceptual and affective aims of the vivification phase are intertwined, since Lawrence thought that new ideas emerge from freshly felt experiences. The central conceptual aim is to offer a specific, concrete account of the forms and activities of the erotic body engaged in a dynamic, unselfconscious encounter. To fulfill this basically verbal end, the narrator deploys and attempts to revitalize a vocabulary consisting of terms associated with the growth, responsiveness, organs, reproduction, vulnerability, and vitality of organic life. Special emphasis is given to words associated with the flow and manifestations of life energy. Even dynamic inorganic phenomena—water, fire, earth, air—are assigned sacred value since they are considered by many religious traditions to be the basic elements from which the living universe is composed. The narrator seeks to transvalue the discourse of natural phenomena by infusing the words with numinous meanings and emotions.

The chief affective aim of the vitalization phase is to offer readers a vicarious felt experience of the erotic unions that begin in Chapter X. Lawrence wants to give the reader an affective experience of the body, rather than simply an emotional experience of the mind. This experience would have to be a unitive one grounded in the reader's bodily consciousness and producing a sense of wonder, awe, vitality, relatedness.<sup>3</sup> Lawrence did not want his novel to be pornographic—that is, to produce a head-centered experience of sexual intercourse. And he certainly did not want readers to masturbate while reading. His relational view of sex, and his esteem for life energy, prohibited erotic self-pleasuring.<sup>4</sup> The novel's sacred discourses and vivification devices would have to act on the reader's whole body, not specifically on the genitals. The explicit descriptions of foreplay unabashedly establish the sexual context and offer an unobstructed view of the body, but the coital acts themselves are represented by elemental and organic figures—which is a main difference from

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pornographic literature.<sup>5</sup> But this figuralization is simultaneously a literalization because Lawrence wants readers to realize that the impassioned body is at the deepest levels a moving, living flame of fire, or pool of water.<sup>6</sup> To offer Connie's personal "head" experience of the couplings would be, in Lawrence's view, to offer a modern and pornographic account. Instead of emphasizing the external movements and personal experience of sex, Lawrence stresses internal, energetic, somatic movements.

While Lawrence certainly believed that male and female readers would have different responses to the novel's sex scenes, he surely also thought that his representations of erotic surrender, arousal, rhythm, exchange, friction, intensification, and climax could have comparable energizing effects for both men and women.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the scenes are constructed with dynamic elemental figures (flames, waves, sap, lava, whirlpools) that are likely to affect male and female readers in somewhat similar ways.

The vitalization phase is built around ten nodal erotic scenes: the introduction of Mellors (Chapter V); Connie's womb vision of Mellors's bathing himself (Chapter VI); the seven sexual encounters between Connie and Mellors in or near the wood in the spring and summer (Chapters X–XVI); and the eighth and final sexual episode in London (Chapter XVIII). Chapter X is the narrative center of the 19-page novel, and depicts Connie's first pivotal transformation: her experience of "another self . . . alive in her" (135).

The serial order and individual structure of these ten scenes reveal an initiatory design. The introduction of Mellors presents the sacred organic vocabulary and establishes Mellors as a vital figure. The womb vision conveys to readers the possibility of bodily consciousness and solidifies the sense of Mellors's vitality, which qualifies him as a participant in an erotic initiation. This scene also establishes Connie's dynamic, sentient body as the primary focalization through which the reader's consciousness will vicariously undergo a conversion. The next eight erotic scenes, which depict thirteen acts of intercourse, are the most crucial episodes in the vitalization phase and are the main subject of my analysis. The first four episodes, which contain seven couplings, involve the progressive deployment of more numerous and more powerful vitalization devices and discourses to depict the experiences of Connie's body. The progressive increase in number and intensity of these devices is accompanied by a reduction in splintering techniques, for as Connie's and the reader's bodily consciousness is slowly awakened, there is less need for extensive and abrasive mental mortification. The next three sex scenes, which

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comprise five unions, break the mood of religious mystery and grandeur developed in the previous scenes and in effect deconstruct any tendency on the reader's part to overvalue the particular experiences or the language in which they are represented. The initial encounters were meant to vivify Connie and the reader, but they are not to be idolized. If they produced their intended enlivening effect, that effect is now part of the reader's past experience. These scenes introduce a variety of erotic actions and feelings in order to convey to readers the sense that the numinous realm can be experienced in numerous ways once nondual awareness has been achieved through initiation. Moreover, the scenes eschew complex literary devices in order to underscore the representational and incantatory limits of language. The eighth scene, which contains the thirteenth and final erotic coupling, offers a psychonarration of Mellors's experience. The revelation of his anxious self-consciousness destabilizes the impression that he is an infallible initiator of Connie or the reader. His insecurity and fallibility indicate to readers that the relationship is the real initiator. Both characters are initiated by and through the relationship. For the reader, the initiator is the new narratorial consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

In Chapter V, the reader is introduced to the sacred organic vocabulary through the narrator's depiction of Mellors's first meeting with Connie. By this point in the novel, Connie's focalization is primary, so her experience of Mellors can be expected to have vicarious effects for the reader. She has already experienced the cold, tedious men's arguments and is already convinced of Mick's "hopelessness" (29) and of Clifford's mental commitment to a "steadily-lived life" (45). It is appropriate that the vivification phase should begin with Mellors's introduction because at this point he is, despite his many flaws, the most vital character in the novel. His Lawrentian ideas, native vitality, woodland home, and rural occupation make him so. This aliveness, coupled with his unconventionality and singularity, qualifies him as a novitiate in Lawrence's religion of passion. I call Mellors a novitiate and not an initiate or hierophant because he and Connie are joint participants in a mutually transformative relationship. The relationship itself is the initiator.<sup>9</sup> Mellors's qualification for participation in the initiation depends on the sustained growth of his vitality, which itself depends on his ability to maintain close ties with the creatures of the wood and, more importantly, to deepen his bond with Connie. He is badly in need of revitalization both at the beginning and at the end of the narrative. The development of his relationship with Connie transforms him as much as it does her. One might even argue that at the end of the novel she is the stronger, more confident, and more vital character.

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The passage presenting Mellors's entrance is crafted to convey his vitality to readers and to introduce various terms that will slowly be sacralized through their association with vigorous life forms and activities. The narrator uses metonymy, common adjectives and verbs, and plural pronouns to link Mellors to his lively dog. The intended effect is to subliminally associate the dog's aliveness with Mellors's animal energy:

She was watching a brown spaniel that had run out of a side-path, and was looking toward them with lifted nose, making a soft, fluffy bark. A man with a gun strode swiftly, softly out after the dog, facing their way as if about to attack them; then stopped instead, saluted, and was turning down hill. 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. (46)

In the first sentence, Mellors is introduced prospectively and metonymically by the appearance of his everpresent spaniel. The dog is represented as a vital creature: active ("running out") and alert ("looking toward them," "lifted nose"). Mellors's own dynamism and alertness will be stressed throughout the novel. As the narrative proceeds, readers will discover that the spaniel almost continuously accompanies Mellors; this constant companionship intensifies the subliminal associations between their living energies. The tight connection between man and dog is reinforced in the second sentence by the coupling of their actions with a single verb and the plural pronoun ("facing their way"). Master and dog are also linked by the common adjective "soft": the dog's "soft, fluffy bark" and Mellors's striding "swiftly, softly." The novel will consistently associate softness with the vulnerability of life. For both dog and master, softness is coupled with force: the force of the dog's barking energy and of Mellors's swift stride. Thus, both have that paradoxical combination of force and gentleness, a sign of their sacred vitality.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout *Lady Chatterley*, Mellors is linked, metonymically and metaphorically, to a variety of organic phenomena in order to establish a connection between human and nonhuman vitality and to energize the reader's response to him. For example, when he is bathing, he is compared to "a weasel playing with water"; when he runs after and catches Connie "he took her . . . like an animal"; and just before he weds John Thomas to Lady Jane, "he stuck flowers in the hair of his own body" (66, 222, 228). The continued use of organic images and figures creates

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the impression that he undergoes metamorphoses like those experienced by the characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The very profusion of organic images applied to Mellors has the net effect of producing imagistic confusion in readers' minds and of blocking their ocularcentric consciousness. That is, as the visual elements of the organic images collide, coalesce, and in effect cancel one another, readers come to associate Mellors with the common life energy that animates all those images.<sup>11</sup>

The first four sex scenes, which cover seven couplings distributed throughout Chapters X and XII, are the most critical for initiating the reader. Their aim is to integrate and energize the reader's consciousness and produce a nondual awareness in which subject and object seem to merge. Thus, as Connie and Mellors seem to coalesce, so too is the reader made to identify more and more closely and intensively with their vivid, unifying experience. As Connie responds with awe or wonder to the elemental quality of the interchange, so too is the reader expected to respond with like feelings to the rhythmic language containing dynamic elemental images.

Even the scenes preceding Connie's sacred encounters with Mellors are designed to energize the reader. Most of the frame scenes depict Connie's emotional or physical contact with the creatures of the wood. These scenes prepare readers by putting them in the kind of receptive mood they might have when in nature. Some of the charged diction in these frame scenes is used in subsequent erotic episodes. The carrying over of feeling from frame to main scene is usually assisted by the narrator describing a sympathetic connection between Connie and her natural surrounding. Moreover, her erotic development is implicitly linked to the growth of the wood's organic life. She and the trees are linked by their common sentience and inwardness: "From the old wood came an ancient melancholy, somehow soothing to her, better than the harsh insentience of the outer world. She liked the *inwardness* of the remnant of forest, the unspeaking reticence of the old trees" (65). Lawrence always emphasized that being connected to the living universe means experiencing the rhythms of decay and growth in the natural environment and being synchronized with those same rhythms in the body.<sup>12</sup> A main narratorial task of the sacralization phase is the coupling of rhythms: of Connie's, the wood's, Mellors's, the text's, and the reader's.

In the frame scene preceding Connie's first coitus with Mellors, the narrator stresses her identification with nonhuman nature—with two hens and their chicks. At first, there is a disparity between Connie's sense of forlornness and barrenness and the hens' connectedness and fecundity, but eventually the hens become "the only things in the world that

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warmed her heart” (113). Some of the vital words used to describe the brooding hens and perky chicks will appear in descriptions of subsequent couplings: warm, deep, blood, alive, ecstasy, life, new, pure, proud, fearless (113–5).

When representing the foreplay to the first coupling, the narrator uses bodily focalizations for the first time. In this and subsequent erotic scenes, the concept of character shifts: from a self constituted by personal and social qualities and acquirements (what could be called personality, persona or ego) to a self founded on bodily, impersonal forces and responses (what could be called the conscious body, the embodied soul, or the unconscious).<sup>13</sup> The characters are not so much the persons named Connie and Mellors as their impassioned bodies. Hands and genitals are central because they are the body’s principal agents of touch and connection. These somatic characters do not have the fixed angle of vision of stock or flat characters, nor the changing scope and depth of vision of characters in realist fiction. Instead, the focalizations are primarily tactile and dynamic: the narrator registers surface changes in texture and warmth of the lovers’ bodies, as well as deeper changes in pleasure and energy flow. These new focalizations seem to bridge traditional perspectival distinctions between subjective and objective, superficial and deep, internal and external, singular and multiple.<sup>14</sup> Meditators who contemplate their bodily feelings and sensations have a similar sense of overcoming dualistic consciousness. It is no accident that Mellors refers to the Buddha’s emphasis on “awareness” (277). In the vivification phase, the plot line focuses on the sequence of exchanges among the somatic characters. The exchanges generally begin as immanent experiences of divinity and culminate in transcendental experience. In the immanent experience, *theos* is experienced as in (infusing, suffusing) the phenomenal world; in the transcendental experience, *deus* is experienced as beyond this world.<sup>15</sup> Immanent moments are associated with passionate contact leading up to orgasm; transcendental moments are associated with orgasmic or post-orgasmic oblivion. Both types of encounters occur in the Now, the present moment. The need to represent intense bodily rhythms and numinous energetic changes as they occur eliminates anachronisms—retrospections and prospectations—and requires the frequent use of concrete, figural and symbolic language and of repetitive and antithetical structures. Concrete language is needed to represent the particularities of bodily response while figural and symbolic language is required to signify the invisible energies associated with those responses. The paradoxical structure of the sacred requires the use of figures of antithesis. The new themes in this phase are the tenets of Lawrence’s

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vitalistic religion. The religious ideas that Tommy Dukes schematically presented—holistic knowledge, phallic bridge, resurrection of the body, democracy of touch—are fleshed out and articulated by Connie and Mellors. Thus, in order to touch the reader's emotional body, Lawrence has transformed the conventional narrative categories.

The first somatic focalization is that of Mellors's libido, and the second is that of his hand. His libido is figured as a flame and is represented as a quasi-independent subject possessing its own intention, knowledge, and motion:

For suddenly he was aware of the old flame shooting and leaping up in his loins. . . . He fought against it. . . . But it leapt, and leapt downwards, circling in his knees. . . . And there was something so mute and forlorn in her, compassion flamed in his bowels for her. (115)

Mellors's libidinal flame is depicted as a sentient being. In this scene, its feeling is compassion, its intention is to soothe Connie, and its motions are quick and forceful like a wild animal's (shooting, leaping, darting, circling). The libido's action is stronger than, and contrary to, Mellors's personal will. He has become a kind of burning bush at the mercy of the sacred compassion inflaming him. The narrator transvalues "compassion" by associating it with Mellors's bowels, instead of with his heart. The narrator offers a more ancient conception of compassion: the Biblical word for compassion (*rachamim*) derives from the word "womb" (*rechem*). The libidinal flame finds expression in Mellors's hand, which then becomes a somatic subject whose focalization is rendered. As a representative of the body's divine force, the hand possesses its own desire, knowledge, motion, intention, sensation: "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" (116). Mellors's hand is stressed in the first four sex scenes because he is the initiator of erotic connection.<sup>16</sup> Lawrence's patriarchal logic required active male initiative and reactive female surrender, at least at the beginning of the relationship. Both patriarchal and egalitarian logics are present in the novel. However, the intended effect of the novel's final mortification phase is to destabilize all assertions of rigid hierarchy. Once Connie is "born . . . a woman," she starts to initiate sexual contact and exploration (187–8). Moreover, regardless of who initiates connection, both Mellors and Connie have to surrender to their relationship. As somatic subject, the hand takes on the linguistic subject position and has a soft, gentle stroking motion that contrasts with the darting, shooting

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motion of the initial erotic impulse. The hand's blindness enables it to operate without ocular interference. It relies instead on felt awareness. A few paragraphs later, the hand's desire and knowledge are explicitly acknowledged: "Yet the hand knew, too, how to unclothe her where it wanted" (116).

The first two acts of intercourse are still largely dominated by Connie's resisting ocularcentric consciousness, but her bodily awareness is nevertheless activated for short periods. As a result, only small portions of each episode present her tactile focalizations. In these passages, her skin registers the movements, desire and knowledge of Mellors's body. For example, during their first coupling,

She lay quite still, in a sort of sleep, in a sort of dream. Then she quivered as she felt his hand groping softly. . . . Then with a quiver of exquisite pleasure he touched her warm soft body, and touched her navel for a moment in a kiss. And he had to come into her at once, to enter the peace on earth of her soft, quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him. (116)

The main significance of the first union is that it transvalues the word "peace" by simultaneously sensualizing and sacralizing it.<sup>17</sup> Mellors's sense of "pure peace" is also emphasized in the second union (125). The word "pure" is implicitly transvalued since Christian notions of purity generally exclude the body. Connie's dreamy, somnolent state during the first sexual coupling indicates that she is partially conscious (116). Even though it is clear that she is not being forced to participate, this semiconscious state is likely to create moral difficulties for the reader and so to generate resistance to reader identification with the initiatory process. Part of the task of the subsequent erotic scenes is to overcome this resistance. In Lawrence's view, the very muting of Connie's conscious mind indicates that a deeper, more sacred connection is at work and that her body is knowingly and freely participating.<sup>18</sup>

Nearly all of the erotic encounters are interpreted, either by the narrator's comments or by Connie's reveries or remarks. When Connie's participation in the coupling is partial, she or the narrator interprets the act as it is happening, usually in a satiric mode. Thus, after her second sexual exchange with Mellors in which she "willed herself into separateness," the narrator presents her vituperative thoughts: "That thrust of the [Mellors's] buttocks, surely it was a little ridiculous" (126). The partially vital activity is thus represented by an "impure" mix of sacralizing and deconstructive modes. When Connie participates fully in the union, the

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narrator's explanation is usually delayed until after the encounter is represented. In these cases, vivifying and explanatory discourses are segregated. The exclusion of explanatory discourses serves to heighten and maintain the nonconceptual—that is, affective—effects of the erotic encounter. Connie's interpretations of sacred exchanges are revealed in reveries as she returns to or resides at Wragby Hall, or are verbalized to Mellors immediately or shortly after the couplings. Thus, as she walks to Wragby Hall after experiencing their third erotic exchange, the narrator reveals her numinous feelings and thoughts: "Connie went slowly home, realising the depth of the other thing in her. Another self was alive in her. . . . And with this self she adored him" (135). And back at Wragby, she feels "gone in her own soft rapture" (138). In some instances, Mellors responds to her remarks and either validates or revises her interpretations of the sexual encounters. Thus, after their fourth encounter, he comments on the rarity of simultaneous orgasms and assures her that full involvement is not always necessary: "Well, dunna fret! There's no law says as tha's got to. Ta'e 't for what it is" (172).

The seesawing of mortifying and vivifying elements within and between erotic episodes reflect the "great oscillations" between "the superficial and spiritual consciousness" that occur in the evolution of mystical consciousness (Underhill 178). Connie's consciousness oscillates between sensual and intellectual, and the reader's awareness is expected to fluctuate similarly. As Connie and the reader become gradually initiated into sacred eroticism, the mortifying elements wane and the vivifying elements wax. The moments of resistance and recoil are indicated by the reintrusion of the satiric, analytic narrator. In effect, the narrator uses satire to attack Connie's and readers' recoil. In general, the mortification techniques are presented more explicitly and pedantically in these scenes, as if Lawrence were anxious to ensure that readers understand what he is trying to do. These devices appear both before and after the sacralizing techniques. Those that come before seek to minimize the reader's resistance to the ensuing vitalization; those that come after aim to reflect and undermine the reader's residual resistance.

Given the theological significance of the number three, it is not surprising that the third sex episode, which contains the third and fourth couplings, is highly significant. In *Apocalypse*, Lawrence underscores that the number three signifies sanctity, divinity, balance, integrity, perfection, absolute being (100). He sometimes refers to the Holy Ghost—the Third Person—as "the balancer."<sup>19</sup> The Holy Ghost encompasses mind and body and thus enables the shift from one mode of consciousness to the other. It is what Tommy Dukes calls "the whole corpus of consciousness"

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for it contains “real knowledge . . . out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain and mind” (37). The third union is narrated from Connie’s bodily focalization and centers on her sensual awakening. The principal vitalizing devices are the concretization of earlier concepts and the use of interlocking metaphors and phonic resonances. Mellors’s sexual powers are only recently revived, and either because of anxiety or inactivity, he prematurely ejaculates, but his orgasm is strong enough to precipitate a rippling response in her that culminates in an unconscious orgasm—her first orgasm with him:

For a moment he was still, inside her, turgid there and quivering. Then as he began to move, in the sudden helpless orgasm, there awoke in her new strange thrills rippling inside her. Rippling, rippling, rippling, like a flapping overlapping of soft flames, soft as feathers, running to points of brilliance, exquisite, exquisite, and melting her all molten inside. It was like bells rippling up and up to a culmination. She lay unconscious of the wild little cries she uttered at last. (133)

The “points of brilliance” in Connie are not the eyes’ focal point perspective, nor the sun’s brilliant light, but the vital body’s multiple, dynamic points of feeling and inner brilliance. The newness and strangeness of the thrills, coupled with the language of awakening, inform readers that a sacred experience is beginning. Earlier, the newness and strangeness of the wood had been stressed. The rippling thrills in this scene are not the abstract, superficial “sex-thrills” that young Connie “took . . . as a sensation, and remained free” (9); they are particularized, embodied thrills concretely represented as the core of her unfolding bodily experience. The inner rippling suggests her body has become an ocean of life. This ocean metaphor is extended in the next sentence, which repeats “rippling” three times—the trinity suggesting the body’s divinity through the influx of divine, soulmaking energy. In that sentence the ocean metaphor is then linked to a bird simile, which is itself linked to a fire simile: the ocean waves resemble flapping wings, which resemble flames. All the images are moving, as are the repeating words that signify them.<sup>20</sup>

The passage’s phonic resonances can be expected to have a brief meditative effect on readers. The rhythmic repetition of sacred words, phrases or sounds—as well as the use of highly emotive imagery—is a common meditative procedure.<sup>21</sup> Sound repetition can both stymie conceptual thought and stimulate the body’s emotional centers. In this scene the

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repetitions are polyphonic, not monotonous. They include various forms of exact and near repetition: consonance (flapping/flames/feathers, melting/molten, rippling/running), word repetition (rippling, exquisite, and soft are repeated), near rhymes (melting/molten), and phonemic iteration (lapping in flapping/overlapping). As the physical properties of these words reduplicate, paralinguistic units seems to copulate like bodies. One word—"overlapping"—actually describes the process in which it participates. And the "lap" common to "flapping" and "overlapping" has a sexual connotation appropriate to the context: the overlapping of Connie and Mellors occurs in their laps. Moreover, "soft" qualifies flames and feathers, indicating that softness characterizes the evanescence and fragility of inorganic things as much as the vulnerability of living organisms. In short, impermanence characterizes and links all created things.<sup>22</sup> Lawrence's use of multiple metaphors to represent diverse manifestations of divine energy is another way of acknowledging the impermanence of forms: each form expresses a unique but limited aspect of the divine; this form endures for only a period of time; when the form dissolves, a new finite form will be created to manifest a different aspect of the infinite divine force.<sup>23</sup>

In the depiction of the fourth coitus, the narrator stresses the moment to moment impact of Mellors's penis on Connie's bodily focalization. It is the most extensive somatic narration so far and relies on the elaboration of images of widening and deepening circular motions, physical and emotional, within Connie's body. Her mind is "unconscious in passion," and the rhythmic phallic action on the oceanic womb produces a deepening spiral of sensations that issue in orgasm:

She clung to him unconscious in passion, and he never quite slipped her. And she felt the soft bud of him within her stirring and in strange rhythms flushing up into her, with a strange, rhythmic growing motion, swelling and swelling till it filled her all cleaving consciousness. And then began again the unspeakable motion that was not really motion, but pure deepening whirlpools of sensation, swirling deeper and deeper through all her tissue and consciousness, till she was one perfect concentric fluid of feeling. And she lay there crying in unconscious inarticulate cries. (133–4)

Unlike Connie's conscious vaginal gripping of Mick's penis, this is a spontaneous, unconscious clinging.<sup>24</sup> Her cleaving womb experiences his penis as a growing bud, recalling her identification with the trees just before her womb vision (66). The "strange rhythms flushing up" is further

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elaborated as “a strange, rhythmic growing motion,” and “growing motion” is further specified as “swelling and swelling.” The repetition plus elaboration conveys to readers the sensation produced by the exfoliating penis. Biblical narrative uses similar repetition devices to convey heightening or accelerating passion.<sup>25</sup> The phallus is implicitly figured as a plunger that turns Connie’s body of water into ever deeper and wider concentric whirlpools of feeling. “Whirl” seems to expand to “swirling,” with the “s . . . ing” rotating around “wirl.” The phrase “fluid of feeling” sacralizes feeling by metaphorically linking it to the influx of divine energy. Thus, feeling is transvalued because of its mediational significance. The sexual relation turns Connie’s passionate body into a purified and purifying body of water—a baptismal pool for her and the reader. The swirling of watery sensations through her tissue also transvalues a Christian analog: the Divine Sea that soaks the mystic’s soul. The sense of divine union is thus translated from the spiritual to the sensual realm. Finally, the rotating images reflect in their form, and highlight in their content, the technique Lawrence identifies, in *Apocalypse*, as “the old pagan process of rotary image-thought” (95).<sup>26</sup> Thus, for Lawrence, “pagan thought” is felt-intuitive thinking based on images. The linking, elaborating and repeating of images is a common visualization technique used by meditators to concentrate attention. The image of the rotating spiral or vortex keeps attention both centered and dynamic: there is circular movement around a stable center at each level of the spiral as well as vertical movement between circular levels.

The stillness and unconscious quality of the post-orgasmic period is emphasized, signifying that the sacredness continues as long as the participants are lost to their conscious selves. The sense of the couple temporarily losing their separate identities is conveyed by the use of “they”: “And they lay, and knew nothing, not even of each other, both lost” (134). This is the first time the plural pronoun appears in a sex scene and underscores the couple’s simultaneous participation in the unknown.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the creative power of the third and fourth couplings is confirmed for the reader in Connie’s subsequent reverie: she realizes that her sensual union has produced a “burning molten” self (135).<sup>28</sup>

The fifth, sixth, and seventh acts of coitus occur in the fourth sex scene, depicted in Chapter XII. These conclude the solemn, mysterious, more rigidly ordered phase of the reader’s initiation. In line with the oscillating pattern of surrender and recoil, the fifth intercourse involves a recoil from the fourth coupling, and the language of sarcasm dominates: “her spirit stiffened in resistance . . . her spirit seemed to look on from the top of her head, and the butting of his haunches seemed ridiculous” (171).

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The sixth exchange involves an extended water metaphor that encompasses and magnifies a variety of earlier images and rhythms. Connie's body becomes a rolling ocean whose depths are plunged, plumbed, and disclosed:

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, touching lower, and she was deeper and deeper and deeper disclosed, and heavier the billows of her rolled away to some shore, uncovering her, and closer and closer plunged the palpable unknown, and further and further rolled the waves of herself away from herself, leaving her, till 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. (174)

The immense, dynamic, sublime image is meant to quicken and extend the reader's consciousness and stir awe. This image of a dark ocean set in rippling, billowing motion by a massive plunger fuses and expands the earlier images of her body as whirlpool and rippling lava. The ripples enlarge to waves, and the waves move outward concentrically as in a whirlpool. This concentric motion is an elaboration of the "concentric fluid of feeling" described in the fourth act of intercourse (134). Connie's "consummation" begins in her sensual consciousness ("she knew herself touched"), gives way to unconsciousness and nonbeing ("she was gone"), and resumes in a new state of consciousness and being ("she was born: a woman") (174). The "consummation" both consumes her old sensual self and completes her womanhood. The colon and space between "born" and "a woman" emphasize the mystery of birth, the fact that it always involves some unknowable addition or influx. Here the addition is Connie's womanhood. Significantly, her womanhood is born during the sixth coupling, much as Eve and Adam are created on the sixth day. The gap produced by the colon here is positively valued, whereas the ellipsis in the destructive phase is figured negatively.<sup>29</sup> The positive gap signifies an open emptiness filled by a divine influx, whereas the negative gaps signify barren, enclosed emptiness.

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In the seventh union, the traditional religious language of negation dominates. The narrator stresses the incomprehension and ineffability of the encounter: "And this time his being within her was . . . such as no consciousness could seize. Her whole self quivered unconscious. . . . She could not know what it was. She could not remember what it had been" (175). The negative language is in keeping with the number seven. Just as the Creator ceased speaking and rested on the seventh day of creation, so too does the narrator refrain from the creative work of inventing positive religious language.<sup>30</sup> Despite Connie's inability to conceptualize or articulate the experience, her body never forgets how it felt—inconceivably "lovely" (188).<sup>31</sup> For the feeling body, the past is continuous with the present, since all time resides in the present moment. The presence of the rainbow in this scene—"his being with her was . . . iridescent" (188)—indicates that a symbolic linking of heaven and earth is achieved.

Given the momentousness of the seventh coupling, it should not be surprising that in the adjoining scene the word "love" is transvalued by being sensualized. Having achieved sexual womanhood and having explored Mellors's manhood, Connie murmurs, "My love! my love!" (175). The word seems to flow naturally out of the experience. While Mellors admits his love for her, he adds that he loves her for the experience or relationship she affords him: "I love that I can go into thee . . . that tha opened to me . . . that I came into thee like that" (176). She becomes not so much a sexual object as a participant in a sacred process. Each is to the other an opening into the sacred. Neither is an ultimate end.

The sequence of erotic scenes can be understood as an attempt to revivify, and hence resacralize, "the great words" that have lost much of their deep inspirational value for Connie and for readers: "love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, all these great dynamic words" that are today "half-dead" (62). While the disintegration phase sought to cancel the moribund meanings of these words, the vitalization phase labors to reinvest them with new, dynamic meanings as Connie and Mellors move toward becoming husband and wife, father and mother, and building a home in which joy and happiness have a place. Abstract words do not disappear in this stage; rather, they accumulate new denotations and connotations from the various concrete and vivid linguistic contexts in which they are imbedded. Moreover, words previously dominated by Christian spiritual meanings—like "peace," "perfection," "purity," and "mystery"—are newly invested with sacred sensual senses.<sup>32</sup>

Having used a fairly rigid—oscillating but progressive—structure to vitalize the reader during the first four sex scenes, the narrator uses the

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next three erotic episodes to dismantle that pattern and present new, more indeterminate patterns. The strict sequencing of devices designed to bring the reader to a conceptual and emotional appreciation of sensuality must now give way to a looser, freer arrangement, because the religious path, in Lawrence's view, is neither single nor strait nor straight. It moves in cycles, much as the images and emotions move in the novel. With the initial transvaluation of sex completed, Lawrence wants to expose readers to the varieties of sacred eroticism. Sacred sex must not become sanctimonious: "Everything has its hour of ridicule—everything" (*Studies in Classic American Literature* 73).<sup>33</sup> The dismantling of the initial pattern is an important instance of Lawrence including a self-critique in his novels.<sup>34</sup> In the "Study of Thomas Hardy," he emphasizes the need for such a self-critique: "every work of art adheres to some system of morality. But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres. . . . The degree to which the system of morality, or the metaphysic of any work is submitted to criticism within the work of art makes the lasting values and satisfaction of that work" (89).

In the fifth sex scene, which contains the eighth, ninth, and tenth couplings, the progressive structure is explicitly critiqued by Connie and Mellors. The characters' analyses of their own erotic encounters constitutes a transvaluation of self-consciousness. Their new critique occurs after, not during, sexual activity, whereas the old, destructive form of self-consciousness had permeated erotic action and so prevented numinous experience. The characters' assessments of themselves and each other begins when Mellors admits his role in his past erotic failures, proclaims his belief in "fucking with a warm heart," and then accuses Connie of liking "cold-hearted fucking," which he condemns as "death and idiocy" (206). Then, he questions her tenderness and criticizes her for wanting sexual intercourse "to be called something grand and mysterious, just to flatter your own self-importance" (207). Connie counters his charge with a similar criticism: "But that's what I'd say of you. Your own self-importance is everything to you" (207). Implicitly, they acknowledge and accept each other's recriminations. In fact, the charge of wanting to make sex grand and mysterious is applicable to Lawrence himself and to his narrator, who has attempted to rejuvenate the reader in the first four sex scenes. The narration of those seven couplings was designed, as I have shown, to convey such grandeur and mystery. Having used a fairly systematic technical organization to stimulate such feelings in the reader, the narrator now creates a third set of focalizations, unlike the intimate, sublime focalizations of the first half of the vitalization

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phase and also unlike the distant, satiric perspectives of the mortification phase. Since the initial vivification has been completed, the narrator can again appeal to the reader's critical mind, for the ultimate focalization is that of the whole self, not just of the feeling body. Moreover, Lawrence is aware that the novel runs the risk of wallowing in its own self-importance. Such conceit is an everpresent danger in all religious matters, whether sensual or not. The last three sex scenes deflate the novel's self-importance by offering a variety of more ordinary yet still valued forms of eroticism. These deconstructive scenes also distance the novel from pornography, which often presents "the sexual breakthrough" as decisive and unproblematic.

The narration of the eighth coitus shuns the elaborate, metaphoric, and rhythmic techniques of earlier sex scenes. Its brief and straightforward depiction indicates that good sex is sometimes no more than a soothing experience: "he lay with her and went into her there on the hearthrug, and so they gained a measure of equanimity" (208).

The prelude to the ninth and tenth couplings is as important as the intercourses themselves because it displays a dramatic shift in tone, toward the light-hearted. It contains: Connie's half-uneasy, half-playful comments about Mellors's phallus; Mellors's amusing address to his phallus; and his naming of their genitalia "John Thomas" and "Lady Jane" (210). The playful tone again indicates that the earlier pattern of solemn mystery has given way to light conversation and ceremony. The transformed couple can now play like children, and the reader is made privy to their ludic sensuality.

The number nine is a trinity of trinities. In keeping with this ineffably holy state, the narration of the ninth union is entirely omitted. It implicitly confesses the verbal incommunicability of the sacred, and retroactively deconstructs all earlier attempts at representing numinous experience. It reminds readers that these verbal representations are simulacra—they should be valued only to the extent that they produce their intended vitalizing effects; they must not be mistaken for the effects themselves, nor should they be considered accurate representations of those experiences. The narrator offers only a brief description of the prelude to and aftermath of the ninth coupling:

He was in a hurry now.

And afterwards, when they had been quite still, the woman had to uncover the man again, to look at the mystery of the phallos [*sic*]. (210)

The intercourse's incommunicability is represented by the gap between the two one-sentence paragraphs. It is as if an extralinguistic coupling

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took place in the space between the linguistic elements. Sex is absolved from language, instead of being another form of talk, as it was for Clifford's friends.<sup>35</sup>

The narration of the tenth coupling is an abbreviated version of earlier acts of intercourse. The narrator merely repeats earlier metaphors rather than continuing to elaborate or link them in new and interesting ways:

And she quivered, and her own mind melted out. Sharp soft waves of unspeakable pleasure washed over her as he entered her, and started the curious molten thrilling that spread and spread till she was carried away with the last blind flush of extremity. (211)

The cursory, summary quality of the prose is almost reminiscent of Connie's first intercourse with Mick, but the focus is clearly not external.<sup>36</sup>

The sixth sex scene, in Chapter XV, contains the eleventh coitus, which is initiated by Connie's eurhythmic dance and culminates in Mellors's animal-like coitus (222). The episode emphasizes the playful-aggressive dimension of eroticism—the male animal pursuing and attaining his mate: “Her pointed keen animal breasts tipped and stirred as she moved. . . . She . . . ran out with a wild little laugh . . . running blurred in the rain with the eurythmic dance-movements . . . he took her, short and sharp and finished, like an animal” (221–2).

Since Lawrence used the number seven to symbolize a complete cycle of initiation, and the number twelve to signify “an established cosmos,” one might expect the seventh sex scene, which contains the twelfth union, to represent the final phase (*Apocalypse* 55). Even the episode's content—anal intercourse—indicates a culmination, since the anus is near the sacrum, the site of the first bodily center (chakra) of “dynamic consciousness.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the narrator explains that the anal intercourse constitutes the final transformation of Connie's body: she is “stripped . . . to the very last” by the “sensual fire” and is “made a different woman” (246–7). This new woman is in touch with “the real bedrock of her nature”—with her “sensual self, naked and unashamed” (247).<sup>38</sup>

But while the content and numbering of this scene make it the appropriate final initiatory step for Connie and the reader, the form argues against this interpretation. The scene's abstract, rhetorical discourse does not give readers the feeling that Connie has been liberated by the experience, nor that she has been a full and willing participant. To the contrary, readers may feel that either Connie or the narrator is trying to force a favorable interpretation of her experience. The language repels rather than attracts the reader.<sup>39</sup> The scene opens with an abstract,

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summarizing sentence recalling the sex scenes with Michaelis: "It was a night of sensual passion . . ." (246). The passage purportedly represents her experience, but that experience is rendered in highly abstract and definitional terms: "It was not really love. It was not voluptuousness. It was sensuality" (246). The static language conveys to readers the frightened response of a partial participant who "almost unwilling . . . let him have his way" (246–7). In subsequent paragraphs, "sensual" and "sensuality" are repeated almost ad nauseam—"the sheer fire of sensuality . . . her sensual self . . . rather awful sensuality. . . Sheer fiery sensuality" (247)—much as "sex" and "love" had been endlessly reiterated in Chapter 1.<sup>40</sup> Connie's reluctant, partial participation is further confirmed when the reader discovers that Mellors makes her "a passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave" (247). The narrator's insistence that Connie's experience is purgative and involves a "marvelous death" of her old sensual self is belied by the analytical, rhetorical language. This language conveys the "cost" of letting Mellors have "his way and his will" (247). Moreover, historical comparisons to Abelard and Heloise and to figures on Greek vases indicate that her consciousness is intellectual, not body-based.<sup>41</sup> Her discussion of Abelard and Heloise is instructive to the extent that it indirectly informs readers that she and Mellors have gone through "all the stages and refinements of passion" (247). But the intrusion of insistent, self-conscious and learned language indicates that Connie—and readers—are not ready to be completely unselfconscious about anal sex, and that it will take a long time before taboos and inhibitions are loosened. It is a welcome note of psychological reality in a story that sometimes unfolds too neatly according to plan.<sup>42</sup>

Another sobering note is sounded in the thirteenth and final coupling, which occurs in Chapter XVIII. It breaks radically from the preceding seven sex episodes by offering mainly Mellors's focalization. What it reveals further deconstructs those episodes, since Mellors is shown to be a man caught in his own head-centered anxieties. The coupling occurs in his rented attic room in London shortly after Connie has returned from Venice. It is the only coitus to occur in an urban environment. Mellors is feeling beleaguered because of the separation and the scandalous rumors. He also worries about his masculinity and occupation. Though Connie praises "the courage of your own tenderness" (277), and thereby helps him articulate his individuality and self-worth, his anxieties remain. The psychonarration of the subsequent act of intercourse suggests that he is a man trying to convince himself of the value of his self, lover, and relationship. His partial, unconfident participation unsettles readers' assumption that he had been fully involved in the earlier unions. It also

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makes clear that he is a novitiate, not an initiator; he, as much as Connie, must learn from the relationship. As he makes love, insistent words fill his mind: "I stand for the touch of bodily awareness. . . . And she is my mate. And it is a battle against the money, and the machine. . . . And she will stand behind me. . . . Thank God I've got a woman who is with me, and tender and aware of me" (279). Earlier, he had expressed doubts and fears but seemed to be immersed in the sexual intercourses; now, an element of doubt retroactively infects the reader's responses to those scenes.

Thus, Lawrence, after submitting the reader's consciousness to an elaborate initiation process, concludes his novel on a note of uncertainty. Even Mellors's final letter expresses unsureness that his relationship with Connie can be sustained. Despite Lawrence's deep and sometimes dogmatic religious convictions, he did not want his works to become authoritative on sacred matters. As early as the "Study of Thomas Hardy" (1914), he stressed the need to criticize his own moral and philosophical positions within his works: "The degree to which the system of morality, or the metaphysic, of any work of art is submitted to criticism within the work of art makes the lasting value and satisfaction of that work" (*Study of Thomas Hardy* 89). The concluding note of doubt in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* implicitly tells readers to find out for themselves if unselfconscious sex is indeed as life-enhancing as the novel suggests. Lawrence would have agreed with the Buddha's advice that the best guide is one's own experience: "Do not accept what you hear by report, do not accept tradition, do not accept a statement because it is found in our books. . . . Be lamps unto yourselves."<sup>43</sup>