THE EROTIC AS RESPONSE: "THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY" IN D.H. LAWRENCE AND GEORGES BATAILLE

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

This project examines three literary texts written by two modern writers, D.H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille. D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Georges Bataille's short stories, "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man," deviate from conventional depictions of eroticism from the early to mid-twentieth century. Though their attention to the erotic is foregrounded in the texts, this project is concerned with the portrayal of the body and the emphasis the authors attribute to, and the way in which they interpret, the bodily experience. The depiction of *both* the male and female body will be analyzed, as this will ultimately serve as the entry for seeing how gender is operative within the texts. This project will demonstrate how traditional notions regarding masculine virility and feminine passivity are challenged through Lawrence's and Bataille's fiction, a deviation which essentially creates a tension between conventional portrayals of the male and the female while it also most notably advocates for a more progressive awareness of, as well as a divergence from, universalized gender classifications.

Throughout my analysis of the three primary texts by Lawrence and Bataille, I plan to incorporate relevant feminist scholarship, including Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Ashley Tauchert's *Against Transgression,* and Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa." I will challenge Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* through Lawrence's and Bataille's depictions of the female body and female desire. Cixous' assertion in her essay,

"Woman must write woman," effectively annihilates the possibility of man writing woman. Cixous even states, "It is time to liberate the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her – by loving her for getting by, for getting beyond the Old without delay". Presented in this light, although Cixous initially establishes a rigid binary opposition between man and woman and man's legitimacy in writing woman, she fails to consider whether *man* can in fact write *woman*. My study shows how the portrayal of the male and female bodies in Lawrence's and Bataille's texts illustrate their inclination to challenge *all* oppressive systems in a program for both "social and sexual redemption," an agenda that ultimately foregrounds literary and sexual transgression.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: MODERNISM AND THE BODY AS MEDIUM

The representation of the human body during the early to mid-twentieth century is revelatory of the shifting consciousness engendered by social and technological advancements. This project examines the ways in which two male writers, D.H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille, respond to these changes through their unyielding attention to the human body. The texts I will explicate in this research are *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence and two short stories written by Georges Bataille, "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man." While the texts are primarily known for their consideration of the erotic and the way in which its textual representation deviates from traditional standards, they also implicitly counter how conventional, or perhaps, stereotypical notions of gender are manifest in the depictions of eroticism. For example, though the three texts are written from the male perspective they prioritize the female body and female desire. This prioritization creates a tension between masculinity and femininity and its textual representation, effectively problematizing the traditional conception of gender roles, a decisive act demonstrating the authors' treatments of the modernist body.

Scholars often view Lawrence and Bataille as responding to modernity's lack of stability. In order to appropriately illustrate *what* it is the two authors are responding *to*, it is imperative to briefly outline the social climate of the time period. The notion of what

constitutes the modern and what is implied by modernity is, in fact, rather ambiguous. Frederick R. Karl, in his book *Modern and Modernism*, acknowledges this incertitude: "The sense of Modern and Modernism in any era is always of becoming. It may be becoming new and different; it may be subverting the old, becoming an agent of disorder and even destruction" (3). Karl's interpretation of the modern as both development and subversion coincides with modernism's duplexity, in that it affirms the sentiment of instability – caught in between progress and tradition. This is why Karl emphatically expresses that "All efforts to simplify Modern into a monolithic movement are doomed to failure" (15). Accordingly, modern artistic and literary representations of the body exalt an alluring portrait of its limitlessness and its multiplicity due to scientific progress.

Stephen Kern concurs with this notion of limitlessness in his book *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. He describes the modern as "a transformation of the dimensions of life and thought" (1). This shift in consciousness and way of life is believed to be the result of rapid advancements in technology. Kern thus explains:

> From around 1880 to the outbreak of World War I a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space. Technological innovations including the telephone, wireless telegraph, x-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile, and airplane established the material foundation for this reorientation; independent cultural developments such as the stream-of-consciousness novel, psychoanalysis, Cubism and the theory of relativity shaped consciousness directly. (1)

These innovations are just a few examples of the belief in cultural and technological progress. Others include the railroad, the phonograph, and the concept of standard, universal time. The act of normalizing the concept of time also effectively changed the way people thought about time, space, the body and its relationship to human nature. In this way, modernism disrupts and dislodges basic human perceptions about reality

through its challenging of conventional methods of interpreting the world.

This succinct explanation of modernism establishes the foundation from which Lawrence's and Bataille's literature develops. Both D.H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille wrote in a postwar era: Lawrence having published *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1928 and Bataille having published "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man" in 1956 and 1964 (posthumously), respectively. The opening line of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* begins, "Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes" (1). Likewise, Bataille comments in the preface of a collection of essays entitled *Literature and Evil*:

> I belong to a turbulent generation, born to literary life in the tumult of surrealism. In the years after the Great War there was a feeling, which was about to overflow. Literature was stifling within its limitations and seemed pregnant with revolution. (Preface)

The way in which the authors label and define the "tragic age," their "turbulent generation" and their relation to revolution implies a coping mechanism, or a way out of the tempestuousness that characterizes the maelstrom of modern innovation (Lawrence 1, Bataille Preface).[1] This liberating escape appears for Lawrence and Bataille as a form of sexual and literary transgression. Both authors essentially use the instability of modernity

[1] It is also relevant to note both Lawrence's and Bataille's engagement with politics, as it plays an integral role in their depiction of masculine virility. Bataille explicitly expresses his interest and support of fascism in his essay "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," which discusses the inherent structure of society. Lawrence, for his part, reportedly embeds his political opinion in many of his fictional works. Though the scope of my research does not include the ways in which Lawrence and Bataille are politically engaged, it should be noted that the primary texts that I examine throughout this project essentially disavow dominant interpretations regarding masculine virility. Analysis of this latter point will be expanded upon in the following chapters of the project.

in order to confront conventional standards regarding purity, tradition, virility and femininity.

Following this thread, the literary response to modernity is not confined to the technological sphere; it extends into all realms of culture. According to Anna Katharina Schaffner in her book *Modernism and Perversion*, modernism encompasses a "wider range of cultural manifestations, all of which constitute attempts to come to terms with a disenchanted industrialized world and the spiritual crisis it engendered" (254). While this "coming to terms" accentuates instinctual elements of human nature, such as D.H. Lawrence's emphasis on the primal body in a "nourishing relation to the cosmos and the universe," it also displays a profound interest in engaging with the "perverse" in order to navigate the cultural terrain of "disenchantment" (Lawrence 354, Schaffner 254).[2] Schaffner goes on to explain how this affects modernist literary works:

> the perversions frequently serve a complex double function. On the one hand, they are figures of disease, allegorical expressions of a profound cultural disenchantment, which are deployed as tools for pathologizing the "perverse" experience of modernity. On the other hand, they are figures of redemption, which function as utopian projection planes, as phantasmagoric spaces in which alternative orders can be imagined, in which teleological and utilitarian biopolitical conceptions can be critiqued. (255)

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[2] Since Schaffner's book will be referenced frequently throughout this research, it is essential to include her interpretation of the term "perverse." Deriving from the Latin word *pervetere*, Schaffner explains that the term, which originally meant "'to turn upside down'" or "to subvert,'" has changed significantly over time. She notes: "its semantic instability [mirrors] the fluctuating definitions of the pathological construct" (3). In conjunction with the evolution of the term's meaning, Schaffner also explains how the "perverse" is linked to sexual behavior, or a "preference that is different from the norm" (4). In sum, Schaffner's use of the word "perverse" or "perversion" affirms its "essentialist assumptions about what is correct and incorrect, natural and unnatural, as well as on ethical or theological notions of right and wrong behavior" (3-4).

Schaffner's elucidation thus points to the dual nature of the way in which the "perverse" questions normativity. In this way, D.H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille, through their portrayal of the body, propose both the "disenchantment" with pervading cultural perceptions, as well as perhaps what some feminist scholars might also call a "utopian projection" through their writing of the female experience (255).

In conjunction with Schaffner's above assertion regarding how the "perverse" challenges conventionality, I will explore the portrayal of both the female *and* the male body and the way in which the depiction of these bodies essentially questions traditional methods of how gender is commonly portrayed. In this way, the radius of modernism's influence, as interpreted and demonstrated by Lawrence and Bataille, shifts and refines its focal point to that of the human body in order to demonstrate the effect of modernism's instability on society. Various texts from feminist scholars, such as Kate Millett, Hélène Cixous, and Ashley Tauchert, will be consulted as they offer a valuable counter-argument to my research.

Kate Millett, in her book *Sexual Politics*, provides a fierce attack of Lawrence, stating that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* abides by the authors' own "sodomous urges" through his accentuation of the liberative power of anal sex (241).[3] In Millett's study of Lawrence, she draws a parallel between Mellors, the man with whom Lady Chatterley has an affair, and Lawrence himself, a "homosexual lover" (244). This assertion insinuates Lawrence's own homosexual tendencies as well as perhaps Millett's

[3] Kate Millett, in her book, *Sexual Politics*, essentially picks up where Simone de Beauvoir left off in her book *The Second Sex*. Though Beauvoir is noticeably less aggressive and less condemning than Millett, she does in fact note that Lawrence's "phallic pride" represents how "Lawrence believes passionately in the supremacy of the male" (*The Second Sex* 214, 218).

interpretation of Lawrence's prioritization of the phallus (244). But Lawrence's sexual preference is neither integral nor relevant; Millett's argument fails to consider how the portrayal of anal sex, and female sexuality in general, resists, and, in fact, transcends the limits society places on the sexual experience. However misguided and characteristically negative Millett's account may be, it is integral to the analysis of "Lawrentian sexuality," which Millett blindly brands "for the man" (240). Millett also notes:

> While insisting his mission is the noble and necessary task of freeing sexual behavior 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)

The "phallic consciousness" to which Millett refers ultimately denies, and completely excludes Lawrence's adamant attention to female pleasure, female desire – to the *female* consciousness. Indeed, though the narration is omniscient, the reader is more often than not invited into the thought processes of Lady Chatterley. Peter Balbert, in his book *D.H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination*, counters Millett's argument, stating that "Millett's reductive approach," or "her one-track criticism, leads to an obliviousness of the literary and philosophical traditions embodied in Lawrence's work" (11). In this way, Millett's account of Lawrence's message is largely a manifestation of her re-creation of the binary logic that she in fact attributes to Lawrence; it is a narrow interpretation that I will use to demonstrate the way in which Lawrence's message exceeds the scope of a "phallic consciousness" (238).

In agreement with the critique of Lawrence in *Sexual Politics*, Ashley Tauchert's account of Georges Bataille's work in her book *Against Transgression* is also noteworthy in that it decidedly attempts to invalidate the author's fundamental program. Tauchert attacks Bataille's dependence on "transgression" in his texts. She writes, "Bataille

initiated for the European critical tradition a powerful figure of transgression that finds orgasm, salvation, and death isomorphic" (28). However, Tauchert also praises Bataille for his ability to represent the un-representable:

> Bataille's ability to reveal in representation the shape of an unconscious wish for sexual violence, and its obsessive tendency to sacrifice its objects to an inexplicably ferocious desire, is deeply impressive. It is the work of a thinker who knew more than most the difference between imaginary representation and other kinds of personal and socially transformative action (while diligently practicing all of these). (21)

Though Tauchert acknowledges Bataille's influence and capacity to interweave sexual violence, death, and eroticism, she is ultimately concerned with what she sees as Bataille's excessive emphasis on the liberative power found in transgression. She argues:

> It is quite possible to accept insight into the longing expressed through transgression without making such a song-and-dance about its more mutilated, anguished expressions. It is also possible (if not ultimately inevitable) to experience this longed-for-continuity without creating conditions of anguish and without entering the states of moral transgression, which are favoured by the Bataillean school. (121)

Tauchert critiques and attempts to invalidate Bataille's major organizing principles – that of taboo and transgression and its ultimate link to the limit experience.

Bataille's emphasis on transcending limitations instituted by society and self coincides with Lawrence's contention regarding society's limiting influence on the individual, which he sees as a numbing force that impedes the embrace of the bodily experience. Through their contestation of limits, the authors also challenge what Hélène Cixous terms "écriture féminine." Cixous alleges in her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" that "Woman must write her self" (875). While this statement clearly advocates for female expression and female equality vis-à-vis the traditionally male-dominated world of literature, it also excludes *male* writers from writing *woman*. In this project, I

propose that both D.H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille are capable of depicting the female experience. Though their fiction and theoretical work is met with much criticism from feminist scholars, through their depiction of the female body, and their emphasis on the bodily experience, I argue that *écriture féminine* is not strictly limited to the female pen.

In her article entitled "Hélène Cixous and the Rhetoric of Feminine Desire: Re-Writing the Medusa," Laura Alexander notes Cixous' emphasis on female liberation: "She [Cixous] counters Freud's model of passivity for women with one that offers uninhibited freedom through the body and the mind" (1). This statement finds an echo in Lawrence's "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover,"* which follows his novel:

> The mind has an old groveling fear of the body and the body's potencies. It is the mind we have to liberate, to civilize on these points. The mind's terror of the body has probably driven more men mad than ever could be counted. (333-334)

Following this logic, Lawrence and Bataille *both* advocate for a display of eroticism that places no restrictions on the body, or the prohibitions attributed to it. Furthermore, Lawrence cites Jonathon Swift and his poem "The Lady's Dressing Room." He writes:

> The insanity of a great mind like Swift's is at least partly traceable to this cause. In the poem to his mistress Celia, which has the maddened refrain, "But – Celia, Celia, Celia s***s! (the word rhymes with spits), we see what can happen to a great mind when it falls into panic. A great wit like Swift could not see how ridiculous he made himself. Of course Celia s***s! Who doesn't? And how much worse if she didn't. It is hopeless. And then think of poor Celia, made to feel iniquitous about her proper natural function, by her "lover." It is monstrous. And it comes from having taboo words, and from not keeping the mind sufficiently developed in physical and sexual consciousness (334).

Indeed, "Who doesn't?" (334). This attention to the universality of certain human experiences is depicted through Lawrence's attention to taboo. Though this rings true

with Bataille and his depiction of prohibition, it should be noted that Lawrence seeks to eradicate limitations while Bataille believes they are integral to the social order.

In *Erotism*, Bataille explains his interpretation of taboo and transgression:

> Organized transgression together with the taboo make social life what it is . . . just as the diastolic movement completes a systolic one, or just as explosion follows upon compression. The compression is not subservient to the explosion, far from it; it gives it increased force. (65)

In this sense, the transgression does not undermine the taboo for Bataille; but rather, it reinforces it through its recognition and ultimate transcendence. Accordingly, both male writers accentuate limitations; but while one seeks to eliminate them, the other demonstrates that they are integral to the structuring of social life. Though the authors diverge on this crucial point, it is crucial to highlight the common attention they give to limitations and the need for their ultimate transcendence – a decisive undertaking that does not give precedence to one single gender. Given this analysis, Cixous' *écriture féminine* is relevant to the authors' foundational agenda, in that through their unbiased attempt to portray female experience, they also question Cixous' underlying argument due to their identification as male writers. It should also be noted that while Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* questions masculine-oriented depictions of sexuality and rhetoric, it simultaneously seeks to revision the dynamics of gender through its prioritization of the female experience. In this way, both Cixous' account of feminine writing and Lawrence's and Bataille's depictions of the female experience represent disillusionment with "traditional categories of stable, fixed identity," which also "generated artistic experimentation in representing subjectivity as fragmented and fluid" during the modern movement (Poplawski *Encyclopedia* 109).

I will begin the following analysis with an in-depth look into Lawrence's highly controversial novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. I will demonstrate the way in which Lawrence highlights the experience of the body vis-à-vis modernity's mechanization, and I will also underline the incongruous portrayal of the masculine and feminine body throughout the narrative. This latter demonstration will ultimately validate the way in which Lawrence attempts to challenge the essentialist argument Cixous presents regarding woman writing her own femininity. Following this exploration of Lawrence's novel and his philosophical beliefs regarding the mind and the body, I will analyze two short stories by Georges Bataille. "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man" will serve as the primary texts from which I will deductively illustrate Bataille's portrayal of the female body and the female bodily experience. Throughout my analysis, I will consult various scholars, including the aforementioned feminist scholars, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding regarding preexisting scholarship and present interpretations. Lastly, I will discuss the ways in which Lawrence's and Bataille's responses to modernity entail a revalorization of the primal and unrefined body. Both of these texts demonstrate David Seelow's assertion, in his book *Radical Modernism and Sexuality*, that the modernist body "is a site of both desire and knowledge" (74).

CHAPTER II

THE EROTICIZATION OF THE PRIMAL BODY: D.H. LAWRENCE'S PANACEA FOR "THE MENTAL LIFE"

D.H. Lawrence's literary project in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a critique of what he interprets as modernity's perversion of human nature. Lawrence's suggested "cure"[4] for this perversion entails firmly establishing an intuitive awareness of the human body. This chapter will elucidate Lawrence's response to modernity through his encouragement for the reevaluation, revitalization, and resurrection of the body.[5] I plan to examine various scenes in the novel that are integral to Lawrence's campaign against modern mechanization. This exploration is not intended to glorify Lawrence's novel as a work of

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[4] In her book *Modernism and Perversion*, Anna Katharina Schaffner discusses literature's influential role in contributing to the formation and interpretation of sexual knowledge. Schaffner's interpretation of perversion is that which goes against cultural universalized notions of accepted behavior. Schaffner notes, "For Lawrence, the triumph over shame is metaphorically associated with a detachment and critique of the prevailing cultural consensus" (191). Schaffner's book treats the notion of how the counter-approach to modernity is essentially the "'cure' for the perversity of modernity," which shuts human nature off from its instinctual urges (107). The book is central to this research project because it supports the way in which culture responds to, and perhaps deviates from, the constraints imposed upon it. In this way, the so-called counter-movement to modernity actually accentuates the notion of perversion and transgression in order to "counteract the evils of modernity" (190).

[5] Lawrence's proverbial statement, "the resurrection of the body," is a metaphor that permeates the entire novel and manifests itself in the revalorization of the body and its inherent relationship with the earth (77).

romanticized, erotic fiction, or, what Kate Millett calls "a celebration of the penis of Oliver Mellors, gamekeeper and social prophet" (238).[6] Instead, the purpose of this research is to illustrate how Lawrence's attention to the erotic experience is part of the healing process that attempts to rehabilitate the body and re-establish its connection to instinctual desires and urges.

Lawrence's approach to resurrecting the body takes the form of the novel, which as a modern form of expression also challenges the preexisting modes of artistic representation. Saire Errico, author of "A Just Reward,"[7] notes that in Lawrence's quest

> towards a moral realistic form of fiction (realistic in the sense that the novel duplicates what it is to feel real, to experience reality) . . . [he] move[s] away from wholeness, from what is set, solid, and complete, towards an understanding of the universe as factious and full of contradiction, separation. (189)

This sense of "separation" or fragmentation, as it is presented in fiction, alludes to what Errico interprets as a breakdown of the conventional order (189). The novel does indeed question systematization, as Errico poignantly adds:

> There is always such a moment—when all the parts of a person, usually bound up neat in layers of propriety and unawareness, are instead thrown into disorder. Chaos arises. It is a condition of the external and necessarily a condition of the internal, no matter how we try to quell it. (189)

Thus, the novel demonstrates how the notion of disintegration generates "disorder" and

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[6] Kate Millett's perspective in *Sexual Politics* will be granted further attention, as it is an integral counter-argument to what Lawrence advocates in his novel. Millett's interpretation of Lawrence's "phallogocentrism" is what Peter Balbert calls, a "misreading" (1). Balbert's book includes adequate examples and support that will essentially debilitate Millett's critique.

[7] Saire Errico's essay "A Just Reward" discusses beauty and pleasure, as it is manifest in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and other modern texts. His reflections on fiction and the novel are pertinent in that they support Lawrence's literary project. Additionally, his analysis of the Dionysian as it appears in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is compelling and will be discussed in further detail on page 26.

"chaos," as the order of the mechanized world exerts pressure on the body and the mind (189). It is within this framework that Lawrence's liberative revalorization of the body in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* attempts to pierce through the deafening and deadening sounds of modernity's mechanization.

Lady Chatterley's Lover questions this mechanization as it chronicles the love affair between the main character, Constance Chatterley, and her husband's gamekeeper of the Estate, Oliver Mellors. Connie's sense of disillusionment is spurred by the lack of physical connection in her life. Clifford Chatterley's paralysis and his inability to truly communicate with his wife contribute to Connie's interest in Mellors. As the narrative progresses, Connie and Mellors develop a relationship that surpasses the purely physical and erotic depictions Lawrence provides; the bond between the two lovers essentially represents the way in which the two characters combat the effects of modernity on the human body and mind.

It is useful to analyze Lawrence's use of the term "modern" in his novel. One such passage offers insightful commentary about Clifford's writing. Connie notes, "'And since the field of life is largely an artificially-lighted stage today, the stories were curiously true to modern life, to the modern psychology . . . '" (14). According to Peter Balbert, Lawrence's use of the "modern" is representative of his "disgust with what he despairingly calls 'modern' notions of sexuality and commitment popular in the 1920's" (134). However, Balbert adds:

> By the time of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence dogmatically associates his culture's more liberal, post-war attitudes towards passion, gender roles, courtship, and marriage with a deadening mechanization (a "mentalizing," as he often puts it) of the instinctual sexual impulse. (134)

In this way, Lawrence's "modern" both references and critiques the prevalent societal

conventions of this period. In essence, the modern is a diversion from human nature in that it seeks to standardize and eclipse basic human desire.

The ability of the modern to obscure what Lawrence sees as natural is most aptly depicted in Connie's comment about the devaluation of English history:

> This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The Industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical. (167-168)

Connie's observation coincides with Frederick R. Karl's statement regarding the modern: "Nature is often defined not by its presence but by its intense absence" (16).[8] Karl adds that the imagery of nature is "molded by the new voices [of] machines, cities, tombs or caves and hollows, streets, buildings; or the absence of these things" (16). The mechanical continuity that Connie references is also indicative of this modern approach to nature, in that its emphasis on the present moment is "often accentuated by memory," which is "one reason why the language and voices of the movement provide so little continuity or narrative function" (16). Thus, the modern depiction of nature serves not only to illuminate mechanization, but moreover to accentuate the absence, or the impersonality, of its representation.

Lawrence's portrayal of the modern environment correlates to Karl's above observation about the deadening effect on passion and the instinctual impulse of the body. The description of the Wragby estate, home to both Lady Chatterley and Clifford Chatterley, is described as "dismal" and "hazy" in its "utter hopeless ugliness" (10). Indeed, the description emphasizes the sensory experience as the haziness is permeated

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[8] Cf. *Modern and Modernism.*

by the olfactory "stench of this sulphureous combustion of the earth's excrement . . . [whereby] the air always smelt of something under-earth: sulphur, iron, coal, or acid" (11). The onomatopoeic explications also emphasize the auditory sense through the "rattle-rattle of the screens at the pit, the puff of the winding-engine, the clink-clink of shunting trucks, and the hoarse little whistle of the colliery locomotives" (11, 10). Additionally, Connie reveals feeling as if she is living underground with a "low dark ceiling of cloud at night" whose "red blotches burned and quavered, dappling and swelling and contracting, like burns that give pain" (11). These descriptions incorporate the visual, olfactory, and tactual perceptions of Wragby, which illustrate how the body perceives and interacts with the environment. In this way, the imagery and the use of synesthesia draw attention to the body and the senses, while they also accentuate the absence of vitality. The desolate portrait of the "soulless ugliness of the coal-and-iron Midlands" extracts life not only from the landscape, but also from the interaction between people (10).

The lack of liveliness is also manifest in the absence of communication. Wragby's location, isolated on the "knoll where the brown house spread its dark brown façade," assured that "There was no communication between Wraby Hall and Tevershall village, none" (11). This lack of communication represents another layer of division and exile from the rest of the world, that of class. The disassociation between the Chatterleys and the mineworkers, the Tevershall colliers, is depicted as a "Gulf impassable, and a quiet sort of resentment on either side" (11). Indeed, even social gestures are nonexistent, "No caps were touched, no curtseys bobbed. The colliers merely stared . . ." (11). This description illustrates the diminished altruism of mankind; it is representative of the

psychological effects of modernity's fragmentation. In his book *D.H. Lawrence's Language of Sacred Experience: The Transfiguration of the Reader,* Charles Burack notes that this fragmentation coincides with what he calls "the modern consciousness' unrootedness in the now . . ." (22).

Lawrence's first chapter theme of modern fragmentation and lack of human connection reveals yet an additional layer of estrangement in the lack of bond between the two Chatterleys. This relationship is also a victim of mechanical deprivation as "Connie and he were attached to one another, in the aloof modern way" (13). As such, Clifford's "maiming" and delineation as "a hurt thing" explains why "Connie stuck to him passionately" (13). It is clear that the relationship is characterized by Clifford's dependence and Connie's empathy. Consequently, Clifford "was absolutely dependent on her, he needed her every moment. Big and strong as he was, he was helpless" (13). This apathetic attachment symbolizes a naturally modern, but unnaturally human, response to industrial Tevershall's asphyxiation of the environment. Clifford is described as "a man looking down a microscope, or up a telescope . . . He was not in touch with anybody, save, traditionally, with Wragby" (13). The explicit reference to scientific observation accentuates Clifford's lack of agency, as it implies a voyeuristic approach to reality and confirms his physical and psychological paralysis.

Clifford's paralysis is significant in that it is a direct representation of his disconnect with the physical world and the body. Balbert addresses Clifford's handicap as a "phallic wound" (142). This wound is representative of Clifford's "phallic failure and absolute reliance on his mechanized wheelchair," which forces him to "sit and adapt" (146). The words "wound" and "failure" preceded by the adjective "phallic" immediately

challenge Clifford's masculinity and, in fact, affirm his impotence. Balbert attributes Clifford's deficiency to "the devastation of libidinal energy occasioned by the first world war, and the consequent emergence of the machine as the potent force of modern life" (142).[9] Clifford "is wedded to his machine for support" and "treats it with all the cruel excess of displaced libido" (164).[10] Balbert notes that the wheelchair "has sunk the roots of his moral being, [and] is his only means of feeling erect and potent" (164). Clifford's paralysis and its implied sterility are juxtaposed alongside Oliver Mellors, gamekeeper of the estate and Connie's lover.

The contrast between the portrayal of the visceral and physical paralysis assures that Oliver Mellors is the exact antithesis of Clifford. Connie's first glimpse of Mellors as he is showering causes her to exclaim, "It was not a question of love; it was a question of *a man*" (66). Not only is it "*a man,*" but it is "the warm, white flame of a single life,

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[9] It is interesting to note that in Lawrence's postscript "A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover" he reveals that Clifford's paralysis was not, in fact, intentional: "As to whether or not the 'symbolism' is intentional – I don't know. Certainly not in the beginning, when Clifford was created. When I created Clifford and Connie, I had no idea what they were or why they were. They just came, pretty much as they are. But the novel was written, from start to finish, three times. And when I read the first version, I recognized that the lameness of Clifford was symbolic of the paralysis, the deeper emotional or passional paralysis, of most men of his sort and class today" (358). The question of whether or not Clifford's paralysis is symbolic according to Lawrence is extraneous. Clifford's handicap is meaningful in that it is, nevertheless, indicative of the extent of modernity's effects on the human body and its interaction with the world.

[10] Balbert provides an example of Clifford's "displaced libido" when his motorized wheelchair becomes stuck on a hill (164). Accordingly, "after an exasperated Clifford guns the engine several times, he climaxes his frustrations and his masturbatory evasions over the source of real energy by 'putting her in gear with a jerk, having jerked his break'" (164). Balbert adds: "The multiple ironies and puns about the perverse distortion of the phallic imagination in this scene all begin with the realization that Lawrence does not make easy sport of Clifford or his paralysis. Rather, he criticizes the extent to which Clifford permits his own incapacity to blind him to what is sustaining, unmechanized, and eternal" (165).

revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a *body*!" (68, my italics). The organic formlessness of the flame manifests itself in the very contours of Mellors' body, stripped of clothing, "naked to the hips, his velveteen breeches slipping down over his slender loins" (68). The emphasis on the body, the loins and the implicit warmth they symbolize is an emphatic juxtaposition against the cool, dismal, empty rooms of Wragby and the grounds surrounding it. Additionally, Mellors, as a returned lieutenant in the army, essentially provides a supportive argument to Balbert's aforementioned claim regarding "the devastation of libidinal energy occasioned by the first world war" (142). Indeed, it is not so much "devastation" in Mellors, but dormancy (142). In her essay "Stripping Off the 'Civilized Body,'"[11] Katie Gramich observes: "Both Clifford and Mellors have been wounded in the war, both return incomplete: Clifford's body is 'more or less in bits,' while Mellors too is fragmented: Connie's body is seen as 'connect[ing] him up again'" (157). In this way, Connie, though fragmented herself, aids in reinstating Mellors' wholeness. Connie's body, then, is empowered with the ability to fuse Mellors' discontinuity.

It is, in fact, the theme of birth and awakening that characterizes the relationship between Connie and Mellors. Their first meeting in the wood takes place in early spring, as Mellors is busy building chicken coops. This time, however, Connie observes him, "clothed: solitary, and intent, like an animal that works alone" (92). Mellors' defense appears in his inclination to solitude, even though "he knew that the seclusion of the wood was illusory. The industrial noises broke the solitude, the sharp lights, though

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[11] Gramich's essay is found within the book *Writing the Body in D.H. Lawrence: Essays on Language, Representation, and Sexuality*, written by Paul Poplawski.

unseen, mocked it. A man could no longer be private and withdrawn" (126). This notion of awakening also includes reinstating one's connection with the world.[12] Mellors reveals that Connie had "connected him up again, when he had wanted to be alone. She had cost him that bitter privacy of a man who at last wants only to be alone" (125). Likewise, Connie also seeks solace in the wood "to get away from the house . . . and everybody" (18). She comments: "Vaguely she knew herself that she was going to pieces in some way. Vaguely she knew she was out of connection: she had lost touch with the substantial and vital world" (18). Consequently, she lies "prone in the bracken," literally hiding in its enclosure (18). Both Mellors' dormancy and Connie's "lost touch" are mediated through the wood, as it "is a simulacrum of reality" (18).

The emphasis on the wood as "simulacrum" is supported in part by Burack and his interpretation of how "spectral metaphors are used to characterize [the] perception of the world" (22). He describes Connie's perceptions of the world:

> She experiences the Wragby household as "spectral" and the wood as "like the simulacrum of reality" (18). The oak leaves appear as if "seen ruffling in a mirror," and she appears to herself as "a figure somebody had read about" (18). [. . .] She experiences self and surroundings at a distance, mirrored in mind, cut off from a felt sense of reality. This ocularcentrism is associated with past – and word – centered experience: the primroses seem "only shadows or memories, or words" (18). (22)

Burack's description highlights the very "heady" consciousness, depicted here through rhetoric's ability to alter the apperception of reality (22). As such, the first sexual encounter between Connie and Mellors emphasizes the dream-like aspect of Connie's "tormented modern-woman's brain," which spins on with endless questioning (22). She asks, "Why? Why was this necessary? Why had it lifted a great cloud from her and given

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[12] Indeed, Mellors adds, "The world allows no hermits" (126).

her peace? Was it real? Was it real?" (Lawrence 124).

Connie's sense of reality and Mellors' desire for isolation are representative of "bodily fragmentation," which, according to Gramich, is by association related to "the dismemberment of the fertility god, Dionysus" (157). Lawrence's portrayal of mythology in the novel is revelatory of his "holistic approach that includes yet transcends – that is, integrates and overcomes – the dualism of Apollonian and Dionysian" (Burack 114). Exemplary of this dualism is the juxtaposition of Connie and Clifford's relationship alongside Connie and Mellors' interactions.

Clifford undoubtedly embodies the Apollonian. His confinement to his wheelchair metaphorically transforms his legs into cylindrical, metallic wheels, which buffer and inhibit his connection with the earth. Gramich notes:

> Clifford is associated with the mechanical and technological. Clifford generally exhibits tight self-control, adhering to the codes of his class and the dictates of civilization. Connie's adultery, when he discovers it, is seen by him as more a lapse in her civilization than a personal betrayal. (153)

Clifford's attention to and care for societal norms and "the dictates of civilization" instantly epitomize Apollonian order (153). To be sure, he asserts, "'The modern world has only vulgarized emotion by letting it loose. What we need is classic control'" (148). Clifford's embodiment and advocacy of Apollonian "classic control" is also interpreted as "an extended critique of Platonic ideals" (Gramich 154).[13] Clifford views the body as an "encumbrance," to which Connie retorts:

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[13] In his essay, "D.H. Lawrence and the Abject Body: A Postmodern History," Garry Watson notes that the critique of Plato is recurrent in Lawrence's texts. In his "Introduction to These Paintings," Lawrence says, "we are now corpses cut off from 'the living substantial world' (254) this is primarily due to the fear and hatred of the body that had first been instilled by Plato and Christianity" (5).

> "The human body is only just coming to 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, it is really rising from the tomb. And it will be a lovely, lovely life in the lovely universe, the life of the human body." (254)[14]

Connie's comment delineates her as the veritable "mouthpiece" of Lawrence's critique (Gramich 154). It is clear that Lawrence's affinity for the Dionysian does not entail the merging of both the Apollonian and Dionysian, as Nietzsche suggested.[15] As such, it is clear how Lawrence's exaltation of the physical body is representative of the Dionysian for its ability to liberate both mind and body.

The liberation of the body necessitates the revalorization of the flesh. However, the liberation of the mind from modernity's mechanization is in fact what appears to be the most difficult task for the characters in the novel. This mechanization is manifest in

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[14] Lawrence writes in his postscript, "A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover," "We have to go back, a long way, before the idealist conceptions begin, before Plato, before the tragic idea of life arose, to get on our feet again. For the gospel of salvation through the ideals and escape from the body coincided with the tragic conception of human life . . ." (354). Lawrence's critique includes idealists Buddha, Plato and Jesus, "three utter pessimists" who, according to Lawrence, believed in abstracting oneself from the "seasonal life of birth and death and fruition" (355). Lawrence's critique incorporates all realms of thought and action; he does not just confine his criticism to modern societal conventions, but to the very foundations that gave birth to them in the first place.

[15] In Frederich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Dionysian and the Apollonian are presented as two opposing forces in Ancient Greek tragedy. An interesting divergence from Nietzsche's text and Lawrence's interpretation appears in the conclusion of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Nietzsche asserts that "the collective effect of tragedy" entails the fusion, or the "fraternal union of the two deities," which thus assures that "the highest goal of tragedy and art overall is attained" (39). Karl notes that in modernism's "quest to de-familiarize, it must assault traditional unities, whether through staging in Wagner, growing abstraction in art, or the packing of subjective states into obdurate images in poetry" (20). This means that traditional notions of harmony are problematized in modernity and must be reevaluated and resituated to reflect the cultural context.

the highly cerebral, verbose, "famous evenings of the cronies" (35).[16] Connie implicitly compares these intellectual evenings to sexual experience. She notes, "Instead of [them] kissing you, and touching you with their bodies, they revealed their minds to you" (35). Intellect, then, replaces the sexual. During one such evening, one crony, Tommy Dukes, even mechanizes his diction when referring to sex. In his words: "No, it's hopeless! I just simply can't vibrate in unison with a woman . . . I'll remain as I am, and lead the mental life" (40). Dukes' terminology, "vibrate in unison," is uncharacteristically mechanized and treats the sexual act as a perfunctory vibration between two people; it is as though speech instantly impedes his ability to "vibrate" (40). The vibration here is indicative of an excess of kinetic energy; it is symbolic of the mind's constant stimulation and insatiable lust for mental nourishment in the modern age.

This kind of mental nourishment is a parody of the modern sexual experience; it is highly stimulating but physically deadening. Clifford ironically declares, "'I do think sufficient civilization ought to eliminate a lot of the physical disabilities. All the love-business for example, it might just as well go'" (77). Lady Bennerley, a guest of the Chatterleys, agrees, stating, "So long as you can forget your body you are happy" (77).

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[16] Connie privately terms Clifford's friends "the cronies" (35). They are significant because they collectively represent "modern" men. Connie describes the time spent with them as "those famous evenings . . . amidst the tobacco smoke" (35). Although this passage is primarily focused on the men's verbosity and Connie's silence, it is important to note that "She was infinitely amused, and proud too, that even their talking they could not do, without her silent presence" (35). Connie's presence functions as an affirmation that bolsters both the creativity and the confidence of the "cronies." For example, "They didn't get on so well without her; their ideas didn't flow so freely. Clifford was much more edgy and nervous, he got cold feet much quicker in Connie's absence, and the talk didn't run . . ." (35). Connie's outward passivity in this representation is, in fact, anything but passive; she is an integral part of the discussions of the "cronies," even through her silence.

Indeed, Bennerley's assertion seems to center around Winterslow's declaration, "'Help us get rid of our bodies altogether. It's quite time man began to improve on his own nature, especially the physical side of it'" (77). Connie even dreamingly contributes, "'Imagine if we floated like tobacco smoke'" (77). What's more, Clifford, "*hors de combat" as* a disabled man, remarks that society should rid itself of physical disabilities, "love-business" included (34, 77).[17] Ironically, his own disability does not factor into his statement because, according to Clifford, the real infirmity of the times is the "love-business" (77). Burack notes that compound terms used in the novel, such as "sex-thrill," "love-making," and "love-business," are suggestive of scientific and chemical jargon, whereby the hyphen between the two words adds a layer of duplicity to its signification (19). Burack adds:

> An important function of Lawrence's mortification techniques is to make readers aware that their modern sexual consciousness has a larger psychosocial context. By using discourses from modern science, commerce, and art, the narrator subliminally tells readers that a "mental" consciousness not only shapes their erotic lives but also structures most modern institutions. (19)

These instances of hyphenated compounding emphasize the scientific diction, which reduces sex to a rational, Apollonian, impassionate discourse.

The desire for cerebral nourishment, and its subsequent denial of the physical body, also appears in Clifford's obsession with the radio. Connie notes, "he would sit alone for hours listening to the loudspeaker bellowing forth . . . there he would sit with a

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[17] Clifford's statement *"hors de combat"* is in response to Tommy Dukes' question regarding whether or not Clifford thinks "'sex is a dynamo to help a man on to success in the world'" (34). His self-characterization as "*hors de combat"* assures that being disabled from the waist down, he is unable even to imagine sex because he cannot possibly conceive of himself partaking in the activity. Clifford's response favors the romanticized, ideological approach to intimacy in which he emphasizes the social contract of marriage to preserve love and "perfect the intimacy" (34).

blank entranced expression on his face, like a person losing his mind, and listen, or seem to listen, to the unspeakable thing" (116). Clifford's time spent with the radio is characterized by "this other weirdness of industrial activity," in which he was becoming "almost a *creature*, with a hard, efficient shell of an exterior and a pulpy interior, one of the amazing crabs and lobsters of the crustacean order, with shells of steel-like machines, and inner bodies of soft pulp" (116). While this analogy references Clifford's body and his fleshy inner self, it does so in a way that detracts from his humanness. He is associated with marine life, equipped with an exoskeleton that resembles "steel-like machines" (116). The analogy to marine life Connie creates here also seems to find an echo in Clifford's description of human life.

Towards the end of the novel Clifford writes in a letter to Connie that in her absence from the estate humans appear to have mutated into fish. Clifford writes:

> "It seems to me absolutely true, that our world, which appears to us the surface of all things, is really the *bottom* of a deep ocean: all our trees are submarine growths, and we are weird, scaly-clad submarine fauna, feeding ourselves on offal like shrimps. Only occasionally the soul rises gasping through the fathomless fathoms under which we live, far up to the surface of the ether, where there is true air. I am convinced that the air we normally breathe is a kind of water, and men and women are a species of fish." (289)

Clifford's observation is eloquently metaphoric as it essentially inverts and displaces human life and the sustenance it needs to survive, water for air. His acknowledgment of "the surface of the ether, where there is true air" is revelatory of his sense of class entitlement (289). According to Paul Bentley in the book *Ted Hughes, Class and Violence,* "the idea of evolutionary degeneration . . . in this period [demonstrates how] this industrial slave class becomes, in the cultural imagination, less than human" (56). In contrast to Connie's analogy comparing Clifford to "one of the amazing crabs and

lobsters of the crustacean order," which is a depiction linked to the real world, Clifford's observation is essentially a distortion of the real world (116). Clifford finally concludes his letter and his musings affirming, "So you see, we are deep sea monsters" (292). Clifford's description of mankind essentially mutates the entire species. The body is not only absent from his description, but it has begun to breath "silent gossip through its gills . . . as if the events of other people's lives were the necessary oxygen" (77, 288).

Clifford's attention to water and the submarine life of humans is a perversion of the natural human environment. It is intriguing to juxtapose Clifford's interpretation of the aqueous life alongside Connie and Mellors' scene during a rainstorm. Lawrence describes this scene with a strong emphasis on, and valorization of, the animal. As opposed to Clifford's world "among the seaweeds and the pallid monsters . . . where the fish of human secrets wriggle and swim," a zoomorphism appears through Connie's ritualistic movements in which she offers her loins "in a kind of homage towards him" (289, 116, 239). Connie's "pointed keen animal breasts tipped and stirred as she moved . . . it was a strange pallid figure lifting and falling, bending so the rain beat and glistened on the full haunches, swaying up again and coming belly-forward through the rain . . ." (239). Connie's nakedness, the rain, and her Dionysian ritualized movements are exemplary of the primal exaltation of her body that reinstates her understanding of reality. Saire Errico concurs with Monroe K. Spears in his study on modernism where he asserts, "in Dionysiac rapture and awe walls are broken down and the bonds between man and man and man and nature are reforged" (191).[18] Indeed, this scene of symbolic rebirth is supported by Errico's interpretation of the mythic "notion of re-living" (Spears

[18]Cf. "A Just Reward" by Saire Errico.

191). He states, "Dionysus is a god born of a mortal woman and then *reborn* from Zeus's thigh, where he has been secreted" (191). In this way, the primal "Dionysiac" experience in the rain is significant in that it reawakens the primal instinct of the erotic by prioritizing the bodily experience (191).

Burack terms this reawakening and the four concluding sex scenes between Connie and Mellors as "the revitalization phase" (32). Burack explains that the "conceptual aim is to offer a specific, concrete account of the forms and activities of the erotic body engaged in a dynamic, unselfconscious encounter" (32). To do so, Lawrence's descriptions emphasize words that accentuate the fluid motion of energy. For example, in Connie's recapitulation of her sexual exploration with Mellors, the "Italian way,"[19] she states, "It was not really love. It was not voluptuousness. It was sensuality sharp and searing as fire, burning the soul to tinder" (290, 267). Indeed, Connie reveals, "she had come to the real bedrock of her nature, and was essentially shameless" (268). Burack confirms that Lawrence's use of "dynamic organic 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" (32). Accordingly, these elemental phenomena are intended to evoke a response from the reader, regardless of his/her gender. He continues:

> the representations of erotic surrender, arousal, rhythm, exchange, friction, intensification, and climax could have a comparable effect for both men and women . . . to affect the male and female reader in somewhat similar ways. (33)[20]

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[19] This euphemism is in direct reference to anal sex. Clifford uses the terminology "'as Benvenuto Cellini says, 'in the Italian way'" to cloak the degradation inherent to the taboo. Clifford also notes when referencing the taboo, "'Humanity has always had a strange avidity for unusual sexual postures'" (290).

Presented in this context, Lawrence's language does not explicitly feminize the discourse of the erotic, nor does it entirely masculinize it either. Instead, it is a conduit that diversifies traditional notions of patriarchy, and therefore, provides an unbiased amplifier through which the feminine can speak.

While this interpretation is supported by many scholars, such as Charles Burack, Katie Gramich, and Peter Balbert, there are undoubtedly counter-arguments that must be considered. Kate Millett, in her book *Sexual Politics*, asserts that Lawrence "is the most talented and fervid of sexual politicians. He is the most subtle as well, for it is through a feminine consciousness that his masculine message is conveyed" (239). Millet asserts that this message, and its "program for sexual redemption," glorify "male genitals" as an "aesthetic standard" alongside "the balls between his legs . . . a strange heavy weight of mystery . . . The roots, root of all that is lovely, the primeval root of all full beauty" (242, 240).[21] Although it is true that there is a significant amount of phallic worship throughout

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[20] Lawrence's rhythmic rhetoric parallels the explanation he provides within the novel itself regarding the essence of the novel as a genre. He states: "It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead. Therefore, the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret place of life: for it is in the *passional* secret places of life, above all, that the tide of sensitive awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and freshening" (106). Balbert declares, "This is the announcement of the phallic theme of the novel, related intrinsically to the language of literary analysis, to the developing affair of Connie and Mellors, and to our experience of reading the work" (135). Balbert's use of the compound "phallic theme" refers to Lawrence's challenging of form, both in discourse and in thematic content.

[21] Millett's analysis of the "aesthetic standard" comes from the quotation in Chapter 12 of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (240). The full citation from Lawrence's text is as follows: "How beautiful he felt, how pure in tissue! How lovely, how lovely, strong, and yet pure and delicate, such stillness of the sensitive body! Such utter stillness of potency and delicate flesh! How beautiful! How beautiful! Her hands came timorously down his back, to the soft, smallish gloves of the buttocks. Beauty! What beauty! A sudden little

the affair between Connie and Mellors, Millet does not take into account that it is not only male pleasure that is at stake in the novel. To be sure, the very development of the narrative hinges on Connie's unhappiness and the slow disappearance of the loss of her "sensual self" until she awakens to a new sense of self as her affair with Mellors progresses (268).[22]

Balbert acknowledges Millett's accusation, affirming, "The novel is so archetypically phallic because of the probing and penetrating ethic of discovery that is the major structuring design in this fiction" (135). However, he maintains that "feminist criticism of this novel often remains content to ignore the work's organic unity in favour of a narrowly partisan effort to isolate Lawrence as cruel and reactionary towards women" (135). As such, it is through Lawrence's imitation of the masculine, or "phallic," structure of discovery that promotes the awareness of its shortcomings. Burack parallels this appropriation with the way in which feminists adopt "traditionally masculine rhetorical devices in order to subvert male power" (16). Accordingly, it appears that the

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flame of new awareness went through her. How was it possible, this beauty here, where she previously had only been repelled? The unspeakable beauty to the touch, of the warm, living buttocks! The life within life, the sheer warm, potent loveliness. And the strange weight of the balls between his legs! What a mystery! What a strange heavy weight of mystery, that could lie soft and heavy in one's hand! The roots, root of all that is lovely, and the primeval root of all full beauty" (188).

[22] This loss is presented in an early scene in the novel after Connie had observed Mellors while he was washing behind his hut. She returns home in the evening and attempts to establish the same sort of appreciation for her naked body. However, she notes that it is "unripe, astringent"; that "it lacked something" (73, 72). In comparison to her observation of Mellors, which was a "pure visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of the body," Connie's belly, as she describes it in the mirror, "had lost the fresh, round gleam it had when she was young . . . she was getting thinner, but to her it was not becoming" (72-73). Lawrence's overall literary project "experiments with a kind of narrative which moves in the opposite direction, by showing the results of the total identification of the 'I' with the mind, and the consequent gradual attempt to free it from the 'prison' of the body" (Michelucci 20).

only possible way to challenge conventional notions of masculine and feminine roles is to apply a form of mimesis that essentially critiques the underlying structure. In this way, it is imperative to "attend to broader negational structures that undermine all dogmatic assertions made within the novel" (16). In other words, Millett's analysis essentially ignores the scope of Lawrence's overarching treatment of the erotic.

One way in which the breadth of Lawrence's novel is undermined is through the feminist critique of the "contempt for a woman's desire for clitoral stimulation" (Gramich 138). Prior to meeting Mellors, Connie's sexual encounters are characterized by "the physical, sexual thrill she could get with him by her own activity" (28).[23] One such lover, Michaelis, an Irishman who comes to visit the estate, finally exclaims in an outrage, "You couldn't go off at the same time as a man, could you? You'd have to bring yourself off! You'd have to run the show!" (55). Here, Michaelis, a modern, successful playwright, angrily attempts to assert his masculine authority as director of "the show" (55). Burack notes:

> Like other scopophilic males, Mick punishes the woman for arousing his castration anxiety. His reference to the intercourse as a "show" underscores his own detachment and explains his stage fright. He clearly has dodged his own responsibility and put the blame for their sexual failure on her. (29)

However, Connie defends her clitoral stimulation by strongly stating, "After all, like so many modern men, he was finished almost before he had begun. And that forced the woman to be active" (Lawrence 55). However, Michaelis berates her, instantly killing "something inside her," and accentuating his own self-consciousness (56). In the novel, the clitoral orgasm is contrasted with the vaginal orgasm Connie finally experiences with

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[23] The "him" here is arbitrary and signifies the male in general.

Mellors. It is this dichotomy and glorification of Mellors, "gamekeeper and social prophet," that inspires the feminist critique (Millett 283).

In regards to the clitoral orgasm, Kate Millett writes, "Lawrentian sexuality seems to be guided by the same principle . . . of the working class . . . 'sex is for the man'" (240). She adds, "there are a number of severe reprimands delivered against subversive female 'friction'" (240). Millett contends that this "reprimanding" is a result of modern psychoanalysis:

> The Freudian school, which had promulgated a doctrine of "feminine fulfillment," "receptive" passivity, the imaginary "adult" vaginal orgasm which some disciples even interpreted as forbidding any penile contact with the clitoris. Notions of this kind could become, in Lawrence's hands, superb instruments for the perfect subjection of women. (241)

In regards to Millett's assertion, Balbert expressively reveals that Lawrence's critique of "masturbatory sexuality" also extends to the men in the novel (138): "He depicts obsessive clitoral friction as the unholy complement to the patently masturbatory sexuality of Michaelis and the other defaulting denizens of Wragby" (139).[24] Michaelis' ardent explosion of anger "contrasts with the weakness of his orgasm," a result, which

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[24] Lawrence's views on "masturbatory sexuality" implicitly expressed in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are explicitly presented in his postscript as well as through Peter Balbert's analysis (139). Lawrence writes, "The disintegrative effect of modern sex activity is undeniable. It is only less fatal than the disintegrative effect of masturbation, which is more deadly still" (351). Additionally, Balbert uses Lawrence's essay "Pornography and Obscenity" to analyze how "masturbatory sex and worship of the machine are related perversions of passion" (163). Balbert quotes Lawrence in "Pornography and Obscenity": "The great danger in masturbation lies in its merely exhaustive nature. In sexual intercourse, there is give and take. A new stimulus enters as the native stimulus departs. Something quite new is added as the old surcharge is removed . . . But in masturbation there is nothing but loss. There is no reciprocity. There is merely the spending away of a certain force, and no return . . . There is no change" (163). Lawrence's beliefs regarding "masturbatory sexuality" demonstrate how he sees masturbation as a perversion of the erotic experience and human sexuality in general (139).

Burack notes is due to the lack of a "new influx of sacred energy to make it grow" (28).[25]

In opposition to Connie's seemingly traumatic experiences with modern men, like Michaelis, her relationship with Mellors is related to discovery. While the notion of "discovery" is traditionally associated with masculinity, Connie's character demonstrates the feminine perspective of exploration. Gramich asserts:

> Connie is the pioneering female explorer in the novel, discovering the geography of her body's pleasure, to use Irigaray's terms, and yet she is equally fascinated with Mellors' body, which is the object of her appreciative female gaze. (156)[26]

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[25] It is intriguing to note that Michaelis' anger in the scene where he "explode [s] verbally" is in fact more powerful than his orgasm (28). This undoubtedly includes the female receiver of his response and his sex, who seems to be affected more strongly by his hostile words than by his sex. Indeed, Connie notes, "This speech was one of the crucial blows of Connie's life. It killed something in her. She had not been so very keen on Michaelis; till he started it, she did not want him. It was as if she never positively wanted him. But once he had started her, it seemed only natural for her to come to her own crisis with him . . . Her whole sexual feeling for him, or for any man, collapsed that night. Her life fell apart from his as completely as if he had never existed. And she went through her days drearily . . . Nothingness! To accept the great nothingness of life seemed to be the one end of living. All the many busy and important little things that make up the grand sum-total of nothingness!" (56) Connie's following sentence begins a new chapter in the novel, as she asks Tommy Dukes, one of Clifford's friends, "Why don't men and women really like one another nowadays?" (57) Connie's response, and indeed the introductory sentence on the following page, are revelatory of just how deep Michaelis' words cut into her. The passage also highlights the composition of the "modern man" as one whose virility lies in the esteemed power of his ability to manipulate rhetoric and essentially inflict violence through words.

[26] Luce Irigaray's "terms" referenced in Gramich's essay "Stripping Off the 'Civilized Body': Lawrence's *nostalgie de la boue* in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" come from her book, ***The Sex Which is Not One.*** Gramich's invocation of Irigaray is depicted in the following quote provided in the essay: "'But woman has sex organs just about everywhere. She experiences pleasure almost everywhere . . . one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle than is imagined – in an imaginary centered a bit too much on one and the same' (Irigaray 103)" (Gramich 156). Presented in this way, Connie's embodiment as "the pioneering female explorer" actually endows her with just as much agency, if not more, than her male counterpart, or explorer (156). Gramich's reference to Irigaray eloquently equalizes the dichotomy between male and female pleasure, as perceived and critiqued by feminist scholars.

Gramich also notes that Connie's pioneering spirit is focused on the "rediscovery of her own body and her learning of a vocabulary to express her *jouissance*," which, she adds, "may be seen as a precise expression of some of the central tenets of *écriture feminine*" (156).[27] This "feminine writing," a term coined by Hélène Cixous, is indicative of a critique against the phallocentric system that characterizes both the social and sexual sphere. Millett even affirms that "*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a program for social as well as sexual redemption, yet the two are inextricable" (242). Though Lawrence's novel does not depict a one-to-one correspondence to *écriture feminine* due to its masculine authorship, the basic premise of writing that portrays the female body and female consciousness, as well as its denial to emulate normative behavior, is in fact shared.

Normative behavior as depicted in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is presented through various avatars of the modern man or modern woman. Examples of this ideology appear in Clifford's admonishment and characterization of Connie's "*nostalgie de la boue*" after he learns of her affair with the gamekeeper (322). This "return to the mud" is

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[27] "Écriture féminine," literally "Feminine writing," is often translated as "Women's writing." As such, it is a strain of literary theory deriving from feminism that foregrounds a deeper understanding of the female self and body. The term was first coined by Hélène Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of The Medusa" (1975). In an essay entitled "Hélène Cixous and the Rhetoric of Feminine Desire: Re-Writing the Medusa," Laura Alexander reiterates Cixous' theory, stating, "feminine writing [is] a discursive activity that rejects stabilized language and structuralism" (2). With regard to Lawrence's novel, feminine writing, much like the erotic experience, "represents expression not only as writing but also as lived experience through the recreation of and through the body" (2). As such, feminine writing, according to Alexander, is indicative of "a cultural, political, and linguistic movement" (2). It is important to note that although Gramich incorporates feminist theory to uphold her claim regarding the impartiality of the erotic in Lawrence's novel, she also acknowledges that "the focus on the phallic imaginary seems directly to contradict some of the central tenets of this kind of feminist theory" (156). This confession functions to safeguard Gramich's authority and also to elucidate how the majority of feminist critics might disagree and find fault with Lawrence's portrayal of the female in *Lady Chatterley's Lover.*

essentially Clifford's way of defining Connie's "lapse in civilization" (Gramich 153). In response to Connie's confession of adultery with Mellors, Clifford, obviously enraged, exclaims, "that proves what I always thought about you is correct: you're not normal, you're not in your senses. You're one of those half-insane, perverted women who must run after depravity, the *nostalgie de la boue*'" (322). Here, it is not only Connie's self-abasement in her affair with a man of a lower class, but also, and most disgracefully, the possibility of Connie having participated in Mellors' "strange avidity for unusual sexual postures" (290).[28] Clifford instinctively associates Connie's "nostalgia of the mud" as an immoral act, characterized by her depravity that delineates her as "half-insane" (322). Clifford's terminology, "La nostalgie de la boue," is significant in that it accentuates the discord between the modern "civilization" of "tight self-control" and "codes . . . of class" as well as the representation of classic control and creative human nature (Gramich 153).

Clifford's retort, intended to shame his wife and establish "civil" distance with her, reveals in fact more about Clifford than it does about Connie (Gramich 153). The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides that *nostalgie de la boue* is "A longing for sexual or social degradation; a desire to regress to more primitive social conditions or behavior than those to which a person is accustomed." The juxtaposition of the two deities, Dionysus and the Apollo, is also explicitly emphasized in this scene as Clifford's

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[28] The implication of anal sex in this passage is in reference to rumors that had been circulating regarding the sexual activities of Mellors and his previous wife, Bertha Coutts. It is a rumor that does not encourage respect within the surrounding community. Clifford reveals that he "had hardly expected our gamekeeper to be up to so many tricks. No doubt Bertha Coutts put him up to them" (290). Here Clifford passes judgment on many different levels. Firstly, it is his admonishment for humanity's "tricks," or "unusual sexual postures," and secondly he attributes this "avidity" to the fault of the woman, who, for all intents and purposes, is in a lower class than Mellors, a common woman (290).

esteemed morality leads him to "become almost wistfully moral, seeing himself the incarnation of good, and people like Mellors and Connie the incarnation of mud, of evil. He seemed to being growing vague, inside a nimbus" (Lawrence 322). Clifford also reveals, upon learning of Connie's decision, that he "was not *inwardly* surprised . . . Therefore, outwardly, it came as the most terrible blow and shock to him" (313). The narrator then summarizes:

> And that is how we are. By strength of will we cut off our inner intuitive knowledge from admitted consciousness. This causes a state of dread, or apprehension, which makes the blow ten times worse when it does fall. (313)

This revelation is poignant in that it underlines the modern infirmity that separates mind and body. Additionally, Clifford's growth "inside a nimbus" emphasizes his perceived divinity and sense of privilege in contrast to Connie's affinity for the Dionysian, which assures that she is rooted in her body and in her desire for her reintegration with the earth (322).

Gramich affirms that Connie's sexual experience is literally a return to the earth. She notes that it is "a return to the mud indeed," as Mellors "tipped her up and fell with her on the path, in the roaring silence of the rain, and short and sharp, he took her, short and sharp and finished, like an animal" (155, Lawrence 240). This scene in the rain, as well as the instance of anal sex, are both representative of Lawrence's attention to primal, instinctual urges of the body. Connie affirms after anal sex with Mellors, "it took some getting at, the core of the physical jungle, the last and deepest recess of organic shame . . . At the bottom of her soul, fundamentally, she had needed this phallic hunting out . . ." (268). She then astutely declares that shame "is fear: the deep organic shame the old, old physical fear which crouches in the bodily roots of us . . ." (268). In this way, Lawrence's

valorization of the human body necessitates its connection with the earth. In the postscript entitled "A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover," Lawrence states:

> "Knowledge" has killed the sun, making it a ball of gas, with spots; "knowledge" has killed the moon, it is a dead little earth fretted with extinct craters as with small-pox; the machine has killed the earth for us, making it a surface, more or less bumpy, that you travel over. How, out of all of this, are we to get back to the grand orbs of the soul's heavens, that fill us with unspeakable joy? How are we to get back to Apollo, and Attis, Demeter, Perspehone, and the halls of Dis? (355)

Lawrence seemingly responds to his own question as he notes, "It is a question, practically of relationship. We *must* get back into relation, vivid and nourishing relation to the cosmos and the universe" (354). This reestablishment of the relation with the "cosmos and the universe" is, in fact, "a return to ancient forms" (354). As such, the theme of sexual discovery in the novel is one that is in favor of "*la nostalgie*" and is in response to pervading, conventional methods of experiencing the erotic.

Connie's experience with anal sex is a form of personal regeneration, a way of combatting the restraints of society. In her chapter "Anal Sex: D.H. Lawrence and the Back Door to Transcendence," Anna Katharina Schaffner positions Connie's sexual regeneration in her breaking of sexual taboos. She notes: "For Lawrence, the triumph over shame is metaphorically associated with a detachment from and critique of the prevailing cultural consensus" (191). Schaffner sees anal sex as one of the ways to challenge and overcome cultural standards. She writes, "The perversion which was taboo even in most sexological handbooks functions as panacea in Lawrence's fictional cosmos, as a cure capable of counteracting the evils of modernity" (190). It appears, then, that there is a special transformative power in identifying, questioning, and thus transgressing the moral standards set forth by society.

Lawrence's panacea appears in the form of his invocation of the reader's sensory

response. The imagery used to describe the wood and Connie's "jungle of herself" suggests, according to Gramich, "the territory is not only an external landscape but an inner region, a heart of darkness which is identified with the blood-consciousness of the resurrected body" (150). This notion of resurrection evokes the Dionysian implication of rebirth as well as the maxim "the resurrection of the body,"[29] which essentially becomes Connie's dithyramb (77). In this way, Lawrence's attention to "primeval mud and [to] the primitive jungle of the self, may be seen as performing a bold experiment in returning to the raw material of existence" (160). While Lawrence's focus is centralized on the notion of "resurrection," conveyed in the early stages of the narrative, it also includes the "dialectic of the novel . . . on the level of discourse" (Lawrence 77, Gramich 160). Gramich notes:

> Although the language of the body itself has primacy, the honesty of its responses transcends all verbalization, the novel suggests, yet Mellors and Connie develop an alternative, hybrid discourse of the body, composed of dialect, taboo words, and a kind of playful pastoral masque . . . (160)

And, I argue, around the definitive elimination of the verbal discourse between Connie and Mellors as their communication does not rely uniquely on the exchange of words.

Silence, devoid of signifiers, is, in fact, a more poignant form of communication than the "cerebral discourse of Sir Clifford" and even the discussions between Connie and Mellors (160). This "hybrid discourse of the body" appears, in fact, through the

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[29] This phrase stems from the conversation at the Wragby Estate with Lady Bennerley, Tommy Dukes and various other characters. The entire citation is as follows: "'Give me the resurrection of the body!' said Dukes. 'But it'll come, in time, when we've shoved the cerebral stone away a bit, the money and the rest. Then we'll get a democracy of touch, instead of a democracy of pocket" (78). This pronouncement deeply affects Connie, who views Dukes as "more or less her oracle," as she echoes, "'Give me the democracy of touch, the resurrection of the body!'" (57, 78).

body's absence (160). Lawrence demonstrates through his emphasis on the visceral that silence with touch actually heightens the symbolic element of the sexual act (160). It becomes, in Tommy Dukes' words, "a democracy of touch" (78). This is precisely why the oxymoron describing Connie and Mellors' erotic scene in the rain, "the roaring silence of the rain," is so very loud (240). Thus, it is the fact that words are not said, not even needed, that exalts the erotic.

Susan Sontag, in her book *Styles of Radical Will*, interprets silence as a metaphor for cleanliness.[30] Speech, and language in general, "is experienced not merely as something shared but as something corrupted, weighed down by historical accumulation" (15). In this way, silence becomes a metaphor for "a cleaned, non-interfering vision" (16). This interpretation also parallels with Lawrence's proclamation in his postscript, "I want men and women to be able to think sex, fully, completely, honestly, and cleanly" (332). Sontag's interpretation of silence as "the wish for a perpetual and cultural clean slate" relates to Lawrence's employment of silence because, in Sontag's words, it "expresses a mythic project of total liberation" (18). This liberation is both linguistic and ideological. Without sound, there is no hint or implication of cultural connections. Instead, what appears is a "clean slate" of unfiltered, raw expression (18). It is as though silence, devoid of its cultural symbolism that rhetoric provides, actually takes on a more symbolically rich role whereby unadulterated authenticity is paramount.

Silence as a means of communication is indicative of the forced reevaluation that

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[30] Sontag's *Styles of Radical Will* treats the aesthetics of silence and its impact on art and literature. She examines the role of silence as an artistic medium. In her treatment, there is a certain sensibility and overarching intellectual capacity for communication brought about by silence.

characterizes modernity. Frederick R. Karl asserts:

> Silence is a valid response to the very elements that made Modern possible: the onslaught of new knowledge that forced rethinking in every field and which, inevitably, forced a reciprocal arrangement with the arts, both as reflection of other realities and as response in its own languages. (31)

It is not requisite that language be conventionally audible. Karl explains, "When we speak of Modern's languages, we must, to be complete, speak of several kinds of languages, of varied voices" (31). In relation to Lawrence's interpretation and treatment of silence, it is the underlying notion of diversifying and varying both discourse and thought processes that pertain to its development. In this way, silence can be just as intense as noise. Indeed, Karl asserts, "Silence was a new form of ecstasy" (32).

Lawrence's literary project intertwines and interrelates the social and the sexual. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* essentially critiques oppressive, masculine-oriented discourse through its valorization and prioritization of female desire, female expression, and the female body. Lawrence's "turbulent generation," as he describes it in the opening sentence of his novel, bears psychological and physical scars from the First World War, which are only deepened by society's failure to address them and its proclivity towards, and emphasis on, masculine virility (1). Lawrence's novel illuminates society's dismissal of the body by explicitly drawing the reader's attention to the discord between the body and the mind. Accordingly, the controversial aspect of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is not simply relegated to Lawrence's use of taboo words and adulterous subjects in his novel. Moreover, it is Lawrence's act of excavation that pierces the very heart of the problem of his "turbulent generation" (1). His interpretation of the erotic, and his emphasis on bodily experience, is the panacea, a long-term prescription, which should be administered constantly, in order to undo the effects of a long history of physical deadening.

CHAPTER III

THE RAW BODY IN GEORGES BATAILLE'S "MADAME EDWARDA" AND "THE DEAD MAN"

The attention to bodily experience in Georges Bataille's fiction and nonfiction is an integral component in his approach to the erotic. Some of Bataille's most salient features that appear through his portrayal of the physical body are taboo and transgression, degradation and inner experience. These features are dependent upon interior and exterior subjectivity, an oscillation that plays with notions of normalization and destabilization. The emphasis on the limit experience and the limitations imposed by society and the self indicate Bataille's attempt to transcend the very boundaries that define human life. Accordingly, Bataille's short stories, "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man," demonstrate a deviation from normative depictions of the female and male. As such, the representation of bodily experience is unrefined; it depicts the corporeality of the body in an explicit, straightforward manner. Both short stories, though they objectify the female, also unexpectedly annul traditional conceptions of female passivity and masculine supremacy. Bataille's portrayal of the erotic, as it is manifest in both the female and male fictional characters, is revelatory of his attempt to challenge the very parameters that define the body in the wake of modernity.

The short stories "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man" exemplify Bataille's notion of dissolution, both in terms of the erotic experience and the structural

development of the narrative. Anna Katharina Schaffner, author of *Modernism and Perversion*, notes that Bataille himself is an advocate of "excess, waste, ruin and unlimited expenditure"; he also "privileges mythical-epiphanic 'inner experience' over logic, which he wishes to break with the capitalist economic order" (239). Accordingly, Bataille believes that the erotic necessitates a rupture with normativity, which thus entails "a breaking down of the established patterns of the regulated social order" (*Erotism* 18). Bataille's attention to the physical body and his interpretation of the unrefined nature of the human destabilizes conventional perceptions regarding subjectivity and sexuality. Jonathon Dollimore, author of the book *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, notes that the lost sense of totality "is not the ethereal transcendent realm of Western metaphysics but physical decomposition"; in other words, Bataille proposes an erotic imbued with an "ambivalent urge to annihilation" (256). This "decomposition" and "annihilation" are indeed manifest in both texts as the erotic intertwines with a romanticized desire for complete and utter ecstatic dissolution (Dollimore 256).

"The Dead Man" and "Madame Edwarda" demonstrate a rupture with conventionality as they vanguard obscenity through explicit descriptions of bodily experiences. While Bataille emphasizes the debased and crude elements of the erotic, he also incorporates various taboos, such as defecation, urination, and vomiting. In this way, Bataille's portrayal of the erotic emphatically communicates its concern with the limit experience. Maurice Blanchot explains that for Bataille the limit experience "is the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself in question" (2).

Raymond Spiteri contrasts Blanchot's interpretation with a citation from Clement Greenberg, an American essayist influential in American Modern art. Greenberg

discusses the "often cited definition" of modernity; he writes, "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (1). Spiteri juxtaposes these two definitions in order to emphasize the underlying notion of "self-criticism" and anxiety inherent to modernism. However, this juxtaposition also elucidates two distinct ways of understanding modernism. While, Greenberg's definition restricts self-criticism to "the conventions of a discipline," Blanchot's "movement of contestation is addressed to the empirical subject itself" (2). In this way, Blanchot's definition is much more pertinent and illustrative of what is implied by the limit experience, as identity is the primary element at stake in Bataille's portrayal of the limit experience. Bataille writes in *Inner Experience*, "I will say this, be it obscure: the object in experience is at first the projection of a dramatic loss of self. It is the image of a subject. The subject tries at first to move towards its fellow being. But once it has entered into inner experience, it is in search of an object like itself – reduced to interiority" (1). In this way, Bataille's "inner experience," also known as Blanchot's "limit experience," is very much intertwined with one key characteristic of modernity, that of a re-evaluation of self and body. [31]

While Bataille's writing seems to attack conventional notions of purity, it also, and more poignantly, depicts the overwhelming sense of anxiety that is subliminally

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[31] Spiteri's article entitled "Georges Bataille and the Limits of Modernism" references Maurice Blanchot, a close friend and contemporary of Bataille's. Blanchot's interpretation of the purposiveness of Bataille's inner experience essentially defines it as a kind of "self-criticism" (2).

characteristic of the epoch.[32] In this light, it appears Bataille walks a thin line that straddles what Dollimore will refer to as first "the erotics of mutability and death and, on the other, the commitment to social praxis" (256). [33] This conflict is most aptly demonstrated through Bataille's manipulation of the human body. The body is a testament to modernity's instability and is what Valerie Laure Popp, author of the dissertation "The Art of the Modernist Body," calls, a "hybrid entity," which registers and attests to the time period's constraints and attempt at homogenization (iii). Popp adds:

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[32] Bataille prefaces his interest and concern with eroticism as an attempt to understand the core of human existence. In his Introduction in *Erotism,* Bataille writes, "Eroticism has its own secrets and I am trying to probe them now. Would that be possible without first getting at the very core of existence?" (16). This core of existence is best represented through Bataille's attention to continuity and discontinuity, a fundamental concept in his representation of eroticism and its relation to the limit experience. Bataille notes, "for us discontinuous beings death implies the continuity of being" (82). In other words, discontinuity is upstaged by eroticism via its ability to assure the continuity of existence. Perhaps more aptly expressed is Bataille's explanation of discontinuity and continuity in regards to procreation: "Sperm and ovum are to begin with discontinuous entities, but they unite, and consequently a continuity comes into existence between them to form a new entity from the death and disappearance of the separate beings. The new entity is itself discontinuous, but it bears within itself the transition to continuity, the fusion, fatal to both, of two separate beings" (14). Bataille's attention to death and limit experiences is in support of his interest in discovering the essence, the veritable, physical limitations of the human body.

[33] Bataille's oscillation between social mores and the salacious way in which he portrays the erotic is subject to much criticism. One such critique that is fundamental to this research is Ashley Tauchert's book *Against Transgression*. In regards to Bataille's attempt to depict a balance between the social and the sexual, Tauchert cites Slavoj Zizek who asserts: "He [Bataille] remains stuck in this dialectic of the Law and its transgression, of the prohibitive Law as generating the transgressive desire, which forces him to the debilitating perverse conclusion that one has to install prohibitions in order to be able to enjoy their violation – a clearly unworkable pragmatic paradox" (31). This "paradox" is essentially the crux of Bataille's recipe for the erotic; it entails the undulation between taboo and transgression, two integral elements that structure the erotic and Bataille's subsequent portrayal of the body.

> Many accounts from the period resist any entrenched, discrete notions of normality and abnormality, and acts of corporeal discipline, normalization, and rehabilitation are neither roundly condemned nor applauded. (iii)

In this sense, the hybridity of the body is testament to modernity's inconstancy. The body becomes an instrument for communicating not only sexuality, but also the way in which eroticism, the act in which the body actively participates, is inherently linked to rigid cultural conceptions of social normativity.

Bataille's solution to overcoming normative notions of gender and sexuality is manifest in his attempt to surpass the limits of self-consciousness. In the article entitled "Flesh and Consciousness: Georges Bataille and the Dionysian," Jonathon David York writes, "Georges Bataille believed that self-consciousness was potentially a curse. Though we are condemned to bear it, we are not, however, condemned to suffer its limitations" (43). York adds that this idea also coincides with Nietzsche's statement from *The Will to Power*: "The entire evolution of the spirit is a question of the body . . . In the long run, it is not a question of man at all: he is to be overcome" (43). Given this elucidation regarding Bataille's fascination with transcending limitations, it is imperative to recall the ambiguity of the era following World War II and its insistence on the virility of the phallic body. Thus, many artists, Bataille included, sought to challenge conventional standards of masculinity and femininity. As such, art and literature produced during this time period reveal tensions about the self and reality:

> "Changing the sense of aesthetic beauty to a rawer conception" (Siebers 67), and by turning disruption, defamiliarization, and heterogeneity, and breakage into strategies that convey a 'realer' phenomenological experience. (Popp 19)

Seen in this light, Bataille's attention to the body and bodily functions in his fiction transcends the "conventional boundaries of literary art" through its deviation from

essentialist notions of gender (22). The "negotiation" of the subject of the body and its cultural "modernist textual" representation is a fundamental component to Bataille's provocative reaction to the modernist body (14). Therefore, it is necessary to examine references to the body and to bodily experience in order to elucidate the way in which Bataille, a relentlessly masculine and modernist writer, depicts the erotic and challenges notions of stability.

"Madame Edwarda"

The short story "Madame Edwarda" is one text of erotic prose found in the book *My Mother / Madame Edwarda / The Dead Man.* "Madame Edwarda," although authored by Bataille, was originally published under the pseudonym Pierre Angélique in 1967. Bataille's use of a fictitious name was, in fact, an attempt to avoid censorship dilemmas.[34] "Madame Edwarda" is both the title of the story as well as the name of the female protagonist, a prostitute who serves as the catalyst for the action that transpires throughout the course of the story.[35] The events take place at a brothel but also spill over

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[34] The chosen pseudonym also points to the subtle reference Bataille makes to religion, as Pierre was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. In the essay entitled "God is Love: Bataille's 'Madame Edwarda' and Mystical Experience," author Keith Currie draws a parallel between "Pierre Angélique," the "author" of the short story, and Saint Peter, or "'the rock' upon which the principal Christian Church was founded" (6). Currie declares that this reference to Saint Peter in "Madame Edwarda" "appears to engage with and reinterpret St. Peter's hagiography," questioning "the nature of the God sought . . . " and undermining "the stability of the 'rock'" (6). This idea does indeed run parallel to the narrative as Madame Edwarda, a prostitute, is referred to as God. This implicit and underlying interrogation of religion serves as the foundation for Bataille's treatment of the sacred and its subsequent implication of the mortality of the body.

[35]It is worthwhile to note that Madame Edwarda's profession represents "the archetype for 'the system of capital'" (Tauchert 37). Tauchert cites Jean-François Lyotard, adding that this profession "is the model relationship in capitalist society . . . in

into the streets of Paris with the narrative finally ending with Madame Edwarda's *jouissance* in the back of a taxicab while the taxi driver as the narrator looks on.

The story begins with a description of the narrator walking the streets of Paris before he finds himself at the "Mirrors," [36] a brothel where he meets and falls in love with Madame Edwarda. On the first page of the narrative, the depiction of the physical body is already paramount. The reader is immediately exposed to the narrator's thoughts regarding nakedness, as well as his own nudity, as he removes his pants and holds his "straight-risen sex" (148).

> I slipped off my pants and moved on, carrying them draped over my arm. Numb, I coasted on a wave of overpowering freedom, I sensed that I'd gotten bigger. In my hand I held my straight-risen sex. (148)

The narrator's desire, as well as his "overpowering freedom" inspired by his nudity, highlights the notion of virility (148). Not only that, but Susan Suleiman, author of the essay "Bataille in the Street: The Search for Virility in the 1930s," also writes that the very streets the narrator wanders are symbolic of "the place of socialist revolution leading

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the immense and vicious circuit of capitalist exchanges, whether of commodities or 'services' it appears that *all the modalities of jouissance* are possible and that none is ostracized" (37). As such, the female protagonist and her profession are symbols of capitalistic exchange. What is most interesting is Bataille's ultimate disavowal of this order in his portrayal of Madame Edwarda's manic *jouissance* in the back of the taxicab, which she performs without any interest or inclination to capital gain. This latter point will be expanded as the paper develops.

[36] The name "Mirrors" is another example of how Bataille embeds and disguises possible sources of influence. The brothel's title could very well be an insinuation of a book entitled *Le Miroir de la Tauromachie*, written by a close friend of Bataille's, Michel Leiris. Indeed, Bataille accredits Leiris in his introduction of *Erotism*, writing, "I should like to mention here that my own endeavours have been preceded by *Le Miroir de la Tauromachie* by Michel Leiris, in which eroticism is envisaged as an experience wedded to life itself; not as an object of scientific study, but more deeply, as an object of passion and poetic contemplation" (9). Bataille also most notably dedicates *Erotism* to Michel Leiris: "This book is dedicated to Michel Leiris particularly because of this book of his, the *Miroir,* written just before the war" (9).

toward a new dawn but also the place of Nazi marches and torchlight parades exploiting the darkest human longings for *violence*, war, and *death*" (62, my italics). Indeed, the first phrase of the narrative begins, "There – I had come to a street corner – there a foul dizzying anguish got its nails into me . . . Loneliness and the dark strung my drunken excitement tighter and tighter. I wanted to be laid as bare as was the night in those empty streets . . ." (148). This description emphasizes the virility, the rawness of the male body, as well as the narrator's desire for dissolution.

Bataille's depiction of the narrator, holding his virility in hand as he walks nude through the streets of Paris, is followed by his entrance into the brothel, whereby he ascends the stairs "like any other john" (Suleiman 64). Suleiman astutely notes that Bataille moves from "an outward, action-oriented definition of virility to an inward one," a move "intimately related to the evolution of European politics during that decade" (69). Although Suleiman refers to Bataille's theoretical and philosophical writings on politics and Fascism, this movement is indeed explicit in the narrative as the narrator's outward virility, represented by his sex, and then transcends to an inward virility, represented by the copulation with Madame Edwarda, an experience the narrator describes as "the emptiness of heaven" (Bataille 151). While Bataille foregrounds masculine virility at first, male pleasure is soon upstaged by female pleasure.

Bataille's attention to the female body also emphasizes the notion of the obscene in relation to the naked body. Edwarda's nakedness at the beginning of the narrative depicts the body as the very catalyst for the obscene. The narrator describes the first time seeing Edwarda: "Amidst a swarm of girls, Madame Edwarda, naked, looked bored to death" (149). The combination of verbiage in this citation is noteworthy in that it

combines Edwarda's nudity with the look of death, an idea adequately supported in *Erotism* where Bataille writes, "Eroticism . . . is assenting to life up to the point of death" (11). Dollimore also observes that for Bataille:

> There really is a link between eroticism and death via putrefaction: while the sexual organs in one sense are at the opposite pole of disintegration of the flesh, "the look of the exposed inner mucosae makes me think of wounds that suppurate, which manifest the connection between the life of the body and the decomposition of the corpse." (256)

This idea is also manifest in "Madame Edwarda" in the scene when the narrator first makes the acquaintance of Edwarda. Madame Edwarda states, "'I guess what you want is to see the old rag and ruin'"[37] seated, she "held one leg stuck up in the air, to open her crack yet wider she used fingers to draw the folds of her skin apart" (150). Following this gesture, Edwarda remarks, "You can see for yourself . . . I am GOD" (150). She then commands the narrator to approach; and as he succumbs, he kneels "as befits a lapsed Catholic"[38] before Edwarda and kisses her "teeming wound" (Hill 95, Bataille 150). The characterization here of Edwarda's vulva as a wound, or even, "rags" dizzyingly combines Edwarda the "obscene" prostitute with Edwarda, God-incarnate (151).

Madame Edwarda's duality is both whore and God. According to Ashley

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[37] This phrase, in the original French edition, appears in the form of an interrogative phrase. Edwarda asks, "Tu veux voir mes guenilles?" (20). The translation in English is: "'Do you want to see my rags?'" The term *guenille* is intriguing, as it is not usually attributed to anatomy. Literally, it means "un vêtement miserable, en lambeaux," or clothing that resembles rags (Grand Robert). It is a stylistic analogy that relates Edwarda's vulva to "l'aspect flasque," flabby or slack (Grand Robert). This terminology perhaps implies the effects of Edwarda's profession, furthermore emphasizing the obscene choice of words and imagery.

[38] This citation comes from the book *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot: Writing at the Limit* written by Leslie Hill. It will be referenced throughout the paper as it provides an interesting interpretation of the events in "Madame Edwarda."

Tauchert, this dualism demonstrates how "Edwarda now stands in for CAPITALISM as well as GOD" (37). Tauchert goes on to explain how Bataille's "narrative heroines" often "act out a rabid mode of obscene, self-pleasuring femininity," a "corrosive effect" that fashions the "material from which his theoretical and narrative work is formed" (38). For instance, in comparing the depiction of Edwarda's nudity with that of the narrator's in the opening scene of the story, one is struck by the disparate, if not diametrically opposed portrayals of the human body. The narrator's "straight-risen sex" paints a straightforward picture of a man's erection while Edwarda's "loathsome squid," "old rag and ruin'" and "teeming wound" reveal the very viscus nature of the female genitalia according to Bataille (148, 150). Tauchert writes:

> Following the insane logic of Bataille, the point is that those 'normal decencies associating with being human' are finally worthless compared to the unthinkable divinity enraptured in the reviled matter of the universe. In the post-Enlightenment rational profanity of industrialized social life, the negation of nature that forges the human-animal seems to be at its peak, and the object of that negation returns to haunt the human dream of transcendent reason. It returns in a form associated with the sacred, and testifies to a reality beyond the concerns of production and reproduction. More to the point, it returns *female*: gaping, material, viscous, emotional, irrational, obscene. (36)

Tauchert's interpretation serves as an explanation for the differentiation between male and female nudity in "Madame Edwarda"; it summarizes how Bataille's approach to the female body is "beyond desire" and "beyond stability" (Hill 97).

Indeed, notions of instability and dissolution are emphasized as the narrative progresses and the narrator and Madame Edwarda ascend the stairs of the brothel. The sexual encounter between Edwarda and the narrator is theatrical and exaggerated in that "the mirrors wherewith the room's walls were everywhere sheathed and the ceiling too, cast multiple reflections of an animal coupling" (151). Leslie Hill describes their

coupling as "fusing together as a single image, an image that, with the help of the mirrors adorning the walls and ceiling of the bedroom, is multiplied to infinity into whose void the pair are dissolved" (96). After their coupling, the narrator remarks, "Madame Edwarda held me spellbound, never had I seen a prettier girl – nor one more naked" (151). Although Madame Edwarda has neither removed nor added clothing, according to the narrator, she is now strangely described as "more naked" (151). Edwarda's unchanging nakedness seemingly evolves to a more revealing state only after sexual intercourse, while the narrator's nakedness remains muted. Indeed, Edwarda's nakedness and sex are foregrounded once again:

> The delirious joy of being naked possessed her: once again she parted her legs, opened her crack, the pungent odor of her flesh and mine commingled flung us both into the same heart's utter exhaustion. (151)

This asymmetrical treatment of gender demonstrates a rupture with Bataille's belief, which links love with sacrifice and sacrifice with femininity. He expresses the latter in *Erotism*: "I must emphasize that the female partner in eroticism was seen as the victim, the male as the sacrificer." Furthermore, "In the process of dissolution, the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity" (18). In sum, Bataille's awareness of dissolution essentially sacrifices the female *for* the purpose of masculine pleasure and male gaze. Though the notion of fusing together is evidently understood, it is the very absence of delicate, female passivity, and the accentuation of female nudity and its synaesthetic representation, that is integral to the storyline.

The last instance in "Madame Edwarda" that requires attention is the ending scene in the taxicab. The scene is representative of the very climax of the story when Edwarda,

after entering the taxi with the narrator, offers her sex to the unassuming driver. The driver, named "Jack" by Madame Edwarda, obliges and the two situate themselves in the backseat as the narrator looks on, going as far as to switch on the overhead light to facilitate his involuntary voyeurism. This sexual encounter in the taxi essentially distorts prostitution as a profession by completely eliminating capitalism from the enterprise, as the scene is entirely devoid of the monetary aspect traditionally attributed to prostitution.[39] Additionally, the scene portrays Edwarda as the agent who solicits sex, as she is the one who "rapped on the glass partition, had the cab stop, and got out. She walked round to the driver and when close enough to touch, said: 'You see . . . I'm bare-assed, Jack. Let's fuck'" (157). Tauchert notes that Edwarda's "iconic 'madness' is the activity of a prostitute enjoying and giving freely . . . ." Edwarda "circulates in Bataille's mysterious little narrative as the *arch-transgressive* figure of the prostitute abandoning herself to a manic desire without claiming payment" (37, my italics). In essence, Edwarda's body is the material that structures Bataille's work. Tauchert writes:

> He [Bataille] never seems to think (theorize or narrate) without involving women. Bataille's women (internal and external to his writing) are unremittingly sexual.

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[39] An alternate interpretation that in many ways seems to run parallel to Bataille's depiction of prostitution in "Madame Edwarda" is presented in Melissa Gira Grant's book *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work.* She notes: "Even 'compassionate' feminists like Kate Millett, herself in attendance as prostitutes crashed another, earlier women's conference in New York . . . 'failed to understand the issue,' writes historian Melinda Chateauvert . . ." (18). Grant adds, "Sex work is a political identity, one that has not fully replaced the earlier identifications imposed upon them . . ." (18). Presented accordingly, Grant's interpretation attempts to rethink sex work by instantiating a re-evaluation of the very system within which sex work occurs, as well as a reconsideration of its treatment of the women (or men) performing the work. Grant's book is in retaliation of the way in which sex is thought *about*. As such, the book, and its attention to prostitution, is an interesting addition to the analysis of Bataille's portrayal of Madame Edwarda and her final act wherein she embraces her desire without regard to monetary compensation, essentially establishing her own identity outside of her profession.

> Their sexuality is the material from which his theoretical and narrative work is formed. One need only to consider Edwarda's gaping vulva to be struck by the degree to which the irrepressible materiality of female-embodiment is the key to Bataille's critical transgression. (38)

Thus, the feminine body, relentlessly, and even crudely, sexualized, is central to Bataille's attempt to challenge what is considered traditionally feminine.

This female "materiality" is most poignantly represented in Bataille's description of Madame Edwarda's final *jouissance* with the cab driver (38). In this sense, the female orgasm, as well as her will to solicit sex and ensure her individual pleasure, is that which stands in for the female experience. The narrator describes Edwarda's orgasm:

> Edwarda's pleasure – fountain of boiling water, heartbursting furious tideflow – went on and on, weirdly, unendingly; that stream of luxury, its strident inflexion, glorified her being unceasingly, made her nakedness unceasingly more naked, her lewdness even more intimate. Her body, her face swept in ecstasy were abandoned to the unspeakable coursing and ebbing, in her sweetness there hovered a crooked smile: she saw me to the bottom of my dryness, from the bottom of my desolation I sensed her joy's torrent run free. (158)

This description, seemingly poetic and explicitly erotic, is contrasted with the following sentence detailing the driver's orgasm: "Some last shudders took slow hold of her, then her sweatbathed frame relaxed – and there in the darkness sprawled the driver, felled by his *spasm*" (158, my italics). The term "spasm" characterizes the masculine orgasm, while Edwarda's orgasm "weirdly, unendingly," continues in a "stream of luxury" (158). From the above description and the comparison and contrast thus outlined, it seems that Bataille is more invested in the description of the female body and female bodily functions. This emphasis effectively accentuates the female's place in the narrative and counters Bataille's assertion in *Erotism* regarding innate female passivity.

The way in which gender is operative in "Madame Edwarda" essentially manipulates and transcends physical and societal limitations. Although "Madame

Edwarda" emphasizes the notion of dissolution, it is from a masculine perspective that is always observed, or passive.[40] Judith Surkis, in her article "No Fun and Games Until Someone Loses an Eye: Transgression and Masculinity in Bataille and Foucault," describes how in Bataille "the loss of the discontinuous self into continuity," or, the act of sexual fusion with another, which permits transcendence beyond the self, in fact, "relies upon the image of another's loss in order to envision the possibility of self-transgression" (22). In other words, "Bataille's transgression may thus be read against itself in order to demonstrate that the 'masculine' writing subject always maintains his position vis-à-vis a witnessed 'feminine' loss" (29). Such an elucidation begs the question, or even "raises the problem of *who* is really lost" (30). It should be emphasized that masculine dissolution, represented by the narrator's "anguish," is contingent upon female *jouissance* (158).[41]

Hill discusses the incongruity between male and female pleasure as it appears in

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[40] Note that it is the narrator who describes and is witness to all the events in the narrative.

[41] For example, as the narrator is "witness" to Madame Edwarda's *jouissance*, he remarks, "My anguish resisted the pleasure I ought to have sought. Edwarda's pain-wrung pleasure filled me with an exhausting impression of bearing witness to a miracle. My own distress and fever seemed small things to me. But that was what I felt, those are the only great things in me which gave an answer to the rapture of her whom in the deeps of an icy silence I called 'my heart'" (158). The narrator's thoughts as he observes Edwarda's *jouissance* are representative of Surkis' assertion that Bataille's depiction of dissolution necessitates a witness, specifically speaking, a masculine witness, or observer. Indeed, Ashley Tauchert concurs: "Bataille's transgression consciously incorporated and evaded the 'woman's point of view' as content because he was in a passionate dialectical encounter with the 'hope and terror' of femininity" (44). Tauchert also notes that the moment of dissolution, while it may be a "'masculine subject who possesses a position of self to transgress or lose' . . . articulates the need for intimacy with a female-embodied thought in order to experience its own transgression" (44). Accordingly, masculine dissolution is in fact dependent upon the representation of the female, or "a female-embodied thought" (44).

the narrative, noting its satiric undertone. She writes of the "irony" of the story. The last sentence of the narrative appears, "The rest is irony, long, weary waiting for death . . . " (159). Hill considers the meaning of the abrupt ending and its ironic reading. She writes:

> For the very attempt to narrate the unnarratable secret of sexuality and death imposes a compromise on Bataille's text which is driven, almost by necessity, to give credence to precisely that hierarchy of (male) subject over (female) object that Bataille is then at such great pains, at any event in *Madame Edwarda*, to erase. True, Bataille was not always so careful, and in many of his more discursive, philosophical texts on eroticism his thinking can often be found appealing to the heterosexist hierarchy *Madame Edwarda* throws into crisis. (98-99)

In "Madame Edwarda" the female body is a harbinger for masculine dissolution, and it essentially disrupts the traditional "heterosexist hierarchy" (99). This interruption of traditional gendered methods of structuring society is integral to Bataille's project.

The treatment of the male and female bodies in "Madame Edwarda" reveals an aporia, a veritable impasse in understanding Bataille's theories presented in his fiction. The female body is indispensable to Bataille's framework, as is the masculine "witness," herein represented by the narrator (Surkis 29). In accordance with this aporia, Leslie Hill also notes that the structural formatting of the narrative also "undermines its own contours, so that its own frame becomes as much an object of the narrative as that which the frame displays" (88). Hill adds that the four metatextual parentheses that occur throughout the narrative help to "erode the text's integrity" (88). She explains:

> Reading then is no longer under the control of any dialectic of identity. Closure is interrupted. This is why Bataille in *Madame Edwarda* is concerned not with femininity in the restricted (Hegelian)[42] sense of the term, but rather with the

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[42] The page preceding this citation in Leslie Hill's text explains what she refers to as Hegel's "sense" of *femininity.* She writes: "Hegel, it will be recalled, once described femininity in a celebrated remark, as 'the eternal irony of the community.' The reason, Hegel explained, was that the feminine, belonging as it did to the singular, private world

> generalized puzzle of sexual difference itself in its necessary but always unrepresentable relationship to carnal pleasure and human mortality. And why his concern with the limits of experience takes him to the experience of the limit itself: to sexual intercourse and death. (88)

Bataille's depiction of gender in the narrative shatters the gendered stratification he advocates in *Erotism*. Accordingly, in "Madame Edwarda," and in the following story "The Dead Man," his focus shifts to the universal human experience: the erotic and death.

"The Dead Man"

Bataille's short story "The Dead Man," published in 1964, is strikingly similar to "Madame Edwarda" in that it foregrounds obscenity and emphasizes the carnality and mortality of the human body. "The Dead Man" is one of Bataille's most obscure texts, as there is little scholarship and analysis of the work. The narrative's ambiguity is part and parcel of Bataille's larger project through writing. As such, Bataille's literary writing "forbids interpretation by constantly obliging us to go beyond it," which thus inhibits its reduction "to the endless and hopelessly inadequate representation of sexual experience . . . " (Hollings 202).[43] The narrative also demonstrates Bataille's motivation to pollute purity and therefore expose "a historically dominant sexuality, which cleansed by social and cultural discourse, has been absorbed and rigidly defined by language"

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of the family, represented an obstacle to the achievement of universality attained at the level of the state. At the same time femininity, for Hegel, was an indispensable moment in the development of the state, which is why it was essential that it be recognized: but recognized only in so far as the act of recognition served in fact to annul the resistance of the (feminine) singular to the (masculine) universal . . . " (87-88).

[43] Ken Hollings' essay, "In the Slaughterhouse of Love," appears in the compilation of stories written by Bataille entitled *My Mother, Madame Edwarda, The Dead Man*, translated by Austryn Wainhouse. The essay provides an overview of various key concepts in Bataille's fiction as well as his theoretical texts. His interpretation is very straightforward and elucidates many nebulous aspects that are consistent in Bataille's work.

(200). As such, the obscurity of the text is fundamental to the narrative's development and is furthermore accentuated as the separation between reality and fantasy is muddled.

The narrative commences in medias res with the recent death of Edouard. Marie, stripping naked, runs into the rain before she enters an inn where she becomes inebriated and meets the Count, a small, dwarf-sized man she believes to be the deceased Edouard. The first few pages of the narrative demonstrate Bataille's undaunted attention to bodily fluids, madness and nudity. He writes:

> She took off her dress and hung her coat over one arm. She was out of her mind and naked. She rushed out and ran in the night under the downpour. Her shoes clattered in the mud, the rain drenched her. She felt a need to move her bowels, held back against it. Come to a wood, she lay down amidst the soothing mildness of trees. She pissed against the earth, the urine wetting her legs. Upon the ground, quietly, in an absurd voice, crazily she sang
>
> " . . . my na-ked na-ked-ness
> po-si-tive at-ro-cious-ness . . . " (169)

This preliminary description of Marie places the narrative within an otherworldly realm. Although the credibility of the story is not the focal point, it demonstrates how Bataille's emphasis on limit experience transcends the parameters of reality. By foregrounding the obscene through his description of taboos, Bataille effectively creates a world of his own fashioning. Valerie Lauren Popp[44] asserts that this act of creating "a new world of [one's] own" gives expression to one's "alien experiences of modernity" (164). The otherworldliness of Bataille's fiction, as well as his attention to obscenity and the body, is exemplary of the way in which Bataille responds to the constraints of modernity.

Bataille's fantasy world glorifies the unintelligible whereby the text essentially becomes "a space wherein abnormal voices and bodies can express themselves without

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[44] Cf. "The Art of the Modernist Body."

fear of censure or censorship or cure" (164). As such, "The Dead Man's" depiction of female and male bodies within Bataille's fantasy world reveals Bataille's underlying logic of subversion. For example, the "abnormal" representation of the female body in the story is combined with its bodily functions and fluids (164).[45] Upon entering the inn, Marie's body is central to the action that transpires.

> She stationed herself next to the boy, pressed her leg against his and taking his hand, placed it between her thighs.
> "For Christ's sake," moaned the boy when he touched the crack.
> The others, flushed, kept still.
> One of the girls came over, drew aside a skirt of the coat.
> "Just look at that," she said, "nothing on!"
> Marie let them go ahead and quickly downed a glass of alcohol. (172)

This interaction demonstrates how the body is depicted as a conduit for the crossing of boundaries.[46] Bataille's world, in which transgression is tantamount, becomes a domain of "organized disorder," a place where the image of the idealized flesh is annihilated (*Erotism* 119). Indeed, the rational order imposed by society seems to dissipate once Marie enters the inn; it becomes a corrupt, sexualized, and perverted microcosm of the world. Bataille's subsequent raw description of Marie's body also effectively eradicates the veneration of the female body.

This rawness is manifest in Bataille's portrayal of Marie. Bataille writes, "Her

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[45] The use of "abnormal" in this instance refers to the way in which Bataille's portrayal of the female body and femininity deviates from normative conceptions of how females are traditionally depicted in society and literature.

[46] In *Erotism*, Bataille writes that the crossing of boundaries is linked to continuity. He explains that the purpose of crossing of boundaries, interpreted here as transgression, "is to make order out of what is essentially chaos. By introducing transcendence into an organized world, transgression becomes a principle of an organized disorder" (119). Transgression is in fact an organizing principle that disrupts standardization.

cunt and ass exposed: the smell of moist ass and moist cunt was setting her inwardly free and Pierrot's tongue, which was wetting her, gave her the impression of the chill of death" (178). Bataille's verbiage as well as his crude portrayal of Marie's body is due in part to his belief that the body, when stripped nude, "ceases to be a sexual commodity"; instead the natural state of the body "converts our skin into a boundary which both contains and conceals us" (Hollings 203). In this way, the body, stripped nude, indicates its vulnerability, whereby "propriety is torn apart: our flesh becomes dirt and we actively embrace its foulness" (204). This excess "foulness" and vulnerability, provoked by transgression, represents the body's limit, which is thus "exposed as a liquefied flux of blood, urine, tears, sperm, sweat and excrement" (Hollings 204, 205). Towards the end of the narrative, Bataille intensifies his portrayal of base human nature as he describes the interaction between Marie and the Count. He writes:

> "The devil," said Marie, "I'll shit in front of the devil!"
> "You vomited a moment ago."
> "I'll shit now."
> She squatted and shat upon the vomit.
> The monster was still upon his knees. (191)

This portrayal of Marie crosses into the realm of the obscene due to its explicit reference to taboo and bodily fluids. Bataille writes, "Bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling of obscenity" (*Erotism* 17). Following this thread, in his book *Passwords*, Jean Baudrillard explains his interpretation of "The Obscene." Baudrillard remarks that we enter the realm of the obscene when there is no longer any distance between what "the obscene" could possibly signify literally and metaphorically. This means that the proximity to the "realness" of the world is actually what constitutes the obscene (28).

Baudrillard's concept of "realness" also coincides with Bataille's presentation of obscenity and the base reality of human nature (Baudrillard 28). Even more explicit is Bataille's statement: "The sexual channels are also the body's sewers; we think of them as shameful and connect the anal orifice with them" (*Erotism* 57). Bataille then adds, "St. Augustine was at pains to insist on the obscenity of the organs and functions of reproduction. 'Inter faeces et urinam nascimur,' he said – 'we are born between feces and urine.'" (57-58). Presented in this light, or rather from this existential perspective, Bataille's attention to bodily fluids and natural functions highlights his notion of "crossing boundaries" into the realm of what Baudrillard calls the "real" and what Bataille in fact facilitates through his implausible fantasy world (119). In this way, Bataille purposefully challenges social conventions regarding notions of purity.[47]

While the depiction of the female body in "The Dead Man" reveals Bataille's attempt to subvert conventional standards regarding femininity and purity, it also prompts an analysis of Bataille's portrayal of the masculine body in order to fully understand how gender is operative in his fiction. The first reference to the male body is in the first sentence of the narrative: "When Edouard fell back dead" (168). Subsequently, once Marie enters the tavern, Bataille writes, "Marie went up to the drunk and unbuttoned his

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[47] Bataille explains in *Erotism* the enigma of taboos. He writes: "But nobody mentions the horror of excremental matter which belongs to man alone. The conventions regarding our bodily waste products are not given any conscious consideration by adults and are not even entered on the list of taboos. There is therefore an aspect of the transition from animal to human so radically negative that no one talks about it. We do not count it among men's religious reactions although we include the most absurd taboos under that heading. On this point, the denial is so absolute that we think it beside the point to notice and to assert that here is something worthy of comment" (215). Indeed, Bataille's explicit description and emphasis on taboo and even "excremental matter" is, as he remarks, "worthy of comment" in that he is consciously foregrounding basic human actions in order to reveal the way in which prohibitions structure social life (215).

fly: the cock she brought to light slumped uncertainly" (173). These two initial depictions of the male body essentially destroy the virility that is so characteristic of Bataille's theoretical works.[48] The male is thus portrayed as inanimate and lifeless, an image that reproduces itself in the genitalia of the drunkard at the inn. The next description Bataille provides of the male body appears when the Count enters the room. After settling down at Marie's table, the Count solicits Pierrot, a young farm hand to "Be a good lad, Pierrot, take me in hand," whereby Pierrot concedes and proceeds to caress the Count until he reaches his orgasm, face reddened as "urine flowed over him" (183-184). Most notable in this description is Marie's response to the Count and her subsequent treatment of his virility. "'Go away,' said Marie, 'or I'll piss on you if you don't . . . '" (184). Marie then "went berserk, got her teeth into the Count's cock, the Count howled" (187). This description of the male body, his *jouissance* and the homoerotic encounter is remarkable in that the Count is portrayed as the passive participant of the action. Additionally, Bataille's simultaneous inclusion of Marie and her response to the Count and his virility demonstrate how the male body is acquiescent and inferior to the female body.

One last example of the portrayal of the male body in "The Dead Man" is at the very end of the story. The final scene of the narrative is perhaps the most ambiguous and, as previously stated, is an integral element to Bataille's treatment of the erotic. As such, Marie and the Count leave the inn and retreat to her house, where he tells Marie, "You are going to give yourself to me" (192). The Count undresses and his naked body and erection are described as a "devilish deformity," which quickly "fails" as he observes the

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[48] The subject of Bataille's treatment of virility and female passivity appears on page 52.

"dead man, in disorder, [was] claiming all the space in the bedroom" (194). The Count's "failing" virility, literally coupled with the appearance of the dead man and the subsequent death of Marie, display on the one hand Bataille's portrayal of the masculine body, while on the other hand, it also abruptly terminates the story and leaves the reader with an indeterminate conception of the narrative (194).[49] In sum, the story highlights mortality, which is omnipresent in the title of the work, as well as throughout the entire narrative with frequent references to Marie's ecstatic sexual experience, which borders the abyss described as "the chill of death" (178). The accentuation of death is an integral component to Bataille's framework of eroticism. He writes, "eroticism is assenting to life even in death"; and he adds, "Eroticism is only fulfilled, only exhausts all its potentialities if it brings some degradation in its train, the horror of which will suggest the simple death of the flesh" (11, 235). In this light, Bataille's reference to the body and its fundamental ephemerality, as well as its necessary bodily functions, is manifest in the conclusion of "The Dead Man."

Conclusion

The humiliation of the Count's virility as well as the eradication of Marie and her dead lover, Edouard, are indicative of Bataille's larger motivations regarding representation and writing. Bataille creates an aporia through his disparate portrayals of the female and male body, and also fashions a veritable impasse with his abrupt and

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[49] Marie's death heralds the end of the narrative. Both definitive endings – Marie's life and the short story – are inexplicable. Though the ambiguity of the conclusion begs for further interpretation, clarification and elucidation evade both the reader and the narrative. However, this incertitude may in fact constitute Bataille's perspective regarding the flesh and its relationship with eroticism and death.

dramatic ending of the narrative. In this way, Bataille's implicit aporetic questioning correlates to his attempt to think beyond the limits of philosophy. Hill explains that thinking beyond philosophy is in itself a philosophical enterprise. She notes: "While necessarily inscribing itself within limits, literature for Bataille is what seeks to respond to that which is beyond limits" (92-93). In this way, literature "expose[s] itself to the impossibility of its own foundation, to the unthinkable relation of non-relation," or, the space "between the limit and the limitlessness that inhabits literature as a simultaneous condition both of possibility and impossibility" (92). Like Bataille's treatment of masculinity and femininity in the text, the ending of the narrative seeks to surpass the boundaries of conventional limitations. This is precisely why Bataille foregrounds transgression, "first, because transgression has always already occurred as a condition of the limit itself, and second, because whatever is beyond the limit is by that token beyond language" (92). In this sense, the abrupt and obscure ending of "The Dead Man" is constituent to the way in which Bataille fashions "a space beyond words," which "occupies the same space as the sacrificial torment of inner experience" (93-94).

The experience of the body in Bataille's fiction, both in "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man," demonstrates the way in which gender functions in the realm of eroticism. Although feminist critics have problematized Bataille and his treatment of female sexuality and the feminine body (with good reason, as his theoretical framework is contingent upon and constructed from female subservience), the analysis of the two short stories has provided an alternate entrance into Bataille's portrayal and eroticization of gender. Although Bataille states in *Erotism* that "Not every woman is a potential prostitute, but prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude," Madame

Edwarda demonstrates that the "feminine attitude" is not subservient, nor is it "prey to man's desire" (131). Edwarda's own desire dominates the narrative and culminates in the back seat of the taxicab, while the narrator can do nothing but observe. Hill notes that this scene to which the narrator bears witness "is not a fantasy of sexual possession, nor is it a sadistic desire intent on subjugating the body of the (sexual) other; it is an attempt to attend in words to the limitlessness of a secret beyond words" (97). This "secret" is clearly stated in the narrative itself as Bataille reveals mid-way into the story in one of his metatextual parenthetical annotations: "This book has its secret, I may not disclose it. Now more words" (156). It seems that Bataille's eroticism relies just as heavily on that which is not written, as to that which is in fact transcribed onto the pages, which, as Hill explains, " . . . the secret beyond language is also surely the greatest secret of all, whose absolute status is irreducible" (93).

Likewise, "The Dead Man" depicts what can only be interpreted as Marie's night in search of "sovereignty." Accordingly, "sovereignty," or what Bataille refers to as "unfettered freedom," essentially frees "human existence from the bonds of necessity" (*Erotism* 171, 174). In this sense, Marie's sovereignty is explicitly manifest within the first page of the narrative as she removes her dress and walks into the inn. Marie's body and her desire precipitate the events that transpire in the narrative. It is relevant to note that these events, as well as the entire narrative, indeed even the title of the story, are all contingent upon Edouard's death. In other words, Marie's "sovereignty" is only accessible due to her lover's death. This depiction of death in the narrative accords Marie her last tryst of promiscuity and obscenity, only to ultimately end the story with her own death. Bataille writes:

> At last the Count caught sight of the two hearses, proceeding slowly to the cemetery, one behind the other.
> The dwarf hissed between his teeth:
> "Foiled . . . "
> He did not see the canal and slipped down into it.
> A heavy splash momentarily disturbed the silence of the water.
> The sunshine remained. (195)

This final scene recalls Hill's interpretation regarding the silence that is so characteristic of Bataille's literature, which, as she notes, "cannot speak limitlessness or excess any more than philosophy can" (92). The final depiction of the Count and the silence, which is "disturbed" by his plunge into the water, represents the way in which Bataille's perspective reveals his incessant questioning of normative representations of eroticism and rhetoric in the wake of modernity. Bataille's depiction of gender challenges conventional standards of representing gendered behavior and social decorum.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: MASCULINE "*ÉCRITURE FEMININE"*

The representation of the body and the bodily experience in the texts by D.H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille reveals the authors' underlying engagement with subverting conventionality. According to Anna Katharina Schaffner,[50] this subversion is a "perversion" of the literary tradition. She notes: "Perversions can thus be defined as both spatial and temporal irregularities," which foreground "'transgression' as a form of stylist deviance from literary traditions and a questioning of prevailing cultural conceptions and epistemological regimes . . . " (164). The major "irregularity" in the three texts examined in this thesis, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, "Madame Edwarda" and "The Dead Man," is perhaps the fact that the texts are authored by male writers and ultimately depict, and emphasize, the subjectivity of the female erotic experience (164). This "perversion," or deviation from traditional portrayals of eroticism, prioritizes female sexuality, accentuating her desire and her agency (164). In this way, both Lawrence and Bataille, two masculine writers working in the modern age, demonstrate through their literary texts the way in which "modernist representations of the perversions . . . occupy a liminal space," meaning "they point both backwards and forward at the same time" (Schaffner 256).

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[50]Cf. *Modernism and Perversion.*

Because both Lawrence and Bataille foreground feminine pleasure and the female experience, Cixous' *écriture féminine* is indeed relevant as the authors attempt to destabilize, and ultimately critique, phallogocentrism.

The accentuation of the female body and feminine desire essentially problematizes Cixous' claim, which states "woman must write her self" (880). In Cixous' 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," she writes:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (875)

Cixous adds: "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display . . . Write yourself. Your *body* must be heard" (880, my italics). Cixous advocates for a female writing *her* self in order to overcome the oppressive patriarchal system and to clear a path for woman's voice. Although the emphasis is on women's writing, Cixous does not distinctly state whether or not men are adamantly excluded from writing the female self. Both D.H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille problematize Cixous' agenda regarding women writers; they demonstrate an alternate perspective of female representation. Cixous' statement, "Your body must be heard," does indeed ring loudly and clearly in the texts by the two male writers (880). Connie's love affair, Madame Edwarda's night of "sovereignty," and the portrayal of Marie's obscene actions effectively establish a new norm or feminine representation, or even, a more "sovereign"

depiction of the female body (*Erotism* 171).[51]

The question of whether or not a man can in fact write *woman* is integral to this project. The research thus conducted demonstrates the ways in which Lawrence and Bataille attempt to answer *yes* to this query. Laura Alexander's essay entitled "Hélène Cixous and the Rhetoric of Feminine Desire: Re-Writing the Medusa" points to the essentialist argument Cixous campaigns. Alexander notes:

> Anglo-American feminists struggling against the confinements placed on women by phallocentrism have rejected Cixous's argument because she insists on sex as a marker that separates masculine and feminine rhetoric . . . Though she rejects Lacan's structuralist binary, or any imposed patriarchal order that suppresses women, she nevertheless creates what appears as yet another binary, primarily of "man" versus "woman." (1)

Indeed, Cixous notes:

> I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man. So only an oblique consideration will be found here of man; it's up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at: this will concern us once men have opened up their eyes and seen themselves clearly. (877)

In this way, Cixous falls prey to phallocentrism in that she, too, follows the logic of binary oppositions in order to make her point. However, Cixous, like many theorists before her, such as Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva for instance, is forced to work within the confines of the system she seeks to critique and overcome. Alexander notes that Cixous "*employs* convention to deconstruct it" (1). And, she then adds:

> By arguing for the essential sexual differences between men and women, Cixous overturns the expectation that the differences create hierarchies, prescribing women into inferior positions. Rather, for Cixous, sexual difference allows difference in expression that has no order. (1)

Cixous' "expression that has no order," as well as her allusion to men "opening their

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[51]As previously mentioned, Bataille's concept of "sovereign" signifies in his terminology "unfettered freedom" (*Erotism* 171).

eyes," seems to indicate and support the possibility of male writers embracing the multiplicity of the female and adequately depicting the feminine experience (Alexander 1, Cixous 877).

The destabilizing effect of writing the woman from the male perspective is transgressive in that it undermines not only Cixous' essentialist claim that necessitates woman writing *her* self; but, moreover, on a grander scale, it surpasses all limitations placed on rhetoric – male and female alike. While Cixous does in fact work within the patriarchal system, she critiques its emphasis on "typically masculine" features (879). For example, she writes:

> I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy; that is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated . . . (879)

Cixous' critique of the dominant social structure is also manifest in both Lawrence's and Bataille's texts. For instance, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the culturally defined and masculine oriented aspect of marriage is emphasized when Connie Chatterley requests a divorce from her husband, Clifford. Clifford retorts, "'*I* shall never divorce you . . . Because I follow my own inclination, and I'm not inclined to'" (323). Clifford's stubborn obstinacy is in fact the last impression the reader is left with as the novel ends. His immovability (literally) in divorcing Connie emphasizes his control over the situation, over their marriage; it effectively reinforces Connie as his property, as she is forced to keep his name and its attributed title. However, the last few paragraphs of the narrative comprise a letter from Mellors, in which he states:

> Never mind about Sir Clifford. If you don't hear anything from him, never mind. He can't really do anything to you. Wait, he will want to get rid of you at last, to

> cast you out. And if he doesn't, we'll manage to keep clear of him. But he will. In the end he will want to spew you out as the abominable thing. (328)

Mellors' hopefulness finds a way around Clifford's refusal to divorce Connie. As these are, in fact, the last few sentences of the novel, it is significant in that the statement ultimately disavows the binding contract of marriage and of Connie's subsequent inferiority in the matter. In this way, Lawrence's portrayal highlights the absurdity of marriage as a binding, economic, or social contract.

While Lawrence challenges the "typically masculine" economy through marriage, Bataille essentially subverts the notion of prostitution and capital by upstaging it with female desire (879). Though Bataille's portrayal of economy and expenditure is much more complex and structurally integral to his theoretical framework,[52] his presentation in "Madame Edwarda" effectively distorts the enterprise through its complete absence of capital. Instead of monetary gain, Madame Edwarda's *jouissance* is central to her encounter with the taxi driver in the cab. The narrator describes Edwarda:

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[52] Bataille's sense of "economy" is defined by expenditure, in which wealth is viewed more along the lines of life force, as opposed to capitalistic representations of excess. Bataille analyzes the relationship of production and consumption, a neologism he denotes in French as "la consumation," or "la consommation improductive" (*The Accursed Share* 431). Bataille "opposes *consumation* – a noun that doesn't exist in French – to *consommation,* or consumption proper . . . [which] recalls the etymological sense of consuming, as in a fire that utterly destroys. It is his own concept of fire, sacrificial consumption, with a sense of nobility, as opposed to the bourgeois consumption of production and accumulation" (431). General economy in this sense is indicative of an excess of resources, or excessive expenditure, which contrasts with the notion of scarcity that is emblematic of the Enlightenment period. Prostitution is exemplary of how desire demands and ultimately assures the *greatest* loss. Desire for the prostitute, which is the case with the narrator in *Madame Edwarda,* "defines its victim and consecrates him in that henceforth he does not just dissipate excess wealth, but burning *himself* up to the point of dying, he behaves as if he were a complete superfluity, a being for whom, in his account, has no meaning" (142).

> Her body, her face swept in ecstasy were abandoned to the unspeakable coursing and ebbing, in her sweetness there hovered a crooked smile: she saw me to the bottom of my dryness, from the bottom of my desolation I sensed her joy's torrent run free. (158)

Edwarda's experience is entirely hers. Though the narrator bears "witness to a miracle," it is Edwarda's *jouissance* that defines the female experience (158). This portrayal also eradicates anything "typically masculine" from the description, besides of course, the lackluster verbiage that characterizes the driver's "spasm" or orgasm (158). In this way, both Lawrence and Bataille's attention to, and displacement of, the patriarchal system delineate the body as a conduit for communicating a divergent illustration of the female body.

To conclude, the emphasis on the body in Lawrence and Bataille's fiction, though it includes and describes both masculine and feminine *jouissance*, is explicitly more invested in the description and ultimate portrayal of the unrefined female body. Upon commencing the research and analysis of the three texts, I expected to compare and contrast the way in which two masculine writers illustrate the human body. In my analysis, I have thus discovered how Lawrence and Bataille challenge Cixous' *écriture féminine*, its essentialist argument regarding sexual demarcation and ultimate emphasis on *woman* writing *woman*. Accordingly, the representation of the female body in the two authors, though Bataille's is characteristically more explicit and "obscene" in its descriptions, reveals the multiplicity of the female experience. No longer is she, as Cixous states, "sensitive – intuitive – dreamy," but, neither is she *not* those things (878). Woman is, as Luce Irigaray asserts, "multiple . . . more complex" (Gramich 156). That is to say, woman is not ideologically restricted to her classic portrayal in literature; like her sex, she is diversified.

This diversification is aptly demonstrated in Luce Irigaray's book, *The Sex Which is Not One*, in which she states, "the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle than is imagined (103)" (Gramich 156). This, I believe, is the crux of what Lawrence and Bataille attempt to demonstrate through their fiction. The "liminal space" created by the modernist depictions of perversion is also the space occupied by literature. Cixous even states, "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (879). In sum, *écriture féminine*, existing "beyond logic," challenges prevailing notions of femininity and masculinity; it focuses on woman, her experience, and her body. The fact that Lawrence and Bataille are indeed privy to woman's diversification and multiplicity is illustrative of their engagement with the portrayal of the body in the modernist era. Both authors write woman's subjectivity through their undaunted attention to the various subject positions the female occupies in society. In a traditionally male-dominated literary world, both Lawrence's and Bataille's attempt at *écriture féminine* endeavors to advance the way in which the female experience and feminine pleasure occupy their own space beyond the realm of masculine primacy.

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