Sexual Consciousness and the "New" *Lady Chatterley*

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The years have not been kind to Lady Chatterley. Nor for that matter have the movies. Scandalous in her day, the sexual adventuress of D H Lawrence’s best-known novel has matured into something of a pop-culture joke, remembered less as a symbol of erotic liberation than a soft-core staple of late-night cable. (Lim 2)

D H Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* insisted on the possibility for human regeneration and fulfillment through a celebration of carnal desire, a Utopian ideal which disengaged guilt from sexuality and thereby constituted a conspicuous deviation from the prevailing puritanical ideologies of the author’s time. Since the mid 20th century, a number of film adaptations have invoked Lawrence’s once contentious observations on sexual pleasure and love in a bid to entertain and provoke modern audiences. With notable exception to the excessively prim and evasive Allegret version released in 1955, many of the films seem to reduce Lawrence’s complex vision to a distinctly tawdry and ultimately ineffectual tale, entertaining and thought-provoking only insofar as its capacity to sexually titillate the viewer. The combination of a particular breed of chic pornography and a Hollywood-inspired visual cliché of sexual love found in the likes of films by Just Jaekin (1981) and Ken Russell (1993) arguably serves to perpetuate a more contemporary brand of sexual repression. In her incisive publication, *Sex and Pleasure in Western Culture*, Gail Hawkes claims that this repression manifests itself in the phenomenon
of “confection sex” inspired by traditional male-oriented pornographic images that trivialize sex and render it a mere mode of entertainment (162). Moreover, the prevalence of such images is inclined to encourage what could be called a formulaic and fetishised sexual conformity. Although it is perhaps over-determined and certainly problematic to consider how successfully or otherwise filmmakers might capture the “essence” of Lawrence’s vision in relation to sex and sexuality, one might reasonably denounce the failure of such modern adaptations to execute the transgressive potential of a re-telling of Lawrence’s novel for contemporary audiences. Indeed, such films are marred by a tendency to disregard the intrinsic complexity of sexual relationships, ultimately diminishing what they purently represent. This inclination seems particularly exasperating given the novel’s insistence on a reclamation of genuine sexual pleasure and desire, a sentiment arguably as radical today as it was in Lawrence’s time. Perhaps the only film adaptation to date with the facility to question and indeed agitate modern sexual consciousness is director Pascal Ferran’s recent release, *Lady Chatterley* (2007). While much has been said in the past about the significant impact of Lawrence’s bold ruminations regarding human sexual thought and behavior in relation to the sexually repressed society in which his novel was received, the current investigation seeks to examine how Ferran’s representation of sex and sexuality in her filmic adaptation of the novel holds the propensity to serve a similar purpose, albeit in response to a very different cultural/sexual milieu.

Just as Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* contributed to the constitution of sex as a legitimate subject of literature in the first half of the twentieth century, Ferran’s *Lady Chatterley* offers contemporary audiences significant innovation in terms of broadening the sexual discourse of our time. Certainly, Ferran’s film avoids the Hollywood inclination towards evasiveness where sexual behavior is concerned, a tendency which sees a general avoidance of nakedness and a distinct lack of candor in the representation of sexual acts. In this sense, Ferran belongs to a wider movement of European directors, including among others the well-respected Tinto Brass, Pedro Almodóvar and Catherine Breillat, whose films have attempted to convert explicit eroticism into their mainstream content. Furthermore, Ferran’s film also avoids the increasingly prevalent, converse tendency to advocate sex as something to “be enjoyed at a very superficial level” (Hawkes
due to its association "with indulgent pleasure, with humor and with recreation" (Hawkes 160), a discourse dictated by numerous purveyors of a tremendously influential Western media (including, of course, cinema) that, in the process of commercializing and ultimately profiting from human sexuality, has managed to render conventional a set of sexual behaviors markedly pornographic and routine in nature: sex itself is repetitively reduced to a mechanical, sometimes callous, act, oriented solely towards that most obvious expression of male pleasure: ejaculation. The conscious "presence" of the individual as a "whole" entity tends to be negated due to a fixation on the exclusive framing of body parts applied predominantly to women who, furthermore, are repeatedly encouraged to subscribe to a rigidly proscriptive sexual posturing characterized by aggressiveness and an exaggerated suggestion of sexual availability. Such insistent and repetitive representations are addressed in Ariel Levy's much talked-about recent publication *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (2005), which contends that standardized and indeed deeply contrived ideas of what is alluring are packaged and sold to women as the "new" liberation, yet ultimately serve to disconnect individuals from their own sexuality. Dutch historian, Dylan van Rijsbergen, too, recently addressed this phenomenon in his entertaining and thought-provoking essay, "Sexing the Handbag" (2007). Van Rijsbergen accuses *Playboy* magnate, Hugh Hefner, of initiating and perpetuating "completely predictable images of sex" that render sexuality "incredibly boring" while inadvertently repressing genuine desire and pleasure (1). According to van Rijsbergen, "our task is to individualize and diversify the images of sexuality we see everyday[...] it is not by restricting images that we should fight Hefnerism. We must drown it in a flood of better alternatives" (1). In its distinct deviation from contemporary sexual mores, Ferran's *Lady Chatterley* surely constitutes such an alternative, boldly challenging a pervasive and perplexing cultural acceptance of (or at least indifference towards) the extant erotic boredom to which van Rijsbergen refers. 

Ferran's French-language adaptation of Lawrence's novel, the first to be directed by a woman, is far less interested in class divisions and industrialization than its predecessor; its condemnation of the sublimation of real human connections (including those of a sexual nature) is delivered almost solely via a celebration of the sensual, organic world of which human sexuality is a natural extension. It
is no surprise to learn that Ferran adapted her film from the lesser known second draft of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover, John Thomas and Lady Jane* (hence the film’s substitution of “Parkin” for “Mellors”), which frequently features descriptions of the natural world and is far less inclined than the better-known third draft towards rambling pontifications explaining, excusing, and intellectualizing its sexual content. Because the third draft of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* became known to history, however, it is this version that is employed in the current study as a point of occasional comparison. Ferran’s film moves at a leisurely, consistent pace, and is conspicuously devoid of didactic subplots and dialogue. Frequent long takes of nature and of the film’s protagonists make for an acute reliance on landscapes, body language, and facial expressions for referential meaning. As A. O. Scott recently noted, in this film, “Lawrence’s quasimystical notions about sex and nature have been revised and to some degree refined. His Eros of dirt and sweat and animal impulses ... are replaced by the sensuality of sunshine, wildflowers and fresh air” (10). Scott further contemplates the style of Ferran’s filmic adaptation and its relevance for contemporary audiences: “Ms Ferran has rediscovered both the novel’s originality and the source of its durable appeal, which is not salaciousness but candor” (11). In his recent review, Ty Burr also considers the film’s style of eroticism: “the film ... is sensual in escalating degrees of heat[,] ... [its] eroticism ... is laid on with a caress” (2). Burr contends that Ferran succeeds in filming Lawrence “so he matters...by emphasizing the one aspect of his writing that can still shock; his gentleness” (2). Concurrently, Dennis Lim has noted that “for a film about torrid passions... [*Lady Chatterley*] is often curiously placid” (3). Clearly many film reviewers have noted Ferran’s disinclination to subscribe to the aforementioned pornographic sexual discourse found in a vast number of films dealing with human sexuality, including other adaptations of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Scott also acknowledges *Lady Chatterley’s* concomitant frankness, its explicit and non-evasive approach towards sexual behaviors, a mode of representation likely inherited from a longstanding tradition in French cinema for sexual candor (at least in relation to representations of the naked body). In a recent interview, Ferran herself claimed that her film’s “view of sexuality is still in the extreme minority,” that it “considers sexuality without guilt, which is completely opposite to the Puritanism of Lawrence’s time and also to the neo-puritanism, so to
speak, of our time” (cited in Lim 3). She further intimated a conscious intent to challenge the narrow and negative conceptualizations of sex frequently found in contemporary cinema:

It would not be a shocking film, but it would remain transgressive, ... Lawrence’s view that sexuality is not shameful, that it’s part of life — you would think that these issues have been resolved, but if you look at films today, the modern tendency is to show an animalistic sexuality. This representation puts desire on the side of destruction and death. It separates the issue of sexuality from the issue of feeling. It disassociates the mind and the body (cited in Lim, 2007, 3).

While Ferran is clearly at pains to establish parallels between Lawrence’s text and her own, overall, Lady Chatterley not only avoids the novel’s importunate and intrusive editorial voice, but also its inclination towards male egoism. By the mid 20th century Lawrence’s novel had certainly lost its salutary shock value and was increasingly no longer considered a revolutionary story of sexual liberation. Rather, it became a troubling chronicle of women’s subservience to men, a view which was convincingly elucidated by many popular feminist critics, including Simone de Beauvoir in her highly influential book The Second Sex (1973) where she disparages Lawrence for the overt phallocentrism of his work. Ferran’s adaptation of Lawrence’s persistently contentious novel will surely avoid such charges of misogyny; as the film’s title suggests, here, it is Connie, not Mellors/Parkin, who is the chief architect of her own sexual awakening.

Despite vast differences in their approaches, Lawrence and Ferran both attempt to examine the individual’s struggle to find meaning in and through sexual relationships and clearly share a sanguine vision that sees the uninhibited expression of sexuality as a potentially euphoric and transformative experience. In order to awaken readers/viewers to this possibility, the orientation of both the novel and the film seeks to expose what Seung Hyn Hong refers to as “the aridity of a purely mental life” (123). Perhaps Charles M. Burack’s incisive framework for deconstructing Lawrence’s narrative is most useful here as he refers to the initiatory “destructive phase” of the novel whereby the author sets out to “expunge the reader’s deadening sexual ideas and inclinations” (103). As Burack posits, the establishing phase of the
novel infers the detached, mechanized nature of the marriage between Connie and Clifford, of life at Wragby Hall, and, more generally, of the progressively industrialized society these characters inhabit. In the novel, Connie’s youthful sexuality is tainted by encounters in which “the impassioned interchange of talk” is paramount, while “love was only a minor accompaniment” (3), where men “insisted on the sex thing like dogs” (4), and women “could use this sex thing to have power over [them]” (4). In this world, sex has become a mere function (a “thing,” or a “tool” [4]), a charge that surely still resonates in a 21st century context. This functionality does not necessarily extend to Connie’s later marriage to Clifford, for whom “the sex part did not mean much” (9), yet Lawrence makes clear the lack of corporeal intimacy in their union, prior even to Clifford’s paralysis: “sex was merely an accident, or an adjunct: one of the curious obsolete, organic processes which persisted in its own clumsiness, but was not really necessary” (9). Instead, Connie and Clifford “were attached to one another, in the aloof modern way” (13). Of course, these earlier observations in the novel serve to contrast the later sequences where, according to Burack, frequent erotic encounters between Connie and Mellors “evoke an experience of aliveness and connectedness” (105).

In Ferran’s film the earlier “destructive phase” of the narrative does not include explicit reference to Connie’s past love affairs nor does it expound Clifford’s character a great deal. Rather, it heavily exploits a cinematic associational form, chiefly enacted through dialectical shots of the distinctly oppressive Wragby Hall and its beautiful, relatively untamed surrounding landscapes. The film opens with an establishing shot that illuminates the spatial relations between Connie (Marina Hands) and her new home. Ferran’s initial delivery of her female protagonist to the audience sees Connie outdoors, heavily clad against the cold, cutting a conspicuously slight form against a stone-grey, monolithic Wragby Hall. While Lawrence renders Wragby “a long low old house in brown stone[,]...a warren of a place without much distinction” (10), Ferran envisions it as a multi-level, majestic structure, despite its fading façade. Here Wragby’s interior is filled with ostentatious crystal chandeliers, luxurious drapes, heavily-framed Renaissance-style paintings, and weighty mahogany furniture and fittings, patently suggesting Clifford’s material prosperity as well as his penchant for all things relating to the intellect. Despite its grandeur, the film’s Wragby, as in the novel, has an unmistakably dark, dismal
quality which Ferran augments via the use of low-key lighting and a predominance of deep green, black, and dark brown hues. Viewers are given the distinct impression of a place completely devoid of warmth and sensuality, particularly when shots of Wragby are juxtaposed with those of the surrounding woodland. The Midlands of the film are teeming with radiant, fecund life, varying with the seasons: lush grass, tree trunks sheathed in moss, autumn leaves in assorted shades, boisterous birdlife, and scurrying lizards, all of which are frequently combined in montage and are filmed using long takes, compelling viewers to linger on various close-ups of flowers, leaves, droplets of water or animal life before transition to the next shot. Minimal use of non-diegetic sound in the film allows for the prominence of noises stemming from nature (birdcalls, running water, and crunching leaves) that blatantly contrast with the deafening silence found within the walls of Wragby Hall. The stillness inside the Chatterley manor is palpable, connoting a sinister calm, unlike the often frenetic movements of nature (driving snow, bulging cloud, wind-swept branches) at which Connie longingly gazes through Wragby windows, drawing attention to her own inactivity, even passivity. The ambient lighting cast over many film sequences of the landscape creates a dreamy, tranquil quality and sets quite a contrast to the slightly underexposed filming generally used inside the shadowy Chatterley manor. Ferran’s cinematic censure of the ordered, lifeless Wragby Hall represents a wider condemnation of the world of the intellect in competition with the world of the sensual, which is metonymically expressed through nature itself. Undoubtedly, the rigid stability and gloomy calm of Wragby Hall are cold comfort for Connie, whose clear enamorment of the surrounding woodland suggests her mounting restiveness. Connie’s plain sense of forlornness and isolation at this stage of the film are symptomatic of her subconscious suppression of latent sexual desires.

Once Connie’s discontent is clearly established, Ferran sees her venture beyond the walls of the barren Wragby Hall into the idyllic pastoral landscape where she first encounters Parkin. The early scenes of Connie exploring the woods radically contrast those that come later. Initially, Connie strikes an almost absurd figure, trudging through the forest, shored up against the landscape with her heavy clothing, including a burdensome grey coat, stockings, hat and scarf, which, along with her clumsy plodding and expression of bewilderment, set her at odds with the tranquil, flowing movement of the organic
world around her. Ferran imagines Parkin’s rustic lodging situated in the woods as a stone cottage, inseparable from the forest itself, its stoop partially covered in moss and ferns and surrounded by free-ranging chickens. While the novel introduces Mellors with gun in hand, striding through the wood “like the sudden rush of a threat out of nowhere” (47), Parkin’s visual introduction to the film renders him decidedly more vulnerable: he appears half-naked, bathing by the side of the cottage. In the novel, Lawrence suggests Mellors’ link to the organic world in this particular episode by describing him as “a weasel playing with water’ (70),” “a creature purely alone” (70). The film exploits the use of an open form in order to establish this link, as Ferran shoots Parkin predominantly in long-shots where the mise-en-scène is conspicuously dominated by the natural environment. Crosscutting to close-up reaction shots of Connie, who is obscured behind a tree, sees her clearly moved by the vision of the bathing Parkin. The “visionary experience” that “hit … [Connie] in the middle of the body” (70) described in the novel is expressed in the film via Hands’ widening eyes, her mouth held ajar, and a quickening of the breath before she awkwardly retreats. This kind of understated expression of sexual arousal in the film is often accompanied by close-up shots of Connie’s wringing or slightly tremulous ungloved hands, a motif suggesting her anxious yearning for physical touch. Indeed, her initial sexual union with Parkin is immediately preceded by her donning of Parkin’s coarse, soiled garden gloves.

The casting of Jean-Louis Coulloc’h as Parkin has served to provoke some audiences; one particularly disgruntled film reviewer went so far as to claim that “he looks like a beer-bellied[,] middle aged ex-soccer hooligan who has just woken up after a night out” (Duckett 3). Coulloc’h’s physical appeal certainly falls far short of his classically beautiful co-star, Hands, and could be perceived as a confrontational casting decision as it seems to challenge romantic typecasts frequently found in commercial cinema; despite this, it is likely that French audiences would be far less troubled by Ferran’s decision to cast a male lover who does not conform physically to leading man standards (one only has to recall a number of films featuring Gerard Depardieu). Even Hands avoids the artificial shine and sparkle of the make-up artist’s brush for the most part, her numerous freckles and moles remaining unconcealed. While not entirely handsome, Coulloc’h’s roughhewn Parkin certainly holds a particular kind of magnetism. His
burly frame, heavy brow, and Roman nose combine with a permanent frown to make for a pervasive sense of brooding, while his full, red lips seem to hint at a propensity for passionate impulse (a propensity mirrored in the motif of Connie’s red garments worn beneath dark overcoats). Furthermore, the film constructs a flagrant contrast between the virile Parkin and the sexless Clifford, played by Hippolyte Girardot, whose stern, aquiline features and three-piece suits link him, again, to the non-sensual world of reason and refinement, a world that visibly confines Connie. Through her contact with the fecund forest and the bathing Parkin, Connie becomes increasingly drawn towards an untamed, sensual world, an attraction which soon finds its physical realization inside Parkin’s crude work hut.

The representations of Connie and Parkin’s first two sexual encounters in *Lady Chatterley* seem intent on creating resistance to audience gratification and identification. These scenes, while not explicit, show the sexual encounter from beginning to end and avoid the Hollywood tendency to superimpose mood music. Ferran renders Parkin almost repulsive in these scenes, focusing the camera in medium close-up on Coulloc’h’s coarse facial stubble, receding hairline, red, perspiring face, and lined, middle-aged hands which are made incongruous against Hands’ youthful, glowing skin. Parkin’s groans and deep, labored panting are most unbecoming, as is his maladroit groping of Connie’s clothing, breasts, and crotch as she lies seemingly inert on the hut floor. The couple’s first sexual union closes with an unceremonious grunt from Parkin as he ejaculates while Connie reclines beneath him, conspicuously motionless (and “unfulfilled”). The second union transpires in much the same manner, but this time Parkin enjoys his post-coital rapture by collapsing and falling asleep on top of Connie. Here, Coulloc’h’s open-mouthed respiration, along with the verity of his large sleeping frame pressing down on the body of the comparatively diminutive Hands, again compels viewers towards a sense of distaste. The two initiatory sex scenes in the novel are also constructed to an extent so as to be problematic in terms of indulging the reader; however, unlike the film, Lawrence’s novel does allow for a certain form of tender, appealing passion: “The hand stroked her face softly, softly” and “with a quiver of exquisite pleasure he touched the warm soft body, and touched her navel for a moment in a kiss” (126). This related “tenderness” in the novel, however, is often evocative of the relationship existing between a master and his acquiescent animal:
Mellors "drew her up and led her slowly to the hut," directed her to "lie there" and "stroked her....with infinite soothing and assurance" while Connie responded with "a queer obedience" (126). In her incisive study of Lawrence's novel, Tonya Marie Krouse determines that it is clearly Mellors who initiates the sexual performance to follow, and his "mastery in the sexual relationship" is made evident as he ravishes the somewhat reluctant and indeed frigid Connie (58). By contrast, Ferran's male protagonist is stripped of the role of sexual "instructor" in the earlier sex scenes through a suggestion that he lacks a certain conventional sexual prowess. Furthermore, it is Connie who leads Parkin into the hut, an expression of conscious desire and exertion of will further suggested with subtlety by the removal of her hat and a steady perusal of her would-be lover while her chest heaves.

The distinctly mute and docile Connie of the novel who initially receives no pleasure from sex is imagined as a more conscious or "present" (though not "active") participant in Ferran's adaptation. The film achieves this effect most notably through the predominance of overhead medium close-up shots depicting Connie's facial expressions in scenes portraying sex. Through these shots viewers are invited to identify with Connie's perspective as we witness Hands' expression initially imply a sense of bemusement and gradually take on an air of smug self-satisfaction—a far cry from Connie's semi-conscious, dream-like state in the novel. Although Connie could most certainly still be described as a passive recipient in the first two sexual encounters with Parkin in the film, ironically she is imagined as assertive in her role as active observer or at least contemplator. For Ferran, it is Connie's perspective that is paramount. Such prioritizing affords her female protagonist an unmistakable subjectivity that, according to the oft quoted feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, is quite rare in dominant forms of cinema. Daniel Chandler's more recent evaluation of Mulvey's contentions illuminates the ways in which conventional films "not only typically focus on a male protagonist in the narrative but also assume a male spectator" (2). He further underlines Mulvey's ideas in his claim that "traditional films present men as active, controlling subjects and treat women as passive objects of desire, ... and do not allow women to be desiring sexual subjects in their own right" (2). *Lady Chatterley* clearly avoids such inclination towards identification with the on-screen male actor and could even be credited with posing a provocation to traditional
subject-object relations in film more generally. Ferran’s film actually
seems to employ what could be considered a curious form of inversion
as the voyeuristic camera lens at work here finds its focus on the male
on-screen actor, even though his representation clearly does not seek
to procure viewer identification. The film’s early focus on Coulloc’h’s
physical features (in conjunction with its employment of frequent
reaction shots of Connie’s facial expression) arguably exploits the
male body as bearer of meaning, a signifier whose function is to aid in
the expression of Connie’s stirring to consciousness, a journey which
becomes manifest in her sexual awakening.

The construction of subsequent sexual unions between Parkin
and Connie in Lady Chatterley has a markedly different tone from the
first two encounters. Most notably, a far more open form of filming is
employed whereby the contents of the mise-en-scène are expanded
to include various elements of the surrounding flora, highlighting
the copulating couple’s special affiliation and indeed unity with the
natural world. The third sexual encounter sees Connie and Parkin still
predominantly clothed, but this time on the forest floor, where Connie
achieves an orgasm. Disturbingly, this episode as played out in the
novel most certainly constitutes a form of rape: after Connie attempted
“to push him away,” Mellors “held her fast” and looked upon her with
eyes that were “fierce, not loving” (144). The passage continues:

...she had to lie down there under the boughs of the
tree, like an animal, while he waited, standing there
in his shirt and breeches, watching her with haunted
eyes[;]...he made her lie properly, properly...[then]
broke the band of her underclothes, for she did not
help him, only lay inert (145).

By stark contrast, Connie is the initiator of this sex act in Ferran’s film
as she places her lover’s hand over her breast as an impediment to him
walking away and sits astride him during intercourse. Even so, the
stilted presage to their intercourse exposes the fear and shame often
associated with the sexual connection of two people: Parkin avoids eye
contact as he mechanically unclips Connie’s stockings and unbucks his
own belt while Connie buries her face in her lover’s shoulder,
initially hesitant to seek pleasure through rocking her loins as she
straddles her lover. Such tender exposure of the human insecurities
that have arisen around sexuality is surely refreshing for contemporary
viewers who are perhaps accustomed to more implicit reminders of
this persistent cloud of repression manifesting in the form of total evasiveness or, conversely, in what Joel Black refers to as “increased visibility,” the graphically presented yet deeply contrived sexual performances that are indicative of some modern filmmakers’ drive “to bring reality closer to us, to rub our faces in its simulated image” (29). Black contends that, of course, in this latter form of representation, the alleged “depiction of reality does not necessarily entail greater realism – quite the contrary” (29). As Connie and Parkin’s sexual union on the forest floor progresses, the lovers become decidedly less reserved. Connie in particular becomes an “active” participant for the first time, passionately kissing Parkin’s mouth and moving her body with purposeful intent. The closing shots of the scene include an overhead tilt of Connie’s face, smiling and bathed in warm sunlight. To finish, the couple’s growing attachment is inferred via Parkin’s gesture of brushing grass and twigs from the back of Connie’s coat and hair. The sense of a diminishing inhibition achieved in this scene sets the tone for subsequent sexual encounters in the film as the lovers begin to explore one another’s bodies, bringing them closer to the film’s final, and the novel’s most celebrated, sexual episode.

Ferran’s depiction of Connie and Parkin’s naked romp in the rain and of their ensuing sexual union on the muddy forest ground is beautifully picturesque. The sense of a true celebration of uninhibited sexual expression is effectively realized in this seminal scene, which takes the form of a single long take, including a tracking shot pursuing Connie and Parkin’s wild chase through the lush green undergrowth of the forest. Hands and Coullec’h are clearly at ease, despite the challenges inherent in performing such a scene. The actors’ onscreen performances retain a distinctly authentic and indeed joyous quality; there is no Hollywood posturing or pretense in the way they embrace their nakedness, or in the camera’s representation of their naked bodies. Hands and Coullec’h are predominantly framed using medium-long and long shots; there is an absence of the conventional framing of partial bodies, thereby avoiding what Black refers to as the tendency in cinema for the camera to present viewers with a “depersonalized assemblage of body parts” (94) when filming sexual encounters, a fixation that precludes “desire for the ‘whole person’” (93). The naked lovers revel in the glory of the summer shower, dancing, swooping like birds and playfully enacting the scenario of a male animal pursuing his mate. Burr contends that this scene
constitutes “an ode to nature, to Rousseau and the hippie dream of getting back to the garden” (3). The suggestion that Connie and Parkin are finally and completely acknowledging their status as creatures of the natural, living world is inspired by Lawrence’s original impression of the lovers: Connie “looked another creature” (244); her “pointed keen animal breasts tipped and stirred as she moved” (243); Parkin eventually “took her, short and sharp and finished, like an animal” (243). Although the film exploits the inference of a particular kind of animal sexuality, its portrayal of this scene clearly denies the sexual discourses found in cinema that Ferran condemns for placing “desire on the side of destruction and death” through portraying an “animalistic sexuality” (Lim 3). Instead, its convincing staging of a playfully unabashed sexual encounter draws attention to the life-affirming potential of pure, impervious sexual expression. As Stephen Rea recently highlighted, the weight and magnitude of this scene rest in Connie’s (enacted) recognition that “the physical world offers a key to something greater: the knowledge that she, and everything, is alive” (2), a sentiment given further form when Hands and Coullac’h return to the shelter of Parkin’s cottage where they play a lover’s game of placing flowers in each others’ navels and pubic hair. J Hoberman, too, notes the import of the lovers’ relationship to the natural world as expressed in these final sensual scenes in his claim that the film “is not so much a love story (and even less a story about love) than it is a movie of passionate loveliness” (65).
Overall, the political potency of Lady Chatterley’s staging of sex and sexuality must surely be attributed to the fact that Ferran’s depictions are a relative rarity in contemporary cinema in terms of both the vital role they fulfill in progressing the narrative and the actual style in which they are portrayed. Jessica Winters recently observed that “the characters’ erotic awakening” in Lady Chatterley “feels thrillingly organic – something that is discovered and experienced before our eyes” as “each of the film’s six sex scenes advance the narrative and deepen the relationship between Connie and Parkin” (1). Winters’ observations highlight Ferran’s disinclination to exploit the staging of sexual encounters in her film exclusively for the purpose of sexually titillating or indulging the voyeuristic spectator. Such negation arguably challenges a current philosophy underpinning dominant discourses that advocates sex as the “pleasure of pleasures,” an assumption which, according to Hawkes, “perpetuates its specialness,” while at the same time its integration into a world of commodities renders this quality “mundane” (180). Interestingly, Lawrence’s novel also condemns this air of mechanized sensationalism or the “artificial sex-compulsion” (61) that renders sex a mere “excitement that bucked you up for a while, then left you more raggy than ever” (66). Lawrence further notes the likeness between “sex and a cocktail: they both last about as long, had the same effect, and amounted to about the same thing” (68). Such discourses surrounding sex in the contemporary context are packaged as a form of sexual “freedom” in that they represent an attenuation of the perceived sexual prudery of the past; yet, as Hawkes so eloquently posits, they continue to limit our experience of sexual pleasure through “normative boundaries enforced not by shame and stigma [as in Lawrence’s time] but by “rules of play” (166). As noted at the outset of the current investigation, these “rules of play,” or formulaic productions are frequently inspired by imagery deriving from male-oriented pornography which tends to equate “raunch” with sexual “liberation.” As Hawkes contends, there is an “obligation to consume this pre-packed erotic experience” that discourages “a conscious constitution of sexual self,” thereby creating a “plasticity of experience” (182). Hawkes furthers her argument via a keenly perceptive identification of the regulative potency of this phenomenon as it relates to the moral restrictions of the past:

Concepts such as “freedom” and “repression” often do not operate in a linear manner. In late modernity,
the relationship between the two is, rather, reflexive and contingent. Accordingly it could be said that “liberated confusion” has replaced “repressed certainties” (175).

Both Ferran’s film and Lawrence’s novel challenge the dominant ideologies that have dictated and restricted sexual experience within each text’s respective context of production. Ferran’s imagining of a complex (and arguably “authentic”) eroticism provides a refreshing alternative to the dominant sexual discourses of our time. Lady Chatterley seems to take up the radical vision in “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover,” where Lawrence simultaneously denounces what he calls the “perversion of Puritanism” and the “perversion of smart licentiousness” (340). Lawrence calls for men and women to cease “acting up” (338) in sex in order to transcend what has become “mechanical, dull and disappointing” (338) and to ensure that human connection and pleasure become central to sexual experience. Much like the work of Lawrence, Ferran’s representation of sex and sexuality in Lady Chatterley compels us to consider the patterns of thinking that initiate and sustain various forms of sexual repression and illuminates the continuing urgency of representing the expression of marginalized sexual perspectives more generally. In a contemporary struggle to understand and subvert the cultural practices and beliefs that serve to smother the genuine, conscious experience of sexual desire and pleasure, Ferran’s gentle musings on the sexual awakening of Lawrence’s most famous lovers certainly seem worthy of consideration.

**Works Cited**


