The Novel and Its Neighbours

I

My concern in this article is with the sociogenesis of literary texts. By making a case study, I argue for a local or regional idea of their provenance. Conceptions of literature vary with different uses of knowledge, representational techniques and ways of valorising texts. Literary modes of writing and reading involve particular trainings, overlap with so called extra-literary discourses, and help define forms of subjectivity and social relations.

The case I consider is a literary ritual in which texts provide a means of conducting what Foucault has called, in a different context, a work on the self. I focus on the factors which made it possible, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for literary and sexual presentations of the self to converge. The key figure to be discussed here is D. H. Lawrence, not as an author in the post-Romantic sense, but as a “type” of literary subject acting in a confluence of cultural forces. Two lines of enquiry run through the first two sections. What discursive conditions first made possible literary writings of the kind associated with Lawrence? And what was the role of such works in forming the sensibilities of writers and readers? In the last two sections I discuss the implications of my analysis for “humanist” and “deconstructionist” ideas of the relation of literary language and subjectivity.

II Conditions of the Serious Sexual Novel

Far from making a breakthrough from repressed into true knowledge of sexuality (as is assumed in humanist criticism), serious literary writing contributed to a particular construction of the subject, that is, of a capacity to define personal identity in sexual terms. Maurice Charney, for example, endorsing what he paraphrases, wrote that:

D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller . . . are prophets of a sexual apocalypse that represents a new freedom for modern man. Being in tune with your deepest sexual impulses also means being in tune with the life force. Sex is the manifestation of our intuitive, instinctive and primitive nature, which is vitally opposed to the constricting and stultifying life of the mind. It was able to do so only because of its overlap with various social knowledges. By the early twentieth century, these literary neighbours included sexual medicine, sexology, moral psychology and psychoanalysis, so many branches of a “science” which already played a role in what Foucault has called the deployment of sexuality. Of particular

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significance in the present case is the way in which sexual medicine disseminated new norms of individual development. These made questions of health, understood in sexualised terms, newly central to the management of personal life.

To recall Foucault's argument, the nineteenth-century medical organisation of sexuality involved strategies such as the postulate that sex was an "inexhaustible and polymorphous" causal power, and the idea of "a latency intrinsic to sexuality" (65-66). In relation to the former, sex could be imagined as the potential cause of any physical or moral type of problem. Sexual causes and effects were not isolated moments, but were crucial in charting a whole life trajectory, a biography in which all elements could be experienced as interrelated and consequential. It became possible to individuate subjects with reference to norms of healthy development and deviations from them. Foucault argues that medical knowledges implanted perversions. In contrast to an earlier classification of sexual transgressions in terms of acts, in which a binary opposition of licit and illicit was adequate, these knowledges focused on social actors, creating new species of individual requiring investigation (36-49). So, for example, in contrast to the sodomite once defined primarily by the illicit act, the nineteenth-century homosexual came to be identified as a complex subject, a personage with "a past, a case history and a childhood" and a problematic future, a being with a specific character, marked by a certain inversion of the masculine and feminine (43).

The causal powers of sex, if ever-active, were also obscure and elusive. The medical and moral expert emerged as one who could bring to light that which was hidden within the individual. Foucault refers here to the medicalisation of confession, whereby talking about sex acquired a therapeutic function but also deepened the meaning which sexual problems could have (53-73). It might be noted that the immediate doctor/patient relation was not the only important one here. Printed materials, especially manuals and pamphlets, played a major role in laicising medical knowledges and forms of judgment, especially among middleclass readers. Through this print dissemination, the concerns of sexual medicine became part of the habitus of bourgeois families, and were clothed with hygienist, moral and eugenic values. Individuals were sensitised to the problem of their own and others' health, within the patterns of parent/child and wife/husband relations. For instance, within the web of causes and effects, individuals were alerted not only to the harmfulness of masturbation, but also to the problem of what this apparent evil was itself caused by – a flawed upbringing, an inner compulsion, an inappropriate diet or regimen – such that the whole fabric of everyday life was able to be scrutinised (Acton, 1-75; Cowan, 353-67).
In this context, visual observation had a role whose importance relates to Foucault's claim that nineteenth-century sexual science "kept as its nucleus the singular ritual of obligatory and exhaustive confession" (68). Medicalised confession made sex the secret which must be turned over and over, and so intensified the very movements of desire which it sought to regulate. Discourse on sex did not have to pass through the rituals of confessional "speech" at every point. The sexual world of the bourgeois family was semioticised: individuals were encouraged to look at the body and find in its bearing, gestures and appearance so many indices of a state of health and of social aptitude. Literature on masturbation, for example, encouraged parents to police the habit, not necessarily by extracting confessions but by reading the signs of its presence and establishing a watchful and supposedly therapeutic environment (Acton, 7-23, 59-75; Cowan, 353-367). As an indication of these writings, which cultivated a household discipline of observing bodies and reading character, the following extracts may be cited. In relation to a subheading for Chapter XXV, "Signs in the boy, girl or man, that he who runs may read" (16), Cowan quotes Lallemand on the effects of self-abuse:

Beside the slow and progressive derangement of his or her health, the diminished energy of application, the languid movement, the stooping gait, the desertion of social games, the solitary walk, late rising, livid and sunken eye, and many other symptoms, will fix the attention of every intelligent and competent guardian of youth. (362)

On the same problem, P. H. Chavasse, M. D. writes: "The whole nature revolts against such artificial means and the confirmed masturbator bears the impress of her penalty in his manner and upon his face" (Man's Strength and Woman's Beauty, 1879, 392). These techniques of observation and secular confession comprised a style of physical and moral self-management, exercised within middle-class domestic life.

Even in fostering a desire for self-improvement, sexual medicine made for a certain volatility of family sensibilities, as can be seen in the fear that "over-mothering" would create homosexual tendencies in sons. Everyday exposure to medical surveillance made it possible for individuals to internalise various norms and feel new kinds of anxiety, alarm, guilt, failure and embarrassment, and to engage in new kinds of introspection. The pages of Acton's The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs give an insight into this pathogenic dimension of Victorian medicine. Appealing to colleagues to humanise their practice by considering the psychological, emotional and moral issues of sex, Acton publishes his work precisely in order to exert "some good and practical influence on public health and public morals" (xiii). Yet the cases and anecdotes he relates show that his male patients and readers could literally worry themselves sick in ways that would not have been possible before the intensification of medical concerns with masturba-
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...tion and similar failings, and their effects on physical and mental health (69ff).

This medicalisation of sex is relevant to the work of writers like Lawrence in so far as the latter is made possible by a broader "discursive" of sex and related "consciencing" of subjects. In particular, literature is able to adapt medical frameworks of narrative and characterisation (Stephen Heath, who has argued for the idea of "sexuality" as a recent cultural construction, refers to the patterns of characterisation and narrative in "novelistic" writing in sexology, literature, and pornography). For instance, Lawrence's literature relies upon the dramatic figures of the impotent male and the hysterical or frigid female to relate stories of sexual sickness and cure. Readers are asked to take seriously situations in which, beginning from a state of immaturity or moral imbalance, certain characters find spiritual regeneration by discovering sexual vitality and harmony.

In general, this excursion into sexual medicine gives force to the argument that literature does not "represent" some given experience of sexuality. If the apparatus of sexuality has marked "a will to know," as Foucault puts it, then literature itself has become one means of deploying knowledge of sex and shaping the self (La volonté de savoir — the will to knowledge — is the French title of volume one of The History of Sexuality).

The second major factor which made serious sexual literature possible was a local transformation of sexual knowledges into aesthetic terms, through a new application of the Romantic dialectic of thought and feeling (and its variants such as norm and experience). To give an example, distinctions between the masculine and the feminine, made in terms of physiological essences or psychological tendencies, were intensified dialectically in relation to the couple, and the possibility of balancing rational and affective forces within oneself. The aesthetic study of sexuality was found across a number of fields, which can only be named in passing here. It embraced concerns within sexual medicine itself, developments in sexology, and Romantic elements in psychoanalysis, including Freud's dialectic of drives and norms or the unconscious and the conscious. Importantly, in relation to Lawrence, it also included the charismatic role accorded a figure like Edward Carpenter, who exerted an influence on the fringe of progressive political and cultural movements such as Fabianism and feminism.

How do the literary texts of Lawrence operate within these mixed circumstances? They reinforce that relation between sexual acts (or thoughts) and personalities which medicalised knowledges have already forged. They also sustain the imagery of perversion, confronting readers with it at the heart of so-called normal sexuality, signifying possibilities which must be confronted in order to know the whole self. Such sexual imagery is organised in dialectical terms, which take on pathological shades of meaning. Consider the following tenets of Law-
rentian writing. If one is too mental or self-conscious in relation to sex, experience is reduced to a self-centred idea. So, for instance, “mentally active” women repress the feminine flow of feeling which might otherwise be released through the phallic discovery. Mental one-sidedness, or didacticism, is a malaise equivalent to masturbation, a crippling denial of spontaneous knowledge of the body. At the same time, one must be careful not to become morbidly sensual and fall in an equally damaging way to realise the spiritual significance of sex. Both kinds of failure are written into the Connie/Michaelis relation in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, for example. The truth is found in the possibility of androgyny, that is, a heightened and balanced state of being in which masculine and feminine, rational and affective, impulses modify one another continually.

Here it is worth noting that, for the first time in serious literature, sexual excitation is considered necessary in order to tap dimensions of sensuous experience that lie beyond the reach of norms and engrained fears, and so renew the moral self. The serious novel appropriates from pornography forms of imagery, narrative and characterisation which are already suffused with the medicine of perversions. It does so in order to turn them into paths of confectional inquiry leading towards the deepest truths of the self.

Foucault’s argument that a shift occurs in middle-class concerns with sexuality in the late nineteenth century is relevant to the present case. Initially the bourgeoisie was distinguished by acquiring a specific, sexual body, a “class” body signifying “health, hygiene, descent, and race”: “The bourgeoisie’s ‘blood’ was its sex” (*History of Sexuality*, 124). Once the whole social body was provided with a sexual body, bourgeois distinction would be claimed “not by the ‘sexual’ quality of the body, but by the intensity of its repression” (129). Lawrentian literature was made possible by, and in turn contributed to, this later bourgeois problematisation of sex.

### III Studies in Subjectivity

Lawrentian texts were artistic studies in subjectivity, not in any narrow sense of an aesthetic pursuit undertaken for its own sake, but in the broader sense that they provided the means for rehearsing problems in writers’ and readers’ relation to themselves. Literary characterisations provided a mirror in which to look for the harmony or disharmony of one’s own moral life. Novels could operate for Lawrence and his readers as models of conduct, whose meaning lay not in any finished content (identification with this or that character), but in the imaginative teasing out of dialectical possibilities of personal growth.

This ethical burden of the Lawrentian text may be specified by making a contrast between two different but historically linked uses of literacy. In order to do so, it is helpful to recall the distinction Foucault
decay (Cowan, 95-113). The mechanism of this economy was associated by many writers with the nature of vital fluids which, through self-discipline, were stored and transformed into other physical, psychological and moral forces (Cowan, 85-107 and Acton, 76-128). On the other hand, within the same framework, it could be held that denial of all sexual passion was unwise and that its careful expression was healthy (Acton, 76-128). Such issues involved the whole family, for medical sins of the parents could be visited upon the children, according to various notions of influence and genetic transmission of strengths and weaknesses, such as “transmitted amativeness” (Cowan, 357ff. and Fowler, 235ff).

Such writings should not be treated, through a sweeping generalisation (of the kind Marcus makes about sexual medicine in The Other Victorians), as signs of a unified and repressive ideology which a self-evidently progressive knowledge of sexuality would shortly replace. These writings contain various medical, religious and political definitions of virtue, and cannot easily be categorised in terms of the single opposition of repression/expression which has been used in much literary and cultural history. So, for instance, a feminist concern with personal rights and spaces was compatible with medical arguments which played down the importance of sexual passion. A wife was not to be obliged by a husband’s sexual demands (Blackwell, 49-53 and Cowan, 394). Even if it was linked to notions of the maternal role, a policy of minimising physical gratifications in order to make this kind of autonomy possible appears as an advance when viewed against the horizon on which an attempt to introduce rape in marriage laws was made in the 1890s.13

I turn now to the erotisation of love in and around Lawrence literature. This would have been impossible without the longer term reform of marriage around a core of affective relations, such as those discussed above. At the same time, a shift is made from “the law of continence” (to use a term from Cowan’s The Science of a New Life, 114-130) to a situation where erotic mutuality is made the spiritual hearth of marriage. Once again, Lawrence is merely one figure contributing to the formation of a fashion. Two brief references may be made to areas of writing which had a similar influence in sex reform, to help contextualise the Lawrencean work.

In the sexological developments represented by Havelock Ellis, erotic pleasure came to be defined as a distinct personal capacity. This is not to say that no importance had previously been attached to passion in sexual science (see, for example, Acton, 106-128 and Fowler, 637-706). But sexology made explicit a theme that guilt free acceptance of erotic impulses was important to self-expression. In Ellis, we see a typical aesthetic notion of sexual “play,” that is, a scheme for the dialectical renewal of physical and intellectual energies.
makes in *The Use of Pleasure* between morality, as a general rule or code of behaviour, and ethics, as the way in which individuals constitute themselves as its subjects. To show that there may be different ways of practising the same moral code, Foucault gives the example of conjugal fidelity, which reveals several key elements (25-32). Practising fidelity can entail different ways of determining the ethical substance, that is, nominating some part of the self over which to become one's own steward. So, for example, one might act as one does through respect for personal obligations, or in order to attain mastery over one's desires. Then there are different modes of taking individual responsibility in relation to a moral code: one might be moved to act as a member of some community, as heir to a spiritual tradition, or in order to offer an exemplary personal life. Differences occur also in the form of ethical work performed on the self: for instance, fidelity might mean an abrupt renunciation of pleasures or a long vigil over all movements of desire. Finally there are different ways of establishing the goal of moral actions. Fidelity may be given importance within a project of self-discipline, or as a means of self-purification assuring spiritual salvation, and so on. Through these variable modes of conduct, the individual becomes no mere cipher of a code but the subject of moral action.

My historical contrast with Lawrentian writings is found in the manuals of sexual medicine of the Victorian era. Briefly, and without ignoring differences amongst these medical texts, it can be established that fidelity was there related to an ethic of sexual restraint in marriage. If one keeps in mind the methodological issues just presented, this case of conscience formation is more complex than the dismissal of Victorian morality as repression makes it appear. The singling out of the husband/wife relation as a crucial domain of moral conduct bore directly on the willingness of individuals to manage the physical and emotional aspects of their own sexuality. A particular concern with individual responsibility was reflected in the pastoral mode of address of these manuals: only through the cooperation of partners would the "natural laws" of human sexuality, projected by a guiding science, be made good for the individual, family, race or nation. The kind of ethical work on the self called for was a personal commitment, a continuous care exercised in preparing oneself for marriage, choosing a partner, and monitoring behaviours within the family. In terms of goals, conjugal fidelity was seen as an ongoing labour of love, necessary for physical and moral health, such that it was not strange to see sexual restraint as central to the meaning of fidelity, paving the way towards "perfect unity of souls" (Cowan, 394).

Central to these concerns was the notion of an economy of sexual subjectivity. This involved a direct interrelation of moral and physical energies. Disturbance in any part could affect the balance of the whole self. So, for example, yielding to sexual appetite drained all the individual's powers, and caused physical ailments, nervous debility and moral
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Play is primarily the instinctive work of the brain, but it is brain activity united in the subtlest way to bodily activity. In the play function of sex two forms of activity, physical and psychic, are most exquisitely and harmoniously blended.

*(Little Essays of Love and Virtue, 132)*

Ellis directs attention towards the “wise use” of pleasure (Objects of Marriage, 8-9). That is, in a work of self-analysis and self-mastery, the individual will learn that eroticism is a vital impulse yet one which must be kept in touch with all other faculties, a recommendation akin to that found in the work of Lawrence.

In his influential works on marriage, first published in the 1920s, T. H. Van de Velde counsels the reader that happiness can only be attained by accepting and indeed maximising masculine and feminine differences as he defines them. Such recognition is necessary in order to understand the reality of unconscious hostilities, the source of “a ‘disease’ to which everyone is more or less exposed” (Sex Hostility in Marriage, 278), but which in normal circumstances may be prevented or cured through mutual emotional and erotic expression. This kind of text, taking up elements of psychoanalysis, retains the notion that there is a precarious economy in the health of the sexual being. What has changed from the sexual medicine of writers like Blackwell and Cowan is the type of emphasis placed on elements within that economy. A reversal has occurred whereby for Van de Velde (or Ellis or Lawrence), it is the absence or neglect of erotic love which is damaging to individual well-being and to marital relations.

Even although a marriage, based on feelings of love for one’s neighbour, on insight and understanding, adaptability and goodwill, and on union and community of interests, may be a marriage without antagonism, even a harmonious marriage — it is still not a marriage in the full meaning of the word. It requires, in addition to all this, in addition to the love as described by St Paul, *sexual love*. There is no true marriage without erotic love, and no ideal marriage unless the practice of sexual love approach perfection. (Sex Hostility in Marriage, 268)

Invoking his communications with “mental specialists,” Van de Velde warns that unsatisfied married sexual life has “fatal consequences” for “mental equilibrium and mental health” (269).

This focus on erotic experience, including the techniques of perfecting it, is part of a marriage reform movement in which aesthetic self-fashioning had a role. Just as Van de Velde refers to the “moral law of asceticism” as “unnatural” (270, note), so Ellis criticises the view that “continence is the only alternative to the animal end of marriage”:

That argument ignores the liberating and harmonising influences, giving wholesome balance and sanity to the whole organism, imparted by a sexual union which is the outcome of the psychic as well as the physical needs. (Object of Marriage, 8-9)
Similarly, for Lawrence, suppression of the affective, erotic self destroys the vital forces just as surely as excess wasted the vital fluids, in the view of Victorian physicians. What counts as fidelity, and the mode and purpose of exercising it, has changed, since being faithful, being truly married, now involves liberating the secret of sexual acts. The moral life has grown abstract, cold and dry. Individuals must know pleasure again, not as self-conscious or instinctual gratification, but as the flame which purifies the soul and harmonises act and thought. The literary labour “to make the sex relation valid and precious” is thus an extremely particular channelling of sex reforms, not some neutral recognition of the truth of the body, and of men’s and women’s personal rights, as would later be supposed by critics such as Richard Hoggart who adopted the same mode of self-presentation:

Nowhere in this book does Lawrence attack or seek to weaken the institution of marriage. “Marriage is the clue to human life,” he once said; and speaking directly about *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* he added:

The instinct of *fidelity* is perhaps the deepest instinct in the great complex we call sex. Where there is real sex there is the underlying passion for fidelity… It’s just the awful and truly unnecessary *recoil* from these things that I would like to break. It’s a question of conscious acceptance and adjustment—only that. God forbid that I should be taken as urging loose sex activity.

Yet even when married we can be uneasy or ashamed about sex, and so our marriages may be distorted. Lawrence wanted the body’s rights to be recognised, gladly but not pruriently:

This is the real point of this book. I want men and women to be able to think of sex, fully, completely, honestly, and clearly,… Years of honest thoughts of sex, and years of struggling action in sex will bring us at last where we want to get, to our real and accomplished chastity, our completeness, when our sexual act and our sexual thought are in harmony, and the one does not interfere with the other.16

It is not necessary to posit any direct exchange between such early twentieth-century writers as I have cited in order to make the point that they are part of a polemical and practical intervention in forms of organising the person. The condition of their discourse was the mobility of a specific number of techniques for knowing the self, including forms of narrative and characterisation. The style of marriage reform in question reinforced essentialist male/female distinctions, in order to generate a dialectic of heterosexual desire, which appeared to transcend all normative fixings of identity. This eroticising of fidelity itself constituted a new, or sharply altered, norm and threshold of expectations, with its own pathogenic possibilities of failure, inadequacy, betrayal and
power struggle. Readers were invited to understand their own subjectivity in the light of certain masculine and feminine characteristics which were said to have an organic basis. Van de Velde defines the “nature” of “Woman” in terms of a dominating emotional capacity, restriction of the conscious mind, reserves of intuition and suggestibility, variability of feelings and a need for violent stimuli (Sex Hostility in Marriage, 41-53). “Man” is identified with rationality, logical thought, objective judgement, egocentricity, and a kind of kinetic energy complementing female potential energy and elasticity (29-40, 80-92). The woman’s submissive, emotional nature is to be moulded by the man, who realises her “sensitivity and plasticity,” her “maternal instinct” and “intuitive understanding of the significance of the sexual act and its results” (270-71). Erotic fulfilment, in harmony with moral feelings, is a form of insurance, uniting the woman with the man who has given her the “love life” (271). The perfecting of pleasure, including “body and psyche, soul and senses,” is in turn the “best guarantee for the fidelity of the man,” and prevents the dominance of mental life which characterises yet threatens masculinity (271). 13

In the case of Lawrence, novels and other works, from The Fox to Lady Chatterley’s Lover, operate in similar terms. The narratives typically progress from an initial state of ethical incompleteness or dissociation, including the malaise of mental consciousness, through scenes of erotic awakening, into the possibility of realising all potentialities of the self and the true relation of man and woman. They depend on and reproduce the characterology already discussed. So, for instance, either women are too mental, and hysterically repress their emotional nature, or they allow themselves to find fulfilment in a heterosexual relation; the rounded character moves from the former into the latter state. Thus, in Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Connie begins as a victim of her own and her husband’s mental consciousness and gradually, through erotic stimulus and soul-searching, achieves what is seen as liberation and maturity. Whereas in social life men were kind only to the “person” she was, Mellors was kind to the “female” in her, “to her womb” and true body (126). Such writing continues to saturate the female body with sexuality, enmeshing it in notions of pathology, thus according with a strategy which Foucault describes as the imaging of the “nervous woman” (History of Sexuality, 104). The characterisation here includes a notion of maternal instinct which, in contrast to earlier notions of maternal capacity found in the already mentioned texts of Blackwell and Cowan, is linked to erotic intensification, and subjection to the phallus (Lady Chatterley’s Lover, 117-20, 140-41). It also includes the aesthetic transformation of perversions, mentioned above. For example, the pornographic motif of anal intercourse is translated into a literary epiphany, an apparent transcendence of sexual difference through a necessary, excitatory purging of mental consciousness and female independence.
Such portrayals invite the reader to participate in a certain style of ethical amusement, in which a detailed, continuous problematising of pleasures becomes crucial in defining one’s moral relation to experience. I have sketched a discursive context which makes possible this refinement of literary preoccupations and capacities. It is within this context that the writer and reader are able to position themselves among the cognoscenti, versed in the problems of repression, self-scrutiny and the true mediation of desire, and to measure literary value through the mode of ethical work which it allows.

IV On Humanist Literary Criticism

Humanist criticism attributes an essence to literature, which is the power to represent directly the intricacies of human experience, transforming them into a meaningful pattern without losing the sense of their lived immediacy. Working within this critical tradition, Charney argues that sexual fiction “could resurrect the novel as a vital and lively form” (Sexual Fiction, 169). Such fiction must be judged by the same criteria as other literature, in terms of how convincingly it creates images of life, and its importance lies in “the powerful evocation of a sexual, eroticised reality” (11, 169).

Laughter and tears cannot by themselves be the criteria for comedy and tragedy, just as orgasm cannot possibly be the touchstone for sexual fiction. It is writing not life that we are dealing with, so that if we are moved, there must be some vision of life intensely depicted by which we judge the quality of the work. We must be made to feel the meaningfulness of the deaths in tragedy, the marriages in comedy and the orgasms (or lack of orgasms) in sexual fiction. (11)

The language of sexual fiction is assumed to be both sensuous and reflective. Charney views it as “an intense and physical engagement of the imagination” (167). This imaginative heightening is not solipsistic for it conveys “insights of the most searing kind of truth” and allows us to explore our most profound experience of humanity (169). In a similar vein, Marcus argues that literature possesses a wealth of intentions, organically relating sexual interest to the whole complex life of the emotions and the intelligence. In contrast, pornography has only one intention which is to arouse the reader, hence its mechanical and repetitious nature (Other Victorians, 278-84). For Marcus, pornography is the dark side of the flawed representations of sex imposed by official culture and knowledge, including sexual medicine (xxi-xxi, 1-77). He sees serious sexual literature as a great “breaking through” in which novelists attacked the hypocrisy, guilt and double-dealing of the bourgeoisie, in order to awaken society to the truths of sex which it had suppressed to its own cost (287-88).
In contrast to this narrative and teleological history of literature’s relation to sexuality, the previous sections have used a method which may be described as genealogical. This approach treats a literary form as a contingent ensemble of rhetorical conventions, techniques and social knowledges stemming from potentially diverse historical sources and possessing no essential unity. The “extra-literary” knowledges considered appear insignificant if one assumes that creative literature speaks for itself. However, from a genealogical point of view, they assume much greater relevance to literary criticism: they are seen to make possible, and to inform, a particular kind of literary program. The genealogical inquiry works against the principle of writing a history as a linear narrative in which different cultural practices are assumed to manifest, in varied hues, an underlying continuity of experience.  It is appropriate here to summarise the consequences for humanist notions of literature which flow from a study of discontinuities.

First, far from recovering a long suppressed truth of human experience, the serious sexual novel can be seen as an instrument which helps to construct and regulate sexualities in a new way. It can be viewed as a textbook disseminating particular norms and techniques of self-formation, interweaving the sense of person with eroticised images of the couple. Second, there is no point at which the literary work synthesises and transcends “extra-literary” knowledges by giving an immediate apprehension of experience. The works in question do not go beyond “merely technical” discourse into a fully human knowledge of sexuality, but adapt particular techniques of self-understanding within a scene of writing. This is also a scene of reading. Educative sexual novels in the tradition of Lawrence could be thought of as “figured texts,” by analogy with that form of musical score containing indications which a player, equipped with appropriate theoretical and technical skills, can realise. These points apply even to what might appear to be essentially literary devices – such as novelistic dialogue, setting, and point of view – and hence show the inadequacy of the distinction between organic and mechanical, or creative and utilitarian, uses of language. The literary imagings found in Lawrence, in which psychological, physiological and moral meanings are condensed, are not “representations” of experience but are, to use Marcel Mauss’s anthropological term, “techniques of the body.” That is, they are ways of modelling physical and mental attributes and activities which are permeated by specific cultural beliefs and norms. The metaphors already operating in sexual medicine, such as the notion of vital fluids essential to the physical/moral economy of the self, may be seen as discursified bodily techniques, since they are imaginary categories which nonetheless have real effects. Lawrence’s writing may be seen in similar terms. Lawrentian dialogue and introspection depend on the medicalised, confessional inquiry into sex as the secret cause used in the quest for fulfilment and harmony in the sexual
soul. This is evident in, for example, the representation of Connie’s pining away caused by the failure of men to provide “healthy human sensuality, that warms the blood and freshens the whole being” (Lady Chatterley’s Lover, 73).

Her body was going meaningless, going dull and opaque, so much insignificant substance. It made her feel immensely depressed and hopeless. What hope was there? She was old, old at twenty-seven, with no gleam and sparkle in the flesh. Old through neglect and denial, yes, denial. Fashionable women kept their bodies bright like delicate porcelain, by external attention. There was nothing inside the porcelain; but she was not even as bright as that. The mental life! Suddenly she hated it with a rushing fury, the swindle! (72)

The Lawrentian texts relay a particular technique of looking, eroticising the landscape of personal and social relationships, which continues the sexualisation of vision and self-inquiry already found within the intimacies of the medical family. The novelistic organisation of point of view – the identification with desires and the ironic portrayal of pathologies such as sterility, hysteria and impotence – is here inseparable from a wider attempt to systematise conducts around the norm of eroticisation.

Third, the materials studied support the claim that literary forms and capacities are local and artefactual. The writings of Lawrence were originally produced and consumed within a minor sub-culture, in contrast to the broader circulation they would have later through the education system. Many of them appeared in specialised journals and, while the novels had more general circulation and review, the readers most likely to take such works seriously belonged to highly educated, upper middle-class circles. These writings worked a small patch, and Lawrence’s choice to use the novel as his main medium need not be taken, as it often has been, primarily as an attempt to reach a wider public and democratically renew the whole English culture. On the contrary, it can be seen as sustaining a project of social distinction, cultivating a prestigious form and taste. The serious use of erotic fiction depended on the acquisition of the dual abilities to take personally the problematic of repression, and to read sexual portrayals dialectically as a way of projecting and balancing the deepest possibilities of the self. This use of fiction, which changed for some what was accepted as literary value, provided a way of differentiating oneself culturally, not only from consumers of popular entertainments, but also from other middle-class fashions of taste associated with, for example, the satires of Galsworthy, since these other forms could all be deemed to fail, in their own ways, to realise sex, that is, they could be deemed insufficiently dialectical.

While relativising the role of a literary form, one might emphasise that Lawrentian literary ethics had no monopoly on the formation of conscience in questions of sexuality. As Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley
argue with reference to religious practices, forms of conscience, like other personal capacities, are organised in different ways by particular rituals, techniques and beliefs.23 As subjectivised modes of systematising conduct (136-37), they are related to particular styles and norms of ethical practice. Central to the Lawrencean regime of erotic relations was a characterology whose anti-feminism was contested in various spheres. These contestations ranged from the arguments made by a writer like Blackwell (referring to herself as a “Christian physiologist”) in the 1880s against the related assumptions that wives who have reservations about the terms in which sexual pleasure is expected to be experienced possess, according to the type-casting of the frigid woman, “no sexual passion,” and that women are “more tyrannically governed than men by the impulses of physical sex” because of their physiological and maternal nature (1, 50-53), to criticisms, written contemporaneously with Lawrence’s novels, of the stereotyping of women and men in sexology and literature.41

V On “Deconstruction”

I conclude my reflections on critical methodology with a contrast between a “genealogy of techniques” and literary “deconstruction” associated with the work of Jacques Derrida.25 Derrida’s critique of “logocentrism” challenges the humanist notion that language expresses and guarantees the presence of the speaking subject. He builds on the methods of structural linguistics to argue that the individual utterance is always articulated within a system of differences, which introduces a tension between presence and absence. Each element signifies only in relation to that which it is not, and so is a trace of difference. In Of Grammatology Derrida claims that some aspects of Saussurean linguistics allowed an original unity to be imagined between signifier and signified, concept and voice, a unity supposedly embodied in a speaking subject’s presence within the logos (27-43). The project of Derrida’s “grammatology” is to define the articulation of difference which is the unthought condition of subjectivity in language, and which divides and disperses the subject historically. According to Gayatri Spivak, Derrida sees the trace of difference as “the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience” (“Translator’s Preface,” xvii). Derrida invents the term différence to suggest, through a deliberate spelling mistake, the principle of division always already at work within the articulation of the apparently self-identical sign (Speech and Phenomena, 129-33). The same root contains the sense both of differing and deferring: this non identity is overlooked in speech since différence and différence sound the same, but is foregrounded in the silent graphic play of writing.

This conception of difference carries over into Derrida’s conception of literary form in so far as this can be read off from his essay on genre.26
Here he suggests that a text is conventionally seen as subject to a “law of genre” or necessity of form. This law is undermined, however, by a counter law, an impurity, “an axiom of impossibility” which confounds its sense (204). Genres are not neatly rounded unities; all attempts to classify them as such are threatened by “disruptive anomalies” (204). These anomalies occur in the very process of repetition (through the trace of difference) which at first appears to reinforce a particular form, such that genres exist only in their own margins, in a continual undermining of identity.

For Derrida, there are two related ways in which difference supplements genre. If a genre provides a frame, a trait by which we recognise membership of a class, a text may also “re-mark” on this distinctive element within itself. This supplementary “re-mark of belonging... does not belong” (211-12). In speaking (remarking) generically, a text is speaking of (re-marking) genre. So a text participates in a genre or several genres, without belonging: “(m)aking genre its mark, a text demarcates itself.” Genre designations “can never simply be part of the corpus” (212): whether present or not – since absence is telling – they reveal the play of difference. The trace of alterity occurs not only between signs but within the individual sign or trait. At the same time, and this is the second sense of the supplement, this trace defers identity. The re-marking materially re-inscribes the mark (sign), realises one possibility among many, and indicates that a text could always take another form within the play of signification. In this process of differencing and deferring, genre is placed under erasure. In her discussion of Derrida and Freud, Gayatri Spivak refers to the otherness of unconscious psychic processes and of language as something which cannot be made present to consciousness:

Something that carries within itself the trace of a perennial alterity: the structure of the psyche, the structure of the sign. To this structure, Derrida gives the name “writing.” The sign cannot be taken as a homogeneous unit bridging an origin (referent) and an end (meaning) as “semiology,” the study of signs, would have it. The sign must be studied “under erasure,” always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such. “Semiology” must give place to “grammatology.” (Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” xxxix)

Like the terms “being” and “sign,” the very name “genre” can be made to cross itself, to show that the canonic demands of form are playfully obeyed, yet are thwarted, exceeded.

What similarities and differences emerge between this apparatus of deconstruction and the mode of analysis used above? First, the Derridean account of genre supports the argument that there is nothing intrinsic to a work which guarantees its recognition as literature, identical with itself, and that valorisations of a work as literary cannot be
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separated from particular techniques of writing and organisations of critical judgment. Second, the notion that genres are not pure, but are constantly mixed, partly coincides with a "discursive" interest in the variability of literary forms and their overlap with other cultural knowledges. Third, deconstruction calls off the search for a transcendent origin (consciousness, psyche, spirit of the age). In relation to the present example, it would be consistent with Derrida's work to argue that no essential relation exists between literature and sexuality. The normative use of literature considered here would be granted no ethical privilege as an original representation reaching back to authentic presence.27

On the other hand, Derrida's paradoxical account of genre employs a characteristically "post-structuralist" argument, where signification is given the general form of a dialectic between a principle of coherence and a principle of incoherence.28 Deconstructive theory continues to hypothesise - with an ironic insistence necessary to its dialectical argument - a pure constraint of identity, precisely so that it can continually assert the impossibility of writing as an un-mixed, self-identical form. As a critical practice, deconstruction offers the possibility of reading any literary text in terms of that singular process in which a structuring opposition is un-made (yet perpetuated) from within, through the play of difference and the dialectical interrelation between opposing elements. The drama of difference is identical with the historical experience of the subject who writes and reads the text in which ideological closure of meaning is always forestalled.

The difference of method may be registered by returning to the Lawrence example. I noted above that a certain medical and moral organisation of the person was there wedded to a practice of aesthetic self-stylisation. In contrast to deconstruction, my question is not whether literary writing here answers to some putative demand of form, or resists it through an internal contradiction which always already points the way towards its deconstruction. The objective is to describe the representational means and practical arrangements involved in a particular use of literature by writers and readers. One outcome of this description is the possibility that the kind of techniques and knowledge relations found in one practice of writing may be found to bear little resemblance to those involved in another. The question of historical limits and contextual differences has become a difficult one for deconstructive criticism to handle, given the latter's "formalistic" reliance on a highly generalised linguistic theory of difference. As it happens, deconstructive readings of Lawrence and similar texts make perfect sense in their own terms. But this is because, in order to generate their radical ontology of signification, they reproduce the aesthetic dialectic of writing about sex, including notions of the masculine as a principle of closure and the feminine as a dangerous principle of excess, whose historical emergence has been described here. This strategy is evident in,
for example, Heath's *The Sexual Fix*. While showing the indebtedness of literary to non-literary forms, Heath's analysis works within the terms of the aesthetic dialectic historicised here. It begs the key question of whether literature has any necessary relation to sexuality, by assuming that literary writing is the acting-out of some essential, psychical subject-formation, even if that process is marked by ideological imbalances between norms and desires. Derrida's radical ontology of signification, as elaborated in his deconstructive reading of Maurice Blanchot's *La Folie du jour* ("The Law of Genre," 213-29), reproduces a dialectic between "masculine" closure and identity and "feminine" openness and otherness, in a form of argument made possible only by the historical convergence of aesthetics and sexuality.

The differences of approach might be underlined by noting the ways in which a category like law is invoked. In deconstruction, and related post-structuralist criticism, the law is a symbolic principle of order, to be understood dialectically in relation to its other, a ludic principle which transforms it (cf. Derrida's apparently subversive use of the term "law" in "The Law of Genre," 46, and Heath's references to "the Law" in *The Sexual Fix*, 82). Given the study made above, what is to be gained by attributing a general, dialectical form to the law, as if it comprised an essential unity within a totality of relations? If we take a particular area of common law, namely obscenity law, we see that it has indeed played a role in regulating practices of writing. But it has worked within a shifting ensemble of cultural relations and institutionalised knowledges with no central, controlling logic. In the nineteenth century, English obscenity law operationalised norms of moral and physical health deriving from the sexual "sciences." It thus authorised morally improving works, including educative medical and literary texts, while seeking to control the flow of publications which were considered harmful to vulnerable kinds of individual, especially the young. The law thus helped construct the very categories "literature" and "pornography" by ensuring that they had different circulations and uses.

What, then, of the fact that a book such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* counted for a long time as pornography? Was this not a case of the law misrecognising literature? On the contrary, it shows that the category "literature" is not a given. Generic distinctions, such as those made between literature and pornography, erotica and obscenity, are produced through complex social relations, and are linked to particular formations of readerships and their capacities. The educative novel posed a problem for obscenity law only when it was "pornographised." Representing an artistic avant-garde, Lawrence pressed the claim that it was absurd to "censor" earnest sexual literature which is life-affirming, in contrast to pornography which does dirt on sex and on life (Phoenix, 175). However the merit of that claim was not obvious to legal administrators. The text which was spiritually cleansing for someone like
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Lawrence might be moral poison for others who were not versed in the esoteric art of distancing themselves aesthetically from the excitation created in explicitly sexual portrayals. As shown above, Lawrentian literature, in its very form and purpose, was enmeshed in those moral norms and knowledges which were the basis for specific medical, legal and literary regulations of sexuality and particular formations of audiences. The historical materials considered here indicate a limit to those forms of criticism which continue to valorise “literary” writing as the intrinsically revolutionary scene of desire, transgressing all normative containments.

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7 I am indebted here to work in progress by Ian Hunter. On Romantic dialectics and their institutional fortunes more generally, see Hunter, Culture and Government (London: Macmillan, 1988).
9 An aesthetic interest in sexuality is made fashionable by books like Carpenier’s Love’s Coming of Age (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1905). A sexualising of the Romantic stages of individual and social life (the unity, disunity and higher re-unification of human faculties) here issues in guide-


17 Despite a view of equality of erotic rights that is different from Van de Velde's, similar definitions of masculine and feminine characteristics are found in the work of Ellis, such as *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* and *The Erotic Rights of Women* (London: British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, 1917).


See the argument of Lord Brentford (former Home Secretary) in *Do We Need a Censor?* (London: Faber, 1929) that certain readers need to be protected from the possible harm of sexual representations even if these are encountered within serious-minded literary publications.

The terms of legal regulation of obscenity were to change significantly by the mid-twentieth century to admit the aesthetic line of argument. See Ian Hunter, David Saunders and Dugald Williamson, “Obscenity, Literature and the Law,” in Gary Wickham, ed., *Social Theory and Legal Politics* (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1987) 76-92.