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TRANSFORMATIONS OF ALIENATED SEXUALITY IN LAWRENCE AND BARNES

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Roland Barthes's famous account of the "text of bliss," introduced in *The Pleasure of the Text*, involves a situation where the reader's "relation with language" is brought to a crisis by the movement of the text (Barthes 14). It is in the *excess* of the text, the gaps in its structure and the play of language beyond referential meaning, where desire is produced and located. Though an application of Barthes's vocabulary to literature, done so frequently in the last half-century or so, often leads to a reductive account of desire in the text(s), his conceptualization foregrounds the possibility that narratives can legitimately produce (as well as reflect) desire in a number of different ways. In this essay, I will attempt to read D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* and Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* in a way that respects the difference in their representations of sexuality and their corresponding structures of desire, and that explores those differences in terms of their alienations within the narratives.

First I will look at Lawrence's novel alongside his theory of the unconscious. By contrasting his cosmic vision of sexuality with its modern form (consolidated most acutely in the character of Gerald Crich), and in developing a brief notion of subjectivity and the unconscious in his characterizations, I will present a working distinction between the ego and the desiring self. Then, with Barnes's novel I will attempt to dig into the repressed sexuality of the quasi-narrative, problematizing an approach to the protagonist-narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite that reads his odd interest in Gustave Flaubert as a reaction-formation to his inability to come to terms with his relationship to his ex-wife. In its place I will argue that the character relationships are too complex to support this account fully, and that the novel's representation of biographical knowledge and inquiry is itself a form of sexuality and desire that complicates the heteronormative reading. Finally, in bringing the two novels together in dialogue, I will conclude with a few thoughts about the relationship between these two structures of

sexual alienation, one ‘in the head’ and the other (specifically) ‘on the page.’

Women in Love and Modern Desire

For Lawrence, the alienated character of sexuality springs from a disordered relationship between the internal faculties of the psyche (and from which, as a result, one’s relation to the world and to the object of desire degenerates). In his psychoanalytic tracts, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, both written within two years of the initial publication of *Women in Love*, Lawrence divided the psyche into vertical and horizontal planes, into the sensual and spiritual domain of love (or sympathy) and a domain of independence (or power). The healthy psyche, he argued, balances the polarities, while the sick psyche is not properly ‘polarized’ and generates as its symptom a neurosis that characterized the alienation of the modern age. By positing an unconscious not completely dissimilar from Freud’s, defined as “that essential unique nature of every individual creature, which is, by its very nature, unanalysable, undefinable, unconceivable” (Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis* 214), Lawrence further attached a didactic purpose to his psychological schema: one’s instinctual energy (manifested most directly in the body’s sexual drive) is directed of its own accord toward self-realization, or a maximum of being.

In these texts, what Lawrence means by ‘love’ involves a striving for an enlarged selfhood through communion with others. Its contrary psychic force, ‘power,’ is a striving for selfhood through a *repudiation* of others. Instead of Freud’s foundational dialectic of Eros and Thanatos we have a dialectic of Love and Power—both dialectical energy-systems operate under a principle of avoiding extreme tension and self-contradiction. However, Lawrence’s ‘system’ is as much influenced by the German Idealist resolution of subject and object and the relation of varying states in the process to the construction of the ego, which maintains itself as a subject over-and-against the object-world (the ‘not-I’). In *Women in Love*, Lawrence represents the ego as the chief enemy of spontaneous life, and offers, at various points in his characters’ dances with romance and the ideals of love and sexuality, a vision of a *desiring* self which strives, instead, to assimilate the All.

The novel posits sexuality (at least a sexuality of the *two*) as the vessel through which the alienated subject can re-find unity. This appears to work on two levels: *within* the desiring self and outside of it, in the field of the collective, which shapes the eschatological

and apocalyptic structure of the narrative. In the first case, we have the (then shocking) representation of intercourse, in scenes where Lawrence's prose turns rhythmic, as if instantiating a sought-after 'oceanic feeling' in which sexuality effects a return to the womb (or, at least, to a pre-alienated state *symbolized* by the womb). Here is Gerald and Gudrun, in 'Death and Love':

And she, she was the great bath of life, he worshipped her. Mother and substance of all life she was. And he, child and man, received of her and was made whole. His pure body was almost killed. But the miraculous, soft effluence of her breast suffused over him, over his seared, damaged brain, like a healing lymph, like a soft, soothing flow of life itself, perfect as if he were bathed in the womb again. (WL 430)¹

The coital condition is repetitively likened to the sea as a primordial anti-landscape and pre-formed nexus of flow, as Gudrun hears "waves break on a hidden shore, long, slow, gloomy waves, breaking with the rhythm of fate, so monotonously that it seemed eternal" (WL 431).

The novel's eschatology may also be considered sexualized, though not in such obvious ways. That is, it is through the inherent *contrasts* with the communion of intercourse that the battleground of Gerald Crich's psyche is set: as a thoroughly modern man, an industrial capitalist, Gerald's subjectivity is split between a 'planning' principle and feeling, the latter repressed in the move to a managerial consciousness that *requires* a dissociation from specific internal desiring states. The vital sexual rhythm in which the body partakes in the movement of the cosmos is here *harnessed* in a contest with nature; it is mechanized and organized by industry, resulting in a mysticism of the machine:

So Gerald set himself to work, to put the great industry in order. In his travels, and in his accompanying readings, he had come to the conclusion that the essential secret of life was harmony. He did not define to himself at all clearly what harmony was. The word pleased him, he felt he had come to his own conclusions. And he proceeded to put his philosophy in practice by forcing order into the established world, translating the mystic word harmony into the practical word order. (WL 300-301)

Here, the will is de-sexualized as an ordering principle, a repression of the harmony of the mystics into the "two opposites," will and "the resistant Matter of the earth," the contest through which "the incarnation of [Gerald's] power, a great and perfect machine, a system, an activity of pure order, pure mechanical repetition" would itself become infinite (WL 301).

¹ All references to *Women in Love* will hereafter be designated by 'WL'.

The process of civilization, marked by Lawrence with the dialectical contraries of Gerald's hyper-conscious industrial mind and Rupert Birkin's post-human visions of a world without people, appears to be nearing its end, and Gerald's solitary, icy death in the mountains is also the death (perhaps demonstrated in the novel in the conditional mode, as a vision of what *will* happen *if* 'progress' continues on its track) of modern man and his particular form of sexual alienation and division.² The antagonism in the psyche of the modern subject, also replicated collectively,³ explains the repetition-compulsions Lawrence's characters suffer throughout the novel: as David Gordon argues, the "style of the novel... is a tension of contrary forces: on the one hand an absolutizing imagination which strains against limits ('She felt [that Gerald's passion] would kill her, she was being killed'); on the other, a strong if impatient resistance to absoluteness" (Gordon 51) which leads to, in the process of the various courtships and seductions represented, seemingly endless qualifications and repetitions, each character at times a voice for others.

The proximity of love to hate in the two principle relationships (Gerald/Gudrun, Rupert/Ursula) and in secondary relationships (Rupert/Hermione, Loerke/Gudrun) is a symptom of this tension, as the repetition in a circuit of opposites (as difficult to break out of as it is to destroy Gerald's proposed 'perfect machine') solidifies the ego in its attempt to protect itself from self-destruction, from the voice of the other speaking through it. This sexual sado-masochism is the degraded version of Birkin's vision of two lovers as stars, where one "must commit oneself to a conjunction with the other—forever. But it is not selfless—it is a maintaining of the self in mystic balance and integrity—like a star balanced with another star" (WL 215-216). The two poles in this relation circulate rather than attempting to absorb the other; they are properly 'polarized.'

² Joyce Carol Oates notes the particular divisions of Gerald's soul and psyche in relation to a notion of apocalypse: "As Gudrun's frenzied lover, as Birkin's elusive beloved, he seems a substantially different person from the Gerald Crich who is a ruthless God of the machine; yet as his cultural role demands extinction (for Lawrence had little doubt that civilization was breaking down rapidly, and Gerald is the very personification of a 'civilized' man), so does his private emotional life, his confusion of the individual will with that of the cosmos, demand death—death by perfect cold" (Oates 93).

³ The parallels between *Women in Love* and Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* are often striking, as the apocalyptic aspects of novel (and the parts that are actually concerned with community) work as an extension of the psyche's contest with the All. To a Marxist, though, Lawrence's novel might be profitably interrogated by Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, since (in another vocabulary) what seems to be happening with Gerald is a kind of *surplus*-repression brought on by the particular form scarcity takes in industrial/monopoly capitalism.

Fiona Becket's essay, "Lawrence and Psychoanalysis," traces the relation between the 'new idiom' and Lawrence's vocabulary and technique, contrasting the stilted, staccato rhythms of aspects of the novel's narration with the sexual "language of flows, circuits and plexuses (the language of the body)" (Becket 223). Her analysis foregrounds the significance of the relation between the self and body, which can take on both a sado-masochistic character (often represented in dialogue, with conventional language as its vehicle) or operate as a pre-verbal, unconscious emanation, structured like a 'slip' that appears as non-'sense' in juxtaposition with aspects of the narrative that imitate the 'plottedness' and psychological realism of the traditional social novel.

The sex scene in 'Excuse,' between Ursula and Birkin, is described by Lawrence as "neither love nor passion." Rather, "[it] was the daughters of men coming back to the sons of God, the strange in-human sons of God who are in the beginning" (WL 395). Cosmic and Kabbalistic, this scene is indeed an oasis of unconscious emanation:

She had her desire of him, she touched, she received the maximum of unspeakable communications in touch, dark, subtle, positively silent, a magnificent gift and give again, a perfect acceptance and yielding, a mystery, the reality of that which can never be known, mystic, sensual reality that can never be transmuted into mind content, but remains outside, living body of darkness and silence and subtlety, the mystic body of reality. She had her desire fulfilled, he had his desire fulfilled. For she was to him what he was to her, the immemorial magnificence of mystic, palpable, real otherness. (WL 403)

If the violence of knowledge, manifested in the novel by Gerald, is nature's death, a killing of the object-world by the phallic, ordering mind, the union of Ursula and Birkin represent an anti-epistemology, a body-consciousness (or consciousness of the *blood*), a cosmic pleasure and stimulation that resists visualization and eliminates separation while retaining the notion of the *two*.

But this performance is hardly inevitable in the novel, as the aforementioned love scene between Gudrun and Gerald attests. Read from a parallax angle, the description of Gudrun's post-coital 'hearing' of waves "on a hidden shore" is a form of *super-consciousness*, an insomniac's inability to shut off the light. Gudrun's mind partakes in an impersonal vigilance in which the bare face of presence is oppressive, and in which being itself is a mute, non-responding presence (her vision is eternal only in its monotony). Gudrun "lay wide awake, destroyed into a perfect consciousness. She lay motionless, with wide eyes staring motionless into the darkness, whilst [Gerald] was sunk away in sleep, his arms round her" (WL 431). The problem of alienated sexuality in *Women in Love*, thoroughly modern in its character,

can easily be traced in the contrast between the relationships of Gerald/Gudrun and Ursula/Rupert, the latter union worth returning to in more detail later.

The Meta-Sexuality of *Flaubert's Parrot*

On the narrative's surface (if indeed, Barnes's novel contains enough of a narrative to even *possess* a surface), *Flaubert's Parrot* presents a largely heteronormative romantic constellation: grieving his wife's adulteries and death, narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite represses his still-powerfully operative desire for his former love through an almost-perverse, tenuously platonic relationship with the dead author. The latter 'relationship,' it might seem, exists in the novel as the opportunity for critique, of the unhealthy obsessiveness of an amateur academic, or even of an unattainable fantasy for union with the dead or with the same sex in general. This reading, rather common in the novel's secondary literature, is one of neurosis, which Eric Berlatsky succinctly summarizes as the result of the removal of "appropriate love object[s]" and a repression and sublimation of "the unreachable desire" of such in "other directions" (Berlatsky 185) (toward, say, an oddly virile and curiously cloistered novelist).

Emma Cox, in this vein, argues that Braithwaite "alternates between using the Flaubertian world as a means of avoiding these [aforementioned] traumas and of seeking to understand them" (Cox 53), but that ultimately, he "can never come to any insight into his own life by looking to, and identifying with, a historical figure" (Cox 55). That is, his obsession with Flaubert, a figure whose historical circumstances render him particularly inaccessible to someone like Braithwaite, involves an unconscious choice of inexhaustible searching and desire (desire constitutively unfulfillable) that endlessly postpones a 'healthy' reckoning with the trauma associated with Ellen (his ex-wife). This displacement of desire is associated throughout the novel with an act of *reading*:

Books say: She did this because. Life says: She did this. Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't. I'm not surprised some people prefer books. Books make sense of life. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other people's lives, never your own. (FP 168)⁴

On this reading, then, Braithwaite's deep concern about the intricacies of Flaubert's life, down to the identity of the stuffed parrot the novelist placed on his desk as he was writing *Un Coeur Simple*,

⁴ All references to *Flaubert's Parrot* will hereafter be designated by 'FP'.

mirrors the repressed puzzle of his wife and his misreading of her own life's secrets.

For any close reader of Barnes's novel, the underlying simplicity of this constellation should be something of a red flag. For one, even though it comes in the climactic chapter about the narrator's relationship to his wife ('Pure Story'), the quotation above is but one of many conflicting passages in the novel regarding the relation between fact and fiction.⁵ As Berlatsky notes, Flaubert, "the figure that most represents the world of books" (Berlatsky 186), is *actually real* in a way that Braithwaite and his wife are not (that is, he is both fictional and real, and maybe the other two are as well, but they are certainly not 'real' in the particular way Flaubert is or was). One might then argue (as I indeed will), that any notion of heteronormativity in the novel is also subverted by its sliding and polysemic account of gender identity and sexuality. When one notes that the narrator's relationship to his wife, and the repressed sexuality associated with it, bear an obvious meta-fictional and allusive relationship to Charles and Emma Bovary's failed marriage in *Madame Bovary* (Braithwaite and Charles are both doctors, Ellen and Emma share initials, both have multiple adulterous affairs, and end up dead by, largely, their own hand), one must finally dispense with the idea that is manifestly 'real' while Braithwaite's homosocial (or partially fantasmatic-homosexual) relation to Flaubert is not.

At what level, one might further ask, does the analogy between the two (fictional) stories operate? Braithwaite is not the author of his own story; rather, Julian Barnes is—"The real relationship, if there is one, must be between Julian Barnes and Gustave Flaubert" (Berlatsky 186), the authors who have actually produced the writings in question and have manipulated the relationships and their associated tragedies. Barnes, and not even Flaubert, represents the subjectivity that has the capacity to engineer the meta-analogy that takes place between Braithwaite's romantic repression and his quest for the 'real parrot' and the 'real voice' of the French author. Braithwaite is

⁵ This is, of course, a legitimate problem in the novel, and can be extended, as Peter Childs does, as a general challenge to "theories of correspondence": "*Flaubert's Parrot* begins with a tale of a statue of Flaubert; but the statue with which the novel begins is soon qualified: 'This statue isn't the original one' (FP 11). Instead there are several monuments to the honoured dead, replicas of an original; multiplied likenesses. The first statue was taken away by the Germans in the war and a 'new image' created. Or rather three were made, one in metal and two in stone. The stone ones have decayed but the copper and tin statue has not: 'Perhaps the foundry's assurances can be believed: perhaps this second-impression statue will last. But I see no particular grounds for confidence. Nothing much else to do with Flaubert has lasted' (FP 12). Imitations abound and their fidelity is always questionable: likenesses taken from likenesses that are not thought will last, copies that will fade or be lost" (Childs 54).

embedded in a novel not of his choosing, given his ninth 'ruling' as 'dictator of literature':

There shall be no more novels which are really about other novels. No 'modern versions', reworkings, sequels or prequels. No imaginative completions of works left unfinished on their author's death. Instead, every writer is to be issued with a sampler in coloured wools to hang over the fireplace. It reads: Knit Your Own Stuff. (FP 99)

The irony of this statement supports Berlatsky's reading of the novel's "real relationship" ("the twelve or so chapters (out of fifteen) devoted exclusively to Flaubert indicate quite obviously that the real concern of the book is Flaubert" (Berlatsky 187)), so that the Braithwaite/Ellen relationship, masked by the Braithwaite/Flaubert relationship, is itself merely another mask for the most dangerous and cleverly repressed romance (repressed by the narrative form as such): Barnes-Flaubert.

Given the narrator's defensive tone in 'The Case Against,' a chapter mounted in defense of *Flaubert*, not himself, one senses that the various charges ("That he didn't involve himself in life," for instance), sometimes extensions of the author's dictum that he should be like God in relation to the world of his work, that his imprint should be hidden from its surface, bear deep connections to the relationships thus listed (FP 131). Ellen's "secret life," Braithwaite notes, "and her despair lay in the same inner chamber of her heart, inaccessible to me" (FP 166). As a *reader*, his story is always partial, as is the reader of any of the four shaggy dog stories recounted in 'The Flaubert Bestiary.' And he is not a writer by trade, but a doctor (like Charles Bovary); in desiring a plenitudinous and complete account of Flaubert's voice as well as his biographical being, Braithwaite desires the omniscient position of the author over his domain, which includes the psychological motivations behind Emma Bovary's (and by extension, Ellen's) choices (and one doesn't even have to go that far, since, as we are told by Flaubert, "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*"). And yet, all that being said, the *real* author's motivation behind establishing these parallel marriages may simply be to traverse *that* fiction (the deadlock at the heart of Braithwaite's romantic existence) in order to understand Emma Bovary.

With that in mind, how the reader positions herself relative to these shifting levels of textuality and the kind of sexuality represented within each becomes the foregrounded challenge:

If the Ellen/Geoffrey relationship merely serves the purposes of a biography of Flaubert, the Barnes/Flaubert relationship is the real one and comfortably falls into the realm of masculine friendship untouched by sexuality. Likewise, if the Geoffrey/Ellen relationship is the real one, then sexuality is at play, but it is not subversive, since it falls into heteronormative parameters. (Berlatsky 188)

What the novel does, however, in its appropriately postmodern structure of *mise en abyme*, is to confuse any tired notion of original/copy or real/fake—we are in what Baudrillard would call the domain of the simulacrum, where the foundational relation has receded completely. This perversion, in its general ontological and formalistic senses, indeed also applies to the novel's surface homosociality and heteronormativity.

Comparing the kind of 'loves' Braithwaite has for Ellen and Flaubert is informative: he notes the distinction between "those who want to know everything and those who don't"; the search for knowledge, even of the worst and most emotionally troubling sort, "is a sign of love," he thinks (FP 127). To love a writer is similar, but with a difference: "it's impossible to know too much," but the result of knowing the worst is, in the case of the writer, not relief ("Life is as I thought it was; shall we celebrate this disappointment?") but an impulse to defend, as he does in 'The Case Against.' On the level of surface consciousness, Braithwaite idealizes and purifies the reader/writer relationship: "perhaps love for a writer is the purest, the steadiest form of love." But, we have seen, on the level of the novel's structure, one can't escape the parallels (including, despite his distinction, a final defense of his ex-wife). Presented as a chiasmus, with each attraction informing the other in textual play, sexuality proper (hidden in Braithwaite's autobiographical narrative, but proudly displayed in Flaubert's) becomes one of the key markers of *actual* distinction.

However, though Braithwaite's 'attraction' to Flaubert could never be consummated (for obvious reasons), his epistemological quest is nonetheless structured according to the vicissitudes of desire. His "childhood instinct" that "still makes me keep the best until last" (FP 13), expressed in his decision to visit Croisset (and thus in some sense the home and body of Flaubert's life) last, is oddly similar to Frederic Moreau's nostalgia for the anticipation, the unconsummated desire, of intercourse at the brothel in *Sentimental Education*. He asks, "What makes us randy for relics?" (FP 12) which places historical material firmly in the position of the fetish. Further, Berlatsky perceptively notes that

Braithwaite's interest in the English governess Juliet Herbert, employed by Flaubert, is clearly sexual: he is eager to uncover a torrid affair implied in a Flaubert letter but never confirmed. Braithwaite imagines publishing an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* titled "Juliet Herbert: A Mystery Solved." The "mystery," or "secret" as Braithwaite also describes it, is, of course, "Gustave and Juliet's [sexual] relationship" (34), and the possibility of uncovering it "thrill[s]" him. As he notes, "all biographers secretly want to annex and channel the sex lives of their subjects," emphasizing the link between secrets and sexuality. (Berlatsky 192)

Here, the very *interest* in biography in the first place is sexualized (in this case homoerotically). Braithwaite is certainly interested in Flaubert's sex life, and hopes (through attaining letters, and positioning himself as a historical voyeur, for instance) for the kind of "honesty in sexual dealings" (FP 135) that he claims Flaubert possessed (this is also, perhaps, his reason for giving Louise Colet's side of the story). But more importantly, *biographical knowledge itself* is constitutively sexualized; it is a form of print-oriented voyeurism in which the drive (for complete knowledge of the historical individual) replicates itself and constantly traverses new failures, always unconsummated since the retroactive perspective is always partial. It is sexual because it seeks a completeness that can never be accomplished.

"Sex in the Head" and "Sex on the Page"

What we have here, with Lawrence and Barnes, are two pictures of alienated sexuality that (if we dare risk being so reductive) can be re-interpreted along a historical trajectory spanning modernism and post-modernism. Without straying too far from the texts under consideration, it is at least profitable, perhaps, to reflect upon the alternative ways in which the metaphysical power of sexuality is diminished here: either as a result of the 'phallic,' super-conscious and voyeuristically visual modern mind (Lawrence), or as the result of an inescapable *textuality* that sacrifices the material altogether (Barnes).

The relation between history and sexuality is far more explicit in *Women in Love* than it is in *Flaubert's Parrot*. While the generational interest of *The Rainbow* was largely eliminated by Lawrence in its sequel, we have seen how the novel bears an eschatological teleology in the doomed character of Gerald Crich, and how industrialization produces symptoms on the level of the subject and its associated sexuality (whether that is of a fully desiring self or the more degraded, enclosed modern ego). Barnes certainly presents a repressed, closeted sexuality in Braithwaite, and also provides a hint of psychoanalysis in the narrator's claim that "discovering the secret of Gustave and Juliet's relationship... might help me imagine even more exactly what Flaubert was like" (FP 41). The aforementioned constitutive sexualization of a historical epistemology can also be seen as the result of Braithwaite's particular style of narration (and Barnes's particular style of writing), in which the deadlocks of textuality are themselves foregrounded. Assuming, indeed, the psychoanalytic insight that desire is produced by some notion of incompleteness in the subject, the deconstruction of the subject in the postmodern text is a production of a *certain sort* of textual desire, overdetermined by the academic-

aesthetic approach to its subject.

Braithwaite's function as a narrator-archivist effects a certain *distance* at the heart of (what we might call a postmodern) repression, the logical extreme to which Proust's narrator, perhaps, tends in his *textual interpretation* of sexuality, keeping the object of desire at an artificial distance (which is, as we see at the end of *Flaubert's Parrot*, ultimately not sustainable). This distance is indeed a form of voyeurship (the voyeurship of the reader, in a sense), but it is markedly different from the alienated sexuality depicted by Lawrence, where the focus is still on the intercourse of bodies. Due to the difference in narrative structure between the novels, we do not get a diegetic personality in *Women in Love* that even *pretends* to be sufficiently removed from the sexual anguish contained therein (as Braithwaite perhaps pretends, but fails, to be). Peter Balbert describes Ursula as the 'critic' of the novel, possessing "a skepticism which is rooted in the instinctual essence of her being as a female" (Balbert 87). This skepticism is typically instantiated in a critique of Birkin's romantic ideals; though Balbert's reading of this skepticism as inherently female is questionable, one could nonetheless confront Lawrence with this gendered design, Ursula possessing a natural, feminine relation to her "instinctual self" that provides the opportunity to hold Birkin verbally and pre-verbally (sexually/materially) to account by providing the apparatus with which the 'nowhere' he seeks, the impossible space beyond the generation and corruption of nature and humanity, can actually be accessed.

Thus, the female provides a way out of damaging, phallic consciousness, but is subservient insofar as she is *supplementary*. Ursula's role in the novel is to clarify Birkin to himself and untangle his contradictions, which will free them both up for love: "She saw him as a clear stroke of uttermost contradiction, a strange gem-like being whose existence defined her own non-existence" (WL 268). In the beautiful 'Moony' chapter, these contradictions are made explicit, as Birkin's mind with its "destructive fires" interferes dramatically with his libido. "Was it really only an idea," he wonders about his philosophy of love as a unique polarity, "or was it the interpretation of a profound yearning? If the latter, how was it he was always talking about sensual fulfilment? The two did not agree very well" (WL 329-330).

But even as mere supplement, as the vehicle for what the psychoanalyst might call 'phallic castration,' the metaphorical surgeon who performs the analyst's work on/for Birkin, Ursula has causal agency in the romantic and sexual narrative. The feminine voice of *Flaubert's Parrot*, Louise Colet, is really Braithwaite's, since he *inscribes* her account through his own conjecture. Colet is not spoken but

spoken-for, and the sexuality contained in her chapter is Braithwaite's projection (or even, perhaps, his fantasy). When she describes the sexual chemistry between her and Flaubert ("Whatever the battles that occurred between us, none of them was fought in the province of the night. There we embraced by lightning; there, violent wonder lay entwined with soft playfulness"), it is Braithwaite who is sculpting the satisfaction of coital completion, as an ideal to which he otherwise, in his own experience and in his musings about the disappointment of consummation, fails to achieve (FP 139-140). Sutured into the position of Colet through the act of narration, Braithwaite is not merely fulfilling the analogy of his own life and his betrayal by Ellen ("I was the only woman to whom he was sufficiently drawn; and he chose, out of fear, to humiliate me" (FP 141), 'Louise' says); he is engaging in a form of pornography (describing where Louise 'placed' the rose given to her, imagining Flaubert gazing at her as she lay naked on her front, creating double entendres that craft a hidden image of Flaubert's penis) that he can orient himself within. By representing a form of textual voyeurism that exceeds heteronormative parameters, Barnes has taken Lawrence's concerns about sexuality to their logical extremes, and oversees their inevitable flip into meta-fictional absurdity.

Of course, sexuality is represented far more implicitly in *Flaubert's Parrot* than it is in *Women in Love*, and my reading here might not agree with many historical characterizations of postmodernity that see it (and its cultural products) as a move into permissiveness. However, this reading is also psychoanalytic enough to recognize that new repressions often replace traversed ones. Further, the novel's relation to a form of twentieth century detective fiction, albeit one in which "the truth is not recorded," (FP 65) itself invites this effort of un-concealing. My analysis of the meta-relation between characters in different fictions (all the way up to the authors themselves) is not meant to be exhaustive. Lawrence's vision of sexual harmony, and his narrative account of 'sex in the head,' flip dialectically into Barnes's textual sexuality, or what I dare to now call 'sex on the page.' Ultimately, the relation I have drawn between these two particular novels and these two particular authors hopefully provides one way in to a further literary-historical investigation of twentieth century sexuality and its associated (and differing) alienations that we continue to work through as long as we still call ourselves human and modern.

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