



# Lady Chatterley's Lover

David Herbert Lawrence  
(1928)

## PLOT AND SETTING

This story is set in Tevershall, an industrial town in the Midlands where the Chatterleys live in their family seat, Wragby Hall. Constance Chatterley is not happy with her husband, Sir Clifford, who was maimed during the war. Since he is crippled, he goes about in an electric wheelchair and cannot have children. Constance begins a relationship with Oliver Mellors, a gamekeeper who lives in a hut in the wood near Wragby Hall, and becomes pregnant by him. The story ends with Mellors and Constance waiting for their divorces, so that they might start a new life together.

## CHARACTERS

**Constance Clifford**, Connie, comes from a cultivated family. As a younger woman, she travelled all over Europe; she was well-educated and used to debating with the young intellectual men of her generation. At the age of 23, she becomes the wife of Sir Clifford Chatterley, baron of Wragby Hall. Three years later, he returns from the war paralysed from the waist down. Connie's empty life with Clifford causes her loneliness and awakes her desire for the physical tenderness Oliver Mellors, the gamekeeper on her husband's estate, can offer her.

**Oliver Mellor** is the lover in the title of the novel. He lives in quiet isolation in a hut in the wood. Here his

relationship with Connie starts: the passion released by their lovemaking creates a deep bond between them. At the end of the novel, he is fired from his job as gamekeeper and starts to work in a farm, waiting for a divorce from his wife in order to marry Connie.

**Clifford Chatterley** is a minor nobleman who is impotent as a result of an injury during World War I. The gap between him and Connie becomes wider and wider as, obsessed with financial success, he is not truly interested in love.

## THEMES

The importance of the novel lies in the criticism of industrialisation and technological progress to which Lawrence opposes the search for the alternative values of individuality, primitivism and the total freedom of body and soul. Through the relationship between Constance and Mellors, Lawrence celebrates the sacredness and purity of sexual passion, which becomes a metaphor for freedom.

## STYLE

The style of the novel is characterised by a mixture of realism and symbolism, and by a remarkable variety of linguistic registers. For instance, Mellors sometimes uses dialect as a weapon against Constance to stress the social gap between them.

## Key idea

Love,  
sex and nature

Both Lady Chatterley and Mellors seek a relationship in which tenderness, physical passion and mutual respect all flow together. Mellors, like a Romantic hero, has chosen to live alone within nature to escape from the strict rules imposed by society; whereas Lady Chatterley, confused and hurt by the prudery and repressive principles of her world, seeks refuge in the wood and in sexual experience. The wood becomes the symbol of life and natural order as opposed to the emptiness and sterility of Wragby Hall; it is also the place of sexual initiation where Mellors and Constance become lovers and learn to understand themselves and each other better. However, their story is left unfinished by Lawrence.

The novel ends with a letter to Constance from Mellors, which opens with gossipy realism concerned with money and the precise details of his job, and recreates in words the act of love: 'Well, so many words, because I can't touch you' (from chapter 19). Like the novel itself, they must both resist and defy the historical situation, as is clear from the opening lines: 'Ours is essentially a tragic age [...]. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes.' These hopes are life, vitality, holiness and sex, which is a part of them: 'But a great deal of us is together, and we can but abide by it, and steer our courses to meet soon' (from the last paragraph of the book).

## COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

### 1 READ the texts and answer the following questions.

- 1 Where does the novel take place?
- 2 What is the key event?
- 3 Who are the main characters?
- 4 Where does the importance of the novel lie?
- 5 What is its style characterised by?
- 6 What do Lady Chatterley and Oliver Mellors share?
- 7 What does the wood become the symbol of?
- 8 How does the novel end?



## Clifford and Connie

*In this extract, taken from the beginning of the novel, Clifford Chatterley and his wife, Constance, are presented. The husband is a friend and companion for his wife, and their life together leaves her free. It is against the empty burden of her freedom, and an excess of good feeling and understanding between Clifford and herself that she finally revolts.*

David Herbert  
Lawrence  
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Chapter I

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth<sup>1</sup> road into the future: but we go round, or scramble<sup>2</sup> over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.

This was more or less Constance Chatterley's position. The war had brought the roof down over her head. And she had realised that one must live and learn.

She married Clifford Chatterley in 1917, when he was home for a month on leave<sup>3</sup>. They had a month's honeymoon. Then he went back to Flanders: to be shipped over to England again six months later, more or less in bits. Constance, his wife, was then twenty-three years old, and he was twenty-nine.

His hold<sup>4</sup> on life was marvellous. He didn't die, and the bits seemed to grow together again. For two years he remained in the doctor's hands. Then he was pronounced a cure, and could return to life again, with the lower half of his body, from the hips<sup>5</sup> down, paralysed for ever.

This was in 1920. They returned, Clifford and Constance, to his home, Wragby Hall, the family 'seat'. His father had died, Clifford was now a baronet, Sir Clifford, and Constance was Lady Chatterley. They came to start housekeeping<sup>6</sup> and married life in the rather forlorn<sup>7</sup> home of the Chatterleys on a rather inadequate income. Clifford had a sister, but she had departed. Otherwise there were no near relatives. The elder brother was dead in the war. Crippled<sup>8</sup> for ever, knowing he could never have any children, Clifford came home to the smoky Midlands to keep the Chatterley name alive while he could.

He was not really downcast<sup>9</sup>. He could wheel himself about in a wheeled chair<sup>10</sup>, and he had a bath-chair<sup>11</sup> with a small motor attachment, so he could drive himself slowly round the garden and into the line melancholy park, of which he was really so proud, though he pretended to be flippant<sup>12</sup> about it.

Having suffered so much, the capacity for suffering had to some extent left him. He remained strange and bright and cheerful, almost, one might say, chirpy<sup>13</sup>, with his ruddy<sup>14</sup>, healthy-looking face, and his pale-blue, challenging bright eyes. His shoulders were broad and strong, his hands were very strong. He was expensively dressed, and wore handsome neckties from Bond Street. Yet still in his face one saw the watchful look, the slight vacancy of a cripple.

He had so very nearly lost his life, that what remained was wonderfully precious to him. It was obvious in the anxious brightness of his eyes, how proud he was, after the great shock, of being alive. But he had been so much hurt that something inside him had perished, some of his feelings had gone. There was a blank of insentience<sup>15</sup>.

Constance, his wife, was a ruddy, country-looking<sup>16</sup> girl with soft brown hair and sturdy body, and slow movements, full of unusual energy. She had big, wondering eyes, and a soft mild voice, and seemed just to have come from her native village. It was not so at all. Her father was the once well-known R. A.<sup>17</sup>, old Sir Malcolm Reid. Her mother had been one of the cultivated Fabians in the palmy<sup>18</sup>, rather pre-Raphaelite days. Between artists and cultured socialists, Constance and her sister Hilda had had what might be called an aesthetically unconventional upbringing. They had been taken to Paris and Florence and Rome to breathe in art, and they had been taken also in the other direction, to the Hague and Berlin, to great Socialist conventions, where the

- 1 smooth. Liscia.
- 2 scramble. Ci arrampichiamo.
- 3 on leave. In licenza.
- 4 hold. Attaccamento.
- 5 hips. Anche.
- 6 housekeeping. La gestione della casa.
- 7 forlorn. Abbandonata, derelitta.
- 8 Crippled. Storpio.
- 9 downcast. Depresso.
- 10 wheel ... chair. Andarsene in giro da solo sulla sedia a rotelle.
- 11 bath-chair. Poltrona a rotelle.
- 12 flippant. Impertinente, frivolo.
- 13 chirpy. Vivace, allegro.
- 14 ruddy. Fiorente, rubicondo.
- 15 insentience. Mancanza di vita.
- 16 country-looking. Dall'aspetto campagnolo.
- 17 R.A. Royal Academy.
- 18 palmy. Felici, di gloria.



speakers spoke in every civilised tongue, and no one was abashed<sup>19</sup>.

The two girls, therefore, were from an early age not the least daunted<sup>20</sup> by either art or ideal politics. It was their natural atmosphere. They were at once cosmopolitan and provincial, with the cosmopolitan provincialism of art that goes with pure social ideals.

They had been sent to Dresden at the age of fifteen, for music among other things. And they had had a good time there. They lived freely among the students, they argued with the men over philosophical, sociological and artistic matters, they were just as good as the men themselves: only better, since they were women. And they tramped off<sup>21</sup> to the forests with sturdy youths bearing guitars, twang-twang! They sang the Wandervogel songs, and they were free. Free! That was the great word. Out in the open world, out in the forests of the morning, with lusty<sup>22</sup> and splendid-throated<sup>23</sup> young fellows, free to do as they liked, and – above all – to say what they liked. It was the talk that mattered supremely: the impassioned interchange of talk. Love was only a minor accompaniment.

Both Hilda and Constance had had their tentative love-affairs by the time they were eighteen. The young men with whom they talked so passionately and sang so lustily and camped under the trees in such freedom wanted, of course, the love connexion. The girls were doubtful, but then the thing was so much talked about, it was supposed to be so important. And the men were so humble and craving<sup>24</sup>. Why couldn't a girl be queenly<sup>25</sup>, and give the gift of herself?

So they had given the gift of themselves, each to the youth with whom she had the most subtle and intimate arguments. The arguments, the discussions were the great thing: the love-making and connexion were only a sort of primitive reversion and a bit of an anti-climax. One was less in love with the boy afterwards, and a little inclined to hate him, as if he had trespassed on one's privacy and inner freedom. For, of course, being a girl, one's whole dignity and meaning in life consisted in the achievement of an absolute, a perfect, a pure and noble freedom. What else did a girl's life mean? To shake off<sup>26</sup> the old and sordid connexions and subjections.

And however one might sentimentalise it, this sex business was one of the most ancient, sordid connexions and subjections. Poets who glorified it were mostly men. Women had always known there was something better, something higher. And now they knew it more definitely than ever. The beautiful pure freedom of a woman was infinitely more wonderful than any sexual love. The only unfortunate thing was that men lagged so far behind<sup>27</sup> women in the matter. They insisted on the sex thing like dogs.

And a woman had to yield<sup>28</sup>. A man was like a child with his appetites. A woman had to yield him what he wanted, or like a child he would probably turn nasty<sup>29</sup> and flounce away<sup>30</sup> and spoil what was a very pleasant connexion. But a woman could yield to a man without yielding her inner, free self. That the poets and talkers about sex did not seem to have taken sufficiently into account. A woman could take a man without really giving herself away. Certainly she could take him without giving herself into his power. Rather she could use this sex thing to have power over him. For she only had to hold herself back in sexual intercourse, and let him finish and expend himself without herself coming to the crisis: and then she could prolong the connexion and achieve her orgasm and her crisis while he was merely her tool<sup>31</sup>.

19 **abashed**. Turbato, intimidito.

20 **daunted**. Intimidite, spaventate.

21 **tramped off**. Vagabondavano.

22 **lusty**. Forti, vivaci.

23 **splendid-throated**. *Lett.*: Dalla gola splendida; *qui*: dalla bella voce.

24 **craving**. Ardenti, insaziabili.

25 **queenly**. Regale.

26 **shake off**. Scuotere.

27 **lagged ... behind**.

Rimanevano talmente tanto indietro.

28 **yield**. Cedere, concedere.

29 **nasty**. Cattivo.

30 **flounce away**. Allontanarsi per l'impazienza.

31 **tool**. Strumento.

**LITERARY COMPETENCE****> VOCABULARY**

**1 READ** the text and match the highlighted words and phrases with their Italian translation.

- 1 accessorio .....
- 2 paraplegico .....
- 3 robusto .....
- 4 vuoto, lacuna .....
- 5 guadagno .....
- 6 ardentemente .....
- 7 indifferenza .....
- 8 essere imbarcato .....

**> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT**

**2 READ** the text and identify the five sections. Then write a heading for each section.

- Part 1 (lines .....): .....
- Part 2 (lines .....): .....
- Part 3 (lines .....): .....
- Part 4 (lines .....): .....
- Part 5 (lines .....): .....

**3 READ** the first section again and complete the following sentences.

- 1 Constance Chatterley lived during a ..... age.
- 2 The war had caused all her .....
- 3 She had ..... Clifford Chatterley when he was home for a month on .....
- 4 They had had a month's .....
- 5 Then her husband was sent to ..... in Flanders.
- 6 He came back after ..... months with the lower part of his body ..... for ever.

**4 READ** the second section again and answer the following questions.

- 1 When did Constance and Clifford come back home?
- 2 What was their family house called?
- 3 Who lived with the married couple?
- 4 Could Clifford have any children?
- 5 How did Sir Clifford move around his house and garden?
- 6 How did he feel?
- 7 What did he use to wear?
- 8 What was he proud of?

**5 FOCUS** on the third and fourth sections again and make notes about

- Constance's father, mother and sister;
- the two girls' upbringing;
- the foreign cities the two girls had visited;
- the topics of their discussions with men;
- their most important gift;
- what they were interested in most;
- how they spent their time when they were together with young men.



**6 READ** the text to the end again and decide whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

- 1 Hilda and Constance gave great importance to love-making and connexion.
- 2 Constance's dignity and meaning in life consisted in finding a husband and in devoting herself to him completely.
- 3 A woman could yield to her man what he wanted without giving him her inner, free self.
- 4 She could use the sex thing to have power over him.

➤ **COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT**

**7 FOCUS** on the narrative technique.

- 1 Who is the narrator in this passage?
- 2 From whose point of view is the story told? Tick as appropriate.
  - ☐ The narrator's.
  - ☐ One of the character's.
  - ☐ An external observer's.
- 3 Who does the pronoun 'we' (lines 1-5) stand for?
- 4 Can you detect the narrator's presence in the passage?

**8 CONSIDER** lines 6-49 where two of the main characters of the whole novel, Connie and Clifford, are introduced. How are they presented? Tick as appropriate.

- ☐ Through their feelings.
- ☐ Through a precise physical description.
- ☐ Through items of physical description combined with their main feelings.
- ☐ Through what they say.
- ☐ Through what they do.

**9 REFER** to the same lines and complete the following table concerning Sir Clifford Chatterley.

Age	
Face	
Build	
Look	
His movements	
His interests	
His attitude to life	

**10 REFER** to the whole text and underline all the information about Constance. Complete the following table and answer the question below.

Age	
Physical features	
Her movements	
Her interests	
Her attitude to life	

How do husband and wife differ?



**11 LOOK** for words and phrases linked to the semantic area of war. How is it connoted? Is there any hope for the future? Will modern man be able to build up a new world? State why the Midlands, where Wragby Hall is set, is related to industrialisation.

**12 READ** the last two sections of the text again: here the theme of the new, modern woman is introduced. Square words connoting both an idea of woman's supremacy over man and that of her submission to him. Collect your data in the chart below, then summarise Lawrence's position towards woman.

Supremacy	Submission

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➤ **COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE CONTEXT OF THE AGE**

**13 DISCUSS.** Refer to 6.17 and Text Banks 90-91 to explain how *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* reflect Lawrence's time.