

D.H.Lawrence: *The White Peacock*, published by the Oxford University Press in the World's Classics Series, 1997

ISBN 0-19-283087-2

Rosemary Howard

This is the third paper-back edition of *The White Peacock* to be produced since 1982, which suggests that there is still a general readership for the novel as well as the specialist's concern with this work as the fore-shadower of D.H.Lawrence's mature genius. For there is no doubt that *The White Peacock* holds in embryo nearly all the concerns which characterize Lawrence's later work. This is in spite of the novel's obvious flaws which are regularly and severely listed by most critics. The present Editor, David Bradshaw, remarks for example on "the spectacular lameness of the narrative in places", the young writer's "penchant for archaisms such as 'wroth' and 'perchance'" the feminisation of nature and the self-consciously fine writing. But he puts forward a different explanation for Cyril's banale poeticisms, suggesting that perhaps they were deliberately inserted to enunciate "his sense of deracination and prim self-loathing", Lawrence thus furnishing Cyril "with a parlance which is exactly attuned to his situation". This opinion however tends to contradict Lawrence's later view of his own work, uncompromisingly stated in letters to Blanche Jennings and William Hopkin and quoted by John Worthen in his introduction to the Penguin 1982 Edition.

David Bradshaw also differs from John Worthen in his suggestion that Lawrence does not isolate the landscape of Nethermere from its industrial environment, but actually draws attention to "its encompassing proximity".

Lawrencian criticism thus continues to be no stranger to controversy. Both Bradshaw and Worthen however comment on the pervasive element of physical cruelty which haunts the novel, with both critics making lists of the examples of pain and slaughter that characterize the text. Bradshaw tends to play down the beauty of Lawrence's descriptions of nature but he testifies to the author's achievement in breaking away from the traditions of the conventional 19th century novel: Lawrence's first novel sets out immediately to test and transgress the form it inherits.

This edition, which has a cover illustration chosen perhaps for its aptness (*The Boy and the Man* by Sir George Clausen - 1908) rather than its attractiveness, comes with a short note on the text, a select bibliography, a chronology of D.H.Lawrence's life, and fourteen pages of useful notes, which should make it a valuable text for both students and the general reader.