

actually helped with the book's already difficult relation with the authorities. Had the 'four-letter-words' been fully rendered into their Chinese equivalents, it would not be hard to imagine the reactions of the state censorship. On the other hand, the words might also antagonise a significant number of Chinese readers accustomed to decades of moralistic community standards which still associate the use of these words with prurience. To defend an author for his purity, honesty and sincerity is one thing, but it requires an unusually-motivated reader, or those expert witnesses at the 1960 Old Bailey trial with their eagerness to secure an acquittal, to actually agree that a whole group of 'dirty' words could take on sacred, tender meanings merely at the stroke of even Lawrence's pen. It might be tentatively suggested, therefore, that for a public who sees Lawrence primarily as the author of *Lady C*, and who desperately needs him to assist their own aspirations toward freedom, Rao's first ever Chinese translation of *Lady C* might have assisted Lawrence popular but politically fragile name in China of the eighties. Other renditions, demonstrating a higher degree of fidelity to the original and therefore more valid purely as translation, might later follow when Lawrence's stature in China is more secure.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Of the three versions of *Lady C* that I have examined which were translated by Taiwanese scholars after the book's open publication there since the late sixties, only one (translated by Yu Zhang and published in 1991 by Lin Yu Cultural Enterprise Co.) uses the Chinese equivalents for the 'four-letter-words', the other two still adopting Rao's genteelising terms.

## FASHION, ART AND THE LEISURE CLASS IN D.H. LAWRENCE'S *THE WHITE PEACOCK*

Barbara Langell Miliaras

1906 marked a watershed year in British social, economic, and political history. The Tories were voted out of office in sweeping numbers; the Education Act was passed, setting in place the intellectually-elitist system that prevailed in the United Kingdom until the 1960s. Free Trade, Home Rule, Trade Unionism and Woman's Suffrage were the burning issues of the political year and the Prince and Princess of Wales continued on the arduous land and sea trek to the far reaches of the British Empire. It was the final gesture of the Age of Imperialism to shore up, with the full magnificence of a royal progress, the foundations of the tottering realm. It was the year that also marked D.H. Lawrence's legal coming of age and his matriculation as a King's Scholar at the University of London (University College, Nottingham).<sup>97</sup> From 1906-1909, these historical and political phenomena had a revolutionary impact on the world of fashion and ideas. This essay examines how these phenomena affected Lawrence when he gained access to London's literary establishment and how they are reflected in *The White Peacock*.

Much of Lawrence's manipulation of fashion as a device for character development depends upon concepts current in some seminal works of early sociological and economic theory, particularly Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* and Oskar Fischel and Max von Boehn's *Modes & Manners of the Nineteenth Century*, the English edition of which contained a long introduction of the history of fashion in Great Britain by one of Lawrence's early mentors, Grace Thompson Rhys.

Art, fashion and the decadence of the leisure class, particularly, as they subvert the taste and education of the young artist, Cyril Beardsall, and his friend, George Saxton, function as dominant thematic motifs in the novel and are reflected in their impact on the lives of the young people growing up in Nethermere. Their importance in the novel reflects their importance in Lawrence's personal life, as well.

Lawrence entered the fashionable world of London's literary circles in 1910, but his ideas about fashion and politics had already been very much formed by his mother and their mutual Eastwood-Nottingham religious and political connections, as well as by his formal education at University College, Nottingham, as early as 1906. He was, at heart, as he describes himself, in an early letter to Rachel Annand Taylor, a non-conformist and a socialist by religious, educational and political

<sup>97</sup> *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, James T. Boulton, ed., 1979: Cambridge University Press, xxvi. Referred to hereafter in the text by page number immediately following quoted material as *DHLL*.



conviction.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, at the same time, he was young enough to be bedazzled by the pageant of London in all of its Edwardian glory. It was a city areel with warring camps of advocates of new ideas and old perversions - in conflict with itself as well as with its immediate past. The Conservative Government of Arthur James Balfour had fallen in 1906 and following this, a kind of frenzied spirit of vigour, youth, and rebirth burst forth in the salons and ateliers of Camden Town and Bloomsbury. Many of the young artists and writers who led the rebellion were themselves offspring or younger siblings of the newly-elected Liberal MPs, who, in turn, had themselves been inspired by a generation of artists and writers that had rejected the Ruskinian notion of art as an instrument of moral and spiritual dimensions, the generation of Whistler, Sargent and Clausen. Differing from each other as they did, however, in style as well as in substance, they created a confusion of codes that spilled over into the world of letters, as well.

Lawrence's first admission to the inner circles of fashion and ideas, however, was not to Bloomsbury or Camden Town but to Hampstead Heath, an entrance that occurred when Ford Madox Hueffer introduced him to Violet Hunt and the Rhyses. Theirs was yet an older generation, still passionately loyal to the ideals of Ruskin and Morris, in many regards, and much more socially conservative, than the Bloomsbury-Camden Town rebels. Everything they now felt uncomfortable with had been spawned in the generation that immediately preceded their own - by aesthetes and demimondaines, the spoiled offspring and prostitutes of the leisure class, who spurned the moral values of their own late Victorian epoch. In the contrived decadence of Art Nouveau, England had exported an artistic revolution to France and Germany, in the waning years of the last decade of the nineteenth century, from whence it returned, enhanced by an aura of radical chic, to confront a generation who viewed the Aesthetes and their art as morally and socially degenerate.

Many of the academics, publishers and civil servants in the Hunt-Hueffer-Rhys circles thus viewed the younger generation with the distaste they had previously reserved for Wilde and his acolytes, particularly for Aubrey Beardsley - but they were too polite to take to the public lectern against them. Privately, however, the direction of the new art disturbed them and the assault against it began in whispered resistance to its excesses. That resistance soon emerged publicly in the

<sup>98</sup> This letter of 3 December 1910 is widely recognised to be the most self-revelatory of all of the confessional letters Lawrence wrote during these seminal, stress-filled days while he attended his mother in her terminal illness. The obvious inferences that can be drawn from this and other letters of the period, I use as the principal foundation for my assertions about Lawrence and his attitudes toward art, fashion and the leisure class in *The White Peacock*. This essay represented the outgrowth but not the final conclusions of a work in progress that grew out of an illustrated presentation I delivered at the *Colloque Laurencien*, University of Paris X Nanterre on March 28, 1992.

press, initially, at any rate, as a kind of internecine warfare over dress codes. It was a very real battle with very real consequences. Like most confrontations, however, it was ultimately settled by outside forces over which the participants had little control - in this case, the onslaught of a modern technology that demanded simplification of dress for its operants primarily so they could access the mass transportation systems designed to carry them to their workplaces. It was accelerated, as well, by the need to create new pursuits for the growing leisure class that the wealth, generated by that new force created - hence the rapid growth in individual and spectator sports with their attendant sporting life, the proliferation of elegant restaurants and night clubs where the chic congregated after the theatre of concert hall and the need for either proficiency of elegance of dress to accommodate both new arenas. (Veblen 240, Boehn 200). The tendency toward social egalitarianism that these phenomena encouraged was deplored by most of the fashion historians of the time, foreshadowing, they feared the collapse of traditional morality and the old world order. For the most part, these theorists were radically conservative in their analysis of the function of fashion in society and viewed the movement toward dress reform with outspoken hostility.

It was not very long before these theoreticians went public with their anxieties in subtle but powerful ways. The dramatic acceleration toward the collapse of traditional values and with it the collapse of existing world order were phenomena which the established press of Great Britain, free though it was, was steadfastly dedicated to prevent from the bully pulpit of its editorial columns and women's pages. Anti-establishment voices were, to be sure, many and strident. Their theatre was internal however - both limited and defined by the new novel, the new art, and the new philosophy. On the other hand, persons with varying and, on the whole, much more socially radical points of view moved frequently in their midst. Just as frequently, however, they were also at odds with the younger generation's flouting of conventional morality as well as with its political apathy. Such representatives included Liberal and Labour politicians like Herbert Asquith and Keir Hardie, philosophers like George E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, socialists and critics like Bernard Shaw, Beatrice and Sidney Webb and the Fabians, artists like Wyndham Lewis, Roger Fry and other members of the New English Art Society. In their modernity, in their social concerns, but particularly in their political philosophies, they, too, wished to wage war on the citadels of repression and reaction: imperialism, the church and the social status quo. For them, however, it was merely the continuation of the battle that had begun two generations previously, in the first reaction of the Pre-Raphaelites to the complacent materialism of mid-nineteenth century England and its excesses of pomp and circumstance. The burning issues of the previous age, moreover - the plight of the poor and the unemployed, the squalor of urban existence and the creation of what Disraeli had much earlier defined in *Sybil* as "the two nations" of rich and poor - had been further kindled by the growing plight and accompanying stridency of the



urban proletariat in its effort to increase its wages and to ameliorate the outrageous conditions of life in the urban hells of industrial England.

Art, religion, industry and politics had seemed, in the high noon of the Victorian period, to posit that reason, education and morality could be brought into harmony so that the elements of the good life could be extended to all those of good will who sought to achieve them. This was the essence both of non-conformist religious conviction and the foundation of Ruskinian and Pre-Raphaelite-inspired social art theory throughout much of the Victorian era. It was largely a provincial working class view and was fundamentally mainstream and chapel-driven in its roots. It was from these mainstream sources, however, that Lawrence initially drew his firmest philosophical convictions and to whose beliefs he remained most loyal throughout his early years. The most vocal advocates of these more optimistic routes to change were also the most vocal supporters of reform of dress, housing and workplace. For them, function was as important as form. Beauty and moral truth - revealed or otherwise - stood inseparable from design.

By the late afternoon of Victoria's reign, however, from that highly moral perspective, it was clear that such optimism was blighted, as well. Affluence had turned into decadence, the plight of the poor, lured from the countryside, worsened and the confrontations between libertarians and establishmentarians became more acrid as social and economic conditions in the cities worsened. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, in short, the bubble of progressive idealism and reform burst and the reaction of the young, this time, was to reject, entirely, the possibility or even the desirability of progress, the morality of art, the consolation of philosophy and the truth of revealed religion. In their despair, they sought validation for their alienation in the Aesthetic Movement of the 1890s and its early twentieth century sibling - Art Nouveau or *Jugendstil*, art and literary movements which, in turn, provided the impetus for a revolution in fashion.

In its flouting of convention, in its excess, this new industry became a growing concern for the ruling and middle classes and the focus of their counterrevolution. What they could not control through private ridicule and disparagement, they attempted to manage by rallying public outcry. To do this they sought support outside their own class boundaries - primarily in the parlours and chapels of the lower middle class, appealing to them in their pride of person, property and feelings of national superiority. Such appeals took place mainly in the public press on the editorial and features pages. While little of the apocalyptic nature of the times had filtered down to the newspaper reading public, it had not escaped the careful eye of the *cognoscenti* and *literati* of the day. Lines were drawn and postures adopted with passionate conviction for or against the hastening of the end.

One of the most outspoken critics of the decline of morals as reflected in the decline in standards of dress was Grace Thompson Rhys, whose fashion bias was decidedly conservative as well as anti-feminist. Her influence upon Lawrence can be demonstrated not only in *The White Peacock*, but throughout his later work, as

well. While far from central to Lawrence's life, fashion was an important interest in his life - indeed in the life of all of his acquaintances, and is particularly in evidence in his letters and expository writings. Physical evidence of his interest indisputably exists in the photographic evidence we have of the author and his circle.

Anyone who thumbs through the wealth of Lawrentian photographic memorabilia must be struck by the fact that his family and Eastwood circle were, on the whole, quite a fashionable lot. One cannot help but be struck, also, by the evidence that their individual variations on fashion, differ accordingly and reflect what we know about their political and religious convictions. For example, the 1892 portrait of the Lawrence family, shows a remarkably well-dressed and handsome, middle-class family attired, conservatively, but very definitely, in the height of fashion for the year. The sisters are dressed in white; the mother in black - the brothers and father in finely-tailored, well-pressed clothes. Arthur Lawrence, from his attire, demonstrates absolutely no visible evidence that he ever earned his living in the belly of a mine. Indeed, he seems quite complacent and content, in his patriarchal, middle-class regalia.

The photographs of Louie Burrows, Jessie Chambers, Blanche Jennings and Alice Dax show them to be, as well, similarly dressed, each wearing a particular variation of the "Reform Dress" of the 1906-08 period (Boehn 112). Louie's portrait shows her attired in an outfit that would please both the Aesthetes and the Society for Rational Dress advocates. Her frock is free-flowing in design and classic in its cut, a primary requisite of this particular fashion mode. Jessie Chambers photo reveals her to be the only fashionably dressed member of her nuclear family's group portrait taken some fourteen years after the Lawrence family's portrait.<sup>99</sup> She appears in a Pre-Raphaelitish, Society for Rational Dress-inspired outfit, a forerunner of the fashion sub-genre that led to the Laura Ashley phenomenon of the 1980s. Blanche Jennings and Alice Dax, in their respective portraits, on the other hand, appear in up-to-the-minute New Woman outfits (a style that provokes frequent antagonistic remarks from Leslie Tempest to Lettie in *The White Peacock* whenever she assumes it in his company). Alice Dax's costume is replete with masculine tie - thereby revealing her suffragist, egalitarian tendencies.

Stylish and happy as that 1892 Lawrence family photograph seems, however, the cloud of what Lydia Lawrence saw as her husband's passion for drink and dissipation hung over their lives. Well-cut, well-cared for, and well-constructed clothing was as necessary for respectable middle-class households, as bread upon their tables. For Lydia Lawrence that necessity was vital if her children were to escape from the spectre of the mines. Thus, in the chapel-oriented, working class community of Eastwood, the tragedy of wastefulness - whether in drink or in trends - or the capricious self-indulgence in fashionable pastimes could lead to ruin. Lydia Lawrence's struggle to liberate her children from the hell of the mines consequently

<sup>99</sup> Mrs. Chambers, for example, is dressed in a costume of precisely the same year as Mrs. Lawrence, taken nearly fourteen years earlier.



resulted in her scornful condemnation of wilful indulgence in drink or in dress. True liberation could be found, she preached, in the form of education, simple domestic beauty, and quiet endeavour.

Her own adherence to that creed, her non-conformity and puritanism, on the other hand, was the erosive force that created the abyss of her marital discord. That was what drove her to view her husband's lapses into drunkenness with the fury of a thwarted Valkyrie. That was what caused her to embrace the causes of temperance and suffrage with such vengeance and what lead her, as well, to found a Woman's Cooperative in Eastwood. Accordingly, her spiritual influence on her son became the most undeniable constant in his life. It was *her* puritanism that prevailed over his own ambivalence toward what was new and trendy that ultimately triumphed in Lawrence's fictional world, as well as in his life. Quite possibly this same puritanism or utilitarianism led him to reject Louie Burrows, whose material expectations emerge as a constant motif of conflict and anxiety in Lawrence's letters to her during the course of their engagement.

His early letters home from London to his friends and family, similarly, are laced often with rather spiteful commentaries about the fashion preferences of Violet Hunt, Ezra Pound, the Garnetts and, even, Rachel Annand Taylor. Yet, he is obsessed by their glamour and the affluence of their life, as well. On the other hand, these same letters convey the magic of those early London days for him. They reflect, as well, Lawrence's pervasive guilt and discomfort over his entrance into a society so clearly at odds with the values of his non-conformist, puritan, family. He knew his mother feared that his frivolous new life would lead to his emotional and spiritual ruin. It had already robbed her of one son. It would very likely, she feared, lead her to lose another. Such fears did not fail to plague the young D.H. Lawrence.

What is unique about Lawrence's use of the destructive allure of fashion *The White Peacock* is his fundamentally non-conformist awareness of its pernicious subversion of the highly-idealised agrarian world of his romantic, boyish imagination. It is intensified by his parallel indictment of the industrial and leisure classes that generated this destruction. This negativism toward the leisure class and the world of power would thenceforth appear regularly in Lawrence's fiction as well as in his life. Indeed, his hostility toward the idle rich intensified as he grew older. Nowhere is this more patently obvious than is his steadfast stylistic transformation of Frieda. This fashionable young matron of Bohemian preferences in dress as her 1912 photograph reveals her to be is transmagnified, slowly by Lawrence, into the unfashionable frump we see in the New Mexico and Mexican photos of the 1920s.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>100</sup>. By the mid-1930s, Frieda had resumed the fashion of the avant-garde, particularly with respect to the wearing of trousers. See photos in *Frieda Lawrence: The Memoirs and Correspondence*, E.W. Tedlock, Jr., editor, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964.

Initially, however, his attitude toward fashion and trend was somewhat attenuated by the awe and gratitude that he felt upon being welcomed into London's elitist circles as a person of genius and, therefore, as their social equal. Nevertheless, his attitude toward the "fashionable" world itself emerges as fundamentally hostile, from the beginning, as he reveals in a letter to Louie Burrows written in March of 1910:

Tomorrow night I am going up to the Rhyses to meet some celebrities, and to read some of my own verses...I am not very keen, and not very much interested...I am no Society man - it bores me. I like private people who will not talk current clippings. (DHLL I, 156)

Earlier that year, as the theatre season of 1909 opened, forcing him into costly evening dress and its attendant expenses, he had found it necessary to defend himself to an indirect accusation of extravagance by his sister Ada 'that he went about too much and did not send money home', which was conveyed to him by Jessie Chambers. He felt compelled to defend himself even though he must have been stinging inside. The ambivalence of his response reveals the negativity as well as the attraction which the world of fashion and the arts represented for him. That ambivalence only deepened as Lawrence gained admission to the drawing rooms and behind-the-scenes manipulations and machinations of these interconnected circles. His nascent antagonism is further revealed and more focused later in a letter to Grace Crowder, written in June 1910, where he provides her with a surfeit of amusing details of his impressions of the fashionable high life he now enjoyed. Written in the tone of a society columnist, he describes an evening at Hueffer's where Ezra Pound provided the principal source of his amusement.

Pound was at Hueffer's when I called on Sunday week. He was just back from Sermione... - which he announces as the earthly paradise...His great grandfather's black satin stock, which would throw into relief the contour of his chin four months ago, had given place to a tie of peach-bloom tint and texture. He wore a dark blue cotton shirt, no vest, and a Panama hat. What is the guise? - sort of latest edition of *jongleur*? (DHLL I 65)

What Lawrence records here is the sartorial transformation of Pound from a neophyte clothed in the conventional garb of a devout Pre-Raphaelite into whose still-influential circle he gained entrance by virtue of his American-initiated acquaintance with Yeats and whose favour he sought from two Pre-Raphaelite descendants - Violet Hunt and Ford Maddox Hueffer.<sup>101</sup> Doubtless, his new

<sup>101</sup>. While neither Hueffer nor Hunt could claim direct descent from the original PRB, they were both, nevertheless, descendants of the inner-most circle of Pre-Raphaelite artists and fellow travellers.



working class French garb presented a convenient substitute for the otherwise obligatory evening dress that participation in the Hunt-Ford-Rhys circles would demand. Lawrence was still too much his mother's son to adopt such Bohemian rags as Pound. White tie and tails, expensive though they might be, became, for him, a sartorial necessity.

Much of Lawrence's disdain for fashion however can be attributed directly to his non-conformist religious background. Indeed, in his early short stories and novels, in his letters and essays, in his very life, itself, Lawrence waged continuous warfare with the fashionable world, calling upon the full force of his critical and satirical powers to revile the movers and shakers of its realm which he considered to be out of control and intrinsically destructive. Accordingly, he portrays its principals with an impressionistic as well as expressionistic seductiveness, which renders them infinitely more negative than his mythologically-drawn, archetypally-derived protagonists - the farmers, miners and labourers of the countryside, who become the sacrificial victims of this fashionable world in his early novels.<sup>102</sup> In *The White Peacock* that warfare can be demonstrated in Lawrence's method of characterisation, where proponents of fashion and fashionable ideas are ultimately held up to ridicule. They emerge - once their seductive robes have been stripped off - either as ridiculous figures of sport for the more serious characters in the novels or as villains whose primary purpose in life appears to be the manipulation and seduction of the positive (or life-enforcing) characters of the novel, either for amusement or for spite.

It becomes a pattern from which he never really deviates for the remainder of his literary career.<sup>103</sup> Sensation-seeking, materialistic, woman, incapable of rising above her own narcissism or her symbiotic relationship with her children and her desires for their aggrandisement, destroys the King-God, the patriarch. As Lawrence expostulates in *Twilight in Italy*: "The woman rejects, repudiates the ideal Self which the man represents to her. The supreme representative, King and Father, is murdered by the Wife and Daughters." (TI 79) Such is the fate of "French" Carlin, Frank Annable, George Saxton and even, to a degree, Leslie Tempest in the *White Peacock*. While fashion and the world that drove it - the world of trends and ephemeral social experimentation - are not the actual assassins of the patriarchal

<sup>102</sup> The dimensions of this mythic world and the interactions of the principals within Lawrence's early novels are examined in detail in Barbara Miliaras Pillar of *Flame: The Mythological Foundations of D.H. Lawrence's Sexual Philosophy*, Bern and New York: Peter Lang Publishing Company, 1987.

<sup>103</sup> Constraints of time and space limit me to the analysis of the function of fashion and the fashionable life in establishing character to *The White Peacock*, alone. This paper, however, represents the preliminary stages of a work-in-progress that will examine the impact of these phenomena throughout Lawrence's canon.

agrarian order, they represent accessories, Lawrence submits, both before and after the fact.

In *The White Peacock*, Lawrence makes fashion and the fashionable world the accessory in the assassination of the representative male patriarchal characters, French Carlin and George Saxton, in subtle yet significant ways. In so doing, he appears to be influenced by at least two social theoreticians: Thorstein Veblen and Grace Rhys.

Veblen's ideas, expressed in his first published work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, had a tremendously important impact on the development of economic and marketing theory in the United States, and, much later, in Europe. It is an exceedingly poorly-written, fundamentally racist and sexist piece of work, which views the trends toward democratisation with their demands for broader extensions of the suffrage as harbingers of apocalypse for Western civilisation. His comments on woman's suffrage, for example, are significant:

The good and beautiful scheme of life, then - that is to say the scheme to which we are habituated - assigns to the woman a "sphere" ancillary to the activity of the man; and it is felt that any departure from the traditions of her assigned round of duties is unwomanly...It is unfeminine in her to aspire to a self-directing, self-centred life; and our common sense tells us that her direct participation in the affairs of the community, civil or industrial, is a menace to that social order which expresses our habits of thought as they have been formed under the guidance of the traditions of the pecuniary culture. All this fume and froth of 'emancipating woman from the slavery of man' and so on, is, to use the chaste and expressive language of Elizabeth Cady Stanton inversely, 'utter rot'. The social relations of the sexes are fixed by nature. Our entire civilisation - that is whatever is good in it - is based on the home. The "home" is the household with a male head.

(Veblen 354-55)<sup>104</sup>

Grace Thompson Rhys echoes these sentiments and is even more emphatic in her anti-feminism:

For centuries the sexes had been regarded as supplementing each other; suddenly they appeared as competitors in the same field of work. The increase in strength in woman's personality through the conflict forced upon her by circumstances is perhaps no great gain to the community as a whole.

<sup>104</sup> Behind Veblen's hysteria, obviously, lies the unexpressed, yet dominant fear of the Anglo-Saxon-Nordic immigrant groups of nineteenth century America that the influx of Southern European hordes with their large families would rob Protestant America of what he believed to be their well-deserved racial and religious dominance of the institutions of privilege and power.



Society today is viewed too much from the woman's standpoint. The spirit and direction of social culture are too much influenced by the particular desire of the woman. (Fishel and Boehn III 33-34)

How much these two theoreticians sound like Lawrence.

Lawrence's antifeminism is very much in evidence from the beginning of *The White Peacock*. It is particularly reflected, in the character of George Saxton, who yearns for the return to the tribal, "honorific", male-dominated traditions of the not-too-distant past. Hence, George's fascination with Greiffenhagen's *Idyll*. In that painting, the primitive satyr overcomes the Victorian, Pre-Raphaelitish maiden, while she faints, prettily, but more importantly, *submissively*, in his embrace. In his soul, George yearns for a return to a society where he could merely reach out and take the woman of his choice - by force if necessary. Lettie and Cyril "sting him" into a Bergsonian consciousness, awaken in him a desire for things and a life of fashionable activity, reject or mock him in his initial efforts at upward mobility and finally awaken to the harm they have done him when it is too late to alter the destructive course of events.

Lawrence establishes the destructiveness of the female characters in *The White Peacock* as they adhere to or deviate from the seductive voice of "New Womanhood" - whether in fashion or in ideas. Emily Saxton, for example, in the beginning of the novel, is viewed scornfully by her brother as a somewhat ridiculous threat to established order as she instills the new ideas in her classroom thereby subverting their younger sister, Mollie, whose egalitarian attitude toward him vexes him. He directs his petulance, however, at his submissive mother, only to be put in his place by his sisters, who wither him with their scorn.

The Strelley Farm household contrasts with that of the Beardsalls where Lettie reigns supreme. She is the first female character to be described at length and her primary concern is for herself and her appearance. Her primary function, for the most part, is limited to choosing the appropriate frock of the hour. She dresses for fashion rather than function for every occasion and serves principally as an ornament to grace the company of Leslie Tempest and enhance his status in Nethermere. Although she is not yet engaged to the region's most eligible bachelor, she has set both her cap and her parasol for him. And she is confident of her game. He dotes upon her, chiefly, it seems, because he alone of the young men of the district can afford her extravagant tastes. Thus she represents for him the embodiment of what Veblen ordains is woman's function as man's vicar on earth - the duty to consume goods conspicuously as evidence of her spouse's pecuniary success and 'honorific' privilege, where "conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure." (Veblen 75).

Lettie's narcissism, which is a major motif of the novel, principally emerges in the lavish attention she affords to her self-adornment and her pleasure in materialism. For Leslie, these attributes represent her principal attraction for him.

For all her upbringing in a matrocentric household, Lettie knows her place in the world of men and doesn't threaten the established traditional order of things. She finally agrees to marry Leslie, after first having put him through the proper patriarchally-understood competitive courtship games by playing at a flirtation with George Saxton (whom she would have preferred had he been well-educated and rich). She represents a prize that only a wealthy man could afford. Moreover, she is a prize *because* of her narcissism, *because* of the envy she will awaken in a competitor's breast, *because* the competitor cannot afford her. She is, in fact, a fashion accessory, an embellishment for the man of means. Indeed, when Lettie and Leslie discuss their liaison in mythological terms she is Atalanta to his Hippomenes, he Narcissus to her Echo. He wins her by dropping golden apples in her path. Ultimately he kills her, spiritually, by loving himself more than he loves her.

That she is to be only her husband's Veblenesque vicar in the social scheme of things, however, Lettie firmly understands, and indicates at the moment of their betrothal, when they discuss the fable of the butterfly and the moth.

"No - you'll be the moth - I'll paint your wings - gaudy feather dust. Then when you lose your coloured dust, when you fly to near the light, or when you play dodge with a butterfly net - away goes my part - you can't fly - I, alas, poor me!

What becomes of the feather-dust when the moth brushes his wings against a butterfly net?" (WP 138)

It is all very pretty posturing on Lettie's part, but she keeps her end of the bargain. She adorns Leslie's home, graces his table, rears his children and remains in his shadow, bored and discontent in the increasingly vapid milieu of Nethermere while Leslie works out his destiny in the powerhouse of London Parliament - in the end seldom returning to Highclose. It is Lettie's allegiance to her newly-achieved class and to the patriarchal social order that ultimately destroys George Saxton - even though he has tried gamefully to forge a similar upwardly mobile course.

Lettie's function as a symbol of pecuniary success is, in fact, to neutralise the threat that men such as George pose to men like Leslie. The only character to recognise this fact is Annable and he relates the legend of the Lady Crystabel to Cyril as an admonition to all men of what can happen when woman holds the pecuniary sway, as Lettie would were she to marry George.

Crystabel's story and Annable's own fate represent a foreshadowing, as well, of the dangerous path George sets forth upon as he engages in his ten year competition with Leslie - not to win Lettie - but to make her regret that she did not choose him to begin with. Tragically, nothing that he does will make her do that. Ultimately, Lettie, like Crystabel, is metamorphosed into Lawrence's primal villain - the glittering Aphrodite he later defines in *Twilight in Italy*, whose "white, cold fire consumes and does not create." (TI 38).



Like all her kind, Crystabel is obsessed with game-playing and fashion. For her, however, fashion takes the form of dressing up her "man", while, at the same time, she corrupts and emasculates him. The seduction begins with her introducing him to society sports and the fashions attendant upon them. Thus she transforms him from the naive vicar he was by first corrupting him and then abandoning him. She dresses him up to suit her fancy like a latter day Omphale out to enslave an all too willing Heracles. In short, Crystabel's fashionableness, her modernity, her title, but, most of all, her financial independence, cast her as the "male" in the relationship. She represents the "New Woman" in its ultimate danger. *She* gives her husband a living. *She* rejects the notion of bearing his children. *She* calls him to wait upon her, and, finally, when she has reduced him to servant status and he flees (a typically feminine avoidance strategy), *she* announces his death in her newspaper (a feminist tract, Annable avers). Then, she writes columns of advice to other similarly-situated young heiresses to warn them against the dangers of marrying down.<sup>105</sup> It is the Griselda story in reverse and only Crystabel's death brings Annable back to England to wreak his vengeance upon her sex. How? By marrying beneath *himself* and bearing a tribe of little savages - a plague of locusts, like the rabbits he protects from the farmers' self-defensive poaching. Thus he serves as both a John the Baptist and St John the Divine figure, hastening as well as heralding the collapse of the decadent aristocracy by provoking the wrath of the impoverished yeomanry against himself and the Squire, as they impose their archaic privileges over them. And, Lawrence suggests, it is the decadence of this archaic, privileged leisure class that has allowed the monstrosity of women like Crystabel to gain ascendancy in the modern world. In this light, the peacock scene in the courtyard of the old Kennels, resonates with the crazed misogyny of *fin de siècle* art nouveau. In the preface to Annable's tale of his sexual enslavement, the imagery of the ruined courtyard resounds with echoes of Aubrey Beardsley's equally-deranged misogyny that dominate his illustrations of Swinburne and Wilde. Thus Annable identifies the defecating peacock with all womankind.

Annable's revelation of his seduction and abandonment by Crystabel is followed by Cyril's seduction of George, which he accomplishes, visually, following Annable's murder and burial. He begins it by revealing to George his reproductions of Beardsley's *Atalanta* and *Salomé*. And, he states, simply, "others" (WP 222). While Beardsley's illustrations of Swinburne's *Atalanta* are Burne-Jonesian enough to be merely titillating rather than obscene, the Tail-piece of *Salomé* and the "others", Cyril alludes to are so scurrilously pornographic they project an image of devouring woman that is at once compelling and chilling. The peacock train of Herodias as she makes love to the decapitated head of John the

<sup>105</sup> The affinities between the Crystabel episode and V. Woolf's "Lapin-Lapinova", I have pointed out earlier in this paper. E. Waugh uses a similar motif in *A Handful of Dust*

Baptist with Wilde's accompanying French citation "*J'ai baisé ta bouche, Joachannan*" of the original text serves to render the whole period of aesthetic, *fin de siècle* eroticism in its unveiled, unrelieved misogyny, for the destructive, deadly charade that Lawrence believed it to be. Annable's fate as the prophet and forerunners of the apocalypse to come, Lawrence implies, will be the fate of any young man who falls victim to the "New Woman". It foreshadows, as well, the fate of George, because Crystabel's manipulatively fashionable games are merely more deadly variations of the games Lettie plays. It is a fate George himself foresees, understands but cannot prevent. He defines it, finally, just before his own spiritual betrayal by Lettie as he views the pageant of London's social detritus along the embankment where he strolls with Cyril. His ability to see Lettie's narcissism reflected in the fate of these wretched outcasts reflects an insight that is at once socialist and non-conforming Christian in its perspective.

In *The White Peacock*, George and Cyril, both, then reflect Lawrence's own initial ambivalence and confusion in response to the strong allure of the world of glamour and power. Lawrence's thematic use of fashion merely provides a different dimension for that obsession to work itself out and can be demonstrated in the evolution of Meg Stainwright's character following her marriage to George Saxton.

Meg's initial attraction for George lies in her utter lack of style. Indeed, her submissiveness appears to be the ideal antidote to Lettie's destructive narcissism. Ironically, marriage transforms Meg into a woman of fashion. As George and Meg's material fortunes improve, her sense of style awakens. She and her daughter, however, owe their visual and fashion lineage to Renoir of perhaps Mary Cassatt, and they are dressed according to the dictates of the House of Worth or of Paquin. To the untutored eye the effect is wholesome and benign; ultimately, however, they cloy and overwhelm in their textured propriety and they fail to achieve any lasting sense of substance.

Meg had grown stouter, and there was a certain immovable confidence in her. She was authoritative, amiable, calm. She wore a handsome dress of dark green, and a toque with opulent ostrich feathers. As she moved about the room she seemed to dominate everything, particularly her husband, who sat ruffled and dejected, his waistcoat hanging loose over his shirt. A girl entered. She was proud and mincing in her deportment. Her face was handsome, but too haughty for a child. She wore a white coat, with ermine tippet, muff, and hat. Her long brown hair twining down her back. (WP 394-95)

They are certainly overdressed for having come back from Sunday worship at a non-conformist chapel. Mother and daughter contrast in their fashion tastes with the final portrait of Lettie with her children, whose acute modishness and artistic self-consciousness reflects the Art Nouveau tastes of the "souls", or latter-day aesthetes of the 1906-1910 period.



Lettie had dressed with some magnificence in a blackish purple gauze over soft satin of the same colour. It was rather startling. She was conscious of her effect, and was very excited... Presently the children came in. They looked very like acolytes, in their long straight dressing-gowns of quilted blue silk. The boy, particularly, looked as if he were going to light the candles in some childish church in paradise... (WP 380-81)<sup>106</sup>

In this final scene Lettie bears close resemblance to Rossetti's portrait of Jane Burden as *Astarte Syriaca*.<sup>107</sup> Her metamorphosis into Lawrence's "sensation-seeking Aphrodite", moreover, is completed by her choice of song for the evening - "Star of Eve", from *Tannhäuser* - a choice that brings her identification with Lady Crystabel full circle in its allusions to Oscar Wilde in Aubrey Beardsley's viciously misogynistic and pornographic novel: *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, where Wilde appears as Priapus. Thus what Lawrence takes the entire novel to establish is indelibly etched in his final marriage of fashion and art to make expressionistic and symbolic statements of ideology - Woman kills.

This epilogue, therefore, seems out of place. It is a happily-ever-after solution to Lawrence's social conundrum. How can what is so beautiful be so ugly and deadly at the same time? Thus, like John Ruskin and William Morris, like George Clausen and George Moore, he chooses to elevate the commonplace into anointed vessels of grace. Emily's evolution from would-be New Woman to nourishing mother and the matrix of a household of her own, does not ring true. It represents a regression into the past. She establishes the home that Lawrence's mother might have created if it had been in her means or in her character to have done so. The ending, then, represents the first expression of Lawrence's life-long dream - one that he attempted to create for Frieda and himself, yet never quite achieved. In the withdrawal of Emily Saxton Renshaw away from the material world and the world of fashion, power and ideas, Lawrence recreates the early twentieth century version of Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House*:

Emily, in her full-blooded beauty, was at home. It is rare now to feel a kinship between a room and the one who inhabits it, a close bond of blood relation. Emily had at last found her place, and had escaped from the torture of strange, complex modern life. (WP 404)

<sup>106</sup>. The details of the scene, apart from the description of Lettie, derive from a real-life evening at H.G. Wells which Lawrence describes in detail in a letter to Louie Burrows. (DHLL163)

<sup>107</sup>. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Astarte Syriaca*, (1877) hangs in the City of Manchester Art Gallery.

The final pages of *The White Peacock* resonate with the rich, Pre-Raphaelite inspired, sense of happiness in small things and simple pleasures. It is a genre piece, a literary equivalent of the paintings of Clausen with nuances of the philosophy of George Moore, understood as Virginia Woolf seemed unable to understand it in the 'direct moral awareness' that the contemplation of beauty and affectionate personal relations represent the only supremely good states of mind. It represents an absolute rejection of the values and the traditions of both the aristocratic and the newly-rich leisure class.

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