

The White Peacock

By drs. J.A.Goris

The White Peacock is Lawrence's first novel; his first piece of longer writing. He began it when he was twenty, and worked on it over a period of more than four years. The fledgling author revised his work several times before submitting it to the publisher, William Heinemann. The literary world in London before the World War I was remarkably small and middle-class, and Lawrence was seen as a curiosity: the son of a coal miner, who wrote poetry that was published in the *English Review*. He received kindness and some slightly patronizing interest; but he knew that, owing to his background, he was an outsider. He was also seen, from the beginning, as a writer with a tendency towards writing 'erotic' pieces, something his critics saw as a lack of control. Even *The White Peacock* suffered publication cuts in England and Heinemann submitted a last-minute demand to Lawrence to rewrite certain passages: several words and phrases were too much for the middle-class reading public. It was Lawrence's first encounter with censorship, with which he would later become so involved.

The novel came out in 1911, a few months after his mother's death. She nevertheless lived to see a copy of it; as Lawrence describes in his bibliography *Prefaces and Introductions to Books*ⁱ he put 'the very first copy of *The White Peacock*' into his mother's hands when she was dying:

She looked at the outside, and then at the title-page, and then at me, with darkening eyes. And though she loved me so much, I think she doubted whether it could be much of a book, since no one more important than I had written it. Somewhere, in the helpless privacies of her being, she had wistful respect for me. But for me in the face of the world, not much. This David would never get a stone across at Goliath. And why try? Let Goliath alone! Anyway, she was beyond reading my first immortal work. It was put aside, and I never wanted to see it again. She never saw it again.

Lawrence's mother had always stimulated his ambitions. She used to present herself to her family as someone very nearly middle-class; she was educated, wrote fluent letters and even poetry, and very much wanted her children to 'get on' in the world. Yet Lawrence was also the son of his father, a miner, who could not see his son's literary exertions as 'work'. This becomes evident from the well-known anecdote in Lawrence's bibliographyⁱⁱ:

After the funeral, my father struggled through half a page, and it might as well have been Hottentot. 'And what dun they gi'e thee for that, lad?'

'Fifty pounds, father.'

'Fifty pounds!' He was dumbfounded, and looked at me with shrewd eyes, as if I were a swindler. 'Fifty pounds! An' tha's niver done a day's hard work in thy life.'

Lawrence had discussed his plans to write a novel with his friend Jessie Chambers. The usual idea in novel writing was to take two couples and develop their relationships, as he had seen in most of George Eliot's work. George Eliot, or Marian Evans, came from a background of solid Warwickshire farmers, who were concerned with life on a more fundamental level than that of London society. Early twentieth century England was very much a class-orientated society, split by deep, self-conscious class divisions. The most widely read fiction was set either in London or in the middle-to upper-class range of social life, so that love and marriage were almost always seen in terms of money, artificial status and standards. The opportunities for working class writers to write about working class life and then to see their work in print were extremely rare. Lawrence made middle class people the subject of his first novel; not until in *Sons and Lovers* did he portray working class protagonists.

The White Peacock is about the lives and relationships of the young farmer George Saxton, the middle class girl Lettie Beardsall and the son of a local coal owner, Leslie Tempest, set against the background of a world changing rapidly. Characters struggle to find new ways in this world of economic expansion and vanishing nature, not only economically but also socially. They are described to us through Lettie's brother Cyril, a young intellectual. The opening lines are a first example of the way Lawrence sees the natural world as part of human life, a characteristic of his writing at some point in many of his novels. He presents an idyllic scene of nature, where Cyril is watching the millpond, reminiscing about the 'young days when the valley was lusty', when the fish were silvery and monks worked the land. He is watching a world 'gathered in the musing of old age'; implied is the threat of the advancing machine age that is disrupting the Nethermere valley.

Throughout the novel Lawrence models characters on people he knows well. The Saxtons, for instance, are modelled on the Chambers family. Moreover, he provides detailed geographical descriptions of actual locations, but mixes fictitious with actual place names. Strelley Mill, the Saxton's home, in reality is Felley Mill farm, now demolished; the Chambers family used to live in its vicinity.

'Looked at as an ordinary novel', says Philip Hobsbaum in his reader's guideⁱⁱⁱ, '*The White Peacock* does not make much sense. The two couples impinge as attitudes rather than as characters.... Insofar as there is a plot, it deals with the reprehensible conduct of Lettie in flirting with George while encouraging the advances of the son of the local squire and coal owner, whom she eventually marries.' Before he started writing the novel Lawrence himself said to Jessie Chambers^{iv}: 'I don't want a plot, I should be bored with it.'

The impression the reader gets of the story is one of too many ideas touched upon but not convincingly worked out. The development of the courtship between Lettie and Leslie is superficial. When Cyril wonders (p.49 ff) why his sister is going over to Tempest's and what she sees in Leslie, her answer is that 'he's as good as most folk.' She hastens to add that as a matter of fact she is not interested in him at all; she is merely going over for a game of tennis. When she gets to Highclose she finds Leslie 'sprawled on a camp chair', having fallen into 'a deep sleep' at the approach of Lettie's parasol. He admits to having been 'dreaming of kisses' - he had been pondering over 'poor Nell Wycherley', a girl suggested to have unrequited feelings for him - creating the impression that this sensation had been produced by Lettie. She gives him 'one of those brief intimate glances with which women flatter men so cleverly' - and Leslie 'radiated with pleasure.'

Meanwhile, Lettie encourages the young farmer George Saxton. He is a manly type; 'stoutly built, brown eyed, with a naturally fair skin, burned dark and freckled in patches' (p.41). Lettie describes him as 'rather good-looking' (p.49), but adds that she is not interested in him. At this stage one wonders if Lawrence made her deny interest in the two men as a way of hoodwinking her brother Cyril, who, being the narrator of the story, is a bit of a Mister Know-All. He follows her around with his comments all the time; such a brother would normally get on a girl's nerves. Gradually it becomes clear, however, that it is normal for Cyril to be present at other people's private moments and that Lettie's half-hearted way of dealing with her feelings is common practice. In actual fact she is deeply thrilled by George's male attractiveness. Within a short time she finds herself staring in erotic confusion at George in the kitchen at Strelley Mill, where he is pottering about getting dressed. She is drawn to his robust simplicity, flatters him and plays a love song for him on the piano. This does not leave the young farmer entirely untouched; even though the finer shades of meaning of Lettie's performance are lost on him - Lettie is more refined - he responds to her by a little laugh 'which was rather more awkward and less satisfied than usual' (p.57).

George does not strike the reader as a likeable character. Even though he is an avid reader of novels, shows an interest in Cyril's intellectual explanations and admires Lettie's

view of art, he does not seem to absorb much of the contents. The very early stages of the novel present a preview of his later macho manners in proposing to Meg. Coming home at Strelley Mill, he addresses his mother with the stereotype 'Dinner not ready?', pronounced with a shade of resentment. Equally stereotype, his mother replies apologetically, whereupon the son drops on the sofa and starts reading a book, ignoring everyone around him. George's behaviour is frequently ill mannered: he has bad table manners and irritating habits; he orders the servants and other people around. In dealing with animals he can be downright cruel; he needlessly kills bees and shows no feelings for the family's badly wounded cat. His own sister 'hates his callousness' (p.55) and Lettie's mother describes him as 'an unlicked cub' (p.49). Even though Lettie agrees, she has a secret admiration for his matter-of-fact attitude to the cruel aspects of life. She is the only one who follows him when he is drowning the cat Mrs Nicky Benn and defends him to his sister as being 'only healthy'. It is true, George does not kill animals out of malice or sadism: he is very serious when he explains to Lettie 'I had to drown her out of mercy' (p.55). He is basically doing his job without getting sentimental, as probably Cyril would be. In this light, the rabbit hunt (p.96 ff.) is a telling example of the differences between the three men. Cyril cannot actually hurt the rabbits, though he feels no pity. Leslie sees it as an exciting sport: he is upon the rabbit in a moment and almost pulls its head off in his excitement to kill it. George is acting on an impulse and is very direct about it: 'if you feel like doing a thing, you'd better do it.'

It needs no explanation that Leslie cannot appreciate Lettie's interest in George; he hates her flirting, and he hates her flirting with a common fellow even more. Lettie pretends her flirtations are a mere game - she ignores Leslie's objections, calls him an infant, pokes fun at him behind his back - while in fact her behaviour is by no means innocent. She seeks George's company, admires his physical strength, his strong arms, plays his favourite piano music, 'soft, wistful morsels' and is well aware of the effect. In the scene where they admire the picture 'Idyll' she gets carried away in sensual passion (p.73):

She looked up, and found his eyes. They gazed at each other for a moment before they hid their faces again. It was a torture to each of them to look thus nakedly at the other, a dazzled, shrinking pain that they forced themselves to undergo for a moment, that they might the moment after tremble with a fierce sensation that filled their veins with fluid, fiery electricity. She sought almost in panic, for something to say.

There is more than a passing interest and even tenderness between them; Lettie may, in fact, have been serious in her advances. Their shared interest in art is something very fundamental.

Yet only Leslie, who frequently appears in the novel as a shallow philanderer, is presented as a possible suitor; marriage within one's own class is the obvious thing to do. Lettie seems predestined not to follow her intuition (p.71):

There's always a sense of death in this home. I believe my mother hated my father before I was born. That was death in her veins for me before I was born. It makes a difference-.

It sounds like a mystic, pre-Freudian notion, and immediately afterwards she laughs it off again - but the fact remains that her eventual choice for the 'dead' industrialist Leslie over the 'living' sensuality of George kills off her being. Opposed to the 'death in her blood' is her liveliness during the moonlight-scene (p.100 ff.) when she dances with George, leaving Leslie a sulking outsider to their merry polka dance. Dancing and moonlight are recurrent in Lawrence's novels; we will see several more dramatic moonlight scenes in *The Trespasser*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, the moon symbolizing dark feminine forces and acquiring witch-like power over men. Lettie's hands are hot, while Leslie's are cold; she feels 'impish', she wants 'things to wink and look wild'. But Lettie is like the old crow, which refuses to fight the storm and perches on a branch (p.133 ff.); she does not have the drive of the lapwings, which never cease to attack the storm in spite of the fact that they do not make any progress.

Lettie's inability to give in to the strong chemistry of passion is intensified by the falling autumn leaves. She feels 'wilful' (p.124); 'she uttered many banalities concerning men, and love, and marriage; she taunted Leslie and thwarted his wishes.' Having inherited money from her father has put thoughts of an independent life into her head: 'Since the death of our father she had been restless; since inheriting her little fortune she had become proud, scornful, difficult to please... she read all things that dealt with modern women'. However, this remains a fragment of thought; Lawrence does not develop the 'modern woman' until *Women in Love*, when Ursula and Gudrun become educated and independent women. The portrayal of Lettie as a wilful female may be traced back to certain literary influences on Lawrence, notably Thomas Hardy with his fickle, tormenting women such as Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*, or Emily Brontë's portrayal of Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*. Cathy, similar to Lettie, divides her amorous interests between two men, the sedate middle-class Edgar Linton and the foundling of unknown parentage, the passionate and ferocious Heathcliff. Both opt for the obvious way out: the middle-class marriage as a life insurance for comfort. Even though Lettie has played with the thought of joining George's world of work on the farm, as in the instance when they are mowing corn (p.94) she gives in to Leslie - be it with reluctance.

There is something like a love scene between the two (p.136), but this is chiefly because of Lettie's relief that her suitor has come back to her after his little fling with Margaret Raymond (p.125). She makes it perfectly clear that she is in no hurry at all to become engaged to him: 'Oh, wait till Christmas'; 'married in haste ... what will your mother say?' (p.138). Like the crow, she is an opportunist. As George puts it (p.142): 'she's like a woman, like a cat - running to comforts - she strikes a bargain. Women are all tradesmen.'

But George himself is responsible, too. It does not do for him to put the blame on Lettie and feel the wronged third party. He is too indecisive, and does not act, or too late. 'You should have gripped her before, and kept her', Cyril says (p.142). Too late he owns up to his wishes, only when he realizes he is nowhere without her and cannot go to Canada alone (p.231):

You don't know, Lettie, now the old life's gone, everything- how I want you- to set out with- it's like beginning life, and I want you... now it's all hazy- not knowing what to do next.

Too late, indeed; for Lettie has chosen for Leslie and half-hearted though this choice may be, it is final: 'look how I'm fixed- it *is* impossible, isn't it now ... look at me now, and say if it's not impossible - a farmer's wife - with you in Canada'. Still, right from the beginning, when Leslie stays the night in the Beardsall spare bedroom (p.236 ff.) she is perfectly aware that his presence does not make her happy. Lettie's attempt to discuss her fears of an unfulfilled marriage with Leslie: 'we can't be - don't you see - oh, what do they say, - flesh of one flesh' does not bring about any new development. In fact, the attempt falls flat at Leslie's panicky response: 'he was querulous, like a sick, indulged child' and his childish need to be comforted by his 'bad little Schnucke'. Nor does Cyril's hearty talk with George (p.263) about his lack of courage to risk himself and his 'poor feelings' shock the latter into action.

George confides in his father as to his ideas for the future. Life on the farm is changing; with the advancement of industrialism he sees no future for his farming business in Nethermere. He clearly feels he must have a new purpose in life now that moving to Canada is out of the question: 'It would need Cyril or Lettie to keep me alive in Canada' (p.256). He considers marrying his cousin Meg, who has some money, and becoming the innkeeper of The Ram instead of taking up farming in Canada. Not without irony his father agrees that 'putting up with the next best thing' is what life is generally about. In this he hints both at his son's choice of a partner in marriage and to his new occupation as a publican. For George is a

rural character at heart; not a 'shopkeeper.' He needs a good many glasses of whisky that make him too drunk to keep his eyes open to proceed with his plans, and addresses his 'thick speech' to Meg about the life he has in mind for the two of them: becoming rich as publican of the Ram. She 'looked up at him as if he were noble. Her love for him was so generous that it beautified him' (p.271 ff.).

Now that George has his new commitments and Lettie is almost engaged the finality of it all weighs heavily on her shoulders. Strolling through nature on a windy, sunny day in June Lettie and George are faced with the last convulsions of their togetherness. There is a sense of revolt and reproach in Lettie; 'with her whimsical moods she tormented him' (p.279). Their conversation preceding the burial scene of the dead wood pigeon symbolizes the end of hope between them:

'Cold- he's quite cold, under the feathers! I think a wood-pigeon must enjoy being fought for- and being won; especially if the right one won. It would be a fine pleasure, to see them fighting- don't you think?' she said, torturing him.

'The claws are spread- it fell dead off the perch,' he replied.

'Ah, poor thing-it was wounded- and sat and waited for death- when the other had won. Don't you think life is very cruel, George- and love the cruelest of all?'

He laughed bitterly under the pain of her soft, sad tones. 'Let me bury him- and have done with the beaten lover.'

What Lettie tries to convey is that she had expected him to show initiative: 'if I were a man, I would shape things - oh, wouldn't I have my own way!' (p.281). There had been a time for him to become her lover; when 'the threads' of Lettie's life were 'untwined' (p.285 ff.); 'they drifted about like floating threads of gossamer; and you didn't put out your hand to take them and twist them up into the chord with yours.' Lettie confides to not having the strength anymore to undo her bonds with Leslie now; nor does she expect him to part with Meg. George's incapacity to take his life into his own hands is agonizing: 'Tell me what to do - yes, if you tell me ... what should I do with my love for you?' To Lettie it is clear that in a union with George it would always have been up to her to carry the load. All there is left for her to do at this realization is 'wait in his arms till he was too tired to hold her' -
' "Poor Meg!" she murmured to herself dully.'

There is George's side of the story, too. All this time, he has been aware of the class difference between him and Lettie; he feels he would always have been 'second to Lettie'. Lettie is educated; she speaks French and reads Latin, has knowledge of various forms of art.

And she knows and uses it; sometimes to the ridicule of George. Her 'my dear heart' and 'poor dear' is rather patronizing at times (p.71/4). 'The best part of love is being made much of, being first and foremost in the whole world for somebody', says George (p.312). It would have been possible for George to develop spiritually and intellectually in an intimacy with Lettie; to become as he puts it 'a poet or something, like Burns' (p.368) but he is too insecure and feels the second fiddle - Lettie fails to offer him a sense of security. At the end of the day - of every day - she is off to Leslie, who is 'more agreeable on the whole' than George, her 'Taurus', yes, her 'bull' (p.62). Now the only option open to George is to marry Meg - in order not to end up in a 'lost lane': 'Meg's easy and lovely. I can have her without trembling, she is full of soothing and comfort' (p.312).

George is keen not to lose anymore time and almost literally plucks Meg from her garden to drag her to the registrar (p.314 ff.), ignoring her protest and that of her grandmother at the seeming rush of the undertaking. The latter had never known George to be in any hurry before: 'tha wor niver in a 'orry a' thy life!' But these days are gone, and his life is now heading in the direction of the proverbial repenting at leisure, be it very gradually. The first omen occurs during the ride to the registrar, when Meg 'sat alone in fierce womanhood', in agony over the well-being of someone's baby in a cart, ignoring George, who feels 'a little bit rebuffed' at her not needing his tenderness and protectiveness (p.320). Lunch in 'the Victoria Hôtel' is the daring initiation of their new life together; to George it means an adventure, 'he marched towards the heart of the unknown' (p.321) whereas to Meg it is sheer agony. She begs him to go to an eating house instead, and feels most comfortable in the vulgarity of Colwick Park. Still the marriage seems happy at first (p.325 ff.); George enjoys having a place of his own, a home, and a beautiful wife who adores him. Meg is 'quaint' and 'naive'; she amuses and delights him; 'she sat on his knee and twisted his mustache'. George is 'incredibly happy', Meg is 'a treat'; 'quite uneducated and such fun.' Cyril is annoyed at his friend's amused indulgence of his wife, whereas in the old days he had been something of a prig. The Saxtons used to have a proud attitude, showing reserve to their workers. George has now come down the social ladder; he has married beneath him, and stoops to Meg's level by associating with 'the rum gang' having dinner in the kitchen. He is a far cry away from the days he and Lettie admired paintings together.

And so is Lettie. She has married into her own class, and has found the security she wanted. She develops into a society lady; 'there she stood, with her white hand upon the peacock of her cloak' (p.330). She has 'discovered the charms of womanhood': a show of affected mannerism and lah-di-dah speech, thus fulfilling Leslie's prediction that she will

make a good wife, 'able to entertain and all that' (p.138). Her development is that of the Victorian woman, as Patricia Branca explains in her study of Victorian times^v, which is as follows. In the early years of the 19th century the middle class housewife was a very active participant in the family, fulfilling vital tasks in the dairy, the confectionery, the storeroom, the stillroom, the poultry garden and the kitchen. She even helped her husband with his business. She was truly the 'helpmeet' of her husband. Her most important task was that of bearing children, and she was a loving and attentive mother. The tale goes on to explain that as the century progressed more and more people prospered, especially the middle class. This new prosperity brought about significant changes in the middle-class life style, for the drive for social esteem became an obsession. The middle class expressed this drive by acquiring what has become known as the 'paraphernalia of gentility', large and expensive houses, elegant horses and carriages, a retinue of servants and lavish dinner parties. The 'Perfect Lady' was a very important element of the 'paraphernalia of gentility.' This new image was accompanied by dramatic and direct changes in the life style of the middle-class woman. An instance of this type of woman in Victorian literature is Cathy in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, who became a society lady for the Lintons, an idea that influenced Lawrence's picture of the Tempests in *The White Peacock*. During their get-together in Nethermere at Christmas it is obvious that in six months' time Lettie has developed into the 'Perfect Lady' and Leslie has been reduced to her humble servant (p.330ff.). 'He had lost his assertive self-confidence' and 'moved unobtrusively about the room' as a courteous host to George and a caring and attentive husband to Lettie, who makes it unequivocally clear that she can do perfectly well without his presence.

George scoffs at her new self, so unlike the Lettie he knows. He hates the outward show of it all and the enormous amount of money that is being squandered. His anger acquires a political connotation; as a socialist he feels impelled to think of the homeless and to help 'the poor devils rotting on the embankment'. His loathing is no doubt Lawrence's own, who in his works frequently lashes out at the mercilessness of 'the bourgeois'. The ruling classes, supposed to give guidance to the masses, appear as empty in their nothingness, like the Tempests. Gradually it becomes clear that Lettie has given up her life, serves her son, who is 'her work' and tolerates her husband, 'living life at second hand (p.363 ff.):

Like a nun, she puts over her living face a veil, a sign that the woman no longer exists for herself: she is the servant of God, of some man, of her children, or may be of some cause. As a servant, she is no longer responsible for her self, which would make her terrified and lonely. Service is light and easy. To

be responsible for the good progress of one's life is terrifying. It is the most insufferable form of loneliness, and the heaviest of responsibilities.

At times Lettie is fiercely unhappy with her existence; she writes to Cyril that 'she had nothing at all in her life, it was a barren futility' (p.370 ff.). But on the other hand, when she puts it into perspective she cannot but conclude that she is 'quite content'. Like so many women she lives a small indoor existence, and only occasionally, when she hears 'the winds of life outside' does she wildly crave for more. Then she is driven to the door, but feminine caution keeps her from following the call of the storm. Her life together with Leslie - back at Highclose - does not develop entirely negatively. The partners are at least to some degree content with what they are offering each other and with the merits of modern life. Leslie, being a mine owner, is a busy man, very often on business in Germany or the South of England. He has acquired a taste for public life and in addition to being a County Councilor takes the chair at political meetings of the Conservatives. At home he is 'quite tame' (p.370) in accepting the pecking order; his wife dominates him, and he in his turn dominates their servants. The simple passion between man and woman, so preciousy valued by Lawrence, is out of the question here: 'As Lettie was always a very good wife, Leslie adored her when he had the time, and when he had not, forgot her comfortably'.

Domestic life at the Ram is less wealthy, but by no means happier (352 ff.). There are a good many parallels between working class Meg and middle class Lettie. Both are secure in their 'high maternity'; both are 'mistress and sole authority'; both fathers are outsiders, servants, finding their wives 'hostile to their wishes'. In both cases it is difficult for visitors to avoid listening to talk about babies, or to listen to talk at all. Whereas visitors at Brentwood figure as an audience for Lettie's dabbling in the arts, visitors to the Saxton home are mere intruders in domestic quarrels. All the hostess' energy is directed towards the children, and, as both George and Cyril find out to their dismay, women give up their interest in men most readily once a child is involved. "'Meg never found any pleasure in me as she does in the kids," said George bitterly, for himself.' And where Emily had been full of interest for Cyril, 'her eyes searching mine, her spirit clinging timidly about me', discussing Strauss and Debussy, the 'inarticulate delight' she finds in caring for Meg's baby leaves him 'alone, neglected, forgotten, outside the glow which surrounded the woman and the baby.' The reader gets a notable Lawrencean message (p.373):

A woman who has her child in her arms is a tower of strength, a beautiful, unassailable tower of strength that may in its turn stand quietly dealing death.

Ultimately, the development of the two couples in the novel is an intermingling of domestic problems and class issues in times of change. The most obvious victim is George. He is rising in the world, outgrowing his marriage and losing contact with the class he grew up in; his socialist ideology soon gives way to the temptations of possessions and prestige when he becomes a wealthy landowner. There is an uplift in his domestic life (p.372 ff.) after his daughter Gertie - whom he can see as belonging to him and not merely to her mother, his 'little girl' - is born. At the same time, the gap between him and Meg is growing; he cannot communicate any longer with Meg's usual visitors, 'the wives of shopkeepers and publicans' and finds himself in a vacuum, in social isolation. His ongoing addiction to alcohol is increasingly becoming a worry for Meg and her contempt for him grows proportionally; she enlists their little daughter on her side in her efforts to domineer him into more acceptable behaviour. Lawrence has developed the harmful effects of alcohol in a family with a drinking father in greater detail in his later novel *Sons and Lovers*, which is based on his own youth. His father is portrayed as Walter Morel, a heavily drinking miner who arouses the disgust of both his wife and children. In *The White Peacock*, the friendship Lettie and George are more or less surreptitiously keeping up cannot offer any solace; George is losing more and more ground and ends up a helpless wreck, drinking himself into *delirium tremens*. This is again a theme found in *Wuthering Heights*, in which Hindley drinks himself into oblivion after his wife's death.

The last character to be confronted with a disappointing love life is Cyril, captured in his awkward double role of being one of the youthful characters as well as the narrator of the story. 'Lawrence handicaps himself by using an 'I' narrator,' says Alastair Niven in his work about Lawrence ¹, 'for after Lettie's marriage it becomes difficult to sustain the intimate observation of their relationship, which Cyril's presence beforehand permits.' However, his presence before Lettie's marriage is not always felt as natural, either. In situations where intimacy is a prerequisite it assumes voyeuristic qualities, as in the scene when Lettie and George are enraptured in an amorous mood (p.68). Cyril's presence at George's wedding day (p.318 ff.) is festive; he makes himself useful by ordering lunch for them at the hotel, which is a token of good friendship. But his observation of the newly weds throughout every minute of their first day together until late in the evening is artificial and unconvincing. Lawrence

¹ See endnote ii, p.24

himself came to dislike Cyril's 'general flaccidity'; in July 1908 he wrote about him in his letters ²: 'a young fool..... a frightful bore.... I hate the fellow...'

On the whole Cyril's appearance in the novel is unnatural. As a narrator he is too intrusive and as a young character he remains too much of an outsider, too wise for his years, and particularly to George he relates more like a preacher to his disciples than like a youngster to a friend. There are passages in the novel that flimsily suggest a homosexual interest for George: after the swimming scene (p.294) we read 'the sweetness of the touch of our naked bodies one against the other was superb'. However, equally unconvincing is his involvement with Emily, George's soulful and moralistic sister, who has become a schoolteacher in Nottingham. We suspect a romantic interest mainly through remarks of others. Cyril himself does not go to great lengths to win Emily's favour, though they are frequently seen in each other's company. Emily is not openly revealed as his sweetheart until the end of the novel, be it in retrospect (p.389): she has found someone else. The way Lawrence has Cyril leave the stage of matrimonial interest is hilarious:

'Let me introduce you. Mr Renshaw, Cyril. Tom, you know who it is, you have heard me speak often enough of Cyril. I am going to marry Tom in three weeks' time,' she said, laughing.

Whatever we may think of Cyril, he is not degraded to vindictiveness at the wedding announcement of his beloved. 'Why didn't you tell me?' he asks of her (p.390) and they are all very nice and civilised about it. 'Mr Renshaw', says Cyril, 'you have out-manœuvred me all unawares, quite indecently.' Probably for the best, for the marriage between Emily and Tom is the only one that brings harmony. Emily's courtship with Tom has mysteriously transformed her from a moralistic, faultfinding female into a vital, sensual being. Surrounded by lonely countryside at Papplewick they have 'escaped from the torture of strange, complex, modern life' (p. 404 ff.). Emily lovingly takes care of her deteriorating brother George, who is 'like a tree that is falling, going soft and pale and rotten, clammy with small fungi'. His figure leaning against the gate, a 'condemned man', presents a sharp contrast with Tom and Arthur, who are harmoniously working the land together, father and son, in close unity with nature, in 'an exquisite, subtle rhythm': the life of the past, not yet threatened by machinery.

The strength of the novel is that it conveys the sense of a changing world. It presents many themes that influenced family life and relationships in early 20th century England: industrialization, economic expansion, class issues, motherhood, emancipation. Lawrence's

² See endnote iii, p.42

descriptions bring to life the beauty of the 'Old World' and the liveliness of young people with ideas and zest for life, enjoying nature and each other's company. Its weakness is that characters are not fully developed and themes not worked out sufficiently and consistently. Lawrence needed more time to develop his ideas for novel writing. As we will see in the chapters that follow, he works out the themes and characters of *The White Peacock* more fully in his later work.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ D.H.Lawrence: PHOENIX : The Posthumous Papers of D.H.Lawrence. (Heinemann, London, 1936) p.232

ⁱⁱ Alastair Niven: D.H.Lawrence: The Writer and his Work. (Longman Group Ltd, 1980) p.23

ⁱⁱⁱ Philip Hobsbaum: A Reader's Guide to D.H.Lawrence. (Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1981) p. 42

^{iv} John Worthen: D.H.Lawrence: A Literary Life.(St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993) p.9

^v Patricia Branca: Silent Sisterhood: Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Home. (Croom Helm London, 1977) p.6