

LAWRENCE: NECESSITY, POSSIBILITY, & REVOLUTIONARY LANDSCAPES

NECESSITY, POSSIBILITY, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY LANDSCAPE:

D.H. LAWRENCE AND THE SEARCH FOR A POSSIBLE ENGLAND

By

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ABSTRACT:

The study is meant to show the evolution of D.H. Lawrence's vision in a discussion which moves from his first novel, *The White Peacock*, through his Mexican novel, *The Plumed Serpent*, before ending with Lawrence's last novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Emphasis is placed on the importance of the physical landscape as it relates to the possibility of psychological and spiritual revolutions in Lawrence's characters. An argument is presented to illustrate that the first novel fails to make any serious attempt at upsetting conventional English cultural, emotional, and psychological standards, while *The Plumed Serpent* is able to attack, and destroy, many of these same standards largely because it is set in a "revolutionary landscape" which is not subject to the many "necessary conditions" Lawrence perceived in England. The return to the English landscape in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is shown to represent a synthesis between the two earlier novels insofar as it recognizes both necessary and possible worlds. By emphasizing emotional and psychological, rather than political and social reorganization, the final novel brings a modest, but significant and authentic, revolution into the distinctly unrevolutionary English framework.

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DEDICATION: All of the following is dedicated to my family,  
Meghan Dimmick, who helped immensely, and all  
individuals killed at the hands of Sawney  
Beane.

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## Introduction

Let us seek life where it is to be found. And having found it, life will solve the problems. But every time we deny the living life, in order to solve a problem, we cause ten problems to spring up where was one before. Solving the problems of the people, we lose the people in a poisonous forest of problems.  
(*The Plumed Serpent* 360-1)

D.H. Lawrence's literary project was one which was forever about articulating difficult questions, and formulating difficult answers. In his very early career, the questions seemed to strain his vision almost to breaking point, while at other stages, he shows himself to be entirely at home, not only with answers, but answers of great magnitude and scope. Always, however, there is a steadfast attention to the problems which Lawrence feels plague our consciousness. The manifestations, the questions or the answers, are essentially different phases of the same treatment-- diagnosis and prescription.

The sickness, the problem, as the above epigraph indicates, is inside everything that denies life, and the cure, the solution, is, in the end, just to live vitally, urgently and sensitively. Of course, finding a way to live, and then finally *living* vitally is not a casual decision. Rather, it is a difficult and an elusive goal which Lawrence, both in his fiction and his life, pursued



diligently for almost all of his adult life.

In this study I am attempting to show the process of this pursuit and to draw a relationship between three of Lawrence's novels, *The White Peacock*, *The Plumed Serpent*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Through these novels, I wish to show Lawrence's handling of "the problem" as it moves from preliminary diagnosis in the *White Peacock*, through some radical experimental research in *The Plumed Serpent*, before finally arriving at a workable treatment in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The movement is both gradual and cumulative, and, with a great deal of effort, the feeling of "struggling against certain inevitable conditions" (Holderness 101) gives way to "the hiss of wonder that [is] also awe, terror" (*Lady Chatterley's Lover* 175).

Like his primary characters in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence came to realize that "The earth under [his] feet was a mystery"; and so "he felt his way by tread" (*Lady Chatterley* 127). That is, he moved forward by feeling the mystery beneath his feet, and for the purposes of this study, the most important new earth under the writer's feet is Mexican. Escaping the "inevitable conditions" of English cultural, financial, and class-oriented traditions which conspired against George and Lettie in *The White Peacock*, Lawrence finds, in Mexico and in *The Plumed Serpent*, the freedom he needs to make a full-on assault on the forces which, he believed, "stole the very sunshine out

of the sky and the sap out of the earth" (*Plumed Serpent* 347). It is this "beggar's bowl of charity" (*Plumed Serpent* 347) approach which is "the poisonous forest" of false morality, the problem disguised as the solution. And Mexico, probably because it lacked, for Lawrence anyway, some of the more odious trappings of "real" life in England, "persists in seeming like a stage" ("Indians and Englishmen" 92) to the writer, and so he takes full advantage of theatre's epic possibilities, leveling life-defying traditions through the "heroic" deeds of a couple of born leaders.

But the process in *The Plumed Serpent*, by the very nature of its epic vision, is too excessive, too ambitious, and above all too violent, to be acceptable to most readers. It is, as I have already suggested, a sort of research which, while opening up many new channels of opportunity, does not constitute a viable cure, a viable avenue toward a sensitive and powerful existence.

So, again "by tread" and through "mystery", Lawrence reshapes his approach in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The English landscape is not a stage for Lawrence, and, feeling the ground under, and space around him, he melds the demands of the static realism which defines *The White Peacock*, and the possibility of romantic change which makes up *The Plumed Serpent*. The new revolutionaries, Connie and Mellors, inherit conditions which are much the same as those laid out

in *The White Peacock*, but rather than crumbling under the pressure or launching a full-scale counter-attack, their revolution is individual and interpersonal. They cannot reform their civilization or their culture, but they reform themselves. And this, both positively and negatively it seems, is not only all we need, but all we can really hope for.

### Chapter One: In the Company of One's Ancestors

In many respects, D.H. Lawrence's first novel, *The White Peacock*, represents the author's attempt to write a novel rather than any *specific* novel. In *The White Peacock*, Lawrence sometimes appears to be inordinately occupied with "the novel" as a literary form at the expense of the particular demands of the *actual* novel he was trying to write. As such, the book seems at times to be a disjointed attempt at "going the distance" that the novel demands without proper attention to the various thematic and aesthetic harmonies a great novel requires. It is, as Julian Moynahan says, a lengthy, literary "improvisation" (Moynahan 5) more than a novel. In the end, Lawrence's first effort in the form takes the shape dictated by a series of loosely related, though often illuminating, ideas and events inside a young man's mind. *The White Peacock* then, is in many ways the collection, if not the cohesion, of the pre-occupations, even pre-dispositions, of Lawrence's very early career.

But if the novel is to be an adventure of the mind, pre-dispositions and pre-occupations must necessarily limit the adventure. One cannot roam too far if he believes from the outset that certain paths and certain destinations are inevitable. In this chapter, I will argue that Lawrence's pre-dispositions are importantly bound up with some fairly

traditional, even typical, stances and assessments common to his "own midlands". By "traditional", I will be content to borrow Moynahan's definition which emphasizes, among other things:

...the set of techniques, thematic pre-occupations, styles in language, styles in the creation of mood and atmosphere, story archetypes, normative conventions of narrative and scene organization, etc. etc, which are blended and re-blended by all serious practitioners of fiction in English. (Moynahan xv)

With emphasis on some of the novel's major characters, I hope to show the function of these traditional aspects as they relate to cultural and social structures, the power of natural forces, and the possibility for marital, or at least romantic, satisfaction. More specifically, I wish to argue that *The White Peacock* fails to recognize the possibility of several successful interrelationships between these forces. That is, Lawrence's first novel treats certain tragedies as necessary, despite the fact that his later work clearly shows these same tragedies to be contingent. Indeed, *The White Peacock's* great achievement is not in any of the resolutions it presents, but in successfully posing the difficult questions, uncovering the important problems, he later tried so tirelessly to answer and address.

In his book *D.H. Lawrence: The Artist as Psychologist*, Daniel J. Schneider attacks some of the more difficult problems in understanding the complexity of

Lawrence's worldview. Chief among these is the superficial disjointedness of many of Lawrence's positions. Combating critics who view "Lawrence's technique generally as an evasion of the conflicts he could not deal with in his schizoid state of mind" (Schneider 1), Schneider highlights instead the "sensitive, inquiring, flexible intelligence" (2) evident in Lawrence's work and regrets that such courage and ambition should be re-classified as "simple-minded compulsiveness...paranoia or schizophrenia" (Schneider 2).

The divergence of opinion, it seems to me, is essentially bound up with the interpretation of the words "possibility" and "necessity". Those who criticize Lawrence for being self-contradictory do so on the basis of some kind of "If X, not Y" formula of logical possibility that recognizes that certain states (positions, ideas...) are in opposition to each other and that it is a necessary condition that they cannot be considered to be true or valid simultaneously. This position is certainly plausible, and there *does* seem to be a certain amount of incompatibility between many things that Lawrence says. But there are possibilities beyond the logical, *and* what is considered logical or even necessary is itself in some ways contingent. If Kant is even partially correct (and likely even if he isn't), we *construct* the world for ourselves, and in the process we construct the logical systems we use to limit the

plausible degrees of freedom available to us in any given circumstance.

So, at the risk of over-estimating the power of positive thinking, what is possible is only, and nothing other than, what is *perceived* as possible.

Any writer who seeks to reveal the truth about his deepest desires and fears exposes himself inevitably to the charge that he is unbalanced, sick, and confused. The most bizarre delusions of the schizophrenic are those of normal consciousness in its dreaming state; and it is the business of the ...novelist to dream "being awake". (Schneider 2)

Nobody thinks it odd when things metamorphosize, magnify, or disappear while dreaming because those possibilities are not excluded in "dream logic". The action fits inside the realm of possibility. When we wake we say, "but that could never happen" and we are happy to be back in a space with more easily defined limitations. It's easier to function that way. Schneider suggests, and I do too, that it is also easier to write a novel that way. The great novelist seeks to "discover those deep conflicts and regressive tendencies that...arise in all human behaviour; and to use them in creating his vision of life" (Schneider 2).

So, great novels discover possibilities that did not seem to be there before; they identify things that were previously undefinable. "When a great novelist has *completed* his life work he leaves the possibilities of the form drastically altered" (Moynahan xv-- italics mine).

This kind of reasoning, I hope, can serve as a nice sort of backdrop for the kind of argument I am trying to make about Lawrence's progress. *The White Peacock* represents the beginning, not the completion, of Lawrence's work, and, not surprisingly, leaves nothing, not even the conditions of its characters, "drastically altered". I think this is because Lawrence himself originally suffered from the same limited vision which troubles some of his critics. That is, they all (both Lawrence and the critics) fail to see that there are new and different ways of organizing one's consciousness. Lawrence didn't see certain possibilities because they were excluded by the conventional English thought system within which he was operating.

*The White Peacock* not only presents characters who fail to realize their potential, it is itself an unfulfilled potential. Like so many of its characters, the novel forever seems on the cusp of a breakthrough that never comes. The satisfaction that seems nearly within reach slips away. Unlike its characters, however, the book is not doomed because it is not finite. *The White Peacock* as a novel may not be altogether remarkable, but as an embryonic glimpse, an ultrasound photo, of things to come it is undeniably interesting. If "Life is a thrusting into being, blind in its origins but acquiring, with its increasing differentiation, a purposive nature, characterized by vital striving or aspiration" (Schneider 3), then *The White*



*Peacock* is clearly inside the "blind" phase of Lawrence's career. The clear differentiations come in later novels.

Unfortunately for the characters in the first novel (and in some ways for the reader of it), the blindness of most characters in *The White Peacock* is permanent and their striving is largely unsuccessful. Various misdirected actions and ideas prevent any major breakthroughs, and so everyone, to some real degree, remains a "fixed bit of mosaic" (*White Peacock* 64)-- stagnant, motionless and inert, with every energy, every possibility, falling from them all the time. The failure to take the vital risks, to move beyond the known and into frightening but exhilarating possibility, is one which troubles both the author and the characters in the novel.

Since George Saxton is both the most interesting and the most frustrated character in *The White Peacock*, it is best to begin by considering his aborted attempt to transcend his social position, complete a romantic union and become something other than the "natural man" we encounter at the opening of the novel. After all, he is the character with the most to win and the character who loses the most. To begin with then, we find a strong, arrogant, powerful young man working on a farm. George is both confident and comfortable in his place in the world.

The essential point about George is that at the beginning of the book he is living naturally, happily and freely in a healthy body, which he is

glad to be and which he is proud of (sic).  
(Black 45)

The happiness is derived from the sureness that comes from being in tune with natural forces. As Cyril notes, he has "hardly a single dogma" (*White Peacock* 59) and his simple and effective philosophy is "if you feel like doing a thing, you'd better do it" (*White Peacock* 52). Indeed, it seems that behind this somewhat flippant statement, George is also saying something more illuminating and profound-- "If you need to do it, you'd better do it." The distinction I am trying to make here is between desire and necessity. The former refers to hopes and wishes which may or may not require action (as in, "Man I really feel like a pizza right now"), while the latter *requires* action if some serious consequences are to be avoided (as in, "I need to quit this job or I'm going to go crazy").

At the outset, George is able to grasp intuitively what any given situation requires and to act swiftly. He forgets this later on. The early George has no false sentiment or romantic ideas about the cat Mrs. Nickie Ben and her future. Her legs have been ruined. She can't live without them. She must be swiftly put to sleep. Indeed, the early George finds Lettie's ignorant moral outrage (and her morbid fascination) laughable. Similar scenarios are played out with rabbits and field mice later in the novel, and, each time, George is able to act swiftly and

appropriately while the other characters (with the possible exception of Emily, who, despite earlier contentions, *is* able to throttle the mangy dog when necessary) are not. Their false sense of pity and shame comes out of ignorance. They don't know what they're talking about when it comes to natural processes and make wrong conjectures based on their own experience, which is largely outside of the natural. George does know what he's doing because he feels himself a part of nature and as such he is able to evaluate the various situations properly. Schneider says that "for Lawrence, the goal of life is to live in harmony with the creative and the destructive will of the great source" (Schneider 6). And, since the great source *is* intimately connected with nature, George seems to be close to achieving a goal he had never even really considered. He is comfortable with creation and destruction in equal measure-- at peace with certain powerful forces *because* he has never considered them and simply lets them move through him.

But his strength is also his major weakness. His comfort with the general "flow" of his life in Nature, once disrupted by the intellectual and aesthetic aspirations of Cyril and Lettie, cannot be restored. The new ideas lead him out of the "blind origins" of his life, but he never gains the ability to see. Cyril and Lettie make him "conscious", but for George it seems the better word is *self-conscious*; and so, he begins to ask himself maddening

questions for which he has no answer and, because he cannot answer his own questions, his confidence falters. His awareness of metaphysics, along with his knowledge of social and cultural barriers, overwhelms his knowledge of the biological and he succumbs to the terror of being responsible for the "good progress" of his own life. He has come out of the blind, unthinking happiness and into nothing at all. Schneider says that "the deepest desire of man [is] in his thrusting for individuation" (Schneider 3), but also that "the roots of human purposiveness remain biological, not metaphysical" (Schneider 4). That is, the striving out of blindness and into individual consciousness ought to run through flesh, blood, and life. The existential angst about an authentic self, being responsible for the good progress of one's own life, *should* be combated with the natural, more specifically with a natural connection with another person. George's failure to actively pursue Lettie, coupled with his inability to recognize that his farm life has value, shows his failure to participate in the correction of his own problems.

The ability to act swiftly and appropriately vanishes, and with it goes all of George's natural beauty, all of his native vigour. His descent from strength and confidence into alcoholic weakness comes about because he has given in to the "woefully passive and pathologically oversensitive" (Moynahan 6) world of Cyril and Leslie. He

can't be sure of himself and so places himself, and his future, into Lettie's far from capable hands. After his exposure to Lettie's and Cyril's books and ideas, George says, "It's rotten to find you haven't a single thing you have to be proud of" (*White Peacock* 65), without ever realizing that he has given the strength and confidence of his own intuitive approach away for what is finally nothing at all.

Of course, the young Lawrence has no particular aversion to intellectual and aesthetic pursuits, and the prevalence of various writers, painters, and philosophers in the novel surely shows (as the decision to write a novel does too) that Lawrence saw some major merit in the *conscious* exercising of the mind. The problem for George is that he abnegates what he is. He cannot find a way, see a possibility that he might "become conscious" and maintain his natural connections. He starts to feel self-conscious and stupid when he clearly is not. So, like the critics who limit possibilities, and like Lawrence himself in this case, George feels he is forced to choose between the two potential versions of himself; he can remain in the marginal cultural space he was born into, with the "old building" (*White Peacock* 200) of his station walking about with him all the time, or he can attempt to win Lettie and become a new man altogether.

Despite the claims of his earlier confidence, "when your blood's up, you don't hang halfway" (*White Peacock* 52), he *does* hang halfway exactly when his blood is up. At the crucial junctures in his life, the moments when he must forcibly *make* Lettie either accept or reject him, the *conscious* George is unable to make the sorts of direct, unconscious decisions the unconscious George made out of hand. Because he is no longer functioning as part of an organic system where things happen based on natural necessity, he is "appalled by the momentousness" of having to force himself into one crucial, self-directed moment (Black 46).

Ironically, George's final failure is that he both fails to choose between *and* fails to synthesize the two versions of himself. Unlike every other character in the novel, all of whom ultimately accept at least a version of themselves, George rejects everything and falls in a sort of odd limbo somewhere between the two possibilities he perceives. I say this is ironic because the refusal to choose a single version is productive; and George, although the least successful, is the only character who can be said to have made this refusal. The trick, of course, is to turn the decision not to choose into a willingness to accept.

The "higher" man arises-- that is, the individual, who is "still the *earth's* most recent creation" as Nietzsche said; and it is the higher man who must lead mankind to build a rainbow bridge into the future, not by cutting man off from his

biological roots, but by planting one foot of the rainbow in the Dark Source. (Schneider 4)

The "higher" man is both conscious and unconscious. He is mental and physical. "The Dark Source", more than being just the natural, is the eternal pulse of the universe which defies temporal constructs. George forsakes the source for the construct, and thus disqualifies himself from being one of the earth's most original creatures. Lawrence presents true "higher" men in later novels, but in *The White Peacock* George misses his chance even though he seems to intuitively grasp what is happening to him.

"You see that sycamore," he said, "that bushy one beyond the big willow? I remember when my father broke off the leading shoot because he wanted a fine straight stick, I can remember I felt sorry. It was running up so straight, with such a fine balance of leaves-- you know how a young strong sycamore looks about nine feet high-- it seemed a cruelty. When you [Cyril] are gone, and we are left from here, I shall feel like that, as if my leading shoot were broken off. You see, the tree is spoiled. Yet how it went on growing." (*White Peacock* 223)

Here, George uses a *natural* metaphor to show how a single event (or, presumably, a non-event) can shut down future potentials and relates the metaphor to himself. He seemed nine feet tall and was running up straight, but he breaks his own leading shoot, which is in his intuition. Still more savagely ironic, it is the surviving portion of his own blunted intuition which constructs this hugely suggestive metaphor that his new consciousness fails to pick up. The

tree was growing perfectly until some external force acted upon it and ruined it. George feels that some force has acted against him, and insofar as there really are several difficult social pressures conspiring against him, he is correct. He is probably correct, for example, when he notes that Lettie wouldn't have chosen Leslie "if it hadn't been that he [Leslie] was a prize, with a ticket...[to a comfortable life]" (*White Peacock* 90). But, I think, the most important assault on George's chances comes from within. It is really his own failure to take his old intuitive certainty into his new contemplative consciousness that ruins him. Further, "anything started into life (physical or intellectual) may by a hairsbreadth be misdirected and started into death" (*Black* 48). And, these misdirections spoil the "pure impulse" that directed the thing before. After the momentary failure, the momentary lapse, everything must become conscious. Intense effort is required just to stay alive *even though* the original state required no effort at all.

Some critics have assumed, wrongly I believe, that George's tragedy is in his failure to reach some intellectual promised land. Graham Holderness has said, for example, that after "the opportunity of redeeming his corruptible physical nature by the 'artistic' vision has been lost...George decays" (114). What he says is essentially true, but true in terms of chronological order,



not causal connection. Holderness implies that the "artistic" world is the redeeming one even though the natural one clearly nurtures and maintains George in ways the artistic never does. The extent of the tragedy has as much to do with his not getting back to his original state as it does with his not reaching any "new level".

Holderness also says that a "culture gap...eventually dissociates Cyril from George's tragedy" (Holderness 110), despite the narrator's continued preoccupation with his friend. Later in the same discussion, Holderness says that "George's descent into the mud, squalor and ugliness of socialism (and thence to alcoholism) is merely a symptom of his moral decay and emotional and psychological deterioration" (Holderness 114). This second statement ignores several important facts and events in the novel and reveals important biases in the critic. Among his biases are i) the ridiculous implication of a necessary relationship between socialism and squalor and ii) the indefensible assumption of some causal relationship between socialism and alcoholism. Holderness fails to recognize that the most sober and successful moments in George's adult life occur while he is a diligent socialist and thus misses an essential aspect of the text that other critics seem to notice. Schneider points out, and much of Lawrence's later work indicates, that "[a] healthy humanity cannot exist in a sick society" and that "Social and Political rebellion are a

precondition of psychic health" (Schneider 4). Again, George seems to have had nearly all the tools for a substantial breakthrough that both he, and the young Lawrence, are unable to see through to fruition.

With all this in mind, I think that the following much talked about passage at the book's close makes a great deal of sense.

Like a tree that is falling, going soft and pale and rotten, clammy with small fungi, [George] stood leaning against the gate, while the dim afternoon drifted with a flow of sweet sunshine past him, not touching him. (*White Peacock* 324)

Everything "straight and strong" has disappeared from George and been replaced by the rotten interior. Metaphorically, the words "soft and pale" serve to describe those men who forsake their bodies for "the life of the mind", "the vacuously cultured half-men" (Kermode 12) that Leslie represents and George, so strangely, almost wishes to become. So, despite George's public and social bond with the distinctly unintellectual Meg, the reader sees that George has never really married her emotionally or psychologically and that he still wishes to be something other than he is. Marrying Meg is a *gesture* against aesthetic and intellectual contemplation, but he remains intimately interested in these issues, and his frustrations regarding the mental life do not dissipate, but rather increase, during his married life. From the first

"conscious" moment, he believes that his true strength bears no necessary relation to his physical strength, yet George's mental and physical deterioration clearly coincide. Indeed, it is his physical failure that the reader finds most significant. Everyone in the novel suffers; George is most pathetic because he is *physically* dying. Further, if the sun doesn't reach George, then both he and the tree are no longer touched by the "life-force" (the "dark sun") which sustained them when their lives were running smoothly.

Although George has a true beauty and grace in his physical connections with nature, he wrongly believes that Lettie's "conscious" affections are worth more than anything he has to offer. The assumption of inferiority paralyzes him, and he can't behave naturally around her. "It is clear to the reader that Lettie half-wants George to master her....[but] he is too passive" to seize her (Black 46). His fear of receiving a final, unequivocal rejection from her leaves him forever "dawdling in the portals of his desires" (*White Peacock* 191). It is the loss of the possibility which frightens him; so, in the end, even after he must know he had missed his chance, he occupies himself with possibility and not with reality. "If it was a fine dream, wouldn't you want to go on dreaming?" (*White Peacock* 66). He refuses to take the significant risk of

"pushing the whole thing to a head", and, in the end, he is exactly like the elm tree he and Lettie saw in the days when there was still hope for him.

"Look at that elm," she said, "You'd think it was in full leaf, wouldn't you? Do you know why it is so prolific?"

"No," he said, with a curious questioning drawl of the monosyllable.

"It's casting its bread upon the winds-- no, it is dying, so it puts out all its strength and loads its boughs with its last fruit. It'll be dead next year." (*White Peacock* 209)

Similarly, George, once he feels his death upon him, casts his "bread upon the wind". All of his original desire for Meg, his devotion to socialism, and even his energetic drinking are, like the tree's last flowers, *imitations* of life. They look like the expressions of someone occupied with life, but are really just precursors of death.

George's final visit with Lettie is his last, and most ambitious, attempt to settle things between them, to come out of the dream and recognize the concrete realities that he has tried so hard to ignore. Only then is he prepared for the sort of, "[We] cannot only be friends, it is love or nothing" (Black 47) ultimatum he should have brought to her years before. Of course, a life of dawdling in portals has left him in a hopeless situation. Like a drunken, late night proposal, George's comes too late, after all that was

attractive in him has vanished. When he finally chooses to call her bluff, it is obvious to her and to the reader that he has no other cards left to play; he is a dazed, defeated fighter hoping to strike some impossible, winning blow in his life's final rounds. Like the elm tree, George will be dead within the year.

Still, for all his many shortcomings, George is in some ways the most admirable character in *The White Peacock*. No matter how ineffective and indecisive he is, he does at least begin to try and bridge the novel's social and psychological gaps. Nobody else tries at all. Among the several non-attempts at re-organization, the most important and illuminating are those of Annable, Lettie, Leslie, and, the narrator, Cyril. Each has approached the cultural/natural and individual/social divides differently. Annable violently rejects "any sign of culture" (*White Peacock* 146), while Leslie ultimately becomes an "advocate of [a world where] machinery ...will do the work of men" (*White Peacock* 296). The Beardsalls, with their artistic, middle-class emphasis on cultural matters, fall somewhere in between. Every character encounters some disappointment because of the position he or she chooses, but no one else is willing, or able, to even begin the effort at the "new consciousness" that George

so woefully attempts and that Lawrence eventually believed to be so important.

Annable, like George, appears in the novel as another sort of maladjusted, displaced natural man. He has also endured romantic disappointment, and we can trace his antagonism to culture to his antagonistic relationship with Lady Crystabel. Unlike George, however, he is able to "jump back" to nature with his categorical rejection of all civilization as "the painted fungus of rottenness" (*White Peacock* 146). Both characters "become conscious", but rather than wallow in the abyss between the culturally conscious and the naturally unconscious, Annable ironically attempts to will himself out of the consciousness he believes he mistakenly discovered. He has not escaped without scars, but his emphatic refusal to accept that he has been replaced by some "souly" poet is, though less ambitious, and in its way more hopeless, more useful than George's decision to remain forever in the shadow of his frustrations without making a serious attempt to reconcile them. Annable acknowledges his unhappy circumstance and makes a clean break. George doesn't do this until much much too late. Indeed, the shadow of "souly" poets and painters is one from which he can never quite emerge.

The most significant of the scars the keeper picks up before his break from Lady Crystabel is his universal cynicism. Like the young George, he is comfortable with the destructive forces in nature, with predators, decay and all of "nature's tragic principle" (Black 58), but his disappointment with culture causes him to place too much emphasis on natural destruction, and not enough on the actual life process. Having had the pride of his own living body "humiliated", he proceeds to delight in humiliating other bodies. George never feels the same after Annable physically conquers him, and Cyril wins the keeper's respect because he is interested in "watching some maggots at work in a dead rabbit" (*White Peacock* 146). Indeed, even his seemingly healthy motto, "Be a good animal, true to your animal instinct" (*White Peacock* 147), and his decision to marry "a breeder", are not healthy or creative because they deny that there is anything at all distinct about the human species. Always, the emphasis is on the destructive; degeneration, degradation, and humiliation become him. His final rejection of society is like George's final ultimatum or the tree's final flowers; it comes too late. He has already been sickened unto death by his experiences. His "unfortunate misalliance" (*White Peacock* 151) is one from which he cannot recover. His final gesture, even

though it saves him some small measure of tranquillity, is, like George's, only just another example of "the decay of mankind". (*White Peacock* 147)

Outside of his close parallels with George (and his thematic foreshadowing of Mellors), Annable is also significant because he provides a powerful and overt link between male romantic discontent and maternity. He says that his children "can be like birds, or weasels, or vipers, or squirrels as long as they ain't human rot" (*White Peacock* 132). This statement, I think, shows a complicated relationship between men and their children. First, while maintaining that the children are "beauties" (*White Peacock* 132), he compares them with the sort of poaching, dangerous animals he, as gamekeeper must be on the look-out against. As Michael Black notes, "It seems extraordinary that a gamekeeper should think of his own children as vermin [because] they are not the stock he is paid to preserve, but the predators he is paid to destroy" (Black 64). Thus, he identifies children as both man's essential adversary and the reason for which he exists. That is, the reality of pests makes the gamekeeper necessary even though he must put all his will against them. Similarly, a man must fear his own child because it is an impossible rival in the man's search for his lover's (here exclusively his wife's) affection. Even the



childless Cyril feels the sting of the rebuke of mother-pride. In Lettie's presence, he feels the unpleasant irrelevance a man feels when he is in the presence of a woman caring for a baby. "I longed for a place where [babies] would be obsolete, and young arrogant, impervious mothers might be a forgotten tradition" (*White Peacock* 315). All of this jostling for position, of course, only becomes necessary for men who have failed to make vital connections with their spouses.

As one such man, Annable already knows Cyril's wish is hopeless, and he attempts to destroy the mother-child unity by rendering the whole domestic situation savage. In civilized circumstances, he feels, woman displaces her lover and focuses all her affection on the child, while man remains significant only as progenitor and provider. His wife tells one of the children, "tha's got a funny Dad, tha' has, not like another man, no, my duckie. 'E's got no 'art ter care for nobody, 'e 'asna, ma pigeon-- no-- lives like a stranger to his own flesh an' blood" (*White Peacock* 134). As an "irrational image of... an ideal father" (Ming 134), Annable's strategy, in contrast to Lawrence's own mother's, is one which emphasizes that the children "can fend for themselves like the wild beasts do" (*White Peacock* 132), an approach to parenting typical of most male animals and one which alienates rather than unites his family.

Annable gets no nearer to anyone. Perhaps this is his intention. What is certain, however, is that his experimental attempt to bring up humans as animals has no noticeable advantages. His children are as dysfunctional as Leslie is, just in different ways. Unhappiness and squalor abound, and the defense against the advance of "human rot" (*White Peacock* 132) is far from successful. Refusing to begin again after disappointment, Annable, in spite of his natural affinities, does not represent life, but death. With all his cynical, death-gazing pessimism, "it is rot which he finally stands for" (Black 61).

Leslie Tempest must be considered Annable's categorical opposite. As the novel's most privileged character, he is the embodiment of the cultural and financial traditions which promote the status quo. He relies heavily on his birth-right as a measure of his own personal worth, and his major frustration is that Lettie refuses to recognize that he is as good a match as he believes himself to be. His comment that Annable is a "splendidly built fellow, but callous [and with] no soul" (*White Peacock* 132) shows a degree of self-delusion surpassing that of all other characters. He knows his station in life better than he knows life itself. Kermode calls him "a vacuously cultivated half-man", and although this seems a bit harsh, it does ring

true in a number of ways. He is physically unattractive, and his mind is unremarkable; he has cultivated things which have nothing to do with natural processes. So completely overfed, he never flowers at all.

Despite all these deficiencies, however, Leslie is, in the end, probably the most satisfied of the major characters. (I call him a major character more because of the fact that he is George's major *obstacle* than for anything he actually says or does.) He is satisfied, probably, because his privileged position never "sparks" him into real consciousness. Because the "natural men" endure difficult, life-changing dilemmas (George is pushed off his land, and Annable is dismissed through a servant's door), they are forced into asking difficult, existential questions -- "For what reasons am I living?" Leslie's essential question seems to be-- "How can I attain *and* maintain the things I want?" This question applies equally to financial and romantic matters, and is pragmatic rather than philosophical. It is the question of the diligent financier as much as the dotting suitor.

Leslie wishes to *acquire* Lettie, nothing more and nothing less. He has no "male pride", and so Lettie's apparent sexual revulsion of him doesn't humiliate him the way Annable's rejection by Lady

Crystabel did the keeper. Annable leaves Lady Crystabel because she humiliates "the pride of a body like mine" (*White Peacock* 150); Lettie "can't bear the sight of [her] own hands" (*White Peacock* 176) after Leslie spends the night with her, but the sexual incompatibility doesn't deter him. He wants only to "win her", to "claim everything" (*White Peacock* 86). Indeed, Leslie's ultimate victory comes through an elevated display of his infirmity rather than virility. Lettie's attempt to break off the engagement fails only because he makes such a weeping show of how pathetic he is. "He was querulous, like a sick, indulged child. He would have her arm under his shoulders, and her face near his" (*White Peacock* 197). But, for Leslie and, one assumes, for men of his sort, the acquisition is the key thing, not the process. So, having won Lettie, she ceases to matter to him in the same way. Leslie becomes occupied with business and politics, content to have, if not know, his wife, and Lettie becomes another of the novel's passionate mothers.

So, it is by his very policy of acquisition that Leslie protects himself, insulates himself, from the humiliation of being displaced by his children. Indeed, he seems immune to humiliation of any sort, unless the humiliation is public. He has no problem crying in Lettie's lap, but he does look around "to see if anyone

were near" (*White Peacock* 197). So, it is fortunate for Leslie, if not for inspired romance, that he loses interest in his wife at nearly the same rate his wife loses interest in him. He is so completely out of touch with his own natural tendencies and desires, that, although he is sometimes bothered by George's continued presence, he does not seem very deeply troubled by Lettie's emotional distance from him. Instead of being a good animal, he decides to be a good citizen-- rich, respectable, and a solid provider for his family... whether he knows them or not.

Lettie, of course, is the centre around which the novel's major action revolves. As such, she is both inside all of the major events *and* in some senses aloof from them. She is at once the most active and most passive force in the novel. Her ceaseless provocation of George does not ultimately amount to anything as far as she is concerned, and despite her precocious youth and the tenuous possibility that she might have made a radical choice for her groom, she does exactly what is expected of her and ends up as just another middle-class midland mother who made an appropriate and upwardly-mobile marriage choice. The interesting thing about Lettie is not in anything she does, but what she might have done. But, as I have indicated throughout this chapter, almost none of the "might haves" in *The White*

*Peacock* become reality. So, the reader's interest shifts to non-events as his/her primary focus, and Lettie's relationship with George is the biggest non-event the novel has to offer.

David Cavitch believes that, of all the novel's character's, "only Lettie's powerful, but misguided, self-assertiveness strikes a spark of convincing vitality in the reader" (Cavitch 20). I think he overstates his case here, but it is certainly incontestable that her *will* is the most significant, and changing, variable, in *The White Peacock*. Still, "her calculating choice of Leslie as a socially valuable husband breaks her own integrity" (Cavitch 19), and after her wedding day, she fades from a being a central interest into the more general, undifferentiated mass of matronly duty and devotion. So, her most interesting moments are those spent when the possibility of connection with George is still alive.

The young Lettie seems vaguely aware that George has a power her genteel lifestyle cannot accommodate. Her immediate repulsion at the casual drowning of Mrs. Nickie Ben ("Isn't it cruel, isn't it awful"-- *White Peacock* 13) is followed by a sensual encounter at the piano where she is "thrilling a little as she felt his arms so near her" (*White Peacock* 15). It is open to interpretation whether she is "getting over" the

drowning or settling into and accepting it. Still, it seems any real aversion would have stopped her from following George to the pond in the first place. I think she follows him because she genuinely *wants* to see it happen. If this is so, then it is safe to say that "her erotic response is partly conditioned by the act of violence" (Storch, "Lacerated" 129). That is, she is partly thrilled by George's violent action, and, if she is, then she is close to understanding "the destructive force" of nature. She intuitively grasps onto some portion of what George's worldview offers. This ability to grasp the other side of Nietzsche's rainbow, the foot that is planted in "the Dark Source", is quite remarkable for such a young, naturally inexperienced woman. Indeed, it is Lettie's precocious sensitivity to natural forces, and to the disregard these forces show for social constructs, that leads to her fascination with George and makes their union a real possibility for a time. Despite her shuddering, she knows she is missing something, and intuitively, if not consciously she wants to see the pond "moving with rats" (*White Peacock* 53) and know what happens at the bottom of the lush garden.

Another more famous example of Lettie's, and also Cyril's, awareness of a natural system outside their own over-bred cultural awareness is the passage

about the "sad and mysterious" snow drops (*White Peacock* 129). In the section, Lettie overtly states that the snowdrops are "something out of an old religion, that we have lost" (*White Peacock* 129), and later asks Cyril if he thinks "we can lose things off the earth-- like mastodons, and those old monstrosities-- but things that matter-- wisdom" (*White Peacock* 129-30). She is conscious of the gap between the understanding human beings have acquired and the things we have failed to maintain-- the things we lost track of when we came out of the "blind origins" of our existence. Indeed, her fascination with George is based primarily on the same sense of mystery and longing she finds in the flowers. It is at these unguarded, unaffected moments that Lettie's "return to nature" is most possible. In the end, however, her conscious desire to make a "good thing" out of her marriage thwarts her intuitive desires.

Ultimately, both Lettie and George fail to cooperate, to teach each other gently, and this failure makes their union impossible. Their courtship is a contest of strength versus strength, or, perhaps better, weakness against weakness. George's athletic ability to polka makes Lettie feel flushed and inferior, so she counters by forcing him into a delicate minuet where her advantage is clear and she is certain he will "look a



fool" (*White Peacock* 95). Indeed, it is Lettie's strategy of humiliating and downplaying the very mysteries she loves in George that wrecks their chances. George's later observation that "marriage is a duel, not a duet" (*White Peacock* 301) applies as much to his romantic relationship with Lettie as it does to his wife Meg. Lettie is bored of culture's "half-men", yet she uses her cultural awareness to embarrass George at every turn. And so, George begins to feel, erroneously, that she wants him to be like Leslie, that she *dislikes* him because he is coarse and ignorant. But if George is to be like Leslie, then he is acting against his primary advantage. He can only be Leslie with the added burden of his own financial destitution. A poor, weak man is worse than a rich, weak one, and the competition is impossibly stacked in Leslie's favour.

Still, it is wrong to *blame* Lettie for their failure; better to just point out how she, like everyone else, has botched some of her life's major moments. "Lettie is not just a tease, because she is not entirely in control. She feels a deep pull towards George" (Black 46) and the pull frightens her as all powerful, unexplainable sensations do when they are first felt. Further, because her instincts are not as acute as they might be, her fear is blind and directionless and she

doesn't know, really, what to do with herself, her love, or her life.

Finally then, let us consider Cyril, "a narrator of marked passivity who typically responds to the experience of others rather than acting directly himself" (Storch "Lacerated" 127). He is a man much more interested in "the delicacies of description" (Kermode 9) than in the necessities of action. Indeed, he contributes so little to the action that Lawrence apparently considered writing him out altogether (Ming 128). Still, he is the lens, an impossibly omniscient one, through which the tale is told, and so he merits some attention. He is, in Lawrence's own assessment, "a fool" (Ming 128); and if so, then *The White Peacock* becomes a tale told by an idiot. But he is a remarkably sensitive idiot, and his pathological inaction is probably both a narrative necessity (there are already more than enough characters and events to occupy the reader), and a thematic advantage. He represents the one life-strategy not explored by any of the others--the strategy of the non-choice. Rather than accept responsibility for any poor life-choice he might make, Cyril simply allows life to happen to him without ever making any concrete, directive moves.

If Black is correct that "Marriage is essentially linked with being launched into the world,

where people have to join society" (Black 44), then Cyril's single life means that he has never been launched. He is still, presumably, waiting. While other characters seem to make crucial decisions that change their lives forever, Cyril simply exists, observes and lets life happen to him. He expresses no particular disappointment at losing Emily even though at times his feelings of love for her are both eloquent and sincere. He seems to fall into a life and a career without ever making any conscious decisions, and ends up content to watch people in London after the people of Nethermore pass out of immediate range.

Of course, given the various tragedies he so keenly observes, emotional stasis does seem a legitimate option for Cyril to take. The path of life in *The White Peacock* is so fraught with land-mines that perhaps one really is best to just stand still-- emotionally and psychologically, if not geographically. His love for George "was perfect for a moment, more perfect than any love" he has known since (*White Peacock* 223), but the moment is all he ever gets. He never gets that close to another human being again. And rather than move forward, rather than searching and exploring new relationships and new connections, he halts his emotional development. From the moment of their togetherness in the water, Cyril ceases to *live* life and

becomes at worst a silent observer and at best a concerned but detached counselor.

Julian Moynahan describes Cyril's development after this point as follows:

When the human condition fails him, Cyril turns to nature to gain some solace through his self-identification with its vital rhythms. But he cannot find a saving connection for himself in nature precisely because he is so withdrawn from other human beings. After all, he cannot mate with the flowers, trees, swans, plough horses, and little animals he spends so much time describing. (Moynahan 10)

The point here, I think, is that Cyril's too conscious paranoia about the dangers in human connections destroys any possible organic connection with nature. He evicts himself from human society in a way that is different, but as significant as Annable's voluntary exile. He can't be a good animal, because he won't relate to his own species. And if the natural world is nothing other than that world which is "sundered from consciousness" (Black 76), any attempt to become part of it cannot follow down a path of paranoid hyper-consciousness. So, Cyril is finally left with the emptiness of stasis rather than the emptiness of action-- the pain of having made no decisions at all in place of the pain of having made wrong ones.

In my heart of hearts, I longed for someone to nestle against, someone who would come between me and the coldness and wetness of the surroundings. I envied the two little

miracles [the birds] exposed to any tread, yet so serene. (*White Peacock* 220)

Unfortunately for Cyril, he never grasps the wisdom in his observations; he never understands, his own advice to George-- You have to risk something to get anything-- you must be *exposed* before you can be serene.

I have attempted in the previous pages to show the function of conservatism, stasis, and tradition in *The White Peacock*. The failure of both the writer and his characters to vividly conceive of new interrelationships for the traditional social, financial, psychological, and emotional forces in the novel, and the associated failure to act upon these conceptions, are the fundamentally limiting factors in the novel. Contingency is too often treated as necessity in this book; and, despite a few fumbling steps toward re-alignment, the overall effect is one which seems to validate the belief that some gulfs are impassable-- that intuitive and learned graces cannot be merged and that romantic unions across class barriers are just too difficult to be successfully managed by any but the bravest and most capable of people. Of course, a close reading of the novel, and an understanding of Lawrence's later work, prove that these assumptions are plainly false. What is needed is only the courage and

the confidence to seize the opportunities your spirit,  
if not your better judgment, divines.

In a typically passive, beautiful, but ultimately fruitless image, Lettie tells George that their union is impossible because he has failed put out his hand and twist "the floating threads of gossamer" that make up her life into a chord that is his own (*White Peacock* 215). Wrapped up in the image rather than its implications, she never realizes that she also has failed to act or that their mutual unhappiness rests in their *mutual* inaction. In "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", William Blake says "He who desires and acts not breeds pestilence." Latent, repressed, and unfulfilled desires inevitably get infected, and people rot because of them. In *The White Peacock*, the pestilence of inaction is everywhere. It is a novel of near-misses and unfulfilled possibility. But it is also in its way a novel of promise-- the promise that Lawrence would not suffer the same fate as these characters, and that new possibilities, and new, powerful connections are on the way.

## Chapter Two: Cursed are the Meek

More than thirteen years and a remarkable amount of really wonderful writing lie between the appearance of *The White Peacock* and the completion of *The Plumed Serpent*. Lawrence's ability to handle and manipulate the genre of the novel increased considerably in that time, and, not coincidentally, the author's reputation and position in the literary world grew significantly between 1911 and 1925. By 1925, the appearance of any new Lawrence novel qualified as a major literary event. Unfortunately, however, a major literary event is not the same thing as a major literary achievement, and *The Plumed Serpent*, while probably qualifying for the former, is almost certainly not properly placed under the latter heading. The novel has been criticized for everything from bad taste to nearly overt fascism, and some have concluded, with the critic Eliseo Vivas, that *The Plumed Serpent* should be considered as little other than "an embarrassment for the writer" (Vivas 71). Indeed, the unsatisfying indigenism and the sense that Lawrence is recommending murder and female submission in the name of some "new order" are difficult for the reader to overcome, and, even if he/she does, the rest of the work is not up to the writer's highest standards.

Even so, however, *The Plumed Serpent* is, in its

fashion, an appropriate heir to the work that came before it. Its treatment of the personal and cultural struggles necessary to overcome centuries of life-defying traditions fits nicely with all of Lawrence's previous work, and the difference is probably not inherently in the writer's gaze, but in what he is gazing upon. Lawrence takes on a radically new geographic space in his Mexican novel, and this new space opens up new areas in his creative consciousness. After first leaving England behind in *Aaron's Rod* and *Kangaroo*, he goes one step further in *The Plumed Serpent* and addresses a space where he feels Western Culture has no necessary place. The result is that "His joyful sense of escape from the limitations of his former life [produces] the will and the opportunity to win a similar freedom for his inward-turning imagination" (Cavitch 17). In *The White Peacock*, George complained about carrying the fixed, old buildings of his home around with him, and observed that "you're nothing in a foreign part" (*White Peacock* 64). In *The Plumed Serpent*, Lawrence accepts the clean slate of being nothing fixed, and constructs a tale that George, or even Lawrence in 1911, could hardly have imagined. That is, he leaves not only English culture but also Western thought behind and creates "an autonomous imaginative world" (Storch "Primitive" 57) that is not, for Lawrence, plagued by all of the "inorganic connections" (*Apocalypse* 135) that he believed clouded and constricted



his own cultural traditions. Because he was occupied with factors that were inherently alien not only to his experience but also to his whole mode of thought, it should not be surprising to anyone that Lawrence's hand is less sure in Mexico. The understanding of nuance, which seems to be hardwired into his apprehension of life in Nottinghamshire, is not always on target in *The Plumed Serpent*; and even though the writer considered it for a time to be "nearer to [his] heart than any other work", the book fails to affect most readers this way. Instead, we find ourselves alienated by Ramon's mumbo-jumbo hymns, incredulous about the plausibility of the novel's plot, and largely out of touch with all but one of the novel's characters, Kate Leslie. The question then, when we know he has much better work to offer us, becomes, "Why bother with *The Plumed Serpent* at all?"

The answer, fortunately, need not be dressed up in any sort of "anything we can learn about Lawrence is good for us" deflection. Instead, the roots of the book's value to the critic are to found inside its aesthetic shortcomings. The lack of subtlety and grace which troubles the reader's appreciation provides the critic with more direct access to the "naked bones" of Lawrence's thought.

None of his other works more sharply focuses the dichotomies that troubled Lawrence: religion and politics, flesh and spirit, the desire to be a part of mankind and the need to be free of all social contact. (Scheckner 124)

Even though, and perhaps because, it is a largely unrealized piece of art, *The Plumed Serpent* does allow us to see clearly what the writer was trying to do, what he was up to, and why he thought it was both possible and worthwhile. The "near epic canvas" (Scheckner 132) of the novel is painted in primary colours that refuse to blend together and are thus easier to pick apart. In this sense, *The Plumed Serpent* is an inversion of *The White Peacock*, which, although lacking in anything approaching epic action, maintains a much more graceful sensitivity to individual characters and circumstances.

In the context of this study, I will attempt to focus on Lawrence's handling of both place and possibility in relation to various contradictions in *The Plumed Serpent*. Further, I hope to prove that the new physical space gave rise to several new connections in Lawrence's mind and allowed him to resolve in Mexico several divergent forces that seemed irreconcilable in most of the strictly "English" novels. In direct contrast with the abiding stasis of *The White Peacock*, *The Plumed Serpent* offers radically new, if morally and logically disturbing, solutions to significant social and personal problems. Where the first novel characteristically limits the possible courses of action for all of its characters, Lawrence's Mexican novel seems to create possibilities. That is, *The White Peacock* fails to recognize and address potentially successful (and even

obvious) connections, while *The Plumed Serpent* not only examines existing possibilities, but also actively creates new scenarios, new psychological spaces, for its characters. These new psychological possibilities are powerfully linked to, if not born out of, Lawrence's experiences in Mexico. Indeed, Mexico is not rightly to be considered as just the "setting" of the novel, but rather as one of the major characters in it. The novel isn't just about people *in* Mexico. It is about Mexico and the things that can happen there.

Still, it is not correct to assume that it is possible to find Lawrence's Mexico on any map, and no one is suggesting that the land presented in *The Plumed Serpent* exists or ever existed in "real space". The country he presents is in his mind at least as much as it is anywhere else. It is not my project, therefore, to check the factual validity of Lawrence's impressions. Vivas (71) and others have already shown the "ersatz" nature of the author's primitivism, but I believe, with Hough, that Mexico should not be considered "in an anthropological sense" (Hough 122) when studying *The Plumed Serpent*. Instead, I say only that it is impossible to imagine the novel existing in any other physical space (except perhaps New Mexico). And if we believe that "Lawrence's conception of God is intimately related to his lyric receptivity to the beauty and power of nature" (Vivas 91), then we must concede that this religious

novel must also be Mexico's novel-- a treatment of God's presence in a particular place, a receptive place outside European cultural traditions. While Lawrence might really have thought of the country as "only the efficient cause of an experience in himself" (Hough 122), "the mood of the landscape is indissolubly central to the events and the concerns" (Alldritt 229) of the novel, and it is almost impossible to overstate its significance.

Beyond all consideration of the accuracy of Lawrence's Mexican vision is the matter of his imaginative apprehension of the country. "*The Plumed Serpent* shows Lawrence engaged with a culture and a whole way of life for the first time since his self-imposed exile from England in 1919" (Alldritt 227). He immersed himself in Mexico and emerged with a vision of the country and the country-side, but immersion is not the same thing as incorporation, and he could not possibly have engaged all of the subtleties of the nation in so short a time. However astute Lawrence is, he remains "inevitably a tourist and the image of cultural possibility which the book presents is largely a projection of an *alien* prophecy" (Alldritt 231). Lawrence was an extremely sensitive man with tremendous intuitive powers, but he was not, and could never be, a Mexican. His Mexico is Mexico as viewed by an extremely sensitive, intuitively talented Midland miner's son. As such, Lawrence, however immersed, is never really "melting into the landscape or

fusing with the people" (Edwards "Travel" 165), but observing and feeling them for use as part of his artistic vision. This vision is necessarily limited simply, but significantly, because it is simply not possible that he should have grasped Mexico as fully as he did his own country.

Ironically, it is just this limited vision that opens up possibilities in *The Plumed Serpent*. Lawrence's limitation, rather than constricting the "flow" of his mind, actually leaves him more mental space to play with because he can't see the hurdles his religious reforms would encounter in Mexico. For Lawrence, Mexico was a land inside "the rich and varied world of the 'possible'" (Padhi "Fabular" 239), and he uses this possibility with incredible energy, if suspect judgement. Through this exercise, a space is created where the author's "life research" in England holds no necessary validity in his less extensive experience of Mexico. Indeed, *The White Peacock* can be seen as little other than a testament to his keen awareness of the hurdles (the impossibilities) blocking any sort of restructuring in England. These hurdles are the self-same ones that drove him from the country. His need to travel and his appearance in Mexico are derived from the psychological necessity of his finding a "revolutionary" climate somewhere in the world. *The Plumed Serpent* is an extended attempt to illuminate the forces that might be

operating beyond "a country like England, where all is so safe and ready-made" and to answer the Englishman's final questions, "What am I missing? What is it that is not here?" (*Plumed Serpent* 203).

The answers to these important questions are many, because any physical space that is not "ready-made" (which is to say complete, closed, and finalized) allows characters the freedom to *make* things happen for themselves. Debra Castillo notes that "the real secret of the primitive in this century is the same as always: the primitive can be, has been, will be, whatever the Euro-Americans want it to be" (38). Further, she says that "the alien other provides a more malleable form" (40) for the imaginative thought exercises of the Western artist. Thus, the number of plausible courses of action for a given character is considerably greater in the "unmade" world than it is in the "made" world. The point is that a Western writer like Lawrence sees the Aztec scenario as a sort of Never-Never Land with more degrees of freedom than the "real world" he grew up in. As such, things that would seem laughable (like the word of mouth elevation of a cult directed by two self-declared Man-Gods into the official church of the state) in the writer's usual circumstances are seen as legitimate avenues in the new, imagined, world. Thus, the writer successfully braces himself for "the shower-bath of contempt and hard usage" (*WP* 195) that accompanies unconventional

ideas in ways that George Saxton could not. George lacks the "courage to risk himself" (WP 195) because the threat of censure overpowers him. This threat is, to the Western mind, less real in Mexico. Don Ramon and Don Cipriano are not possible in England, but they might be in a place as dark, strange, and unknowable as Mexico seems to Lawrence. Where George and Lettie Beardsall cannot manage a slight class discrepancy, Cipriano is able to marry a white woman and murder his detractors without penalty, and Ramon almost single-handedly derails the whole Catholic Church in Mexico. In the revolutionary *physical* landscape dichotomies and necessities often fail to enforce themselves, and ambitious characters can move quite naturally into *psycho-emotional* spaces that the dominant modes of Western thought and experience preclude. Thus, the "sad and mysterious" snowdrops which have "lost their meaning" (WP 129) in *The White Peacock* are replaced with something meaningful in Mexico, and the "old religion that we [in the Western World] have lost" (WP 129) is, in a very real sense, found in *The Plumed Serpent*.

Peter Scheckner has said that *The Plumed Serpent* is a novel which can be crudely but usefully examined in terms of various attempts to reconcile binaries, to recognize "both a vision and a repudiation of a vision" (Scheckner 125). These attempts seem to exist on at least two levels. One involves Kate's *psychological* journey toward wholeness;

the other involves the religious and social quest of the Quetzalcoatl cult. The two planes intersect on a number of occasions because Kate's psychological breakthroughs affect the state of the social and religious movement, and the cult's religious and social vision is based on a psychological re-organization. But since every revelation, social or individual, must begin in the mind, I have chosen to focus upon Kate's quest in this study. Her movement from constriction into possibility shows both the need for and the inherent difficulties in any radical re-organization of our conservative values.

Most readers, I believe, will concede (in one fashion or another) that Kate Leslie is the only psychologically interesting and fully realized character in *The Plumed Serpent*. Ramon, Cipriano and Carlota are interesting in terms of the development of plot and the discourse between various argumentative positions, but in the end they sound like mouthpieces for ideas rather than characters. They are *positions*, not people, and so the reader, while certainly able to *consider* them, can't really feel that they are present as people in the world, just as parts of a didactic argument. Only Kate actually reaches the reader in the way most of the major characters in *The White Peacock* do, and it is her struggle with herself that informs the reader's opinion of Ramon's struggle with history. Kate's psychological battle to unpack all of the



baggage she is carrying parallels Ramon's effort to overcome religious tradition. When the hocus-pocus of Ramon's mysticism strains our sympathies, it is Kate's presence, her struggle, that keeps the reader interested. When Kate extends her sympathies to the cult, the reader is inclined to do so also; when she retreats, the reader likes to follow, and her final ambivalence is the reader's too. Her final two comments, "You don't want me to go, do you?" (*Plumed Serpent* 481) and "You won't let me go" (*Plumed Serpent* 482) illustrate the complexity of her relationship not only with Cipriano, but also with Mexico and with herself. Further, her ambiguous relationship to the cult is similar to Lettie's assessment of "the free life" in *The White Peacock*. When questioned by George, Lettie says " 'you don't want to be a fixed bit of a mosaic-- you want to fuse into life, melt and mix with the rest of folk, to have something burned out of you.' " (*WP* 65). But at the same time, she is afraid of giving in to the flame she feels will cleanse her-- so afraid, finally, that she can only make the safe, predictable choice that leaves her so permanently "fixed" in place. Kate makes a much more serious approach to the flame, but even her ambitious and somewhat successful psychological journey reaches no easy conclusion; it just indicates some useful modes of travel. The reader, like the character, has to get wherever she is going by herself.

Like that of the characters (most notably George and Lettie) in *The White Peacock*, Kate's basic struggle is to unite two spheres of life which appear antithetical to each other. She wants to regenerate her life, but she is afraid of the unknown, dark space through which the path to regeneration travels. She wants to remain herself and to avoid becoming the "grimalkin woman" (*Plumed Serpent* 439) she feels her *self* will become if nothing changes. "Of all the horrors, perhaps the grimalkin women, her contemporaries, were the most repellent to her" (*Plumed Serpent* 439). Lettie Beardsall, as English mother and wife to a Conservative Member of Parliament, is just such a contemporary. In her efforts to avoid such a fate, Kate finds the Quetzalcoatl cult to be a dangerous and attractive possibility.

...[Kate] realized [there] was a duplicity in herself. It was as if she had two selves: one, a new one, which belonged to Cipriano and to Ramon, and which was her sensitive, desirous self: the other hard and finished, accomplished, belonging to her mother, her children, England, her whole past. This old accomplished self was curiously hard and free. In it, she was an individual and her own mistress. The other self was vulnerable, and organically connected with Cipriano, even with Ramon and Teresa, and so not free at all.

She was aware of a duality in herself, and she suffered from it. She could not definitely commit herself, either to the old way or to the new. She reacted from both. The old was a prison, and she loathed it. But in the new way she was not her own mistress at all, and all her egoistic will recoiled.  
(*Plumed Serpent* 466)

Curiously, or perhaps characteristically, Kate's confusions are rarely expressed in positive terms. She expresses a fear at being cornered, coupled with a fear of the responsibility of freedom. She is afraid of both options because either choice will "trap" her in one fashion or another. She says both that staying in Mexico will leave her "not free at all", and that her old life in England "was a prison". The fear of constriction, unfortunately for her, in turn constricts her, and her fear of being arrested arrests her development. These problems must be overcome if she is to accept a new and greater vision of her life, and, like Lettie, her crisis is ultimately one of commitment. Both women seek to "look in" on another way of life, but they encounter difficulties when their casual attractions move toward serious, life-changing, consequences. Neil Roberts says that the Quetzalcotl cult "draws in the 'colonial traveller' [Kate] and robs her of the freedom to observe and pass on" (Roberts 138). This "freedom" represents the most important distinction between Lettie and Kate. Lettie *does* move on, and her life, from that point on, becomes essentially fixed. Kate, though never finally and decisively willing to give up her "freedom to pass on", does keep the possibility of final commitment alive, and this possibility, even if largely negative in its origins, is significant.

Further, if we keep in mind the themes of uniting dichotomies and uncovering possibilities, her unwillingness to limit herself is probably psychologically helpful for her. When she says "I will make my submission; as far as I need, and no further" (*Plumed Serpent* 439) she is attempting to keep all the divergent aspects of her personality alive, to have whatever parts of the cake she wants, and to eat it as well. She is aware of the dualistic nature of her personality but she refuses to let the two factions in turn "duel" to the death. The psychologist Erich Neumann, a contemporary and a follower of Jung, sees parts of this strategy as viable. "At the core of Neumann's new ethic is wholeness. 'Whatever leads to wholeness is good. Whatever leads to splitting is evil'" (Edwards "Neumann" 129). Further, he says that all individuals must at some point face a "crisis of consciousness" and that the healthy personality "must face the crisis of consciousness by expanding and strengthening [its] consciousness" (Edwards "Neumann" 130). In the context of this study, expanding one's consciousness can be considered in terms of uncovering possibilities and/or making new connections. That is, Kate's crisis requires an expansion, an extension, of her imagination to some point at which she can intuit, if not grasp, the *possibility* that both individuality and submissiveness to a greater power in the universe can exist simultaneously, that she can remain herself, indeed become

more herself, while "giving over" to the new forces she feels at work on her. "The death of the old self in the primal unity followed by the resurrection of the new self in a new awareness, is the precondition of building a new world, new values, and a new religion" (Schneider 7). Thus, Kate's effort to change, like both George's and Lettie's stands on the doorstep both of a sort of death and of a new kind of life simultaneously.

Given the prevalence, and the author's seeming validation of violence in the novel, it is useful to consider Kate's progress, or alternately her regression, with relation to physical violence in Neumann's terms. At the novel's opening, she hates the "squalid cruelty" of the bullfight and "the squalid sadism of the spectators" and is "disgusted and horrified to the roots of her being" by her experience (Hough 123, 132). She is presented as a hypersensitive, even fragile individual, who cannot bear acts of cruelty. The tortured bird (*Plumed Serpent* 215-6), replacing the rabbit in *The White Peacock*, becomes the object of her extreme sympathy, and the Mexican boys are objects of disdain. These early indicators of Kate's sensitivity work toward the reader's surprise when he is confronted with Kate's near acceptance of the ritual murders Cipriano performs near the book's close. The woman who was sent into "hysterical flight" (Pritchard 172) by the torture of brute animals is just "gloomy and uneasy" about

remorseless executions later on. Hough believes this to be a sign of the degradation of Kate's character, an indication that she has lost all her sensitivity and that she is beginning to exist in the realm of some dangerous abstractions-- that she has bought too far into the symbolism of Quetzalcoatl and misses the actual event in front of her. "[W]hen she thought of [Cipriano] and his soldiers , tales of swift cruelty she had heard of him: when she remembered his stabbing the three helpless peons, she thought: Why should I judge him? He is of the gods" (*Plumed Serpent* 394). According to Hough, both Kate and Lawrence have been seduced by the mythic dimension, have become so taken with the imaginary world they have constructed that they are willing to wholeheartedly "accept the horrors as well as the exaltations of the old religion" (Hough 124). Earlier in the novel, Ramon tells Kate that she must "disentangle [herself] from persons and personalities" (*Plumed Serpent* 288), but in doing so she seems to lose her fundamental connections with the human race and becomes insensitive to human suffering.

Of course, this is all true, and it seems obvious that the idea of Quetzalcoatl as a visible symbol is gradually replaced with some more bizarre conception in which Ramon merges with Quetzalcoatl by the end of the novel. And, given these truths, it does seem difficult to argue for any sort of progression in Kate's character, but I

believe that here and elsewhere Lawrence is carving out a position that has a trace of subtle genius inside its much more obvious failings. That is, the sheer stupidity of validating torture and submission is tempered, if not balanced, by the inspired, and too often missed, legitimacy of Lawrence's (and Neumann's) position-- that the whole human being is better than the split, that confronting and accepting is better than repressing. There is some real value in at least some of Kate's psychological strategies, and it is even possible to uncover some redemptive qualities in Lawrence's sadistic presentations of human suffering. Crudely, the *direction*, not the destination Lawrence indicates is good. The move toward *some* acceptance of the destructive principle is good, but the gruesome celebration of it is not. Herein lies the difference between the practical and natural destruction of the cat, Mrs. Nickie Ben, in *The White Peacock*, and the cruel torture of the beasts and men in *The Plumed Serpent*. Puncturing through the fabric of repression, Lawrence goes too far, and ends up unwittingly showing that the dangers in extreme action are at least as significant as those of the inaction he wittingly displayed in his first novel.

Still, if we can get past our feelings of disgust, there are some important things that can be taken from Lawrence's program. According to Neumann, the split, which is to say the sick, individual divides himself into two

distinct entities-- the persona, housing all positive attributes and representing an idealized vision of the self, and the shadow, housing all those negative, unattractive aspects the individual wishes to deny. "Split, the individual can continue to think of himself as kind, good, even noble. However, what is repressed accumulates in the unconscious and becomes regressive" (Edwards "Neumann" 130). Thus, the shadow becomes larger and more powerful all the time it is being repressed, until it begins to overwhelm the persona and make itself manifest. No one can suppress his shadow forever. "Faced with the problem of confronting his own emerging shadow, the individual finds a scapegoat, that is, he projects what he would rather not know about himself on to something or somebody else" (Edwards "Neumann" 130). In Kate's case then, her hatred of the bloodthirsty masses at the bullfight, in some ways also similar to Lettie's aversion to the drowning of the cat, can be seen as an attempt to suppress her shadow. The crowd's fascination with violence is rejected because she does not wish to acknowledge her own fascination. But, "the persona behind which she tries to hide is merely a cloak and a shell, the 'acceptable facade behind which the dark, strange, eccentric, secret and uncanny side of our nature remains invisible'" (Edwards "Neumann" 134). If this is so, then her ability to accept violence at the novel's close, rather than indicating any regression, is an expression of her



growth, of her willingness to remove the mask, to accept Cipriano's earlier assertion that "Peace is only the rest after war...So it is not more natural than fighting: perhaps not so natural" (*Plumed Serpent* 185). Further, she also comes to accept that "Each man has two spirits in him" (*Plumed Serpent* 186). At this stage, she is at peace with both the creative and the destructive forces in the universe, although not in a very satisfactory sense. There is an important difference between fighting, which pits "natural" adversaries against each other, and torture, which, quite unnaturally, systematically maims and eliminates people based on some *conception*, not intuition, of terms like "good", "necessity" and "order". Nobody in *The Plumed Serpent*, including Lawrence, seems to make this distinction in relation to the Quetzalcoatl cult. So, although it is unquestionably good that her original disgust at the dark, scary forces of Mexico, and her disdain for the Mexican people have given way to a fairly serious desire to confront the darkness inside herself, Kate's, and Lawrence's, unwillingness to reject human torture makes any application of the word "progress" to Kate's development precarious at best.

In spite of this difficulty, however, there is much to be learned from Kate's movement away from her persona and into some version of her "true" personality. The movement is a complicated and difficult one because it affirms and

denies the same thing simultaneously. That is, her rejection of the idealized vision of herself is an avenue toward a heightened (even idealized) state, ironically, of selfhood. Kate becomes what Nietzsche called an "ego hero", "one who dares the evolutionary step and does not, like the average man who clings to the conservatism of the existing system, remain the inveterate enemy of the new" (Edwards "Neumann" 138). And the new, even if tempered with pain and horror (and if only because it infuses some hope that doesn't exist in the old), is always better than the old, especially if the old is the fixed, restricted, conservative structure both Kate and Lawrence knew at home. Through the Quetzalcoatl Cult, Kate realizes something George and Lettie don't seem to recognize-- "[T]here is no dream that is perfect, for every dream has an urge and an ache, an ache and an urge" (*Plumed Serpent* 177). Unwilling to take the important risks, to accept the ache that comes with the dream, both Lettie and George are unwilling contributors to the old, and unwitting enemies of the new. In Kate, then, Lawrence presents the reader with a challenge, rather than an easy solution. Rather than defuse dichotomies, he recognizes their existence and comes to terms with them. The reader must "get past" his aversions and move on to "the next evolutionary step" if he is not to become static and degenerate. By this process, horror and hope become reconciled and the social, psychological and religious

themes concerning the difficult passage toward the regeneration of the individual and the society come together in the emblem of "the true primitive".

The most pointed way in which dualism is expressed in *The Plumed Serpent* is through Lawrence's portrayal of the Indians: they personify the most negative, atavistic qualities of mankind and, at the same time, humanity's most potentially redemptive features. (Scheckner 128)

The positive and negative are inextricably linked, Lawrence suggests, and recognizing this truth is probably every strong individual's first and most significant realization.

The Quetzalcoatl movement manifests the psychological move toward wholeness in religious and social terms. As a religious movement, it seeks to overwhelm Christianity's repressing, regressive tendencies. For Lawrence and for Don Ramon, Catholicism (along with all other Christian belief systems) must be put aside because it encourages people to repress significant parts of themselves. "Christianity is outmoded because of its halfness...[its] stressing of the lamb qualities...and ignoring and repressing of the lion qualities" (Edwards "Neumann" 131). Ramon's new religion recognizes this and attempts to offset generations of self-defeating piety by addressing the whole of humanity-- the creative and the destructive. As the Living Quetzalcoatl, he says, "On the palm of my hand is the water of life and on the back of my hand is the shadow of death" (*Plumed Serpent* 123-4). Later,

Cipriano, as Huitzilapochtli says, "The Lords of Life are the masters of death" (*Plumed Serpent* 380). The effort is always to stress the fact that we are instruments of life and instruments of death. Lawrence's problem with Christianity is based in his belief that its emphasis on meekness makes people feel guilty whenever the lion makes an appearance. Further, because the lion, the shadow, will never go away and everyone can *feel* it inside himself, we grow to hate ourselves and to consider organic parts of ourselves as alien. Lawrence believes that we come to feel that we are unworthy of the divine only because of the way the divine has been constructed for us by Christianity. Ramon's new religion attempts to reconstruct God in a way that more accurately reflects the hopes and needs, not to mention the fundamental make up, of the people. Always, the effort is to show a *vital* religion that puts people in "direct and immediate contact with what [Lawrence] would have called 'the living universe'" (Padhi "New Mexico" 197). It is a religion, unlike Christianity, which takes, rather than begs for, its divinity. When Ramon says, "God must come to Mexico in a blanket and huraches" (*Plumed Serpent* 360), he is making God a Mexican and, in doing so, is claiming for the Mexican people their right to the divine. Of course, the vital, aggressive religion also creates an unnecessarily violent conception of both God and the Mexican people. But again, the problem is one of emphasis, not

existence. To overcome the long-established power of the Lamb, Cipriano and Ramon place too much importance on the Lion. Still, the most important thing is that Ramon recognizes the God inside people, not the abstracted God his wife worships. He creates a God to be *felt* in the core of one's being, not meditated over, and contemplated in the mind.

In *Phoenix* Lawrence makes his rejection of Christianity, and his acceptance of a more accessible divinity, more explicit. "I know my derivation. I was born of no virgin, of no holy ghost. Ah no. These old men telling tribal tales were my fathers" ("Indians and Englishmen" 99). His point is the same as Ramon's. He rejects the mysteries he cannot feel and accepts the ones that reach him as a whole entity. The Christian myths do not appeal to us as people, only as spirits; and because of this limitation, they miss us at the centre of our physicality. The virgin birth makes no sense to us as physical entities, and because we can never understand it physically, its mystery remains foreign to us. The rationale behind Jesus' voluntary submission to crucifixion is similarly foreign to us as physical beings. Because of this natural gulf between us, as human beings, and the Christian mysteries, the church must operate on the basis of several deflections and denials. Like the divine right of kings, or the belief that the masses are naturally unsuited

for power or wealth, the Catholic church only *seems* to be a natural necessity to some of Lawrence's characters because it has been propped up so relentlessly for so long.

In contrast, the church Lawrence proposes in *The Plumed Serpent* focuses on mysteries made manifest. That is, the Quetzalcoatl cult emphasizes the stars, the natural landscape and sexual communion as examples of mysteries that we do feel in the bottom of our beings, mysteries that do not need to be validated by artificial dogmas. Both Lawrence and Ramon want "to make people emotionally or intuitively vital by exposing them to the world of nature, or the cosmos, where the gods dwell" (Iida 180). We become "vital" because we access the gods directly when we feel natural mysteries organically in our everyday life. Thus, the emphasis on "the morning star" is important because the morning star, the planet Venus, actually *is* the evening star as well. It is not only a "symbol of that which reconciles morning and night" (Kermode 106), but a real, functional part of both day and night. The people do not need to be told about this kind of mystery; they can see it for themselves, and seeing it, begin to understand that "man [can] exist between and reconcile the opposing forces of creation *like the morning star*" (Pritchard 172, emphasis mine), that there are mysteries of identity, not just mysteries of alienation. Thus, the Quetzalcoatl cult attempts to build a structure based upon the strange forces

that make up the experience of its constituents, instead of a structure which restricts and represses these forces.

One of the novel's most distinctive features is its elevation of non-traditional, even counter-logical ways of learning and understanding. Lawrence suggests that attempting to "know" too much makes us oblivious to the natural flow of the universe, and further that these natural mysteries, even though they can never be fully explained, are the sources of true wisdom. He believes that Western Culture typically attempts to decode, rather than truly understand, the things with which it comes in contact. And these unimaginative attempts at logically cornering the "meaning" of things leave us closed to many illuminating possibilities. Kate says that she is "cursed" with the "itching, prurient, knowing, imagining eye" (*Plumed Serpent* 184), and asks, "Who will free me from the grappling of my eyes, from the impurity of sharp sight?" (*Plumed Serpent* 184) Sharp sight is seen as impure because it is limiting. When Kate is trying to understand the hymns of Quetzalcoatl, she has trouble because she is focusing on the literal meaning, rather than the underlying sense, of the words. Indeed, part of the problem which makes the hymns seem so foolish to some readers is that Lawrence is trying to transmit the non-linguistic sense of the *sounds* of Quetzalcoatl through an emphatically linguistic medium, the novel. That is, Lawrence wants to show how the hymns feel,

but can only give us what they say, which is not all that impressive. In *Phoenix*, Lawrence speaks of the experience with Indian hymns which gave rise to those found in *The Plumed Serpent*.

The voice out of the far-off time was not for my ears. Its language was unknown to me. And I did not wish to know. It was enough to hear the sound issuing plangent from the bristling darkness of the far-off past, to see the bronze mask of the face uplifted, the white, small close-packed teeth showing all the time. It was not for me, and I knew it. Nor had I any curiosity to understand. ("Indians and Englishmen" 99)

The experience is never really successfully communicated in the novel, but the approach is significant. Lawrence believes his unwillingness to decode the words helps him to connect with the hymn on a more personal, organic level. Indeed, Kimberly Van Hoosier-Carey has quite successfully argued that the most significant difference between the drafts of the novel and the final version is that "in the published version, Ramon tries to reestablish an ancient way of *experiencing* the mysteries of the universe" while the drafts are full of "abstract explanations" (Van Hoosier-Carey 113). Lawrence also attempts this feat, but Kate's experience is not the reader's, and, even if Ramon's hymns work when accompanied with drums and ceremony, the reader can't hear or see anything but the words on the page, and she probably finally finds the hymns to be too long, too vague, and too disjointed to ever represent the organic forces both Ramon and Lawrence want them to embody.



Still, we do know that they work even if we don't believe that they should, and the fact that Lawrence believes, even if he can't show, they work is significant. As both artistic creations and organic rhythms, they should provide a link between the two spheres (the pale contemplative and the ruggedly natural) Lawrence was unable to reconcile in *The White Peacock*. In the first novel, the choice is between Natural Man and Man of Culture. George must either keep his unthinking, unconscious relationship with the natural world or attempt the leap into the artistry and culture of a "more refined" class. In *The Plumed Serpent*, Ramon and Cipriano attempt, with some tempered success, to form a culture of the natural. They are not ignorant peons (Cipriano was educated in England), but they are in league with everything the peons know. They are not pale, abstracted "idea-mongers" (Vivas 112), but they do know how to contemplate complex ideas. As both natural men (their religion emphasizes the tangible mysteries of the cosmos) and men of sociopolitical, religious and cultural significance, they are able to unite modes of existence that George Saxton never could. They are in the "state of true relatedness" which lies between the situations where we seek our own ends absolutely and those where we "yield utterly" (Hyde and Clark 144). They give in to the Dark Source and remain strong individuals. They maintain their intellects without destroying mystery. Thus, the sorts of

difficulties which troubled Annable and George, where they feel compelled to solve one problem by creating another, are avoided. The Quetzalcoatl movement affirms both the natural animal and the contemplative soul of the Mexican people, the lion and the lamb, and rejects only the artificial piety and sanctimonious pretensions of the old order. In *Apocalypse* Lawrence sounds suspiciously like Ramon when he says "What we want to destroy is our false, inorganic connections....and to reestablish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family" (*Apocalypse* 135). The Quetzalcoatl cult sometimes seems to be coming tantalizingly close to realizing this dream.

Countering this dream-force is Dona Carlota. Ramon's first wife is the novel's most prominent example of the old, split, religious vision the Quetzalcoatl cult is attempting to overwhelm. Hers is the devouring lamb, the pale pathetic mildness that begs for everything and demands nothing. Despite the fact that she is a Mexican and Roman Catholic, she comes to represent the tired, unimaginative conservatism Lawrence associated with England because she believes things are good simply because they have strong traditions. Her morality-by-rote devotion to various abstractions is pathological in its sense of denial. Regardless of what the reader thinks of Ramon's movement as a viable successor, we can see that Carlota's old vision is outmoded. Indeed,

Vivas believes her sort of repressive Christianity to be just another sort of Paganism, thinly veiled in Christian dogma.

The Indians of Mexico have remained very much the old polytheists that they were when Cortez brought down Montezuma....The elaborate and subtle theology preached by the conquerors could not have made much sense to them. What touches them... are the visible symbols: the pictures or statues of the Father, the young Jesus, the bleeding Christ on the cross, the Dove, the Lamb, the Virgin, and the saints. (Vivas 82)

If Vivas is correct, then Carlota *is* already Pagan and, ironically, already a devotee of the Church of the Visible Symbol, a church to which both she and Ramon belong. Further, Ramon's attempt to establish some continuity between Jesus and Quetzalcoatl (Ramon says they are brothers) is legitimate, because it appeals to both the past and the present manifestations of the worship of symbol. Jesus *did* replace the Aztec gods, but he did not revolutionize the *kind* of praying; the polytheistic always remained. Thus, Quetzalcoatl can step back into the Mexican religious consciousness without too much difficulty. All of these things together make the narrator's comment that Carlota's "love was nearly all will" (*Plumed Serpent* 156) applicable to both her romantic and her religious attachments. She, like Leslie in *The White Peacock*, is always *trying* to maintain and promote a vision that does not maintain and promote itself. Will and effort are needed to impose an order (the split, lamb-only Catholicism that is

"weakening and vitiating" her children) that does not impose itself organically. Ramon seeks to restore "the awful mystery that men have dreaded, been fascinated by, and have been compelled to worship, [that] modern intellectuals are incapable of discovering" (Vivas 108), and, despite the fact that it does get pretty awful in a violent sense, the movement into mystery is, ultimately, the only way with even the possibility of any redemptive power.

In the end, then, *The Plumed Serpent* might be best considered in terms of what Julian Moynahan calls "a semi-deliberate giving way to confusion" (Moynahan 113). Both the writer, and his more sympathetically portrayed characters, are surely occupied in a vigorous exercise of mind and imagination; this project, by the very nature of its ambition, moves into the strange and unexpected spaces where, Lawrence believed, the great novelist finds his home. These spaces are both physical and psychological. Unfortunately, one of the places *The Plumed Serpent* leads the reader into is downright frightening in its harshness. Still, his Mexican novel, in considering a dark and different nation at its base, both maps out and stumbles into areas a less vigorous novel like *The White Peacock* does not. Indeed, for all its aesthetic, and moral shortcomings, *The Plumed Serpent* is an unquestionably powerful novel. Not powerful, perhaps, in the sense that it has the ability to radically affect those who read it, but powerful in the

sense that it is full of power, that power is part of its content. It is *about* being full of power-- a power that takes risks, tackles major problems, and seeks difficult and tenuous connections between far-flung ideas and influences. It finds spaces, both psychic and physical, that the people of Nethermore, with their powerless submission to the existing order, could never, and might not even want to, imagine.

### Chapter Three: A Revolutionary Intimacy

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* occupies, I think, an interesting space between the universal paralysis of *The White Peacock* and the unbridled "action" of *The Plumed Serpent*. Where the first novel habitually fails to recognize the possibility for even slight social, emotional and psychological re-organization, the Mexican book takes dramatic re-structuring to be both plausible and possible, and uses radical religious reform as an avenue toward some new, higher consciousness. Over the course of a number of years, Lawrence moved from a novel based primarily on the inability of certain individuals to take risks and change themselves to a fairly didactic treatment of the ability of certain "leaders of men" to reshape history. Lawrence was oppressively aware of the constricting nature of English society, and *The White Peacock* shows just how few possibilities the young writer perceived there. In contrast, *The Plumed Serpent* shows how many opportunities he seemed to find in a "dark, mysterious" Mexico. Thus, we find ourselves reading two distinct and very different parts of Lawrence's vision in the two novels so far addressed. The two visions embody "the conflict between a mode of discovery and a mode of certainty" (Squires 487); the discovery of possibilities, and the certainty of the status

quo. The part of the vision involving *The White Peacock* is a hopeless recognition of the myriad of hurdles that stand between the England Lawrence knows and the England he desires. *The Plumed Serpent's* part shows an ambitious and hopeful thought experiment which suggests that the world might still, in some probably violent fashion, save itself. The subject of this chapter is Lawrence's attempt to unite, or at least in some way synthesize, the two visions-- to bring some hope of new and powerful connections back to the English landscape, or more crudely to examine just how much of the possibility, the hopeful vision (which found so much problematic space overseas), made it safely back across the Atlantic.

A unique feature of the three novels I have been trying to address here resides in their chronological relationships with each other. By chronological I do not mean the order of their appearance in "actual" time. (For the sake of reference, *The White Peacock* appeared in 1911, *The Plumed Serpent* in 1925, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1928.) Instead, I mean only the way in which the "fictional time frames" of the individual novels fit together. I do not mean this in terms of months or years, but in terms of the stages of development of each book's major characters. That is, the major concerns of the major personalities are different every time, but together they form a sort of continuum. For the most part, *The White Peacock* is a

coming of age novel. It begins with young characters and occupies itself with the important life choices typical of most young adults. The most significant of the choices they make is, of course, that of a marital partner. *The Plumed Serpent* is, in contrast, an application of a religious and social theory. It tends to consider this theory as more important than the dramatic difficulties of characters; but, even so, the novel begins with characters, such as they are, who are long past these sorts of decisions, and only brings up romantic relationships in connection with the religious and social movement of Quetzalcoatl. That is, both Kate and Cipriano's and Ramon and Teresa's relationships are significant only insofar as they illustrate some aspect (most notably the giving over of the individual will into the new, greater mystery) of the novel's overall regenerative purpose. It is a novel where interpersonal relationships, despite the significance of sex, are secondary to larger, broader cultural reforms.

The huge gap between the concern for individual romance and the concern for social re-structuring is strangely and almost perfectly negotiated by *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It begins somewhere very close to the place where *The White Peacock* leaves off, and ends at almost exactly the point where *The Plumed Serpent* picks up. It covers the space after the marital decision is made, moves through the consequences of this decision, presents the



process of psychological and emotional reform that precedes the *action* of Connie's rejection of traditional standards, and ends with Mellors contemplating a modest sort of revolution that remains interestingly similar in intent to Ramon's in *The Plumed Serpent*. I don't think that this relationship is unilluminating. The space that I am here calling chronological parallels the thematic space I am arguing for in this paper. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* fits *between* the other two novels. Its breakthroughs are more tender and timid (and less aggressive and violent) than the Mexican revolution, but less hopeless and static than the various non-events of *The White Peacock*. The movement, as I have set it up here, is one that travels from the self-paralyzing self-consciousness of George Saxton, through the intense, intuitive, powerful, personal and, above all, active relationship of Connie and Mellors, before finally spilling over into the impersonal, didactic "movement" of Quetzalcoatl. And, because both the static and the violent positions are likely to be unacceptable to most readers, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is not only between the other two novels, but above, ahead of, and better than them because it offers the most viable solution to the social and artistic problems which, to different degrees, trouble each of these three novels.

To analyze the intermediate, and to me more inviting position of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I will attempt first to

look *forward* from the stasis of the *White Peacock*, then, more briefly, *backward* from *The Plumed Serpent*. That is, I will show the ways in which *Lady Chatterley* advances past the universal arrest of the first book *and* the ways in which it shies away from the excessive radicalism of the Mexican novel.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is, like *The White Peacock*, an emphatically "English" novel. Further, I agree with Daniel Schneider when he says that "Lawrence was at his best when he wrote about *his* England" (Schneider 238). *Lady Chatterley* also represents a return to fictional realism after the various "foreign" novels which ended with *The Plumed Serpent*. These simultaneous returns are not coincidental but importantly related. Lawrence's intimate knowledge of his own Midlands demanded an authentic touch, and his own experience would tolerate none of the vague conjectures and romantic fabrications that sometimes crippled his novels written about other continents. Not even Lawrence's vivid and restless imagination could ignore the "real" limitations that oppose change in England. Consequently, the new regeneration exists in a limited framework which happily precludes the excesses of action and intention in *The Plumed Serpent* while still maintaining, even expanding upon, that novel's general emphasis on the value of unconventional, organic connection.

So, the heroes of the "leadership" novels never receive passports to the U.K., and a new, more personal, more realistic, and generally less offensive vision of the ambitious protagonist emerges. Lawrence returns to characters and leaves socio-historical/religio-political concepts largely behind. "In the opening stages of Connie's acquaintance with Mellors all doctrine seems to have been forgotten, and we simply have the intimate, closely observed record of the secret growth of a relationship" (Hough 155). In his famous letter to Witter Bynner, written in between *The Plumed Serpent* and *Lady Chatterley*, Lawrence acknowledges that the most useful revolutions are interpersonal and/or internal rather than structural, religious or political in the conventional sense.

The leader of men is a back number. After all, at the back of the hero is the militant ideal; and the militant ideal, or the ideal militant seems to me also a cold egg...The leader cum follower relationship is a bore. And the new relationship will be a sort of tenderness, sensitive, between men and men and men and women and not the one up, one down, lead on I follow, ich dien, sort of business. (*Letters* 711)

Thus, the hero, in the sense expressed in *The Plumed Serpent*, disappears, and is replaced not by another "super" hero, but with a sympathetic protagonist, a psychologically accessible character, struggling with a number of significant and substantial obstacles. "*Lady Chatterley* represents a fresh attempt at least to confront the problem of living out a life, coping with a determined set of

conditions, instead of running off to another continent to find new ones" (Hough 148).

But, of course, there is something more significant than the confrontation of problems-- the potential for solutions. Indeed, Lawrence's first novel expressed the nature of the difficulties so emphatically that he hardly needed to gloss the initial "conditions" again. The significant thing about the "fresh" attempt at realism is that it carries with it the echo of the hero, the memory of radical possibility, and this shadow permeates *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Thus, even as he is creating a "persuasively real" (Schneider 240) scenario, "the rich tapestry of history, social struggle and interdependence of public and private sectors is greatly diminished" (Scheckner 161) by comparison with earlier "English" novels, and the diminished presence of socio-historical necessity leaves extra room for characters to act freely. Thus, the earlier polemical vision that suggested England was the land of *in*opportunities in the same way that Mexico was the land of opportunity is compromised. As Schneider puts it, "Lawrence normalizes, at last, his mystical vision" (Schneider 240). That is, the new policy of tenderness, and intimacy, based on the power of sex, allows for "mystical" possibilities in realistic fiction. Rather than submitting to, or ignoring, historical and social circumstance, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* enters into negotiations with both real limitations and

imaginative opportunities. Thus, the new gamekeeper, Mellors, even though he feels "great groping white hands...wanting to get hold of the throat of anyone who tries to live" (*Lady Chatterley* 300), is able to "pick up" on possibilities that the first keeper, Annable, could not. The new class-troubled romance, between Mellors and Connie, breaks through where George and Lettie's relationship stumbled. The money and prestige of the weak, sickly half-man in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are not enough, finally, to get him what he wants. Lawrence revisits a number of the scenarios of *The White Peacock*, and presents some much more hopeful conclusions-- most significantly, that the society and the traditions which strong individuals "bump up against ... with a vengeance" (Hough 164) are not indomitable and that there is *space*, even in England, for true relationships, and by extension real living, to take place.

The points of connection between Lettie Beardsall and Constance Chatterley are many. Both are confronted with the possibility of an instinctively desirable but socially and financially unattractive romance. Both must struggle to cast off cultural baggage before any new connection can be made, and both marry rich, "intelligent" men who are emphatically not "natural" because they do not, finally, believe that their physical bodies should matter at all. This scenario is so much a part of Lawrence's fiction as to become a sort of blueprint.

From *The White Peacock* on , there are women... who, afraid of losing control, won't submit to that feeling of going beyond themselves....[T]hey avoid 'living touch.' In fact, believing that close contact will suffocate, extinguish, and annihilate them, they remain aloof and detached. In doing so, they feel secure; they can control situations. But they also feel dissatisfied and unfulfilled....Seeking a release from their emptiness, they engage in brief flirtations and meaningless affairs, and, eventually marry a safe man, one who is older, sickly and weak. As a last resort they seek self-abnegation by accepting roles in life: they become mothers and wives. (Edwards "Submission" 213-4)

While one might contest Edwards' use of the word "meaningless" to describe all of these affairs, I believe he is correct about the general pattern. Further, this pattern seems to represent the normal, though decidedly not "natural", line of development for Lawrence's women. The disjunction between the natural and the normal comes about because the dominant traditions in English culture are, for Lawrence, themselves unnatural and must be combated by strong, resilient individuals.

Still, some of Lawrence's female characters do manage to avoid the usual pitfalls. Because of her resistance to the pattern, Connie's affair, far from being meaningless, becomes the centre, the very locus, of meaning for her. Here, I do not say "meaning" in terms of any easily explained *understanding*, but rather meaning in the sense that it is the most important part of her life. Her "sympathetic connection" (Schneider 240) with Mellors

changes everything about her life and allows her to overcome "the separateness of upper class life....[in which] all capacity for tenderness and warm human relationships is lost" (Hough 150-1).

Connie and Mellors, like Lettie and George, and even Kate and Cipriano before them, engage in a sort of power struggle *for a time* but they are finally able to "submit" to each other. Lettie and George never make this submission, and Kate and Cipriano make it only partially. Hence, they never make the same powerful connections. George's simple shows of physical vitality are continually deflated by Lettie's cultural pretensions, and the two spheres, the natural and the cultural, are never finally linked. Instead, they are played against each other for contrast, but not for connection. Thus, their affair ultimately amounts to (means?) nothing. Kate and Cipriano get a little closer together, but the same guarding of the self occurs and limits their connection. When she says "One can have enough of a good thing....Quetzalcoatl and all that" (*Plumed Serpent* 430), she is commenting on the most essential project of Cipriano's life. She knows, even though she is talking to Ramon at the time, that any rejection of the cult is necessarily a rejection of Cipriano. Thus, she believes she can have too much of him, and the same distancing, the same refusal to give in, occurs. In contrast, Mellors uses the Tevershall dialect in his relationship with Connie to

illustrate his disregard for all that is vacantly "proper" in the aristocratic England Wragby represents. But this is a contempt for a cultural tradition, not an individual. It isn't mean-spirited in the way that Lettie is when she forces George to look "a fool" in the minuet. Instead, the dialect is a sort of road-marker, a reference-point that should indicate to Connie what Mellors thinks of her "life in the void" (*Lady Chatterley* 18). This is not to say that the dialect is a conscious invitation by Mellors, just that the distance, first established through the unconventional use of language, does not hold forever, and that it ends up being a source of connection between them.

Thus, Connie goes from openly hating the dialect (*Lady Chatterley* 172) to a giggling attempt at it (*Lady Chatterley* 177) after sex in just a few pages. The sexual connection transforms her contempt into wonder. "How was it possible, this beauty here, where she had previously been only repelled" (*Lady Chatterley* 175). Lady Constance Chatterley, in some sort of joy of sexual afterglow, reaches out and attempts to speak in her lover's "crude" voice. Lettie and Kate never make parallel attempts. Instead, Lettie humiliates George into a frustrated silence, while she, in turn, fulfills Edwards' pattern and becomes Leslie's proper wife and a doting mother to her children. Further, Kate, refusing to yield without qualification, ends up somewhere halfway between "You don't want me to go, do you?"



(*Plumed Serpent* 444) pleading for acceptance, and "You won't let me go" (*Plumed Serpent* 444) refusal of connection. Insofar as each refuses these new connections, each comes to "sacrifice her individuality...and experience life only vaguely" (Edwards "Submission" 213). Importantly, we see that the refusal to connect leads to the loss of individuality. The too aloof guarding of her "self", actually destroys the capacity to live life fully. Connie, despite the wide social gap and the profound stigma of adultery, does not fall victim to the same pattern.

Another aspect of the pattern Edwards outlines has to do with the choice of sickly, weak husbands. We don't know anything really about Kate's Irish husband Joachim, but both Lettie and Connie are married to men who cannot, either because of psychological barriers or physical necessity, establish any sort of relationship between their intellects and their physical bodies. Lettie tells Leslie that they "can't be...flesh of one flesh" (*WP* 196), and although Connie and Clifford are "verbally very near" (*Lady Chatterley* 8), they are physically "out of contact" (*Lady Chatterley* 19). Strangely, or for Lawrence probably typically, both women are in some way won rather than lost by this physical absence. Leslie corners Lettie into marrying him through a shameless display of his own weakness after the accident. Similarly, we learn very early in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that "[Clifford] was a hurt thing. And as such Connie stuck

to him passionately" (*Lady Chatterley* 13). The force of any real, physical virility is so foreign to both women as to be shocking and even frightening, and they are drawn to weakness. Connie is shaken by the "swift menace" (*Lady Chatterley* 46) Mellors represents to her on their first encounter, and George sends shivers through Lettie when he stands near to her. Further, both Leslie and Clifford wield their physical weakness as a psychological weapon.

Clifford's "But for you, I'm absolutely nothing" (*Lady Chatterley* 112) is passively aggressive in its attempt to block off and limit Connie's chances at changing her life. The reader picks this up, and resents the illegitimate bonds of pity Clifford is so consciously and inauthentically trying to maintain. Lawrence strongly suggests that both Leslie and Clifford are *psychological* and *emotional* cripples more than anything else.

Lawrence rejects false pity, I think, without ever offending our usual bonds of sympathy with injured parties. The narrator says that Clifford is a "hurt thing" and that his injury strengthens Connie's affection. This seems to be true, and no one, I think, will find it particularly unusual or even really unhealthy that she should feel this way. Healthy people *can* feel badly for other people. But, I also think that a more accurate assessment of Clifford's condition is that he is not hurt, but sick. There is a large and significant difference between a hurt thing and a

sick thing, and many acts which seem good and generous in the first scenario are foolish and unhealthy in the second. No one is afraid of *hurt* things, whereas many people are afraid of sick things. We all gather to visit a friend with a broken ankle; we don't do the same for friends with chicken pox. So, Clifford, insofar as he is hurt, is inoffensive and even a bit sympathetic, but insofar as he is sick, diseased, and contagious, he is to be avoided.

Connie finally loses her pitying connection with Clifford and realizes, as natural law dictates, that it is wrong to voluntarily endure and contract her husband's illness. The illness, crudely, is the one which Lettie catches, and Kate never completely shakes. It is one which denies "the Deed of life" (*A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"* 329), the organic form of life which is forever in conflict with the tired and the mechanical, and which is forever denying a life built on empty and repressive traditions. Clifford's hope of ever having meaningful physical relationships is shattered by the war, but there is little to indicate that he ever had the psychological tools to recognize that they are even important. Leslie never does! The problem for Clifford seems to have more to do with recognition than action. It's not that he knows the physical realm matters and can't satisfy himself. Quite the opposite, he simply does not believe that the physical matters at all. Moynahan notes that a man totally

disconnected from his own corpus "will create a 'simulacrum of reality', a complex pattern of abstract relationships to substitute for felt connections between himself and others" (Moynahan 151). Clifford's "abstract relationships" are represented through his disembodied intellectualism, his books that have "nothing in them", his fanatical attachment to the radio, and, most importantly, his relationship with the workers in the mine, whom he considers as nothing other than mechanical objects. But the reader, I think, doesn't really care if Clifford is a lost cause. He only matters because his diseased simulacrum of reality is infectious. "Clifford's great crime is that he draws his wife into his orbit of non-existence" (151). The same can be said, though probably less emphatically, about Leslie, who, by virtue of his cultural and financial inheritance, "acquires" Lettie at the expense of her natural desires. The great project of all three novels, then, is to reverse the movement toward unreality, to resist the typical pattern, to heal ourselves of our own sickness.

This project becomes *Lady Chatterley's Lover's* new revolution, not one of sweeping external reforms, but of personal and individual decisions to resist pale abstraction through a serious connection with another person. The attack on the obviously flawed social structure is focused upon root causes rather than large-scale manifestations. When Scheckner says, "What has gone bad... is not the social

system ... but man's mental consciousness" (Scheckner 165), he does not mean that the social system is good, but that it has gone bad because of some very specific, individual, reasons. After this start, the negative influence expands to a point at which individuals are wrecking society and society is wrecking individuals simultaneously. Further, people like Clifford, using pathetic manipulations based on some serious misuses of principles of morality and loyalty, propagate the sickness. Thus, one of the narrator's most intrusive comments gains great significance:

This is the importance of the novel properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone bad. (*Lady Chatterley* 101)

Here, Lawrence unites the project of his novel with the dilemma of its characters. In Chapter One of this study, I said that *The White Peacock* was not just a story of unfulfilled potential, but also that it is itself an unfulfilled potential. In the same manner, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is both a novel about finding "new places" and a new place itself, one which rejects, "is led away", from a dead moral system. It is exactly the place that Lawrence couldn't find, wasn't able to lead himself into, in that first novel published in 1911.

The final significant character I would like to look at in relation to *The White Peacock* is Mellors. Some of the

connections between Annable and Mellors will be apparent to even the most casual readers of the two novels. Both are gamekeepers. Both have been defeated by disastrous marriages. Both are employed by typical Laurentian half-men, and, in contrast, are meant to be examples of "natural" men. The difference between them is also fairly obvious but not insignificant-- Mellors starts life again with Connie; Annable, like George, simply opts for the path of least resistance, which ultimately leads to death. Indeed, it is precisely the ability to start again which makes Mellors such a powerful and notable character in Lawrence's fiction.

Much has been made of the risks that Connie takes in dismissing "the strict conventions of 'Her Ladyship'" (Balbert 77), but considerably less attention, Peter Balbert notes, has been given to the fact that Mellors, in his own fashion, risks everything he has; he sacrifices his only remaining solace, which is solitude. "Not only does the affair jeopardize his conditioned comforts in the private woods, and his legal status in the community, but [Mellors] must also reengage painful memories" (Balbert 77). After his multiple disappointments, he retreats from both the class he was born into and the status he achieved through the military, and finds a space which, though better than Clifford's kind of abstractions, remains distinctly unnatural. Because we are a social species, it is finally not natural to be so decidedly solitary. Like so many of

Lawrence's characters, Annable and Mellors seem prepared to settle for "a kind of life" rather than risk anything.

But something sensitive has survived in Mellors that has died in Annable. "Suddenly he [Mellors] was aware of the old flame shooting and leaping up in his loins, that he had hoped was quiescent forever" (*Lady Chatterley* 115). Connie's "tender" presence, her sensitivity to the little chick, and her real desolation reach some "secret place" in Mellors and start him moving toward real life again. Connie does for him something very similar to the thing he does for her. Just as she had been a void, "He had not bothered nor cared till now, when this woman had come into his life....Must he start again?" (*Lady Chatterley* 142). The answer, of course, is that he should, and the fact that he does, shows a cautious optimism where Annable, in the end, stands only for sullen resignation and a grim anticipation of the death that finally befalls him.

Death, it seems, can be the direct result of poor life-decisions. The young Mellors, like George Saxton, feels he must make a distinct decision between the mental and the physical life. As a young man, Mellors "knew women who gave him their spirit of love but they never really wanted the physical act of sex" (Cavitch 196). He tells Connie that he and a former love had been "the most literary, cultured couple in ten counties" (*Lady Chatterley* 200), but further that this woman was so physically frigid

that she steeled herself and "ground her teeth" (*Lady Chatterley* 201) during sex. This is finally unacceptable to Mellors, and, "in a state of murder" (*Lady Chatterley* 201), he rejects all middle class pretensions, becomes a blacksmith, and marries Bertha Coutts simply because she is sexually pleasing.

Those other 'pure' women had nearly taken all the balls out of me, but [Bertha] was all right that way. She wanted me, and made no bones about it. And I was pleased as punch. That was what I wanted: a woman who *wanted* me to fuck her. (*Lady Chatterley* 201)

So, like George, Mellors makes what he thinks is a simple choice between two life options-- the intellectually satisfying but physically frustrating life of his first love, or the sensual, unquestioning life of the second. George chooses Meg because she is a simple country barmaid who, he thinks, will offer no resistance to his happiness even if she will not contribute very much to it. Mellors takes Bertha. Both of these decisions are finally destructive for them because they limit the possibility of other, better, connections. In choosing their wives pragmatically, each opts out of something which ought to be his life's central concern-- the sympathetic connection with another human being. From this beginning, it is not surprising that Meg falls into her distant role as mother, or that George, because he has no real connection with her, stumbles into alcoholism. For Mellors, Bertha's originally



attractive "aggressions during intercourse finally demonstrate a fierce sexual hatred" (Cavitch 196). She refuses to "come off" with him, and her masturbation makes him feel insignificant in the sex-act. Thus, his choice of Bertha as sexually satisfying partner is negated. She sexually humiliates him and, declaring both his intellectual and sexual investments bust, he retreats to the woods like Annable before him. Indeed, it is the same humiliation of the "pride of a body like mine" (*White Peacock* 150) that drives both of them away. The humiliation of the body, either from a patronizing aristocrat or working-class sexual predator, is the fundamental factor in both withdrawals from society-- withdrawals, Lawrence means to show, which are based on bitterness about the anti-sexual cancer of modern industrial civilization.

Graham Hough tells us that "It is an essential part of Lawrence's creed that the social pattern is a reflection of the private sexual pattern" (Hough 152). Both *The White Peacock* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* seem to bear this out. Lettie, George, Annable, Connie and Mellors all make personal romantic decisions which finally determine their positions in the social structure. I have attempted, so far in this chapter, to emphasize *personal* patterns in Lawrence's first and last novels because of the private, interpersonal aspects of these books. Now, I would like to examine the social pattern as it moves *back* from general

principles and into individual characters through the relationship between *The Plumed Serpent* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As I said in the beginning of this section, I believe that the movement back from the abstractions of Quetzalcoatl and into real character is through tenderness. Its presence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* represents the fundamental difference between the two novels, because "tenderness is something conspicuously lacking in *The Plumed Serpent*" (Hough 149).

Lawrence is correct when he says that the novel discovers the most secret places, the mysteries, in our consciousness, but *The Plumed Serpent* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* show very different ways of uncovering secrets. Don Ramon and Don Cipriano *project out*, build constructs through religious rituals, to express natural mysteries. Mellors and Connie *dig down* into themselves and each other to experience mystery directly. The Quetzalcoatl cult, despite its reliance on natural mystery and its desire to represent the whole of our being, remains a construct and as such is, in the end, not entirely authentic. It does not need to be propped up in the same way that the old Catholic order was, but it still requires various hymns, pamphlets, and ceremonies which are to be learned by rote. Thus, the old problems of empty symbols and unthinking hymn-response religion have an easy point of entry. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* avoids this difficulty by focusing on personal,

private mysteries. "Only things mysterious in themselves-- for example, the sensations of a woman during orgasm-- are described mysteriously" (Moynahan 143). Thus, we are presented with what Mark Spilka calls an "applied mysticism" (191) which does not rely on anything but actual experience and sensation for its authority. "The experience of love is delivered...as religion in itself" (Spilka 191). Mellors needn't become Huitzilopochtli any more than Connie needs to become Mary Magdalen; they are religious figures through an organic transformation *inside* themselves and they require no new construct to mark the change. They are not trying to be revolutionary figures; they simply experience a revolution. Thus, readers who were alienated by the hocus-pocus of Ramon's religion can feel through character what they could never pick up from doctrine, and *Lady Chatterley* becomes a much more satisfying novel. Indeed, the validation of Connie's adultery is more powerful than the validation of the "heretical" movement in *The Plumed Serpent* because *Lady Chatterley's Lover* shows us the *failure* of, rather than just the violent overthrow of, an outmoded belief system.

Still, there are some important points of connection between the novels that are worth the reader's attention. For the purposes of this study I wish to focus particularly on the similarities and essential differences between the Quetzalcoatl idols, Cipriano and Ramon, and Mellors, as well as those between Kate Leslie and Connie Chatterley.

Essentially, I believe that Mellors presents a more human, plausible and concrete manifestation of the values presented in the Quetzalcoatl project, and that Connie's relationship with Mellors is finally more complete and fulfilling than Kate and Cipriano's because she is able to "give over", not project out, more completely.

The Quetzalcoatl cult arises out of the need to establish a religion that really appeals to the Mexican people and relates to their circumstances. It seeks to overthrow the regressive life-denying inadequacy of the Christian vision and replace it with a religion that acknowledges both the lion and the lamb, the physical *force* and the contemplative soul of man through natural mysteries like the Morning Star. In this sense, it is a success and a good thing. Unfortunately, however, the movement also validates excessive violence as a legitimate expression of the lion, and its leaders, probably with both Leslie's political and Clifford's artistic "blind, imperious desire to be known" (*Lady Chatterley* 21), somehow transmute themselves in their own minds to become *actual* gods. And, further, while recognizing that man has god inside him is good and life-affirming, watching a man dressed up in a costume kill another in the name of his own divine power is disturbing.

In *The Plumed Serpent*, the lion devours the lamb in an excessive display of power and virility; *Lady*

*Chatterley's Lover* avoids this failing, and the creative and destructive principles reach a greater harmony.

In *The Plumed Serpent* [Lawrence] had overstepped himself quite badly; he had sanctioned murder in defense of the life morality-- but in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* he found a legitimately cruel and dramatic way to assault good will-- rootless, pointless, sterile good will. (Spilka 199)

Spilka's comment is interesting because it emphasizes Lawrence's ability to retain force and power without losing the reins of his project. That is, the assault is no longer necessarily physical and no longer aimed at poor and ignorant Mexican Indians, but at the destructive ideal itself, at the useless fake morality Clifford uses to keep Connie in line. As the new hero, Mellors wastes no unnecessary sentiment on the "big black cat stretched out grimly with a bit of blood on it" (*Lady Chatterley* 59), because he, like George with the rabbit in *The White Peacock*, sees its death as a natural necessity. He also sees clearly that Connie's gift of sixpence to the child solves nothing; it's just an empty gesture from a rich woman who, vaguely and abstractly, believes a bit of money can overwhelm the child's fear of death. But this understanding of the destructive principle doesn't spill over into anything approaching blood-lust. Indeed, the most important difference between the novels in this respect is the simple fact that Mellors doesn't *kill* Clifford as Cipriano and Ramon kill those who threaten their project. Rather than

slash and destroy, Mellors simply allows Clifford to eliminate himself. Clifford is allowed the space to fail; the Catholic church is forcibly defeated. Mellors' superiority to Clifford enforces itself; Quetzalcoatl needs to be enforced.

Further, Mellors shows a degree of humility that the "heroes" of *The Plumed Serpent* do not. While they declare themselves to be gods, Mellors is, in his way, too modest for such assertions. Even after proposing his own much more modest, and infinitely more tender program of reform ("If men wore scarlet trousers...they could do with very little cash"-- 299), he still believes that the consideration of "me and God is a bit uppish" (*Lady Chatterley* 301) and wants to avoid it absolutely without giving up the mystical "little forked flame" (*Lady Chatterley* 301) that keeps Connie near him all the time. Thus, he maintains the mystical-religious connection without being seduced by his own role in it. He is content to "give in" to the forces at work in him, and in allowing this to happen, he reaches a more profound state of tranquillity in turmoil than anyone in *The Plumed Serpent*. Both Ramon and Lawrence (at that stage) are trying to speak as God speaks, but all they can come up with are disjointed and abstracted hymns. Ignoring his own advice, Lawrence tries to corner the meaning, find the language, of God in the hymns, while Ramon tries to pin down the meaning of Quetzalcoatl by becoming him himself.

When Lawrence tries to decode mystery he generally fails to some significant degree. His difficulty with the sex sequences in *Lady Chatterley* is the same as his difficulty with the hymns, because "there is no adequate language in which the sexual encounter can even be referred to, still less described" (Hough 158), but most readers can infer, read between the lines, a great deal more about sex (however far from ideal) than they can about the Mexican hymns. Lawrence chooses a more accessible mystery and a more accessible (to him) landscape in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and the vision, consequently, is more vivid to the reader. "Mellors is related to Lawrence's Indians and Gipsies" (Kermode 125), but he is also related to Annable, another Midland gamekeeper who was destroyed by English life. And based on this context, Mellors is literally struggling in spaces where others have failed before. Kermode is correct to note that the most important difference between Mellors and the Indians, indeed Mellors and Annable, is that "he has found his way out of white consciousness" (Kermode 125). Mellors completes the journey hardly started in *The White Peacock* and so distantly and frightfully realized in *The Plumed Serpent*.

What I mean here, is that, of all the characters studied, only Mellors cures himself of the sickness people like Clifford, as representatives of "white consciousness", spread around. Annable, by nature of his very birth in

England, is prone to the virus all of his life, and is finally and fatally infected by Lady Crystabel. George is born in a similar circumstance, and, once exposed directly to the sickness by the Beardsalls, can never quite stop chasing after the trophies (books, ideas, paintings, politics) of their life, even as they, knowing the empty value of their own trophies, look in his direction for "some knowledge we have lost" (*White Peacock* 129). Cipriano and Ramon, in contrast, are not born into "Western thought". Rather, they are "educated" about it. As such, their exposure to Western consciousness is by design and choice, and in much smaller doses than those enforced upon characters in *The White Peacock*. In this way, Ramon and Cipriano are inoculated against, rather than drowned inside, some destructive ideas. Far from having to "find their way out" of a place like Nethermore, they are instead allowed to take a peek over the fence while keeping their feet in their own yard. And, seeing what's happened on the other side, they begin to work tirelessly to prevent it from happening to them and their nation. Only Mellors manages to be both English and uninfected. Perhaps better, he is not uninfected, but has rather disinfected himself, cured himself of his own disease, and, importantly, had the courage, unlike almost everyone else, "to have some things burned out of [him]" (*White Peacock* 65).



Like her lover, Connie Chatterley completes a journey suggested, but not satisfactorily rendered, in the other two novels. Where Lettie stands for a time on the precipice of a breakthrough she never finally attempts, and Kate remains forever *between* her old and new modes of thought, Connie ultimately reverses the progress of her life and leaves Clifford and his "orbit of non-existence" behind. Like Kate, she finds herself "loose and adrift between the old life and the new, and must exert herself to find new moorings" (Moynahan 169), but unlike her, she finally does find these moorings and abandons the sort of "escape clauses" Kate (and even Lettie through her continued relationship with both George and Leslie) so often seem to employ. When Mellors asks Connie if she would raise their child at Wragby, she says, "If you wouldn't take me away, I should have to" (*Lady Chatterley* 224). This sounds suspiciously like Kate's "You won't let me go" at the end of *The Plumed Serpent* in that it expresses both a willingness to return to the old life and a belief that the male figure must finally determine the position of the female. The difference is that Kate's statement is her last in the novel, while Connie goes on to actively confront Clifford, commit herself wholly to Mellors, and actively *participate* in the forging of a new, unconventional life. She overcomes the love-hate relationship with the new consciousness and develops simply a love relationship. This is certainly

better than Lettie's strategy of overcoming "love/hate" with the non-love/non-hate relationship she has with Leslie. And, while Kate at least remains powerfully involved in her circumstance, she is still both fascinated and repelled by Cipriano, Ramon and Mexico at the close of the novel. Connie ends up simply enthralled and, not so simply, *resolved* to do whatever is necessary to begin again.

Connie is able to make this commitment, I think, because her concrete experience with Mellors is both more powerful than Kate's often alienating experience with the Quetzalcoatl cult, and more dynamic and challenging than Lettie's all too average experiences in Nethermore. Mexico shocks, overwhelms, and paralyzes Kate, but at the same time, Lettie needs a shock, needs to be pushed through the "crisis of consciousness" (Edwards "Neumann" 129) before she can break out of the very mosaic she fears. Connie creates a dialogue between oppressive difference and oppressive stasis. She replaces distance with nearness, and nearness with distance simultaneously. Kermode says that "tenderness was to replace leadership as the quality most necessary to the health of the world" (Kermode 123), and in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* it surely does. Connie's "democracy of touch" (*Lady Chatterley* 76) is superior to Quetzalcoatl's dictatorship of visible symbol. *The Plumed Serpent* "tries to convince the reader that the common people of Mexico need a spiritual revolution, accompanied by political and

economic changes" (Carpenter 3), whereas *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, while still recognizing economic and political realities, treats the spiritual revolution as the only *absolutely* necessary goal of the successful individual. Everything else is secondary at best. And, despite its very personal nature, Connie's move remains revolutionary in the most important sense because it refuses to "replace the claims of life with a bootless (if heroic) ideal" (Spilka 199). Connie grasps early on that "angry honesty made a bad man" out of a character whose spouse's "mealy mouthedness made a 'nice woman' out of her" (*Lady Chatterley* 101). In rejecting this conventional sense of timid, creeping morality, and accepting, without overcompensating for, the true (rather than the constructed) "demands" of a full life, she *assaults* the old code through tenderness.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* retains... evidence of a desire to take a final revenge on the mother, on all the women who had ruined England; to them Connie will be the Scarlet Woman, to [Lawrence] she is the Woman Clothed in the Sun. St. John took them apart, and Lawrence puts them together again. (Kermode 125)

In the above section, which might just as easily have been directed against the "men (like Clifford and Leslie) who had ruined England", Connie's remarkable decision manifests itself as a religious (she corrects St. John) and political (she critiques a "ruined" England), but most importantly, an inner force.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* both inherits much from and improves upon *The White Peacock* and *The Plumed Serpent*. The old hopeless scenarios of the first novel are replaced with possibilities, and the doctrine-heavy excesses of the Mexican novel give way to more concrete, personal relationships. The choice is not, finally, between grim realism and utopian vision; instead, it is between connection and disconnection through tender sexual union. This connection, though necessary, is not easy. Indeed, it is "bitter as death" (*Lady Chatterley* 294) to those who, like Leslie Tempest, Dona Carlota and Clifford Chatterley, represent the old order. But still again, it *is* possible. These people can be overcome, and better still overcome without violence. It will happen, not through mammoth movements, but through subtle, sympathetic touch. In the end it is not the light of the Morning Star which saves, but "the little glow between me and you" (*Lady Chatterley* 300).

### Conclusion

In the preceding pages I hope to have shown that Lawrence's regenerative vision is one which arises out of, and finally descends back into, sensitivity. The acute awareness of the limitations placed upon human beings by social, financial and psychological barriers in *The White Peacock* is at the heart of the emphatic rejection of falsity which underlies the violence of *The Plumed Serpent*, and both the awareness and the rejection are synthesized in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The wincing inaction spills over into excessive, misdirected action before an understanding of appropriate action finally arrives. Thus, the arc of frustration that launched Lawrence's imagination out of England's orbit returns to Nottinghamshire with some important new ideas, and without the uglier trappings encountered along its course. In this manner, a sort of harmony is created between creation and destruction, passivity and action, necessity and possibility, and tenderness and aggression.

This is the music of the unrepressed life, of elemental contact with each other, and above all, of real recognition of what and who we are, and what, finally matters to us. It is a music which finds some relationship between the beat of Ramon's (too loud) Mexican drum, and

Lettie's (too soft) English piano. Connie and Mellors teach each other, through sensitive, open sexual encounters, to hear and understand this song. Importantly, they do not lead ideal lives, and they are not ideal people; life is complicated and difficult and it gets in the way of any idealized vision, but Connie and Mellors are committed to being alive, and they are ultimately willing to accept the consequences of this commitment. And, if the Quetzalcoatl cult got anything right it is that life is *about* pain and happiness and is inauthentic without either part. Life can be cruel, but *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, refining the vision of *The Plumed Serpent*, recognizes rather than celebrates this truth. "The cruelty in the book is the cruelty of life rather than that of the author or even his characters" (Hough 165). The destructive principle, Lawrence knows, is at work in real, vital life, and it must not, cannot, be ignored, but neither must the creative be overwhelmed.

To show this is true, Lawrence provides a character like Clifford as evidence that people *do* get hurt, both physically and emotionally, in situations where it is ultimately nobody's fault. It is obviously very difficult to be one of these people, but, it is also obvious that it is difficult to be *anyone*, and sacrificing the possibility of life for the certainty of death is not only not moral and a bit foolish, but immoral in the truest sense, because it only increases the suffering of our species and propagates a

disease. Clifford's problem is not with his legs or with Connie, but that he can't see what "any man in his senses must have *known*" (*Lady Chatterley* 289), that he is missing some essential human traits. Both the land under us and the sensations inside us have been "squeezed and squeezed and squeezed again" (*Lady Chatterley* 255) by the sickness of men like Clifford, Lawrence says, and we are all nearly wrung out.

And yet still, for all this negativity, all this emphasis on the reality of pain and the cruelty in the shock that comes with recognizing ourselves, Lawrence's vision is finally, I think, redemptive. We do not need to be wrung out, and we do not either need to "escape" everything we know in some far continent. Instead, through Connie and Mellors and their private revolution, we see that we, like George Saxton, have the tools to change our own lives, and that what we need is only to touch, to care, and to try very hard to be really alive.

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