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D. H. LAWRENCE AND "SOMETHING CALLED 'CANADA'"

Commenting upon the technical problems consequent to Lawrence's poetic vision in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Mark Schorer observes, "There is only one value, Lawrence says finally, the wholly functioning and therefore the free organism. When Lady Chatterley and Mellors take off their clothes (civilized artifice) and run naked through the woods in the rain, they are meant to symbolize this condition. And yet, at the end of the novel, where are these liberated beings going to live their liberated lives? They are going to something called 'Canada'—and that is the new world in more than our usual sense".¹ *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence's last major work of fiction, was written in 1927. The preceding central period of his career was literally and figuratively characterized by his search for a better world and a place conducive to a new beginning, a quest that took him to Germany, to Italy, to Ceylon, to Australia, and to America—but never did Lawrence venture into Canada. Significant as it is that he should turn to this "unknown" land as a symbol at the end of his odyssey, however, the impact is doubled when one realizes that Lawrence's turning to Canada in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is actually a *return* to this country as a symbol of a "new world".² In *The White Peacock* (1911), Lawrence's first novel, it is similarly Canada that symbolizes the place where liberated beings may go to live their liberated lives.³

The White Peacock is an elegiac work. Its theme is the decline of rural "Merrie" England but as much as a result of over-civilization as of the advent of industrialism, and this theme is focused in the degeneration of George Saxton and the fortunes of the Saxton family. The narrator of the piece is Cyril Beardsall, a friend of the Saxtons and a romantic of the nineteenth-century British variety. The first mention of Canada is

to be found in his ode to autumn, when, as is his fashion, he goes to the Saxton farm to assist with the harvesting and to enjoy the companionship of his friend George. "Afternoon is all warm and golden. Oat sheaves are lighter; they whisper to each other as they freely embrace. The long, stout stubble tinkles as the foot brushes over it; the scent of the straw is sweet. When the poor, bleached sheaves are lifted out of the hedge, a spray of nodding wild raspberries is disclosed, with belated berries ready to drop; among the damp grass lush blackberries may be discovered. Then one notices that the last bell hangs from the ragged spire of fox-floves" (p. 67). Against this background of pastoral indolence and effortless fruition, the two friends talk, and the "talk is of people, an odd book; of one's hopes—and of the future; of Canada, where work is strenuous, but not life; where the plains are wide, and one is not lapped in a soft valley, like an apple that falls in a secluded orchard." Life is "strenuous" in England because of the over-cultivated landscape and its conduciveness to lethargy and surrender; conversely, Canada, and specifically prairie Canada, symbolizes an escape from the cultural drag and the demoralizing effect of tradition.

George Saxton at the beginning of the work is the epitome of this indolence, but with characteristic Lawrencean irony, what awakens him from his lethargy is the thing that prevents him from taking advantage of the opportunity that Canada offers. With the impending economic collapse of the family farm, and following his physical defeat at the hands of Annable, the gamekeeper, George announces to Cyril his decision to "emigrate": "What is there to stop here for? The valley is all running wild and unprofitable. You've no freedom for thinking what the other folks think of you, and everything round you keeps the same, and so you can't change yourself—because everything you look at brings up the same old feeling, and stops you from feeling fresh things" (p. 72). What has occasioned this decision is George's desperate attraction to Cyril's ambitious and discontented sister, Lettie. Canada is thus to him the French Foreign Legion, on the one hand, and the setting for his dreams, on the other.

"I don't suppose I shall have above twenty pounds left when we've sold up', he tells Cyril, —'but she's got plenty of money to start with—if she has me—in Canada. I could get well off—and she could have—what she wanted—I'm sure she'd have what she wanted' " (p. 177). What Lettie wants, however, is a fawning "taurus" to complement her future

socialite husband, and thus she is as reluctant to see him prepare to depart as she is scornful of his vision of their future life in Canada. " 'And where will you go—Canada? You'll settle there and be quite a patriarch, won't you?' " she taunts him when she deigns to meet him for a last time before the Saxton family leave the farm. " "You don't know, Lettie, now the old life's gone, everything—how I want you—to set out with—it's like beginning life, and I want you'," he says in an attempt to prevent her coy farewell, and when she continues to be sweetly obtuse he explains:

"If I had you I could go straight on."

"Where?" "Oh— I should take a farm in Canada..." "Well, wouldn't it be better to get it first and make sure...?"

"I have no money."

"Oh!—so you wanted me...?"

"I only wanted you. I only wanted you. I would have given you..."

"What?"

"You'd have me—you'd have all me, and everything you wanted."

"That I paid for—a good bargain! No, oh no, George, I beg your pardon. This is one of my flippant nights. I don't mean it like that. But you know it's impossible—look how I'm fixed—it is impossible, isn't it now."

"I suppose it is."

"You know it is—look at me now, and say if it's not impossible—a farmer's wife—with you in Canada."

(pp. 182-83)

The offshoot of the conversation is that George gives up his Canadian dream and has revenge upon Lettie by promptly marrying another woman; as a result he lives a life of increasing dissipation and she endures a retributive life of quiet desperation as the well-kept wife of a successful industrialist.

Like his son, the elder Mr. Saxton was also a willing victim of cultural inertia until circumstances awakened him: "He was a pure romanticist, forever seeking the colour of the past in the present's monotony. He seemed to be settling down to an easy contented middle-age, when the unrest on the farm and development of his children quickened him with fresh activity. He read books on the land question, and modern novels. In the end he became an advanced radical, almost a socialist. Occasionally his letters appeared in the newspapers. He had taken a new hold on life" (p. 203). Precipitated by his economic prospects and focusing his spiritual rebirth is his interest in Canada: "Over supper he became enthusiastic about Canada, and to watch him, his ruddy face lighted up, and his burly form straight and nerved with excitement, was

to admire him; to hear him, his words of thoughtful common-sense all warm with a young man's hopes, was to love him. At forty-six he was more spontaneous and enthusiastic than George, and far more happy and hopeful" (pp. 203-204). Unfortunately, his daughter has Lettie's view of Canada: "Emily would not agree to go away with them—what should she do in Canada, she said—and she did not want the little ones 'to be drudges on a farm—in the end to be nothing but cattle' " (p. 204). The father's optimistic rejoinder is that "It'll perhaps be a bit rough and hard at first, but when we've got over it we shall think it was one of the best times—like you do.' " At this point his son George, under the influence of his infatuation, announces that he will not be going, explaining that the contentment Canada offers is an "animal" contentment; at which the father looks at his son "gravely and thoughtfully": " 'Now it seems to me so different,' he said sadly, 'it seems to me you can live your own life, and be independent, and think as you like without being choked with harassments.' "

The conversation is resumed a final time when George dresses before an antique mirror in preparation for his "rebound" courtship: " 'Your do see yourself a bit ghostish...' said he, 'on a background of your ancestors. I always think when you stop in an old place like this you sort of keep company with your ancestors too much; I sometimes feel like a bit of the old building walking about; the old feelings of the old folks stick to you like the lichens on the walls; you sort of get hoary.' " His father immediately and enthusiastically seconds this expression of historical decline and the burden of heritage: " 'That's it—it's true,' asserted the father, 'people whose families have shifted about much don't know how it feels. That's why I'm going to Canada.' " But at this point the son perversely announces his alternate solution: " 'And I'm going in a pub,' said George, 'where it's quite different—plenty of life.' " His sister repeats the word with contempt for his definition of what constitutes it, but he replies, in deliberate dialect, " 'That's the word, my wench...That's what I'm after. We known such a lot, an' we known nowt.' The father neglects the implications of his son's comment on the family's provinciality and continues instead to expand upon the theme as the rationale behind his going to Canada: " 'You stay in one place, generation after generation, and you seem to get proud, an' look on things outside as foolishness. There's many a thing as any common man knows, as we haven't a glimpse of. We keep on thinking and feeling the

same, year after year, till we've only got one side; an' I suppose they've done it before us' " (p. 220).

The last mention of Canada in this novel is a referential one contained in a letter from the elder Mr. Saxton to Cyril a fortnight before the family is to leave the English farm. Again the emphasis is upon the debilitating effect of remaining too long in the ancestral setting: "I begin to feel as if we'd stagnated here. I begin to feel as if I was settling and getting narrow and dull. It will be a new lease of life to get away." The imminence of the departure, however, also occasions some apprehension: "But I'm wondering how we shall be over there. Mrs. Saxton feels very nervous about going. But at the worst we can come back. I feel as if I must go somewhere, it's stagnation and starvation for us here. I wish George would come with me" (p. 286). One never discovers how the family fares in Canada, for the focus of the rest of the story is upon the lives of those who have remained, particularly the degeneration of George into alcoholism—which one could perhaps interpret as inverse confirmation of the rightness of the father's decision to emigrate.

To summarize briefly, Canada, in D.H. Lawrence's first novel has both a positive and a negative value and both advantages and disadvantages. The wide prairies are presented in Emersonian fashion by the romantic father and the narrator as having a liberating effect on the mind, while the quality of life in the "wilds" is viewed as the kind of healthy exercise that calls forth man's energy. George Saxton shares this attitude until he comes under the influence of the sophisticated Lettie, who like his sister envisions a Canadian existence as an unrelieved round of hard and pointless labour. Thus the disadvantage of the positive value of Canada is that all man's energy may be wasted in the simple struggle for survival. Significantly it is the women who make this argument, and thus hold back their men.

The value of emigration to Canada consists in the break with the past; the geographical removal to Canada effects a psychological liberation for the British emigrants. The disadvantage is the loss of identity and the sense of security that a traditional setting affords, as George suggests when early in response to Cyril's question of why he has not thought of emigrating sooner he answers, "There are a lot of little comforts and interests at home that one would miss. Besides, you feel somebody in your own countryside, and you're nothing in a

foreign part, I expect' ” (p. 72). The specific interest that ties George to England is, of course, Lettie, and the solution to the dilemma would be for her to go with him. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* this condition is met insofar as Connie is only too eager to follow her man. But before turning to this final work a few considerations stimulated by our discussion of the treatment of Canada in Lawrence's first novel are in order.

In the first place, Lawrence is neither as naive nor as condescending as one might expect of a *fin de siècle* British romantic. To be sure, we never see any Canadians at work on their farms, but neither are we allowed to rest with Mr. Saxton's noble yeoman—nor with Lettie's country cousin. In the second place, while it is politically appropriate for a jaded Englishman to look west to the “colony”, it is aesthetically curious that an as yet undiscovered writer should risk employing a relatively undefined symbol of the New World such as Canada undoubtedly was in 1911. Finally, though the “plains” are essential to Lawrence's concept of the farm life as Eden, it is interesting that it is the prairies that he associates with the symbolic import of Canada.

Helen Corke, one of the few living acquaintances of D.H. Lawrence and an intimate and confidante during the time he was beginning his literary career, provides the needed explanation. In a letter to me of April 14, 1972, she wrote: “As Canada is your home country, you will be interested in the following:—while Lawrence was writing *The White Peacock*, living in Eastwood and visiting the Hags Farm, Jessie Chambers' brothers Bernard and Hubert were thinking of emigrating to Canada, and no doubt he discussed the idea with them. Later, about 1911, they both took up land in Saskatchewan, as did Jessie's brother-in-law and sister May.”⁴

Lawrence's interest in prairie Canada as well as his realistically ambiguous attitude toward the life of the homesteader in *The White Peacock* can thus in part be traced to his personal acquaintance with persons practically familiar with “something called ‘Canada’.”

The year following the publication of *The White Peacock*, Lawrence left with Frieda for the Continent⁵ and in 1919 began the travels that took him south and east and then west to America; in 1923 he returned to England and then back to America in 1924; but falling ill in Mexico, he returned to Europe in 1925. Two years after his return he wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Though he did not go to Canada

during this sixteen-year period, that his interest in the country as a possibility persisted is suggested by his letters. In 1914 he wrote to May Chambers Holbrook, who became a school-teacher in Saskatchewan, "Why don't you write me a proper letter and tell me about Will's [her husband] going to Canada. You know right well I want to hear. Is he going anywhere definite?—is he going with the boys?"⁶ In October, 1921, Lawrence wrote to Earl Brewster: "My plan is, ultimately, to get a little farm somewhere by myself, in Mexico, New Mexico, Rocky Mountains or British Columbia. The desire to be away from the body of mankind—to be a bit of a hermit—is paramount."⁷ And in December he replied to a letter from Mary Cannan, "Sounds a thrilling trip across Canada."⁸ In between these two letters, however, came Mabel Dodge Luhan's invitation to New Mexico which led to Lawrence's residence in America.

The shift of Lawrence's interest in Canada from Saskatchewan to British Columbia that these letters suggest may perhaps be attributed to the removal of his Saskatchewan friends and correspondents from the prairies to the west coast.⁹ In any case, when Lawrence "returns" to Canada in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, it is British Columbia rather than the prairies that is the area in question, and it is only the positive aspects of emigration that are stressed.

Although it is the geographical focus of the many allusions to the possibility of escaping from the deadliness of England and beginning again, Canada is specifically invoked only one time in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Lawrence, however, wrote three versions of this final major work, and in the second version—recently published under the title *John Thomas and Lady JAane*—not only is Canada repeatedly mentioned, but, curiously, the treatment of the Canadian theme is closer to that of *The White Peacock* than to that of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

As Parkin (the gamekeeper in the second version) and Connie sit together before the fire in the forest hut, naked except for the flowers with which they have adorned each other after their encounter outside in the rain, they lapse into despair at the thought of the world that encroaches beyond the wood: " 'If they knowed we was like this,' he said, 'they'd want to kill us. If they knowed you had forget-me-nots in your maidenhair, they'd want to kill us.' He pressed his powerful thighs on her, and held her close. 'Should you like to go away wi' me to

Canada or somewhere?' he asked." The Connie of this second version stands midway between the sophisticated and frustrated Lettie of *The White Peacock* and the sympathetic and devoted Connie of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "The world is all alike, all over,' she said. 'It would be the same in Canada' " (pp. 255-56).

Parkin is reluctant to admit this, and as the social barriers to their love assert themselves in the form of Connie's departure on a holiday to find a suitable father for their expected child, he announces his plans for his departure. On the morning Connie is about to leave, he receives a letter and explains, "'It's from a cousin of mine in Canada. I wrote to him as 'appen I might go out there.' "(p. 274). Connie begs him not to and he bows to her wishes. But when she returns to Wragby, after the scandal created by Parkin's wife has led to his dismissal, she hears from Mrs. Bolton that he is "'going away too—or else gone. To Canada, they say' " (p. 313). Actually Parkin has not left England; Connie finds him at his mother's house and obtains his promise to meet her in the hut a final time. During this last forest rendezvous, Parkin attempts to explain to his paramour the character of a "Lawrencean man", and the opportunity that Canada symbolizes for such a type: "'Ca' it sensitive, ca' it what you like, I canna get on wheer other chaps gets on. I canna get on wi' other chaps. I want ter be by mysen...I sh'd 'ave liked to go to Canada—to get away, an' 'appen make somethink of my life—out there.' " Connie sympathizes with her lover's desires but violently opposes his belief that Canada is the place to fulfill them: "'No!' she said hastily. 'Don't go to Canada yet! You won't, will you? Trust me first, won't you? I've been to Canada and America, and I know I don't want to live there. You wouldn't like it. Perhaps you'd be able to be alone—but you wouldn't like it. It would kill something in you—the most sensitive bit of you, it would kill it. I know! You have got a gift—a gift of life. Don't spoil it. And don't take it away from me. You've got to help me live, too. Don't have silly ideas about being manly' " (p. 328). Thus in *John Thomas and Lady Jane* Lawrence plays off the advantages of Canada against the disadvantages in the same way that he did in *The White Peacock*, the male view versus the female.

The second version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is similar to the first novel also in terms of the potential solution to the dilemma that it offers; namely, that the woman accompany the man: "'Shall you go to Canada with me!'" Parkin writes to Connie in response to her letter

announcing her decision to leave Sir Clifford; " 'I'll go next week, if you will. I've a cousin there as would help me' " (p.364). Though Connie promises to talk it over, she adds, " 'I don't think we should either of us be really happy in Canada' " (p. 366); and thus one is prepared for her veto of the Canadian dream during their last meeting:

"You don't want to go to Canada, do you?" he said.

"No! The thought of it is cold to me."

"Nor Africa nor Australia?"

She thought about it. She had an unconquerable aversion from leaving Europe. She had been overseas. He had not. She knew what it meant. She did not want to break with the past, even for her child's sake. She had no faith in the newness of new countries. It was exile, always exile. (p.369)

As a substitute for his dreams of Canada, Connie plans to buy her lover an English farm where she may occasionally come to visit him.

The White Peacock and *John Thomas and Lady Jane* are both pessimistic works, and in each the man's dream of making a new beginning in Canada is defeated by the woman's bondage to the past and refusal to be his partner in the wilderness. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is similarly concerned with the cultural sterility of England, but the work is a mythically optimistic one, and in it the woman is thrilled with her man's suggestion that they emigrate to Canada. On the morning of their socially necessitated separation, Connie and Millors eat their last breakfast, and with timely and healthy comic relief their pledges to each other are interrupted by the tinkle of the postman's bicycle bell and his announcement of a registered letter:

"Canada!" said the stranger's voice

"Ay! That's a mate o' mine out there in British Columbia. Dunno what he's got to register."

"'Appen sent y'a fortune, like."

"More like wants summat."

Pause

"Well! lovely day again!" (p. 261)

When the postman leaves, Mellors returns to his lover who has a similar innocent concept of the portent of a letter from Canada:

"Did your mate send you a fortune?"

"No! Only some photographs and papers about a place out there in British Columbia."

"Would you go there?"

"I thought perhaps we might."

"Oh yes! I believe it's lovely!" (p. 262)

Perhaps it was because D. H. Lawrence similarly "believed" rather than knew Canada to be lovely that he turned to this country in his final work as a place for his lovers. All the places he had been and known had ultimately proved disappointing; to Canada he had never been and consequently had never been disillusioned. Probably it was Canada's lack of a culture and history that initially dissuaded him from "North" America and attracted him to America proper,¹⁰ as both his interest in American literature and culture and the negative aspects of Canada as they are reflected in *The White Peacock* would suggest. But later perhaps it was his increasing disillusionment with other lands that kept him from putting his belief in Canada to the test. And this disillusion, paradoxically, could be said to account for the attitude reflected in Lady Jane's pessimistic argument that "It would be the same in Canada." Experience warned Lawrence that his dreams were futile; but his intuition told him that they were true. The introduction of Canada as the new land accommodate to the lives of his reborn lovers is his solution to his dilemmas. D.H. Lawrence could finally "believe" in "something called 'Canada'," because he had never practically pursued his initial belief in the possibilities of the Canadian "new world".

Or did Lawrence ultimately return to Canada in his last fiction literally because of a *dream*? In a letter to S.S. Koteliansky, in June, 1927, he wrote: "I feel a bit like you: nothing nice ever happens, or ever will happen. I dreamed I was made head of a school somewhere, I think, in Canada. I felt so queer about it: such a vivid dream—that I half wonder if it is *my destiny*!"¹¹

NOTES

1. Mark Schorer, *D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), pp. 90-91.
2. Many critics have traced Lawrence's imaginative and practical quest for a new world, but the Canadian aspect of his search has either been overlooked or ignored.
3. The following editions of Lawrence's works will be used and quotations will be identified by page numbers in parentheses: *The White Peacock*, with a Preface by Harry T. Moore (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966); *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, editor's introduction by Roland Gant (New York: The Viking Press, 1972); *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, with an introduction by Richard Hoggart (Penguin Books, 1961).
4. For further materials concerning the relationship between Lawrence and the Chambers see "The Chambers Papers," in *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, edited by Edward Nehls (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1957). Vol. III, pp. 531-629.
5. In "Daughters of the Vicar," written during this period, Canada is briefly mentioned at the conclusion of the story as the place to make a new start.

6. *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, edited and with an Introduction by Harry T. Moore (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), Vol. I., p. 265.
7. Quoted by Richard Aldington in *D. H. Lawrence: Portrait of a Genius But...* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 231.
8. *The Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 678.
9. See *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record by E. T.* edited by J. D. Chambers, (2nd ed., New York, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1965), p. xi.
10. Perhaps it was also Lawrence's disillusionment with America, ("Columbia") as reflected in his satiric portrait of the State of Liberty in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, that prompted him to choose *British Columbia* as the focus of the new world in his final work.
11. *The Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 985.