

Thomas Hardy and Lady Chatterley

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THE question of Lady Chatterley's literary antecedents is an intriguing one, and some curious candidates have been advanced. Neither Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Lady Connie* (1916) nor Shaw's *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1886), two of the most recent, betrays any family likeness, even if they were ever read by Lawrence, which is improbable.¹ The ancient theme of old or maimed husband and young, passionate wife tends, in its Victorian variants, towards the sombre. Lawrence's presentation of Clifford and Connie was plainly influenced by such couples as Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, and Casaubon and Dorothea, and also by local families such as the Sitwells at Renishaw and the Barbers at Lamb Close — indeed, the range of Eastwood names Lawrence introduces, including Chatterley, Mellors, Chambers and Leivers, hints at a *roman à clef*.

I think we may identify one literary analogue which lay closer to "the country of my heart" than any so far proposed: Hardy's *Two on a Tower*, a story centering on the secret passion of a neglected aristocratic lady for a young astronomer. Even without Lawrence's "Study of Thomas Hardy," his familiarity with Hardy's work would be indisputable and its formative influence beyond doubt. Jessie Chambers recalled her father reading *Tess* in the kitchen at the Hags, and added, "Hardy's name had been familiar in our house since childhood days".² Lawrence left no recorded reference to Hardy before 1910, but he and Jessie had certainly read a good deal in their teens and this reading spilt over into the various versions of *The White Peacock*. As it happens, *Two on a Tower* was one of the novels most immediately available to the young Lawrence, being one of four volumes by Hardy in the Eastwood

Mechanics' Institute Library according to the 1895 catalogue.³ We have Jessie's testimony that Lawrence was familiar with virtually everything in this library, and I think we can reasonably conclude that *Two on a Tower* was a Wessex novel crucially placed to influence Lawrence's imagination at this time.

This must necessarily remain conjectural. What is certain is that Lawrence was fully aware of *Two on a Tower* by the time he came to prepare his study of Hardy. He speaks impressively in the "Study" of the "great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it," citing not only *The Return of the Native* and *The Woodlanders*, but also *Two on a Tower* in proof of his assertion. Lawrence takes Lady Constantine, Hardy's heroine, as an example of Hardy's *prédilection d'artiste* for the aristocratic type, and places her in a group of "passionate natures" with Elfride, Marty South, and Tess. Passion is a quality he finds lacking in the male protagonist of *Two on a Tower*, the young Swithin St. Cleeve, whom he characterises as an "unsuccessful but not very much injured astronomer."⁴ After the "Study", scattered references reveal that Hardy was still in Lawrence's mind from time to time. He wrote of the country round Hermitage, where he stayed towards the end of the war, and which he took as the setting for "The Fox," that "to wander through the hazel copses, away to the real old English hamlets" was like something from *The Woodlanders* (*Kangaroo*, ch. XXI). In 1924 he wrote that Hardy, "a last big one, rings the knell of our Oneness," and in the same year noted more quizzically that "Even the greatest men spend most of their time making marvellous fine toys. Like *Pickwick* or *Two on a Tower*."⁵ Early in 1928, whilst completing the third version of *Lady Chatterley*, Lawrence re-read Hardy's stories. "What a commonplace genius he has," he complained, "or a genius for the commonplace, I don't know which." "He doesn't rank so terribly high, really," Lawrence concluded, adding maliciously, "But better than Bernard Shaw, even

then."⁶ This summing-up, despite its dismissive tone, argues that Lawrence's imagination was still to some extent engaged with Hardy; this is corroborated by a report from Barbara Weekley, who on visiting the Lawrences in 1929 noted, "the only serious writer I heard him speak of with respect was Thomas Hardy."

Hardy, then, was in Lawrence's thoughts in the late nineteen-twenties when he was working on the three versions of the *Lady Chatterley* story. It seems highly probable that his lifelong familiarity with the novels, and specifically, I believe, with *Two on a Tower*, helped in the germination of these extraordinary works.

The plot of *Two on a Tower* was recounted with bald succinctness in an early review by J. M. Barrie:

a married lady visits an astronomer stealthily, and makes open display of her affection for him. She secretly marries him in the belief that her husband has died in Africa. Some time afterwards she learns that her husband did not die until after this secret ceremony, and then she marries a bishop.⁷

An important factor which Barrie omits, and which Lawrence utilised, is that Lady Constantine becomes pregnant by the astronomer, but when she discovers her false marital position "fathers" the baby on Bishop Helmsdale. This is an implausible recital of events, but Hardy had a serious intent in his "slightly-built romance:" a wish, as he put it, "to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe" (Preface to the Osgood, McIlvaine edition, 1895). Despite these high aims, like Lawrence after him, Hardy complained that he was "made to suffer" for his novel, "such warm epithets as 'hazardous', 'repulsive', 'little short of revolting', 'a studied and gratuitous insult,' being flung at the precarious volumes" (*Ibid.*). *Two on a Tower*, therefore, possesses a metaphysical aim which was rather botched by Hardy's not having completed the writing until after the work had begun to appear in print. In later years, whilst urging Mrs. Henniker to read his "more serious and

later books," on looking again at *Two on a Tower* Hardy found it "rather clever."⁸ The contrast between human and cosmic is carefully drawn, and the implausibility is subsumed in the emotional romance.

Such poems as "At a Lunar Eclipse," and "In Vision I Roamed," with the latter's images of "ghast heights of sky" and a "Universe taciturn and drear," have been justly cited as origins of the novel, but an important source in Mill seems to have gone unnoticed. In the essay on "Nature," published eight years before *Two on a Tower*, Mill wrote:

The solar system, and the great cosmic forces which hold it together; the boundless firmament, and to an educated mind any single star; excite feelings which make all human enterprises and powers appear so insignificant, that to a mind thus occupied it seems insufferable presumption in so puny a creature as man to look critically on things so far above him, or dare to measure himself against the grandeur of the universe . . . The enormous extension in space and time, or the enormous power they exemplify, constitutes their sublimity; a feeling, in all cases, more allied to terror than to any moral emotion.

(*Three Essays on Religion*, 1874)

Thus *Two on a Tower*, however slight and imperfect, shares that late-Victorian intellectual scientific pessimism which Walter Houghton has said led to "cosmic isolation and the terror of absolute solitude." At the same time Michael Millgate is right to stress that "the stars were inescapably associated with ancient mythologies and with lingering and perhaps inextinguishable superstitions, that heavenly bodies had always provided a rich source of imagery, especially for the poetry of love."⁹ This helps to make the link with Lawrence, who in place of astronomy portrays his protagonist as an adept of nature; but the function within the parable is essentially the same.

An examination of *Two on a Tower* reveals how closely the parallels run. The naming of the heroines is very near, and it takes little willing suspension of disbelief to visualize Lady Constantine being transformed into Lady Constance Chatterley, whilst her Christian name, Viviette,

may have suggested Yvette of "The Virgin and the Gipsy." More substantially, the characterisation is exceptionally close even where the plots diverge, for Lady Constantine is one of those Hardyesque victims of *Bovarysme* of which Eustacia Vye is the supreme exemplar. Hardy explained this at the beginning of chapter fourteen, in a passage later deleted:

Rural solitude, which provides ample themes for the intellect and sweet occupations innumerable for the minor sentiments, often denies a ready object for those stronger passions that enter no less than the others into the human constitution. The suspended pathos finds its remedy in settling on the first intrusive shape that happens to be reasonably well organized for the purpose, disregarding social and other minor accessories. Where the solitude is shadowed by the secret melancholies of the solitary, this natural law is still surer in operation.

At the outset of the tale Lady Constantine is in a mood of "almost killing *ennui*" as she contemplates the column of the tower where her love is to kindled (p. 3).¹⁰ Her "cribbed and confined emotions" (p. 55), like those of Connie Chatterley, are rendered more intense by her peculiar marital status. Her husband, Sir Blount, after mistreating her, has disappeared in Africa, leaving her, as St. Cleve's grandmother explains, "neither maid, wife, nor widow" (p. 19). With "Romance blood in her veins" (p. 77), Viviette is possessed of "a warm and affectionate, perhaps slightly voluptuous temperament, languishing for want of something to do" (p. 25) — a want that is supplied when she encounters the handsome young astronomer on top of the tower. As Lawrence says of his heroine, "Out of her disconnexion, a restlessness was taking possession of her like madness . . . she must get away from the house and everybody. The wood was her one refuge, her sanctuary" (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 21).¹¹ The symbolic configurations of landscape in the two stories are close: the great, gloomy house, the park, and the woods, with the "sanctuary" of tower or cottage. The resonance of the scene in Lawrence has been suggestively analysed by Ian Gregor:

Instead of the traditionally opposed entrances of Heaven and Hell, we have, on the right, the fretted silhouette of a great wood, and on the left, the pyramid outline of the colliery slag heap, and the shadows of both darken the façade of the great house which is placed in the centre of the stage. Continually, we have the double awareness of the setting, realism is shot through with symbolism and vice versa.¹²

But the Hardy setting also has symbolic overtones; as Richard Carpenter writes, men ascend towers "to place themselves in mystic converse with the eternal, to raise themselves above ordinary men the better to realise their universal humanity." Carpenter justly adds that the tower is "a powerful phallic symbol, suited to the growth and consummation of a passionate love affair."¹³ In both works love is separated from the mundane world outside — in Hardy's case an agricultural reality epitomised by the rustic comedy of the choir-practice, in Lawrence's by the more threatening industrial reality of Tevershall and the pits:

Round the near horizon went the haze, opalescent with frost and smoke, and on top lay the small blue sky; so that it was like being inside an enclosure, always inside. Life always a dream or a frenzy, inside an enclosure.

(*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 42)

Like Lady Chatterley, Viviette makes little of her social eminence. There was in her, Hardy, writes, "an inborn liking . . . to dwell less on her social position as a county lady than on her passing emotions as a woman" (p. 37), and in this portrait he may be drawing upon his early patroness, Julia Augusta Martin of Kingston Maurward. These "passing emotions" draw Lady Constantine inexorably into an affair with Swithin St. Cleeve, "no *amoroso*, no gallant, but a guileless philosopher" (p. 47), who attempts to initiate her into the mysteries of the heavens. She is drawn on by his almost obtuse lack of personal awareness, until it becomes "a serious question whether, if he were not hidden from her eyes, she would not soon be plunging across the ragged boundary which divides the permissible from the forbidden"

(p. 86) — a distinction which, allowance made for changes in morals, is equally operative with Lady Chatterley. Like Connie, Viviette's aristocratic selfhood is revived in passional contact with a man of the lower orders, and like her she protests her commitment: "I did not mean that it was a mere interlude to *me*. O if you only knew how very far it is from that!" (p. 112). In both cases this commitment issues in the renewal of childbirth: "Lady Constantine's external affairs wore just that aspect which suggests that new blood may be advantageously introduced into the line; and new blood had been introduced, in good sooth, — with what social result remained to be seen" (p. 162). This comes after news of Sir Blount's death and the clandestine marriage ceremony — like Parkin/Mellors and Connie, Swithin and Viviette communicate by a system of signals from house to woods. It later transpires that Sir Blount had died later than first reported, and that the marriage is consequently null and void; Lawrence had utilised this sequence in his first novel, when Annable, the gamekeeper, tells Cyril of his marriage to Lady Crystabel: "I was supposed to have died in the bush. She married a young fellow. Then I was proved to have died, and I read a little obituary notice on myself" (*The White Peacock*, pt. ii, ch. II). Lady Constantine, discovering that her lover had sacrificed a bequest by marrying, and despite her pregnancy, practises that abnegation of self that decisively marks off the Victorian from the modern heroine: "She laboured, with a generosity more worthy even than its object, to sink her love for her own decorum in devotion to the world in general, and to Swithin in particular" (p. 270). This devotion leads her to impose the child of her passion on the unwitting and pompous Bishop Helmsdale, just as Connie plans to have her child "fathered" by the impotent Clifford — a crucial narrative twist which underlines Lawrence's debt. The *dénouement* of *Two on a Tower*, with Swithin's return from abroad to confront the now widowed Lady Constantine, and her death from over-

excitement on top of the tower, lapses into Victorian sensationalism far removed from Lawrence's elegiac close.

There is nothing like so close a parallel between St. Cleeve and the gamekeeper. The origin of Lawrence's keepers is a topic of some complexity,¹⁴ but there are points of comparison. First, St. Cleeve is conceived, however pallidly, as an initiate of nature indifferent to social distinctions. "A student of the greatest forces in nature," Hardy writes, "he had, like many others of his sort, no personal force to speak of in a social point of view, mainly because he took no interest in human ranks and formulas" (p. 176). Though it might be said that "he was worshipping the sun" (p. 8), his worship does not always fill him with joyful contemplation of nature. On the contrary, as he himself explains, "those minds who exert their imaginative powers to bury themselves in the depths of the universe merely strain their faculties to gain a new horror" (p. 35), and the lovers often feel themselves "oppressed with the presence of a vastness they could not cope with even as an idea, and which hung about them like a nightmare" (p. 70). Nonetheless, Swithin, in his rôle as student of natural forces, does have a point of contact with the nature-loving gamekeepers, and interestingly enough, one of Connie's friends is Charles May, "an Irishman, who wrote scientifically about the stars," though she finds him "a little distasteful and messy, in spite of his stars" (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, pp. 32, 37).¹⁵

A closer analogue is to be found in the social origins of the characters. St. Cleeve is the product of a marriage between a curate and a local farmer's daughter. Thus, although he does not affect the curious vacillation between orthodox and dialect speech which characterises Lawrence's socially mobile keepers (and which is also a feature of *Tess* and Jefferies's *Amaryllis at the Fair*), St. Cleeve is in an equally ambivalent, if not *déclassé*, position. As old Amos explains to Lady Constantine, "what with having two stations of life in his blood he's good for nothing, my lady"

(p. 12). It is this social ambiguity that drives St. Cleeve into the isolation of his tower-top, "the temple of that sublime mystery on whose threshold he stood as priest" (p. 67), just as the keeper lives "quite alone, detached, in that stone cottage at the end of the wood" (*The First Lady Chatterley*, p. 24). When Viviette joins him, the tower becomes a love-nest not dissimilar to the keeper's hut and cottage — indeed, Swithin has a hut constructed at the base of the column and rudely furnished in exactly the manner of the "cosy" woodland hut in Lawrence. After the wedding Viviette and Swithin spend three days secretly encamped in this hut, in a sequence which prefigures the second "honeymoon" of Tess and Angel Clare, and which resembles Connie's night in the gamekeeper's cottage. "I could be happy here for ever," Viviette exclaims on awakening, "I wish I could never see my great gloomy house again" (p. 156). Just so does Connie, in the cottage, thinking with revulsion of Wragby, reflect that "she would be content with this little house, if only it were in a world of its own" (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 222). And like Connie's sojourn in the wood, the honeymoon in the astronomer's hut takes on an aura of irrecoverable joy: "I wish I was going back with you to the cabin", Viviette declares, "How happy we were, those three days of our stay there" (p. 167).

As Millgate has shown, the patterning of Hardy's narrative is carefully achieved:

Hardy works largely in terms of schematised oppositions . . . Swithin's paganism . . . is set against Lady Constantine's religiosity — her temperament, as Hardy says, makes her "necessarily either lover or *dévoté*" — while his initiation of her into the mysteries of the universe balances her initiation of him into the realities of sexual passion.

This sort of *schema*, in which the major characters become archetypes moving in a heightened romantic landscape, is equally discernible in Lawrence, though with a crucial difference which Millgate helps to suggest when he con-

cludes that "Hardy himself remained uninvolved, manipulating the story as a structural and thematic exercise."¹⁶

It would be wrong to try to "process" one novel into the other. The differences, centering upon Lawrence's critique of industrialization, are crucial and massive. But there is a residue of material parallels and similarities: the *donnée* of the marital situation; the characterization of the heroine, and the social background of the hero; and the symbolic country house landscape. These factors are enough, I believe, to warrant the assertion that Hardy played a crucial part in the shaping of the story of *Lady Chatterley*.

NOTES

- ¹U. C. Knoepfelmacher, "The rival ladies," *Victorian Studies*, IV (1960-61), 141-58; Elsie Adams, "A Lawrence novel by Shaw," *The D. H. Lawrence Review*, II (1969), 245-53. On the question of Lawrence's early reading see Rose Marie Burwell, "A catalogue of D. H. Lawrence's early reading," *The D. H. Lawrence Review*, III (1970), 193-324.
- ²"E.T.," *D. H. Lawrence, A Personal Record*, ed. J. D. Chambers (London: Frank Cass, 1965), p. 110.
- ³This catalogue was kindly made available to me by Mr. K. A. Stockham, Notts. County Librarian.
- ⁴*D. H. Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Mercury Books, 1964), pp. 176, 179, 182.
- ⁵*Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 49, 44.
- ⁶*Collected Letters*, ed. Aldous Huxley (London: Heinemann, 1956), p. 738.
- ⁷*Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 165.
- ⁸E. Hardy and F. B. Pinion, *One Rare Fair Woman* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 192.
- ⁹Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy, His Career as a Novelist* (London: The Bodley Head, 1971), p. 186.
- ¹⁰Edition cited: *Two on a Tower* (London: Macmillan Pocket Edition, 1912).
- ¹¹Lawrence texts cited in Penguin Books edition: *The First Lady Chatterley* (1973); *John Thomas and Lady Jane* (1973); *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960).
- ¹²Ian Gregor, "The novel as prophecy," in I. Gregor and B. Nicholas, *The Moral and the Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 223.
- ¹³Richard Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 66.

- ¹⁴One debt is undoubtedly to the gamekeepers of Richard Jefferies, who in *The Gamekeeper at Home* portrays a keeper, in his "freedom and constant contact with nature" as "every inch a man": "here in this nineteenth-century of civilised effeminacy may be seen some relic of what men were in the old feudal days when they dwelt practically in the woods." Jefferies also prefigures the educated background of Lawrence's various keepers, noting a recent proposal, "that gentlemen who had met with misfortune or were unable to obtain congenial employment should take service as gamekeepers" (Oxford: World's Classics Edition, 1961, pp. 12, 34). A number of volumes by Jefferies were in the Eastwood Mechanics' Library by 1895.
- ¹⁵Lawrence had already touched upon the astronomical theme of *Two on a Tower* in "The Captain's Doll," in which Hannele is drawn to the enigmatically star-gazing Captain Hepburn as he "squatted like a great cat peering up his telescope." Like Viviette, Hannele is "bewitched" by what she sees through the telescope, and this reaction is linked with her feelings for the captain.
- ¹⁶Millgate, *op. cit.*, pp. 190, 193.