



Man-Woman Relationship: George, Lettie, Leslie

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Abstract: In *The White Peacock*, D.H. Lawrence explores the complex dynamics of human relationships, particularly focusing on the intertwined lives of George, Lettie, and Leslie. The central theme revolves around the emotional and psychological struggles in their love triangle. George is a sensitive, introspective man, deeply connected to nature, and represents the idealistic yet troubled figure in the narrative. Lettie, caught between her desires for both George and Leslie, embodies the struggle of emotional conflict, torn between different aspects of love and personal fulfillment. Leslie, a more practical and grounded character, contrasts sharply with George's dreaminess. His affections for Lettie form a key aspect of the triangle. The novel delves into the tension between idealistic love and the stark reality of human imperfection. George and Lettie's romantic connection is strained by his deep attachment to nature, while Lettie is drawn to Leslie's more pragmatic approach to life. The emotional complexities in their interactions reveal the contrasts between idealism and realism in relationships, exploring themes of self-discovery, unrequited love, and the difficulties of balancing personal aspirations with love. The characters' relationships reflect broader themes of identity and emotional fulfillment, offering a poignant commentary on the conflicts inherent in the human condition.

Keywords: Embodies, Emotional Conflict, Sensitive, Nature and Represents etc.

Introduction:

There are numerous variations in relationships between men and women, men and men and women and women which Lawrence has described in his novels. In *The White Peacock* the relationship relating to George, Lettie, and Leslie predominates the main theme; therefore, it deserves special consideration. George Saxton is "a young farmer, stoutly built, brown-eyed, with a natural fair skin burned dark and freckled in patches."¹ He is a frank, physical sensuous man, but is "infected by the prevailing mental consciousness." He works at the 'Strelley Mill', a farm, is fond of reading novels. He loves Lettie, the sister of his close friend, Cyril. Lettie is flirtish with a tinge of modernity and sprouting feminism in her as could have been possible in the first decade of the twentieth century. Leslie Tempest is a smart, rich, self-conscious, moderately sensitive, but ultimately rather empty manufacturer's son." He may be said to be the fore-runne for Gerald (Women in Love). Lettie calls him "an infant". George to Lettie is her 'Taurus', a bull. Lettie may be characterised as *the White Peacock* of the novel.

Lettie is interested in poetry and painting, has quite a good sense of appreciation of the beauties of both poetry and painting; George is almost dull. He is dragged into discussion by Lettie over the feelings and emotions in a poem and the lines and colours of a picture. While Lettie's acumen is clear (she plays the active role) George is only passive. Lettie once quotes a line from Ben Jonson, "Drink to me only with thine eyes"², and asks George if he likes the words. He replies that he thinks- them rather "daft". Lettie retorts sharply : "That's because you have no wine in your eyes to pledge with". Lettie looks at him with pretended scorn and tells him that there is no change in his eyes when she looks at him. In her considered opinion, people who have some worth talk much with their eyes. Even uneducated people are loved and respected on account of this quality in them. She pities that George lacks such finer sensibilities. She tells him that he is "either asleep or stupid", he has no ear for the music either. He is "worse and worse". George's words "I thought how pretty your hands are and what they are like to touch and I thought it was a new experience to feel somebody's hair tickling my cheek" expose him to be merely physical- sensuous, earthy, nothing more. He seems losing ground, but Lettie won't let him go so easily although she knows and tells it frankly to his father that he'll sing quite well when he is in love and that "when he finds out something he wants and can't have" George hears it and he only laughs. On another occasion, Lettie tells George, "you are only a boy," "you are blind, you are only half-born; you are gross with good living and heavy sleeping you are a piano which will only play a dozen common notes. Sunset is nothing to you- it merely happens anywhere ... you never grow up. " And finally she tells him, "you ought to have been a monk- a martyr"³.

Lettie's relationship with Leslie Tempest appears not much encouraging either. Once they all meet at the Strelley Mill. George, Leslie and Cyril chase a few rabbits and kill some. Emily and Lettie don't feel at ease. Conversation ensues, Lettie bursts out, "Men are all brutes". Prompt comes retort from Leslie, "you can take us." George speaks, "It does make you mad, though, to touch the fur, and not be able to grab him." Emily gets



annoyed, Lettie, too, feels badly over the coarseness of George. After this episode Lettie becomes indifferent both to George and Leslie. They don't meet so frequently now. During this period Lettie (deal) things that (deal) with modern woman."

While George keeps away Leslie comes to meet Lettie. Leslie's words to Lettie, "I think there is more in the warm touch of a soft body than in a prayer. I'll pray with Kisses. ... I have you here-yes, I have you now" make a deep impact upon Lettie. Cyril informs George that Lettie and Leslie are engaged. George's comments are "She- She's like a woman, like a cat-running to comforts- She strikes a bargain. Women are all tradesmen.. She's like a prostitute."⁴

This is despair, disappointment, disgust and frustration. George feels jilted and humiliated. Their meetings are minimised. It is only at a party at the Beardsall's on the occasion of Lettie's coming of age that they meet again and converse. Lawrence has described this short scene with excellent masterly skill. George says, "you began it. You played with me you have awakened my life. ... you start me off-then leave me at a loose end. What am I going to do"? "you are a man" she replied. He laughs. 'What does this mean? he says contemptuously. 'You can go on which way you like', she answers 'Oh, well', he says we'll see."

George is at his best at the moment. Actually it is Lawrence himself setting out his theory of love. George says, "you began it" Lawrence says "Woman is the initiator in emotion" Lettie tells George that being a man he can go on which way he likes. George quips, "We'll see" This is most ironical. Both George and Lettie fail to cope with the eventualities that follow.

During the period of courtship Lettie and Leslie visit the Strelley Mill after sometime. It appears as if Lettie were a stranger. Emily and Alice become a bit sentimental. Lettie is also moved; Lawrence writes, "She said farewell to George, and looked at him through a quiver of suppressed tears. George was somewhat flushed with triumph over Lettie. She had gone home with tears shaken from her eyes unknown to her lover."

Lawrence has caught very delicate moments in the life of George and Lettie. Something that is lying in the unconscious of the two comes out on the surface during such moments. Yet on another occasion when on the insistence of Cyril, who was formerly implored by George for this, Lettie agrees to meet him, George blurts out, "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"⁵ Lettie says, "But what could I do". George implores, "If I had you I could go straight on. ... I should take a farm in Canada. I only wanted you. you'd have me- you'd have all me, and everything you wanted." Lettie's reply is, "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?" Lettie refuses to be "a farmer's wife" with him in Canada.

After the car accident in which Leslie was wounded and on account of which his marriage with Lettie was compelled to be delayed, Cyril tells George, "you should have insisted and made your own destiny. ... you should have had the courage to risk yourself you're always too careful of yourself and your own poor feelings" Graham Hough rightly remarks that George, "has denied his manhood not in the familiar way of later Laurentian characters, by starving the passions and the senses, but by a following consciousness and will to rot unused."

George is drawn towards Meg of the Ram, "a bonny delightful girl of twenty four", "a self, sensual, mindless woman" in the words of Anthony Beal, George has "proved inadequate in the middle- class world of ideas,". Notwithstanding his virtual engagement with Meg. George once again implores Lettie unabashedly when he finds an opportunity to talk to her alone. Lettie replies in a voice in restrained sadness and resignation, "No, my dear, no. The threads of my life were untwined they drifted about like floating threads of gossamer; and you didn't put out your hand to take them and twist them up into the chord with yours. Now another has caught them up, and the chord of my life is being twisted, and I cannot wrench it free and untwine it again- I can't I am not strong enough. Besides, you have twisted another thread far and tight into your chord; could you get free?"⁶

George pleaded with terror and humility, "No, Lettie, No Lettie; don't go. What should I do with my life? Nobody would love you like I do and what should I do with my love for you? - hate it and fear it, because it's too much for me? "George's degeneration is complete.

Lettie is wedded to Leslie; George marries Meg. Graham Hough calls it "a direct consequence of his refusal of the responsibility of consciousness" The result of these marriages for both George and Lettie is something near to tragedy Lawrence has evolved a beautiful plot for this tragedy. Surprisingly George's need for an individual assertion of the will awakens. He achieves commendable success in business and becomes a power in the town. He joins the Socialist group in politics as opposed to the conservative party of Leslie. However, he is unsatisfied, unhappy. He takes to drink, and ends in hopeless mental and physical degradation. Lettie seems brighter, more and gay in the early stages of her marriage with - Leslie whom she subdues so much so that he loses his imperious I assertive self-confidence. Her interest in the superficial social attractions which



had drawn her towards Leslie gradually subsides. She extinguishes herself in social life and her children. Lawrence describes it beautifully in the following words:

“Having reached that point in a woman’s career when most, perhaps all of the things in life seem worthless and insipid, she had determined to put up with it, to ignore her own self, to empty her own potentialities into the vessel of another or others, and to live her life at second hand. This peculiar abnegation of self is the resource of a woman for the escaping of the responsibilities of her own development.”⁷

Like George Lettie has also failed. She is disillusioned. Her degradation reaches abysmal depth in her last bid for flirtation with George after about ten years of their marriage. Smiling playfully on George, she exclaims, “Oh, but come, cane, come! We are not talking about going on; we are considering what a fine parting I have made you down the middle, like two wings of a spread bird.”

“No, no.” ‘it must be one way or another’ was George’s emphatic rebuff. Lettie’s passionate frenzy gave way. George asserted his manhood with unusual self confidence and rescued his male chastity by refusing to play the sacrificial lamb at the altar of pure sensuality. George rose to the loftiest heights of his character even at the most degenerated and degraded phase of his unfulfilled life. Earlier he was refused favour by Lettie. This was probably the last and the final stroke of revenge struck at the most opportune moment. *The White Peacock* was not allowed to defile the fallen angel; she was rather forced to lick the wound of her injured pride. They parted quietly. That was the end of their relationship. Allan Monkhouse, a contemporary novelist and playwright remarked, Lettie is “a full-fledged flirt, fascinating and conscienceless, with just enough passion in her to make her flirtation dangerous. She turns George’s head, and makes violent love to him. Even after she has married a rich husband, and he has declined on his humble cousin Meg, she does not leave him alone, but dangles her charms before his eyes, and disturbs an honest life with a vision of what was never meant for him.”⁸

The ‘Morning Post’ characterised her as “the wayward Lettie.” Henry Savage described her as a “delightful picture of a lively, clever girl, who likes excitement of all kinds, and especially the rather dangerous excitement of all kinds, and especially the rather dangerous excitement of leading passionate men on to making passionate love.”⁹ Both George and Lettie face defeat and degradation. Nevertheless, neither of the two loses our sympathy on account of their deft characterisation by their creator. It is clever of Lawrence, remarks Henry Savage “to compel us to sympathize both with George and Lettie. We are made to feel they are both hard driven by their natures, and are not to be blamed for the inevitable catastrophe.”

Conclusion:

While George’s deep emotional and spiritual connection to nature distances him from the more grounded, worldly Leslie, Lettie finds herself torn between the two men, struggling to reconcile her desires for both romantic passion and stability. The resolution of their relationships is marked by a sense of unresolved tension, as each character must ultimately navigate their personal journey toward fulfillment and understanding. The novel ultimately underscores the difficulty of finding true emotional harmony in relationships. The conflict between idealistic love and the practicalities of human nature is not easily resolved, suggesting that relationships, much like the characters themselves, are often marked by imperfections and internal struggles. In *The White Peacock*, Lawrence paints a portrait of human relationships that is both tragic and deeply reflective, illustrating the complexities of love and the profound emotional labor required to truly understand one and others.

References:

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