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Mothers in the Margins: Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, and Suffragism’s Discontents
by SUZANNE DIAMOND

"THE HAND THAT WRECKS the cradle wrecks the nation!" American eugenist William E. Kellicott echoes this provocative motto in a 1910 lecture at Oberlin College. Of course conservatives and radicals alike would assume that this "hand" is inevitably a woman's; the mother's centrality in a whole range of visions for contemporary reform is not to be overlooked. Neither should we overlook the assumptions about maternity that we simply inherit, for these assumptions may blind us to new and effective alliances. Even in the so-called historical narratives of turn-of-the-century British suffragism, one may be struck by the stubborn resiliency of age-old fictions about maternity and its limitations. This phenomenon is nowhere more striking than in Sylvia Pankhurst's The Suffragette Movement.

In this otherwise forward-looking and radically sensitive text, Pankhurst betrays a strikingly rigid notion of maternal accountability on the domestic front. Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, whose activist career is predictably celebrated by Pankhurst, who shared many of the elder's goals, nevertheless receives dubious grades from the younger feminist in terms of marital and maternal success. An inevitable coincidence is assumed between public involvement and private neglect, and this assumption dates straight back through Charles Dickens' Mrs. Jellyby (Bleak House). If you're a woman, this logic informs us, even impassioned efforts to save the nation entail "wrecking the cradle." Pankhurst recounts the rumor that Wolstenholme Elmy's marriage may have fallen short of the pioneer suffragist's ideal, before her critical attention turns to the woman's son:

As to the child, he grew up puny and frail and lacking in initiative. [However, she notes, his want of vigour is not surprising. Always poor, always working for her living, and always giving to the Causes she had at heart a wealth of unpaid service, unable to employ household aid, or aid in attending to her child, could it be otherwise? Undoubtedly he was stunted from his birth, by solitude and by lack of material things, knowing only the care of that work-driven mother, who was here, there and everywhere upon her mission, and whose tiny hand daily covered a multitude of closely-written sheets on the all-important questions of women's emancipation. She was an instrument in the grasp of Progress; he was a victim of her time and work.]

Indeed such ruminations, especially from a woman who was a pioneer feminist in her own right, are cause for larger speculation about the family’s place in feminist imaginations. With the slightest of revisions, such ideas might have found a comfortable home in a speech by David Lloyd George or Herbert Gladstone. That these ideas tread so teasingly close to a kind of antifeminism, I would argue, is a function of their maternity politics. Correspondingly, alternate family politics might denote for us, retrospectively, alternate feminist politics. In fact, in taking this line toward the feminist mother, Pankhurst falls more into line—though certainly against her own wishes—with the likes of Lydia Becker, whose name, according to Pankhurst, “was to become for twenty years synonymous with the women’s suffrage cause” (34) even though only some categories of women were encompassed within Becker’s reforms. Pankhurst contends that Becker’s “influence on the women’s movement was on the whole a narrowing one” (35), presumably due to the latter’s lukewarm sympathy toward both working-class women’s reforms and married women’s enfranchisement. But in framing Wolstenholme Elmy’s son as inevitably thwarted by a working mother who had insufficient domestic help, Pankhurst unwittingly betrays congruent patriarchal and middle-class assumptions about the competing claims of feminism and the family.

It is within this context that I should like to examine the careers of two male authors who are not particularly lauded for their feminism. I mean to argue that Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence practiced, in ways not readily apparent, an almost avant-garde ideological fusion between emancipationist and maternal impulses. In this fusion, no less than in their clumsy—if well intended—gestures toward the plight of contemporary women, I would align these two authors with the turn-of-the-century Suffragist movement. This revaluation of their self-constructions as both sons and creators situates them solidly not only within the movement but within a fringe whose radical inclusiveness of maternity has yet to be fully embraced by feminist reforms. 3

If I have raised an eyebrow with the suggestion that either of these men avowed an affinity with feminism, please allow me to lower it; in their sometimes clumsy ways, both Hardy and Lawrence expressed in no uncertain terms the wish to align themselves with the Suffragist project. Hardy’s espousal of feminism coincides with his own self-advancement, which

3. Sheila Jeffreys, ed., The Sexuality Debates (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987). In this context, for instance, Ellen Key is almost violently misrepresented by Jeffreys, whose biographical sketch of Key reproduces the either-or thinking about maternity evinced by Pankhurst. Jeffreys argues that Key “saw women’s destiny as limited to motherhood” (617, emphasis mine). Clearly a sentimentalization of maternity is present in Key’s work, but it is present enough in contemporary rhetoric to be corrected by contextual reading. However, the far more radical implication of Key’s stance on maternity inheres precisely in her impulse to include it within the feminist agenda. Right within Jeffreys’ compilation, for instance, Key may be quoted arguing (in 1912!) that “all women’s rights have little value, until this one thing is attained: that a woman who through her illegitimate motherhood has lost nothing of her personal worth . . . does not forfeit social esteem” (574, emphasis mine). Of course, the material ignored by my own ellipses is material that confirms Jeffreys’ reservations about Key. What I mean to reclaim here is the radically new social treatment of maternity for which Key argues, despite her indulgence in a contemporary rhetoric of maternal sentimentality. Throwing out Key’s radical impulse to legitimize even “illegitimate” maternity is like throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water! See Ellen Key, “From The Woman Movement,” in Jeffreys, 573–601.
argues for a class-based alignment of the working-class author and the struggling woman. Without a doubt, his eagerness to be deemed an early New Woman novelist coincided neatly with his eagerness to be seen as a ground-breaking storyteller: in his 1912 Preface to *Jude the Obscure*, as Penny Boumelha points out, Hardy allows Sue Bridehead to be mistaken for “the first delineation in fiction of . . . the woman of the feminist movement—the slight, pale, 'bachelor' girl—the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing.” Boumelha alerts us to the facts, however, that Sue is not the first New Woman, and that she represents “no discernible movement” whatsoever. Moreover, Boumelha argues convincingly that this oversight represents a “characteristic piece of obfuscation.” Of course, this is careerist “obfuscation,” but by 1912 Hardy’s preoccupation with the plights of vulnerable women hardly requires such white-lying, Sue Bridehead’s diminutive characterization as a “bundle of nerves” notwithstanding.

Comparably identifiable—though equally complex—interest in the subject of female emancipation is evident in Lawrence’s writing, moreover, when he proclaims in a letter to feminist friend Sallie Hopkin Gust as he begins *The Sisters*) that “I shall do my work for women better than the suffrage.” Such a chivalrous stance toward women’s liberation might seem misguided to generous readers—and downright bombastic to impatient ones—but if we bracket questions about these authors’ deftness or sophistication, it becomes easy to locate in their stances that impulse to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

It becomes a most striking connection between Hardy and Lawrence, therefore, that their identification with women’s struggles entails the emplotment of themselves in two provocative dream narratives as that more marginalized among marginalized women: the single mother. By implication, the machinery of middle-class literary consumption is represented by these dreams as an indifferent father, and thus the authors’ vulnerable stance toward patriarchy—their biological maleness notwithstanding—becomes highlighted by the revealing stories these fictionalists told themselves during sleep.

In *Thomas Hardy: A Life* (ghost-written by Hardy), for instance, the author himself recalls a dream in which he is carrying a baby carefully up a ladder in order

6. Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1975). *Thomas Hardy: A Life*, as Gittings points out, was a most “authorized” biography, originally published after Hardy’s death and crediting Hardy’s second wife, Florence Dugdale, with authorship. It was later discovered that Hardy had written daily manuscripts for this work, burning them after their transcription into type by Mrs. Hardy. In this sense, *A Life* is actually an autobiography and, as Gittings cautions, a highly selective one.
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...to lift it over the edge of the loft to a place of safety. On the loft sat George Meredith in his shirt sleeves, smoking; though his manner was rather that of Augustus John. The child was his, but he seemed indifferent to its fate, whether I should drop it or not.  

The contemporary double meaning of the term “drop” in the context Hardy isolates should not be overlooked; this is a dream about the miscarriage of both babies and literary careers! Furthermore, anyone with even cursory exposure to the circumstances of Hardy’s early life cannot fail to intuit the poignancy of this dream plot’s dilemma. Hardy’s own mother, Jemima Hand, found herself pregnant with the author himself, though she was unmarried. This dilemma was, in a sense, history repeating itself. She herself, along with six siblings, had been raised on parish relief. Jemima’s mother, a generation earlier, having been disowned by her own respectable, middle-class father—Hardy’s great-grandfather—for forming a “low” alliance, then being widowed, struggled for survival along with six children, right across town from the indifferent type of patriarch about whom Hardy dreams. It was the culture of such patriarchs that made “emancipation” contingent upon either denying desire in the first place, or “dropping” the baby if denial failed. Certainly motherhood held no guarantee of cultural survival. Thomas Hardy senior must hardly have seemed more promising to Jemima than her own father or grandfather; he is described by Gittings as “a handsome and well-formed man [who] had a reputation for getting village girls into trouble.” Where indeed are those others in the history books? Where indeed is desire or freedom in Jemima’s final marriage? Ominously, neither Jemima Hand nor Thomas Hardy senior appeared to be in a rush to marry. 

Always ambivalent about his origins, Hardy was careful to destroy all materials that might shed light on his private and early life; instead, and like Lawrence, he would half invent a more “legitimate” “Hardy pedigree.” In the realm of domestic relations, therefore, we are forced to read between the lines of biographical scraps. It is these omissions and the truths among dreams’ fictions that finally tell on Hardy.

But perhaps the most provocative slant of Hardy’s dream is its literary infusion. If, in waking hours, Hardy preferred to be seen as allied with the likes of Walter Besant and his Rabelais Club, it appears that, when the blinds and his guard were down, his sense of his own project ran rather counter to the concerns of a George Meredith, whose “virility” he longed to admire but could not quite. In his dream, as in his best-known fictions, this idol became the father who would “drop” his own baby, the culture which would consign unconnected talent to the realm of obscurity.

7. Qtd. in Gittings, 29.
8. Gittings’ is a good text for gaining such an understanding. It is excellent at piecing together what reads like a plausible human being, neither perfect nor predestined for literary greatness.
9. Gittings, 7. In fact, as history makes obvious, Jemima’s mother and siblings prevailed in this matter, compelling Thomas Hardy senior—though no Hardy witnesses—to the altar on 22 December 1839, just six months before the author was born.
Lawrence confesses a strikingly similar dream in a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith. Directly contingent upon—and thus unconsciously associated with—his critique of the mothering styles of his two sisters, while observing that “motherhood, in these days, is a strange and rather frightening phenomenon,” Lawrence’s letter makes a telling free association to recall that:

I dreamed...such a funny dream. When I had been to some big, crowded fair somewhere—where things were to buy and sell, in booth and on the floor—as I was coming back down an open road, I heard such a strange crying overhead, in front, and looking up, I saw, not very high in the air above me, but higher than I could throw, two pale spotted dogs, crouching in the air, and mauling a bird that was crying loudly. I ran fast forwards and clapped my hands and the dogs started back. The bird came falling to earth. It was a young peacock, blue all over like a peacock's neck, very lovely. It still kept crying. But it was not much hurt. A woman came running out of a cottage not far off, and took the bird, saying it would be all right. So I went my way.12

This dream, no less than Hardy’s, embeds a curiously compounded representation of the author's historical mother within an anxiety about imperiled infants and literary careers. In his initial emplotment in the “crowded fair” “where things were to buy and sell,” Lawrence represents the worldview of Lydia Beardsall Lawrence, who, by his own summarial confession, was thoroughly bourgeois, thoroughly alive at the marketplace. Corroborating this estimate is Jessie Chambers’ recollection that

[when we [Lawrence and she] were alone together we were in a world apart, where feeling and thought were intense, and we seemed to touch a reality that was beyond the ordinary workaday world. But if his mother or sister returned, bringing with them the atmosphere of the marketplace, our separate world was temporarily shattered, and was only recaptured with difficulty. (emphasis mine)13

This description is again corroborated, in fiction’s manner, by the way the otherwise stern and pious Mrs. Morel of Sons and Lovers may be transformed to the rapture she elsewhere denies by a blue-flowered plate advantageously bargained for.14 Moreover, like Hardy, Lawrence carries a “baby,” metonymically associated with himself and his own literary project. Like Hardy’s dream encounter with Meredith, Lawrence’s experience with the mauling dogs occurs in connection with the rescue of a peacock; the object of his concern, in other words, echoes the title of Lawrence’s literary progeny of seven years earlier, The White Peacock. The book is then conflated with its own creator, in turn, for this peacock, said to be “crying” in human fashion, is enacting a form of demand for maternal attention that Lawrence

12. Richard Aldington, D.H. Lawrence: Selected Letters (1950; Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), 123. This letter is dated 3 June 1918, and it is pertinent to note that Lawrence’s first published novel, The White Peacock, had been published seven years before the dream is recorded.
14. However, I do not mean to imply any direct correspondence between the Sons and Lovers storyline and the Lawrence household that some readers distractedly insist upon. In this regard, I am cognizant and respectful of the objections Judith Arcana raises in “I Remember Mama: Mother-Blaming in Sons and Lovers Criticism,” The D.H. Lawrence Review 13.3 (1980): 137–51.
himself has owned as a repeated (and alarming) behavior of his childhood.\textsuperscript{15} In either case the survival of the “baby” is viewed from the perspective of maternal solicitude: both responsible parenthood and the author’s plight are feminized vis-à-vis a masculinized and menacing culture, constructed as an inherently single-handed project that takes place beneath—or contrary to—the interests of a patriarchal establishment.

Indeed, the inscribed fantasy of single parenthood is perceived by Emma Lavinia Gifford in her early days of intimacy with Hardy. Reading \textit{Desperate Remedies}, she intuitively observes that “your novel seems like a child all your own and none of me.” It is hardly insignificant that Hardy carefully copies Emma’s seemingly offhand observation into his own journal and allows it to survive among the “thirty or forty years’” worth of journals and correspondence that he saw fit to destroy. Underscoring the same construction of his literary parenthood as maternal and single-handed, in fact, Lawrence distances Jessie Chambers’ significant collaboration on \textit{The White Peacock} by enforcing the hierarchy that might exist between a new mother and her maid: “I its creator,” he reminds her, “you its nurse.”\textsuperscript{16} In fact, Lawrence appears to be quite conscious of this connection. In a letter to Harriet Monroe, for instance, he frames his own project by characteristic allusion to maternal romance: “I’m glad,” he teases,

to hear that my \textit{Ophelia} shall go in whole—a great relief to me. I could not bear that she should be cut through the middle, and the top half given to me and the lower half given to the world. Am I not her mother, you Solomon with the sword? (10/1/14)

The biographical speculation about the fathers of these two authors is abundant and need not be recalled here; the connection between them and contemporary models of middle-class paternity represents a fresher line of inquiry. I wish to isolate two figures—each a friend of Hardy and Lawrence—who serve to underscore what I’d call the class-complicated gender alliances of these two writers. For Hardy, this friend was Horace Moule, the beloved son of a public service oriented family (and upon whom \textit{Tess of the D’Urbervilles}’ Angel Clare is thought to be modeled); Lawrence found this troubling model in his childhood companion, George Henry Neville, a young man one year Lawrence’s junior, of a financially more stable family, who early on distinguished himself academically in a manner quite similar to Lawrence’s. The authors’ attitudes toward these two men can be characterized as veiled reproach; the two figures share a rather shoddy treatment of both the single mothers who became pregnant by them and their own illegitimate offspring.

Hardy met Horace Moule, member of the well-known and public-spirited Moule family, in 1857; Hardy recalls that he was sketching and that Moule

\textsuperscript{15} See Worthen; Witter Bynner, \textit{Journey with Genius} (New York: John Day Co., 1951); and John Middleton Murry, \textit{Son of Woman} (1931; London: Jonathan Cape, 1954; New York: Klaus Reprint Co., 1972). Worthen explores Lawrence’s own propensity to sob incessantly, and for no apparent reason, when young. Bynner and Murry refer to crucifixion metaphors and to the idea that Lawrence courted or invited them.

\textsuperscript{16} Chambers, xxxiii.
freely offered criticism. Afterwards, the two men were to maintain a correspondence which amounted to a tutoring experience for young Hardy. Moule tutored Hardy in more than writing, as it happened; this man was also an example for Hardy of the potential limitations of the staunchly pious, privileged literary man, particularly with respect to accidental paternity. As Gittings points out, it was made public, upon Moule’s suicide (itself the culmination of years of what might now be named manic depression complicated by alcoholism), that the tragedy of his life (pertinently the only life on record) was that he had the presumable misfortune to have fathered an illegitimate son by a “low woman.”

One can only conjecture about the contradictory strains on Hardy’s allegiances caused by this presumably sordid secret (to which, Gittings suggests, Hardy may have had access before Moule’s death). Gittings is illuminating, to a point, in demonstrating Hardy’s literary preoccupation with Moule and with this particular trauma. The full significance of this preoccupation, however, is not sufficiently dealt with by Gittings or other biographers. As Gittings observes, for instance, Hardy wrote Shakespearean sonnets to Moule. Additionally, he points out that some figures in Hardy’s poetry—such as the woman in garish dress in “She at His Funeral,” or the “journeying boy” in “Midnight on the Great Western”—express a continuing fascination with this real-life “tragedy.” The dismal emplotment of the “journeying boy” under a lamp with “oily flame,” the ironic use of the train as metaphoric “vehicle” to represent the life plot of a boy who knew neither “whence he came” nor “to what he was going,” brim with sympathy for the

17. Gittings maintains that this correspondence, while developing Hardy in some ways, limited him in others. Gittings cites Moule as a significant influence in Hardy’s sometimes conservative views; both were readers of—and Moule a regular contributor to—the conservative and satirical Saturday Review.
18. Gittings also speculates that Jude the Obscure’s Father Time might have been modeled on what Hardy knew of this illegitimate child.
20. She At his [sic] Funeral
   They bear him to his resting-place—
   In slow procession sweeping by;
   I follow at a stranger’s pace;
   His kindred they, his sweetheart I.
   Unchanged my gown of garish dye,
   Though sable-sad is their attire;
   But they stand round with griefless eye,
   While my regret consumes like fire.
   (qtd. in Gittings, 181)
21. From “Midnight on the Great Western”:
   In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy,
   And the roof-lamp’s oily flame
   Played down upon his listless form and face,
   Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,
   Or whence he came.
   In the band of his hat the journeying boy
   Had a ticket strong; and a string
   Around his neck bore the key of his box,
   That twinkled gleams of the lamp’s sad beams
   Like a living thing ....
   (qtd. in Gittings, 186)
marginalized and silently reproachful offspring of Moule, the literary public
man.22 In “She at His Funeral,” moreover, the somber person of the marginal­
ized woman is internalized, powerfully separated from her function as showpiece or spectacle. The poem tells us that neither the “sable-sad” garb of the family nor the “garish” clothing her own wardrobe offers convey any­
thing more than the social circumstances of their respective wearers. Gittings is indeed onto some provocative material in isolating these poems, but he ultimately underreads it. Hardy’s imaginative fusion with the “low” woman at the public man’s funeral, for instance, leads Gittings to speculate in merely sexualized terms. It seems a distraction from the greatest significance of these poetic manifestations, therefore, when he concludes about Hardy’s allusions to Moule by cautioning against a presumably inevitable homopho­bia on the reader’s part. He continues, therefore:

If Hardy shared in any way the grief of the girl [in “She at His Funeral”] and felt excluded from the grief of the Moule family [such as the girl in dress “of garish dye” does in the poem], it was the exclusion of his own particular kind of grief. Modern thought is apt to deal heavy-handedly with the topic of Victorian male affection. Hardy has left the evidence . . . that he felt for Moule in some way as Shakespeare did for his friend, and as Tennyson did for Hallam. There is no point of definition. (YTH 182)

In his eagerness to rescue Hardy, as it were, from speculations about homo­sexuality, Gittings winds up ignoring the more rich social implications of Hardy’s preoccupation with Moule’s “tragedy.” In the first place, Hardy himself would have been keenly aware of his situational identification with the “journeying boy,” who resembles (as Gittings notes) Jude’s “Father Time.” Had Hardy’s mother married five and a half months later, for instance, the author himself would have been an “illegitimate” child; had Jemima Hand’s family been unsuccessful in persuading Hardy senior to marry Jemima, the author’s fate within the rigid Victorian class system might have been very different indeed. Moreover, like Moule’s anonymous consort, Hardy’s own mother would have been deemed a “low” woman—even by presumably enlightened types like Moule himself—for Hardy’s social origins came to be his own “tragic secret.” And since conjecture is in large measure the Hardy reader’s lot, one conjectures mightily about the feelings that might haunt a person who denies those who raised him in the interest of personal success: garish dress indeed.

Similarly, Lawrence had a friend in his youth, George Henry Neville, who won a scholarship to the Nottingham High School the year after Lawrence did, and who is problematized in The White Peacock. Neville him-

22. Gittings explains that:

[The bastard child of Horace Moule and the Dorchester girl was, according to Florence Hardy, brought up in Australia and, to add a final touch to the whole macabre story, was hanged there. (185)

“When and why this happened,” he adds, “is not specified; but the story obviously is closely con­

nected with what has seemed to many critics the height of improbability in Jude [i.e., the bizarre murder-suicide by hanging attributed to little Father Time]. . . .” (185).
self identifies his portrait as Leslie in this novel, underscoring the affection between himself and the author and ironically—as I shall demonstrate—characterizing the relationship in terms of parental love. Neville recalls the correspondence between the homoerotic swimming scene and his own affection for the author, while affirming the historical veracity of the lakeside scene:

it is true, all true; and it is further true that, while holding and rubbing, I crooned and mumbled to him in the seemingly half-senile way I have many, many times since then crooned and mumbled to my babies when they have been in trouble, which crooning and mumbling, though seemingly half-senile it may be, seems to bring the greatest possible comfort to their souls; that, and the physical contact together, is the surest way I have discovered of making them realize that there is no further need for fear; the most certain method of assuring the fluttering heart that it is enfolded in the arms of Love.23

Indeed, apparently zealous about recontextualizing the homoerotic aspects of this scene in the novel, Neville characterizes himself as a model of paternal tenderness. Yet history offers us a Neville modeled more on Horace Moule than on Father Knows Best. The best instance of Lawrence’s disturbed feelings about Neville’s paternity is offered in a letter to Edward Garnett of some six years later on the occasion of the former’s final marriage:

And Neville—my very old friend, the Don Juanish fellow I told you of—went and got married three months back, without telling a soul—and now boasts a son: “Jimmy, a very fine lad.” . . . He implores me to go and stay a week with him. I suppose I s’ll have to. This has upset me—One never knows what’ll happen. You know Georgie has already got one illegitimate child. It’s a lovely story, the end of it: the beginning was damnable. She was only nineteen, and he only twenty. Her father, great Christian, turned her out. Georgie wouldn’t acknowledge the kid, but had to pay whether or not. That’s five years back.

Last October, I am told, the girl got married. Before the wedding—two days or so—she went to Neville’s home with the child and showed it to Georgie’s father and mother.

“I’ve come, Mr. Neville, for you to own this child. Who’s the father of that—?” pushing forward the small girl.

“Eh bless her, it’s just like him,” cried old Mrs. Neville, and she kissed the kid with tears.

“Well, Lizzie,” said Neville to the girl, “if our George-Henry says that isn’t his’n, he’s a liar. It’s the spit and image of him.”

Whereupon Lizzie went away satisfied, got married to a collier, and lives in Cordy Lane. She, with one or two others, will rejoice over George’s final nabbing. Isn’t it awful!24

Try as this letter might to assume the urbanely humorous stance implied by Neville’s dismissal as “that Don Juanish fellow,” it robs its own voice of that comfortable snicker with the simple tale of a pathetic and disowned little girl at her estranged grandparents’ house. By the end of the letter, a sympathetic identification with the ostracized child and would-be collier’s wife grabs the interpretive reins to proclaim with a rhetorical question (minus its question mark): “Isn’t it awful!”

This letter betrays, as Hardy’s literary preoccupation with Moule does, a

24. Qtd. in Neville (specifically in Carl Baron’s “Editor’s Introduction”), 15–16.
site of Lawrence’s similarly conflicting alliances. George himself, his pro-
fessed paternal expertise with “crooning,” “mumbling” and “physical con-
tact” notwithstanding, never acknowledged this daughter, who died in child-
hood as Moule’s son had. As Hardy’s representations have flown to the ser-
vice of the marginalized woman mourner, and the illegitimate boy in the
“cheap seats” of the “Midnight Express,” Lawrence’s allegiance with the
turned-out fallen woman and with the “spit and image” orphan speaks loudly
through all pretense of urbanity. It is, moreover, an indication of
Lawrence’s powerful ambivalence toward Neville’s handling of fatherhood
that The White Peacock, the novel that deals most overtly with a Neville-like
character (Leslie), erases the issue of the illegitimate child which had existed
in its original version, surviving in a fragment entitled “Laetitia.”

For Hardy and Lawrence, mother was precisely the model for effective
worldly struggle. Jemima Hand and Lydia Beardsall invested their own
thwarted ambitions into the upward mobility of their sickly but gender-privi-
leged sons. Thomas Hardy senior and Arthur Lawrence, on the other hand,
offered models of class stasis, of social obscurity and the abortion of histori-
cal ambitions against which contemporary women of all classes were begin-
ing to protest. What these complicated identifications with maternal vulner-
ability call into question, contextually considered, are the class assumptions
that can attend our reconstructions of gender struggle. These assumptions
contaminate various lines of inquiry into the real cultural work being done
by Hardy’s and Lawrence’s writing; and this contamination, in turn, informs
the heteronormative and class-situated—not to mention distracting—Oedipal
inquiry to which these two men have been silent prey. Janice Harris puts her
finger directly upon this blind spot—accidentally, one deduces—when she
recalls the way Edwardian feminists must have been at ideological odds with
the monolith she domesticates under the rubric of “the Modern Artist”: Harris urges us to be cognizant of
the genuine intellectual and political dilemmas [Edwardian] authors faced in writing about femi-
nism . . . how to reconcile a skepticism about the value of individualism with an awareness that
women have yet to enjoy the adventure of Western individualism; how to reconcile a distrust of
political activism and market-place labor with an acknowledgement that women have yet to take
their place in the world of politics and commerce. Feminists often seem to be fighting for pre-

25. Neville, 21. Incidentally, as Baron points out (in Neville), Lawrence is mistaken in his account that
Neville winds up supporting the child; the Neville family informs Baron that the eldest Neville brother,
William Baker Neville, sent ten shillings per week to the child’s mother until its subsequent death at the age
of twelve.

26. Neville, like Lawrence’s paternal uncle Walter Lawrence, had a similar altercation with his son involv-
ing a kitchen knife. In Neville’s case, however, the outcome, fortunately, was not manslaughter. See Worthen,
45, and Neville, 7.

27. Neville (Baron’s “Editor’s Introduction”), 20–23; the “Laetitia” manuscript is at The Bancroft Library,
University of California, Berkeley. It is perhaps a further indication of Lawrence’s feelings of affinity with the
“fallen” woman—Lettie, in this early novel—that the figure of Lettie is drawn, in part, from Lawrence’s own
sister Ada (with whom he was close). See also Worthen, 33. Such assumptions must of course be balanced
against Lawrence’s less sensitive later treatment of the pregnant woman—Emmie, for instance—in the unre-
vised and posthumously published Mr. Noon. Thus, this essay does not pretend to account for whole literary
careers but, rather, to assess impulses of striking and underexplored sympathies displayed by moments in
these two authors’ work.
cisely what the dissenting modern artist finds hollow. ("Lawrence and the Edwardian Feminists," 73)

Harris forgets momentarily, however, that in a manner that paralleled feminist impulses a contemporary miner's son might be fighting for the presence of a T.S. Eliot or an E.M. Forster. In the same way, a builder's son, a few decades earlier, might have compared himself as unfavorably to one Sir Walter Besant or Sir Leslie Stephen . . . or one George Meredith, for that matter. What Hardy and Lawrence help us see, in their class-based affinity with vulnerable mothers, is the complicated overlap between some Modern Artists and some silent feminists that the critical commentary too often has obscured.

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