PEACOCK AND
THE PEACOCK PAPERS

Thomas E. Tausky

Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) first appears in Leo Simpson's novel, *The Peacock Papers* (1973) as one name in a catalogue of heterogeneous persons who have been re-located in "Bradfarrow, S.E. Ontario (p. 48,000), largest city in Mackenzie County, on Blue River, founded in 1803 by Richard Backus Brad and Jonathan Farrow, fur-traders"[1] as a consequence of the Last Judgment. Bunty Oakes, a "power," which, as he modestly explains is "in the cellar of the middle league" *(PP,* p. 33) of the celestial hierarchy, confides the news of impending doom to Jeffrey Anchyr, owner of the Anchyr Feed Mill, and the protagonist of the novel. As the result of a dubious policy of "trying to keep in touch with human needs" *(PP,* p. 35), Bunty says, the old-fashioned policy of a fiery apocalypse has been abandoned, but "adjustments will be made" *(PP,* p. 36).

Peacock is known to Bunty as "T.L. Peacock, colonial administrator" *(PP,* p. 37). Anchyr, a highly literate manufacturer of cattle feed, feels impelled to ask: "Would he be Thomas Love Peacock, a writer, who died about a hundred years ago?" (PP, p. 39).

Peacock was, of course, both a colonial administrator and a novelist; some awareness of his career, personality and fictional methods is necessary for a full understanding of *The Peacock Papers.*

Peacock is remembered principally for two reasons: he was one of Shelley's closest friends, and wrote about him in both a novel and a memoir; he also perfected a highly distinctive form of fiction. A comment by J. B. Priestley may serve as a basis for defining the characteristic qualities of Peacock's fiction:

> Perhaps the shortest way of describing these novels is to say that their action is talk. . . . The moments when the talk is in full flood are the real crises of these novels, the action of which exists either to bring about these moments or as a droll or sardonic commentary upon them.[2]

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[1]Leo Simpson, *The Peacock Papers* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 1. Cited hereafter as *PP* in parentheses within the text.

[2]J. B. Priestley, *Thomas Love Peacock* (1927; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 133.

The talk gets going when a number of intellectuals gather in a lavishly provided country house. Each character eloquently sets forth his pet theory on literature or politics or social reform, but each character is also enslaved by his own theory, which he sees as the one indispensable attitude towards all human problems.

Leo Simpson has clearly been a very astute and observant reader of Peacock. There are allusions in *The Peacock Papers* to six of Peacock's seven novels (I could not find any specific reference to *Maid Marian)*. Chapter Six of *The Peacock Papers,* "Dogmatic Manor," is so accurate and effective as an imitation of Peacock's method that it can be used simultaneously to expound Peacock and Simpson. The enumeration of the many exact parallels between Peacock and Simpson is in some ways a mechanical task, but it does serve as a reminder that Simpson has placed a miniature Peacock novel right at the centre of *The Peacock Papers.*

The "Peacock papers" were, for the most part, written by Jeffrey Anchyr, and passed on to the Bradfarrow Municipal Data Centre (formerly the Bradfarrow Public Library) after Anchyr's untimely death. "Dogmatic Manor" was, however, the contribution of Mr. Peacock. It is left as a fragment, but was to chronicle the "great Mr. Peacock and Dr. Royce confrontation" *(PP,* p. 145); Dr. Harrison Royce, identified by Mr. Peacock as "the mediamaniac" *(PP,* p. 122) might be identified by others as Marshall McLuhan.

Mr. Peacock begins his account with a genealogy of his host:

> Mr. Jonathan Farrow . . . was extremely wealthy as a result of an inheritance received from his father. The same inheritance had also been received by Mr. Farrow's father from *his* father, and by Mr. Farrow's grandfather from his father, and so on, in an unbroken line of dwindling strands back to a very early age of man, later than Adam but somewhat earlier than the golden days of Homer, there being a legend within the family that the surname was nothing less than a corruption of the Hebrew word for "the great house", i.e. the Biblical title for the kings of Egypt, *Pharaoh.* *(PP,* pp. 116-17)

So, in Peacock's last novel, *Gryll Grange,* Gregory Gryll, an epicurean by temperament, asserts that he is

> lineally descended from the ancient and illustrious Gryllus, who maintained against Ulysses the superior happiness of the life of animals to that of the life of man.[3]

[3]*The Novels of Thomas Love Peacock,* ed. David Garnett, 2nd ed. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), p. 782. Cited hereafter as *TLP* in parentheses within the text.

The hosts in Peacock's novels are often amiable dabblers in ideas, content to pass the innumerable bottles and referee when the intellectual sparring matches threaten to become too vigorous. In these respects, Jonathan Farrow resembles Squire Headlong of *Headlong Hall,* Ebenezer Crotchet of *Crotchet Castle,* and Mr. Gryll. Mr. Farrow has the distinctive attribute of being a poetaster, though he is like Scythrop Glowry of *Nightmare Abbey* in that he publishes his own work and has deluded conceptions of its value:

> And since vanity is a weed, while the virtues of prudence and modesty are tender flower-buds, which do not easily come to bloom, even where an occasional light effort is made toward their cultivation, a man who has surprised himself in the mystical act of initiating philosophy will inevitably wish, next, to donate the benefit of his genius to his fellows; which is the reason for so many impudent and presumptuous books in the world; although we are concerned here only with remarking the half-dozen volumes of verse contributed to the general literary treasury by Mr. Jonathan Farrow. *(PP,* pp. 117-18)

In the foregoing excerpt, we can observe that Simpson has reproduced the prose style as well as the character types of Peacock. The magisterial tone of the generalized assessment of human qualities; the stately, confident pace from one measured clause to the next; the dry, ironic observation that quietly implies that it could have been an epigram if it so chose: all these stylistic features are common to Peacock's narrator and Simpson's "Mr. Peacock."

Mr. Farrow's guests are introduced to the reader by means of an epithet. Thus, we have "Mr. Apely Heritage, the human zoologist; Mr. Relapsus, the scandalous novelist; Mr. Tactor, the touch-and-feel grouper; . . . and Mr. Chirm, the student incendiary" *(PP,* p. 122), just as in *Headlong Hall* we are introduced to "Mr. Foster, the perfectibilian; Mr. Escot, the deteriorationist; Mr. Jenkison, the status-quo-ite" *(TLP,* p. 11).

Simpson's characters, like Peacock's, are a mixture of satirized individuals and satirized general tendencies. Mr. Apely Heritage is Desmond Morris and Mr. Relapsus is John Updike, while Mr. Chirm is a representative student radical of the late Sixties and early Seventies. Mr. Chirm, who "has already burnt down a number of small universities" *(PP,* p. 128) is associated with Mr. Peacock's memories of a "young poet who was somewhat of the same temper" *(PP,* p. 129) — Shelley; Mr. Chirm's confidence that he can mend

"the crazy fabric of human nature" *(PP,* p. 129) is an exact echo of Scythrop's intentions in *Nightmare Abbey (TLP,* p. 364). Mr. Tactor, the representative of sensitivity training through touch, is by the nature of his crotchet without a parallel in Peacock, though perhaps Mr. Cranium, the phrenologist of *Headlong Hall,* is a distant relative, since he enjoys examining skulls and delivers a lecture which prompts some thick-skulled Welshmen to amuse themselves "for the ensuing twelvemonth, in feeling the skulls of all their acquaintance" *(TLP,* p. 70).

The camaraderie which characterizes most of Peacock's banquets is undercut at Dogmatic Manor by the disappointing quality of the food and drink. The chef resigns at a crucial moment and the vintage wine goes astray in a lake because of the mistaken view held by one Elmy Crunkle (Pierre Berton) that he is capable of walking on water. The substitutes are Kentucky Fried Chicken and "Old Voyager, Canadian Sherry" *(PP,* p. 135). It is one of the comforts of Peacock's fictional world that dinner never fails, yet even in relation to this unlikely event some relevant passages in Peacock can be found. Mr. MacBorrowdale, safely esconced in the Grylls' dining-room, laments the fashionable custom of "Siberian dinners" *(TLP,* p. 839), the portions of which are carved behind a screen; he had the misfortune, at one such dinner, of being compelled to make do with "the tail of a mullet and the drum-stick of a fowl" *(TLP,* p. 840). Also in *Gryll Grange,* Dr. Opimian, an idolatrous worshipper of all things Greek, is hard pressed to defend the ingredient of turpentine in Athenian wine; the same element is identified by Mr. Peacock as being responsible for the distinctive flavour of Canadian sherry. Mr. Crunkle's discomfiture parallels the "involuntary immersions," which, Peacock's editor rightly points out, "occur in every novel by Peacock" *(TLP,* p. 863).

The universal depression induced by "Old Voyager" prompts a very Peacock-like reaction. Each character in turn relates the catastrophe to his own *idée fixe,* This most striking means of underlining the mental solitude of intellectual obsessiveness is found throughout Peacock's work, notably in the "Theories" chapter of *Crotchet Castle,* and the following passage, presumably in praise of a more acceptable wine, from *Nightmare Abbey:*

> MR. CYPRESS (filling a bumper). This is the only social habit that the disappointed spirit never unlearns.
>
> THE REVEREND MR. LARNYX (filling). It is the only piece

of academical learning that the finished educatee retains.

MR. FLOSKY (filling). It is the only objective fact which the sceptic can realise.

SCYTHROP (filling). It is the only styptic for a bleeding heart.

THE HONOURABLE MR. LISTLESS (filling). It is the only trouble that is very well worth taking. (*TLP*, p. 408).

The parallel section in *The Peacock Papers* is, I think, the highlight of the Dogmatic Manor chapter. Here are three of the eight speakers:

DR. HARRISON ROYCE. The label, of course, is the medium, and the wine is the message. The production of wine has become information-movement, and so the wine tastes as it does because of the phonetic alphabet.

MR. APELY HERITAGE. I am sorry to declare myself in disagreement with your explanation, doctor. As a legacy of our animal natures, we have a racial memory of eating the grape directly from the vine. Therefore, a liquefied grape will always be unsatisfactory to our animal selves. Also, you will notice that a grape in form is suggestive of an erect female nipple, which a bottle of wine is not. The wine is unsatisfactory because the exclusive ambition of all animals is to survive, or to attract the opposite sex. . . .

MRS. WINSOME GAINES. The owners of the wine manufactories are all males, while those who consume wine, at civilized gatherings, with cheese and crackers, are predominantly female. The wine tastes as it does because men never ignore an opportunity to grind their heels evilly in the faces of abject women. (*PP*, pp. 136-37)

A Peacock convention used by Simpson in "Dogmatic Manor" to achieve a contrary effect is the drinking song. In Peacock's novels, such songs turn away with wrath engendered by overly earnest controversy. At Dogmatic Manor, the guests turn to glee-singing, with compulsory hand-clapping, in a futile attempt to divert Mr. Tactor from a manual exploration of Mrs. Winsome Gaines (it is perhaps unnecessary to point out that ideology does not lead to actions of such crudity in Peacock). The scene ends, not with reconciliation, but with an acrimonious exchange between Mr. Peacock (whose primness in fiction is perhaps being slyly mocked) and Dr. Royce on the virtues of Mr. Tactor's experimentation.

The spoiled dinner, the disharmony caused by Mr. Tactor, and the surliness exhibited by Mr. Peacock and Anchyr throughout much of the scene combine to create an atmosphere that is far less genial

than the spirit that prevails at many of Peacock's banquets. Yet it must be remembered that there is considerable variation in tone and mode to be found in Peacock, from the astringent satire of *Headlong Hall,* Peacock's first novel, to the gentle world of nearly pure romance depicted in *Gryll Grange.* In displaying his mastery of the Peacock conventions, Leo Simpson has chosen to dramatize a scene at the satiric end of Peacock's spectrum.

The variety of Peacock's fiction mirrors the complexity of Peacock's character. Too often, literary critics make Peacock into a stereotype of their own choosing: Shelley's sceptical, cold and rationalistic friend, or the lovable eccentric whose novels do not need to be taken too seriously.

Yet there were many Peacocks. There was the ambitious young poet whose verse attracted Shelley's attention; there was the unpredictable lover who was thrown into debtor's prison as the result of one of his affairs, and eventually proposed, in a remarkably stiff note, to a Welsh girl he had not seen in eight years; there was the young man of uncertain career, who, according to Mary Shelley's Diary, "tells us of his plan of going to Canada"[4] — Canadian literature might have taken another course if he had put his plan into action. There was the ardent liberal in politics; the respected, senior official of the East Indian Company, and, in the last age of Peacock, the recluse who "refused to see any visitors, preferring the society of his books to anything else."[5]

Leo Simpson's Peacock, like his Peacock chapter, is shaped to fit the role that is appropriate to the novel as a whole; Simpson has explained to an interviewer, "I had McLuhan in *The Peacock Papers* as being a prophet of the machine, as against Thomas Love Peacock being a prophet of literacy."[6] A complex characterization incorporating all of the rather contradictory elements I have just outlined would tend to distract the reader from the central concept the Peacock figure was to embody. Accordingly, Simpson's Peacock is not a pure exercise in the reconstruction of an historical personality, though important aspects of Peacock's actual character are very effectively

[4]Quoted in H. F. B. Brett-Smith, "Biographical Introduction," *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock* (London: Constable, 1924-34), I, lxii. Cited hereafter as *Halliford.*

[5]Edith Nicolls (Peacock's grand-daughter), quoted in "Biographical Introduction," *Halliford,* I, cciv.

[6]Lorraine McMullen, "A Conversation with Leo Simpson," *Journal of Canadian Fiction,* 13, (1975), 115-16.

dramatized. His chief function is to be the principal spokesman for the entire range of older cultural and ethical values that are threatened by Dr. Royce's equally comprehensive new order; by the end of the novel, he is called upon to prove his allegiance by deeds as well as words.

Simpson's use of Peacock recalls Peacock's own handling of similar characters. In several of Peacock's novels, one character proclaiming the values of the past confronts an advocate of modern progress: Mr. Escot, the deteriorationist, opposes Mr. Foster, the perfectibilian, in *Headlong Hall;* Mr. Hilary, the advocate of ancient wisdom, debates with Mr. Flosky, the theorist of modern misanthropical literature, in *Nightmare Abbey;* Dr. Folliott, the opponent of "the march of mind" and Mr. Chainmail, the champion of the twelfth century, joust with Mr. MacQuedy, the Scottish political economist, in *Crotchet Castle;* and in milder fashion Dr. Opimian, the clerical classicist, and Lord Curryfin, an experimenter, inventor and lecturer on fish, express opposing points of view in *Gryll Grange.*

The physical description of Peacock given at the time of his first appearance provides confirming evidence for the view that Simpson's Peacock combines features of the historical Peacock and of Peacock's characters:

> The man was stout, of middle height, quick and elastic in his movements, with a large grey-maned head, a Roman and somewhat fleshy nose, and a generally clerical manner, as of being captured by mundanities and, simultaneously, other matters of higher moment. *(PP,* p. 92)

This rather cool description is reminiscent of the two visual records of the later Peacock: a portrait by Thomas Wallis, and a photograph taken when Peacock was 72 and the fleshy nose was more conspicuous than in the idealized portrait. Yet the phrase "and a generally clerical manner" conjures up the flock of Peacock vicars, from the Reverend Doctor Gaster of *Headlong Hall* through to Dr. Opimian of *Gryll Grange.* All of these clerical gentlemen (five in all) have a healthy respect for mundanities, especially in the form of food and drink; the last two, Dr. Folliott of *Crotchet Castle,* and Dr. Opimian, are much more prominent characters than their brethren. They are, in fact, the chief sources of theoretical speculation in the novels in which they appear, and their opinions are treated with respect by the other characters, and seemingly by the author.

In this first scene (an encounter with Anchyr at a baby-judging contest), Peacock comments on the deficiencies of the modern world:

> "I can only say that I find myself in a place where science has triumphed beyond dreams, to nightmare . . . Where poetry is moribund, of abuses and maltreatment, and no longer commands respect, and novels are charts of febrile emotion in interminate permutation. . . . So, being a person of common sense, endowed with normal perception, I conclude that I am, for whatever reason, presently in Hell." (*PP*, p. 95)

The condemnation of science is consistent with Dr. Opimian's views:

> Science is one thing, and wisdom is another. Science is an edged tool, with which men play like children, and cut their own fingers. If you look at the results which science has brought in its train, you will find them to consist almost wholly in elements of mischief. . . . I almost think it is the ultimate destiny of science to exterminate the human race. (*TLP*, p. 877)

Dr. Opimian is also quoted directly (*PP*, p. 194) on the subject of the American continent's failings. When Bradfarrow's leading bore, Hector Jorgenson reports (*PP*, p. 115) that Mr. Peacock hit him over the head with a bamboo walking-stick, Dr. Folliott's use of a similar weapon upon a pair of ruffians (*TLP*, p. 703) comes to mind. The fiercer views of Simpson's Peacock (as when he calls Dr. Royce and his followers "the barbarians . . . those who would encompass the end of the world, and life as we know it" — *PP*. p. 94) closely resemble, in their vision of present and future evil, Dr. Folliott's fulminations against the technologists and social engineers of 1831.

Simpson's Peacock is like a character in Peacock's fiction in his willingness to put his theories into practice. The usual method in Peacock of expressing distaste for life or modern society is to withdraw from it. Scythrop Glowry retreats to his tower, and Algernon Falconer of *Gryll Grange* remodels an abandoned folly. The plan proposed by Peacock to Anchyr of barricading the Bradfarrow Public Library against Dr. Royce seems at first sight to be unusually aggressive. Yet Anchyr subsequently reminds us that there is a parallel with Dr. Folliott's equally militant strategy:

> What we're doing here is keeping the filthy mob out. Captain Swing, Mr. Peacock, if you understand me. (*PP*, p. 195)

Representatives of Captain Swing, the name given by its supporters to a violent rebellion of farm labourers in 1830, actually appear in one scene of *Crotchet Castle,* and demand arms. They are routed by the country house forces under the generalship of Dr. Folliott.

The ideal standard, against which Simpson's Peacock measures modern degeneration, is the culture of Greece and Rome. Characters in every Peacock novel express the same point of view; it is given its most emphatic and pervasive statement in *Gryll Grange.* All the characters of that novel, not just Dr. Opimian, conceive of character in classical terms. Dr. Opimian thinks of the romantic hero as "this young Numa" *(TLP,* p. 794), and pictures Numa's devoted young female attendants as Vestal Virgins. A second young man thinks of his beloved as both Melpomene and Camilla, and the host, as we have seen, associates himself with the Homeric Gryllus. All the characters gather for the purpose of staging an Aristophanic comedy, written partly by Dr. Opimian, which turns out, not surprisingly, to be a satire on modern pretensions.

Simpson's Peacock similarly sees both action and character through classical lenses. The narrator seems to view this tendency with some amusement:

> In Mr. Peacock's anticipation of the Bradfarrow battle, the classical influence was dominant. . . . He saw himself walking the battlements of Ilium. The tall warriors around him were *homo sapiens* proper, men who had chosen the right direction at a crossroad. Outside was chaos, an army superior in numbers — and not even the understandable Greeks but wild mutants, fellows who kept their brains in strange communal boxes which they consulted when they had to make a decision. *(PP,* p. 151)

When the epic battle for the library does take place, Peacock's mythology rises to the occasion. Anchyr, who has come to confuse lust with the life-force, is termed "our gallant Paris" *(PP,* p. 195), and Krista St. John, the object of Anchyr's desire, is Helen. Hector Jorgenson, Peacock's and Anchyr's sole ally, who displays his valour by stabbing would-be conquerors with a shovel, is Hector. Peacock's classical perspective seems inappropriate when Dr. Royce proves to be more mock-heroic than heroic:

> Mr. Peacock said: ". . . . What I fear most is the wrath of Achilles, when he emerges finally from his tent."
>
> But Dr. Royce stayed in the truck. . . . *(PP,* p. 200)

Yet Simpson's delight in making fantasy triumph over mundane reality provides Peacock with his vindication in the end. Royce's data-processing experts depart, leaving their "book-shrinking machines" (*PP*, p. 202) behind. Anchyr thinks it clever to capture their machines, but Peacock keeps the Trojan War in mind:

> Mr. Peacock said, looking at Anchyr with disbelief: "They go away, and they leave their unaccountable structures behind. Now we are to take the structures inside our fortification. Is that how it is? Have you no sense whatever of repeating a fatal blunder?" (*PP*, p. 203)

Anchyr disregards Peacock's advice; the machines are dragged in; they release tear gas; hidden policemen attack, and the library falls, to be replaced by Dr. Royce's Municipal Data Centre. As for Peacock, Hector Jorgenson explains in one of his innumerable foot-notes:

> Apparently, Mr. Peacock had just left. He simply turned to Westy and said, Well, I bid you good day, sir. This has been an eventful experience, but now I have business elsewhere. And off he went, quite happily, like a man going out for an afternoon stroll. (*PP*, p. 216)

The preceding evidence taken together would tend to suggest that Simpson's Peacock is a charming and admirable, but by no means infallible, spokesman for the pro-literacy cause. Two more passages can be found to confirm the view that Simpson's Peacock has his limitations, and is also distinguished in some respects from Thomas Love Peacock. We have already seen that Simpson's Peacock is not very sympathetic to the spirit of modern literature. In one sense, of course, this attitude reflects Peacock's views of his contemporaries, as expressed in "The Four Ages of Poetry" and *Nightmare Abbey*. But an objection to the neurotic heroes of modern fiction is hard to take seriously when it occurs in a novel whose protagonist is in the process of complete mental breakdown. Moreover, when Simpson's Peacock returns to this subject, he echoes a character in Thomas Love Peacock's fiction who is certainly not to be identified with Peacock himself. Anchyr's collapse is in its final stage when Simpson's Peacock returns to literary criticism:

> "H'm, *The First Shipwright*[7] — a modern novel," he said. . . .

[7]An allusion to Simpson's own *Arkwright* (1971).

> "H'm. I see how it is," Mr. Peacock said, interrupting with a bluff show of enlightenment as he scanned the book. "Drunkenness, indecision, boredom, aggressive folly, decayed romantic love, idleness, discontentment with the times, flight from life, and unmalleable hope in the beneficence of the future. Surely this is the morbid anatomy of *human weakness?*" *(PP,* p. 173)

Peacock's speech directly recalls the words of Mr. Flosky, the Coleridgean disseminator of discontent, in *Nightmare Abbey:*

> Hm. Hatred — revenge — misanthropy — and quotations from the Bible. Hm. This is the morbid anatomy of black bile. — "Paul Jones, a poem." Hm. I see how it is. *(ILP,* p. 173)

In the "Dogmatic Manor" scene, Peacock indulges in a petulant outburst of anti-feminism:

> MR. PEACOCK. Certainly a system of utter and impartial equality of the sexes would produce an automatic reduction in the status of beautiful women.
>
> MR. ANCHYR. Well, perhaps. The position I wished to avoid defending was that of the tedious male reactionary who must find all advocates of women's equality ugly.
>
> MR. PEACOCK. And so they are ugly, sir, very ugly, damnably ugly. *(PP,* p. 127)

There is no doubt that Thomas Love Peacock (possibly influenced by Shelley) was an advocate of greater equality for women; for example, Anthelia Melincourt, the very idealized (and beautiful) heroine of *Melincourt* is said to have been wisely educated by her father,

> who maintained the heretical notion that women are, or at least may be, rational beings; though, from the great pains usually taken in what is called education to make them otherwise, there are unfortunately very few examples to warrant the truth of the theory. *(TLP,* p. 105)

Though Simpson's Peacock is quite unlike Thomas Love Peacock in some ways, and often more like one of Peacock's own characters than Peacock himself, it would nevertheless be unwise to maintain that there is absolutely no connection between Simpson's Peacock and the real Peacock, or between Peacock and his own fictional creations. As critics have often remarked, one can feel an

autobiographical impulse in the loving portraits of Dr. Folliott and Dr. Opimian, the two characters Simpson's Peacock most closely resembles. There is reason to suppose that a writer whose positive characters invariably place a high value on gastronomy and Greek culture also has a personal interest in those aspects of civilization, and if proof were needed, Peacock's non-fictional writings provide it. We can feel assured that Thomas Love Peacock, Dr. Folliott and Dr. Opimian would all contemplate the spectacle of Kentucky Fried Chicken and golden-crisp french fries with the horror expressed by Simpson's Peacock.

Turning from characterization to structure, one may observe that the role played by Peacock in *The Peacock Papers* is not much different from the parts assigned to Dr. Folliott and Dr. Opimian in *Crotchet Castle* and *Gryll Grange* respectively. In each case, an appealing character is given vigorous and eloquent speeches denouncing modern degeneration. In each case, the character's views inspire sympathy, but there is just enough hyperbole and rant in the speeches to remind the reader of the limitations of dogmatism, no matter how attractive the dogma may be. In each case, other voices state an opposite point of view with equal fervour, and though those voices do not command as much respect, they provide another means of ensuring that each novel, though concerned with ideas, is not an ideological tract.

Up to this point, I have been concerned with the direct influence of Peacock on *The Peacock Papers*. Yet it is evident that *The Peacock Papers* is not a pure imitation of Peacock. One can imagine such a novel: an heir to the Eaton department store fortune, for example, might be described as having suddenly been seized with a burning ambition to be a writer, and might then proceed to invite a number of opinionated (and satirized) Canadian writers to his country estate to help him achieve his goal. But *The Peacock Papers* is set in a small Ontario city (Belleville), not in the exotic realm of the country house. The good citizens of Bradfarrow are the typical natives of semi-urbanized Canada: the accountant incapable of any human emotion; the doctor consumed by vanity; the hopelessly senile war veteran who has been elected to city council; the tough old grandmothers determined to use physical violence, if necessary, to make sure that their babies win the beauty prize.

One may safely conclude that social satire, rather than realism, is the dominant feature of the depiction of Bradfarrow. Much of this

satire is not essentially Peacock-like, simply because most of the citizens of Bradfarrow are completely impervious to ideas, and at least a modest enthusiasm for ideas is required for admission to any of Peacock's country houses. The only Bradfarrow native one can imagine stepping out of a Peacock novel is Hector Jorgenson, whose obsession with archeological excavations of Indian artefacts is reminiscent of the many single-minded scientists found throughout Peacock's work. The average Bradfarrow attitude towards the library controversy reaches heights of sub-intellectual absurdity in the brilliant City Council debate scene. The mayor favours cost-cutting at any cost; Councillor Thompson's "principles are against these recording machines and what-have-you" *(PP,* p. 74) because, as he sagely points out, "that recording machine . . . makes me sound stupid" *(PP,* p. 67), and the decisive vote is cast by the ancient warrior, Councillor Drummond, after the mayor has placed the issue in a military perspective for him: "Eugene, yes we go forward, no we stay put, which will it be?" *(PP,* p. 75).

Jeffrey Anchyr's sensitive and complex nature is all the more evident by contrast with his dim-witted fellow citizens. Simply by virtue of his many-sidedness, Anchyr is not essentially a Peacock-like figure, but knowledge of Peacock's novels does contribute to an understanding of his character.

Before the crisis that overtakes him at the age of forty, Anchyr has led a respectable and apparently placid existence. But the tensions of being a feed-mill intellectual have been gnawing away at him: "Anchyr has been lonely, surrounded during the long office hours by men who would guess Milton to be one of the Kraft cheeses" *(PP,* p. 87). When the story begins, Anchyr for four months has been "a wrathful beast, snarling and wanting freedom" *(PP.* p. 13). He can only feel himself to be "a son of freedom" *(PP,* p. 85) when he decides, one Saturday morning, to go to the library instead of the feed mill.

Anchyr's breakdown also has another catalyst. He is alone in Bradfarrow in his acute realization of the sufferings of life. At Dogmatic Manor, he cannot sympathize with grumblings about the wine:

> MR. JEFFREY ANCHYR *(From the couch, with an angry and impatient sigh.)* The wine is bad, is it? The world that produced the wine is bad, and what are we to do? . . . What I cannot bear to think of now, and what I cannot bear, are the

> screams of pain that go up to the deaf vaults of heaven from tenderer inhabitants of this desolate world, every second of every day. I was a competent businessman previously. I was a respectable Bradfarrow citizen, past-chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, and a trustee of the Bradfarrow Museum and Art Gallery, but now I awaken in the night and I hear children crying for food, and I feel the agony of their mothers, and I watch much confused dying. *(PP,* pp. 137-38)

To one who urges "We have to do something about the children" *(PP,* p. 107), the Bradfarrow reply, "They're mostly in India and Africa, aren't they, Jeff?" *(PP,* p. 107) may appear a trifle insufficient.

Anchyr's malaise may seem to be a complaint of the 20th century. It has much in common with the anguish of Nathaniel West's Miss Lonelyhearts, for example; however, it also resembles the outlook shared by several of Peacock's central characters. Escot, of *Headlong Hall,* Forester of *Melincourt,* Scythrop, of *Nightmare Abbey,* Chainmail, of *Crotchet Castle,* and Falconer, of *Gryll Grange,* all are convinced that the time is out of joint. Some of these characters have superficial or misguided reasons for their state of dissatisfaction, but Forester and Falconer at least are serious thinkers whose sense of grievance cannot be lightly dismissed. Falconer speaks for all of them:

> "It is not my own world that I complain of. It is the world on which I look 'from the loop-holes of retreat.' I cannot sit here, like one of the Gods of Epicurus, who, as Cicero says, was satisfied with thinking, through all eternity 'how comfortable he was.' I look with feelings of intense pain on the mass of poverty and crime; of unhealthy, unavailing, unremunerated toil, blighting childhood in its blossom, and womanhood in its prime; of 'all the oppressions that are done under the sun.' " *(TLP,* p. 825)

The essential difference between Peacock's world, and the world of the modern satirist, is of course that Falconer eventually finds happiness with Morgana Gryll, whereas Anchyr and Miss Lonelyhearts find only an ignominious death. Anchyr ultimately seeks a release from psychological pressure through lust and violence; like Miss Lonelyhearts, but unlike Peacock's more restrained heroes, he deliberately hardens himself when the pain of remaining sensitive to suffering becomes too great. This abrupt reversal of attitude takes place as the Trojan army prepares to defend the library. Suddenly,

the battle-ground becomes the setting for a Peacock-like debate scene, with Anchyr as the spokesman for Nietzchean heroism and Peacock as the defender of the humanitarianism Anchyr has abandoned:

> When Anchyr turned to reply to the Librarian, the antacid medicine was at the corners of his mouth like rabid foam. "Human!" he shouted. "We're not becoming human, we're becoming homogenized! . . . we have love for all and sundry in our blood like a disease. . . . we can't believe in ourselves or in our culture, we can't enjoy sex, we can't make money, *we can't move an inch* because we're all drowning in a sewer of sickness, *yes sir!,* we're drowning in a river of shitty sentimental slop!"
>
> Mr. Peacock said courteously: "Give me leave to argue to the contrary that a deficiency of tender feeling has always been the blight of hope. Milton's precept —"
>
> "You know why you're a minor writer?" Jeffrey Anchyr asked, fixing Mr. Peacock with his bright eyes. "Because of too much jollity! Too much fun and singing! People are dying. We're going through the Osterizer in this age, and it isn't funny. Sooner or later we have to get serious."
>
> "But tell me why, sir? What good has seriousness ever brought us?" (*PP,* pp. 175-76)

Peacock's subsequent comment to Anchyr: "Well, sir, go and kidnap your girl if it will help to settle your temper. We are all weary of being harangued" (*PP,* p. 180) no doubt reflects the natural indignation aroused by an attack on one's literary value in a scene couched in one's own literary form. Another element contributing to the intricacy of the scene (and an indication that Anchyr's literary and ethical judgments should not be taken too seriously) is the fact that Peacock himself had covered much the same ground, in the *Nightmare Abbey* debate (Chapter XI) between Mr. Hilary as the proponent of "cheerfulness" and an alliance of melancholy pessimists.

Anchyr dies during the course of a gastrectomy operation, and has for his elegy Hector Jorgenson's verdict that "Jeff had become a very cold-hearted and malicious man before he died" (*PP,* p. 217). Hector's evidence is that Anchyr threw "four oranges and a banana at me, and a steel kidney dish, a nail scissors, a glass of prune juice, and an empty bed-urinal" (*PP,* p. 218) when Hector had innocently offered to show Anchyr some fascinating photographs of Cumrum Indian finds. This final tragi-comic touch is symptomatic of the

inadequate judgments, based on partial perspectives, that are made upon Anchyr's spiritual condition throughout the novel. Anchyr's doctor contends that he is "in a condition of standard anxiety prostration" (*PP*, p. 108). A psychiatrist to whom Anchyr is referred concludes that Anchyr is acting out "a standard male-victor/female-subjection fantasy" (*PP*, p. 161). Mrs. Campbell, Anchyr's mother-in-law, is under the influence of an advisory council of Jewish mothers, and therefore denounces her son-in-law as a simple libertine. Anchyr himself, as we have seen, first gives a naturalistic account of himself as the victim of Bradfarrow insensitivity and anti-intellectualism; at other times, he sees himself as a typical victim of mid-life crisis, or as the product of traumatic childhood experiences, and he eventually concludes that he has merely become more aware of the mystery of life: "We are too damned ready with dull explanations" (*PP*, p. 153). This is soon followed by the narrator's self-styled "even duller explanation" (*PP*, p. 153): a dictionary definition of neurasthenia.

All these explanations have a glimmer of truth about them (except for Mrs. Campbell's diagnosis), but none grasp the whole point. Anchyr himself comes closest in complaining to his doctor:

> "What the hell is normal, Dave?" he asked. "Yesterday I was happy as a clam, and I wasn't normal. Today I'm lying in bed remembering a few things, and I'm not normal. I got a bleeding ulcer worrying how to sell more cattle-feed than Oglethorpe in this district and nobody thought about a psychiatrist. . . . Now I'm worried about children who are shown less mercy than rabbits, and I have to take pills for it." (*PP*, p. 109)

The presentation of Anchyr's breakdown seems to imply that the basis of behaviour is elusive, and does not yield itself up to fashionable or pseudo-scientific explanations. Though I cannot claim that Simpson derived this view of human nature from Peacock, it is nevertheless at least consistent with Peacock's portrayal of humanity. Though Peacock often seems merely to satirize intellectual eccentricity, there is always under the surface a fascination with the vagaries of the mind, and few writers have been less restricted b what Anchyr calls "the consensus definition of *normality*" (*PP*, p. 82).

In a well-known passage of his "Letter to Maria Gisborne," Shelley looks forward to an eventual recognition of Peacock's talent:

> . . . . let his page,
> Which charms the chosen spirits of the time,
> Fold itself up for the serener clime
> Of years to come, and find its recompense
> In that just expectation.

That expectation was certainly not fulfilled in the nineteenth century, and though there have been several full-length studies of his work in the twentieth century, it still appears that Peacock's novels appeal only to a minority audience of "chosen spirits." Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that there are affinities between Peacock's fiction and much of the experimental fiction of the last twenty years. In Peacock's work, no apologies are made for the creation of a fantasy world; the extremely subjective nature of each character's perception of reality is strongly stressed, public figures are satirized, and the novelist consciously reminds the reader at every turn of his own artifice. Any reader of contemporary fiction could compose his own list of writers who employ the same conventions.

The Peacock Papers stands alone, however, in its brilliantly imaginative use of Peacock himself as an instrument for literary satire and social tragi-comedy. In an essay on "French Comic Romances," Peacock wrote of

> two very distinct classes of comic fictions: one in which the characters are abstractions or embodied classifications, and the implied or embodied opinions the main matter of the work; another, in which the characters are individuals, and the events and the action those of actual life — the opinions, however prominent they may be made, being merely incidental.[8]

It could be argued that both types of comedy may be found in the later Peacock; they are certainly found in *The Peacock Papers*. In the "Dogmatic Manor" chapter, in the figure of Peacock himself, and in his choice of the quintessential Peacock theme — the relative claims of modern science and of an earlier literary culture — Leo Simpson has created a magnificent comedy of "implied or embodied opinions"; in his portrait of Jeffrey Anchyr against a background of the Bradfarrow citizenry, he has created a shrewdly observed and at times poignant comedy of "actual life" — if we construe "actual life" to mean insight into the psychology of a particular society, rather than adherence to photographic realism. As Simpson himself has

[8] "French Comic Romances," *Halliford*, IX, 258.

pointed out, "fantasy and farce are elements in real life"[9]; it is the merit both of Peacock's novels and of *The Peacock Papers* that they make us examine what we choose to call the fantasy world and the real world, and make us realize that the boundaries of those countries are not as fixed as we may be inclined to think.

University of Western Ontario

[9]Lorraine McMullen, *op. cit.*, p. 112.