

# ***Sun-Aristocrats: Heredity and Heraldry in D. H. Lawrence's The Ladybird***

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**Abstract:** Many critics have discussed the significance of the sun and its worship in D. H. Lawrence's writing, which is very relevant to his theories of blood consciousness and mental consciousness and also his concept of dark love. Graham Hough entitled his own study of Lawrence's works *The Dark Sun*. For Professor Jack Stewart in *The Vital Art of D. H. Lawrence*, Lawrence's sun-worship was related to primitive animism. However, a very significant aspect has been overlooked, which is the hereditary nature of this worship of the sun, termed by Lawrence as Aristocracy of the Sun. This essay aims to explore Lawrence's presentation of sun-aristocrats in his novella *The Ladybird* (1923). The scientific concept of heredity, manifested particularly in physiognomy, is repeatedly emphasized to delineate the lineage of both Lady Daphne Beveridge and Count Johann Dionys Psanek. To illustrate ancestral traits, I have related Lawrence's employment of the heraldic symbol of the Mary-beetle to his interest in Egyptology. Count Dionys claims pharaonic roots through this crest, which has a long genealogy. Whether it is the reckless blood of daredevils or that of the ancient Pharaohs, literary genetics is conspicuous in *The Ladybird*.

**Keywords:** Heredity, Heraldry, Sun, Aristocracy, Initiation, Dark, Physiognomy, Egyptology

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## **1. Introduction**

In his poem "Aristocracy of the Sun", D. H. Lawrence asserts that one draws one's nobility directly from the sun [6]. His writing teems with "sun-aristocrats [6]", but only in his novella *The Ladybird* (1923) does he fully explicate this concept of sun-aristocracy. For Professor Jack Stewart, Lawrence's "sun-worship was a significant part of [his] attempt to recover a state of primitive animism [15] (p. 141)", but this essay aims to demonstrate the hereditary nature of such worship, a significant aspect that has been overlooked by critics.

## **2. Daphne's Bloodline**

In a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, dated 16 August 1915, Lawrence claims that aristocrats and plebeians are born, and not made [13] (p. 379). In *The Ladybird*, Lady Daphne Beveridge is a born aristocrat. She takes after her father, Earl Beveridge. She inherited his "wild energy [12] (p. 13)" and many physical traits. She has his "fine stature [12] (p. 12)",

which along with "her lovely, long, strong legs [12] (p. 13)", make her look like a huntress, an "Artemis or Atlanta [12] (p. 13)", rather than the dryad which her name indicates. Her physiognomy, which is characterized by "a certain width of brow and even of chin [12] (p. 13)", indicates the "strong, reckless nature [12] (p. 13)" she imbibed from Earl Beveridge. The "distracted slant of her eyes [12] (p. 13)" reveals "a wild energy dammed up inside her [12] (p. 13)". The repression of this ancestral energy, which she inherited from "her father's desperate race [12] (p. 13)", made her ill. Genetically speaking, the family's "earldom had begun with a riotous, dare-devil border soldier, and this was the blood that flowed on [12] (p. 13)". Like her father's, Daphne's blood "is reckless, the blood of daredevils [12] (p. 14)", but her philanthropic mother instructed her to hate all daredevils and to "admire only the good [12] (p. 13)". Thus, instead of marrying a daredevil, she married a handsome "well-bred Englishman... full of sap, milk and honey, and northern golden wine [12] (p. 38)". Such a marriage thwarts the "reckless, anti-philanthropic passion [12] (p. 13)" in her, making her own blood turn against her, filling her with the anger and frustration that eventually wreck her nerves. She

acquires a malaise, as Lawrence Jones remarks, “an overdevelopment of the spiritual self at the expense of the sensual self ... a result of maternal training [4] (p. 9)”.

### 3. Count Dionys' Bloodline

Similarly, Count Johann Dionys Psanek had inherited his race's outward and inward traits. He claims Pharaonic roots and there are numerous references to his Pharaonic looks. His dark face, a “queer, dark, aboriginal little face ... not an Aryan [12] (p. 12)”, has a “swarthy-transparent look [12] (p. 32)”. Lady Beveridge remarks that there is something “primitive” and “heroic in his dark face [12] (p. 16)”, whose upper part seems “very dusky-black [12] (p. 53)”, with twenty-seven other references to the darkness/blackness of his eyes and eyebrows. The “dark, beautifully-fringed eyes [12] (p. 27)” possess “curved black lashes [12] (p. 53)”. Daphne sees “the darkness swaying in the depths [12] (p. 36)”. His eyebrows glint “like a curve of black glass on the swarthy opalescence of his brow [12] (p. 25)”. His forehead, elfish hair, moustache and beard are all similarly black. His skin is “swarthy [12] (p. 29)”. All these numerous and repetitive references to the dark aspect of his physiognomy go beyond enhancing his being a subject of the dark sun and a follower of the cult of blood consciousness; they most significantly reinforce the idea of his inheritance of ancestral traits. Count Dionys is also linked to Daphne's own father, a man with a “dark, somber face [12] (p. 63)” and “dark passionate nature [12] (p. 63)”, who possesses some of “the unconscious blood-warmth of the lower classes [12] (p. 70)”. Likewise, the Count has “something that was hot and invisible, a dark flame of life that might warm the cold white fire [12] (p. 70)” of Daphne's blood. Thus, he introduces her to his own inherited sun-religion shortly after requesting to be exposed to the sun, which in his view has no nationality, emphasizing the fact that by tradition, he is “a subject of the sun [12] (p. 24)” and belongs “to the fire-worshippers [12] (p. 24)”.

### 4. Sun-Worship

“Who says the sun cannot speak to me [5],” declares Lawrence in *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, written during the winter of 1929-30, where he explains the importance of the sun and the nature of its worship. He emphasizes the vital interchange between man and the sun, defining the sun as “a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins [5] (p. 29)”. In ancient times, men obtained strength and splendor from him and in turn expressed their homage and thanks [5] (27). Lawrence asserts that he can even speak to the sun that “has a great blazing consciousness [5] (28)”. Only when he has discarded discards “the trash of personal feelings and ideas” and “[got] down to [his] naked sun-self” can he establish a communion, what he calls “the blazing interchange [5] (28)” with the sun, which being a great source of blood-vitality, strengthens and enriches him [5] (p. 29). In order to re-establish a living,

organic connection with the cosmos, one has to “start with the sun [5] (p. 126)”, but modern man has this severed connection because his responsive centers are dead [5] (p. 27). According to Lawrence, man has trivialized the sun, so the cosmic sun of the ancients, Helios, is lost to him/her forever [5] (p. 27). Modern sunbathers become disintegrated by the very sun that bronzes them [5] (30) because the sun hates man's “nervous and personal consciousness [5] (28)”. Men cannot receive the sun by exposing their nudity on the beach [5] (30). It can only be received by “going forth to worship the sun, worship that is felt in the blood [5] (30)”. Thus, man can receive from the sun “his strength and his promptings [9] (1.7)” and woman belongs neither to men nor to her children “but to the sun [10] (1.4)” and he manifests hostility only to “the old leafy foliage of [their] thoughts [11] (1.10)”. In his short story “Sun”, Juliet's exposure to the sun goes beyond sunbathing because “something deep inside her unfolds and relaxed.... She was put into connection with the sun, and the stream flowed of itself, from her womb [8] (535)”. Doctors had advised her to lie naked in the sun, who lifts “himself naked and molten [8] (529)” too, and Juliet felt him not only penetrate into her bones, but also loosening emotional and mental tension [8] (530). This “mating” with the sun heals her and her life becomes “a whole ritual [8] (532)”.

### 5. Initiation and Secret Knowledge

This is the type of healing that Count Dionys undergoes when he requests to be put in the sun. He informs Daphne that he is a member of a secret society, which possesses a secret knowledge, passed on from one generation to another, where “one is initiated into certain so-called secrets and rites [12] (p. 34)”. Like his family members, he became an initiate [12] (p. 34). He imparts to her the essence of this secret knowledge, which is their sun-worship, asserting that the sun is dark and is only made visible by “his jacket of dust” [12] (p. 35)”. In his article “Background and Significance of D. H. Lawrence's ‘The Ladybird’”, Joost Daadler rightly remarks that the role of the dark sun “is primarily to replenish our lower consciousness, as happens to the count notably when Daphne ... helps to revive him by putting him in the sun [2] (p. 23)”, but I believe it also serves to introduce Daphne to Dionys' concept of the true nature of love.

### 6. Dark and White Love

Like the sun, true love is “dark [12] (p. 35)” and white love “is only the reverse, the whited sepulchre of the true love [12] (p. 35)”. For Dionys, the love of Daphne's husband, which amounts to worship, is white. In “The Ladybird and the Enabling Image”, John B. Humma states that “[a]gainst the submerged and subterranean dark-god aspect of Dionys, Basil is all transcendence and white light, and would have Daphne be the same [3] (p. 24)”. Indeed, Basil makes his wife feel that “she could glow white and fill the universe like the moon, like Astarte, like Isis [12] (p. 49)”. He pays homage to her pale

beauty, calling her “Aphrodite of the foam [12] (p. 46)” and “Venus of the foam ... moon-mother of the world [12] (p. 47)”. He endows her with divinity, so she becomes to him “Cybele – Isis [12] (p. 48)”. He wishes to offer all his blood at her altar [12] (p. 51), but Daphne fails to believe in the “woman-godhead [12] (p. 52)” he attributes to her. She fails to attain “the incandescent, transcendent, moon-fierce womanhood [12] (p. 52)”. Instead, she responds to Dionys’ nocturnal singing, a bat-like sound, “crooning [12] (p. 71)” the old songs of his childhood. For her, it is “the sound of a man who is alone in his blood [12] (p. 70)”, a call to her “from the beyond [12] (p. 72)”. It heals her of chronic insomnia, inducing a type of “bewitched sleep [12] (p. 72)”. She stops grieving and fretting. Her physiognomy reflects this new phase. Her face acquires “a delicate look of virginity [12] (p. 76)”. Her eyes, which “had been like slow, living jewels, resistant [12] (p. 76)”, acquire the “wonder, and the stillness of a quiet night [12] (p. 96)”. His singing liberates her from her old self, helping her to attain a type of “quiescence that was like a full dark river flowing eternally in her soul [12] (p. 79)”. Her own husband, who feels her aversion to his lovemaking, observes how in the company of the Count she attains a “quiet, intact quality of Virginity [12] (p. 77)” that makes him cease all sexual intercourse with her.

## 7. Darkness and Egyptology

Daphne’s first clandestine meeting with Count Dionys occurs on a moonless night in a room whose darkness seems “alive like blood [12] (p. 74)”. His own invisibility is repeatedly stressed: “It was uncanny, to feel her near in the dark, and not to see any sign of her, nor to hear any sound [12] (p. 74)”. Her presence becomes “[d]arkness answering to darkness [12] (p. 74)”. Hence, darkness flows “about them thick like blood [12] (p. 74)”. Critics such as Laurence Steven fail to see the significance of Lawrence’s “evocation of the bedroom scene” which appears to him “if not ridiculous, at least arbitrary and imposed [14] (p. 252)”. The association between darkness and sensual love can be linked to ancient Egypt whose relation to the living universe was “only dimly visual in its reality [7]”. For example, “an ancient Rameses can sit in stone absolute, absolved from visual contact, deep in the silent ocean of sensual contact [7]”. Indeed, when Daphne’s finger-tips touch Dionys’ arm, a flame envelops his being, and he is reconnected with his Pharoanic roots: he feels no longer like an ordinary man, but “something seated in flame, a flame unconscious, seated erect like an Egyptian King-god in the statues [12] (pp. 74-75)”. The “rush of dark flame [12] (p. 75)” draws him towards her out of his solitude. Dionys becomes a prince of the underworld, like the Egyptian god Ra. He feels that the afterlife, and not the present or the future, belongs to him: “he was master of the after-life [12] (p. 75)”, so he is resolved to take her to his world, “the dark Hades [12] (p. 75)”, where they would reign as king and queen. Only in darkness and in death does she belong to him, and so she becomes “the night wife of the ladybird [12] (76)”.

## 8. Heraldry

For her seventeenth birthday, the Count had given Daphne a thimble as a gift, which bears his heraldic crest, a Mary-beetle, “a Mary-beetle of green stone at the top, to push the needle with .... carved like a scarab, with little dots [12] (p. 39)”. Through this ladybird, Dionys connects himself with the Pharaohs. When Basil remarks that it is odd to have a ladybird on the Count’s crest, the latter responds by stating that “Charlemagne had bees”, and his own crest “is a Marienkäfer--a Mary-beetle. The beetle of Our Lady.... a heraldic insect [12] (p. 67)”. He takes pride in it because this spotted beetle has “a long genealogy.... Much longer than the Psaneks [12] (p. 67)”. His heraldic crest descends from the “Egyptian scarabeus, which is a very mysterious emblem. So [he] connect[s] [himself] with the Pharaohs: just through [his] ladybird [12] (p. 67)”. With his heraldic thimble, the Count asks Daphne to sew for him a shirt because he has never purchased shirts from a shop [12] (p. 27). He explains to her the shirt tradition that he inherited from his ancestors: “In our family the shirt should be made and washed by a woman of our own blood: but when we marry, by the wife [12] (28)”. When he married, his mother and aunt sewed sixty shirts for him, with his initial “and the ladybird, which is [his] crest [12] (29)”. Their linen has always borne no crown, “only the ladybird [12] (29)”. He justifies his request by explaining that it should not be “indelicate [12] (29)” for her to sew a shirt for him since the ladybird on her finger will endow her with understanding.

## 9. Egyptian Scarabeus

In his book *Egyptian Religion* (1959), Sir Wallis Budge, an Egyptologist and keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum, explains the significance of the beetle. Time began when Ra appeared in the form of the sun at the time of creation [1] (p. 126). Ra, who “evolved from the primeval abyss of water [1] (p. 45)”, is a prince of the underworld [1] (p. 57). He is identified with the god Khepera, “an old primeval god.... depicted in the form of a man having a beetle for a head [1] (p. 125)”. This beetle (scarabaeus) became “his emblem because it was supposed to be self-begotten and self-produced [1] (p. 125)”. Sir Budge states that the name Khepera means “he who rolls [1] (p. 125)”. The appropriateness of this name is manifested in the fact that this insect has the habit of “rolling along its ball filled with eggs [1] (p. 126)”. As the sun daily “rolls across the sky emitting light and heat [1] (p. 126)”, thus enabling earthly things to produce and come into being, so does the beetle’s “ball of eggs rolls along [1] (p. 126)” enabling the germs to come to life. A similar discussion of the significance of the beetle to the ancient Egyptians is discussed by Count Dionys and Daphne’s family:

‘The scarab is a piquant insect,’ said Basil.

‘Do you know Fabre?’ put in Lord Beveridge. ‘He suggests that the beetle rolling a little ball of dung before him, in a dry old field, must have suggested to the Egyptians the First

Principle that set the globe rolling. And so the scarab became the symbol of the creative principle—or something like that.' 'That the earth is a tiny ball of dry dung is good,' said Basil. 'Between the claws of a ladybird,' added Daphne [12] (p. 68).

This discussion of Count Dionys' crest enhances the importance of heredity and heraldry in *The Ladybird*. It is interesting to note that Lawrence was keenly interested in the history of ancient Egypt. In 1914, he visited the British Museum when Sir Wallis Budge was responsible for the Egyptian section. In a letter to Gordon Campbell, dated 21 September 1914, he writes:

I went to the British Museum -- and I know, from the Egyptian and Assyrian sculpture -- what we are after. We want to realize the tremendous *non-human* quality of life -- it is wonderful. It is not the emotions, nor the personal feelings and attachments, that matter. Behind us all are the tremendous unknown forces of life, coming unseen and unperceived as out of the desert to the Egyptians, and driving us, forcing us, destroying us if we do not submit to be swept away [13] (p. 218).

Swept away were Daphne Beveridge and Count Johann Dionys Psanek by these invisible and unknown forces of life the way their ancestors were.

## 10. Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated the significance of heredity in Lawrence's aristocracy of the sun. Whether it is the reckless blood of daredevils or that of the ancient Pharaohs, literary genetics is conspicuous in Lawrence's novella.

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