

Sujet 0
Texte littéraire

D. H. Lawrence
The first Lady Chatterley, 1944

1 Ours is essentially a tragic age but we refuse emphatically to be tragic about it.

This was Constance Chatterley's position. The war landed her in a dreadful situation, and she was determined not to make
5 a tragedy out of it.

She married Clifford Chatterley in 1917 when he was home on leave. They had a month of honeymoon, and he went back to France. In 1918 he was very badly wounded, brought home a wreck. She was twenty-three years old.

10 After two years, he was restored to comparative health. But the lower part of his body was paralysed for ever. He could wheel himself about in a wheeled chair, and he had a little motor attached to a bath chair, so that he could even make excursions in the grounds at home.

15 Clifford had suffered so much that the capacity for suffering had to some extent left him. He remained strange and bright and cheerful, with his ruddy, quite handsome face, and his bright, haunted blue eyes. He had so nearly lost life that what remained to him seemed to him precious. And he had been so
20 much hurt, that something inside him had hardened and could feel no more.

Constance, his wife, was a ruddy, country-looking girl, with soft brown hair and sturdy body and a great deal of rather clumsy vitality. She had big, wondering blue eyes and a slow,
25 soft voice, and seemed a real quiet maiden.

As a matter of fact, she was one of those very modern, brooding women who ponder all the time persistently and laboriously. She had been educated partly in Germany, in Dresden; indeed, she had been hurried home when the war
30 broke out. And though it filled her now with bitter, heavy irony to think of it, now that Germany, the German guns at least, had ruined her life, yet she had been most happy in Dresden. Or perhaps not happy but thrilled.

**Waldemar
Januszczak** learns a
new sartorial language
at the Queen's Gallery

The Sunday Times (26.05.2013)

The Fates, those sneaky devils, have been busy in recent weeks overturning our perceptions of British art. First they arranged for Tate Britain to be put through a floor-to-ceiling defibrillation that brought the old dear back from the dead and finally allowed us to admire the nation's art journey from Tudor times to the Chapman brothers. Now they have turned their attention to the Queen, and have fixed it for Her Majesty's fabulous collection of royal portraiture to be understood in intriguing new ways.

The sumptuous display that has appeared at the Queen's Gallery seems to be about clothes — their importance and meaning in Tudor and Stuart times — but it can also be understood as an examination of portraiture itself. These days, we generally assume the task of the portraitist is to capture the sitter's character as well as their appearance. When Rembrandt paints the outer man, he seems to paint the inner man, too: their spiritual anguish, their awareness of passing time, their dashed hopes. It is, of course, an illusion made possible by the expressive power of Rembrandt's brush strokes, but it tallies with our views about what portraiture should be doing.

So, when we encounter a school of portraiture that doesn't do any of this — which appears thoroughly uninterested in probing the psyche, which seems to lavish more attention on the patterns in a dress than on the sorrow in the eyes — we tend to belittle it. It is a fate that has befallen most British portraiture before the arrival of Van Dyck. All those pointy-toed Elizabethan ladies arranged stiffly along the stairs of our stately homes, all those men in tights standing bolt upright in our oak-lined Tudor halls, have tended to prompt national embarrassment rather than joy. Were we really this provincial?

Yes, we were. And we should puff our chests, Henry VIII-style, and be mightily proud of it. Because, as this show makes excellently clear, being provincial in this context means being from here, not from there. In Tudor Britain, portraiture developed a set of ambitions that was particular to these isles. It was a uniquely British way of understanding what portraiture should do and how it should be done. And in this new national outlook, clothes took on an elevated role. This was a portraiture in which the language of the embroidered doublet told you as much about the sitter as the worry lines on one of Rembrandt's foreheads.

We start, inevitably, with Henry VIII, the

human mastiff, whose four-square presence in our pictorial imaginations is largely the result of the clothes he wore in his portraits. Amazingly, Henry was renowned as "the best-dressed monarch in Europe". His entire get-up, from the slashed doublet to the broad-shouldered gown, was adopted to achieve a particular visual effect. Yes, he was meaty, but those were never his real shoulders spreading sideways so outrageously. Henry's superhero width was deliberately achieved with padding and stiffening.

Most of the female presences in the show, from Elizabeth I onwards, are more obviously exquisite. Their jewel-like clothing presents them as human gems, and the painter's task is to describe their finery so precisely that every symbolic nuance can be read. There's a Portrait of a Lady by Cornelius Johnson so astonishingly exact, you can actually see that the stitches on her right sleeve are aligned perfectly, but the ones on her left sleeve are not.

Those of us who enjoy giggling at the ridiculousness of contemporary fashion are constantly reminded that it was ever thus. Many of the developments in men's clothing were tasked with emphasising the wearer's masculinity, and by the beginning of the 17th century, men's thighs had grown so theatrically huge in their "bombasticated" breeches that they made Chris Hoy's hamstrings look like the legs of a flamingo.

LITERARY EXCERPT

BLANCHE: He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded. There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate-looking – still – that thing was there... He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything till after our marriage when we'd run away and come back and all I knew was I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me – but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn't know that. I didn't know anything except I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty – which wasn't empty, but had two people in it...

[A locomotive is heard approaching outside. She claps her hands to her ears and crouches over. The headlight of the locomotive glares into the room as it thunders past. As the noise recedes she straightens slowly and continues speaking.]

Afterwards we pretended that nothing had been discovered. Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk and laughing all the way.

[Polka music sounds, in a minor key faint with distance.]

We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later – a shot!

[The polka stops abruptly.]

Blanche rises stiffly. Then the polka resumes in a major key.]

I ran out – all did – all ran and gathered about the terrible thing at the edge of the lake! I couldn't get near for the crowding. Then somebody caught my arm. 'Don't go any closer! Come back! You don't want to see! See? See what! Then I heard voices say – Allan! Allan! The Grey boy! He'd stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired – so that the back of his head had been – blown away!

[She sways and covers her face.]

It was because – on the dance-floor – unable to stop myself – I'd suddenly said – 'I know! I know! You disgust me...' And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since had there been any light that's stronger than this – kitchen – candle...

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)

LITERARY EXCERPT

Earthrise

On Christmas Eve, 1968, astronaut Bill Anders
Snapped a photo of the Earth
As Apollo 8 orbited the Moon.
Those three guys
Were surprised
To see from their eyes
Our planet looked like an earthrise
A blue orb hovering over the Moon's gray horizon,
with deep oceans and silver skies.

It was our world's first glance at itself
Our first chance to see a shared reality,
A declared stance and a commonality;

A glimpse into our planet's mirror,
And as threats drew nearer,
Our own urgency became clearer,
As we realize that we hold nothing dearer
than this floating body we all call home.

We've known
That we're caught in the throes
Of climactic changes some say
Will just go away,
While some simply pray
To survive another day;
For it is the obscure, the oppressed, the poor,
Who when the disaster
Is declared done,
Still suffer more than anyone.

Climate change is the single greatest challenge of our time,

Of this, you're certainly aware.
It's saddening, but I cannot spare you
From knowing an inconvenient fact, because
It's getting the facts straight that gets us to act and not to wait.

So I tell you this not to scare you,
But to prepare you, to dare you
To dream a different reality,

Where despite disparities
We all care to protect this world,
This riddled blue marble, this little true marvel
To muster the verve and the nerve
To see how we can serve
Our planet. You don't need to be a politician
To make it your mission to conserve, to protect,
To preserve that one and only home
That is ours,
To use your unique power
To give next generations the planet they deserve.

We are demonstrating, creating, advocating
We heed this inconvenient truth, because we need to be anything but lenient
With the future of our youth.

And while this is a training,
in sustaining the future of our planet,
There is no rehearsal. The time is
Now
Now
Now,
Because the reversal of harm,
And protection of a future so universal
Should be anything but controversial.

So, Earth, pale blue dot
We will fail you not.

[...]

Amanda Gorman, 2018