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"BUT WOULD NOT THE SAME LOVE BE A GREAT DEAL
SAFER IN A CASTLE?": LOVE AND MONEY IN THE
NOVELS OF THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK.

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between romantic love and wealth in the novels of Thomas Love Peacock. Nineteenth-century England was a time of great social mobility as well as severe economic hardship, showing the effects of capitalism to have both positive and negative influences. In his novels Peacock views the market economy as cruel and greedy, and the aristocracy as self-interested and petty. The economic and moral solution Peacock offers to redress these failings is based on an older feudalistic model which promotes benevolence and humanitarianism. To portray the development of this new yet old social model, Peacock employs romantic love as an instrument of social reform. Wealthy young individuals marry for romantic love rather than reasons of wealth and pedigree that dominate most marriages of their class, thereby heralding a new, more compassionate generation.

Peacock's solution is somewhat idealistic, yet it is an idealism that survives to this day, as twentieth-century society still invests a great deal of hope in romantic love. Though Peacock tries to separate romantic love from economic influence, he creates somewhat of a paradox by then using the romantic partnership in marriage as a method of social reform. This paradox displays the moral difficulties surrounding money that often cause literature to retreat into idealism. It is this retreat that has facilitated the cultural emphasis on romantic love, which is now an integral aspect of our popular culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Love Peacock lived from 1785 to 1866. He witnessed the excesses of England's Regency era and the transition of those excesses into the Victorians' rigid morality. He also witnessed the emergence of the London Stock Exchange and the wild speculation, easy wealth and great misery it caused. Peacock lived in a time of great social upheaval, and his novels reflect some of the conflict of those times.

English society was in the process of changing from an interdependent hierarchical structure to a system that divided society into upper, middle and lower classes. These changes were effected by the needs of the economy, where the old feudal system was being replaced by an industrial economy. Speed of change varied for different classes: for the upper class, change happened at a slower pace than for the lower class - those with the most social power were in a better position to protect their own interests.

Peacock's novels are an attempt to encourage a change of behaviour among the aristocracy, most notably in the area of marriage. In his novels he portrays the aristocracy, especially those who reside in the cities and form the 'fashionable set', as being mercenary and calculating in their marital relations. Peacock believed this practice to be the cause of much misery, leading to the development of poor character, and an unstable society. For Peacock, a happy marriage was one based on romantic love. Those marriages then promoted a stable society, where emotional well-being influenced

humanitarian practices toward those less well-off in society.

Romantic love appealed to Peacock as an element of democracy that did not alter the power structure of society: coming into the aristocracy as a stabilising effect, it allowed Peacock to accommodate the struggle between idealism and materialism. Romantic love is seen by Peacock as a mostly pleasurable emotion, but he does not leave it simply on that level. He gives it a moral purpose that approaches religion in its nature: it becomes a form of behaviour with a higher purpose, and a system of reward and punishment.

Rather than deal with each of the seven novels in turn, I have divided the chapters into topics that encompass all the novels. The first chapter concentrates on the economic situation of nineteenth-century England where industry and the money market were redistributing wealth previously monopolized by the aristocracy. The social problems that emerged provided novelists with endless material for the scrutiny of the behaviours that accompanied wealth and the ethics of those behaviours.

Chapter two examines the wealthy society of London that Peacock criticizes throughout his seven novels. Fashionable life, with its excesses, provided abundant material for the moral spotlight. The fashionable set seemed driven by appearance and greed which rendered them narrow and insincere. There is a substantial body of biographical evidence that proves this to be the case. Peacock, however, is mostly general in his condemnation, relying on characterisation to hint at reality, rather than expressing outright disapproval. Such a mode has

contributed to the detailed speculation found in many studies of Peacock's novels. Peacock associated with some of the great literary figures of his time, which has generated abundant guesswork as to the basis of his characterisations. I have kept biographical detail to a minimum in the body of this thesis, concentrating on the literature and the society of the time, rather than the specifics of Peacock's associations. Biographical information can be found mostly in the endnotes of each chapter.

Chapters three and four are titled 'Men' and 'Women' respectively, and examine Peacock's male and female lovers who are the heroes and heroines of the novels. In order to facilitate a change in marriage patterns Peacock has altered expected gender behaviours. Women are made more feminist and men more gentlemanly, allowing for a more equal interaction which facilitates easier communications between the sexes, leading to situations where they can fall in love on the basis of knowing each other's character, rather than their fashionable pedigree and bank balance.

The final chapter is titled 'Love and Marriage' and examines the history of romantic love, and the influence of economy on the emergence of the cultural emphasis Western civilization has placed on romantic love. An investigation of the economy of nineteenth-century Britain shows Peacock's view of romantic love to be in context with the disruption of his time. Romantic love, in part, is a social reaction, and Peacock's novels are part of that reaction through their emphasis on personal emotion at a time when private and public life were becoming increasingly divided.