D.H. Lawrence: Dramatist

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During his lifetime Lawrence published three plays: *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* (1914), *Touch and Go* (1920), and *David* (1926). The 1933 Seeker edition of *The Plays* contained only these three. In the same year *The Fight for Barbara* was published as *Keeping Barbara* in *Argosy* (December, 1933), and *A Collier's Friday Night* the following year. The fragment *Noah's Flood* was included in *Phoenix* (1936), and another fragment, *Altitude*, in *The Laughing Horse*, No. 20 (Summer, 1938). *The Virginia Quarterly Review* published *The Married Man* (Autumn, 1940) and *The Merry-Go-Round* (Winter, 1941). The Heinemann *Complete Plays* of 1965 contained all these together with the previously unpublished *The Daughter-in-Law*. In his Soho bibliography of Lawrence, Warren Roberts records that a play called *My Son's My Son*, completed by Walter Greenwood from an unfinished Lawrence manuscript, was performed in London in 1936. This seems to have been the total extent of Lawrence's work in the drama.[1]

Only two of these plays, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* and *David*, were produced in Lawrence's lifetime, neither creating very much interest. From his death until the late fifties, his dramatic work seems to have been in complete eclipse. In 1958 there was a sensitive production on Independent Television of *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, adapted by Ken Taylor, who was later to adapt many of Lawrence's short stories for television. The theatre was slow to follow. In 1965 the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre gave a single performance of *A Collier's Friday Night*. The success of this experiment led to a full-scale production of *The Daughter-in-Law* which opened at the Royal Court on March 19, 1967, and which in turn generated the season of three Lawrence plays in repertory *(The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* joining the other two) which opened on February 29, 1968. The first production of *The Fight for Barbara*, directed by Robin Midgley, opened at the Mermaid Theatre on August 9, 1967.

It was Peter Gill's sensitive and painstaking productions at the Royal Court which really opened our eyes to the power of Lawrence the dramatist. Both theatre goers and critics were shaken to find themselves confronted by what was so clearly the work of a major English twentieth century dramatist, and to see so forcibly demonstrated that naturalism is dead only in those naturalistic plays which never were alive.

These three plays, A *Collier's Friday Night*, *The Daughter-in-Law*, and *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, have now passed into the repertories of countless companies, professional and amateur, throughout the British Isles, presumably to stay. It is upon them that Lawrence's status as a dramatist depends and upon them that I wish to concentrate in the account which follows, with brief references to the other plays to fill in the picture.[2]

ii

Lawrence's first play, A *Collier's Friday Night*, was written in November 1906.[3] At the time Lawrence had written nothing but a handful of poems and a few chapters of *Laetitia*, an early version of *The White Peacock. A* note on the ms. says: "Written when I was twenty-one, almost before I'd done anything, it is most horribly green."

As the title implies, with its ironic allusion to Burns' sentimental *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, this is a naturalistic play, a "slice of life"; as such, it makes the other naturalistic plays of the period look like something else again. Never before had working-class family life in all its vital or stifling intimacy been presented with such immediacy and authenticity. In a sense "nothing happens"; yet the continual play of love and hate, the living process of young lives being moulded by the domestic and social and economic environment and asserting themselves against the pressures, controls the movement of the play and holds the attention of the audience far better than any plot could do. The immediacy and authenticity are such that, if we are aware of the play as having been "written" at all, we feel it must have been written on the Saturday morning. Such closeness to the material might well have undermined a novel. It was four years before Lawrence felt ready to tackle the same themes in fiction. Yet here is nothing but gain.

The mother, Mrs. Lambert, loves her son Ernest with a deep possessive love against which he is beginning to strain, though he loves her deeply. Mother and children all reject and despise the father, who struggles pathetically to maintain an authority and dignity only he believes in. These conflicts, just under the surface, set all their lives on edge. Any triviality can trigger an explosion. Again and again there is an adjustment, a reconciliation, a crisis averted, but the conflict is only shifting its ground around its real, unacknowledged centre.

The Friday night is any Friday night and many Friday nights. Friday is itself a significant night. Ernest comes home from college for the weekend. He needs yet more books his mother can ill afford to buy him. His girlfriend Maggie, whom his family dislikes and his mother

is intensely jealous of, visits him. It is baking night for the weekend, and shopping night, for Mrs. Lambert has just received her week's housekeeping money, so Ernest must mind the baking bread. Preoccupied with Maggie, he lets it burn. Mr. Lambert is chief butty, and every Friday must meet the other butties to do the weekly reckoning, first putting aside the wages of their daymen, then sharing what remains. Afterwards they all retire to the pub. Mr. Lambert will be tipsy when he returns, and aggressive. Ernest's sister, Nellie, has finished a week's drudgery school-teaching and must see her boyfriend, who works late on a Friday. She will be late home, to the annoyance of her mother. This combination of circumstances is always critical: this Friday, perhaps, it brings the family a little closer to open crisis than usual.

The whole play takes place in one room, the hot living-room / kitchen where all the life of the family is concentrated. Here the mother cooks, the family eats, the father conducts his pit business, the daughter gossips with her friends, the son studies or reads Baudelaire to his girl. Yet we know the rest of the house: there are sounds of washing and washing-up from the draughty scullery, of a piano from the little-used front room; the father's clean trousers, brought down from upstairs, steam when he holds them to the fire.

The life of the family is continuous with the life of the neighbourhood and the whole mining community. All the meticulous naturalistic detail is not there to fool an audience into believing that it is watching real life. It is there to bring real life onto the stage. The props are there to be used, and used in such a way that every routine household task implies a culture, a whole way of life, yields its testimony to the infinite adjustments these people have evolved to the exigencies of life in this community: for example, to the poverty and life-sapping labour of the mother, for whom the burning of a loaf is a major catastrophe; to the indomitable human spirit which has created, out of suffering and conflict, a family life which gives us no sense of deprivation for the young-the tensions frequently give way to both hope and gaiety. The routine becomes a ritual; the action grows out of it and drops back into it.

I have not yet mentioned the play's greatest strength, and Lawrence's greatest strength as a dramatist: the quality of the dialogue, and of the silences. The spontaneous family silence which greets the father on his return from work conveys as much as a page of *Sons and Lovers*. The mother says little, but her presence and character is strongly felt. Her stillness centres on her suffering. Every terse understatement implies a personal history, meanings both speaker and hearer are too familiar with to labour or even fully articulate. And beneath the surface lies the history of the whole

community, the patterns of speech corresponding to patterns of life, of survival and dignity, generated by the conditions of mining life. The dialect and rhythm of their speech functions with poetic force, with potent unfamiliar words like "sluthering," salty regional proverbs, and all the characteristics of a living, rooted speech. Beyond this, each character has his own distinctive speech habits and rhythms which can be raised, at the crises, to the level of poetry. When Mrs. Lambert finds the scorched loaf she says to herself:

So this is it, is it? It's a nice thing! — And they put it down there, thinking I shouldn't see it. It's a nice thing! I always said she was a deep one. And he thinks he'll stop out till his father comes! — And what have they done with the other? — Burnt it, I should think. That's what they've done. It's a nice thing — a nice thing! *(She sits down in the rocking-chair, perfectly rigid, still overdone with weariness and anger and pain.)* (p. 518)

After the confrontation of father and son, which has almost led to blows, the father speaks out of the depths of his humiliation:

But don't think I'm going to be put down in my own house! It would take a better man than you, you white-faced jockey — or your mother either — or all the lot of you put together! *(He waits awhile.)* I'm not daft — I can see what she's driving at. *(Silence.)* I'm not a fool, if you think so. I can pay you yet, you sliving bitch! *(He sticks out his chin at his wife.)*

ERNEST lifts his head and looks at him.

(Turns with renewing ferocity on his son): Yes, and you either. I'll stand no more of your chelp. I'll stand no *more*! Do you hear me

MOTHER: Ernest!

ERNEST looks down at his book.

The FATHER turns to the MOTHER.

FATHER: Ernest! Ay, prompt him! Set him on — you know how to do it — you know how to do it!

There is a persistent silence.

I know it! I know it! I'm not daft, I'm not a fool!

(The other boot falls to the floor.) (p. 522)

A page of such dialogue has more life in it than all the volumes of Galsworthy.

Lawrence's first novel, *The White Peacock*, not only does not face the problems of relationships within his own family, which we know to have been uppermost in his consciousness at the time; it conspicuously avoids even the mining and working-class background he knew so well, transposing the characters to a rural and middle-class society. These characteristics are linked to the literary derivativeness of the novel, owing much to the early George Eliot and the early Hardy. Not until he began *Sons and Lovers* in 1910 did Lawrence return to the theme of *A Collier's Friday Night*, and even there we may doubt whether he entirely recaptured the amazing objectivity and insight of the play in relation to the central problem. Sympathy is not here deliberately withheld from the father. We see that his coarseness is his only defence against the denial and exclusion of him by his children who have been set against him by his wife. How warmly he responds when someone treats him with ordinary decency, as a human being:

The FATHER . . . *stands warming his trousers before the fire* . . . .

GERTIE: Are they cold, Mr. Lambert?

FATHER: They are that! Look you, they steaming like a sweating hoss.

MOTHER: Get away, man! The driest thing in the house would smoke if you held it in front of the fire like that.

FATHER *(shortly)*: Ah, I know I'm a liar. I knowed it to begin wi'.

NELLIE *(much irritated)*: Isn't he a nasty-tempered kid!

GERTIE: But those front bedrooms are clammy.

FATHER *(gratified)*: They h'are, Genie, they h'are.

GERTIE *(turning to avoid* NELLIE'S *contempt)*: I know the things I bring down from ours, they fair damp in a day.

FATHER: They h'are, Gertie, I know it. And I wonder how 'er'd like to clap 'er arse into wet breeches. (p. 479)

His aggression towards Ernest is clearly to a large extent frustrated love.

It would be possible to play the ending as a happy reconciliation of mother and son. The stage directions, however, make clear that this is not intended, that, indeed, we are to see in their embrace a "moment of abnormal emotion and proximity" and in their tones "a dangerous gentleness — so much gentleness that the safe reserve of their souls is broken" (p. 530). There is no such stress on the danger and abnormality in *Sons and Lovers*. One of the central motivations behind *Sons and Lovers* is the vindication of the mother. After completing it he told Frieda, "I would write a different `Sons and Lovers' now; my mother was wrong, and I thought she was absolutely right."[4] *A Collier's Friday Night* was not written to vindicate anybody. Its discipline is that imposed by the medium. The author is not required to explain and excuse and blame. He is required by the exigencies of writing a naturalistic play to present these people, these relationships, this world, in such a way that it yields its own moral significance, which an honest author must let stand. It seems that, at this particular point in his career, such a discipline was particularly valuable to Lawrence. It is a great pity that he did not submit himself to it again for five years.

iii

Lawrence's second play, The *Merry-Go-Round*, was probably written in 1910. It is, in intention, an Eastwood *As You Like It*. "It's `As You Lump It' " says the play's last line, and that might have been a better title. But the absence of any real wit, subtlety in characterisation, or even appropriateness in the eventual marital pairings makes it little more than a romp for the local amateur dramatic society. It has never, to my knowledge, been performed.

iv

Lawrence sent his third play, The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd, to Grace Crawford on 17 November 1910.[5] She forwarded it to Violet Hunt, who liked it. Heuffer then sent it to Harley Granville-Barker, who returned it saying that he had read it with interest but did not want it. Lawrence then sent the play to Edward Garnett, who in turn showed it to Iden Payne and led Lawrence to believe that Payne would put it on:

It is huge to think of Iden Payne acting me on the stage: you are like a genius of Arabian Nights, to get me through. Of course I will alter and improve whatever I can, and Mr. Payne has fullest liberty to do entirely as he pleases with the play — you know that. And of course I don't expect to get money by it. But it's ripping to think of my being acted. (Ch 107)[6]

The project fell through. Garnett kept the ms, for "nearly two years." Lawrence sent for it in August 1913 in order to revise it for publication. He wrote to the publisher, Mitchell Kennerley:

. . . I saw how it needed altering-refining. Particularly I hated it in the last act, where the man and woman wrangled rather shallowly across the dead body of the husband. And it seemed nasty that they should make love where he lay drunk. I hope to heaven I have come in time to have it made decent. (*CL* 223)

Lawrence was satisfied with his revised version: "What a jolly fine play it is, too, when I have pulled it together" (*CL* 218). Lawrence, anxious to see the play staged, made unsuccessful approaches to theatre people in 1914, 1915, and again in 1919. There were two productions in his lifetime, neither of which he saw, by a group of amateurs in Altringham in February 1920, and by the amalgamated Stage Society and 300 Club in December 1926, produced by Esme Percy. At Lawrence's request, Catherine Carswell attended the 1920 production, which she reviewed for *The Times*. She felt that the closing scene, where the dead miner's body is washed by his women, was "theatrically unacceptable" unless the whole production could be

. . . lifted into a plane beyond realism with movements that were classically simplified. To read, the scene is simple and tragic. Outside the Irish People's Plays I reckon we can hardly match it in English with any other scene of dramatic dialogue having working folk as the protagonists And the play holds its own against the Irish plays. Yet, as things are, it does not quite "do," and I believe the reason lies in the fact that the theatre itself was antipathetic to Lawrence, so much so that even when writing for it he maintained his antipathy. "Here is drama," one imagines him to say — "here is prose drama as authentic as any the English theatre can show. It is not `good theatre!' Then the English theatre must change itself to accommodate a living contemporary English play." [7]

Several of Lawrence's friends saw the 1926 production. On December 13, 1926, Rolf Gardiner wrote:

I have just come back from seeing "Mrs. Holroyd:" It was a very good performance and Esme Percy had produced it in the right way. Mrs Holroyd herself was perfect, and Blackmore and the children and all the subsidiary characters, quite splendid. But the man who played Holroyd wasn't fine or big enough, I thought; not that touch of fire and physical splendour that I feel was the hidden ore in the body of him as you meant him perhaps. The atmosphere was right and you were in the play right through; only of course they couldn't talk the Derbyshire vernacular. Bernard Shaw, who was there, said

the dialogue was the most magnificent he had ever heard, and his own stuff was "The Barber of Fleet Street" in comparison! The actors loved the play; one felt 'that. The bulk of the audience? I can't tell. But anyway the audiences at these shows are mostly bloody. [8]

Lawrence wrote to Esme Percy on December 19:

Mrs. Whitworth sent me photographs and press-cuttings of your production of *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*. I dearly wish I could have been there. You seem to have done the thing so well, and the actors, especially Miss Vanne, seem to have put such heart into it. What a bore that the audience and the critics didn't like it! — Anyhow they all say plainly it was my fault-which no doubt it was: for an audience and a critic is always the same perfection unto itself. — Why do they never have the grace to say: But alas, perhaps I was an inefficient listener!

I have to confess it's years since I read the play myself. I wrote it fifteen years ago, when I was raw. Probably they're quite right when they say that the last act is too much taken up with washing the dead, instead of getting on a bit with life. I bet that would be my present opinion. If you've a moment to spare, tell me, will. you, what you think-and what Miss Vanne thinks. And then, if ever the play were to be done again, I'd re-model the end. I feel I should want to.

I should be really grateful for your criticism, and for that of any of the actors who wouldn't mind telling me how they feel.

Meanwhile many thanks to you and Miss Vanne and Colin Keith-Johnston and the others who did what they could, and evidently made the play live, even if there was no making it please the audience.

[P.S.] One of my friends thought the grandmother whined too muchand somebody else said Holroyd wasn't big enough, not the type-but people all have their own fancies. (*CL* 953)

In his review of the 1968 Royal Court production Ronald Bryden called Lawrence

. . . a master of concentration, of burning intensity, distilling from a naturalism homely as potatoes a fiery, white and ice-cold emotion which shocks like a gulp of liquid-energy.

You can see how he does it in Mrs. Holroyd if you attend to the constant, unobtrusive detail of washing, cleaning and ironing. It

falls perfectly naturally: what else was the life of a miner's wife? But as Lizzie Holroyd pursues the endless purification of her house, you know without Freudian hinting or nudging symbolism why she is bound to prefer the genteel electrician who never goes underground, and also why she will never break her marriage for him. When she bends over her husband's body to wash it, the whole movement and cumulative meaning of the play gathers in her gesture like a breaking wave. [9]

The wife, in true womanliness, cannot but despise dirt, drunkenness, and brutality; and Holroyd, in his manhood, knowing himself despised, cannot but retreat into still more coarseness, drunkenness, and brutality. Underneath there is the vulnerability of Holroyd, the real helplessness which is only evident when he is drunk or dead, and the gulf between any man and any woman which neither, here, can find the courage to cross. *The Daughter-in-Law* is to be about that, too, about the terrible courage arid patience a woman needs if she is to elicit love from a man without destroying his manhood. Minnie Gascoigne has that courage and faith; Lizzie Holroyd has not. It seems hard to her, but easier, to give her children and herself to a man already gentle and understanding. In *The Daughter-in-Law* Mrs. Gascoigne warns Minnie that

. . . men verily gets accidents, to pay us out, I do believe . . . . For they'd run theirselves into danger and lick their lips for joy, thinking, if I'm killed, then she maun lay me out. Yi — I seed it in our mester. He got killed a' pit. An' when I laid him out, his face wor that grim, an' his body that stiff, an' it said as plain as plain: "Nowthen, you've done for me." For it's risky work, handlin' men, my lass, an' niver thee pray for sons. (pp. 264.265)

This is what Charlie Holroyd does to pay his wife out for despising him and preferring Blackmore.

Simon Gray rightly testifies to the power of the tragic ending which Lawrence himself came to doubt. Of the role of the mother Gray says:

The mother is an old woman, already experienced in the loss of sons, and from the moment that she hears the rumour of an accident she lapses into a keening that is really a conversation with fate. "I'm sure I've had my share of bad luck, I have. I'm sure I've brought up five lads in the pit, through accidents and troubles, and now there's this. The Lord has treated me very hard . . ." So that by the time Holroyd's body is brought in she has already come to terms with his death. It is she, then, stoic in her knowledge of what has to be done, who begins to organise the details of the ritual.' [10]

But the daughter cannot blame hard luck or a hard God. Yet neither is she consumed by guilt; for her whole being is given over to compassion for this man she had never known, this man with a body whiter than her own under the pit dirt, in his pain and helplessness:

My dear, my dear — oh, my dear! I can't bear it, my dear-you shouldn't have done it. You shouldn't have done it. Oh-I can't bear it for you. Why couldn't I do anything for you? The children's father — my dear — I wasn't good to you. But you shouldn't have done this to me. Oh, dear, oh dear! Did it hurt you? — oh my dear, it hurt you — oh, I can't bear it. No, things aren't fair-we went wrong, my dear. I never loved you enough — I never did. What a shame for you! It was a shame. But you didn't — you didn't try. I would have loved you — I tried hard. What a shame for you! It was so cruel for you. You couldn't help it — my dear, my dear. You couldn't help it. And I can't do anything for you, and it hurt you so! (pp. 58-59)

A great deal depends on the actress. But this can be one of the great moments of modern drama. Simon Gray writes:

It is as if Lawrence were rediscovering the source of those great choric threnodies in Greek tragedy. For a short time at least, the separate members of the audience become one, not only with the mourning widow, but also with the pathetic and still vulnerable body in her arms. The wretched, wearying battle between husband and wife is over, the division between the stage and the spectators vanishes, and something like a community is created out of the shared recognition of the race's tragedy. [11]

v

In 1912, Lawrence wrote two "impromptus," *The Married Man* and *The Fight for Barbara*. *The Married Man* was suggested by the story of a Don Juanish friend whose extra-marital adventures finally brought him low. It is a short play, but its four acts of flirting, arch conversations, leaden wit, and callow moralising are more than enough. It represents a phase of Lawrence's development which he quickly grew out of. *The Fight for Barbara* is largely of biographical interest. It dramatises the early difficulties of the eloped Lawrence and Frieda, hounded by Frieda's outraged parents and distracted husband, adding to the difficult enough problems of adjustment to each other. It was no doubt of great therapeutic value to Lawrence to present the events of this painful period as comedy and amenable to resolution.

vi

In January 1913 Lawrence wrote to Garnett:

I am going to send you a new play I have written. It is neither a comedy nor a tragedy just ordinary. It is quite objective, as far as that term goes, and though, no doubt, like most of my stuff, it wants weeding out a bit, yet I think the whole thing is there, laid out properly, planned and progressive. If you don't think so, I am disappointed.

I enjoy so much writing my plays-they come so quick and exciting from the pen-that you mustn't growl at me if you think them a waste of time. At any rate, they'll be stuff for shaping later on, when I'm more of a workman .... I *do* think this play might have a chance on the stage. It'll bear cutting, but I don't think it lacks the stuff for the theatre. (CL 175)

The new play was *The Daughter-in-Law*.

Three weeks later he wrote to Garnett again:

I believe that, just as an audience was found in Russia for *Tchekhov*, so an audience might be found in England for some of my stuff, if there were a man to whip 'em in. It's the producer that is lacking, not the audience. I am sure we are sick of the rather bony, bloodless drama we get nowadays — it is time for a reaction against Shaw and Galsworthy and Barker and Irishy (except Synge) people — the rule and measure mathematical folk. *(CL* 182)

Certainly there is nothing bloodless about *The Daughter-in-Law*. Its strengths are those of *A Collier's Friday Night* and *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* The first line of the play establishes a tone which never falters: "MRS. GASCOIGNE: Well, I s'd ha' thought thy belly 'ud a browt thee whoam afore this" (p. 207). Mrs. Gascoigne's speech throughout has the strength of proverbs substantiated by experience: "Marriage is like a mouse-trap, for either man or woman. You've soon come to the end o' th' cheese" (p. 210). The main theme is the effort of Minnie Gascoigne, a young woman of great character and some refinement, to "wriggle a place out for hersen," to give back to her husband, Luther, the manhood lost at his mother's apron-strings, from which he will be able to give her the love she needs. Minnie brings a hundred and twenty pounds to her wedding but comes to realize that the independence this gives her undermines her husband's self-esteem. In desperation she goes to Manchester and spends it all on a ring and two prints. She wins the grudging admiration of her mother-in-law; but her husband takes the prints, which are, of course, an investment, as a further sneer at his lack of refinement, and thrusts them in the fire. This ending of Act III is masterly:

MINNIE *(with a cry)*: Ah! — that's my ninety pounds gone.

(Tries to snatch them out.)

MRS. GASCOIGNE *(beginning to cry)*: Come, Joe, let's go; let's go, my lad. I've seen as much this day as ever my eyes want to see. Let's go, my lad. *(Gets up, beginning to tie on her bonnet.)*

MINNIE *(white and intense, to* LUTHER*)*: Should you like to throw my ring after them? It's all I've got left. *(She holds out her hand — he flings it from him.)*

LUTHER: Yi, what do I care what I do! *(Clenching his fists as if he would strike her.)* — what do I! — what do I — !

MRS. GASCOIGNE *(putting on her shawl)*: A day's work — a day's work! Ninety pound! Nay — nay, oh, nay — nay, oh, nay — nay! Let's go, Joe my lad. Eh, our Luther, our Luther! Let's go, Joe. Come.

JOE: Ah, I'll come, Mother.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: Luther!

LUTHER: What?

MRS. GASCOIGNE: It's a day's work, it is, wi' thee. Eh dear! Come, let's go, Joe. Let's go whoam.

LUTHER: An' I'll go.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: Donna thee do nowt as ter'll repent of, Luther-donna thee. It's thy mother axes thee. Come, Joe.

MRS. GASCOIGNE *goes out, followed by* JOE. LUTHER *stands with face averted from his wife: mutters something, reaches for his cap, goes out.* MINNIE *stands with her hand on the mantlepiece.*

CURTAIN (p. 262)

Joe, the younger brother still at home, has nothing to say here, but his mother's refrain: "Let's go, Joe" invests him with a dramatic importance as great as the other three. Mrs. Gascoigne has lost Luther and lost her battle with Minnie:

MINNIE: . . . it was your fault. You held him, and persuaded him that what he wanted was *you*. You kept him, like a child, you even

gave him what money he wanted, like a child. He never roughed it — he never faced out anything. You did all that for him.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: And what if I did! If you made as good a wife to him as I made a mother, you'd do.

MINNIE: Should I? You didn't care what women your sons went with, so long as they didn't love them .... You kept the solid meal, and the orts and slams any other woman could have. But I tell you, I'm not for having the orts and darts, and your leavings from your sons. I'll have a man, or nothing, I will. (pp. 255-256)

Whether Minnie can make a man of Luther remains doubtful. The ending, with Luther weeping in his wife's arms, is open. Minnie has done all that a woman, with courage and tenderness, can do. But it may be that Luther will simply transfer his dependence from his mother to her. Meanwhile, Joe remains with his mother, talking idly of Australia, flirting with Minnie. He is in a worse case than his brother and knows it.

How is a woman ever to have a husband, when the men all belong to their mothers?

Minnie cries. And Joe says:

Nay, Mother, tha knows it's right. Tha knows tha's got me-an'll ha'e me till ter dies-an' after that-yi . . . . And sometimes, Mother, I wish I wor dead, I do . . . . Tha knows I couldna leave thee, Mother-tha knows I couldna. An' me, a young man, belongs to thy owd age. An' there's nowheer for me to go, Mother. For tha'rt gettin' nearer to death an' yet I canna leave thee to go my own road. An' I wish, yi, often, as I wor dead.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: Dunna, lad — dunna let 'er put these ideas i' thy head.

JOE: An' I can but fritter my days away. There's no goin' forrard for me.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: Nay, lad, nay-what lad's better off than thee, dost reckon?

JOE: If I went t'r Australia, th' best part on me wouldna go wi' me.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: Tha wunna go t'r Australia!

JOE: If I want, I should be a husk of a man. I'm alleys a husk of a man, Mother. There's nowt solid about me. The' isna.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: Whativer dost mean? You've a' set on me at once.

JOE: I'm nowt, Mother an' I count for nowt. Yi, an' I know it.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: Tha does. Tha sounds as if tha counts for nowt, as a rule, doesn't ter?

JOE: There's not much of a man about me. T'other chaps is more of fools, but they more of men an' a'-an' they know it.

MRS. GASCOIGNE: That's thy fault.

JOE: Yi — an' will be — ter th' end o' th' chapter. (pp. 257-258)

In *Twilight in Italy* Lawrence records how, when he went to the theatre on the Lago di Garda in 1912 to see *I Spettri* (Ibsen's *Ghosts*) and *Amleto*, the real drama took place, for him, in the auditorium, where the villagers played their habitual parts, where all the diversity and all the tensions of village life were brought together under one roof, where the delicate balance of this life was shifted by something new, extraordinary, releasing passion and excitement. This is the kind of drama Lawrence strove, in these early plays, to put on the stage.

He wanted to create a dramatic form which would embody, in the words of Raymond Williams, "the detail and closeness of fiction . . . the flow of experience and the sympathy with ordinary life and speech." What he came up against was

. . . the habits of theatre, and of most traditional drama, in which posture, rhetoric, formality and presentation, had been the ordinary means. That this problem is still unsolved is evident from the movement of so much of our best drama away from ordinary experience and away from the flow of sympathy.[12]

Fifteen years later Lawrence was to write:

It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead.[13]

In 1913 he saw no reason why the drama, properly handled, could not also perform this "cleansing and refreshing" function. For the ebb and flow of sympathy, both between the characters on stage,

and between them and their audience, is surely the essence of all drama.

vii

In 1919, Lawrence thought he had found his man to "whip 'em in." Douglas Goldring offered to publish *Touch and Go*, written the previous year, in a series called Plays for a People's Theatre. Lawrence's play would be first in the series, and would be produced. On this understanding, Lawrence let Goldring have the play and its preface free. In the event, Goldring published his own play *The Fight for Freedom* (which Lawrence despised) first in the series, and there was no production of *Touch and Go*.

In his preface, Lawrence tries to define the phrase: A People's Theatre. His first point is that the seats are cheap; his second that "the plays of A People's Theatre are plays about people":

Not mannequins. Not lords nor proletarians nor bishops nor husbands nor co-respondents nor virgins nor adulteresses nor uncles nor noses. Not even white rabbits nor presidents. People. Men who are somebody, not men who are something.

If there are still a few "living individuals" among the miners and among the masters

. . . then we have added another tragic possibility to the list: the Strike situation . . . . Mr. Galsworthy had a peep, and sank down towards bathos. Granted that men are still men, Labour v. Capitalism is a tragic struggle . . . . The man is caught in the wheels of his part, his fate, he may be torn asunder . . . .

The essence of tragedy, which is creative crisis, is that a man should go through with his fate, and not dodge it and go bumping into an accident. And the whole business of life, at the great critical periods of mankind, is that men should accept and be one with their tragedy. Therefore we should open our hearts. For one thing, we should have a People's Theatre. Perhaps it would help us in this hour of confusion better than anything. [14]

In theory, this sounds exciting. But *Touch and Go* does not quite ring true. It has the feel of having been written to a programme. The characters and situation are lifted from *Women in Love*. The movement of the play is a working up to a confrontation, with the threat of violence, between Gerald Barlow, the mine owner (who is Gerald Crich again), and his striking men. Each side thinks it wants more money, a larger slice of the cake. Each side thinks that bullying in one form or another is the way to get it. The point of it

all is to bring forward at the end Oliver Turton, the Birkin / Lawrence figure, to preach his simple solution:

We're all human beings after all. And why can't we try really to leave off struggling against one another, and set up a new state of things . . . .

It's life and living that matters, not simply having money . . . . If you want what is natural and good, I'm sure the owners would soon agree with you. (pp. 384-385)

We do not open our hearts when we are told to; we open them when we see on the stage living individuals going through with their fates as we saw them in *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* and *The Daughter-in-Law*. There is nothing of comparable authenticity in *Touch and Go*.

viii

On the strength of the text alone, *David* is Lawrence's most difficult play to discuss. Written in 1925, it is quite unlike any of his other plays. Lawrence sticks closely to the Old Testament story, which obviously fascinates him in its own right. His only significant addition is the prophecy of Saul that David is the first of a new kind of leader of men, that his seed shall thicken upon the earth, cover it with houses and iron and, ultimately, destroy it:

And the world shall be Godless, there shall no God walk on the mountains, no whirlwind shall stir like a heart in the deeps of the blue firmament. And God shall be gone from the world. Only men there shall be, in myriads, like locusts, clicking and grating upon one another, and crawling over one another. The smell of them shall be as smoke, but it shall rise up into the air without finding the nostrils of God. For God shall be gone! gone! gone! And men shall inherit the earth! (p.117)

The characters are strong and living, the story essentially dramatic; with the conflict of Saul and David at its centre. I cannot share George Panichas' interpretation of this conflict as "the eternal quarrel between purity and innocence on the one side, and treachery and debasement on the other."[15] David is self-sufficient. He is God's annointed, but he does not need God. When God departs from Saul, Saul collapses upon himself like a burnt-out fire. David brings down two giants, Goliath and Saul, but is not himself a giant. Saul's prophecy is confirmed at the end by Jonathan:

I would not see thy new day, David. For thy wisdom is the wisdom of the subtle, and behind thy passion lies prudence. And naked thou

wilt not go into the fire. Yea, go forth, and let me die. For thy virtue is in thy wit, and thy shrewdness. But in Saul have I known the magnanimity of a man. Yea, thou art a smiter down of giants, with a smart stone! Great men and magnanimous, men of the faceless flame, shall fall from Strength, fall before thee, thou David, shrewd whelp of the lion of Judah! (p. 153)

Saul, at the beginning, is like a father to David. Another David, hero in exile, had lived through a bitter conflict with his father, who had debased the life that was in him. Now, towards the end of his life (and of his father's, who died the year *David* was published), Lawrence regretted that he had never fully recognized and respected the quality of life which had been there to be debased, the bright flame of life, fed straight from the source without consciousness, or not fed at all, guttering in drunkenness and brutality in the father, in brutality and treachery in Saul.

This theme, like those of brotherhood and leadership already central to the original story, is close to Lawrence's heart. The language of the play has a few lapses, but is for the most part adequate and occasionally distinguished. Why, then, should one feel dissatisfied? Perhaps we have been too much deadened by the Hollywood epics and by the adaptations of Bible stories for children's television to respond as fully as Lawrence clearly expects. Perhaps, in a fine production, the play could live. Lawrence said in 1925: "It is a good play, and for the theatre. Someone ought to do it" (*CL* 845). His agent did not agree:

Curtis Brown says it is full of long speeches that call for a whole company of Forbes-Robertsons. There might be a whole company of even better men. I believe there might be found Jews or Italians or Spaniards or Celts to do the thing properly: not Teutons or Scandinavians or Nordics: it's not in their blood-as a rule. And if the speeches are too long-well, they can be made shorter if necessary .... Curbs Brown says it is not a "popular" play. But damn it, how does he know even that? Playgoing isn't the same as reading. Reading in itself is highbrow. But give the "populace" in the theatre something with a bit of sincere good-feeling in it, and they'll respond. If you do it properly. (*CL* 845-846)

In 1927 someone did do it — the Teutons of the Stage Society at the Regent Theatre, London, on May 22nd and 23rd. It was not well received. Someone sent Lawrence the press cuttings, which roused him to anger:

My business is a fight, and I've got to keep it up. I'm reminded of the fact by the impudent reviews of the production of David. They

say it was just dull. I say they are eunuchs, and have no balls. It is a fight. The same old one. (*CL* 980)

Five months later the fight seems to have gone out of Lawrence. There is a weary acceptance of his own inadequacy, with a last petulant snipe at the public:

. . of course the whole play is too literary, too many words. The actual technique of the stage is foreign to me . . . . The public only foolish realism: Hamlet in a smoking jacket. (*CL* 1016)

It is quite untrue, as must already be evident, that Lawrence did not care about the production of his plays in the theatre. He never saw a play of his staged. He was abroad on all three occasions that his plays were performed in his lifetime; but the difficulties of getting home could have been overcome had there not been also the more fundamental difficulty of Lawrence's fear, since the war, of the theatre world, which was very much part of the England he had chosen to cut himself off from. As Michael Marland suggests, [16] "exile" and "dramatist" are almost mutually exclusive terms. There was also a distaste for the whole business of negotiating with impresarios, of putting his works, which were always like children to him, into the hands of producers and actors, whom he felt were not his kind of people, and of exposing himself to theatre audiences he knew would be unsympathetic. Publishing books was less intimate, less nerve-racking, more like casting bread upon the waters.

After *David* Lawrence did not again expose himself to the impudence of the public and the reviewers. At the Royal Court Theatre in 1968, producer, actors, public, and reviewers repaid a little of the debt.

Notes

1

After Lawrence's death someone found in a box in an attic in Vienna or Berlin the typescript of two complete acts and a draft of the third act of a play of his called *My Son's My Son*. This is, in fact, the play we now know as *The Daughter-in-Law*. The typescript came into the hands of a theatrical manager Mr. Leon M. Lion who invited Walter Greenwood to complete the third act, which he did. The play opened at the Playhouse Theatre, London, on May 26, 1936, produced by Mr. Lion, with Louise Hampton as Mrs. Gascoigne, Sarah Erskine as Minnie, Giles Isham (who put up most of the money) as Luther, and Valentine Dyall as Joe. The reviews were mixed, either damning, like James Agate, who claimed

to know more about colliers than Lawrence (whose view of them was "Bloomsbury"!) and pronounces that the play was "not true," or damning with faint praise like the anonymous critic who said that it was "not a good play. It is awkwardly planned and the author does not develop his theme clearly. Yet there is an underlying sincerity of purpose that commands respect." The Players apparently had great difficulty with the dialect. D. B. in the *Evening Standard* wrote of the "passages of pure Kensington which crept persistently in, and into which Miss Sarah Erskine, as Luther's wife, at last frankly relapsed." There was general praise for Miss Hampton's performance as the mother. *My Son's My Son* was later revived at the Golders Green Hippodrome with Sybil Thorndike as Luther. Again Mrs. Gascoigne dominated the play. Again the dialect floored the actors. And Luther brought down the house when he returned from work covered in dirt and sweat, sat down and turned to the audience the white, virgin soles of his brand new pit boots.

2

All quotations from the plays will be from *The Complete Plays of D. H. Lawrence* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1965). Subsequent references will be given in my text.

3

Jessie Chambers has said that *A Collier's Friday Night* was "certainly" written in the autumn of 1909 (Emile Delavenay, *D. H. Lawrence: L'Homme et la Genese de son Oeuvre, Les Annees de Formation: 1885-1919* Paris: Librairie C. Klincksiech, 1969, p. 694), so we must choose between her recollection and Lawrence's own. The circumstances of the play, so minutely recorded, are those of the autumn of 1906 or 1907. However, if the play was first written earlier than 1909, it was certainly rewritten then (Delavenay, p. 142).

4

Frieda Lawrence, "*Not I But the Wind . . .*" (New York: The Viking Press, 1934), p. 56.

5

I am indebted to Mr. T. J. Worthen for drawing my attention to the misdating of *The Daughter-in-Law* in the chronologies of my *The Art of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

6

The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Harry T. Moore, 2 vols. (New York: The Viking Press, 1962). Subsequent references to this edition of Lawrence's letters will be referred to as *CL* and will be given in my text.

7

Catherine Carswell, *The Savage Pilgrimage: A Narrative of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), p. 135.

8 Quoted in Edward Nehls, D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), III, 121.

9 *0bserver* (17 March 1968).

10 *New Society* (21 March 1968).

11 *Ibid*.

12 Introduction to *Three Plays* by D. H. Lawrence (*A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Daughter-in-Law*, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*) (London: Penguin Books, 1969). See also Raymond Williams' chapter on Lawrence in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Chatto and Windus, 196E).

13 *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

14 Preface to *Touch and Go*.

15 Dr. Panichas has a chapter on *David* in his book *Adventure in Consciousness: The Meaning of D. H. Lawrence's Religious Quest* (The Hague, Mouton, 1964), pp. 136-150.

16 In his useful Introduction to *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* and *The Daughter-in-Law* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1968).