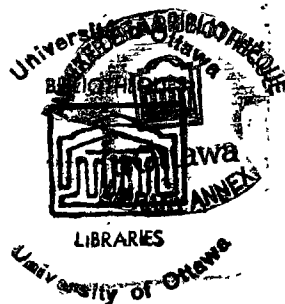


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NATURALISTIC STYLE
IN THREE EARLY PLAYS
OF D. H. LAWRENCE



In partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
University of Ottawa
April 2, 1970

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis adviser,
Dr. Virginia Moseley, for her many hours of generous
direction and guidance. I am also grateful to
Miss Teresa Ierullo for her patient typing of the
manuscript.

John McGovern

March 26, 1970,
Toronto, Ontario.

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PREFACE

On March 16, 1967, The Daughter-in-Law, a play by D. H. Lawrence, was produced successfully at the Royal Court Theatre in London, England. The highlight of the following season was the presentation of three early plays by Lawrence dealing with family life in a mining town. These three plays, A Collier's Friday Night, The Daughter-in-Law, and The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd, revealed a facet of Lawrence's artistry generally unrealized. The Royal Court Theatre, which, since the epochal opening of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956), has prided itself on its experimental drama and its fostering of new playwrights, was introducing to the world the drama of a playwright who had died thirty-seven years previously. Lawrence's plays had largely been passed over while scholars delved into his major fiction, poetry, and letters. Peter Gill's production of the trilogy, then, provided an auspicious début for these little-known dramas.

The plays were linked together as a trilogy in this production because they relate to and comment on one another both in style and theme. Yet each play has a distinctly individual character, making each a complete artistic entity. The major bond among the three plays is their naturalistic technique, through which Lawrence created a realistic world in which characters are heavily influenced by the forces of

heredity and environment. Lawrence's thematic interests correlate with his concerns in his early short fiction and novels. The plays explore the major problems of family life--marital tension, parental domination, friendships, and lack of communication.

In creating artistically the everyday details of life within a naturalistic framework, Lawrence established a pattern of inevitability. Such a pattern, at times, takes on an air of ritual, thus heightening the immediate reality of what is happening on stage as well as introducing archetypal images which ally the characters with man in his most elemental state. Each of the three plays contains a ritual washing scene as the miner, home from the pit, cleans off his pit-dirt. The import of such scenes can be seen, by analogy, in Lawrence's short story, "Jimmy and the Desperate Woman" (1924), where a "citified" editor, Jimmy, views "real" life in a collier's home:

After a while, Pinnegar came running in, naked to the waist, and squatted plumb in front of the big red fire, on his heels. His head and face and the front part of his body were all wet. His back was grey and unwashed. He seized the towel from the fender and began to rub his face and head with a sort of brutal vigour, while his wife brought a bowl, and with a soapy flannel silently washed his back, right down to the loins, where the trousers were rolled back. The man was entirely oblivious of the stranger--the washing was part of the collier's ritual, and nobody existed for the moment. The woman, washing her husband's back, stooping there as he kneeled with knees wide apart, squatting on his heels on the rag hearthrug, had a peculiar look on her strong, handsome face, a look sinister and derisive. She was deriding something or somebody; but Jimmy could not make out whom or what.

It was a new experience for him to sit completely and brutally excluded, from a personal ritual.¹

Ritual silences, motions, and daily customs such as tea-time are presented with faithful accuracy and loving detail in the plays.

In the marital complexities of hate and love common to the three plays is a sense of the other world, apart from wife and family, in which the miner exists. The woman, practical and intellectual, resents exclusion from this instinctive working world in which the man feels some equality with those about him. This "other" world, which serves as background for the plays, is described in "Daughters of the Vicar" (1914) thus:

He was not unhappy in the pit. He was admired by the men, and well enough liked And, being naturally cheerful, he was happy at work. He was sure of himself there. Naked to the waist, hot and grimy with labour, they squatted on their heels for a few minutes and talked, seeing each other dimly by the light of the safety lamps, while the black coal rose jutting around them, and the props of wood stood like little pillars in the low, black, very dark temple There was an ease, a go-as-you-please about the day underground, a delightful camaraderie of men shut off alone from the rest of the world, in a dangerous place, and a variety of labour, holing, timbering, and a glamour of mystery and adventure in the atmosphere, that made the pit not unattractive to him when he had again got over his anguish of desire for the open air and the sea.²

Through naturalistic technique Lawrence was able to create

¹In The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), pp. 118-119.

²D. H. Lawrence, "Daughters of the Vicar", in The Prussian Officer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945), pp. 81-82.

on stage a sense of life being lived. There are no heroes or villains in these plays; nor is there a movement towards strongly dramatic climaxes. Lawrence's careful observation of humorous details lightens the dominant mood of resignation to sorrow. In reviewing the 1967 production of The Daughter-in-Law, Frank Marcus commented:

The most remarkable thing about this production is its realism. The characters are as rounded as figures from a canvas by Courbet. The household tasks, preparing, cooking, serving and eating meals, the miner washing off the grime after a day in the pit, his clothes drying over the oven, have an absolute verisimilitude.³

The impact of the Lawrence trilogy was captured in the New Statesman article, "A Major Miner Dramatist":

The three plays running in repertory at the Court constitute one of the outstanding theatrical events in recent years Gill has established beyond doubt that Lawrence is a major dramatist in the naturalistic tradition, unrivalled in his ear for working-class speech

Despite the persistent humour, the warmth and depth of the way these characters feel for each other, this is a grim hard life they live, and to embody it as totally as these actors do must be a painful experience. But they never betray Lawrence's truth by attempting to alleviate it with sentimentality, caricature, or the suggestion of false hope. They do not, in short, patronize these people The actors are so sunk in their roles that every unemphasized gesture is part of a personal history, a network of relationships, and a contribution to creating a portrait of a way of live that extends beyond these tiny rooms.⁴

The power of these dramas has influenced recent productions at the Royal Court to such an extent that the 1968 Lawrence

³"The Dominant Sex", Plays and Players, XV (May, 1967), p. 19.

⁴New Statesman, LXXV, No. 1932 (1968), 390.

season is now referred to as "legendary" in London theatrical circles. Lawrence's acquaintance with the roots of the naturalistic tradition combined with his knowledge and love of the theatre to create three individual, moving, and detailed works of art. In their own quiet strength and power they are significant additions to the Lawrence canon.

CHAPTER ONE

NATURALISM FROM ZOLA TO LAWRENCE:

PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

Time submits terminology to subtle shifts and refinements. What naturalism meant to D. H. Lawrence does not necessarily coincide with what it means today. Like so many literary terms, "naturalism" eludes precise definition. This term must be viewed in its historical context; it must be seen in relation to other literary terms, particularly romanticism and realism. The only satisfactory approach to definition is to examine the general tenets usually considered as "naturalistic" and then to see them at work. These findings will be applied to the technique and content employed by D. H. Lawrence in the following early plays: A Collier's Friday Night (1909), The Daughter-in-Law (1912), and The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd (1914).

Naturalism is defined simply in A Handbook to Literature as "the application of the principles of scientific determinism to fiction".¹ This technique differs, then,

¹W. F. Thrall and A. Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, revised by C. Hugh Holman (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 301.

immediately from its generic term, realism, in that it is dominated by a scientific attitude, an attitude derived mainly from the materialistic writings of certain nineteenth-century philosophers and scientists. Realism as a literary trend emphasizes faithfulness in the rendition of actuality. The editors of The Modern Tradition state that "in all schools of realism objectivity of some kind is a main tenet".² Joseph Shipley's Dictionary of World Literature mentions the importance of sense perceptions and the objectivity of the author in reporting them: "He aims to give the reader a strong sense of participation by circumstantiality and relative fullness of detail".³ Naturalism also employs these devices, but employs them within a broad philosophic framework of determinism and materialism. This framework controls the author's use of his materials. For the materialist, all that is real exists in sensate nature; the spiritual is denied. All things in nature operate according to the laws of scientific determinism in a cause-and-effect relationship; by means of careful analysis one can find out the motivation for all natural entities. As Emile Zola remarks in The Experimental Novel (1880), "There is an absolute determinism

²R. Ellmann and C. Feidleson, eds., The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 227.

³J. T. Shipley, ed., Dictionary of World Literature (Paterson, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1962), p. 335.

in the existing conditions of natural phenomena for the living as for the inanimate bodies".⁴ According to this system of thought, man's quest for complete knowledge can theoretically be attained. In his attempt to codify the naturalistic mode, Zola used this optimistic thesis as a starting point. However, the less attractive side of naturalism is its emphasis on "the strength of external forces (social and natural) that obstruct human freedom, and the strength of internal forces (genetic and unconscious) that limit human rationality and moral responsibility".⁵ In Modern Fiction: A Study of Values Herbert J. Muller terms naturalism "a natural culmination of the growth of the realistic spirit and a natural reaction against the excesses of febrile romanticism".⁶ The elements of reaction and innovation combined in the mind of naturalism's most eloquent theorist, Emile Zola.

Zola was the first to apply the term "naturalism" to literature. One can see, though, how it evolved from the prevailing currents of thought in the nineteenth century. Romanticism had attempted such magnificent peaks that, in spite of its successes, some failure was inevitable. In Classic, Romantic and Modern Jacques Barzun states, "The

⁴"The Novel as Social Science", in The Modern Tradition, p. 271.

⁵Dictionary of World Literature, p. 278.

⁶H. J. Muller, Modern Fiction: A Study of Values (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company [1937]), p. 160.

rebound from this disappointment was Realism".⁷ He points out how romantic perceptions and methods were reduced to the term "realism" in an attempt to put romantic goals more efficiently into practice. That realism "equated science with the common denominator of matter . . . is why the post-romantic period seems in all ways so scientific".⁸ Barzun considers naturalism both an offshoot of realism and, more importantly, a form of neo-romanticism: ". . . the esthetic principles of a Zola, or, more consciously, of a Thomas Hardy, are often nothing more than reaffirmations of romantic beliefs against a constricting convention".⁹ Zola's so-called "scientific" method, then, might be termed more accurately "applied science", with its own particular romantic emphasis.

One of the dominant French works in the reaction to romanticism was the series La comédie humaine by Honoré de Balzac. In his Preface (1842) to this work, Balzac declared himself a student of social species. Ironically, through his acquaintance with the novels of Sir Walter Scott, he had been impressed with the "infinite variety of human nature".¹⁰ Setting forth his social panorama, Balzac wrote:

⁷J. Barzun, Classic, Romantic and Modern, 2nd rev. ed. of Romanticism and the Modern Ego, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), p. 102.

⁸Ibid., p. 103.

⁹Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁰"Society as Historical Organism", in The Modern Tradition, p. 248.

I attach to common, daily facts, hidden or patent to the eye, to the acts of individual lives, and to their causes and principles, the importance which historians have hitherto ascribed to the events of public national life.¹¹

A similar concern with ordinary people was to direct Zola in his twenty-novel cycle on one family, Les Rougon-Macquart, which he subtitled "une histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second~~e~~ Empire".

Zola's sub-title indicates to some extent his debt to Hippolyte Taine. Zola's concern was the human being as seen at home ("naturelle") as well as in society ("sociale") and in history ("sous le Seconde Empire"). Taine, influenced by the social and environmental determinism of Auguste Comte, looked at literature from a utilitarian point of view. In his History of English Literature (1864) he declared that great literature "resembles those admirable instruments of remarkable sensitiveness which physicists make use of to detect and measure the most profound and delicate changes that occur in a human body".¹² Taine thought causation of human character centred mainly in race, milieu, and moment. "Race" is the given heritage of an individual--his skin colour, body type, temperament, ancestral traits. "Milieu" is the environment of the individual--home conditions, the political system, climate, and historical events. "Moment" refers to all the

¹¹Ibid., p. 252.

¹²"Art as Historical Product", in The Modern Tradition, p. 264.

circumstances--physiological, social and otherwise--that stimulate a given action at a certain time. These three principles were incorporated by Zola into his writings, as exemplified both by his fiction and his several statements of theory.

Zola presented his views on naturalism in somewhat simplistic terms in the Preface to the second edition (1868) of his first successful novel, Thérèse Raquin, a chilling tale of the effects of murder on the adulterous love-affair of a drab shop-assistant and a part-time artist. Expressing his desire to study temperaments, Zola stated that the people he wrote about were "completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by the inexorable laws of their physical nature. Thérèse and Laurent are human animals, nothing more".¹³ Yet this deterministic theory is not borne out by the facts of the novel. What really corrodes the love affair is what most readers would call the pangs of conscience and remorse. This feeling is externalized in the Poe-like presence of the livid bite on Laurent's neck which never heals, the accusing figure of Camille's paralytic mother, and the persistent appearance of the dead Camille in the portraits of Laurent. Are these images scientific? No, but Zola did not deny the author the right to select, arrange, and interpret his

¹³Emile Zola, Thérèse Raquin, trans. with intro. by L. W. Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 20.

materials, for, in Mes Haines (1866), he wrote: "Une oeuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament".¹⁴ The temperament or personality of the artist does have, Zola thought, a part to play.

However, later naturalistic writers favoured an impersonal, objective treatment; it was in this direction Zola moved as his work matured. Particularly influential in solidifying his views was the treatise by Claude Bernard, L'introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale (1865). Zola's The Experimental Novel was the direct transcription to literary theory of Bernard's approach to medicine:

The experimental novel is a consequence of the scientific evolution of the century; it continues and completes physiology, which itself leans for support on chemistry and medicine; it substitutes for the study of the abstract and the metaphysical man the study of the natural man, governed by physical and chemical laws, and modified by the influences of his surroundings; it is in one word the literature of our scientific age.¹⁵

Using Bernard's analytical methods, Zola wished to subject human beings to close scrutiny and dissection. But his hypothetical cases were fictive, not verifiable in reality, no matter how documentary they might seem. Even though Zola declared that the tragedy in Thérèse Raquin is one of environment, the novel does not so indicate. Thérèse and Laurent are completely responsible for their actions--for their desire

¹⁴Cited in Introduction, Thérèse Raquin, p. 14.

¹⁵"The Novel as Social Science", in The Modern Tradition, p. 279.

to murder Camille. There is, consequently, a false, melodramatic ring to sentences such as this: "They wept and said nothing, thinking of the sink of filth in which they had been living and would go on living if they were cowardly enough to remain alive".¹⁶ In a later naturalistic novel, Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy, a similar love-and-murder situation raises the same problem of the role played by free will in a rational decision. The deterministic view seems to reveal a limited, incomplete explanation of human nature and the way it works--a major flaw, perhaps, in the naturalistic credo.

Although the most influential statement regarding naturalism was Le roman expérimental, the Goncourt brothers, as early as 1864, had advocated clinical realism in their preface to Germinie Lacerteux. Zola agreed with the Goncourts that the naturalistic writer tries to know phenomena so as to make himself master of them. Zola viewed experimental results as guideposts to aid society in avoiding certain aberrations. He pleads his case with repetition and frequent inconsistency, but always with fervour, as he poses questions such as the following: "Since medicine, which was an art, is becoming a science, why should not literature also become a science by means of the experimental method?"¹⁷ The influence of Charles Darwin emphasized for Zola the interaction of

¹⁶Thérèse Raquin, p. 254.

¹⁷In The Modern Tradition, p. 282

individual and society in the survival of the fittest.

Marx and Engels viewed history as the battleground for vast economic and social forces. This sense of history is present in Etienne Lantier's visit to the Voreux mining area in one of Zola's mature novels, Germinal (1885). Here Zola painted a broad, but detailed canvas of the lives of the ordinary people of a mining area, both rich and poor, beset by the problems of everyday life as well as by the larger problems of social change which focus on a massive strike and its effects. The ostensibly objective third-person narrative often rises above the action to comment on the situation:

The devouring shaft had swallowed its daily ration of men: nearly seven hundred hands, who were now at work in this giant ant-hill, everywhere making holes in the earth, drilling at it like an old worm-eaten piece of wood.¹⁸

The novel concludes on a surprisingly idealistic, optimistic note. The concluding paragraph is a poetic hymn to the process of germination and rebirth in which the author expresses his hopes for the future. Even Zola's own naturalism was beginning to transcend in application its theoretical limitations.

Yet Zola described the role of the experimental novelist as that of

. . . the one who accepts proven facts, who points out in man and in society the mechanism of the

¹⁸Emile Zola, Germinal, trans. by Havelock Ellis (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948), p. 27.

phenomena over which science is mistress, and who does not interpose his personal sentiments, except in the phenomena whose determinism is not yet settled, and who tries to test as much as he can this personal sentiment . . . by observation and experiment.¹⁹

The dogmatism of this statement need not apply to all those whom one would call naturalistic writers. In fact, Zola's position in this regard can be seen to weaken progressively as the naturalistic novel extends its range. Herbert J. Muller comments:

The entire naturalistic movement is by no means . . . to be judged by the extreme statement of Zola's views. Few of his followers went so far in theory, nor in practice did he himself. The Experimental Novel was one of a number of polemical treatises designed to present a striking exposition of his creed²⁰

Where naturalism is most recognizably in contrast with realism is in its emphasis on the more sordid and animalistic side of human nature, termed tranche de vie or slice-of-life realism, and in its presentation of ordinary rather than exceptional or heroic human beings. William York Tindall discusses this aspect of naturalism in Forces in Modern British Literature:

Zola called his novels naturalistic. By naturalism, a term for critics to quarrel over, he meant scientific or, better, Positivistic realism, which he hoped by this name to distinguish from the artistic realism of Flaubert. Naturalism is an exaggeration, with the aid of Comte, Taine, and the scientists, of the methods of Balzac and Flaubert. . . . it is customary to reserve the label for

¹⁹In The Modern Tradition, pp. 288-289.

²⁰Modern Fiction: A Study of Values, p. 166.

Zola's novels and the work of his followers, the early novels of Huysmans, for example, and the stories of Maupassant. The naturalistic novel usually differs from the realistic in the kind of reality it includes. . . . [Their] novels are filled [not with the average reality of the realists but] with brutality, ugliness, and degradation.²¹

The main conflict which usually emerges in naturalistic novels is that of man with his environment.

A lighter note concerning naturalism is provided in the letters of the Goncourt brothers:

This evening Flaubert, while paying tribute to his colleague's genius, attacked the prefaces, the doctrines, the naturalist professions of faith, in a word all the rather flamboyant humbug with which Zola helps along the sale of his books. Zola replied roughly to this effect: . . . I had to earn my living with nothing but my pen . . . it has left me with--how shall I put it?--a certain taste for charlatanism; . . . I consider the word Naturalism as ridiculous as you do, but I shall go on repeating it over and over again, because you have to give new things new names for the public to think they are new²²

Whether this statement is true or apocryphal must be left to the reader's imagination.

Before moving to the manifestations of naturalism in the theatre, one must examine briefly the naturalistic trend in the novel. In many ways pure naturalism became hybridized with romantic elements so that slum conditions often replaced

²¹W. Y. Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature: 1885-1956, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 124.

²²Edmund and Jules de Goncourt, "The Fad of Naturalism", in The Modern Tradition, pp. 297-298.

trees and flowers as a subject for idealization. The middle-class decorum of certain Victorian authors resulted in the softening of brutality by sentiment or moral tags. Commenting on naturalism in England, Herbert J. Muller states:

Novelists borrowed his [Zola's] method and subject matter without clearly subscribing to his mechanistic philosophy or his devotion to science; naturalism in England was only an extreme form of realism, not a definite, self-contained program.²³

There was a softening in the form when it was adapted for English use. Nevertheless, the philosophical framework did remain largely intact in the writings of the early English naturalists.

One of the first of these was George Gissing, who shows in New Grub Street (1891) a certain fastidious aloofness in dealing with the plight of his lower-class characters. Harold Biffen, a character in this novel, indicates the tension which faces the naturalistic writer:

'I don't know any writer who has treated ordinary vulgar life with fidelity and seriousness. Zola writes deliberate tragedies; his vilest figures become heroic from the place they will fill in a strongly imagined drama. I want to deal with the essentially unheroic, with the day-to-day life of that vast majority of people who are at the mercy of paltry circumstances.'²⁴

This everyday life of the unheroic is an important part of naturalistic technique. It is here that a skilful naturalistic

²³Modern Fiction: A Study of Values, p. 185.

²⁴New Grub Street (London: The Bodley Head, 1967), p. 119.

writer can succeed in capturing the fabric of everyday lives.

Perhaps the most successful naturalistic British writer was George Moore. Moore wrote the first naturalistic novel in English, A Mummer's Wife (1885), in which he traced the gradual degradation of a respectable woman of the lower middle class who elopes with an actor and falls into alcoholism. William York Tindall comments on Moore's approach to naturalism:

For this relentless sequence of cause and effect Moore took his notebook to the pottery district, travelled with actors, and mastered the symptoms and progress of alcoholism. Like Zola he provided detailed descriptions of the motivating environment: asthma, the shop, the potteries, the theater. His attitude is sympathetic but aloof. He refuses to moralize, to soften or distort.²⁵

In Esther Waters (1894) Moore succeeded in presenting the joys and sorrows of an ordinary servant-girl who is able to maintain a firm grip on reality in spite of the vagaries of fortune. Seduction, an illegitimate child, the death of loved ones, the return of her first lover, the loss of all her life-savings in a horse-race--all these potentially melodramatic elements are handled with tenderness and objectivity. Throughout the novel the reader is aware of the shaping force of environment and social class on Esther. Yet she rises from all her sufferings with the nobility and dignity of true womanhood.

Environment plays an even more important role in the

²⁵Forces, p. 127.

novels of Thomas Hardy. Elements of naturalism are present in the pessimistic fatalism which controls the lives of his characters. The brooding presence of Egdon Heath is evoked in the opening chapter of The Return of the Native (1878). This gloomy heath is presented as a fellow sufferer of the ravages of fate. Naturalistic elements combine in Hardy's works with a pastoral setting.

Certain writers of the turn-of-the-century might be termed "moderate realists" or "timid naturalists". These include Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy. Their novels are rooted in the naturalistic tradition, but are unconcerned with the more sordid and bestial aspects of human nature. In The Old Wives' Tale (1908) Bennett, acknowledging the influence of Maupassant, portrayed in great detail the contrasting lives of two sisters--one remaining for life in the Five Towns, the other living a life of seeming adventure in France, amidst great political and personal turmoil. The corrosive effects of time as well as the effects of heredity and environment act on Constance and Sophia Baines. W. Y. Tindall thinks the novel is "an epic of dull lives and of all life"²⁶, but a delight in everyday life is communicated in spite of the moments of drabness and boredom in the two girls' lives.

John Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga belongs more to the realistic tradition in its vein of social satire and

²⁶Ibid., p. 134.

commentary. Galsworthy's naturalistic roots, though, are apparent in the power of cause and effect, heredity and environment on the life of the wealthy upper-middle-class Forsyte family. Environmental roots are embodied in the title of the first novel in the series, The Man of Property (1906). Soames Forsyte can never be free from the shackles of property which his family has placed on him. He had made his free-spirited, beautiful wife, Irene, part of his property in such a way that it is inevitable that she will be attracted to the equally free artistic temperament of the architect, Philip Bosinney. As the novel continues, the world of art and the world of property are at definite odds with one another. Cause and effect limit the lives of the inhabitants of worlds controlled by environmental factors.

These novelists typify the kind of naturalism appearing in English fiction when Lawrence began to write. From its initial Zolaesque state, naturalism had become mainly, by 1906, a more fatalistic form of realism, not a distinct mode in itself. By this time, too, naturalistic devices and themes were playing an important role in the novels of adolescence which were achieving prominence. Some important examples of the bildungsroman were Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh (1903), D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers (1913), and W. Somerset Maugham's Of Human Bondage (1915). This form was to culminate in James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916). H. J. Muller comments on the contribution of the naturalistic novelists: "The naturalists are

important chiefly because they hacked a path through the jungles of artifice and convention, enabling later writers to make more balanced, penetrating and inclusive studies of life."²⁷ What Zola initially aimed for--to make man aware of what life is--the naturalistic writers showed could be done, even within an artistic framework.

By 1906 naturalism as a term relating to drama had, however, a connotation somewhat different from its meaning as applied to fiction. To trace its growth in this respect, one must return to Zola, this time to his essay "Naturalism in the Theatre" (1881). In The Theory of the Modern Stage Eric Bentley states, "Zola was not a great playwright, but . . . he knew how to speak for an epoch and also how to see into the future."²⁸ In fact, Zola was a major influence in the return of drama to respectability as an art form. Zola believed that the time had come for naturalism to take over:

[Romanticism] provided the occasion for a magnificent flowering of lyricism; that will be its eternal glory. Today, however, with the evolution accomplished, it is plain that romanticism was no more than the necessary link between classicism and naturalism Naturalism alone corresponds to our social needs; it alone has deep roots in the spirit of our times; and it alone can provide

²⁷Modern Fiction: A Study of Values, p. 40.

²⁸Eric Bentley, ed. The Theory of the Modern Stage (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 349.

a living, durable formula for our art, because this formula will express the nature of our contemporary intelligence.²⁹

Zola declared that the naturalistic writers present truth, unadorned by idealization and moralization. He had no use in his age for the writers of the past who, he felt, had counterfeited nature: "Naturalism, in letters, is equally a return to nature and to man; it is direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depiction of what man is."³⁰ Perhaps Zola's most significant and prophetic statement, particularly in view of its reverberations in twentieth-century literature, was: "The naturalistic movement comes along and says squarely that poetry is everywhere, in everything, even more in the present and the real than in the past and the abstract. Each event at each moment has its poetic, superb aspect."³¹ Although anxious to see naturalism incorporated into the theatre, Zola admitted that he was not the one to do it. Yet he was eager for his followers to take up his ideas:

The future is with naturalism. The formula will be found; it will be proved that there is more poetry

²⁹"Naturalism in the Theatre", trans. by Albert Bermel, in The Theory of the Modern Stage, p. 359.

³⁰"Naturalism in the Theatre" (1880), in Documents of Modern Literary Realism, George J. Becker, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 201. This essay is not the same as Zola's 1881 essay of the same title.

³¹"Naturalism in the Theatre", in Bentley, p. 363.

in the little apartment of a bourgeois than in all the empty, worm-eaten palaces of history.³²

Zola made the important claim that it all depends on the idea one has of what literature is, and dramatic literature in particular.³³

The dramatists who followed Zola, such as Becque, Hauptmann, Ibsen, Strindberg, Gorky, and Chekhov, were able to express the poetry in the ordinary. True to naturalistic theory, environment functions more or less deterministically in their plays. Their dialogue largely conforms to Zola's wishes: "We are moving towards simplicity, the exact word spoken without emphasis, quite naturally."³⁴ Diction was an aid in the presentation of a human document. Martin Esslin points out, in his excellent essay "Naturalism in Context", that Zola used the term document humain to show that "any truthful description of human experience, however subjective, also has an objective value as a contribution to man's knowledge of himself".³⁵ In battling with stage conventions, Zola realized that these conventions could often stand in the way of artistic truth. He would probably approve of the experimental theatre of today which attempts to break with

³²Ibid., p. 365.

³³"Naturalism in the Theatre", in Becker, p. 228.

³⁴In Bentley, The Theory, p. 371.

³⁵M. Esslin, "Naturalism in Context", The Drama Review, XIII, No. 2 (Winter, 1968), 71.

all the conventions of the past--not only theatrical, but political, social and moral--in its attempt to explore the nature of man. This freedom to experiment was a major tenet of Zola's naturalistic credo.

Les Corbeaux (1882), by Henry Becque, is an early example of the type of theatre which Zola envisioned. This play depicts the downfall of a nouveau-riche merchant family following the death of the father. The family is forced into the slums by the creditors who prey on them like vultures. The deterministic philosophy is seen in the inability of this predominantly female family to rise above its circumstances in any way other than by the ironic marriage into wealth which concludes the play. Eric Bentley comments in The Playwright as Thinker: "Becque is known, if at all, for his diabolically clever, yet forbidding Les Corbeaux, a naturalistic slice of life such as the talkers of the movement, like Zola, could never have created."³⁶ The first act concludes as the corpse of M. Vigneron is carried across the stage. Other naturalistic elements are the detailed settings, which emphasize the contrast of the rich surroundings with the humble setting of Act Four, and the use of silences in the play. In fact, Act IV, Scene V, is sub-titled "Scène Muette". The family, gathered around the lunch table, is required to express its sorrow through a silence prolongé. The play's

³⁶E. Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker: A Study of Drama in Modern Times (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 131.

main theme--the power of money over human lives--is expressed by M. Bourdon in Act IV, Scene VI: "Tout se paye en ce monde".³⁷

At no point can Henrik Ibsen, it seems, be called a thorough-going naturalist, yet naturalism was an important influence on his plays. In his Foreword to Four Major Plays Rolf Fjelde states:

From one perspective, Ibsen's later plays are a series of naturalistic photographs, literal and exact exposures of the social lies and corruption of the time . . . but the Ibsen of the later plays is not the Scandinavian Zola of Thérèse Raquin.³⁸

In spite of the naturalistic settings, Ibsen was able to suggest a world of psychological tension beyond the reality of an enclosed room. He could, as well, invest objects with a reality beyond their mere physical meaning, as he did with Hedda Tesman's pistols and with the wild duck. Naturalism here borders on symbolism and expressionism. In Hedda Gabler a woman is motivated by complex forces which, one senses, are both inside herself as part of her nature as well as imposed on her from without by the limitations of heredity and environment. The individuality of Ibsen's plays lies greatly in the interplay and paradox of surface and sub-surface, appearance and reality. The naturalistic veneer of many of his plays is actually multi-layered in significance. Thus Eric Bentley can say: "Ibsen pretends to write flat

³⁷H. Becque, Les Corbeaux (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1925), p. 122.

³⁸H. Ibsen, Four Major Plays, trans. by Rolf Fjelde, Signet Books (Toronto: New American Library, 1965), p. xi.

dialogue, but the opaque, uninviting sentences carry rich meanings which are enforced only by their context".³⁹ Ibsen used naturalism as one of the dramatic metaphors for the total world he wished to suggest for his characters.

August Strindberg looked to the naturalists for their willingness to allow for the complex motivations behind every human action. Influenced by the novels of the Goncourt brothers, he wrote in the Preface to Miss Julie (1888): Our inquisitive souls are no longer satisfied with seeing a thing happen; we must also know how it happens".⁴⁰ But for Strindberg motivation was a complex issue made up of many small causes. Why does Miss Julie act as she does? One cannot assign her conduct merely to the deterministic forces of heredity and environment, even though they have some importance. Important also are her sexual feelings on the night of the rowdy Midsummer festival, as well as the desires which she arouses in the valet, Jean. These complex causes indicate the denial by Strindberg of a single definite cause. Why this ordinary individual, Julie, acts as she does is known fully to nobody, least of all herself. Eric Bentley comments:

In making a kind of serious parody of classic theories of tragedy, Strindberg elevates the naturalistic theory of Zola to the level of imagination and in so doing parodies Zola. The

³⁹The Playwright as Thinker, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁰"A Naturalistic Manifesto", in The Modern Tradition, p. 294.

world which science coolly and objectively reveals, so Strindberg implies, cannot be coolly and objectively regarded. To think that it can is the error of Zolaism.⁴¹

Strindberg, in moving away from the coolly analytical point of view of Zola, moved inward to the psyches of his characters, where he found chaotic tension and unresolved turmoil. What Strindberg understood naturalism to be is seen in his statement:

[Naturalism] is not a dramatic method like that of Becque, a simple photography which includes everything, even the speck of dust on the lens of the camera. That is realism; a method, lately exalted in art, a tiny art which cannot see the wood for the trees. That is the false naturalism, which believes that art consists simply of sketching a piece of nature in a natural manner; but it is not the true naturalism, which seeks out those points in life where the great conflicts occur, which rejoices in seeing what can be seen every day.⁴²

To express this tight, close world, Strindberg wanted his plays acted in small, intimate theatres where the artificialities of theatrical conventions would be at a minimum.

In Russia, naturalism reached a high point in the plays of Anton Chekhov and in the naturalistic school of acting advocated by Stanislavsky. Raymond Williams discusses the working relationship between these men as well as the accomplishments of Chekhov in drama:

Chekhov complained of Stanislavsky's naturalism frequently in his life, and seems to have realized

⁴¹The Playwright as Thinker, p. 40.

⁴²Cited in Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 103.

the inevitability of the failure of the attempt at "complete, psychologically-justified illusion." But in the drama he was of Stanislavsky's camp, and of the camp too of the decadent naturalism, which, in Russia and elsewhere, succeeded him. Perhaps no man is more completely characteristic of the naturalist theatre than Chekhov. He had all its virtues and its talents, in a measure, indeed, amounting to genius. But also he had its limitations.⁴³

Chekhov succeeded in capturing in his plays the quiet music of ordinary human beings immersed in the slow pace of everyday life, with its problems big and small. In a letter to M. V. Kiselev (1887), Chekhov, concerned with the hostile reaction to his works, wrote:

A littérateur is not a confectioner, not a dealer in cosmetics, not an entertainer; he is a man bound, under compulsion, by the realization of his duty and by his conscience; having put his hand to the plow, he must not plead weakness; and no matter how painful it is to him, he is constrained to overcome his aversion, and soil his imagination with the sordidness of life. He is just like any ordinary reporter. . . . A writer must be as objective as a chemist; he must abandon the subjective line; he must know that dunghills play a very respectable part in a landscape, and that evil passions are as inherent in life as good ones.⁴⁴

Thus this usually restrained playwright spoke out strongly for freedom in choice of artistic materials. For Chekhov this freedom meant primarily the right to deal with human behaviour, including passion, vice, and more particularly, foolishness, both as he saw it and as his characters reveal it to one another or hide it in their conversation.

⁴³Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, pp. 136-137.

⁴⁴"Dunghills as Artistic Material", in The Modern Tradition, p. 245.

Other noteworthy naturalistic plays were The Weavers (1892) by Gerhart Hauptmann and The Lower Depths (1902) by Maxim Gorky. Hauptmann's particular contribution in The Weavers was his demonstration of the determining power of history and environment on a social class--a whole mass of people rather than individuals. Gorky's play descends to genuine slice-of-life drama in depicting the lowest inhabitants of a Moscow slum.

By the 1900's the forces of naturalism had been felt in English theatre. Zola's plays had been translated for the English stage and performed as early as 1879. However, it was after the visit of the Théâtre Libre to London in February, 1889, that Zola's plays rose in estimation. J. T. Grein founded the Independent Theatre in 1891. Following the sensation of the opening performance of Ibsen's Ghosts, Grein chose Thérèse Raquin for the second production. George Moore was co-translator with Teixeira de Mattos. Critical opinion was generally favorable, although moral alarm was often the dominant reaction.⁴⁵

Because of current trends in the theatre and the influence of essays such as George Bernard Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism, naturalism, by 1900, had largely become diluted with social drama. The result was the social-message play. Such a play is John Galsworthy's Strife (1909), which shows the effects of a strike upon the rich and poor

⁴⁵See Eileen E. Pryme, "Zola's Plays in England, 1870-1900", French Studies, XIII, No. 1 (1959), 28-38.

of a town. Galsworthy used contrasting settings--the rich home of the Underwoods and the humble kitchen of the Roberts' cottage. Act II, Scene I, is described as "an open muddy space crowded with workmen". Characterization is paltry in this play; naturalism has been clearly used for a social rather than an artistic purpose. Galsworthy declared that his aim in using the naturalistic mode was:

to create such an illusion of actual life passing on the stage as to compel the spectator for the moment to lose all sense of artifice, to think, talk, and move with the people he sees thinking, talking, and moving in front of him. . . . [The service of such naturalistic drama is] the swaying and focusing of man's feelings and thoughts in the various departments of national life. It will be like a steady lamp, held up from time to time, in whose light things will be seen for a space clearly and in due proportion, freed from the mists of prejudice and partisanship.⁴⁶

Such motives are laudatory from a social point of view, but do not necessarily guarantee good drama.

The real achievement of the naturalistic playwrights is described by Martin Esslin:

They discussed the magic that lies behind the seemingly commonplace surfaces of ordinary life, the tragic greatness of simple people, the poetry of silences and reticences, the bitter ironies of unspoken thoughts.⁴⁷

The great naturalistic writers were not in fact scientists at all: they were poets. Such then was the state of naturalism in world drama and in English theatre when Lawrence began

⁴⁶Cited in Introduction, J. Galsworthy, Representative Plays, intro. by George P. Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), pp. xix-xx.

⁴⁷"Naturalism in Context", p. 76.

to write. It is not surprising that he was to use this realistic form to present his own response to reality. His early plays were rooted in a tradition which had established itself in less than thirty years.

CHAPTER TWO

D. H. LAWRENCE AND THE THEATRE:

1906-1914

The letters of D. H. Lawrence and the memoirs of his friends and colleagues reveal to some extent his knowledge of the theatre and of naturalistic trends in the literature and drama of his time. These writings provide helpful indications of Lawrence's interests and how he developed them. For example, Lawrence shared many of the literary experiences of his formative adolescent years with his close friend, Jessie Chambers, who recounted in 1935 her memories of these years in D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record. Jessie's writings mention Lawrence's acquaintance with the French authors involved in the birth of naturalism. While Lawrence was tutoring Jessie in French, they read much French literature together, including the works of Victor Hugo, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, and Balzac. Lawrence admired Flaubert's Madame Bovary "immensely",¹ Jessie remembers, and he was "very impressed"² with Balzac's La Peau de Chagrin. Although

¹E. T. (Jessie Chambers), D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record, J. D. Chambers, ed. (2nd ed.; New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1965), p. 107.

²Ibid., p. 105.

Emile Zola is not included in Jessie's list of their early readings, Lawrence was well-acquainted with the development of realism in the French novel.

According to biographer Harry T. Moore, Lawrence's early experience of the theatre was largely that of most provincial English lads of his day. Entertainment consisted largely of the strolling players who travelled from town to town. In The Intelligent Heart Moore describes one such troupe:

The most popular among these troupes was Teddy Rayner's company that acted under a huge tent. Several times they found business in Eastwood district so good that they remained for months, playing everything from Shakespeare to Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street and Maria Martin, or Murder in the Red Barn. Lawrence once wrote of having seen Hamlet at "the tu'penny travelling theatre" and "having sat in pale transport" while the armored Ghost chanted "'Amblet, 'Amblet, I am thy father's ghost."³

"Penny readings" at the British School frequently included the works of Charles Dickens.⁴

After Lawrence became a friend of the Chambers family, he organized play readings in his "excited" and "domineering" way.⁵ Jessie's father played Macduff in their reading of Macbeth. Three Ibsen plays were included in their readings: Rosmersholme, Lawrence's favourite; The Lady from the Sea;

³The Intelligent Heart: The Story of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954), p. 12.

⁴Ibid.

⁵D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record, p. 108.

and Hedda Gabler, which he "thoroughly disliked".⁶

The Chambers family was rather upset by the young Lawrence's interest (circa 1907) in the philosophical writings of such agnostics as J. M. Robertson, T. H. Huxley, Haeckel, and Darwin. He moved from these writers to Locke, Bishop Berkeley, Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, and William James.⁷ Jessie Chambers comments:

This rationalistic teaching impressed Lawrence deeply. He came upon it at a time of spiritual fog, when the lights of orthodox religion and morality were proving wholly inadequate, perplexed as he was by his own personal dilemma. My feeling was that he tried to fill up a spiritual vacuum by swallowing materialism at a gulp.⁸

It seems that Lawrence experienced these authors from a feeling deeply personal rather than from an academic stance. Such was his approach to almost everything which he read.

Jessie Chambers describes Lawrence at age sixteen as immersed in an orgy of reading. Ranging through the great English classics, he settled on Dickens and George Eliot as favourites.⁹ From this intoxicated state Lawrence moved to what Jessie calls a "purely receptive"¹⁰ stage. Palgrave's Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics was succeeded by writers

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 84, 112-113.

⁸Ibid., p. 112.

⁹Ibid., pp. 94-99.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 99.

such as Emerson, Thoreau, Carlyle, Emily Bronte, and the great French authors.¹¹ By this time Lawrence was almost twenty-two. His reading at this time included the works of George Meredith, George Gissing, Hardy, Wilde, and Synge.¹²

Jessie Chambers speaks of occasional visits to the theatre with Lawrence. They had seen Hamlet and Macbeth.¹³

Opera was also popular, she recalls, with Lawrence:

Going to the theatre was the same as reading, Lawrence identified himself with the play, and for the time being lived in its atmosphere. Now and again we saw a D'Oyley Carte opera--Lawrence was often humming a tune from Il Trovatore--and we heard Tannhauser. Once on a Saturday afternoon we went to a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, and on another occasion we saw Galsworthy's Strife.¹⁴

Lawrence was evidently experiencing the popular operas and plays of his day--the works of Ibsen, Wagner, Shaw, and Galsworthy.

Lawrence's interest in the fine arts extended to painting and drawing. In fact, he had tried his hand at these before he began to write seriously. In The Intelligent Heart Moore discusses Lawrence's early attempts at drawing: he copied illustrations from magazines and had lessons from G. L. Parkinson, a creator of ornamental pottery.¹⁵ Lawrence

¹¹Ibid., pp. 100-105.

¹²Ibid., p. 110.

¹³Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁵The Intelligent Heart, p. 54.

found the plaster-cast look of drawings from nature unappealing and, as Moore reports, "concentrated on copying reproductions, quiet landscapes by Corot, Brangwyn, and Greiffenhagen."¹⁶ Such early attempts certainly increased Lawrence's response to form and visual sense, providing a basis for vigorous scene-painting in his writings.

In 1908, Lawrence saw the most exciting actress of his day. On June 25 he wrote to Blanche Jennings:

Sarah Bernhardt was wonderful and terrible. She opened up the covered tragedy that works the grimaces of this wonderful dime show. Oh, to see her, and to hear her, a wild creature, a gazelle with a beautiful panther's fascination and fury, laughing in musical French, screaming with true panther cry She is not pretty--her voice is not sweet--but there she is, the incarnation of wild emotion which we share with all live things She represents the primeval passions of women, and she is fascinating to an extraordinary degree¹⁷

The extent of Lawrence's involvement in this production of La Dame aux Camélias is revealed by Jessie Chambers:

The next day he wrote to me that the play had so upset him that at the end he rushed from his place and found himself battering at the doors until an attendant came and let him out.¹⁸

Bernhardt's charisma had triggered a profound emotional response in this young admirer.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. with intro. by Harry T. Moore (2 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1962), I, 18.

¹⁸D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record, p. 109.

From October 12, 1908, until early in 1912, D. H. Lawrence was employed as a schoolmaster at the Davidson Road School in Croydon, South London. These years, more than any others, seem to have been the period in which he began to write seriously. On November 11, 1908, he conveyed to Blanche Jennings his delight in the novels of Balzac, such as Eugénie Grandet and Old Goriot:

Balzac can lay bare the living body of the great Life better than anybody in the world. He doesn't hesitate at the last covering; he doesn't point out the absurdities of the intricate innumerable wrappings and accessories of the body of Life; he goes straight to the flesh; and, unlike de Maupassant or Zola, he doesn't inevitably light on a wound or a festering sore¹⁹

Lawrence's mention of Zola at this point indicates at least a passing knowledge of his works. Jessie Chambers's detailed report of Lawrence's readings during the Croydon years includes many other authors considered realistic or naturalistic in style. Among the English authors, he read Samuel Butler, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, and George Moore; among the Russian authors, he read Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gorky, and Dostoevsky. Verlaine and Baudelaire were the "two great poetic lights in his firmament" at this time; also he admired Walt Whitman.²⁰ The lists of Jessie Chambers are by no means exhaustive, but do provide helpful indications of Lawrence's reading habits during these formative years.

¹⁹Collected Letters, I, 36.

²⁰A Personal Record, pp. 119-123.

A. W. McLeod, a colleague and friend of Lawrence at the Croydon school, recalls Lawrence's reading interests at that time: "He read everything he could lay hands on--plays, verse and novels especially--from Ibsen, Verhaeren and Peacock to so humble a writer as Mary Mann."²¹ Lawrence's letters during this period reveal he was especially fond of Gissing's The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft and Wells's Tono-Bungay.²²

Some of Lawrence's pupils at Croydon were from actor families. Lawrence wrote on December 2, 1908, to Jessie's sister, May Holbrook:

I have Std IV--about 50 boys now. They are queerly mixed. Six are the orphans of actors and actresses, who live in the Actor's home near us. They are delightful boys, refined, mannerly, and amiable. The other week we had Beerbohm Tree and Cyril Maude and other big actresses and actors round to see them in school.²³

Philip F. T. Smith, headmaster of the school, recalled:

Lawrence was greatly interested in a section of boys who attended the school from the English Actors' Home. Some of these pupils bore well-known names connected in the past with the English stage. For a school dramatic performance, Lawrence painted all the scenery, revised and added to the text of the drama²⁴

It was about this time that Lawrence was writing his first play, A Collier's Friday Night. Lawrence invited Jessie

²¹Quoted in The Intelligent Heart, p. 75.

²²Letters to Blanche Jennings (1909-1910), Collected Letters, I, 47, 54, 60.

²³Collected Letters, I, 38.

²⁴Quoted in The Intelligent Heart, p. 79.

Chambers to London soon after his first meeting with his prospective publisher, Ford Madox Hueffer, in 1909. Jessie reports:

He had so much to tell me and to show me. He had written a play Finally we went to a theatre and, in the steep gallery, sitting between Lawrence and a negro, I watched a play called The Making of a Gentleman . . . (obviously rubbish)
 . . . : Supper over, he . . . began to show me his writings. There were poems . . . and a play that was about his home on a Friday night. Sitting there in the tiny suburban room, it troubled me deeply to see his home put before me in vivid phrases.²⁵

Lawrence was not yet ready, though, to publish his play.

The letters of 1909 indicate a continued interest in Ibsen and Synge, as well as in the British realistic authors. Lawrence sent two volumes of Ibsen's plays to Louisa Burrows (February 9 & 12, 1909), recommending Hedda Gabler as "subtlest, profoundest--and, I think, truest; least imaginary".²⁶ Very much moved by the tragic motif in Synge's Riders to the Sea, Lawrence wrote to Blanche Jennings on November 1, 1909, requesting a copy of The Playboy of the Western World. Lawrence considered Synge to be the only new Irish playwright of merit.²⁷ Synge's influence can be felt in the tragic overtones of The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd.

²⁵A Personal Record, pp. 164-166.

²⁶Lawrence in Love: Letters to Louie Burrows, ed. with intro. by James T. Boulton (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Press, 1968), pp. 26-28.

²⁷Collected Letters, I, 57.

Lawrence's letters to Louie Burrows communicate his interest in the theatrical life of London, particularly in German and Italian opera. On September 11, 1909, he wrote: "Last week I went to the Lyceum, to see Justin McCarthy's 'Proud Prince'--never saw such rot in my life."²⁸ He saw Tristan and Isolde on October 16: " . . . was very disappointed. I would much rather have seen 'Strife'. Tristan is long, feeble, a bit hysterical, without grip or force. I was frankly sick of it."²⁹ Early in November Lawrence and Tom Smith enjoyed Rudolf Besier's comedy, Don, at the Haymarket.³⁰ On December 22, 1910, Lawrence sent Louie Burrows a volume of Gorky:

. . . a fine volume, but don't let your father read it . . . Poor Gorki: I'm very much of an English equivalent of his. I have not read all the tales, so I'll have a look at them when I'm over.³¹

Lawrence seems to have been thoroughly caught up in the opportunities for theatrical and musical enrichment which his proximity to London allowed him.

Helen Corke, in a lecture on September 18, 1950, recalled the D. H. Lawrence she knew. She spoke of their activities together in 1911:

²⁸Lawrence in Love, p. 43.

²⁹Ibid., p. 44.

³⁰Ibid., p. 45.

³¹Ibid., p. 68.

The authors he brought me now were Flaubert, Maupassant, Baudelaire, and there was no drama to compare with Oedipus Rex Once we attended a performance of Strauss's Electra at Covent Garden, sitting on the stone parapet of the gallery slips.³²

Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer) reports what may have been an apocryphal visit to the Lawrence's Eastwood home in Return from Yesterday: "All the while the young people were talking about Nietzsche and Wagner and Leopardi and Flaubert and Karl Marx and Darwin" ³³ Lawrence's letter to Mrs. Hopkin on April 26, 1911, confirms his dramatic interests:

I am sending you the dramas as I promised. No doubt it will surprise you to find me so scrupulous. Riders to the Sea is about the genuinest bit of dramatic tragedy, English, since Shakespeare, I should say; and you can read it in half an hour The Trojan Women is the finest study of women from ancient times Oedipus is the finest drama of all times. It is terrible in its accumulation--like a great big wave coming up--and then crash! Bacchae I like exceedingly for its flashing poetry. These are very great things.³⁴

Lawrence's interest in tragedy had sent him back, seemingly, to its roots in Greek classical drama.

Lawrence's letters to Louie Burrows reveal more about

³²Helen Corke, "Lawrence as I Knew Him", cited by Edward Nehls, ed. D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography, 3 Vols.; I: 1885-1919 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), pp. 142-143.

³³Cited By Nehls, I, 152.

³⁴The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. with intro. by Aldous Huxley (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932), p. 7.

his theatre-going and reading in 1911. By this time he was familiar with the naturalistic writings of Zola. On April 10 he asked Louie: "Do you want Zola's 'Débâcle' or 'L'Assommoir'? I've got 'em both to give away."³⁵ His theatre-going included a great deal of opera:

I went to Cavalleria Rusticana and Pagliacci at Croydon last night It's an Italian company from Drury Lane

I love Italian opera--it's so reckless. Damn Wagner and his bellowings at Fate and death. Damn Debussy, and his averted face. I like the Italians who run all on impulse, and don't care about their immortal souls, and don't worry about the ultimate

But if you were here tonight we'd go to Carmen, and hear those delicious little Italians love and weep.³⁶

Other theatrical events for Lawrence during this year were Puccini's La Fanciulla del West³⁷ and La Bohème.³⁸ In September he saw Bunty Pulls the String at the Haymarket, a delightful comedy on Scottish manners circa 1845,³⁹ and the opera Samson and Dalila.⁴⁰ Jessie Chambers writes: "I saw Lawrence in the October of that year when 'Helen' and I were at a theatre in London at the same time as he and his brother."⁴¹

³⁵Lawrence in Love, p. 97.

³⁶Ibid. (1 April 1911), p. 88.

³⁷Ibid., p. 113.

³⁸Ibid., p. 116.

³⁹Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 137.

⁴¹A Personal Record, p. 186.

Lawrence had enjoyed Sumurum, the wordless musical play by Max Reinhardt at the Savoy that month.⁴² On November 15, 1911, he wrote to Louie: "On Monday I was up at Covent Garden to hear Siegfried--Wagner--one of the Ring cycle that I had not heard. It was good, but it did not make any terrific impression on me."⁴³ Early in 1912 Lawrence reports: "Hueffer drove me in great state to the Court Theatre, where we heard some Morality Players--Yeats and Rev. something Adderley."⁴⁴ These letters indicate that Lawrence had a lively interest in the current entertainment and drama which brightened the London stage. His interest was probably heightened by his involvement at this time in writing his first plays.

By 1911 Lawrence was hopeful of publication for some of his plays. Writing to his sister Ada in October he said: "Garnett is going to get my verses published, and perhaps a vol. of plays in Spring. I am terribly busy."⁴⁵ Earlier he had written to Louie Burrows: "I had back the play that Hueffer had sent to Granville Barker--with a 'read it with much interest, but afraid I don't want it' note."⁴⁶ On

⁴²Lawrence in Love, p. 140.

⁴³Ibid., p. 149.

⁴⁴Collected Letters (10 Feb. 1912), I, 99.

⁴⁵Ibid., I, 84.

⁴⁶Lawrence in Love (29 Aug. 1911), p. 130.

October 6, 1911, Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett:

I send you this, the one play I have at home. I have written to Mr. Hueffer for the other two. This is the least literary--and the least unified of the three. I tried to write for the stage--I tried to make it end stagily. If I send it you at once, you can read it at your leisure. The first scenes are good.⁴⁷

Lawrence may be referring here to his early version of The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd. In the following months Lawrence was engaged in trying to get his plays back from Hueffer, who had mislaid them. The plays were finally returned to Lawrence on April 5, 1912:

Mrs. Hueffer sent me the plays today Mrs. Hueffer is "so sorry the plays were delayed. They might have taken quite well, while collieries are in the air. But perhaps it is not too late. You must get them published, with the aid of Mr. Garnett." So you see the fat's in the fire there. The plays are very interesting, but again, formless. Form will never be my strong point, she says, but I needn't be quite so bad.⁴⁸

James T. Boulton, editor of Lawrence in Love, conjectures that the plays referred to were The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd, The Merry Go Round, and A Collier's Friday Night.⁴⁹ But Raymond Williams dates The Merry Go Round later and replaces it here with The Daughter-in-Law.⁵⁰ No mention of The

⁴⁷Letters, p. 11.

⁴⁸Collected Letters, I, 107.

⁴⁹Lawrence in Love, footnote 4, p. 139.

⁵⁰D. H. Lawrence, Three Plays: A Collier's Friday Night, The Daughter-in-Law, The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd; intro. by Raymond Williams (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 7.

Daughter-in-Law is found in Lawrence's published letters.

However, he does not refer to The Merry Go Round by name before his letter to Edward Garnett on November 14, 1912.

The theme and style of The Daughter-in-Law are similar enough to the other two plays to suggest that it was most likely among the three which Hueffer read.

Lawrence's reading had now expanded to include Chekhov. Jessie Chambers recalls his reading the story "The Man in the Red Muffler".⁵¹ On April 22, 1912, Lawrence sent a letter of thanks to P. F. T. Smith and his teaching colleagues for a going-away present of two books of Russian drama: "It was awfully nice of you and the other chaps and Miss Mason to get me those two books. The plays are exceedingly interesting. I hope you read them. Tchekhov is a new thing in drama."⁵² To May Chambers Holbrook he wrote of his enjoyment in reading Shaw's Man and Superman.⁵³

In 1912 Lawrence was quite excited at the prospect of having one of his plays, most likely The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd, performed. This excitement coincided with his love affair with Frieda Weekley. On April 17 he wrote to Edward Garnett:

It is huge to think of Iden Payne acting me on

⁵¹A Personal Record, p. 184.

⁵²Letters, p. 33.

⁵³Collected Letters, I, 104.

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.⁵⁴

Lawrence's elopement conflicted with his plans to see this production, which, it seems did not materialize:

Mrs. Weekley is going to Germany on the 4th of May. I want to go then, because we could have at least one week together. I should think it wouldn't matter, would it, if I weren't in London when the little play was performed? And I wanted to see it, but as things are, I want to go to Germany more.⁵⁵

In an article "The Plays of D. H. Lawrence" Arthur E. Waterman writes: "When two of his plays were given stage performances, he didn't bother to see them. The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd was done in London in 1926 and David the following year, but Lawrence, who was living in Italy at the time, wrote that he couldn't come."⁵⁶ Waterman's tone indicates that Lawrence was not at all interested in seeing these plays; he omits the fact that Lawrence was seriously ill at this time with both malaria and tuberculosis.⁵⁷ Lawrence's letters of 1912 indicate a vital interest in the possibilities of

⁵⁴Letters, p. 32.

⁵⁵Collected Letters, I, 109.

⁵⁶Arthur E. Waterman, "The Plays of D. H. Lawrence", in D. H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, Mark Spilka, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 142.

⁵⁷The Intelligent Heart, p. 361, 365.

production, but, as he explains, the future course of his personal life was more important to him at this point.

From Germany and then Italy, Lawrence conducted most of his business affairs over the next two years. Lawrence's European travels with Frieda involved some theatre-going. He saw a peasant play in the Ober-Ammergau country: "It was an old Miracle play, with the Devil and Death, and Christ, and Maria--quaint and rather touching."⁵⁸ On December 28, 1912, Lawrence and Frieda saw Ibsen's Ghosts " . . . in the Italian in the little theatre here. It was awfully well acted, and gave me the creeps."⁵⁹ To Will Holbrook, Lawrence wrote circa January 17, 1913: "We have a box at the theatre--no it's not like Teddy Rayner's--and we see Amletto who is Hamlet with an Eyetalian hat on--and we nearly die The theatre is quite grand."⁶⁰ At this theatre Lawrence also enjoyed the "fearful melodrama" of a D'Annunzio play.⁶¹

The Garnett's son, David, spent some time with the Lawrences at Lago di Garda, Italy. He reminisces in The Golden Echo:

Lawrence was a natural copy-cat; indeed he was the only great mimic I have ever known; he had a genius for "taking people off" and could reproduce voice and manner exactly. . . .

⁵⁸To Helen Corke (1912), Letters, p. 39.

⁵⁹To Edward Garnett, Collected Letters, I, 174.

⁶⁰Collected Letters, I, 177.

⁶¹To A. D. McLeod (17 Jan. 1913), Letters, p. 92.

In the evenings we all three of us acted complicated nonsense charades, without an audience.⁶²

Lawrence had carried his childhood love of charades and play-readings with him into adulthood.

Lawrence was indebted to his friends in England for much of his reading matter while he was in Italy. A. D. McLeod had sent him Bennett's Anna of the Five Towns:

. . . To be in Hanley, and to read almost my own dialect, makes me feel quite ill. I hate England and its hopelessness. I hate Bennett's resignation. Tragedy ought really to be a kick at misery. But Anna of the Five Towns seems like an acceptance--so does all the modern stuff since Flaubert.⁶³

In thanking Edward Garnett for some books, Lawrence adds:

"I hate Strindberg--he seems unnatural, forced, a bit indecent--a bit wooden, like Ibsen, a bit skin-erupty."⁶⁴ On March 5, 1913, he requested more books from McLeod, including New Grub Street, Clarissa Harlowe, and George Moore's Salve.⁶⁵

Much of Lawrence's correspondence from Italy concerned his involvement in play-writing. To Edward Garnett he wrote on November 14, 1912:

As for the Fight for Barbara--I don't know much about plays. If ever you have time, you might tell me where you find fault with the Fight for Barbara. The Merry Go Round and the others are candidly impromptus. I know they want doing again--recasting. I should like to have them again, now, before I

⁶²Cited by Nehls, I, 176-177.

⁶³Letters, pp. 64-65.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 66

⁶⁵Collected Letters, I, 192.

really set to work on my next novel--which I have conceived--and I should like to try recasting and reforming them.⁶⁶

Sending a new play, "neither a comedy nor a tragedy", to Edward Garnett for approval on January 12, 1913, Lawrence added:

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 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 The plays I can re-write and re-create: I shall love it, when I want to do it. But I don't want to do it yet.⁶⁷

In his letter of February 1, Lawrence expressed to Garnett his aspirations for his plays:

The three plays--Fight for Barbara, Married Man, and Merry Go Round--came this morning

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 I'm 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 I don't want to write like Galsworthy, nor Ibsen, nor Strindberg, nor any of them, not even if I could. We have to hate our immediate predecessors, to get free from their authority.⁶⁸

By 1913 Lawrence was involved in the publication of Sons and Lovers and the play The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd.

⁶⁶Letters, p. 77.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 90.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 104

On August 13 he wrote to Edward Garnett, who worked for the publisher Duckworth:

I have been very busy reading the play to Frieda. It wants a lot of altering. I have made it heaps better What a jolly fine play it is, too, when I have pulled it together. I shall be glad if you'll send me the typed copy when you can, so I may alter it. Must I find another title? The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd describes it, but doesn't sound very well.⁶⁹

By August 24 Lawrence had sent the revised manuscript to Duckworth.⁷⁰ On September 4, he replied to a letter from Garnett:

Your letter made me very sad. It was mean of that Daily Mail crew. But do you think they might get the column through on the strength of the play, when it comes. That is of the same industrial interest, and they might easily work it up with Sons and Lovers.⁷¹

Lawrence promised copies of the play to many of his correspondents.

Lawrence's dealings with the American publisher, Mitchell Kennerley, were somewhat bizarre. Kennerley published avant-garde writers, but often did not pay them or, as in the case of Lawrence, gave them non-negotiable cheques. Lawrence apologized to Kennerley for sending the revised play late:

The MS. had lain with Mr. Garnett for nearly two years: he had had it typed, and I had seen nothing

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 132.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 136.

⁷¹Collected Letters, I, 222.

of it until I asked for it a week or two back. Then 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 The MS. forwarded you by Mr. Duckworth, revised by me, looks rather messy, but I am sure is perfectly easy for a printer to decipher. He can correct from that copy.⁷²

Lawrence considered Afterdamp and the German Schlagander Wetter as possible alternative titles. Edwin Bjorkman was chosen to correct the revisions and write an introduction.

In a letter which he received on December 21, 1913, Lawrence was invited to join the Stage Society. He communicated his delight to Edward Garnett:

I had a letter . . . saying that Arnold Bennett had recommended the committee to consider any work of mine I might bring out and asking me if I cared to submit the MS. . . . I said I would send them a copy of the play as soon as I had one.⁷³

By the early months of 1914, Lawrence was quite anxious about the publishing of his play and requested his friends to be patient in their requests for copies. By May 9, 1914, the play was on the market. In a letter to Edward Garnett, Lawrence remarked: "I am surprised that the papers are going on at such length about the play."⁷⁴ But Lawrence was dissatisfied with Bjorkman's introduction: "I wish you hadn't included Bjorkman's filthy little notice on me, but I like

⁷²Letters, pp. 138-139.

⁷³Ibid., p. 171.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 193.

the blue cover. I suppose, as you say, plays never sell. The notices were very good."⁷⁵

The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd was Lawrence's first published play and the only one to be published before Touch and Go in 1920. However, his avid interest in its publication refutes Arthur E. Waterman's statement that "Lawrence didn't take his dramatic work very seriously".⁷⁶ As already shown, Lawrence was very much concerned with this play, from first revision right through to publication.

Firmly rooted in realistic literary conventions, Lawrence brought to his work also his own experience of life, his concern for the telling detail and for the nuance of character. That the young Lawrence was very much aware of theatre in his time is proved by his voracious reading of all that was current and by his avid interest in live theatre, music, and stagecraft. Waterman's statement that Lawrence "rarely went to the theater, so his knowledge of drama was fairly well limited to texts rather than stage presentations,"⁷⁷ ignores the facts. Lawrence's familiarity with the printed texts is undeniable, but his knowledge and appreciation of the drama stemmed as well from the impact on him of

⁷⁵Collected Letters, I, 276.

⁷⁶"The Plays of D. H. Lawrence", in D. H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 142.

⁷⁷Ibid.

live dramatic performances which stimulated, no doubt, his imagination and provided him with a sound understanding of the principles of theatricality and stagecraft.

CHAPTER THREE

A COLLIER'S FRIDAY NIGHT: THE FABRIC OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Although A Collier's Friday Night was written in 1909, while Lawrence was teaching at Croydon, it was not published until 1934.¹ The materials with which Lawrence deals in this play were incorporated almost intact into the "reckoning night" sequence (Chapter VIII) in Sons and Lovers.² However, this first attempt at play-writing indicates a careful insight into and observance of the many elements which constituted family life in a mining town, thus demonstrating the dramatic viability of these materials. Structurally, the play observes the unities of time and place. Lawrence has successfully transformed the audience into a window in the fourth wall, observing the minutiae of life in the Lambert household. Why Friday night? Because it was the most important night of the week: the father brings home the pay; the children conclude their week at school; the mother prepares to bake the bread; the father splits up the pay with his workers; the mother goes to the market; the daughter

¹The Complete Plays of D. H. Lawrence (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 469.

²Sons and Lovers (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), pp. 195 ff.

follows with her girlfriend, expecting to meet some male friends; the father goes out drinking; and the son stays home to tutor his girlfriend and watch the bread. Friday night was the high point of the week, the respite after a hard week's work. Rooted in the realistic tradition, Lawrence was able to recreate the incidents of a mining family's ritualistic Friday night with a warm hominess that results in a lively, believable fabric, seemingly episodic, but actually knit closely together. Lawrence's ear for authentic dialogue and nuance of speech, together with his flair for naturalistic detail, resulted in a range of characters alive with the stamp of humanity. The audience is invited to experience not stock or heroic characters but real flesh-and-blood human beings.

Lawrence's eye for detail is evident in his description of the setting. The instructions indicate a set depicting sensate reality. Lawrence does not present the "lower-depths" type of naturalism but merely the appropriate decor of a working-man's kitchen-living room. This is not a slum. The fire is burning. Outside, "through the first twilight", the rain is dripping.³ That this is not the typical miner's house is made evident by the various signs of culture throughout the room. Behind and above the mother's rocking-chair are four shelves filled with school books and "an edition of Lessing, florid in green and gilt, but

³A Collier's Friday Night, in The Complete Plays of D. H. Lawrence, Act I, p. 473 (hereinafter referred to in text by act and page number.)

tarnished". Boxes of oil and water-colours indicate an interest in painting. A bookcase atop a chest of drawers of imitation mahogany contains, on its top shelf, a large set of the World's Famous Literature in dark green. The next shelf contains prize books in calf and gold, poetry books bound in imitation leather, Nuttall's dictionary, and Cassell's French, German, and Latin dictionaries. These books bear silent witness as signs of education, literacy, and a love of reading.

Various feminine touches abound in this room. A clothes-horse is covered with cotton articles. A tall glass jar on top of the cupboard is filled with ragged pink chrysanthemums. There are large framed prints of water colours on each side of the bookcase. Over the mantel hangs a picture of Venice "from one of Stead's Christmas Numbers." The feminine touch is also seen in the red and green colours in the various pieces of furniture. There is an uncluttered air of comfort and warmth.

A Collier's Friday Night, like The Daughter-in-Law and The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd, is dominated by a female presence. The play begins and ends in peaceful silence with this single character on stage--Mrs. Lambert. At the beginning of the play she is sitting quietly in her rocking-chair, reading The New Age (a democratic review of politics, religion, and literature). From time to time she checks a piece of bread toasting by the fire. Lawrence describes Mrs. Lambert in the stage directions as a woman of fifty-five, dressed in

black. She wears spectacles. There is an air of expectancy, since the table is laid for tea. The silence at the end of the play is of a different sort: it is the calm after the storm, what Lawrence terms "a dangerous gentleness"

(III, p. 530), as Ernest Lambert kisses his mother goodnight. When she hears his door shut, Mrs. Lambert stands and stares into the red glow of the fire which has been burning throughout the play. The rest of the room is now dark. She goes into the scullery to wash, leaving the stage daringly empty; returns with her candle; crosses the room; and, as the play ends, closes the door softly behind her. The characteristic tone of determinism emerges in Lawrence's description of her at this particular moment: "little and bowed and pathetic". Much of this play illustrates how the woman, as pivotal force of this family, becomes so wearied and sorrow-laden. The naturalistic details allow this theme to emerge clearly.

The deterministic emphasis, though, does not deprive the play of a certain humour in its celebration of all the elements which make each Friday night memorable. For the feeling is always present that this is not one particular Friday night in this family's life, but every Friday night. By avoiding a strong story-line or unified plot development, Lawrence has merely let Friday night unfold as it happens. In doing so he succeeds at verisimilitude, avoiding the dramatic high point and climactic action which naturalistic writers from Zola to Chekhov could not resist. The first vignette to interrupt the mother's silence is the return of

Nellie Lambert, weary after a week of teaching. Nellie shares her classroom problems and school gossip with her mother. Her gestures and talk suggest a strong, aggressive, argumentative nature. She "smacks" pupils who are a nuisance (I, p. 475) and does not hesitate to tell others what she thinks. Nellie complains about her mother's choice of food for tea-time and picks up The Scarlet Pimpernel to read. Her actions here and her brief arrangement of her hair in front of the mirror set up a definite sense of the rhythm of life, the cyclic patterns of daily existence. Mrs. Lambert returns with some apricots to sweeten her daughter's sour disposition and reports to Nellie the news of another mining accident:

MOTHER: Polly Goddard says her young man got hurt in the pit this morning.

NELLIE: Oh--is it much? (She looks up from her book.)

MOTHER: One of his feet crushed. Poor Polly's very sad. What made her tell me was Ben Goddard's going by. I didn't know he was at work again, but he was just coming home, and I asked her about him, and then she went on to tell me of her young man. They're all coming home from Selson, so I expect your father won't be long. (pp. 475-476)

The accident is a part of everyday living to which the women have become accustomed. In their tone is a note of acceptance and inevitability as they move on to the next piece of news.

Nellie's friend, Gertie Coomber, interrupts their tea. The girls affectionately greet each other as "duck" and "bird".

With Gertie, Nellie is able to lose some of her "teacher image" and become a young girl again. Gertie is a giggly girl whose talk is most often about the boys in the neighbourhood:

GERTIE (giggling): No, I'm not a mean cat. But I like Friday night; we can go jinking off up town and wink at the boys. I like market night. (p. 476)

Gertie is a fun-loving girl; her behaviour contrasts effectively with that of the somewhat primly severe Nellie. Gertie declares that she will never marry a collier: "I'm not going to wash stinking pit-things" (p. 477). In the midst of her clowning she flees, frightened by the approach of Mr. Lambert. But she is not quick enough.

Mr. Lambert, black from the pit, is an imposing figure with his iron-grey beard and black arms bare to the elbow. However, he has a slight limp, one leg being shorter than the other. A wrangling session begins immediately. Their disagreements emphasize disparity of personality even through difference of speech patterns. Mr. Lambert responds to the fine speech of mother and daughter in rough dialect: "Dun yer?--Well, yer know too much, then. You wiser than them as knows, you are!" (p. 478). Gertie giggles at the sound of Mr. Lambert sucking up his tea from the saucer. Mrs. Lambert, amidst awkward silences, tries to deal with her husband quietly, but Nellie cannot resist baiting his patience further. When she refuses his impolite request for his breeches, her father exclaims: "You lazy idle bitch, you let your mother

go!" (p. 479). Nellie, sensing his rising anger, knows when to stop.

Gertie, sensing that Mr. Lambert is the "underdog", somehow overcomes her initial fear and speaks to him pleasantly by the fire. Mr. Lambert, warming his trousers, cannot resist another verbal thrust at Nellie, so as to embarrass her in front of her friend: "And I wonder how 'er'd like to clap 'er arse into wet breeches" (p. 479). This authenticity of dialogue is an integral part of the naturalistic style of the play.

As Act One proceeds, Nellie reveals herself as more and more of a nag. She has fallen into a pattern of shrewishness which will certainly provide an obstacle for any prospective suitors. She cannot even abide the sounds of her father's eating, so she leaves contemptuously with Gertie. Her behaviour emphasizes that environment has in many ways modelled her after her mother.

In an ensuing scene between husband and wife, Mr. Lambert is berated for arousing his daughter's anger. One cannot help but sympathize with him, since his wife so obviously supports the children's case:

MOTHER (scornfully): You set them against yourself. You do your best for it, every time they come in.

FATHER: Do I, do I! I set 'em against me, do I? I'm going to stand 'em orderin' me about, an' turnin' their noses up, am I? . . . An it's you 'as made 'em like it, the pair on 'em. There's neither of 'em but what treats me like a dog. I'm not daft! I'm not blind! I can see it. (p. 481)

Mr. Lambert's disposition is not improved by his wife's noble silence, her concern with other matters, and her statements such as, "somebody's put you out at the pit, and you come home to vent your spleen on us" (p. 482). The smouldering rage of Mr. Lambert now explodes:

You're a liar, you're a liar! A man comes home after a hard day's work to folks as 'as never a word to say to 'im, 'as shuts up the minute 'e enters the house, as 'ates the sight of 'im as soon as 'e comes in th' room--!

In this educated, literate, well-spoken circle Mr. Lambert is definitely the odd man out and is most sensitive to the injustice with which he is victimized. The contrast in dialogue allows Lawrence to emphasize the misery of the situation.

Even the son, Ernest, belongs to the mother's world. The first thing he requests from his father is the page from the paper with the book reviews on it (p. 483). Unlike his father, Ernest is "a young man of twenty-one, tall and broad, pale, clean-shaven" (p. 482). His hair is ginger-coloured; his coat pockets are filled with books. Like Nellie, young Ernest reports to his mother the interesting details of his day at college. When Ernest relates his falling asleep during a boring lecture, his father justifiably wonders aloud about the value of education.

During the discussion between mother and son, Mr. Lambert prepares his bath water and strips to the waist. His rhythm of life contrasts with the chatty tea-time rhythm of the other members of the family. He is considerably

annoyed about having to wash in the scullery, especially when Nellie enters through the front door:

'An there isn't another man in th' kingdom
as 'ud stan' i' that scullery stark naked.
It's like standin' i' t' coud watter
Other men's wives brings th' puncheon on to
th' 'earthstone, an' gets the watter for
'em, an'--" (p. 486).

In counterpoint with the father's loud complaints is Ernest's conversation with his mother: "Fancy! Swinburne's dead." There are two opposed worlds in tension with each other under this one roof.

The rhythmic dissonances of Friday night continue as Nellie washes her father's back, not without some teasing at first. This scene is followed by preparation for the "reckoning". Mrs. Lambert counts the money and puts it in little piles. Barker and Carlin, Mr. Lambert's co-workers, arrive. Their conversation reveals the events of life outside the Lambert home: the accident of Barker's son and the expectant state of his pregnant wife. There is a sense here of the inevitability and futility of this type of existence. With these men Mr. Lambert is able to be "slightly condescending" (p. 488), exerting to some extent the authority which is denied him by his family. The miners are amazed by Ernest's new fountain pen. Act One does not end with a climax, nor does Act Two. The curtain closes while the action continues, as the miners reckon the wages for the week. Lawrence conforms to the demands of slice-of-life realism by ending the act gently, without a dramatic high point on which

to close the curtain. Ernest is doing his homework and the men conclude their reckoning as Act Two begins. Barker goes with Nellie to try some Grieg and other pieces on the piano. The humorous result is a banging version of "The Maiden's Prayer" on an old, sharp-toned piano. Mr. Lambert's suspicions about pretentious culture are justified in this instance. As he leaves the room, Mr. Lambert gives twenty-eight shillings to his wife. She is most dissatisfied with this inadequate sum. As Nellie begins to play smoothly some pieces from Grieg's Peer Gynt, Mrs. Lambert expresses her view that Barker is staying too long. Barker, though, soon leaves with Mr. Lambert. Mrs. Lambert's feelings indicate a cynicism regarding men's lack of concern for their suffering women.

As Mrs. Lambert prepares to go to market, she asks Ernest to look after the bread. In accordance with naturalistic verisimilitude, the bread is to be baked on stage. Nellie teases Ernest about Maggie Pearson, whom he expects for her French lesson. Nellie's argumentative nature is illustrated much more vividly than that of her counterpart, Annie, in Sons and Lovers. She displays her disagreeable nature at times even to her girlfriend, Gertie.

Maggie Pearson is described as "a ruddy girl of twenty, a full-bosomed, heavily-built girl, of medium stature and handsome appearance, ruddy and black" (II, p. 494). In age and physical appearance, both Maggie Pearson and

Ernest correspond, respectively, to Jessie Chambers and D. H. Lawrence in 1906. In fact, the play may even have been written in rough form at this time.⁴ Maggie wears a crimson "tam" and a long grey coat. Her romantic nature is conveyed by her love of walking in the night: "I rather like a black night; you can wrap yourself up in it" (p. 494). Mrs. Lambert is very civil in conversation with Maggie until it is time to leave. Then she cannot resist one verbal thrust: "Oh, you'll be here when I get back" (p. 495). This otherwise innocent remark has a slight edge of hostility behind it.

The conversation between the two young people consists mainly of the problem of ideals and their dissolution. Their discussion is punctuated by Ernest's checking the bread from time to time. The naturalistic theatre depends almost as much on action as it does on dialogue to recreate the everyday experience of ordinary characters; thus the bread-making scene is dramatically effective. The two young people share their writing experiences with one another--Ernest his verses; Maggie, a French diary. Their personal differences intrude unexpectedly:

ERNEST: You never tell me about you, and you
 drink me up, get me up like a cup with both
 hands and drink yourself breathless--and--
 and there you are--you, you never pour me any
 wine of yourself-- (p. 498).

⁴Written when I was twenty-one, almost before I'd done anything, it is most horribly green'--Nottingham Exhibition Catalogue--D. H. Lawrence after Thirty Years, ed. by V. de S. Pinto (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Press, 1960), p. 14.

However, Ernest is able to slip back readily to the French lesson and put personal matters aside for the time being. As a teacher, though, he is a martinet, ready to pounce on his victim-pupil with acerbity. Ernest does not completely respond to the sensitivity of his pupil. Maggie remarks, "You can forget things and play about" (p. 500). It is not quite so easy for her. Ernest tells Maggie that she thinks and broods about him too much, then he turns to Balzac's Le Balcon, which he reads in "tolerably bad French" (p. 501). But the French class is interrupted by the entrance of Beatrice Wyld.

Beatrice, who plays a similar role in Sons and Lovers, is a short, slight, pale girl of twenty-three or four, with dust-coloured hair and "dark circles under her rather large blue eyes" (p. 502). Like her friend Nellie, Beatrice likes to tease. Her presence points up the great seriousness of the younger visitor, Maggie. It is seen quite clearly that Maggie is not at all like the other girls--Beatrice, Nellie, or Gertie. Maggie is all but excluded from the gossipy chatter between Beatrice and Ernest. Flirtatious Beatrice is quite clearly playing games with Ernest, calling him "Willie" and trying to arouse Maggie's jealousy. Beatrice descends to coarseness in her talk: "Do you like being a mutton-bone, William?--one bitch at one end and one at the other? Do you think he's such a juicy bone to squabble for, Maggie?" (p. 504). Maggie by this time is "red and mortified." As Beatrice's reports of Ernest's flirtations at college

become too close, Ernest lashes out at her during a pause and puts her in her place with some French which she does not understand. The result of Beatrice's visit literally is--one loaf of bread is blackened. The humour of the situation gradually dawns on the three of them as they one by one burst into laughter. Ernest, though, is worried about his mother's possible reception of their carelessness! Ernest warns Maggie that his mother will blame it on her. When he hears his sister approaching, Ernest hides the second loaf, in tolerable condition, in the kitchen. Nellie, smelling the burnt bread, echoes her mother's probable remarks by putting the blame on Maggie. As this act ends, Ernest leaves to accompany Maggie home. Beatrice gloats with Nellie and Gertie about how she teased Maggie. Act Two is dominated by the aura of adolescence--the interrelationships of personalities on a superficial but also on a more deeply personal level. Lawrence has shown a faithfulness to reality in recording for the stage the typical problems which beset the young in social encounters of this nature.

Half an hour has elapsed when Act Three begins. The girls are engaged, as usual, in gossip. Mrs. Lambert returns, weary from carrying the groceries. Nellie's alarm at Mrs. Lambert's weak heart is assuaged as her mother also launches into gossip. Beatrice and Mrs. Lambert criticize Maggie Pearson for visiting in such foul weather conditions. Their words only emphasize their own blindness and jealousy. The mother hastens to put the groceries away in order to

prevent her husband's criticizing her for extravagance (III, p. 514). She has bought some pine-kernels; she does not want Ernest to think Mother Dacre's things are better than hers! As Mrs. Lambert starts looking for the bread, Beatrice decides that it is time for her to leave. When Gertie enters, a few more criticisms of Maggie emerge:

MOTHER: I should thank her not to come down here
messing every Friday and Sunday.

NELLIE: Ah, she's always here. I should be
ashamed of myself. (p. 516)

Nellie accompanies Beatrice home, with one eye out for a young man, Eddie. Mrs. Lambert reveals her feelings to Gertie: "I was born with too much sense for that sort of slobber" (p. 517). A humorous incident follows when Gertie's young man, John, whistles three times for her and, finally, but reluctantly, she goes to him.

Mrs. Lambert soon discovers what has happened to the bread. All she can dwell on is the deceitfulness of Ernest and Maggie: "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!" (p. 518). At this point Mr. Lambert enters silently, slightly drunk. The time is ripe for a violent explosion between the two.

Mr. Lambert's feelings of inferiority, established in the first act, and Mrs. Lambert's earlier annoyance at her small allowance provide ample fuel for the fire:

FATHER: . . . But I'm not going to be treated like a dog in my own house! I'm not, so don't think it! I'm master in this house, 'an I'm going to be. I tell you, I'm master of this house.

MOTHER: You're the only one who thinks so.

Their argument, as usual, leads them to the problem of their children, particularly Ernest:

FATHER: Keep that lad in his idleness yourself, then.

MOTHER: Very willingly, very willingly. And that lad works ten times as hard as you do.

FATHER: Does he? I should like to see him go down th' pit every day! I should like to see him working every day in th' hole. No, he won't dirty his fingers.

MOTHER: Yes, you wanted to drop all the lads into the pit, and you only begrudge them because I wouldn't let them. (p. 520)

These verbal fireworks bear the ring of authenticity, illustrating the naturalistic mode at its most effective level in reproducing the reality of human speech. These two strong-willed human beings are battering out their frustrations on each other, completely deaf to any logic in the words of one another. These illogical and meaningless arguments illustrate the blindness of husband and wife to each other. Such arguments are found, too, in The Daughter-in-Law and The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd. To Mrs. Lambert's "Whose fault is it?" Mr. Lambert bursts out:

Yours, you stinking hussy! It's you as makes 'em like it. They're like you. You teach 'em to hate me. You make me like dirt for 'em: You set 'em against me . . . (pp. 520-521).

In these words of hate and misery is the agonizing realization by both parties that what he says is true and irrefutable. As Mr. Lambert threatens to strike his wife, Ernest returns, angered by the commotion which he can hear from outside.

Father and son threaten each other with gestures of hate and hostility. The undercurrent of teasing and disrespect in the earlier parts of the play now presents itself as something insidious and rooted in the social situation which controls this household. The deterministic bias of naturalism is present in the hopelessness of this family situation, where, because of different formative factors, the mother has drawn her children away from what she considers disgusting and revolting in her husband. Although Mrs. Lambert stands alone at the end of the play, her husband is quite clearly more alone than she is.

Ernest has been won over completely to his mother's side. He remarks, after his father fumbles off, "He is a damned accursed fool!" (p. 523). There is no affection or love here. Ernest tries to explain to his jealous mother his interest in Maggie Pearson, but she does not understand. She admits that she just does not like her. Her attitude is that of a martyr as she complains to her son about his keeping her up at night waiting for him to come in. She cannot face losing her son, since he is the only man in her life:

You tell me nothing but the little things:
you used to tell me everything; you used to
come to me with everything; but now--I don't
do for you now. You have to find somebody
else. (p. 526)

Son and mother find some consolation in an embrace and kiss as Ernest begrudgingly admits that he does not really care for Maggie and that his feelings towards his mother have not changed. Lawrence is keenly aware of the possibility of sub-current in the speech of his characters, since he allows the casual conversation which follows to act as an attempted return to normalcy after the high-pitched emotional anguish through which both have just passed. The currents of normal life swiftly return; Nellie, unaware of all that has happened but annoyed by the embarrassment which her father's shouting has caused her, comes in. A rose and a candle are the quiet signs of continuing life as the three Lamberts prepare for bed. Mrs. Lambert sets the table for Saturday breakfast, a customary habit of miners' wives. Life will go on. This Friday night is merely a piece of the total fabric. Ernest fetches some coal and adjusts the fire. As he kisses his mother good-night, Ernest tenderly strokes her cheek with his fingertips. In the "dangerous gentleness" of their voices is the suggestion of a chaotic, sinister world bound in by these four walls, from which the harmful forces emanate. Like life, the play lacks resolution. All that is left is the lonely old woman on the stage.

A Collier's Friday Night, as a title, echoes and invites comparison with the poem of Robert Burns, "The Cotter's Saturday Night". This poem presents an idyllic scene of family life as the "toil-worn cotter" returns to

the warmth of the hearth.⁵ The beautiful daughter Jenny waits for her "strappin' youth". The family's frugal supper is followed by the patriarchal father's reading from the Bible. D. H. Lawrence moves away from such idealization and shows family life in its true colours, while Burns clearly makes the family a prototype for his native land:

O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
 For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!
 Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
 Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content!
 And oh! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
 From luxury's contagion, weak and vile!
 Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent;
 A virtuous populace may rise the while,
 And stand a wall of fire around their much-lov'd isle.
 (ll. 172-180)

If D. H. Lawrence's collier family is any indication of the unity of the country, then the situation is most unhealthy. Life in this family has become rotten. Between the constant tension and moments of explosive anger only remnants of affection are salvaged. The naturalistic mode allows Lawrence to explore this disturbed world sympathetically and honestly, yet without sentimentality. What results is a fabric thickly woven with the pattern of everyday living, the authenticity of dialogue, both humorous and serious, the interplay of conflicting personalities, and the context of a little world enclosed by the four walls of the Lambert household. This is a world in miniature. Lawrence

⁵ "The Cotter's Saturday Night", in Enlightened England: An Anthology of English Literature from Dryden to Blake, Wylie Sypher, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962), p. 1187.

has disregarded the conventional traditions of the well-made play in expressing what Friday night means to the members of a working-class family. As in the opening chapter of The Rainbow, he captures the everyday rhythms of life and shows them in operation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW:

MARITAL TENSION AND MATERNAL DOMINATION

The naturalistic texture of The Daughter-in-Law is apparent in the setting and dialogue of the play, as well as in the characters. Lawrence's main themes in this play--marital discord and maternal domination--lend themselves effectively to naturalistic treatment. Structurally, the first act, with its two scenes, is half the length of the play. The tensions among the characters are established in this act. The three acts which follow move more quickly as the problems of the Gascoigne family come to a breaking-point.

The first act begins in Mrs. Gascoigne's kitchen. This kitchen setting is a forerunner of the typical setting for the "kitchen-sink" dramas of playwrights such as John Osborne and Arnold Wesker. Lawrence briefly sketches the details of time and place: It is half-past two of a winter's afternoon; the kitchen is not poor. The room contains Windsor chairs, a deal table, a dresser of painted wood, and a sofa covered with red cotton material.¹ As in

¹The Daughter-in-Law, in The Complete Plays of D. H. Lawrence, p. 207.

A Collier's Friday Night, Lawrence has described the setting with careful attention to details. His resemblance to the naturalistic playwrights of the late 1950's is seen in his use of setting to convey a real sense of life being lived in this room.

Lawrence's interest in verisimilitude is evident in the heavy Midlands dialect in which mother and son address each other. The refinement of speech in A Collier's Friday Night is not a part of Gascoigne family life.

Mrs. Gascoigne, described as "a large, stoutish woman of sixty-five, with smooth black hair parted down the middle of her head", speaks to her son, Joe, in this way: "Well, I s'd ha' thought thy belly 'ud a browt thee whoam afore this Doesn't ter want no dinner?" (I, i. p. 207). Mrs. Gascoigne's conversation with her good-looking twenty-six-year-old son reveals that she still treats him as a child. His accident at work, necessitating a sling for his right arm, makes Joe even more dependent on his mother than usual. The roughness of the dialect is perfectly suited to the nagging and arguing which make up the better part of their conversation. Mrs. Gascoigne complains about having to cut her disabled son's meat for him; such complaining masks somewhat her actual delight in being needed. She cross-questions Joe, forcing him to reveal all the details of his accident, caused at the pit by his own foolery. Her comments reflect a world-weary view tinged with a dry pessimism:

MRS. GASCOIGNE: We know thee! Tha's done thysen
 one i' th'eye this time. When dost think
 tha'll iver get ter be a butty, at this rate?
 There's Luther nowt b'r a day man yet (p. 209).

Her ambitions for her sons Luther and Joe are clearly not being realized by them.

The attitudes of the Gascoignes to work and marriage are frequently expressed through an exchange of proverbs and aphorisms. These sayings are part of everyday speech in a provincial town; they intensify the atmosphere of the play by their emphasis on the cliché element, rooted as it is in colloquial expressions and Biblical quotations. Lawrence's careful ear has recorded the way his characters would speak. Joe's dislike of his job is counteracted by his recurring dream: "I s'll go to Australia." He would also like to get married, but his mother comments, "Marriage is like a mouse-trap, for either man or woman. You've soon come to the end of the cheese." Joe replies, "Well, ha'ef a loaf's better nor no bread" (p. 210). Similar proverbs appear throughout the play. When Luther's indiscretion with Bertha Purdy is revealed, Mrs. Purdy cannot help but add, "He'd seen th' blossom i' flower, if he hadna spotted the fruit a'comin'." Joe defends his brother by replying, "You dunna expect--ivry time yer cast yer bread on th' wathers, as it'll come whoam to you like" (p. 214). Such Biblical phrases contrast with expressions derived from images more immediate to the typical English housewife. As the two women criticize Luther's wife, Mrs. Gascoigne says, "She's

put her puddin' in her mouth, an' if she's burnt herself, serve her right." (p. 218) In a similar vein she remarks later, "It was her dip i' th' bran-tub--if there's a mouse nips hold of her finger, she must suck it better, for nobody axed her to dip" (p. 219). These remarks encourage Mrs. Gascoigne to punctuate her conversation with more and more proverbs, such as "If th' woman ca's for th' piper, th' woman maun pay th' tune" (p. 220) and "Let them as cooked the goose eat it" (p. 221). There is a definite sense here of the older generation being rooted in the old ways, finding easy solutions to problems in facile aphoristic comments which require little thought of or response to the individuality of a situation.

Lawrence allows his feelings for the humour of a situation to emerge as he portrays the visit of Mrs. Purdy to report her daughter's pregnancy. There is a delightful sensitivity apparent when Mrs. Purdy tries to mention casually the forty pounds which she feels would be just retribution for Luther's seduction of her daughter. Her approach is extremely indirect. On entering, she states, "I wanted to speak to yer rather pertickler" (p. 211), then proceeds to question Joe about his injured arm. The conversation, now concerned with mining abuses and the impending strike, halts at least three times. Following each ominous pause, Mrs. Gascoigne tries to pick up Mrs. Purdy's train of thought. Finally she asks the leading question, to which Mrs. Purdy responds coyly:

MRS. GASCOIGNE: An' how have yer all bin' keepin'?

MRS. PURDY: Oh, very nicely--except our Bertha. (p. 212).

Mrs. Gascoigne is quite shocked to hear that Luther, only six weeks married, is responsible for Bertha's pregnancy.

But each hen defends her own roost:

MRS. PURDY: No indeed--a man as plays fast an' loose first wi' one an' then goes an' marries another stuck-up piece . . .

MRS. GASCOIGNE: An' a wench as goes sittin' i' "Th' Ram" wi' th' fellers mun expect what she gets, missis (p. 214).

Mrs. Purdy, who refers to Luther's wife as "stuck-up", is very much aware, too, that she has money. Mrs. Gascoigne substantiates her point of view: "All she wanted was as much for her money as she could get. An' when she fun as nob'dy was for sale but our Luther, she says, 'Well, I'll take it.'" (p. 215). With ironic humour Lawrence allows these women to launch an attack on Luther's wife, Minnie, making her the scapegoat for the venom which they should, by rights, be pouring on their own offspring. As Mrs. Gascoigne describes Luther's long courtship of Minnie, her own prejudice and jealousy pour out. Her gossip is most antagonistic to her daughter-in-law, and reveals a deep layer of dislike and resentment. She feels that Minnie, having received a hundred pounds in her uncle's will, puts on airs and dominates Luther. Mrs. Gascoigne calls her "a Madam i' service" (p. 216). What is evident, though, from Mrs. Gascoigne's long description of the courtship, although she does not realize it, is that she has allowed her son, Luther, to remain a weak-willed

adolescent in his dependence on her. He had even consulted her in his confusion regarding Minnie's proposal of marriage, indicating a character which lacks firm decisiveness and common sense in matters of love and marriage.

The humour is bitter as Mrs. Purdy makes her claim. What she really is practising is a subtle form of blackmail. In a business-like fashion she claims to be poor and hopes that the money will help Bertha to find a young man to marry. Mrs. Gascoigne must surely be rationalizing as she makes the inane comment:

Well, ter my knowledge, them as has had a childt seems to get off i' marriage better nor many as hasn't. I'm sure, there's a lot o' men likes it, if they think a woman's had a baby by another man. (p. 219)

Joe is much more direct as he asks curtly: "An' about how much do you want? Thirty pounds?" Mrs. Purdy hedges in her reply: "We want what's fair. I got it fra Emma Stapleton; they had forty wi' their Lucy." Mrs. Gascoigne, hostile to her son's marriage, is determined not to carry this burden; so she sends Mrs. Purdy to Luther's home to get the required amount from Minnie's savings.

Joe is the only practical and sympathetic party as the two women become more and more vicious in their attack on Minnie. He knows that there are problems in Luther's marriage and that this news will be the finishing touch. But his mother is determined: "It'll take her down a peg or two, and, my sirs, she wants it, my sirs, she needs it" (p. 220). Mrs. Gascoigne refuses to turn over to Joe his own

money so that he can pay the amount and spare his sister-in-law the anguish. When Mrs. Purdy leaves, Mrs. Gascoigne reveals the animal depths of her rage at her son for disagreeing with her in front of company: "I--I could fetch thee a wipec ower th' face, I could!" (p. 222). This is a strong woman, indeed, with an unhealthy, domineering influence over her sons' lives. Her manipulative powers prevent these grown men from having the necessary self-respect to stand on their own feet.

Scene Two introduces Minnie and Luther, about whom so much has been revealed in the first scene. Minnie is waiting expectantly for her husband as the scene begins. Her actions conform to the typical housewife's routine: she checks the food which is cooking, hovers impatiently, and looks at the clock frequently. Talking to herself, she reveals her nagging habits:

I wish he'd come. If I didn't want him, he'd be here half-an-hour since. But just because I've got a pudding that wants eating on the tick . . .! He--he's never up to the cratch; he never is. As if the day wasn't long enough! (I. ii. p. 222).

The accent of this tall, good-looking woman is not nearly as rough as that of the Gascoigne's; it shows signs of refinement and education. Her actions are natural and psychologically justified, thereby fitting smoothly into the naturalistic mode.

When Luther returns from work, Minnie immediately begins to nag him for being late. Her concern for appearances

is seen as she asks her husband to wash off his pit-dirt before eating. Luther teases her as he replies: "Eh, wench, Tha'lt soon get used ter th' looks on me. A bit o' dirt's like a veil on my face--I shine through th' 'andsomer " (p. 223). Their conversation consists of both affectionate gesture and useless complaints, tinged at first with gentle humour:

MINNIE: But you're such a bother--never here at the right time--never doing the right thing--

LUTHER: An' my mouth's ter wide an' my head's ter narrow. Shalt iver ha' come ter th' end of my faults an' failin's?

MINNIE (giving him soup): I wish I could.

LUTHER: An' now tha'lt snap mu head off cos' I slobber, shanna tha?

MINNIE: Then don't slobber. (p. 224).

Minnie and Luther are physically aware of one another. Their feelings towards one another are a complex web in which both love and hate are bound together. Moments of tenderness alternate with bouts of nagging and complaining. In one such moment Minnie remarks on Luther in his pit-dirt:

MINNIE: It's almost like having a stranger.

LUTHER: Would ter rather?

MINNIE: What?

LUTHER: Ha'e a stranger?

MINNIE: What for?

LUTHER: Hao--I dunno.

MINNIE (touching his hair): You look rather nice--an' your hair's so dirty.

LUTHER: Gi'e me a kiss.

MINNIE: But where? You're all grime.

LUTHER: I'm sure I licked my mouth clean.

MINNIE (stooping suddenly and kissing him): You don't look nearly such a tame rabbit, in your pit-dirt. (p. 225)

Such moments indicate that there are possibilities for happiness in this marriage. Minnie is attracted to the physical beauty of her husband but is somewhat repulsed by the pit-black which hides and disguises her ideal picture of him. There is a feeling here which reaches beyond naturalism and introduces some of the ritualistic elements which are dominant in the last act of The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd. The miner returning from the bowels of the earth, his strength and inner light coated with darkness, can be compared on a mythological level to gods and privileged mortals returning to daylight from the underworld. The strange power of these men is suggested in the short story by Lawrence, "A Sick Collier" (1914), in which the daily washing is described in this way:

When he washed himself, kneeling on the hearth-rug stripped to the waist, she felt afraid of him again. He was so muscular, he seemed so intent on what he was doing, so intensely himself, like a vigorous animal. And as he stood wiping himself, with his naked breast towards her, she felt rather sick, seeing his thick arms bulge their muscles.²

The realistic framework is coloured with

²D. H. Lawrence, "A Sick Collier", in The Prussian Officer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945), pp. 188-189.

a sense of primitive forces at work, as Lawrence allows the subconscious feelings of his characters to emerge, particularly the woman's awareness of her man's masculinity. What he can express descriptively in the short story emerges more subtly in the play as an undercurrent to the actual conversation in which the couple is engaged. Minnie fusses because Luther leaves some pit-black on her blouse. When he speaks of problems at the pit, she taunts him for a lack of aggressiveness: "I know you're not much of a workman--I've heard it from the other butties, that you never put your heart into anything." She attacks his masculinity, blaming his mother for his lack of will: "You've been dragged round at your mother's apron-strings, all the lot of you, till there isn't half a man among you". (p. 226). Their argument becomes hostile, revealing difficulties at the very root of their marriage:

MINNIE: Me!--me take anything from you! Why, you've got nothing worth having.

LUTHER: I dunno--tha seems ter think so sometimes.
(p. 227).

The sexual attraction is obviously strong between these two healthy animals, but neither has come to accept the other yet on a personal level. Minnie was not won in a conventional courtship. Her aggressiveness in proposing the marriage is a continual affront to her husband's male dignity. She compounds the difficulty by constantly reminding him of his weak-willed nature. Since what she says is basically true, he must suffer her persistent brow-beating. She cannot

accept him for what he is.

In his essay "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside", Lawrence described how a man could seem "a tame rabbit" and a scoundrel to his wife at the same time. The wife, laden with everyday concerns such as family life and money, was unable to understand the mystic intimacy with and awareness of beauty which her non-intellectual husband might possess. Lawrence wrote:

The collier fled out of the house as soon as he could, away from the nagging materialism of the woman He loved the countryside, just the indiscriminating feel of it Life for him did not consist in facts, but in a flow.³

Luther Gascoigne, like the typical miner, seems to be less a man when placed against the forceful above-ground world of practical woman.

When Joe arrives, he incurs Minnie's wrath by deliberately smashing some of her good dinner-plates. What he does as a practical joke, to divert her wrath from Luther, frays her nerves even further. In her anger she strikes Joe's injured arm and leaves the house. As Joe questions him on his marriage, Luther indicates his patience: "I'm married to 'er, an' she's married to me, so she can pick holes i' me as much as she likes--" (p. 229). But Luther feels he bears the brunt of her wrath, since she seems to be pleasant with everyone else.

³In New Adelphi (June-August, 1930), p. 259.

When Joe tells Luther about Bertha Purdy, Luther reacts in an adolescent fashion, wishing that he were dead. Luther fears Minnie's reaction. He goes to wash before Mrs. Purdy arrives.

Mrs. Purdy's inquisitive nature provides some humour and relieves some of the tension in this scene. Joe shows her through the house, which she finds "very nice an' natty" (p. 232). Her nature is overly-practical and somewhat skeptical as she comments on the furniture: "But it hardly goes wi' my fancy, somehow, startin' wi' second-hand, owd fashioned stuff. You dunno who's sotten themselves on these 'ere chairs now, do you?" Luther in the meantime is washing and drying his face, chest, and hair. As he places his dirty clothes in front of the hearth, Mrs. Purdy reveals the motherly side of her nature: "Nay, if ter drops 'em of a heap, they niver goin' ter get dry an' cosy. Tha sweats o' th' hips, as my lads did" (p. 233).

Mrs. Purdy's conversation with Luther is punctuated by pauses and silences which reveal the awkwardness of the situation. The meaningful silences which bridge stilted conversation were to give way to the nothingness communicated in the spare dialogue and long silences in the plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Dwelling, perhaps, on the problems of his own marriage, Luther tells Mrs. Purdy that he wishes he had married her Bertha, for "she wor better to me than iver my wife's bin" (p. 235). Mrs. Purdy, in contrast with her criticism of Minnie in Scene One, now

hastens to her defense, for she is defending both the sanctity of marriage and her own sex:

LUTHER: She thought a lot on me.

MRS. PURDY: An' so I'm sure your missis does. She naggles thy heart out, maybe. But that's just the wrigglin' a place out for hersen. She'll settle down comfortable, lad."

Mrs. Purdy seems to be very understanding of the weakness of her "long lass" and Luther: "For it's not th' bad women as 'as bastards nowadays--they've a sight too much gumption. It's fools like our'n--poor thing." Luther is feeling quite sorry about the failure of his own marriage and the happiness he might have shared with Bertha.

Minnie and Joe return for a few minutes before going to the cinema. As they do the dishes, it is obvious that they are comfortable and happy in each other's company. When she lights Joe's cigarette, Minnie is subconsciously taunting her husband: "It's so nice to have a lamed man. You feel you've got an excuse for making a fuss of him. You've got awfully nice eyes and eyebrows. I like dark eyes" (p. 237). Minnie, though, has failed to recognize the lameness in her own husband. As he leaves abruptly, Minnie sobs to Joe: "You don't know how hard it is, with a man as--as leaves you alone all the time." Minnie is referring to the lack of loving communication, both physical and mental, in this sour marriage. She tries to lighten her somber mood before they leave for the cinema.

Act Two begins with a conventional scene in natural-

istic fiction--the husband returning home drunk to his patiently-suffering wife. Zola had portrayed the effects of demon drink in his novel L'Assommoir. Minnie is weeping as she fills the kettle and prepares to confront her tipsy husband. They argue angrily. When she asks for an apology, her husband is bewildered: he does not really know for what he should be apologizing. Minnie resorts to her usual tactic of taunting his manhood:

No, you're not man enough to say anything--you can only slobber. You do a woman a wrong, but you're never man enough to say you're sorry for it. You're not a man, you're not--you're something crawling. (p. 240)

Luther's tongue, loosened by drink, gives away the news about Bertha's pregnancy. With this assertion he can, he thinks, declare his manhood in front of his wife: "I'm glad I did it. I'm glad! Fo tha's wiped tha feet on me enough" (p. 241). Yet he is reluctant to reveal the details. There is a crackling tension in the air as his sobriety returns. The conversation proceeds haltingly, with many pauses and silences, because he knows the news will hurt his wife. She must know, though, and presses him to tell the whole story. Arguing and the inflicting of pain on one another provide two of the bonds in this marriage. Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is by no means the first play to explore this theme. Lawrence had seen it at work in the plays of Strindberg, which disgusted him with their hopeless pessimism, yet showed him the depths to which a love-hate relationship could sink a marriage. Strindberg's *Baron* in the one-act

play The Bond (1892), entangled in the web of divorce, exclaims to his wife, "I know very well what I want, but in me there is room for both love and hate--and one minute I can love you, while I can't the next!"⁴ This ambivalence is distressingly present in the Gascoigne's marriage. Its causes are rooted in circumstances of environment and personality; its solution is nebulous and doubtful. Such a relationship almost demands acceptance as a condition of living, since neither party is really willing to sever the ties which bind each other. The Baroness describes the complexity of this bond at the end of Strindberg's play:

And Nature drove us to hate each other, just
as it impels us to love each other. And now
we are condemned to inflict pain on each other
as long as we have a spark of life in us⁵

Her only wish is to scream against "this fiendish love" which torments human beings, as she realizes that not even divorce can break the bond. The Gascoignes in Lawrence's play are still concerned with the practical problems which face them. Minnie cannot understand why Luther failed to tell her about Bertha before they were married. Luther is determined not to ask her for the forty pounds. Their marriage is at low ebb. Minnie makes desperate attempts to find out her husband's feelings and salvage what is left of her marriage:

⁴In "Strindberg's One-Act Plays, trans. by Arvid Paulson (New York: Washington Square Press, 1969), p. 314.

⁵Ibid., p. 325.

MINNIE: What did you marry me for?

LUTHER: 'Cos tha axed me.

MINNIE: Did you never care for me?
(He does not answer.)

Didn't you?
(He does not answer.)
Didn't you?

LUTHER (slowly): You niver wanted me--you thought
me dirt.

MINNIE: Ha! (A pause.) You can have the forty
pounds.

LUTHER (very doggedly): I shanna. (pp. 244-245).

Luther's manly pride refuses humbling for the sake of a
woman's money.

The only course open for them seems to be separation;
so Minnie decides to leave. Luther makes her understand
that the decision is hers: "I non want ter git rid on thee.
Nay, nay, it's not that. It's thee as wants ter go" (p. 246).
Their business arrangements are now cold and mathematical,
but Minnie soon resumes her attack on her husband's mascu-
linity: "I'll bet she never wanted you. I shouldn't be
surprised if the child isn't somebody else's, that she just
foists on you because you're so soft". (p. 247) In her
anger she accuses him of impotency: "I'd rather have married
a tramp off the streets than you. And--and I don't believe
you can have children." The invective of each party digs
deeper and deeper into the other's feelings as their verbal
battle continues:

MINNIE: But it's your mother's doing. She molly-
coddled and marded you till you weren't a man--
and now--I have to pay for it.

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: No, you're not a man!

LUTHER: Alright. They're plenty of women as would
say I am.

MINNIE: They'd be lying to get something out of
you. (p. 247)

Minnie's attacks are directed most frequently at her husband's virility; she knows its existence on a physical level, but cannot accept the man's weak approach to the daylight world. The primitive god of the mine becomes, in her view, a disappointing nothing when he returns to the hearth and washes off his pit-dirt. Luther warns Minnie about the upcoming strike and its effect on his pay. Minnie says that she hopes that he in his laziness will get what he deserves. Luther quietly replies:

LUTHER: Tha'rt gi'en to me.

MINNIE (lifting her head suddenly): How dare you
say so--how dare you! I'm too good for you.

LUTHER (sullenly): I know.

Luther recognizes the disparity in their personalities; Minnie sees the difficulties, but cannot accept them. The bitter undercurrent of the dialogue expresses the great need and desire in each party to reach out to each other and attain at least a glimmer of understanding. But their proud natures block the way. As Minnie lights a candle to guide her to bed, Luther lies down by the hearth to sleep. There is no reassuring "good-night" from either partner; only silence.

Two weeks have passed when Act Three begins.

Mrs. Gascoigne is inside Luther's house when Minnie returns from Manchester. This scene is the first confrontation between the two women. Mrs. Gascoigne attacks what she considers Minnie's extravagance in travelling from the station by cab. Her conversation reveals, though, that Luther has not depended on the maternal relationship as much as in the past. He did not run home to his mother when Minnie left. Since her son has been so involved in the strike, Mrs. Gascoigne has not been able to find out exactly what has happened and is very anxious to know. She pries about the fate of the forty pounds, pretending she does not know why Luther needed it, and is considerably alarmed when Minnie says that she no longer has that much money.

Joe is quite genial to Minnie when he enters, but Luther completely ignores her at first and speaks to his mother. Both brothers are concerned about the strike. Luther asks his mother to be housekeeper while he is so busy. She replies bitterly: "Nay--if ter wants owt tha mun come ter me." (p. 253) Luther compares Minnie's present situation to that of a man on strike. He realizes what he needs in his helplessness: "I want somebody ter look after me." (p. 254) He needs a wife who is a mother and nursemaid as well. Luther is not the aggressive man that a woman such as Minnie needs: "He didn't need much putting off. He never came any faster than a snail." (p. 255) Mrs. Gascoigne criticizes Minnie for not marrying Luther

after his first proposal seven years previously. Minnie explains her reasons for acting as she did: "Because he came in his half-hearted 'I will if you like' fashion, and I despised him, yes I did." She now launches her attack on Mrs. Gascoigne:

But I know now, 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. (p. 255)

Minnie does not want the part of Luther which Mrs. Gascoigne has left over after claiming his love. She declares, "I'll have a man, or nothing, I will" (p. 256), and strikes out at the root of the troubles in her marriage:

I'd rather have had a husband who knocked me about than a husband who was good to me because he belonged to his mother. He doesn't and can't really care for me. You stand before him. His real caring goes to you. Me he only wants sometimes.

The powerful domination of Mrs. Gascoigne has prevented her son from giving himself freely in marriage, so that, in a sense, he is impotent.

Joe, too, is helpless. Minnie forces him to realize how much he is tied to his mother. He now sees himself as "a husk of a man" (p. 258) and knows that his plans to go to Australia are merely idle daydreams.

Minnie sees that one way to break the bonds of heredity and environment is to make herself more dependent on her husband in an attempt to restore the natural order. Luther married her partly for her money; so he has been, in

a sense, dominated by her "power of the purse". Minnie puts the situation back as it should be by spending all her money so that her husband can no longer be financially dependent on her. Thus she has put herself in a position of submission. As Mrs. Gascoigne expresses her alarm at Minnie's expenditures in view of the uncertain future, Minnie makes frequent statements such as, "Luther must see to that" (p. 260) and, "That's Luther's duty to provide" (p. 261). She is now willing to let the man take proper control of the marriage. Luther, angry and frustrated at this sudden reversal of roles, throws the prints Minnie has bought into the fire, performing, for the first time, a decisive action. Mrs. Gascoigne fails to see the meaning of what has happened--she can only comment on the great waste of money.

The fourth act is brief. The strike has brought Mrs. Gascoigne and Minnie closer to one another. It is 5 A.M. when Mrs. Gascoigne visits Minnie, who is sitting by the fire weeping. Both are frightened by the violence which the strike has produced in the town. Minnie now calls Mrs. Gascoigne "Mother". Mrs. Gascoigne reveals that her feelings of domination over the sons are not produced necessarily by love, but also by a form of loathing, again showing the presence of a love-hate relationship in which attraction and repulsion ebb and flow. She says that men have accidents just to spite their women:

Children they are, these men, but, my word,
they're revengeful children. Children men is
a' the days o' their lives. But they're

master of us women when their dander's up,
 an' they pay us back double an' treble--they
 do--an' you mun allers expect it. (p. 264).

Minnie tries to convince Mrs. Gascoigne that she is wrong,
 but the mother-in-law continues:

For they'd run themselves 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--not but what daughters
 is any good. (p. 256).

Mrs. Gascoigne sees herself as a "mater dolorosa", bearing
 through life a burden of sorrows, all caused by her men:
 "For when a woman builds her life on men, either husbands
 or sons, she builds on summat as sooner or later brings the
 house down crash on her head--yi, she does." Minnie tries
 to console Mrs. Gascoigne and apologizes for her anger the
 previous afternoon.

The play concludes with the return of Luther,
 visibly shaken from the rioting, with blood on his face.
 He calls for Minnie; Mrs. Gascoigne leaves to look for Joe.
 The time has come for reconciliation. Luther is almost
 child-like as he appeals to Minnie to bandage his wound.
 Lawrence depicts the wife in this concluding scene as the
 healer of wounds, both physical and psychic. In doing so,
 he has moved away from photographic naturalism and once
 again allowed the mythic and ritualistic element to appear.
 The wife is not merely the Minnie Gascoigne present in this

scene, but appears in her role as mythic healer of wounds and consoler of the sorrowful. John Vickery, in an article in Modern Fiction Studies, comments on the significance of certain everyday actions in Lawrence's shorter fiction:

The very manner of their performance testifies to their connection with the sacred existence, that is, the order in which the mysterious potency of life itself resides.⁶

This feeling of the life-force is captured dramatically in this Pieta-like scene. Luther appeals to Minnie: "I want thee ter ma'e what tha can o' me" (p. 267). Minnie, with Luther in her arms, reassures him: "Trust yourself to me." For the time being, the son has escaped from his mother's influence and turned his love towards his wife. The woman, though, is still the stronger partner and the determining influence in this marriage. The conclusion does not pretend to suggest that all the problems are resolved in this marriage. The Daughter-in-Law presents without sentimentality the naturalistic ethos wherein heredity and environment are strong determinants of character and temperament. Lawrence, though, has captured in his final scene a tableau of temporary reconciliation. Perhaps moments such as these will bind this infirm marriage together so that it can weather future storms.

⁶"Myth and Ritual in the Shorter Fiction of D. H. Lawrence", MFS V, No. 1 (1959), pp. 67-68.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD:

FROM NATURALISM TO RITUAL

The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd (1914) is the bleakest of Lawrence's plays. The title itself emphasizes the inevitability of what is to follow. Through naturalistic technique Lawrence has allowed the complex psychological and physical tensions of an unhappy woman to emerge gradually within a dramatic framework. The play is very similar in theme to Lawrence's short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums". In spite of the sorrowful elements, Lawrence does not neglect the occasional moments of happiness in this woman's life. The first act especially has a certain air of joie de vivre amidst suffering.

Its setting, like that of The Daughter-in-Law, is a kitchen. A brightly-burning fire warms the small cottage. Items of furniture include a chintz-backed sofa, a glass-knobbed painted dresser, a table with a red-and-blue-checked tablecloth, a wooden rocking-chair, and an arm chair--in most ways a typical miner's dwelling. From the raftered ceiling hangs an unlighted copper-shaded lamp. The time is twilight.

As a woman enters from outside with the laundry, the

silent scene is interrupted. Mrs. Holroyd, physically attractive, is described as "tall and voluptuously built".¹ She is obviously weary as she sets the clothes-basket down. Counterpointing her appearance are the outlines of the pit visible behind the open door. Her sorting of the laundry is somewhat reminiscent of the opening scene of the first and third acts of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956), in which Jimmy Porter's wife, and later his mistress, do the ironing. The use of actual laundry on stage emphasizes the drudgery of daily life to which these women are condemned.

A man intrudes on Mrs. Holroyd, but it is not her husband. Blackmore, an electrician at the mine, has stopped by on the way home. As he talks, Mrs. Holroyd continues to sort her washing. She tells him that her husband has been home already, but has since gone out for a game. Mrs. Holroyd is a little worried about her children, but they soon return from play. Jack, who is eight, and Minnie, six, report that they saw their father dancing at New Inn with some women wearing paper bonnets. Jack realizes his father's popularity: "An' lots of folks outside watchin', lookin' at my dad! He can dance, can't he, mam?" (p. 13). Jack does not realize the effect of his innocent remarks on his mother. The psychological tension building within Mrs. Holroyd is externalized as she drops the lamp-glass for the oil-lamp and

¹The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd, in The Complete Plays of D. H. Lawrence, p. 11.

smashes it. Mr. Blackmore insists on bringing a candle from the pit nearby.

The children obviously like Blackmore, who is twenty-seven. Minnie invites him to live with them, adding plaintively: "Dad shouts when we've gone to bed, an' thumps the table. He wouldn't if you was here." (p. 15) Blackmore places his hands on Mrs. Holroyd's cold hands, but she is confused and upset by this attempt at physical communion and interjects: "You must want your tea." As the two of them fold sheets, Mrs. Holroyd tells Blackmore that she had hoped that moving to "this vile hole" would keep her husband away from the public-house. Remarking that the cottage is infested with rats, she exclaims, "I'd give anything to be out of this place." (p. 16) Her dissatisfaction with her environment mingles with her resentful feelings towards her husband. When Blackmore and Mrs. Holroyd shyly match hands with one another, they are as awkward as two young lovers. The children, returning from picking up the clothes-pegs and stockings, ask Blackmore to stay until their father comes home. They need a man present, but their father has no time for them.

The setting in this play--the kitchen--is permanent. Scene Two begins two hours later (approximately nine o'clock). Most of the laundry has been neatly folded into little piles. Mrs. Holroyd, not expecting her husband for another two hours, is folding his pit undervest which has just dried. Her erratic actions betray her nervous tension and frustration--

she starts to relax on the sofa, then jumps up to resume work on her laundry. These actions are accompanied by the anxiety in her voice: "Why should I put up with it all?-- He can do what he likes. But I don't care, no, I don't--" (p. 18). But her repeated insistence on not caring intensifies the degree to which she does care. Her weeping is interrupted by boisterous sounds of merriment from outside.

The door opens--a "little, plump, pretty woman of thirty, in a close-fitting dress and a giddy, frilled bonnet of pink paper, stands perkily in the doorway". The appearance of this woman, obviously one of the "paper bonnets" mentioned earlier by the children, contrasts greatly with the humble surroundings and housewifely bearing of Mrs. Holroyd. The visitor, Clara, is very vivacious, but Mrs. Holroyd springs to the defensive. Clara is from Yorkshire. Her snorting burst of laughter is echoed by another female laugh and by a man's guffaws. Mrs. Holroyd, determined not to let them in, finally gives up, almost reduced to tears of anger. Both Clara and her friend, Laura, are conventionally tart-like in appearance: both are plump, wear much jewellery, dress brightly, and laugh and talk loudly and constantly. Laura is in her forties and looks like the landlady of a public-house. Their "party spirit" indicates that both have come from an enjoyable evening of fun and drink. They violate the wishes of Mrs. Holroyd by making themselves perfectly at home.

Holroyd is described as "a big blond man" with a "heavy blond moustache". His general demeanor and the rakish angle of his cap betray the relative amount of liquor which he has consumed in the course of the evening. Mrs. Holroyd is virtually ignored as these common women ask their host for some more drink. Her brooding presence inspires them to silence, while Mr. Holroyd departs for the scullery.

The ominous silence is broken by a crashing sound of pots. A rat comes racing through the room, terrifying the women. This naturalistic detail emphasizes the squalor of the Holroyd's home. Clara, jumping on the table, bangs her head on the lamp. Mrs. Holroyd, accustomed by now to rats, is more concerned about the fate of the lamp. As Mr. Holroyd advances toward the rat, his wife shows her concern for him as she screams out, "Don't, he'll fly at you" (p. 20). She runs to the door and opens it, preferring that the rat escape than that her husband be harmed by an infectious bite. Such solicitude suggests that her attitude towards her husband is not completely antagonistic. Holroyd throws the bottle of stout out of the door after the rat.

Clara tends to Laura, who is nearly fainting from the shock combined with the effect of drink. Mrs. Holroyd tries to "look cold and contemptuous" (p. 21). The children, awakened by the noise, come in to see what is happening. Clara anxiously appeals to Mrs. Holroyd for some brandy for Laura; but Mrs. Holroyd coldly ignores her and orders the children to return to bed. When she realizes

that Laura really is ill, Mrs. Holroyd brings in some brandy. The children sit on the stairs, watching the proceedings; mischievous and curious, they creep down and try on Laura's paper bonnet. Mrs. Holroyd sharply commands Minnie to take it off; Mr. Holroyd throws it into the fire. As he looks longingly at the brandy bottle, Mrs. Holroyd re-corks it and puts it away. The children, particularly Minnie, have been frightened by the noise and are reluctant to go back to bed; Mrs. Holroyd accompanies Minnie this time. With such human details Lawrence has depicted in a tone of tender realism the effects of this strange intrusion on the family's life.

Before leaving, Jack asks Clara about a "dognose". She describes this drink to him, then displays her good nature by asking him to tell his mother that she and Laura meant no harm. As his mother calls him, Jack touches Clara's bracelet and earrings with fascination. She, in turn, kisses him good-night and gives him the bracelet for his sister. Mr. Holroyd's mood has become pensive and brooding while watching the affection which his children inspire in others. Clara calls him "solemn as a roast potato" (p. 24), provoking another fit of hysterical laughter between her and Laura, by now revived.

Holroyd wants to get these women out of the house before his wife comes back downstairs. Clara's actions are becoming very physical: she touches his cheek and caresses his thigh. Fearing his wife's wrath, Holroyd realizes that

he must forcibly remove Clara. She gives him a sharp slap across the face as Mrs. Holroyd returns. Mr. Holroyd stomps to the outside door.

Clara, now ready to leave, apologizes for her actions, even though Mrs. Holroyd is unwilling to listen. Lawrence's impersonal presentation of Clara's reasons for meeting strange men after a drink in the tavern moves the audience to be sympathetic:

You know, my husband was a brute to me--an' I was in bed three month after he died. He was a brute, he was. This is the first time I've been out; it's a'most the first laugh I've had for a year. (p. 25)

Laura adds that he "killed hisself drinking". Clara claims: "I was as nice a young girl as you could wish when I married him and went to the Fleece Inn--I was". But Mrs. Holroyd has little sympathy and replies indifferently, "I don't know why I should hear all this." In her view, no woman should behave in such a degrading manner. Clara makes a last attempt at friendship while Mrs. Holroyd escorts them to the door: "But if you'd buried a husband like mine, you wouldn't feel you'd much left to be proud of--an' you might go off occasionally" (p. 26). Clara's talk of widowhood and death foreshadows the dominant theme of the last act, while her description of her deceased husband shows that Mrs. Holroyd is not the only one with marital problems. Mrs. Holroyd stands at the door as the footsteps and voices of the women gradually die away.

Holroyd, unlacing his boots and very much on the defensive, asks for his slippers. His tone reveals his shame

and defiance. Mrs. Holroyd does not answer him. While looking for some cheese, he cuts his foot open, but even this misfortune fails to engage his wife's sympathy. Holroyd starts putting on his boots again; his wife tells him that all he wants is an excuse to go out again. Now the argument begins:

HOLROYD (shouting): An' what man'd want to stop in wi' a woman sittin' as fow as a jackass, an' canna get a word from 'er edgeways.

MRS. HOLROYD: Don't expect me to speak to you after tonight's show. How dare you bring them to my house, how dare you? (p. 27)

Holroyd's reply is: "They're as good as you are". His wife is rendered speechless by this statement. After a moment of staring she speaks to him in a low, smouldering voice: "Don't you come near me again--". With blazing anger she repeats this wish. Holroyd condemns his wife for putting on airs. His accusations resemble those of Luther Gascoigne to his wife in The Daughter-in-Law:

HOLROYD: You think you're something, since your uncle left you that money, an' Blackymore puttin' you up to it. I can see your little game. I'm not as daft as you imagine. I'm no fool, I tell you.

They hurl at each other the usual accusations. Mrs. Holroyd calls her husband a "drunken beast". Charles Holroyd states, "You've always been too big for your shoes in my house--" (p. 28). Mrs. Holroyd replies, "Yes--I ought never to have looked at you. Only you showed a fair face then". Admitting that she was once attracted to her husband, she accuses him of hypocrisy and change. Holroyd, though,

has sensed a change in her, also, and has wearied of her domineering nagging: "Do you think I'm a dog in the house, an' not a man, do you--". Holroyd's problem is similar to that of the Baron in Strindberg's The Bond--the problem of finding a stable balance between two people:

THE BARON: My weakness for you, which was the very source from which my feelings took their strength, gave you the idea that you were the stronger one, while in reality you were merely more malicious, more brutal, and more ruthless than I.²

Lawrence's typical miner, confident in the pit but weak when placed against a strong-willed, practical woman, endures wifely reproaches. In such a complex love-hate relationship the woman nags the husband for his weakness. He in frustration largely ignores her and seeks a life away from home instead of taking on the leadership role of a good husband and father. Mrs. Holroyd orders her husband to go off to his trollops: "For I'm sick of the sights and sounds of you." His bitter, agonized reply, "By God, an' I've known it a long time", indicates that all love has gone from this marriage; Holroyd also insinuates that his wife is "hankering after" another man, but she is too weary to reply. She refuses to look at him; from her downcast face comes a dull and inflexible monotone as she intones: "Go, I mean it, go out again. And if you never come back again, I'm glad. I've had enough." (p. 29) This love-hate relationship is

²In Strindberg's One-Act Plays, p. 314.

almost Strindbergian in nuance and intensity. The husband, hobbling to the door, looks back at Mrs. Holroyd, but she has no glance for him. She turns herself farther away from his gaze. As he leaves, her back is towards him. Their marriage is completely devoid at this point of any love. The life-like action and realistic dialect adequately portray the sadness and bitterness of this altercation. The effect Lawrence has achieved here is almost documentary in its similarity to actual marital squabbles.

Two hours later, when Act Two begins, the cottage is in darkness, except for the flickering firelight. As is customary with mining families, the table has been spread with newspaper and set for breakfast. The stage is empty at first, since Mrs. Holroyd has gone to bed. Noises from outside reveal that Blackmore is bringing home an extremely drunk Mr. Holroyd. Enraged at being locked out, Holroyd strikes heavily on the door while his wife, now awake, unlatches it. Blackmore has to restrain Holroyd from beating his wife. Holroyd's cheek has been cut in a fight. When Blackmore suggests that Holroyd is getting fat, Mrs. Holroyd insists, "He's big made--he has a big frame."

Her quiet assurance shows a studied awareness of her husband's physical being. Lawrence establishes the importance of the miner's body early in the play so as to allow the fullest implications for the ritualistic finale. Holroyd, awakening from his stupor, is both angry and jealous to see Blackmore speaking closely to his wife. His drunken-

ness has loosened his tongue, so that he begins to make uncomfortable accusations: "I'm not good enough for 'er. She wants Mr. Blackmore. He's a gentleman, he is. Now we have it all; now we understand." (p. 32) His feelings reveal his sense of inferiority towards his wife. Mrs. Holroyd angrily calls him a "vulgar, low-minded brute" (p. 33). As her husband threatens Blackmore, she covers her face with her hands, trying unsuccessfully to shut out the building tension. Her husband's drunken blows have little effect on Blackmore until a misdirected punch strikes him on the side of the chest. He moves to strike back, but Mrs. Holroyd jumps to her husband's defense. The feelings which tie together the marital bond are not easily broken. Unable to stand the strain any longer, she runs outside for escape. Blackmore finds an opportunity to trip Holroyd and expresses his contempt for him in his curse: "Let him go to hell" (p. 34). Holroyd rallies his forces, but Blackmore lightly kicks him and sends him sprawling again. He can only reply with a nervous laugh when Mrs. Holroyd warns him of her husband's wrath: "He'll kill you, he'll kill you." Lawrence has depicted this drunken scene with scrupulous detail, showing the ugliness of the situation and the violent effects it produces on the three characters involved.

Such scenes of drunkenness are common to many of the naturalistic writers, particularly Zola and George Moore. What Lawrence has added to this conventional reportorial type of scene is an attempt at psychological verisimilitude as he

examines the mental and emotional states of his characters. Mrs. Holroyd is so upset that she spurts out: "I wish he was dead; I do, with all my heart." (p. 34) One feels that only in this highly-charged situation would she externalize this sentiment, which has been lurking, certainly, in her sub-conscious thoughts. In its intensity this statement points forward to the "widowing" to come. Mrs. Holroyd's firmness of conviction begins to lose ground, though, under the intense gaze of Blackmore, accompanied by his remark: "You don't know what you wish, or what you want." Mrs. Holroyd, "silent and troubled", maneuvers her way back into the house, crossing her husband's inert form. This drunken body forebodes the corpse which lies on the floor in the following act.

Blackmore's tender gestures and sympathy for Mrs. Holroyd's plight ease the tension somewhat, although both are afraid to inquire into one another's thoughts. Together they lift the drunken Holroyd from the floor and place him on the sofa. Mrs. Holroyd's solicitude for her husband is expressed more willingly when he is helpless: "Doesn't he look awful?" (p. 35). As Blackmore loosens Holroyd's clothing and prepares him for bed, an undercurrent of brittle tension enters the dialogue:

MRS. HOLROYD (who has been watching closely): I shall never get him upstairs.

BLACKMORE: He can sleep here, with a rug or something to cover him. You don't want him--upstairs?

MRS. HOLROYD: Never again.

The pauses are revealing in this conversation. Blackmore is questioning the very basis of the Holroyd's conjugal relationship. Mrs. Holroyd's firm reply is all he requires to strengthen his tender feelings towards her.

While Mrs. Holroyd is upstairs getting a rug for her husband, Blackmore is gently wiping the blood and grime from Holroyd's face, foreshadowing the ritual washing which will climax the play. Mrs. Holroyd, observing Blackmore's actions, wonders if her husband would do the same for him. She protests firmly when Blackmore offers to stay with her. To prove that his intentions are honourable, he points to Holroyd and alludes unwittingly to the legend of Tristan and Isolde, "There will be the drawn sword between us." Blackmore does not yet realize the ramifications of his statement: Holroyd's presence will prevent Blackmore's romance, like Tristan's, from amounting to anything while under his watchful eye. Lawrence knew the Tristan legend through Wagner's opera. In Wagner's source, Gottfried von Strassburg, the drawn sword was placed between the two lovers while they were sleeping so that Isolde's husband, King Mark, would be less suspicious of their adulterous love.³ King Mark's dual reaction to the scene is described thus: "Their lying so apart both pleased and pained him. Pleased him . . . because of the idea that they were innocent: pained him . . . because he harboured

³G. von Strassburg, Tristan, trans. by A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 270-272.

suspicion."⁴ Through the reference to the sword Lawrence suggests that, although Blackmore desires another man's wife, he will not act dishonourably while the husband is present. Mrs. Holroyd is amazed by Blackmore's tenderness with her husband, since it contrasts so strongly with the previous murderous violence of the two men:

MRS. HOLROYD: I wonder you can be so careful over him.

BLACKMORE (quietly): It's only because he's helpless.

MRS. HOLROYD: But why should you love him ever so little?

BLACKMORE: I don't--only he's helpless. Five minutes since I could have killed him.

Mrs. Holroyd finds it difficult to understand the mixed emotions in this man and, indirectly, in herself. Blackmore's solicitude for Holroyd may arise from the strange intimacy resulting from fighting, as suggested in Sons and Lovers following the struggle between Paul Morel and Baxter Dawes:

There was a feeling of connection between the rival men, more than ever since they had fought. In a way Morel felt guilty towards the other, and more or less responsible. And being in such a state of soul himself, he felt an almost painful nearness to Dawes, who was suffering and despairing, too. Besides, they had met in a naked extremity of hate, and it was a bond. At any rate, the elemental man in each had met.⁵

Like Paul, Blackmore desires the wife of the man he has fought.

⁴Ibid., p. 272.

⁵D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 379.

Sexual tensions have entered each fight so as to suggest primitive battles for possession which combine sexual desire for the man's mate with admiration and awe at the innate strength of the warring rival. Such feelings produce the mystic sense of union: both men see clearly into the basic emotions of one another. Blackmore functions in the play as the character who draws out Mrs. Holroyd's unresolved thoughts. He interrogates her closely on her marriage. Mrs. Holroyd cannot help but indicate the confusion of her feelings:

BLACKMORE: I suppose you're fond of him really.

MRS. HOLROYD: No more.

BLACKMORE: You were fond of him?

MRS. HOLROYD: I was--yes.

BLACKMORE: What did you like in him?

MRS. HOLROYD (uneasily): I don't know. (p. 37)

In reviewing her marriage, Mrs. Holroyd realizes that there was something there which produced happiness at one time. Since this element is now missing, she finds it difficult to express outwardly what it was that attracted her to Charles Holroyd. Certainly the physical attraction was important to her, although it has now become perverted, in her view, through misuse:

BLACKMORE: But what did you like in him--because he was good-looking, and strong, and that?

MRS. HOLROYD: I liked that as well. But if a man makes a nuisance of himself, his good looks are ugly to you, and his strength loathsome.

Mrs. Holroyd does not define what she means by the mildly contemptuous term "nuisance". Such a term is usually reserved for a mischievous child. She looks down on her husband as a "pettifogging, paltry" coward. Blackmore cannot understand why she continues to live with this object of her seeming hate. After a long, thoughtful pause, he continues his insistent, probing questioning with, "But was there nothing else in him but his muscles and his good looks to attract you to him?" Mrs. Holroyd now hedges and refuses to answer directly. In her nervousness she blurts out, "But it was never right between us." If she feels this way, why did she marry him? The partial answer is forthcoming. Although Lawrence is not as explicit here as in his later novels, there is a definite sense of an unresolved sexual maladjustment between husband and wife. The problem is that of a strong-willed woman initially over-idealizing her husband and consequently expecting too much of him. His escape through drink is interpreted by the wife as a direct insult to her: "The feeling comes out in drink . . . He wants to insult me, and humiliate me, in every moment of his life. Now I simply despise him." (p. 38) What Mrs. Holroyd is really looking for is her ideal notion of love. She does not understand her husband's nature, much less comprehend why he has turned to drink. At the public-house he can share a few drinks with his mining friends in innocent companionship. However, when the miner would have to face a nagging wife, he would naturally stay at the inn

longer and longer so as to delay the unpleasantness which would greet him as soon as he entered his humble abode. The effect on the wife's already aggravated disposition would intensify the vicious circle of resentfulness and wounded feelings. When Blackmore offers to take Mrs. Holroyd and the children to Spain, she questions the integrity of his love. Blackmore's relative incompleteness as a human being is revealed in his uncertain reply, "I don't know anything about love." (p. 39) Although he desires Mrs. Holroyd as a sexual partner, he cannot yet admit that he is honestly in love. The man she is leaning on for support is, in his own way, crippled emotionally. As a woman, Mrs. Holroyd cannot accept his offer until she feels she has gained his love. She naturally fears a duplication of her present experience:

MRS. HOLROYD: And have you never been in love?

BLACKMORE: I don't think so, I don't know.

This discrepancy allows Lawrence to suggest that Blackmore is far from the ideal solution for Mrs. Holroyd's problems.

Mrs. Holroyd tends to some noise upstairs; her husband, awakening, decides to go up to his bed. The "drawn sword" is removed for the moment. Mrs. Holroyd, on returning, is overcome by the barrage of her conflicting emotions. Blackmore attempts to console her by tenderly caressing her cheek, murmuring his dislike of Holroyd all the while: "My God, but I hate him! I wish either he was dead or me." (p. 40) Mrs. Holroyd feels helpless; Blackmore cannot say he loves her; nor does she feel that she loves him. Desperately he

says, "If he was dead, should you marry me?", but she refuses to answer. However, as he leaves, Mrs. Holroyd, in response to his kindness, is overcome by tender feeling and desperation. She flings her arms around his neck; he responds by kissing her passionately. Although he presses her for a decision, Mrs. Holroyd needs time to sort out her tangled emotions. She confesses further, admitting to Blackmore that she married Holroyd to escape from an unpleasant life. Her failure to understand the nature of sex and the meaning of marriage has probably caused most of the problems for which she blames her husband. As an orphan she had a difficult upbringing:

And I felt I'd nowhere to go, I belonged to nowhere,
and nobody cared about me, and men came after me,
and I hated it. So to get out of it, I married the
first man that turned up.

Mrs. Holroyd's romantic idealization of marriage as an escape from life's problems was rapidly shattered when she was forced to realize that her husband was human, too. Her reaction, though, has been to look at him with great contempt:

But there's nothing at the bottom of him, if you
know what I mean There's just his body
and nothing else It's a horrible feeling
there is about him, that nothing is safe or
permanent--nothing is anything. (p. 42)

There is nothing here for Mrs. Holroyd because she has refused that very body which her husband has offered. As the final act reveals, she is able to receive this body only in death.

Blackmore's enigmatic reply, when Mrs. Holroyd insinuates that he is different from her husband, is, "Perhaps I'm not." She pledges her love to him at the end of the act,

although he is still unable to speak words of love to her. Mrs. Holroyd promises to let him know by Saturday about the plans for leaving. Blackmore's final query, "Not now?", leads one to wonder, 'If ever?'. Lawrence has moved away from the conventional treatment of love in fiction and on the stage. His technique here reveals the psychological difficulty and complexity involved in a developing awareness of love between two people. The approach is one of delicate sensitivity, each character involved in a probing yet hesitant analysis of the other. The words come haltingly as each tries to assimilate personal feelings with the feelings of the other. Neither wants to be hurt. A sense of the vulnerability of human relationships is vital to this scene.

Act Three begins on the following evening, about seven o'clock. Mr. Holroyd's table-place is set, indicating that he has not yet returned home for dinner. Mrs. Holroyd is ironing on the other half of the table. Her freshly-baked bread is by the hearth. The children are indoors, Jack parading around in a bowler hat, Minnie dusting a picture in housewifely fashion. Their playing at being adults ends in argument and tears. The household is tense because Mr. Holroyd has not come home. Mrs. Holroyd remarks:

I suppose he thinks he's paying me out. This is the third time this week he's slunk past the door and gone down to Old Brinsley instead of coming in to his dinner. He'll be as drunk as a lord when he does come. (p. 45)

Angry as she is, though, she defends her husband when Jack expresses hate for him. She probes the children gently to

see their possible reactions to leaving their father.

Footsteps are heard; but it is Blackmore. He offers to look for Mr. Holroyd at the New Inn. While Mrs. Holroyd is upstairs preparing the children for bed, an old woman with a gray shawl over her head enters. After warming herself by the fire, she sits in the rocking chair, assuming a very sombre expression. She is Charles Holroyd's mother. Alarmed by Blackmore's searching, she has come to see if there is any trouble. Almost immediately she is accusing Mrs. Holroyd: "I suppose something you've done's set him off." (p. 48) At the same time she defends her son for his excesses: "Well, what can you expect of a man 'as been shut up i' th' pit all day? He must have a bit of relaxation." The discussion depicts the conflict between generations; the Grandmother remarks, "Ay, you've a stiff neck, but it'll be bowed by you're my age." When Mrs. Holroyd complains about her husband's consorting with trollops, her mother-in-law informs her of the gossip about her and Blackmore: "They've been saying a long time now as that young electrician is here a bit too often." Mrs. Holroyd's violent retort expresses her disgust at life in this town: "In this hole, every gossiping creature thinks that she's got the right to cackle about you--sickening! And a parcel of lies." (p. 49) She is trapped mentally and physically within a stifling environment.

The Grandmother, experienced in the troubles of life, does have some wisdom to offer. Her insights indicate an honest awareness of her son and of the perilous direction

in which his marriage is heading:

Charlie's been a handful of trouble. He made my heart ache one or twice afore you had him, and he's made it ache many, many's the time since. But it's not all on his side, you know You thought yourself above him, Lizzie, an' you know he's not the man to stand it.

But Mrs. Holroyd is still blind to her own faults. She can only think of how her husband has treated her:

MRS. HOLROYD: It is I who have lived on sufferance, for his service and pleasure. No, what he wanted was the drink and the public-house company, and because he couldn't get them here, he went out for them. That's all.

GRANDMOTHER: . . . I was always sorry my youngest son married a clever woman. He only wanted a bit of coaxing and managing, and you clever women won't do it.

MRS. HOLROYD: He wanted a slave, not a wife.

Clearly, just as Mrs. Holroyd has failed to appreciate the manly nature of her husband, so has he failed to treat her as a woman. Such marital difficulties are commented on ironically by the Constable in Strindberg's The Bond:

And then she dribbles out long harangues about her being human, too--as if I didn't know that before--as if I had ever said she wasn't--and that she is fed up with being a servant to me . . . when the truth is that I am the one who really slaves for her.⁶

Mrs. Holroyd, like Strindberg's tormented characters and like Nora in Ibsen's A Doll House, launches a demand for women's rights, a major concern in the twentieth century.

The bitter argument between wife and mother-in-law

⁶Strindberg's One-Act Plays, p. 296.

is interrupted by a knock at the door. The night is foggy. One of Holroyd's co-workers, Rigley, reports very uneasily, in faltering voice, that Holroyd has been involved in an accident at the mine. The Grandmother begins to wail hysterically, aided by her memories of previous family tragedies in the mine. Mrs. Holroyd tries to remain calm and clear-headed. She stands at the door, listening to the lift descending into the mine. She is anxious to run to the mine, finding it unbearable to wait. But the Grandmother firmly says, "Come in an' shut the door--it's a cold that gets in your bones." (p. 51)

At this point the scene takes on an air of ritual. The sense of impending doom draws the two women, previously hostile, closer to one another. They, in a sense, are representative of all women who must sit by the fire awaiting unbearable news from the world of men. The mood Lawrence has created in this scene is similar to that of Synge's Riders to the Sea. There is an air of terse expectancy in the exchange of conversation. Mrs. Holroyd notices the chill which the fog has brought with it.

Blackmore warns Mrs. Holroyd to expect the worst. Horrified by now, she sinks into a chair. Crossing to her mother-in-law, she flings her arms around her and both begin to wail. The rhythm of the rocking-chair underscores the chant-like quality of the Grandmother's wailing, similar to the "keening" of Maurya in Synge's play. She wonders about her son's fate in the next world and moans, "If only you'd

have tried to be different with him." (p. 53) But Mrs. Holroyd cannot bear to be reminded. The Grandmother remains rocking and weeping as Mrs. Holroyd shakenly makes a place for the men to lay out the corpse. She drops the sugar and stares witlessly while Blackmore moves the table back.

The first of the miners, Rigley, arrives, describing how Mr. Holroyd was trapped by a fall of rock and enclosed in a pocket of poisonous gases which smothered him. Emphasis is placed by Lawrence on the fact that his body was completely unharmed. Holroyd has been transformed in death into a beautiful chthonic deity, preserved inviolate. In "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside" Lawrence described the dark gods of the mine in more detail:

Under the butty system, the miners worked underground as a sort of intimate community; they knew each other practically naked, and with curious close intimacy, and the darkness and the underground remoteness of the pit "stall", and the continual presence of danger, made the physical, instinctive and intuitional contact between men very highly developed, a contact almost as close as touch, very real and very powerful.⁷

The miners bring in the corpse and spend much time distastefully re-telling the technical aspects of the death to Holroyd's mother. Mrs. Holroyd hysterically screams for them to stop, but the men continue to rationalize so as not to have to bear the guilt of the death. After a moment of silence they discuss the inquest. Rigley, suffering from feelings of guilt, remains behind after the others have left to explain why he left Holroyd alone in the mine. But

⁷In New Adelphi (June-August, 1930), p. 258.

Mrs. Holroyd, too weary, bids Rigley good-night.

Mrs. Holroyd has not yet looked at her husband. The scene's ritualism intensifies as the Grandmother continues to rock to and fro, murmuring and moaning beside her son. The Grandmother, arising, now turns to the practical problem of laying out the body. She goes home for a few minutes to get some of the father's good clothes.

Mrs. Holroyd prepares the water for the washing of her husband. But she stands still, afraid to approach him. Now forced to confront Blackmore, she states her belief that her husband's death is a judgment on her for conspiring against him. Yet still she does not love him. He lies on the rug just as he lay there the previous night in a drunken stupor. Although she does not wish to be alone, Mrs. Holroyd feels it necessary to send Blackmore away.

Overcoming her fear, Mrs. Holroyd stoops over the body and begins tenderly to sponge her husband's face. As she washes him, she moans repeatedly over the failure of their love and this final hurt with which his death has afflicted her. Her bitter tears and sudden kiss indicate her sense of complete failure: "I would have loved you--I tried hard My dear, my dear, what can I do for you, what can I?"(p. 59).

The mother-in-law, returning with a bundle of clothes, describes her own husband's lack of feeling when confronted with the news. The dialogue of mother and wife is tender as both continuing washing:

GRANDMOTHER: He always had such a rare smile on him--not that he's smiled much of late--

MRS. HOLROYD: I loved him for that.

GRANDMOTHER: Ay, my poor child--my poor child.

MRS. HOLROYD: He looks nice, mother.

GRANDMOTHER: I hope he made his peace with the Lord.

MRS. HOLROYD: Yes.

But this dialogue is disjointed, indicating the random thoughts flickering through each woman's mind at this moment of great tension.

While washing his chest, the Grandmother begins to speak of his physical beauty, which so often repulsed Mrs. Holroyd while he was alive:

Eh--and he's fair as a lily. Did you ever see a man with a whiter skin--and flesh as fine as the driven snow. He's beautiful, he is, the lamb. Many's the time I've looked at him, and I've felt proud of him, I have. And now he lies here and such arms on 'im! Look at the vaccination marks, Lizzie. (p. 60)

Both women weep again when they discover some blood on his fingers. The red blood and white flesh ally the dead man to the crucified Lamb of God and to the dead Adonis. Mrs. Holroyd pulls off his boots as her mother-in-law continues: "There's hardly a mark on him. Eh, what a man he is! I've had some fine sons, Lizzie, I've had some big men of sons." Mrs. Holroyd has a few affectionate memories, and admits, "He was always a lot whiter than me." The Grandmother, practical as ever, fears that the stiffness will set into the corpse before they have finished. She tells Lizzie to unfasten his belt. As the play ends, Lizzie rises, weeping. The scene is one of

utter failure.

The ritualistic element highlights the presence of this body, beautiful in death but doomed to a life of pit-grime and loveless marriage. Only through death does the realization come to the living of the potentialities unresolved in this human being. In death they wash off the dirt permanently. Mrs. Holroyd's ritual washing of her husband is not a labour of love, but an acceptance of failure as a human being. Thus the ritual brings her closer to reality, resolving the theme of the play with a continued slice-of-life portrayal, yet universalizing through ritual these trials of everyday existence. Philosophically, the ending is deterministic: Mrs. Holroyd is doomed to a world from which it will be very difficult for her to escape. The problems of her own personality, together with the circumstances of environment, combine to place Mrs. Holroyd in an all but hopeless situation. The ritual of washing forces her to realize the truth of her situation. Like her counterpart in "Odour of Chrysanthemums", she knows she must submit to "her immediate master"⁸--life.

⁸In The Prussian Officer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945), p. 224.

EPILOGUE

LAWRENCE'S PLAYS AS FORERUNNERS OF BRITISH NEO-NATURALISM

Lawrence's plays were not particularly well-received at the time of their composition. The escapist worlds presented by social comedy and satire were preferred by audiences to naturalistic depictions of reality. Miss Florence Horniman's Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, which fostered naturalistic playwrights such as Stanley Houghton, was soon to be in its death throes. Edwardian audiences considered representations of everyday, lower-class life unpleasant.

At Altrincham, near Manchester, a company of experienced amateurs produced The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd in 1920. Catherine Carswell, friend and biographer of Lawrence, reviewed the production for the Times. Her own mixed feelings about the play are presented in The Savage Pilgrimage:

The presentation . . . was creditable, if no more. It compared favourably with the performance given in London by the Stage Society in December, 1926, which also I saw . . . I felt that in a play so realistically written and produced, a body-washing scene was theatrically unacceptable. Either it must be done 'off' with only the voices and the footsteps of the women to give it reality, or the stage must be darkened to a firelight glow and the whole production 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.¹

Certainly the ritual washing scene must have produced an uneasy feeling on the 1920 audience who, like Carswell, might find it theatrically unsuitable because it was so different from anything they might have experienced previously.

Carswell was, on the whole, rather deprecating and apologetic about Lawrence's plays and his attitude towards the theatre:

Though his plays are far from being mere literary dramatisations, and are most genuinely plays, they are not truly adapted to the mechanics of our stage.

Of contemporary productions, opera, with its light-hearted formality and transparent artifice, was probably most to his taste. He was not interested in 'problems', effective situations, or any of the sophisticated trickery of the modern theatre. I question indeed if he ever found enjoyment in witnessing a play unless it might be one of the older classics.²

To strengthen her view, Mrs. Carswell related Lawrence's leaving half-way through a poor performance of Tolstoi's Living Corpse. Surely, though, a sensitive man such as Lawrence, who did love theatre and its potentialities, was justified in leaving a performance which, in his view, insulted its source material by its theatrical ineptitude.

¹Catherine Carswell, The Savage Pilgrimage: A Narrative of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1932), p. 135.

²Ibid., p. 136.

Seeing that the climate was not amicable to his drama, Lawrence's interests became more and more involved with the possibilities of fiction, even though he did occasionally return to drama. He did not have time, however, for involvement in the production of his plays. Mrs. Carswell commented on Lawrence's failure to attend the 1926 professional production of The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd:

But he was both doubtful of his strength and reluctant about the undertaking.

. . . Lawrence would not risk the strain and disappointment. Though he always had a half hope that one of his plays would succeed on the stage, I doubt if he had much belief in them as stage plays, or if he felt their failure acutely.³

And not surprisingly, Lawrence's plays were largely ignored as interest focused on his fiction, poetry, and letters.

In 1936 a play entitled My Son's My Son, by D. H. Lawrence and Walter Greenwood, was presented in London. This play was an early version of The Daughter-in-Law from an incomplete manuscript to which Greenwood added a conclusion. A. V. Cookman reviewed this production in London Mercury:

As a "slice of life", a picture of "The Miner at Home", the play is admirable, but this method of realism now seems curiously old-fashioned, and one cannot help recalling that it was the method which slowly but surely drained Miss Horniman's famous Manchester Theatre of its audience.⁴

From then on, until the 1967 production of The Daughter-in-Law, Lawrence's plays remained largely forgotten.

³Ibid., p. 253.

⁴London Mercury, XXXIV, No. 201(1936), p. 249.

Neo-naturalism came to the British stage with the 1956 production of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court Theatre. Simon Trussler writes in The Drama Review: "The difficulties and dangers of resurrecting an apparently atrophying form were considerable".⁵ Yet the English Stage Company, under the leadership of George Devine, was able to effect this resurrection. Of the achievement of the neo-naturalistic playwrights Trussler writes: "And they did indeed put kitchen-sinks on the stage--not to mention ironing boards, and tin baths in front of the fire".⁶ Innovations? D. H. Lawrence had done the same fifty years earlier, but at a time which was not ripe for audience response or recognition from critics: "Vague stirrings from Miss Horniman's Manchester or D. H. Lawrence's Nottinghamshire didn't ruffle the surface of metropolitan drama."⁷

The increase in class awareness and articulation was a considerable aid in the enthusiastic response to the works of Osborne and Arnold Wesker. The naturalistic works of these authors have in common with Lawrence and other naturalistic writers a concern with proletarian society--the working class. But this concern, emerging often as social criticism, is an immediate limitation. Trussler considers naturalism "the most socially dangerous of dramatic forms" because

⁵"British Neo-Naturalism", TDR, XIII, No. 2 (1968), p. 130.

⁶Ibid., p. 132.

⁷Ibid.

it can be "as deceptively convincing in its worst as in its best manifestation".⁸ Naturalistic drama dates quickly, losing its force as social commentary when conditions improve.

Why then were Lawrence's plays the highlight of the 1968 Royal Court season? Trussler provides part of the answer in his statement: "The survival of its [naturalism's] fittest specimens depends on a delicate equation between ephemerality of theme and universality of implication".⁹ By introducing ritualistic elements and by creating interestingly human characters, Lawrence, like John Arden, made his plays something more than a mere frame for social comment. Throughout the trilogy his concern for the human condition is continually reflected. His detailed awareness of the customary objects and actions connected with everyday life produced the realistic world of the miner's humble cottage which is, in turn, a microcosm of the universe in which the whole range of human passions and emotions is present. Lawrence's sensitivity to objects was to lead him from a predominantly naturalistic mode to the heightened sense of reality reflected in the symbolism and expressionism of his later works.¹⁰ In his early works, though, the naturalistic mode was best suited to his lovingly detailed dramatic reconstructions of life in a mining town. Lawrence's feeling for place, combined with his ear for authentic dialogue and his interest in human situations, produced a sincerity of

⁸Ibid., p. 136.

⁹Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁰See The Plumed Serpent and the play David (1926).

tone and a sense of artistic completeness which exhibited Lawrence's genius even at this early stage in his literary career.

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RÉSUMÉ

D. H. Lawrence's plays have remained virtually unknown since his death. The Complete Plays were not published until 1966. Three early plays by Lawrence--A Collier's Friday Night, The Daughter-in-Law, and The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd--were produced at the Royal Court Theatre in 1968. The enthusiastic reception accorded them pointed to a facet of Lawrence's artistry hitherto largely unnoticed--his skill as a playwright. Lawrence found the naturalistic mode best suited to his presentation of mining-family life in these three plays. Through naturalistic style he could document artistically the detailed complexities of life as he saw it; he could also unearth the patterns which evolve into the various cyclic rituals of human existence.

Chapter One explores the meaning of the term "naturalism" and its evolution as a literary mode. As conceived by Emile Zola, naturalism was the application of the principles of scientific determinism to literature. In its deterministic bias and its emphasis on lower-class life, naturalism differed in meaning from realism and romanticism. In novels such as Thérèse Raquin Zola applied to his characters the determining factors of race, milieu, and moment. Such characters were controlled largely by their environment. George Moore introduced the naturalistic mode to English fiction in his novels

A Mummer's Wife (1885) and Esther Waters (1894). The harshness of tranche de vie naturalism was watered down somewhat in the works of Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, producing a hybrid form of realism by the time Lawrence began writing. On the stage naturalism became the vogue in such plays as Becque's The Vultures, Gorky's The Lower Depths, and Hauptmann's The Weavers. The naturalistic plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg gradually gave way to symbolism and expressionism as these authors attempted to move beyond immediate objective reality.

In an article in Modern Drama (1960) Arthur E. Waterman stated that Lawrence rarely went to the theatre and that his plays were merely academic impromptus. Chapter Two investigates details of Lawrence's biography between the years 1906-1914 in an attempt to see the extent of his awareness of both naturalistic technique and theatre. Writings such as his letters and Jessie Chambers' A Personal Record reveal Lawrence's familiarity with the works of major naturalistic writers such as Balzac, Zola, Gissing, and George Moore. He was also well-read in philosophers such as Locke, Berkeley, and John Stuart Mill. From childhood Lawrence was fond of the theatre and often organized play-readings ranging from Shakespeare to Ibsen. His four years of teaching in Croydon placed Lawrence in close proximity to the exciting theatre world of London, where he enjoyed the best and the worst, from Wagner and Puccini to The Proud Prince. During this period his reading included Zola, Chekhov, Strindberg and Synge, as well as Greek

classical drama. In 1912 Lawrence was quite excited about the prospects of seeing his own play, The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd, produced. While travelling in Europe with his future wife, Frieda, Lawrence attended the local theatrical events. He was also involved at this time with the publication of The Widowing. His reading and theatre-going reveal Lawrence's avid interest in theatre, particularly in its flexibility as an artistic medium.

Lawrence's first play, A Collier's Friday Night (1909), recreates the typical events that marked the conclusion of a working week. The setting is a miner's kitchen-living room, where the miner's wife reigns supreme. The play unfolds in gentle and tense encounters which illustrate the comings and goings of various members of the family and their friends. Dialogue is punctuated by silences, but rises occasionally to bursts of passion and anger. In one scene bread is baked by the son, Ernest, on stage. The electric tension between the rough, physical world of Mr. Lambert and the more genteel, practical world of his wife is continually present, producing a sense of rhythmic dissonance. The play moves forward in similar fashion to real life, with little regard to conventional plot patterning. A pattern, nevertheless, does emerge, revealing a hopeless family situation in which the son, influenced by his mother's feelings, rejects all that his father represents. In recreating the family rituals of Friday night, Lawrence has used naturalistic style to present a piece of the total fabric which makes up everyday life for the Lambert household.

Chapter Four discusses the themes of marital tension

and maternal domination which Lawrence treats in naturalistic fashion in The Daughter-in-Law (1912). Luther Gascoigne is unsuccessful in marriage because he has allowed his wife and his mother to dominate him. The play captures the texture of Midlands speech through its use of dialect and proverbial clichés. In his presentation of the physical awareness between husband and wife, Lawrence has illustrated his feeling for elemental forces which he discussed in his essay "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside". The marital squabbles reveal a complexity of love and hate almost Strindbergian in its intensity. The play is resolved when the estranged husband returns to his wife who performs her role as healer of wounds. For the time being, their tensions are resolved.

The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd is the grimmest of Lawrence's plays. Ritual elements, present in the two previous plays, now assume greater importance. Lawrence has allowed Mrs. Holroyd's life with her husband and children to emerge in all its bleakness and sterility. At the beginning of the play she is wearily bringing in her laundry; at the end she is sorrowfully washing the pit grime from the body of her dead husband. Charles Holroyd has been an irresponsible father, finding in the pub solace from wife and children. Arguments between husband and wife are clouded by the blindness and stubbornness of each. Blackmore, a family friend, offers an escape to Mrs. Holroyd, but she is unable to take the decisive step. The play is resolved in the ritualistic washing which prepares Mrs. Holroyd to face life again in this depressing

environment.

The Epilogue discusses the lack of enthusiasm which greeted Lawrence's dramas at the time of writing. This reception is contrasted with the encouraging reaction given to the 1968 production of these three early plays. Neo-naturalism became the vogue after the success of Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956). Lawrence's plays fitted smoothly into this genre, which included writers such as Arnold Wesker (Roots) and John Arden (Sergeant Musgrave's Dance). As individual works of art, each play reflects Lawrence's careful fashioning, even at this early stage of his career, of a microcosm which contains within it the stamp of universal humanity.