

D H Lawrence the Dramatist and His Tragic Vision

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要 約

劇作家 D. H. ローレンスと悲劇的想像力

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D. H. ローレンスは数多くの戯曲を書いたが、劇作家としての業績は十分に認められていない。ローレンスの戯曲を注意深く考察すれば、彼が書いた他のジャンルの作品よりも、戯曲という形態によってより多くの説得力を持って、ある主題とテーマとを扱うことが出来たということを発見するであろう。ローレンスの2つの戯曲『炭坑夫の金曜日の夜』『ホルロイド夫人未亡人となる』の中で、彼は、人間存在に充滿している基本的な悲劇性についての彼の想像を描写している。

Even educated people in general are not aware that D H Lawrence was a dramatist: the latest, revised, edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2000) makes no mention of the fact that Lawrence wrote plays. The more serious students of the writer, though they show a nodding acquaintance with his dramatic writings, believe that they were peripheral to his main achievement as a novelist. Richard Aldington might be taken as a representative spokesman for the second group: "Lawrence's great literary output is remarkable for its diversity and versatility. As the impulse took him he attempted different kinds of writing, and failed only as a writer of plays" (7). It is astonishing, in retrospect, to note that the recognition of Lawrence as a novelist has blinded his critics to his achievement in other genres. As late as 1958, Alfred Alvarez was regretting the fact that Lawrence's "verse is very little read. As a minor adjunct to the novels, it has come in, on occasions, for a little off-hand comment" (140). The situation has altered considerably by our time, and critics and readers have begun to give him due credit for his poetic excellence, Keith Sagar declaring that "Lawrence was a great poet in every sense, including technical" (*Poems* 11). However, as a playwright, Lawrence is still in the process of being "discovered." His plays had little success in his life-time, and as long ago as 1934, Sean O'Casey had reminded his readers that if Lawrence had got the encouragement that he deserved, "England would have had a great dramatist" (qtd. in Sagar, *Life* 44); the implication is, of course, that he had received no such encouragement. It is only after World War II that his plays have made any impact at all. They still have not been sufficiently acclaimed.

Yet Lawrence's first impulse as a writer was to write plays and poems. He is on record as saying that one of his plays (*A Collier's Friday Night*) was written "when I was twenty-one, almost before I had done anything" (qtd. in Sklar 37). And at the age of twenty-three he was still writing, "I put out my hands passionately for modern verses and drama, in less degree, novels" (*Letters* I, 103).

Lawrence was interested in dramatic performances right from the very beginning. He was fond of doing charades before family and friends and, as a boy, he spent his pocket money watching the histrionics of travelling actors who came to his town or its neighbourhood. As a college student, he was excited at the prospect of seeing the most famous actress of his time on the stage: "Tonight, I am going to see Sarah Bernhardt in *La Dame aux Camelias*. As Camille I think she will be thrilling" (*Letters* I, 55). As for the playwrights, he was drawn, characteristically, to the modern drama of Europe rather than that of England. As Keith Sagar has pointed out, contemporary English drama offered little of interest to him. Not only that, it was anti-working-class life, which was to become Lawrence's central subject-matter. Sagar goes on to say:

It is difficult now to credit the degree of ignorance, philistinism, snobbery, callousness and hypocrisy of almost everyone connected with the Edwardian commercial theatre, the theatre dominated by Sir Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. Society drama existed to support a lie. Jones was only voicing one of its central assumptions when he said that working class life 'does not matter.' Not only were working-class characters thought to be to be unworthy of dramatic presentation, except occasionally

as rogues or louts; they were not thought to be human beings at all. (*Life* 37)

The first European dramatist who caught Lawrence's attention was Henrik Ibsen. Jessie Chambers has recorded how Lawrence "admired Ibsen tremendously" and how they read together "*Rosmerholme* which was Lawrence's favourite, and *The Lady from the Sea*, of which he gave us a full description in advance, saying it was the most poetical of Ibsen's plays that he had read" (108). But it was only in 1912 that he first read Chekov whose Naturalistic dramatic mode later on came to be compared to Lawrence's own. By that time he had already written six of his own plays. He happened to read Chekov when he was laid low with an attack of pneumonia. His erstwhile colleagues at Davidson Road School sent him a gift of two volumes of the recent English translations of Chekov's plays. In a letter of thanks, he said, "[t]he plays are exceedingly interesting. I hope you read them. Tchekov is a new thing in drama" (*Letters* I, 385). He must have been delighted to discover that he had been independently writing the 'new' kind of drama for which Chekov was gaining recognition and praise. The plays that Lawrence had been writing can be put in the category of "Naturalistic Drama" which was a part of the revolt that the European dramatists had initiated at the beginning of the twentieth-century. J L Styan defines this form as follows:

Naturalistic is a critical term . . . which may be applied more specifically to those playwrights of the so-called 'naturalistic movement,' writers who were committed to presenting a specially angled view of real life . . . The scientific naturalism showed that powerful forces governed human lives, forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control—the forces of heredity and environment. (6)

Lawrence's naturalism was different in that by realistically portraying life in the mining communities, it unobtrusively, but convincingly, revealed the workings of elemental forces that relentlessly drove human life to tragedy. When he discovered Chekov and his "Naturalistic" mode he felt a certain affinity with him, but he knew that he would encounter more difficulties in having *his* plays accepted in England than Chekov had done in his native Russia. In a letter written soon after, on 1 February 1913, he wrote to Edward Garnett:

I believe that, just as an audience was found in Russia for Tchekov, so an audience might be found in England for some of my plays, if there were a man to whip'em in. It's the producer that is lacking, not the audience. I'm sure we are sick of the rather bony, bloodless drama we get nowadays—it is a time for reaction against Shaw and Galsworthy and Barker and Irishy (except Synge) people—the rule and mathematical folk. But you are of them and your sympathies are with your generation, not with mine. I think it is inevitable. You are about the only man who is willing to let a new generation come in. It will seem a bit of tough for me, when I am 45,—and must see myself and my tradition supplanted. I shall bear it badly. Damn my impudence, and but don't dislike me. But 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 away from their authority. (*Letters* I, 509)

Lawrence had no use for his "immediate predecessors" because he wanted to write only about what he knew, while they wrote mainly about middle-class life. He wrote about the lived experiences of ordinary people living ordinary lives and in ordinary situations. As he himself knew,

such plays could have little or no success in the hands of theatre producers or publishers in his time. Indeed, though he wrote eight plays, only three of them were published and three were performed in small theatres during his lifetime. It was not until almost half a century later that he got some recognition as a playwright. His plays were staged in London in the latter 1960's, culminating in the D H Lawrence Season at the Royal Court Theatre, when his work was produced to wide acclaim. This led to the publication of *The Complete Plays of D H Lawrence* in 1965.

Unlike poetry or fiction. English drama was slow to show its uniqueness in the twentieth-century. Only after the Second World War did English drama seek to find a new voice. It was the actor and director George Devine who, by founding the English Court Theatre in 1956, offered a platform to new, often unknown and experimental dramatic talents. Many of those young playwrights showed scant regard for the English theatrical traditions and wrote new kinds of plays, called, variously, "kitchen-sink drama," "angry theatre," or "committed drama." They wrote realistic plays about the working class, its dissatisfaction with the post-war situation, its disillusionment and its spirit of rebellion. Against this background it is not surprising that the The Royal Court discovered Lawrence's plays. Actually, in the changing cultural climate of the 1960's in Britain, it was the television which first discovered Lawrence's dramatic talents, though not his plays. As Shwarze points out, "television returned to his [Lawrence's] works as a source of drama . . . but not to his plays: thirteen short stories were adapted into eleven one-hour plays, and enthusiastically acclaimed by audiences and critics alike for the realism of their dialogue and their naturally dramatic form." Shwarze goes on to quote an advertisement in 1967 which claimed that Lawrence "wrote television plays before television was invented . . . some of his short stories are perfect television material" (xxvii). But the fact remains that Lawrence the dramatist got his first real recognition when The Royal Court produced his plays. It was Peter Gill who, on hearing of Lawrence through the television production of his works, asked to see his play *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* and was given, by mistake, *A Collier's Friday Night*. He liked the play and gave it a try for one night at the Royal Court in 1965. Encouraged by its reception, he went on to produce two more plays, first *The Daughter-in-Law* in 1967, and then both these and *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* in a Lawrence Season in 1968. These productions received laudatory reviews, among which the one by the practicing English dramatist Frank Marcus was specially perceptive: "The most remarkable thing about this production is its realism. The characters are as rounded as figures from canvas by Courbet. The household tasks, preparing, cooking 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" (19). Raymond Williams went on to explain that Lawrence's realism went further, in that through it he not only defined a category of life which had largely been neglected by English drama, but also made it dramatically significant. This he did by discovering larger meanings in the apparently unremarkable life that he was dealing with. Lawrence's handling of common people and their common life is "critically different from the use of ordinary situations, probable characters and probable conversations to embody a problem capable of being stated in general terms . . . the method most obviously of Galsworthy . . . (Williams 11). Lawrence was not interested so much in the social or religious 'problems' of the day as in the nature of life in general, and this he reveals through a

naturalistic rendering of working-class life.

Admittedly, he goes deeper into life and evolves his own artistic vision with mastery and conviction in his major novels and poems. But a study of his plays is important because in the early stages of his life and literary career, he tried to wrest this vision more directly from his own immediate experience. Like a true artist, he realized that he needed dramatic objectivity in order not only to understand their true nature but also to relate them to the wider world. F R Leavis had famously described the Lawrentian novel as "a dramatic poem." It is not surprising that, at the start at any rate, the form of drama proved to be an ideal medium for him. One might speculate that he did not persist with this form because "there was no theatre in England which could remotely understand what he [Lawrence] was trying to do" (Williams 13). He turned, instead, to the novel form, as Hardy had done before him, in order to make "a living as a writer" (Worthen 137). But his novels, as has been already pointed out, seemed to have obscured his distinctive talents as a playwright, and prevented their recognition. In particular, the naturalistic mode of his plays reveals a wider perspective, and dimensions of the characters, that are seldom to be found in the other genres that he adopted later on.

Lawrence's treatment of the miner, for instance, is a case in point. In the poems, and novels, especially *Sons and Lovers*, the miner appears in a stereotypically negative light. He is a crude, drunken, violent lout who not only denies 'life' in the Lawrentian sense to himself but also to his family and everyone else around him. In other words, he is an obstacle to the fulfilling life to which his wife and children aspire.

We know that the portrait of the miner was based mainly on his own father, and his "hatred" of his father is equally well known. Worthen thought that "Lawrence was exceptional in his deep hatred of his father" (57), and Lawrence would no doubt have agreed: "It is astonishing," he is reported to have said, "how hard and bitter I feel towards him" (qtd. in Moore 170). But, as he himself and other biographers have explained, he actually saw his father in a different light when he was not "hating" him, and much more so in his later life: he went on to regret his "hatred" of his father, especially his portrait of him in *Sons and Lovers*. He had told his friends the Brewsters that "he had done an injustice to his father in that book and felt like re-writing it" (Moore 25). Though Worthen claims that he got over the "hatred" of his father only "later in the year when his mother died," (60) it is quite likely that he always had ambivalent feelings towards his father. He also saw him as a kind man who loved his children and as someone who was himself a victim of his circumstances. But this side had to be omitted when he wrote something to illustrate and illuminate a point of view as he did in his novels. He had worked "out [his] theme" in *Sons and Lovers*, he told Edward Garenett (*Letters*, I 476-7). It so happened that the plot that he chose demanded that in order to show the development of Paul Morel, the brutish and violent side of the father's character had to be given prominence and that the mother had to be presented as his victim.

Yet, in the plays, the miner-character appears in a different light. He wrote about his lived experiences without subjecting them to the tyranny of a theme or the restrictions of a point of view. Sklar believes that "it is the dramatic form itself which allows Lawrence—whether or not he was aware of it—to present a view of the family situation which he only came personally to recognize as 'true' for himself very much later in life" (54). This is another way of saying that

Lawrence, by writing about them, gained a deeper understanding of his own personal experiences. This he did by recreating life as he himself saw and lived it. People and experiences are presented as they are, and there is no room for passing judgments or blaming or vindicating the characters. Thus it is that in his "colliery plays," the miner has many facets to his character and personality. He is disagreeable, uncouth and uncultured but he also excites our sympathy. We see him as a victim not only of the circumstances of his profession but also of his family members, starting with his wife, and finally, of life itself.

Walter Lambert in *A Collier's Friday Night* is one such miner. The play is about his Friday night, and though the bulk of the action involves others of his family, his presence nevertheless is felt all the time. The wife is busy keeping the house. She prepares dinner, bakes bread and goes out for her weekly shopping. The daughter Nellie who is a school-teacher goes out with her friends and has her rendezvous with her lover, and the son Ernest is back from college for the week-end to be with his mother and his girlfriend Maggie. Walter comes back from the pit, and he and his friends, after sharing their weekly wages, go out to the pub. Nothing much 'happens' in the play, but we are presented with life in which love, hate, the pressure of work—whether it is that of Nellie as a school-teacher or of Ernest as a student—the little enjoyments and flirtations of the young people and Walter Lambert's drinking after a hard day's work in the pit. All are a part of the total pattern. But what makes the play of absorbing interest are the tensions that pervade this ordinary mining life, and how their causes and effects colour and poison the human relationships involved. In the process, what also emerges is Lawrence's own assessment of the picture that he is presenting.

Walter Lambert is at the centre of the play. He is the bread-winner and it is his wages that keep the family going. But he is resented by his wife as well by his children. In the opening scene, he returns after a long and weary day at the pit, not to a home where he might expect welcome and rest but to one which is filled with tension. Lawrence renders this very effectively through stage-directions:

The door opens and he enters. He is a man of middling stature, a miner, black from the pit. His shoulders are pushed up because he is cold. He has a bushy, iron grey beard. He takes from his pocket a tin bottle and a knotted 'snap' bag—his food bag of dirty calico—and puts them with a bang on the table. Then he drags his heavily shod feet to the door on Right: he limps slightly, one leg being shorter than the other. He hangs up his coat and cap in the passage, and comes back into the living room. No one speaks. (9)

His wife, his daughter and her friend Gertie are in the room, but their hostility shuts him off: "No one speaks." When they do speak, it is only to criticize or mock at him: Nellie for his pushing the table near the fire, his wife for his "stopping [on the way home], drinking" (10) and for putting his dirty arms on the white table-cloth. Nellie cannot stand the sight of her uncouth father, and when her friend Gertie is ready to leave this tense family situation, Nellie also joins her, saying, "I'll come across with you. I don't want to stop *here*" (11). When, after her haughty departure, Walter's wife blames him for annoying his daughter, thus forcing her to go away, he flies into a rage and accuses her of turning both the children against him: "It's you as eggs 'em on against me, both 'on them" (12). Despite his bad manners, it is hard not to sympathize with him, especially when he reminds his wife, and us, "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" (13).

On the other hand, though Mrs Lambert seems more civil and has higher aspirations for her children, she strikes one as distant and unfeeling. She is short and sharp with everybody and she is far from being an agreeable woman. Her obsession in life is her son Ernest and his rise in the world. And this alienates her not only from her husband but also from her daughter too, who resentfully complains, "we can't have a thing in this house—everything's for our Ernest" (46). Ironically, Ernest also becomes a victim of his mother's (abnormal) passion for him. In the first place, he is rather priggish, with his mockery of his college and the teachers and his bafflement at his mother's and Maggie's difficulties with French, though his own is only a "tolerably bad French" (33). But the most pernicious effect of her feelings for Ernest is that he finds it difficult to love Maggie as he would like to. His mother resents her from the moment Maggie enters the scene and remains hostile towards her both in words and looks. She laments the change in her son since he was a boy. She accuses him of now caring more for Maggie than for her:

... you seem to care nothing—you care for anything more than 'home: you tell me nothing but the little things: you used to tell me everything, you used to come come to me with everything, but now—I don't do for you now. You have to find somebody else.

He retorts, "but I can't help it: I can't help it. I have to grow up—and things are different to us now." She pathetically admits that things "*are* different to us now. They never used to be. . . I've tried and tried to like her [Maggie], but I can't, and it's no good." Of course, her son is moved, and he tells her, "You know, Mater—I don't care for her—really not half as much as I care for you—only just now—well, I can't help it, I can't help it—but I care just the same—for you, I do" (56).

One can feel the pressure on him here, and its effect on his emotional growth. What drives Ernest more towards his mother is her husband's brutality towards her. When Walter Lambert returns drunk from the pub and goes for the grapes, his wife admonishes him, saying, "you needn't eat all those grapes. There's somebody else!" (49). At this, he cannot contain himself and begins to abuse her and physically threatens her. Ernest comes to her rescue and there is almost a fist-fight between the father and the son. When Ernest says that he "would [like to] kill him," his mother pleads, "Oh, you mustn't. Think how awful it would be if there were anything like that. I couldn't bear it" (53). But Walter has the last word. He tells his wife that but for her he would have got on well with his children:

FATHER: I don't, I don't begrudge 'em nothing. I'm willing to do everything I can for 'em, and 'ow they treat me like. Like a dog, I say, like a dog.

MOTHER: And whose fault is it?

FATHER: Yours, you slinking 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 . . . (51)

After this encounter, "*he lurches round, and limping pitiably, goes off upstairs*" (53). And soon afterwards the play ends as Ernest kisses his mother good-night and goes to his bed-room. Mrs Lambert is left on the stage, "*looking little and bowed and pathetic, and crosses the room, softly*

closing the passage door behind her" (60).

One can see that this naturalistic presentation of an ordinary day in the life of a colliery family is something more than just a realistic portrait. A deeper impression is one of the tragedy that pervades this life. It is hard to pick out any one person who might be held responsible for this. If anything, it is the economic and social forces of the time that can explain the brutalized life that Walter leads, and the social and cultural improvement that his wife craves for herself and her children. However, I think, it is the miner, Walter Lambert, more than anybody else in the play, who becomes the chief object of our sympathy and compassion. Sklar rightly points out that although Lambert is "not overtly presented as sympathetic, the details of the play actively endorse Lambert's view when he berates his wife for making the children detest him . . . [we are made to see] the truth of his accusations" (52). The *Times* reviewer of the 1965 production of the play went further and found that the miner arouses in the reader deeper feelings of compassion;

the play treats him [Walter] tenderly as he bends grimly over his plate shovelling down his supper, miserably conscious that the rest of the family are ashamed of him. Even in the midst of his desperately inarticulate language, he is inclined to stop and say something generous or ask humbly for a pudding. (12)

Lawrence's treatment of a similar life and plot in *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* reveal new insights and dimensions, and the overall tragic theme of the play is all-embracing and wide-ranging. The actual subject is the death of the miner in a pit accident. That Lawrence was rather interested in this subject is evident from the fact that he wrote a short story at this time in which too the miner is killed in a pit accident. Schwarz explains the circumstances of the composition of these two works:

The writing of Lawrence's second play *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* also falls into the period 1909–10; it was finished by 9 November 1910, when he offered it to a close friend to read, but may well have been completed by October, before he started the version of "Paul Morel." The play's closeness in subject matter, selection of character and atmosphere to "Odour of Chrysanthemums" is, however, so striking that the play's origins may be directly linked to the first version of the story, which Lawrence had sent to Hueffer on 9 December 1909 and which he had extensively revised by March 1910. (xxix)

The story was finally published in 1911, and the play in 1914. Despite the similarities in them, the play is quite different from the short story. In the first place, Lawrence was very conscious of the fact that he was writing the play for the stage, and the washing of the miner's body at the end of play can be described as rather "dramatic." He specifically said, "I tried to write for the stage—I tried to make it end up stagily" (*Letters* 309). There is another element in the play which might be described as "dramatically" effective, the flirtations in which both the miner and his wife are involved. Mrs Holroyd is described as "*tall and voluptuously built*" (63) and her husband as a "*big blond man . . . with a heavy blond moustache*" (71) She has a lover, Blackmore an electrician, a cut above the lowly miner. The husband also has his flings and dances and flirts with women in the pub. However, the relationship between his wife and her lover be-

comes more serious as the play progresses. But it becomes equally clear that the relationship between the two is one of convenience rather than any deep feelings. Blackmore comes to her "cosy" house because "there isn't much in Bestwood, is there?" and Mrs Holroyd feels dissatisfied because she feels out of place in the community where she has to live—"There's less than nothing if you can't be like the rest of them—as common as they're made" (68). She is of course tired of her husband too, who just goes into the pit during the day and to the pub in the evening, leaving the care of the children and the running of the family to his wife. It would therefore seem that she agrees to elope with Blackmore to Spain at the end of Act I, Scene I, mainly in order to escape from the life she finds herself holed up in, rather than to find new love.

Again, as in *A Collier's Friday Night*, the wife in the present play can be held responsible, at least to a certain extent, for aggravating the marital situation. Her upbringing which has given her a sense of superiority has made it difficult for her to get adjusted to the role of a miner's wife about which she, apparently, had no choice. She was left an orphan at the age of six and was brought up by her uncle, who had no children of his own. She went to Mansfield Grammar School, but fell out with her uncle when he asked her to wait in the bar or to become a nursery governess. So, "to get out of it," she "married the first man that turned up" (92). However, once they got married, she started to despise her husband and his ways, and a sharp division inevitably arose between the two, resulting in conflicts and disagreements. For this, Sagar believes, Mrs Holroyd shares a greater responsibility:

Although on the surface Holroyd is coarse and brutal and unworthy of his wife, we do not need to look far below it to see what has provoked him to it. Her assumption of superiority, her real superiority in some respects, drives him to strike out, to mask his humiliation. (47)

To this is added Charles Holroyd's suspicion that his wife is having an affair with another man. His bringing home of the trollops, Clara and Laura, can be seen as his act of revenge against his wife for thus cheating him. But he soon feels apologetic about his act, particularly when his children come down and Clara says, "Aren't they nice children?" He turns "*solemn as a roast potato*" out of feelings of guilt and shame. After the departure of the women, Charles is "*ashamed yet defiant, withal anxious to apologize*." His wife, of course, is outraged and is in no mood to forgive him. She asks him to go away, never to come back again. At this Charles begins to shout at her and tells her that he knows everything about her relationship with Blackmore: "You think you're something, since your uncle left that money, an' Blackmore putting you up to it. I can see your little game" (79). She simply disregards his accusations and counterattacks him for his drunkenness and coarseness. She asks him to "Go, I mean it, go out again. And if you don't come back again, I'm glad. I've had enough." To this he says, "All right then!" but as he goes, the stage directions underscore the ambiguity in their relationship: "*She keeps her face averted, will not look at him . . .*" and he "*hobbles, in unlaced boots to the door. Then he turns to look at her. She turns herself still farther away, so that her back is towards him. He goes.*" It is not long after this that the fatal accident occurs which changes her whole attitude towards her husband.

When this play was first produced by the Altincham Garrick Society, an amateur theatre

group in Cheshire, some critics were disappointed with it because they felt cheated; they felt that the play was inconclusive "for denying the audience the expected dramatic climax between Mrs Holroyd and Blackmore" (Sagar 52). But the play is not so much a love story as a tragedy on an elemental scale. This tragic note is struck very early in the play, when on hearing the voice of Blackmore, which she did not immediately recognize, she characterized it as "the Evil One, out of the darkness" (63). And the play ends with Mrs Holroyd and her mother-in-law seen weeping unconsolably as they wash the dead body of Charles Holroyd. Lena Ashwell, an actress who was asked to act Mrs Holroyd in the play, finally decided against it because "it was terribly tragic, and I felt if I acted in it, I would make the part unbearable for even the toughest audience" (qtd. in Nehls I, 598). Similarly, another actress, Marda Vanne, who actually had played the part in the production of the play in 1926, remarked, "My own country, South Africa, has something of the doom-like quality [of the play]" (qtd. in Nehls III, 673). The profound tragic sense is created, of course, in the last act of the play when the miner's dead body is brought into his house after the pit accident. As both mother and the wife express their lamentations and grief over the death of their son and husband respectively, the whole play is lifted to a higher level of human tragedy.

This climactic last scene opens on an a customary note, the wife waiting for her husband to come for dinner. But he does not come, which is not unusual because he often goes to the pub after work. When it gets late, Blackmore offers to go to find him and bring him home. But instead of his (or their) returning, Charles's mother enters the house and informs Lizzie that Blackmore has told her that he has not found her son in any of the pubs he normally goes to. This has made the old woman worried and she has come to her daughter-in-law. She asks her whether there was any quarrel between her and her husband that might explain his absence, to which Mrs Holroyd replies, "It's nothing I've done" (97). In the ensuing conversation it becomes clear that, whatever the reason might be for his absence on this occasion, she knows that the relations between her and her husband are not good, and that she is, partly at least, to be blamed for it. The old woman tells her that she "has a stiff neck" (98) and that she always thought herself "above him" (99). She also blames her daughter-in-law for refusing to understand the nature of his work and the few means of relaxation that he has: "Well, what can you expect of a man as 'as been shut i' th' pit all day? He must have a bit of relaxation" (98). More seriously, she tells her that she has angered and alienated her husband by having an affair with another man: "They've been saying a long time now as that young electrician is here a bit too often . . . this is going to end in trouble" (98). Here Lawrence is using a brilliant dramatic strategy whereby Mrs Holroyd is faced with truths which she does not deny now, but it is these truths that will blaze accusingly at her when she is confronted by her dead husband.

When her husband is brought home, it is different from previous occasions when he was carried home drunk. Now he is dead. Blackmore tells her the circumstances of the accident, "some stuff fell" (102), and Ringley gives fuller details: "It fell a' back of him, an' shut 'im, as you might shut a loaf i' th' oven. It never touched him . . . You see, it come on 'im as close as a trap on a mouse, an' gen him no air, an' what wi' th' gas, it smothered him. An' it wouldna be very long about it neither" (103). On hearing this, Mrs Holroyd is driven into hysterical grief and lamentation. In perhaps the most moving soliloquy in the play, she bewails her loss as she

sponges the dead man's face and admits her own part in the tragedy:

My dear, my dear—oh, my dear! I can't bear it, my dear—you shouldn't have done it. Oh, I can't bear it for you. Why couldn't I do anything for you? The children's father—my dear—I wasn't good to you. But you shouldn't have done this to me. Oh, dear, oh, dear! Did it hurt you?—oh, my dear, it hurt you—oh, I can't bear it. No, things aren't fair—we went wrong, my dear. I never loved you enough, I never did. What a shame for you! It was a shame. But you didn't—you didn't try. I *would have* loved you—I tried hard. What a shame for you! It was so cruel for you. You couldn't help it—my dear, my dear. You couldn't help it. And I can't do anything for you, and it hurt you so. (*She weeps bitterly, so her tears fall on the dead man's face; suddenly she kisses him.*) My dear, my dear, what can I do for you, what can I? (*She weeps as she wipes his face gently.*) (108)

She looks at her dead husband's cleaned "peaceful" and "smiling" face and says, "I loved him for that" (109).

In such a naturalistic portrayal of a certain section of life, there is no room for praise or blame for any particular character. The characters seem to be "trapped in the social treadmill of a particular way of life" (Sklar 77). But I think Lawrence strikes a higher, more elemental note here, as Synge does in *The Riders to the Sea*. We know that he had admired the play which, he had told Mrs Hopkin, was "about the genuinest bit of dramatic tragedy, English, since Shakespeare . . . (*Letters* I, 260–1). And Sagar believes that Lawrence was inspired to write on a similar vein out of the material that he was close to: "If Synge could make genuine dramatic tragedy out of the culture and speech of the Aran islands, why couldn't Lawrence out of the culture and speech of the Nottinghamshire coalfields? (61).

Indeed, Charles Holroyd's mother brings to one's mind the mother in *The Riders to the Sea* who has been robbed of her sons by the sea. Her overwhelming grief is balanced by the stoicism and fatalism which her life's experiences have taught her. After losing everything she had, the only thing she does not have to fear is any further loss. "Though they're all gone from me now," says Maurya at the close of the play, "and there isn't anything more the sea can do for me." In *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, the death of the miner has not only brought to his wife a new understanding of her relationship with her husband but it also gives the mother the role of a spokeswoman who speaks of the elemental tragedy in which all the living and the dead are victims. She speaks of the cruel treatment that she has suffered as a mother of children: "I'm sure I've had my share of bad luck, I have. I'm sure I've brought up five lads in the pit, through accidents and troubles, and now there's this. The Lord has treated me very hard, very hard" (100–1). But at the same time she clings to the only consolation that she has, religious hope: "But the Lord gave him time to repent. He'd have a few minutes to repent. Ay, I hope he did, I hope he did, else what was to become of him. The Lord cut him off in his sins, but He gave him time to repent" (103). As she washes his dead body, she moves away from her present tragedy and sees him as he was when he was young: "Eh—and he is fair as lily. Did you ever see a man with a whiter skin—flesh as white as driven snow. He's beautiful, he is, the lamb. Many's the time I've looked, and I've felt proud of him, I have. And now he lies" (109). She accepts this tragedy as an elemental phenomenon, and derives her own consolation from doing so. She

asks her daughter-in-law, "Don't cry, my girl, don't" (109).

Thus it is that in this naturalistic play, Lawrence does not simply record characters and their actions but arranges them in such a manner that the proverbial uncouth miner in his writing assumes the role of a tragic hero. When he reviewed a performance of this play, the playwright Simon Gray eloquently congratulated Lawrence on

. . .rediscovering the sources of those great choric threnodies in Greek tragedy. For a short time, at least, the separate members of the audience become one, not only with the mourning widow, but also with the pathetic and still vulnerable body in her arms. The wretched, weary battle between husband and wife is over, the division between the stage and the spectator vanishes, and something like a community is created out of the sharing recognition of the race's tragedy. (454)

High praise indeed.

This is only one example of Lawrence's skills as a dramatist and of how a close study of his plays can throw light on aspects of his artistic vision which remain submerged or ignored in his other writings. It is regrettable that he continues to be so "underestimated as a playwright" (Stringer 381).

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