

Simon Trussler, ed., *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd and other plays* [*A Collier's Friday Night, The Daughter-in-Law, The Fight for Barbara and Touch and Go*], Oxford: Oxford University Press (World's Classics), 2001. Pp. xxxviii + 282, paperback, ISBN 0 192 83314 6, £7.99

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'Compared with that, my prose is machine-made lace. You can hear the typewriter in it.' Bernard Shaw's reported comment, after seeing a performance of *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* in 1926, neatly sums up the difference between his plays and those of D.H. Lawrence. Shaw writes for the reader as much as for an audience. His notoriously long and sometimes ludicrously specific stage directions suggest a writer never quite content to allow his characters to speak for themselves, and who always hankered for the novelist's power of intervention. The dialogue itself often sounds *written* and even at moments of high dramatic tension has the tone of a previously prepared statement. But Lawrence, as Shaw realised, writes for the voice and the ear. In his finest plays, the direct, utterly unpatronising and natural use of dialect, allows the characters to speak for themselves, in a language that creates and contains the drama.

There are, of course, some lengthy stage directions in Lawrence's plays: the one that opens *A Collier's Friday Night*, which specifies the titles of the books on the shelves, betrays something of the self-consciousness of a beginner. But even here the direction has a crucial function in helping the designer, the director and the cast to understand in ways beyond the stereotypical the realities of being in 'a working-man's house'. Elsewhere, the directions are simply brilliant, pointing to the actions the actors should be undertaking while they are speaking: preparing and cooking

food, folding up clean washing, taking off their boots, raking the fire, rolling up the mat, emptying slops. A similar effect is found at the end of the final version of 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', where Elizabeth Bates' reflections on her marriage accompany the washing and dressing of her husband's body. The practical business that occupies Elizabeth and her mother-in-law makes those reflections more painful and poignant. It is while this everyday life goes on, the story and the plays suggest, that the characters achieve access to their deepest feelings.

It is clear that Lawrence's three plays of life in mining communities – *A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* and *The Daughter-in-Law* represent one of the finest achievements in British drama in the early twentieth century. All three plays were completed by 1914, and in that year *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* was published. Only two others of Lawrence's ten plays were published in his lifetime: *Touch and Go* in 1920 and *David* in 1926. *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* was produced three times, in 1916, 1920 and 1926, and *David* was produced once, in 1927, but Lawrence saw none of these productions. The remainder of his plays made their way into print during the 1930s and early 1940s, and in 1965 Heinemann published a two volume *Complete Plays*. It was probably as a result of reading this edition that Peter Gill decided to mount his ground-breaking productions of the three mining community plays, which made their greatest impact at the Royal Court Theatre in 1968. Soon afterwards, Michael Marland edited *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* and *The Daughter-in-Law* for a Heinemann educational series, while Raymond Williams' 1969 Penguin edition of these two plays, together with *A Collier's Friday Night*, made them accessible to a wider reading public.

The reasons for the neglect of Lawrence's plays in his lifetime and their success in the late 1960s are not difficult to find. As Simon Trussler makes clear, the theatre of

Lawrence's day could not accommodate the kind of plays he was writing. Attempts were made to represent working-class life on stage, but the result was usually stereotypical, veering in tone between the comic and the patronising. If theatrical audiences tolerated working-class characters at all, it was only to see them as 'the other', inhabitants of a world beyond their experience, speaking a language whose registers could be unfavourably compared with the standard English of the central characters. Lawrence, however, as Trussler puts it 'wrote of the working classes from within, from experience, and from the heart'. By the 1960s, the English stage was ready for this kind of play: directors were prepared to accept the challenges of producing Lawrence's work; there were actors able to play working-class characters with conviction, often drawing on their own experience; and there was a receptive audience. Already attuned to the work of Osborne, Wesker, Bond and Pinter, as well as to films of books by Sil-litoe, Barstow, Storey and Braine, theatre-goers were able to understand and appreciate Lawrence's plays on their own terms.

Trussler, a distinguished theatre critic and historian, is at his best in contextualising Lawrence's work, both in its own time and in the years since 1968. His readings of the plays, mostly steady and reliable rather than dazzling, are strengthened by the ways in which he relates, say, *The Fight for Barbara* to Ibsen's *The Doll's House*, or perceives an analogy between *Touch and Go* and John Whiting's *Saint's Day*. In this sense, Oxford have made a good choice in asking Trussler to edit this selection: many commentators come to the plays from a background in Lawrence scholarship, and sometimes fail to give sufficient attention to dramatic and theatrical contexts. At the same time, however, Trussler's lack of Lawrence scholarship leads him to oddities of emphasis, dubious judgements and occasional errors of fact. His page and a half on Lawrence's life is very strangely pro-

portioned: one paragraph for the first thirteen years, three for all the rest. This enables Trussler to indulge in a dramatic but somewhat caricatured sketch of the Lawrences' 'ill-fated' marriage. Mr Lawrence is illiterate but possessed of 'rough virtues', with which Mrs Lawrence is briefly infatuated; his lack of ambition drives her to 'fretful disappointment', which drives *him* to the 'rough camaraderie' of the pub. A fully nuanced account would not be possible in so short a space, but something better than this could have been achieved. At least Mr and Mrs Lawrence are *there*, however, which is more than can be said for Louie Burrows, Nottingham University College and the United States of America. Also, to describe Ernest Weekley as 'a Nottingham professor' misses the point; 'one of Lawrence's Nottingham professors' would not have taken many more words, and given some indication of the real situation. And to describe *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* as 'linked novels of provincial life' completely ignores the ways in which the later novel is almost programmatically non-provincial. On page xxxvi there is a reference to the 'Complete Works of 1964', by which is presumably meant the *Complete Plays* of 1965, the dating error being repeated elsewhere.

Doubts must also arise concerning Trussler's choice of copy-text. The Cambridge University Press edition, edited by Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen, appeared in 1999, when Trussler's work was at 'an advanced stage of preparation'. Copyright considerations would no doubt have prevented him from adopting the Cambridge texts, but he anyway claims that the copy-text he chooses – the 1965 *Complete Plays* – has 'the authority of stage performance', because it is that on which Peter Gill's and all subsequent productions have been based. This argument is in some respects persuasive, in that earlier texts, lacking the attention of modern scholarship, but well-known to readers or theatre-goers, retain an historical and cultural interest. Thus, there

is an incontrovertible argument for keeping in print the 1913 version of *Sons and Lovers*, which has played a central role in British literary culture for nearly eighty years; a centrality from which it cannot be displaced by the Cambridge edition of 1992, in which Edward Garnett's cuts are restored. Although the Cambridge editors, rightly in my view, prefer the manuscript of *The Fight for Barbara* as copy-text, there may also be an argument for keeping in print the truncated 1933 *Argosy* text, reprinted in *Complete Plays*, on the grounds that it has been used as the basis for productions since 1965. My problem with Trussler's argument, however, lies in that phrase, 'used as the basis for'. By his own account, theatre directors, including Gill, often cut and rearrange playtexts, and if this is the case, the 1965 *Complete Plays* represents merely a director's starting-point, rather than a guide to what audiences at the Royal Court actually saw and heard in 1968. Surely the only guide approaching reliability would be the performing script, including all the changes made in rehearsal, whose excisions, changes and reorderings would give a much stronger sense of Gill's reading of the plays he directed.

Two cheers, then, for Trussler's edition. It is good to have the best and most frequently produced of Lawrence's plays in a reasonably priced paperback, with notes, helpful (if not totally reliable) background information, and a glossary of dialect terms. But although Trussler claims to have corrected 'evident misprints or mistranscriptions', with the help of the Cambridge edition, it is frustrating to have a text that is confusing in its origins and aims. For in sticking stubbornly to his choice of *Complete Plays* as copy-text, Trussler does not feel the need to indicate what difference might have been made had he chosen some other text. There is no hint of where the 'evident' errors occur, no sense of how manuscript or typescript might differ from printed text, no account of what is contained in the missing portion of *The*

Fight for Barbara. But Trussler is a real enthusiast for the plays, alert to their strengths and to their ability to speak for themselves, rooted as they are in the real lives of feeling people. Lawrence himself made the best single remark about his dramatic work when he said of *The Daughter-in-Law*, 'It is neither a tragedy nor a comedy—just ordinary'. No one before Lawrence, and few since, have made ordinariness so dramatic, vivid and moving.

Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen, eds.,
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1999. Pp. cxxvi + 824, hardback, ISBN 0 521 24277
0, £130

Ian Clarke

In 1955 F.R. Leavis published his seminal *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*. In 1971 Keith Sagar, borrowing from the form of words of Leavis' title, wrote an influential article for the *D.H. Lawrence Review* entitled 'D.H. Lawrence: Dramatist'. Sagar's essay followed on from the 'rediscovery' (or perhaps it would be more accurate to call it the 'discovery') of Lawrence as a dramatist capable of effective and successful staging during the late 1960s in London and British regional theatres. Given its date, that Sagar's was arguably the first serious scholarly essay of any substance to be published on Lawrence's theatre writing is in itself indicative of the curious neglect from which Lawrence's plays have suffered – a neglect shown not just by literary scholars, but by the evidence of the plays' publishing and staging histories. The appearance of *The Plays*, edited by Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen, in the Cambridge University Press series, is therefore most welcome.

Despite Heinemann's publication of Lawrence's *Complete Plays* in 1965, this substantial new edition offers for the first time authoritative texts with extensive critical apparatus and essential historical contextualisation. The admirable work carried out by the two editors is fully in keeping with the high standards we have come to expect of the Cambridge editions.

The volume contains the texts of Lawrence's eight complete plays: *A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, *The Merry-Go-Round*, *The Married Man*, *The Fight For Barbara*, *The Daughter-in-Law*, *Touch and Go*,