

coloured darkness was the embryo of all light' (p. 201). Here we find a source of the little plume of rose in 'The Ship of Death'.

## Dialogue and Dialect in Lawrence's Colliery Plays

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The publishing and stage history in Britain of Lawrence's plays makes for curious reading. Only three were published in Lawrence's lifetime: *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* in 1914, *Touch and Go* in 1920, and *David* in 1926; these three were published posthumously in a single volume in 1933. *A Collier's Friday Night* followed in 1934; the rest remained unpublished until the *Complete Plays* in 1965.<sup>1</sup> *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* was staged in 1920 by the Altrincham Garrick Society and in 1926 by the Stage Society and 300 Club who also staged *David* in 1927. Only with productions in the Royal Court's 1968 season of Lawrence's three colliery plays, *A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Daughter-in-Law* and *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, all written before 1914, was Lawrence's reputation as a dramatist eventually secured.<sup>2</sup> No other generic body of Lawrence's work has suffered such extensive obscurity.

This history partly derives from a cultural prejudice (identified by Williams<sup>3</sup>) against the subject matter and form of the colliery plays. Reviews of the publication of *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* make explicit that Lawrence's representation in dramatic writing of industrial working-class ways of living is repugnant: the play 'is merely another sordid picture of lower class life' ('The Black Country'), 'all its elements are sordid and uninspiring'.<sup>4</sup> Of the 1920 production the *Altrincham Guardian* commented on its 'sordid theme – the dismalness of life in a small colliery town, where work and drink provide the occupations of the people'.<sup>5</sup> The review in the *Graphic* of the 1926 production remarked that 'the spectacle of the dead man's grimy body through half the last act, with his wife and then his mother washing it

for the ceremonies of the grave, is repulsive', and another, showing a keener sense of socio-cultural reference, felt that 'there crept in the gross sentimentality of a Hecuba turned oyster-wench'.<sup>6</sup>

Just as remarkable as the publishing and stage history is the plays' neglect by literary scholars. The first essay in an academic journal<sup>7</sup> acknowledges the plays' existence, but is dismissive, judging them of little value or interest in their own right; their only significance is in their relation to Lawrence's prose fiction. However, in the year of the Royal Court season several very positive essays appeared.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by Sagar's influential article,<sup>9</sup> and the only full length study of Lawrence's plays to date.<sup>10</sup> Since then there have been a mere handful of essays and passing remarks in larger works. Given the extent of the literary-critical interest in Lawrence since the nineteen-fifties, this omission when it comes to the plays is significant.

In the case of the colliery plays, this neglect is connected to a wider difficulty that the literary-critical tradition has in accommodating certain sorts of modern naturalistic drama. The problem resides in the plays' verbal art. Kennedy's 'evaluative' study<sup>11</sup> of language in twentieth-century English drama remarks on the 'verbal poverty of naturalism'; and offers as axiomatic: 'It is no news that naturalism has imposed a severe limitation on the resources of the word in the theatre'. As literary criticism has traditionally valued language usage which it recognises as artistic as opposed to the ordinary language of everyday speech,<sup>12</sup> then naturalistic drama, which seeks to appear to replicate ordinary speech, is immediately disadvantaged unless approaches other than the literary critical are adopted.<sup>13</sup> Even so, studies of stage language employing quite different approaches from each other<sup>14</sup> have all tended to prioritise non-realist texts.

The difficulty literary-critical practice finds in valuing the language of realist drama is exacerbated by the repre-

sentation of working-class speech. Pinero, one of the most successful serious commercial dramatists during the Edwardian period, expresses a common attitude:

I think you would find, if you wanted to write drama, not only that wealth and leisure are more productive of dramatic complications than hard work, but that if you want to get a certain order of ideas expressed or questions discussed, you must go pretty well up in the social scale... You must take into account the inarticulateness, the inexpressiveness, of the English lower-middle and lower classes – their reluctance to analyse, to generalise, to give vivid utterance either to their thoughts or their emotions.<sup>15</sup>

Nor is significant Lawrentian scholarship immune to the cultural and aesthetic prejudice. Emile Delavenay remarks on the 'squalid realism' of the ending of *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* and specifically focuses on its language:

The lamentations of the old mother seem to be a faint echo of the words of Maurya, towards the end of that play [*Riders to the Sea*], but here we find no trace of the verbal beauty of Synge, whose characters also possess a dignity worlds away from the platitudes proffered by Mrs Holroyd, Blackmore and the old woman. A discordant note of squalid realism is continually creeping in: arguments about money, the old woman's recriminations against Lizzie, the triteness of the mother's final words. And how far removed from Synge's original and poetical Anglo-Irish idiom is the rough Nottinghamshire speech!<sup>16</sup>

Delavenay's vocabulary abounds with the cultural underpinnings of what is offered as an unassailable and self-evident aesthetic. Lawrence is compared to Synge in a series of damning oppositions where verbal beauty and dignity are



set against platitude, triteness and discordancy. His designation of the language of Synge's play as 'idiom' and of Lawrence's as 'speech' is in itself an indicative indictment of realist stage dialogue. Delavenay's case depends upon an assumption of essentialist value and aesthetic purity that can accommodate Synge's conventional representation of Irish rural working-class speech but not Lawrence's use of the conventions of stage dialogue to represent the speech of the English industrial working-class.<sup>17</sup>

However, there is an obvious link between the dialogue of the colliery plays and the characters' direct speech in *Sons and Lovers* and the early mining stories. Yet the direct speech in the fiction is rarely castigated in the same way as the dialogue of the plays. This is not surprising for the dominant verbal art of prose fiction is the language of the novelist not the direct speech of the characters. Comparatively little attention is consequently paid to characters' direct speech. Textual analysis in one of the few full length studies of the representation of speech in the novel<sup>18</sup> is not so much concerned with the relationship of that representation to real speech events nor how it may operate as something like dialogue, but rather it centres on its formal relationships with the other prose elements of the novel. Raymond Williams, writing of Lawrence's fiction, does something similar:

When I read Lawrence's early work... what I really find is a miracle of language... What is new here, really new, is that the language of the writer is at one with the language of the characters.<sup>19</sup>

For Williams, even though he thinks highly of the dialogue of the plays, the 'miracle' of Lawrence's language lies not in the characters' speech but in the language of the novelist.

Many responses to productions of the plays in the nineteen-sixties, though, reflected wider changes in cultural attitudes that had become apparent in the previous decade

in the representation of the working class in British fiction, drama, television and film, and in sociological and documentary writings. Theatre critics, for instance, were generally much more favourably disposed to the plays and their language than earlier commentary. And, in certain quarters, academe shared in the change of cultural and aesthetic attitude. Williams wrote in 1968:

[in *The Daughter-in-Law*] all Lawrence's gifts for a precise form of speech – the rhythms of a dialect which is not just a variant of printed English but the shape and sound of a particular way of living – are as evident as anywhere in the stories.

Keith Sagar expressed a similar point of view:

And beneath the surface lies the history of the whole community, the patterns of speech corresponding to patterns of life, of survival and dignity, generated by the conditions of mining life. The dialect and rhythm of their speech functions with poetic force, with potent unfamiliar words like 'sluthering,' salty regional proverbs, and the characteristics of a living, rooted speech.<sup>20</sup>

Williams and Sagar propose an emphatically affirmative class consciousness that asserts the value and importance of working-class regional experience. In terms of stage representation, this entails the inversion of a dominant aesthetic of twentieth century English dramatic writing. In the year of the Royal Court season, the theatre director Peter Brook offered the view that many of the theatre's cultural values had by then been debunked. One of these was the proposition that 'if a man could "write" – and writing meant the ability to put together words and phrases in a stylish and elegant manner – then this was accepted as a start towards good writing in the theatre'.<sup>21</sup> Brook suggests that another



sort of language was now acceptable in the theatre. But, while the dialogue of the colliery plays might fit the concept of a new aesthetic where language no longer needs to be stylish and elegant, he overstates his case. Frank Marcus' review of *The Daughter-in-Law*<sup>22</sup> for *Plays and Players*, the most widely disseminated serious British theatrical monthly at the time, shows that earlier attitudes remained part of the dominant discourse: 'The play is written in archaic Midlands dialect. As much of it is incomprehensible (with the exception of Minnie), I take it to be authentic.' His studied, disengaged irony, representing a class affiliation typical of English theatre, patronises the experience of the colliery plays.

Nevertheless, Marcus, Williams, and Sagar all implicitly agree that the dialogue of the plays can be validated by an impressionistic sense of its truth to life, its authenticity, its reality. The implications of their statements, however, need both elaboration and qualification. They do not sufficiently acknowledge the conventional nature of stage dialogue and consequently imply a too straightforward relationship between notional real speech events and the language of the plays. The aim of a realist play's language is to be mimetic, but its dialogue is never real speech. The stage dialogue of the realist play is constructed from a set of conventions that create the impression of real speech. Moreover, the concept of authenticity does not sufficiently recognise how the dialogue functions in conjunction with a play's other defining systems and ordering principles.

Near the beginning of *A Collier's Friday Night* the following exchange occurs between Mrs Lambert and her daughter, Nellie:

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

NELLIE LAMBERT: 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 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.<sup>23</sup>

Mother and daughter appear merely to chat. The content is inconsequential in as much as Ben Goddard, Polly Goddard, and her young man do not appear in the play nor are they mentioned again. The dialogue approximates, at an impressionistic level, to the sort of conversation one might expect in a similar real life situation. Basil Bernstein's findings in sociolinguistics reveal that the passage exhibits features of the restricted code of language.<sup>24</sup> This code is predominantly employed in informal situations, within the family for instance, and indicates shared knowledge and assumptions among the speakers. Grammatically it is marked by a high proportion of personal pronouns, as in Mrs Lambert's sentence beginning 'I didn't know he was at work again...' This is an important mode of communication that stresses a speaker's membership of a group. Lawrence, here, is exploiting a real mode of communication that can be identified linguistically. On the other hand, considered as a piece of stage speech, its calculated redundancy within connected passages of dialogue might be seen as the equivalent of the insertion of lexical fillers in any individual speech – a technique in writing realist dialogue. The apparent inconsequence and redundancy are therefore simultaneously like a real speech event identifiable from linguistic markers, and also a technical convention of realist dramatic writing. The result is an audience's intuited impression that the dialogue is like real speech.

Such observations are crucial to an understanding of how authenticating techniques operate in realist stage dialogue.



Lawrence successfully fulfils the mimetic needs of realist dialogue. But the dialogue's dramatic effectiveness goes far beyond the merely mimetic. It is so central to the systems of definition of *A Collier's Friday Night* that the significance of the Mrs Lambert / Polly exchange cannot be separated from the play's overall structure.

In the context of the well-made play of the period, *A Collier's Friday Night* is the least formally plotted of the colliery plays. The structure of the play is the Friday night itself; it starts with the principal characters' return from work and ends at bed-time. While many things happen, the play has no plot in the way that concept was usually conceived in the Edwardian theatre. Its defining system does not arise from the ordering of experience by a formal plot structure. B.A. Young's glaringly inaccurate review<sup>25</sup> of *The Daughter-in-Law* ironically indicates the actual defining system of *A Collier's Friday Night*. Young states in passing that *A Collier's Friday Night* shows evidence of Lawrence's technical inadequacy as a dramatist because he brings on stage every character he mentions. Over thirty other characters in addition to the Goddards are mentioned individually but do not appear. Most are actually named (this specificity is crucial) and, even when not named, virtually all are individuated in terms of professional, social, and personal relationships within and around the mining town.

Exchanges, of which that between Mrs Lambert and Nellie is just one of many, may at one level be inconsequential, but they are not redundant in the play's overall defining system. Although individually incidental, Lawrence uses such references compositely to establish relationships, opportunities, and modes of behaviour in this specific mining community. This method locates the characters who do appear on stage and enables their status and behaviours to be comprehended.

A curious effect is that the drama becomes one of typicality not exceptionality; or, what might appear to be exceptionality is variation within a typicality. Thus the character of Barker, one of Lambert's fellow butties who is learning to play the piano, is defined by the sense, which is made quite explicit, of what this means in relation to a communal norm where men like him rarely learn piano. Barker is a minor figure, but the same system of relationships defines and locates the central characters. Ernest, for instance, would appear superficially to be the most exceptional character in the play. He is twenty-two, the son of a miner, and in full-time education. Yet he, and his schoolteacher sister, reflect how real developments in late nineteenth century educational provision created new opportunities for working-class children. At one level *A Collier's Friday Night* dramatises and problematises the effects of these developments. Nevertheless, the identity of Ernest and Nellie rests in their relationship to the defining working-class context. They are largely bound by the range of opportunities, and social and economic formations of the colliery town. Thus, in the first act, apparently inconsequential dialogue between Nellie and Gertie about young men and Friday night courting indicates that their range of options is circumscribed by opportunities within the mining town. Seen in this light, the central relationship between Ernest and Maggie has a greater typicality than the equivalent relationship between Paul and Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*.

The dramatic conflicts arising from the clash of working-class and middle-class values are complicated and subtle. Despite Mrs Lambert's middle-class attitudes, her dominant identity is provided by the defining social and economic context. She is primarily a miner's wife. She can converse with Ernest about the death of Swinburne, yet in her conversation with Barker she shows a fundamental affiliation to the experience and values of the colliery community. This affili-



ation is identified specifically by Lawrence's notation of her use of colloquial and dialect forms:

MOTHER: ...Sit down, Mr Barker. How's that lad of yours?

BARKER: Well, 'e seems to be goin' on nicely, thank yer. Dixon took th' splints off last wik.

MOTHER: Oh, well, that's better! He'll be alright directly. I should think he doesn't want to go in the pit again –

BARKER: 'e doesna. 'e says 'e shall go farmin' wi' Jakes, but I shanna let 'im. It's nowt o' a sort o' job that.

MOTHER: No, it isn't. (*Lowering her voice.*) And how's Mrs? (*Plays*, p. 18)

The behaviour of the central characters, like that of the minor and unseen characters, is defined by its relationship to what the play's dialogue indicates are the dominant behaviours and attitudes in the community. The significance of the dialogue in *A Collier's Friday Night* is not so much that it seems like real speech; its crucial function in the drama is its contribution to the play's central defining system. Nevertheless, the very ordinariness of the dialogue can disappoint literary expectations of dramatic language.

At the beginning of *The Daughter-in-Law*, Mrs Purdy bluntly confronts Mrs Gascoyne whose son impregnated Bertha Purdy shortly before his marriage to another woman: 'It's a matter of a girl wi' child, an' a man six week married' (*Plays*, p. 213). While most of the exchanges in this scene are predominantly denotational, if perhaps not so peremptory, the characters are also capable of figurative language. Mrs Purdy and Joe use two unexpected, inventive metaphors:

MRS PURDY: An' what about him, Missis, as goes an' gets married t'r another fine madam d'rectly after he's been wi' my long lass?

JOE: But he niver knowed owt about –

MRS PURDY: He'd seen th' blossom i' flower, if he hadna spotted th' fruit acomin'.

JOE: Yi – but –

MRS GASCOYNE: Yi but what – ?

JOE: Well, – you dunna expect – ivry time yer cast yer bread on th' watters, as it'll come whoam to you like – (*Plays*, p. 309)

Metaphors are, of course, not only a feature of real speech events but a literary device valued for the relationship between vehicle and tenor, their linguistic and conceptual ingenuity, and their originality. The figurative language of Mrs Purdy and Joe may be colourful but it is doubtful whether it can be positively evaluated by these sorts of literary criteria. These metaphors do not function structurally as part of a developed verbal system valued because it informs and resonates throughout a whole text. Rather they are incidentally functional to this specific situation: Mrs Purdy and Joe need to shift into metaphor for reasons of euphemism. This enables the older women and the young man to conduct a conversation about the consequences of irregular sexual activity. Metaphor here is not provided for an audience's pleasure, its main function is as a means of communication between the characters.

Aspects of Joe's humorous discourse function in a similar way to these metaphors. In the second scene he deliberately breaks two plates from Minnie's dinner service. Partly to placate, partly to infuriate her, he launches into a comic routine:

MINNIE: Why did you break my plate?

JOE: Nay, I didna break it – it wor th' floor.

MINNIE: You did it on purpose.

JOE: How could I? I didn't say ter th' floor: 'break thou this plate, oh floor!'



MINNIE: You have no right –

JOE (*addressing the floor*): Tha'd no right to break that plate – dost hear? I'd a good mind ter drop a bit o' puddin' on thy face. (*Plays*, p. 323)

Joe's is not that sort of high comedy that depends upon linguistic and conceptual sophistication. An obvious antithesis to Joe's humour is the epigrammatic style of Oscar Wilde. The difference between the two is not just of style and content but of theatrical purpose. A Wildean epigram may be directed to a specific character or characters but its humour is aimed not at stage characters as much as the audience. Unlike Wilde, Lawrence does not contrive Joe's humour for the sake of the audience's desire to be amused. Joe is a humorist in accordance with Keating's observation that the true humour of the realist writer is funny to the characters rather than to the reader.<sup>26</sup> The logic of Joe's humour is therefore internal not external to the play. In the theatre Wilde's method results in a process of reciprocating flattery where members of the audience appreciate what is offered them by the play and thus feel that they share in the author's wit, range of cultural reference, linguistic skill, and intellectual agility. Joe's humour disappoints this sort of class-determined cultural expectation, whether at the Court in 1912 or the Royal Court in 1968. Moreover, it cannot readily be validated by those traditions of literary and theatrical criticism which value Wilde's work.

A corollary of the above is that it is problematic to apply to the colliery plays the concepts and vocabulary which are used to judge the verbal art of different sorts of texts. The first problem is that if conventional literary judgements are invoked, the colliery plays' verbal art fails. This is exemplified by Joe's humour. A further problem occurs with commentary that uses standard critical terminology in order to express a positive response. Thus Sagar claims that 'the dialogue [is charged] with poetic force, in, for example,

such potent unfamiliar words as 'sluthering' and 'slikey', or such phrases as 'Ah dun, if you dunna'.<sup>27</sup> But there are critical difficulties here. What exactly is the relationship between the unfamiliarity of a word (seemingly because it is not standard English but a socio-geographical dialect) and its potency? Also the notion of poetic force seems inappropriate to the words and phrase Sagar cites. The cultural and ideological implications of the concept of the poetic when applied to these plays distort their language and the experience it offers. Writing of *The Daughter-in-Law*, Lawrence himself thought standard critical terminology inappropriate, 'it is neither a comedy nor a tragedy – just ordinary'.<sup>28</sup>

In the nineteen-sixties, as in the Edwardian period and the present day, the class-bound nature of English theatre meant that the production of the colliery plays is the provision of working-class spectacle for a predominantly middle-class audience. The application of the idea of the poetic to these plays' language is the literary-critical equivalent of a wider cultural perception of seeing its difference from standard English as 'charming'. Just how readily this sort of perception could be applied to any variation from standard English is indicated by these observations made in the year of the Royal Court season of *Blood Knot*, a play by the South African writer Athol Fugard:

For English readers, of course, such dialogue as this has the added charm of a genuinely conceived dialect drama, in which the familiarity of one's native tongue is distanced by those slight modifications of expression and emphasis which define the play's locale as precisely in verbal terms as its setting does in physical.<sup>29</sup>

The colliery plays have also been subject to this sort of cultural perception. Praise of their 'salty regional proverbs'<sup>30</sup> shares in the construction of a version of English regionalism



that not only distorts the experience of the plays but can accommodate more appropriately a very different sort of play. Thus J.C. Trewin, reviewing *The Daughter-in-Law*,<sup>31</sup> commented on what he viewed as its reach-me-down aphorisms: 'With suitable apologies to Lawrentians, this might be the very voice of Phillpotts' Dartmoor ancient Churdles Ash'. He refers to Eden Phillpotts' *The Farmer's Wife*, a popular light comedy typical of many hundreds of English plays of this century which have an utterly conventional non-specific rustic setting whose characters' speech has been appropriately designated the dialect of 'Mummerset' – a location non-existent except on the English stage.

Consequently, there is a genuine difficulty about how one approaches the dialogue of these plays. One way is through a consideration of Lawrence's use of dialect and linguistic variation in the context of the dominant modes of twentieth-century English drama.

Raymond Williams, writing of a similar issue in the English novel, observes:

We have only to read a George Eliot novel to see the difficulty of the coexistence, within one form, of an analytically conscious observer of conduct with a developed analytical vocabulary, and of people represented as living and speaking in mainly customary ways.

Williams identifies a 'failure of continuity between the necessary language of the novelist and the recorded language of the characters'.<sup>32</sup> In the drama the relationships are somewhat different: the verbal art of a play exists primarily in the direct speech of the characters. But it remains that the linguistic norm of twentieth-century English drama is, like the predominant language of the novelist, educated middle-class English and against this norm language variation is pitched. Working-class variation is most often represented

in very conventional ways for, if the structural emphasis of the drama is on the experience and speech patterns of the middle classes, any other class dialect can be differentiated from the norm by obvious, and easily achieved markers.

This is apparent in Galsworthy's play *Strife*, of which Lawrence had a low opinion.<sup>33</sup> In the second act, Enid Underwood, the wife of the works manager, visits the home of one of the workers. Her paternalistic attitude is exposed by Galsworthy's skilful representation of her speech patterns:

You all seem to think the shareholders are rich men, but they're not – most of them are really not better off than working men... They have to keep up appearances... You don't have to pay rates and taxes, and a hundred other things that they do. If the men didn't spend such a lot in drink and betting they'd be quite well off!<sup>34</sup>

The scene's effectiveness derives from an ability to decode the signifiers of middle-class stage dialogue. Even though her middle-class viewpoints are castigated, the emphasis remains with an examination of middle-class ways of thinking. Thus, judgements made within the play are constructed within the formality of varieties of middle-class social and ideological discourse. Working-class experience is mediated within the terms of that discourse. Consequently, working-class language is essentially subordinate as a mediator of the play's central focus. This is apparent in the structure of the scene as a whole. It is instructive to consider the representation of working-class speech at the scene's start before Enid Underwood appears:

MRS. YEO. So he give me a sixpence, and that's the first bit o' money *I* seen this week. There an't much 'eat to this fire. Come and warm yerself, Mrs. Rous, you're lookin' as white as the snow, you are.



MRS. ROUS. [*Shivering placidly*] Ah! but the winter my old man was took was the proper winter. Seventy-nine that was, when none of you was hardly born – not Madge Thomas, nor Sue Bulgin. [*Looking at them in turn.*] Annie Roberts, 'ow old were you, dear?

MRS. ROBERTS. Seven, Mrs. Rous.

MRS. ROUS. Seven – well ther'! A tiny little thing!

MRS. YEO. [*Aggressively*] Well, I was ten myself, I remembers it.

MRS. ROUS. [*Placidly*] The Company hadn't been started three years. Father was workin' on the acid that's 'ow he got 'is pisoned leg. I kep' sayin' to 'im 'Father, you've got a pisoned leg.' 'Well,' 'e said, 'Mother, pison or no pison, I can't afford to go a-layin' up.' An'two days after he was on 'is back, and never got up again. It was Providence! There wasn't none o' these Compension Acts then.<sup>35</sup>

References, for instance to an industrial accident, do not contribute to an understanding of the dispute that lies at the play's centre. That dispute is defined by the confrontation between Enid Underwood and the working women, not by a mediation of communal working-class experience. Moreover, working-class characters' dialogue is expository and conventional, transitions between speeches are awkward. Galsworthy is unable to capture the subtle nuances of tone and variation that are a feature of the dialogue of his middle-class characters.

Nevertheless, Galsworthy was viewed at the time as offering a serious and successful representation of working-class life. Many other Edwardian dramatists – Granville Barker, Shaw, Stanley Houghton, Harold Brighouse, Elizabeth Baker, Cicely Hamilton, Alan Monkhouse, Githa Sowerby – were exercised by the problems of developing

the conventions of stage dialogue to represent working-class speech. Yet, even among these, it is rare to find dramatists who can represent the range, registers, and variations of working-class speech with the skill and competence of the typical stage representation of middle-class speech. The mainstream tradition of twentieth-century English theatre – Maugham, Lonsdale, Coward, Rattigan, Priestley, Mortimer, Ayckbourn – has been principally preoccupied with middle-class experience and language.

Linguistic variety in the representation of working-class speech in twentieth century English drama has most frequently been indicated by regional variation. *Strife*, for instance, is set in a non-specific location on the English/Welsh border. When Galsworthy introduces individual workers, he indicates their speech patterns in only the broadest terms: Green – '*an Englishman*',<sup>36</sup> Thomas – '*a pure Welshman*'.<sup>37</sup> This way of conceiving of regional variation is a durable and complacent convention as can be seen in J.B. Priestley's *Desert Highway*<sup>38</sup>: 'Herbert Shaw is a... West Riding working-class type'; 'Illydd Hughes is very Welsh in accent and manner and general outlook'; '"Knocker" Elvin is a Cockney of the Cockneys'; 'George Wick... preferably should speak with something like a Gloucestershire accent, but any not too marked rural accent will do, so long as it is not North-country or Welsh'.<sup>39</sup> One would not have to read far in twentieth-century English drama to find many other examples. The most telling note is for George Wick which indicates no dialect specificity or even regional identity so long as it doesn't replicate those of Shaw or Hughes. Thus the notation of any regional dialect variation can only be conventional and generalising.

Language variation and its defining functions in Lawrence's plays need to be seen in the light of these dominant conventions. The most extreme class variation is shown



by Ernest's and his father's speech patterns in *A Collier's Friday Night*:

ERNEST LAMBERT: I say, Mater, another seven and six up your sleeve... Piers the Ploughman, that piffle, and two books of Horace: Quintus Horatius Flaccius, dear old chap. (*Plays*, p. 15)

FATHER: ...I wonder how 'er'd like to clap 'er 'arce into wet breeches. (*Plays*, p. 11)

The effect, albeit easily achieved, indicates a divergence of experiential and cultural histories that is central to the play. This is, however, vastly different from the similar juxtaposition of class dialects in *Strife*. Ernest's register does not represent the dominant linguistic variety, nor does it offer a judgemental reference point. In keeping with the defining system of the play as a whole, the father's speech patterns represent the typicality against which Ernest's middle-class dialect is pitted.

Lawrence does not usually depend upon such widely divergent class dialects to indicate difference between characters. Nor does he utilise the overworked stage convention of regional difference. The defining function of linguistic variation operates within the social and geographical restrictions of the plays' settings. Two examples will give some indication of Lawrence's method.

In the second act of *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* Blackmore and Holroyd argue:

BLACKMORE: I think I'd better go. You seem to enjoy - er - er - calumniating your wife.

HOLROYD (*mockingly*): Calamniating - calamniating - I'll give you calamniating, you mealy-mouthed jockey: I'll give you calamniating. (*Plays*, p. 83)

Lawrence's notation shows Blackmore searching with some difficulty for the unusual word 'calumniating'; Holroyd's colloquial rejoinder, 'you mealy-mouthed jockey', is offered as the more spontaneous language usage. The phonetic shift when Holroyd contemptuously returns the latinate word should also be noted. A similar phonetic shift occurs in an argument between Ernest and Lambert in *A Collier's Friday Night*; Lawrence notates the psychological process involved: Lambert is 'speaking with an exaggerated imitation of his son's English' (*Plays*, p. 49); later, 'his accent is becoming still more urban. His 'os' are 'as', so that 'nothing' is 'nathing' (*Plays*, p. 50). It should be added, given the play's geographical setting, that his accent is becoming more southernly urban. Both Holroyd and Lambert are responding to what they recognise as alien registers and point them up as such. Despite the understatement of the notation of Holroyd's shift, it is effective because it reinforces and contributes to the play's overall defining system. It makes sense in terms of social and professional relationships in the mining town. Holroyd works at the coal face; Blackmore is a pit electrician. Blackmore's job makes him appear genteel to Mrs Holroyd and therefore more attractive than her husband. Blackmore has a certain status because of his profession that coincides with his self-mocking description of himself as one of the 'gentlemen on a mine'; yet the play also establishes a hierarchy in the mining community which recognises the value of hard labour. This is acknowledged in his next remark: 'But mine's a lad's job, and I do nothing!' (*Plays*, p. 64). These cross-currents, that arise from the play's internal systems of definition, are implicit in the brief exchange cited above where Blackmore's self-conscious erudition is balanced against Holroyd's bluntness. Lawrence's achievement here lies in his subtle precision that operates totally within a *specific* working-class setting.



In *The Daughter-in-Law*, there is a similar finesse in the handling of socio-regional variation. Minnie mostly speaks a fairly standard English; her mother-in-law and antagonist is represented as more typical of the mining community by, among other things, her use of dialect forms. Yet Minnie harangues first her husband, Luther, and then her mother-in-law as follows:

It isn't what you do, it's how you do it. Sluther through any job; get to th' end of it, no matter how. That's you... You'll be a dayman at seven shillings a day till the end of your life – and you'll be satisfied, so long as you can shilly-shally through. That's what your mother did for you – mardin' you up till you were all mard-soft. (*Plays*, p. 321)

You didn't care what women your sons went with, so long as they didn't *love* them. What do you care really about this affair of Bertha Purdy. You don't. All you cared about was to keep your sons for yourself. You kept the solid meal, and the orts and slarts any other woman could have. But I tell you, I'm *not* for having the orts and slarts, and your leavings from your sons. (*Plays*, p. 348)

Minnie, while her predominant discourse is close to standard English, adopts speech patterns more usually associated in the play with old Mrs Gascoyne. She uses dialect words specifically to describe the effect on Luther of his mother's possessiveness. As the closeness of family ties is represented as a communal norm, Minnie effectively shows her contempt for a system of values of which the dialect she uses is itself an expression.

These examples indicate some of the ways Lawrence represents working-class dialect variation with a precision and subtlety extremely rare in twentieth-century English drama

and almost inconceivable in the Edwardian period itself. This is one of his major achievements in English theatre. The colliery plays demonstrate that working-class dialogue can avoid complacently conventional representations, that it can fulfil the mimetic needs of realist stage dialogue, and, above all, can also serve a defining function that creates dramatic meaning. In wider cultural terms, the colliery plays assert the validity and importance of working-class experience; their language testifies that that experience can be successfully represented in a dramatic form which works in the class-defined context of English theatre.

## Endnotes

1. The publishing history of Lawrence's plays is listed in what is now the definitive Cambridge University Press edition: *The Plays*, edited by Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
2. The Royal Court preceded its 1968 season with productions of *A Collier's Friday Night* in 1965 and *The Daughter-in-Law* in 1967. The latter play was staged at the Traverse, Edinburgh, also in 1967. As the earlier productions had been done by amateur play-producing societies, these were effectively the first professional productions of Lawrence's plays.
3. Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1968, p. 258.
4. J.R. Crawford, review of *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, *Yale Review* 4, 1915, p. 624.
5. Keith Sagar and Sylvia Sklar, 'Major Productions of Lawrence's Plays', in *A D.H. Lawrence Handbook*, ed. Keith Sagar, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982, p. 286.
6. Omicron, review of *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, *Nation and Athenaeum* 40, p. 422. Reprinted in Sagar and Sklar, *ibid.*, pp. 292–93.
7. Arthur E. Waterman, 'The Plays of D.H. Lawrence', *Modern Drama* 2, 1960, pp. 349–57.
8. Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1968; Raymond Williams, 'Introduction', *Three Plays, by D.H. Lawrence*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, pp. 7–14 and Michael Marland, 'Introduction', *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd and The Daughter-in-Law by D.H. Lawrence*, London: Heinemann Educational, 1968, pp. xi–xxxvi.



9. Keith Sagar, 'D.H. Lawrence: Dramatist', *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 4, 1971, pp. 154–82.
10. Sylvia Sklar, *The Plays of D.H. Lawrence*, London: Vision, 1975.
11. Andrew Kennedy, *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
12. Tzvetan Todorov, 'Artistic Language and Ordinary Language', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 October 1973.
13. See Deirdre Burton, *Dialogue and Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Modern Drama Dialogue and Naturally Occurring Conversation*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, *passim*; and Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 51–70.
14. John Russell Brown, *Theatre Language: A Study of Arden, Osborne, Pinter and Wesker*, London: Allen Lane, 1972; Andrew Kennedy, *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975; Deirdre Burton, *op.cit.*; Vimala Herman, *Dramatic Discourse: Dialogue as Interaction in Plays*, London: Routledge, 1995.
15. William Archer, *Real Conversations*, London: Heinemann, 1904, pp. 21–2.
16. Emile Delavenay, *D.H. Lawrence: The Man and His Work. The Formative Years: 1885–1919*, trans. Katherine M. Delavenay, London: Heinemann, 1972, p. 108.
17. The essentialism of Delavenay's position is more apparent in the original French. Synge's 'verbal beauty' is a rendering of the original's 'véritable beauté'; and, in a phrase entirely omitted from the English version. Delavenay offers the opinion that Synge 'a su retrouver des accents éternels'. See Emile Delavenay, *D.H. Lawrence: L'homme et la genèse de son oeuvre: les années de formation: 1885–1919*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1969, p. 147.
18. Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel*, London: Longman, 1974.
19. Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1970, pp. 172–73.
20. Keith Sagar, 'D.H. Lawrence: Dramatist', in *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, 4, 1971, p. 157.
21. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, London: McGibbon and Key, 1968, p. 37.
22. Frank Marcus, 'The Dominant Sex', review of *The Daughter-in-Law, Plays and Players*, 1967, May, p. 19.
23. Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen, eds., *The Plays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 7. References to this edition will be abbreviated to *Plays* and included in the body of the text.
24. Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, vol. i, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, pp. 76–78 and *passim*.

25. B.A. Young, 'The Daughter-in-Law', *Financial Times*, 8 March 1968, p. 28.
26. P.J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 191.
27. Keith Sagar, *D.H. Lawrence: Life Into Art*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p. 42.
28. James T. Boulton, ed., *Letters*, vol. i., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 500–501.
29. Simon Trussler, 'Introduction', in *New English Dramatists*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968, p. 13.
30. Keith Sagar, 'D.H. Lawrence: Dramatist', *op.cit.*, p. 157.
31. J.C. Trewin, Review of *The Daughter-in-Law*, *Illustrated London News*, 6 March 1968, p. 32.
32. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1973, p. 169.
33. D.H. Lawrence, 'Preface', *Touch and Go, Phoenix II*, ed., Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore, London: Heinemann, 1968, p. 291.
34. John Galsworthy, *op.cit.*, p. 123.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
38. J.B. Priestley, *Four Plays*, London: Heinemann, 1944.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 176.