

John Worthen and Lindeth Vasey, eds., *The First 'Women in Love'*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. lv + 532, ISBN 0 521 37326 3

Rosemary Howard

I make no attempt in this short commentary on *The First 'Women in Love'* to review critically the volume as a whole – to comment, for example, on the expertise of the editors in their presentation of the complex textual history of the novel, or on their provision of explanatory notes and textual apparatus. I confine myself to making some points on the editors' discussion of the nature of Lawrence's revisions (some of which are most helpfully listed in the 'Introduction'), and on some of their literary judgements concerning the relative merits of the two versions.

In the 'Introduction', the editors suggest that *The First 'Women in Love'* (hereafter F.W.L.) is one of Lawrence's greatest works – and, by implication, that it is in some ways greater as a work of art than the novel we know in its final form. The task of forming a holistic concept of the earlier draft and making a just comparison is a daunting one, yet in my view it is perfectly possible to argue the counter-case (as Howard Booth suggests in his Review Essay in D.H.L.R. Volume 28 No 3): that the final *Women in Love* is the greater achievement, in spite of such obvious flaws as the embarrassing Blatavsky additions to 'Excuse'.

The division of the later novel into a greater number of scenes, i.e. chapters, seems wholly advantageous, avoiding, for example, the almost comical jump from Birkin's tedious monologue regarding death as the giver of freedom in his discussion of marriage with Gerald (p.325, F.W.L.) to, in the very next paragraph, 'There was a jumble market every Monday afternoon in the old market-place in town.'

To me, the argument that Lawrence made changes in his references to war and increased the emphasis on violence in the second text as a result of his changing feelings about the progress of the war, seems to be on thin ground. I believe this is so since there must have been little change in the desperate news from France in the months in 1916 when Lawrence wrote the bulk of F.W.L. and the months in 1917 when he rewrote it. Admittedly Birkin's comment at the end of *Women in Love* – 'We shan't have any need to despair, in death' – is a much more cynical commentary on the future than 'All is not lost' which appears near the end of the first draft. But the increased stress on violence throughout the revised version, as seen in the 'Rabbit' chapter, seems to me to be aesthetically and deliberately determined as a result of Lawrence's critical hind-sight which led him, on re-reading the earlier version, to the necessity of pointing and sharpening the characters, rather than as the result of a growing despair about the outcome of the war.

This process of sharpening, as John Worthen indeed points out, starts in the very first scene, where the sisters' discussion of marriage and child-bearing is much more biting and cynical in the second version. The changes in the 'Rabbit' chapter, as I see it, are part of Lawrence's plan to foreshadow, anticipate and so heighten, the ultimate destructiveness of the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun with their 'mutual hellish recognition' and Gerald's realisation of 'her sullen passion of cruelty.'

Finally, one of the most interesting aspects of the development of the characters in 1917, pointed out by Mark Kinkad-Weekes, is how Lawrence uses Ursula's regular ridiculing of Birkin's attitudes to underline the inconsistencies of his character, as well as the ambivalence of their relationship – in other words, he achieves a psychological deepening of his main characters which was possibly a reflection of his

own developing attitudes to marriage and relationships between men and women.

In view of Lawrence's statement, 'There was a lot of the original draft that I couldn't have bettered'<sup>1</sup>, it seems logical to argue that in the version we know best, at least he thought he was improving his earlier draft.

### Endnotes

1. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson, eds., *Letters III*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p.25.

Rosemary Sumner, *A Route to Modernism: Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000. Pp. xiv + 208, hardback, 42.50 GBP

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As the title of Rosemary Sumner's thought-provoking book suggests, there are many routes to modernism; and they do not all lead to the same destination. 'Modernism' emerged as a literary term in the 1960s as a way of describing the changes in literature from 1880-1930. None of the writers it was used to describe would have called themselves modernists, although they might have admitted to being Imaginists, Vorticists or Futurists. To cover such a range of practices, the term had to be commodious (although it could also be proscriptive and exclusive) and encompass both the 'dry', concentrated modernism of Pound or Eliot and the more fluid, impressionistic writing of Woolf or Dorothy Richardson. Among its putative contexts are Darwinism, urbanisation, the rise of mass culture, scientific and technological developments and psychoanalysis. It has been seen as both democratic and elitist, socialist and fascist. Recently, post-modernism has encouraged us to pluralise the concept, and to find interest and energy on the borders where its differing practices contend.

Rosemary Sumner is aware of these complexities without spending a great deal of time on definitions or the conflicts within modernism. She is concerned with how Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf 'push out the boundaries of the novel, extending it into unknown regions of the universe and the psyche' (xiii). Where Joyce creates puzzles which given the right key can be solved, they create mysteries, are interested in 'the inconsistent, the irrational, the unresolved, the unknown' (p.2), and are drawn to indeterminacy and multiplicity. Their characters, like Elizabeth-Jane in *The Mayor*