

## THE NOVEL AS DRAMATIC POEM (VI):

## 'WOMEN IN LOVE' (III)

SO substantially and wonderfully is *Women in Love* an achieved thing that the faults seem to me very minor. I have spoken of the worst, the element of jargon, which is the more irritating because it so often comes when the uncertainty it betrays is unnecessary: what Lawrence offers to reinforce by saying and insisting, though saying could in any case be of no avail, his art has sufficiently done. The other fault is of a kind that might look like strength, for in it are certainly manifested, in a striking way, the powers of a highly gifted novelist. It is represented pre-eminently by chapters VI and VII ('Crème de Menthe' and 'Token') and chapter XXVIII ('Gudrun in the Pompadour'). Lawrence here does some astonishingly vivid history: he recreates, giving us the identifiable individuals, the metropolitan Bohemia he had known after the success of *Sons and Lovers*. A great deal of what he renders with such force is clearly there because it was once actual; he recalls the scene, the detail and the face. The episode that made so deep an impression on him goes in, for that reason—even when it was one he only heard about, as for instance that of the impounding of the letter by Katherine Mansfield at the Café Royal. But all that doesn't owe its presence to the needs of thematic definition and development would have been better excluded; a point to be made with the more emphasis since *Women in Love* has so complex and subtle an organization, and we have to assume in general, as we read, that everything is fully significant.

How, we have now to inquire, was it possible to bring against Lawrence's art in *Women in Love* the kind of criticism brought with such violence by Middleton Murry when the novel came up for review?—

'we can discern no individuality whatever in the denizens of Mr. Lawrence's world. We should have thought that we should be able to distinguish between male and female, at least. But no! Remove the names, remove the sedulous catalogue of unnecessary clothing . . . and man and woman are as indistinguishable as octopods in an aquarium tank'.<sup>1</sup>

If what we have here were merely an astonishing capacity for aberration in a given critic there would be no point in asking how such a pronouncement should have been possible. But Murry's reaction has in fact a representative quality. It expresses in an extreme form a kind of dislike that one met with among the

<sup>1</sup>J. Middleton Murry: *Reminiscences of D. H. Lawrence*, p. 223.

sophisticated in the 1930s when advancing the claims of Lawrence ('I've no use for a novelist who can't create characters you can get hold of'). Where *Women in Love* has been in question I am not sure that Murry's verdict wouldn't at any time up till now have been very generally endorsed. No one, of course, could say of the great body of short stories and *nouvelles* that they were remarkable for any lack of gift or bent they showed for the evoking of distinguishable *dramatis personae*. And—though how account for the almost complete neglect suffered by such a masterpiece as *St. Mawr*?—that an original creative genius appears convincingly in some of them has been very widely recognized. Yet the power of making human individuality livingly present which is in fact one of the striking manifestations of that genius in the tales is not less undeniably there in *Women in Love*. By 'undeniably' I mean that one could, without research, produce abundant and varied illustration of the thing's being done, in ways that the ordinary novel-reader might have been expected to find irresistible—if, that is, *Women in Love* hadn't offered so much more than the dramatic play of 'character'.

Here, of course, in this last clause, we have the answer to the question why so patently false a judgment as that of Murry's quoted above should have been possible. These recognizable manifestations of the 'art of the novelist' are, like everything else in *Women in Love* (with the minor qualifications suggested), wholly significant, and significant in relation to a drama of a different order from that of *Madame Bovary* or of *Adam Bede*—or of *Sons and Lovers*. The habit-conditioned novel-reader brings to the book expectations that certainly do not open him to the possibility of that kind of significance; he merely feels that such local life as he may acclaim is unexplained, or wantonly stultified, by the offered context; he is left with a general impression of meaningless chaos. Murry, intent on the significance, and responding with exasperation to a challenge he doesn't understand, but is sure he hates, declares the whole book altogether devoid of any life that is distinguishably human: 'We can discern no individuality whatever in the denizens of Mr. Lawrence's world'.

Yet consider Hermione Roddice. I pick on her because she so indisputably has all the qualifications for being recognized as triumphantly a character even by the novel-reader who is repelled by the hint of Laurentian significances. With her introduction at the wedding, in the first chapter, she becomes for us a potent specific presence. We see her first through Ursula Brangwen's eyes:

'a tall slow, reluctant woman with a weight of fair hair, and a pale, long face. This was Hermione Roddice, a friend of the Criches. Now she came along with her head held up, balancing an enormous flat hat of pale yellow velvet, on which were streaks of ostrich feathers, natural and grey. She drifted forward as if scarcely conscious, her long blanched face lifted up, not to see the world. . . . People were silent when she passed, impressed,

aroused, wanting to jeer, yet for some reason silenced. Her long, pale face, that she carried lifted up, somewhat in the Rossetti fashion, seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within, and she was never allowed to escape'.

Her physical presence and her manner are as vividly evoked as those of any character in fiction, and they transmit to us the resonance of her inner personality. The highly and convincingly individual Hermione, who is 'there' beyond question even for the reader who doesn't take kindly to the hint of significances that are not to be expressed in the climaxes and resolutions of the drama of 'characters', is nevertheless wholly significant in terms of the deep informing themes of the book.

'“I was a very queer and nervous girl. And by learning to use my will, simply by using my will, I *made* myself right”'.

Ursula looked all the while at Hermione, as she spoke in her slow, dispassionate, and yet strangely tense voice. A curious thrill went over the younger woman. Some strange, dark, convulsive power was in Hermione, fascinating and repelling.

“It is fatal to use the will like that”, cried Birkin harshly, “disgusting. Such a will is an obscenity”.

Hermione looked at him for a long time, with her shadowed, heavy eyes. Her face was soft and pale and thin, almost phosphorescent, her jaw was lean.

“I'm sure it isn't”, she said at length. There always seemed an interval, a strange split between what she seemed to feel and experience, and what she actually said and thought. She seemed to catch her thoughts at length from off the surface of a maelstrom of chaotic black emotions and reactions. Birkin was always filled with repulsion, she caught so infallibly, her will never failed her. Her voice was always dispassionate and tense, and perfectly confident. Yet she shuddered with a sense of nausea, a sort of sea-sickness that always threatened to overwhelm her mind. But her mind remained unbroken, her will was still perfect. It almost sent Birkin mad. But he would never, never dare to break her will, and let loose the maelstrom of her unconsciousness, and see her in her ultimate madness. Yet he was always striking at her'.

The penultimate sentence is not an instance of a Laurentian lapse into jargon. It has behind it the blow that Birkin has suffered from Hermione's paper-weight. That episode represents the radical disconcertingness with which *Women in Love* has defeated so many readers and left them ready to endorse some such judgment as Murry's; it gives us the preoccupation with significances that are not to be conveyed by crises and resolutions of the familiar kind, at the level of the drama of 'characters'. And yet, as a matter of fact, the blow dealt by Hermione issues with a sufficiently clear inevitability (one would have thought) out of a preceding exoteric

drama in which the powers of a great novelist manifest themselves in ways that offer nothing to baffle, and everything to engage, and convince, the reader who comes to Lawrence from George Eliot and Tolstoy. Since the instance has a very convenient representative value I will examine at some length the circumstances of the blow.

The chapter (VIII, called by the name of the Roddice country-house, 'Breadalby') opens with Hermione's reception of the two Brangwen sisters, which makes us feel at the outset the peculiar oppressive insistence with which her presence pervades the house-party. We recognize this reception as wholly significant—Hermione's personality in action: this is what, as hostess, she inevitably is:

"The motor-car ran down the hill and up again in one breath, and they were curving to the side door. A parlour-maid appeared, and then Hermione, coming forward with her pale face lifted, and her hands outstretched, advancing straight to the newcomers, her voice singing:

"Here you are—I'm so glad to see you—" she kissed Gudrun—"so glad to see you"—she kissed Ursula and remained with her arm round her.

"Are you very tired?"

"Not at all tired," said Ursula.

"Are you tired, Gudrun?"

"Not at all, thanks", said Gudrun.

"No—" drawled Hermione. And she stood and looked at them. The two girls were embarrassed because she would not move into the house, but must have her little scene of welcome there on the path. The servants waited.

"Come in", said Hermione at last, having fully taken in the pair of them.

Ursula was glad when she could be left alone in her room. Hermione lingered so long, made such a stress on one. She stood so near to one, pressing herself near upon one, in a way that was most embarrassing and oppressive. She seemed to hinder one's workings.'

It is the idealistic intellectuality going with the insistent will that we are next reminded of. As the party sit on the lawn after lunch, 'round the bushes comes the tall form of Alexander Roddice, striding romantically like a Meredith hero who remembers Disraeli'. Since he has just come from London, from the House, and has the resignation of the Minister of Education to report, the talk (the very recognizable advanced thinker Sir Joshua Mattheson being present) naturally turns on education. Hermione rhapsodizes characteristically, provoking from Birkin a retort the personal animus of which brings in as a disturbingly immediate presence the tense history of their personal relations:

"M-m-m— I don't know. . . . But one thing was the stars, when I really understood something about the stars. One feels so *uplifted, so unbounded.*"

Birkin looked at her in a white fury.

"What do you want to feel unbounded for?" he said sarcastically. "You don't want to *be* unbounded."

Hermione recoiled in offence.

"Yes, but one does have that limitless feeling", said Gerald. "It's like getting on top of the mountain and seeing the Pacific."

"Silent upon a peak in Dariayn", murmured the Italian, lifting her face for a moment from her book.

"Not necessarily in Darien", said Gerald, while Ursula began to laugh.

Hermione waited for the dust to settle, and then she said, untouched:

"Yes, it's the greatest thing in life—to *know*. It is really to be happy, to be *free*".

"Knowledge is, of course, liberty", said Mattheson'.

Hermione, we know, is *not* happy and *not* free; to what extent not, the culmination of this chapter will bring out. Her love of 'knowledge' is the desperate sense of insufficiency that determines also her attachment to Birkin—makes him, that is, so terribly necessary to her; and the sense of insufficiency is indistinguishable from the unrelaxed insistence of her will. The will asserts itself now, after the affront, in what is on the surface an episode of comedy:

'After tea, they were all gathered for a walk.

"Would you like to come for a walk?" said Hermione to each of them, one by one. And they all said yes, feeling somehow like prisoners marshalled for exercise. Birkin only refused.

"Will you come for a walk, Rupert?"

"No, Hermione".

"But are you *sure*?"

"Quite sure". There was a second's hesitation.

"And why not?" sang Hermione's question. It made her blood run sharp, to be thwarted in even so trifling a matter. She intended them all to walk with her in the park'.

"Because I don't like trooping off in a gang", he said.

Her voice rumbled in her throat for a moment. Then she said, with a curious strong calm:

"Then we'll leave a little boy behind, if he's sulky."

And she looked really gay, while she insulted him'.

This leaves things at a new pitch of tension between them. Hermione's behaviour as she conducts the walk is given us with all the economy of Lawrence's most vivid art. We see her as a figure of comedy, the domineering female. But, at the same time, if we have really been reading the book, we see her as enacting the case that, by a variety of creative means, has been diagnosed for us and presented with such potency:

"They all went through the park. Hermione wanted to show them the wild daffodils on a little slope. "This way, this way",

sang her voice at intervals. And they had all to come this way. The daffodils were pretty, but who could see them? Ursula was stiff all over with resentment by this time, resentment of the whole atmosphere. Gudrun, mocking and objective, watched and registered everything.

They looked at the shy deer, and Hermione talked to the stag as if he too were a boy she wanted to wheedle and fondle. He was male, so she must exert some kind of power over him. They trailed home by the fish-ponds, and Hermione told them about the quarrel of two male swans, who had striven for the love of one lady. She chuckled and laughed as she told them how the ousted lover had sat with his head buried under his wing, on the gravel'.

It is not to comedy that this, in its full significance, belongs; we feel too disturbingly beneath the comedy surface, in the feminine will and the malice, the thwarted life and the torments of the starved psyche. That Gudrun, 'mocking and objective, watched and registered everything' we register against *her* as characteristic (for, in spite of Murry, the sisters are strongly differentiated, and Gudrun, in being evoked as a highly specific personality, is critically 'placed').

The insistent will makes itself felt more menacingly as a blind and sinister force in the obsessed intensity with which Hermione, returned from the walk, seeks Birkin out:

"Where is Mr. Birkin, Alice?" asked the mild, straying voice of Hermione. But under the straying voice, what a persistent, almost insane *will*'.

"I think he is in his room, madam".

"Is he?"

Hermione went slowly up the stairs, along the corridor, singing out in her high, small call:

"Ru-oo-pert! Ru-oo-pert!"

She came to his door, and tapped, still crying: "Roo-pert".

"Yes", sounded his voice at last.

"What are you doing?"

The question was mild and curious.

There was no answer. Then he opened the door.

"We've come back", said Hermione. "The daffodils are so beautiful".

"Yes", he said. "I've seen them".

She looked at him with her long, slow impressive look, along her cheeks.

"Have you?" she echoed. And she remained looking at him. She was stimulated above all things by this conflict with him, when he was like a sulky boy, helpless, and she had him safe at Bredalby. But underneath she knew the split was coming, and her hatred of him was subconscious and intense'.

It is not a mere matter of our being *told* that 'her hatred of him was subconscious and intense'; the destructive animus has been defined and conveyed by a variety of inexplicit evocative means.

It is there in the hunger of possession with which she besieges him :

"What were you doing?" she reiterated, in her mild, indifferent tone. He did not answer, and she made her way, almost unconsciously into his room. He had taken a Chinese drawing of geese from the boudoir, and was copying it, with much skill and vividness.

"You are copying the drawing", she said, standing near the table, and looking down at his work . . .

"But why do you copy it?" she asked, casual and sing-song. "Why not do something original?"

"I want to know it", he replied. "One gets more of China, copying this picture, than reading all the books".

"And what do you get?"

She was at once roused, she laid as it were violent hands on him, to extract his secrets from him. She *must* know. It was a dreadful tyranny, an obsession in her, to know all he knew. For some time he was silent, hating to answer her. Then, compelled, he began :

"I know what centres they live from—what they perceive and feel—the hot, stinging centrality of a goose in the flux of cold water and mud—the curious bitter stinging heat of a goose's blood, entering their own blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire—fire of the cold-burning mud—the lotus mystery."

She *must* know; her will is not her instrument, a power by which she commands: she is under its compulsion, the slave of a malign automatism that is inimical to life in herself as in Birkin. To 'know' is to possess, and to possess is to destroy; it is a self-defeating process. This, far down in herself, Birkin's reply forces her to realize; his 'knowing' is so obviously a different kind of thing, and different in a way that proclaims, implicitly, the impossibility of satisfying her own hunger to 'know': hence the strange quality of her reaction.

It is here, it might be said, that the drama becomes decidedly esoteric; no longer, that is, immediately intelligible and convincing to the novel-reader who approaches in good faith, but with no special apparatus of interpretation. And yet, actually, what we have here demands of the reader, for its effect, no interpretive capacity beyond the power of recognition and response that is generated in an intelligent reading of what has gone before. It is not for nothing that the very identifiable Sir Joshua Mattheson figures in the house-party (he alone, 'whose mental fibre was so tough as to be insentient, seemed to be thoroughly happy'). Birkin, we are counted on to recognize, is consciously resorting to a use of language directly opposed to that of which Sir Joshua is the distinguished representative—Sir Joshua, the 'famous sociologist', whose approach to human problems, we have reason for supposing, very closely resembles Bertrand Russell's. Birkin here, with the Chinese drawing in view, is forcing Hermione to admit to herself an awareness of 'unknown modes of being'. To understand him is to recognize her awareness of such modes in herself; unknown and unknowable, in



the sense that they cannot be reduced to terms of the 'mental consciousness'.

This recognition is insufferable to her; it is a recognition that the reality of life is something she can have no command over, and cannot take into her possession. As for Birkin, not only is he brutally defying her need of him; he has made her, for the moment at least, unable not to realize that he couldn't in any case be the cure for her insufficiency that she so desperately wants him to be, since to possess him is in the nature of things impossible. Forced by the essential failure of life in herself to live by her will and her possessiveness (a process that confirms the failure), she now finds these annulled—for that is what, for the moment, her sense of their futility amounts to. There is nothing unintelligible about the rendering, here, of her state and its significance, even though the language is not Sir Joshua's, any more than the state represents any problem that could interest him:

'Hermione looked at him along her narrow, pallid cheeks. Her eyes were strange and drugged, heavy under their heavy drooping lids. Her thin bosom shrugged convulsively. He stared back at her, devilish and unchanging. With another strange, sick convulsion, she turned away, as if she were sick, could feel dissolution setting-on in her body. For with her mind she was unable to attend to his words, he caught her, as it were, beneath all her defences, and destroyed her with some hideous occult potency'.

This, then, is Hermione when her will has lost its illusion of command, her 'personality' has collapsed, and she feels herself for the moment nothing but the play of chaotic forces that the 'mental consciousness' had excluded. We should have found ourselves ready enough to take the significance, since the art of *Women in Love* is, with such endless resource, preoccupied with evoking the deeper life of the psyche; that life which, under the drama of relations between the characters at the level of the social 'personality', makes itself felt as a kind of latent drama of fields of force, a drama out of which disconcerting effects may emerge at the upper level, where the characters feel themselves to be wills and consciousnesses.

Hermione, we are told, immediately after the passage last quoted, 'came down to dinner strange and sepulchral, her eyes heavy and full of sepulchral darkness'. In the atmosphere of social-intellectual talk at the brilliant dinner-table her possessive will—her personality—rallies. 'She took very little part in the conversation, yet she heard it all, it was all hers'. The talk continues after dinner in the drawing-room, and, sensitized as we are, we take the potent suggestion that all this excited intellectuality has beneath it energies of a wholly different order from the interest in ideas that the talkers are conscious of:

'The talk was very often political or sociological, and interesting, curiously anarchistic. There was an accumulation of powerful



force in the room, powerful and destructive. Everything seemed to be thrown into the melting pot, and it seemed to Ursula they were all witches, helping the pot to bubble. There was an elation and a satisfaction in it all, but it was cruelly exhausting for the newcomers, this ruthless mental pressure, this powerful, consuming, destructive mentality that emanated from Joshua and Hermione and Birkin and dominated the rest'.

The pressure of destructive mentality, or the main incitement to it, we realize, derives from Hermione, and registers her desperate effort of self-recovery. The significance is clear enough when we are told :

'But a sickness, a fearful nausea gathered possession of Hermione. There was a lull in the talk, as it was arrested by her unconscious but all-powerful will'.

She proposes dancing, rings the bell for costumes, tells off the dancers, and it begins. It is dance-miming, and I need not analyse the ways in which it conveys the deep accompaniment that underlies the overt drama—underlies the play, in and between the characters, of conscious intention, feeling and thought. But since what we have in view is the climax to come between Hermione and Birkin, there is a passage that should be quoted :

'Birkin, when he could get free from the weight of the people present, whom he disliked, danced rapidly and with a real gaiety. And how Hermione hated him for this irresponsible gaiety.

"Now I see", cried the Contessa excitedly, watching his purely gay motion, which he had all to himself. "Mr. Birkin is a changer".

Hermione looked at her coldly, and shuddered, knowing that only a foreigner could have seen and have said this.

"Cosa vuol' dire, Palestra?" she asked, sing-song.

"Look," said the Contessa in Italian. "He is not a man, he is a chameleon, a creature of change".

"He is not a man, he is treacherous, not one of us", said itself over in Hermione's consciousness. And her soul writhed in the black subjugation to him, because of his power to escape, to exist, other than she did, because he was not consistent, not a man, less than a man. She hated him in a despair that shattered her and broke her down. . . .

The changeableness perceived in Birkin is a capacity for surrender to the spontaneous life that will cannot command. Hermione feels it as something lethal and insufferable, because it denies the competence of will and idea for the rôle assigned to them in her psyche, and denies it in the most disturbing way, by assuring her that she cannot hope to take that possessive hold of Birkin which alone, she feels, could remedy the insufficiency from which will cannot save her.

To take note of everything in this highly complex and brilliantly successful chapter would demand inordinate space. Enough has been said to suggest how the discussion, towards its close, of political and social ideas, in which Gerald expounds his functionalism, reducing human life to instrumentality, and in which Hermione proclaims that 'in the *spirit* we are all one', can be at the same time, and be convincingly, so intense a personal crisis between Hermione and Birkin that it can end in the murderous violence of that blow upon the head.

The discussion comes convincingly as in the natural course of an intellectual house-party. The ideas expressed in it engage immediately, such is the force of Lawrence's art and his mastery of organization, the essential themes of the book (themes that are presented in terms of individual lives). Birkin, in contradicting Hermione, as, out of intense conviction as well as exasperation, he is bound to do, makes, characteristically, and with wholly felicitous relevance to the general discussion, his affirmation of the Laurentian truth that 'One man isn't any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically *other*'. He is not only affronting Hermione's idealism; in asserting 'otherness' he asserts the vanity of the will that seeks after possessive 'knowledge'.

In the same way, though the major event in which the whole action of *Women in Love* resolves itself, Gerald's death in the snow, doesn't belong to the familiar kind of dramatic climax, but is a resolution below the level of personality, it nevertheless comes as the inevitable upshot of a drama enacted by human individuals as recognizable and as intelligibly motivated as any in fiction. And Gerald's case reminds us that it is the scope as well as the depth of Lawrence's significances that has led to the kind of incomprehension typified by Murry: Lawrence's preoccupation with relating the overt expressions of personal life to the impersonal depths goes with his power of presenting in the malady of the individual psyche the large movement of civilization. It is because it gives so much, and gives the unexpected, that *Women in Love* has been judged to give less than the reader has the right to demand.

For it must be insisted that the profundity of Lawrence's interests in human life doesn't mean any lack of interest in the individual. Or, rather, there is no need to insist: no one could be in less danger than Lawrence of forgetting the truth that life is a matter of individual lives. In fact, as his affirmation of 'otherness' implies (together with his hatred of 'merging'), he lays peculiar stress on individuality. And not only are the main characters of *Women in Love*, *pace* Murry, thoroughly individualized; Lawrence's natural genius for the rendering of character shows itself, as a kind of Dickensian creativeness, in the rendering of the minor figures. The German party at the hostel in chapter XXIX ('Continental') seems to be done with a gusto of appreciative response. Then take the episode (chapter XXVI) of the woman and her captive man to whom Birkin and Ursula give the chair they have just bought: we

have here something very different from gusto, but in an equally notable degree we have that specific kind of creative power which is generally supposed to constitute a novelist.

There is no need, however, to enforce the point by multiplying illustrations or to show in detail how completely (and significantly) Gudrun and Ursula are differentiated. The facts are manifestly and abundantly what they are, and only the kind of wrong-headed approach, with the consequent exasperation, exemplified in an extreme form by Murry, can account for any report to the contrary. Rather in closing this examination of *Women in Love*, I will revert to those aspects of Lawrence's astonishingly original art which, in the rendering of the manifestations of life in the actors, are *not* concerned with 'character'. The ways in which Lawrence brings into the drama the forces of the psyche of which the actors' wills have no cognizance, and which, consequently, do not seem to belong to their selves, are very various. There may, however, be some point in adducing a major illustration of a kind of thing for which ordinary notions of what should be found in a novel have no place.

There is the episode of the rabbit in the chapter (XVIII) called after it. How does this chapter advance the action of the novel? readers have no doubt asked. What can it be said to do to justify its presence, which is a very emphatic one? The vividness and the disturbing quality are beyond question; but in what ways are they relevant in *Women in Love*? Do they not belong rather to an independent and highly Laurentian short-story or sketch that is loosely brought in here—as (it might be alleged) so much is brought into *Women in Love* in default of any pressure of significance? The child, Winifred Crich, is wonderfully done, here and elsewhere—in the rendering of children Lawrence, it seems to me, has no rival. We are given the French governess—her 'neat, brittle finality of form', 'like some elegant beetle with thin ankles . . . how repulsive her completeness and her finality was'—with characteristic vivid economy. The storm of frenetic violence emanating from the rabbit has a disturbing immediacy of effect as we read. But the only major characters figuring in the chapter are Gerald and Gudrun, to whom falls the problem of dealing with the possessed resistance of the brute, and for them the episode seems wholly incidental and marginal. In what way does it leave them or their relations different from what they were before? The question cannot be satisfactorily replied to at the level of the expectations going with the drama of 'characters'. Yet, in relation to the essential themes of *Women in Love* the episode is charged with significance. There is no need to analyse here how, in the violence of response engendered in Gerald and Gudrun by the struggle with the rabbit there is engendered too an effect as of a dangerous field of force between the lovers—an intimation, not even now taken by their conscious minds, of latent tensions and potential conflict. The nature of the significance is suggested well enough in such places as these:

'The long, demon-like beast lashed out again, spread on the air as if it were flying, looking something like a dragon, then

closing up again, inconceivably powerful and explosive. The man's body, strung to its efforts, vibrated strongly. Then a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came the unearthly abhorrent scream of a rabbit in the fear of death. It made one immense writhe, tore his wrists and his sleeve in a final convulsion, all its belly flashed white in a whirlwind of paws, and then he had slung it round and had it under his arm, fast. It cowered and skulked. His face was gleaming with a smile.

"You wouldn't think there was all that force in a rabbit", he said, looking at Gudrun. And he saw her eyes black as night in her pallid face, she looked almost unearthly. The scream of the rabbit, after the violent tussle, seemed to have torn the veil of her consciousness. He looked at her, and the whitish, electric gleam in his face intensified.

"Isn't it a *fool*!" she cried. "Isn't it a sickening *fool*?" The vindictive mockery in her voice made his brain quiver. Glancing up at him, into his eyes, she revealed again the mocking, white-cruel recognition. There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries.

"How many scratches have you?" he asked, showing his hard forearm, white and hard and torn in red gashes.

"How really vile!" she cried, flushing with a sinister vision. "Mine is nothing".

She lifted her arm and showed a deep red score down the silken white flesh.

"What a devil!" he exclaimed. But it was as if he had had knowledge of her in the long red rent of her forearm, so silken and soft. He did not want to touch her. He would have to make himself touch her, deliberately. The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain. . . .

Gudrun's wanton provocation of the Highland cattle in chapter XIV ('Water-party') is the last instance I can allow myself to refer to. The general bearings of the incident on the potentialities of her relations with Gerald should be plain enough. To sum up the significance is another matter: the whole remarkable chapter is very complex, closely organized, and highly charged. It will be noticed that I have avoided the terms 'symbol' and 'symbolism' in this discussion: to suggest that the rabbit and the cattle 'stand for' this and that would be to suggest much simpler ways of constructing and conveying significance, and much simpler significances, than we actually have. The point may be made by turning for comparison to instances of what can, without misleading effect, be called symbolism. We have such an instance when, after the episode of the Highland cattle, Gerald and Gudrun sit at either end of the canoe they have elected to share, returning to the other end of the lake:

'You like this, do you?' she said, in a gentle solicitous voice. He laughed shortly.

'There is a space between us', he said, in the same low, unconscious voice, as if something were speaking out of him. And she was as if magically aware of their being balanced in separation, in the boat. She swooned with acute comprehension and pleasure.

'But I'm very near', she said caressively, gaily.

'Yet distant, distant', he said.

What is symbolized is that normative relation between the man and the woman which Birkin ultimately achieves with Ursula, and in which alone Gerald can escape disaster. A little further on we are given Gerald's new sense—for him new and unprecedented—of spontaneous life in the relaxed whole psyche:

He was listening to the faint near sounds, the dropping of water-drops from the oar-blades, the slight drumming of the lanterns behind him, as they rubbed against one another, the occasional rustling of Gudrun's full skirt, an alien land noise. His mind was almost submerged, he was almost transfused, lapsed out for the first time in his life, into the things about him. For he always kept such a keen attentiveness, concentrated and unyielding in himself. Now he had let go, imperceptively he was melting into oneness with the whole. It was like pure, perfect sleep, his first great sleep of life. He had been so insistent, so guarded, all his life. But here was sleep, and peace, and perfect lapsing out.

And, symbolically too, this transcending of that sense of imminent disaster which underlies Gerald's characteristically tensed will breaks when the stillness of the serene night is shattered:

And again they were still. The launch twanged and hooted, somebody was singing. Then as if the night smashed, suddenly there was a great shout, a confusion of shouting, warring on the water, then the horrid noise of paddles reversed and churned violently.

Gerald sat up, and Gudrun looked at him in fear. 'Somebody in the water', he said, angrily, and desperately, looking keenly across the dusk. . . .

'Wasn't this *bound* to happen?' said Gudrun, with heavy hateful irony. . . . She glanced at his face. He was looking fixedly into the darkness, very keen and alert and single in himself, instrumental. Her heart sank, she seemed to die a death. 'Of course', she said to herself, 'nobody will be drowned. Of course they won't. It would be too extravagant and sensational'. But her heart was cold, because of his sharp impersonal face. It was as if he belonged naturally to dread and catastrophe, as if he were himself again.

Then there came a child's voice, a girl's high, piercing shriek: 'Di—Di—Di—Di—Oh Di—Oh Di—Oh Di!'

The blood ran cold in Gudrun's veins.

Then, when Gerald dives into the black depths of the lake, seeking in vain for the vanished pair, Diana Crich and her would-be-rescuer, there is, for the reader who recalls the earlier chapter (IV), 'Diver', a clear symbolism. On that earlier occasion Gerald's man-of-action mastery on the surface of the water, the plane of will and mental consciousness, had evoked in Gudrun a passionate envy—and evoked too Ursula's account (the sinister resonance of which is amplified now) of Gerald's boyhood: 'You know he shot his brother?' He now, with a horribly disturbing and chilling effect, conveys his sense of the strange vast world beneath the surface, a world where he is helpless and hopeless:

'If you once die', he said, 'then when it's over, it's finished. Why come to life again? There's room under that water there for thousands'.

'Two is enough', she said murmuring.

He dragged on his second shoe. He was shivering violently, and his jaw shook as he spoke.

'That's true', he said, 'maybe. But it's curious how much room there seems, a whole universe under there; and as cold as hell, you're as helpless as if your head was cut off'. He could scarcely speak, he shook so violently. 'There's one thing about our family, you know', he continued. 'Once anything goes wrong, it can never be put right again—not with us. I've noticed it all my life—you can't put a thing right once it has gone wrong'.

They were walking across the high-road to the house.

And do you know, when you are down there, it is so cold, actually, and so endless, so different really from what it is on top, so endless—you wonder how it is so many are alive, why we're up here'.

Then again, replacing with an ironical response the suggestion of the balanced pair in the canoe, there is an anticipatory symbolism in this:

'The bodies of the dead were not recovered till towards dawn.

Diana had her arms tight round the neck of the young man, choking him'.

But these effects work subtly in with the whole complex organization of poetic and dramatic means that forms this wonderful chapter, means that, in sum, are no more to be brought helpfully under the limiting suggestion of 'symbolism' than the Shakespearean means in an act of *Macbeth*.

F. R. LEAVIS.

## MATTHEW ARNOLD, H.M.I.

THE appearance of Dr. Connell's book on the educational thought and influence of Matthew Arnold<sup>1</sup> provides a timely opportunity for a re-assessment of Arnold's educational importance. Had Dr. Connell done his work rather more adequately, such an essay as this would have been unnecessary; a review would have sufficed to stress the importance of the undertaking and to draw the attention of the reader to the significant points. But the book, though conscientious and informative, turns out to be confused; its author seems to possess too little understanding of what, fundamentally, Matthew Arnold was about, and is, moreover, unrevealing as to the significance of Matthew Arnold's position for to-day, in the particular educational situation that we now find ourselves; so that some clarification, however inadequate in the length of an article, seems to be desirable.

The importance of Matthew Arnold as an educationalist—the reason why, to-day, we need so much to turn to him for light—seems to me to lie in at least two directions. There is his diagnosis of a particular cultural situation, a situation which since Arnold's day has not only grown worse, but has grown worse along the lines that Arnold indicated; and there is his appreciation of the necessity of tackling the current degeneration of standards by a clear-sighted understanding of essential distinctions to be made between means and ends.

His diagnosis of the cultural illness of his society is perhaps too well known to need much detailed description. He saw clearly the cultural consequences of there being no centre of enlightened opinion that might at once set and correct the cultural standards of the age. Matthew Arnold's 'Culture' was, of course, a self-consciously acquired taste and appreciation that he thought contact with the 'best which has been thought and said in the world' would bring; at the same time, it involved a protest against the romantic idea that the source of enlightenment lay within the self. It implied the reassertion of a classical ideal and involved a submission to an external discipline, a discipline that was regarded as something creative and refining, not stultifying and deadening. For, indeed, Arnold was much concerned with the dangers of 'doing as one likes.' He realized that genuine creativity was the product of a co-operation between the man and the moment, that 'the creative power has, for its happy exercise, appointed elements, and those elements are not in its own control'.<sup>2</sup> Something much more than the projection of the self was needed.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Educational Thought and Influence of Matthew Arnold*, by W. F. Connell (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.) 21/-.