

But Mr Morrall deals with this exciting controversy in a disappointing way. He repeats Gerson's own self-repetitions in different pamphlets ad nauseam, he does not spot-light the key issues, he lacks familiarity with the canon-law origins and aspects of the debate, without which some of the issues are barely discussable, and as a result he is very inadequate on the relations of Gerson to earlier and later conciliarism.

A better part of the book is that dealing with Gerson's life and his spiritual teaching; one sees how the Schism promoted new ideas in moral theology, such as those of 'invincibilis ignorantia', and of a 'via tutior' and 'probabilior' in case of perplexity about who was the true pope.

ANTONY BLACK

LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER, by D. H. Lawrence; Penguin Books; 3s. 6d.

PHOENIX, the Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence; Heinemann; 35s.

We must be thankful, in these times, for the deposit of an intelligent conscience. There can surely be no doubt that Lawrence's work is a more powerful moral resource than many another's even if he did run away with a married woman and write a notorious book. These two facts, along with some grievous misconceptions of what he stood for, make the sum of most people's information about him. They do not represent his life and work at all fairly. A writer's private life is not much our business, but the reissue of *Phoenix*, since it deals so much with moral themes and issues, offers a serviceable base and gauge in forming some estimate of the significance of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

It is a fact perhaps more about me than about it that I have never found the novel obscene or felt that it should be suppressed. This does not mean that I think it is a good novel. It is surely one of Lawrence's worst. My objections are not to the unprintable words or to the accounts of sexual intercourse. These do not seem to me offensive. They play an important part in establishing the delicately felt and presented relationship which the book is about. But the praise and the blame which it has come in for seems mostly never to make out what the real morale of the book is. A good novel unflinchingly celebrates the triumph of life. The standards which Lawrence himself has set, or rather reaffirmed, in his finest fiction, force one to conclude that this novel ends in—and endorses—a total defeat of the human spirit. What the hero represents, unambiguously and unimpeached, is nothing but misanthropic disengagement from the human community. Human life, being social, is impossible outside the context of moral and political responsibility. That Lawrence at his best often brings this out, if sometimes with an eccentric accent, makes one that much more sensitive to how terribly he has defaulted here—and how, for once, he lies open to the gravamen of romantic anarchism. It is sad that he should now be so widely identified as the author of this one book.

There are of course fine things in it. Given what he was, it could hardly be otherwise (though he had already done most of them, and done them better). Nearly half the book is taken up with showing, persuasively and movingly, how Connie is being driven mad by a sick form of life which degrades and demoralizes all who are caught up in it. Her sense of what is happening, in herself and in society, comes to a head when she motors through the Midlands and sees the savage defilement of men and land by the evil pressures and values of industrial capitalism. So far, so good. Nobody can doubt that industrialism, or rather the spiritual outlook of industrialism, has done serious mischief in England, even to the very energies of human love. The trouble is that the gamekeeper's personal charism, his love-making, can be accepted as the redeeming element in the situation only if one disregards the appalling things he is made to say. It might have been better if Lawrence had kept to his original intention of making him a communist: at least he would then have had to engage his hero's passion and intelligence socially, and therefore morally, in the total human situation. As it is, Mellors is permitted so much irresponsible fantasy that he annihilates whatever moral force his tenderness might have engendered. It is this disqualifying lesion in Lawrence's conception of Mellors that brings the whole book down. He is represented as an intellectual, and occasional rancour might have been assimilated, if it had not come to discolour all that he ever says. His political reflections, for instance, unchallenged by Lawrence's tone, amount at best to fuzzy defeatism—speaking of what he characteristically calls the 'wage-squabble' he concludes: 'There was no solution short of death. The only thing was not to care, not to care about the wages'. At worst, a shrill cynicism that sets one's teeth on edge: 'I tell you, every generation breeds a more rabbit generation, with indiarubber tubing for guts and tin legs and tin faces . . . To contemplate the extermination of the human species and the long pause that follows before some other species crops up, it calms you more than anything else'. The tenderness is inseparable from many pronouncements of that kind: a profoundly anti-human impulse which issues in merciless, garrulous pessimism. The conversation on tenderness ('It's a question of awareness, as Buddha said'), with its typically gimcrack intellectual's mention of Buddha, cannot be dissociated from the conversation a few pages later in which Mellors wants to shoot his wife—not as a *crime passionnel*, which might have been understandable, but out of a high-minded desire to clear the world of scum who cannot make love as he does.

It is not that Mellors is not made to 'adjust' to what is plainly an immoral world, but that he is allowed to opt out altogether, and to opt out in a peculiarly unpleasant form of misanthropy: that is why, it seems to me, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is ultimately a disservice to the precarious existence of the human spirit. That it is Lawrence giving way to weakness and nothing like his own wonderful poise, compassion, gaiety, and goodness, comes out abundantly in *Phoenix*. This is a very manageable volume of eight hundred pages. There is plenty to pick holes in and some complete flops, but by and large it is a superb exhibition of a great writer's talent working sensitively and indomitably on the whole of

his experience. The book-reviews, the long study of Hardy, and the many observations about the function of literature, are essential reading for anybody who sees how intimately serious writing has to do with the quality of civilization. Lawrence took on everything that came his way, and nearly always responded eagerly and pungently. The last thing he wrote was a review of Eric Gill—assenting to his central insights and condemning the rest, and especially the style ('maddening, like a tiresome uneducated workman arguing in a pub—*argefying* would describe it better—and banging his fist'), and all with the same perceptive enthusiasm. The precipitate of his travels, with that eloquent feel for the shape of place, flora and fauna, is familiar. One might draw attention to 'Nottingham and mining countryside', a fine essay, which explores the incubus of industrialism far more coherently and responsibly than one would expect of the author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* ('The industrial problem arises from the base forcing of all human energy into a competition of mere acquisition'). What must surely become a classical essay on 'Pornography and obscenity', written almost in the same breath as the novel and again much more spontaneously, much more *voluntarily*, offers a decisive critique of book-control and art-prevention, and useful criteria to identify the mass of smuggled pornography that soils our lives. There is of course a certain continuity with the fault in the novel. Lawrence did not have the 'liberal imagination'. But if his deep-seated suspicions of democratic and progressive values sometimes excited him to frenzies of destructive protest, and if his sense of political responsibility was always uncertain, one need only read the long essay 'Education of the people' to see how deeply humane and committed to the finer unfolding of human potentialities Lawrence was. It is his advice on bringing up children—an outrageous, uproarious, and exhilarating attack on much cant that is still current. 'Kick the cat out of the room when the cat is a nuisance, and let the baby see you do it. And if the baby whimpers, kick the baby after the cat . . . If a boy slouches out of a door, throw a book at him, like lightning. That will make him jump into keen and handsome alertness. And if a girl comes creeping, whining in, seize her by her pigtail and run her out again, full speed'. What he is out against is psychological bullying, the pained silence and the averted eyes, to punish the child, instead of open and passionate reaction. 'Why would we reduce a child to a nervous, irritable wreck, rather than spank it wholesomely? Why do we make such a fuss about a row? A row, a fierce storm in a family, is a natural and healthy thing, which we ought even to have the courage to enjoy and exult in, as we can enjoy and exult in a storm of the elements'. Well, he must have been impossible to live with, but there is something in it. He cared enormously for a certain spontaneity and independence in human relationships, something which can easily be stifled in the congelations of gentility, and he wrote so generously that we can always go back to his work to be roused, refreshed, and even educated, by his indefeasible fund of life. It is certainly good to have *Phoenix* back in print.

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