

**The Toll of Toil: Manual Labour  
in the Works of D.H. Lawrence and Robert Tressell**  
by  
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D.H. Lawrence and Robert Tressell were both from working - class families, and must have observed from an early age the nuclear role played by physical labour in such households as theirs, where paterfamilias and spouse must each surrender to the daily drudge if they were not to tumble into the abyss of poverty and despair that yawned beyond the outhouse. But whereas Lawrence managed to climb out of the «Bottoms» of his mining - village, Tressell<sup>(1)</sup>, with his lesser endowment of both genius and energy, remained firmly embedded in the proletariat of pre-Great - War England. Both writers died of tuberculosis in their forties.

Apart from the similarity of their class origins, Lawrence and Tressell were near-contemporaries. Both of them wrote novels displaying aspects of life in Edwardian England. It sometimes surprises us to recall that **Sons and Lovers** (1913) and **The Rainbow** (1915) were published before the Battle of the Somme (July - November, 1916) had effected an irreversible alteration in the thinking habits of the English<sup>(2)</sup>. Tressell's rather ponderous tone, on the other hand, and particularly his frequent use of caricature (as emphasized by the names of his villains, Belcher, Sweater, Grinder, Didlum, etc.) seem much more akin to the practices of Fielding and Dickens than to anything we find in **Sons and Lovers**.

Yet there is a cumulative impression of misery in **The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists** (1914) which gives to the novel a grim reality as unequivocal, and therefore perhaps as 'modern', as anything that Lawrence wrote. In some respects **Sons and Lovers** seems idyllic, even romantic, by comparison with Tressell's work. Certainly the optimism of Lawrence's conclusion, with Paul Morel turning for salvation toward the «faintly humming, glowing town»<sup>(3)</sup> of the industrial Midlands, is the contrary of the fatally - ill Owen's closing vision of the «gloomy shadows enshrouding the streets» and the «black masses of cloud gathering so menacingly in the tempestuous sky» and presaging the «Nemesis which was overtaking the Capitalist system»<sup>(4)</sup>.

The fundamental difference between Tressell and Lawrence is that Tressell's viewpoint remains ineluctably that of his working - class heroes: his solidarity with his characters is radical. No - one from the higher echelons, with the exception of the mysterious **deus ex machina** Barrington, has a single saving grace. A capitalist is **ipso facto** a villain. He is motivated by a greed that increases geometrically as his possessions multiply. Every **bourgeois - grand** or **petit** - is on the make, so that given control, by virtue of his position on the town council, over the municipal park, he will requisition the ducks from the pond for his private dinner - table. In Tressell's view, to become middle - class is to cease to be virtuous. Commerce is the last refuge of a scoundrel; as we see after the Organized Benevolence Society has issued food - tickets to the unemployed of Mugsborough, whereupon every shopkeeper to whom these tickets are presented seizes the occasion "to get rid of any stale or damaged stock he may have on hand" (332).

Although Lawrence shares some of Tressell's opinions-for example, his conviction of the harmfulness of the possessive urge - he does not share his viewpoint. Strongly influenced as he was by his mother, who had married beneath herself into the working class, Lawrence's sensibilities were middle - class and, at their worst, snobbish. This is noticeable in **Sons and Lovers**, his autobiographical novel, where Paul waxes idyllic about his "common people", but then rejects them for their social betters because "from the middle classes one gets ideas" (313). Lawrence recoils from his class - origins, and from his former working - classmates, much as Somers does in **Kangaroo** (1923), because he is afraid of being sucked back into the vortex of "oblivion", the commonality of working - class unconsciousness, "blind" and "ventral", where everyone is equal and no-one has any character of his own<sup>(5)</sup>.

Lawrence's reaction to people who belong to the working class and do not fight to escape from it ranges through pity and fear to hate and contempt. The road - repairers who whistle at Gudrun and Ursula in **Women in Love** (1921) are "sinister creatures",<sup>(6)</sup> while to Gudrun the miners have a "voluptuousness" that is "mindless, inhuman... like that of machinery, cold and iron" (128). In the same novel, the young man, "a creature that the towns have produced", whom Birkin and Ursula meet at the market is given credit for a basic sexuality - "his legs would be marvellously subtle and alive, under the shapeless trousers" - but is ultimately dismissed with disdain by Ursula, and by Lawrence, as a "dark - eyed, silent rat" (403).

In Lawrence's eyes, to be working-class is to be condemned to a half-life, an entombment like that of his father, or of Mr. Morel who acknowledges, with philosophical humour, the rodent quality of his occupation: "You live like th' mice, an' you pop out at night to see what's going on" (**Sons and Lovers**, 19). In his essay, "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside" (1930), Lawrence again uses this image to emphasize the gregariousness of the miners, and by extension of the proletariat generally: a behaviour - pattern that was abhorrent to a man as aware of his own independent genius as Lawrence was. The miners, he says, live in "rat-traps"<sup>(7)</sup> where everyone could see how often one visited the lavatory; and it was the claustrophobia of the mining community, where everyone knew everyone else's business, as much as the suffocation of the life "down pit", that contributed to Lawrence's deeply - felt hatred of his class-origins. The miner, says Lawrence in the same essay, is afraid to express himself idiosyncratically. He seeks safety rather in his sameness with his fellow-miners, fleeing from the insecurity of an isolated self - awareness: "the collier went to the pub and drank in order to continue his intimacy with his mates" (136).

To Lawrence "the collier" is a genus, a type, referred to as "he", as if all miners can be reduced to one representative stereotype: "He was not intellectually interested. Life for him did not consist in facts, but in a flow" (137). One of the few working - class men whom Lawrence depicts in any depth is Mellors, the gamekeeper in **Lady Chatterley's Lover** (1928). But, distinguished from the rest of his herd by having had "a scholarship for Sheffield Grammar School",<sup>(8)</sup> Mellors's manners and broad local accent are only assumed - synthetic rather than genuine accoutrements.

By and large, Lawrence treats the **Lumpenproletariat** as an undifferentiated mass. He does not individualize them to the extent that Tressell does. Nor does he describe in detail the work that the workers do. We search in vain in **Sons and Lovers** for the kind of particularized account of the operation of extracting coal that we find in George Orwell's **Road to Wigan Pier** (1937)<sup>(9)</sup>. Distance lends enchantment to Lawrence's view of industry. When Paul and his mother walk to Willey Farm they look across the wheat - fields to Minton Pit and observe "a little group in silhouette against the sky, a horse, a small truck, and a man" (**Sons and Lovers**, 153). The worker in Lawrence's novels is often dwarfed or overshadowed by the landscape. Nature is a vast impersonal presence, to whose face the impudence of industry is only a passing affront. So the train in **Sons and Lovers** temporarily spills fire into the valley that it has "violated" before disappearing once more into the darkness (141). In **Kangaroo** the "several

black colliers" are distanced, not delineated(75). The narrator in these novels is most often kept at a conveniently comfortable remove from the actual scene of physical work. The significance of men, machines and the working - life as a whole is consequently belittled by the objective viewpoint of a focal character, such as Somers, who with a private income of four hundred pounds **per annum** has joined the bourgeoisie, and can note with detached amusement when "a little engine would chuff along the pier... and little men would saunter across the sky-line".

The working life was to Lawrence another of society's snares for impairing the freedom of the conscious individual. Judith Farr has pointed out the extent to which the mine is a "restrictive force" on the Morel family, emphasized by the imagery of "bondage" in the early chapters of **Sons and Lovers**<sup>(10)</sup>. To Lawrence's mind, to be in somebody's employ is to be the slave or prisoner of that person. On Ursula's first day at work, in **The Rainbow**, she feels herself "shut in with... unliving, spectral people" on the tram taking her to the school she is to teach in<sup>(11)</sup>. The school itself has "a threatening expression... like an empty prison" (369) and it continues to tyrannize over Ursula's free spirit for most of the next two years.

To submit oneself to the yoke of employment was in Lawrence's opinion a form of voluntary mutilation: hence the emasculated quality of life - long employees, such as the churlish Baxter Dawes, in Lawrence's novels. The people who attract most of Lawrence's admiration, and most of his interest, are those who do not have to labour at the mill with slaves in order to keep mind, soul and genitals alive. Tressell, on the other hand, is almost exclusively concerned with the ones who sow that others might reap. In **Sons and Lovers** we see Walter Morel only in his leisure - hours. His pit-life is dressed and dished out as anecdote for the benefit of both his children and ourselves. From Tressell we sense the reality of what it is to work with one's hands. Jack Mitchell says that "one of the greatest things about Tressell's book is that for the first time in the English novel man as producer is the main object of investigation",<sup>(12)</sup> and he describes **The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists** as having a cartwheel structure, always returning from the peripheral scenes of social activity to the hub of the working (or out-of-working) day.

At this point it may be useful to say something of the Puritan work - ethic, and of the working classes as fictional subject - matter, in order to place Tressell within the tradition of both. "With labour I must earn/My bread",

complains the fallen Adam in Milton's **Paradise Lost**, but corrects himself with: "what harm? Idleness had been worse" (X, 1054-5). Work is part of the heritage of English Puritanism. As Karl Marx, Max Weber and many another socialist theoretician have pointed out, the governing classes swiftly learned the trick of harnessing religious authority to their cause of self-enrichment. This was especially necessary during the 19th century, as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace, uprooting the worker from his soil and depositing him in penitentiaries of brick and soot, conglomerations of forced labour like the Coketown of Charles Dickens's **Hard Times** (1854): "a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever"<sup>(13)</sup>. To justify condemning the "hands" to labour in such a parody of Paradise (complete with vaporized serpents), the entrepreneurial and ruling classes - the Bounderbies and the Gradgrinds - had recourse to biblical sanction. Man must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, they said, and pointed to Genesis for corroboration.

William Blake had seen this coming in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, and he damned state religion with all the other "mind-forged manacles" with which man fettered his fellows. Shelley, also, was disturbed by the ramifications of impending industrialism, with its tendency to widen the gap between ruler and ruled - between "princes" who "leech-like to their fainting country cling" and "a people starved and stabbed in the untilled field" ("England in 1819"); while Wordsworth limited himself, in "Michael", to depicting the half-built sheep-fold, with its resonances of an abandoned countryside, without carrying his analysis into the purlieus of the new, gluttonous cities themselves.

Throughout the 19th century voices were raised in protest against the dehumanizing processes that were going on in the mines and factories of Britain. Taking the same line as Shelley, Benjamin Disraeli described England, in his novel **Sybil** (1845), as not one but "two nations", suffering a kind of collective schizophrenia - an implication also embedded in Mrs. Gaskell's **North and South** (1854-5). Dickens is well-known as a champion of the oppressed, yet, in line with his compeers, there was a limit to his sympathy for the underdog. He stopped short of endorsing collective action: Stephen Blackpool, the 'hero' of **Hard Times**, is implicitly lauded for refusing to join the union. Both Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell feared the power of the mindless mob, which they tended to equate with trades unionism; while Disraeli sought redress for the fissiparous state of the nation in a nostalgic return to a pristine feudalism. Through the whole of the 19th century, with the notable exception of George Gissing, writers of 'conscience' all adopted a

middle - class standpoint, bearing out Trotsky's lugubrious assessment that "so long as the bourgeoisie are the dominant class, literature must be bourgeois"<sup>(14)</sup>.

As in England, literature elsewhere in the world was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, compassionate handling of the inhabitants of the nether-world - the "People of the Abyss", in the phrase of one of their chroniclers, Jack London - sometimes mingled with a less commendable prurience. The Danish writer Jeppe Aakjaer (1866-1930) showed the local peasantry of Jutland wallowing in a standard of living below that of the beasts of the field;<sup>(15)</sup> in France, Emile Zola - in **L'Assommoir** (1877) and **La Bête humaine** (1890) - displayed the workers as victims of a monstrous fate bringing diabolical violence into their lives; while across the Atlantic Upton Sinclair, in **The Jungle** (1906) depicted the blood and guts of the Chicago slaughterhouse industry with such exuberance that many Americans subsequently boycotted Chicago meat until the U.S. government launched an enquiry into the meatpacking companies.

Tressell's novel stands apart in its insistence on the sheer **monotony** of physical labour. While not devoid of melodramatic incident, the novel gains its effect largely through its fidelity to the rhythms of the laboriously long working day - although it must be conceded that such painstaking documentation makes of it, as D.M. Roskies points out, "a prolix and ungainly affair"<sup>(16)</sup>.

**The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists** is unique on three counts: its relentless itemization of the events, trivial and significant, that make up the working-man's day; its refusal to step outside the bounds of its own circumscribed territory, so that the world of the "Cave" is seen to have a desperate organic closure of its own; and its choice of interior decorators in the south of England, rather than the more readily 'identifiable' miners or factory - workers from the industrial north, as microcosmic representatives of the downtrodden masses. Tressell may also be unique, among writers of Protestant Europe and America, in his recognition of the insidiousness of the Puritan work-ethic. Only the pervasiveness of this ethos could prompt his workman Easton - doomed to die in the workhouse, in the judgement of Tressell's protagonist, Owen - to look back with nostalgia to the days when he could sleep with tranquillity (and exhaustion), because he had "Plenty of Work":

“Why, you can remember as well as I can a few years ago there was so much work that we was putting in fourteen and sixteen hours a day. I used to be so done up by the end of the week that I used to stay in bed nearly all day on Sunday” (128).

The man who does not work is made to feel culpable, either by his neighbours or by his own conscience. Thus Lawrence's Will Brangwen, on the first morning of his honeymoon, «could not help feeling guilty» when he hears others going to work while he remains abed (**The Rainbow**, 144). In Tressell's novel the out-of-work men are made to feel guilty, as if their unemployment were a crime, by the people who write to the local paper complaining of the «nuisance» to the town caused by the marches of the unemployed (331). The predatory Hermione Roddice, in **Women in Love**, illustrates the destructiveness of too much leisure: «She seemed to grip the hours by the throat, to force her life from them» (109).

Yet, although work can assuage the guilt - feelings fostered by the Puritan work - ethic and relieve the **ennui** of the empty hours, mental health and wholeness depend very much on the type of work one is doing. Tressell's interior decorators are not permitted to take any satisfaction from their work. Their employer, Rushton, whose motto is «Rush it on», is interested solely in doing the job as quickly and as cheaply as possible, and this involves «botching», papering over cracks, and slapping on only one or two coats of paint where three or four will be charged for. «The incentive was not to make good work, but to make good profit» (368). Their position of privation in the basement of the English social structure causes these men to demand «Plenty of Work», and yet the work when it does come is incapable of satisfying their material demands, let alone their spiritual needs. The work is so poorly paid that they must spend long hours at it, leaving them no leisure for using time creatively; yet the monotony of the work and the way it must be «skimped» and hurried rules out any possibility of their being able to take a pride in it, or to find it remotely fulfilling: «So they went on, day after day, year after year, wishing their time was over, and without realizing it, really wishing that they were dead» (92).

Once a man's spirit has been broken by the automatic nature of his labour, his one remaining goal in life is death, as Lawrence too recognizes in Lady **Chatterley's Lover**, where Mrs. Bolton says of her late husband, killed as a youth in a mining accident, «He looked so quiet when he was dead, as if he'd got free» (170).

So both Lawrence and Tressell realize that physical work under what Tressell calls «the present system» is a slavery that kills men inwardly. But whereas Tressell concentrates all his attention on the nature of this work, Lawrence turns away from it and chooses rather to follow the progress of characters like William Morel who have escaped the worst shackles of industrialism and enjoy the comparative freedom of hob-nobbing with «the bourgeois of Bestwood» (**Sons and Lovers**, 69). Both authors understand that the working man has been bought, his soul is no longer his own. The time that Tressell's workmen spend in labour is dead time, because it belongs not to them but to their employer. Hence Rushton's exasperation at finding the apprentice Bert, «Sitting down in my time!» (115). Tressell's workmen pass all their time either working, looking for work, or forlornly trying to escape by spending their precious pennies at the Cricketers Arms. As one of them, Easton, remarks, even when there is «Plenty of Work» available the workman is «so done up by the end of the week» that he has no time or energy left for anything else (128). Tressell's characters are offered the alternative of death by starvation or death by over-work.

Lawrence's principal characters, drawn from a different social **milieu**, are more fortunate. Ursula, in **Women in Love**, recognizes that working for the local education authority is «mere routine and mechanical activity» (216), no more beneficial to spiritual health than the work that Owen and his mates undertake for Rushton and Co. To be in bondage to one's employer is to insult one's soul, to cripple one's own capacity for responding to the unknown within oneself and in the universe at large. To work for somebody else is to lead, as Ursula sees it, «a life of barren routine, without inner meaning, without any real significance». Work in the industrial epoch is at odds with nature: «No flowers grow upon busy machinery» (216). But Lawrence's protest is fundamentally that of the poet rather than the polemicist. Economic analysis is not his concern. It is immaterial to him that Birkin's private income, like that of Somers in **Kangaroo**, is derived from investments in the same industrial system that he and the characters who speak for him in his novels so roundly condemn.

Birkin's annuity, which enables himself and Ursula to thumb their noses at the education committee and «light out» for foreign parts in the romantic manner of Huckleberry Finn, must stem, in Tressell's socialist phraseology, from the «surplus labour» of working men. That is to say, Birkin is just as much a «possessor» of men, in quality if not in quantity, as Gerald Crich is, and it is anomalous that Lawrence should approve of one while reproving the other (Gerald is castigated by Gudrun for talking of «his» Highland cattle:

«How are they yours! You haven't swallowed them» (**Women in Love**, 190). Tressell's Owen would have condemned the social opters-out such as Birkin and Somers as «parasites», along with the rest of the non-productive bourgeoisie: a criticism which Lawrence himself tentatively endorses in **Kangaroo**, when he shows Jack Callcott «despising» Somers, «the man who had no job and therefore no significance in life» (38).

Both authors believe that the industrial system is a treadmill grinding down the vital spirit of both employers and employed. Gerald is as inwardly dead as any of his workers. In both worker and owner the industrial system, the thralldom that binds a man to a machine for life, captures and corrodes the human spirit and destroys all spontaneous impulse. Tressell recognizes that the employers, whom he calls the «Brigands», are as much prisoners of greed as their employees are prisoners of want. Yet Lawrence's sympathy goes to the owner, Gerald, who is individualized, and whose death in the snow and ice, emblematic of his spiritual barrenness, is described with pity and compassion, while Gerald's workers are presented unsympathetically and **en masse**: «some of the common people were standing along the hedge, looking at the festivity beyond, enviously, like souls not admitted to paradise» (**Women in Love**, 176). With Tressell, the opposite prevails. The owners are treated as birds of prey all of the same feather, all tainted by the same arrogant greed, while the author's sympathy goes to the workers, who are carefully and compassionately characterized and discriminated.

Lawrence's sympathy is attracted to those who master the given economic conditions, adapting themselves to the industrial age as Squire Winter does in **Lady Chatterley's Lover**, rather than to those who succumb to the system and sink slowly into deeper levels of unconsciousness. Lawrence's scorn for the defeated working - man, and his depiction of him as a rodent, is echoed by Paul Morel in **Sons and Lovers**, who, self-educated into an agony of hyperconsciousness, wishes momentarily that he were as insensible as the drayman and uses animal imagery to express this desire: «I wish I was fat like him, and like a dog in the sun. I wish I was a pig and a brewer's waggoner» (114).

Lawrence realizes the extent to which English working - men have been destroyed, the heavy pit-clothing that the miners wear emphasizing their sub-humanity. Yet it is always feelings of repulsion rather than pity or compassion that such a realization arouses in Lawrence: «they were only half, only the grey half of a human being» (**Lady Chatterley's Lover**, 166). As with the fortuitous but undisclosed sources of Birkin's and Somers's

private incomes, Lawrence elsewhere in his novels makes little attempt to grasp the economic realities or to analyze the structure of his society. The poetic, often rather fantastical vision prevails over any rationalized apprehension. Thus Connie, in **Lady Chatterley's Lover**, when puzzling over the origins of the miners, concludes that «perhaps they were only weird fauna of the coal-seams» (166).

This is not to say that Lawrence scorned all work. He himself worked tirelessly at his writing throughout his life, pouring his vitality into a prodigious quantity of literature. It was the mindlessness, the automatous quality of labour that he so heartily despised and feared, and he despised and feared the workmen who could subject themselves to it so acquiescently. In Lawrence's view the modern workman had been sexually neutered. Paul Morel, although he might appear to have stunted himself as a man by giving the best years of his youth to Jordan's Surgical Appliances, has an outlet through which to express his true self: his art. The slack afternoons at Jordan's leave Paul the freedom to save himself by this activity. In Lawrence's opinion this is the only real work that Paul achieves, an opinion diametrically opposed to that of Walter Morel who greets Paul's victory at the local art exhibition with incredulity : «twenty guineas for a bit of a paintin' as he knocked off in an hour or two!» (**Sons and Lovers**, 313).

Yet not all working - men are as impervious to the appeal of the aesthetic or as unresponsive to the creative urge as is Paul Morel's father. Owen, in Tressell's novel, as soon as he is asked to design a «Moorish» decor for a room at «The Cave», feels «an intense desire to do the work», even though he will not be paid extra for his pains (120). The chance is given him to be creative, and the cash-nexus, which is normally the only bond between workman and employer, is for once and at once in abeyance. Owen can at last respond with his whole self and give the whole of his manhood to the task.

Lawrence, too, realizes that modern labour has become alienated from the goods it produces. Thus Paul Morel's productive work is his painting, for which the financial reward is incidental, whereas the work at Jordan's, under the artificial light, is something alien and threatening: «all the time he was there his health suffered from the darkness and lack of air and the long hours» (**Sons and Lovers**, 137). The women at Jordan's are even more estranged from their work than the men are: «The real woman never seemed to be there at the task, but as if left out, waiting» (141). And Clara's

natural grace is contrasted vividly with the dead machinery that she is forced to serve through her lack of economic independence: «Her jenny spun with a subdued buzz. ...Her arms were creamy and full of life beside the white lace» (318).

Walter Morel's long hours of labour down the mine eventually take their toll of his humanity: «His work seemed to exhaust him. When he came home he did not speak civilly to anybody» (51). As he gives more and more of his life to Carston, Waite and Co., Morel becomes more and more brutish, alienated by degrees from the family that his wife is nursing toward gentility: «Morel crouched at the knees and showed his fist in an ugly, almost beast-like fashion» (76). He scampers for refuge from his culturally - enlightened hearthside to the dim and smoky atmosphere of the pub, and he seems less and less able to cope with the bright light of reality. The adolescent Paul is his superior in consciousness as well as in manners, as is noticeable on William's death when Morel emerges blinking from the darkness of the mine unable to grasp the fact of his son's demise, just as he had been incapable of reacting to his other son Paul's birth. Ultimately the coal - face becomes his own face : blank, obtuse and insentient.

It is the mechanical labour of the pit that dehumanizes Morel and quenches the "sensuous flame of life" that, when young, had "flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle" (18). But when working for himself, his own tools merely an extension of his own body, there is a oneness between Morel and his material, and harmony is restored to his wounded humanity. When making fuses or doing odd jobs in his own home, Morel becomes again the core of the family, the nucleus around which the household revolves; and the children, who hate him in his pit -clothes, "united with him in the work, in the actual doing of something, when he was his real self again" (82). Man, working for himself, is an organic unit giving organic unity to the family of which he is the head. In Marxist terms, it is the division of labour that has divided man from himself. He works for an employer with whom his only connection is the wage-settlement. In **The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists** Rushton talks of the state of affairs in industrial England in terms of an organism : "It was a matter of division of labour: the men worked with their hands and the masters worked with their brains, and one was no use without the other" (440). But when on another occasion a worker stops Rushton "in the street to ask some question about some work that was being done" and "gets the sack" for his pains (391), it is clear that Rushton's concept of employers and employees forming one organic unity is an insincere and spurious one.

Lawrence, too, agrees that the employer's habit of regarding his employee as his tool is misguided and detrimental to the well-being of both parties. Gerald's initial humanitarianism is soon "crystallized" into a reduction of humanity to "the pure instrumentality of the individual. As a man as of a knife: does it cut well?" (**Women in Love**, 251). Gerald's utilitarian attitude is also criticized in Ursula's Uncle Tom in **The Rainbow**, to whom the pit that he manages is all that counts: "Marriage and home is a little sideshow". John Smith is a "loader", in Tom's eyes, before he is a husband and a human being: his primary role is that which his job forces him to play (348).

So Lawrence and Tressell agree on one fundamental proposition: that the labour-system of early 20th-century industrial England is inhuman and destructive. But whereas Lawrence shows the men allowing themselves to be laid in front of the juggernaut of commerce almost without a murmur, Tressell shows the intensity and fierceness of the struggle that the men undertake to preserve their pride and individuality to the bitter end. Thus his workers are not a senseless lump, but definite and distinct characters: Philpot the humourist, Owen the socialist fighting dauntlessly to arouse the inertia of his workmates against their oppressors, Easton the 'everyman' figure who succumbs to the blandishments of drink, Slyme the puritanical hypocrite, thoroughly self-centred and as opportunistic as those who exploit him. The minutiae of the working class life are what interest Tressell. The sweep of Lawrence's vision, which takes in both *The Bottoms* and *Breadalby*, is beyond Tressell's scope and intention. Tressell's concern is strictly for the underprivileged. His sensibility is working-class; he has no compassion to spare for the less unfortunate.

Both novelists describe working-class life at the turn of the century, and yet there is the feeling, in **Sons and Lovers**, that the Morel family enjoys an affluence unheard of among the toilers and moilers of Tressell's Mugsborough. We need only compare the respective Christmases to be convinced of this. At the Morels', "there were parties, there were rejoicings" (105), nuts and eggs, "unheard-of extravagance in the larder", "holly and evergreens" and all the trappings of a bourgeois yuletide, although, we are cautioned, "[the Morels] were very poor that autumn" (101). This contrasts with Tressell's picture of the Owens walking about Mugsborough, shivering in ragged shoes and clothing that they are too poor to replace, clutching four shillings and sevenpence - farthing that they have saved to spend on Christmas presents for their child and for the children of neighbours even more penniless than they are (295).

Nowhere in Lawrence do we find the sense of how wretched it is to be poor. Lawrence's novels are full of the vitality of nature, particularly of springtime when the sap flows in trees and plants in harmony with the revitalized sexuality of men. Tressell's novel emphasizes the hostility of nature: to those working at "The Cave" December is the cruellest month. Owen risks losing his job when he lights an unauthorized fire to prevent the boy, Bert, from shivering at his work. Paul Morel, protected by the warmth of his mother's love and a roaring fire, can lie convalescent in bed, watching with his artist's eye, "the miners troop home - small, black figures trailing in gangs across the white field" (**Sons and Lovers**, 87); but to Owen winter in a damp house which he cannot afford to heat accelerates the consumption from which he is dying.

To Tressell the English landscape and the English seasons are as harsh and indifferent towards the fate of the mass of humanity as are the English upper and middle classes. There is no harmony between man and nature in Tressell. Although a keen bicyclist himself, often making weekend forays into the surrounding countryside of Hastings,<sup>(17)</sup> Tressell does not show any of his characters seeking solace from the Mugsborough hinterland: an activity which would be as alien to them as invading the grounds of Buckingham Palace. Tressell's workers are prisoners of their urban environment. The one annual excursion into the country - the "Beano" - merely serves as an excuse to extend the drinking that is their one recreation in Mugsborough. They rush from one country pub to another, totally oblivious of the "rich, brown fields of standing corn, shimmering with gleams of gold", the "apple-orchards where bending boughs were heavily loaded with mellow fruits exhaling fragrant odours", and the "cool shades of lofty avenues of venerable oaks" through which their charabanc is passing (433). Their urban squalor has become so much a part of them that they can no longer respond to the beauties or rhythms of nature. And neither, implies Tressell, can the employers who accompany them on this trip.

Both Lawrence and Tressell are writing about man's inhumanity to man, and both apportion a share of the blame for this to puritanical English Christianity. But it is the harm done to man's creative, spontaneous sexuality by the Puritan ethical code that engages Lawrence, whereas Tressell is primarily concerned with that interpretation of the New Testament that gives the man that hath the licence to take away from the man that hath not<sup>(18)</sup>. Both novelists deplore the state of affairs that they witness in the England of their day, and both would concur in the opinion that the acquisitive instinct has brutalized man. They each seek comfort and hope for the future

by harbouring a vision of revolution. For Lawrence this is the revolution that will happen when man rediscovers blood - consciousness, his sexual roots or his Pan - emanation; that is, when man throws off the weight of the ego which has made him top - heavy, like Gerald in **Women in Love**, and allows his loins to do his thinking for him, like Mellors in **Lady Chatterley's Lover**. For Tressell, however, the revolution he foresees is couched in the imagery of the socialist apocalypse: "The Golden Light that will be diffused throughout all the happy world from the rays of the risen sun of Socialism" (584).

Tressell looks to the salvation of "Mankind" as a whole, "awaking from the long night of bondage and mourning"; Lawrence envisions salvation as the passage of the individual man, through the crucible of an experience fundamentally sexual, to a rebirth like that of the phoenix from a fire of sensual passion. Tressell's vision of the regeneration of man is doctrinaire, socialist, even Christian; Lawrence's is individualistic, apolitical and pagan. Tressell believes that mankind in general can be reformed by the panacea of socialism; Lawrence believes that only the health of certain hyperconscious individuals can be restored, on condition that they remain as isolated and aloof from involvement with the masses as Somers keeps himself from Kangaroo, Willie Struthers and their respective political movements. Tressell is occupied with the organic well - being of the whole social fabric, whereas Lawrence is interested in the psychic wholeness of the individual. Both realize that work, to be beneficial to the worker, must not be mechanical but must allow free play to the individual's creative urge. This is a concern that is central to Tressell, but only incidental to Lawrence. Tressell's entire work is taken up with showing how the working man's creativity and vitality are slowly and inexorably crushed. Lawrence grants this as a premise, then turns away from the social problem to concentrate on middle - class characters who have the leisure-time and the intellectual ability to devote themselves to the personal problem of discovering and rediscovering themselves and learning and relearning how to relate to other people. Meanwhile someone must keep the wheels of industry turning so that the modest incomes of the Birkins and the Somers do not wane away.

Other questions about the relationship of man to his work might be raised. For instance, is the kind of agricultural work that the Brangwens do in **The Rainbow**, "their faces always turned to the heat of the blood, staring into the sun, dazed with looking towards the source of generation"(9), more conducive to the development of the inner man than Mr. Morel's diurnal plunge to the bottom of the pit? In other words, is working on the land intrinsically healthier than working in it? The somewhat retarded sensibility

of the Leivers brothers and their insensitive treatment of Miriam, as well as the torpidity of the Brangwen men themselves, would seem to suggest that working continuously with the hands, be it above or below the earth, effectively deprives the brain of brightness and the heart of humanity. But only a more extensive study of Lawrence's individual works of fiction could attempt to do justice to the issue.

The main purpose of this article has been to show how two early 20th century authors from proletarian backgrounds viewed the part played by work in the life of the individual. We may conclude, in general, that Tressell's characters seem to live in a society that is far less 'mobile' than Lawrence's is. Paul Morel wears an "evening suit" to the homes of the bourgeoisie who invite him to dine with them (**Sons and Lovers**, 314). The Owen family, however, can only watch the diminishing red light of the train that is carrying the privileged Barrington away from Mugsborough. The Owens remain firmly stuck in the position that society has ordained for them, condemned to endure generations of slavery and starvation. Paul Morel wins prizes and is lionized by the bourgeoisie for his artistic creations; Owen wins extra work and is exploited by the bourgeoisie for his. One man's fête is another man's Fate.

In the last analysis, the difference between the two authors and their respective 'heroes' is one of imagination. Both Lawrence and Paul Morel have enough imaginative energy to shake off the ballast of their background and rise in the social stratosphere: consequently, they have no axe to grind. The system, from their point-of-view, is a good or at least an adequate one. Lawrence would probably endorse Rushton's creed that some men are made to work with their heads and others with their hands. He would not subscribe to the premise of equality among men that underlies Tressell's philosophy. Robert Tressell writes exclusively about the conditions of the working class from which he and his characters are unable to escape. Lawrence, who has escaped, turns his attention to other matters than the earning of daily bread. Yet he may justly be censured for political insouciance in making Birkin self-righteously contemptuous of the social system from which he indirectly benefits.

On a scale of Christian virtues, the doggedly honest and unostentatiously selfless Owen reaches a level of humanity which the opinionated, self-involved protagonists in most of Lawrence's novels would be incapable of attaining. Owen's own life is ebbing, and his main concern is for other people. The concern, almost amounting to an obsession, of Lawrence's

heroes for their own independence, the refusal to get involved with political causes, with other people, or even - except on their own terms - with their own wives, makes Lawrence's novels so much more 'modern' in tone than Tressell's rather quaint social evangelism. Tressell's working-man hero knows of no existential crises, only economic ones; and it is the baldness of his analysis and the naiveté of his solution - the redistribution of wealth through socialism - that make Tressell seem so much more old-fashioned nowadays than Lawrence.

1. Robert Tressell's real name was Robert Noonan. The little that is known of his personal life has been pieced together in two books by F. C. Ball: **Tressell of Mugsborough** (London, 1951) and **One of the Damned** (London, 1974). Born in Dublin around 1870, Tressell was educated at a local grammar school. He was married in 1890, and separated from his wife in 1893. Tressell's daughter from this marriage became the first editor of his novel (see note 4 below). An interior decorator by trade, Tressell went to try his luck in Johannesburg from 1897 - 9. Returning to the British Isles, he lived in Hastings (the Mugsborough of his novel) from 1902, working as a painter and sign-writer. He died in 1911.
2. As the hero of one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels remarks, when visiting the Somme battlefield after the War,

This Western - front business couldn't be done again, not for a long time: ...This took religion and years of plenty and tremendous sureties and the exact relation that existed between the classes (**Tender is the Night** [1934] (London, 1977), 150).

The slaughter into which the ruling class - whether by accident or design (see Robert Graves, **Goodbye to All That** (1929), **passim**) - led its human «cattle» (in Wilfred Owen's expression) discredited the system and encouraged the independence of thought that was already discernible in Lawrence's early fiction.

3. D. H. Lawrence, **Sons and Lovers** (Penguin, 1965), 511.
4. Robert Tressell, **The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists** (St. Albans: Panther, 1973), 583. The novel first appeared in 1914, having been edited from Tressell's manuscript by his daughter, who seems to have approached the task with the sentiments of a cosmetic surgeon. Under her hand the novel was shaped according to the fashion of the Naturalist

novels of the early 20th century, ending with Owen contemplating suicide as the only exit from his deterministic dilemma. Moreover, some of its dialogue was deemed too racy and was consequently 'sanitized'. And some of its contents were judged to be hostile to English Christianity, whose chief representative in the novel - the Reverend Mr. Belcher, «a vast expanse of waistcoat and trousers» (167) - finally explodes on Monte Carlo station when «a porter runned into 'im with a barrer load o' luggage, and 'e blowed up» (249). However, as Tressell stressed in his Preface - and as the novel itself bears out - «no attack is made upon sincere religion» (14): it is the hypocrisy of the «whited sepulchres», the greedy ones who grovel before the Lord while filling their pockets, that Tressell savages. The **Philanthropists** was known in its bowdlerized version to inter-war writers such as George Orwell, but it was not until 1955 that Tressell's original intentions were restored when the unexpurgated edition was issued for the first time.

5. D. H. Lawrence, **Kangaroo** (New York: Viking, 1966), 234.
6. D. H. Lawrence, **Women in Love** (Penguin, 1960), 127.
7. Edward D. McDonald, ed., **Phoenix: the Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence** (London: Heinemann, 1961), 140.
8. D. H. Lawrence, **Lady Chatterley's Lover** (Penguin, 1960), 151.
9. George Orwell, **The Road to Wigan Pier** (Penguin, 1962), 22-29.
10. Judith Farr, Introduction to **Twentieth - Century Interpretations of «Sons and Lovers»** (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice - Hall, 1977), 14.
11. D. H. Lawrence, **The Rainbow** (Penguin, 1949), 368.
12. Jack Mitchell, **Robert Tressell and the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists** (Woking: Laurence & Wishart, 1969), 15.
13. Charles Dickens, **Hard Times** (Penguin, 1980), 65.
14. D. M. Roskies, «Robert Tressell's Revolutionary Art», **Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens: Revue du Centre D'Etudes et de Recherches Victoriennes et Edouardiennes de l'Université Paul Yale**, 16 (October, 1982) (51 - 68), 51.

15. A. M. Kinghorn, «Robert Burns's Danish Translator: Jeppe Aakjaer (1866 - 1930)», **Studies in Scottish Literature**, XV (1980) (53 - 79), 53.
16. Roskies, **op. cit.**, 52.
17. F. C. Ball, **One of the Damned: the Life and Times of Robert Tressell** (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 127.
18. The text is from the parable of the talents, where the master orders the confiscation of the meagre store of the unadventurous one - talented servant with the words: «Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents» (**Matthew**, 25, xxviii). Ignoring the spiritual allegory, Tressell uses the parable to assert the impossibility of those deficient in worldly goods ever accumulating enough wealth to 'take off' into the capitalist sphere. In this situation of economic disablement are found (among others) the apprentices of Mr. Sweater's drapery business,

some of whom had paid premiums of from five to ten pounds. They were 'bound' for three years. For the first two years they received no wages: the third year they got a shilling or eightpence a week. At the end of the third year they usually got the sack (193).