

Education and faith in *The Rainbow*¹

(or, Something Brown might learn from D. H. Lawrence)

In his televised Dimbleby lecture of 2002, the Archbishop of Canterbury described the church as a space within which an account could be given of life which didn't reduce it to a mere materio-mechanical process. A thoroughly secular world, he said, would be one in which such a space did not exist.

Yes but, to say the church and the (secular) world occupy different spaces ignores the way in which the two influence, penetrate, belong within one another. It ignores the counter-truth, that the space the church and the world occupy is the same. When the world is thoroughly, radically secularised, the church will be too, and not know it.

In *On the Constitution of Church and State*, Coleridge calls the church “the correcting, befriending Opposite of the world”—a description which captures the mutuality of the relation that Dr Williams's image of ‘different spaces’ misses. A secular world uncorrected, unbefriended by the church its Opposite *is* the world reduced to materio-mechanical process. (And, in such a world, what space remains for a church?)

The church—a church, some church—is necessary to the (secular) world not as somewhere different—a bubble of differently constituted space we can escape to—but as a constitutive part of it, a part which the world depends on for its own integrity. We can see this in education—not education that fits people to be monks and hermits but the ordinary kind fitting them for profane society.

‘The sacred and the profane’, ‘the religious and the secular’, ‘faith and reason’, ‘the spiritual and the temporal’, ‘the church and the state’ (or, following Coleridge, ‘the world’): all these are opposites but not as matter and anti-matter or ignorance and knowledge are, where one thrives at the other's expense; rather they are opposites as the individual and society are, where each entails and depends on, is intermixed with and penetrated by the other. Each is the other's “sustaining, correcting befriending Opposite”.

Priests who are ignorant of what the profane know aren't thereby perfected as priests. A priest needs to know more than pieties. Priests and saints are men and need to know what is proper to men. A churchy church is deficient as a church. Deficiencies in the ungodly are deficiencies in the godly too (deficiencies, in their *godliness* even?). A sense of humour or good manners or literary judgement or playfulness—even a capacity for scepticism—aren't impediments to godliness. Godliness doesn't result

¹ This originated as a contribution to a series of lectures given at McMaster, Brock and Laurentian universities in Ontario by Ian Robinson and me in 2002. The tour was arranged by Brian Crick and centred on Brock university where Crick taught. Robinson and I were invited to make the tour because we had just published the *New Idea of a University*. Had the lecture been written in time, it might have made a chapter in that book, to go with a related chapter on *Pride and Prejudice*.

from a process of *subtraction*. Men who know and want to know only pieties run the danger of making the world a nightmare—in which turbans worn at too profane an angle must be arraigned and punished. A church without literary judgement or taste can't know whether it has fallen into atheism or not (so that it makes sense to call the NEB the atheist's Bible²). That is why Newman's *Idea of a University*, which was written as lectures for Catholic priests and argues the impossibility of a secular, non-religious university education, sums up the "practical end" of a university course in a Catholic university as training not priests and monks or even a pious laity but "good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world."³

And something analogous goes wrong when the profane reason imagines it might be self-sufficient too. When secular reason denies the reality of those invisible or unverifiable aspects of things that depend on faith, it destroys the basis not just of religion but of the secular world too. Medicine that tries to dispense with everything but what it can find within itself—in concentration camp experiments or upon the assumption that a foetus is nothing but a collection of useful or disposable cells—doesn't thereby become more purely itself but gives up its character as medicine. When husbands and wives become partners merely (but not in a life's work) no one can be divorced because marriage has already been dissolved. When crime and punishment become offence and penalty, wrongdoing loses its seriousness. When nations become societies, citizens and subjects are reduced to tax-payers and -receivers (and then sentimentalised over). When literature becomes texts nothing is worth reading, except for an ulterior motive. When quality becomes subject to control or audit, it has been reduced to quantity. When education becomes 'anything someone might be instructed in at some place or on some occasion set aside for instruction', no one is educated.

Education and religion depend on one another. The most deeply secular education—while it remains education and not something else, under that name—depends on faith and a belief in the reality of an unseen world. Education may not depend on any particular religious belief but it can only exist in a world in which religious belief is possible. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* shows us how this is so, beautifully.

Lawrence begins the novel—before he introduces any of the characters—with a prologue picturing the desire for education in the uneducated as something that necessarily rests upon faith—not faith in God but faith all the same, belief in the reality of things unseen. The generalised Brangwen woman, who is Ursula's forebear, wants something but it necessarily belongs to what she wants that she can't say what it is. She could never be a customer of an education service industry because she doesn't know what product she wants. She wants something, beyond what she knows:

the women looked out from the heated, blind intercourse of farm life, to the spoken word beyond. They were aware of the lips and

² Ian Robinson, *Cambridge Quarterly* 2/4, Autumn 1967, p. 323

³ The book which these lectures became, *The Idea of a University*, exists in a number of states. I am quoting the first edition as reprinted in Newman: Prose and Poetry, sel. Geoffrey Tillotson, 1957, p. 521.

mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance, and they strained to listen. ... Her house faced out from the farm-buildings and fields, looked out to the road and the village with church and Hall and the world beyond. She stood to see the far-off world of cities and governments and the active scope of man, the magic land to her, where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled. She faced outwards to where men moved dominant and creative ... and ... were set out to discover what was beyond, to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom ... she strained her eyes to see what man had done in fighting outwards to knowledge, she strained to hear how he uttered himself in his conquest, her deepest desire hung on the battle that she heard, far off, being waged on the edge of the unknown. She also wanted to know, and to be of the fighting host.⁴

She is aware of lips and mind speaking but not as making sense, only as sound, which she has to strain to hear, far off, in the distance, the spoken word as something to be looked out to, beyond. She doesn't herself know but she wants to know. And what it is she wants to know, she cannot say. She aspires to or towards only.

Lawrence finds various ways of suggesting that the knowledge and speech she aspires to are beyond her—beyond her in every way but one: her faith in them as real. She believes in as real something whose reality she cannot verify. She has to have faith in it—as something that makes possible a higher kind of life than the one she knows, a life she sees (perhaps mistakenly) in the vicar and squire, “the wonderful men who had the power of thought and comprehension”, who “spoke the other magic language, and had the other, finer bearing”, who had a “higher being” and were master over her husband as he was over the cattle, a superiority created not by “money nor power nor position ... it was a question of knowledge”, “not money, nor even class ... it was education and experience.” And it is this—something she can never have herself—that she wants for her children:

It was this, this education, this higher form of being, that the mother wished to give to her children, so that they too could live the supreme life on earth. For her children, at least the children of her heart, had the complete nature that should take place in equality with the living, vital people in the land, not be left behind, obscure among the labourers. Why must they remain obscure and stifled all their lives, why should they suffer from lack of freedom to move? How should they learn the entry into the finer, more vivid circle of life? (p. 4)

Of course in the light of what follows—not only the first Tom Brangwen, sent forcibly and unsuccessfully to grammar school, but the successfully educated too, like Paul Lensky, Winifred Inger, the younger Tom Brangwen, Baron Skrebensky, Ursula's university teachers as they finally, in the mass, come to seem to her—there are ironies here. The “finer, more vivid circle of life” is how the world of the educated strikes the aspiring uneducated, those who, too far away from it ever to aspire to it

⁴ Heinemann Phoenix Edition, pp. 2-3. All other page references are to this edition.

for themselves, can do so only for their children, and are in no position to judge it. Their aspiration, inevitably, has its unrealistic and comic side.

But that, it seems to me, is more or less as it has to be. That is what it is to aspire to be educated—educated rather than another thing. It is to desire to be something different and not to know what it is.

It is an aspiration for the aspirant knows-not-what, for some new form of life which, in the nature of things, he can't specify. So how could he ever be a customer or the educator a service provider? Or any third party be capable of estimating whether the service had been provided efficiently and at an appropriate cost or not?

The way in which education does, for good or ill, actually change the character and produce effects which couldn't possibly be predicted or even perhaps anticipated, is illustrated in chapter 12, "Shame", which deals with the influence on Ursula of Winifred Inger. Here Lawrence—like Jane Austen when she is showing us the mutual influence of Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy⁵—is showing us education from the inside. Lawrence shows us someone not just helplessly becoming a new person, in the haphazard course of growing up but, through formal education and in cooperation with her teacher, making herself a new person—someone neither her parents nor she could possibly have anticipated her becoming—the Ursula Brangwen who (temporarily) takes on the form of life of Winifred Inger, as she accepts her schoolmistress's invitation to look upon and to inhabit the world as she herself does, under the influence of science, 'objectively'.

Of course there is an important difference between what the two writers do. Jane Austen isn't trying to judge what education has come to mean in her day. She is just showing us a relation between two of her characters which we can't but recognise as involving their mutual education. But, for her, education hadn't yet become the specialised activity, distinctly separated from all our other activities it has become for us: the kind of thing a nation has a Department of or governments have to have policies for. It hadn't yet become compulsory for all 4 to 16 year-olds to have it or, as the present Government intends, 16 to 18 year-olds too. It hadn't yet occurred to anybody to think of it as the kind of thing which one in two 18 to 21 year-olds ought to receive at university. It hadn't yet become an industry. In our day of course it has become all those things, and more.

And our day is Lawrence's day (but more so), and he is trying to judge the phenomenon. Although Mary Bennet is an ancestor of Winifred Inger's, Lawrence has a deliberate prophetic purpose⁶ that Jane Austen hasn't. She may have detected in her world the form of life out of which the modern university has evolved in ours but that was prescience not prophecy.

I think we *can* say that Winifred Inger educates Ursula but only if we allow that education can be for good or ill. If you won't allow that, then you must say something else, which amounts to much the same thing, that she miseducates Ursula. And also that—and this is where Lawrence's prophetic purpose comes in—the way in which she does so is exactly the way of the modern university, not when it is a fraud and a sham or at its worst but when it is most plainly living up to its own ideal of itself.

⁵ See *The New Idea of a University*, Duke Maskell and Ian Robinson, Haven Books, 2001.

⁶ See, for instance, various places in Ian Robinson's *The English Prophets*, published by Edgeways Books.

Chapter 12, the Winifred Inger chapter, needs to be seen in relation to chapters 10 and 11, “The Widening Circle” and “First Love”. Partly what these two chapters are about is the tangle of Ursula’s religious life—a tangle which, in a certain sense, Winifred Inger and education enable her to sort out—though it might be truer to say that what they do is, give her the illusion that she has sorted something out, when that something doesn’t need to be sorted out, just lived. As Lawrence presents it the tangle in Ursula’s religious thought and feelings is just a way of living a certain aspect of her life; and the untangling a way of not living it, of killing it off or dodging round it. But to speak of a tangle of or in Ursula’s ‘religious life’ is misleading in a way because it suggests that the tangle is in some one, separable aspect of her life, when what it is, is a tangle in a life, a whole life, seen in its religious aspect.

Life, for Ursula, as we see her in early adolescence in chapter 10, is divided in two. There’s the weekday world, of weekday responsibilities—of schoolwork, and school authority and punishment, and generalised anxiety—and there’s the Sunday world, in which the weekday world is revoked. Sunday is the “maximum day of the week” for her, she “turned passionately to it”, for “the sense of eternal security it gave”. What makes the security “eternal” and not just a temporary relief from weekday demands and fears, is that her Sunday is not just an interval between sets of weekdays but a Sabbath. While it lasts, only the things that belong to it are real. But—and this is why I call it a tangle—for Ursula their reality is only conditional and temporary. Their reality makes no connection with that other reality of the weekday world, so her world is split into two, disconnected parts.

For her “the white robed vision of Christ” *does* pass between the olive trees but only as “a vision not a reality”. A voice *does* call and continue to call “Samuel, Samuel” in the night but “not this night, nor last night”, only in “the unfathomed night of Sunday, of the Sabbath silence”. The “shadowy Jesus with the Stigmata: that was her own vision” but “Jesus the actual man” with holes in his hands and feet was distasteful to her. She believes in the “extra-human”, what is beyond herself; but against the humanity of Christ she “stood at bay”.

She lived a dual life, one where the facts of daily life encompassed everything, being legion, and the other wherein the facts of daily life were superseded by the eternal truth. (p. 275)

But how could she ever go on like this? One way or another, the two halves of her life, *must*, eventually, be brought into some sort of stable relation with one another or else just collide. This isn’t a division that could last into adulthood without it becoming a form of dishonesty or bad faith. In an adult it would be an evasion. We have no difficulty in seeing what’s wrong. But, still, Lawrence doesn’t invite us to look at Ursula as anything like a case to diagnose—and not just because she’s just a girl. One is never conscious of being asked to make allowances for her age. This may be the temporary solution of a young girl but it is hit upon as a solution to a great problem: how to believe religiously in a world—in a language—in which the dominant form of life leaves less and less room for religious belief. Ursula’s solution may be temporary; it’s hardly contemptible. We live in a secular and unbelieving world, which explains itself to itself in a language expressive only of the secular and the unbelieving. Where/how can belief

make room for itself in such a world at all? *On Sunday*, is this schoolgirl's answer. Is it so bad an answer?

In the next chapter, as she "passed from girlhood to womanhood", when she is about 16, what was unstable falls down. She rebels, predictably, against herself. and her own solution:

The religion which had been another world for her, a glorious sort of play-world, where she lived, climbing the tree with the short-statured man, walking shakily on the sea like the disciple, breaking the bread into five thousand portions, like the Lord, giving a great picnic to five thousand people, now fell away from reality, and became a tale, a myth, an illusion, which, however much one might assert it to be true as historical fact, one knew was not true—at least, for this present-day life of ours. There could, within the limits of this life we know, be no Feeding of the Five Thousand. And the girl had come to the point where she held that that which one cannot experience in daily life is not true for oneself.

So, the old duality of life, wherein there had been a weekday world, of people and trains and duties and reports, and beside that a Sunday world of absolute truth and living mystery, of walking upon the waters, and being blinded by the face of the Lord, of following the pillar of cloud across the desert and watching the bush that crackled yet did not burn away, this old, unquestioned duality suddenly was found to be broken apart. The weekday world had triumphed over the Sunday world. The Sunday world was not real, or at least, not actual. And one lived by action.

Only the weekday world mattered. She herself, Ursula Brangwen, must know how to take the weekday life. Her body must be a weekday body, held in the world's estimate. Her soul must have a weekday value, known according to the world's knowledge. (p. 281)

She "denied the vision" and she "demanded only the weekday meaning" of words. "There *were* words spoken by the vision" but "let them bespeak themselves in weekday terms. The vision should translate itself into weekday terms." But this doesn't satisfy her either, because what it comes to mean is that her religious yearnings are translated into sexual terms (we mustn't forget she's 16; and we mustn't ignore the comic side of Lawrence's treatment either):

She answered the call of the spirit in terms of immediate, everyday desire.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

It was the temporal answer she gave. She leapt with sensuous yearning to respond to Christ. If she could go to him really, and lay her head on his breast, to have comfort, to be made much of, caressed like a child!

All the time she walked in a confused heat of religious yearning. She wanted Jesus to love her deliciously, to take her sensuous offering, to give her sensuous response. For weeks she went in a muse of enjoyment. (p. 285)

So we aren't surprised to learn either that this sixteen year old girl still "craved for the breast of the Son of Man, to lie there" or that where that craving leads her is to Anton Skrebensky. (And Lawrence is said to lack a sense of humour!)

But, of course, the terms in which Lawrence renders the victory of the weekday over the Sunday life in Ursula are rather obviously not those of the weekday world that has supposedly triumphed but a sort of jokey version of the Sunday world that has been supposedly triumphed over. For the genuine weekday, in which Ursula's Sunday vision really is denied, we need to go to something like the letter from the Kingston on Thames Education Committee inviting her to interview for a job:

"Dear Madam, You are requested to call at the above offices on Thursday next, the 10th, at 11.30 a.m., for an interview with the committee, referring to your application for the post of assistant mistress at the Willingborough Green Schools." (p. 363)

So it doesn't need to be said explicitly: Ursula's supposed denial of what Lawrence jokily calls the Sunday world is, at bottom, for all the comedy in the presentation, another way of affirming it. Having tried to hold on to it by separating it from its opposite; she now tries to hold on to it by merging it with it.

She might feel it a falsification, be ashamed, feel confused, dazed, in a tangle, degraded and so on but Lawrence doesn't present this new solution of hers to the problem anything but sympathetically. He may show us the comedy in it but never in any way that invites us to feel superior to the character or her solutions. Better Christ found in Anton Skrebensky, you might say, than found nowhere at all. or, to turn it the other way round: better to find Anton Skrebensky something more than 'nothing but' what biology, chemistry, psychology, sociology make of him.

Whatever might be said about Ursula's tangle or confusion, one thing about it must be said, it's a living tangle, a living confusion, and the tangle of someone genuinely alive in her own day. She isn't making do with formulas. The so-called tangle she is in is Lawrence's own. As Lawrence shows it to us, it's one that the most sophisticated professor of Theology need not be ashamed of finding himself in.

In chapter 11, as in 10, the last thing we are likely to attribute to Ursula is anything like real religious unbelief or to Lawrence any impulse towards the diagnostic in the way he presents her. But, in the next chapter, when she comes under Winifred Inger's influence, and when she imagines that she is being shown a way to save the religion she thinks she has lost, she does fall into unbelief and Lawrence's attitude does become diagnostic (or we might say, prophetic)—and diagnostic not just of her but of Winifred Inger and the modern, science-habituated world (is that a phrase of Leavis's?)—our world—that she so plausibly represents. And the style he then goes to, as the style most fit for unbelief, is the style of the text-book and the academy.

Winifred Inger is, as Lawrence puts it, only partly ironically, a fearless-seeming clean type of modern girl, clever, expert in what she did, accurate, quick, commanding. Everything about her was well-ordered, betraying a fine clear spirit. Her voice was ringing and clear. She had an unyielding mind. She was a Bachelor of Arts who had studied at Newnham

(Cambridge). She had had a scientific education. She had known many clever people. She wanted to bring Ursula to her own position of thought.

And, as we see over the next few paragraphs, she does.

Now, the influence she has on her protégée is, from one point of view, genuinely educational. It isn't the sham thing Ursula eventually judges university to be. It has the two chief marks of real education: a real personal change is brought about in Ursula, in herself, who comes to see, speak, think, value things differently, as a different person; and that change in her is brought about not by a method or set of instructions or anything else of a quasi-mechanical character but as a result of personal influence. It's persons that educate not methods.

But, from another point of view, this being, decidedly, as Lawrence shows us it, a change for the worse, it's not education but miseducation. Both teacher and taught think they are saving religion, finding a way to hold on to it that is compatible with ... expertise, accuracy, speed, order, commandingness, clarity, unyieldingness, cleverness, and where all these terms are pointing ... modernity and science, the modernity formed upon science. Winifred Inger's "position of thought" is by no means hers alone, it is the position of thought of what Leavis used to call the dominant culture, the objectivity or relativism that supports the most characteristic aspects of the modern world, including its universities.

Those Brangwen women at the start wanted another unknown form of life. Here's what they got. We all surely recognise it. It's an academic, trying to stand outside ... outside what? Outside everything, everything but the text-book and lecture-hall: so that what he is left with *as* his world is just that and that alone, text-book and lecture-hall:

They took religion and rid it of its dogmas, its falsehoods. Winifred humanised it all. Gradually it dawned upon Ursula that all the religion she knew was but a particular clothing to a human aspiration. The aspiration was the real thing,—the clothing was a matter almost of national taste or need. The Greeks had a naked Apollo, the Christians a white-robed Christ, the Buddhists a royal prince, the Egyptians their Osiris.

(Then the style shifts into the text-book propositional or lecture-hall drone, the only proper style for expressing such a position of thought.)

Religions were local and religion was universal. Christianity was a local branch. There was as yet no assimilation of local religion into universal religion.

In religion there were the two great motives of fear and love. The motive of fear was as great as the motive of love.

Christianity accepted crucifixion to escape from fear: "Do your worst to me, that I may have no more fear of the worst." But that which was feared was not necessarily all evil, and that which was loved not necessarily all good. Fear shall become reverence, and reverence is submission in identification; love shall become triumph, and triumph is delight in identification.

So much she talked of religion, getting the gist of many writings. In philosophy she was brought to the conclusion that the human desire is the criterion of all truth and all good. Truth does not lie beyond humanity, but is one of the products of the human mind and feeling. There is really nothing to fear. The motive of

fear in religion is base, and must be left to the ancient worshippers of power, worship of Moloch. We do not worship power, in our enlightened souls. Power is degenerated to money and Napoleonic stupidity. (p. 340)

What Winifred Inger and Ursula make of religion here is just what George Grant, the Canadian philosopher/theologian describes:

The spirit of the multiversity is just too strong to allow the study of religion to transcend the modern project of reason, as producing objective knowledge ... The result is that the study of religion increasingly tends to become objectified into antiquarianism. The religions become like flies caught in amber, worthy objects for libraries and museums, but not living realities in a living culture.⁷

But two or three paragraphs after that last paragraph quoted from *The Rainbow*, and it's clear that Winifred Inger's influence isn't going very deep. Ursula just isn't cut out for objectivity, expertise, accuracy, order, clarity and the rest of it. She may have learned that the motive of fear in religion is base and that, in our enlightened souls, we leave all that to the worship of Moloch, but, in her healthily unenlightened way, she "could not help dreaming of Moloch". And thoughts of Moloch lead her on to thoughts of lions and eagles and then the kind of love they represent as contrasted with that represented by lambs and doves; until finally, without ever having meant to and without recognising that she has, she abandons the textbook style she had adopted from Winifred Inger and returns to an earlier style, with more of the ecstatic about it and with more room for religion in it: "knowing herself different from and separate from the great, conflicting universe that was not herself", which looks back to that moment of doctrineless religious feeling when Tom Brangwen

knew that he did not belong to himself. He must admit that he was only fragmentary, something incomplete and subject. There were the stars in the dark heaven travelling, the whole host passing by on some eternal voyage. So he sat small and submissive to the greater ordering. (p. 35)

That conclusion which Winifred Inger had brought Ursula to, that human desire is the criterion of all truth and good, has been forgotten already. And to emphasise her unconscious backsliding Lawrence's next paragraph consists of just one sentence, obviously satirical: "Winifred Inger was also interested in the Women's Movement." Ursula had learned her lessons but, like a lot of us, as soon as she got out of school, forgot them. Which can be, and is here, a relief.

When Ursula gets to university, she wants it to be something like a church. On the one hand, it must be admitted, she has expectations of academic life that are unfair, unrealistic, even ridiculous. She has looked for a "religious retreat", a "seclusion of pure learning", a "temple" inhabited by "priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge" where she would hear "the echo of learning pulsing back to the source of the mystery". And if you expect that, and nothing else, of the perfectly ordinary men and women university teachers are, what else can

⁷ "Faith and the Multiversity", *The Compass*, No. 4, Autumn 1978, p. 12

you be but disappointed and disillusioned? Still, those phrases and the expectations they express aren't there simply to mock at. They also correspond to something without which the university is just what it comes to seem to Ursula, barren and sterile. An academy which doesn't aspire to have *anything* to do with "deep mysteries of life and knowledge", one in which such phrases have become incomprehensible or fit only for ridicule is no university, whatever it is called. If the necessarily ordinary men and women who are its professors have nowhere about them or in their nature any aspect of the priestly, none at all, if they are men with jobs and nothing but, through and through, they all want sacking and the university, so-called, wants shutting down.

Ursula's hatred for such an academy is plainly hers and no one else's, and hers at a particular moment in her own history and in a particular state of mind, "with the ash of disillusion gritting under her teeth" but that doesn't take away from its authority as a judgement of something the university can decline into (now thought almost universally what it should rise up to): an equipment, a shop, a warehouse, a laboratory, a commercial commodity for bringing material success:

a second-hand dealer's shop, and one bought an equipment for an examination ... a little side-show to the factories of the town ... a little apprentice-shop where one was further equipped for making money ... a little, slovenly laboratory for the factory ... the sham workshop ... a sham store, a sham warehouse, with a single motive of material gain, and no productivity. It pretended to exist by the religious virtue of knowledge. But the religious virtue of knowledge was become a flunkey to the god of material success ... warehouse of dead reality ... barren, cheap, a temple converted to the most vulgar, petty commerce ... And barrenly, the professors offered commercial commodity that could be turned to good account in the examination room; ready-made stuff too, and not really worth the money it was intended to fetch; which they all knew. (pp. 434-6)

This is a passage, all university teachers ought to be made to learn by heart: "the religious virtue of knowledge ... become a flunkey to the god of material success."

Lawrence, who might be ironical but isn't cynical, is, of course, here representing the Brangwens' faith in education as thoroughly vindicated by its upshot, Ursula, even if that vindication doesn't take a form the faithful, being uneducated themselves, would have found it easy to recognise. Here *is* knowledge, experience, education, the power of thought and comprehension, all in the other magic language ... used to make an adverse judgement of education itself ... but who but the educated could make it? What stronger vindication of their faith in education could those earlier Brangwens have had?

The extraordinary thing, now, is not that someone should go to university as Ursula does and come away disillusioned with it; or even that the university should very often justify such disillusion. The truly extraordinary thing, in Britain today, is that what Lawrence derides as an inversion of the university has been adopted as the official national idea of it by the entire British political class, almost all of whom are university

graduates, and many of the most senior of whom are graduates of our oldest, most famous and supposedly best universities.

According to all British politicians, to provide for us materially is what the university does not when it is most grossly false to itself but when it is itself, in ideal perfection.

So when Tony Blair famously said, “Education, Education, Education”, he didn’t mean by it what Socrates or Plato or Newman or Jane Austen or Lawrence mean. He meant what Mrs Thatcher used to call “wealth creation”, more familiarly known—in that song, for instance, sung so marvellously by Joel Grey in the film *Cabaret*—as Money, Money, Money—except that Joel Grey sings as if the desire for it is the root of all (deeply desirable) evil and Tony Blair said it as if it were the noblest political good he could imagine.

And about that—however else he might differ from him—his successor doesn’t differ at all. He too values education, but also only for its supposed effect on GDP. He too thinks not just that there is an economic case for it but that the economic case *is* the case for it. He thinks that. His Education Minister (just like all those of his predecessor) thinks that. His Chancellor (just like his predecessor’s) thinks that. The Vice-Chancellors of all British universities continue to think that and the editors of all British newspapers continue to think that too. There is no one in either the Liberal or the Labour Party who does not think that as much as he ever did; and if there is anyone in the Conservative Party, it is someone who dare not say so.

And in the difference between what our politicians make of education and what Lawrence does, something tremendous is at stake: what Ursula sees. Where Lawrence makes real a phrase like “the deep mysteries of life and knowledge”, what Tony Blair and the rest make real are the meanings of those other phrases of Ursula’s, “a sideshow to the factories of the town” and the rest. It is the religious virtue of knowledge made flunkey to the god of material success by people who recognise no virtue but that of material success, idealised and sentimentalised.

The immense, immensely expensive, immensely complex, worldwide institution of the modern university, employing hundreds of thousands of people, attended by millions, funded by states from taxes freely paid, and legitimised by popular votes, sits under the judgement of a relatively few books like, in English, *The Rainbow* and *Pride and Prejudice*, purchasable for a couple of pounds, comprehensible to anyone who can read a sentence with a subordinate clause in it and written by a few people mostly long dead expressing—what is from the point of view of a publicly appointed public servant—just their own opinions and individual sense of things.

Those who have had the running of universities in the English-speaking world in the past forty years or so have, for the most part, had no idea that they have been doing so beneath the judgement of such as Newman or Carlyle or Jane Austen or Lawrence. And that’s just as true of those who have read them as those who haven’t. At best, they make the kind of division between the Newman they read and the universities they work in as Ursula Brangwen makes between the Sunday and weekday worlds. Newman is just a glorious sort of play-world, not something to be applied to one’s own actions. The only thing applicable to those is the latest minute or memorandum from the appropriate government department.

But, myself—like the evangelicals whose teachings the adolescent Ursula resents—I want, as it were, to apply the scriptures literally. I don’t

see why what Lawrence shows us of the character of education in *The Rainbow* shouldn't be applied to our daily actions. If we are to have universities, we oughtn't to talk about them and run them in defiance or indifference to what we ourselves recognise as their true character.

Duke Maskell

Endnote: reprinted from *World Review*, 2002

The Brangwens' expectations of education, in all their innocence, seem to me absolutely convincing and true to life,. They are very like those of my own father. Not from the Nottingham countryside of the early nineteenth century but from Wapping a hundred years later, he looked out from what he called "the rut" and saw in the same distance the same unattainable magic land the Brangwens see, inhabited, for him, not by the local squire and curate but the upperclass schoolboys of public school stories—doing Latin and 'lines', toasting crumpets in the study, resorting to the long handle in batting emergencies, shouting "*Cave!*" when the beaks came along.⁸ This was the magic land he would never enter but his son might.

So—not liking coarse manners and thieving—he refused to go down the docks, like his father and brothers, and became a professional boxer. One meaning of which he represented to himself by never going to the gym without a rolled umbrella and a folded copy of the *Times*, neither of which, I suppose, he ever opened. (It gives me a soft spot for Chris Eubank.)

And like Tom Brangwen's, his dreams of some unknown but finer form of life were mixed up with dreams of a woman. Tom Brangwen dreams of "an intimacy with fine-textured, subtle-mannered people such as the foreigner at Matlock, and amidst this subtle intimacy was always the satisfaction of a voluptuous woman". In my father's case, the woman was one of the four children of a local widowed fishmonger—a fishmonger in such a very small way that his house was his shop, and smelled like it, and his children were the recipients of their neighbours' charitable bread-and-jam. All the same, all four children—in poverty-stricken, pre-war Wapping—went to grammar school, and matriculated—which would have qualified them to go to university if they had been able to afford it, a step for which there is in modern England no equivalent. It represented a heroism on somebody's part, probably on five parts. It might, today, be like going to Oxford from a village in the Congo. It was simply unknown.

My parents once took me to see my father's dream-woman, when I was at university myself and she would have been in her forties. Was *this* the Helen for whom he'd fought 'KO' Morgan with a broken hand, had him down for three counts of nine and got counted out, pulling himself up the ropes after himself being put down for a seventh time? No wonder my mother wasn't jealous. This dream-woman wasn't fine-textured or voluptuous. She was a perfectly nice, ordinary, lower-middle-class English housewife, welcoming and snobbish. The longings my father had once had

⁸ "Without any idea, I suppose, of what might have been getting interrupted in a real school?" a friend asked. See—by the friend who asked—*Captain Eros*, Bryan Osborn, Eagle Feather, 1996.

for her (remembered even in senility the day before he died) can have been aroused only by the wonder of her matriculation certificate.

And that is more or less as it has to be—as Lawrence shows it and my father lived it.

If the Blairs and Browns knew that, they would first blush then hang themselves. As they don't, they must themselves be radically uneducated—for all their schooling, much more deeply uneducated than Lawrence's mid-nineteenth century farmers or my own prize-fighting father.