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Lessons and Lovers

A Play

Olwen Wymark

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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LESSONS AND LOVERS

Commissioned by and first performed at York Theatre Royal in November, 1985.

Frieda Lawrence	Jennie Stoller
Mabel Dodge Luhan	Patricia England
The Hon. Dorothy Brett	Amanda Grinling
D. H. Lawrence	Benny Young
Professor	Adrian Lukis
Students	Lisa David
	Anna Gilbert
	Lawrence Evans
	Dean Hollingsworth

Directed by Andrew McKinnon
Designed by Vikie le Sache
Lighting designed by Tim Thornalley

CHARACTERS

D. H. Lawrence	Tall and thin, red hair and beard. Speaks with slight North Country accent. Arrogant, tempestuous and often violently bad tempered but also affectionatee, kind and witty
Frieda Lawrence	Born the Baronness von Richthofen. A fat, genial, handsome lioness of a woman who can be as domineering and hot tempered as Lawrence but is generally warm and easygoing. Marked Austrian accent
The Honourable Dorothy Brett	Young-looking and quite pretty though chinless and pop-eyed. Posh accent and background (dancing lessons with Queen Victoria's grandchildren as a child) but also a hard worker on the ranch. Hunts and fishes rather well; paints rather badly
Mabel Dodge Luhan	A literary American headhunter married (her fourth marriage) to a Pueblo Indian. Affected and pretentious but is also warmhearted and generous; and rich. Not tall but quite plump and attractive
The Professor	Typical East-coast academic anywhere between thirty and fifty
The Students	Post-graduates from University of New Mexico. Two women, two men

The women are all in their early forties for most of the play but also in their fifties and sixties for some of the scenes

The play is set in New Mexico on the Lawrences' ranch, Kiowa (pronounced to rhyme with Iowa) and the action takes place between the years 1922 and 1945 and also in the present day

Lawrence is in his late thirties and, at the end of the play, forty-four

My thanks to Keith Sagar for his help concerning copyright material and whose books on Lawrence were of great value to me in researching and writing the play.

Thanks, too, to Gerald Pollinger Ltd. and the Estate of Mrs Frieda Lawrence Ravagli for permission to include the copyright material.

My most particular thanks to Andrew McKinnon without whose encouragement and support this play would probably never have been written.

O. W.

ACT I*

In the darkness the sound of the comfortable laughter of three women

Frieda Oh Mabel, you're making it up.
Mabel I'm not I swear to God. He said——
Brett Do keep still, Mabel.
Mabel Sorry, Brett. No but really, Frieda, this man said he knew for a fact that just before Lorenzo died he was made supreme chief of the Pueblo Indians. He wanted to buy a photograph of him in his tribal robes.
Frieda (*laughing*) You can see him. All in feathers.
Brett He would have looked beautiful.
Mabel Oh he would not, Brett. Much too skinny. And that red beard!

The Lights have been coming up very slowly. Frieda and Mabel are sitting on the steps of the Lawrences' wooden house on their ranch in New Mexico. Brett sits a little distance away, sketching them. She wears an old-fashioned hearing aid. Frieda is smoking and Mabel is posing for Brett. It's nineteen forty-five and they're all in their sixties. A wide beautiful sky is behind them and the house is represented in a skeletal way so that we can see the sky behind. Near the house is the corral fence and there is a rather crudely made wooden chair with painted decorations standing downstage

Also revealed by the gradually increasing light are three figures in silhouette who are quite still. These are Students I, II and III

Frieda So what did your Tony say about how it turns out Lorenzo was the supreme chief of his tribe?
Mabel I didn't dare tell him.
Lawrence (*shouting, off, in the distance*) Frieda!

No-one on stage reacts to this

Brett All these damnfool people coming up here with their damnfool questions. Mabel, you moved again.
Mabel Oh dear. Like this?
Frieda Ja ja, Brett is right. They should just stay at home and read his

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* N.B. Paragraph 3 on page ii of this Acting Edition regarding photocopying and video-recording should be carefully read.

books. Stupid tourists. What they like is all the lies and scandals they've heard about Lorenzo and me. They don't care about his genius.

Mabel Well it's your own fault the tourists come, Frieda. They all want to see that hideous chapel you built.

Frieda Oh bosh, Mabel. Anyway it's not a chapel, it's a shrine, with Lorenzo's phoenix carved on the top and the beautiful decorations Brett did inside. He would have loved it.

Lawrence (*shouting, off*) Brett!

Again there is no reaction

Frieda And how could I have left him buried in Europe? Ach, this terrible war.

Mabel Oh Frieda, the war's been over for weeks now.

Frieda It's different for you. You're not German.

Brett Well neither are you. You were British for years and now you're American. What I'm worried about is whether that dreadful little Labour Government's going to let me take my money out of England.

Mabel The thing is, Lorenzo's books are hard to get hold of nowadays. That's why people don't read them.

Brett Oh codswallop. They could get them if they wanted to. Libraries and places.

Mabel I'm only saying they aren't being published any more. A lot of the younger people haven't even heard of him.

Frieda And they are exactly the ones who should read him! They would understand what he wanted this ranch to be. Everyone living and working together and writing books and poems and painting and making sculptures.

Brett (*smiling over at Frieda*) Rananim.

Lawrence (*shouting, off*) Mabel!

Again no reaction

Frieda Ja, Rananim. Poor Lorenzo, he always had that dream. Never came true.

At some point during the last few speeches, Student I has walked over to the steps and gone up them between Mabel and Frieda who are totally unaware of him. He has been standing and gazing round in the house and now he comes down the steps again

Student I The house is still the same as when the Lawrences lived in it. Even the furniture. (*He goes over to the wooden chair*) He made this chair himself.

Brett Oh it did come true, Frieda. When we first came here.

Mabel No, Frieda's right. It wasn't what he meant.

Frieda Like when we tried in Cornwall, Lawrence and me. With Katherine and Murry. Too much squabbling.

Brett Well, but do you remember how we used to sit around and sing in the evenings in the old days here?

Frieda Ach yes, Lorenzo always sang.

Frieda hums and then sings a German folksong. Mabel and Brett join in

Mabel (*breaking off*) Brett! You're out of tune.
Frieda (*laughing*) She always was.
Brett Not always.
Frieda (*affectionately*) Always.
Student II There's a fellowship the University gives for somebody to come up here and live in this house for six months and write a paper.
Frieda He knew this second war would come, you know. He said so on Armistice Day in nineteen eighteen. On that very day. Nobody listened. We were at a party in Gordon Square.
Mabel Speaking of parties, I'm sorry, Brett, but I'll have to go. I've still got loads of things to do for tonight. Is Angelino going to be back in time, Frieda?
Frieda Oh ja ja, I'm sure. You know him, he never wants to miss a party. Especially your big Thanksgiving dinner.
Mabel The first Thanksgiving since the war! Tony's asked some of the other Indians to come up after dinner. They're going to dance the peace dances.
Frieda Oh good. Lovely.
Brett Don't move yet, Mabel. Just a minute more. (*As she works*) Anyway you don't have to do anything. Your servants do all the work.
Student III Be lonely living up here all by yourself.
Student II How could you be lonely? There's conferences and seminars and faculty weekends and stuff going on practically the whole year round.
Mabel (*annoyed*) They have to be told what to do, you know. Organized. I'm the one that has to make all the decisions. Not that you know the first thing about being a hostess. (*She gets up*) Oh honestly, I get stiffer every week.
Frieda So do I. (*She laughs*) We're so old.
Brett I don't feel any older at all.
Mabel You! You've always refused to grow up.
Frieda The eternal débutante.
Brett Don't. I detested all that. Ugh. Those ghastly dances.
Frieda Oh I loved dancing.
Student I (*pointing out toward the audience*) That's that pine tree where he used to sit and write.
Mabel (*looking at Brett's picture*) Nice, Brett. You've made Frieda awfully thin, though.
Frieda Oh good let's see. Oh. Why do I have to be smoking?
Brett You always are. I'm putting Lorenzo here. Sitting against the pine tree, writing.
Mabel But the tree isn't behind the house. It's down there.
Brett Artistic licence.
Student III Look, you can see the desert from up here. And the Rockies.
Frieda (*ruefully*) He'd be sixty.
Mabel (*sadly*) Can you imagine.
Brett (*romantic*) Silver hair, silver beard.

Frieda and Mabel exchange an amused look

Frieda You know sometimes I think what I should do is leave this ranch to the New Mexico University in my will.
Brett Why on earth?
Frieda Oh well ... they could study up here. Young people coming and working on the ranch and writing and painting ... reading Lorenzo's books.
Brett (*laughing*) Oh I see. They could be Rananim.
Frieda (*laughing too*) Ja.
Mabel But you wouldn't really, would you, Frieda?
Frieda I might.
Mabel Angelino wouldn't let you.
Frieda Let? Let? It's my ranch!
Mabel All right, all right. Brett, do you want to drive down to Taos with me now?
Brett No, I'm going to do some work. Did I tell you that woman definitely wants one of the big pictures?
Frieda No! *Wunderbar*!
Mabel You be sure she pays you a good price.
Frieda (*kissing them*) *Wiedersehen*, Brett. Mabel.
Brett Toodle pip. (*Then as she starts to go*) Oh Frieda, do you think Angie would come and have a look at the skylight in the studio? It's sticking again.
Frieda Sure. I'll tell him.
Mabel Bye Brett. See you later, Frieda.

Mabel and Brett exit in different directions

Frieda goes out through the house

The Students are still looking out

After a moment or so, the Professor enters

Professor Oh, you're here. I'm rounding people up for the reading.
Student III What time does it start?
Professor In about ten minutes. It's in the main seminar room. I'm just going to check and see if people are still in the cafeteria.

The Professor goes off in one direction, the Students go off in the other

The Lights fade to a Black-out

Lawrence enters during the Black-out

Lawrence (*in the darkness*) Brett!

The Lights come up on Lawrence, centre stage. After a moment, he calls again

Brett? Where've you got to?

Brett runs on, breathless

Brett I'm here, Lorenzo. I was just going to fetch the wood.

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