J·D·H·L·S

Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies

Citation details

Review of: **Indrek Männiste, ed., *D. H. Lawrence, Technology, and Modernity*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.**

Author: David Trotter

Source: *Journal of the D. H. Lawrence Society*, vol. 5.2 (2019)

Pages: 191–94

A Publication of the
D. H. Lawrence Society of Great Britain

resurrecting the original Frieda, Abbs adds another layer to the "palimpsest" of Frieda's fictional proxies: Abbs critiques Lawrence for making the living Frieda into a paper doll but also reinscribes her "real" Frieda in the terms of his fiction. Arguably, Abbs's novel bites the biofictional hand that feeds it, and does so in highly readable prose that is also, in places, a pastiche of Lawrence's: "His gaze – straight, guileless, blue – seemed to bore into her and she had … that strangely thrilling sensation of being split open, like a fig" (201).

In another recent Frieda biofiction, *The Novelist's Wife* (2015) by Sasha Bristol (Marianna Torgovnick), Frieda says that Lawrence is "linking our life to his work" (Northampton MA: The Modernist Press, 2015: n. p. Kindle edition). Annabel Abbs's Frieda may want to decouple her life from his art, but *Frieda: A Novel of the Real Lady Chatterley* shows us that we cannot recoup Frieda's "story" from Lawrence's fiction.

Indrek Männiste, ed., *D. H. Lawrence, Technology, and Modernity*.
London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
Pp xxii + 234. £96 (hardcover). ISBN 978 1 5013 4000 0

Reviewed by David Trotter

There is wall-to-wall D. H. Lawrence in this welcome collection of fifteen essays on a relatively unexamined topic, and a lot of modernity, but not quite as much technology as one might perhaps have expected.

Technology, as the philosopher John Durham Peters has put it, is the externalisation of technique into durable form (*The Marvelous Clouds: Towards a Philosophy of Elemental Media* [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015], 91). As such, it is as old as the wheel, if not older. In literary studies, however, it has not yet shaken off its long association with aspects of "modernity": a loose,

baggy monster of a term so dulled by over-use that it is hard to know any longer exactly what it refers to. Lawrence remains central to that association; and, given his increasingly bitter campaign against industrial capitalism, for very good reason. F. R. Leavis notoriously championed him as a staunch opponent of "technologico-Benthamite" civilisation (*English Literature in Our Time and the University* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969], 125). Raymond Williams, establishing him as heir to the Carlylean critique of the social, political and cultural effects of runaway industrialisation, provided some historical context (*Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* [London: The Hogarth Press, 1990], 200). In the 1990s, Michael Bell introduced Martin Heidegger's understanding of technology as a modern metaphysic into his account of Lawrence's philosophy of being (*D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992], 8). More recently, eco-criticism has productively harnessed Lawrence's rage against the machine. "It could even be said", Indrek Männiste remarks in his Introduction to this volume, "that Lawrence's whole oeuvre arises from an outcry against industrial modernity" (1). We value Lawrence as a witness to the Anthropocene: a term which, although still lacking an agreed definition, may yet prove more reliable than "modernity".

The largest group of essays in the collection chronicle Lawrence's long, arduously fruitful maladjustment to a technological age by means of a discussion of the major novels from *The White Peacock* to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Appropriately enough, it is the editor who in his own contribution states most clearly the assumption underlying them. In Lawrence's writing, Männiste proposes, technology should be understood as "almost always synecdochal and representing industrial modernity in its entirety" (176). I found little to disagree with in any of these essays, while at the same time feeling that there is much to be gained, as Tina Ferris, Annalise Grice, Andrew Harrison and Katherine Toy Miller demonstrate in exemplary fashion, by a narrower focus on a specific historical event or context.

Technology, the externalisation of technique into durable form, remains the dog that didn't bark in the night. Or if it does bark, the effect is to introduce an odd turbulence into otherwise persuasive and engaging contributions. Fiona Becket, for example, writes with characteristic insight and elegance about key poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* which, as she remarks, put the "sap" back into "sapience" (154). I am not sure, however, that she needed to shoe-horn green technology into her analysis of 'Bare Almond Trees', written in January 1921, in Taormina, in Sicily. "Do you take the whisper of sulphur from the air?" is one of several questions Lawrence asks of the almond trees which winter has transformed into a "strange magnetic apparatus" (*1Poems* 253). Becket suggests that by taking the sulphur from the air, the trees might prove "ecologically helpful", a technologically-enhanced nature thus undoing the damage done by industrial intervention (156). But the chemical in question is surely the sulphur dioxide (SO_2) emitted by volcanoes such as the nearby Mount Etna, which can cause air pollution and acid rain downwind, but is scarcely man-made.

Similarly, I learnt a great deal from Jeff Wallace's deft outline of a Lawrentian "art of living" which the fiction consistently renders by encouraging its protagonists to act on the spur of the moment, for reasons they cannot explain to themselves. Such impetuousness amounts, paradoxically, to a practice; a habit, even. But I could not really see the benefit of introducing the concept of "technologies of the self", which has immediately to be prised out of the grasp of Michel Foucault, for whom it was an ancient art, with the help of commentaries by Gilbert Simondon, Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi. In historical terms, the more productive comparison might have been with Marcel Mauss's 1934 lecture on 'Techniques of the Body' (trans. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society*, 2.1 [1973], 70–88).

Männiste and his contributors have shown that technology does indeed provide a revealing window into many aspects of Lawrence's achievement as a writer. In the end, however, I put the book down wanting to hear more about actual technologies, in the

novels, stories, and poems. Take Anna Brangwen's sewing machine, for example, in *The Rainbow*. Anna Lensky marries Will Brangwen in December 1882. After a delirious honeymoon, they fight and make up repeatedly as they search for equilibrium. Since the first electrically-powered machines did not come onto the market until the late 1880s, Anna's would have been hand-cranked, or driven by a treadle. Crank or drive it she certainly does, making it start and stutter and buzz in a gesture of defiance, at once bodily and technological, to which Will has no answer (*R* 152). The sewing machine matters intensely to Anna. It is her weapon of choice. A synecdoche for industrial modernity? I don't think so.

Carrie Rohman, *Choreographies of the Living: Bioaesthetics in Literature, Art, and Performance*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
Pp xv + 178. £23.99 (paperback). ISBN: 9780190604417

Reviewed by Jeff Wallace

The critical wager upon which this intriguing and intensely argued book is founded is, in the words of its author, that the "aesthetic impulse itself" (2) is profoundly animal, inhuman and, as such, trans-species. Art should no longer be considered as an exclusively human activity; rather, the affective and somatic dimensions of artistic creation are one of the key ways in which our kinship with inhuman nature is expressed. While we have known since Baumgarten that aesthetics is, as Terry Eagleton puts it (in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1990]), a discourse of the body and the senses, bioaesthetics calls for a more radical rethinking of the physicality or materiality of human art.

Does this therefore, in turn, imply that animals create art? Only, it is argued, in an expanded sense of "excess", play or performance, often associated with sexual selection in animals, which challenges the proposition of post-Darwinian logic that any trait or behaviour has evolved for its functional or "fitness" value alone. In this,