
¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 171–2.

Helen Smith, *The Uncommon Reader: A Life of Edward Garnett*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2017. Pp. 440. £30 (hardcover). ISBN 978 0 2240 8181 8

Reviewed by Annalise Grice

Above all, Edward Garnett was a man of letters. He was also a proud freethinker, whose anti-institutional principles led him to refuse official recognition for his services to literature in a career spanning some fifty years. When offered an Honorary Doctorate in 1936, Garnett declined, describing himself as “an outsider, a solitary person, unacademic in essence and unfitted to be Dr Garnett” (350). Emerging from an intellectual – rather than wealthy – middle-class background, Garnett had close family links to the world of literature. Lacking a university education, in 1889 he married the Cambridge-educated Constance Black, who became the celebrated translator of over seventy volumes of Russian literature including the complete works of Turgenev, whose writing Garnett held in the highest regard. Alongside Constance, Garnett became known as a promoter of Russian literature, writing volumes on *Tolstoy* (1914) and *Turgenev* (1917) and contributing literary journalism and reviews to the *Speaker*, the *Academy* and the *Nation*.

Helen Smith’s highly anticipated biography *The Uncommon Reader* provides valuable and extensive details about Garnett’s career as a publisher’s reader for T. Fisher Unwin, Heinemann, John Lane, Duckworth and Jonathan Cape, and as English representative for the American *Century* magazine and the Viking Press. The biography is designed to appeal to a broad readership, but scholars reading the book for research purposes may be frustrated by the lack of a chronology, and an appendix of first meetings or first

correspondence with future mentees would also have been useful. An absence of dates within chapter titles and page headings makes the book hard to navigate. Nevertheless, the biography proceeds chronologically, and Smith reveals how Garnett intervened in the professional (and often also in the personal) lives of an array of significant writers including Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, W. B. Yeats and – of course – D. H. Lawrence. There have been a number of other substantial biographies on the Garnetts and Smith is most indebted to George Jefferson's *Edward Garnett: A Life in Literature* (1982) and Richard Garnett's *Constance Garnett: A Heroic Life* (1991), but she has also carried out expansive archival research and examines a cache of Garnett's reader's reports to discern his literary values, concluding that Garnett prized "veracity", originality and "an unflinching readiness to show people what they are" (273).

It is little wonder, then, that he was so drawn to Lawrence's writing. Smith detects Garnett's influence in the rewriting of scenes in *Sons and Lovers* in which, in the final manuscript, Lawrence replaces several instances of protracted authorial exposition with dramatic exchanges and symbolism (228–9) and writes to Garnett that he has rewritten the novel, "pruning it and shaping it and filling it in" (1L 476), pre-emptively defending himself against any charges of formlessness. Responding to the manuscript of 'The Wedding Ring', Garnett advised Lawrence to express the novel's emotional and psychological elements through vivid episodes rather than abstract theorising, and to work on the character of Ella (241). By this date, Lawrence had gained a degree of self-confidence from the largely positive reception of *Sons and Lovers* and he defended his work against Garnett's criticism, telling him that he no longer cared for "accumulating objects in the powerful light of emotion, and making a scene of them. I have to write differently" (2L 142). The intimate friendship and productive literary engagements between Lawrence and Garnett, which ended with a period of mutual frustration and disagreement about literary matters in 1914, fit the pattern of Garnett's role as a self-appointed mentor throughout his career. Garnett would scout out promising young writers, school

them in literary style, offer them guidance about publishing practice, instil them with the confidence to stand alone, undergo a period of disagreement, and then leave them to choose their own path with his cautionary tales ringing in their ears.

Much of the detail in Smith's biography about Garnett's engagements with Lawrence is well-known to Lawrence scholars. However, an excerpt from a letter held at the Bodleian Library from Garnett to Heinemann's reader Walter de la Mare fills in some further detail about Heinemann's rejection of *Sons and Lovers* (then entitled 'Paul Morel') and Garnett's hand in taking the novel over to Duckworth. This letter reveals the communication and collegiality between publishing houses at this time and suggests that Duckworth eagerly supported Garnett's move to take on 'Paul Morel' in 1912. Garnett then commented on and returned the manuscript to Lawrence together with a "list of notes from Duckworth" (IL 427), further indications of Duckworth's close involvement and interest in Lawrence's work.

Readers of the *JDHLS* will be interested in how *The Uncommon Reader* shows Lawrence not simply as a sole recipient of Garnett's sharp but well-informed criticism and editorial intervention, but as one of Garnett's many acutely-criticised protégés. A better understanding of Garnett allows us to reassess his contribution to Lawrence's career and comprehend why he and Lawrence got on so well. Throughout his life Garnett attempted to become a fiction writer, but Smith observes that Garnett's "critical faculty overwhelmed his creative aspirations" (80), and he appears as a melancholy, embattled figure, who was prone (in Constance's words) to "nervous irritability". Garnett suffered a form of nervous breakdown at the age of 26 (49–51) and he turned to bromide in order to sleep at night (174). Smith reveals that his marriage was companionate rather than passionate and, from 1896, Garnett's feelings for the artist Nellie Heath grew, apparently with Constance's blessing, and Nellie became Garnett's long-term partner. By the age of 43 Garnett had become "tired of books and MSS", feeling the work of a publisher's reader was "a second-hand sort of existence"

(198), but despite long-term illness he continued working for Jonathan Cape until his death of a cerebral haemorrhage at the age of 69.

This is an enjoyable, deeply informative and wide-ranging biography for any reader interested in early-twentieth-century publishing culture and literary networks. It ends rather abruptly, leaving one wishing that Smith had rounded off her extensive research and evident admiration for her biographical subject by giving a final brief evaluation of the shape of Garnett's life, career and his remarkable legacy.

Anthony Pacitto. *A Sense of Ancient Gods*.

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Reviewed by Neil Roberts

In December 1919 Lawrence and Frieda spent nine days in an uncomfortable and poorly furnished villa near the mountain village of Picinisco on the western edge of the Abruzzi. They were the guests of Orazio Cervi, a "returned native" who had spent years in London working as a model for artists including Lord Leighton and Sir Hamo Thorneycroft. The latter was the father of Lawrence's friend Rosalind Baynes, and the sojourn was partly to see if the villa was a suitable bolt-hole for Rosalind and her children, in flight from her marriage.

The cold and discomfort, and the lure of a much warmer climate in Capri, proved too much for Lawrence, but he was profoundly impressed by the remoteness (perhaps the most remote place he experienced before his New Mexico ranch) and, in his own word, "primitiveness" of the Abruzzi. It became the setting for the closing chapters of *The Lost Girl*, which he wrote in March–May 1920, after retrieving the manuscript of 'The Insurrection of Miss Houghton' which he had abandoned in 1913.