

(e.g. “Lawrence had a love-hate relationship” with the commercial literary world). It is a pity that such blemishes undermine what is in many respects a well-researched and worthy study of an important subject.

**Louise E. Wright, *Maurice Magnus: A Biography*.
Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.
Pp. xvi+179. £34.99 (hardback). ISBN 9781847182029**

Reviewed by Keith Cushman

Maurice Magnus: A Biography is the first full-length study of that curious, elusive expatriate American who briefly but intriguingly crossed paths with Lawrence in Italy and Malta immediately after World War One. Magnus is well-known to Lawrence scholars because of Lawrence’s vivid ‘Memoir of Maurice Magnus’, originally published in 1924 as ‘Introduction to *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*’. Lawrence described this biographical essay to Catherine Carswell as “the best single piece of writing, *as writing*, that he had ever done”.¹

Maurice Magnus was an American, but apparently his mother was the illegitimate daughter of Kaiser Wilhelm I (which would have made Magnus a cousin of Wilhelm II). Before meeting Lawrence, Magnus had been the business manager of two important early twentieth-century artists: the theatre designer and theoretician Gordon Craig and the dancer Isadora Duncan. He had founded a European literary bureau and managed another, and he had worked as a journalist and translator. He had a wife back in the United States although he was homosexual. Having made the catastrophic mistake of enlisting in the French Foreign Legion in 1916, he deserted when his unit was en route to the trenches.

¹ Catherine Carswell, *The Savage Pilgrimage: A Narrative of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Martin Secker, 1932), 123.

Magnus insisted on living first-class, although he rarely had money. He considered himself a writer, but he published little during his lifetime. By the time Norman Douglas introduced Lawrence to Magnus in Florence in November 1919, Magnus was living by his wits. In November 1920 he committed suicide in Maletta, Malta, in order to avoid arrest for an unpaid hotel bill in Rome. Lawrence wrote the ‘Memoir of Maurice Magnus’ in an effort to convince a publisher to take a risk on Magnus’s unpublished memoir of his experiences in the Foreign Legion: in Lawrence’s words, “his horrid *Legion* book” (4*L* 191). I don’t have space to recapitulate the circumstances that caused Norman Douglas to publish *D. H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus: A Plea for Better Manners* (1924), the pamphlet in which Douglas argues that he should have received Magnus’s literary remains, and in which he takes Lawrence to task for his portrait of Magnus in ‘Memoir of Maurice Magnus’.

As N. H. Reeve and John Worthen make clear in their introduction to the Magnus ‘Memoir’ in the Cambridge Edition of *Introductions and Reviews* (2005), all the evidence points to the fact that Lawrence was acting in good faith. No doubt Lawrence to some extent indulges his “novelist’s touch” in his portrait of Magnus, as Douglas complains,² but the fair-minded Mark Kinkead-Weekes points out that the writings of Gordon Craig (who knew Magnus for many years) and Craig’s son Edward (who met him many times) “bear out the mixture of sophisticate and trickster, elegance and sleaze, wistful charm with suspect flattery, that Lawrence recreates so cogently”.³

Magnus the trickster is nowhere to be found in the pages of *Maurice Magnus: A Biography*. Although Louise Wright declares that she “did not set out to redeem Magnus’s character from

² Norman Douglas, *D. H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus: A Plea for Better Manners* (n.p. [Florence]: Privately printed, 1924), 27, 30.

³ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 707.

Lawrence's assessment of it" (xv), her biography reads like a reclamation project. Since Douglas "knew Magnus infinitely better than did Lawrence", she accepts his "much more sympathetic and comprehensive account of Magnus's character" (xiii), overlooking the polemical dimension of *A Plea for Better Manners*.

The great strength of *Maurice Magnus: A Biography* is the remarkable research that went into its creation. Wright's travels took her not only to Yale, Harvard, the Humanities Research Center at Texas, and the National Archives in Washington, D. C., but also to Nottingham, Amsterdam, Weimar, and the National Archives of Malta. She worked in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, which somehow owns Gordon Craig's copy of *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*. This book features Craig's marginalia, which Wright uses effectively (though not extensively). Reeve and Worthen paid impressive tribute to Wright's research when they published her finely detailed 'The Death of Maurice Magnus' as Appendix IX in *Introductions and Reviews*; it corrects previous accounts of Magnus's suicide, including Lawrence's own.

A main problem of *Maurice Magnus: A Biography* is Wright's difficulty in demonstrating that "Magnus's life makes for a fascinating story" (xv). The trivial detail she regularly includes does not help her make that case. Magnus's suicide ended a life in which he had never really accomplished anything. His greatest claim to fame was his series of intersections with important artists and writers of the first half of the twentieth century: Craig, Duncan, Douglas, Lawrence. Business managers don't merit biographies. Indeed, the chapter concerning Duncan's 1907-8 tour of Russia, drawn from an unfinished manuscript by Magnus, is notable for what it adds to our knowledge of the dancer, not her manager. Magnus did not succeed as manager of the *Direktion Vereinigter Künste*, nor as director of the European Literary Bureau (an agency that specialised in translation rights). Would these ventures have been interesting even if they *had* succeeded?

Magnus and Craig's publishing venture, *The Mask: A Monthly Journal of the Art of the Theatre*, was another failure. Although

Magnus's experiences in the Foreign Legion provided him with powerful (though painful) material for a book, anyone who has read *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion* will agree that the book would not have been published without Lawrence's intervention and introduction. No one would have considered writing a biography of Maurice Magnus had Magnus not become a brief but intriguing part of Lawrence's life after the war. Without Lawrence there would have been no posthumous literary controversy, no publication of *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, no 'Memoir of Maurice Magnus'.

Wright romanticises Magnus's life as the "tragedy of an individual who has outlived the world into which he was born, who finds it difficult to adapt to a lifestyle other than the one for which he was groomed and who fails to support himself in his chosen profession" (xv). But that world of high civilisation and great wealth still flourished during Magnus's lifetime. His belief that he was part of that world, a sort of prince in exile, seems to me self-delusion, and self-delusion is not tragedy. Furthermore, in her effort to counteract Lawrence's colourful portrait of Maurice Magnus, she presents a Magnus who is bland and lacking in personality.

The most curious aspect of Wright's biography is her treatment of Magnus's homosexuality. It is as if she feels that his homosexuality somehow diminishes him. While acknowledging that "Magnus is often thought of as homosexual", she observes that "his comments on effeminacy and homosexuality ... indicate that he did not see himself as such" (xv). This reminds me of Roy Cohn's insistence that the fact that he had sex with men didn't mean that he was homosexual. Magnus told Lawrence that although "physical relationships are very attractive", they "pass" – in contrast to "one's *mental* friendships", which "last for ever" (*IR* 32). Nevertheless, Magnus *had* "physical relationships", mostly with men and on a cash basis, as Wright herself documents (for example, she mentions the "family legend" that shortly after Magnus's marriage, his wife "soon discovered that he preferred young boys" and in the bargain "ran off with her fortune" [73]). Wright misses an opportunity to enrich her portrait of Magnus

when she shies away from his rather open homosexuality, which was obviously a rarity early in the twentieth century.

Maurice Magnus: A Biography is a very short book: only 139 pages of text (plus 21 pages of footnotes). These pages do not include an account of the Lawrence-Douglas controversy, one of the most notable literary feuds of the mid-1920s. Others have told this story, but it seems odd to omit it from a biography of Magnus, especially since Wright has a clear point of view about the controversy. Wright devotes only a few sentences to Lawrence's fictional portrait of Magnus as Mr May in *The Lost Girl*. She notes, for example, that Mr May's sense of responsibility in supporting his wife and daughter might "have some truth in it", "given Lawrence's generally negative attitude toward Magnus" (107). Why does Wright choose to believe only the positive aspects of Lawrence's fictional portrait?

It's not as if Magnus actually did support his wife and daughter. In a document he left behind at his suicide, he asked that the American Consul in Valletta be advised to "please bury me first class—the expenses will be paid by my wife" (IR 427). This request, one of Magnus's last, seems to me to be truly in character: spare no expense and let his abandoned wife pay. That's precisely the aspect of Magnus's personality that this biography chooses to overlook. We can be grateful for Louise Wright's splendidly researched life of Maurice Magnus, but her portrait of him would have been more persuasive if she had set aside her airbrush.

Jae-kyung Koh, *D. H. Lawrence and the Great War: The Quest for Cultural Regeneration*.

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Reviewed by Oliver Taylor

Although this book sets itself the ambitious task of demonstrating the resemblances between Lawrence's and Foucault's views of