

stood for, “life, art, creation, regeneration, movement, intuition, primitivism, the present, immediacy, spontaneity, and spiritual aristocracy”, and what it stood against, “aestheticism, science, machines, capitalism, the masses, democracy” (403), Muto is able to draw parallels with Lawrence (and suggest areas where Murry may have influenced him). He sees in the two book reviews and one short story that Lawrence wrote for the magazine and its successor, the *Blue Review*, indications of the development Lawrence was making in moving from *Sons and Lovers* to *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, notable for their “distinctively repetitive, rhythmic style” (406). He concludes with the claim that it was Lawrence, not Murry, who realised “the artistic dream of the *Rhythm*” (407).

I enjoyed being able to dip into essays on very different topics in this compendious volume. I cannot improve on Michael Bell’s summary of its merits: “Overall [it] reflects, albeit very selectively, the continuing contribution of Japanese and Korean scholars to the understanding of Lawrence” (20).

**Keith Sagar, *D. H. Lawrence: Poet.***

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***Reviewed by Bethan Jones***

Keith Sagar’s new e-book, incorporating research carried out between the early 1970s and the present day, serves as an extremely valuable addition to the relatively few full-length studies of Lawrence as poet already in existence. It covers the entire range of Lawrence’s poetic output, charting his development from the earliest signs of interest to the final, highest reaches of artistic accomplishment in some of the *Last Poems*. This study combines detailed textual analysis with biographical and literary contextualisation, considering the influence of place and situation on the

writing of specific poems and situating Lawrence within an intertextual chain of key poets. Sagar's strategy is broad in the sense that his discussion incorporates extensive reference to every book of poems composed by Lawrence, yet he also selects certain poems for in-depth, detailed analysis. These poems either illustrate a general trend or shine out in their uniqueness, indicating a departure from the limitations of the norm – a step forward. At the same time, the study is too frank to be merely a celebration of Lawrence's triumph in this genre. It tells the story of struggle and even failure in Lawrence's wrestle with his poetic demon, as well as a coming through in the creation of a Whitmanesque free verse: a form that could (in Lawrence's terms) slit the umbrella of conventionality and open up a window to the sun.

The Introduction, entitled 'Lawrence and Imagination', draws on a number of Lawrence's essays and letters to create a general context that frames the subsequent discussion of his poetry. Sagar interrogates the key term 'imagination', revealing a number of its complex ramifications. It is categorised as an attribute that we all possess: something that can be released when we are liberated from the force of habit or processes of indoctrination, and from the restrictions of social bonds. Sagar considers how imagery of clothing versus nakedness can indicate a need to divest oneself of restriction. 'Religion' in this context might be perceived as a potency within us; God becomes a "dark continent of the body", a way of voicing our own inner meaning. Poetry taps into this inner reservoir of potential utterance through symbolism, and the imagination emerges via imagery. Through the linking of sense impressions, poetry can establish a wholeness and forge a link between man and the circumambient universe. Lawrence, envisaged as a poet who functions in this way, is placed in a lineage of key poets including William Blake, Ted Hughes, Gerard Manley Hopkins and – perhaps most crucially – Walt Whitman, who becomes central to Sagar's argument later on.

Chapter 1 ('The Young Man and the Demon') is illustrative of the scope of the study as a whole in discussing Lawrence's pro-

gression from his first expressed aspiration to become a poet, to his writing of the *Look! We Have Come Through!* collection and the liberation of his poetic demon. The early poems 'To Guelder-Roses' and 'To Champions' have frequently been considered – and dismissed – as naïve nature poems, but Sagar affords them a rather more controversial status as symbolic attacks on specific young ladies of Lawrence's acquaintance: this interpretation is substantiated by a detailed analysis of the poems' imagery. According to Sagar's argument, these poems are more interesting than we may have thought. Yet there is no simple agenda here, involving an attempt to rescue Lawrence from attack. Rather, Sagar is keen to point out the weaknesses resulting from bad rhymes and other structural inadequacies, as he continues to do throughout the book.

Two poems selected for detailed analysis, in early and late draft form, are 'The Wild Common' and 'Dreams Old and Nascent', which exemplify Lawrence's engagement with Haeckelian 'substance' and a struggle with his past. These poems are considered potent and promising early works – yet Sagar identifies a later moment of crucial development sparked by Lawrence's discovery of Frieda and the subsequent composition of *Look! We Have Come Through!* 'Song of a Man Who Came Through', for instance, is identified as a genuinely revealing poem about life and art. Lawrence the married man is seen as inseparable from Lawrence the poet, and (as Sagar puts it at the end of the chapter) the demon is "no longer the writhing repressed half of a split psyche, but Lawrence's newborn self, his new wholeness and courage, the self which can recognise and respond to the sacred" (28).

Sagar's second main chapter adopts a different, intertextual strategy, focusing on 'Lawrence's debt to Whitman' (the chapter title). He proceeds from the undeniable assertion that Lawrence would not have achieved the status of 'great poet' had he died before 1920; that he was only able to reach this elevated position as a consequence of Whitman's influence. While the previous chapter ended with a discussion of the poetic liberation facilitated by

Frieda, this one begins by reaching back again to the early years and stages of Lawrence's grapple with the constraints of rhyme. Sagar contrasts the difficulty experienced in casting off the shackles of conventional poetic forms with Whitman's relatively painless passage – unlike Lawrence, Whitman was unfettered by a weighty English poetic tradition.

Sagar considers Lawrence's early interest in Whitman as well as his subsequent misreadings and misrepresentations of him, particularly in later drafts of the 'Whitman' essay within *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Foregrounding the inherent falsification within these drafts, Sagar argues for 'Poetry of the Present' as a truer celebration of indebtedness. In the light of his general observations, Sagar undertakes an interesting localised discussion of Whitmanesque syntax and punctuation, including the specific ways in which the poetry differs from prose. He considers, for example, how free verse attempts to achieve holistic connectedness through the use of commas, which can act as unifying agents rather than creating discontinuity.

The characteristic frankness of this study is evident in Sagar's reference to sections of 'The Wild Common' as "rhythmically, a dog's breakfast" (31); yet he also indicates that the poem incorporates liberated, free verse moments of real potential. Arguably, a structural weakness within these early chapters is evident in the way in which this poem (in addition to 'Dreams Old and Nascent') is introduced for the second time here, still with preliminaries, and without acknowledgement that it has been evoked and discussed before. This may be a consequence of the fact that the chapters are self-contained units, so that the book includes some overlapping material. Nonetheless, while some close repetition appears spurious, it becomes evident that new insights are generated within the context of a different setting or discourse.

Chapter 3, entitled "'Little living myths": *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*' continues the chronological progression of Chapter 1, moving beyond the *Look! We Have Come Through!* poems to the 1923 collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, considered by many to

be Lawrence's first genuinely proficient and unified volume written in free verse. This chapter is one of the high points of the entire study in its fascinating analysis of texts ranging from 'Snake' to the lesser-known 'Evangelistic Beasts' poems. Sagar identifies and explores a number of salient themes within the collection, such as the dichotomy of mind/spirit in 'St Matthew'; Pythagorean numbering and the symbolic significance of the Crucifix within the Tortoise poems; and Lawrence's playful use of the Persephone myth in 'Purple Anemones'.

Although some poems are prioritised and analysed at length, Sagar remains true to his comprehensive, chronological method through briefly alluding to the composition of other, contemporaneous pieces, indicating their place within the sequences. Interestingly, Sagar suggests that the chronology does not reflect a gradual development in proficiency, for the "delicacy and sensitivity and balance" (88) of the best of these European poems cannot be maintained throughout. He identifies in later poems a harsher note, tainted by the vast obduracy of the American southwest: poems that anticipate *The Plumed Serpent* in their symbolic association of man with the "sun of power". As an illustration, Sagar contrasts the accomplishment of 'Fish' with 'American Eagle', the poem he considers the worst in the volume, as it fails to be about a real eagle or any other facet of the natural world. It is interesting that Sagar identifies such writing as an "act of inattention", and condemns the dogmatism that anticipates Don Ramón's rhetoric. His judgements here seem harsh, but such condemnation of the allegedly weaker poems also serves to highlight the greatness of poems which are seen as genuinely insightful and attentive.

Chapter 4 is marked out by its focus on the one most frequently anthologised poem of Lawrence's output. 'The Genesis of "Snake"' functions as a corrective to the common preconceptions regarding the composition of this poem. It is a widely held assumption that the poem was written in direct response to Lawrence encountering a snake in Taormina, during July 1920. Sagar offers an alternative –

and highly convincing – argument for the poem as “a little myth” (101), establishing a number of intertextual and particularly mythological sources. He alludes to Lawrence’s two previously recorded encounters with snakes, and charts the evolution of his reaction from revulsion (fuelled by the culturally deep-rooted symbolic association of the creature with corruption) to aesthetic appreciation and even awe. Yet he is above all keen to establish that Lawrence is *not* the narrator of the poem: the response to the snake evoked therein is that of civilisation more generally, for Lawrence himself had moved well beyond this stage by the time of the poem’s composition. The poem is therefore a drama, a myth, rather than a spontaneous response to lived experience.

In considering the poem’s symbolic language, Sagar establishes an interesting dichotomy, in which the snake (associated with corruption) is set against the fissure (connoting mystic or religious visionary seeing). In 1915, Sagar argues, snake and fissure symbolism would have been on parallel tracks for Lawrence, whereas by 1920-21 he had found ways of exploring their common implications. ‘Snake’ is also discussed in relation to the other *Birds*, *Beasts and Flowers* poems, ‘The Reality of Peace’, *The Plumed Serpent*, and ‘Sun’. More broadly, W. H. Hudson’s autobiography *Far Away and Long Ago*, in addition to the more commonly acknowledged poetic intertext *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, are brought into play in order to indicate that ‘Snake’ is a richer, more complex and more resonant poem than has hitherto been recognised.

Fissures paradoxically function as a binding agent between this chapter and the next, as does the common focus on poetic symbolism, evident in the chapter title ‘Womb, Wind, Fissure and Underworld: the stages of Lawrence’s poetic quest’. Fissures are again discussed in relation to mystic vision (such as in the poem ‘Peach’), though here their sexual connotations are also considered, and they are seen symbolically as a deviation from the static perfection of a Grecian Urn. There is another link with the preceding chapter through a further analysis of ‘Snake’ which does

cover some of the same ground, evident, for instance, in the citation of “I didn’t know his God” again on page 114, and the argument regarding Lawrence’s reversal of Yahweh’s curse in the poem. However, some of these reiterated insights are important in substantiating Sagar’s argument that the witty, playful tone of certain *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* poems is inadequate when accounting for the ‘gods’ of snakes, bats and fishes. He is keen to emphasise the essential seriousness that complements the jocular, outspoken effrontery of the Fruit poems.

While the discussion of fissures foregrounds the *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* collection, womb symbolism is considered in relation to earlier poems, such as the three drafts of ‘Piano’. In the first draft of this poem, Sagar argues, the past is reified as the place in which authenticity lies, though the present has asserted itself and gained precedence. The second draft repudiates this sentimental position, replacing it with an overly emphatic claim that the past has been suitably left behind, while in the third, the past is seen to betray the authentic self which *ought* to be living in the present. Characteristically, Sagar manages to achieve new insight into a well-known and acclaimed poem through his detailed analysis of the compositional procedure. The area beneath the piano, in which the child leans up against the sound-board, is examined as a womb-space, associated with maternal influence and regression.

Having previously explored the snake/fissure antithesis, Sagar now establishes a further symbolic dichotomy, in which the womb is placed in opposition to the wind of ‘Song of a Man who has Come Through’, which is associated with spontaneity and naturalness in art and life. This poem, he argues, celebrates the dream of liberation yet hasn’t entirely *achieved* poetic freedom, though Whitman’s influence and the transition to free verse will finally enable Lawrence to attain the kind of “wind-like transit” described in ‘Poetry of the Present’. In terms of relative weighting, wombs, winds and fissures receive more attention than the Underworld, which is only discussed explicitly at the very end of the chapter, where it is linked symbolically to the descent through a

fissure of visionary insight. This brief section serves principally to anticipate the imagery discussed in the next chapter on the late poetry – such as the descent through a fissure into a deeper, darker world in the celebrated poem ‘Bavarian Gentians’.

Appropriately, Sagar’s last analytical chapter – “‘New, Strange Flowers’: *Pansies*, *Nettles* and *Last Poems*” – considers the wave of poetry generated after a long break following publication of the *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* volume in 1923. Sagar again emphasises the biographical context, considering ways in which Lawrence’s changes of location, such as his move to Rottach, and the practical necessities arising from his degenerating state of health, resulted in a resurgence in his writing of verse between 1928 and 1930. He conveys Lawrence’s delight in his newfound ‘pansy’ style, alluding to the ‘pensée’ influence and discussing Lawrence’s exploitation of the satirical possibilities of rhyme, particularly in the poems of December 1928. Just as he indicated the controversial thrust of Lawrence’s earliest nature poems, targeted at female friends, here Sagar argues that some of the Pansy satires are levelled at Richard Aldington and Aldous Huxley. He cites Richard Hoggart’s interpretation of such poems as embodiments of the sharp, witty tone of the Midlands. Yet, just as he earlier emphasised the serious as well as the playful aspect of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, here he is keen to emphasise that the satirical voice of these late poems is not the only one. He asserts that the demon possesses two voices – the one satirical, the other rhapsodic or lyrical – and Sagar is determined to do justice to both.

The ‘serious’ poems of 1929 engage with such issues as the relationship between men and women, or gods and men. They chart an intense connection with, and an ultimate repudiation of, the ‘fellow-men’ or neighbours evoked, inhabitants of a modern world in which people are destroying themselves and each other. Again, Sagar considers a wide range of texts, from ‘Triumph of the Machine’ and the Leda poems to ‘Red Geranium and Godly Mignonette’, ‘The Man of Tyre’ and ‘God is Born’, before moving on to the late masterpieces. He tracks ‘The Ship of Death’ through



its various draft stages to its final truncated version, considers 'Bavarian Gentians' in all extant forms and makes a final value-judgement that 'Shadows' is in fact the greatest of all these poems.

One extremely useful aspect of this book is the lengthy bibliography (extending to almost thirty pages), listing reviews, articles, chapters and books written on Lawrence's poetry. The sheer quantity of published works is particularly surprising, given the widely held assumption that Lawrence as poet has been shamefully neglected. Sagar does make the point, however, that the entries here are scarcely comparable in quantity with critical works on other genres, and also that full-length studies of the poetry are few and far between. What he provides here is an invaluable research tool in the form of a chronological listing from 1909 to the present, starting with reviews of the various poetry collections as they appeared and moving on to more substantial works of criticism. Although Sagar himself refers to the list as incomplete, he has clearly tracked down the vast majority of relevant texts, and created a reference point for which scholars in the field will be truly grateful.

Overall, Sagar has forged an argument that is rich in insight and broad in scope. He has brought to this work a wealth of knowledge and understanding of Lawrence accumulated over decades of attentive study. This e-book will remain an extremely important contribution to the field, serving both as a reference companion – like his earlier *A D. H. Lawrence Handbook* – and as a convincing interpretative guide to Lawrence's poetry.