

Youngjoo Son, *Here and Now: The Politics of Social Space in D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf*.

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Reviewed by Oliver Taylor

“How is the world using you?” Lawrence wrote to May Holbrook in August 1909 (*IL* 134). Asking the question of Lawrence today we are answered by a growing body of criticism that not only takes an interdisciplinary look at his work but also approaches him in relation to other modern authors. Youngjoo Son’s *Here and Now* is the most recent book among others including Gregory Tague’s *Character and Consciousness: Eliot, Hardy, Forster, Lawrence (Phenomenological, Ecological, and Ethical Readings)* (2005) and David Seelow’s *Radical Modernism and Sexuality: Freud, Reich, D. H. Lawrence and Beyond* (2005). So why Lawrence and Woolf? Critical attention that has taken these writers together has tended to emphasise the differences between them but Son’s study aims to “excavate less observed similarities” (2). Son argues that the affinity between Lawrence and Woolf’s treatment of space comes not only from their shared exposure to the “contemporary spatio-temporal transformation”, but also from their perceived marginality: “Lawrence because of his social class, and Woolf because of her sex” (5). Given John Worthen’s recent reappraisal of Lawrence in these terms, studies of the authors individually in relation to science (e.g. Jeff Wallace’s *D. H. Lawrence, Science and the Posthuman* [2005] and Holly Henry’s *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science* [2003]), and Son’s attentiveness to gender politics, it is a pity Son doesn’t give sustained treatment to their shared response to (male) scientific discourses responsible for this transformation and those underlying the “aesthetic discourses of modernism” (5). Nonetheless, Son’s focus on social space does provide the reader with a better understanding of the complex politics of their works and new ways of interpreting epiphanic

moments in terms of an engagement with, rather than a transcendence of, everyday life, emphasising socio-historical contexts and how Lawrence and Woolf criticise the dominant spatial codes at work within them.

Son's concern with space owes much to theorists like Foucault who address the issue of space with reference to modernity. Registering an increasing concern with space and cultural geography in various fields, Son surveys the critical literature from sociology, (feminist) geography, urban and cultural studies. However, the term "social space" is built primarily upon Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. In this study, the term "refers neither to a purely physical nor to an entirely psychological concept. It designates the material, mental, and discursive spaces that produce and are produced by power structures and social relations" (9). However, whereas recent theorists like Bachelard and Lefebvre tend to "dehistoricise and naturalise private/domestic space", Lawrence and Woolf, Son argues, "challenge their problematic spatial codes" by neither idealising it nor relegating it to a purely oppressive domain (12, 23). In questioning Lefebvre, Heidegger is said to demonstrate more of an awareness of "the interrelation between cognitive, linguistic, and physical space" (210 n. 9) but, after a brief footnote on 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', he is not mentioned again. In the light of recent discussions of Lawrence and Heidegger by Michael Bell and Anne Fernihough, it is a shame Son does not dwell on the intersections between Woolfian and Heideggerean poetics of space. For example, in Chapter Two, Son's sophisticated reading of how the "ideological spatial code erases workers' bodily and psychological existence through the image of 'indefatigable' commerce" (75-6) would make for an interesting comparison with Heidegger on 'The Question Concerning Technology'. Furthermore, given that "one of the central assumptions that underlies [the] project is that language and space are interconnected and mutually constitutive" (8), and that close readings often tend to pay attention to shifts in narrative perspective, narratology would have been another welcome critical

lens, despite another footnote in which Son says that the book is “not the place to discuss in detail Lawrence’s use of narrative point of view” (213 n. 4). However, Son’s reading of Woolf and Lawrence through Deleuze in the latter stages of the book is illuminating and timely, representing a recent increase of critical interest in Lawrence and Deleuze.

Part One (‘Rewriting Private and Public Spaces’) demonstrates the interconnections between the spatial, gender, and class politics which underlie the authors’ social criticism. Like Parts Two (‘Remoulding Home and Nation’) and Three (‘Utopic Spaces Here and Now’) it is divided into two chapters with one each devoted to Lawrence and Woolf. This is certainly methodical; however, more comparative readings within chapters to draw attention to their shared linguistic responses to, and treatments of, particular spaces would have been informative and helped the book cohere as an enquiry into both authors. Son mentions in the book’s final paragraph the omission of various texts from his account (*The Voyage Out*, Lawrence’s travel writings, and *The Plumed Serpent*); he describes his book as “highly selective ... structured by deliberate or unwitting neglect of other issues or works” (207). Books of literary criticism are by their very nature selective spaces, but “unwitting neglect” is a problematic and unsettling phrase to use. Moreover, the caveat might have been stated in setting out the terms of the book. On the positive side, Son’s selection does bring to light texts that have hitherto received less critical attention than they ought (in a discussion of Lawrence’s reversal of patriarchal discourses on gender and space, for instance, he discusses the poem ‘Discord in Childhood’ and the “journalistic” ‘Master in His House’ alongside canonical novels like *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*). And the book rightly closes with the encouraging thought that, whilst it revises the concept of space, it also opens up a critical area of study that will continue to change and grow.

Part Two investigates Lawrence and Woolf’s critical response to the “ideological implications embedded in the emphasis on enclosure and safety that prevailed in the discourse of home and

nation" (87). As in the Lawrence chapter of Part One, Son takes a cross-section of the genres in which Lawrence wrote, looking at essays ('On Coming Home', 'The English and the Germans', 'Return to Bestwood'), a short story ('England, My England'), a novella (*The Virgin and the Gipsy*) and a novel (*Kangaroo*). The eclecticism is laudable. In fact it is one of the strengths of the book that it manages to synthesise thinking from such a wide range of critical disciplines. However, the neglect of *Aaron's Rod* in a discussion of protagonists who "are repelled by home and at times leave it" (93) seems to be unwitting rather than deliberate.

In defining utopia as "a different/other space that disrupts dominant spatial practices and discourses" through "a radical reformulation of time, space, and social being", Son is aware that these previous chapters have already trespassed onto the space of Part Three (13, 151). Undoubtedly the most original section of the book, it is also at times the most uneven. For example, in the Lawrence chapter, which considers letters on Ranim, 'The Man Who Loved Islands', *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, Son justifies his reading of the end of 'A Dream of Life' against Howard J. Booth's biographical approach with the problematic assertion that "paradoxically, the narrator's suicidal gesture can be seen as a profound assertion of life" (162). In the following chapter on *Mrs Dalloway*, the "dangerous side of utopian longing, the danger to annihilate selfhood without forming a new one", adumbrated in Septimus's "suicidal plunging into his fantasy world and death" (190), is contrasted with Clarissa's "ultimate affirmation of life gained through a fight with death and closure" (203), which leaves the reader wondering whether Son can have it both ways.

For Son, Woolf's "moments of being" anticipate Lefebvre and have "a curious affinity" with Lawrence's "insurgent Now". Utopia, then, is for these writers a "dynamic process that brings about a sense of the self 'becoming'", coming into being "through an abrupt interruption of the 'now'" in response to, and disruption of, "the illusory stability of the self and the social order" (193). Given that Son mentions Lawrence's 'Democracy', the chapter

would have been a good place to compare the essay's "spontaneous being [that] is subject to no law" with Woolf's "moments of being" in relation to utopia and the body. Nevertheless, Son's focus on social space allows for the book to address the complex political implications of the works of Lawrence and Woolf and to highlight the subversive role played by literary discourse in "intervening in the production of social space" through its "critical interaction with dominant spatial codes" (207).

Eunyoung Oh, *D. H. Lawrence's Border Crossing: Colonialism in His Travel Writings and "Leadership" Novels*.

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Reviewed by Neil Roberts

As its title suggests, Eunyoung Oh's book approaches Lawrence's fictional and non-fictional travel writing from a postcolonial perspective. Her texts are mostly well-chosen, and she rightly discusses *The Lost Girl* as well as the books implied in her title. I think, however, that some consideration of 'The Woman Who Rode Away', 'The Princess' and *St. Mawr* would have been more rewarding than *Aaron's Rod*, which is so lacking in non-English characters.

Her study is fair-minded, well written and offers interesting insights into all the texts discussed. She makes a telling contrast between the unchallenged authorial voice of Lilly in *Aaron's Rod* and Somers's much more dialogically situated voice in *Kangaroo*; she perceptively identifies the "emotionally vulnerable and untrustworthy" (40) narrator of *Sea and Sardinia* and has a telling analysis of the perspective of the opening of *Kangaroo*, where Somers and Harriett are seen through the eyes of the Australian workmen. More broadly, the book is informed by a strong sense of the "conflict or tension" between Lawrence's "sense of superiority as a civilized white man and his sense of repulsion to the white